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The Making of Paris: Musée d'Orsay Museum Critique: Prompt 1

Impressionism was a European art movement that occurred during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The movement is characterized mostly through painting techniques that differed from the widely accepted norms of Salons at the time; unblended colors, a preoccupation with capturing light, and attention to movement and atmosphere through unique, loose brushstrokes. The Musée d'Orsay in Paris houses many works by the most important and influential French Impressionists of this period, including Claude Monet, Édouard Manet, and Paul Cézanne, among many others. The three works of art from the Musée d'Orsay that I will describe and analyze in this paper are *Paysage de Provence* by Paul Guigou, *Nature morte à la bouilloire* by Paul Cézanne, and *Londres, le Parlement. Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* by Claude Monet.

Paul Guigou's *Paysage de Provence* (Fig. 1) is an outdoor landscape of the French countryside; natural elements (trees, mountains) combined with a human presence (a small, lone figure and a farm) are typical of subject matter of this time. What is most striking about the piece, however, is its use of unique brushstrokes and accurate depiction of outdoor light. Bright colors are contrasted with dark, almost black shadows, suggesting high noon and accurately encapsulating the starkness of direct sunlight (Fig 1.1). Guigou seemed to have used a sponge or very course brush when painting this piece—the rough marks on the painting suggest as much. This somewhat unconventional use of tools gives texture to the work, both literally (the actual physicality of the paint on the canvas) and representationally (the forms within the painting). Specifically, the roughened texturing

gives more dimension to the clouds in the sky (Fig. 1.2), and more details in the leaves of the landscape's vegetation (Fig 1.1).

Much like *Paysage de Provence*, Paul Cézanne's *Nature morte à la bouilloire* (Fig. 2) uses color to emphasize the space in which this piece is depicted. While Guigou aimed to capture sunlight, Cézanne's indoor still life sought to highlight artificial light. While there is a warm, yellow overtone to Guigou's composition, Cézanne uses almost pure white (among other contextual signifiers, such as a grey background) to signify that his light source was not natural. This purity, so stark that it seems almost straight from the tube, can be seen in the reflections of the kettle and pot in the scene (Fig. 2.1), mirroring a light source that seems to come from a lamp just out of sight above the piece's upper left corner. The white is so unadulterated that it's almost glaring.

Typical of Cézanne's work are thick, wide, and heavy brushstrokes that give the impression of fast gestures in this painting. Unlike works of earlier movements, with almost perfect applications and blending of paint, here we come as close as possible to seeing the artist's hand. Guigou's work as well suggests a unique and individual hand; both artists, aligning to one of the signifying styles of Impressionism, neglect in some places to fully blend colors. This is more apparent, however, in *Nature morte à la bouilloire*, specifically in the artist's rendering of white cloth (Fig. 2.2). Cézanne uses almost pure whites and blacks to create the cloth, yet nonetheless captures the fluidity of fabric through brushstrokes. Guigou's signifying brushworks are less significant in *Paysage de Provence*, possibly because, as previously mentioned, he emphasized the use of the application of paint with a course tool. He also applies less paint to the canvas than Cézanne.

*Londres, le Parlement. Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* (Fig. 3) is similar and contrasting to the preceding two works in a multitude of ways. It is perhaps here that the experimentation of color to depict light is most extreme. Part of a series done by Monet in depicting the London Parliament building at different times of the day, this particular piece captures a sunset (*Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* translates to *Sunset in the fog*) and uses a wide color palette to do such, much more so *Paysage de Provence* or *Nature morte à la bouilloire*. While the previous works depict light using an overtone that affects the objects and forms in the entire composition, Monet's work captures the brilliance of a sunset using pinks, oranges, and yellows as well as the dusk predominantly depicted through blues and greens. The contrast between these cool and warm colors depicts a weak yet nonetheless fiery light. The lighting is much stronger in Guigou and Cézanne's works than it is here. Yet similarly to Guigou and Cézanne, Monet largely neglects to blend the colors he uses.

Monet's brushstrokes in this piece also present another extreme in the way the artist applied his paint. Unlike Guigou and Cézanne's works, Monet's brushstrokes in *Londres, le Parlement* are almost completely uniform. Their consistency throughout the painting rarely deviate from brief splashes of color. Specifically, Monet used small, short strokes to create a blended landscape where forms are difficult to distinguish. Because of the nearly identical brushstrokes used throughout the composition, forms are not defined by lines but rather by soft, subtle differences in color. Additionally, the brushstrokes on the whole (with the exception of the depiction of the water) generally follow a large, sweeping clockwise pattern (Fig. 3.1). This gives motion to the otherwise static landscape. Guigou neglects to achieve this overall motion through brushstrokes in his

painting. Cézanne does not achieve this uniform movement either throughout his entire composition. However, a similar pattern of identically oriented brushstrokes can be seen in certain parts of *Nature morte à la bouilloire*, specifically within the painting's grey background.

Monet was also able to achieve the depiction of fog in *Londres, le Parlement*. The combination of color and subtle, soft strokes gives the feel of haze and atmospheric perspective. The soft outlines of the Parliament (Fig. 3.2) building also give the illusion of misty air—usually architecture is depicted rectilinearly and geometrically through use of clear and straight lines. This painting has none. The building's presence is announced solely through color. Contrastingly, there is no atmospheric obscurity in Guigou or Cézanne's works. In fact, as previously mentioned, their stark uses of color to depict light shows the clarity of the scenes they depict. We see this with Guigou's harsh, unclouded sun and Cézanne's garish light bulb.

*Paysage de Provence, Nature morte à la bouilloire, and Londres, le Parlement. Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* used unique color and brushstroke to achieve a readily identifiable style unique to each artist. Paul Guigou used coarse brushstrokes and warm overtones to depict a lush, wild landscape at high noon. Paul Cézanne, contrastingly, used cool overtones and thickly applied paint in sweeping movements to capture the artificiality of the staged still life. Claude Monet used the widest color palette of these featured paintings, and an almost undeviating brushstroke to capture the haze of London in a fleeting sunset. While these three compositions are immediately different in overall forms and composition, the artists' inattention to specific detail, form, and color blending are similarly utilized. Such techniques, while differently applied, are all characteristic of

the Impressionist style and serve to highlight the artists' unique hand while still acknowledging the Impressionists' stylistic similarities.



Fig. 1. *Paysage de Provence*. Paul Guigou, 1860. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 1.1. Detail from *Paysage de Provence*.



Fig 1.2. Detail from *Paysage de Provence*.



Fig. 2. *Nature morte à la bouilloire*. Paul Cézanne, 1867-1869. Oil on canvas.



Fig. 2.1. Detail from *Nature morte à la bouilloire*.



Fig. 2.2. Detail from *Nature morte à la bouilloire*.





Fig. 3. *Londres, le Parlement. Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard.* Claude Monet, 1904. Oil on canvas.

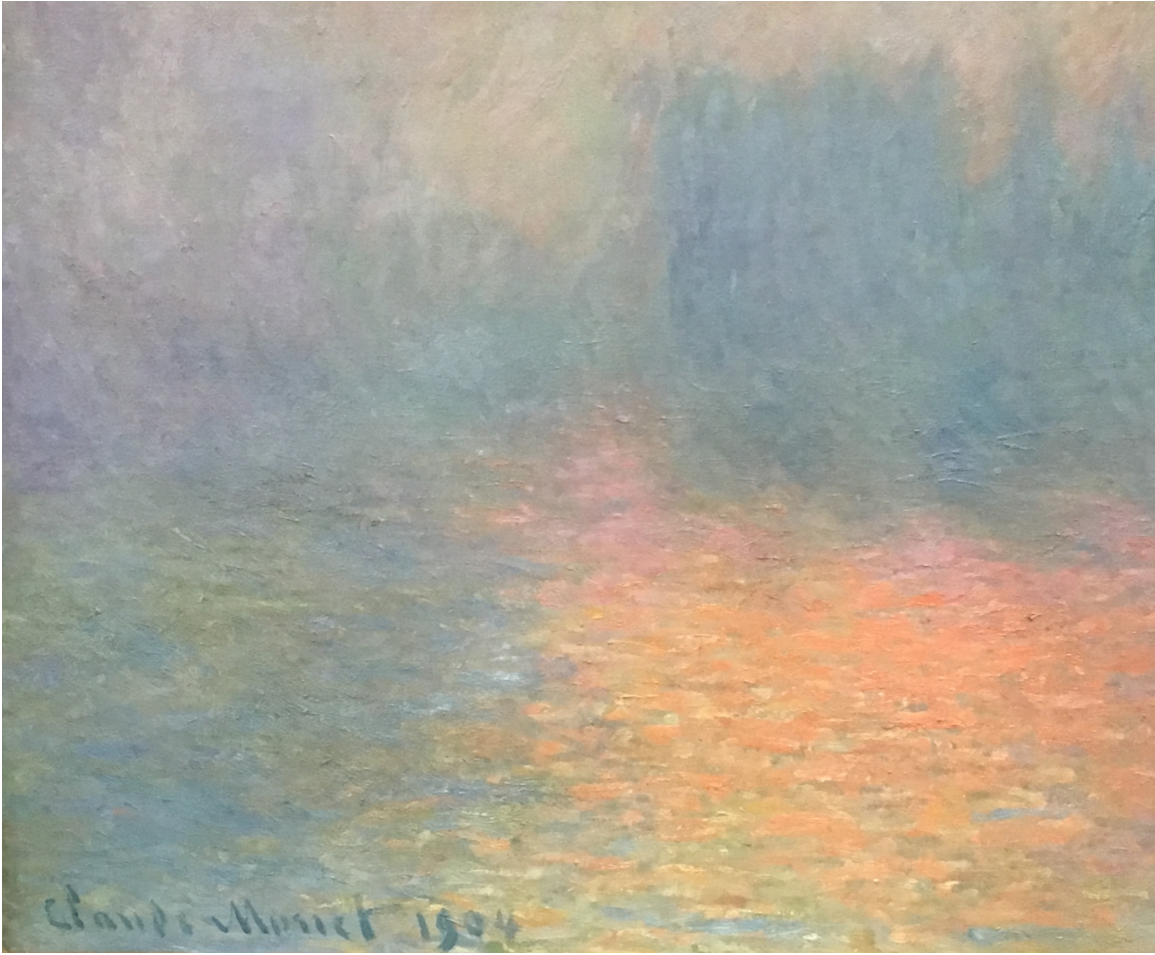


Fig. 3.1. Detail from *Londres, le Parlement. Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard*.

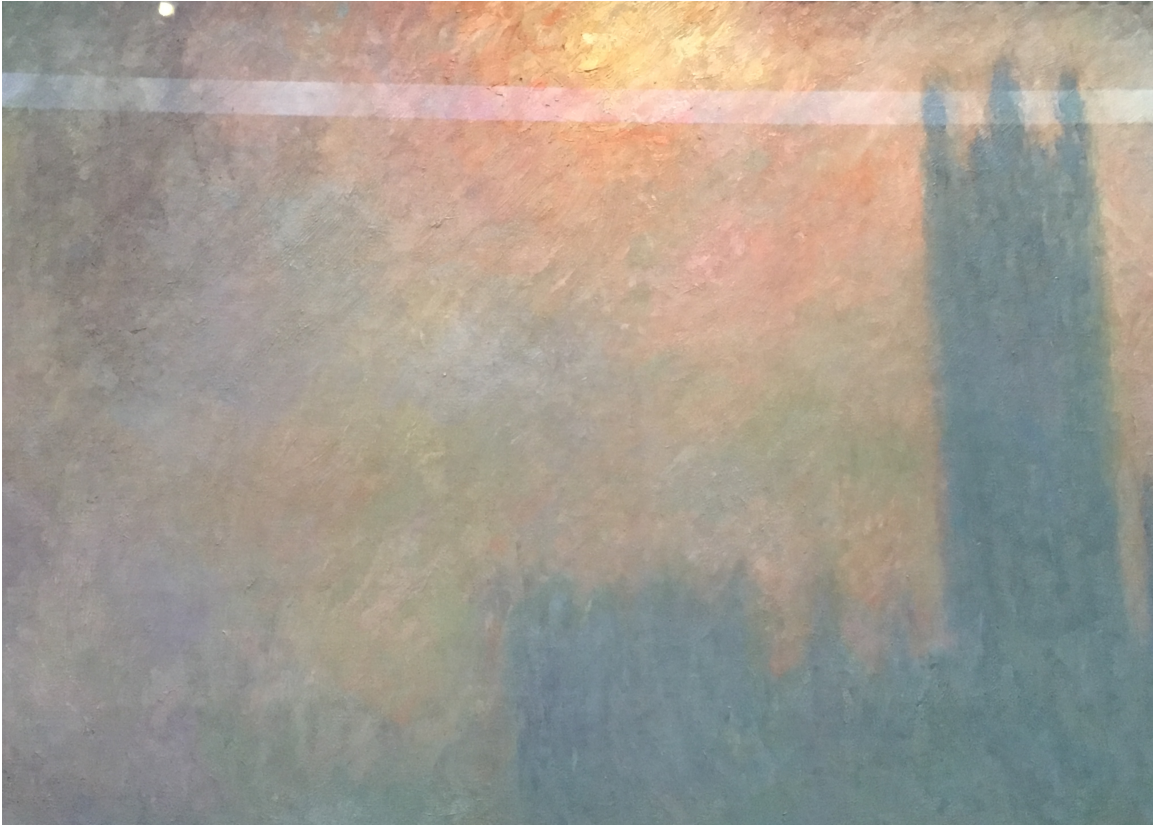


Fig. 3.2. Detail from *Londres, le Parlement*. *Trouée de soleil dans le brouillard*.