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Monet in Bordighera

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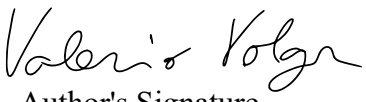

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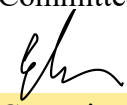

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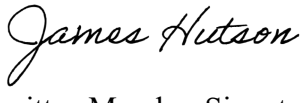

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ABSTRACT

MONET IN BORDIGHERA

Valerio Volga, Master of Art History and Visual Culture, 2023

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Esperança Camara, PhD

Claude Monet visited Bordighera, the coastal town on the Italian Riviera, in 1884. This paper argues how, in Bordighera, Monet pursued a more immersive experience with nature than ever before. Monet first visited Bordighera late in 1883 with Renoir; he then went back in 1884 for a second and last trip, this time on his own. He stayed almost three months and painted 38 canvases; this paper focuses on four canvases that help illustrate Monet's depiction of nature and its transition from wide open views to close-up views that convey an immersive experience. Monet began his painting sessions on bristling hilly spots where he could capture views of Bordighera Alta overlooking the sea; he then moved to the sort of outdoor studio the Moreno Gardens offered, where he could paint intimate views of olive and lemon groves. In Bordighera, vegetation – which was exotic to the eyes of a man who had never painted the Mediterranean before – became more and more the sole subject in Monet's paintings, with the sky receding to give way to a tangle of trunks, foliage, and fruits. The colors are more vivid, the brushstrokes more consistent than ever before in his oeuvre. The results Monet achieves in Bordighera are the climax of his approach to nature, which, over two decades, had seen him go from realistic, geometric, or symmetrical compositions to a complete surrender to wilderness. As Monet worked toward the perfect impression *en plein air*, he painted the same subjects multiple times, initially unsure whether he was properly capturing the essence of Bordighera. These repetitions, which may be seen as both trials and final products, result in seriality, which, as noted by Joachim Pissarro, Monet invents in Bordighera.

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Dedication

To grandma Gemma

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Introduction

Monet shares the credit for founding Impressionism and was fully engaged in its life cycle, from its origins in the 1860s, to its rise in the 1870s, to its final decline after the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886. Perhaps most importantly, Monet's 1872 painting *Impression, Sunrise* famously gave the movement its name. In the 1997 catalog of the exhibition "Monet and the Mediterranean," art historian Joachim Pissarro, Camille Pissarro's great-grandson no less, explains how Impressionism originated:

> Impressionism began as one of the first truly democratic movements in the development of modern art. Originally the Impressionists had relatively little to do with one another; the individual artists were separately forging new and assertive art forms that addressed a wide and noncohesive range of subject matters and deployed a variety of pictorial strategies. During this "heroic phase" of Impressionism in the 1860s, the Impressionists were bound together as strong artistic individuals who agreed upon one thing; their rejection of (and rejection by) the traditional system of taste and evaluation of "success" dictated by the Academy.[1]

As the movement was being shaped, the Academy ignored the works of early Impressionists and rejected their submissions to the official Salon. In 1866, after having two paintings rejected and receiving no reply to his inquiries from the Academy's jury, Paul Cezanne wrote them once again, this time requesting that they reinstated a secondary exhibition called *Salon des Refusés*, or Salon of the Rejected, which used to exhibit the submissions that had not been accepted and which had been discontinued.[2] In doing so, Cezanne demanded acknowledgment of his work and claimed his right to be viewed by the public. His letter soon became a manifesto of

[1] Joachim Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean* (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), 17.
[2] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 18.

Impressionism, a movement that would grow independently of the Academy by way of a total of eight exhibitions between 1874 and 1886.

The idea behind Impressionism, the short glance given to a scene by an observer, capturing what is immediately before one's eyes, quickly and without intervention of the mind or any learned visual structure, driven by that ephemeral perception, all are experiences which an audience can relate to at a personal level whenever enjoying a landscape, for instance. It is not always the attention to detail that does it, as much as the feeling of being overwhelmed by vivid colors. By using short glances to capture a scene, impressionists were able to create paintings that evoke a sense of immediacy and authenticity, allowing the audience to connect with the artwork on a personal level.

This research is going to investigate the time Claude Monet spent in Bordighera, the coastal town on the Italian Riviera, in 1884. Monet had visited Bordighera late in 1883 with Renoir, who was already familiar with Mediterranean landscapes. When Monet went back to Bordighera in 1884 for a second trip, this time alone, he stayed almost three months and painted 38 canvases in the process. The bulk of this research will cover four canvases – *View of Bordighera* (Figure 1), *Bordighera* (Figure 2), *Study of Olive Trees* (Figure 3), and *Lemon Grove in Bordighera* (Figure 4) – that help illustrate how Monet's experience with nature became more and more immersive as vegetation gradually take over his compositions. While imagery from waterways like the Seine and coast of Normandy feature prominently across Monet's oeuvre, and his Water Lilies series is general knowledge, the impact of Monet's travels to Italy – particularly Bordighera – are understudied.[3] The purpose of Monet's trip was not to explore new places as a

[3] For example, in 1985, prominent Monet scholar Charles Stuckey limited his coverage of the Bordighera trip to a couple of out-of-context illustrations and an entry in the chronology in *Monet: A Retrospective* (New York: Levin, 1985), 13.

mere tourist; instead, he was solely on a journey to discover new subjects for his paintings and was desperate to succeed. The information collected paints the picture of an often-insecure Claude Monet who doubted himself and the suitability of the places he visited.

The Mediterranean light and colors presented new pictorial challenges, which originated in the way the sunlight kissed the vegetations to produce unique light and color effects. This paper will argue that Monet's response to such challenges led him to an immersive experience with nature that is both the climax of his work to that point and an anticipation of later works. In Bordighera, Monet found new, unfamiliar lights and colors. He was fascinated by the intricate colors of the trees he studied, but he faced a challenging task in recreating the delicate hues of blue, pink, and bright yellow that outlined an olive leaf, a sea wave, and a lemon on his palette. He got to know the region of Liguria and its everchanging weather, which he managed to appreciate and even work around; during those days he could not paint outdoors, he would paint still lifes. A couple of these have survived, though they are the exception in a collection of landscapes and seascapes. Moreover, in order to mitigate the impact of weather and optimize time, Monet worked on multiple canvases at a time; at one point in February, he reveals having canvases ten to twelve sittings into the making and barely seeing any progress on them.[4] At one point, some thirty pictures were in the making at various stages of progress.[5] At this stage in his life Monet was not new to having to adapt to unfamiliar nature. As Alborno points out, Monet's investigation of nature in Bordighera can perhaps be compared to his youthful quests in Étretat,

[4] Claude Monet, *Parole a Colori: Lettere Da Bordighera, Gennaio-Aprile 1884 [Words in Color: Letters From Bordighera, January-April 1884]*, ed. Silvia Alborno (Ventimiglia, Italy: Philobiblon, 2009), 87. Writing to Alice Hoschedé on February 15th, 1884.

[5] Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet, or, the Triumph of Impressionism* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999), 196-7.

in his beloved Normandy, where he focuses on the materiality of the cliffs and on the *impression* produced by the sunlight caressing the rocks, seemingly marking time.[6]

The trip to Bordighera was supposed to be a short one, but Monet ended up staying for two and half months. Why did he travel to Bordighera in the first place? Why did he extend his trip? Did he finally leave because he was satisfied, because he gave up, or a combination of the two? Monet put time and effort into these 38 canvases, which suggests he had set himself goals. This paper is going to focus on the artistic challenges and solutions Monet explores in the four above-mentioned Bordighera paintings and provide visual evidence of Monet's unique, immersive experience in Bordighera. Additionally, the paper will touch on who and what influenced Monet, as well as the impact of the B trip on Monet's later works and on the works of artists who would paint the Riviera after him.

[6] Silvia Alborno, "Monet. Un'Intermittenza del Cuore [Monet. An Intermittence of the Heart]," in *Claude Monet: Ritorno in Riviera: Bordighera, Dolceacqua [Claude Monet: Return to the Riviera: Bordighera, Dolceacqua]* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2019), 21.

Literature Review

In the last 25 years or so, scholars occasionally rediscovered Monet's Bordighera by way of publications, catalogs, and exhibitions. Primary sources were carefully assembled in the process. Silvia Alborno curated a collection of Monet's letters which she titled *Words in Color: Letters from Bordighera, January-April 1884*. While in Bordighera, in fact, Monet corresponded extensively with Alice Hoschedé, who had separated from her husband Ernest – an art collector who was once in business with Monet – and was now in a romantic relationship with Monet himself; the couple would go on to marry in 1892. Monet also wrote to his art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, mainly in regard to financial matters. In the letters, the painter confessed he was not used to the colors he was admiring on the Mediterranean coast and how he was afraid he would not succeed at his task.[7] Such letters are an invaluable primary source; they are regular entries of a journal in which Monet spells out his experience in Bordighera firsthand. Artists themselves are the best possible primary sources, and the letters left by Monet are remarkable, especially those he posted to Hoschedé. In the letters, which Monet did not mean to publish, he opens up to his recipient and expresses his feelings with no filter other than his educated language.

In a chapter of his *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867-1886* exceptionally dedicated to the Bordighera trip, Robert L. Herbert investigates the influence Monet's travel companion Renoir may have had in the definition of his color palette in Bordighera, which ties into the difficulties in rendering natural colors on canvas: "Monet needed time to develop a suitable palette, and he also had to approach the composition slowly because his views had to be constructed from a satisfactory mixture of techniques and compositional

[7] Monet, *Words in Color*, 49.

devices learned in the north."[8] This may just be one of the reasons why Monet extended his trip. Initially, he approached the painting trip with a well-defined approached developed from years of experience painting the landscape of northern France, for instance. Once he reached the Riviera, it did not take him long to figure out this would be a whole new challenge, made compelling by Mediterranean light and colors. In addition, Monet would not always paint a subject straight after seeing it, but he would develop an impression in his mind, then re-elaborate it later, often due to everchanging weather of the Riviera which did not always allow long painting sessions.[9]

Normandy is a different story compared to Bordighera, still it was so extensively painted by Monet that this paper can adopt it as a benchmark to better understand his artistic journey that culminated in Bordighera. Moreover, Normandy can show how Monet's art changed following the Bordighera trip, as Monet never really stopped painting Normandy and went back to Giverny soon after leaving the Riviera. Throughout his career, water was a recurring subject in Monet's artwork, and he produced some of his most iconic paintings depicting it. Even in Bordighera, Monet intended to focus on water, using orange and lemon trees with the sea in the background. However, as we will see below, he struggled to find the right composition and ended up studying the sea and trees separately to work around the issue.

With his 2010 *Monet, Painter of Water*, only available in French to this date, art historian Pascal Bonafoux deserves credit for carefully observing Monet's oeuvre and the way he treats seascapes across four decades, from the 1860s all the way to the 90s, and scrupulously

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[8] Robert L. Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867-1886* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 91.

[9] At least a couple of times, in fact, Monet took photographs and posted them to his companion in Giverny (Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast*, 92); unfortunately, there is no account of such photographs being preserved. Monet loved en plein air but also enjoyed working in his studio, alone. These photographs may or may not mean that he planned to continue painting the Italian landscapes when back home.

comparing similar subjects side by side for readers to appreciate differences in style. The book is organized by themes, with paintings being divided into subject categories. In such seascapes, water is often flanked by cliff and vegetation including trees, making them relevant to this paper as we observe Monet's shift from wide open views of Bordighera to close-up views of trees.

A great deal of scholarly content was written in the 1990s, when the Musée d'Orsay in Paris acquired one of the paintings, in 1993, or when a major exhibition titled "Monet and the Mediterranean" toured the world, in 1997. The exhibition was the first show to bring the Bordighera paintings together and to publicize this understudied phase of Monet's life and career, and his love at first sight with the Mediterranean and its nature, sun-kissed and colorful. Moreover, it dealt with the significant challenges faced by Monet when he painted the sunny views of the Riviera. In fact, on the Mediterranean coast, he found different visual experiences compared to those he encountered in Paris's environs and in Normandy; a new palette was much needed to effectively render Mediterranean colors. The exhibition catalogue advises that, following his exploration of southern coasts of France and Italy, Monet produced over 100 paintings created over the course of three major trips to the Mediterranean. One of these was Bordighera. Author and curator Joachim Pissarro gathered these paintings from the collections of not only major museums but of private individuals worldwide. The catalogue presents introductory commentaries for each series or group of paintings, including the Bordighera images. Anecdotes are also present in Monet's own words – he enjoyed written correspondence – like Monet's struggle with translating his impressions into paintings. Different traits of Monet's personality emerge from a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond his art.

As part of the official catalogue of the 1997 exhibition, an article by another Ligurian author, Tito Schiva, provides an historical account of the Moreno Gardens, a location Monet

frequently painted while in Bordighera. Francesco Moreno, son of Vincenzo the founder of the gardens, was a very reserved man and particularly jealous of his property and his tropical plants, which he did not like to share. In the 1860s, the Moreno Gardens were already well-known internationally, and in 1881, they had been featured in one of the very first travel guides, *Italia Geografica Illustrata* or "Geographic Italy Illustrated," which called them one of the best spots in the Mediterranean and among the most splendid gardens in Europe.[10] It was thanks to this established fame that Monet heard of the gardens and did everything he could to visit them. He had a hard time obtaining the reference letter which could grant access to the gardens, but during the first months of 1884, he fulfilled his dream. Initially, he worked in the garden along the Bordighera's Via Romana;[11] he produced a dozen canvasses, some of which are now exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The Moreno Gardens were not the only botanical property Francesco Moreno owned; he was able to secure exotic plants for similar gardens on the Riviera, and for that, Monet nicknamed him "a real Marquis of Carabas."[12] The Marquis of Carabas is character from the *Puss in Boots* fairy tale, and he is often used to indicate a happy and wealthy man, with the origin of his wealth being unknown. As jealous as he was of his property, Moreno was actually a perfect host and took good care of Monet, even inviting him to several excursions to his other properties – probably to brag about those, too. One day, he took Monet to his Stampino property, near Albenga, where the painter discovered a Japanese bridge,[13] which inspired Monet to famously reproduce at his property back in Giverny, the place where he would retire in his last years of life and production.

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[10] Tito Schiva, "Moreno, Monet, Bordighera: Una Storia Da Scoprire [Moreno, Monet, Bordighera: A Story to Discover]," in *Monet a Bordighera*, ed. Silvia Alborno (Milano: Città di Bordighera, 1998), 139.
[11] Schiva, "Moreno, Monet, Bordighera," 140.
[12] Schiva, 140.
[13] Silvia Alborno, *Monet a Bordighera [Monet in Bordighera]* (Milan: Città di Bordighera, 1998), 22. Sadly, the original bridge was destroyed during one of the floods that hit the Riviera.

Schiva, a botanist, is very fond of the story of the Moreno Gardens; actually, he points out how the real protagonist in the Bordighera images is actually the flora, and not the villas. While this may be true, his argument must be considered in relation to his profession. In fact, he lists exotic plants from official records on the Gardens and looks at Monet's paintings as visual testimony of the same plants, as they can be recognized. Apart from plants like the olive trees and palm trees, which of course are common in the Mediterranean – and Monet must have been familiar with them already – the rest of the botanical gardens might have been a further challenge for the painter, as they were full of plants he was not familiar with, adding an additional challenge to the Mediterranean colors with which he was already struggling. In fact, olive, palm, lemon, and orange trees – all painted by Monet in Bordighera – are not native in Normandy where the Frenchman was raised. The search for that perfect palette may have just become more interesting.[14] In the Gardens, Monet found the outdoor studio he needed to further his close observation of the trees he was interested in. The visit to the Moreno Gardens was a much-needed break in between sittings when Monet was struggling the most and provided access to the same range of plants he found in the wild – and more, since plants were also imported from the East – but in a much more accessible and calm environment. From the Gardens he may not enjoy a view of Bordighera Alta or the bay beneath, nevertheless the variety of colors of the Riviera was intact.

[14] Unfortunately, the Moreno Gardens did not last long. Following the death of Francesco in 1885, only a year after Monet's trip, the gardens were left to themselves; as a result, the plants were neglected and grew wild. In 1888, the widow moved back to Marseille, and the gardens were split into individual properties, some of which still preserve parts of the original Moreno Gardens to this date. It was a real shame. The Gardens had been around for decades, at least since 1838, when Giorgio Gallesio, an agronomist, went to visit the palm trees (Schiva, 140). Monet was lucky enough to visit them at their peak of beauty but also just before the whole thing collapsed.

Another Riviera-based writer like Alborno, Giuseppe Marcenaro also helped revive the interest in Monet and Bordighera during the famous 1997 exhibition. His article "Light on the Riviera: Monet and the Mediterranean" looks at the exhibition through the eyes of a proud local who celebrates the Bordighera paintings as a unique legacy of late 19th-century Italian Riviera, whose picturesque towns were already popular at the time and still attract foreign tourists to this day. Most visitors were English aristocracy and middle-class. Monet himself chose the Pension Anglaise – where, as the name suggests, most guests were English – for his 1884 trip.[15] Bordighera was attractive but unattainable, its hues new to Monet. Marcenaro's analysis is an excellent starting point for a later discussion on how and why Monet initially struggled with the Mediterranean light, but – more importantly – how he was ultimately successful.

Before leaving for the Riviera, Monet had just finished decorating the interior of a luxurious apartment belonging to his art dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel. Monet had accepted the job because, as any practicing artist knows, relationships with patrons, dealers, and regular buyers – any stakeholders, really – are critical to stay in business, then as it is today. He had been working indoors. After completing this commissioned work, Monet felt exhausted and very much in need of rest, relaxation, and time outdoors. " 'I cannot wait until I am out of all this,' he [Monet]

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[15] The most hilarious episode is, by far, Monet's struggle to find a suitable accommodation, due to him being picky.

> He arrived there around 20 January 1884, intending to stay a month. Much to his dismay, however, the town was more crowded than it had been during his previous visit. Even more disturbing was the fact that when he came down from his room for his first dinner in the hotel restaurant, he discovered he was the only French person in the place. That might not have been so bad, he told Durand-Ruel, but everyone else was "German." Revealing his nationalistic bent and his disdain for his neighbors across the Rhine, he "was not going to stay there at any price." Without hesitation, he moved out immediately and "after great difficulty was able to find something more accommodating," a hotel that was dominated this time by English people whom he at least could tolerate. (Tucker, *Claude Monet*, 119)

Monet was only in his forties but was already behaving like a grumpy old man straight out of a sitcom. As an aside, it is worth mentioning that scholar Charles Stuckey, in his comprehensive work *Monet: A Retrospective*, presents a very detailed chronology and also sets Monet's date of arrival in Bordighera to January 17, three days earlier.

wrote. 'It has been a century since I last worked outdoors, and it's all because of this. I sometimes reach the point where I wonder if I'm going insane.' "[16] Charles Stuckey argues that the sense of desperation Monet conveys in these letters occasionally rises to a pathological level.[17] This is a compelling perspective which must be taken into account to try and understand Monet's mindset at the time, which was the one of a desperate painter who had felt compelled to work on interior decoration to make ends meet. In Bordighera, Monet was finally free to paint *en plein air* again, with no studio constraints or interference from patrons.

In fact, Monet would not wait for anyone and would leave for Bordighera to pursue his own quest. Paul Tucker is one of Monet's main scholars. In his *Claude Monet: Life and Art*, Tucker investigates both the 1883 and the 1884 trips. The account is full of anecdotes. We already know Monet wanted to travel alone; the painter expands on it. "He [Monet] informed Durand-Ruel of his plans, asking him 'to say nothing about [it] to anyone, not because I want to make a mystery about it but because I want to go alone. I've always worked better in solitude… following my own impression.' "[18] Once again, Monet stresses how his ideal condition for working is, indeed, solitude.

Once Monet made the decision to go to Bordighera, his enthusiasm took off. Silvia Alborno, a Riviera native, wrote a thesis in 1989 on Monet in Bordighera. In 1998 she curated a related exhibition.[19] In the 1998 exhibition catalogue, she highlights a letter that Monet wrote to his art merchant Paul Durand-Ruel: "I'm leaving full of ardor, I feel I am going to do wonderful things," [20] a quotation that became the exhibition's subheading. This statement is important since

[16] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 27.
[17] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 27-8.
[18] Paul Hayes Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 119.
[19] Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 20.
[20] Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 20.

it clearly articulates what Monet is anticipating from the trip, it shows the mindset with which he was going to approach Bordighera. Monet went on to explore this region to find himself surrounded by a refreshing atmosphere and overwhelming nature, all rich in spectacular landscapes and vivid colors. As mentioned above, Alborno also edited a collection of Monet's letters from Bordighera. Over most letters we get a sense of a relentless but stressed Monet – working intensely to crack the color code in Bordighera, to find his desired composition in nature without making it up – and in need of breaks from time to time – which the weather often provided too – so he could go back to more familiar subjects, potentially seeking validation of his skills.

A second exhibition we will be taking into account is the 2000 "Monet, Renoir and the Impressionist Landscape," which toured Ottawa in Canada, then Richmond and Houston in the US. The show used canvases permanently exhibited at the MFA in Boston to investigate the evolution of landscape painting in Impressionist across the decades and under the brushes of several painters, including Monet and Renoir. The official catalogue, organized chronologically, opens with an introduction by George T. M. Shackleford who explains how "the development of the Impressionist landscape forms a complex story, yet too often it has been reduced to a simple and direct trajectory."[21] While the exhibition is more comprehensive than we require to the purpose of this research, the approach to the Impressionist timeline and the interdependencies between painters proves extremely relevant when pinpointing cause and effect of Monet's style in the 1880s and his trip to Bordighera. When studying Monet whom he calls Impressionism's "most famous, most steadfast, and arguably most innovative practitioner", Shackleford names

[21] Fronia E. Wissman, Erika M. Swanson, and George T. M. Shackelford, *Monet, Renoir and the Impressionist Landscape* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2000), 11.

Eugène Boudin in the 1850s, Gustave Courbet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Pissarro in the 1860s as having – by no means exclusively – a strong influence on Monet.[22] Apart from Renoir who introduced Monet to the Mediterranean, Courbet's influence is relevant to Bordighera. Monet's search for immediacy, in fact, goes back to Courbet's Letter to Young Artists in 1861, in which Courbet praises artists' loyalty to their originality and to the time in which they live.[23]

Further in regard to how Monet may have been influenced, Pissarro writes:

> One of the essential aspects of Impressionism was *interchange*, a profound sharing of ideas, techniques, and compositional recipes. For the Impressionists, this process should not be read in terms of influence but as fascinating, mutually enriching give-and-take. […] Like many of his colleagues, Monet tried to assert a pictorial idiom that was unique. While distancing himself quite deliberately from his colleagues, he became more independent […].[24]

I think Pissarro is onto something here. Monet did take part in this so-called interchange (after all, he befriended many fellow painters, like the above-mentioned Renoir and Morisot, among others), but because of his unique personality, he would not feel accomplished if he did not distance himself, artistically and philosophically. Going on a trip alone without Renoir – who would have probably loved to join – was a more desirable option at the time for Monet. This is where artistic temperament comes in, which is referenced by Courbet in his letter and is key to Monet's desire to paint alone, to be true both to what he sees and how he captures it.

Monet really wanted to have an immersive experience, surrounded by nature. The point of view we get in many paintings is of an artist sitting in a garden, under a tree, or hiding behind one, as a bird watcher would lurk in the bushes, waiting for the perfect shot. It respectfully

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[22] Wissman, Swanson, and Shackelford, *Monet, Renoir and the Impressionist Landscape*, 11-3.
[23] Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 403.
[24] Pissarro, 13.

observed nature without interfering; he showed signs of human life, like villas, only when he had too. Even when villas are supposed to be the subject – and give a painting its title – they are often cropped and only partially shown, with the flora taking over the canvas. Somehow, this approach makes the images the more intriguing; they are very immersive, they invite the viewer in.

This study delves of the Bordighera images, using primarily the artist's own words in his letters as a key to interpret his work. Our formalist approach will not be limited to Monet's work but will keep an eye on what other fellow Impressionists were accomplishing around the same time. Once we introduce comparisons with adjacent styles then the analysis becomes exponentially more and more complex but brings further evidence to the table that corroborates the influence of the Bordighera trip.

Monet's trip to Bordighera turns out to be a very emotional one, as his mood fluctuated based on the volatile weather and news received from France – Alice was also enduring financial difficulties which he took care of via Durand-Ruel. These affected Monet's ability to work effectively. A psychoanalytic approach gives central attention to "unconscious motives and feelings," and identifies "a 'psychic' context for the literary work, at the expense of social or historical context, privileging the individual 'psycho-drama' above the 'social drama' of class conflict."[25] This is very relevant to Monet's work in Bordighera: as the study will observe, the vegetation in Bordighera will captivate the painter to the point that his experience will have to become more and more immersive, shutting out any interference from friends in France and acquaintances in Bordighera. There is a parallelism between the artistic journey in Bordighera,

[25] Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 105.

beginning with the villas and ending with the studies of trees, and Monet embrace of nature and vivid colors. In fact, as Monet familiarized himself with Bordighera, his choice of subjects reflected more and more his preference for nature and his fascination with the local vegetation.

Production and Analysis

The Literature Review introduced a series of sources and exhibition that covered Bordighera as part of the Mediterranean. In fact, the first major exhibition to cover Bordighera, "Monet and the Mediterranean," did so by covering the trip as part of the larger context of Monet's work in the Mediterranean. Further exhibitions on Bordighera alone were often limited to regional shows. This point is more than a detail and, in terms of scholarly methodologies, it highlights how Bordighera has been seen so far by academics as just another stop along the journey that took Monet to the Mediterranean. By stressing the uniqueness of Bordighera in Monet's oeuvre, this paper challenges the existing scholarship that mostly considers Bordighera as good as any other stop along the Mediterranean coast, and aims at putting Bordighera in a new light, giving it the place it deserves among Monet's works in the Mediterranean or seascapes painted elsewhere.

In December 1883, Monet traveled to the Mediterranean with his lifetime friend Renoir. The trip could have not come too soon. After living between Vétheuil and Giverny, Monet was finally enjoying financial independence, and was keen on enjoying the perks. The 1883 trip was an *en touriste* one, and Bordighera stood out compared to any other stops. Monet and Renoir traveled on the recently built railway from Ventimiglia all the way to Genoa, a large city and commercial port which they barely noticed and about which they did not write down a single note in their diary.[26] If Monet had to go back to the Riviera, it could only be for a place like Bordighera. The 1884 trip was solely motivated by the deep fascination that this town inspired. From the Bordighera letters, edited by Alborno, we get an indication of what sort of mindset Monet was in at the time he decided to travel to Bordighera. Monet traveled to Bordighera

[26] Giuseppe Marcenaro, "Light on the Riviera: Monet and the Mediterranean," *FMR*, no. 86 (June 1997), 68.

seeking a fresh start. During the final months of 1883, in fact, he had been working on Paul Durand-Ruel's property, doing interior décor. It does not come as a surprise that Monet would work with floral motifs even when circumstances had him work indoor.[27] Such floral motifs would be painted on vertical wooden panel like the one in Figure 5. Considering the shape – tall and narrow – and the subject – a couple of flowers, mostly out of any context – such panel appears to be very limiting and unlikely to satisfy a painter like Monet, who was used to wide open views. While Monet's body and mind were occupied with making wooden panels for upscale decorating purposes – after all, Durand-Ruel was a bespoke art dealer – his soul was miles away, off to landscapes and seascape Monet longed for, away from the constrained routine of Paris, a city Monet had left years back, in 1877.[28]

We introduced Courbet and his letter in which he urges young artists to know the past but only in order to produce their own, original art. Firstly, one main point in the letter is Courbet's belief that artists should portray the era they live in, without trying to reinvent the past: "A man who picks up an era at exactly the point at which past times left it is the only true artist."[29] This is not in contradiction with immediacy, impression, or immersiveness at all, but quite the opposite, as Monet lives the moment and the place he chooses to paint. Secondly and more importantly, in his letter Courbet urged his younger colleagues – who had asked him to be their teacher – to pursue an unbiased perspective free not only of any unnecessary legacy from the past but also any interference from other artists: "To my mind, every artist must be his own master: hence I could not begin to think of setting myself up as a teacher to be imitated." "Art cannot be

[27] Monet, *Words in Color*, 8.
[28] Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 42.
[29] Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *Art in Theory*, 403.

taught,"[30] Courbet insists. This is, in fact, what Monet is practicing when he decides to travel alone without Renoir, or when he shows little interest in the work of other artists in Bordighera, like a group of English painters staying at the same pension. Monet is happy to explore new places and potential subjects with fellow artists, but his painting process on the Riviera is best executed when he is working on his own, a condition that facilitates immersiveness and the capturing of an impression, a purely individual impression, untainted by what others might see or paint.

Courbet is not the only artist to promote fresh, original perspectives in artists. Actually, components that are to be appreciated in the manifesto-letter by Cezanne mentioned in the Introduction are individualism of the artists, their nonconformism when it comes to systems of artistic value, and their strong desire to engage with the public and be judged by them. These can all be observed in Monet's work in Bordighera. Firstly, Pissarro notices how "Monet's choice of similar motifs [to Cezanne's] was largely coincidental, since he refused to consider art made by others."[31] In fact, there were a number of other artists who had already traveled to the Riviera and painted, but little of that work appears to have directly inspired what Monet achieved in Bordighera. Secondly, Monet's desire for his Bordighera paintings to be seen by the public was strong; the fact that he could not exhibit haunted him, as will become apparent in his correspondence with Durand-Ruel.

To Monet, painting alone meant pursuing an immersive experience with nature, something that is more easily achieved in a coastal town like Bordighera compared to a metropolis like Paris. Surprisingly, Monet's emotional disconnection from Paris started in the

[30] Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *Art in Theory*, 403.
[31] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 17.

1860s. What follows is an extract from the letter he wrote to Frédéric Bazille from Étretat, on the coast of Normandy.

> Believe me, I don't envy you being in Paris – I hardly miss our get-togethers, though even so I'd be happy to see some of the regulars – but frankly, I think pretty bad the kind of work that inevitably gets done in such a context – don't you think that nature is the only place to do better? I'm sure of it. What's more, I've always thought so, and whatever I've done under such conditions has always been better.
>
> People are too preoccupied with what they see and hear in Paris, however strong they are; at least what I'll do here will have the merit of not resembling anyone else, at least I think so, since it will simply be the record of what I've felt, me personally. The more I go on, the more I regret the little I know, and the more I see that people never dare to express what they feel frankly. It's odd. That's why I'm doubly happy to be here, and I don't think I'll come back very often, at most a month every year.[32]

The above continues to be a key thread in Monet's works - to paint alone so he can record to his own impression, unadulterated by the impression of others. Here, Monet made it clear how he thrived when away from Paris and close to nature. Apart from the brutal honesty in stating he does not miss the get-togethers with his fellow Impressionists, Monet's statement is a declaration of love for nature, a statement of *en plein air* painting that celebrates nature as the artist's natural habitat and rejects Paris with its huge social and art scene that interferes with the artist's perception of reality; this is a feeling Monet developed as a 20-odd artist, long before he discovered Bordighera. The fresh start that Monet was after, combined with the need to return to *en plein air* painting following the tedious assignment at Durand-Ruel's apartment, culminated in the discovery of Bordighera and its dense vegetation with little to no human interference. There is more to this transition that a taste for nature. Over the decades, Monet abandoned city,

[32] Daniel Wildenstein and Claude Monet, "Monet to Bazille, Étretat, December 1868," in *Claude Monet: Biographie Et Catalogue Raisonné. Tome I, 1840-1881, Peintures [Claude Monet: Biography and Annotated Catalog. Volume I, 1840-1881, Paintings]* (Paris and Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts, 1974), 426.

bourgeoise, and figure painting, things that are virtually absent in his Bordighera paintings. Anne M. Wagner links the figure paintings that Monet worked earlier in his life – with his last one being *Luncheon on the Grass* (1865), painted just two years after Manet's more popular homonymous canvas – as a means for "securing a narrative of bourgeois sociability."[33] Wagner argues that, in moving away from the Parisian context of modern life, Monet could better manage the series of unresolved personal traits that came with his multifaceted identity of painter, father, and lover, of which we are offered a glimpse at by Monet himself in the Bordighera letters. Control of personal matters is reflected in the control of his subject, which from that point on is going to be nature.

> A fictive control, to be sure: the impersonality of Monet's landscapes, their "devotion to natural phenomena," is their central pretense, not their truth. Monet's landscapes insist that they have no attitude toward their subjects; their exemplary modernism lies in the fact that they purport to see faithfully, directly, intensely – regardless of personal circumstance. And of course Monet *did* need to see what he painted […]. As painted, Monet's nature was more spectacular than simple. But nonetheless he offered it as fidelity, not invention.[34]

Wagner offers a valuable interpretation of Monet's approach toward nature which is observed in the Bordighera paintings.

Monet's portfolio in Bordighera can easily be divided into series by way of subjects, also based on Monet's letters where his progress is documented on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. The chronological order of the subjects he decides to paint says something about his preference for nature compared to anything human-made. In the early days of his stay in Bordighera, Monet painted a series of views of Villa Bischoffsheim, today known as Villa Etelinda, which Baron

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[33] Anne M. Wagner, "Why Monet Gave up Figure Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (1994), https://doi.org/10.2307/3046059, 628.
[34] Wagner, "Why Monet Gave up Figure Painting," 628.

Raphael Bischoffsheim commissioned to French architect Charles Garnier, of Paris' opera house Palais Garnier fame.[35] In any painting of this series, nature is still a fairly aggressive presence, as it dominates the canvas in foreground and background.[36] Villa Bischoffsheim is actually cleft to either side of the painting, cropped in a way that hardly reveal the nature of its architecture – only leaving a corner of it, a technique Monet would use later in Venice too. This point is more than a detail and furthers this paper's claim on nature being the subject that best characterize Monet's trip to Bordighera: the depiction of nature alone, with its challenges, gives meaning to three months of dedicated work. Compared to any study of trees by Monet in Bordighera, these definitely have three-dimensionality, as spatial recession is clearly spelled out in its various depths: the vegetation in the foreground, the villa in the middle ground, and farther nature and buildings in the background. Architecture in Monet's work in Bordighera is the exception, and, outside the villa series, is limited to isolated buildings surrounded by wild vegetation, like the one in Val Sasso, or distant views of Bordighera Alta, the upper town of Bordighera. Furthermore, not only had Monet traveled from Giverny all the way to Bordighera to paint nature and certainly not villas, but he was not keen on mingling with the elite either.[37]

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[35] The villa would go on to host British and Italian aristocracy, like the Queen Mother and Margherita of Savoy. It is today a museum. While it is unknown why Monet singled out this building, considering the social status of Baron Bischoffsheim at the time one can reasonably assume some of sort of commission came Monet's way – possibly the Baron craving the prestige of having his own villa painted by Monet, possibly as part of a bigger marketing plan to advertise his real estate business.

[36] One paintings of the series of Villa Etelinda features more intense colors. Joachim Pissarro has an explanation for this; "Monet was evidently unafraid of shocking or surprising Morisot [to whom Monet gifted the painting], and he boldly intensified the chromatic effects of the picture." (Pissarro, 78) Colors are indeed brighter, and they better outline the forms depicted: the yellow of the villa, the green of the vegetation, the blue of the hills and the sky.

[37] Garnier, who was already an established presence and socialite in Bordighera, perfectly embodied the official culture of the Second Empire – which had collapsed during the Franco-Prussian war – by fully representing values and ideals repudiated by Monet. Rodolphe Walter and Giuseppe E. Bessone, "Charles Garnier et Claude Monet à Bordighera," *L'Oeil* 258-59 (February 1977), 27.

Vegetation is Monet's favorite subject in Bordighera but also a statement. Alborno analyzes Monet's depiction of plants in his series of villas in Bordighera to further the argument: "Monet provocatively restores the centrality of the motif to the dialogue between a beautiful agave with its solitary flower erect toward the sky and three sinuous palm trees [...]. It is for Monet to subvert what others normally see, an attitude consistent with his repeatedly stated opposition to all academic conventions."[38] Once Monet was free from presumedly any commitment to the Baron or any of his associates like Garnier, he dove deeply into that wonderful Ligurian flora that was his main source of inspiration, challenge, and, ultimately, artistic satisfaction. By using unfamiliar plants like the above-mentioned agave and palm tree, Monet creates asymmetrical and immersive compositions that transport the viewer to new and unexpected landscapes. This reinforces the idea of Monet's seeking a refreshing, immersive experience with nature. Since the very first days of his stay, Monet felt compelled to explore the surrounding environment to get a better understanding of what type of subjects and challenges he would be up against. Monet was a relentless walker, as he demonstrated by reaching. As soon as he laid eyes on the Ligurian landscape, he realized this would be an unprecedented challenge, of the good kind, which would suit his will for a fresh start perfectly. As Monet reached the Mostaccini district, a hilly area overlooking not just the bay but Bordighera Alta as well, Monet found himself an interesting spot from where to paint.[39]

Monet's element is water, he confesses in a letter from Bordighera to Hoschedé. Monet had doubts regarding the suitability of Bordighera and often had a hard time finding the right

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[38] Claude Monet and Silvia Alborno, Introduction, in *Parole a Colori: Lettere Da Bordighera, Gennaio-Aprile 1884 [Words in Color: Letters From Bordighera, January-April 1884]* (Ventimiglia, Italy: Philobiblon, 2009), 14.

[39] Vivian Russell, *Monet's Landscapes* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2000), 21. Russel also compares Monet's view with a contemporary photograph taken from the same spot: the same view cannot be appreciated because of modern real estate developments.

spot from where he could paint those native trees that fascinated him – palm, lemon, olive trees – and capture the sea in the background at the same time. He may have also struggled to find the right time of the day. He writes in his letter:

> So, everything is proceeding quite well, although it is very difficult to do: these palm trees are my downfall; and then the patterns are extremely difficult to render, to put on canvas; everything is so thick; it is a delight to look at. You can walk nonstop under the palm trees, orange and lemon trees, and even under the beautiful olive trees, but when you look for subjects, it is very difficult. I would like to paint orange and lemon trees with the blue of the sea as background: I can't find any the way I want them.
>
> As to the blue of the sea and sky, it's impossible.[40]

Monet's words serve as an introduction to the challenges he faced in Bordighera, one being Monet's difficulty in facing a natural environment he was not familiar. The fact that he can "walk nonstop" under palm trees is the result of being surrounded by thick vegetation at any altitude along the hilly environment that framed the otherwise coastal town. A frame is indeed what the vegetation in the foreground acts as, especially in the series of views of Bordighera. On the one hand, any exotic tree stood out on its own, having caught his eye since his first trip to the Rivera in 1883. On the other hand, he was eager to capture such trees against a background of sea and sky. Later in the correspondence, Monet admitted how the palm trees were a curse, as he could not figure out how to get the motifs right on canvas. The vegetation was so dense it was a pleasure to walk through it. One could walk tirelessly among palm, orange, lemon, and olive trees. What was a wonder to the mind and soul was a pain when it came to painting: one day, he was desperate to paint orange and lemon trees with the blue sea in the background, but he could not find any that could tick that box. This statement is an example of just how reliant he was on

[40] Monet, *Words in Color*, 49.

what he saw in front of him, he did not feel he could create simply from his imagination the scene he wanted. Instead, he sought to paint what he saw, he tried to search for the scene he wanted to paint in reality, rather than simply making it up.

In addition to vegetation, in the quotation above Monet lists the sea among the technical challenges. As a subject, the sea – or, we should say, water in general – follows Monet along his entire career, before he finally settles in Giverny, close to his garden, pond, and Japanese bridge. As Monet embarks on a new adventure, what better medium than water to bridge Monet's past and present? In a letter to Hoschedé, Monet wrote how the sea was out of this world and could be compared to the rough sea in Pourville, just in a wonderful blue with a silver surf. When he was not painting, he confessed how he loved to go for long walks and explore new paths: his eyes could not get enough of the seascapes and landscapes. He also called the blue of the sea and sky "impossible."[41] Why was Monet struggling with blue? In an 1888 letter from the French Riviera to sculptor and friend Auguste Rodin, Monet wrote: "I'm fencing and wrestling with the sun. In order to paint here, one would need gold and precious stones."[42] Monet is in awe of the luminosity of the colors and of light. The sea, with his endless hues of blue, is one challenge that shapes Monet's work in Bordighera.

The Ligurian sea is not the same Monet enjoys from the coast of Normandy which he visits regularly between 1867 and 1886, as we know from Herbert's above-mentioned study of the matter; in fact, the Ligurian sea can go from tranquil to rough in the blink of an eye, and, combined with Mediterranean sunlight, it translates into mesmerizing effects that fascinate the locals as much as the next traveler. Moreover, ever-changing is also the weather on the Riviera,

[41] Silvia Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 24.
[42] Paul Hayes Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 119.

making such light effects as elusive as they come. Nevertheless, readers should not mistake the challenge introduced with the Mediterranean Sea as a reflection of Monet's lack of skills with it. "When circumstances and subject came together, Monet could still paint rapidly and brilliantly," points out Daniel Wildenstein. During the 1884 trip, Monet took a day off to travel to and paint Menton and Cap Martin. "They were subjects with plenty of sea in them, whereas the sea was still largely absent from the Bordighera studies."[43] Monet seems to struggle with scenes that lack expanses of water. Furthermore, after he visited Dolceacqua with his fellow English hosts, Monet was impressed by the view and went back two days later and painted two canvases from start to finish in one afternoon, much to the painters' awe.[44] This validates the fact that Monet was after a way to reboot his impression in light of what newly visited places could offer in terms of pictorial challenges. In a way, Monet left his comfort zone, built over decades of seascapes and vegetation with certain characteristics, to push his limits and see where his adaptive skills would take him.

In his work in Bordighera, Monet departs from those established systems observed in his own previous landscape painting, a most noticeable change being the almost total disappearance of a path, or a stream, usually cutting through nature and directing the viewer's gaze to a focal point. See for instance Figure 6. Pissarro confirms this in his "Monet and the Mediterranean" catalog:

> These paintings present a strong contrast to *The Monte Carlo Road.*[45] There is no longer a stable road in which the easel of the painter is set. In fact, one wonders in each painting where the artist stood – where he placed his easel, given the overwhelming vegetation on the hillside. In each of the three paintings, there is an

[43] Wildenstein, *Monet, or, the Triumph of Impressionism*, 196.
[44] Monet, *Words in Color*, 91.
[45] See Figure 7. More commonly translated as *The Road to Monte Carlo* (French: *Route de Monte-Carlo*). Monet painted it during his 1883 trip to the Mediterranean.

> interplay between four elements (or "characters"): the sky, the sea, the town (Bordighera, with its small church tower), and the vegetation. Each view is dominated by two or three pine trees that spring out of the foreground and create sophisticated, quasi-choreography pattern the binds all four parts of the painting.[46]

These four elements are observable in the views of Bordighera that this paper analyzes. In fact, thick vegetation takes over the foreground and creates a natural barrier, a recurring trait in the Bordighera paintings. A glance at *View of Bordighera* (Figure 1) is sufficient to appreciate its uniqueness compared to those symmetrical compositions which Monet would later paint in Giverny, such as those depicting the garden path (Figure 8) or the Japanese bridge (Figure 9). While *View of Bordighera* does not come close to the level of wilderness that later compositions will reach, nevertheless from this elevated point of view the expanse of vegetation covers most of the canvas, with the color green conveying an immersive experience, almost suggesting how the best way to view the painting is, in fact, *en plein air*, where it was created. Finding pattern within wilderness was a challenge. Considering the relatively wild environment, Monet had to work hard to locate a spot where vegetation opened up enough to allow a glance at both Bordighera Alta and the sea. The contrast between green (foliage) and blue (sea and sky) is classic Monet. Still, the town of Bordighera blooms in the middle ground, a discreet presence which effectively balances the composition with its warm hues of yellow, orange, and red. Nature does not ignore it as a passage is opened up, and a tree in the foreground in the bottom right corner seems to point to Bordighera, mimicking the town's soft silhouette. While this arrangement is observed in Monet's works pre-dating his Mediterranean trips[47] – Pissarro mentions Monet's 1882 *Varengeville Church* (Figure 10), as an example – in Bordighera it is

[46] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 74.
[47] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 74. As an example, Pissarro mentions Monet's 1882 *Varengeville Church*.

taken to the next level, in the spreading vegetation and sparkling sea. The result is a comforting view; the place, as Marcenaro describes it, is "the transmutation of a mental paradise which, apparently proffering calm and refreshment, then proceeds to stir up the most elusive, sensual frame of mind." The encounter between the Riviera and Claude Monet holds the potential to release memorable art; Monet's stay in Bordighera, though, is a slow journey that begins with repeats of villas and end with brushes of colorful vegetation.

Before moving onto the next paintings, the seascapes found in the *Views* cannot be fully understood unless placed in the larger context of the seascapes painted by Monet over the two decades preceding Bordighera. In the Literature Review, Herbert's *Monet on the Normandy Coast: Tourism and Painting, 1867-1886* was included in light of a chapter on Bordighera, to suggests how Normandy, a most recurring setting in Monet's career, can be our benchmark to place Bordighera within Monet's stylistic context. While there are two decades worth of stylistic evolution between the early paintings in Normandy and the Bordighera trip, Monet's style when paintings seascapes – and nature in general – was already approaching the heights of Bordighera, though Monet's work on the Riviera is visually unique. In fact, early works by Monet on the Northern coast of France – say from Sainte-Adresse to Trouville in the late 1860s – shows a primordial style that echoes Gustave Courbet's Realism, a major inspiration to young Monet. Tranquil views of seashores, still featuring figure painting, populate balanced compositions where sky and sea often make up half canvas each. As vegetation gradually takes over in the Bordighera paintings, sky and sea recedes more and more, till they are gone.

Bonafoux walks us through pairs of paintings containing similar subjects to effectively illustrate Monet's differences in style between his younger and older self. Bonafoux's analysis also uncovers compositions that preceded the Bordighera trip but with which Monet would

experiment again on the Riviera. Monet was already used to climb on top of hills to capture the scenery from an elevated spot, like in his 1882 *Cabin of the Customs Watch, Afternoon Effect* (Figure 11), where the cabin is surrounded by plants and weeds that recall palm leaves of Bordighera in shape and color, with Monet's beloved sea in the background. Monet would adopt similar viewpoint in his views of Bordighera. Moreover, differences that emerge from Bonafoux's comparisons highlight Monet's growing interest in vegetation just before he traveled to the Mediterranean. In fact, in the same settings where Monet did not pay particular attention to vegetation, he eventually began to carefully observe it, and vegetation would subsequently stand out in his paintings. See for instance one of the best pairs of paintings that Bonafoux places on flanking pages: 1868 *Rough Sea at Étretat* (Figure 12) and 1883 *Stormy Sea in Étretat* (Figure 13), 15 years apart on the timeline and miles style-wise. In the 1868 version of the cliff, its flat, greyish surface is lifeless and lacks identity; it is hard to tell any vegetation from the actual rock. Promontory, sky, sea, and beach all are harmonized by the same dull palette, with the only drops of color being the people's clothes on the shore. In these observers, fans of German Romantic painting may see Caspar David Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*, which expresses the anxiety of existential angst and primal fear before the immensity of nature. In the 1883 version of the cliff, instead, colors are lively, the palette is wide-ranging, the vegetation stands out from the naked rock, and, overall, the composition comes to life, also thanks to a more realistic sea, a more animated shore, and distinct brushstrokes. In 1883, the year when Monet moved to Giverny btu also had to work interiors, the painter was in a similar mindset to the one that prompted him to seek a reinvigorating trop to the Mediterranean. Monet's 1883 paintings foretold Bordighera, or Bordighera was the culmination of a stylistic journey made of more vivid colors and more consistent brushstrokes than ever.

Monet's increasingly immersive experience of nature is reflected, for instance, in a tree added in the foreground in Figure 2 compared to Figure 1. Subsequent paintings, however, such as the second pair of selected works *Study of Olive Tree* (Figure 3) and *Lemon Grove* (Figure 4), offer a further and decisive step toward such an immersive experience. Monet gets closer to his subjects, places himself right in front of them or underneath, rather than standing uphill from a distance. But how did Monet go from seascapes such as the *Views* to tree studies like *Study of Olive Tree* and *Lemon Grove*? The Moreno Gardens served as an outdoor studio for Monet to further his work on trees. Théodore Duret, with whom Monet occasionally corresponded from Bordighera, wrote the following in 1880: "In order to lessen the distance separating preliminary studies and the work in the studio, they [Corot and Courbet] sketched oil on the canvas out of doors, in the presence of nature. And those preliminary studies, brought to conclusion in the studio, would become pictures or serve as the basis for enlarged and more developed canvases. […] Claude Monet, who follows them, has succeeded in accomplishing what they began."[48] by producing the finished works outside, rather than only sketches, by essentially claiming the "sketches" done *en plein air* were finished works of art themselves. At the Moreno Gardens, in fact, Monet could take a closer look at the olive trees – which he adored for their green and blue shades – and work on studies. Monet saw in the vegetation what he called "pure magic," so "intertwined" the trees were in his eyes. In a much more relaxed environment compared to those bristling hilly spots he had to earn by way of long walks while carrying his equipment under the sun, in the Gardens Monet produced a series of studies of olive trees, at least one of which is

[48] Théodore Duret, "Le Peintre Claude Monet [The Painter Claude Monet]," in *Monet: A Retrospective*, ed. Charles Stuckey (New York: Levin, 1985), 70-1.

famously still alive to this day and can be seen when visiting Villa Mariani, one of the villas the original gardens were split into.

Vegetation is more the sole protagonist at the Gardens, with no room for buildings, towns, or twinkles of sea or sky. Monet was immediately enraptured by the beauty of nature in Bordighera, and decided to tackle the olive trees in February, early in the trip. As opposed to the views of Bordighera – which are fairly balanced in terms of color wheel, featuring at least a hint of a path or an opening in the vegetation which leads to Bordighera and eventually to a cliff or a beach, in the studies of olive trees, the vegetation is a barrier that does not seem to lead anywhere, actually appearing to prevent the viewer from moving any further. A viewer is, therefore, sort of trapped in an immersive composition full of light and color. In *Study of Olive Trees* (Figure 3), painted at the Moreno Gardens, the largest tree in the foreground, shaped like a lightning bolt striking the ground, leads the viewer's gaze up and down, but never out of the grove. It keeps the viewer's attention on the surface of the canvas rather than in leading it into the depth of the space. Nature is not necessarily welcoming, rather vigorous and imposing. Ironically, when taking cover behind bushes and being exposed to the elements, Monet seeks lighter, complementary, calming colors. It is in the tranquility of the Gardens that he looks for trouble. See the stark contrast between the blueish green of the olive tree in the above-mentioned study. Such blueish effect in olive trees is the result of sunlight filtering through the foliage, which, in a windy place with ever-changing weather, is guaranteed to be unpredictable and hard to capture. Such contrast is even more evident in *Olive Tree Wood at Bordighera*, which is in no way symmetrical or balanced, with a clear cut between blue and red and an organization along a diagonal line that conveys a great deal of dramatic effect, with trunks and foliage once again acting as a barrier and blocking the viewer from seeing what is on the other side. How deep is the

wood? Is there a cliff? *Study of Olive Trees* depicts what Pissarro calls a "a self-contained natural space that takes over the whole surface of the canvas and acts as a cocoon, completely absorbing the artist's gaze into that space and negating the laws of perspective."[49] Ironically, in one of his letters to Hoschedé, Monet identifies as "the man of isolated trees and wide open spaces," as he complains about how dense Bordighera is, with its tangles of vegetation so full of detail and difficult to render.[50] Monet is really picking views and experiencing a landscape outside his comfort zone.

The increasingly more immersive experience in the Bordighera paintings suggests Monet eventually grew accustomed to such density and came to appreciate those details he used to struggle with; the Moreno Gardens played a big part in the process. Such evidence is found Monet's studies of trees. The view of Bordighera (Figure 1 and 2) were painted from hilly spots while exposed to the elements; at the Gardens, instead, Monets finds the quietness of an outdoor studio, shielded from any everchanging wind. Monet still has a seaview here, if he wishes to paint water; still, he shifts his attention to the trees. Once he visits the Gardens, Monet even regrets having already begun other studies[51] – he always had so much on his plate. Further on *Study of Olive Trees*, the olive tree is a rather twisted one, it dominates the composition, brutally replacing Monet's trademark "path" with a series of diagonal lines. The tree trunk, combined with two perpendicular branches originating from it, seem to draw a rectangle, in a possibly unwanted geometrical effect that cuts through the horizontal line where foliage and soil meet – the horizon, of course, is not visible – and throws the composition off balance. With exception of the olive tree in the foreground, the composition appears as a flat surface, screen-like – such

[49] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 88.
[50] Monet, *Words in Color*, 75.
[51] Monet, *Words in Color*, 67.

feature will be more evident in *Lemon Grove in Bordighera*. The blue of the olive trees particularly impressed Monet, which is understandable as not many trees can sport shades of blue with no help from blooming flowers. Color effects were facilitated by the light filtering through the foliage. Blue was probably the most compelling and difficult color; it dominated views by way of sky and sea, it sneaked in between branches and through foliage, while also giving way to "extraordinary, untranslatable" pink.[52] Pink is, in fact, carefully observed in the foamy waves of Figure 1 and 2, and in the sky. Monet was experimenting so much that his paint supply was never enough; at least once during his trip he had to order oils from Turin. Monet needs multiple attempts to render the desired impressions. We know he is working on multiple canvases at a time – unusual, if one's goal is to capture the immediacy of an impression. It is taking more attempts to capture the ideal impression Monet is after. Monet is potentially wasting painting material, with more trials required than expected to capture his impression. These may seem like meaningless technical details but, all combined, they pinpoint Monet's challenges in Bordighera.

Introducing the lemon tree to his readers and comparing it to the rest of the Ligurian flora back in 1883, Frederick Fitzroy Hamilton wrote: "The Lemon-tree [sic] is not only more delicate, but at the same gives larger profits than the orange; […] it also without doubt, after the olive, and because of the importance of its produce, the most interesting tree under cultivation in this part of the Riviera of Genoa, which extends from Monaco to Mentone, from Ventimiglia to Bordighera […]."[53] As one of those exotic plants that someone from the North was not expected to be familiar with, if not through writings like Hamilton's guide, the lemon tree took Monet's

[52] Wildenstein, *Monet, or, the Triumph of Impressionism*, 196.
[53] Frederick Fitzroy Hamilton, *Bordighera and the Western Riviera*, trans. Alfred C. Dowson (London: Edward Stanford, 1883), 306.

art by storm and, together with the orange tree, provided some fresh, vivid colors that could offer ideal complementary colors to those hues of blues that would inevitably be part or the Frenchman's palette, painter of the light as he was, with water being his favorite element of all. With yellow and orange being naturally part of Bordighera's floral spectrum, these facilitate the use of color wheel theory – somehow an easier way to do so, compared to the olive trees – while still representing a visual challenge. One can appreciate Monet's frustration as an *en plein air* artist dealing with intermittent effect and with an *impression* that seems to play hide and seek with the painter. On the bright side, lemon groves further unlock a love for a surrounding nature that shuts the world outside and is self-sufficient, transcending time and space.

A romantically inspired Monet writes to Hoschedé: "I then delivered myself to the lemons in a delicious spot, and as I was painting, I was thinking of you." A closer look at *Lemon Grove in Bordighera* (Figure 4) once again reveals a quite bidimensional composition, with laws of perspective being negated in favor of a wall of color for the viewer to absorb all of it, without entering. The image is dominated by a screen-like, flat surface of vegetation. One can hardly tell what makes up the little background peeping out from behind the trees, either sky, clouds, snowy mountains, or further foliage. The tree branches, the leaves, and the fruits are so tightly intertwined that one wonders how light can even filter through, so thick this net is; lemons, like yellow electric light bulbs, seem to have the power of shining by their own light. The lemon grove is an enchanted forest where trees do not appear to be rooted, floating as they are above a layer of green which incidentally reveals more than just grass. Is there a realistic depiction of light and shade in *Lemon Grove in Bordighera*? Definitely not, but Monet's brush instills lifeblood into the scene, it enables the wonders of Mediterranean vegetation to flourish. The *impression* reveals what the naked eye cannot. Monet continues: "Imagine the courtyard of a

Normandy farm; instead of apples, oranges and lemons, and in place of grass, Parma violets; the ground is absolutely blue; I am trying to render this."[54] The connection Monet makes here is most compelling, as he compares the Riviera with Normandy, celebrating the uniqueness of the former when it comes to color. Monet also needs to draw the comparison so that Hoschedé can try to envision what he is talking about without being able to see it, so he reverts to a view she would be familiar with – in this case, Normandy – and then describes modifications to help her envision what he is experiencing.

To be fair, Normandy had also been a blessing and a challenge. Speaking of the cliffs at Étretat, Monet said they were "like nowhere else." In one instance, he complained about the fishermen, guilty of moving the boats he had been painting, and the volatile weather. Normandy extensively prepared Monet for the type of seascapes he would be up against in Bordighera, but it could not do the same with the vivid colors and light games that come with the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Monet is attracted to different subjects in the North and the South. In Normandy, he is fascinated with cliffs, their imposing geometry and staggering heights. In Étretat, he recalls walking casually downhill to an unknown spot one day, and being so impressed with the cliff beneath to be willing to walk home to get his equipment and walk all the way back to paint it that same day.[55] In Bordighera, he does never get too close to the sea like walking to the top of a cliff, instead, he prefers wide open views from a safe distance while well immersed into nature. His experience would get more and more immersive by the day.

The four paintings selected for this analysis (Figure 1-4) actually consists of two pairs of same or similar subjects. This paper's statement about immersiveness is a valid integration to

[54] Russell, *Monet's Landscapes*, 29.
[55] Tucker, *Claude Monet*, 111. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Étretat.

Joachim Pissarro's claims on seriality. In fact, *View of Bordighera* is not a unique composition, as further permutations of such view are proposed, one being *Bordighera* (Figure 2). Similarly, while working at the Moreno Gardens, Monet produces studies of olive and lemon. Multiple attempts lead to a deeper understanding of the vegetation in Bordighera and a more immersive experience. Bordighera's influence on Monet is, therefore not limited to immersive nature. In fact, Pissarro observes how in Bordighera Monet actually invents his seriality, which from this point on is consistently observed across his entire *oeuvre*;[56] the key to understand this method within the bigger picture of the *impression* may be found in Pissarro's definition of seriality, which "emphasizes the natural uniqueness of painting, not only in the subject matter (representing a fragment of the real that is constantly under flux) but also in its temporality (reflecting a moment of the creative individuality that cannot be repeated). This nonreiterativity of the picture was perhaps the most radical innovation introduced by Monet."[57] Pissarro's words contain complex, close-to-scientific vocabulary, but they may well embody a statement of Monet's Impressionism. Pissarro argues that, while Monet's seriality may seem to disprove the very concept of *impression* – the quintessential idea of capturing an unrepeatable light effect – it actually underpins it. The point is not that no two paintings can ever be the same – rather, that the purpose of a series is not to copy over and over for the sake of it, but to prove that nature is ever-changing, that images are volatile, that the same light effect cannot be captured twice, no

[56] Later, between 1892 and 1894, Monet will paint the well-known Rouen Cathedral series, which basically consisted in painting the same subject, the cathedral, from the same point of view but at different times of the day, to study the effect of light and color on the façade. This is an approach Monet may have adopted a decade earlier in Bordighera. In *Bordighera* and *The Villas in Bordighera*, for instance, we have two views of the same villas with a different color palette, which could be the result of painting at different times of the day. *The Valley of Sasso* and *The Valley of Sasso, Sun Effect* are once again a view of the same subject – a villa with palm trees in the foreground, the hills in the background – from the same point of view, the main difference being the sun effect Monet himself included in the title.

[57] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 20.

matter how hard an artist works to recreate the same conditions. More than just a definition of *impression*, Pissarro's argument defines the Bordighera trip in its entirety.

Pissarro refers to Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin who first theorized nonreiterativity, though not in the realm of painting but text which is also easily reproduced. Paintings may not talk, but having a careful, personal, emotionally charged description of the creative process like the letters left by Monet is a blessing. Alborno is aware of Pissarro's investigation on seriality and nonreiterativity – the two met at the 1997 exhibition and began to collaborate on the topic. In fact, Alborno links the uniqueness of the work of art to time and weather: "The groups of paintings representing the same motif under inevitably different objective conditions, because they are subject to the passage of time and atmospheric changes, express and intend to communicate the uniqueness of the work of art, which can never be equal to itself, just as it is never equal to itself and the world around us. As stressed before, facing inevitable challenges like the passage of time and atmospheric changes required series of painting sessions. This suggests one final observation about seriality: that probably Monet did not mean to introduce it to begin with, and that seriality in Bordighera was more of a technical necessity in order to capture the impression, as in having a series of trials before achieving the desired version, or even working on multiple canvases whenever everchanging conditions did not allow the desired impression to be captured during one painting session. As a result, Monet's deep investigation of the vegetation in Bordighera that lead to immersiveness may have been impossible without the painter's meticulous dedication to studying views and trees.

Nonreiterativity, in combination with seriality, suggests that each painting is part of a series and unique at the same time. This is the reason why it was so important to Monet for these

works, the result of great determination and effort, to be 'seen' together."[58] Alborno does not discount the role of the audience, same as Pissarro. "The interaction between creator and receiver," Pissarro continues, "constitutes another unique circumstance. Not only was Monet a maker of series but, as viewers, we are the makers of our own series."[59] Each new paper on the topic, including this one, introduces the author's own interpretation of art, instills lifeblood into the works of art. Had the Bordighera paintings been exhibited shortly after the trip, for instance, they may have adjusted the course of Monet's style, maybe prompted him to go back to Bordighera for more. Moreover, where would these be exhibited, Bordighera, where they were conceived, or back in Paris, where the target market was? Art is a three-way dialogue among creator, work of art, and viewer: different audiences provide different feedback.

The fact that no audience had the opportunity appreciate the paintings at the time was a wasted opportunity. The reasons behind it were financial ones. In fact, in 1884, Durand-Ruel began enduring financial difficulties – which would last till 1886, the year the Impressionists conquered the American market. With Durand-Ruel unable to support the core of the Impressionist group, Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir made the difficult decision to not exhibit that year.[60] As a result, there would be no Impressionist exhibition in 1884, and one would have to wait till 1886 to see the next – and last – one. By that time, unfortunately, interest would have already shifted to other Impressionist works. Moreover, because of such financial hardship, Durand-Ruel took the unusual and difficult decision to sell all the Bordighera paintings straight

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[58] Silvia Alborno, "Il Viaggio Meraviglioso Di Monet [Monet's Wonderful Journey]," in *Clarence Bicknell: La Vita e Le Opere. Vita Artistica e Culturale Nella Riviera Di Ponente e Nella Costa Azzurra Tra Ottocento e Novecento [Clarence Bicknell: The Life and Works. Artistic and Cultural Life in the Western Riviera and the French Riviera Between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries]*, ed. Daniela Gandolfi (Bordighera, Italy: Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 2003), 249.

[59] Pissarro, *Monet and the Mediterranean*, 21.

[60] Alborno, *Monet a Bordighera*, 46.

away, before the public had a chance to lay eyes on them. What did this mean for Monet and his Bordighera images? The painter artist was not in control of the fate of his own art. It does not appear that Monet ever tried and impose on Durand-Ruel regarding the destination of his Bordighera words when these were sent to the art dealer. Monet's reaction later on, though, suggests the artist was still expecting an exhibition at some point, rather than an art sale. Monet was, after all, an artist and not a businessman like Durand-Ruel. In fact. when Monet got back to Paris, he wrote a strong-worded letter to Durand-Ruel, complaining that his art dealer never did anything with his Italian paintings.[61]

As an external factor, the triumph of Impressionism over the strictly rule of the Academy was marked by the art and exhibit scene at the time, in an era where artists were overall successful in bypassing art critics and sought approval directly from the public. Monet was no exception and he thrived in acknowledgement of his efforts and success. Monet had worked relentlessly for almost three months, seeking new pictorial inspiration, and embarking on a journey of self-discovery and artistic rebirth; he wanted the public to acknowledge his effort. Having no exhibition meant Monet would not receive any feedback from the audience – including fellow artists – on anything related on his subjects in Bordighera and how he interpreted them: the Mediterranean light, the exotic colors, the screen of vegetation. Because of lack of exhibition time, and, later, of critical attention, audiences – especially those contemporary to Monet – missed out massively on the Bordighera paintings. Nevertheless, the fact that the art market was incidentally able to absorb these paintings, which ended up bought by wealthy art collectors for their private spaces, was good and bad news. On the one hand, it validated Monet's popularity and the demand for his work – in spite of any financial dilemma,

[61] Alborno, "Monet's Wonderful Journey," 249.

his paintings were best-sellers; on the other hand, the swift sale of his Bordighera works deprived his art of the main function it was intended to fulfill: to please, amaze, enchant the public. Monet was as money-oriented as the next modern artist, often complaining about never having enough money, while in fact any shortness was due to his occasional lavish lifestyle. The Monet did not go back to Paris, visit Durand-Ruel, shake his hand, or thank him for selling his paintings and making both of them money. Instead, he complained that his paintings vanished too quickly.

How did the Riviera instill new lifeblood into Monet's creative process? The answer lies in the artistic challenge that Monet faced, and how he deciphered it. As much as Impressionism often lacks detail, Impressionists seek to capture their unique experience of the reality they observe and its impression, in a time short enough not to let that impression vanish. Initially, what failed was the technical vocabulary – as in panting techniques – Monet had at his disposal. He was not able to capture the impression the way he wanted to. The ever-changing nature of the Riviera forced him to reconsider his approach to painting. As he discusses in his letters at great length, Monet would work relentlessly on multiple canvases at a time. "Here I am definitely at work, four canvases have been started; it is now a matter of finishing them and making four more and so on."[62] And again, just two days later: "Today I worked even more: five canvases, and tomorrow I plan to start a sixth."[63] He could not start a single painting and complete it straight away because of his initial difficulty in capturing the impression. The perfect light effects, bringing amazing Mediterranean color to life, would grace the painter's eyes at one point, but disappear soon after, leaving the painter hanging for hours, sometimes days before the same light effect was reproduced. Marcenaro, who knows the Riviera very well, uses extremely poetic

[62] Monet, *Words in Color*, 39.
[63] Monet, *Words in Color*, 49.

language to describe the Ligurian microcosm, a burst of light and color among the forces of nature: "All that is needed to knock one off balance is the sudden toss of the foliage of an olive tree, as the brisk rush of sea breeze swashes its branches, its leaves mimicking the wave with a quake of foam, thinning and then regrouping in an arboreal undertow which can ruffle its colors."[64] If Monet desperately wanted to paint Bordighera, he had to be willing to dance with the elements, to allow the sea to be itself, and the weather to dictate the timing. The same wind that bent the tree branches under its force also flipped Monet's equipment in the process.

Monet cuts through a cross-section of Bordighera which he peels off layer after layer, day by day. He walks from the *Pension Anglaise* to his favorite spots and back. Every day in Bordighera must have been a journey within a journey: making his way through unmarked paths flanked by trees, Monet would fill up his eyes with the triumph of colors that is the Mediterranean, taking it all in. The more familiar Monet grew with the environment, the more immersive his experience became. In one of his letters in early February, Monet speaks of turning points, of breakthroughs: "Finally, I work hard, I will bring back some palm trees, olive trees (they are beautiful, the olive trees) and from here my blues."[65] Trees, rather than sky or water, become the focus of Monet's exploration of blue. In *Study of Olive Trees* which we analyzed, hues are clearly visible in the foliage. Less than three weeks later, he adds: "Finally, nice weather is back for good; after the cold, a tropical heat. I have been working hard and well. A few days like this, and my work will progress."[66] Monet writes these words relatively early along his trip, as he begins shaping his art and palette to accommodate what he sees. Similar to the four parts that Pissarro points to in the views of Bordighera – the sky, the sea, the town, and

[64] Marcenaro, "Light on the Riviera," 68.
[65] Monet, *Words in Color*, 63.
[66] Monet, *Words in Color*, 95.

the vegetation – the days Monet spends on the Riviera pile up, and finally converge to construct a profound meaning to Monet's work in Bordighera. Monet himself becomes the fifth component of each view, or variable in the equation. The passage of time, marked by the light on a swaying tree or a foamy sea wave, also marks Monet's time. The clock is ticking for that *impression* to be captured once again. During a troubled but exciting time of his life, Monet succeeds at rebooting the concept of *impression*. Anyone with a background in information technology might just compare Monet's stay in Bordighera to a long run of user acceptance testing, and maybe be bold enough to title Monet's project: *Impression 2.0*.

Conclusion

While the Bordighera images did not have the resonance they deserved at the time Monet painted them, they immediately impacted the art scene on the Riviera. Marcenaro imitates Monet and focuses on nature, as he walks his readers through his Riviera, once captured by photographers like Alfredo Noack or painters like Monet who contributed to make the fortune of the Western Riviera. Years after Monet's visit, the Riviera would be included under the umbrella of that new French term that became a quintessential synonym for tourism: Côte d'Azur.[67] In a time when the idea of fascinating Orient was still vivid in the mind of the French audience, Marcenaro compares the Riviera to a new type of "Orient," one that could reignite people's imagination and artists' fascination with the exotic.[68]

The Riviera had acquired international fame among tourists and foreign businessmen, like Baron Bischoffsheim, and artists took note. Painters made the most of the recently built railroad between Ventimiglia and Genoa, opened in 1871,[69] to reach the Italian Riviera. Still, in 1884, no one had ever painted Bordighera like Monet did, and no one would. The Italian Riviera became a major tourist and artistic destination in the 19th century. In *Monet, Return to the Riviera*, Marco Farotto looks at Bordighera through its representations by painters in late 19th and early 20th century. "Knowledge of the works of Monet and other French masters," writes Farotto, "influenced in no small measure local artists such as Giuseppe Ferdinando Piana, adopted local painters such as Lombard-born, Verist and Impressionist painter Pompeo Mariani, and numerous other naturalized foreigners such as Von Kleudgen and Nestel, leaving an

[67] Marcenaro, "Light on the Riviera," 68.
[68] Marcenaro, "Light on the Riviera," 74.
[69] Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 46.

indelible mark on their artistic production."[70] These cannot be listed as mainstream artists, however, as they are significant locally, they are a testimony to the artistic influence Monet had on the Riviera. If the public did not have much chance to view Monet's Bordighera paintings, with the exception of those private collectors who acquired them from Durand-Ruel in Paris, the Bordighera-based community of professional painters was indeed touched by Monet's innovative representation of nature.

Enzo Savoia and Stefano Bosi revisit Mariani's oeuvre including his work in Bordighera. Partially departing from his veristic background, in fact, from the 1890s on Mariani will travel the Riviera and paint it with a whole new approach, less oriented to veristic narrative and more focused on lyrical, emotional accounts of memory.[71] This will be relevant as his change in interest and style follows Monet's trip to the Riviera. The monography written by Savoia and Bosi investigates such change when Mariani visited Genoa and the Riviera, between 1883 and 1898, and, after that, Bordighera, between 1898 and 1927. What interests him in Bordighera is "the insistence on the fragility of things, the search for a subtle pattern of correspondence between state of mind and landscape."[72] Moreover, Mariani "aspires to a poetic form capable of burning all complacency and redeeming the landscape components by elevating it from the contingent plane to that of an absorbed meditation." The Ligurian sea took Mariani's art by storm too. The connection between Mariani's philosophical quest and the Riviera's sparkling seascapes is, actually, powerful, and a parallelism between Mariani's intellectual transition and

[70] Marco Farotto, "Bordighera nei Dipinti da Fine Ottocento ai Primi Decenni Del Novecento [Bordighera in the Paintings from the Late 19th Century to the Early Decades of the 20th Century]," in *Claude Monet: Ritorno in Riviera: Bordighera, Dolceacqua [Claude Monet: Return to the Riviera: Bordighera, Dolceacqua]* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2019), 32.

[71] Enzo Savoia and Stefano Bosi, *Pompeo Mariani. Impressionista Italiano [Pompeo Mariani. Italian Impressionist]* (Milan: Bottegantica, 2014), 119.

[72] Savoia and Bosi, *Pompeo Mariani*, 119.

Monet's embrace of immersive nature is possible. A closer look at Mariani's work on the Riviera seems to support Savoia and Bosi's thesis. Mariani's painting is emotionally charged; he is, like Monet, enraptured by a sort of *sublime*. Mariani contemplates a rough sea like JMW Turner does, though depicting the tame storms the Ligurian coast offers, and with a more vibrant, colorful palette. Moreover, same as Monet, Mariani's interest lies in the exotic vegetation that the Riviera offers, and the Frenchman's influence projects for at least two decades; in Mariani's 1912 *Olive Grove in Bordighera* (Figure 14), the well-filed olive trees make up a natural barrier and enclose the space, not inviting the viewer anywhere – exactly what we observed in Monet's *Study of Olive Trees* (Figure 3) – rather enclosing the entire space within a frame of blue and green, those hues that belong to olive trees and that Monet himself fell for. The unnatural light that does not seem to filter through the thick foliage – very much like Monet's *Lemon Grove in Bordighera* (Figure 4) – with tree trunks and branches seemingly shining by their own light. Gold paint defines contours, light and shade across the painting – after all, Monet himself thought "one would need gold and precious stones"[73] to paint the Riviera – including the dried grass sticking out of the green and blue soil, the "absolutely blue" soil like Monet once called it. Mariani's *Olive Grove in Bordighera* is a pleasantly balanced composition, thanks to the gold and blue, and follows Monet's footsteps on the Riviera.

Monet may have made the fortune of Bordighera, but Bordighera may have done the same for Monet. Speaking of colors, in regard to the aggressive ones used by Monet in Bordighera – remember the above-mentioned *Study of Olive Trees* and *Olive Tree Wood at Bordighera*, Alborno even considers his work to be pre-Fauvism.[74] Marco Goldin, author of

[73] Tucker, *Claude Monet: Life and Art*, 119.
[74] Alborno, Monet in Bordighera, 74.

Monet – The Places of Painting, finds elements of such energetic paintings in Monet's 1881-82 canvases.[75] Bordighera was the scenic marvel that triggered the explosion of light and color that defined Monet's painting style. Bordighera took technical and visual challenges to the next level; Monet sounds like a perfectionist when he stressed the importance of hard work: "[…] can one ever be happy in front of nature and here in particular?" And again, answering his own question: "A true painter can never be happy with himself."[76] Nevertheless, Monet proves to have a can-do attitude whenever he describes Bordighera with remarkable enthusiasm., or whenever he decides on extending his stay. The Riviera changed Monet: what he accomplished there drove his style forward and affected his life and painting routine. Herbert introduces Monet's life after Bordighera:

> Upon his return from the Riviera in mid-April 1884, Monet established a routine that prevailed for a number of years. Long periods at Giverny, ensconced in his extended family, would alternate with campaigns spent further afield, when he would stay in hotel or lodgings for several weeks at a time, as he had at Bordighera. At home he worked in his studio on canvases brought back from those trips, and he also undertook new pictures of Giverny and his environs.[77]

It is worth deconstructing Herbert's analysis sentence by sentence to better understand Monet's follow-up works on the coast of Normandy. Firstly, Monet's intent to recapture places he is already familiar with, like Giverny and Étretat, does not just speak of Monet and his extended family having roots there, but also of his desire to revisit those places in a different light, or through the new stylistic lens he had carefully assembled in Bordighera. Full, solitary immersion seems to be key. Impression is immediate, transitory, so it needs to be re-experienced. In 1884, back in the Paris region, Monet paints *Banks of the Seine at Jeufosse* (Figure 15), a colorful river

[75] Marco Goldin, Monet: *I Luoghi Della Pittura [Monet: The Places of Painting]* (Conegliano, Italy: Linea d'Ombra Libri, 2001), 176.
[76] Tucker, *Claude Monet*, 111-2. Letter to Alice Hoschedé from Bordighera.
[77] Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast*, 97.

view in which the Seine is flanked with green, blue, and yellow vegetation. The bushes on the left clearly echo the palm trees in Bordighera, in their thin, straight, fine brushstrokes. A more open view on the right, with a range of stronger hues, is more reminiscent of Bordighera's lemon tree branches and stretching all the way to the hill in the background. The river leads the viewer's gaze to what appears to be a belltower, similarly to a villa in a view of Bordighera. In one painting, Monet combines components from all his series and studies in Bordighera. Herbert continues:

> On 17 September 1885 the painter settled in Étretat with his extended family for the tag end of the bathing season […]. His paintings are a product of the seasonal alternation of home and away, and the daily alternation of solitude and evening company. In other words, the energy invested in his apparently solitary views of natural settings partly derives from this seesaw rhythm.[78]

There is, in fact, more to the cliffs in Étretat than their majesty, geometry, or materiality. Monet rejoiced in finding so much blue and pink in Bordighera – a pink sunset on the Ligurian coast is no rare occurrence nowadays either. Back in Étretat, Normandy, Monet is willing to capture the same hues he discovered in Bordighera, with a little help from the sunlight, see for instance Monet's 1885-6 *Fishing Boats Leaving the Port, Étretat* (Figure 16), even in bad weather, see the *Étretat, Rainy Weather* (Figure 17), also 1885-6, where the storm is literally translated on the canvas by way of violent brushstrokes, orientated along straight and diagonal lines to follow either the sea or wind. Hues of pink and blue – just like the forces of wind and waves – either combine or compete for dominance. Among other colors, Monet enjoyed working with pink in Bordighera: once back in Normandy, he appears to emphasize it more than he used

[78] Herbert, *Monet on the Normandy Coast*, 97.

to. One can now see the previously mentioned observation by Alborno when she considers Monet to be the precursor of action painting.[79]

The outstanding studies of olive and lemon trees from Bordighera marked the beginning of seriality and foretold the series on which Monet will work on in the following decades. Once Monet was all settled and retired in Giverny, he focused on his water garden, flower garden, and Japanese bridge, all of which soon became primary sources of inspiration to him. The Water Lilies in particular kept Monet busy between the 1890s and the 1920s and were studied at great length. Monet is once again the painter of water. The water garden, combined with the flowers floating on the surface, presents visual elements already observed in the Bordighera studies. Water and flowers, often rendered by way of blue and green, echoes Monet's olive and lemon groves from the Riviera. See, as two examples, 1915 *Water Lilies* (Figure 18) and 1916-9 *Blue Water Lilies* (Figure 19). The pond is a reflecting surface, a canvas within the canvas; it welcomes light, water, vegetation, and flowers, in a composition that, in the case of *Blue Water Lilies*, feels very much two-dimensional. In *Water Lilies*, though, the light effects are so masterly captured that the image appears to defy space, to confuse any orientation for the viewer. In fact, thanks to light and reflection, the floating flowers project their volume in multiple directions; like staircases in a lithograph by M. C. Escher, they defy gravity. While paintings like *Water Lilies* might slightly depart from the Bordighera studies in terms of spatial organization, they are strongly based on them.

One could argue that an understudied topic should not automatically lead to new research. But when such topic involves a founder and most influential and innovative member of

[79] Alborno, *Monet in Bordighera*, 20.

Impressionism, further reading and research might prove worth. This paper was meant to humbly review existing academic scholarship, connect existing dots and identify connections that were either shallowly marked or unmarked before. The paper does not presume to have put the Bordighera trip on the map – academically, it has been there since the 1990s – instead, to highlight the uniqueness of Monet's experience in Bordighera, his encounter with its vegetation, and a more and immersive experience with nature. Monet initially let it ride him, to then master its colors and succeed in reenacting his impression once again and staying out in front of the challenge by way of skills.

In 1883, Monet sought a fresh start, a way to reboot his *impression*. In Bordighera, he saw a happy island of color and light, where the vegetation showed such potential to be able to establish new canons, to further fuel the Impressionist way, and further crush any obsolete, Academy-induced standards. Tucker attributes Monet's success in Bordighera to both his individual skills and the nature of Impressionist art.

> Despite Monet's initial fears, these paintings became reaffirming proof of his ability to capture effects that were radically different from what existed in Normandy and the Île de France. While attesting to his dexterity and the sensitivity of his eye, these pictures also underscored his ability to reinvent himself and demonstrated the flexibility of his Impressionist style. As such, they suggested that Impressionism, long associated with Paris and the north, could actually be responsive to a wider, more diverse geographical base, that it might even be adaptable to the nation as a whole, a notion that became increasingly important to Monet as the decade progressed.[80]

Monet's style never stayed the same for longer than a few years, so eager he was to experiment and innovate. He did love nature and always sought it. During his stay in Bordighera, a steady but inevitable journey within the journey took place. Witnessing his own self-discovery and

[80] Tucker, *Claude Monet*, 120.

artistic rebirth, he could not come back empty-handed – he wrote so to Hoschedé multiple times – and he did not. After all, the only thing to be more moving than his dedication to his art is the sincere love for Hoschedé. The letters from Bordighera open a window onto Monet's soul. Venturing through the pages feels like intruding. Layer after layer, words reveal both the artist and the man.

Postscript

One thing that this research contributed to the vast English-speaking art history world consisted in revealing valid sources on the Bordighera trip that were originally published in Italian and have never been translated to English in their entirety, see Alborno's various sources, or sources only available in French, see Bonafoux's book. There used to be much interest among the local Ligurian community in Monet's trip to Bordighera, and rightly so; it is uncommon for a small coastal town to have such a distinctive history, or to be able to say that a master of Impressionism graced it with his presence and work. Alborno shares her dream of seeing a non-profit trust established, similarly to the one in Giverny, that will manage all Monet-related points of interest in Bordighera.[81] Unfortunately, Bordighera is not Giverny. While Giverny is a major attraction to Monet enthusiasts and hosts his house, studio, and gardens which saw a significant chunk of his oeuvre produced, Bordighera is niche. The research process for this paper included a visit to Bordighera. While Monet's story is well known locally, any public project is, sadly, subject to various constraints, like the lack of funding. Villa Etelinda and Villa Margherita are currently closed and undergoing refurbishments, with unclear delivery times. The fact that no major exhibition in Italy or Europe ever focused on Monet in Bordighera should raise a few eyebrows. Bordighera itself, as a small town, does not possess the infrastructures required to host invaluable paintings on loan from major museums around the globe – the 1998 show exhibited photographs of the paintings, and not the actual canvases. Nevertheless, if ideas became reality and opportunities for working or volunteering on exhibitions arose, the author might reach out to offer his help and perspective. As for a project that the author can indeed control, translating this

[81] Alborno, "Monet's Wonderful Journey," 251.

paper to Italian and have it published for the Italian-speaking art community might prove useful for rekindling a gorgeous topic.

Figures

Figure 1. Claude Monet, *View of Bordighera*, 1884, oil on canvas, 26 x 32 3/16 in. The Armand Hammer Collection, Los Angeles.

Figure 2. Claude Monet, *Bordighera*, 1884, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 × 31 13/16 in. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 3. Claude Monet, *Study of Olive Trees*, 1884, oil on canvas, 28 3/4 × 23 5/8 in. Private Collection.

Figure 4. Claude Monet, *Lemon Grove in Bordighera*, 1884, oil on canvas, 28 15/16 x 23 13/16 in. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Figure 5. Claude Monet, *Red and Pink Poppies*, between 1882 and 1884, oil on canvas, 47 x 14 1/2 in. Private Collection.

Figure 6. Claude Monet, *The Seine at Argenteuil*, 1875, oil on canvas, 23 1/2 x 31 1/2 in. Private Collection.

Figure 7. Claude Monet, *The Road to Monte Carlo*, 1883, oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 32 in. Private Collection.

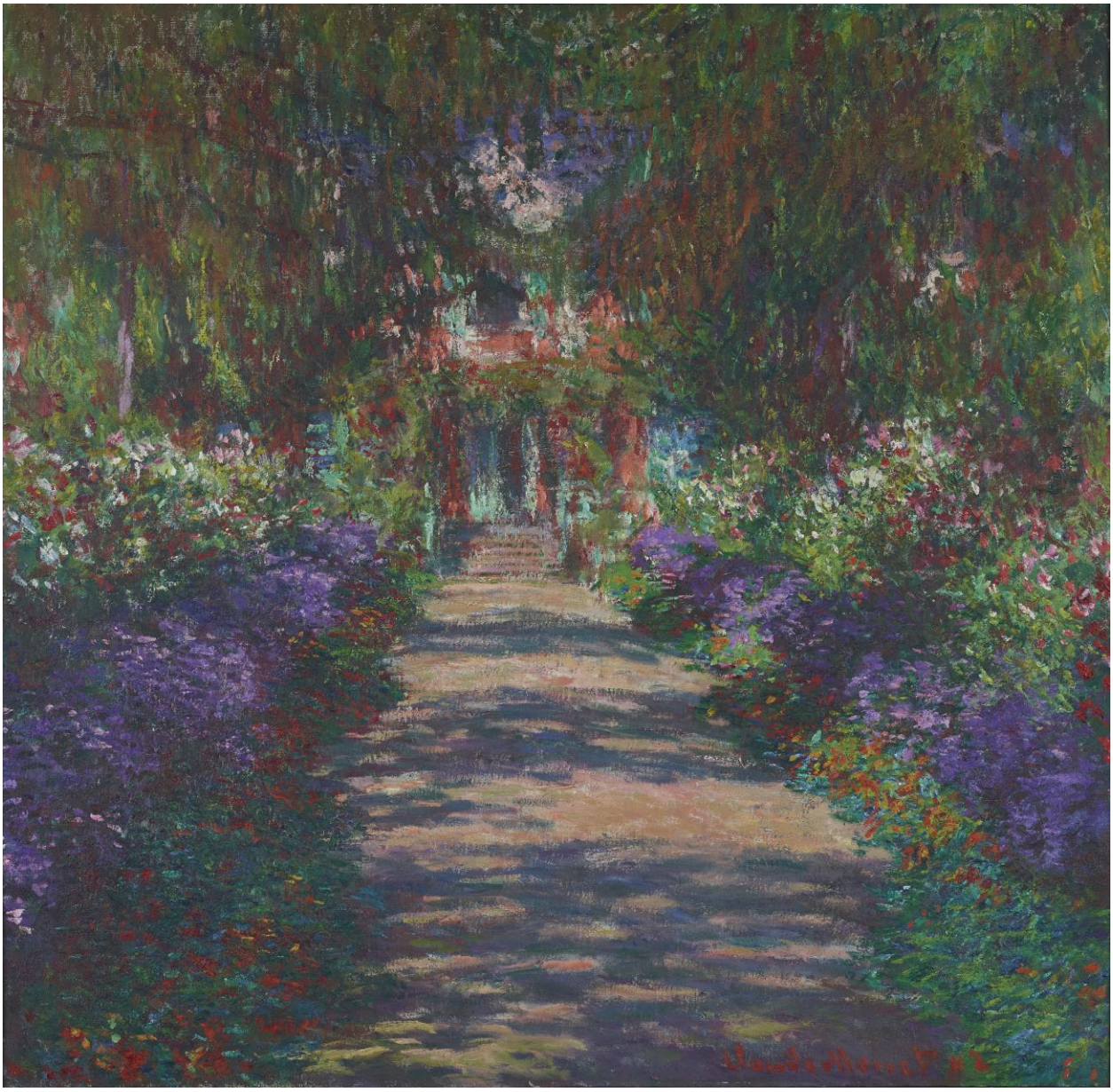

Figure 8. Claude Monet, *Garden Path*, 1902, oil on canvas, 35 1/4 x 36 1/3 in. Upper Belvedere, Vienna.

Figure 9. Claude Monet, *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge*, 1899, oil on canvas, 35 5/8 x 35 5/16 in. Princeton University Art Museum.

Figure 10. Claude Monet, *The Church at Varengeville*, 1882, oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 32 in. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, UK.

Figure 11. Claude Monet, *Cabin of the Customs Watch*, Afternoon Effect, 1882, oil on canvas, 22 13/16 x 31 7/8 in. Musée des Douanes, Bordeaux.

Figure 12. Claude Monet, *Rough Sea at Étretat*, 1868, oil on canvas, 26 x 51 7/12 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

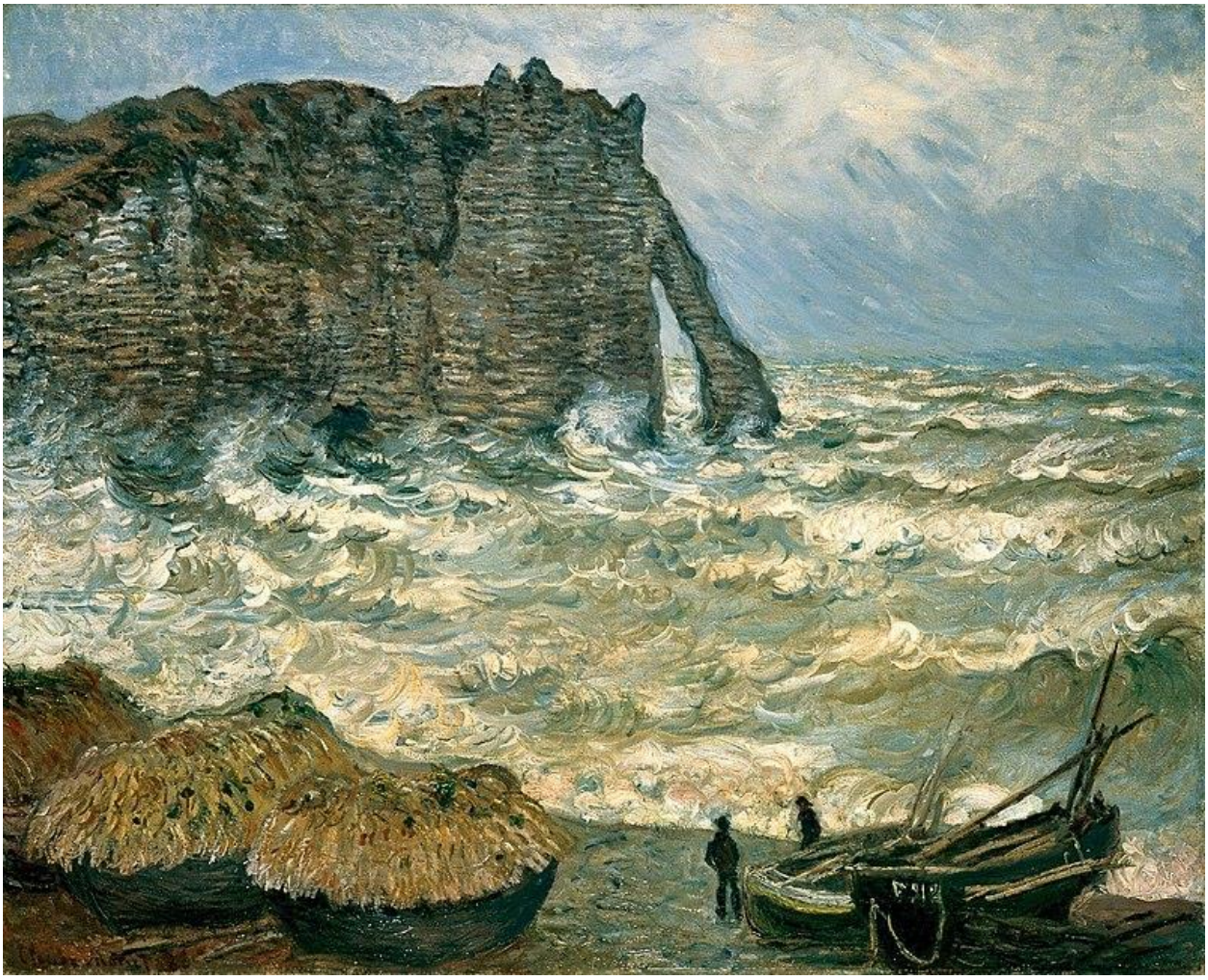

Figure 13. Claude Monet, *Stormy Sea in Étretat*, 1883, oil on canvas, 31 7/8 x 39 3/8 in. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

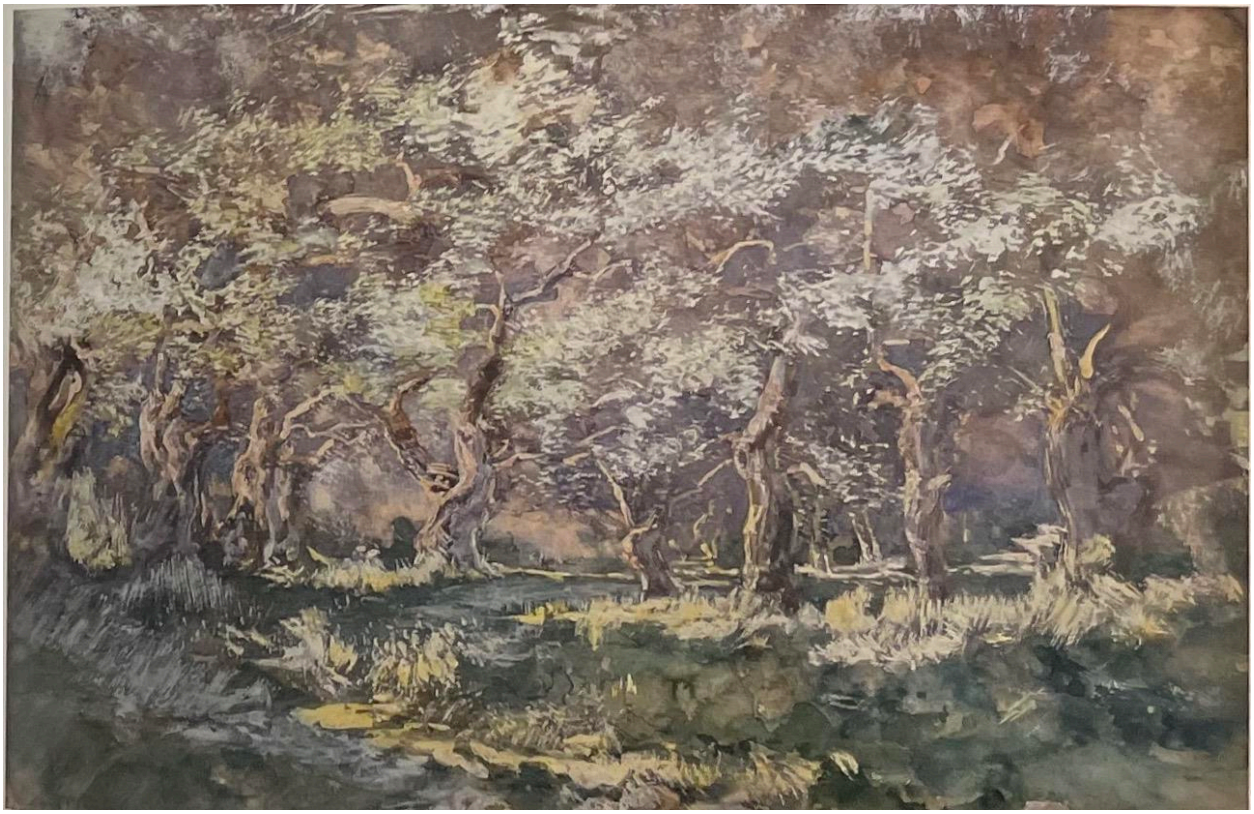

Figure 14. Pompeo Mariani, Olive Grove in Bordighera, 1912, oil on canvas, 13 7/8 x 19 13/16 in. Private collection.

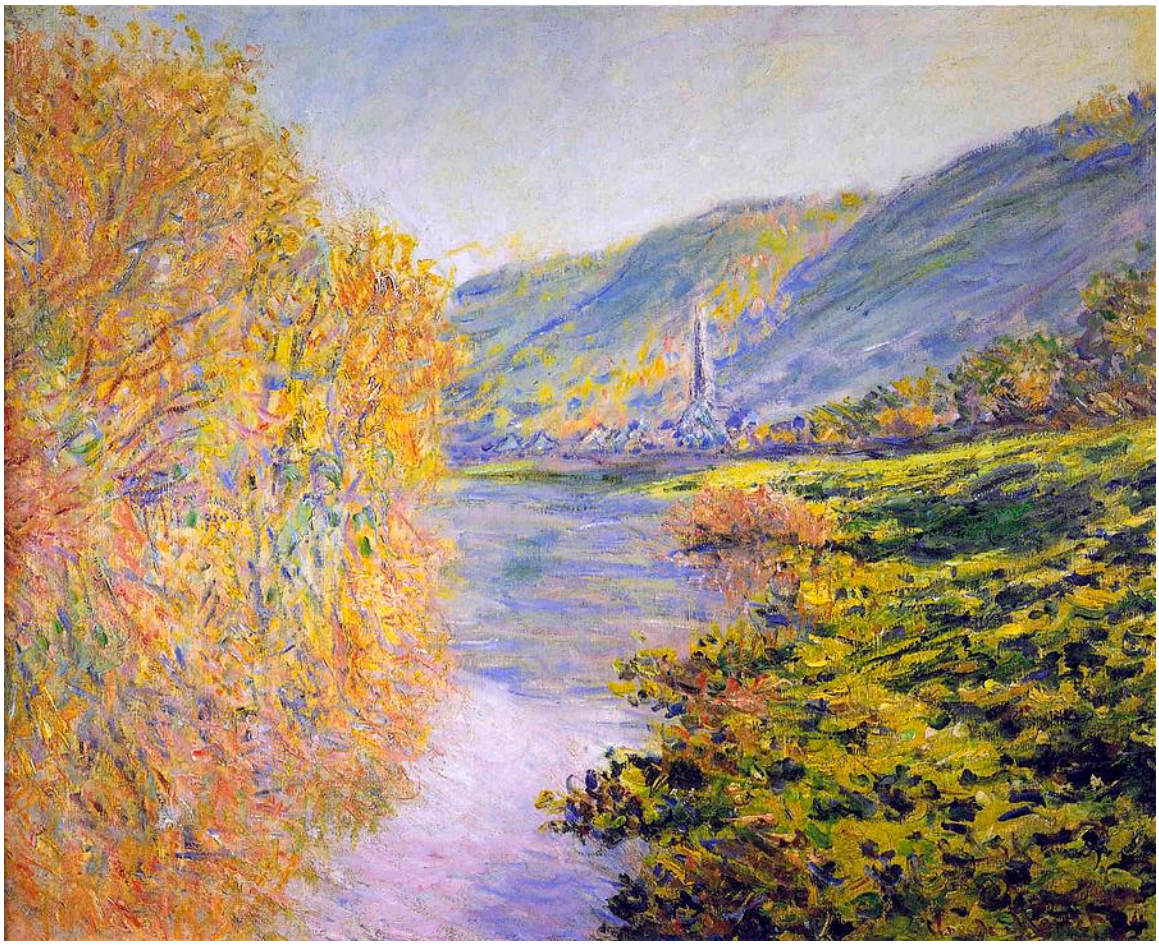

Figure 15. Claude Monet, *Banks of the Seine at Jeufosse*, 1884, oil on canvas, 21 1/4 x 28 3/4 in. Private Collection.

Figure 16. Claude Monet, *Fishing Boats Leaving the Port, Étretat*, 1885-6, oil on wood, 34 3/4 x 36 21/32 in. The Museum of Fine Art, Dijon.

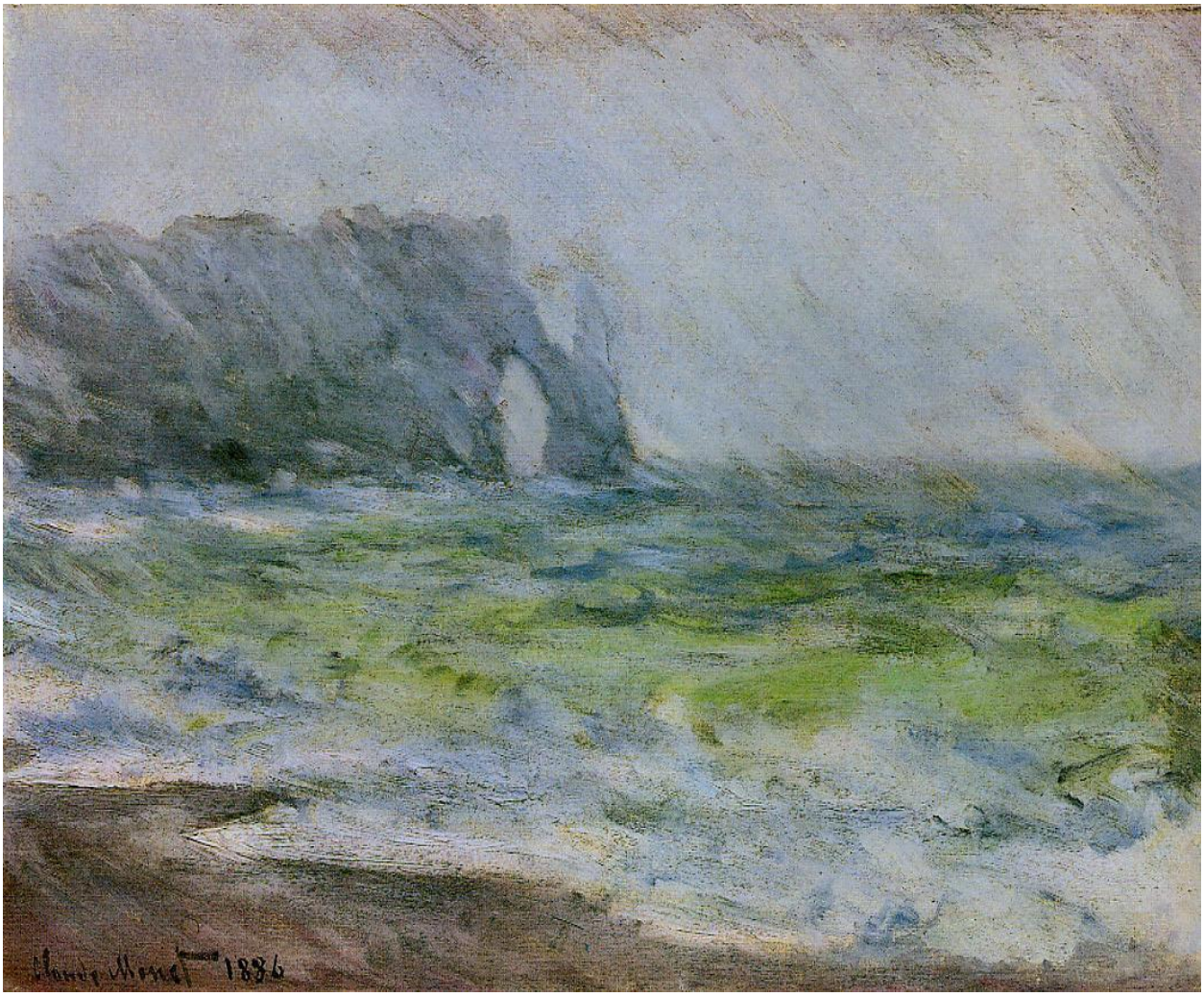

Figure 17. Claude Monet, *Étretat, Rainy Weather*, 1885-6, oil on canvas, 23 7/8 x 28 7/8 in. The National Museum, Oslo.

Figure 18. Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, 1915, oil on canvas, 59 5/8 x 79 1/8 in. Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

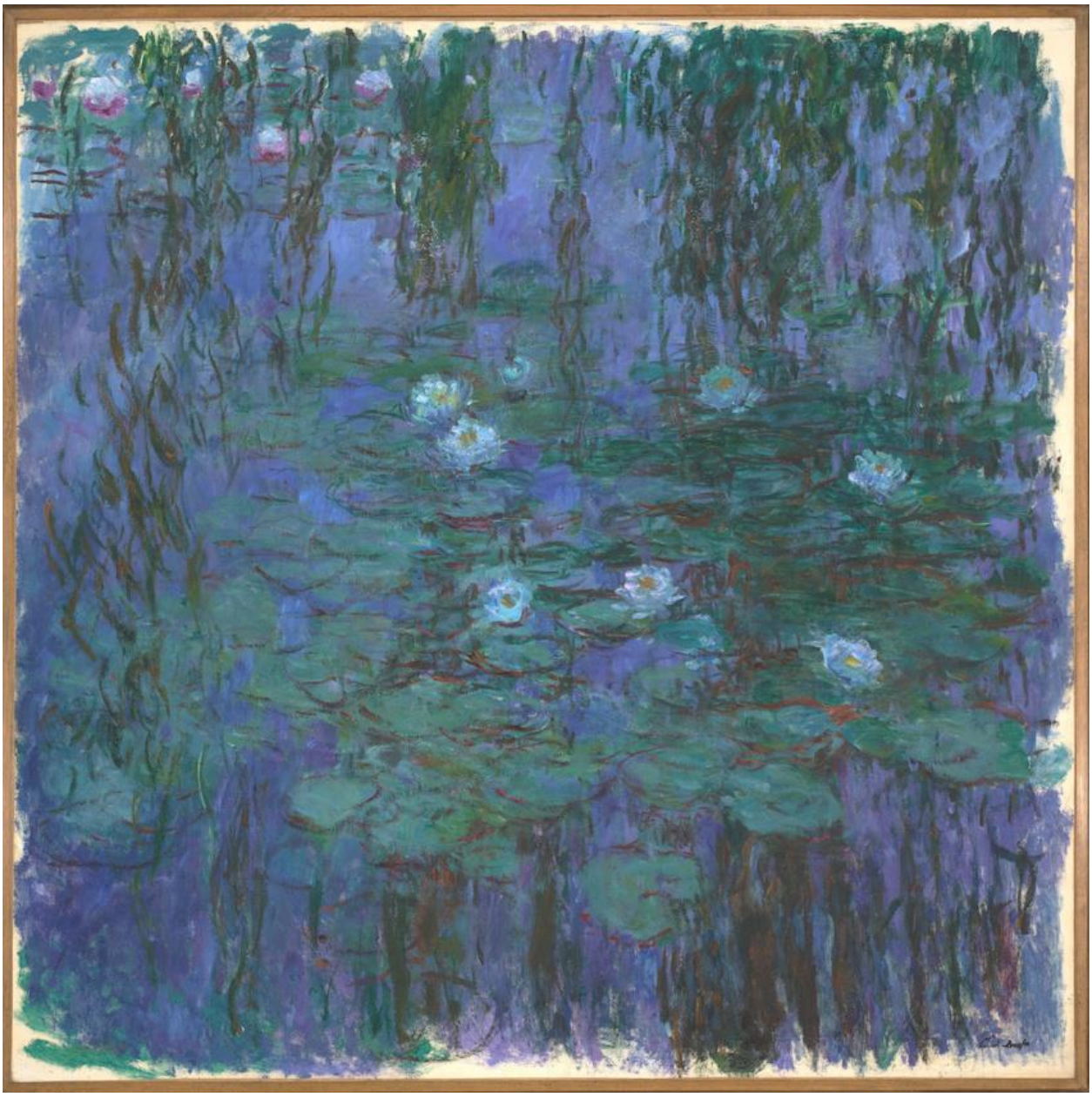

Figure 19. Claude Monet, *Blue Water Lilies*, 1916-9, oil on canvas, 80 5/16 x 78 3/4 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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