

Thoughts Out of Season

Occasional Reviews & Notes
Of Mutual Interest
Compiled by Tim Forward



Edgar Degas, L'Absinthe, 1876

Conclusion

What I take to be essential criticism of modernist painting was made at the time by a young writer Camille Lemonnier. In his “Notes on the Universal Exhibition” of 1878, he had this to say of Degas, Manet, Caillebotte, and Forain (I have been literal with his entry’s staccato French):¹

“None of them appears to possess the *sense of the picture*. They make fragments; they confine themselves with only certain corners of humanity, the most striking in their display of corruption. They have all the sense of the immoral woman. From them one gets frightful gesticulations of *filles perdues* (lost girls). They deliberately keep company with the demented. Let them beware: this too is a form of virtuosity. The lower depths in which they linger have excessive aspects to them which are easier to do and more accessible than the simple order of bourgeois life, so hard to express because it has no surprises.”²

¹ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Live, Paris and the Art of Manet and His Followers*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) p.259

² Camille Lemonnier, *Les Peintres de la vie*, p.21