



Claude Monet

(1840-1926)

Water lilies

(Nymphéas)

1914-1917

*signature stamp bottom left and verso:
"Claude Monet"*

oil on canvas

H 180,0 cm x B 200,5 cm

WRM Dep. 3266





Brief Report

This large painting belongs to the famous “Water Lily” series, comprising some two hundred works, which Monet executed in his later years between 1898 and his death. They depict the pond in his garden at Giverny. The painterly findings are comparable with other pictures in the series [Sagner-Düchting 1985 pp. 96-112; House 1986; Kendall 1989, p. 241]. Monet used a standard commercial pre-primed canvas which to judge by appearances he cut from the roll and stretched himself. The palette used in the picture comprises eleven different hues. According to the artist himself, in 1905 he had still made do with almost half that number, namely six: “blanc d’argent [lead white], jaune cadmium [cadmium yellow], vermillon [vermilion], garance foncée [red lake], bleu de cobalt [cobalt blue], vert émeraude [viridian], et c’est tout” [letter dated 3 June 1905, Venturi 1968, p. 404]. It already has been assumed that before starting work Monet reduced the oil content of the commercial paints [Monet 1977, p. 7]. The result was a matt finish resembling pastel which has been preserved on the unvarnished picture in Cologne (fig. 1). The edges of the picture allow us to trace the way the picture was built up in layers (fig. 6). Here one can see the first relaxed brushstrokes, whose thin application of paint has nothing in common with the dense relief-like painting in the interior of the picture. It was only the constantly growing layering of individual higgledy-piggledy brushstrokes that, taken as a whole, produced the texture of the picture that we have today.

Under raking light a number of deviations from the currently visible painting can be detected (fig. 4). Above all on the vegetated bank in the right-hand half of the picture, one can see the relief produced by oval brushstrokes having been painted over. These forms, which match those of the water-lily leaves, remind us that the pond originally extended further to the right. Reports suggest that Monet devoted between twenty and thirty sessions to his water-lily pictures [Sagner-Düchting 1985, pp. 98f.] Nor did he shy away from revising a picture even at the cost of spoiling it. Some of his water-lily pictures are even said to combine four or five different versions [House 1986, p. 191]. In spite of the numerous phases of work, evinced also by the picture in Cologne, it is unclear to this day whether Monet regarded the painting as finished or unfinished. Thus the bottom right-hand corner is almost totally unpainted, to an extent which the great majority of his contemporaries would surely have seen as a sign of non-completion (fig. 6). Like most of the other water-lily pictures, this one remained in the artist’s possession at first, and only sold later by his son Michel, who supplied the studio stamps recto and verso before the sale (fig. 2, 5). At the latest from 1915/16, Monet no longer signed his pictures—either because his international popularity made this unnecessary, or in order to signal their unfinished status [David 2006].



Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size, pre-primed canvas cut from the roll (horizontal canvas format with foldover edges: 2.10 m)
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 25/26, horizontal 27/28 threads per cm; fine weave of pale colour (fig. 8)
Stretching	original stretcher with nails has been preserved; slight stretch marks corresponding all the way round with the fastenings at largely regularly intervals of 9.5-13.0 cm on either sides and of 4.5-8.0 cm on the top and bottom (fig. 7)
Stretcher/strainer	original stretcher with cross bars, chamfered
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.5 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none present



Ground

Sizing	none present
Colour	white (fig. 8)
Application	applied in a thin single layer before the canvas was cut to size and stretched; on the top, right-hand and bottom foldover edges a strip app. 1.0-2.5 cm broad is unprimed (fig. 7)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	even surface; homogeneous priming material; no filler or pigment particles visible up to 90x magnification; no traces of any application instrument (fig. 8)

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	flat brush and several paints whose hue matches the eventual painting; presumably oil the sole binding medium
Extent/character	fluid transition from the first colour lay-in to the painterly interpretation; character and extent of underpainting cannot be comprehensively assessed: the dense multilayer applications of paint mean that there are hardly any unpainted areas to provide useful information, nor are any clues provided by the IR examination; the edges of the picture show that Monet provided the picture with its first colour in the form of thin, dry paint applied with broad brushstrokes (app. 3-4 cm in breadth) in a clear flow on the white ground (fig. 6); application open and energetic, so that the brushstrokes impact powerfully against the inner edge of the stretcher
Pentimenti	compositional changes are only evident in the later stages of the painting process (see Paint layer)



Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

layer by layer construction, wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry; the first thin brushstrokes were followed by numerous further applications of paint with increasing opacity and pastosity; constant increasing layering of dynamic higgledy-piggledy labyrinthine brushstrokes, which at the same time often fail to cover previously applied layers of paint (figs 9,10); early shrinkage cracks point to the fact that in places still-damp paint layers were overpainted within a short time; the orientation of the brushstrokes seems to follow no recognizable principle; the overlayering resulted in clear changes in coloration and composition; visible in many places under raking light is the relief of underlying applications of paint which have no connexion with the finished painting; revised oval brushstrokes in the form of the water-lily leaves point to the fact that the edge of the pond was originally planned to be further to the right (fig. 4); the picture was presumably painted in the studio, like most of the water-lily pictures in this format

Painting tools

flat bristle brushes of varying width (mostly 1-3 cm)

Surface structure

relief-like, marked by powerful brushstrokes in the different paint layers and paint structures

Palette

hues revealed by visual microscopic examination: white, medium yellow, yellow ochre, medium orange, pale red, dark red lake with conspicuously large pale substrate particles which lend the actually transparent paint an impasto quality (fig. 11, UV fluorescence: orange, fig. 3), violet, medium blue, dark blue, medium green, dark green, no black, in general the colours were applied in blends of two or three pigments

VIS-spectrometry: chrome yellow, cadmium yellow(?), iron-oxide yellow, red lead(?), vermilion(?), red lake, cobalt blue, ultramarine, cobalt violet, viridian

FTIR: lead white, synthetic (French) ultramarine, earth pigments as filler

Binding mediums

oil (FTIR)



Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition	authentic unvarnished condition; in his water-lily pictures, Monet pursued the intention of a matt unvarnished surface [House 1986, p. 109, Hoschede 1960, p. 26, Monet 1977-1978, p. 10]
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Signature/Mark

When?	recto: studio stamp in black “Claude Monet” applied to the completely dry paint layer (fig. 5); verso: studio stamp in black: “Claude Monet”, below: “Certifié authentique/M. MONET” (fig. 2)
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Autograph signature	no
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Serial	each stamp represents one of Monet’s three known studio stamps; the script corresponds to a rightward sloping handwriting oriented towards Monet’s early writing style; the precise use and distribution of the stamp is still unclear [David 2006]
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Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The state of preservation is largely authentic; slight wavelike and small blister-like deformations in the canvas; cracks and holes in the turnover edge and visible edge of the picture; age-related craquelure in impasto areas; marked early shrinkage cracks; swellings of underlying paint-layers (fig. 12); scratches; whitish places where the paint has burst, also saponifications esp. in connexion with the bright blue; drastic adhesion problem between the paint layers has already led to numerous small losses and several counter-measures.



Additional remarks

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Literature

- David 2006: Jeanne-Marie David, De la naissance d'un nom à l'évidence d'un style. Une étude de la signature de Claude Monet (1840-1926), Mémoire de recherche appliquée, Paris 2006, unpublished diploma thesis École du Louvre, Paris
- Hoschedé 1960: J.P. Hoschedé, Claude Monet ce mal connu; intimité familiale d'un demi-siècle à Giverny de 1883 à 1926, Genf 1960, 2 vols
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- Kendall 1989: Richard Kendall (Ed.), Monet by himself, London 1989
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- Roy 2007: Ahok Roy, Monet's Palette in the Twentieth Century, Water-Lilies and Irises, in: National Gallery Technical Bulletin, Vol. 28 (2007), pp. 58-68
- Sagner-Düchting 1985: Karin Sagner-Düchting, Claude Monet: „Nymphéas“, Eine Annäherung (Ph.D.), Hildesheim, Zurich, New York 1985, pp. 96-112
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- Venturi 1968: Lionello Venturi, Les Archives des Impressionistes, Bd.I, New York 1968
- Wildenstein 1974-1999: Daniel Wildenstein: Claude Monet, biographie et catalogue raisonné, Lausanne, Paris, Köln 1974-1999
- Wallraf 1986: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum Köln, Von Stefan Lochner bis Paul Cézanne, 120 Meisterwerke der Gemäldesammlung, Köln 1986, p. 270, with fig.

Source of illustrations

All illustrations and figures Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud



Examination methods used

- | | |
|--|--|
| ✓ Incident light | ✓ VIS spectrometry |
| ✓ Raking light | – Wood identification |
| ✓ Reflected light | ✓ FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy) |
| – Transmitted light | – EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis) |
| ✓ Ultraviolet fluorescence | ✓ Microchemical analysis |
| ✓ Infrared reflectography | |
| ✓ False-colour infrared reflectography | |
| – X-ray | |
| ✓ Stereomicroscopy | |

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Brief Report on Technology and Condition



Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso with studio stamp



Fig. 3
Ultraviolet fluorescence

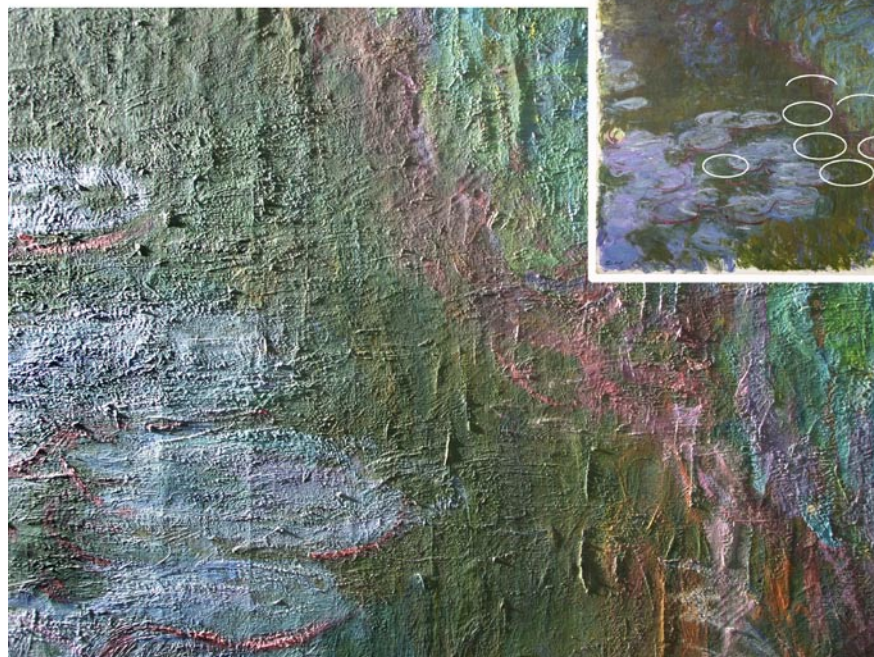


Fig. 4
Raking light, detail
of centre of picture,
oval relief-like brush
structures dating from
an earlier stage in the
painting



Fig. 5
Detail of signature in
bottom left-hand corner,
studio stamp



Fig. 6
Detail, bottom right-
hand corner unfinished?



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Fig. 7
Detail, right-hand (top)
and left-hand (bottom)
foldover edges

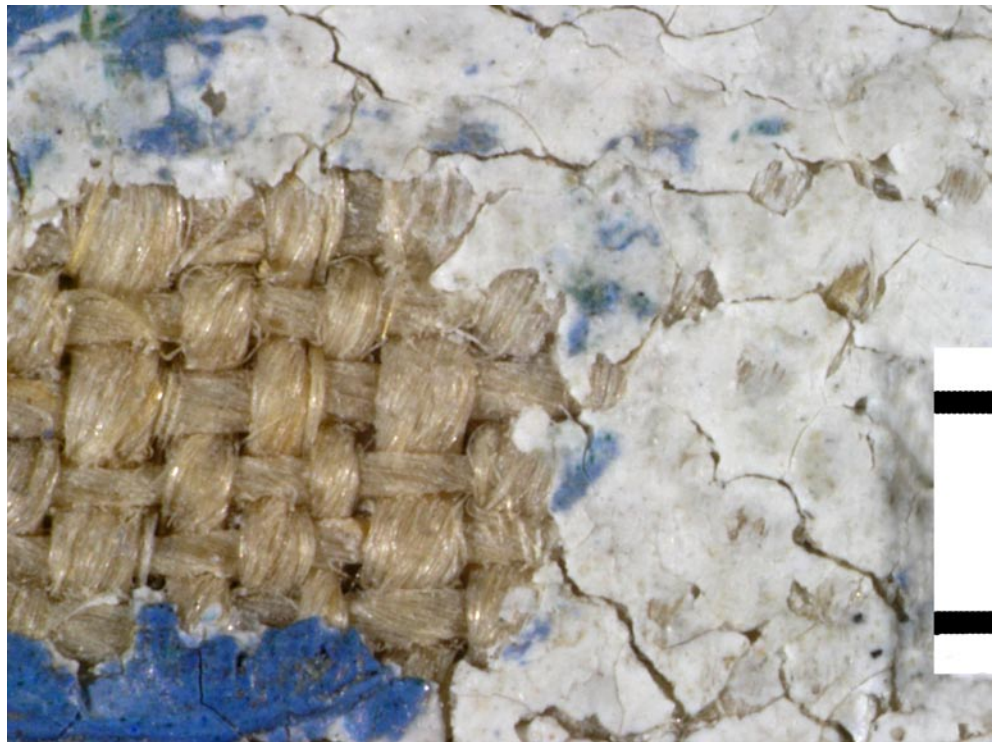


Fig. 8
Canvas and ground,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)



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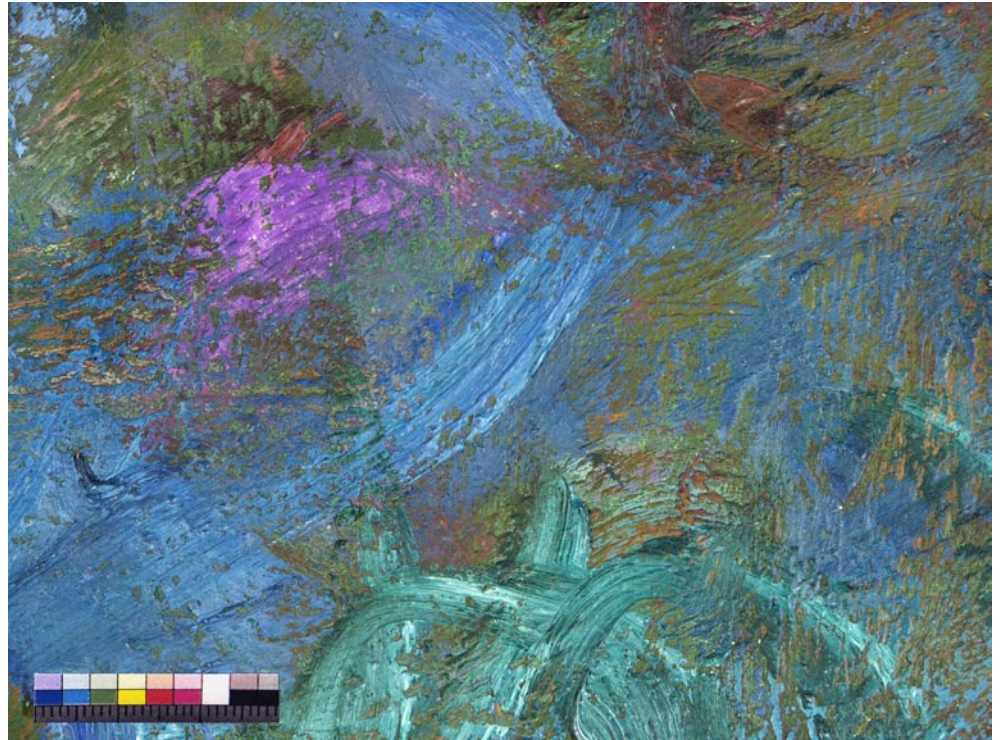


Fig. 9
Detail, dynamic
brushstrokes

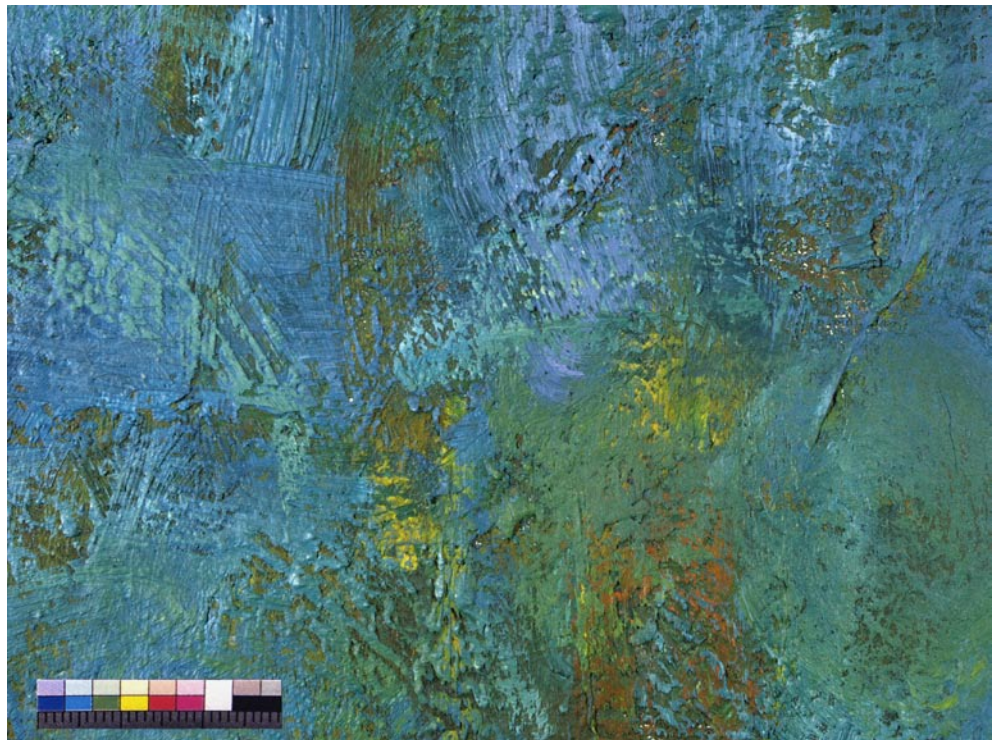


Fig. 10
Detail, overlayering
of colours



Fig. 11
Red lake,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

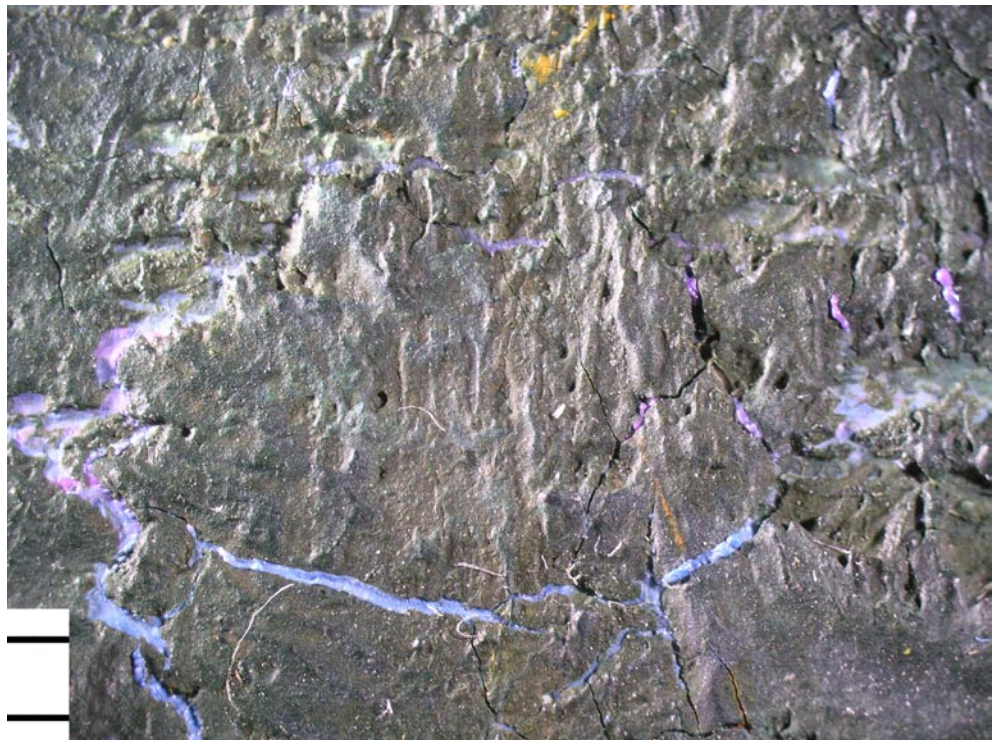


Fig. 12
Swellings of underlying
paint-layers,
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)