Fig. 364 **Édouard Manet**, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881–82. Oil on canvas, 37½ × 51″. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.

Paris's new Hôtel de Ville (City Hall) with scenes of the city's public and commercial life—its markets, railroads, bridges, underground structures, racetracks, gardens. As he put it, he wanted "to paint the life of Paris in the house of Paris," but his request went unheeded. Such grand-scale ambitions, however, seem redirected to *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, which, exhibited at the Salon of 1882, the year before Manet's untimely death, stands as his last will and testament. The subject chosen, anonymous crowds in a place of public entertainment, was a familiar one for the period, and attracted other artists, like Degas, and other writers, like Huysmans. Manet, however, transformed this Paris commonplace into an image of haunting contradictions that have never stopped intriguing spectators. For one, the painting at first proposes an almost Raphaelesque compositional clarity, with the blonde barmaid (posed for by a certain Suzon, who actually was a barmaid at the Folies-Bergère) usurping the traditional role of a frontal, centralized Madonna. Yet this surprising symmetry of the foreground—the very buttons of her bodice bisect the painting—is immediately denied by everything around and behind the barmaid, who suddenly seems to stand totally alone in a world of such shimmer and confusion that it might almost be a mirage. Indeed, this ambient reality is in fact a mirrored surface in which we must read indirect clues to the reality which lies in the imaginary space behind us and which would be seen by the barmaid herself, were she to cast her eyes outward.

From the 1860s on, Manet redirected the illusions of painting from inside to outside the canvas, seeking the fullest involvement with the space of the viewer. The climax is reached here, as we realize that the entire rear plane of the painting, through its glassy reflection, obliges us to read the painted images as occurring on our side of the canvas. Of these surprising reflections, perhaps the most disconcerting and enigmatic is the top-hatted gentleman at the upper right, whose position apparently corresponds to that of the spectator who stands before the painting, forcing us to see ourselves mirrored irrationally as another person, a dapper Parisian who holds a walking stick and is possibly

propositioning the recalcitrant barmaid. At the upper left, this ostensibly stable composition becomes still more centrifugal, as we glimpse only the lower extremities of a pair of dangling legs that belong to a trapeze artist performing above the picture frame and over our heads. Further reflections include the lady at the balcony railing who peers through opera glasses at something invisible to us or, less momentary, the mesmerizing pair of globe lights that frame the barmaid's head and introduce a floating element of geometric order in the confusion of the reflected distance. Psychologically, too, the mood remains endlessly fascinating; for the barmaid's expression of loneliness or apathy completely denies the ambience of communal pleasure and bustle, as if Manet had pinpointed definitively what was later to become a sociological cliché about the alienation of the individual in the modern city.

Marvelous, too, is the exploration not only of these multiple emotional realities, but of visual ones as well. The foreground still life of champagne bottles, roses, oranges, ales, and liqueurs is, like the barmaid, "real," but this "reality," already mitigated by the dissolving shimmer of reflected light on the bottles, glass, and crystal, must be measured against the oblique mirror image of the same still life as partially viewed behind the barmaid's right arm. And, typically for Manet, even though this painting at first conveys the unedited immediacy of a direct and casual

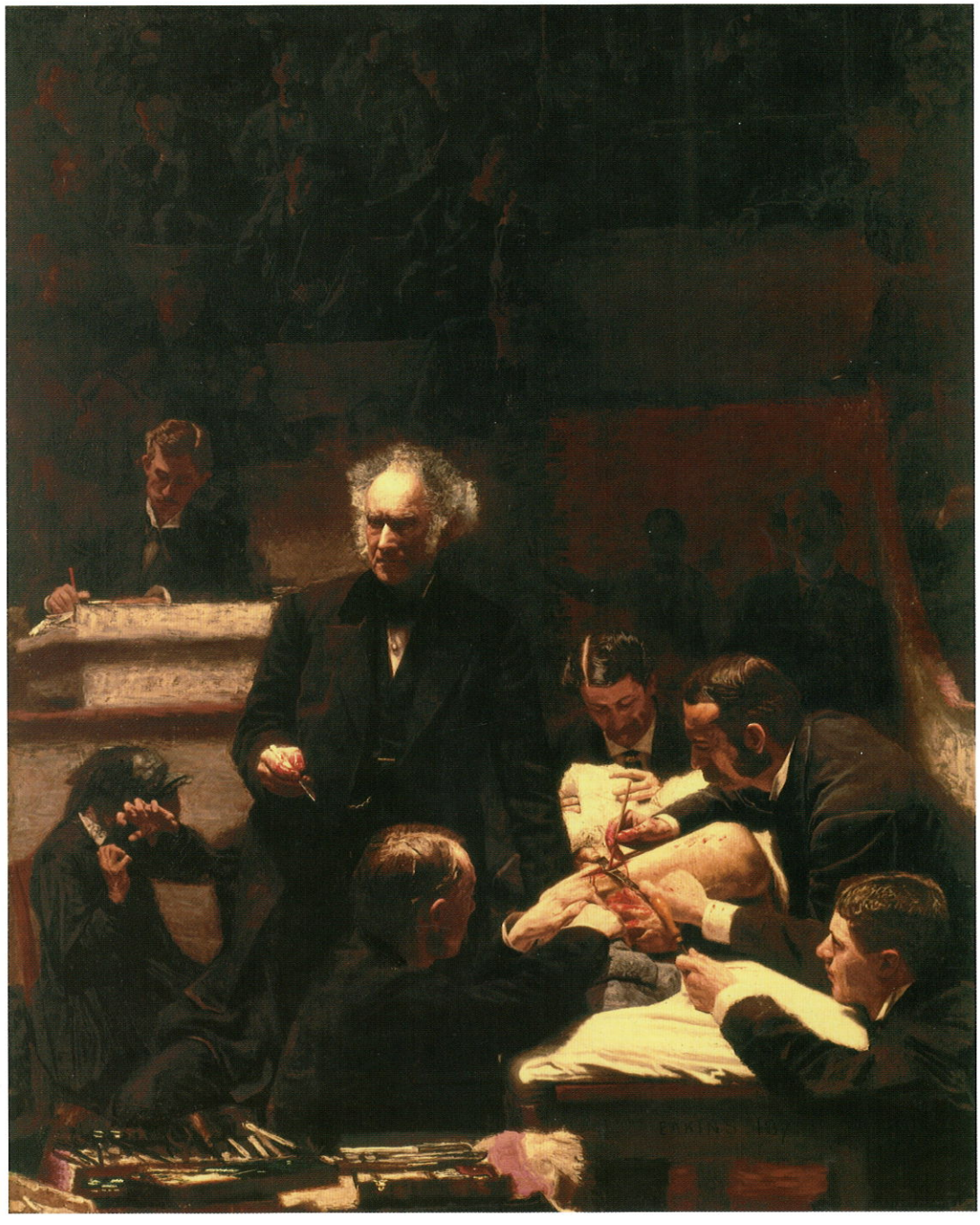

Fig. 365 **Thomas Eakins**, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 96 × 78″. Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.