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SLAM to present first U.S. exhibition bringing together major works by renowned painters Claude Monet and Joan Mitchell

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 26, 2022—Opening March 24, the Saint Louis Art Museum will present the first exhibition in America to examine the relationship between the paintings of two masters of their medium: the French artist Claude Monet (1840-1926) and the American artist Joan Mitchell (1925-1992).

“Monet/Mitchell: Painting the French Landscape” will present 24 paintings, 12 by each artist, and will closely follow the development of Mitchell’s work from 1968 until 1992, a period when she lived in the small village of Vétheuil, France overlooking a house once inhabited by Monet. Organized in partnership with the Fondation Louis Vuitton and the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, the exhibition adapts the Paris presentation of “Monet-Mitchell” now at the Fondation Louis Vuitton by incorporating eight different works by Mitchell and two by Monet.

The exhibition will open with a free, public opening celebration at 4 pm on Friday, March 24, 2023 and continue through June 25, 2023.

“Monet and Mitchell fearlessly and exuberantly upended the established traditions within their medium, and it is a joy to bring their monumental paintings together for our community to experience,” said Min Jung Kim, the Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum. “We are thrilled to present these two artists in dialogue with one another, and thank the Fondation Louis Vuitton and the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris for their generous loans to our exhibition.”

In 1968, Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell moved to the small village of Vétheuil in the north of France, where she would continue to live and work for the rest of her life overlooking a house where Claude Monet had lived between 1878 and 1881. The artist, a contemporary of Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Philip Guston, already counted the late Impressionist amongst her influences, but it was during this time period that she most intimately shared an interest in Monet’s most enduring subject: the landscape and flora of northern France. Their gestural and energetic canvases reflect a mutual affinity with the landscape, rivers, and rolling fields of the greater Paris region.

The exhibition examines the relationship to nature of these two artists and the ways in which they addressed similar themes of trees, earth, water, and flowers, as well as the inspiration of Monet and Mitchell’s gardens at Giverny and nearby Vétheuil, respectively. The exhibition also shows how Mitchell’s compositional formats, and vibrant, gestural style took inspiration from Monet’s. Mitchell’s vivid brushstrokes, saturated colors, and depiction of sunlight create an evocative sense of memory and feeling within her paintings, which abandoned formal composition and perspective. Monet’s later works, bold and undoubtedly abstract, were defined by their lack of formality, and are revered by generations for his brilliant, unexpected use of color and capturing of fleeting light. Monumental in scale and overwhelming in impact, the works in the exhibition highlight the fascination both painters had for expansive, panoramic formats, and their shared mastery of light, color, and expressive brushwork.

Exhibition highlights will include striking examples from Monet’s iconic “Water Lilies” series, considered a masterpiece of the Impressionist movement. Of these works, on view from SLAM’s permanent collection will be the central panel of Monet’s “Agapanthus” triptych, which the artist considered to be among “my four best series”. The exhibition will also highlight two paintings from the artist’s masterful “Japanese Bridge” series, circa 1918-24, and other works depicting the flowers and gardens of Giverny, including “Wisteria” (1919-20) on loan from the Musée Marmottan Monet. This will mark the first time these works by Monet will be displayed without frames in a US museum.

In the late 1950s when Monet’s work rose in popularity amongst US audiences, Mitchell took part in exhibitions devoted to the notion of "abstract impressionism," a term coined by her friend Elaine de Kooning in recognition of the Impressionists’ impact on the evolution of abstraction. Notable late works by Monet—considered precursors of abstraction by the painters of Abstract Expressionism for their remarkable treatment of color and light, and reduction of form—will be displayed with Mitchell’s canvases. Pairings of paintings by each artist—such as Monet’s “Weeping Willow (Saule pleureur)” (c.1921–22) and Mitchell’s “Red Tree” (1976) —will present each artist’s interpretation of particular natural elements.

“By presenting the paintings of Monet and Mitchell in dialogue, we see how fervently they each depicted the beauty and transience of their beloved Vétheuil and Giverny,” said Simon Kelly, SLAM’s curator of modern and contemporary art. “While Mitchell both embraced and disavowed comparisons between her work and that of the late Impressionist, the through lines between their paintings are both undeniable and astonishing to witness.”

Highlights from Mitchell’s oeuvre include “Ici” (1992), one of her poignant, final paintings, rendered in broad brush strokes of radiant blues, yellows, purples and oranges. A selection of diptychs from the 1980s, including “Row Row” (1982) and “River” (1989) suggest visions of the Seine in cool blues and yellows. Mitchell painted “Plowed Field” (1971), a monumental triptych featuring more distinct blocks of greens, reds and other colors demarcating a field, just a few years after relocating to Vétheuil. Mitchell’s permanent move to France became synonymous with her multi-paneled, or polyptych, paintings of the 1970s and 80s. Highlights of Mitchell’s works will also include paintings from the 1980s, such as “South” (1989), a work which references Cezanne’s iconic series of the Mont Saint-Victoire, in a nod to another great French Impressionist.

Throughout the duration of the exhibition, SLAM will present a robust schedule of community and educational programming that will offer visitors the opportunity to explore the restorative and meditative potential and rich histories of these beautiful paintings. The exhibition is curated by Simon Kelly.

The Saint Louis Art Museum is one of the nation’s leading comprehensive art museums with collections that include works of art of exceptional quality from virtually every culture and time period. Areas of notable depth include Oceanic art, ancient American art, ancient Chinese bronzes and European and American art of the late 19th and 20th centuries, with particular strength in 20th-century German art. Admission to the Saint Louis Art Museum is free to all every day. For more information, call 314.721.0072 or visit slam.org.