



Berthe Morisot's Images of Women

Anne Higonnet

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Berthe Morisot has taken her place as a founder of Impressionism and a leader in women's history. Like her colleagues - Cassatt, Degas, Monet, and Renoir - Morisot sought to represent the experience of modern life, a project that for her entailed rethinking what it meant to be a woman in the 19th century. Through close attention to the artist's work and its context, Anne Higonnet shows how Morisot transformed her femininity and its visual culture into Impressionist paintings. Higonnet presents a picture of visual tradition that, though very much a part of Morisot's world and work, figure only marginally in art history. Amateur picture making, for instance, was enormously popular among 19th-century women. Higonnet locates Morisot's origins in this private practice, then traces her reactions to an industrialized feminine imagery characterized by consumption and dominated by the fashion plate. This discussion provides a background and context for Morisot's imagery, but also helps to explain the "look" of her pictures. Focusing on formal choices - poses, props, composition, and especially brushwork - Higonnet compares Morisot's images of women with those of Cassatt, Degas and Manet and details the emergence of her stylistic and thematic individuality. She also shows us the critical themes of Morisot's late work: her self-portraiture; her attempts, with Cassatt, at painting the female nude; and her pictorial explorations of the mother-daughter relationship. Combining social history, art criticism, and psychological insights, this illustrated volume renegotiates the boundaries of art history as well as the terms of women's self-representation.

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