



Musée  
d'Orsay

*From Manet to  
Impressionism  
A Modern Renaissance*

**Fondation MAPFRE, Madrid : 11 janvier –  
22 avril 2010**

**Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, De  
Young, San Francisco : 22 mai au 6  
septembre 2010**

**Frist Center for Visual Arts Nashville : 14  
octobre 2010 au 23 janvier 2011**



Édouard Manet (1832-1883), *Le fifre*, [The Fife Player],  
1866, Oil on canvas, Paris, musée d'Orsay, © Musée d'Orsay / P.  
Schmidt

Does Impressionism still have something to teach us about its sources, its beginnings, its transformations and its links with the period of its first flowering? That is the challenge taken up by this exhibition which attempts to decompartmentalize the movement by comparing it with art in the 1870s in general. It begins and ends with Manet: in short it spans the period from *The Fife Player* to the *Escape from Rochefort*, from the late 1860s to the early 1880s. Above all; it seeks to restore the unity of a period and not to emphasise the contrasts between movements within it. From room to room, visitors are encouraged to evaluate the various components: the Hispanic influence on artists as different as Whistler and Carolus-Duran, the "Batignolles school" in which Bazille, Monet, and Renoir took their first steps after leaving Gleyre's studio, the legacy of Courbet and Millet and their impact on naturalism in Salon paintings (Breton, Bastien-Lepage, Falguières, etc.), the Impressionist adventure and its dark legend, the Cézanne/Pissarro duo, the question of women artists through the figure of Berthe Morisot and the evolution of so-called academic art, far from the supposed diktats of the School of Fine Arts.

Even in the Salon, painting partly escaped traditional categories and canons. Alongside Henri Levy's baroque style or William Bouguereau satin chairs, the poetic world of Gustave Moreau or Puvis de Chavannes opens the way to symbolism without ignoring current preoccupations. In short, they were all working in an art world that was as mobile as the borderlines between aesthetic categories. However, this exhibition is careful to avoid the revisionism which has sometimes underlain the rehabilitation of 19th-century academic artists.

The 1870s may seem anarchic, but wanting to approach this period as a whole does not mean failing to distinguish the great creators from lesser artists. To compare is not to confuse. For the last twenty years, the Musée d'Orsay has wholeheartedly supported this new assessment of the 1870s.

Its role is to demonstrate the diversity of art in the second half of the nineteenth century by comparing Manet with Couture and Moreau with Degas, since their paths crossed. Taking advantage of renovations in the museum in 2010, this travelling exhibition of a great number of masterpieces is a perfect illustration of the unique position that Orsay holds on the international stage. In our view, modernity is not the closed club dear to the twentieth century. It is characterised by the variable but authentic link between each painting in the exhibition and its origin and first public appearance. Manet, at both ends of the exhibition, reminds us that the period was indeed haunted by the question of the Salon and its perpetual reform, until the moment when Jules Ferry freed it from state control in 1880. Manet's early death coincides with this major turning point in the history of modern art. The period from 1866 to 1883 therefore simultaneously witnessed the "death of the Salon" and the rise of a more open art market.

The decade of the 1870s was a renaissance in all respects.

Deeply scarred by the war, amputated of its eastern provinces and traumatised by the Commune and its terrible repression, the country longed for a new start.

The Paris city council had started to rebuild the city hall (1873) while the conservatives rallied around the Sacré Coeur project (an architectural competition was held in 1874), in a bid to expiate their "sins". The Republic of the Dukes also made a point of decorating the Pantheon with paintings in a spirit of atonement and appeasement. Puvis de Chavannes who had taken an active part in the siege and exhibited at the Salon, painted his major decorative cycle dedicated to St Genevieve, the patron saint of Paris. Although Courbet was doomed to exile and an early death in Switzerland, he remained a shining example. Manet was not the only painter to pay homage to him from afar, although he did not emulate his realism. Nor did he adhere to the aesthetics of his friends Monet and Degas. Some of the masterpieces in the exhibition are reminiscent of his political battle before 1879, logically associated with his stubborn determination to force the doors of the official exhibition and his support for the work of the Impressionists.

## Sections

- Manet's triumph?
- Hispanism in Paris
- The Batignolles School
- The terrible year (1870-1871)
- Realism: the legacy of Millet and Courbet
- The Salon: Ancients and Moderns
- Monet / Renoir / Sisley
- Pissarro / Cézanne
- Women painters / Painted women
- Degas: seizing modern life
- Manet between Impressionism and the Salon

## Curated by:

**Paris:** Guy Cogeval, president of the Musée d'Orsay;

**Stéphane Guégan and Alice Thomine, curators at the Musée d'Orsay**

**Madrid:** Pablo Jimenez Burillo, managing director of the MAPFRE Foundation Cultural Institute

**San Francisco:** John E. Buchanan, Director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

**Nashville:** Susan Edwards, Executive Director and CEO of the Frist Center for Visual Arts.

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