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Double Début: Édouard Manet and *The Execution of Maximilian* in New York and Boston, 1879-80

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Abstract:

When Manet's *Execution of Maximilian* was exhibited in New York and Boston in 1879-80, it elicited the cautious enthusiasm of some critics and artists but was an unmitigated failure with the public. This essay examines Manet's motivations for sending the *Execution* to America, and analyzes the artistic and political concerns that influenced the painting's reception.

Double Début: Édouard Manet and *The Execution of Maximilian* in New York and Boston, 1879-80

by Mishoe Brennecke

In December and January 1879-80, *The Execution of Maximilian* by Édouard Manet (fig. 1) was exhibited in New York and Boston, brought to this country by the opera singer Émilie Ambré and her partner Gaston de Beauplan. These little-known exhibitions represent both Manet's American début and the début of his large canvas, which had remained in his studio, seen only by friends and colleagues, since its completion in 1868-69. Although much scholarship has been devoted to the genesis, meaning, and history of the *Execution* within the context of nineteenth-century French art and politics, the American exhibitions of the painting have not been thoroughly investigated until now.[1] Historians of American and European art have discussed the exhibitions in relation to the development of a taste for avant-garde French painting in the late-nineteenth century and have noted correctly that Manet's picture won the praises of a few progressive artists and critics but was a complete failure with the American public.[2] The identities of Manet's American admirers, however, have been open to speculation, and the failure of the exhibitions has not been explained. The dearth of popular interest in Manet's painting is especially puzzling for two reasons. The *Execution* was given Great Picture treatment, with a promotional and advertising campaign engineered to attract viewers, and the tragic subject of the painting had elicited widespread concern among Americans in 1867 and for years following. Correspondence from Ambré and Beauplan to Manet, of which only partial transcripts have been relied upon previously, not only reveals the identities of Manet's American admirers but also suggests that Manet's agents failed to promote and present his picture to best advantage.[3] While inept handling certainly damaged the potential for success, even more devastating to the venture was the press response. Critics, although themselves cautiously enthusiastic, warned the public away from Manet's painting because of the unconventional paint handling, and they responded negatively to the un-idealized, brutal depiction of Maximilian's death, an event that, for many Americans, was indicative of the persistent and distressing problem of political violence in Mexico.



Fig. 1, Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas. Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle [\[larger image\]](#)

The *Execution* represents the final moments of the Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph of Austria, emperor of Mexico, who died on June 19, 1867 (fig. 2). Three years earlier, in an effort to establish an economic and political foothold in North America, Napoleon III of France had placed Maximilian on the throne of Mexico and supported him militarily. The United States, however, refused to recognize Maximilian's rule and maintained its support for Benito Juárez, the republican president. At the conclusion of American Civil War, when the government could focus again on foreign relations, the United States pressured France to remove her troops, warning that their presence on North American soil was a violation of the Monroe Doctrine. Fearing conflict, Napoleon III complied, and by mid-March 1867, French forces had departed Mexico, but despite encouragement from both France and the United States, Maximilian refused to remove himself to safety. In May, republican forces captured the emperor in Querétaro, and the following month, together with his Mexican generals Tomás Mejía and Miguel Miramón, he was executed by firing squad. News of Maximilian's death reached Paris ten days later and immediately the French court went into mourning, but their expressions of grief could not mask the fact that Napoleon III had aided Maximilian's assumption of power in Mexico and then abandoned him to hostile forces. The Mexico debacle rapidly came to be seen, inside and outside of France, as one of Napoleon III's worst political blunders and a key factor in the demise of his government.[4]



Fig. 2, "The Late Maximilian I, 'Emperor of Mexico.'" Engraving from Harper's Weekly 11 (20 July 1867), p. 461. Sewanee, TN, duPont Library, The University of the South [\[larger image\]](#)

In the wake of this tragedy, Manet began work on what would eventually become three large oil paintings, a preparatory oil sketch, and a lithograph devoted to Maximilian's execution. [5] Identifiable by a photograph taken in New York in 1879 (fig. 3), the version sent to the United States was the last of the three oil paintings, which is the largest and most finished. Today in the collection of the Städtische Kunsthalle in Mannheim, *The Execution of Maximilian* presents the three victims on the left: Maximilian in the center, flanked by Mejía on his right and Miramón on his left. The firing squad, positioned center right, points its rifles at the victims and releases fire, while at the far right, an officer loads his gun for the *coup de grâce*. Smoke fills the air, and the pained expression on Mejía's face reveals that he has been hit. Gripping the hand of Miramón, Maximilian waits calmly for the next round of gunfire. Meanwhile, Mexicans swarm down from the distant hills, and a group of them watches the death scene over the wall that contains the foreground.



Fig. 3, Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1868-69. Cabinet print, Mora Studio, New York, 1879. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library. MA 3953 [\[larger image\]](#)

Manet had intended to show the Mannheim painting at the Salon of 1869, but in advance of the exhibition, he was informed unofficially that it would be refused. Because the Maximilian affair had embarrassed Napoleon III and cast grave doubt over the soundness of his foreign policies, imperial censors were alert to all representations of the execution. Apparently, Manet's image was suspect because its meaning is ambiguous. While the immediacy with which the painter seized upon the execution of Maximilian as a subject, as well as his sustained commitment to it, reveals deep concern over the tragic events of June 1867, the presentation of the scene lacks rhetorical devices—gestures, facial expressions, accessories—that would make the moral or meaning clear. On the one hand, it can be interpreted literally as a brutal representation of Mexican republican soldiers firing upon Maximilian and his generals. On the other hand, as was first suggested by the French novelist and critic Émile Zola, the uniforms of the executioners resemble French military dress, which implies French culpability in the emperor's death.^[6]

Although he did not submit it to the admissions jury for the 1869 Salon, Manet continued to think about exhibiting *The Execution of Maximilian*. In a letter written in June 1873 to the wife of the French historian Jules Michelet, like Manet an opponent of Napoleon III's imperial government, Madame Manet noted her husband's frustrated ambitions to exhibit the *Execution*.^[7] Three years later, in the spring of 1876, both of Manet's Salon submissions were refused, and he held a public exhibition of the rejected works in his studio, where a critic inquired about a large canvas turned to the wall. Manet replied that it was an unfinished painting of the *Execution* and that it would be revealed "in due course."^[8]

While his reasons for sending *The Execution of Maximilian* to the United States in 1879 are not documented, Manet's growing artistic reputation, combined with his rapidly deteriorating health, surely contributed to his decision. In the late 1870s, Manet had begun to attract the admiration and respect of French critics, as well as the public, for which he had yearned. Manet's simultaneous realization that he was succumbing to the debilitating effects of syphilis intensified his thirst for this long overdue recognition. In 1878-79, as if to proclaim the long awaited confirmation of his artistic worth, Manet painted the first self-portraits of his career, depicting himself as a fashionable artist and society man. Although never realized, Manet also planned a large independent retrospective exhibition to be held

simultaneously with the Paris Universal Exposition in 1878, and he proposed himself, unsuccessfully, to decorate a chamber in the new Hôtel de Ville.^[9] Likewise, Manet must have felt some urgency to exhibit the *Execution*, one of only a few large modern history paintings executed during his career, and a work he considered among his most important.^[10]

Other factors that certainly influenced Manet's decision to send *The Execution of Maximilian* abroad included the volatile political climate in France and the pertinence of the subject of the painting for North American viewers. Since 1869, when Manet first thought of exhibiting the *Execution*, the political environment in France had become more tolerant, but memories of Napoleon III's political blunders, the humiliating defeat of France by Prussia in 1870, and the horrors of the Commune remained fresh. Moreover, although it was gaining supporters, Royalists and Bonapartists continued to challenge the new republic. Consequently, the likelihood of a warm reception for the *Execution* in France remained negligible, but Manet might have imagined a sympathetic audience for his painting across the Atlantic, where anti-Napoleon sentiment had been intense. American relations with the French had been strained during the Civil War, and when the French were defeated at Sedan and the emperor tumbled from power, Americans were relieved, if not overjoyed. Not surprisingly, the United States approved heartily of the establishment of the Third Republic. For their part, the French were eager to capitalize on this enthusiasm to rebuild their relationship with America. The gift of the Statue of Liberty, for example, was a manifestation of French desire to restore and strengthen relations with her former ally. Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi's *Liberty Enlightening the World* (1875-84) was intended to symbolize the two nations' shared commitment to the republican ideal of liberty. Manet, perhaps operating on a similar perception of the American abhorrence of political tyranny, took the opportunity offered by his friends Beauplan and Ambré—bound for America—to share his painted condemnation of violence and over-reaching imperial power with the citizens of the sister republic.^[11]

Additional motivating factors for Manet in his decision to send *The Execution of Maximilian* to America were the desire to expand his reputation outside of France and to realize a profit. The American exhibitions of the *Execution* were "Great Picture" displays, popular entertainments, centered on a large painting, that were staged publicly for a fee.^[12] By the nineteenth century, Great Picture exhibitions were common in Europe and America, as enterprising artists sought to promote their works beyond the confines of academy exhibitions. Standing alone in the spotlight, surrounded by glowing, often self-generated, publicity, the artist could enhance his reputation, and his pocketbook, by appealing directly to the public. Typically, the artist contracted with an agent to manage the exhibitions, and they shared the profits. As the agent, Beauplan carried out all of the exhibition preparations and oversaw the day-to-day management at each venue, and Manet supplied some, if not all, of the funding. Having put forward his own money, Manet was concerned that it be spent prudently, and Beauplan made a point in his letters to reassure the painter that expenditures for each exhibition were minimal.^[13] The price of admission to the exhibition was twenty-five cents, a standard fee for Great Picture displays, and had it been popular, revenues should have covered the start-up costs and provided artist and impresario with handsome profits.^[14] Furthermore, if well received, the *Execution* might also find a buyer, adding to the financial rewards.^[15]

Finally, the scheme to parade *The Execution of Maximilian* around the United States might have served also as a prelude to an exhibition of the picture in England and possibly in France. If the American exhibitions were popular, word of their enthusiastic reception would filter back to Europe and perhaps contribute to a ground swell of interest in the artist and his picture. Beauplan, in a letter to Manet from New York, outlined his plan to have favorable reviews of the *Execution* reprinted in Mexico and London and stated his intention to send notices of the American exhibitions to newspapers in France. To incite interest among French nationals, specifically those living or traveling in the United States, Beauplan invited at least one French journalist, employed by a French newspaper in New York, to see the exhibition.[16]

Although personal, political, and financial concerns serve to explain why Manet wanted to send *The Execution of Maximilian* to America, the exhibitions would never have been realized without the assistance of his agents. Émilie Ambré (1854-1898) was born in Oran, Algeria, to a French father and a half-Arab mother, and her stage name, Ambré, referred to the golden color of her complexion. Ambré left Algeria at a young age and moved to France, where she studied at the Marseilles conservatory. In 1876-77, the Algerine performed in The Hague, where she captured the attention of the notorious womanizer William III, King of Holland. Ambré had a brief affair with the monarch, which she used to full advantage, claiming he had bestowed the title Comtesse d'Amboise upon her and showered her with priceless jewels that enhanced her glamorous stage presence.[17]

Ambré's career reached a high point in Paris in 1878, when she sang the lead role in *Aida* for the first French-language performance under the direction of Giuseppe Verdi, as well as the role of Violetta in Verdi's *La Traviata*. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Ambré also performed in England and in the United States with Her Majesty's Italian Opera Company, a London-based "pick-up" troupe founded and directed by James Henry Mapleson. Mapleson's company, built primarily of European performers, capitalized upon the American thirst for European culture in the years before most cities could support permanent opera companies.[18] In his memoirs, Mapleson described Ambré as "a Moorish prima donna of some ability and possessing great personal charms," thereby suggesting that her voice was not sublime.[19] Ambré was not of the same operatic rank or talent as Mapleson's more renowned prima donnas Etelka Gerster, Marie Marimon, or Christine Nilsson, but in the fall of 1879, when Gerster canceled her participation in Mapleson's American tour due to poor health and Nilsson was also unavailable, Ambré was thrust into the spotlight, rivaled only by Marimon. Circumstances were then favorable for Ambré to perform the role she most coveted, the lead in Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, which had introduced a new and shocking element of realism on the operatic stage. In New York, on November 26, 1879, Ambré debuted in *Carmen* to mixed reviews. Critics in New York found Ambré's voice unsuitable for the role but applauded her acting skills, especially her expression of the "fierceness and animality" that enlivened the character of *Carmen*. [20] Shedding light on her willingness to escort the *Execution* to America, in a letter to Manet, Ambré described her début as triumphant and asked the painter to urge his friend Antonin Proust to revive *Carmen* on the Paris stage with her in the title role.[21]

Exactly when or how Ambré became acquainted with Manet is not known. Manet probably met the diva in Paris, through his many connections in the French opera world, most likely

the French baritone, Jean-Baptiste Faure, who was one of the artist's most devoted patrons. [22] Moreover, Ambré owned a house near Bellevue, outside of Paris, where Manet took a hydrotherapy treatment in the summer and fall of 1879. Perhaps at Bellevue, they hatched a plan to exhibit *The Execution of Maximilian* in America, where Mapleson's troupe was scheduled to tour. One year later, at Bellevue, the artist painted the diva's portrait, undoubtedly a token of his gratitude for the exhibition of his painting abroad. To celebrate her performance of the role, and to flatter her desire to perform it in Paris, Manet painted Ambré as Carmen (fig. 4).[23]



Fig. 4, Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Emilie Ambre in the Role of Carmen*, 1880. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Edgar Scott [\[larger image\]](#)

While Ambré's association with Mapleson provided the opportunity for an American tour of Manet's painting, organization and management of the exhibitions fell to her partner Gaston de Beauplan, providing him with a potentially profitable project, while the diva focused on her operatic performances. The identity of Beauplan, whom American newspapers described as an art connoisseur and intimate of Manet, is obscure. He may have been a member of the prestigious Beauplan family that had served the French monarchy and boasted a line of painters, composers, and writers.[24] In an interview with the couple, published during the opera company's engagement in St. Louis, the reporter referred to Beauplan as the "count" and explained that he "lolls around the house attired *en négligé*, rigged up in an old coat with the legion of honor showing through the button hole. He is an affable, nervous gentleman and seems to think his lady quite worth all the litigation and trouble she has caused him." [25] Newspaper accounts, published during their tour, indicate that Ambré and Beauplan were married, and the litigation to which they referred was a case said to have been brought by Beauplan's father, who tried to have his son placed in a mental asylum when he announced his intention to wed the diva.[26]

The scandalous stories that surrounded the couple—Ambré's affair with the Dutch monarch and Beauplan's family tensions—sound almost too fantastic to be true. Indeed, impresarios like Mapleson, and individual performers themselves, were not above mixing fact and fiction to attract attention. As is true today, the lives of celebrities were fodder for the press, who recounted their activities to readers hungry for the sensational. In the case of Ambré, who was not considered one of opera's most gifted performers, the publicity that resulted

from such stories, printed in newspapers in the cities along the tour, made her more interesting to audiences. Manet may have believed as well that Ambré's notoriety would boost interest in *The Execution of Maximilian*, but the promotional materials for the exhibition did not mention the diva, nor was her association discussed in the exhibition reviews, further indications that she was not involved with the venture on a daily basis.

In October of 1879, Ambré and Beauplan traveled to the United States with Her Majesty's Italian Opera Company and brought Manet's picture with them for exhibition. Because Her Majesty's would travel to the most artistic and cultured cities in late nineteenth-century America—New York, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Baltimore—the tour offered the perfect opportunity for *The Execution of Maximilian* to be displayed in appropriate venues, a fact that could not have been lost on Manet. The troupe's first stop was New York, and midway through Mapleson's season, on December 1, the *Execution* was placed on view for approximately two weeks. On December 30, Her Majesty's moved to Boston, where the troupe performed at the Boston Theatre. In Boston, Manet's picture was on view from January 3 to 9, 1880. Scant attendance, and therefore monetary losses, at both venues led Beauplan to curtail the exhibition tour, and he did not take the *Execution* to Chicago, the troupe's third stop. In a letter to Manet, Beauplan stated pessimistically that he saw no potential for the success of Manet's painting in Chicago, which he characterized as a city completely lacking in culture.^[27] He sent the painting back to New York to await the couple at the end of their tour.

As mentioned previously, *The Execution of Maximilian* was presented to American viewers in a Great Picture exhibition. In the United States, the fascination for Great Pictures reached its height in the decades preceding its Civil War, a period when appreciation for art grew significantly. The American art scene blossomed through increased opportunities for art training, exhibitions, and sales, and interest in European art was spurred on as well by a growing number of artists and collectors who traveled abroad and by increased reporting of European art events in newspapers and magazines. Despite expanding interest, however, displays of art, especially foreign art, were still relatively rare.^[28] As a result, when Great Pictures came to town, trumpeted with the promise to educate, uplift, or amaze the viewer, a cross section of the public, seeking culture or entertainment or both, eagerly attended.

After the Civil War, however, with greater wealth, more opportunities for travel, and increased exposure to art at home and abroad, Americans grew more refined in their aesthetic tastes. As fortunes boomed, art collecting became a serious pursuit for many Americans, who looked to Europe for guidance. European paintings, in particular easel pictures by fashionable Continental artists, were imported in large numbers into the United States and were on display and available for purchase at a growing number of art galleries.^[29] American artists, keenly aware of the mounting competition, began to go abroad in record numbers to travel and to complete their educations in the great academies and studios of Europe. At home, they stepped up efforts to put their works before the public in exhibitions sponsored by artist organizations, many of which were founded in the post-war decades, and they worked more closely with art dealers as well. Reinforcing this process of aesthetic maturation, and lending a heightened seriousness to both art collecting and display, the first art museums—the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.—were incorporated in

1870, initiating a trend that would continue in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In this increasingly sophisticated environment, with numerous opportunities to view premium art from antiquity to the present, the spectacle of the Great Picture, with its crass marketplace associations and dependence upon mass appeal, lost much of its cachet.[30]

Thus, by 1879, when *The Execution of Maximilian* arrived in New York, the attraction of the Great Picture exhibition was questionable. In 1880, fading interest in these spectacles had a negative impact on another Great Picture exhibition in Boston and New York, that of William Holman Hunt's *Shadow of Death* (1870-73; Manchester City Art Galleries). Despite the fact that Hunt was better known than Manet and had enjoyed previous successes in the United States, in particular with his painting *The Light of the World*, the reception of *The Shadow of Death* was not overwhelmingly positive.[31] In part, Americans had grown weary of Pre-Raphaelite painting, but a writer for the *New-York Times* also expressed disillusionment with the enterprise of the Great Picture. Reflecting a nearly reverential attitude toward art, the writer observed, "A really great picture is too noble a creation to be made a peep-show of. It is beautiful in itself, and does not need an elaborate *mise en scene* to make it attractive. To cart a painting from city to city, advertise it, illuminate [it], drape it, and spout over it is really to lower its dignity." [32]

In their heyday, the most successful Great Pictures appealed to the largest segment of the public through dramatic, awe-inspiring subjects, large-scale format, and the display of breath-taking artistic ability. Skilled impresarios, using clever marketing strategies, stirred up great anticipation for these works, sometimes long before they were ready for exhibition, and used extensive advertising at the time of their débuts to attract crowds. To draw in visitors, Great Picture displays also required advance notices in the press, opening receptions, recognized venues, generous opening hours to allow for both the leisure and working classes to attend, and sometimes gimmicks, such as the endorsement of famous individuals or the promise of riveting installations. Moreover, the sale of explanatory brochures or prints of the work could generate even more money and expand public interest.[33]

Two of the most popular Great Pictures in nineteenth-century America were French painter Rosa Bonheur's *Horse Fair*, 1853 (figs. 5 and 6), a picture undoubtedly known to Manet during his student years in Paris, and American artist Frederic E. Church's *The Heart of the Andes* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Bonheur's painting was perceived as novel for the fact that a woman had painted the powerful, moving horses, rendered on an enormous scale. In the case of Church's landscape, the location was exotic, and the focus on natural forms, ranging from the minute to the sublime, was highly inspirational. Supplying them with the prestigious patina of Old World acclaim, both arrived in America from exhibitions abroad, floating on lavish praises from foreign critics and the public alike. Finally, experienced art handlers, familiar with the art scene in both Europe and America, managed both exhibition tours.[34]



Fig. 5, Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1853. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887(87.25). Photograph ©1997 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

[\[larger image\]](#)

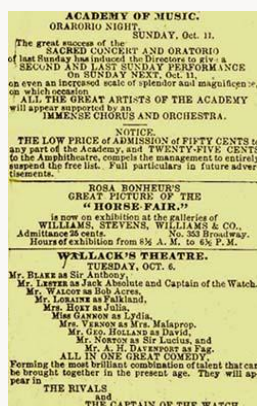


Fig. 6, "Rosa Bonheur's Great Picture of the *Horse Fair*." Advertisement in the *New-York Times*, 6 October 1857, p. 3. Sewanee, TN, duPont Library, The University of the South [\[larger image\]](#)

Already disadvantaged by the diminished status of the Great Picture and by the fact that the picture did not have a big reputation prior to its arrival in America, inept handling further compromised the potential for success for Manet's picture. Despite their association with Mapleson, a skilled operatic impresario, Beauplan and Ambré were not seasoned art agents like the men who had managed the tours of Bonheur and Church's Great Pictures. Manet's agents followed, more or less, the standard formula for the presentation of Great Pictures, but a number of poor, or uninformed, choices contributed to the exhibitions' failure. For example, Beauplan and Ambré hosted opening receptions prior to the public exhibitions of *The Execution of Maximilian*, and they took the opportunity to discuss Manet's painting with their guests over a buffet and champagne punch. Such social occasions had proven effective as a means to win over the press, the artistic community, and the social elite to the importance of individual Great Picture displays. However, in New York, they issued only one hundred-twenty invitations for the opening reception of Manet's painting, of which less than half attended. In Boston, a mere twenty-two invitations for the opening reception were issued, of which nineteen invitees showed up. These *soirées* were not large enough to incite the desired surge of interest among members of the art world and society, whose enthusiasm would lead to return visits and inspire the visits of their friends, family, and colleagues. The numbers are notably small when compared, for example, to the more than

five hundred guests who attended the 1859 opening reception for Church's *Heart of the Andes* in New York.[35]

Most likely, the short invitation lists resulted from the agents having but few contacts. Recognizing his outsider status, Beauplan found local people with connections to the art world to help with the arrangements for both exhibitions. For the New York exhibition, the art critic for the *New York Herald* assisted Beauplan by drafting the guest list for the opening reception and publishing the first review of the exhibition. While he expressed admiration for the highly dramatic, yet natural and convincing, presentation of the victims and the firing squad, the *Herald* critic was ambivalent about the loose paint handling and the unfinished appearance of the painting, a reaction shared by most critics:

The painting is as coarse as the work on a piece of theatrical scenery, and is in broad, flat masses, accentuated here and there by a few shades and shadows. . . . Of detail there is none on near examination. Confused splashes of paint, which at close quarters look like a mass of frozen beef, at a distance assume the form and action of hands clasped or in other positions. The whole work seems a huge *ébauche*. . . Figures and all take their place wonderfully well. At the proper distance all the detail is there. It is *la vérité cru* [sic].[36]

Judging from his use of French studio terminology, as well as a reference to the influence of Francisco Goya on *The Execution of Maximilian* (an aspect of Manet's picture completely ignored by other critics), this unidentified writer had traveled to Europe, and perhaps even studied art in Paris with one of Manet's acquaintances, such as Carolus-Duran or Léon Bonnat, who were ardent admirers of Spanish painting.[37] However, if he were a recent art student, and fairly new to New York, the *Herald* writer's contacts within the art world probably did not include the larger circle of established artists, art writers, members of the National Academy of Design, and sophisticated art aficionados who would have been most influential in generating interest in Manet's painting. Likely, the *Herald* critic compiled a guest list of those artists and critics who, like himself, might appreciate Manet's unorthodox style; for example, members and champions of the newly-formed Society of American Artists, many of whom had been exposed to recent art developments in Europe.[38] The small number of guests invited to the Boston reception also suggests that the invitees were carefully selected. If chosen for their liberal artistic inclinations, obvious candidates were followers and students of William M. Hunt, himself a former student of Couture's, who had overlapped briefly with Manet in the master's atelier.

In New York, advertising for the exhibition was also woefully inadequate. The event was announced solely by posters, five hundred of which were printed (fig. 7), but in a city the size of New York, for an exhibition that remained open for approximately two weeks, this number was hardly sufficient. Beauplan hired an assistant to place the posters along the city streets daily, but as he noted to Manet, they were usually plastered over within two hours. [39] Beauplan did not employ newspaper advertisements, although they were commonly used for art exhibitions and other entertainments. Furthermore, only two New York newspapers and two art journals noted the exhibition, which suggests that either Beauplan did not alert the New York press, other than the friends of the *Herald* critic who were invited to the opening reception, or his overtures were ignored.



Fig. 7, Poster advertising the exhibition of *The Execution of Maximilian* in New York, 1879. Paris, Galerie Berès [\[larger image\]](#)

Another factor detrimental to the success of the New York exhibition was the venue. Rather than a recognized exhibition hall or art gallery, Manet's agents chose to exhibit *The Execution of Maximilian* in an obscure basement space on Broadway at the corner of Eighth Street.^[40] The location was proximate to the Academy of Music, where Ambré was working, but in the late 1870s, Broadway below Fourteenth Street was a heavily trafficked commercial thoroughfare, not an art or entertainment district. Concurrent with the exhibition, the New-York Circus was in residence nearby at the old Globe Theatre and a few blocks away the Theatre Comique offered a special Christmas program, but the majority of theaters, music halls, and art galleries had, by this date, moved uptown.

By the late 1870s, the center of art exhibitions and sales in New York was the Twenty-third street area, close to the National Academy of Design, or points farther north.^[41] Early December exhibitions included: John H. Sherwood's and Benjamin Hart's collections of predominantly European paintings—on preview at the National Academy of Design before auction; paintings by American artists at Moore and Sutton's gallery on Madison Square followed by John Ruskin drawings in the same location; and modern European paintings at M. Knoedler and Company, located at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-second Street. While the exhibition of *The Execution of Maximilian* was virtually unattended, crowds flocked even farther uptown to the Seventh Regiment Armory, where a loan collection of Continental and American paintings was on view. Reflecting the taste for academic art, the place of honor in the art gallery was given to Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* (1870; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), the original version of which was owned by Napoleon III (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Examples by Karl Von Piloty, Michael Munkacsy, and Hugues Merle, to name a few of the European artists represented, as well as by Americans Frederic E. Church, George Inness, and William Merritt Chase, were also shown.

Despite the lackluster reception in New York, Beauplan had high hopes for Manet's painting in Boston, which he described as the most aristocratic, elegant, and artistic city in America.^[42] While in New York, Beauplan had met an *amateur* from Boston, with whose help he had completed arrangements for the Boston exhibition. Beauplan strengthened the advertising

campaign, sending announcements to four Boston newspapers in advance of the exhibition and utilizing newspaper advertisements, in addition to posters, during the display (figs. 8 and 9). Moreover, he secured a recognized venue for the Boston exhibition, the gallery of the Studio Building (fig. 10). Although not as fashionable as in the early 1860s, when Hunt was the chief occupant, in 1880 the Studio Building housed a number of artists, among them J. Foxcroft Cole, J. Appleton Brown, and Ignaz Gaugengigl, as well as musicians and language teachers. It was located in the heart of the commercial district in Boston, where there were also many art galleries, and the theater district was a few blocks away. Moreover, the large gallery of the Studio Building was in active use for exhibitions. In fact, immediately following the display of Manet's painting, it was used for the American Art Gallery, a newly instituted exhibition and sale of works by local artists.[43] Proving a marginal benefit derived from the improved advertising and venue, admissions in Boston exceeded those in New York, despite competition from the enormously popular Hunt memorial exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts. In a letter to Manet, written the day the exhibition closed, Beauplan maintained that *The Execution of Maximilian* had been received more warmly in Boston than in New York, which he called "a city consumed with business where art did not exist." Nonetheless, there were only thirteen visitors on opening day, and a meager fifteen to twenty visitors a day attended the exhibition thereafter.[44]



Fig. 8, Poster advertising the exhibition of *The Execution of Maximilian* in Boston, 1880. Paris, Galerie Berès
[\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 9, "Exhibition of a Great Painting by E. Manet." Advertisement in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 5 January 1880, p. 1. Boston Public Library [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 10, *Horticultural Hall and Studio Building, Tremont Street, Boston*, n.d. Photograph. Courtesy of The Bostonian Society. The Studio Building is the second from the left. [\[larger image\]](#)

Aside from the requisite exhibition arrangements, Manet's agents used one gimmick to attract attention to, and validate, the artist's Great Picture. On view at both venues was a letter from Émile Zola that read:

I assert that this canvas is truly the flesh and blood of the painter. It is he entirely and nothing but he. It will remain the most characteristic example of his talent, as well as the highest type of his power. . . . Manet has admirably succeeded in producing a work of a painter, of a great painter, I mean in translating a page of history into a personal idiom, with a truth of light and shade, with the truth of objects and personages.

Zola's comments proclaimed *The Execution of Maximilian* an outstanding example of Manet's work and raised the viewer's awareness of the artist's personal investment in the painting by describing the painting in visceral terms as "truly the flesh and blood of the painter," an especially graphic characterization given the violent subject.[\[45\]](#)

The letter from Zola was a seemingly brilliant stroke in the bid for public interest, both in its insistence on the artist's dedication to his art and as evidence of the enthusiasm shown Manet's picture by the famous novelist. Indeed, Beauplan noted to Manet that everyone who attended the opening reception in New York had asked to see the letter.[46] In the late 1870s, Zola's novels enjoyed a stunning success in America, and in the summer of 1879, in particular, a tidal wave of interest followed the publication in English of *Assomoir* (1877), the seventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart series. Despite wide readership of his novels, however, there was little agreement on the merits of Zola's style among literary critics and defenders of high culture. The problem was Zola's realistic style, especially his low-life subjects, which were questionable from an aesthetic and educational vantage point.[47] An example of the negative reaction of some critics to the mention of Zola, Montezuma, writing for the *Art Amateur*, lambasted Manet's picture and stated that it was fitting for the artist's outrageous work to be accompanied by a "certificate from Zola, the Dickens of bad literature." [48] The reaction to Zola's works was similar to that incited later by Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In 1884, Twain's novel was extremely popular but was not approved of by the more hidebound defenders of traditional culture.[49]

While not well served by his agents, the lack of interest in *The Execution of Maximilian* can also be linked to the fact that Manet was virtually unknown in America, which was noted repeatedly by the critics who reviewed the exhibitions. To remedy the situation, the organizers "puffed" the artist, supplying information on his life and career which they communicated orally to journalists at the opening receptions, and perhaps in a printed form as well. Given his personal and financial involvement in the exhibition of the *Execution*, it stands to reason that Manet supplied the basic information utilized by his agents, who, after all, were not artists but *habitués* of the opera world. In a letter to Manet, for example, Ambré credited him for giving her the essential vocabulary in English with which to point out the key elements of his painting.[50] The supplied data appeared initially in the *New York Herald* review, followed by a review in the *Art Interchange*. Later, segments of text, identical to those published in New York, appeared in almost all of the Boston reviews.[51] However, the material repeated in the reviews is riddled with inaccuracies and exaggerations, the consistency of which points to the distribution of corrupt information. The nature of the inaccuracies suggests that an effort was made to sensationalize both the picture and the artist. It should be remembered that Manet's agents were not strangers to scandal and that Ambré was, at the same moment, relishing the opportunity to perform in one of the most controversial operas of the nineteenth century. Given their tendencies toward the *dramatique*, Beauplan and Ambré likely embellished the information to pique public interest, an effort that evidently backfired.

As revealed by reviews published in New York and Boston, Manet was portrayed as a radical and an outsider to Parisian art circles, facts that would raise a question with American observers about his artistic talents and seriousness of purpose. As the critic for the *New York Herald* phrased it, Manet "declared himself a revolutionist against the usual methods and conventionalities of the French school of the day and has therefore had many difficulties to encounter and has been rewarded by no medals." [52] In addition to the purported lack of official recognition, Manet's canvases were said to have created a "sensation" at the Salon from the beginning of his career. To refer to Manet's works as sensational implied a shallow

desire to attract attention and suggested that his art deviated in subject or style from the aesthetic norm.[53]

Although he had studied with Thomas Couture, the artist's master was identified instead as Gustave Courbet. Beuplan and Ambré may have confused Courbet and Couture, or they may have deliberately advanced a prevailing notion in Paris that Manet was a follower of Courbet, a leader of young, progressive artists. The link between the Realism of Courbet and Manet's works was suggested early on by French critics, as both men painted low-life subjects in a sober palette antithetical to the aesthetic sensibilities upheld by the French academy. Additionally, the artists were paired for their private exhibitions held simultaneously with the 1867 Universal Exposition. In the years following his death, Courbet's reputation was on the rise in advanced art circles, but the painter was still perceived by many as a political radical and creator of powerful but ugly pictures.[54] Couture, on the other hand, was greatly admired in New York and especially in Boston, where Hunt had helped to spread his teacher's fame. Given his recent death and undisputed celebrity, had it been stated that Couture was Manet's master, more interest in the exhibition might have been generated.[55]

Manet's obscurity, which the organizers attempted to overcome with sensationalism, was due largely to two factors, a dearth of printed information in English on the artist and the fact that his works had never before been exhibited in America. In the late 1870s, Manet was discussed from time to time in the art columns of American magazines and newspapers, in particular, in reviews of the Salon and discussions of French Impressionism, but these notices were not flattering. Typically, he was described as a rebel, although, it was observed, a handful of influential French critics recognized his importance. Even in 1879, when he made a splash at the Salon with *In the Conservatory* (1879; Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin) and *Boating* (1874; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Manet was not mentioned in a single American art journal and, of the major newspapers in New York and Boston, only by the *New York World*. [56]

Aside from these occasional, brief, and typically negative published notices, one cautiously positive account of Manet's art was printed in the United States prior to the arrival of *The Execution of Maximilian*. In September 1878, William Minturn, an English novelist and critic, wrote the first feature article on the artist to appear in an American magazine. Published in *Appleton's Journal* of New York, Minturn's article provided biographical information, associated the artist with Realism, and discussed examples of his works in different media and from different stages in his career. Minturn identified bold originality as the source of Manet's unpopularity and the abuse he received from official quarters. Defining his style as one built upon ordinary, everyday observation, Minturn expressed especially high regard for the *Execution*, in which "the realism of Manet has its true field, and the emotionalism of his genius is only restrained by it within due bounds." As Minturn could only have seen it in the studio, the painter must have shown his great canvas to the critic and underscored its significance, opening the alluring possibility that Manet, already in 1878, may have been considering an American exhibition of the *Execution*. [57]

Like the artist's biography, a history of the painting, as well as a physical description, appears in almost all of the exhibition reviews. The majority of the reviewers proclaimed

that *The Execution of Maximilian* was inflammatory in content, for which it had been censored by the French government. As a result, it was noted, the painting had never been publicly displayed. The physical description accounted for the major figures in the composition and also hinted at the artist's belief in the dignity and courage of Maximilian and his generals at the moment of their deaths. The emperor was said to "boldly" face the firing squad, while Miramon "turns a calm, disdainful face" to his executioners.

Undoubtedly, the declaration of the beleaguered history of *The Execution of Maximilian* was part of the strategy to excite interest in the picture. Manet and his agents anticipated that Americans, who were opposed to Napoleon III and to censorship, would rush to see the provocative painting, but their perception of American attitudes toward the Maximilian affair was overly simplified. Stemming from mounting opposition to Napoleon III and his imperial government, Europeans, including republican-minded French citizens like Manet, assigned the French emperor the lion's share of the blame for luring Maximilian to Mexico and, consequently, for his savage death. Many Americans, however, had believed Maximilian was complicit with Napoleon III in his attempt to challenge American domination in North America. They viewed Maximilian's presence in North America as a violation of the Monroe Doctrine and a threat to republicanism; they had even advocated his removal. While it is true that some felt pity for Maximilian and saw him as a pawn of French imperialism, sympathy for the Austrian eroded when he ordered the immediate execution of any person found carrying arms or who was convicted of membership in an armed band. The so-called Black Decree, signed by Maximilian on October 3, 1865, was, in effect, a zero-tolerance decree against the republican rebels and supporters of President Juárez. By signing this decree, in the opinion of most Americans, Maximilian had essentially signed his own death warrant.

Considering that he had ousted another leader and then put the former members and supporters of the preceding government to death, there was little doubt that Maximilian's own execution was justified; nonetheless, Americans expressed overwhelming dismay at the violent treatment of the Mexican emperor by republican forces. The United States government had asked Juárez to spare Maximilian's life, a request that the republican president ignored, insisting that his authority might be challenged if the emperor lived. Given the fact that the United States government supported Juárez, his refusal to spare Maximilian's life raised an outcry among Americans, who saw his actions as unpardonable and insulting to republican ideals. For those who had hoped to see a stable democratic government established in Mexico, the assassination of the emperor by Juárez and his forces was not an enlightened, humanitarian way of handling a difficult political transition. Rather, such an act of brutality proved that change in Mexico would continue to be effected through violence and bloodshed. As a writer for the *Nation* gloomily commented, "During the whole of the revolting farce there has not been the slightest evidence that the mass of the people have the slightest idea of what republican liberty means, or that the political leaders have either the self restraint, respect for life and property and liberty and law, without which political leaders in a semi-barbarous country are sure to prove a curse."^[58] Only when Mexico could utilize non-aggressive, diplomatic means of solving conflict to effect political policy could a true republic come into being.^[59]

By 1879-80, when Americans had the opportunity to view Manet's picture, Mexico had made political and economic advances under the presidencies of Juárez and his successor Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, but the republic remained unstable and socially repressive, conditions which contributed to continued ambivalence toward their southern neighbor on the part of most Americans. In 1876, Porfirio Díaz, famous for his defeat of the French at Puebla in 1862, had muscled his way into power through a coup. Even after his legitimate election to the presidency in 1877, peace and order were achieved mainly through intimidation and violence. While Díaz's presidency—more accurately his dictatorship—would prove itself effective in putting Mexico on the road to modernization and establishing profitable business partnerships with American industrialists by the end of the century, in the late 1870s, his success was far from certain. Not surprisingly, President Rutherford B. Hayes was hesitant to formally acknowledge Díaz's government but did so with reluctance in the spring of 1878.[60]

Thus, to American eyes in 1879-80, Manet's painting was as much a reminder of the regrettable ending to Maximilian's life, and the implications this brutal event held for the future of Mexico, as of Napoleon III's abominable interference in the New World. Expressing sympathy for the plight of Maximilian, the *Boston Traveller* critic referred to him as the "unfortunate emperor of Mexico," and the critic for the *Boston Journal* referred to Manet's painting as "a severe commentary upon the policy which made the unfortunate Maximilian a corpse and Carlotta a maniac." The *Journal* writer noted the subsequent insanity of his wife as well, suggesting that both were victimized by Napoleon's intervention in Mexico.[61] While the reviewers conveyed some sadness in response to Maximilian's tragic fate, the overwhelming sentiment was one of animosity and disdain for the Mexican rebels and their perceived supporters. Most writers focused their attention on the central section of the composition, specifically the firing squad and the onlookers who peer over the wall. These reviewers interpreted Manet's painting literally, as Mexican soldiers coldly executing the emperor and his generals. Apparently encouraged by Manet's matter-of-fact presentation, the critics expressed certain ethnic biases in response to these figures; in particular, they conveyed the notion that the Mexican character was indifferent to suffering and death and the culture exemplified a tendency for violence. The writer for the *Boston Journal*, for example, characterized the men of the firing squad as "nonchalant" in carrying out their deathly deed and noted that the faces of the Mexican onlookers were both "curious" and "brutal." As proof that Mexicans had become inured to death and violence, presumably because they endured them frequently, the *New York Herald* writer pointed to "the little girl, leaning her head on her bare arms as she looks with curious cold eyes at the dying men." Likewise, the critic for the *Boston Traveller*, responding to the same figures, denigrated the "coolness" with which "Mexicans of all classes look on such deeds, being so well accustomed to them." He noted that one of the women watching the execution was "in the act of using her fan," signaling that she was unmoved by the event, while "another is leisurely resting her head on her hand, the elbow being indolently placed on the top of the wall," also indicating a perverse indifference to the horror of the event unfolding in front of her.[62]

Critics were clearly disturbed by the aggressive actions of the executioners and commented repeatedly that the subject was simply too terrible for art. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* called the work an example of "startling effrontery" and remarked that few artists would have had

the "impudence to paint and the courage to show such a group as the six soldiers." The critic for the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette* called Manet's picture "a howling blood-and-thunder melodrama in paint."^[63] While *The Execution of Maximilian* packed plenty of tragic drama, critics were surprised at the lack of emotion and individual expression in the painting, ingredients they expected to encounter in historical painting.^[64] The critic for the *Boston Journal* described Manet's picture as "unrelieved by any sympathy or sentiment." The same critic elaborated, "The rude final set of the melancholy drama in which Maximilian played is illuminated by no colored light, and relieved by no refining touch; it is presented with all the force of unmodified realism, and stands forth bare and cold."^[65] In other words, Manet avoided all artistic devices, such as symbolic lighting or warm rich color, which would have conveyed the notion of heroic sacrifice for Maximilian and his generals and focused instead on the hard, cold reality of the emperor's horrifying demise.

In their study of American historical paintings, William H. Gerdtz and Mark Thistlewaite have argued that, even as the taste for history painting waned in the late-nineteenth century, the expectation persisted for the genre to exalt significant human action.^[66] While death—even violent death—was not an unusual subject in historical painting, successful examples of the genre had presented victims as martyrs to a worthy cause, as in Emanuel Leutze's *Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848 (fig. 11), a stirring representation of the victory of Hernán Cortés over the Aztec Indians in Mexico in 1521. Acts of aggression and brutality are committed by both Spanish soldiers and Aztecs, but the superior armor and weapons of the Spanish carry the day. Leutze chose the subject at an important moment in nineteenth-century history—the close of the war between the United States and Mexico—as a reminder of the long, but noble, struggle of civilization over barbarism and the hope for peace and stability in the future.^[67]



Fig. 11, Emanuel Leutze, *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. Oil on canvas. Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund [\[larger image\]](#)

Although some viewers deemed the work excessively violent, *The Storming of the Teocalli* was exhibited to great acclaim in both Boston and New York in the years after its completion. In contrast to Leutze's epic vision of the domination of a superior culture over an uncivilized one, *The Execution of Maximilian* did not impress viewers with an inspiring message. Instead, Manet's painting presents an ignoble moment—the cold-blooded execution of a European

aristocrat and ruler—and is completely devoid of a moral. The uncivilized element of Mexican society dominates, which spurred one critic to call Manet's work an example of "barbarous realism."[\[68\]](#) As a result, the picture offered little hope for the correction of brutality and injustice in Mexico. Instead, it reminded viewers of a situation that had shocked and disappointed in 1867 and that remained problematic in 1879-80.

Finally, writers quibbled over inaccuracies in Manet's picture and suggested that the picture could not be taken seriously because of its factual errors; comments that must have damaged interest in the exhibition even further. In fact, some journalists took Manet to task for these flaws, which reflects an expectation for truth in historical painting. The journalist for the *Boston Evening Gazette* noted petulantly, "We doubt if the story is told with a single fidelity to the real facts of the execution, from the uniforms of the soldiery to the positions of the actors, and the locale in which the scene was enacted. A picture such as this is an insult to the understanding." Likewise, the *New York Herald* critic wrote, "Historically considered the whole scene is incorrect; for the three men were over two paces apart, and were shot standing on a hillside with their executioners below them and inside a hollow square of 4,000 men. Mejia, besides, who is represented as of about the same height as his companions, was a very short man. Maximilian had also changed his place from the centre to the left of the line. The costumes and accoutrements of the soldiers, too, might be criticised on the score of inaccuracy."[\[69\]](#)

In addition to their shocked, and sometimes angry, responses to the subject matter, critics also focused their attentions on stylistic issues. They admired the forceful but natural presentation of the figures and the action in *The Execution of Maximilian* but lamented the loose, seemingly undisciplined handling of painting and the sacrifice of details. Again, their reactions are not surprising in light of the fact that Manet's picture is a historical painting, for which the expectation existed for clarity and detail to support the narrative. The writer for the *Art Interchange* identified the power of the picture "in the pose of the figures and the vigorous action of the scene" but complained that there was "no detail whatever, and the painting is in coarse, broad masses of painting with a strong contrast of light and shade." Likewise, the critic for the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, perhaps William Howe Downes, wrote, "The types of the individual soldiers are in their way quite perfect. The sergeant behind them, taken alone, is a very skillful and satisfactory figure. The movements are in all cases natural, unaffected, and characteristic. . . . Manet has given in various parts a very true impression of nature, in other parts his representation has proved to be far behind what he intended, and totally inadequate to express his idea." In reference to the loose paint handling, the same critic classified, and devalued, Manet's painting as a "magnified sketch," indicating, as had the *Herald* critic, that the work did not appear finished. The most sympathetic respondent, the reporter for the *Boston Evening Transcript*, acknowledged the "crudities" of handling in Manet's picture, but he praised the painting for its originality, unconventional effects, vigor, and faithfulness to nature. Hinting at dissatisfaction with the flawless and idealized treatment typical of academic painting, he wrote, "There is a sort of fascination in its [the *Execution's*] almost brutal realism, and in what the artist doubtless considers a sincerity of treatment that disdains the prettinesses [sic] of finish which often emasculate a work of art."[\[70\]](#) As a result of its unorthodox treatment, and the resulting de-emphasis on narrative, reviewers predicted correctly—classifiable in this case as a self-

fulfilling prophecy—that the *Execution* would hold interest only for artists, not for the general public.

As noted in previous discussions of his American debut, Manet's picture won the praises of three American painters, but until now, the identities of these artists have not been revealed. In a letter to Manet, written from New York on November 30, 1879, Beuplan noted that J. Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917), William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), and Walter Shirlaw (1838-1909) had attended the opening reception in that city and, as they stood before Manet's canvas, they had praised the spirit and energy with which the work was executed and promised to commend the work to others.[71] Providing insight into their ability to appreciate the unconventional style of Manet, Shirlaw and Chase (fig. 12) had studied at the Royal Academy in Munich, while Beckwith was a student in Paris, where he studied with Carolus-Duran and briefly also with Bonnat. As evidence of his taste for progressive art during his student years, Chase was inspired as well by the work of the German painter Wilhelm Leibl, who worked in a painterly, bravura style and focused on ordinary subjects. Despite different locations of study, the men shared certain fundamental ideas about painting; in particular, a reverence for direct engagement with subject matter conveyed through personalized facture. Additionally, all three men had been encouraged by their teachers to study and emulate the boldly realistic and expressive paintings of the seventeenth-century Dutch and Spanish masters, in particular Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez, whom Manet and the French Realists also admired.[72]



Fig. 12, William Merritt Chase, *Keying Up—The Court Jester*, 1875. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Gift of the Chapellier Galleries [\[larger image\]](#)

The predisposition to find merit in, even to admire, Manet's *The Execution of Maximilian* was a reflection of an aesthetic trend that had begun in the United States in the mid-to-late 1870s, brought about by exposure to more progressive artistic styles and techniques. European travel and study bolstered the confidence of American artists and art writers, who increasingly expressed their weariness with stale and predictable academic formulae and supported the adoption of individual modes of expression. In Boston, anti-academic aesthetic concerns had been introduced early-on by William Morris Hunt and propagated by his students, and in New York, the founding of the Society of American Artists in 1877 was a manifestation of the fact that the number of progressive artists was growing. Manet's

admirers Chase, Shirlaw, and Beckwith had aligned themselves with the progressives. All three were members of the Society of American Artists, and Shirlaw served as its first president.

The new aesthetic ideas would dominate by the mid 1880s, when the activities of artists and critics, among them Chase and Beckwith, would prove decisive in establishing Manet's reputation in America, through additional exhibitions and purchases of his works and more frequent criticism devoted to his innovations. Works by Manet were seen again in Boston and New York in 1883, at the Foreign Exhibition and at the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition respectively, but it was in 1886, when the influential French dealer Paul Durand-Ruel presented a ground-breaking Impressionist exhibition in New York, featuring the even more radical experiments of a younger generation of French artists, that Manet was hailed by critics as the old master of modern painting and father of French Impressionism.^[73] However, the works by Manet that found favor in the mid-to-late 1880s were not his sober Realist paintings, like *The Execution of Maximilian*, but fashionable genre scenes, still life paintings, and portraits. When it was exhibited for a second time, in May 1887, at the National Academy of Design in New York, the *Execution* again stirred up controversy, proving that it was not an easy picture to like, even at a time when Manet's pictures were receiving warmer recognition and praise from American critics.

Partial to fashionable Continental art, unfamiliar with the artist and his oeuvre, and little attracted by the racy promotional tactics employed by the exhibition organizers, Americans ignored Manet's painting at the time of its début in December and January 1879-80. Their lack of interest in *The Execution of Maximilian* was influenced also by the critical response. Critics divided their attentions between the political subject matter of the painting, which they deemed shockingly brutal, and Manet's unorthodox style. The subject caused discomfort for the writers, reminding them of the ongoing problem of political instability in Mexico and of the frequent use of violence to effect, or enforce, change. Artistically speaking, Manet's picture both troubled and intrigued critics. In a historical painting, American viewers expected to find the truth, rendered in precise detail and with fine finish, but in the *Execution*, they encountered a misrepresentation of the facts on a large canvas, treated in the unfinished manner of a sketch. While they actually discouraged the public from visiting the exhibition, claiming that it would not please, critics, as well as a few American artists, were enthralled with Manet's broad, strong manner of handling paint, and the direct treatment of the subject, but their praises were not enough to insure the success of the exhibition.

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Notes

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[1] There is an extensive bibliography for *The Execution of Maximilian* and related works. The fundamental studies are Nils Gösta Sandblad, *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception*, trans. Walter Nash (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954), pp. 109-80; Albert Boime, "New Light on Manet's *Execution of Maximilian*," *Art Quarterly* 36 (Autumn 1973), pp. 172-208; Anne Coffin Hanson, *Manet and the Modern Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 110-18; Bell Gallery, List Art Center, *Edouard Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1981); Françoise Cachin, Charles S. Moffett, and Michel Melot, *Manet 1832-1883*, Exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), pp. 272-80; Juliet Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: The Execution of Maximilian. Painting, Politics and Censorship* (London: National Gallery, 1992).

[2] See Hans Huth, "Impressionism Comes to America," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 29 (April 1946): pp. 226-28; Hanson, pp. 116-17; Alexandra Murphy, "French Paintings in Boston: 1800-1900," in Anne L. Poulet and Alexandra Murphy, *Corot to Braque: French Paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), pp. xli-xliii; William H. Gerdtz, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 48; Juliet Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian" in Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: Execution of Maximilian*, pp. 69-70; Laura L. Meixner, *French Realist Painting and the Critique of American Society, 1865-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 211-13.

[3] Information on the exhibitions is found in four letters from Beauplan and Ambré to Manet. These letters are in the Département des arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris. The letters are partially transcribed in Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Manet raconté par lui-même*, vol. 2 (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1926), pp. 71-76, and most accounts of the exhibitions are drawn from these transcriptions, rather than the originals. Certain facts, such as the identities of Manet's American admirers, are not given in the transcripts and, as a result, are not widely known.

[4] For a history of Napoleon III's intervention in Mexico, the American reaction to this incursion, and discussion of Maximilian's precarious rule, see Jasper Ridley, *Maximilian and Juárez* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992); Henry Blumenthal, *France and the United States: Their Diplomatic Relations, 1789-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. 74-116; Douglas Johnson, "The French Intervention in Mexico: A Historical Background," in Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: Execution of Maximilian*, pp. 15-33.

[5] *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1867; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *The Execution of Maximilian* (1867-68; National Gallery, London), *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868-69; Städtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim), study for *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868-69; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen), and *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868; lithograph, New York Public Library). While the three large oil paintings share key compositional elements, the first was Manet's most emotional and imaginative presentation of the tragedy. The second and third canvases, by contrast, reveal a process of refinement in the accessories and setting as documentary evidence of the execution filtered into France.

Sandblad established the chronology for the Maximilian series and identified the documentary and visual sources on which Manet relied. See Sandblad, *Manet: Three Studies*, pp. 109-80. For the most recent analysis of the works, see Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian," in Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: Execution of Maximilian*, pp. 51-67.

[6] John House, "Manet's Maximilian: History Painting, Censorship and Ambiguity," in Wilson-Bareau, *Manet: Execution of Maximilian*, pp. 107-8. For Zola's comments on the soldiers' uniforms, made in response to the lithograph of *The Execution of Maximilian*, see Juliet Wilson-Bareau, ed., "Appendix II: Documents Relating to the 'Maximilian Affair,'" in Cachin, Moffett, and Melot, pp. 531-32.

Religious allusions have also been detected in the painting, suggesting that Maximilian was viewed by Manet as a martyr to French imperialism. Sandblad first associated the rounded brim of the emperor's sombrero with a halo. Boime furthered Sandblad's reading of the religious allusions by likening the position of Maximilian between the two generals to the position of Christ at the Crucifixion. Sandblad, pp. 147-48; 156-57, and Boime, "New Light on Manet's *Execution of Maximilian*," p. 193.

In actuality, Maximilian was third in the line of victims, with Miramón in the center. Although he may not have known the correct order when he began the Maximilian series, Manet certainly knew it by the time he painted the second and third canvases but chose instead to place the emperor in the center. Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian," pp. 48-58.

[7] Wilson-Bareau has suggested, in light of Madame Manet's statement, that the artist may have considered sending the *Execution* to the Viennese Universal Exposition that summer. Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian," p. 69. Michelet, an ardent

republican, was opposed to the Second Empire and Napoleon III and would have been sympathetic to Manet's frustrations over the censorship of his painting. Michelet had been a professor of history at the Collège de France and in charge of the historical section of the national archives but lost these positions in 1851, when he refused to take the oath of allegiance to Napoleon III.

For Manet's political alignment, specifically his support of republican ideals and the Third Republic, see Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 169-71. As evidence of his dislike of Napoleon III and his desire to discredit his leadership, at least one other work by Manet from the 1860s has been read as negative commentary on the emperor's policies and perhaps on his intervention in Mexico specifically. See Douglas Druick and P. Zegers, "Manet's 'Balloon': French Diversion, The Fête de l'Empereur 1862," *Print Collector's Newsletter* 14 (May-June 1983), pp. 37-46.

[8] "La journée à Paris, M. Manet chez lui," *L'Événement*, 20 April 1876, cited in Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian," p. 69. The two rejected paintings were *Artist* (1875; Museu de Arte, São Paulo) and *Laundry* (1875; Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA).

[9] These are *Self-Portrait with a Palette* (1878-79; Private Collection) and *Self-Portrait with a Skullcap* (1878-79; Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo). For Manet's growing reputation in the late 1870s and his thirst for greater acclaim, see George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 200-35; John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), pp. 399-437; Carol Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 201-67.

[10] In 1872, in an inventory of his works, Manet valued the *Execution* at 25,000 francs, an amount equivalent to that he assigned to *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Wilson-Bareau, "Manet and The Execution of Maximilian," p. 69, n. 80.

[11] For Franco-American relations in the 1870s, see Blumenthal, pp. 116-27. The history and meaning of the Statue of Liberty are discussed in Marvin Trachtenberg, *The Statue of Liberty* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), and also in Albert Boime, *Hollow Icons: The Politics of Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), pp. 113-39.

[12] The phenomenon of the Great Picture had been introduced with stunning success in the late-eighteenth century by the entrepreneurial Anglo-American artist John Singleton Copley, who exhibited single paintings in hired spaces in London and charged admission. Most successful of these ventures was the exhibition of *The Death of Major Peirson* (1782-84; Tate Gallery, London), a contemporary history painting in which the valiant British hero, Peirson, dies in the process of defeating the French on the Isle of Jersey in 1781. Not only did Copley sell the painting for £800 to the print seller and promoter John Boydell, but also the artist reaped financial rewards by exhibiting the work for a fee before relinquishing it to the owner, who then oversaw the production of a print. See Richard H. Saunders, "Genius and Glory: John Singleton Copley's *The Death of Major Peirson*," *American Art Journal* 22 (1990): p. 11.

The lucrative practice was quickly adopted outside of England. For example, in France, Jacques-Louis David exhibited *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799; Musée du Louvre, Paris) for a fee, and in 1820, Théodore Géricault took *The Raft of the Medusa* (1817-18; Musée du Louvre, Paris) from Paris to England for exhibition. Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 104-6, 408-15.

There were many famous pictures by French artists that toured the United States in the nineteenth century. In the 1820s and 1830s, copies of David's *Coronation of Napoleon* (David and his studio; Musée de Versailles) and Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (copy by George Cook, New-York Historical Society) toured American cities to great acclaim. Also popular were *The Temptation of Adam and Eve* and *The Expulsion from Paradise* (1828; unlocated) by Claude-Marie Dubufe, which were seen in New York and Boston in 1832-33, and elicited much attention for the full nudity of the figures. For single-painting exhibitions of works by French artists in Boston and New York, see Murphy, pp. xxiv-xxv, and Carrie Reborra Barratt, "Mapping the Venues: New York City Art Exhibitions," in Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat, eds., *Art and the Empire City, New York, 1825-1861* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), pp. 47-65.

[13] Beauplan also promised to send Manet a complete list of expenditures as well as the admission receipts. Unfortunately, neither has been located. Gaston de Beauplan to Édouard Manet, 30 November 1879, Manet, *Lettres et documents*, Département des arts graphique, Musée du Louvre, Paris, p. 21.

[14] As an example of the profits that could be realized from successful Great Picture exhibitions, for three weeks in the spring of 1859, American landscape painter Frederic E. Church exhibited *The Heart of the Andes* (1859; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) in New York at twenty-five cents a ticket. Sharing the profits with his agent, Church grossed

approximately \$3,200. Kevin J. Avery, *Church's Great Picture, The Heart of the Andes* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993), p. 36.

[15] It was a widely-known fact that Americans, especially eager to purchase contemporary French art, had forcefully entered the international art-buying arena after the American Civil War. Works by French academic painters, like Jean-Léon Gérôme and William-Adolphe Bouguereau, were popular among American collectors, but also desirable were examples by non-academic painters, including Manet's master, Thomas Couture, and artists of the Barbizon School. By 1879, even the works of the radical Realist Gustave Courbet had received favorable notice, and several major examples were owned by Americans. Douglas E. Edelson, "Courbet's Reception in America Before 1900," in Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, *Courbet Reconsidered* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1988), pp. 69-71.

With an eye to the sale of the Execution, in a press statement, Manet's agents noted that the 1878 sale of opera star Jean-Baptiste Faure's collection of paintings was a spectacular success where Manet's pictures realized prices far beyond what Faure had paid. The French baritone was indeed a major collector of Manet's paintings, but the sale on April 29, 1878 was a flop. Not only does the mention of the Faure sale link Ambré and Beauplan to Faure, who perhaps introduced them to Manet, but also the distortion of the sale outcome by Manet's agents was intended to present Manet as a market success and thereby to encourage interest in the acquisition of the painting. For details of the 1878 Faure sale, see Anthea Callen, "Faure and Manet," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 83 (March 1974), pp. 166-67.

[16] The decision to invite the French journalist to the New York exhibition backfired. Beauplan wrote Manet that the French writer accused the painter in print of being a turncoat, and not a loyal compatriot. Gaston de Beauplan to Édouard Manet, 4 January 1880, Manet, *Lettres et documents*, p. 22.

[17] For biographical and professional information on Ambré, see "La Comtesse D'Amboise," *New York World*, 9 May 1878, p. 5; "Musical Matters," *Boston Herald*, 4 January 1880, p. 3; "Ambre, the Algerine," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 January 1880, p. 2; Luigi Arditì, *My Reminiscences* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1896), p. 205; card file on Ambré, Archives, Metropolitan Opera, New York.

[18] For the history of opera in the United States, see John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993) and June C. Ottenberg, *Opera Odyssey: Toward a History of Opera in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1994). Mapleson's history is recorded in Harold Rosenthal, ed., *The Mapleson Memoirs: The Career of an Operatic Impresario, 1858-1888* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966). Additional information on Mapleson and the 1879-80 American tour of Her Majesty's Italian Opera Company can be found in John Frederick Cone, *First Rival of the Metropolitan Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage*, vol. 11 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 90-97; "A Talk with Col. Mapleson," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 49 (29 November 1879), p. 232; "Thirty Years as a Manager," *New-York Times*, 28 December 1879, pp. 1-2.

[19] Rosenthal, p. 133.

[20] *Carmen* had premiered in Paris in 1875 with Marie Galli-Marié singing the title role. In 1878, Minnie Hauk appeared in the first performance of *Carmen* in New York and Boston. For the response to Ambré's performance in *Carmen*, see "Italian Opera. Mme. Ambre in *Carmen*," *New York Sun*, 27 November 1879, p. 3; "Academy of Music—'Carmen,'" *New York Herald*, 27 November 1879, p. 4. It was for her performance of the title role in *Aida*, not for her performance in *Carmen*, that Ambré received the warmest praise during Mapleson's 1879-80 American tour.

[21] Émilie Ambré to Édouard Manet, 4 January 1880, Manet, *Lettres et documents*, p. 24. Proust would serve as minister of fine arts under prime minister Léon Michel Gambetta from 1881-82.

[22] Supporting their probable acquaintance, both Faure and Ambré contracted with Mapleson for performances during his 1879 spring season in London. For an earlier reference to Faure and Ambré, see note 15.

[23] My thanks to Professor Therese Dolan who shared her research on Ambré with me; in particular, a paper she wrote on Manet's portrait of Ambré in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Professor Dolan delivered the paper as the Roz Perry Memorial Lecture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in May 1997.

[24] For example, in the 1870s, Victor-Arthur de Beauplan (1823-1890) served as the Chief Clerk of Theatres and as the Vice-Director of Fine Arts for the Ministry of Public Instruction. If Gaston were related to Victor-Arthur, an association with the world of the theater and public entertainment, where he could have met Ambré, would have been natural. *Dictionnaire*

international des écrivains du jour, 1891 ed., s.v. "Beauplan (Victor-Arthur Rousseau de)," and *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, 1949 ed., s.v. "Beauplan (Victor-Arthur Rousseau de)," by P. Leguay.

[25] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 January 1880

[26] "Art and Artists," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 3 January 1880, p. 7; "Musical Matters. A Chat about the Operatic Week. Marimon, Ambre, Valleria at Home," *Boston Sunday Herald*, 4 January 1880, p. 3; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 30 January 1880.

[27] Gaston de Beauplan to Édouard Manet, 9 January 1880, Manet, *Lettres et documents*, p. 23.

[28] In New York, for example, European art could be seen only at the Dusseldorf Gallery, which opened in 1849 and presented works by artists trained at the Dusseldorf Academy in Germany, at a few European art galleries like Goupil, Vibert and Company, a Paris firm that opened a New York branch in 1848, and the occasional academy or club exhibition.

[29] For the decades following the American Civil War, the largely conservative tastes of American collectors are documented in period studies of their collections, such as Earl Shinn's *Art Treasures of America* (Philadelphia, 1879-1881), which reveal particular interest in the works of the French academicians and the Barbizon School, as well as the genre painters of Italy, Spain and Holland. By the mid-1880s, the number of French paintings in American collections was so large that the French government sent a representative to record and assess the national treasures that had fallen into Yankee hands. In his report, the Frenchman used the William H. Vanderbilt collection as a typical example in which two-thirds of the holdings were French paintings, and the remainder were examples of the Belgian, Dutch, English, German, Italian, and Spanish schools. Among the French examples, which Durand-Gréville deemed the finest works in the collection, were examples by Gérôme, Ernest Meissonier, Jules Breton, Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, and Couture. E. Durand-Gréville, "La Peinture aux Etats-Unis: Les Galeries privées. (premier article)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 2, 36 (July 1887), pp. 65-75, and E. Durand-Gréville, "La Peinture aux Etats-Unis: Les Galeries privées. (deuxième et dernier article)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 2, 36 (September 1887), pp. 250-55. The articles were also published in English. See E. Durand-Gréville, "Private Picture-Galleries of the United States. First Article," *Connoisseur* 2 (Winter 1887-88), pp. 86-99, and E. Durand-Gréville, "Private Picture-Galleries of the United States. Second Article," *Connoisseur* 2 (Spring 1888), pp. 137-42.

[30] For the heightened interest in foreign art in the years preceding and, especially, following the American Civil War, see Lois Marie Fink, "French Art in the United States, 1850-1870. Three Dealers and Collectors," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 2 (September 1978), pp. 87-100; Madeleine Fidell-Beaufort and Jeanne K. Welcher, "Some Views of Art Buying in New York in the 1870s and 1880s," *Oxford Art Journal* 5 (1982), pp. 48-55; Albert Boime, "America's Purchasing Power and the Evolution of European Art in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Francis Haskell, ed., *Saloni, gallerie, musei e loro influenza sullo sviluppo dell'arte dei secoli XIX e XX* (Bologna: Cooperativa Libreria Universitaria, 1979), pp. 123-39. For the separation of high and low culture in the post-Civil War years, see Foster Rhea Dulles, *American Learns to Play: A History of Popular Recreation, 1607-1940* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century, 1940), pp. 234-39, and Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 83-168.

After the Civil War, the number of venues where quality European and American art could be viewed increased significantly. Art galleries became the primary outlets for contemporary paintings and represented stiff competition for independent exhibitions. Goupil and Company in New York, for example, had an exclusive contract with Gérôme, whose works such as *The Crucifixion (Golgotha, 1867; Musée d'Orsay, Paris)*, were exhibited upon their arrival in New York, with modest fanfare and press attention and without an entrance fee, before they were relinquished to their new owners. Likewise, Frederic E. Church's *Parthenon* (1871; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) premiered at Goupil's before shipment to its owner, Morris K. Jesup. Widely heralded pictures occasionally appeared at the exhibitions of artist organizations such as the Society of American Artists as well. In 1881, the chief attraction of the Society exhibition was Jules Bastien-Lepage's *Joan of Arc* (1879; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), which had debuted at the Salon of 1880. After the Society's exhibition closed, Lepage's painting was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, before installation in the New York home of its owner Erwin Davis. See DeCourcy E. McIntosh, "Goupil and the American Triumph of Jean-Léon Gérôme," in Hélène Lafont-Couturier, et al., *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise* (Bordeaux: Musée Goupil in association with the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), pp. 31-43; "'The Parthenon' by Mr. F. W. [sic] Church," *New-York Times*, 30 March 1872, p. 5; Jennifer A. Martin Bienenstock, "The Formation and Early Years of

the Society of American Artists, 1877-1884" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1983), pp. 119-21.

[31] Susan P. Casteras discusses the American exhibitions and reception of Hunt's *Shadow of Death*, in *English Pre-Raphaelitism and Its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), pp. 118-19.

[32] "Star Paintings," *New-York Times*, 14 November 1880, p. 6.

[33] Standard practices for promotion and advertising of popular entertainments are discussed in Altick, pp. 420-26.

[34] After an enthusiastic reception at the Paris Salon in 1853, *The Horse Fair* was purchased by the London-based, Belgian print publisher and dealer Ernest Gambart, who exhibited it to tremendous acclaim in Great Britain in 1855-56. After its purchase by American collector William P. Wright, an American tour, also orchestrated by Gambart, began in New York in October 1857 and continued for over one year. The direct result of the positive reception given the work abroad, Americans flocked to see Bonheur's large canvas, furthering the artist's already substantial reputation, and generating a great deal of money for both the owner and the promoter. Gabriel P. Weisberg, "Rosa Bonheur's Reception in England and America: The Popularization of a Legend and the Celebration of a Myth," in Gabriel P. Weisberg, et al., *Rosa Bonheur: All Nature's Children* (New York: Dahesh Museum, 1998), pp. 1-22.

Frederic E. Church premiered *The Heart of the Andes* in New York in the spring of 1859, where it was seen, within a three-week period, by thousands before it was sent to England on tour. Once its fame was established overseas, the picture returned to the United States for an extended, extremely lucrative, tour. The 1859-61 exhibitions of *The Heart of the Andes* were managed by John McClure, a Scotsman who worked as an independent agent and publisher in New York. According to the contract made between artist and agent, McClure could exhibit the work in the United States and abroad for a period of two years, during which he and Church split the net profits generated from admissions and from the sale of an engraving made from his Great Picture. Gerald L. Carr, "American Art in Great Britain: The National Gallery Watercolor of the *Heart of the Andes*," *Studies in the History of Art* 12 (1982), pp. 81-100. Also, Avery, *Church's Great Picture* and Kevin J. Avery, "Heart of the Andes Exhibited: Frederic E. Church's Window on the Equatorial World," *American Art Journal* 18 (1986), pp. 52-72.

[35] Avery, *Church's Great Picture*, p. 36.

[36] "Fine Arts. Manet's 'Execution of Maximilian,'" *New York Herald*, 29 November 1879, p. 4.

[37] In reference to the influence of Goya on Manet's picture, the *Herald* critic wrote: "We are constantly reminded of the Spanish master, Goya, and in nothing more than in the little group of children, daubed in, we might say, but in a most effective manner." Ibid.

[38] For the formation of the Society of American Artists, its goals and function, see Bienenstock. For a discussion of aesthetic reorientation in the 1870s, see Margaret C. Conrads, "'In the Midst of an Era of Revolution': The New York Art Press and the Annual Exhibitions of the National Academy of Design in the 1870s," in David B. Dearing, ed., *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826-1925* (New York: National Academy of Design, 2000), pp. 93-105.

[39] Beauplan to Manet, 30 November 1879, Manet, *Lettres et documents*.

[40] Most accounts of the American exhibitions of *The Execution of Maximilian* claim incorrectly that the New York exhibition was held at the Clarendon Hotel. Ambré and Beauplan stayed at the Clarendon Hotel, a fact known from Beauplan's first letter to Manet, which was written from the hotel on November 30. The Clarendon Hotel was located near the Academy of Music, on the southeast corner of Eighteenth Street and Fourth Avenue. See Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown: An Illustrated History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), pp. 290-91.

[41] For an historical overview of art institutions in New York and their locations from the seventeenth through the early-twentieth centuries, see Kenneth John Myers, "The Public Display of Art in New York City, 1664-1914," in Dearing, pp. 31-51.

[42] Beauplan to Manet, 30 November 1879, Manet, *Lettres et documents*.

[43] For a description of the Studio Building and its occupants over the years, see "Artist Life in Boston," *Boston Herald*, 21 December 1879, p. 4, and "Boston Artists' Studios," *Boston Herald*, 5 June 1887, p. 18.

[44] Beauplan to Manet, 4 and 9 January 1880, Manet, *Lettres et documents*.

[45] The words were Zola's, but they were not written in response to the *Execution*. Rather, they appeared in Zola's comments on Manet's *Olympia* (1863; Musée du Louvre, Paris) published first in 1867 in *L'Artiste. Revue du XIXe siècle* and subsequently enlarged into a

pamphlet for the painter's solo exhibition at the Universal Exposition the same year. The article was republished in 1879 in a collection of critical essays by Zola titled *Mes Haines*.

In the summer of 1879, the relationship between Zola and Manet had turned sour in a misunderstanding over a negative comment made about the artist in a Salon review. Zola, eager to make amends, must have agreed to contribute a statement of support for the American exhibitions but lifted his commentary from the earlier publication.

Statements by famous individuals were common tools for aggrandizing Great Pictures. For example, descriptive booklets by Theodore Winthrop and the Reverend Louis L. Noble were written in response to Church's *Heart of the Andes* and sold at the exhibition. Avery, "Heart of the Andes Exhibited," p. 59.

[46] Beauplan to Manet, 30 November 1879, Manet, *Lettres et documents*.

[47] William C. Frierson and Herbert Edwards, "Impact of French Naturalism on American Critical Opinion 1877-1892," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 63 (September 1948), pp. 1007-16. Frierson and Edwards argue that the period from 1879 through 1883 represented the years of the most vehement critical resistance to Zola's works in the United States. For an exhaustive treatment of American reactions to Zola's novels, see Albert J. Salvan, *Zola aux Etas-Unis* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1943). Ambivalence about the merits of Zola's grittily realist style is obvious in reviews of *Assomoir*. For the range of responses to the novel, see William Minturn, "French Writers and Artists. II. Emile Zola and Edmond de Goncourt," *Appleton's Journal* n.s., 5 (July 1878), p. 83; "Editor's Table. 'L'Assomoir' and Its Moral," *Appleton's Journal* n.s., 6 (June 1879), p. 567; "Editor's Literary Record," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 59 (July 1879), p. 309.

[48] Montezuma, "My Note Book," *Art Amateur* 2 (January 1880), p. 25. For the association of Manet and Zola in the American press and the impact that the link to Naturalism had on the reception of Manet's works, see Meixner, 206-13.

[49] The reception of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is discussed in Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 190.

[50] Ambré to Manet, 4 January 1880, Manet, *Lettres et documents*.

[51] It is also possible that information was conveyed by Beauplan to the Herald critic, and subsequent reviewers lifted certain items, or even sections of text, from his November 29, 1879 exhibition review.

[52] *New York Herald*, 29 November 1879. Early in his career, at the Salon of 1861, Manet received an honorable mention for his *Portrait of M. and Mme Auguste Manet* (1860; Musée d'Orsay, on view Galeries du Jeu de Paume, Paris) and *Spanish Singer* (1860; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Years later, at the Salon of 1881, Manet was awarded a second-class award for *Portrait of M. Henri Rochefort* (1881; Kunsthalle, Hamburg).

[53] By contrast, during the exhibition tour of the *Horse Fair*, when they commented on the career and personal characteristics of Rosa Bonheur, critics focused on her utter devotion to her work and extreme sympathy for the natural world. These notions about the artist were carefully cultivated by Bonheur's handler, Gambart, who worked to counter the also widely reported facts that Bonheur had the unusual habit of dressing in men's clothing and smoking cigars. Despite the curiosity they aroused, these eccentric habits never dominated discourse on the artist. Her integrity, intelligence, and dedication, as well as descriptions of her undisputed success as an artist, were always foremost in discussions of her professional life. Weisberg, p. 12.

[54] In 1876, one year before his death, four works by Courbet were exhibited in the French section of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. By the late 1870s, major works by Courbet in American collections included *Quarry* (1857; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), purchased in 1866 by the Allston Club in Boston. The painting was later acquired by Henry Sayles of Boston and placed on loan at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, from 1877 to 1889. Also, Courbet's *Young Ladies of the Village* (1851; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) was acquired in 1878 or 1879 by Henry Wigglesworth of Boston and exhibited at the Boston Art Club in 1879. Edelson, pp. 69-71.

[55] In 1879, Couture's book *Méthode et Entretiens d'Atelier* (Paris, 1867) was published in English to great acclaim. Couture died the same year, which gave rise to numerous flattering notices in American newspapers and magazines. For Couture's popularity and influence in America, see Marchal E. Landgren, *American Pupils of Thomas Couture* (College Park: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1970); Albert Boime, *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), chapter 15; H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris:*

Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), pp. 43-46.

[56] Richard Whiteing, "The Paris Salon of 1879," *New York World*, 25 May 1879, p. 5.

[57] William Minturn, "French Writers and Artists. III. Edouard Manet," *Appleton's Journal* n.s., 5 (September 1878), pp. 277-79. Attesting to an acquaintance between the two men, a copy of Minturn's novel, *Last of the Kerdrecks* (1879), inscribed by the author to Édouard Manet, is in the Tabarant Collection at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

[58] "The Mexican Moral," *Nation* 5 (18 July 1867), pp. 51-52.

[59] Ridley, pp. 228-40. For representative examples of views expressed by Americans toward the Maximilian affair, see "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly* 35 (September 1867), pp. 529-30; "Maximilian," *New York Evening Post*, 1 July 1867, p. 2; "The Fate of Maximilian," *Independent* 19 (4 July 1867), p. 4; "The Mexican Savages and Their Crime," *New-York Times*, 4 July 1867, p. 4.

[60] For a history of the restoration of the Republic of Mexico (1867-76), the rise of Díaz, and the improvements brought under his rule (1876-1910), see Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 403-15; 431-65; John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 9-267.

[61] "Art and Artists," *Boston Traveller*, 3 January 1880, p. 1; "Art Gossip at Home and Abroad," *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1880, p. 4.

[62] *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1880; *New York Herald*, 29 November 1879; *Boston Traveller*, 3 January 1880.

[63] "The Fine Arts," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1880, p. 1; "Art Notes," *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 3 January 1880, p. 2.

[64] The straightforward, unemotional presentation of Manet's subject matter was puzzling to American critics and viewers, as they expected examples of the genre to be replete with facial expressions and gestures that conveyed the sentiments of the figures and therefore the sentiments of the artist. In a review of the French historical paintings in the fine arts section of the Universal Exposition of 1878 in Paris, the critic for the *New-York Times* discussed this expectation for sentiment and expression in large narrative paintings. He wrote, "An artist in high art must . . . feel all the sorrow and the exultation which his subject may demand. He must undergo all the agony he depicts, and thrill himself if he wants the spectator to be thrilled." Gar, "The Historical Paintings," *New-York Times*, 9 July 1878, p. 2.

[65] *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1880.

[66] For discussion of the expectations American art viewers of the period held for historical painting, see Mark Thistlewaite, "The Most Important Themes: History Painting and Its Place in American Art," and William H. Gerds, "On Elevated Heights: American Historical Painting and Its Critics," in William H. Gerds and Mark Thistlewaite, *Grand Illusions: History Painting in America* (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum, 1988), pp. 7-123.

[67] The painting was commissioned by Bostonian Amos Binney in 1847 and was often before the public eye in Boston and New York for the first twenty years after its completion. In 1879, Binney's widow placed the work on loan at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where it remained until 1884. William H. Truettner, ed., *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, for the National Museum of American Art, 1991), pp. 50-63; William H. Truettner, "Storming the Teocalli—Again, Or, Further Thoughts on Reading History Paintings," *American Art* 9 (Fall 1995), pp. 57-95; Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *American Paintings before 1945 in the Wadsworth Atheneum*, vol. 2 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 536-40.

[68] *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1880.

[69] *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 3 January 1880; *New York Herald*, 29 November 1879.

[70] "Manet and Zola," *Art Interchange* 3 (10 December 1879), p. 100; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 3 January 1880; Delta, "Pictures in New York," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 13 December 1879, p. 5.

[71] Beauplan to Manet, 30 November 1879, Manet, *Lettres et documents*. Attendance at the opening reception for Manet's *Execution of Maximilian* was recorded in Beckwith's diary. On the following day, Beckwith noted a visit to Chase's studio, where he found the Boston portraitist Frederic Porter Vinton (1846-1911), which may suggest that Vinton also attended the soirée the previous evening. It is also possible that Vinton was the *amateur* referred to in Beauplan's letter of 30 November who promised to assist the Frenchman with the Boston exhibition. Diary entries, 29 and 30 November 1879, J. Carroll Beckwith Diaries, National

Academy of Design, New York. Microfilm, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, reel 4798.

Vinton was probably a cautious enthusiast for Manet's work, sharing with his artist friends a love for the seventeenth-century masters and an appreciation for painterly handling. Vinton had studied in Paris with both Jean-Paul Laurens and Bonnat, with a short stint at the Royal Academy in Munich. On Vinton's student years in Paris and the influences on his works, see Weinberg, *Lure of Paris*, pp. 182-85. Also, "Frederic P. Vinton, Dead," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 20 May 1911, p. 1, and William Howe Downes, "Memories of Vinton," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 24 May 1911, p. 20.

[72] Biographical information for Shirlaw can be found in Michael Quick, Eberhard Ruhmer, and Richard V. West, *Munich and American Realism in the 19th Century* (Sacramento, CA: Crocker Art Gallery, 1978), pp. 59-60. An extensive bibliography exists for Chase, but most useful for this study were Ronald G. Pisano, *A Leading Spirit in American Art: William Merritt Chase, 1849-1916* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1983); Ronald G. Pisano, "William Merritt Chase: Innovator and Reformer," in Maureen C. O'Brien, *In Support of Liberty: European Paintings at the 1883 Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition* (Southampton, NY: Parrish Art Museum, 1986), pp. 59-72, and Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase: Modern American Landscapes, 1886-1890* (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1999). For Beckwith's training and experience in Europe, see Pepi Marchetti Franchi and Bruce Weber, *Intimate Revelations: The Art of Carroll Beckwith (1852-1917)* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 1999), and Weinberg, *Lure of Paris*, p. 193.

[73] For the development of interest in avant-garde art in post-Civil War America, see Frances Weitzenhoffer, "The Earliest American Collectors of Monet," in John Rewald and Frances Weitzenhoffer, eds., *Aspects of Monet: A Symposium on the Artist's Life and Times* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), pp. 74-91; Edelson, pp. 67-75; Anne Elizabeth Dawson, "Idol of the Moderns: Renoir's Critical Reception in America, 1904-1940" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1996), pp. 9-25; Ann Dumas, "Degas in America," in Ann Dumas and David A. Brenneman, *Degas and America: The Early Collectors* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2000), pp. 13-23.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas. Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, "The Late Maximilian I, 'Emperor of Mexico.'" Engraving from Harper's Weekly 11 (20 July 1867), p. 461. Sewanee, TN, duPont Library, The University of the South [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilian*, 1868-69. Cabinet print, Mora Studio, New York, 1879. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library. MA 3953 [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Emilie Ambre in the Role of Carmen*, 1880. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Edgar Scott [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1853. Oil on canvas. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt, 1887(87.25). Photograph ©1997 The Metropolitan Museum of Art [\[return to text\]](#)

ACADEMY OF MUSIC.
ORATORIO NIGHT.
SUNDAY, Oct. 11.
The great success of the
SACRED CONCERT AND ORATORIO
of last Sunday has induced the Directors to give a
SECOND AND LAST SUNDAY PERFORMANCE
On SUNDAY NEXT, Oct. 11,
on even an increased scale of splendor and magnificence,
on which occasion
ALL THE GREAT ARTISTS OF THE ACADEMY
will appear supported by an
IMMENSE CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA.

NOTICE.
THE LOW PRICE OF ADMISSION OF FIFTY CENTS to
any part of the Academy, and TWENTY-FIVE CENTS
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suspend the free list. Full particulars in future adver-
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GREAT PICTURE OF THE
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Mr. BLAKE as Sir Anthony,
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Mr. WALCOT as Bob Acres,
Mr. LORAIN as Falkland,
Mrs. HOY as Julia,
Miss GANNON as Lydia,
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Forming the most brilliant combination of talent that can
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THE RIVALS
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Fig. 6, "Rosa Bonheur's Great Picture of the *Horse Fair*." Advertisement in the *New-York Times*, 6 October 1857, p. 3. Sewanee, TN, duPont Library, The University of the South [\[return to text\]](#)

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ADMISSION, . . . 25 CENTS.
Open daily, Sundays excepted, from 10 A. M. to 9 P. M. at
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Fig. 7, Poster advertising the exhibition of *The Execution of Maximilian* in New York, 1879. Paris, Galerie Berès [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Poster advertising the exhibition of *The Execution of Maximilian* in Boston, 1880. Paris, Galerie Berès [\[return to text\]](#)

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BOSTON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA,
Bernhard Listemann, Conductor.
On the **EVENINGS** of January 13 and 16, at 8, and
SATURDAY AFTERNOON, Jan. 17, at 2 1/2.
Admission \$1; reserved seats 25 cts. extra; season
tickets, with reserved seats, \$3 each; now on sale at
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COOKING SCHOOL.
Under Mme. Favler, 66 Warren street. **Monday,**
Jan. 5—Soup (Palestine); Fricadeille of Veal, sauce
ricquette; Celery à la crème; Rix à l'Impératrice.
Wednesday—soup (Ox Tail) à la Jardinière; Beet in
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MONDAY, Jan. 5, at 12 M. Proinde: "Disloyal Mor-
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Fig. 9, "Exhibition of a Great Painting by E. Manet." Advertisement in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 5
January 1880, p. 1. Boston Public Library [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, *Horticultural Hall and Studio Building, Tremont Street, Boston*, n.d. Photograph. Courtesy of The Bostonian Society. The Studio Building is the second from the left. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 11, Emanuel Leutze, *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. Oil on canvas. Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund
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Fig. 12, William Merritt Chase, *Keying Up—The Court Jester*, 1875. Oil on canvas. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Gift of the Chapellier Galleries [\[return to text\]](#)