THE MYTHS OF IDENTITY: CORRECTING THE LEGACY OF BERTHE MORISOT

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ABSTRACT

The Myths of Identity: Correcting the
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Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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This dissertation examines several myths, commonly understood as factual explanations for Berthe Morisot's lack of recognition in the art world. Beyond gender discrimination, several assumed facts are explored to reveal how variables beyond her control and incomplete information has resulted in her eclipse as an important artist.

Berthe Morisot, a painter at the apex of the Impressionist practice in French art, died in 1895 following a thirty-year career. Her work included both portrait and landscape executed in pastel, watercolor and oil and she participated in all but one of the eight Impressionist exhibitions. A friend of both Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir, Morisot was revered by fellow artists for her ability to capture transient light on canvas. As interest in Impressionist expression dominated the early twentieth century, particularly in the United States, Morisot was denied any prominence in art history.

Morisot's six-year relationship with the French Realist Edouard Manet has been used to categorize her as a protégé or, at best, student of the master artist. There is little evidence to substantiate this assumption. Her artistic output has been characterized as insufficient as compared to fellow painters. Morisot's died in 1895 at age 54 and her painting stopped well short of the extended careers of Monet and Renoir. The economics

of the art market shifted dramatically to an owner/dealer model after 1886 and her body of work was never accepted within the new model.

Following her death, Morisot was memorialized by family and friends, as late as 1926, in words that did not serve her artistic achievements well. These “word portraits” confused the qualities of Morisot as gracious hostess with the feminine attributes used to describe Impressionism. The result has been a record that betrays the necessary strength, character and determination required of Morisot to make her way as a successful practitioner in a world defined by men. Correcting this misinformation and clarifying the myth surrounding the life of this artist provides an avenue to restore her to her rightful role in the history of Impressionism. By examining factors beyond gender, all women artists might be appreciated in a new light.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Marie Clarkson Klotz,

who always championed my desire to learn

and to my other mother Erna Brogger-Andersen

who believed in me without reservation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Researching and writing this dissertation has been a long journey and would not have been completed without the support and confidence of many friends. My inspiration was the struggle of Berthe Morisot to be accepted as a true professional in a man's world. I felt consistently encouraged to tell her story by the presence of similar young stars in my own life, Eva, Abigail, Phoebe, Julia, Katie, Ava, Maia, Maggie, Annelise and Elle. It is my hope that their personal life stories will have easier paths but be as much appreciated as Morisot's achievements.

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My husband, Robert, who served as proofreader, companion, chauffer and occasional typist will be forever in my debt.

INTRODUCTION

> "Few people balk when one declares that one is working on Morisot. Most have a generous word or two to say about how she has been undervalued, how beautiful her work is, how central she was to the Impressionist enterprise. To succumb to this sort of flattery, although tempting, is dangerous." (Adler and Garb 4)

The artist Berthe Morisot (1841-1894) holds the unrivaled distinction of being the initial female artist to join with Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley and Camille Pissarro who, perhaps unwittingly, launched an unconventional, avant-garde art movement later known as Impressionism. She would initially exhibit nine works including three pastels, three watercolors and three oils. Included was work previously shown successfully at the Salon de Paris. Her active participation and support of this artist collaboration would continue through 1886, together with the work of as many as twenty-eight fellow painters. Morisot was unique among her fellow artists, but her gifts were overlooked "by over hasty eyes" in the documentation of art history, comments art historian Jean Dominique Rey:

> A painter of women and a woman herself, Berthe Morisot imbued all her female models with all the charm, all the sensuality, all the tender lightness of being that characterize her own being, communicated through her work. It falls to us to recognize that beyond its tender charm and femininity, her work is well structured, constantly searching for greater subtlety of expression; and that its superficial appearance , however delightful and attractive, simultaneously hides and reveals a depth concealed from over hasty eyes by discretion and diffidence alone. (134)

It is that diffidence toward a woman artist which would result in her absence from the History of Impressionism. While her fellow artists went on to fame in varying

degrees, the contributions of Berthe Morisot were largely forgotten. Her artistic career was based on the strength of three, supportive pillars: family, artistic training and love of nature. Over time, these pillars would begin to falter, and it is how she created a new structure of support that underscores the courage and determination, not typical of a woman of her class, but necessary to pursue her life passion.

In December 1873 a small group of Parisian artists, discouraged by the prospect of continuing to exhibit solely at the annual juried Salon de Paris exhibit, met to form an artist's cooperative, *Le Societe anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs*. The goal of this new group of artists was to broaden the audience for their art works, thereby increasing the potential for sales. Many of these artists would continue to show at the annual Salon de Paris sponsored by the Academie des Beaux Arts, but the new exhibit differed as a non-juried show with member artists encouraged to submit multiple works demonstrating the full range of their ability. This first exhibit, in the spring 1874, was labeled by critics as "new art"; it was considered both revolutionary as well as an affront to the carefully controlled standards of French art. Many of the 7,000 spectators who attended the new four-week exhibit were outraged and not only failed to appreciate the works but rather reveled in the humor of its absurdity. Art critic Albert Wolff, whose stock and trade was described as the poisonous review, would comment in his critique of a later exhibition: "There is also, as in all famous gangs, a woman. She is a curiosity. She manages to convey a certain degree of feminine grace in spite of her outbursts of delirium" (qtd. in Shennan 179).

The central issue explored in this dissertation is an examination of the myths surrounding Morisot's legacy that might explain her lack of recognition. Among these

factors are the perception of her relationship with Realist Master Edouard Manet, her early death and the inventory of completed works and her memorialization by family and friends.

Morisot's rationale in joining this group of painters, against the opposition of her early teacher as well as her beloved Edouard Manet, is unclear. There are no letters to illuminate her decision process or her reaction to the criticism that first exhibit would provoke. What we do know is that Morisot chose to embrace her own art and move independently forward within a company of other artists, many of whom would become her friends. Her self-doubt and depression which she revealed only to her mother and sister seemed to vanish; we find no trace of it in her letters after 1874. She enters into a new and productive phase as a mature artist and her previously suppressed creative spirit was unleashed.

Her importance to these artists was documented in an 1877 review of the third Impressionist exhibit by art critic Georges Riviere:

> "Her watercolors, her pastels, her painting all show a light touch and unpretentious allure that we can only admire. Mlle. Morisot has an extraordinary sensitive eye and succeeds in capturing fleeting notes on her canvases, with a delicacy, spirit and skill that ensure her a prominent place at the center of the Impressionist group." (qtd. in Rey 71)

Morisot's difference from her male colleagues extended beyond gender. Her position as a woman in upper middle-class French society made her focus as professional artist remarkable and it allowed her to create representations of women with a distinct and individual point of view. Her technical skills, reflecting her training in realism, plein

air painting and naturalism influenced both her peers as well as a generation of succeeding artists. Art historian George Moore commented in 1898 that Morisot produced "the only pictures painted by a woman that could not be destroyed without creating a blank, a hiatus in the history of art" (qtd. in Durand-Ruel 6). Unlike her contemporary women artists, notably Rosa Bonheur and Mary Cassatt, Morisot managed to lead a full personal life as wife and mother as well. Biographer Anne Higonnet confirms that "she is unlike any other woman artist or writer of comparable character" (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* xii). Her place in art history deserves a more thorough analysis noting her contributions despite the gender discrimination, emotional and psychological difficulties she conquered, as her artistic style continued to evolve from that initial exhibition in 1874 until her death twenty years later. In the introduction to her compelling biography of Morisot, author and historian Margaret Shennan differentiates between the biographies of men and women. Quoting art historian Nanette Solomon, Shennan writes:

> "The details of a man's biography are conveyed as a measure of the universal applicable to all mankind; the details of a woman's biography are used to underscore that she is an exhibition; her art is reduced to a visual record of her personal and psychological makeup." (Shennan viii)

Herein lies the challenge in writing about Berthe Morisot. We need to keep in mind, as Morisot herself did, that she considered herself an artist who happened to be female as opposed to a female who painted. We must require ourselves to evaluate her painting with the similar standard of universality that has been applied to her male colleagues. The names and works of these male artists are legendary and dominate the

current art market and museum exhibitions. Berthe Morisot, however, has been largely forgotten and with the exception of infrequent exhibitions, the body of her work never circulated beyond family and friends. Her work still rarely comes to market and when it does, is priced considerably below that of her male colleagues. The factors beyond obvious gender discrimination that might explain Morisot's absence on museum walls are both social and economic

Impressionism was so bold a departure from the established norms of the French Academy des Beaux Arts that it was considered revolutionary. Impressionists gave overwhelming importance to the effect of natural light as a singular element in the composition of their paintings. Impressionism as an artistic style was considered essentially "feminine" regardless of the artists' gender due to the softness of palette, the absence of black or bitumen in darkening tone, an unfinished surface and short, sketchy brushstrokes. The Impressionists painted reality "as with the possibilities of shimmering, dancing light and color" (Rackow 1). Women in nineteenth century French art circles were considered amateurs despite their acceptance at the Salon de Paris and Morisot' s bourgeoisie social class dictated that her artwork was no more than a hobby. It was Morisot's life struggle be considered a professional artist and her place within a movement to be described as Impressionism provided a path to that recognition.

American art historian Robert Hopson explains: "No artist of Morisot's immediate circle has suffered more from deprecatory and delimiting associations long operating between Impressionism and 'pretty painting'" (Hopson iii). Despite the inclusion of a few of her paintings and watercolors in art shows after the turn of the century, the work of Berthe Morisot faded from view. As Tamar Garb and Kathleen

Adler noted in their introduction to *Berthe Morisot Correspondence* there was much more to Morisot than just pretty pictures (Adler and Garb 4). As they indicate, any undertaking of research into Morisot's life and career path demands a thorough and serious pursuit of the truth.

Morisot's challenge in entering a field dominated by men, including male critics and male historians is explained by feminist art historian Linda Nochlin:

> "For a woman to opt for a career at all, much less for a career in art, has required a certain amount of unconventionality; whether or not the woman artist rebels against or finds strength in the attitude of her family, she must in any case have a good strong streak of rebellion in her to make her way in the world of art; it is only by adopting, however covertly, the 'masculine' attributes of singlemindedness, concentration, tenaciousness and absorption in the ideas of craftmanship for their own sake, that women have succeeded in the world of art." (qtd. in Shennan 2)

These very attributes necessary for the eventual success of women artists were diametrically opposed to the accepted roles of women in nineteenth century French society. But gender alone cannot be considered the determining factor in Morisot's failed acknowledgement in art history. This is evident as her gender provided for no exclusion to that initial 1874 exhibit. Edgar Degas, who partnered with Claude Monet in organizing the painters, approached her mother for permission to extend an invitation to Morisot stating: "'there could be no exhibit without her'" (qtd. in Delafond 27).

This research explores several alternative theories to explain why her work has yet to be fully recognized and understood; focusing on three factors, her limited

production prior to 1874, her relationship with the Realist master Edouard Manet and her early death, we might explain why Morisot's work not been fully appreciated. As the history of Impressionism was recorded in the twentieth century Morisot would be frequently overlooked. In *Critical Readings in Impressionism* author and editor Mary Tompkins Lewis fails to mention Morisot. John Rewald, respected historian and author of the seminal *History of Impressionism* catalogues Morisot as a pupil of Edouard Manet (Rewald 190). Impressionist art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel has no mention of Morisot in his diary although he catalogues hundreds of works by her fellow painters. Neither Gardiner's *Art Though the Ages, Fifth Edition* (1970) or H.W. Janson's *History of Art* mention Morisot. As recently as 2017, the volume *Broad Strokes: Fifteen Women Who Made Art and History*, by author Bridget Quinn, fails to include Morisot although she does include Rosa Bonheur, a French realist from the same period.

Her frequent categorization as a student or protégé of Edouard Manet has subjugated a full evaluation of her work in historical context. Their six-year relationship coincided with the most formative part of her artistic development. The relationship was complex but often reduced by art historians to a relationship between teacher and protégé. She was frequently identified as Manet's favorite model, posing for him more than eleven times. Consequently, her work could easily be considered derivative or deeply influenced. This relationship spanned a particularly critical time in Morisot's mature artistic progress and her frequent modeling would take critical time and attention away from her own work.

Her death came years before Impressionism was accepted and valued. The popularity of this art formed occurred well after her death, principally in America. Her

failure to interest dealer Paul Durand-Ruel in 1872 made it unlikely that her offerings would ever receive consideration with the paintings of her peers. Durand-Ruel's unique and successful business model depended on volume of paintings and Morisot would not create enough work to attract his interest, regardless of its obvious quality. Analysis in economic research of a changing nineteenth century art market, with the infusion of American money, is currently inadequate and has never been explored specifically in relation to Morisot's work. Only by understanding how and when her work eventually came to market can we determine why she continues to be ignored as a painter of influence and merit.

Her death at a relatively young age (54) was both sudden and tragic. Camille Pissaro would write to his son Lucien following her death "that poor Madame Morisot, the public hardly knows her" (qtd. in Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images* 29). Beloved by her family and fellow painters, she was remembered not just for her extraordinary contributions to art but for her gentle, gracious manner as socialite and friend. When her art was discussed, the intellectual tangle of an essentially feminist art form with the mourning for a beautiful woman, muddies the long-term effect of these tributes left as her memorial by the people who knew her best.

Written with the focus of a humanities dissertation, this writing explores causative factors of social, psychological and economic considerations; each factor could have amplified gender disparity and attention to these points prevents a more balanced evaluation of Morisot's importance. By focusing on them and moving beyond gender discrimination, the reexamination of many other female artists is opened to new avenues for further research. "The study of women artist is often viewed as unacademic and

unworthy of interest" (Cherry 4). This in turn influences how the artist is perceived, treated and located in institutions of culture and art history.

Morisot may be the earliest woman artist who can be examined within the full context of her social and economic environment. By viewing her work through the lens of economic and psychological and social forces, we can gain a more thorough understanding of her potential for influence in the history of the period.

Gender discrimination does play a significant role in explanation of Morisot's absence on museum walls. Foremost among them is the familiar meme, "there are no great women artists." The correctness and continued timelessness of the work of twentieth century scholars Linda Nochlin, Tamar Garb and Kathleen Adler provide bedrock theory on gender discrimination. This long held attitude of discounting the validity of the creativity of women continues to influence the contemporary art market. Women artists, according the National Museum for Women in Art, Washington, D.C., account for fewer than five percent of all works included in American museum collections. If price is equated with greatness, even the most well acknowledged women artists, like contemporary artist Georgia O'Keeffe, fail to achieve anything close to parity with their male counterparts. The highest price paid to date for an O'Keeffe work is $40 million, well below prices achieved by her male contemporaries. A recent study of acquisition budgets of American museum suggests the disparity will continue, with fully 80% of new acquisition funding dedicated to male artists. A contemporary analysis of art world statistics by Maura Reilly published in *ART News*, May 26, 2015 reviews the participation of women in solo exhibitions, museum leadership, permanent collections and press coverage and offers less than encouraging news. "Despite decades of post-

colonial, feminist, anti-racist and queer activism and theorizing, the majority continues to be defined as white, European-American, heterosexual, privileged and, above all, male" (Reilly 1). Her review of all solo exhibitions held at major museums since 2007 is stark illustration of how the work of women is rarely celebrated. Of all solo exhibitions since 2007 at the Whitney Museum (New York) 29% went to women. Numbers for other museums are more discouraging: the Pompidou Center, (Paris) 16%; the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) 4%; the Museum of Modern Art (New York) 7% (Sterling).

The financial disparity between male and female artists is even greater. More than $196.6 billion has been spent on art at auction between 2008 and the first half of 2019. Of this, work made by women accounts for just $4 billion - around 2%. Overall, 96.1% of artworks sold at auction are by male artists (Sterling). Creating a clearer understanding of the unique problems of women artists like Morisot, in addition the obvious discrimination of gender, may get us closer to a fairer evaluation of these artists' contributions and provide a measurement of their work by other than price.

Berthe Morisot was a complicated individual and it is this complexity that makes her life and its remembrance both a challenging and worthy topic for study. Art historian Griselda Pollock affirms the core of her complexity: "Berthe Morisot was a complex personality, ravaged by depression and emotional suffering as a woman intellectual struggling with her creative ambition in a culture that structurally defined her femininity as the absence of both" (247).

A retrospective of her work at the Marmottan Museum, Paris, in 2005 captures this duality of Morisot's life in its accurately descriptive title, *Reasoned Audacity.* Here is the story, told through her art, of a woman whose creative pursuit was bold and

audacious, pushing the edge of acceptability while her personal life was practical, well balanced and well-reasoned. Neither social change nor physical disruption impeded her continued progress over more than 20 years as a mature artist. Her nephew Paul Valery described her intense brand of individualism and unexpected originality exhibited in her mature work "as if the moderation, the fear of risk, the clear cut and well- tried beliefs, the cult of sincerity and solidity in all its forms were defied" (qtd. in Rouart 8). This dichotomy between artistic excellence and honor in the proscribed, traditional roles for women and the lack of validation of an artist who pushed the envelope of creativity and acceptability, produced a constant tension in Morisot that carries through to the energy of her canvases.

It is this compelling expression by an artist which has not been clearly evaluated. While exactingly feminine in outward behavior, her private moments and inner most thoughts often spoke to a life more heroic and less romantic than many scholars have assumed. Her "voice" as expressed in her art, is not angry but could be considered "edgy"; she continually requires us to observe and acknowledge the unique roles of women both as subjects and as artists. No other artist of her period, male or female, did the same. Mary Cassatt's portraits of women offer few direct facial views. Male artists rarely portrayed women, other than prostitutes, in the interior spaces of their lives but preferred fashionable models in outdoor settings engaged in little more than conversation or observation.

Author Jean-Dominique Rey cautions us against viewing Morisot's work superficially because of her gender and subject matter:

> A painter of women and a woman herself, Berthe Morisot imbued her female models with all the charm, all the sensuality, all the tender lightness of being that characterizes her own vision, communicated through her work. It falls to us to recognize that beyond the tender charm of femininity, her work is well structured, constantly searching for greater subtlety of expression and that its superficial appearance, however delightful and attractive, simultaneously hides and reveals depth revealed from our hasty eyes by discretion and diffidence alone. (71)

Berthe Morisot was not, nor had she any intention of being a revolutionary. She was private, quiet and reserved. She did have strong opinions about the 19th century value of women in a society which relegated them to passive, acceptable roles and limited physical surroundings. Although constrained in subject matter and by her physical environment, she nonetheless was clear and deliberate about how she saw women in the world. She accomplished this by carefully selecting her compositions and eventually moving beyond the artistic technique usually attributed to Impressionism to explore new art forms and changed compositions. Her work continually evolved from early landscapes deeply influenced by Camille Corot to mature works with figures and complex backgrounds. Work of her later years, including many sketches and portraits of her daughter Julie, are rarely explored in historical texts, but reflect the influences of more progressive ideas like psychology and the scientific and intellectual thinking regarding the nature of personality. This constant search for her truth through painting prevents us from viewing Morisot and her work in isolation. She was continually moving forward as an artist, setting the stage for the post-Impressionist work of Paul Signac and Edward Munch.

In the late 20th century, buoyed by a tide of feminist politics and in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of her death, Berthe Morisot emerged from the archives of art history. A strong push by American feminists in the 1990s, shined new light on her accomplishments. A series of lectures, monographs and a retrospective exhibit at Mount Holyoke College in 1997 was followed by the publication of two biographies. Those works by Anne Higonnet and Margaret Shennan form the foundation for much of the information presented in the first two chapters of this dissertation. Higonnet includes translations of private, unpublished letters and journals while Shennan provides more in depth and detailed historical background and challenges what she refers to a "the myths" of Morisot. Higonnet comes closest to scratching the surface of Morisot's crippling self-doubt and artistic temperament. Also enlightening is a limited volume of translated correspondence published in 1987. Heavily edited by her grandson Denis Rouart, the collection of letters fails to provide information on key topics like her relationship with Manet and her decision to join the Impressionist group. Many letters, however, do provide some insight into her thoughts and state of mind in the critical period 1868 through 1874.

An initial Morisot biography, published by Armand Forreau in 1925, was written with significant input from Morisot's daughter Julie Manet Rouart. This biography, together with the introduction to her memorial retrospective in 1896, authored by close friend Stephan Mallarme and the catalogue from the first contemporary Morisot retrospective, mounted by her descendants in 1997 provide insight into how her family and friends dealt with this duality of woman and artist and chose to remember her. Morisot's image in these writings have been softened with a solemn and an extended

emphasis on grace and femininity at the expense of acknowledged creativity and bold exploration. These documents together with a monograph authored by nephew Paul Valery in 1926 will provide the written portrait that the greater Morisot family left behind. The words of Mallarme and Valery have been translated from the original French. Another early biography of Morisot was published by Monique Angoulvent in Paris in 1933. Julie Manet Rouart shared her family papers and assisted in the drafting of the biography. The book was never translated from the original French and has been out of print for many years. It could not be located for inclusion in this dissertation. There has been no published academic interest in Morisot or her work for the last 15 years with the exception of exhibition catalogues.

Morisot research is greatly hampered by a lack of primary source material. For example, no written correspondence exists between Morisot and painter Edouard Manet which might provide an understanding of their intense six-year relationship. There is also no direct correspondence between Morisot and Parisian art dealers such as Paul Durand-Ruel. She destroyed all early work and her available art journals tend to be sterile catalogues of paint and canvas purchases with no reflection on their eventual use. Several personal diaries have been preserved at the Marmottan Museum in Paris, but none have been translated from the original French nor are they available except in the original format at the Museum. This void of information may have been intentional as Morisot valued her privacy. She was quoted later in life as having said, “We shall die, every one of us, with our secrets untold” (qtd. in Shennan 280).

We are fortunate to have access to many catalogues of Morisot’s work that include studies, watercolors, pastels, engraving and sculpture. Between 1997 and 2010

four large format portfolio editions of Morisot's work from both public and private collections were published. Each volume provides chronological, biographical information on Morisot's life. The volumes also include enlightening essays by art historians Jean Dominique Rey, Sylvia Paltry and Ingrid Pfieffer. The catalogue of the most recent Barnes Foundation exhibit, *Berthe Morisot: Woman Impressionist* includes with the total exhibit of 68 paintings as many as thirty works from private collections not previously exhibited.

Prior to her death, we can account for only fifty of her works in the public domain; only twenty-five of the canvases had been directly purchased including just two large format oils purchased by Paul Durand-Ruel in 1872 and 1883. This dissertation examines the provenance of more than 30 Morisot works currently owned by American public galleries. These records demonstrate that Morisot's work did not circulate nor was it handled by major galleries or auction houses. With few exceptions, the works were privately purchased and, in some cases, inherited and finally bequeathed to public institutions. A study of the provenance of privately held Morisot works would be similarly enlightening. The best source for that information is the extensive purchase and sales records of the Knoedler Galleries, New York held by the Getty Research Institute in California. None of this information is available by internet research and would requires physical examination in California. The general Morisot listing by the Getty, however, contains three separate portfolios of related records. While important, the amount of primary Morisot data is dwarfed by the voluminous records for the other Impressionist artists, including Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir and Paul Cezanne. A source search for primary information referencing Morisot or Morisot dealers among private collections

including the Clark Williams Art Museum and the Morgan Library uncover no direct reference to Morisot. Some primary research material does exist in the original French and, as noted above, has been translated for use in this dissertation. Digital libraries, especially Digital Library of America are helpful in locating resources available from other libraries and universities including four dissertations focused on Morisot. But perhaps the best information about how Morisot saw herself as an artist is the analysis of Morisot's artwork itself. She constantly "speaks" to us about women's societal roles and what she feels is important in life. As nephew Paul Valery would note after her death, "She painted her life" (qtd. in Rey 10).

Chapters in this dissertation will include analysis of select paintings to illustrate and underscore points being argued in the text, thereby connecting the paintings with specific events or concepts related to an understanding of the richness that was lost as Morisot's work disappeared from public view. The selection of paintings will demonstrate that Morisot's treatment of topic would change dramatically as she grew more confident and assured in her work. Early landscapes progress to landscapes with figures, then portraits and portraits in interior spaces. With each movement forward she communicates a different and stronger message on the roles of women in society, with a unique emphasis on working women.

There are many volumes on Impressionism, biographies of major artists and newspaper and journal articles of nineteenth century Paris to be accommodated within the scope of this research. For all matters relating to the history of Impressionism, the dissertation relies on the seminal work of John Rewald, in his well-acknowledged 1980 source book, *The History of Impressionism*.

The bulk of current Morisot scholarship has focused on the aspect of gender in explaining her secondary status in the Impressionist movement. The examination of additional other factors has relevance in aiding our understanding of why Morisot has seemed forgotten, perhaps limiting the argument of gender status and allowing the technical excellence of her work to be celebrated. These areas, especially economic forces, have not been adequately researched with direct regard to Morisot and create an opportunity to break new ground that goes beyond previous research devoted solely to her technique, composition and palette.

A second limiting consideration is the remaining volume work created she created. Many scholars have concluded that Morisot is unknown because she left an insufficient body of work at her death. It is true that her peers produced prodigious quantities of pictures, numbering in the thousands, but most painted and sold well into the twentieth century. Her friend Claude Monet, as well as Paul Cezanne, lived and actively painted until 1926, well after Impressionist art became not only marketable but sought after.

Morisot passed very suddenly, most probably from influenza at the age of 54. Her entire body of work, beyond the twenty-five paintings she gifted to friends and family and fewer than 25 paintings sold, was left to her 15-year-old daughter Julie Manet. In later years Julie would gift a few paintings to regional French museums in the hopes that her mother's name would be recognized and live on. It was, therefore, not the body of Morisot's work that was insufficient but the number of paintings in circulation and her premature death. The Wildenstein catalogue of her work lists fewer than 700 oils in addition to many pastels and watercolors.

In 1997 grandsons Denis and Julien Rouart gifted the Manet/Rouart collection, including watercolors, sketches and finished oils to the Marmatton Monet Museum in Passy, Paris, originally founded by the son of her friend Claude Monet. These works were first exhibited in 2005, *Berthe Morisot or Reasoned Audacity*.

The final area of study challenges how Morisot as artist was remembered after her death. Both biographers Higonnet and Shennan chose as cover art Morisot portraits painted by Edouard Manet. The cover art for her correspondence, edited by her grandson Denis Rouart, also featured a Manet portrait as did the catalogue of the mentioned major retrospective of her work at the Marmottan Museum, Paris. None of these important works promoted Berthe Morisot as a painter and these portraits failed to represent Morisot as an artist. The chosen images tell us how her family and historians believe she should be remembered: a bold, daring, vivacious and attractive young woman. This dissertation challenges those decisions as contributing to a less than full understanding of the power of the artist and unproductively supporting the very gender bias of the painter of "pretty pictures" that has contributed to her denigration.

Morisot's three self-portraits, created in 1884, were available as were many paintings that would have highlighted her talent. Painted ten years before her death, each shows a more realistic rendering of a confident woman as artist, holding her palette and brushes. (See Illustration 1.) She had paid a price for her determination. Her hair had turned prematurely white and her shoulders sag. Her dark eyes continue to challenge us with her direct stare, but she is no longer the vivacious, teasing Manet model. Instead she seems amused at our interruption of her work. She is a serious artist gowned in her painting smock, who has been momentarily, perhaps unexpectedly, interrupted in her

work. Unlike the Manet portraits she does not invite us to linger in her presence; her look is almost dismissive. She is busy and dedicated to the work at hand.

A review of public writing by her daughter and grandsons confirm the depiction of a quiet, reserved, delicate female with only the most positive connotations associated with her life. This is how her family chose to portray her for all time. The real Morisot word portrait would include her struggle and immense drive for validation as the forces which propelled her forward in her artistic career described by Delafond as "a warrior for the avant-garde movement" (3).

This dissertation attempts to resituate the artist within an examination of important art discourses and trigger new avenues of research. Attention to Berthe Morisot's work could restore her to a position with firmer footing in the development of the Impressionist movement rather than as a footnote in art history. At the height of her talent in the Sixth Impressionist exhibit, one critic noted: "'The artist has found the means to fix a passing moment in time. No one represents Impressionism with a more refined talent, with more authority than does Ms. Morisot'" (qtd. in Delafond 44). But the true test of her valuation will be how future exhibitions focus on the artist. Will exhibitions continue to equate her work with that of her contemporaries only by palette and brushstroke. Or will exhibitions underscore the unique contributions of Morisot as artist with a strong woman's voice and message in her work? Will Morisot be included with the familiar Impressionist painters or relegated to shows with other women artists.

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter documents Morisot's steps to mature artist. Three critical elements form the foundation of her journey between 1855 and 1868. Particularly important is her art education by two

extraordinary teachers who laid the fundamental structure which would allow Morisot to eventually flourish and capture her own vision.

In a second chapter the role in Morisot's development as an artist is the initial constant encouragement and support of her family particularly her sister and fellow artist Edma Morisot Pontillon. Her mother Cornelie Morisot was not only a support but also Berthe's chief antagonist and prodding conscience as she constantly pressed her concerns about her daughter's work, failure to find a market as well as Berthe's commitment to painting over marriage. Within these familial relationships Morisot revealed her deep sadness, frustration, anxiety and, at times despair with her work and the self-imposed pressure of her own standards for success. Understanding her painful emotional struggle provides insight into the price Morisot was willing to pay to follow and complete her journey. It also suggests that her psychological and emotional distress interfered with her artistic output at a critical time. This chapter takes a deep look at the psychology of a woman's pursuit of creativity in addition to the pain of lack of recognition, both crucial factors in understanding Morisot and her artistic output.

The third chapter explores Morisot's relationship with Edouard Manet and answers questions of Manet's supposed influence on Morisot as an artist. Was she his student or protégé? Their relationship, and her artistic expression changes after Morisot began to exhibit with her fellow Impressionists in 1874, the same year she marries Edouard's younger brother. Morisot's painting style, again, changes after Manet's death in 1883. She moves to more freely constructed and flowing forms often symbolic in nature and she freely explores her subjects' personality and identity.

The fourth chapter begins with an understanding of the turmoil of the Paris art scene in 1874 and offers a fuller discussion of Impressionism and how its critics failed to dissuade Morisot from her commitment to the basic tenets of this new art form. Why did Morisot gamble and join the Impressionists? Morisot's painting began to shift once again, taking on a more mature, settled tone particularly after her marriage to Eugene Manet and the birth of their daughter Julie in 1877. While none of the lightness is gone, her compositions focus at greater detail on human figures and the relationship between figures and their interaction within a landscape background. She appears more settled as an artist and allows herself to move more deeply into an examination of form and symbolism.

The fifth chapter focuses on the economic changes in the world art market particularly after Morisot's death in 1895. The work of her fellow Impressionists, still actively painting, finds wider favor and ever-growing audiences after the turn of the century. Morisot's work remains hidden from public view and she is considered a more obscure artist. Parisian art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel develops a vast inventory of Impressionist paintings, creates a new economic model for the sale of paintings and successfully introduces Impressionism to new American markets. It is this dramatic change in how art is marketed and sold that gives us the best understanding of why Morisot is unknown, despite the quality of her work.

A final sixth chapter examines the "portrait" painted for us in words by Morisot's family in both text and her physical representations. Several texts written immediately after her death, as well as the early Fourand biography compete with one another in flattery without a sincere and frank evaluation of her well-deserved place in art history.

These statements would inform successive generations of art historians. What does it say of her 'real" life, her artistic life. Do these texts explore the factors which contributed to Morisot's relentless drive for validation. Or do they provide a polite view of a well-mannered, ever composed haute bourgeoisie matron?

This dissertation attempts to generate a new conversation about Berthe Morisot. It argues against some commonly held assumptions that she was a woman painter of minimal influence rather than a significant artist who happened to be female. She has been heedlessly left behind, because of social, psychological and economic factors, some of which occurred well after her death. Examining such factors enables us to further understand why her important role in art history has never been adequately acknowledged. While none of these arguments draw firm conclusions, the writing opens new avenues of discourse and research about how the work of all women artists may best be validated by evaluating artists within their own personal story.

Chapter 1

A DIARY IN LINE AND COLOR

> "'Considering the characters of your daughters," Joseph Guichard advised Cornelie Morisot, "my teaching will not endow them with minor drawing room accomplishments; they will become painters. Do you realize what this means? In the upper-class milieu to which you belong, this will be revolutionary, I might almost say catastrophic!'" (qtd. in Rouart 19)

Berthe Marie Pauline Morisot was not destined to become an avant-garde artist at the dawn of a new and revolutionary movement. Her journey would begin as a young girl copying architectural drawings in books. Twenty years later she would exhibit with the most accomplished male artists of her generation. But unlike a traditional fairy tale, Morisot would continually struggle with doubt and self-deprecation and the limiting factors of a woman of her social class.

In his introduction to a Berthe Morisot exhibition in Paris at the Musee de l'Orangerie in 1941, her nephew Paul Valery would reflect on the origins of Berthe's artistic generation:

> "The bourgeoisie has this paradoxical quality: it suddenly produces artists, when nothing in the taste, mores or ambitions of thoroughly conventional families could make or foresee. The spontaneous generation of individuals who escape so completely the influence of their forbearers and their circle . . ." (qtd. in Rewald 330)

Just as quickly as she rose in stature to achieve public notice and the accolades of fellow artists August Renoir, Edgar Degas and Claude Monet, she would be forgotten after her tragic, early death. Her influence would seem as transient as the enveloping morning light she captured on canvas. Why she was forgotten requires more than an

examination of the obvious gender discrimination. Understanding Morisot's development as an artist is fundamental to understanding and appreciating her greatness and only by appreciating her accomplishments can we underscore the inequity in the disregard of her contributions in recording the history of twentieth century modernism.

There is little evidence that her family had any more than a passing interest, appropriate to their social status, of any visual art form. Art instruction, usually in drawing, was seen merely as a cultural component together with music in the proper education of privileged young women. Yet Berthe Morisot would eventually win a significant mention in art history.

A 2019 *New Yorker* article by contemporary art critic Peter Schjeldahl views Berthe Morisot as having begun life in Paris with a full deck of advantages necessary to buck the odds against female aspiration in her era. She had money, intelligence, character, beauty, sophistication, charm and opportunity (Schjeldahl 1). Yet the transformation to a respected, mature artist from a young girl taught to create art to please others would be neither easy nor seamless. The odds against her acceptance as an artist were striking; more than 40 females exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1864. Most of their names failed to be recorded despite their recognized talent and ability to meet the strict standards of the Salon.

Her achievement would rely on three strong pillars. These factors underscore the uniqueness of Morisot's choice of an unlikely profession for a woman of her social class as well as an understanding of how she came to develop and pursue this choice. First, she initially enjoyed the full emotional and financial support of her family, both necessary to develop the independence necessary to express herself artistically. Second, she benefitted

from a grounding technical education as an artist that would have been the envy of many of her male peers. Finally, she lived her entire life in Passy, a Parisian suburb dominated by the great natural expanse of the Bois des Boulogne. The park became both her source of inspiration and a reserve of quiet and calm. She would paint here throughout her life always reveling in her deep connection to nature and capturing the effect of transient light on canvas. So long as these pillars remained intact, Morisot would grow and develop as an artist. When they began to falter, so would her artistic career.

Resilient and continuous emotional support of her family included her mother Cornelie and especially her older sister Edma, her closest companion and painting partner. The sisters studied and painted in tandem and were never separated until Edma's marriage in 1868. Edma's calm, reassuring temperament and confident painting style seemed to temper Berthe's exuberance as she grew as an artist while her encouragement continually reassured Berthe of her artistic value.

Berthe's relationship with her mother was often strained, at times combative; nonetheless Cornelie Morisot continually supported Morisot's ambition to achieve status as a recognized artist in the very public cultural arena of nineteenth century Paris. Only the issue of marriage, surfacing in 1868, began to drive the mother and daughter apart; Berthe refused to abandon painting for marriage and inevitable motherhood while her mother felt strongly that marriage was requisite of Berthe's status and privilege.

At a young age, Morisot benefitted from a firm grounding in artistic principles and techniques provided by two very different artists/teachers. This education created a secure base which anchored her ability and natural talent to springboard beyond the status of amateur painter, as other young women of her class were accustomed. She developed

an individual style of expression which would become her "voice" in a world where the opinions women of her class were rarely heard beyond the confines of their parlors. "Today, she is the most interesting artist of her generation," notes art critic Schjeldahl, "for feats of form and depths of meaning which were still developing when she died" (3). Art critic and historian George Moore, writing in 1898, provides an even more definitive statement. "'Morisot's pictures are the only pictures painted by a woman that could not be destroyed without creating a blank, a hiatus in the history of art'" (qtd. in Rouart 6).

A third foundation of Morisot's career is her lifelong home in the village of Passy on the outskirts Paris. No longer considered a suburb today, much of the modern Passy is encompassed within the sixteenth arrondissement. In Morisot's lifetime, it was a pleasant rural community of summer homes for Parisian elite and grew to become a fashionable address with direct connections to Paris. The hillside Trocadero Park provided distant views of Paris beyond the deep bend in the Seine River. These views, well known to Morisot, would link her directly to the life of the city while providing her with the privacy and security of the countryside. Passy would afford her a physical grounding and stable environment in which natural settings and airy light would feed her development in "*plein air*" technique. She would live in four different households during her lifetime, all in Passy, just blocks from the expansive, wooded Bois des Boulogne. "Love of nature," Morisot would later reflect, "is a consolation against failure" ("Berthe Morisot Quotes"). She refers to her enjoyment in being in the countryside despite the disappointment that her early work would not receive the recognition she desired. Simply the act of painting in plein air, outside the studio, were sources of joy and comfort.

The Bois de Boulogne, a large urban park, was created in 1858 and covered more

than 2,000 acres with lakes, streams and riding trails. The park was built by Napoleon III based on his experience in Hyde Park, London. He had been particularly impressed by its lakes and streams and its popularity with Londoners of all social classes. Built on the Western edge of the city, Napoleon envisioned it as a destination where both the rich and ordinary people of Paris could enjoy themselves. The Bois offered a young Morisot independence and endless inspiration from its vistas to fuel her passion for watercolor, sketching and plein air painting. Even later in life, Morisot would return to the lakes of the Bois to paint.

Passy, over time, also became an intellectual community that would expose Morisot and her family to new ideas and allow them to socialize among the best of Parisian intellectual life. Her nephew Paul Valery emphasizes the importance of her surroundings. “She lived at the approaches of the Bois which supplied her with all the landscape she required. The objects she painted were within the reach of her hand” (Rouart 13). Her niece Pauline Gobilliard recalled: “She liked the Bois. It’s neighborhood then not very built up, was quite elegant. The horse drawn carriages came few and far between on the Avenue du Bois; you could often see charming women, delightfully dressed. My aunt went all the way to the lake, her favorite spot. She went there with her little girl and often brought her models. You could rent a boat, she painted on the bank” (Rouart 13). (See Illustration 2.)

Born on January 14, 1841, she was the third daughter of Cornelie Thomas Morisot (1819-1876) and Edme Tiburce Morisot (1806-1874). She was raised, as were her sisters, in a loving and supportive environment and with the financial stability accorded her bourgeoisie class. She was expected to eventually take her place in society

in the primary roles of wife and mother, following the path taken by both her sisters and at which her mother excelled as role model. Little in her childhood pointed the way to her role in an artistic movement considered both revolutionary and audacious. If anything, the experience and education in her younger years should have warned against the dangers apparent in her later life decisions.

Berthe Morisot's childhood was characterized by a close family lifestyle that, while cultivated, was considered conventional. The youngest of three daughters, each were born within a span of four years. The sisters, although eventually separated geographically, remained close throughout their lives.

Her father initially earned a comfortable living at the time of her birth with a government appointment as Prefect of Limoges. The posting in a predominately working-class town was not considered especially desirable. The position as king's representative carried with it a reasonable salary, a generous allowance and free government residence. The children were restricted to the immediate environs of their home with education delivered by their mother and English governess. Her father, although much better educated than his wife deferred to the societal norm of leaving his daughters education to their mother. Berthe never developed a close relationship with her father and there is little evidence of his involvement on her eventual chosen career choice. Neither does evidence exist that Berthe was inclined to want to especially please her "papa." Her mother was the dominant figure in her childhood with her father somewhat distant as would be expected of his position in traditional nineteenth century family life.

Tiburce Morisot had been well educated in arts and the classics as accorded his class. He graduated from the Lycee Condorcet and studied fine arts and architecture at

the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He never practiced as an architect and following a failed attempt to publish an architectural magazine, he traveled extensively through Italy, Greece and Sicily before returning to Paris in 1836 to marry at age 30. His bride, Cornelie Thomas, was 14 years younger.

Cornelie Thomas Morisot was not particularly well educated having been kept at home by Berthe's grandmother. Berthe described her mother in writings to her own daughter Julie not long before her own death:

> "My mother married quite young to Tiburce Morisot, very much enamored of him, wildly fond of social life.…she had the gift of charm and an admirable nature. She wrote with great facility…her reading and her social graces made her a very pleasant companion. She was indifferent to (any aspect of) the material world, knowing it was beneath her, and wrote with great abandon and charm. She adored success, was witty, innocent and graceful, and good of heart." (qtd. in Rouart 17)

"My mother," brother Tiburce Morisot would write, "was a born hostess, she received her visitors simply without the slightest ostentation. The cordial welcome she gave her guests put them at ease; she not only had wit, she also stimulated wit in those with whom she talked" (qtd. in Rouart 22). These personality traits, which her daughter lacked, would be invaluable in marking Berthe's way through the Parisian art world.

Biographer Margaret Shennan describes Cornelie Morisot as a natural networker, a compulsive socializer, a salonist by instinct (56). Her mother's social skills and eventual representation of her in the art world would become critical to Morisot's evolution as artist.

Berthe's maternal grandmother also played a role in her development as a young woman. Morisot reflected in a letter to her daughter Julie:

> "My grandmother, whom I am like, (has a) boyish frankness, a very lucid, very keen intelligence . . . . didn't ever hesitate to speak boldly. (She) could be so vivid, so gay! Nothing can convey her imagination. She must have been deliciously charming with a really cultured mind that would have stopped her from suddenly descending into very childish gossip." (qtd. in Rouart 17)

This was a maternal lineage which biographer Anne Higonnet suggests gave Morisot a sense of moral and intellectual identity as well as an independent and bold spirit (*Berthe Morisot* 5). It was that bold spirit that would eventually lead her to aggressively pursue success in a man's world. Her mother's firm hand, however, would attempt to reign Berthe onto a course that would be deemed socially acceptable. Cornelie's own social nature would find her eventually enjoying and seeking the company of many of Paris' most notable citizens including philosophers, writers and musical composers. Her regular Tuesday evening salons created a stimulating intellectual environment for her children. Her social skills would play a decisive role in supporting Berthe's artistic career by bringing her into direct contact with practicing artists of the same social class including Camille Corot, Alfred Stevens, Puvis De Chavannes and Edgar Degas.

One additional woman factors into Berthe's personal growth. Berthe's English governess, Louisa, was cut from a different bolt of cloth, and her relationship with Berthe was more proscribed by the requirements of her job. Her Victorian background equated sensitivity with weakness. Berthe later recalled: "'she gave me courage to suffer alone and in silence. When I was quite small, I used to cry sometimes in bed, but she pretended

not to hear, never consoling me'" (qtd. in Shennan 18). After the birth of her brother Tiburce, when Berthe was five, her governess, not her mother, would become her primary caregiver. These early life lessons would become a double-edged sword. The ability to bear suffering would allow Berthe in later years to persist in her artistic goals when her desired progress seemed elusive. The dynamic of suffering in silence, with letters to her sister Edma her only outlet for frustration and despair, would eventually lead to a numbing depression, thwarted creativity and the temporary abandonment of painting. Mother, grandmother and governess provided Berthe with vastly different female role models.

Only letters from her mother and anecdotal remembrances of her grandmother and governess survive; but their characters provide a glimpse into the origins of the personal drive the artist would exhibit throughout her life.

Settling into Passy in 1852 and creating a necessary social life for her growing daughters demanded Cornelie Morisot's attention. Her choice for her daughters' education would become an important factor in Berthe's early art training. Her mother had three options to provide her daughters with an education acceptable to their status: a governess and home tutoring, boarding school with a strict and predictable routine or a private and secular day school for young ladies in Paris.

Cornelie chose the latter, the Coeur Adeline Desir on the Left Bank of Paris, a decision that was not without cost but also afforded certain benefits not available in boarding school. Cornelie would accompany her daughters many days to school by horse drawn bus to the Place de la Concorde. The school encouraged parental participation in a student's daily curriculum. Most importantly, Cornelie could arrange and supervise the

activities when the school day ended. This of course would not have been possible had the girls attended boarding school.

Coeur Adeline Desir provided an educational model based on the bourgeois ideal of womanhood with general culture and Catholic values. The education format depended on rote learning and accurate memorization; neither method would promote creativity in young girls. It prepared young ladies to be reasonably well read and well informed, accomplished and socially at ease. The goal was to equip women with the necessary tools to run a household and take their place in society. There was no thought of a serious intellectual education. It was thought happiness existed for women only in the performance of duty and the joys of family. These values would have been in tune with their mother's own education and upbringing.

The typical female education provided grooming for a life of domestic responsibility, motherhood, appropriate subservience, piety and gentle accomplishment in those arts deemed suitable, such as needlework, watercolor and singing – *les arts des femmes*." The need for accomplishment was stressed; underlying all in instruction as was the ability to master chosen tasks satisfactorily. This principle would be reflected in Morisot's drive for excellence throughout her artistic career and often led to the destruction of canvases which did not meet her high standards, greatly limiting her output. As late as 1886, a mature Morisot would write to her friend Auguste Renoir, "Here I am again, up and battling with my canvases. Don't count on me to cover the walls. I am not producing anything worthwhile" (qtd. in Delafond 62).

Well-schooled young women of Morisot's class would have been expected to develop a sense of artistic expression through music and drawing. Berthe excelled at the

former as an excellent student of piano. Sketching, watercolor and needlepoint were also required as appropriate elements in the education of young girls. Oil painting was deemed too masculine for young ladies and this art expression was not encouraged because of the offensive smells of paint and solvents and physicality of work and would have been considered masculine as opposed to the feminine expression in watercolor.

Cornelie's encouragement to develop her daughters' talents was not intended to pursue any career in art or music so much as to entertain themselves and please others. Berthe played well and would frequently entertain at the Tuesday evening soirees hosted by her mother. She had no intention of encouraging her daughters to any kind of artistic career or expression. The same philosophy would have applied to her daughter's instruction in drawing. Berthe's earliest formal art lessons were begun not to give voice to her artistic expression but so that she might fulfill their father's wish that she learns to draw with some expertise. Her mother arranged for drawing lessons specifically so her daughters would be sufficiently trained to please their father with suitable pictures as birthday gifts.

Dedicating oneself to the pleasure of others would have a dark side when the approval sought was not achieved. This philosophy, taken to heart by Berthe, would revisit her in despair and anxiety experienced throughout much of her early adult artistic life. As seriously as Berthe took her commitment to artistic expression, equally serious would be the mental anguish she suffered when validation was not achieved. Initially Berthe's definition of validation seems to be the acceptance of her work by other artists and the Salon. As she matured, her measure of validation would include the sale of her paintings, a particularly difficult challenge for a woman of her class.

Biographer Margaret Shennan cites another educational element necessary for the development of a young artist of the period, one at which Morisot would excel. Much of the depiction of the contemporary Parisian art scene would involve the accurate depiction of women in an increasingly fashionable environment. As a child of the bourgeois, Morisot would have practiced the rituals of dressing appropriately for the time of day as well as setting. The accoutrements of good taste in fashion would have been second nature to her as well. She would be able to include these elements in the composition of her work with ease, using them to greatest advantage in communicating a message and not solely as props. “Her [depictions of] fashionably dressed Parisians are not spectacles but bodily presences in dresses that feel rendered from the inside” (Schjeldahl 3).

The exceptional quality of her art education would determine the course of Morisot’s earliest painting life. Berthe benefited from an excellent education in the fundamentals of art. These principles would create the underlying structure from which she would eventually move into more mature self-expression. Her art education would be unique in a city where no school, especially the noted state-run Ecole des Beaux Arts, would permit women students and few painters accepted private students. Yet her technical art education would rival that of her fellow male painters like Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet who had the advantage of more traditional education and studio training.

The Morisot girls’ first instructor, Geoffrey Alphonse Chocarne (1787-1837), warrants only briefest mention as a teacher. It is likely that he was recommended by the headmistress of their school or parents of fellow students. An academic painter of some age, he taught in a “low ceiling room darkened by curtains on the third floor in the Rue

de Lille, walking distance from the girl's school (Forreau 11). He demanded a monotonous three-four-hour daily session three times a week. Not a gifted teacher. he set the girls to work with repetitive lessons in cross hatch. "Cross hatch with straight strokes for plane surfaces, or with curved strokes to signify convex or concave surfaces. Shadows were created with compact crosshatch, less close for half-shadows and very loose for chiaroscuro" (Rouart 18).

The instruction was not successful, the experiences dull and unpleasant and within weeks all three sisters begged their mother to stop. Perhaps the only advantage of his less than adequate teaching might be that it resulted in Berthe's first, vociferous expression of her commitment to quality instruction and a passion to learn. Since no formal art institutions accepted female students, Cornelie's only recourse was to find another private teacher. We don't know if it was her intent at this juncture was simply to continue their instruction in drawing rather than educate her daughters in the fundamentals of art. The former was most probably her motivation. But it was her choice of teacher that accomplished the latter.

Joseph Benoit Guichard (1806-1880) was a recognized and somewhat accomplished artist who showed regularly at the annual Paris Salon and took a few private pupils. Cornelie would have known his wife who ran a private girls' school in the Rue des Moulins, Passy not far from the Morisot home. His reputation, as well as the accessible address in Passy may have been deciding factors for the ever socially minded mother. An early student of neo classicist Jean August Dominique Ingres (1780-1867). Guichard was impressed by the necessity for firmness and accuracy of depiction. It was Ingres who preached "Drawing is the probity of art," as he advocated the superiority of

line over color. Correct drawing became an end in itself and to Ingres “a noble contour” was sufficient reason to accommodate lack of inspiration and dull coloring. But the rigidity of Ingres ultimately moved Guichard to admire and study in the school of Romanticists Jacques Louis David and Eugene Delacroix with a much stronger emphasis on fluid line and bright color.

Guichard understood the value in both Ingres and Delacroix approaches to art and combined best practices in his instruction of the Morisot girls by emphasizing the importance of both line and color. He challenged the sisters to create pictures effectively utilizing blank space within the composition. He also taught the importance of accurate observation and visual memory, allowing them to carefully study a small still life before removing it from view; he would then instruct them to render it from memory focusing on each detail. He wanted them to understand what they were doing intuitively in composition, without sketching, before a brush touched the canvas. Like Chocarne, there could be repetitive practice but now this practice had a well-defined goal, moving the girls toward individual creativity. Guichard’s instruction would have been like a match to dry tinder. Gradually he introduced topics of perspective, brushwork, composition and palette choices. The sisters practiced draftsmanship and drawing skills by copying pages from the architectural engravings of Guarino Guarini, a Baroque Italian architect published in a series of books owned by their father. After many months of instruction Guichard was satisfied the sisters had understood and embraced his teaching. He knew the next step, should his pupils continue, would be to copy directly from the Old Masters in the Louvre. This, however, he saw as a serious, if not dangerous step for his charges. He warned Cornelie that, once embarking on this course, there would be no turning back.

Being admitted as copyists at the Louvre was not an insignificant step and Guichard carefully broached the topic with Cornelie Morisot. The famous quote, “It will be revolutionary” that opens this chapter proceeded from this conversation. Despite his caution Madame Morisot agreed to the plan. It is probable that Madame Morisot did not take him seriously. She had her daughters’ lives in firm control. Both girls were of marriageable age, older than she was when married. She would have assumed that within a few years they would take on their intended roles as wife and mother. Being seen in public would provide a social advantage for the girls as well. The Louvre offered her well-coiffed and dressed daughters the opportunity to be seen in public by many of Paris’ finest citizens and both their beauty and accomplishments would attract attention.

Guichard chose the Venetian school to demonstrate the requirement of successful balance between line and color. Standing before the great works of Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, Berthe and Edma would have experienced firsthand how color was used to unify a composition; they would also be able to soak in the palettes of rich, warm reds, gold and greens with tonal variations evident throughout the canvas to create compositional balance.

Edma was considered the better artist. Her patient, careful planning and disciplined approach showed in her earliest works including a portrait of her young sister as artist. But it was Berthe in whom Guichard detected a genuine passion for her work. “He observed her quick eye, her grasp of techniques and her gritty of determination to succeed at a task” (Shennan 38). This spark, when fully developed, would have only one result; she was a born artist. What is clear is that more than 15 years before the first Impressionist exhibit, Guichard foresaw the future of his fledgling artists. His words to

Cornelie in 1857 were prophetic. "'Are you sure Madame'" he advised their mother, "'you will not come to curse the day that art, having gained admission to your home, will become the sole arbiter of the fate of two of your children'" (qtd. in Shennan 40).

Painting at the Louvre brought the Morisot sisters directly in contact with other young painters who had varying degrees of academic training. Principal among them were Guichard friends Felix Bracquemond and Henri Fantin-Latour. Louvre records indicate that James Tissot and Edward Manet were also admitted as copyists in 1856-7 (Amonpichecal 335). Social decorum would have prevented their direct introductions to the Morisot's but certainly both sisters with their striking beauty and obvious talent would have attracted notice. "It was as if a door had opened," describes biographer Margaret Shennan. Now the sisters had access to lively conversations and new relationships, all of which had artistic expression at the core. Here Guichard taught them to fix color on their palettes and hold their brushes straight forward never bending their wrists. They painted "alla prima" carefully filling in large swaths of color, painting directly wet paint on wet canvas. Because each exercise was limited in time, they worked the full canvas with no overpainting which would have taken too long to dry. This style of painting resulted in works that were quick, fresh and spontaneous. "Alla prima" practiced under Guichard's careful eye, prepared Berthe for her next great teacher and the experience of *plein air* painting.

Perhaps it was the discussion of artistic change with other young painters or just a practical desire to continue painting over the summer months spent in the French countryside, but both sisters wanted to begin to study painting out of doors in natural light. Guichard did not approve of this "*plein air* painting" and felt that only art fully

executed in a studio over time was valid. Nonetheless, he would provide an introduction, through his friend, artist Achille Oudinot, to the leading artist of the Barbizon school of naturalist painters, the revered Camille Corot (1796-1875). The sisters knew that the natural landscape would allow them to develop their own compositions and this would be embodied in the practice of working out of doors. The difference was, however, that they would paint in oils as well as the quick, watercolor sketches usually completed by young women on holiday.

Corot proved, at first, a challenging choice. He moved frequently between his Parisian home and studio and the homes of fellow artists in the countryside outside Paris. He still painted but at 66 years of age had already achieved every honor and award available. It was Cornelie Morisot who created the opportunity to introduce Corot to her daughters. Ever the hostess and societal matron, Cornelie invited the bachelor painter to dinner at their Passy home, a practice which would continue for years. But Corot never enjoyed giving lessons and rarely took students. Perhaps only the charm of their mother and recurring dinner invitations moved the older man to work with the two girls. Corot preferred offering advice to actual teaching. He would give the girls one of his paintings to copy, then critique their results. Once again, Edma was the favored artist with her attention to detail and exact composition. Berthe would paint quickly with obvious brushstrokes, often leaving out details and she developed a painting style as less traditional, more unique.

Time spent with Corot left an indelible mark on Berthe's vision as artist. His influences could easily be seen in her work through 1870. He stressed the importance of understanding values in color with a gradation from lightest tint to darkest shade. He

advised the girls to paint early in the day or late afternoon when refracted light would diffuse line and shape. They should paint, he advised, “when light is tempered, when useless detail disappears” (qtd. in Shennan 25). Corot became the source for her vision of light and pale palette, a remarkable shift from the darker Venetians she copied at the Louvre. “Nature” he said, “is the best counselor” (qtd. in Rouart 21).

“It was Corot,” her family later remarked, “who taught her to bathe in air her landscapes, her figures, her still life’s” (qtd. in Shennan 46). It was Camille Corot, of whom an early critic said (his) “half-finished manner has at least the merit of producing a harmonious ensemble and an impression. Instead of analyzing a feature, one feels an impression” (Rewald 331). Corot was the unacknowledged early father of Impressionism and his student Berthe Morisot would become one if its greatest practitioners.

Passy resident and family friend Leon Riesner, a cousin of Delacroix, is not an acknowledged teacher of Morisot but he also influenced her work. Berthe respected his artistic opinions particularly on color. In 1864 she borrowed and studied his unpublished writings and admired his painting technique as he demonstrated for her. Mixing watercolor and pastel, he created a more saturated, fixed color that dried quickly. With a quick drying time, he worked in rapid brushstrokes. Berthe would begin to experiment with similar brushstrokes in oil in her early canvases (Shennan 55).

Edma and Berthe spent the summer of 1863 in the countryside on the Oise River between the towns of Pontoise and Auvers. Achille Oudinot, a respected painter and Corot friend substituted for the master and both sisters developed increasing confidence in in their efforts and their ability to create interesting compositions. Berthe’s ability to capture the effects of the morning light, would remain the chief theme of her landscapes

her entire career. “Here she made a special place for herself, a place apart among painters of light by rendering the particular variety of it – the silvery morning light, the virginal whiteness’s - which she managed to transfer to canvas so surely” (Forreau 26). Her brother Tiburce would later recall: “‘Berthe devoted herself with feverish zest to her work; With her knapsack on her shoulder, her painted stick in her hand, and loaded with all the apparatus of a true landscapist; she would vanish for entire days among the cliffs’” (qtd. in Rouart 21).

This need for acceptance and respect would dominate her emotional life for years. Validation as an artist was the goal which continued to drive her to paint. At 21 Berthe confides in her personal journal,

> “The more you want, the better you want it; both morally and physically, I have always had the sensation of a void – the void of action, dream, memory and the like, and of beauty. I glimpse my hysteria with enjoyment and terror. To consider, to make ordinary torment into my perpetual exquisite pleasure, that is to say, my work. To be cured of all distress, sickness and melancholy, absolutely all you need is a taste for work” (qtd. in Delafond 18).

Her mind may have begun to focus on the future required by her class of marriage and motherhood which would limit her ability to pursue her passion. Could she master the “hysteria” of a mind too aware, too conscious of the conditions of its existence (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 36). She could not settle for a way of life that would subjugate what she described as this “abyss” within her. Morisot chose her path as painter but this inner turmoil would never quiet. Anne Higonnet suggests she consciously traded “peace of mind” for “the power of obsession” (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 37).Twenty years later

Morisot reflected, "'The love of art . . . reconciles us to our lined faces and white hair'" (qtd. in Rouart 117).

It may be that at this time Edma began painting Berthe's portrait, perhaps starting as early as 1863. (See Illustration 3.) She portrays Berthe as artist, standing before her easel, poised but somewhat unsure. Palette in hand, she is about to place her brush on the canvas. She is intense, focused entirely on the vision she intends to create. She knows the first brushstroke is all important and Edma captures the tension and intensity in her face as she faces the abyss of a blank canvas. The portrait would have been meant to reassure Berthe and celebrate her artistic ability. "It is not only a sisterly dedication," Margaret Shennan tell us, "it is an important statement. The pretty round-faced girl had vanished" (xiv). While Edma may have been the favored student, it was Berthe who had the intense passion for painting and Edma's portrait encourages our understanding of Berthe's determination and may have been intended to boost her frequently flagging morale. It is unclear when the portrait was finished but certainly before Edma's approaching marriage in 1869.

In 1864, after seven years of continuous study, both Berthe and Edma would have small oil landscapes accepted at the Paris Salon and displayed among the hundreds of painters from the Academy des Beaux Arts. The Salon was a juried biennial exhibit and the largest art show in Paris. The standards for acceptance were rigid, based on the teaching principles of the Academy and the Academy teachers served as judges. Many well-known and accepted artists would have paintings rejected because the composition, line and color of submitted works failed to follow the Academy's standard. There was no room for creativity or invention within the Salon corridors. The purpose of the exhibition

was twofold; jurors enforced a narrow set of rules to define aesthetics in French art. More important to the artists, the Salon served as the most important art market in Europe. The economic fortunes of an artist would be determined as buyers could purchase paintings directly or commission additional work based on their approval of the artist's displayed work.

The sisters must have been excited about their initial acceptance although no correspondence exists to mark the occasion. They were not alone among women painters; as many as 400 female artists submitted small landscapes or still life's to each year's Salon. This category of painting by women of an amateur status was often described as "pretty pictures." But without fortunate placement, these 60-80 small pictures would go unnoticed in the more than 2,000 works adorning the walls of the Louvre or, later, the Palais d'Industrie.

Berthe's entry *The Old Roadway at Ouvers* was painted the previous summer with the encouragement of Achille Oudinout. The small landscape with soft coloration, was hung in a less than favorable position and bore the unmistakable mark of the Barbizon school and her teacher, Corot. This is confirmed by an article about the 1864 Salon authored by Emile Zola: "'I would also point out two landscapes by the Mlle. Morisot. Corot is sure to be their master. The canvases show a freshness and naivety of expression and atmosphere that provided some respite from the suave, mean minded work lapped up with such enthusiasm by the crowds'" (qtd. in Rey 175).

This painting does not survive. It is thought that Morisot would have destroyed all her early work, as she felt her efforts were inadequate. An 1865 submission, *Thatched Cottage in Normandy* which does survive, again shows the direct influences of Corot in

the total value of colors and the softly filtered sunlight. The following year both sisters had paintings accepted. Neither Berthe's still life nor Edma's floral arrangement received optimal placement within the gallery. However, both received some press notice. Critic Paul Mantz, writing in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, was somewhat dismissive of Berthe's submission:

> "Paintings of this type fill the Salon. Since it is not necessary to have had a long training in draftsmanship at the Academy to paint a copper pot, a candlestick and a bunch of radishes, women succeed quite well in this domestic type of painting. Mlle Berthe Morisot brings to the task a great deal of frankness with a delicate feeling for light and color." (qtd. in Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 62)

Morisot continued to send paintings to the Salon but with limited success until 1874. At times only a pastel would be accepted while a full format oil painting was rejected. Morisot began to struggle with her attempts to adhere to the standards of the Salon jury while creating compositions that were fresh and reflected her own vision and originality. It must have been a delicate balancing act for a developing artist. Should she continue to pursue her unique original qualities, or should she produce more expected, traditional works so that her art had a better opportunity to be seen? For the next six years, as her technical proficiency continued to develop, Berthe Morisot's painting would begin to illustrate that her own individual style would hold sway. But she would pay a price, not only because she was a woman but also because she was original. In 1872 Berthe's application to exhibit at the Salon was rejected. Close friend and fellow artist Puvis de Chavannes offered consolation: "'I find you very dignified and philosophical about your refusal by the Salon. How long it takes for eyes aged by routine to grow

accustomed to the fresh and naïve light of nature; they (the Salon judges) will make it in the end but very slowly. They go the same speed as justice'" (qtd. in Delafond 25).

Her need for validation and the reassurance did not diminish. Morisot continued to exhibit at the Salon with only fair success. Between 1864 and 1866 she had a total of six paintings accepted. In 1865 her submissions were landscapes. The year was notable at the Salon due to the absence of Edouard Manet, Alfred Sisley and Frederic Bazille, each of whom favored a more realist approach to composition. Morisot's acceptance indicates it is likely that she had yet to breakout from her heavily Corot influenced style and palette. The move toward realism was evident in other painters including her friend from summers in Auvers, Charles Francis Daubigny who also worked directly from nature. Daubigny, whom Berthe admired, came under scathing public criticism from critic Theodore Gauthier: "'It is really too bad this landscape painter, who possesses such a true, such a just, such a natural feeling is satisfied by an impression and neglects details'" (qtd. in Rewald 101). This describes the very same style that Morisot was moving toward in finding her own originality. Paul Valery explains his aunt's technique: "'It is made of nothing, a nothingness multiplied by the supreme act of her touch, the merest touch of mist, a hint of swans, the quick touch of a brush barely touching the fabric'" (qtd. in Rey 189).

The potential for criticism like Daubigny experienced in a public forum may have made her own unique, identifiable expression difficult for Morisot to pursue and could have thwarted her progress at a critical moment in her developing career. Morisot did begin attempts to market her works by sending paintings for exhibition at the Cadart Gallery, Paris (Shennan 95). Although Morisot was financially comfortable, lack of sales

would become just another unsuccessful measure of validation which would increase pressure and provoke anxiety.

By her early twenties, Berthe began to experience and acknowledge these anxious moments. She was on a collision course between her desire to paint and her expected role in French society. She was often depressed and felt the pull of traditional life values of domesticity and femininity. She would note that she was “dizzy” with the prospect of moving toward life and described her art as “my daily torment, my daily pleasure” (qtd. in Delafond 18). She struggled to master the “hysteria” of a mind too aware, too conscious of the conditions of its existence (qtd. in Higonnet 36). Modern aesthetic realist artist Marcia Rackow sees Morisot’s work as imbued with “restlessness” which she describes as the feeling of not being at home in the world you have been born into (2). Like her developing painting style Morisot must learn to combine energy and emotion in her psychological makeup as at one with form and repose, a transformation which would not be complete until 1874.

Here we find Morisot at a crossroads. Well trained, experienced, with innate talent, she must define her own fate within the potential for her future. It would take years for her to be able to embrace the balance of her life as both artist and bourgeoisie woman. She will eventually choose her life as a painter, at great risk, but her inner turmoil would never quiet until after 1874 when she found stability and accomplishment in both marriage and motherhood.

But initial success would also depend on keeping her three pillars of support firmly in place. She required the emotional support of both her mother and her sister; she relied on her artistic training to guide her palette and composition choices and she

continued to celebrate her great love and association with nature. These pillars began to erode as her sister married and moved from Paris, her mother became increasingly critical of her lack of success and the Franco Prussian War and Siege of Paris made painting from nature impossible. As she began to re interpret the lessons of Guichard and Corot in finding her own style, Morisot, on her own, would be challenged both emotionally and professionally to the breaking point.

Chapter 2

MORISOT ALONE

> "'When she works, she has an unhappy, anxious, almost fierce look. This existence of hers is like a convict in chains.'" Cornelie Morisot to her daughter Edma, 1869 (qtd. in Rouart 84)

Morisot's psychological distress would intensify in the years following 1868 caused not only by her chosen career path but also by deep feelings of loss and abandonment. Depression would have a significant effect on her artistic productivity, profoundly limiting the number of completed works at a time when she began to experience a level of some success in the Salon. Combined with the devastation of the Franco Prussian War and the Siege of Paris in 1870 Morisot would accomplish few completed canvases, and, while Morisot's work continued to progress in composition and technique, her work effort may have been sporadic.

Depression is well documented in the lives of artists and writers and can manifest itself in creative blocks. Deep depression can often result in creative sterility. While positive mood facilitates creative problem solving, depressed mood and thinking can well lead to long periods bereft of creative work (Jamison 108). For many artists and writers in the nineteenth century, suffering was often associated as a necessary element in connecting to one's innermost feelings or inspiration. Kay Redfield Jamison, writing in *Touched with Fire*, quotes poet John Keats: "'do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make a soul'" (115).

In writing about women at the vanguard of 1950s abstract painting, author Mary Gabriel observes, "all artists succumb to self-doubt; that is the handmaiden of creation. But for a woman the doubt would have been the result of forces both creative and social"

as Gabriel explains these contemporary women artists, “art wasn’t removed from life, art was life.” Her words bring Morisot is conversation will all women artists across generations, for as late as the 1950s, Gabriel notes that servitude to families was the only good which a healthy woman was to aspire. Clearly Morisot experienced doubt caused both by the social forces which dictated the necessity of marriage as well as a lack of confidence in her own artistic ability. As Morisot’s psychological distress deepens and runs its course through 1874, her creative output will diminish as will her opportunity to leave her lasting mark on the French art world. The effect of her experiences of abandonment and loss combined with her determination to produce work in conformity with the strict dictates of the Académie des Beaux Arts would slow her journey toward the artistic independence necessary to unleash her true talent and creativity. “‘The more you want,’” Morisot wrote,

> “the better you want it; both morally and physically, I have always had the sensation of a void – the void of action, dream, memory and the like, and of beauty. I glimpse my hysteria with enjoyment and terror.” To consider, to make ordinary torment into my perpetual exquisite pleasure, that is to say, my work. To be cured of all distress, sickness and melancholy, absolutely all you need is a taste for work.” (qtd. in Delafond 18)

In 1869, her sister Edma married a young naval officer, Adolphe Pontillon, and moved to Cherbourg, physically separating the sisters for the first time. We cannot underestimate what the loss of her constant painting companion would mean to Berthe’s continued struggle to be accepted for her artistic merit. The geographic distance resulted in continual conversation by letter and, in these letters, we hear Berthe’s own voice for

the first time. The dialogue between the two women relates an honest and frank discussion of the relative values of their life situations. The sisters, one married, the other single and actively painting, discussed the strain of domesticity colliding with career aspirations that had long troubled Berthe. She wrote to her now married sister "'romance is all very well, as long as there is something besides it to fill one's days'" (qtd. in Higonnet 64). Edma's response is telling of the sisters' continued closeness as well as Edma's own experience. "'The further I get into marriage, the more I am convinced that you should not arrange your life in the same way. Use all your skill and all your charm to find something more satisfactory'" (qtd. in Rouart 33).

The physical distance between the sisters seemed to amplify their closeness. "'I am often with you dear Berthe,'" Edma would write. "'In my thoughts I follow you about in your studio, and wish that I could escape, if only for a quarter hour, to breathe in that air in which we lived for many long years.'" Later, Berthe would respond to Edma: "'work is the sole purpose of my existence'" (qtd. in Higonnet 64). When Edma confides to Berthe that she regrets the loss of her own painting career to marriage, Berthe responds:

> "This painting, this work that you mourn for, is the cause of many griefs and many troubles. You know it as well as I do and yet you are already lamenting that which was depressing you only a little while ago. Think of it, yours is not the worse lot ….do not revile your fate. Remember that it is sad to be alone; that despite anything that is to be said or done, a woman has an immense need of affection. To want to retreat into yourself is to attempt the impossible." (qtd. in Rouart 34)

The closeness of the siblings may have influenced Morisot's painting *The Sisters (Two Sisters on a Sofa)*. (See Illustration 4.) With Edma ever present in her mind, Morisot depicted two sisters as identical twins. The women were dressed in the same blue-dotted white dress and have the same cascades of dark hair. Seated beside one another, some space separates them. Their bodies face each other but their gazes are separate and blank as if one is unaware of the other's presence. One woman has a ring on her right hand, perhaps indicating marriage, with a potted plant at her feet signaling domesticity. The other holds a fan and behind the sisters is a framed fan, probably the painted fan that Edgar Degas had earlier given Berthe as a token of his admiration. Berthe viewed the sisters as mirror images but separated and moving in different directions.

Anne Higonnet reads deeper meaning into the portrait that signals a shift in Morisot's focus as a painter of the images of women. "We must look at *Two Sisters* as a reflecting Morisot's sense of self since she was a woman dedicated to making images about women's identity" (Higonnet, *Images of Women* 142). *Two Sisters* explores the difference between painting (essentially masculine) and conventional feminine self-expression by using a double motif of fans. The fan behind the women is a work of art, clearly delineated. The fan in the woman's hand, indistinct in design, is merely a prop. So Higonnet concludes, "the women like the fans are superficially alike but yet so different" (Higgonet, *Berthe Morisot's Images* 142).

Edma continued to play a critical role in Berthe's progress toward originality in artistic expression. In anticipating a visit from Edma, her mother writes to her: "'I spend my days, or almost all of them in the studio. Berthe says she is waiting for you, to know what she is doing is good or is bad. After you leave, she will never dare to show anything

to anyone'" (qtd. in Rouart 34). With Edma removed, Berthe had lost her artistic sounding board. She needed her work to be clearly evaluated by someone both trusted and respected. Without that judgment, Morisot like many artists before her, had difficulty in developing confidence in her own evolution, growth that would not reflect the influences of the past. Other (male) painters in Paris would congregate daily is studios and bars that dotted the streets of Montmartre to discuss and review the merits of one another's work. Morisot had no similar companionship. Her constant need for affirmation would continue unrelieved. After a return from a summer trip to visit Edma in 1870, Berthe again wrote, "I am sad and what's worse everyone is abandoning me. I feel lonely, disillusioned and old in the bargain" (qtd. in Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 49). Clearly for Berthe the pillar of familial support had begun to crumble.

Her visits with Edma also confirmed to her that marriage would result in the end of an artistic career. Living in Cherbourg Edma had no access to proper art materials and views were largely limited to seascapes. The arrival of children would consume her time. So it is not surprising that the potential for a removal from Paris and the responsibilities of family life were an anathema to Berthe. Her mother would not understand the dilemma she forced upon her daughter with her constant efforts to find an appropriate suitor.

As Berthe's painting career had failed to develop to her satisfaction it is clear in her correspondence that her problem is overwhelming self-deprecation. "'I am too nervous to make anyone sit for me, and then the opinions of this one and that one worry me and make me disgusted with things already in place'" (qtd. in Rouart 46). She wrote to Edma again: "'I feel myself overcome by an insurmountable laziness. I am reproached by everybody and I do not have the strength to react. And I understand perfectly the

difficulties you have in painting. I have reached the point of wondering how I have ever in my life been able to do anything'" (qtd. in Rouart 46). The laziness, fatigue and irritability she describes are all probable signs of a growing depression. These bouts of depression with underlying melancholia would continue to plague Morisot for years. "'My inaction,'" Berthe complains, "'is beginning to weigh on me. I am eager to do something at least fairly good'" (qtd. in Rouart 35). Through it, she stayed doggedly persistent to her goal: move beyond the ranks of amateur to full recognition as an artist. Determined to continue, she writes to Edma in 1869 "'I will achieve it only by perseverance and by openly asserting my determination to emancipate myself. I both lament and envy your (Edma's) fate.'" Edma had given birth to a daughter and Berthe continues: "'life gets more complicated by the day here now I am gripped by the desire to have children'" (qtd. in Rouart 31). Later generations of women artists would survive only by believing in their work as modern artist Lee Krasner reports in 1949 claiming the requisite of "ignoring the ludicrous machismo some male artists wore like body armor" (Gabriel 153). But such sustained determination would require fuel and it is unclear from her letters where Berthe would find this strength. It is helpful to place these words within the timeline of Morisot's relationship with Edouard Manet. Written in the spring of 1869, when Berthe had begun to model for Manet, his association might have provided needed encouragement and his frequent presence a salve to her loneliness. She would eventually turn to Edouard Manet for guidance and we might understand the prescience of Krasner's words a century later as fair warning.

Morisot's social isolation and physical deprivation through probable anorexia during the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71) would also have negatively affected her artistic

process. A certain asceticism may have been necessary to harness her powers. Virtually all the Morisot family's collective social companionship left Paris during the war years and the weekly soirees ended. Morisot's isolation would remove social choices and focus her only need: to paint, continuing to struggle to find her originality. But Morisot's health would be seriously compromised by a lack of food during the war and her studio would be requisitioned for housing troops. The year 1870 would be a particularly barren time for artistic productivity with only one painting completed.

Art historian Sebastian Smee explains that states of susceptibility are concentrated early in an artist's career. Important art could only be made, work that is uniquely hers, if the work came from inside her. Her isolation, while painful, would have been part of the process of emergence as an artist.

Morisot seems to confirm that this had been her experience when years later, deeply in grief after the death of her husband, she confides in her journal: "'I want to touch bottom in my well of pain, since I have always thought that in doing so I would be forced to surface again. I have descended to the depths of suffering and it seems to me that one cannot help be raised up'" (unpublished Morisot letter, qtd. in "Berthe Morisot Quotes").

This is the reflection of an older, wiser woman but the pain Morisot felt in 1868-70 must have seemed bottomless. Without an art community around her she would have no avenue to place these feelings within an understanding of the creative process. Writing in 1940, American author Pearl S. Buck comments on her experience and the life of women in the arts.

> "The talented woman must have besides their talent, an unusual energy that drives them to exercise their own powers. Like talented men they are single minded creatures, and they cannot sink into idleness, nor fritter away life and time, nor endure discontent. They possess the rarest gift, integrity of purpose." (qtd. in Gabriel 181)

As Berthe continued to work she began to become more ambitious in composition in search of her own originality and style. Technical skills in brushstroke, palette and composition would mature. Landscapes would contain figures and gradually these figures would take on more importance than the landscape itself. Her painting, *Paris from the Trocadero,* completed in 1868, shows a horizontal layering of landscape. In the foreground are the figures of a woman and child, most probably her sister Yves and niece. (See Illustration 5.) Captured behind a railing, they look out over the near scene of a racetrack, with the buildings of Paris prominently behind. Beyond the city, she paints the factories of the newly industrialized western Paris against the sky. Loosely painted in the immediate foreground are horse and drivers moving along the track, giving the sense of motion and a single moment in time fixed in paint. *Paris From the Trocadero* would also be among the first of many paintings in which Morisot pictures women viewing the world from behind physical barriers. Those barriers would also represent the separation of the masculine world (painting) and the feminine (motherhood). We now know that Morisot is not simply replicating a familiar scene but finding her own interpretation of the modern world with both technique and thoughtfulness. Biographer Armand Forreau sees this painting as marking the beginning of an evolution of a true artist with signs of the representation of modern life (32).

A harbor scene *Harbour at L'Orient* (1868-69) (Illustration 6) was created during a summer visit with Edma along the French coast. The composition demonstrated a masterly execution of perspective, scale and tonal stability as Morisot balances the upper left view of distant ships masts with the bottom right corner figure of her sister Edma. The background of ships, masts, and village are painted in detail while the foreground is indistinct, almost blurred. Without the placement of the figure in the foreground, the entire scene might appear to slip off the lower edge of the canvas. She creates a three-dimensional space with the pattern on the water and uses large swaths of color to depict sky and clouds reflected in water. The tones of blue juxtapose with harmonious tones of warm yellows and ochre in the parapet wall. The painting had an unfinished quality as the paint was loosely applied, thinly in places with short strokes, not achieving the smooth finish expected by other artists and critics. It gave the work a fresh and spontaneous impression that continues to this day.

The painting would later be declared a masterpiece by the controversial Realist Edouard Manet. Although she had yet to meet Manet, Berthe was overcome with emotion when she heard of his comments from fellow artist, Fantin LaTour. She reacted with the impulsiveness of a child and none of the savvy of an artist intent on the sale of her works. She wrapped the painting and shipped it to his home. No doubt she wanted to please him but perhaps this was her way of offering Manet a socially acceptable invitation to visit her studio in Passy. The painting would remain in Manet's personal collection until his death and would eventually be purchased by art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel.

Meeting Manet would not be far in the future as the families were friendly and Madame Auguste Manet would begin to invite the Morisot family to her frequent evening

soirees. Morisot's feelings would again shift as she perhaps began to see in Manet the possibility for the accolades, she very much desired. Between 1868 and 1874, Edouard Manet would paint twelve portraits of Berthe Morisot indicating that they spent much time together both in her home and more frequently at his studio. He was clearly mesmerized by her as a woman if not as an artist. At one point she wrote to Edma, "'He viewed the work in progress (in her study) and was complimentary'" but Morisot did not always take his compliments to heart as she had been assured by their mutual friend, artist Henri Fantin LaTour, "'He always likes the painting of people he likes'" (qtd. in Rewald 222).

Berthe had no need of money, unlike many of her fellow artists, but she actively but unsuccessfully pursued the sale of her work as a validation of her ability and chosen path. Perhaps because she was shy and unmarried, she did not market her own work but often left that task to her mother and later her husband, not even bothering to suggest prices for canvases. She did understand that realized income was also the means to independence from any potential marriage. As her mother pursued marriage prospects, Berthe moved aggressively forward toward her goals. The clash of her mother's goals of marriage and the daughter's career path was inevitable. With two daughters already married and secure in their lifestyle, Berthe was the sole beneficiary of her mother's constant attention. With diametrically opposed goals, tension between the two must have made for a difficult household environment. Her mother continued to press her toward marriage and complained about Berthe's failure to sell her art. It is not clear when Berthe's mother realized that her daughter was intent on becoming a professional artist and firmly rejected marriage but as early as 1871 she would openly express her continued

frustration. Discussing Berthe with Edma, her mother wrote: "'I am earnestly imploring Berthe not to be so disdainful (of marriage). Everyone thinks it is better to marry, even making some concessions, than to remain independent in a position that is not really one. We must consider that in a few more years, she will be more alone, her youth will fade'" (qtd. in Rouart 27). Her mother did not understand, nor do we know if Berthe shared with her that the concession Berthe most feared was the end of her life as an artist.

Perhaps to push Berthe away from her opposition to marriage, her mother became openly critical of her daughter's accomplishments. "'Yesterday,'" Berthe wrote to Edma, "'my mother told me politely that she has no faith in my talent'" (qtd. in Rouart 83). Reinforcing those words, Cornelie wrote to Edma, "'She will never do the kind of work that dealers buy in hope of reselling it. Would anyone give even 20 francs for these ravishing things?'" and later,

> "she has not the kind of talent that has commercial value; she will never sell anything done in her present manner, and she is incapable of painting differently. I know that now the activity and artistic milieu of Paris are of great attraction for Berthe…. how I wish the dear child had all this turmoil of feeling and fantasy behind her."

In a subsequent letter, "'When she works, she has an anxious, unhappy, almost fierce look…. This existence of her is like the ordeal of a convict in chains'" (qtd. in Rouart 83).

At the same time, Berthe wrote to Edma, "'I am keen to earn some money . . . am beginning to lose all hope. What I see most clearly is that my situation is impossible from every point of view'" (qtd. in Rouart 89-90). "'It seems to me a painting (she was

working on another harbor scene) like the one I gave Manet could perhaps sell, and that is all I care about'" (qtd. in Rouart 70). But Morisot continued to have difficulty valuing her own work. As early as 1867, Cornelie would report: "'I have never seen you choose something that was within your reach; Imagination is all very well but not when it makes things more difficult'" (qtd. in Rouart 27). As late as 1875, Cornelie Morisot would report to Berthe "'Your dealer complained that you didn't tell him your prices. I told him that you left it up to him but that puts him on the spot and he does not like that'" (qtd. in Delafond 32). At this point, the mother who had arranged her teachers, chaperoned her on numerous lessons and arranged salons to introduce her to other artists, became a harsh critic. This must have exacerbated Morisot's sense of abandonment.

Berthe' lack of confidence in her work and the absence of acknowledgement from other artists and art critics stifled her output with the completion of very few paintings each year. While she worked diligently, the number of completed canvases never approximated those of the other Impressionist painters. Even more importantly she had yet to reconcile her personal artistic vision with the judgment of the Paris Salon and the restrictive rules it enforced. Morisot continued to reject fixed rules of painting including the work of some contemporary Realists. "'Real painters understand with a brush in their hand,'" she recorded in her personal journal. "'What does anyone do with rules. Nothing worthwhile. What's needed is new, personal sensations; and where to learn those'" (qtd. in Delafond 47).

Years before, her friend and artist Rosalie Riesner advised:

"Some works are made to be exhibited, others to remain in the studio; one must follow the public taste if one is to be successful. The idea is to exhibit a little of

> everything- with some works one makes one reputation with artists, with others one does business." (qtd. in Shennan 72)

There is no evidence that Berthe took this advice in the submissions she sent to dealers or to the Salon. In fact, this was the exact course taken by many of her fellow artists including Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas and Claude Monet each of whom was experiencing some limited commercial success. They painted landscapes, portraits, still life's and seascapes. They also increased their productivity by painting variations of the same scene or changing the position of familiar figures to create new and different pictures. Perhaps because she was still struggling with her own artistic vision Morisot continued to paint with little variation; she complained to Edma of her dislike of painting still life: "'I, too, wanted to paint my plums and flowers all on a white tablecloth but it caused me any amount of trouble and all for a very meagre result. This type of exercise bores me profoundly'" (qtd. in Delafond 32).

Morisot would not begin to expose her depth of artistic vision and technical skill until she was directly challenged. That challenge would come in the winter of 1868-69 from a most unexpected source. In completing a canvas for submission to the 1869 spring salon, Morisot was not satisfied with the final product. The painting, *The Mother and Sister of the Artist*, (Illustration 7) depicts a pregnant Edma Pontillon sitting on a divan with her mother sitting at a right angle in an adjacent chair. She requested advice from Edouard Manet with the result that he overpainted much of Morisot's work. Morisot's reaction underscores her questioning self-doubt. She was furious and refused to allow the picture to be submitted to the Salon although Manet had taken it upon himself to assign it

to a carter for transport. Only when she feared for her daughter's health did Madame Morisot retrieve the painting.

> "Yesterday she looked like a person about to faint; she grieves and worries me; her despair and discontent were so great that they could only be ascribed to a morbid condition. She kept telling me that she would rather be at the bottom of the river than learn that her picture had been accepted." (qtd. in Rouart 49)

Her mother attributed Morisot's reaction to hysteria and a "nervous and febrile condition," but what seems clear is that rather than taking the role of supportive mentor, Edouard Manet had focused the self-doubt that continued to plague her. Perhaps the artist was standing up for her work and outraged that another artist had overpainted it, embarrassed that the work was deemed to need such correction. She had encouraged his advice but had never given permission to have her work changed. In fact, an examination of the painting shows that the head of the mother, heavily painted by Manet, differs greatly in style from the head of Edma as painted by Morisot. She was able to convey a warmer and more human visage. Biographer Anne Higonnet ascribes Morisot's reaction to a lack of confidence in her own work. But it is reasonable to suggest that Manet's complete overshadowing of her work may have also sparked an outrage that was rooted in a growing commitment to her own personal style. It echoes the same feeling she expressed as a young student bored by the instruction of Chocarne. Both her mother and Manet showed incredible insensitivity and failed to understand Berthe's feelings and the seriousness of her vision of herself as artist.

The siege of Paris 1870-71 during the Franco Prussian war prevented Berthe from working. Her studio was commandeered as a barracks and eventually destroyed by

bombardment. Art supplies were nonexistent and even food was scarce. Berthe became so frail and depressed that she was ordered by her family doctor to spend days in bed and her ever vigilant and caring "mamam" feared for her life. "'We are very much on edge, very sad.'" Cornelie wrote to Edma in Cherbourg. "'Berthe worries me a great deal. She seems to be getting consumption.'" And two months later she reports, "'Berthe has grown thinner, she has hollows in her cheeks. Provisions are not coming in very quickly; we have been living on biscuits for 12 days for the bread is impossible'" (qtd. in. Rouart 57).

When the siege ended, and she slowly regained her health, her parents sent her to stay with Edma. "'Do not worry if she seems sad at times,'" Cornelie writes to Edma; "'sadness has become like a second nature to her'" (qtd. in Rouart 67).

Morisot continued at times to struggle with technique in oil painting. She spent much of her time between 1870 and 1874 developing her plein air skills in watercolor and pastel, often as sketches for works in oil to be completed in her study. It was often pastels that were accepted by the Salon at which Berthe was masterful. But watercolors and pastels, when created by women were too often considered amateur, preliminary sketches to more masculine fully rendered oil painting.

In 1871 Edma Pontillon returned to her parent's home in Passy to await the birth of her second child. Following her confinement, Berthe completed another celebrated masterpiece, *The Cradle*, this time in oil. Shown at the 1872 Paris Salon, T*he Cradle* would become a sensation at the initial Impressionist exhibit in 1874.

Discouraged and depressed by her own critical judgment, Morisot still searched for the originality she longed to create. She may have still been suffering physically from

the effects of malnutrition during the war years. The pillars which had supported her nascent career seemed to be crumbling beneath her. She no longer enjoyed the support of her mother; her sister had physically abandoned her; her well-developed artistic training had failed to produce an originality acceptable either to herself or to the public. Her best attempts in oil in both 1872 and 1873 were rejected by the Salon which accepted only one work in each year; the works she exhibited in fine Parisian galleries failed to sell. She had not had favorable press reviews or notice of her work since 1869.

Both sisters Yves and Edma had started their families and many of the young artists she admired, including a previous suitor Carolus Duran, had also married. Her mother had lost patience with her chosen life pursuit and begged her to "steer her ship wisely." In a personal journal Berthe shares with us the depth of her despair: "'I work without respect or rest, and its pure waste. I am sad, sad as one can be. What I see most clearly is that my situation is impossible from every point of view'" (qtd. in Rouart 90).

In 1873, the Morisot family moved to a new large apartment on Rue Guichard a few blocks from their former home. Morisot would not paint in a studio again until after the death of her husband in 1893. Instead, she preferred to paint in her bedroom with a window view of the garden or in the parlor. There she would keep her paints, brushes and smocks in an armoire or cupboard and simply cover work with cloth should visitors arrive. She effectively merged her painting and personal life. The loss of the studio may have freed her to pursue her own vision more aggressively. Perhaps it was the simple fact that she now felt painting as her life force and completely integrated her work with her daily routine. Later in life she would build her own home in the same neighborhood and specifically direct the architect to design a hidden closet in the living room to

accommodate her canvases, paints and brushes. Leaving the studio behind, she also moved beyond the memories of sketching and painting there with her sister. She accepted her life as separate from Edma's as the sisters shared neither a painting life nor children.

The loss of dedicated studio space would also carry significant shortcomings for the young artist. Without dedicated separate painting space, Morisot may not have been able to work on multiple canvases simultaneously. Paintings would be completed, abandoned or scraped down and repainted. There would be no suitable public space where other artists could see her work in progress. Her social status would prevent her from leaving home to share studio space or independently rent her own space as did American artist Mary Cassatt. The loss of her studio would make Morisot's isolation as an artist complete. It is interesting to note that none of Morisot's three biographers found the loss of a studio space significant.

Between 1864 when she first exhibited with the Salon des Paris and 1874, the first Impressionist exhibit, Morisot completed only 26 oil canvases, many of these small in format. Only three oil canvases were completed in 1869, two in 1870. Subsequent years showed only a small improvement in output with four, five and seven oil canvases respectively completed each year (Wildenstein, *Berthe Morisot*). By comparison Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir might paint 30 or more works in a single year (Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*).

Siting as examples her subtle variations in light, cool, quiet harmonies in color, fullness of modeling and justness of values biographer Armand Forreau suggests that in 1872 her technique changes: "It begins to widen, to grow freer, to be transformed until it becomes the marvelous and docile instrument that will allow her to create a whole sheaf

of works that mark the end of her classical manner and the moment when she now definitely emancipated becomes fully herself" (38).

From 1872 through 1874 she would frequently travel to the homes and companionship of her two sisters and their children. These became her favorite models and most of her work completed during this period focused on them with charming results. As Morisot's mood lightened so too did her painting style and its celebration of light. Morisot's compositional technique also changed. In each representation of her sisters and their children, Morisot connects figures with nature. Within these settings the figures are grouped with nature both anchoring and surrounding them. There are no open skies, no horizons to be explored. Nature becomes both sheltering and restrictive; the borders frame the families in place just as nurturing mothers connect with their children. There are no wide vistas to draw away the attention of these women to the world. Perhaps Morisot was reflecting on how safe she felt in this company and in nature, away from Paris and the Salon. She had developed her own unique style. One of the paintings completed during this period, *Hide and Seek* was later reviewed favorably in the First Impressionist exhibition: "'Ms. Berthe Morisot has finally captured the spirit to her very fingertips. What fine artistic sense! I would add that here the execution is in perfect unison with the idea to be expressed'" (qtd. in Delafond 30).

She often employed a detailed process from original sketch to finished oil which may explain why Morisot produced relatively few oil paintings in comparison with her peers. Her painting regime might include light pencil sketches, then develop the subject in red ink (sanguine) perhaps with gouache, proceed to a pastel and finally a watercolor.

Only then would Morisot begin an oil painting. Examination of her work, particularly after 1874, shows these multiple stages for many paintings.

Morisot began to show a new level of maturity as an artist. She did not destroy her work but might leave canvases unfinished to return to later. Her nephew Paul Valery recalled:

> "she took up, put down, returned to a brush like a thought that comes to us, is clean forgotten, then occurs to us once again. A nothingness multiplied by the supreme art of her touch, the great gift of reducing things to their essence, of lightening matter to the extreme. And through that a connection between the artist's ideal and the intimacy of an individual life." (qtd. in Rey 10)

Berthe would continue to exhibit at the Salon until 1874. As her composition, color and brushstroke moved farther away from the imprint of her old teachers, Morisot's work no longer fit the rigid guidelines of the Salon. She also had trouble "finishing" her canvas. Perhaps because her initial instruction in painting was in the "alla prima" technique, she may have experienced difficulty in mastering "layered painting." This technique requires layering "fat" over lean paint or "elastic" over "non elastic" paint. The layers are achieved by mixing paint with a painting medium composed of oil, resin and solvent. The painting medium recipe changes as layers are added. Years of experience in working with oils would be required to master the technique. Her simpler technique of mixing wet paint directly on the canvas allowed her to catch the spontaneity and freshness she desired but would have contributed to criticism that her work appeared unfinished.

None of the Salon shows resulted in sales. Berthe's work was also exhibited at the Alfred Cadart Gallery in Paris where it was reported to generate considerable interest but no purchases. Gallery owner Paul Durand-Ruel purchased just three watercolors in 1872 for 100 francs ($20) each and a few canvases the same year: a Cherbourg seascape for 300 francs ($60) and *View of Paris from the Trocader*o, the large format oil painting for 500 francs ($100). Durand-Ruel was a friend and supporter of both Manet and Monet and may have purchased the works at their urging to encourage Berthe. Durand-Ruel quickly resold Morisot's works; they generated only a small profit margin for him, much less than he experienced with other artists. He would include her work in shows on consignment and reportedly was genuinely fond of Morisot but he would never purchase artwork from her directly again, despite his significant enthusiasm for her fellow Impressionists.

By the close of 1873, Berthe must have felt that only some dramatic intervention would allow her to continue pursuit of an artistic career. That transformation would be delivered in the following year by her bold initiative in response to events that forever changed her life and could not have been foreseen.

A final note from Cornelie to Edma at the close of this period reveals something much deeper than her mother's usual complaints about Berthe's resistance to marriage:

> "I have become skeptical – that's quite possible. But now much time has passed, enough to convince me that my family is fairly distinguished, fairly gifted but incapable of the effort needed to reach certain rungs of the ladder. That is how we are, and that is how we'll always be, because of the physical obstacles and because our means are insufficient in all sorts of ways. I am therefore a bit

disappointed to see that Berthe won't settle down like everyone else." (qtd. in Rouart 83)

The ever social Cornelie seems to have come to terms with the reality that her family was not in the same league with the wealthy Manet or Degas families. Her daughters and son had married well but not beyond the family's social level. Her son and sons-in-law would not earn the salaries of her husband or father. Berthe's accomplishments paled in comparison to successful contemporary painters and friends like James Tissot, Puvis de Chavannes and Henri Fatin LaTour. With no inherited wealth or status, it was not a lack of creativity or passion which she expects will doom her daughter's aspirations, but the barriers of class and culture always present in the lives of the emerging haute bourgeoisie.

The new year would begin with deep grief for the closely-knit Morisot family. In January 1874, her beloved "Papa" Tiburce Morisot died from heart disease at age 68. He left Berthe, his only unmarried child, a bequest of 41,000 francs, perhaps to encourage her to continue to paint. The amount, however (equal to approximately $8,000), would not last indefinitely and it would be necessary for Berthe to eventually find some other source of income.

For the first time in Berthe's young life, personal income would have a significant effect on her decisions. Her emotional stability, as well, would require her to seek a steady, dependable relationship to weather the storms of life ahead. With the Salon as the sole opportunity to show her work to a large audience, her paintings would remain in her home and the rooms of friends. No audience would develop to purchase and support her work. Years of depression and insecurity had taken a toll on her creative output and her

portfolio at what may have been considered the height of her career amounted to not much more than that of a dedicated amateur. Morisot, on her own, would need to rebuild those pillars of support; she needed to find a supportive group of fellow arts, she needed to find a way to display her work to a larger audience and she needed to reconnect with the natural landscape.

Chapter 3

MANET AND MORISOT: THE MYTH

> "This woman's work is exceptional. Too bad she is not a man. I agree with you. The demoiselles Morisot are charming. However, as women, they might serve the cause of painting by each marrying an academician and sowing the seeds of discord in the ranks of those senile fellows. But that would be asking them great self-sacrifice indeed." -Edouard Manet, 1868 (qtd. in Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 59)

With obvious chauvinism, Edouard Manet simultaneously registers the beauty and charm of the Morisot sisters while alluding to his own problems with the strict rules of Salon des Paris jury. He considers the Morisot sisters role in the art world, as most men would, within the narrow definition of woman as defined by marriage. If this was how he related to women in general, how would he relate to Berthe Morisot as artist? Within a few years both his opinions on the Salon and the Morisot sisters would change. The relationship between Edouard Manet and Berthe Morisot would dramatically affect her path to artistic independence and will figure significantly in her fate.

For the formative years of Impressionism and well after the turn of the century, the power of Edouard Manet's force of personality and his extraordinary output of paintings would outweigh any consideration by the art world of Morisot's unique talents and contributions to modern art. In truth, many of the art historians writing about Manet and modernity were more sympathetic to the muscular power of realism than the considered feminine delicacy of Impressionism. Well into the twentieth century, after the deaths of both Manet in 1883 and Morisot in 1895, the pair would be described as teacher and student or teacher and model. Art historian John Rewald thoroughly documents the history of Impressionism and introduces Morisot simply as Manet's model and sister-in-law. A deeper understanding of the relationship between these two as artists is important

in assigning a more equitable role and stature to Mlle. Morisot. Was she a Manet's student or was she a unique artist who made her own individual contributions to the art called Impressionism? In order to prove the latter, it is necessary to isolate Manet's role in her life and work.

The actual nature of their six-year relationship is unclear and has been the subject of speculation throughout the twentieth century. Was it romantic, artistic or both? Did Manet consider Morisot his protégé and did she consider him her mentor? Morisot was a beautiful young girl passionately in love with the handsome, older artist. Manet's affection toward Morisot initially seems less clear. He was a dandy and had many well-known affairs, particularly with his models. But Morisot and Manet were of the same social class and, as a traditionalist who firmly conformed to societal restrictions, he would have found it unseemly to have crossed a line to a physical relationship. In fact, from their initial meeting the already married Manet proposed his younger brother Eugene as Morisot's potential husband. Their families were friends and the Edouard spent considerable time in the company of the Morisots both in Paris and on summer holidays. Morisot biographers Anne Higonnet and Margaret Shennan agree that while Berthe may have been in love with Manet, their relationship, fueled by mutual attraction to their intellect and talent, was dangerous but platonic. Morisot's early biographer Armand Fourreau references Manet only with regard to his painting style, leaving aside the issue of any personal relationship. This, however, might be expected as Morisot's daughter Julie collaborated in the biography and discussing any relationship between her mother and uncle would have been awkward.

Edouard Manet began making his work known in Paris art circles as early as 1853 with his first self-sponsored solo exhibition. His exhibits at the Salon de Paris as well as the specially arranged Salon des Refuses (1873) confounded and outraged critics with both his subject matter and bold use of color. "'I paint what I see,'" he explained, "'and not what others want to see'" (qtd. in Brombert 48). He is acknowledged by many art historians as the founding father of Realism and later in his career was attributed to have strong influence in technique on the compositions of many Impressionists, by employing a stiff, straight edged brush to apply color in a method called "tache." But unlike them he was preferred the studio as painter and utilized a much darker palette.

Berthe Morisot and the much older Manet would not officially meet until 1868 when mutual friend and artist Henri Fatin LaTour introduced them at a dinner at Manet's mother's home. She was 27 and he nine years older. By then, Manet had married his mistress Suzanne Leenhoff and was notorious on the Parisian art scene for his controversial subject matter and bold painting style. Only his social status as an established member of a wealthy, bourgeoise family and the admiration of fellow artists prevented him from being considered a social pariah.

Morisot would have certainly noticed Edouard Manet at the Louvre as early as 1865 when both were registered as copyists (Amornpichekal 355). He made an immediate impression; slim and tall, dressed in beautifully tailored clothes of the latest fashion; he was recognizable by his ginger hair and full ginger beard. Both Morisot biographers describe his natural charisma combining boyish impunity with impeccable adult manners (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 42; Shennan 72). He walked with a certain nonchalance and moved gracefully in a carefully careless manner. His childhood friend

Anton Proust described him: “medium height, well-muscled…he was obviously a thoroughbred. Beneath the broad forehead, the frank, straight line of the nose, the eyes small, the glance lively.” (qtd. in Brombert 42) He had a wit that was sharp and quick and at times even cutting. Friends noted he was courteous but irreverent and free spirited as his flippant comment on the Morisot sisters indicates. A rebellious, opinionated young woman like Berthe Morisot would have easily been attracted to his charm and good looks as well as his rogue’s personality.

His painting style would have been just as appealing; Manet disdained formality in his paintings. He applied vivid color straight on the canvas in large brushy blocks with none of the conventional buildup of dark layers to light. He painted with energy, ease and impulsiveness and above all an underlying sense of conviction and confidence. Manet biographer Henri Lallemand feels Manet’s art defies clear cut categorization. Writing in *Manet: A Visionary Impressionist*, he describes a primarily figure painter who was fascinated with subjects from modern urban life. Deep inside, he was a traditionalist preferring to exhibit at the Salon, changing its rigid definitions of artistic worth from within, rather than challenging the system from outside. Above all he was a midcentury painter trying to steer a middle path between the Classicism of Ingre and the Romanticism of Delacroix, all the while adding his own vision of Realism. As a well-trained student of Joseph Guichard, Morisot would have understood and admired these qualities as reflecting the lessons of both Ingres and Delacroix.

Within weeks of their initial meeting in 1868, he would secure permission from her mother to paint the first of twelve portraits and solidify a relationship that would continue to the end of his life in 1883. Morisot quickly became recognized as Manet’s

favorite model. For Morisot, their relationship for the next six years would be intense, layered and complicated. They presented a handsome, rebellious man and a beautiful young woman joined by a passion for individual creativity and expression but separated by Manet's marriage. Both parties were positioned in a society that did not permit bohemian behavior and their frequent meetings must have produced a sexual tension defined by expressed desire without possession. It was during this period that Morisot expresses crippling self-doubt and continually seeks validation as an artist through Salon acceptance and gallery sales. Feeling abandoned by her married sister and often criticized by her mother, Morisot may have been looking for artistic validation if not solace in the company of the older and knowledgeable Manet.

Did Manet consider Morisot his protégé? The word comes from the French root "to protect." There is little doubt that he loved her but in a way which reflected the paternalistic standards that ruled French male society and art at the time. A famous incident described by Berthe to her sister Edma might advance an understanding of their conflicted artistic relationship. In completing a canvas for submission to the 1869 Salon, Morisot was not satisfied with the final product. This double portrait, *The Mother and Sister of the Artis*t (see Illustration 7) depicts a pregnant Edma Pontillon sitting on a divan with her mother sitting at a right angle on an adjacent chair. Morisot was not satisfied with her rendering of her mother's head, partially in profile. Asking Manet for advice he assured her "You may put yourself in my hands. I shall tell you what needs to be done" (qtd. in Rouart 48).

The following day, Manet, now a family friend, arrived at the Morisot residence in Passy. For four hours he continuously reworked Berthe's painting. Berthe writes to Edma:

> "He took the brushes and put in a few accents that looked very well. Once started, nothing could stop him; from the skirt he went to the bust, from the bust to the head, from the head to the background . . . finally by five o'clock in the afternoon we had made the prettiest caricature that we have ever seen" (qtd. in Rouart 48).

Morisot was reportedly furious after Manet left. What is interesting about this incident is what is not said. We learn that Morisot apparently never confronted Manet directly during the painting session. It is similarly obvious that Manet, perhaps self-involved in his painting frenzy, did not anticipate what Morisot's reaction might be as an artist. Would he have done this to the completed work of a fellow male artist? He was either unaware of Morisot's fragile self-awareness as an emerging artist or he crassly preferred to dominate her attempts. In either situation this does not appear to be an appropriate role for either teacher or mentor. The great Manet had corrected her vision, not by advice but by his brush and she had been powerless to stop him. Biographer Anne Higonnet ascribes Morisot's reaction to a lack of confidence in her own work (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot* 64). Also disturbing is Morisot's mother's reaction to her daughter's reported hysteria. It did not occur to Cornelie that Berthe's reaction might have been her daughter's anger or her howling at the pain which would result from having her own work corrected and restructured. This insensitivity would signal the beginning deterioration of their relationship as misunderstandings continued and the support her mother once offered became more often criticism.

This incident occurs within the same time frame when Morisot would begin to model for Manet with his first portrait of her as she sat for *Le Balcon,* a large canvas exhibited in 1873 at the Salon. His inspiration for *Le Balcon* reflects his bias toward the traditional; the painting was planned as an homage to the Spanish painter Goya's work in *Majas at the Balcony* but employed a more modern, "realist" staging. Berthe is one of three figures; she is located on the left side of the balcony sitting behind a striking green fence that draws the eye toward the figures behind. The other figures, one standing, one seated, are lightly painted with bland, indistinct facial expressions. Manet deliberately distinguished Morisot, as though a spotlight is on her, by facing her away from the other figures, pushing her forward and showing her strong and direct gaze. It would be Morisot's eyes, nephew Paul Valery would explain in his essay *Tante Berthe*, "too vast, so powerfully obscure that Manet in the many portraits that he made of her tried to capture all their shadowed, magnetic force, painted them black rather than green as they were." She was depicted by Manet, who paints what he sees, as a femme fatale.

Manet's painting *Repose,* completed in the summer of 1870, reveals what may have been Manet's true feelings for Morisot (see Illustration 8). He poses her relaxing on a red sofa with her left leg drawn up beneath her forcing her torso to recline to the right. She wears a flowing almost virginal white gown, an appropriate day dress signaling the informality if not intimacy of the moment. Her face is framed by black curls and her right hand holds a signature red fan. Her right toe pokes coquettishly below the hemline of her gown. It was her face that he wanted to capture with a mixed expression of sadness and reflectiveness, what nephew Paul Valery would call her "dangerous silence." Manet imbues Berthe with beauty, not merely as a beautiful object but with radiant, glowing

beauty painted with love and tenderness. This was in fact a love poem to Berthe communicated from a distance in the way Manet knew best.

He would later submit *Repose* to the Salon of 1873 where it caused a sensation. The pose reminded critics of his paintings *Olympia* and *Baudelaire's Mistress* both pictures of courtesans displaying their bodies in allurement. The critics misunderstood Manet's intent as well as his realist approach. "A forlorn, miserable creature, and miserably dressed" from critic Theophile Silvestre "from woebegone face to tiny foot, she is wilted, wretched, and ill-humored as can be." (Daughter Julie Manet would later recall her mother complaining that the pose Manet required became physically painful as the sitting took several hours to complete.)

The public response to *Repose* would have caused Morisot distress and embarrassment within the artistic circle where she aspired to status as a professional artist. Her role as Manet's favorite model would have clouded recognition of her own artistic achievement and, perhaps solidified her status as "amateur" in the eyes of the critics. With Salon paintings grouped by last name, the painting may have shared space with her own work.

Manet would paint Morisot's portraits twelve times within a period of six years (1868-1874). We have no written record of the ongoing relationship and feelings of the couple through letters or private journals. The series of pictures becomes an alternate form of communication. Clearly the artist and model wanted to be in each other's company in a private setting. Morisot limited her own painting to spend time as Manet's model. As the artist and model faced each other directly, he painted what he saw and she expressed what she felt.

The portrait done in 1869, *Berthe Morisot with a Muff* has Berthe facing in three quarters profile. Swaddled in fur, she appears uncomfortable, even nervous. Perhaps it was the continued intimacy of their private meetings that unnerved Berthe. Because their families were close friends (and Manet was married), Berthe would at times pose unchaperoned. In 1872 Manet paints Berthe with a fan covering most of her face, perhaps suggesting that their intimacy and her direct stare must be covered. Also completed in 1872, Morisot posed for *Berthe Morisot in Profile.* This representation shows Morisot more relaxed with an almost piquant or provocative reaction to Manet, as though taunting him. The most famous of these portraits was also painted in 1872, *Berthe Morisot with Violets*. The violets symbolized love and were pinned to the top of her jacket. Did Morisot bring Manet the violets or did he choose to include them as a prop in the portrait? This Morisot seems radiant, confident and happy. *Berthe Morisot Reclining* (1873) shows the artist to be relaxed and inviting and *Berthe Morisot with a Veil* (1874*)* shows her face covered in black lace. While coquettish and not unlike *Berthe Morisot with a Fan*, the message is unmistakable: the feelings between them must be denied. Manet would paint one final portrait in 1874 showing Morisot pale and emaciated with a look of horror and sadness. This painting completed after the death of her father in 1874 would be Manet's final portrait. She no longer modeled for him after her marriage to his brother and her exhibition against his advice with her fellow Impressionists. Viewed in chronological order, there appears to be a varying unpredictable tension between the artists with Morisot at times playful and other times unavailable and or deeply troubled. Some art historians suggest that Manet was merely using Morisot as a model to develop his back and white portfolio as his portraits of her were often devoid of color. Others see

that Manet was attempting to capture something in Morisot's face never available to him with his professional models. In each portrait her face radiated with true emotion in response to his presence. Both these theories have some truth, but both would also indicate Manet as self-serving and used Morisot to accomplish his own ends while enjoying the time he spent with her. Manet would retain five of the twelve portraits and shared two with Morisot. Following his death in 1883, Morisot would purchase *Berthe Morisot With Violets* from his estate. It would hang in her bedroom throughout her life.

It is their artistic relationship that presents a problem for accurately placing Morisot in the revolution of mid nineteenth century French art. As the history of Impressionism began to be recorded, exclusively by men, Berthe Morisot was often described as Manet's student. This designation unfairly suggests that Morisot as artist was in some way shaped or tutored by Manet.

Morisot biographer Armand Forreau sees Manet and Morisot contributing equally to one another in their vision and artistic development. Writing in 1925, Forreau discussed Morisot's experience during the portrait sessions.

> During the sittings in the painter's studio, she had constantly examined his work. All these oil paintings, pastels, pen drawings, so varied so alive, so strange many of the startling in their revelation of unexpected aspects of life under the most every day, sometimes the most commonplace reality. A revelation to Berthe, enlarging her outlook, helping her to become conscious of her own power, to turn to advantage her own natural gifts and particularly the sense of modernism.
>
> Until now she had been too exclusively engaged in extracting a rather standardized type of beauty from nature. (32)

But Forreau also sees difference in their approaches to modernism: “In Manet, everything is weighted and considered. On the contrary, in Berthe Morisot’s case the touch is always varied according to the inspiration of the moment” (33). Forreau also contrasts Manet’s somber palette with Morisot, whose palette and color vibrated with real radiance. He concludes:

> The ascendency that Manet seems to have exercised over the art of Berthe Morisot has been considerably exaggerated. The truth is that there was an exchange of influence between them; and if Manet, by his example, put Berthe Morisot on the way to modernism which she was to follow, she on her side helped by the charm of her color to lighten and enliven the somber range of the painter of Olympia. (34)

Even the designation of protégé seems somewhat pejorative. Defined as “one who is protected or trained or whose career is furthered by a person of experience, prominence or influence” this also suggests that Manet played the greater role in the relationship. But Manet himself had already acknowledged Morisot’s considerable talent as early as 1868 when he declared her painting *Harbour L’Orient* a masterpiece. Theodore Duret writing in his 1887 history of this new art comment on Manet’s influence. He suggests her artistic education was complete. What she had to acquire from him was that new technique, that sparkling form of execution that he had personally inaugurated in realism.

“‘There remained nothing for her as far as his rules; her superior artistic gifts enabled her to appropriate them herself’” (qtd. in Durand-Ruel 62). It is interesting that Manet biographer Brombert sees some influence of Morisot on Manet’s work,

specifically his palette: “There is an interesting similarity between Morisot’s palette and that of Edouard Manet in the use of color” (180). It was during this period that Manet began to use brighter, warmer tones, including cerulean blue and cadmium yellow.

It is possible that the authors of history simply had trouble defining an accurate and socially acceptable role for Morisot within their relationship. A second explanation may be the historical necessity of her factual inclusion with the male Impressionist painters. As the only woman who initially exhibited with the group, she would have to be included in its history. By designating her status as Manet’s pupil, historians would have allowed her inclusion without giving her, a woman, the deserved acclamation later reserved for Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Auguste Renoir. In addition to the obvious paternalism that this choice conferred it would also allow twentieth century historians to dodge discussions of the embarrassing question of any physical relationship between the two painters. No letters exist to add explanation, nor is there mention of Manet in Berthe’s letters to Edma or Yves. Morisot did maintain personal journals some of which remain (untranslated) at the Marmottan-Monet Museum in Paris but it is unlikely that she would have confided her personal feelings on such a delicate topic.

She has left us some rather oblique clues to explain her relationship with Manet in statements recorded in a journal late in her life. “In love, there is sentiment and passion. I know only sentiment through myself, passion through others. I hear certain voices say: sentiment = love of the intellect; I can answer passion = love of the body” (“Berthe Morisot Quotes”). These words would suggest she understood their love was, indeed, a marriage of their minds in artistic temperament but not of their bodies with passion denied.

Art critic Sebastian Smee gives us another avenue to approach this artistic relationship. In *The Art of Rivalry* Smee discusses competitive friendships between artists as necessary to spur them to new heights. Artists, he contends, need the influence of a contemporary, one equally ambitious but possessed of sharp contrasting strengths and weaknesses. A relationship, originally close and intimate, will rupture in a betrayal and triggers greater innovation as an artist comes into his(her) own, finding his(her) voice. This almost always involves the artist breaking away from the others' expectations of who they are.

This process requires an artist open to influence, even vulnerability especially early in his or her career. Initially one way, the flow of influence begins to flow in both directions. Beginning with an urgent attraction to another person, the artistic relationship moves through a period of ambivalence and onward to independence. The vital creative process Smee calls "finding your voice" is a kind of spiritual distinction that mitigates against the yearning for union and collegiality. It is a natural part of the formation of any truly potent creative identity. The artist feels the yearning to be unique, original, inimitable and it acquires the singularity of greatness.

If we apply this paradigm to the relationship of Manet and Morisot, we begin to understand that in Smee's world they would be considered rivals. The timeline fits as Berthe emerges from a period of discouragement and depression in the late 1860s in her fledging career to spend more time in the company of Manet, as both model and social companion. The break occurs as early as 1869 when Manet introduces then younger artist Eva Gonzales into his studio as student and when his depiction of Morisot in *Repose* embarrasses her in the face of her fellow artists. These changes push Morisot toward

creative independence, a break with Manet substituting her alignment with the Impressionists.

The "rivalry" paradigm may work in explaining Manet's behavior as well. Manet recognized the genius of a young Morisot in 1868 and then proceeded to paint her portrait twelve times. The first four of these portraits were completed in 1868-69, allowing Morisot little time to pursue her own art. In effect Manet "captured" Morisot by enclosing her in a frame; these portraits have an almost eerie quality of exclusivity, containment and restraint. After *Le Balcon* all Manet's portraits were done in his studio without distracting backgrounds. Manet may have perceived Morisot's genius as a kind of threat in the face of his own vulnerability to the scorn of the Salon. She would prove to be a much more courageous rebel than he; by containing her with the frame of the portrait he could protect his own vision of creativity at the very time the art world would begin to dramatically change. The portraits would end in 1874 at the time Berthe married Edouard's brother. Again, he may have interpreted her marriage, joining his family, as ending any perceived threat or need to contain her. She would, he may have supposed, be contained by the societal restraints imposed by marriage. This would be the same year that Morisot would break with the Salon des Paris to exhibit with the Impressionists against Manet's impassioned advice.

Thinking of Manet and a mature Morisot as rivals puts their artistic relationship in perspective, with Morisot accorded her due on an equal footing with the great Manet. The hours spent in his studio, watching him paint, examining the subject matter and compositions he found interesting would have influenced her thinking. Manet's studio was open to fellow artists and no doubt Morisot would have listened to and joined in

many conversations on artistic merit. But her continued role as his favorite model would also have sent the message that she did his bidding, following his lead.

The best way to establish Morisot's independence from Manet as an artist is to compare two paintings of similar subjects painted within the same time frame. Does Morisot's work show direct influence of Manet in composition, palette or technique, as in his over painting of Morisot's *The Artist's Mother and Sister* or does Morisot convey a unique warmth and sensibility with her own palette and brushstroke.

About 1868, Manet finished a portrait of his wife Suzanne, one of only six portraits he painted during their lifetime together. The portrait would have been in Manet's studio during the whole of 1868 and Morisot would have had ample time to study it.

The painting titled *Reading* (Illustration 9) shows Suzanne Manet, the artist's wife, sitting on a sofa directly facing us. It is obvious that she was watching the painter at work, but her face is void of expression or emotion and registers the barest, general interest. She is dressed in a flowing white gown accented with a black sash and black ribbon choker. Behind her are double windows or doors heavily curtained in white. The handling of the white paint in both curtains and skirt is thick and layered, creating contrast of folds by use of impasto. The shadowed edge of Suzanne's body against the sofa is outlined by a black line, fading away to gray. Curiously, Suzanne is not reading herself but is impassively listening. Behind her is a shadowy figure, probably her son Leon, reading a book. We can assume he is reading to her, although nothing in her outer demeanor or pose suggests she is interested. It is difficult to assess the source of the light in the picture which arrears harsh, and overly bright. The window is closed and heavily

curtained with illumination glowing from the outside. Suzanne's face indicates the light source must be coming from the right front of the frame but that does not translate well into the deepening shadows in the rear of the picture. Despite the shadowy background, the painting of the rear figure appears surprisingly flat.

In 1869 Morisot completed a painting with a similar motif. *Young Woman at a Window* depicts her sister Edma sitting in an easy chair before open French doors. (See Illustration 10.) The view across the street is apparent; green awnings decorate the building and residents appear at their windows. The light from the window splashes across Edma's white grown and Morisot deftly handles the differences in reflection with gentle tones of blue underlying the folds and ruffles in material rather than the impasto favored by Manet. Edma sits in a softly floral beige chair; with the gentlest of pink/grey shadow, Morisot juxtaposes cool and warm tones to create her outline. Edma seems lost in thought, contemplating a painted fan held in her hands. Here is Morisot's woman. With the world open and apparent before her, she chooses to use a quiet moment to fall deeply into thought. Perhaps the fan represents her lost artistic life as Edma was pregnant at the time. Her contemplation seems more than absent thought but rather some important consideration of the time ahead.

Morisot here paints with purpose, choosing elements and palette which enable her to draw us into the scene. There is an immediacy about the work, communicated by the sunlight falling on the dress as though any stirring would change the picture and its purpose. In a typical yet unique Morisot touch, the broad expanse of white skirt is broken by a small splash of red as Edma's foot appears. That red is balanced by a similar touch of red in the folded fan and the bold color points our gaze diagonally to her face. The

exposed foot is not intended to be coquettish but seems to suggest that Edma may arise as any moment. We understand the time of day as Edma is completely bathed in the soft glow of natural late afternoon light. It is time for Edma to change her day frock into more formal dressing for dinner. Morisot gives us a sense of a pause in life as in Edma deeply contemplates the future.

Beyond the similar pose of the two subjects, there is little direct indication of any Manet influence on Morisot's work. The difference may be explained by the feelings of each artist toward their subject; Manet was largely disinterested in his wife while Morisot passionately loved her sister. The message about each figure is, however, very distinct. One woman is a mere prop on the canvas, to be entertained by another while Morisot's woman is imbued with thought, intelligence and warmth.

When comparing this Morisot portrait of her sister to Manet's portrait of Morisot herself in *Le Balcon* we see very different interpretations of women in society. Manet also chooses to represent Berthe in a window but on the outdoor balcony. Unlike Edma's portrait, Manet positions Morisot leaning forward, showing her almost eagerly pressing into the public eye. She is restrained only by a distinctly green railing on the balcony. Both women are dressed in white muslin, both hold fans, but Berthe's fan is a mere prop while Edma's gentle handling of the fan becomes the focus of her contemplation. Manet presents us with a beautiful woman, a femme fatale, who intends to be publicly adored; Morisot's woman is private, contemplative and inner focused. She can see a world outside but, in the moment represented in this picture, she is at peace with herself and chooses the privacy of an interior domestic space. This is a theme Morisot would develop

over time, women in domestic, interior spaces aware of the world but separated or distanced from involvement.

Undoubtedly, Berthe's frequent proximately to Manet as an artist and, her blinding affection for him, would have had some influence. Traces of these effects is seen in later works as her brushstrokes became longer and flowing, not unlike Manet's brushstrokes in the overpainting of her mother's gown in *The Artist's Mother and Sister*. Her style changed dramatically again after Manet's death in 1883 perhaps indicating that the loss of his influence and his approval, somehow allowed her to develop more deeply, more freely in her own originally.

That approval she sought was never fully realized by Morisot. At the end of her life she contemplates her standing in the art world she so loved. She records in her journal "I don't think there has ever been a man who treated a woman as equal and that's all I would have asked for, for I know I am worth as much as they" (qtd. in Delafond 58).

Correcting the record of the artistic relationship between Morisot and Monet is a significant step forward in elevating her unique contributions to artistic change and modernity and her role at the birth of Impressionism. At the time of her death, she was still considered the "other" Manet, sister-in-law of the great master of realism connected more by convention than by their mutual artistic passion. Morisot continued to sign her pictures with her maiden name throughout her life. Her marriage to Eugene Manet would have permitted her to use a Manet signature. This might have increased marketability of her work but she chose to clearly differentiate her work and claim it for herself.

The time spent with Edouard Manet both in his studio and in social settings could have exacerbated Morisot's self-doubt and personal lack of confidence. We know she

was emotionally fragile at the time and constantly in need of reassurance as a painter. Yet Manet never painted a portrait of her as an artist. In fact, in 1870, at the same time he was painting Berthe in *Repose,* he took on a young student, Eva Gonzales. He was to paint Gonzales as an artist standing with palette and brushes before a canvas. The picture was prominent in Manet's studio and Morisot would have likely encountered them at work together. Again, Manet either was oblivious to Morisot's feelings or used his relationship with Gonzales as a way of insulating himself from his ardor for Morisot. Morisot reacted with the expected anger and jealousy at the introduction of another younger woman who she considered a rival for attention if not affection. There is also little indication that the well-known artist attempted to encourage her career. He never bought a Morisot painting and there is only one record of him referring a commission portrait of children to her attention. He promised to show her work to dealer Paul Durand-Ruel but never followed up on his offer. It would seem he put her on a pedestal as his muse and then removed her to replace her position with his own art. The relationship between these two stars crossed lovers would have uneven but perhaps expected results. Edouard Manet would create some of his most iconic and celebrated works. Morisot's self-doubt, in both her artistic and personal worth, would continue to exacerbate her psychological anguish. It would in return restrict her painting output. She completed few new canvases between 1868 and 1874.

In one of life's great ironies, Berthe Morisot would be buried in the Manet family plot in Passy between her husband Eugene Manet and her brother-in-law Edouard. A large bust of Edouard Manet overlooks her grave, continuing to overshadow her in death as he did in life.

Chapter 4

"POUR CAPTURER QUELQUE CHOSE DE CI QUI SE PASSE"

TO CAPTURE SOMETHING OF WHAT GOES BY

Edouard Manet was not the only contemporary artist in Berthe Morisot's social circle. Her mother's weekly soirees often included Henri Fantin La Tour, Puvis de Chavannes, Alfred Stevens and Edgar Degas. Each gentleman was of the same social class with a similar background as the Morisot family; they were well educated and financially secure. Fantin La Tour, de Chavannes and Stevens were primarily portrait painters and only Degas among them practiced the blend of realism and bright color that defined the new art. In the winter of 1873, Degas asked Madame Morisot permission to approach her daughter about an initiative to create new audiences for new art.

Understanding Berthe Morisot's rationale in agreeing to participate as the only woman in this exhibit tells us much about both her ambition as well as her courage. The answers lie in her frustration with unsuccessful attempts to exhibit at the Salon and the continued need for validation and approval. The validation had not resulted from her relationship with Edouard Manet and Morisot would look to other possibilities. Her decision to exhibit with a group of painters who created art beyond the strict requirements of the juried Salon would provide the freedom of expression she sought. It also carried the encumbrance of being measured, in an essentially "feminine" style of painting, against the work of bold and innovative male painters. Perhaps unwittingly, Morisot herself invited the potential for gender discrimination with this decision. It is clear that Edgar Degas considered her an important practitioner of the new art regardless of gender.

It is important is to understand what this “new art” represented within the tradition of French art and culture and how the origins of this form were grounded in the work of previous artists. Was it to be a considered a break from tradition? Or was it the logical extension of developments in painting as influenced in the mid nineteenth century by innovations of photography, portable paint tubes and new chemically developed colors. If it was the latter, it was less a break from tradition than it was a fresh new approach to visual representation that incorporated some of the finest traditions of French art. Morisot’s training, particularly working with Camille Corot, would have encouraged her that this exhibition was the right path to take. Morisot would explain her career choice: “My ambition is limited to the desire capture something transient, and yet, this ambition is excessive.” (“Berthe Morisot Quotes”).

By January of 1872, Paris began its recovery from the devastation from the Franco Prussian War and the Siege of Paris. Rebuilding stimulated the economy and new buildings and businesses emerged from the rubble. As a testament to the indomitable spirit of courageous Parisians and to mark the dawn of a new Republic, a public subscription raised funds to build a gleaming, white domed cathedral, Sacre Coeur, atop the hills of Montmartre.

Contemporary novelist and Manet friend Emile Zola anticipated the changes to come:

> “The hour is well chosen to state some truths. After each social disaster there appears a certain stupor, a desire to return to an untarnished reality. The false basis on which one has lived has crumbled and one looks for firmer ground to build upon more solidly. All great literary and artistic blossoming have taken

place in periods of complete maturity or after violent upheavals." (qtd. in Rewald 265)

This was a time of change in Paris with new concepts and a renewed vibrancy of life among the population. Many intellectuals who fled France during the war years, including France's leading artists, returned. Evening suppers and soirees attended by the haute bourgeoise, including the Morisots, were re kindled with many fresh new ideas emerging on the Continent. A new generation born thirty years earlier would begin to create original directions in art, music, politics, poetry and the novel. Working in Paris in the 1870s were musicians and composers Emmanuel Chabrier and Julius Massenet, writers Emile Zola, Stephane Mallarme and Alphonse Daudet, artists Odilion Redon, Claude Monet, August Renoir, and Alfred Sisley among others, as well as a budding political leader, Georges Clemenceau. Perhaps not since the Italian Renaissance had so much creativity and talent been concentrated in one locale, Paris.

Although the ravages of the Franco-Prussian war were behind them, a new battle was surfacing in the Parisian art world. Fueling this fight was an infusion of money from the postwar economy and a newly emerging class of wealthy industrialists. Many new and expanded art galleries were built to capture these audiences for the sale of paintings. Traditions in French paintings as taught by the Ecole des Beaux Arts were increasingly under pressure. Large, dark canvases featuring religious and historical scenes contrasted sharply with the work filled with light and color from the Barbizon School of naturalists and the Group des Batignolles lead by realist Edouard Manet, who abandoned the traditional themes favored by the Salon preferring to capture everyday life in the here and now. These pictures were visually accessible to a growing middle class who may have

lacked the education to appreciate the heroic scenes favored by the Salon. Most notably their work often showed visible brushstrokes and rough canvases opposed to the smoothly painted surfaces of pictures considered acceptable to the Salon jury.

The traditional Paris Salon had resumed its post war exhibitions with no change in its standards or the process through which an artist found his works hung on the long walls of the Palais d'Industrie. Rue Lafitte in central Paris, however, became known as "the alternate Salon" as it consisted of art galleries with opportunities for rejected artists; but the path to glory for artists continued to lead through the studios of the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Wealthy industrialists became the commercial aristocracy, the middle class expanded into suburbs on the western border of the city and new opportunities for the sale of art developed. Dealers, especially Paul Durand-Ruel, began to buy directly from some artists as opposed to showing works on consignment, and stockpiled work well before customers appeared, at times paying for work in installments. Durand-Ruel took interest in the new artists, particularly Claude Monet, who he met in London. He would provide cash advances to favored artists against future work, allowing them to maintain their studios and buy art supplies. He also favored the realism of Manet and purchased multiple Manet canvases.

Some painters considered this the golden age of the middleman. Dealers would hold solo exhibitions at galleries to increase interest and prices and attempt to establish an artist's name and reputation. In a single transaction, Durand-Ruel purchased 39 Edouard Manet canvases for a total of 50,000 gold francs, an amount equal to 50 years rent for the small house in Argenteuil where a penniless Claude Monet lived with his family. Prices for some artists work began to rise. Monet sold a few canvases for up to 1500 francs and

Camille Pissarro's work brought as much as 500 francs, signaling that a market for new art might be found if the right audiences could be reached. But many other artists, contemporaries of Monet and Pissarro, failed to sell at all. For these artists it was only at the Paris Salon, with its 40,000 visitors each year, that their work could be seen. With submissions limited to only two or three works annually, the Salon proved ineffective as a marketplace for new art.

In order to even be considered for selection, artists would have to conform in their work to rigid academic standards with little room for originality in subject matter, style or finish. The Salon resumed serving an important role as the arbiter of accepted French culture. Following the upheaval of the war years, a return to normalcy would be desired by the public and the Salon maintained its traditional position in defining what was acceptable. With the power to exclude any artist, the juried Salon show set standards for acceptable artistic achievement. Any a radically new art in either subject matter or technique would not be well received or accepted. Even when selected, works would be hung among the 2000 or more entries according to the artists' last name. Artists would run the risk of unfavorable placement where the height of the room and inadequate light would make their work difficult to see. Pictures hung well above eye level were said to be "skyed." Restrictions on the number of works submitted were especially limiting on new artists who challenged standards in both composition and technique. Since artists had no say in how their paintings would be displayed it was only on the first day of the exhibit that their fate would be revealed. Despite these problems all working artists continued to submit their paintings to judgment because the Salon was the single largest

art market in Paris. Morisot continued to submit her work to the Salon's judgment through 1873 but without success of sale or public acclamation.

By 1874, the bubble of the post war economic boom began to fade and the French economy faltered. A prolonged seven-year recession set in and dampened economic growth particularly for the middle class. Most important to the new artists in Paris was the threatened bankruptcy of dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. Financially overextended, he was unable to sell paintings in sufficient quantities to justify his inventories. He managed to keep his business afloat only through his continued sale of traditional old masters to wealthy patrons and Corot landscapes to American buyers. With no advances, many artists were left without the means to purchase canvas and paints. Paul Cezanne was forced to barter paintings for groceries. After years of war and civil discord the intellectual atmosphere in Paris may not have supported innovation and change as much as Durand-Ruel supposed and the new artists had hoped.

Mary Tompkins Lewis defines the young Impressionists as painters: "Their approach encompassed a sense of naturalism based not only on close observation of nature but also each painter's subjective vision (or temperament), often expressed in highly individual techniques. Impressionist painting celebrated a sense freedom that underpins many of the subjects and spectacles it offers" (1).

Claude Monet would be the first among his peers to broach the possibility of an independent exhibit to run in tandem with the spring Salon in 1874 when Paris was filled with thousands of French and foreign art lovers. Such a parallel exhibition might not only create sales, but also confront the open hostility these new artists and their works encountered from previous Salon juries. The confidence of these painters of a new artistic

movement was moving full force toward a collision with revered standards and the powerful Ecole des Beaux Arts. Years later Camille Pissarro would remember: "'Although I was full of ardor (for plein air) I did not have the slightest idea, even of the profound aspect of the movement which we pursued instinctively. It was in the air'" (qtd. in Rey 212).

The concept of an independent exhibition, not a new idea, was controversial and opposed by many established artists. Edouard Manet, a recognized leader of new artistic directions in French society refused to consider showing any of his work in this new format despite the constant urging of his friend Edgar Degas. Manet believed the only way to change the rigidity of the Salon was from within and cautioned Monet and Morisot that a separate, independent show would make them and their work outcasts in the French capital. Manet had experienced some success in the recent Salon show and sales of his work had begun to increase significantly in price. His personal motivation for success seems to have outweighed his support for fellow artists.

Manet was less a rebel than a traditionalist and had no desire to break with the past but rather to move forward with his own individual stamp on artistic excellence. Several of the new artists had not participated in the 1873 Salon for fear of continued rejection. Manet considered this cowardly and now had no empathy with their tactics. He was not opposed to the work of these painters. He had painted together with Monet in Argenteuil, and as early as 1858, had espoused ideas of the need for spontaneity in painting. His childhood friend Anton Proust would recall their conversation. "'To have spontaneity,'" Proust remembers Manet's position, "'one has to be a master of one's art.

You have to translate what you feel, but translate on the spot, so to speak'" (qtd. in Brombert 272).

Parisian art critic Theodore Duret also opposed the idea of the independent exhibition but for very different reasons. Writing to Camille Pissarro in February 1874, he advised:

> "You have still one step to take, that is to succeed in becoming known to the public and accepted by all the dealers and art lovers. You possess now a group of art lovers and collectors who are devoted to you and support you. Your name is known to artists and critics, a special public. But you must make one more stride and become widely known. You won't get there by exhibitions put on by special groups." (qtd. in Rewald 310)

Duret was suggesting that Pissarro continue to exhibit at the Salon, carefully selecting pictures that had the acceptable subject, composition and were not too freshly painted. In other words, submit what the Salon will accept while incorporating his own vision. Defy the standards and attract criticism, he encouraged, coming face to face with the big public and developing name recognition as an innovative painter. This approach was similar to Manet's approach to the Salon and Duret believed it would elevate Pissarro's name and technique within a much larger audience. Duret's advice seems to replicate the advice given to Berthe Morisot by Rosalie Riesner and her mother years earlier about the sale and marketing of her work. Paint one style for the Academy, they encouraged, another style to sell and yet a third, truer representation of one's vision for fellow artists.

Unlike Manet, Degas and Morisot, Pissarro and his peers had no inherited wealth and depended on the sale of their works to support themselves and their families. It was the looming economic recession in France and the approaching bankruptcy of their patron Durand-Ruel that would have threatened to cut off Durand-Ruel's support. This may have encouraged the new artists to strike out on their own. Only an independent exhibit, separate from the Salon would allow them to show their numerous canvases with varied subjects, technique and color. They gambled that such a show would not be viewed as a collection of paintings by artists rejected by the Salon so much as a fresh, new alternative approach to painting. In fact, these new artists continued to submit some of their work to the Salon jury each year as represented by Durand-Ruel. By the final Impressionist exhibition in 1886, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro no longer participated but returned to the Salon. Berthe Morisot would be the only exception from the original group of painters.

The decision to show independently carried consequences that the "new" artists may not have fully understood. They rejected the Salon standards widely shared in their own culture and fundamentally rejected the power of the Salon to set standards. In doing so, they cut themselves off from the usual avenues of success, including prizes, commercial dealers, collectors and sponsors. New criteria would need to be developed to cultivate credibility and establish new norms. Without these new standards audiences other than artists themselves would be confused by expressions foreign to them. This situation might be compared to the advent of jazz in the 1920s with its discordant patterns of notes and rhythm. Jazz would utilize the same notes and scales as traditional music but arranged so differently and expressing such upbeat enthusiasm and emotion that its audiences were jarred by the cacophonous sound. So too might the new art of Claude

Monet and others be viewed as incongruous to the viewing public. It is doubtful that these "new" artists were fully aware of the complications inherent in the decisions. Perhaps they felt safe as they continued to submit work to the Salon, combining expressions measured by accepted standards in one venue, while new works could be exhibited in a separate venue and galleries, thereby straddling the line between tradition and nouveau.

It was Edgar Degas who initially agreed with Monet that an independent, non-juried show could be a success and he threw his reputation and, more importantly, his financial support behind the initiative. Degas enjoyed a wealthy family background but was saddled by failed business debts. He was an unlikely advocate of these new painters. He hated painting out of doors and considered himself a realist. "'The study of nature,'" he would write, "'is of no significance, for painting is a conventional art, and it is infinitely more valuable to learn to draw'" (qtd. in Rewald 313). Degas created paintings deeply reflective of real lives with a changed perspective by effectively employing empty space in his compositions. His work often juxtaposed dark interiors with bright spots of color emerging in the foreground, experimenting with perspective and bringing the viewer closer to interaction with the subject matter. Degas spared no invective in criticizing the recalcitrance of his friend Manet. "'The Realist movement no longer needs to fight with others. It *is,* it *exists, it has to show itself separately*. There has to be a Realist Salon. Manet doesn't understand that. I definitely believe him to be more vain than intelligent'" (qtd. in Rewald 313).

Degas' battle cry for a Realist Salon reflects one tenet of this new school of art. The Realists, with Manet as a leading practitioner, focused on compositions reflecting

real life. They rejected the historical and religious themes so favored by the Salon and the classical style of smooth brushwork and flat even surfaces. Like Degas, Manet was principally a studio painter who used a full range of color on his palette with dark backgrounds to create perspective and emphasize the visual impact of his subjects.

Other new artists reflected the combination of these contributions with the aesthetics of the Barbizon school of naturalists who favored painting out of doors, using softer palettes of color and a reliance on tone to create value within a painting. Claude Monet and August Renoir had both worked with Camille Corot in Fontainebleau woods, perfecting their ability to infuse and envelope their paintings with natural light. These new artists represented in their works the logical extension of realism combined with a new naturalism. Their frequent gatherings at the Café Guerbois as one of many Parisian meeting places began as early as 1866 and brought Camille Pissarro, Theodore Duret, and Emile Zola together in frequent discussion. Edouard Manet, whose studio was nearby, attended and invited August Renoir who in turn invited Alfred Sisley. Color, brushwork, technique and composition all differed radically from the teachings of the Ecole des Beaux Arts but it is easy to understand from the perspectives of a later century that their work was still grounded in fundamentals of drawing, line and color but without the restrictions imposed by the accepted work of earlier Salon artists.

This was not a coherent group nor did they consider themselves a movement. Each artist exhibited an individual style and interpretive quality. Their collaboration to exhibit independently in itself would have seemed revolutionary. Many were friends who frequently visited one another’s small studios to critique and exchange ideas and advice, but they were also competitors for sales. Varying levels of personal finance and artistic

education created disparities that would have affected their output as well as their contacts within the artistic community of Paris which was still dominated by the old guard artists like Classicist Enrique Messonier (1815-1891). His much-admired paintings of 17th and 18th century life and historical scenes with deep, rich color and little if any effect of natural light still commanded extraordinary prices in the thousands of francs. This is the work Emile Zola described as being at best "'anecdotal, uninspired, colorless and painstaking, but highly successful'" (qtd. in Rewald 171).

How this new group organized underscored their commitment to individuality. In December 1873 the *Societe Anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs* was formed as a business corporation. All members paid equal dues, were free to submit for exhibition as many paintings as they chose and importantly worked together to assure that the hanging and placement of pictures was fair. Paintings were first classified by size and then lots were drawn to determine placement. Many members including Berthe Morisot took on the additional tasks necessary to prepare for the exhibit including writing the catalogue, assuring invitations to art critics and arranging for the ticketing. Notably absent from the group were lifelong Morisot friends Puvis de Chavannes, James Tissot and Henri Fantin LaTour, each of whom was making a very successful living in portrait art and taking commissions abroad in London. Other artists were thought not to be well qualified and without a strong body of work. In the end, twenty-nine artists were included in membership and the membership decisions reflected the economic reality of maximizing the total income from dues more than adherence to any artistic standard. Each artist agreed to donate 10% of any sales price back to the corporation. Most of the corporation's members had previously shown at the Salon as it was an intentional

decision of the founding members to avoid the label, indeed any inference, that they were merely a group of "rejected" artists.

The group had no name and no commonly ascribed artistic tenets. The teachings of Camille Corot come closest to expressing what each new artist would feel about their underlying motivation. "'Above all,'" Corot espoused, "'one must study values; that is the basis of everything; choose only subjects which harmonize with one's impressions'" (qtd. in Rewald 101). The impression Corot refers to is the physical, ocular sensation of seeing colors juxtaposed in the natural landscape. Since each artist sees differently, and the eclipse of time would alter color in natural light, each impression would be individual and unique.

Degas would invite Mlle. Berthe Morisot to participate perhaps thinking her acceptance would lend the exhibit a certain haute bourgeoisie cachet. Writing to her mother, Degas explained, "Mlle. Berthe's name and talent are too important for us to do without" (qtd. in Roe 119). Degas and Morisot were of the same social class; Degas had long admired Morisot's work and must have sensed that she was eager to exhibit more fully. He would also have known that she had the financial means to fully participate in the costs of the exhibit. Her study with Corot and Guichard would have also recommended her as a qualified artist and the links to Corot and naturalism would be apparent.

The first group show was scheduled to open April 15, two weeks before the 1874 Salon du Paris, to take advantage of the crowds of art lovers who would descend on Paris for the annual exhibition. Two large galleries with full windows and natural light were donated by the photographer Nadar (Gaspar-Felix Tournachon) who had recently vacated

35 Boulevard des Capucine in the middle of Paris' busiest commercial district. The show was to open from 10 – 6 and evenings from 8-10, the evening hours being another revolutionary change.

One hundred sixty-five works were exhibited including paintings borrowed from private owners and art dealers. But the public failed to flock to the show as was anticipated. On the first day there were 175 admissions and by the close of the show, one month later, daily attendance was recorded at only 54 spectators. The total attendance was estimated to be 3,500 visitors, less than 1% of the audience for the Salon. With a one-franc entry fee, admissions failed to cover the basic costs of the exhibit. The income from sales (at 10%) were only 360 francs, leaving a large deficit to be covered by the founding members, including Morisot.

Even more disappointing to the artists must have been the scathing public reaction. The public conscience was indignant. The show was described as "awful, stupid, dirty" and "the paintings showed no common sense." One critic commented on Pissarro's landscape *Ploughed Field* as "'Palette scrapings placed uniformly on a dirty canvas'" (qtd. in Rewald 319). Claude Monet's seascape of a sunrise elicited the comment from one viewer. "'Wallpaper, in its embryonic state is more finished'" (qtd. in Rewald 319). Another critic sarcastically commented: "'Soil three quarters of a canvas with black and white, rub the rest yellow, distribute haphazardly some red and blue spots and you'll obtain an impression of spring'" (qtd in Rewald 323). Open, unbridled laughter rang out across the gallery as it became apparent that many of the visitors came for entertainment. An oft repeated joke made the rounds. The artists, it was supposed, had

loaded a gun with tubes of paint and shot them at the canvas, finishing it off with a signature.

Not all critics were so fierce though. "'Here is talent, even much talent. These youths have a way of understanding nature that is neither boring nor banal. It is lively, sharp, light; it is delightful'" (qtd. in Rewald 330). Criticism of so called "impressionist techniques" called into question how artists transcribes their sensations directly onto canvass without thought or planning. The captured form would be fleeting or ephemeral rather than solid and permanent. The term "anti-intellectual" sensationalism was applied to works that were judged to be formless and lacked clearly articulated structure.

As late as 1883, art critic Jules LaForgue would write in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* that the time taken to record an impression was 15 minutes. The work must be rushed, unfinished with subjects that are short lived. The painter, he concluded, had to be in flux, moving rapidly to transcribe accurately the motifs fleeting character. The artist would be working with so much spontaneity, his or her intrinsic nature was thought to be revealed because so much of the activity was not subject to second thought or control.

This was the environment that Joseph Guichard, Berthe's teacher, encountered on reviewing the show of this "new school" at the request of Madame Morisot. Berthe had sent nine works including four oil paintings, three watercolors and two pastels. Guichard's reaction, communicated in a letter to her mother, was extreme.

> "When I entered dear Madam, and saw your daughters works in this pernicious milieu, my heart sank. I said to myself, 'One does not associate with madmen except at some peril….to negate all the efforts, all the aspirations, all the past

dreams that have filled one's life, is madness. Worse it is almost a sacrilege." (qtd. in Shennan 152)

Guichard was referring to the oil painting, *The Cradle* (Illustration 11). The picture focuses on her sister Edma sitting by the cradle of her newborn, sleeping child. The choice would have been a safe entry by Morisot because it had previously been reviewed favorably by the Salon and represented Morisot's acknowledged mastery of transient light. The composition is formed by two intersecting triangles. One frames the mother, the other outlines the delicate drape of lace and muslin over the sleeping baby. Cool blues and grays form the background for the mother's figure while the cradle and its lace veil are created with warm golden tones. Morisot creates a direct line between mother and child by placing the mother's hand and arm at an angle pointing directly to the child's indistinct, sleeping face.

Morisot draws our attention most prominently to the mother's face. Her expression is wistful even questioning as though she can't believe that she has created this creature. Since we know the model was Berthe's sister Edma perhaps that wistful gaze can be explained that this act of creation, the birth of her child, was what Edma had traded for her painting creativity. Or it may be a quiet expression of fear as the mother is uncertain of her own ability to care for the child. Unlike traditional mother and child compositions, Morisot's treatment shows the mother as a distinct person without any of the usual, expected sentimentality. The work captures Morisot's power in subtly infusing the scene with emotion while avoiding overly romanticizing the relationship. *The Cradle* failed to sell and would remain with the family until 1930.

Despite the intimacy and delicacy of the portrait, Morisot also was criticized. "'The young lady is not interested in reproducing trifling details,'" commented the artist Albert Vincent. "'When she has a hand to paint, she makes exactly as many brushstrokes lengthwise as are fingers and the business is done'" (qtd. in Rewald 322).

With her acknowledged ability to create such a masterpiece, what factors caused Morisot to cast her lot with these practitioners of new art? She has left no discussion of her decision in her letters to Edma or in the personal journals we are aware of to date. Our only recourse is to return to those known elements of her training and personal life that might explain such bold behavior.

She would have undoubtedly been flattered by the invitation from Edgar Degas. The trait to paint to please others, learned in early childhood, continued to influence her decision making. She may also have known of Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro who she could have met at the home or studio of Edouard Manet. Exhibiting with these artists might have assured her finally elevating her status beyond the rank of amateur, as women were designated in the Salon showings.

The exhibit would provide Morisot with a much-needed group of compatriots, like minds in artistic expression. What freedom she must have felt in the invitation to exhibit multiple works, showing her aptitude in oil, pastel and watercolor. Edouard Manet argued against the exhibit as a whole and argued strenuously with Morisot about her participation. Perhaps this break with Manet, after posing as his model over six years, was a statement of the freedom she needed to move on in her artistic expression and open her artistic development with new ideas and technique. Certainly, like the other painters, she wanted to reach new audiences and show a wider range of work. The possibility of

sales might have satisfied her need to prove to her mother that painting was a viable pursuit for a woman. With the death of her father, an identifiable source of income would be necessary and economic considerations alone could have influenced her decisions.

But the overriding consideration may well have been that the body of work by these painters was in tune with her own personal vision as an artist. The elements that lay at the heart of Berthe's many Salon criticisms, including short rapid brushstrokes, broken color, a lighter palette and often "unfinished" work and bare canvas, were celebrated by these fellow artists. Within the halls of this exhibit, with the collegiality of fellow painters, Berthe Morisot had found an artistic home where she was considered a painter first, despite her gender.

Ironically, art historian John Rewald would observe in *The History of Impressionism* that the construct of a group of painters in opposition to academic conventions may have marginalized the unique artistic contribution made by Morisot. She would now be categorized as just one of the many Impressionist artists. Impressionism is often offered as the answer to Morisot's obvious femininity and the problem posed by a skilled and prolific professional woman painter; the overriding view of Impressionism was the review of surface appearances only. Work that was described as "charming, delicate and feminine" was not expected to be concerned with deep and intimate relationships and would not penetrate below the (obvious) surface. This categorization may also explain why Morisot's later work, exploring the identity of women, was also largely ignored. The choice of catching a fleeting moment in time carried with it the burden that there could be nothing of deep and lasting value and the works might not rise to the standard of universality that characterized traditional art.

We have no record of Berthe's reaction to the exhibit or its criticisms. Surely, she would have shared her experiences with Edma or her oldest sister Yves or recorded her thoughts in her personal journals. While preparing this dissertation I was unable to locate any correspondence between her mother and her sisters which references the exhibit. It seems odd that such a monumental break from the Salon and Manet would not have been memorialized. In a letter written in 1876 regarding the second exhibition where Morisot would show nineteen works, she reacts to criticism in the Parisian newspaper *Figaro*: "'Well at least we are getting attention, and we have enough self-esteem not to care'" (qtd. in Roe 155). The letter is important because we hear Morisot describing herself as part of a group and making a strong statement about her sense of value of her work.

In December 1874 she would marry Edouard's younger brother Eugene. Writing to her brother Tiburce in 1875 she would exclaim: "'I have found an honest and excellent man who, I believe sincerely loves me. I have entered into the positive life after having lived so long in the chimeras (fantasies or daydreams)'" (qtd. in Rouart 96). With her mother moving into a smaller apartment following her father's death and no independent means of support, Berthe finally accepted the decision that would transform her life to one of ease and stability while assuring independence and freedom of spirit. Eugene Manet would give up his own painting career to devote himself to assisting Berthe with hers. As Madame Eugene Manet she would continue in the orbit of Edouard Manet, but perhaps on more equal footing. Morisot has now re-created the stable pillars of her artistic career begun years ago with her lessons with Joseph Guichard. She had the firm support of her husband, artistic direction and encouragement with a comradery of fellow artists, particularly Monet and Renoir, with whom she would continue to identify, exhibit

and at times paint “en plein air” as well as a direct connection with nature as she continued to live in Passy.

She would continue to show in these Impressionist exhibits through the end in 1886, missing only one year with the birth of her daughter. Several of the founding members including Monet and Degas would drop out, rarely exhibiting unless in solo shows arranged by Paul Durand-Ruel. Another woman, American Mary Cassatt, would enter her work in the third show. But despite Morisot’s successes and favorable press, her paintings failed to sell. Not in need of money as her husband had a comfortable inheritance she would continue to develop on her own terms, changing her brushstroke and exploring new themes. She refused an invitation to join an independent group of female artists in 1886 who lobbied for the inclusion of women in the Académie des Beaux Arts; she never again submitted work to the Salon de Paris.

Her one failing as an artist was to make the connection, important to all artists of her generation, to the support of a single dealer to represent her work. As the economics of the art world began to shift after 1886 and expand to the United States, the lack of a committed dealer and gallery owner would guarantee she would eventually be forgotten among all but her family and these few fellow artists.

Chapter 5

MARKETING IMPRESSIONISM: THE DEALER OWNER MODEL

> "We would have died of hunger without Durand-Ruel, all we Impressionists." -Claude Monet
>
> "'Without him, we would never have survived.'" -Auguste Renoir (qtd. in Assouline 104)

How the market for Impressionist art would shift between 1886 and 1910 is key to understanding why the paintings of Berthe Morisot disappeared from public view. Art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922) would create a new economic model for the sale of this artwork dependent on the ability of the dealer to both monopolize and promote the work of select artists. After the turn of the century, American money would begin to flood galleries and auction houses both in Paris and New York. Art would begin to be acquired not only for its beauty or rarity but also for its intrinsic value as a commodity. The American mentality in purchasing art objects, distinctly different and innovative from the European tradition, would radically change how art would be viewed forever.

Berthe Morisot would not benefit from either of these changes because she had produced little volume during her lifetime relative to the work of her associates; her death in 1895 would predate the explosion in sales for her fellow Impressionists in the American market, each of whom lived well after the turn of the century (Appendix A). None of the Impressionist exhibitions in Paris resulted in active sales or followings for the artists' work. This "new art" was neither understood nor valued by the French and the few, American collectors shopping in Europe preferred scarce, old master paintings, regardless of price, and favored the traditional style of dark, historical works. Wealthy American buyers, like Isabella Stewart Gardner from Boston and J.P. Morgan from New

York sought the advice of specialist art historians like Bernard Berenson or Joseph Duveen and purchased based on their recommendations as arbiters of both quality and price. The Impressionists would need to rely on exhibiting in the Parisian galleries lining the Rue Laffitte or auctions to sell their work. Prior to 1886, a date which coincides with the last Impressionist exhibition in Paris, very few Americans were interested in this "new art" and engaged with Paul Durand-Ruel principally in the purchase of more classic work like the canvases of Spanish painters Francisco Goya (1746-1828) or Diego Velasquez (1599-1660).

Following the disappointing sales of the first Impressionist show in 1874, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot and Auguste Renoir decided to sell their work at auction, through the Hotel Drouot, the largest auction house in France. Sales at auction would give the artists a good indication of what a work might be worth in the open art market. Monet, Renoir and Alfred Sisley all joined Morisot in this 1875 venture; they were motivated by their financial need. But the auction market for Impressionist works continued to be disappointing, with bids disastrously low. Morisot sold twelve works in total claiming the first and second highest bids of 480 francs and 340 francs respectively for a small oil painting, *Interior*, and a watercolor *On the Grass.* All twelve works, however, were purchased by family and friends (Higonnet, *Berthe Morisot's Images* 124). Her fellow artists did not fare so well with lower prices for their work. In addition to the three works purchased in 1872 by Paul Durand-Ruel, these are the only works for which we there records of direct purchases from Morisot. Hotel Durot auction records indicate that only large lots by individual artists came to market after 1879, suggesting that the Impressionists would have abandoned this venue for the sale of their paintings. By 1879,

however, the Impressionist artists Monet, Sisley and Manet would have found another venue for the sale of their work through the financially re-invigorated dealer and gallery owner, Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922).

Paul Durand-Ruel was unique among gallery owners and art representatives. He was not an art historian but a shrewd and ambitious gallery operator, not afraid to take risks by anticipating trends in the art world. This dealer's interest was in artists of independent mind and talent, as well as those whose work displayed tendencies that suggested a group affinity (Shennan 135). Artist Eugene Delacroix regarded dealers "'as the financiers of mystery'" (qtd. in Assouline 28). An entrepreneur, Durand-Ruel, was equipped with a love of gain, an enterprising spirit, a sharp mathematical mind, a certain delight in risk, tempered by daring (Assouline 32).

The increased middle class with new wealth both in France and the United States resulted in greater interest and demand for art works. These pieces would be purchased directly from dealer inventory. Collectors began to think in terms of schools of art (Impressionism) rather than individual artists. A robust distribution system would replace the function of the Paris Salon and artists would have greater access to new audiences. Durand-Ruel responded to these economic changes by developing what became known as the dealer owner system. He recognized the key elements of distribution of any product, including art: visibility, knowledge of the market and homogeneity of product (Stout 20). The dealer critic system was composed of three parts: dealers who would purchase and resell the works of individual artists, critical reviews by individual dealers that promoted shows and artists and art shows that would promote individual client artists' works. It was this dealer critic system that would replace the Paris Salon as the

marketing agent for new art (Stout 22). The impoverished Parisian artists, principally Monet and Renoir, would embrace this new marketing, although both would continue to exhibit at the Salon.

Durand-Ruel came to his career choice quite naturally. He was born into a family of art if not artists. His father, Jean Marie Fortune Ruel, founded a fine paper and stationary business in Paris that he quickly expanded to include artists materials including canvases, easels, oil paints and fine brushes. Durand-Ruel described his parents as "not people whose primary interest was money" (qtd. in Assouline 34) and his father would trade artist supplies for finished works that he would then sell in his shop (Assouline 40). This was a practice that would later be reflected in Durand-Ruel's dealing with the Impressionists often advancing payments to his artists in return for the right to procure all their finished work.

Durand-Ruel's awakening to a passion for art came at the Parisian International Exhibition of 1855 with his first experience of the work of Eugene Delacroix. Durand-Ruel would reflect,

> "It (Delacroix' monumental painting *Liberty Leading the People*) was the triumph of living art over academic art. These paintings opened my eyes completely. They encouraged in me the idea that perhaps, I too, in my own humble sphere, might be able to help true artists by setting out to make them better loved and better understood." (qtd. in Assouline 55)

Here he experienced firsthand the transformations and contrast between the traditional revered painters of the Salon like Ernest Messonier (1815-1891), Jean Leon Gerome (1824-1904) and Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899) and the realism exhibited by Gustave Courbet (1819-

1877), Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) and Camille Corot (1796-1875). It was the work of this new generation of artists that he would begin to show in his first gallery although he continued to acquire and sell old masters and traditional paintings to support his business overall. It is predictable then that he would show interest in the work of the Realist school, as well as the naturalism of the Barbizon school, both forerunners of Impressionism and eventually the new generation of Impressionist artists themselves. Although he was not an art historian, Durand-Ruel could see the potential for a new trend if the right audience could be found.

In 1869 Durand-Ruel would explain his philosophy as a dealer: "'A genuine dealer must be at once an enlightened amateur, ready to sacrifice if necessary, his apparent immediate interests to his artistic conviction, as well as capable of fighting against speculators rather than involving himself in their schemes'" (qtd. in Hook 122). For Durand-Ruel it was all about the art and not about the dealing. His memoirs provide no clue as to what prompted his extreme interest in the Impressionists, but what is clear from his correspondence with these artists over time is that he showed an intense compassion for them and worked tirelessly to see them succeed.

Durand-Ruel waited out the Franco Prussian War (1870-71) in London where he was first introduced to Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro possibly by French portrait artist and London resident James Tissot. On his return to Paris, these two painters introduced him to Alfred Sisley, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir and Edouard Manet. He would also meet Berthe Morisot in 1872 but only as introduced and recommended by Manet and or possibly Monet.

Durand-Ruel became quickly excited by the work of these "new artists" and began to massively over purchase the work of both Manet and Monet. By 1872, two years before the first Impressionist exhibit, he had purchased 29 paintings by Monet in addition to an enormous 50,000-franc investment in the work of E. Manet. He purchased the first of what would be more than a thousand of Renoir paintings in 1872 for 200 francs. He was unique in that he would buy out an artist's entire studio at once; he bought 29 Alfred Sisley landscapes in the first year he met him. "Now's the time to by pictures," another dealer commented, "the artists are starving. They haven't a sou, not a sou" (Hook 117). Durand-Ruel would also serve as the artists' emotional support. "'Don't despair if you're feeling like you are in a rut artistically,'" he writes to Claude Monet. "'I believe in you. Continue to paint and we'll find a market'" (qtd. in Stamberg np).

There was no identified market for these artists at the time but Durand-Ruel had confidence in the ultimate worth of their artistic talent. As dealer, gallery owner and broker, he had a clear idea of what constituted art and he stuck to it through thick and thin (Assouline 16). Renoir would later describe his friend "as (a) missionary, and his religion was art" (qtd. in Assouline 28). Throughout his career Durand-Ruel would eventually purchase more than 5,000 Impressionist works including 1,500 Renoirs, 800 Pissarros, 400 Sisleys, 400 Cassatts and 200 works by Edouard Manet (Stamberg).

Other Parisian galleries would eventually show and sell Impressionist art but not before Durand-Ruel cornered the market. They would come to appreciate the Impressionist artists only after Durand-Ruel began to aggressively promote and sell their work. In many cases it would be after 1886 when Parisian galleries Bernhein-Jeune worked with Monet, Sisley, Renoir and Pissarro. Siegfried Bing offered works by

Impressionists in general including Berthe Morisot. Boussard-Valadon galleries began selling Impressionist works in 1879 when Theodore Van Gogh took over the Boulevard Montmartre location. This gallery would eventually host Berthe Morisot's only solo exhibition in May 1892. Dealer Ambrose Vollard organized Impressionist exhibitions in his galleries after 1893. But no other gallery owner purchased artists work directly.

Durand-Ruel professed no interest in promoting the painting of Berthe Morisot, although he admired it and displayed several of her works in his home, presumably those pictures he bought at the Hotel Drouart auction. His diary provides no mention of her. The answer may lie in Durand-Ruel's political and philosophical tendencies as he was conservative as both a royalist and a committed Roman Catholic. He may have been uncomfortable with the notion of a woman of Morisot's class as a professional artist as well brokering the actual sale of her paintings. Gender discrimination may have been as issue but perhaps in a gentler form of paternalism. In this case, Durand-Ruel might have felt he was protecting Morisot from the banality of commerce.

Tamar Garb, writing in *The Sisters of the Brush*, explores the theory that art viewed as the production of knowledge is intimately related to the workings of power (3). Female artists would have been seen as a challenge to male claims of professionalism at the very time a rising middle class of men moved into and beyond professional careers (Garb 14). This would suggest a larger sociological issue might have been at play in addition to the usual form of gender bias that simply denied the intellectual creativity of women. It is likely that multiple factors influenced his thinking.

Another more probable factor is that Morisot's production of paintings failed to achieve the volume necessary for his owner dealer economic model to work. This unique

economic model was comprehensive and included financial support in advance of work received, exclusivity of representation, monopolizing the work of individual artists, creating a floor for prices by bidding up works at auction and publicizing the work of an artist by holding extensive one man shows in his Rue Laffite gallery. Above all, Durand-Ruel's economic model would depend on his exclusive holdings of a large volume of works by an individual artist. He had a clear idea of what constitutes art and stuck with it through thick and thin (Assouline 116). Perhaps the great genius of Durand-Ruel was his ability to see a coming trend in art in which the new, younger artists would be embraced as replacements for their older more established colleagues.

Durand-Ruel genuinely believed in the work of these artists. In 1885 he would publicly assert his support. Writing to the editor of *L'Evenement, LaGaulois*:

> "I have been buying and I value at the highest level the works of very original and very knowledgeable painters, several of whom are men of genius, and I have presumed to exhibit them. I consider that the works of Degas, of Puvis de Chavannes, of Monet, of Renoir, of Pissarro and of Sisley are worthy of taking their place in the finest collections. Many lovers of painting already agree with me." (qtd. in Assouline 182)

But unlike the traditional middleman, or the Renaissance dealer who paid an allowance to the artist in exchange for what he produced, Durand-Ruel was a part of the artist's work process from every stage (Assouline 32). He was the first dealer to become an explainer of the new art and educator of his clientele; the second Impressionist exhibit (1876) was held in his gallery space despite previous public criticism of their work. He was a savvy businessman, visiting artist studios and contracting in advance for the

purchase of paintings he knew would be successfully reviewed at the Salon. He would make rather bold suggestions to his artists regarding the marketability of their paintings. He advised Monet to make his landscapes "finished as completely as possible. And to Pissarro, he advised "Seek out pretty subjects which are the key element to success. Leave figures aside for the moment or add them merely as props" (qtd. in Hook 120).

Durand-Ruel understood the necessity of promoting and explaining this art to the public. He began to offer one man shows, solo exhibitions which would allow the individual artist to show case all his talents in different mediums. What Durand-Ruel understood, and what other dealers perhaps missed, was the sale and promotion of the artist as opposed to the individual work. He worked to "brand" art by artist, publishing catalogues and magazines to explain what he was selling, believing that what people read in the newspapers and magazines would make them more comfortable with and appreciative of these new techniques. With stockpiles of their work, he believed that buyers would eventually come to him. Indeed, he himself became a brand in the American market with new, perhaps unsophisticated buyers who were satisfied with the knowledge that a painting had come from the Durand-Ruel galleries.

Given this economic model, we can understand why Morisot as an artist would not fit into his plans. She produced relatively few new oil paintings each year and her works often featured figures of family members in gardens or surrounded by woodlands. Her canvases were small in comparison to those of most male painters and she would occasionally leave her work unfinished, often substituting bare canvas for white paint. She refused to paint still life and her general subject matter would always lack the range and variety present in the works of the male artists, especially since her social position

often restricted her ability to visit a variety of locations. We can hear echoes of the criticism expressed by her mother years earlier to Edma Pontillon in regard to Berthe's failure to produce work of commercial value.

Another answer lies in understanding the number of Morisot canvases available for purchase in 1872 when Durand-Ruel first met her. We know that in 1868-69 Morisot spent much of her time as model for Manet, presumably neglecting her own work. In 1870 and 71 there was little work in oil completed due to the Franco-Prussian war. Other artists fled to the safety of England or the French countryside, only Morisot remained in Paris where there was constant bombardment and a scarcity of critical supplies. Even after the war ended, Berthe spent much of her time with her sisters, especially Edma Pontillon in Cherbourg, creating charming pictures of family members in gardens and landscapes. Pictures from this period are overwhelmingly bathed in shades of verdant greens and the subject matter runs counter to the advice Durand-Ruel of landscape artist Alfred Sisley.

By 1873 Morisot had abandoned her studio and painted directly in her home. Her productivity would never begin to approximate that of her fellow Impressionists. The quality of her work would not have been an issue with Durand-Ruel as we know her work was appreciated and collected by other artists including Manet and Monet. But Durand-Ruel's business model was based on quantity of work and the ability to generate high numbers of sales when assumed pent up demand would drive prices upward. The Wildenstein Catalogue Raisonne lists only 29 Morisot oil and watercolor works completed by 1874.

After purchasing so many paintings, Durand-Ruel's Impressionists sales continued to be limited to a small number of eccentric enthusiasts (Hook 123). The Impressionist exhibitions of the 1870s and 1880s resulted in few sales and those sales were at modest prices. Durand-Ruel would have a long wait to turn profits on his vast inventory of Impressionist works and the new trend he anticipated was long in coming. It was a slow and disheartening process that did not pay dividends until the late 1880s. He believed, however, the "new art" had only to overcome opposition due to the astonishment that was naturally evoked by the original forms and art techniques employed. Meanwhile he focused on the work of more traditional artists to pay the bills. In 1872, he purchased a large collection of paintings by Jean-Francoise Millet (1814-1875) for 390,000 francs and quickly resold them at a profit. He spent increasing amounts just to subsidize the Impressionists, particularly Monet and Pissarro who had households to support. Unable to support all the Impressionists, he would cut prices he paid them once he had an enough of their pictures in stock and he did this in full knowledge that the paintings would sell much better later. The cheaper they were the better for him (Assouline 259). The subject of price within his economic model would become a difficult topic for Durand-Ruel to explain to his artists. In an exchange of letters with Camille Pissarro, Durand-Ruel would clarify:

> "There are two things that art dealers have to protect their clients from. If the client is a buyer, he must at all costs be shielded from the knowledge of the dealers (actual) cost price. If the client is the seller (in this case the artist) he must as far as possible be protected from the potential painful discovery of the dealer's selling price." (qtd. in Hook 121)

While this position was self-serving, Durand-Ruel was cautioning artists from becoming directly involved in the business aspects of art. A few days later he again advises Pissarro: "'It is the only way to avoid competition, the competition that has prevented me from boosting your prices for so long'" (qtd. in Hook 122). The Impressionists were aware and grateful for the consistent financial support of Durand-Ruel as it allowed them to continue to paint regardless of sales. It must have registered as a fair bargain as they continued to sell to him. His exclusive right to their work was based on a handshake and not a contract as Durand-Ruel felt this an appropriate way to do business between gentlemen. On occasion, painters might sell directly to another dealer and here Durand-Ruel cautioned that the artist must sell at three times the price that would have been paid to him to keep a floor on prices. This would also guarantee that Durand-Ruel could manipulate the market and block other dealers some of whom would have been eager to devalue his vast inventory by narrowing his profit margin. In a letter to Auguste Renoir he explains: "'It is essential the public sales reach big figures, whether or not the prices are fabricated. This is the only way we will achieve great success'" (qtd. in Hook 123). Durand-Ruel himself would consistently manipulate the art market by putting pictures out to auction and setting high reserve prices or having a compatriot secretly bid up the price. The phenomenon Paul Durand-Ruel became was the product of collusion between of art and commerce in an increasingly entrepreneurial age. By the second half of the nineteenth century the idea of art as investment was well entrenched and it was understood that the investments that produced the best returns were in the works of newer contemporary artists. Successful art dealers were selling to the newly rich who may not have shared the prejudices of the monied class (Hook 117). Durand-Ruel

would also buy back pictures from collectors both to maintain the prices of an artist as well as to resell at a higher profit, understanding the direction of the trend. In one famous example, artist Mary Cassatt encouraged her friend and collector Louisine Havemeyer to sell two Cezanne pictures shortly after the artist's death in 1906 feeling the work would decline in value. Durand-Ruel purchased them for $7,500 each and quickly resold them to a Russian collector for a total of $60,000. Durand-Ruel represented a kind of classic balance of artistic love and salesmanship. He loved the things he sold and sold the things he loved (Assouline 236).

This commercialization of art was not without criticism and the work of these painters was still unpopular in France and, even as the Salon loosened its grip on acceptable artistic standards, London and New York became alternative sites for sales. "'We must try to revolutionize the New World at the same time as the Old,'" suggested Durand-Ruel (qtd. in Assouline 169).

By 1886 the financial position of both Durand-Ruel and his artists became disastrous. The gallery sold an insufficient number of paintings to maintain the business as well as support the artists. The bank which financed his operations failed and he was close to bankruptcy. In the same year that the final Impressionist exhibition was held, 1886, Durand-Ruel was unexpectedly invited by two American collectors, Thomas E. Kirby and James F. Sutton to participate in a show sponsored by the American Art Association of the City of New York. The invitation provided for full reimbursement of costs including insurance and shipping of paintings.

Art historian Pierre Assouline comments: "Durand-Ruel accepted with the desperate energy of a man playing his last card" (qtd. in Assouline 194). He traveled to

New York with over 300 canvases, most of them his own purchases. Included were fifty paintings by Monet, forty-two by Pissarro, thirty-eight by Renoir, seventeen by Manet, twenty-three by Degas, fifteen by Sisley, and nine by Berthe Morisot. The Morisot works were likely from his own collection or borrowed but not inventory. Mary Cassatt would write to her brother Robert in New York telling him that Durand-Ruel would come to New York with an exhibition of Impressionist paintings. "'Affairs here in Paris, he (Durand-Ruel) complains, are at a standstill and he hopes to have better luck in America'" (qtd. in Salzman 133).

This exhibit, *Works in Oil and Pastel by the Impressionists of Paris*, reportedly had moderate sales but what encouraged Durand-Ruel even more was the reception by American audiences. Durand-Ruel was already known in Americans as a dealer of the popular Barbizon School. "This reputation" historian John Rewald determines, "led the American public to a very realistic conclusion – since he so consistently supported his new friends, their works had to have some value" (531). It also became evident that the "Durand-Ruel brand" had taken effect in New York and new artists were accepted because they were recommended by Durand-Ruel. American reviewers made an honest effort to understand and Durand-Ruel writes to Fatin LaTour: "'They are less ignorant, less bound by routine than our French collectors'" (qtd. in Rewald 531). An unsigned critique in the New York periodical *The Critic* remarks "'It is distinctly felt that the painters have worked with decided intention, that if they have neglected established rules it is because they have outgrown them, and that if they have ignored lesser truths, it has been in order to dwell more strongly on larger'" (qtd. in Rewald 532). Based on this reception, Durand-Ruel was able to attract many American buyers. His sons would open

a New York gallery and offer additional major exhibitions of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art through the 1920s with increasing financial success. Ironically, 1886 was the year that the core of Impressionist painters finally disbanded, each moving on in successful careers with different interpretations of Impressionist values. Only Berthe Morisot and her dear friend Auguste Renoir would stay true to the underlying Impressionist value of capturing transient light.

Durand-Ruel's relationship with American artist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) deserves additional explanation as it was unlike his business dealings with any other painter. It would be a mistake to compare his support for Cassatt with any lack of interest in Berthe Morisot. Mary Cassatt was an independently wealthy American painter, living in Paris, who began showing with the Impressionists in their Third Exhibition of 1877. She considered herself a connoisseur with the ability to discern which works of contemporary art would survive and prove most influential (Salzman 117). As a painter she provided a direct link between Impressionism and the wealthy American market. She needed a gallery and a dealer to promote her work and Durand-Ruel needed direct access to the richest buyers in the American market. He exhibited and sold her pictures and she served as an intermediary with her friends, principally Louisine and Henry Havemeyer, the American Sugar Baron, who would amass one of the finest collections of Impressionist art in the United States. Eventually over 40% of the Havemeyer's collection would be purchased directly from Durand-Ruel, including a number of highly sought old master paintings (Salzman 132). Cassatt, however, did not care for the art dealer who she felt lacked sufficient knowledge of great art and as a businessman failed to pay adequate prices to his artists (Assouline 195). After the turn of the century, Cassatt

would comment "'It has been one of the chief pleasures of my life to help fine things across the Atlantic'" (qtd. in Salzman 112). Cassatt's support for Impressionism was decidedly patriotic, if not idiosyncratic, as she was chiefly interested in assuring that newly emerging American museums were given access to great European art. Her personal relationship with Durand-Ruel was of secondary importance, not worth mentioning. "As to the Havemeyer collection," Cassatt wrote, "I consider they are doing a great work for the country in spending so much time and money in bringing together such works of art, all the great public collections were formed by private individuals" (qtd. in Salzman 112).

Without work available to be viewed in the public domain, it is understandable that the Morisot's reputation for excellence would fade and her place in art history would fail to be recorded. But her failure to be accepted has as much to do with the date of her death as the limited size of her collection in circulation. Her contemporaries and friends, August Renoir, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Mary Cassatt would live well past the turn of the century, actively producing work as Durand-Ruel was representing them in London and New York (Appendix A). In fact, Morisot and Alfred Sisley were the only identified Impressionists who died before the end of the nineteenth century. Morisot's death in 1895 came fifteen years before the Durand-Ruel Gallery's blockbuster New York show in 1910 that firmly established Impressionism as a significant and important movement in the annals of art history.

Any explanation of her failure to sell and to be accepted needs to be dealt with in two separate time frames as the art market for Impressionist work shifted dramatically after her death. Prior to 1874, Morisot sent pictures to a few prominent galleries in Paris.

She would have been represented in dealings with gallery owners by her mother, and then her husband and we know she frequently sent pictures without prices, leaving the gallery owner to determine for themselves what the market value might be. She did not paint landscapes without figures as her landscape work still showed the strong influence of Corot. Neither did she paint still life which would have been highly saleable to the emerging class of wealthy industrialists for its both artistic value and decorative use. She disliked painting seascapes as she found the constant change of light on the movement of water distracting and the long stretches of monotone beaches boring. She also never painted nudes or male figures as this subject matter would have been unacceptable for a woman of her class.

Her oeuvre was limited and consisted of interior and garden scenes or countryside settings with the women in her family as her primary models. Her canvases tended to be small and often unvarnished, giving them an amateurish appearance. It is understandable that these works may have had limited commercial value, but we know Morisot sought validation as an artist not only through money but through the acknowledgment of her peers. How ironic that as Morisot worked to be accepted as an artist, rather than an amateur painter of "pretty pictures," she seemed to shy away from the very subject matter her fellow artists pursued. It would seem easy to argue that Morisot's work suffered from gender discrimination were it not for the extraordinary career of American painter Mary Cassatt. Cassatt's success, however, reflected a very different business relationship with Paul Durand-Ruel. Cassatt could be aggressive with Durand-Ruel in business affairs while we know that Berthe Morisot would have been retiring. Cassatt was described by those who knew her as pushy, arrogant and self-serving, all qualities Durand-Ruel would

have associated with male artists (Shennan 271). Perhaps their most important difference for Durand-Ruel was that Morisot, as haute bourgeoise, was in a different and elevated class, requiring decorum, respect and admiration on his part. Paul Durand-Ruel had a demonstrated fondness for Berthe Morisot and an appreciation of her talent. He purchased her masterpiece *Harbor at L'Orient* from the private estate of Edouard Manet after the artists death and kept it in his personal collection. He provided space and underwrote costs for her memorial exhibit in 1896. She never, however, produced the volume requisite for Durand-Ruel's economic model.

Had Morisot experienced the full life span of her compatriots, well into the twentieth century, her work would have no doubt demanded a more appropriate position. Her late work shows her interest in the psychology of the mind, nature of personality and the exploration of symbolism in multiple portraits of her daughter. At a time when other artists were continuing to paint series and endless variations on similar subjects like Renoir's endless nudes, Morisot began to push herself into new forms of art that anticipated the Post-Impressionists. It was Morisot who advocated for the inclusion of a young George Seurat, the pointillist, in the final Impressionist exhibit of 1886. Berthe continued to actively paint through the end of her life, with a burst of activity following the death of her husband Eugene in 1892. Berthe's solace to grief was to paint. Her art, her palliative, took the place of religion (Shennan 269). Late in her life, Berthe Morisot would look back on her career with disappointment "It looks as though I am coming to the end of my life without having achieved anything and only selling my work at bargain prices" (qtd. in "Berthe Morisot Quotes").

Her close friend Auguste Renoir, who would survive her by two decades, remarked at her death: "'What a curious thing is destiny! What an anomaly to see the appearance in our age of realism a painter so impregnated with grace and finesse of the eighteenth century: in a word, the last elegant and *feminine* artist that we have had since Fragonard'" (qtd. in Shennan 279). Perhaps, Morisot's destiny and her great contribution to artistic expression was to bridge these worlds of expression between the centuries, connecting with the great French artists like Jean Honore Fragonard (1732-1806) and Francois Boucher (1703-1770). She would return to the Louvre even late in her life to copy their work and celebrate their fluid style and brilliant color. This was a destiny that could only be appreciated looking backward through the lens of time without the blurring restrictions of gender, societal factors and value expressed in economic terms.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: MORISOT REMEMBERED

> "For all that Berthe Morisot has been misunderstood. Her life has rapidly taken on the mantle of myth. It is a charming myth. It is a magical myth perpetuated by the friends, relatives and descendants for the best part of a century." (Shennan xiv)

The title page of *La Justice* newspaper on March 4, 1895 carried the news: "'Today a woman who was a rare artist is to be buried. May a tribute of respect and admiration here be offered to the pain of her near and dear…of those who liked her art and knew her role in the evolution of modern painting'" (qtd. in Delafond 82).

Berthe Morisot died on March 2, 1895 just two months after her 54th birthday. It was the suddenness of her death, as well as her relative youth, which provoked an outpouring of grief from family, close friends and fellow artists. Berthe had been ill for just a few days, after having caught influenza when nursing her daughter Julie back to health from the same disease. This was a dual tragedy that left the young Julie Manet an orphan at the age of fifteen.

One year following Morisot's death, Julie, assisted by her mother's many fellow Impressionist friends, would hold a memorial retrospective in her honor. The occasion was described as reflecting the soul even more than the spirit of that first Impressionist exhibit more than twenty years before (Assouline 264). Degas, Renoir and Monet all actively participated in the selection and hanging of the works and the catalogue introduction was written by close friend and French literary giant Stephane Mallarme. Paintings, pastels, red chalk drawings and black pencil drawings, in all about 400 hundred pieces, went on public display for the first time together demonstrating Berthe Morisot's ability as a great painter in her own right (Assouline 267).

The exhibit was a revelation, even to her own family, one of whom remarked "'I would never have believed she had done so much work'" (qtd. in Assouline 267).

Following the month-long exhibit, the works were returned to the home she had shared with Julie at 10 Rue Weber. Julie would live there for much of her life. There is no record that these works were ever publicly exhibited again during Julie Manet Rouart's lifetime. Morisot left no direction for the distribution of her assets; she did provide for the care of Julie following the death of her husband, three years earlier. Stephane Mallarme would serve as her legal guardian with Auguste Renoir and her sister Edma Pontillon also taking a role in Julie's future. Morisot's work would remain unseen behind the walls of her apartment. She made legal arrangements for Julie's guardianship after the death of her husband Eugene in 1893 but the closest document we have that approaches a will was a note Morisot composed on her death bed to her daughter

> "Please give a remembrance from me to your Aunt Edma and to your cousins; and to your cousin Gabriel give *Monet's Ships Under Repair*. Tell M. Degas that if he founds a museum, he should select a Manet. A souvenir to Monet, to Renoir and one of my drawings to Bartholome." (qtd. in Shennan 277)

It would be easy to assume that Morisot did not value her work sufficiently to provide for more direction, but it is likely that the sudden onset of her illness and unanticipated shortness of her life simply did not allow for more forethought. Even as Julie lay sick, her mother took an occasional break from her room and busied herself with work on pencil sketches for an anticipated portrait. She continued to see herself as an active artist to the end.

Julie Manet chose not to sell her mother's work at auction, as had been done with her Uncle Edouard's paintings after his death in 1883. Unlike Suzanne Manet, Julie Manet had no need to raise money and the financial results of Manet's auction, which Berthe Morisot had helped to organize, were disappointing. It is likely that the overwhelming grief the young girl experienced and her longing for her absent mother would have made it impossible to part with any of the work. Later, Juliet would have had multiple venues to sell her mother's work particularly when she married a few years later to Ernest Rouart son of well-known collector and artist, Henri Rouart. The Rouart family were well connected within the Parisian art market.

But Morisot's work only slowly made its way to the public domain. Monique Angoulvent first catalogued Morisot's work in 1933; 441 of 667 works in all media belonged to her daughter Julie with the preponderance of these works oil paintings. Only in 1929 was a Morisot work bought by a public institution, the Brooklyn Museum, on its own initiative (Higonnet, *Images of Women* 31).

With none of Morisot's work extant, it would fall to family and friends to remember her, painting a portrait with words. At issue is whether these word portraits acknowledged artistic excellence and courage as an artist or would they fall to a sympathetic and romanticized remembrance. In recording the history of Impressionism, artist and Manet friend Theodore Duret would write "The position which Berthe Morisot held in society continually obscured her reputation as an artist." (Duret 175).

Two essays, each authored by someone with direct knowledge of Morisot, will show how this myth was shaped in word pictures after her death. The first essay was written by her close friend, Stephane Mallarme, considered a literary giant in France, a

symbolist poet and Romanticist. published as the dedication in the catalogue of Morisot's memorial exhibit. Reading Mallarme in translation is not for the faint of heart as his work has been characterized as complex, multilayered and tortuous in syntax, ambiguous in expression and filled with often obscure imagery. Mallarme initially reminds the reader that Morisot's name alone invokes "extraordinary charm in life, and of extreme personal elegance." Acknowledging that "Paris knew little of her, except in such sumptuous exhibitions ordinarily of Monet and Renoir" suggesting her personal reticence but referring to her inclusion in the exhibits of the Impressionists. In a rather back handed way, he acknowledges that she was a great painter but only by reference to these male artists. He then proceeds to discuss her evening salons and notes that this was the same space in which she paints by day "with fury and nonchalance, years, keeping the monotony and profusely exalting a freshness of idea. The art itself was far away." The furnishings reflect "the superiority of the guardian," the gathered ensemble of guests, all carefully chosen" signal the exclusion of all outside. "Alongside Madam Manet," utters an assumed guest, "I feel like a boor and a brute" (Mallarme). Mallarme criticizes the dissidents who reject women artists like Morisot and associates her rather grandly with an artistic lineage that begins with the great French landscape painter Jean Honore Fragonard (1732-1806) and carries through to Edouard Manet by virtue of her marriage to his brother.

With these introductory comments Mallarme then turns to Morisot's painting as an Impressionist "vivid in a panel, limpid shuddering grasps of skin tones, of orchards, of skies, all the lightness of a craft with an eighteenth touch." This is a theme frequently repeated about Morisot as her work is compared to the elegance of eighteenth-century

painting like the work of Boucher (1703-1770). Mallarme seems unable to grasp the fact that he has singled her out among her fellow artists as an individual, falling into the same trap of excluding her from the true greatness of the Impressionists like Claude Monet because she is a female painter. Referencing the strident opposition to Impressionism, which still lingered in France, Mallarme seems to apologize. “Any mastery casts a chill; or the fragile powder of the colors is defended by a pane (perhaps referring to glass on pastels or fragility), divination for some” (Mallarme).

Not a memory, Mallarme explains but stresses her role as mother. “We know the person of prompt caprice, to ward off boredom, singular, fit in resolutions”; Morisot remained true to these traits through life and only came to death, “because passionately, of an ardent maternal flame, where went, the whole, the creator” (Mallarme).

Mallarme concludes his eulogy referring to the loss to the art world of, “the void in the art of this previously reserved vanisher.” His sadness, he explains, may have left him to leave out what the artist herself would wish for, “To pour into such a world in joy, in feast, in bloom, the only shadow (death) which by her, was ever painted there and that her brush challenged” (Mallarme).

Then, with sweeping vocabulary and no lack of adjectives he recommends the exhibit to the viewer:

> “Here that fade, dispersing a radiant caress, idyllic, powdery, diapree (varied, mottled color), as in my memory the paintings remain, their armature, many a superb drawing, not a single instruction, to attest a science in voluntary touch, colors aside, on a subject. Studies for the public to appreciate with the sense,

> virgin, drawn from this nacre and silver gloss, a show of modern enchantment appears." (Mallarme)

Morisot's later portraits of women were especially recommended. Mallarme writes:

> "She restores it, by which clairvoyance, the satin vivifying at a skin contact, the orient of the pearls, to the atmosphere; or undressed in ideal negligee, the social niceties closed to style, so that springs the intention of the dress in relation with the gardens and the beach, a greenhouse, the gallery. Fluidity, luminosity."

Only in his closing remarks does Mallarme (finally) place Morisot firmly within the arc of Impressionism and acknowledged as artist:

> "We must look at the walls about the one whose current praise means that her talent denotes the Woman – again, as well as, a Master; her work completed according to the estimation of some great originals, whom counted her as a comrade in the struggle, worth, next to none, produced by one of them and binds, exquisitely, to the history of painting during a period of the century."

Mallarme's word portrait of Morisot describes a strong yet reticent woman, a woman who seems not to seek engagement or acknowledgement for her work but creates modern enchantment. His repeated use of references to the feminine with words like luminosity, radiant caress, elegance, enchantment, fragile, tells us this word portrait is a myth, carefully constructed to avoid the agony, melancholy and sacrifice of a woman who aspired to success in a man's world and whose success was never acknowledged in life. She seems quite a sweet, shy woman, as well as acknowledged master painter. Mallarme's obvious references to the eighteenth-century period of romanticism and his direct positioning her between male artistic giants Fragonard and Manet, seem to

reference Morisot as benchmark for males artists, or transition between two very different approaches to painting and the reflection in art of the history of the times. What is missing from this tribute is the resolve and determination of the intense, steely eyed young woman who posed so frequently for Edouard Manet.

A second essay dedicated to Morisot was published in 1926 by French poet Paul Valery (1871-1946). Valery would have met Morisot as a young man as he married her niece, Jeannie Gobillard, daughter of her older sister Yves. The date of the essay is rather curious as it marks no specific anniversary in the life of Berthe Morisot, although it does follow in publication the first Morisot biography authored by Armand Forreau in 1925. Entitled *Tante Berthe,* Valery's short essay was printed as a limited edition of 125 copies each signed by the author and dedicated "To the Happy Few." Valery distributed copies directly to friends and admirers. Very few copies of the original remain, however the essay was reprinted in French in a reissue of Theodore Duret's 1886 book, *Manet and the Impressionists.*

With the distance of time, some thirty years later, Valery communicates an image of the artist that is less romantic and more substantive than Mallarme's elegy of 1896. "The educated, seduced by her graces of her work, which were to be simple, - pure,- intimately, passionately, laborious, rather withdrawn but withdrawn with elegance. She relentlessly pursued the noble ends of the most proud and exquisite art."

> With even greater directness, Valery addresses Morisot's sequestered existence:
>
> As for her very person, it is quite known that she is one of the most rare and reserved; distinct in essence; easily, 'dangerously silent', and who imposed

> without knowing it on all the others who approached her, when they were not the first artists of her time, an inexplicable distance.

He discusses her physical appearance as he further develops his comment on her "dangerous silence."

> I will attempt with a few ideas to shed some light on the deep nature of this painter singularly painter, who not long ago lived under the figure of a lady always delicately dressed, with remarkably sharp features, a clear and willful face, of almost tragic expression, where sometimes lonely lips were formed with such as a smile which was the part of those who were indifferent and offered them what they had to fear.

Here Morisot takes on the appearance of enigma, willful and direct with no clue to what lay behind that taunt half smile. This was a strong woman who kept her own confidence in an artistic world that was rapidly changing and seemed to be moving forward without her.

Her strong will and independence are further defined:

> Everything about her breathed the *choice*, in her usual manner and in her stares . . . . That is what I wanted to come to, to her eyes. They were almost too vast, and so powerfully obscure that Manet, in several portraits he made of her, to fix all the dark and magnetic force, painted them black instead of greenish as they were. These pupils disappeared in front of the retina. (Valery)

His description of her eyes and the reference to Manet immediately calls to mind those early portraits of Morisot, completed before she began to exhibit with the Impressionists and fully develop her unique, personal style. Valery uses these words to

begin a more philosophical discussion of the vision of the artist: “the color speaks to him color and he answers to the color by the color. He can only see what he is thinking and thinks what he sees.”

Valery develops these ideas with the masculine pronoun, perhaps to allude to the universality of the artistic theme. He returns to Morisot specifically in stating: “Berthe Morisot lived in her big eyes which extraordinary attention to their function, to their continuous act, gave her that foreign separate air, foreign meaning strange (but) distant by excessive presence. Nothing gives this absent and distinct air from the world like seeing the present all pure.”

Perhaps Valery is claiming that the purity of Morisot’s work, which bore only the slightest influence from fellow artists and proceeds from her originality in seeing the world and choosing to paint what was pure to her eyes.

This essay presents an altogether different view of Morisot as artist, a view that underscores her strength and originality and explains her distance as a strength, a choice and not the reticence suggested years earlier by Mallarme. It is obvious that the essay provides Valery, a popular and well praised philosopher, a vehicle within which he uses a popular theme – his direct relationship with Morisot – as a platform for his philosophical musings on abstraction, creativity and mysticism, all topics developed in the final pages of the essay without reference to Morisot. Valery chooses to describe Morisot as artist not with the universality which would be attributed to a male artist but rather within the narrower scope of the feminine: “Her sketches and paintings keep closely in step with her development as a girl, a wife and mother. Her work as a whole is like the diary of a woman who uses color and line as her means of expression” (qtd. in Shennan xv).

It is her eyes, “this dangerous silence,” that take centerstage in more contemporary reflections and histories of Morisot. Both biographers, Anne Higonnet and Margaret Shennan both chose as cover art for their work Manet’s portraits of Morisot, the image of the vivacious and attractive femme fatale. The cover for the first Morisot retrospective catalogue, published by the Dennis and Annie Rouart Foundation at the Marmottan Monet Museum in Paris in 2005, similarly advertises an iconic Manet portrait. While it is understandable that these images are well known, what does it say about the remembrance of an influential, female artist that her own work or self-portrait was not chosen? Manet might laughingly explain that pictures of pretty girls sell books but the emphasis here is not on the direct stare of Morisot so celebrated by Paul Valery but an artistic work created by another artist. Both Armand Forreau and Anne Higonnet introduce their biographies of Morisot’s life with sentimental word pictures. From Forreau we understand “‘her life was like some very sheltered lake, which no storms have ever stirred, was calm, straightforward, and of a piece with her Art’” (qtd. in Shennan xv). Anne Higonnet begins her biography with the foundation “‘an art so radiant, so calm, a life led soberly’” (qtd. in Shennan xvi). Curiously, both biographers worked directly with the assistance of the Rouart family. Morisot’s nineteenth century reputation appears to remain intact and the myth of the gracious and calm woman artist continues. The opening paragraph, however, of Marianne Delafond’s narrative, accompanying the catalogue *Berthe Morisot or Reasoned Audacity*, provides us with a more appropriate remembrance of Berthe Morisot, one to which contemporary writers could subscribe.

> Berthe was a woman of refined elegance with an independent turn of mind driven by a will of iron. An attentive and self-contained person whose grace and aloofness gave her extraordinary charm. She took her enthusiasm as a painter to the point of insurrection and her painting was the reflection of her temperament. Surely the quest of this woman, who had to face up to so many conventions, neglect so many desires, and take so many affronts, must have been a hymn to happiness. (Delafond 9)

This is the Berthe Morisot who deserves to be celebrated not only for her art but for her character, strength and perseverance. In 2015 a group of fourth grade students toured the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence, Rhode Island. The docent led them before one of the Museum's prized paintings: the famous *Le Repos* by Edouard Manet. This is the portrait of a young Berthe Morisot that caused a sensation when exhibited in the Salon of 1873. It would forever associate Morisot with Manet as his model. The student reactions to the picture, seen with the fresh eyes of youth, help right the myth of Morisot. "It's like she doesn't care." says one boy who is reading the posture of the painting's subject. "It's like saying, I'm so tired of being proper," says another girl in response. "Like she got out of work and she's tired." The students begin to look at the painting hanging behind her, purposely chosen by Manet. The picture shows a woman being caught in a wave. "Do you think its related to Morisot?" the docent asks. "He's saying she's a fighter," says the boy. "He's saying that girls can do anything they want," says a girl. "Girls can be as brave as boys can," says another girl.

The untrained, unfiltered, direct analysis of these children viewing her portrait, absent a trained, artistic eye, provides a simple definition of who this woman was. Here

in the eyes of children we find the woman Marianne Delafond sees as pushing her painting to the point of insurrection (Delafond 9). This provides hope for the reclamation of the true Berthe Morisot.

In 2018 the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia mounted a major retrospective of Morisot's work. Included in the show were thirty-two paintings from private collections previously unseen in public. The curator chose the title *Berthe Morisot: Woman Impressionist*, perhaps feeling that in order to market the show to a public unfamiliar with her work her painting as impressionism needed to be emphasized. To their credit the curators chose a Morisot self-portrait for the cover of their brochure and a painting by Morisot for the cover of the catalogue. Unfortunately, in printing the brochure, the self portrait of Morisot working before her easel was cropped to exclude her palette and brushes. While the full painting was exhibited, this altered portrait separates the woman from her work. The choice of the title for the show is also somewhat disturbing. Morisot saw herself as a painter/artist who happened to be a woman. This was the very goal to which she dedicated her life t, so the title *Woman Impressionist* seems somewhat demeaning as though the curators meant to purposely single out a woman in the well know group of Impressionist painters. Art historian Peter Schjeldahl highlights the absurdity of the title and cynically suggests a parallel case: "Georges Braque: Man Cubist" (3).

The actual hanging of the exhibit grouped paintings by theme without regard to chronological order so there was no attempt to portray her continual development as an artist. Sadly, her later work, especially the sketches and portraits of her then teenage daughter Julie, were grouped without an explanation of how Morisot was moving toward

beyond Impressionism toward more fluid brush strokes and inclusion of symbolism in her work with her many studies of Julie reflecting her deep interest in portraying the nature of identity and personality. These important themes in her artistic portfolio, obviously the result of an intellectually engaged artist, were never mentioned in the show. The exhibit was focused on brushstrokes and palette without regard to the disappointment, stress and trauma so often present in her life or linking her creativity to important life events.

Nonetheless, a major exhibit of so much of her work is a significant step forward in growing awareness of her value as an artist. The show, which originated at the National Gallery of Canada, left Philadelphia to be exhibited in Dallas, Texas with a final showing planned for the Paris Musee d'Orsay where Morisot will be celebrated in the presence her comrades.

In writing the introduction to Margaret Shennan's biography, art historian Griselda Pollock tells us: "Berthe Morisot's place in art history, has been shaped by a specific legacy of admiration and family curatorship, that her art was truly Impressionist because it was so truly feminine (so) she was damned by the very terms in which she had once been so enthusiastically acclaimed" (x).

The presentation of her work in the Barnes Foundation exhibit continues to carry this message of the feminine painter forward despite Pollock's warning more than twenty years ago. But Pollock suggests a different path forward, one which Margaret Shennan pursues in her detailed historic biography of Morisot: "To have become an artist in the manner, style and purpose that Morisot did demands an analysis attentive to minute particularities of a cultural and historical moment mediated via a particular family and social network" (xi).

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore the social and economic myths related to Morisot's work to bring greater clarity to her true position in art history. Her history rests on a mistaken identity of an exotic and enticing vixen in the portraits of Edouard Manet combined with a perfect storm of ill-timed entry into the art world. Her deep psychological despair, so evident in her letters to her sister Edma, severely limited her full production as an artist. Her goal of acceptance by the Salon de Paris, whose rigid standards, inhibited originality, again discouraged her and limited her work. Importantly, at the very moment when Paul Durand-Ruel was willing to gamble his fortune and his reputation on the work of the original male Impressionist artists, Morisot had an insufficient quantity of pictures to allow him to "make a market" in her work as he did with Sisley, Pissarro, Monet and Degas. When her productivity did begin to increase, (although never enough for Durand-Ruel) given the security and stability of marriage and motherhood, her preferred genre of women in interior scenes and children in gardens and parks, held no attraction for the emerging American market. Durand-Ruel did include her pictures in New York shows as early as 1886, but there is no record of any sale. More than 25 privately owned paintings were loaned to her memorial exhibit, but all had a recent provenance of French family and friends.

The Barnes Foundation Morisot exhibit was reviewed by contemporary art critic Peter Schjeldahl under the title "Berthe Morisot, 'Woman Impressionist' Emerges from the Margins." He writes:

> "the most interesting artist of her generation has been not so much underrated in standard art history as not rated at all . . . , she was a painter's painter but only by

> default. Today she is the most interesting artist of her generation, for feats of form and depth of meaning that were still developing when she died." (1)

Looking at specific works, he differentiates her from other Impressionists.

> "She has the loosest, least finished look of Impressionist techniques, a trait that helps explain her neglect vs. the more decisively branded manners of men. It's as if she truncated a process of picturing that we, as viewers, irresistibly see through to completion. Her paintings, indefinite at first glance are hard to stop contemplating once you've started." (Schjeldahl 2)

This is a refreshing look at Morisot by a critic not blinded by the vagaries of myth or gender. He simply looks deeply at her work. He sees this as an opportunity to re see and rethink the whole history of modern art from the perspective of women who never stood a chance of major attainment. As an example, he compares her to contemporary abstract expressionist Joan Mitchell (1929-1992) and finds a similarity both in their brush stroke and the fresh alacrity of their work.

Schjeldahl suggests that Morisot is due for "full blown fame" in the future. As a major artist he further suggests that as that fame comes, we set Berthe Morisot at center stage and look around from there. Such a retrospective may be difficult, however, given the continued scarcity of Morisot's work on public view. A review of sixteen major American museum collections found fourteen of these museums had Morisot works in their collections but at present only four museums had paintings on view. Only three of the museums, the Clark Art Institute, the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and the Denver Museum of Art has purchased Morisot works. The remainder of works were gifted to museum collections usually after multiple inheritances. Only one Painting, held

by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, included direct provenance from Durand-Ruel Galleries.

One barrier to such a new take on art history may be that art available to public view and participation is driven by museum acquisition budgets that overwhelmingly favor male artists. The relevance of this dissertation is to begin to clear the historical record of the myths and disinformation so that a truer vision of Morisot's artistic worth as well as all female artists can be fairly evaluated. Morisot was an independent artist with her own unique vision; it is that unique vision that drives the quality of her artistry. That quality and pureness of temperament, expressed on canvas, is what drives her value and not quantity or price.

EPILOGUE: MEETING BERTHE

It was late afternoon and the museum was about to close. A guard stood idly by the door, checking the time on his watch and inspected an adjacent gallery to assess the numbers of patrons still wandering. I had moved through the small 19th century European gallery filled with several recognizable Monets and Renoirs, good but not great paintings. A Cassatt pastel stood out as did an impressive Pissarro oil landscape and a small Bonnard study. The collection was assembled largely from gifts typical of such acquisitions in many small, regional museums. I did not anticipate, nor did I see a Degas, Cezanne or Manet. These artists works are priced too highly to be donated.

Turning a corner toward the entrance, I noticed a small canvas hung alone on a side wall, at right angles to the doors. Many patrons ignored it as they walked by. But I knew immediately it was painted by Berthe Morisot. (See Illustration 12)

The subject was a young woman standing on a patio watering a potted plant. She was painted from behind with her face turned just slightly to the side. The model was Berthe's sister Edma. There were several visual clues to the artist's identify. The dramatic use of black as an accent in the ribbon around her neck is a feature of many Morisot female figures. A bright splash of cobalt blue drew my eye to the pitcher at the Edma's side. Beyond, a wrought iron fence marked the end of the patio, separating the ground from the distant Parisian skyline with varied rooftops.

I stood admiring the supple brushwork in the folds of the Edma's gown. A range of tones in grays and pale blue gave the fabric volume and motion. Morisot had captured a moment in time. With the exhalation of a single breath, Edma would move, rearranging the folds of fabric as she raised her arm and finished her task.

An older woman and young girl approached. The child spoke in a clear, inquisitive voice. “Granny, why can’t we see her face?” The child had immediately noticed what was missing from the picture. The central object was facing away, hidden from the viewer.

Why, indeed? At a time when John Singer Sergeant and James MacNeil Whistler were painting lavish society portraits and Morisot’s fellow impressionists depicted their wives and mistresses in endless poses and public spaces, Morisot had the audacity to face her model away from the viewer. Morisot herself was the subject of twelve portraits by fellow painter Edouard Manet. In each, she faces us with a deep, intense stare. Why then would she create a portrait in which the model’s face is turned away from the viewer?

The child’s question forces a complicated understanding of Morisot’s vision as a painter. In all probability, her sister Edma was pregnant at the time she modeled. She would have returned to Paris for the birth of her child. It would have been unseemly to display her as such and Morisot, with respect for her condition, painted her from behind. Morisot captures Edma as she delicately lifts her watering can. In an instant she will finish her work and then, lift her head, and her gaze will focus beyond the edge of the garden.

Now we begin to understand the genius of Morisot. She wants us to focus on the direction Edma will face as she shifts her position. Lifting her head she will see the skyline of the city. Morisot is sending us a deliberate message, using the composition of this painting to suggest that the world beyond the fence of her garden gates awaits future generations of women. Her choice of location, an informal exterior but private space deliberately shows a woman caught in the performance of a daily chore but with the

entire world, as Morisot knew it, placed before her. The woman's physical presence is restrained, or perhaps protected by the gate. But her intellectual capacity and spirit has direct contact with the world.

Here we can see the inherent conflict in Morisot's life as a woman painter. She carefully observes social dictums in her portrayal of Edma's pregnancy but, in doing so, makes a bold statement about women in the arts. She uses her painting as her voice to communicate a strong and deliberate message about a woman's place in the world. A woman's clear vision is in the world, not merely confined to interior spaces or the privacy of gardens as designated by society.

This is a conflict that tortures Berthe Morisot from her earliest years as an artist and becomes magnified by the explosive tide of the art world in late nineteenth century Paris. Some critics might see the figure's positioning as merely coincidental. Impressionism is considered a "feminist" art form with the softness of line and subtly of color. All Impressionists painted women and children as genre. But Morisot continually connects her women with the larger world, challenging the restrictions and definitions of private space. She continues to develop these themes in a span of more than thirty years, from her first Paris Salon juried exhibit in 1864 until her death in 1895.

As one of just four female artists recognized as Impressionist (others being Eva Gonzales (1849-1930), Marie Bracquemond (1840-1916) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), Morisot alone uses her work to express her feelings and vision as a woman in a male dominated and defined artistic field

Appendix A

MORISOT CONTEMPORARIES

Exhibiting at Impressionist Shows (1874-1886)

	Lifespan
Frederic Bazille	1841 - 1870*
Frederic Bracquemond	1840 - 1914
Mme. Marie Braquemond	1840 - 1916
Gustav Caillebotte	1848 - 1894
Mary Cassatt	1844 - 1926
Paul Cezanne	1839 - 1916
Edgar Degas	1834-1917
Paul Gauguin	1848 - 1903
Armand Guillaumin	1841-1927
Claude Monet	1840- 1926
Berthe Morisot	1841-1895
Camille Pissaro	1830-1903
Pierre August Renoir	1841 - 1919
Odillon Redon	1840 - 1916
Henri Rouart	1833 - 1912
Georges Seurat	1859-1891**
Alfred Sisley	1839-1891

*Bazille was killed fighting in Paris in the Franco Prussian War

**Seurat exhibited only in the last Impressionist show (1896). He was included at the encouragement of Berthe Morisot and is considered today as a Post-Impressionist.

Appendix B

BERTHE MORISOT: PRINCIPAL DATES

1841 Born 14 January in Bourges, third daughter of Edme Tiburce Morisot and Marie Josephine Cornelie Thomas.

1855 Family moves to Rue des Moulins in Passy, Paris.

1857 Morisot sisters had first drawing lessons with Geoffrey Alphonse Chocarne.

1858 Edma and Berthe continue lessons with Joseph Benoit Guichard; the sisters register as copyists at the Louvre.

1860 Family moves to Rue Franklin, Passy.

1862 Berthe and Edma had lessons with Camille Corot.

1863 On the recommendation of Corot, the sisters commenced lessons with Achille Francois Oudinat.

Summer at Le Chou, Auvers.

1864 Berthe and Edma both exhibit at the Paris Salon. They exhibit again in the Salons of 1865-67.

1867 Introduced by Henri-Fatin LaTour, met Edouard Manet.

1869 Edma marries Adolphe Pontillon, a friend of Manet. She gives up painting.

1868 Exhibits at the Salon. No longer identified as a student in her Salon entry.

1870 Berthe shows in the Paris Salon of 1870. Remains in Paris during the Siege of Paris and the Commune.

1872 Exhibits at the Salon.

1873 Exhibits for the last time at the Salon. She never returns.

1874 January, her father Tiburce Morisot dies.

Participates in the independent, juryless competition, now known as the first Impressionist exhibit.

22 December – marries Eugene Manet, brother of Edouard Manet.

1875 Participates in the Hotel Drouot Auction in Paris with Monet, Renoir and Sisley.

1876 Participates in the second Impressionist exhibit. Moves with her husband to 9 Avenue d'Eylau, Passy,

1878 14 November – birth of her daughter Julie Manet.

1887 Showed at George Petit's International Exhibition, Paris, exhibited with Les XX Brussels, included in Durand Ruel's New York Impressionist exhibit.

1892 13 April death of Eugene Manet. Her first solo exhibition at the gallery Bousssard and Valadon, Paris.

1893 Moved with Julie to Rue Weber, Passy

1894 First State purchase of one of her works *Young Woman at the Bath.*

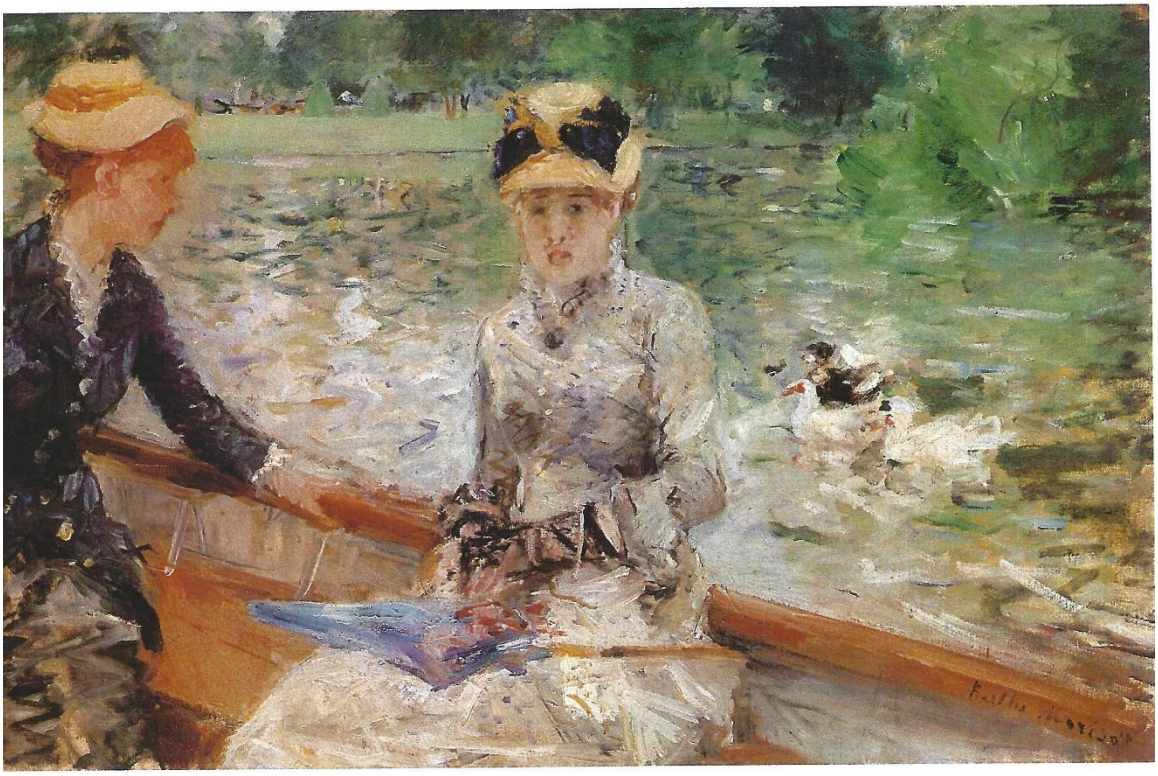
1895 2 March death of Berthe Morisot.

Appendix C

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. *Self Portrait*, 1885, Oil on Canvas, 24 in. by 19 in. Museum Marmottan Monet, Paris.

2. *Bois de Boulogne, Summers Day* 1879, Oil on Canvas, 18 in. by 29 in. National Gallery, London.



3. *Portrait of Artist*, Edma Pontillon, 1865-68, Oil on Canvas, 100 cm by 71 cm. Private Collection.

4. *The Sisters*, 1869, Oil on Canvas, 52.1 by 82.3 cm National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

5. *Paris from the Trocadero,* 1871-73, Oil on Canvas, 46.1 cm by 81.5 cm, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

6. *Harbor at L'Orient,* 1868, Oil on Canvas, 43.5 cm by 75 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

7. *Portrait of Two Women* (Mother and Sister) 1869-70, 101 cm by 81 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

8. *Repose,* Edouard Manet, 1871, Oil on Canvas, 148 cm by 113 cm, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I.

9. *Reading,* Edouard Manet, 1865-73, Oil on Canvas, 61 cm by 74 cm, Musee D'Orsay, Paris.

10. *Artist's Sister at a Window*, 1869, Oil on Canvas, 55 cm by 46 cm, Musee D'Orsay, Paris.

11. *The Cradle,* 1873, Oil on Canvas, 56 cm by 46 cm. Musee D'Orsay, Paris.

12. *Young Woman Watering a Shrub,* 1876, Oil on Canvas, 40 cm by 32 cm, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia.

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