Fig. 286 **Lady Hawarden**, *Clementina Before a Mirror in her Underwear*, c. 1861. Albumen print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

mood further. Its phantom-like frailty, in which the real world is perceived with such exquisite selectivity that it seems deprived of any coarseness or substance, is very much the artist's own and very much an avowal of his belief in the purity and sanctity of art. What became a virtual religion was subscribed to by growing numbers of artists and writers and was constantly nurtured by non-Western art that seemed, to Western eyes, liberated from earthbound realities. Indeed, in Whistler's case, this faith in art for art's sake would later reach public notoriety in 1878, at his trial (see page 370).

In the 1860s, both Whistler and Manet could be described as Realists, insofar as their vision was premised on recording the facts of contemporary life (although these facts, in Whistler's case, were often selected from interior environments that were already rarefied works of art). Nevertheless, they could also be described as aesthetes who believed that art represented a highly personal order distinct from the shared, inherited order of the Western past that was still preached by the academies and that could be challenged by such new systems of decorative coherence as those found in Japanese art. This seemingly contradictory fusion of Realism and art for art's sake was similarly attained by a friend of Whistler's and Manet's, Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas (1834–1917), who also defined his unforgettably personal viewpoint in the early 1860s. As dandified as his friends, he was, if anything, a more oddly detached and acerbic spectator of the world around him, a world which, like Manet's, included both the private and public facets of Paris life, from aristocratic portraits and laundresses to cafés and brothels. And for all his willful contemporaneity, his art, like Manet's no less than Whistler's, has deep and self-conscious roots in the old masters, whom he studied assiduously first as a pupil of Louis Lamothe, a disciple of Ingres and Flandrin, and thereafter as a lifelong copyist of venerable painters from Mantegna and Poussin to David and Lawrence and even such contemporaries as Menzel. Thus, when he painted

horses at the racetrack, there was something of the Parthenon horses in their pedigree; and when he painted the rhythms of contemporary ballet, the measured rhymes of Poussin's figural order can be sensed.

Degas's daring rejection, however, of the overt structure of traditional art is immediately more conspicuous than his subtle immersion in history. In the *Woman with Chrysanthemums* (**fig. 287**), completed in 1865, we can trace this audacity. The painting was originally painted in 1858 as a still life, but was then fully repainted in 1865 with the addi-tiion of a figure, clearly a portrait, but one not yet identified with certainty. But is this then a portrait? If so, the amount of attention given to the sitter is perplexingly peripheral, since she not only looks anxiously away from the spectator and toward something unseen outside the painting, but she even becomes part of an inanimate still-life composition, her bent elbow symmetrically balancing the glass pitcher on the other side of the flower still life. Is this just a genre scene, with a figure in an interior? If so, the face is far too specific and even inexplicably troubled, and the still life far too prominent. And of course, by the same token, it cannot be accepted merely as a still life. To measure something of Degas's startling breakdown of these inherited subject categories, other works of the early 1860s may be mustered, such as Courbet's *The Trellis* of 1863 (**fig. 288**), which also features a young woman and a copious still life, but connects them in a narrative way by having her arrange the flowers rather than turn her back on them. As for flower paintings per se, there were remarkably fine examples by Degas's friend Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904), who painted subjects ranging from sober portraits to vaporous evocations of Wagner's operas, but whose success, in both France and England, was associated with his floral still lifes. In one of 1862, he painstakingly records with serene centrality and absolutely no other visual distractions, the botanical detail, petal by petal, of an elegantly disheveled,

Fig. 287 **Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas**, *A Woman with Chrysanthemums*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 29 × 36½". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 288 **Gustave Courbet**, *The Trellis*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 43¼ × 53¼". Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio.

autumnal bouquet of chrysanthemums (fig. 289), whose intricate silhouette against a cool monochrome ground was to become his visual signature.

But in the context of Courbet and Fantin-Latour, Degas's painting proposes a new and intensely modern world, where the eye seesaws from an unruly profusion of flowers to a woman who nervously looks sideways, with both competing for equal visual time and reaching a stalemate. Moreover, Degas's flowers, far from being painted with either the robust concreteness of Courbet's or the miniaturist accuracy of Fantin-Latour's, are seized in a swift, brushy way that almost merges them with the artificial flower pattern of the wallpaper behind, and that differentiates them as well from the more finished

Fig. 289 **Henri Fantin-Latour**, *Chrysanthemums*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 18⅛ × 22". The Philadelphia Museum of Art.

detail of the [illegible] head (if not of her broadly sketched-in clothing). We seem here to have captured an unedited glimpse of a corner of a French interior and its occupant. The still life, for all its centrality, becomes almost as arbitrary in its inclusion as the tan gloves that seem so casually strewn on the tabletop. What we see, as in many of Manet's paintings, has the character of an accidental frame in a view-finder, though even more contracted in its visual range; and, as a corollary, what we see suggests an instant in time, with fingers twitching, eyes darting, and reflected window light glimmering off the pitcher. If Manet's *Zola* or Whistler's *Little White Girl* presents a variety of still-life components that compete with the human presence, Degas's painting is even more startling in its willingness to equate the human figure with its surroundings, as if, for the purposes of art, neither had more or less importance.

In both public and private spaces, Degas continued to explore these surprising fragments of the visual spectacle around him, extending, in many ways, the journalist's view offered by Daumier and lesser illustrators who rapidly depicted cross-sections of Paris's cafés, streets, and entertainments, but elevating this mode to an unfamiliar level of razor-sharp construction and psychological irony. At the theater, for instance, his vision was willfully eccentric, avoiding the head-on view of the stage and choosing, instead, what look like random frames that crop images mercilessly top, bottom, left, and right. In *The Orchestra of the Paris Opera* of 1868–69 (**fig. 290**), we are thrust into the middle of a ballet performance, with the musicians in full swing. But what are we to look at? The dancers above, their gauzy tutus illuminated by gaslight, are seen only in one small corner of the vast stage, their feet, as it were, amputated by the edge of the footlights and their heads guillotined by the upper edge of the canvas. As for the musicians, they comprise only a small part of a large orchestra, although, unlike the headless dancers, each one is so specific that we might think of this as a group portrait of the orchestra, were so many members not excluded. Indeed, it is hardly a surprise to find that the painting began as a kind of occupational portrait of the bassoonist, Désiré Dihau, who ended up being only one part of a multi-focused whole that even includes, at the extreme left, in a box, the composer Emmanuel Chabrier, who sees this spectacle from an even more oblique and close-up

Fig. 290 **Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas,** *The Orchestra of the Paris Opera,* 1868–69. Oil on canvas, 22 × 18″. Louvre, Paris.

view than we do. At first, this may look like undifferentiated disorder, the product of the blinking of an eye as we move to find our central and stationary places; but then we discern the calculations of Degas's art, in which a network of abstract lucidity is imposed upon what may seem sheer visual happenstance. Unlike Manet, whose vision of the random emphasizes a kind of loose-jointed, flexible relationship among all things, Degas insists upon clockwork precision. A broad and taut pattern of diagonal axes is marked out by the front and rear enclosures of the orchestra pit against the rigid angles of the harp, cello, bassoon, and bass; and within this linear skeleton, countless smaller rhymes, from the violin bows to the repeated movements of the dancers' arms and legs, are regimented into abstract place.

Fig. 291 **Édouard Manet**, *Still Life with Salmon*, 1866–69. Oil on canvas, 29½ × 37½". Shelburne Museum, Vermont.

Fig. 292 **François Bonvin**, *Still Life with Lemon and Oysters*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 30 × 33½". Private collection.

As in Manet's paintings, the close and the distant are telescoped in a continuously decorative surface: the luminous frieze of decapitated dancers above appears to be almost on the same plane as the darkly silhouetted scroll of the bass viol held by the musician in the right foreground. Up and down, near and far are confounded in what appears to be both a candid camera record of public Parisian fact and a totally artificial construction that proclaims the rights of artists to invent the rules of their own aesthetic domain. Dealing with things that anyone with eyes could verify, Degas, like Manet, nevertheless translated these objective commonplaces into the subjective world of art. This was a polarity that was, in fact, to become still more intense in the later work of Degas and his contemporaries, and that would reach its peak in the 1870s in a kind of painting that would be called Impressionism.

Yet throughout these innovations, the tug of tradition could also be felt. In Degas's split-second glimpse of the Paris Opera orchestra, the musicians, unlike the dancers, are rendered with a clarity and suppleness of contour that could pass muster as the work of an Ingres student. In still-life painting as well, these ghosts of the past continue to hover, as in Manet's *Still Life with Salmon* of 1866–69 (**fig. 291**). Here, the ostensibly serene and timeless display of food and drink upon a heavy white cloth, turned up to reveal a wooden buffet and metal keyhole, evokes similar arrangements by Chardin, whose still-life and genre painting were an especially fruitful inspiration in mid-nineteenth-century France. Chardin's ghost, in fact, was often resurrected in Manet's lifetime, as in the works of François Bonvin (1817–87), whose *Still Life with Lemon and Oysters* of 1858 (**fig. 292**) prefigures many aspects of Manet's own Chardinesque still lifes of the 1860s, including even the strong dark–light contrasts or the cooling color accent of a single lemon. Yet next to Bonvin's inventory of the ritual bounty and elegance of a French table, Manet's strikes a subtly different note that reveals even here the newness of his art. Rather than an inviolate, static arrangement like Bonvin's, Manet's introduces a curious element of the momentary and the casual, with the lemon half-peeled, the cloth disheveled, and a knife and fork precariously poised in the foreground, as if the dinner guest presented with the salmon, lemon, and wine had just left the table. And spatial relations also begin to move in restless ways. The bowl at the right is tipped off axis, and the tabletop is tilted too high for the laws of gravity to work without effort. Even here, in a set piece so close to traditional still-life painting, Manet's modernity can be felt.

That modernity could, at the same time, be aired far more openly in other paintings of the late 1860s which seem to have left the art of the museums to another premodern era. Even seen beside the *Concert in the Tuileries* of 1862 (see fig. 271), Manet's *Departure of the Folkestone*