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James H. Rubin, *Why Monet Matters: Meanings Among the Lily Pads*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. xiv + 378 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$99.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 978-0-271-08620-0; \$49.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-271-09116-7.

Response by James Rubin, Stony Brook University (Professor Emeritus)

First, I thank Professor Fratello for his fair summary of what *Why Monet Matters* accomplishes. As to the valid questions he raises in his later paragraphs, I am delighted to have been invited to engage with him about them by the Chief Editor of *H-France Review*. Most simply put, I believe Dr. Fratello's suggestions of where I might have gone further call for additional chapters, which from the point of view of publication and cost could well have been prohibitive for a book that is already quite long and expensive. More important, however, they are not chapters I am equipped to write, since the topics he feels are missing from the book are well outside my field of expertise: I am neither a student of Eastern philosophy nor, in any great detail, of contemporary art.

Yet his suggestions do raise issues which I agree might well be more fully explored. The relationship to Eastern thinking in Monet's art is well-known as far as I presented it, but not even an Asian scholar of whom I'm aware has gone as far as Dr. Fratello suggests. There is a good amount of Japanese literature on Monet, a lot of which I became familiar with during a trip to Japan and contact with Japanese scholars, but there was nothing of which I was made aware that followed the lines of Dr. Fratello's suggestion. That is not to say that it couldn't be done, and he makes me wonder why it hasn't been so far. That said, it would be wonderful if, as a result of this review, someone with the appropriate background were to take up his challenge.

Dr. Fratello's other suggestion is that I might have followed the contemporary turn in the history of art. It is true that so much scholarship today is judged according to its relevance to contemporary art. Expanding the canon is a good thing, and Dr. Fratello does give me credit for expanding the range of thinking about Monet. I actually intended to allude to contemporary art by mentioning Monet's relevance to an artist such as the African-American painter Sam Gilliam on p. 294 and I think I stated that Monet could be considered a precursor of installation and performance art. But it is true that I did not follow through with detailed examples. Rather, the main purpose in my last chapter, where I bring Monet's legacy up through the 1960s, was to attack the still popular, but ultimately wrong and nefarious Greenbergian interpretation of it, hence opening Monet's late painting up to a broader consideration of the channels through which his concerns propagated, namely a tradition of organic abstraction and immersion.

I invoked the audience for *Why Monet Matters* in the preface, but I suppose that is easily forgotten given the book's length. The brief of the NEH "Public Scholar" grant I received for the project was to make scholarship accessible to a broader public, bridging the gap between the general and the academic reader. I took it to mean being clear and highly readable without dumbing down. Thanks to the same grant, I wrote the short monograph, *Monet (World of Art)* in Thames and Hudson's paperback series "World of Art." [1] So with the two books, I felt I was fulfilling my desire and mandate to be accessible. I am grateful for Dr. Fratello's suggestion that the book could be read by students seeking comparisons of methodologies for which my work is known.

One quibble: I stated quite specifically that my use of philosophy was to shed light on Monet's work, not to demonstrate its influence (p. 192). I doubt Monet read much philosophy at all. But contemporary philosophical thought helps to contextualize Monet's work in the world of ideas. I use a Bergsonian critique of Impressionism, not his influence, declaring specifically that "I reverse the approach usually brought to bear on the pairing of Bergson and art, for I concentrate on Bergson's *critique* rather than on his influence" (p. 195).

To conclude, I am happy that Professor Fratello has found connections to contemporary global art, about which my knowledge is limited. I agree with his examples and I am glad to see him quote my phrase "seeing with the body." Both of his suggestions could lead to further and freestanding studies. They prove that no one will ever have the last word on the great Claude Monet, and that within the turn to the contemporary and the global, Monet's work and legacy are well worth continuing to think and write about.

#### NOTE

[1] James H. Rubin, *Monet (World of Art)* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020).

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