

The Garden Through Monet's Eyes

Please follow the black and white number and arrow signs for this tour which will be about an hour, or longer if you like. To begin the tour, cross the plaza to the edge of **1-Livingstone Lake** where you will see the first of VanDusen's waterlily collections.

This tour explores the connection between art and VanDusen Botanical Garden's living collections, a nod to the Vancouver Art Gallery's current exhibit of paintings by revered French impressionist painter Claude Monet. Monet's studies of waterlilies brought acclaim to the small village of Giverny about thirty minutes outside Paris. His art captured time and perspective through observations in his garden. Today, Monet's gardens of waterlilies and irises attract upwards of 600,000 visitors annually from all over the world. His plant collection helped to change the way art is both created and appreciated.

Art historians believe Monet's declining eyesight, caused by cataracts, may have contributed to his "impressionist" technique. In fact, the Impressionist movement is thought to have taken its name from the title of his most recognized early painting, *Impression, Sunrise* (referenced in the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibit but not displayed). "He just couldn't see all of the details clearly," said one of VanDusen's guides this summer. "He painted what he saw."

Here at Livingstone Lake, one of VanDusen's many water features, you can become acquainted with waterlilies, which belong to the waterlily family (Nymphaeaceae). Some 70 known species of these aquatic flowers are found in both temperate and tropical regions of planet Earth. They still grow wild in some regions, are invasive in others, and they connect symbolically to culture and history beyond French art.

The scented double-flowered white waterlily, *Nymphaea 'Gonnère'*, is just one of the hardy waterlilies growing in Livingstone Lake and other water features throughout the Garden. 'Gonnère' bears a resemblance to the wild tropical waterlily and national flower of Bangladesh, *Nymphaea nouchali*, which also has white flowers but is not suitable for our climate. The European white waterlily (*Nymphaea alba*) grows wild in parts of Scandinavia and across Europe, while a blue waterlily (*Nymphaea nouchali*) is the national flower of Sri Lanka. In Western cultures, waterlily is the birth flower for the month of July and a stylized waterlily leaf is used symbolically in European heraldry (Friesland and Denmark in particular). Some cultures include waterlily blossoms, leaves, seeds and roots among their culinary staples.

Look at the waterlilies on Livingstone Lake. If you squint your eyes slightly and pay particular attention to the reflections in the water between the plants, you can catch a glimpse of how Monet possibly saw them as he chose his brush and colours from his pallet. Giovanna Bertazzoni, the director of Christie's British auction house and a specialist in impressionist and modern art, once noted, "Claude Monet's water-lily paintings are amongst the most recognized and celebrated works of the 20th Century and were hugely influential to many of the following generations of artists."

Impressionism wasn't the only reason Claude Monet became famous. He was one of the first artists to attempt to capture the way light and objects change visually from hour to hour during the day, from week to week during the year, and from season to season during the course of a lifetime.

Those who are connected to the garden in a regular way, appreciate VanDusen's changes through the year, but the way members of the waterlily family (Nymphaeaceae) change during the day made them a perfect subject for Monet's paintings. Observed early in the morning, *Nymphaea* flowers are closed and look like large buds among the lily pads. Gradually these buds open into to a full blossom, then close again as night approaches.

The lilies on Livingstone Lake include *Nymphaea 'Charles de Meurville'* (pink), *Nymphaea 'Norma Gedye'* (pink), *'Nymphaea 'Pearl of the Pool'* (light pink), *Nymphaea 'Paul Hariot'* (white to off-white), *Nymphaea 'Gonnère'* (white), *Nymphaea 'Firecrest'* (pink with a yellow centre)

Floating among the larger lily pads you may observe smaller heart-shaped or circular leaves with small bright yellow flowers. This is an invasive species from Eurasia known as yellow floating heart (*Nymphoides peltata*). Clara Bryant Ford, the wife of Henry Ford, who revolutionized the auto industry, is believed to have planted it in ponds near their home in Michigan. Today it is the focus of a costly removal program in the Great Lakes. At VanDusen, a crew works to clear the plant every second year but it invariably returns. Uncontrolled, this little waterlily relative can choke the life out of any pond or lake.

Leave the plaza to your left and cross the small wooden bridge, bearing left as you approach the rise. Directly ahead, you will see the **2 – Phyllis Bentall Garden pool**.

Here you find a number of hardy waterlilies that can be found in other water features throughout VanDusen. Note the pots in which these lilies grow. Similar submerged and unseen pots contain waterlilies in the other areas of the garden, including those planted in the lakes and ponds. These pots help to keep one species from taking over a pond and allow plants to be moved, removed or replaced over time.

The waterlilies in the Phyllis Bentall Garden pool include *Nymphaea* 'Sioux' (white with a pink centre), *Nymphaea* 'Sunny Pink' (pink with a yellow centre), *Nymphaea* 'Texas Dawn' (yellow), *Nymphaea* 'Virginalis' (pure white with a yellow centre), *Nymphaea* 'Yul Ling' (dark red to dark pink), *Nymphaea* 'Escarboucle' (red to dark pink with pinkish white) and *Nymphaea* 'Gonnère' (white).

Now turn back and retrace your steps toward Livingstone Lake. Before you reach the small wooden bridge, turn left along the paved path that follows the southwestern shore of the lake. Stay on this path until you get to the zigzag bridge between Livingstone Lake and **3- Heron Lake**. Here you find *Nymphaea* 'Gonnère' (white), *Nymphaea* 'Escarboucle' (dark pink), *Nymphaea* 'Colonel A.J. Welch' (yellow with sharply pointed tips).

During other seasons, you will find blooming varieties of irises around the ponds at VanDusen. Irises were also the subject of paintings by Monet, as well as VanGogh. Both artists captured the flowers in their own style. Each of their paintings depicts movement, light, colour and shape, showing the power of art to capture the restless beauty of nature.

Continue across the wooden zigzag bridge and up the short rise, bear left and follow this path until you arrive at a towering grove of giant sequoias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) on the edge of the lawn. These are the largest trees in the world by mass but the trees here are infants at just 40 years old and a fraction of their mature size. To your right is a small gravel path among the California or coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) and dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), underplanted with bamboo. Follow this path to the floating bridge which crosses the **4 – R. Roy Forster Cypress Pond**.

Here, fall colour is provided by the rust-colored needles of the deciduous bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*), whose reflection can be seen in the pond. Accents of colour can be found among the waterlilies growing on either side of the bridge. Here you find *Nymphaea* 'Firecrest' (pink with a yellow centre), *Nymphaea* 'Attraction' (light to dark pink), and *Nymphaea* 'Odorata Sulphurea' (white with a yellow centre).

Squint your eyes one last time to take in the view and contemplate not only the reflection but the time of day and the time of year. These flowers and lily pads will disappear from the surface of the ponds for the winter months, leading us full circle to Tamil poetry, where the waterlily is considered symbolic of the grief of separation.

Come see our garden again next week, next month, next year.