Edouard Manet

Edouard Manet (mah-NAY)
1832-1883
French Painter

Edouard Manet was a transitional figure in 19th century French painting. He bridged the classical tradition of Realism and the new style of Impressionism in the mid-1800s. He was greatly influenced by Spanish painting, especially Velazquez and Goya. In later years, influences from Japanese art and photography also affected his compositions. Manet influenced, and was influenced by, the Impressionists. Many considered him the leader of this avant-garde group of artists, although he never painted a truly Impressionist work and personally rejected the label.

Manet was a pioneer in depicting modern life by generating interest in this new subject matter. He borrowed a lighter palette and freer brushwork from the Impressionists, especially Berthe Morisot and Claude Monet. However, unlike the Impressionists, he did not abandon the use of black in his painting and he continued to paint in his studio. He refused to show his work in the Impressionist exhibitions, instead preferring the traditional Salon. Manet used strong contrasts and bold colors. His works contained flattened shapes created by harsh light and he eliminated tonal gradations in favor of patches of “pure color.” He painted a variety of everyday subjects, with an emphasis on figures and still life elements.

Manet’s work was the subject of controversy when he portrayed nudes realistically in works such as “Luncheon on the Grass” and “Olympia.” He was rejected from the Salon and criticized by the public. It was not until late in life that he finally received the recognition he longed for throughout his career. Manet’s work marked a new era of unsentimental realism, bold new approaches to subject matter; his use of flat planes of colored shapes paved the way for non-figurative art in the 20th century.

**Vocabulary**

**Impressionism**—A style of art that originated in 19th century France, which concentrated on changes in light and color. Artists painted outdoors (en plein air) and used dabs of pure color (no black) to capture their “impression” of scenes.

**Realism**—A style of art that shows objects or scenes accurately and objectively, without idealization. Realism was also an art movement in 19th century France that rebelled against traditional subjects in favor of scenes of modern life.

**Still life**—A painting or drawing of inanimate objects.

**Art Elements**

**Color**—Color has three properties: hue, which is the name of the color; value, referring to the lightness or darkness of the color; and intensity, referring to the purity of the hue. Primary colors are yellow, red and blue. Secondary colors are orange, green and purple. Warm colors appear to advance toward the viewer, while cool colors appear to recede in an artwork. Manet painted with a restricted palette of “pure colors” avoiding intermediate tones or gradations of value. He used broad areas of color and vividly contrasted light and dark values. Black was very important in his work and he never abandoned its use, as did the Impressionists.

**Shape**—Shape is an area that is contained within an implied line, or is seen and identified because of color or value changes. Shapes are geometric or organic, and positive or negative. In a realistic work, the subject is a positive shape while the
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background is a negative shape. Design in art is basically the planned arrangement of shapes. Manet painted shapes that appeared flat due to harsh frontal lighting. He created shapes using broad planes of color that stood out due to vivid contrast. Often he depicted a single positive shape against the negative shape of a solid background.

Art Principles

Contrast—Contrast refers to differences in values, colors, textures, shapes, and other elements that create visual excitement and add interest to a work of art. Value contrast is most evident when black is next to white. Contrast of color intensity occurs when a pure, intense color is next to a muted or grayed color. Shape contrast occurs when positive and negative shapes or geometric and organic shapes are juxtaposed. Manet contrasted negative background shapes with positive shapes, and light values against dark values for emphasis.

Emphasis—Emphasis is used by artists to create dominance and focus in their work. Artists can emphasize color, value, shape or other elements to draw attention to the most important aspect of their work. Placement in the center, isolation, strong value contrast, shape contrast and color dominance, all add emphasis to a focal area. Manet used placement, isolation and strong contrasts of shape and color in his single figure compositions, while in larger group paintings, he used value, shape and color contrasts to add emphasis to focal areas.
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Biography

Edouard Manet was born in Paris, France, on January 23, 1832, to a wealthy and distinguished family. During this time, about 30 years after the end of the French Revolution, an emperor ruled France, but the real power rested firmly in the hands of the middle class known as the “bourgeoisie.” Manet’s parents were well-respected members of the bourgeoisie; his father was a judge and his mother was the goddaughter of the Crown Prince of Sweden. They hoped their son would someday follow in his father’s footsteps to become a lawyer, but Edouard longed to become an artist. As a compromise, Manet agreed to join the French Navy as a sea cadet and sailed to South America at the age of 16. In 1849, at the end of his term, he failed his naval examinations. To the disappointment of his parents, he returned home to France to pursue art.

With the help of his parents, Edouard entered the studio of Thomas Couture where he studied until 1856. Manet often disagreed with his teacher about subject matter, style and technique. At this time in France, there were established rules of traditional painting methods. Subject matter reflected classical Greek and Roman styles, and techniques of painting light and shadow were standardized. In addition there was a jury of distinguished artists who set the standards for what was considered “good” French art. This group was called the Salon and it held yearly art exhibits that attracted thousands of people. Artists submitted works seeking the Salon’s acceptance, hoping that after many years they would become established enough to serve on its juries. The Salon gave “official” approval to the art it exhibited and accepted artists were then given commissions by the French government for future work. Paintings rejected by the Salon became so stigmatized that they were often unable to be sold at a decent price. There were few art dealers in Paris but most of them were outlets for the Salon. An artist’s success and even his/her livelihood depended on the Salon’s acceptance in those days.

After leaving the studio of Thomas Couture, Manet traveled to Germany, Austria and Italy studying the Old Masters in famous museums throughout Europe. He was particularly influenced by Velazquez, Goya and Hals, as well as by the example of the French realist painter, Gustave Courbet. Manet developed a style of painting that owed a great deal to the old masters, but which focused on images of the modern city. He replaced the old sentimental storytelling of the classical style with a realistic naturalism. Instead of dramatic poses and a central event, Manet painted the modern world in a seemingly spontaneous way. He found his subjects in contemporary Parisian life—at horse races, in gardens, parks and cafes—and painted them with bold brushwork.

The appearance of everyday subjects and this free technique of painting alarmed the Salon and the bourgeoisie. The Salon rejected Manet’s first submission, “The Absinthe Drinker”. But in 1861 he received honorable mentions for a painting of his parents and for a painting of a Spanish guitar player, because they were deemed acceptable subjects. Manet painted genre subjects such as old beggars, street urchins, café characters, and Spanish bullfight scenes. These portrayed a darker aspect of Parisian life, which was quite removed from Manet’s circle, but nonetheless very real. The subject matter did not curry favor among the critics, but because Manet was from a wealthy family, he did not need to sell his paintings to survive.
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The years 1863-1865 were key years in Manet’s career. He had his first confrontations with the public and the Salon. Manet put great emphasis on Salon acceptance, but when he submitted “Luncheon on the Grass” in 1863, and “Olympia” in 1865, they were not only rejected, they caused a scandal that is now part of the folklore of art history. Both were based on classical themes, but Manet’s realistic portrayal of the nude without idealization left his audience shocked and repulsed.

The Salon jury of 1863 had been exceptionally brutal, rejecting three thousand paintings. The Emperor Napolean III, indignant at the excessive severity of the jury, ordered it to display all paintings submitted to it. Thus the Salon des Refusés (the Salon of the Refused) was established and crowds rushed into the “rejected” area in far greater numbers than the official area. They came to see Manet’s newest work, “Luncheon on the Grass.” With this work Manet was thrust into the position of leader of the anti-establishment faction in the French art world.

Younger artists saw Manet as a pioneer and began to gather around him. Known as “Manet’s gang,” artists such as Fantin-Latour, Degas, and Bazille came to the Café Guerbois for animated discussions of modern art. Bazille later brought friends whom he met in art classes at Gleyre’s studio—Monet, Renoir, and Sisley. The group would later become known as the Impressionists, with Cézanne and Pissarro joining the discussion group on occasion. Although Manet was frequently in the company of members of the Impressionist group—Berthe Morisot (his sister-in-law), Degas and Monet in particular—and they regarded him as a leader, he had no wish to join their group. He was naturally irritated by the critic’s tendency to confuse him with Monet and he never painted a truly Impressionist painting.

In 1874, when the Impressionists held their first exhibition at photographer Nadar’s studio, Manet refused to participate. He chose instead to remain focused on the Salon. He never exhibited in any of the eight Impressionist exhibitions, however he still remained connected to them artistically. He worked closely with Monet in Argenteuil in 1874 and often gave financial support to those artists with families who needed it. Berthe Morisot was not only his sister-in-law, but also a student and frequent model for Manet. She also convinced him to lighten his palette and free his brushwork. Although he frequently painted outdoors with his friends, he would return to finish paintings in the studio; he didn’t share their approach to changing light and never abandoned the use of black, which the Impressionists all but banned from their paintings.

Manet had a longstanding relationship with his former piano teacher, Suzanne Leenhoff. She was Dutch and several years older than Manet. Manet married her in 1863 after the death of his father. His father never learned of the affair nor, astoundingly, did Manet’s friends. The relationship had lasted 10 years and produced a son, but Manet was never listed as the father on the birth certificate. The boy, named Léon Koella, was born in 1852, and was presented as Suzanne’s younger brother. Manet painted him several times, and his is the central figure in the “Luncheon in the Studio.”

Political events between 1867-1871 were turbulent in Paris, and Manet turned his eye to the Franco-Prussian War in such works as “The Execution of Maximilian,” “Civil War,” and “The Barricade.” He sent his family south to protect them from the fighting in Paris and signed on as a gunner in the National Guard. He continued to paint and seek acceptance from the Salon but found himself criticized by the public and rejected by the Salon for most of his life. However, toward the end of his life, an old friend, who was then Minister of Fine Arts, arranged for Manet to receive the award of Legion of Honor.

In 1882, his last great masterpiece, “The Bar at the Folies-Bergère,” was exhibited at the Salon. The scene from the modern world of Parisian nightlife exemplified Manet’s philosophy of life and art. He was at the peak of his career, but he was afflicted by untreated syphilis, which caused him much pain. His left foot was amputated due to gangrene and he died eleven days later on April 30, 1883, at the age of 51. He suffered greatly during his later years and the illness confined him to his studio. During those years he painted small still lifes, in particular many paintings of flowers...
posed in vases. In addition he often used pastels or watercolors, as they were easier to manipulate. He left behind 430 oil paintings and a reputation for recording modern Parisian life using his own unique style, however controversial for the time.

Bibliography


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The Presentation

1. **Self-Portrait with Palette**  
   1879, oil on canvas, 32-5/8" x 26-3/8", Private Collection

   This portrait was painted a year after Manet was diagnosed with complications from syphilis. He was 47 and already suffering frequent collapses. Confined to the studio, he produced two self-portraits within a year; both were more like sketches than finished works. Despite the sketchy appearance of this self-portrait, many characteristics of Manet’s work are evident here. His **colors** are spread over the canvas in broad strokes and cover large areas. He **contrasts** the bold yellow **shape** of his jacket (positive shape) with a solid, dark background (negative shape). This color contrast, coupled with the isolation of a brightly colored figure against the vacant backdrop creates **emphasis**.

2. **The Absinthe Drinker**  
   1858-9, oil on canvas, 71-1/4" x 41-3/4", Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark

   This painting was Manet’s first submission to the official Salon. The jury rejected it due to the unprecedented sketch-like treatment and the subject matter itself. The man was a rag picker named Colardet whose poverty and addiction to absinthe are portrayed, not in the customary romanticized way, but realistically. Manet basically painted a life-sized genre scene with a real man from the lower segment of Parisian society. This offended not only the Salon, but the public as well. Because the Salon was the only public place to exhibit art and thus gain acceptance and recognition, Manet continued to seek the Salon’s acceptance throughout his career.

   The work is characteristic of Manet’s use of a simple composition with one figure set against a plain background for **emphasis**. Details and colors are used sparingly. The rough outline of the **shape** is established with broad areas of flat **color** and a minimum of shading. Manet used only a small range of earth tones, and contrasted the sketch-like treatment of the man with detailed still life items: the empty bottle and the glass. Still life objects figure prominently in Manet’s work and here he draws attention to these items through color **contrast**. The light colors of the glass contrast with the dark color of the shadow on the wall, while the dark bottle contrasts with a light yellow color used for the ground. The man’s blurred face is similarly emphasized by the white collar and flesh tones, which contrast with the browns, grays and blacks of the wall, hat and cape.

   Fun Fact: The only Salon jury member to vote in favor of Manet’s submission was Eugène Delacroix, who also used thick lively brushstrokes.
### 3. The Old Musician

*c. 1862, oil on canvas, 73-3/4” x 98”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*

This painting is another example of Manet’s decision to paint everyday life in Paris. The subjects in this group portrait are a gypsy girl and infant, an acrobat, a street urchin, a strolling musician, a drunkard and a figure described as a wandering Jew, all dispossessed by the renovation of Paris that was undertaken by Baron Haussmann at the time of this painting. Manet represents the figures in a realistic, unsentimental manner. This detachment from the subject was very characteristic of Manet’s work and reflected a modern approach to painting. Even the figures themselves seem detached from one another, which is also common in Manet’s paintings. By isolating them from one another, Manet emphasized their isolation from 1860s society.

The composition is loosely based on a Velazquez painting (“Los Borrachos”) in the frieze-like manner in which the figures are lined up across the canvas. It shows the influence of Spanish painting in both technique and subject matter. However, Manet’s lighting seems unnatural and inconsistent. Compare the shadows on the girl and the drinker with the lack of shadows on the two boys. **Shapes** are flatly rendered in broad strokes and areas of solid **color**. Manet was criticized for these characteristics throughout his career. Once again the background is not detailed, rather it is a large area of broadly applied color; it functions as a negative shape behind the positive shapes of the figures.

**Fun Fact:** Can the students find a familiar face? The figure from “The Absinthe Drinker” is on the right of the musician.

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### 4. The Street Singer

*c. 1862, oil on canvas, 69” x 42-1/4”, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

This painting was inspired by a casual encounter between Manet and a woman guitarist on the streets of Paris. He asked the woman to pose for him, but she refused. Instead, he used a model, Victorine Meurent, who became a favorite for future compositions. The subject herself is very realistic and shows the influence of photography, as she seems caught in mid-action, exiting the café behind her. She looks directly at the viewer. Manet’s subjects often make direct eye contact with the viewer, lending a sense of spontaneity and realism to the work.

The composition is typical in its simplicity, with a single figure shown against a contrasting background. Manet draws attention to her direct gaze with harsh light on her face for **emphasis**. The light **color** of her face is in stark **contrast** to her dark eyes, the cherries, and overall drab browns and greens of the background. In addition, the bright red of the cherries in the yellow wrapping paper creates a vivid focal point through color contrast. The harsh light also creates crisp outlines around her **shape**, making her appear flat and setting her off against the background. The composition reflects the influence of Japanese prints with an emphasis on flattened shapes, simplified space, shape outlines, and using the color black to create contrasts. This type of frontal lighting is common in Manet paintings and results from his distinctive shading using gray and black instead of gradations of the color itself.

**Fun Fact:** Victorine Meurent is also the model in “Luncheon on the Grass,” “Olympia” and “The Railway.”
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5. **Concert at the Tuileries Gardens**  
1862, oil on canvas, 30" x 46-1/2", National Gallery, London

Manet depicts a modern subject (the fashionable bourgeoisie of Parisian society) in a modern setting using a modern technique. For all these reasons, this painting was not accepted by the Salon judges. It is a contemporary group portrait with the entire crowd as the subject. Manet included himself (at the extreme left) and several friends in the scene. His brother, Eugène, is the central bowing figure, while the poet Baudelaire, the painter Fantin-Latour and the composer Offenbach are also visible. All of these important figures are placed in the foreground, close to the viewer, lending emphasis through placement.

Manet sought to capture a moment in time, similar to a snapshot of contemporary life. The influence of photography is evident in the feeling of a “glimpsed moment,” which derives from the uneven finish, lack of emphasis on a single focal point, and the cropped figures at the edge of the canvas. Some areas are outlined and crisp while others are blurry. Manet uses several types of contrast. He contrasts light and dark colors by alternating black coats and top hats with bright dresses of blue, red and yellow, and he contrasts the vertical lines of the tree trunks with the organic shapes of the crowd. This contrast captures our attention. The brushwork is not finished or refined, rather paint is applied freely, and in bold broad patches of color. This technique and the use of flat brightly colored shapes, rendered without the traditional shading using gradations of color, were totally against the traditions of the Salon and shocked the public when the painting was exhibited in 1863.

Fun Fact: This painting became famous after it was rejected by the official Salon and was exhibited at the Salon des Refusés. It greatly influenced the Impressionists because it was a contemporary outdoor scene, depicting a general impression of real people. The sketchy brushwork and modern theme seen here were two stylistic features the Impressionists would later become known for.

6. **Luncheon on the Grass**  
1862-3, oil on canvas, 83-3/4" x 106-3/8", Musée d'Orsay, Paris

This painting marked the first scandal of modern art and established Manet as the leader of the anti-establishment faction in the French art world. It was displayed in the exhibition known as the Salon des Refusés (the Salon of the Refused) in 1863 and it became the talk of the show.

The theme itself, a picnic in the woods, was an often-repeated artistic subject. However, until this painting was exhibited, all nudes had been idealized. This picnic was shocking due to its modernity. The woman was unmistakably contemporary, and she was naked. She is portrayed realistically and her gaze visually engages the viewer. In addition, the two gentleman are not only clothed in the fashion of the day, but are recognizable as Manet’s brother, Eugène, and his future brother-in-law, Ferdinand Leenhoff. The public, who considered the subject matter an affront to morality and decency in 1863, rejected it.
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Manet never intended his painting to be so controversial. He painted a scene with classical elements of a nude in a landscape and added a small still life in the lower left. He posed the scene in his studio and originally used the title “The Bath.” Unfortunately, the painting was not well received. The scene is lit by brilliant frontal light, which flattens the shapes of the figures. The resulting hard contours make the shapes look like silhouettes. Stark contrasts of light tones used on the women and dark tones used on the men create emphasis on the women. One woman is dramatically set off in her nudity while the other woman seems out of scale, with a distinct lack of perspective. Rather than appearing as two bathers blending with the scene, Manet draws attention to their differences from the landscape with color and value contrasts.

Familiar Manet elements are evident here: the still life in the lower left on the discarded clothing is rendered in contrasts of vivid color; the main subject (who makes direct eye contact) appears frozen in harsh light similar to a snapshot in photography; and brushwork reflects heavy application of almost pure colors, without tonal gradations. The subject and its treatment are distinctly “modern.”

7. The Dead Toreador
1863-4, oil on canvas, 29-1/2” x 60-1/4”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Possibly because the emperor, Napoleon III, was married to a Spanish woman, Spanish subjects were in vogue in 1850s France. Manet’s choice of subject and his style of painting reflected this. He appreciated the stark contrasts in the work of Velazquez and Goya, and this is emulated here. The painting does not seek to tell a story; rather Manet wanted to achieve a bold composition. He used contrasts of black and white for drama. He placed the figure against an ambiguous background creating emphasis on the positive shape of the isolated toreador. Due to foreshortening of the body, his figure is thrust toward the viewer, further adding emphasis. Only the brightly colored cape and the bright spots of red blood offer contrast to the stark scene of blacks and whites. Black was a color Manet used often and it figured prominently in both his own works and in the many Spanish works that he so admired.

Fun Fact: This painting was originally part of a larger painting “Episode from a Bullfight.” Critics complained that the figure of the toreador in the foreground was out of proportion to the bullfight in the background, so Manet cut them into two smaller works: this one and one called the “Bullfight.”
8. The Fifer
1865-6, oil on canvas, 63" x 38-1/2", Musée d’Orsay, Paris

This composition reflects the Spanish penchant for showing an isolated figure surrounded by empty space. The isolated, flattened figure of the boy is clearly the emphasis in this highly simplified composition. Contrast is responsible for this emphasis. The harsh frontal lighting eliminates realistic shadows and flattens the boy’s positive shape against the gray negative shape of the background (shape contrast). Manet uses only a few areas of distinct shadow—on the boy’s hand and behind his outstretched foot. Critics said that Manet’s “figures looked as flat as playing cards.” The lack of shadows makes the space in this composition ambiguous. The flat areas of solid color reinforce this feeling. Only six colors are used in this composition and these colors are applied in bold strokes of pure pigments layered on top of one another.

The use of black lines and solid areas of color reflect the influence of Japanese prints. The bands of the bright red trousers edged by black contours lines, the use of stark black and white contrasts in the shoes and sash, and the flatness of the shapes, all serve to make the painting very decorative and highlight the strong influence of Japanese print techniques on French artists in the mid-1800s.

Fun Fact: A young trooper from the Imperial Guard came to Manet’s studio to serve as a model for this painting.

9. The Balcony
1869, oil on canvas, 66-1/2" x 48-1/2", Musée d’Orsay, Paris

Manet sought the acceptance of the official Salon throughout his career. He eventually had 15 paintings accepted between 1861 and 1882. This painting was one of those accepted by the jury. The subject is a contemporary group of identifiable people on a balcony. On the left is Berthe Morisot, whom Manet painted several times. She met Manet through the painter Fantin-Latour and then later married Manet’s brother. Next to her is the violinist Fanny Claus and behind them is the painter Antonin Guillemet. The figures appear detached from the viewer and each other, as is often the case in Manet’s group paintings.

Harsh lighting flattens the depth of the balcony and interior, emphasizing the two-dimensionality of the canvas. The interior space is poorly lit and, as a result, we can barely see the figure in the ambiguous background. Characteristic use of black and white contrast emphasizes the two women in the shallow foreground. Yet we can only guess as to why they are posed next to one another, but staring in opposite directions. They are portrayed as large white shapes, modeled with gray tones. Small touches of contrasting bright colors appear in the man’s cravat and the green of the shutters and railing. The green shutters and vertical lines of the balcony railing reinforce the flatness of the space. These features show influences of Japanese prints in the linear decoration and division of space. Note the small hydrangea plant in a pot on the far left which functions as a still life object.

Fun Fact: The painting is based on a similar composition by Goya, named “Mayas on the Balcony.” Manet felt he was updating a classic painting with this group of contemporary figures.
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10. Luncheon in the Studio
1868, oil on canvas, 47-1/4" x 60-5/8", Neue Pinakotek, Munich

This group portrait is another of Manet's paintings where the individuals are detached from one another - only the maid holding the coffee pot engages the viewer with direct eye contact. The other two figures gaze off in opposing directions. The scene appears captured and frozen in a harsh light and the boy is cropped at the knees, reflecting the influence of photography.

As in photography, some areas appear more finished than others. Manet took great care with certain elements such as the still life objects on either side of the central figure of the young man. This figure, his son Léon at age 16, is clearly the emphasis of the painting; he is framed by two still life focal points. The crisp contours of his face, the velvet jacket, shirt, tie and straw hat are contrasted by the less distinct depiction of the woman behind him and the man next to him. They are rendered in a much looser manner, and form a backdrop for the focal point. Contrasts of light and dark areas further draw attention to Leon. His shape dominates the foreground of the genre scene. Yet it seems less than natural with the 17th century armor on the chair and the food on the table, which seems more like a staged Dutch still life than a lunch in a studio. It seems Manet has included shapes to suit his composition rather than to reflect an actual scene.

11. The Railway
1873, oil on canvas, 45" x 37", National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Because this painting was exhibited at the Salon of 1874, the year of the first Impressionist group exhibition, the public mistakenly associated Manet's work with that group. In fact, many people confused Manet with Monet. The painting, Manet's largest to date, does show influences of the Impressionist technique and was one of the few that he worked on en plein air. Manet was one of the first to use the modern subject of the railway station, but his treatment of it is quite different from the Impressionists. Note how the train is not actually part of the composition.

This painting of a young girl and a woman in front of the St. Lazare station is a wonderful “impression” of contemporary life. Influences from Berthe Morisot are evident in the compositional structure of the painting: the railing that separates the figures from the world beyond the barrier, and the girl shown from the back, which was a favorite device of Morisot's.

The model, Victorine Meurent, makes direct contact with the viewer. As is typical of many Manet figures, she is detached from the little girl who is clearly detached from us, as she turns her back to the viewer. The railing in the background flattens the space and shows the influence of Japanese prints. Emphasis is on the shallow foreground figures placed in front of the smoke and steam of the diffused background. These two figures are a study in opposing contrasts. The girl is clad in a white dress trimmed with a blue bow, while the woman is dressed in dark blue trimmed with white. One has her hair bound by a narrow black ribbon and the other has flowing tresses under a black hat, with a black ribbon around her neck. One figure ignores us and the other confronts us. The shapes are created using large areas of boldly applied vivid colors and Manet's favorite color, black.
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12. Boating
1874, oil on canvas, 38-1/4” x 51-1/4”, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Manet painted this slice of modern life in the summer of 1874, when he was working with Renoir and Monet at Argenteuil. The subject was painted en plein air using a bright palette applied in loose visible brush strokes, all of which reflect the Impressionist technique of painting. Manet combined the Impressionist subject with Japanese compositional features such as the unusually high viewpoint, bold lines and the flattened, cropped shape of the sail. He used broken brushwork in the woman’s striped dress, but he did not modify his colors to convey the effect of the sunlight as did the Impressionists. Manet stayed true to himself by contrasting the bright white shapes of the woman’s hat and the man against a plain background of blue water, with only a hint of gray to indicate a shadow. This contrast creates emphasis, which is reinforced by her black ribbon against the stark white hat, creating a contrast of colors.

13. SCANNING: A Bar at the Folies-Bergère
1881-2, oil on canvas, 37-3/4” x 51-1/5”, The Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

This is considered Manet’s last great masterpiece and it synthesizes all the themes that had interested him throughout his career. At this time, he was already too sick to stand without a cane, so he made sketches on site, but finished the painting in his studio. There he improvised a bar using a table for the model to stand behind. She is the dominant figure (emphasis) of this painting and makes eye contact with the viewer. Manet captured a scene any middle-class Parisian visiting a bar in 1881 would have experienced. Thus the subject is modern and the treatment of the elements is as well.

Our attention is concentrated on the foreground, with its shallow space and the row of still life objects on the bar. Instead of a plain contrasting background, Manet has added a twist with a mirror reflecting what the barmaid sees. He gives us an impression of the room, but distorts reality by moving her reflection and that of the customer she speaks to off to the right. Even her shape in the reflection is rendered in a more casual pose than the vertical pose of the frontal view. The harsh artificial light creates the familiar flattening of shapes and catches the figure as if frozen in a photograph. Shadows are not realistic and are simply modeled with gray tones, rather than values of the same color. Cropping adds to the feeling of a “glimpse” and reflects Japanese influences.

Stark contrasts of white and black, light versus dark values and organic shapes against geometric tables, railings and columns all draw attention to the barmaid and the array of still life objects in the foreground. Placement in the center and foreground further reinforce the bar maid’s role as the focal point of the painting. As always, there is ample use of black, which Manet contrasts with stark white or bright vivid colors to create emphasis. The group portrait in the background is merely a diffused backdrop for the real focal points in the foreground, the barmaid and the objects on the bar.

Fun Fact: The model, Suzan, was a real barmaid from the Folies-Bergère.
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Scanning Questions

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère
1881-2, oil on canvas, 37-3/4" x 51-1/5", The Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

Art Elements: What you see.

Color
• Which two colors did the artist use most? (Black and white.)
• Where are the brightest colors in this painting? (The objects on the bar in the foreground.)

Shape
• Which shape dominates the composition? (The barmaid.)
• Can you find two shapes that are cropped? (The trapeze artist on the upper left and the man on the right.)

Art Principles: How the elements are arranged.

Contrast
• Where is the greatest area of color contrast? (The barmaid and the still life objects.)
• Can you find an example of shape contrast? (Organic barmaid and geometric tables, railings and columns.)

Emphasis
• What is the dominant focus of this painting? (The barmaid.)
• How did Manet achieve this emphasis? (Placement, isolation, color contrast, shape contrast and value contrast.)

Technical Properties: How it was made.
Did the artist paint this from his imagination? (No, he painted it from real life in the bar, finishing it in the studio.)
• Did Manet use small brushstrokes that are hard to find, or bold visible brushstrokes? (Bold, visible brushstrokes.)

Expressive Properties: How it makes you feel.
• What do you think the barmaid is thinking?
• What title would you give this painting?
Edouard Manet

14. A Bar at the Folies-Bergère (Detail)
1881-2, oil on canvas, The Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

Manet was a master of the still life whether in tiny works or complex arrangements containing still life elements. This painting has long been admired for the dazzling rendering of the champagne bottles and fruit on the marble counter top. The bright orange of the fruit is complemented and contrasted by the green glass of the bottle of crème de menthe, but most intensely by the black of the barmaid’s dress above it. Contrasts of complementary colors create emphasis on the bottles while contrasts of white and black establish the shapes of the barmaid’s arm and the flowers in the glass.

15. Pinks and Clematis in a Crystal Vase
1883, oil on canvas, 22” x 13-3/4”, Musée d’Orsay, Paris

As his health steadily declined, Manet turned to small floral paintings and portraits. His severe illness and the amputation of one foot made it extremely difficult to move around. He painted things that could be brought indoors and placed on his dining room table. This is the first of a series of floral still life paintings. The brushwork is very loose, but the broad shapes of bold color still seem flat and simply modeled. The negative shape of a plain blue-gray background contrasts with the positive shape of the flowers. The only shape that is not depicted as a solid area of color is the transparent vase. Contrasts of color, value and shape create emphasis on the brightly colored flowers placed in the center of the canvas. Placement and isolation reinforce their position as the focal point of the painting.