Cézanne and the Modern

MASTERPIECES OF EUROPEAN ART FROM THE PEARLMAN COLLECTION

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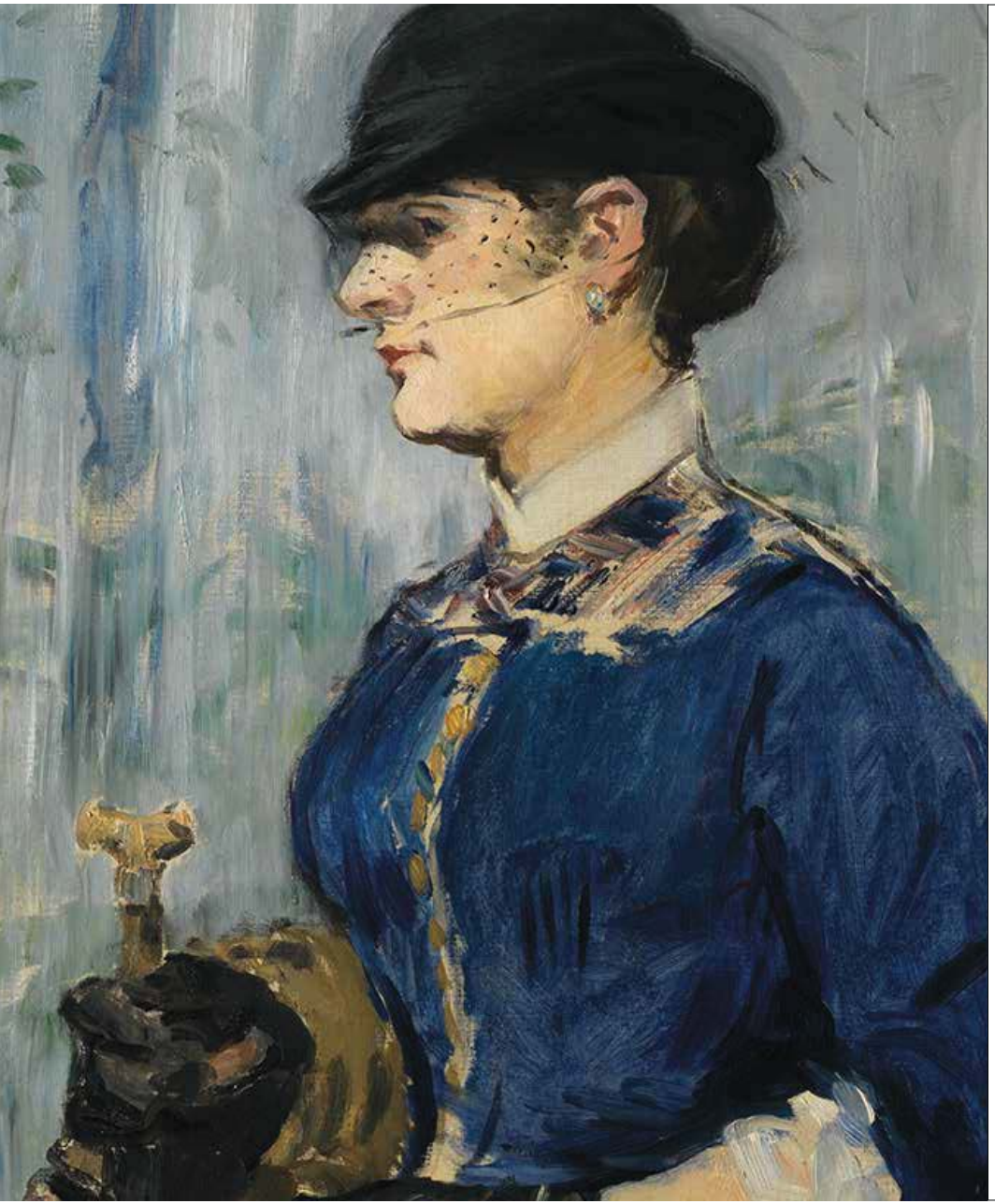


Detail of Édouard Manet, *Young Woman in a Round Hat*, ca. 1877–79 (cat. 35)

Manet's Quarrel with Impressionism

BRIDGET ALSDORF

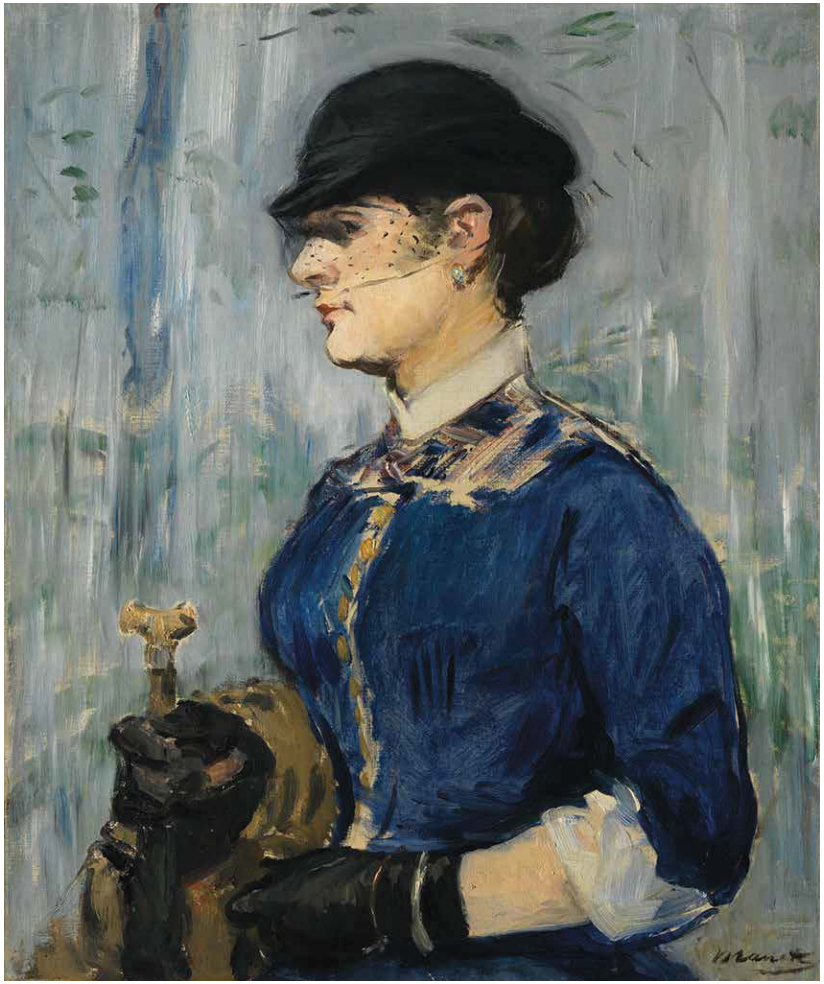
Édouard Manet's *Young Woman in a Round Hat* can be seen as a response to the poet Charles Baudelaire, whose essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863) called on artists "to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distill the eternal from the transitory." For Baudelaire, modern painters had to capture "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent," and their primary subject was to be portraits of women, in which everything "from costume to coiffure down to gesture, glance and smile . . . combines to form a completely viable whole."[1] In Baudelaire's view, women and fashion represented the fleeting character of modern life. Their superficiality and changeability was, paradoxically, modernity's core.

Young Woman in a Round Hat is one of many paintings in Manet's oeuvre that hovers between portraiture and the painting of modern life. The woman has never been identified, so it is unclear whether she is a model or a well-to-do Parisienne, and the painting obscures her features enough to suggest that the physiognomic specificity of portraiture was not the artist's principal goal.[2] The half-length, three-quarter pose, frozen against an indeterminate background, combined with the woman's seeming awareness of our gaze — her left eye peering out the side of her veil and her lips slightly pursed — suggest a knowing dialogue with the conventions of portraiture, yet there is little about the woman that renders her distinguishable as an individual. According to Linda Nochlin, this ambiguity defines the Impressionist portrait. As she muses in an essay on the subject, "Are the figures 'sitters' (portrait subjects whose identities are maintained or reinforced) or are they 'models' (figures hired by the artist to pose for him, usually with their actual identities erased or transformed)?"[3] But although critics and audiences in nineteenth-century Paris associated Manet with Impressionism — indeed, many saw him as its inveterate leader — Manet did not consider himself an Impressionist, and repeatedly declined to participate in the group's exhibitions. This painting vividly demonstrates his conflicted relationship to the Impressionist movement, and exemplifies his fascination with the modern Parisienne.

51 Édouard Manet, *In the Conservatory*, 1878–79. Oil on canvas, 115 x 150 cm. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

The woman in Manet's painting is dressed as a fashionable *bourgeoise* outfitted for a promenade, with a dress of deep cobalt blue, black gloves, an umbrella, and a round black hat. The painting's signature feature, the hat, is embellished with a short veil extending from the brim to just below the woman's nose, lightly shading her features. Manet materializes the *voilette* in the form of a loose, broken outline that hovers around the top half of her face, indicating its delicate texture with a loose freckling of black dabs painted with the tip of a brush. The veil's edge loops around the contour of the woman's nose, calling further attention to its prominent shape — with a stray black dab beneath the tip that seems to have escaped the fabric's dotted pattern — and then curls around her upper ear, guiding the eye to this feature's awkward shape. The delicacy of the veil is incongruent with the relative indelicacy of the woman's features: her strong nose, with its yawning nostril; her crooked, ruddy-colored ear; her ample chin and jowl; her slightly thick neck; and the suggestion of a sideburn on her temple that casts a masculine shadow across her face. Her disproportionately large right hand — a misshapen clump of thickly gloved fingers — is another feature that subverts the feminine fragility of the veil.[4] This clash of bodily awkwardness and fashionable chic is a hallmark of Manet's paintings. The stiff posture and claw-like hand of the elegant woman in the contemporary *In the Conservatory* (fig. 51) is a case in point, and contributes to that painting's study of the tensions of bourgeois social relations.

The most remarkable feature of *Young Woman in a Round Hat* (fig. 52) is the large smudge of blackish-brown paint that appears to rest on the bridge of her nose. This smudge echoes and amplifies her neatly manicured eyebrow, which is further echoed by a third black stroke that could be a tendril of hair escaping from her hat. Perhaps a representation of shadow cast by the hat's down-turned brim, the smudge blocks the woman's vision, shielding her eyes like a blind. Its insistent opacity and materiality contrasts sharply with the immateriality of the shadow or



52 Édouard Manet, *Young Woman in a Round Hat*, ca. 1877–79 (cat. 35)

53 Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Alphonse Maureau (L'homme au chapeau ronde)*, ca. 1880. Pastel with gouache on canvas prepared with a gouache ground, 54.7 x 45.2 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Edward L. Brewster

54 Édouard Manet, *At the Milliner's (Chez la modiste)*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 85.1 x 73.7 cm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Mildred Anna Williams Collection

veil to which (we presume) it refers, and concentrates the hat's masking function. As Marni Kessler has written, Manet's representation of the *voilette* "articulates the circumscription of a modern woman's vision,"[5] making tangible the spatial and social boundaries of her gaze.

The veil also acts as an emblem for the painting's overall play with transparency and the illusory seduction of surfaces. Rather than staging the portrait in a conventional outdoor setting, Manet evokes a park-like environment through light layers of color that connote the natural world without concretely depicting it. Long, vertical strokes of pale white and gray blur the green decoration beneath, conveying an almost aqueous milieu, as if the woman were standing in front of a stream of water behind which float the foliage of plants and trees. This background effectively serves as a second veil in the painting; here, paint itself is a scrim whose masking forms distort and embellish. A roughly contemporary pastel portrait of Manet's fellow painter Alphonse Maureau, also known as *Man in a Round Hat* (fig. 53), has similar features: a bust-length, three-quarter pose; a pair of loosely sketched, seemingly unfinished hands; a series of dark shadows playing across the face; and a diaphanous background of blue, white, and gray that approximates a light-filled window thinly veiled by a curtain. The soft texture of the pastel medium lends itself to such atmospheric effects. The background of the Pearlman Collection painting looks more labored, and Manet seems to have fretted in particular over the area around the woman's hat. A gray halo indicates that he shifted or contracted the volume of her head, and the outlining of her arms and bust similarly suggests a concern to distinguish figure from ground.

In the late 1870s, when *Young Woman in a Round Hat* was painted,[6] Manet was drawing on the stylistic innovations of Impressionism — a loose, feather-like facture; a bright, pastel

55 Édouard Manet, *Madame Manet (Suzanne Leenhoff, 1830–1906) at Bellevue*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 80.6 x 60.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1997, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002

palette; and a preoccupation with light. In this painting, the insubstantiality and opticality of these techniques are linked to the dissimulations of female fashion — the coy flirtation of a veil, the alluring surface and silhouette of a dress, the way that makeup can model a face.[7] The blues that compose the woman's bodice and sleeve are painted with loose, dynamic strokes that play off passages of bare canvas throughout the collar and along the buttons, aerating the overall solidity of her form. But despite these areas of Impressionistic brushwork, *Young Woman in a Round Hat* displays several decidedly non-Impressionist features, most notably, its extensive use of black. Manet was a master of black in all its varied textures, shades, and sheens. Like the pastel portrait of Maureau, this painting demonstrates a range of examples: from the rich, matte felt of the woman's hat, to the satin luster of her left glove, which contrasts with the rougher, duller fabric of the umbrella; to the violet-tinged shadow under her chin; to the wispy, faded strokes that outline her veil.

The thickly outlined contours of the woman's form also defy the Impressionist approach to modeling with color, without the aid of chiaroscuro or drawn lines. Manet drew her silhouette with a bold, blackish-blue border that makes her shape stand out against the pastel background. Compare these effects with those achieved in *At the Milliner's* (fig. 54), where Manet employed a similar technique, framing the woman's alabaster skin with dark contour lines that separate her body from the wall. The colorful floral pattern of the wallpaper in this painting evokes the Impressionist style of artists like Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, brought indoors and made into a decorative backdrop to the modern figure painting that was Manet's focus.

The self-fashioning of modern women sustained Manet's interest throughout his career, much more than the suburban landscapes and transient light effects that captivated his Impressionist friends. Even in the more Impressionistic portrait of his wife, *Madame Manet at Bellevue* (fig. 55) — where Manet limited black to the sash of the hat and a few isolated shadows in the foliage, brightening his palette with creamy dashes of white — his emphasis remains the mystery of a woman and her clothing. Nature is merely a setting, an accessory to her form. The focus is on what fashion — like painting — can enhance and conceal. Although the Pearlman painting's basic subject — a woman taking a walk in the park — is Impressionist through and through, its presentation and execution of this subject depart from Impressionism in fundamental ways.

Manet was committed to painting the human figure, and his social standing gave him entrée to a wide range of subjects, from elegant friends and acquaintances who posed voluntarily, to the models and street urchins he hired for pay. Well-groomed, well-dressed, well-mannered, and highly educated, Manet was the consummate bourgeois gentleman, a sophisticated urbanite with high-society connections. His father was the chief of staff at the Ministry of Justice; his mother was the daughter of a diplomat. Manet thus had access to an elite world of state functionaries and administrators as well as leading cultural figures. Besides the many artists in his social circle, he was a close friend of Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Émile Zola, and he was invited to many of the fashionable salons of the era (in addition to hosting his own). As such, he understood the power of appearances in constructing a social image and securing a class position. And like Baudelaire, he saw the posturing of fashion as central to both the thrill and pathos of modern life. Although his financial security allowed him

56 Review of *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* in *The Illustrated London News*, 26 November 1910

57 Édouard Manet, *Horsewoman (L'amazone de face)*, ca. 1882. Oil on canvas, 73 x 52 cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

ATTRACTORS OF ALL SOCIETY: WORKS BY POST-IMPRESSIONISTS.

to defy the demands of the art market, Manet greatly desired public attention and appreciation for his work. He submitted paintings to the Paris Salon jury year after year, despite frequent rejection, and was known to take negative reviews of his work as a personal affront. (He once struck the writer Edmond Duranty upon encountering him in a café because Duranty had written a sharp critique of Manet's Salon submissions the previous year. The men fought a duel to settle the dispute, an event that Manet, ever the dandy, took as an opportunity to buy a new pair of shoes.[8])

Young Woman in a Round Hat was never exhibited in Manet's lifetime, so we have no insights into how it was initially received. Its first public appearance was in London in 1910, in the landmark exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, curated by Roger Fry. The Bloomsbury artist and critic situated Manet in the exhibition as the father of the Post-Impressionist avant-garde, the progenitor of artists such as Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Cézanne. Eight oils and one pastel by the artist served as an introduction to the show, setting the stage for a presentation of what Fry regarded as the most advanced modern painting. The exhibition caused an uproar, shocking British audiences who were unfamiliar with recent developments in French art. Fry anticipated the reaction of his countrymen with glee, writing, "The show will be a great affair. I am preparing for a huge campaign of outraged British Philistinism."[9] Manet's importance to the exhibition is clear in a review appearing in *The Illustrated London News*, which prominently featured *Young Woman in a Round Hat* at the top center of the page (fig. 56). Following the exhibition, the reviewer called the painting *L'Amazone* (The Amazon), a word that invokes mythological female warriors renowned for their courage and masculine strength. By the nineteenth century, *l'amazone* had become a term of fashion, designating the elegant costume women wore to ride on

horseback, and it was a subject that fascinated Manet in the last years of his life (fig. 57).[10] Juliet Wilson-Bareau has described the Amazon as an "enigmatic, subversively modern '*jeune fille*' . . . a female '*Gilles*,' clad all in black."[11] In a last attempt at a Salon submission before his untimely death in 1883, Manet painted three versions of this seductive figure — all unfinished, like the Pearlman picture — underscoring the centrality of fashion to his vision of modern life.[12]

In the catalogue to the London exhibition, Fry writes that the Post-Impressionists considered their predecessors "too naturalistic." To them, the Impressionist vision of nature appeared on canvas as "just so much shimmer and color." Inspired by Manet, they sought to capture both material surface and psychological depth, to represent the "emotional significance which lies in things." Directly beneath the reproduction of *Young Woman in a Round Hat* in the *Illustrated London News* review, a block of text describes Fry's exhibition as a "quarrel with the Impressionists," but then admits that Post-Impressionism's connection to Impressionism is "extremely close."[13] A fitting caption for a painting that wears its quarrel with Impressionism quite literally on its sleeve.

1. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London, 1964), pp. 12–13.
2. Anne Coffin Hanson refers to this painting as "one of Manet's finest portraits," in Hanson, *Édouard Manet, 1832–1883* (Philadelphia, 1966), p. 179. However, Charles Moffett argues that the painting's "obscuring effects . . . suggest that it is not a portrait in the conventional sense," in Françoise Cachin et al., *Manet, 1832–1883* (New York, 1983), p. 441.
3. Linda Nochlin, "Impressionist Portraits and the Construction of Modern Identity," in *Renoir's Portraits: Impressions of an Age*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New Haven and London, 1997), p. 55.
4. This section seems to have given Manet trouble, and, in fact, a photograph of the painting taken in the artist's studio shortly after his death shows it incomplete, with areas of unpainted canvas around the fingers. These areas, along with a strip of dark paint on the woman's left forearm, were retouched sometime before 1910. The signature is also posthumous, probably added at the same time.
5. Marni Reva Kessler, *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet's Paris* (Minneapolis and London, 2006), p. 146.
6. See Moffett's discussion of the picture's dating in Cachin et al., *Manet, 1832–1883*, p. 441. He cites various scholarly opinions that place the work somewhere between 1877 and 1879.
7. For more on Manet and the relationship between painting and makeup, see Jean Clay, "Ointments, Makeup, Pollen," trans. John Shepley, *October* 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 3–44; and Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven, 2002). On women, fashion, and Impressionism, see Gloria Groom, ed., *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (New Haven and London, 2012); and Justine de Young, "Women in Black: Fashion, Modernity, and Modernism in Paris, 1860–1890" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2009).
8. For a full account of Manet's duel with Duranty, see Marcel Crouzet, *Un Méconnu du réalisme: Duranty (1833–1880)* (Paris, 1964), pp. 289–97.
9. For a thorough history of this exhibition and its reception, see Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art* (London, 1972), pp. 120–44. Fry's quote appears on p. 134.
10. See Juliet Wilson-Bareau, "Manet's 'Amazon': A Final Salon Painting," *Burlington Magazine* 154, no. 1309 (Apr. 2012), pp. 256–59.
11. Ibid., p. 259.
12. As Wilson-Bareau recounts, Manet never managed to complete his final *Amazon* painting for the Salon of 1883; he died of syphilis in April of that year. Ibid., pp. 256–59. However, the *Amazone de face* (fig. 57) is frequently shown in its unfinished state, and even served as the main marketing image for the exhibition *Manet, inventeur du Moderne*, held at the Musée d'Orsay in 2011.
13. Roger Fry, *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* (London, 1910), quoted in *The Illustrated London News*, 26 Nov. 1910, p. 825.