

Work and Industry

The Gare St- Lazare by Claude Monet

The artist visited this railway on several occasions painting sometimes, as with this image from within the station itself. Why such a fascination? Remember for some the freedom that railways provided in the 1870's was new – liberating.

Obviously the engines are different from those now adays but whereas now power and speed are conveyed by trains rushing through stations these would have been powerful in other ways. Noisy, hissing and obvious moving parts were all part of steam locomotion.

When we go to stations now they are usually quite clean, would this have been clean. Not only steam but coal dust and smoke from the burning coal. Added to that there would have been gas lights so quite a different atmosphere.

Look at the arches, these would have been for the storing of parcels and goods to be transported, perhaps even coal to load before a journey. You can often still see these arches near railways, filled with cafes, shops, workshops.

Monet has worked to convey the aspect of inside and outside with a contrast with the clouds of the sky and the steam. The glass roof with its strong girder structure also allows glimpses of the sky. He further brings the outside in by including the almost horizontal line of the bridge in the background. Iron was an important material for structures at this time and you can see it used in a decorative way as part of an arch on the right of this image.

Look at the way Monet has used his oil paints – although many of the aspects, the engines and the people appear black like they would have been painted using a mix of pigments including red and blue and yellows to gain the different shades. As he is using oils he is able to use white both in the clouds and the steam.

Look carefully and you will see that the artist has used Cobalt Blue and Vermillion to create highlights on the nearest engine, one of the lamps and some figures. This would have been pure, unmixed pigment applied at the end of the painting.

Does this painting manage to convey the sounds, smells and business of the station. Look at the people there isn't much space between them giving a feeling of crowds. Their focus appears to be towards the train on the left, perhaps they are waiting to start their journey.

This station is still in Paris, try to find it on a map. Where do the trains go to now?

What else can you spot, perhaps you can search for some of his other paintings of this particular station.