Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, oil on canvas, 51⅜ × 75¼".

THE MODERN WOMAN

EMMELYN BUTTERFIELD-ROSEN ON "POSING MODERNITY" AND "BLACK MODELS"

"BLACK MODELS: FROM GÉRICAULT TO MATISSE," on view this past spring and summer in Paris at the Musée d'Orsay, was a tripled-in-size version of "Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today." That exhibition, which opened this past fall at Columbia University's Wallach Art Gallery, was curated by Denise Murrell, based on her 2014 dissertation, "Seeing Laure: Race and Modernity from Manet's *Olympia* to Matisse, Bearden and Beyond." (A scaled-back version of the Paris show is now open through December 29 at the Mémorial ACTe in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe.)

There were major differences between the versions in New York and Paris, where Murrell was joined by three additional curators: Cécile Debray, director of the Musée de l'Orangerie, and Stéphane Guégan and Isolde Pludermacher, both of the Musée d'Orsay. But the two shows can be considered part of a single project, one initially conceived as a "model project for introducing diverse new perspectives and wider audiences to the history and institutions of art."[1] Together, they constitute one of the most consequential events to take place in the field of nineteenth-century art in Euro-America in recent decades. These exhibitions captured the public imagination in ways exceedingly rare for thematic scholarly exhibitions (extended hours and a sold-out catalogue in New York; more than half a million visitors in Paris; extensive press coverage, including in venues such as the CBS Sunday-morning news). In their aftermath, it seems certain that some of the world's most famous paintings will not be taught in the same way in college lecture halls nor labeled in the same way on museum tombstones.

"Seeing is both the physical act of looking and the cognitive processes that construct attention," Murrell states in her catalogue introduction.[2] Much press coverage of these exhibitions has reveled in the beloved fantasy of art history as detective story, suggesting that the curators penetrated newly discovered archives to unearth the names of black models previously unknown to art history. The reality is more damning to the discipline. With a few notable exceptions, the forenames of the African-diasporic subjects who posed for famous artists like Manet and Géricault have long been available in books one could find in any decent library. But by and large, scholars and museums have not cited these names, let alone considered the role these models played in the history of modernism more broadly. As Murrell writes: "In the absence of narratives that animate viewer curiosity and interest," figures such as Laure, the woman who posed as the maid in Manet's *Olympia*, 1863, become "invisible even while in plain view."[3]

Murrell achieved something more profound, and more challenging, than archival "discovery." Her exhibition placed the past blindnesses of art history on very public view, making devastatingly clear the remedial nature of the lesson in seeing required by this discipline—a lesson that could be encapsulated in a question as elementary as: Tell me, class, how many figures are in this picture?

Above: **Édouard Manet, *Enfants aux Tuileries* (Children in the Tuileries Gardens), ca. 1861–62,** oil on canvas, 14⅞ × 18⅛".

Above, right: **Édouard Manet, *Portrait de Laure*, 1863,** oil on canvas, 24 × 19¾".

Right: **Mickalene Thomas, *Din, une très belle négresse #1* (Din, a Very Beautiful Black Woman #1), 2012,** rhinestones, acrylic, oil, and enamel on wood panel, 102 × 84".

Opposite page, left: **Frédéric Bazille, *Jeune femme aux pivoines* (Young Woman with Peonies), 1870,** oil on canvas, 23⅛ × 29½".

Opposite page, right, from top: **Jacques-Philippe Potteau, *Marie Lassus*, 1860,** albumen print on paper mounted on cardboard, 7½ × 5⅛". **Gustave Le Gray, *Portrait d'Alexandre Dumas en costume russe* (Portrait of Alexandre Dumas in Russian Costume), 1859,** albumen print retouched with gouache and ink mounted on paper mounted on cardboard, 9½ × 7⅛". **Félix Nadar, *Maria l'Antillaise* (Maria the West Indian Woman), ca. 1856–59,** salt paper print, 9½ × 7½".

The sheer didactic force of "Posing Modernity" stemmed from its unfolding of an argument that opened outward from a single object—one that is a staple of any modern-art survey and perhaps "the second-most famous painting in Paris after the 'Mona Lisa.'"[4] It began with the incontrovertible premise that Manet's *Olympia* is an "emphatically bi-figural work."[5] Right in the foreground, beside the reclining nude, stands a figure of equivalent size and visual emphasis: a young woman, fully clothed in a distinctively Parisian pale-pink dress and a distinctively French Antillean madras head wrap.

Probably in the same year he recorded the address of the woman who posed the nude, Victorine Meurent—scribbling in his notebook, "*Louise Meuran* [sic], *rue Maître-Albert, 17*"—Manet wrote down the coordinates of another individual: "*Laure, très belle négresse, rue Vintimille, 11, 3ème.*" Meurent, who figured in nine of Manet's pictures, has long been a subject of fascination. She is now acknowledged as an important co-contributor to Manet's modernism, and understood to have formed with the painter a working relation that almost "anticipate[d] that of certain film directors to particular female stars."[6] By contrast, the role played by Laure fell into art-historical oblivion, although Manet painted her three times—as a nanny wielding a toy hoop in *Enfants aux Tuileries* (Children in the Tuileries Gardens), 1861–62; as the bearer of that mammoth bouquet in *Olympia*; and as the sole figure in a picture previously known as *La négresse*, 1863, exhibited by Murrell under the new title *Portrait de Laure*.

The artist Lorraine O'Grady, in her milestone 1992 essay "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," was the first to call attention to the name Laure, which initially appeared in Adolphe Tabarant's first catalogue of Manet's paintings, published in 1931. Important scholarly studies by Griselda Pollock and, more recently, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby followed.[7] Murrell's innovation was to

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WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS of Manet's *Portrait of Laure*, most of the Harlem Renaissance portraits, and many of the contemporary works by black female artists, nearly all of the one hundred objects displayed in New York traveled to Paris.

But when the show was taken to the painting that launched its argument—*Olympia* is in the Musée d'Orsay's permanent collection and did not travel to New York—the viewing experience was markedly different. Roughly two hundred additional works enlarged the exhibition's purview in two key respects: first, in taking up a more capacious working concept of the "model," and second, in expanding its historical scope by about a half century. These changes to the exhibition's structure, at least for this viewer, had the effect of perpetuating some of the structural inequalities the museum was ostensibly trying to move beyond in embracing this project.

While New York concentrated exclusively on posing women, the Musée d'Orsay also foregrounded some of the Afro-descended men who posed in the nineteenth century. The show's constant visual framing of a split trajectory of bodies sorted into male and female categories (at one point, *académies* of men and women were segregated onto separate walls) exacerbated the need for a more robust exploration of gender. Why was it, as these shows implicitly posited, that by the late nineteenth century the black female, and not the black male, had emerged as the principal "muse" of modernism? Although this unexamined question hung in the air, the expansion of the show to encompass both men and women did allow for what was by far its strongest new material. This focused on a single man—Joseph, born circa 1793 in the colony of Saint-Domingue in present-day Haiti, who posed for the principal figure in Géricault's *Le radeau de la Méduse* (The Raft of the Medusa), 1818–19, and later worked as a regular model at the École des Beaux Arts, where artists apparently knew him as "Joseph le Nègre."

By aggregating numerous and wildly different roles in which Joseph was cast—as savior of his shipwrecked compatriots in Géricault's *Raft* or as Satan in a study Théodore Chassériau executed at the behest of Ingres (1839), as an Ethiopian eunuch receiving baptism in a painting by Abel de Pujol (1848) or as an enslaved captive being whipped in a work by Marcel Antoine Verdier (1843)—the curators demonstrated how the body of a life model functioned as a floating signifier, assuming different meanings when inserted into different compositional contexts. In Joseph's case, these contexts were almost always predetermined by the connotations European culture attached to his skin pigment. Emblematic of this condition of open-ended overdetermination is the abovementioned Chassériau study, where Joseph's naked body appears suspended in blank blue space, as if in free fall. When Chassériau executed this study, according to Ingres's exacting specifications, neither artist nor model, both of whom had African ancestry by way of Saint-Domingue, was aware that Ingres had ordered it "*d'après le modèle Joseph le Nègre*" because he intended to figure, in a religious picture, the devil cast down from the mountaintop.

In his 1861 "Lecture on Pictures," Frederick Douglass declared: The "picture-making faculty is flung out into the world like all others—subject to the wild scramble between contending interests and forces. It is a mighty power, and the side to which it goes has achieved a wondrous conquest. . . . It will either lift us to the highest heavens or sink us to the bottomless depths, for good and evil know [no] limits."[10] The strength of the exhibition's section on Joseph was that it made this "scramble between contending interests" vivid, and did so by way of probing questions about the nature of modeling that lie at the conceptual heart of this project: To what degree does the artist-model transaction—more than, for instance, posing for a photograph—entail a surrender of agency in the fate of one's own image? Can the intersubjective character of that human interaction do more than simply reduplicate in microcosm existing relations of power? Can it also unbalance them?

The weaknesses of the Musée d'Orsay show surfaced when it abandoned the dynamics of "posing"—kept firmly in focus even in the title of the New York

treat Laure as a springboard to look expansively outward. The simultaneously kaleidoscopic and laser-focused format of "Posing Modernity" presented her as an emblem of the specifically modern cultural condition of *créolité* and the progenitor of a rich and evolving iconographic lineage. Among other things, the exhibition demonstrated that artists are often much better at "seeing" than art historians. The history of *Olympia*'s reception in images betrays how the black female figure almost instantly commanded attention and called out to be visually reimagined, as Murrell showed through works spanning two centuries, from Frédéric Bazille's *Jeune femme aux pivoines* (Young Woman with Peonies), 1870, to Mickalene Thomas's *Din, une très belle négresse #1* (Din, a Very Beautiful Black Woman #1), 2012.

In its mesmerizing point of departure, the New York show reconstructed a milieu around Laure, focusing on the convergence of "Manet, the Impressionists, and 19th Century Black Paris." In large part through photography—a then-new medium that captured black Parisians of different professions and classes, from smartly dressed young female students (Marie Lassus) and anonymous wet nurses to performers (the Cuban singer Maria Martinez) and celebrated writers such as the two Alexandres Dumas, père and fils—Murrell brought to life the demographic fact Manet put on display in his most famous canvas. Paris in 1863 was a multiracial city. Which is to say, it was a modern city, affected by an African diaspora that was integral to the emergence of capitalism, settler colonialism, and what is now called, following the coinage of Manet's friend Charles Baudelaire, "modernity."

From "Black Paris" the show crossed the Atlantic to land in early-twentieth-century Harlem. Portraits by Charles Alston, William H. Johnson, James Porter, and others were set alongside photographs by James Van Der Zee and Carl Van Vechten. The exhibition juxtaposed this material with paintings, drawings, and collages by Matisse, who, as Murrell argues, began to work differently and more extensively with black female models after he visited the neighborhood in the 1930s. The final section, "The Legacy of Laure in Global Contemporary Art," was more uneven, but it performed work indispensable to the exhibition's most fundamental ideological argument: that the course of art history, from modernism to "the present globalized historical moment," manifests social progress.[9] Murrell presents the black female figure as moving from the margins to the center of artistic practice, shedding her identity as a generic racialized type and becoming an individual—an agent rather than object of representation. No doubt one could charge that the history the show presented was *too* sanguine, too uncritical of the power exchanges between black female "muses" and "European masters," as the catalogue at times refers to them. But Murrell made a powerful visual argument, and it was thrilling to see it staged in galleries packed with a young, diverse, and obviously captivated public.

Can the intersubjective character of that human interaction do more than simply reduplicate in microcosm existing relations of power? Can it also unbalance them?

Opposite page, left: **Charles Alston, *Girl in a Red Dress*, 1934**, oil on canvas, 28 × 22".

Opposite page, right: **William H. Johnson, *Nude (Mahlinda)*, ca. 1939**, oil on burlap, 29¼ × 38¼".

Above: **Théodore Géricault, *Étude de dos (d'après le modèle Joseph) pour* Le radeau de la Méduse (Back Study [After the Model Joseph] for *The Raft of the Medusa*), ca. 1818–19**, oil and pierre noire pencil on canvas, 22 × 18⅛".

Above, center: **Théodore Géricault, *Le radeau de la Méduse* (The Raft of the Medusa), 1818–19**, oil on canvas, 16' 1" × 23' 6".

Above, right: **Abel de Pujol, *Saint Philippe baptisant l'eunuque de la reine d'Ethiopie* (Saint Philip Baptizing the Eunuch of the Queen of Ethiopia), 1848**, oil on canvas, 10' ¼" × 7' 10½".

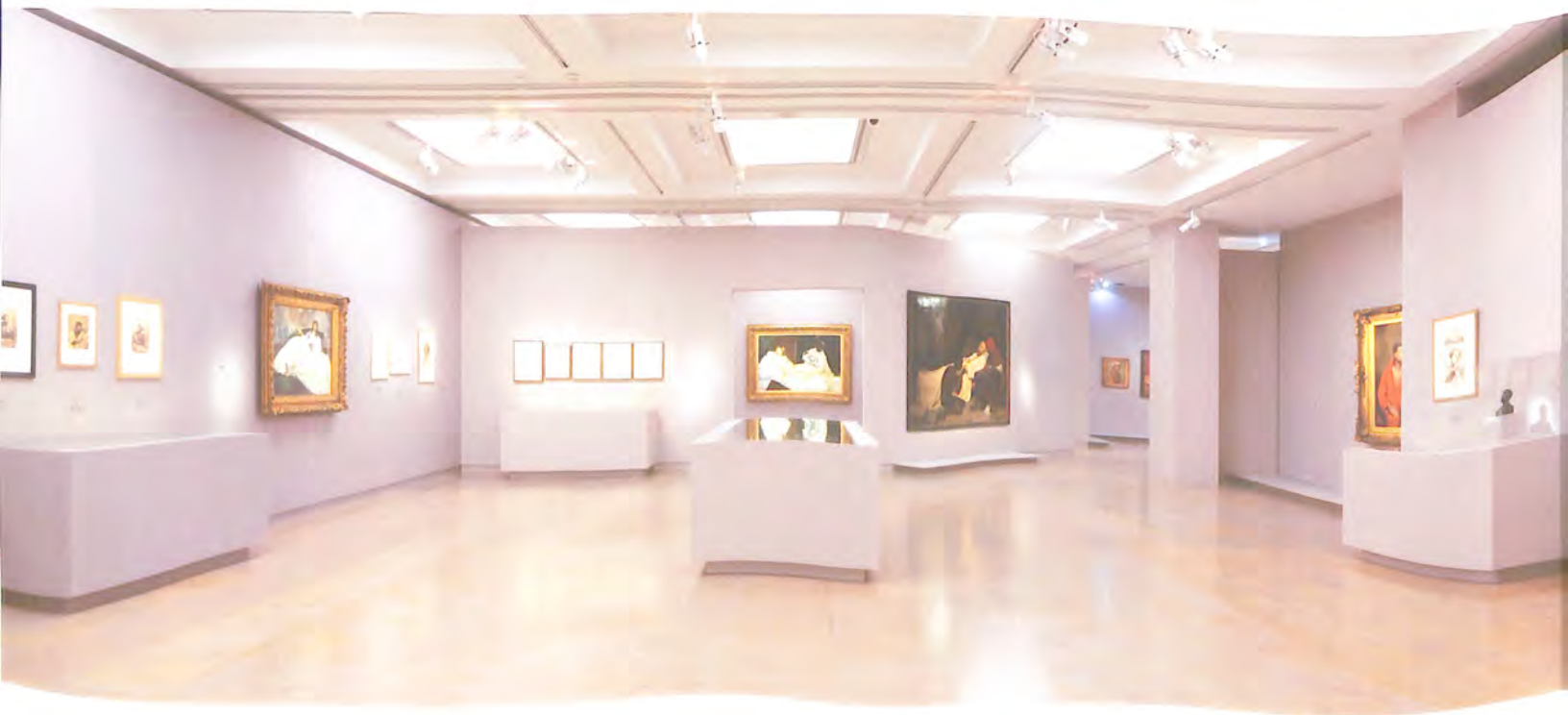
Right: **Théodore Chassériau, *Étude d'après le modèle Joseph* (Study After the Model Joseph), 1839**, oil on canvas, 21⅛ × 29".

exhibition—in favor of more generic explorations of "blackness." In Paris, the word *model* was interpreted metaphorically, as not only a "subject observed and represented by an artist" but also a "bearer of values" or an exemplary object.[11] Hence, in later portions of the Paris show, Picasso's studies for *Demoiselles d'Avignon* were included alongside a Gabon mask in his personal possession. Murrell's catalogue made a hard distinction between someone like Matisse—whose engagement with the "black model" stemmed from interactions with actual living persons, as shown vividly in Hélène Adant's photographs of the artist working and conversing with Carmen Lahens—and someone like Picasso, whose African "models" were masks, models that by definition cannot talk back.[12] One of the strong but largely unstated arguments of "Posing Modernity" was to demonstrate the unavoidably intersubjective character of working "from life" as an artistic practice, and thus to clearly distinguish between something we might call cultural appropriation and something we might call an interpersonal encounter—even if, of course, the first often bleeds into the second.

In New York the exhibition opened with a map of northern Paris, marking the proximity of Manet's studio to the residences of Laure and other black Parisians in his social orbit. At the Musée d'Orsay, the thought-prop of the map was replaced with a time line, which also runs through the catalogue.[13] The consequence of this contextual shift was that the exhibited works no longer appeared as products of specific interactions in a shared social space, but rather as points along a larger, more abstract march of history. Where this time line begins is also profoundly significant. The Musée d'Orsay moved back its point of departure to the end of the eighteenth century, to the beginning of the abolition movement in France—a country that holds the dubious honor of being the only European nation to have twice outlawed the institution of slavery, first in 1794, following the Revolution, and again following the revolution of 1848, forty-six years after Napoléon had swiftly reinstated its legality in the colonies. (Slavery was formally outlawed in the French metropole, but enslavement could persist via legal loopholes.)[14]

In the opening gallery, the original 1794 and 1848 decrees of abolition were displayed alongside other revolutionary-era ephemera. (Images of the Haitian Revolution were consigned to a side gallery.) Included were a pair of prints, ca. 1800, celebrating the munificence of the revolutionary "emancipators." Within roundels inscribed with the caricatured speech line *Moi libre aussi* (Me free also), the profiles of a black man and woman appear, he in the uniform of revolution, wearing the Phrygian "liberty cap," she in drop earrings and a Caribbean head wrap, as if at one further degree of remove from freedom. The prints emblematize the white-savior racism of much of the abolitionist imagery one got immersed in at the start of the exhibition, pointedly demonstrating how white French artists struggled to visualize the freedom of black citizens without retaining visual or linguistic souvenirs of enslavement that marked the deviation of this freedom from a fully "French" one—one that could say not *Moi libre aussi*, but *Je suis libre*.

A similar problem was evident in the historical framing of this show. The time line's pegging to the 1794 decree—at the exhibition's exit one could purchase keepsake notebooks emblazoned with the initial (revoked) decree—meant that the exhibition began by positioning Afro-descended people as de facto slaves awaiting liberation. To move the time line back responsibly, one would have to go back much further. For instance, "Afro-Atlantic Histories," last year's major exhibition at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, began in the sixteenth century, a historical moment from which one could show *under construction* the systems that led to the capture and trafficking of people from Africa for the profit of Europeans, as well as the resulting emergence of modern concepts of race, with "black" and "white" as new visual-conceptual-linguistic categories into which to sort humans.



Opposite page: **View of "*Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse*" (Black Models: From Géricault to Matisse), 2019,** Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo: Sophie Crepy Boegly.

This page: **Simon-Louis Boizot and Louis Darcis, *Moi libre aussi* (Me Free Also) (details), 1794,** engravings, each sheet 6⅝ × 6½".

What is named channels what is seen. The proper names given to pictures, and to depicted persons, matter profoundly.

IT WAS A PARADOXICAL AIM of both the New York and Paris shows to call attention to "the black model" as a category while also underlining the necessity of replacing such racializing language with specific personal identities. A central achievement of both shows was to point to seeing and naming as coconstitutive activities. What is named channels how and what is seen. Thus the proper names given to pictures, and to depicted persons, matter profoundly. Murrell proposed alternate titles in New York, most importantly, as noted above, substituting *Portrait of Laure* for *La négresse*. (Historical titles were retained but bracketed on wall labels.) She has eloquently advocated removing the "gratuitous uses of racial nomenclature" that have been "almost casually, gratuitously assigned by archivists, by collectors, [and] by registrars in museums to be the names by which these paintings come to us in art history even though even a cursory look at the archival record shows that the artist knew who these people were."[15]

The Paris exhibition heeded the call to remove racializing markers and identify models or sitters, but did so with more fanfare. The institutional act of renomination was the subject of a catalogue essay by Anne Higonnet and a wall text in the galleries. This was the aspect of the exhibition seized on by the popular press, which led with headlines such as "French Masterpieces Renamed After Black Subjects" and at one point reported, erroneously, that *Olympia*'s title was being changed to *Laure*.[16]

The task of initiating a conversation about titling is crucial, and consistent with widespread contemporary efforts to make vocabulary acknowledge the full, complex personhoods, and the crimes against humanity, that common language routinely effaces from history. But at the Musée d'Orsay, the exultant rhetoric that surrounded the project of renomination had the effect of reasserting the privileged naming authority of powerful state institutions, and the suggestion that these retitlings might carry "the cathartic power of a new beginning" made one feel that the reality of the archive's asymmetry and the dynamics of historical erasure were being somewhat papered over.[17] While it is urgent that the names of black models be written back into art history whenever possible, doing so is often impossible. And the names that *can* be retrieved necessarily betray their gross insufficiency as reparations for the injustices of history.

This conundrum was emblematic in the Paris exhibition's opening work, which was one of relatively few paintings retitled according to actually new archival information. I refer to a picture exhibited as *Portrait d'une négresse* in the Salon of 1800, painted by an artist who identified herself as "*Mme LAVILLE LE ROULX, (M.-G.), Femme BENOIT, élève [Jacques-Louis] David.*"[18] The possible forename of the anonymous "*négresse*" who posed for this iconic portrait, now exponentially more famous thanks to its closing cameo in Jay-Z and Beyoncé's 2018 video *APESHIT*, was recently discovered by Marianne Lévy. When the artist's brother-in-law, a naval officer, returned to France from Guadeloupe, he brought two black servants with him, a man called Ringa and a woman called Magdeleine.[19] It is assumed that the sitter for the portrait was this Magdeleine, who prior to 1794 may have been enslaved by and/or in a sexual relationship with the artist's brother-in-law. In Paris, this painting appeared with the new title *Portrait de Ma[g]deleine*. (I have inserted the bracket to mark an orthographic discrepancy between the name given by Lévy and the one that appears in the Musée Orsay's presentation. I have not examined the archival documents, so am not aware of the reason for this discrepancy. Here I will follow the museum in calling her Madeleine.)

As every art historian who writes on this portrait notes, the canvas contains a *punctum* that crystallizes the immense ambiguity of this white female artist's portrayal of a bare-breasted black woman decked in the blue, white, and red of the new French flag. This is the spot where, just above Madeleine's right hand, the painter signed the canvas "*Laville-Laroulx f[emme] Benoist.*" (The artist's first name is Marie-Guillemine.) This "symbolic interlacing of hands," as Anne Lafont beautifully puts it, can be seen as indexing the agency of the model, implying that Madeleine is "equally a signatory of the picture," especially since the signature appears, in a brown pigment that matches Madeleine's skin color, over the typically dominant hand that paints and writes.[20] The gap between her oddly flexed-back middle and index fingers can be seen as a space for a missing pen or brush, at the same time that it makes that hand resemble "the split claw of an animal" and calls up "the after-effect of slave-work and torture," specifically the punitive practice of mutilating hands and severing fingers.[21] The contradictory readings elicited by this "symbolic interlacing of hands" is indicative of broader contradictions endemic to artist-model relations, which can run the gamut (in both directions) from collaboration to exploitation. Given that *Portrait of Madeleine* is a "signature" work for the Musée d'Orsay exhibition, however, what is important is that it thematizes the artist-model relation as one caught up in the fate of proper names.

If she had not painted Madeleine, it is unlikely that Marie-Guillemine's name would be mentioned so regularly in today's art-history surveys. The importance of her "signature" work inheres in the fact that, thanks to the willing (or unwilling) labor of a black woman who sat for and interacted with the painter for we-know-

So much scholarly ink has been lavished on Olympia's famous "gaze." But another question emerges: *Can she hear?*

Above: **Pierre Mignard, *Louise de Kéroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth*, 1682**, oil on canvas, 47½ × 37½".

Above, right: **Titian, *Portrait of Laura Dianti*, ca. 1520–25**, oil on canvas, 46½ × 36⅛".

Right: **Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538**, oil on canvas, 50 × 65".

Opposite page: **View of "*Le modèle noir de Géricault à Matisse*" (Black Models: From Géricault to Matisse), 2019**, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo: Sophie Crepy Boegly.

emerges: *Can she hear?* Murrell is not the first viewer of *Olympia* who has felt compelled to put words into the maid's mouth.[32] Although Manet's paintings from the 1860s are in general profoundly anti-narrative, conveying a palpable absence of spoken communication between persons, *Olympia* is an exception to that rule; the painting seems to demand that the viewer imagine the maid's voice, the words she is about to speak, or has just spoken, to the naked woman. The sense that an oral communication is taking place forces into focus the lack of visual exchange between the two figures.

The configuration of gazes in *Olympia*—a picture bearing a title that positions it as a species of *portraiture*—makes it possible to see the two models as travesty-ing a particular painter's template: the portrait "genre of master/mistress accompanied by an adoring servant/slave," which emerged amid early modern Europe's accelerating traffic in humans.[33] Given Manet's obvious compositional citation in *Olympia* of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, it is significant that David Bindman identifies Titian's *Portrait of Laura Dianti*, ca. 1520–25, as the prototype for this genre of portrait, which was, from the start, characterized by a very specific ricochet of gazes. The black page, often bearing flowers or some other tribute, turns his or her head to look at the picture's ostensible "subject," who does not meet that gaze but rather stares out of the picture.

One might describe *Olympia* as collapsing this portrait genre with the genre of the nude and, in so doing, rendering both genres strange. The sense of travesty inheres most potently in the ambiguous way Laure looks over (not up) at the naked "mistress"—her lips in an almost-smile, the prominent whites of her eyes emphasizing the sidelong look she casts at her companion, a look that can be read as interrogative, conspiratorial, exasperated—but not deferential according to the old template. That sense of travesty also inheres in the title of the work into which Laure's image was inserted, for Olympia is patently not the same kind of name, for instance, as Louise Renée de Penancoët de Kérouallе, Duchess of Portsmouth, the resplendently named subject who appears accompanied by an unidentified black page in a 1682 portrait by Pierre Mignard.[34] Much like the names of certain performers in this exhibition, such as Miss Lala (Olga Albertina Brown) or Chocolat (Rafael Padilla), Olympia—a name evoking the dwelling place of the Grecian gods—is clearly a sobriquet; it was among the common noms de guerre of high-class prostitutes.[35] Although the naked prostitute pointedly deflates her lofty appellation, she actively apes entitlement by looking out of the picture; it is with this posture that she claims her role as the painting's titular "subject."

One wonders how the two models felt about this staging of their relation, and how much they contributed to Manet's conception of the composition. Grigsby has speculated that Laure and Victorine likely never posed together; "the envelopes of time and space that they occupy [in the picture] are incongruent," she writes; "models studied at different times have been placed side by side."[36] One wonders if the two women—born within five years of each other in Paris—ever met, or saw their respective likenesses taking form on the canvas.[37] One wonders whether Victorine could have intuited that the woman posed alongside her would eventually, as future artists reinterpreted this image, break free of her pictorially subservient position, or even reverse roles with her mistress. (As both exhibitions demonstrated, role reversal is a trope of contemporary artistic reinterpretations of the picture.) One wonders whether the white model would have welcomed such a situation or perceived it as a threat; the composition itself perhaps broaches the problem Lorraine O'Grady raised in "Olympia's Maid": "white women's inability to surrender white skin-privilege even to form basic alliances."[38] It is probably an accident of history that in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century, models formed a union called L'Olympe, committed to the restriction of the profession to ethnically "French" persons and "dismiss[ing] from the association every foreign element."[39] Later in life, the model who posed for the nude made some living as an artist, and toward the end of the century she created a calling card that laid claim to her preeminence in Manet's most famous canvas: "Victorine-Louise Meurent / exhibiting artist at the Palais de l'Industrie / I am Olympia / the subject of M. Manet's celebrated painting / I invite you to look at this drawing / Thank you!"[40]

We do not know what became of Laure. She likely would have been less able to eke out any profit from her association with the name Manet. Nor can we know whether she would have wanted to stake her name on his "most celebrated" picture. But it is clear that it will now be far less possible for the mainstream of art history to maintain that Laure is not a "subject" of *Olympia*, or to mimic the action of its titular character, and fail to look at her. □

"Black Models: From Géricault to Matisse" is on view at the Mémorial ACTe in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, through December 29.

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For notes, see page 245.