

## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

### AMBIGUITY, AND THE ENGAGEMENT OF SPATIAL ILLUSION WITHIN THE SURFACE OF MANET'S PAINTINGS

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The dissertation proposes that the engagement of spatial illusion within the surface of the paintings of Edouard Manet (1832–83) was a critical dimension to their artifice and ambiguity. Rather than being created arbitrarily or formed in error, it was the result of two intentionally applied spatial strategies which, paradoxically, were anchored within the conventions of linear perspective. This use of a coherent system to structure the ambiguity which has always been thought to have no rational explanation, created a new pictorial and surface coherence.

One strategy involved the spatial shaping provided by offset one-point perspective viewpoints, in which the geometry is part of a frontal view but the view itself seems angled, and the other strategy involved the creation of composite images with the synthesis of separate parts of actual views. Photography was directly involved in both these strategies, with the *chambre photographique* 'view' camera providing the means to produce images with offset viewpoints, and evidence that many of the views in the composite images were most likely derived from photographs. Additionally, in two of his paintings some of the segments could only have been from aerial photographs taken from a balloon.

A research program of spatial analysis and identification, utilising computer-generated modelling, has resulted in proposals for *Incident in a Bullfight* (1864), *View of the 1867 Exposition Universelle* (1867), *The Burial* (1867?), *The Railway* (1873), *Masked Ball at the Opera* (1873–74), and *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–82). The program and the proposals are presented in the relevant historical, theoretical and comparative contexts.

An important aspect of the perception that the work of Manet brought about a decisive change in painting involved the shift in the dynamic between pictorial space and surface. Although the approaches to this aspect taken by scholars such as Clement Greenberg, T.J. Clark and Michael Fried have provided a cogent discourse for comparison, the proposals made in this dissertation suggest that their conclusions, together with other perceptions of Manet's picture-making process, need to be re-assessed.

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