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Monet's Study for "The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil" Shown with National Gallery of Art Painting for First Time as Part of Norton Simon Loan Exchange



Left: Claude Monet, *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*, 1881, oil on canvas, The Norton Simon Foundation; right: Claude Monet, *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil*, 1880, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection.

Washington, DC—Two of Claude Monet's paintings of the garden at his home in Vétheuil, France, will be on view together for the first time since they were created more than 100 years ago as part of a long-term series of loan exchanges between the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena. On view in the French impressionism galleries of the West Building from May 19 through August 8, 2018, the Norton Simon version of *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil* (1881) is believed to have served as the basis for the Gallery's canvas of the same title. The paintings are the only two of the four known works Monet painted of this scene currently in public collections. They are a rare example of Monet reworking a scene painted en plein air later in his studio until he reached his final, magnificent composition.

"Since 2007 the Gallery and the Norton Simon's series of loan exchanges have shared rarely lent works with new audiences on the East and West coasts," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "The special installation of Monet's two renditions of *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil* allows us to learn more about the creation of the Gallery's painting. We are grateful to the Norton Simon for their loan, which is a wonderful temporary addition to the outstanding works by Monet on view in our permanent collection galleries, including several others created during the artist's time in Vétheuil."

Adds Norton Simon Museum president Walter Timoshuk, "It is a privilege to continue this special art exchange program with the National Gallery of Art, which was a favorite of Norton Simon's, and to see these remarkable paintings side-by-side. We extend our thanks to Rusty and his exceptional team of curators and specialists who organized this thoughtful installation."

Monet in Vétheuil

Following financial difficulties, Monet moved in 1878 with his family (including his recently born son, Michel) to the small village of Vétheuil, located northwest of Paris on the bank of the Seine. There, Monet rented a house with his former patron Ernest Hoschedé, who had also recently fallen on hard times. Monet's wife Camille fell ill shortly before moving to Vétheuil and passed away in September of 1879. After her death Monet remained in the town along with Hoschedé's wife, Alice (who would later become the artist's second wife), and her six children until they relocated to Poissy at the end of 1881.

While painting views of Vétheuil's buildings and landscapes, Monet also experimented with scenes of his home's gardens in the summer of 1881. Both versions of *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil* depict a central pathway flanked by wild greenery and statuesque sunflower stalks leading to a stairway up to the house. The Norton Simon study shows blue-and-white flowerpots planted with red gladiolas on either side of the path. The flowerpots belonged to Monet and are seen in earlier views of his garden in Argenteuil. In both works Monet also painted identical cloud patterns in the topmost register of the canvas.

While Monet settled the basic elements of the composition in the Norton Simon study, he refined the details, enlarged the composition, and added the figures in the Gallery's version, his final of the subject. For the larger canvas created in his studio Monet extended the pathway and added two more blue-and-white pots. Perhaps his most significant addition though, was the incorporation of three figures: Monet's son Michel next to a wagon on the path along with Jean-Pierre Hoschedé and a woman believed to be a member of the extended Monet/Hoschedé household behind him on the stairs. Monet's process for this painting is unusual. While earlier paintings were presumably created en plein air and later series repeated common subjects in varied light or weather conditions, for this view of his garden at Vétheuil, Monet revisited the same scene at the same time of day, building upon it until he arrived at the final masterpiece.

Conservation

Recent treatment of the Gallery's *The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil* undertaken by Ann Hoenigswald, senior conservator of paintings, revealed a brighter palette closer to the Norton Simon's. A thick varnish layer covered the surface of the picture and had yellowed over time. The coating was most likely applied after Monet's death, given that documentation indicates that after 1880 or so Monet preferred to leave his paintings unvarnished after recognizing that varnishes had a tendency to discolor as they aged. The coating distorted the intended tonalities and striking color relationships and masked the energy and vibrancy of the brushwork. The dark unifying veil also flattened the spatial integrity of the composition. Over a period of months, Hoenigswald removed the coating, revealing the range and subtlety of the paint which Monet had intended.

Although both works were created in 1881, the Gallery's version is inscribed "1880." Monet is believed to have erroneously dated the work when he later repainted the foreground. Recent x-radiographs and infrared imaging revealed that the work was neither signed nor dated until Monet repainted the foreground and added the 1880 date, indicating that it had never left his studio.

The Norton Simon Museum and National Gallery of Art Loan Exchange

The long-term loan exchange was established in 2007 to share the masterpieces of the two institutions. Outside of specific loan agreements like this one, the Norton Simon foundations seldom lend work from their collections. The rare exchange was established with the Gallery in part as an extension of Norton Simon's (1907–1993) history of lending works to the Gallery during his lifetime.

The first loan came from the Norton Simon in 2007, when Rembrandt van Rijn's *Portrait of a Boy* (1655–60) was installed with the artist's *Self Portrait* (1659) from the Gallery's collection. The following year the Gallery lent a jewel of their collection—Johannes Vermeer's *A Lady Writing* (c. 1665)—to the Norton Simon Museum. Since then the Norton Simon has lent several works to the Gallery, including Édouard Manet's *Ragpicker* (c. 1865–1870) in 2009 and Auguste Renoir's *The Pont des Arts, Paris* (1867–1868) in 2012. In turn, the Gallery has lent works to the Norton Simon that rarely leave the walls: Raphael's *The Small Cowper Madonna* (c. 1505) in 2010–2011; Van Gogh's *Self Portrait* (1889) in 2012–2013; and Manet's *The Railway* (1873) from 2014–2015.

The Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is home to one of the world's most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, the industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an impressive group of European masterworks from the Renaissance to the 20th century and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern works from Europe and the United

States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupy an important place in the Museum's holdings.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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