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FRENCH PASTORAL: FOUR IMPORTANT IMPRESSIONIST PAINTINGS FROM A DISTINGUISHED FRENCH COLLECTION



LEFT: Claude Monet, *Coin du bassin aux nymphéas*, oil on canvas, Painted in Giverny, circa 1918-1919. \$15-25 million

RIGHT: Claude Monet, *Le pont japonais*, oil on canvas, Painted in Giverny, circa 1918-1924 | \$12-18 million

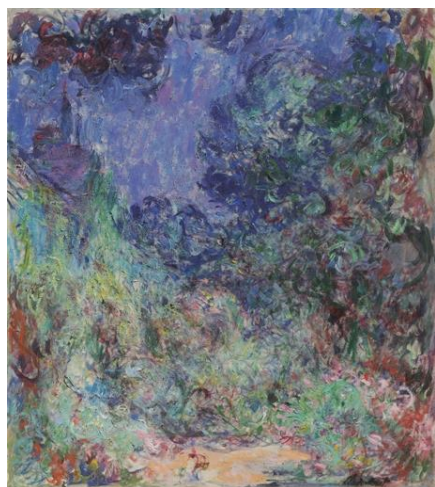
New York – On May 13, Christie's will offer Four Important Impressionist Paintings from a Distinguished French Collection, encompassing three works by Claude Monet and a fourth by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Together the works embody the unadulterated beauty of the French landscape, which served as such an extraordinary source of inspiration to the masters of Impressionism.

Jessica Fertig, Head of Evening Sale, Impressionist and Modern Art, remarked: “The three canvases by Monet illustrate the endless inspiration that the gardens at Giverny provided the artist. From the luminous *Coin du bassin*, to the lush foliage and gestural depiction of the iconic Japanese bridge and his blooming garden surrounding his home, the scenes from Giverny celebrate Monet's lifelong love affair with nature. Renoir's *Le pêcheur à la ligne*, painted in the pivotal year of the first group exhibition, is the quintessence of a high Impressionist painting.”

Leading the group is Claude Monet's *Coin du bassin aux nymphéas*, painted in Giverny, circa 1918-1919 (\$15,000,000-25,000,000) – pictured above, left. In mid-1918, with the outcome of the First World War hanging precariously in the balance after four years of devastating, all-out combat, Monet set up his easel on the northeastern bank of his beloved water garden at Giverny—a site of solace and serenity in a world seemingly come undone—and began a suite of four *Coin du bassin* paintings, that represent a radical departure from the now iconic *Nymphéas* paintings that had occupied him almost exclusively since early in the century. These lush, lyrical canvases represent an irrepressible cry of hope: a return to the safety of terra firma, with streams of brilliant yellow light penetrating the darkness and promising deliverance. Monet's vigorous, gestural handling of paint, is more experimental and proto-abstract than ever in the present series. The present painting — one of the two largest from the sequence — was the only *Coin du bassin* to remain in Monet's studio until his death, where it provided the artist with ongoing inspiration

as he completed the *Grandes décorations*. The canvas passed from the artist's son Michel through the Parisian dealer Katia Granoff to the family of the present owner in the 1960s and has never again changed hand on the market.

Claude Monet's *Le pont japonais* was painted in Giverny, circa 1918-1924 (\$12,000,000-18,000,000) – *pictured above, right*. During the period between 1918-1924, Claude Monet painted a sequence of 24 canvases featuring the Japanese footbridge that spanned the western banks of the oval lily pond on his property in Giverny. The *Pont japonais* sequence of paintings all focus on the simple structural element of the arching, wooden Japanese footbridge, completed during 1894-1895. Monet first painted the bridge under an early April snowfall in 1895 and later that year in the full brilliance of summer. The present *pont japonais* renders the blue-green tonality of the foliage, with touches of violet, in the early morning, when the cool, silvery white vapors of a mist had settled on the pond. The artist had situated himself at the western tip, along the channel that drains the water back into the Ru river. Gazing through the shadowy form of the bridge, he beheld the gathering light at the eastern end of the pond.



Also among the highlights is Claude Monet's *La maison vue du jardin aux roses*, circa 1922-1924 (\$4,000,000-6,000,000) – *pictured left*. In 1922, the year of his 82nd birthday, Monet set up his easel just outside the pink stucco house at Giverny that had been his home for nearly four decades and began an extraordinary group of canvases that depict the sprawling, two-story structure almost entirely engulfed in the luxuriant vegetation of his beloved flower garden. Created over the course of four years and eventually numbering eighteen canvases in all, these deeply felt views constitute the very last, independent series that Monet would ever undertake—"a swan song," Daniel Wildenstein has written, "a marvelous farewell to his house and his roses". During this culminating campaign, Monet painted the house and garden from three different vantage points in turn. The present canvas is part of the earliest subset, in which Monet took up a position to the southwest of the house and depicted the façade receding into depth at an angle.

An emerald-toned mirage of soft color and shimmering light, Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Le pêcheur à la ligne* was painted in 1874 (\$8,000,000-12,000,000) – *pictured right*, a momentous year that witnessed the birth of Impressionism. Likely painted in the summer of this seminal year, while Renoir was working with his friend Claude Monet at his home in Argenteuil, this painting shows the artist working en plein air, using swift, spontaneous brushstrokes to capture an immersive impression of this idyllic corner of the landscape, evoking the soft light, hazy warmth and gentle reverie of this summers' day. Picturing a well-dressed couple enjoying the rural French countryside, here Renoir achieves a masterful synthesis of figure and landscape, bathing both of these components in a vaporous light and conveying them in a palette of harmonious, fresh color. One of a small series of works of this time, all of which present couples within the secluded landscape, *Le pêcheur à la ligne* sees Renoir conceive a new kind of genre of painting, transforming the classical subject of the pastoral idyll into modern times and portraying it with a radical new pictorial language. Exhibited in public shortly after its completion at the inaugural Impressionist auction, held at Hôtel Drouot in March 1875, this painting was the very first Renoir acquired by the publisher, Georges Charpentier, who would become the artist's greatest patron and lifelong friend.



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