

# BEYOND THE PALETTE'S LYNNE HANLEY HAS THE 'IMPRESSION'

*that art history  
can thrive in a  
virtual world*



As an art historian who is always searching for creative ways to entertain and spread the word about the crazy and fascinating world of art history, I relish the opportunities offered by the surprisingly rich possibilities in the virtual world.

Now, here's a question: how wrong would it be to begin a Valentine's Day virtual history of art extravaganza with the fact that Edgar Degas really didn't like women to the point that he considered them to be nothing more than animals, and said he preferred horses? In my defence, he produced some of the most exquisite portrayals of women in art and was quoted as saying that a "painting requires a little mystery, some vagueness and some fantasy", which is frankly a pretty good maxim for the success of a long-term relationship in my book.

Are you silently shaking your head? If so, you may be relieved to hear that I've decided not to regale guests with that particular story as an opener, but it is still lurking in the depths of the script I'm working on for a Valentine's Day offering. Perhaps that's because the script hasn't been submitted to the scrutiny of my several trusty sounding boards yet. It may still get the hoof (sorry!)

Terrible puns aside, it seems that I need an increasing army of talented helpers as I navigate Beyond the Palette through this extraordinary era. I used to simply do my research and punctuate my notes with some

well-appointed phrases to keep me on track in The National Gallery. I am now having conversations about lighting, what to record and how to record it, which camera angles work best, how to make the most of Zoom and, of course, how to market all this new material and these new ideas.

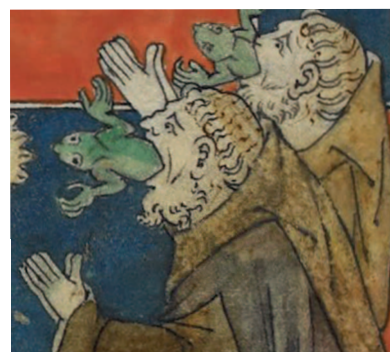
In my previous article for FOCUS, I wrote about using a green screen to create arty vignettes that I call 'Curated Canapés and Cocktails', committing to a twice-weekly livestreams on Instagram called 'Elevenes with Lynne' and operating virtual art tours via Zoom. They have changed with the times, but are still going strong. I have reduced the number of weekly livestreams to Thursday mornings and have a gorgeous gang of regulars who send me fabulously weird suggestions for new content, the strange image of prophets quite literally ridding themselves of the frogs in their throats being a case in point. No subject is too bizarre for 'Elevenes with Lynne'.

The demand for virtual art tours has certainly grown and the trend has become to book a private session, connect me to a large screen and combine the stories of sev-

## The Prophets (below)

These poor fellows definitely aren't enjoying an early incarnation of the delicious French dish of frog legs for supper. They are in fact false prophets getting their comeuppance as depicted in a manuscript known as The Queen Mary Apocalypse. The image is taken from the book of Revelation 16:13, "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of... the false prophet". Nice.

*The Queen Mary Apocalypse*, London 14th century. British Library, Royal MS 19 B XV, fol. 30v





eral well-known paintings with a pre-prepared feast. I can't tell you how much I love being the new Netflix. Let's face it, even the best series won't give you illicit love affairs, wild parties, murder, shape-shifting and the creation of a galaxy in the space of 60 minutes. Plus, you have the opportunity to ask all the questions you can think of, all from the comfort of your sofa with your favourite tippie in hand.

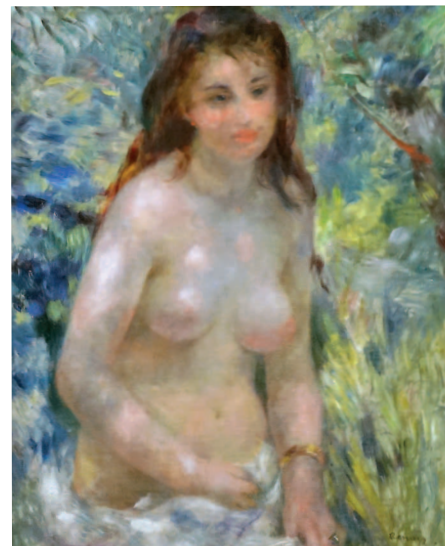
I may, however, have reached a temporary peak with 'Curated Canapés and Cocktails' when I decided to pretend to be Victorine Meurent, Édouard Manet's model for his famous and controversial work *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. The foreground of the huge canvas depicts two fully clothed men and a naked Meurent, all happily enjoying an al fresco picnic. Never one to shirk a challenge, I shuffled in front of the camera in nothing, with my modesty protected only by 'Meurent's' clothes clutched tightly to my chest.

The denouement sees my clothes thrown across the room with a Gallic shrug as the credits roll. Technically, this doesn't quite fit as in the painting they're in a tidy pile topped with a hat but as I didn't want to break character (you see, I take these things very seriously) the only other option was to bend over to place them on the ground and then arrange myself insouciantly into her pose. You can perhaps imagine why I took a small liberty in rejecting that option, and the camera angle and lighting would have been a nightmare. I was obliged to edit the raw footage extremely carefully before sending it to my actual editor, so I don't think you'll ever see an outtake of that particular video.

It was a natural progression, judicious editing aside, to create a virtual history of art Christmas experience, from which a

Valentine's Day special became an obvious next flutter. It's always difficult to know where to start when creating an event that required a wide appeal. One idea came to me when I had a request for a private gallery tour that concentrated exclusively on the Impressionists. You'd be hard pushed not to have heard of Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne, and as I researched further, I realised that their stories as well as their artwork provided a wealth of brilliant material to be woven into any interactive hour of arty insights and anecdotes.

For example, did you know that Monet was quite the dandy and very attractive to women? Unfortunately, when it came to the opposite sex, his tastes were rather specific. "Sorry," Monet told them, "I only sleep with duchesses or maids. Preferably duchesses' maids. Anything in between turns me right off." Who knew?



Renoir's 'corpse' (above)

In 1874, critic Albert Wolff wrote: "Try to explain to M Renoir that a woman's torso is not a mass of decomposing flesh with green and purple spots that indicate the state of total putrefaction in a corpse!"

**Pierre-Auguste Renoir**, *Torso of a Woman in the Sunlight*, 1876, Clark Art Institute, USA

Al fresco picnic (below)

Frogs also get a bad rap in Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. There is a little frog or grenouille, bottom left in this work. Grenouille was slang for prostitute, hence the frog's presence added to the scandal the work was already generating.

**Édouard Manet**, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862, Musée d'Orsay, Paris





### Can you spot the green shoes in the painting?

The Folies Bergère had acrobats, animal acts, ballet, cabaret and operetta as well as the famous can-can girls. What a brilliant night out, although from the bar attendant's point of view, it all seems to have become a little dull.

**Édouard Manet**, *A Bar at the Folies Bergère*, 1882, The Courtauld Gallery, London



### Impressionism

The term "Impressionism" was coined in 1874 when Monet exhibited a work in the group's first exhibition entitled *Impression, Sunrise*. The name stuck when a critic also dismissively called the works nothing but impressions.

**Claude Monet**, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris

Degas, as we do know, wasn't interested in actually engaging with women at all, despite painting numerous ballerinas and nudes. In the days when dinner parties were commonplace (remember them?), he would seldom accept an invitation and only then if a long list of conditions were met: no cooking in butter, no flowers on the table, no perfume on female diners, no pets in the room, dinner to be served promptly at 19.30, and lights to be dimmed. I have a feeling no one ever asked him to play cupid.

Renoir, on the other hand, was all about fun and frivolity and was therefore exceedingly upset when one critic accused him of painting a nude who, he claimed, looked to be in an advanced state of decomposition thanks to the yellow, blue and green colour palette. That little gem is unlikely to make the Valentine's Day cut.

The idea is, after all, to send waves of romance and passion into the world, not kill them stone dead, but I love the fact that far from being the comfortable images you might find on the lid of a chocolate box or in a doctor's waiting room. All the Impressionists pushed contemporary tastes and comprehension to the limit. I cannot imagine that they'd ever dream of a day when their works would be used to inspire love songs or caption competitions. And as for Degas, perhaps I should banish him completely from the Valentine's Day offering. Arrows and love potions will provide quite enough drama and controversy for that particular virtual art experience, and no one wants a Valentine's date who would prefer the company of a horse... unless you're talking stallions, but I think that's a different subject entirely!



**Lynne Hanley** is the founder of Beyond the Palette art tours. She curates themed tours for small groups and individuals at The National Gallery in London, and offers regular virtual art talks via Zoom which can be booked through her website at [www.beyondthepalette.co.uk](http://www.beyondthepalette.co.uk). She also creates lively talks and videos for YouTube and on social media. Instagram: [@lynne\\_beyondthepalette](https://www.instagram.com/lynne_beyondthepalette/); Facebook: [arttoursbeyondthepalette](https://www.facebook.com/arttoursbeyondthepalette/); YouTube: *Beyond the Palette*. Lynne is delighted to offer readers of FOCUS magazine a 10% discount on all virtual or face-to-face tours, please use the code FOCUS10 at checkout.