

Édouard Manet (1832- 1883)

Manet came from a wealthy Parisian family. He was a sophisticated and sociable city man. He attended the École des beaux-Arts for six years but he became frustrated with academic style. He carefully copied paintings by Titian and Velasquez in the Louvre Museum.

Manet collected Japanese prints and was influenced by their unusual compositions and perspective. he was also influenced by photography.

Manet regularly met the impressionists at the Café Guerbois. They saw him as a pioneering leader. He painted outdoors by the Seine with Monet and Renoir in the 1870s and his colours became brighter. However he refused to take part in impressionist exhibitions. He did not share their concern with the transient effects of natural light.

Manet wanted to challenge the conventions of academic art. However he did not want to be seen as an 'upstart Impressionist' by the Salon exhibition judges. These two goals were incompatible. Significantly, the Salon continued to refuse his paintings.

Personal Style and Technique

- Use of strong contrasts of light and dark
- Flat areas of colour, without much shading
- A loose painting technique, leaving brush strokes visible
- Limited range of colours
- More realist than impressionist
- Use of black (unlike the Impressionists)

*realism- is an attitude to art rather than an organised movement. Realists painted everyday life, based on direct observation. They rejected academic art's idealisation of heroic subjects and Romantic art's exotic settings.

Subject Matter

Having inherited money from his father, Manet could paint whatever subject he liked in his own style. He ignored the historical themes acceptable to the Salon. Instead he chose to paint everyday life: horse racing, theatres, dances, cafés and his friends.

Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, 1863 (luncheon on the grass)

- In this painting, Manet challenged conventional ideas of what was an 'acceptable' subject for art. Salon paintings that portrayed nude figures usually had a mythological title such as *Venus* in order to provide an excuse for nudity. This painting makes no such excuse.
- The men are fully dressed in contemporary clothes, which emphasises the nudity of the seated woman who is gazing unashamedly at the viewer.

- The female figure was Victorine Meurent a favourite model of Manet's, and the gentlemen were Ferdinand Leenhof; a sculptor, and Manet's brother Eugene (seen on the right).
- The nude, unidealised woman sitting with men in contemporary dress, looking frankly at the viewer, posed too many questions and unsettled critics and public alike.
- Nudes were accepted as goddesses or nymphs of ancient times or harem girls in far-off places, but not as ordinary people here and now.
- *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* was violently attacked for its immorality and for its disrespectful borrowing of the composition in an Old Master painting *Fete Champetre*, attributed to Titian.
- Manet's slightly shaded female figures show how the human form looks outside in natural light. This is also possibly as a result of the influence of the recently developed flash photography which had a similar flattening effect on tonal values.
- Manet does not lend importance to the 'middle tones', instead filling his painting with strong contrasts between light and dark. The pale skin tone of the female helps her to stand out in the composition, and focuses our attention against the dark tones surrounding her.
- The strong contrast of dark and light in his nudes shocked contemporary viewers accustomed to carefully modelled Salon nudes. The painting looked unfinished to them.
- Perhaps what the critics of the time found so shocking about Manet's art was the way he stripped away the fantasy and romanticism of his subjects to reveal a truthful and inelegant realism. He created this effect by his brushwork and use of light.
- The background, including the figure of the second female, are loosely painted and appear to be less in focus than the figures in the foreground.
- The artist also uses thick, impasto brushstrokes which can be seen in the hair and the beard of Eugene Manet on the right.

impasto is a method of painting in which the artist applies paint so thickly that it stands out from the surface



Déjeuner sur l'Herbe, oil on canvas, 1863, Musée d'Orsay

Olympia, 1865

- Olympia was created two years later, caused even greater outrage.
- This was not a goddess but a prostitute. It was copied from Titian's 'Venus of Urbino' which Manet had seen on a visit to Florence ten years earlier. However he did not portray her as a goddess.
- She is realistic and worldly, looking candidly out at the viewer without shyness or seductiveness in her gaze.
- The white stark light flooding the picture does not serve to flatter her but instead causes her to look pale and unhealthy.
- This is in severe contrast to the gentle modelling of light and shade in the previous paintings.
- Olympia is shown wearing only a bracelet, a flower in her hair and a string around her neck. She shows no interest in the bouquet proffered to her by her servant, indicating that she is used to receiving gifts from men.
- Another element of the painting was shocking to the viewers was that the woman was most likely a woman of questionable morals placed in a contemporary setting.
- The real reason for the uproar was the harsh realism of the work; Manet had painted the subject as he saw her and not as an idealised and virtuous beauty.
- The free handling of paint and the strong frontal lighting which eliminated intermediate shadows gave the image an added starkness. Manet focused equally on fabrics and background patterns which created a flatter, more two dimensional effect.
- He was influenced by Japanese prints which have no tradition of perspective or depth of field. This explains the apparent flatness of many of his paintings. He was admired by the young impressionists.
- The influence of the Impressionists encouraged Manet to paint outdoors and to lighten his palette.



Édouard Manet, Olympia, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Later Life

When he became ill in the late 1870s he began to work more frequently in pastels which require less physical effort. His last oil painting, 'A Bar at the Folies- Bergere' is one of the masterpieces of nineteenth century painting.

A Bar at the Folies- Bergere, 1882

- This painting spotlights a scene from fashionable parisian society.
- It shows a tired, sad barmaid named Suzon at the Folies-Bergere (cabaret Cafe), facing a customer. At the time this was painted Manet was terminally ill and the expression of the barmaid may possibly reflect the artist's state of mind.
- The Folies- Bergere was a very popular parisian music hall, it showed burlesques to trapeze artists. In the top left corner of the painting, reflected in the mirror, we can see the legs with green boots of a trapeze artist.
- The mirror behind the barmaid reflects the smoky scene in the bar.
- The barmaid divides the composition vertically and this gives her a commanding presence. The still life elements on the counter help to place her in the foreground. The composition is unusual as it is infact a shallow space which appears to have great depth as a result of the reflection of the bar in the large mirror behind Suzon.
- At the time, critics criticised Manet's use of perspective, as in the reflection we can see a man facing Suzon whereas he does not appear in the front of the composition. this was because Manet was using a device to introduce the viewer into the picture space, by letting us take the place of the viewer.
- Manet was interested on the effects of light on objects and their surroundings rather than creating the illusion of reality.

- The beers on the left and right with the red triangle are an English beer called Bass, the fact that this bar served imported beer tells us it was an expensive bar catering for tourists.
- Manet's depiction of artificial light is one of the main reasons why this painting achieved such fame and acclaim. The reflection of the bright gas globes in the background bounce off the seated figures, creating dark shadows and vividly bright colours.
- the huge chandelier, shown behind the barmaids head, is roughly painted, a mixture of gold, blues, and brilliant white giving the impression of dazzling light.
- Hazy purplish- blue patches of paint are applied to the surface of the mirror, demonstrating the two-dimensional surface, while also helping to create the smoky atmosphere of the bar.
- Manet executed this painting with some of the spontaneous quality of a quickly painted sketch.
- He used a wide range of vivid colours, which adds to the lively scene.
- Beautifully painted and brightly lit by the new electric light, it is one of the most impressionist of Manet's works.



A Bar at the Folies- Bergere, oil on canvas, 1882, Courtauld Gallery, London

Influence

Manet paved the way for impressionism. His loose, flat style of painting and his modern themes had a great influence on artists such as Monet, Morisot, Degas and Pissarro.

Exam Questions

2011

Discuss the contribution that Edouard Manet (1832-1883) made to the development of 19th century painting. Make detailed reference to his painting, 'Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe', which is illustrated on the accompanying sheet. and Name and briefly discuss one other work by Edouard Manet. Illustrate your answer.