

Manet and His Influence

When Edouard Manet began to study painting in 1850, Paris' familiar, broad, tree-lined streets did not yet exist, and the life of the city was not a subject artists explored. 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 new looks. 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 new techniques and 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 the seventeenth-century Spanish artist Diego 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 already begun to challenge the stale conventions of the Academy when Manet's *Olympia* (today in the collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris) was accepted for the Salon in 1865. It caused a scandal. Critics advised pregnant women to avoid the picture, and it was re-hung to thwart vandals. Viewers were not used to flat space and shallow volumes in painting. To many, Manet's "color patches" appeared unfinished. Even more shocking was the frank honesty of the courtesan: her boldness — not nudity — offended. Her languid pose copied a painting of Venus by the Italian artist Titian, but Manet did not cloak her with mythology.

Manet's succès de scandale made him a leader of the avant-garde. In the evenings at the Café Guerbois, near his studio, he was joined by writers and artists, including Claude Monet, Frédéric Bazille, and others who would go on to organize the first impressionist exhibition. Manet's embrace of what Charles 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

"It was the homeland, at ten pence a night, of all the street organ players, of all the monkey tamers, of all the acrobats and of all the chimney sweeps that swarm the streets of the town." Such was a contemporary description of the neighborhood of Petite Pologne, close to Edouard Manet's studio.

Here Manet has painted characters from this area he called "a picturesque slum." Most are real individuals. The seated musician is Jean Lagrène, leader of a local gypsy band who earned his living as an organ grinder and artist's model. The man in the top hat is Colardet, a rag-picker and iron-monger. At the right a man named Guérout is cast as the "wandering Jew," the prototypical outsider. In their poses and dress, several figures recall those of Velázquez or the peasants painted by French seventeenth-century artist Louis Le Nain, whose works Manet would also have seen during his studies in the Louvre.

Impassive and silent, these people from the margins of Parisian life are restricted to the narrow plane of the foreground. Presented with neutral detachment, they do not interact, appearing equally unconnected to each other and the vague, undefined setting they inhabit. The urchin and rag picker look toward the seated musician, but he is unaware, focused instead on the viewer outside the picture. The emotional blankness of Manet's painting felt "modern" to contemporary viewers.

Oil on canvas, 187.4 x 248.2 cm (73 3/4 x 97 11/16 in.)
Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.162



Edouard Manet
French, 1832 – 1883
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*, shown 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. Against the featureless background, the man's dramatically foreshortened body thrusts toward the viewer. Its proximity and isolation are startling. Only the man's costume informs us about him; traces of blood are the only signs of a painful death.

Manet's choice of a Spanish subject — he painted 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, 75.9 x 153.3 cm (29 7/8 x 60 3/8 in.)
Widener Collection 1942.9.40



Edouard Manet
French, 1832 – 1883
Still Life with Melon and Peaches, c. 1866

Manet is known overwhelmingly for his paintings of people, but he called still life "the touchstone of painting," and it accounts for about twenty percent of his work. Most of his still lifes, like this one, were painted in the 1860s. At the time, still life enjoyed great popularity among the bourgeois citizens of the Second Empire. Dining rooms were filled with depictions of lush bouquets and lavish repasts that suggested their owners' comfortable lives. Bourgeois tastes tended toward the finely detailed and highly finished work of more conventional artists, however. A satirist looked at Manet's painting when it was exhibited in 1867 and remarked, "I do not know much about melons, but this one seems past its prime."

What contemporary viewers did not like in Manet's painting is precisely what attracts us today: its bold style. Sudden transitions of color — not a gradual modulation of tone — give shape to the objects. Each brushstroke stands independently. They rivet attention on the canvas surface, on the painting itself. The simple tabletop assemblage does not point, either, to any meaning outside itself. Manet's arrangement stands on its own terms, without allegorical allusions — common in earlier still lifes — to abundance or the transitory nature of life. Although his work harkens back to Dutch banquet pictures from the seventeenth century, it has a distinctly modern feel.

Oil on canvas, 68.3 x 91 cm (26 7/8 x 35 13/16 in.)
Gift of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer 1960.1.1



Claude Monet
French, 1840–1926

The Cradle—Camille with the Artist's Son Jean, 1867

Claude Monet was one of the young artists in Paris during the 1860s strongly influenced by Manet, becoming a part of his avant-garde circle. The broad strokes of color and abrupt juxtapositions here are reminiscent of Manet's bold, innovative manner. In this early work, Monet uses black and grays to create shadows, but soon black all but disappeared from his palette.

In 1867, when this was painted, the *Exposition Universelle*, or World's Fair, in Paris introduced Japanese woodblock prints to a wide audience. They had first appeared in France in the 1850s, packed around imported porcelains, and now enjoyed a huge vogue. Monet himself became an avid collector. Many years later, after he moved to his last home at Giverny, he hung the yellow walls of his dining room with them. Their distinctive style influenced many impressionist painters. Here that influence is evident in the unusual angle Monet has chosen—as if we peer down into the cradle—and in the abruptly cropped figure of the woman. The bold areas of pattern, in the bedclothes and canopy, for example, that divide the composition and seem to flatten the space are also inspired by Japanese prints.

Oil on canvas, 116.2 x 88.8 cm (45 3/4 x 34 15/16 in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1983.1.25



Edouard Manet
French, 1832–1883

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 Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863). Although critics were pleased with Rouvière's highly pitched, emotional performance, the public was not. 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' 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, 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, 187.2 x 108.1 cm (73 11/16 x 42 9/16 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, Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley as fellow students in the studio of painter Charles Gleyre. The four were unimpressed by the lofty religious and mythological subjects and the 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 in Manet's infamous *Olympia*. The flowers themselves, especially the prominent peonies, also offer a kind of tribute. Manet cultivated peonies and often painted their lush blooms. Bazille's painting style was usually more smoothly blended, but here, even his brushstrokes seem to echo Manet's thick patches of color.

Oil on canvas, 60 x 75 cm (23 3/8 x 29 1/2 in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1983.1.6



Edouard Manet
French, 1832–1883

Masked 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 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 showgirls 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, legs dangle 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, 59.1 x 72.5 cm (23 1/4 x 28 9/16 in.)
Gift of Mrs. Horace Havemeyer in memory of her mother-in-law, Louise W. Havemeyer 1982.75.1

- 1848 Louis-Philippe abdicates the French throne; Louis-Napoléon elected President
- 1851 First edition of *The New York Times*
- 1852 Louis-Napoléon proclaims himself Emperor Napoléon III, forming the Second Empire
- 1853 Baron Haussmann begins renovations of Paris
- 1855 Gustave Courbet opens an alternative exhibition space, the *Pavilion du Réalisme*
- 1856 Nadar takes the first aerial photographs from a balloon above Paris
- 1857 Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* published
- 1859 Charles Darwin's *The Origins of Species* published
- 1862 Actress Sarah Bernhardt debuts in Paris
- 1863 Emancipation Proclamation
 - Death of Eugène Delacroix
 - Works by Manet and James McNeill Whistler exhibited at the *Salon des Refusés*
- 1864 Louis Pasteur develops the pasteurization process
- 1866 Jacques Offenbach's comic opera *La Vie Parisienne* debuts
- 1867 Emperor Maximilian is executed in Mexico
 - Death of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
 - Japanese art shown at the *Exposition Universelle*
- 1870 French defeated in the Franco-Prussian War after four-month siege of Paris
 - Death of Frédéric Bazille
- 1871 Two-month rule of the Commune ends violently; the French Republic is restored
- 1872 Emile Zola's *La Curée* published
- 1874 First impressionist exhibition