This coming February, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and Fundación Caja Madrid are presenting the exhibition *Monet and Abstraction*. It offers a survey of the work of the great French Impressionist painter from an innovative perspective and one never previously employed in the context of a temporary exhibition of this scale and importance, namely the artist's relationship with the development of abstraction in the second half of the 20th century.

From his ethereal London landscapes to the monumental depictions of his garden at Giverny where he spent the last forty years of his life, the exhibition looks at how Claude Monet's permanent obsession with capturing the instantaneous led him to break down pictorial representation to the point of reaching the threshold of abstraction. It also analyses how, around the middle of the 20th century, the young generation of European and American abstract artists rediscovered his art and elevated the figure of Monet to the status of undisputed prophet of the material-based trends within abstraction. Monet thus came to occupy the fundamental role within the history of art that he still maintains today.

Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, Adolph Gottlieb, André Masson, Philip Guston and Gerhard Richter were among the young artists who turned back to Monet. The present exhibition now offers the chance to see their work in the context of a fascinating dialogue with that of the Impressionist master, revealing numerous connections. Exhibiting Monet's painting in this new way allows for an analysis of the important influence that he exerted on the development of certain aspects of abstraction in the second half of the 20th century and hence his key role in the development of modern art.

More than 100 works have been assembled for this new project, jointly organised by the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and Fundación Caja Madrid. It has benefited from the fundamental collaboration of the Musée Marmottan Monet in Paris, where the exhibition will be seen in the summer of 2010 after its Madrid showing. The French museum has lent a magnificent group of works from the major legacy of works by Monet that it houses. Also important are the numerous loans from museums and private collections around the world, particularly Europe and the USA.

**Images from left to right:**

**For more information and / or images, please contact with:**
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza – Press Office. Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014 Madrid. Telephones +34 914203944 / 913600236. Fax +34 914202780. prensa@museothyssen.org; www.museothyssen.org
www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2009/Monet-y-la-abstraccion
Monet was undoubtedly the most celebrated and prolific of the French Impressionists, but he was also the most independent and innovative. His obsession with capturing a sense of the instantaneous, his interest in issues such as the perception of nature and his need to express his personal experience solely through pictorial means led him to break down pictorial representation into an almost abstract atmosphere. Monet's death in December 1926 passed almost unnoticed within the art world of the day. His Grandes Décorations comprising the Water Lilies series, donated to the French State by the artist himself in 1918 and placed on display in 1927, one year after his death, were largely ignored for decades in the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.

In the early decades of the 20th century the norms of the new avant-garde movements prevailed, primarily based on the concept of "construction". As a result, Monet's work, like that of most of the Impressionist painters other than Cézanne, was considered out of date and was consequently forgotten. The rediscovery of Monet did not come about until the mid-20th century when young artists of the triumphant Abstract Expressionism movement in the United States began to look at his works with a fresh eye. The emphasis on paint and its application in his work, his "all-over" technique, his loose brushstroke and sketchy forms were nothing less than a revelation both for the young generation of Abstract Expressionists in the States and for the followers of European Informalism.

As is habitually the case, the exhibition is divided between the galleries of the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and those of Fundación Caja Madrid.

**MUSEO THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA**

**1. Mists and variations**

The exhibition opens with a room devoted to the impact that the work of Turner had on Claude Monet during the trips to London that Monet made between 1899 and 1901. A comparison of Turner's work with Monet's paintings of the Thames allows us to appreciate how the play of light across Turner's sparkling pictorial surfaces and his loose, free brushwork influenced Monet's subtle effects in his urban landscapes bathed in the London fog. In addition, the presence in this room of the work of Gerhard Richter, who also executed a series inspired by London, establishes a connection with contemporary abstraction.
2. Effects of light

Monet’s sunsets reveal his interest in depicting the changing and ephemeral effects of evening light on the picture surface. The way in which he transformed the rhythms of nature into the expression of his own emotions through a loose, free technique in which the study of colour became the true protagonist, anticipates the chromatic abstractions of later artists such as Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb.


3. Reflections and transparencies

In the rooms devoted to the subject of Water lilies - one of the most important chapters within the artist’s late output - Monet reveals a growing interest in reconciling a representative type of art, which he never fully abandoned, and a defence of the material aspects of the paint surface. These works mark a shift in his art from narration to abstraction, a process that is related in the present exhibition to the subtle abstraction of the American painter Helen Frankenthaler.


4. Contrasts of forms

The variations of light, time and atmosphere and the contrasts of forms that arise from the reflection of vegetation on tranquil water captured by Monet in a number of his series were crucial for later artists such as Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman. Their brilliantly coloured shapes with strong effects of backlighting must inevitably be related to the work of Monet.

5. **Brushstroke and gesture**

The innovative technique used by Monet in the last years of his life paved the way for the abstract idioms of the 20th century. In the final rooms of this first part of the exhibition, paintings from Monet's last period establish a dialogue with abstract works by Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Mark Tobey, Philip Guston, Esteban Vicente, Willem de Kooning and Cy Twombly.

**FUNDACIÓN CAJA MADRID**

6. **In the garden at Giverny**

Along with the water lilies, the flowers, trees and Japanese bridge in his garden at Giverny were Monet's preferred subjects during the last years of his life. The loose handling of these paintings, in which the paint sometimes runs across the surface of the canvas, anticipates the style and technique of the Abstract Expressionists many years later. During the 1950s various young artists such as Joan Mitchell, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Sam Francis, Zao Wou-Ki and Ellsworth Kelly made Monet's house and garden at Giverny a place of pilgrimage. As can be seen in this section of the exhibition, the discovery of works that remained in Monet's studio provided a crucial stimulus for many key figures of abstraction.

7. **In the wake of Monet**

Monet's influence can be traced in the work of numerous abstract artists of the second half of the 20th century for a wide variety of reasons. This room presents some of the clear affinities between the work of the French Impressionist painter and artists such as Jean Bazaine, Maria Elena Vieira da Silva, Robert Ryman and Gerhard Richter.
**8- Documentation area**

This room displays a selection of photographs of Monet and his garden at Giverny (both from the artist’s own time and those taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson in the 1950s). It also includes a projection of part of Ceux de chez nous, the film made in 1915 by Sacha Guitry in which Monet himself appears alongside other artists including Renoir, Rodin and Edgar Degas.

![Claude Monet in front of his house in Giverny, Springtime 1921. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.](image)

**COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES**

**Monographic Course Monet and Abstraction:** In conjunction with the temporary exhibition Monet and Abstraction, and led by its curator, Paloma Alarcó, the Museum will be holding a monographic course of the same title from 10 March to 5 May. It has been jointly organised with Fundación Caja Madrid and the Complutense and Autónoma universities. Like the exhibition, the course aims to draw attention to the crucial role of the great French Impressionist master in the development of modern art. It will analyse and reveal the close relationship between Monet’s late work and the new abstract idioms that arose in the second half of the 20th century. During the eight lectures that make up the course the work of Monet will be studied from a new perspective through the interpretations offered by leading experts. Enrolment for Friends of the Museum and students opens on 16 February, and on 1 March for the general public.

**Film Cycle:** In April and May the Museum will be presenting a film series on the subject of the exhibition. Programme to be confirmed.
EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: Monet and Abstraction.


Curator: Paloma Alarcó, Curator at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Head of the Department of Modern Painting.

Technical curator: Marta Ruiz del Árbol, Department of Modern Painting, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Number of works: 107.

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Paloma Alarcó and Michael Leja, anthology of critical texts, a chronology of Monet’s critical fortunes and biographies of the artists. Published in Spanish and English.

Website: In Spanish and English.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Paseo del Prado, 28014 Madrid.

Opening times: Tuesdays to Sundays, 10am to 7pm. Ticket desks close at 6.30pm.

Ticket prices Temporary Exhibition:
General ticket: Ticket desks: 8 Euros, Internet: 7 Euros
Reduced ticket: 5 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status, and family groups of at least one adult and three children (or two if one is disabled in any way) with official proof of Large Family status.
Free entry: children under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens.

Temporary Exhibition + Permanent Collection:
General ticket: Ticket desks: 13 Euros, Internet: 12 Euros
Reduced ticket: 7,50 Euros

Pre-purchased tickets available from the ticket desks, on the Museum’s website, and on 902 760 511
For more information: tel. 91 369 01 51 and www.museothyssen.org

Fundación Caja Madrid.

Plaza de San Martín, 1, 28013 Madrid
Opening times: Tuesdays to Sundays, 10am to 8pm.
Free entry. For more information: 902 246 810 y www.fundacioncajamadrid.org

PRESS INFORMATION:

www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2009/Monet-y-la-abstraccion