

EXHIBITION UNITES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UNITED STATES EDOUARD MANET'S WORKS DEPICTING THE EXECUTION OF EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN

Works Are Considered Amongst the Greatest Achievements in Early Modern Painting

***Manet and the Execution of Maximilian*
Special Exhibitions Gallery, third floor
November 5, 2006–January 29, 2007**

New York, October 19, 2006—*Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* unites for the first time in the United States a series of compositions created between 1867 and 1869 by Edouard Manet that depict the execution of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. The exhibition—featuring the series of three large paintings, an oil sketch, and one lithograph—examines the evolution from one painting to the next, which was fueled by a steady stream of written and graphic accounts of the event. Also included in the exhibition are selected works by photographers and other artists who documented the event or whose pictures were likely sources for what Manet produced.

Additionally, a small group of canvases by Manet is included to add context to the Maximilian works. This exhibition, on view in the Special Exhibitions Gallery on the third floor from November 5, 2006, to January 29, 2007, is organized by John Elderfield, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

Napoleon III, seeking to assert France's economic and political power over Mexico, appointed Maximilian, a member of the Hapsburg family of Austria, emperor of that country in 1864. Three years later, Maximilian was abandoned by the French government when Napoleon III withdrew troops assigned to protect him, and was subsequently tried and executed for treason by the resurgent Mexican army. News of the execution reached Paris on July 1, 1867, and Manet, opposed to Napoleon III's policies, immediately began the first painting in the series.

Manet and the Execution of Maximilian continues an initiative by MoMA to hold exhibitions devoted to art made before the 1880s, the point at which the Museum's painting and sculpture collection begins. First established in the early years of the Museum's history, with exhibitions such as *Corot, Daumier* (1930), this tradition is motivated by the belief that an understanding of the art shown in the Museum's collection can be aided by an understanding of the art that immediately preceded it. Most recently, in 2005, MoMA presented *Pioneering Modern Painting: Cézanne and Pissarro 1865–1885*, which signaled the Museum's wish to reengage the idea by examining how Cézanne's mature art, which is among the earliest in MoMA's collection, was founded in the 1870s in collaboration with Pissarro, who is not represented in the collection. *Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* reveals how an artist of the 1860s reinvented the then-defunct art of "history painting"—the painting of significant public events.

Mr. Elderfield says, "Manet's *Execution of Maximilian* series comprises extraordinary works of art considered to be among the greatest achievements of early modern painting. These works, arguably, reinvented the old conception of history painting and, as such, opened the way to works as diverse as Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* and Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977*."

History

In 1861, Benito Juárez became President of Mexico and, due to the collapse of the nation's economy, declared a moratorium on payments of foreign debt. Britain, France, and Spain decided to coerce him into payment, but France was the only country that took the initiative seriously. Napoleon III of France disliked Juárez's liberal beliefs and felt that Mexico could fall prey to United States aggression. Napoleon III sought to assert France's economic and political power over Mexico and sent Archduke Maximilian of Austria, a member of the Hapsburg family, to assume leadership of the alliance. In 1863, a French expeditionary force expelled Juárez from Mexico City, allowing Maximilian to assume his position as emperor there one year later.

Three years after Maximilian settled in Mexico City, Juárez's guerilla forces gained strength, and French control of Mexico declined. Napoleon III, convinced he had made a mistake, withdrew French troops from Mexico, abandoning Maximilian and his few supporters. Juárez's army easily defeated Maximilian at Querétaro, north of Mexico City, in May 1867. Maximilian and two of his generals—Miguel Miramón, who had been president of the Mexican Republic before Juárez, and Tomás Mejía, an indigenous soldier from the hills outside Querétaro—were tried on June 13, and the following day the death sentence was announced for all three defendants. As the news spread, some Mexican supporters wanted to aid Maximilian's escape, but he refused. Others pleaded with Juárez to pardon him, but he declined, fearing that Maximilian would set up a government in exile. Many Europeans, ranging from Queen Victoria of England to the author Victor Hugo, sent telegrams to Juárez urging him to spare Maximilian's life. On June 19, 1867, Maximilian and his two generals were executed by the firing squad of Juárez's army on Cerro de las Campanas (Hill of the Bells), near Querétaro.

The Execution of Maximilian Series

Manet, who was opposed to Napoleon III's policies, responded to the ongoing accounts of Maximilian's death as they were published in French journals. These accounts—which came from eyewitnesses, signed and anonymous letters, and various foreign publications—presented many inconsistencies about the time of day and site of the execution and the number of victims and soldiers involved. This exhibition includes a selection of photographs, some taken by François Aubert, Maximilian's official photographer, and engravings that Manet might have seen published in the French newspapers.

The series includes three large paintings that currently reside, in order of creation, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; in The National Gallery, London; and in the Städtische Kunsthalle,

Mannheim. The other two works are a small painting that served as a study for the Mannheim painting, now in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, and a lithograph, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which was made in the same period as the Copenhagen painting. Mr. Elderfield states: "Although there were striking differences among the works, the basic compositional elements—the horizontal placement of the figures, the direction of the firing squads, the positions of the victims—remain consistent in all five works."

The first painting in the series, begun in 1867, is a large canvas with nearly life-size figures. The painterly brushstrokes and the atmospheric quality may reflect the ambiguity of early reports of Maximilian's death, as well as revealing the influence of Francisco de Goya's *The Third of May, 1808*, which Manet had seen in Madrid two years earlier. Manet changed elements in the painting as news filtered into France. For instance, the flared trousers and outlines of sombreros indicate that Manet had originally painted the soldiers in Mexican guerilla uniforms rather than the uniforms of Juárez's regular army.

By autumn 1867, as more details about Maximilian's death were published, Manet set aside the first painting and began a second, more refined canvas (1867–68). This second painting formed the basis on which the remaining works were composed. He reworked the background, altered the distance between the victims and the firing squad, and changed the uniforms of the soldiers so that they resembled French army uniforms. This painting exists in fragments, having been damaged while in storage in Manet's studio. In the 1890s, Edgar Degas sought out the surviving fragments and brought them together again. The National Gallery acquired the fragments in 1918, and in 1992 reassembled them onto one canvas to afford at least a partial sense of what the composition had originally looked like.

The small oil sketch (1868-69) and the lithograph (1868-69) were made in preparation for the final painting (1868–69), which is the largest and most definitive work. New reports and photographs pertaining to the execution continued to appear in French newspapers, influencing Manet's final work. To this composition, Manet added a background landscape with spectators that was borrowed from an earlier painting from 1865–66, titled *Bullfight*, which in turn referenced Francisco de Goya's *La Tauromaquia (Bullfight)* prints from 1816. This painting and a print from Goya's series will also be included in this exhibition.

In addition to *Bullfight*, the exhibition includes others works by Manet to add historic and aesthetic context to the series. *The Dead Toreador* was a part of a composition called *Incident in a Bullfight*, which Manet began in 1862 after the French defeated Juárez's forces. Manet excised this portion of the painting, reworked it and exhibited it in 1867 as *The Dead Man*. This title change coincided with Maximilian's surrender to Juárez's forces. Also included is *The Funeral* (c. 1867), inspired by the funeral of his friend, the poet Charles Baudelaire, which Manet created while he was working on the Maximilian series. This painting would become the source for the cemetery and landscape in the background of the final painting of Maximilian's execution. The Maximilian series also influenced a later work on paper titled *The Barricade* (1871), which depicts

a crowd of Communards in the streets of Paris being fired upon by French soldiers, the figures of which are derived from a tracing of the Maximilian lithograph.

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PUBLICATION:

In the book that accompanies this exhibition, John Elderfield analyzes and documents the creation of the works and discusses their art-historical importance in the context of modern art. The book also includes a bibliography and newspaper excerpts from Parisian newspapers that circulated in Paris at the time of Maximilian's execution. The book is published by The Museum of Modern Art and is sold in the MoMA Stores. It is available to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) in the United States and Canada and through Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada. 200 pages; 112 illustrations. Price: \$29.95. See separate press release for more information.

PROGRAMS:

Manet at MoMA: A Conversation between John Elderfield and Michael Fried

Wednesday, November 8, 6:00 p.m., The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2

John Elderfield, organizer of the exhibition, and Michael Fried, the J.R. Herbert Boone Professor in the Humanities, Krieger School of Arts and Science, The Johns Hopkins University, and author of the critically acclaimed *Manet's Modernism: or, the Face of Painting in the 1860s*, discuss the Maximilian paintings and Manet's importance to the history of modern art.

Manet and the Execution of Maximilian: Representing Politics and the Spectacle of War

Thursday, January 18, 6:00 p.m., The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2

In this panel discussion, scholars and artists discuss the legacy of Manet's representation of politics and war through painting and historical documentation in contemporary art and culture. The panel features artists Sue Coe and Gilles Peress, among others.

Tickets for each program (\$10; members \$8; students and seniors \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk and the Film and Media desk. Tickets are also available online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

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Film Admission: Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m. \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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