Fashionable Modernity: Agency and Spectacle in James Tissot's *Portrait of the Marquise de Miramon*

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In 1866, James Tissot painted the full-length portrait of Thèrése Feuillant, the Marquise de Miramon, standing in her private room at the Château de Paulhac (Figure 1). Contemporary art historians have not studied the importance of the *Marquise* in relation to Tissot's body of work during the 1860s. Despite the avowedly feminine fashion and domestic setting of her portrait, this paper argues that the Marquise's collection of eighteenth-century and Japanese art on display in the painting demonstrates her elite lineage and intellectual agency beyond the nineteenth-century norms for women. The work was originally intended for the family's home until Tissot asked to borrow and submit the painting to the 1867 Universal Exposition. This massive world fair demonstrated Paris' modern industry and consumerism, and the *Marquise* was one of the few paintings chosen by the selective jury to represent French art that year. Tissot rocketed to public and financial success following the Exposition and received numerous commissions from the fashionable elite in Paris. Tissot's participation in the Exposition, from which many of his contemporaries were rejected, would also have a profound impact on his critical reception. Based on a close reading of his *Portrait of the Marquise*, this paper offers a corrective to the received understanding of Tissot as a plagiarist who pandered to middle class tastes and instead considers the ways in which his art engaged modernity, consumerism and gender. This paper examines how Tissot's art and career provide important insight into the lucrative roles art played in constructing the modern, fashionable identities of the nineteenth-century elite and discusses the impact of these ideas on the critical biases toward the value of his oeuvre.

When Tissot set to work on the *Marquise*, he had been living in Paris for nearly ten years, relocating from his hometown of Nantes.[1] He received a traditional Academic education under Louis Lamothe and Hendrik Leys and was popular in the official art world that was controlled by Emperor Napoleon III and his supporters. Tissot's earliest exhibited works were meticulously detailed medieval narratives shown in Paris at the Salon, in London at the Royal Academy, and at the 1862 International Exhibition in London. As a student, Tissot developed friendships with painters of what is known today as the avant-garde movement. These artists, including Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and James Whistler embraced depictions of modern life, fashion, and culture in Paris. Such ideas had a profound impact on Tissot's work. In 1863, he exchanged historic subject matter for modern scenes that were exhibited in Paris to attract a larger crowd of wealthy patrons, including the Marquise de Miramon.

Little public information exists about the sitter. Thèrése de Cassagnes de Beaufort (née Feuillant) was born in 1836 in Paris to Xavier Feuillant and Marie Chauveau-Dupois. Her father, the Comte Feuillant, was a cavalry officer and Gentleman of the Chamber of Charles X.[2] He had made a fortune in the northern French coal mines, which Thèrése inherited to restore her husband's financial security after their marriage in 1860.[3] Réne Cassagnes de Beaufort, the Marquis de Miramon, was paternally connected to Napoleon I, his father's godfather.[4] Their wealth and connections to the Emperor and Bourbon royalists would have represented a significant amount of power for the pair; their wealth was prominently depicted in the paintings they commissioned from Tissot.

The Marquise stands by the fireplace in her private parlor at the Château de Paulhac, the Miramon family's lavish country estate. She wears a salmon pink Watteau peignoir over a loose, white lace tea gown. Her gloved right hand clutches at the velvet fabric and pulls its left side across her right hip, revealing a white lace handkerchief that has been casually tucked into her pocket. She wears a black lace scarf tied loosely around her neck, as well as a large silver crucifix set with rubies. Thèrése's hair is pulled tightly into a chignon

This essay is an abbreviated version of my MA thesis. I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Melissa Hyde, for her time, guidance, and constructive comments throughout this project. I would also like to thank Sally McKay at the Getty Research Institute, who provided access to Tissot's letters to the Miramon family, as well as Dr. Weltman-Aron at the University of Florida for her help in transcribing them. Finally, I thank the faculty and students at Florida State University for inviting me to share my research.

1 Michael Wentworth, *James Tissot* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1984), 9. Following his arrival in 1857, Tissot began copying paintings at the Louvre and studying under Louis Lamothe and Hippolyte Flandrin. Wentworth draws from the most complete account of Tissot's family, an article written in 1906: George Bastard, "James Tissot," *Revue de Bretagne*, 2nd ser. 36 (November 1906): 253-278.

2 Louis Pierre D'Hozier, *Armorial général de la France* (Paris: Firmin Didot frères et fils, 1868), 455.

3 Stéphane Guégan, *James Tissot*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2012), 8.

4 D'Hozier, *Armorial général de la France,* 455.

style, which highlights the flawless skin of her thirty-year old face. Although the room has high ceilings, Tissot cropped the composition to a small space. The deep red walls hold four paintings: two genre scenes and two miniature portraits. Red velvet and floral curtains hang in the background, in front of which stands a low Japanese screen decorated with cranes. A carved stool is in front of the screen, its fringed cushion nearly hidden from view by the colorful embroidery that is heaped on top. The gray marble floor of the room is almost entirely covered by a thick, brown fur rug. The stone fireplace is dressed in heavy red drapery that cascades to the floor as gracefully as the Marquise's dress. On top of the mantle are two tall candlesticks that flank an eighteenth-century portrait bust of a woman whose low cut bodice and Apollo knot hairstyle are much more formal than the Marquise's relaxed attire. Her left glove rests on the mantle beside a Japanese Hirado ware dragon-fish sculpture and a circular bowl that holds Japanese azalea bonsai flowers, whose color perfectly matches the Marquise's dress. The portrait gives a casual, intimate image of the Marquise as an individual, which is distinctly different from the picture of domestic bliss Tissot had painted the previous year.

The 1865 *Portrait of the Marquis and Marquise of Miramon and their Children* depicts the Marquise with her husband and their children, Genevieve and Léon, on the balcony of the Château de Paulhac (Figure 2). This portrait reflects a forward-thinking, yet traditional aristocratic family, and it is an engaging portrait that was influenced by modern painting: with the exception of Léon, the sitters gaze directly into the viewer's eyes, exhibiting his or her own awareness of being watched.[5] Despite the nuances of the portrait, traditional gender roles within the family are prominently evoked. The Marquise holds her daughter Genevieve in her arms like a modern Madonna and Child, and the figures are aesthetically joined by the large blue bows that sit on their waists. At the right of the work sits a ladies' desk that functions as a sewing table. Its top drawer has been left open, out of which spills folds of colored fabric. A casual still life of thread and more fabric sit on top of the desk. The furniture is cut off at the edge of the painting, but it is clear to see that two significant signs of femininity anchor the canvas: motherhood on the left, and domesticity on the right.

Despite the gendered roles established by the family portrait, subtle allusions of the Marquise's power are evoked by details in the painting. Her tall stature takes up more room than Réne, who slumps boyishly on the terrace wall. His gray suit is extremely baggy compared to the fashion of men's tailored suits in the 1860s. The opposition of power is highlighted by the fruit still life between the couple: one half of a split pear stands vertically on a scalloped porcelain plate, echoing the pose of the Marquise. The other half of the pear, closest to Réne, lies facing upward. The knife used to the cut the fruit also sits on the plate, and its hilt faces the Marquise, further indicating that she is the active figure in the work. Given what we know of her family's fortune, which saved her husband's social standing, and the details, it is possible that the Marquise, and not her husband, was the patron of this work.

The 1866 portrait includes details similar to the family portrait, but focuses solely on the Marquise. Her embroidery is present in the painting, although it has been heaped on a stool and pushed to the background. She is also depicted with gloves and a handkerchief, two important feminine accessories that hint at social codes influenced by the revival of eighteenth-century court life.[6] Although women typically used these items to send suggestive messages to their male viewers, the *Marquise* purposely rejects any indication of flirtatiousness. She has removed one of her gloves and pocketed her handkerchief. The diminished importance of these feminine tools, coupled with the taut pose, gesture and gaze of the Marquise, provides the viewer with a better understanding of the sitter as a serious, thoughtful, and modest woman.

The Japanese items on display in the portrait further demonstrate her intellectual agency. Azalea bonsai flowers and a Hirado ware dragon-fish sculpture take prime spots on her mantelpiece, and the folding screen in the background is also an authentic Japanese item.[7] In the early 1860s, authentic Japanese items could only be purchased in small specialty shops frequented by male collectors. Trade negotiations between France and Japan in the late 1850s introduced the culture's exotic objects to the Parisian market. The rise of small Japanese boutiques drove the obsession for these foreign items among elite artists and collectors, most of whom were male. Whereas women appeared to desire only the latest fashionable trends provided by department stores, men "hunt[ed] down and uncover[ed] unexpected, unrecognized" treasures at auction houses and specialty shops.[8] In the 1860s, the most valuable treasures were Chinese and Japanese porcelain ware that had recently entered Paris from the East. Both men and women purchased artwork and objects for the home, however, there was implied a higher

[5] Melissa McQuillan, *Impressionist Portraits* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 34.

[6] Edward Maeder, "Decent Exposure: Status, Excess, the World of Haute Couture and Tissot," in *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of James Tissot* (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre BA, 1999), 89. In his chapter, Maeder examines the use of fashion and accessories in Tissot's paintings of the late 1860s and early 1870s. He argues that in reading these details, the viewer can construct the nineteenth-century social codes embedded in Tissot's works. However, he does not mention the *Marquise*, who is the owner of these items, but does not use them to flirt with the viewer of the painting.

[7] John La Farge, "An Artist's Letters from Japan," 1886. Reproduced in Charlotte Gere, *Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1989), 280. Small screens were more typical of authentic Japanese homes that were described by artists who visited Japan in the mid-nineteenth century.

[8] Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 298.

intellectual engagement for masculine over feminine consumption. Having been painted in 1866, the *Marquise* predates the widespread fashion for japonaiserie in department stores, indicating that the subject participated in typically masculine consumer practices. Despite its avowedly feminine setting and costume, Tissot's portrait invites us to look at the Marquise not as a wife, mother or flirtatious femme, but as an intellectual—yet still fashionable—individual.

Tissot was proud of the portrait, which he made clear in his written request to borrow and submit the *Marquise* to the 1867 Universal Exposition. The enormous event, which was open from April to November, promoted the industrial, political, and cultural power of modern Paris on an international stage. Tissot understood that it was "necessary [to show a painting] of a certain importance" at an Exposition "where only a few [works] would be selected," and he felt that his artistic virtuosity was embodied in the Marquise's portrait.[9] Tissot's claim that the patrons would be "owed for the benefits that this Exposition may bring me" indicates his certainty that the portrait would be highly beneficial to his career as a fashionable painter.[10]

The Admissions Jury for fine art was assembled by the Comte de Nieuwerkerke and was highly selective about the paintings that would be displayed. Exhibiting at the Exposition meant that the chosen artist represented France, and their work would be seen by a massive number of visitors who were likely to become future patrons. Since the Jury only selected paintings that best represented the French nation and the new consumer class, artists understood that publicity garnered at the Exposition would be financially beneficial to their careers. Many of Tissot's friends, including Renoir and Degas, were rejected. [11] The majority of the art world was shocked at the Jury's approval of just 550 paintings for display at the center of the designated Exposition pavilion, a surprisingly small number compared to the 1,872 shown in 1855.[12] "Never in the memory of a painter has a jury been so severe," wrote Jules-Antoinne Castagnary.[13] Tissot's acceptance at the Universal Exposition highlights his skilled effort to produce paintings that appealed to official taste, as well as to that of the public, and ensured his own financial success.

Not only did the Exposition showcase French taste, but it also celebrated Napoleon III's political advances that connected Paris with foreign countries.[14] Visitors from all classes were introduced to the numerous Japanese books, prints, ceramics and other objects displayed in the large Japanese pavilion at the Exposition.[15] The exposure of the middle class to these elite exotic wares ignited their own desire for ownership. Following the Exposition, consumers were able to buy similar items from department stores that sold mass-produced "export goods made in Japan and readily adapted to fit the new European taste."[16] These transformations directly suited the rapidly growing bourgeois public, who had become the largest consuming class in the city. Tissot entered the *Marquise* to the Universal Exposition because it portrayed an elite woman whose fashion, art collection, and body politic had been transformed by these modern changes, which appealed on this level to the *nouveau riche* bourgeoisie hoping to emulate the aristocracy in every way. The Marquise's stylish refinement is alluded to by her Watteau gown and carefully decorated interior, which included Japanese porcelain, azalea bonsai flowers, and screen, all of which would have been recognizable to Exposition visitors in 1867.

The scale of Tissot's painting emphasizes this concept by inviting the viewer to adopt the role of an educated buyer. At 50 9/16 x 29 15/16 inches, the *Marquise* is much larger than other genre scenes depicting fashionable women at the Exposition.[17] Viewers of Tissot's work would directly engage with the painting by leaning forward in order to examine the items on display in the Marquise's room—not to mention the sitter herself—as well as the brushstrokes in the painting. As the viewer took inventory of her possessions, the prolonged gaze would emulate the position of an art collector who scrutinized paintings to determine their worth. This type of looking elevated them to a position more refined than the common department store consumer, who pushed through crowded showrooms to find the latest wares.

Following the Universal Exposition, Tissot was commis-

9 James Tissot, Letter to the Marquis de Miramon, 1866. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2008.M.8): "… il en faudrait un d'une certaine importance pour figurer dignement à ce Salon où il y aura fort peu d'élus… Il est vrai qu'il attirera peut-être un peu trop les regards par son originalité… et vous serai redevable des avantages que cette exposition pourra me procurer."

10 Ibid.

11 Frédéric Bazille, "Correspondence" (Montpellier: Les Presses du Languedoc, 1992), 136. Reproduced and translated by Gary Tinterow in *Origins of Impressionism*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), 317. In March 1867, the painter Bazille described Renoir's plan to exhibit at the Exposition: "My friend Renoir executed an excellent painting [*Diane chasseresse*] that amazed everyone. I hope it will be successful at the Exposition, because he really needs it."

12 Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 134.

13 Jules Castagnary, *Salons 1857-1870* (Paris: Charpentier-Fasquelle, 1892). Reproduced and translated by Gary Tinterow in *Origins of Impressionism*, 317.

14 Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire*, 123.

15 Toshio Watanabe, "The Western Image of Japanese Art in the Late Edo Period," *Modern Asian Studies* 18, no. 4 (1984): 667-684. Watanabe argues that the 1867 Exposition first "attracted extensive critical attention and for most people put Japan on the artistic map."

16 Klaus Berger, *Japonisme in Western Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67-8.

17 The 1867 Admissions Jury was not interested in large-scale history paintings, accepting instead small paintings that depicted modern life and fashionable women. Painter Alfred Stevens, who is best known for these scenes, exhibited a large number of works at the Exposition. However, whereas his works are of anonymous models, Tissot's work depicted a fashionable member of elite society.

sioned to paint portraits of men using the same composition as the *Marquise*. In 1867, he depicted *Eugene Coppens de Fontenay*, the president of Paris' Jockey Club, leaning against a white marble and gold ormolu fireplace (Figure 3). Whereas Tissot painted the portrait of the Marquise from a side view, Fontenay's portrait is shallower in depth. A deep red carpet partially covers the black and white tile floor of the room, and a small green tapestry covers the fireplace on which Fontenay leans. His identity as a Parisian dandy is coded by his fashionable dress. His hair and moustache are neatly combed. He wears a black tailored suit and grasps firmly onto his top hat. Like the Marquise, Fontenay wears a fitted glove on his left hand. His bare right hand carries a jockey's whip similar to the one held by Réne de Miramon in the 1865 family portrait, indicating their positions in the same social group.[18] Whereas the Marquise stands in a powerful, almost masculine pose, Fontenay appears to be very relaxed as he leans cross-legged against the fireplace and tilts his head to directly meet the viewer's gaze.

While art historians have noted similarity between the Marquise's portrait and that of Fontenay's, the significance of her influence has been overlooked. Tissot's main biographer, Michael Wentworth, posits that the *Marquise* adopts the "familiar setting and typical gesture" of Tissot's paintings of women in order to "define the sitter's character" as a bourgeois wife. [19] Whereas Thèrése's portrait is simply evocative of her ornamental femininity, Fontenay's "elegant and self-satisfied" pose is described as "effortlessly natural."[20] However, it is Fontenay's portrait that glistens with glamorous Second Empire furnishing in a public reception space of his home. In contrast, the Marquise's room is constructed for her personal use and represents a private space for intellectual exchanges, rather than a show room for any and all visitors. The lack of scholarly consideration for the *Portrait of the Marquise* compared to that of *Fontenay* points to the difference between their genders. However, that Tissot used the same composition for both male and female sitters indicates that he understood that portraiture was an important medium for self-fashioning to both genders. This idea was promoted by the displays at the 1867 Universal Exposition where the work was publicly exhibited for the first time.

By 1868, Tissot had established his own reputation as fashionable painter and dandy. He moved into a large house and studio on the affluent Rue de l'Imperatrice that was built with the money he earned from portrait commissions. The publicity and financial success Tissot garnered at the Exposition allowed him to move freely in social circles, but strained his relationships with friends who had been rejected from the show. Tissot's compositions were similar to those of his friends, but were also popular with public taste, which did not sit well with his contemporaries. Henri Fantin-Latour wrote to James Whistler to say that Tissot went "mad over" his Symphony in White series and warned Whistler to expect imitations from his friend.[21] It was normal for artists to share ideas for their paintings, and it is clear from Fantin-Latour's letter that Tissot borrowed elements of his friends' paintings for his own. Borrowing is portrayed in a negative light among artists establishing their own unique innovations; they may also have resented the fact that Tissot's works were so successful with the public. Fantin-Latour was not the only person to be frustrated by Tissot's paintings. In 1874, Edmond de Goncourt denigrated Tissot as an "ingenious exploiter of [his audience's] idiocy," whose lifestyle was as superficial as his art.[22] Tissot was influenced by modernity and was popular with Napoleon III, the wealthy elite, and bourgeois patrons, which aggravated friends and critics who were not as publicly successful.

Although there is still work to be done, this paper asks a different set of questions about Tissot's position in the art world during the 1860s. Contrary to what has previously been asserted by art historians, a deeper examination of the painter-patron relationship in the *Marquise* can provide important information about women's roles in collecting and commissioning art in the nineteenth century. Tissot's meteoric rise to fame following the Exposition frustrated his contemporaries and biased his critics which has, for a long time, hindered a thorough study of his paintings. However, his works provide a unique interpretation of fashionable society that varies from other artists working with the same subject matter. Whereas the avant-garde embraced modernity by making profound statements about the nature of painting, Tissot's work makes important claims about the use of consumption to fashion the modern identities emerging in the new urban capital of France.

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[18] The two men would later be depicted in Tissot's 1868 portrait of the *Cercle de la Rue Royale*.

[19] Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 62.

[20] Christopher Wood, *James Tissot* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 36.

[21] Henri Fantin-Latour, "Letter to James Whistler," 12 February 1867. Quoted in Wentworth, *James Tissot*, 15.

[22] Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la Vie Littéraire Vol II: 1866-1886* (Paris: R. Laffont, 2004), 596.

Figure 1. James Tissot, *Portrait of the Marquise de Miramon,* 1866, oil on canvas, 76 x 128 cm. J Paul Getty Institute, Los Angeles.

Figure 2. James Tissot, *Portrait of the Marquis and Marquise of Miramon and their Children*, 1865, oil on canvas, 177 x 217 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 3. James Tissot, *Eugene Coppens de Fontenay*, 1867, oil on canvas, 69.8 x 39.1 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.