

Coming next at the Courtauld Gallery



Goya to
Impressionism.
Masterpieces from
the Oskar Reinhart
Collection

14 February –
26 May 2025

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec,
Clown Cha-U-Kao, 1895, oil on
canvas, Oskar Reinhart Collection
'Am Römerholz', Winterthur

Abstract Erotic:
Louise Bourgeois,
Eva Hesse,
Alice Adams

20 June –
14 September 2025

Wayne Thiebaud.
American Still Life

10 October 2025 –
18 January 2026

Friends
go free

Find out more at courtauld.ac.uk/gallery

The Courtauld

Monet and London

Views of the Thames

**'Every day, I find London
more beautiful to paint.'**

Letter from Claude Monet,
London, 4 March 1900

Monet and London

Views of the Thames

In September 1899, Claude Monet (1840-1926) set up an easel on his hotel balcony overlooking the Thames in the heart of London and began painting what he described as 'some fog effects'. The experience so captivated him that he returned to London over several years, eventually completing a major group of paintings. They are some of the most significant representations of the Thames ever made, full of evocative atmosphere, mysterious light and radiant colour. Monet offered a new vision of London, adding to its allure as one of the world's great modern cities.

Begun over three extended stays between 1899 and 1901, Monet's paintings focus on just three sites along the Thames: Charing Cross Bridge, Waterloo Bridge and the Houses of Parliament. He was endlessly fascinated by how fog and sunlight mixed with the smoke belching from London's industrial south bank to create unique atmospheric effects over the river, which dissolved the forms of the city's mighty bridges and buildings. He wrote to his wife, Alice, 'It has to be said that this climate is so idiosyncratic; you wouldn't believe the amazing effects I have seen in the nearly two months that I have been constantly looking at this river Thames.'

Monet brought home to France over a hundred canvases of London, all unfinished. Over the following years, in his studio in Giverny, northwest of Paris, he set about completing a special group of 37 paintings, which he called *Views of the Thames*. The series was unveiled in 1904 in a dedicated



The Savoy Hotel around 1900. Monet worked from balconies on the top two floors during his stays in London.



Waterloo Bridge and the industrial south bank around the time that Monet was working in London

exhibition at the Paris gallery of Monet's dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel. Monet particularly enjoyed working in series, creating a whole visual experience from multiple canvases of a same subject. As he explained, the individual paintings 'take on their full value only in the comparison and succession of the entire series'.

The exhibition in Paris met with great critical and commercial success, cementing Monet's status as France's leading artist. He wanted to show the series in London itself in 1905, but his plans fell through. This exhibition at The Courtauld realises Monet's ambition 120 years later and presents the works just 300 metres from the Savoy Hotel, where most of them were painted. Crucially, it reunites a significant group of paintings from the original display to recreate the experience of the series that Monet conceived.

Right: Title page of the catalogue for Monet's exhibition
Views of the Thames in London, presented in Paris in 1904

GALERIES DURAND-RUEL

16, Rue Laffitte — 11, Rue Le Peletier

CLAUDE MONET

VUES DE LA TAMISE
A LONDRES

Exposition du 9 Mai au 4 Juin 1904

1 WATERLOO BRIDGE, OVERCAST WEATHER

Dated 1900

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

This richly detailed view of Waterloo Bridge on a gloomy day was painted from the balcony of Claude Monet's suite on the top floor of the Savoy Hotel. While other guests may have been taken aback by the sight of heavy industrial activity in central London, Monet was fascinated by the plumes of smoke emanating from the tall chimneys on the south bank of the Thames. What appears to us today as toxic pollution appeared to Monet as a symbol of modernity and the source of London's particular atmosphere. Smoke and coal particles merged with clouds, steam and vapour along the wide river to create the striking visual effects that so enthralled him.

Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

Donated by Ella Fry, 1905

2 WATERLOO BRIDGE, MORNING FOG

Undated

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Claude Monet relished the challenge of rendering the fleeting effects of the London fog in winter. As he told a journalist in 1901, 'The fog assumes all sorts of colours; there are black, brown, yellow, green, purple fogs and the interest in painting is to get the objects as seen through all these fogs. My practiced eye has found that objects change in appearance in a London fog more and quicker than in any other atmosphere, and the difficulty is to get every change down on canvas.' Here, buildings and objects gradually emerge from the foggy shroud, although some sections remain almost abstract.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Bequest of Anne Thomson in memory of her father, Frank Thomson, and her mother, Mary Elizabeth Clarke Thomson, 1954

3 WATERLOO BRIDGE, EFFECT OF SUNLIGHT IN THE FOG

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Claude Monet particularly favoured the pictorial device of placing at the top of his compositions a small sun – the 'little red ball', as he called it – just piercing through the fog. Its light casts a warm glow on the river below. This motif, used in other paintings in the series, creates a striking colour contrast with the surrounding darker elements. Although one imagines that this is an evening scene, the sun's easterly position disproves this. Darkness has descended not with night-time but with a thick fog.

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

4 CHARING CROSS BRIDGE. FOG ON THE THAMES

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

This view of Charing Cross Bridge strikingly differs from Claude Monet's other depictions. Instead of neatly bisecting the composition, the bridge is here seen at an angle and part of the south bank is included, albeit barely visible. In this representation, Monet has taken the dissolving effects of the fog to their extreme.

Although the dates of Monet's *Views of the Thames* range from 1900 to 1904, the artist's correspondence confirms that no work was finished until shortly before their public display in 1904. The dates inscribed on the canvases were therefore added by Monet at that time and don't necessarily correspond to their actual date of completion.

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Mass.

Gift of Mrs Henry Lyman

5 CHARING CROSS BRIDGE. SMOKE IN THE FOG; IMPRESSION

Dated 1902

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Claude Monet had first painted London in 1870, when, as a penniless artist, he had sought refuge here from the Franco-Prussian war with his wife and son. Thirty years later, he was a wealthy man able to afford London's most expensive hotel, the Savoy, which offered an unparalleled panorama of the Thames. The view up the river was dominated by the iron railway bridge leading into the recently opened Charing Cross Station. Monet's representation of trains trailing steam as they pass over the river presents London as a quintessentially modern landscape.

Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris

6 CHARING CROSS BRIDGE. THE THAMES

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

A year after purchasing this painting at the 1904 exhibition, its new owner wrote to Claude Monet, 'It is the first time that I am back in London since seeing your *Thameses*, and I must tell you all the joy I had to see once again this wonderful landscape, which you have enabled us to understand better. There was today one of those luminous half-fogs: I stopped ten times on the bridges and the banks thinking of you'. Monet's *Views of the Thames* influenced the way some people perceived the smog, which became, in their eyes, a source of poetic revelry rather than a health hazard.

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon

7 CHARING CROSS BRIDGE

Dated 1902

Oil on canvas

Claude Monet has here conjured a greater sense of depth than in most other views of Charing Cross Bridge, with the elongated towers of the Houses of Parliament in the distance and the rare inclusion of the curving Embankment in the lower right. This painting is one of three works in the exhibition not included in his inaugural display of the Thames series in 1904. It remained unfinished until 1910 when Monet completed it for a charity raffle, and backdated it to 1902. It is one of only two Thames paintings by Monet in a British public collection today (the other is no. 8), thanks to the pioneering Welsh collector Margaret Davies who bought the work in 1913.

Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales, Cardiff

Bequeathed by Margaret Davies, 1963

8 CHARING CROSS BRIDGE

Dated 1902

Oil on canvas

Claude Monet often marvelled at London's 'extraordinary fog so very yellow'. Yellow fogs were common at the time due to large concentrations of sulphurous emissions in the air. Monet complements this tone with swathes of pink and purple. The placement of the seemingly floating bridge cutting through the composition is indebted to Japanese prints, which Monet collected.

This painting was given to Winston Churchill in 1949 by his literary agent who added that he hoped Churchill, by then the Leader of the Opposition, would soon 'dissipate the fog that shrouds Westminster' - an allusion to the Houses of Parliament, visible in the distance on the right.

National Trust Collections, Chartwell (Churchill Collection)

Accepted in lieu of tax by HM Government in 1967
and transferred to the National Trust in 1984

9 WATERLOO BRIDGE, SUNLIGHT EFFECT

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Writing to his wife, Alice, from London in March 1900, Claude Monet described the day's astonishing weather: 'today's weather has been crazy, at times very fine with a delicious fog, then suddenly an extraordinary clarity and, with that, very cold with gusts of snow' In this depiction of Waterloo Bridge, one feels the crisp air that accompanies the bright sunshine turning the grey of the granite bridge into a soft pink. The golden light seems more reminiscent of the south of France or Venice (other places painted by Monet) than of England. However, the incredible variety of light and the ever-changing weather effects were precisely what so fascinated Monet about London.

The Scharf Collection

10 WATERLOO BRIDGE, VEILED SUN

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

The unveiling of the Thames series in 1904 was a revelation to visitors and critics. One stated, 'this spring 1904 ... sees the definitive recognition of Monet' while another mused, 'he will have been Impressionism all on his own'. After years of hardship, Monet was now widely recognised as France's leading painter and his works were in great demand. He continued, however, to seek new challenges. This was certainly the case with London's particular atmosphere. Monet described the 'wonderful things [he saw while in England], but none lasting more than five minutes, it is enough to drive one mad. No, there is no country more extraordinary for a painter.'

Private collection

11 WATERLOO BRIDGE, GREY WEATHER

Dated 1900

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Opened in 1817, Waterloo Bridge is the oldest of Monet's three motifs. The vehicular and pedestrian stone bridge was widely admired and reproduced in photographs and postcards. Structural issues meant it was torn down in 1934 and replaced with the current bridge. This painting brings to mind Claude Monet's description of foggy winter mornings in London that were so dark that he had to keep the lights on until at least 10 am.

Art Institute of Chicago

Gift of Mrs Mortimer B. Harris

12 WATERLOO BRIDGE, OVERCAST

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

This view of Waterloo Bridge is striking in its depth and rich tones. Despite the overcast day and the chimneys belching smoke in the background, the scene is sharp and full of captivating detail. On the river, long barges congregate around the piers of Waterloo Bridge. Meanwhile, on the bridge, horse-drawn double-decker buses and motorised vehicles crawl their way from one bank to the other.

Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen

13 WATERLOO BRIDGE, SUNLIGHT EFFECT

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Visitors to London around 1900 were struck by the scale of the Thames, the amount of daily traffic around it and the level of industrial activity along its banks. London was the most populous city in the world at the time and the Thames its vital artery. The long barges and the steamboat in the foreground of this painting, as well as the factories in the distance - which worked at full blast six days a week - are a reminder of the hidden human labour powering the city, most often in dangerous and polluted circumstances.

Denver Art Museum

Funds from Helen Dill bequest

14 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. EFFECT OF FOG, LONDON

Dated 1904

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

For his third motif in the Thames series, Claude Monet ventured out of the Savoy Hotel and crossed the river. In February 1900, he secured permission to paint the Houses of Parliament from a private terrace in St Thomas's Hospital on the south bank. Instead of the iconic Clock Tower (known as Big Ben), Monet focused on the Victoria Tower and the southern section of the building, painting its dramatic roofline as dusk descended. In its depiction of the fog over the Thames, Monet's series was sometimes compared to a well-known group of muted paintings made by the American artist James McNeill Whistler some 30 years earlier, his so-called *Nocturnes*.

Museum of Fine Arts, St Petersburg, Florida

Partial gift of Charles C. and Margaret Stevenson Henderson
and museum purchase, 1979.5

15 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT, SUNSET

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Views of the Houses of Parliament were painted on almost square canvases, an unusual format that doesn't appear in suppliers' trade books. It is likely that Claude Monet had the canvases made bespoke in London with this particular composition in mind. In contrast, representations of Charing Cross Bridge and Waterloo Bridge were painted on standard-sized, off-the-peg canvases. Despite the relative uniformity of their composition, the views of the Houses of Parliament exhibit a striking variety in their rendering of atmosphere and weather.

Hasso Plattner Collection

16 LONDON.

THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. SHAFT OF SUNLIGHT IN THE FOG

Dated 1904

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Claude Monet always painted the Houses of Parliament in the late afternoon as he particularly loved rendering the sun setting behind its towers. He despaired on foggy evenings, which disrupted his plans for a dramatic composition. He wrote to his wife, Alice, 'Here, very fine weather today and, a rare thing, sunshine, and, as I thought, the sun is already setting very far from the place that I had dreamed of having it set in a huge ball of fire behind the Parliament.' This painting and others bring to mind the loose brushwork and dramatic effects in works by J.M.W. Turner, whom Monet admired but never claimed as an influence.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

17 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT (EFFECT OF FOG)

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Claude Monet never worked on his paintings in a systematic way and did not complete them in one go. Rather, he made starts on many of them, up to several dozen at a time. As he explained, the weather in London was so changing that he could only work on a canvas for five minutes before the light and fog shifted, and he was forced to start anew or pick up an earlier canvas. All the paintings were finished in his studio in Giverny. This distance allowed Monet to exaggerate specific effects or enhance certain colours, adding to the visual power of the individual works and the coherence of the series.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Bequest of Julia W. Emmons, 1956

18 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT IN THE FOG

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

The fog (later called 'smog') that covered London in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was, to foreigners, one of its distinctive features. It took on a particular density and a variety of colours that occurred nowhere else, due to heavy industrialisation in the heart of the city. Claude Monet's ambition was to render those unique effects on canvas. He famously declared, 'I so love London! but I only love London in the winter ... Without the fog, London wouldn't be a beautiful city. It's the fog that gives it its magnificent breadth. Its regular and massive blocks become grandiose within that mysterious cloak.'

High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Purchase with Great Painting Fund in honour of Sarah Belle Broadnax Hansell

19 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. SUNSET

Dated 1904

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

Throughout Claude Monet's series, the Houses of Parliament appear 'as though constructed of different densities' from painting to painting, in the words of one 1904 critic. Here, Monet expresses the grandeur of the building by setting its dark, dramatic silhouette against an ochre fog. For contemporary audiences, the Houses of Parliament would have been instantly recognisable as an iconic London subject and a symbol of one of the world's most powerful imperial cities.

This painting became the first work from the Thames series to enter a public collection when the director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Germany purchased it in 1907.

Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Kunstmuseen Krefeld

20 THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Dated 1904

Oil on canvas

The success of the 1904 exhibition in Paris emboldened Claude Monet to make plans to show the series in London the following year. Unable to borrow back enough sold paintings from the original series, he set about completing unfinished canvases left in his studio. These, he hoped, would be 'as good as the other ones, if not better'. In the end, Monet couldn't complete enough paintings to his liking and the London exhibition never took place. This is one of the works he made for that unrealised show. In it, he returned to a light effect he particularly liked and had used in a view of the Houses of Parliament in the 1904 exhibition (no. 16 in this room).

Kunsthhaus Zurich

Gift of Walter Haefner, 1995

21 WATERLOO BRIDGE, SUNLIGHT EFFECT

Dated 1903

Oil on canvas

Included in Monet's 1904 exhibition

Views of the Thames in London

This dramatic view of Waterloo Bridge depicts one of Claude Monet's favourite light effects as powerful rays of sunshine pierce the thick cloud cover and turn a section of the Thames into a patch of gold. Unusually, the bridge is seen from further away than in other views, with at least six of its nine arches included in the composition. The distinctive cubic form of the Waterloo Flour Mill is recognisable in the centre. The blurring of water and sky in Monet's *Views of the Thames* anticipates his *Water Lilies*, which he began after his return from London and which occupied him for the rest of his life.

Milwaukee Art Museum

Bequest of Mrs Albert T. Friedmann, M1950.3

Continue your visit

Exhibition Catalogue

The richly illustrated catalogue includes four original essays that shed new light on Monet's famous Thames series. Available in The Courtauld Shop.

The Courtauld Shop

Open daily 10.00 – 18.00

Located on the Lower
Ground Floor

The Courtauld Shop offers a wide selection of postcards, books and gifts inspired by The Courtauld collection. Shop in-store or visit shop.courtauld.ac.uk

Art Café

Open daily 10.00 – 17.30

Located on the Ground
Floor, across the arches

Discover the perfect spot to relax and unwind.

Become a Friend

Get free unlimited entry to our permanent collection and exhibitions, access to presale tickets and sold-out time slots, exclusive events, discounts in The Courtauld Shop and Art Café, and much more. Join today at the ticket desk or visit courtauld.ac.uk/friends

Stay in touch

Sign up to the Courtauld Gallery newsletter to hear about exhibitions, events, news and more: visit courtauld.ac.uk/gallery