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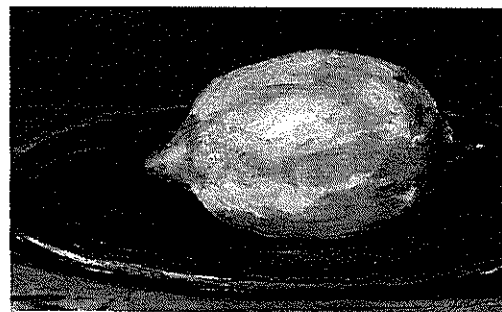
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MANET

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MODERN

Françoise Cachin



DISCOVERIES

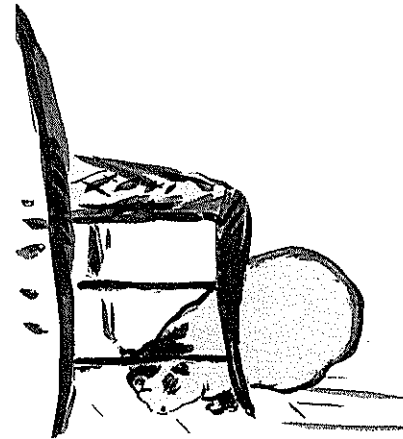
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History has endowed certain paintings with the signal status of inaugurating a new chapter in art. There is a before and an after. This is the case for Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in the 20th century; and, in the second half of the 19th century, rightly or wrongly, the same role was fulfilled by *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*.

CHAPTER III

"IS THIS PAINTING?"



In the foreground of *The Bath* (1863, detail opposite), more famous now under the title *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, Manet painted a superb still life: a basket of fruit carelessly overturned on the model's garments. At left is one of Manet's numerous pen-and-ink portraits of cats, animals for which Manet and Baudelaire shared a great fondness.

On 15 May 1863 the Salon des Refusés opened in an annex of the official Salon, which was held in the Palais de l'Industrie (also called the Palais des Champs-Élysées). Two nudes shown in the official Salon captivated the public and the critics: Paul Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave* and Alexandre Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*, which was immediately purchased by Emperor Louis-Napoleon. But in the Salon des Refusés the curious public could view those scandalous avant-garde works that had been rejected by the official Salon.

As many as seven thousand people visited the exciting and diverting Salon des Refusés on opening day. "The exhibition was separated from the other by a turnstile. One entered as if one were entering the 'Chamber of Horrors' at Madame Tussaud's in London," recalled Jean-Charles Cazin, one of the Refusés. It is hard to comprehend today that works by such artists as Whistler, Cézanne, and Fantin-Latour—all of which have since become respected and beloved—could have at one time fomented such mirth. Of course, this is also the case for the paintings of the young Manet.

Corrupt Taste

It was Manet, in fact, who proved the hero of the day with his contribution—a sort of triptych, whose central panel, *The Bath* (later renamed *Le Déjeuner sur*

CATALOGUE

DES OUVRAGES

DE

PEINTURE, SCULPTURE, GRAVURE

LITHOGRAPHIE ET ARCHITECTURE

REFUSÉS PAR LE JURY DE 1863

Et exposés,
par décision de S. M. l'Empereur,

AU SALON ANNEXE

PALAIS DES CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES



"MY SON! TAKE OFF YOUR HAT! LET US HONOR UNHAPPY COURAGE."

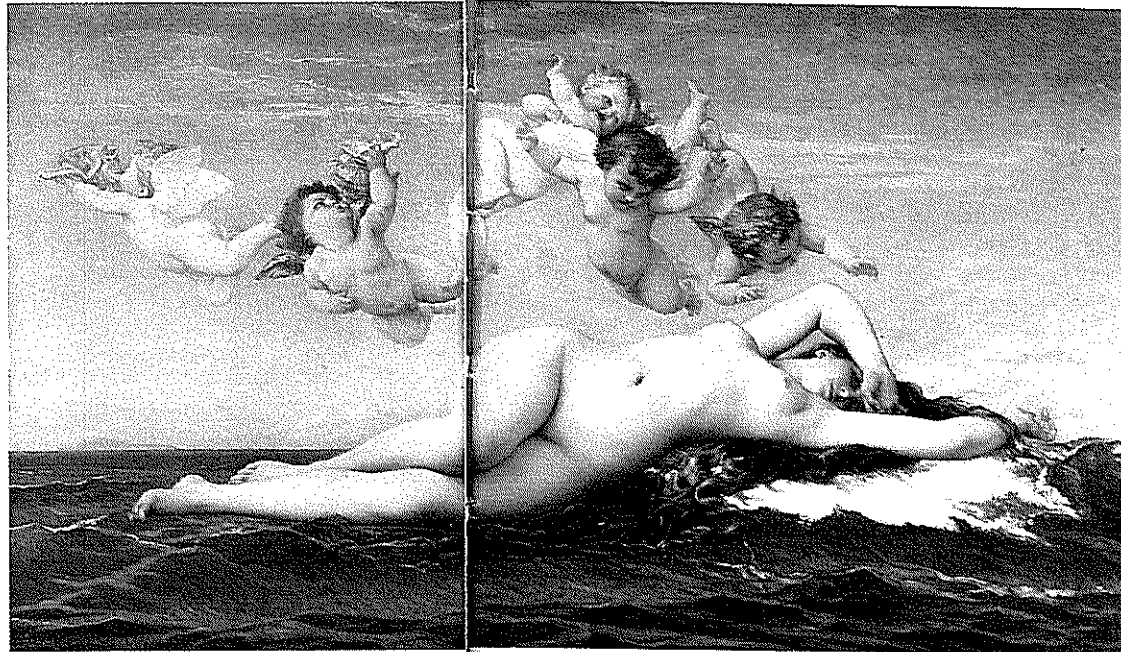
"We cannot accept that this is a perfectly chaste work of a young woman seated in the woods dressed only in

l'Herbe), was flanked by *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* and *Mlle. V... in the Costume of an Espada*. Most critics were shocked, not just by the subject matter, but also by the technique. "Manet will have talent the day he learns drawing and perspective, and he will have taste the day he gives up choosing subjects solely for their ability to create a scandal," noted critic Ernest Chesneau.

The 1863 Salon des Refusés gave rise to many caricatures, such as this one (left) by the satirist Cham.

Opposite: The cover of the small catalogue published for the 1863 Salon des Refusés.

One need only compare *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and the *Olympia*, painted the same year, to Alexandre Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* (left)—a great success at the official Salon of 1863—to understand why it is that Manet's nudes were so shocking but those of the academic painters (even though they were more lascivious and, one might say, hypocritically slutty) were not. Cabanel's *Venus* is idealized, but in keeping with the taste of the day, and she modestly hides her face. Cupids flying above her indicate that this is a goddess, not a woman of the 1800s. She is painted in a smooth and sugary manner—"in exquisite taste," according to the same critic who found Manet's nudes so vulgar and his manner of painting so brutal.



the shade of leaves and surrounded by [male] students wearing berets and overcoats," he continued. "That is a very secondary consideration, and I deplore, even more than the composition itself, the intention that inspired it.... M. Manet wants to achieve fame by shocking the bourgeois;...his taste has been corrupted by his fascination with the bizarre." Added Jules-Antoine Castagnary, "I agree that *The Bath*, *The Majo*, and *The Espada* are good rough sketches. There is a certain life in the tone, a particular honesty in the brush stroke, both of which are far from average. But beyond that? Is this drawing? Is this painting? M. Manet thinks he is solid and powerful, he is only hard; what is especially odd is that he is weak as well as hard." Even a critic as discerning as Théophile Thoré found *The Bath* to be "in slightly risqué taste," though he also noted that "in these spurned works there appears to be a new beginning for French art. He is baroque and wild, sometimes apt and even profound."

From *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*...

The centerpiece of the triptych, positioned between two brilliant works of Spanish fantasy, was altogether classic in inspiration. Connoisseurs, artists in particular, could not have missed that. In fact, its group of three figures had been copied from an early 16th-century composition of Raphael's, *The Judgment of Paris*, which had been popularized by a contemporary, the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi. This view of two river gods and a nymph was well known in the studios of Manet's day. The only difference in Manet's work was that, while leaving the woman naked, he had dressed the two men in contemporary garb, making their companion an "authentic" modern nude, a woman undressed, whose clothes could be seen brazenly strewn in the foreground among the remains of a picnic.



Two works done in the "Spanish manner" flanked *The Bath* at the Salon des Refusés in 1863. On the left was *The Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* (above), for which Manet's brother Gustave posed. Critics deplored the vividness with which the red blanket had been painted, remarking that in this work, as well as the one next to it, the head ought to be painted "differently than the fabrics, with more intensity and profundity" (Thoré).

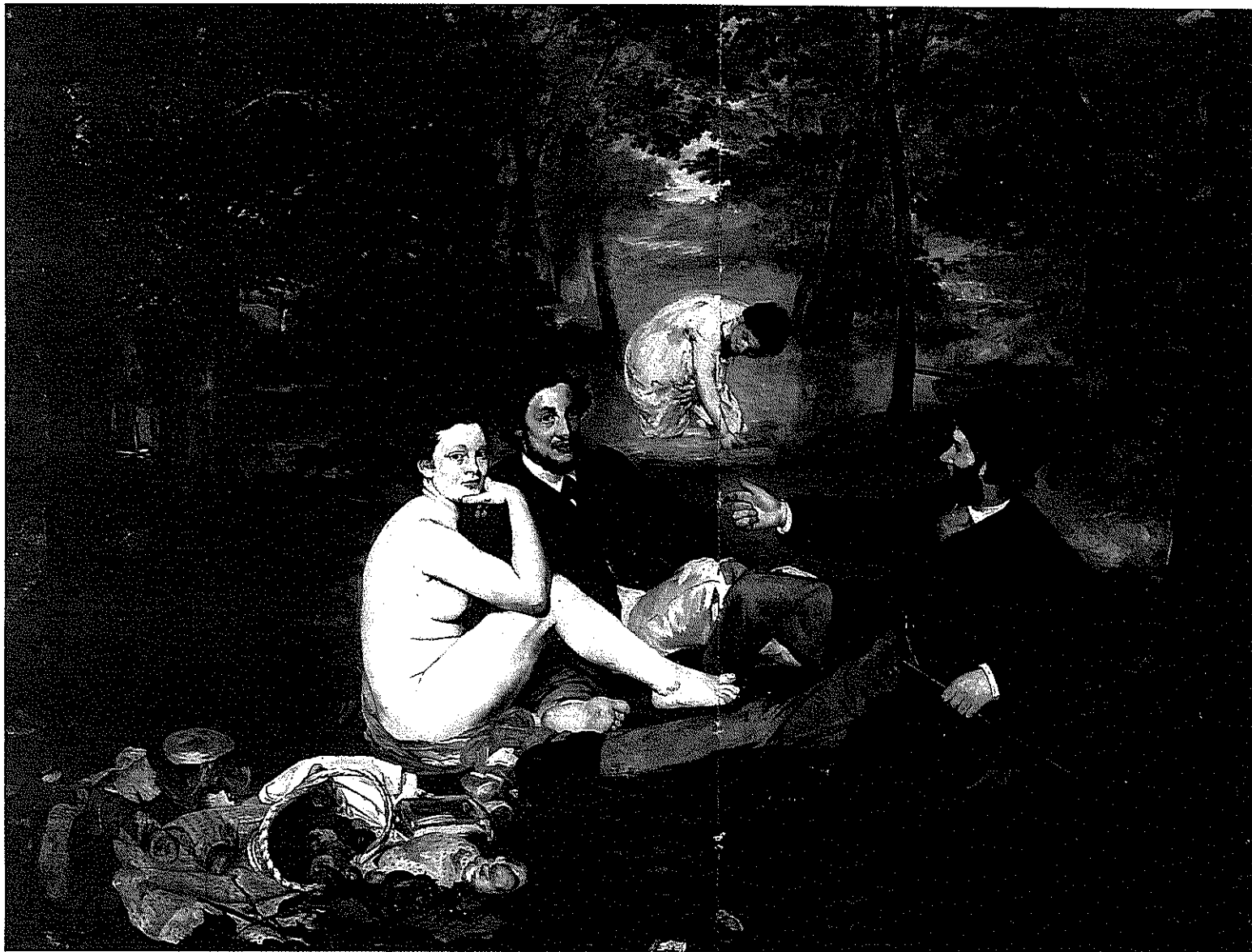
It must be said that Titian's *Concert Champêtre* (c. 1508, then falsely attributed to Giorgione), one of the Louvre's most famous paintings, contains nothing different from what is depicted in Manet's notorious work. It is simply that no one was shocked any longer by the sight of young musicians dressed in the clothes of Titian's time next to a nude woman. In truth, Manet—though no doubt fully aware of the provocativeness of the canvas that he himself called the *La Partie Carrée* (*The Party of Four*)—had done nothing more than the work of a contemporary Titian. The allusion was clear, and perhaps more than the naturalistic nudity of the model or the sketchy, if not downright hasty, style of the landscape—a deliberately offhand-seeming backdrop behind models who clearly had posed in the studio—the real scandal was this placid challenge to high art. Manet was, in fact, measuring himself against the great Spanish and Italian masters of the 16th and 17th centuries, not against those who were winning the Académie's prizes in his own time, not even against Courbet, whose work he had obviously consciously drawn upon in painting his nude and the still-life in the foreground.

...To Impressionism

Many people have wanted to detect *a posteriori* in this scene of a nude under the trees the first manifestation of Impressionism. Manet himself changed the title of the work for his private exhibition of 1867 only after Monet had entered the fray with his own "déjeuner sur l'herbe" (*The Picnic*, 1865–6), only this time, one that truly was painted out-of-doors, at Fontainebleau. Did Manet sense the extraordinary innovation in Monet's work and want



Here, gazing at us when she should be looking at the bull, is Victorine Meurent, disguised as a bullfighter. This context only served to heighten the model's femininity. "An unusual costume and an unusual occupation for a young person," wrote a journalist for the French publication *Le Siècle*. "I confess that I'd rather see her pursue more tender conquests and...if I had to choose a companion, [between one who] excelled at making jam and the other at killing bulls, it is the first I would pick!"



“My God! What indecency: a woman without the least covering between two clothed men!... The crowd... thought that the artist had instilled an indecent and disturbing design in the arrangement of his subjects, when, in fact, he only had sought to obtain lively contrasts and authentic masses.... What must be seen in this painting is not that it is a picnic, but that it is an entire landscape, with its strengths and its subtleties, its foreground so large and solid and its background so light and delicate; it is firm flesh modeled with great patches of light... this corner of nature rendered with such fitting simplicity.”

“You needed a nude woman, and you chose *Olympia* [overleaf], the first one who showed up; you needed light and brilliant areas, so you put in a bouquet; you needed dark areas, so you put in a negress and a cat. What does all of this mean? You don't know, nor do I. But I know that you have succeeded in making a work of art, the work of a great painter, in other words, to render energetically and in a unique language the verities of light and shade, the realities of objects and creatures.”

Emile Zola, 1867



Olympia

La fille des Ties

to impress on others the fact that it was he who was the progenitor of this "new painting" and that he intended it to remain that way? The more or less conscious strategy that Manet pursued throughout his entire career could lead us to think that.

But in reality, Manet's truly representative modern work, much more so than *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, was his *Olympia*—also painted in 1863, though not exhibited until two years later.

Victorine as Olympia

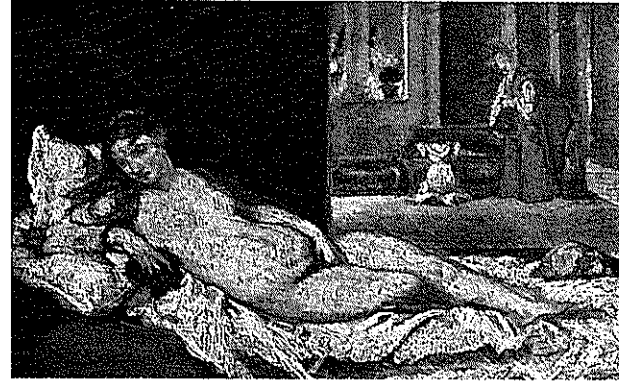
This odalisque (concubine), this harem creature (whose profession was unmistakable to the public at the time), was an agglomeration of Manet's most cherished paintings: a modern and ironic reincarnation of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which he had copied at the Louvre, Francisco Goya's *Nude Maja*, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' *Odalisque*.

In the juxtaposition of the two women, in this case one white and one black, the work perpetuates the long tradition of the odalisque and the slave, as did various works being exhibited at the Musée du Luxembourg at the time.

But Manet added to this altogether honorable genealogy the quiet impudence of Victorine, truly a

"*Olympia* shocked, aroused a sacred horror, imposed herself, and triumphed. She was a scandal, an idol, a public presence, and a powerful skeleton in society's closet. Her head is empty; a black velvet string isolates it from the essence of her being.... A bestial vestal virgin consecrated to the nude absolute, she bears dreams of all the primitive barbarism and animal ritual retained and hidden in the customs and practices of urban prostitution."

Paul Valéry, 1932



In 1863 Manet transposed this painting (left), his copy of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, into the *Olympia*. This 1853 photograph (below) toys with the fashionable eroticism of the contrast of white flesh and black flesh, so refined in Jean-Achille Bénouville's 1844 *Odalisque* (opposite left).



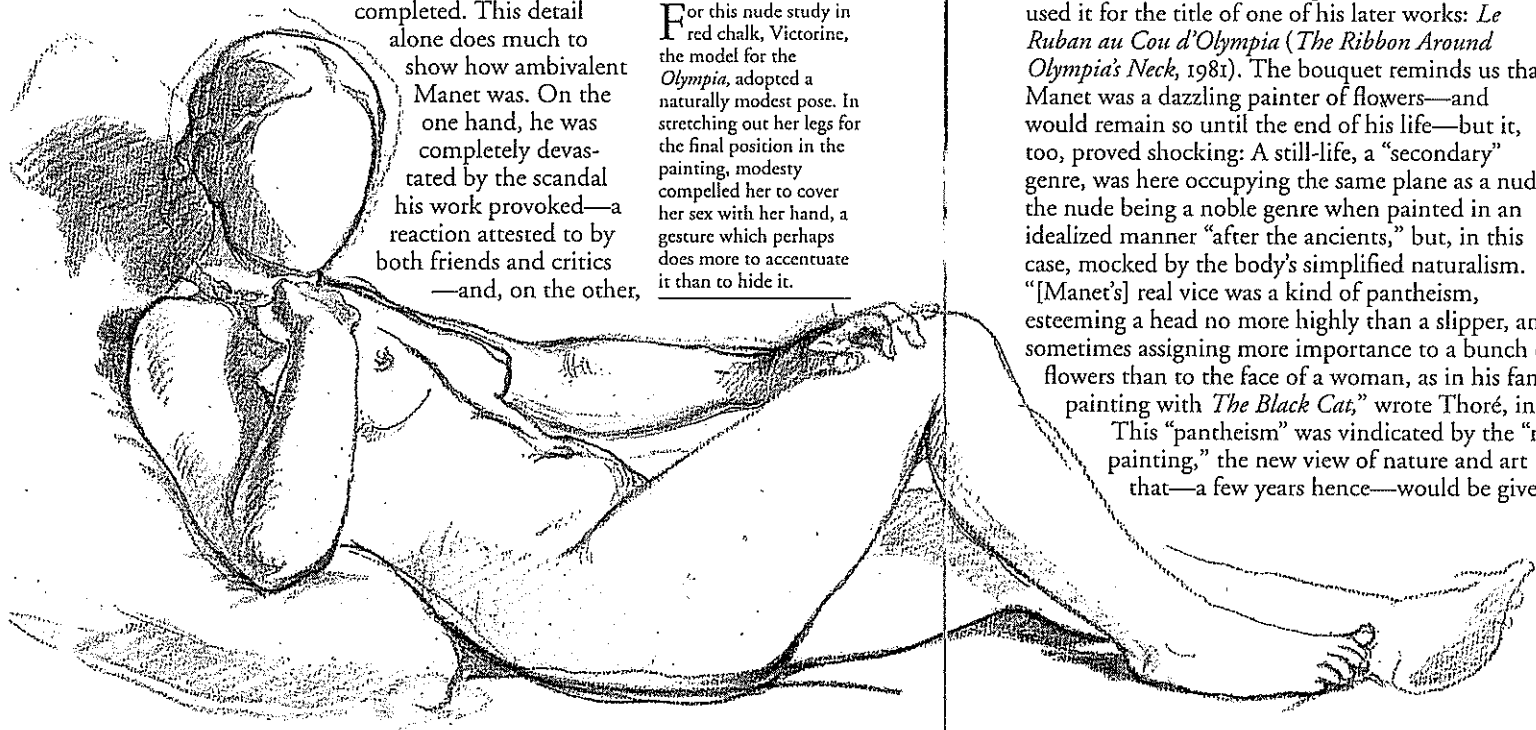
"free bohemian, a painter's model, a hedonist of the brasserie, a paramour for a day... with a cruel child's face and eyes of mystery" (critic Gustave Geffroy).

The black cat with raised tail gave the work a note of erotic irony; with a sly wink to the art student, Manet substituted for the faithful dog sleeping at the chaste feet of the *Venus of Urbino* an animal that was believed to be satanic. Moreover, "cat" in French slang is the word for the very thing Olympia is concealing with her hand. Perhaps Baudelaire had also inspired him: "I should have wished to live with some young giantess / As at the feet of a queen, a voluptuous cat."

Manet was by no means unaware of all that was embodied in his black cat. Indeed, X rays have revealed that the animal was painted in as an afterthought, most likely shortly before it was submitted to the Salon of 1865—more than a year after the rest of the canvas was

completed. This detail alone does much to show how ambivalent Manet was. On the one hand, he was completely devastated by the scandal his work provoked—a reaction attested to by both friends and critics—and, on the other,

For this nude study in red chalk, Victorine, the model for the *Olympia*, adopted a naturally modest pose. In stretching out her legs for the final position in the painting, modesty compelled her to cover her sex with her hand, a gesture which perhaps does more to accentuate it than to hide it.



he was entirely unable to resist giving in to those irreverent impulses that would lead to even greater commotion. Some of these impulses were better hidden than others: Perhaps many viewers were familiar with these lines by Baudelaire—"My darling lay nude / For knowing well my heart / She had kept nothing on but her sonorous jewels"—but how many could possibly have known that the very same bracelet sported by Victorine in the painting once belonged to Manet's very bourgeois mother?

Pantheism and the "New Painting"

A little black ribbon holding a pearl, and some mules, Olympia's only garb, have generated a lot of ink, including from the poet Paul Valéry, who wrote: "Her head is empty; a black velvet string isolates it from the essence of her being" (1932). Michel Leiris used it for the title of one of his later works: *Le Ruban au Cou d'Olympia* (*The Ribbon Around Olympia's Neck*, 1981). The bouquet reminds us that Manet was a dazzling painter of flowers—and would remain so until the end of his life—but it, too, proved shocking: A still-life, a "secondary" genre, was here occupying the same plane as a nude, the nude being a noble genre when painted in an idealized manner "after the ancients," but, in this case, mocked by the body's simplified naturalism. "[Manet's] real vice was a kind of pantheism, esteeming a head no more highly than a slipper, and sometimes assigning more importance to a bunch of flowers than to the face of a woman, as in his famous painting with *The Black Cat*," wrote Thoré, in 1868. This "pantheism" was vindicated by the "new painting," the new view of nature and art that—a few years hence—would be given the

Manet was always passionately interested in making prints, both engravings and lithographs. He was one of the founders of the Society of Etchers, an organization created in May 1862. That year his own engravings were acclaimed in the last piece of art criticism published by Baudelaire, "Painters and Etchers," which predicted the revival of artists' original printmaking.



The Cat and the Flowers (1869, above) repeats a motif in *The Balcony*, which Manet was then in the middle of painting, but the little dog in the painting was replaced by a cat, Manet's favorite animal. This engraving was intended to illustrate a book titled *The Cats* by Champfleury, a strong supporter of Realism, for whom Manet had already created the famous poster depicting two tomcats on a roof, one black and one white.

name that would make its fortune. It is significant that it was Claude Monet himself, the incontestable leader of this movement, who, seven years after Manet's death, would take it upon himself to raise funds to buy the *Olympia* and offer it to the French state in 1890. The painting was exhibited first at the Musée du Luxembourg, and finally, seventeen years later, at the Louvre; there it was hung in the Salle des Etats, next to Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*. Thanks to the *Olympia*, then, Manet triumphed—posthumously, at any rate—well beyond his hopes.

"I Painted What I Saw"

Seven years after the *Olympia* scandal, a venomous article by Jules Claretie accusing

"Like a man who has fallen in the snow, Manet made an impression on public opinion."

Champfleury

"If the canvas of the *Olympia* was not slashed and destroyed, it is only because of the precautions that were taken by the administration."

Antonin Proust



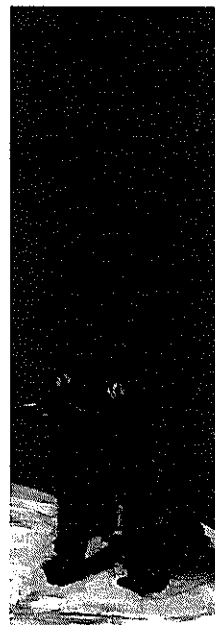
THIS WORK BY MANET WAS THE CULMINATION OF THE EXHIBITION. M. COURBET KEPT HIS DISTANCE FROM THE FAMOUS BLACK CAT. THE GREAT COLORIST'S PREFERRED MOMENT WAS WHEN THIS WOMAN WAS ABOUT TO TAKE A BATH, WHICH STRUCK US AS BEING URGENTLY NEEDED.

Manet of once again "firing off a revolver" to draw attention to himself, provoked this response from the painter: "How foolish must one be to have said that!... I render as simply as can be the things I see. Take *Olympia*, could anything be plainer? There are hard parts, I've been told. They were there. I saw them. I painted what I saw."

But by 1865, the catastrophic impact of his painting had nearly crushed him. "I would like to have you here, my dear Baudelaire, the insults rain down on me like hail.... I should have wished to have your sound opinion of my work," Manet wrote to his friend, who was then in Brussels. The answer was a famous letter, severe and galvanizing, that clearly demonstrates the high regard the poet held for his friend: "I must speak to you again about yourself. I must apply myself to showing you what you are worth. What you seem to expect is ridiculous. They make fun of you; their jokes set you on edge; they aren't fair to you, etc., etc. Do you think you are the first man to find himself in such a position? Do you have more genius than Chateaubriand and Wagner, who were also roundly made fun of? Still, they survived. And, not to instill you with too much pride, I will tell you that these men are models, each in his field, in a very varied world, and you, you are but first in the decrepitude of your art. I hope that you won't resent me for the matter-of-fact way I treat you. You know the affection I have for you."

The poet's usage of the word "decrepitude" probably did not do much to raise the spirits of the disheartened painter! But he knew Baudelaire well enough to understand what he meant, that in an era he condemned for its "bourgeois and democratic stupidity," little inclined to elevate and recognize genius, his young friend not only was the "first," but also represented hope for the future.

Olympia's black cat quickly became a symbol for the scandalous Manet. Théophile Gautier, who had defended Manet a few years earlier, found the work empty and dirty—in particular, the "cat that leaves the trace of his muddy feet on the bed."



Allusions to "Michel's mother and her cat," a popular vulgar song, also turned out to be unavoidable. The cat, whose tail resembles a question mark, left the impression that Manet wanted to poke fun at the bourgeoisie. Left: A caricature by Bertall.

The Role of Shadow

The brilliant and charming Manet "nursed neurasthenia, his cocky appearance notwithstanding," recalls the painter Pierre Prins, who knew him fairly well. A sense of drama and images of death are not uncommon in his work; they make their appearance as early the 1860s, a full two decades before death cast its shadow upon him. He would then say to his old friend Antonin Proust that he "always had the desire to... paint Christ on the cross. What a symbol! One could search until the end of time, and one would never find anything comparable. Minerva, that is fine; Venus, that is all right. But the image of heroism, the image of love, could never equal the image of suffering. That is the root of humanity. That is its poetry."

One should not underestimate Manet's religious works. At the same time that he presented the *Olympia* to the Salon, Manet had also sent *Jesus Mocked by the Soldiers*—the pair suggesting a sort of diptych composed of a degraded Venus and a Christ with a laborer's body (represented by the well-known studio model Janvier, who was also a locksmith), a double scandal to complement the publication of Ernest Renan's controversial *La Vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus*, 1863), a positivist portrait of Jesus as "a great man" rather than the Son of God. More than anything else, Manet's painting was about the drama of death and was by no means merely another edifying "historical tableau" of the sort he had produced the previous year.

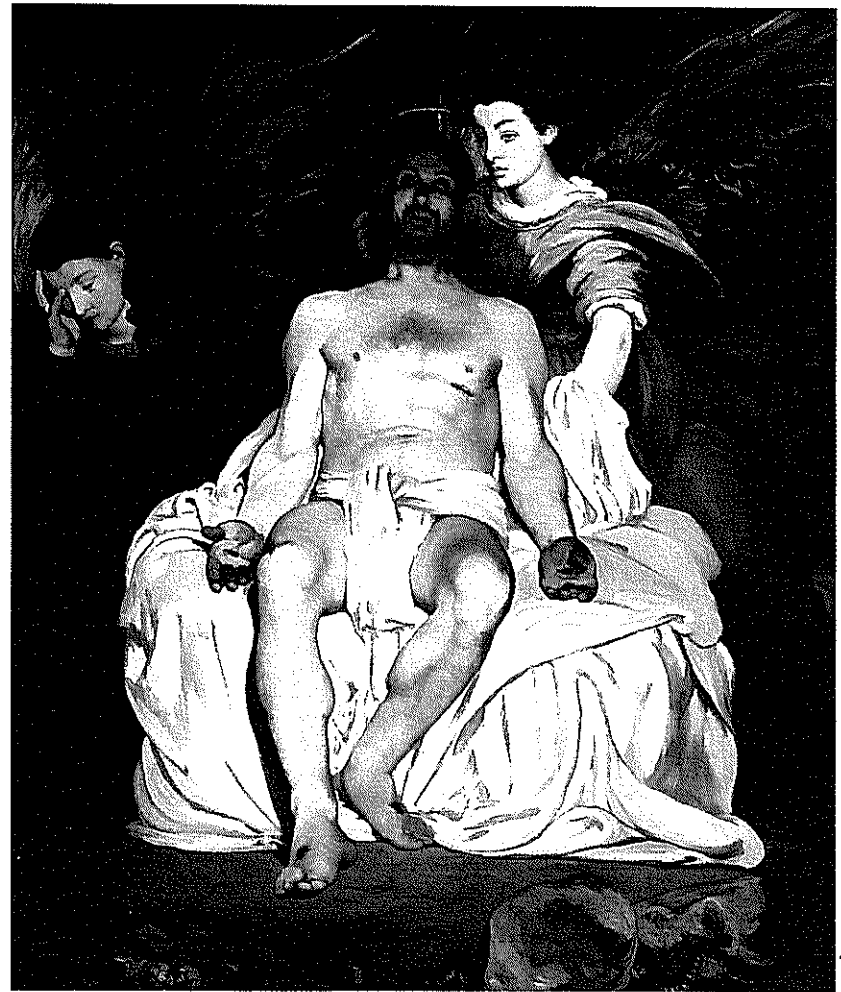
The subject of another painting on this theme, *The Dead Christ and the Angels*, submitted to the Salon of 1864, was a very naturalistic cadaver, a pretext for a brilliant "piece of painting"—a proletarian body sporting the swarthy hands and feet of a worker placed like a still life on a white drapery and

To reproduce *The Dead Christ and the Angels* as an engraving, Manet made a watercolor sketch in reverse.



Opposite: *The Dead Christ and the Angels*, 1864.

Courbet made fun of Manet's painting, averring, ostensibly in defense of Realism, that he himself had never seen angels! Much later, Degas, taking issue with Courbet's jest, exclaimed, "I don't give a damn about all that; there is a drawing in this *Christ with Angels*! And what transparency of paint! Ah! The devil!"



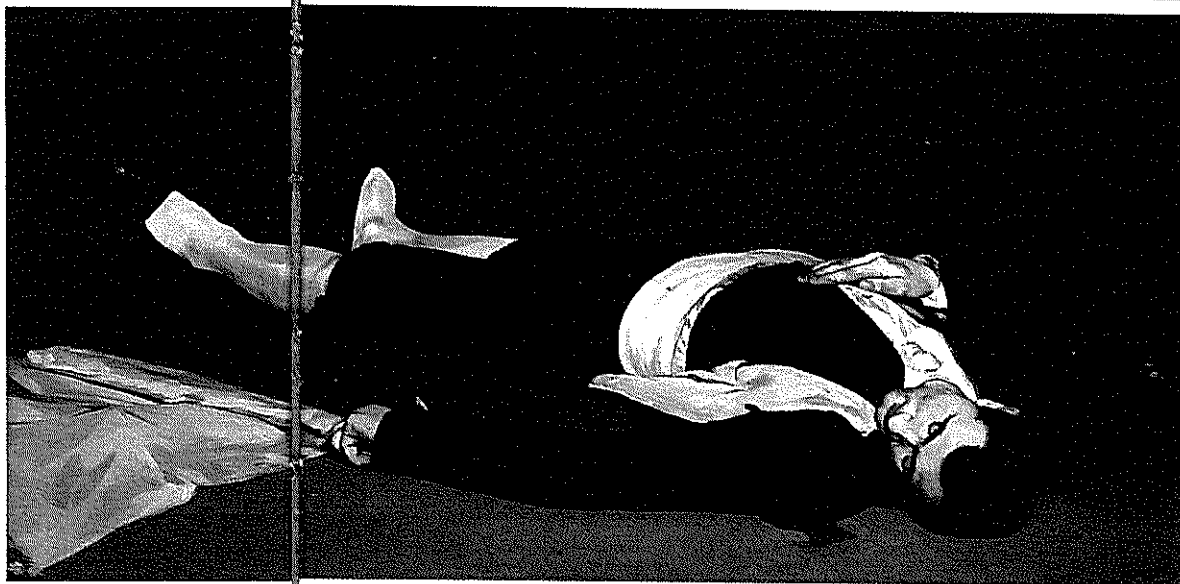
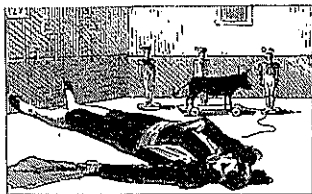
vaguely supported by blue-winged angels with pretty feminine faces who appear impervious to the tragedy before them.

Yet another, *The Dead Man* (or *The Dead Toreador*), was cut from a larger work shown at the same Salon of 1864, *Episode from a Bullfight*, which was widely

"I like the angels in the background, these children with their big blue wings who have such a sweet and elegant strangeness."

Emile Zola, 1867

ridiculed. In a way this is fortunate, since it is only from caricatures that appeared alongside the scandalous reviews that the original work was able to be reconstituted. The bull was evidently microscopic, and the background comprised of the audience at the fight unconvincing, even in Manet's own estimation (his trip to Spain would not come until the following year). In painting his dead toreador, he must have remembered the *Dead Soldier* (at the time wrongly attributed to Velázquez), a work he had seen as a child in the Louvre's Spanish wing.



We cannot know today what moved Manet, in 1877, to paint his very realistic-looking *Suicide*, though it could have had to do with a tragic episode that had occurred over a decade earlier: One day he had discovered the body of one of his young models—the one in the *Child with Cherries* (1859)—hanging in his studio. (Baudelaire's *The*

About *Peonies in a Vase on a Stand* (1864), the poet André Fraigneau said, quite aptly, that it is "the story of the death of a flower."

Rope, a tale dedicated to Manet, was also inspired by this tragic incident.)

A kind of morbid fascination was also present in a number of Manet's still lifes, dating—like *The Dead Man* and *The Dead Christ and the Angels*—from 1864 and representing fish, or even flowers. These are meditations on death in the tradition of the *vanitas*, or macabre still-lives of the 17th century, though in Manet's style: somehow simultaneously lighthearted and pitiless.

In his 1867 show, Manet titled this work *The Dead Man*, thus avoiding all association with folkloric anecdote. Henri Matisse, upon discovering the painting in the United States in the 1930s, wrote enthusiastically, "I saw it in the midst of a magnificent collection of works from all periods, between Rembrandts and Rubens, and it astonished me by the way it equaled its neighbors."



Opposite above: An 1864 caricature of the original work, before Manet cut it up, retaining only the figure of the dead toreador.