

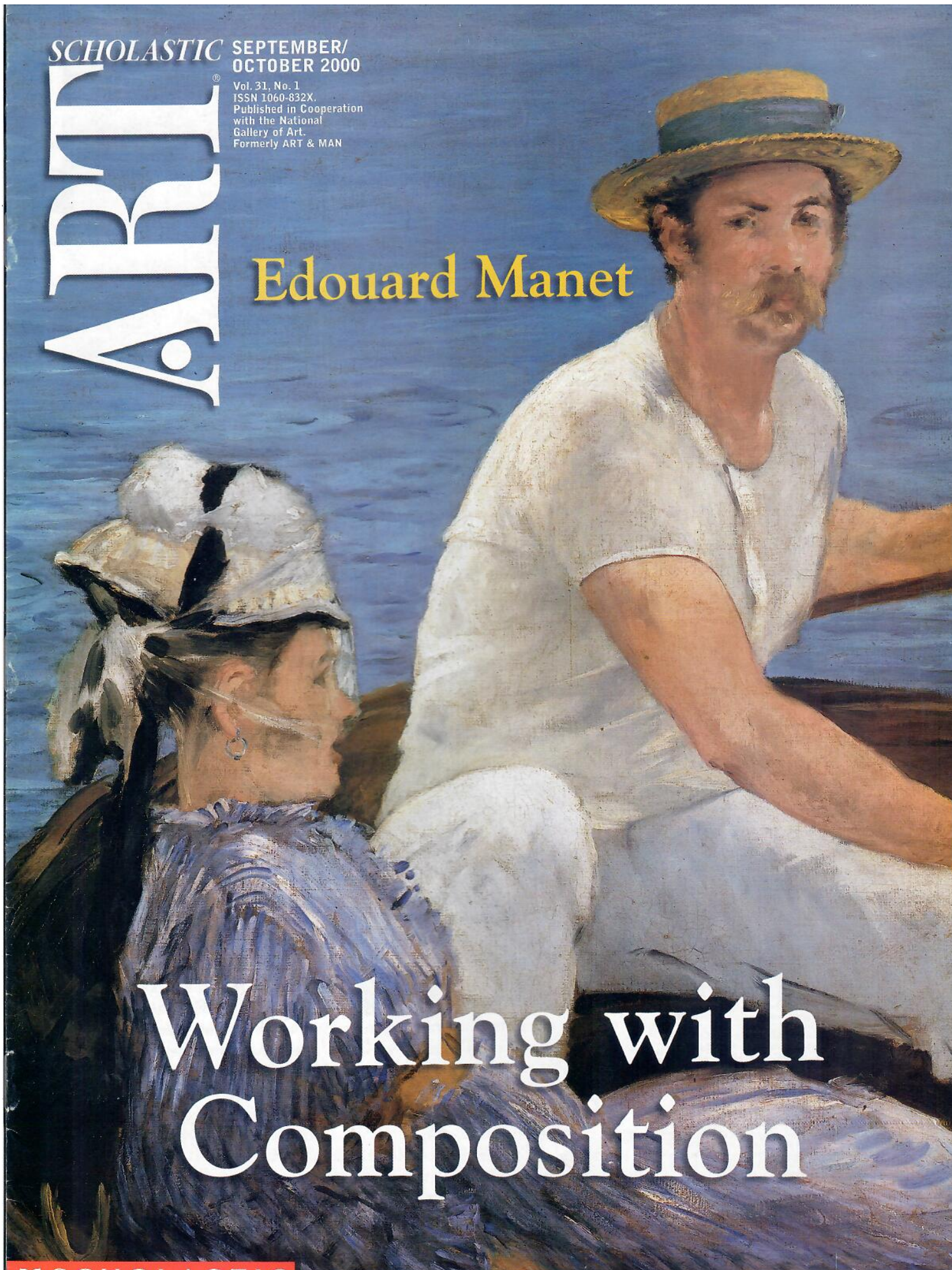
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ART

Edouard Manet

Working with
Composition





COVER: Edouard Manet (1832-1883). Boating (detail), 1874. Oil on canvas, 38 1/4" x 51 1/4". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y., N.Y. Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer. Photograph © 1994 Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Manet's New Way of Seeing

In the year 1866, two very different artists completed the two paintings you see here. One work was enormously popular, critically acclaimed, the winner of many prizes and awards. The other was rejected, insulted, made the subject of numerous jokes and cartoons. Which of these paintings is today considered a modern masterpiece, appearing in nearly every art history book? And which painting has practically been forgotten?

The good news for 19th-century artist Edouard Manet (Ma-NAY) was that he lived and painted in Paris when that city was the center of the art world. The bad news was



More than anything, 19th-century French artist Edouard Manet wanted his work to be accepted by the art establishment. But he knew he had to paint what he saw.

that all art created in France was governed by the very strict rules set down by the Academy, the official institution that controlled art at that time. Young artists could succeed only through the official Academy exhibitions known as *Salons*. For these shows, the conservative judges nearly always chose huge, complex, highly detailed works featuring mythological, historical or biblical

subjects: paintings like *Art and Literature* (top, right).

The style of Manet's painting, *The Fifer* (far right), looks fairly ordinary to us today. But to viewers in 1866, it was quite outrageous. The Salon judges who rejected this work

“Our modern Renaissance begins with Edouard Manet.”

—Paul Cézanne



“Bouguereau creates an ideal world, a realm of beauty that can only be regarded as high art.”—19th-century critic

Adolphe-William Bouguereau (1825-1905). *Art and Literature*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 78 3/4" x 42 1/2". Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, N.Y.

“What can this Manet be thinking? The work is as flat as a playing card. And the boy is surrounded by nothing but air!”—19th-century critic

Edouard Manet (1832-1883). *The Fifer*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 63 1/2" x 38". Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



regarded its bold, direct brushstrokes, simplified shapes, and flat background as unfinished. They felt the figure was “floating.” Worst of all, the subject—a boy in an oversize uniform who might be seen in any street musicians’ group—was too ordinary to be thought of as “art.”

Edouard Manet has been called the “inventor of modern art.” He was ahead of his time because of the subjects he chose and the way that he painted them. He was one of the first painters to reject the traditional, academic style of painting. He painted everyday subjects just the way he saw them. Nineteenth-century artists felt that a painting should be an illusion of three-dimensional reality. Manet thought of a painting as a series of images on a flat surface.

Manet, the son of a government official, was born in Paris in 1832. Young Manet didn’t do very well in school but he showed a great interest in art. When he graduated from college, his parents wanted him to study law or become an officer in the navy. But he failed his naval exams, and entered a Parisian painter’s studio. After studying there, he traveled through Europe for the next few years, opening his own studio in 1856.

Breaking the Rules

By 1868, Manet had had a great number of pictures rejected by the Salon. Since there were no other outlets for showing his work, he decided to organize his own exhibition. The project—renting a building, advertising, and printing catalogues—was enormously expensive. Manet’s mother worried that he was “wasting his whole inheritance on this folly.” In spite of all this work and expense, few people came and even fewer critics praised Manet’s paintings.

Among those who did come to see the artist’s work were a number of young painters, many of whom would later become world famous—Edgar Degas (Day-GA), Claude Monet (Mo-NAY), Auguste Renoir (Ren-WAR), Paul Cézanne (Say-ZAHN). Later known as the “Impressionists,” these painters were also frustrated by

the Academy’s restrictions. They felt that “painting rules” made art artificial and lifeless. They wanted to express the movement and energy of everyday life, using **bright colors** and **loose brushstrokes**, and to paint **quickly** and **spontaneously** right on the spot. Although Manet was never an Impressionist, his bold, realistic style paved the way for the Impressionists. They admired the **simplified shapes**, **sharp natural lighting**, and **flat, unmodeled areas of color** that Manet used in paintings like the ones shown here.

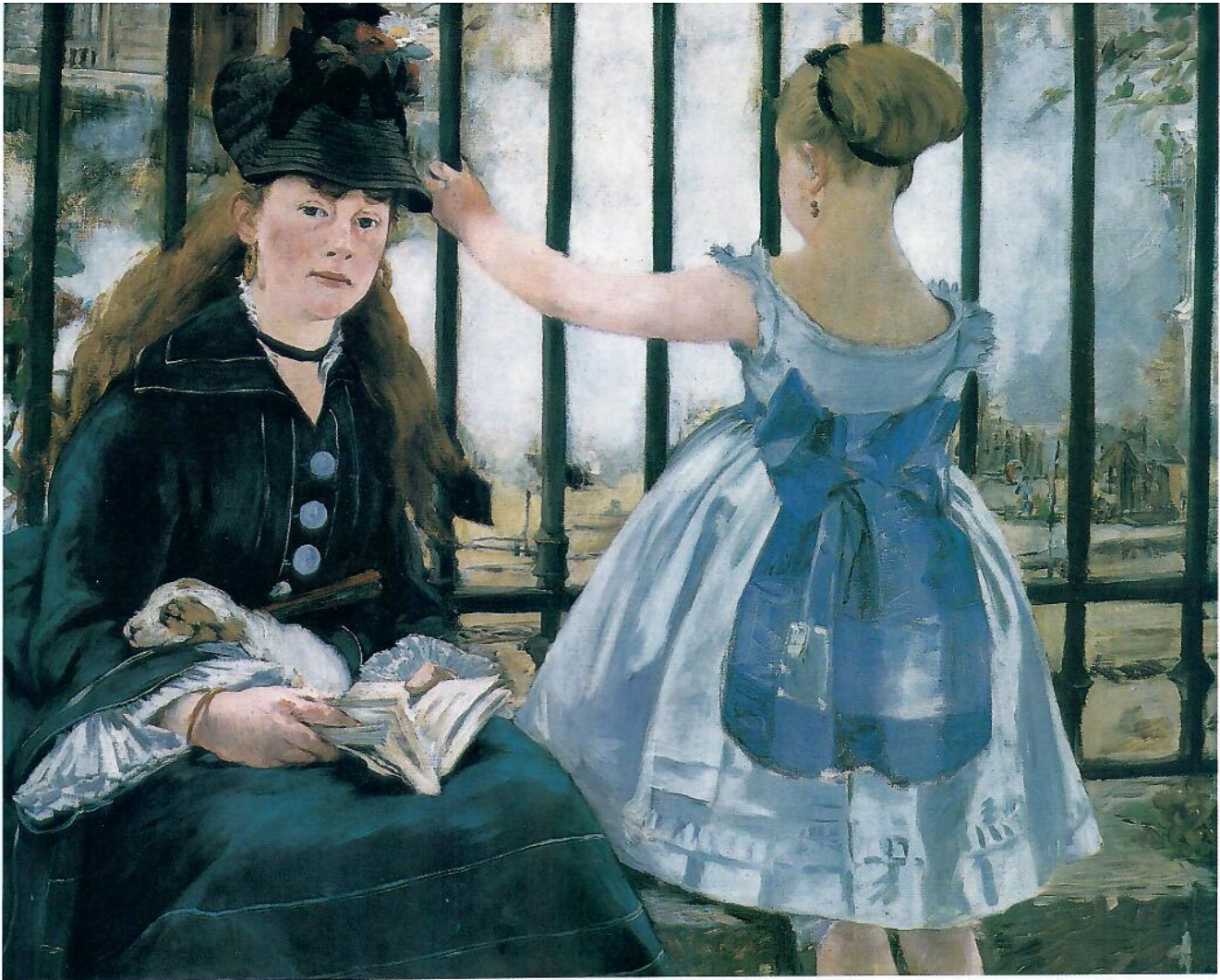
Manet almost always painted people, mainly group portraits. His carefully planned compositions often contain people involved in their own thoughts staring into the distance. Usually only one person in his paintings looks out at the viewer. *The Balcony* (below, right) was

created after a trip to the seashore where Manet saw people sitting on small balconies looking out at the sea. In his studio, he arranged three friends in a **triangular composition**. On the left is his sister-in-law, the Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot. The figure in back stares in the opposite direction. Only the woman on the right makes eye contact with the viewer. The group is **framed** by the **horizontal** and **vertical**



Many critics considered the paintings on these pages to be “unfinished sketches.”

The Luncheon, 1868. Oil, 46 1/2" x 60 1/2". Neue Pinakothek, Munich



“Seeing themselves painted this way, the females want to flee! But M. Manet put up a barrier to prevent their escape!”—a hostile critic

The Railway, 1873. Oil on canvas, 36 3/4" x 45 1/8". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Horace Havemeyer.

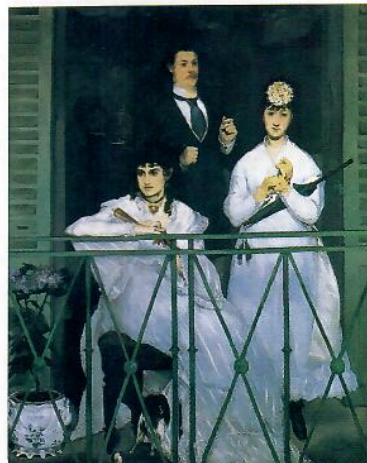
“Paint the truth, let them say what they will.”

—Edouard Manet

lines of the green shutters on each side and the metal railing in front.

Above all, Manet insisted that his figures look as they did in everyday life. In *The Luncheon* (left), three solid, realistic figures dramatized by spotlighting effects are placed in a tightly worked out composition. Manet depicts an everyday scene, but also captures a feeling of mystery. Is lunch beginning or over? Why is the young man the center of attention? Why is one of the chairs filled with helmets and swords?

In this work, Manet’s 15-year-old son, Léon, is the focal point. Léon wears the uniform for his new job as a



Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot is the focal point of this work.

The Balcony, 1868. Oil on canvas, 67" x 49 3/4". Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

bank messenger. The artist’s neighbor, a servant, and the family cat complete the group. Manet also included two still-life setups he had been working on—the dishes on the table and the armor on the chair.

The same mysterious feeling is suggested in *The Railway* (above). A woman and girl wait in a Parisian train station. The asymmetrical composition balances the shapes on the left and the negative space on the right. The girl grips the fence while the woman sits with a puppy in her lap. Vertical iron bars separate the group from the smoke and industrial chaos of the city on the other side.

Teaching the Teacher

As Manet inspired the Impressionists, their paintings in turn influenced his later works. Although he worked within “the rules” and never exhibited in any of the shows held by the Impressionists, Manet’s style changed after he met them. From 1868 on, his colors became **brighter** and **lighter** in value. He used **loose, expressive brushstrokes** in his paintings, many of which were now set outdoors. The **unusual, dramatic points of view** that characterize many Impressionist paintings can be seen in the works shown here and on pages 8-9. The viewer seems to be standing in front of galloping horses in one, hanging from the sails of a boat in another, and looking at a series of reflected images in a third.

In the mid 1870s, Manet became friendly with a young Impressionist painter whose name was very similar to his own—Claude Monet. Works like Manet’s *Monet Painting in his Studio* (above), filled with **loose brushstrokes, melting forms, and bright colors** added to the confusion between the two. “How can this be?” Manet would ask as yet another person told him how much he



Edouard Manet painted several portraits like this of his good friend, painter Claude Monet.

Monet Painting in his Studio Boat, 1874. Oil on canvas, 32 1/2" x 39 1/2". Neue Pinakothek, Munich

“Go outside and use your own eyes. You’ll be surprised to see things you’ve never been taught.”

—Edouard Manet

the bottom and the sail on the right This **sharp cropping** causes the viewer to feel like part of the scene. But it completely confused the judges. According to the Academy, water was always green. But Manet’s water was blue. So many critics didn’t recognize that the flat

had enjoyed a work that had actually been painted by Monet. “It’s like a bad joke.”

Manet also worked with another Impressionist, Edgar Degas. One of the places they liked best was the new race-track. In *Races at Longchamp* (below, right), Manet uses **diagonals** to suggest that the horses are coming right at the viewer. This point of view and the loose, slashing brushstrokes capture the excitement of the races and the rush of horses pounding down the track.

Boats and water were favorite subjects for many Impressionist painters. Inspired by his Impressionist friends, Manet created one of his best known works, *Boating* (pages 8-9). When the artist entered this painting into the Salon, it was accepted. However, it broke many of the Academy’s rules. The shapes are **simplified**, the colors **bright** and **flat**. The figures are **framed** by the boat at



"The painting appears to be the reflection of a reflection, the shimmering image of a disappearing world."—Jacques-Emile Blanche

Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1881-82; Courtauld Institute Galleries, London

blue area behind the figures was supposed to be water. The point of view is from **above**, so no **horizon line** can be seen in back. For this reason, many critics thought the boat was sailing away from a blue wall!

Done at the end of his life, *Bar at the Folies Bergère* (Bear-JAIR) is one of Manet's best-known paintings. This work, seen above, is carefully composed. The artist did the background—a vast, crowded restaurant—from

sketches made at the scene. He then reconstructed the marble bar in his studio and posed a model behind it. Is the bored-looking woman in the picture staring into space waiting for her shift to be over? Or is she standing there listening to a customer? Does a mirror in back reflect her image? Or could there be a second bar behind her and another waitress talking to a man on the right? Can you find the tiny green feet of an acrobat in one of

the corners? The composition's complexity and the mysterious nature of its subject make this one of Manet's most important works.

Edouard Manet died in 1883 at the age of 51. The artist's legacy was not only the highly original work he produced, but the great influence he had on the other painters of his time.

**"Manet's sour, irritating colors attack the eye like steel saws; the shapes are complete blurs."
—19th-century critic**

Races at Longchamp, 1864.
Oil on canvas, 17 1/4" x 33 1/4". Art Institute, Chicago.
Potter Palmer Collection.



Boating

by Edouard Manet

“I feel that every work must have something to say. Otherwise, an artist shouldn’t even bother.”

—Edouard Manet



Edouard Manet (1852-1883). *Boating*, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 38 1/4" x 51 1/4". The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, N.Y., N.Y. Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer.
Photo © 1994. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ART SPOTLIGHT

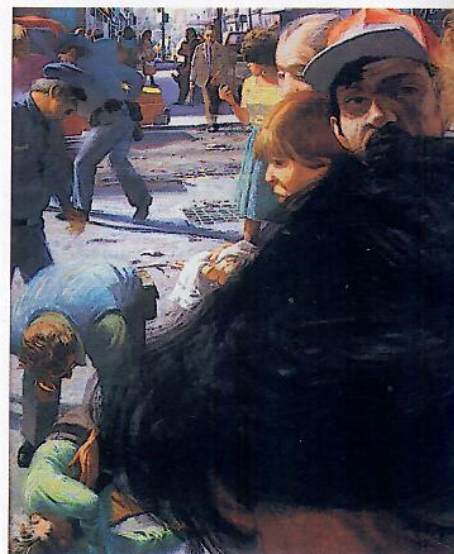
Street Scenes

Manet and other 19th-century Impressionists painted scenes of everyday life set in the streets of Paris. The points of view chosen by these painters look ordinary to us today, but they were highly unusual for that time.

What might the Impressionists have made of contemporary American artist Robert Birmelin's *A Street Event* (right)? The **unusual point of view** makes it hard to tell exactly what is going on. A large, dark, **positive shape** takes up half of the picture. All the action takes place at the edges. Images **run into each other**, figures are **sharply cropped** as they walk out of the picture frame. Like Manet, Birmelin captures the

feeling of contemporary urban life. The pace is so frantic and speeded up that only a **fragmented image** like this can convey the sensation of walking down a crowded street. The use of **tilted perspectives**, **plunging diagonals**, and **overlapping images** adds to the feelings of anxiety, excitement, and possible danger.

Robert Birmelin, b. 1933. *A Street Event*, 1983. Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 78". National Museum of American Art.



“In these works, the individual is either absorbed by or pitted against the masses.”

—Robert Birmelin

Group Portraits of Today

Three very different ways of depicting groups of people



Lucien Freud, b. 1922. *Reflection with Two Children*, 1965. 36" x 36". Private Collection.

Family Groups

British figure painter Lucien Freud (FROID) has done many self-portraits. The artist paints from a mirror set on the floor, accounting for this work's (left) **unusual point of view**.

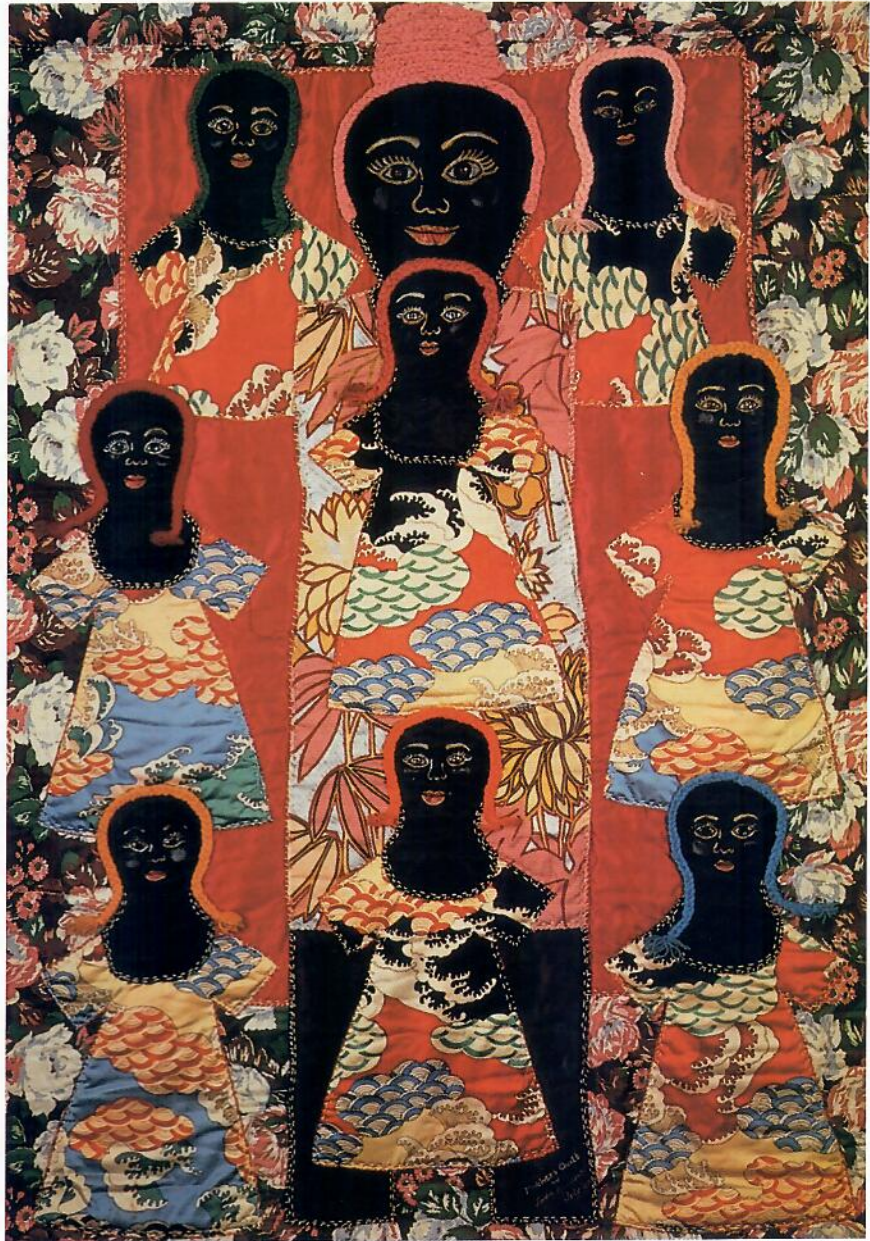
Like Manet, Freud wants his figures to convey a sense of “reality.” But Freud makes his reality as unflattering as possible. In this work, the **angle and harsh spotlighting** distort the main figure, emphasizing every wrinkle and shadow. The **asymmetrical composition** balances the **positive**

shapes of the artist and overhead lights with the “empty” space on the left. This large area of **negative space** dwarfs the tiny children. Located outside the mirror's frame, these children are too small. This **scale change** causes their father's image to loom over them like that of some grotesque giant.

“It is the task of the artist to make the sitter uncomfortable. Only then will he get the results he wants.”

—Lucien Freud

Faith Ringgold, b. 1930. *Mother's Quilt*, 1983. Acrylic on canvas, fabric. 56" x 43 1/2". © 1983 Faith Ringgold



ay

African Figures

In works like *Mother's Quilt* (right), contemporary African-American artist Faith Ringgold has created her own unique art form. She combines conventional Western composition with the traditions of African fabric design. The artist says, "I was inspired by African art and I also wanted to write stories. The art form of the quilt seemed to accept both of these things together."

Her **stylized, simplified, outlined** figures with their **bright, unnatural colors** create **flat, repeat patterns**. Ringgold explains, "I didn't want perspective distorting things for me. I like to keep my works flat because I like to give equal intensity to every area. I make heads larger than bodies because in African art, the soul and the intelligence are more significant than the mere body." The central

"I wanted to use the classical traditions of African design to create my own art form."— Faith Ringgold

head at the top of the piece is larger than any of the others. This **change in scale** may signify that that particular person is more important than the others. The work's **symmetrical** (the arrangement of shapes is the same on both sides) **composition** and its **framelike border** links both African and Western quilt making traditions.

ARTIST OF THE MONTH

Vincent Hoon

Painting People

The dramatic self-portrait on the opposite page was created by 18-year-old Vincent Hoon in a special summer art class he took at Jefferson High School in Lafayette, Indiana. Now a freshman at Purdue University, he plans to major in computer science—at least for now. Although he's very open to a career in art, Vincent wants to use college as a way to explore all the options available to him.

When did you first begin to get involved in art?

I've been drawing since I was a child. My mother is a really good artist and I know that she definitely influenced me.

How did you come to make this award-winning painting?

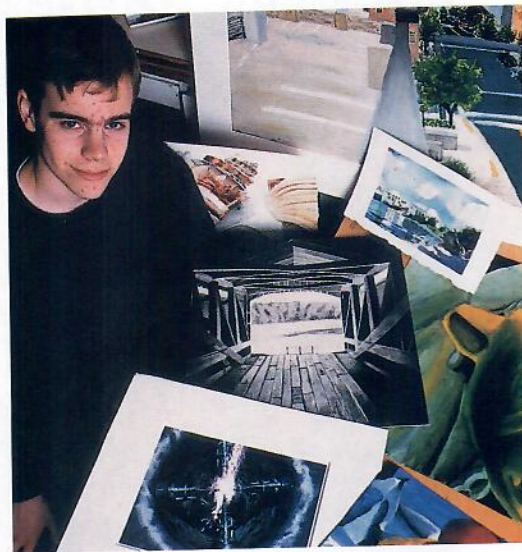
I created this work while I was in a summer challenge art program that was run by the high school. The best art students are chosen for this program by their art teachers. We went for three weeks, four hours every day. It was like an extended art class, a great atmosphere to be in. The project that inspired this piece was to create a large-scale self-portrait.

How did you go about doing this?

Before creating this work, we went to downtown Lafayette and set up photographs of ourselves that we could use to paint from. This was my favorite set-up—taken in an alley where we found some really neat lighting.

What was it about the set-up that you liked?

I think it was the composition. All the colors and shapes really appealed to my eye. The balance of color attracted me too, half green, half orange. All the vertical lines par-



alleled each other. Plus, there was really great-looking back lighting that illuminated my outline and a green-tinted light above me. It felt surreal, and looked really neat. I liked that there was a sort of a cross beam of light, a cool pattern, and that it all came together to produce a very natural feeling.

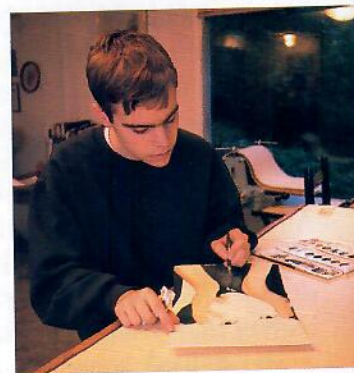
The viewer sees your figure from below. Why did you choose that point of view?

I liked the low angle from a technical standpoint. I had the photographer kneel when he

took the picture to emphasize the fact that I'm staring off into the distance. I also remember wanting to find a doorway to stand in. Looking back, I think the doorway created a very nice framing element. I wanted to increase the drama of the picture by having the doorway emphasize the figure.

What effect were you looking for with the deep shadows and the bright spotlighting?

The title of my painting is *Contemplation in Green*. I wanted a contemplative mood, which I think this lighting provides. I wanted the picture to feel visionary; to suggest the idea of looking toward the future. I think the mood created by the lighting is emphasized by the perspective. The viewer is looking up toward the figure who looks up toward what lies ahead for him.



"I love to feel the brush gliding over the canvas. The brush stroke itself is a beautiful thing."

How did you create this piece?

First we took the photos. Then we cut large pieces of canvas, some nearly life-size. My painting is about five feet tall and three feet wide. Its size was one of the most challenging aspects and one of the reasons the painting got so much acclaim. I had to prop the canvas against a wall or a chair so I could work on it. Just covering the canvas with paint required a great deal of effort.

How did you begin?

First I used an opaque projector to project the photo onto the canvas. Then I fixed the canvas to a piece of Styrofoam so it would stand up. Next, I made a sketch on the canvas. Then I started mixing oil paints. The first thing I painted was the face. I thought that would be the hardest part because it would require the most subtlety. I like to tackle the hardest aspects first, so I started there. From there, I continued down the figure and painted the torso and legs. That took a couple of



exactly as I wanted it. It was a good omen for the rest of the piece. The painting definitely felt like a culmination of my high school painting skills.

Do you like to use figures in your compositions?

Yes. I've done a little bit of still life, but most of my paintings are portraits. I've done quite a few self-portraits, which is convenient because a model is always available. I like the human form. It's beautiful. When you're talking about human emotions, it's only natural that you'd use figures to express those.

How would you describe your painting style?

My earlier works are realistic. My more recent paintings are starting to have a more surreal feeling. This painting is funny. It's realism with a twist.

Would you have any advice for aspiring artists like yourself?

In high school you have

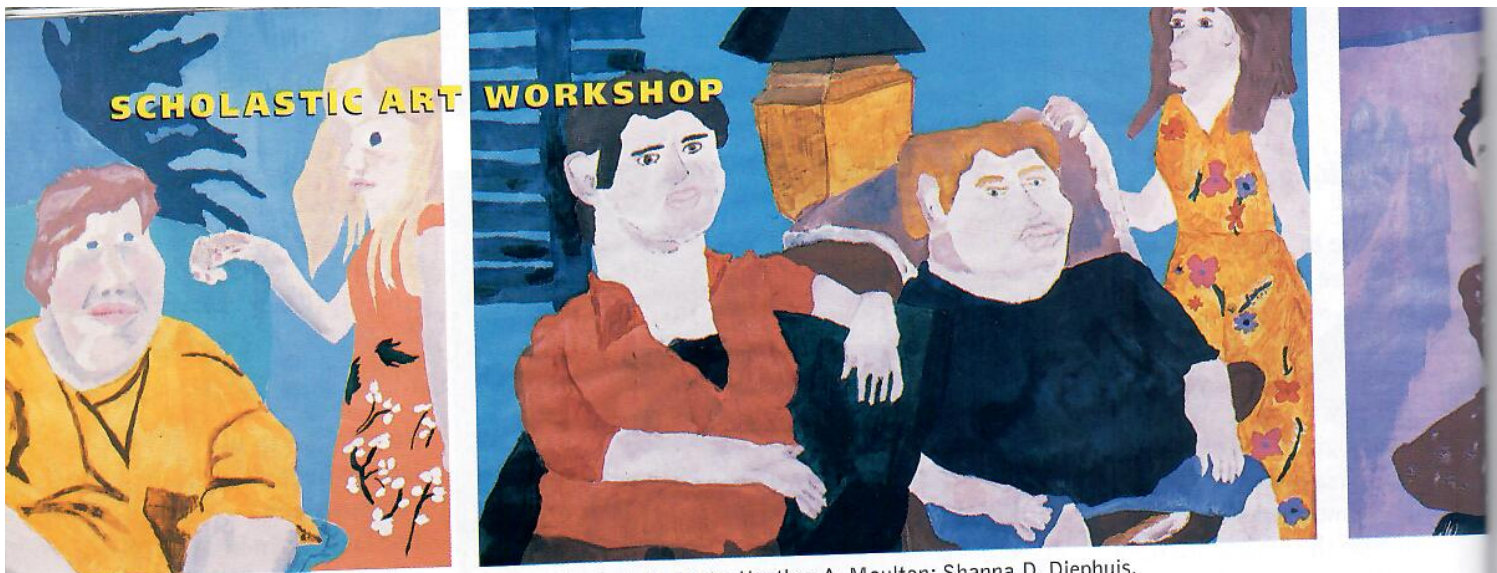
"I like the human form. When you're talking about human emotions, it's only natural that you'd use figures to express them."

weeks, then I began to run out of time. In order to get the painting done for our exhibition, I had to race. So as I got farther away from the face, I began to get looser with the paint. I like that, I think it keeps the focus on the face. I painted the background last, and that was it.

Were you satisfied when you were done?

I was pretty pleased with the results. The face came out

access to teachers who are dedicated to art. And you are exposed to a lot of different mediums and forms of art that you're able to explore freely. It would be good to take advantage of these opportunities while you have them. And have fun while you're doing it. You should enjoy creating. If you don't enjoy it, then maybe you shouldn't consider being an artist, because creating is what art is all about.



Paintings by: (left to right) Justin D. Boyles; Kimberly A. Deets; Heather A. Moulton; Shanna D. Diephuis.

Painting a Group **Port**

In this issue, you've seen some of Edouard Manet's unique compositions that feature groups of figures. In Manet's works, people are arranged in ways that suggest their relationships to each other. They could be friends, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, mothers and daughters. Adding objects to the background gives more visual clues.

For this project, you'll paint three figures. Your composition should be visually pleasing. It should also suggest some of the possible relationships between the people, or reasons why they may be grouped together.

MATERIALS

- 18" x 24" 80lb white sulfite drawing paper
- Drawing board
- Ebony school pencil for preliminary drawing
- Variety of small, flat brushes: 1/2", 1/4", 1/8", 1/16"
- Primary, secondary, black, white, *Blickrylic* or liquid tempera paint
- Divided container or small covered containers to hold paint (old cupcake tin or margarine containers)
- water containers
- palettes (old dinner plates)
- paper towels and plastic wrap



STEP 1

Arrange three models in front of the class in a tight, dramatic composition so models are clearly interacting or *not* interacting. (One could look straight ahead, one to the left, one could have his/her back to the class and look to one side.) Models should break every 15 minutes to avoid fatigue. Plants or other objects can be placed beside models for added interest.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr. and Stuart P. Roddy, Art Instructors, Morrison (IL) High School. Assisted by Nicholas R. Bonheur and Andrea D. Beveroth, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL. Photos by Larry Gregory



rait

Create a visual story by the arrangement of the figures in your composition.



There should be no interaction between class and models while students are working. Students should be arranged around models to emphasize unusual points of view (from right or left), below looking

up, above (on chairs) looking down, or close up in front. Floodlights can be used to emphasize details, colors, and contours.

STEP 2

Do two 15-minute blind contour drawings and two 25-minute contour drawings. *Details* are not important; pay attention to *scale* and *proportion*. The figures should be minor focal

points, with one figure serving as the **dominant focal point** of the entire composition. Select the strongest drawing as the basis for your final figure painting.

STEP 3

In painting the figures, limit the number of colors. Achieve variety by changing color values (add black to darken color, white to lighten it). Use **negative space** to achieve a **balanced composition**. The style of your painting should be simplified and realistic. While class works on the paintings, models should remain posed for reference.

SOME SOLUTIONS

All of the examples of figure paintings above feature **bright colors**, **simplified shapes**, and **flat space**. Which of the student artists who did these works have in

some way **framed** at least one of their figures? Which have used **loose brushstrokes** and which **hard edges**? Have any made **balanced asymmetrical compositions**? Have any of these artists painted their figures from **unusual points of view**? Who has used **negative space** to balance the composition? Has any artist chosen to isolate a **detail** or to **sharply crop in** on any of the figures? In order to emphasize the **main focal point**, has **selective spotlighting** been used in any of these works?



Composed Figures

How is composition used in each of these details?



060

You'll probably recognize these details from works featured in the magazine. Each image exemplifies some of the compositional or design elements that have been discussed. Next to each word or phrase, write the letter of the visual that best applies (hint: each letter is used three times).

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Simplified shapes | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Loose brushstrokes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Low point of view | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Asymmetrical composition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Light color values | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Distortion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Flat background | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Sharp cropping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Harsh spotlighting | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Overlapping figures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Repeat patterns | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Scale changes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Fragmented images | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Large positive shape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Bright colors | |