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James H. Rubin

# Manet's Ironic Duplicity

*Hamlet, Baudelaire, and Masculinity*

SERIES IN ART

## About the author

**James Rubin** is one of the world's foremost specialists in the history, theory, and criticism of nineteenth-century avant-garde European Art, especially that of France. His interests are interdisciplinary, with special attention to cultural history, art and politics, and art and philosophy. Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he was taken by his mother to Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum at a young age. He was educated at Phillips Academy Andover, where he discovered the Addison Gallery, and Yale (B.A.), where he first discovered art history. From there, and during the Vietnam War, he went to Paris to study at the Institut d'Art et d'Archéologie of the Sorbonne (license-ès-lettres in art history), returning to Harvard University for his PhD (1972). He has taught at Harvard, Boston University, Princeton University, The Cooper Union, and Stony Brook, the State University of New York, from which he is now retired. He has published over 70 articles and essays on subjects ranging from the eighteenth century to the present. He has given over 80 public lectures in North America, Western and Eastern Europe, and Asia. He is the author of 16 published books on Impressionism and on artists such as Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, and Paul Cézanne. Several of these have been translated into other languages, including French, Greek, Korean, Japanese, and Dutch. He travels frequently, speaks fluent French, and lives in Manhattan, New York and Mittelbergheim, Alsace. He is a dual national, married to Liliane Béatrix Braesch of Strasbourg, France. Their son, Henry-Alex, is a cineaste for Smuggler and a winner of an Oscar nomination and many other awards. Their daughter, Delphine McNeill, is a fashionista and co-founder of Livotte Tops, Ltd. In London. Their Boston Terrier's name is Texas Pete.

## Summary

The painter Edouard Manet (1832-1883) was a central figure for momentous and lasting changes in the realm of art that still resound today. His art speaks directly to the philosophical issues and political conflicts of his own time and is therefore deeply embedded in the development of modernity. 'Manet's Ironic Duplicity' focuses on that situation and the historically conscious artist's sometimes ambivalent struggle for authenticity. Rather than another full chronological monograph, the book is an interdisciplinary study organized around key concepts. It reframes the major, and sometimes disparate issues in Manet scholarship by focusing on a never-before-considered overriding theme—duplicity—which itself is multiple in its manifestations and variants, hence 'duplicities'. Reversing the usual narrative, this study deconstructs and enlightens the myth of the heroic artist struggling for individual and original vision by revealing how so much of Manet's creativity and irony was prompted by frustrations due to repressive politics, censorship, and challenges to his sense of self. A key aspect of the latter was his masculinity. Although Manet's association with the ideas of the poet and critic Charles Baudelaire is well known, never has Baudelaire's essay 'On the Essence of Laughter and the Comic in the Visual Arts' been brought to bear on the concept of irony in Manet's work. Given Baudelaire's rapprochement between actors and artists, as well as Manet's familiarity with the theatrical milieu, the book focuses on Manet's two little-studied representations of 'Hamlet' as both the starting and end point of its analysis. It then concludes with a re-reading of the painter's illustrated letters to women as a dissimulation of his final, fatal illness in order to maintain his masculine honor.

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