



[Home](#) > Watercolour; Manet

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# Watercolour; Manet

Books Reviewed:

[Watercolour](#) [1]

Books Reviewed:

[Manet](#) [2]

Issue:

[82](#) [3]

Reviewer:

[Veronica Holliday](#) [4]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

~~New Talent~~

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

0

These new 'Eyewitness Art' titles cover a single artist, a movement and a technique. The limitations imposed by a series framework are evident in some of the texts, all of which are very accessible but sometimes leave the reader wishing there was scope for a more leisurely and detailed analysis of their subject.

Whilst many people probably think of watercolour in terms of its nineteenth-century exponents, the medium has in fact been used for hundreds of years, with Durer 'often regarded as the first all-round master'. Michael Clarke has to cover an awful lot of ground - from Ancient Greece to Picasso, taking in many other artistic styles on the way - so perhaps it's not surprising that his prose occasionally seems rather cerebral.

Focusing attention on one individual painter provides scope for a well-rounded portrait of his life, work and technique, and all the high and low points of Manet's influential career are included in Patricia Wright's narrative. Despite her best efforts, however, the real essence of the man remains somewhat elusive - perhaps because, as she herself suggests, 'underneath his suave public exterior there existed a very different private character that found expression in his paintings'.

Manet was derided almost as much as the Impressionists. Jude Wetton gives us fascinating insights into their controversial approach to painting and how it was also affected by external sources such as Haussman's modernisation of Paris, the rise of the railway, and the development of photography, in addition to Chevreul's influential treatise on colour.

As always, the quality of the reproduced illustrations is excellent. My one regret is that having whetted our appetite so successfully there are no bibliographies to encourage further study.

Running Order:

104

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**Links:**

- [1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/watercolour>
- [2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/manet>
- [3] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/82>
- [4] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/veronica-holliday>