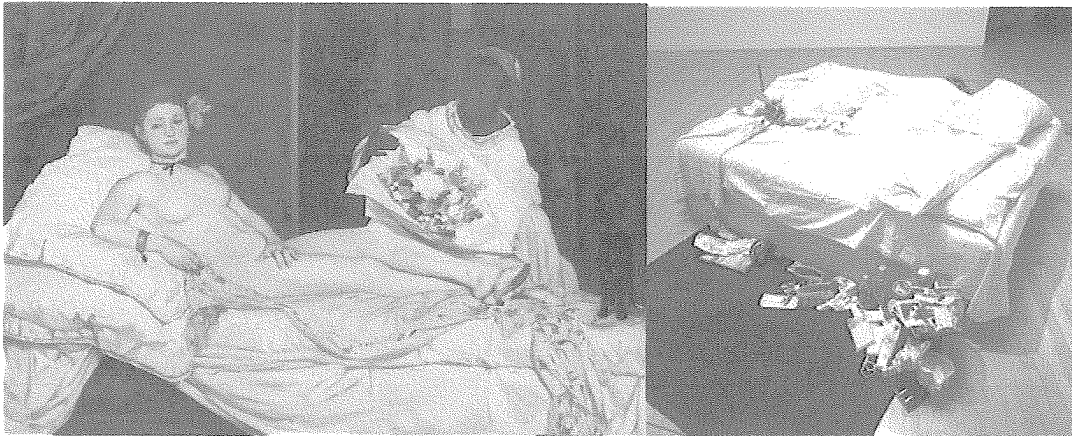


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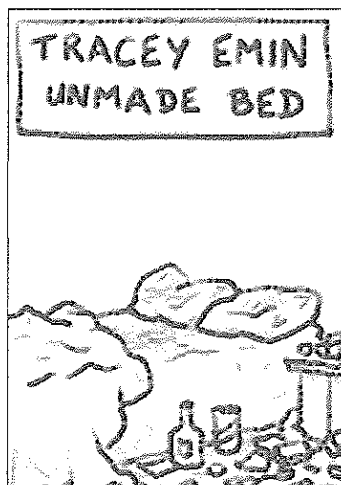
Is There Any Link that can be made between the shock of Edouard Manet's 'Olympia' and Tracey Emin's Bed?



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Abstract

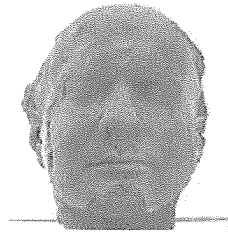
What is the true purpose of art? Throughout history art has been a strong presence within society across the world. However it must be seen that as times change so too do the artists. A common theme within modern artists is the newfound 'need' to shock the public. But is this a strictly true statement?

Artists have managed to outrage society even without the intention of gaining publicity or a reputation. From an age where a bad reputation was enough to destroy your way of living, to modern 21st century life where there's no such thing as bad publicity the close link between society and artists has always been present. The boundaries for modern artists have been stretched compared to the artistic freedom allowed in the past.

In this essay I will investigate to see if there are links between the creator of modernism: Edouard Manet and the modern artists of today. Do contemporary artists have Manet to thank for the liberal nature of their work? By focusing on the symbol of the bed of 'Olympia' by Manet and Tracey's Emin's own personal place of excess, parallels will be shown suggesting that although there are two beds, there only is one motive, to turn convention on its head.

Introduction

I recently viewed¹ a piece of work entitled 'Self' by Marc Quinn consisting of a mould of the artist's own head entirely made out of his own blood. Kept at a constant freezing temperature it looks at art and science asking what the future of representation will be. With developments in DNA cloning could it be possible to actually reconstruct himself? This portrayal of self is something revolutionary in the world of modern art and from its exposure equal amounts of viewers have been left in awe and shock.



'Self' (1991)

Where has this newfound need to shock viewers has risen from? It could be due to the fact that artists over time have noticed the publicity gained from causing an outrage. In the modern art world is publicity and fame more important than the art itself? Either way this rise of discussing and exposing delicate unmentionable subjects in the face of the public brilliantly shows the newfound 21st century freedom offered to artists and therefore the public as a whole. The relationship between society and art has been ever evolving pushing artists to new levels of initiative artistic ability, whether it is to conform or violently repulse convention. However it should be considered, is it modern

¹ 'Self' viewed at the Saatchi Gallery, London 14/07/03

artists that push the boundaries of society or is it the newfound freedom of expression and speech that drives the artists to explore and create?

Artists causing an outrage in society is not a new phenomena. Modern artists tend to consciously want to shock the public whereas artists of the past tended to upset society without intention. This is due to the fact that the 'enfant terrible' artist has always been present in society; however artists found it easier to shock in the past as there were more boundaries to 'cross' within society's 'regulations'.

The portrayal of real life is often a focus of modern art and is accepted simply due to the fact that 21st century culture is far more open to expression and varied subject matters. The public thrives on being exposed to matters they would otherwise not be able to experience. Through the rise of reality television programmes² and the constant barrage of celebrity gossip magazines³ it is becoming apparent how modern society is obsessed by other people's lives. Throughout time people have been curious, conformities within the mid 19th century society dictated that what was not spoken about did not occur. Secrets would be kept to oneself at times literally behind closed doors in case of disastrously ruining reputation. Therefore it could be seen that modern contemporary artists have found a headlining position within the arts world, staring into the face of taboos by intimately exposing parts of society that are meant to be 'ignored'.

²'Big Brother' shown on UK television channel 4

³ UK publications of 'Hello!', 'Now' and 'Closer' for examples

Chapter 1: Edouard Manet's Bed

A revolutionary in his time, guilty of artistically repulsing convention is Edouard Manet. Born 1832 into a wealthy family, he never used his fortune to further his career. This could be seen as a method to be able to 'see' life from a true point of view instead of through eyes of an upper class gentleman from which society most probably would have been formed. However he still yearned to solely make his reputation at the Parisian Salons⁴. His own influences centred mostly on the Dutch painter Frans Hals and the Spanish painters Diego Velazquez and Francisco Jose de Goya.

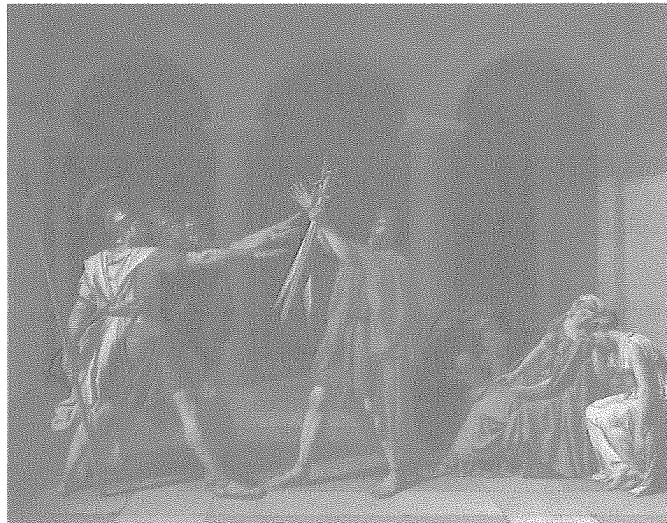
Although he mingled very well with society and made many friends including fellow artists and writers⁵ his innovative method of painting was not warmly received. Unlike painters of the past⁶ Manet used vigorous brush strokes which allowed him to appreciate every stroke he made. Manet felt that these brushstrokes portrayed the process of art. Unlike a silk smooth finish that withheld the true technique, vivid brushstrokes exposed the method and skill involved. However society was accustomed to paintings with a smooth, refined finish⁷. Thus David's paintings contain crisp outlines of subjects, filled with bright and clear colours. Even the shadows present appear disciplined and unambiguous.

⁴ Manet was exposed to the Salons by working with the notorious Thomas Couture with Salon masterpiece 'The Romans in the Period of their Decadence'. The Salon Defuse was a public space for paintings to be exhibited only for the eyes of the elite.

⁵ Manet's life long companion, the novelist and social critic Emile Zola and Poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire.

⁶ Painters such as Ingres and David

⁷ Such as neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David whom produced famously The Oath Of The Horatii (1794)



'Oath of the Horatii' (1784) by Jacques-Louis David

With this painting in particular⁸ it can be seen how Manet's rough brushstrokes made his paintings apparently appear 'unfinished' and his unconventional subject matters to appear impudent. This use of the paintbrush was innovative and unique at the time. Society unable to adapt to this new technique rejected his paintings, unable to adapt to change. Focusing on simple everyday objects is a theme still used by modern artists today.

A painting that caused outrage, prompting two policemen to stand guard to protect it, met with laughter (nervous?), criticism and contempt. The pinnacle point of Manet's career could be summarized with 'Olympia' completed in 1863. A reflection by Manet of the painting 'I paint what I see'⁹ it was a direct observation of reality. Such realism had not been seen or expressed before in

⁸ A traditional salute to the theme of ancient Rome

⁹ Quote taken from <http://www.allaboutartists.com/bios/manet.html>

a piece. Neoclassical¹⁰ and Romantic¹¹ paintings such as Ingres had previously contained idealised figures complete with angelic facial expressions and perfectly presented backgrounds.



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'Madame moitessier' (1856)

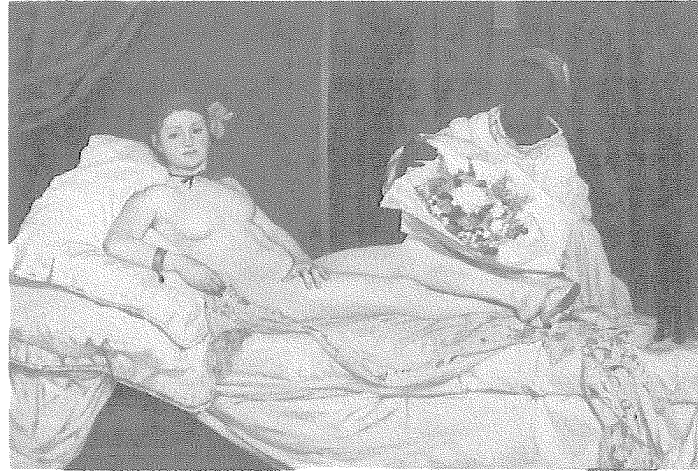
by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

A main focus of 'Olympia' is the simple fact that this nude is not looking away or into the distance but with direct eye contact with the viewer. This sort of confrontation was probably something that was less desired by French society at this time. The nude within the piece however is not a mythical or historical figure, she is a prostitute. Part of Manet painting real life, she is a non-fantastical woman taken from lower-class society lying completely comfortable and proudly in her surroundings. Upper-class gentlemen most likely would have visited such women – most likely on a regular basis – which tends to

¹⁰ 'Neoclassicism' - A nineteenth century French art style and movement that originated as a reaction to the Baroque. It sought to revive the ideals of ancient Greek and Roman art. Neoclassic artists used classical forms to express their ideas about courage, sacrifice, and love of country.

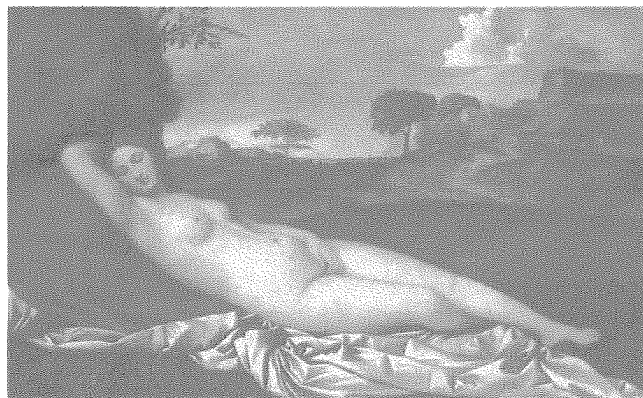
¹¹ 'Romanticism' - An art movement and style that flourished in the early nineteenth century. It emphasized the emotions painted in a bold, dramatic manner

highlight the hypocritical nature of society. It was a moral threat and an outrage to the social order at the time.



'Olympia' (1863)

It was seen that if you wanted to become a great painter you had to contend with old masters¹², hence Manet based 'Olympia's' composition on Giorgione's 'Sleeping Venus'.

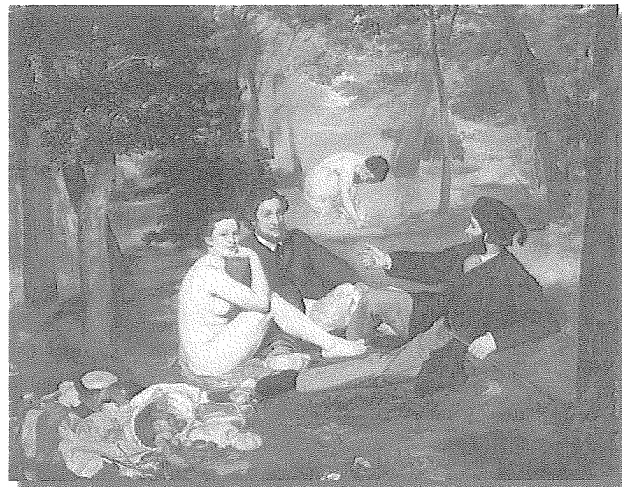


'Sleeping Venus' (1508) by Giorgione

'Olympia' was supposed to be seen as a modern interpretation of a time-honoured theme, it was received as a disrespectful expression of tradition.

¹² Such as Titian, Rembrandt, Goya and Tintoretto.

Disregarding the use of shadow and soft light, the painting was considered 'playing card like' and therefore incompetent. As well as this rebellion of principle Manet, instead of the structural forms of a painting where the viewer's eye is gracefully lead around the piece, created a powerful unconventional divide of black and white. The foreground being the posed china white reclining nude, the backdrop falling into darkness prompted by the black servant and the presence of the black cat¹³ who has been awakened by the intruding viewer. The servant is offering flowers obviously from Olympia's next client however she does not notice as she focuses on the true client - the viewer.



'Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe' (1863)

Another painting that allowed Manet to first become the centre of outrage was the predecessor to 'Olympia' was 'Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe'.¹⁴ This painting was seen as a deliberate insult to society due to the subject matter,

¹³ The symbol of the black cat was also showing Manet mocking society by the intentional sexual natured innuendo of the upright position of the cat's tail.

¹⁴ Translated 'The Luncheon on the Grass' painted in 1863 it depicts a naked woman having a picnic on the grass with two fully clothed young men.

suggesting that this woman was comfortable and enjoying her time with these two fine men. Once again the female has direct eye contact, somewhat involving the viewer into the painting. The fact that society found this painting so disgraceful could be a reflection on the exposure to a side of upper-class life that was wished to be ignored. However artistically this painting is a landmark in art history as it shows a direct link with the use of thought (of subject matter) and beauty captured by light in the same piece. Manet remained silent about the intentions of his art throughout his career and was therefore labelled an incompetent artist without any decency.

His paintings reflected the harshness of life that was perhaps out of sight for the eyes of upper-class citizens. Paintings of old beggars, street urchins and drunkards¹⁵ were an expression of modern life at the time. This piece of art was similarly rejected as it was depicting a man in such a non-idealistic state. Perhaps it was the role of the artist to question art, conformity and the formation of society. Manet was capturing existence, exposing a part of life that many were unwilling to see.

Apart from the intentions of artists it is vital to consider the level of freedom one has in modern 21st century society. There are no rules or regulations of offence to the public, in a sense that an artist will not be banished and excluded from society in order to be ignored because of their work. In Manet's period an artist would adhere to the expectations required and produce art that was accepted and therefore appreciated. However this would limit the

¹⁵ 'The Absinthe Drinker/The Philosopher' (1859)

amount of freedom authorized by society's standards, crossing the boundaries into experimentation could lead to an artist becoming a social outcast. Manet's input into this revolution of art was therefore vitally significant to the creation of modernism. Through his work he was able to influence and inspire many artists¹⁶ who then created the Impressionist movement¹⁷. This was a movement that utilized the fundamentals of light without the limitations of exact perspective using such focuses as landscapes and once again everyday life. Although he inspired many, Manet until the day of his death, refused to label his work as impressionistic.



'Poppy Field' (1873) by Claude Monet

¹⁶ Including Paul Cezanne, Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir

¹⁷ Impressionism – an art movement dating from mid 1860 – mid 1880

Chapter 2: Tracey Emin's Bed

'It only takes one little knock, to start the never ending downward spiral'¹⁸

Tracey Emin, the icon; her name has no longer the title of just an artist's but as a celebrity figure in the modern media obsessed world. It highlights the fact that modern artists may not just be known for their art but for their thoughts, their social life and their (media conscious) actions. Is this the new role of an artist?

Tracey Emin is part of a 'new breed' of artist in the 21st century known as the YBA. Other such similar artists are considered part of the YBA¹⁹ group are contemporaries such as Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Sam Taylor Wood to name but a few. Yet in my personal opinion Emin takes the best parts of all these artists; from Damien Hirst's use of ready-mades to the exposing symbolism of Sarah Lucas' work to the multi-media usage and messages of Sam Taylor-Wood. Tracey Emin has made a name for herself and its been forever branded in the history of British modern art for years to come.



'Breach's girl and Eunuch' by Sam Taylor-Wood

¹⁸ Tracey Emin commenting on her piece 'Helter F**king Skelter' taken from internet article Bushby, H., Emin's New Show Gets Personal. <http://bbc.co.uk>

¹⁹ Young British Artists – label given to young artists that emerged in Britain in the early 1990's

Emin's personal life is her art, as though it is the release for her pent up emotions allowed to be set free. 'My major Retrospective'²⁰ included a display of personal items and photographs of all of her work destroyed in a straight forward exploration of her own life.

Born in London 1963, she moved and grew up in the area of Margate, Kent. However experiencing a somewhat troubled childhood she managed to emerge and complete an MA in painting at the Royal College of Art where mostly inspired by such artists as Schiele and Munch she also received a first class honours degree²¹. From setting up her own shop²² with Sarah Lucas simply to opening her own museum²³ containing objects and memories of her life. Her first exhibition was her solo show at the South London Gallery²⁴ in 1994 and many others have followed reaching Germany, Japan and America.

Emin through her work exposes her thoughts, feelings, hopes, humiliations, tragedies, successes and failures all in a manner that are thought provoking and shocking. In this way she somewhat celebrates self-hatred and despair as a way of life. Honey Luard, Emin's exhibition organiser at White Cube once said:

'Tracey's art presents the world in a way you haven't seen it'²⁵

²⁰ Shown at her exhibition at White Cube, London 1994

²¹ Graduating from Maidstone College of Art

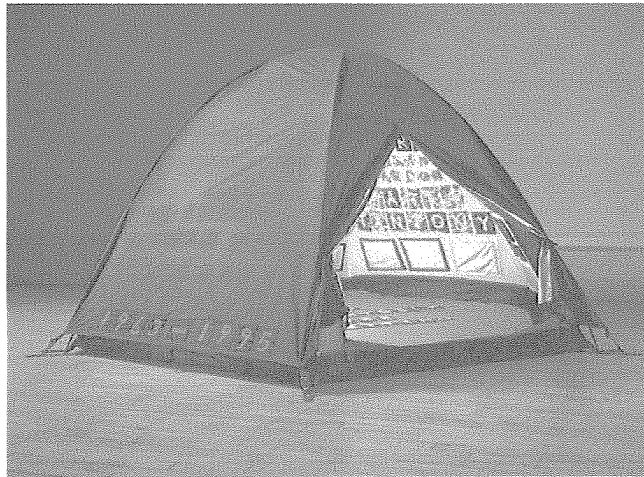
²² Named 'The Shop'

²³ 'The Museum of Tracey Emin

²⁴ Titled 'I Need Art Like I Need God'

²⁵ Quote taken from internet article: 'Something's Wrong: Melanie McGrath on Tracey Emin'
<http://www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue1/something.htm>

This can be viewed as true, yet more to the point Emin's art presents the world in ways you've always known about but never admitted. The famous piece 'Everyone I have ever slept with 1963-1995' included in the Royal Academy's Sensation exhibition highlighted the tenderness and honesty shown by Emin and what privacies she was revealing to her viewers.



'Everyone I have ever slept with 1963 – 1995' (1995)

Emin portrays a piece that contains a mattress on the floor of a nylon tent, while names of all her past lovers are appliquéd on a flowery background on the walls. These names range from an in utero twin brother, school friends, lovers (and shows her promiscuous teen years) and two aborted fetuses from which Emin decided to physically use a part of to put in the piece. A light illuminates the tent, making it shrine like as this confessional work allows the viewer to literally step inside of Emin's personal history. When has art ever been able to give the viewer this opportunity before?

Emin uses a range of materials, from text (for telling stories), drawing, filmmaking, painting, neon signs, photography, hand sewn blankets, sculpture and installation. The latter, which it could be considered to be her main explosion into the public eye. The installation referred to is titled 'My Bed' which was nominated for the annual Turner Prize in 1999. It is as simple as the title suggests - Tracey Emin's actual unmade bed, complete with soiled sheets, used condoms, vodka, pills, cigarette butts – a scene of complete sloth. However there is so much more to this grimy bed than is assumed; it is a reminder that this is where we spend a significant and crucial part of our lives being born, being ill, sleeping, making love and eventually, dying.

It was to be seen as a piece that broke down the barriers between art and real life. However more importantly it caused a great stir within the viewing public, some viewing it with complete distaste, while others praised the piece. She is merely showing a scene of squalor, but it must be considered for what reasons? Was she in fact pushing the boundaries of what society expects and believes to be the correct way of living, or was she exposing a part of her life and exorcising her emotions? The hanging noose to one side of the bed gives a hint to what Tracey Emin's mental state appeared to be.



'My Bed' (1998) as viewed at White Cube Gallery

'I really cannot carry on with all that stuff stuck inside of me'²⁶

From the press coverage of such pieces it has brought more increased public interest in her personal life. Her appearance on national television became one of the all time favourite moments²⁷. Emin - debating the 1997 Turner Prize - was so intoxicated that she later claimed that she hadn't even realised she was on television, but at some boring dinner party. Press reports of such experiences as abusive stepfathers, her rape at 13²⁸ and her traumatic abortion²⁹ all of which are character destroying events. These are issues that one would want to keep to themselves, yet Emin has done her best to make them as publicly exposed as possible.

²⁶ Tracey Emin taken from Riemschneider, B., Grosenick, U., ed. Art At The Turn Of The Millennium 1999

²⁷ As voted by readers of The Guardian UK newspaper publication.

²⁸ As expressed in 'Exploration of the Soul'

²⁹ As Emin confesses in 'Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963 - 1995'

In 'Exploration of the Soul 1994' Emin recorded her troubled life from her conception to the loss of her virginity. However despite the authenticity of this story it actually proves to be nonfactual, more of a literary exploration of herself which comes across as confessional, baring her soul for all to see. However all of Emin's pieces hardly come across as embarrassing, as it the public is comforted in the knowing that she has nothing to hide.



'Sometimes I feel beautiful' (2000)

The viewing public thrives on such deep insight into the life of another person, many may even find themselves able to relate and speak out - something which before they never would have considered. Breaking the laws of society and their taboos is something which Tracey Emin has successfully been able to achieve. From using such intimate objects as pregnancy tests, used tampons and exposing her times of attempted suicide and alcoholism. Objects and aspects of life that most would like to be again kept hidden away. She seems to portray confidence to be able to bare so much of herself to the public however her work shows the complete opposite, focusing on her

feelings of declining views of personal worth³⁰. All capable of shocking and grabbing people's attention - she has not conformed to the views and expectations of what should be 'art' and has been fantastically successful. Such raw openness however is not all focused on herself as some of her later work 'Don't sell me your f**king fear' is Emin's reflection on the September 11th bombing. It shows that Emin is bringing herself into the wide world by integrating other elements into her work instead of merely focusing upon herself.

³⁰ 'Fantastic to Feel Beautiful Again' (1997)

Chapter 3: Evolving From Victorian Realism

Recently visiting Pre-Raphaelite and Other Masters: The Andrew Lloyd Webber Collection³¹ viewing paintings dated from the early 19th century to middle 20th century, one in particular was very significant. Artist Adrien-Emmanud Marie's painting 'Feeding the hungry after the Lord Mayor's banquet' as the title suggests it portrays a scene of the poor being given the plentiful scraps of food after a banquet.



'Feeding the hungry after the Lord Mayor's banquet' (1882)

It clearly shows the extravagance of the rich and the large spectrum between the life of the rich and the poor. Painted in 1882, it must be considered how a rich household could happily display a scene of present life squalor and hardship perhaps in their guildhall where they ate their ample meals. There are no idealistic figures present in the painting; the poor have a look of disgust

³¹ Exhibition held at The Royal Academy of Arts, London; viewed 05/10/03

on their faces suggesting that instead of being grateful they are just merely desperate. This is reminiscent of both the work of Manet and Emin, each at their specific time portray scenes of everyday life exposing a part that otherwise would like to be ignored. In the case of this painting real life is exposed and in fact is being largely ignored or 'put to one side' by higher society. However in previous years before Manet presented the upper class gentlemen with a vision of their unspoken secret fancies with 'Olympia' and the public was outraged.

Conclusion

Emin presented her life, encouraging viewers to open their eyes and take a wider look at the world, yet the rebellious nature of her work forces viewers to once again focus on the subject and the relevance it has. Through her art she is exorcising her 'inner demons' and inviting the viewer to somewhat do the same. From viewing 'My Bed' (1998)³² portraying a scene of modern (in)habitable filth after a nervous breakdown, the viewer is exposed to new excesses and personal pleasures of life. In modern society these excesses are seen as human weakness. The shock of this piece is the fact that Emin as a human being has no shame in exposing her weaknesses. From the use of the bed Manet was able to focus on a taboo subject very much secretly involved in society, thus can similarly be seen as a common motive within Emin's work. Both beds expose aspects of real life that society doesn't want to be confronted with and in their wake cause widespread outrage.

Manet was also able to oppose the nature of convention by simply painting the drapery in a different manner than had been seen before. This was unique and therefore caused a stir within society as someone was stepping outside the boundaries of usual practice. Both Manet and Emin's beds both capture a significant moment; a pause in time that engulfs the viewer. Emin depicts the consequences of a 5-day time period, whereas Manet captures the few minutes between the departure and the arrival of the next 'visitor'. Each portrayal of the beds expresses a level of intimacy which the artist is able to expose the viewer to. Manet portrays a familiar private scene to the viewer whereas Emin bares her own private space bringing the installation to a whole

³² Viewed at the Saatchi Gallery, London 14/07/03

new level of connection between artist and viewer. A significant feature is that both pieces of art show a representation of the female figure. Manet is presenting a woman who looks dignified and fully in control partaking in degrading actions; however Emin is presenting a degrading scene of a woman who has broken down in complete disaster. These two different portrayals could have been affected by the period that they were created. The role of the female has significantly changed throughout time and the supposed theory is that a level of equality should be present in western modern society. Therefore Manet has shown a woman using only one 'talent' suggesting this is all she is useful for, however Emin shows a period of female living stating that a female breakdown could be just the same as anyone else's regardless of sex. Both beds are nevertheless about female secrets, a side that many would be closed off from seeing. Manet and Emin are therefore bringing the private to the public eye in full glory. Viewers would be inclined to see such pieces of art due to curiosity created by the bare nature of each work. The impressive aspect of each piece is that there are many clues lying within that the viewer has to discover for themselves. Both Manet and Emin haven't clearly stated what exactly has happened in each piece therefore it is the capability of different emotions to be aroused in the viewers that make each piece a success. Both pieces embarrass the viewer, the guilt inducing 'Olympia' and the awkward nature of stepping into someone's personal space with 'My Bed'. Is it as though the viewer has interrupted the ongoing scene, creating the viewer to feel brilliantly uncomfortable. These features allow the viewer to experience the sensation of being completely

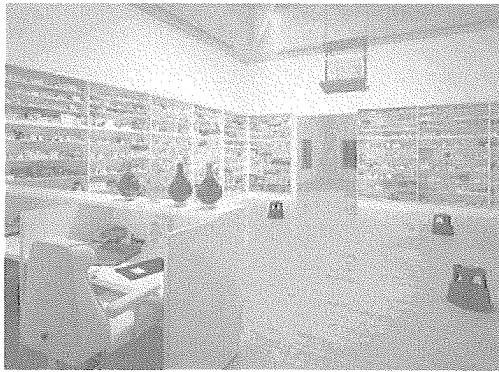
involved in the art piece, similar to having the privilege of a 'private eye' into the life of someone else.

To look at the motives behind paintings widely varies. It may be to show a new medium, a means of technique and style, a new subject matter or focus, to question the viewer and in many cases to cause a stir as is seemingly more popular in the late 20th century onwards. Through Manet's bed I believe that his intention wasn't to shock the public, but to present them with a new way of thinking by using a unique, newborn method of painting. It is seen that Manet himself created the movement of modernism, by breaking out of the rut of continuing styles from the masters before. After Manet came a flurry of new movements³³ in quick succession. He opened the doors for artists to be adventurous, to experiment and change what was considered to be 'art' beforehand. Experimentation began to categorise such artists as 'Avant Garde' by always searching for something that hadn't been seen before. The succession of such artists is apparent as the different movements continue to constantly develop. This combined with the underlying notion of artists wanting to make a point with their art the outcome is 'shock tactics'. By shocking the audience artists are able to not help but influence the viewer, positively or negatively the audience has still been left with something to reflect upon.

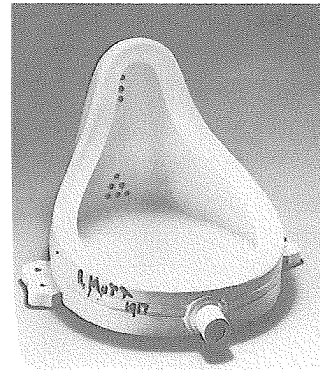
Evolving from portraying real life as the subject matter in paintings to bringing real life literally to the viewer. The readymade sculpture of the urinal 'Fountain'

³³ From uprising of Impressionism to Postimpressionism, Art Nouveau, Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism to Constructivism which continues to evolve to modern day.

by Marcel Duchamp³⁴ to the installation of conceptual contemporary Damien Hirst's 'Pharmacy'³⁵. The audience of art has grown rapidly - once reserved for the elite's eyes only it has become widely accessible to the public.



'Pharmacy' (1999)



'Fountain' (1917)

Without 'Avant Garde' artists the future of art looks bleak. The responsibility of creating new concepts of art that have never been considered lies in their hands and we as the public crave to inquire what they will come up with next. Although we live in a relatively liberalised society the conservatism that underpins society is still evident the ability of the artists to shock and outrage. All because of one man's motive for the admiration of an elite few at the Salons in Paris.

³⁴ Viewed at the Tate Modern, London 2002

³⁵ Installation at the Tate Modern, London 2002

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