

Behind the Feminine Façade: Reinterpreting Berthe Morisot

Allison Smith
Art History
Union College
807 Union St,
Schenectady, New York 12308

Faculty Advisor: Dr. David Ogawa

Abstract

This paper traces the evolution of intellectual discourse concerning Berthe Morisot, an Impressionist artist, by examining the methods of art history evaluation that emerged in the wake of the Second and Third Wave Feminist Movements. Morisot is used as a case study to investigate the ways in which gender affected scholarly critiques of female artists. A historiographical approach is taken in order to analyze the progression of scholarship on Morisot and determine the basis on which she has been granted credibility as an integral member of the Impressionist group. The paper reveals that the language used to discuss Morisot changes in the 1960s and 1970s to focus on her identity as a woman. The canon of research then expanded to include discussion of Morisot's value as an artist who was able to masterfully depict her experience as a woman in 19th century Europe. This paper proposes an alternative visual analysis to traditional gendered readings of Morisot, and asserts that Morisot challenged societal expectations of herself, and women in general, through her representations of femininity and motherhood. Ultimately, the reevaluation of Morisot led art historians to develop new techniques to examine female painters, and their works, as unique commentary and reflections of time, gender, and social experience.

Keywords: Impressionism, Feminism, Gender

1. Introduction

Berthe Morisot was an Impressionist artist born in 1841 in Bourges, France. She has often been neglected, overlooked, and undervalued in the art historical narrative despite the fact that she produced many works of art alongside her peers Manet, Renoir, and Monet. Scholars have dismissed Morisot as irrelevant in favor of these other notable male Impressionist artists, and her gender is the driving force behind these failures to document and analyze her work. However, the language used to talk about Morisot changes in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, the literature focuses on Morisot's identity as a woman in 19th Century Europe. The most recent generation of scholarship makes use of feminist language, but also discusses the formal issues of style and the definition of Impressionism with regard to Morisot. This evolution of literature aligns with feminist art history movements, which demonstrates that as scholars developed new methods of art historical analysis, there was a spike of renewed interest in Morisot and how she, and her works, can be viewed as a responding to, and challenging, societal constructs.

2. Background Context and Literature Review

2.1. The First Generation

Scholarship is bereft of meaningful discussions about Morisot before the 1960s, and the literature that exists mainly focuses on Morisot's relationships with other Impressionist painters, specifically Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot and Édouard Manet, rather than her individual achievements. In 1910 art critics Theodore Duret and John Ernest Crawford Flicht published a work that claimed that Morisot's artistic development was heavily influenced and guided by Corot and Manet. Duret and Flicht state that Corot became Berthe and Edma Morisot's guide and that when the sisters first began to exhibit at the salon in 1894, Berthe's work revealed that she was an, "obvious student of Corot" and describe that her early paintings are done, "very correctly, like most early work [and] are finished in every detail." While they acknowledge that she developed her own artistic invention and personal feeling, they say that this "evidently" occurred "under Corot's influence," insinuating that Corot shaped her techniques and abilities.¹

Duret and Flicht state that while Berthe and Edma were copying works at the Louvre around 1861, the two noticed Manet doing the same and became casual acquaintances with him but did not think much of Manet since he was not a well-known painter yet. They then go on to state that after Manet became famous, the sisters visited Manet's studio to befriend him, and after that point Morisot was, "under his immediate influence." Duret and Flicht argue that Morisot borrowed, "the new technique and the brilliant execution which [Manet] personally had introduced."² Not only do the authors list Manet as a major influence on Morisot, but also say that as Morisot moved forward with the development of her works she, "developed simultaneously with the others, partly working out her own ideas, partly borrowing from Claude Monet and Renoir."³ Early critics of Morisot, like Duret and Flicht, argue that she was highly influenced by her peers and describe Morisot's relationship with Manet in a suspicious manner, insinuating that she worked to develop a relationship with Manet in order to further her own personal aspirations and techniques.

In 1892 Morisot had her first "one-man," or more appropriately, one-woman exhibition that was fairly well received. Around the time of her show, Morisot made a statement about women saying, "truly, we are worth something through a feeling, an intention, a vision which is more delicate than that of men and if, by good luck, we are not impeded by affectation, pedantry and over-refinement, we shall be able to do a great deal."⁴ Hyslop integrated this quote in his publication, "Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassat" to demonstrate that Morisot served as an example of a successful woman who could have her own show devoted entirely to her work, without any other male artists displayed. In doing so, Morisot defied societal expectations of womanhood since she executed a project by herself, yet Hyslop does not acknowledge this feat.

Hyslop also discusses Morisot's relationship with Manet, but not as extensively as the authors previously mentioned. Hyslop does, however, make the argument the Morisot was influenced by Manet and says, "if one tried to sum up the general character of Morisot's paintings by choosing a single characteristic picture, that picture might well be *Eugene Manet and His Daughter at Bougival* ... A pleasant, summery garden scene, it combines the broad figure painting style of Manet with a loose, freely suggested outdoor setting (Fig. 1)."⁵



Figure 1: Berthe Morisot, *Eugene Manet and His Daughter at Bougival*, 1881. From: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1664>.

By summarizing the general character of Morisot's work as resembling Manet's style with some other techniques employed, Hyslop emphasizes the notion that much of Morisot's work is similar to Manet's, which leads to the assumption that Manet had a large impact on her entire body of work. As a result, Hyslop leaves the reader believing that Morisot was not as much of an innovative artist as she was in reality. This sentiment is furthered when Hyslop confidently states that, "the Impressionist movement had a formative and determining influence on [Morisot]."⁶ While Hyslop acknowledges that Morisot "may" not have been accepted on equal footing as her male counterparts, he also states that the Impressionists included Morisot in their ranks and that she, "achieved an unusual eminence in the history of painting."⁷ In choosing to say that the Impressionists included Morisot into their circle, the author detaches Morisot from the rest of the notable Impressionists that art history has chosen to favor, and belittles her independent success.

2.2. The 1960s Through the 1980s

Scholarship from the 1960s through the 1980s starts to discuss how Morisot influenced her male peers and lists the reasons why previous scholars neglected to call her a founder and important artist involved with Impressionist movement. During this time, feminist methodology developed and scholars analyzed Morisot's work within its historical context and emphasized the idea of Morisot as a prominent female figure and artist.

The 1962 catalog review of, "Berthe Morisot, Catalogue Des Peintures, Pastels Et Aquarelles" by Aaron Scharf acknowledges that Morisot was an integral member of the Impressionists who did not receive the correct amount of publicity or acclaim as male painters have. Scharf makes it clear that Morisot is important to mention when talking about the Impressionist movement as he states that she is the, "the foremost feminine exponent of the Impressionist movement."⁸ While the author acknowledges that Morisot had relationships with Corot, Manet, and Renoir, and most likely exchanged ideas and techniques, he states that Morisot was an individual, first and foremost. He goes as far to deviate from previous scholarship to say that her work, "accounts for another variation within the general character of Impressionist painting," and that, "the open and multi-directional strokes of the pastel, as Morisot used it from 1872, seems to have influenced her painting style and not improbably contributed to Manet's new style as well."⁹ This publication not only endorses Morisot as an important member of the Impressionists, but also proposes that her work influenced Manet's, which is quite a different claim about Manet and Morisot's professional relationship compared to the prior scholarship.

In 1987 a book was published by Kathleen Adler and Tamar Garb and is fittingly titled, *Berthe Morisot*. Unlike other publications, this publication focuses on five relevant issues surrounding Morisot, rather than simply detail her life and career. This book, "seeks to make explicit, to spell out and explore, the situation which a woman who wished to become a professional painter at a time might have faced."¹⁰ The authors wish to give the reader an understanding of what it was like to be an upper class female artist in 19th century France, and describe how she, "reconciled the

private world of the 'feminine sphere' with the public world of artistic practice."¹¹ Compared to the previous sources, this book features the first real glimpse of intentional feminist writing, talks about Morisot admirably, and focuses first and foremost on the significance of Morisot's gender and how she has been viewed historically.

Berthe Morisot, Impressionist was also published in 1987 and features more feminist language. The authors Charles F. Stuckey, William P. Scott, and Suzanne G. Lindsay hail Morisot as a clear founder of Impressionism. This bold statement was often left out of scholarship on Morisot prior to the 1960s and 1970s, and may be a result of the renewed interest in female artists during the Second Wave feminist movement. This book suggests the influence of Manet on Morisot's painting, *Two Seated Women*, but does not argue that Manet corrected this piece or was a major guiding force in her development of the painting. The authors focus on Morisot's gender when they say that her, "professional ambitions were met with sexist skepticism," and that in critiquing her work, males called Morisot a whore.¹² Similarly to the Adler and Garb publication, this book largely focuses on the injustices Morisot faced as a woman.

2.3. Contemporary Approaches To The Study Of Morisot

2.3.1 *morisot and her representation of femininity*

Recent approaches to the study of the Impressionist Group have focused on woman painters more so than in previous scholarship. This is the result of an emerging group of scholars equipped with feminist art historical tools that are now delving back into history to analyze the artwork of notable female impressionists. After the 1980s/1990s feminist project, scholars took another look back at the works of Morisot with regard to the representation of "femininity" as a social construct. In an essay titled, "Berthe Morisot and the Feminizing of Impressionism" author Tamar Garb discusses Morisot's critics and analyzes how she was received in the context of her time. Garb sets up the reasoning behind the connection between Impressionism and femininity and states that it was, "Impressionism's alleged attachment to surface, its very celebration of sensory experience born of the rapid perception and notation of fleeting impressions ... made it in the 1890s as a practice most suited to women's temperament and character."¹³ Garb notes that Morisot's critics felt that Morisot's loose brushstroke was a result of "feminine weakness." Garb reveals that in many of the criticisms surrounding Morisot's art, there is a reoccurring idea that her paintings were achieved without effort due to the fact that she was a feminine individual.¹⁴

Even those who praised Morisot's work praised it for its ability to convey femininity. Garb cites the critic George Moore who said that her success, "lay in her investing, 'her art with all her femininity' ... her art is 'all womanhood – sweet and gracious, tender and wistful womanhood'."¹⁵ Instead of crediting Morisot for her originality, technique, or treatment of subjects, the critics place her work inside the feminine sphere and, as a result, do not provide her with the credit that she is due, and Garb successfully makes this evident through an analysis of her critics and supporters alike.

An important part of understanding how post-1980s scholarship looks at Morisot is recognizing that as a woman, Morisot "worked from different positions and experiences from those of [her] colleagues who were men" and that a major aspect of the feminist project is, "the theorization and historical analysis of sexual difference."¹⁶ In her book, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity, and the Histories of Art*, Griselda Pollack defines the spaces in which Morisot, as a bourgeois woman in 19th century France, was confined to. Pollack looks at how the societal structure affected what Morisot produced, and lists the spaces represented in Morisot's works as, "dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, bedrooms, balconies/verandas, private gardens" and instead of bars, cafes, and backstage as in the paintings of her male contemporaries.¹⁷

In Pollack's book as well as in the articles, "Unmasking Manet's Morisot" by Marni R. Kessler and "Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman or the Cult of True Womanhood?" by Norma Broude, the authors demonstrate that Morisot was confined to the spaces and ideas of femininity. Pollack discusses Morisot's painting *On the Balcony* (1872) and points out that the two figures are separated from the city and are confined by a barred-in balcony (Fig. 2). Pollack argues that, "what Morisot's balustrades demarcate is not the boundary between public and private, but between the spaces of masculinity and femininity."¹⁸ In "Unmasking Manet's Morisot" Kessler, too, discusses an image of a balcony, but this time it is *The Balcony* (1868) by Manet. Manet painted Morisot in this image, and Kessler states that Manet painted Morisot with a deliberately "seductively torsioned body" and argues that Morisot is seated on the balcony not only so that she can enjoy the view, but that she is placed there to be seen from the street (Fig. 3). Kessler states that, "Morisot is not simply the viewer, she is also the viewed" which implies that Morisot was an object to be looked at, not to be actively in the public sphere, but separated and stationary in the private sphere.¹⁹



Figure 2: Berthe Morisot, *On the Balcony*, 1872.
From: The Athenaeum,

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1596>.



Figure 3: Édouard Manet, *The Balcony*, 1868.
From: The Athenaeum,

<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=14725>.

In, "Mary Cassatt: Modern Woman of the Cult of True Womanhood" author Norma Broude also looks at *On the Balcony* (1872) by Morisot and upholds that recent feminist studies on Morisot of the "conventional notions of feminine respectability the denied these upper-middle-class women artists access to the wider public sphere."²⁰ Broude also declares a balcony as a "space of femininity" and says that in this painting, the mother and daughter are, "literally confined to the domestic sphere, fenced off from the public life of the city that lies beyond."²¹ In each of these discussions, the authors agree women were confined to certain spaces in the 19th century and that Morisot represented herself, and others represented her, within this feminine world.

2.3.2 morisot's response to motherhood

Since the 1980s and second-wave feminism, art historians have taken new approaches to the study of Berthe Morisot, and woman artists as a whole. In the context of Morisot's and her contemporary's works, feminist art historians have found new approaches to analyze the representation of motherhood. When discussing the representation of motherhood within Impressionist painting, an evolution of scholarship can be traced demonstrating the progression of views towards Morisot and her ability to challenge social expectations of her, and of women, through her works.

Stewart Buettner discusses Morisot's representations of motherhood in, "Images of Modern Motherhood in the Art of Morisot, Cassatt, Modersohn-Becker, Kollwitz." Buettner, however, argues that the frequency of representations of motherhood in Morisot and Cassatt's work comes down to a shift in attitudes towards motherhood. Buettner starts out by asserting that mothers and children have been represented in art for as long as art has been recorded. He then argues that Morisot, "took a theme laden with convention and recast it in a manner that reflected the social mores of their particular worlds."²² Buettner proposes that the, "increasing intimacy between mothers and children found in

their work can, in part, be explained by changes in childrearing practices and more romantic attitudes toward motherhood.”²³ Buettner takes the reader through history as he mentions that most aristocratic mothers felt that their children were burdens in the 18th century and prior, but that this attitude changed after the publication of Rousseau’s *Emile* which advocated for the mother as the “baby’s natural nurse.”²⁴ He then asserts that Rousseau’s ideas caught on with aristocratic women, and the “cult of motherhood” developed, and was reinforced, by the French Revolution, which “supported the politics of good motherhood for the stability that a peaceful, ordered home life brought the state. Napoleon himself is reported to have claimed that the education of women was designed to form ‘mothers for their children’.”²⁵

As the 19th century progressed, the “cult of motherhood” expanded, and Buettner claims that we can find evidence of this through the progression of Morisot’s work. Buettner looks at *The Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1869), an earlier work of Morisot’s (Fig. 4). Buettner notices that the mother and daughter are distanced from each other, the mother is absorbed in her own book, and that the piece reads as unsentimental. He then compares this piece with a later work by Morisot, *In the Garden at Maurecourt* (1884), which was painted after Morisot married Eugene Manet and had given birth to her daughter Julie (Fig. 5). In this image, Buettner finds that Edma and her daughter are seated, “close together in a loosely painted landscape, shot through with greens, matte blues, and purples. The proximity of the sitters in this and other early landscape paintings that feature Edma and her daughters reveals the closeness between this mother and her young children.”²⁶ Buettner relates the progression of Morisot’s work to the progression of society’s views on motherhood, and Morisot’s own changing views towards the value of the relationship between mother and daughter.



Figure 4: Berthe Morisot, *The Mother and Sister of the Artist*, 1869.
From: The Athenaeum,
<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1590>.



Figure 5: Berthe Morisot, *In the Garden at Maurecourt*, 1884.
From: The Athenaeum,
<http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1698>.

Morisot’s representations of Edma and motherhood are also discussed in, “Reconstructing Relationships: Berthe Morisot’s Edma Series.” Marni Reva Kessler, another notable Morisot scholar, writes that Morisot consciously painted more images of her sister after Edma married and that, in these paintings, “the female self is the prevailing theme as Berthe leads us through Edma’s progression from newlywed, to pregnant woman, to mother.”²⁷ However, this earlier work of Kessler’s takes a different stance regarding what motivated Morisot to paint motherhood, and specifically Edma, frequently. Instead of arguing that Morisot painted motherhood to battle social norms, Kessler claims that Morisot painted to satisfy her own needs, and to acknowledge what she had not achieved at the time. When discussing *The Mother and Sister of the Artist* (1869), Kessler states that this image, “must be seen as still another deliberate act on the part of Morisot to reclaim for herself the security of relationship” between herself, her mother, and Edma.²⁸ Kessler asserts that Morisot’s desire to paint motherhood was a result of societal pressures from around her and that, “at 30 Berthe may have felt remiss in not yet having fulfilled what was expected of a woman and what she may even have wanted for herself. Edma, the signifier of the domestic and maternal for Berthe, is now joined by the ultimate

signifier, their mother.”²⁹ Kessler places Morisot’s paintings of Edma within the context of 19th century France, and declares that Morisot’s desire to paint motherhood was spurred by her sister’s marriage and transformation into a maternal figure, which led Morisot to feel a loss in her relationship with her sister, and that she was not satisfying society’s expectations of her as child-bearing aged woman.

While Buettner and Kessler’s earlier work follows Morisot’s progression from a single woman to a proper mother through her paintings, Anne Higonnet, a leading scholar of Morisot, argues that Morisot challenged the notions of proper female practices and motherhood in a recent publication. In, “Making Babies, Painting Bodies: Women, Art, and Paula Modersohn-Becker’s Productivity” Higonnet asserts that Morisot defied social norms in the painting, *Portrait of Edma Pontillon (1871)* (Fig. 6). Women in 19th century Europe, especially those of the bourgeois class like Edma, were not supposed to show themselves when they were pregnant in public. Higonnet argues that Morisot applied an artistic skill that she acquired and adapted from Manet in order to slyly represent Edma’s pregnant self through the “subtle modulations” of flat black paint.³⁰



Figure 6: Berthe Morisot, *Portrait of Edma Pontillon*, 1871. From: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1593>.

Morisot was a well-documented friend of Manet, and there is much evidence that the two learned stylistic techniques from each other. Higonnet makes the assumption that Morisot learned this technique from Manet, and used it to represent Edma’s full belly without making it overtly obvious that Edma was pregnant. Higonnet states that, “by deciphering the black expanse, by understanding it in relation to the position of the hands, an astute observer realizes that Edma is close to delivery.”³¹ Morisot employs artistic strategies to make is clear, without being socially vulgar, that Edma is pregnant. Morisot achieved this goal by working the composition of the painting and, “the hands have been arched to hint at a high round volume below them. The first joints of her two right fingers and thumb, a triply firm alternation of light bars and dark lines, angle downward, marking the shelf that only the taut stretch over a near-term infant raise.”³² In doing so, Morisot successfully defies social norms, and shows the public what motherhood looks like. This demonstrates that Morisot was not simply a women painter who can be discredited by asserting that Impressionism suits itself to the female. Higonnet rather challenges the clichés set forth by George Moore and argues that Morisot learned and utilized artistic skills in her works in order to question society’s views on motherhood.

3. Visual Analysis

The first generation of scholarship on Morisot largely paints a picture of Morisot as a follower of a larger artistic movement, rather than an innovator in her own right. The second generation of scholarship conducted by social art history feminists reintroduced Morisot to the world of art history through a new lens that emphasized her work as a result of the time in which she produced it, as well as her gender. These scholars struggled against a gendered formalist understanding of Morisot and brought to light important issues surrounding how to perceive her visual techniques in the historical context. It is possible, however, to continue to comprehend her works within their historical context, but

also propose an alternative viewing of her works that focuses on her visual effects which can be read as a visual manifestation of tension surrounding gender, Morisot's role and understanding of motherhood, and her role as an artist.

3.1 Challenging Femininity

Morisot challenged what it meant to represent femininity in Impressionist painting in *Woman at Her Toilette* dated between 1875 and 1880 (Fig. 7). Morisot exhibited *Woman at Her Toilette* in the fifth Impressionist exhibition in 1880 alongside other toilette scenes by Degas and Manet.³³ Morisot's painting, however, was atypical of scenes of toilettes and femininity at the time, which were often erotically charged and featured nude women.



Figure 7: Berthe Morisot, *Woman at Her Toilette*, 1880.

From: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1648>.

In *Woman at Her Toilette* the figure's back is turned to the viewer, and any subtle erotic curves of her form have been blurred through the application of airy brushstrokes. Morisot follows the tradition of toilette scenes and includes a mirror in the painting, but when the figure's gaze is followed, it is revealed that she is not looking at the mirror, but is looking down. The mood of the image is then changed from one of superficial to one of pensive nature. Morisot "broke with the convention of using the mirror as a means to double the voyeuristic pleasure of glancing at a woman unawares. As a result of this unexpected complication, we are made to consider the state of being looked at, even while engaged in the act of looking."³⁴ Morisot's departure from convention evokes a feeling of unease from the viewer instead of feeling as if they were entitled voyeurs.

Morisot creates tension in this work between the figure and the background by using similar color palettes for both. As a result, the viewer must wrestle with focusing on either the figure or the background, and must work in order to discern where the figure's shape starts, and where the background ends. This back and forth looking complicates the image and forces the viewer to read the competition between the figure and the background, which in turn raises the question of the woman's confining relationship with the interior, and the relationship that females in 19th century Europe had with interiority as a whole.

In 19th century Europe, women were not supposed to reveal or talk about the effort it took them to get dressed and ready for public viewing. One can argue that Morisot defies this standard and forces the viewer to confront the preparation that goes into a woman's routine by neglecting to show the woman's reflection, and instead choosing to show cosmetic cases and flowers, traditional symbols of femininity. In doing so, Morisot also avoids any, "moves to associate a scenario of libidinous voyeurism, illicit dalliance, and sexual commodification with her" that were insinuated in the toilette paintings of her male peers.³⁵ Instead, Morisot uses the reflection to create visual effects that propose an alternative image of femininity. Morisot implements elongated brushstrokes on the flowers in the reflection, which makes them appear to be wilting. This changes the nature of the flowers from bright and feminine to dark and depressed. Morisot also features lighter flecks of color toward the bottom of the mirror reflection to create

an allusion that the flowers are falling to the floor, defeated. Morisot continues to challenge what it means to be feminine in 19th century Europe in *Woman at Her Toilette* and employs visual techniques in order to humanize the figure and depict the realities of being a bourgeois woman, rather than paint an erotic image suited to entice men.

3.2 Defying Societal Norms Regarding Motherhood

Evidence of Morisot questioning the preconceived notions of motherhood can be found in what many hail as her most famous painting, *Le Berceau (The Cradle)* (Fig. 8). Dated in 1872, Morisot showed *Le Berceau* at the first Impressionist exhibit in 1874, where she was the first woman to exhibit with the Impressionist group. The painting's subjects are Edma and her sleeping daughter Blanche. Upon first glance, the painting reads as a tranquil and sweet depiction of a mother watching over her infant. Upon further examination, undertones of tension, hostility, uncertainty, discontent, and wonderment are revealed.



Figure 8: Berthe Morisot, *Le Berceau (The Cradle)*, 1872.

From: The Athenaeum, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=1598>.

It is possible to read this tension by analyzing visual techniques employed by Morisot. Starting with the background, the two figures are separated into two distinct planes using line and color. The background behind Edma is painted using light pastel colors that contrast with the darkness of her clothing. Morisot creates an illusion of drapery in the fabric behind Edma makes it appear as if Edma is physically separated from her child. In comparison, the background on the left side of the painting starkly contrasts with the color of the veil and with the color of the drapery behind Edma. The darkness of the area surrounding the veil calls attention to the importance of the veil over the cradle.

These deliberate visual effects impact how the image is read. Upon reading these elements, it can be understood that Edma and the child are not one unit, and are separated on physical and emotional levels. The child, who we know is a girl from information surrounding the image as well as the bow on her head, is just starting out her life as a woman, and has not yet realized the societal pressures that she will soon come to face. Edma, on the other hand, has grown up in a society that influenced her life decisions, and she did not have social freedom. As she aged, Edma would have confronted the pressure to find a suitable husband and rear children. At this stage of her life, Edma is no freer than she was as a young woman when she was not allowed to go to certain places in the city, like cafes at night and brothels. Edma is now confined in the sense that she belongs to her husband and her daughter and must be a mother and wife first, rather than an individual.

Edma and Blanche's arms mirror each other, but convey different states. Edma's left arm is solidly placed on her hand and her gaze is at her daughter, relating that she is thinking about her child, or role as a mother. One can assume that her thoughts are not frivolous or pleasant, as Morisot has abandoned her traditional loose brushwork in order to represent the taught lips of Edma. Blanche's right arm is back behind her head, but this position is one of calm rest. One can read the mirrored physical positions of the figures as Morisot's way of portraying the stages of womanhood, and demonstrating the physical tiredness that accompanies motherhood.

In this painting, Edma is not an object to be viewed in a sexual manner from a male point of view. Instead, Morisot has obscured Edma's body almost altogether by hiding it behind the cradle, and Edma's chest is directed toward her daughter rather than the viewer. At this point in her life, Edma should no longer be a sexual being in the eyes of anyone expect for her husband, and must now focus all of her energy on the care of her child. Morisot has represented the importance of Blanche in Edma's life through the scale of the cradle. While Morisot cannot paint Blanche large in size since she is a baby, she favors representing the cradle as dominant in size. The cradle demands attention, much like a child demands constant attention from its mother.

It is important to note that Morisot could have easily represented Edma cradling Blanche, but instead painted Blanche and Edma without them touching. One might claim that this decision by Morisot allows the viewer to comprehend the true nature of motherhood. While mothers were supposed to be loving figures, the reality was and is that not all women are happy with their new motherhood. By implementing visual techniques, Morisot represents the realities of motherhood that were often left out of public discussion, and demonstrates what motherhood looks like in reality in *Le Berceau*.

4. Conclusion

Largely as a result of her gender, early scholars denied Berthe Morisot the credit she was due as a pioneer of art in 19th Century Europe. As time progressed, and social movements like Second and Third-Wave feminism developed, scholars reevaluated the works of Morisot within the art historical narrative and discussed her value as an artist who was able to masterfully depict her experiences as a woman in 19th century Europe. Upon granting Morisot the time and effort, an alternative visual analysis is proposed that asserts that Morisot used visual techniques to challenge societal expectations of her, and women in general, through her representations of femininity and motherhood.

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