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There are others who own reproductions of the 'Lilies' without having seen them in person. Here, the more pertinent effect is to convey a message about that person's taste and personality. By wearing or decorating her surroundings with prints of the 'Water Lilies', a person announces that that is her stylistic choice. She informs them that those are the colours and the style of painting she prefers, that she is familiar with Impressionist art and perhaps subscribes to the political and intellectual ideologies that come with it. Whether these messages are true is tangential; what matters is that they are projected to construct an idea, an image, an 'aura' of that person in front of the world that she meets. While this is different from the aura emanated by Monet's art, it is by witnessing such tastes and practices that many others become aware of Monet's 'Water Lilies' and Impressionist art. These different ways of finding and experiencing art beget our interaction with art in its original setting, surrounded by the "traditional" aura that Benjamin propounds.

But what is one's experience with Monet's 'Water Lilies'? How is it different from seeing their reproduced forms? "[The] unique existence of the work of art determine[s] the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence," explains Benjamin in his essay. This is certainly true of the 'Water Lilies'. A print of the lilies on a scarf, an umbrella, or even a framed miniature won't reveal the physical traces of its historical existence, nor the complex blend of colors and skill used by Monet on the originals. It won't help me experience Monet's grand artistic endeavour as he had intended it. The eight (out of the 300 in total) 'Water Lilies' housed by the Musée de l'Orangerie are 1.97m tall and



Water Lilies', Claude Monet, 1906.

Monet completely disposed of the material world in the paintings from 1905 onwards, immersing the viewer entirely in the distorted "reality" of the pond's reflections. By 1908, he was creating "unique atmospheric effects" by painting the lilies on vertical canvases and using varying colour palettes to depict the pond at different times of the day. After experiencing art of such nuance and magnitude, it's hard not to agree with Benjamin's insistence for the "presence of the original as a prerequisite to the concept of authenticity". It would certainly be difficult to discern such details of colour and perspective in smaller and scattered repro-

scope for their comparison. To me, the reproductions seem aware of this difference, and so they settle for serving as reminders. They entice us to visit the originals. Enamoured, we try to retain their essence on regular, everyday objects.

At the Gardens: The Effect of the Original

If reproductions of the 'Water Lilies' remind us of Monet's original paintings, the paintings in turn remind us of something else: the water garden painstakingly crafted by Monet in Giverny, Clos Normand in 1893. Winning against local farmers' legal objections that diverting the river Epte for the pond would poison the local water, flora, and fauna, Monet fashioned his estate after the prints of Japanese gardens that he used to collect. He built a Japanese-style bridge strung with violet wisteria and allowed the garden's asymmetrical curves and angles to grow wildly covered with bamboos, willows, Japanese peonies, maple trees, and the famed white lilies. As the website for Giverny, a not-for-profit tourism organisation in Giverny, acknowledges, Monet thus "shaped his subjects in nature before painting them, [therefore] creat[ing] his works twice". This makes the 'Water Lilies' paintings a reproduction of Monet's first work of art—his water garden.

By painting the reflections of the lilies on the pond water, Monet seems to agree with Benjamin that, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be". While reproductions of the paintings merely hint at their failure to recreate Monet's art, his paintings more directly announce their inability to recreate the water garden. The shape and proportions of the 'Water Lilies' and the absence of the material world on their canvas aim at a grand immersive experience for the viewer, like an attempt to become a "[near] perfect

reproduction of a work of art", in Benjamin's words. But by depicting the reflections of the lilies instead of the flowers themselves, the paintings confess to their "lacking", marking the extent to which they can recreate the garden. They know that transporting the viewer to the time and place of the garden is impossible; hence she must be satiated with their reflections. And by projecting so many abstract perspectives of the reflections in nearly 300 installments, the paintings highlight how even a reflection of the garden produces innumerable interpretations. It makes one wonder—how much more multidimensional and overwhelming must the actual sight, the original art of the garden, be?

How overwhelming indeed. In elaborating the follies of reproduced art, Benjamin complains that, "Mechanical reproduction [...] changes the reaction of the masses toward art. [...] Individual reactions [become] predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce". This couldn't be truer than in 2018, when visitors of Monet's art have already been preconditioned to take an interest in them by social media and globalised cultural exchange. The mechanical reproduction of the 'Lilies' misleads our expectations because, separated from the environmental realities of a densely-grown water garden, the prints lead us to expect a solitary idyll. The variety of hues melting into a sea of blue promises a location where cool elements like water drown out noise, heat, and human crowds. This feeling is even more intense when one is surrounded by the panorama at the Musée de l'Orangerie. As a result, an actual visit to Giverny comes as a shock to the senses.

The water garden in Giverny currently functions as the Fondation de Claude Monet, an hour's ride away from Paris and open to the public from late March to early November every year. I went there in the first week of May, on a day with blazing sunlight and heat that sticks to the skin. Monet's estate was a 20-minute drive away from the Gare de Vernon train station, although finding and queuing up for a tourist bus took up another 30 minutes. Upon reaching the location, visitors have to walk through a large parking area, a small underground tunnel, and a maze of streets before reaching the entrance to the Fondation. What follows is an hour-long queue in the heat, depending on when you join the line, and more jostling through crowds and gift shops, restaurants, and art exhibitions, until you finally arrive at the gardens.

To describe it as picturesque would be an understatement. There are flowers of every colour and shape imaginable. There are butterflies, bees, dragonflies, curious green insects, croaking frogs, wildly chirruping birds. There are throngs of visitors taking pictures from every possible angle, while a few quiet ones sit in a corner sketching or painting the surroundings onto paper. The biggest surprise? The pond water was green instead of Monet's famous blue, and the lily pads were vacant of the famous lilies on the water. We snaked our way through the gardens until we started



Souvenir shop at the Fondation Claude Monet, Giverny, France.

span nearly 100 linear meters of painted landscape, according to the museum catalogue. The entire work is said to take up 200 square meters of space. In addition to the sheer size, the egg-shaped walls intensify one's feeling of being ensconced in an "endless horizon" filled with trees, willows, water lilies, and clouds. Most interestingly, these plants don't appear in the paintings as themselves, but as abstract impressions of their reflections on the pond water in Monet's garden.

ductions of the 'Water Lilies'. It would be entirely impossible to feel surrounded by the scenery on all sides at different times of the day, and be able to imagine a distorted, colourful reality without the shape and grandeur of the original paintings.

This might confirm the shortcomings of mechanically reproduced art. But reproductions of the 'Water Lilies' are so vastly, so blatantly different from the originals in the effects that they produce on the viewer that it eliminates even the