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# Manet in Paris

Monographies citadines



Born in Paris in 1832 to an upper class family: — his mother was the daughter of a diplomat and his father was the head of staff at the ministry of justice — Edouard Manet can be considered as the most Parisian member of the Impressionist painters. Manet was certainly the most complex character in the movement to which, for that matter, he never really belonged, always stubbornly refusing to exhibit his works alongside these new generation painters who rejected traditional conventions, wishing to transcribe their experience of colour and light as objectively as possible. Yet, this distinguished man, who, with his friend Baudelaire, used to carry himself with a certain dandyism, who used to chase after honours, year after year forcing his entry into the Salon Officiel, was, in spite of himself, considered to be the one who finally broke open the doors of modernity. His friends believed him to be the master of the school.

Manet was not a natural revolutionary and nobody had more respect for old style painting than he, in particular 17th century Spanish painting, the influence of which can be seen in his remarkable use of blacks. Monet had only the honesty of his conscience. After six years spent at the studio of Thomas Couture, he understood, quite simply, that it was not possible for a painter to depict the modern world through images of the past. He understood the great changes in society brought about by industrialisation and, in Paris, he saw

«IT IS IMPOSSIBLE -  
IMPOSSIBLE, DO YOU  
HEAR? - THAT M. MANET  
SHOULD NOT HAVE HIS  
DAY OF TRIUMPH AND  
SHOULD NOT CRUSH THE  
TIMID MEDIOCRITIES  
THAT SURROUND HIM.»

ZOLA, L'ÉVÈNEMENT OF 7 MAY  
1856.

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La Musique aux Tuileries,  
Music in the Tuileries, 1860  
oil on canvas  
76 x 118 cm  
National Gallery, London/ Bridgeman Images

«ONE HAS TO BE OF  
ONE'S TIME, DO WHAT  
ONE SEES.»



the many people who had been left behind by progress, a world of poor people for whom Haussmann's great works had shown no pity. With the advent of railway, Manet understood that it was no longer time to paint Venus, but, rather, real women who were very much alive and attractive, and that it was high time to stop lying and hiding behind sterile and often stupid conventions. It is astonishing to see the way in which the academy and the public «read» a painting at the time. We will see this later, when talking about the masterpiece *Le Chemin de fer* which, we can but wonder how, created quite a scandal.

We often forget how awful the 19th century was, eaten away by the religious obscurantism behind which the bourgeoisie of Louis-Philippe protected its privileges. The Revolution was far behind and, sadly, the ideas of liberty were long forgotten.

In 1861, Manet finally gained access to the Salon with *Le Chanteur espagnol*, and even received an award. He quickly chose Victorine Meurent as his model, the woman behind the greatest scandal in the art world in the 19th century: the famous *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, which he presented at the Salon des Refusés in 1863, where, shock horror! he turned a Giorgione nymph into a stark naked harlot, accompanied by two students dressed in jackets enjoying a picnic in a park. In the press it was said that «he has taste corrupted by a love for the unusual» and much worse.



Manet returned to the Salon in 1865 with *L'Olympia* based on *La Vénus d'Urbain* by Titien. Here again, the painting was a transposition of a classical nude into a provocative portrait of a modern-day prostitute. It was enough to make Manet the most revolutionary of painters and to be admired by those whom the critics soon came to call the Impressionists.

Manet, in the same way as Degas, was not a landscape artist but a Parisian who was particularly fond of the human figure and the places where people met, namely parks or cafés. But, unlike Pissarro, he was not a dumbstruck witness to the Paris which Haussmann was in the process of shaping by demolishing entire neighbourhoods and razing hillsides.

*La Musique aux Tuileries* from 1862 shows the social world of Paris, the one which Manet knew, more concerned about celebrating itself than worrying about what was happening behind the scenes. In this large picture, for which he produced numerous studies on the theme, Manet placed a number of his friends around himself. It is possible to recognise Zacharie Astruc, the painters Albert de Balleroy and Fantin-Latour, as well as Baudelaire, Offenbach and Baron Taylor, to mention just a few of the most well-known. With this work, Manet confirmed the notion defended by Baudelaire that you just had to open your eyes to the world around you to find subjects of wonder, implying that a painter should be a chronicler of his times.





The social world of Paris also included horse racing. At Bois de Boulogne, enthusiasts used to meet at the Longchamp racing track, which inspired Manet to produce several paintings, including *Courses à Longchamp*, the exact date of which is not known. With this painting, he was the first to show horses face-on, with them traditionally being depicted in profile, in the style of English engravings, as Manet painted them in another picture in 1872: *Les Courses au bois de Boulogne*.

Another major event which Manet, Renoir and Monet witnessed was the 1867 International Exposition hosted again in Paris after the one in 1855. The 50 hectares of the Champ-de-Mars were devoted to the event as well as land on the island of Billancourt. Also called the International Exposition of Art and Industry, this event, which welcomed 10 million visitors, was also a tribute by the emperor to industrial liberalism. All the very latest technical innovations were presented there. Manet's painting depicts the national and industrial pavilions which line the immense oval structure built by Léopold Hardy. The child in the foreground walking the dog is Léon Koëlla, the son of Suzanne Leenhoff, who Manet married in 1863. She used to present her son as her younger brother. In the sky, the balloon belongs to his friend, the photographer Nadar, in whose studio the first Impressionist exhibition was held in 1874.





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**Courses à Longchamp,  
Races at Longchamp, 1864 ?**  
*oil on canvas*  
43,9 x 84,5 cm  
The Art Institute of Chicago, IL, USA  
/ Bridgeman Images

OPPOSITE  
**Vue de l'Exposition universelle  
à Paris,  
View of the Universal Exposition  
in Paris, 1867**  
*oil on canvas*  
108 x 196 cm  
Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo, Norway / De Agostini  
Picture Library / Bridgeman Images







«MY SOLDIER'S BAG IS  
EQUIPPED WITH WHAT I  
NEED TO PAINT, AND I AM  
SOON GOING TO START A  
FEW NATURE STUDIES.»

LETTER TO HIS WIFE,  
19 NOVEMBER 1870

OPPOSITE  
**L'Enterrement,  
The Burial**  
oil on canvas  
73 x 90 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA / De  
Agostini Picture Library / Bridgeman Images

Excluded from the artistic section, Manet, in the same way as Courbet, occupied a shack near the Pont de l'Alma, on land belonging to the Marquis of Pommereux, where he presented about 50 works for which he published a catalogue with an anonymous preface by Zacharie Astruc. Zola was his most fervent defender before he abandoned him feeling himself unable to understand his evolution.

#### THE TERRIBLE YEAR

Tragically, the war with Prussia led to a slowdown in his artistic life, punctuated with a few, more or less, comical events, such as a ridiculous duel with the critic Duranty, who came out of it slightly injured. The Prussians were at the gates of Paris. Manet sent his family to safety in Pyrénées-Orientales and, rather than seeking exile in London, as Monet and Durand-Ruel did, he took up arms alongside his brothers. It was a terrible year during which he was forced to close his studio and live alone as a recluse at 51 Rue de Saint-Petersbourg. The many letters he sent to Suzanne allow us to share these moments of deprivation and boredom, between waiting and guard duty on the fortifications. After the surrender of Paris, he left the city to join his wife and took her to rest in Arcachon. When he returned to Paris on 18 May 1871, the city, in the throes of an insurrection, was a scene of horror, which inspired him to



create *La Guerre civile* engravings. In *L'Enterrement*, an uncompleted work, maybe prior to the fighting in Paris, the silhouettes of five buildings can be seen from the Glacière. This picture may also have been painted in 1867 and may depict the funeral of Baudelaire.

1872. Paris was licking its wounds and people were starting to return to their everyday activities. The year started well for Manet with the firm purchase of 24 paintings by Durand-Rueil. It allowed Manet to treat himself to a beautiful new studio at 4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, opposite Rue Mosnier (the present-day Rue de Berne). In 1878, he painted five pictures of the view from his new studio.

Rue Saint-Pétersbourg was located in the Quartier de l'Europe, recently built after the area of wasteland was purchased by the developers Jonas Hagerman and Sylvain Mignon. Because of its proximity to Saint-Lazare train station and the construction of the superb, all-metal, Pont de l'Europe, replacing the former Place de l'Europe, this neighbourhood became one of the most popular subjects with Impressionist painters, as well as with other artists, such as Jean Béraud, who cultivated a more commercial form of realism. The bridge can be found in the series *Gares Saint-Lazare* by Monet, and, above all, in the work by Caillebotte, which became one of his masterpieces.

OPPOSITE  
**Bal masqué à l'Opéra,**  
Masked Ball at the Opera, 1873  
oil on canvas  
59,1 x 72,5 cm  
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA  
/ Bridgeman Images

