

ART IMPRESSIONISTS

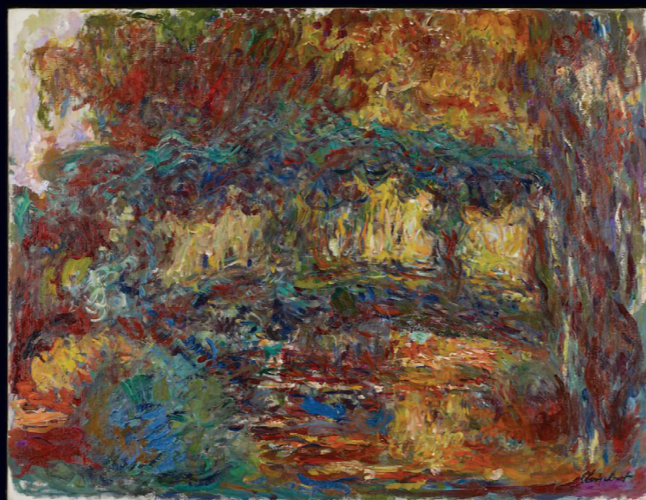
Is beauty purely in the eye of the beholder?



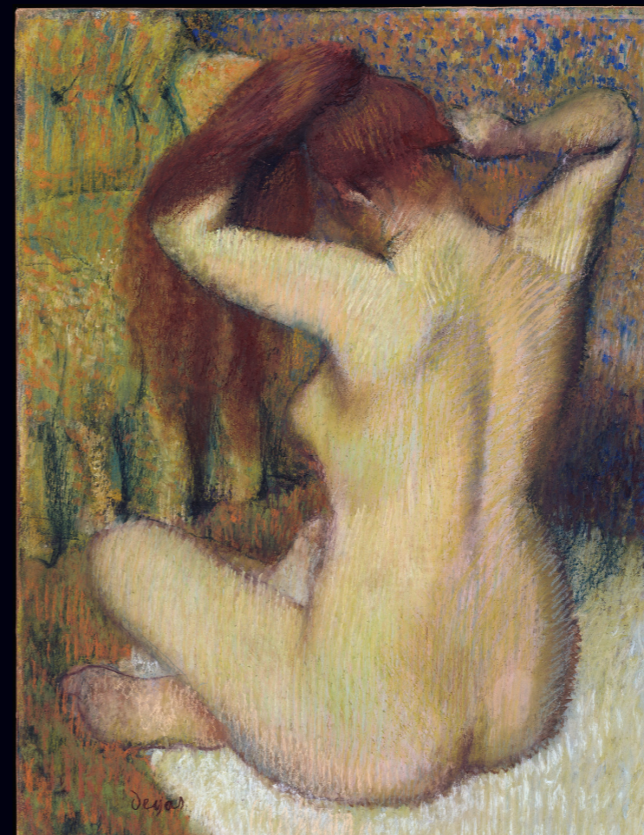
Degas's *The Dance Class* (1874). Held in The Met, New York.



Monet's *The Japanese Footbridge* (1899). Held in The National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Monet's *The Japanese Bridge* (1923-25). Held in The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis.



Degas's *Woman Combing her Hair* (1890). Held in The Met, New York.

BEAUTY IS OFTEN said to be in the eye of the beholder, but more objectively it can depend upon the eye of the artist who creates the painting.

A look at two renowned Impressionists shows how their views of their subject can change over time.

This change could reflect their growth and maturing of style, but could also reflect their advancing eye conditions.

Edgar Degas is said to be one of the founders of the Impressionist art movement.

This style is identified by how the artists capture the momentary and transient effects of sunlight on ordinary subjects, using rapid broken brush strokes which create a perception of movement.

Degas is particularly known for his bronze sculptures, paintings, and etchings of ballerinas and nude ladies.

These works are known and loved for their detailed depiction of movement, anatomical detail, and pose of the female form.

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His subject matter over the course of his career didn't change, which allows a study of the 'development' of his style over time.

In the 1880s, Degas's figures are clear and distinct with the use of subtle pastels.

By the late 1890s, the lines of his figures could be said to become 'softer' and less defined.

This progression continued into the early 1900s, where details began to disappear and colours became stronger, favouring more intense browns and strong blue tones.

Another founder of the Impressionist movement, Claude Monet, seems to have had a similar development in style over time.

This is evident in how he depicted his beloved and prolifically painted garden of Giverny in France.

An avid gardener, Monet went about transforming the rural orchard he had purchased into a veritable flowering garden.

His 'oriental garden' was created from a marsh across the road from his property.

Monet then spent the next 30 years of his life creating over 250 panels and paintings which depicted his 'pond' throughout the seasons and years.

The Japanese Footbridge, one of his early paintings of the garden, shows vibrant blues, greens, and cool tones with distinct images of the bridge, waterlilies and trees in the background.

By the mid 1900s, the subtle hues of earlier paintings were changing to flatter blues and greens.

The details of the reeds and flowers were becoming blurred.

By the 1920s his subtle colours had been replaced with strong dark pigments, depicting a scene that is indistinguishable as being the same as in his first *Japanese Footbridge*. But to Monet, it was the same subject – the colours were as he saw them and he was aware of the change.

He is reported to have said, in a letter to a Parisian eye doctor, that 'I no

longer perceived colours with the same intensity ... I no longer painted light in the same accuracy. Reds appeared muddy to me, pinks insipid, and the intermediate and lower tones escaped me'.

Both Degas and Monet were diagnosed with cataracts towards the end of their careers.

Despite this, they both continued with their art.

A cataract is a change in the consistency of the eye's natural lens, which sits behind the iris (coloured part of the eye).

The change typically results in people seeing more brown and yellow hues, while images and distinct edges are often blurred, hazy, and dulled.

The colour spectrum changes from white to yellow, blues darken, and subtle shades of colours become indistinguishable, as seen in the progression of Degas and Monet's work.

Cataract surgery in the 1880 and early 1900s was a significant operation, with sometimes devastating consequences, so was not often undertaken.

In 2021, thanks to technology and research, cataract surgery is one of the most common and successful operations.

Unless you are a painter or working in the arts, people with cataracts commonly notice that they have difficulty seeing things in the distance, and driving at night becomes a problem due to the glare of oncoming traffic lights.

Reading, even with glasses on, and seeing menus are also common problems.

If you are having these or other eye problems, you should visit your local optometrist to organise a referral to an ophthalmologist who can assess your eyes and determine what treatment is most appropriate for you. ●

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