

Plate 215 Marie Bashkirtseff, *L'Académie Julien*, c.1880, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Present whereabouts unknown. Photograph by courtesy of the Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art.



that would remove them from their primary duties as mothers and wives. To be a professional woman artist was, in many quarters, to transgress social expectations. While the mechanisms of coping, both conscious and unconscious, might have varied, there was not a woman artist in late nineteenth-century France who could escape from the conflict, internal and external, which the tension between her aspirations as a professional artist, and the 'feminine' ideal entailed.

It is interesting to consider whether these tensions were also articulated in portraits of women artists by their male contemporaries. Until very recently Manet's portraits of Berthe Morisot and Eva Gonzalès have been more widely reproduced and better known than any of their own works. In most standard accounts of the period, Gonzalès and Morisot are represented as Manet's beautiful models or his pupils. (Morisot had, in fact, never been Manet's pupil, although like the artists who had figured in the group portraits, she was highly influenced by his work.) Manet's *Portrait of Mlle E.G.*, as it was titled when it was shown at the Salon of 1870, is the best known image of a woman artist, Eva Gonzalès, represented as such, from this period (Plate 218). Manet's other submission to the Salon in this year was *The Music Lesson*, showing his friend, the painter and writer Zacharie Astruc, in the guise of a guitar player while an unidentifiable young woman holds open and points at some sheet music (Plate 219). Submitted together to the Salon of 1870, these paintings can be read, as a pair, to represent the currently acceptable manner in which upper-middle-class women could engage with artistic practice. But there is a significant difference between them. Both are elaborately staged studio set pieces in which figures are made to act out designated roles, but whereas the identity of the figures in *The Music Lesson* is immaterial (Manet, like many of his peers often used his friends as models) that of the former is crucial as it was exhibited as a portrait of a named individual, if only by her initials, rather than as a genre/modern life painting.

Morisot & Gonzalès



Plate 216 'Allons Darancourt, gros indécent' ('Come on, Darancourt, you gross slob, remember that you are no longer at the baths; you represent Achilles and you are posing in front of your wife and your daughter, Clara. '), lithograph from *Pièces sur les arts*, tome 6, BN Kc.164. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

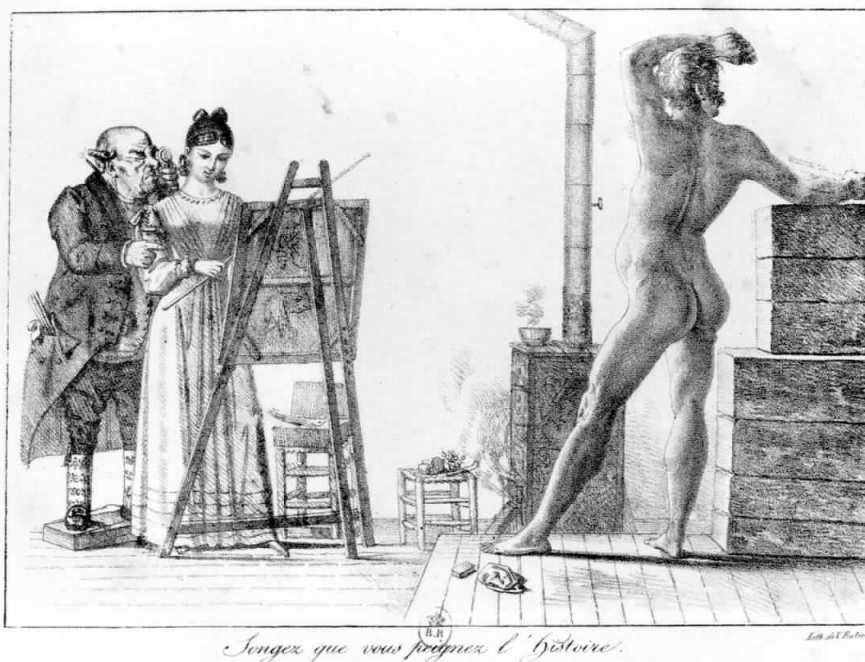


Plate 217 'Songez que vous peignez l'histoire' ('Remember that you are painting History'), lithograph by Ratier, from *Pièces sur les arts*, tome 6, BN Kc.164. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



Plate 218 Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Mlle E. G.*, 1870, oil on canvas, 191 x 133 cm. National Gallery, London, Lane Bequest, reproduced by permission of the Trustees.



Plate 219 Édouard Manet, *La Leçon de musique* (*The Music Lesson*), 1870, oil on canvas, 140 x 173 cm. Anonymous Centennial Gift in memory of Charles Deering. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Eva Gonzalès

In most of the art-historical literature, Eva Gonzalès is represented as an inconsequential painter but a beautiful model. As George Heard Hamilton unself-critically put it: 'The poignantly lovely portrait of Eva Gonzalès is proof of Manet's sensitivity to the charm of the young woman as she sat working in his studio' (*Manet and his Critics*, p.141). To what extent, we might ask, does the manner of her representation here, and the conventions of female portraiture on which it draws, contribute to the received image of Eva Gonzalès as wealthy amateur and beautiful dabbler, the quintessential representation of the acceptable woman artist? In the painting Gonzalès is placed at an easel, the primary indicator of her identity as artist. But, simultaneously, all other signs in the image collaborate to discount the seriousness of her involvement with her work. As in Renoir's *La Loge*, the eyes of the woman are averted, this time both away from a potential confrontation with the viewer and from the work on the easel at which she unconvincingly daubs. She is positioned, beautifully gowned in evening dress, for our delectation, her lids are half-closed, her eyes characteristically unseeing. The palette and brush operate as so many fashion accessories, rather than as the tools of her trade. And the painting at which she is ostensibly working, is of course a still-life, in fact an unidentifiable flower-painting, deemed at the time to be the genre most suited to women's innate delicate sensibilities and inferior powers of reason. As such, the painting on the easel functions more as a fictitious sign of gender than as a particular painting executed by the artist who is represented. What is more, it is already framed and finished, its frame draped by a transparent cloth as if its cover has



Plate 220 *Deux Femmes devant un chevalet* (Two Women in front of an Easel), 1880s, fashion plate from the *Gazette des femmes*. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris BN fol 2, 132.



Plate 221 *Deux Femmes et un chevalet* (Two Women and an Easel), 1880s, fashion plate from the *Gazette des femmes*. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris BN fol 2, 132.

been lifted for the duration of the sitting. The act of painting, here imaged, provides no more than a fitting setting for the beautiful, accomplished and appropriately 'feminine' young woman. This is finally underlined by the subtle assertion that the studio depicted is not that of the artist represented, as might be expected, but of the artist representing. If we look at the scrolled image on the floor we can detect Manet's signature on the border, a signature both of the painting within the painting, and of the portrait itself. It stands as the sign of the artist outside of the image, invoking his presence and authority. It is here juxtaposed with the image of the flower, evocative of the still-life, evocative of the woman herself, evocative of narrative traditions in which women are identified with flowers: plucked, blooming, or withered. In illustrations for the contemporary *Gazette des femmes* the props for the display of the new fashions are, similarly, the easel, the palette and the brush (Plates 220 and 221). They are not in themselves signs of a subversion of traditional female roles but invoke the world of feminine accomplishment. When combined with standard conventions of female portraiture – the full-length elaborately costumed and adorned female body – their potential, in other contexts, to signify as professional attributes is discounted. Manet's painting functions simultaneously therefore as the elaborate staging of Gonzalès' professionalism and the denial of it.

In the *Portrait of Mlle E.G.*, Gonzalès' femininity is guaranteed by her value as spectacle. To be positioned in this way is to be placed reassuringly as the 'object of the gaze'. The professional identity of the painter, which involves the use of sight as mastery (an

identity which, in women, is potentially subversive in the context of nineteenth-century constructions of sexual difference) is here contained by the display value of the female body. It was widely thought in nineteenth-century Paris that when women became painters, writers or intellectuals, they forgot their primary function, self-adornment. As Octave Uzanne lamented: 'The first result which followed their jealousy of men's genius was that they lost their own; that genius for dress in virtue of which they are – or should be – both poets and poems' (*The Modern Parisienne*, p.134). It was through their *toilette* that women could legitimately exercise their creativity and yet remain objects of delectation. For Baudelaire, women's self-adornment amounted to a duty:

Woman is quite within her rights, indeed she is even accomplishing a kind of duty, when she devotes herself to appearing magical and supernatural; she has to astonish and charm us; as an idol, she is obliged to adorn herself in order to be adored. Thus she has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature, the better to conquer hearts and rivet attention. It matters but little that the artifice and trickery are known to all, so long as their success is assured and their effect always irresistible.

(Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, p.33)

Baudelaire



Plate 222 Édouard Manet, *Eva Gonzalès peignant dans l'atelier de Manet* (Eva Gonzalès Painting in Manet's Studio), 1870, oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm. Private Collection.

Femininity, for Baudelaire, is unashamed and necessary artifice. It is a woman's duty to devote herself to its perfection, to turn her gaze upon herself and render herself an object of delectation. For women to lay claim to an artistic identity which involves a command of the gaze, a looking out, an apparent mastery of the world, is to renege on that very narcissism which modern masculinity projects onto women as reassurance. As with *La Loge*, we get a sense of the fragile balance within which such relations of power are maintained and of the threat which their potential inversion invariably provokes.

The success of Manet's painting may indeed lie in his unconscious articulation of one of the central anxieties of modern culture, that between spectacle and specularly, the régime of looking and being looked at which is so carefully socially and sexually regulated and which the existence of the woman artist threatened to undermine. Her usurping of the gaze could render masculinity on display. Her gaze has therefore always to be contained and turned upon herself. It was for men to be the scrutinizers, to look beyond themselves, to shield themselves from being looked at. In this light it is interesting to consider a little known contemporary painting by Manet which seeks to invert dominant power relations and is never resolved or completed in the same way as the *Portrait of Mlle E.G.*; this is the contemporary *Eva Gonzalès Painting in Manet's Studio* (Plate 222). In this painting, the artist's back is firmly turned away from the viewer as she works intently on the large canvas in front of her. She provides no value as spectacle. This function resides rather uncomfortably with the figure of a young androgynous model (Léon Leenhoff) dressed as a matador, who perches awkwardly on a table behind the artist. While the costume that the model wears is effectively a masculine one in its own cultural context, Spain, in the context of France, such a display effectively feminizes the figure in the representation. The flamboyant costume, so different from the uniform of modern, urban masculinity which Fantin-Latour's painting so neatly represented, marks the figure as culturally different from Manet and his audience. Perhaps the power of the woman artist to refuse specularly in an image like this one is bought at the expense of the 'masculinity' of the model. Once he is 'exoticized', made culturally alien, her power is diffused and 'he' can comfortably assume the position of spectacle without threatening traditional gender roles. Empowered French masculinity (located outside the image) remains intact, even in the face of a woman who turns her back, intent on her work.

Berthe Morisot

It is interesting that on the many occasions when Manet painted the other woman painter of his circle, Berthe Morisot, he avoided all references to her professional status. Manet had used Morisot as a model (much in the way that he used Astruc in *The Music Lesson*) in *The Balcony* (Plate 223) but he also painted a number of portraits of her alone, the most ambitious of which was *Le Repos* (Plate 224). In all of these Morisot is represented as a mysterious, rather melancholy, dark-eyed beauty, and it is this construction of her person that art history has inherited and perpetuated. It is the languid inertia of the pose, drawing on standard conventions for the representation of a passive but sensuous femininity, which is interesting. The image of supine, almost seductive waiting is characteristic of earlier prints by Achille Devéria (see Plate 225). The figurative elements of the painting and the print are uncannily similar: in both, the semi-reclining woman, luxurious sofa, interior with art-work, attributes of handkerchief and fan, and single outstretched foot, contrive to create the atmosphere of the boudoir or private sitting room. In *Le Repos* the only art-work represented is a Japanese woodblock print by Kuniyoshi, probably in Manet's possession at the time, which helps to situate the figure in what would have been seen as a comfortable but avant-garde setting, evoking some of the ambiguities of Manet's own situation in the art world at the time. The presence of the Japanese print has nothing to do with Morisot's output as a painter, which by this time was substantial. The overwriting of the identity of the sitter by the presence of the artist, which we saw in the

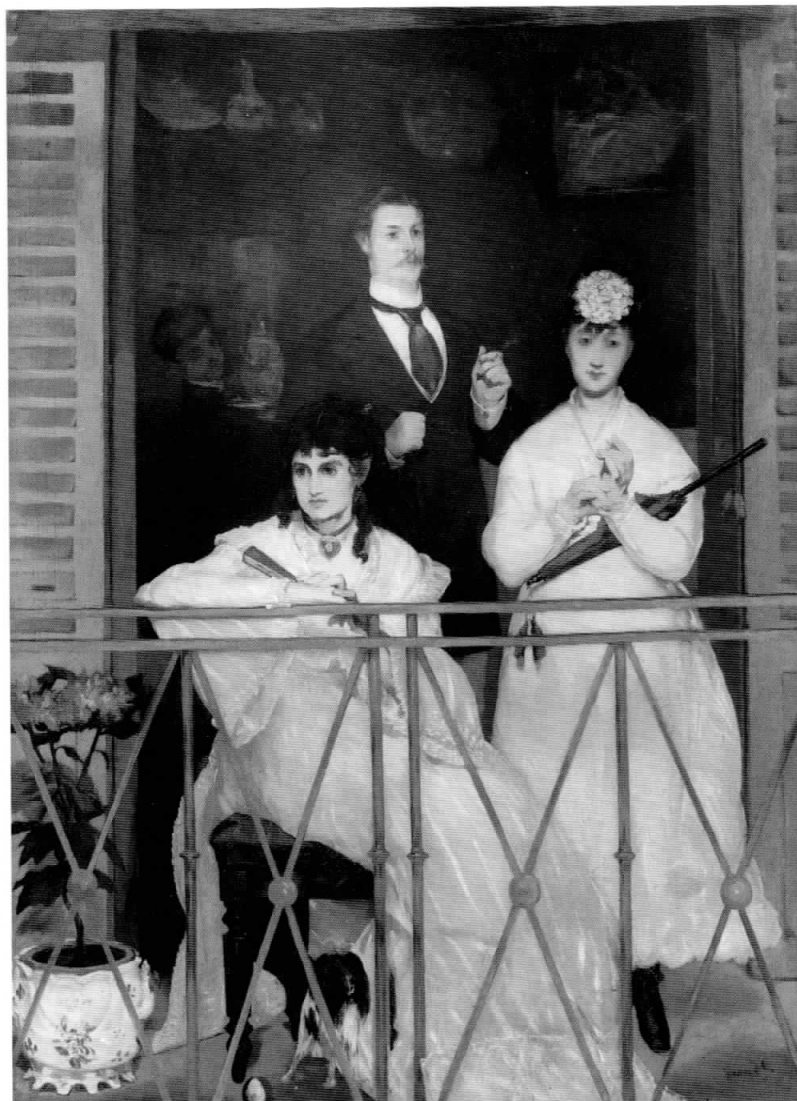


Plate 223 Édouard Manet, *Le Balcon* (*The Balcony*), 1868–69, oil on canvas, 169 x 125 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique.

Portrait of Mlle E.G., is common to many of Manet's portraits. But it seems all the more obliterating of the independent identity of the sitter when it is a portrait of a professional woman (rather than a man). There are no established conventions for the representation of the professional woman equivalent to the representation of the 'man of letters', into which such paintings as the *Portrait of Émile Zola* can be inserted (Plate 226). When Manet places his signature prominently on a pamphlet on the table in this image, the reference is to a shared professional world which artist and critic occupy. The painter pays homage to the writer who was one of his staunchest defenders. Whereas portraits of men were generally judged in terms of their capacity to represent character and identity, those of women were expected to capture beauty and elegance, conveyed by costume and surroundings as much as in the rendering of the face and pose. The idea of the male artist capturing the essence of 'femininity' in portraiture was perfectly acceptable. But the reverse was not the case. While it was deemed absolutely appropriate that men, who were seen as connoisseurs of art and female beauty, should paint portraits of women at this time, for a woman artist to execute a portrait of a man was a delicate and contentious project, and was usually only permissible if the sitter was a close relative (see for example Morisot's portrait of her husband Eugène Manet and their daughter Julie, Plate 227).

no caricature
in portrait
?

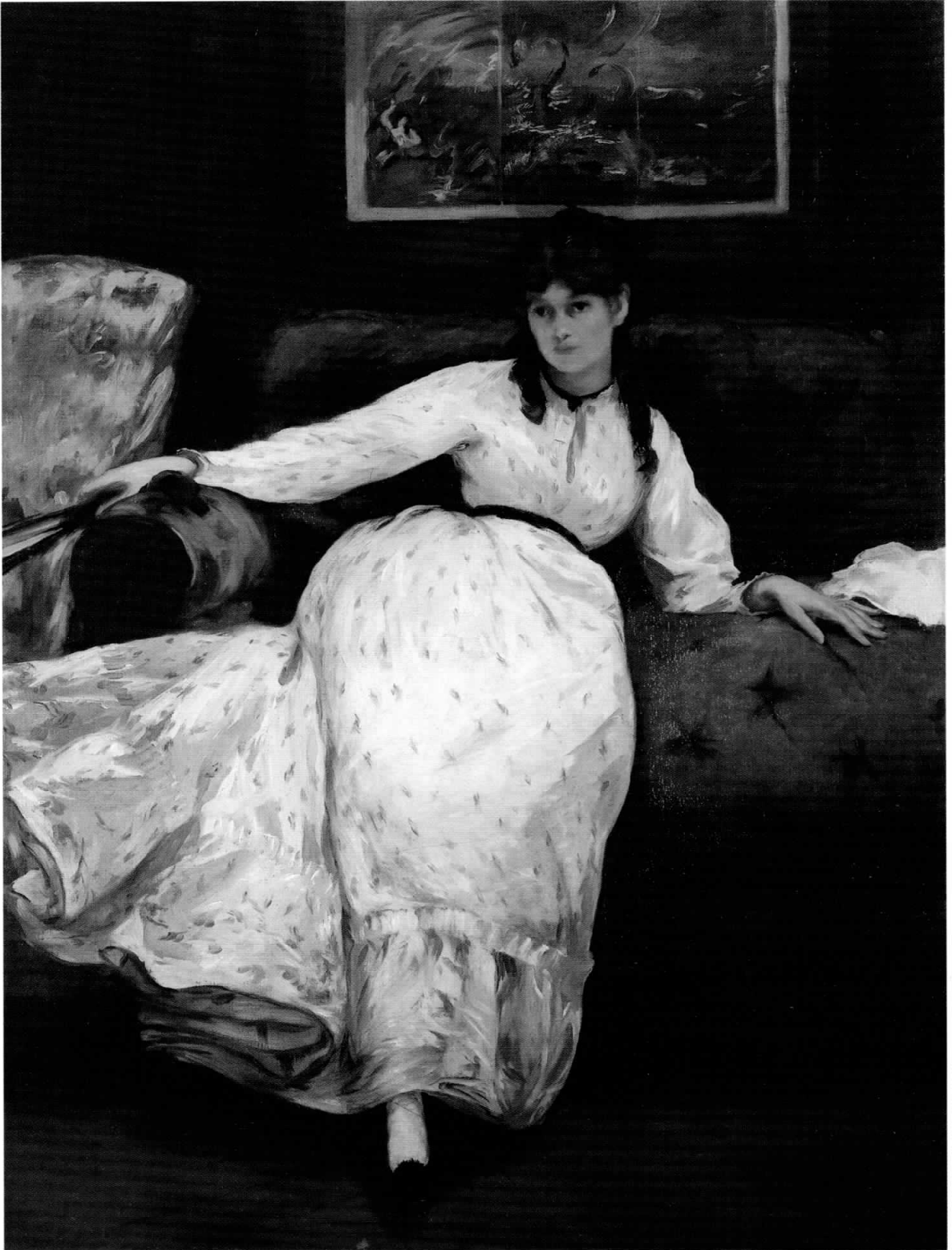


Plate 224 Édouard Manet, *Le Repos (Rest; Portrait of Berthe Morisot)*, 1870, oil on canvas, 148 x 113 cm. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Bequest of the Estate of Edith Stuyvesant Vanderbilt Gerry.



Plate 225 Achille Devéria, *Jeune Femme sur un canapé* (Young Woman on a Couch), lithograph. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Dc 178 bt, 4, no.788 80 892.

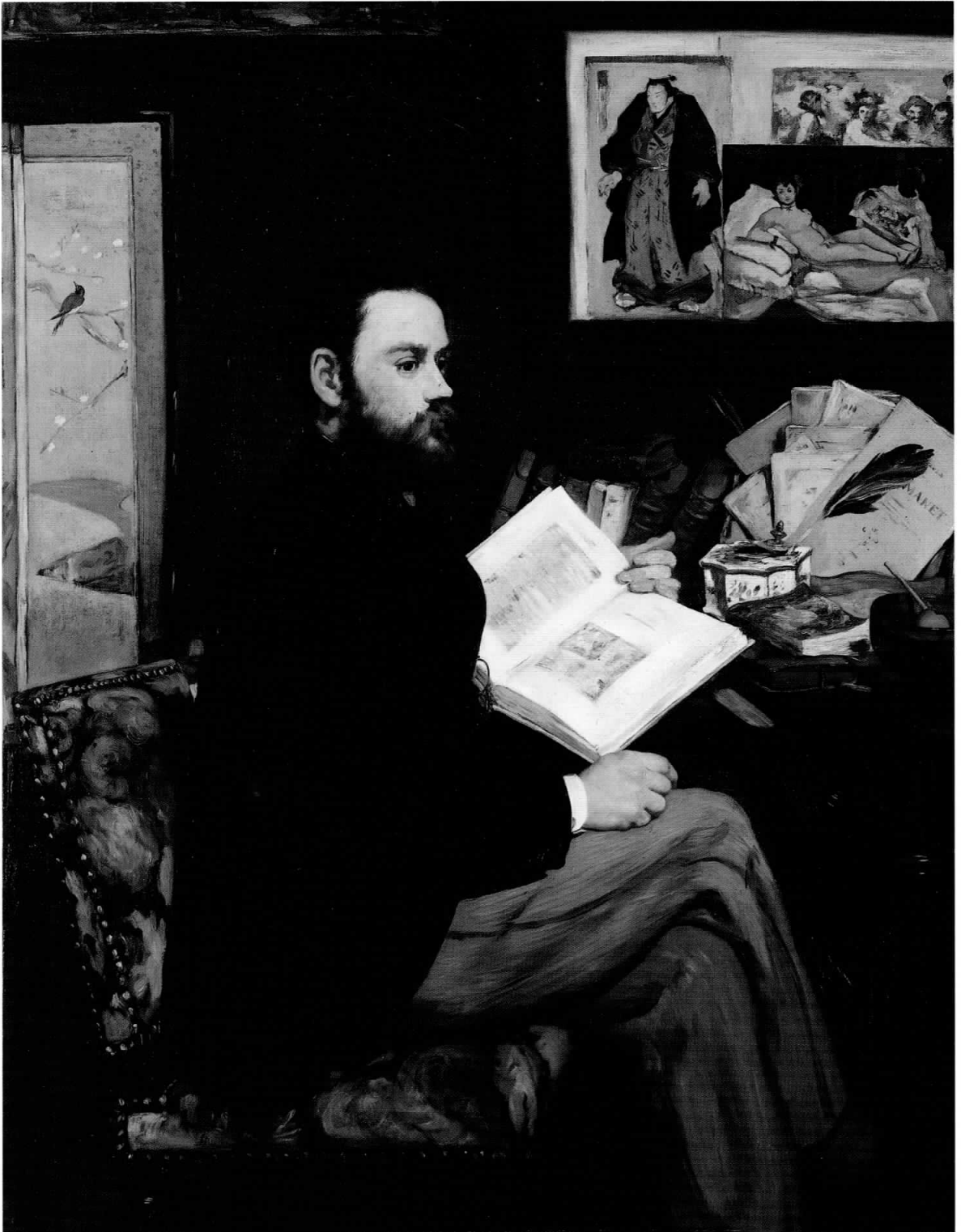


Plate 226 Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Émile Zola*, 1868, oil on canvas, 146 x 114 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique.



Plate 227 Berthe Morisot, *Eugène et sa fille à Bougival* (*Eugène Manet and his Daughter at Bougival*), 1881, oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm. Private Collection, Paris. Photo: Giraudon.

On those very rare occasions when women painted portraits of male public figures, critical eyebrows were raised and questions were asked about the capacity of women to be objective enough to capture the character of their sitter or brazen enough to confront them with their gaze. For a male artist, the potential confrontation with the representation of a deviant femininity could be evaded by the obliteration of all references to it, as in *Le Repos*, or the diffusion of it as in the *Portrait of Mlle E.G.*, so that what is left is a painting which evokes normative constructions of femininity. But there were other options. When Degas painted Mary Cassatt in a seated, alert and forward thrusting position, legs slightly apart, he was adapting conventions of male portraiture for this representation of an unconventional woman, perhaps thereby asserting the independence and autonomy of an American woman in Paris (Plate 228). And when, in the last decade of the century, some women artists self-consciously rejected the trappings of an oppressive femininity and proclaimed the professional identity of their mentor Rosa Bonheur, they had to invent a means of representing the professional woman artist, one in which professional attributes took the place of conventional props of femininity in order to confer an identity on the sitter. (See, for example, Anna Klumpke's *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur* (Plate 229) and Mme Achille Fould's *Rosa Bonheur* (Plate 230).) Unknown to them, Edma Morisot, had, as early as 1865–68, executed a portrait of her sister painting at the easel, eyes securely fixed on the canvas in front of her and paintbrush poised at the palette (Plate 231).



Plate 228 Edgar Degas, *Portrait of Mary Cassatt*, c.1884, oil on canvas, 72 x 59 cm. The National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC; gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Regent's Major Acquisitions Fund, Smithsonian Institution, no. NPG. 84.34.

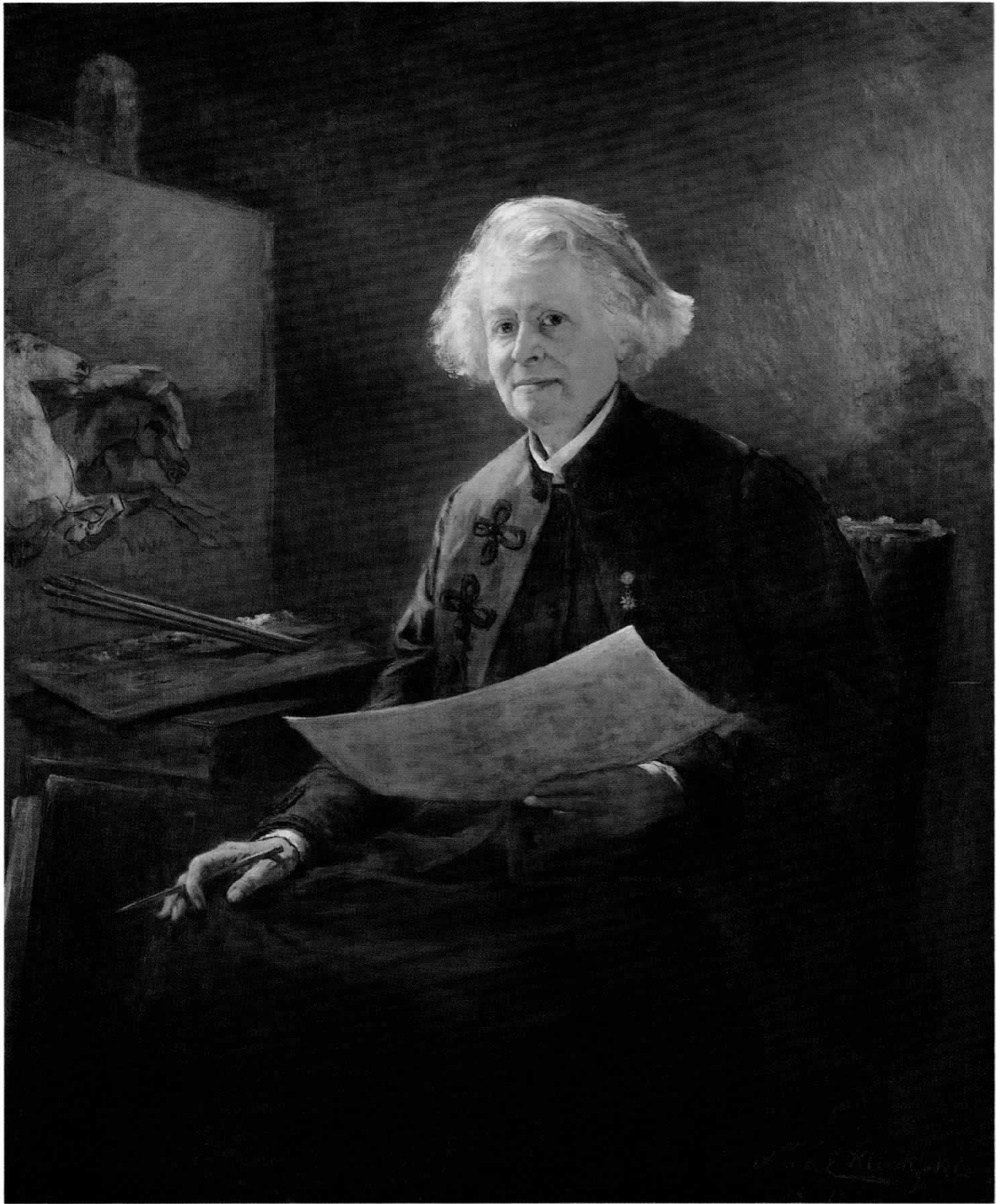


Plate 229 Anna Klumpke, *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur*, 1898, oil on canvas, 117 x 98 cm. All Rights Reserved, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; gift of the Artist in Memory of Rosa Bonheur 1922.



Plate 230 Mme Achille Fould, *Rosa Bonheur*, exhibited Salon 1893, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Present whereabouts unknown.

Generally the attributes of gendered subjectivity, as inscribed on the body and its accoutrements, together with more covert conventions of setting and pose, construct normative images of masculinity and femininity in portraiture. Only occasionally do they subvert them. Portraiture most often draws upon the visual codes present in other forms of representation (fashion, for example), but does its own work in naturalizing these by either personalizing them or transforming them into elevated types. Pose and props function simultaneously to indicate personal traits and preferences and gendered or classed attributes. Manet's portraits of Eva Gonzalès and Berthe Morisot manipulate the available symbols of middle-class femininity to great effect, but they leave us completely uninformed about the lives and achievements of the women that they represent. The attempts of art historians to use them as 'documents' which are expected to yield information about their sitters as people, are singularly misguided. They yield little such 'information'. But as paintings which can tell us something about dominant constructions of a historically contingent femininity, they are deeply resonant.

So far we have concentrated on the iconography and signifying properties of these paintings without paying particular attention to their surfaces as paintings. It is worth returning, at this stage, to some of those questions, flagged in the introduction to this chapter, which ask whether problems of gender in representation can be addressed to imagery alone or whether a more complex consideration needs also to be inflected by addressing questions of technique. I have already alluded to the way in which an attention to surface can involve an eroticized looking which effectively displaces attention from the figure represented ('the prettiness, say of a girl, her colouring, her expression, her attitude', to use Clement Greenberg's words), to a caressing of the surface itself as feminine. But Greenberg more than anyone is aware that it is the tension that is set up between surface and subject which provides the interest in figurative painting. In his words, '...the illustrated subject can no more be thought away, or "seen away" from a

Support
Narrative
body

attention to
surface

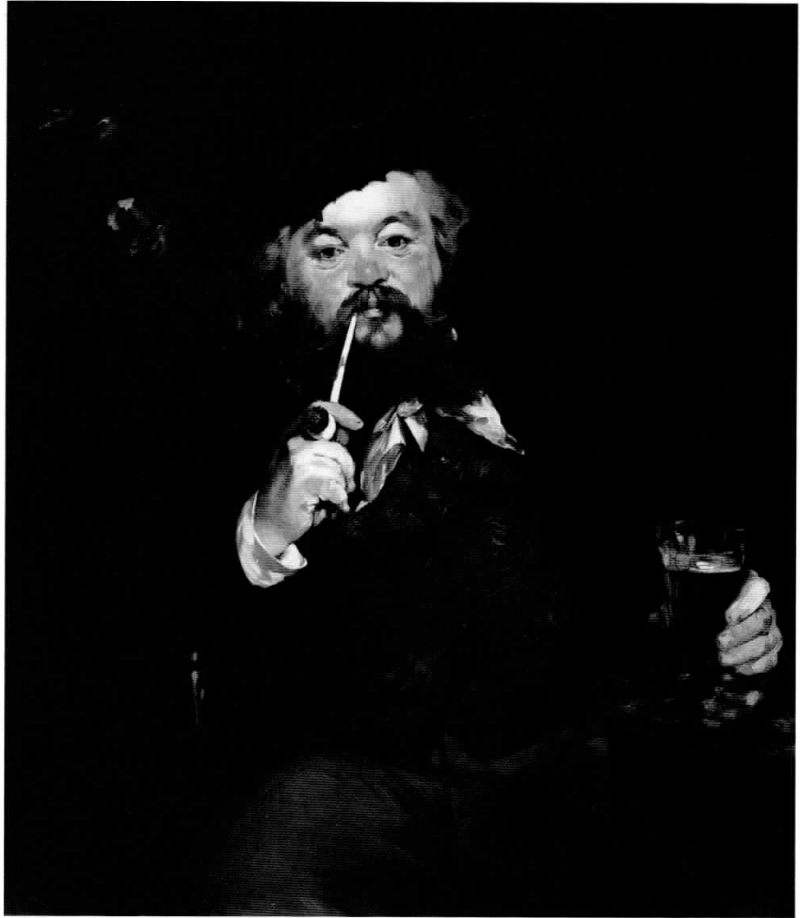


Plate 231 Edma Morisot,
Portrait of Berthe Morisot, 1863,
 oil on canvas, 100 x 71 cm.
 Private Collection, Paris.
 Photograph by courtesy of
 Galerie Hopkins-Thomas.

picture than anything else in it can'. Indeed it was this tension, if understood rather differently, that made Manet's *Le Repos* untenable for at least one of its first viewers. It offended him, not so much for the type of femininity that it represented (indeed there was little offensive here) but for the manner in which it represented it. In terms of contemporary conventions of picture-making, Manet's works were highly transgressive. Their fluidity of handling, their lack of surface finish and their rich contrasts of dark and light devoid of acceptably subtle tonal modulation, were not easily absorbed by the majority of their contemporary viewers. When *Le Repos* was shown at the Salon of 1873 the manner of its execution was seen by one critic as an affront to the delicacy of the subject it portrayed. While Manet's robust technique seemed quite suited to his earthy, masculine and lower-class figure in *Le Bon Boc*, shown together with *Le Repos*, it did not seem so for the delicacy and refinement which a portrait of a young lady should capture (Plates 224 and 232).² For this critic, Manet's technique functioned in the one case as an appropriate analogue to the brutality of its coarse, male subject and in the other as an insult to accepted notions of bourgeois femininity. In the latter case, it assaulted its subject with its directness. Considerations of gender are here inflected by those of class. A hostile response to the way the painting is executed, claims as its alibi a reverence for bourgeois femininity. In so doing it reaffirms traditional social relations while simultaneously denouncing formal innovation.

² George Lafenestre wrote: 'And Manet himself shows, in his *Repos*, that what is adequate for the interpretation of the good-humoured appearance of a ruddy smoker stuffed with dinner, becomes remarkably inadequate when it is a question of rendering the grace, delicacy and spontaneity in the figure of a young woman' (quoted in Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics*, p. 168).

Plate 232 Édouard Manet, *Le Bon Boc*, 1873, oil on canvas, 94 x 83 cm (portrait of Emile Bellot, engraver and lithographer). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Mr and Mrs Carroll S. Tyson Collection.



Manet's *Le Repos* offered difficulties therefore for some of its first viewers, who were hostile to innovative painting techniques. Its acceptability as a work which represented dominant social attitudes was impaired by its unconventional means of representation. Technique functions as a barrier, a form of resistance to the easy exchange of dominant social attitudes via the work. The work, on some level, went against the grain of the very attitudes to which it owed its existence. It exists in a complex and contradictory relation to them. It is perhaps part of the feminist project to hold on both to the oppressive narratives which have historically informed and continued to produce meaning and the tensions that are set up in their material realization.

Painting as a woman

So far we have used paintings of artists, mostly by men, as a focus for a discussion of the context within which the woman artist worked in late nineteenth-century France. Now we need to address the issue of women's artistic production itself within this social context. By examining a number of paintings by women which draw on the same subject as Renoir's *La Loge* we can ask some comparative questions about the position of the woman artist as the active maker of art during this period. We need also to consider what happens to our reading of a painting when we know that a woman has painted it. Is this a relevant question at all? In some recent theoretical inquiries, particularly literary studies, the text has come to be seen to have a life which is relatively independent of its author. In such

left independent
for other