

CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926)

Pommiers en fleurs

◆ Third party guarantee

Price realised	Estimate
USD 9,035,000	USD 7,000,000 – USD 10,000,000

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DETAILS

CLAUDE MONET (1840-1926)

Pommiers en fleurs

signed 'Claude Monet.' (lower left)

oil on canvas

23 3/8 × 29 in. (59.3 × 73.7 cm.)

Painted in Argenteuil in 1872

PROVENANCE

Galerie Durand-Ruel et Cie., Paris (acquired from the artist, 11 May 1872).

(possibly) W.C. Reynolds, New York (1894).

John Barton Payne, Chicago.

The Union League Club of Chicago (acquired from the above, 1895).

LITERATURE

A. Silvestre, intro., *Galerie Durand-Ruel: Recueil d'estampes*, 1873, no. LXXXI

(engraving by H. Lefort after the present work illustrated).

A. Baignères, "Exposition de peinture" in *L'Echa*, vol. 8, no. 437, 13 April 1876, p. 3 (titled *Printemps*).C. Bigot, "Causerie artistique: L'exposition des 'intransigeants'" in *La revue politique et littéraire*, vol. 5, no. 41, 8 April 1876, p. 350 (titled *Printemps*).G. Rivière, "2ème exposition des Impressionnistes" in *L'esprit moderne*, 13 April 1876, pp. 7-8.P. Dax, "Chronique: Salon de 1876" in *L'Artiste*, vol. 47, no. 1, May 1876, p. 348."About Art and Artists" in *Chicago Evening Post*, 22 March 1895.G. Corliss, ed., *Catalogue of Paintings and Other Works of Art*, Chicago, 1899, p. 10, no. 22 (with incorrect dimensions)."Landscapes by Monet: The Impressionist's Work at Art Institute" in *Chicago Evening Journal*, 22 March 1895.L.M. McCauley, ed., *Catalogue of Paintings, Etchings, Engravings and Sculpture*, Chicago, 1907, pp. 34-35, no. 55.G. Geffroy, *Claude Monet: Sa vie, son temps, son oeuvre*, Paris, 1922, pp. 59 and 72 (titled *Printemps*).W.B. Mundie, "Monet, Lately Deceased, First 'Impressionist'" in *Union League Club Bulletin*, vol. IV, no. 1, February 1927, pp. 22-23 (illustrated, p. 22).D. **Wildenstein**, *Claude Monet: Biographie et catalogue raisonné, peintures*, Lausanne, 1974, vol. I, p. 204, **no. 201** (illustrated, p. 205).A.P. Belloli, ed., *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape*, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1984, pp. 256-257 and 364, no. 100 (illustrated in color, p. 257).C.S. Moffett, *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874-1886*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1986, p. 163, no. 163.D. Wildenstein, *Monet: Catalogue raisonné*, Cologne, 1996, vol. I, p. 95 and vol. II, p. 92, no. 201 (illustrated).N. Harris, *Union League Club of Chicago Art Collection*, Chicago, 2003, pp. 168-170 and 284 (illustrated in color, p. 169; detail illustrated in color, p. 283; illustrated in color again on the inside cover).

EXHIBITED

Paris, Rue Le Peletier, *2e exposition de peinture*, April 1876, p. 16, no. 163 (titled *Le Printemps*).(possibly) New York, Durand-Ruel Galleries, *Exhibition of Paintings by Claude Monet*, January 1895.The Art Institute of Chicago, *Exhibition of Paintings by Claude Monet*, March 1895.Nashville, Centennial Park, *Centennial Exposition*, May-October 1897.The Art Institute of Chicago, *Paintings by Monet*, March-May 1975, p. 99, no. 45 (illustrated; dated 1878).Rome, Complesso Monumentale del Vittoriano, *From Corot to Monet: The Ecology of Impressionism*, March-June 2010, p. 128, no. 4 (illustrated in color, p. 129).Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum and Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, *Monet: The Early Years*, October 2016-May 2017, pp. 178-179 and 197, no. 51 (illustrated in color, p. 178).Denver Art Museum and Potsdam, Museum Barberini, *Claude Monet: The Truth of Nature*, October 2019-June 2020, pp. 151 and 266, no. 46 (illustrated in color, p. 151).The Art Institute of Chicago, *Monet and Chicago*, September 2020-January 2021, pp. 28, 35, 54 and 131, no. 19 (illustrated in color, p. 54; detail illustrated in color, p. 22).

Lot Essay

“The fruit trees are fragrant bouquets of pink and white newly washed by the showers from misty April skies. The broken clouds are scattered over sapphire skies and moisture lingers in the atmosphere... Monet has painted spring meadows fragrant with bloom. He heard the voices of evening, the jubilation of morning, and he painted the eternal undulations of light on the same objects...” These lines, written in the 1907 collection catalogue of the Union League Club of Chicago, vividly describe Claude Monet’s *Pommiers en fleurs*, an early and quintessentially Impressionist scene that entered the venerated Club’s esteemed collection in 1895 (L.M. McCauley, *Catalogue of Paintings, Etchings, Engravings and Sculpture*, Chicago, 1907, p. 35). Painted in 1872, this springtime vision of blossoming fruit trees dates from the inception of Impressionism, a period of remarkable artistic revolution in which the essential tenets of this radical movement coalesced. The first in a series of canvases in which Monet captured, with his light, rapid brushwork, and luminous, fresh palette, an orchard in blossom, *Pommiers en fleurs* also has a remarkable provenance and exhibition history. **Exhibited for the first time in the Second Impressionist exhibition of 1876**, this work was later featured in the newly founded Art Institute of Chicago’s exhibition of the artist, which was held in 1895—the first solo show of Monet to be held in a museum in the United States.

Just over two decades before *Pommiers en fleurs* crossed the Atlantic, Monet had arrived in Argenteuil, the picturesque town set on the Seine just outside Paris that would change the course of his career forever.

Today Argenteuil is synonymous with the origins of Impressionism. It was there, on the banks of the Seine, that Monet, along with his friends, most notably Edouard Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, would come to consolidate the innovative formal vocabulary of the movement as they depicted the fleeting, ephemeral effects of the landscape with instinctive brushwork and pure color. “It was during his time at Argenteuil,” Paul Hayes Tucker has written, “that Monet developed his unique vision of landscape painting, at once authentic and idyllic, suffused with light, atmosphere, and the complexities of contemporaneity” (*The Impressionists at Argenteuil*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2000, p. 14). Among the very first canvases he painted upon his arrival, *Pommiers en fleurs* epitomizes Monet’s art of this golden period, filled with the distinctive charm and quiet beauty that distinguishes these Argenteuil paintings as some of the greatest of the artist’s oeuvre.

“I have been seeing Monet frequently these days,” the artist’s long-time friend and mentor Eugène Boudin wrote to his dealer in January 1872, just weeks after Monet had moved to the burgeoning town at the end of the previous year. “He’s settled in comfortably and seems to have a great desire to make a name for himself. I believe that he is destined to fill one of the most prominent positions in our school of painting” (quoted in P.H. Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art*, New Haven, 1995, p. 53). Boudin was correct on all counts. Monet and his young family had moved into their first home, a large house on the edge of the town that was perfectly positioned with views of the river, and surrounded by a garden—more than satisfying the artist’s desire for a greater contact with nature.

Happy with his new set up and determined to further establish the so-called “New Painting,” Monet quickly set about immersing himself in his surroundings, painting the river and its environs, as well as the rural oasis of their garden, and further exploring the daring pictorial effects of working *en plein air*. Argenteuil had much to offer the artist, with vistas both rural and modern. He could regard the Seine filled with sailboats or flanked by promenading couples, the picturesque streets of the town, as well as smoking factories and tilled fields, wild flower meadows, or bridges with steam trains passing through. The extraordinary productivity of 1872 shows the range of artistic inspiration that Monet found in his new home.

The arrival of spring at the beginning of this year gave Monet the opportunity to paint one of his favorite and most enduring themes, the landscape in bloom. In *Pommiers en fleurs*, the apple blossom appears like jubilant explosions of confetti, the delicate white petals luminous amid the bright spring light, their radiance heightened by the contrast with the fresh greens of the new vegetation bursting into leaf that surrounds them. Blossom was a motif Monet adored at this time. At some point during this spring, he set up his easel in his garden and painted a small series of related works that show an abundantly flowering lilac tree, under which the artist’s wife, Camille, sits (Wildenstein, nos. 202-204).

Depicting a track flanked by an orchard of apple trees, *Pommiers en fleurs* possibly depicts another, less tended, corner of Monet’s beloved first garden. This, George Shackelford has written, “explains the presence of rows of trimmed vines beneath the trees at left and the young tendrils being trained on spindly poles at right. The former may be there to provide grapes for the table, the latter to bring forth a crop of peas as the spring turns into summer” (*Monet: The Early Years*, exh. cat., Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 2016, p. 179). Over the course of 1872 and 1873, before the Monet family moved to their second home in the town the following year, the artist painted his garden on many occasions, with Manet and Renoir likewise portraying him within this private realm.

With these works, Monet turned away from the reality of his setting—from his garden he would likely have heard the rumble of trains passing nearby and could have seen the ever-neighboring houses bordering his own—to instead create a rural idyll, with no trace of the signs of the over-encroaching modernity present. At this time, Argenteuil was a fast-growing suburb of Paris, with commercial structures increasingly appearing amid the previously rural landscape. In his works of this time, Monet chose to artfully eliminate many of these industrial subjects, a reflection of the fact that while his Impressionist paintings have the appearance of spontaneity, their compositions were in fact carefully crafted. Employing his innate sensibility for pictorial construction, Monet was able to balance a range of pictorial elements and motifs to create works filled with a sense of harmony, beauty and poeticism.

When, **four years after its creation in 1872, *Pommiers en fleurs* was included in the Second Impressionist exhibition under the title *Le Printemps***, it was shown alongside other masterpieces by the artist—*Les bains de la Grenouillère* (Wildenstein, no. 134; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), *La Promenade* (Wildenstein, no. 381; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), and *Le Pont d’Argenteuil* (Wildenstein, no. 311, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), to name but a few—as well as major works by Gustave Caillebotte, Berthe Morisot, Alfred Sisley, and Renoir.

This was an important exhibition in the history of Impressionism, proving to the public that the *Société anonyme*, as the group had called themselves in the first 1874 show, was not a one-time event, but an ongoing phenomenon, a movement with consistent members and shared formal and stylistic qualities. It attracted more critical attention than the first exhibition, with a number of critics picking out *Pommiers en fleurs* in their reviews. One by Charles Bigot described it as, “a garden path, flushed with grass, that disappears between blossoming apple trees and shrubs bursting into leaf... [It is] an impression of the month of May that delights the eyes” (quoted in R. Berson, *The New Painting: Impressionism, 1874-1886*, San Francisco, 1996, vol. 1, p. 60).

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