MONTE PACKHAM

The Drawings of Claude Monet: The Life of Line

Volume 1

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) degree.

Department of Art History and Theory
University of Sydney
November 2003
CONTENTS

Volume One:
Acknowledgments / iii
Preface / iv
List of Illustrations / v
Introduction / 1
Chapter One / 9
Chapter Two / 24
Conclusion / 40

Volume Two:
Bibliography / 1
Illustrations / 4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Virginia Spate for her generosity and kindness, and for writing my favourite book. The delight she finds in paintings is inspirational, as is her dedication to finding the words to explain them. I would like to thank Roger Benjamin for his precise criticism and advice. Finally, I would like to thank my family and particularly Matthias.
PREFACE

To my knowledge, this thesis is the first exclusive study of Monet's drawings. Very little has been written about them, and as a result my bibliography is modest. But for this reason - and to my delight - I have had to rely on the visual evidence of the drawings themselves.

This thesis is not a complete survey of Monet's graphic oeuvre - for example I do not consider his pastels - but rather a close reading of certain drawings which aims to determine their relationship to his paintings and their meanings for the viewer today.

I do not speak French, and can read very little. Writing about Monet has therefore been a challenge. However, good translations of primary sources exist, and the best literature on Monet's drawings is found in English books. When I cite a French text, I give the source of its translation. (I also include these in the bibliography.)

Many times when typing 'Monet', my fingers slipped and 'Monte' appeared instead. In many ways, writing about art brings one closer to it, and to its creator. But writing also reveals the distance between oneself and art, by making clear the questions and possibilities that cannot be resolved. I hope this thesis brings to light what can and cannot be known about Monet's drawings.
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

All works are by Monet, unless otherwise stated. All paintings are oil on canvas; all drawings are pencil on paper, unless otherwise stated. Measurements are in centimetres, height before width. ‘W’ and ‘D’ catalogue numbers refer to Daniel Wildenstein, Claude Monet. Bibliographie et catalogue raisonné, 5 vols, Bibliothèque des Arts, Lausanne and Paris, 1974-1991 (W refers to paintings, D to drawings.) I provide the source of each illustration in square brackets; dimensions of drawings are given whenever they are available.

Figure 1: Léon Manchon (D481), probably 1858, charcoal, with stumping, heightened with white chalk, on blue laid paper, 61.2 x 45.2, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago [Charles F. Stuckey, Claude Monet 1840-1926 (exh. cat.), The Art Institute of Chicago in association with Thames and Hudson, Chicago, 1995, 23]

Figure 2: View of Rouen (D434), 1883, drawing on papier Gillot, 31 x 47, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachussets [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 127]

Figure 3: Haystack (D219), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 94]

Figure 4: Stacks of wheat (D178), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 89]

Figure 5: Stacks of wheat (D179), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 89]

Figure 6: Houses at Giverny (D190), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 91]

Figure 7: Stacks of wheat (D192), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 91]

Figure 8: Stacks of wheat (D194), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 91]
Figure 9: Stacks of wheat (D189), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Virginia Spate, Claude Monet. The Colour of Time, Thames and Hudson, London, 1992, 209]

Figure 10: Stacks of wheat (D193), c.1888-89, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 91]

Figure 11: Stack of wheat, sun in the mist (W1286), 1891, 65 x 100, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis [Spate, The Colour of Time, 214]

Figure 12: Haystacks (W994), 1885, 65 x 81, Ohara Museum of Art Kurashiki, Okayama, Japan [Daniel Wildenstein, Monet or the Triumph of Impressionism. Catalogue raisonné, 4 vols, Taschen, Cologne, 1996, vol. 3, 373]

Figure 13: Detail of Stack of wheat, sunset (W1289), 1891, 73 x 92, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [Spate, The Colour of Time, 211]

Figure 14: Reflections of weeping willows and water lilies (D347), c.1914, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 110]

Figure 15: Reflections of weeping willows and water lilies (D349), c.1914, over drawing of Young Girls in a Boat, c.1887, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 111]

Figure 16: Reflections of weeping willows and water lilies (D350), c.1914, over drawing of Poplars, 1891, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Pierre Georgel, Monet: Le cycle des Nymphéas (exh. cat.), Musée national de l’Orangerie, Paris, 1999, figure 64]

Figure 17: Water lilies (D357), c.1914, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Spate, The Colour of Time, 270]

Figure 18: Water lilies (W1717), 1907, 105 x 73, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, The Triumph of Impressionism, vol. 4, 791]

Figure 19: Detail of The Grandes Décorations. Green Reflections, c.1916-26, two canvases, each 200 x 425, Musée de l’Orangerie, [Spate, The Colour of Time, 204]

Figure 20: Water lilies (W1902), 1917-19, 100 x 300, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Stuckey, Claude Monet 1840-1926, 249]

Figure 21: Detail of Wisteria (W1903), 1917-19, 100 x 300, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, The Triumph of Impressionism, 906]
Figure 22: *The Empty Boat* (W1154), c.1887-90, 146 x 133, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 204]

Figure 23: *Girl in a boat* (D345), c. 1887, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 110]

Figure 24: *Girl in a boat* (D346), c. 1887, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 186]

Figure 25: *Girl in a boat* (vertical drawing) (D348), c. 1887, 31.5 x 23.5, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 312]

Figure 26: *Reflections of weeping willow and water lilies* (horizontal drawing) (D348), c.1914, 23.5 x 31.5, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 312]

Figure 27: *Weeping willow and water lily pool* (D351), c.1914, over drawing of *Poplars*, 1891, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 111]

Figure 28: Katsushika Hokusai, *Peonies and butterfly*, c.1832, colour woodblock print, 25 x 37.4, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [Virginia Spate, *Monet and Japan* (exh. cat.), National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2001, 131]

Figure 29: *Water lily pool* (D354), c.1914, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 111]

Figure 30: Kanō Naonobu, *Winter, Summer*, pair of screens, first half of 17th century, ink and colour on paper [Spate, *Monet and Japan*, 56]

Figure 31: *Reflections of weeping willows* (D450), c.1914, Musée Marmottan, Paris [Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 130]
INTRODUCTION

You must begin by drawing... Draw simply and directly, with charcoal, crayon or whatever, above all observing the contours, because you can never be too sure of holding on to them, once you start to paint (Monet, 1920)¹

All life, all movement, all modelling is contained in a line (Mirbeau, 1907)²

Drawing allowed Monet to experience nature in terms of the paintings nature would become. Monet both perceived and recorded his perception of the motif by creating drawings through which he would later re-experience his initial sensations of nature. In his purely linear drawings or ‘sketches’ - which are the focus of this thesis - Monet developed a spatial sense of the motif by translating natural forms into incomplete linear structures that seem to vibrate in the vacant potential space of the page created by the lack of tonal shading.³ The sketches are preliminary to his paintings yet in most cases they are not directly preparatory, because they were not made for a specific pre-conceived painting. They rely on the delicate interaction between line and the whiteness of the page, and only reach a state of fullness in the viewer’s imagination.

The relationship between Monet’s drawings and paintings, and the subtle beauty of the drawings have not yet been sufficiently examined. Contemporary critics and later art historians believed that Monet’s drawings were not only insignificant but that they were also of poor quality: for example, in an article of 1883 Philippe Burty deemed Monet’s caricatures ‘somewhat deficient’; in 1891 Mirbeau described Monet as ‘a

³ I explain my choice of the term ‘sketch’ on pages 3-4.
man who can’t draw'; and in 1974 Daniel Wildenstein wrote that Monet had ‘little facility at drawing’. Monet himself doubted his graphic ability, writing in 1914 that drawing was something he knew ‘nothing about’. Indeed, what is the appeal of small drawings on faded paper - most of which are stored away from sight in the Musée Marmottan - when only a few Métro stops away, one can become absorbed in the Grandes Décorations at the Musée de l’Orangerie?

Monet’s drawings have been overlooked because he is known as a painter who, from his earliest works, was obsessed with using colour to fix his sensation of moments of light dispersed in atmosphere. The obscurity of his drawings is also self-perpetuated, as Monet persistently promoted himself as a pleinairist who avoided the preparatory drawings associated with the academic painting process. In 1880 he stated: ‘My studio! But I never have had one, and personally I don’t understand why anybody would want to shut themselves up in some room. Maybe for drawing, sure; but not for painting’. This comment imposes a division between drawing and painting, and implies that drawing had no relevance to Monet’s painting en plein air. However, as I will show, Monet’s drawings were in fact made en plein air, and they informed subsequent paintings of the same motif.

Monet’s drawings vary greatly in style and purpose, which suggests that drawing was a persistent yet mutable component of his art. The drawings fall into three categories: the caricatures of the 1850s; a

---


small group of drawings made after paintings in the 1880s; and eight
sketchbooks of purely linear sketches spanning from the 1850s into the
1910s. Two other sketchbooks survive, one from 1856 and the other from
1857, which contain early derivative landscape studies, and drawings of
boats and figures. Several loose drawings from throughout his career
including images of coastal scenes, family members and water lilies also
survive. This thesis will focus on Monet’s sketches because they have the
strongest relationship to his creative processes. I will develop my
argument from a close reading of the sketches of the stacks of wheat of
1890-1 and the water lilies of 1914, yet the shape of that argument is
applicable to other sketches such as those of the Gare Saint-Lazare of
1877, the poplars of 1891, and those of Rouen cathedral of 1893.

The status of Monet’s sketches must be determined in the context
of the French terms used to describe the different kinds of preparatory
work involved in the painting process. These terms became more fluid
throughout Monet’s life with the de-structuring of the academic painting
system, yet they were nevertheless existent and were part of the
vocabulary with which he described his art. The terms which are most
useful in understanding Monet’s sketches are: croquis, esquisse, étude and
tableau. The term tableau refers to a fully-realised painting. The degree of
completeness of Monet’s tableaux varied, and the issue was used by critics
throughout his career to denigrate his art. A croquis is a ‘rapidly

7 Monet’s entire graphic oeuvre is reproduced in Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5.
Unfortunately, this volume was not reprinted in The Triumph of Impressionism.
8 Reproduced in Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 60-78
9 Reproduced in Wildenstein, Claude Monet, vol. 5, 121-131
10 There is confusion over the English translation for the French ‘meules’: ‘grainstacks’,
‘haystacks’ and ‘stacks of wheat’ are all used. Monet represented two kinds of stacks,
both of which I will analyse: the smaller uneven haystacks in works such as W900-2 of
1894, and the larger more refined ‘grainstacks’ or ‘stacks of wheat’ of the painted series
1890-1. I will adopt Spate’s term ‘stacks of wheat’ or simply ‘stacks’. Wildenstein deals
with the problem of translating ‘meules’ in The Triumph of Impressionism, vol. 1, 246-7.
11 Conventional definitions of these terms are given in the dictionary volume of Paillot de
Montabert’s Traité complet de la peinture, J.-F. Delion, Paris, 1829-51. For a discussion
of these terms and their relationship to Monet’s art, see House, Nature into Art, 157-166.
For a wider discussion of these terms in nineteenth century French art, see Albert Boime,
12 Steven Z. Levine, Monet and His Critics, Garland Publishing, New York and London,
1976. I. Levine analyses the critical reception of Monet’s art through this issue, and the
alternative concepts of nature and art; transcriptions and imagination; realism and
decoration; and line and colour.
rendered drawing...composed of a few marks’ that informs the composition of the tableau and is also normally the artist’s ‘first thought’ within the motif.\textsuperscript{13} An esquisse may be a graphic or painted work, and is a more refined kind of croquis which has a stronger preparatory relationship to the tableau, but is nevertheless defined by its looseness of technique. The term étude or ‘study’ has a range of meanings, for example, it may refer to a preparatory graphic work, or a finished though incomplete painting.\textsuperscript{14}

Monet’s sketches seem to move between these terms as he did not categorize them.\textsuperscript{15} However, they are undoubtedly exploratory, and were made with the knowledge that they could inform later paintings. Philip Rawson argues that a ‘sketch’ - a term which includes aspects of the croquis, esquisse and étude - embodies the artist’s immediate vision as a unity and without detail: it is ‘the bones of the design which will later be clothed in the flesh of forms. But even so the final, clothed forms will not violate the main ideas of the initial summary’.\textsuperscript{16} I have therefore adopted the term ‘sketch’ to refer to the purely linear drawings in Monet’s sketchbooks because it implies their smallness of scale, linearity, incompleteness and the rapidity of their execution.\textsuperscript{17}

From an early age Monet drew caricatures through which he expressed his imaginative grasp of his sitter’s physical appearance and character (see figure 1). When Baudelaire praised the caricaturist Pigal for ‘a habit of sound imagination, a good memory, and an adequate sureness of style’, he summed up the qualities of all good caricaturists.\textsuperscript{18} For Monet it is particularly his sureness of style, his confidence with an abbreviated

\textsuperscript{13} Boime, The Academy and French Painting, 34 and 81
\textsuperscript{14} For more detailed discussion of the étude, see Boime, The Academy and French Painting, 149-150
\textsuperscript{15} Wildenstein’s categorization of Monet’s sketches is often confusing as he uses croquis, esquisse and étude without any justification.
\textsuperscript{16} Philip Rawson, Drawing, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1987, 294
\textsuperscript{17} The pages of the sketchbooks vary in size, the largest seeming to be 25.5 x 34 cm, a little bigger than an A4 sheet of paper; see Charles F. Stuckey, Claude Monet (1840-1926) (exh. cat.), The Art Institute of Chicago in association with Thames and Hudson, Chicago, 1995, 243. Irritatingly, Wildenstein does not give their dimensions.
drawing technique that was nurtured through caricature. However, the significance of the caricatures is limited because they are self-contained graphic works whose subjects were never painted.

The drawings made after paintings have been categorised by John House as 'reproductive drawings' whose purpose was to copy finished paintings for publication in journals (see figure 2).\textsuperscript{19} In them Monet used line and tone to recreate a sense of the appearance and brushwork of the paintings. Only eight reproductive drawings were published, and probably no more were made as they were only produced at the request of publishers, and were replaced in the early 1890s by photography. The function of these drawings was not to realise a creative vision but to promote an already-realised one. Indeed, Monet's willingness to promote his art through graphic reproductions was not limited to his drawings: around 1890 he signed every lithographic print in the twenty-five copies of Thornley's \textit{20 Lithographies d'après Claude Monet}, lending authenticity to another's work in order to increase the circulation of his own.\textsuperscript{20}

Monet's sketches are disconnected from the processes of publication and promotion in which the reproductive drawings are enmeshed. They were personal and private documents which Monet never exhibited. They were scarcely known before Michel Monet's bequest to the Musée Marmottan in 1966, and were only published in their entirety in 1991.\textsuperscript{21} There is no concrete evidence to prove that the sketches were made \textit{en plein air} but it is reasonable to assume that they were, as \textit{pleinairisme} was such a fundamental aspect of Monet's art. This is evident in the sketches themselves: for example, a sequence of sketches made at Rouen shows how Monet carried his sketchbook with him as he approached the cathedral and walked around it, searching for the desired composition to paint.\textsuperscript{22} Sketches survive from a large range of painting

\textsuperscript{19} Monet's reproductive drawings are fully documented in House, \textit{Nature into Art}, 227. For a general summary of drawings made for mechanical reproduction see Rawson, \textit{Drawing}, 308-9.

\textsuperscript{20} House, \textit{Nature into Art}, 228

\textsuperscript{21} Today the museum displays several sketchbooks in glass cabinets, but most of them are stored away from view.

\textsuperscript{22} See sketches D162-64; D166-68. For ease of understanding, I refer to the sketches by their Wildenstein number, as many have the same title.
campaigns including Argenteuil, Vétheuil, Étretat, Bordighera, Zaandam in Holland, Kolsas in Norway, and London which shows that he used drawing to explore possible motifs in new environments. In 1908 Monet stated ‘one must know a place thoroughly before one can paint it’, and I believe that drawing allowed him to gain such knowledge.\(^{23}\) As Monet did not date the sketches and reused old sketchbooks (at times two could have been in use) one can only date groups of sketches by reference to certain painting campaigns. For example, the sketches of the stacks of wheat were made around the time of the painted series in 1890-1; the sketches of Rouen cathedral were made in 1893; and the water lilies sketches date from around 1914.

The differences in style and purpose between the caricatures, reproductive drawings and sketches suggest the complexity of any definition of drawing, both in Monet’s œuvre and in general. The term ‘drawing’ refers to both an act and the product of that act; the noun ‘drawing’ is taken from the present participle of the verb, and suggests that a drawing embodies a process that is ongoing and incomplete. Drawing is both a mode of experiencing a subject - something real or imagined - through an intense synthesis between hand and eye, and a means to record that experience. The drawing object allows the artist to re-experience his or her initial sensations before the subject, and enables the viewer to construct a sense of the artist’s vision. Rawson suggests that one’s experience of a drawing is defined not by the materials which constitute it, but by how those materials come together and the process of ‘grasping’ through which the viewer transforms them into an image.\(^{24}\)

In the first chapter of his book Drawing Acts. Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation, David Rosand defines drawing as an incomplete and ambivalent art in which the processes of its production are

---


\(^{24}\) Philip Rawson, *Seeing through Drawing*, British Broadcasting Corporation, London 1979, 14
revealed, and in which both the drawn mark and the ground participate. Rosand’s argument focuses on the physicality of the drawing object, yet for me the experience of drawing transforms it from a mere object into a kind of entity with which one must engage to understand. Drawing is a process of becoming that continues after the drawing act is completed: when the artist ‘finishes’ the drawing, the processes of its movement are transferred to the drawing itself from which the viewer attempts to grasp - or further, not complete - a process of ongoing movement.

The processes at work in Monet’s sketches are part of the broader process of the making of lines, a process in which his paintings increasingly participate from the 1890s onwards. For example, in the paintings of the stacks of wheat of 1890-1, Monet used painted line to represent dense masses vibrating in coloured light, and in the poplars of 1891 he used long painted lines to depict trees that are themselves like great lines wavering in light. In his paintings of the garden and water lily pool at Giverny, Monet paired linear brushwork with an increasing linearity of subject matter, including grasses, weeping willows, agapanthus lilies and wisteria vines which suggests that he was interested in the relationship between actual line-like structures in nature and their representation in painted line. In such works, painted line records the direction and duration of the movement of the brush, so that line embodies the unfolding of time and mirrors the growth of the living linear structures which it represents.

Rosand cites the work of Pliny to define two kinds of line, one that marks the identity of its maker, and the other that fulfils a representational function. The first kind of line is ‘an index, a pure trace’, that demonstrates the artist’s authorship in the same way that one’s style of writing is a kind of signature. The second kind of line transforms the flat

---

surface of the page into a potential space in which objects, surfaces and depths seem to exist by ‘(disrupting) the flatness of the surface, subtly inflecting itself into space, (and) disappearing behind its own horizon’. Rosand describes two functions of line which co-exist in Monet’s sketches, yet I believe what distinguishes Monet’s line is its distance from these functions, the sense in which it possesses its own ‘life’.

In this thesis I will use the phrase ‘the life of line’ to designate the independence of line, what remains of it beyond its functional responsibilities. The life of line is a sense of vitality given to line in the viewer’s imagination, yet while it is a result of human experience, it seems somehow to be of line itself. Nicholas Wadley touches on this self-reflexivity of line, describing ‘marks on paper that have a compulsive urgency, and yet do not clearly refer to anything outside themselves’. The life of line also lies in line’s capacity for growth and change: its ability to fulfil multiple representational functions, and to then transcend those functions and become an autonomous structure like a strand or tendril, unfurling in the space of the page.

The life of line pervades Monet’s sketches, yet it is not exclusive to them. It may be sensed in all types of drawn and painted line. It is explicit in dynamic sketches such as those of the Gare Saint-Lazare, the stacks of wheat and the water lilies, and is subtly expressed in more restrained sketches such as those at Rouen and Kolsas. Rosand implies the life of line when he argues that the viewer responds to ‘the reality of the drawn line, to its substance, its body and personality, its idiosyncratic and vagrant qualities’. A line possesses life when it is imaginatively transformed from a mere mark into an entity with ‘values and qualities, affect and character’, with which we must engage and interact. The life of line permeates my experience of Monet’s sketches, and I think it goes some way in explaining their elusive beauty.

---

28 Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 7
30 Rosand, *Drawing Acts*, 12
31 Ibid., 13
CHAPTER ONE

Incandescent Line:
The Stacks of Wheat

For a real painter, objects create their own atmosphere, all colour is an irradiation, each and every colour the unveiling of one of the secrets of matter
(Gaston Bachelard, 1952)\textsuperscript{32}

The sparkling colours and delicate effects of Monet’s paintings of the stacks of wheat are structured by an underlying linear foundation. This foundation exists in its purest form in the sketches. On the one hand, it seems difficult to link the colour structures of the paintings with the sketches because of their pure linearity: they are all lines, and no colour. Yet while the sketches lack material colour, they are full of implied colour that is realised in the imagination. The significance of the sketches lies not so much in the drawing object - the linear foundation itself - but in how Monet transformed and transcribed ideas from that foundation into his paintings. Such a transformation, the imaginative shape given to the incompleteness of the drawing object, is fundamental to the experience of all Monet’s sketches.

In the sketches of the stacks Monet developed a preliminary linear understanding of the motif which allowed him to paint without using structural lines but with a sense of linear substructure. The paintings therefore show that lines need not be material for knowledge of them to exist. Monet constructed the motif as a network of interconnected spaces with a line that is in parts continuous and in parts discontinuous, in such a way that contours flow into one another, and separate shapes such as stacks, shadows, grass and sky merge into a single linear framework. The mobility of Monet’s line means that forms become indeterminate and shifting, and compositional ideas for multiple paintings may be condensed

\textsuperscript{32} Gaston Bachelard, The Right to Dream (1952), cited in Kapos, The Impressionists. A Retrospective, 354
into a single sketch. The emptiness of the sketches engages the viewer’s imagination and means that all drawn forms are defined by the brightness of the exposed paper which I see as equivalent to ‘the enveloppe, the same light spreading everywhere’, a quality that Monet sought to embody in the paintings of the stacks.\footnote{33}

Through drawing Monet also developed and rehearsed the life of line, which is rearticulated in the coloured line of many of the painted stacks. This life, alongside the tension between line and colour, imbues the stacks with a presence beyond that of inanimate objects. Contemporary critics have commented on this presence, and art historians continue to be fascinated by it. This sense of being also characterises many of Monet’s other series paintings, such as the poplars, Rouen cathedral and the Houses of Parliament in London, which seem less like trees or buildings, and more like forces animated from within which exert themselves in changing atmospheric conditions.

Eleven sketches of the stacks survive in the sketchbooks now housed in the Musée Marmottan. Most of them are related to the series of stacks painted in 1890-91 (W1266-90), of which fifteen were shown at an exhibition that opened on 4 May 1891 at the Galerie Durand-Ruel. With one exception, the sketches are not directly preparatory because they were not made with a specific painting in mind.\footnote{34} However, ideas of the sketches are evident in many paintings. Monet thus absorbed aspects of the sketches into his paintings, similarly to how he incorporated ideas from different Japanese prints into his art.\footnote{35} The sketches of the stacks are spread throughout two sketchbooks, sometimes on consecutive pages and at other times between drawings of different subjects, which suggests that Monet’s focus on drawing was at times sustained, and at others

\footnote{33 Letter to Gustave Geffroy, October 1890, cited in Spate, \textit{The Colour of Time}, 205.}

\footnote{34 In contrast, a sketch such as \textit{The Picnic} (D106) is directly preparatory because it was made for the pre-conceived painting, \textit{The Picnic} (W63a and W63b).}

intermittent. While he drew sporadically, the idea of drawing was with him constantly.

The relationship between the sketches and paintings varies from sketch to sketch. A sketch of a stack in a meadow lined with trees at Giverny (D219, figure 3) is directly preparatory for three paintings all named *Haystacks* (W1362-64), which Monet painted in 1893. In this sketch Monet developed compositional relationships that he would articulate and vary in the paintings. Like the paintings, the sketch depicts a large plump stack ringed by shadow and backed by a line of trees; in the paintings, but not in the sketch there are stacks behind the trees. D296 shows a similar motif of a large and a small stack backed by dark foliage, and corresponds to a series of *Haystacks* paintings made in 1885 (W993-95).

D178 and 179 (figures 4 and 5) were probably made in succession as they depict the same motif and are on consecutive pages. D178 shows a field backed by a line of hills with a large stack and a small one behind it to the left; in D179 Monet barely indicated the hills and stacks, as though he had grasped the idea of the motif early and found it unnecessary to finish the sketch. Wildenstein categorises D179 as an *esquisse*, yet for me its sparseness makes it more of a *croquis*. The placement of the stacks in both sketches is the same as a group of summer-autumn paintings of 1890 (W1266-70), so it is likely that they depict the same south-west view towards the hills that extend along the Seine. The shadow stretching to the left of the large stack in D178 shows that the sketch was made in the late afternoon or early evening, and links it to *Stacks of wheat at the end of summer, evening effect* (W1269).

The consecutive sketches D188-195 seem to be the product of a substantial period of drawing in which Monet teased out the multiple compositions inherent in the motif. All of these sketches resemble the painted series of 1890-91. For example, the buildings and the dipping line

---

36 The sketches are in the 3rd and 4th sketchbooks; see Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 89, 91 and 94.
37 Wildenstein asserts the link between D219 and W1362-64 in *The Triumph of Impressionism*, vol. 2, 565. D219 and 296 depict haystacks, unlike the other sketches which depict stacks of wheat.
38 Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, vol. 5, 89
of hills in D190 and D192 (figures 6 and 7) seem to be the same as those in W1268-70 which depict stacks framed by the hillside that extends along the Seine and dips where the Grand Val meets the Petit Val. In D194 (figure 8), another version of the motif in D192, the dip in the hills to the right is less defined, which suggests that these sketches might represent a view that is closer to the south-west as seen in such paintings as *Stacks of wheat at the end of summer, morning effect* (W1266).

While none of these sketches demonstrates a compositional link to a painting as directly as does D219, each rehearses different arrangements of stacks which Monet later refined in the paintings. D189 (figure 9) depicts a large stack on the right with a small one to its left set back in deeper space, an arrangement that is expressed in the paintings W1266-71 and W1274-76. D188 shows a single stack backed by hills, a framework that is present in the paintings W1280-87. D193 (figure 10) shows a small centralised stack and a fragment of a large stack that is cut by the right-hand edge of the frame. Such an unbalanced composition was not translated into paint, yet a sense of it reappears in works such as W1289 and W1290 which depict a large stack cropped by the right-hand edge. In *Stack of wheat, sun in the mist* (W1286, figure 11) a solitary stack shimmers in the misty sunlight, as if Monet realised the appeal of such an isolated centralised stack in D193 and therefore omitted the fragment of the large stack in the painting.

The sketches D188-195 are characterised by waving multiple outlines which suggest rather than define forms. The lack of tonal shading means that the different textures and patterns of the motif are implied within the equivalent empty spaces encased by the linear framework. For example, in D193 dynamic urgent lines indicate the edge of the larger stack and its shadow so that two different substances - one a dense mass, and the other a zone of darkness cast on grass - become interconnected spaces. The painted stacks and their shadows are not connected in this way, but in some paintings the shadows take on the same presence as the stacks. In *Stacks of wheat, white frost effect* (W1277) and *Stacks of wheat, winter effect* (W1279), the shadows seem not to mark areas of comparative darkness, but are like objects of glowing blue light, and in *Stack of wheat*
in the sunlight (W1288) the shadow is larger than the stack and seems to be expanding beyond the picture frame.

Monet may have been influenced by John Ruskin’s *The Elements of Drawing*, a practical and theoretic manual on drawing published in 1857.\(^{39}\) In an article titled ‘What is Impressionism?’ published in *Contemporary Review* on 11 March 1911, Wynford Dewhurst quotes Monet as saying that *The Elements of Drawing* contains ‘ninety per cent of the theory of Impressionist painting’.\(^{40}\) This is an improbable exaggeration, but it is understandable as Ruskin places great value on perceptual truth and on objectifying nature into different colour values and tonal variations. Ruskin’s notion that light interpenetrates all forms is particularly relevant to the sketches of the stacks:

> All natural shadows are more or less mingled with gleams of light. In the darkness of ground there is the light of the little pebbles or dust; in the darkness of foliage, the glitter of leaves; in the darkness of flesh, transparency; in that of a stone, granulation: in every case there is some mingling of light.\(^{41}\)

This luminous mingling is expressed in sketches such as D193 where zones of lightness and darkness are equivalent in the white emptiness of the page. Such emptiness suggests that the sketches are in a sense of light because, as Ruskin states, ‘you have no means of getting light brighter than white paper’.\(^{42}\) All drawn forms are equally of light so that they embody ‘the same light spreading everywhere’, which Monet sought to represent in the paintings.\(^{43}\)

The stacks in the sketches are generally taller and more pointed than the painted ones which suggests that Monet tested the proportions of the stacks before painting them. This is evident in D189 in the way that Monet enlarged the size of the stacks as he drew, a process that is also

---

\(^{39}\) Although the text was not translated into French, two passages from it were included in Ogden Rood’s *Modern Chromatics: with Applications to Art and Industry*, Kegan Paul, London, 1879, which was translated into French in 1881; see Lawrence Campbell, ‘Introduction to the Dover Edition’, John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), Dover Publications, London, 1971, viii.

\(^{40}\) Cited in Campbell, ‘Introduction to the Dover Edition’, viii

\(^{41}\) Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, 37

\(^{42}\) Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, 53

\(^{43}\) Letter to Geffroy, October 1890, cited in Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 205
found in paintings such as *Stacks of wheat in sunlight, midday* (W1271) and *Stacks of wheat, winter frost effect* (W1277). The mobility of Monet’s vision is expressed in paintings which depict the same motif in different proportions such as *Stack of wheat at the end of summer, evening effect* (W1269) where the stacks are round and plump, and *Two stacks of wheat at the end of the day, autumn* (W1270) where they are taller and more angular.

In ‘Mnemonic Art’ in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire interprets the graphic work of Constantin Guys in a way that curiously anticipates the effects of Monet’s wavy linear drawing style. Although Guys’ work was executed in ink, wash and watercolour, it is related to Monet’s because both embody unfolding perceptual effects in graphic form. Baudelaire argues that the abbreviated almost calligraphic quality of Guys’ work is the result of his desire to ‘see things broadly and to consider them above all in their total effect’. A similar desire could explain why Monet rejected tonal shading and chose to represent different forms such as houses and shadows as equivalent interconnected spaces. Baudelaire continues: ‘all those painters whose vision is synthesizing and abbreviative have been accused of barbarousness - M. Corot, for example, whose initial concern is always to trace the principal lines of a landscape - its bony structure, its physiognomy, so to speak’. Like Monet, Corot drew from nature in an incomplete linear style that registered the spatial structures of the motif. Baudelaire moves beyond this structural conception of the landscape and suggests that Guys sought to mark ‘the salient or luminous points of an object (which may be salient or luminous from the dramatic point of view)’. Such emphasis on luminosity reminds us that Monet was interested not simply in the structure of the stacks, but in how that structure was made material by the surrounding light-filled atmosphere.

---

44 For detailed analysis of Monet’s sentiments see House, *Nature into Art*, 183-191.
45 Charles Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, *Figaro*, 26, 28 November and 3 December, 1863, repr. in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 15
46 Idem.
48 Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, 16 (Baudelaire’s emphasis)
Monet's sketches, I believe, do not simply record the motif as a spatial pattern; they also embody it in terms of the light-filled painting it will become. In D189 Monet established the basic positions of the stacks with soft grainy contours and expanded their size with increasingly dark and clear lines, so that the original lines become contained within new outlines. The lines are most dense on the left of the stacks' cones which indicates shadow and implies what Ruskin calls the 'roundness' of the stacks, a bodily presence possessed by all natural forms, the depiction of which he believes to be crucial to successful drawing. Rawson argues that multiple contours such as these form a 'rhythmic band' that enhances the three-dimensional presence of objects, and creates the sensation of 'ambient space' in which objects are distinct from, yet also seem to merge with the space around them. In D189 these lines also indicate the stacks' internal architecture, particularly in the small stack where they seem to radiate from its unseen core. The curling, overlapping life of these lines reveals the internal dynamism of the stacks which cannot be seen, but is nevertheless sensed through perception.

When describing Monet's approach to landscape painting, Philippe Burty wrote that Monet sought to harmonise with the sounds, effects and 'evasive lines' of the landscape, and that his paintings were characterised by a 'science of lines'. While Burty's comments do not directly concern Monet's sketches, they do express ideas within them. For example, the notion of an evasive line evokes the moving, expanding presence of the stacks in D189, as if through line Monet sought to give form to that which was about to escape vision. Burty's notion of a science of lines implies line to be an element of an exploratory system in which the multiple meanings of line are at stake. The way that the lines in D189 embody multiple

---

49 Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, 50
50 Rawson, *Drawing*, 213
51 One can consider the radiating quality of these lines in light of Ruskin's 'Law of Radiation', a principle of growth in which a 'tendency of force from some one given point' governs natural forms such as leaves and branches; see *The Elements of Drawing*, 180-191.
effects is an element of their life which allowed Monet to experience the motif both as and beyond a flat pattern.

The lines in this sketch evoke the internal dynamism of the stacks because they possess their own life as thin spindly forms like tendrils or strands, which seem to reflect and absorb light as they twist and grow in space. On the right edge of the cone of the large stack two lines seem to curl around one another like strands of kinetic energy, trembling as they rise, before parting at the cone’s tip: one line curves downwards to mark out the left edge of the cone, while the other peaks at the cone’s apex and fades into the whiteness of the page as it crosses over its partner line. Ruskin’s notion that ‘If lines are to be distinctly shown, it is better that, so far as they can indicate anything by their direction, they should explain rather than oppose the general character of the object’, is expressed by the upward thrust of these lines which emphasises the height of the stacks, and anticipates the mobile vision required to perceive them.53

Baudelaire’s notion of an art that is so incomplete that it is ‘barbaric’, is expressed in the relationship between Monet’s line and the paper surface. As with all of Monet’s sketches, the pure linearity of the stacks means that the emptiness of the page is dominant. For Baudelaire, such emptiness requires the viewer to ‘fill in’ or further that emptiness through the imagination, to construct a sense of the textures, light effects and colours that are implied within it. The emptiness of the sketches means that they embody a kind of timeless, colourless, unfinished space in which a multiplicity of effects is implied. Even when Monet indicated light patterns by marking out shadows such as in D178 and D193, the emptiness of the sketches means that they could structure paintings of completely different effects of light and weather. This may explain why so few sketches were made, as if their emptiness allowed them to act as condensed templates for multiple paintings. For example, Monet could have used the hovering effect of the small stack in D192 as a source for both the small stack in Stacks of wheat, snow effect (W1274), and for the stack in Stack of wheat, sun in the mist (W1286) which seems to move

53 Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing, 80 (Ruskin’s emphasis)
upwards into the sunny mist-filled air. To an extent, the emptiness of each sketch makes it an image of ‘no weather, of no season’, another quality which Monet sought to express in his paintings.54

The emptiness of Monet’s sketches engages the viewer’s imagination because it seems to oscillate between an absence and a fullness. This oscillation is present in all of Monet’s sketches regardless of their degree of finish. For example, the emptiness within the contours of each stack reads as both an absence which makes them read as flat pattern, and as a fullness whereby they seem to bulge as solid masses. When Roland Barthes likens the act of writing to drawing - both are forms of expression involving marks made on a surface - he experiences ‘the joy of drawing on and rhythmically incising a virgin surface (its virginity representing the infinitely possible)’.55 Ruskin similarly interprets the emptiness of untouched paper as a kind of potential light-filled space awaiting delineation.56 The sexual connotations of Barthes’ ‘virgin surface’ suggest drawing to be the act of defining absence, and also the defilement of a fullness or wholeness. Indeed, the paradoxical notion of ‘incision’ suggests a process in which marks are made by removing matter: creation through subtraction. The emptiness of Monet’s sketches can therefore be seen as a fullness that is detracted from during the act of drawing, which in turn becomes an act of loss. This would suggest drawing to be an ambiguous kind of progression through loss.

Baudelaire concludes his praise of Guys by stating: ‘To put the whole thing in a nutshell, this extraordinary artist is able to express at once the attitude and the gesture of living beings, whether solemn or grotesque, and their luminous explosion in space’.57 The sense of an ‘exploding’ motif is expressed in Spate’s idea that the multiple and dotted outlines of the sketches reflect Monet’s awareness of how forms seem to contract and expand as they are perceived in light.58 Both Baudelaire and Spate refer to

56 Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing, 53
57 Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, 18 (Baudelaire’s emphasis)
58 Spate, The Colour of Time, 213
a type of image that embodies the process of an object coming into being; the sketches of the stacks therefore embody the presentness of the motif by representing both the ‘explosion’ of the stacks, and the moment when that ‘explosion’ enters human vision. This is particularly evident in sketches with multiple contours such as D189 and D193, yet as I will show, it is also present in the painted stacks.

The ‘luminous explosion’ of the painted stacks is not simply the result of how light defines them in space, nor is it a purely perceptual effect. It has something to do with the presence of the stacks, a self-determined quality of being that exists irrespective of light and human sight. Like the life of line, the presence of the stacks is a concept that requires the full imaginative engagement of the viewer. It is evoked in both the sparkling colours and light of the paintings, and through the shape given to that sparkling in perception. I will develop this notion through an analysis of the painted stacks of 1890–91, but will begin by analysing the relationship between the stacks and human life, as it is expressed in two earlier paintings of 1885, Haystacks at Giverny (W993) and Haystacks (W994, figure 12).

These are the only surviving paintings of stacks in which Monet included human figures. In all the other paintings, no human presence interrupts the stacks’ aesthetic autonomy and the evanescent effects of light. Haystacks at Giverny depicts three stacks soaked in sunlight on the right, while on the left walk Alice and Germaine Hoschedé, contained in shadow and followed by the little figures of Michel Monet and Jean-Pierre Hoschedé. The jagged threshold between shadow and light on the grass suggests the subject of the painting to be the distinction between the human life of the figures as they walk through shadow and the ‘life’ of the stacks as they are animated by light. In Haystacks, these two kinds of life merge: the small stack on the left is illuminated by strong sunlight and in the foreground, shadow unites the large stack with Alice and Michel who sit against it. Filtered sunlight speckles both the figures and the stack,
while the same small fragmented brushstrokes suggest the figures and
stack to be equivalent, both as painted substance and implicitly in being.
Alice and Michel touch the stack which implies not only the equivalence
of these two kinds of life, but also their connection: the figures are almost
on the point of being absorbed into the stack. At the exhibition at Durand-
Ruel’s in 1891, Monet hung two paintings of Suzanne Hoschedé (W1076
and W1077) above a line of stacks paintings, which could reflect Monet’s
conscious desire to link humans and stacks as equivalent presences in the
these paintings of Suzanne could have also stressed the feminine in nature or they could
have been a satirical comment on popular religious and mystical painting of the time; see
107.}

Paul Hayes Tucker touches on the notion of the presence of the
stacks when he observes that in nearly all the paintings from the summer
and autumn of 1890, the stacks break the top of the horizon as if pushing
into the sky, while in most of the winter canvases of 1890-91 they ‘sit
wrapped by the bands of hill and field as if bedded down for the season’.\footnote{Ibid., 89}
This implies that the compositional variations between Monet’s paintings
were not only determined by aesthetic logic, but also by a desire to
embody a characteristic of the stacks analogous to that of hibernating
animals. Tucker then personifies the stacks as beings that react to the
changing conditions of their environment: they greet the brilliant morning
sun, they huddle together in winter and they stand alone in the thin evening
light ‘like solitary actors on a dimly lit, deserted stage’.\footnote{Ibid., 90}
Tucker’s descriptions of Monet’s motifs are at times inappropriate - at one point he
describes the poplars as ‘elegant forms...like courtiers at an 18\textsuperscript{th} century
ball’ - yet nevertheless he responds to what I also experience in these
paintings, a sense of the motif as charged with a vitality beyond the
inanimate.\footnote{Ibid., 117}

Tucker interprets the sketches of the stacks, as I have done, as
preliminary exercises in which Monet explored the structural relationships
in the motif. But they are more than that because they are closely linked to the presence of the painted stacks. This sense of vitality is expressed in multiple ways such as the luminous colour harmonies, the intimate relationships between pairs of stacks, the relationship of the stacks to surrounding forms such as hills and trees, and the ways in which the stacks mingle with the light which defines them. However, Monet’s painted line is more fundamental than all these factors, and is the main conductor of this vitality. I see Monet’s painted line as a development of the drawn line of the sketches. Line is not only a basic drawing tool, it is the drawing tool chosen by Monet. It is not simply a technique but a form with its own conviction and life through which Monet evoked the presence of the stacks, firstly in the sketches and later in the paintings.

Gustave Geffroy expressed the relationship between painted line and the presence of the stacks in his introduction to the catalogue of the Durand-Ruel exhibition. He observes how the stacks are defined by light but that they also give shape to it, describing them as ‘objects on which are reflected, as on a mirror, the influences of the surroundings, atmospheric conditions, random breezes, sudden bursts of light’. Here the presence of the stacks is a sense of animation caused by the effects of light and weather, but Geffroy also associates the stacks with an independent, internal light:

The haystacks glow in the confusion of evening like heaps of somber gems. Their sides split and light up, revealing garnets and sapphires, amethysts and topazes; the flames scattered in the air condense into violent fires with the gentle flames of precious stones. These red-glowing haystacks throw lengthening shadows riddled with emeralds. Later still, under an orange and red sky, darkness envelops the haystacks, which have begun to glow like hearth fires.

Geffroy thus imbues the stacks with a sense of inner glowing by evoking the way that fire is such an intense source of light that it seems to be of

---

63 Ibid., 91
65 Ibid. 164
light, and the curious manner in which gems, although they reflect and refract external light, seem to glimmer with their own self-sustaining energy.

Monet frequently defines the edges of the stacks, or rather the space just beyond the edges with what Geffroy calls ‘incandescent’ line. In *Stacks of wheat at the end of summer, morning effect* (W1266), a short line of green-blue paint sits outside the right-hand tip of the large stack, as if to suggest the stack’s vibration in the physical and perceptual space between it and the tree behind. In *Stacks of wheat at the end of summer, evening effect* (W1269), a pasty line defines the right-hand edges of the stacks, suggesting both the brightness of the setting sun, and the stacks’ assertion against that brightness. In other works such as *Stacks of wheat in the sunlight, morning effect* (W1268), *Two stacks of wheat at the end of the day, autumn* (W1270) and *Stacks of wheat, snow effect* (W1274), painted line extends from the cone to the base of the stack, suggesting the stacks’ vibration as uniform masses in light-filled atmosphere. In paintings where two stacks overlap, line physically links the stacks and imbues them with the same vibrating quality that is present in sketches with multiple outlines. In *Stacks of wheat, white frost effect* (W1277) line links the stacks into a unit and implies them to be presences that are engaged in a kind of silent communication. Similar subtle halos of incandescent line exist in *Stacks of wheat at sunset, snow effect* (W1278) and *Stacks of wheat, winter effect* (W1279). In such paintings, the overlapping stacks merge into a composite unity whose presence is a result of the interaction of its parts; thus the stacks in each pair, like the fifteen paintings exhibited at Durand-Ruel’s, ‘only acquire their value by the comparison and succession of the entire series’.\(^{66}\)

The tension between line and colour was the basis of much critical response to Monet’s exhibition. Steven Z. Levine argues that Geffroy saw the traditional dichotomy between line and colour as unified in Monet’s art.\(^{67}\) Geffroy’s interest in the relationship between line and colour is evident not only in his notion of incandescent line that is embodied

---

66 Letter to Durand-Ruel, 9 November 1886, cited in House, *Nature into Art*, 201
67 Levine, *Monet and His Critics*, 124
through the merging of line and colour, but also in the continuity between
the linear structures of the paintings which facilitated the 'continuous
appearance...of immutable objects...the face of a changeless spectacle',
and the various colour harmonies through which Monet expressed 'the
uninterrupted flood of changing and interrelated sensations'.

68 The implied linear framework of the paintings, as explored in the sketches, made the
effects of these changing harmonies tangible. Camille Mauplain concurs
with Geffroy, describing Monet as 'a great painter (who) unites incredibly
rich colour with minute drawing, (producing) a surety of execution that is
almost mathematical'.

69 Georges Lecomte commented on the bold linear
structure of the paintings: 'His drawing is broad, vigorous, powerfully
synthetic, and his painting bright, sonorous; his touch is bold'.

70 Pissarro saw the linear framework of Monet's paintings as 'good but wavering -
particularly in the backgrounds'.

71 The Dutch essayist Willem G. C. Byvanck found the dual presence
of line and colour in the paintings both striking and disorientating: 'no
sooner had I arrived but I immediately felt like leaving. Those loud
colours, those zigzagging lines, blues, yellows, greens, reds and browns,
dancing a mad saraband...hurt my eyes'.

72 Byvanck could have responded to multiple aspects of the paintings: he could have been struck by the same
incandescent lines as those described by Geffroy, such as the line which
seems to trickle down the edge of the large stack in Stacks of wheat, white
frost effect (W1277); he could have experienced the linear movement of
the diagonal brushstrokes to the left of the large stack in Stacks of wheat at
the end of summer, morning effect (W1266); or he could have observed the
interlocking almost serpentine lines that suggest the texture of the cone of
the stack in Stack of wheat, sunset (W1289, figure 13).

68 Geffroy, 'Claude Monet Exhibition', cited in Stuckey, Monet. A Retrospective, 162
69 Camille Mauplain, 'L’Exposition Claude Monet: Durand-Ruel', La Revue indépendante
de Littérature et d’Art, 19 May 1891, cited in Tucker, Monet in the ’90s, 108
70 Georges Lecomte, L'Art impressionniste d'après la collection privée de M. Durand-
Ruel, Paris, 1892, cited in Levine, Monet and His Critics, 140 (my translation)
71 Camille Pissarro in a letter to his son of 5th May 1891, cited in Tucker, Monet in the
’90s, 108
72 Byvanck, Un Hollandais à Paris en 1891, cited in Stuckey, Monet. A Retrospective,
165
The metaphor of fire has been consistently linked with the experience of the stacks paintings: Byvanck describes how sunlight seems to ignite the stacks, Geffroy interpreted the stacks as glowing fires and Spate in her analysis of *Stack of wheat, sunset* describes the atmosphere as ‘aflame with the last rays of the sun’. The effects of this burning can be seen as the result of Monet’s coloured line: the ‘writhing red lines’ around the stack not only convey the optical effects of looking at and past an object blocking brilliant light as Spate argues, but they also suggest the stack’s disintegration into the fiery light. Perhaps it was this effect which startled Byvanck, as if the life of painted line had initiated a transformation which was in reality impossible: the absorption of the substance of the stack into fiery atmosphere.

While the incandescence of Monet’s drawn line is implied, and the incandescence of his painted line is palpable, the continuity of line between the sketches and the paintings suggests that Monet was aware of the expressive potential of line irrespective of the medium in which it was embodied. Line is able to convey the presence of the stacks not simply by representing that presence, but by mirroring it with its own life.

---

73 Spate, *The Colour of Time*, 213
CHAPTER TWO

The Substance of Drawing: The Water Lilies

And the external world is reborn upon his paper, natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator

(Baudelaire, 1863)74

Like all of Monet’s sketches, those of the water lilies are incomplete drawings whose meaning resides in the shape given to them by the imagination. This chapter, like the first, will examine the ways in which the sketches inform Monet’s paintings and how they embody the life of line. It will also focus more on the depth of the viewer’s imaginative experience of the sketches, independent of their preparatory function. These meanings have not yet been investigated. I will explain the experience of the sketches through the concept of paper-as-water, and then address the ways in which Japanese aesthetics mediate that experience.

My concept of paper-as-water needs some initial explanation. It is present to a degree in all twenty-five of the sketches of the water lilies, and particularly in the seven sketches in which Monet deliberately drew on top of previous drawings. These underlying drawings, mostly of poplars from 1891, provide a physical grid for the overlaying lilies, yet that grid is so faint that it seems to be fading into the paper and, I believe, into the realm of memory. All of these ‘overlaid’ sketches involve the representation of water in some way which suggests that their effect - the way that the underlying image seems to be floating beneath the overlaying one - is a deliberate response to the complexities involved in representing water. The coexisting images in these sketches demand an increasingly speculative response in which the paper seems to hold or suspend the drawing, and through which Monet recorded the lines of the present within the energy of

74 Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, 12
dissolving memories. In the viewer’s imagination, the paper is transformed from a mere surface into a substance which I call paper-as-water.

The sketches of the water lilies were probably made in 1914, when Monet began work on a large decorative scheme which would become the Grandes Décorations. Monet told François Thiébault-Sisson that he ‘waited until the idea (of the Décorations) had taken shape, (and) the arrangement and composition of the motif had gradually inscribed themselves on (his) mind’, before building the large studio which was finished by at least August 1915. The sketches were probably part of this process of gradual inscription, yet Monet could have continued making them as the Décorations evolved into the 1920s.

The sketches of the lilies have a more direct relationship to Monet’s paintings than those of the stacks, as most of them are compositional studies for the Grandes Décorations in which he experimented with the placement of trees, leaves, lilies, reflections, and the bank of the pool on a small scale, before attempting them on the huge canvases. The sketches may also have helped Monet to develop the final sequence of canvases. Many of the sketches echo or prefigure the compositions of the Décorations. For example, the reflected weeping willow in Reflections of trees can be seen in D347, 349 and 350 (figures 14, 15 and 16), while the placement of the two groups of lilies at the left of the painting, one at the top and one at the bottom, could be influenced by those on the left hand side of D350. The motif of the thick willow trunk in Clear morning with willows and Morning with willows is teased out in D118, 119, 123, 124, 351 and 352. In D120 and 121 faint lines could denote groups of lily pads or the shapes of reflected clouds like those in The Clouds. Some sketches contain elements that were not included in the Décorations, which shows how drawing allowed Monet to eliminate as well as generate compositional ideas. For example, D109, 116, 117, 122, 351-54, and 369 depict the bank of the pool as a continuous structure at the base of the composition which Monet either fragmented or eliminated in

---

75 Spate, The Colour of Time, 269
76 House, for example, suggests that the sketch of lily pads in D348 (figure 26) was made in the 1920s; see Nature into Art, 229. However, he gives no justification for this dating.
77 Most of the 22 canvases of the Décorations are 200 x 425 cm.
the Décorations: the thick grasses in Morning and the grassy mound at the base of the willow tree in Morning with willows are its only remnants.

The sketches of the water lilies should be seen in the context of the 60 or so painted studies or études for the Grandes Décorations, a form of preparatory work in which Monet explored various motifs, specific effects of light and colour structures.\textsuperscript{78} Unlike the sketches, the painted studies do not rehearse the long horizontal compositions of the Décorations, but they did allow Monet to develop and eliminate compositional ideas. For example Water lilies (W1807), like the sketches mentioned above, depicts the bank as a continuous strip along the base of the painting. In four related studies (W1848-50 and 1855), Monet explored various arrangements of the willow trunk, fronds and reflections which he rearticulated in the left canvas of Morning with willows. Throughout the studies W1816-1833 he experimented with the placement of grasses, agapanthus lilies and irises, and was only able to attain the subtle placement of grasses and their reflections in Morning by working through such cumbersome compositions as Agapanthus (W1820) and Water lilies and agapanthus (W1821).

Spate makes a direct comparison between the sketches and the painted studies, arguing that the mobile linearity of sketches such as D352 and 357 (figure 17) is expressed in Willow fronds, water lilies and clouds (W1852), in the way that the loosely outlined lily leaves seem to detach themselves from the water surface.\textsuperscript{79} Monet’s dynamic line undoubtedly links the sketches to the painted studies, yet the connection which Spate implies is more than stylistic similarity. I see Monet’s drawn and painted lines as aspects of the broader process of the making of lines, which I have suggested to be a possible definition of drawing. The continuity of line throughout the sketches and the painted studies suggests that Monet was conscious of the potential of line as an exploratory tool, irrespective of the medium in which it was realised. The presence of much empty canvas in many of the painted studies could be interpreted as the incorporation of

\textsuperscript{78} Spate classifies around 60 of the large water lilies canvases as studies because they focus on a fragment of the pool; see The Colour of Time, 271.

\textsuperscript{79} Spate, The Colour of Time, 272-4
other aspects of drawing - its incompleteness and the imaginative
genesis of the viewer necessary to shape that incompleteness - into
paint. Such incompleteness is arguably intrinsic to all drawings, regardless
of their degree of finish. The incompleteness of studies such as
*Agapanthus* and *Water lilies and agapanthus* makes them fragmentary
records of Monet’s engagement with nature that are, in Baudelaire’s
words, like ‘defective drawings, only to be transformed into perfect things
with the aid of the spectator’s imagination’.

The correspondence between the processes of drawing and painting
which I am suggesting is most evident in the way that Monet began his
paintings of water lilies, including the *Grandes Décorations*. Monet first
outlined the lily pads, trees and reflected shapes such as trees and clouds
with flowing lines of paint, a process which I see as drawing with paint.
The unfinished canvas *Water lilies* (W1717, figure 18) reveals this. In it
Monet established a rough painted framework of the major spatial areas of
lilies, reflected trees and sky - very similar to the linear framework of the
sketches - upon which he intended to refine the effects of light on the
water surface. Finished paintings of the same motif such as W1710 and
W1715 show that Monet established the water surface with thin layers of
paint, before rearticulating the contours of the lily pads which had become
submerged beneath them. He thus reasserted the drawn painted lines which
had begun the painting. Such lines can be seen in the *Décorations*, for
example in *Morning* and particularly in *Green Reflections* (figure 19).

Monet’s comments ‘I never draw except with a brush and paint’
and ‘I have never liked to isolate colour and line’ imply a desire to merge
line and colour, which is suggested in *Water lilies*. This desire is almost
palpable in the startling *Water lilies* (W1902, figure 20), which is
composed of nothing but scrawled lines of coloured paint, and in *Wisteria*
(W1903, figure 21), where lines of orange paint move across the top left of
the canvas with no clear representational function. These lines were
painted with such calligraphic force that four hairs from Monet’s brush

---

80 Rosand, *Drawings Acts*, 2
81 Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, 15
82 Letter to an unknown recipient, 5 April 1914, cited in Kendall, *Monet by Himself*, 247;

27
became embedded within them; the spindly linearity of the hairs mirrors the gestural linearity of the painted lines. This merging of line and colour which I also explored through the incandescent line of Monet’s paintings of the stacks, loosens the distinction between the disciplines of drawing and painting and suggests that line could be the means for their reconciliation.

The close relationship between drawn and painted line is evident in the sketches and painting of The Empty Boat (W1154, figure 22) which prefigure Monet’s sketches and paintings of the water lilies. In the three surviving sketches (D345, 346, 348; figures 23, 24, 25 and 26) which are preparatory for the painting, Monet used line to embody living linear structures, long stringy grasses in flowing water. These sketches anticipate sketches of the water lilies such as D123 and 351 (figure 27) in which Monet similarly depicted linear structures such as grasses and weeping willow fronds. The influence of the sketches for The Empty Boat on those of water lilies seems all the more likely as they are next to each other in the sketchbook and in one sketch, D348, Monet superimposed a horizontal drawing of reflections and lilies over the vertical drawing of the boat.

In 1890 Monet wrote to Geffroy telling him, ‘I have again taken up things impossible to do: water with grasses waving in the depths...it’s marvellous to see but it’s enough to drive one mad to want to do it’. Mirbeau similarly viewed the grasses in terms of their movement, describing ‘an entire watery plant life...agitating, twisting, becoming dishevelled, scattering, reassembling, and then undulating, meandering, coiling and lengthening...’ The lines of the sketches and the painting of The Empty Boat, embody both the forms and the ongoing movement or the ‘becoming’ of nature, a notion which I discuss later in relation to the influence of Japanese prints on Monet’s sketches.

In the sketches for The Empty Boat, line fulfils multiple representational functions and at the same time approaches the limits of representation by taking on the quality of a line-like object. The first two

---

83 Letter to Geffroy, 22 June 1890, cited in Spate, The Colour of Time, 203. Monet probably refers to The Empty Boat, although he could be referring to The Pink Boat (W1249) or Boating on the Epte (W1250), which also depict moving grasses in water.
sketches are horizontal in format. In the first and most incomplete (D345), Monet drew the boat with a reclining figure in it, and traced the moving grasses with what Ruskin would call ‘bold, undulatory, descending lines’. In D346, the boat is smaller and is tilted more sharply, as if it had been moved by the currents of lines which oddly seem to be cascading from the top of the page to the bottom. In D348, Monet shifted to a vertical format like that of the painting, so that the lines seem to fall with greater force.

The dynamism of line which Monet developed in the sketches defines the painting The Empty Boat, in which the grainy tangles of lines have a fullness which the drawn lines lack. Some of the deep green lines seem to stand for actual strands of grass while the darkest lines denote moving shadows amidst the grasses. The bright yellow lines denote light penetrating moving water and embody movement itself, as they ‘hold’ the kinetic movement of Monet’s hand with which they were made. The red-brown lines of varying lengths weave between the yellow and green, implying the depth of the water between the moving surface and the dark bed of the river.

The loosely painted lines of The Empty Boat approach the limits of representation, yet they never reach pure abstraction. Line always remains at the service of Monet’s sensation of nature. In contrast, the painted line of Jackson Pollock’s all over drip paintings is purely abstract. (I do not want to imply a direct analogy between The Empty Boat and Pollock’s paintings, but rather to indicate the abstract quality of line which Monet signalled in his painting, but never quite realised.) Michael Fried argues that Pollock’s line oscillates between being a contour - a line that is

85 Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing, 124
defined by its descriptive function - and a dynamic object that transcends representation:

The line either possesses a residual but irreducible quality as of contour...or else it possesses the quality of an object in its own right: not merely as line, but as a kind of thing, like a branch or bolt of lightning, seen in a more or less illusionistic space.\(^7\)

Fried’s notion of line as an object goes some way in explaining the sensation of movement that one experiences before the sketches and the painting of *The Empty Boat*. In these works, line does not simply represent movement; it is itself of movement, traced with the movement of the hand, yet somehow imbued with its own direction and conviction.

In the introduction to *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Gaston Bachelard describes water as a substance that is in constant flux.\(^8\) He argues that it is a ‘mainstay’ for images because it makes them visible either by reflecting them on its surface or acting as a medium through which submerged objects are seen. When water presents images to sight, it acts as a ‘founding contributor’, so that images seem not simply to be on or in water, but also of it.\(^9\) Water only becomes such a substance within human consciousness where it is transformed into an ‘element of materializing imagination’.\(^9\) Bachelard’s notion of water thus demands a level of imaginative engagement similar to that which Monet’s sketches require. Water takes on its productive potential by deforming or essentialising objects. It eliminates the distinctions between forms so that in Monet’s representations of water lilies, for example, various objects - lily pads both on and under the surface of water, and reflections of grasses, clouds and trees - become equivalent images within water’s substance.


\(^9\) Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 10

\(^9\) Idem.
On the one hand it is difficult to link Bachelard’s notion of water and the paper of Monet’s sketches as equivalent substances because while water is a substance into which objects deform and dissolve, the purpose of drawing is to materialize forms and ideas. Yet the emptiness of Monet’s sketches means that the lines seem to be forming or deforming, as if emerging from or dissolving into the substance of the page. In D348 for example, the bold lines denoting the reflected weeping willow and lily pads seem to emerge from the substance of the page, and push the underlying lines of the moving grasses back into it. In the sketches of the water lilies, one can conceive of the paper as an equivalent substance to water - as paper-as-water - because within the reality of the drawing, the paper is water.

In his Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins, Jacques Derrida defines drawing as a kind of blindness, arguing that at the moment when the stylus touches the surface, neither the object being drawn nor the emerging drawing are seen by the artist.91 Such blindness emerges as the artist is tracing the trait - line in Monet’s case - and is crucial to the unfolding of the drawing process, the drawing itself.92 Derrida supports his ideas on blindness by incorporating Baudelaire’s notion that the origin of drawing lies in memory and not in the presentness of perception.93 The looseness of Monet’s sketches suggests to me that they were the result of a prolonged experience of blindness in which the eye was directed more to the motif than to the unfolding sketch, allowing the drawing to grow on the page, largely unseen.

Derrida then considers a concept which he calls ‘the withdrawal...or the etipse, the differential inappearance of the trait’.94 He suggests that once a trait is drawn, it marks the inside and outside of a shape and thereby becomes a contour; the withdrawal of the trait is what

92 The translators leave ‘trait’ in its original French to maintain its multiplicity of English meanings, ‘from trait or feature to a line, stroke, or mark’; see Translators’ Note, Derrida, Memoirs of the Blind, 2.
93 Ibid., 49
94 Ibid., 53
remains of the line after it has become a contour. For example, in D351 and 352 Derrida would argue that the overlapping lines which mark the edges of the willow tree trunk cancel themselves in the face of the surrounding spaces they define, and reach for a limit that is unreachable. Drawing, he suggests

always signals toward this inaccessibility, toward the threshold where only the surroundings of the trait appear - that which the trait spaces by delimiting and which thus does not belong to the trait. Nothing belongs to the trait, and thus to drawing and to the thought of drawing, not even its own ‘trace’. Nothing participates in it. The trait joins and adjoins only in separating.\(^{95}\)

In this sense, a line withdraws not because of what it is, but because of what it does, that is, its function as a separating trait. In Derrida’s terms, what the viewer sees is not so much a line, but what remains of it after its withdrawal. The life of line, the enduring beingness of line which I believe permeates Monet’s sketches, can therefore be seen as what remains of a line after its withdrawal: the life left behind. One’s perception of Monet’s sketches therefore involves the recovery or imaginative re-grasping of these traces of life.

The withdrawal of Monet’s line - or as I see it, its dissolution into paper-as-water - is particularly evident in the overlaid sketches of the lilies, in which two images seem to be suspended in the same substance. In all of these sketches, the superimposed drawing is bolder than the one beneath it. D348 depicts a reflected weeping willow and lilies over a sketch of a boat and moving grasses; D349 depicts lilies over a sketch of girls in a boat; in D350, 351, 352, and 369 Monet drew lilies over poplar compositions of 1891; and D379 shows lilies drawn over an image of the village of Limetz near Giverny.

Monet’s overlaid sketches complicate Derrida’s notion of the withdrawal of the trait, because the two coexisting images delineate different spaces within the same paper-as-water, and they withdraw in different directions. For example, in D350 the faint underlying lines of the

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 54
poplars on the right-hand page denote the spaces surrounding them as sky, yet the dark overlaid lines of the reflected weeping willow denote the same space as the water of the lily pool. In D351 these effects are more complicated, because the superimposed image depicts both the water of the pool and the earth of the bank over the poplars beneath. In D348, Monet combined sketches on vertical and horizontal axes so that the lines seem to move between the two images. In the vertical sketch, he used faint lines to embody the moving grasses beside the boat. In the superimposed horizontal sketch of the reflected weeping willow (the same tree as in D347, 349 and 350) these faint lines become, in Ruskin's words, 'lines of disturbance on the surface' which imply the depth of the water on which the willow is reflected.\textsuperscript{96} The same lines simultaneously describe two different waters - the flowing water of the Epte, and the still water of the lily pool - yet they dissolve into the same paper-as-water.

The dissolution of Monet's lines and a sense of the paper as a fluid substance is evoked by Fried, again in relation to Pollock's painted line:

Line...is entirely transparent both to the nonillusionistic space it inhabits but does not structure and to the pulses of something like pure, disembodied energy that seem to move without resistance through them. Pollock's line bounds and delimits nothing - except in a sense, eyesight. We tend not to look beyond it, and the raw canvas is wholly surrogate to the paint itself. We tend to read the raw canvas as if it were not there.\textsuperscript{97}

As I have stated, Monet's line is never completely separate from a representational function, but it does approach the limits of representation which Fried indicates. For example, in the top left hand corner of D350, drawn squiggles denote lily pads floating on the water surface, but they also seem to hover in airy abstract space. These squiggles are almost, but not quite 'transparent': they float like an abstract cluster of threads yet that cluster constantly signals the existence of the lily pads, or at least an idea of their existence. Similar floating effects are evident in \textit{Green Reflections}. Fried’s emphasis on the fluid movement of line and on the seeming non-

\textsuperscript{96} Ruskin, \textit{The Elements of Drawing}, 124
\textsuperscript{97} Fried, 'Three American Painters', 224
existence of the canvas evokes, for me, Monet's paper-as-water: a transparent, viscous imaginative substance in which lines seem to move, hover and dissolve at the same time.

The dissolution of line into paper-as-water is similar to the way that the ink or paint pigment sinks into and is absorbed by the paper or silk ground of Japanese prints. More importantly, such prints could have influenced the boldness of Monet's line, a boldness which animates the paper-as-water and defines many of the painted studies for the *Grandes Décorations*. The two quotes that open Virginia Spate's and David Bromfield's essay 'A New and Strange Beauty. Monet and Japanese Art', locate their discussion of Monet's art and Japanese aesthetics within the context of the dichotomy between line and colour, and implicitly within the relationship between drawing and painting which I have been discussing. In one of these quotes, Monet asks the Duc du Trévise to appreciate a Japanese print in terms of the boldness of line:

look at this bathing scene: look at these bodies, can you not feel their firmness? They are made of flesh, yet are described only by their outline. What we particularly appreciated above all in the West was the bold fashion of defining their subjects: those people have taught us to compose differently, there's no doubt about that.

Monet also comments on the mutability of line - how it can both outline a body and suggest the 'firmness' of its flesh - a quality which I have defined as an aspect of the life of line. Mirbeau similarly defines printed Japanese line in terms of its mutable potential, writing in his novel *La 628 E-8* of 1907: 'all life, all movement, all modelling is contained in a line'.

In separate interviews, Monet analysed Hokusai’s *Peonies and butterfly* (c.1832, figure 28), which suggests that it was of particular, perhaps personal significance. He said to the Duc du Trévise, 'Look at that

---

98 Spate and Bromfield, 'A New and Strange Beauty', 15 and 54  
99 Spate and Bromfield, 'A New and Strange Beauty', 2  
100 Trévise, 'Le Pèlerinage de Giverny', cited in Spate and Bromfield, 'A New and Strange Beauty', 2  
flower with its petals turned back by the wind...is that not truth itself?’, while in 1924, Marc Elder reported: “Hokusai”, [Monet] said slowly, “how powerful his work is. Look at this butterfly which is struggling against the wind, the flowers which are bending. And nothing useless. Sobriety of life”.

In this print, bold line and pure colour evoke the effects of moving wind and embody a frozen moment in the continuous unfolding processes of nature - what I see as the becoming of nature.

Ruskin also defines nature as a constantly moving entity whose evanescence the artist must somehow embody. He writes, for example:

The clouds will not wait while we copy their heaps or clefts; the shadows will escape from us as we try to shape them, each in its stealthy minute march, still leaving light where its tremulous edge had rested the moment before.

For Ruskin, the becoming of nature includes a sense of its past and future states, and is a ‘vital truth’ of both life and art:

Now remember, nothing distinguishes great men from inferior men than their always, whether in life or in art, knowing the way things are going. Your dunce thinks they are standing still, and draws them all fixed; your wise man sees the change or changing in them, and draws them so... Try always, whenever you look at a form, to see the lines in it which have had power over its past fate, and you will have power over its futurity. Those are its awful lines; see that you seize on those, whatever else you miss.

Monet’s sketches acknowledge the dynamism of nature which Ruskin describes, and possess an ‘awful’ mobile quality which is lacking in Japanese prints such as Peonies and butterfly. While Hokusai’s clear, even lines embody a frozen moment in the becoming of nature, the overlapping lines of Monet’s sketches seem to be converging or diverging, and thus embody the becoming of nature through the becoming of the drawing itself. This shows that while Japanese prints informed Monet’s linear...

---

103 Ruskin, The Elements of Drawing, 91
104 Idem. (Ruskin’s emphasis)
vocabulary, their aesthetic was transformed and rearticulated in his own visual language.

The relationship between Japanese screen paintings and the Grandes Décorations has been investigated, yet the role of the sketches within this relationship has not been sufficiently examined. House for example argues that traditional Japanese screens which had been exhibited in Paris at least by 1883 influenced the extended horizontal format of the Décorations.\(^{105}\) Spate suggests that such screens could have influenced both the format and the compositions of the Décorations.\(^{106}\) Akiko Mabuchi distinguishes between fusuma, paintings on sliding screens which were installed in interiors, and byōbu, portable folding screens, and analyses the various exhibitions, auctions and publications through which Monet could have come in contact with them.\(^{107}\)

The long horizontal sketches of the water lilies which occupy opposite pages in the sketchbooks allowed Monet to trial various Japanese-inspired compositions on a small scale prior to the large format of the Décorations. For example, D349 and 350 depict islands of lilies and a curving reflection of a weeping willow that is echoed in Reflections of trees. In both sketches, the weeping willow is on the left side of the right page, among reflected fronds and lily pads. In Reflections of trees, Monet stretched the horizontal proportions of the sketch, and shifted the weeping willow to the right edge of the left canvas. In D351 and 352, Monet experimented with the placement of a large weeping willow tree on a grassy bank, a motif which occurs in the far left panel of Morning with willows. In D353 and 354 (figure 29), as well as D117, 124 and 369, Monet reduced the height of the sketches but maintained their full width across two pages, creating longer, thinner compositions that are closer to the proportions of the Décorations.

Japanese folding screens or byōbu depict scenes across a number of connected panels, in the same way that the Décorations are composed of images spread across two, three or four joined canvases. Louis Gillet

\(^{105}\) House, Nature into Art, 59 and note 44, 237
\(^{106}\) Spate, The Colour of Time, 269
noticed this relationship, describing the unjoined canvases of the
Décorations in the studio at Giverny as ‘successive parts as if they were
the folds of a screen, which is turned back’. The difficulty of using
multiple panels such as these is maintaining the continuity of the image
across the thresholds between panels. The sketches were a way for Monet
to meet this challenge. In works such as D350 and 357 Monet drew
directly across the divide between the two pages with continuous sweeping
lines, creating a unified image of two parts, like The Setting Sun, Green
Reflections and Reflections of trees. In sketches such as D353 and 354,
certain lines do not extend across the divide between the two pages, and
the image is less unified. In D123, 351 and 352, Monet chose not to place
the tree trunk over the divide between pages, a strategy which is evident in
Japanese screens such as Kaihō Yusho’s Bamboo and morning glories,
Pine and camellias (mid 16th-early 17th century) and Okamoto Toyohiko’s
Pines (1800-25), and which Monet employed in Clear morning with
willows, Morning with willows, and The Two willows. These aesthetic
choices became much more complicated in the Décorations, with the
introduction of brushwork and colour. Such were these difficulties that
Monet was unable to overcome them before his death: the colour
harmonies in the two left panels of Morning and Clear Morning with
willows remain unresolved.

Monet’s sketches of the water lilies, the Grandes Décorations and
Japanese screens are shaped by the notion of emptiness. As I have shown,
Monet’s sketches are characterised by an emptiness which, in Baudelaire’s
words, activates the viewer as the ‘translator’ of the image, the participant
in ‘a translation which is always clear and thrilling’. The Décorations
are in many ways of emptiness, as they lack human presence and narrative
structure, and depict huge boundless expanses of water. When forms do
interrupt this watery emptiness, such as the pairs of trees in Clear morning
with willows, Morning with willows, and particularly those in The Two
willows, they do not interrupt but stretch it, articulating the absence

Revue des deux mondes, 1 February 1924, cited in Monet and Japan, 209
109 Baudelaire, ‘Le Peintre de la vie moderne’, 16
between them. Japanese screens represent space in such a way that isolated objects animate the surrounding emptiness. For example in Kanō Naonobu’s pair of *Winter* and *Summer* screens (first half of 17th century, figure 30) which was exhibited in Paris in 1904 and 1908, birds, branches and leaves punctuate the surrounding space.\(^{110}\)

In 1909 Roger Marx imagined that Monet asserted a link between the Japanese aesthetic which ‘evokes presence by a shadow, the whole by a fragment’, and his own art, which suggests that Japanese emptiness could have influenced Monet’s sketches.\(^{111}\) In sketches where Monet repeated contours such as D353, 354, 357 and 369, the rhythms of lines seem to vibrate within the surrounding emptiness of the page, like ripples on a water surface. In sketches with particularly bold lines, such as D109 and 350, the emptiness of the page seems to shrink around the lines, as if drawn into their dynamism. And in the overlaid sketches which contain two coexisting images, such emptiness is a characteristic of the paper-as-water which seems to absorb the lines that define it.

Spate and Bromfield argue that the shimmering washes of paint on Japanese screens allow one’s consciousness to dissolve into space which itself seems to be dissolving.\(^{112}\) Although the sketches of the water lilies are on a much smaller scale than Japanese screens, they create similar effects of dissolution. In D450 (figure 31), the lines describing the reflected willow branches and their fronds merge into one another, and could also denote the moving reflections of clouds, or shadows cast in the depths of the water. In D357, the distinctions between the pond, the bank, the floating islands of lilies and reflections dissolve into rhythms of calligraphic lines, the dynamism of which could also have been influenced by Japanese screens.\(^{113}\) In the most incomplete and feint sketches such as D119 and D121, the substance of the drawing becomes almost palpable as lines struggle to emerge from the paper-as-water which threatens to dissolve them. Monet’s sketches therefore not only embody the sensation

\(^{110}\) Spate and Bromfield, ‘A New and Strange Beauty’, 56
\(^{112}\) Spate and Bromfield, ‘A New and Strange Beauty’, 56

38
of dissolving space that permeates Japanese screens; they also anticipate the dissolution of consciousness that one experiences before the watery, absorptive expanses of the Grandes Décorations.
CONCLUSION

Monet’s advice that ‘You must begin by drawing...Draw simply and directly, with charcoal, crayon, or whatever above all observing the contours, because you can never be too sure of holding onto them, once you start to paint’, suggests that drawing had a more fundamental importance for his art than it actually did.\textsuperscript{114} However, as I hope this thesis has shown, drawing was of deeper importance than has been previously thought.

Monet’s concern with ‘holding onto’ contours brings the pure linearity of his sketches into context, a linearity which is startling because it seems at odds with all that we know his paintings to be: sparkling colours, brilliant light and forms which dissolve into tiny touches of paint. The delicate effects of Monet’s paintings seem somehow incompatible with notions of line, draughtsmanship and drawing. In fact, these effects were only made possible by an underlying linearity which structures the paintings, a linearity that is often concealed under countless scales of colour, but whose presence we nevertheless sense.

If one too easily subscribes to the traditional opposition between line and colour, one can ignore the possibility that line can be of colour. Often the underlying linearity of Monet’s paintings makes its way to the surface and is expressed in coloured line: a line that represents undulating grasses, a line that expresses the vibration of stacks of wheat in light, a line that defines distant poplars swaying in the wind, and a line that embodies ripples around water lilies. Line is mutable: it makes a multiplicity of perceptual effects material, yet it is also unavoidably caught up in its own materiality, its own life.

Monet’s insistence that one must begin with drawing indicates the preliminary status of his sketches. Drawing allowed Monet to work his way into a motif, to perceptually familiarise himself with an environment before beginning to paint. It also allowed him to see nature in compositional terms, to distil from experience ideas for potential paintings.

\textsuperscript{114} Trévisac, ‘Le Pèlerinage de Giverny’, cited in House, \textit{Nature into Art}, 230
Monet's sketches abstract nature into incomplete linear structures that seem to be caught in the processes of their embodiment. They show that the act of drawing begins with looking, and the experience of drawing continues after that act is completed.

The meanings of Monet's sketches are not immediately there; they are there to be found. The challenge of drawings as simple as these lies in how they seem to be: their openness and potential. I cannot predict what the viewer's experience of the sketches will be, but I hope that it is in many ways like my own: an imaginative engagement with line that quivers in the whiteness of the page, articulating objects and sensations, and then twists, turns and inflects itself into the substance of the paper. The notions of the life of line and paper-as-water shape my experience of Monet's sketches, but they may not shape everyone's. Such uncertainty is an aspect of their beauty.