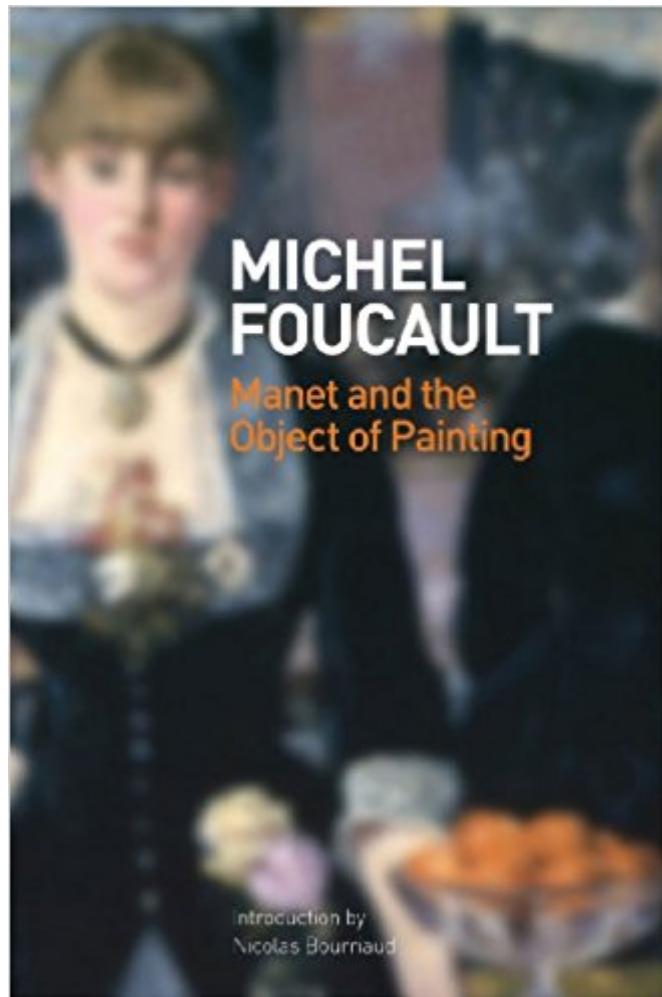


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# Manet And The Object Of Painting



## Synopsis

In this encounter between one of the 20th century's greatest minds and an artist fundamental to the development of modern art, French philosopher Michel Foucault explores Edouard Manet's importance in the overthrow of traditional values in painting. Originally delivered in Tunis in 1971 as part of a conference on Manet and here translated into English for the first time, this powerful critique takes the form of a commentary on 13 of Manet's paintings. For the political-minded philosopher, the connection between visual art and power was clear: art is not an aesthetic pursuit, but a means to explore and challenge power dynamics. A precursor to Foucault's later work on *le regard*, or the gaze, the text examines paintings like *Un Bar aux Folies-Bergère*, where Manet used the mirror to imply the multiple gaze of the waitress, the viewer, and the man at the bar, who may or may not be the artist himself. Foucault used Manet as a basis for a wider exploration of culture. With a new introduction by leading French critic and Tate curator Nicolas Bourriaud and a note on the translation by Matthew Barr, this is a major contribution to the fields of both modern philosophy and art history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was an internationally renowned French historian and philosopher, associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. His many books include *The Order of Things*, *The History of Sexuality* and *Madness*, and *Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Nicolas Bourriaud, a critical theorist, is Gulbenkian Curator of Contemporary Art at Tate Britain and co-founder of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

This text by Foucault is a very interesting work in his oeuvre. His main argument he presents is how Manet as a painter comes along and ruptures, or opens up the pathway for modern art. He also looks at conditions of representation, self-conscious depiction of art, and free range of space, among others. This text was a lecture given by Foucault during his post-structural years and as such is very evident as he introduces time into space. Very good text to read if you are a Foucault fan.

As an artist, I found Foucault's observations pointed, but not as insightful as I have come to expect from his brilliant mind. This book is a lecture, not a more contemplative tour de-force and thus not as lengthy and in depth as I would have liked. That said, I did thoroughly enjoy this very quick read. If you like Foucault and have a basic appreciation of the plastic arts, you will probably enjoy this book. There are few subjects better than Manet's catalog and I commend Michel for sharing his thoughts. As always, it is filled with clever observations that will invariably contribute to any small talk at a dinner party.

The text of this thin volume is a transcript (translated from French to English) of a recording of a lecture Michel Foucault delivered in 1971 at the Tahar Haddad Cultural Club in Tunis. Foucault's words, in print, occupy 40 pages. Foucault illustrated his lecture with 13 slides. The book includes reproductions of each of those paintings, from "Music in the Tuileries" (1862) to "A Bar at the Folies-Bergere" (1881-82). Unfortunately, as another reviewer rightly laments, those illustrations are tiny (all 81.9 by 104.5 inches of "Luncheon on the Grass" (1862-63), for example, are shrunk to a Lilliputian 3.2 by 4.2 inches) and are blandly reproduced, with details lost, colors misplaced, and the punch of Manet's blacks absent. This is sure to frustrate many readers. Additional editorial content includes an introductory essay by Nicolas Bourriaud (11 pages), a very brief Translator's Introduction by Matthew Barr, and a one-page index. At the outset of his lecture Foucault says with modesty: "I am not a Manet specialist; nor am I a painting specialist, so it is as a layman that I would speak to you about Manet." His focus is on formal analysis, and he organizes his thoughts under three rubrics: the space of the canvas; lighting; and the place of the viewer. He concludes that Manet "was inventing, if you like, the 'picture-object', the 'painting-object'." From my own perspective as someone who's no stranger to the inside of an art museum (but also a "layman"), I'm thankful to Foucault for providing me new deciphering tools to use when standing before a Manet -- and new ways of seeing paintings in general. At the same time I'm mindful of the limitations of

Foucault's perspective. First, his interest is constrained to painting. Other forms of representation such as sculpture, drawing, printmaking and illustration, are ignored. Also, non-European art -- the bulk of mankind's imaginative achievements -- is not within Foucault's ken in this lecture. An important realization is that the revolution whose success Foucault attributes to Manet terminated what we can see now was merely a brief interregnum -- a mode of representation that occupied only a few hundred years, from the early 15th to the late 19th centuries, before receding into the broad flow of European artistic output. You may be disappointed too if you expect Foucault's insights to stray much beyond formal analysis into the realm of philosophy. Fortunately, that task is taken up in Bourriaud's introduction, a superb essay I recommend reading both before and after reading the main text if, like me, you've had no previous exposure to Foucault's philosophical works. This small book is handsomely produced, and features the surprising use, in a paperback binding, of stitch-sewn signatures. For a closer look, please see the set of photos I've uploaded to the "Product Images from Customers" section, found on the right side of this Product page.

[Note: Four reviews of this illustrated essay can be read on 's main product page for the book, here: [A Manet and the Object of Painting](#). Below is just one of them.] The text of this thin volume is a transcript (translated from French to English) of a recording of a lecture Michel Foucault delivered in 1971 at the Tahar Haddad Cultural Club in Tunis. Foucault's words, in print, occupy 40 pages. Foucault illustrated his lecture with 13 slides. The book includes reproductions of each of those paintings, from "Music in the Tuileries" (1862) to "A Bar at the Folies-Bergere" (1881-82). Unfortunately, as another reviewer rightly laments, those illustrations are tiny (all 81.9 by 104.5 inches of "Luncheon on the Grass" (1862-63), for example, are shrunk to a Lilliputian 3.2 by 4.2 inches) and are blandly reproduced, with details lost, colors misplaced, and the punch of Manet's blacks absent. This is sure to frustrate many readers. Additional editorial content includes an introductory essay by Nicolas Bourriaud (11 pages), a very brief Translator's Introduction by Matthew Barr, and a one-page index. At the outset of his lecture Foucault says with modesty: "I am not a Manet specialist; nor am I a painting specialist, so it is as a layman that I would speak to you about Manet." His focus is on formal analysis, and he organizes his thoughts under three rubrics: the space of the canvas; lighting; and the place of the viewer. He concludes that Manet "was inventing, if you like, the 'picture-object', the 'painting-object'." From my own perspective as someone who's no stranger to the inside of an art museum (but also a "layman"), I'm thankful to Foucault for providing me new deciphering tools to use when standing before a Manet -- and new ways of seeing paintings in general. At the same time I'm mindful of the limitations of Foucault's

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