

Down the garden path

STORY REBECCA HOWDEN

The National Gallery of Victoria celebrates the iconic garden paintings of the father of impressionism, Claude Monet.

This year's instalment of the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series celebrates the work of one of the most significant figures in art history, Claude Monet (1840-1936). In particular, it pays homage to the waterlilies, ponds, bridges and flowering plants that were his solace and inspiration in the later decades of his life, and that have become almost synonymous with his name today.

Monet's Garden: The Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, opening this May at the National Gallery of Victoria, brings together more than 60 of Monet's captivating garden paintings, from his tranquil Seine Valley landscapes to his famous suite of waterlilies, right through to some rarely-seen later works. "Monet's Garden is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the world of Monet and the garden that became his lifelong obsession," NGV director Tony Ellwood says. "We are thrilled to collaborate with the Musée Marmottan, home to one of the largest collections of works by Monet in the world, to bring these masterpieces to Melbourne for the first time."

The exhibition is arranged to tell the story of Monet and his garden at Giverny, beginning with a snapshot of his private

world, with a selection of photographs and paintings of the artist and his family in the gardens, including portraits by renowned painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Leaving behind the bustling art scene of Paris, Monet and his first wife Camille lived in small villages along the Seine throughout the 1870s, during which the artist relished in his fascination with seasonal colours, the shifting light of the day, and reflections on water. In 1883, when Monet discovered Le Pressoir – an old farmhouse and cider press nestled in the small town of Giverny, half-way between Paris and the Normandy coast – he began his lifelong work of improving the gardens, transforming them into both an open-air studio and a lush retreat for his family and friends.

At the centre of Monet's Garden is the iconic series of waterlilies paintings completed between 1900 and 1919, a celebration of light and nature that would offer hope to Monet throughout the dark years of World War One. "Through these paintings, visitors will experience every aspect of Monet's garden – the iconic Japanese footbridge, the waterlilies and other flowers including irises, agapanthus,



From top: Claude Monet; *Field of Yellow Irises at Giverny* (1887); *Waterlilies and Agapanthus* (1914–17)
© Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, © Bridgeman-Giraudon / Presse.

wisteria, the weeping willow and the alley of roses," Ellwood says.

Completing the exhibition is a film installation capturing Giverny from sunrise to sunset on the last day of each season from the past year, immersing visitors in a sensual, evocative experience of what may be the most iconic garden in art history. 🐾

The annual VRC Members' Private Exhibition Viewing of the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series – Monet's Garden – will be on Friday 21 June 2013. Further information will be sent in Members' emails and will appear on the VRC website.