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Édouard-Louis Dubufe,
The Woman with the Gold Grain Necklace, 1861

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ÉDOUARD-LOUIS DUBUFE

(Paris 1819 -1883)

THE WOMAN WITH THE GOLD GRAIN NECKLACE, 1861

Signed and dated lower right: "Édouard. Dubufe. 1861."

Oil on canvas

Diameter: 50 cm; (19 5/8 in.)

Provenance

Salon de l'Union Artistique, Toulouse, 1864, no.99 ("Une négresse");
Taylor Sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 1867, no. 39, acquired by Mr. Thomas;
American war correspondent, WW1; Morris family, Florida;
Restored by Harry W. Jones, Hempstead, NY, 1971;
Recently returned to France; Private Collection.

Literature

Adolphe Tabarant, *Manet et ses œuvres*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947.
Emmanuel Bréon, *Une revanche pour les Dubufe*, in *Revue du Louvre*, avril 1984.
Emmanuel Bréon, *Claude-Marie, Edouard et Guillaume Dubufe : Portraits d'un siècle d'élégance parisienne*, Paris, Délégation à l'Action Artistique de la Ville de Paris, 1988.
Adrien Goetz, Claudette Joannis, *Bijoux*, Flammarion, 2008.
Claude-Marie, Edouard et Guillaume Dubufe, la peinture en héritage, Emmanuelle Le Bail (dir.), cat. exp., Musée des Avelines, Saint-Cloud, 2018.
Denise Murrell, *Posing Modernity. The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*, New Haven, Londres, Yale University Press, 2018.
Le Modèle noir. De Géricault à Matisse, Collectif, cat. exp., Paris, musée d'Orsay, 26 mars-21 juillet 2019, Pointe-à-Pitre, Mémorial ACTE, 13 septembre-29 décembre 2019, Paris, musée d'Orsay, Flammarion, 2019.
Emmanuelle Amiot-Saulnier, *L'Orient des peintres du rêve à la lumière*, Musée Marmottan Monet, Éditions Hazan, Vanves, 2019.

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Dressed in a simple white tunic, her neck is decorated with a gold grain necklace of Guadeloupean origin. This traditional Creole piece of jewelry is made up of gold spheres, reminiscent of pearl necklaces. The latter being prohibited to black people, artisan jewelers have invented a piece of jewelry imitating them. This jewel refers to the West Indies origin of the young woman knowing that in the history of slavery, when a master wanted to reward a slave (favorite or nurse), he would offer her a grain of gold for her new year or her birthday. The latter made it gradually rise into a collar, her pride being to have many as a testimony of her years of work.

Her left hand, delicately supporting her chin in a slightly mannerist gesture, is decorated with a shuttle-shaped ring which lengthens her hand in a reflecting and flattering manner. The marquise rings, created during the 18th century, is of European design and does not belong to the Creole vocabulary. The stones are set in silver, the ring is in gold. This white ring in the foreground plays an important role in the portrait from an aesthetic point of view, as an element of radiant color that awakens her dark skin. Finally, an earring, partly erased, can be seen under the right earlobe. This earring is of a common form in the 19th century, a design that can be found, as an example, on *La Servante de Cléopâtre* by Théodore Chassériau (Museum of Fine Arts of Marseille).

The “Second Empire” tondo composition reinforces the grace and depth of this portrait which appears as a finished work and not as a study. The image is very sober and avoid of eroticism or passionate emotions. The model's tunic completely covers her unexposed chest and makes no reference to slavery (other than the gold grain necklace) or to the nurturing or servant-like role traditionally depicted by black models. The marquise ring worn by the model calls out: this jewel does not match with practices that black women used by then, the latter not wearing either bracelet or ring, jewelry which could hinder their task. Are we dealing with a servant that the painter particularly appreciates and to whom he would have made this unusual present (a mistress possibly?) or is it a decorative element which was added by the painter to highlight the color of the hand and of the model's face, black being very difficult to get?

A certain reserve is evident for the face of the young woman who seems to be immersed into deep thinking. The model is complicit in the pensive pose desired by the artist and her gaze turns towards the painter, giving the feeling of a self-portrait. This exchange of glances with the painter suggests a close relationship. Some others may also see it as an affirmation of the model's character. The work is powerful; it goes beyond a simple studio study. She is a portrait in her own right, quite intimate. If the model is not identified, it clearly appears that it is not an allegory but rather a personality close to the painter, whether it is a model shared with other artists or perhaps a young woman who gravitates into the more private circle of the painter? Unfortunately, there is a lack of sources to document the history of the model of this painting.

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Our female model, with this gesture of the hand delicately supporting her chin, adopts an attitude of reflection in an assertive pose. The artist returns to this thoughtful pose for his portrait of Charles Gounod, in search of inspiration (Fig. 1). Our portrait was presented at the Salon de l'Union artistique de Toulouse in 1864 with the following title *Une négresse* testifying the invisibility of the model. This title was common at the time, but it is no longer in use today. For now, we have not been able to find the identity of the female model and therefore to name it. Dated 1861, our painting was painted when slavery had been abolished in France (1848 the year of the second abolition of slavery in France) and while the United States was in the middle of the Civil War. The portrait questions the place of newly freed black people living in Paris in the French society of the Second Empire. The distinction of the pose and the jewelry suggest that we are in the presence of a woman with a certain ease (ring and scarf), but who affirms her West Indies origins with a gold grain necklace.

Edouard Dubufe lives in a wealthy Parisian bourgeois environment, he has never traveled to the Orient and therefore was not able to bring back sketches or drawings of black women seen during his travels. We do not know if he had been in touch with black models who posed for artists of his time. Is she an actress, a freedwoman, a model? To this day, due to a lack of sources, we cannot solve the mystery of the identity of the model. Our portrait is in line with portraits of black women such as the « *Portrait de négresse* » by Marie-Guilhelmine Benoist, exhibited at the Salon of 1800 (Fig. 2.). This painting most certainly represents Madeleine, slave or servant attached to the house of the Benoist family and constitutes the first presentation of a portrait of a black woman at the Salon. This strong work, with its sculptural model, retains an element of mystery. It was acquired by Louis XVIII for the Louvre during the abolition of the slave trade in the French colonial empire in 1818.¹

In our search to identify our black model, it is interesting to draw a parallel with Manet's *Olympia* a work painted in 1863 and presented at the Salon of 1865 (Fig. 3). In this painting which « made all of Paris run to see this funny of a woman, her splendid bouquet, her negress and her black cat »², the black woman was highlighted by the curators of the exhibition as *The Black Model. From Géricault to Matisse*.³ The model called Laure⁴, is represented in the conventional role of the black servant serving the white courtier.⁵ She is bringing a bouquet of flowers to her mistress and

¹ Luce-Marie ALBIGES, « Portrait d'une femme noire », Histoire par l'image [en ligne] URL : histoire-image.org/etudes/portrait-femme-noire.

² *Salons de W. Bürger (1861-1868)*, Tome second avec une préface de Théophile Thoré, Paris, Librairie de Jules Renouard, 1870, p.221.

³ *Le Modèle noir. De Géricault à Matisse*, Collectif, cat. exp., Paris, musée d'Orsay, 26 mars-21 juillet 2019, Pointe-à-Pitre, Mémorial ACTE, 13 septembre-29 décembre 2019, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Flammarion, 2019.

⁴ Laure was identified as one of the *Olympia* models in 1947 by Adolphe Tabarant.

⁵ Isolde Pludermacher : « *Olympia* au Salon, De la guerre de Sécession au contexte parisien » in *Le Modèle noir. De Géricault à Matisse*, op.cit. p.158.

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serves as a foil. Laure lived at 11 rue Vintimille near the Place de Clichy in the 17th arrondissement of Paris in a neighborhood of traders and workers mixed with artists. A descendant of a slave, she has no surname. Her portrait painted by Manet in 1862 (Fig. 4) represents the same young woman whose features are nevertheless distant from our Dubufe painted portrait. It does not seem to be the same model.

The distinction common at the time between the white mistress and the black servant, in an orientaling vein, is visible in a painting painted by Edouard Dubufe in 1844 entitled *Bethsabée* (Fig. 5) today known by an etching. The painter represents in the foreground a young black servant in profile, crouching while working on her mistress's toilet. This one is painted full-length and from the front, her naked and white body, modestly draped, is in full light, accentuating the contrasts. The painting was exhibited at the Salon of 1844 under the number 579. We find this role of black servants, accompanying the ablutions and treatments of her white mistress, in several works by contemporary painters such as Frédéric Bazille with *La Toilette* (Fig. 6) or Jean-Léon Gérôme with *Bain turc* (Fig. 7). In our portrait, the model is not a foil for a white person but rather a woman of real distinction who is portrayed for herself, in an intimate vein, without exoticism.

Our portrait with a dark complexion, exhibited during the lifetime of the artist, a great personality, is a rediscovery in the corpus of Edouard Dubufe. It is, according to Emmanuel Breon, the specialist of the painter, a burst of genius from Edouard Dubufe who, thanks to this work, was able to deceive the critics, too often reproaching him for the « blandness »²⁴ of his work. The artist must have been aware of the strength of his portrait, because not only does he give it the particularly worked form of a tondo (which has no other equivalent to our knowledge in a female portrait by the painter), but also gives it a very beautiful frame in gilded and carved wood which is still preserved and which is not without reference to the tondo frames of Ingres as we can see in *Tête de la Grande Odalisque*, deposited by the Louvre Museum at the Cambrai Museum of Fine Arts (Fig. 8).

Our portrait was sent by the artist to the Beaux- Arts exhibition in Toulouse in 1864, an exhibition organized by the Toulouse Artistic Union. This patronage society for artists, founded in 1860, organizes « annual exhibitions, buys paintings and other objects of art from exhibiting artists ».²⁵

The presentation of Dubufe's painting entitled *Une négresse* is praised by Joseph Noulens (1828- 1898) in his report on the exhibition.⁶ The writer and art critic specifies, however, that of the 380 paintings that were admitted : « Well! around thirty productions are worthy of praise or censure; the rest, almost, will have to consider themselves happy to endure only silence ». The critic underlines the profound truth of Dubufe's model : « Mr. Dubufe's *La Négresse* deserves attention. The type is strikingly true; the tones are warm; clearly accentuated facial protrusions; She is, in a word, a pure-bred woman as far as race is concerned. I cannot bring myself to

⁶ J. Noulens, *Exposition des Beaux-Arts à Toulouse*, Extrait de la *Revue d'Aquitaine*, Paris, Dumoulin, 1864, p.1.

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examine the other human copies, especially one or two which are soft and creamy. Those who performed them had to load their palette with ointment or cream cheese.”⁷ It is interesting to note that, although Dubufe's painting was noted by critics, it was not purchased by a visitor nor acquired by the Toulouse Artistic Union for its lottery in favor of its members. The artist will donate it three years later for a sale for the benefit of the Emergency fund for painters, sculptors, architects and designers which will be held at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris on March 8 and 9, 1867 under the hammer of Charles Pillet, auctioneer⁸. The painting then entitled *Tête de Nègresse* was purchased by a certain Mr. Thomas for the sum of 160 francs⁹. The work was then acquired by an American war correspondent stationed in France during the First World War and would subsequently remain with the same family in Florida: the Morris. The painting was the subject of a restoration in 1971.

This portrait by Dubufe is an exceptional work, due to the significance of the model. A true « black Mona Lisa », she achieves a remarkable synthesis of the Ingres vocabulary, the colors of the palette of a Delacroix and the beauties of the renaissance, in a tondo format. The black woman is here in majesty, with a diversion of codes, far from a conventional exoticism. A haughty woman, she wears her origins with pride.

⁷ J.Noulens, op.cit., p.9.

⁸ Catalogue de la vente des tableaux, dessins, aquarelles... / [expert] Francis Petit, Hôtel Drouot, vendredi 8 et samedi 9 mars 1867, Paris, p.8.

⁹ Le procès-verbal de la vente Taylor (caisse de secours des artistes) est conservé aux Archives de Paris dans le dossier de maître Charles Pillet, commissaire-priseur, année 1867.

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Fig. 1 Edouard Dubufe, *Portrait de Charles Gounod*, 1867. Oil on canvas
Musée National du Château, Versailles.



Fig.2 Marie-Guilhelmine Benoist, *Portrait d'une femme noire* *Portrait de négresse* (Title at the Salon of 1800) Other title: *Portrait présumé de Madeleine*. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Fig. 3 Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 4 Edouard Manet, *Portrait de Laure*, former title: *La Nègresse*, 1862. Oil on canvas. Pinacothèque Giovanni et Marella Agnelli, Turin.

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Fig. 5 After Edouard Dubufe, *Bethsabée*, 1844, Etching.
Paris, Private Collection.

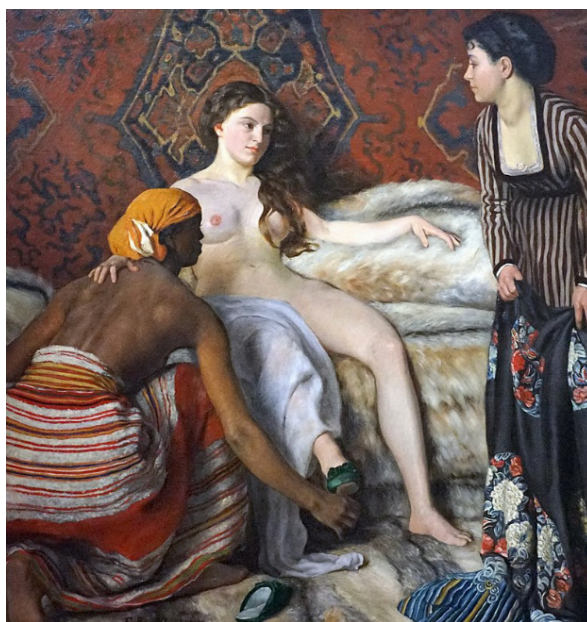


Fig. 6 Frédéric Bazille, *La toilette*, 1870. Oil on canvas. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

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Fig. 7 Jean-Léon Gerôme, *Le Bain Turc*, 1870. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts Boston.



Fig. 8 Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Tête de la Grande Odalisque*, c.1814-1815. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Cambrai.

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COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT

spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI *Brussels*

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM

BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

brussels@colnaghi.com