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Edouard Manet

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Art is a powerful tool of learning. It allows people to be aware of human conditions, societies, and the world.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the art history, each era of arts was distinguished by inspirations and approaches in creating them. Each period reflects the different perspectives and ideologies from both artists and people living at the time in a society. Without exception, from the 1840s, realistic painting was flourished in France, but not until at the end of the 1800s when there was a big turn in the painting history again.<sup>2</sup> Instead of following strictly to the realistic painting, a revolutionary painter named Edouard Manet made a tremendously outrageous movement by introducing a new painting ideology which strongly opposed to that of realism. Despite of harsh criticism and disparagement from critics and public almost throughout his career, with his determination, Manet was at last able to prove his art worthy through the public's eyes. Edouard Manet had made his most important contribution to mankind as the pioneer of modernist painting, in which we have descended and developed until today.<sup>3</sup> Even though Edouard Manet has passed away

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. Cronin. "On the Importance of the Arts." *Whitman College*. 1 Jan. 2012. <[http://www.whitman.edu/president/cronin/articles/importance\\_arts.cfm](http://www.whitman.edu/president/cronin/articles/importance_arts.cfm)>

<sup>2</sup> Charong Chow. "The Definitions of Impressionism & Realism in Art Paintings." *eHow, Discover the expert in you*. 4 Feb. 2012. <[http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8066251\\_definitions-impersonism-realism-art-paintings.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8066251_definitions-impersonism-realism-art-paintings.html)>

<sup>3</sup> Christopher L.C.E. Witcombe. "Modernism." *Art History Resources*. 28 Jan. 2012. <<http://arthistoryresources.net/modernism/roots.html>>

almost a hundred and thirty years, his works of art speak for him and his legacy still lives on.<sup>4</sup>

Edouard Manet began his study in painting with Thomas Couture, an influential realist painter and teacher.<sup>5</sup> As the time passed by, however, rather than adhering to the popular realistic way of painting, Manet found his own inspiration amidst the urban Paris. Parisian contemporary life was known to be the main subject of his work in which he found it worthwhile depicting. Manet drew the urban life of Parisians from the wealthy men to the street people like beggars and prostitutes; however, he did not paint just to serve the appearance of the real world like any other realist painters. His paintings were full of interpretations and reflected the society even in a way that he knew would lead to public dissatisfaction. The reflection of a society from chatting to political issues that other painters during his time either did not recognize or were not dare to paint because it would not comply to the realist painting inevitably marked his work as modern art.<sup>6</sup>

His refusal to accept the conservative ideologies and theories of realism can be observed immensely in his painting techniques. Instead of rigidly drawing the pictures the way as it should be according to the laws and rules, Manet painted what he actually saw, abandoned the elements of realism, and invented in his own styles. While the perfection of the painting was the first priority in realism, Manet's paintings, on the contrary, looked bold and flat with apparent brushstrokes left on the paintings which were unacceptable by the realists. His work was widely perceived as

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Rabinow. "Edouard Manet (1832-1883)." *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. 4 Feb. 2012. <[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mane/hd\\_mane.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mane/hd_mane.htm)>

<sup>5</sup> Ashley E. Remer. "Edouard Manet." *The Art Story Foundation*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-manet-edouard.htm>>

<sup>6</sup> Akiya Takahashi. "Founder of Modernism Edouard Manet: Gazing on the Light and Shadows of Paris." *A web magazine from and for Marunouchi*. 4 Feb. 2012. <[http://www.marunouchi.com/e/culture/manet\\_10\\_08.html](http://www.marunouchi.com/e/culture/manet_10_08.html)>

offensive and poorly painted. Nevertheless, it was his intention he obtained from early photographs that a picture can be seen as realistic even if certain details and shades were left out.<sup>7</sup> And the evidence of brushstrokes was meant to bring about the immediate response from the viewer which was important element to make the audience feel and capture the moment of contemporary life in his paintings.<sup>8</sup>

His modernity was critically emphasized immensely by his ground breaking works in which he altered the conventional elements in old paintings and putting a new content into them. His most scandalous painting known as Luncheon on the Grass which mocked the great renaissance artists' work, was rejected by the Salon of 1863, and was shown in Salon des Refuses which exhibited the paintings refused by the Salon instead. His rebels against the academic and conventional ways of painting were strongly asserted two years later when he presented another outrageous painting, the Olympia, which depicted a courtesan posing naked on her bed mocking that of the Titian's Venus of Urbino, however, it got accepted by the Salon this time even though it would undoubtedly cause widespread public outcry.<sup>9</sup> These two most controversial paintings of Manet were notorious for both of their unconventional painting techniques and subject matters. His paintings were full of questions which encouraged individuals to find answers by profound thinking, and most importantly, they were often provocative as they challenged the issues that hindered the human

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Lewis, Susan I. Lewis. *The Power of Art*. 2008. p.368-370.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Chilvers. "Modernist Painting." *Encyclopedia.com*. 13 Feb. 2012.  
<<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O5-ModernistPainting.html>>

<sup>9</sup> Mark Roskill. "Edouard Manet." *Discover France*. 4 Feb. 2012.  
<<http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Art/Manet/Manet.shtml>>

progress. These characteristics of his work distinguished him from other realists and marked him as the root of new generation of artist, that is, modernist.<sup>10</sup>

Even though Manet possessed strong unconventional ideology, he held on the traditional belief that for artists to be truly successful, they had to have their work accepted into the Salon which was the famous official art exhibition in Paris. However, for Manet, it took him a long time before he could reach his dream. Manet set his own exhibition in 1876 after several of his works were rejected by the Salon and it drew more than 4,000 visitors. Manet had pursued his career as a painter for thirty years and finally achieved his renowned victory for the first time when he was 49 in 1881. He won the second place medal at the Salon and got the right to exhibit every piece of his painting there. Unfortunately, just two years later his life came to an end, leaving his masterpiece of his last years, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere*, a remarkable notion of the new era of visual art known as modernism which was immensely hailed by the public.<sup>11</sup>

Edouard Manet had contributed a revolutionary change in art history. Modern art would not have been created if it was not because of his courageous to break the rules from prominent realistic painting. He did not allow the popular demand for a certain kind of art during his time to limit his creativity and imagination. He tried, played, and experimented with innovation even if the realization of his provocative painting. His sincere attempts to draw what he observed resulted in the invaluable reflection of contemporary life of people in Paris, and the society and make people think. Even his work was savagely criticized at the beginning, as time passed by

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<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia Contributors. "Modernism." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism>>

<sup>11</sup> Ashley E. Remer. "Edouard Manet." *The Art Story Foundation*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.theartstory.org/artist-manet-edouard.htm>>

people began to appreciate his works, unfortunately, that happened near the end of his lifetime. His contribution to the visual art was recognized and realized even further after his death. Manet's endless passion to express his aesthetic view to the public through his paintings distinguished him from other ordinary artists. He insisted on his ideology and never gave up to struggle for his dreams - Edouard Manet, the founder of modernist painting.