



Paris: A View Toward the Modern



Berthe Marie Paul Morisot (France, 1841-1895)

View of Paris from the Trocadero, 1871-72

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Mrs. Hugh N. Kirkland

Berthe Morisot was born to a middle class French family in 1842. She studied under Corot, became friends with Edward Manet and the other Impressionists and eventually married Eugene Manet, the artist's brother. She wrote in the year that *View of Paris from the Trocadero* was painted, "I will obtain my independence only by showing openly that I mean to be free."

This oil painting captures a unique view of Paris poised between past and future. On this site less than a year earlier the city was under siege...first with the brief but bloody Franco-Prussian War, then with the revolutionary Commune. In Morisot's painting no sign of such conflict remains. Nor do we find ourselves in the urban swirl of the boulevards and cafes painted by Morisot's male counterparts. There is no sign of the Eiffel Tower- that monument to the modern- that will be erected directly in front of this scene just seventeen years later.

- The art critic Kathleen Adler has written that "Morisot's women exist in a protected space that is transitional, neither city nor country. The separation between the figures and the view of the city is not only physical space it is social space. It is not so much no-man's land as it is woman's- land, isolated from the world of business and of war." From your study of this period do you agree with Adler's read of the painting? How did the bourgeoisie and the suburbs relate to the city? What was woman's role? By placing her women in the clean, quiet suburbs, does Morisot suggest that the faraway city- a symbol of the future- lies beyond their reach? Explain.

Taking it to the Streets: Baudelaire, the Modern City and the “Flaneur”

The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvelous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvelous; but we do not notice it.

Charles Baudelaire

- Charles Baudelaire, French poet and critic, saw the city as an endlessly exciting and stimulating environment, a place of intoxication. He said that the task of the artist is to depict, “the pageant of fashionable life.” He believed that the city creates and demands a new mode of perception, a new mode of representation. What do you think is the new mode of expression and representation for the 21st century? What best captures the pace and scope of our time? (Film, digital art, advertising???)
- Baudelaire called his city wanderer *le flaneur*: “The crowd is his domain just as the air is the bird’s, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect flaneur, for the passionate observer, it becomes an immense source of pleasure to choose to live among the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the floating and the infinite...the lover of life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity.”

Try your hand at being a flaneur in Santa Barbara. Spend at least an hour, alone, walking through crowded streets, a mall etc. record your observations in a sketchbook, journal or series of photographs. Choose one passage or sketch or photo and turn it into a more polished, finished piece.