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## A Japanese Collector's Long-Lost Monet Has Been Rediscovered in the Louvre's Storage Space

The heavily damaged work is now in Tokyo for restoration ahead of its display next year.

**Javier Pes**, February 27, 2018



The Louvre. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.

A painting by Claude Monet of water lilies and willow trees that disappeared in France during World War II has been recovered in a surprising location: a storage facility at the Louvre Museum.

*Water Lilies: Reflection of Willows* (1916) was one of many works by the French Impressionist that the ship building tycoon Kojiro Matsukata bought in the early 1920s. Tucked away for safe-keeping during the war, it hadn't been seen for more than 60 years. Now recovered, the canvas is due to go on show at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo in 2019.

According to [Japanese media reports](#), a French researcher found the painting rolled up in a Louvre storage space in September 2016. (A representative for the Paris museum did not immediately respond to a request for comment.)

News of the discovery remained under wraps until yesterday, when the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo announced that the large, heavily damaged canvas would go on view in the summer of 2019 following conservation. Around half of the painted surface is reported to be missing.

The museum's director, Akiko Mabuchi, told the *Asahi Shimbun* that the damaged painting is "a valuable work that is indispensable in research of Monet." According to the Japanese newspaper, the work is a study for the *Water Lilies* series at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.

During the 1920s and '30s, Matsukata kept many works from his vast collection, including the four-meter-wide Monet canvas, in Paris for safekeeping. He intended eventually to build a modern art museum for his collection in Tokyo, but the plan was never realized.

The National Museum of Western Art was established after the war to house what survived of Matsukata's collection, which was handed over to the Japanese state by the French government in 1959. But *Water Lilies: Reflection of Willows* had long ago gone missing. It was believed to be lost until its rediscovery last year.

Matsukata first visited Monet at his home in Giverny in 1921. (They were introduced by a mutual friend, the French wartime leader Georges Clemenceau.) According to legend, Matsukata handed him a check for one million francs, politely rejecting Clemenceau's suggestion that Monet offer him a discount. By 1922, the Japanese collector owned 25 paintings by the artist.

But Matsukata's dream of opening a museum of Western art in Tokyo never materialized. In 1927, he was forced to sell much of his art in Japan after a financial crisis hit his shipyard. His misfortunes continued when around 400 of his works stored in London were destroyed in a fire.

His holdings in Paris were more fortunate. Around 400 of them were left in the care of his art advisor, Léonce Bénédicté, the director of the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. The French government sequestered much of the France-based collection in 1944 before returning it to Japan in 1959.