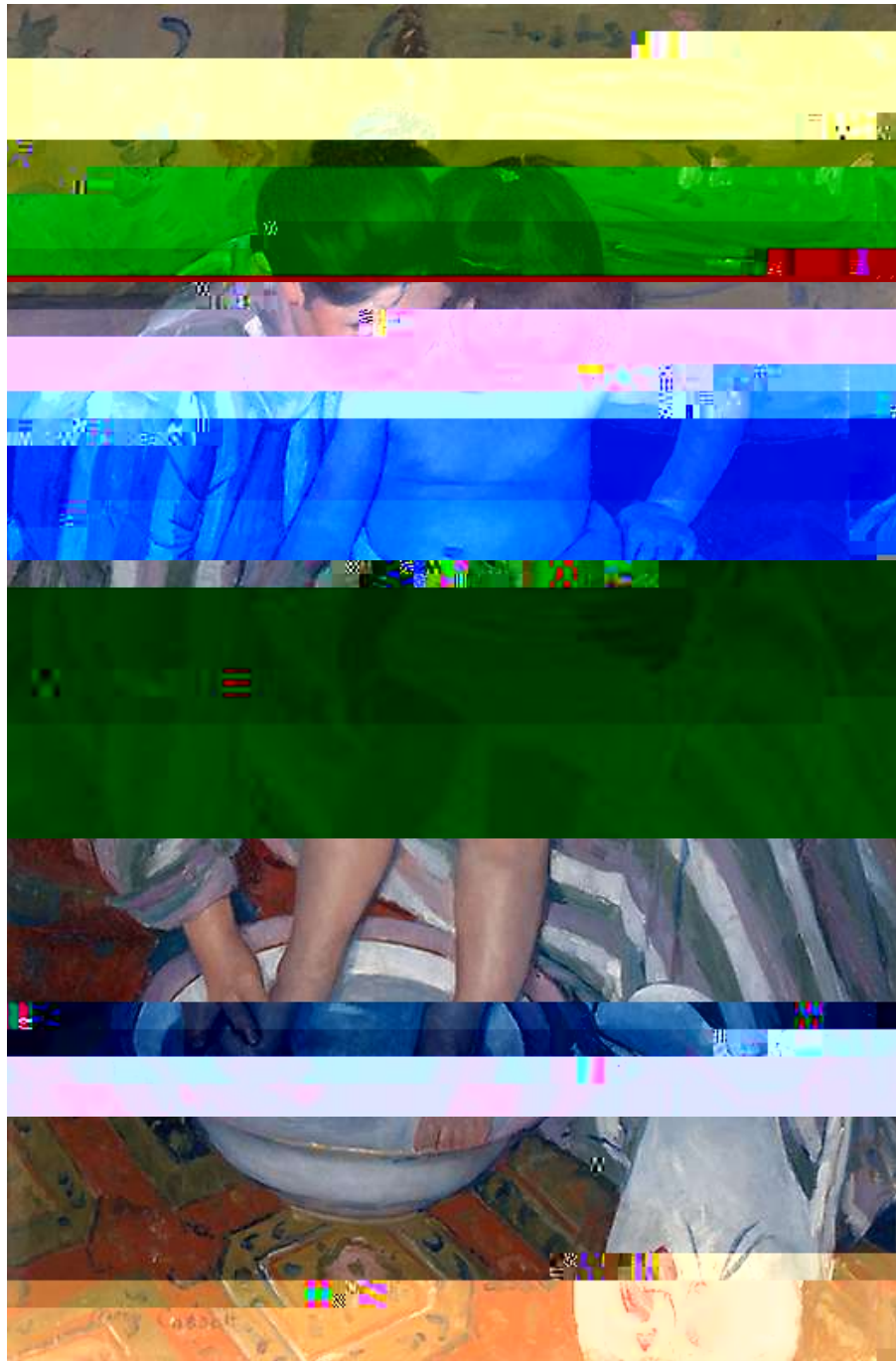


Mary Cassatt's *The Child's Bath* (1893, oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 26 inches) was one of a few paintings created by a female artist that was ever exhibited together with other Impressionist masterpieces painted by Manet, Monet, or Degas. *The Child's Bath* illustrates an intimate scene between a mother and her young daughter inside a contemporary Parisian bedroom. Mary Cassatt was born in the United States in 1844 but spent most of her adult life in France, where she was influenced by her close friend Edgar Degas, advances in photography, as well as widely popular woodblock prints from Tokugawa, Japan. This non-western influence shaped her unique style and subject matter that distinguished her from other male contemporary artists. Mary Cassatt unconventionally played with the traditional theme, bold patterns and outlines, as well as flattened perspective on a relatively small canvas, which directly reflected the intimacy of love between a mother and her child, but at the same time displayed aspects of the avant-garde and modernism¹. Furthermore, this sensitive portrayal of a mother and her child reflects the most advanced nineteenth-century "feminist" art.

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**Cassatt, Mary S. The Child's Bath 1893 American Art Gallery
273, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL. In About This
Artwork <http://www.aic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/111442>**

artist to even a oad to exhibit at the Impressionist exhibition in Paris.⁸ This could explain why Cassatt depicted a traditional subject matter of child rearing resembling Mary with Jesus, and still introduced an innovative approach to a traditional subject matter.

Cassatt exhibited her art at the Impressionist exhibitions and her talent as an observer of a revolutionized subject matter of motherhood was widely recognized by her contemporaries as well as many art critics.⁹ Cassatt became famous for her neutrality which allowed her to depict extraordinary, yet compelling pictures of people engaged in seemingly inconsequential activity.¹⁰ Nonetheless, her paintings are not just pictorial clichés of maternal love. Until the eighteenth century in France, children were seen as burdens who impinged upon a woman's life at court or salon. Mary Cassatt perfected the technique of showing young children in a naturalistic style.¹¹ The change came with the publication of *Emile* by Jean Jacques Rousseau, in which he argued for a more intimate relationship between mothers and their children. This change in society caused women being seen as domestic beings.¹² Moreover, several cholera epidemics in the mid 1880s prompted the official promotion of regular bathing as prevention against the disease. And after 1870, French mothers were encouraged to take care of their own children instead of employing caretakers and to use modern hygiene practices.¹³ Although Cassatt never had children of her own, she brilliantly captured the change in the relationship between mothers and their children.

During Cassatt's life in Paris, Japanese Tokugawa woodblock prints were becoming a valuable commodity and many artists started to collect them. Woodblock prints in Japan were produced for huge audiences; thus, the technique had to be inexpensive to capture popular subjects. The medium of printmaking originated in China in the ninth century CE and in the sixteenth century came to Japan.¹⁴ The production of Ukiyo-e prints was based in the capital city Edo.¹⁵ The

8 Pauline de Tholozan, "Paris: Capital of the 19th century: The Expositions Universelles in Nineteenth Century Paris," Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, last modified December, 2014. <http://library.brown.edu/cds/paris/worldfair.html#de1867>.

9 "Notes from The World's Columbian Exposition Chicago 1893," *Scientific American* 68, no. 16 (1893): 243-244, doi:10.1038/scientificamerican04221893-243

10 Steven Minson, "Mary Cassatt, Modern Painter - Commentary Magazine," *Commentary Magazine*, 2017, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/mary-cassatt-modern-painter/>.

11 *Ibid*

12 Brude, "Mary Cassatt," 14

13 Potter, "Women Caring for Children In 'The Floating World'"

14 Tinios, *Japanese Prints Ukiyo in Edo, 1700-1900* (Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2010), 15

15 *Ibid*, 17

as geishas, who were female entertainers often patronized for sex

Furthermore, Mary Cassatt decided to angle the faces of the mother and her child in a way that the viewer cannot identify their exact features. The heightened anonymity in *The Child's Bath* suggests that Mary Cassatt did not intend to paint two particular figures but rather the ideal of motherhood in nineteenth century France.²⁶ Furthermore, Mary Cassatt painted the daughter with greater attention to detail than her mother and placed the child in the center of the painting which further emphasized the importance of a child over the importance of the mother:

