

Japanese Influence on European Art

View Claude Monet's *La Japonaise* (Camille Monet in Japanese costume), 1876, oil on canvas, 231 x 142 cm, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

In collaborative groups, read and discuss the following statements. Then, develop a joint response to the questions presented.

The Artist

"If you absolutely must find an affiliation for me, select the Japanese of old times...their aesthetic...evokes a presence by means of shadow and the whole by means of a fragment."

--Claude Monet, 1909

The Art Critic/Art Historian

"In this painting, Monet makes reference to the Japonism which was in vogue during the 1860s, and not only in artist circles...Like many of his fellow artists, Monet also had a collection of Japanese kimonos, fans, and screens, which can still be seen and admired in his house in Giverny today.

As opposed to Monet's usual preference for everyday subjects, the arrangement of this scene looks rather contrived. Camille's pose and her blond wig create a somewhat artificial impression. The fans in the background seem to be floating in mid-air.

In retrospect, Monet took a critical view of this work (*La Japonaise*), calling it a concession to the popular taste of its time. Nonetheless, it bears eloquent witness to the fascination which the exotic held for Monet and his contemporaries."

-- Sagner-Duchting, K. (1992). *The Claude Monet poster book*.

Questions to Consider:

Identify and compare the two attitudes given by Monet towards this painting. Why do you think his opinion may have changed over time?

What specific aspects of this painting suggest a Japanese influence?

Locate the time of this work on a chronology, and discover what was happening around 1876. Why do you think Japanese aesthetics had such a profound effect on artists such as Monet and Van Gogh at this time?

Do you think that this painting was "a concession to the popular taste of its time," as suggested in the passage above? Give reasons for your answer.

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