

The color of Monet

From his garden in France to a bridge in The Bronx, this painter leaves an impression



Despite his great work as a painter, Claude Monet believed his garden in Giverny, France, was his masterpiece. The New York Botanical Garden's inspired new exhibit includes a replica (right) of the artist's Japanese bridge (above), seen in many of his paintings.



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By BILLY HELLER

CLAUDE Monet never set foot in The Bronx. But the colorful new show his work inspired at the New York Botanical Garden would probably impress that great Impressionist.

Opening tomorrow, just off the Moshulu Parkway, is "Monet's Garden," which vividly brings to life the Giverny, France, retreat the artist called home from 1883 until his death in 1926.

Despite its more than 200 types of flowers, thousands of individual plants, replicas of Monet's Japanese bridge, part of his house and a water lily pond, the exhibit isn't an exact copy of Giverny, concedes Todd Forrest, the NYBG's vice president of horticulture and living collections. "We could never try to re-create his gardens," he says. "We distill and evoke, celebrate the plants Monet grew."

But take a look at Elizabeth Murray's photos of the real Giverny, displayed at the NYBG's Ross Gallery, and you might disagree. You could easily mistake this Bronx paradise — with its rainbow of morning glories, irises, peonies and more — for rural France. Even the arches Monet built for his roses to climb across are imitated here, painted just the right shade of green (327-C on the Pantone color

system) after a careful study of his paintings.

Those eager to see the artist's best-known flowers will have to wait. "It'll be July when the water lilies take off," says Forrest, although a few have bloomed already. "This is like a living painting that grows and changes." Those water lilies will be worth the wait: They come from the same nursery, Latour-Marliac, where

Monet bought his plants; one of his purchase orders is on display here, too.

After strolling through the flowers in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, it's an eye-opener to look at the two Monet paintings on display in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library: One shows the Giverny garden circa 1900, in all its textured, Impressionist glory — pretty in

pinks, purples and greens. The other, a darker painting, is a close-up of irises circa 1914-1917.

Those who want a piece of "Monet's Garden" to go can hit the gift shop for signed Elizabeth Murray prints (\$195), a watercolor set (\$38), a pair of Monet sunflower mugs (\$46) — even Monet cocktail napkins (\$6).

For tickets and hours, go to nybg.org.



While the New York Botanical Garden mimics Monet's *Grande Allée*, the flower-lined path from his home, it also displays a painting of his garden from 1919 (inset).

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Monet was famous for his paintings of water lilies. Some of the lilies in The Bronx come from the same French nursery as his did.