



12-30 **Gustave Courbet**, *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 5'8" x 6'6" (1.74 x 2 m). Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

### **Courbet, Manet, and the Beginnings of Modernism**

While Guys preferred working "small," and on paper, there were a few artists during the Second Empire who treated modern urban life on a larger scale. One was Courbet who, in at least one painting, monumentalized the *demimonde* that Guys had represented only in miniature. Courbet's *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)* (FIG. 12-30), of 1856–7, shows two fashionable young women on the grassy banks of the Seine river, just outside Paris. Apparently they have come to this spot in the company of one or more men, because a black top hat lies in their rowboat. The woman in the background has picked some flowers and gazes across the water. Her cohort, meanwhile, has made herself truly comfortable by taking off her dress, to use it as a pillow. She reclines on the grass in her underwear, only summarily covered by a cashmere shawl. Contemporary Salon visitors must have understood the irony of Courbet's

title, since these, of course, were not "young ladies" but *cocottes*, whose easy availability was manifest both in their partial undress and their reclining position (one of the many French nicknames for call girls was "horizontal").

If Courbet's *Young Ladies* shocked many a Salon visitor in 1857, it is evident why *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass; FIG. 12-31), by Edouard Manet (1832–1883), was refused outright by the Salon jury in 1863. Manet's painting, shown at the Salon des Refusés, also represents two *cocottes*, but they have undressed down to the skin. While Courbet only hinted at the presence of male lovers, Manet has placed two fully dressed men in close proximity to one of the women.

Manet was thirty-one years old when he submitted *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (or *Le Bain* [The Bath], as it was originally called) to the Salon of 1863. A student of Thomas Couture, he had already won a medal two years earlier for his *Spanish Singer* (FIG. 12-32). But while that painting repre-





12-31 (above) **Edouard Manet**, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass), 1863. Oil on canvas, 6'9" x 8'10" (2.06 x 2.69 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.



12-32 **Edouard Manet**, *Spanish Singer*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 58 x 45" (1.47 x 1.14 m). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

sented an acceptable aspect of Parisian public life, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* ventured into more private corners. Moreover, while the *Spanish Singer* was painted in a traditional style inspired by seventeenth-century Spanish painting, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* represents an entirely new way of seeing and representing reality.

*Déjeuner sur l'herbe* shows two young Parisians dressed in the formal attire of university students. They are seated in the wood, outside Paris, together with a naked woman. (The word "naked" is appropriate here, for this woman is not a nude—i.e., an ideal human being in its natural state. Rather, she is a specific individual who has purposely taken off her clothes, which lie in a heap in the foreground of the painting.) A second woman, lightly draped in a diaphanous chemise, bathes in a shallow pool in the distance.

As one or two critics reporting on the Salon des Refusés noticed, the subject of the painting and even the general



arrangement of the figures are related to a work by the sixteenth-century Venetian painter Titian, *Pastoral Concert* (FIG. 12-33). That painting, formerly attributed to Giorgione, likewise shows two unclothed women in the company of two men dressed in contemporary costume. The general arrangement of the figures—three seated, one standing apart—is also similar. Titian's painting was well known in nineteenth-century Paris since it was one of the most widely admired Renaissance paintings in the Louvre.

Manet's paraphrase of the famous Venetian painting was, no doubt, deliberate. His painting may be seen as an attempt to demonstrate that an undressed body can be read in different ways, depending on its visual context. It can be seen aesthetically, as a pure and beautiful form, and erotically, as an object of sexual desire. Manet chose to create a context that made an erotic reading unavoidable. Yet, in so doing, he also raised questions about Titian's hallowed masterpiece.

Among the many questions raised by *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* is one that affects the way we read this work today. Does the distance in time and the masterpiece status of paintings, such as Titian's *Pastoral Concert* and Manet's *Déjeuner*,

dull the erotic effect of the nude? Nineteenth-century viewers were able to ignore the erotic aspects of Titian's painting because it was supposed to represent people from the past, not the present. Similarly, today, we are only mildly shocked to see nineteenth-century men in the company of naked women, as in Manet's painting. But if we translate Manet's painting into modern terms, remove the dignity of the museum setting, and put it on a popular album cover (FIG. 12-34), the effect changes dramatically. Indeed, unless the viewer realizes that the image on the cover is a pun on Manet's painting, he or she may find it, if not shocking, at least provocative.

In his "remake" of Titian's painting, Manet not only modernized the costume but also introduced a new way of representing reality. In typically Renaissance fashion, Titian had emphasized the three-dimensionality of the nudes in his painting with pronounced *chiaroscuro*. The strong contrast between light and shade and the gentle transitions between them no doubt reflect what Titian saw as he observed the nude model lit by the directed light that came through his atelier window. Had he painted out

12-33 **Titian** (formerly attributed to Giorgione), *Pastoral Concert*, c.1508. Oil on canvas, 43 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 54 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (1.1 x 1.38 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.







12-34 **BowWowWow**, *Go Wild in the Country*, 1981–2. Record sleeve. Photograph by Andy Earl.

in the open, however, light and dark contrasts would have been much less visible. One look at the nude figure on the *BowWowWow* album cover (see FIG. 12-34) shows that, in broad daylight, *chiaroscuro* is limited to narrow areas of shading. Manet was keenly aware of this visual phenomenon and, although he painted his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* inside the studio, he tried to retain the effect of outdoor light in his painting. He did this by minimizing *chiaroscuro*: shading is reduced to little more than a narrow black line on the underside of the woman's thigh.

In his memoirs, Manet's close friend Antonin Proust recalled an incident when he and Manet were lying on the banks of the Seine, outside Paris, watching some women bathing in the river. Proust quotes Manet as having said: "When we were in [Couture's] studio, I copied Giorgione's women, the women with musicians. It's black that painting. The ground has come through. I want to redo it . . . with a transparent atmosphere with people like those you see over there." Although the authenticity of this statement has been doubted, it brings up some important points. First, Manet appears to have objected to Titian's painting—and to Old Master paintings in general—because it was too dark. It did not convey the sunny outdoors; the pearly white skins of the nudes, which should glow in the sunlight, are obscured by too much shading. Secondly, Manet pointed out that Titian used a dark ground, or undercoating, for his painting, which inevitably increased its dimness. In *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* Manet effectively abandoned the dark ground to paint directly on the white canvas. The artist predicted that his painting would be attacked for the newness of its formal qualities, and, indeed, several older critics faulted the painting for its foreground modeling.

Younger critics, however, praised Manet's fresh and innovative approach.

Manet took his innovations one step further in a painting that he submitted to the Salon of 1865, entitled *Olympia* (FIG. 12-35). In the wake of the famous "Salon of the Venuses" of 1863 (see page 279) he may have felt the urge to take on the art establishment once again by treating the traditional subject of the reclining nude. *Olympia* represents a young woman, undressed, her body "displayed" on a cashmere shawl casually thrown upon a bed. Behind her, a black servant approaches with a bunch of flowers. But the woman turns away from her to look, somewhat defiantly, at the spectator.

Like *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, *Olympia* contains an obvious reference to an Old Master painting—Titian's *Venus of Urbino* in Florence (FIG. 12-36). But the black choker around the woman's neck, as well as her fashionable slippers, makes it clear that she is not a mythical being but a mercenary love goddess of the nineteenth century. Once again, Manet has subverted a much-admired traditional image by substituting a courtesan for a goddess. The name *Olympia*, though it has a Classical ring to it, was not used by women in ancient times. It did not become popular until the nineteenth century, when it was a common "professional" name for prostitutes.

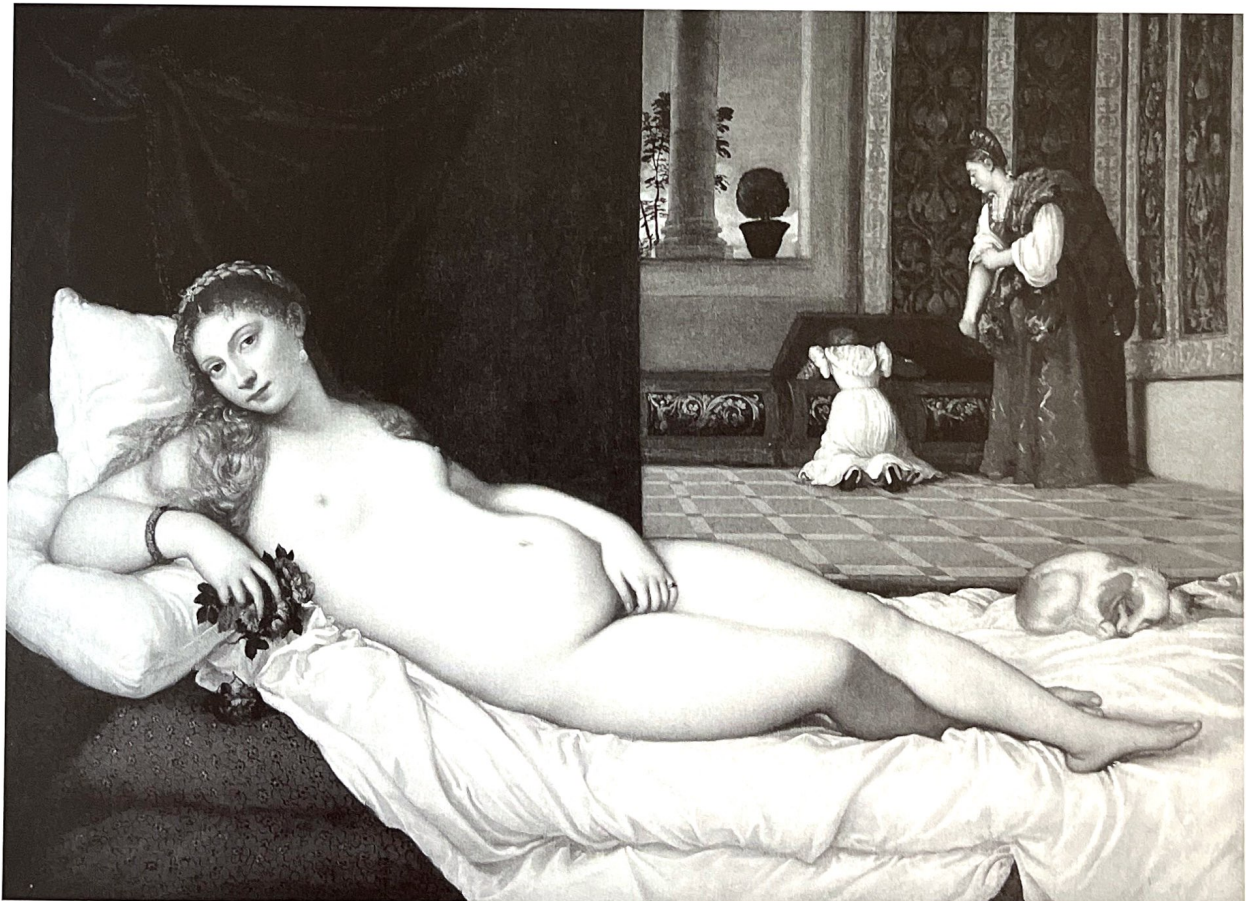
As in *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, Manet has reduced shading to little more than a dark contour. By choosing to focus again on the nude—the darling subject of every academic painter—Manet clearly set himself up as an innovator, even a rebel. In *Olympia* he dispensed with all the basic rules that were taught in the Academy: rules pertaining to subject matter, which dictated decorum; rules pertaining to form, which emphasized modeling with light and shade; and rules of





12-35 **Edouard Manet**, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 4'3" x 6'2" (1.3 x 1.9 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

12-36 **Titian**, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. Oil on canvas, 47 x 65" (1.19 x 1.65 m). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.







12-37 **Edouard Manet**, *Portrait of Emile Zola*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 57 x 45" (1.46 x 1.14 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

beauty, which emphasized the ideal perfection of Classical Greek art. For breaching tradition and advocating something that was radically new, Manet has been called the father of "modernism"—an important trend in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art that entails the continuous rejection of the past and the unremitting search for new forms of expression. Or, to put it differently, Manet was a modernist because he sought new artistic forms and strategies that could express the essence of social modernity.

While Manet was widely attacked by his contemporaries, he also had a number of defenders. Among them was the writer Emile Zola (see page 270), who, in a series of essays devoted to Manet, defended him for his "originality," a term that became closely linked to "modernism."

A young painter has obeyed, in a very straightforward manner, his own personal inclinations concerning vision and understanding [of reality]; he has begun to paint in a way which is

contrary to the sacred rules taught in schools. Thus, he has produced original works, strong and bitter in flavor, which have offended the eyes of people accustomed to other points of view . . . I ask them not only to criticize Edouard Manet fairly, but also all original artists, who will make their appearance. I extend my plea further—my aim is not only to have one man accepted, but to have all art accepted.

As a gesture of appreciation, in 1868 Manet painted Zola's portrait (FIG. 12-37). The young writer is shown seated in his study at a desk littered with books and papers. Zola's pamphlet on Manet is clearly visible behind the writer's quill, framing the artist's name. In the background we see a Japanese screen, suggesting that the writer is caught up in the new craze for Japanese art. We also see a Japanese print, set in a large frame, together with a photograph of Manet's *Olympia* and an engraved reproduction of a painting by the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Velázquez.





12-38 **Kitagawa Utamaro**, *The Fickle Type*, from the "Ten Facial Types of Women," c.1792–3. Woodblock print, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (36.4 x 24.5 cm). British Museum, London.

The juxtaposition of Manet's *Olympia* and a Japanese print was, no doubt, intentional. In his essay on Manet, Zola had urged viewers to compare Manet's "simplified style of painting" with Japanese woodblock prints, which, he felt, "resemble[d] Manet's work in their strange elegance and magnificent bold patches of color." Japanese prints had been coming into western Europe since 1854 (see pages 360 and 370), and soon become the rage among young artists because they offered a rendition of reality that ran counter to the traditional Western representational model. Japanese prints lacked most of the formal devices used in the West to suggest three-dimensionality and depth, particularly linear perspective and *chiaroscuro*. Asian artists were less obsessed than Western artists with approximating reality. They had different aesthetic priorities, preferring to capture the essence of their subjects rather than fooling the beholder into thinking that he or she was looking at the "real thing." A print by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), showing a Japanese geisha girl after

her bath (FIG. 12-38), is typical of the kind of Japanese prints that were reaching the West. Its simple, flowing contours, lack of shading, and pure colors impressed contemporary viewers, including Manet.

We will never know whether Japanese prints caused Manet drastically to reduce *chiaroscuro* in his works; or whether, vice versa, his "*chiaroscuro* fatigue" caused him to become interested in Japanese prints. What is noteworthy is that, beginning with Manet, the history of "modernism" in art goes hand in hand with a growing awareness of and interest in non-Western art. (This was facilitated by the imperialism of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.) Exposure to non-Western art forms showed artists that it was possible to create art unbound by traditional rules. Indeed, non-Western art as well as art outside the "high art" tradition (folk art, children's art, etc.) provided a fresh alternative to the aesthetic precepts, rooted in Classical art, that were promoted by the academies from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.



### Manet at the Salons of the 1870s and 1880s

Surrounded by the canvases of Bouguereau, Breton, and Bastien-Lepage, the works of Manet continued to strike a dissonant note, even though, by the 1870s, the artist had abandoned the shocking subject matter of the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*. *Railroad (Gare St-Lazare)* (FIG. 16-18), shown at the Salon of 1874, shows a scene from contemporary urban life. At the Gare St-Lazare (St-Lazare Station) a young woman and a little girl are waiting near a black iron fence that spans the width of the canvas. The woman, wearing a simple dark blue dress and a black hat, sits on the masonry base that anchors the fence. Aware of our presence, she looks up from her reading, marking with her finger the place in the book where she has left off. Meanwhile, the little girl in her pretty white frock is fascinated by the urban life beyond the fence. She turns her back, as if oblivious to our presence. We, the viewers, are cast in the role of passers-by. The scene suggests one of those fleeting moments in modern life when our eyes momen-

arily meet those of a stranger in the crowd and when, for just a second, we consciously isolate and register a visual sensation within the continuous bombardment of visual stimuli that hit our eye. The impression of the picture as a fleeting moment is further enhanced by the sketchy, loose brushwork. Some parts of the painting, such as the girl's hand, seem hardly finished. The lack of definition is even more pronounced in the background of the painting, where a huge cloud of steam, apparently coming from a train, blurs the view.

Contemporary critics were at a loss how to deal with this picture. Although it was not blatantly offensive, as were *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* (see FIGS. 12-31 and 12-35), it was nevertheless startling because it was so entirely devoid of beauty, sentiment, and narrative. This caused the subject to be, as one critic put it, "unintelligible." "Properly speaking," he wrote, "there was no subject at all; no interest attaches to the two figures because of what they are doing." Humor was one way of coping with this work, which became the subject of numerous jokes

16-18 **Edouard Manet**, *Railroad (Gare St-Lazare)*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (93.3 cm x 1.15 m). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.





and caricatures. In a cartoon by the well-known caricaturist Cham (the pseudonym of Count Amédée-Charles-Henry de Noé), the young woman has become a drunken witch and the puppy on her lap a baby seal, while the extended arm of the little girl has been stretched to ridiculous proportions. The caption reads: "Manet. *The Lady with the Seal*. These unfortunate creatures, seeing themselves painted this way, wanted to flee. But he [Manet], foreseeing this, has introduced a fence, which makes it impossible for them to retreat."

Only a few critics defended Manet, such as the one who wrote: "I should understand how one might disapprove of the style of the work and even that one could grow indignant. But what is the problem? What has the painter wanted to do? To give us a truthful impression of a familiar scene." That defense sounds so simple as to be almost unnecessary. Today we are used to the idea that even the most trivial scene or object from daily life can be the subject of art or even art itself. But the nineteenth-century imperative that art should teach a moral lesson or evoke a powerful sentiment dictated that it should have a meaningful subject. To concede that a painter need only

evoke a glimpse of modern life to create a work of art was quite a revolutionary statement.

If the meaning of *Railroad (Gare St-Lazare)* was unclear to many so was that of Manet's last major painting, *A Bar at the Folies Bergère* (FIG. 16-19), submitted to the Salon of 1882. The painting is centered on a young barmaid, who glances at the viewer from behind a marble counter covered with bottles and glassware. Behind her is a huge wall mirror in which we see the reflection of the Folies Bergère, one of the most famous variety nightclubs of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Paris. Also in the mirror, though apparently at an incorrect angle, we see the barmaid's back and a man with a droopy mustache, who appears here as a stand-in for us, the viewers. We do not know whether he is ordering a drink or propositioning her. The barmaid's face is aloof and emotionless, showing only boredom and indifference to the customer—one of countless men who, night after night, ask for drinks or the price of her after-hour services. Like the *Railroad (Gare St-Lazare)*, Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergère* suggests that the essence of modernity is the fleeting encounter, the superficial contact that leaves no lasting impression.

16-19 **Edouard Manet**, *A Bar at the Folies Bergère*, 1881–2. Oil on canvas, 37<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 51" (96 cm x 1.3 m). Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

