



# Comparative Study: *Claude Monet and Hal Koenig*

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**Introduction:** This investigation explores two artists, the famous Impressionist painter Claude Monet with the works *Water Lilies* and *Landscape with Figures, Giverny*, and local Milwaukee artist Hal Koenig with the works *Bough* and *Peppers and Squash*. It is an investigation and a compare and contrast of both of their style, content, and cultural background from which their art is inspired, based on various sources that are either analysis of the artist's works and life or short biographies and presentation of formal qualities from galleries, written by the institutions that display the works. Themes of locality and reality as well as its execution will be explored in each, along with depiction of figure, form, and reality. After comparing these artist to each other, they will be compared against my own work to see how their themes and techniques affect my art.

# Evaluation of Cultural Significance: Hal Koenig, “*Bough*”

Hal Koenig is a local Milwaukee artist, with paintings and galleries in Milwaukee, Madison and Chicago. He’s been an active artist since 2005, working mainly in oil paint. He has a background working in architecture, laying down a foundation for much of his work of urban landscapes, a common subject in his paintings. It also influences the style of his paintings in their structure, accuracy, sense of detail, proportion, etc. His paintings remain fairly accurate and, while details are sometimes distorted or changed, the basic foundations of the scene are kept accurate.

This focus on urban landscapes can be seen in the first painting, *Bough*, which focuses on the natural scene but includes a city background. Koenig has also lived in the Milwaukee area where much of the quiet local scenes depicted in his works are found.<sup>1</sup> These urban environments and landscapes are what inspire his paintings, including *Bough*: a local landscape, one more intimate than what is expected of the city.<sup>2</sup> In this piece Koenig creates a peaceful place off to the side with a city set in the background, as if sharing a place one knows intimately.

<sup>1</sup> “Hal Koenig.” Artcloud, Water Street Gallery, [artcloud.com/artist/hal-koenig](http://artcloud.com/artist/hal-koenig).

<sup>2</sup> Koenig, Hal. “Landscapes.” HAL KOENIG, [www.halkoenig.com/landscapes/](http://www.halkoenig.com/landscapes/).



# Evaluation of Cultural Significance: Monet, “*Water Lilies*”

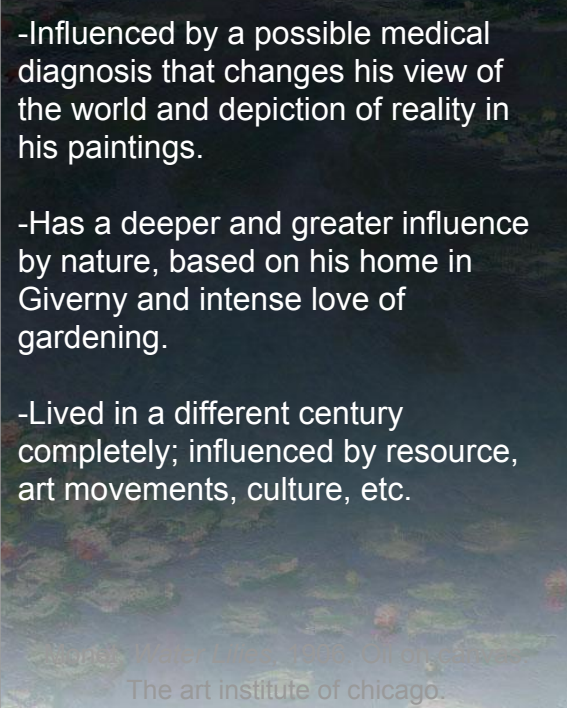
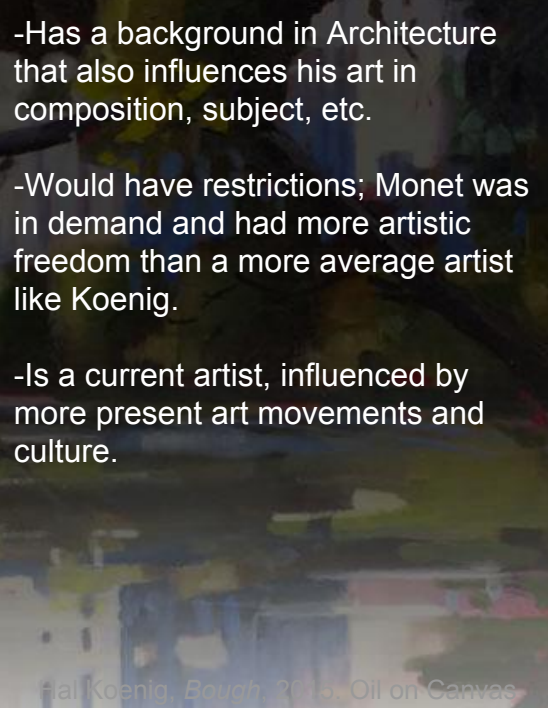
Monet is widely renowned as the pioneer of French Impressionism. One key part of his life and paintings was his Garden. In May of 1883 Monet, an established painter, moved his family to Giverny, a farming village west of Paris. It's there that he created his famed garden he would come to obsess over. Monet structured his life around the seasons, dedicating much of his time to his created landscape of nature and colors. This garden became his favorite studio, many of his paintings being done in them. Over time there was a shift where he started to include a shoreline of his Water Garden, the perspective moving lower and lower until the entire composition was of the water, which is how such famous paintings like *Water Lilies* came to be.<sup>1</sup>

Monet was also diagnosed with Nuclear Cataracts of both eyes in 1912, and it is to his vision problems that some attribute a shift in his paintings. This theory reasons that due to his own distorted view of reality, Monet painted *Water Lilies* just as he saw it.<sup>2</sup> One of the interpreted themes of this painting is the very depiction of reality, seen through the reflection of the water. This idea changes if you consider this isn't an exploration of reality, but a definition of the very way Monet saw the world.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, Robert. *Monet: The Gardener*. New York, NY, USA. Universe Publishing: Rizzoli International Publications inc., 2002. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Walsh, John. "What We See as a Blurry Paradisiacal Fog in 'Waterlilies' was, through Monet's Clouded Eyes, an Exact Representation of Reality." Independent [London, England], 3 July 1997, p. 25. Global Issues in Context, link. [galegroup.com/apps/doc/A66989224/GIC?u=gree82036&xid=f5797a1e](http://galegroup.com/apps/doc/A66989224/GIC?u=gree82036&xid=f5797a1e). Accessed 27 Mar. 2017

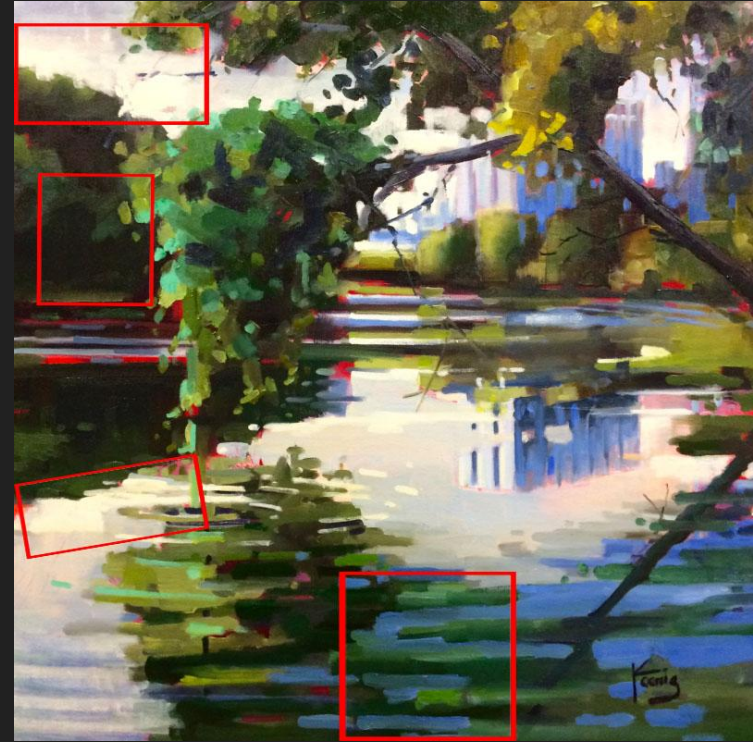
# Compare and Contrast: Cultural Context

Monet	Both	Koenig
 <p>-Influenced by a possible medical diagnosis that changes his view of the world and depiction of reality in his paintings.</p> <p>-Has a deeper and greater influence by nature, based on his home in Giverny and intense love of gardening.</p> <p>-Lived in a different century completely; influenced by resource, art movements, culture, etc.</p> <p>Water Lilies, 1906, Oil on Canvas The art institute of chicago.</p>	<p>-Were influenced by specific places: Monet by Giverny and his own personal garden, Koenig his home of the Milwaukee area</p> <p>-Show an appreciation for nature and show that small quiet scenes are a part of their major influences.</p> <p>-Influenced by the Impressionist movement, one working during it and one working after it.</p> <p>-While living and working in different countries, both seem to focus on small anonymous scenes, less than recognizable facets of their respective countries.</p>	 <p>-Has a background in Architecture that also influences his art in composition, subject, etc.</p> <p>-Would have restrictions; Monet was in demand and had more artistic freedom than a more average artist like Koenig.</p> <p>-Is a current artist, influenced by more present art movements and culture.</p> <p>Boath, 2016, Oil on Canvas</p>

# Analysis of formal qualities: *Bough*

In the piece *Bough* a landscape is painted using **blocks of color**, reminiscent of an Impressionist style of painting. Some figures are closer together and blended (such as the nature in the background). These areas are also filled with more **darker colors** to set them in the background. The water is where the brushstrokes are the most divided, creating a **ripple effect** and adding to the depiction of the natural part of the scene. The water and sky have the values closest to white, as the **light source** and the **reflection** of it. Blocks of blue are set into the reflection of the the Bough to create the effect of a ripple in the water, as well as longer and more whole brush strokes to alter the form of the Bough in the reflection.

There's a sense of **movement** as the ripple comes toward the viewer, and where the leaves of the Bough hang down in a graceful way where they'd be blowing in the wind. The blocks of color are also most prevalent in the **foreground** and in the center of the painting to create these effects. This is most effective in the leaves of the bough; those hanging down and also in the reflection. The **repetition** created by these marks also creates a sense of **rhythm**, giving it a natural consistency.



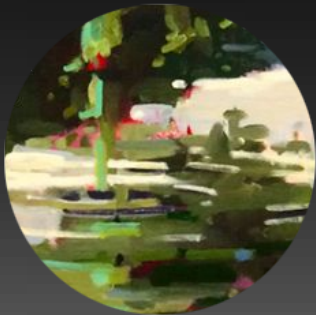
Hal Koenig, *Bough*, 2015. Oil on Canvas.



# Interpretation of Function and Purpose: *Bough*

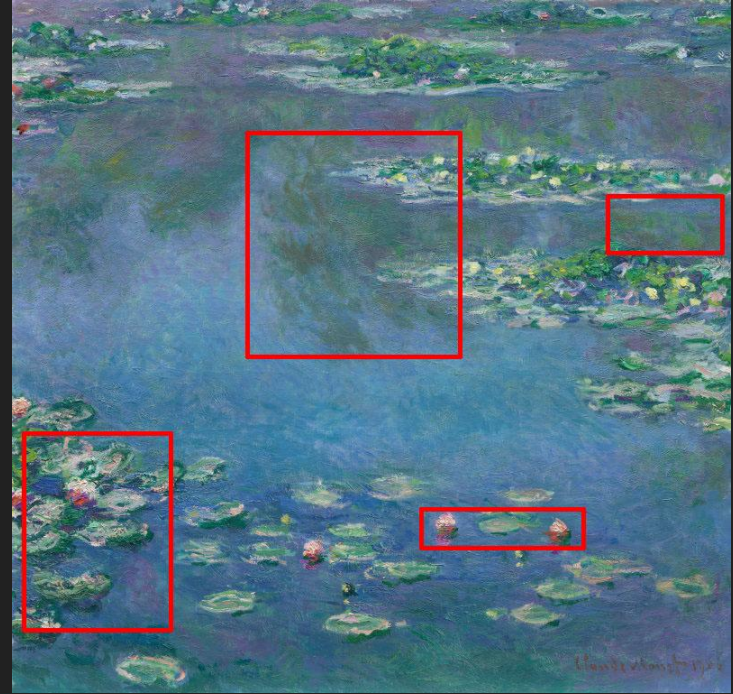
My interpretation of this painting is that it's meant to capture the beauty of a quiet, sunny scene. You don't have to be familiar with the area to get a feel for it; there's a certain intimacy in the small scene paired with the anonymity of it that makes it **generalizable**. It's relatable to the extent that the viewer can feel it without knowing it. The use of larger blocks of color in the water creates a ripple that can clearly be identified by the viewer, the lights and darks in the landscape and water show the light and reflection that can be identified clearly. There's also the color and form of the leaves in the overhanging tree. All of these things are **common** and **anonymous**, making this scene identifiable, but allowing it to retain uniqueness in the details. There is no action conveyed, no story, just a picture in time in a quiet place. The color, composition, use of light/dark, saturation, etc., all come together to create a calm and positive mood.

With the buildings reduced to the background and small sections of the main painting, the nature is actively covering up the urban scene in the back, isolating the spot and encapsulating the viewer in this scene. This also focuses on the nature, having it feel more important than the busy city it's covering up.



# Analysis of Formal Qualities: *Water Lilies*

The piece *Water Lilies* is comprised of a variation of **dull colors** applied with long brush strokes. Most of the colors are **cool colors**, overwhelmingly blue and green in keeping with the landscape, with dulled down spots of **warm colors** along the flowers, which makes these areas pop slightly from their surrounding as a result, creating **emphasis**, but also mix in with blue overtones so as to mediate the objects. These spots are also highlighted with whites, a primary way of separating them from the background/water. While the land beyond the pond isn't seen, there is a clear **reflection** in the water of a tree and surrounding nature. Not only is this shape clearly established in the viewer's mind, it's position and application through more broken and wavy brushstrokes show that it is a reflection on the water. This also creates **movement** to add to the landscape and draw the viewer's eye around the piece. The painting also establishes movement through the **placement** and spacing of the Lilies so the viewer has a **hierarchy of objects** to follow. The Lilies, as the only concrete objects, show the the lack of **line** in the painting, ridding the objects of any concrete restrictions. Finally the painting shows **perspective** through how the Lilies vary in size as they are closer to the viewer. All of these qualities contribute to creating a fuzzy, uneasy depiction of reality.



Monet, *Water Lilies*, 1906. Oil on canvas. The art institute of chicago.

# Interpretation of Function and Purpose: *Water Lilies*



One interesting fact about the painting *Water Lilies* is that it is *not* one of a kind. There are many variations of what seems to be the same painting. At first the Lilies were merely a feature, yet as time went on they became the subject.<sup>1</sup> This framework presents a new narrative of the world around it, seen only in the reflection of the water. First we're drawn to the Lilies, then to the reflection as the next near-concrete image, yet set in the water it's distorted and creates an **illusion-like** scene. Here you can't even quite tell what is being depicted, taking Impressionism to a new height in using shapes to imply objects. The purpose of this scene seems to be to explore a traditional subject (landscape) through a more distorted view (the water, a perceived **reality unto itself**).<sup>2</sup> This can be seen at the top and middle, with the reflection of the trees, already hazy, broken up by the Lilies. The purpose of the Lilies seems to be to draw the viewer back from the distorted reality seen in the water but also to comment that even as the anchor of the painting and the most concrete object, the Lilies are also uncertain.

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, Robert. *Monet: The Gardener*. New York, NY, USA. Universe Publishing: Rizzoli International Publications inc., 2002. Print.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*,



# Compare and Contrast

## *Bough*

## *Water Lilies*

-Aesthetically driven

-Explores the surrounding world through a new narrative

-Depiction of the landscape; approach and mood created

-Impressionistic use of blocks of color in place of traditional blending techniques

-A scene meant to capture beauty; aesthetic focus

-Less concerned with beauty, more about the reality of the scene/depiction of reality

-Vibrant colors, lighter mood and appreciation of beauty

-Nature based scenes, natural expression of light and dark

-Some contrast present in both

-Dull colors, low saturation & vibrancy to affect the mood

-High contrast in color and light, brushstrokes in blocks

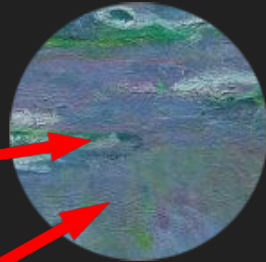
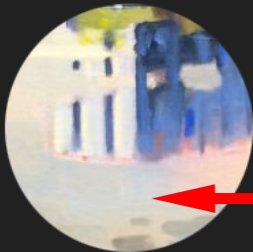
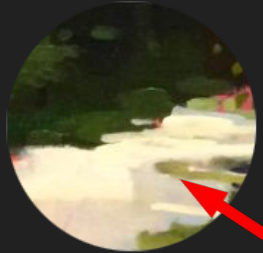
-Secluded scene with a sense of intimacy and personal feelings

-Low contrast, more blending overall.

-Water less central to the piece, just a part of a larger scene.

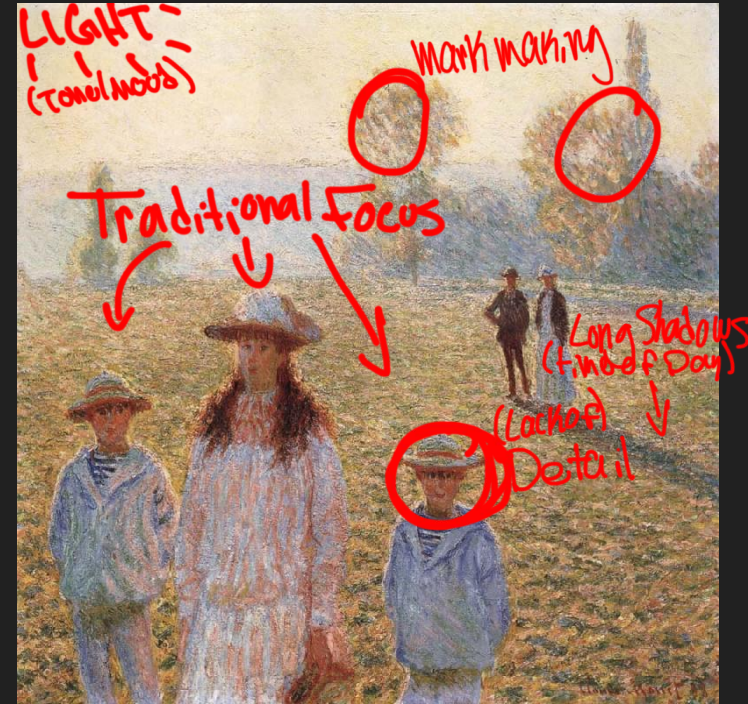
-Water-based scene

-Water a focus; central to composition, meaning, etc.



# Analysis of formal qualities: Monet, “*Landscape with figures, Giverny*”

This painting’s most obvious function is the exploration of **light**. The light has a significant effect on the painting’s mood, themes, etc., by altering how the viewer perceives the scene (level of light = the levity of the scene), as well as affecting color, figure, etc. through similar ways. The **colors** are dulled down some but mainly **warm** in the rise or fall of the sun, unseen. Color and light together create the **mood** of the piece, conveying positive feelings about the scene with frequent use of warm colors and light. This painting also explores both nature and human figures; the figures are considerably **undetailed**, especially in key parts like the face. The nature, set mostly in the background, creates the setting which these figures interact with. Monet continuously uses **line** in a more undefined way for figures, landscape, etc., creating a sense of equal importance. Despite this the figures remain distinct and a focus of the painting even though they’re not sharp or refined, due to the **perspective** and placing figures in the **foreground**. The brushstrokes are short and unblended blocks of color, true to more early works of Monet, and show a clear sense of **movement** through the direction of these marks over the landscape and partially the figures.



Claude Monet, *Landscape with figures, Giverny*, 1888. Oil on Canvas.

# Interpretation of Function and Purpose: Monet



There are a few key qualities of this painting that are common across many of Monet's works, like the landscape, true to the Impressionist style as it explores the scene through **color** and **warmth** and attempts to capture **movement** through short brushstrokes. There is also the exploration of **light** that is famous in Monet's work. Capturing the scene in different light shifts how color functions in the piece, the perception of warmth, the **exposure/clarity** of subjects which can all change **tone** and **meaning**. There's also the time of the day, with the color of the landscape and the long shadows being cast. It's unclear whether this is sunset or sunrise, but with the long drawn out **shadows** cast by the figures it gives the impression of the end of long day. This interpretation changes how we feel about the scene being captured, as it changes the **narrative** being presented. Feelings are also created through the mix of warm colors and shadows, the day itself being good, creating **calm** and **peaceful** feelings. There are also the figures, with a clear direction, all depicted in a very **simple** manner. This is intended to draw attention away from the details of the people and create a more holistic scene where the nature, movement, light, etc., all are created on equal ground. This leads to the **purpose** of capturing all of these positive feelings and directing them towards the scene as a whole, not settled centrally around the figures or action or nature. Another purpose could lie in the exploration of **light** and its effect on a scene.



# Analysis of Formal Qualities: Koenig, “Peppers and Squash”

This is a painting bursting with color. The main subject, the man, is actually quite dull considering the objects around him. **Focus** seems to be shifted away from him as he is dressed in grey and white and his face is left mostly without **detail**. The other figures appear to be somewhat smudged/distorted as well, but as the main subject the man is expected to have a high amount of attention and detail, giving off a lot of information to the viewer, yet is left to be defined by shadows and shapes rather than the details. This allows the viewer to travel away from him easily, to the surrounding environment. The **style** in which the painting is done is similar to the Impressionist style, with blocks of colors being used to create shapes rather than blending and refining. Using unblended brushstrokes this technique more implies the shapes and actions. There is a sense of **movement** in the painting, told through the **composition**; how the figure is positioned and the vegetables are laid out. This is affected by the weight of the **colors** (like the expanse of black weighing down the vegetables at the bottom or the use of light against dark to set some in the background). In regards to color, there is a balanced use of **warm** and **cool** to create a contrast, often cool being used to divide the blocks of warm (squash, cabbage, etc.). There is also a **border**, a white and jagged frame to the painting that gives the painting even more of a **personal** feeling to the viewer, being an uneven, informal edge.



Hal Koenig, *Peppers and Squash*, 2013, Watercolor on arches paper

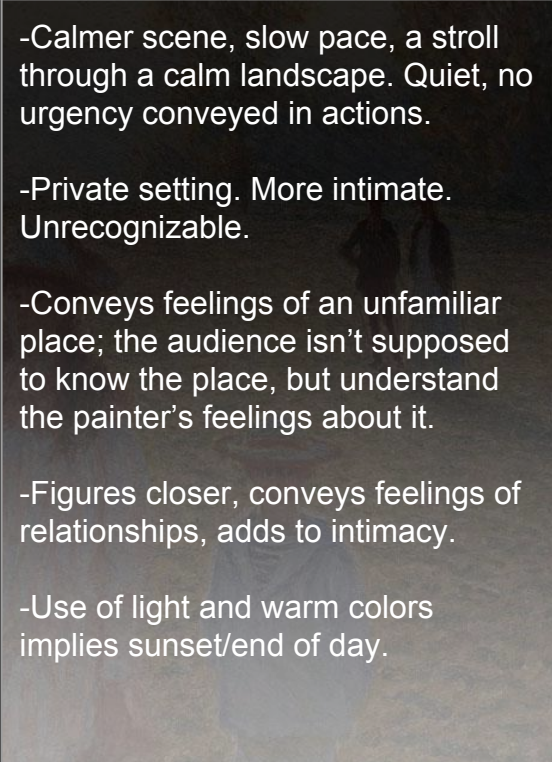
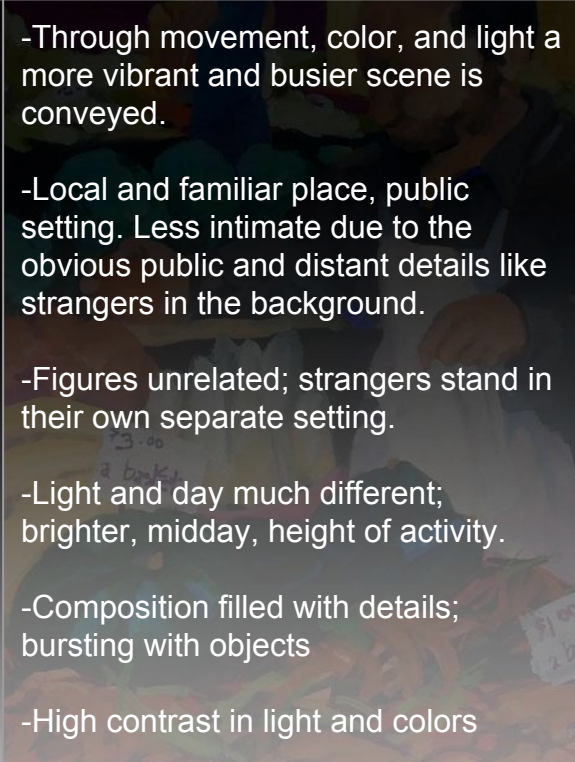
# Interpretation of Function and Purpose: Koenig

The purpose of this painting was to create a depiction of an urban landscape: local, familiar. This piece shows an ordinary place lit up with vibrant colors; ordinary people as they are but **redefined** as the subject of a painting surrounded by an appealing arrangement of shape and color. To change the relationship between the figure and its environment, Koenig uses the level of detail and brushstrokes to relate objects that might otherwise be ranked differently on a **hierarchy**, leveling the playfield in a sense. This way the vegetables are given the same blurry amount of attention as the figures, and create a holistic scene. There's also the anonymity of the scene, with hardly any specific details that make it very very personal. In fact, it's the blurry-ness and lack of specifics in the scene that make it generalizable, as it can be related to other scenes in a person's life. Even just the portrayal of the main figure's movement conveys this; this action is not unique or interesting, but it conveys **familiarity**.

The purpose of this piece is to show a small, intimate scene that the artist doesn't feel should be passed over. It's to emphasize parts of a scene that may be ignored, like the **vibrance** of the vegetables, **cohesivity** of the man and his vegetable stand, or scene as a whole.



# Compare and Contrast: Figures vs Squash

<i>Landscape with Figures, Giverny</i>	Similarities	<i>Peppers and Squash</i>
 A painting of a calm landscape with figures in the foreground, rendered in soft, warm tones. <p>-Calmer scene, slow pace, a stroll through a calm landscape. Quiet, no urgency conveyed in actions.</p> <p>-Private setting. More intimate. Unrecognizable.</p> <p>-Conveys feelings of an unfamiliar place; the audience isn't supposed to know the place, but understand the painter's feelings about it.</p> <p>-Figures closer, conveys feelings of relationships, adds to intimacy.</p> <p>-Use of light and warm colors implies sunset/end of day.</p>	<p>-Warm colors which change the depiction of the scene/alter function and purpose with mood.</p> <p>-Use of blocks of color; impressionist technique.</p> <p>-Blurry figures; lack of detail in traditionally important places; depiction of figures</p> <p>-Clear movement/action that alter the mood even more with how the figures are interacting with the environment/what they're doing.</p>	 A painting of a busy, vibrant scene with many figures and objects, rendered in bright, contrasting colors. <p>-Through movement, color, and light a more vibrant and busier scene is conveyed.</p> <p>-Local and familiar place, public setting. Less intimate due to the obvious public and distant details like strangers in the background.</p> <p>-Figures unrelated; strangers stand in their own separate setting.</p> <p>-Light and day much different; brighter, midday, height of activity.</p> <p>-Composition filled with details; bursting with objects</p> <p>-High contrast in light and colors</p>



# Compare and Contrast: Artists

## Monet

- More concerned with how typical conventions can affect the mood, meaning, etc. of a scene.
- More blending; monet had a softer approach to painting.
- Depicts more secluded scenes, creating a much calmer scene overall. More nature, garden or farm scenes.
- Low saturation/vibrancy; colors muted; typically uses more cool colors.
- Relies more heavily on conventions like light and shadow to alter mood, action, etc.

## Koenig

- A facet of Koenig's work seems to be that it's, in part, aesthetically driven. This is to capture beauty of these scenes.
- Brushstrokes remained primarily in blocks, less blending as a whole.
- Public and urban landscapes dominate Koenig's paintings.
- Much higher saturation of colors. Higher vibrancy overall. Blend of both, but typically uses more warm colors.
- Has hints of superficiality in the pieces

- Concerned themselves with the surrounding landscape and how it affected their work.
- Used blocks of color when painting to substitute traditional painting techniques; impressionist style
- Were influenced by local or highly personal scenes.
- Used blurred figures, focus on nature

# Connections to own art

Both Monet and Koenig inspired a purposeful use of nature and color in my own work. I focused on these aspects in creating a piece, *Father (to Son)*, a digital collage/drawing that explores cycles of life along with cycles of nature. Trouble came from connecting the piece to the artists due to their traditional medium and this piece's digital medium.

Still, it explores visual qualities like the effect of color on the tone of the piece. Here the selective color creates an emphasis on important figure,

a convention used in works like Monet's *Water Lilies*, where the flowers on the lilies have dots of warm colors like red against the overwhelming use of cold colors like blues and greens, creating an emphasis that makes them pop out more against the background. The use of color and light in Monet and Koenig's work influenced this one greatly.



Another example is how in Koenig's painting *Bough*, the use of light outlines key figures in the painting and makes them more noticeable. Other than color and light, nature is a very common subject of these painters works. Landscapes are their focus even when figures are involved, and their use of nature inspired its use in

this piece. Here the nature is a focus its own along with the figures, similar to the treatment of subjects in Monet's *Landscape with Figures*,

*Giverny*. There, however, it is a landscape with figures almost coming second, whereas the roles are almost reversed here. While the nature aspects are more detailed they function more supplementary due to their size and placement. Relating to Koenig's work stylistically, Koenig focuses primarily on aesthetics. Much of the details in the trees are also for this purpose.

# Compare and contrast: use of color

## Own

## Monet

-Little manipulation of warm and cool colors

-Manipulation of warm/cool colors to change the tone of the piece

-Colors that are present are mainly warm, with no mix. Less major use than in Monet's work.

-Color affects mood. Ex. calm tone in *Water Lilies* or warm/positive feelings in *Father (to Son)*

-Explores a range of emotions; Ex. a calm feeling through the use of cool colors

-Less careful use of color; it's role in the piece is less important and so the colors don't always match themes or intended tones.

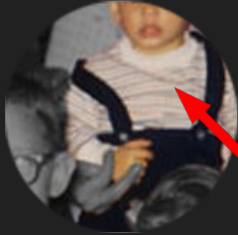
-Color creates an emphasis on certain parts of the painting (figure in my own, lilies in *Water Lilies*, etc.)

-The colors are largely influenced by the medium, creating a fuzzy blended effect. This is different from digital/photography mediums.

-No progression or thoughtful transition of colors; the use is more of an overall scheme.

-Color scheme acts unifying across pieces

-An expanse of colors with a variety of blending across the piece; variation across the scheme

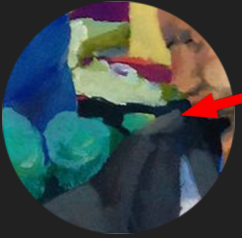
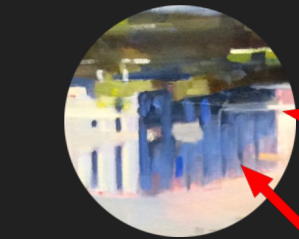




# Compare and contrast: use of nature

## Koenig

## Own



-Nature and landscape-based; wanted to show the beauty of the scene

-Meant to capture the beauty of a *moment*, rather than anything long-term or over time.

-Completely immersed in nature with regards to themes and deeper meanings. Little deeper personal connections.

-While figures and nature may share a space, nature tends to override in Koenig's work.

-Nature functioned supplementary rather than a focus. Depicted a story.

-Aesthetically driven use of nature and details in it.

-Can be created to coexist with the figures in the piece, sharing focus.

-While only supplementary in own piece, both have a use of nature imperative to the purpose of the piece.

-Sequential; showed a progression of this nature instead of a single scene

-Themes completely based on personal connections; nature acts as a supplement to these themes, showing much more deeper meaning.

-Figures are very obviously the focus of this piece, not nature.

# Compare and Contrast: Themes

## Father (to Son)

-Highly personal; focused on a life and a story rather than a particular scene or exploration.

-Addresses specific themes of cycles of life and connections between family portrayed visually

-Coexistence between figures and nature

-Figures used become personal; tells a story

-Implies narrative

-Deeper meaning through composition

-Familiarity, intimacy

-Influenced by surroundings & upbringing

-Nature supporting themes

-Themes of reality and questioning its depiction

-Focuses on aesthetics; captures a scene

-Feelings of intimacy come from the closeness of the scene, rather a personal connection

-Highlighting of a scene previously overlooked

-Capturing landscape based scenes, highlighting nature

-Capturing a single scene

-While choices can imply deeper meaning, not always as personal. Much less figure-focused.

## Koenig:

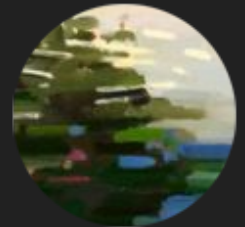
*Bough & Peppers and Squash*

## Monet:

*Water Lilies & Landscape with figures, Giverny*

# Reflection of materials, conceptual and cultural context

While the materials used are extremely different (traditional vs digital medias), similar effects are attempted. For example the mark making in both Koenig and Monet's paintings are distinctly impressionistic, consisting of blocks of color that imply shape, line and movement. Similarly in the piece *Father (to Son)*, short lines make up the bit of drawing done of the nature. These drawings also, however, come only in white, rather the colors that Monet and Koenig utilize in their pieces. The cultural context of Monet's paintings would be very different from my own, Monet being a famous painter in the 1800s. Koenig would be more similar, as a living and currently working local artist, yet it still differs; Koenig is influenced by his background in architecture as well as local landscapes, yet neither a focus on architecture or local landscapes show in my own work. Rather, the cultural context of this piece would be a more family-oriented piece, focused around a specific family member/their life and experience. People influencing these painters isn't unheard of either; Monet often painted his wife and daughters,<sup>1</sup> yet the role of these influences was much less in Monet and Koenig's work than how it shows in this piece. I find most of the connections a general success, and the differences are intentional, to make the piece more of my own, yet I do believe there could be more connections. Doing the piece over there could definitely be more consideration on connecting back to the artists more strongly, especially on use of nature and themes.



<sup>1</sup>Gordon, Robert. *Monet: The Gardener*. New York, NY, USA. Universe Publishing: Rizzoli International Publications inc., 2002. Print.