



## The Hour of the Women

Dana Schutz  
*Red* (detail), 2016  
Oil on canvas  
102.2 × 81.5 cm

If one wishes to take stock or make a farewell statement at the recurring moment of the year's end, and if one does so in the art sector and not in "real life," then the exhibition "Manet/Degas" in New York's *Metropolitan Museum* is well suited for the occasion. Why? Here, until January 7, 2024, we can survey the very long history of modernity, a period of at least 160 years. The two painters, born in 1832 and 1834, were fierce competitors. They both chose to study outside of the traditional academic setting of the Paris *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*. They instead chose the *Louvre*, which had been open to the public since 1851, as a source of their education. Degas became a supporter of Edouard Manet. He collected his works, looked for sales for him and sought to secure suitable collections for his colleague's work after he died in 1883. Though he was an outstanding painter himself, he was not his friend's equal as an artist. When Manet depicted his brother's wife Berthe Morisot, herself a painter whom Manet revered, the motif of overwhelming beauty at close range was boldly presented. At the same time, the sitter's gaze eluded the viewer — an ambiguity Paul Valéry alluded to in an essay he wrote one hundred years after Manet's birth with a reference to Morisot's "abstract charm." **Modern life in Manet's work was erratic; as a son of the Parisian bourgeoisie, he replaced convention with scandals. Not unlike Andy Warhol in the following century, he weathered social attacks with a gentlemanly shrug instead of an angry blowup. His inimitable artistic strength manifested itself in the depiction of a prostitute as "Olympia." Every square inch of this 1861 painting evinces the greatest skill.** Manet's world fame is based on the inimitably casual sovereignty of his brushstrokes. While the picture bursts with life, the figures radiate a transcendent calm that is scarcely imaginable today. For a long time it was believed that Walter Benjamin had expressed himself in this sense when he said that the "flaneur," a combination of snob and loafer, was the prototypical figure of modernity. In any case, it wasn't the industrial worker like the ones Adolph Menzel painted in his "Iron Rolling Mill," nor was it a madman. And today? Women painters, such as Berthe Morisot, have long been a staple of Impressionist exhibitions; or Mary Cassatt, an American artist who ardently supported Manet. More and more, women are occupying positions that were traditionally accorded to men, not just socially but also aesthetically. **The upending of traditional aesthetic values is only gradually announcing itself. We don't know yet precisely what women's contribution is and will be. Does it have to do with digitalization or even AI? No doubt. Could it amount to another form of globalization? Perhaps.**

A new, already long-prevailing form of unrest is spreading. In and with women's art, rather than with the artistic production of men, a swirling, wavering, ceaseless movement has begun, a movement that is not mechanical and that no longer represents interlocking gears like Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times." In 1959, the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely printed the words "Everything moves, nothing stands still" on a large number of leaflets. Allegedly, he had 150,000 of them dropped from a plane. But Tinguely, a kinetic artist, returned to building machines in order to present himself, somewhat mischievously, in a state of rest. **So what are today's women doing? They promote and distribute movement within us. They reject the linear — not all of them, to be sure. They are less prone than men are to think in terms of finality. Women have not yet created an "ism." They are less inclined to claim dominance.** Let's take as a first example a slogan from the 1950s, "Abstract Art as a World Language." It is quite shocking that today we are aware that in the fields of pottery and textile design there has been a millennia-old practice of abstraction that was mainly developed by women. In early December 2023, the exhibition "To Weave the Sky: Textile Abstractions from the Jorge M. Pérez Collection" was on display in Miami next to the high-profile *Art Basel* trade fair. Leading figures of Abstract Expressionism and Hard Edge, from Robert Motherwell to Kenneth Noland, suddenly appeared with quilts and embroidered pictures alongside an almost equally strong number of women. Eighty women artists are currently on view in New York under the title "Making Their Mark: Art by Women in the Shah Garg Collection." Cecilia Alemani was invited to present 96 of them, mostly large-format works, textile art along with paintings and sculpture. In addition to famous names such as Joan Mitchell and Julie Mehretu, there is the New Yorker Faith Ringgold, who was born in 1930 and was recognized only fairly recently, and Andra Ursuta of Romania, who was grandly presented by Alemani in Venice in 2022. The mere fact that they are all women doesn't mean much. But women are showing greater sensitivity when it comes to the epochal turning point of today's inner unrest: Consider Dana Schutz, the painter born in Michigan in 1976. Like no other, she is blessed with exhibitions in prestigious locations. The most extreme works of German Expressionism, the coarsest physical distortions in Picasso's art, are her points of departure. **Almost all her paintings are monstrous. People are trapped in elevators, even large spaces are crammed with bodies and limbs. As early as the beginning of 2017, during an unforgettable exhibition at the CFA Gallery in Berlin, Dana Schutz, as Hanna Magauer wrote, "purposely refuses to offer either any zone of aesthetic calm or safe retreat into some strategic course of irony."** On the occasion of her latest, again monstrous exhibition at David Zwirner in New York, Jerry Saltz wrote the remarkable sentence, "everyone in a Schutz painting is busy." The era of the flaneur is over, the age of aesthetic disdain is passé. We are surrounded by problems, our heads are almost constantly buzzing. It is the women who can express this more easily, even more aggressively. Perhaps because they are better at multitasking, perhaps because we are all screaming children. We wish you and ourselves peaceful holidays. We need them.

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