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# MONET & Japan

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(front cover) Claude MONET *Haystack, midday* 1890 (detail)  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra  
(back cover) Katsushika HOKUSAI *South wind, clear skies* c.1830-31  
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College Mary A. Ainsworth Bequest, 1950

## Monet & Japan

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Claude Monet  
Between 'Impressionism' and 'Japonism'



The role played by Théodore Duret (1838–1927) in the propagation of Impressionism as an aesthetic ideology is problematic, for it rested on his personal understanding of Japanese art, which he claimed to be essential to the development of French Impressionism. I will examine three components of Duret's discussion of Impressionism, all of which were closely related to what I call his *Japonisant* ideology: firstly, Impressionist colours, which, according to him, consisted of the juxtaposition of bright primary and secondary colours; and secondly, his insistence on the spontaneous rendering of fugitive aspects of nature in the open air. In Duret's argument both were justified by the Japanese aesthetics that he promoted. Thirdly, Duret developed an evolutionary schema of the progress of French landscape painting to explain Impressionism, and especially Monet's painting. These three points require close examination, since none of them have been critically approached and, indeed, have become the commonly accepted truths of Impressionism.

Duret's *Japonisant* ideology influenced this common understanding of Impressionism. From the late nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century (well after the last edition of his *Histoire des peintres impressionnistes* was published in 1939), Duret was regarded as one of the most reliable historiographers of Impressionism.

Immediately after the disaster of the Paris Commune in 1871 Duret joined the collector and financier, Henri Cernuschi on a voyage to Asia. He was thus the first French avant-garde art critic to visit Japan.<sup>1</sup> On his return in January 1873 he wrote to Edouard Manet that Cernuschi had purchased bronzes in China and Japan, some of which he claimed 'will knock you out'. Among them was the four metres high bronze Buddha of Meguro, from the Banryū-ji temple in downtown Tokyo.<sup>2</sup>

Announcing his return from Japan, Duret wrote to Camille Pissarro in February 1873 congratulating the artist on the 'triumph' of their 'school', and expressing his wish to purchase 'one great Pissarro' before it becomes as expensive as works by Corot and Hobbema. He ends the letter, 'Down with the works of Couture, the Bonapartists and the Bourgeois', indicating the highly charged artistic atmosphere at the beginning of the Third Republic, shortly before what came to be called the 'First Impressionist Exhibition' of 1874. Pissarro replied: 'I would be fascinated to talk with you about Japan for a moment. I am much interested in that extraordinary country, with so many curious aspects and artists.'<sup>3</sup> Their letters suggest that the future Impressionist painters' revolt against academic art — represented by Thomas Couture's paintings — was by now closely related to their interest in Japanese art, which had become popular in Paris in the latter half of the 1860s. As a rare eyewitness of that 'extraordinary country', and as one who had close contacts with French avant-garde artists and writers, Duret could have been expected to become one of the major advocates of *Japonisant* aesthetics.

In his review of the 1874 exhibition, Jules-Antoine Castagnary, an ardent supporter of Courbet and of the Realism of his generation, denied what would seem to have been the assumption that those who exhibited were associated with Japan:

Once the impression has been seized and fixed, they declare their role over. The title *Japonais*, which they were first given, makes no sense. If one wants to characterise them with a word that explains them, one would have to coin the new term of *Impressionists*.

They are *Impressionists* in the sense that they reproduce not the landscape, but the sensation evoked by the landscape. Even the word has passed into their language: in the catalogue, M. Monet's *Sunrise* is not called landscape, but *impression*.<sup>4</sup>

Despite Castagnary's denial, the Impressionists were more or less associated with things Japanese by the mid-1870s. In his 1878 review of the Salon, Castagnary transformed his previous suspicion of the new aesthetics of Impressionism — with specific acknowledgement to Duret:

We are taking a step towards Impressionism. But Impressionism is not only a right, for certain subjects, whose charm cannot be rendered otherwise, it becomes a duty, doesn't it, Duret? ... What does it mean to create and to put forth? When the painter has rendered his impression, when he has said what he had to say, the painting is finished and to add something would spoil it.<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime Monet exhibited *La Japonaise* (illus. p. 24) at the second Impressionist exhibition in 1876, thus explicitly demonstrating his attraction to Japanese motifs by meticulously depicting the silk embroideries and Samurai figure of Kabuki theatre clothing.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1860s and 1870s Manet and his followers, notably Monet, were constantly attacked by conservative art critics for lack of finish in their paintings. Duret belonged to the generation of art critics who, from their earliest writings onwards, defended the cause of the 'impression'. In a passage on Manet's work in the 1870 Salon, Duret had already claimed that a real artist was not one who made conscientious and literal reproduction of nature, but one 'who, having a powerful vision of things, and a personal impression of their appearance, succeeds in fixing his vision on canvas in an appropriate form, which at the same time communicates his impression'.<sup>7</sup> Though it has become almost a cliché, this awkward passage on Manet was singled out, twenty-eight years later, as the epigraph of an article on Monet by Maurice Guillemot, as if to emphasise Duret's authority in the matters of art at the end of the century. Guillemot's little known text was to become a key document in the controversy about the originality of the Impressionist aesthetics which took place in the late 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Japan was such an attraction in the Salon of 1872 that Jules Claretie, a witty and somewhat frivolous art critic, included a chapter on 'The Japanese' in his review, where he criticised painters of Japanese subjects for imitating Japanese albums and prints without visiting that country:

If only the connoisseurs of things Japanese, the *Japonisants*, to give them a name, gave us or painted for us, the genuine, living Japan, studied on the spot, and if only their passionate taste forced them to go and study at Kawasaki or Yo-kohama! Not at all. Most of these artists, while smitten or taken by Japonism, hardly know anything about the art of Japan, doubtless very charming and very special, than what they have learnt from albums brought back by tourists, or from knick-knacks purchased in the rue Vivienne.<sup>9</sup>

Claretie would have been dismayed at the fact that many Western illustrators visiting Japan were busy modifying their 'impressions' of *ukiyo-e* prints by applying Western perspective, modelling and chiaroscuro to create illusionistic images of Japan, while Japanese printmakers in Yokohama were busy imitating these Western techniques (see cat. 116).

*arsorge' and the 'Alabama'*  
137.8 x 128.9 cm  
30 Collection,  
m of Art



In another chapter of this review entitled 'M. Edouard Manet', Claretie found 'too much Japanese perspective' in Manet's *The battle of the 'Kearsarge' and the 'Alabama'*, and he reiterated the common complaint that Manet's work was at best a *morceau*, a fragmentary study that cannot be taken for a *tableau*, a properly finished painting. Duret intervened in this debate. He tried to justify not only Manet's strange composition and perspective, but also his summary execution, and he later found arguments for Monet's use of primary and secondary colours juxtaposed on the canvas without attenuation or gradation. As an eyewitness of 'Kawasaki' and 'Yo-kohama', Duret was one of the few people who could authenticate the *morceau* and the *impression* in the name of 'Japonism'.

In his thirty-six page brochure, *Les peintres impressionnistes* — the first publication with this title — Duret wrote:

When one saw Japanese prints on which were juxtaposed the most clear cut and sharp colours, one at last understood that there were new processes that it would be worth trying in order to represent natural effects that had been neglected or believed impossible until now. For these Japanese prints, which so many people first chose to think of as a confused mixture of colours are actually strikingly true. Let us ask those who have visited Japan. As for me, every time I discover on a fan or in an album, the exact sensation of the scenes and the countryside that I saw in Japan, I look at a Japanese album and I say, 'Yes this is really how Japan appeared to me; this is really the way the deeply coloured blue sea stretches out under a luminous and transparent atmosphere ... here there really is Fuji-ama, the most soaring of volcanos, then the masses of slender bamboos that cover its slopes, and finally the teeming and picturesque inhabitants of the cities and countryside!' Japanese art renders the specific aspects of nature with new and bold ways of using colour; it could not fail to strike enquiring artists, and it has also strongly influenced the Impressionists.<sup>10</sup>

This description of Mount Fuji perceived through bamboo trees relates to a print in Hokusai's *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (cat. 128), an album owned by Duret, which could have been a source of inspiration for Monet's depictions of trees superimposed on the background scenery.<sup>11</sup>

Duret frequently defended Japanese art against the belief that its variegated colours were unrealistic. He used the word *bariolage* (translated above as a 'confused mixture of colours'), as did Paul Mantz in his attack on Manet's works in the Galerie Martinet in 1863 (that Duret mentioned forty years later in his *Histoire d'Edouard Manet et de son oeuvre*, 1902). Mantz sarcastically described *Music in the Tuileries* and other works as a 'bariolage of red, blue and black', 'a caricature of colours rather than colour itself'. In 1878 Duret's claim that the seeming *bariolage* of Japanese prints was in fact 'strikingly true' to nature, should be seen as an argument against this still continuing criticism. He did, of course, make similar claims for Impressionist colour.

The brilliant colours that Duret interpreted as characteristic of Japanese prints were, however, imported from the West. The blue which characterises many *ukiyo-e* prints of the first half of the nineteenth century by Hokusai, Hiroshige, Kuniyoshi, Kunitora and others was a newly imported Western chemical pigment, Prussian blue. The vogue of *bero-ai* ('Berliner indigo') was to be followed



Katsushika HOKUSAI *Fuji through bamboo trees from One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, vol. 2, 1835 (detail) (cat. 128)



Edouard MANET  
*Music in the Tuileries* 1862  
oil on canvas 76.2 x 118.1 cm  
© The National Gallery, London



Edouard MANET *Claude Monet painting in his studio boat* 1874 oil on canvas 80.0 x 98.0 cm  
Munich, Bayerische Staatgemäldesammlungen



Edouard MANET *Claude Monet c.1874*  
chinese ink 17.0 x 13.5 cm  
Musée Marmottan-Monet, Paris

in the 1870s (at the time of Duret's visit to Japan) by the vogue for the crude aniline red that was called *beni-guri*, 'anilin mania'.<sup>12</sup> What Duret took to be typical Japanese colour was in fact a manifestation of Japanese interest in imported colours, and of the insatiable Japanese curiosity about the West that characterised this period of its history.

In 1874, the year following Duret's return from Japan, Manet painted with Monet in the open air at Argenteuil. In the 'excessive blue' of Manet's *Claude Monet painting in his studio boat*, or in the sketchiness of his ink portrait of Monet, one may see Manet's response to Duret's insistence on the truthfulness of bright, unmodulated colours and on the 'vividness' of the brushstrokes of Japanese craftsmen, which Duret would by this time have enthusiastically discussed with his artist friends. Their aesthetic experiments could be supported by Duret's verbal testimony of his Japanese experience which might have stimulated them to further emulation at Argenteuil.<sup>13</sup>

Duret's comments on Monet's art, published in 1880, would endorse this hypothesis. In his preface to Monet's one-man show, Duret defended the artist's juxtaposition of brilliant colours by comparing it with the Japanese practice, as he fancied it. He claimed that the Japanese saw nature as 'coloured and full of clarity', and knew how to 'harmonise side by side, on silk or paper, without attenuation, the most striking and the most variegated colours ...'<sup>14</sup> Duret developed this selective interpretation of certain kinds of Japanese prints to explain Monet's vision of this period.<sup>15</sup> Duret stated categorically that Impressionism was not possible without the arrival of Japanese albums. This assertion in *Les peintres impressionnistes* did not name Monet, but certainly evokes his paintings:

Well, it may seem strange, but it is nonetheless true, that it required the arrival among us of Japanese prints, for one of us to dare to sit down on a river bank, to juxtapose on a canvas a bright red roof, a white fence, a green poplar, a yellow road and blue water. Before the example given by the Japanese, this was impossible, the artist always lied. Nature with its clear colours stared him in the face; never did one see on the canvas anything but feeble colours, drowning in a generalised half-tone.<sup>16</sup>

Repeating the same statement in 1880, Duret recognised in Monet the first incarnation of this aesthetics in the West:

The appearance among us of Japanese albums and prints completed the transformation by initiating us into an absolutely new colour system. Without the techniques revealed to us by the Japanese a whole methodology would have remained unknown to us ... In observing nature, the European landscape-painter appeared to have forgotten the real colour of things; he scarcely saw more than light and shade, mostly shade; because of this, many painters covered open landscapes with opaque darkness and eternal shadows. The Japanese did not see nature swathed in mourning, in shadowy veils; on the contrary, it appeared to them as coloured and full of light, their eye discerned above all the colouration of things, and they knew how to harmonise side by side on silk or on paper, without softening, the most clear cut and the most varied colours that objects seen in nature gave them ... Among our landscape painters Claude Monet was the first to have the boldness to go as far as the Japanese in the use of colour.<sup>17</sup>



This statement is less a verification of historical fact than the advocacy of a new aesthetics by a champion of Japanese art. It was now Duret's unshakeable conviction.

In the same passage Duret tried to strengthen his argument by a pseudo-scientific explanation about the physiology of the 'Japanese eye':

The Japanese eye, endowed with particular keenness, functioning at the heart of a marvellous light, in an atmosphere of an extraordinary limpidity and transparency, has been able to see in the open air a scale of brilliant colours that the European eye had never seen, and, left to itself, would probably never have discovered.

The 'lazy European eye' explains why Europeans still see the colours of Japanese artists as a riot of colours, although they are 'so true and so delicate'.<sup>18</sup>

This strange claim has, of course, no more scientific validity than that made a few months later by Joris-Karl Huysmans, who followed other critics in believing that the Impressionists had 'diseased retinas', an 'atrophy of several of the nervous fibres of the eye' that led to the loss of perception of green to such an extent that blue 'dominates everything, drowns everything on their canvasses'.<sup>19</sup>

Although Duret's theory of Impressionist colour was misleading, it must be counted among the critical statements that sought to counteract the widespread prejudice that the Impressionists' way of seeing was somehow abnormal.

Another critical issue of Duret's aesthetics of Impressionism concerned the brushstroke. In his essay on Japanese art, published in 1885, Duret characterised the ink technique:

Using only a tool with a resistant point to paint or draw, using a raised hand to manipulate the brush, the Japanese artist, who cannot revise the first brushstroke, fixes his vision on the paper in one go, with a boldness, a sureness, which the most gifted European artists, accustomed to other practices, cannot attain. It's because of this technique as much as the specific nature of their taste, that Japanese artists have been the first and the most perfect of the Impressionists.<sup>20</sup>

This passage explains why Duret had claimed in 1878 that Monet's brushstroke corresponded to the Japanese practice: 'Monet is the Impressionist par excellence, for he succeeded in rendering fugitive impressions that other painters, his predecessors, had overlooked or considered impossible to render by the brush.'<sup>21</sup> In 1880 he wrote: 'In a word, his brush fixed these thousand passing impressions which are communicated to the spectator's eye by the moving sky and the changing atmosphere. That is why the epithet of "Impressionist" was coined, with reason, to apply to him.'<sup>22</sup> Duret's tautological argument shows how the association between Japan and Monet was reinforced by his concept of the 'impressionist.'

The idea of the spontaneous rendering of fugitive impressions was, however, not yet largely accepted, and continuing criticism accounts for the circumstances in which Duret had to defend Monet in 1880. For example, in the same year that Duret wrote *Les peintres impressionnistes*, Charles Ephrussi wrote in the prestigious *Gazette des beaux-arts*: 'It seems to us that to render these instantaneous impressions sufficiently well ... it is necessary to apply a less summary procedure.'<sup>23</sup> Similar criticism



of the painterliness of Impressionism was common in the period. It is found in Edmond Duranty's *La nouvelle peinture* of 1876, and in Duret's close friend Zola's final rejection of Impressionism in 1879 (when he praised the Naturalist Bastien-Lepage's technical superiority to the Impressionists' lack of a 'definitive formula').<sup>24</sup> Similarly Huysmans, Zola's disciple, preferred Gustave Caillebotte's meticulously calculated execution to Impressionistic improvisation.<sup>25</sup>

Such adverse criticism seems to have led Duret to make use of a schematised evolutionary theory of landscape painting to justify Impressionistic execution in a global historical perspective. In his preface to Monet's exhibition in 1880, Duret, a proud Spenserian, presented a schema that defined the evolution of plein-airism in three different phases. Firstly, Rousseau's use of the rough sketches in watercolour or pastel (*croquis*) of effects of light and shadow to work up into the finished oil painting (*tableau*) in the studio. Secondly, Corot and Courbet (whom Duret had watched at work in the summer of 1862) painted their oil sketches directly on the canvas 'in the open air, facing nature', so as to 'diminish the distance which separates the preliminary studies from work in the studio'. These would be finished in the studio, or would be used as 'sketches for a larger and more finished painting'. Then comes the third phase:

Claude Monet, coming after them in his turn, realised what they had begun. With him, no more accumulated preliminary sketches, no more crayons and watercolours used in the studio, but an oil painting, entirely begun and completed in front of the natural scene, directly interpreted and rendered. And it is thus that he became the leader of what has rightly been called 'the plein air school'.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly enough, this passage anticipates Monet's account of the genesis of the term Impressionism that was quoted in Guillemot's 1898 article, in which the few theoretical comments are largely composed of quotations from Duret's *Critique d'avant-garde* (1885).

Formerly, the artist told me, we all did rough sketches. Jongkind, whom I knew well, took notes in watercolour to later enlarge into tableaux. Corot, with his studies painted rapidly from nature, combining them in canvases, which connoisseurs fight over, and there are some where one can clearly see his assemblage of notes [from nature] ... A landscape painting is only an instantaneous impression, from which derives the label that was given us, because of me. I sent a thing done from my window at Le Havre, with the sun in the mist and ships' masts appearing in the foreground ... I was asked for the title for the catalogue, it really couldn't pass for a view of Le Havre: I replied: 'Put *Impression*.' 'Impressionism' was coined from this, and the joke spread.<sup>27</sup>

Monet's schema — suggesting evolution from Jongkind and Corot to himself — is remarkably similar to that proposed by Duret eighteen years earlier for Monet's benefit, and which Monet never denied. Indeed, by the end of the century, there was a general understanding about how the recent evolution of the French landscape painting should be explained to the public.

In 1880 it was audacious to locate Impressionism as the latest school on the central trunk of the genealogy of French landscape painting. Duret's claim was, therefore, an ideological statement rather than a neutral empirical observation, and it played a role in the public recognition of Impressionism over the next two decades. Guillemot's 1898 article was published in a journal

that addressed itself to a bourgeois audience and offered easily digested material. It thus shows how the minority group, assisted by Duret's articles of 1878 and 1880, was finally legitimised eighteen years later in a commonly accepted form. Guillemot quoted Duret's views to give authority to his own article.

Ironically enough, this story of the genesis of the term 'Impressionism' (as it was recounted as late as 1898) reveals a mythic aspect of Duret's plein-airism. As Monet's anecdote suggests, spontaneous execution and sketchy touch were not necessarily the result of open-air aesthetics, nor proof of improvisation. A comparison of Monet's *Impression. Sunrise* with Manet's highly calculated *Departure from Boulogne Harbour* shows that the sketchy brushstroke could have been intentionally rough in emulation of Oriental ink paintings. The relationship between these paintings reveals the arbitrariness of Duret's neglect of the pictorial artifice in Monet's work in favour of his own preference for spontaneity of execution.

I have examined the relevance of Duret's interpretation of Monet and Impressionism through his *Japonisant* preferences. On the three main points — the relationship of Impressionist colour to Japanese prints, and of open-air execution to Oriental brush technique, and his evolutionary schema of the progress in French landscape painting — Duret's notions were more ideological than neutral, and his judgement too much shaped by the strategy of the Parisian art market to be taken at face value.<sup>28</sup> And yet his interpretations, however biased, were not rejected by Monet and those Impressionists who had become *Japonisants* no less enthusiastically than Duret. Indeed, the advice, strong advocacy and first-hand knowledge of a close friend would have been of undoubted encouragement to Monet and his colleagues. Thus Pissarro (one of the main organisers of the First Impressionist Exhibition, despite Duret's attempt at dissuasion) wrote after visiting an exhibition of Japanese prints by Hiroshige at Durand-Ruel's gallery in 1893:

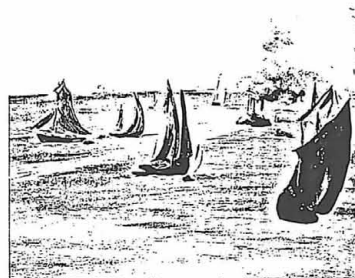
Marvellous, the Japanese Exhibition. Hiroshige is a surprising Impressionist. Monet, Rodin and I are enthusiastic. I am satisfied by my having made the effects of snow and flood. For, these Japanese artists confirm our visual predilections.<sup>29</sup>

In 1870, shortly before his trip to Japan, Duret had praised such snow scenes and encouraged the painter to continue in this way — as he did until the mid 1870s. Pissarro's letters to Duret on the latter's return from Japan suggest that Duret's new knowledge of aspects of Japanese art had helped confirm Pissarro's visual predilections. Two years after the exhibition of Japanese prints, Monet wrote from Norway:

I have here a delicious motif, little islands ... all covered by snow, a mountain in the background. One would say it's Japan. It is like Japan, which is, moreover, frequent in this country. I had in the train a view of Sandviken, which resembles a Japanese village, and I also did a mountain which one can see from everywhere, and which makes me dream of Fuji-Yama.<sup>30</sup>



Claude Monet *Impression, Sunrise*  
oil on canvas 48.0 x 63.0 cm (W. 263)  
Musée Marmottan-Monet, Paris



Edouard MANET *Departure from Boulogne Harbour* 1864  
oil on canvas 73.6 x 92.6 cm  
Art Institute of Chicago, Mr and Mrs Potter Palmer Collection

Monet's projection onto Norway of a snowy Japan known to him only through its art was analogous to Vincent van Gogh's visionary identification of Arles with a Japan full of colours under the strong summer sun in a transparent atmosphere, like the mythical land described by Duret.<sup>31</sup>

Finally I want to examine Monet as a '*décorateur*' in the mirror of Duret's *Japonisant* aesthetics. In *L'art japonais* (1885) Duret claimed that the Japanese had a quite different conception of decoration from Westerners:

It could be said ... that they are repulsed by balance and repetition, that they avoid as much as possible. They follow their caprice, and devote themselves to fantasy, and scatter the motifs of the decoration here and there, without any apparent system, but with a secret instinct for proportions, which ensures that the result fully satisfies the taste. Thanks to these processes Japanese decoration has inimitable variety, and M. Gonse is perfectly right when he says that the Japanese are the greatest decorators in the world.<sup>32</sup>

Similar ideas had been already expressed by several writers. As early as 1869 Ernest Chesneau had coined the term '*dysymétrie*' to designate the Japanese decorator's hatred of symmetry.<sup>33</sup> He repeated the idea in his famous article on Japanese art in the 1878 *Exposition universelle*, and also stated that the artists whom he had mentioned as *Japonisants* — including, Tissot, Whistler, Manet, Degas and Monet — had 'found among the Japanese ... a confirmation, rather than an inspiration of their personal ways of seeing, feeling and interpreting nature. Hence, instead of a weak-spirited submission to the Japanese art, the originality of each individual artist was strengthened.'<sup>34</sup> This passage anticipates Pissarro's comment that Japanese art confirmed their 'visual predilections'.

In 1883 Louis Gonse, editor of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*, organised a huge retrospective exhibition of Japanese art, and also published a monumental book, *L'art japonais*, in which he quoted extensively from Duret's study of Hokusai published in the *Gazette des beaux-arts* in 1882. In his book Gonse paid special attention to the painters of the Rimpa school:

Kōrin ... is perhaps the most original and the most personal of the painters of Nippon ... His style is like no other, and at first confuses the European eye. It seems at the antipodes of our taste and our habits. It is the summit of Impressionism, at least, it be understood, of the Impressionism of appearances, for his execution is melting, light and smooth, his brushwork astonishingly supple, sinuous and serene.<sup>35</sup>

We do not know if Monet shared Gonse's enthusiasm for Kōrin, although the prominence of prints of his works in the dining room at Giverny suggests that he did. These were pages from the widely diffused *Kōrin gafu*, an album of the artist's graphic work reproduced by woodblock, first published in 1802 — Gonse had a copy, as had Duret. The high appreciation of the decorative works of the Kōrin school by the French promoters of Impressionism, such as Duret and Gonse, could provide a new perspective on the inspiration of Monet's decorative schemes, the waterlily paintings for his *Grandes décorations*.

The pair of six-fold screens, *Flowers and trees by a mountain stream* of the late seventeenth century, attributed to the Sōtatsu school, was acquired by the dealer Sadajirō Yamanaka at the sale of Charles

Gillot's famous Japanese collection in Paris in 1904.<sup>36</sup> The motif of flowers and trees scattered on the decorative ground of a stylised stream is similar in composition to Monet's *Grandes décorations*, as is the huge scale of the vision realised by the extended width of the juxtaposed screens. As the sale was conducted in the galleries of Durand-Ruel — Monet's dealer for several decades — Monet could have had a close look at this screen.

In *Les peintres impressionnistes*, Duret recognised that 'water occupies the principal place' in Monet's work, and he claimed that the 'thousand nuances of sea and river water, the play of light in clouds, the vibrant colour of flowers and the variegated reflections of trees under the rays of a dazzling sun have been seized by him in all their truth'.<sup>37</sup> Duret's evocation could also be applied to many paintings of the Rimpa School.

The convergence of interest in the Oriental decorative tradition and the rehabilitation of the decorative arts in the second half of the nineteenth century is reflected in the texts of the *Japonisant* critics. Indeed, the sinuous but ample black lines of Chinese calligraphic ink painting with the subtle nuances of Rimpa design was described by Gonse as 'this undulating flexibility of contours', with the touch 'like a slippery material'. The motifs were scattered on the luminous gold or silver background, 'without any apparent system, but with a secret instinct for proportions ...' (as Duret put it).<sup>38</sup> Similar descriptions were commonly applied to the analysis of Monet's work. The highly praised manual dexterity of Japanese decorators also recalls Duret's description of Monet as possessing 'great facility in his handling of the brush: his touch is broad and rapid; work and effort are hidden. Each time that he begins a new subject, he discovers quite naturally, the appropriate means of rendering it'.<sup>39</sup>

One more coincidence can be detected in the French writer's desire to educate the public eye to unfamiliar beauties. Duret claimed that:

If one classifies painters according to the degree of novelty and unexpectedness of their works, one would, without hesitation, have to place [Monet] among the masters. But because the crowd is first repulsed by everything that is new and original in painting, this very individuality, which should recommend him, is precisely the reason why, to this day, the public and most critics have been alienated by him.<sup>40</sup>

In a similar fashion Gonse maintained that 'Kōrin's drawing is always strange and unexpected, his motifs ... have an almost gauche naivety which surprises one; but one soon becomes accustomed to it'; and he added: 'I confess very sincerely that Kōrin's taste, which at first really troubled me, today gives me the most refined enjoyment.' As Duret declared: 'Taste is a question of habit, and the palate requires apprenticeship'.<sup>41</sup>

It was in a direct response to the European appreciation of the Rimpa school that Japan began to rehabilitate this tradition in the early twentieth century. In his preface to *Masterpieces Selected from the Kōrin school* (1903–06), Baron Kuki Ryūichi, Director of the Imperial Museum, emphasised the supreme excellence of the 'decorative features' of the work, placing it in an international perspective by quoting from Gonse's comparison of the Rimpa school with French Impressionism.<sup>42</sup>

Almost simultaneously, Okakura Kakuzō, Kuki's top adviser and Director of the Tokyo School of Art until 1900, began to promote the Rimpa school in the West with publications in English.<sup>43</sup> In his *The Ideals of the East* (1903) — Monet owned the 1917 French edition — Okakura claimed that the artistic achievements of the Rimpa school preceded Western Impressionism by two centuries. In his view, the rich colours and the bold and ample calligraphic brushstrokes, as well as the subtle and inventive arrangement of the motifs on the luminous decorative surface, entitled the screens of the Rimpa school to be called Impressionist. In the Japan Fine Art Academy, a private institution founded by Okakura, similar decorative effects were pursued on golden and silver screens.<sup>44</sup>

The notion of decoration was also changing in late nineteenth-century France. While the *Japonisants*, Chesneau, Burty, Gonse, Duret and others, promoted Oriental decoration, Gustave Geffroy and Roger Marx represented a younger generation, bureaucrats and promoters of artistic reform in the Third Republic under Antonin Proust's direction. Both were involved in the reform of Gobelins tapestry manufacture, and both aimed to liberate the decorative arts from the yoke of historicist styles. Though Monet was sceptical about industrial reproduction, his ideal of the decoration itself did not necessarily contradict what had been dreamed by these bureaucrats. Significantly, the *Union centrale des beaux-arts appliqués à l'industrie* was reorganised under Proust's influence, and renamed in 1882 the *Union centrale des arts décoratifs*, thus registering a change in policy from the application of the fine arts to industry to the promotion of the 'decorative arts' as a means of social reform for the common good. This was the ideal to which Monet's younger friends adhered and, in the minds of Geffroy and Marx, this concept of decorative art was closely related to the ideal of Japanese art, as they conceived it.<sup>45</sup>

Roger Marx's famous fictional conversation with Monet should be understood in this context. It evokes the initial idea of a decoration composed of paintings of waterlilies:

'One moment the temptation came to me to employ this theme of waterlilies in the decoration of a salon: transported along the walls, enveloping all the panels with its unity, it would have procured the illusion of a whole without end, of a wave without horizon and without shore; nerves overcome by work would have unwound there, according to the restful example of these still waters, and, to whomever would have lived there, this room would have offered the asylum of a peaceful meditation in the centre of a flowering aquarium.'<sup>46</sup>

The notion of aesthetic comfort is similar to that expressed a few months earlier by Matisse in his *Notes d'un peintre* of 1908.

Guillemot had published the first account of Monet's idea for such a decoration in 1898:

Let one imagine a round room whose walls, beneath the supporting plinth, would be entirely occupied by a horizon of water spotted with these plants, walls of a transparency by turns green and mauve, the calm and the silence of the still waters reflecting the scattered blooms; the tones are imprecise, deliciously nuanced, of the delicacy of dreams.<sup>47</sup>

Here was Monet's dream of the *Grandes décorations* which would represent both the next stage of the *fin-de-siècle* Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk* and the Art nouveau movement. In a marked coincidence with Monet's project, the Nabis painters had begun to develop larger decorative schemes

than they had made in the 1890s. Many of Odilon Redon's paintings of his final years can be understood in the same context of the revival of large-scale decorative painting.<sup>48</sup>

In the last years of his life Monet was frequently visited at Giverny by Japanese collectors. Among them were the oil painter, Kojima Torajirō — who was responsible for the formation of the collection of his patron, Ohara Magosaburō, in the city of Kurashiki; and Matsukata Kojiro who — with the aid of the scholars Naruse Masakazu and Yashiro Yukio — made a huge collection which was to constitute the foundation of the holdings of the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, in a building designed by Le Corbusier and opened in 1959.<sup>49</sup> No doubt the Japanese visitors searched for a synthesis of Eastern and Western art in Monet's pantheistic decoration of waterlilies. And these Japanese collectors themselves owed their visual sensibilities — without necessarily being conscious of it — to the cross-cultural appreciation of artistic heritage since the epoch of Japonism.

The *Nymphéas* at the Oyamazaki Collection — which are sheltered in an underground structure designed by Andō Tadao — are the latest testimonies of the dialogue in art between the East and the West, the outcome of the long 'apprenticeship' which Duret, as an avant-garde art critic and well-known cosmopolitan, believed was necessary to reach true understanding between cultures.

Shigemi Inaga



Mme Kuroki (Princess Matsukata), Monet, Lily Butler, Blanche Hoschedé-Monet and Clemenceau, Giverny, June 1921, photograph. © Collection Philippe Piguet

- 1 Shigemi Inaga, 'Théodore Duret et Henri Cernuschi: journalisme politique, voyage en Asie et collection japonaise', *États. Etudes japonaises*, Tokyo: Actes du colloque, Henri Cernuschi (1821–1896), 1998, pp. 79–94.
- 2 Manuscript, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 1978-A-20.
- 3 2 February 1873, Janine Bailly-Herberg (ed.), *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris, 1980, vol. 1, pp. 78–79.
- 4 'Exposition du boulevard des Capucines: Les impressionnistes', *Le Siècle*, 29 April 1874; repr. in Ruth Benson (ed.), *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886. Documentation*, San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1966, vol. 1, pp. 15–17.
- 5 Jules Antoine Castagnary, 'Salon de 1878', *Salons*, Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1892, vol. 2, p. 350 (he referred to Eva González's painting).
- 6 In his *Les peintres impressionnistes* (1878), Duret wrote that in *Le Japonais* 'the red robe, with the embroideries in relief and the multicoloured fans pinned onto the wall constitute the real reason for the painting'. In this sense, the work can be interpreted as marking the shift from the Orientalist odalisque to an autonomous aesthetic decoration characteristic of late 19th-century decorative arts. Shigemi Inaga, *The Orient of Painting* [in Japanese], Nagoya, 1999, pp. 325–328.
- 7 Théodore Duret, 'Salon de 1870: Manet', *Électeur libre*, 7 June 1870; repr. in Denys Riout (ed.), *Critique d'avant-garde* (1885), Paris: Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1998, p. 42.
- 8 Maurice Guillemot, 'Claude Monet', *La revue illustrée*, 15 March 1898. Shigemi Inaga, *Le crépuscule de la peinture, la lune posthume d'Edouard Manet* [in Japanese], Nagoya, 1997, pp. 290–297.
- 9 Jules Claretie, '"Les japonais en 1872"', in *Peintres et sculpteurs contemporains*, Paris: Charpentier, 1874, p. 273 — he mentions Eschudier's *Japonaises*, Edouard Castres's *Bazar japonais*, Paul Lenoir's *Bac japonais*, and Adrien Marie's *Mouvement d'un dait-nôg* (see Geneviève Lacambre, *Le japonisme*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1988, figs 6, 141); Claretie, '"M. Edouard Manet", in "L'art français en 1872"', p. 205.
- 10 Théodore Duret, *Les peintres impressionnistes — Claude Monet, Sisley, C. Pissarro, Renoir, Berthe Morisot*, Paris: Heymann et Pérois, 1878; repr. in *Critique d'avant-garde* ([1885] 1998), pp. 52–53.
- 11 Akiko Mabuchi, 'Monet's "Le printemps à travers les branches" [in Japanese], *Japanisme, représentation et imagination des Européens*, Tokyo, 1997, ch. 3. See also Shigemi Inaga, 'La réinterprétation de la perspective linéaire au Japon (1740–1830) et son retour en France (1860–1910)', in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 49, 1983, pp. 29–45.
- 12 Henry Smith, 'Rethinking the "Blue Revolution" in Ukiyo-e', in Gian Carlo Calza and John T. Carpenter (eds), *Hokusai and his Age*, International Hokusai Research Centre, University of Venice (forthcoming); Gary Hickey, 'Hokusai landscape prints and Prussian Blue', in *Proceedings of the Third International Hokusai Conference*, Obuse: Third International Hokusai Conference Organising Committee 1998, pp. 40–46.
- 13 Inaga, *Le crépuscule de la peinture* (1997), pp. 239–274.
- 14 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet', preface, exhibition catalogue, Galerie de la Vie moderne, 1880; repr. in *Critique d'avant-garde* ([1885] 1998), p. 64.
- 15 In 1873, Armand Silvestre used the term 'bariole' when comparing Monet's painting and Japanese prints (*Galerie Durand-Ruel, Recueil d'estampes gravées à l'eau-forte*, 1873; repr. in Denys Riout (ed.), *Les écrivains devant l'impressionnisme*, Paris: Macula, 1989, pp. 37–38).
- 16 Duret, *Les peintres impressionnistes* ([1878] 1998), p. 52.
- 17 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 64.
- 18 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 64.
- 19 Joris-Karl Huysmans, 'L'exposition des Indépendants en 1880', *La réforme économique*, 1 July 1880; repr. in edited form, *L'art moderne*, Paris, 1883; repr. in *Les écrivains devant l'impressionnisme* (1989), pp. 252–257. Huysmans was probably alluding to Duret's 1880 preface for Monet's exhibition, without mentioning him.
- 20 Théodore Duret, 'L'art japonais' (1885); repr. in *Critique d'avant-garde* ([1885] 1998), pp. 87–88.
- 21 Duret, *Les peintres impressionnistes* ([1878] 1998), p. 54.
- 22 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 65.
- 23 Charles Ephrussi, in *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, 18 May 1878, p. 158 (supplement to the *Gazette des beaux-arts*).
- 24 Edmond Duranty, *La nouvelle peinture*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1876, new edn, Marcel Guérin (ed.), Paris: Floury, 1946, pp. 35–36. Emile Zola, 'Le Salon de 1879', *Messager d'Europe* [in Russian], July 1879; repr. in Jean-Paul Bouillon (ed.), *Le bon combat*, Paris: Hermann, 1974, pp. 206–207.
- 25 Huysmans, 'L'exposition des Indépendants en 1880', in *Les écrivains devant l'impressionnisme* (1989), pp. 252–257.
- 26 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 63.
- 27 Guillemot, 'Claude Monet' (1898), n.p.
- 28 In *Histoire des peintres impressionnistes*, Paris: H. Floury, 1906. While avoiding a conventional hagiography, Duret recounted the myth of vanguard artists suffering from material misery and public incomprehension before being recognised as masters of modern French painting. He published letters between Monet, Manet and Duret about Monet's desperate financial situation in 1875 (*La revue blanche*, 15 May 1899); he later said that their over-frequent publication had exaggerated the situation (Florent Fels, *Propos d'artistes*, Paris, 1925).
- 29 Letter to Lucien Pissarro, 3 February 1893, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro* (1980), vol. 3, p. 309, L. 870.
- 30 Monet to Blanche-Hoschedé, 1 March 1895, in Daniel Wildenstein (ed.), *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné*, 5 vols, Lausanne/Paris: Bibliothèque des arts, 1974–85, vol. 3, p. 282, L. 1276.
- 31 Duret's description of Japan, published in 1885, comparing the light and colours of Japan with the Midi could have influenced Van Gogh's comparison of Arles to Japan. See Inaga, *The Orient of Painting* (1999), ch. 3.
- 32 Duret, 'L'art japonais' ([1885] 1998), p. 89.
- 33 Ernest Chesneau, 'L'art japonais' (lecture given at the Union Centrale des beaux-arts appliqués à l'industrie, 15 February 1869), Paris: A. Morel, 1869. Richard Muther paraphrased Chesneau's *dynamisme* in a chapter on the influence of Japanese art, inserted between 'Realism' and 'Impressionism' — faithful to Duret's conception — in his monumental *The History of Modern Paintings* [trans. from German], 3 vols, London, 1893–94, vol. 2, pp. 714–715.
- 34 Ernest Chesneau, 'Exposition universelle. Le Japon à Paris', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, September 1878, pp. 385–396.
- 35 Louis Gosse, *L'art japonais*, Paris: A. Quantin, 1883, vol. 1, pp. 231–232. Timothy Clark, 'The intuition and genius of decoration: Critical reactions to Rimpas art', in *Rimpas art from the Idemitsu Collection*, exhibition catalogue, London: British Museum Press, 1998, pp. 68–82.
- 36 *Collection Ch. Gillot. Objets d'art et peinture d'Extrême-Orient*, Paris: Galeries Durand-Ruel, 8–13 February 1904, lot 2060.
- 37 Duret, *Les peintres impressionnistes* (1878), p. 63, 62.
- 38 Duret, 'L'art japonais' ([1885] 1998), p. 89.
- 39 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 66.
- 40 Duret, 'Le peintre Claude Monet' ([1880] 1998), p. 66.
- 41 Gosse, *L'art japonais* (1883), p. 6; Duret, *Les peintres impressionnistes* (1878), p. 61.
- 42 Shichi Tajima, *Masterpieces Selected from the Kōrin Salon*, Tokyo: Shimbi Shoin, 1903–06, 5 vols [in Japanese], 4 vols [in English]. Toshiko Tamamushi, 'Transitions in the image of Kōrin 1815–1915', *Bijutsu kenkyū*, [with English resume], no. 371, pp. 1–70.
- 43 Josephine M. Hyde, 'The Autumn Exhibition of the Nippon Bijutsu in The Japan Fine Arts Academy', *The Studio*, vol. 25, no. 108, 1902, pp. 128–130.
- 44 Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the Orient*, London: J. Murray, 1903, trans. *Les idéaux de l'Orient. Le réveil du Japon*, Paris: Payot, 1917. Asai Chu (1856–1907), inspired by Bing, whom he had met in Paris in 1900, promoted the renewal of the Rimpas tradition to modernise decorative design in Kyoto. Both believed that Art nouveau, promoted by Bing, was inspired by the Rimpas School, Christophe Marquer, Asai Chu in Paris. Awakening to Graphic Design', *Kindai Gakka*, no. 1, 1992; Asai Chu and the Lacquer Craft', *Bijutsu shi*, no. 134, 1993 [both in Japanese].
- 45 Gustave Geffroy, 'Les paysagistes japonais', *Le Japon artistique*, nos 32, 33, January–February 1891; Roger Marx, 'Sur le rôle et l'influence des arts de l'Extrême Orient', *Le Japon artistique*, no. 36, May 1891. Debora L. Silverman, *Art nouveau in fin-de-siècle France*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1989; Pierre Vaisse, 'De la fantaisie en histoire de l'art. A propos d'un livre récent', *Revue de l'art*, no. 111, 1996.
- 46 Roger Marx, 'Les Nymphéas de M. Claude Monet', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, June 1909, p. 529.
- 47 Guillemot, 'Claude Monet' (1898), n.p.
- 48 Claire Fitch-Thory, 'Les Nabis et les arts décoratifs', *Nabis 1888–1900*, exhibition catalogue, Munich: Prestel/Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993.
- 49 Takumi Hideo, 'Claude Monet and Japan' [Japanese, French translation], exhibition catalogue, *Monet et ses amis*, Musée d'art moderne d'Ibaraki, 1988.