

Karlyn Bortfeld

Art 201

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Art Review of *The Japanese Footbridge*



<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.74796.html>

The National Gallery of Art contains an impressionist painting by Claude Monet called *The Japanese Footbridge* from 1899. The piece was painted on a canvas and consists of a

footbridge atop a beautiful pond garden. In the pond, there are numerous water lilies dispersed across the water. Surrounding the bridge and pond is a scenery of green background plants. Monet created the oil painting in 1899, just after hand building a bridge in the backyard of his new home in Giverny, France. According to the National Gallery of Art, Monet “acquired a swampy area across the railroad tracks abutting his property and petitioned the village council for permission to divert a small stream into it.” This property later became the subject for twelve of Monet’s paintings, with *The Japanese Footbridge* being one of them. Monet explored the genre of impressionism in the painting in order to give the viewer a realistic experience of the moment that he captured.

The most notable components of *The Japanese Footbridge* are the techniques of structure and color. Monet structured the content of the painting in a symmetrically balanced format. The bridge lays at the very top of the canvas, while the pond takes up the middle and bottom section of the canvas. Due to the bridge and pond’s symmetrical balance, the painting radiates a calm, serene energy. This is because of how the symmetry creates a sense of uniformity and consistency through its safe, orderly effect. Another key aspect of the painting’s structure is how it draws the viewer’s attention to the bridge. When a form of an art piece nears the edge of the frame, it holds more weight than the other forms in the piece. Because the bridge is so close to the top edge of the frame, it causes the viewer to focus their attention on it. Overall, the structure of the painting uses balance and weight to help the audience understand the painting better.

Furthermore, *The Japanese Footbridge* utilizes color in order to enhance the serene mood, as well as improve the viewer’s depth perception. A major color harmony that is present

in the piece is the harmony of cool colors. The background behind the bridge is predominantly made of different shades of green. In front of the green plant background is the teal bridge. Below the bridge lays the bed of water, which is a reflection of the green background plants. The cool colors such as green and blue further develop the calm, tranquil mood of the painting. Monet uses different hues, tints, tones, and shades of the cool colors to create value. The value promotes a soft, yet realistic texture in order to reveal the authentic shapes of the plants, water, and bridge. Monet's use of value plays a major role in his impressionist approach because it adequately helps the viewer feel present in the moment. In addition to the different shades of cool colors, the painting includes subtle hints of warm colors. The lily pads that float on the water's surface are mostly white, but contain hints of purple, pink, red, and yellow. Monet included touches of warm colors because while cool colors tend to diminish in space, warm colors appear to be bolder and closer to the front. This improves the viewer's depth perception because it shows that the water lilies are closer to the front, while the bridge and the green plants are further away from the point of view. Thus, Monet uses color to construct a serene mood and improve depth perception.

After analyzing more of Claude Monet's paintings, it became clear that Monet tends to manipulate light in order to display nature in a unique way. In his other works such as *The Lily Pond* (1899) and *Bridge over the Lily Pond* (1899), Monet used various tints to show the texture of nature when sunlight is shined on it. Rather than using harsh lines to outline the shapes of his art, he carefully blended the hues and tints of colors to give his paintings a soft and smooth appearance. These techniques are essentially a part of Monet's impressionist approach, which is present in almost all of his works. Impressionism is described as a genre of art that uses soft

brush strokes and accentuates the appearance of light. *The Japanese Footbridge* is a perfect example of how Claude Monet executed impressionism, ultimately causing him to be seen as a primary leader of impressionism.

Sources: <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.74796.html>