

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C., December 20: John Walker, Director, announced today that the National Gallery of Art has acquired one of the greatest masterpieces of the French artist, Édouard Manet (1832-1883). Entitled Le Chemin de Fer, the painting is the gift of Horace Havemeyer in memory of his mother, Louisine W. Havemeyer. It has been placed on exhibition in Gallery 72.

There are two figures in the composition, a seated young woman, who looks up at us from her open book, and a little girl, whom we see from the back as she looks out through an iron fence. Her attention is apparently fixed on a train which, although on a lower level and invisible to us, sends up a great cloud of steam and smoke into the background of the picture.

Most of the painting was carried out in the garden of Manet's friend Alphonse Hirsch, whose little daughter posed for the child, while the model for the older woman was Victorine Meurend, whom Manet painted on other occasions also. The canvas, which seems to have been the first one of considerable size painted mostly out of doors by Manet, measures 36 5/8 inches high by 44 1/8 wide and is signed at the lower right. It was painted between 1872 and 1874, at the height of the artist's career, when his genius was winning recognition even among the conservative critics who were bitterly prejudiced against the group of modern artists to which Manet belonged. Le Chemin de Fer was, to most people's surprise, admitted to the Salon of 1874, where it attracted, among the pronouncements of less understanding critics, Castagnary's comment that it is "so powerful in its light, so distinguished in color, and a lost profile so gracefully indicated, a dress of blue cloth

so broadly modeled that I ignore the unfinished state of the face and hands." Armand Silvestre, in his discussion of the painting at this time, answered Manet's detractors with this conclusion: "What has the painter wanted to do? To give us a truthful impression of a familiar scene . . . A work so conceived must have only two qualities: truth, and beauty of color. Well then, it is hard to imagine anything more truthful than this painting, and one would have to have a sensitivity very little developed not to admire certain passages of truly marvelous color."

Today Manet is unanimously acclaimed as one of the greatest French painters of the nineteenth century and in all the brilliant work of that School Le Chemin de Fer is one of the most delightful paintings. One could scarcely find a more glorious passage than Manet has given us in the light reflected from the particles of steam and smoke that fill the background of this picture, or more beautiful brushwork than in the painting of the child's blue sash. And in clear realization of tactile values and articulation, these two figures, of the woman and child, offer a formidable challenge to all modern art.

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