

Public Abstract

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Title: The Impression of Humor: Mary Cassatt and Her Rendering of Wit

The academic scholarship that surrounds Mary Cassatt situates her work within a staunchly gendered category of "female artist." By placing this title on the artist and her work, in the context of 19th century art criticism, her paintings have been overlooked as simple sentimental representations of women and children. Yet, a thorough analysis of Cassatt's character, class-status, and cultural exposure to wit, present a very different picture; her "sentimental" work takes a new meaning when looked at through a cultural context of artistic practices in wit and conversation. Cassatt's presentation of wit is grounded in social critique, asserting her position as an upper-class woman. She takes the act of perception, intrinsic to the irony found in wit and turns it towards the traditional conceptions of femininity and womanhood. By identifying the witty play within Cassatt's work as well as her contemporaries, a more intellectually engaged artist appears.