

# Manet and His Influence

It is hard to image a time when Paris was without broad, tree-lined streets or when the life of the city did not interest French artists. Yet this was the case in 1850 when Manet began to study painting. Young artists could expect to succeed only through the official Academy exhibitions known as Salons, whose conservative juries favored biblical and mythological themes and a polished technique. Within twenty-five years, however, both Paris and painting had a new look. Renovations had opened the wide avenues and parks we know today, and painting was transformed when artists abandoned the transparent glazes and blended brushstrokes of the past and turned their attention to life around them. Contemporary urban subjects and a bold style, which offered paint on the canvas as something to be admired in itself, gave their art a strong, new sense of the present.

More than in his teacher's studio, Manet learned to paint in the Louvre by studying old masters. He was particularly impressed by Velázquez, contrasting his vivid brushwork with the "stews and gravies" of academic style. Manet began to develop a freer manner, creating form not through a gradual blending of tones, but with discrete areas of color side by side. He drew on the old masters for structure, often incorporating their motifs, but giving them a modern cast.

Several artists had begun to challenge the stale conventions of the Academy when Manet's *Olympia* (over) was accepted for the Salon in 1865. Never had a work caused such scandal. Critics advised pregnant women to avoid the picture, and it was rehung to thwart vandals. Viewers were not used to the painting's flat space and shallow volumes. To many, Manet's "color patches" appeared unfinished. Even more shocking was the frank honesty of his courtesan: her boldness—not nudity—offended. Her languid pose copied a Titian Venus, but Manet did not cloak her with mythology. She is not a remote goddess but emphatically in the present, easily recognized among the *demimonde* of prostitutes and dancehalls. In *Olympia*'s steady gaze there is no apology for sensuality and, for uncomfortable viewers, no escaping her "reality."

Manet's *succès de scandale* made him a leader of the avant-garde. In the evenings at the Café Guberois, near his studio, he was joined by writers and artists, including Monet, Bazille, and others who would go on to organize the first impressionist exhibition. Manet's embrace of what Baudelaire termed the "heroism of modern life" and his bold manner with paint inspired the future impressionists, though Manet never exhibited with them.



Edouard Manet

French, 1832–1883

## *The Old Musician*, 1862

During Manet's lifetime the population of Paris increased fourfold. By the 1860s more than a hundred thousand people were officially listed as indigent—and many more were missed by the census. Napoleon III appointed Baron Georges Haussmann to devise a master plan for the city, giving him a broad mandate and funds for its modernization and revitalization.

The grand boulevards that we associate with Paris today replaced the cramped and irregular streets of the older city, and new railway stations, bridges, and public monuments were built. Many poor sections—such as the Petite Pologne near Manet's studio—were completely razed. This painting, the largest and most ambitious Manet had yet undertaken, is a catalogue of the people displaced by these renovations: strolling musicians, gypsies, ragpickers, street acrobats, drunks. He presented these dispossessed characters—people he may have seen in his neighborhood—with neutral detachment, arranging them friezelike along the narrow plane of the foreground. They are impassive and silent, connected only by their common poverty and homelessness. A disquieting ambiguity and emotional distance—attitudes that mark Manet's work—lend a modern feel. Appearing in an open space—recently cleared perhaps?—these people are equally displaced in Manet's art and in real life.

Oil on canvas, 1.874 x 2.483 m (73 3/4 x 97 3/4 in.). Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.162



Edouard Manet

## *Oysters*, 1862

One of Manet's earliest still lifes, *Oysters* was reportedly painted for his fiancée and remained with them in the family home. The painting was in the artist's studio at the time of his death, however, so this may only be a romantic fiction.

Manet spent long hours in the Louvre, studying and copying the works of the past. Here, cool subdued colors recall seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, while the simple subject and thick application of paint show the influence of the eighteenth-century French artist Chardin.

The heavy yellow paint puckers in imitation of the lemons' pebbly skins, while the wet surface of the cut fruit is smooth and flat, sectioned by a few spare strokes. The oysters, plump and slick from a distance, appear upon closer inspection to be formed by a few swift undulations of a brush laden with thick paint. This work from the early 1860s reveals Manet's developing style. Sudden transitions of color within a limited range—not a continuous and gradual modulation of tone—give shape to his objects. Each color, each brushstroke, stands independently on the canvas; it is in our eye that they blend to create form.

Oil on canvas, .391 x .476 m (15 3/8 x 18 3/8 in.). Gift of the Adele R. Levy Fund, Inc. 1962.3.1



Edouard Manet

## *The Dead Toreador*, probably 1864

In 1864 Manet exhibited a large painting he called *Episode from a Bullfight*. Critics complained that its image of a fallen matador was out of proportion to the bull that had just gored him. "A wooden bullfighter, killed by a horned rat," one sneered. At some point, Manet cut the painting apart, creating two smaller, more powerful works: the *Dead Toreador*, here, and the *Bullfight*, now in the Frick Collection, New York.

Although Manet may have acted in response to the harsh criticism, it was not uncommon for him to rework compositions. He repainted the background, extracting the figure from the context of the bullfight—and in so doing changed the nature of his painting. The fallen matador is no longer part of a narrative but is instead an icon, an isolated and compelling figure of sudden and violent death. From the now featureless background the man's body is dramatically foreshortened, thrusting toward the viewer. Its proximity and isolation are startling. Only the man's costume informs us about him, traces of blood the only signs of a painful death.

Manet's choice of a Spanish subject—he did many early in his career—reflects his interest in the seventeenth-century painter Velázquez, as does the dramatic organization of the composition and his palette of rich, dark tones.

Oil on canvas, .759 x 1.533 m (29 7/8 x 60 3/8 in.). Widener Collection 1942.9.40



**Claude Monet**  
French, 1840–1926

***Bazille and Camille (Study for Déjeuner sur l'Herbe), 1865***

An elegant young couple steps into a sunlit clearing from the cool of the Fontainebleau forest. Brightness dances off their clothes, creating the strong highlights that define the curve of the man's hat and catch the bunched hem of the woman's dress. Shadows fall, not in blacks or grays, but as deeper concentrations of the colors around them.

Monet was one of the young artists who frequented the Café Guberois, where Manet and other members of the avant-garde discussed art and literature. Monet championed painting out-of-doors—*en plein air*—as the only way to capture the sensory experience of light and atmosphere. He sought to transcribe a single instant onto the canvas, and here that momentary quality is enhanced by the pose of the couple, who seem only to have paused. Monet knew the pair. The man is his friend and fellow painter Frédéric Bazille, described by novelist Emile Zola as we see him: “Blond, tall and thin, very distinguished....” The woman may be Monet's mistress Camille, whom he would eventually marry.

This painting was made as an oil sketch for a much larger work (15 x 20 feet) whose size made painting outdoors impossible. Instead Monet made smaller preparatory paintings out-of-doors, including this one. Only fragments of the final large canvas survive. Monet left it with a landlord to cover a debt, and it was ruined by moisture and neglect.

Oil on canvas, .930 x .689 m (36 5/8 x 27 1/8 in.).  
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection 1970.17.41



**Edouard Manet**

***The Tragic Actor (Rouvière as Hamlet), 1866***

Philibert Rouvière stands before us as he did before Parisian theatergoers as Shakespeare's melancholy prince of Denmark, isolated on stage during one of the play's great soliloquies. The actor, who had been trained as a painter, modeled his portrayal of Hamlet on engravings of scenes from the play by Delacroix. Critics were pleased with Rouvière's highly pitched, emotional performance, but not the public. He ended his career destitute and discouraged, and died shortly before Manet completed this portrait.

There was a long French tradition of painting actors in their most famous roles, but Manet's Rouvière may also owe something to a work by Velázquez that Manet saw in Spain, where he had gone in 1865 following the controversy stirred by *Olympia*. Here, as in Velázquez's painting, only the angular shadows cast by the actor's legs anchor him to the ground; we concentrate only on the particulars of his posture, expression, and the minimal props around him. His costume is an orchestration of blacks—glossy and flat, tinged with blues or greens or browns—applied with the kind of energetic brushstrokes that Manet admired in the work of Velázquez, whom Manet once praised as the “painter of painters.”

Oil on canvas, 1.872 x 1.081 m (73 3/4 x 42 1/2 in.). Gift of Edith Stuyvesant Gerry 1959.3.1



**Frédéric Bazille**  
French, 1841–1870

***Young Woman with Peonies, 1870***

Perhaps because he died so young—killed during the Franco-Prussian War only days short of his twenty-ninth birthday—Bazille's name is less familiar than those of the other founders of impressionism. Bazille met Monet, Renoir, and Sisley as fellow students in the studio of painter Charles Gleyre. The four were unimpressed by the lofty religious and mythological subjects and polished painting style demanded by the academic tradition. They were attracted instead to the broad “unfinished” brushwork of Manet and also shared his preference for scenes of modern life.

This painting can be seen as Bazille's homage to Manet. The flower vendor appears to be a reference to the black woman with the extravagant bouquet who stands behind Manet's infamous nude *Olympia*. The flowers themselves, especially the prominent peonies, also offer a kind of tribute. Manet cultivated peonies and often painted their lush blooms. Here Bazille seems to have matched even his painting style—usually more smoothly blended—to Manet's own, echoing with his brushstrokes Manet's thick patches of color.

Bazille, who was from a well-to-do family in the south of France, came originally to Paris to study medicine. Better off than his friends Monet and Renoir, he often helped them by buying their canvases and offering shelter, and on occasion dispensing limited medical advice.

Oil on canvas, .603 x .755 m (23 3/4 x 29 3/4 in.).  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1983.1.6



**Edouard Manet**

***Ball at the Opera, 1873***

Manet came from a well-to-do family, and this painting provides a glimpse of the sophisticated Parisian world he loved. He was uncomfortable in the countryside, preferring instead the dress finery of the city. These elegant men and coquettish young women are attending a masked ball held each year during Lent. “Imagine,” ran a description in the newspaper *Figaro*, “the opera house packed to the rafters, the boxes furnished out with all the pretty show-girls of Paris....” There is little doubt about the openly sexual nature of the encounters depicted here between masked young women, scantily clad members of the Parisian *demimonde*, and well-dressed young men.

Manet sketched the scene on site, but painted it over a period of months in his studio. He posed several of his friends—noted writers, artists, and musicians—and even included himself in the crowded scene. He is probably the bearded blond man at right who looks out toward the viewer. At his feet, a fallen dance card bears the painter's signature.

At the edges of the horizontal painting—a format Manet used often—figures end abruptly. At top a leg dangles over a railing. In contrast to the self-contained compositions of academic art, we are instantly aware that we see only a part of life and that it extends beyond the picture frame.

Oil on canvas, .590 x .725 m (23 1/4 x 28 1/2 in.).  
Gift of Mrs. Horace Havemeyer in memory of her mother-in-law, Louisine W. Havemeyer 1982.75.1

- 1848 Louis Phillipe abdicates; Louis-Napoléon elected President
- 1851 First edition of *The New York Times*
- 1852 Louis-Napoléon proclaims himself Emperor Napoléon III (Second Empire)
- 1853 Baron Haussmann begins renovations of Paris
- 1855 Courbet presents PAVILION DU RÉALISME
- 1856 A. F. Nadar takes the first aerial photographs from a balloon above Paris
- 1857 Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*  
Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*
- 1859 Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*
- 1862 Sarah Bernhardt debuts
- 1863 Emancipation Proclamation  
**death of Delacroix**  
Works by Manet and Whistler exhibited at the Salon des Refusés
- 1864 Louis Pasteur develops the pasteurization process
- 1866 Jacques Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*
- 1867 Emperor Maximilian is executed in Mexico  
**death of Ingres**  
Japanese art gets wide exposure at the Exposition Universelle
- 1870 French defeated in the Franco-Prussian War after four-month siege of Paris  
**death of Bazille**
- 1871 Two-month rule of the Commune ends violently; the Republic restored  
Arthur Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer*
- 1872 Emile Zola's *La Curée*
- 1874 First impressionist exhibition