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Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002. xviii, 400 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$50 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-300-09658-5.

Review by James Smalls, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Just when you thought that everything has been said about the creative magnificence of Edouard Manet, a book such as *Manet Manette* by Carol Armstrong appears and provides a fresh approach and outlook. This hefty volume of 315 pages of text, in addition to sixty-three pages of explanatory endnotes, is intelligently illustrated and rich in art-historical and critical detail. Armstrong has not only harnessed and unpacked a great deal of information on Manet and his unique brand of modernism but also has done so with the art of many of his contemporaries. The book is ambitious in scope and divided into three interrelated parts, each of which has a successful outcome. Armstrong opens her text with a discussion of, what Clement Greenberg described as Manet's "inconsistency," that is, his sustained tendency not to paint in "connected series but in large ambitious singles." This "inconsistency," according to Greenberg, is what sets him apart from other modernists who came before and after him (p. xvii) and was the significant aspect of his status as a unique modern artist.

The first section of Armstrong's book sets out to measure Manet's "inconsistency" through the politics and poetics of his exhibition strategies. For the most part, Armstrong agrees with Greenberg and considers the "inconsistency," "undecidability," "irreducibility," and the non-unified aspects of Manet's brand of modernism as what makes him unique among his contemporaries. These qualities are measured first through and against a comparison of two retrospective exhibitions, one by Courbet in 1855 and the other by Manet in 1867. We discover that Courbet and Manet were rather similar in personality and artistic goals but were very different in terms of the conception they held of themselves as modern artists. Armstrong sets the parameters of analysis with a formalistic and conceptual comparing and contrasting of selected works by each artist. In the process, she scrutinizes not only the choices of works made by each artist for inclusion in his respective catalogue but also finds significance in how each painter grouped and codified his or her works. She characterizes Manet's list as "a staccato rhythm of dispersal and interspersed, miscellaneous and the extraneous, pairs and singles, and disparate suits of two or three" (p. 16). Even here, Manet's "inconsistency," his "odd logic," his "pastiche" of domestic and foreign quotations, Armstrong argues, is meaningful when compared with Courbet's more ordered, more deliberate listing of works by genre (still lifes, portraits, genre paintings, etc.). Armstrong notes that there is a paradox in Manet's "inconsistency:" the heterogeneous effects of his work all carry what seems to be the same "handwriting." That is, they constitute "a singularity fashioned out of extraordinary diversity" (p. 24). Manet is an artist whose modernism was comprised of looking back to past exhibitions and quotational styles while simultaneously looking forward to how he thought his contemporaries were viewing him.

It is in this first section of the book where Armstrong is strongest in her generous use of literary and critical sources of the period to analyze specific artworks and to reinforce her general observation about Manet's "inconsistency." Armstrong demonstrates an impressive dexterity in weaving Manet's

paintings into the complex critical and literary texts and subtexts provided by modern emissaries such as Émile Zola, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and several others. The author spends a considerable amount of time analyzing Zola's tract "Une nouvelle manière en peinture: Edouard Manet" (1867), a work that "sets Manet's 'individuality' in distinct contrast to the eclecticism of the Exposition's patrimonial display" (p. 31). Zola presented Manet the man and artist in a "positivist vision of progress and unity . . . with a corollary accent upon modernity and the unified individual" (p. 38). His text combines metaphor, positivism, and biography, while providing evidence of his own "mixed feelings about visual art and artists." As well, he presents "an image of the femininity of art" through woman as "the 'great Impure,' the Courtesan, the 'Infamous One'" (pp. 34-35).

From Zola, Armstrong then moves to an examination of Manet the man, his exhibition strategies, and his approach to speaking as and to the feminine through another literary text—the Goncourt brothers' artist novel *Manette Salomon* (1867). It is at this point we learn of the reasoning behind Armstrong's unusual choice of title for her book. Even prior to the 1867 retrospective and to Zola's assessment of Manet, observers viewed *Olympia* (1863) not only as a prostitute but also as an image of Manet himself, dubbing her "Manette" (p. 45). *Manette Salomon* is one of several novels named by Armstrong to serve as a conceptual model for probing the conflation of Manet the man with Olympia the prostitute and asking the questions about Manet's "inconsistency" and "individuality" as a modern artist. It is in *Manette Salomon* where gender plays a crucial role. *Manette* is a feminized version of Manet's name given not only to the title of the Goncourt's book but also to the Jewish mistress and artist's model of the main protagonist of the story, the artist Coriolis. Armstrong spends a great deal of time analyzing *Manette* in relation to Zola's positivist view of Manet and modern art. The story, which parallels "the Baudelairean topos of ornamented and cosmeticized femininity" (p. 62), Armstrong then relates to the women depicted in specific Manet's paintings, beginning first with portraits of Victorine Meurent, Manet's favorite model. It is with this aspect of the analysis that Armstrong shines as an art historian adept at excavating significant meaning from image and text through critical and feminist interventions. Armstrong concludes that *Manette Salomon*, more than Zola's positivist work, gives us a better context in which to understand and judge what Manet was about, which is the subject of the remaining two sections of the book.

The second section of Armstrong's study ventures back in time to 1862, five years prior to Manet's 1867 *exposition particulière* and just a few years after his student days, when the artist was planning an earlier retrospective of his works. This summary exhibition was held at Louis Martinet's newly reopened gallery in Paris and set up for debutant artists as a complement to the established, government-sponsored Salon exhibitions. Armstrong concludes that Manet's focus on this early retrospective indicates that he was, very early on, concerned about the exhibition coherency of his then young body of works. It was at Martinet's gallery where he could "make statements about his individuality as a painter, single himself out while presenting the overall shape of his work in a way that he could control" (p. 71). Manet exhibited fourteen works there, many of which had been announced and advertised shortly before with a portfolio of "autographic" prints published by the print dealer and publisher Alfred Cadart in 1862. Armstrong views the Cadart portfolio as credible evidence of Manet's early focus on "self-promotion and manifestation" (p. 72). The prints were significant to Manet in that they forged a link between display of original works and the renaissance of the medium of etching and the controlled reproduction of artists' work. That link, Armstrong notes, "hinged on the artist's right to represent and reproduce himself . . ." (p. 77).

Armstrong enters into new territory here by observing the importance of etching to Manet's production of himself as a modern artist. With the graphic medium, Manet mined the past by referencing earlier forms of art reproduction from Raimondi to Goya as a means to point to his originality and modernity. Armstrong notes that by exploiting the mechanical processes of printmaking, Manet explored "the relationship between the bodies of represented people and the orientation of his pictures," as well as "the relay between bodiliness and mechanicalness embedded in the labor of the artist . . ." (p. 84). In order to

form and promote his individuality by way of the print medium, Manet relied heavily on his abilities to quote and reinvent the graphic works of Velasquez and Goya. As well, it is no accident that these two revered masters were critical to the introduction and exploitation of Spanish themes and sources in Manet's art.

Even while discussing the formalistic and conceptual merits of the Cadart portfolio, Armstrong never forgets to bring in the relevant critical and literary sources for support. In this instance, she liberally quotes and cites Baudelaire and his views of printmaking as "the autographic medium of modernity" and "the sharpest possible translation of the character of the artist" (p. 88). It is here as well that Armstrong brings in a crucial yet brief discussion of photography as printmaking's nemesis--described by Baudelaire as "mechanicalness without the hand and temperament of the artist" (p. 88). Clearly, Armstrong evokes the ideas of critic Walter Benjamin here in terms of notions of the original, the copy, and the "aura." However, instead of explaining nineteenth-century events in twentieth-century terms, Armstrong invokes the ideas in support of aquatint and other graphic media that were being bandied about within the Société des Aquafortistes, in whose journal Théophile Gautier, Martinet, Paul de St. Victor, Albert de la Fizière, and Baudelaire wrote disparagingly about "the invasion of photography--read mechanical reproduction--and the rise of the 'auratic' artist's print" (pp. 90-91). The upshot of all this in relation to Manet's portfolio is that, as a body of work, the Cadart portfolio was "emblematic of the Société des Aquafortistes's [and Manet's] signature combination of individuality, replicability, and heterogeneity . . ." (p. 92).

From here, Armstrong goes on to discuss the Spanish-themed aquatints of Manet. At this point in her discussion, Armstrong poses a seemingly simple question: what did Spain and Spanish art represent to Manet? To answer this, she goes to the primary sources of literary criticism, notably Charles Blanc's 1863 essay in *Histoire des peintres de toutes écoles* (1869). After meticulously unpacking Blanc's text about Velasquez and that artist's coloristic tendencies with Spanish subjects, Armstrong concludes that "Manet was Velasquez (courtly, purist, ancien régime Spain) filtered through Goya (romantic, colonized, modern Spain) and then caricatured . . ." (p. 96). The Velasquez/Goya split placed "the paradox of Manet's reproductive etching under the sign of a Spanishness that could not be comprehended within the standard polarities . . ." (p. 96)--in other words, a marvelous "inconsistency" if there ever was one.

The next chapter of Armstrong's book opens with Manet's Spanish costume pieces and their emphases on masquerade and cross-dressing (notably, female to male). It is here that we are reminded of the importance of Manet's favorite model, Victorine Meurent, in these theatrical images. In this section, Armstrong ties the coloristic tendencies of the "Spanishized" paintings into the phenomenon of dressing up in Parisian fashion. Here is where Armstrong's skill in feminist critique is at its most refined. She examines selected works by Manet by way of Velasquez's and Goya's coloristic presentations of women and femininity. The principal Manet work discussed, minutely dissected, and recalled again and again throughout the book, is *Lola de Valence* of 1862. Here, Armstrong distinguishes and yet relates Manet's images of coloristically clothed women to his female nudes. Armstrong then proceeds to incorporate into her art-historical enterprise, as she has faithfully done up to this point, nineteenth-century literary descriptions of Spain and the Spanish (notably the writings of Gautier and Baron Isidore Taylor) and how these jibe with the artist's visual tropes of Spanishness, modernity, and self-construction. In this section of the book, Armstrong discerns several credible links between the literary critiques of the period on Spanish costume, modern French fashion, and Manet's artistic practice. What Gautier and Baudelaire wrote about Manet's complex dialectical movement between romantic "Spanishicity" and modern French fashionability recurs throughout the book with different images serving as examples. Manet's pairing of "Spanishicity" and French modernity was, as Armstrong emphasizes, not only literary and artistic but was also a deliberate exhibition strategy for fashioning himself as an "inconsistent" (eclectic, and therefore, modern) artist.

In this section, Armstrong also details the color scheme of Manet's Spanish works as they relate to Baudelaire's writings on color and modernity. Here Armstrong delves into the elaborateness of Baudelaire's color theory in relation to Eugène Delacroix and then Manet to describe the modern world and "a theory of the authorial subject" (p. 119). Armstrong is very skilled at analyzing the literary subtext and intent of writers such as Baudelaire and linking them to the visual texts of artists such as Delacroix and Manet.

From Baudelaire's 1846 essay "De la couleur," Armstrong moves to examine yet another Baudelaire text, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," through which she unpacks the writer's cliché of the artist/man of the world as *flâneur* and his definition of "modernity" as "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, whose other half [woman] is the eternal and unchanging" (pp. 122-23). Here, Armstrong provides an intense critical and feminist reading of Baudelaire's work down to practically every line, every nuance, and every subtext. The author concludes that Baudelaire "offers a model for understanding Manet's 'modernity' against the grain of positivist art discourse (including Clement Greenberg's) and in the image of the feminine" (p. 132). Armstrong reads into Baudelaire's text the "elision of the difference between the (masculine) subject and the (feminine) object of art" and sees the text as the "model of the masculine self which depends simultaneously on othering and identifying with 'autrui, la femme'" (pp. 122, 124). She relates all this to Manet's *Music in the Tuileries* (1862) and the "feminizing of the crowd." In this painting, Manet includes a self-portrait—a reflection of himself in the midst of the blurred and shapeless thrall. As a *flâneur*, he is simultaneously the "decentered and centered," "distantiated and immersed" painter of modern life. (p. 124)

For Armstrong, Baudelaire's description and discussion of *coloris* and *maquillage* is designed to set the stage for an involved analysis of specific works by Manet in the 1860s, including those of Victorine Meurent in various guises and in post-1867 works of "fashionability of the feminine in the figures of Berthe Morisot, [Eva Gonzalès] Méry Laurent, Jeanne Demarsy, Mme. Guillemet and other women of fiction and fact. . ." (p. 132). In these works, Armstrong sets out to thematize Manet's oppositional contrasts between "left and right, top and bottom," male and female that comprised the ingredients for the framing and fabrication of personhood. Armstrong relates Baudelaire's focus on make-up, artifice, nuance, variation, etc. to the masquerades of Victorine Meurent. Through a "re-creation" of woman, she concludes, the modern artist fashions himself.

It is with these works in particular where Armstrong demonstrates her expertise and facility with formalist description and art-historical analysis, nimbly linking them with Baudelaire's writings to arrive at complex and deep-seated significations lurking beneath the visual surface of Manet's works. She deviates from T.J. Clark's class-based interpretation (particularly with *Olympia*)^[1] and instead offers a reading of Meurent's body as "participating in Manet's serial questioning of the problem of painting personhood" (p. 353, n. 11). It is through Victorine that Armstrong unpacks Manet's strategy of doubling and collapsing "subject and object, male and female" as opposed and combined terms (p. 154). At the same time, she also notes how this strategy works in the color, lines, and tones of the compositions. She even finds room to analyze the feminine, racial, and visual dynamics of the gaze, particularly with *Olympia*, as well as grapple cohesively with the concept of the nude as a still life and the "image of the female body as mediated by the museum and the print" (p. 156). Clearly, the major strength of Armstrong's book lies in her ability to cohesively tie together all of these complex and seemingly disparate concepts without losing sight of her main objective.

One of the more intriguing aspects of Armstrong's interdisciplinary methodology occurs with her charting of the "epistolary romance" between Manet and Berthe Morisot (pp. 183ff). We learn that the two artists carried on a flirtatious and contested dialogue through letters and paintings. Through a thorough examination of correspondence and artworks produced by the two artists, Armstrong concludes that Manet's dialogue with Morisot "was a crucial catalyst for altering the terms of the dialogue with himself" (p. 186). Both artists were divided and hesitant, yet it was Morisot who,

according to Armstrong, was the most critical in Manet's changeover to Impressionism in the 1870s. From here, Armstrong launches into a pointed analysis of Manet's inclusion of flowers and their alliance with femininity and fashion. The complexities of all this led up to Manet's last great painting to which the terminating chapter of Armstrong's book is devoted: *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881-82). As the product of "a discordance between a public and private, a masculine and feminine, an essential and a supplemental modernism" (p. 228), *Bar* summed up everything that had preoccupied the artist earlier. However, even before that, Armstrong details, through an examination of *The Railway* (1873) and *Argenteuil* (1874), Manet's use of "fashion and facture, . . . divergent gazes, to fissure the fabric of space and time. . . ." and this, she observes, was "Manet's peculiar contribution to the defining of modernity in painting" (pp. 205-06).

The last third of this skillful study is vintage Armstrong in that it meticulously dissects the role of gender in Manet's work—relating that focus to formal aspects of the paintings, definitions of Impressionism as modern practice, and literary critical accounts of Manet. As Armstrong discusses Manet's approach to fashion, facture, and femininity, she sometimes gets carried away with overly descriptive terms and metaphoric nuances that are often painstakingly contrived in her attempts to convey a more precise meaning. She takes considerable care in describing Manet's manner of delineating body flesh and fashion, while simultaneously deconstructing the artist's "transparency of representation, the illusion of [his] content, and hence the imagistic thematics of female body and boudoir, dress and undress, and their contemporary erotic associations" (p. 257). This is all then brought back to Zola's novel *Nana*—a work that evokes "the erotics of narrative content and the narrative-stopping erotics of facture, the thematics of sexual possession . . . of eroticized unpossessibility . . ." (p. 257). It is by way of Manet's "thematics of femininity" and the "autonomy of painting" that the "Manette" in Manet carries its significant connotation.

In conclusion, Armstrong's book is a wonderful marriage of critical literary analysis and art historical methodology. It is a worthy study executed with first-rate scholarship and a comprehensiveness that is overwhelming at times in terms of the sheer amount and complexity of detail. Nevertheless, Armstrong's book provides the reader of any and all methodological leanings with something different and enticing to consider. As an eclectic writer—herself a formalist, literary critic, theoretician, and feminist—Armstrong's project mirrors, one might say, the very artistic shape and "facture" that Manet's works labor to exemplify. Although *Manet Manette* will not be the last word on Manet and his "feminine" counterpart, it might just be one of the most definitive.

NOTES

[1] T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

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