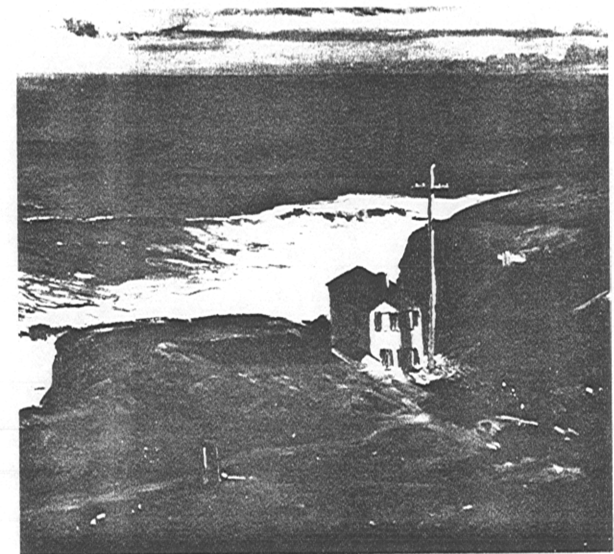
the twentieth century strangely stimulated a renewal of interest in painterly mimesis and mimicry; by appropriating the conventions of photography the Photorealists and others effected a renewal of pictorial realism, partly following the example set by Pop art.

This might seem a strange course for painting to have taken, given the greater mimetic power of new visual technologies. Yet painting was not in competition with these new means; it was responding in its own terms to the artificial reality they created, and it had one inalienable resource at its disposal, namely its physicality, as a skin of paint on a surface. This last factor helps explain the persistence of realist depiction in a period during which the diffuse and many-stranded theme of 'the body' became influential. Freud, whose earlier paintings echo *Neue Sachlichkeit* and British Neo-Romanticism, lives on into the era of video artists such as Bill Viola (b. 1951); the painted body, in the era of the body electronic.

Having begun this Introduction by doubting whether 'realism' could be given a coherent definition, I will end by more positively asserting that the word has a manifold meaning, and that the practice of painting in the twentieth century did much to bring this about, so great was its technical diversity. Often, when painters and critics used the word, they modified it, as in 'Social Realism' and 'Photorealism', to specify particular means and ends; all twentieth-century realisms were partial or hybrid. However, my introductory remarks have also implied a broad dualism governing this manifold of meanings: realist painting may either show an intense interest in the social or present an equally strong preoccupation with the visible (to which I referred broadly by using the term 'pictorial realism'). These concerns are certainly not mutually exclusive, but they are distinct, and painters have tended often to emphasize one more than the other. Equally, the literature on realism can be roughly divided between social histories of art, on the one hand, and studies (or critiques) of pictorial illusionism, spectatorship (or 'beholding') and kindred subjects, on the other (the former not excluding the visual, nor the latter the social). This book aims to do equal historical justice to the two concerns, tracing their evolution through a diversity of practice, variously involving modernist innovation, neo-academicism, and the renewal of genre.

Chapter 1: The Realism of Modernism: From the Turn of the Century to the First World War

Painting has given rise both to radical and to conservative versions of realism, and where it has been radical, it has been modern. To be a realist, in terms of the most self-consciously modern kinds of pictorial practice in nineteenth-century France, meant addressing the present, with an emphatic immediacy: this painting, this world, here and now. In depicting 'modern life', painters developed techniques that entailed a flattening of their images, to achieve an immediacy that was in the first place visual. Flatness has subsequently come to be regarded as a defining property of 'modernism' in painting, since, as the art critic Clement Greenberg influentially claimed, it entailed for painting what obtained for modernist practice in all fields: an assertion of the medium itself, of the means particular to it. Rather than receding into an imaginary depth, the image materializes as paint on a surface. What needs to be added, however, is that there is



3. **George Bellows**, *Shore House*, 1911. Bellows painted this in January 1911 at Montauk (Long Island). It is a feat of painterly simplification, characteristically suggestive. The house, at once sheltered and exposed, is framed as if seen from above and at a distance. It stands between two further distances, one gable pointing seaward to the high horizon, the other shadowed by a telegraph pole, last in the line.

4. **Edouard Manet**, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863. Manet's large canvas, undertaken in pursuit of visual 'truth', was among the works rejected from the Salon in 1863 and shown in a 'Salon des Refusés' at the order of the French Emperor Napoleon III; critics were scandalized because – in contrast with academic practice the nude, while not eroticized, was erotic in its effect. The composition has a classical source, a relatively obscure engraving after Raphael; contemporary viewers might have grasped Manet's allusion to the early sixteenth-century *Concert champêtre*, in the Louvre in Paris, now attributed to Titian.

more in the painted surface than the paint: there are signs and traces that refer us to perception and feeling, to bodily awareness, and to social existence – including the sociality of art itself, its disputes and debates. Edouard Manet's (1832–83) *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) brought to the attention of contemporary viewers more than the calculated shallowness of the painter's modelling. They would have found nakedness where they expected nudity, they would have seen a present-day setting instead of the timeless sylvan scene hinted at by the composition. They might have felt embarrassed before the painting, anxious as to propriety and perhaps physically ill at ease; disconcerted perceptually, too, by an inability to make either painted image or imaged body predominate one over the other. They could have studied this painted conversation with the sense of being participants, drawn into the disputatious environment of modern art. The painting would therefore have referred its viewers not to matters purely external to the painting and to themselves, but to a present reality, in their midst as well as in the painting – or on its surface. Some paintings by Courbet and Manet shocked contemporary spectators, for diverse and particular reasons, but in general because, like the work of Charles Darwin in a different contemporary context, their work afforded a vivid and disconcerting apprehension of the materiality of existence, the argumentative here and now.

Throughout the period discussed in this chapter (approximately 1900–14), artists in different countries took up the agenda of French modernism, in diversely innovative ways; it was an era of experiment and of ambitious large-scale exhibitions, a time in which the most challenging French art of the nineteenth century was shown internationally, alongside new work. The paintings discussed here reflect something of the variety of contemporary practice, in cases where realism was a significant ingredient. In diverse ways, they alert us to the real as the modern, as all that comprises the present, in its dimensions of subjectivity, corporeality and social existence.

While the inclusion of subjectivity might seem incongruous in this context (reality, in common usage, is always 'objective'), a crucial aspect of the realism of modernism was its highlighting of spectatorship, of the viewer's own responsive and subjective presence before the painting. There was in fact a permanent tension in French realism and modernism, from Courbet and Manet to Impressionism, between an outward attention to things as they are and an inward reference to subjectivity, made explicit

in painters' (and critics') claims that what they painted was their 'sensation'. At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of French painters, among whom Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) was a leading figure, helped shift the critical emphasis still further towards the pole of the subjective, under the auspices of the Symbolist movement. As a consequence of the new development, entailing as it did a turning from the real to the ideal, academic practice was able to come into the modernist frame of reference. Embodying what I referred to in the Introduction as the conservative version of realism, the academic tradition in France had lost its social pre-eminence with the fall of the Second Empire in 1870. We will see in chapter two that it was to come into its own during the interwar period, when its capacity for rendering the human image in universalizing, symbolic terms answered to contemporary political demands. Earlier in the twentieth century, as I shall argue, artists explored the contradiction between the academic appeal to timeless order and the modernist address to the present. In a sense, this is what had occurred in Manet's *Déjeuner*; a shock effect that was to be repeated, in different and in varied ways, in some of the painting of the pre-First World War period that inclined to realism. In general, realist concerns, motifs and strategies gained expression through a diversity of conventions, some radically new, and this anticipated the pattern for the rest of the century: realism was to appear in hybrid guises.

From the Nineteenth Century

Through the work of Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), whose career continued into the 1900s, we can begin to trace the presence of the nineteenth century in the realisms of the twentieth. Born in Philadelphia, he trained there and in Paris, between 1866 and 1869, as a pupil of the academic realists Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) and Léon Bonnat (1833–1922). While he received a thorough academic training, one that recognizably shaped his work, his teachers did not follow the orthodox classicist line, and he himself turned realist methods to expressly modern ends. We can see his paintings as combining both of the traditions that contributed to the development of realism in Europe, academic high art and genre painting; even his boxing scenes have a monumental calm and grandeur.

Eakins belongs to the history of twentieth-century painting partly because, like Winslow Homer (1836–1910), he came to be seen as a founder of a confident and self-directed American school; American realists of the new century, from the generation of

5. **Thomas Eakins**, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875. Eakins, the son of a Philadelphia drawing master, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and later in Paris, with the academic realists Gérôme and Bonnat, from 1866 to 1869. Eakins's choice of this subject, which was not a commission, and his treatment of it at monumental scale, reflects his interest in science. His interpretation, which alludes through subject, lighting and handling to Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Professor Tulp* (1632), exemplifies the confrontational character of his realism.

George Bellows (1882–1925) to that of Reginald Marsh (1898–1954), looked to him as a precursor. Eakins was an ambitious painter who showed remarkable independence in his methods and in his choice and interpretation of subjects. While the largest part of his work was portraiture, his subject paintings (sometimes themselves incorporating portraits) had the greatest public impact, and built his later reputation. His work was not generally well received during his own lifetime. His most celebrated painting, *The Gross Clinic* (1875), still has the power to disconcert that in some degree characterizes his work in general. Despite its date, it is appropriate to discuss this painting in the present context, since it highlights aspects of realism in an exceptionally vivid manner. With more than an echo of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Professor Tulp* (1632), it shows a celebrated and innovative surgeon, Dr Samuel Gross, conducting an operation. What made the painting notorious – even though, like other works by Eakins, it was scarcely seen in public in his lifetime – was the representation of the surgeon's hand holding the scalpel, his fingers glistening with blood. The detail struck Eakins's critics as crystallizing a brutality and a wilful disregard of propriety that they found in his actions and attitudes more generally. The conservative Philadelphian élite was admittedly not hard to upset, particularly in respect of Eakins's unhesitating use of naked models in art classes for female as well as male students.

What lent the painting its particular force was precisely its violation of propriety. It was not a matter simply that the squeamish might be upset, but rather that a cardinal rule of art had been broken. The rule, as recurrently set out in academic teaching and treatises, was that art, which must be beautiful, should not incorporate an ugly subject or an unpleasing form. There can be no doubt that Eakins vehemently disagreed with this familiar precept. At the same time, it proved as useful to him as it had done to Caravaggio (1571–1610) and to Courbet, whose work in different ways broke the same rule – by allowing a deliberate and strategic upsetting of expectations. Eakins, who as a student in Paris wrote to his father that 'the big artist does not sit down like a monkey and copy a coal scuttle', knew that, for any worthwhile painter, reality had to enter painting through calculation and artifice rather than through direct imitation. The viewer is looking at a painting, a cultural object, and not at an actual scene, and so the rules and means of painting necessarily set the terms of the encounter. A sense of the real arises, in front of Eakins's painting (a life-scaled work, more than six feet in width), through

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a calculated shock. The shock is not crude, it is precisely placed and arises within an extraordinarily complex and calculated whole. Standing before *The Gross Clinic*, the viewer's restless and anxious gaze may, for example, move back and forth between the open wound, the bloody fingers holding the scalpel and the patriarchal head of the surgeon, with its Rembrandtesque scumbled highlight – just such a distinguished head as might properly be the subject of a boardroom portrait. A dignified elder has been caught out in a cruel act; and in the same glimpse, the actuality of surgery, wounding to heal, is made vivid. Our gaze shifts from the top-lit death's head of the surgeon to the life-blood of the patient. Blood is the central fact of the painting, and Eakins is very much a painter of the central fact – one who knows that the painter's way to it is indirect.

While it testifies to the complexity of realist strategies in general, *The Gross Clinic* is of particular interest for its treatment of vision. The methods Eakins uses to engage the viewer entail making the act of seeing central both to the painting's subject matter and to its structure. Like Edgar Degas (1834–1917) and Manet, yet independently of them, Eakins here portrays a scene of theatre in which the beholders themselves are framed; the word 'theatre' itself derives etymologically from a Greek stem denoting the act of seeing. Both in general and in particular ways, the painting contradicts Lloyd Goodrich, who concluded his monograph on Eakins (1982) with the assertion that 'Eakins's art was counter to the concern with appearances that was a major trend of this period, both in impressionism and in the visual naturalism of the Sargent kind'. While Eakins was certainly far from being an Impressionist or a painter like John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), who was a highly accomplished social portraitist, the real and the apparent are quite inextricable in his work. It was indeed by virtue of his intense concern with the real that Eakins showed his preoccupation with the way things appear, a preoccupation that is if anything particularly acute and critical in his case. *The Gross Clinic* is a visual treatise on forms of attention: the surgeons intent on their work, the woman who flinches away, and the shadowy audience, which we implicitly join.

6. **John Singer Sargent**, *Ena and Betty, Daughters of Mr and Mrs Asher Wertheimer*, 1901. Sargent, an American who, like Eakins, studied in Paris (under Charles Carolus-Duran), made his living as a social portraitist, principally in London, painting wealthy and aristocratic sitters as they might wish to have themselves presented.

It would be nearer the mark to say that Eakins was an artist dedicated to *unvarnished* appearance. It is instructive to set his 1900 portrait of Louis N. Kenton against a typical Sargent portrait; the portrayal of Kenton is, we might almost say, antisocial, for rather than turning an elegant face to the world, this gaunt figure looks at the ground (hence its popular name, 'The

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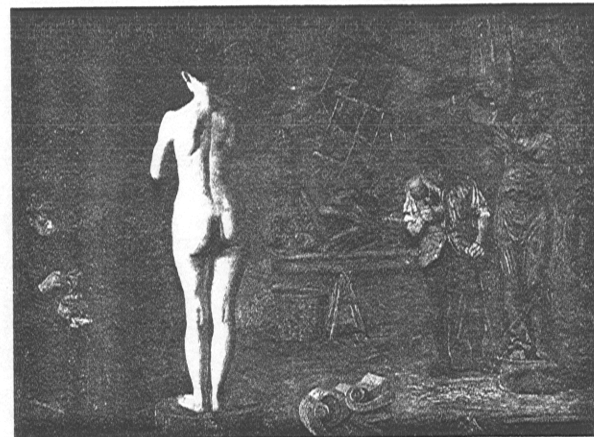
7. **Thomas Eakins**, *The Thinker, Portrait of Louis N. Kenton*, 1900. The sitter was related to Eakins by marriage. Unlike Sargent, Eakins spent his working life in the United States, devoting much of his time to teaching. Both this painting and Sargent's (see plate 6) reflect admiration for Velázquez, but in divergent respects: physical realism versus painterly grace.

8. **Thomas Eakins**, *William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*, 1908. Eakins follows Courbet and Manet in presenting the nude in pointedly non-mythologized form. In contrasting the actual with the allegorical, Eakins develops an allegory of his own, akin to Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1854–55), on the subject of realism (see plate 12).



9. **Paul Cézanne**, *Standing Female Nude*, 1898–99. Replacing tonal modelling with a 'modulation' of hues, and painting in distinct and substantial touches, Cézanne achieves a sense of volumetric mass not only in the figure but in the space surrounding it. The evident paintedness of the body confers materiality on it while preventing it from taking on an illusionistic presence. The painting relates to Cézanne's late bathers compositions of the 1890s and 1900s.

10. **William Adolphe Bouguereau**, *Birth of Venus*, 1879. The academic painter Bouguereau effaces brushwork, further enhancing illusion through the use of photographic tonality.

Thinker') and the paint gives a plain and ungraceful account of the way the angular body invests the lived-in suit. The painting demonstrates Eakins's concern for the concrete. He made this concern programmatically evident in *William Rush Carving his Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1908), a later and more austere version of a subject he had first tackled in 1877. Eakins, who spent his working life in his native Philadelphia, here pays tribute to the sculptor who in 1809 carved a figure to surmount the waterworks that brought water to the city from the Schuylkill. Where a painter schooled in Impressionism would have made figure and ground relatively continuous with one another, Eakins, as if in competition with the sculptor, carves the naked model into a quasi-solid presence. As in most of his paintings, he uses a dark-ground technique and builds up paint in layers or glazes. The seeming solidity of the model is partly a function of the density of paint, relative to the thinner and looser background. 8

Eakins's method is quite unlike Cézanne's in *Standing Female Nude*, a late painting of 1898–99, where the background areas, painted with as dense a variegation of tones as the figure itself, tend to press forward around it. However, we can see how much these painters have in common as inheritors of earlier French realism if we compare their respective treatments of the nude with the idealized and allegorical illusionism characteristic of an academic Salon painter such as William Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905). In allegory, that which is immediately presented is the vehicle for a higher, more universal meaning. 'Allegory', in 9 10

etymological terms, means 'other-saying' – what is shown speaks of something other than itself. In Eakins's painting the figure whose flowing drapery Rush is carving, which carries a bittern (a marsh bird) on one shoulder, personifies or symbolizes water. The naked model in the foreground stands as nothing but herself, and the contrast allows us to appreciate this, and conveys a sense of her firm and distinct individuality. The section of tree-trunk she stands on underlines the contrast between her living flesh and the wooden sculpture, and also holds her up in luminous suspense. The other two living figures are subordinate, and lend support to the main theme. The chaperone, a black woman, is shrouded in a dark dress, against the naked model in the light; the sculptor, at work, is as awkward in form as his carving is graceful.

11. **Diego Velázquez**, *Fable of Arachne ('The Spinners')*, c. 1657. Velázquez juxtaposed different orders of reality in several of his paintings. Here, as has been rediscovered only in relatively recent times, the background represents the mythical weaving competition between the mortal Arachne and the Goddess Minerva. For her presumption, Arachne is transformed into a spider, but her achievement had equalled that of the goddess. In this allegory of painting, Velázquez displays his own skill in the foreground, with its murmur of conversation, its unprecedented illusion of the spinning wheel. Additions to the top and right of the canvas were made by a later hand.

12. **Gustave Courbet**, *The Painter's Studio. A Real Allegory Determining a Phase of Seven Years in my Artistic Life*, 1854–55. This is an allegory in that the figures would never have been brought together in life, but are present in order to place Courbet's practice in a wider contemporary framework. Personal friends and others close to his art are assembled on the right; on the left is a miscellany of figures representing society at large (including apparent political portraits). It is 'real' in that none of the figures is supernatural or from the past, and landscape painting is at the centre of this manifesto for Courbet's declared 'realism'.

13. (overleaf) **George Bellows**, *Both Members of this Club*, 1909. The subject affords Bellows an opportunity to display painterly vigour. 'Manliness' was regarded as a prime virtue in the circle of artists around Robert Henri, matching contemporary middle-class attitudes to sport in its legitimate forms (the boxing shown here was semi-legal). Contemporary writing on Eakins praised the 'manliness' of his art.

Eakins, for whom the naked human body was the subject most fitting for the artist's study, painted relatively few nudes, since he generally treated only modern and actual subjects. Even the *Crucifixion* he painted in 1880 is realized as if in the present, like his historical reconstruction of William Rush at work. The boxing subjects he pioneered in American painting allowed him to render the male nude. They also enabled him, as with *The Gross Clinic*, to represent spectators and thus evoke the arena of vision. Spectatorship is also a theme in *William Rush*, if less explicitly. Brought to the very foreground, Eakins's nude stands pivotally between the shadowy region of the painted studio and the realm of the spectator. Imaginarily, we are brought into the studio space. The earliest precedents for Eakins's strategy here are afforded by sixteenth-century Venetian mannerism and by the work of Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) – a painter Eakins especially admired. In Velázquez's *Fable of Arachne* (*'The Spinners'*) (*c.* 1657), high allegory forms the background to a realistic foreground. The allegory, a contest between a goddess and a mortal, carries a universal meaning, while the foreground, a workshop where women are spinning, opens into present reality. Eakins goes further in *William Rush*, and makes the here and now the sole place of universal or common meaning. The allegories fade, but the actuality of the model and the labour of the sculptor advance to be seen. The world of realism *is* this world of appearance, of the present, of work and life. Beside the model in the immediate foreground is a block of carved scrollwork (Rush was a ship's carver), inscribed with Eakins's signature; he signs his name in the place where work has been done, to show beauty arising from work, rather than descending from above.

11

The Social Fabric

The main innovating impulse in North American art at the beginning of the twentieth century was decidedly realist, and the rising generation looked to Eakins as a precursor, in spirit if not in terms of style. No elevated beauty is to be found in *Both Members of this Club* (1909), by George Bellows (1882–1925). He was the most successful of several artists associated with the portraitist and art teacher Robert Henri (1865–1929), who were struggling to gain a public for their work during the years before the First World War. Bellows, like Rockwell Kent (1882–1971) and Edward Hopper (1882–1967), was a pupil of Henri in New York. Before coming to New York at the turn of the century, Henri had been the leading light among a group of artists working

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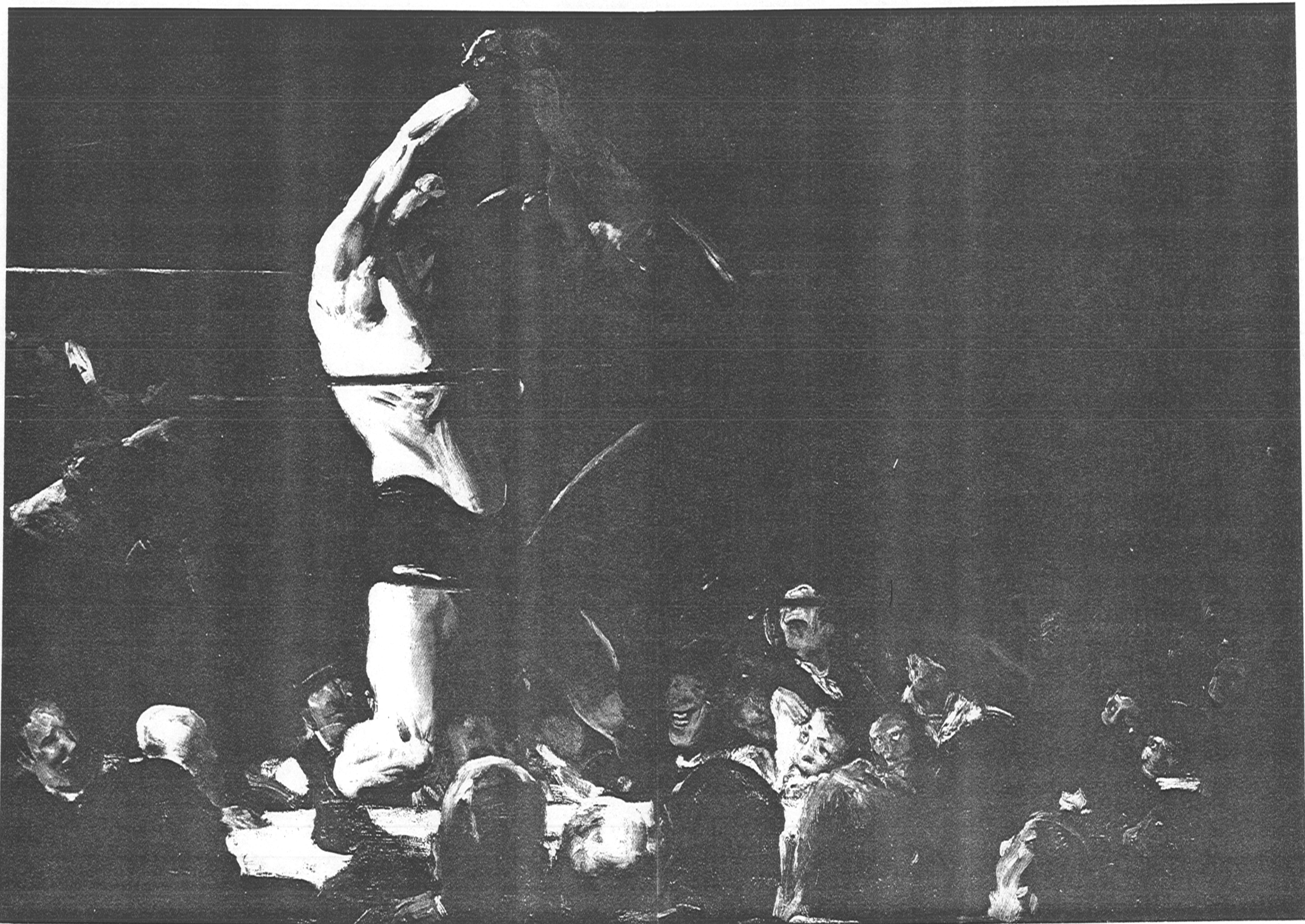

as illustrators for Philadelphia news journals. By 1904 John Sloan (1871–1951), William Glackens (1870–1938), Everett Shinn (1873–1953) and George Luks (1867–1933) were all in New York, beginning to practise as painters (in 1908 they were to comprise, with Henri, the majority of the independent exhibiting group known as 'The Eight'). The common tendencies evident in the work of some of the painters linked with Henri caused them to become known later as the Ashcan School. Within the span of very few years, Bellows produced a series of paintings that gave particularly emphatic expression to attitudes that had emerged informally within the group, in conversations, café gatherings and life classes. His are the paintings that most programmatically fulfil Henri's injunction to his students to paint the life of the modern city, implicitly that of its poor and immigrant communities. Bellows was also the painter who followed Henri's technical example with the greatest energy and confidence. In imitation of the methods of Frans Hals (1580/5–1666) and Manet, Henri painted his portraits rapidly, keeping spare canvases ready in case the work in hand lost its freshness. This was not for the purpose of nurturing a bravura manner, as in Sargent's case. For Henri and his followers, execution had to carry a sense of vigour, of the painter's energetic engagement with the subject; correspondingly, they favoured scenes they could treat so as to project a lively or forceful physicality. *Both Members of this Club* is, accordingly, a scene of violent action, and the painter's charged brush smears sweeping strokes of oily pigment, applied wet into wet, to give extremely cursive accounts of the boxers' anatomies and of spectators' faces. Bellows paints, aptly enough, with attack.

Both Members is the culminating and largest work in a series that Bellows based on visits he had made to Sharkey's, one of the semi-legal boxing clubs that flourished in private halls and the back rooms of bars after public prizefighting was made illegal in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. While leaders of society, including President Theodore Roosevelt, promoted a cult of manliness and themselves engaged in boxing, among other sports, the 'noble art' of the gentleman's clubs was a far remove from its popular equivalent. Equally, in terms of painting, boxing as we see it here is to be distinguished from its ostensible precursors, the boxing pictures of Eakins; those were essentially static images which, in the case of *Salutat* (1898), alluded to the gladiators of Roman antiquity. Nothing is noble here.

It has been argued that Bellows affords a view of boxing that reflects comfortable middle-class judgmentalism. Indeed, he

once commented on the immorality he sensed in the fight audience, more than in the ring itself. One has only to study the leering, greenish face of a central spectator at the far side of this scene to sense what is meant, and feel invited to judge that these people are less than human. Little of the ring's surface is glimpsed, so that the crowd, emerging from the dark into the cone of light that defines the boxers, seems to surge voraciously towards them, sensing the kill. Yet Bellows's staging of spectatorship works in this case – if not in others – to undermine any feeling of distance and detachment. The rising heads in the foreground, and the low eye level, position the viewer of the painting in the midst of the crowd, so as to feel pressed upon by the same palpable blackness, and pulled by the same centripetal force.

This, of all Bellows's paintings, jumps out of its time. American twentieth-century art is often thought of as beginning in 1913, the date of the Armory Show in New York, which brought European avant-garde art to the United States, making paintings like this appear technically antiquated. Yet here Bellows invents the modern image of boxing, before the advent of ringside photographers. Boxing is already recognizable here as the sport of the underclass, the chance for escape from slum and ghetto. It is also mortally violent. The aggressive male ethos evoked here is like that of boxing in later Hollywood cinema, right up to Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*. As to painting, the treatment of the white boxer creates a head not to be seen again until Francis Bacon (1909–92) painted his images of George Dyer – an ex-boxer.

The title, *Both Members*, alludes to the racial aspect of the subject. One of the boxers is black, and while this heightens the pictorial drama, it also touches a topical nerve, as often with Bellows. The famous black boxer Jack Johnson, an undefeated champion, was then the object of racially driven publicity concerning the search for a 'white hope' who might defeat him. Bellows's original title, *A Nigger and a White Man*, takes up a phrase he might have heard muttered among the fight crowd. *Both Members of this Club* alludes sardonically to the fact that a black man could join a club with white men only in these peculiar circumstances. The title aligns the viewer with the liberal reformer, watching from outside. More obviously external to the scene is the viewpoint offered by Bellows's *The Cliff Dwellers* (1913). Here are the urban poor *en masse*, as an object of reformist attention. Daylight penetrates the tenement darkness from the side of the viewer, as if a door had been thrown open, to

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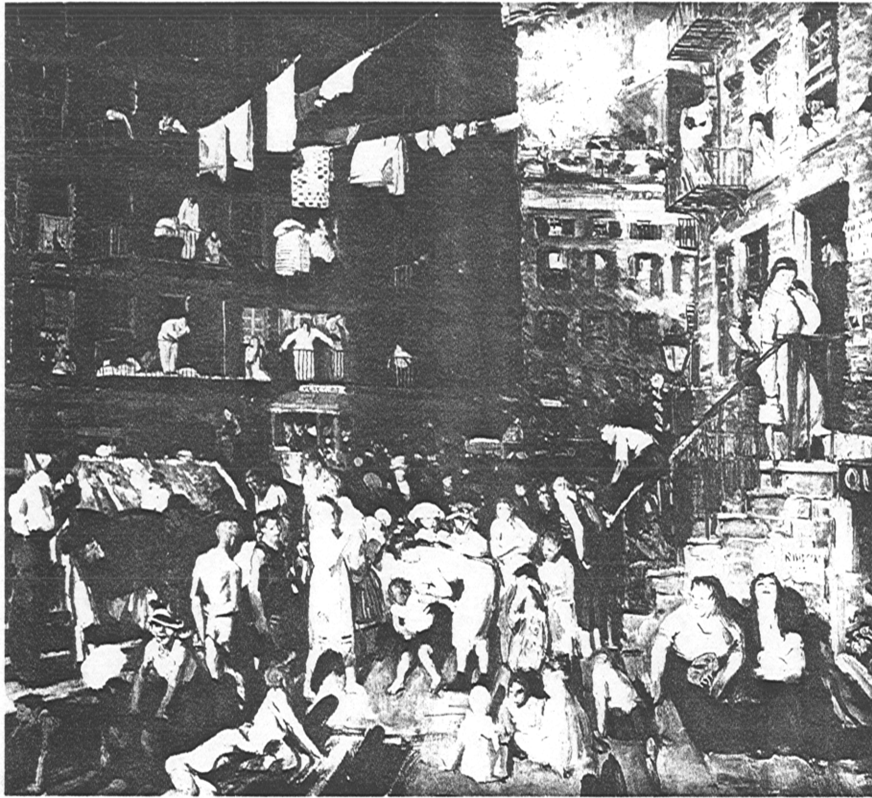


14. **George Bellows**, *The Cliff Dwellers*, 1913. Bellows's painting differs from Riis's photographs of slum life in his tendency to caricature and his pursuit of vitality and individuality. In comparing Bellows with Riis, however, we need to bear in mind the differences in context and function between an easel painting and an illustration to a published text – a distinction Bellows himself would certainly have understood. Bellows's earlier view of this scene was in fact an illustration for *The Masses*, where it had a pointedly political title.

reveal overcrowding, evidence of idleness and drunkenness, with children at large in the street. It is very much the view of urban poverty as presented in reformist literature, most famously in Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). The reformer comes in with the health officer and the policeman, and reports back to a concerned public on the immigrant 'colonies' of the city's poorer districts. Bellows makes his figures somewhat less than human through a kind of stick-like caricature redolent of newspaper comic strips; the effect is still more evident in his *Forty Two Kids* (1907). The title, *The Cliff Dwellers*, suggests a natural colony of creatures of some kind.

In 1890, half-tone printing was at an early stage of development, and some of the photographs Riis had taken and had chosen as illustrations were represented by drawn copies. It was due to the relative inadequacy of half tone that Sloan, Glackens, Shinn and Luks were able to make a living during the 1890s as 'artist-reporters'. Subsequently, they approached their paintings with a reporter's appetites and interests. In Sloan's case, what

15. **Jacob Riis**, *Coffee at One Cent*, from *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890. Riis used his own photographs for illustrations. Some were printed in half tone, others were reproduced from artists' copies. The Ashcan artists painted scenes similar to his (John Sloan painted a picture of a coffee stall), partly animated by the same reformist motives, partly in a pursuit of scenes that had life and character.

16. **John Sloan**, *The Haymarket*, 1907. Sloan's paintings of urban subjects sometimes show the bleak side of life in the slums; most, however, are vignettes, dwelling on incident and character.

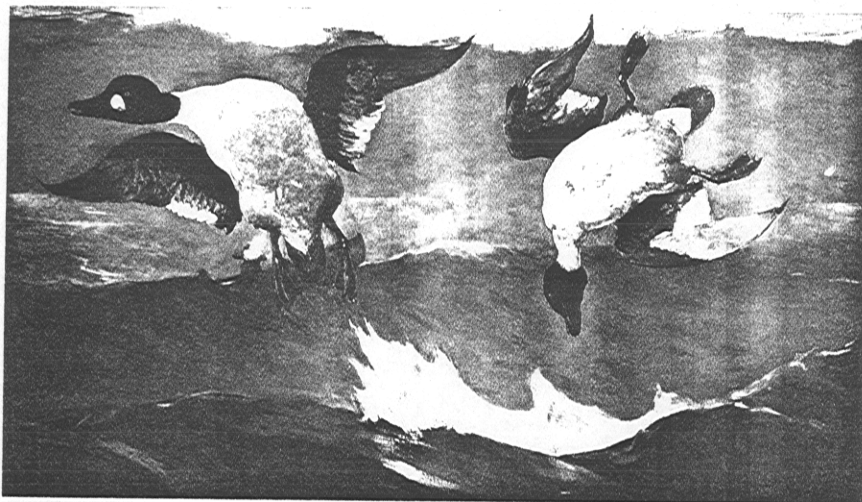
resulted was both more modest in proportions and also more sympathetic and humane than was generally the case with Bellows. As with the others, Sloan's practice as a painter drew on his journalistic habits. He made rapid sketches at the scene which he later worked up from memory into paintings (Luks ludicrously claimed he based an illustration of a man shot from a galloping horse on an 'on the spot' sketch). Sloan's city scenes, of which *The Haymarket* (1907) is typical, tend to be relatively small [16] and intimate. The Haymarket was a dance hall and, in Sloan's words, 'an underworld hangout'. Its reputation was as bad as that of Sharkey's, and the painting shows prostitutes being let in free of charge by the doorman. A young girl looks back, under her mother's reproving gaze; a group of figures huddles conspiratorially in the shadows, and a boy plays. There is enough evidence to form a social judgment, but at the same time there is something inviting in the billowing white figures drifting towards the lit interior, while the open windows intimate the life within.

During the 1900s, artist-illustrators were being put out of business by news photography, and the Henri group's fluid, suggestive use of paint distanced their practice from photography, and in a sense outdid it by achieving effects of movement and atmosphere photography could not (although the pictorial photographers, led by Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) and Edward J. Steichen (1879–1973), were seeking precisely those qualities in their work at the same time). *The Haymarket* is atmospheric and alive in a non-photographic way, and so is *The Cliff Dwellers*. The latter painting, however, refers the viewer to photography in other ways, both in its content and in its method. By opening a view from outside onto the life of the poor, it directly evokes photographs like those of Riis. The connection is more evident still in a drawing that had set out a first version of the scene, which Bellows had produced for *The Masses*, a socialist magazine whose art editor was Sloan (he had joined the Socialist party in 1909). The title, *Why Don't They Go to the Country for a Vacation?*, gives the drawing a more expressly political slant than the painting, and echoes Riis's campaigning work.

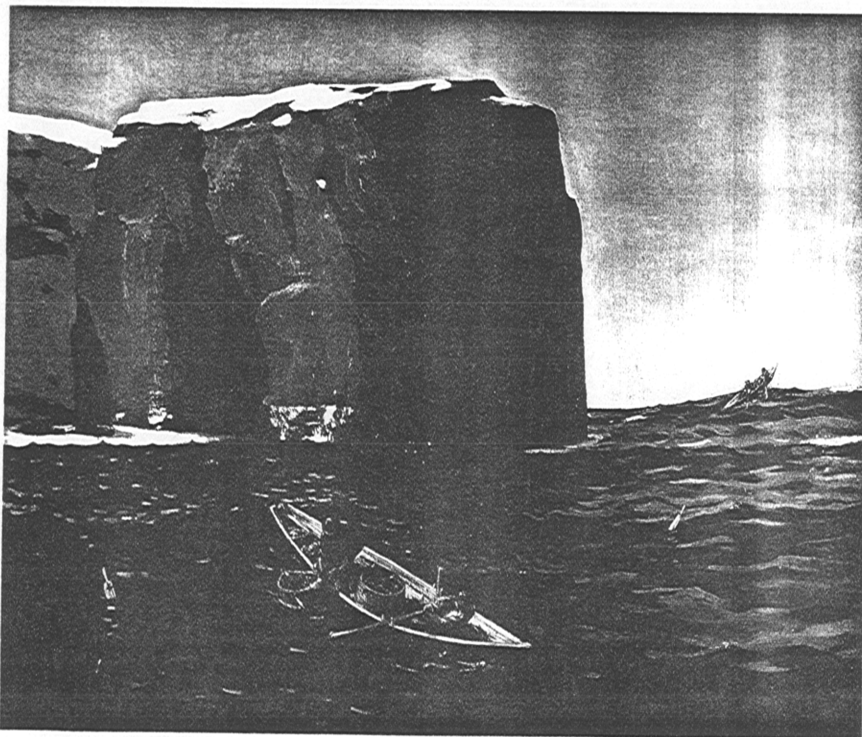
In no case, however, did these painters work directly from photographs, as Eakins had sometimes done (as we now know). Eakins's involvement with photography – he collaborated with Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), and invented a precursor of the cinematic camera – reflected an outlook that might be termed materialist, in its attunement to the factual and the scientific. While Henri and his associates were not materialists in that sense, they certainly addressed physical materiality, using oil paint as a means to translate between human and worldly substance. Sloan and Bellows impose on figures and settings alike the same plasticity and malleability. This they learnt not only from Henri, but also from a painter he admired, Winslow Homer, whose work thus affords a certain perspective on theirs.

Homer's paintings had nothing to do with urban experience. His late canvases were marine subjects, painted from the 1890s onwards in his studio at Prout's Neck on the Maine coast. What led Henri, despite this, to take his students to work in the area was the energy manifested in Homer's paintings of surging and foaming waves breaking on rocky shores. The paint itself mimed the action of the waves, rather than merely recording their form, and it was this painterly enactment of a world of manifold energy that excited Henri and his group. A picture such as the famous *Right and Left* (1909) [17] shows what his work held for them, although its most remarkable qualities remained inalienably Homer's. His marine subjects recurrently present crashing waves whose cascades of foam, in some paintings, rise up the surface of the canvas in vertical formations of agitated brushwork. Vision, paint and nature coincide in the picture-plane, in a moment of nature which is also (to paraphrase Matisse) a moment of the artist and the beholder. It is the fleeting instant at which the wave reaches its fullest existence. In *Right and Left*, the ducks appear transfixed, at the exact instant of death. At the same time as we glimpse the orange flame from the discharged gun (the title refers to its two barrels) in the grey-green distance, we realize the impossibility of our viewpoint. The physical reality of the painting, paradoxically, is brought to our attention by the illusory reality of the ducks; our gaze holds them in suspense, in their sensuous painted beauty, in the moment of their death.

None of the younger painters achieved anything like Homer's complex simplicity, and only Bellows, in his boxing paintings, approached (if more obviously) a comparable conjunction of violence with latent sexuality. Only one of Henri's pupils, Kent, devoted himself wholly to landscape and seascape. Yet Kent, who went to live in Maine, never showed Homer's preoccupation (drawn partly from Courbet) with the paradox of death in nature, with the fall and renewal of the material world. Kent's *Toilers of the Sea* (1907) [18] conveys, in a world of icy blues and greens, of crisp edges, of white snow against dark rock, the interinvolvement of the men with the natural world and with each other. It is the same coast as Homer's, but it is not his world of spray and storm, of lost



17. **Winslow Homer**, *Right and Left*, 1909. The title was not given by Homer, though he accepted it. For innovative artists and critics of George Bellows's generation in the 1900s, Homer had a mythic standing as the embodiment of American strength, will and directness. Yet his paintings frequently concern death, lonely and unredeemed by heroism.



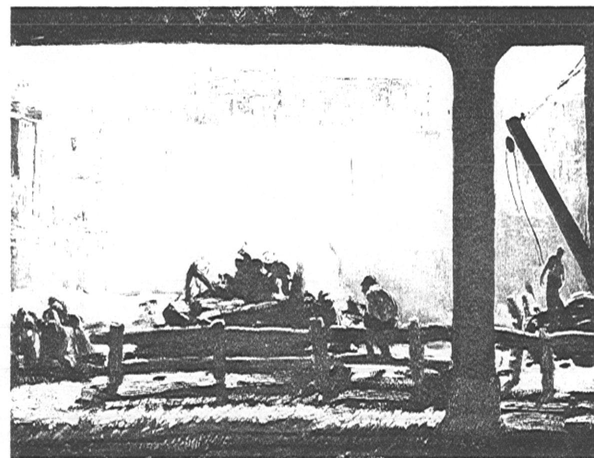
18. **Rockwell Kent**, *Toilers of the Sea*, 1907. Kent, who was a socialist, interpreted northern American landscape and coastal subjects in terms of the struggles of their human communities, and lived among the people he painted, so that he came to have an intimate knowledge of their way of life.

or imperilled seafarers. It is an empathetic representation of hard survival, akin to the account of a fishing community offered later by the documentarist Robert Flaherty, in his film *Man of Aran* (1934). For Kent, the social bond is crucial; Homer's sailors, by contrast, confront danger alone.

The urban painters among Henri's group took up Homer's methods in so far as they painted the city itself as a natural environment, softening its contours and rendering its tenements as cliffs for cliff dwellers. They represent the city's energies as a flux of natural force, the city's physical substance uniting with the human life it contains to comprise a common material, a social fabric. Bellows's *Blue Morning* (1909) is an urban scene which is a landscape, and in its encapsulation of the view it follows Homer's example of broad massing in the frontal plane. It is a subject Bellows tackled several times. The painting shows the vast excavation for Pennsylvania Station, with the massive new building rising incomplete in the distance; excavated beneath is an entire network of rail tunnels, and the girders of the elevated railway frame the whole scene. A subject the Italian Futurists would have interpreted with methods imitative of machinery, Bellows renders as a landscape of astonishing freshness. The painting nonetheless captures a specifically urban quality of excitement and offers an intimation of the city's vastness and aliveness – adapting Homer's methods so as to render its mortal present.

19

19. **George Bellows**, *Blue Morning*, 1909. The vast civil-engineering project to build Pennsylvania Station was under way when Bellows arrived in New York, and this is one of several paintings he based on it. The space Bellows depicts here is haunted by a quite different one, for the New York excavation was often compared at the time to the contemporaneous construction of the Panama Canal, an expression of the United States' imperial power within the continent which was to cost many thousand lives.



The Subjective and the Counterfeit

The reality of Bellows's *Blue Morning* is not simply external, for the painting does more than objectively record its subject. It conveys an atmosphere, renders a space that is not merely physical but emotional. It would be wrong to suppose that this diminishes its realism. European pictorial realism had been grounded in subjectivity from the time of its origins in the late Middle Ages. The Renaissance invention of perspective construction answered an already long-existing demand to render the world as it appeared to the individual beholder. We cannot distinguish, in painting, between (subjective) appearance and (objective) reality, for in pictorial realism the two have always been inseparable; Eakins, as we have seen, is a case in point. However, it is true that the methods fundamental to Renaissance realism, namely perspective construction and the consistent rendering of light and shade, were by themselves sufficient only to create an illusion – the induced belief that something is indeed situated externally to the viewer, in the depth behind the picture frame. The resulting effect of distance, of something seen in effigy, while highly effective for rendering still life – or angels – proved insufficient for the treatment of living subjects, such as portraits and the scenes of everyday life that came to be known as 'genre'. In fact, a convincing depth illusion, while 'realistic' in one sense, is unreal and alienating in another. In *A Favourite Custom* (1909), the academic realist Alma-Tadema constructs an illusion of spatial distance that intimates remoteness in time; the viewer apprehends a scene of intense sensuality as if lying behind the surface of the canvas, a world tantalisingly out of reach. 20

20. **Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema**, *A Favourite Custom*, 1909. The painting offers voyeuristic glimpses into classical antiquity: fragile and luminous, like other classicizing works of the late nineteenth-century aesthetic movement, Alma-Tadema's pictures are archaeologically exact. They reconstruct in detail the mortal life of a lost world: the painting represents life in Pompeii.

By contrast, in order to convey the livingness of their subjects, painters from the sixteenth century onwards developed methods that demanded the viewer's continued awareness of the painted surface. These methods, complementing illusionist techniques of disclosure, were what could be termed techniques of suggestion. Through suggestion, painters were able to convey phenomena that could not be shown, such as the vitality of a portrait subject, the emotional quality of a situation, its atmosphere. This implied a complicity with the viewer; not observation from a distance, but closeness and recognition: an illusion not of distance but of nearness.

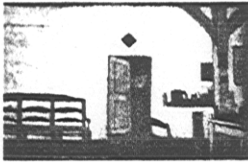
The French Impressionists invented techniques of suggestion by means of which they addressed the present, the modern and the urban. In his 1873 painting *The Railway*, Manet brought Impressionist techniques to bear on just such a subject, one 21

21. **Edouard Manet**, *The Railway*, 1873. The woman is Victorine Meurent, model for Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia*. The scene is a garden overlooking the lines from Saint-Lazare station in Paris. The subject is a cloud of steam, seen by the child through the black railings she grasps.

similar to that of Bellows's *Blue Morning*. Unlike Bellows, Manet does not transform the scene into the semblance of a natural landscape. On the contrary, he emphasizes its urbanity, and the blank impassiveness that is so characteristic of his paintings is consistent with that. Nothing particularly happens here. The young woman looks up from her book and the girl watches a cloud of steam. In its structure, the painting is highly suggestive of the passing urban scene. In its luminosity, it conveys an immersion in daylight. By both means, it points the viewer to a reality that is pervasive and ungraspable, yet present and immediate; it intimates that the city, which surrounds us as daylight does, is as elusive and yet as ubiquitous as light itself, materializing here in the child's dress and in the cloud of steam.

The modern city is a reality that pervades our existence. There is, accordingly, something almost abstract in Manet's attempt to represent it, as equally in his effort to paint light itself. The abstract implications of Impressionism were taken up by a succeeding generation of French painters. It is particularly in the work of Edouard Vuillard (1868–1940), Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) and Félix Vallotton (1865–1925) that we may recognize both an inheritance from Impressionism and genre painting, and a still more decided refusal to treat reality as 'external'.

During the final decade of the nineteenth century, these painters participated as members of a group calling themselves Nabis ('prophets'), a group associated with *La Revue blanche*, one of the small avant-garde magazines that appeared during the period. The wider cultural movement to which they belonged was Symbolism; in terms of painting, the Symbolist aesthetic entailed a turn from nature to artifice, from Monet's daylight colour to Gauguin's decorative hues. This was less a radical change than a transition, as can be seen from an entry Vuillard wrote in his *Journal* in 1894, underlining the continuity between Impressionism and Symbolism (which he refers to as modernism): 'So this idea of the life that surrounds us, of our life, the source of all our thoughts and creations, this became modernism.' His words evoke Impressionist immersion. In 1876, the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, a mentor for the Symbolist generation, had remarked on the surroundingness of light in Manet: 'The natural light of day penetrating into and influencing all things, although itself invisible.' He saw this pervasive light as being analogous to participative democracy, and in his use of the motif of universal visibility envisaged a democratic art: 'today the multitude demands to see with its own eyes.' Ironically, Symbolist art



22. **Edouard Vuillard**, *Misia at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne*, 1897–99. The timber post extends from floor to ceiling, and from top to bottom of the painting, associating the perimeters of the depicted space with the canvas rectangle; Misia stands in the vertical rectangle of the doorway, just outside the space of the room, thus reflecting the presence of the viewer before the painting. The horizontality of the picture, correspondingly, suggests the shape of the visual field.

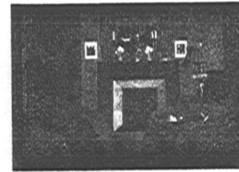
23. **Edouard Vuillard**, *La Femme qui balaie (Woman Sweeping)*, 1899–1900. Vuillard here evokes genre painting tradition, where women appear in close identification with the domestic space they inhabit and in which they work.

and literature is singularly refined and élitist, but we might nonetheless see it as rehearsing, in intimate and conspiratorial terms, a broader social mutuality.

Vuillard, Bonnard and Vallotton were indeed painters of intimate scenes, and the work of the first two came to be known under the heading of 'intimism'. Vuillard's *Misia at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne* (1897–99) offers an example of his intimist methods. It shows a close friend, Misia Natanson, looking into a room familiar to them both. In flattening the composition, Vuillard, like Gauguin and his fellow Nabis, draws out the radical implications of Impressionism. He abandons the methods of simple illusionism altogether (perspective, light and shade) and enhances the painting's power of suggestion. Colours, forms, brushstrokes, figure and setting are united in a common texture. Rendered frankly as colours and shapes on a surface (as Maurice Denis (1870–1943), theorist of the Nabis, had advocated), the genre scene, in its very privacy and reticence, intimates an emotional and imaginative space that stands outside of social convention. In other paintings, and increasingly in later years, Vuillard introduced a greater degree of depth, and in those cases the kinship with genre is still more evident. *La Femme qui balaie (Woman Sweeping)* (1899–1900) has been compared to work by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), which Vuillard particularly admired. What differentiates it, however, from painting of earlier periods is the proliferation of surface pattern characteristic of Vuillard. This counters the indications of spatial depth and joins with the variegated strokes on the objects to weave figure, furniture and room into a common fabric, a pictorial embroidery. Figure and space pervade each other; matter and consciousness unite.

The room becomes an atmosphere, its features impregnated with human emotional and moral qualities, and comparable effects can be seen in paintings by Vallotton and Bonnard. In *La Chambre rouge (The Red Room)* (1898) by Vallotton, the conspiratorial feeling is as strong as in Vuillard's painting of Misia, only now there are two figures who lurk in a darkened doorway, to intimate a sexual liaison. While the objects stand in a legible depth, the colours are strident and flat, giving the ordinary domestic setting a sinister unreality. In its stark light, the figures displaced from the centre and suppressed, it is like the scene of a crime, with the woman's belongings lying like clues on the table.

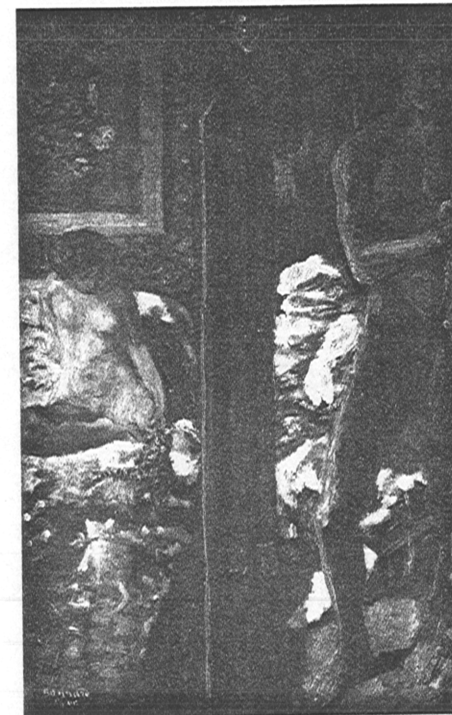
The sharp separations in Vallotton convey a feeling of alienation that is characteristic of his work in general. Ostensibly,



24. **Félix Vallotton**, *La Chambre rouge (The Red Room)*, 1898. Like Vuillard in his paintings of interiors (see plates 22 and 23), Vallotton identifies the depicted scene with the painted surface, but the sense of artifice is sharper and more cynical. Vallotton's graphic art informed his painting style; his illustrations, erotic in content like this painting, appeared in major *fin de siècle* reviews.

these formal and emotional qualities distinguish his paintings from those of Bonnard. In Bonnard's *Man and Woman* (1900) the scene is indeed intimate, for the protagonists are Bonnard himself and Marthe (Maria Boursin), with whom he lived from the time he met her in 1893 until her death in 1942. Here, male and female share an ambience, a deep red interior warmly yet dimly illuminated from an unseen source; the paint, as dishevelled as the scattered bedclothes, assists the general softening. Yet a folded screen emphatically divides the canvas, separating the figures. There is an intimation of sexual and emotional dissonance, possibly drawing inspiration from stagings of Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, Paris, with which the Nabis were closely associated.

At the time, Bonnard was turning from Nabi patterning towards a more Monet-like and atmospheric organization of colour. Nabi practice had generally favoured the use of highly artificial colour, to suggest a spiritual world raised above mundane reality, most evidently in the religious paintings of



25. **Pierre Bonnard**, *Man and Woman*, 1900. In the years after 1900, Bonnard's art underwent a transition, as he ceased to be part of the avant-garde and began a personal exploration of Impressionist methods. Marthe Boursin, who was to feature so centrally in his painting, appeared now in a number of erotic works.

Denis. This practice took a more cynical turn in the paintings of Vallotton. In an extraordinary triptych, *Le Bon marché* (1898), he interpreted the famous Parisian department store as a heaven of consumerism – a cynical reflection indeed of Denis's super-natural colour. He sets the bright and sharply contrasting hues of packaged goods against the generally shadowy mass of purchasers, who ascend and descend the central staircase. But these bright objects that the painting displays also turn it into another bright object for sale. Over twenty years after Vallotton painted this picture, André Gide (of the same generation as the Nabis, and an associate of *La Revue blanche*) wrote a novel describing the artistic culture that made its mingling of idealism and perversity possible. The title he chose, *The Counterfeiters* (*Les Faux-Monnayeurs*), suggests both the flirting with the illicit and the entrepreneurialism that characterized the Nabis and the Symbolists. It also aptly names a wilfully skewed reality, such as we find in Vallotton's *Le Bon marché*, whose very title – the Good Market – comes to appear sardonic.

Commerce was, in hard fact, a matter of pressing concern for these artists. They banded together for practical purposes as well as on more idealistic grounds, since they followed the career path established by the Impressionists. As modernists, they had to find exhibition space outside the official framework, they needed to draw attention to their art, and they required dealers. They had accomplished all of this by 1904, when Bonnard, Vuillard and Vallotton began to exhibit in the gallery of Bernheim-Jeune, a leading art dealer.

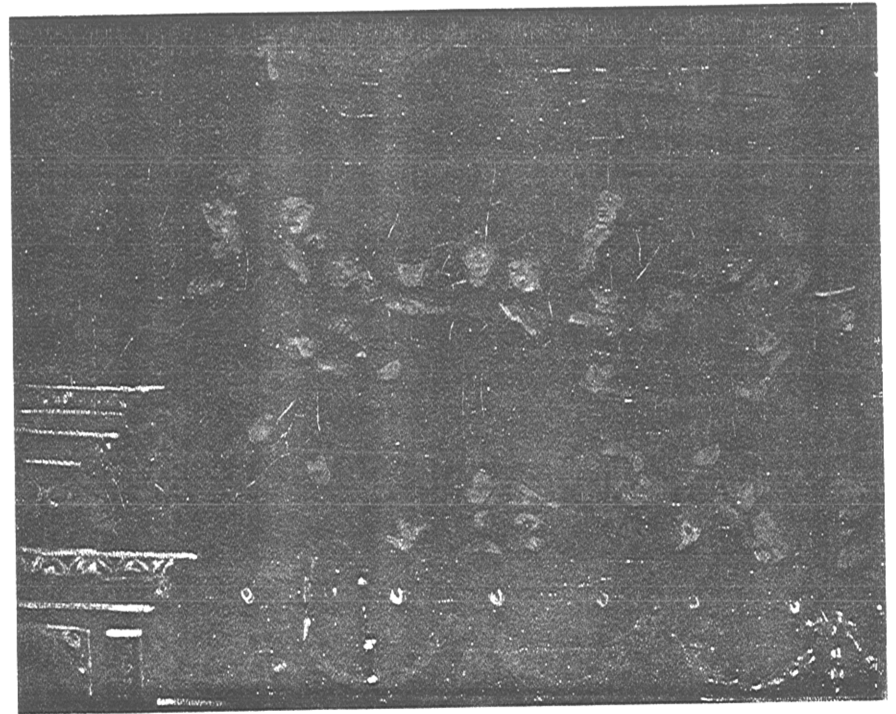
The English painter Walter Sickert (1860–1942) showed there in the same year. Sickert, who had been working in France, was shortly to return to London, where he was to be instrumental in forming groups whose function was far more bluntly to do with selling. Both the Fitzroy Group, founded in 1906, and the Camden Town Group that grew from it in 1911 served commercial ends. There are close parallels, too, between the London and New York art worlds during this period, with respect to the publicizing and selling of modern art. The respective roles and personalities of Sickert and Henri, as teachers, organizers and

26. **Félix Vallotton**, *Le Bon marché*, 1898. The description of compulsive commerce in Emile Zola's novel *Au Bonheur des dames* (1883), based on the Bon Marché, first of the big department stores in Paris, may have inspired the central panel. The magazine *La Revue blanche* was soon to move up market, to the area of big stores.

publicists, were in many ways similar. In both countries, independent exhibiting organizations had been established in the late nineteenth century to promote largely French-based innovation. The Society of American Artists stood to the long-established National Academy of Design as the New English Art Club did to the Royal Academy of Arts. In both countries, the younger organizations were themselves becoming restrictive by the 1900s. The English and American art worlds followed the French pattern, each establishing in rivalry to the official corporate structure a more diffuse pattern of activity in which exhibiting groups, private dealers and critics all interacted together.

In both London and New York, an already destabilized art world received a further shock with the arrival of still newer French art. The sensation created by the group show in which Henri and seven others ('The Eight') took part in 1908 at the Macbeth Galleries in New York was eclipsed by the famous Armory Show of 1913, with its Fauvist and Cubist exhibits. The British painter and critic Roger Fry's two 'Post-Impressionist' exhibitions, of 1910 to 1911 and 1912, caused equal disturbance

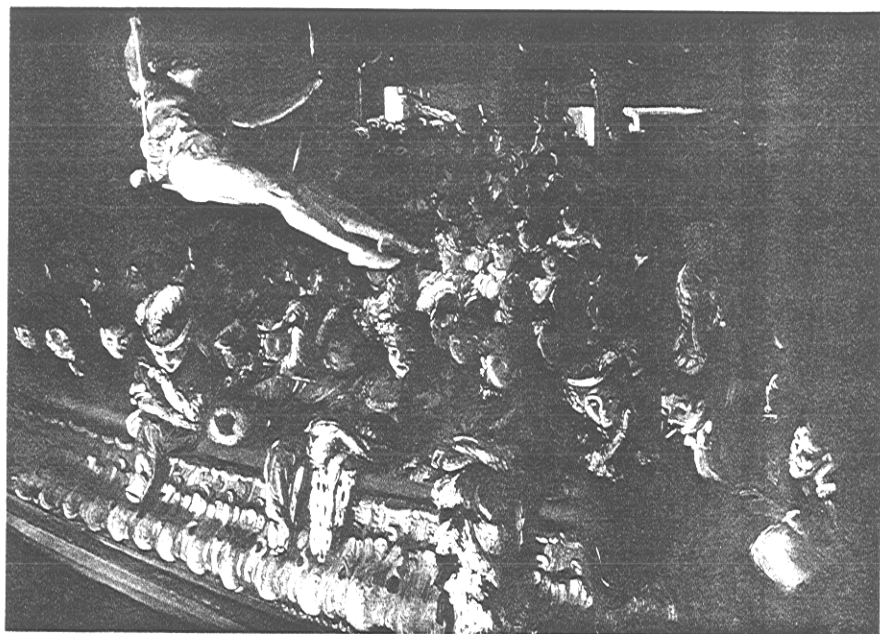
27. **Frederick Spencer Gore**, *Gauguins and Connoisseurs in the Stafford Gallery*, 1911–12. Roger Fry's exhibition 'Manet and the Post Impressionists' at the Grafton Gallery in London from 1910 to 1911 set the precedent for this showing of Gauguin and Cezanne. Gore was a founder member of the Fitzroy Group and the Camden Town Group.



28. **Walter Sickert**, *Noctes Ambrosianae*, 1908. Theatrical deception and illusion appealed to Sickert as to Degas. Here, working-class spectators in steep seats rise up the canvas in a scattered pattern. Like the surrounding gilt, their enraptured faces reflect back the stage light.

in London. Between 1911 and 1912, Frederick Spencer Gore (1878–1914), a close associate of Sickert, painted *Gauguins and Connoisseurs in the Stafford Gallery*, depicting art-world figures catching their first glimpse of paintings by Gauguin and Cézanne. Part in tribute and part satirically, Gore adapts his style to greet the arrival of the *faux-monnayeurs* – the counterfeiters. His high viewpoint displays both viewers and viewed, and makes the gallery a microcosm of the urban scene, of its diversions, novelties and excitements.

English painters, like the Americans around Henri, followed French examples in presenting the city as an infinite spectacle, in which their paintings were themselves participants. When Sickert painted *Noctes Ambrosianae* (1908), showing spectators in the gallery at the Middlesex music hall, he dwelt on reactions of uninhibited delight and astonishment such as he might have wished his paintings to elicit. In framing the audience rather than the stage, he was being even more devious than his mentor Degas, whose café-concert pictures were a source of inspiration.



29. **Everett Shinn**, *London Hippodrome*, 1902. Shinn was the first member of the group of Philadelphian artists and illustrators at the core of 'The Eight' to enjoy commercial success. This oil painting takes up the dashing style of his pastels; scattered light sources illuminate the diverse responses of individual spectators.

Quite independently, the American Shinn had used exactly the same strategy in 1902, in his *London Hippodrome* (though Degas's one-time pupil Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) had anticipated both of them). Both paintings suggest more than they show. The Sickert is more subtle if less thrilling; by ranging the faces parallel to the surface, he directs the attention of the whole rectangular formation down to the bottom left corner, where the gilded gleam hints at what lies below – the framed scene reflected in this frame of faces.

The faces shining dimly out of the reddish darkness are typical of Sickert's way with light. His interior scenes of this period fictionalize Camden Town, a working-class district of London made notorious in 1907 by the murder of a prostitute, whose naked body was found in her lodgings. Sickert, with an eye for the sensational, painted several pictures related to the subject, the most confrontational being *L'Affaire de Camden Town* (1909). Using methods not unlike those of Vuillard, he immerses the nude, brutally portrayed, in an atmosphere of squalour. Like Vallotton's *La Chambre rouge*, the painting invites an attention that mingles aestheticism with prurience. While less anti-

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30. **Mary Cassatt**, *Woman in Black at the Opera*, 1880. Like Walter Sickert, whose career also began in the nineteenth century, Cassatt drew on Degas's treatment of theatrical subjects. Like Manet in *A Bar at the Folies Bergère* (1881–82), she associates Impressionist immersion in light with a universal social exposure to vision – but here gives her female protagonist an assertive role. The theme of watching one who watches, which conjoins seeing with being seen, had been developed by Manet in a series of café-concert paintings during the late 1870s.

naturalistic than the Vallotton, Sickert's painting equally avoids narrational and descriptive clarity; the title does not mention murder and the viewer, left to interpret the scene, is effectively rendered a participant and denied judgmental distance. Even with less dramatic nudes, such as *La Hollandaise* (1906), there is a feeling of intrusion – assisted, as with *L'Affaire*, by the steep foreshortening of figure and bed. The woman is not merely intruded upon, however, for her presence is assertive and forceful rather than passive, as is the space with which she is identified, the whole being rendered in uningratiating impasto strokes of lilac, brown and dull green.

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31. **Walter Sickert**, *L'Affaire de Camden Town*, 1909. Sickert exhibited this painting, with its calculated glimpse of a chamber pot, in the first exhibition of the Camden Town Group in June 1911, in order to attract publicity. There is no actual evidence of violence, Sickert typically (and provocatively) relying on the power of suggestion. The title does not mention murder, but the recent killing of a prostitute in Camden Town would have been brought to the minds of contemporary viewers.

32. **Walter Sickert**, *La Hollandaise*, 1906. Sickert held that painting should deal with 'gross material facts', but also observed that the nude was 'in the nature of a gleam'. Here, he paints bold volumes that are yet insubstantial, disconnected gleams in the dark.

The female body nonetheless remains the object of an attention that is male in the first instance, and this is also the case with Bonnard's *The Bathroom* (1908). Here, Bonnard paints Marthe's body with evident desire, modelling its contours in contre-jour silhouette and reflected light. Yet she has a self-possession that matches any possessing gaze, and she wholly appropriates the environment of colour she partakes of; held by light, she catches the light with an object she holds. However, despite the implied mutuality of the depicted space, Bonnard remained the painter in the partnership. No women were equal practitioners among these groups of artists. The Camden Town Group prevented women from exhibiting (lest wives or pupils be given favoured treatment). Among the New York painters of the 1900s, there were several who became supportive wives of better-known men. Women artists in England had a similar fate, the striking exception being Gwen John (1876–1939), who remained single and took a determinedly independent path, with support from her brother Augustus.

33. **Pierre Bonnard**, *The Bathroom*, 1908. Light and vision surround the naked Marthe, since her body is seen from in front (in the mirror) as well as from behind. Yet she is seen to be more than the object of another's vision, since she touches her own body, perhaps to apply lotion; she is seen to feel.

34. **Gwen John**, *Girl Reading at a Window*, 1911. John lived in Paris from 1904 onwards, sending work for exhibition in London. A notable painter of interiors, she would likely have seen work by Pierre Bonnard and Edouard Vuillard. This painting has been compared convincingly with the subject of the Virgin Annunciate (John was to convert to Catholicism in 1913).

35. **Gwen John**, *Nude Girl*, *c.* 1909–10. In a companion painting, *Girl with Bare Shoulders*, the clothed model holds the same pose. Here the medallion and the presence of clothing draw attention to her nakedness.

At the time of her self-portrait, *Girl Reading at a Window* (1911), John was living in Paris, where she had for a time modelled for Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), with whom she had had a sexual relationship. This painting was the first she sold to the American collector John Quinn, whose support gave her financial independence until the time of his death in 1924. Like Sickert and Bonnard, she identifies figure with space, though only partly through the agency of light. Her painted self turns her upper body to the window, partaking of the pale matt tonality that gives the room its even, tranquil atmosphere. But the black dress stands out sharply against the light on the right-hand side, and its long vertical rhymes both with the window and with the verticality of the canvas itself. The dryness of the paint, the self-containment of the figure, and her identification with the vertical surface all give the portrait a quality of holding its own space – almost against the viewer. This upward flattening of the figure characterizes John's other oil portraits too – all of women – which in later years become hieratic images of repose. Her earlier paintings give a strong yet unemphatic account of her sitters' individuality. *Nude Girl* (*c.* 1909–10) is not simply a nude but a portrait (John painted

the same sitter clothed). The lean figure is tensely upright, perched rather than seated, her body turned slightly to the light-source. She is close to the wall and to the surface plane of the canvas – all three are collapsed together. There is a remoteness and perhaps a challenge in her expression. Seen too readily as a 'spiritual' painter, John here gives a very material account of a subject as elusive as the spirit: the embodiment of the self.

Corporeality

No subject of painting speaks to us more directly than the human body. Nothing is more real to us, in that it is the part of reality we know most intimately. Yet there is no subject more elusive, for the body, as depicted at all times and in every culture, appears as a paradoxical and contradictory entity, combining matter and spirit, animality and divinity, selfhood and sociality. It is something that we inhabit, and yet see outside ourselves, in the bodies of others and in our own reflections.

Realism in western painting, as it developed over recent centuries, expressed this dividedness of the body through a division in pictorial method. On the one hand, taking Greco-Roman sculptures as their prototypes, Renaissance painters gave their nude figures the traits of anatomical coherence and physical cohesiveness proper to actual bodies. Yet the illusionistic methods they used to project such figures in depth, on a flat surface, necessarily invoked the subjective viewpoint of a beholder. In the genre tradition, as we have noted, there was a comparable duality, an alliance of the actual and the virtual, since genre painting developed techniques of suggestion. Impressionism took such techniques to a radical extreme; Impressionist paintings strongly suggest our perceptual, bodily immersion in reality, by presenting us with diffuse fields of pigment that are at once illusionistically enveloping and physically immediate.

Pictorial realism thus came both to portray the body and to imply it: portraying it as an object of vision, implying it by allusion to the (subjective) visual field. This duality of inside and outside reflected a dualism in the western cultural and religious traditions that informed realist practice. Yet this is not the only duality or contradiction involved here. Precisely because the body is what we all have in common, images of it have the potential to touch on our deepest disagreements. Images of the human body can be highly controversial, in a wide range of contexts, both religious and secular, ranging from Judaic and Islamic prohibitions of image-worship to latter-day feminist critiques of

36. **Mary Cassatt**, *The Bath*, 1892. Cassatt's treatments of motherhood do not reflect personal experience, as she had no children. Friends and servants posed for her. Madonna images are inevitably recollected, but Cassatt often represents infant girls and, as in this case, attends to the prosaic aspects of child nurture; it is not even obvious here that the woman is the child's mother. Yet in its observant descriptiveness *The Bath* conveys more strongly than do many insistently maternal scenes the sense of communication between two bodies.

the imaging of gender. To paint the human body, then, has entailed a use of divided means to depict something understood culturally as divided within itself, which is furthermore the focus of profound ideological and emotional conflicts.

One of the dichotomies at work here is that between conservative and radical impulses in realism, referred to at the beginning of this chapter. It is possible to see modernist realism in terms of a recurring dialectic, or argument, between two principles; an internal dispute in art which, as it recommences, draws in the wider cultural arguments referred to above. To take an example, *The Bath* (1892) by Cassatt presents what appears at first sight to be unqualified harmony, and yet there are underlying dissonances. There is a conflict within the very structure of the painting, since it betrays a divided allegiance. In Paris, where she pursued her career, Cassatt exhibited with the artists calling themselves Independents and Impressionists. However, like Degas, to whom her work is visibly indebted, she at once participated in Impressionism and turned away from it. We can see how this painting participates in the radical turn to subjectivity, for the handling of colour, the orientation of the scene and the compression of all planes towards the picture-surface conjure a perceptual field implicitly inclusive of the beholder. The figures and even the objects communicate through this field, drawing the viewer in as well. Yet Cassatt does not deploy expression and gesture so as to engage the viewer emotionally. Instead, she attends to physical actuality; both gazes turn to the mother's hand holding the foot in the water, and the child's left arm pushes against her mother's knee for support. Accompanying this stress on the actual is an accentuation of form, and of the integrity and solidity of the child's body in particular. In her realization of the corporeal, Cassatt draws on academic traditions of life drawing and of the monumental nude, as Degas and Cézanne had done.

From Cassatt's time to our own, depictions of women and pictorial interpretations of gender and sexuality have been matters of dispute. For Griselda Pollock, an influential feminist art historian who has written incisively on Cassatt, an image such as this, in its modernity and actuality, undermines the traditional image of timeless femininity, of madonnas with infants. However, it might also be observed that, if all our prototypes of the human image are noble or divine, then realism dethrones them all, irrespective of gender. Additionally, painters' efforts to represent either male or female bodies during this period took place in a wider context of dispute regarding sexuality and relationships

37. **Paula Modersohn-Becker**, *Kneeling Mother and Child*, 1906. Modersohn-Becker's paintings from this period include other naked mother and child compositions, as well as self-portraits. As here, the figures are simple and monumental and tend to fill the frame. She gave birth to a child the following year, and died shortly afterwards. Unlike Mary Cassatt, who uses the conventions of 'modern life' painting, Modersohn-Becker here associates motherhood with the earth.

38. **Lovis Corinth**, *A Mother's Love*, 1911. A founder-member of the progressive Munich Secession, an artists' association, in 1891, Corinth was by 1911 a well-established artist, and president of the Berlin Secession. His wife, Charlotte Berend, shown here with their son, had been his first pupil, in 1901. Here, an association with Madonna compositions (by Michelangelo and Raphael) is surely intended, and the child's pose is assertive of his gender.

between men and women, both intimate and social. The argument was taken up in literature as well as in painting, by Strindberg and Ibsen as well as by Edvard Munch (1863–1944); in psychology and in the new field of psychoanalysis. Men certainly dominated the debate and were overwhelmingly predominant socially; but among artistic élites, the imbalance was slightly less, and self-examination was the rule.

It is worth comparing Cassatt's painting with two other mother and child images, *Kneeling Mother and Child* (1906) by Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907) and *A Mother's Love* (1911) by Lovis Corinth (1858–1925). Both these Germans spent time in Paris and drew significantly on French painting, in ways characteristic of their respective generations. Corinth, whose work combined aspects of Symbolist and academic art, here brings Impressionism into play, using a characteristically exuberant and painterly technique. Modersohn-Becker's painting, on the other hand, reflects a use of Gauguin and Cézanne (whose work Corinth, too, admired). Both the younger and the older painter treat nudity in an assertive rather than in a merely conventional spirit. Movements in contemporary German culture promoted a cult of youth and nature, and both painters equate nakedness with naturalness, an emphasis absent from Cassatt's painting. As a member of the artists' colony at Worpswede in north Germany, Modersohn-Becker had participated in an artistic return to nature and to a natural simplicity whose embodiment she, like the others, found in the peasant society of the region. Whereas one of the group's founders, Fritz Mackensen (1866–1953), had painted a peasant mother and infant in deliberate echo of the madonna and child, Modersohn-Becker here contrives a primal and monumental image, in which life-giving motherhood is redolent of fertility in nature. In its deliberate removal from observed reality, the painting joins a tradition of symbolic realism that had originated in the peasant scenes of Jean-François Millet (1814–75).

Corinth's painting differs from Modersohn-Becker's in almost every respect, except that Corinth, in letting the dress slip to disclose the mother's breasts, evokes the nursing of the infant. It is as personal as the Modersohn-Becker is anonymous, for this mother and child are Corinth's much younger wife and their son. While Corinth's sculptural realization of the child is at least as strong as Cassatt's, he blends where she separates, immersing the figures in an atmosphere at once visual and emotional. As the title shows, the painting's whole impetus is subjective, and in addition to the adoring exchange between mother and son, a third – and certainly paternal – gaze is strongly implied. Patriarchal as it may be, the painting is unsettling in its eroticism.

More disturbing still is *The Blinded Samson*, which Corinth painted in 1912, while recovering from the stroke he had suffered not long after completing *A Mother's Love*. In its blind thrusting, the body loses its power, to become a mere blundering physical force, its impotence signified by the manacles and loincloth which, taken together with the bloodied visage, suggest castration. Corinth's constriction of the body into a narrow space and his urgent handling serve to project an internal chaos of impotent energy.

39. **Lovis Corinth**, *The Blinded Samson*, 1912. Corinth's sense of selfhood was bound up with his sense of masculinity; manifest in the self-portraits he painted on each birthday after 1896, his maleness is in crisis here (after the confidence of *A Mother's Love*).

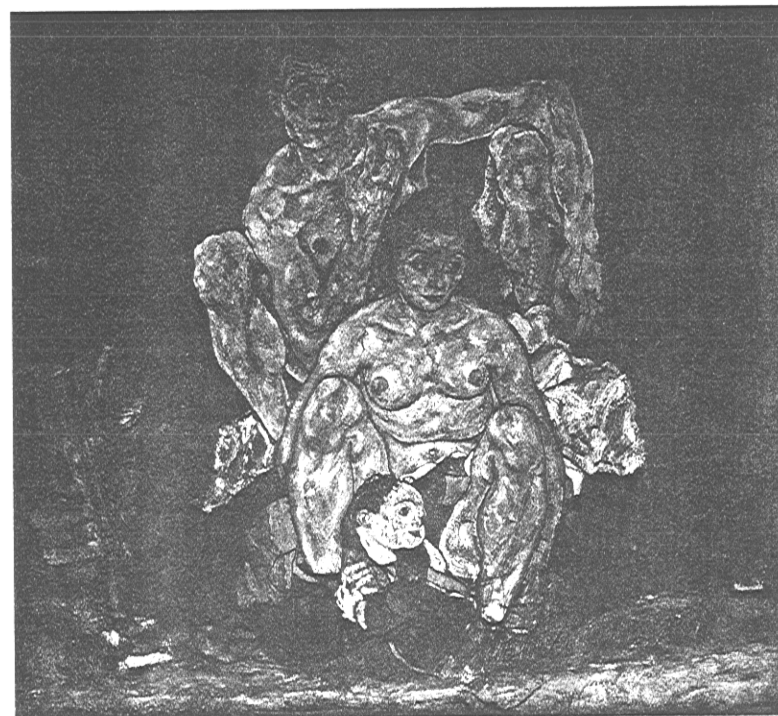
Other painters of the time used more programmatic methods to close the body upon itself, for the purpose of suggesting its inner life, and its mortality. The body's life cycles, its suspension between life and death, vitality and sickness, were themes to which painters of the Symbolist generation returned repeatedly, among them the Norwegian Munch and the Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler (1853–1918). When his mistress Valentine Godé-Darel lay dying of cancer, Hodler drew and painted her incessantly, as if to capture what could not be brought into view, tracing from outside the ebbing of life and the encroaching isolation of death; recording the formation of the brittle mask.

40. **Egon Schiele**, *Nude Self-Portrait, Grimacing*, 1910. Schiele's most radical works present the body in terms of extremes of pain or sexual ecstasy. He thus brings subjective feeling and objectifying vision into violent conjunction.

Nowhere, during these years, is the life of the body more tellingly isolated, as if pinned to a board, than in the work of Egon Schiele (1890–1918). This artist owed something to Hodler in his schematic containment of his figures. In watercolour and gouache drawings he made of himself in 1910, the background lies flush with his contorted naked body. A tense and angular outline, accentuated by a surrounding rim of white gouache, gives the flattened body a hard edge, to render it as an object of intense (self-) scrutiny. But because the figure is flattened, the ground bare, the viewer's attention is invited to switch back and forth across this boundary, from inside to outside. Within, the brushing is soft and transparent, even if it models a lean and bony physique. It extends the feeling of tense discomfort, evident in the face, throughout the entire body. There is an analogy with Corinth, in the artist's re-enactment of his body in paint. This is painting as mime; indeed, Schiele used a professional mime as a model for a while. The body becomes a mask, a persona.

In its decorative rhythms and its eroticism, Schiele's work owed a debt to Gustav Klimt (1862–1918), the major figure in the Viennese art world of the 1900s, an artist on whom Schiele modelled his career, and who gave the younger artist assistance at crucial periods. However, like his contemporary Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), Schiele departed significantly from Klimt's practice, partly in response to a change in the critical climate. In very general terms, the change involved a new emphasis on clarity and differentiation, which in the influential polemics of the architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) required a turn from ornament to plain articulation. Klimt's great allegorical cycles blended their tumultuous figures together, portraying human sexuality as an ingredient of universal nature. Schiele produced allegories too, but in a different spirit. His famous monumental painting *The Family (Squatting Couple)*, from the year of his death, 1918, characteristically isolates the protagonists in their individuality, even though they constitute a couple (*Squatting Couple* was Schiele's title, not *The Family*). The painting was intended to form part of an allegorical cycle for a projected mortuary chapel, in a sequence concerning 'earthly existence'. The woman (a model, not Schiele's wife Edith) looks away to the side, beneath the painter's predominant gaze. Here, as in the 1910 drawing, Schiele in the first place sees himself (*Self-Seers* was a title he used more than once for double self-portraits), and through that, others. Schiele, as it has often been argued, showed in his studies of pubescent girls, including his sister Gerti, an understanding

41. **Ferdinand Hodler**, *The Dying Valentine Godé-Darel*, 1915. A major Swiss painter who participated in the Symbolist movement at the end of the nineteenth century, Hodler is best known for his monumental paintings allegorizing the cycle of human life.



42. **Egon Schiele**, *The Family (Squatting Couple)*, 1918. Borne down by their own weight, the bodies of the man and the woman appear as inert physical mass; they are without animation and seem depressed or devoid of feeling.

that stemmed from his own closeness to adolescence, still felt in the 1910 drawing. Fascinated with sexuality, he produced many erotic drawings, including scenes of masturbation, for the egotism of sex clearly preoccupied him. The erotic in Schiele entails not only the subjectivity of arousal, as suggested in earlier works by a hypersensitive line and agitated, transparent brushing, but also a staring objectivity and specifically an intense focus upon the female genitalia. His art is realist in its passionate appetite for the actual; his eye is aroused by what is not sublime in the naked body. Few nudes are more naked than Schiele's, exposed, their bones protruding, limbs contorted in pain or ecstasy. Love in Schiele is the opposite of Platonic; far from suggesting an escape of souls into transcendent union, his pictures describe with intensity the separateness of embodied selves, a separation that is a source both of dismay and excitement.

Cubism and Realism

We use the term 'realistic' of paintings that present an illusion of reality and indeed, as I have argued, realism in western art has been founded in illusionism. However, we also customarily speak of reality as *distinct* from illusion, and I have invoked this sense of the real in several contexts, for example in relation to sculptural properties of solidity and cohesiveness. Modersohn-Becker's figures, while not illusionistically real, have something of this quality. One factor involved here is the contrast between the tactile and visual senses, since we may be assured of the physical reality of that which we can touch. Cubism, the most radical development in the art of the period, finds a place here since it was radical precisely through transforming the Impressionist (and Symbolist) field of vision into what could be called a visual-tactile field. In this, the Cubists drew inspiration from Cézanne, even while developing methods utterly different from his.

Cubism, we might say, takes realism apart, but does so for a realist end. In *Seated Female Nude* (1910) Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) invokes the methods of pictorial realism only to deny an illusion of coherent physical reality. But in the process, he both sets in play and puts on view the pictorial conventions for rendering depth and solidity. Tonally contrasted areas of paint demarcated by straight and angled lines suggest planarity and depth without allowing the shifting planes to gather into a unified image. This means that the immediate physical reality of the painting itself prevails over the pictorial reality of the depicted body. The nude here does not stand out in space as does Eakins's

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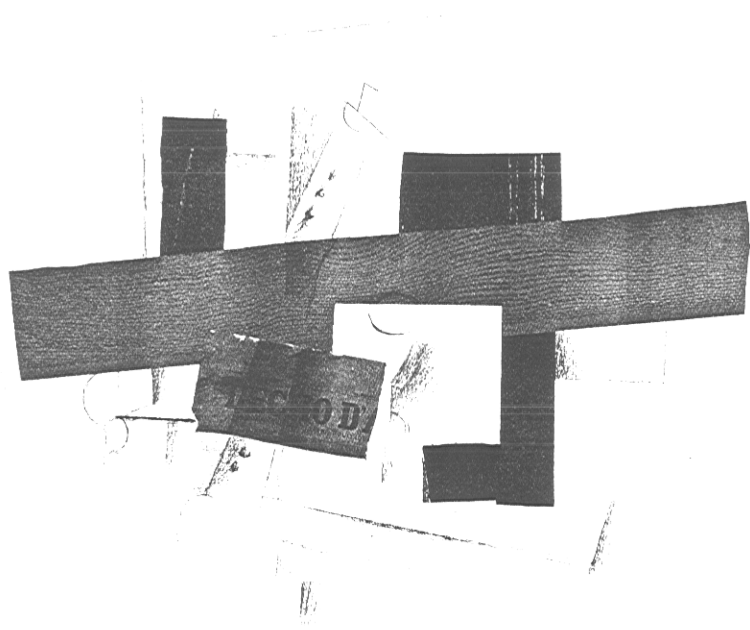
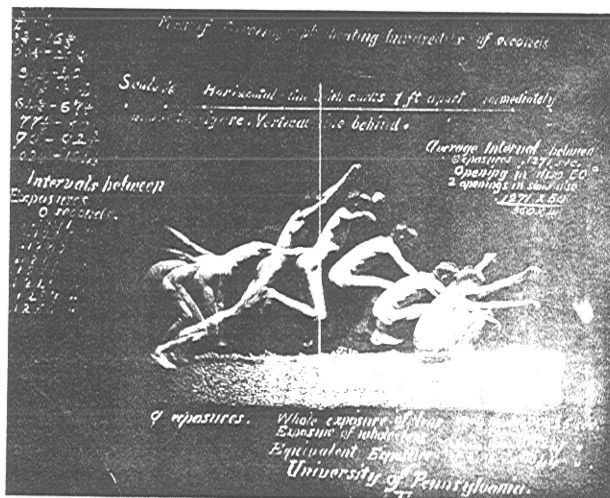
43. Pablo Picasso, *Seated Female Nude*, 1910. Between 1907 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Picasso and Braque (see plate 44) invented a new artistic practice, based on the playful analysis and redeployment of the conventions of pictorial realism; this game, whose rules continually changed, was labelled 'Cubism'.

in *William Rush*; nonetheless, there are resemblances, for Eakins, as was noted, brings attention to the artist's labour, and asserts the materiality of the body. On the first point, we might set the array of artist's implements on the wall in the background of Eakins's painting beside a Cubist *papier collé* of 1913, in which Georges Braque (1882–1963) plays a game with the conventions of still life and *trompe-l'oeil*, and where the very components are themselves the artist's tools. On materiality, we can note the predominance of earth colours in both the Eakins and the Picasso – colours of matter, rather than of air and light. Finally, in the famous *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2* (1912) by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), a painting whose form derives from the chronophotography that had also engaged Eakins, we see being set to work once more the antithesis between allegory and material actuality, as the nude, yet again, descends to earth, and into our argumentative midst.



44 **Georges Braque**, *Clarinet, Glass and Newspaper on a Table*, c. 1913. The *papiers collés* represent the most inventive phase of the Braque–Picasso creative partnership. Here, paper printed as wood represents the substance of the table; the newspaper, crossing the clarinet, happens to be called *L'Echo*.



45 **Thomas Eakins**, *A Man Jumping Horizontally*, 1885. In the mid-1880s, Eakins, who was in contact with Etienne-Jules Marey and collaborated with Eadweard Muybridge, made chronophotographs. He also designed a revolving disk camera, adapting and improving on Marey's.

46 **Marcel Duchamp**, *Nude Descending a Staircase, no. 2*, 1912. The physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey's photographs of sequences of superimposed movements stimulated Duchamp's pictorial experiments at this time. This painting became famous after its inclusion in the 1913 Armory Show in New York.