

**Édouard Manet** (1832 – 1883) was a French painter and the Grand Master of proto-Impressionism. He was one of the first 19th-century artists to paint modern life, and a pivotal figure in the transition from Realism to the Impressionist ethos. His early masterworks, *The Luncheon on the Grass* (*Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*) and *Olympia*, each 1863, caused great controversy in both polite and aesthetic societies, and served as rallying points for the young painters who would create Impressionism. Today, these are considered watershed paintings that mark the genesis of modern art, as well. Along with Cézanne, Manet exerted great influence on a multitude of French avant-gardes who would follow him.

*Lifetime output of prints:* 111 (etchings, lithographs, including the first color-separated litho)

**“The Urchin” (“*Le gamin*”), 1862**, etching was executed in the same year as a lithograph of the same image drawn on stone. The model for “The Urchin” is the artist’s son Léon, and both prints are based on Manet’s own painting. “Once he had outlined the figures of the boy and the dog, Manet set carefully to work, building up their whole surface. For the boy, he crossed his strokes [hatchings and cross-hatchings], while reserving the whites and greys for the perfection of the design. Likewise, with a very light touch, he laid in the shading on the lad’s face, to which he succeeded in giving that gentle, affectionate, rather wistful expression of a child looking at his dog.” Furthermore, the overall tone of both the Manet painting and these two prints is borrowed from the Spanish School, notably from Esteban Murillo, ultra-famous for his many oils of handsome, adorable boys as street urchins.

When Napoleon set up his brother as Viceroy of Spain, many Spanish School masterpieces, including ones by Velázquez, were looted from the Prado and installed in the Louvre. They created a sensation among Parisians, who -- given the earthiness and genuineness of the Spanish School’s gritty eye and no-fuss portraiture -- became rather embarrassed by the excesses of their own Rococo confections, as in Boucher and Fragonard.

**“Olympia”** is Manet’s most famous etching, based on one of his most famous paintings; the other, being *“Dejeuner sur l’herbe,”* (“Lunch on the Grass”). “Manet’s scandalous canvas of 1863, exhibited at the 1865 Salon, was transcribed into two etchings.” The version at DRFA is closer to the painting, and our sixth state is considered the best of all the states, since it is the only one in which the artist reworked the left hand to bring out its contours more naturally. “In this etching, Manet suppressed the lower part of the canvas . . . [to] emphasize the length and horizontality of the woman’s figure.” She is Victoria Meunière, the famous courtesan and haughty favorite of Paris aristocrats, haute-bourgeois businessmen, and worthy artists in one particularly infamous brothel of the French capital. “The painting raised an unusually violent storm of protest. Visitors to the exhibition were so angry that the canvas had to be protected by attendants against the threat of violence [vandalism]. Objections and repugnance even extended to the black cat, which in itself was considered perfectly outrageous” as an omen of evil. The artists Pissarro and Degas, who are thought to have known Meunière intimately, publicly approved of the painting, while Courbet did not. And therein lies the rub. Manet with his scandalous painting and two etchings of the famous sexual libertine had crossed a line of honor. Many of the “gentlemen” attending the Salon show were *hypocritically* incensed to see their favorite lady of the night on show all for the world to see! There was

tremendous complicity between high society and the brothels, but who would want their code of silence broken for all the Catholic world to behold? Even the critics, shouting epithets in the papers against “Olympia” -- so named to suggest that sexual passion rules us like the gods of Olympus -- were not above frequenting these houses of *ill repute*.

### **History of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Master Prints**

Starting in 1860, and coming into full force by 1890, there was a revival in printmaking in both London and Paris, an artform that had fallen out of favor since the glory days of Rembrandt. By 1890, the print revival was sweeping Paris and London by storm, supported by the newly widespread popularity of poster art and the invention of new lithographic inks, which made drawing on stones produce works of vivid color -- something the Impressionists required in the re-established medium. As for B&W prints, so many new techniques were being advanced that prints became a kind of nuanced and refined multiple ‘ink drawing,’ if you will. Furthermore, art dealers, notably Ambrose Vollard (publisher of *The Album of Painter-Engravers*) and Durand Ruel, began pressing their stables to create works in print media like etching and lithography that were more affordable to entry-level collectors. Ruel went so far as to underwrite print-only exhibitions at his famed gallery. Finally, enough cannot be said about the influence of the art patron Dr. Paul Gachet, M.D. -- who, being an amateur etcher himself, practically forced each artist who visited him to try their hands at printmaking! Gachet is ever famous for having cared for van Gogh in the last months of his life, and for van Gogh’s famous painting of Gachet.\*

\**Portrait of Dr. Gachet* is one of the most revered paintings by the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh. It depicts Dr. Paul Gachet who took care of Van Gogh during the final months of his life. There are two authenticated versions of the portrait, both painted in June 1890 at Auvers-sur-Oise, Gachet’s country hometown. One is in a private collection and the other, at the Orsay Museum in Paris. Both show Gachet sitting at a table and leaning his head on his right arm, but they are easily differentiated in color and style. In 1990, the first version fetched a record price of \$82.5 million (\$75 million, plus a 10 percent buyer’s commission) when sold at auction in New York. When accounting for inflation, this is still the *highest price* paid for art at a public auction!

Here is a summary of the major shows dealing with the 1890 print revival in Paris:

*General Exhibition of Lithography, École de Beaux Arts, Paris, 1891, a thousand prints on view*

*Centenary Exhibition of Lithography, Champs de Mars, Paris, 1895\*\**

\*\*Lithography was invented in 1796 by German author and actor Alois Senefelder, as a thrifty method of publishing theatrical works. Thus, 1895 would be the centenary of the medium