

The Avant-Garde in the 2nd Republic-2nd Empire 1848-70

The French for “advanced guard”, the term *avant-garde* was used to denote the vanguard of an army and was first applied to French art of the early and mid 19th century. With reference to art, it relates to any artist, movement, or artwork that broke with precedent and was regarded as innovative, or pushing the boundaries of contemporary acceptability. Major advances often accompanied revolution and the middle of the 19th century was a time of turmoil and enormous societal change across Europe, with the beginning of a revolution in France in February 1848, which spread to fifty countries, the aim of which was to remove the old monarchies, which had become increasingly out of touch with its citizens. In France, the 1789 Revolution, the Napoleonic regime and the 1830 Revolution and subsequent related events, resulted in a modicum of emancipation for the rural peasantry and the city workers, but it was not until 1848, when mounting dissatisfaction led to the Luxembourg Commission, that the principle of universal suffrage was proclaimed, a return to the precedent of 1792, that increased at a stroke, the electorate from 200,000 to 9 million. However, whilst Paris had become a hot-bed of radical political discontent, especially amongst its students and workers, the rural peasantry still under the power and influence of Church and Landowners, remained more inclined to support conservative candidates in the first election. As a result, the Radicals or Socialists won only 80 of 880 seats, the rest taken by bourgeois republicans, or constitutional monarchists. In spite of Lamartine’s efforts to maintain broad Republican unity and avert a sharp turn to the right, the assembly abolished the Commission. The immediate consequence was a brief and bloody civil war in Paris (June 23-26 1848), in which 1,500 revolutionary workers, artisans and students were killed and 12,000 arrested. The radical movement was decapitated and the workers withdrew into silent and bitter opposition. After much political manoeuvring, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was installed as President of the 2nd Republic, in September 1848 and later in a coup d’etat, was proclaimed Emperor on 2nd December 1852.

It was against this backdrop of privilege, decadence and social inequality, that Thomas Couture (1815-79), a staunch Republican exhibited his *Romans of the Decadence* at the 1848 Paris Salon. The painting was both an effort to revive monumental history painting for the public sphere and a commentary on the perilous state of Parisian society. At 26 x 16 feet, it achieved a success as impressive as its size and as such, its seminal importance in the development of French painting is acknowledged by its prominent position in the **Musee d’Orsay**.



The painting represents the morning after a night of bacchanalian revelry and when exhibited was accompanied by a quote from the Roman poet, Juvenal, 'Crueller than war, vice fell upon Rome and avenged the conquered world'. Just as a period of moral decline brought an end to the Roman Empire, Couture was suggesting that the behaviour of the Parisian bourgeois was threatening the already delicate fabric of civil life. This seminal work is considered by many art historians to mark an end and a beginning. **The end of centuries of history painting and the era of Romanticism and the beginning of a revolution in painting, marked by Courbet's emergence as painter of the people, of Realism, a painter who enjoyed being the outsider, the rebel, with all the associated notoriety.**



Self-portrait with a Leather Belt, 1845, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay

Gustave Courbet born 1819 in Ornans in the Franche-Compte Region of Eastern France, into a prosperous farming family with Republican sentiments, had revolutionary ancestors, his maternal grandfather having participated in the French Revolution. As a twenty-year-old, with limited academic art training, he embarked upon a program of self-development, studying in the Louvre, the Spanish, Dutch and French masters. He was essentially a Romantic at heart, but visits to the Netherlands, where he became acquainted not only with the 17th century masters, especially Rembrandt and Rubens, but also contemporary painters such as Andreas Schelfhout and his best pupils Jan Hendrick Weissenbruch and Johan Barthold Jongkind, strengthened his belief that he should paint the realities of life.

The young Courbet did not participate in the 1848 February Revolution, but did design the headpiece, 'Revolution on the barricades,' for the final number of *Le Salut Public*, a newspaper founded by

Baudelaire, Champfleury and Charles Toubin. The previous year, a son Alfred Emile, was born to Virginie Binet, his muse and model, but Courbet's paternity was never legally acknowledged by her. This was also the year in which Courbet became acquainted with three of the most important radical minds in Paris, the writers Jules Champfleury and Charles Baudelaire and the liberal political activist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Together with other artists, writers and radical thinkers, Courbet became a prominent member of 'Realist' thinkers, who met regularly at the Brasserie Andler, the 'Temple of Realism,' a hot-bed of political discontent and Republican sentiment. And it was also here that the Realist artistic and literary manifesto came to fruition.

1848-9 was Courbet's break-through Salon, where he had many paintings accepted and won a gold medal for one of the exhibits, *After Dinner at Ornans*. This exempted him from the degrading process of undergoing the Salon selection committee process until 1857, when the Salon rules were changed. He then returned to his native Ornans to work on several paintings, which would break with the Academic tradition and confirm his position as the most radically progressive European painter.

For *Burial at Ornans*, Courbet gathered together some 51 men, women and children to re-enact the funeral of his great uncle, painting their portraits on a canvas almost 22 feet long. Courbet has emphasised death as a material event, with the uncovered grave appearing to extend into our space. The mourners are organised as if in a group portrait of Dutch 17th century civic guards, in a rigorous frieze-like composition, with behind them the steep cliffs of the Jura landscape.

The mourners, including his father and sisters, are organised in three distinct groups, the women on the right, including pall bearers and clergy on the left and a member of the bourgeoisie with a dog in the centre, perhaps emphasising that aristocrats could mix with the proletariat and that death is no respecter of wealth, or social position; a skull at the edge of the grave as a memento-mori emphasises the transience of life. Just behind the man kneeling on the edge of the grave are two beadles dressed in red gowns close by the top-hatted town mayor.

Courbet's approach was radically innovative, using a canvas of dimensions usually reserved for history painting, to present an ordinary, everyday subject, with no trace of idealisation. The painting is characterised by its tonal simplicity, the predominance of black, its compositional disunity and the restrained emotion of the mourners. At the 1850-51 Salon, the painting was greeted with total incomprehension and outrage, although more enlightened critics such as Champfleury and Baudelaire recognised that the painting represented a turning point in French art.

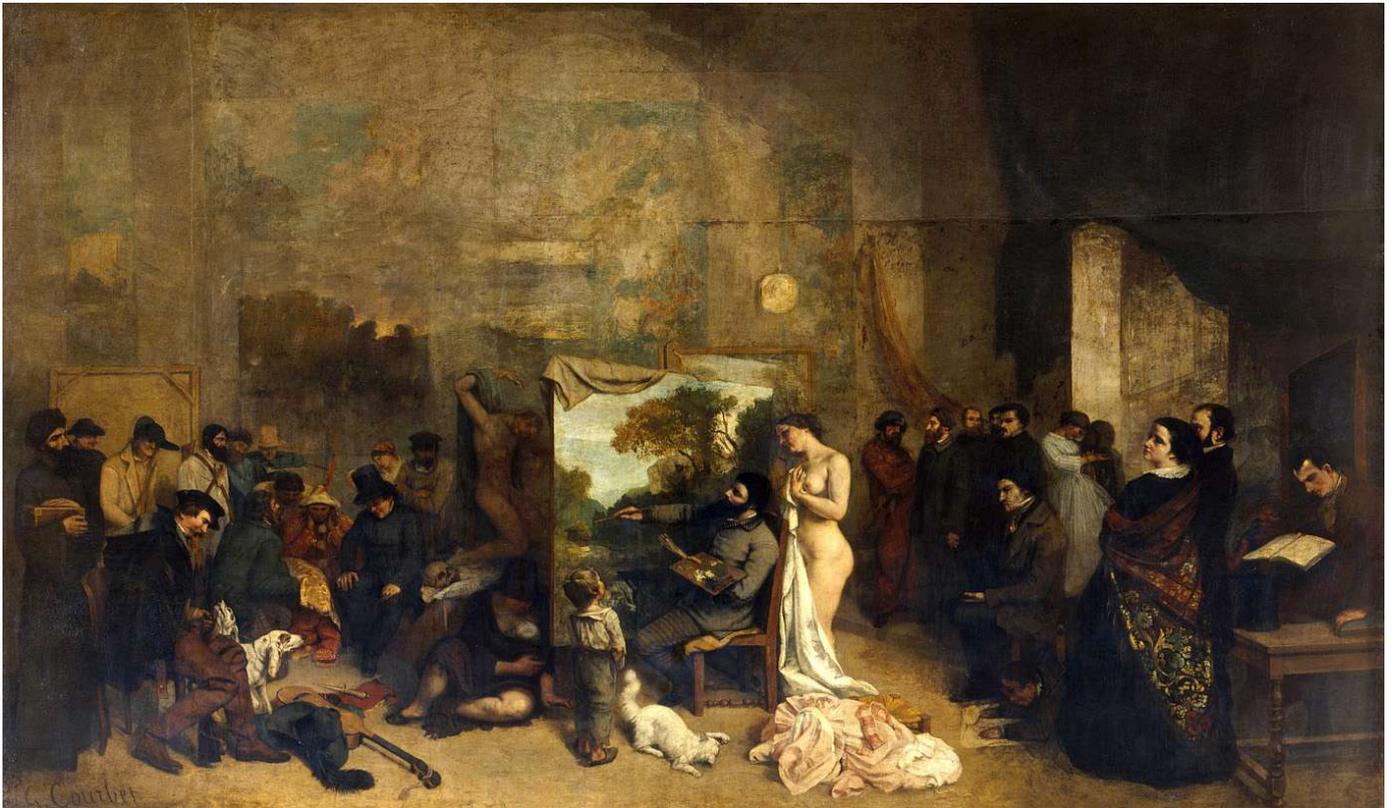


Burial at Ornans, 1849, Gustave Courbet, oil on canvas, 124x260 inches, Musee d'Orsay

A Real Allegory of Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life, the title originally given by Courbet, is one of the most important, enigmatic and quite possibly least well understood paintings of the 19th century. Above all, Courbet wanted to be true to himself and to paint from his own experience. Whilst he studied the old masters, he developed his own iconography. The figures can be considered as allegorical representations of various influences on his life. In a sense the painting is an artistic manifesto, in which Courbet is laying out his philosophy of painting. In Courbet's own words in a letter to Champfleury in 1854, "the painting depicts Society with all its interests and passions. It's the whole world coming to be painted."

The composition can best be described in three elements. Beginning with the central focus, Courbet is seated in front of his easel, painting a landscape of the Loue River Valley, near his home in Ornans, an act of blatant provincialism to the Parisian Bourgeois, whilst behind him stands a buxom nude, symbolising the ancient art of painting. To the artist's left stands a small boy, gazing admiringly at the painting, whilst a small dog plays nearby.

To the right of the image, is an admiring group of friends and admirers, including in the foreground, the novelist Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, alias Georg Sand, better known in her lifetime than Victor Hugo, or Balzac. Immediately behind her on the extreme right, is the seated novelist and critic Charles Baudelaire and in the background with a red beard, Courbet's first major patron, Alfred Bruyas. Pierre Proudhon, the source of the term anarchist, looks directly at the viewer from the back.



The Artist's Studio, 1854, Courbet, oil on canvas, 142x235 inches, Musee d'Orsay

To the left of the image, is the 'world of the commonplace', including Emperor Napoleon III with his hunting-dogs, a Jewish man and closest to the painting, a sprawling Irish woman. Immediately behind the canvas, is a contorted figure of a manikin, thought to represent the death of Academic Art and if to further emphasise its demise, there is a skull as a memento-mori. The collection of items in front of the Emperor is thought to be symbolic of the demise of Romanticism. The background has always been puzzling, but the explanation is in fact quite prosaic. Originally, Courbet meant to paint replicas of several of his paintings and indeed in the part just to the left of the manikin, can just be deciphered *The Return from Flagey*, painted in 1848; however, running out of time, he simply brushed roughly over them.

Eleven of his works were selected for inclusion in the 1855 Universal Exhibition in Paris, together with those of the most renowned French Academic and Romantic painters, Ingres, Cabanel, Delacroix and Vernet. However, as a result of a public confrontation with the all powerful superintendent of fine arts, Comte Nieuwerkerke, several of his most notable works were refused display in the Salon. Courbet countered with his own 'Pavilion of Realism,' audaciously erected within sight of the official Salon, where he charged for entrance and exhibited, among other works, *The Painter's Studio*. The accompanying catalogue included his "Realist Manifesto," in which he declared:

'I have studied the art of the ancients and that of the moderns, avoiding any preconceived system and without prejudice. I no longer wanted to imitate the one and to copy the other; nor, furthermore, was it my intention to attain the trivial goal of Art for Art's sake. No, I simply wanted to draw forth, from a complete acquaintance with tradition, the reasoned and independent consciousness of my own individuality. To know in order to do, that was my idea. To be in a position to translate the customs, ideas, the appearance of my time according to my own estimation; to be not only a painter, but a man as well; in short, to create living art-that is my goal.'

Delacroix was one of the few, who visited the Pavilion, but nevertheless commented, 'they have rejected one of the most remarkable works of our time, but Courbet is not a man to be discouraged by a little thing like that.' High praise indeed from the master of Romanticism.



La Rencontre, also known as *Good Morning Monsieur Courbet*, depicts a meeting between the painter and his first patron, Alfred Bruyas, at a crossroads outside Montpellier. It is very much an allegorical work, symbolising the relationship between the two men. The thirty-five-year old Courbet with painting gear on his back and pilgrim's staff in his hand meets the well-dressed Bruyas and his accompanying servant, who bows his head deferentially.

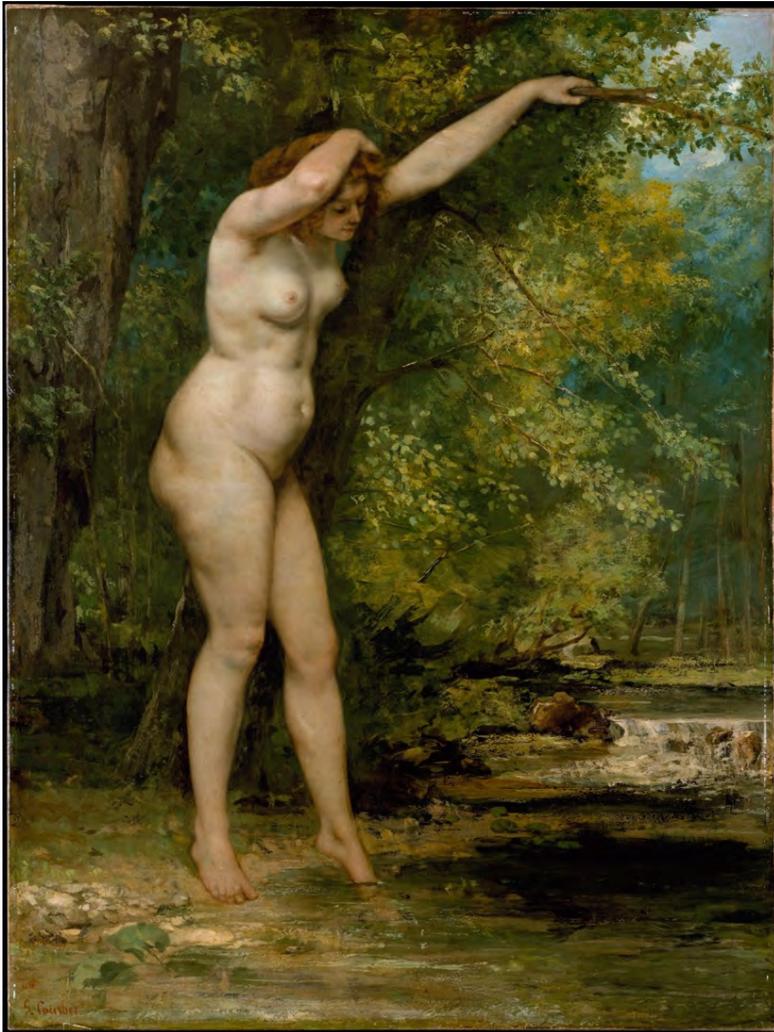
Courbet casts himself as the apostle of a new religion, that of Realism, his feet planted solidly on the ground with a somewhat haughty look, chin and beard pointing into the patron's space. Alfred Bruyas

featured in the *Artist's Studio*. He was an amateur painter, who realised his artistic limits early on and consequently turned his attention to that of collecting the work of many of the foremost contemporary painters, Corot, Millet, Couture, Delacroix, Rousseau, but above all Courbet.



Les Desmoiselles au Bords de la Seine, 1857, Courbet, oil on canvas, Petit Palais, Paris

Les Desmoiselles au Bords de la Seine, depicts two young women, most likely courtesans, who have come out from the City on a hot Summer's day to cool off under the tree by the waterside. One fully dressed in the background, leaning on her left hand, appears reflective, whilst the other in the foreground, in her undergarments, looks out provocatively at the viewer. This life-size painting is a tour de force of technique and remains one of Courbet's most technically sensuous works.



Young Bather, 1866, Courbet, oil on canvas, Metropolitan, New York.

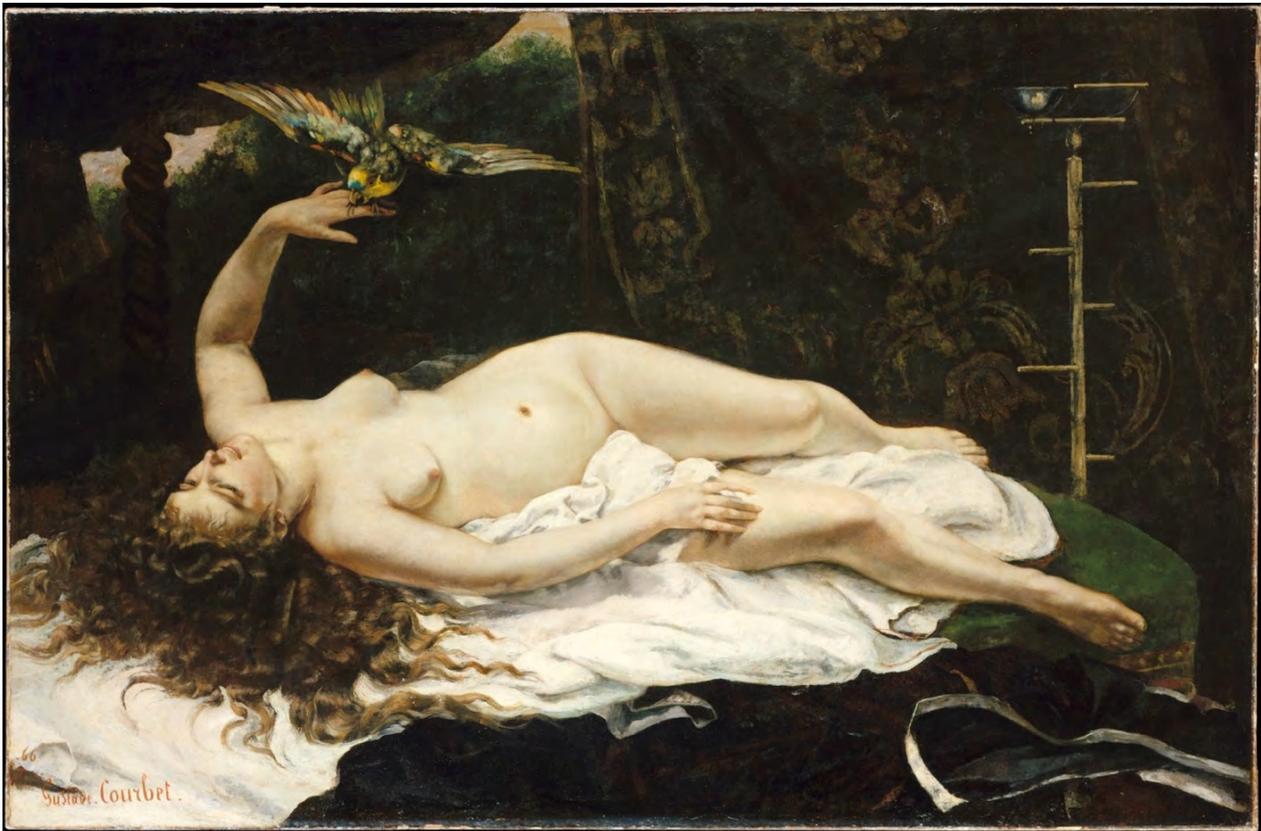
In his *Les Baigneuses*, Musee Fabre, bought by Alfred Bruyas, Courbet had in 1853, already attracted a storm of criticism, founded on the fact that his representation of female form was too far removed from the idealised-academic nudes of Cabanel and Bougereau. However, by 1866, when he painted a further series of paintings featuring beautiful young nude women, most of the critics and public had become accustomed to his more realistic portrayal of female form; Joanna Hifferman was the model in the *Young Bather*.

In the Autumn of 1865, Courbet met the beguiling Joanna Hiffernan, in the fashionable seaside resort of Trouville. She was accompanied by James McNeil Whistler, whom she first met in London in 1860 and had modelled for *Symphony in White No.1*, *The White Girl* and *Symphony in White No.2*. Joanna also became Whistler's muse and business manager. Courbet was captivated by Hiffernan and she quickly agreed to pose for him.



Portrait of Jo, La Belle Irlandaise, 1866, Courbet, Stockholm.

Born in 1843, Hiffernan came from a lower middle-class Irish family, who may have left Ireland for London during the Great Famine of 1845-8. Whistler first met the 17-year-old Hiffernan in 1860, while she was modelling at a studio in Rathbone Place and in 1861 began a five-year relationship with her. Whistler's biographers and friends, the Pennells, wrote of her, 'She was not only beautiful. She was intelligent, she was sympathetic. She gave Whistler the constant companionship he could not do without.' In 1866, she posed for many of Courbet's most captivating and provocative paintings, including the infamous *L'Origine du Monde*.



Woman with a Parrot, 1866, Courbet, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Le Sommeil, The Sleepers, 1866, Courbet, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay

Hiffernan also posed for *Woman with a Parrot* and the girl on the right in *The Sleepers*. *Woman with a Parrot*, was Courbet's response to Alexandre Cabanel's, *The Birth of Venus*, exhibited at the 1863 Salon. This was of course the year of the infamous Salon des Refuses, instigated by Napoleon III, following the uproar by spurned artists, when an especially uncompromising Salon Committee refused entry to hundreds of exhibits, including famously Manet's *Dejeuner sur L'Herbe*.



The Birth of Venus, 1863, oil on canvas, Alexandre Cabanel, Musee d'Orsay

The contrast between Courbet's blatantly provocative pose, crumpled sheets and the presence of the parrot, an embodiment of the exotic, with Cabanel's idealised, somewhat ridiculous composition, is all too plain to see. Hiffernan's luxuriant hair is mirrored by the outstretched wings of the parrot. Here Courbet suggests a daring mix of references, no doubt designed to ruffle the feathers of

the Salon Committee. However, Courbet's contemporaries loved it. *Le Sommeil*, was commissioned by the Turkish Diplomat, Khalil-Bey and it was he who also commissioned *L'Origine du Monde*. Here lesbian love is treated with a subtle comprehension and sensitivity unusual for a contemporary male.

The last few years of Courbet's life were much much compromised by the 1870-1 Franco-Prussian war and the 1871 Paris Commune. On the 4th September 1870, during the war, he made a proposal to the Paris authorities to take down the Vendome Tower, a memorial raised in honour of Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz in 1805, an act that was to return to haunt him, after the tower was actually destroyed during the Commune and he was held responsible after the overthrow of the Commune. As a result, he spent six months in prison and in 1873, was required to pay for its reconstruction, at which he went into exile in Switzerland, where he died in 1877.



Symphony in White No.1, Lady in White, 1862, Whistler, oil on canvas, N.G. Washington.

Born in 1834, James Abbot McNeill Whistler was an American artist, who left the States, never to return, arriving in Paris in 1855, where he began his training with Gabriel Gleyre, a disciple of Ingres the following year. Two years later, he went into partnership with Alphonse Legros and Henri Fantin-Latour to ensure a better circulation of his works; Fantin-Latour's circle of fellow artists included Courbet and Manet. Although he spent prolonged periods in Paris, he always regarded London as his home. It was in 1861, that he painted *Symphony in White No.1*. Whistler had by this time met Hiffernan and for the next four years, she became his constant companion, model, mistress and business manager. The painting was rejected by the Salon, but was exhibited at the 1863 Salon des Refuses.

Whistler, especially in his later career, resented the idea that his paintings should have any meaning beyond what was seen on the canvas. By referring to the painting in the abstract term of Symphony, Whistler was emphasising his philosophy of, 'Art for Art's Sake.' Nevertheless, that did not stop the critics making their own interpretations. The critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary (author of the term 'Impression' at the 1874 Impressionist Exhibition), thought the painting an allegory of a new bride's lost innocence, whilst others linked it with Wilkie Collins novel, *Woman in White*. Even though the work was completed before he met Rossetti, the Pre-Raphaelite influence is still clear. More recent critics have associated it with the Annunciation, a

secular interpretation, most probably due to the use of white and the lily that Joanna is holding in her left hand. Notice also the possible symbolism of the sprig of Lavender and the head of the bear rug looking directly out at the viewer, the latter being regarded as a symbol of lust and male domination.



Homage a Delacroix, 1864, Henri Fantin Latour, Musee d'Orsay

Within this painting, are portraits of many of the foremost literary and critical minds and painters of the time. Latour himself, wearing just a white shirt is seated just behind **Whistler, with his characteristic mop of curly hair, whilst to the right of the portrait of Delacroix is Edouard Manet, standing with left hand in trouser pocket.** Seated centrally, is Jules Champfleury and to the far right of

the image, with white handkerchief in his breast-pocket is one of Delacroix's greatest admirers, the writer Charles Baudelaire. The admiration that the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* felt for Delacroix, is confirmation of the respect paid by him and by the artists, who were to incarnate modernity in the second half of the 19th century.



Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1, Whistler's Mother, Whistler, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay.

Purchased by the French State in 1891, the painting has been variously described as an American icon and a Victorian *Mona Lisa*, a painting that surely most American Galleries would love to own. The painting is unusual for several reasons, not the least the fact it is a portrait in profile, more typical of early 15th century Renaissance portraits. Also of interest is the mono-tonal chromatic range, with its domination by black and finally its simplified geometric compositional structure.

All his adult life something of a 'Dandy', he became a leading member of the Aesthetic Movement, promoting the 'Art for Art's Sake' philosophy. He had a wide side circle of friends, both literary and artistic, including Oscar Wilde, Stephen Mallarme, Rossetti, Fantin-Latour, Manet, Monet and Degas and influenced the work of Walter Sickert, the Impressionists, the Glasgow Boys, especially Guthrie and Lavery, John Singer Sargent and Alma-Tadema. The one blight on his career was the Ruskin Trial in 1877, the result of which nearly ruined him financially. He died in London in 1903.

Edouard Manet was born in 1832 into an affluent and well connected Parisian family, his mother the daughter of a diplomat and his father a French Judge, who expected his son to pursue a career in law. His uncle however, encouraged him to take up painting and took him on visits to the Louvre. It was on a special course in drawing that he met Antonin Proust, a life-long friend and future minister of the arts. At his father's suggestion, he sailed on a training vessel to Rio de Janeiro, where he almost certainly contracted syphilis, which was to be the author of his demise in 1883. On return to Paris, after failing his Naval exams, he was allowed by his father to study art seriously. He joined Thomas Couture's Studio from 1850-6 and in his spare time copied the old masters in the Louvre. In the mid 1850s, he also travelled widely throughout Europe, visiting all the great museums. His most pronounced influence throughout his career would be the Spanish masters, Velasquez and Goya and the Dutch master, Frans Hals.

In 1856, he opened a studio in Paris, his style from the beginning, being characterised by loose brushstrokes, simplification of details and suppression of transitional tones, in other words, minimal attention to the Academically accepted modelling of flesh tones. Early subjects were painted in the manner of Courbet's Realism, contemporary subjects such as beggars, gypsies and dancers, many with a Spanish flavour.

At the age of twenty-six, he met Baudelaire, who became a life-long friend and confidant and a little later, Edgar Degas. It was at the urging of Baudelaire, an advocate of 'Modern Life', that he painted *Music in the Tuileries*, recognised by many critics as the first, 'Modern Painting.'



Music in the Tuileries, 1862, Edouard Manet, oil on canvas, Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, N.G. London

This is the earliest known example of Manet's 'painterly', almost sketch-like style and also of his life-long interest in Bourgeois Parisian life. The painting depicts the gathering of middle and upper-class Parisians at weekly concerts in the Tuileries Gardens near the Louvre; Manet has included portraits of several friends, artists, writers and Musicians. The painter is included on the far left of the image, with next to him, also with a full beard, the painter Albert de Balleroy. To their right seated is the sculptor Zacharie Astruc and just to the right of centre standing with white trousers and top-hat is Eugene,

Edouard Manet's brother. Just to his right, seated in front of a tree is the composer, Jacques Offenbach. Also include are Theophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire and the painter Henri Fantin-Latour.

To 'capture the moment', as if by a photographic image, the painting was completed both en plain air and in the studio, 'Alla Prima', that is, 'wet on wet', rather than the accepted way of building up the composition in layers of glazes on dried layers of paint. The underlying concept was that of emphasising the two-dimensionality of the canvas, rather than traditional modelling with chiaroscuro (light and shade) suggesting the illusion of three-dimensionality. The range of middle value tones is also diminished in favour of greater contrast of light and dark. This and the absence of modelling with chiaroscuro, results in flattening of the picture plane, a practice possibly borrowed from Japanese prints.

In summary Manet introduced two important innovations. He rejected the traditional illusion created by perspective and he simplified representation of form, without the subtle blending of colour known by the Academic tradition as, 'Fondue', replacing it with sharp, contrasting blocks of colour; 'there are no lines in Nature, just blocks of colour.' Manet and Degas were well aware of the development of the Daguerreotype, first invented in the early 1830's and in common usage by the 1840's and 1850's and recognised that their painting style should both recognise the increasing competition from the photographic image and react accordingly.



Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe, 1862, Edouard Manet, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay.

By introducing a naked woman in the company of fully dressed men, in *Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe*, Manet has gone one step further than Courbet's, *Les Desmoiselles au Bord de la Seine*. The men appear

engaged in conversation, apparently oblivious of the woman, who looks out provocatively, without any hint of embarrassment. Here there is a certain frisson and suggestion of innuendo. In the foreground is a wonderful still-life of an overturned basket of fruit sitting on the woman's cast off clothes. Another female, an almost ethereal floating, figure, most probably Susannah Leenhof, Manet's wife, can be seen in the background bathing. Victorine Meurent, Manet's mistress, modelled for this and many other of his early paintings, including *Olympia*. The dimensions of the painting with life-size models, would normally have been reserved for large scale Academic historical, mythological, or biblical narratives and the stark lighting, with an almost absence of shadows and the apparent flatness of the picture plane, all add to the artifice of the image and foreshadows impressionism.



Whilst Titian had included dressed male figures with nude females in, *Le Concert Champêtre*, the Renaissance masterpiece Manet undoubtedly used as one of his sources, Titian's were intended as idealised nudes. Thus the hint of innuendo is suppressed and in any case the most recent interpretation of this renowned painting suggests that the nudes are only within the imagination of the instrumentalist and his singing companion. But, perhaps Manet is also playing the same trick here on the viewer, where the two young men, are engaged in a phantasy about such an encounter?



Another equally influential source, may well have been Giorgione's *The Tempest*, but Marcantonio Raimondo's, *The Judgement of Paris*, an engraving after Raphael, was undoubtedly the principal model for the composition. This early in his career, Manet had found the creation of balanced compositions problematical and this engraving provided the perfect solution.

Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe was exhibited at the now famous 1863 '**Salon des Refuses**', an alternative exhibition to the Salon, authorised by the Emperor, overruling Comte Nieuwerkerke, the Superintendent of Fine Arts and director of the Salon committee. With almost 3,000 out of a possible 5,000 works of art

rejected by the Salon Jury, many of the rejected having been produced by well established artists, such as Gustave Courbet, Henri-Fantin-Latour, Camille Pissarro and James Whistler, there was a huge outcry, which the Emperor could not ignore and thought best to placate. The Salon des Refuses drew huge crowds everyday, many of whom were astonished and affronted in equal measure at what they witnessed; it was the precedent for the Impressionist exhibitions, which commenced in 1874.



Olympia, 1863, Edouard Manet, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay

Two years later, *Olympia*, created a further storm of protest on its exhibition. The title was based on Olympia Maidalchini, Pope Innocent X's mistress, hence the contemporary sobriquet, 'The Holy Prostitute.' Here Manet broke all the accepted rules of Academic painting, provoking critics and the bourgeois alike, by what was seen as a subversion of the nude genre and his rejection of the received ideas of sex and race. To depict nudes, 'fallen' and alluring women, was common enough in 19th century Paris, as for instance in Couture's *Romans of the Decadence*, but to do so with such an unglamourised, proletarian model and one with such a provocative attitude was considered unacceptable. Manet had violated a taboo; he had painted neither a Greek goddess, nor a startled nymph, the Salon's customary fare, but an everyday prostitute waiting to receive a punter. In both *Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe* and *Olympia*, Manet had for the first time on canvas, depicted a truly 'naked' woman, flesh and blood, as if she had just stepped out of her clothes, a woman undressed, not a nude.



Like *The Venus of Urbino*, by Titian, painted in 1538, Academic representations of the nude were expected to be idealised and highly polished, with illusionary modelling of flesh and with no visible brushstrokes. On first viewing, *Olympia* appears to be more of a sketch in comparison, with its clearly visible brushstrokes and abrupt changes in tonality. However, even in Titian's wonderful work, the courtesan is looking out at the viewer with an uninhibited stare, her left hand covering her genitalia, or is there a more erotic connotation as more recent female historians have suggested.



The Races at Longchamp, 1867, Manet, oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago

As further evidence of Manet and Degas's fascination with the portrayal of modern life, they both painted views of the races, Degas the more prolific, but it was Manet, who produced the earliest and most compelling image of the horses in clouds of dust, galloping towards the viewer. In his *Races at Longchamp*, Manet has replicated the camera snap-shot, the spontaneity of the brush-work representing the immediacy of the moment.



Lunch in the Studio, 1868, Manet, oil on canvas, Munich

In *Lunch in the Studio*, Manet excels himself, in this wonderfully executed portrait of the sixteen-year-old Leon Leenhoff. The work was composed on holiday, within the dining-room of Manet's rented house in Boulogne-sur-Mer. The influence of Vermeer has often been sited, in a work where the artist has achieved an elegant harmony between the distribution of light and the delicately contrasted yellows and blacks. Throughout the canvas, there are superlative displays of still-life painting, not the least the Japanese decorated plant-holder in the left-hand corner of the room and the shield and swords on the chair in front. There has been much discussion about the identity of the other figures, some being of the opinion that they represent Manet himself, smoking a cigar and his wife Susannah, who appears to be bringing in a coffee-pot. Whilst some feel, that here we have a coded message that Leon has been accepted as their son, rather than as was commonly accepted that he was Susannah's younger brother, there is also a theory, now gaining greater credence, that Leon was in fact the result of an affair between Susannah and Manet's father, Auguste. The Danish born Susannah was originally taken on as Edouard's piano teacher in 1851 and for ten years, before he left the parental home, they were romantically involved. Leon was born in 1852, to a father never positively identified, but without doubt either to Edouard, or Auguste. The most propitious way to avoid a scandal was for Edouard and Susannah, to marry, which duly happened in 1863, a year after his father's death



Portrait of Emile Zola, 1868, Manet, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay.

This is a portrait of the Realist novelist and art critic, Emile Zola, the childhood friend of Paul Cezanne. It comprises of two still-lives; the wall decorations, a Japanese print, an engraving after Velasquez's *The Drunkards*, partly hidden by a reproduction of *Olympia*, who appears to turn her head towards Zola as if in gratitude.

Below, on the desk, there is a masterly depiction of a jumble of objects, amongst which are a porcelain ink-pot, a copy of the pamphlet with a sky-blue cover, *Revue du XIVe Siecle*, Jan 1867, in which Zola had written in praise of Manet. Held in his left hand is one of the artist's favourite reference books on painting by Charles Leblanc. The importance of the objects depicted, might encourage the belief that the relevance be attributed to Zola, but in truth they are expressions of the artist's own interests and in fact Manet's artistic manifesto.

Before, he was introduced to the artist by Antoine Guillemet in February 1866, Zola was not always that positive about Manet's work, but he seems to have been converted by the exhibition of *Olympia* and succeeding works. The Symbolist painter Odilon Redon in *La Gironde*, observed penetratingly in his 1868 Salon review, 'it is rather a still life, so to speak, than the expression of a human being.'



The Balcony, 1869, Manet, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay.

Here Berthe Morisot makes her first impressive appearance into Manet's work, with inspiration surely from Goya's painting of a similar subject, *Majas on a Balcony*. Morisot sits with her right arm leaning on the balcony, hands clasped holding a fan, looking out, whilst on her left is Fanny Claus holding an umbrella. Just behind and between the two is the painter, Antoine Guillemet. There is a further, much less distinct figure, a young boy, who may well be Leon, carrying a coffee pot.

There is a sense of isolation of the participants, with all appearing to be lost in contemplation. Morisot is undoubtedly the centre of attraction, with her dark brooding eyes imparting a sense of mystery and intrigue. At its exhibition at the 1869 Salon, this enigmatic group portrait was overwhelmingly misunderstood. Manet held onto the painting until after his death, when it was sold at a L'Hotel Drouot auction in 1884, the year after he died in such dreadful circumstances.



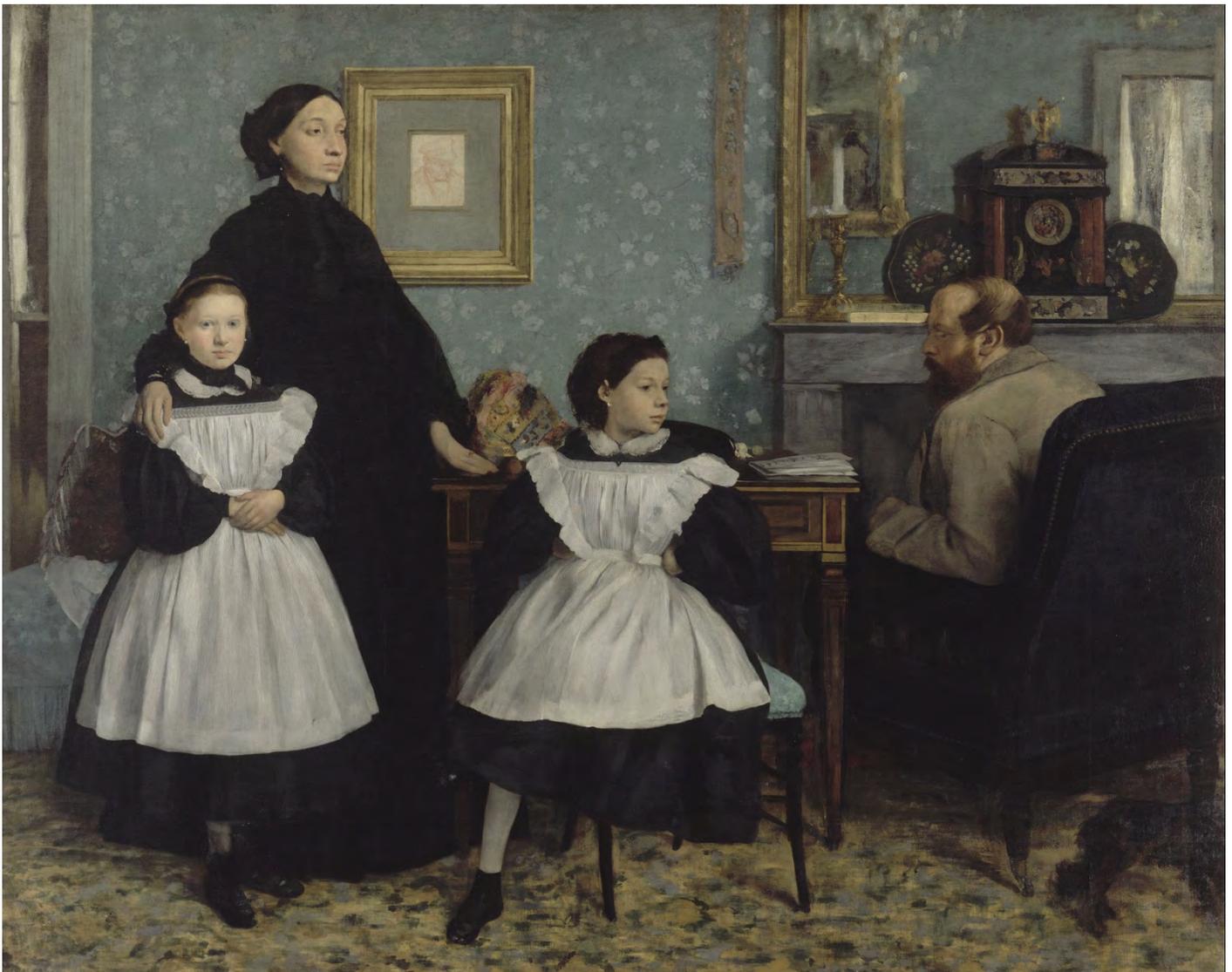
While Manet pays homage to the Spanish master, he also emphasises the differences. In contrast to the animation of the two young courtesans in Goya's painting, with its warm, harmonious colouring, Manet uses bright, brilliantly contrasting colours and his protagonists appear dislocated, oddly posed and distracted. Guillemet's, hand gestures and expression suggest that he is totally absorbed in his thoughts and Fanny Clause, a concert violinist looks out blankly at the viewer. The bright green balcony metal work and the shutters introduce an inner frame and a deft contrast to the predominance of white and black.

Under the stool on which Morisot is sitting, is a small dog, whilst to her right is another of Manet's superlative still-lives, a potted hydrangea. Morisot, together with another female painter, Eva Gonzales, became students in Manet's studio and both idolised the suave, highly personable Manet, very much the Parisian 'dandy', who spent much of his time pacing the boulevards, observing the life of the Parisian bourgeois. Although there was undoubtedly a strong mutual attraction between Manet and Morisot, witness the number of portraits of

her, there is no evidence that she became his mistress; she would eventually marry Manet's brother Eugene, also an amateur painter.

Regarded by the younger Impressionists, Degas, Renoir, Monet and Sisley, as their cheer-leader after the 1863 Salon des Refuses, Manet was, despite the harsh criticism meted out by the academic establishment and most of the critics, reluctant to turn his back completely on the Salon. He was desperate for official recognition, which arrived in part arrived, when in 1872, Paul Durand-Ruel, the ambitious Parisian art dealer, purchased 24 of his paintings for 51,000 francs. It was Durand-Ruel's boldest attempt to monopolize the work of an emerging painter, not yet universally recognised. He had similarly monopolized the works of Delacroix, Courbet, Corot, Millet and Rousseau in the 1860's. He would in due course help the Impressionists in an even more extensive way and without his unwavering support, it is undoubtedly true that Impressionism as known now, would not have achieved such a pivotal place in the history of late 19th century Western European art.

Manet's greatest wish was to become a Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur, a prestigious award, which only came his way in 1881, when his health was already in decline, due to the progress of the Syphilis contracted in South America. He died on 30th April 1883, a blessed relief after a year of dreadful suffering. On leaving Passy cemetery, Edgar Degas reflected: "He was greater than we thought..."



The Bellelli Family, 1858-67, Edgar Degas, oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), was the son of a wealthy bourgeois banker and mother, a Creole from New Orleans, whose family's wealth came from the cotton industry. He enjoyed a prestigious education, well educated in the classics and history. Although destined for a legal career, his father recognised his

son's artistic acumen early on and encouraged his efforts at drawing by taking him regularly to the Paris museums, where for much of his early adult life, he would copy Italian Renaissance paintings. Training in the studio of the Academic painter, Louis Lamothe, emphasised the principles of line and draftsmanship, reinforced by several long visits to Italy in the late 1850's, where he was strongly influenced by frescoes. His meeting with Ingres in his early twenties was also a seminal moment, the now much older master being a point of reference throughout Degas's career. His three years of study and training in Italy between 1856-9, equipped him to follow in his master's footsteps. During this time, he would have visited his aunt in Florence and it appears that this was when *The Bellelli Family* was first conceived, in 1857.

Despite his relative youth and inexperience, the monumental *Bellelli Family*, is now regarded as one of Degas's finest works, one full of ambiguity and intrigue. Whilst the older father, an Italian patriot, Baron Gennaro, sits at his desk, with his head turned toward his family, the mother, Laura de Gas, Degas's aunt, looks into the distance with a solemn demeanour, as she mourns the death of her father, Hilaire de Gas, whom Degas has also included as a red-chalk drawing on the wall. As the sombre atmosphere of the painting suggests, the couple were known to be experiencing marital problems around this time, which may also explain the position of the figures chosen for this family portrait. One might also consider that the daughters, Guilia and Giovanni, have conflicting loyalties, the one enjoying the embrace of the mother's right arm, whilst the possibly younger daughter appears to be responding to something her father may have said. The Italian High Renaissance painter, Bronzino and his contemporary, Ingres, are thought to have been specific influences for the way in which Aunt Laura is portrayed; Laura who had earlier lost a child, was also pregnant at the time the family portrait was conceived, but was clearly not displaying the glow of an expectant mother, perhaps understandably so.

There is of course another Master's influence, that of Velasquez, who in his *Las Meninas*, generated a somewhat equivalent atmosphere of mystery and ambiguity. But here Degas has taken a further step forward. At the time of the work, there weren't similar paintings, none that expressed the psychological nuances and complexities of married life, in a manner that almost anticipates the concept of 'Freudian.' Alienation between the sexes was a recurring theme in Degas's works of the 1860's. *Interior Scene*, is a similar work of ambiguous content set in contemporary Paris.



Interior Scene, The Rape, 1868-9, Edgar Degas, oil on canvas, Philadelphia

The most commonly cited reference for this work, is a scene in Emile Zola's *Therese Raquin*, published in 1867, one of his first Realist novels. As a point of interest, this was followed between 1871-1893 by the Rougon-Macquart series, which represented a panoramic account of a family dynasty living through the 2nd Empire, the most relevant to this subject being *L'Oeuvre*, 1886, which had as its central character, Charles Lantier, a failed painter, who eventually committed suicide. It is thought that Zola's tragic hero may have been based on the lives of Claude Monet, who did in fact jump into the Seine at an especially low point in his career and his childhood friend, the also struggling Paul Cezanne. On receipt of a copy sent by Zola to Cezanne, Cezanne broke off contact, the two never to be reconciled, something that both men regretted towards the end of their lives.

So, within a setting metaphoric of the inner life, Degas has here staged a new kind of genre painting, radical in structure, ambitious in theme and not essentially narrative driven. Like many of his paintings and even more of his sculptures, the canvas with the image of a fully-dressed man and a partly-dressed woman in an austere furnished room, possibly that of a seedy hotel room, or prostitute's boudoir, languished in his Parisian studio for thirty-five years. Withheld from the scrutiny of public exhibition, the painting had been seen by only a few of Degas's closest friends and associates; it was eventually exhibited in 1905 in the Gallery of Durand-Ruel. As to why Degas finally relinquished *Interior* after so many years, that too remains an enigma.

So how should the painting be viewed. Is it simple a contemporary view on a moralising Victorian genre painting, such as Leopold Augustus Egg's 1858 series of three paintings, *Past and Present*, where as a result of a wife's illicit affair, she is thrown out of the house, later seen abandoned with her baby, under the arch of a London Bridge, or Holman Hunt's, *The Awakening Conscience*, Rossetti's *Found*, or a bourgeois male visiting a prostitute, or his kept mistress, or its aftermath. Or, is it more sinister, as the optional title supposes, the scene after a rape, as the partially packed suitcase on the table might lead one to suspect. There are lots of clues, but none that together point to a definitive narrative plot. The influence of the painting has been noted in the compositions of Degas's protégé, Walter Sickert, specifically in the latter's *Ennui* and *The Camden Town Murder* series of 1908.



Orchestra of the Opera, 1870, oil on canvas, Degas, Musee d'Orsay

From the late 1860's the ballet, either the orchestra, or the ballerinas began to appear with much greater regularity in his paintings. *Orchestra of the Ballet*, is one of the earliest examples, typified by the cropped composition, as if in a photograph. With its focus on the members of the orchestra in the orchestra-pit, only the legs and torsos of the ballerinas are visible.

Of all the renowned contemporary painters, Degas was by far the most fascinated by the advent of photography. His images of the horse racing at Longchamp, the ballet class, or his wonderful pastels of women at their toilette all confirm this preoccupation. Which rather fittingly leads to the question of Degas's sexuality, which to this day remains ambiguous. That he had close female friends is beyond dispute, the most important being the American Impressionist, Mary Cassatt; however, there is no evidence of intimacy.

On the other hand, close observation of his many images of women may reveal a darker side. Do those many pictures of the rigours of the ballet class, or more especially the 'through the key-hole' observation of bathing women, reveal a misogynistic bent, which in the Society of the 19th century was still prevalent. Was he only reflecting his times, or was there a personal issue with women, even a repressed sexuality. Whatever the problem, there is no doubting the excellence of those wonderful pastels, a technique, that he almost single-handedly rescued from obscurity, thought to be the domain of only children and the female amateur.

Degas met Manet in January 1862 in the Louvre, when both young painters were copying Velasquez's masterpiece, *The Infanta Margarita*. Manet was impressed by the skill of the 27-year-old Degas, who as the story goes, was etching directly onto an engraving plate. The two men became life-long friends, in spite of their contrasting personalities and artistic interests. Both were reluctant members of the Impressionists, because they could not completely turn their backs on the Academic establishment, Manet probably more so than Degas. Nevertheless, Degas exhibited at all the Impressionist exhibitions from 1874 onwards and indeed was at times an enthusiastic organiser.

So, having discussed these titans of the Avant-Garde, how can one determine their personal contributions to the Avant-Garde and the origins of 'Modern Art.' Gustave Courbet, a Romantic at heart, was the first artist of note to explicitly rebel against both the political and artistic establishment, to the extent that his staunch republican views could have resulted in his execution after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. His subject matter was also revolutionary, the use of the provincial classes in his paintings, rather than traditional academic history and mythological painting, which were inhabited by kings, queens, aristocrats, gods and goddesses. And when he did paint a goddess, it was a robust earthly equivalent, not an idealised Venus. Again, when he painted *L'Origin*, he broke the last taboo, that of putting on canvas an anatomically correct, 'in your face' image of the vagina. Also elaborated throughout the period under discussion, reaching its peak at the end of the 2nd Empire, was the image of Courbet in cartoons as a rustic brute, painting in 'crude' impasto on paintings utterly lacking in idealism, what art historians now refer to as Courbet's Materialism, a practice followed in the abstract work of many 20th century artists, Frank Auerbach, Jean Dubuffet and Leon Kossoff.

Whistler's contribution was the aesthetic component, regarding a picture as just that, a picture, without narrative, except that which the observer, critic, or otherwise chooses to attach to it, in other words, 'Art for Art's sake.' With his pupils, he advocated simple design, economy of means, the avoidance of over-laboured technique and the tonal harmony of the final result. He also insisted that it was the artist's obligation to interpret what he saw, not to be a slave to reality and to 'bring forth from chaos glorious harmony.' A master print-maker, he produced etchings, lithographs and dry-points, reinventing the techniques of the great past-masters, gaining a reputation to challenge Rembrandt.

Edouard Manet may have in the opinion of much critical opinion, produced in 1862 the first truly 'Modern' painting, *Music in the Tuileries*. With its 'sketchy', plein air depiction of a Parisian Bourgeois event, here surely was one of the first Impressionist paintings, in the sense that it was indeed Manet's impression of such a gathering. With *Le Dejeuner sur L'herbe* and *Olympia*, his treatment of the nude transcended even that which Courbet had achieved; he had broken the taboo of the naked woman, the hypocrisy associated with the common prostitute, who inhabited the Bois de Boulogne, supposedly preying on Society. Portrayal of the naked female would never be the same after Manet's *Olympia* and Courbet's *L'Origin*.

Degas's reticent and often spikey personality was never going to establish him as a contemporary figure to match the charm, vitality and gregariousness of Manet, but in his own way, he too made a considerable contribution to the development of modern art. Many of his portraits, both single and group are replete with a modern insightfulness of the tensions between the sexes, a theme that was taken up by both his contemporaries and future generations of painters. His fascination with photography transformed the painted image, where cropping of the composition, added to the spontaneity and modernity of painting.

All broke with the accepted conventions of the time, but none more so than Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, who popularised the concept of the rebel, willing to be innovative and expand the boundaries of artistic expression and for the young Impressionists, Monet, Renoir and Sisley and Post Impressionists, Paul Cezanne and Paul Gauguin especially, they were the exemplars; both the latter thought of themselves very much as ‘outsiders.’



A Bar at the Folies-Bergere, 1881-2, Edouard Manet, oil on canvas, Courtauld Gallery London

Outside the time-frame of this discussion, but included as a fitting memorial to Edouard Manet, one of the great innovators of 19th French Art, this was his last and greatest masterpiece. This most enigmatic and intriguing painting, of a young woman, portrayed looking out at the viewer across a bar, the top of which is replete with the most superb collection of still-lives, anyone of which would be a wonderful picture in its own right, is a tour-de-force of oil painting technique. But beware, the painting is not all that it seems on first appearance and warrants the closest inspection, to fathom how Manet, just like one of his heroes Velasquez with *Las Meninas*, has tricked the viewer into making possibly incorrect assumptions.

Finally, the bar-maid's absent-minded, reflective, resigned, wistful demeanour, take your pick, is reminiscent of that of the central reclining female figure in *The Romans of the Decadence* and if agreed, does make it a fitting end to this exploration of 2nd Empire painting, so obsessed by the female and her place in a Parisian Society, so dominated by the male gaze.