

SHIGEMI INAGA

THE ORIGIN OF MODERNIST AESTHETICS AS THE  
OBLIVION OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE: THE CASE OF  
ÉDOUARD MANET AND THE MARKETING  
STRATEGY OF HIS POSTHUMOUS AUCTION IN 1884

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ΗΥΜΝΑΙΑ ΚΙΡΩΝΟΣ ΛΑΙΑΣ ΟΔΥΣΣΕΙΑ ΟΜΗΡΟΣ ΜΥΘΟΣ  
*Io. Bapt. Galostruccius pict. Florentinus del. et Scul. Romae. 1658.*

ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΓΟΗΣΙΣ ΤΡΑΓΩΔΙΑ ΚΩΜΩΔΙΑ ΦΥΣΙΣ ΑΡΕΤΗ ΜΝΗΜΗ  
ΓΙΕΤΙΣ ΣΟΦΙΑ

# Κριτική

Anno III – 2022



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SHIGEMI INAGA★

THE ORIGIN OF MODERNIST AESTHETICS AS THE OBLIVION  
OF POLITICAL STRUGGLE: THE CASE OF ÉDOUARD MANET  
AND THE MARKETING STRATEGY OF HIS  
POSTHUMOUS AUCTION IN 1884<sup>1</sup>

Ouverture de l'Exposition Manet à l'École des Beaux-Arts! / Je vais avec maman. / Il n'y a pas un an que Manet est mort. Je ne connaissais pas grand-chose de lui. L'ensemble de cette exposition est saisissant. C'est incohérent, enfantin et grandiose! / Il y a des choses folles, mais il y a des morceaux superbes. Avec un peu plus ce serait un des grands génies de la peinture. C'est presque toujours laid, souvent difforme, mais c'est toujours vivant. Il y a là des impressions splendides. / Et dans les choses les plus mauvaises on sent un je ne sais quoi qui fait qu'on regarde sans dégoût ni lassitude. Il y a là un tel aplomb, une si formidable confi-

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★ Professor, Kyoto Seika University; Emeritus Professor, International Research Center for Japanese Studies; Emeritus Professor, Graduate University for Advanced Studies.

<sup>1</sup> The English text presented here was initially presented at the 14th International Congress of Aesthetics in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on September 4, 1998. The main idea had been developed in my Ph.D. thesis, *Théodore Duret, du journaliste politique à l'historien d'art japonisant*, presented at the Université Paris 7, in 1988, and the summary was presented at the poster session of the 29th International Congress of the History of Art, *Memory and Oblivion*, held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September 1-7, 1996. The circumstances have not allowed the author to publish the full text of the original English. Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Barbara Maria Stafford, Petra Ten-Doesschate Chu, Dario Gamboni, Alan Krell, and Tsukasa Kôdera for their useful and encouraging remarks in Amsterdam. I also enjoyed lively discussions with Michael Fried in two conversations on the core issue. I received useful and supportive commentaries from John Rosenfield at Harvard University and Henri Mitterand in New York. In response to my manuscript, Pierre Bourdieu confessed on December 22, 1996 that he had postponed the realization of his own *Manet* project "for the time being" (the book is to be posthumously published in 2013, combining the unfinished manuscript together with the transcription of the lectures). My thanks also go to Donald MacCallum, who kindly offered meticulous editorial advice to my manuscript on July 4, 2002, and to David Estrin who again checked the manuscript in 2014. The present essay focuses on the auction sale of 1884; other aspects that should be discussed remain untouched. For a full development of my research on Manet's posthumous destiny, please refer to my book in Japanese, *Kaiga no Tasogare*, with the French summary: *Le Crépuscule de la peinture, Lutte posthume d'Édouard Manet* (Nagoya, Japan: University of Nagoya Press, 1997).

humorous reward prepared by Manet's republican friends amounted to a form of spiritual treason. To deceive the bourgeois, one should disguise oneself as a bourgeois artist; but after the performance in masquerade (i.e., the auction), who can distinguish the disguised from the real bourgeois? Those enemy bourgeois, victims of the conspiracy (which P. Boburdieu calls "symbolic revolution") plotted by Durand-Ruel (legitimist) and Duret (republican), left the auction hall triumphantly, without noticing that they had been deceived. This is what André Chastel ironically called the "Impressionism disguised in bourgeois fashion" ("embrougeoisement de l'Impressionnisme").<sup>38</sup> In contrast, those artists, like Pissarro, who would profit from the canonization of their precursor felt betrayed, and he therefore scornfully disdained the ceremony of Manet's canonization. Such are the ironies of the double treason implied in the symbolic revolution that created "Manets" as negotiable merchandise in the art market.

In 1885, Duret and Durand-Ruel crossed the Atlantic to sell Manet and the Impressionist painters in New York and Boston. Their success in search of a new American market eventually contributed to the legitimating of the Impressionists in France. As Pissarro put it (with a grimace), «C'est roide, mais c'est bien dans l'ordre.» *L'enfant à l'épée* and *Femme au péroquet* entered the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1889, and in the same year, Belgian collector Henri van Cutsem (1839–1904) purchased *Argenteuil* at the Paris World Fair (to be bequeathed to the city of Tournai in 1904 together with *Chez le Père Lathuille* in the building designed by Victor Holta). Meanwhile, *Olympia* was purchased from the Manet family in 1890 by a fund-raising campaign.

Monet, who had been worried about the possible exodus of *Olympia* to the United States, took the initiative. Still, it was not until 1907 that *Olympia* finally entered the Louvre. The event did not fail to provoke many protests. As for *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, it had to wait until 1934 to be welcomed into the Louvre. The centennial of the painter had been celebrated two years earlier to commemorate the definitive "Triomphe de Manet" (Paul Valéry)<sup>39</sup> as a representative classic now fully integrated into the authentic modern tradition of French art history.

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<sup>38</sup> A. CHASTEL, *L'Impressionnisme: une révision*, «La Revue de l'art», 1980, p. 264.

<sup>39</sup> P. VALÉRY, *Le Triomphe de Manet*, in P. COURTHION (ed.), *Manet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, Genève, P. Cailler, vol. 2, p. 205. For this phase see further S. FUJIHARA, *Edouard Manet between the two Wars: the Nachleben and Anachronism of the Centennial Exhibition*, in S. INAGA (ed.), *Utsushi and Utsuroi: Metempsychosis and Passage-Recipients of Transcultural Migration and Haptic Transfigurations*, in Japanese, Kacô-sha, Tokyo, 2019, pp. 392-409.

*The Origin of Modernist Aesthetics as the Oblivion of Political Struggle: The Case of Édouard Manet and the Marketing Strategy of His Posthumous Auction in 1884* –The paper focuses on Manet’s studio auction sale which took place on Feb. 4 and 5, 1884 at the Hotel Drouot in Paris. The “success” of the auction has been generally taken for granted and has been regarded as a matter of course. However, Édouard Manet was still a highly controversial figure at his death in 1883 and the circumstances suggest precarious conditions in which Manet’s friends and supporters were searching for his posthumous glory. It must be reminded that the lending of the Hall of the Fine Art School (École des Beaux-Arts), for the Manet retrospective exhibition, which preceded the auction sale, was realized despite the strong opposition by Albert Kaempfen, then “Directeur des Beaux-Arts”. The decision was made by Jules Ferry, then “ministre de l’enseignement public et des Beaux-Arts”, who had to concede to Antonin Proust, influential Gambettist liberal republican, and close friend of Manet. The affair was not so much a matter of “bon sens” on purely artistic interest as a political maneuver, which provoked inevitable protests by Edmond About, who was to be nominated a member of the Academie française.

Théodore Duret, who had been constituted executor of Manet’s last will, describes the auction in his biography of Manet (1902): «The sale, which had begun in such a precarious conditions, immediately took unexpected successful looking». However, the transcription of the sale (“procès-verbal”) reveals that Duret himself paid no less than 8.000 francs so that the Manet family could withdraw *Chez le Père Lathuille* and *Le Linge*, which preceded *Olympia* in the bidding. Judging from main buyers’ bidding, the so-called “successful looking” is almost a fiction which largely depended on, and was sustained by, the sacrifice made by Manet’s close friends who were involved in the sale. It turns out that Duret, among others, was one of the key persons who successfully “represented” the sale as an “unexpected success” and contributed to the diffusion of this positive image, which has remained unquestioned until now.

The “success” of the auction sale, which Albert Wolff bitterly qualified as «unexpected apotheosis», is rich in consequences. Not only Manet’s own later oil paintings with impressionistic overtones, but also works of Impressionists themselves were to be recognized as negotiable commodity goods in the art market (though it would take still some time before they got really profitable). Manet’s drawings, pastels and etchings, which had been despised as meaningless, began to attract buyers’ interest. This recognition will eventually overturn the academic hierarchy of Fine Arts. In this sense, Manet’s posthumous studio sale was a process of alchemical transubstantiation where “most insignificant things” were transfigured into the canon of Modernist aesthetics.



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e-mail: [periodici@olschki.it](mailto:periodici@olschki.it)  
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