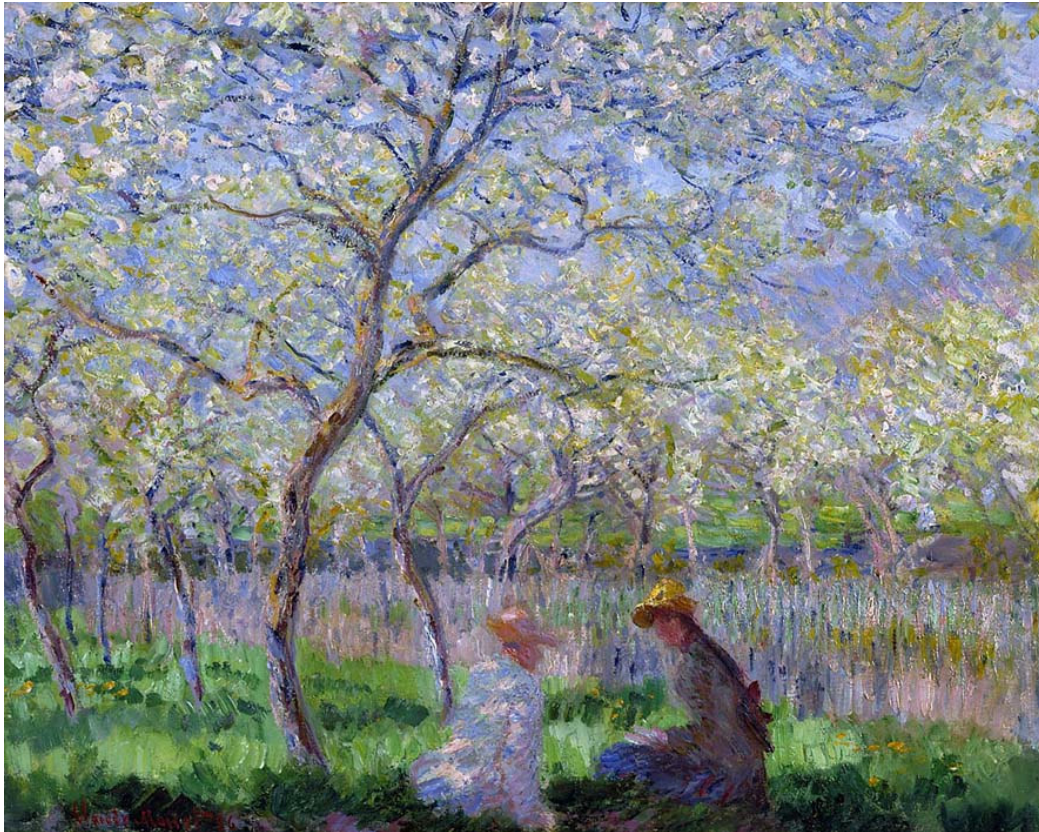


THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Fact Sheet

Springtime by Claude Monet



Title:	Springtime
Maker:	Claude Monet (1840-1926)
Medium:	Oil on canvas
Date:	1886
Dimensions:	h. 64.8 x w. 80.6 cm
Museum No:	PD.2-1953
Gallery:	5

Key Dates for Monet

1840	Born in Paris
1845	Family moves to Le Havre
1858	Meets Eugène Boudin who encourages him to paint in open air
1859	Moves to study in Paris, meets Pissarro at Atelier Suisse
1862	Meets Dutch landscapist Johan Barthold Jonkind
1863	Meets Renoir, Sisley and Bazille
1867	His son Jean born to Camille Doncieux
1870	Marries Camille, visits England and meets dealer Durand-Rule
1871	Moves to Argenteuil and paints Seine, the town and his house and gardens – much visited by other artists
1874	First Impressionist exhibition in Paris (first of 8 in total)
1877	Paints over a dozen views of St-Lazar Station in Paris
1877	Camille dies
1880s	Several painting trips throughout decade to Normandy, Brittany and Mediterranean coasts to paint dramatic scenery in changing weather conditions.
1883	Settles at Giverny
1886	PAINTS THIS PAINTING in spring in orchard at Giverny
1890s	Begins series paintings including the <i>Poplars</i> , marries Alice Hoschedé
1900	Enlarges water lily pond in his garden
1908	Begins to suffer from cataracts on eye
1914	Builds studio for series of water lilies
1926	Dies at Giverny

This painting shows the orchard of Monet's garden at Giverny. The artist's son Jean is on the left, and his stepdaughter Suzanne Hoschedé on the right. The flowering fruit trees in the garden of this property were some of the first aspects which attracted him to his home of more than forty years.

Springtime is a very good example of the revolutionary way that the Impressionists handled paint. It is in complete contrast to the smooth surface of paintings produced by the more traditional academic artists whose work was shown in the Salon. In this painting we are very aware of the paint itself and how it has been applied to the canvas. Monet said:

'When you go out to paint, try to forget what object you have before you – a tree, a house, a field, or whatever. Merely think here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact colour and shape, until you have your own naïve impression'.

The way in which Monet has painted the white blossom in the top two-thirds of the painting keeps our attention in the foreground of the painting, as our eyes travel down from the blossom, to the tall grasses and finally the green grass on which Jean and Suzanne sit in dappled shade, partly encircled in the trunk and bough of the tree. Each of these horizontal bands in the painting bears the brushstrokes of the contrasting ways that Monet has handled the paint.

Springtime, in its palette of colours, displays some of the colour theory of the Impressionists. Working in the open air demanded that they work with speed. The invention of lightweight metal tubes for storing paint in the 1840s and the availability of folding easels helped them to do this. They developed a technique to capture fleeting light effects and colours of nature quickly. Here Monet uses a limited range of bold colours, with shadows in a violet hue. The Romantic artist Delacroix had mixed his colours with white to increase the overall brightness of his paintings and used colour to indicate shadows rather than black, and his influence can be seen here. The Impressionists were repeatedly criticized in some circles for 'seeing blue' or for what was known as 'violettomania'.

The Impressionists liked to use colour contrasts. This involved using the contrast of opposite or complementary colours such as red and green, yellow and mauve, orange and blue – often using these colours against one another to create the appearance of light. The basic complementary pairs of colour are related to the primaries: each primary has a complementary created by mixing the other two. Chevreul first published his influential book, *On the Law of Simultaneous Contrast of Colours* in 1839. It describes how neighbouring colours modify each other, the most intense effects occurring when complementaries are contrasted. Monet used a colour contrast here in the green of the grass set against the details picked out in red and purple in the figure of Suzanne. The effect emphasises the brilliance of the spring light on the grass.