

The Courtauld

A Closer Look – key information

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, Édouard Manet (1882)



Édouard Manet (1832-1883), A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1882, The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

This painting was the last major work by French artist Édouard Manet. It represents the bustling interior of one of the most prominent music halls and cabarets of Paris, the Folies-Bergère. The venue opened in 1869 and was frequented by fashionable figures in Parisian society. Its atmosphere was described as “unmixed joy”.

Manet was a frequent visitor to the Folies-Bergère, and made sketches while he was there. This painting was completed in his studio, where he set up a bar and employed one of the barmaids, Suzon, to pose behind it.

On the bar we see a collection of items that indicate this venue was for wealthy patrons, including champagne, imported Bass beer, a vase with fresh

flowers and a bowl of fresh clementine oranges. If you look closely at the wine bottle on the left you will see Manet’s signature.

While the loosely painted crowds in the background convey the bustle of the Folies-Bergère, the barmaid appears detached from the rest of the scene. She stares directly out at the viewer, but her reflection in the mirror behind is displaced to the right and shows her facing a gentleman customer. Who is this gentleman? If Suzon’s reflection shows that she is facing this man, then who are we? Could we be looking at the scene through his eyes?

At the time this was considered an incredibly modern painting. In fact, it was the first painting to ever show electric lighting!