

Seeing Laure:
Race and Modernity from Manet's *Olympia* to Matisse, Bearden and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

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During the 1860s in Paris, Edouard Manet and his circle transformed the style and content of art to reflect an emerging modernity in the social, political and economic life of the city. Manet's *Olympia* (1863) was foundational to the new manner of painting that captured the changing realities of modern life in Paris. One readily observable development of the period was the emergence of a small but highly visible population of free blacks in the city, just fifteen years after the second and final French abolition of territorial slavery in 1848.

The discourse around *Olympia* has centered almost exclusively on one of the two figures depicted: the eponymous prostitute whose portrayal constitutes a radical revision of conventional images of the courtesan. This dissertation will attempt to provide a sustained art-historical treatment of the second figure, the prostitute's black maid, posed by a model whose name, as recorded by Manet, was Laure. It will first seek to establish that the maid figure of *Olympia*, in the context of precedent and Manet's other images of Laure, can be seen as a focal point of interest, and as a representation of the complex racial dimension of modern life in post-abolition Paris.

It will then examine the continuing resonance and influence of Manet's Laure across successive generations of artists from Manet's own time to the present moment.

The dissertation thereby suggests a continuing iconographic lineage for Manet's Laure, as manifested in iteratively modernizing depictions of the black female figure from 1870 to the present. Artworks discussed include a clarifying homage to Manet by his acolyte Frédéric Bazille; the countertypical portrayal by early modernist Henri Matisse of two principal black models as personifications of cosmopolitan modernity; the presentation by collagist Romare Bearden of a black odalisque defined by cultural, rather than sexual, attributes metaphoric of the cultural hybridity of African American culture; and direct engagement with Manet's depiction of Laure by selected contemporary artists, including Maud Sulter and Mickalene Thomas, often with imagery, materials and processes also influenced by Matisse or Bearden. In each case, the fitfully evolving modernity of the black female figure will be seen to emerge from each artist's fidelity to his or her transformative creative vision regardless of the representational norms of the day.

The question of what, if anything, is represented by Manet's idiosyncratic depiction of the prostitute's black maid has seldom been comprehensively addressed by the histories of modern art. The small body of published commentary about Manet's Laure, with a few notable exceptions, generally dismisses the figure as meaning, essentially, nothing -- except as an ancillary intensifier of the connotations of immorality attributed to the prostitute. Manet's earlier portrait of Laure, rich in significations relevant to her portrayal in *Olympia*, is even more rarely discussed, and typically seen as a study for *Olympia*, rather than as a stand-alone portrait as this analysis suggests. The image of Laure as Olympia's maid is frequently oversimplified as a racist stereotype, a perspective that belies the metonymic implications of a figure that is simultaneously centered and obscured.

It is in the extensive body of response to Laure's *Olympia* pose by artists, more than by historians, that the full complexity and enduring influence of the figure's problematic nuance can be seen. This dissertation, like the artists, takes its cues from the formal qualities of Manet's images of Laure, in the context of precedent images and the fraught racial interface within Manet's social and artistic milieu, to suggest new and revisionary narratives. It suggests that Manet's Laure can be seen as an early depiction of an evolving cultural hybridity among black Parisians— visible in Laure's placement, affect and attire—that took shape during the early years of the newly built northern areas of Paris that are today home to some of the largest black populations in central Paris. Within this context, an iconographic legacy of ambivalent yet innovative modernity can be asserted for the Laure figure —extending from Delacroix to Matisse, Bearden and beyond. This lineage can be seen as parallel to the long-established pictorial lineage for Manet's figuring of the prostitute Olympia.

What is at stake is an art-historical discourse posed as an intervention with the prevailing historical silence about the representation and legacy of Manet's Laure, and by derivation about the significance of the black female muse to the formation of modernism. This analysis suggests that the black female figure is foundational to the evolving aesthetics of modern art. It suggests that *Olympia*'s standing as a progenitor of modern painting can only be enhanced by breaking through the marginalization of Laure's representational legacy. It asserts that it is only when the bi-figural significance of Manet's *Olympia* is recognized that the extent and influence of Manet's radical modernity can be most fully understood.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
MY MOTHER
AND
MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER

VOLUME ONE

INTRODUCTION

During the 1860s in Paris, painting styles and modes of viewing were transformed to reflect an emerging modernity in the social, political and economic life of the city. Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863) is invariably cited as foundational to the new modernist manner of painting that simultaneously represented modern life in Paris and revealed bourgeois anxieties over the increasing lack of class stability that accompanied these changes.

The discourse around *Olympia* has centered almost exclusively on one of the two figures depicted: the eponymous prostitute whose portrayal constitutes a radical revision of conventional images of the courtesan. This dissertation will attempt to provide the first sustained art-historical treatment of the second figure, the prostitute's black maid, posed by a model whose name, as recorded by the artist, was Laure.¹ Taking its cues from comparative visual analysis, the dissertation will seek to establish that the maid figure is formally positioned, by her placement, attire and affect, as a focal point of interest, even as she is simultaneously effaced through a pictorial blending with background tonalities. The dissertation sets forth a socio-cultural context for the painting that situates the profound ambivalence of this depiction as a representation of the complex racial aspect of modern life in Manet's Paris. It then examines the continuing resonance of Manet's Laure across subsequent generations of artists.

¹Manet archivist Achille Tabarant, in *Manet et ses Oeuvres* (1947: 79), cites Manet's notes in his studio carnet about sessions with "Laure, très belle négresse, 11 rue Vintimille, 3e." See detailed discussion of this source in Chapter One.

Manet's Laure and the Histories of Art

The question of what, if anything, is represented by Manet's idiosyncratic figuring of the prostitute's black maid has rarely been raised and never comprehensively addressed by art history.² The small body of published commentary about this figure, with a few notable exceptions, generally dismisses it on formal terms, except as an ancillary intensifier of the illicit hypersexuality attributed to the prostitute.³ Some

² See discussion in Chapter Two of Cachin's insightful analysis of *Olympia* in *Manet 1832-1883*, exh. cat., (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983) and of Theodore Reff's *Manet: Olympia*. (New York: Viking Press), 1977. Two texts typify the prevalent tendency to discuss the figure, if at all, primarily in terms of precedent paintings depicting black maids with white mistresses of varying social stature. In both cases, there is an absence of analysis of either the formal or socio-cultural context of the Manet figure itself; thus there is virtually no discussion of how the image might be a modernizing turn, albeit a fraught one, from such precedent. James Rubin's essay on Manet, "The Artist as Subject," provides a brief formal analysis of the prostitute and a more detailed discussion of the social phenomena surrounding prostitution in Paris; but provides no such context for the maid, beyond noting that France had colonies in Africa and the Caribbean, and describing her as an "African" servant -- an anomaly if true, since most black domestic workers in Paris at that time, as discussed in Chapter One, were from the Caribbean. (See *Impressionism*, London: Phaidon, 1999: 64-69). The far more extensive essay "Manet and the Impressionists," found in the survey *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, 2007) by Stephen Eisenman, Thomas Crow, Linda Nochlin et al, provides a useful short overview of "the practice of depicting 'negresses' in art", which it observes is almost as longstanding as that of the white "fallen woman," while also noting that, as discussed herein in Chapters One and Two, both "figured lasciviousness and evolutionary retardation." It also, atypically, mentions Laure by name. But again, it makes none of the formal and iconographical analysis for Laure that it provides over several pages for the prostitute. For texts that, in contrast, specifically interpret the Laure figure, see the Cachin, Pollock and Reff essays cited in Chapter 2.

³ Stéphane Guégan, curator of the Musée d'Orsay's 2011 retrospective *Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity*, like Eisenman et al, takes an important step toward breaking the general silence about Laure by including a short discussion of the figure in the exhibition catalog; and even more remarkably, he moreover displayed Manet's seldom-seen portrait of Laure in the exhibition. But he repeats the standard review of precedent images, with no discussion of the Manet image in its own right. He notes that it was Manet's friend Emile Zola who first applied a strictly formalist analysis to its presence in saying that "the black servant woman is only there to introduce a patch (of black) required for the chromatic balance of the composition." Guégan dismisses this as "disingenuous," asserting a need for a broader reading; but he then cites the literature for the "extent through its exotic component {the maid}, black connoted free, available, animal sexuality. It is indeed a must in 'gallant' paintings." While this narrative captures then-

analyses perform the necessary and important postmodernist project of deconstructing the racial and colonialist agendas behind the figure's metonymic presentation.⁴ Others join in the long line of parody and satire dating to *Olympia's* 1863 Salon exhibition.⁵ Such stereotyping can, however, be overly simplistic, given the metonymy of a figure that is simultaneously centered and obscured.

The assumptions underlying the art-historical privileging of the prostitute and inattention to the maid in *Olympia* are perhaps most explicitly stated by T. J. Clark who, in his widely read essay "Olympia's Choice," asserts that, while the prostitute was "the main representation of modernity in 1860s Paris," the maid figure, while "modern," ultimately meant "nothing."⁶ Clark subsequently acknowledged an ideological

prevalent perceptions about black femininity, it does not address Manet's breaks from precedent, and the ways in which he clearly modernizes the figure.

⁴ The canonical work of postmodernist (and feminist) critique, as discussed in Chapter Two, is Lorraine O'Grady's "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity", reprinted with "Postscript" in Grant Kester, ed, *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, Duke University, 1998; especially when read together with Anne Higonnet's "Hybrid Viewer,-My Difference,-Lorraine O'Grady!" In *New Histories*, Sharon Nelson ed. Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996. Jennifer De Vere Brody recaps the main veins of postmodernist critique in "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's Olympia," in *Theatre Journal*, 53:1 (2001), 95-118.

⁵ T. J. Clark, cited below, provides a useful summary of critical reaction at the time of *Olympia's* 1863 Salon showing, as well as images of cartoon caricatures appearing in the popular press. Larry River's 1970 *I Like Olympia in Blackface* exemplifies satirical vein of modern artistic response, which includes caricatures by Cezanne and Picasso. See discussion of the Rivers work in relation to his friend Romare Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt*, made in the same year, in Chapter Four.

⁶ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Revised Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 103, 93, 146. In a Preface to the Revised Edition written ten years later, Clark noted that "'Olympia's Choice' was a difficult chapter to organize and keep clear....And I remember one of the first friends to read the chapter saying, more in disbelief than in anger, 'For God's sake! You've written about the white woman on the bed for fifty pages and more, and hardly mentioned the black woman alongside her!' It is, and remains, an unanswerable criticism; and the fact that I truly had not anticipated it, and saw no genuine way of responding to it within the frame I had made, is still my best, and most rueful

“blindness” underlying his conclusion, rooted in his observation that “the fiction of ‘blackness’ meant preeminently, I think, as the sign of servitude existing outside the circuit of money –a ‘natural’ subjection, in other words, as opposed to Olympia’s ‘unnatural’ one....”⁷ Within this frame, Clark implies that art history seems to justify giving only nominal attention to the maid because she is perceived to be in a familiar, or natural role, and to focus on the prostitute because of the shock of her perceived “unnatural” circumstances.

This dissertation, in contrast, seeks to critique this prevalent blindness, or silence, in art history as a manifestation of what Walter Benjamin, and other historians, have described as a propensity of institutions, whether political or cultural, to omit dissonant episodes when constructing a body of historical knowledge, in order to serve the interests of the ruling classes –which in nineteenth century Europe centered on the maintenance and expansion of empire, and the myths of white cultural superiority invented to justify it.⁸ This institutional silence, or blindness, can be seen to render depictions of blacks, such as Manet’s images of Laure, as unimportant, unworthy of attention. The figure therefore, in the absence of narratives that animate viewer curiosity and interest, becomes invisible even while in plain view.⁹

example of the way the snake of ideology always circles back and strikes at the mind trying to outflank it. It always has a deeper blindness in reserve....” (1974 xxvii)

⁷ Clark, *ibid.*, Preface to the Revised Edition, 1984: xxviii.

⁸ Walter Benjamin discusses the manner in which ruling classes construct cultural treasures to reflect their own interests, as a metaphorical “triumphal procession” over those subordinated to their power; in this way, cultural institutions (which I would argue include art and its histories) become tools of suppression and control. (in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken), 1969: 253-264.

⁹ As suggested by Jennifer Gonzales on the manner in which the viewer can be positioned, by an art institution --which in this case would be an absence of narrative about a readily visible object

The dissertation, in contrast, suggests that, given the formal properties and socio-cultural context of the Laure images, the past lack of historical attention or curiosity about this figure is increasingly divergent from the concerns of the more diverse viewing public of today's globalized art world.¹⁰ As Benjamin writes, "In every era, the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."¹¹

The objective, therefore, is to achieve what Foucault describes as the final phase of postmodernist deconstruction: the generation of new and revisionary narratives.¹² Informed by an excavation of overlooked fragments of the art-historical archive, this generative effort hopes to be a catalyst for an expanded historical discourse for Manet's *Olympia* and its iconographic legacy. Its approach to this task is to look beyond the ideologically-determined art-historical silence about Laure, and to focus instead on the extensive artistic response to Manet's vision. It suggests that this body of work by subsequent artists is a manifestation of the distinctive artistic vision that defined the

-- to effectively blend even an "excessively visible" object into the background, in "Against the Grain: The Artist as Conceptual Materialist," in Maurice Berger, *Fred Wilson: Objects and Installations 1979-2000*. Baltimore: Center for Art and Visual Culture, University of Maryland, 2001. In his 1991 performance piece *Guarded View*, Wilson first gave a gallery tour to a group of museum docents, then found that when he returned to the gallery in the uniform of a guard, no one recognized him—an example of how even a readily recognizable figure can blend into the background if in a role perceived to be unimportant.

¹⁰ Jennifer Brody analyses the differentiated capacity to "see" images among observers of different backgrounds in her 2001 essay "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's *Olympia*." Jonathan Crary writes of agnosia, or the inability to see an object due to an inability to form a conceptual or symbolic identification with it, in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).

¹¹ Benjamin, *ibid*.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks), 1972: 6.

modernist avant garde, a creative impulse often separate from and in opposition to or disregard of the artistic conventions of its day. This creative autonomy is first seen in Manet's depictions of Laure, and then in iconic works by subsequent artists –from Bazille and Matisse to Bearden and beyond.

Laure in the Context of Manet's Paris

Central to an expanded understanding of Manet's Laure is the socio-cultural context of modern life in the new quarters of northern Paris where Manet lived his entire adult life. Manet was an artist firmly committed to painting the realities of everyday life that defined 1860s Paris. And one readily observed development was the emergence of a slowly expanding population of free blacks just 15 years after the final French abolition of territorial slavery in 1848. Nowhere was this new free black presence more visible than in the city's northerly ninth and seventeenth arrondissements. The area was simultaneously home to the studios, apartments and cafes of Manet, his bourgeois family and his circle of avant-garde artists and writers, as well as to a small but highly visible population of black Parisians; the *Olympia* model Laure herself lived in this area, less than ten minutes walk from Manet's studio. (Image 9)

From the Place de Clichy and Place Pigalle south to the Gare St. Lazare, and on through the Tuileries Gardens to the Louvre, Manet strolled the area's boulevards and parks on a daily basis, often with his friend, the critic and poet Charles Baudelaire. As a prototypical Baudelairean flaneur, he observed every aspect of life, from destitute shantytown dwellers to the statesmen, socialites and demimondaines, all of whom he portrayed in empathetic and elegant portraits regardless of social stature.

The *Olympia* figure will first be examined within the context of Manet's full oeuvre, including his two other paintings posed by Laure -- *Children in the Tuileries* and a portrait generally referred to as *La Negresse*. (Image 2) Each can be seen as an index not only of the evolving formal style with which Manet became definitive of modern painting, but of Manet's evolving awareness of and engagement with black Parisians.

Accordingly, the *Portrait of Laure* will be presented as among the gallery of Parisian outsiders, including the *Absinthe Drinker* and the *Street Musician*, that Manet, from the start of his career, rendered with the same humanity and empathy imbued in portraits of his bourgeois family and friends. (Image 12) Like Laure, these outsiders were dismissed by the academic establishment as unworthy subjects of fine art. The dissertation asserts that this portrait, given that Laure is identified and described by Manet himself, must be seen as a named portrait, a revision of its longstanding relegation as merely an anonymous study for *Olympia*.¹³ It is therefore referred to herein by the title *Portrait of Laure*. It further suggests that the *Portrait of Laure*, together with her markedly different rendering in *Olympia*, can be seen as capturing early manifestations of a hybrid culture taking shape within Paris' black working class, a hybridity blending Caribbean and French influences, as seen in the model's placement, facial affect and attire.¹⁴ (Images 24, 28)

¹³ This painting is consistently referred to in art history, from Tabarant to Guégan, by the anonymous title *La Negresse*; this title is still used by the current owner of the painting, the Pinacoteca Agnelli in Turin. In exceptions to the established historical norm, Hugh Honour, in the *Image of the Black in Western Art*, uses the *Portrait of Laure* title (Houston: Menil Foundation), 1989: 204; also see Hanson 1977: 78.

¹⁴ See a discussion of the evolving cultural hybridity of Paris' black populations in the 1995 essay collection *Penser la créolité (Thinking Creoleness)*, edited by Maryse Condé, who critiques what is described as an "outdated opposition between France and the Caribbean, metropolitan center and tropical margin" in characterizing black French culture a century later.

At a time when images of blacks in popular culture were still invariably stereotyped, Manet's work comprises a uniquely modernizing artistic representation of this presence. (Image 5) This becomes clear when the Laure images are seen in comparison with precedent and contemporaneous representations of the black female figure in nineteenth century French painting, photography and sculpture; costume history; images from popular culture provides added context. (Image 37)

The premise of the dissertation's analysis of Manet's Laure is that the maid figure in *Olympia* constitutes a de-Orientalized figuring of the black working class woman in Paris that breaks with key precedents dating from the Renaissance to Orientalism.¹⁵ This revision is, however, an ambivalent one; the maid is both pictorially centralized and blended into the background. The Laure figure can therefore be seen to manifest an unresolved anxiety about race in Paris society just fifteen years after the 1848 emancipation of slavery. The resulting duality of the maid's pose simultaneously thwarts the attention of the public viewer base for the Salon, including most of the art world establishment, and even invites its derision; yet offers a contingency of layered meanings

Madeleine Dobie, in "Invisible Exodus: The Cultural Effacement of Antillean Migration," writes of the development of a hybrid culture in the metropole even while noting a parallel silence in French literature about Antillaise migrants to France. In *Diaspora* (2004: 149-183). This forging of a cultural hybridity based on disparate influences has also been theorized as part of a diasporic condition found across the "Black Atlantic" defined by, among others, Paul Gilroy, and within African American culture as defined by W.E.B. DuBois' articulation of a "double consciousness" –see a discussion of these texts in Chapter Four.

¹⁵ Griselda Pollock helps to differentiate the "de-Orientalized" black female figure, in understated everyday French work attire, from the bared breasts, ornate turban and jewelry, and , clothing in print fabrics read as "tropical," of her Orientalized precedent; this figure is also typically placed in a non-Parisian setting, as in Delacroix' *Women in Algiers* (Image 46). Pollock's important essay, "A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet," appears to be the most detailed treatment to date of the Laure figure; it also reviews Manet's portraits of Jeanne Duval and Berthe Morisot. In *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

discernible with more sustained attention. This contingency, with its sense of openness to the viewer's interpretation, evoked response from a smaller number of artists and writers.

The dissertation will attempt to sketch a profile of the emerging black Paris of Manet's time, including high profile figures –such as Alexandre Dumas *fils* --who were members of Manet's artistic and social circles, as further context for the reception of Manet's work. (Images 15, 16,19) This will include a discussion of Manet's presumed awareness of the controversy surrounding his friend Baudelaire's relationship with his mulatto mistress Jeanne Duval as one possible motivation for this conflicted image of Laure in *Olympia*. Baudelaire expressed his conflicted passion for Duval in the poetry of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), which was censored for indecency; it is now seen as a foundational text of modern literature and included in French secondary school curricula. Courbet painted Duval out of the final version of a portrait of Baudelaire in his 1855 painting *The Artist's Studio*; Manet nevertheless painted Duval's portrait in 1862, in a pose similar to that seen in Manet portraits of his wife and other Parisian elites. (Image 14) The Manet archivist Tabarant speculates that Duval referred Manet to the model Laure.¹⁶

It is in this context that, through his serial images of Laure, Manet can be seen to have manifested the racial ambivalence of the day. Laure, who is both a “très belle négresse” and a pictorially obscured brothel maid, personifies this dichotomy. The dissertation, in seeking to analyze how she could simultaneously embody both of these disparate descriptions in Manet's depiction, will therefore assert that Manet's final image of Laure, in *Olympia*, when seen in tandem with the previous two paintings, is a culmination, albeit a deeply problematic one, of the formal and iconographic issues raised

¹⁶ Achille Tabarant, in *Manet et ses Oeuvres*, 1947: 79. ; also noted in Pollock, 1999: 277-278.

in Manet's earlier *Portrait of Laure* of his placement of Laure in a recognizable scene from modern life in Paris. Its ambivalent and metonymous depiction of Laure, whose controversial reception can be related to varying modes of viewing, is framed as emblematic of the deeply conflicted racial context of Manet's day.¹⁷ (Images 41, 42, 47, 50)

This analysis will, however, examine the Laure of *Olympia* within the context of compositional process, preliminary studies and the evolution of its title to suggest significant discrepancies between Manet's likely intended portrayal of Laure and viewer perceptions. One aspect of this will be a discussion of the Laure figure as a prototypical Baudelairean muse –a personification of themes from the poet's seminal *Les Fleurs du Mal* that are symbolic of the fraught issues of race, empire and class represented by Laure, and by Duval. These poems manifest a highly problematic modernity, simultaneously evoking the denigration of exoticizing stereotypes, yet placing the black female figure not in a remote non-Western locale, but as a culturally hybrid figure at the heart of modern life in Paris. This would offer one resolution of how Laure, or Jeanne Duval, could be "belle" to avant-garde thinkers like Manet and Baudelaire, but still project negative stereotypes to the general public. (Images 43, 49)

¹⁷ Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1999, presents a helpful analysis of disparate modes of attention, namely modern (distracted attention, the result of viewing conditions such as crowds, insufficient leisure for close viewing, etc.) vs traditional (sustained attention, based on close repeat viewing, such as that of an artist, art student or well-informed connoisseur); Jennifer De Vere Brody's previously cited "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's *Olympia*" (2001) advances the concept of the socially constructed fragmentation of the viewer base. The dissertation suggests that these two factors combined render certain observers, including crowds, mass media critics attending, to be literally incapable of seeing the modernizing aspects of the Laure image, but instead fall back on easy, familiar stereotypes.

This racial dimension of 1860s society, in the context of present-day French socio-political concerns, is an issue emanating from *Olympia* that will arguably be of more enduring relevance than concerns about the sex-as-commodity phenomenon embodied by the prostitute that informs the current art-historical narrative about *Olympia*. Manet's revisionary depictions of Laure are left as an unfinished beacon, for the clarification, recuperation and re-imagining of subsequent generations of artists.

The Manet discussion concludes with an analysis of two paintings by Manet acolyte Frédéric Bazille made in homage to Manet's images of Laure. (Images 56, 57, 61, 63) The Bazille paintings mark the start of an iconographic legacy that extends not only contemporaneously across Manet's Batignolles cohort (images of black Parisians by Degas, Cezanne, Nadar and others are briefly examined) but down through successive generations of artists into the present day.

Subsequent chapters will examine continuities of this legacy in the work of later artists whose work has been resonant of or directly influenced by the Laure figure. In addition to Bazille, this will include signature works by the School of Paris early modernist Henri Matisse, African American collagist Romare Bearden, and selected contemporary artists. These artists' strategies of evocation, clarification, recuperation and transcendence locate the Laure image as central to innovations in figural representation from the avant-gardes of the late 19th century through 21st century contemporary art. Throughout this analysis, a critique of the evolving modes of vision constructed by the social context of each period will trace the iterative process through

which segments of the observing viewer base acquired the capacity to perceive and articulate the significance of Manet's representation of the Laure figure.¹⁸

The dissertation will therefore be foundational in asserting that the art-historical importance of *Olympia's* Laure is based on the formal qualities of the image within the context of 1860s Paris, as well as its sustained influence on subsequent artists. It will, in this way, seek to intervene with prevalent art histories and suggest an iconographic lineage for the Laure figure that parallels the long-established Renaissance-to-Cubism context for the prostitute.

Bazille's Homage to Manet: A Clarifying Revision in Manet's Own Time

Frédéric Bazille, the scion of a wealthy family from Montpellier in Provence, became a Manet protégé after moving to Paris in 1862, where he abandoned his medical studies to become a painter. After studying with the Orientalist painter Gerome, Bazille joined the circle of artists surrounding Manet in order to pursue his preference for realist painting of modern life. In his 1868 painting, *Atelier de la Rue de la Condamine*, Bazille depicts a visit to his studio by his friends Renoir, Sisley, Astruc, Monet (his former studio mate) and Manet. (Image 54)

In 1870, Bazille made two paintings, both titled *Négresse aux Pivoines*, that are invariably described as an homage to his mentor and friend Manet.¹⁹ (Images 56, 57)

The *Peonies* paintings can be seen to mark an *Olympia*-inspired prefiguring of a subsequent Impressionist focus on painting modern working-class Paris. The Bazille

¹⁸ Ibid., Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* and Brody, "Black Cat Fever."

¹⁹ As stated in a detailed profile of this painting on the National Gallery of Art in Washington's website. The Gallery also renamed its version *Young Woman with Peonies*, while the Montpellier version retains the title *Négresse aux Pivoines*. The DeYoung Museum archives in San Francisco reveal a similar retitling, as part of a wider trend of name changes in U.S. museums to eliminate the use of the word *Négresse* in titles of works in their collection.

paintings appear to be figured as a direct reference to the flower-bearing black woman in *Olympia*; with these images he embraces Manet's commitment to the depiction of modern life and resolutely turns away from previous Orientalizing work as a student of Gerome, like *La Toilette*. (Image 58) Bazille not only resumes Manet's de-Orientalizing project; he clarifies it. Bazille depicts his subject with un-ambivalent directness as a modest but engaging black member of the Paris working class.

The most important Bazille revisions are that she is the single figure in the image, and that her occupational status remains unclear. No mistresses hover to marginalize her interest as the focal point of attention. She is overtly a member of the Parisian working class, but her work with the peonies and tulips she holds might be as a maid or a self-employed flower vendor. This figure is quiet, industrious, even unremarkable. She is simply part of the daily life of the city. Bazille therefore appears to clarify Manet's ambivalent impulse to paint Laure as he sees her. The figure not only retains the de-Orientalized and culturally hybrid features of the *Portrait of Laure* and the Laure of *Olympia*; he depicts it with heightened clarity. Her crisply tailored dress, cinched to fit a trim waistline, distinctive earrings and madras headscarf can be said to be stylish, and thus perhaps even more modern, combining meticulous detailing with the loose brushwork characteristic of Manet.

Part of the significance of the Bazille paintings is their representation of the varied roles occupied by black women settling into Parisian society in the early decades post-abolition. The subject poses a maid or a street vendor, but she herself is clearly a black woman working as a professional model in 19th century Paris. The fact that the model also wears the same earrings and headscarf as in her earlier poses for a Thomas

Eakins study (Image 63) and other paintings, suggests an element of collaboration between artist and model; she participates at least nominally in the styling of her image.

The flowers with which the Bazille figure is juxtaposed appear to go beyond the expected nature vs culture subtexts, in which the flowers can project onto non-European women the stereotype of an excessively sexualized nature that cannot be tamed by cultural refinement. They seem instead to broaden the range of roles that she might plausibly represent. While there has been no published attempt to explore the relevance of flower symbology for the *Peonies* paintings, art historians have established that Manet referenced the literary associations of flowers in his paintings.²⁰ The dissertation therefore examines popular 19th century flower symbology texts which link tulips and peonies to connotations including Bazille's abandoned profession of medicine and healing, as well as turbans, the moon goddess and forbidden love.

Given Bazille's likely awareness through Manet of the Baudelaire-Duval story, such associations would only strengthen the Bazille paintings' ties with *Olympia*. Other contextualizing images might include his friend Degas' painting, after sixteen preparatory studies, of a black Paris circus star *Miss La La at the Folies Bergere*.²¹

(Image 65) The Bazille and Degas paintings exemplify the little-recognized body of images that represent a black Parisian proletariat that was often resident post-abolition in

²⁰ Reff discusses Manet's use of flower symbology in *Manet, Olympia*. New York: Viking Press, 1977. I reviewed several texts about 19th century French flower symbology, including Beverly Seaton's *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 1995).

²¹ The National Gallery in London has begun in recent years to present extensive on-line information about this painting, as does Marilyn Brown's analysis of the development of the work through multiple preliminary sketches in "Miss La La's" Teeth: Reflections on Degas and Race," in *The Art Bulletin*, Volume LXXXIX, No. 4, December 2007, 738-765. In February 2013, the exhibition "Miss La La at the Folies Bergere" opened at the Morgan Library and Museum.

the Batignolles quartier of northern Paris where Bazille, Manet, Degas and many Impressionists maintained studios. (Image 66) The dissertation suggests that these paintings are comparable to canonical works by Manet and his circle depicting the ballet dancers, laundresses, millinesses and bar maids who also populated the area's venues of modern, late 19th century life in Paris.

Matisse at the Villa Le Rêve: Toward a New Baudelairean Muse

If Bazille's paintings clarified the presence of the black woman within modern life in nineteenth century Paris, it was in the late work of Henri Matisse that the representation of the black woman was transformed into an icon of modernity transcending any single ethnic identity. The seemingly unlikely resonance between the urbane Manet and eden-seeking Matisse is rooted in each artist's profound engagement with different aspects of Charles Baudelaire's vision for the artist's role in modern life. Manet exemplified Baudelaire's concept of the artist as flaneur, a member of Parisian café society who tirelessly roamed the city's boulevards observing life high and low. *Matisse* at the Villa Le Rêve, in the hills above Nice, embraced the poet's invitation to the voyage, to a perpetual quest, by turns actual and imaginary, for the remote idyll-by-the-sea and a life where all is "luxe, calme et volupté."

The evolution of Matisse's imagery from nineteenth to twentieth century modes of modernism is often chronicled primarily by monographic reviews of his paintings. However, Matisse himself repeatedly insisted that he did not distinguish between the construction of a book and that of a painting.²² This chapter will therefore trace this

²² Alfred Barr quotes from Matisse's 1946 note "How I Made My Books" in *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1951: 563).

formal and thematic evolution in large part through an examination of Matisse's seldom-discussed late graphic works, specifically those posed by a New York –based Haitian dancer, Carmen Helouis; while also reviewing parallel developments in several of his final easel paintings that were based on his work a second black model, the Belgian-Congolese Madame Van Hyfte, Both bodies of work are in turn related first to Matisse's longstanding passion for jazz and his friendships with artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance; and then to his culminating engagement, in his paper cutout paintings, with the image of African American dancer Josephine Baker.

In late 1930, after returning to France from a world tour that included visits to New York on the way to Tahiti, and the Caribbean during the return voyage, Matisse accepted a commission to create the illustrations for a new edition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.²³ Although delayed for years by other major projects, including the Barnes Foundation *Dancers* murals, which entailed three subsequent visits to New York, Matisse returned to the *Fleurs* project in 1943. During the years 1943-1946, he made multiple drawings, prints and paintings posed by several black models during a series of sessions at his Villa Le Rêve studio. This work most notably included numerous images of Carmen Helouis for the *Fleurs* illustrations; these were made during studio sessions that were extensively photographed by Hélène Adant.²⁴ (Images 70, 71, 97, 98) Matisse ultimately selected images of Carmen for ten of his thirty-three *Fleurs* illustrations, more than any of his three other *Fleurs* models; as well as the frontispiece. (Images 77, 80)

²³ Matisse's itinerary is detailed in the timeline of the Museum of Modern Art exhibition catalog *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective*, 1992: 297.

²⁴ Adant's archives are in the Kandinsky Library at the Centre Pompidou. Several of these Adant photos appear in the book *Matisse a la Villa Le Rêve* (Thames and Hudson, 2004), by Marie-France Boyer, Paris editor of the English magazine *The World of Interiors*; the book documented Matisse's life and work at the villa, as well as its interiors.

Carmen also posed for stand-alone drawings, meticulously developed in several states, and illustrations for other book projects. (Image 86) This was the only period in his career when Matisse worked with a black model on a sustained basis over a period of several years.

Some of Matisse's images of Carmen, including for the *Fleurs* poem "À Une Malabraise," appear to directly evoke Manet's depiction of Laure in *Olympia*, itself a figure that, as discussed in Chapter Two, has been considered to be a personification of the poem's subject. If Manet's Laure can be seen as a personification, both stereotyped and empathetic, of the Malabaraise after her arrival in Paris, Matisse's more idealized depiction, while in the trope of the Manet image, appears to suggest her life prior to departure. (Images 72, 73) Other Carmen illustrations veer decidedly toward wholly new and modern modes of portraying the black female figure (Image 77). This was a clear break in the artist's representational style for a subject which Matisse had episodically depicted in his earlier Orientalizing and primitivist periods. (Images 75,76)

The dissertation suggests that this modernity instead had affinities with the representational style of Harlem Renaissance artists including portraits of jazz singers by Carl van Vechten.²⁵ (Images 83, 84, 85) Citing previously unpublished correspondence, agendas and photographs, obtained from the private archives of the artist and surviving family members of a model, the dissertation suggests that one influence for this new universalized modernity may well have been Matisse's encounters, during his 1930s visits to New York, with leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. While in New York,

²⁵ Richard Powell and David Bailey summarizes the Harlem Renaissance artists' approach to modernizing the image of African Americans in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (Los Angeles: University of California Press and London: Haywood Gallery), exh. cat., 1997:18-19.

Matisse sat for portraits by Carl van Vechten, a photographer and journalist who hosted Harlem Renaissance salons, and who also knew and made portraits of many leading Harlem Renaissance figures in addition to the aforementioned jazz singers. (Image 81) This chapter suggests formal affinities between the modernizing images among Matisse's Baudelaire illustrations –which he agreed to create just after his first New York visit --and the aesthetics of Harlem Renaissance portraits that Matisse may have become aware of through van Vechten and other friends, including Paul Robeson. (Images 77-82, 90) These images reflect the ideas that define the “New Negro” as described by Alain Locke, the philosophical founder of the Harlem Renaissance artists who was himself portraitized by van Vechten. Locke advocated a depiction of black subjects as urbane and stylish subjects in contemplative poses that rejected prevailing stereotypes; this approach to portraiture was visible in photographic portraits by van Vechten and in paintings by a range of Harlem Renaissance artists. (Images 85, 87, 89)

This analysis supports its discussion of Matisse's engagement with Harlem Renaissance aesthetics with quotes from the artist's unpublished family correspondence and journals describing Matisse's little-known but frequent visits to black theater and jazz performances in Harlem while in New York, and the many hours he spent listening to his personal collection of jazz recordings.²⁶ These engagements with modern black culture can be seen as opportunities for Matisse to gain exposure to the modern modes of representing women of color later seen in his 1940s work with Carmen and other black models. The dissertation therefore suggests that, through his *Fleurs* illustration work, Matisse moved beyond past nineteenth-century exoticizing imagery and re-presented the

²⁶ Unpublished correspondence provided by Wanda de Guébriant, Director, Archives Matisse, Issy-les-Moulineux.

black female subject as fully present within the modern world of France and New York in his own mid-twentieth century.

Matisse's *Fleurs* work is also significant as a site for the development for the artist's signature single-line drawing technique, through which he advanced the revolutionary flatness of his pictorial style. The artist's engagement with Baudelairean imagery was therefore central to his pictorial innovation. This work places resonances of Manet's *Laure* at the heart of Matisse's serially inventive figural style, informing much of his work with the abstraction of the female figure into a non-naturalistic system of signs that further developed the possibilities of contingent meaning, open to the viewer's interpretation, begun by Manet's flattened painterly style. While his School of Paris rival and colleague Picasso did this through the fragmentation of figural volumes, Matisse, though maintaining the integrity of the figure, did so with the semiotic use of color, line and white space.

Fleurs is moreover significant not only in itself, but because it appears to have also informed both the subject and style of his subsequent work in cut paper—including *Jazz* and *Creole Dancer*, and his final series of easel paintings. *Jazz*, was being made at the same time as *Fleurs*, and features Matisse's breakthrough paper cut-outs as well as text in his handwriting; his apparent fluency with the themes being illustrated suggests some level of knowledge of jazz and modern culture. This idea is reinforced by Matisse's later monumental cutouts *Creole Dancer*, known to have been inspired by Caribbean dancer Katherine Dunham, and *La Negresse*, whose inspiration was Josephine Baker. (Image 122)

Matisse's work for *Fleurs* and *Jazz* –which may have been interrelated --was therefore a turn that had no readily discernible influences or parallels within Matisse's School of Paris cohort. While Matisse's imagery evolved beyond archaic or tribal black images, and depicted the modernity of black culture itself, Picasso never moved beyond working with the aesthetic ideas of traditional tribal sculpture. Matisse, in his 1940s work with black models, moved beyond the now-problematic premises of primitivism in a manner that Picasso never did.

While the Villa le Rêve drawings and cut-outs demonstrated a continuity of the pictorial resonances of Manet's *Laure*, Matisse simultaneously moved, in his final easel paintings, still further beyond ethnic specificity. Three of the paintings including *l'Asie* and *Young Woman in White, Red Background*, were posed by a biracial Congolese-Belgian neighbor, Mme Franz van Hyfte who was living in Nice with her husband, a Belgian lawyer. (Images 108, 117, 119)²⁷ One remarkable iconographic implication of these paintings is that they make no explicit reference to their black model's ethnicity beyond the specificity of her facial features and flesh tones. Though posed by a black model, the demeanor, bodily stance and sartorial style is interchangeable with paintings posed by European models. These paintings therefore appear to be among the earliest modernist uses of a black model for non-black imagery. In *l'Asie*, Matisse's depiction of Madame van Hyfte as a personification of Asia, Matisse expands the realm of modern beauty. He includes subjects of multinational origin in poses that are unfaithful to the

²⁷ Matisse's biographer, Hillary Spurling briefly discusses Matisse's easy social rapport with Mme van Hyfte in *Matisse The Master* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 2005:439. Unpublished correspondence and photos for both Carmen and Mme. van Hyfte provided to the author by Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineaux. The sessions with van Hyfte for *White Dress, Red Background*, were filmed for a 1947 documentary by Francois Campaux.

more prevalent but formulaic depictions of ethnic specificity; he thus escaped ethnic essentialization to an extent unmatched by his School of Paris colleagues.

Despite the iconic standing of these two paintings, and the extended working relationships Matisse maintained with both Carmen and Mme. van Hyfte, these two models are most often omitted from histories of Matisse and his models. This is despite extensive coverage, in exhibitions and monographs, of Matisse's work during this period with other important models, most notably Lydia Delectorskaya, his longtime studio assistant and muse.²⁸ In contrast, this dissertation references unpublished photographs and correspondence that provide biographical information about both Carmen Helouis and Elvira van Hyfte, while also documenting the artist's ongoing friendship with both models long after their studio sessions. (Images 91-96, 100-101, 109, 116-119, 123)

Like Manet, Matisse's work with black models emanated from a radically personal creative vision that disrupted traditional modes of representation for the black female figure. Just as Manet before him had represented Laure not as an exotic, but as a culturally hybrid figure integral to urban modernity, Matisse disregarded longstanding racially based hierarchies of beauty that remained very much in place in the 1940s. In this way, the iconographic legacy of Manet's Laure can be seen as a precedent for Matisse's serially inventive late figural style. With *Fleurs* he evolved an increasing abstraction of the female figure through new treatments of flatness, the minimization of detail. For the paintings posed by Madame van Hyfte, Matisse used flesh tones that evoked, but did not seek to replicate, observed reality. All of these modernist gestures opened up Matisse's

²⁸ See also the recent catalog for an exhibition *Matisse and the Model* (New York: Eykyn Maclean), 2011. In which the essay by Anne Dumas focuses on the Villa le Rêve period. While retrospective monographs, including that of the Museum of Modern Art, cite the 1947 documentary made during the *Woman in White, Red Background* studio sessions; the commentary focuses on the painterly gesture of the artist.

figural portrayals into realms of gradually decreased ethnica codification, even as they made no attempt to homogenize or Europeanize racially specific facial features and flesh tones.

With these images, Matisse broke with longstanding binaries that ascribed iconic modernity to the white subject. Instead, these works prefigured the late twentieth century postmodernist call for an expanded realm of beauty, through the dismantlement of the very notion of a single universal standard of beauty, in favor of an inclusiveness that retained individuality while avoiding essentialized archetypes. Matisse appears to have started with depictions of black models derived from Baudelairean re-imaginings of Manet's Laure and Jeanne Duval –figures viewed as radically modern in a nineteenth century context. But he then evolved, through his experiments with color and graphic form, to depict these models simply as emblems of modern femininity transcendent of race. Matisse arguably remained tethered to his early modernist roots with his continuation of odalisque traditions that did little to critique the objectifying aspects of displaying female subjects as objects of beauty. But Matisse also anticipated the future, whether deliberately or not, by broadening the realm of beauty to embrace ethnic multiplicity.

Bearden in Harlem and Paris: Collaging Cultural Hybridity

If Matisse rendered his Laure-inspired figures as racially sublimated universal objects of desire, Romare Bearden achieved the inverse--a specifically black overlay of a universal trope of desire. Bearden's 1970 collage *Patchwork Quilt* exemplifies his view that art is "an old tune that the artist plays with new variation. He attempts to see things with fresh eyes yet he must determine his relation to his past history." With *Patchwork*

Quilt's highly stylized depiction of a female nude reclining on a bed, Bearden re-imagines the Titian-Manet pictorial representations of the female as object of desire, by figuring the odalisque as black. (Image 135) He thus supplants the erasure, stereotyping and marginalization of the black female subjectivity that permeates art history, and re-imagines her as the focal point of interest.

Bearden intensifies his revisionary agenda by contextualizing the figure, not within the traditional European boudoir, but with attributes--attire, furnishings, compositional materials--that signify the legacy and aesthetics of African American culture. *Patchwork Quilt* thus extends the iconic reclining nude from the Renaissance and nineteenth century France into postwar American modernism. It can be seen as a manifestation of civil-rights era artistic initiatives to establish the modern black woman within the lineage of women depicted as objects of beauty and desire.

Patchwork Quilt also anticipated another radical revision--the subsequent feminist-motivated push for the de-objectification of women, by its shift of visual interest from the nude's physical attributes to its representation of the mix of tradition and improvisation that characterized mid-20th century African American culture. Bearden's face-down nude presaged the formal qualities deployed by a later generation of black female artists, including the conceptual photography of Lorna Simpson featuring turned-away black women.

A formal analysis of *Patchwork Quilt* reveals several similarities to the pictorial structure of *Olympia*. These include the spatial flatness of the interior, its division into three pictorial planes and the subdued green-black color tones of its upper right expanse. Bearden wrote extensively about his admiration for Manet's painterly style; after a 1950

stint in Paris, he systematically copied many iconic European works, including Manet and Matisse.²⁹ He highlighted what he described as the unfinished, improvised quality of Manet's surfaces, which he likened to jazz. He notes, significantly, that although he changed the color tones of other masters' works while copying them, he retained the palettes of Manet and Matisse.

Archival research at the Romare Bearden Foundation in New York reveals that Bearden owned at least one large color reproduction of *Olympia*. (Image 137) It appears, together with images of nudes by Renoir, Titian, Boucher and others, as part of a 5-page article titled "Languorous Ladies on Couch and Cushion," torn from what appears to be a 1960s issue of *Look* magazine. Scrutiny suggests that Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt* nude could be a blend of the *Olympia* pose and another image-- shown on the missing opposite page, but identified by a caption below the *Olympia* image --of Boucher's portrait of Marie-Louise O'Murphy, a teenaged mistress of Louis XV. (Images 138-139) The coincidental parallels between O'Murphy's face-down pose with dangling legs, and the aesthetics of the Egyptian tomb reliefs frequently visible in Bearden's work, strengthens Bearden's ability to create *Patchwork Quilt* from elements of both Western and African aesthetics. The fragments of quilts across the surface add a specifically African American process, materials and design. In combination, these pictorial components signify the culturally hybrid genesis of the *Patchwork* odalisque's

²⁹ Bearden discusses his views of Manet, Matisse and other artists in his and Carl Holty's book *Painter's Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1969; Myron Schwartzman also discussed this in *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art*. New York: Charles Abrams & Sons, 1990. Ruth Fine quoted Bearden on his approach to copying Manet and Matisse in her exhibition catalog *The Art of Romare Bearden*. exh. cat. Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 2003. Correspondence with Fine in February 2009, while researching a paper for Professor Kellie Jones, clarified attribution methods for the *Olympia* images found in the Bearden archives.

face-down pose. The flowery pillow beneath her head symbolizes an iconographic continuity with the flower-bearing black women of Manet and Bazille, and the floral print blouse of the Matisse muse Carmen.

Bearden's engagement with Manet's imagery thus appears in a repertory of collage techniques, including fragmentation, inversion and de-contextualization, which manifest a commitment to pictorial improvisation that Bearden believed he shared with Manet. Yet, as Kobena Mercer, quoting Ralph Ellison, has suggested, the method of collage is also a manifestation of the cultural processes that shaped African American cultural identity as it became increasingly integrated with mainstream society in the postwar civil rights era.³⁰ As described by Toni Morrison, the African American psyche is "multilayered, with many dimensions that are not readily seen or fathomed."³¹ If, as Mercer suggests, the diasporic identity is itself a collaged condition, then this collaged figure is constructed as emblematic of that identity. In this context, *Patchwork Quilt* can be seen as a completion, and a re-vision, of Manet's unfinished Laure figure.

Bearden's admiration for Manet crystallized, while expanding to include Matisse and other twentieth century masters, during his nine-month stay in Paris in 1950, when he used income from the G.I. Bill to join African American artist and writer friends

³⁰ See Kobena Mercer's analysis of the cultural hybridity imbedded in Bearden's collage as in jazz in his chapter "Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*. London and Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press and The Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005.

³¹ Robert O'Meally discusses Toni Morrison's comments in the essay "Layering and Unlayering: Jazz, Literature and Bearden's Collage," in *Romare Bearden in the Modernist Tradition*, 2008: 96-97.

already in France.³² (Image 151) Through letters of introduction, he met with Brancusi, and with Picasso in Juan-les-Pins on the Riviera, describing the latter event, which took place amid an unending flow of other visitors, as “like going to see the Eiffel Tower, a colossal tourist attraction.”

Bearden’s most memorable observation of an artist in Paris was a sighting of Matisse while Bearden was at the Dome café in Montparnasse with friends. Bearden described the scene as Matisse, then elderly and in the last four years of his life, walked past, supported by a young man and a young woman on each side: “A waiter hollered something like, ‘He’s passing by,’ and all the waiters ran to the front of the café and started clapping. . . . Matisse then walked over to shake hands with the waiters, and all the people were reaching over to shake his hand. I thought ‘isn’t this wonderful. They’re not applauding a movie star, but a man who changed the way we saw life because he was a great painter.’ After being in the States, Paris was a miracle because things like that could happen.”³³

Bearden also found disillusionment in Paris. Despite the black American artists’ feeling of well-being in Paris, their experience remained invisible in the American press, in stark contrast to the high-profile European tours of jazz musicians. Bearden also came to believe that the center of the postwar art world was shifting to New York. Once back in the United States, he returned to Europe for only two brief visits.

³² See Schwartzman, (1990:160-170), for the most complete and detailed account, including excerpts from correspondence, of Bearden’s time in Paris; unless otherwise noted, statements of fact and correspondence excerpts are drawn from this invaluable source. Since Bearden by his own account (see Fine p23) did not paint while in Paris, monographical accounts of Bearden’s artistic career give relatively cursory attention to this period. As one example, Ruth Fine, *The Art of Romare Bearden*. exh. cat. 2003:23-24 the most impressively comprehensive treatment of Bearden to date, covers the period in two pages \

³³ Diedra Harris-Kelley at the Romare Bearden Foundation first alerted me to this quote, which can found in its entirety in Schwartzman, 1990:168.

One lasting impact of his time in Paris was Bearden's decision to systematically undertake critical deconstructions of admired paintings. Having read Delacroix' journals about his own such explorations, Bearden felt that he too could develop artistically by extensively and analytically copying masterworks.

We thus see a conflation of influence from two Matisse *Piano Lesson* paintings in Bearden's *Homage to Mary Lou*, in which he depicts a scene reminiscent of his native rural North Carolina, and names it in tribute to the great jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams, who like Bearden moved from the South to Pittsburgh. (Image 151) We see quotations from Picasso and Courbet in a version of *The Street*, arguably Bearden's greatest single work. (Image 152) In both collages, Bearden displays antecedent ideas about color, about masklike figural treatment; but always deployed to representing these scenes within the context of African American life.

While Matisse was arguably a greater influence for Bearden than any other twentieth century master, Bearden apparently was unaware of some aspects of their numerous affinities. The fact that the two artists both viewed cats as intriguing household companions may seem trivial, until we connect the connotations of cats to Baudelaire, an author whom both read and admired. (Image 25) Noting that Bearden referred to his cat by its French name "le chat" should lessen the strain of credulity that he may have such ideas in mind.

Matisse and Bearden each made serial works inspired by the Caribbean island of Martinique. For both artists, the island was an idyllic destination, redolent of Baudelairean "luxe, calme et volupté." Matisse noted that his 1940s residence near Nice, the Villa Le Rêve, inspired reminiscences of Tahiti and Martinique, the latter a stopover

on his way to New York. This was perhaps a factor in his choice to complete his thirty-three illustrations for *Les Fleurs du Mal* there. Bearden produced at least thirty works featuring Matisse-like black cutout figures, inspired by Martinique following a 1973 cruise there, which were later exhibited together in a *Prevalence of Ritual – Martinique* exhibition. (Image 159)

One interface that perhaps closes this circle of affinities was Carl van Vechten, Matisse's 1930s Harlem Renaissance portraitist. In 1944, van Vechten published a review of an early exhibition by the young Bearden, who was then working in a more traditional style predating his collages. Van Vechten described Bearden as a "young Rouault," evoking evoking Matisse's friend and fellow Fauvist from his own artistic breakthrough years a half century earlier a half century earlier.³⁴

Seeing Laure: The Anterior as Muse in the Art of Maud Sulter and Mickalene Thomas

In its conclusion, the dissertation examines the iconographic legacy of Manet's Laure as one that remains resonant today for diverse contemporary artists, including two who, like their predecessors, re-imagine past imagery to create works definitive of their own time. The project of British artist Maud Sulter, who was of Ghanaian-Scottish descent, was one of retrieval, of claiming the Laure figure as an art-historical legacy for an emergent black European diaspora. Mickalene Thomas infuses the bold visuals of late twentieth century African American film and media images sensibility into the odalisque and portraiture traditions.

³⁴See Sharon F. Patton, and Mary Schmidt Campbell. *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Oxford University Press, 1991:27.

In her 2002 series *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Sulter combined the compositional strategies of 1970s conceptual art with Dadaist-inspired photomontage superimposed on a reproduction of *Olympia*. Sulter's intervention mediates an imagined recuperation of Laure's obscured subjectivity through an overlay of the maid figure with a photograph of a black artist's model who, given the photograph's 1850s date, was a near-contemporary of Laure.³⁵ (Images 165-167)

Sulter constructed viewer attention for this intervention through a conceptualist use of scale --her overlay photograph blown up to be larger than the prostitute, as a metaphoric effort to retrieve the subjectivity of Manet's model and establish its value as equivalent to that of the prostitute.³⁶ Still, Sulter acknowledges the impossibility of full retrieval of subjectivities lost to history; the identity of the Nadar model herself remains unknown. Sulter captures this reality with a second element of photomontage on the lower right --a portrait of herself, taken from the back-- hair wrapped with a madras scarf reminiscent of Baudelaire's sketch of Jeanne Duval-- shown leaning on the rail of a tourist boat, gazing pensively at the Paris skyline as seen from the Seine.³⁷ With the conceptualist-inspired de-aestheticization and unskilled qualities of the grainy black-and-

³⁵ As discussed in Deborah Cherry's essay in the exhibition brochure for *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Edinburgh: The National Gallery of Scotland's 2003 exhibition.

³⁶ Alexander Alberro outlines the main veins of conceptual practice, several of which are seen in Sulter's work, including the negation of aesthetic content and gestures of de-authorship, in the preface, "Reconsidering Conceptual Art," of *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, editors, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999. Sulter's overscaling in order to call attention to the obscured Laure is an inverse, of sorts, of Louise Lawler's institutionally critical photographs unmasking the way the Metropolitan Museum positions the viewer to venerate a classicized sculpture of Greek hero Perseus, as discussed by Rosalyn Deutsche in "Lawler's Rude Museum," in *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (Looking Back)*. Columbus, Ohio and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Wexner Center for the Arts and MIT Press, 2006.

³⁷ As described by Deborah Cherry in a London discussion with me while we viewed the *Jeanne Duval* series, which is in her personal collection, in September 2012.

white snapshot deflecting attention from herself, this portrait instead directs the viewer to follow her gaze –in the direction of the Musée d’Orsay, the Louvre, and other art institutions along the banks of the Seine. These institutions, and their display and interpretive strategies for the images of black Europeans among their holdings, are the true subjects of Sulter’s work.

Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama advanced Sulter’s extensive engagement with nineteenth century representations of black women, as in her re-imagined appropriation of Benoist’s 1800 painting *La Nègresse*, a precedent for *Olympia* discussed in Chapter One. This painting was reconstituted by Sulter in 2002 as a monumental photograph and video, *Portrait d’une nègresse (Bonny Greer)*, 2002 posed by a prominent African American writer. (Image 168) As with *Duval*, Sulter uses dramatically overscale dimensions to draw viewer attention to and reverence for a portrait of a black woman that, as discussed in Chapter One, was detested by some critics in its own time for its choice of subject. Even though working with photography, a medium noted for mass mechanical reproduction, Sulter’s photographs are one-of-a-kind, and their size (8x10 feet) approximates that of 19th century history paintings –all devices enlisted in service of her intent to inspire belated respect for the sublimated black female subject.

Mickalene Thomas has since the onset of her career forged a creative process and pictorial style that re-imagines past masterworks as vivid evocations of the contemporary moment. With her signature rhinestone-studded portraits of vibrant black women, Thomas fuses a global artistic legacy spanning the modernizing turn in early modern France from Manet to Matisse’s School of Paris: the visual strategies of postwar

African American artists; and the meaning-laden processes and materials of transnational studio practice today. (Images 170 -172)

The originality with which Thomas mines this trove of found imagery is manifest in her portraits, which evoke yet transcend past figurings of the black female body. These works embody Thomas' expressed intention to inject socially, sexually and artistically empowered black women of socially, sexually and artistically empowered black femininity into the canon.³⁸ She thus embraces the Foucauldian exhortation to push beyond the mere excavation and deconstruction of the documents of history and the marginalizing agendas underlying them, and to replace outmoded convention with an overlay of new narratives.³⁹

With her most recent work with long-favored studio models, a practice resonant of Manet and Matisse, Thomas embeds the models' names in the titles, in refutation of past black models' obscured identities. With paintings like *Portrait of Qusuquzah 2*, *Une Très Belle Négresse* and *Din, Une Très Belle Négresse #1*, both from 2012, Thomas retrieves the legacy of Manet's Laure, long marginalized and unnamed in art history, with subtitles quoting Manet's description of Laure. (Image 172) Thomas' direct link of the black female subject with the appellation of beauty performs an intervention with a longstanding history that Western art has no place for representations of black female beauty, a convention also disregarded by Matisse's 1940s work in *Vence*.

³⁸See Denise Murrell's essay "The Anterior as Muse: Recent Paintings by Mickalene Thomas," in *Mickalene Thomas: Origin of the Universe*, the exhibition catalog for Thomas' 2012-2013 solo exhibitions at the Santa Monica Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. Unless otherwise noted, all references to the artist's comments are from the author's several meetings with Mickalene Thomas in her Brooklyn and Giverny studios from April 8 through November 11, 2011.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks), 1972: 6.

It is both poignant and ironic that Willia Marie Simone, the African American protagonist of *Matisse's Model*, Faith Ringgold's 1991 quilted story painting, goes to Paris at age 16 and in posing for Matisse and Picasso, "leads a life that no African American woman artist could have dreamed of having at the time."⁴⁰ (Image 173). This assumption is an index of the unintended misperceptions constructed by the silences of art history. The historical obliteration of the black modernist muse was so profound that Ringgold, an acclaimed African American artist who had studied in France and maintained an extensive engagement with modernist masters, appears to have been unaware in the 1990s, like Bearden in the 1970s, of Matisse's work fifty years earlier with Carmen Helouis and Mme van Hyfte.

It is within this context that Mickalene Thomas engages with the iconographic legacy of precedent artists including Manet, Matisse and Bearden, while bringing the gradual modernization of the black female subject into the present moment. Thomas's investigation of Manet's *Olympia* offers compelling interrogations of this painting's problematic iconographic legacy. It is with her renderings of the flower-bearing black woman that Thomas advances the iterative transformation of this figure, across successive artistic generations, from the servant of Olympia to a personification of empowered contemporary black womanhood

In her collage *Marie: Femme Noire, Nue Couchée*, (Image 173) Thomas resurrects the self-assured demeanor of her previous portraits of black female subjects, but now in the iconic trope of the reclining nude. Posing languidly on a floral patterned sofa, old prints overhead suggestive of dreams, she dons glittering jewels and dramatic

⁴⁰ See the exhibition catalog *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art), 1998:9.

animal prints, projecting new connotations of glamour and success for these attributes of past alterity. Thomas reinforces her intervention with a unique update of the nineteenth-century flower-bearing black woman. This twenty-first century odalisque allows her bouquet to fall away, with a casual confidence derived as much from her own sense of self as from others' admiration.

Mickalene Thomas' reformulation of this figure links her with contemporary artists who address a need, expressed by Lorraine O'Grady, for "...images of the black female body by black women made as acts of auto-expression, the discrete stage that must immediately precede or occur simultaneously with acts of auto-critique... When, in other words, does the present begin?"

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Manet's Three Images of Laure

In late 1862 Edouard Manet (1832-1883) noted in his studio *carnet* that a model he described as “Laure, très belle négresse” sat for a portrait in his rue Guyot studio in northern Paris.⁴¹ This session would produce the second of Manet's three known paintings posed by Laure, all made within a twelve-month period.

During the previous summer, Manet had depicted a nursemaid figure with Laure's deep brown flesh tones, but with indeterminate facial features, along the right

⁴¹ The Manet archivist Achille Tabarant comments that “...Manet a consacré a la Nègresse une étude a part (61x50)... Elle est en buste, coiffée de son madras, les épaules nues... Cette négresse, nous avons pu l'identifier grace a notre Carnet de notes de Manet (1862). Il porte en effet cette mention: “Laure, très belle négresse, rue Vintimille, 11, au 3e. Cette adresse, ne peut-on penser que ce fut Baudelaire qui l'indiqua?” (*Manet et ses Oeuvres*, 1947: 79) Tabarant's attribution is invariably cited on the few occasions when Manet scholars mention this quote, including in noteworthy essays by Françoise Cachin in the 1983 catalog for a Manet retrospective shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and at the Musée d'Orsay, and Griselda Pollock in her essay, “A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet,” in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge), 1999: 277. I have not been able to locate and view the 1862 carnet; all signs are that it is no longer extant. Juliet Wilson Bareau, discussing sourcing problems for the 2011 Musée d'Orsay Manet retrospective, writes that many of Manet's papers appear to have vanished, after being mainly in Leon Leenhoff's possession until the early twentieth century. (In “The Manet Exhibition in Paris,” *The Burlington Magazine*, December 2011: 816. I have decided, nevertheless, to accept the Tabarant quote as fact, in part because he provides a carefully observed formal description of the “étude,” including of the double pearl earring dangling from Laure's one visible ear, as well as a summation of its provenance; and because highly esteemed Manet scholars have previously cited the carnet with no mention of having viewed it. I was particularly struck by Cachin's use of the quote, since her 1983 exhibition is widely considered to be the definitive postwar Manet show, and because she did not include the carnet in her catalog bibliography's listing of the primary sources she viewed in the original. I did view excerpts of a later carnet, covering Manet's 1870s-1880s practice, which is packaged with other materials under the title *Cahiers Leenhoff*, on microfilm at the Bibliothèque National de France in Paris. These documents apparently passed from Manet's widow Suzanne to her son Leon Leenhoff, whom Tabarant knew, and then to the Bibliothèque National. A version of the *Cahiers* is also in the Tabarant archives that I viewed at the Morgan Library in New York.

border of his painting *Children in the Tuileries*,⁴² The result of this second sitting was to be completely different. If the *Tuileries* nursemaid had been rendered as a “type,” one of several stock figures in a genre scene, Laure was now the subject of a carefully observed painting, in which the blank visage of *Children* is rendered with portraitzing detail in demeanor and attire; her direct gaze meets the viewer’s eye.

Manet’s presentation of Laure as the sole focal point of interest introduces us to her as a specific individual who compels the same sustained attention from the viewer that she received from the artist. Within months, Laure would return to Manet’s studio, to pose the maid figure to a prostitute in Manet’s groundbreaking *Olympia*.⁴³ The Laure of *Olympia* assumes such a markedly different stance from her portrait, one characterized by formal and thematic ambiguity, that this final pose situates the earlier portrait not as a mere study for *Olympia* but as a standalone work in its own right.

Manet’s three representations of Laure can collectively be seen as an important manifestation of his defining artistic commitment -- to paint what he saw in the daily life of modern Paris, in a radically modern style, and in defiance of the romanticized classicism and exoticism that defined the academically sanctioned art of his day. Manet’s images of Laure figure modernity with their formal pictorial values -- a broad, loose brushstroke and flattened pictorial effect -- that were antithetical to the illusionistic mimicry prevalent since the Renaissance. Laure also figures modernity through a simultaneous citation of, and evolution beyond, the stock figure of the exotic black servingwoman. Long featured in academic painting as existing irreducibly outside

⁴²While there do not appear to be extant records confirming that Laure posed the *Children* nanny, Pollock also asserts that the model was Laure (Pollock, 1999: 278), and given Manet’s habit of working repeatedly with a single model, this seems plausible.

⁴³ Pollock (Ibid., 1999: 277) and Tabarant (1947: 79) both suggest this sequencing and timeline for the two paintings.

modernity. Manet, to the contrary, placed her squarely in the midst of scenes of modern life in the Paris of Manet's time. Laure moreover figures modernity by her depiction in a manner strikingly apart from the derisive stereotypical caricatures with which the period's popular media invariably depicted black Parisians. And finally, Laure figures modernity as part of Manet's effort to assert the artistic merit of marginalized subjects, individuals whose ethnicity, class, regional origins or occupation place them firmly outside bourgeois European society, at a time when only portraits of elite or historical subjects were sanctioned by academy convention.

The three Manet images of Laure are collectively noteworthy because they not only manifest the new modern style of painting, but because they depict, as a documentary of sorts, the range of the roles –nanny, artist's model, brothel maid and more -- with which free black Parisian women, just fifteen years after abolition, gained an economic foothold and became a fixture in the daily life of Paris.⁴⁴

The Ethnic Demographics of Manet's Paris

Taken together with later works by other artists in Manet's circle, his images of Laure can in retrospect be seen as a representation of the early formation of one of the principal black communities in central Paris. Manet's Laure personifies a small but visible black presence in Paris that took root in the aftermath of abolition and still exists today.⁴⁵ (Image 10) Nowhere was this new free black presence more manifest than in

⁴⁴ The first emancipation of slavery was implemented in 1794, as part of the French Revolution and suspended in 1801 with the rise of Napoleon, whose wife Josephine was from a slaveholding Caribbean family. Blanchard, et al, *La France Noire*, 2011: 23, 31.

⁴⁵ The areas from the Place de Clichy to Place Pigalle, and especially around Barbes-Rochechouart, the Gare du Nord and Belleville are today the main *quartiers* of central Paris where there are concentrations of black Parisians large enough to form a visible residential community clustered around predominately black and North African commercial districts. See

the city's northerly ninth and seventeenth arrondissements. (Image 8) This was the area where Manet also lived and worked at the time, along with his artist and writer friends Monet, Renoir, Baudelaire and Zola, especially in and around the Nouvelles Athenes quarter of the ninth arrondissement, and Batignolles in the adjacent seventeenth. (Image 9) The title of Fantin-Latour's painting *Studio at Batignolles*, a group portrait of Manet and his friends, captures this reality, as does the artists' gathering seen in Manet's *Au Café Guerbois*. (Image 11)

Tabarant points out that, in addition to Manet's physical description of Laure, he noted in his carnet that she lived at "11 rue Vintimille, au 3e" –an address within ten minutes' walk of Manet's apartment and studio. Several notable Parisians of color resided nearby, including Alexandre Dumas *père*, who lived on Avenue Frochot, a private street just blocks away from rue Vintimille. This presence anecdotally indexes census data that, while incomplete, suggests that these northern areas have traditionally hosted some of the largest black Antillaise populations in central Paris, a fact that persisted over successive generations and is manifest today.⁴⁶ (Image 10)

discussion of the black population in Paris, including the presence of nannies and household servants recruited from the Caribbean in the years immediately after the 1848 abolition, in *La France Noire: Trois Siecles de Presences*, edited by Pascal Blanchard (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2011: 42-43). After World War II, as the numbers of migrants from the Antilles to Paris expanded, and as expanding numbers of immigrants from West Africa arrived, often recruited as guest workers to meet the demand for labor, additional black communities formed in the banlieues.

⁴⁶ French census demographer Claude-Valentin Marie writes that, while only 16,000 people of Departements d'Outre Mer (DOM) origin resided in France in 1952, this number swelled to 183,000 by 1982. ("Les populations des DOM-TOM, nées et originaires, résidant en France...sondage de 1990" in INSEE Resultats 24 (1993). In *La Condition Noire* one of the first scholarly histories of black France, EHESS researcher Pap Ndiaye suggests a stability of numbers from the 19th century until World War II, while noting that "Le XIX siècle est malheureusement mal connu en ce qui concerne l'histoire des populations noires de France. ...Il est probable que le nombre de Noirs en France à la fin du XIX siècle avoisait le millier, dont quelques centaines à Paris, qui étaient d'autant plus visibles qu'ils étaient rares." (2009: 126)

Manet and his friends maintained studios along streets emanating from the Place de Clichy, and many of their paintings were set in specific locations throughout the area. They gathered daily in the cafes and cabarets lining the stretch between Place Clichy and Place Pigalle, and walked south along newly built residential streets to the Louvre and Tuileries Gardens. They departed from the nearby Gare St. Lazare for leisurely outings in Argenteuil and other pleasure destinations along the Seine. They attended performances and society events at the Opera and observed popular entertainments at the circus and cabarets in Places Blanche and Pigalle. The ninth arrondissement in the 1860s was an area where migrant workers, avant garde artists, the bourgeoisie, and the demimondaines who served and entertained them all, lived in close proximity and mingled in public spaces.

In working with Laure, therefore, Manet followed his career-long practice of engaging models who were part of his daily lived experience. The evolving specificity of his images of Laure, from type to portrait to the *Olympia* pose, is perhaps an indication of Manet's gradual awareness of this expanding black presence, as through personages like Alexandre Dumas *fils* and Jeanne Duval, the mistress of Baudelaire, some black Parisians became part of his personal artistic circle.

A First Awareness: *Children in the Tuileries* and the Black Presence in Manet's Paris

Children in the Tuileries (1862) depicts an everyday scene that Manet could well have observed during his regular strolls through the Tuileries gardens, on his way from his studio to sketching sessions at the Louvre.⁴⁷ This view of well-dressed children strolling through the Tuileries gardens, carefully attended to by their uniformed

⁴⁷ Manet biographer Beth Brombert suggests that Manet visited the Louvre several times each week in *Manet: Rebel in a Frock Coat* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1997:162.

nannies, captured a commonplace occurrence. *Children* is thus an example of Manet's commitment to painting ordinary events from daily life. These excursions may also have been a context for Manet's first awareness of Paris' changing black population, as black nannies became increasingly visible.⁴⁸

The painting is also an early manifestation of the formal strategies and subject matter that became hallmarks of Manet's art; in choosing to portray this scene, Manet embraced a well-established subject of genre painting, while updating it to reflect current realities. Its pictorial methods display the abrupt break with convention that also characterizes his work. This becomes clear when Manet's *Children* is juxtaposed with a painting that typifies the sanctioned approach to this scene, Timoleon Marie Lobrichon's *Promenade des Enfants*. (Image 4) *Promenade* fits within a standardized genre painting style – generalized figures arrayed before perspectival vistas sweeping over manicured gardens into a distant background expanse. The palette of pleasant pastel pinks, blues and greens accentuates the artist's depiction of a scene of charming and well-ordered bourgeois leisure –the children are regimented into parade-like columns yet display the inevitable unruliness of toddlers at play, even as their impeccably aproned nannies gently assert a semblance of discipline. The sunny skies and brilliant green foliage project optimism, well-being and security, the latter reinforced by the dignified gray-bearded gentlemen hovering nearby, ready to impose masculine authority and protection as needed. It is a decorative scene, updated with uncomplicated realism, intended to please

⁴⁸ As previously cited, for a discussion of the expanding presence of black nannies in Paris, see *La France Noire* (Blanchard ed., 2011: 42-44). Tabarant suggests that Manet may have met Laure while she was working as a nursemaid for a family friend; he also speculates that Manet's friend Charles Baudelaire may have introduced them. In *Manet et ses Oeuvres*, 1947: 79.

without provocation, and to adorn bourgeois interiors as a sort of luxe wall backdrop for other luxury possessions.⁴⁹

Manet, like Lobrichon, captures the beguiling aspects of coming across a children's outing –the amusing efforts of the nurses to keep the youngsters moving ahead in formation, the charming round straw hats and loose cream-colored playclothes, the affectionate gestures of nannies adjusting children's caps or shooing them back into line. But Manet reduces the cuteness factor by depicting slightly older children, from a back view, in a far less open and sunny setting. The perspectival view into background is closed off, the murky black tree trunks seem to close in; the distant view is indistinct, rendered with blanked out spaces and loosely gestural brushstrokes to create a flattened picture plane. It is an economy of detail, a pictorial flattening, that sets off a generation of modernizing depictions of such genre scenes, exemplified by Bonnard's *Promenade des Nourrices* decades later. (Image 4) The slightly sinister sense of the figures, who are pushed forward into the foreground by a garden that seems to close in on them, is underscored by Manet's version of the gray-bearded male presence; idealized and dignified in Lobrichon, he now seems more like a vagrant, a figure that the children perhaps are being steered away from, rather than a soothing protective presence.

Manet thus evokes a genre scene but depicts it in a modern way, both in his formal pictorial devices and by his choice of figural types.⁵⁰ If Lobrichon paints a scene

⁴⁹ Timoleon Marie Lobrichon (1831-1914), studied at the Academie des Beaux-Arts and successfully exhibited, and won prizes for, portraits and genre scenes depicting children throughout the 1860s-1870s. While his work has received scant scholarly attention, he was elected Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour in 1882, just one year after Manet received the same award.

⁵⁰ Other artists with ties to the Batignolles artists painted scenes of nannies with children in gardens, that, like Manet's *Children*, escaped the conventions of genre. See Linda Nochlin's

of sanitized orderly cheer, Manet paints a scene perhaps closer to observed reality – a city where displaced loiterers and bourgeois families intermingled at every turn.

Manet’s rendering of the right-most nurse with the brown skin tones of his model Laure seems to advance the picture’s real-world qualities. If Lorichon shows the nannies as his bourgeois viewers would perhaps like them to be –elegantly uniformed Europeans –Manet, even if marginally, injects a dose of the reality that nannies in 1860s Paris were a mix of races, even if still predominantly European. Lsure’s deep brown skin tones break with Lorichard’s idealized figures; this can be seen perhaps as an effort to depict the demographic fact that a Parisian nursemaid could very well, by the 1860s, be black.

Manet tapped into a tradition dating back to the Renaissance of depicting bourgeois subjects with black servants to emphasize that their wealth was extensive enough to import costly exotic help.⁵¹ Yet the prevalent view of black women was clearly negative and suspicious. The frequent depictions of black nannies as caricatures in popular media illustrates that this prejudice is anything but obscure—it is commonplace enough, and loaded enough with racist connotation, that it is a highly effective gag line. The brown-skinned nanny and foreboding greybeard in *Children* are, therefore, part of

discussion of the Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot’s 1879 *Wet Nurse* in “Morisot’s Wet Nurse: The Construction of Work and Leisure in Impressionist Painting,” in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row) 1988: 231-241. Morisot also reconfigured standard mother-and-child imagery in depicting her family in a garden setting in her painting *Eugene Manet and his Daughter*. Eugene was Edouard Manet’s brother. Also see Anne Higonnet’s biography for a discussion of Morisot’s unconventional approach to depictions of children, including her “solemn contemplation” as she gazes at her enfant daughter in *The Cradle*, in *Berthe Morisot* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press), 1995: 91, 111.

⁵¹ As discussed in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Titian’s *Laura Dianti* (1523-1529) is an iconic image of this genre, an interesting fact in the context of this dissertation given that Titian did not repeat this model in his 1538 *Venus of Urbino*, a prototype for *Olympia* (eds David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Vol. III Part 1, 2010: 107-109).

Manet's mode of escaping the most saccharine aspects of genre, by painting everyday life in a way that is radically modern, both formally and in subject matter. *Children* depicts life as it is, not as the conservative upper classes may have wished it to be. It is striking that the flesh tones of the later Bonnard nanny are racially indeterminate, far removed from the rosy-cheeked hues of earlier genre works like the Lobreichon.

Still, Manet evokes tradition even as he transcends it. He uses the figural devices of genre types and at times echoes aspects of Lobreichon's figurations. Both the nannies and their children are composed as types—their sketched-in faces uniformly indistinct so as not to distract from the detailing of their attire that defines their social position. These figures are clearly intended to depict an occupation or social position rather than specific individuals. This typing is directly descended from the interest by Romantic painters in depicting sweeping scenes, even in everyday life. It was Delacroix who advanced the idea, in paintings like *Liberty Leading her People*, that a range of Parisian "types" should be depicted in paintings, but with all the metaphoric classicism of history painting rather than the specifics of actual appearance. From the radical worker and the street urchin to the dandy flaneur, each is defined by costume and context; there are few or no portraits.⁵² The focus on costume as the main manifestation of socio-economic status also typifies the popular media genres of fashion plates and the then-recently completed Balzac mega-opus *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. It is thus essential for social placement of the figures to represent the expensive round straw hats

⁵² Ségolène Le Men discusses the roots of genre painting in Romantic illustration, which uses durable formulaic types to visualize a narrative by isolating a figure and giving it instantly recognizable, and therefore defining, specifics of costume. If background is added at all, it is only to add "local color." Le Men cites as an example a palm tree in the background as part of what defines the *Creole de Cayenne* type, or an arid mountainous backdrop for "Le Maure." In *Les Français Peints par eux-mêmes: Panorama social du XIXe siècle*, exh.cat. (Paris: Musée d'Orsay), 1995: 9-11.

and loose white playclothes of bourgeois children as well as the high-buttoned white-collared dress and matching headscarf of their nursemaids, as posed here by Laure.

The headscarf is particularly characteristic of typing the black female servant – by piling it high on her head, tied to the side, its two-tones evoking the madras worn in the Antilles, Manet deftly captures a reality also seen in the anonymous photograph *Portrait of a black woman holding an enfant on her knee*. (Image 6) The instant recognition factor in popular culture for the black nanny figure is underscored by the caricature from popular media satirizing famed mulatto writer Alexandre Dumas *pere* as a nursemaid to the theatre. Here the type makes its facile transition to a stereotype of the black nourrice figure so well-established in Paris that it is instantly recognizable. (Image 5)

Manet's earliest break with his conventional teachings was his decision, while a student of esteemed academician Thomas Couture, to discard the classicized Romanticism that was the academically sanctioned mode of advanced painting.⁵³ Before doing so, Manet maintained continuity with such conventional subject matter including portraits of upper bourgeois personae and mythological subjects deemed worthy of fine painting, as in his 1860 portraits of his upper bourgeois parents and in *The Surprised Nymph* of 1861.

After Manet successfully exhibited such works at the 1861 Salon, his friend Fantin-Latour placed him at the center of an 1865 group portrait, *Homage to Delacroix*, of artists and writers who he believed best advanced the tradition of the recently deceased Romantic master. But Manet bolted from this early trajectory, abandoning a style that

⁵³ Manet studied with Couture from 1850-1856, but after traveling in Italy to copy the Old Masters—and meeting Fantin-Latour—Manet set up his own rue Goyot studio in 1862. See Guégan, *Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity*. Exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Orsay), 2011: 269.

had placed him on the path toward a secure position as a respectable Salon-sanctioned artist.

By early 1862 he had turned irrevocably to representations of the more ordinary aspects of daily life, with *Children in the Tuileries* as a prelude to his masterpiece *Music in the Tuileries* a few months later.⁵⁴ Such material had long been relegated to genre painting, characterized by a matter-of-fact/nondramatic realism in depicting workaday scenes. Genre painting therefore occupied the bottom rung in an established hierarchy of fine art that privileged the vivid color palette and melodramatic subject matter of history painting above all others. *Children in the Tuileries* anticipated Manet's contrarian attempt to "paint what I see" in everyday life, while deploying the avant garde pictorial values previously reserved for loftier content.

Manet's *Portrait of Laure*: From Type to Individual

Manet's first depiction of Laure in *Children*, as an anonymous, yet modernized, figural type, suggests that, while Manet saw black servants as part of the city's public life, and chose to depict that reality in *Children*, this awareness was initially a distanced one. They were anonymous figures that he could well have seen during his strolls around the city.

In contrast, his second image of Laure is a closely observed portrait of an individual –the opposite of a faceless genre type. And once again, with this representation of a specific personality who compelled his close attention, Manet combines tradition and

⁵⁴ Rubin provides one of the most detailed discussions of the multiple social classes depicted in *Music in the Tuileries* (1999: 56-7) while the Musée d'Orsay's Guégan discusses its formal inventiveness (2011:31)

innovation in both iconographic details and picture-making style, much as he had done months earlier in *Children*.⁵⁵

The portrait, finished in early 1863, depicts the subject in a pale dress that sits low on the shoulders. She wears a subtly colored, vaguely patterned head-wrap, and simple jewelry comprising a double pearl pendant earring in the one visible ear and a necklace of colored stones set in golden links. The image may appear at first glance to be more a study than a finished painting –the color tones of the shoulders seem to be unfinished and do not match those of the face, where splotches of pigment are left unblended. But this open brushwork and lack of blended half-tones are also seen in other Manet portraits throughout his career; they are an early harbinger of Manet’s revolutionary approach to painting. It is a style that depicts the figure more in flat planes of color, loosely bound by outline, than in fully contoured and naturalistically molded forms.⁵⁶ It exhibits almost none of the genre-like realism seen in Feyen’s rendering of a

⁵⁵ There is a paucity of scholarly, curatorial and critical commentary about Manet’s portrait of Laure, beyond a passing mention, as discussed in the Introduction for this dissertation, in essays about the broader history of images of black women in nineteenth century French art, as seen in Nochlin, Guégan and Rubin. Pollock, after noting Laure’s sitting for this “portrait study, an early essay for another scene of modernity,” focuses on Laure’s *Olympia* pose. (1999:277) Pinacoteca Agnelli, the current owner of the painting, which it labels *La Nègresse* and dates 1862-63, provides a superb reproduction of the work in its collection catalog, accompanied by a label text that quotes Manet’s “très belle nègresse” description. In *Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli al Lingotto* (Milano: Bompiani), 2002: 68-69. A separate bibliography provided by the Pinacoteca lists several Italian periodical articles, primarily for survey exhibitions with little commentary specifically about this painting. The Pinacoteca also establishes a provenance for the painting that extends from Eva Gonzales, a student of Manet to whom he gave the portrait, through several collectors in Paris (Auguste Pellerin, Prince de Wagram), in Budapest (Marczell de Nemes, Baron Herzog) and in Turin (Riccardo Gualino of Torino). The painting entered the Agnelli family collection in 1959, after ownership by the Honolulu Academy of Art.

⁵⁶ During a viewing of the Laure portrait during the 2011 Manet exhibition at the Musée d’Orsay, the artist Mickalene Thomas remarked that, as an artist, she could see from the ‘loosely brushed flesh tones’ variegated browns, applied in slightly impastoed swirls, evoking the material presence of a palette, that Manet seemed to be searching for the best representation of the model’s flesh tones.

woman who appears to be the same model in *Baiser Enfantin*.⁵⁷ (Image 23) The contours and modeling of her face and shoulders, like the drape of her dress fabric, are suggested, but not fully articulated; rather than the posed charm and smooth surface of Feyen's academic illusionism, Manet leaves the presence of the canvas support manifest, his model's gaze direct, frank and engaging rather than charmingly diverted.

Yet it is a portraitizing image that captures the specificity of the model's rounded facial features and her faintly bemused gaze. It is a salutary example of Manet's modernity—he retains the capacity to reveal character even as he simplifies its formal qualities.

Laure within Manet's Gallery of Outsiders

Manet's Laure portrait is striking in its resemblance to *The Absinthe Drinker*, another Manet single figure painting of 1862. The two paintings share a blank background of brown-grey tonalities that keeps the viewer's attention focused on the figure. The pants leg displays the same kind of outlined shaping of flat color bands seen around Laure's shoulders. As previously discussed, this loose, open brushwork and flattened form, while it may appear to some observers as unfinished, is actually a characteristic of Manet's radical new painting style, one that would be more fully realized in the multi-figure paintings such as *Music in the Tuileries* and *Olympia* made during the same period.

⁵⁷ I make this assumption based on visual analysis of this image, which I first came across in the *Image of the Black in Western Art* archives at Harvard's W.E.B. Dubois Institute. I found very little information elsewhere about this painting, but the *Image of the Black* archives cover sheet indicated that the painting was shown at the Salon of 1865; the fact that this is the same year that *Olympia* reinforces the possibility that the model could have been Laure.

Just as Manet's neighborhood included one of Paris' most concentrated black populations, it also abutted the labyrinthian medieval alleys and shantytowns that, though long home to immigrant gypsies, Italians and Spaniards, as well as migrant French provincials, were being razed by the 1860s to make way for the broad boulevards and plazas of modern Paris. For both Manet and Baudelaire, this reconfiguring of central Paris, planned and ruthlessly executed by Baron Hausmann, Napoleon II's Prefect of the Seine, placed compelling personalities from all walks of life in close and regular proximity and on public display as they went about their daily peregrinations along the broad new, tree-lined boulevards lined with elegant new apartment buildings.⁵⁸ The Baudelairean "painter of modern life" was drawn not just by the opulent lifestyles of the city's upper classes, and the café society of fellow artists, writers and their demimondaine lovers, but also by the plight of the city's working classes of servants, laundresses and shop workers and the underclass displaced by Hausmannization.⁵⁹ Many were migrants from the poorer countries of Europe, drawn to new employment opportunities in Paris created by the industrial revolution.

⁵⁸ Beth Archer Brombert's Manet biography (1997: 54-55) provides a detailed discussion of how Hausmann—a trained musician and lawyer—became prefect of the Seine in 1853 and from 1853-1870 replaced 300 miles of haphazard streets with 85 miles of open thoroughfares and started remaking central Paris. This program, known as Hausmannization, involved evicting the poor to make way for the new middle class and their dwellings, businesses and places of entertainment. A new water supply and sewer system was established and the Gare St. Lazare was a major new construction. Streets were illuminated, new bridges and wide, tree-lined streets were built. These sidewalk-lined boulevards radiated from grand new plazas including the Etoile and the Place de l'Opera. New parks and gardens, hospitals, and the rue de Rivoli bordering the Tuileries were built, as was the now-demolished central market. This massive program changed the face of the northern Paris areas where Manet lived and worked, but it left much of the rest of the city intact, including the Marais, the aristocratic eighteenth-century Saint-Germain quarter on the Left Bank, and the sixteenth and seventeenth arrondissements.

⁵⁹ This was a key tenet of Baudelaire's argument that artists should focus on modern subject matter in his seminal essay "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. (New York and London: Phaidon), 2005: 1-42.

Manet's notation, in recording Laure's rue Vintimille address, that she resided on the third floor there underscored the mix of economic classes living in close proximity that provided a lifetime of richly diverse subject matter for Manet.⁶⁰ The third floor of such bourgeois apartment buildings was typically a no-frills working class domain, located up narrow flights of stairs above the elegant bourgeois apartments on the first and second floors. Laure's third floor residence signified the likely proximity between Paris' free black population, as part of a multiethnic working class, and their affluent neighbors.⁶¹

Manet's portrait of Laure came during a year when he painted several other single figure portraits of outsiders. (Image 12) Manet's 1862 portrait of Laure can thus be seen, together with works such as *the Street Musician*, *the Absinthe Drinker* and *Gypsy with a Cigarette*, as part of Manet's commitment to representing the full range of personalities whom he encountered in the streets and squares of his immediate neighborhood. (Image 12)

This was a period of artistic transition when Manet began to fully embrace the exhortation that "*il faut etre de son temps*" –one must be of one's times –advanced by his

⁶⁰ Rue Vintimille was built up in part during Hausmannization, among the blocks of bourgeois housing built in areas where extensive razing of old neighborhoods took place. It was built in 1844 at the same time as much of the surrounding quartier, known as Nouvelle Athenes; Berlioz, Monet and later Vuillard lived at intervals on rue Vintimille, and Zola lived a block away, during the 1860s-1870s.

⁶¹ This detail completed the previously referenced notation in Manet's carnet; as recorded by Tabarant, it read in its entirety "Laure, très belle négresse, 11 rue Vintimille, 3e." The presence of a resident named Laure at this address has been documented beyond Tabarant's comment by at least one other source. Griselda Pollock describes her research assistant Nancy Proctor's discovery of the name Laure listed in the 1860s rent register of 11 rue Vintimille at the ninth arrondissement's town hall. (1999: 255)

friend the essayist and poet Charles Baudelaire.⁶² Baudelaire's ideas were central to Manet's proactive transformation of his artistic identity from student of the classicizing masters into foundational modernist, committed to capturing the daily life around him. Manet embraced Baudelaire's ideal of the artist as flaneur, the impartial yet empathetic observer of every aspect of life around him.

Baudelaire was at the time finalizing his *Painter of Modern Life* essay of 1863, which called on the artist to move away from the exoticized content of Romanticism, drawn from antiquity and past history, despite Baudelaire's earlier embrace of Delacroix. He now profiled a prototypical modern artist as a flaneur, a man of the crowd who roamed the streets and back alleys of Paris, standing apart from but observing and recording all aspects, high and low, of daily life.⁶³ Baudelaire had gained recognition in the 1840s as a critic for his essays in admiration of the color palette of Romantic master Eugene Delacroix, but by the next decade, struck by the drastic changes in the cityscape of a rapidly modernizing Paris, he came to believe that the true artist must depict the new and definitive aspects of his own time. Some members of the newly displaced populations were regularly visible on the area's streets, sometimes due to homelessness, or were employed in the nearby cabarets and brothels of Batignolles. These figures, including menial day laborers, homeless alcoholics and itinerant entertainers were therefore readily visible to Manet and his Impressionist friends.

⁶² Brombert, 1997: 48, 66.

⁶³ Scholars believe that it was the artist Constant Guys whose sketches captured a wide spectrum of Paris life, who inspired Baudelaire's exhortation, even though Baudelaire by the early 1860s was visiting Manet's studio. See Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" for a discussion of the nineteenth-century constraints on women's access to art schools, on their movement outside the home, and other factors that contributed to the lack of women among painters of life observed in public venues. (1988: 145-177)

While Manet himself was securely rooted in the upper bourgeoisie, he therefore had regular encounters with people on the margins of French society.⁶⁴ Manet thus captured Parisian “types” ranging from his bourgeois social peers residing along Haussmann’s new Grands Boulevards, and the demimondaines with whom they mingled at cafes and theaters, to the destitute street performers, vendors and other denizens of the area’s street life. The model for *The Old Musician*, for example, was a gypsy who lived near Manet’s rue Guyot studio and worked as an organ grinder.⁶⁵ Baudelaire described the itinerant man who posed for the absinthe drinker as a “street philosopher.”⁶⁶ Laure, like the absinthe addict and the gypsy singer, was among the outsiders who populated Manet’s world.⁶⁷

Manet’s portraits of such figures, who were still considered unworthy subjects of fine art by leading academicians, combines Courbet’s gritty realism with the loose brushwork, flattened picture plane, and discomfitingly direct gaze toward the viewer, that came to characterize modernist painting. Manet represented these figures with an empathetic dignity comparable to that he gave to his bourgeois and café society friends; he took care to note their names and addresses, and in that way to immortalize personages relegated to the margins of society.

⁶⁴ Manet’s father, August Manet, was a senior French jurist; his mother was the daughter of an affluent merchant. Manet was financially independent due to a direct inheritance from his father’s estate, as well as regular cash infusions from his widowed mother. Brombert, 1997: 4-5.

⁶⁵ The National Gallery in Washington’s nga.gov site includes commentary on *The Old Musician*.

⁶⁶ See Rubin, *Impressionism*, 1999: 53

⁶⁷ As discussed with the Martinican artist Marc Latamie in January 2013, his 2012 exhibition at the Americas Society New York, ironically in this context, investigates, among other things, the export of the absinthe business from Paris to Martinique in the late nineteenth century.

Manet's images of Laure therefore bridge an important transition in the content and subject matter of Manet's paintings. While his later depictions of scenes from the lifestyles of artists, writers and demimondaines are now seen as Manet's masterpieces, it was primarily with portraits of single figures that Manet first broke free of his training in Couture's studio in the late 1850s-early 1860s. Manet's three images of Laure also manifest the artist's serial treatment of such subjects as his work evolves from single figures to group scenes. Just as Laure appears both as herself, and then as a character in constructed scenes, so the *Absinthe Drinker* is repeated in *Street Musicians*; Manet also repeatedly posed his wife and her son Leon in both portraits and in constructed scenarios.

Racial Interface and Anxiety within Manet's Artistic Circle

While there is no evidence that Manet had social interaction with Laure, he clearly saw Baudelaire, at times accompanied by Jeanne Duval, on a regular basis. As mentioned earlier, Tabarant speculates that it was Baudelaire who introduced Manet to Laure, who may have known his biracial mistress Jeanne Duval. Laure therefore indexes some minimal degree of racial and economic diversity among the general population within Manet's environs while also manifesting the multi-ethnicity of Manet's close social and artistic circles.⁶⁸

Baudelaire was not among the twelve artists and writers with whom Manet met every Friday at the Café Guerbois off Place de Clichy, but the two friends often met to stroll the city's parks; Baudelaire also sometimes joined Manet's daily table at the

⁶⁸ Tabarant, as previously mentioned, also suggests that Baudelaire may have referred Manet to Laure. (1947: 79)

Nouvelle Athènes cafe in the Place Pigalle and regularly visited Manet in his studio.⁶⁹

Baudelaire's longtime mistress was Jeanne Duval, a former actress of biracial Antillean and French parentage. (Images 13-14)

It is noteworthy that, during the same period that Manet noted Laure's residence on rue Vintimille, Baudelaire sent letters to Jeanne Duval at 17 rue Sauffroy in nearby Batignolles. This proximity of Duval and Laure underscores the sense of a geographic and social intermingling between Manet's social circle and black Parisians.

Duval was known to have sometimes accompanied Baudelaire during his Manet studio visits, and in early 1862 Manet painted a portrait, known as *The Mistress of Baudelaire*, that critics generally agree is a depiction of Jeanne Duval.⁷⁰ Baudelaire and his mistress had by then been an established couple for decades, and although this was accepted, if perhaps ambivalently, within their artistic circle, they were the subject of extensive derisive commentary in published accounts specifically because of Duval's mixed race heritage.⁷¹ The tumultuous life story of Jeanne Duval surely awaits its

⁶⁹ Manet biographer Beth Brombert points out that, from the early 1860s until 1875, and especially after Delacroix's death in 1863, twelve artists gathered on Fridays at the Café Guerbois, 19 avenue de Clichy, pulling together two tables to the left of the entrance; in addition to Manet, the group included Monet, Bazille, Renoir, Degas, Whistler, Fantin-Latour, Legros and the writers Zola, Duranty, Astruc, Burty and Babou. Many members of this group are depicted in Fantin-Latour's 1865 and 1870 group portraits. This was in addition to Manet's daily visits to the Café Nouvelle-Athenes on the south side of Place Pigalle. (Brombert, 1999: 29-60, 164)

⁷⁰ Guégan (2011: 107) discusses the couple's joint visits to Manet's studio. Moreau-Nelaton is one of the earliest writers to note these visits (1926:65). Pollock (1999: 263) questions the premise that the portrait is of Duval, citing Jean Adhemar's earlier demurrals, and suggesting that the portrait dates to a period when Baudelaire and Duval lived separately during one of their many breakup-reconciliation cycles. Dolan is convinced that the model is Duval; but allows that Manet may have worked from a photograph of Duval, possibly made by Nadar. (1997: 615) Baudelaire himself made at least one extant sketch of Duval, now in the Musée d'Orsay, that he labeled with Duval's name.

⁷¹ See Griselda Pollock's commentary on Jeanne Duval in "A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet," in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge), 1999: 267.

biographers; from the sketchy details and speculation available, she appears to have been born to a black Nanterre brothel worker and an unknown French father; she was an actress and already well-established in Parisian demimondaine circles when Baudelaire met her; and may have been Nadar's lover at the time.⁷²

Duval's relationship with Baudelaire was both turbulent and emotionally intimate, featuring multiple cycles of break-up and reconciliation as well as shared visits to the studios of artists and writers and to a coffee house in the rue Richelieu.⁷³

Baudelaire expressed feelings about Duval that acknowledged her as his principal muse for many years, but also revealed a mix of admiring and disparaging views about her ethnic heritage. In a September 1856 letter to his mother after a breakup, he describes how much, when he sees a fine object, he wishes Duval was there to admire it with him. Yet his two pen-and-ink sketches of Duval, while sensitively capturing the strong personality and facial features described by Nadar and others, were inscribed "quarens quem de voret" ("in search of someone to devour"). (Image 16)

While Duval inspired an extended suite of poems in Baudelaire's seminal volume *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), some of the poems similarly exhibit ambivalence –on the one hand an emotional need and a powerful sexual attraction to her as an emblem of idyllic faraway lands, but also exoticizing attitudes about non-European cultures shared by Baudelaire's early idol Delacroix. As Anne Higonnet writes, in Baudelaire's descriptions of and allusions to Duval, she "evokes the experience of a black woman

⁷² Ibid. Duval is the third of Manet's models, together with Laure and Berthe Morisot, profiled in Pollok's 1999 essay.

⁷³ Roberto Calasso characterizes the emotional and intellectual intimacy of Baudelaire's relationship with Duval in *La Folie Baudelaire* (New York: Farrar Strauss), 2008: 34, 40-41.

whose suffering and degradation has obliterated identity.”⁷⁴ The pressures of public controversy and private turbulence in the couple’s relationship may have helped determine the final version of Baudelaire’s portrait in Courbet’s allegorical painting *The Artist’s Studio* of 1855. Some scholars suggest that a portrait of Duval initially appeared hovering over Baudelaire’s shoulder, and though painted out by Courbet, is still discernible as pentimento.⁷⁵

Although Duval was disparaged by Baudelaire’s mother as a “black Venus,” Manet depicted her in a semi-reclining pose that he also used for bourgeois members of his innermost social circle.⁷⁶ (Image 16) Duval assumes a seated position on a sofa, her legs elevated and extended somewhat stiffly before her, a pose in which Manet painted his wife Susanne, facing in the opposite direction on a blue sofa, a decade later.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ See Higonet’s discussion of this mix of admiration and exoticizing objectification, as explored in contemporary artist and critic Lorraine O’Grady’s work on Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval, *Miscegenated Family Album*, 1980-94. In “Hybrid Viewer,-My Difference,-Lorraine O’Grady!,” *New Histories*, Sharon Nelson ed. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art), 1996: 154-160.

⁷⁵ Discussed by both Guégan of the Musée d’Orsay and Clark 93. Guégan notes that Baudelaire is among the art-loving friends – “shareholders” –who are juxtaposed with the exploitative ruling classes and oppressed poor of everyday life in this work intended to be a “summation of seven years of my (Courbet’s) artistic and moral life.”

⁷⁶ Pollock, 1999: 262.

⁷⁷ Therese Dolan provides an in-depth reading of this portrait in “Skirting the Issue: Manet’s Portrait of Baudelaire’s Mistress, Reclining,” in *The Art Bulletin*, December 1997: 611-629. Dolan summarizes the known facts about the turbulent Baudelaire-Duval relationship, assesses the portrait subject’s heavily crinolined dress, with its strong connotations of another complex woman, the Empress Eugenie, and concludes that the portrait is a visualization of the Baudelaire *Fleurs du Mal* poems inspired by Jeanne Duval and of Manet and Baudelaire’s shared ideas about fashion, modernity and femininity. For a more recent discussion of the Duval portrait, see Suzanne Singletary’s essay “Manet and Whistler: Baudelairean Voyage” in *Perspectives on Manet* edited by Therese Dolan (Burlington VT: Ashgate), 2012:58-60. Singletary reprises commentary linking the portrait to the Duval suite in *Fleurs* (as does Guégan, 2011: 101,107); she also suggests that Manet’s decision to “entomb” Duval in white may have been an “ironic” comment on Whistler’s *Symphony in White*, which Manet probably saw. Griselda Pollock also provides an extensive account of Duval’s known biography and sets forth a contrarian view, one

Brombert notes that, while Duval's tempestuous, on-and-off relationship with Baudelaire may have animated Manet's portrayal of her amidst billowing white skirts and fluttering lace curtains, his wife's prim control of her own ruffles suggests the static propriety of his married life. Yet the placement of Duval's right hand is comparable to that in Manet's similarly posed portrait of Berthe Morisot; the black fan is held by both Duval, a demimondaine, and Morisot, Manet's sister-in-law, artistic colleague and social peer. The similarity of all three women's white hosiery and velvety black shoes belies an equivalence in the pictorial worthiness Manet assigns to these three women of radically different social standing.

Duval was not unique as a person of color circulating among Manet's close associates. The celebrated writer Alexandre Dumas, whose grandparents were a French nobleman and an enslaved woman from Haiti, lived on Avenue Frochot, an elegant gated private street one block south of Place Pigalle. While Dumas gained international fame for his novels *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845), he was outspoken about racism in the French upper classes whose literary salons he frequented; he also published a short novel, *Georges*, which dealt with the prevalence of racial prejudice in French Caribbean society.⁷⁸

noted and refuted by Dolan, that this portrait may not be of Duval given that the timing falls during a period when Duval and Baudelaire were separated; (1999: 262-269).

⁷⁸ In one oft-repeated anecdote, Dumas confronts a speaker who derisively mocked his mixed-race heritage at a literary salon by saying "Mon père était un mulâtre, mon grand-père était un nègre et mon arrière grand-père un singe. Vous voyez, Monsieur: ma famille commence où la vôtre finit." ("My father was a mulatto, my grandfather a black man and my great-grandfather a monkey. You see, sir, my family begins where yours ends.") C. Brighelli and J.-P. Rispaill *Alexandre Dumas ou les aventures d'un romancier*, Paris, Gallimard, Coll. Découverte, 1986: 75.

The photographer and caricaturist Étienne Carjat, a friend of Manet and Baudelaire, made a late-life portrait of Dumas in a style that, while capturing the gravitas apparent in Carjat's earlier portrait of Baudelaire, subtly references Dumas' penchant for flamboyant self-parody.⁷⁹ (Image 13) Dumas, who lived lavishly and had many mistresses, was a sought-after habitué of both the lavish salons of his father's aristocratic class and the cafe society of upper class males and demimondaines – the young women from a working class background who worked as cafe waitresses, shopgirls, stage performers and prostitutes at varying levels of economic success.

Duval and Dumas thus both embody a duality of racial attitudes that contextualizes Manet's representations of Laure in 1860s Paris. Each had intimate personal relationships and social privileges transcending racial lines, yet each was regularly confronted with racial animosity and prejudice. Racially based anxiety can thus be seen as embedded in the social fabric of Manet's day.

Each also had subject roles in some of the period's most definitive works of art and music, manifesting the ethnically hybrid origins of these icons of European culture. Duval, though generally historicized solely as Baudelaire's mistress, was an established actress in her own right when Baudelaire first saw her on stage at a Montparnasse theater.⁸⁰ A decade later, she inspired much of his poetry, including a major suite of

⁷⁹ Carjat, while not an intimate of Manet, was clearly part of his extended social circle. Brombert (1997:99) describes Baudelaire's 1863 letter to Carjat expressing surprise at Manet's marriage to Suzanne Leenhoff, someone that neither of them knew.

⁸⁰ While most historians and novelists writing about Duval have considered her primarily through her relationship with Baudelaire, the black British artist Maud Sulter, in addition to her Duval-inspired artmaking, attempted to construct a standalone biography, including her family origins and theatrical career before Baudelaire. She summarizes her efforts, and her frustration at the fragmentary nature of available facts, in her essay "Maud Sulter on Jeanne Duval," in *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Edinburgh: The National Gallery of Scotland, 2003: 21-24.

poems in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.⁸¹ When published, *Fleurs* was censured and Baudelaire faced an 1857 obscenity trial, due in part to some poems' sexually explicit paeans to « exotic » beauty. Today *Fleurs* is esteemed as a classic of French literature, regularly appearing on required reading lists for French public schools.

Alexandre Dumas *fil*s, the elder Dumas' illegitimate son by one of his many mistresses, chronicled this era in an 1850s play, *La Dame aux Camélias*, which inspired the Verdi opera *La Traviata*, first performed in Paris in 1856 at the Theatre-Italien. (Image 21) As in his other works, Dumas *fil*s draws on the plight of his own mother and of his abandoned Haitian great-grandmother, to craft the story of a tragic courtesan whose loyalty is exploited by rich male patrons. Dumas *fil*s was known to be a friend of Manet at the time of *Camélias*' Paris debut, to the extent that Manet traveled with him to Normandy the day after the successful opening.⁸² Scholars note that Olympia is the name of the rival of Dumas' heroine Marguerite Gaultier in the play. Manet's familiarity with the *Camélias* narrative may thus have influenced his decision to paint *Olympia*.

Dumas *fil*s' *Camélias* prefigured by just a few years the life story of one of his father's other mistresses, the young mixed-race American actress Ada Isaacs Menken.

(Images 13, 15) Menken, one of the most highly-paid American actresses of the period,

⁸¹ See Jacques Dupont for one of the more specific discussion of the poems scholars generally agree were inspired by Duval. He states that “c’est au minimum dix-huit poems des *Fleurs* (de “Parfum exotique: à “Je te donne ces vers “ que Jeanne aura certainement inspirés.” In *Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: GF Flammarion), 2004: 13 .

⁸² As described, based on a quote by Proust, by Nils Gosta Sandblad, who suggested in the 1950s that past scholars had not yet fully examined Manet's friendship with Dumas *fil*s. In his *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception*, (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup), 1954: 97-98. Also see Phyllis Floyd's discussion, in her 2004 essay, “The Puzzle of Olympia,” of possible links between the Manet painting *Olympia* and the eponymous Dumas theatrical character.

began an affair with Dumas, who was almost twice her age, during her successful tour of London and Paris in 1864-66.⁸³ She died in Paris just two years later, at age 33, after a sudden illness.

What we know of Jeanne Duval's final years renders true-to-life the archtypal tragic ending that was invariably the fate of demimondaine heroines of the era's works of opera and literature.⁸⁴ The photographer and Manet friend Nadar wrote of spotting her hobbling along a city street after Baudelaire's death, in apparently failing health, just before the siege of Paris during the 1870 Franco-Prussian War's Commune.⁸⁵ Many thousands of Parisians died from starvation and disease during the war's siege of Paris. There is no known subsequent mention of Duval.

Jeanne Duval, Alexandre Dumas *pere* and *fils*, and Ada Menken were early examples of a black presence in the environs of Pigalle's entertainment district that expanded exponentially in the decades after their deaths. Degas painted the famous Cirque Fernando performer Miss La-La in action during the 1880s; she most likely lived during the season at the Cirque's residence near Place Pigalle. Toulouse-Lautrec depicted Rafael Padilla, a well-known black male concert hall dancer whose stage name was Chocolat⁸⁶ Ada Isaacs Mencken was in Paris in the early years of a steady stream of African American actors and writers whose European tours included high-profile visits

⁸³ The historian Renee Sentilles chronicles Menken's life in *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003.

⁸⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two, Brombert, 1996: 114, recounts the ubiquity of the tragic courtesan narrative in popular culture and in opera and literature.

⁸⁵ Pollock (1999: 270) is among the scholars who cite Nadar's account.

⁸⁶ Rafael Padilla, aka Chocolat's biography is detailed in the 2012 book *Chocolat clown negre* by EHESS scholar Gerard Noiriel.

to Paris during Manet's time. This included the landscape painter Robert Duncanson, the sculptor Edmonia Lewis and the Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge.⁸⁷ (Image 18) Many free families of color in New Orleans sent their children to schools in France; some settled in Paris, including the playwright Victor Séjour, who had several successful plays produced in Paris during the 1850s-1860s.⁸⁸ (Image 17) The French photographer Camille Silvy, who divided his time between Paris and London, was commissioned by the British royal family to make wedding portraits of Sarah Bonetta Davies, a young woman of West African origin who, after being orphaned in a British military expedition, became a goddaughter of Queen Victoria.⁸⁹ (Image 18) This trickle became a strong current in the early twentieth century, when many well-known African American creative personalities spent extended periods in Paris or became long-term expatriates. Legendary stars including Josephine Baker, Katherine Dunham and Langston Hughes lived and performed in and around the Place Pigalle entertainment district (see map) until the later evolution of the Left Bank as the epicenter of creative Paris.

Laure as Index: Paris' Free Black Working Class

If Duval and Dumas embodied the little-examined extent to which interracial social contacts were commonplace within Manet's immediate social circle, then Laure

⁸⁷ When Aldridge performed as Othello at Versailles in 1866, Alexandre Dumas *pere*, who was in the audience, embraced Aldridge afterward and exclaimed "Moi aussi, je suis Nègre!" (*La France Noire: Trois Siècles de Présences*, edited by Pascal Blanchard, 2012: 50.

⁸⁸ See discussion of New Orleans creoles and other African American visitors to nineteenth century Paris in Tyler Stovall's history of Paris' African American expatriate community *Paris Noir: Afro Americans in the City of Light*, while it covers the twentieth century, the preface recaps the late 1800s. (1996: xiv)

⁸⁹ Silvy's portraits of Davies were exhibited during a Silvy retrospective at the National/Royal Portrait Gallery in London in 2010; Davies has been the subject of a good deal of recent research focused on excavating the stories of prominent black figures in pre-modern Britain. It is likely that the Silvy portraits were made in his London studio, though the Bonettas may well have visited Paris during their honeymoon trip from London to the Maldives.

represents the greater number of black Parisians who were intermittently visible along the margins of that world. Even though Laure may have been an associate of Jeanne Duval's, we have almost no factual information about her independent of Manet's description.⁹⁰ Yet Laure indexes the fact that northern Paris was home not just to prominent blacks, but to a small but much-noted population of ordinary black people, either born in Paris or new migrants, generally from the Antilles.

As the first histories of black Paris have emerged in recent years, scholars, while noting a paucity of census data, suggest a numerical stasis in this population from the 1848 emancipation of slavery in French colonies until the 1950s postwar period.⁹¹ As data from the postwar years show that northern Paris had the highest concentrations of residents of Antilles origin, it might be inferred to support the presumption that this pattern existed in the nineteenth century.⁹² (Image 10) Socio-economic conditions in the Antilles motivated a small but steady stream of migration to the metropole which, after

⁹⁰ Two descriptive details of the model Laure show up in sources other than Manet: Ross King, in his book *Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that gave the World Impressionism* (2006), states that Laure was 24 years old, but appears to incorrectly cite Tabarant as the source, based on source materials that I reviewed. Eunice Lipton, in *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Model and Her Own Desire* (1999), a semi-fictionalized account of her research on Victorine Meurent, has Victorine describing Laure as a friend and novice model who worked as a milliner's assistant in a Left Bank shop. This would be a plausible "day job" for an artists' model, as discussed later in this chapter. But I have found no archival evidence of either of these details.

⁹¹ On the absence of census data on black French populations, in addition to Ndiaye, already cited, the recent *La France Noire: Trois Siècles de Présences* (2012), edited by Blanchard, states that prior to 1900, "...on voit ...peu de Noirs dans la vie quotidienne de la métropole, tout au plus peut-on estimer qu'ils sont un petit millier à y résider, en étant bien souvent de passage pour quelques mois." Joel Dreyfuss discusses the fact that France did not collect racial data in its census as a factor complicating modern-day French blacks' demands for political representation—see his May 27, 2012 article "Why France Can't Say the M-Word" in *The Root.com*, a blog of the *Washington Post*. Two texts, *Parinoir* by Nicolas Silatsa, and *Paris Noir*, edited by Pascal Blanchard and Eric Deroo) are useful precursors to Blanchard's subsequent *La France Noire*.

⁹² This chart was included in the 1979 publication *L'émigration antillaise en France* by Alain Anselin of INSEE.

the 1950s, surged into a postwar wave of mass migration.⁹³ While prominent black Parisians later joined the French avant-garde's early twentieth century move to the Left Bank, northern Paris, especially from the Barbes-Rochechouart area just east of Pigalle to Belleville and Gare du Nord, remained the main choice for blacks living in central Paris. Simultaneously, the Paris suburbs (banlieues) became home to much greater numbers of postwar migrants, including from Africa, as guest worker programs accelerated after the 1950s. It is this combination of the newer banlieues and the northern areas of central Paris that draws most black Parisians today.

The even keel of Paris' late nineteenth century black population can be attributed to a sense that abolition, while attracting strong support among the French intelligentsia, was not in 1848 the same burning issue, on a standalone basis, as it was fifteen years later in the United States.⁹⁴ It was instead, like anticlerical and anti-imperial views, a requisite issue on the mandatory checklist that came hand-in-hand with republicanism; it is worth noting that just as France's first abolition of slavery in 1794 was an outcome of the French revolution, its final 1848 abolition was part of the establishment of the short-lived republic that preceded the Second Empire. It is therefore important to understand that any visual expression by Manet of a common

⁹³ See *La Colonisation aussi est un crime: de la destruction du système esclavagiste à la reconstruction coloniale* by Guadeloupian historian Oruno D. Lara (L'Harmattan, 2007) for an assessment of post-abolition French colonial rule as so exploitative as to be a crime against humanity comparable to that of slavery itself. Lara also includes a discussion of strong class distinctions, often color-based, among Antilles blacks. Lara asserts that both of these factors motivated migration to France. See also Mireille Rosello's writings denouncing the recruitment of Antillean women as domestic workers in France as the new slave trade ("Lettres à une noire de Françoise Ega: la femme de ménage de lettres." In *l'heritage de Caliban*, Maryse Condé, ed. (Paris: Ed. Jasor), 1992: 178, 180.

⁹⁴ Anne Lafont, faculty member at INHA, expressed this view of the role of abolition in republican politics during a discussion with the author at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA) in Sept 2011.

humanity across race and social class most likely stemmed from his adamant and well-known republican political views.⁹⁵

The most direct impact of the 1848 abolition on Manet's representations of Laure as an ordinary person was that it unleashed opportunities for persons like Laure to act as individuals due to a greater degree of agency to live autonomously. Before the 1848 abolition, black household servants of Antillean origin—whether slaves or free during the short-lived abolition of 1794-1803—were technically free to live as they pleased when they accompanied their masters to metropolitan France. But their opportunities to earn a living, should they try, were circumscribed by French social customs respecting the claims of visiting employers.

In contrast, after the 1848 abolition, persons in similar occupations had increased opportunities to live more independently of employers and perhaps maintain one's own household. This was the time of the mid-nineteenth century Industrial Revolution, when entire families poured in from the provinces, and poor families' extra daughters were sent to the cities to find work in shops and small businesses, as well as in the entertainment and sex industries, or as self-employed vendors and service providers. The migrant from the French Caribbean could thus be seen overall as a part of the era's broad-based working class quest for work.

⁹⁵ See Philip Nord's discussion of Manet's republican sentiments in *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2000: 31-34)

Portrait of Laure : From Exotic Symbol to Cultural Hybridity in Modern Paris

Manet's *Portrait of Laure* is simultaneously rooted in conventions of nineteenth century representations of black women, whether in fine art, popular media or fashion and a clean break with it. It can be seen as an early work of fine art that deploys the flattened modernizing style to portray a black woman as a specific individual in 1860s Paris. The radical innovation of Manet's departure from convention can be clearly seen by viewing Laure in juxtaposition with major precedents by artists working within the Salon system.

An early precedent, Marie-Guillemine Benoist's 1800 painting *La Negresse*, underscores the implication of academy-sanctioned painting methods in the representation of a black woman whose life circumstances in pre-abolition Paris were markedly more circumscribed than that suggested by Manet's Laure in the early post-abolition years. (Image 14) The woman who posed Benoist's *Negresse* was a servant of the artist's brother-in-law, a French Navy officer, who brought the model to Paris during a visit from his base in the Antilles.⁹⁶ Benoist, a former student of David, exhibited the painting at the Salon of 1800, after painting the portrait in honor of the first French abolition of slavery in its territories in 1794 (which was overturned in 1801). Benoist's portrayal of the young woman featured a graceful rendering of the seated woman's slim

⁹⁶ See Sylvain Bellanger's detailed account of the factors that brought this young woman to Paris, the conditions of her employment, and the details of her attire; the Benoist painting is discussed in the context of Girodet's portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley. In *Girodet: Romantic Rebel*. Exh. cat. Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2006: 331. Hugh Honour identifies the models' employer and surmises her possible attitude about the bared breast, in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, v.3. Houston: Menil Foundation, 1989: 7-8. James Smalls describes the status of enslaved individuals brought by their owners to Paris, both in legal terms and in often contradictory social practice, in "Slavery is a Woman: "Race," Gender and Visuality in Marie Benoist's Portrait d'une négresse." In *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture*. Online edition, Vol. 4, Issue 1 2004.

figure, deep brown skin tones, and poised facial expression seen in half view. The surface of the painting is smooth, the figure is painted with meticulous use of half tones, light and shadow to achieve fully molded naturalism of academically sanctioned painting. While Benoist was attentive to the specificity of her model's facial features – the irregular hairline and somber, slightly guarded expression—her overriding concern was to portray her as a symbol, more than as an individual; the artist, in contrast to Manet's notes on Laure, appears to have never recorded her model's name. The liberty theme is echoed in the blue shawl and red ribbon accentuating the white dress; her white headwrap, likely a madras plaid in actual life, maintained the symbolic tri-color theme. The model's stylish French clothing signified the anticipated new role of freed slaves within French society. Some reviewers focused on the issue of slavery, rather than the painting's formal qualities, and praised the Salon's display of the painting as a salute to liberty. Virtually all art critics, however, revealed deep-rooted racist attitudes in denouncements of Benoist's choice of subject matter, stating that the image, especially its deep brown skin tones, was an “affront to the art of painting.”⁹⁷

The front of her white Empire-style gown, in a style then at the height of fashion, is folded down to expose her left breast. This had been the pose for Raphael's widely admired Renaissance painting, *La Fornarina*; and since then, when used in depictions of female allegorical figures, the bared breast had been emblematic of liberty or divinity. By 1800, however, the nude breast was considered too erotically charged to be acceptable in portraits of known living subjects. Critics also described their revulsion at the juxtaposition of black skin and luxurious white fabrics, especially given the presumed

⁹⁷ Honour, 1989, Ibid.

contact between the white female painter and the sitter necessary to drape the fabrics, which carried strong connotations of illicit eroticism.⁹⁸

Perhaps for the subject herself, the bared breast was reminiscent of the slave markets that had just been abolished within her lifetime; while the color of her headwrap might relate to the white clothing worn by worshippers at religious services, a reference that could only deepen objections to the pose. The painting thus manifests an assumed audience of Europeans for whom slavery was an abstract moral issue; the model's own subjectivity was presumably not taken into account.

This context makes it clear just how transgressive it was for Manet to formulate his portrait of Laure as a black member of the French proletariat, with her breasts covered. This constitutes a clear break with her dramatically articulated and exotically attired predecessors, whose attributes clearly establish them as residents of colonies or as emblems of political ideals. This and Manet's depiction of the maid in *Olympia* are therefore among the first images in an important painting in which an image of a black woman is de-Orientalized, and portrayed not as an exoticized foreigner but as part of the working class of Paris.

While the Benoist model was technically not a slave while in Paris, her options for autonomy were limited—many Parisians had family and other personal ties to French Caribbean slaveowners, and regardless of their own views, few seemed willing to openly challenge known claims of ownership; thus hiring opportunities were limited. Bellanger suggests that the model may have expressed some resistance to the semi-nudity of her pose, but may also have felt constrained by a financially driven need to please her

⁹⁸ Bellanger (2006: 331) also summarizes critical reception during the painting's showing at the 1800 Salon.

employer. This continued even after abolition, such women more clearly free agents, free to make whatever life they could for themselves. In 1802, Napoleon reinstated slavery in France, setting off a decades-long anti-slavery movement until slavery was abolished again in 1848. Many French activists continued to support the American abolitionist movement through the 1865 Civil War; thus many fine art images of black women during this period, often in sculpture, served abolitionist themes. These women were invariably represented as exotically costumed Others who, as slaves or colonials, were completely outside French society.

The 1872 bust *Why Born a Slave?*, by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, typifies the continuity of this iconography into and beyond the time of Manet's *Laure*. (Image 24) Produced in terracotta for sale in an edition, the busts were adapted from the allegorical figure for Africa in Carpeaux's monumental Luxembourg Gardens fountain, *Four Parts of the World Sustaining the Globe*. The bust reflects the artist's political beliefs through its title and in his idealized, theatrical rendering of the Africa figure. But as with Benoist, this representation repeats the bared breast, which though based in notions of liberty, still continue to signify unbridled eroticism when used in depictions of black women.⁹⁹ Despite its allegorical purpose, the figure carries the stereotype of the black woman's sexuality as revealed, available and presumably excessive. The effect of this imagery was to establish a racial difference and otherness existing apart from the French social structure. Thus, even though the Carpeaux bust's face is recognizable as that of a popular black Parisian model, such images of black women no longer drew public

⁹⁹ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the origins of these attitudes as delineated by Reff (1997: 92-93).

outrage.¹⁰⁰ The unyielding fixity of this iconography had over the decades become an accepted, even reassuring, emblem of French class stability due to its firm placement of these figures completely outside modern life.

The formulaic display of the single bare breast, combined with the gold hoop earrings and elaborate headwrap that already signified blacks' exoticism, typified the established trope for a racially differenced artistic representation of black females that endured through much of the nineteenth century, including during and well after Manet's 1860s depictions of Laure. Given its assumptions about the presumed viewer, as well as its disregard for the likely self-presentation preferences of its subject, this mode of representation amounts to a representation of empire. It is, arguably, only when works of fine art depict the black female figure in modes consistent with the model's own subject position as a free person of color, that these works can be seen as modern.

This transition was clearly made in Manet's images of Laure, in a radical iconographic turn that is perhaps most clearly shown in a direct comparison of Laure with Delacroix's portraits of the model Aspasia, one of its most direct precedents. (Image 25) Both artists depicted a free black woman who was resident in France, not a visitor from a distant land. But while Delacroix's images of Aspasia straddle the pictorial values of empire and republic, and ultimately undermine the former, Manet's images of Laure consistently project republican humanism.

As detailed by Grigsby, Delacroix's studio journals make clear his intention, in painting Aspasia, to challenge prevailing conventions of female portraiture, by using a mulatto model to achieve an image that merged the completely disparate modes of

¹⁰⁰ Honour (1989: 166) notes that the model, though her name has not been retained for today's audiences, was sought-after among artists; she posed regularly for Carpeaux and other artists.

representing black and white women.¹⁰¹ His choice to represent a woman of color as the subject of a portrait, as someone other than an exoticized symbol or servant, was transgressive at a time when a black woman was considered to be an unworthy subject of fine art portraiture. The virulent racism underlying this presumption was manifest in the popular culture of the era, including the harrowing saga of Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who, due to her unusually full-hipped physiognomy, was displayed in a degrading and dehumanizing manner, naked in animal cages, and billed “the Hottentot Venus” in traveling vaudeville shows (in England and France from 1810-1815).¹⁰² (Image 26) Baartman was perhaps the single most egregious example of pseudo-scientific assertions of black woman’s immutable inferiority to European standards of female beauty. This presumption was not only a key component of Europe’s socio-political justification of imperial conquest and the slave trade in Africa; it was also manifest in fine art’s rigid black-white representational modes.

But Delacroix’s images of Aspasia, while refusing those aspects of visualizing empire, remain implicated with imperial visual agendas; in the end, these works leave the stereotypes intact, but express them in the tropes of fine art. Delacroix eschews the carnivalesque public display and depraved exploitation used to define Saartjie in popular culture as the hypersexed yet grotesque black woman. He instead invokes the fine art

¹⁰¹ Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby provides a detailed analysis of Delacroix’s three portraits of Aspasia as a visualization of empire, writing that “the mulatta incarnated empire; she was its sign because she was its product... because a person of mixed-race confused the rational categories of black or white, each with its own set of representational norms.” In *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) 2002: 266-272.

¹⁰² Kellie Jones provides a full account of the Saartjie Baartmans episode, and of its resonances in the art and exhibition options of contemporary black women today, in her essay “A.K.A. Saartjie “The Hottentot Venus,” in Context (Some Reflections and a Dialogue) 1998/2004” In *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 2011: 44-67.

trope of the courtesan to express hypersexuality as unchecked sensuality. In the first two portraits, the model's upswept hair and quiet facial expression at first glance portray a modest, ordinary persona. But the pale-toned blouse, though simple and modest in style, is draped to display an expanse of bare breasts that becomes more pronounced with each successive version of the portrait –in all three images, there is the suggestion of ready sexual availability. This suggestion is made explicit in the third portrait, in which she is essentially barebreasted, the blouse now a mere drape arranged to enhance the display of a prostitute's body available for hire.¹⁰³ His serial portraits serve to intensify the stereotypical significations, by suggesting that for a black woman, modest attire can never connote respectability; it is but a thin veneer of culture, a temporary masking of an excessively sensuous nature, a nature that must be suppressed and subordinated within European culture, or situated in exotic or symbolic venues wholly outside European culture.

It is within this contextual precedent that Manet's representations of Laure as fully clothed, her garb off-the-shoulder but revealing no cleavage, can be seen as a break with the representation of empire, and a turn to a more unambiguous representation of the everyday life around him. The radical aspect of this turn is underscored when Manet's Laure is compared not just to the Delacroix precedent, but to works by artists of Manet's own time. Nadar, a friend of Manet's, and a regular at the Manet's Friday salons at Café Guerbois, was an early supporter of the Batignolles artists whose first Impressionist

¹⁰³ Honour's interpretation, based like Grigsby's on the artist's notes in his 1821 carnet and later in his 1824 *Journal*, notes Delacroix's intentionality to transcend notions of an ideal beauty, but also his implication in imperial agendas through his sexual objectification of black female models, (in *L'Image du Noir dans l'Art Occidental: De la Révolution Américaine à la Première Guerre Mondiale*, Tome 2, 1989: 36-37). Both also suggest that the two earlier portraits may have been posed by a different model.

exhibition was held in his studios. But even though Nadar worked in photography, the medium then most emphatically linked to modernity, he repeated the Delacroix approach to black female representation in his portraits *Marie, L'Antillaise*.¹⁰⁴ (Images 28-29) Two of these three images pair an image of the model fully clothed, in elegant attire combining a European artist's model's drape with an Antilles headwrap style, with a view of the model with drape pulled back, like that of Delacroix's *Aspasie*, in a bare breasted pose suggesting sex for hire. The Nadar images are reminders of the continuity of this stereotypical trope in art in Manet's time and beyond.

Yet the Nadar Marias reveal, on the other hand, a commonality with the evolving modernism of Manet's *Laure* in that both *Laure* and *Maria* are shown in attire that appears to be a blend of French and Antilles influences. The artist's model drape worn by *Maria* is a European-style garment with no racial signifiers –it was used by Nadar in many portraits of women, whether black or white, anonymous or famous, including that of Sarah Bernhardt, one of the most famous French actresses of the day. The drape seems intended to provide a neutral background allowing Nadar to focus on capturing his subject's individuality, as revealed by facial expression and pose. This approach was Nadar's own modernizing gesture, like Manet's pictorial flatness, supplanting past portraiture which defined its subjects largely by distinctive and meticulously rendered attributes, interiors and fashions. Yet *Maria's* headwrap, and possibly her floral print skirt, are Antillean in style. Likewise, *Laure* wears a headwrap, though rendered in

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Willis and Carla Williams offer a similar reading of Nadar's paired portraits of *Maria*, placing them within the iconography of colonial conquest, as a conflation of art portraiture with ethnographic photography and popular stereotypes of the exotic, in *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 2002: 25-28.

loosely brushed bands of color that minimalize pattern, together with a European-style dress or blouse.

This sartorial hybridity is worthy of scrutiny as a signifier in its own right of the artist's intended characterization of the model –does she represent an actual individual, presented as she appears in every day life? Or is she a symbol, a visualization of a type, an idea, even a fantasy –more than a manifestation of a lived reality?

The Nadar portraits seem to be a fairly overt “performance” of a type –the black woman from the Caribbean islands. Even though made in Paris, this model seems to be exoticized, her portrayal heavily invested in the instantly recognizable signifiers evoked by the portrait's title. The richly patterned skirt and the turn of the head for maximum display of the back-tied headwrap (known in the Antilles as a foulard) invite the question of whether she is depicted as she actually appears, or is she the staging of an idea? The preponderance of her representational details, together with the paired clothed vs nude images, suggest that Nadar, despite the modernity of his medium, has sustained a representation of the black woman, even if one resident in Paris, as the exoticized other.

In his attempt to paint modern life as he sees it, Manet seems to puzzle with the evolving modes of self-representation he might have observed in the sartorial choices of Laure and other blacks he encountered. To a much greater extent than Nadar's Maria, he depicts a hybridity, a blend of French and Antillaise influences, A comparison of Manet's Laure with images from popular culture and fashions of the day can help evaluate the assumption that Laure is a representation, albeit an abstracted and intermediated one, of a modern black woman who is presented as she might appear in the daily life of 1860s Paris.

One body of contextual images for Manet's Laure comprises contemporaneous ethnographic portraits made in multiple mediums, but especially in sculpture and photography. These images can perhaps help ascertain what Laure was not intended to represent. When we look at Cordier's 1861 *Capresse des Colonies*, or at photographs presented as images of women from the Antilles, we see stark differences in attire and presentational style. By the time of the mid-century rise of the Orientalist style, epitomized in sculpture by Cordier's *Capresse*, the representational norms for the black Other had become part of establishment art. (Image 31) With the meticulous detailing of her ornate metallic armbands, voluptuously draped shawl and allegorical flowers sprouting from her thickly wrapped curls, this figure illustrates the documentary hyper-realism used in Orientalist pictorial values to construct images of the Other that had little to do with contemporary urban reality.¹⁰⁵ This figure was part of a series made to depict various ethnic groups, and female busts were often made and sold in pairs with either a male counterpart or a female of a different ethnicity—the Metropolitan Museum currently displays this bust with one titled *Jewish Woman of Algiers*.

Laure's minimized foulard, in the characteristic Antilles colors, but no discernible pattern, her understated jewelry and off-the-shoulder white dress contrast sharply with the elaborately patterned and wrapped foulard, dress with all-over patterning in the madras plaids characteristic of the islands, and copious amount of jewelry displayed in an unknown photographer's *La Guadeloupe Historique: Costume porté par la plupart des femmes du pays*. (Image 31) This photograph has far more in common with the similarly prominent headdress, braided coiffure and metal armband of Cordier's North African

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of this sculpture as an exemplification of Cordier's ethnographically informed imagery, see *Facing the Other* by Laure de Margerie et al, 2004: 54-80.

goatherder. Manet seems to respectfully evoke Laure's ethnicity and cultural origins, but to de-emphasize the strongest signifiers of this background.

A set of photographic portraits by anthropologist Jacques-Philippe Potteau provides images of black women said to be residents of Paris. (Image 17, 32) The paired images, posed in profile and frontally, of women like Louise Kuhling suggest the ethnographic roots of Nadar's paired Maries. Kuhling's impassive expression and rigid posture imply that the purpose was to display the clothing, the hairstyle, the physiognomy of the sitter, but not to reveal a specific personality. Although she gazes toward the viewer, it is from a distance, unlike Laure, that is too great to allow an immediacy of connection. She is an ethnographic type.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, Potteau's portraits of the young Marie Lassus, a 19-year-old student in Paris from New Orleans, captures the young woman's youthful curiosity, well-groomed coiffure and fashionable attire in a less wooden manner. Her simple two-tiered earrings and jewelry are very similar to those worn by Manet's Laure.¹⁰⁷

The fact that the women in each of Potteau's portraits are bareheaded suggests that black women in 1860s Paris did not necessarily wear the foulard when wearing ordinary daywear. A well-known ship-boarding song, *Adieu foulard, adieu madras*,

¹⁰⁶ Blanchard's *La France Noire* asserts Potteau's anthropological approach, which documents appearance but does not attempt the portraitist's objective of capturing the defining essence of an individual. (2012: 49)

¹⁰⁷ Selected images of Potteau's 1860-69 *Collection anthropologique* appear on the Musée d'Orsay website with images from BNF's *Gallica Bibliothèque Numérique*, with a note that "A choice of ethnographic photographs and daguerreotypes by the photographers Louis Rousseau, Jacques-Philippe Potteau and Henri Jacquart, exactly contemporary with Cordier's work and from the collections of the photographic library of the Musée de l'Homme, establishes a parallel between sculpture and photography, both used as tools at the service of nascent ethnology." Louise Kuhling is described on the BNF site as a "35 ans. négresse, née à Norfolk, de parents venant du Congo. Amenée en France par Mr le Commandant Louvet. Amérique du Nord. Créoles" while Marie Lassus is identified as "19 ans. Née à la Nouvelle-Orléans. Père parisien et mère noire Amérique du Nord. Créoles."

sung at departure celebrations for migrants leaving the Antilles for Paris, seems to celebrate an end to wearing the foulard upon embarkment.¹⁰⁸ (Image 33) However, the foulard may well have been, as earlier discussed, part of a workplace “uniform,” required by affluent employers of domestic workers in order to flaunt their ability to afford presumably more expensive staff from distant lands. A domestic worker wearing a foulard would thus project the same significations as a household maid wearing a crisp white apron over a black dress would connote today. This uniform could also be an asset for stage actresses (like Jeanne Duval) or to draw customers and extract higher prices in the sex and entertainment industries. It is possible, therefore, that Manet minimized Laure’s foulard after observing such dualities of preference and practice, perhaps in recognition that the model donned it specifically for the pose.

While there is no sign that Manet looked to popular culture as a point of reference, it is useful to understand that Manet’s matter-of-fact, depictions of Laure had little in common with the stereotypes prevalent in popular culture. Black women were invariably depicted in the mass media wearing an elaborate foulard –which was sometimes slightly askew when the intended connotation was laziness on the job, or stealing time from employers for personal pursuits –together with hoop earrings and simple low-cut dresses. (Images 34-36) In one example of this stereotype, a series of ads for La Silenceuse sewing machine in 1863 includes a cartoon showing Cora the seamstress –who borrows her mistress’s sewing machine to make herself a dress for the domestic workers’ ball; in the same year, a witty comic-book-like story of the pre-marital amorous conquests of a young aristocrat includes a black maid wearing exotic pantaloons

¹⁰⁸ From *Les Antillais d’Ici: Les métro-caraibéens*” by Samia Messaoudi and Mehdi Lallaoui, revised by Céline Bonneau (Ile de France: Au Nom de la Mémoire, Bezons, 2009)

with her blouse, above a caption “Aime bon blanc, lui pas aime bonne noire.”¹⁰⁹ The facial expression of these characters is often frozen in a sly grin, underscoring the idea that they are somehow engaged in an illicit activity.

It is finally through a comparative analysis of fashion plates and costume history that we can most securely situate Manet’s depiction of Laure in the space of a modern black Parisian woman, working as an entertainer or servant, who adopts a culturally hybrid mix of personal attire that may retain the foulard, but minimizes it to bands of color without fetishizing its ethnic specificity. A series of visual comparisons allows us to place Manet’s Laure as more an individual, a figure of still-evolving modernity, than a symbolic type; she is an individual who is observed from daily life in Manet’s 1860s Paris. We can then turn to costume analysis to situate her more specifically within that milieu and gain more insight into the observed reality that Laure might represent.

An attempt to stylistically place the delicate upright neck ruffle, off-the-shoulder neckline and loosely fitted full sleeves of Laure’s dress/blouse is especially engaging.¹¹⁰ (Images 37-38) The specific style of the neckline ruffle, which is bordered at the seam with a thin satin ribbon, is almost identical to one reconstituted by Harran.

¹⁰⁹ From archival copies of the Paris revue *La Vie Parisienne*. A manual review of a complete set of this periodical for the year 1863 revealed several such stereotypical depictions of blacks; this satirical journal also included caricatures of numerous other “types” from across the spectrum of Paris social classes. Also see Hanson (1977: 99).

¹¹⁰ I found no histories of Second Empire costume that specifically addressed Antilles styles, although depictions of attire worn by working class vs affluent women were available, as was a delineation of daytime and evening wear. Antilles-based publications focused mainly on the 20th century. Nathalie Harran was the costume historian who seemed to give the most detailed treatment to working-class women’s styles, but mainly in photographed reconstitutions of dresses, in *La Femme sous le Second Empire* (Editions Errance, Paris, 2010). Harran describes the crinoline, for which democratized access was a product of the Industrial Revolution, as a symbol of modernity during this period. I reviewed relatively few fashion plates, assuming that this would not be fruitful given their couture orientation.

But the latter is the bodice of a ballgown whose fitted bouffant sleeve treatment is quite different from Laure's more loosely structured one, and whose diaphanous fabric is fancier than Laure's linen-like textures. Laure clearly does not wear the more tailored day dress styles, with kerchief or neck ribbon, seen in Baudelaire's sketch of Duval, in the Potteau ethnographic portraits, or even in her own depiction as a nursemaid in *Children in the Tuileries*. Neither does she wear the picturesque floral prints of Nadar's overtly exoticized Maria.

Stand-alone Portrait or Study for Olympia?

A closer similarity with Laure's attire is evident in the fashions of Parisian grisettes, who were extensively sketched by Constantin Guys, the flaneur artist who inspired Baudelaire's *Painter of Modern Life*. (Image 38) There is a similar matte finish and linen-like consistency of the fabric, and similarly monochromatic color tones, including a match with the creamy hues of Laure's dress. Her bodice is a close match with the grisette's lightly ruffled, off-the-shoulder bodice, which attractively displays the arms but covers the bosom. The grisette held moderate ranking within the hierarchy of Parisian demimondaines –elevated above the streetwalker, sometimes maintained in intermittently comfortable style by a handful of loyal male patrons, sometimes working as a shop girl or café waitress, but not yet the grand courtesan who lived luxuriously, held opulent balls and hosted respected salons.¹¹¹

¹¹¹Brombert (1997: 114) describes grisettes' day and evening fashions and occupations in close detail, writing that, as "a girl of working class or lower middle class origins, without the vulgarity of the urban underclass or the coarseness of the proletariat. The term came from the cheap cloth of her dress, tinted in a drab gray. She gave herself generously to artists and students in long-term relationships and became the melodramatic heroine of fictional and operatic renderings of romantic life. Eventually abandoned, often tubercular, she rarely reached the age of

We can conclude from this comparative analysis that Laure's dress is a conflation of Antillean references and a creamier toned version of the grisette attire found within the Paris demimonde. This style, combined with her foulard, would be consistent with the "uniform" of a woman employed in the entertainment or sex industry, part of whose job, perhaps, is to perform the erotic connotations of women of Antillaise origin. All of this could be seen to underscore the idea that this portrait is a study for Manet's *Olympia*.

But other formal aspects mark it as a portrait in its own right.¹¹² The figure's frontal placement differs from the profile view of the maid in *Olympia*. It remains unclear whether she's a servant, entertainer or prostitute. Beyond the grisette styling, there is nothing suggestive about her dress –not only are her breasts covered, but there is no exposed cleavage –it is a modest neckline that draws attention upwards to her face. Finally, in the facial features, Laure engages the viewer with a close-up immediacy and direct gaze atypical of a preparatory sketch, or of the more distanced portrayals of ethnographic subjects. For these reasons, we might conclude that this is a standalone portrait.

A final set of comparisons bolsters this stand-alone portrait conclusion. During the same period, Manet made a portrait of Victorine Meurent, the intended model for the prostitute in *Olympia*, that manifests an uncanny stylistic equivalence with the Laure

30, and even more rarely escaped from her miserable garret to the opulence enjoyed by the well-kept cocotte.”

¹¹² The title *La Nègresse* is consistently used for this painting throughout the literature, from the Leenhoff cahiers assembled shortly after Manet's 1883 death to his archivist Tabarant in 1947 and virtually all modern writers. Two writers who, in addition to Pollock, have to my knowledge used the title *Portrait of Laure* are Anne Coffin Hanson, in *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (1977: 99 and Figure 73) and Hugh Honour, who uses *Portrait de la Nègresse Laure* in *Image of the Black in Western Art* (1989: 204).

portrait. (Images 39-41) If Laure is a deep brown form set against a lighter background, Victorine's pale flesh tones are set against a background of browns matching Laure's skin tones. The thinner paler tonalities of Laure's shoulders, sometimes seen to mark the painting as unfinished, are in fact a characteristic of Manet's flattened painting style that can also be seen in Victorine's hair (as well as in the treatment of hands and garments in many other Manet portraits.) And while Laure wears the attire of the grisette circulating around the entertainment or sex industries, Victorine's string-colored dress, in more true-to-life gray tones, is that of the grisette working in a shop, perhaps as a milliner or glove-maker. Artists like Delacroix or Nadar, more engaged with visualizing empire, created pairs of paintings of the same model that implied her ready sexual availability. Manet appears to have created a pair of paintings that portray two versions of the Parisian grisette who earns her living in spaces of modern life. Focused resolutely on depicting modern life in all its variations, he nevertheless gives individuality to his types. This practice was apparent toward the end of Manet's career, as he again portraitized the model Suzon, a barmaid he recruited to re-enact her role in his studio for *Bar at the Folies Bergere*. (Image 41)

We thus see the portrait of Laure, despite the significations of her ethnic specificity, as fully equivalent to Manet's portraits of other models for his most famous paintings, and within the context of Manet's other 1862 portraits of outsiders. The portraits of Victorine and Suzon are universally acknowledged as such, in titles that immortalize their names. The formal equivalence of the Laure and Victorine portraits, and Manet's recording of Laure's name, make a compelling case for ending the marginalizing conventions of the *La Nègresse* title. These facts suggest that this painting

should be named *Portrait of Laure*, as a standalone portrait of comparable rank with those of Manet's other important models.

This analysis has attempted to situate Manet's portrait of Laure within a broader lineage of representations of black women in the single figure format, not just in the fine art paintings made for the Salon, but in images from popular culture and the *soi-disant* scientific observation of anthropology. It is a de-Orientalized, or de-exoticized, image, with the hybridity of its Antilles and French stylistic influences placing her as a black woman in modern 1860s Paris. The indistinct treatment of the body, produced by Manet's loose brushstrokes, revises the revealing display of breasts seen in the Benoist, Delacroix, Carpeaux and Cordier precedents, and in popular media caricatures. The sitter engages with the viewer with a slightly quizzical affect that projects a specific and modestly engaging personality that could not be more different than the vacant smirk that is a fixture on the stereotyped faces of black women depicted in popular culture. Unlike all of these precedents except Delacroix, the artist made a point of recording the model's name for posterity. Unlike Delacroix, Manet was able to dissociate his model's "beauty" from her sexual attributes, and to present her as a distinct personality. Laure is therefore depicted with understated realism as an individual, a presence in working class Paris, rather than as a symbolic other, existing wholly outside modern French society. The radicalism of her representation is first evident in the formal simplicity of her representation, and second in its singular iconography in the face of depictions of black women in Salon precedent and the popular media. Like its companion portrait of Victorine, it is a standalone work of art. It is a prelude to, but much more than a mere study for, Laure's next pose in the dual-figured painting *Olympia*.

CHAPTER TWO

Laure of *Olympia* : Metonymy and Hybridity in an Emergent Black Paris

In early 1863, Manet resumed his work with the two models Victorine Meurent and Laure, but this time transforming their images from the mode of portraiture to that of performance. In the painting later known as *Olympia*, each model posed a role emblematic of modern life -- Victorine as the unsentimental prostitute who was rapidly replacing the deferential Renaissance-style courtesan and Laure as a representation of the changing racial composition of the Parisian working class. (Image 42) While Manet's *Portrait of Laure* was a clearly empathetic portrayal, Manet positioned her as Olympia's maid with seeming ambivalence. In this pose, Laure is again clad in de-Orientalized attire reflecting hybrid French and Antillaise influences. Yet the overall effect, on first impression, is very different.

On the one hand, Laure in *Olympia* has a centered placement on the pictorial plane, well-positioned to be a focal point of interest. But other details conspire to exactly the opposite effect, and the figure's modernizing features are all but obliterated for many viewers. Still, with sustained attention, the figure of Laure in *Olympia* reveals a metonymy, a duality of overt tradition and sublimated innovation. The figure evokes stock types, yet remains apart from then-prevalent modes of stereotyping, while being wholly consistent with the formal devices of modernist painting.

The Maid as Modernity: A Revision of Precedent

During the mid-nineteenth century, Manet's friend the writer Charles Baudelaire equated social change with modern life in Paris, and exhorted artists to make this their

subject.¹¹³ The art histories covering the period have generally echoed this theme through to the present day. T. J. Clark stated that a defining characteristic of modernity in 1860s Paris was the breakdown of long-established bourgeois behavioral norms, including a shift of recreational activities from private to public venues and a more overt presence of prostitution within society.¹¹⁴ Manet's representation of the prostitute figure of *Olympia* has long been understood to be the crux of this discontinuity. Clark provides a comprehensive iconographic lineage for the prostitute and documents the extensive critical and artistic commentary about this figure, which he concluded was "the main representation of modernity in 1860s Paris;" but he asserted that the maid figure, while "modern," ultimately meant "nothing."¹¹⁵

Yet a close formal analysis of the painting, as well as a broader examination of the multiple contexts within which *Olympia* was created, titled and displayed, combine to strongly suggest that Manet depicted the black maid to be a second focal point of disruptive modernity. This doubled lack of fixity in pictorial style and content, and the

¹¹³ As previously discussed, Baudelaire's essay "The Painter of Modern Life" articulates the necessity that the artist chronicle changes in socio-economic structures present in the society of his own time rather than looking to the past for inspiration. T. J. Clark characterizes Manet as the prototypical modernist painter precisely because his oeuvre insistently maintained such a focus. In "Olympia's Choice" in *The Painter of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Revised Edition, Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1984.

¹¹⁴ Clark, *ibid.*, 1984: 105-107.

¹¹⁵ Clark's discussion of *Olympia* focused almost exclusively on an exegesis of the figure and social context of the prostitute, whom he considered to be the single focal point of interest. *Ibid.*, Clark 1984: 69, 93, 146. See the Introduction to this dissertation for an extended excerpt of his subsequent comments about that approach. As also summarized in my Introduction, few art historians have discussed the Laure figure to any significant degree. Still, as cited in this chapter, texts by writers including Griselda Pollock, Françoise Cachin and Jennifer DeVere Brody, together with the works of art and commentary by generations of modern and contemporary artists, provide insightful interpretations of this figure. This work is central to the analysis that I develop herein. I also consider the preceding interpretation of the *Portrait of Laure* to be part of the analysis of *Olympia*, since the discussion of the formation of a hybrid culture among free blacks in Manet's Paris, and its manifestations in attire, are integral to this analysis of *Olympia*.

resulting instability of their claim on viewer attention, was crucial to both the modernity of Manet's *Olympia* and the negative initial response it provoked on its first showing at the 1865 Salon. Manet's work manifests his preference to depict contemporary life in a manner influenced by realism, rather than in the classicizing style of Orientalist history paintings. He thus maintains, even intensifies, the same de-Orientalized cultural hybridity of Laure's depiction as seen in his *Portrait of Laure*, sartorially defining her in *Olympia* not as an exoticized foreigner but as a working class Parisian. Manet's continuing fealty to truths observed during his routine encounters with women of color, whether as passersby in the park (*Children of the Tuileries*) or in social contacts (his portrait of Jeanne Duval), can be seen as an early modern artistic representation of the emerging cultural hybridity, defined by Maryse Condé a century and a half later, of the free black community then staking out a place in his northern Paris neighborhood.¹¹⁶ The root of *Olympia*'s unstable reception can thus be seen as a discontinuity, not just with pictorial and iconographic traditions of academic painting, but also a rupture with the rigid divisions of ethnic representation found in precedents of academic painting as well as in popular culture. As Jennifer DeVere Brody points out, "how we see is determined by conventions of translation... one's "theory" of the ways in which art performs directly impacts how art is read."¹¹⁷ Manet's modernity can thus be located within a modern mode of artistic spectacle that, as Crary says, "takes us outside of a stable circuit of

¹¹⁶ In her 1995 essay "Chercher nos verities," Maryse Condé analyzes the increasing cultural hybridity of the Paris-based Antillean community during the late 20th century, but asserts that such hybridity dated back at least to Aimé Césaire, who 50 years earlier, in his seminal *Cahier d'un retour au pays natale*, asserted that he did not fully belong to any single nationality specified by the world's governments. In *Penser la Creolité (Thinking Creoleness)* edited by Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottentot-Hage (Paris: Karthala), 1995: 305-310.

¹¹⁷ Jennifer DeVere Brody, "Black Cat Fever: Manifestations of Manet's *Olympia*." In *Theatre Journal* Vol. 53, No. 1, March 2001: 97.

visuality to an arrangement where neither the eye nor objects...can be understood in terms of fixed positions and identities.”¹¹⁸

The rupture is evident in even a superficial pictorial comparison of *Olympia* with Titian’s 1538 *Venus of Urbino*, a painting invariably cited as the source for *Olympia*.¹¹⁹ (Image 42) Manet produces a flattening of spatial depth that refuses the perspectival visual system evident in the Titian work, as he forecloses the view into the room with a heavily draped curtain and shadowy tonalities. The scene presented to the observer is that of two figures pushed into the foreground of a shallow two-dimensional space, rather than of a window through which the eye is drawn into an illusion of interior space. This closing off of a view into depth would normally deflect viewer attention from content to surface; it is the materiality of the support that is of compelling interest.

But Manet simultaneously invites viewer interest in *Olympia* through radical revisions of expected stock figure tropes. The depiction of the prostitute transforms one standard by converting Titian’s invitingly diffident courtesan into a confrontational sex-for-pay worker. *Olympia* meets the viewer’s gaze with an assertive stare in place of the demure glance of Venus; her gray-white flesh and thin flattened physiognomy replace the naturalistic tones and voluptuous curves of her Renaissance precedent. Manet’s depiction of the prostitute laid bare the modern reality that prostitution as a sex-for-cash commodity enterprise was supplanting the tradition of the cosseted and

¹¹⁸ Crary delineates between traditional (close and sustained) and modern (superficial and distracted) modes of viewing, and their impact on the communion between the subject matter and the viewer, in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1999: 3, 87. His comments on the necessity of pictorial novelty for sustained attention, but also the thwarting of attention caused by pictorial blankness, are especially relevant to this discussion of *Olympia*.

¹¹⁹ Clark, “*Olympia*’s Choice,” 1984: 93 and Rubin (1999:65) are among the writers who make this attribution; Juliet Wilson Bareau (1986: 44) includes an image of an early Manet copy of the Titian.

discreet courtesan who existed outside the money economy—and therefore was a key factor disrupting the fixity of the social classes in modern Paris life.

The maid figure is also presented in a revisionary manner. While the *Urbino* maid is hieratically much smaller than the courtesan, the *Olympia* maid assumes a spatial dimension nearly equivalent to that of the prostitute. And while clearly positioned behind and subordinate to the prostitute, Manet's maid is also placed frontally, and more in the foreground of the picture plane, in contrast to her Titian counterpart's placement well into background depth. The greater equivalence between the two figures in *Olympia* sets up a counterbalancing relationship between them on purely formal terms—the maid's blackness is heightened by the prostitute's whiteness and vice versa—with the effect, for many critics, of transferring a racist connotation of uncleanness and illicit sexuality from the black maid to the white prostitute: beginning with Manet's friend Emile Zola's review of *Olympia* at the Salon, this is the primary context in which the maid has been historicized, if mentioned at all.¹²⁰ Still, the maid's forward placement may also suggest an intentionality by Manet that his figuring of the maid is to be an object of viewer attention in its own right.

This impression is heightened by Manet's second revision, centered on the style of the maid figure's attire, aspects of which extend the sharp break, seen in the earlier *Portrait of Laure*, with conventional images of black women in nineteenth century

¹²⁰ See Stephane Guégan's exposition, exceptionally in some length, of Zola's formalism, and a rejection of its failure to take content into account, in the Musée d'Orsay's catalog for its exhibition *Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity* (2011: 136-137). One of the most extensive treatments of this formalist binary can be found in the riveting Griselda Pollock essay discussing Manet's images of Laure, Jeanne Duval and Berthe Morisot – see “A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet,” in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge), 1999.

French art. The maid wears a bulky white dress of a vaguely European style, not the brightly patterned, seductively draped and exotically styled garment typically seen in precedent paintings depicting a black woman within a space of sex labor, such as Delacroix's Orientalist icon *Women of Algiers*. (Image 46) This European garment, in combination with the Antillean headscarf, or foulard, here even smaller and more sketchily painted than that in Laure's portrait, captures a *creolité* that is defined in direct opposition to the elaborately wrapped and boldly patterned turban of the Delacroix painting. This simple headwrap disrupts one of the most consistent attributes of the black female's exoticization in nineteenth century French art. The highly defined scarf is visible in precedent paintings whether the black woman is posed as a maid in a harem by Delacroix or by Benoist as an emblem of liberty after the first (and soon aborted) emancipation of French slavery in 1800. But as with *the Portrait of Laure*, Manet depicts republican modernity in *Olympia*, not the Romanticized exoticism of empire. Its blend of European and Antillean influences in the garb of a black woman is an early representation of the *créolité* of the black woman resident in Paris.

It is of even greater importance to this figure's revisionary depiction that the breasts of Olympia's maid are fully covered and only vaguely detailed. As with the portrait, this treatment supercedes the bared breast and suggestively delineated curves that were a standard aspect of images of black women in 19th century French art. As seen in the work of Benoist, Nadar, Delacroix, Cordier and Carpeaux, this iconography was deployed regardless of the work's style, medium or intended meaning.

Abolitionist Aesthetics and Republican Sentiment

This context makes clear the extent of Manet's transgressive formulation of the maid figure as a black member of the French proletariat. This, like the portrait, constitutes a clear break with her dramatically articulated and exotically attired predecessors, whose attributes clearly establish them as residents of remote colonies or as emblems of political ideals. Manet's depiction of the maid in *Olympia* is therefore among the early images in Salon painting in which an image of a black woman is de-Orientalized, and portrayed not as an exoticized foreigner but in a modern way, as part of the working class of Paris.

Whether intentional or not, Manet's sartorial choice for Laure in *Olympia* perhaps has stronger affinities with abolitionist works by contemporaneous artists of color than with his Paris colleagues. This is visible when Manet's Laure is compared to a very different visualization of abolitionist sentiment, in *Forever Free* by the African-American sculptor Edmonia Lewis. (Image 47) By 1864, Lewis had settled in Rome, where she maintained a studio for decades, and was known to do commissioned work for abolitionists both in the US and in Europe. Lewis spent extended periods in Paris, including a visit to research the 1867 Exposition Universelle's display of Egyptian artifacts.¹²¹ The young woman depicted in *Forever Free* blends the dramatic gesture and pose of traditionally rendered figures like the Carpeaux *Why Born a Slave?* together with modestly covered Western attire similar to that of Manet's Laure. While there is

¹²¹ Kirsten Pai Buick discusses Lewis' interest in Egyptian art in relation to her sculpture *Death of Cleopatra*, finished in 1875 after several years' work, in *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2010. In the 1890s, Lewis was a friend of the African American painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, a Paris-based expatriate who showed at the Salon.

no known contact between Lewis and Manet's artistic circle, Manet's approach to the attire of his black model is more akin to the subject position of this expatriate American artist of black and Native American ancestry than to the imagery of Carpeaux, a fellow Frenchman working in an academically sanctioned style. This affinity can perhaps best be attributed to their shared abolitionist sentiment—Lewis' in the context of the antislavery movement, Manet's a more abstract belief embedded in his strong republicanism.¹²²

This contrarian practice of covered European attire for black female subjects also resonates with artistic depictions of events leading to the liberation and abolition in the French colonies. The best-known freedom-themed painting by a French artist of color was the monumental *Oath of Our Ancestors*, by Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, who was born in Guadeloupe to a French colonial officer and his enslaved mistress.¹²³ (Image 48) Painted in 1822, the work captures a scene from the 1804 revolution that led to Haiti's independence, in which the mulatto leader Alexandre Pétion and his black counterpart Jean-Jacques Dessalines unite forces to defeat the French. This scene of unity and liberation features several vague figures in the background, including a black woman in a headwrap to the right, who is fully clothed.

¹²² Philip Nord, *Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Routledge), 2000: 31-34.

¹²³ Journalistic accounts in the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, and the American Historical Society's February 2012 on-line feature, note that this painting, lost until it was rediscovered in the cathedral of Port-au-Prince in 1991, had been restored by French museum conservators in 1998, then exhibited at the Louvre before returning to Haiti. It hung in the Presidential Palace, where it was seriously damaged during the earthquake; restoration is again being handled by French conservators but the two governments agreed that this time it was to be carried out on location in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince.

This idea is far more elaborated in French artist Francois Auguste Biard's 1849 painting, *Proclamation de l'Abolition des Esclavages dans les colonies Françaises* (27 avril 1848). (Image 47) This history painting, with presumably unintended irony, is problematic in that it deploys the stock pictorial elements of pre-modernist representations of empire –generic figures, sweeping gestures –to depict a scene of colonial liberation. It also, in keeping with the programmatic norms of the genre, represents abolition as a magnanimous gesture by Europe, personified by the man at center lifting his top hat, proclamation in hand, before Antilleans swooning in presumed gratitude. There is no allusion to the importance of colonial subjects' own actions –from the Haitian revolution to repeated Martiniquaise revolts --in securing their freedom. Biard's attention to details of attire, perhaps rooted in the period's ethnographic impulses, depicts almost all black women with the foulard, but those posed as slaves being freed on the left are barebreasted, while those newly freed on the right are fully covered. The painting's sartorial distinction between enslaved and free black women documents a reality that Biard could have observed during his two-year residency in Brazil.

Manet noted the attire of enslaved black women based on his own first-hand observations, during a trip to Brazil as a 16-year-old rebelling against his father's pressure to attend law school. Manet's father, a prominent jurist, consented to the voyage, in which Manet joined a group of other well-born boys for a merchant ship ocean crossing in preparation for a naval career, in the ultimately futile hope of deterring Manet's aspirations to become an artist.¹²⁴

Although Manet traveled in 1848, the year of the second and final abolition in French territories, slavery did not end in Brazil until 1850. Manet described his

¹²⁴ Brombert, *Manet: Rebel in a Frock Coat*, 1996: 15-16.

encounters with various aspects of the institution in letters sent back to Paris, mainly to his mother, during the ocean crossing and while in Brazil.¹²⁵ The neutral racial tone of these notes first becomes apparent in letters sent from aboard the ship on the voyage to Brazil, in which he noted that the shipmate charged with both tutoring and disciplining the ship's servant boys was a black man. Manet simply notes that the man is black as he recounts various aspects of shipboard life, without further comment about that fact. He focuses instead on describing the man's responsibilities:

“Nous avons 26 hommes à bord dont un cuisinier et un maître d'hôtel nègre. . . . Nous avons pour nous servir quatre pauvres petits mousques et deux novices. . . . Notre maître d'hôtel, qui est nègre, comme je te l'ai dit, et qui est chargé de leur éducation, leur flanque de fameuses roulées quand. . . .”¹²⁶

These comments are an indication that, from early on, Manet when confronted with racial difference, remained in his typical mode of close and objective observation. His interest was to understand and depict what he saw, without the casual, reflexive racially based disparagement that typified the era, as revealed in Alexandre Dumas *pere*'s accounts of his personal experiences in Paris salons. Manet's comments show a mix of curiosity, empathy and negative attitudes toward blacks that are fully reflective of republican thinking during the era. At one point he remarks, when describing the black women he encountered in the streets of Rio:

¹²⁵Complete texts of all extant letters from this trip are included in *Edouard Manet Lettres de Jeunesse: 1848-1849 Voyage à Rio*, (Paris: Louis Rouart et Fils), 1928. All excerpts from Manet's letters during the Brazil trip are based on this source.

¹²⁶ “We have 26 men on board, including a chef and a Negro maître d'hotel. We're looked after by four poor little ship's boys and two apprentices. . . . Our maître d'hotel, who is a Negro as I told you, and is responsible for their training, gives them a terrible licking if [they don't behave].” As translated in *Manet by Himself: correspondence and conversation, paintings, pastels, prints & drawings*, edited by Juliet Wilson Bareau. (Boston: Little, Brown), 1991: 15-16.

“La population est au trois quarts nègre, ou mulâtre, cette partie est généralement affreuse sauf quelques exceptions parmi les négresses et les mulâtres; ces dernières sont presque toutes jolies.”¹²⁷

Present-day readers may well note with rue the continuity of these views in some veins of current attitudes about race and beauty.

Yet Manet in the same passage goes on to state his disgust upon witnessing a slave market: “j’ai vu un marché d’esclaves, c’est un spectacle assez revoltant pour nous.” (“I saw a slave market, and it’s a rather revolting sight for us’); he then expresses his general antipathy for slavery in commenting that “in this country, all the black people are slaves; they all look downtrodden and the whites have power over them that is truly extraordinary to us.”

The young Manet again reveals his penchant for discerning observation with his detailed description of what he saw at the slave markets, noting that the men being sold wore pantaloons and a light jacket but were denied shoes. The young Manet is especially detailed in his close descriptions of the details of the enslaved women’s attire:¹²⁸

“...les negresses sont...pour la plupart nues jusqu’à la ceinture, quelques-unes ont un foulard attaché au cou et tombant sur la poitrine...elles se mettent avec beaucoup de recherché. Les unes se font des turbans, les autres arrangent très artistement leur cheveux crepus et elles portent presque toutes des jupons ornés de monstrueux volants.”

¹²⁷ Manet, *Lettres à Jeunesse*, 1928: 58. I translate this passage as: “The population [of Rio] is three-quarters black or mulatto; they are generally ugly, except for some exceptions among the black and mulatto women, the latter of whom are almost always pretty.”

¹²⁸ Edouard Manet, *Lettres à Jeunesse: 1848-1849 Voyage à Rio*. (Paris: Louis Rouart et Fils), 1928: 52. As translated, with my additions to passages from Wilson Bareau (1991: 22): “The Negresses are generally naked to the waist; some with a scarf tied at the neck and falling over their breasts....They dress with a great deal of care. Some wear turbans, others do their frizzy hair in very artistic styles and almost all wear petticoats adorned with monstrous flounces.”

The straightforwardness, on balance, of Manet's teenage descriptions of black Brazilians suggests that even at the age of 16, Manet displayed an innate respect for the humanity, and at times creativity, of individual enslaved blacks whom he encountered. Manet, though an avid republican, was no activist challenging the social order. Yet he respected individuals' personal dignity regardless of their station in life. These teenage letters foretold an empathy also seen in his portrayals decades later of downtrodden Parisian figures such as the model for *Absinthe Drinker* as a street philosopher.

Manet's letters from Rio can only serve to reinforce a sense that Manet's decision to present Laure as fully clothed was a turn to modernity. He was fully aware of exactly how to depict a slave woman –she would have to be bare-breasted, as he had seen in Brazil. In choosing not to disrobe Laure, and to de-emphasize or omit the elaborate hair, jewelry and full skirt, he is doing so not out of derision –he described the slaves' attire in a respectful, even admiring manner. He makes these choices because he intends to represent Laure not in a distant scenario of empire, subjugation and slavery, but as a free participant in the everyday life of modern Paris.

Thus the Laure of *Olympia* can in the first instance be seen as a still more evolved manifestation of Manet's republican sentiments than the *Portrait of Laure*. We saw earlier in Carpeaux a lingering fidelity to the representation of black women in terms of hypersensuality and exoticism, a residual representation of empire, even in abolitionist artworks. Manet, to the contrary, pulls back from those tropes –with minimized headscarf and jewelry, with French rather than 'exotic' garb. Manet represents Laure, even in the context of a brothel maid, more as a worker than as an exoticized fantasy. Her loose, full-sleeved, pinkish cream attire seems to place her in the space of a sex

worker, like the women seen in extant photographs made at brothels in the decades surrounding Manet's time. (Image 50) A simple fact of life in the first fifteen years after slavery is that brothels were one of the few employment options for young black women in Paris, and extant photos indicate that they worked both as servants and as prostitutes. Laure, in *Olympia*, is on the job. But the pared down creamy tones, and the barely discernible foulard, also place her in the realm of cultural hybridity, the sartorial space of blending Antillaise and European influences as a free black in Paris; it is an image of pragmatic realism, not of an exotic fantasy sex object.

Costume comparisons bear this out. Laure's attire is on the one hand similar to that in available images of brothel attire; it is also not unlike the nightrobe styles of a respectable French woman in her boudoir. (Image 51) Manet was surely aware of the commonplace erotic connotations projected onto the black female figure, yet he does not sexualize Laure.¹²⁹ As Pollock writes, "Manet does not, at least, inflict the wound of exposure on Laure. When we look at this painting, we do not have to ignore the sitter's feelings in order to be able to bear looking at her at all."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ted Reff provides a succinct account of the history of this racist stereotype in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European commentary, ranging from the Abbé Raynal's supposition in 1775 of "an ardor of temperament which gives them a power to arouse and experience the most burning raptures" and J.J. Virey's pseudo-scientific assertion, in his widely read 1824 *Histoire Naturelle du genre humain* that "Negresses carry voluptuousness to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate [because] their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites" to Gustave Flaubert's entry "negresses. More passionate than white women...", in his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, posthumously published in 1911. Reff notes that at least Flaubert made clear "how ridiculous he thought such comparisons were." In *Manet: Olympia* (New York: Viking Press), 1977: 92-93. Reff makes the useful point that the figure of the white prostitute herself also drew widespread derisive descriptions of "primitive barbarity and ritual animality;" while the maid is clearly subordinate to the prostitute, she underscores the misogynistic connotations already associated with the prostitute. This underscores my suggestion that Manet intended a certain pictorial equivalence between the two figures in *Olympia*, rather than a focus solely on the prostitute.

¹³⁰ Pollock, *Differencing the Canon* (2001: 301)

The inverse of this seemingly respectful treatment, however, is the fact that Manet, despite modernizing Laure, appears to also embrace pictorial devices that for many viewers obliterate her. On the one hand, Manet describes Laure as “très belle négresse,” and renders her as such in her portrait. On the other hand, in *Olympia*, he appears to place the figure squarely within agendas of marginalization, servitude and sexual undesirability. As Lorraine O’Grady writes, pictorial conventions then were that:

“[the non-white woman is] castrata and whore...her place exists outside of what can be conceived of as woman. She is the chaos that must be excised and it is her excision that stabilizes the West’s construct of the female body...Thus, only the white body remains as the object of a voyeuristic, fetishizing, male gaze. The nonwhite body has been made opaque by a blank stare.”¹³¹

This critique clearly reflects the widespread audience reception of the Laure figure in *Olympia* across generations—from the racist stereotyping in 1865 Salon reviews to the late 1900s postmodernist “recoil” that Anne Higonnet describes, as discussed earlier, in reviewing O’Grady’s work on Baudelaire and Jeanne Duval. In order to unpack the perceived marginalization of *Olympia*’s Laure, it is useful to attempt to examine indications of Manet’s intentionality for the figure, as well as the ways in which varying modes of viewing *Olympia*, during and after the 1865 Salon, may have impacted various observers’ perspectives.

Manet’s Intentionality: The Duality of the Baudelairean Muse

Manet remained enigmatic about his intentionality for *Olympia*; he wrote very little about it. The most commonly cited indicator is an excerpt of a poem written by his friend, Zacharie Astruc, that Manet submitted to the 1865 Salon as the only

¹³¹ Lorraine O’Grady, “Olympia’s Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity” in Grant Kester, ed, *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press), 1998: 3.

descriptive text to be included with the exhibition catalog's listing of *Olympia*.¹³²

“When weary of dreaming, Olympia awakes,
Spring enters in the arms of a gentle black messenger
It is the slave, like the amorous night,
Who comes to make the day bloom, delicious to see:
The august young girl in whom the fire burns.”

These words themselves, however, lack any fixed meaning. They may seem to offer validation for negating the maid by the poem's equation of the “gentle black messenger” with “slave.” But the irony of Olympia's description as “august,” when Manet pictures her as anything but, can also extend to the use of the term “slave” fifteen years after abolition. As we have seen, Manet, who clearly knew from his time in Brazil how to depict the attire of an enslaved black woman, just as clearly did not choose to present Laure in such attire.¹³³

It is moreover unclear that Manet himself actually named the painting *Olympia*, as evidence suggests that it was Astruc who named it just before the 1865 Salon opening. Sandblad cites an 1865 letter in which Baudelaire refers to the painting by describing it, as “the painting representing the woman with the *négresse* and the cat,” without mentioning the name Olympia.¹³⁴ This suggests that, even though the painting was

¹³² Clark, “Olympia's Choice,” 1984: 83, 283.

¹³³ The Pinacoteca Agnelli catalog entry for the *Portrait of Laure* suggests that the model may have been evocative for Manet of during his youthful trip to Brazil. (2002: 68) The fact that he had described in detail the enslaved Brazilian women's enforced nudity, and stated his dismay as a republican over slavery, suggests that his choice to depict Laure fully clothed indicates that he did not intend to portray her as a slave.

¹³⁴ Nils Sandblad notes that Baudelaire had left Paris for Brussels in 1864; given his friendship with Manet and regular visits to the artist's studio, the description in his letter seems to imply that the painting remained unnamed for at least a year after it was painted. In *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception*, (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup) 1954: 97-98. Phyllis Floyd suggests that the flower in Olympia's hair, described as an orchid by Reff and others, is in fact a single-flower

completed in 1863, and remained in Manet's studio until the 1865 Salon -- a two-year period during which Baudelaire regularly visited Manet -- Baudelaire did not think of the painting by the name *Olympia*. Baudelaire's quote, which gives nearly equal weight to the prostitute, maid and cat, also supports an intended formal equivalence of the maid and the prostitute. This is despite the fact that, as earlier discussed, Manet made the painting soon after the opening of his friend Alexandre Dumas *filis*' play *La Dame aux Camelias*, in which the rival of the tragic courtesan heroine is named Olympia. It is possible that, just as Dumas' Olympia was not the lead character, but still central to the narrative, Manet also intended to have *Olympia*'s Laure, even as Olympia's maid, be a figure of more than passing interest.

The painting's potential links to Dumas *filis*, who was of partial African heritage, may also relate to Manet's decision to render the maid as a black woman. The two attendants in Titian's Renaissance-era *Venus of Urbino*, who are sometimes described as gypsies, are transformed as a single black woman, a presence in nineteenth-century French brothels alluded to in some of the poems of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Cachin makes the singular observation that "the importance accorded to the bouquet and its bearer, as essential to the subject as the nude figure, clarifies the enigma of Manet's thought: Olympia is first and foremost a grand painting, and it was meant as such."¹³⁵

camellia, in linking the painting to the Dumas *filis* play *La Dame aux Camelias*, in an online version of her 2004 essay "The Puzzle of Manet."

¹³⁵ Françoise Cachin is one of the few critics to offer a considered, if cryptic, reading of Manet's portrayal of Laure as Olympia's maid, including her important suggestion of its Baudelairean influences, in the exhibition catalogue *Manet* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art), 1983:175, 179. Ted Reff also relates the Laure figure to the Baudelaire poem *A Une Malabaraise*, and more tangentially to his other poems *A une dame creole*, *Bien loin d'ici* and *La Belle Dorothee*. (In *Manet: Olympia*, 1977: 91-92). Cachin and other writers point to the black

She goes on to suggest a correspondence between Manet's "superb" rendering of Laure, as a brothel maid whose carefully painted "elegant" hand rests on her bouquet of flowers, and the "flower-adorned" woman described in a *Fleurs* poem titled *A Une Malabaraise (To a Woman from Malabar)*; yet she is more a "nursemaid-procuress,... not a harem slave."¹³⁶ As with the young Manet's descriptions of black women in Brazil, today's reader may note with ambivalence that while the poet retreads highly offensive stereotypes of the day, he is also uncannily accurate in some of his description of some of the life options faced by the period's women of color.¹³⁷

Still, as a possible personification of the Malabarise, she becomes a version of the muslim-draped grisette seen in the watercolors of Constantin Guys, Baudelaire's prototypical painter of modern life.

cat as the painting's most obvious Baudelairean reference, given its widely known connotations of promiscuity and illicit sex.

¹³⁶ Cachin, *Manet*, *ibid.*, 1983: 179-180.

¹³⁷ Deborah Cherry summarizes commentary by critics including Gaytri Spivak, Griselda Pollock and Christopher Miller, who warns that "the representation of an exoticised, eroticized black femininity in Baudelaire's modernist poems recycles and renews a longstanding trope of western racism." Still, artists Maud Sulter and Lorraine O'Grady, in their work on Jeanne Duval, point out the equally racist (and sexist) basis for the historicization of Duval as "bestialized, stupefied, hated, ugly" and overall a negative influence on Baudelaire—a characterization that contradicts much of the fragmented information still extant about the relationship. See Cherry's discussion of Maud Sulter's work in the Conclusion. Maryse Condé discussed with me her view that Manet's depictions of Laure and Jeanne Duval may be related to different stereotypes found in nineteenth century literature for mulatto women (said to mirror all the weaknesses of both races) in contrast to black women (said to be virtuous and pure); these too are mixed metaphors which can elide negatively with primitivist stereotypes. She mentioned the 1882 novel *La Misère de Paris*, by Louise Michel, as one manifestation of this dichotomy of stereotypes. In a different vein, Anne Coffin Hanson argues that "there is little reason to think that the depiction of Laure in the *Olympia* is "a symbol of primitive passion," in *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (1977: 99). Hanson suggests that Laure's modest uniform is intended to keep her out of the visualization of illicit sex, although she also argues that this is because the focus is on Olympia, and to eroticize Laure would detract from that.

To a Malabar Woman (bold fonts added)

**Your feet are as slender as your hands and your hips
Are broad;** they'd make the fairest white woman jealous;
To the pensive artist your body's sweet and dear;
Your wide, velvety eyes are darker than your skin.

In the hot blue country where your God had you born
It is your task to light the pipe of your master,
To keep the flasks filled with cool water and perfumes,
To drive far from his bed the roving mosquitoes,
And as soon as morning makes the plane-trees sing, to
Buy pineapples and bananas at the bazaar.
All day long your bare feet follow your whims,
And, very low, you hum old, unknown melodies;
And when evening in his scarlet cloak descends,
You stretch out quietly upon a mat and there
Your drifting dreams are full of humming-birds and are
Like you, always pleasant and adorned with flowers.

Why, happy child, do **you wish to see France,**
That over-peopled country which suffering mows down,
And entrusting your life to the strong arms of sailors,
Bid a last farewell to your dear tamarinds?
You, half-dressed in filmy muslins,
Shivering over there in the snow and the hail,
How you would weep for your free, pleasant leisure, if,
With a brutal corset imprisoning your flanks,
You had to glean your supper in our muddy streets
And sell the fragrance of your exotic charms,
With pensive eye, following in our dirty fogs
The sprawling phantoms of the absent coco palms!

—*Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil (1857)*, translated by William Aggeler (Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1954)

Olympia herself, nude except for her jewelry and neck ribbon, is likewise depicted in ways linked to *Fleurs* poems including *Les Bijoux (The Jewels)*:¹³⁸ The text's reference to a Moorish harem supports her pictorial equivalency with Laure:

The Jewels

Knowing my heart, **my dearest one was nude,**
Her resonating jewelry all she wore,
Which rich array gave her **the attitude**
Of a darling in the harem of a Moor....

(translation by James McGowan, Oxford University Press)

Here again, as with Baudelaire's epistolary description of *Olympia*, we see a degree of equivalence between the prostitute and the maid in the poet's words that Manet seems to recreate pictorially in *Olympia*. As a Baudelairean painter of modern life, Manet strives to render archetypal scenes modern. He presents a brothel scene as he sees it in the daily life of Paris, rather than as an exoticized or Renaissance fantasy scene. This was the path, he and Baudelaire believed, to joining the pantheon of great French painters.

This dual motivation, to be in the vanguard yet achieve popular acclaim, could help to explain Manet's profound surprise and dismay at the intensely hostile public reaction to *Olympia*. Manet's ambivalence derived from the impossibility of synthesizing his republicanist recognition of his subjects' equal humanity regardless of social standing with his desire to be an acclaimed painter. This ambivalence, like that seen in Baudelaire's poetry, and in the lived experiences of their friends Dumas *fils* and Jeanne Duval, can be seen as a zeitgeist, a condition of early modernity in the creative expression of 1860s Paris.

¹³⁸ Cachin, *Manet*, 1983: 180.

Michael Fried notes this ambivalence in subsequent Manet works, such as *On the Balcony* in 1868-69, stressing that despite repeated Salon ridicule and rejection throughout his career, it was never Manet's intention to shock, and that he in fact wanted his work to be recognized as quintessentially French to such an extent that he sometimes sublimated aesthetic influences and cultural affinities derived from outside French culture.¹³⁹ Higonnet reinforces the idea of Manet's cross-cultural references by noting the equivalence with which Manet places Japanese and Goya prints on the wall in a portrait of his friend the writer Emile Zola.¹⁴⁰ Fried maintains that Manet reveals admiration for Japanese pictorial values in this painting—the center figure of a standing woman with a parasol displays a Japanese-derived pose and facial detailing, while also masking it with her European-style attire. (Image 44)

Manet's ambivalence could also explain why, after centering Laure as a working Parisian in culturally hybrid everyday attire, an advance from Orientalized exoticism, he then tonally negates this modernizing gesture. This ambivalence can be one explanation for Manet's republican instinct to have Laure personify the modern black woman in Paris, central to everyday life and to the poetry of his friend Baudelaire; but to then overlay her with tropes of racist typcasting given his quest to show at the Salon and be recognized as a great French painter.

¹³⁹ Michael Fried suggests, for example, that the artist highlighted the Dutch inspiration for the male figure in *On the Balcony*, due to critics' links of the Dutch and French styles, but that this Dutch influence would have been less evident if not contrasted with the two other figures who are derived from Japanese and Spanish influences. These latter influences, especially the allusions to Japanese style, are therefore sublimated, since they were then more avant-garde than academically sanctioned. ("Manet's Sources" in *Artforum*, March 1969: 24, 32, 33.)

¹⁴⁰ Higonnet also discusses Fried's efforts, together with Reff, to lead "a generation away from formalist interpretations of Manet's work toward a vision of Manet as an artist who positioned himself in the history of art by citing it profusely." See Anne Higonnet, "Manet and the Multiple," in *The Grey Room*, No. 48, Summer 2012: 104.

Ironically, these conflicted objectives would suggest a metonymy around the figure of Laure that only heightens its interpretive richness. Laure is both an exemplification of a radically modernized black persona while simultaneously constructed to denote the old stereotypes. Laure's indeterminate modernity would simultaneously evade detection by the public Salon exhibition's bourgeois audience, and thus avoid controversy, while meriting admiration from more sophisticated artists and critics.

Modernity and Composition: Laure Constructed and Unbound

While Manet's conflicted motivations present one possible resolution of the conundrum of Laure in *Olympia* --the duality of her modernity but obliteration --there remains the formal materiality of the painted composition. Much of the perception of Laure as a stereotype is rooted in the painting's tonality --Laure is somewhat difficult to discern from the background, especially in print reproductions of *Olympia*, and instead seems blended into it. An analysis of the formal structure of *Olympia*, at different stages of Manet's creative process, reveals a second manifestation of the importance of the draft to the understanding of any finished painting. DeVere-Brody warns, as a theatrical critic, against the fallacy of calling the opening night of a theatrical play the "premiere," given the extent of rehearsals. She notes a similar incompleteness in any history of art which "obscures the process of artmaking in favor of...an artwork's debut. *Olympia*'s drafts, or rehearsals, make plural its origins although we think of it as a singular event."¹⁴¹ This points to the importance of examining the multiple stages of the making of *Olympia*, and of its title, as well as the varying circumstances of its viewership across time.

¹⁴¹ DeVere Brody, "Black Cat Fever," 2001: 3.

We see, for example, that in a preliminary watercolor drawing, Laure is far more firmly represented than in the completed painting, her skin tones more differentiated from the murky wall behind her. (Image 49) This distinctiveness from the background is retained, to a slightly lesser extent, in an 1867 etching in which the darker background tones close off the view into a pictorial depth still visible in the earlier, lighter tones of the wall behind Laure.¹⁴² (Image 49) Its graphic qualities suggest that Manet darkened the space around Laure primarily as part of his flattening of the picture plane, as a modernizing device. The more muted the tonalities of the Laure figure in relation to the background, the flatter the pictorial plane. We also learn from x-ray studies that the scale of Laure's body was reduced from more ample volumes which, like that of Titian's gypsy maid, was closer to Old Master prototypes.¹⁴³ All of this suggests that Manet was not necessarily thinking of stereotyping Laure in blending her in tonally, but instead, to enhance the modernist pictorial style of the image.

Cachin further notes that some of what viewers see in the *Olympia* painting today may also be due simply to a darkening of the painting's tonality with the passage of time.¹⁴⁴ This darkening may contribute to the murky background seen in the plethora of bad reproductive images of *Olympia* that are widely circulated today.

¹⁴² Cachin et al, *Manet* (1983: 185-186). The Metropolitan Museum of Art notes that this etching of *Olympia*, which is in its collection and described as the sixth and final state, was made to illustrate Emile Zola's defense of the painting in a brochure released for Manet's private exhibition in 1867. See Introduction to *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Vol. 6 No.1, Summer 1988: 4.

¹⁴³ As described by Juliet Wilson Bareau in comparing the earlier and later states of the painting of *Olympia*. In *The Hidden Face of Manet: an investigation of the artist's working processes*, (London: The Burlington Magazine), 1986:45.

¹⁴⁴ Cachin, *Manet* (1983: 186)

Still, it is undeniable that, just as with the prostitute's body, Manet uses a minimum of half-tones and naturalistic molding for Laure, instead shaping faces from a series of loose, flat, slightly impastoed slashes of paint. He does not strive for the contours and shade gradations of the more conventional genre painter Feytaud, whose *Le baiser enfantin*, as noted earlier, may also have been posed by Laure in the same year. (Image 53)

Direct, in-person viewing of *Olympia*, however, quite easily reveals a degree of facial expressiveness less discernible in reproductions. We see that Laure's features are set in a quizzical, but not unkind, gaze, as if in concern for the consequences of the prostitute's curt disregard for her admirer's flowers.¹⁴⁵ Direct viewing also allows the viewer to observe other details, often blurred in reproductions. We see Laure's elegantly elongated coral red earrings and the delicately turned hand on the proffered bouquet. We note the subtly contrasting cream and pink tonalities of her dress, as well as its lightly ruffled sleeves and neckline.

Many reproductions, in contrast, obscure the subtle animation of Laure's facial expression and project mainly its color tones, leaving many viewers to discern only the blank stare perceived by O'Grady. As Crary discusses, a novel representation must be binding, or fixed, in order to hold the attention it draws; and any unbinding, or lack, of clarity -- as with Laure's seemingly blank affect-- has the effect of deflecting attention.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Based on my observations from repeat viewings of the painting *Olympia* at the Musée d'Orsay from 2010-2012. It is striking to me that, when I began this project, working from reproductions, I described Laure's features as barely discernible, with no trace of expressive affect, but that view has evolved with direct observation.

¹⁴⁶ Crary, in *Suspensions of Perception* (1999:92), refers to Manet's awareness of the "volatility" of the blank face in the perception of the viewer, of its capacity to destabilize attention. Bataille also cites this type of "messy" brushwork as evidence of Manet's "indifference" to constructing

In this case, all but the most careful attention then dissipates into boredom; the viewer lacks interest in what appears to be merely an expected, and thus already known, stock figure. The overall impression, at least to the present-day casual viewer, is that the maid for the most part conflated the stock obese and asexually unattractive black maid figure from art history with racist stereotypes from popular culture; thus producing a figure that was familiar, derogatory, and therefore dismissed.

This impression is only heightened by the figural profile produced by the particular angle of Laure's pose. Despite Manet's 1862 description of Laure as *très belle*, she now projects, for some viewers, an obesity not indicated in her portrait; she is slender from the waist up but appears to balloon into corpulence below, covered by loose, bulky skirts. This is not just an allusion to the seductively broad hips of Baudelaire's *Woman from Malabar*. Manet's "très belle négresse" Laure is often perceived as a stereotypically obese figure, and this is how she was frequently depicted in the many satirical cartoons of *Olympia* that appeared in the popular press at the time.¹⁴⁷ (Image 52)

This impression of obesity is not, however, the only possible reading of this figure, however, especially when the attire is placed within the context of the period's fashions. Manet may simply have tried to capture the look of the full-sleeved dress over

an effect of beauty; thus allowing a split between figural facts and the materiality of the painting almost to the point of formlessness. In *Manet: Biographical and Critical Study* (New York: Skira) 1955: 70-74.

¹⁴⁷ The Bertall and other derisive caricatures are summarized in Clark, "Olympia's Choice," (1984: 92, 97) and Alan Krell, *Manet and the Painters of Modern Life* (1996: 56-61). Carol Armstrong in *Manet/Manette* (2002: 44-45) points out that Bertall names his caricature Manette, suggesting that the figure is not just a prostitute but an ametaphorical allusion to Manet himself, as an artist who, like the prostitute, requires public display. This idea is borne out by recent research summarized in Rubin, *Impressionism* (1999: 67), which matches the prostitute's bracelet to one still extant from Manet's mother's estate, which contains a locket of Manet's hair. Armstrong also notes that the cartoons satirized the prostitute with a derogatory intensity comparable to that for the maid, creating another level of equivalence between the maid and prostitute figures.

wide crinolines that was considered to be very stylish at the time. Laure's sleeve in particular, with its close fit above the elbow and voluminous flare to the wrist, is a quite accurate match with silhouettes seen in fashion plates and re-enacted fashions, even though it contributes to the impression of obesity. (Image 51) This perceived obesity was likely a surprise for Manet who, we have seen from x-rays, actually reduced the volumes of Laure's figure in the interest of flatness.¹⁴⁸

The Dissipation of Attention: Modern Modes of Viewing *Olympia* Across Time

Despite the ambiguity produced by close observation, the stereotype of the obliterated black female dominated viewers' perceptions, and critical commentary was correspondingly derogatory. Salon reviewers almost uniformly described the maid figure as "hideous," and limited their remarks about her to no more than a single phrase.¹⁴⁹ As the expected stereotype, rather than a novelty, the maid did not merit serious attention. Yet, even in Manet's own time, at least one critic, and his protégé the artist Frédéric Bazille, were substantively engaged by the Laure of *Olympia*. So were successive generations of artists through to the present moment. Much of this disparate reception can be examined in the context of differing modes of viewing.

In the 1860s scientific and other investigations led to the belief that vision was not a fixed mental process, as postulated by traditional theory, but in fact involved a degree of uncertainty due to new assumptions that it was based in the unstable physiology

¹⁴⁸ Juliet Wilson Bareau, *The Hidden Face of Manet* (1986: 45).

¹⁴⁹ Clark, 1984: 96.

of the body.¹⁵⁰ A variation of Crary's framework for analyzing traditional and modern modes of viewing art, when combined with Clark's social history of viewer response to *Olympia*, can be particularly relevant for understanding the modes of attention available to viewers of Manet's representation of Laure in the setting of *Olympia's* Salon 1865 exhibition. Crary suggests that Manet could well have been aware of the new studies, and viewing conditions at the Salon were in some aspects consistent with the newly formulated modern mode of viewer attention.

The new mid-1800s theory of the materiality of visual perception contradicted the well-established classical model of vision, grounded in Kant, whose modernist variations existed in the formalism of Greenberg and Fried. The traditional thinking assumed that perception was a mental process, fixed in the domain of the cognitive. The classical model embraced the Kantian notion of the *a priori* capacity for cognitive synthesis based on a fixed mental unity. It characterized the perceiving mind as a passive receiver of sensation, and implied that this process was objective and universal. Every human mind was assumed to perceive a given object in the same way.

The modern conception, in stark contrast, was that cognition, or understanding, was temporal, achieved over time. It was not *a priori*, but contingent on unpredictable material aspects of the body such as discomfort or movement. It was this modern idea of a material basis for vision that led to the even more radical focus on attention, a dimension of perception that had been of little interest until the 1870s. In rejecting the notion of *a priori* cognition, the idea of attention as subjective materiality was established.

¹⁵⁰ Unless otherwise noted, this discussion of modern vs traditional modes of attention in the viewing of art is based on Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1999: 3-55, 87 and 92.

Walter Benjamin characterized modern subjectivity as “reception in a state of distraction” with the resulting experience of perceptive fragmentation and...dispersal.”¹⁵¹ Benjamin linked modern subjectivity most famously to the viewing of mechanized images such as photography, and while Crary extended this critique to images on movie screens in public theaters, there are remarkable parallels between the Salon and such venues, even though the images on view at the Salon were original paintings.

The Salon, like the early cinema, was a public exhibition space which constructed a collective viewing experience for large audiences which, if not as mass as cinema audiences, certainly catered to the growing Parisian petit bourgeoisie. Clark describes Salon viewings as social outings for these viewers who, as social life shifted to public venues from its traditional base in private residences, now visited cafes-concerts and other public spaces, such as the Salon, as a way to spend time with friends. He noted accounts of noisy discussions in front of the painting, and of gossip about its media controversy, along with outbursts of laughter, among viewers in Room M, where *Olympia* was on view; the gallery was often so crowded that many viewers stood packed in rows seven or eight people away from the wall, unable to clearly see the painting.¹⁵² The viewers’ experience thus became essentially that of the immobilized body that Crary asserts is essential to the distracted quality of modern attention.

If one reason for the failure of Salon viewers to “see” the revisionary nature of the maid figure is the ambivalence of Manet’s representational choices, which themselves deflected attention, the other major reason was that the public, crowded nature of the

¹⁵¹ In Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company), 1976: 252-253.

¹⁵² See T. J. Clark’s account of Salon viewing conditions in “*Olympia’s Choice*, 1984: 83, 89 and 93).

Salon viewing experience rendered many viewers so thoroughly distracted that they were all but incapable of close study of the painting. Faced with growing controversy, the Salon took steps that further reduced the painting's visibility, soon moving *Olympia* from Room M to another gallery, where its placement high on the wall rendered it impossible to see in detail.¹⁵³

The highly distracted nature of the public viewing experience helped to define the Salon as modern. It was a definitive break with the private contemplation that Crary characterized as pre-modern, exemplified by Riegl's formulation of viewer subjectivity in his essay on 17th century Dutch group portrait paintings.¹⁵⁴ Riegl had hypothesized a coherence, in artworks such as Rembrandt's *The Staalmeesters*, of two kinds: one created by the painter in balancing the individuality of each individual depicted in the portrait with his subordination to the overall group, and a second created by the spectator and his relationship with the painting's content. As Crary summarized, "these portraits provided... a utopian figuration of an imaginary harmony of individual and community... the representation of attention as an... element through which individual psyches were forged together as a whole in the consciousness of the beholding subject."¹⁵⁵ An aspect of *Olympia*'s modernity was that even though Manet's compositional devices disrupt viewer communion with its subject and instead play on their anxieties about it, communion was further blocked by its public display in a venue of modern spectacular culture that denies close study to its viewers.

¹⁵³ Clark, "Olympia's Choice," 1984, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Alois Riegl, "Excerpts from *The Dutch Group Portrait*" Translated by Benjamin Binstock. In *October* 74, (Fall 1999: 15, 19).

¹⁵⁵ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 1999.

The physical inability and cultural indisposition of the bourgeois audience to view *Olympia* in a contemplative manner contributed to their reliance on the influence of the more than seventy mostly scathing reviews published in Paris periodicals in shaping the view of the painting and its maid figure. The inability even among professional observers to detect Laure's revisionary nature suggests the relevance of other aspects of modern theories of attention. Not only did these theories suggest that attention was a physical behavior subject to distraction; they also placed attention, as Crary points out, within historical structures, including the experience of memory, will and desire.¹⁵⁶ This aspect of the critics' motivations can further be framed within Crary's use of Marxist discourse, in which he links class-based theories of labor and education with the quality of viewer attention to the painting. Crary identifies a *concentrated* attentiveness seen in viewers motivated by productive and consumption requirements--who focus on an object just enough to be able to do their jobs-- and contrasts it with his ideal, the *sustained* attentiveness that is key to creative and free subjectivity" "In fact," he writes, "modernity makes doing more prevalent than thinking."¹⁵⁷

Clark characterizes most of the publications for which the critics were writing as daily newspapers and monthly magazines.¹⁵⁸ He noted that the critics lacked artistic training and overlooked many key aspects of Manet's work; almost none of them, for example, discussed its sources in Titian and other precedent.¹⁵⁹ They can therefore be seen not as art experts but as journalists, who deployed a hyperbolic and sensational

¹⁵⁶ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 1999:27, 29, 43.

¹⁵⁷ Crary, *ibid.*, 1999: 112.

¹⁵⁸ Clark, "Olympia's Choice," 1984: 89.

¹⁵⁹ Clark, *ibid.*, 1984: 89, 93.

writing style, with little formal analysis, to generate the controversy and interest that drove mass circulation objectives. As Marx theorized, such novelty and entertainment value drove the boom and bust cycles necessary to maintain and expand profits in all capitalist enterprises.¹⁶⁰ In this context, the critics can be seen as commodity workers, producing reviews to generate revenues for their publications; their mode of attention was therefore that of the wage-earning laborer, attentive only to the extent necessary to complete the task of writing a review of the Salon in exchange for pay.¹⁶¹

The unknowledgeable critics, the distracted public viewers, and the Salon's own actions in removing *Olympia* from close view, all suggest that at the Salon, viewing and writing about the paintings was not primarily about the aesthetics or the content; it was mainly about selling commodity publications (and perhaps paintings too, due to the Salon's impact on painters' reputations). The subjectivity of these viewers was thus constructed around modern cultural and economic forces that negated the sustained attention required for these audiences to "see" Laure. The Salon exhibition therefore exemplified a modern spectacular culture in which the image itself was all but irrelevant in comparison with its function serving modern social practices in the expanding commodity culture.

A Fragmented Audience and Differentiated Modes of Attention

Despite the near unanimous critical rejection of *Olympia*, there were exceptions to this critical response. As noted, modern theories of attention accommodated the experience of memory, will and desire. And this would seem to imply that, just as

¹⁶⁰ Karl Marx, "The Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall," in *Capital*, Volume III, Part III. Edited by Frederick Engels. (New York: International Publishing Co. Inc.), 1967: 250.

¹⁶¹ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 1999: 29-34.

varying levels of attention arose from its material embodiment in the viewer, there could also be different levels of attention by individuals with different experiences and intentionalities, even if they all view a work in the same modern spectacular venue.

This idea reveals a fragmentation in the body of the collective modern viewer that Crary did not address, as he only posits that a single response--a superficial level of attention due to distraction and economic factors--is common to all individuals in modern viewing conditions. This fragmentation of the viewer base for the Laure figure in *Olympia* can be glimpsed in Clark's social history of the range of the painting's critical response. But it becomes even more apparent with the recognition that there was also a small but important legacy of accomplished paintings made in response to Manet's representation of this figure.

Clark cited one Salon critic, Alfred Sensier, writing under the pseudonym Jean Ravenel, who in contrast to his peers was knowledgeable of art history and wrote seriously about form, content and sources in *Olympia*.¹⁶² This critic, perhaps informed by his friendships with artists including Millet, seems to have discerned the potential that the Laure figure might represent a more nuanced meaning than is apparent at first glance.

In an 1865 essay for the republican-leaning journal *L'Epoque*, writing under the Ravenel name, Sensier refers to the painting as a whole as a "nightmare full of unknown things," and said that "the Negress and flowers (are) insufficient in execution, but with a real harmony to them, the shoulder and arm solidly established in a clean and pure light....(the painting *Olympia*) is hideous but all the same it is something. A painter is in evidence and the strange group is bathed in light;" in a later article, Sensier suggested that "a nude Olympia and a Negress presenting her some flowers...a trifle daring in their

¹⁶² Clark, "Olympia's Choice," *ibid.*, 1984: 99, 140.

poses...but too visibly the offspring of Goya for anyone to be disturbed by their misdeeds.”¹⁶³ Sensier’s commentary, more analytical than sensational, referenced the Laure figure as a point of interest in its own right, and perhaps even with a degree of equivalence to the prostitute. He was discerning enough to intuit a transgressive quality to the maid figure, even as he acknowledges a lack of clarity which deflects his further consideration. It would fall to Manet’s artist colleagues to give the work the full contemplation required to unlock the possibilities of its veiled significations.

Bazille’s Homage to Manet: The Iconographic Legacy of Laure Begins

The artistic response to *Olympia*’s Laure figure in Manet’s own time represents an additional iteration of the notion that, as suggested by theories of vision, attention varies by individual viewers’ experiences of history, memory, will and desire. The existence of these artworks was not addressed by Clark; while he constructed an extensive lineage for the painting’s prostitute figure, citing sources for the prostitute as well as images inspired by her, he made no such effort for the maid figure.¹⁶⁴ But *Olympia* influenced at least two contemporaneous works of art that appear to be the result of sustained attention for the Laure figure.

Frédéric Bazille, the scion of a wealthy family from Montpellier in Provence, met Manet after moving in 1862 to Paris, where he abandoned his medical studies to become

¹⁶³ Clark, *ibid.*, 1984: 140, 143.

¹⁶⁴ As previously discussed, Pollock (1999: 287-297) and Cachin (1983: 179-180) are among the few writers who outline precedent and comparable figures images for the maid; Pollock briefly discusses the National Gallery version of the Bazille *Peonies* paintings, suggesting that the juxtaposition of the black woman and flowers is more re-Orientalizing than modern (1999: 295)

a painter.¹⁶⁵ After studying with the Orientalist painter Gerome, Bazille joined the circle of artists surrounding Manet in order to pursue his preference for the new modern style in painting scenes from contemporary life.¹⁶⁶ In his 1868 painting, *Atelier de la Rue de la Condamine*, Bazille depicts a visit to his studio by his friends Renoir, Sisley, Astruc, Monet (a former studio mate) and Manet. The tall, lanky figure of Bazille was painted into the scene, as a gesture of admiration, by Manet.¹⁶⁷ (Image 54)

In 1870, Bazille made two paintings, both titled *Négresse aux Pivoines*, that are invariably described as an homage to his friend Manet, figured as a direct reference to the flower-bearing black woman in *Olympia*.¹⁶⁸ (Image 56) Some scholars suggest that

¹⁶⁵ In addition to the monographic studies cited herein by Bajou, Jourdan, Marandel and Pittman, François-Bernard Michel chronicles the artist's life from his perspective as a fellow Montpelliérain trained as a physician, in *Bazille 1841-1870*. (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée: Editions Grasset), 1992.

¹⁶⁶ Dianne Pittman describes Bazille's stated preference for simple subjects based on modern life, even if he risked rejection by the Salon, quoting his comment, in a March 1866 letter that "I have chosen the modern epoch because it is what I understand best and find to be most alive for living people, and this is what will cause me to be refused. If I had done Romans or Greeks, I would be quite at ease...." in *Bazille: Purity, Pose, and Painting in the 1860s* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 1998: 58.

¹⁶⁷ Pittman, *ibid.*, points out that the loose brushwork of Manet's hand, for the painted figure of Bazille, is also a subtle reference to the way that the scene depicted might actually play out; it would be normal for Manet, revered by the artists, if not the public, as a modern master, to take up the brush and demonstrate a correction or suggested style for an acolyte. (1978: 185).

¹⁶⁸ As invariably stated by Bazille scholars, and by the National Gallery of Art Washington on its website, www.nga.org. It is unclear how Bazille and Manet first met; it was likely through their shared upper middle class social connections; Bazille's mother's cousins the Lejosnes were friends of Manet and Baudelaire and they, like Bazille, were regularly invited to the Lejosnes' weekly socials. (Pittman, 1998:54) Joseph Rishel describes the artists' friendship and Bazille's frequent visits to Manet's studio during this period, noting that at this time both Bazille and Manet were posing for Fantin-Latour's 1870 *Studio at Batignolles*, a group portrait painting of Manet and his circle of artists, in *The Second Empire, 1852-1870: Art in France under Napoleon III*, exh. cat., Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978: 252.

Bazille's black model may be the same person, Laure, who posed for Manet.¹⁶⁹ This can be questioned due to a difference in skin tones and, more subtly, in features. The model does, however, appear to be the same woman who posed for Thomas Eakin's 1867 study *Negress*, painted while he was in Paris, while wearing an identical headscarf.¹⁷⁰ (Image 63) The same model had previously posed for Bazille in the sole Orientalist painting he submitted to the Salon, a sketch of which is visible in *Atelier*.¹⁷¹ With the *Peonies* paintings, Bazille appears to not only resume Manet's de-Orientalizing project, but he asserts it with a clarity that supercedes Manet's ambiguity. Bazille establishes a fixity - an image that rivets the viewer's eye and invites contemplation - for his tribute to Manet. The model, inspired by Laure, is even more precisely placed as a member of the black Paris working class.

¹⁶⁹ See Hugh Honour, *Image of the Black in Western Art* (1989: 206). I believe that Laure is more likely the same model who posed for Feyen's *Le baiser enfantin* (Image 23) which was shown at the Salon in 1865, the same year as *Olympia*. I found this image in the *Image of the Black in Western Art* archives at Harvard's W.E.B. Dubois Institute, but the Institute does not suggest such a linkage.

¹⁷⁰ The DeYoung Museum of San Francisco, owner of this painting, renamed it in 2002 as *Female Model (formerly Negress)* citing evolving usage of racial terminology, as described in a curatorial memo included in the museum's object files for the painting. (I have used the Eakins spelling "Negress.") The National Gallery in Washington similarly renamed its *Peonies* painting as *Young Woman with Peonies*, as described in its archives, after concluding that it was unnecessary to reference the model's ethnicity. The Musée Fabre in Montpellier continues to use the *Negresse aux Pivoines* title. As seen in the DeYoung archives, discussion of the Eakins painting of this model is most often framed in analyses of exoticism in American art; one comprehensive account in this vein is a Henry Louis Gates essay for *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940* for an eponymous exhibition: (The Brooklyn Museum and the Corcoran Gallery of Art), 1990. The Eakins study has seldom been the subject of scholarly commentary, although it receives brief mention in the catalog for the De Young's 1996 survey exhibition *The Exoticized Woman and her Allure in American Art 1865-1917*.

¹⁷¹ *La Toilette* can be seen as Bazille's one attempt, as an ambitious young painter, to gain acceptance at the Salon despite his reservations about painting works so rooted in the subject matter and style of Romanticism and Delacroix, whom Bazille initially deeply admired. Marandel summarizes the debate among Bazille and his fellow art students Monet and Renoir over the competing influences of Delacroix and their ultimate preference for the realism of Courbet, a turn that led to their gravitation toward Manet's circle, in *Frédéric Bazille: Prophet of Impressionism* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum), 1992: 71-75.

One de-inhibiting factor for Bazille's clarity may have been the paintings' intended ownership. If Manet was motivated by his ambition to show publicly, Bazille's paintings were typically sold privately, and were held primarily by his family and friends. At least one of the peonies paintings was promised in advance to his sister-in-law Suzanne, wife of his brother Marc.¹⁷²

This representational choice also relates directly to the way in which Bazille's experiences and interests, derived from his position as an acolyte of Manet, shaped the obviously sustained mode of attention that he gave to Manet's painting. It was established practice for young artists to visit the Louvre and the Salon and sketch paintings they admired, and Bazille is known to have done from 1863-1870.¹⁷³ Thus, even though they worked in venues of modern spectacular culture, these artists gave the work the sustained attention associated with creativity, as a necessary aspect of their artistic training. This mode of viewing would also have produced the benefits of temporality, which Crary describes as an important component of sustained attention.¹⁷⁴ The repeat viewings required for sketching would have forced Bazille to deconstruct the layers of form, stance, attire and physical attributes with which Manet composed *Olympia*; presumably Bazille also had opportunities to speak directly with his mentor Manet about the painting, although no records of such discussions appear to be extant.

¹⁷² Bajou describes the the National Gallery *Peonies* painting as one of two that Bazille promised to make for Suzanne Bazille in an 1869 letter; in a second letter, in January 1870, Bazille apologizes for his delay and says he would soon start them. (1993: 175).

¹⁷³ Pittman discusses Bazille's visits to the Salons and his reactions, as expressed in letters to his parents (1998:15, 59, 55).

¹⁷⁴ Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, 1999: 55.

Bazille, much more than the typical Salon viewer of Manet's time, would have been able to decipher the veiled de-Orientalization of the Manet figure.

It is conceivable that Bazille's decision to portray the maid figure, rather than the prostitute, in his tribute to Manet resulted from an intense emotional response to the evidence of the conflicting impulses that seemed to inform his mentor's painting. As David Freedberg writes in *The Power of Images*, "attentiveness (is not just)... channeling the mind to the image, but...the intimate experience of the beholder. The beholder...(doesn't) just concentrate on the image but directs his mediation to aspects most likely to arouse a strong sense of fragility or tragedy."¹⁷⁵ Like many young artists, Bazille may have sought to pay homage to his mentor by resolving the tenuous and ultimately sublimated nature of Manet's revision of the Laure figure; indeed the meticulous care with which he reworked even the smallest details of her portrayal suggest an intensely emotional commitment to completing this revision.

The homage paintings comprise two versions of a flowers with figure scene. Bazille describes in correspondence with his family how he painted them back-to-back in the spring of 1870.¹⁷⁶ The version in the National Gallery was presumably painted first, because the woman's enormous bouquet includes early-blooming tulips and semi-open peonies, while the Musée Fabre version ("the Fabre *Peonies*"), for which a preliminary study is extant, displays mainly peonies in luxuriant full bloom.¹⁷⁷ (Image 59)

¹⁷⁵ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1989: 166-167.

¹⁷⁶ See Marandel's translations of Bazille's letters in an appendix to the exhibition catalog *Frederic Bazille and Early Impressionism*.: Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1978.

¹⁷⁷ Pittman (1998:179) suggests this sequence, and while the preliminary sketch of the Fabre version, now in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, may suggest the reverse order, it is possible

Bazille's figuring of the black model in his *Peonies* paintings retains key modernizing elements of Manet's representation of Olympia's maid, while adding new types of imagery that seem to advance his de-Orientalizing objectives.¹⁷⁸

The most important of Bazille's revisions, one that greatly strengthens the revisionary representation of the woman, is that she is the single figure in the image, and her occupational status remains unclear. She is overtly a member of the Parisian working class—her proffer of peonies from a wicker basket in the National Gallery version suggests that she poses a flower vendor, while her flower-arranging task in the Fabre version suggests that she depicts a maid. In both cases, however, as the sole figure shown, she is the focal point of interest together with the flowers. No mistresses hover to marginalize or diminish her status.

The figure not only retains the de-Orientalized attire of Olympia's maid; her clothing, featuring smart, stylish details, is perhaps even more modern; she is emblematic of a culturally blended sartorial style. Her off-white dress--which does not bare her breasts-- is crisply tailored and well-fitted. Bazille carefully details a high-buttoned, form-fitting bodice that is cinched to reveal a slim waistline—very unlike the Manet maid's voluminous frock. Like the *Olympia* maid, she wears none of the stereotypical black woman's heavy gold jewelry; each model wears coral-hued earrings whose color reflects the pinks in her bouquet but while Manet merely sketches them as pendulant slashes, Bazille carefully crafts them, in the National Gallery version, to reveal their

that there was a second study that is now lost. Schulman, in a 2006 supplement to his Bazille catalog raisonné, reproduces the sketch and notes that Bazille habitually made preliminary sketches.

¹⁷⁸ Pittman also cites Courbet's *The Trellis*, an 1862 depiction of a young woman picking flowers, as possible influence for the figure with flowers composition. (1998: 180-182).

distinctive flower shapes, which are also seen in the Eakins study. While the earrings may suggest Baudelairean references, Bazille maintains Manet's representation of cultural hybridity; the model repeats the combination of Antillaise headscarf and European dress, in a style consistent with the fashions of the day. Bazille clearly does not seek to present this model as "exotic," as a comparison with precedent paintings and popular imagery, earlier discussed, can attest.

Overall, the model is figured by Bazille with far more specificity, if less modernist technique, than seen in Manet's *Laure*, and with a level of careful detailing that is more unambivalently portrait-like.¹⁷⁹ Part of this is due to the greater clarity of Bazille's realist painting style, with a tighter brushstroke than Manet's. Bazille's treatment of the black woman's figure may signal a deliberate attempt to represent her differently from Manet, and in his own style. Thus her headscarf pattern is clearly delineated, her brown skin tones are blended and modeled to be distinct from the gray background; the smallest details of her dress buttons and crenellated neck ruffle are carefully articulated. The acolyte artist's tribute to his mentor may also be a retort, an assertion of his own individual style.

¹⁷⁹ Valerie Bajou describes the young Bazille's delight at having engaged the model, first as one of the three who posed for his earlier *La Toilette*, and then continuing as the sole model for the two *Peonies* paintings. He wrote to his mother that "J'ai eu de la chance, il y a trois femmes dans mon tableau et j'ai trouvé trois modèles charmants, dont une négresse superbe." One motivation for his meticulous work may have been the cost of modeling fees—in the same letter he requests money to pay them, noting that "if me faut absolument un peu d'argent, je suis ruiné par mes modèles, cent francs de plus me sont indispensables." Perhaps for this reason, he maintained an intensive studio schedule. While working alone with the model for the *Peonies* paintings, he writes in late February 1870 that "Je viens de finir ma journée, ma négresse sort de l'atelier, et je me dispose à aller diner..." He notes that he is working "tout le jour, et tous les jours." Bajou quotes these excerpts in her monograph *Frédéric Bazille* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud), 1993: 176. See also Patrice Marandel's previously cited 1978 English translations. Since Bazille did not always date his letters, there are differences of attribution among the various publications of them. Pittman provides a concordance of the differing versions (1998: 223-229)

Bazille's *Peonies* paintings therefore mark the beginning of an *Olympia*-inspired lineage of naturalistic portrayals of the black Parisian proletariat. This figure is quiet, industrious, even unremarkable. She is simply part of the daily life of the city. It appears, at first glance, that the artist has inscribed his black figure with none of the racial stereotypes—immorality, uncleanness, marginalization-- that are evoked in Manet's *Olympia*. Still, Bazille's model, while displaying little of the ambivalence of Laure, is an enigma, a representation of ambiguity. Her facial expression is calm, without overt emotion; she is attentive to her handling of the flowers. She is surrounded not by murky shadows, a tensed black cat, a prostitute, but by beauty--a brilliantly colored array of lush flowers.

But the presence of these flowers signals that, while Bazille has not repeated Manet's stereotypical tropes, he has set up allusions to them in a visually different way. The profusion of the flowers, and their placement relative to the figure, make clear that the *Peonies* paintings are not intended to be just portraits. In both the title and the image, the black woman and the flowers are nearly equivalent, though she is named first, in their appeal as focal points of interest. It is, therefore, the direct juxtaposition of these dual pictorial elements, rather than either of them separately, that is the true subject of the painting. And it is this juxtaposition that evokes racial and gender stereotypes, albeit in inverse proportion to Manet's *Olympia*. If Manet submerged his modernizing revision so that the first impression is the stereotype, Bazille presents the de-Orientalized figure as the first impression and sublimates stereotypical elements.¹⁸⁰ If Manet's Laure can be seen as syntactically dense, but more diagrammatic in its ambiguity, Bazille's Laure is

¹⁸⁰Pittman notes the absence of exoticizing objects in comparing the *Peonies* paintings with precedent images of black women (1998: 183).

syntactically replete, due to its more precise representation; yet the Bazille manifests its own ambiguities and, therefore, aesthetic richness.¹⁸¹

Paintings of women with flowers are a well-established genre of European art, and flowers have long symbolized beauty, luxury, romance and sensuality. Bazille's friend Degas' 1865 *Woman with Chrysanthemums* is in this tradition in its depiction of a bourgeois woman with a vase of flowers.¹⁸² (Image 59) As with Bazille's peonies, the flowers are of at least equivalent interest in both the title and the image, and the woman's facial expression is enigmatic.

What is new in *Peonies* is that the figure in the painting is a black woman, a figure newly present in modern Paris, but whose image as an allegorical or Orientalist Other has historically evoked very different connotations -- exoticism, foreign origins, and the excessive carnal aspect of sensuality. For this reason, it can be argued that Bazille does not de-Orientalize his black model, but instead re-Orientalizes her. This logic would suggest that by juxtaposing the model with the flowers, and giving the flowers equal spatial importance with her, Bazille equates her with the flowers, and with related ideas of nature, the earth and primitivism. In the National Gallery of Art version, this is made explicit, the flowers held beside the woman's face functioning as an index, pointing to her to establish this equivalence. She is thus, arguably, exoticized and relegated from culture to nature by her proximity with the flowers in the same way that Olympia's maid is marginalized by the presence of the prostitute.

¹⁸¹ As discussed by Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art*, 1976: 252-253.

¹⁸² Rishel notes the Bazille-Degas friendship (1978: 252) but was unsure if Bazille was aware of this Degas painting; he also notes that Monet had first introduced Bazille to the "pleasure of painting flowers," and that Bazille painted several still lifes in the late 1860s but then decided to include a figure in the *Peonies* paintings.

However, direct juxtapositions are often based on the premise that each element helps to define the other. If Manet established a formal synchronicity between the prostitute and the maid, Bazille does so between the woman and the flowers. Therefore, the meanings of the flowers as well as the figure must be understood in order to deduce Bazille's intended characterization of the woman. There are many accounts of widespread interest in the literary and symbolic references of flowers in late nineteenth century Paris, which extended to Manet, Baudelaire and their circle of artists.¹⁸³ In 1860, Manet's friend Baudelaire wrote to his friend the engraver Bracquemonde, who was also a friend of Manet, stressing "the necessity to consult the books on analogies, the symbolic language of flowers." while designing a frontispiece depicting the Garden of Eden for one of his books.¹⁸⁴ Zola wrote of Manet's portrait of his friend Berthe Morisot, noting that she was shown wearing a corsage of violets because they represented the modesty and reserve of her personality.¹⁸⁵

Reff points out that romantic scenes in popular plays and novels often depicted suitors offering bouquets to their lovers and flattering them with detailed explanations of each flower's meaning.¹⁸⁶ Historian Beverly Seaton and other writers observe that as

¹⁸³ Beth Brombert notes that strong interest in flower symbology cut across all social classes, from demimondaines and artists to the conservative bourgeoisie, and that knowledge of the meanings of specific flowers was so widespread that a bouquet of flowers was "as eloquent as a love letter or poem." (Brombert, 1997: 165). Reff provides a detailed account of the "vogue" for flower symbology in France. In *Manet, Olympia* (New York: Viking Press), 1977: 105-111.

¹⁸⁴ Reff, *ibid.*, 1977: 103.

¹⁸⁵ Reff, *ibid.*, 1977: 106-107.

¹⁸⁶ Reff, *ibid.*, 1977:105. In relating flower symbology to the bouquet in *Olympia*, Reff discusses specific popular plays, including productions staged by friends of Baudelaire and Manet. The title of Manet friend Dumas *fils* ' play, *La Dame aux Camelias*, references common knowledge that the camellia was an emblem of demimondaines like the play's tragic heroine; when her maid

early as 1809, numerous manuals describing the meanings of individual flowers and their combinations in bouquets were printed, and that between 1830 and 1880, these texts frequently went into multiple reprints to meet popular demand in France.¹⁸⁷ Seaton notes that the development of a European language of flowers is sometimes attributed to French and British travelers in Turkey, and that much Western symbology is of Eastern origin.¹⁸⁸ She reveals that British manuals were popular throughout the Victorian era. Some blended adaptations from French manuals, but longstanding Francophobia led to specifically English symbolism as well; however, the first flower manual published in the United States was by a French-American author. While tracing the origins of specific meanings is therefore difficult, France is considered to be the most extensive source.

Thus, in analyzing Bazille's most direct juxtaposition of figure with flowers, when the model holds up lush peonies beside her face in the National Gallery *version*, it is useful to note that there have been literary associations of peonies with the healing powers of physicians to the gods, and with tributes to the gods; the word's etymology derives from the Latin *paeon*, which means hymn of praise to a helping god.¹⁸⁹ Given

brings her a bouquet that does not include camellias, she rejects it. He suggests that this scene was an inspiration for *Olympia*.

¹⁸⁷ Seaton chronicles the initial publication of these books by minor or almanac publishers such as Audot and Janet; as interest spread among the upper classes, the publisher Latour released a flower symbology manual in 1840 that went into multiple reprints. In *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press), 1995: 78.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1995: 62, 80-84. Seaton provides histories by countries of the interest in and sources of flower symbology. Reff concurs on the partially Eastern origins of the craze, which he says was at its height in the 1860s, linking it to "the oriental practice of sending bouquets, or *Selams*, as discreet messages of love and the Romantic habit of investing natural forms with human significance." (1977: 105).

¹⁸⁹ Diana Wells traces the word's origin to the name of Paeon, who was a pre-Apollonian physician to the gods and was mentioned in the *Iliad*. It has also been the name of a song of praise sung to the god Apollo. In *100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names*. (Chapel Hill, N.

Bazille's earlier medical studies and acolyte relationship with Manet, this meaning supports the idea of the painting as a tribute to Manet, although it remains unclear whether Bazille was known to have consulted flower manuals.¹⁹⁰ The peony is also associated with the moon goddess Selena, and therefore is supposed to be picked only at night.¹⁹¹ This allusion could reinforce the reasons why Bazille chose the black model, as a reference to Olympia's maid, to figure in his tribute to Manet.

Other symbolic meanings of peonies, however, may project less conventional associations onto the figure, since the peony can also symbolize shame, shyness and uncondoned relationships; according to a Chinese legend repeated in Victorian manuals, a young scholar who grows peonies falls in love with a servant girl who wills herself to assume the flower's form in order to remain with him because of societal censure of the affair.¹⁹²

C.: Algonquin Press), 1997. Bobby J. West notes that Paeon, a son of Endymion, was said to be the first to understand the peony's medicinal powers, thus his name was used to mean healer; Homer cites Paeon's healing of Hades after Heracles wounded him in the Trojan War. In *A Contemplation Upon Flowers: Garden Plants in Myth and Literature* (Portland: Timber Press), 1999: 279- 280.

¹⁹⁰ Manet was known to keep a garden of peonies, his favorite flower, and white lilacs, at his family's Gennevilliers estate; he also made two series of paintings of peony still lifes, in 1864 and 1882 (Brombert 1997: 164-165). Bazille's silence about possible knowledge of flower symbology, despite in his extensive correspondence with his parents, should not be seen as a conclusive indication that he did not consult them. Pittman notes that Bazille frequently did not mention important aspects of his life in his letters; for example, although he and Manet clearly moved in the same close circles, his letters give no indication of how they met or any details of their ongoing friendship. (Pittman, 1998: 55-56).

¹⁹¹ West also notes that due to its significations of the moon, the peony is mentioned in books dating back to at least 1591 as a remedy for nervousness and insanity; in nineteenth century England peony root beads were worn as amulets to of illness and evil spirits. See West, 1999: 282.

¹⁹² West, *ibid.*, 1999: 353.

It is interesting to consider this allusion together with the literary meanings of tulips, whose name, significantly, is a Latin translation of the Turkish word for turban.¹⁹³ Tulips are invariably cited, in French, English and American manuals, as symbols of declarations of love.¹⁹⁴ Seaton points out that this meaning is differentiated by the specific colors seen in the National Gallery bouquet—red tulips symbolize a declaration of love, while yellow tulips signal a hopeless love.¹⁹⁵ In his 1853 poem *L'invitation au voyage*, Baudelaire wrote of a *tulipe noire* as an idealized woman with whom the dreamer would travel to a country “ou tout vous ressemble.”¹⁹⁶

This analysis of the literary symbolism of the flowers present in the Bazille *Peonies* paintings suggests that Bazille's *Peonies* paintings may not only be tributes to Manet, but also a commentary referencing what is represented by the black female whom both artists figured in their paintings. As Manet's friend, he would probably have been aware of Baudelaire's mulatto mistress, as well as of the Baudelairean references attributed to *Olympia*.

More important, however, is that these significations open up the suggestion that the image of the black woman by the 1870s no longer carried a single signification, but could project potential new meanings in modern Paris society. As the eroticized black woman is transformed from the Other who exists wholly outside French society to a free

¹⁹³ West, *ibid.*, 1999: 281. West notes that tulips are native to Turkey, and European travelers there perceived a resemblance to local headwear.

¹⁹⁴ These meanings are consistently cited in flower symbology texts. See West (1999: 354) and Seaton (1995: 196).

¹⁹⁵ Seaton, *ibid.*, (1995: 196-197).

¹⁹⁶ Philip Knight, *Flower Poetics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1986: 115.

working woman within the metropolis, art begins to represent this new figure in differing roles comparable to her European counterparts. She may be a maid or flower vendor working for a wage. Or she may become the next iteration of ethnic artist's models who often became artists' long-term lovers—a role well established by the Belle Juive and Italian artist's models during the 1830s-1840s.¹⁹⁷ She may be someone of foreign birth who is secreted and indulged, but ultimately discarded, like the young painter's mistress in Balzac's story, *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Or she may become a publicly acknowledged long-time mistress of a prominent man, like Jeanne Duval.

She is simply a representation of a new racial reality within French society. Cezanne's *Scipio*, from a few years earlier, is another index; so are Toulouse Lautrec's images of the dancer Chocolat. (Image 64) Within the decade, Bazille's friend Degas painted *Miss La-La at the Cirque Fernando*, depicting a black French-German circus entertainer at work in Paris. (Image 64) While Miss La-La's brown skin is clearly denoted, it seems by then to be merely physical description, with a still greater sublimation, even an absence-- save for her work with animals-- of the old connotations. Degas has rendered her with a grace and intelligence completely lacking in the popular culture images, including posters and advertisements, for Miss La-La's acts. (image 65) She is just one of the many working women that Degas portrayed throughout his career. Miss La-La therefore can be seen as an end bracket for a groundbreaking lineage of iconographic representations that, beginning with Manet's images of Laure, broke with

¹⁹⁷ Susan Waller provides an extensive discussion of the changing fashions among artists for models of varying ethnic types, in *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate) 2006: 39. Bazille himself comments about the debate among family and artist friends over the changing status of "Italian types" as models, in correspondence translated by Marandel (1978: 178).

the romanticization of empire and, in the spirit of painting modern life, immortalized the formation of a new culturally hybrid black female working class and demimondaine presence in late nineteenth century Paris. (Image 66)

CHAPTER THREE

Matisse at the Villa Le Rêve: Toward a New Baudelairean Muse

Introduction

If Frédéric Bazille's *Peonies* paintings clarified Manet's foundational imagery of Laure as part of a free black presence in 1860s Paris, it was in the late work of Henri Matisse (1869 -1954) that the legacy of Manet's Laure was extended to reflect the cosmopolitan modernity of 1940s France. It is a testament to the cross-generational continuity of this legacy that the two artists, despite sharply contrasting artistic visions, produced work linked by the same iconographic lineage.

This seemingly unlikely resonance between the urbane Manet and eden-seeking Matisse is rooted in each artist's profound engagement with different aspects of Charles Baudelaire's vision for the artist's role in modern life. Manet exemplified Baudelairean artist as flaneur, a member of Parisian café society who tirelessly roamed the city's streets observing life high and low. Matisse embraced the poet's invitation to the voyage, to a perpetual quest, by turns actual and imaginary, for the remote idyll-by-the-sea and a life where all is "*luxe, calme et volupté.*"¹⁹⁸

The evolution of Matisse's imagery from nineteenth to twentieth century modes of modernism is often chronicled primarily by monographic reviews of his paintings. However, Matisse himself repeatedly insisted that he "did not distinguish between the

¹⁹⁸ Baudelaire sets forth his beliefs about the ideal lifestyle and subject matter of modern artists in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), while the longing for an escape from the city to "*luxe, calme et volupté*" is captured in his poem *Invitation au Voyage*, from the poetry collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). Matisse engaged with Baudelaire's poetry early in his career, most directly with his 1904 painting, named *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* in direct evocation of *Invitation au Voyage*.

construction of a book and that of a painting.”¹⁹⁹ This chapter will trace this formal and thematic evolution primarily through an examination of Matisse’s late graphic works, specifically those posed by the Haitian model Carmen; it will also review parallel developments in his work with a second black model, of Congolese-Belgian origin, in his final series of paintings.

In the late 1930, Matisse accepted a commission to create illustrations for what became a new edition of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*.²⁰⁰ This was during the same year that Matisse traveled extensively, making three trips to New York, the first en route to Tahiti. During each New York visit, he met with major American collectors, including Alfred Barnes, who commissioned Matisse to create the monumental *Dancers* murals for installation at the Barnes Foundation. Although the Baudelaire project was delayed for years by the Barnes murals and other major commitments, Matisse returned to the *Fleurs* in 1943. From 1943-1946, Matisse made dozens of images of a New York –based Haitian dancer, Carmen Helouis, during sessions at his Villa Le Rêve home and studio in the hills above Nice. Matisse engaged Carmen to pose nine of his thirty-three *Fleurs* illustrations, as well as the frontispiece; she also sat for stand-alone drawings as well as illustrations

¹⁹⁹ Alfred Barr quotes from Matisse’s 1946 note “How I Made My Books” in *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1951: 563).

²⁰⁰ The commission was from a Lyonnais group of bibliophiles known as Les XXX; they requested that Matisse create an “edition de luxe” on a topic of his choice. Matisse decided to illustrate the Baudelaire poems after several years of fitful deliberation, and did not begin work on the illustrations until 1943. See Dominique Szymusiak’s account of the commission, as part of her comprehensive essay about the project, in the essay “Poésie et Regard: Le Baudelaire de Matisse” for the Musée Matisse Le Cateau-Cambrésis *Matisse et Baudelaire* exhibition catalog (1992: 35-36) and in the Claude Duthuit catalog raisonné (1988:130).

for other book projects.²⁰¹ This was the first time in his career when Matisse worked with a black model on a sustained basis over a period of several years.

Some of Matisse's images of Carmen, including for the *Fleurs* poem "À Une Malabaraise," appear to directly evoke the iconography of Manet's depiction of Laure in *Olympia*, itself a figure that, as discussed in Chapter Two, has been described as a personification of the poem's subject. (Images 72, 73) Other Carmen illustrations veer decidedly toward wholly new and modern modes of portraying the black female figure – a subject which Matisse had episodically depicted in his earlier Orientalizing and primitivist periods. (Image 77)

This chapter therefore suggests that, through his *Fleurs* illustration work, Matisse both evoked and moved beyond nineteenth-century imagery and re-presented the black female subject as fully present within the modern world of his own mid-twentieth century. In doing so, he advanced the modernizing flatness of his pictorial style through his signature single-line drawing technique. Matisse's *Fleurs* work is significant not only in itself, but because it may have also informed both the subject and style of his subsequent work in cut paper—including *Jazz* and *Creole Dancer*, and his final series of easel paintings.

Like Manet, Matisse did not express an overt socio-political agenda specifically with regard to the black female figure. His imagery appears instead to have emerged largely from an artistic vision centered on a capacity to see and represent beauty without

²⁰¹ Based on agendas detailing Matisse's Villa le Rêve studio sessions provided by Wanda de Guébriant, director of the Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineaux, as well as dates of drawings and other works separate from the Baudelaire project as recorded in the Duthuit catalogs raisonnés and the Musée Matisse Le Cateau-Cambrésis *Matisse et Baudelaire* exhibition catalog, Matisse had studio sessions with Carmen in 1943, 1945, and during several separate periods in 1946, including for sessions with the specific purpose of creating the *Fleurs du Mal* frontispiece.

regard to ethnicity, just as Manet had earlier represented urban modernity in all its aspects.²⁰² In this way, the iconographic legacy of Manet's *Laure* can be seen as a precedent for Matisse's serially inventive late figural style, as he evolved an increasing abstraction of the female figure into a non-naturalistic system of signs. This was a turn that had no readily apparent influences or parallels within Matisse's School of Paris cohort. Matisse, in his 1940s work with black models, moved beyond primitivism in a manner that Picasso never did.

This chapter reviews evidence suggesting that one influence for his expansive realm of modernity may well have been Matisse's encounters with leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance during his four 1930s visits to New York. During these visits, Matisse sat for a portrait by Carl van Vechten, a photographer and journalist who hosted Harlem Renaissance salons, and who also knew and made portraits of many leading Harlem Renaissance figures. (Image 81) The chapter suggests formal affinities between the modernizing images among Matisse's Baudelaire illustrations and the aesthetics of Harlem Renaissance portraits that Matisse may have become aware of through Van Vechten. It additionally presents evidence of visits by Matisse to black theater and Harlem jazz performances while in New York, as opportunities for further exposure to

²⁰² Matisse's choice to work with models of diverse national origins may well have taken shape due to his extensive travel, not only within Europe but also in North Africa, the United States, Tahiti and the Caribbean. During his return voyage from Tahiti in 1930, Matisse made stops in Panama, Martinique and Guadeloupe, as delineated in the chronology of the 1992 Museum of Modern Art Matisse retrospective (Elderfield, 1992: 197). There is scant historical reference to Matisse's activities while in the Caribbean. But on May 30, 1946, during the period of his final studio sessions with Carmen, Matisse wrote to his friend Aragon expressing reluctance to leave the *Villa le Rêve* for an impending return to Paris because it reminded him of Tahiti and Martinique: "Je pars d'ici avec regret, lorsque je vois la nature si belle.... Je me retrouve à Tahiti ou à la Martinique." (Source: Wanda de Guébriant, director of the Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineaux)

modern modes of representing women of color. It should be noted that this discussion of Matisse's engagement with artists of the Harlem Renaissance, jazz and the Haitian and Congolese models is based in large part on documents –family correspondence, photographs and personal travel and studio agendas –that have never been previously published or historicized; this analysis therefore contains relatively few citations of previous literature.

The chapter finally examines Matisse's work, simultaneous to his later sessions with Carmen, with a second black model, a biracial Congolese-Belgian woman whom Matisse addressed in correspondence as Mme Van Hyfte, to create at least three 1946 paintings including *Young Woman in White Dress, Red Background* and *l'Asie (Asia)*. (Images 106, 115, 117) The depictions of the model in these paintings parallel the lack of traditional modes of signifying ethnicity also seen in some of the *Fleurs* illustrations.

The chapter concludes that, through an evolution from the primitivist aesthetics that informed his early drawing and painting style, and seemingly informed by travel and his personal engagement with modern black culture, Matisse created portraits that transformed archaic modes of representing black women. He thus participated in the gradual modernization of black female imagery that became central to modernist art. He thus can be seen as a mid-twentieth century manifestation of an artistic vision, similar to that of Manet, that assumes an equal humanity and capacity to figure beauty regardless of ethnicity.

Among the several significant implications of this evolution, the dissertation concludes that Matisse was unique among School of Paris painters, in that, motivated not by overt social concerns but by his core artistic vision, Matisse transcended primitivism.

Matisse moved beyond working with the aesthetic ideas of traditional African and Oceanic sculpture, and embraced modernist modes of portraying black women to a degree that was unique among his School of Paris cohort. Matisse is therefore, arguably, the early twentieth-century French modernist most anticipatory of the subsequent work by contemporary artists imbuing the black female figure with a restored subjectivity and iconic stature that is increasingly less ethnically singular and more globally resonant.

Matisse's Modernism: From Primitivism to the Cusp of Modernity

Matisse agreed to illustrate what became a new edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* during a period immediately after beginning his first sustained engagement with book illustration, for a volume of poems by the nineteenth century poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898).²⁰³ In many aspects, the drawing methods developed for these and his other 1930s-1940s book illustrations can be seen as a reprise of ideas that had led the young Matisse to transcend his nineteenth century instruction and formulate a signature visual style fully of twentieth century modernism.

In order to contextualize the innovative nature of Matisse's 1940s images of Carmen, it is important to understand that Matisse was, at the outset of his career, an artist formed by the nineteenth century; his early depictions of the black female figure were consistent with an Orientalizing approach to representations of non-western subject matter. Matisse was born in 1869 in the northern France fabric-weaving town of Le Cateau-Cambrésis. He later abandoned a fledgling law career and came to Paris in 1891 to train as an artist under Gustave Moreau and then Signac. This was a time when, for a major contingent of Paris' artistic avant-garde, the depiction of modern life in Paris had

²⁰³ As described by Barr, 1951: 244, 563.

given way to a retreat from modernity. The fresh discoveries, by Manet and the Impressionists, of an emergent modern way of life along Haussman's broad new boulevards was now decades old. Their marvel at life around them had congealed, among Matisse's cohort, to a disgust with the effects of the industrial revolution—congestion, pollution, social alienation.²⁰⁴ The vivid colors of post-Impressionist painting styles seemed overly optimistic in their representations of city life, and artists increasingly depicted scenes from the smaller, less urban locales that appealed to those in search of a simpler way of life, whether in the French provinces or farther afield. A key concern of the avant-garde of Matisse's formative years was a quest for a world apart from the metropole, and for pictorial styles and subject matter reflecting these concerns and lifestyles.

Based on ideas later theorized by Marcuse, this artistic retreat can be seen as a form of ideology, in which social or man-made viewpoints are naturalized, and taken as givens; as art becomes more separate from society and, like religion, becomes an ideology.²⁰⁵ Vanguard artists admired by the young Matisse included Cezanne and Van Gogh, who by the late nineteenth century were working principally in the South of France, and Gauguin, who had spent time observing peasant religious practices in rural

²⁰⁴ See Walter Benjamin's discussion of Baudelaire's fascination yet disillusionment with modern urban spaces in *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, 1939, translated by Harry Zohn in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, (New York: Schocken), 1968: 186-191.

²⁰⁵ See Marcuse's argument that, in the avant-gardes, art took over the ideological function of religion, in his 1937 'Affirmative Character of Culture,' in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. (London: Free Association Books) 1988: 88-133. Peter Burger's 1974 *Theory of the Avant-Garde* articulates the refutation of art as ideology that can be seen to frame the twentieth century modernist attempt to show that art is not autonomous, its meaning not determined by anything inherent to the work, but by the framing elements—function, production and reception—that comprise art as institution.

Brittany, then traveled to Panama and Martinique, and left Paris for Tahiti in 1891.²⁰⁶

These artists' work comprised primarily landscapes and figural groupings intended to represent their perspectives on these locales. Van Gogh and Gauguin attempted to evoke local forms of art and cultural expression, with vivid colors applied to sometimes impastoed surfaces in rough, gestural brushstrokes; this helped forge a now-problematic perspective that became known as avant-garde primitivism. On the one hand, the attempt was to depict these locales, and the people who populated them, as pure, serene, apart from the corruption of Europe; on the other hand, the sense of such domains as outside civilization sustained the racialized hierarchies of culture used to justify empire.²⁰⁷

In this context, much of Matisse's early work seeks to embrace these ideas in order to establish himself as an artist, even as he moves beyond them. Matisse, by the early 1900s a leader of the Fauvist (wild beast) move to work in vivid, nonnaturalistic "colors of the jungle," first came to wide attention with his 1904 painting, *Luxe, calme et volupté*. (Image 74) Here Matisse displays fidelity to the new content but also his move beyond it. *Luxe, calme et volupté* comprises an idyllic depiction of a remote (and in part imagined) locale. But it escapes the specific representations of individuals that Gauguin specialized in, and depicts generic types instead. It is the idea of an idyll that is evoked by the scene, rather than a pseudo-realistic depiction of it, that is of interest to Matisse.

²⁰⁶ John Elderfield discusses Matisse's early admiration for these artists, whose work he viewed at exhibitions and sometimes purchased, as well as his visual evocations of Baudelaire's poem *Luxe, Calme et Volupté*, in *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art), 1992:32-36.

²⁰⁷ See discussion by Abigail Solomon Godeau of the philosophical contradictions of primitivism -- Gauguin wrote that by going to Tahiti, Panama or Martinique, "civilization was falling away from him" -- in her essay "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

This pictorial strategy represents Matisse's early engagement with the poetry of Baudelaire –taking its title from his *Fleurs du Mal* poem *l'Invitation au voyage*. Even as Baudelaire had rhapsodized about the life of the flaneur artist out and about in modern Paris, he had also, though dead by 1865, presaged 1890s concerns in discussing the potentially destructive consequences of modernity. In his 1857 poem *The Swan*,“ he suggests that “old Paris is no more,” and that modern life will ruin the past and create hopelessness and alienation for the future.²⁰⁸ Moreover, *Luxe* represents an early effort by Matisse, who first began to read poetry during an extended adolescent recuperation from appendicitis, to render this Baudelairean scene as a visualization of the ideas of Mallarmé –specifically his belief that artistic expression is based on suggestion, not illusionism. Referring, during an interview, to a nearby table, Matisse asserts that he does not want to paint the table, but to capture the emotion it evokes.²⁰⁹ In depicting Baudelaire's dreamlike scene, Matisse seeks to represent Mallarmé's view that to suggest an object is the dream of the artist; that it is the effect that an object produces, not its actual appearance, that the artist seeks to capture. Thus, Matisse uses nonspecific figural and facial types to suggest the idea of a sea-side idyll; he uses pastel colors to create non-naturalistic flesh and landscape tones. He intends to conjure the idea of a reverie, a place apart that is as much a creation of the mind as it is an actual locale. With this pictorial symbolism, Matisse thus formulates his own approach to a nineteenth century subject in a way that escapes nineteenth century ideology.

²⁰⁸ See Walter Benjamin's further discussion of Baudelaire's prescient sense of alienation, and of an increasing inability to authentically experience life in the modern city due to the myriad consequences of industrialization, in *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, 1939: 192-193.

²⁰⁹ Jack Flam excerpts Matisse's 1908 discussion of his efforts to visualize Mallarmé's textual ideas in “Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” in *Matisse on Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1995: 30-43.

By the turn of the twentieth century, with an influx of sculpture from the French colonies, and in particular Africa, Matisse also became a leading figure for the Fauvists, a group of artists who developed a synthesis of the Orientalizing nineteenth century content with mask aesthetics. Through their use of an unusually bright or “wild” color palette was based on an imagined affinity with the aesthetics of tribal art, the Fauves became one of the two main branches of primitivism within the School of Paris. One arm comprised a cohort led by Picasso and Braque as the inventors of the Cubist faceting treatment of images, while Matisse and the Fauves sought to meld western and African influences in the use of color and line.²¹⁰

Matisse’s early works of sculpture mirror this synthesis, as well as a continuity of his semiotic approach to image-making, focused on the evocation of a reality more than on the reality itself. Matisse’s first known depiction of women of color, his 1906 *Two Women*, was from a photograph, not the live model. (Image 76) The motives behind Matisse’s reimagining of the photograph are revealed by an account of his visit, in 1900, to the Paris studio of the then legendary sculptor Rodin.²¹¹ When Matisse showed him some of his sculptural drawings, Rodin disliked them and suggested that Matisse add detail to more fully capture the figures –advice Matisse ignored. Thus in *Two Women*, Matisse omitted details of jewelry and hairstyle, and did not attempt to mimic the natural molding of the women’s nude bodies. For this work, his only sculpture of a figural group,

²¹⁰ James Clifford, in commentary on MoMA’s “Primitivism” exhibition, which heavily relied on notions of affinities in African and Western art, delineates the problematic aspects of suggesting such a common essence between the tribal and the modern and dismissing the practice as merely a “way of appropriating otherness...for constituting non-western arts in its (the west’s) own image” in “Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,” in *Art in America*, April 1985:165-166.

²¹¹ As recounted by Alfred Barr in *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (New York: Museum of Modern Art), 1951: 52, 531.

he seemed instead drawn by the formal structure of mirroring images, with the objective of making a work that would draw the viewer into a circumnavigation around the object, a break with the primarily frontal work of Rodin.²¹² Likewise, with *The Back*, a 1909-1931 series inspired by the proportions of African sculpture, he again removes detail, and with a flattening objective, blurs the distinction between the modeling of the back and the treatment of the background.

Contemporaneous works of painting revealed a second break with the past. When Matisse traveled in 1906 to North Africa, he, like Gauguin, followed the primitivist impulse to seek out “local” women of color as models to create “exotic” scenes. But Matisse appears not to have overtly engaged in Gauguin’s sexualization of primitivism; his interest was more to extend his formal visual language to new and varied subject matter.²¹³

Likewise with Matisse’s most famous Fauvist painting influenced by African art, the 1907 *Blue Nude: Souvenir of Biskra*, the nude body is angular and pictorially flattened. (Image 73, 74) Even with the strong Fauvist color palette, Matisse again privileges formal innovation over explicit sexualization of this primitivized nude, drawing the eye to the masklike face and the alternation between the flattening of flesh tones and the distortion of bodily proportions, in particular at the hip.

²¹² Alfred Barr, who referred to this sculpture as *Two Negresses*, suggests affinities with, or perhaps influences from direct observation of, sculptural styles from Cameroon and Ivory Coast, in *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art), 1951: 138-140.

²¹³ Solomon-Godeau (1992:310, writes of Gauguin’s work as implicated with an “explicit linkage of the natural and the Edenic culture of the tropics to the sensual and carnal –nature’s plenitude reflected in the desirability and compliance of “savage women,” and suggests that the move away from this was a dividing line between nineteenth and twentieth century modernists.

There was clearly some vacillation in Matisse's synthesis of Mallarmé-inspired evocation with Orientalizing depiction, as in his rarely seen 1912 painting *Portrait de la Mulatresse Fatma*, his only known painting of a black female subject before the 1940s.²¹⁴ (Image 74) While clearly rendering the model's face with the flattening of a mask, he depicts her North African attire and cross-legged seated position with the hyper-detail often used in mid-nineteenth century Orientalist painting to project an "accurate" representation for what might well be a partially imagined scene.²¹⁵

We thus see, even in this work as one Matisse's early representations of exoticized women in scenes of empire, the emergence of a revisionary artistic vision that engaged with the values and ideas of both Mallarmé and Baudelaire. The work is a manifestation of his nineteenth-century artistic training and heritage, but principally in twentieth-century formalist terms, rather than in Orientalist thematics and scenarios. Alastair Wight suggests that, for Matisse, the very notion of modernity was implicated with a sense of a need to represent an ethnic hybridity that, for many scholars of the period, was perceived as a break with the ethnic separation of the previous era.²¹⁶ The

²¹⁴ Research staffers at the Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineaux, in showing me this image, spoke of Matisse's comments in correspondence from North Africa that he went to a brothel to retain Fatma as a model, and that at the behest of both the model and the brothel owner, he worked in a back room well away from the view of customers.

²¹⁵ Linda Nochlin discusses this practice, and its artificially contrived construction of colonial settings to falsely imply that traditional cultures were, in the absence of European oversight, immutably resistant to modernity. in "The Imaginary Orient" in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, eds., (New York: Routledge) 2004: 289-299.

²¹⁶ Alastair Wright discusses, for example, the negative commentary on Matisse's *Blue Nude* in the context of theories in some French intellectual circles at the time that racial mixing "was what made the modern period modern." He notes that, while many writers expressed dismay at this seemingly irreversible development in European culture, there was no evidence that Matisse himself shared this dismay; in a 1915 letter, "Matisse himself would note, though without any apparent distaste, the mingling of the races –English, Moroccans, Senegalese and the Maori of

modernity of Matisse can also be found in his striving for an apartness between the subject and its representation; an effort to engage with the subject in order to render effect and emotion, including his own response to the subject, rather than attempting actual depiction. First seen in his early painting and sculpture, this impulse achieves its fullest modernity when he returns to this subject matter in the 1940s.

Tradition and Modernity: The *Fleurs du Mal* Illustrations

For much of the 1920s, Matisse focused primarily on paintings, very often of single female figures posed as odalisques or costumed from his extensive collection of clothing and fabrics from throughout the world.²¹⁷ By the end of the decade, Matisse, professing an exhaustion with painting, decided that he needed fresh content and, after a period of travel, he turned to his first extensive engagement with illustrated books. Yet his drawings and graphic work for these illustrations show a continuity of the artistic vision that had shaped his earlier painting and sculpture, for both subject matter and compositional values.

In particular, by the 1940s we see a return of the black female model, in representations that initially recapitulate his blend of traditional content rendered in a modern way, reflecting the artistic principles of Mallarmé. But then, just as Matisse earlier transcended Gauguin and Rodin, he moves during this period beyond his twentieth century cohort, Picasso and the School of Paris, in creating an extraordinary and singular vision of an expansive realm of feminine beauty.

New Zealand --among the Allied troops on the quay in Marseilles during the First World War.” In *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2004:183, 263.

²¹⁷ For a groundbreaking exposition of Matisse’s use of fabrics to project tradition through modern compositional devices, see the *Matisse and His Fabrics* catalog by Rebecca Rabinowitz for a 2004 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibiton.

Matisse's illustrations for *Fleurs du Mal* can be seen to constitute a graphic version of the compositional and thematic values –the idea of the “place apart” -- first explored in *Luxe, calme, et volupté*. The setting within which Matisse installed himself to create these illustrations supports that assumption. The Villa Le Rêve, where Matisse resided and worked from 1943-1949, sits in the hills above Nice, just outside the adjacent village of Vence. Though compact, it is an idyllic location, surrounded by towering century-old palm trees, and set within a garden full of cypresses, olive trees and flowers that bloomed year-round. (Image 69)²¹⁸ “I thought I was back in Tahiti or Martinique,” Matisse wrote, as previously discussed, in a letter describing the villa to his friend Aragon.²¹⁹ Filling his studio with favorite chairs, vases and textiles that had served as props for many previous paintings and graphic work, he hung the walls of his bedroom with Polynesian tapas and Kasai textiles from the Belgian Congo.

It was here that Carmen Helouis, a New York –based Haitian dancer, came to pose for dozens of drawings that Matisse made in 1946 for the *Fleurs* lithographs.²²⁰ (Images 97-99) The villa's subtropical ambience underscores the idea of resonances

²¹⁸ Marie-France Boyer, Paris editor of the English magazine *The World of Interiors*, documented Matisse's life and work at the villa, as well as its interiors, in her lavishly illustrated book *Matisse à la Villa Le Rêve* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts and, in English, London: Thames and Hudson), 2004. Matisse moved to the villa in June 1943, to escape Nice at a time during the war when there was a risk of bombing. Aged 74 and in poor health in the aftermath of cancer surgery, he settled in with his young studio assistant and frequent model, Lydia Delectorskaya, a Russian refugee who was by all accounts an extremely dedicated personal aide to Matisse. Possibly in a deft nod to Baudelaire, Matisse owned two cats at the villa, named Coussi and Minouche.

²¹⁹ In Matisse's May 30, 1946 letter to Aragon, text provided to me by the Archives Matisse.

²²⁰ I found just two publications, (Boyer, Duthuit) that mention Carmen by her first name. I have never seen her surname published. I was given her full name, together with never-published photographs of Carmen, during my September 7, 2012 research session at the Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineux, by Wanda de Guébriant. I separately noted her name on a U.S. Customs department ship manifest.

between Matisse's portrayal of Carmen in the *Fleurs* poem *À Une Malabaraise* and that of Manet's *Laure of Olympia*. In this poem, which captures both offensive exoticizing stereotypes and Baudelaire's observed reality of life in Paris, the poet laments the departure of a woman from Malabar to Paris, predicting that her best hope for earning a living there may be to "sell your charms."²²¹

To a Malabar Woman

**Your feet are as slender as your hands and your hips
Are broad;** they'd make the fairest white woman jealous;
To the pensive artist your body's sweet and dear;
Your wide, velvety eyes are darker than your skin.

In the hot blue country where your God had you born
It is your task to light the pipe of your master,
To keep the flasks filled with cool water and perfumes,
To drive far from his bed the roving mosquitoes,
And as soon as morning makes the plane-trees sing, to
Buy pineapples and bananas at the bazaar.
All day long your bare feet follow your whims,
And, very low, you hum old, unknown melodies;
And when evening in his scarlet cloak descends,
You stretch out quietly upon a mat and there
Your drifting dreams are full of humming-birds and are
Like you, always pleasant and adorned with flowers.

Why, happy child, do **you wish to see France,**
That over-peopled country which suffering mows down,
And entrusting your life to the strong arms of sailors,
Bid a last farewell to your dear tamarinds?
You, half-dressed in filmy muslins,
Shivering over there in the snow and the hail,
How you would weep for your free, pleasant leisure, if,
With a brutal corset imprisoning your flanks,
You had to glean your supper in our muddy streets

²²¹ The Introduction and Chapter Two of this dissertation include a discussion of the problematic aspects of the this text including, on the one hand, some critics' ambivalent or dismissive treatment of this and other Baudelaire poems for their allusions to the stereotypical exoticized black muse, and on the other, black female contemporary artists' work with this material in efforts to recuperate the subjectivity of Jeanne Duval. All quotations from the *Fleurs* text are from my copy of a volume *Les Fleurs du Mal* with a "fac-simile" of the Matisse publication.

And sell the fragrance of your exotic charms,
With pensive eye, following in our dirty fogs
The sprawling phantoms of the absent coco palms!

—*Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil (1857)*, translated by William Aggeler (Fresno: Academy Library Guild, 1954)

Françoise Cachin of the Musée d'Orsay (see Chapter Two) suggests that Manet depicts Laure in *Olympia* to personify the Malabaraise, clad in “pale filmy muslin,” *after* her arrival in Paris. (Image 72) Matisse, conversely, seems to depict her *before* she departs for Paris –her hair is ornamented, but not covered by her headscarf, its natural texture on view presumably less acceptable in Manet's Paris, as it is rarely seen in that period's images of black women in the metropole. There are obvious representational similarities –the headscarf, hoop earrings, jewelry –between Matisse's Malabaraise, and several other Carmen illustrations, and Laure of Manet's *Olympia*. The fact that Matisse placed most of the Carmen images opposite the *Fleurs* poems known to have been inspired by Baudelaire's mulatto mistress Jeanne Duval, thought to have introduced Manet to Laure, further strengthens the implication of a continuity into the twentieth century of associations between this poetry and Duval.²²²

²²² Matisse's choice of the poems posed by Carmen indicate that Matisse had an erudite knowledge of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Five of her nine poses (beyond the frontispiece) were for poems from the so-called Jeanne Duval cycle, a cluster of eighteen poems extending from *Parfum exotique* to *Je te donne ces vers*. Jacques Dupont describes this cycle in *Baudelaire: Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: GF Flammarion), 2004:13. Carmen's other four poses were for *Fleurs* poems outside that well-known group, though some still signified women of color. These included *Malabaraise* and *À une dame creole*. But Carmen also posed the poem *Bien loin d'ici*, whose connotations are less overt. All three poems are linked by Reff to Laure of Manet's *Olympia*. (Reff, 1977: 91-92). But it is a more obscure fact that, as Griselda Pollock points out, some earlier scholars, including Claude Pichois, believed that Jeanne Duval was really called Berthe. (Pollock, 1999: 262); Matisse poses Carmen for the poem *Berthe's Eyes*. Yet Matisse shows his penchant to avoid complete submission to predictable types; Carmen also sits for *Chanson d'après-midi* and for the frontispiece of the entire *Fleurs du Mal* volume, and neither of these connotes any specific ethnicity.

Still, Matisse exerted his own artistic vision over the Baudelaire poems, on both formal and thematic matters. If Manet may have darkened Laure's background to the point of nearly obscuring her, Matisse renders her primarily in white spaces, bound by a minimum of black lines. A single curving line, definitive of Matisse's distinctive drawing style, frames her entire face. Her neck and shoulders are captured by just three more lines. We also see, when the drawing is juxtaposed with an actual photograph of Carmen, the influence of Mallarmé aesthetics emphasizing suggestion, instead of depiction, a style previously displayed in Fauvist colors in Matisse's *Luxe, calme et volupté*, and now rendered in graphic black-and-white. There is no attempt to replicate the model's features; Matisse merely denotes them. Almond shapes formed from unbroken lines denote the eyes, but they have no lids or lashes; the eyebrows are lines, not a naturalistic arc of tiny, meticulously drawn-in hairs. The beads of the necklace are suggested by a series of swirls, but no visible connecting thread holds them together. The ruffled flowery pattern of the blouse shown in the photographs is suggested here with just wispy squiggles.

Printmaking was Matisse's primary means of "demonstrating his working process, the character of his vision, and the way his drawing transformed what he observed."²²³ Matisse himself wrote that, whether working on a painting or a book, he always chooses "to work from the simple to the complex, yet always ready at any moment to reconceive in simplicity."²²⁴ The *Fleurs* book illustrations thus exemplify

²²³ William Lieberman provides a comprehensive overview of Matisse's motivations and approach to printmaking in his 1956 essay "Matisse: 50 Years of His Graphic Art," reprinted in *Matisse as Printmaker: Works from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation*, by Jay McKean Fisher, exh cat, New York: American Federation of Arts, 2009:15-31.

²²⁴ Alfred Barr (1951:563) quotes from Matisse's 1946 note "How I Made My Books."

Matisse's project of pictorially rendering the drawn image as autonomous from its source. The graphic black and white, due to its absence of color, made this perhaps even more starkly manifest than had the earlier paintings. Matisse discusses his admiration for Mallarmé's own use of white space, in favorite poems such as *Le Hasard*, likening his placement of lines on a white page to the words on a page in a Baudelairean or Mallarmé poem, using the black line to define and bound space much like words.²²⁵ Matisse guides the eye, with carefully developed patterns of lines, to roam back and forth on the page, a process of perception similar to reading a text, using bottom cropping to extend the image beyond the confines of the page.

A second powerful motivation for Matisse's devotion to book illustration was his desire to work in series. Throughout the process of illustrating *Fleurs*, including during multiple sessions with Carmen, Matisse routinely made several drawings before arriving at a final version for the lithograph.²²⁶ (Images 95-97)²²⁷ Matisse considered all of the

²²⁵ Matisse comments on his efforts to visualize Mallarmé's approach to poetry in Flam, *Matisse on Art*, 1995.

²²⁶ Carmen's 1946 sessions with Matisse, including the different stages of his preparation of a single drawing, were documented in twenty-two photos taken by Hélène Adant, whose archives are in the Kandinsky Library at the Centre Pompidou. Several Adant photos appear in the book *Matisse à la Villa Le Rêve* (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts and London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), by Marie-France Boyer, Paris editor of the English magazine *The World of Interiors*; Boyer documented Matisse's life and work at the villa, as well as its interiors.

²²⁷ The definitive source on the process of creating the *Fleurs* illustrations is the 1992 exhibition catalogue for *Matisse et Baudelaire*, by the Musée Matisse, Le Cateau-Cambrésis. (1992: 29) It notes that six drawings were completed before *Les Yeux de Berthe* was finalized; between three and five were made for several other illustrations. The catalog includes a comprehensive account of the genesis and development of Matisse's illustrations for *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and as stated in the acknowledgements, was based on the recollections of Matisse's longtime studio assistant Lydia Delectorskaya. While the catalog contains limited iconographic analysis of the works themselves, it provides invaluable contextual information detailing the chronology from commission to publication, the four principal models, and the technical difficulties that led ultimately to the work being published based on photographs of the original drawings.

final drawings selected for the volume to collectively be a single work. As Fisher notes, “What made Matisse so devoted to the illustrated book format was that it enabled him to publish images in a sequence. He wanted them seen together...[and] would be distressed that publishers and dealers have broken them up.”²²⁸

Despite these formal qualities, Matisse often pointed out that it is the intangible factor of inspiration that, in the end, imbues works with the special quality of art; an artwork must not only suggest its subject, but it must capture the emotional response of the artist to the subject. Matisse describes this essential improvisatory gesture as an “enriched accord –I almost wrote musical accord” with the other compositional elements –black, white, color, typography.²²⁹ The need for inspiration best explains Matisse’s intensive working sessions with the live model: “What interests me most is neither still life nor landscape, but the human figure. It is that which permits me to express my so-to-speak religious awe towards life.” He also points out that “They [the models] communicate an immediacy in recording sensation and the process through which a different conclusion –a new visual synthesis –is achieved.”²³⁰

One aspect of Matisse’s emotional engagement with *Fleurs* was his selection of the specific poems for illustration, as well as the models he would pose for each. In both matters, Matisse revealed a highly original vision for his project that disregarded previous conventions –again a replay of his youthful rejection of Gauguin and Rodin as role models. His choice of poems for illustration was a reversal of nearly 70 years of

²²⁸ Fisher, 2009:29.

²²⁹ Barr, 1951: 563. Matisse has made the analogy between artmaking and music elsewhere, referring to the relations of color tonalities of his *Dancers* murals as “rhythms,” suggesting that this relationship can change actual colors to other colors.

²³⁰ Fisher, *ibid.*

tradition, during which several artists, including Odile Redon, Jacob Epstein, Gustave Rodin and Georges Rouault have illustrated *Fleurs*. All of these artists' illustrations invariably relate to the sinister, even morbid aspects of the poems; Matisse took an different approach.²³¹

As his daughter Marguerite Duthuit wrote, "His Baudelaire selections confirm that, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the painter excluded the *mal* in favor of the *fleurs*. We find images of light, the beauty of the senses, aromas, flowers –in short, an atmosphere of 'luxe, calme, et volupté' reminiscent of Matisse's 1904 painting."²³² The enchantment of the Villa Le Rêve setting may well have contributed to Matisse's decision to select those poems most referencing idyllic beauty. With a few exceptions, including *Remords posthume* as modeled by Carmen, Matisse omitted the poems focused on disillusionment and death. He included only one poem, *Le lethé*, from those banned after Baudelaire's prosecution at an 1857 obscenity trial. Instead, he was guided, as Duthuit put it, by the evocations of beauty, passion and serenity that the selected poems elicited from him.

Matisse moreover did not precisely match the poems to models whose physiognomies fit the female type generally assumed to be the poems' subject –the femme fatale, fully aware of the power of her beauty, seductive yet destructive. Carmen, described by Boyer as always laughing, presents herself even in dance costume as a

²³¹ These artists were identified by a listing on an unofficial Baudelaire website www.henri-matisse.net/poetry; their illustrations were then reviewed on various museum and other sites.

²³² Lydia Delectorskaya made a similar comment, in the 1992 *Matisse et Baudelaire* catalog, noting that even for his drawings of the flower motifs, Matisse had no interest in the sinister, exotic flowers found in other artists' illustrations, but instead selected luxuriant local blooms. Still, he abstracted the flowers in his drawings much as he did the human figure. Marguerite Duthuit and her husband authored a definitive catalog raisonné for Matisse's prints. In *Henri Matisse: Catalog raisonné de l'oeuvre grave gravé établi avec la collaboration de Françoise Garnaud* by Marguerite Duthuit-Matisse and Claude Duthuit et al (Paris: Imprimerie Union) 1983: 413.

straightforward, unassuming personality. (Image 100) She was one of four principal models the artist chose for *Fleurs*, including a Dutch war refugee Annelies, Menette Palomarès from Spain, and his Russian assistant Lydia. Carmen's images were the most frequently used, with nine of the 33 illustrations plus the frontispiece. Even as he matched almost all of Carmen's illustrations to poems in the suite known to have been inspired by Jeanne Duval, he assigned other Duval suite poems, for example, *Dame Creole* to the blond Russian Lydia.²³³

The Modernizing Turn: Toward A New Baudelairean Muse

All of these factors of design and creative process combine to make the Matisse *Fleurs* illustrations arguably the most extraordinary and original of all artists' illustrations for these poems. But perhaps its most remarkable iconographic development is the evolving style with which Carmen is portrayed across her nine illustrations and the frontispiece. It is here that we see the same type of breakthrough imagery in Matisse's illustrations that we saw at the start of his career with his move beyond of sexualized imagery of Orientalist subjects. While the *Malabaraise* illustration can be argued to be a direct extension of representational modes for black women dating back to *Olympia*, other Carmen images manifest a veer away from it.

The poem *Les Yeux de Berthe* (*Berthe's Eyes*) for example, is one of Baudelaire's very few pure poems to beauty, almost free of his more typical femme fatale insinuations:

Bertha's Eyes

You can hold in contempt the most famous eyes,
Beautiful eyes of my child, whence filters and flees

²³³ As discussed in the Musée Matisse Le Cateau –Cambrésis exhibition catalog 1992: 26.

A certain something as kind, as sweet as the Night!
Beautiful eyes pour your charming shadows upon me!

Urge eyes of my child, adored mysteries,
You greatly resemble those magical grottos
In which, behind the heap of lethargic shadows,
Unknown treasures sparkle indistinctly!

My child has eyes, dark, profound and immense
Like you, vast Night, lighted like you!
Their fires are those thoughts of Love mingled with Faith
Which sparkle in their depths, voluptuous or chaste.

— William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil* (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954)

Berthe is also a tribute to a beauty of no clearly specified ethnicity, unlike the Malabaraise.²³⁴ Matisse seems to discern this nuance and to reflect it in his rendering of Carmen for *Berthe*, which is very different from that of *La Malabaraise* in ways large and small. (Image 77) *Berthe*, drawn in an even more sparsely detailed manner than *La Malabaraise*, is a small masterpiece of single-line drawing. The entirety of the model's face, neck and shoulders is denoted by just three deftly drawn lines. The curly hair over her forehead is depicted with just enough detail to be evocative of the underlying reality, as seen in photographs of Carmen (Image 78). More obviously, the model does not wear the ubiquitous headscarf or hoop earrings used to signify "black woman" in precedent imagery. Her lips are full; for the discerning viewer this alone might suggest that she is black, but this ethnicity is not as legible as with *La Malabaraise*. This style of imagery in artistic depictions of black women is quite singular within Matisse's Paris School cohort, a rare portrayal of a black woman that sublimates her ethnicity instead of trumpeting it.

²³⁴As previously noted, Griselda Pollock and others have surmised that *Berthe* was Jeanne Duval's stage name while she was working as an actress in Montparnasse at the time that Baudelaire met her. See "A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet," in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

Berthe is deceptive in its apparently effortless simplicity; Matisse made six drawings of Carmen, more than for any other *Fleurs* poem, before arriving at this final version.²³⁵ As Hanhloser writes, “the late graphic work consists almost exclusively of faces, evoked with the minimum number of strokes... this looks like an obsession and only becomes comprehensible when the faces are seen in conjunction –the observer must examine the works in a series in order to understand Matisse’s aims and ways of working. Only then does one begin to understand the complexity of these apparently simple line sketches, seeing the infinite creative imagination that lies within them.”²³⁶

The sublimation is still more pronounced in *Remords posthume*, which illustrates a poem with a more ambiguous message (Image 80):

Posthumous Remorse

When you will sleep, O dusky beauty mine,
Beneath a monument fashioned of black marble,
When you will have for bedroom and mansion
Only a rain-swept vault and a hollow grave,

When the slab of stone, oppressing your frightened breast
And your flanks now supple with charming nonchalance,
Will keep your heart from beating, from wishing,
And your feet from running their adventurous course,

The tomb, confidant of my infinite dreams
(For the tomb will always understand the poet)
Through those long nights from which all sleep is banned, will say:

"What does it profit you, imperfect courtesan,
Not to have known why the dead weep?"
— And like remorse the worm will gnaw your skin.

— William Aggeler, *The Flowers of Evil* (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1954)

²³⁵ In *Matisse et Baudelaire*, exh.cat., Musée Matisse, le Cateau-Cambrésis, 1992:29.

²³⁶ In *Matisse: The Graphic Work*, New York: Rizzoli, 1989.

Like Berthe, the subject's ethnicity is ambiguous, but still more so. The line along her left cheek, over a hint of curls at the temple, is just the slightest suggestion of a headscarf, or perhaps a strand of hair. The facial affect is of equal interest, the pensive demeanor relevant to the poem, but also autonomous of it. This portrayal, on a standalone basis, could simply be seen as a deftly drawn image of an elegant and poised woman in 1940s Nice, who may, or may not, be of African descent, as she contemplates, perhaps, something a friend has just said, or an object in a shop. She is a mid-twentieth century iteration of the culturally hybrid modernity first seen emerging in 1860s Paris.²³⁷ Matisse thus appears to have conceived *Fleurs* with depictions of Carmen derived from by-then formulaic representations of black women emanating from Manet's Laure (and earlier). But he then transformed this imagery, through the explorations of his single-line drawing style, to create a fresh way of imaging this visage, as not just a beautiful woman of color, but as a beautiful woman, period.

We therefore see a series of images by Matisse, in both graphic works and paintings, in which Carmen is presented as emblematic of cosmopolitan modern femininity, a sharp turn for an artist rooted in first Orientalism and then primitivism, and apparently without precedent or peer within Matisse's School of Paris cohort. This raises the question of whether other stimuli or influences may have inspired Matisse's evolution from *La Malabaraise* to *Berthe*. One possibility requires a review of Matisse's little-known time spent in Harlem during his New York visits in the early 1930s, the same period that he accepted the commission that led to his *Fleurs* illustrations.

²³⁷ Chapter One of this dissertation includes a discussion of the evolving cultural hybridity of black populations in France, in the 1995 essay collection *Penser la Creolité*, edited by Maryse Condé.

Matisse and the “New Negro” Aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance

In 1930, feeling the need to seek fresh ideas, Matisse set out for a five-month trip around the world. His ultimate destination was Tahiti, which he had long dreamed of visiting; in addition, he had many important American collectors and had been invited to be a judge for the prestigious Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, a competition for which he had won first prize in 1927.²³⁸ His route would take him to the United States for the first time before departing San Francisco for the Pacific crossing. Matisse accepted invitations to visit several collectors in New York, the Cone Sisters in Baltimore and Alfred Barnes in Merion, Pennsylvania, before traveling cross-country to San Francisco and boarding a trans-Pacific ocean-liner for Tahiti.

While Matisse monographs focus on chronicling the artist’s dealings with collectors, his biographer Hilary Spurling provides a more intimate glimpse into Matisse’s personal reactions to his travels, especially in New York City, based on Matisse’s letters to his wife and friends. She informs us that, on arrival for his first New York visit, on the evening of March 4, 1930, he saw Manhattan, while sailing up the Hudson, as “this block of black and gold mirrored by night on the water;” and was “bewitched, electrified,” by the city.²³⁹ Spurling informs us that, between press interviews and visiting private collections and the Metropolitan Museum (“the old pictures are dubious or mediocre, the modern ones extremely good,” he wrote), Matisse embraced a whirlwind schedule. He “rose at dawn to watch the sun rise over the

²³⁸ Alfred Barr recounts Matisse’s four visits to the United States, detailing the Carnegie jury, Barnes *Dancers* commission, and New York collector visits. In *Matisse: His Art and his Public*, 1951:219-220.

²³⁹ As described in Spurling’s biography *Matisse the Master: A Life of Henri Matisse –The Conquest of Color 1909-1954*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005: 305.

skyscraper cityscape, enjoyed his first ice cream soda on Park Avenue, went up to the top of the Woolworth Building, and saw a powerful black play in Harlem; apart from Broadway (“absolutely infernal, hideous), he loved everything.”²⁴⁰ While there are other detailed accounts of Matisse’s reactions to New York, Spurling provides the only known published mention that Matisse had seen a black play.²⁴¹

With those two lines of text, it was possible to seek a full transcript of the cited letter, in order to learn more about Matisse’s visit to a black play. His description was especially interesting given his antipathy to Broadway.²⁴²

7 mars : Lettre à Amélie « Ce soir je dîne chez Val avec Mad. Reed --- hier j’ai eu journée chargée, le matin j’ai été au building Woolworth, 60 étage. ... Ensuite dîné dans un nouveau restaurant qu’on appelle Marigny... Ensuite j’ai été voir une pièce nègre très épatante. Nègre sérieux. C’est l’histoire de l’ancien testament tel que se le représente un nègre. Très bien joué, très bons décors. Epatant.²⁴³ (Image 91)

²⁴⁰ Spurling, *Ibid.*, 2005:486. In a footnote, Spurling attributes the quote to a March 1930 letter from Matisse to his wife Amélie.

²⁴¹ John Cauman provides a detailed account of Matisse’s reactions, as expressed in his letters, to his New York visit, as well as quotes from the extensive coverage Matisse’s visit received in the New York art and news press. It is interesting to note that Cauman characterizes Matisse’s impressions of Harlem as disparaging; he does not mention Matisse’s description of the black play, but comments that “Matisse’s impressions of New York were not entirely favorable,” citing his loathing of Broadway but also Matisse’s mention of Harlem as a “black hell where Americans go in search of their paradise.” When this comment is placed in the context of Matisse’s admiring reaction to the play, as well as the absence of distaste in his descriptions of his other activities in Harlem, it is not clear whether Matisse was expressing in the cited comment a personal negative reaction to Harlem or perhaps mimicking what he perceived as the view of “Americans” (presumably white). See Cauman’s dissertation *Matisse and America, 1905-1933*, (New York: City University of New York), 2000: 457-465. Cauman sources his quotes of Matisse’s letters to Pierre Schneider’s monograph *Matisse*, translated by Michael Taylor and Bridget Strevens Romer, (New York: Rizzoli), 1984.

²⁴² As stated in the cited March 7, 1930 letter, made available to me by Wanda de Guébriant, Director, Archives Matisse, Issy-les-Moulineux, who also provided the translation in an email correspondence on October 13, 2011. I viewed this letter and other unpublished materials onscreen at the Archives during several research visits from August 21- September 13, 2012. While the Archives does not provide hard photocopies of Matisse’s letters, I received permission to use a photocopy of this one for research purposes

March 7: Letter to Amelie: “This evening I’m dining at Val’s with Mad.Reed. Yesterday I had a busy day, in the morning I went up to the 60th floor of the Woolworth Building, then dined at the new restaurant Marign. I then saw a splendid black play. Very well acted, very good sets. Splendid.”

Separately, it became clear that, during a subsequent visit to New York, Matisse sat for two May 20, 1933 portraits by Carl Van Vechten, who depicted Matisse against a backdrop of textured fabric.²⁴⁴ (Image 80). Van Vechten, who had been a friend and advisor to early Matisse supporter Gertrude Stein in Paris, was now a New York journalist, portrait photographer and close associate of many of the Harlem Renaissance artists, writers and musicians whose portraits he made.²⁴⁵ Leading Harlem Renaissance figures, including its founding philosopher Alain Locke, embraced Van Vechten’s enthusiasm for “uptown” black entertainment venues, and the steady stream of “downtown” guests he brought with him, in the belief that whites’ embrace of black music, and even primitivist engagement with African sculpture, would lead to more respect for black Americans. But Van Vechten was despised by others, including W.E.B Dubois, for his 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven*, which captured the contradictions of a primitivist view of Harlem and its nightlife as “exotic.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ See United States Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten Collection online site for a listing of May 20, 1933 as the creation/publication date. (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004663297>) Cauman notes that Matisse’s fourth and final trip to New York took place May 16-25, 1933. (2000: 523-525)

²⁴⁵ Emily Bernard describes Van Vechten’s role as a white who was both controversial and an important supporter of many Harlem Renaissance artists, in *Carl van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. The only detail about Van Vechten’s portrait of Matisse comes from Bruce Kellner, who describes a version of it as “Matisse recumbent on some Matisse-like fabrics,” in *Carl Van Vechten and the Irreverent Decades*, Univ of Oklahoma, 1968:261. Van Vechten’s portrait subjects included Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Jacob Lawrence in addition to Matisse.

²⁴⁶ Bernard, 2012, *ibid*.

Still, Van Vechten was a prolific photographer who became a close personal friend of Locke and other Harlem luminaries, whose portraits he made throughout the 1930s and 1940s. It is striking that Van Vechten, despite his primitivist inclinations, depicted his many subjects in a style that was exemplary of Harlem Renaissance values. As Richard Powell explains, photography was a means of projecting a new racial identity for black Americans.²⁴⁷ In the wake of Alain Locke's 1925 essay, "The New Negro," Harlem Renaissance artists sought to defy then-prevalent stereotypes with images depicting the new "city Negro." The subjects' demeanor was remarkably similar to that of Matisse's modernizing images of Carmen a decade later, with the head turned slightly to the left, eyes downcast in contemplation, the understated but elegant coiffure, jewelry and attire. (Images 82-85) As Powell writes, about Charles Alston's *Girl in a Red Dress*, (Image 84), the New Negro woman is "defiantly black, beautiful and feminine, yet also unsettled, mysterious, and utterly modern."²⁴⁸ These representations responded to Locke's warning that "art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid." Alston specifically sought to challenge stock characterizations and "invest the modern black... not only with beauty, light-heartedness and urban sophistication but with psychological depth." Given Van Vechten's close friendship with Locke, it is possible that the consistency of Van Vechten's portraiture poses may well have been an explicit intention, one discussed and made known to subjects. Could

²⁴⁷ For an overview of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, see *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, by Richard J. Powell and David A. Bailey et al., Los Angeles: University of California Press and London: Haywood Gallery, exh. cat., 1997: 18-19. Chapter Four herein also includes a detailed discussion of the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance for Romare Bearden, who was a member of the generation of African American artists who came of age in its immediate aftermath and embraced its philosophy.

²⁴⁸ Powell et al, *ibid.*, 1997:19.

Matisse have heard of the importance of this philosophy to modern blacks as he was being positioned for his own portrait?

In the course of locating Matisse's 1930 letter about attending a black play, the Archives Matisse in Issy-les-Moulineux made available a wealth of additional unpublished materials –letters, photographs and agendas - about Matisse's activities in New York. While by no means complete, and in need of further research, this information establishes that Matisse visits to Harlem were not isolated events, but part of a broader network of interlocking personal contacts, based on sustained engagement with Harlem-based artists and musicians, and with modern black culture, prior to, during and after his three New York visits. (see chronologies in Images 81 and 90-95).

As Emily Bernard notes, for example, Van Vechten “single-handedly jumpstarted the black singer Paul Robeson's career” in 1925, arranging for the Robeson's first public concert in New York; he and Robeson's wife Essie were close and she sat for portrait by Van Vechten. (Image 86) Less than a year after that, a letter to Matisse from his son Pierre, well before Matisse first traveled to New York, notes that Robeson and his wife were guests at Matisse's Issy home (which is on rue Clamart) and that Robeson gave a private concert there.²⁴⁹ We also see that, in 1929, Matisse is already a big jazz fan, as described by his wife in a May 1929 letter.

The archives do not yet reveal who accompanied Matisse during his Harlem visits.²⁵⁰ Bernard also notes that “Van Vechten ushered numerous whites to Harlem—he

²⁴⁹ All unpublished Matisse correspondence discussed herein was made available courtesy of Wanda de Guébriant, Director, Archives Matisse, Issy-les-Moulineux.

²⁵⁰ Wanda de Guébriant commented in September 2012 that the information she shared with me cannot be considered to be complete. Not all of Matisse's diaries and correspondence have been reviewed for this content; he habitually wrote several letters each day.

called it his fate. His unofficial tours were famous and captured the attention of black songwriter Andy Razaf, whose popular “Go Harlem!” urged listeners to “Go inspectin’ like Van Vechten.”²⁵¹ While we don’t know if Matisse was escorted by Van Vechten, he wrote of making several visits (or having to cancel plans to do so) to Harlem’s jazz clubs, including the “Club Brewd,” Hot Rhythm and the famous Connie’s Inn. Matisse was known to hate Broadway, but during his second New York visit, in September and October 1930, he was in Harlem clubs on at least three days of his ten-day visit.

Matisse seemed to have a relaxed familiarity with Harlem, remarkable since he did not speak English. In 1934, well after his final New York trip, he reminisces about going shopping for a corn cob pipe in the “quartier nègre de NY.” (Image 95)

Coincidentally, one of Romare Bearden’s best known jazz club paintings decades later is of Connie’s Inn, a club which, as seen in Chapter Four, was directly opposite his parents’ home. (Image 158) Van Vechten, and especially Razaf, were close to Romare Bearden’s parents, and by the 1950s, to Bearden himself.

The Archives documents also reveal that, during Matisse’s visits with Alfred Barnes in Merion, the two men attended a “bal nègre” together on the evening of signing their 1930 contract for Matisse’s *Dancers*.

This anecdotal information does not make an undeniable case that Matisse may have absorbed some of the New Negro aesthetic during his New York visits, and factored it into his depictions of Carmen. It does suggest, however, that he was almost certainly exposed to these ideas, and that he explored jazz and black dance on his own, rather than

²⁵¹ Bernard discusses Van Vechten’s relationship with Paul and especially Essie Robeson and his uptown tours for whites. (2012: 34, 53-54)

just as a tourist in Harlem, for decades. As late as March 1945, twelve years after his last New York trip, a Paris concert of Negro spirituals was on his agenda. (Image 96)

It is within the context of Matisse's ongoing exposure to and personal investigation of black modernist aesthetics that we can now consider Matisse's images of a second black model, during his final series of easel paintings, in which she is portrayed as an icon of international modernity. Matisse made this series at the same period, in 1946, that he was working with Carmen on *Fleurs*.²⁵²

Modernity and Cosmopolitan Beauty: The Final Easel Paintings

Throughout his career, Matisse made series of images of the same scene, model or theme, both in works on paper, as seen with *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and in paintings.²⁵³

Weekend after a serious illness in 1941, the artist had since then largely abandoned large-scale easel paintings in favor of book illustrations, and had begun making cut paper paintings while bedridden. In early 1946, however, he returned to the easel for what would be his last series of oils on canvas. And he took up once again a subject that he had treated in several previous versions, all titled *Young Woman in White, Red Background*. The most recent iteration, from 1944, had an overall visual style not unlike his graphic

²⁵² Wanda de Guébriant suggests the possibility that Matisse made no paintings of Carmen because, as a New York-based dancer, she did not have time for the more extended periods of studio sessions that were required. She clearly was in Nice for temporary reasons, perhaps to visit family; although it appears that in 1947, she traveled there from New York specifically to pose the frontispiece; the ship manifest shows that, after sitting for drawings for another book project, based on Matisse friend Antoine Nau's *Poesies Antillaises*, she returned to New York within days of the final session.

²⁵³ For a recent survey of Matisse's series of paintings, see Matisse: *In Search of True Painting*, by Rebecca Rabinow and Dorthe Aagesen, exh. cat., New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.

work –with the figure in white, firmly drawn with still-visible black lines, set against flattened planes of matte reds and yellows, patterning all but absent. (Image 107) It seemed more a study than a final painting, given the absence of Matisse’s usual richly saturated color, and although considered complete—and signed by Matisse -- he now returned to portray the subject with his characteristic lushness of pattern and tone.

While the basic pictorial structure –woman in white dress, semi-reclining on a fur-draped chair --remained the same, virtually everything else in the 1946 image changed. The white dress is still long, but now strapless. The chair is an old favorite, a striped Louis XV bergere that had been a prop for numerous previous paintings, now draped by a Tibetan pelisse covered by a tiger skin from the Gobi desert.²⁵⁴ And the model is not the French model Lucienne from 1944, but a young woman, Elvira van Hyfte, who was separated from her Congolese mother at an early age when her Belgian father, a colonial official, returned to Europe and took her with him. She received a degree in journalism from the university at Louvain.²⁵⁵

Matisse agreed to have the making of this painting be the subject of a documentary film by François Campaux. Stills of the film provide an intriguing glimpse into Matisse’s painting process, as well as the interpersonal dynamics between the artist and his model. (Image 108). We see the mixing of the paints to achieve light caramel colored flesh tones that approximate, but do not attempt to match, those of the model herself. What the film shows is the truth of Matisse’s lifelong artistic practice –inspired by the presence of the model, he makes a representation, not of the woman herself, but of his inspired response to her. We watch as he abstracts her neatly coiffed hair into a mass

²⁵⁴ See Boyer, 2004: 51, for a description and photograph of this chair.

²⁵⁵ Based on documents and photographs provided by the Archives Matisse.

of squiggles. The natural curve of her face is gently flattened to a masklike angularity, her arms, to mere elbow-less forms. With rapid, loose brushstrokes, sometimes suspended as he considers the next gesture, he evokes the lush textures of the fur and the filmy white dress. The surrounding planes of rich color denote the floor and walls not in angular planes but in curving expanses that seem to fan out from a convergence behind her for the widest possible view onto the scene.

And thus, we have a further iteration, in a painting, of Carmen's pose as Berthe, which was taking place at around the same time. The model is a woman of color, and the painting indexes that –but this is not, in the context of art history, a portrayal of a black woman –it carries none of the overt signifiers –hyper- or a-sexuality, ornate pre-modern attire. True, the fur might be a sublimated touchstone with old e blacks animals - - but here it is as much emblematic of luxury here as well. It is simply a painting of an elegant modern woman in a gorgeous dress.

Matisse simply did not, as a matter of artistic practice, observe racially based hierarchies of beauty. His realm of beauty embraced multiplicity. Mme Van Hyfte is rendered here as an icon of an international elegance. The revision is subtle, but enormous. It is very hard to imagine what cohort Matisse might have had during the 1940s beyond the post-Harlem black artists, for depicting a black model as emblematic of universal beauty.

Matisse made a second, more cropped painting of Mme. Van Hyfte, in a striped sundress. (Image 118) But the final, and, many feel the greatest, in this final series of easel paintings is the large, richly hued *l'Asie/Asia*, also posed by Mme Van Hyfte.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ The Elderfield catalog notes that *L'Asie* is the work in this last series of easel paintings that has been most widely received as a great painting but does not reference the model's ethnicity.

(Image 116) The artist and model appeared to have a friendly rapport. Indications are that Mme. Van Hyfte was sometimes a companion for Matisse when Lydia had to go out; they seemed to chat easily about a range of topics.²⁵⁷ In a 1947 letter to “Mme. Van Hyfte” at a Paris address, evidently in response to one from her, Matisse apologizes for taking three weeks to respond due to scheduling, says he would be delighted to see her again whenever she is in Nice, and encloses an invitation to the opening of his upcoming Paris show.

Formally, *l'Asie* manifests, in an opulently decorative manner, the stylization of the source figure, in particular the alluring yet masklike face with its high bare forehead and pulled back black curls as she appears to have slipped one arm from the voluminous sleeve. That Madame van Hyfte is a personification of Asia despite the presence of a Chinese model, with whom Matisse was also working around this time, (Image 118) underscores Matisse's disregard for conventions that limit models to any one ethnic type. He drapes the Gobi desert tiger skin over a chair for an image that has nothing to do with Asia; Asia herself is surrounded not by overtly Asian objects but by expanses of reds and yellow. The appeal is in the color and patterning of the image, and in the artist's ever-present determination to do the unexpected rather than the formulaic. (Image 117)

The first half of 1946 was one of the busiest times for Matisse at la Villa le Rêve. His three paintings modeled by Mme. Van Hyfte were completed in late spring, during the same period as his work with Carmen on *Fleurs*. During these months, Matisse also completed the text for *Jazz*, whose paper cutouts he had made in 1944. An analysis of the

(1992:413). A short label for *l'Asie* on the website of its owner the Kimbell Art Museum mentions that, “while the golden ochre skin tones of the model are characteristic of Asian peoples, the model apparently came from the Congo.”

²⁵⁷ Anecdotes from conversations with Wanda de Guébriant, Issy-le-Moulineux, September 2012.

parallels between these three of these projects, in terms of Matisse's working methods and thematic interests, is a study waiting to be done. Matisse's friend, the writer Aragon, referred to these activities as the "comédie du modèle," in perhaps the only critical writing that references Matisse's extensive work with black models during this period.²⁵⁸

In June 1946, Matisse left Vence for Paris, where he stayed until April of the following year. He continued to engage with representations of the black female figure, and his explorations of modern black culture. During his time in Paris, he attended at least one concert of Negro spirituals, and engaged a Madagascan model, Athenore, for sittings in his Montparnasse studio. (Images 120 and 121) His assistant Lydia has recounted that sometimes, when she and Matisse visited the Montparnasse cafés, he would have her approach "exotic" women, to avoid sending the wrong signals if he approached them himself, and ask them to pose for him.²⁵⁹ Matisse maintained contact with the model Carmen, now based full-time in New York, long after her studio sessions ended; she sent him photographs of her young family. (Image 122). During the 1950s, among Matisse's important cut paper paintings were *Creole Dancer*, said to be based on Katharine Dunham, and *La Negresse*, based on Josephine Baker. (Images 121 and 123). Matisse can thus be said to have made images of women of color from Europe, Africa and the Americas.

Influences and Critical Reception of *Les Fleurs du Mal*

Aside from the Musée Matisse Le Cateau-Cambrésis exhibition, *Les Fleurs du Mal* has drawn little art-historical interest. William Lieberman captures the general view:

²⁵⁸ Aragon, *Henri Matisse, roman*, Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1998.

²⁵⁹ As described by Wanda de Guébriant.

“A Baudelaire by Matisse should have been an important publishing event. It was not. Dry weather unfortunately ruined the transfer paper on which Matisse had drawn. Finally the illustrations, mostly female heads, were photographed and mechanically reproduced. They bear little affinity to the passion of the poems.”²⁶⁰ This commentary may not reflect the artist’s own view, since, as explained in the *Le Cateau* catalog, Matisse had fortunately had his illustrations photographed before sending them to the printer. After extensive additional effort on his part, the final published version was mechanically reproduced, but based on the original, undamaged Matisse illustrations.²⁶¹ Matisse’s assistant Lydia spoke of the artist’s passion for the project, saying that “no other book had been worked on as hard as Matisse worked on *Fleurs*, especially after the printmaking difficulties;” that in order to save his eight months’ work on the project, Matisse had overseen every small detail to ensure its publication, finally, in 1947.²⁶²

Thus, it can be said that there was no consensus on the artistic value of Matisse’s seldom-studied *Fleurs du Mal* project. The argument herein is that *Fleurs* is of unique art-historical importance in its exemplification of the development of Matisse’s single line drawing technique and his interest in creating series as well as in its iconographic advances in the representations of the black female subject.

Though technically flawed in final production, the *Fleurs* lithographs are small masterpieces of Matisse’s commitment to the autonomy of the work of art as a suggestion, rather than a representation, of its source material. Iconographically, *Fleurs* appears to demonstrate a continuity of the pictorial resonances of Manet’s *Laure*.

²⁶⁰ From the 1956 essay by William Lieberman in Fisher, 2009: 26.

²⁶¹ Musée Matisse Le Cateau-Cambrésis, 1992: 58, 62.

²⁶² Musée Matisse Le Cateau- Cambrésis, 1992:80.

Together with Matisse's late paintings, it also led to a break with longstanding binaries that ascribed iconic beauty solely to the white subject.

Like the Harlem Renaissance artists, Matisse was among the first to depict the black female subject in modern terms. His images were based not on socio-political agendas, but solely on an artistic vision that did not consign the representation of beauty to then-prevalent racial hierarchies. Matisse traveled to the new world, engaged with modern black culture there, and experienced firsthand the diversity of its cultures. In this way, Matisse, alone among his School of Paris cohort, surpassed primitivism, and thus anticipated the future, in a way that Picasso never did.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bearden in Harlem and Paris: Collaging Cultural Hybridity

Romare Bearden, as an African American artist of the second half of the twentieth century, sought to re-imagine modernist aesthetics in a way that centered African American subject matter and cultural practices. It was through Bearden's efforts to manifest in art the "double consciousness," that W.E.B. DuBois described as shaping the African American psyche, that Bearden developed an oeuvre that became a definitive representation of African life and culture during his time.²⁶³ As his friend the novelist Ralph Ellison asserted that the mission of the artist is "to bring a new visual order into the world, and though his art... reset society's clock by imposing upon it his own method of defining the times," Bearden himself stated that his practice developed out of "a need to to redefine the image of man in the terms of the Negro experience, I know best.... What I've attempted to do is establish a world through art in which the validity of my Negro experience could live and make its own logic."²⁶⁴

²⁶³ W.E.B. DuBois states, in his 1903 collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folks* that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," noting the prevalence of a "double consciousness among black Americans characterized by "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" and the necessity of reconciling one's dual identity as an American of African descent. This concept was central to the emerging modernity expressed by artists and writers of the 1920s-30s Harlem Renaissance, a generation that shaped Bearden's early development as an artist. By the middle of the century, Bearden's friend Ralph Ellison, author of the seminal 1952 novel *The Invisible Man*, articulated the additional necessity for the black American to escape the condition of invisibility within mainstream American culture, despite being in plain view. These two texts provide a contextual framework for the creative expression of many mid-century African American artists and writers of Bearden's generation.

²⁶⁴ See Gail Gelburd's discussion of Ellison's commentary in *Romare Bearden in Black- and - White: Photomontage Projections* (Whitney Museum of Art, 1964:17); Bearden's remarks are part of a Sharon Patton's comprehensive overview of Bearden's life and work in *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Oxford University Press, 1991: 38).

This chapter will suggest that Bearden's 1970 collage *Patchwork Quilt* exemplifies his quest for a synthesis of subject matter, creative process and artmaking materials in order to represent this new worldview. It will propose that there is an iconographic affinity between *Patchwork Quilt* and Manet's *Olympia* that is rooted in Bearden's investigation of the pictorial and content values of Manet's foundational modernist painting, but equally in his reinvention of these tropes to represent a culturally hybrid African American culture that draws on myriad sources in order to craft its own unique identity.

It is in particular the revisionary impulse of *Patchwork Quilt* with which Bearden displays an admiring yet critical engagement with the art of the past. By evoking yet re-presenting its iconic tropes, he asserts the central presence of the African American subject in the formation of Western modernity, as an intervention against its marginalization to the point of invisibility in mainstream culture.

The cultural hybridity underlying the making and meaning of *Patchwork Quilt* will finally be seen as not just emblematic of African American identity but of the paradigmatic formation of cultural hybridity across the black Atlantic, including the African diaspora of France, of which Manet's modernized but fraught figuring of Laure in *Olympia*, as discussed in the first half of this dissertation, was an early manifestation.²⁶⁵ Bearden sought to reveal the universal through the specificities of African diasporan culture.

²⁶⁵ Paul Gilroy writes of the synthesis of African, American, European and Caribbean cultural ideas to shape unique new diasporan identities in the US and Europe in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), while Maryse Condé, as discussed in the Manet chapters of this dissertation, examines the evolving cultural hybridity of Paris' black populations in the 1995 essay collection *Penser la Creolité* (Thinking Creoleness).

Bearden's engagement with the art of Edouard Manet is best considered within the broader context of Bearden's decades-long artistic practice of viewing, analyzing, copying and re-imagining the paintings of European masters. Bearden emerged as an artist at a time when racial attitudes in the United States circumscribed black artists' personal freedom and artistic opportunity at home. This socio-economic context, especially in the decades before the 1960s civil rights movement, led many black artists since the aftermath of World War I to travel and seek longterm expatriation in Europe, and especially in Paris, a city then seen as both the capital of the art world and relatively free of the racist constraints of American society.²⁶⁶ Bearden's wholehearted embrace of this tradition led to his nine-month sojourn in Paris in 1950, funded by the GI bill, when he took in the life of the city, visited museums and studied the writings of artists he admired.

It was his reading of Eugene Delacroix' journal, detailing his study of past masters that inspired Bearden, upon his return to New York, and enrolling in classes at the Art Students League, to begin his own program of systematically copying masterpieces of art in order to analyze their composition and find his own unique style.²⁶⁷

At the same time, Bearden participated in an uptown-downtown artistic exchange, developing long friendships with both his fellow Harlem-based African American artists as well as "downtown" artists including Stuart Davis, Miro and Mondrian. By the 1960s, these artists, while sharing Bearden's engagement with the European masters, were also

²⁶⁶ See essays by Kinshasha Holman Conwill and Michel Fabre in the Studio Museum in Harlem exhibition catalog *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris 1945-1965*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996: 6-7, 37.

²⁶⁷ Schwartzman, Myron. *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art*. New York: Charles Abrams & Sons, 1990:30.

extensively engaged with African art and jazz as part of the modernist project based on infusing European and nonwestern, or fine art and popular culture traditions. All of these exchanges and influences informed Bearden's decision in the early 1960s to use collage as his compositional method. Likening it to the improvisational style of jazz, he saw the processes and materials of collage as metaphoric of his instinct to represent the specificity and universality, the realities and aspirations, of African American culture, by drawing from the multiplicity of sources that shaped it.²⁶⁸ Bearden pointed out that "the dynamics of collage (are) especially relevant to the hyphenated character of diaspora identities...the formal principle lies in the purposive selection of signifying elements from disparate sources, combined in unexpected juxtapositions," noting that once, when his friend Max Roach was played on the radio, "I just took the brush and painted the sounds, the color rhythms, and the silences" for a work he called "Portrait of Max in Sounds, Rhythms and Colors...."

The Reclining Nude: Continuity and Revision

Romare Bearden's 1970 collage *Patchwork Quilt* exemplifies his view that art is "an old tune that the artist plays with new variation. He attempts to see things with fresh eyes yet he must determine his relation to his past history."²⁶⁹ With *Patchwork Quilt's* highly stylized depiction of a female nude reclining on a bed, Bearden invokes one of the

²⁶⁸ Schwartzman, *ibid*, 1990:289, from his 1986 conversations with Bearden.

²⁶⁹ Museum of Modern Art. *Artist's Questionnaire, Object Record for Patchwork Quilt* by Romare Bearden in the Collection of Painting and Sculpture: New York, 1970: 4.

most iconic images in the history of Western art since the Renaissance. (Image 134)²⁷⁰

But Bearden radically revises this trope by presenting his odalisque as a black female. He thus supplants the erasure, stereotyping and marginalization of the black female subject that permeates art history, and re-imagines her as the focal point of interest.

Bearden intensifies his revisionary agenda by contextualizing the figure, not within the traditional European boudoir, but with attributes--attire, furnishings, compositional materials--that signify the legacy and aesthetics of African American culture. *Patchwork Quilt* thus extends the iconicity of the reclining nude from the Renaissance and nineteenth century France into postwar American modernism. While Bearden's work can be seen as a manifestation of civil-rights era artistic initiatives to establish the modern black woman within the lineage of women depicted as objects of beauty and desire, it also presaged a subsequent feminist-motivated push for the de-objectification of women through a shift of visual interest from their physical attributes to their cultural context.²⁷¹

Patchwork Quilt is a pivotal work in a project that was central to modernist art from its inception: the representation of the issue of race, as personified by the black female figure, as a defining factor of modern life in the West. Artistic engagement with

²⁷⁰ Images in the Bearden chapter have split numbers due to size-related technical difficulties with a single powerpoint containing all of the dissertation's images. The first number is the slide number in the single entire document; the second number relates to a second standalone Bearden powerpoint made as a backup. This will be corrected before deposit.

²⁷¹ In defining black culture, as a context for art, Powell echoes Bearden's comments about the collaged nature of black culture, noting that this hybridity complicates efforts to essentialize race; yet he defines it as a critical mass of individuals with shared beliefs and experiences; yet he warns against a singular...all-inclusive black aesthetic. Yet, as Stuart Hall says, more simply, it is "the things that significant numbers of black people do." See *Black Art: A Cultural History*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002:11-15. Raiford (2011:197-198) discusses the use of Bearden imagery in the development of symbols of black culture and power: See Cornelia Butler's discussion of issues defining feminism in the exhibition catalog *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007: 15.

this project can be traced to Manet's 1863 painting *Olympia*, a work often designated as foundational to modern art. (Image 133) Bearden's writings and archival materials suggest that Manet's representation in *Olympia* of Laure, a black model posed as a brothel maid, is the "old tune" for which *Patchwork Quilt* offers a radical "new variation."

A cursory first viewing of *Patchwork Quilt* offers several reasons to look to *Olympia* as a source for its imagery. (Image 134) The basic pictorial placement of Bearden's central image, a nude woman reclining on a bed, mirrors that of the prostitute figure in *Olympia*. The figure lies close to the central horizontal axis of the image. She supports herself on her bent right elbow, with pillows beneath her head and upper torso. Bearden's revised figure is black and alone, lies face down, and is composed in modernist collage rather than traditional oil paint. But her basic placement mirrors that not only of the *Olympia* prostitute, but of a lineage of reclining nudes by old masters on which *Olympia* itself is based, including Titian's 1563 *Venus of Urbino* (Image 135). Bearden therefore places his figure within a central trope of Western art history, even as he radically revises it.

Other details suggest *Patchwork Quilt*'s engagement with *Olympia*, including a pictorial structure for *Patchwork Quilt* that reflects the spatial and figural flatness that marked *Olympia* as a radical break with Renaissance perspective and naturalism. Both paintings are situated in an interior space divided into three pictorial planes. An expansive bed and a glimpse of floor occupy the lower half of each painting, while the upper half is vertically divided into a tonally subdued green-black plane on the right and slightly brighter-hued space to the left.

Bearden's green-black background is very similar in color tone to that of Manet's; though Manet's green is divided between a deep greenish-black behind the Laure figure and a slightly brighter drapery over the prostitute's head-- a detail which itself is a somewhat lurid version of the deep green velvet curtain in the same location in the Titian painting. (Image 135) Since this green tonality frames Manet's Laure figure, it is also worth noting the compositional similarities between Bearden's reclining nude and Manet's black brothel maid. Both faces are seen in profile from the right; both wear headscarfs and a single earring. If Manet's Laure proffers a bouquet of flowers, Bearden's nude rests her head on a flowery pillow, evoking an idyllic place of dreams. Both figures' faces are rendered in a schematic, generalized manner, rather than as a portraitized individual, signifying an intent to render these figures as archetypes. While the Bearden nude's skin tones are varying shades of brown and black, some expanses closely match those of Manet's Laure figure. Bearden's evocation of Manet's green-black spatial background, and the similar brown figural tonalities, combine to suggest Bearden's intent to remove Manet's maid figure, as an archetypal black woman, out of the murky shadows of her obscured 19th century representation, and into the open-horizons realm--signified by the rich blue expanse of color above the *Patchwork Quilt* nude's head-- of dreams and possibility.

On the basis of this formal analysis alone, *Patchwork Quilt* can therefore be seen as a retrieval and transformation of Manet's Laure figure. This was an intervention that Bearden felt was invited by Manet's working methods. Bearden admired what he saw as an "unfinished" quality in Manet's paintings, due to Manet's constant reworking of the surface, and sometimes blurred distinctions between figure and ground; he believed that

this left Manet's paintings open for the viewer –or other artists --to complete or re-interpret.²⁷² In *Olympia*, these techniques work to the detriment of the Laure figure, who, though modernized, is blended into the shadows of the room and rendered all but invisible. This obliteration diverted the attention of most viewers from the radically modern attributes of her attire--including that unlike her exoticized Orientalist precedents, her breasts are covered, her attire is that of a European working class woman, and the sartorial markers of her Antillaise ethnicity –her headscarf and jewelry -are abstracted and understated. With these modernizing attributes of cultural hybridity, Manet places Laure outside the trope of an ethnically specific type, and places her at the heart of the urban working class in 1860s Paris. She is perhaps the earliest representation in Salon art of an emerging free black population in post-abolition Paris.²⁷³ But the tonal obscuring of these modernizing revisions ultimately obliterate her subjectivity, and thus allowed viewers to inscribe the Laure figure with the racist stereotypes of the asexual, marginal black female who is subordinated to the white female by the very nature of her race.²⁷⁴

The metonymy of this duality –modernized but obscured –led a subset of the observing public to be more perceptive of her problematic modernity, and to see it as a turn, as the beginning of something new, but in the end left unfinished. At least one critic

²⁷² Schwartzman, Myron. *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art*. New York: Charles Abrams & Sons, 1990:30.

²⁷³ Griselda Pollock, "A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the dark, seeing double, at least with Manet." In *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. (London and New York: Routledge), 1999: 285.

²⁷⁴ Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," reprinted with "Postscript" in Grant Kester, ed, *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, Duke University, 1998.

of Manet's own time voiced a view similar to Bearden's about the incompleteness of this figure. Alfred Sensier, considered the most astute critic of 1860s Paris, wrote of *Olympia* that "the Negress and flowers [are] insufficient in execution, but with a real harmony to them...hideous but still something."²⁷⁵ And when Manet's acolyte Frederic Bazille painted a tribute to Manet in 1870, he re-imagined, with much greater clarity, not the much-debated prostitute in *Olympia*, but her obliterated black maid. (Image 136)

Bearden can be seen as within the lineage of artists extending from Bazille who seek to advance Manet's problematic modernization of the maid figure. Like Bazille, he the unfinished business was the marginalized and obscured representation of the "Negress." *Patchwork Quilt*, made exactly one century after the Bazille, can be seen as part of this lineage of critical and artistic interest in retrieving what Sensier called the "something" that Manet left "insufficient." Bearden confronted *Olympia*'s formal and iconographic methods en route to developing his own distinctive vision of the reclining nude female, reversing her relegation to the margins of visibility, and placing her instead in a newly central position reflective of 1960s African Americans' societal role and aspirations.

Manet and Boucher: Archival Sources for a Synthesizing Pose

Bearden voiced a reluctance to clarify specific iconographic influences himself, preferring, in comments about *Patchwork Quilt*, that the viewer's "sense of searching within the work imparts to it an added tension and has power to lift the onlooker with a sense of discovery."²⁷⁶ But Bearden wrote extensively about his admiration for Manet's

²⁷⁵ T.J. Clark, 1984: 140.

²⁷⁶ Museum of Modern Art. *Artist's Questionnaire, Object Record for Patchwork Quilt by Romare Bearden in the Collection of Painting and Sculpture*: New York, 1970: 4.

painterly style.²⁷⁷ He states that, although while living in Paris in 1950; after his return, he studied and copied works by Manet and other masters, though none of these works are known to be extant: “ I made reasonably free copies of the work of artists including Giotto, Verones, Rembrandt, Manet and Matisse, substituting my own choice of colors for those of these artists, except for those of Manet and Matisse, when I was guided by color reproductions.”²⁷⁸

Bearden’s fidelity to Manet’s color tones is especially relevant, since as previously discussed, he almost exactly reproduces the shade, if not the murky texture, of the green-black background tones surrounding, and seemingly absorbing, the maid figure in *Olympia*. This formal affinity between the two works, and the fact that it is hard to imagine any artist copying Manet without looking at *Olympia*, together imply that Bearden was almost certainly aware of *Olympia*, and that he engaged with Manet’s ideas in his own work. Further evidence emerges from additional visual analysis based on Bearden’s archival records.

_____ There are strong indications that *Olympia*’s imagery was part of a vast inventory of pictorial elements from which Bearden constructed his collages. Archival research at the Romare Bearden Foundation in New York reveals that Bearden owned at least one large color reproduction of the painting. It appears, together with images of nudes by Renoir, Titian, Boucher and others, as part of a 5-page article titled “Languorous Ladies on Couch and Cushion,” torn from what appears to be a 1960s issue of *Look* magazine.

²⁷⁷ Romare Bearden and Carl Holty, *Painter’s Mind: A Study of the Relations of Structure and Space in Painting*, (New York: Crown Publishers), 1969: 142-145.

²⁷⁸ Sharon Patton, *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987*, (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Oxford University Press), 1991: 31. This quote also appears in Ruth Fine, *The Art of Romare Bearden*. exh. cat. Washington, D.C., The National Gallery of Art, 2003: 263.

(Image 137) Found stored in a folder containing dozens of magazine tear-sheets, clippings and photographs, the “Languorous Ladies” article was part of an extensive file of images of medieval, old master and modernist paintings, art photography, and hardcore pornography. This folder was clearly a working file for Bearden; several items were cutouts or fragments of photographs; and cryptic notes and pencil sketches were sometimes found in borders and inside covers.²⁷⁹

Scrutiny of the archival images suggests that Bearden’s *Patchwork Quilt* nude is a blend of the *Olympia* pose and another image shown in the “Languorous Ladies” article-- that of Boucher’s portrait of Marie-Louise O’Murphy, a teenaged mistress of Louis XV, which was part of the “Languorous Ladies” spread. With one leg dangling off the edge of the bed and along its side, the pose of Bearden’s nude, from the legs down, closely emulates that of the Boucher nude. While the page with the full image is missing, the caption for the image, placed just below the *Olympia* image, identifies it as Boucher’s 1752 celebrated portrait of Mary-Louise Murphy.

Re-Situating the Object of Desire

Bearden may have been especially receptive to the conflation of the Manet and Boucher odalisques due to his pre-existing interest in conflating imagery from varied sources into symbolic representations of African American concerns. Bearden regularly used fragments of images drawn from African masks and ancient Egyptian tomb

²⁷⁹ I reviewed and selectively photocopied the Bearden Foundation archives on January 9, 11 and 29, 2009. “Languorous Ladies” is a color spread, on pages sized in the oversized format of old Life and Look magazines, but these pages did not carry the name of any magazine, nor were they dated. The folded multi-page clipping was included in a folder of magazine clippings of paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, Titian and several Impressionists. The clippings file was in a box labeled “ship to Sheila” which was dated October 2005. The Foundation’s library of books owned by Bearden included one titled *French Painting*, by Joseph C. Sloane, which included a section on Manet and discussed the controversy that *Olympia* triggered during the 1865 Salon.

sculpture to collage African American figures.²⁸⁰ The flattened, masklike form of the *Patchwork Quilt* odalisque's face in profile suggests a continuity of that practice here, as does the combination of nearly full-frontal breasts and profile-view legs often shown in striding relief figures from Egyptian tombs. (Image 139) The Boucher nude's leg placement bears an uncanny resemblance to the archetypal Egyptian striding figure. By placing the Egyptian-inspired form in the reclining pose of a European odalisque, and arranging her on a patchwork quilt connotative of African American culture, Bearden creates an intriguing visual metaphor for the hybrid origins and double-consciousness of that culture.

The face-down placement of the figure may well suggest other key components Bearden's signifying intentions. The positioning of Bearden's nude on the picture plane, as discussed above, clearly mirrors the prototypes established by Titian and Manet, even as he radically alters her skin tones. Like Olympia and Venus, she lies on a sofa facing to the right. It is perhaps in the pose of the Bearden nude, however, that we also see the most complex evolution of Bearden's revisionary work. The *Patchwork Quilt* reclining nude occupies the same pictorial space as those of Titian and Manet.

But the precedent nudes present themselves frontally to the viewer, and place their sexual attributes on almost complete display, while Bearden's nude lies on her stomach, her sensuality all but concealed. She evokes the European odalisque, but her attributes are her culture, not her sexuality. Bearden's iterative images of the black nude suggest that this was a careful and discerning revision, done with full awareness of the

²⁸⁰ In discussing Bearden's 1960s photomontages, Thelma Golden observes that "African masks replaced black faces in Bearden's work, and black faces (were) constructed as African masks," in *Romare Bearden in Black-and-White* (The Whitney Museum), 1997:49. And Bearden alludes to Egyptian tomb sculpture as a source in an unpublished artist's questionnaire on file in the Museum of Modern Art's *Object Record for Patchwork Quilt by Romare Bearden* (1970:3).

different significations of a frontal vs face-down pose. The former suggests sexual availability to the viewer; the latter places the figure as an object of desire, but the implication of her sexual availability is more recondite.

The connotation of sexual availability projected by the frontal female nude is an especially fraught one when the nude is a black woman, as it can all too easily conflate with racist stereotypes of promiscuity and hypersexuality that have long associated with black female figure in art. As Kellie Jones has pointed out, this is one reason for the paucity of black nudes in paintings by black artists, with very few exceptions, such as William H. Johnson's *Mahlinda*.²⁸¹ (Image 141) Lowery Stokes-Sims relates this 1939 painting to Johnson's engagement with German Expressionism and Fauvism –the exaggerated bodily proportions, densely textured facture and Matisse-like still lifes manifest these influences.²⁸² And simply by making the subject black, Johnson relates to a Harlem Renaissance –era interest in situating the black female as the focal object of desire, Yet it did not address the derogatory myths around black sexuality that images of nude black women evoked.

²⁸¹ Jones writes that “Some of the (black) artists who were able to portray sexuality prior to the 1960s were W.H. Johnson, Archibald Motley and Eldzier Cortor. With the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the topic became more acceptable among African American artists. Romare Bearden was the first to work consistently with the nude, which has been a standard them of Western (and I would argue African) art for centuries. Some of his collages portraying the black female body were created out of clippings from porn magazines, a topic that has yet to be thoroughly interrogated....” in a note to her essay about the contemporary artist Lorna Simpson, in *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, Duke University Press, 2011:121. The essay was originally published in *Lorna Simpson* by Kellie Jones et al (London: Phaidon Press, 2002).

²⁸² Sims further relates the painting to Gauguin's studies of Tahitian women, as part of the modernist inclination for “anti-classical” depictions of the odalisque, while noting that “...most black artists did work towards dramatic or radical transformations of the human body that had been a hallmark of vanguard modernism....They did, however, entertain modernist constructs of identity {with regard to} issues of self-assertive sexuality, self-definiiton in the fae of stereotypes and caricature...” In *The Challenge of the Modern: African American Artists 1925-1945* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem) 2003: 74.

Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt*, however, made a more definitive, if still not complete, break from this tradition, privileging the cultural aspects of the black nude as the basis for her desirability over the purely erotic dimension. But this was an evolution in Bearden's own imaging of the black female nude. During the same period that *Patchwork Quilt* was composed, other Bearden collages depicted the frontal female nudity of Titian and *Olympia*, often, as in a 1971 version of *The Street*, in the explicit poses excerpted directly from pictures in pornographic magazines.²⁸³ (Image 153) On the one hand, these women were typically situated in bedroom love scenes, including those voyeuristically seen as part of panoramic cityscapes, thus situating them outside the space of pornography, as part of the artist's frank representation of all aspects of black life in urban tenements. (Image 142) And the artist's many images of brothels, such as *The Apprenticeship of Jelly Roll Morton*, related to Bearden's interest in the biographies of great jazz musicians like Morton. (Image 152) This combination of high and low culture is captured in the many single figures composed in photomontage from a mix of pornography and fine art. Bearden conflated high and low images of nude women, from paintings and pornographic magazines, without seeming to privilege one format over the other.

This observation is underscored by the contents of Bearden's archives. The "Langourous Ladies" article was found in a folder in which explicit color images torn from hardcore pornographic magazines were stuffed inside an expensively designed book, titled *Nus*, of artistically photographed nudes. Pencil sketches were drawn on the

²⁸³ See Judith Wilson's comments that Bearden's work often uncritically reflected the most graphic tropes of hardcore pornography, including the romanticization of sex work and voyeuristic scenarios, and other. in "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-U.S. Art." In Gina Dent and Michelle Wallace, *Black Popular Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1992:116, 118.

inside covers of *Nus*, in close imitation of the poses of enclosed images of both pornographic and artistic poses. And almost identical poses can frequently be seen in several of Bearden's final collages. This extensive engagement with pornography and brothels may relate to Bearden's childhood, when he first learned to draw from one of his best friends, who was the son of a prostitute.²⁸⁴ He was clearly fluent with what images of frontally nude women implied --her status as an object of desire was based on the display, and implied availability, of her body to the viewer; frontal nudes were sex objects, even commodities, presented for inspection, mating or the purchase of sex. By turning the nude of *Patchwork Quilt* away from the viewer, therefore, Bearden appears to very deliberately situate her desirability more with her cultural iconicity than on her sexuality.

In a *Study for Patchwork Quilt*, Bearden painstakingly writes a note above the legs to "take care for leg angle" suggesting his close attention to the stiffening reminiscent of Egyptian tomb reliefs as well as the precise placement of the legs as slightly off-balance in relation to the sofa. (Image 149)²⁸⁵ Collages featuring a face-down black nude made before *Patchwork Quilt*, which appear to have been experimentations with this pose leading up to his final composition, reveal an

²⁸⁴ Reginia Perry recounts Bearden's story of how he first became interested in drawing --when a childhood friend Eugene showed him notebooks full of his drawings of couples in different sex positions. He had apparently observed this through holes in the floor of his attic room in the brothel owned by his mother, and reflecting that viewing perspective, he depicted the brothel as if without walls, so that the viewer could see into every room -- an idea which Bearden repeatedly used when depicting urban life in works such as *The Street*. When Bearden's grandmother, with whom he lived while in Pittsburgh, became aware of these notebooks, she invited Eugene to live with them. When Bearden helped him pack in his attic room, he saw the holes in the floor through which Eugene saw the scenes he sketched --which depicted a brothel without walls so that the viewer could see into every room --In the exhibition catalog *Celebration and Vision: The Hewitt Collection of African American Art*, Charlotte: Bank of America Corp, 1999:22-23). Judith Wilson also details this incident.

²⁸⁵ Bearden's longtime studio assistant Andre Thibault ("Teabo") remarked, during a January 16, 2013 talk at ACA Galleries New York, remarked that there had also been a smaller study tacked to Bearden's studio wall as he made the 1970 *Patchwork Quilt*; the study now appears to be lost.

increasingly abstracted figural treatment. (Image 144) In the 1968 *Black Venus*, the figure, though in black paper cutouts, retains a more naturalistic treatment of bodily curves as well as of the arms folded under the head. A second black woman shown topless in the background and the man seated in the left foreground suggest a brothel venue. While the odalisque rests on a patchwork quilt, its pastel colors, as well as the rich fuschias of the walls and the flowers and wine on tables, all seem intended to heighten the allure of the women. *Black Venus* is suffused with pictorial ideas from early modernists whose work Bearden was known to analyze and copy.²⁸⁶ The Matissean palette reflects Bearden's comment, cited herein, that when he copied Manet and Matisse, he was guided by color reproductions, and did not adapt the palette as he did when copying other artists. The style of the foreground still life and the use of black cutout silhouette figures, stylized to the point that hands and feet are merely suggested, but not actually depicted, also manifest Bearden's admiration for Matisse—the cutouts evoke Matisse's 1943-47 illustrated book *Jazz*, which would hold special thematic interest for Bearden given his commitment to the visualizing the improvisation of jazz. The guitar player's somewhat ominous presence—including the specific treatment of the eye--together with the woman's hand and head placement, may suggest Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau*.²⁸⁷ The abstracted patchwork patterning of the bed anchors a scene otherwise resonant of European depictions of brothels within a specifically African American

²⁸⁶ Fine discusses Bearden's admiration for Matisse and his presumed interest in the Jazz cutouts, 2003:28.

²⁸⁷ Curator Kate Butler of the Kempner Museum of Art, to whose collection *Black Venus* belongs, pointed this collage out to me and discussed her sense of a combined Manet and Gauguin influence during a June 15, 2012 discussion.

context, while the image is universalized by the quilt's tipped over contribution to modernist pictorial flatness.

In Bearden's 1969 version of *Patchwork Quilt*, the female figure appears to be a standing study for the reclining figure of the final version, her multihued body still curvaceous, but turned in profile away from the viewer as she appears to step into a washbasin while a man nearby either removes his shirt or pulls on one previously removed –thus marking the scene as a bedroom, perhaps again in a brothel. This is a far more threadbare bordello, the small shabby room with potbellied stove perhaps placing it in a rural context not unlike the environs of Bearden's native Charlotte, or perhaps the Pittsburgh countryside. The fact of Bearden's encounters as an adolescent with prostitution through his friend, as well as his many images of brothel scenes, demonstrate an interest in brothels ; it is almost inconceivable that Bearden's acknowledged close study of Manet would not have included *Olympia*.

Only in the 1970 *Patchwork Quilt*, now at the Museum of Modern Art, does Bearden make a clean break with Johnson's *Mahlinda*, an image which replaced the white object of desire with a reclining black woman, but still presented her on the basis of sexual attributes. (Image 141) The 1970 *Patchwork Quilt* refuses the brothel scene of *Olympia*, in which idealized beauty is subverted by the dual images of the prostitute and black maid., by contextualizing the odalisque in a manner that is not explicitly sexual.²⁸⁸ No lover or customer is present; the reclining nude's figure is constructed with the angularity and stiffly extended limbs of the Egyptian tomb relief. The patterning of the quilt is greatly clarified beyond the 1969 version, after the careful preparatory drawing

²⁸⁸ Coco Fusco writes of the significations of sexual immorality and uncleanness, by both prostitution and the black females, in "Captain Shit and Other Allegories of Black Stardom." In *NKA* (Spring/Summer 1999: 40-45, 134.

seen in the study. In this version, the sensuous Matissean palette resolves into solid flat planes of color, described upon its first exhibition as “ increasingly more sophisticated in color and design, less compressed, airier, and more elegant....Here is an artist who truly enjoys the plasticity of his medium.”²⁸⁹

By positioning the 1970 *Patchwork Quilt*'s black nude in the precise pictorial location of the Manet (and Titian) nudes, but imbuing her with the attributes of black culture rather than the frontal exposure of sexual availability, he creates a new ideal of beauty. Facially generalized, she is not a specific individual, but a black female archetype, representing an idealized and cultivated beauty that suited 1960s civil rights-era aspirations. She is not necessarily sexually available to the viewer; she seeks the more elevated status of goddess, or of the mistress who becomes the wife. Or, shown alone, she may be a harbinger of the liberated woman whose stature, even her place of residence, seems totally her own, and not necessarily dependent on the support of male admirers.

In this context, the Boucher figure seen in the archives reveals still more affinity with Bearden's evolving composition of the *Patchwork Quilt* nude. As the caption notes, while O'Murphy's legs are provocatively spread, it is a relatively modest pose, and even suggests youthful innocence. The troubled, but ultimately triumphant, story of Boucher's young royal mistress was a saga widely known to connoisseurs of this famous painting. O'Murphy was renowned in the 18th century as a woman of humble origins who

²⁸⁹ From Carroll Greene's essay in *Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual*, (1971: 4) the exhibition catalogue accompanying MoMA's exhibition of this collage in its first Bearden solo show.

overcame great adversity and achieved success on her own terms.²⁹⁰ She had been placed by her military family, while still a teenager, as a mistress of Louis XV. But Madame Pompidour, Louis' principal mistress, openly plotted to expel her from the royal court, leaving her in a tenuous position at court. But O'Murphy soon married a count, upon whose death she, as a wealthy widow became an arts patron and married a man thirty years her junior. O'Murphy thus symbolizes a woman who emerged from society's margins and became a well-placed and venerated figure.

If Bearden, as a serious student of French art, knew this story, he would be aware of this eighteenth century parallel to modern cultural aspirations of black Americans. In his artist's statement about *Patchwork Quilt*, Bearden wrote that art celebrates a victory, and that he searched for all those elements in which life expresses that victory.²⁹¹ It appears that it was the innocence and cultivation of the royal mistress, rather than the sexually available persona of the Titian/Manet courtesan/prostitute, that symbolized the iconographic victory that Bearden wished to achieve for the black nude in *Patchwork Quilt*.

Bearden was clearly aware of the iconographic means to depict this distinction between the nude who is venerated versus merely available. As he pictorially moves the Laure figure of Olympia from her marginal and subservient status, and re-imagines her as an object of desire, placing her in Murphy's pose signifies her further transformation from the Titian/Manet courtesan/prostitute to a position of security and respect within

²⁹⁰ Jill Jimenez and Joanna Banham. *The Dictionary of Artists' Models*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001:142.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, MoMA 1971.

society. This double revision is thus one of Bearden's most multilayered syntheses of the fragments of tradition into his vision for the future.

This intentionality is visible in other collages made in the years surrounding *Patchwork Quilt*. When Bearden represents the temptress goddess Circe, or the favored mistress of the sultan Khayan, she lies face-down, her turned-away face and body eluding the viewer's gaze. (Image 146) It is further worth noting that the setting of works like *Khayan and the Black Girl*, in an outdoor garden, invokes another stereotype problematic for the black nude-- the longstanding nature-culture juxtaposition which equates black women (and to some degree all women) with the unrefined nature of plants, wildlife and the outdoors, and carries the accompanying notions of excessive, too easily available sexuality, in comparison with that of the virginal, educated woman, invariably white, as the epitome of culture.²⁹² In *Patchwork Quilt*, Bearden evades such allusions by placing the nude within an interior, intensifying her location in the domain of culture rather than nature. These images show that, as Bearden developed his face-down nude through multiple iterations, *Patchwork Quilt* emerged as the masterwork revision that addressed almost all of these legacy issues.²⁹³

Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt* nude, however, even though connotatively an advance from Johnson's *Mahlinda*, still reflected the limits of its time. On the cusp of the feminist movement of the 1970s, it did not address what became the ultimate goal of the reconstituted black woman. Once the presumption of desirability and beauty becomes a given, the final stage of completion requires an end to even this exalted form of

²⁹² Wilson, 1992: 118.

²⁹³ Elizabeth Alexander discusses the construction of the self in the "spaces we designate and create" in *The Black Interior*, (Saint Paul, MN, Graywolf Press), 2004: 9.

objectification in favor of imaging women's own subjectivities. Still, Bearden's face-down nude pre-saged the formal qualities deployed by a later generation of black female artists, including the photography of Lorna Simpson featuring turned-away black women. Even as Bearden achieves the problematic goal of establishing an art-historical presence for the black woman as exalted object of desire, he is also a precedent for the next phase, which is not only to place her within her own cultural legacy, but to remove her from the object position of the reclining nude, and to give her an individually specific subjectivity, as contemporary artists like Maud Sulter would subsequently attempt.

The Fragmentary Development of Revision

The presumption that Bearden conflated and inverted the two figures of *Olympia* into one reclining black nude is underscored with observations of other aspects of Bearden's engagement with *Olympia*. Bearden used interpolated fragments of *Olympia*'s imagery in numerous other works, including several featuring decontextualized, but stylistically faithful, evocations of *Olympia*'s tense black cat. (Image 147) The cat appears in the lower right of the image, its tail crookedly upright, its eyes feral and glaring, all in the manner of *Olympia*. From the beginning, scholars have related *Olympia*'s cat directly to Manet's friend the poet Charles Baudelaire, whose poetry related cats to feminine sexuality, and especially to the idea of sexual immorality

or promiscuity.²⁹⁴ It is entirely plausible to imagine that Bearden, himself a cat lover who regularly quoted Baudelaire, was fully aware of the connotation.²⁹⁵

There is a similarly fragmented engagement with the Laure figure, whose baseline configuration, of a solidly built black woman extending an offer to another figure, is ubiquitous in Bearden collages of varying subject matter and emblematic of vernacular black culture and folk culture.²⁹⁶ Whether posed as a conjur woman, a brothel madam, in a garden greeting a visitor, or at home feeding her family, Bearden's proffering black woman figure is invariably placed in the same pictorial space and pose as Olympia's maid. She stands to the left of center and is profiled from the left while facing right. Her arms are outstretched toward a figure to her left, whether to offer fruit or flowers, serve a meal, or reach for an embrace of greeting or affection. With her sturdy body build, brown and black skin tones, placement within the right half of the pictorial space, headscarf and single earring, the stance of Bearden's proffering black woman is that of the Laure figure in *Olympia*.

The frequency of Bearden's engagement with the proffering woman image, and the variety of the scenes, that suggests a preoccupation with not only

²⁹⁴ Guégan, 2011, p137 asserts that the Baudelairean link is a certainty, noting that three poems in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* relate to "the one who occupies first place in the bestiary."

²⁹⁵ Sources describe Bearden as an avid reader of Baudelaire, including Schwartzman, who notes that Bearden in 1948 gave a Christmas gift to a friend of a book of Delacroix drawings along with a copy of Baudelaire's essay on Delacroix (p154-6); O'Meally quotes Bearden's citation of Baudelaire's definition of the modern person as someone who "may be wounded by mystery and absurdity" but nevertheless has great capacity to endure, in *Romare Bearden in the Modernist Tradition*, Romare Bearden Foundation: 2008: 102. Bearden's friend the novelist Ralph Ellison quoted Baudelaire's observation that "wise men never laugh but that they tremble," in his 1986 collection of essays *Going to the Territory* (see John-Edgar Wideman's June 20, 1999 *New York Times* review).

²⁹⁶ See Patton and Campbell's placement of the proffering black woman with black vernacular culture in *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987*, 1991.

depicting but re-imagining this figure. Her proffering stance is in essence one of serving, or nurturing, the needs of others –she brings food to her family’s table, offers herbs or food, apparently handpicked from the nearby garden, to a friend. This profusion of scenes, all rooted in daily African American life, suggests a different aspect of Bearden’s lengthy evolution of this figure from a stance of marginalization, indistinct subjectivity or outright obliteration--the de-sensualized black woman at the service of others –into the nurturer, mother or friend , all pillars of African American community life. Bearden adapts the formal devices of Manet’s *Olympia*--the placement of the figure, pictorial flatness--but re-imagines it as a site for the transformation of the Laure figure, as an archetypal black woman, from marginal to the many central roles she occupies in African American society. His transformation in *Patchwork Quilt* of this standing figure and marginalized subject position into a reclining black everywoman embodying beauty and desirability, carries fragments of all of her predecessors, just as the African American culture she represents is a collage of multiple influences.

As an additional factor sustaining the Manet - Bearden attribution made herein, it is noteworthy that, on the basis of perusal of the images in this folder alongside catalogs from Bearden exhibitions, it is clear that pictorial elements from several images in the Bearden Foundation’s archives, of both fine art and pornography, are readily identifiable in numerous Bearden collages.²⁹⁷ These archival images, therefore, are invaluable to the excavation of iconographic sources that could have informed the pictorial evolution of *Patchwork Quilt*. The pattern of evolution bolsters the idea that the

²⁹⁷ The Manet-Bearden affinities suggested herein are indebted to the methodology of Ruth Fine, who corresponded with me about their approach to the use of comparative visual analysis to suggest that numerous specific Bearden works were influenced by artists including Giotto, Renoir, Picasso and others. see her exhibition catalog *The Art of Romare Bearden*, Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art, 2003: 145-151, 170.

black reclining nude in *Patchwork Quilt* is, in addition to its African and Egyptian sources, a revised composite of the two *Olympia* figures and other well-known reclining nudes.

Bearden and the School of Life in Paris

No single experience was more influential to Bearden's synthesizing of multiple artistic influences than his intensive engagement with the modernist avant garde of Paris. While Bearden drew his subject matter from his lived experiences within the black communities of Charlotte, Pittsburgh and New York, his collage fragments drew not just from black and African imagery but from his passionate and extended engagement with the art of antecedent European masters. By the time Bearden enlisted in the American armed forces in 1945, his family had lived in Harlem for over two decades, and he had come to know many leading Harlem Renaissance-influenced artists and writers through his mother, Bessie Bearden, the New York correspondent for the *Chicago Defender*, an African American periodical with national circulation. He had been exposed to the collaged techniques of Dadaist photomontage through his 1935 study with George Grosz at the NY Art Students' league, but this method remained dormant in his artistic practice for two decades, as he eschewed the overtly political subject matter of Dadaism.

While Bearden wanted to depict the black community in ways rarely seen in popular culture, he eschewed the idea of art as propaganda and believed an artist's commitment was first and foremost to aesthetics.²⁹⁸ It was when Bearden became aware of this philosophical affinity with Manet, who personified Baudelaire's "painter of modern life" (as discussed in Chapters 1-2) and with the School of Paris of Matisse and

²⁹⁸ Gelburd, 1997: 18.

Picasso that extended Manet's modernizing turn, that he found a path to the synthesizing artistic practice that best captured his vision.

Bearden's awareness of this affinity crystallized during his nine-month stay in Paris in 1950, when he used income from the G.I. Bill to join African American artist and writer friends already in France.²⁹⁹ (Image 151) Bearden's fellow Harlemites James Baldwin had been invited to live there by the French government; other friends and acquaintances there included the artist Herbert Gentry, Albert Murray (whom he met there), jazz musicians Sidney Bechet, Kenny Clark and Don Byas, and the writer Richard Wright: Gentry described the friends' lifestyle as centered on school, camaraderie, painting and jazz; he and his wife owned Honey's Club, scene of salon – like gatherings of artists and writers by day and jazz club at night – which was frequented by other Americans including the painter Larry Rivers., as well as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. Bearden used the G.I. bill to enroll for a Philosophy class with Gaston Bachelard at the Sorbonne as well as for French language courses at the Institut Britannique. This was the site of some of Bearden's early encounters with European and white American artists who looked to jazz as a source of influence in their attempts to break with European classicism; Rivers and other downtown New York artists would remain close friends after his return to New York.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁹ See Schwartzman, 1990: 160-170, for the most complete and detailed account, including excerpts from correspondence, of Bearden's time in Paris; unless otherwise noted, statements of fact and correspondence excerpts are drawn from this invaluable source. Since Bearden by his own account (see Fine 2003:23) did not paint while in Paris, monographical accounts of Bearden's artistic career give relatively cursory attention to this period. As one example, Fine's 2003 exhibition catalog, arguably the most impressively comprehensive treatment of Bearden to date, covers the period in two pages (2003: 23-24).

³⁰⁰ Jerald Melberg provides a detailed discussion of Bearden's friendships with Stuart Davis, Piet Mondrian and Joan Miro, whom he had met during his mid-1940s Art Students' League classes, a

Bearden initially set up a studio with a fellow expatriate in a Latin quarter attic, and wrote of making charcoal drawings, none of which are known to be extant, but not paintings. But he found it impossible to remain confined, preferring instead to participate full-time in the life of the city, often joining James Baldwin and others at cafes in St. German and especially Montparnasse, to watch and comment on passersby, or simply strolling at leisure through neighborhoods and park.

Still, Bearden constantly thought about his art, and shared his ideas in letters to friends. He completed two chapters of the book he co-authored with Carl Holty *The Painter's Mind*, a treatise on how different artists achieved flatness in painting, in which discussed, for example, his desire to feel as free in his use of color as the German Expressionists in a gallery show he had seen in Paris.³⁰¹ Paris seems to have been a catalyst, a source of influences that surfaced years later, after Bearden's return to New York. Bearden, who had long habitually roamed his Harlem neighborhood and other areas of New York, would later translate the style of the Parisian Baudelairean flaneur, who roamed the streets of Paris and depicted all aspects of life, high and low, to his panoramas of Harlem life, such as *The Street*, but rather than painting gatherings in cafes and parks, turned more toward representing the range of activity in private life that would normally be invisible to the public.

time when Bearden was already trying to make art infused with a blues aesthetic. It would be after Paris, in the 1950s-60s, that Bearden recalled Davis' interest in making art that visualized the compositional principles, as well as Mondrian's pictorial architecture, both of which informed his 1960s embrace of collage processes as reminiscent of jazz improvisation. (*Romare Bearden: 1970-1980*, Mint Museum of Art exh.cat, 1980: 20-23.

³⁰¹ Bearden and Holty's *The Painter's Mind* was published in 1969 and includes extensive analysis of works by Manet, Matisse and many others (New York: Crown Publishers).

Bearden wrote of visiting museums –the Louvre, Cluny for tapestries, the Museum of Man for African art, and numerous gallery shows, including those for Asian art; he also took short train trips throughout Italy, where he remarked on his awe at Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling frescos.³⁰² One crucial experience for Bearden’s later work was that, while he was already familiar with the art of the European past from antiquity and through the post-Impressionists, it was while in Paris that contemporary European art became more vivid for him. Bearden carried letters of introduction to French artists from friends, and from Samuel Kootz, owner of his New York gallery; he made several visits with Brancusi in his expansive studios, but wrote mainly about their joint excursions to markets to shop for the feasts Brancusi, a superb cook, prepared for groups of friends. He made short trips to the south and west France, traveling at night to avoid hotel costs, including to see Picasso, who had responded to his letter of introduction, in Juan-les-Pins on the Riviera –“like gong to see the Eiffel Tower,a colossal tourist attraction,” he wrote, describing the steady stream of people stopping by to visit the master painter.³⁰³ Fragments of images from all of these sources would later show up in his collages.

But perhaps Bearden’s most profound encounter with , or better, observation of, an artist in Paris was a sighting of Matisse while Bearden was at the Dome café in Montparnasse with friends. Bearden described the scene as Matisse, then elderly and in

³⁰² Fine, 2003; 23.

³⁰³ There are some omissions and ambiguities in the literature describing Bearden’s comments on his time in Paris. Schwartzman offers the quote about Picasso (1990: 169) but attributes it to no specific letter. He also attributes Bearden’s discussion of seeing Matisse pass by the Dome to an Avis Berman article, “Romare Bearden: I Paint out of the Tradition of the Blues” from ARTNews, Dec 1980: 66. Fine indirectly summarizes this episode as an “often-recounted” event, but without attribution.

the last four years of his life, walked past, supported by a young man and a young woman on each side: “A waiter hollered something like, ‘He’s passing by,’” and all the waiters ran to the front of the café and started clapping. . . . Matisse then walked over to shake hands with the waiters, and all the people were reaching over to shake his hand. I thought ‘isn’t this wonderful. They’re not applauding a movie star, but a man who changed the way we saw life because he was a great painter.’ After being in the States, Paris was a miracle because things like that could happen.”³⁰⁴

Still, Bearden also found disillusionment in Paris. He later noted his surprise to feel that Paris seemed “tired,” lacking in energy in comparison to New York. Larry Rivers agreed that a turning point was occurring around 1950, and that “more was happening in New York; there was more energy and more interest.” Bearden had already noted in a 1945 letter that, despite the black Americans’ feeling of well-being in Paris, their experience remained invisible in the American press: “why is it that Stein, Hemingway, Fitzgerald are eternally being written about (re their years in Paris) and for all their notoriety and fame, it did not affect French life in the least. The same cannot be said of the exodus of jazz musicians who “invaded” France, Yet that is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the American press.”³⁰⁵ Bearden ultimately came to feel that Paris, while “a thing of dreams,” was not the place to transcend this invisibility, at least not for a black American artist who could not tap into the popular appeal available to a musician or writer. The center of gravity in the art world had shifted to New York; he would take

³⁰⁴ Deidra Harris Kelly at the Romare Bearden Foundation first alerted me to this quote, which can be found in its entirety in Schwartzman, 1990: 168.

³⁰⁵ From a page of notes in Bearden’s handwriting dated Oct. 1, 1945, shared with the author by Myron Schwartzman, who said Bearden had given it to him but that it had not been included in any of his publications, in March 2013.

all that he had absorbed with him, but it was in New York, and specifically in Harlem, where he would make his career. In one of just two return trips to Paris after 1950, in the early 1960s with his wife Nanette, he wrote to Carl Holty: “I don’t know, now, if I would want to live in Paris; New York, at this time in our history, is far more alive.” Yet Albert Murray recounts that Bearden teared up repeatedly on the last day of his trip.

As Sharon Patton summed up, Bearden’s time in Paris reinforced for him the importance of art history, and increased his awareness of current trends. It immeasurably deepened the trove of imagery from western art that he would later combine with African and other sources to make his collages. She noted that Bearden frequently quoted Andre Malraux’s comment that “art is made from art.”³⁰⁶

Upon his return to New York, after a decade of downtime from art while employed as a social services caseworker and jazz lyricist, Bearden returned to artmaking with a new vision taking shape. One lasting impact of his time in Paris was his decision to systematically undertake critical deconstructions of admired paintings. Having read Delacroix’ journals about his own such explorations, Bearden felt that he too could develop artistically by extensively and analytically copying masterworks. The intimate familiarity with the entire canon that surfaced repeatedly in the collages Bearden began a decade later. We see quotations from Picasso and Courbet in a version of *The Street*, arguably his greatest single work. (Image 153) We see in *Homage to Mary Lou* a conflation of influence from two Matisse *Piano Lesson* paintings. (Image 152) In both collages, Bearden displays antecedent ideas about color, about masklike figural treatment; but always deployed to representing these scenes within the context of African American life. His eclectic sourcing of materials and ideas is perhaps best seen as

³⁰⁶ Patton, *Memory and Metaphor*, 1991:34.

metaphoric of his belief that, in drawing subject matter from the community around him, he highlights the universality of the human lived experience, showing that the basics of life are the same across cultures

Paris Blues Revisited

It is ironic that Bearden's experiences as a black artist in mid-century Paris, given his sense of the lack of popular interest, drew the interest of at least one moviemaker, Bearden's former studio mate, Sam Shaw. In 1961, Shaw produced the movie *Paris Blues*, scored by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, featuring Louis Armstrong in a cameo role, and starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Sidney Poitier and Diahann Carroll. Shaw, Bearden's former studio mate, had originally been inspired to make the movie about Bearden, based on his Paris stories. The Hollywood studios rejected this idea as "too abstract for American moviegoers."³⁰⁷ It was reworked to revolve around music, but the interracial cast was still unusual for the time. In the early 1980s, Shaw revisited the project, this time teaming up with Bearden and Albert Murray to make a series of images that reinvented the story, but with Armstrong and Ellington as the protagonists. As O'Meally wrote, the intent was to create "a tale of the quest for the freedom of artistic expression in three of the world's greatest cities."

A visual analysis of available reproductions offers interesting insights into what about Paris continued to compel Bearden's interest more than thirty years after his stay there. (Images 154-155) One green and yellow toned image, which features Ellington leaving a bandstand, draws an imagined map populated with the names of leading

³⁰⁷ See Robert O'Meally's brief essay in *Paris Blues Revisited*, the brochure for a fall 2011 exhibition at Jazz at Lincoln Center that displayed a complete set of the collages-finished and unfinished-and sketches designed by Romare Bearden for an intended, but never realized project intended to evoke but re-tell the story of the 1961 movie, including scenes from Paris, New York and New Orleans.

writers of Manet's time –Apollinaire, Gaudier, Victor Hugo, and most centrally, Charles Baudelaire, whose name is bracketed by references to the idea of the dream (le reve) – “cite du reve,” “aimai je un reve.” The grammar is perhaps deliberately fracture, recalling Bearden's frustrations with the language. But the evocation of the preoccupations of Baudelaire's “invitation au voyage,” his longing for a place of “luxe, calme et volupté,” is an unmistakable sign of Bearden's intimate knowledge of Baudelaire. It bolsters the idea of his intention that the *Patchwork Quilt* nude reclining on her patchwork sofa, her head resting on a flowery pillow, is also replete with such evocations. The second image fast-forwards Ellington by almost a century, into the mid-twentieth century world of Matisse. A white cutout figure, perhaps a dancer to the left evokes Matisse's illustrations for the book *Jazz*, while Ellington now inhabits a more fully realized jazz club scene replete with multi-ethnic bandmates and audience --a second vision of an idyll that could, by its 1980s date, exist in any of the three subject cities on either side of the Atlantic. Bearden commented to Holty that he admired the way that Matisse reworked paintings over and over, and then finally, like jazz, just stopped.³⁰⁸

Bearden and Matisse: Affinities in the Absence of Encounter

Even as Bearden, after Paris, was perhaps more profoundly inspired by the art of Matisse than by any other early twentieth century master, he was apparently oblivious to the many ways in which their paths almost, but never quite, crossed. The artists' lack of direct encounters, despite sharing friends, entertainment venues and artmaking values, is emblematic of the continuing gaps in art history narratives, where incomplete narratives

³⁰⁸ Schwartzman, 153-4.

are presented as entire truths.³⁰⁹ The fact that the two artists both viewed cats as intriguing household companions may seem trivial, until we connect the connotations of cats to Baudelaire, an author whom both read and admired. (Image 156) Noting that Bearden referred to his cat by its French name “le chat” should lessen the strain of credulity that he may have such ideas in mind.“

As discussed in Chapter 3, Matisse engaged perhaps even more extensively with the iconography of the Baudelairean muse in his illustrations of a 1947 edition of the poet’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*. What would perhaps be surprising to Bearden would be the idea that Matisse may have evolved these modernizing images of a black model through his exposure to the aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance during repeat visits to Harlem. Matisse’s visits in Harlem in 1930-33, as discussed in Chapter 3, occurred when Bearden was still an adolescent. But it is remarkable that Bearden was still an anonymous stranger to Matisse when he observed the 1950 adulation scene at the Dome in Paris. Bearden likely had at least a passing acquaintance with Matisse’s portraitist and sometime Harlem host Carl van Vechten.³¹⁰ And while Paul Robeson sometimes stayed with Matisse during 1920s and 30s visits to Paris, he was during the same period a guest at the literary and

³⁰⁹ Although, as discussed in this chapter, Bearden had a letter of introduction to Matisse during his 1950 Paris trip, he apparently never met him; Matisse’s known contacts with Harlem-based artists had been with the older generation of the 1920s-1930s; there is only a brief mention of a Matisse exhibition, but not of contacts with African-American expatriate artists, in the Peter Selz essay “School of Paris at Mid-Century” and Michel Fabre’s “The Cultural Milieu in Postwar Paris,” both in the exhibition catalog *Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris 1945-1965*. New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1996: 28, 34-37.

³¹⁰ Patton, *Memory and Metaphor* (1991: 27) notes that van Vechten, upon viewing Bearden’s 1944 exhibition of religiously themed paintings at the Kootz gallery, at a time predating his collages, referred to Bearden as “the Negro Rouault.” This exhibition, in which 20 of the 24 works on view sold out, one to the Museum of Modern Art, was the start of Bearden’s rise to success as an artist.

artists' salons held by Bearden's mother, a prominent journalist, in her Harlem apartment.³¹¹

Perhaps the most remarkable coincidence of a venue shared unknowingly by the two artists was the iconic jazz club Connie's Inn. Matisse, as discussed in Chapter 3, went to performances there during his early 1930s New York visits. The entrance to Connie's Inn was directly across the street from Bearden's family home during the 1920s and 1930s on West 131st St.³¹² By the time Bearden made his iconic 1974 collage *At Connie's Inn*, the audiences were integrated; the club has since closed.

Martinique as Eden and Inspiration

A final shared interest was the Caribbean island of Martinique. For both artists, the island was an idyllic destination, redolent of Baudelairean "luxe, calme et volupte." Matisse visited the island en route from Tahiti to France in the early 1930s; his later *Fleurs du Mal* illustrations were seen as derived from his nostalgia for his visit. During the 1970s, Bearden and his wife Nanette (whose family was from the island) build a house on the nearby island of St. Martin, and took cruises that stopped at Martinique. Just as Matisse's visits to the Caribbean were opportunities to expand his representations of modern female beauty to encompass non-Western cultures, Bearden's time in the Caribbean was an opportunity to broaden his engagement with wider of the African

³¹¹ Schwartzman, p69, names and describes the many illustrious guests who attended Bessye Bearden's events, while Fine, p6, notes that Harlem Renaissance luminaires Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen were also on the guest list.

³¹² Schwartzman (1990:69) writes that "from a front window of the Bearden apartment [on the third floor at 154 West 131st Street], one could see a passageway that led straight to the backstage entrance of the Lafayette Theater on Seventh Avenue between 131st and 132nd streets. Near the Lafayette stood the Tree of Hope, the great elm around which all the performers would gather in the evening... On the same side of Seventh Avenue, toward the corner of 131st Street, was an entrance, going downstairs, to Connie's Inn, which, like the Cotton Club, had black entertainers playing to an all-white clientele."

diasporas that comprise Gilroy's Black Atlantic; he developed an enduring friendship with Martinican writer Aimé Césaire, and the two men discussed Césaire's concept of *négritude*, a blackness that transcends national boundaries, and knew the St. Lucian writer Derek Walcott. Bearden produced at least thirty works inspired by Martinique following a 1973 cruise there, which were later exhibited together in a *Prevalence of Ritual – Martinique* exhibition. Patton observed that “secrecy and mystery veil faceless women...who walk or lie nude in tropical landscapes. They remind us of the mythological nudes of Titian, Rubens and Delacroix or Renoir and Manet.”³¹³ As one example, the 1973 Martinique work *The Mimicry of Water* displays two nude bathers by the sea, rendered in black cutouts reminiscent of Matisse's *Jazz* cutouts, in a seaside landscape like those on the French Riviera often depicted by Matisse. (Image 159) These images restate compositional ideas explored earlier in *Black Venus*, set in African American bordello. Yet even as he made this series with content specific to the Caribbean, the most lasting influence of Bearden's Caribbean work was that the region's lush vegetation and lifestyle reminded Bearden of his native American South --he wrote to a friend that “the yard is filled with stray cats and the fowl community.” His time on the islands mainly helped him refresh his approach to portraying his home culture.³¹⁴

Collage as Manifestation of Identity and Influence

It is crucial to the understanding of Bearden's revisionary use of source imagery to consider the implications of Bearden's choice to work in collage. Bearden seldom reproduced these source images in their entirety; they are instead most often discernible

³¹³Patton, *Memory and Metaphor*, 1991:67.

³¹⁴ Sally Price and Richard Price, in *Romare Bearden: The Caribbean Dimension* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006: 103) for a discussion of Bearden's activities and interests whole in the Caribbean. Add orig text

as figural fragments, or as prototypes for pose positions or pictorial structure. But these image fragments and patterns appear repeatedly in Bearden's collages during the ten year period around his creation of *Patchwork Quilt*.

Bearden's engagement with Manet's imagery appears in a repertory of collage techniques, including fragmentation, inversion and de-contextualization, which manifest a commitment to pictorial improvisation that Bearden believed he shared with Manet. Yet, as Kobena Mercer, quoting Ralph Ellison, has suggested, the method of collage is also a manifestation of the cultural processes that shaped African Americans' cultural identity.³¹⁵ If, as Ellison says, collage's "sharp breaks, distortions, surrealist blending of styles, values, hopes and dreams" characterize much of African American history, these factors also characterize the nature of Bearden's engagement, as an African American artist, with the art of the past. Given Bearden's intent to inject a previously obscured black subjectivity--including the images of daily African American life evoked in his seminal 1964 photomontages--into his re-workings of this imagery, he had as a matter of necessity to selectively decide which fragments of source images, styles or process were useful to him, and to synthesize these with his own artistic vision. This selective re-use and revision provides a framework for considering how Bearden's reclining nude in *Patchwork Quilt* evolved from, yet radically revised, those of Titian and Manet.

A complementary, yet contrasting perspective has been offered by Toni Morrison, who has written that Bearden's images, like hers, are not so much broken or fractured, but "pieced and layered.," thus, she asserts, many African Americans are not so much

³¹⁵ See discussion of collage as compositional hybridity by Kobena Mercer in "Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen." In *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, London and Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press and The Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005:125.

broken as they are multilayered, with many dimensions that are not readily seen or fathomed.”³¹⁶

Bearden’s fragmented citations from Manet might also be framed by Harold Bloom’s theorization of the phases by which creative influences are absorbed.³¹⁷ Creative output tends not only to swerve away from, or avoid, close emulation of admired predecessors. It may also manifest a process that Bloom defines as *tessitura*, which involves the completion of even antithetical material through a fragmentation of the original. The fact that the term *tessitura* is also used in the making of mosaics only strengthens its relevance to Bearden’s collage—especially his final image related to quilts *Quilting Time*, a monumental mosaic commissioned by the Detroit Art Institute which represents multiple generations of a community at a quilting bee. (Image 157)

The Quilt as Metaphor: Legacy and Materiality

If the face-down stance of Bearden’s nude begins the process of her elevation from sex object to cultural icon, her transformation is completed by her stylized repose on a collaged image of a bed draped with a patchwork quilt. Her figural aesthetics invoke an ancestral legacy of Egypt and West Africa, while the quilt locates her in a specifically African American cultural milieu.³¹⁸ In the manner of a history painting, both the image and the materials of this collage manifest a fragmented synthesis of the multiple styles, ideas and influences which have shaped the African American

³¹⁶ Robert O’Meally discusses Toni Morrison’s comments in the essay “Layering and Unlayering: Jazz, literature and Bearden’s Collage,” in *Romare Bearden in the Modernist Tradition*, 2008: 96-97.

³¹⁷ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997:14.

³¹⁸ Museum of Modern Art Object Record for Romare Bearden, 1970: 3

experience. If, as Kobena Mercer suggests, the diasporic identity is itself a collaged condition, or Morrison's layers, then this collaged figure is constructed as emblematic of that identity.³¹⁹

Bearden suggests the figure's everywoman status by constructing her arms, legs and breasts from papers painted in varying shades of brown. Her rigid, angular body recalls the striding figures of Egyptian tomb reliefs, rotated ninety degrees to a reclining position. The figure retains the stiffly extended arm, and the combination of a face in profile with a frontal view of the breasts, that are signature Egyptian aesthetics. The Egyptian striding stance of the legs is deftly conflated with Boucher's bottoms-up pose, as a manifestation of the multiple cultural origins of Bearden's sources. The proportion of the head to the body recalls the outsized heads of Benin bronze sculptures, whose function as objects of the Benin royal court help ennoble Bearden's lounging black woman in repose-- and perhaps provide further resonance to Bearden's revisionary blending of these African figural forms with those of Boucher's portrait of the royal mistress O'Murphy.

Bearden's placement of the figure within the expanse of collaged quilt intensifies the revision. If it is sex for sale that ties Manet's prostitute to the cash economy, the quilt-making craft is the visible source of possible income for Bearden's nude. By using actual fabric, Bearden is not only improvising on the early modernist tradition of paper-based collage; he is participating in the elimination, in contemporary art, of the divide between the materials of fine art and handicraft or women's work-- another aspect of his presaging later feminist artistic strategies. He uses collaged fabric and paper, instead of a painted illusion of fine, opulently draped white linens. By

³¹⁹ Kobena Mercer, "Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen," 2005:125.

blending the image with its material, his ennobling of the black everywoman is transported from the realm of illusion to material reality.

If some sections of the quilted corduroy bedcover on which she lies are slightly torn, or look worn and faded, they do not signify an uncleanness comparable to the prostitute Olympia's gray-white skin. It instead suggests a temporal patina, a history that is being restored to a people whose past had been stripped away. Likewise, the scalloped edging across the bottom of the quilt, despite its wear and tear, evokes a tradition of making fine things from even the plainest materials.³²⁰ This analogy is strengthened by the matching of the nude's striped belt fabric with a patch of the quilt, which aptly extends this make-do improvisation from home furnishings to budget fashions sometimes cut from discarded upholstery.

Having imbued the *Patchwork Quilt* nude with this ancestral and black American aesthetic tradition, Bearden completes her configuration as everywoman with trans-temporal references that also place her within contemporary styles of its 1970 period. Her headscarf and earrings may evoke a past of mammies or household workers, but during the 1960s-70s, it also reflected the fashion of wearing African-influenced headscarfs, which together with kente cloths, dashikis, cornrows, etc., served as rhetorical devices of the then-current black power and black is beautiful movements. Although the scarf is stylistically ambiguous, and could also resolve as a (perhaps Jazz Age-inspired) cloche, it also can signify vernacular figures such as the conjur woman. In

³²⁰ This aspect of improvising with available everyday materials to create a work of both functional and aesthetic desirability is central to the African-American quilting culture, as explored by Bridget R. Cooks in *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 2011:140; Jane Livingstone also contrasts the vernacular yet synthesizing aspects of quilts in *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* by John Beardsley et al (Atlanta, GA; Tinwood Books in association with The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston), 2002: 40-41.

contrast, the very materiality of the sparkly bangle bracelet --made of photostated paper with circle patterns like the Benday dots of comic strips and Lichtenstein Pop paintings - provides a touch of more unambiguously contemporary elegance. This subtle detailing serves to further conflate the timelessness of her Egyptian-inspired figure with a contemporary feel that places her in the present day. She represents no single period, but exists across the ages. Due to the multiplicity and nuance of Bearden's choice of compositional materials, *Patchwork Quilt* stands as a masterful example of the materiality of an artwork as metaphor for its meaning.

Collage as the Visualization of African American Identity Formation

If the materiality of Bearden's collage is one metaphor for meaning, his compositional technique is an important corollary. As previously discussed, the very nature of collage-making is metaphoric of the fragmented, improvised basis of African American identity formation, as well as an emphatic reminder of its culturally hybrid sources.³²¹ Bearden warned against essentialism and stated that there is only one art and that it belongs to all mankind, and his collage methods embody this belief.³²² He poses his reclining nude within a pictorial trope advanced by Western masters Titian and Manet, even as he stylizes the figure with the aesthetics of Egypt and Benin. His fragmented and revisionary sourcing of imagery from *Olympia*, re-imagining the marginalized black maid as an object of veneration, reveals Bearden's willingness to

³²¹ Kobena Mercer 2005: 126.

³²² Ibid., 132.

work with and learn even from sources, such as Manet's Laure figure, that are antithetical to his own artistic vision.³²³

The compositional method of collage, moreover, embraces the constant reworking required to create imagery from such a multiplicity of sources. Bearden's admiration for Manet's blurred, "incomplete" surfaces stemmed from the fact that Manet extensively re-worked his canvases, often stripping the surfaces down every day, to achieve an effect in his finished paintings that looked as if they could have been done in a single setting.³²⁴ This type of reworking is evident in a comparison of Manet's preparatory drawings and portrait study for the Laure figure in *Olympia*, which show her facial features and attire quite clearly. But in the final painting, although the attire remains intact, the facial detailing is almost indiscernible after her skin tones are blended with the wall behind her.

Bearden saw in this reworking of fragments of images --his perception was that Manet never absolutely finished a work, but at some point simply "relinquished" it --as a process similar to jazz and collage.³²⁵ He perceived this act of just stopping, as opposed to finishing, as leaving the work open to re-interpretation, in much the way an Ellington jazz score was written with space left open for repeat subsequent improvisations.

Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt* constituted a move to occupy the space left for improvisation by the blanked out aspects of the Laure figure in *Olympia*.

³²³Ibid., 139.

³²⁴ Myron Schwartzman: 1990:30, 38.

³²⁵Ibid., 38, 40

Situating *Patchwork Quilt* Within the History of Modern and Contemporary Art

On the one hand, it is the sense of *Patchwork Quilt* as a completion, a re-vision, of the Laure figure that had been left unfinished by Manet, that frames the significance of *Patchwork Quilt* within the narrative of modern art. On the other hand, *Patchwork Quilt* is pivotal in its own right, due to the cultural specificity of its nude, and its anticipation of the work of subsequent generations of especially black female artists. If Bearden's 1964 photomontages represented the panorama of modern black life and culture, which was otherwise largely excluded from the canonical images of art histories of the period, *Patchwork Quilt* constituted a specific redress of the invisibility of the black female.

Judith Wilson defines Bearden's role in an important recuperative project of twentieth-century African-American art as the re-visioning of the black female, and the situation of this figure within an African-American cultural context after a long tradition of erasure and marginalization.³²⁶ This art of retrieval can be contextualized even more broadly, as a major work in the project of imaging race that is a defining aspect of modernism. Given *Olympia*'s stature as a foundational painting of modern art, its representation of the Laure figure, even though flawed, establishes the imaging of race as foundational to modern art. The most thoughtful nineteenth century responses to *Olympia*'s Laure figure-- including the critic Sensier and Manet's acolyte Bazille-- evinced a sense that this figure was compelling but incomplete. Both Bazille in 1870 and Bearden a century later, redressed this void by creating solo images of this figure, with no

³²⁶ Judith Wilson, "Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-U.S. Art, 1992: 112-122, esp. 118.

white companion to subordinate or limit her, with carefully nuanced detailing, each evocative of their own time, that serve to fill the void. The existence of these and other carefully considered responses to the Laure figure suggests that the history of modernism, which has to date been largely silent about this subject, must likewise be completed. This act would situate Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt* within a central narrative of modernist art history.

Roland Barthes writes, in his "Discourse of History," of the necessity for shifters in any historian's organization of a narrative, which determine what is included given the necessity to exclude material deemed insignificant.³²⁷ A redress of art history's exclusion of the matter of race, and an acknowledgement of the subject's centrality to modern art, will require a re-evaluation of these criteria. As Derrida points out, the distinction between the inside of a work and the *parergon*, the material relegated to the outside, is unstable; that the outside is often essential to the definition of the inside and therefore an indispensable part of it.³²⁸ If the artworks themselves are subject to subsequent intervention, so are the narratives about them.

Within the context of its own time, during the American civil rights and black power movements, *Patchwork Quilt* is most radical in the hybridity of the sources it embraced; an eclecticism arising from Bearden's resistance to racial essentialism during a period when the expectations placed on black artists were often emphatically essentialist. Bearden's improvisational collaging of fragmentary source images from Manet and

³²⁷ In his essay "The Discourse of History," Barthes points out each historian selects which details to include in his or her narratives, but that subsequent generations may opt to revise this constructed account. In *The Rustle of Language*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1986: 130.

³²⁸ Derrida, Jacques. "Parergon." In *The Truth in Painting*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press). 1987: 15-149.

African art, from paper and fabric, to craft patchwork imagery emblematic of African American culture, replicates the hybridity of influences that have shaped African American identity. The fact that Bearden centers this project on the black female nude, an image whose rarity even by black artists was induced by the prevailing racist connotations associated with black nudity, reinforces the radical boldness of his work.

Patchwork Quilt is equally important as a counterpoint to the imagery concurrently emerging from the then-dominant Pop art movement. As just one example, *Patchwork Quilt* first appeared in a 1970 exhibition titled *She*, within years of Richard Hamilton's eponymous 1961 collage. (Image 161) The Hamilton image manifests Pop's engagement with the female figure, here shaped from kitchen appliances, within the cultural context of popular culture, mass media and consumerism, while Bearden's nude engages with the legacy and aspirations of the civil rights movement which was equally definitive of the period. Art history often dismisses the latter as mere politics, and thus unworthy of inclusion in the discussion of art. But it is no more political than discussing Russian Constructivism within the context of the Bolshevik revolution, or Dada as a resistance of Nazism, or Abstract Expressionism in terms of postwar pro-American ideology. It is the juxtaposition of images that capture the aesthetic impact of both consumerism and the political context of the 1960s that presents the most complete art historical representation of the period.

This comparative approach is equally salient even for works of Pop art that appear to directly address the issue of race, but do so with aesthetic strategies that read more as satire, which was an acceptable trope of artistic expression, than as political critique, which at the time was not. Larry Rivers, in making his 1970 *I Like Olympia in*

Blackface, was motivated by his black seminar students' objections to the fact that only images of whites were presented for study in their painting and sculpture courses.³²⁹ (Image 160) Rivers created *I Like Olympia in Blackface* as a work that contemplated the implications of reversing that situation, though he acknowledged that the "corny minstrelization" with which he styled the work detracted from that objective even as it succeeded as a work of Pop art. Like Manet one hundred years earlier, Rivers submerged his work's politically revisionary intentions with an overlay of recognizable satire that obliterated one of its original purposes. Bearden's *Patchwork Quilt*, made in the same year as the Rivers piece, rejected mainstream Pop's sublimated approach to race, in favor of an aesthetic strategy that explicitly addressed the issue, with the result that this work is omitted from most art histories of the period. There are strong parallels between Rivers' play to market expectations in 1970 and Manet's ambivalence in the face of his 1863 Salon audience's expectations; in contrast with the more overtly revisionary, and thus more historically marginalized, work of their respective contemporaries Bearden and Bazille. An art history narrative that looks at Bazille together with Manet, as well as Bearden together with Hamilton, Warhol and Rivers, would comprise a more nuanced reading of these artists' work and times.

Patchwork Quilt can finally be seen as a harbinger of the post-modernist and contemporary work that not only advanced Bearden's re-viewing of the Laure figure, but sustained the anti-essentialist philosophy inherent in his collage. Even as Bearden's imagery forms a critical juncture, at mid-century, in the process of revisioning the black nude, it was also marked by the limited imagining of the black female subject that

³²⁹ As described during an interview with Robert Hughes for "Bronx is Beautiful," in *Time*, February 8, 1971.

characterized the pre-feminist period. Bearden inserted the black female into a central trope of art history, but she remained subject to the objectification inherent in this trope. As Bearden himself commented in his 1970 MoMA Artist's Statement, quoting Goethe, every artist is anchored to his times by at least two of its major defects. Still, Bearden captured a pivotal moment in the continuing evolution of this figure, whose subjectivity would increasingly be asserted in subsequent decades, including for artistic agendas extending well beyond the construction of the black female subject position. Artists including Yasumasa Morimura, Renee Cox, and Maud Sulter, among others, form a vanguard. (Images 162-163)

But perhaps the most radical and conclusive response is just beginning to emerge, in the work of currently emerging artists such as Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. This artist readily acknowledges the influence of Manet and other early masters; and she, like Bearden, develops her ideas by making multiple versions of the same image.³³⁰ But her engagement with Manet relates less to his imagery--there are no reclining women in her work-- than to the formal aspects of his painting style. The women in her paintings are figured, she says, from images drawn from her imagination, and reflect her specific perspective, as a British artist of Ghanaian heritage, of being not fully anchored in any one culture. Perhaps this artist represents one outcome of the long process of recuperating a black female identity from its obliteration in art history. Yiadom-Boakye continues the diasporan stance of drawing freely from the *mélange* of sources that she finds aesthetically useful. But with a new sense of no longer needing to turn away from or

³³⁰ Sarah Kent's essay "Lynette Yiadom-Boakye," in *Flow*, Exh. cat. Christine Y. Kim, ed. (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem), 2008: 102-123.

overtly revise the old objectifying tropes, she can now directly engage the viewer with the synthesizing complexity of her own subject position.

Summation

If the problem of the twentieth century, according to W.E.B. du Bois, was the problem of the color line, then a problem of many histories of twentieth century art, as set forth to date, is their inadequate historicization of the imaging of race as a foundational element of modernist painting. If this oversight is to be corrected, then the art of Romare Bearden, including *Patchwork Quilt*, will be situated at the center of the discourse around modern art since Manet.

Bearden and Manet were both painters of modern life as it existed in their times. Both offered visual representations that, while deeply flawed, acknowledged the question of race, as personified by the black female figure, as a central factor of modern life. The artists have made the work, and it is the ongoing challenge of art history to perform the Foucauldian excavations that lead to a remaking of the modernist document, so that it becomes a more complete critique of the work it purports to historicize.

CONCLUSION

Seeing Laure: The Anterior as Muse in the Art of Maud Sulter and Mickalene Thomas

This dissertation has asserted a foundational centrality for the black female figure in the development of modernist pictorial values, as seen its survey of the black muse from Manet and Bazille to Matisse and Bearden. Numerous artists have explored this figure in more recent decades, including two leading contemporary artists whose work advances its legacy into the present day. The Ghanaian-Scottish artist Maud Sulter (1960 - 2008) and African American painter Mickalene Thomas (b.1971) manifest a present-day continuity of critical artistic engagement with Manet's Laureby making work that is resonant of their own time even as they recapitulate pictorial tropes, processes and materials retrieved from the past.

Maud Sulter: A Recuperative Mode of Vision

Maud Sulter's work is unique among all artistic engagements with the Laure figure surveyed herein because of her attempt to act as both artist and historian. She attempts to not just revise nineteenth-century artists' images of black women including Laure, but to retrieve these models' lost subjectivity. Sulter wrote of the importance to her work of "putting black women back in the centre of the frame, by not only reimagining their depictions, but by constructing plausible histories for these obliterated personae. Yet Sulter noted the challenges of retrieving surviving fragments of history in the service of suggesting plausible readings of their meaning and significance., Sulter

wrote that, “as a black person and a women I don’t read history for facts, I read it for clues.”³³¹

Sulter often worked with pictorial fragments, in a methodology similar to that of Bearden’s collage, to visualize the dispersed nature of the clues at her disposal. In her 2002 photomontage series *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Sulter overlaid Manet’s depiction of Laure in *Olympia* with a found photograph. (Images 165-167) By reformatting the painting so that both women meet the viewer’s gaze, unlike in *Olympia*, she suggests that the two women have an equivalent claim on the viewer’s attention.³³² This device thus disrupts the historical treatment of *Olympia* as a painting solely about the prostitute.

By selecting an 1850s Nadar photograph of an unnamed black artist’s model for the collaged overlay, Sulter moreover suggests an historical basis for retrieving Laure’s obscured subjectivity, since given the date, the Nadar model was a near-contemporary of Laure.³³³ Still, in selecting an image of an unknown Nadar model, Sulter acknowledged the unlikelihood of a full recovery of subjectivities lost to history. Sulter, who speculated that the model might be Jeanne Duval, traveled to Nantes and the Americas to

³³¹ Deborah Cherry, in a March 2012 draft of her forthcoming essay, “Image-Making with Jeanne Duval in Mind: photoworks by Maud Sulter, 1989-2002,” which she generously shared with me, notes that Sulter uses this quote in the “Clio” section of her unpaginated text *Zabat: Narratives* (Hebden Bridge: Urban Fox Press), 1989.

³³² Deborah Cherry, *ibid.*, for a discussion of Sulter’s use of directional gazes, as well as the use of scale and other conceptual devices.

³³³ As discussed in Deborah Cherry’s essay in the exhibition brochure for *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Edinburgh: The National Gallery of Scotland, 2003: 51.

research a biography of Duval, but it remained unfinished at the time of Sulter's premature death.³³⁴

Sulter was, however, able to support her choice of *Jeune Modele* for her to overlay of the *Olympia* maid's visage on the basis of her discovery that Duval's mother had worked in a Nantes brothel. By refiguring Manet's Laure with a surmised likeness of Duval, a brothel worker's daughter, Sulter uses fragments of historical fact to retrieve possible, but ultimately unprovable, biographical narratives for the Manet figure posed by Laure.

Sulter, in adapting the collaborative artist-model relationship previously seen with Bazille and Matisse, used a second device for asserting possible narratives, in *Portrait d'une négresse (Bonnie Greer)*, 2002, based on Benoist's 1800 painting *La Négrresse*. (Image 168) Sulter often posed well-known artists and writers like Greer to assert that, even though antecedent models like Jeanne Duval and Laure are unknown to us today, they may well have had a prominence within the artistic circles of their day comparable to the present-day celebrity of Sulter's own models.³³⁵ This device was central to Sulter's *Zabat* series of monumental photographs, including *Phalia*, in which the award-winning writer Alice Walker assumes Laure's flower-bearing stance. (Image 166)

Sulter significantly advances her models creative agency, to the point of allowing Greer and others to directly possess and rework her depictions of them, as Greer did in making a 2004 BBC documentary based on her sessions with Sulter. (Image 168) Sulter's blending performance and video into her photographic sessions rounds out the

³³⁴ Ibid., *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama* exh cat., 2003: 21.

³³⁵ Ibid., *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, 2003: 51.

conceptualist approaches to scale and de-skilling that consistently informed her critical engagement with art history.

Sulter 's use of her own image, with a second overlay photograph in *Jeanne Duval*, relates to her highly personal concerns about the erasure of muses' subjectivity in the service of the artist's objectives. This empathy derived from her own experience as a model for other artists.³³⁶ Sulter wrote of an episode in which she posed for an artist friend who later reworked the photographs taken of Sulter in a manner that rendered her own personality and collaborative creativity invisible. Her friend moreover reworked the image to project the exoticized stereotypes that Sulter despised. This can be related to the many racist stereotypes that were, as discussed in Chapter One, affixed to both Laure and Jeanne Duval. Sulter therefore infuses the narrative possibilities of Manet's Laure with both her own dehumanizing experience as a muse and her imagined sense of Jeanne Duval's lived experience. Sulter's empathy also derived from her sense that Duval's facial features, as represented by a Baudelaire sketch, resembled her own. (Image 16) This doubling is manifested by her placement of her own snapshot image on the bottom left of *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama* – her hair wrapped with a madras scarf reminiscent of Duval's. It is Sulter's personalized response to the Laure figure, based on perceived parallels with her own likeness and biography, that motivate her ability to so powerfully re-imagine the image. Like Manet, she reworks past imagery based on her own lived experiences.

This emotional response informs Sulter's belief in the capacity of present-day audiences to surmount the past inability of many observing viewers to actually see the

³³⁶ As described in the essay "Maud Sulter on Negotiating the Muse" in the exhibition catalog *Jeanne Duval: A Melodrama*, Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003:14-15.

obliterated Manet figure. Some art historians, as discussed in Chapter Two, have described this type of oversight as *agnosia*, the inability to see an object due to an inability to make a conceptual or symbolic identification with it.³³⁷ In this light, the silence of art history about the Laure figure could be seen to manifest, simply, an inability to imagine this novel figure's subjectivity. If attention derives from experience and history, it could be surmised that, prior to the late twentieth century, the overall social and political lack of interest in the black subject throughout Western society framed the historical silence on artistic representations of the free black population in nineteenth-century Paris. As discussed by Roland Barthes in his "Discourse of History," (see Chapter Four) histories are constructed as much through the inclusion of selected facts as by the exclusion of others; Derrida notes that what is viewed as inside a specific entity is defined in part by what relegated to the outside. The construction of Western culture as white and European was served by histories of art relegating non-Europeans to obscurity.

The context for the art historical investigation of *Olympia* has evolved in more recent years. The nonwhite population of France has expanded, as in much of Europe, creating a more diverse audience for major museums. Public awareness of the presence of a free black working class in nineteenth-century Paris is evolving as events like the annual May 10 commemoration of the 1848 French emancipation of slavery, invariably attended by the country's president, become part of the national consciousness. A concurrent interdisciplinary scholarly focus on this topic is now emerging.

It is within this context that an emerging group of black European artists like Sulter are working with strategies of co-optation and retrieval for pre-modern images like Laure. They seek to reach a multiethnic audience, including individuals who may

³³⁷ See Crary (1999:94) and Pollock (1999: 280).

find it impossible *not* to “see” the Laure figure. Like Sulter, this audience will want to understand what is knowable about the reality behind the image of the black muse.

Sulter’s excavations and imagined recuperations therefore perform the necessary interventions with the histories of art discussed in the Introduction –she enacts the revision of historical narratives that Benjamin suggests is the prerogative of every new generation, she also sets forth a Foucauldian suggestion of plausible new narratives.³³⁸ Her works of retrieval use contemporary media-- video, performance and photomontage—that can claim the viewer’s sustained attention. As this leads to a new cognition of the Laure figure’s faceted significations, a revisionary understanding of Manet’s representations of both the maid and the prostitute becomes possible. The art historian, by addressing the centrality of the Laure figure to the art of modern life, can then reimagine the painting as a bi-figural image. With this enhanced art historical discourse around *Olympia*, the extent of the painting’s radical modernity can be most fully understood.

Mickalene Thomas: Presenting a *Très Belle Nègresse* of the Present Moment

For more than a decade, the rhinestone-studded portrait paintings of Mickalene Thomas have underscored the degree to which she has posed the composite body of art history as her ultimate muse. While this work derives in part from late twentieth century images of black women in popular culture, it has been her engagement with anterior generations of avant-garde painters that has induced the most sustained inspiration as she forges a creative vision that is wholly her own.

³³⁸ Foucault’s previously cited text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and Walter Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” comprise a basis for theorizing the premise of this dissertation; as does the artistic practice of Fred Wilson, especially for his 2003 Venice Biennale exhibition *Speak of Me as I Am*, which was the subject of an independent research project for Professor Rosalyn Deutsche in 2010.

Thomas, like Manet and Matisse before her, works with favored models, to create thoughtfully rendered portraits. Monumentally scaled like Sulter's photomontages, they bear titles derived from her artistic commitment to the centrality of the black female figure within the canons of art. With paintings like *Portrait of Qusuquzah 2*, *Une Très Belle Négresse* and *Din, Une Très Belle Négresse #1*, Thomas asserts an intervention with the historical effacement of Manet's Laure, whose portrait, as discussed in Chapter One, remains titled merely as the anonymous *La Négresse*. Thomas, in contrast, formulates titles pairing her models' names with Manet's brief description of Laure, "très belle négresse." (Image 172) Thomas' titles therefore act as textual metaphors of her visual style; the obscured individuality of Laure is reconstituted in glittering portrayals of confident and empowered black women. Thomas' muses are simultaneously subjects and objects of beauty.

Thomas also embraces the collaborative working methods of Bazille and Matisse as she engages with her models in a creative exchange that she views as inherent to the portrait-making process. Thomas speaks of her efforts to "encourage the models to assume poses that are naturally theirs."³³⁹ She provides costumes, wigs and makeup artists for the models, and consults with them to style their poses of looks inspired by black popular culture from the 1970s to the present. The relaxed give and take that typifies her studio sessions is revealed to be consistent with the past studio practice of Bazille --whose *Peonies* model had enough agency to repeatedly don the same distinctive headscarf and flower-shaped earrings in poses for Bazille and other artists.— and of Matisse --whose easy rapport with the model Carmen is revealed in *Hélène*

³³⁹ See Melandri et al, *Mickalene Thomas: Origin of the Universe*, Murrell essay "The Anterior as Muse," 2012: 22.

Adant's photographs from their studio sessions for his Baudelaire illustrations, as discussed in Chapter Two.³⁴⁰ (Image 71)

The art-historical excision of the black modernist muse, despite the existence of archival documentation such as the Adant photos, is underscored by the apparent obscurity of such archives, even to interested artists like Romare Bearden and Faith Ringgold, who both spent significant time in France actively researching modernist icons. Yet these artists were resolutely aspirational, as indicated in the narratives for some of Ringgold's *French Collection* series of story quilts. (Image 173) Even as she assumes that no African American woman could have been a muse to Matisse or Picasso, she also predicts that this will change before the end of the twentieth century, suggesting that artists like her young protagonist Willia Marie Simone will ultimately "meet all the artistic and literary luminaries of the day and make a name for herself in the modern art movement."³⁴¹

Mickalene Thomas is among the subsequent artists who can be seen as a fulfillment of Ringgold's vision, in works like her monumental *Dejeuner sur l'herbe: Les Trois Femmes Noires*, which was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art. (Images 169, 170) Thomas consolidates her mastery of metaphor into a visually opulent paean to three anterior masters—Manet, Matisse and Bearden—who are among her most sustained influences. The original *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, by Edouard Manet, transformed the classicized allegory of an Italian Renaissance print into a recognizable

³⁴⁰ Selected Adant photographs of Matisse's sessions with Carmen appear in a book by home décor magazine editor Marie-France Boyer, *Matisse à la Villa Le Rêve*, Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des Arts (2004).

³⁴¹ See the exhibition catalog *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art), 1998:9.

scene from bohemian Paris life. Thomas overlays Manet's ivory-complexioned demimondaines with vibrant black women styled from 1970s blaxploitation films.

The blurred background shape of Matisse's sculpture *The Back* situates the tableau in the Museum of Modern Art sculpture garden, setting up a dialogue with Matisse's own reworking of the female figure through a modernist abstraction fusing classical and African aesthetics.³⁴² The fragmented and layered texture of *Dejeuner's* painted surface, itself derived from a projected photograph, denotes the inspiration of Bearden's deconstructed and reassembled collages, which in turn cited the improvisational aesthetic of jazz, Matisse cutouts and Dadaist photomontage. Thomas stresses the importance of the collage to her process, noting that it is through collage, more than drawing or sketches, that she develops her compositions, observing that "the process of collage allowed me to navigate an image: segmenting, deconstructing, pasting, and recontextualizing my ideas. I wanted to shift ways of seeing the image."³⁴³ *Dejeuner* can therefore be seen a summation of the hybridity of the pictorial cut that Kobena Mercer attributes to Bearden's collage, as discussed in Chapter Four, becoming an embodiment of the "sharp breaks, distortions, surrealist blending of styles, values, hopes and dreams" that characterizes both African American culture and the evolution of modernist aesthetics.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Jack D. Flam, "Matisse and the Fauves," in. "*Primitivism* " in *20th Century Art*, exh cat, William Rubin, ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984) v1, 230-231.

³⁴³ From the artist's interview with curator Lisa Melandri in the exhibition catalogue *Mickalene Thomas: Origin of the Universe* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Museum of Art), 2012: 30.

³⁴⁴ Mercer cites Ralph Ellison's discussion of Bearden in "Romare Bearden, 1964: Collage as Kunstwollen," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*. London and Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press and the Institute of International Visual Arts, 2005.

Thomas applies an equally revisionary approach to her remaking of Manet's fraught depiction of Laure in *Olympia*, with pictorial devices that bring the gradual modernization of the black female subject into the contemporary moment.. As Thomas asserts her intervention, in the 2012 painting *Marie: Femme Noire, Nue Couchée*, her reclining nude turns away from the viewer, in contrast to the confrontational stare of Manet's courtesan, introducing a Bazille-like ambiguity to the pictorial connotation. She appears more as an indifferent paramour than as a paid consort—her body on artfully arranged and unabashed display but her gaze turned away. (Image 174) Her casual self-confidence is underscored by the spreading disarray of her bouquet as it slips to the floor from the relaxed grasp of a half-open hand. With the centuries-old presumption of an objectifying male viewer now dematerialized as an empty chair, it is the figure itself, rather than its relationship with the viewer, that is the source of pictorial interest. This radically new black muse transcends an antecedent history of subordination and obliteration and assumes the power of her central subject position.

Summation

Romare Bearden wrote that “art is an old tune that the artist plays with new variation. He attempts to see things with fresh eyes yet he must determine his relation to his past history.”³⁴⁵ This dissertation's acts of retrieval and revision have comprised an attempt to clarify just one of the many areas of *agnosia*, or blindness, still extant in the art-historical narrative. By focusing on the artists discussed herein, this analysis attempts to demonstrate that the inability to “see” Laure is primarily be one of narrative omission, rather than of artmaking practice. Matisse's innovative aesthetic engagement with

³⁴⁵ Romare Bearden, Artist's Questionnaire (1970) for his *Patchwork Quilt* collage, in the Painting and Sculpture department's Object Records, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

modern black culture is deemed extraneous to his stature as a foundational modernist. Bearden's pictorial insights about European masters are subordinated to his visualizations of jazz. Sulter's search for self-affirmation in history is subsumed by the demand for critiques of racial tensions in contemporary Britain. These disparate artists' shared project of modernizing the black muse, whether explicitly stated or not, complicates the distinct categories set up by canons. It therefore advances the impetus toward new narratives more reflective of the current transformative moment.

With free-ranging imagination, Maud Sulter and Mickalene Thomas stake their claims to a place in a lineage of transformative artists from Manet and Bazille to Matisse, and Bearden. Like their forebears, Sulter, Thomas and other contemporary artists, strive through critical engagement with the past, to capture the essence of their own time, and thus to foretell the icons of the future.

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