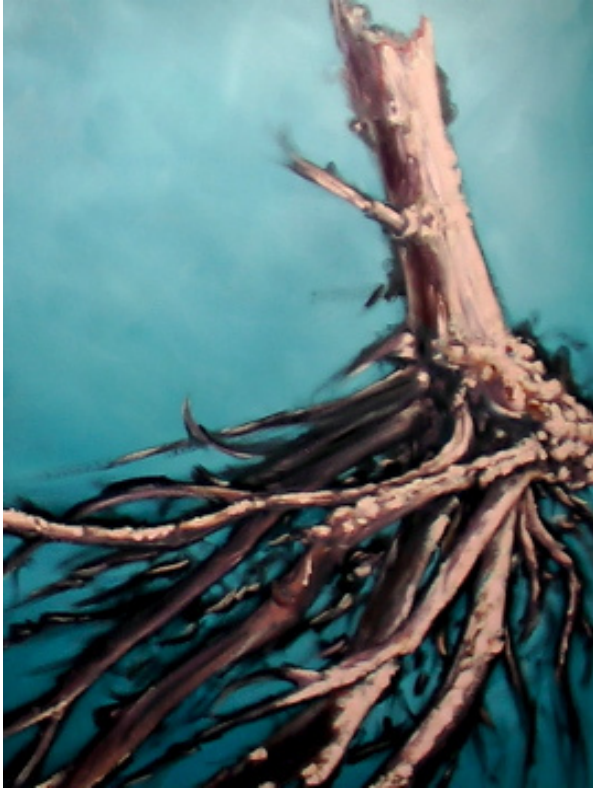


Callus #1, 2007. Oil on canvas, 48" x 60"



With this work, I have created a postmodern view of Meurent's proposed identity. I placed items in a delicate space resembling a living room, in order to give the audience a sense of her presence. She was involved with a notorious painter and his world, but she was also a woman. I see her not only as Manet's model, but also as a person.

I have recently become interested in the medium of sculpture, using a combination of found and self created objects. I feel that utilizing old items allows my work to have a previous life or context and thus a deeper meaning.

My installation responds to the identity of the main character in Manet's *Olympia*. Through research on the painting I discovered the subject's name, Victorine Meurent. She modeled for Manet for over a decade, adding her presence to at least five of his known works. As a nude she can be found in two of Manet's most controversial pieces, *Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe* and *Olympia*. Meurent also played the parts of a bullfighter and a street singer. Besides acting as Manet's muse and model, she was also his companion.

A Render Student Project Featuring Work by:
Gary Crosby, Tarin Hughes, Adam Meyer,
Matthew Schust, Steph Shantz & Sam Ulliyot
Curated by: Tarin Hughes at Artery



Image & Individual: Contemporary Responses to Manet's 'Olympia'

Image and Individual: Contemporary Responses to Manet's Olympia

Tarin Hughes

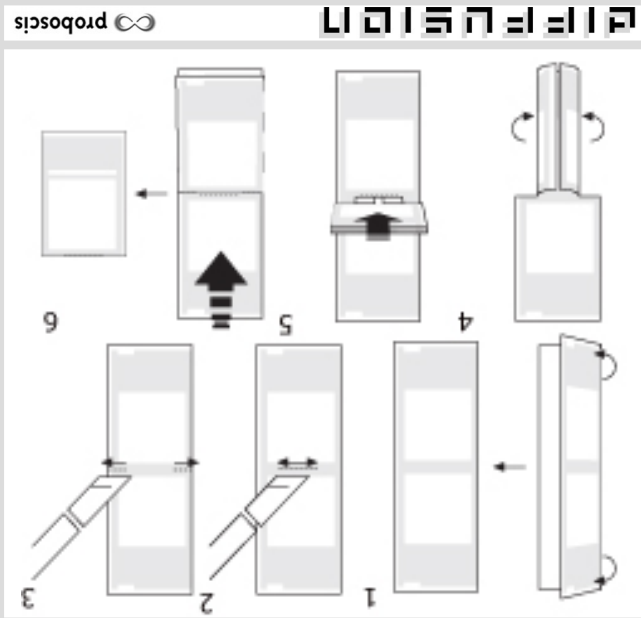
Inspiration for this show stemmed from my interest in pictorial identities. My investigation of this topic began with the construction of masks in portraiture, which is the subject of my fourth year thesis. The portrait's supposed function is to reveal the sitter's character. However, the process is convoluted by the perceptions of the sitter, artist and viewer. Rather than a true record of a person, the portrait is usually a carefully composed image. The artist evokes the desired character who is systematically falsified through a variety of poses, objects and gazes. These aspects of the painting often work cohesively to employ a language of symbols.

Symbols often set boundaries, blocking our insights into the true nature of the individual being portrayed. In this way they act as masks, both concealing personality and revealing projected aspects of their character.

In Edouard Manet's *Olympia*, the artist was not necessarily painting a portrait, but he did paint three sitters. Manet was responsible for choosing his models and subsequently his subject matter. For inspiration he looked at Titian's *Venus of*

in society. A high paid prostitute would be perfectly acceptable as long as she took steps to appropriately "brand" herself.

We felt that wall drawing, being somewhat avant-garde, in keeping with the spirit of Manet, was an ideal way in which to express our sense of corporate reliance concerning the construction of identity. Reflecting the bombardment of mass consumerism as modern day vassalage was our contemporary response to the painting.



www.diffusion.org.uk
 DIFFUSION eBooks are designed to be freely available to download, print out and share.

created on: Thu Nov 29 16:06:52 2007

Tarin Hughes

Image and Individual: Contemporary Responses

"What is this Odalisque with a yellow stomach, a base model picked up I know not where who represents Olympia?"

Jules Claretie, 19th c. French Art Critic

"a courtesan with dirty hands and wrinkled feet . . . protected all the while by a hideous Negress."

T. J. Clark, 19th c. French Art Critic

While contemplating and discussing our response to Manet's *Olympia* we decided to create a wall drawing that reflected the modern struggle for individualism and identity amidst the chaos of mass consumerism.

Our figures, faceless, appear consumed and overwhelmed by a plethora of representations of modern day consumer items. In contrast to the characters portrayed by Manet with their telling and provocative expressions our figures are black, any sense of identity lost to cold demographics.

We have engaged in much dialogue concerning the secondary character in modern culture and found that being constantly bombarded with images of false intimacy has reached a point of redundancy. Such provocative implications of servitude have become almost commonplace, relating directly to pop culture, materialism and marketing of life-style categorization.

More scandalous to us was the idea that much of our interaction and experience is dictated by that which we consume and acquire. Materialism, although androgynous, has become primary, leaving little suggestion of our profession or place

Urbino, drawing on a popular historical work of art. From there, Manet infused the painting with his own messages. Primarily, the work is a painting for paintings sake, existing solely as a figurative work resulting from a flat usage of the medium. Although this caused an uproar in French society, *Olympia* became an inspiration for the avant-garde artists. The painting provided a link between the Impressionist movement and Modernism.

However, it is also a painting about two women and a cat. The models are unidentifiable to the viewer except in their obvious servitude to society, as lovers, as servants, as pets. The language of symbols used by Manet to make these implications is overt. *Olympia* is confident, naked and beautiful. This is accentuated by the black cat at her feet and the open bunch of flowers in her maid's hands. *Olympia's* bed takes center stage in the painting, signifying her occupation. The servant attending to her, reinforces *Olympia's* servile position. In this aspect the women are unified. Additionally, the women and the cat are secondary characters to the symbolic nature of this painting. Who are these people? Are they more than they represent?



Untitled, 2007. Wall Drawing, ink, graphite

Steph SHANTZ & Sam ULLIOT

I presented these perceptions regarding *Olympia* to the Fine Arts student body at the University of Waterloo. Proposing that anyone that had a desire to respond to the piece would take part in a group show. In asking students from second through to fourth year to participate, the show would be inclusive of a variety of perceptions. The second year students are in an experimental phase of their university career. The third year students are in the early stages of developing an area of focus. The fourth year students are working within the constraints of their chosen mediums. In some cases the work might speak to an artist on a personal level, in others it might fit into their body of work.

In regards to the medium for the works, there were no limitations. I wanted the artists to take the idea of identities and infuse it with their own understanding of the subject. In this way, the show would present the viewer with unrestricted responses.

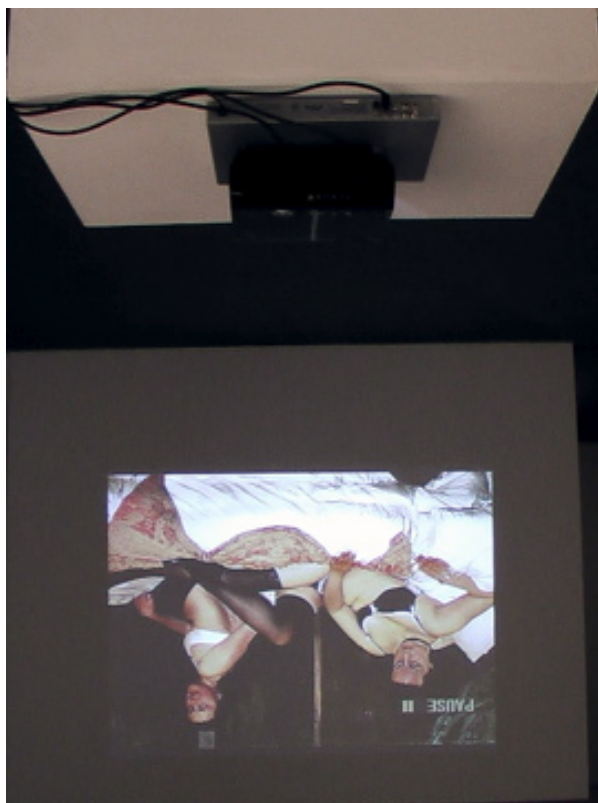
Throughout this process, I worked with Andrew Hunter Director/Curator of Rander (formerly the University of Waterloo Art Gallery). In addition to its professional artists program, Rander is actively

The cat in *Olympia* could be viewed as the most 'secondary' character of all. In Manet's time, the black cat was a symbol of promiscuity and the underbelly of society. In my piece, I wanted to put the spotlight on the cat . . . and who better to steal the show than Sylvester! He is a contemporary cultural symbol of mischievousness and sneakiness- my parody of Manet's cat. The use of a cartoon character also touches on the hierarchy of what is deemed as 'high' and 'low' art. Sylvester has now graduated to 'primary' status as the sitter in my work for this exhibition.

Olympia, for me, marks the beginning of Modernism and is as much about the act of painting for its own sake as it is about a promiscuous woman, a servant and a black cat. For this exhibition, I wanted to create a piece of work that reflects my interest in mixed media, using symbols from my culture and place in history to discuss some of the things that Manet was discussing in the 1860s. My work for the show is created entirely from the pages of adult magazines and a sparing amount of acrylic paint. During the 1860s, *Olympia* would have been viewed in a similar light as we now view pornography . . . so it seemed fitting to begin there. I wanted to eradicate the literal imagery of the pornography and re-contextualize it so that it became something noticed for its materiality rather than the images contained within. The sheets were glued down, torn away, re-glued, then grinded and sanded. This 'secondary' material has now been given primary status through negation of the image contained upon it.

involved in supporting and presenting student projects. After the curatorial approach and subject matter were solidified, we decided that the Artery would be an excellent venue for a student curated and participated show. The Artery space was donated by the city of Kitchener to the students at the University of Waterloo. It is a student-artist run center now operating with the support of Render, featuring work by students, graduates and professional artists.

The following pages describe the perceptions held by the student-artists who participated in the show. Each artist came to the show with a different experience and outlook. Their visual voices will infuse alternative views of Manet's *Olympia* for the audience.



Olympia Paused, 2007. Digital Media

GARY CROSBY

Pussy, 2007. Adult magazines, acrylic on board, 4" x 5 1/2"



My *Olympia Paused* piece is a digital construction featuring elements of Manet's original painting as well as contemporary models. The painting *Olympia* is distinctly sexual and has throughout time caused controversy. However, in a modern age surrounded by sexual imagery, *Olympia* has lost some of its original connotation.

To rejuvenate the contextual elements that existed in the original painting, I have given the image the feeling of a paused pornographic video. Also, as a stand-in for the secondary attendant character I used a sexualized character, adding a further sexual element. Thus the sexuality of the procurement of sex is replaced with the sexuality of the voyeur.

The pivotal decision in Manet's *Olympia* was how he painted truth; harsh and unashamed. Through my piece, my goal was to achieve raw truth visually with the natural form, like *Olympia*, stripped of the many layers and presented for interpretation. Both images are essentially simple, but with a simplicity that establishes our desire to understand its symbolism. Manet painted a real woman, not a goddess. I chose to paint the natural form through the root/driftwood, a mundane item that beckons a mortal reality.



Daughter, Sister, Mother, Lover, 2007. Found objects, paper, prints