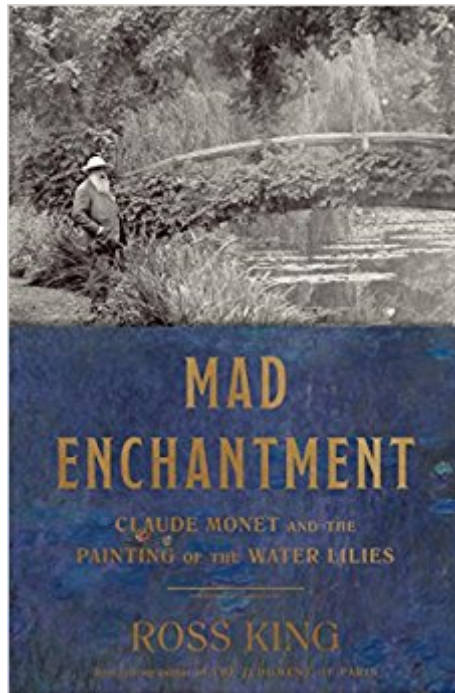




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Mad Enchantment: Claude Monet And The Painting Of The Water Lilies



Synopsis

Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist From bestselling author Ross King, a brilliant portrait of legendary artist Claude Monet and the story of his most memorable achievement, the water lilies. Claude Monet is perhaps the world's most beloved artist, and among all his creations, the paintings of the water lilies in his garden at Giverny are most famous. Seeing them in museums around the world, viewers are transported by the power of Monet's brush into a peaceful world of harmonious nature. Monet himself intended them to provide "an asylum of peaceful meditation." Yet, as Ross King reveals in his magisterial chronicle of both artist and masterpiece, these beautiful canvases belie the intense frustration Monet experienced at the difficulties of capturing the fugitive effects of light, water, and color. They also reflect the terrible personal torments Monet suffered in the last dozen years of his life. *Mad Enchantment* tells the full story behind the creation of the Water Lilies, as the horrors of World War I came ever closer to Paris and Giverny, and a new generation of younger artists, led by Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, were challenging the achievements of Impressionism. By early 1914, French newspapers were reporting that Monet, by then 73 and one of the world's wealthiest, most celebrated painters, had retired his brushes. He had lost his beloved wife, Alice, and his eldest son, Jean. His famously acute vision--what Paul Cezanne called "the most prodigious eye in the history of painting"--was threatened by cataracts. And yet, despite ill health, self-doubt, and advancing age, Monet began painting again on a more ambitious scale than ever before. Linking great artistic achievement to the personal and historical dramas unfolding around it, Ross King presents the most intimate and revealing portrait of an iconic figure in world culture--from his lavish lifestyle and tempestuous personality to his close friendship with the fiery war leader Georges Clemenceau, who regarded the Water Lilies as one of the highest expressions of the human spirit.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Ross King's *Mad Enchantment: Claude Monet and the Painting of the Water Lilies* is an engaging and authoritative portrait of the aged artist and his travails. . . the Monet who emerges from King's pages is a sympathetic and vivid character. . . A moving portrait of the artist as an old man." - Deborah Solomon, *New York Times Book Review*"King, author of books on Michelangelo, Leonardo and Machiavelli, offers a well-researched and in-depth account, based on Monet's letters and the reminiscences and writings of his many friends and admirers. . . . Readers will come away with an enhanced understanding of Monet's art, about which King is insightful and articulate. And when King animates the colorful politics of Monet's France, the book sparkles." - Philip Kennicott, *The Washington Post*"[A] sensitive, deeply researched and altogether delightful biography." - *Newsday*"A vivid account of Claude Monet (1840-1926) facing his greatest artistic challenge in the last years of his life. . . . King elegantly reveals the soul of a great artist, the last impressionist standing at the end of one of history's most remarkable art movements." - starred review, *Kirkus*"Biographer Ross King once again puts a human face on the historical narrative of an artistic triumph [Monet] described himself as 'at war with nature and time,' and 'Mad Enchantment' captures that war with page-turning intensity." - *Christian Science Monitor*"If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, than anyone who is not drawn into *Mad Enchantment: Claude Monet and the Painting of the Water Lilies* by Ross King is truly visually impaired . . . Mad Enchantment is a book to be read and enjoyed; it is a learning experience for those both learned and inexperienced in the world of art. Ross King does an exemplary job of bringing Claude Monet back to life. This one belongs on the bookshelf within easy reach." - *New York Journal of Books*"Mr. King's portrait of Monet--as driven, largely generous, sometimes petulant, never quite cruel--is finely balanced. . . Mr. King's first-rate 'The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade That Gave the World Impressionism' (2006) centered on youth and aesthetic revolt. 'Mad Enchantment,' by contrast, celebrates the twilight culmination of the Impressionist movement. Taken together, they are satisfying and informative bookends." - *Wall Street Journal*"King, an exhaustive researcher and a pleasing writer, has produced a perceptive chronicle of war and friendship, shifting tastes and lasting art -- and of the painted reflections of a pond that became a mirror." - Christopher

Sullivan, The Associated Press"King is ever the brilliant docent murmuring the right, telling details and critical backstories in our ear as we move through space and time. He ultimately brings the man and his work into perfect focus while increasing his audience's interest in both all the more.

VERDICT This work is essential." - starred review, Library Journal"Best-selling King (Leonardo and the Last Supper, 2012) consummately meshes biography with art history as he turns the creation of one resounding masterpiece into a portal onto the artist's life. . . . Never before has the full drama and significance of Monet's magnificent Water Lilies been conveyed with such knowledge and perception, empathy and wonder." - starred review, Booklist"King's marvelous storytelling draws us back to these sublime, timeless paintings, so remote from -- and yet, paradoxically, so necessary a part of -- our own unquiet times." - Dallas Morning News"Ross King has a knack for explaining complicated processes in a manner that is not only lucid but downright intriguing . . . Fascinating." - Los Angeles Times on BRUNELLESCHI'S DOME"An altogether enchanting tale." - Dava Sobel, author of LONGITUDE and GALILEO'S DAUGHTER, on BRUNELLESCHI'S DOME"[A] dramatic, vivid, and brainy mix of biography and art history." - starred review, Booklist on LEONARDO AND THE LAST SUPPER"A fascinating and in-depth story of one of the world's most famous works of art that will appeal to general readers as well as academics. Highly recommended." - starred review, Library Journal on LEONARDO AND THE LAST SUPPER"Riveting . . . Such material could have been tedious in less nimble literary hands. But so thorough is King's grasp of the Second Empire's cultural politics, so ironic his wit and choice of detail, that his text remains a page-turner throughout." - Los Angeles Times on THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS"Scrupulously researched, written with wit and panache, Ross King's Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling is a sublime peek into a remarkable era." - Miami Herald on MICHELANGELO AND THE POPE'S CEILING

Ross King is the author of Brunelleschi's Dome, Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling, The Judgment of Paris, Leonardo and the Last Supper, and Machiavelli: Philosopher of Power, along with two novels, Ex Libris and Domino. He has twice won Canada's Governor General's Award, and his work has been nominated for a National Book Critics' Circle Award, the Charles Taylor Prize, and the National Award for Arts Writing. He has lectured at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian, the Aspen Institute, and the Frick Collection, and in Florence, Milan, Paris, and Giverny. Born in Canada, he now lives near Oxford with his wife, Melanie.

Make no mistake. This book is more about history than art. (Or the history of art, as I was taught it in

college, where images cannot be separated from the artist and the times that produced them.) As someone who majored in art history in college, I found its blend of art, context and personality utterly compelling. But if you're looking for lavish illustrations of Monet's celebrated water lily paintings, as one reviewer lamented, you won't find them. (The Internet has scads of images of them, of course.) If, however, you're interested in a detailed, comprehensive and incisive account of Monet the man and the circumstances that led him to create his water lily paintings, or *Grande Decoration*, as he envisioned them, you'll find that in spades. And in my book, it's the only way they have any real meaning, and why I found the book so interesting. Author Ross King is a skilled, fluent writer, who brings the people and their era to life. He's done so much research that much of the book reads almost like fiction, with strongly defined characters and the kinds of details that grab your attention. (Monet's fondness for food, for instance, and the famous lunches he'd serve his guests.) The horrors of World War I, which was the backdrop behind many of Monet's water lily paintings (they helped serve as a distraction for him) are vividly depicted. And Monet's beloved home in Giverny is as much a character as his close friend, the statesman and journalist Georges Clemenceau and his family members, especially his stepdaughter, daughter-in-law and helpmate, Blanche. While Monet's Impressionist colleagues are dying (or have died), he remains robust for his age, even while the infirmities of old age are taking their toll, especially cataracts that make it harder and harder for him to see the colors and landscapes that led to his fame and fortune. In the end, this is a detailed snapshot of a period in the life of one of the world's greatest and most beloved artists, made possible through King's exhaustive research and skillful writing. If I have one gripe, it's that at times it seems as if the book is a bit too long, which is why I've deducted one star. But rest assured, if you're interested in late 19th/early 20th century art and the events and people who produced it, this is an exceptionally good read.

Monet in his later years, struggling with cataracts which caused color changes, eye pain from the sun's glare and reflection off the water, as well as blurred vision as he was struggling to paint. Amazingly, he overcame these seemingly impossible obstacles to create his water lily series. Always an admirer of his work, I feel I have a much better understanding of him as a man after reading this book.

An excellent review of an age long past from both a retrospective and forward looking perspective. The insertion of so many key characters of French politics, Literature, and the arts as well as the tension between the "Old Guard" and the cutting/bleeding edge of art. The focus on what World War

I dos to French Art was good, but, a bit drawn out at the end.

It's an amazingly in-depth portrayal of Monet in his last years and the impact of World War I and his declining eyesight on his art and temperament. Perfect for someone who loves art history.

An exhibit of Monet's early work led me to Ross King's Mad Enchantment. King's research, grasp of the creative, artistic life and writing style have resulted in a very readable book. The use of Monet's friendship with Clemenceau provides a rich context. I only wish I had read this book before visiting Giverny and the Marmotten.

Fantastic biography. So much detail about the painting, and the paintings. A sensitive and personal look at Monet, his life, his work, the times he lived in and how all of it affected his work and how his work affected history. Terrific. I will read another by Ross King.

Interesting man and story .I have visited his home,

Bought this as a gift for my wife after we visited Monet's home and gardens in Giverny, France this year, and it was a big hit with her. I haven't read it yet, but that's not what I bought it for.

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