

**LOOKING AT
THE LANDSCAPES
COURBET AND
MODERNISM**

Papers from a symposium
Held at the J. Paul Getty Museum
on March 18, 2006

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Preface

On March 18, 2006, the Department of Paintings at the J. Paul Getty Museum invited a group of international scholars to convene in Los Angeles for a day of discussions related to the loan exhibition *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (J. Paul Getty Museum, February 21–May 14, 2006; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, June 18–September 10, 2006; The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, October 15, 2006–January 7, 2007). The intent was to bring together art historians from the academic and museum professions who had carefully considered the work of the Realist master Gustave Courbet, expose them to the exhibition, and provide a forum in which to exchange ideas about a relatively neglected topic in the historiography of nineteenth-century French painting: Courbet's landscapes. The group included several senior scholars who have focused on the life and work of Courbet across their careers, a PhD candidate writing his dissertation on the very subject at hand, two art historians trained as paintings conservators, and two curators in the process of organizing the upcoming monographic exhibition devoted to Courbet, opening at the Grand Palais in Paris in October 2007.

Courbet and the Modern Landscape was the first opportunity to look intently at Courbet since the 1988 Brooklyn Museum exhibition *Courbet Reconsidered*, and the first chance (since 1882) to look at so many landscape paintings by Courbet in one place. The organizing criterion for the installation was Courbet's responsiveness to distinct landscape types, and the exhibition curators, Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman, both viewed his achievement in landscape painting through the prism of late-nineteenth-century French and mid-twentieth-century American avant-garde painting. With a formalist bent aimed at extricating Courbet's work from the sociohistorical and psychoanalytical context that has dominated Courbet scholarship for the last thirty years, the exhibition and catalogue emphasized the visual complexity, variety, and richness of his landscape oeuvre, with the intent of provoking new responses from experts in the field.

Indeed, the range of viewing experiences to be had in the exhibition galleries was dramatic. There were pictures that were peacefully pleasing (the Norton Simon *Marine*) as well as darkly disturbing (the Metropolitan *Source of the Loue*); there were baffling paintings, powerful but rather bizarre (the Houston *Gust of Wind* and Salander O'Reilly *Valley of the Loue*); paintings of an acute freshness (the Brooklyn *Wave* and private collection *Rocks at Chauveroche*); and larger, carefully finished works held within a firm, almost classical geometric structure (the Musée Courbet *Chateau de Chillon*.)

Installation highlights included a wall of five paintings of the same motif spanning fifteen years of Courbet's career. Viewers could compare the Montreal *Puits Noir* (fig. 1), a spontaneous transcription of the site just outside Ornans, with the more labored Salon production of the Orsay *Shaded Stream* (fig. 2)—larger, more organized, ennobled—and then with the profoundly penetrating, formal meditation of the Baltimore *Shaded Stream at the Puits Noir* (fig. 3), a work that so clearly illustrates Courbet as the artist with whom Cézanne begins. The remarkable presence of the *Grotto of Sarrazine* (fig. 4), a little-known painting acquired by the Getty in 2004, was consistently impressive in its combination of intense empiricism and painterly experimentation, the curling wavelike structure of the rock face elicited with a variety of studio tools used to scrape, brush, blot, and marble the canvas surface. The final gallery's long



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Figure 1

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), *Stream of the Puits Noir* (*Le Ruisseau de Puits Noir*), ca. 1855. Oil on canvas, 64.8 x 81.3 cm (25 1/2 x 32 in.). Montréal, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Purchase, John W. Tempest Fund.



Figure 2

Gustave Courbet, *The Shaded Stream* (*Le Ruisseau couvert*), 1865. Oil on canvas, 94 x 135 cm (37 x 53 3/16 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 3

Gustave Courbet, *The Shaded Stream at the Puits Noir* (*Le Puits Noir*), ca. 1860–65. Oil on canvas, 64.2 x 79.1 cm (25 1/4 x 31 1/8 in.). The Baltimore Museum of Art, The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland, BMA 1950.202.



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Figure 4

Gustave Courbet, *The Grotto of Sarrazine near Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne*, ca. 1864. Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm (19 11/16 x 23 5/8 in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004.47.

wall of tonal studies that Courbet produced in the mid- to late 1860s on the Normandy coast foregrounded both the serial nature of this particular campaign, and the range of expressive effects achieved with the minimal motif of sky, sea, and sand. Finally, the profoundly haunting Hamburg *Winter Landscape* (fig. 5), painted on a black ground, attested to Courbet's continued (if intermittent) artistic achievements during the difficult last years of his life.



Figure 5

Gustave Courbet, *Winter Landscape with the "Dents du Midi,"* 1876. Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 101 cm (28 15/16 x 39 3/4 in.). Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Photo: Elke Walford, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.

Moderated by myself, Charlotte Eyerman, and Richard Brettell, each of us specialists in nineteenth-century French painting and bringing to the discussion our own preoccupations, the symposium offered nine brief formulations on the nature of Courbet's landscape oeuvre. Michael Clarke opened the day by sketching the context for Courbet's landscapes in terms of the art market and of contemporary practice in the genre, suggesting ways in which the Realist painter both conformed to and diverged from his artistic



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environment. Courbet's work did not fit comfortably in his time, and so Clarke raises the question, explored in Charlotte Eyerman's catalogue essay, whether Courbet speaks more to a mid-twentieth-century painterly world or, as James Rubin suggested in his recent monograph, whether Courbet's legacy has more to do with the principles underlying his art than with the influence of the objects themselves.

The issue of Courbet's legacy to Modernist painting, explored in the catalogue though not in the exhibition itself, was a central theme of papers by Sarah Faunce, Klaus Herding, and Paul Galvez, as well as for symposium keynote speaker and moderator Brettell. The public lecture Brettell presented on March 19 addressed, in particular, the debt that Gauguin's landscapes owed to Courbet's work, notably those in a vertical format. Brettell underscored the enormous impact of Courbet's death, in 1877, for the generation of young painters we think of as Impressionists. Courbet's example, both as a painter and as a self-made, self-promoting artist, inspired generations of vanguard artists.

Faunce focused on Courbet's method of paint construction, which she described as profoundly informed by the extraordinary topography of the artist's native Jura. Courbet's layering and scumbling of paint with his palette knife, and the variety of mark making, served as a kind of visual analogue to the rocky outcroppings and rich foliage of the area surrounding Ornans, his hometown. Herding debunked the category of Realism for Courbet, emphasizing the emotional expression, ambiguity, and abstract tendencies of his landscapes. Courbet's complex oeuvre served as a "gold mine" for the Modernist generation that followed, for painters like Cézanne, Seurat, Gauguin, and Van Gogh.

Adding to the "never-ending discussion" of precisely what constitutes "modern" in painting, and when it begins, Galvez suggested an alternative to the tried-and-true Baudelaire-Manet-Impressionist story, in which Modernism is about acceleration and urban spectacle. In his intense meditation on the experience of looking at Courbet's landscapes, Galvez marveled at the careful skill and masterful sophistication of Courbet's paint application, which resulted in images of powerful sensual appeal that demand a decelerated viewing, and that ultimately have more to do with darkness than with "Impressionist light."

Returning Courbet to his sociocultural context, Petra Chu argued for a market imperative guiding not only the subject matter but also the tactile sensuality of Courbet's landscape imagery. She placed Courbet's practice firmly within the burgeoning trade for images of tourist sites in the 1850s and 1860s. Dominique de Font-Réaulx connected Courbet's landscape work to developments in midcentury landscape photography, particularly as it was practiced by such artists as Gustave Le Gray, several of whose marine photographs were included in the exhibition, offering a fascinating comparison with Courbet's seascapes lined up in the adjacent gallery.

Seizing the opportunity to break for a moment from the "desperately looking forward from Courbet" context of the exhibition, David Bomford explored Courbet's roots in seventeenth-century painterly practice, specifically the "rough manner," or textural painting, of Velázquez, Titian, and above all Rembrandt. Also looking at seventeenth-century precedents, Laurence des Cars focused on Courbet's submissions to the Salon of 1870, *The Stormy Sea* and *The Cliffs at Étretat*, suggesting the continuity—within both their compositional structure and their emotional impact—of the heroic landscape tradition established by Poussin and Claude Lorrain. Marking one of the many links between Courbet and Cézanne, she described a Neoclassical principle of organization in the modern painterly practice of both men.



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Each one of the presentations engaged in some way with the issue of Courbet's highly unusual paint surfaces, as they appeared in all their rich variety in the exhibition galleries. In her presentation, Anthea Callen investigated the actual (as opposed to presumed or mythological) tools of Courbet's working method in an attempt to excavate his surfaces. Clearly, Courbet directed an enormous amount of his voluble energy into the live process of painting, employing brushes of all sizes and textures, all aspects of the palette knife (tip, edge, and flat side), the range of dry to wet and thick to thin paint consistencies, sponges, rags, and fingers. He was and continues to be very much a painter's painter, and his experimentation with his materials resulted in a group of pictures that, while potentially thrilling, are wildly uneven, inconsistent, and sometimes mysterious in their construction.

From the moment *The Grotto of Sarrazine* arrived at the Getty Museum through the de-installation at the close of the exhibition, Getty paintings conservators and curators studied Courbet's surfaces in an attempt to get a sense of the artist's consistency (or inconsistency) of technique. Focusing on paintings in very good condition, we did develop a sense of familiarity with particular marks, some of them highly unusual. But at the same time, the sheer variety of paint handling and Courbet's experimental drive confounded attempts to get a clear sense of stylistic evolution or even an entirely consistent "hand." Building on what we have learned from *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, and capitalizing on the imminent monographic exhibition at the Grand Palais/Musée d'Orsay, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Musée Fabre, much remains to be done in Courbet technical studies, and the interpretive field remains rich for future scholarship.

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Rough Manners: Reflections on Courbet and Seventeenth-Century Painting

David Bomford

In a typically elegant and wittily concise review of the great 1977–78 Courbet exhibition shown at the Grand Palais and the Royal Academy, Anita Brookner remarked that Gustave Courbet appeared less like the first of the dissidents—setting himself up at the gates of the Universal Exposition in 1855—and more like the last of the old masters.¹ Although these two viewpoints are not wholly mutually exclusive, it is in the old master context that I would like to consider Courbet’s paintings here.

Petra Chu summarized this theme in the opening paragraph of her book *French Realism and the Dutch Masters*, where she wrote: “There has probably been no period in the history of Western art in which painters, sculptors and architects alike were as preoccupied with the art of the past as the nineteenth century. All the major artistic currents of this period hark back to one or more historical styles, a phenomenon that is most common in architecture, but that can also be observed in painting and sculpture.”²

Without exception, every author who has written about Courbet’s life and art has pointed out his early debt to seventeenth-century painters—principally Dutch and Spanish. Courbet himself acknowledged it. In a letter to his family written in August 1846, he noted that he had to go to Holland, principally to earn money, but also to “study their old masters.” In the same letter, he described painting the portrait of a M. de Fresquet, who “has paid me the greatest compliments on the one of his son which has made quite an impression in Bordeaux. He showed me a letter in which his wife says that the Bordeaux painters maintained that it reminded them very much of Rembrandt.”³

Courbet would have had no difficulty studying seventeenth-century painting in Paris. The collection of the Louvre was famously strong in Dutch art—although it had rather fewer Spanish paintings—and the young Courbet copied old master paintings there. For Spanish art, he would have had the riches of King Louis-Philippe’s Galerie Espagnole, which was exhibited at the Louvre from January 7, 1838, to January 1, 1849.⁴

The Spanish connection was evidently significant for Courbet. Of his self-portrait known as the *Man with a Leather Belt* (fig. 1), exhibited at the Salon of 1846 under the title *Portrait of M. X*****, Courbet himself said, “C’est du sur-Velázquez” (It’s super-Velázquez). T. J. Clark, in his *Image of the People*, described this portrait in Spanish terms also: “What Courbet borrowed from the Spanish paintings in Louis-Philippe’s Galerie Espagnole, was not so much their formal qualities, though he sometimes copied these, as their sheer brutality, the unembarrassed emotion of the paintings and of the painters’ own legendary lives.”⁵





Figure 1

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), *Self-Portrait, Entitled "Man with a Leather Belt,"* 1845–46. Oil on canvas, 100 x 82 cm (39 3/8 x 32 1/4 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Erich Lessing, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 2

Titian (Tiziano Vecelli, Italian, 1488/90–1576), *Man with a Glove*, ca. 1520. Oil on canvas, 100 x 89 cm (39 3/8 x 35 in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: Thierry Le Mage, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



There is another fascinating old master association with this painting. Courbet exhibited it again, in 1855, under the title *Portrait of the Artist /A Study of the Venetians*, and various twentieth-century scholars have connected it compositionally with Titian's famous *Man with a Glove* in the Louvre (fig. 2). Their instincts were proved correct when, in 1973, an X-ray of the picture showed that Courbet had painted it over a copy he had made of that very Titian.⁶



Figure 3

Gustave Courbet, *The Burial at Ornans*, 1850. Oil on canvas, 315 x 668 cm (10 ft. 4 in. x 21 ft. 11 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

Contemporary critics were not slow to make the Spanish connection, either. Courbet's loyal friend, the critic Jules Champfleury, mounted a passionate defense of *The Burial at Ornans* (fig. 3), shown so controversially in the 1851 Salon. He wrote, "with its composition and arrangement of groups, Courbet was already breaking with tradition. Although unacquainted with Velázquez's wonderful canvases, he was in agreement with that illustrious master, who placed figures next to one another without worrying about laws laid down by pedantic and mediocre minds. Only those who know Velázquez can understand Courbet. Had the Parisians been more familiar with the works of Velázquez, they would undoubtedly have been less angry about *The Burial at Ornans*."⁷ Although Champfleury didn't make the additional connection, others have pointed out the painting's obvious similarity to a burial scene by an earlier Spanish artist—El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (fig. 4).

The nineteenth-century critical view of Courbet's style was grounded in drawing parallels with seventeenth-century Spanish painting. The critic Jules Castagnary wrote, "In his power and variety, I find him very like Velázquez, the great Spanish naturalist; but with this slight difference: Velázquez was a courtier of the court, Courbet is a Velázquez of the people."⁸



Image Not Available for Publication

Figure 4

El Greco (Doménikos Theotokópoulos [Spanish, born in Greece, 1541–1614]), *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1568. Oil on canvas, 480 x 360 cm (15 ft. 8 in. x 11 ft. 9 in.). Toledo, Spain, Santo Tomé.



Figure 5

Gustave Courbet, *The Cellist: Self-Portrait*, 1847. Oil on canvas, 117 x 90 cm (46 1/8 x 35 1/2 in.). Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, 3105. Photo: © The National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm.



However, the essential subjectivity of these comparisons shouldn't be underestimated. In an admiring comment on Courbet's 1848 Salon piece *The Cellist: Self-Portrait* (fig. 5), Champfleury wrote, "If you put his portrait *Man with a Cello* in the Spanish museum, it would hang there proud and calm with no fear of the Velázquezes and the Murillos."⁹ But Champfleury's comparison of Courbet with the Spanish masters has to be set alongside the opinions of other contemporary critics, who simultaneously likened the *Cellist* to Rembrandt. In the modern era, Clark described the painting as "Rembrandt confused by the concern for elaborate posing and spatial arrangement—undecided whether to set the figure in a dissolving chiaroscuro or against a background which presses it to the canvas surface."¹⁰ Linda Nochlin has proposed a specific source for the self-portrait, Rembrandt's own 1660 self-portrait in the Louvre (fig. 6), pointing out the "subtle and expressive lighting of the head, the inquietude of the expression and the general composition, including the fact, unusual for Courbet, that he has chosen to represent himself almost full length in a life-size format."¹¹



Figure 6
Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669), *Self-Portrait with Easel*, 1660. Oil on canvas, 111 x 90 cm (43 3/4 x 35 3/8 in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 7
Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of H. J. van Wisselingh*, 1846. Oil on panel, 57.2 x 46 cm (22 1/2 x 18 1/8 in.). Fort Worth, Texas, The Kimbell Art Museum. Photo: Art Resource, New York.



Courbet was an inveterate traveler and visited a number of major cities in Holland, Belgium, and Germany to work and to study old master paintings. We know of trips to Amsterdam, at the invitation of the Dutch art dealer H. J. van Wisselingh, whom Courbet depicted in a highly Rembrandtesque portrait (fig. 7). He certainly went to the Rijksmuseum to look at Rembrandt, not in the building we know today, but in the museum's previous home, the Trippenhuus. He also went to Brussels, Ghent, Antwerp, and Bruges, and to Frankfurt for almost a year in 1858–59—where his hosts provided him with a studio and introduced him to stag hunting—as well as to Munich in 1869, where he copied a self-portrait by Rembrandt and *Malle Babbe* by Frans Hals (figs. 8, 9).



Figure 8

Gustave Courbet, *Copy of a Self-Portrait by Rembrandt*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 87 x 73 cm (34 1/4 x 28 3/4 in.). Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts. Photo: RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 9

Gustave Courbet, *Malle Babbe*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 85 x 71 cm (33 1/2 x 28 in.). Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2262. Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.



Until quite recently, it was assumed that Courbet never went to Spain, but a search through the register of copyists at the Prado has revealed his unmistakable signature under the date of September 4, 1868.¹² Tantalizingly, we know no further details of his visit to Madrid—not even which paintings he copied in the Prado—but perhaps more will come to light about this mysterious journey.

We should now ask ourselves a general question about the notion of artistic influence and examine how important it was for Courbet—and, in the context of the exhibition at the Getty, for his landscape painting. How was Courbet's own art shaped by his intense scrutiny of the art of the past? The answer, naturally, is not straightforward. We can identify clearly different levels of influence by earlier masters.

At the most obvious level are direct copies of the sort that he made in Munich—but these were not particularly significant for Courbet. Perhaps they were brief acts of homage to painters he admired, or simply technical exercises in mimicking style; it is certainly interesting that they are after two of the greatest exponents of painterly brushwork in European art. Courbet dismissed the idea of simple imitation as an end in itself, emphasizing that such processes were part of a cumulative search for artistic identity. In his so-called Manifesto of Realism, he wrote, "I have studied the art of the Old Masters and the art of the Modern Masters. I no more want to imitate the former than copy the latter; nor have I pursued the futile goal of art for art's sake. No! I simply wanted to draw from a complete knowledge of tradition a reasoned and independent sense of my own individuality. I sought knowledge in order to acquire skill, that was my idea."¹³

At a more indirect level are the Rembrandt-like or Velázquez-like portraits and figure studies that we have already seen. Here the influence is of a general kind—of shape and arrangement, of mood and characterization, of chiaroscuro and theatrically lit forms set against crepuscular backgrounds. True, certain of these compositions seem to follow seventeenth-century prototypes rather closely, and there is undoubtedly some conscious or unconscious assimilation taking place. Apart from the similarities to Rembrandt and Velázquez, we might mention other examples. For instance, parallels between the still solemnity of *After Dinner at Ornans* (fig. 10) and the family groups of Louis Le Nain (fig. 11) are abundantly clear.

In all of these comparisons, we are playing the art historian's favorite game of spotting the sources—matching images to plausible and sometimes proven precursors. For Courbet, however, it is almost entirely in his figure painting that we can trace these connections. So—what can we say about the landscapes that will be of particular interest to us here?

We have very few clues. There is one intriguing reference to an early landscape that Courbet may have studied, *Paysage imaginaire imité des Flamands*, but we have no idea which painting this is.¹⁴ There are no obvious seventeenth-century prototypes for Courbet's brilliant and vibrantly textured landscapes. The Rembrandt landscapes that Courbet would have seen are quite different—small, serene panels, the paint thin and transparent with the light ground shining through. We are perhaps closer to Courbet if we look at other seventeenth-century Dutch artists, such as Jacob van Ruisdael or Philips Koninck or Meindert Hobbema, but these are influences of a fairly universal kind and not specific enough to be significant.





Figure 10

Gustave Courbet, *After Dinner at Ornans*, 1848/49. Oil on canvas, 195 x 257 cm (76 3/4 x 8 ft. 5 1/8 in.). Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts. Photo: Philippe Bernard, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 11

Louis Le Nain (French, 1593–1648), *Repas de paysans*, 1642. Oil on canvas, 97 x 122 cm (38 1/8 x 48 in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: Gérard Blot, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



The only type of rural scene in which we can identify a direct connection is that with prominent cattle, where the derivation from Albert Cuyp and Paulus Potter—whose works Courbet saw when he visited Holland—is very clear. The light brown cow in *The Young Ladies of the Village* (fig. 12), for example, has almost exactly the same shape and pose as Potter's monumental *Bull* (fig. 13), in the Mauritshuis.



Figure 12

Gustave Courbet, *The Young Ladies of the Village*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 195 x 261 cm (76 3/4 x 8 ft. 6 1/2 in.). New York, © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Harry Payne Bingham, 1940. Photo: Art Resource, New York.



Figure 13

Paulus Potter (Dutch, 1625–1654), *The Bull*, ca. 1647. Oil on canvas, 235.5 x 339 cm (7 ft. 3/4 in. x 11 ft 1/12 in.). The Hague, Mauritshuis, Royal Picture Gallery.





Figure 14

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Portrait of a Pair of Old Testament Figures, Called "The Jewish Bride,"* 1667. Oil on canvas, 121.5 x 166.5 cm (47 7/8 x 65 1/2 in.). Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-C-216.

Such borrowings are reasonably clear transpositions of motif from recognizable sources. I want to suggest an altogether different type of influence, however—a fundamental of painterly representation firmly rooted in seventeenth-century art theory and practice. I refer to the emergence of the “rough manner” in Dutch painting, particularly in the works of Rembrandt, and in Spanish painting, with Velázquez.¹⁵ Both were working against the prevailing norms of smooth or fine painting, and, for both, the example of late Titian was cited as authorization of their increasingly broken and irregular handling of paint. In a remarkable trajectory that echoed Titian’s, Rembrandt moved through his career from being a founding father of the Leiden *fijnschilders*, or “fine painters”—those painters who, with invisible brushstrokes and “the patience of saints and the industry of ants” (as one contemporary author described it), took the illusionistic depiction of objects to a new level—to his culmination as the undisputed extreme exponent of the rough manner. In his late works, the paint surfaces have the density of rock faces. Ernst van de Wetering of the Rembrandt Research Project has described the sleeve of the so-called *Jewish Bride* in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 14)—a picture that Courbet would have seen—as appearing to be “the outcome of some geological process rather than paint applied by a human hand . . . the paint rises from the surface in clots and flakes, reflecting the light. It is a mystery how such a surface structure was achieved, to imagine what implement was used, for it is difficult to distinguish any clear brushstrokes, nor are there any traces of the palette knife.”¹⁶

The rough manner in Dutch painting was a conscious aesthetic choice and was described in Rembrandt’s day as *lossigheidt*, “looseness”—the equivalent of the *sprezzatura* of the Italian writer Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), who drew parallels between the effortless nonchalance of courtly behavior and the loose, seemingly careless touches that the artist applied with his brush. The epitome of *lossigheidt* or *sprezzatura* in Rembrandt’s art is his masterpiece, the *Portrait of Jan Six* (Amsterdam, Six Collection), in which the paint seems to have massed spontaneously into the gorgeous fabric of the sitter’s clothes and



the powerful passages of his face and hands. Seventeenth-century Spanish art theory, similarly, had terminology for loose, expressive brushstrokes: they were referred to as *borriones* or *manchas*, words loaded with the same significance as “sprezzatura.”¹⁷

In his brilliant and eccentric study of Rembrandt, *Rembrandt's Eyes*, Simon Schama cogently summarized that significance. “The rough surface,” he said, “engages with, and stimulates, the activity of the eye far more powerfully than a smooth surface. Rough and smooth surfaces, in fact, presuppose quite different relationships between artist and spectator. The unequivocally completed, clear and polished work of art is an act of authority, presented to the spectator like a gift or declaration. The roughly finished painting, on the other hand, is more akin to an initiated conversation, a posed question, demanding an engaged response from the beholder. Rough artists deliberately expose the working processes of composition as a way of pulling the spectator further into the image.”¹⁸

Would Courbet have been aware of the theoretical underpinning of the seventeenth-century paintings he studied so assiduously? The answer is, almost certainly not—since scholarly debate about the rough/smooth aesthetic did not resurface until the twentieth century. But what we are talking about here is something instinctive, not the deliberate borrowing or imitation of motifs. We are talking about the almost unconscious exercise of visual memory, the storing of perceptions and sensations on the retina of some inner eye. From the textured surfaces of those seventeenth-century paintings, Courbet was absorbing a sort of mnemonic code of representation, to be rediscovered and reinvented in the extraordinary low-relief formations that were his landscape paintings.

Nor was that inner eye simply registering the superficial rough manners of Rembrandt and Velázquez; it was also taking in the dramatic effects that could be imparted by the colors underlying the paint. Rembrandt's dark brown quartz grounds, often used for his canvases, and the deep earth color of Velázquez's early Sevillian grounds, established an approach that was startlingly different from conventional methods, which involved working on light-colored preparations. Courbet's apparent preference for painting on dark underlayers echoes that of those earlier artists. It was a technique entirely without transparency or inner luminosity—the complete antithesis of the later, Impressionist technique of allowing light to reflect from a pale ground and flood through the paint layers above.

The tonal effect is curious. Colors must be applied thickly—reinforcing the textural effects we have already examined—and they are glittering and brilliant rather than soft and luminous. There is a hardness to them, unsoftened by any shimmer of transparency or play of light through translucent brushwork. They seem to hover above some dark void, colors overcoming blackness by sheer force. There is a sense of the photographic about this way of working—forms and colors emerging piece by piece from deep shadow and increasing in substance until they subdue the darkness underneath. This is tenebrist painting remade in a new and unique idiom for a new type of nineteenth-century landscape.





Figure 15

Gustave Courbet. *The Diligence in the Snow*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 137.2 x 199.1 cm (54 x 78 3/8 in.). London, National Gallery, and Dublin, Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art. Photo: © The National Gallery, London.

I conclude with a Courbet landscape that few people have seen in recent years. It is the huge *Diligence in the Snow* (fig. 15), owned jointly by the National Gallery in London and the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery in Dublin. Apparently it records an actual incident of a carriage and its terrified occupants foundering in the snow that Courbet witnessed in the Jura. In terms of technique, it has all the rough texture you would expect of a grand, sweeping composition loaded with so much lead white paint. Great pastose swirls of white and gray stand for rocks and snow in the foreground, flat slabs of pale color are knifed on for background and sky, and trees in the distance are slashed on with stripes of black. Underlying everything is a ground color of inky darkness, giving the whole scene a tone of oppressive cold and threatening intensity. The physical structure of this underlayer caused tremendous problems for the painting. It has a slick, greasy surface, to which the paint layers never stuck properly. The work was plagued with flaking and paint loss for most of the last century and was repaired on many occasions. Happily, it is reasonably stable these days—and, when the Hugh Lane Gallery opened again to the public in spring 2006, it was seen in public for the first time in years.

This powerful image is very much of its time. No Dutch seventeenth-century Little Ice Age snow scene would have looked like this. But it is my contention that Courbet unconsciously drew on his acute visual memory of seventeenth-century paintings every time he made one of his extraordinary landscapes.

¹ Anita Brookner, *Soundings* (London, 1997), pp. 110–14. Originally published as “The Last of the Old Masters,” *Times Literary Supplement*, January 27, 1978.

² Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *French Realism and the Dutch Masters* (Utrecht, 1974), p. 1.



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- ³ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed., *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 65–66.
- ⁴ See Jeannine Baticle, “The Galerie Espagnole of Louis-Philippe,” in *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting*, exh. cat. (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), pp. 175–89.
- ⁵ T. J. Clark, *Image of the People* (London, 1973), p. 41.
- ⁶ Valérie Bajou, *Courbet* (Paris, 2003), pp. 36–37.
- ⁷ Champfleury [Jules-François-Félix Husson], “Courbet en 1860,” in *Grandes figures d’hier et d’aujourd’hui* (Paris, 1861), cited in Geneviève and Jean Lacambre, eds., *Champfleury, Le Réalisme* (Paris, 1973), p. 182.
- ⁸ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, *Salons (1857–1870)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1892), vol. 1, p. 149.
- ⁹ Champfleury 1861 cited in Lacambre and Lacambre 1973 (see note 7), pp. 153–54.
- ¹⁰ Clark 1973 (see note 5), p. 42.
- ¹¹ Linda Nochlin, “Gustave Courbet: A Study in Style and Society” (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1963); published New York, 1976, p. 51.
- ¹² See Alisa Luxenberg, “Buenos Días Señor Courbet: The Artist’s Trip to Spain,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143 (November 2001): pp. 690–93.
- ¹³ Courbet, “Le Réalisme,” preface to *Exhibition et Vente de 40 Tableaux & 4 Dessins de l’oeuvre de M. Gustave Courbet* (Paris, 1855).
- ¹⁴ Chu 1974 (see note 2), p. 28.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, Bernhard Schnackenburg, “Young Rembrandt’s Rough Manner: A Painting Style and Its Sources,” in *The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt*, exh. cat. (Staatliche Museen, Kassel, and Museum het Rembranthuis, Amsterdam, 2001), pp. 92–121; also Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 160–69; and Gridley McKim-Smith et al., *Examining Velázquez* (New Haven, 1988).
- ¹⁶ Van de Wetering 1997 (see note 15), p. 157.
- ¹⁷ McKim-Smith et al. 1988 (see note 15), pp. 15–27.
- ¹⁸ Simon Schama, *Rembrandt’s Eyes* (London, 1999), p. 654.



The Purposeful Sightseer: Courbet and Mid-Nineteenth-Century Tourism

Petra ten-Doesschate Chu

The exhibition *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2006, was the result of an interest on the part of its curators, Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman, in “rethinking Courbet’s landscape painting.”¹ Conceptually, the exhibition and its catalogue marked a return to an essentially formalist approach to art history. Such a return was the more refreshing as it concerned Gustave Courbet, an artist whose oeuvre, for more than three decades, had been the preferred object of alternative approaches to art history, be they sociohistorical/Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytical, or semiotic. The practitioners of these approaches focused primarily on Courbet’s figure paintings and underplayed his landscapes. In so doing, they neglected one of the most striking aspects of Courbet’s work—the artist’s daring and revolutionary *facture*.

Courbet and the Modern Landscape was stimulating because it invited the visitor to look at Courbet, once again, as an artist whose work concerned what the French call *faire*, i.e., the physical application of paint to the canvas. The exhibition helped us see his paintings as they were seen in the first half of the twentieth century, when critics from Claude Roger-Marx in the 1920s to Clement Greenberg in the late 1940s were seduced by Courbet’s innovative painting technique. The latter, in particular, saw it as the beginning of Modernism in painting, anticipating the Impressionists and Cézanne.² In her catalogue essay, Eyerman went further and argued that Courbet’s landscapes contained the germs of the action paintings of Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and even some works of the contemporary German artist Gerhard Richter.³

For all the richness and sensuality of their surfaces, however, one cannot ignore that Courbet’s landscape paintings are objective and concrete representations of specific sites, in France as well as abroad. Many of them, as we shall see, represent common nineteenth-century tourist attractions. To modern viewers unfamiliar with these locales, the formal qualities of the paintings may well be more interesting than their subjects. However, this was hardly the case for Courbet and the public for which his paintings were intended. Who, one might ask, were those admirers and buyers of the artist’s landscape paintings? As far as we know, they were well-to-do middle-class viewers—industrialists and rentiers, both in Paris and the provinces, who enjoyed sightseeing and travel. On Sundays, they would hike to a nearby ruin or natural wonder. In the summer months, they might take a coach to the shore, embark on a river cruise on the Seine, the Rhine, or the Meuse, or take the train to visit the Franche-Comté or Auvergne.

Courbet, traditionally, has been characterized as the landscape painter par excellence of the Franche-Comté region, from which he hailed. His early biographers, Jules Castagnary and Georges Riat, were convinced that his youth in Ornans had left an indelible impression on the artist and had decisively marked his art, and particularly his landscapes. Riat wrote that, when the young Courbet left Ornans for Paris, he carried the impressions of his native landscape, already “drawn and colored in his heart” (“dessinés et colorés dans son coeur”).⁴ Castagnary agreed, commenting that “wherever he went, he



carried the image [of the Franche-Comté] with him ... Courbet did not understand that a painter would go abroad to find his motifs. To a young man who came to show him a view of the Orient, he said, 'Don't you have your own country, is that why you find yourself obliged to borrow someone else's to paint?'"⁵

This conventional image of Courbet as a painter rooted in his native soil is still popular today, and it has caused us to downplay, if not ignore, the fact that the artist was an inveterate traveler and sightseer and that many of his landscapes were painted outside the Franche-Comté or even outside France. Furthermore, it has caused us to lose sight of the fact that many of the landscapes that Courbet painted in the Franche-Comté depict the region's well-known nineteenth-century tourist sites—sites that had become attractions both to local sightseers and to visitors from other regions of France or even from abroad.⁶

Courbet's youth coincided with the appearance of the *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* (Picturesque and Romantic Travels in Old France), a huge serial publishing project that was initiated in 1820, one year after the artist's birth, by Baron Isidore Taylor, with the help of the writer Charles Nodier.⁷ Taylor sought to produce albums with engaging texts and prints that described and depicted picturesque cultural and natural sites in the various regions of France. Published in installments, the *Voyages pittoresques* were exceedingly popular from the 1820s through the 1840s. Their subscribers, it seems, were mostly armchair travelers, who delighted in their virtual visits to sites that, at the time, were still difficult to access. Though the publication continued until 1878, the albums, ironically, lost some of their appeal as armchair travel gradually turned into real tourism, thanks to improvements in coach, train, and steamboat transportation.

Many of the regions that were the subjects of the initial *Voyages pittoresques* albums became popular among these early tourists. The very first album, devoted to Normandy, popularized the river cruise up the Seine, which took travelers from Paris to Le Havre, via the old city of Rouen. Subsequent albums devoted to the Franche-Comté (1825) and Auvergne (2 vols., 1829–33) led to increased tourist traffic to those distant and previously little-visited regions of France.

Courbet himself took his earliest pleasure trip to Normandy in 1841. Many of the drawings he made during that voyage show precisely the kind of scenery that abounds in the *Voyages pittoresques*—medieval buildings and monuments, picturesque streets, and dramatic landscape scenery. His drawing of the Fontaine de la Croix de Pierre in Rouen may serve as an example (fig. 1). The careful rendering of architectural and sculptural detail and the attempt at creating interesting chiaroscuro effects, especially inside the arches, correspond to the characteristic features of the lithographic plates found in the *Voyages pittoresques* of the 1840s, such as the illustration of the choir screen at the church in Folgoët, in the Brittany albums of 1845–46 (fig. 2). In 1842, Courbet traveled via Strasbourg and Baden-Baden to Switzerland, which had been a tourist destination since the eighteenth century. On this trip he drew not only many of the picturesque streets and buildings in Strasbourg, but also some of the great natural wonders of Switzerland beloved by nineteenth-century tourists, such as the Staubbach Falls in the Lauterbrunnen Valley (fig. 3). The Swiss sites had figured in British and French illustrated travel books that preceded Taylor and Nodier's publication, such as Gabriel Lory's *Pittoresque de l'Oberland Bernois*, published in Paris in 1822, and the anonymous *Picturesque Tour through the Oberland in the Canton of Berne, in Switzerland* (London, 1823), which was directly based on Lory's publication (fig. 4).





Figure 1
Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), *Fontaine de la Croix de Pierre in Rouen*, 1841. Drawing in sketchbook. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, RF 29334. Photo: Thierry Le Mage, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 2
The Choir Screen in the Church at Folgoët. Lithograph. Illustration from *Les Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor and Charles Nodier, vols. 4–5, *Bretagne* (1845–46).





Figure 3
Courbet, Gustave. *The Staubbach Falls*. Musée du Louvre, RF9105.
Photo: Madeleine Coursaget, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 4
The Staubbach Falls. Colored engraving. Reproduction from
*Picturesque Tour through the Oberland in the Canton of Berne, in
Switzerland* (London, 1823), pl. 10. Photo: Digital version made
available by David S. Miall at [http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/
Traveltexts/Oberland_p.htm](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/Traveltexts/Oberland_p.htm).



Figure 5
Gustave Courbet, *The Bridge of Ambrussum*, 1857. Oil on canvas,
47.5 x 63 cm (18 3/4 x 24 7/8 in.). Montpellier, Musée Fabre, 892.4.1.
Photo: Frederic Jaulmes, © Musée Fabre, Montpellier Agglomération.

Courbet's fascination with tourism lasted his entire life. The artist traveled throughout France as well as to Holland, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland. Though he no longer carried a sketchbook with him after the 1840s (at least as far as we know), he did paint pictures of well-loved tourist sites, knowing that they would appeal to middle-class viewers and buyers. As he went to visit the Montpellier collector Alfred Bruyas in 1857, for example, he painted the ruins of the Pont d'Ambroix, or the Bridge of Ambrussum (fig. 5), a popular nineteenth-century tourist attraction. Located near Lunel, between Montpellier and Nîmes, this ancient Roman bridge across the Vidourle River had once formed part of the famous Via Domitia, the first highway built in Gallia (Gaul), which dated from the beginning of the second century A.D. Originally the bridge had eleven arches, nine of which were destroyed in a series of floods of the Vidourle; in Courbet's time, only two were left.⁸ Courbet's *The Meeting* ("Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet") of 1854 (Musée Fabre) may well represent him on his way to, or returning from, Lunel, carrying on his back the type of portable equipment that had been developed for the purpose of sketching landscapes and cultural sites in situ.



Figure 6
Gustave Courbet, *Bayard Rock, Dinant (Belgium)*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 55 x 45.8 cm (21 3/4 x 18 in.). Cambridge, England, Fitzwilliam Museum, 2386. Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

In Belgium, in 1858, Courbet painted the famous Bayard Rock (Roche Bayard) in Dinant (fig. 6). En route from Brussels to Frankfurt, where he spent the winter of 1858–59, he must have stopped in Dinant, a town popular among tourists. It had both a railroad station and a dock for river steamboats, which ran cruises on the Meuse River along dramatic rock formations such as the Freyr Rock, which Courbet painted as well, though probably on a different occasion.⁹ The Bayard Rock was a particularly well-known attraction of Dinant: not only was it spectacular, but it also had both legendary and historical associations.

Here the famous Bayard horse was said to have taken a giant leap across the Meuse, carrying the four sons of Aymon to safety from the pursuit of Charlemagne. The horse pushed off with such force that the rock split in two. The reality was considerably more prosaic: the rock had been divided by an explosion set off by Louis XIV's army in order to create an exit route for the troops after they had taken the city of Dinant in 1675.¹⁰



As the identities of the first owners of *Bayard Rock* and *The Meuse River at Freyr* are unknown, it is impossible to determine whether, indeed, they bought these paintings because they had visited the sites and were eager to possess the works as souvenirs of their trips. By contrast, it is almost certain that many of the paintings of well-known Swiss sites that Courbet executed in the 1870s were made for the tourist market. His numerous views of the Château de Chillon, some doubtlessly authentic (fig. 7), others possibly painted by or with the help of assistants, echo the countless prints, book illustrations (fig. 8), and postcards that were produced throughout the nineteenth century for those who came to see the site of Lord Byron's famous novel, *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1819).¹¹ Courbet also painted other tourist attractions



Figure 7
Gustave Courbet, *Château de Chillon*, 1874. Oil on canvas,
86 x 100 cm (33 7/8 x 39 3/8 in.). Ornans, Musée Gustave Courbet.
Photo: Erich Lessing, Art Resource, New York.



Figure 8
The Château de Chillon. Steel engraving. Illustration from vol. 2 of
William Beatty, *Switzerland Illustrated in a Series of Views Taken
Expressly for This Work by W. H. Bartlett, Esq.* (London, 1836).





Figure 9
Gustave Courbet, *Grotto of the Giants (Grotte des Géants)* near Saillon, Switzerland, 1873. Oil on canvas, 87 x 93 cm (34 1/4 x 36 3/4 in.). Amiens, Musée de Picardie.

in Switzerland, such as Lake Geneva, Mont Blanc, and the Grotte des Géants (Grotto of the Giants), near Saillon (fig. 9), which, though neglected by travelers today, was much visited in Courbet's time by tourists intrigued by the anthropomorphic shape of the rock. The herbalist F.-O. Wolf, who met Courbet in Saillon in 1873, described the rock as follows:

The Salence flows here through a deep gorge, which certainly merits a visit, especially now that its access is facilitated by a new road with suspended walkways and bridges. While this gorge, formed by the incessant labor of the water, cannot rival those of Trient and Durnand, it does nevertheless present some quite interesting particularities, if only the grotesque head of a giant, a unique spectacle in its genre.¹²

Courbet's painting corresponds in detail to Wolf's description, showing not only the grotesque head, washed by numerous rivulets of water, but also the new walkways and bridges that offered access to the rock. In this painting, exceptionally, Courbet has even added some tourists, including a lady with a parasol and a hiker who, standing proudly on the giant's head, reminds us vaguely of Courbet's own self-image as a tourist in the Montpellier region.

While it seems obvious that Courbet's Swiss paintings were geared to the tourist market, many of his Franche-Comté landscapes also may have been intended for a public of sightseers interested in the region, which, like Normandy, had been among the first to be featured in the *Voyages pittoresques* (1825). Take,





Figure 10

Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Loue River*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 84 x 106.5 cm (33 1/8 x 42 in.). Zurich, Kunsthhaus. Photo: © 2007 Kunsthhaus Zurich. All rights reserved.

for example, *The Source of the Loue River* (fig. 10), one of Courbet's many paintings of cave entrances and "sources"—a term that in the Franche-Comté refers not only to the origin of a stream or river, but also to the place where a river that has gone underground reemerges. Standing in front of this painting, twenty-first-century viewers are easily drawn to the work's surface aspects—the black, smoothly painted center and the lighter periphery, sculpted in broad touches of white, black, brown, and gray with the palette knife. It is tempting, today, to think of a painting like this in terms of twentieth-century non-objective painting, as Eyerman has shown.¹³ But in so doing, it is all too easy to forget that the source of the Loue was a major tourist attraction in Courbet's time (and still is in our own), as were other cave openings, such as the source of the Lison River and the Sarrazine Grotto, both of which were painted by Courbet. In a drawing in one of his sketchbooks, dating from the early 1840s (fig. 11), we see a group of hikers, both male and female, resting on the rocks inside a cave—a clear indication of the popularity of these geological wonders in the artist's own time.



Figure 11

Gustave Courbet, *Group of Tourists Seated at the Entrance to a Cave*, early 1840s. Drawing in sketchbook. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, RF 9105, fol. 24 verso. Photo: RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Indeed, the caves and sources of the Franche-Comté were the foremost tourist attractions of the region and had been a magnet for travelers since the eighteenth century. One of the most famous among them was the Osselle (or Esselles) Cave. Known as early as the thirteenth century and regularly visited since the sixteenth, this cave had become especially famous after its exploration by Georges Cuvier in the early 1820s, and after the discovery by William Buckland, in 1826, of the complete skeleton of a cave bear, which was exhibited in the British Museum.¹⁴ Sometime before or in 1825, Baron Taylor visited the cave to make a series of drawings that would be lithographed for the Franche-Comté volume of the *Voyages pittoresques* (fig. 12).¹⁵



Figure 12

Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor (French, 1789–1879). *Osselle Cave (Grottes d'Esselles)*, 1829. Pencil drawing with brown ink wash on beige paper. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. Lithographed for *Les Voyages pittoresques*, vol. 3, *Franche-Comté* (1825).



Figure 13

Gustave Courbet, *Dame Verte*. Drawing in sketchbook. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, RF29234, 17. Photo: Thierry Le Mage, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Nineteenth-century visitors were attracted to the caves and sources in the Franche-Comté not merely as geological wonders but also for the legends that had attached themselves to these locations, as with the Bayard Rock. One such legend concerned the Dame Verte, or Green Lady, a beautiful fairy who wandered around the mountains and the fields in the summer but retired to the caves in the winter.¹⁶ An early drawing of a cave by Courbet has the words “Dame Verte” written on the side (fig. 13). Another tale was that of the Source Bleue, the place where the Cusancin brook emerges from the rocks, which was painted by Courbet in 1872 (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum). This source, according to legend, owed its blue color to the tears of Berthe, the unfaithful wife of Crusader Amaury de Joux. Locked up in prison for her affair, she could see through a small window the gallows from which her lover was hanged.¹⁷

Though geological sites were the major tourist attractions of the Franche-Comté, they were not the only ones. The region had a rich history that went back to Gallo-Roman times, and it boasted a number of important historic buildings and sites. Here, in the first century BC, the Gallic tribe of the Sequani had joined the Arverni, under Vercingetorix, in their revolt against the Romans. There was a huge debate, in the middle of the nineteenth century, as to whether the ancient town of Alesia, where Julius Cesar had defeated Vercingetorix, had become the village of Alaise, in the Franche-Comté, or Alise-la-Reine, a village in the Côte d’Or region. Much has been written, in this context, about Courbet’s *Oak at Flagey* (fig. 14), a painting of a giant oak tree that local imagination must have associated with the ancient druids,



Figure 14

Gustave Courbet, *The Oak at Flagey, or The Oak of Vercingetorix*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 89 x 110 cm (35 1/8 x 43 3/8 in.). Tokyo, Murauchi Art Museum.

the priest class of the Gauls.¹⁸ The painting’s subtitle—*Oak of Vercingetorix, Caesar’s Camp near Alesia, Franche-Comté*—moreover suggests that the tree had a place in the famous debate about the modern-day location of Alesia.¹⁹ Ancient trees were favorite tourist destinations in the nineteenth century, when they were admired both as biological marvels and for their historic associations. Courbet himself, in the early





Figure 15

Gustave Courbet, *Hikers Resting under Trees*, early 1840s. Drawing in sketchbook. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, RF 9105. Photo: Thierry Le Mage, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

sketchbook mentioned above, had drawn just such an old tree (fig. 15), a destination of Sunday hikers who contemplated the venerable old oak as their kids climbed its branches. It is tempting to see, in the figures on the left, two young artists who are sketching the tree.



Figure 16

Gustave Courbet, *Fort de Joux* (detail), 1864. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm (28 3/4 x 23 5/8 in.). Current whereabouts unknown. Photo: Author.

The *Fort de Joux* (fig. 16) represents another type of cultural tourist attraction. The fort, which dominates the Doubs Valley, dates back to the Middle Ages but became particularly notorious in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it served as a state prison. The comte de Mirabeau had been locked up



here in 1775; in the early nineteenth century, Napoleon had sent François-Dominique Toussaint-Louverture, the leader of the Haitian independence movement, to the Fort de Joux, where he died from tuberculosis contracted in his cold and airless cell.²⁰

The examples discussed above seem to demonstrate that the subjects of Courbet's landscapes were important to the artist and to his public. Many of the sites he chose to paint were well-known tourist attractions that were described in guidebooks, as well as depicted in prints and photographs and, by the end of the century, even on postcards. Does that mean that Courbet was merely a belated imitator of the Romantic tradition of the *Voyages pittoresques*? I would argue that he developed a new kind of tourist-site picture that was deliberately different from the picturesque imagery that he had admired in his youth. The prints in the *Voyages pittoresques*, and the paintings and watercolors related to them, had been geared to armchair travelers, who loved amazing detail and amusing staffage. Courbet's own work, I venture, was destined for a public that had actually traveled to the places he painted and had experienced the sites themselves, with all five senses. In other words, Courbet intended to produce paintings that evoked that physical encounter.



Figure 17

Barend Cornelis Koekkoek (Dutch, 1803–1862), *La Roche à Bayard*, 1835. River landscape of the Maas with La Roche à Bayard (close to Dinant). Pencil, pen and brown ink, brush and watercolor on paper, 24.2 x 32.9 cm (9 1/2 x 13 in.). Teylers Museum, Haarlem, AA 51.

Let's look once more at *Bayard Rock* (see fig. 6). In an earlier publication, I have compared this picture with a drawing by the Dutch Romantic artist Barend Cornelis Koekkoek (fig. 17).²¹ At that time, I pointed to the difference between Courbet's scientific approach to the subject and Koekkoek's allegorical vision. Today, I want to concentrate on the representational differences between the two works. In the drawing, the huge size of the rock is emphasized by the tiny figures at its bottom, reminding us that there is often something of the sublime in the picturesque. In the drawing of the rock itself, there is an excessive emphasis on the irregular contour and on the strong contrast between light and shade that is created by the clearly articulated facets of the rock. Those features, combined with the low viewpoint and the



medium of the work, make Koekkoek's image a textbook example of the picturesque tradition. Courbet's painting represents the antithesis to this tradition. His contours roughly block out the rock, which seems almost streamlined in comparison to Koekkoek's drawing. Gone is the faceted surface of the rock, with its strong contrasts between light and dark. Instead, it appears as a dark monolith silhouetted against the sky. Rather than presenting an intensified, visual experience of the rock by overemphasizing irregularity of contour and variation of texture and of light and shade, Courbet seems to have wanted to suggest something about its tactility by simulating its roughness with the bumpy paint surface, heavily laid on with both brush and palette knife. His view of the rock would have appealed to the travelers who had visited the place in person—who had walked through the narrow path between the cliffs, perhaps touching its sides with their hands. It is interesting to note how much more closely Courbet's painting resembles turn-of-the-century postcards, such as the one reproduced below (fig. 18), than it does Koekkoek's drawing, in spite of the fact that there is a greater time lag between them. The postcard not only shows a very similar viewpoint but—through its photographic process (perhaps albumen)—also offers a strong sense of kinetic tactility.

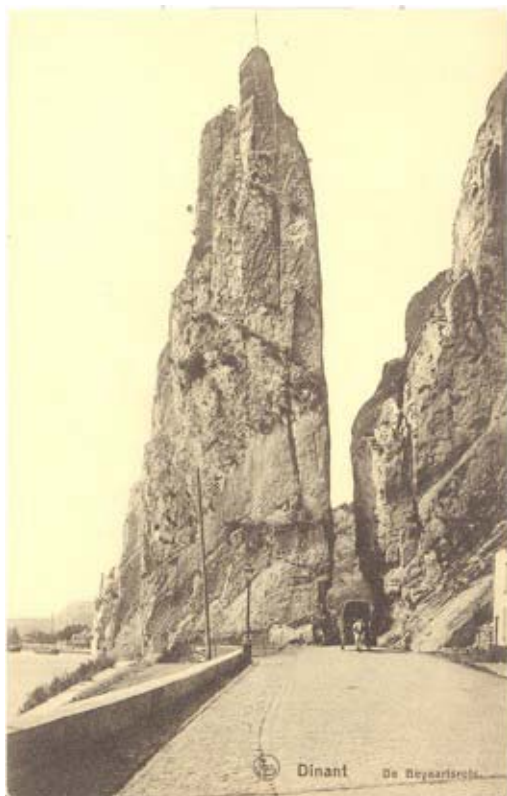


Figure 18
Bayard Rock, Dinant. Postcard, late nineteenth century[?].
Source: Author.

Courbet's paintings, then, represent a new way of looking at landscape that is quite different from the Romantic picturesque tradition of his youth. Instead of engaging with the landscape in a purely visual manner, Courbet tries to convey in his painting something of the total sensual reality of the landscape. This includes, most importantly, engaging the viewer's tactile sense; on occasion, his paintings may even



invoke a sense of smell or sound. Courbet's seascapes, such as the one reproduced below (fig. 19), may serve as an example of the latter. Unlike his Franche-Comté landscapes, they are thinly brushed and convey a sense of lightness and freshness, which not only suggests the feeling of a soft sea breeze but, to the particularly sensitive observer, perhaps even hints of the smell of the sea. By the same token, his wave paintings (e.g., fig. 20), with their close-up viewpoints and agitated brushwork, suggest the roar of the surf.



Figure 19
Gustave Courbet, *L'Immensité*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 60 x 82.2 cm (23 5/8 x 32 3/8 in.). London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: Art Resource, New York.



Figure 20
Gustave Courbet, *The Wave*, ca. 1871. Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm (18 1/8 x 21 3/4 in.). Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, NG 2233.



The mature Courbet's anti-picturesque attitude was well-known in his time. In an 1860 essay, Jules Champfleury wrote that Courbet was "the artist who tackles the thing itself, and removes every element of a false picturesque."²² Indeed, by the 1850s Courbet had turned away completely from the picturesque leanings of his youth, disliking all its trappings of carefully selected sites (ruins and rustic cottages) and viewpoints. Talking to the painter Chérubino Pata at the end of his life, Courbet recalled an episode that took place in Normandy, probably in the 1860s. Walking along the sea in the evening with the poet Charles Baudelaire, Courbet was taken by the latter to an opening between two rocks through which there was a dramatic view of the sea. Courbet commented to Pata, "Was he ever bourgeois! What are viewpoints? Do viewpoints exist?"²³

Courbet's landscape paintings were unique in the nineteenth century, and their distinctiveness was related to the way in which Courbet engaged with the picturesque tradition. While other landscape painters of his time, most notably the artists of the Barbizon school, turned their back on picturesque subject matter—preferring instead the simple country and woodland scenes that could be found in the environs of Paris—Courbet continued to be interested in many of the subjects that had been popularized by the *Voyages pittoresques* and similar Romantic travel publications. By treating them in a new way, however, downplaying their visual aspects and emphasizing their tactility, he gave the viewer a more comprehensive sensual appreciation of the subject's physical qualities. This aspect of Courbet's landscapes, as I have suggested in this article, may have appealed in particular to the well-to-do middle class tourists who visited the sites depicted in his works.

¹ Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman, eds., *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), p. 21.

² For Greenberg's view of Courbet, see Charlotte Eyerman, "Courbet's Legacy in the Twentieth Century," *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 1), pp. 21–22.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–34.

⁴ Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre* (Paris, 1906), p. 22.

⁵ "Où qu'il allât, il en emportait l'image avec lui ... Courbet ne comprenait pas qu'un peintre allât chercher des motifs à l'étranger. Un jour qu'un jeune homme lui apportait à juger une vue d'Orient: 'Vous n'avez donc pas de pays,' dit il, 'que vous soyez obligé d'emprunter le pays des autres pour le peindre?'" (Unless otherwise indicated, translations by author.) Cited in Pierre Courthion, *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1948–50), vol. 1, pp. 170–71.

⁶ Due to its relative proximity to Switzerland and Germany, one would expect tourists from those countries to visit the Franche-Comté, and they did. But apparently, the region was popular among British travelers as well. Xavier Marmier writes about "ces fades Anglais qui [y] courent en chaise de poste, un lorgnon d'une main, un carnet de l'autre" (those insipid Englishmen, who travel [there] by post coach, a lorgnette in one hand and a notebook in the other). See *Souvenirs de voyages et traditions populaires* (Paris, 1841), p. 67.

⁷ Following, in alphabetical order, are the volumes of the *Voyages pittoresques*: *Ancienne Normandie*, 3 vols.: 1820, 1825, 1878; *Auvergne*, 2 vols.: 1829–33; *Bourgogne*, 2 vols. (one text, one plates): 1863; *Bretagne*, 2 vols.: 1845–46; *Champagne*: 4 vols. (one text, three plates): 1857; *Dauphiné*, 2 vols. (one text, one plates): 1854; *Franche-Comté*, 1 vol.: 1825; *Languedoc*, 4 vols.: 1833–37; *Picardie*, 3 vols.: 1835–45.



⁸ One of these was washed away by another flood in 1930, so that today only a single arch is left.

⁹ The painting, *La Meuse à Freyr* (*The Meuse River at Freyr*, ca. 1856) is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, France.

¹⁰ See “Wandelingen door België,” *De Aarde en haar Volken* 22 (1886), cited in Project Gutenberg, EText 17082 (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/17082>), p. 315.

¹¹ Sorting out which views of Chillon Castle are authentic is a difficult task. Robert Fernier, in his catalogue raisonné of Courbet’s paintings, *La Vie et l’oeuvre de Gustave Courbet*, 2 vols. (Geneva and Lausanne, 1977–78), lists twenty-one views, but the attribution of several of these is currently in doubt.

¹² “La Salence coule ici dans une profonde gorge qui mérite certainement une visite, surtout maintenant que l’abord en est facilité par un nouveau chemin avec galeries et ponts. Cette gorge creusée par le travail incessant des eaux ne peut, il est vrai, rivaliser avec celles du Trient et du Durnand, mais elle présente cependant bien des particularités intéressantes, ne fût-ce que la grotesque tête de géant qui forme un spectacle unique en son genre.” F.-O. Wolf, “Les Environs de Saillon et ses carrières de marbre,” *Bulletin des travaux de la Société muritienne du Valais* (1879). Cited in Lisbeth Koutchoumoff, “Tableau de Courbet: Mystère levé à Saillon,” *Le Temps* (Lausanne), July 19, 2002. I thank Dario Gamboni for drawing my attention to this newspaper article.

¹³ Eyerman 2006 (see note 2). Klaus Herding and Dominique de Font-Réaulx make similar points in their papers in this volume.

¹⁴ See <http://grottes.osselle.free.fr> (accessed December 30, 2006).

¹⁵ Two of these drawings, including the one reproduced in figure 12, are in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. (On-line reproductions, with captions, at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b77431889.notice> and <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b77431889.notice>.) Both drawings bear inscriptions that date them in 1829. However, the inscriptions appear to have been added later, perhaps by someone unfamiliar with the date of Taylor’s visit. The inscriptions also ascribe the two drawings to different authors—one to Taylor, the other to Charlet. There appears to be little doubt, however, that both drawings were executed by the same artist, most likely Taylor.

¹⁶ See Marmier 1841 (see note 6), pp. 76–78.

¹⁷ This story, in one form or another, is found in almost every tour guide of the region.

¹⁸ See, among others, Linda Nochlin, “Le chêne de Flagey de Courbet: Un motif de paysage et sa signification,” *Quarante-huit/Quatorze (Conférences du Musée d’Orsay)* 1 (1989): pp. 15–25, and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, “It Took Millions of Years to Compose That Picture,” in *Courbet Reconsidered*, exh. cat., ed. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin (New York, The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), pp. 58 and 230, notes 18 and 23.

¹⁹ On this debate, see J. Bruley, *L’Identification de la ‘vraie’ Alésia* (Paris, n.d.).

²⁰ On Toussaint-Louverture, see the Web site <http://thelouvertureproject.org>, which has full information and several online sources.

²¹ Chu 1988 (see note 18), pp. 61–63.

²² “L’artiste qui s’attaque à la chose en elle-même, écarte tout élément d’un faux pittoresque.” Champfleury, *Grandes figures d’hier et d’aujourd’hui* (Paris, 1861), cited in Geneviève and Jean Lacambre, eds., *Champfleury, Le Réalisme* (Paris, 1973), p. 186.

²³ “Etait-il assez bourgeois, hein! Qu’est-ce que c’est que des points de vue? Est-ce qu’il existe des points de vue?” Courthion 1948–50 (see note 5), vol. 1, pp. 159–60.



Parallel Lines: Gustave Courbet's "Paysages de Mer" and Gustave Le Gray's Seascapes, 1856–70

Dominique de Font-Réaulx

The links between the seascapes of Gustave Le Gray and Gustave Courbet's marine paintings, or *paysages de mer*, were first underlined by Aaron Scharf in 1968. In his still unequaled *Art and Photography*, he juxtaposed a Le Gray photograph (*Méditerranée, Cette, grande lame*, 1857, fig. 1) and a Courbet painting (*Marine, Moon Effect*, 1869, ancient coll. Fischer), stressing the aesthetic similarities between the two pictures. The photographer and the painter both chose to reproduce empty seas with large, cloudy skies—subjects that were quite new when the works were created. The compositions are also comparable, for both images are cut in two by a firmly drawn horizon line (see figs. 1 and 2 [a similar Courbet seascape]).

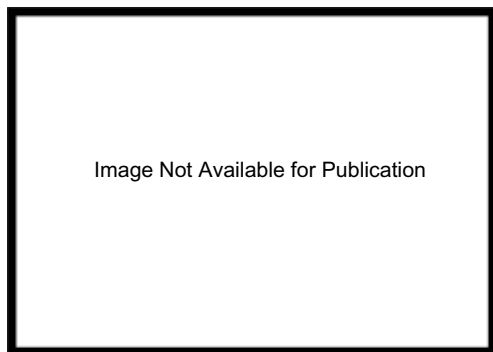


Figure 1

Gustave Le Gray (French, 1820–1884), *Méditerranée, Cette, grande lame*, 1857. Albumen print. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Département des Estampes et de la photographie.



Figure 2

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), *L'immensité*, 1869. Oil on



canvas, 60 x 82.2 cm (23 5/8 x 32 3/8 in.). London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: Art Resource, New York.

The artists' styles clearly differ, however; indeed, the thick matter of Courbet's paintings could hardly be farther away from Le Gray's photographs, with their flat surfaces and clear, precise images. Nonetheless, comparisons between their works have now been drawn by many Le Gray and Courbet scholars.

As far as we know, the two men never met. They could have, as both of them were around Sète and Montpellier in the spring of 1857. Courbet was visiting his patron Alfred Bruyas for the second and last time; Le Gray had been sent there by the South Railway Company to document the Toulouse-Sète railway opening.



Figure 3
Gustave Courbet, *Seacoast at Palavas*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 27 x 46 cm (10 5/8 x 18 1/8). Montpellier, Musée Fabre. Photo: Christian Jean, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.

As a man from rocks and cliffs, Courbet wasn't familiar with the sea; he painted it for the first time in 1854, when he first visited Bruyas (fig. 3). His early seascapes related to Romanticism. In the Montpellier picture a tiny man, seen from the back, waves to a massive, calm sea. The painting has something of the bravado spirit of *The Meeting* ("*Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*") (1854, Musée Fabre), in which Courbet meets Bruyas on the road; there the patron appears to defer to the artist, while here the Mediterranean itself seems to greet the fierce young man. Although he painted more seascapes in 1857, one has to wait until 1865—and his many stays on the Normandy coast—to see *paysages de mer* becoming one of Courbet's favorite themes.





Figure 4
Gustave Le Gray, *Le Brick*, 1856. Albumen print from a glass negative,
34 x 42 cm (13 3/8 x 16 1/2 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay, PHO1985-334.
Photo: B. Hatala, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

Gustave Le Gray had already created marine photographs in Normandy in 1856 (fig. 4). He showed them in December of that year in London, where they were highly praised. Courbet certainly saw Le Gray's seascapes when they were shown in France in 1857. They aroused great interest among amateurs, as *La Revue photographique* reported: "This time, Le Gray has gone beyond the limits of what could be achieved. We are not surprised at all that these mighty pictures [the French author wrote "tableaux"] have met with such great success that their author already received more than 50,000 francs from considerable orders."¹

Courbet quite often showed an interest in photography. He was one of the very first artists to order photographic reproductions of his paintings; as early as 1853, he tried to get reproductions of his two Salon pictures, *The Bathers* (Musée Fabre) and *The Wrestlers* (Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts). He collected photographs both for his work and for his pleasure—he claimed "hundreds of lost photographs" after his Ornans studio was damaged by Prussian soldiers in 1870. All his life Courbet was a close friend to many photographers; Etienne Carjat (1828–1906) and Félix Nadar (1820–1910) were among them (although his relationship with the latter was always fraught).

Unlike some academic painters, Courbet did not imitate or copy photographs. His use of photography, if I dare say so, was more interpretive. He shared the photographer's interest in the representation of reality, in the issue of Realism—which was never explored more than it was in landscape painting and photography.²



Links between Courbet's and Le Gray's works were never drawn in their time. Indeed, almost ten years separated Le Gray's early exhibitions—from 1856 to 1858—and Courbet's first show of his *paysages de mer* in 1865, which met with similar success. Le Gray was no longer in Paris at that time. He had left for, or escaped to, Cairo (he left Paris for reasons that are unclear, but gave up both his family and his business). Although conservative critics always conflated Courbet's paintings and photography in the same negative assessment, blaming both for their closeness to a “dirty and sad” reality, they never addressed a precise connection between works. As a result, Courbet's contemporary supporters—such as the critics Jules Champfleury and Jules Castagnary—always avoided any comparisons between his paintings and photography.

Both men were well known among Parisian artistic circles in 1855. Thanks to that year's impressive Pavilion of Realism, Courbet was considered one of the most important painters of his time; Le Gray, one of the founders of the Société héliographique in 1851 and of the Société française de photographie in 1854, was seen as one of the most gifted French photographers. That said, they belonged to quite different worlds. Courbet sympathized with the republican cause (and was involved in the Paris Commune years later), while Le Gray was quite close to the imperial family (in his boulevard des Capucines studio, he taught well-off apprentices such as Olympe Aguado, a Spanish banker's son who had almost been engaged to Eugénie de Montijo, who married Napoleon III).

Courbet shared with Le Gray a clear awareness of pictorial tradition. Le Gray had been trained as a painter in the studio of Paul Delaroche (1797–1856), where he met Jean-Léon Gérôme (who remained one of his closest friends, at least until 1855). Departing from the classical marines and the Romantic waves they knew well, Le Gray and Courbet designed a new subject. Writing on the painter's seascapes, Hélène Toussaint pointed this out in 1977: “His pictures introduced an actual innovation; they belong, within the history of painting, to the future rather than to the past.”³ In 1882, Castagnary wrote, “Before [Courbet], marine painters dealt with ships and vessels; they did not deal with sea, with sky strokes.”⁴ Such statements could apply to Le Gray's photographs as well. For example, it is interesting to compare Joseph Vernet's *Port de Sète*, painted in 1756–57 (fig. 5), and Le Gray's *Broken Wave*, realized exactly one



Figure 5
Joseph Vernet (French, 1714–1789), *Port de Sète*, 1756–57. Oil on canvas, 165 x 263 cm (64 7/8 in. x 8 ft. 7 1/2 in.). Paris, Musée de la Marine. Photo: Christian Jean, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



century later at the same place. Vernet's picture stresses the size and quality of military facilities, as well as the battle fleet's power. Le Gray's photograph focuses on an empty sky and the wave breaking on the embankment. Although Le Gray created his image through the photographic reproduction of reality, his Sète landscape seems more like a dream than a literal copy.

Ernest Lacan, assessing Le Gray's photographs at the second Société française de photographie show, in 1857, stated: "What's clearly new at the Exhibition, what makes it so different from all the others before, are the astonishing Le Gray seascapes, where ships with no sail keep on sailing, where a surging sea, floating clouds, and the sun itself with its glorious rays are reproduced."⁵ He added, "Mister Le Gray's marines are beyond comparison; they are completely unlike anything done before."⁶

Reproducing the sea and its endless movement was one of the first photographic goals. The length of exposure times as well as the difficulties of conveying light and tones prevented most photographers from succeeding. Louis-Cyrus Macaire and Jean-Victor Macaire-Warnod produced the first photograph of waves, in 1851 in Le Havre (fig. 6); they were supported and promoted by the marine painter Théodore Gudin. The French government then commissioned them to create thirty daguerreotypes in 1853 with "rough sea, skies, sailing vessels."⁷ In these works, the photographers achieved a technical success as well as an aesthetic one, as both sea waves and soft clouds—which move at different speeds and thus require exposures of different lengths—appear on the plate. The reproduction of waves continued to be a technical challenge for photographers until the end of the nineteenth century. As Andre Gunthert noted, the goal of capturing their movement remained elusive because the fixed image could succeed only in reproducing a single moment.

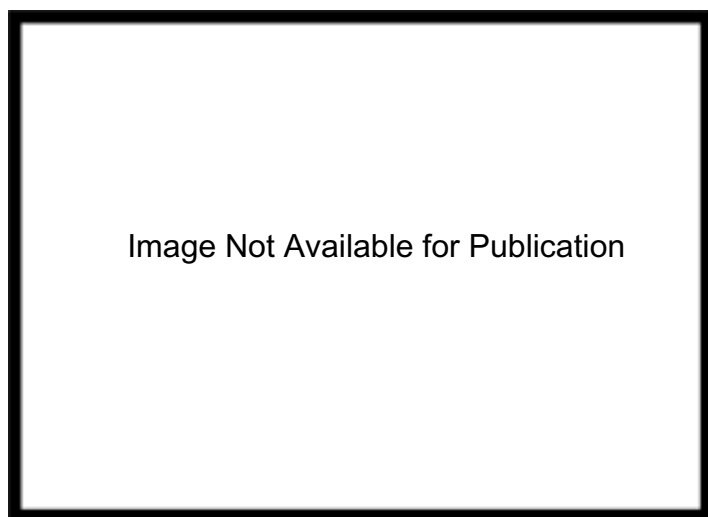


Figure 6

Louis-Cyrus Macaire (French, 1807–1871) and Jean-Victor Macaire-Warnod (French, 1812–ca. 1886), *Ship Leaving the Harbor of Le Havre*, 1851. Daguerreotype, 15 x 11 cm (5 7/8 x 4 3/8 in.). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Département des Estampes et de la photographie.



In the scale and stillness of their images, and in the care given to their compositions, Le Gray and Courbet express a sense of the sublime that recalls the works of such artists as the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). However, they broke with the fury and the outburst of the sea as it was described by Romantic painters. Unlike Paul Huet or Victor Hugo (figs. 7 and 8), whom Courbet deeply admired—he wrote to Hugo in 1864, “I shall myself go and see the spectacle of your sea”⁸—they didn’t intend to interpret our battle with the sea, the struggle against nature. Their images describe a postbattle state, with no winner—the human and the sea are face to face and equal.



Figure 7

Paul Huet (French, 1804–1869), *Breakers at Granville Point*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 68 x 103 cm (26 3/4 x 40 1/2 in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: R. G. Ojeda, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 8

Victor Hugo (French, 1802–1885), *The Vision-Ship*, drawing for *Les Travailleurs de la Mer (The Toilers of the Sea)*, 1865–66. Pen and ink wash on vellum, 17.5 x 21.5 cm (6 7/8 x 8 1/2 in.). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale.



Both Courbet and Le Gray went beyond the picturesque. They did not show a particular place that was easy to recognize and name, for the place itself was not as important as the pictorial or photographic effects made by sea and sky. Both artists used artifice to produce these effects, freeing themselves from the mere reproduction of reality. Le Gray used two negatives for his marine prints, one for the sea, the other for the sky, in order to reach the right exposure times for the moving sea and the cloudy sky. He might sometimes have used a Normandy sky negative and a Mediterranean sea negative. In doing so, he designed an unreal place that nonetheless appears as Realist as could be (fig. 9). His images were seen as not only true to reality but also as the most accurate sea representation possible. As a critic wrote in 1857, Le Gray reversed the scientific laws: “It is a difficult matter to condemn as utterly untrue pictures to which universal praise is given for truthfulness: but still the laws of nature, as interpreted by science, are unerring.”⁹



Figure 9

Gustave Le Gray, *Ciel chargé, Méditerranée*, 1857. Albumen print from two separate glass negatives, 39.4 x 39.8 cm (15 1/2 x 15 5/8 in.). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Département des Estampes et de la photographie.

In Courbet’s seascapes, no clue is given as to the beach or the harbor he painted. When he created his first Normandy paysage de mer in Trouville, he didn’t show anything of the social life there. As the critic Georges Riat wrote, “Most of the time, Courbet’s marines are empty. . . . Courbet is not among those painters [“marinistes” in the original] who try to reproduce . . . the social life scenes, as did his friend Boudin [Eugène Boudin (1824–1898)].”¹⁰ When he painted his Wave series in 1869, he broke with a realistic representation of the sea, showing a rough yet still body of water. A frontal point of view gives it solid features, with an almost telluric density that comes close to the Ornans cliffs the painter was familiar with, as pointed out by Klaus Herding. Such a representation could have been inspired by photographs. Thanks to photographic prints, a sea as strong as his Franche-Comté cliffs—a very unrealistic sea, of course—could have been revealed to him (figs. 10 and 11).





Figure 10

Gustave Courbet, *The Wave*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 112 x 144 cm (43 11/16 x 56 3/16 in.). Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Photo: Jörg P. Anders, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 11

Gustave Courbet, *Source of the Loue*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 98 x 130.5 cm (38 5/8 x 51 3/8 in.). Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle. Photo: Elke Walford, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.



Font-Réaulx Parallel Lines: Courbet's "Paysages de Mer" and Le Gray's Seascapes, 1856–70

Papers from the Symposium *Looking at the Landscapes: Courbet and Modernism*
Held at the J. Paul Getty Museum on March 18, 2006

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If no precise place could be recognized in either artist's seascapes, the time of the day also could not be assessed without difficulty. The "moonlight effect" of some Le Gray photographs was drawn not from the chiaroscuro of night but from the bright light of a noon sun; it's interesting to note that when Aaron Scharf compared two works by Le Gray and Courbet, he did so using a moonlit marine by Courbet and a daytime Le Gray photograph.

The commercial success of their marines often aroused suspicion among art historians; some still see them as works made merely to attract more customers. Indeed, they gave their authors the chance to appeal to a new audience. But they were not mere commercial products. Le Gray showed his seaside photographs at all major photographic exhibitions in Great Britain and in France from the end of 1856 to 1859. Courbet showed more than ten Trouville marines at his 1867 solo Alma exhibition. In 1870, he sent to the Salon *The Stormy Sea* and *The Cliffs at Étretat* (both Musée d'Orsay), thus demonstrating how important they were for him.



Figure 12

Gustave Courbet, *Low Tide at Trouville*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 59.6 x 72.6 cm (23 1/2 x 28 5/8 in.). Liverpool, The Walker Art Gallery, WAG 6111. Photo © Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, United Kingdom, www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk.

The critic Théophile Thoré praised Courbet's paintings when they were exhibited by Alfred Cadart in 1865–66 (fig. 12): "He is fascinated by sea, he forgets Paris and Ornans. Morning after morning sea and sky are never the same. He makes every morning a study of what he sees, 'des paysages de mer,' as he says. He brought back almost forty of them, all of outstanding importance and of greatest quality."¹¹ A few years later, after Courbet's lonely death, Castagnary wrote in his foreword to the 1882 *École des Beaux-Arts* Courbet exhibition catalogue, "The sea gave him many triumphs. . . . His knife plays with astonishing skill in the clouds, the raining showers, the sun rays, all the changes of atmosphere."¹²



Henri Delaborde, usually a fierce Courbet opponent, wrote quite mildly in his 1870 Salon review, “We haven’t said anything . . . of Mr. Courbet’s marines. . . . Nevertheless, these works and several others could not be confused with the works that should be hushed up.”¹³ Under Delaborde’s pen it sounds almost like a compliment.

The admiration for Courbet’s seascapes, and for Le Gray’s, continues today. Several exhibitions in the past five years have reflected the interest their works inspire among art historians: *Manet and the Sea* (Philadelphia, Chicago, Amsterdam); *Autour des vagues de Gustave Courbet* (Le Havre); *Correspondence between Pierre Soulages and Gustave Le Gray* (Paris).

The poetic words of Riat still sound: “The loneliness of the ‘paysages de mer’ gives them a feeling of terror and of quietness, achieved through very simple means.”¹⁴ As Castagnary wrote, Courbet’s *paysages de mer* show “an eye of tremendous depth,”¹⁵ as do Le Gray’s marines. Both artists invented a new subject, in which careful observation of reality is made transcendent by great skill and vast knowledge of pictorial tradition. They composed convincing images of unreal landscapes, through Le Gray’s mastery of light and Courbet’s strong brushstrokes.

¹ “Cette fois-ci, les limites du possible ont été atteintes et nous ne sommes nullement surpris que ces tableaux enchantés fassent fureur, à ce point que leur bienheureux auteur aurait déjà reçu pour plus de 50 000 francs de commandes importantes.” Ernest Lacan, “Exposition de la société française, bd des Capucines, n°35,” *La Revue photographique* 16 (February 5, 1857): p. 213. (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.)

² See Dominique de Font-Réaulx, “Reproducing Reality,” in Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman, eds., *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), pp. 37–53.

³ “Ces toiles constituent une innovation et appartiennent, dans l’histoire de la peinture française, plus à l’avenir qu’au passé.” Hélène Toussaint, *Gustave Courbet, 1819–1877*, exh. cat. (Paris, Grand Palais, 1977), p. 178.

⁴ “Avant lui, les peintres de marines s’occupaient surtout des vaisseaux; ils ne s’occupaient pas de la mer, des touches du ciel.” Jules-Antoine Castagnary, introduction to *Catalogue de l’Exposition Courbet à l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1882; rev. ed., 2000, ed. Bertrand Tillier), p. 47.

⁵ “Les grandes nouveautés de l’Exposition, ce qui la distingue de toutes les expositions précédentes, ce sont au premier rang les étonnantes marines de M. Le Gray, où des navires sans voiles et en marche, une mer houleuse, des nuages flottant dans l’air, le soleil lui-même avec ses longs rayons de gloire.” Lacan 1857 (see note 1).

⁶ “Prix hors ligne à M. Le Gray pour ses marines, qui ne ressemblent à rien de ce qui a été fait jusqu’ici.” Lacan 1857 (see note 1), p. 214.

⁷ “Mer agitée, de ciels, de navires en marche.” Paris, Archives nationales, F 21 “Beaux-arts,” F21 112 “Commande et acquisition d’oeuvres d’art,” “Dossier d’acquisitions de daguerréotypes de marines à Macaire et Warnod, février 1853–janvier 1856.” Two of these works are now kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁸ “J’irai devant votre retraite sympathique contempler le spectacle de votre mer.” Letter to Victor Hugo, November 28, 1864, in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed., *Correspondance de Courbet* (Paris, 1996), p. 223.

⁹ “London exhibition,” *The Liverpool and Manchester Photographic Journal*, March 1857.



¹⁰ “La plupart du temps, ces marines sont désertes, à peine meublées, parfois, par une barque échouée sur la grève ou indiquée dans le lointain. Courbet n’est point, en effet, de ces marinistes qui montrent l’homme aux prises avec les éléments, dans les drames terribles de la tempête, comme le faisait Joseph Vernet, ni de ceux qui s’ingénient à représenter les scènes de la vie élégante et mondaine sur la plage, ainsi que l’essayait son ami Boudin.” Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre* (Paris, 1906), p. 268.

¹¹ “La mer le fascine, il oublie Paris et Ornans. Et chaque matin, les effets de la grande eau et du grand ciel changent toujours; il fait chaque matin une étude de ce qu’il voit, ‘des paysages de mer’ comme il dit. Il en a rapporté quarante peintures, d’une importance extraordinaire et de la plus grande qualité.” Théophile Thoré, “Salon de 1866,” in *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861–1868*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1870), vol. 2, p. 281.

¹² “La mer fut aussi l’occasion de nombreux triomphes. . . . Dans ces brumes, ces pluies, ces rayons, tous ces mouvements de l’atmosphère, son couteau à palette se joue avec une agilité surprenante.” Castagnary 1882, rev. ed., 2000 (see note 4), p. 49.

¹³ “Nous n’avons rien dit non plus . . . des marines de M. Courbet. . . . Et pourtant, ces ouvrages et plusieurs autres ne sauraient être confondus avec les oeuvres qu’il est équitable de passer sous silence.” Henri Delaborde, “Salon de 1870,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, June 1, 1870: p. 710.

¹⁴ “La solitude de ces ‘paysages de mer’ leur communique une impression de terreur et de sérénité, obtenue avec une grande simplicité de moyens, et qui les rend plus admirables encore.” Riat 1906 (see note 10), pp. 268–69.

¹⁵ “Un oeil d’une profondeur immense.” Jules-Antoine Castagnary, “Le Salon de 1868,” in *Salons (1857–1870)*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1892), vol. 1, p. 263.



Painting at the Origin

Paul Galvez

The title of the Getty exhibition *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* puts my problem front and center: how can we call a work such as the Getty Museum's *Grotto of Sarrazine* (ca. 1864, fig. 1) modern when, in the same decade, other works such as Édouard Manet's *Races at Longchamp* (1867[?], fig. 2) are proposing the breathtaking pace of the spectacle and the brushstroke as the defining features of modern painting? Or to put it another way, does it make any sense to mention in the same breath the brooding, figureless grottoes of 1864 and the multicolored swarm of humanity gathering for *Music in the Tuileries Garden* (1862, fig. 3)?

My answer is, of course, yes, we can. But to do so means finding a place for darkness and deceleration in our understanding of modern experience, at the expense of—or, rather, as an alternative to—the brilliance and immediacy made familiar to us by the art of Manet and the Impressionists. In the first part of this paper, I discuss two pictorial strategies Gustave Courbet uses in 1864 to create the feeling of slow immersion. I will then reemerge from the depths of Courbet's painting, so to speak, to explore its modernity from another point of view, not that of speed and the city, but that of matter and its origins.



Figure 1

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877). *The Grotto of Sarrazine near Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne*, ca. 1864. Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 cm (19 11/16 x 23 5/8 in.). Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004.7.



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Figure 2
Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883). *The Races at Longchamp*, 1867[?]. Oil on canvas, 43.9 x 84.5 cm (17 1/4 x 33 1/4 in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection, 1922.424. Photo: © The Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 3
Édouard Manet. *Music in the Tuileries Garden*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 76 x 118 cm (30 x 46 1/2 in.). Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, 1917, London, The Trustees of the National Gallery, NG3260. Photo: © The National Gallery, London.



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First, a bit of background. After the opening of the Salon in spring 1864, Courbet returns to his studio at Ornans, where he spends the summer painting the Source of the Loue and the Black Well (Puits Noir) series. Later, that autumn, he is reunited with his childhood friend Max Buchon in the latter's hometown of Salins. Passing by his familial property at Flagey, Courbet's route is marked by a series of old Roman towns on the plateau until he descends at Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne into a river valley leading to Salins. During these travels he produces *The Source of the Lison*, the *Roche Pourrie*, and the *Gour de Conche* (figs. 4, 5, and 6).



Figure 4

Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Lison*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 80.5 cm (25 13/16 x 31 11/16 in.). Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Photo: Jörg P. Anders, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 5

Gustave Courbet, *La Roche Pourrie*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 73 cm (23 1/2 x 28 3/4 in.). Salins-les-Bains, France, Musée Max-Claudet, F.409.



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Figure 6

Gustave Courbet, *Le Gour de Conche*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 70 x 60 cm (27 5/8 x 23 5/8 in.). Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie. Photo: Snark / Art Resource, NY.

It is striking how much Courbet avoids the long expansive views to be found on the plateau of Flagey. His first strategy could therefore be called one of downward descent. His eye gravitates to sites naturally corralled. Usually he even accentuates their enclosure. Sometimes he does so by cropping the top of the motif so as not to reveal its full height, as in the Source of the Loue series (fig. 7). In other works he



Figure 7

Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Loue*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 99.7 x 142.2 cm (39 1/4 x 56 in.). New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, New York.



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reduces the sky to a mere speck of blue paint, thus delivering himself from the rules of aerial perspective, which state that the further up into the landscape you go, the more blue the color and the smaller and more invisible the brushstroke. It is not hard to imagine Courbet reveling in this antiacademic maneuver, whereby he could distinguish himself from more traditional landscape painters, such as that great master of the early nineteenth century, Camille Corot (1796–1875).

Courbet's habit of sucking the air out of his landscapes is fairly well known. But less remarked upon is the compensatory gesture: atmosphere that once covered the landscape now covertly returns as a moist air permeating it. We are fortunate to have an eyewitness account revealing this process of humidification:

I accompanied the painter to the Gour de Conche, explaining to him on the spot that the bridge overhanging the three basins had been farther forward in the past and thus even more picturesque. Courbet gave to the waterfall more water than there was that day, made it whiter, added some foliage, and placed the bridge where I had indicated. So I said to him when he gave the last swipe of the brush, "Realism?" "Oh," he laughed, "nothings, some touches of beauty. It happens sometimes."¹

Contrary to the realist mantra of painting only what one sees, Courbet is not averse to moistening a landscape, as long as this allows it, like rejuvenated skin, to breathe more easily.

Courbet's "downward descent" should one day be part of a history of implied viewing distance in nineteenth-century painting, from, let's say, the uncomfortable proximity of the toppling corpse in the foreground of Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819, Louvre) to Adolf von Hildebrand's plea for the superiority of the far view over the near one, toward century's end. With Courbet's landscapes we are well on our way to the perceptual incoherence and breakdown of form that Hildebrand feared would paralyze the viewer who looks at a work of art from too close. While in the Black Well series (fig. 8) individual trees and rocks are easily recognized, they are oases of stability in an otherwise pulsating vortex of hesitant forms and black holes, where craggy outgrowths, verdant canopies, and mossy embankments creep out toward the beholder. Their stealthy approach seems to warp space around them, initiating an invagination of space running from uppermost leaf all the way to the stream's watery depths. Add to this the undifferentiated dark areas near the center and middle ground, and it is hard not to feel that the entire image field is somehow in flux, convulsing, as if powered by an invisible bellows.

Courbet's second strategy is what I will provisionally call his antihierarchical mark making. Klaus Herding's important article "Equality and Authority in Courbet's Landscape Painting" first brought attention to the democratizing impulse behind Courbet's use of noncentered composition in this genre, to his way of depositing the elements of a landscape across a canvas so that all parts are treated equally.² I would argue that the concept of equality—or at least of evenness of attention—also aptly describes his unique approach to the pictorial mark.





Figure 8

Gustave Courbet, *The Shaded Stream at the Puits Noir*, ca. 1860–65. Oil on canvas, 64.2 x 79.1 cm (25 1/4 x 31 1/8 in.). The Baltimore Museum of Art, BMA 1950.202. Photo: The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland.

It is obvious from the Getty Museum exhibition that, far from being simply a crude palette-knife painter, Courbet exercises a great degree of control over the four properties of the mark: its size, its color, its degree of transparency, and its texture or thickness. This focused study of the painter's touch is already evident in the series of still lifes Courbet paints in 1862 and 1863. But it is in the 1864 landscapes—where the intimacy of domestic tabletop arrangement must adapt to a more chaotic, unruly genre—that Courbet unleashes the full range of his technique. Here his great contribution to the history of painting is not so much making these brusque gestures visible but making them visible without one mark—or one group of marks—completely dominating the others. It is almost as if Courbet is playing out an internal dare: how boldly can I set down my paint, how much pictorial energy can I inject into the composition, before one of these strokes begins to stick out too much, thus spoiling the careful buildup of layers? Can I really load up a canvas with so many discrete units, he asks himself, without ever creating a dominant figure or compositional center?

In terms of color, he learns from Corot—when they paint together in 1862—how to create a landscape from a palette limited to colors of a certain tone or tonal range. The Museum of Fine Arts's *Stream in the Forest* (fig. 9), where a small number of different greens generate a multitude of forms, culminates this apprenticeship. The difference between the two is that Corot likes blond tonalities, whereas Courbet prefers his auburn or brunette. We tend not to give Courbet enough credit for this choice, no doubt because his colors do not illuminate like Corot's. Yet when you look closely at the landscapes in the show, you discover that darkness in Courbet is never simply black but rather a varied undergrowth of tonally somber colors.





Figure 9

Gustave Courbet, *A Stream in the Forest*, ca. 1862. Oil on canvas, 156.8 x 114 cm (61 3/4 x 44 7/8 in.). Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 55.892.

We know that Courbet also learns a lot from an older master, Rembrandt (1606–1669). The way in which the Dutchman seems to conjure cloaks and garments from the fabric of the canvas itself is not unlike the terrestrial magic of Courbet’s landscapes, where foliage and rocks emerge similarly from a primordial soup. Rembrandt, however, likes to add a gold necklace, metal filigree, or wrinkled skin as the cherry on top of the image, whereas Courbet limits himself to an odd rock or ripple here and there, always careful not to usurp the other marks. To put it admittedly all too briefly, I would say that Courbet is the Rembrandt of nineteenth-century landscape, but a Rembrandt filtered through the powerful example of Géricault’s horses and heroes. It is no accident that one compares Courbet’s rocks to bodies or organs; the ability to create the illusion of unbridled muscle and mass out of the thinnest paint application is a talent Courbet shares with the master of *The Raft of the Medusa*.

To return to my original juxtaposition, Courbet’s fondness for what I am calling the antihierarchical mark makes him the opposite of Manet in almost every respect. Color in Manet’s *Fifer* (fig. 10) is not about binding the palette to a single tone but about bringing opposites into chromatic confrontation, thus making lights even lighter, darks even darker. The opacity of these color planes helps distribute visual interest across the picture plane rather than coaxing it out of the fabric of the field; as for the size of the mark, Manet pushes the length and width of the brushstroke to extremes, longer in the fifer’s instruments, wider in his hat, short and sweet in the face and hands; finally, he cultivates textural accidents of the brush—the way in which ridges and furrows effortlessly metamorphose into skin and fabric is one of the great accomplishments of his art.





Figure 10
Édouard Manet. *The Fifer*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 160 x 98 cm (63 x 38 1/2 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.

I have been arguing that the face-off between Courbet and Manet, so crucial to any account of Modernist painting, goes well beyond the art-historical cliché of Courbet's rotund forms versus Manet's flat playing cards.³ I would like to make the further claim that we can actually pinpoint the beginning of Courbet's deep investment in the decelerated, lingering gaze to a specific historical event.

In January 1864, Courbet prepares a large canvas for that year's Salon. The painting, *The Source of the Hippocrene*, depicts a beautiful nude Parisian model spitting into the mythical waters of a splendid vale where poets since antiquity have gone in hopes of invigorating their creative powers. However, as one would expect of Courbet, the pilgrims paying homage to the source are no toga-clad Homers, but the nineteenth-century writers Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and Alphonse Lamartine, among others, all unwittingly imbibing the tainted brew.

One day the artist's sister, Juliette, accidentally knocks the painting over, causing it severe damage. Courbet abandons the composition but saves the canvas. At the Salon of 1866, Courbet exhibits a new scene, the Musée d'Orsay *Covert of the Roe-Deer* (fig. 11), painted over the old one.⁴ A photograph taken of Courbet's studio some time in 1864 shows the Orsay picture. Lo and behold a landscape clearly representing the Black Well is laid out, if not altogether finished, a full year or two before its arrival at the Salon. We do not know whether Courbet painted over *The Source of Hippocrene* soon after the accident or was incorporating the original landscape into the new work. Either way the photograph shows that in 1864 Courbet already had major aspirations for this particular scene.





Figure 11

Gustave Courbet, *The Covert of the Roe-Deer*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 174 x 209 cm (68 1/2 x 82 1/4 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Gérard Blot / Christian Jean, RMN / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 12

Édouard Manet. *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 208 x 264 cm (82 in. x 12 ft. 8 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: RMN / Art Resource, New York.

Is *The Source of Hippocrene* perhaps Courbet's response to another painting staging the encounter of a Parisian nude with her male colleagues in a landscape? The *Luncheon on the Grass*, or *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (fig. 12), announces the raucous arrival of Manet at the Salon des Refusés of 1863, the very same



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year Baudelaire publishes his famous essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” a text which in many respects can be read as a defense of the kind of painting Manet was doing at the time. The coupling of Manet and Baudelaire in the public’s mind is made explicit in Henri Fantin-Latour’s *Homage to Delacroix* (fig. 13).

The death of Delacroix in 1863 prompts a long glowing eulogy from Baudelaire, seated at bottom right, implicitly raising the question of who would replace the great Romantic at the head of the modern school. Immediately to the right of the deceased artist’s portrait stands Fantin-Latour’s answer, the heir apparent, Manet. Needless to say, in this august company the loutish Courbet is conspicuously absent.



Figure 13
Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). *Homage to Delacroix*, 1864.
Oil on canvas, 160 x 250 cm (63 x 98 3/8 in.). Paris, Musée d’Orsay.
Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

Courbet, an artist so aware of his public persona, would not have taken these developments lightly, especially since Manet’s showpiece seems to inherit its ambiguity, lack of narrative action, and interplay of reality and fantasy from Courbet’s own *Bathers* of 1853 (fig. 14). His response is to reframe *Déjeuner*: intimates become public figures; a scenic, decorative background becomes a hybrid landscape at once Hippocrene and Puits Noir; the nude stops staring and starts spitting; and, most curiously, Manet’s brother, gesturing to the mysterious woman in the water, becomes Baudelaire drinking from the source, getting indigestion from inspiration. If to be inspired is to drink from an original source, then Baudelaire’s counterpart in painting is surely Manet, who had an unquenchable thirst for sources. Courbet does not simply reconfigure *Déjeuner*; he recasts Manet’s signature strategy of combining sources as mere romantic inspiration: “Drink from the well of art history too often,” Courbet seems to say, “and you’ll get sick!”

But how does an artist in 1864 avoid the influence of the old masters? Manet’s answer was to pile up selected references to past art and contemporary events to the point of indecipherability. Courbet takes the opposite tack; he dreams of a world without precedent. And this is where Courbet’s “deceleration”





Figure 14

Gustave Courbet, *Bathers*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 227.7 x 193 cm (89 5/8 x 76 in.). Montpellier, France, Musée Fabre. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.

comes into play. For if one is to avoid drowning in the currents of art-historical influence, one needs something else to do at the source. By slowing down perception, by making the viewer an active participant in the making of a world, Courbet in the landscapes of 1864 unleashes all the physical sensations the source has to offer, thus evading its contaminated waters, where creativity goes to die. Urban spectacle is not the only way to stir the modern consciousness. It can happen anywhere, even in the serene precincts of Nature, even right outside the door of one's studio, if one submits to the tactile experience of what is going on right here, right now.

¹ Memoirs of Charles Toubin, cited in Charles Pornier, "Un Témoin de la Bohème littéraire," *La Revue de France* (March 1925): pp. 85–86. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.

² Klaus Herding, "Equality and Authority in Courbet's Landscape Painting," in *Courbet: To Venture Independence*, trans. John William Gabriel, (New Haven and London, 1991), pp. 62–98. Originally published as "Egalität und Autorität in Courbets Landschaftsmalerei," *Städel-Jahrbuch* 5 (1975): pp. 159–99.

³ As has been argued, in their own ways, by Theodore Rett, "Courbet and Manet," *Art News* 54 (March 1980): pp. 98–103; Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 343–44, 478 n. 89, 480 n. 97; and Carol M. Armstrong, *Manet Manette* (New Haven, 2002), pp. 3–30.

⁴ See letter to Jules Castagnary, January 18, 1864, and letter to Urbain Cuenot, April 6, 1866, in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed., *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago, 1992).



“The more you approach nature, the more you must leave it”: Another Look at Courbet’s Landscape Painting

Klaus Herding

The purpose of this paper is to propose a fresh look at the structure of Courbet’s landscapes, considering above all the painter’s *expressiveness*. I want to draw your attention to five aspects of his works:

First aspect: Emotional ambiguity. Let me go back to *Courbet Reconsidered* at the Brooklyn Museum. When I visited this exhibition in 1988, I caught the words of a critic saying, “One sees above all how *bad* Courbet is as a landscape painter and how marvelous he is as a figure painter.” The Getty Museum exhibition *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (2006), emphasizing Courbet’s talent as a landscape painter, had the great merit of refuting this underestimation of landscape within his oeuvre. This concept especially allows us to learn how emotional life works in Courbet’s interpretations of nature. Some details from the Houston *Gust of Wind* (fig. 1) are very illuminating in this respect. Threatening black clouds hang heavily just where the beholder might long for celestial consolation or at least pictorial harmony. The viewer has to make a choice between the dark and the joyful aspects of the picture, between light and shade, and between enjoying an overview when looking from afar as an observer and getting involved in captivating peculiarities when looking from up close, *becoming a virtual part of the depicted nature*. Every picture by Courbet is imbued with both an attractive and a repulsive power. Emotional ambiguity, even for the beholder of the twenty-first century, it seems to me, is one of the most basic and most amazing features in Courbet. The more lively a Courbet landscape is, the more striking are these ambivalences.



Figure 1

Gustave Courbet (French, 1819–1877), *Gust of Wind*, ca. 1865. Oil on canvas, 143.5 x 228.5 cm (56 1/2 x 89 15/16 in.). Houston, Museum of Fine Arts, 2002.216. Gift of Caroline Wiess Law.



Second aspect: The emotive connection of landscape and figure. If emotional ambiguity is one of the keys to understanding the inner life of Courbet's landscapes, should we really keep away from the figures? In other words: as meritorious as it has been to concentrate on landscapes exclusively in the Getty exhibition, it would be equally worthwhile to go a little beyond this concept, by looking at pictures that show landscapes with figures. I doubt that one can fully understand the human impact of Courbet's landscapes without considering his figurative painting. Figures interpret nature, and nature interprets figures. This will allow us to investigate whether the painter's methods change when he shifts from landscape to figure, whether the processes and effects are different or, rather, comparable or complementary. I will ask these questions with regard to the central part of *The Studio* and to the *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine*. My hypothesis is that landscapes strengthen the figures' mood or even express it more frankly.

Third aspect: Introspection. Scholars and critics have often emphasized Courbet's positivist approach to nature, his materialism, his objective perception when depicting the world. Moreover, they see this view mirrored in the physicality and the tactility of his stroke. Rarely discussed, however, are Courbet's deep subjectivity, his reflectiveness, his skepticism toward the sheer reality of things, his poetic imagery—in short, his emotive capacities. By *introspection* I mean examination of the painter's self and expression of his inner conflicts through an artwork.¹ Art historians rightly tend to be suspicious of a psychology-driven history of art, being afraid of either a superficial psychobiography of the artist or a vision that neglects the historical context. But thanks to a scholars' research group dealing with the expression of psychic energies in art, which I initiated and chaired over nine years,² I feel immune to the obvious dangers of internalization that dominated some misguided currents of art history in the 1920s and the 1950s.³ Recent neurophysical research has suggested that neural actions are followed by emotional reactions. I learned from neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio that there is a need for both self-reflection and consideration of the other's conflicts when analyzing human emotive faculties.⁴ Historians like Reinhart Koselleck and philosophers like Wolf Lepenies note the importance of distinguishing between social, or outside, perception and psychic, or inner-life, perception.⁵ It is, therefore, a widespread misunderstanding to denounce "introspection" as a mere psychological term.

Emotional reflection leads to works of art that tend to express the self. In Courbet's case, depicting nature revealed thoughts about himself that are not really different from what he was concerned with when depicting figures. The meaning of introspection that I want to apply here to landscape and figurative paintings should be distinguished from the idea of absorption.⁶ While absorption concerns the artist exchanging roles with the beholder (becoming the "painter-beholder," to quote Michael Fried), introspection points to the painter's doubts about the recognizability of the world, and furthermore to an artistic exploration of the self that serves to clarify the painter's status within the world. The need to clarify one's status is not relevant to every epoch and is therefore not reflected in Leonardo's famous adage, "Ogni pittore dipinge sè" (Every painter depicts himself).⁷ Rather, it results from the dissolution of firm borders of single objects in paintings (in late works of Courbet—or in Odilon Redon, Eugène Carrière, etc.—objects are no longer separated from each other, but form a continuous stratum). Dario Gamboni described this phenomenon in terms of "ambiguity" and "indeterminacy" with regard to late-nineteenth-century art.⁸ Introspection has something to do with melancholy, but in a positive way—it defines an attitude: that of intense reflection between two creative actions, between conceiving a painting in one's mind and realizing it on the canvas. It points to the need for an intermediate stage of thinking over the



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situation, containing the presentiment of a forthcoming perspective, the outlines of which are just vaguely perceptible. Everybody knows Courbet's famous letter to his Maecenas, Alfred Bruyas, which reads, "Behind the laughing mask that you are familiar with, I hide, deep down, grief, bitterness, and a sorrow that clings to the heart like a vampire."⁹ But few people realize that in the same letter, he exposes to Bruyas the project of *The Studio*, where he depicts himself as a proud man amid the pictures, pointing to a landscape as the central medium of reflection. The landscape, in other words, represents himself. It represents both the dark aspect of looking inward and the joyful aspect of creating a new worldview.

Courbet's dual reflectiveness is a result of feeling insufficiently supported by society, of living as a "sauvage" (Courbet's term¹⁰). It is exactly this feeling that may provoke the aim of creating one's own, independent means of introspection. But what is needed is an outside realm where the artistic exploration of the self can be expressed without danger. For Courbet, this field was nature, or, in pictorial terms, landscape painting.

Establishing this theoretical framework is necessary to any further discussion of landscapes but also to understanding the way in which two scholars, Werner Hofmann in 1978 and Aaron Sheon in 1981, used the term *introspection* when speaking of Courbet.¹¹ In dealing with Courbet's figurative painting, both authors pointed to the self-concerned attitude of just one subject, the sleeping women, the focus of several works. A coherent theory was lacking for these paintings that close off the outside world, and therefore some conclusions became extremely antagonistic. The Montpellier *Sleeping Spinner* (1853), for instance, was interpreted as a "démon de la nuit" (demon of the night) by Sheon,¹² and as "La Belle au bois dormant" (The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood) by Hofmann.¹³ It has also been suggested that Courbet "traced the course of his inner life" in some of his portraits,¹⁴ for example in the Montpellier *Portrait of Alfred Bruyas* (1853) or in the *Portrait of a Lady*, the so-called *Meditation* or *Reflection* (1864, in Douai). No word, however, on landscapes in this context.

With regard to Courbet, this topic has not been developed since those discussions. Yet, *introspection* was as important to the painter as was *provocation*; these were two complementary forces to him, and I should even add: introspection was a kind of provocation, if applied to figures, since it prevented them from appearing all too pleasant or conformist. If applied to landscapes, introspection results in an expression of autonomy, self-enjoyment, or, sometimes, resistance against the central power.¹⁵ When Werner Hofmann, in another article, wrote on Courbet's landscapes,¹⁶ he rightly discovered connections to figurative painting, linking the "sources" to female bodies, to wombs, vulvae, and uteri. This aspect of the works can be seen as a form of introspection. Yet, limiting the representation of nature to sexual metaphors seems too restrained a view to me. Rather, as we shall see in the seven *Source of the Loue* paintings, the numerous *Black Well* pictures, the *Wave* series, and others, Courbet indeed "traced the course of his inner life" through landscapes to define his own place in the world.

Fourth aspect: Abstract art versus objective art. Artistic introspection is a challenge for the beholder. It involves changing the pattern when looking at a picture, switching from the objects to subjectivity, to the *mood* of the painter. Distancing ourselves from the object leads us to look at the pictorial means as independent of the proposed theme. As noted above, the materiality and tactility of Courbet's stroke have been widely observed, while at the same time, the artist's ability to liberate himself from the constraint of merely depicting objects has been underestimated. A free handling of surface, color, and stroke is not only



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a technical procedure opposed to tradition, however. Gaining the upper hand during the 1860s over a faithful translation of objects, it responds to a widespread discourse on speediness, in which *la touche* (the speedy stroke) and *la tache* (the color spot) played their role. When this discourse arose in France during the 1850s, under English influence, it was connected to a debate over whether a picture done in a sketchy manner could claim to be a full painting. If such works were said by some to surpass photography, they soon became more. Details of the anarchically painted *Source of the Loue* (see fig. 11 of Font-Réaulx's essay in this publication), Hamburg version, of 1864,¹⁷ show not only how much Courbet was imbued with this modern manner, but also how it allowed him to express his own feelings instead of objectively observing the outside world. Thus, the painter's method of approaching nature means leaving it at the same time—in other words, going beyond the observation of objects. It involves linking landscape to figures, or to sheer expressive structures. Indeed, where Courbet depicts rocks, there are spots of color without any illusion of solidity; those in the water of the Paris and the Frankfurt *Wave* pictures (both 1869) consist of brown hollows;¹⁸ snow is very often incoherent and porous; and trees, as in the famous *Oak of Vercingetorix* (fig. 2), are puzzles of light and shade.¹⁹ When this manner became popular, caricaturists identified Courbet as its leader (figs. 3 and 4) and as a forerunner of abstract art—which, of course, would place him at the opposite end of the spectrum from Realism.



Figure 2
Gustave Courbet, *The Oak at Flagey or The Oak of Vercingetorix*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 89 x 110 cm (35 1/8 x 43 3/8 in.). Tokyo, Marouchi Art Museum.



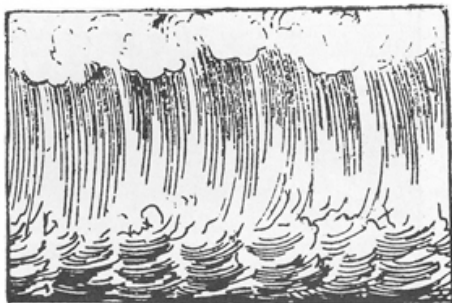


Figure 3

G. Randon. Caricature of *The Waterspout*, in *Le Journal amusant*, 1867. Photo from Herding, "Courbet's Modernity" (1978), transl. in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (New Haven and London, 1991), p. 168, fig. 81.

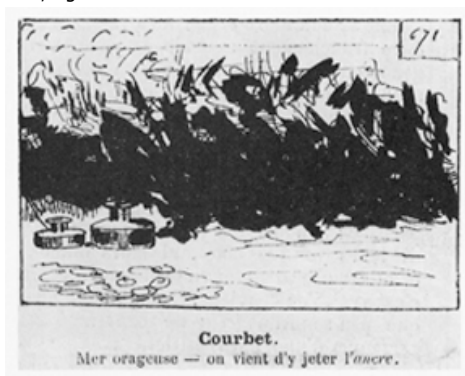


Figure 4

Henry Somm (1844-1907), Caricature of *The Wave*, in *Le Salon de c' année* (Paris, 1870). Photo from "Courbet's Modernity," ed. of 1991 (see fig. 3), p. 168, fig. 80.

Fifth aspect: Courbet as the anti-Realist par excellence. After these observations, what is the result of a pictorial conception that aims at the investigation of the self instead of depicting objects, combined with an obvious undermining of reliability and coherence? One could almost define Courbet the landscape painter as a non-objective artist working with plashes of dark and light color. Indeed, I came to this result in my Courbet entries for the *Dictionary of Art* and the new encyclopedia of the world's artists.²⁰ More and more, during my research, I felt that the term *Realism* has a very limited reach. It may be a valid label for Courbet, strictly speaking, due to the *Stonebreakers* (1849, formerly Dresden, destroyed in World War II) and *The Burial at Ornans* (1850, Musée d'Orsay; see Bomford, fig. 3, in this volume), which he considered to be the "exposé of his principles,"²¹ to the first time he used the word "Realism" (1851), and to his Manifesto of Realism (1855), which is echoed in some of his statements and works of 1861, 1863, and 1867. As for the entire rest of his career, the label might have been useful to provoke the attention of the crowd, after it had reached the mass media. One might even say that it has been imposed on Courbet, and this is why I gave it up early. But there are further reasons. I think Realism, with regard to Courbet, is composed of two incompatible principles. One is that of popular art, of woodcuts like those made at Épinal. Another is that of political perspectives, or of a politically founded rebuttal of bourgeois



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idealism. The writer Jules Champfleury, Courbet's adviser for a down-to-earth Realism based on popular imagery, was an apolitical man who wanted to reconcile the good old customs of the *peuple* with modern life.²² The philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Courbet's guide to a political conception of Realism, wanted to fight the hypocrisy of institutional idealism, which he accused of concealing the real condition of the lower classes; he therefore encouraged an offensive, anticlerical, and anticentralist art.²³ Hence, Realism implied two extremely different issues, one leading to modest works within a conformist attitude, and one trusting in the popular power to remodel society and to free the oppressed social strata from suffering, which possibly would lead to an illustrative art containing political propaganda, without any formal perspectives. The far-reaching difference between these two attitudes has often been overlooked: popular art meant simplicity, simplicity would lead to reduction, and reductionism came to be one of the decisive principles of modern art in the works of Pissarro, Seurat, and Gauguin.²⁴ Anti-idealist art in Proudhon's understanding would lead to satirical art, to a crude focusing of reality, to representing work instead of leisure, along with peasants, day laborers, and beggars, and finally, beyond Millet and Van Gogh to twentieth-century painters like George Grosz. For Proudhon, art's focus lay on fight, not on form. Moreover, both concepts do not really apply to landscape painting. That is why the critic Jules Castagnary, as early as 1857, wrote, "One is no longer busy with realism. The idea which Courbet claimed to have put forth in *The Stonebreakers*, *The Burial*, *The Ladies of the Village*, and *The Bathers* becomes more and more incomprehensible."²⁵ And in 1870, Castagnary was bold enough to write, "Courbet has never been a Realist."²⁶ Iconographically, one can "save" the notion of Realism only if one loads it up with lots of contradictory meanings, as does Sheon.²⁷

The crucial question about Realism is what *matter* is. Is it the object as shown in its plausible and recognizable form, is it the sheer substance of things (which means the reduction of objects to symbols), or is it the pictorial equivalent of real matter in the outside world?²⁸ If we replace "Realism" with "reductionism," we'll seize at once the importance of the non-objective plashes that lead to abstract patterns: they can be read as questioning coherence and substance in nature. That is why Roger Fry, in his translation of Maurice Denis's "Cézanne," in 1910, stated that so-called primitive art has the potential to represent a higher degree of truth than modern objective art, just because it does *not* represent things realistically.²⁹ This view is well known, but my argument is that Fry's division between depicting reality and conceiving truth in pictorial terms goes back to Courbet. Not only was the painter written off as a "primitive," and his "Bather" labeled as a "Vénus Hottentotte,"³⁰ but his search for pure color, pure black, and pure light guided him beyond representational art. Truth in art may be greater when it departs from concrete objects. In landscape painting, a picture is more convincing when it does not (or not only) depict a real site. We are more inclined to perceive freedom, power, resistance, or joy if we do not have the feeling that we are just confronted with a view of the castle A or the river B.

We may then ask how far it is possible to apply Gamboni's concept of "ambiguity and indeterminacy" in modern art to Courbet's landscape painting. Gamboni applied these terms to Symbolism, that is, to paintings of twenty or thirty years later. If we leave aside the specific pictorial means of Symbolism, I would argue that the black holes and the broken-up structure in Courbet's *Wave* pictures are no less paradigms of ambiguity and indeterminacy, because they are exchanging solid and unsolid matter—withdrawing, so to speak, the soil from under the beholder's feet, while the heaviness of the clouds seems to oppress the viewer and the water appears to consist of jewels, as Salon visitors put it. One cannot trust



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matter, nor reality. So, the most important point in the works of Courbet is ambiguity, the defining feature of twentieth-century art. This was easier to realize in landscape pictures, while in human portraits it could be realized only insofar as the figures were embedded in nature.

We are now well prepared to have a closer look at some pictures. I will not go through all five aspects, as the first—ambiguity based on attractive and repulsive features—occurs in nearly every picture; and I will treat the second and the third aspects, the connection of landscape and figure and introspection, together, because they shine out in the same paintings. In all these works, we are referring to the painter's introspection as translated into the figures' mood, the crucial part of which is rendered in landscape. Let us start with *The Meeting* of 1854 (figs. 5 and 6). Here, at first glance, the landscape seems to play a subordinate role. Courbet's manner of reversing his dependence on his patron Bruyas by giving him a humiliating, almost worshipful attitude has dominated the research literature. The iconography of the



Figure 5
Gustave Courbet, *Courbet Meeting Alfred Bruyas (or The Meeting—'Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet')*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 129 x 149 cm (50 7/8 x 58 3/4 in.). Montpellier, Musée Fabre. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 6
Detail of Figure 5.



“Wandering Jew,” then despised and now honored, was treated long ago by Linda Nochlin.³¹ With regard to the landscape, it has been noted that this picture was the first by Courbet to show Mediterranean light.³² More important, the pattern of the soil, the plants, and the shade is an early example of his dividing and dissolving of color fields, which reached its climax ten years later, as seen in *The Source of the Loue* series, leading almost to decomposition. Looking more intensely at *The Meeting*, one becomes aware that the brightness of the figures is an assimilation to the landscape. Even in Courbet’s shirt and trousers, one can detect traces of the blue of the sky; the white of the clouds is there, the green of Bruyas’s jacket goes with the plants in the foreground, and the brown of the servant’s coat and vest is an echo of the stony crossroad. This is not only the beginning of the famous earth colors in Courbet, but the starting point of subordinating figures to landscape, which is a reversal of the academic tradition. Because of such a dominating emphasis, landscape was judged by conservative critics of the time to be a “subversive” genre, as Michael Clarke has shown.³³

Courbet, the “anti-civilized” man, was longing for a world in its original state. I am not so much alluding to his famous nude called *L’Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*; 1866, Musée d’Orsay), but to the landscape in *The Studio* (fig. 7). Before analyzing nature in this picture, I have to clarify that, if I say “nature” here, I am using this term not in the comprehensive Aristotelian sense, which means the totality of physics and every physical object, but rather I use it as did Friedrich Schiller in his “Spaziergang,” the famous poem of 1795—that is, to mean the outside environment in contrast to the city, a concept that implies a sensation of freedom in contemplating it. Nature therefore, if reduced to landscape, was not just given a passive role. It was believed to carry messages of self-realization and creativeness. This was what Courbet and his friends Champfleury, Castagnary, and the critic Théophile Thoré meant by “nature” (when speaking of “nature libre”³⁴) and what they especially meant when discussing Courbet’s landscape pictures in terms of health—not only individual health, but that of society at large. Champfleury described landscapes as an antidote to the city dweller’s fatigue, and Thoré emphasized Courbet and Millet as “these doctors . . . of forests and mountains.”³⁵ Pointing to the landscape in *The Studio*, Courbet presents it as the core of the whole composition. In spite of the landscape’s importance, however, its role has not been explained sufficiently: an impenetrable mountain valley is depicted there, functioning as a guarantor of



Figure 7
Gustave Courbet, *The Studio*, 1855 (detail). Oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm (11 ft. 10 1/4 in. x 19 ft. 7 5/8 in.). Paris, Musée d’Orsay. Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.



individual freedom to which the artist guides us. Courbet points to a little hut while depicting the ruins of a castle, as if to say that castles are done with, that the future lies in the small hut, making landscape a key to the figurative part of the picture. This emphasis may imply a criticism directed against the regime of Napoleon III, who is supposed to be present in *The Studio*. As I demonstrated thirty years ago,³⁶ the contemporary—and therefore authentic—terms of authoritarian and egalitarian landscape are valid here and should not be ignored. Courbet used horizontality and verticality to build up landscapes like castles—a kind of metaphor of resistance against the authority of central power. Champfleury lucidly wrote, “Nearly all of [Courbet’s] landscapes represent . . . mountains and rocks that look like fortresses.”³⁷ The landscape of *The Studio* is indeed commuted into a place that resists the regime.



Figure 8

Gustave Courbet, *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine, Summertime*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 174 x 206 cm (68 1/2 x 81 1/8 in.). Paris, Musée du Petit-Palais. Photo: Bulloz, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine, Summertime (fig. 8) is another of Courbet’s crucial figural compositions that contain landscapes. This picture is so important because figure and landscape are melted together here, and again (as in *The Meeting* and *The Studio*) it is the landscape that dominates. We cannot see this picture without thinking of Surrealism; the women lie there like attributes of their clothes. The lower lady is represented almost with detached limbs, while the upper one, looking into the far distance, seems to be a meditative part—let’s say an emanation—of the surrounding nature. The figures’ fatigue is expressed by nature. The clustered foliage above corresponds in its heaviness to the sleepy attitude below; the longing of the upper woman’s gaze is even mirrored in the mood of the water. It has not yet been noted that the ground on which the two are resting originally extended farther. Courbet changed part of the soil into water, thus augmenting the sense of longing. This pentimento can be clearly seen thanks to the display of the picture at the Petit Palais since 2005. A latent artificiality, an attribute of urban life, characterizes the lower woman, especially in the stiffly upright part of her blouse. With the other figure, the unarranged bouquet of flowers indicates a transformation into a natural state. Courbet seems to have wanted *to show nature as overwhelming*. The picture is a daydream reflecting the marriage of figurative and landscape painting.



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With regard to introspection, I would say that *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine* anticipates what the critics, thirty years later, said about Puvis de Chavannes's pictures: "What really marks a work of art is less the action or subject matter it presents but rather the nuance of sensibility which it brings forward . . . , the dreamers will always be more suggestive"³⁸ (than the Realists, we may add). It is the daydream atmosphere that counts, and it is unfortunate that Sheon did not really analyze this picture, arguing that the ladies are not asleep; however, somnolence—or more precisely, the state of half-consciousness, between sleep and wakefulness—is the concern here. If one could say about such an architecturally constructed composition as Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* that "the spell of the picture . . . lies in an intensification of the subject's mood,"³⁹ how much more true is this of the reclining woman's dreamily lost glance, which is accompanied by the bacchanalian, heavy leaves of the upper tree? This is an example of nature interpreting human beings. Courbet here ceases to qualify objects and instead turns toward the evocation of a psychic state, that of both the two figures and the artist himself—a daydream longing for love in the past and in the future, with the present situation eclipsed. Earth colors and earthly objects create the setting for a mood and a symbolic offering of love.⁴⁰ As with Gauguin, not one object or one person constitutes the dream scenery, but the composition as a whole works in this way. As a result, time is suspended—as it is in nature.



Figure 9

Gustave Courbet, *Lady of Frankfurt (Mrs. Pauline Pose)*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 104 x 140 cm (41 x 55 1/8 in.). Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

During his stay in Frankfurt (1858–59), Courbet painted the *Lady of Frankfurt* (fig. 9), not really an unfinished picture, as one is used to reading it. The lady's attitude is that of a woman who is somewhat lost in her richness. Originally, close to her, her husband was depicted; he has been erased. This kind of vanishing occurs several times in Courbet.⁴¹ The work represents the estrangement of the couple; even if one reconstructs the original composition, the woman would appear alone, since she looks straight ahead and not at her husband. But, in our context, it is especially significant to see how the rooflike form, the covering gesture of the fir branches, and the "protecting" leaves of the trees at the right escort the mourning figure. *This is Romanticism avant la lettre*. The lonesomeness is notable as well: the effaced figure depicted the painter Eduard Wilhelm Pose, one of Courbet's Frankfurt friends whose pictures Courbet nonetheless despised, and sitting at the table is his wife, Pauline. In the middle, a sort of *tempietto* partly overpaints her husband. Although Eduard was the commissioner of the picture, he



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declined to accept the work even before it was overpainted, because his wife gazed so romantically into the void, without looking at him. She is painted in a self-concerned, or introspective, attitude. For Courbet, the affair was simple: he was in love with Pauline, her husband disturbed him, so he had to disappear.⁴² As you see, my point concerns the Romantic attitude between the figures and the Romantic link between the woman and the surrounding nature.

The Woman in the Waves (1866),⁴³ an extremely attractive–repulsive picture, is important both with regard to the figure representing nature and vice versa, and with regard to introspection. The curved body of the woman is shaped like the bow of a wave, a high breaker at the moment of turning over, as Courbet depicted them so many times in his seascapes. The woman's arms are, in a very academic way, almost artificially crossed and closed over the head—a self-protecting and surrendering gesture at the same time—and the face is represented as reflecting, not as dreaming. The figure seems to reflect very consciously what she did in the past and what she will have to do in the future. Her self-centeredness and taciturnity point to introspection. In this respect, there is a close affinity to the look of *Lady of Frankfurt*, or to that of the upper girl in *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine*. In all three pictures, a hesitating ambiguity, also with regard to sexuality, is obvious.⁴⁴ The face of *The Woman in the Waves* is shy, and apart from the breast, nothing is “realist” in this picture.⁴⁵ I do not agree with the reading of the figure as “demythologized,” if that is due only to “the presence of a far-off boat,”⁴⁶ which is very tiny. Rather, we are confronted with a pre-Symbolist concept: the woman emerging from the depths as the goddess or nymph symbolizing the wet element. The figure thus stands for nature; one can replace the other, as in *The Sea-Maids*, or *Play of the Waves*, of Böcklin (a picture that is much closer to Courbet than are Ingres's *Source* or Cabanel's and Baudry's *Venuses*).⁴⁷ Despite his earlier Realist manifesto, this concept of the figure becoming nature was not alien to Courbet, who was acquainted with such poets as Charles Nodier, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, and Gérard de Nerval. The domination of nature in this work is enforced by the green color that suffuses the figure's body, arms, and face.

Introspection and subordination of the figure to the landscape come together again in the *Hunter on Horseback, Recovering the Trail*, possibly of 1867 (fig. 10). There is a notable gray color covering the whole picture, in a loosely treated surface layer. Gray is the atmosphere, gray are the (partly hollow) mountains in the background, gray are parts of the soil, and this color—a dirty gray, far from Ingres's ennobling gray—penetrates the horse and the hunter. Not only the gloves but all of this “Chagallian” daydreaming figure, who scarcely observes the trail, is enveloped by the snowy-icy tone. In short, this rider is part of nature and even enveloped by her.

If Courbet, in this picture, went a step further by placing the figure into nature, the same holds true for *The Beach at Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer*, of 1867 (fig. 11), about which I published a detailed study.⁴⁸ Let me just underline that Courbet's primary goal here is to convey the supremacy of nature. The children are part of the gray and brown tones on the beach, the lady resting above the cliffs looks immersed in the surrounding green, and the fishermen's boats are melted into the dark areas of the beach, as if part of it.

I will also be brief about *The Cliff at Étretat after the Storm*, of 1869 (dated 1870; fig. 12), where human beings are so much embedded into nature that they have been overlooked.⁴⁹ As I pointed out in a 1978 exhibition catalogue,⁵⁰ there are twelve women at the border of the sea, who, in shape and color, are almost indistinguishable from their surroundings. The integration of human beings into nature has



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Figure 10
Gustave Courbet, *Hunter on Horseback, Recovering the Trail*, ca. 1867. Oil on canvas, 119.4 x 95.3 cm (47 x 37 1/2 in.). New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery. Photo: Art Resource, New York.



Figure 11
Gustave Courbet, *The Beach at Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer*, 1867. Oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm (21 1/4 x 25 5/8 in.). Madrid, Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.





Figure 12
Gustave Courbet, *The Cliff at Étretat after the Storm*, 1870 (detail). Oil on canvas, 133 x 162 cm (52 3/8 x 63 7/8 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Arnaudet, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

reached its climax here. The figures belong to nature. Castagnary's statement regarding the painter's seascapes holds true for this picture as well: Courbet "no longer depicts any partial and local situation, but shows the eternal drama that is in play in all countries, at all coasts,"⁵¹ and, especially pointing to this picture, Castagnary emphasized its "truthful rendering which makes the work of art disappear, letting us see only nature."⁵² To conclude this aspect, one can state that from *The Studio* onward, Courbet would place his emphasis on nature as the ground out of which human beings come to life.

Let us investigate now how introspection functions in landscape paintings without figures, and how their expressiveness is achieved through a tendency toward abstraction. In other words, my fourth aspect, concerning the dialectics between non-objective and objective parts in Courbet's work, turns out to be a means to express the third: introspection. The question is how far a landscape may express or replace a human being, or more precisely, if it can represent the mood of a human figure or that figure's emotional condition, essentially that of the painter himself.

Creating a landscape as a mirror of one's own mood, as an expression of sadness or joy, supposes an indeterminate place, not a specific site, because in the latter case the beholders would be invited to spell out what they see, which would prevent them from projecting their own feelings into the landscape. As early as 1852, the French-Swiss critic Henri-Frédéric Amiel wrote very lucidly, "Un paysage quelconque est un paysage d'âme" (A landscape, whatever it shows, is a landscape of one's soul).⁵³ One has to insist on "quelconque"—only a landscape that does not render the view of a defined place has the chance to offer the substance of a moving introspection. Courbet tried to combine both, the view of a defined place and the vagueness of a "paysage d'âme," and this is what makes his painting so complex.⁵⁴ His landscapes from 1855 onward demonstrate this point, as seen in two versions of the *Puits Noir*.⁵⁵ Both pictures are symphonies of green and yellow, and the local identity no longer matters, although both depict the same place! This holds true for some of Courbet's travel sketches, which represent parts of the Puits Noir as



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Figure 13

Gustave Courbet, *The Shaded Stream at the Puits Noir*, ca. 1860–65. Oil on canvas, 64.2 x 79.1 cm (25 1/4 x 31 1/8 in.). The Baltimore Museum of Art, BMA 1950.202. Photo: The Cone Collection, formed by Dr. Claribel Cone and Miss Etta Cone of Baltimore, Maryland.

well.⁵⁶ The same indeterminacy characterizes the versions in Columbus⁵⁷ and in a private collection, and another subtle version (fig. 13) at the Baltimore Museum. All these versions are so different from each other that one should not imagine that they show an identical location. While Courbet was a fanatic *amateur* of the Franche-Comté, he did much to make his compositions not recognizably depict this or that place. Thus my headline, “The more you approach nature, the more you must leave it.”⁵⁸ Expressing a similar sentiment, the painter Paul Signac described Monet depicting nature not as it was, but as he felt it: “No, Mr. Monet, you are not a naturalist. . . . In nature, the trees are not blue, people are not violet . . . and your great merit consists exactly in having depicted them like this, just as you feel them by love of beautiful color, and not as they are.”⁵⁹

Over the course of his work, Courbet moved farther and farther away from depicting defined places. This shift is at the core of a conversation he had with Baudelaire, which he described as follows: “‘There, this is what I wanted to show you,’ Baudelaire said to me, ‘this is the viewpoint.’ Pretty bourgeois, isn’t it?! Just what are viewpoints? Do viewpoints even exist?”⁶⁰ Not only did Courbet deny the existence of any hierarchy of perception, that any point was more important than another, but to his mind, any fixation on a single viewpoint should be given up—one must free oneself of a determined viewpoint, after which the subject becomes a mere pretext for composing color and form. Courbet’s subjectivity explains why his work was so appreciated by Cézanne and Gauguin, who approached their subjects similarly, while it does not seem to have impressed the Naturalists. Courbet, to apply Maurice Denis’s wordplay, was not a “nature-mortiste.”⁶¹ Not only did Courbet keep nature alive, but by shaping it through abstract patterns, his landscapes were best suited to describing his feelings, to expressing the painter’s relationship to the world. In this respect, nothing is more explicit than the silence of his dark and introspective *Black Well* pictures (see fig. 13), where the beholder is invited to dive into the painter’s inner life.



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Although sites depicted in *The Source of the Loue* in New York (see Galvez, fig. 7, in this volume) and *The Source of the Lison* (see Galvez, fig. 4) in Berlin (both from 1864) are fairly recognizable, these paintings also consist of abstract patterns of gray and brown, representing holes and rocks, which are painted ruminations about solidity and ephemeral effects, and in a way tend to confound both.⁶² The light gray layers in front of the rocks are neither clouds nor lichens, but seem to be part of the heavy rocks themselves. But it is not inappropriate to see more in these strokes. Remember that Werner Hofmann established a link between *The Source of the Loue* and the desire to return to the uterus,⁶³ and Günter Metken, in his fabulous book on the *Origine du monde*, detected a most direct “introspection,” connecting this picture of a womb to Courbet’s sources.⁶⁴ Others saw in the man with the harpoon who stands in the center of the Washington *Puits Noir* an image of Charon, the ferryman who crosses the river Styx.⁶⁵

Taken literally, this would be an offense to Courbet’s principle of not depicting anything intangible; as the man is harpooning or fishing, he may, in a first layer of interpretation, be identified with Courbet’s own desires as a hunter. But there is no doubt that the meaning of the picture is greater; the work implies a debate over Romanticism, over contemplative figures like those by the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840). Although the man here is active, he seems tiny and overwhelmed by nature. And nature itself can appear unstable, as in the Frankfurt *Wave*, where the rock at the left is one of the least solid pieces of the picture.⁶⁶ That said, another *Source of the Lison* (1864) comes close to the journalist Maxime Du Camp’s photographs;⁶⁷ it is an exact rendering of geological formations, as is the famous *Grotto of Sarrazine near Nans-sous-Sainte-Anne* at the Getty Museum (ca. 1864; see fig. 4 in the Preface by Mary Morton).⁶⁸ In Courbet’s landscapes we are to meet the effect of positive philosophy, Hippolyte Taine, geological experience, and materiality on the one hand,⁶⁹ and of indeterminacy, unrest, ambiguity, and transitoriness on the other.

In contrast to *The Grotto of Sarrazine*, there are pictures like *The Underwood* (fig. 14) in Lausanne, published here for the first time, or *The Old Tree by the Glen* (1871),⁷⁰ which one cannot but read as an image of vanity. *The Old Tree* seems to mirror Courbet’s words to Alfred Bruyas, about his inward distress, quoted above. The painter indeed continued questioning himself through the image of nature.

The exchangeability of places is important in another respect. As I pointed out, it is only a small step from not defining places to not defining objects, as perfectly realized in the yellow, green, and brown parts of *The Underwood*. Although the picture bears this label, we are meeting here with Courbet as a non-objective painter. Landscape painting offered the best opportunity for this approach, as it was less bound by academic rules than portrait or history painting. I do not pretend, however, that the tendency toward abstraction leads to introspection in every possible case. Courbet also liked to simply experiment with colors and strokes. Look at one of his late pictures, *Mountain Landscape with a Goat Guard* (fig. 15), in a Swiss private collection. At first glance, it is a somewhat wrinkled but well-organized landscape, with a stream, some tiny trees, rocks, goats, and the shepherdess. Looking closer, we see more and more that there is nothing behind it but a play of colors (figs. 16a and 16b). This dissolving effect can be seen in the work itself, not just in blown-up reproductions. It goes far beyond the works of John Constable (1776–1837), from whom Courbet learned much about such displays of color. A similar example can be seen in a



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Figure 14

Gustave Courbet, *The Underwood*, ca. 1865. Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 54 cm (25 7/8 x 21 1/4 in.). Lausanne, private collection.

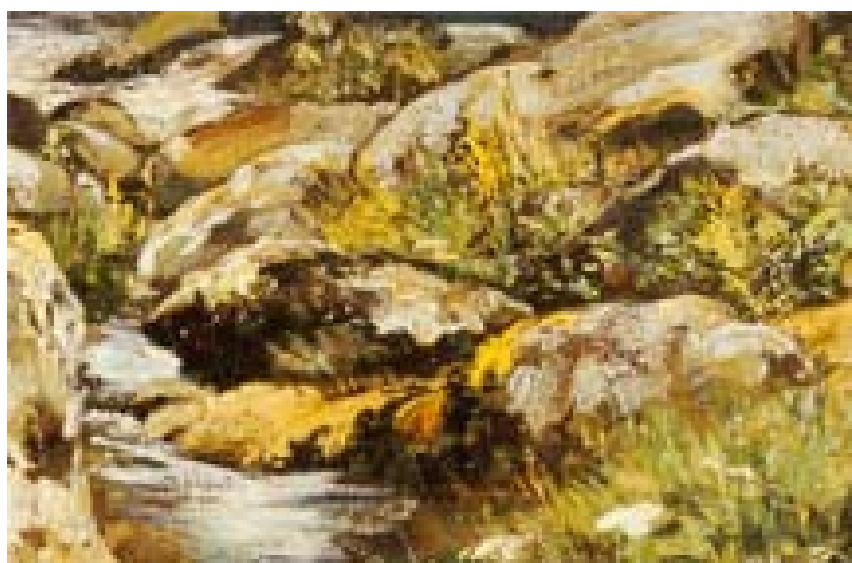


Figure 15

Gustave Courbet, *Mountain Landscape with a Goat Guard*, ca. 1873. Oil on canvas, 70 x 120.5 cm (27 5/8 x 47 1/2 in.). Private collection.



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Figures 16a and 16b
Details of Figure 15.





Figure 17

Gustave Courbet, *The Wave*, 1869–70. Oil on canvas, 112 x 144 cm (44 1/8 x 56 3/4 in.). Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Photo: Jörg P. Anders, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 18

Detail of Figure 17.

detail of the great *Wave* in Berlin (figs. 17 and 18), which Cézanne admired so much. The power of Courbet's insistence on the object is to be seen from afar, while a different kind of power is experienced up close, where the object vanishes. *Dissolution is played against firmness.*⁷¹

For a further understanding of this point, we will need some more insights about Courbet's place as a landscape painter in European art between Romanticism and Cézanne. In my first approach to Courbet, in 1970, I considered him in a way to be "the last German Romantic," and there are indeed several



features that Courbet shared with the Romantics, a kind of naive sincerity, even ingenuousness, in depicting trees and meadows, village houses and waterfalls, and a strong identification with his native homeland. These are qualities Courbet shared with Ludwig Richter (1803–1884), and they are the reason why the late Romantic Hans Thoma (1839–1924) followed the Frenchman so much, in the 1870s. On the other hand, there is a Romantic perception of endlessness in Courbet, an experience of personal freedom and of lonesomeness, both a utopia of happiness and a feeling of being lost that comes close to Caspar David Friedrich and, in a very different way, to the finest works of Carl Spitzweg (1808–1885). These two elements strongly persist in Courbet's landscapes, and only in this genre. The feeling of unquiet and calm, the lost and homely qualities of nature, can be detected in pictures of fir trees and streams, rocky castles and thunderstorms⁷²—Romantic features, both in subject matter and form, which are suffused with a search for a virginal nature in the Rousseauian understanding of the term, as in *The Oak of Vercingetorix* (see fig. 2),⁷³ or in the landscape of *The Studio* (see fig. 7), where this myth carries an enigmatic program for the future. Insofar as Courbet was longing for the world in its original state, he found companions in the painters of Barbizon, another group of “Romantics.” In discussions with Courbet scholars in Los Angeles, both *The Oak* and the hut in *The Studio* landscape have been designated as metaphorical self-portraits. They thus reflect strength and fragility in personal and pictorial terms.

Michael Clarke is almost the only writer who took up the Romantic point and developed it, suggesting that Courbet knew pictures by Caspar David Friedrich's friend Georg Friedrich Kersting (1785–1847).⁷⁴ Even if I do not see how, when, and why Courbet might have become acquainted with Kersting, I approve of Clarke's statement in general. It corresponds with the Romantic songs by Courbet (one of which I published⁷⁵), and with Courbet's behavior—his walking over long distances, his feeling for his own region as a place that he is familiar with and where he feels secure. More than a connection to Kersting, I see an affinity with the formerly underestimated Carl Spitzweg, whose great period ran from 1840 to 1870. Spitzweg was acquainted with every important figure not only in Rome, Vienna, and Prague, but also in London and Paris, exhibiting at the world fairs of 1851 and 1867. I do not pretend that Courbet knew Spitzweg's work, but there is an undeniable proximity—apart from the size, since Spitzweg's painting is



Figure 19
 Carl Spitzweg (German, 1808–1885). *The Forest of Barbizon*, ca. 1851. Oil on wood, 120 x 240 cm (47 1/4 x 94 1/2 in.). Private collection. Photo from *Carl Spitzweg: Reisen und Wandern in Europa: Der glückliche Winkel*, exh. cat., Siegfried Wichmann, ed. (Pfäffikon, Seedamm Kulturzentrum and other institutions), p. 120, pl. 52.



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done in a small format. Numerous works of his—*Seascape with Breakers* of about 1832;⁷⁶ the pre-Impressionist *Travelers in a Rocky Landscape with Castle Ruins* (ca. 1850);⁷⁷ the subversive forest pictures, such as *The Forest of Barbizon* (ca. 1851, fig. 19) and *The Dunes at the Mouth of the Schelde* (ca. 1851);⁷⁸ *The Seaside at Dieppe* (ca. 1851);⁷⁹ and *Women's Bathplace at Dieppe, after Isabey* (ca. 1857)⁸⁰—come close to Courbet in the freshness of their color layers and in the nonconformist handling of compositions. I fully agree with Clarke even when he compares the poetical effect of Courbet's late seascapes with the Romantic *paysages d'âme* or *Stimmungslandschaften*.⁸¹ That is to say: the mood is what counts, the spirit more than the technique—although some of Courbet's wild coast pictures are so agitated that they are also technically reminiscent of earlier Romantic compositions, like Carl Rottmann's *Battlefield of Marathon* of about 1849 (fig. 20).⁸²



Figure 20

Carl Rottmann (German, 1797–1850). *The Battlefield of Marathon*, ca. 1849. Oil on canvas, 91 x 90.5 cm (35 7/8 x 35 5/8 in.). Berlin, Nationalgalerie. Photo: Jörg P. Anders, Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, New York.

The dissolution of the subject was at the core of Romantic painting,⁸³ and as the Paris exhibition *Aux origines de l'abstraction* has shown,⁸⁴ non-objective painting even goes back to late-eighteenth-century pre-Romanticism, and introspection goes back to the same epoch as well. What Courbet adds to this tradition is the vehemence of his handling of color, the understanding of black as the substance of everything, and the palette-knife violence in getting color on and off the canvas. This is the technique that the Impressionists, the Pointillists, Van Gogh, and Cézanne learned from Courbet. The Impressionists took over one element of Courbet's complex procedure (dissolution), while Seurat and Cézanne created an artistic system out of the other (stabilization/solidification).



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So when I proposed that Courbet's late pictures should be understood as a reaction to Impressionism, one of partial acceptance and partial refusal,⁸⁵ I did not mean this suggestion literally. For in fact, being exiled, it was impossible for him to visit the first Impressionist show of 1874, the second of 1876, or the third of 1877. But he knew Manet and Monet long before then, and knew about the principles of *objet nature* (an object as it is in nature) and *objet peinture* (the object in its painted form). He also practiced, from 1864 onward, the division of color into small, separate brushstrokes without representational values, and he created atmosphere not by depicting "tous les tons" (all the tones),⁸⁶ but rather by opposing two neighboring kinds of blue to two neighboring kinds of red, as in *Fisherman at the Lake of Geneva*, of 1877 (fig. 21). In this work Courbet, incorporated by his signature, and the fisherman, dipped into red color, stand for earth and solidity, while the lake and the sky—with their white, blue, and violet overtones—represent fluidity and an ephemeral mood. So Courbet maintained a twofold principle, one of self-assertion and one of dissolving the self through slashing strokes in landscape pictures. In other words, he said yes to Impressionist color spots, but no to Impressionist *légèreté* as expressed by light nuances overall. This holds especially true for the *Panoramic View of the Alps* (1874–77),⁸⁷ a detail of which shows how precariously the object is defined. All now is painterly matter. The grass no longer does work as grass, nor the earth as earth, because it is broken up, and black is coming through everywhere.



Figure 21

Gustave Courbet, *Fisherman at the Lake of Geneva*, 1877.
Oil on canvas, 22.3 x 27 cm (8 7/8 x 10 5/8 in.). Private collection.



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Figure 22

Gustave Courbet, *La Roche de Dix-Heures*, ca. 1855 (detail). Oil on canvas, 85 x 160 cm (33 1/2 x 63 in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: Gerard Blot / Christian Jean, RMN / Art Resource, New York.

In other cases, as in *La Roche de Dix-Heures* (fig. 22) or in *Trees in Winter* (1865),⁸⁸ Courbet invites the beholder to imagine what the artist did not paint. Often he covers one substance with another, both loosely painted, so that it is the viewer's responsibility to determine whether there is light on the leaves, or rather snow or blooms—perhaps the latter in *La Roche de Dix-Heures*, while snow is meant in *Trees in Winter*. Altogether, it is clear that at least from 1864 on, long before the first Impressionist exhibition took place, Courbet tried to come to terms with this new manner of translating bourgeois leisure themes into a leisurely procedure of painting. In any case, the beholder is challenged to make a choice, to discover a personal picture, and has to be more active than ever before. Courbet did not practice an Impressionist method, but he pursued a similar and perhaps a deeper intention. If we look back to him from the four pioneers, or “fathers,” of twentieth-century painting—Cézanne, Seurat, Gauguin, and Van Gogh—then we must recognize that Courbet was the figure responsible for most of their achievements; or, to put it otherwise, he prepared their way in many respects. The creation of light and shade through colors in Cézanne's work is there, in the bare huts of the Chicago *Rock of Haute-pierre* (ca. 1869);⁸⁹ Seurat's reductionism, as in *The Bathers of Asnières* (1883–84, London, National Gallery), is present, for example, in the reductive oil sketch of *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine*;⁹⁰ Gauguin's method of representing landscape with horizontal strata is found in *The Moscow Coast in Brittany* (ca. 1865) or in the Amsterdam *View of the Mediterranean at Maguelonne* (1858),⁹¹ which consists of just a strip of sky, two strips of clouds, one for the sea, one for the beach, and some loosely displayed rocks; and Van Gogh's nervous display of color with harsh brushstrokes is there, as in the Philadelphia *Fringe of the Forest* (ca. 1856) or in the Pasadena *Cliffs by the Sea in Winter* (1870).⁹²

The problem with Courbet lies in his complexity. His work reflects an artistic strategy in which contradictory goals are forced into a “cohabitation,” while Seurat, for example, was interested in a synthesis, or, to put it in Signac's words, “le génie simplifie, élimine, sacrifie” (The genius simplifies,



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eliminates, sacrifices [details]).⁹³ However, if the history of modern art is not a mere progression of formal abstraction, then Courbet's œuvre is a gold mine, which was exploited by the many different currents to follow him. The painter's expressiveness, his capacity for introspection, and his impulse to withdraw from depicting objects place him at the core of Modernism.

¹ I had fruitful discussions on that matter with Paul Galvez and Ulrich Pfarr, to whom I wish to express my gratitude.

A first approach to the widespread term of *introspection* can be found in Edwin Garrigues Boring's article "Introspection" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica: A New Survey of Universal Knowledge*, vol. 12 (London, 1959), p. 542. In the context of this paper, introspection means both examination of the self and self-expression through works. Artistic introspection has its roots in the fifteenth century, leading to the representation of melancholy. It has been understood as "artistic exploration of the self" in Dürer. Later on, during the Enlightenment, it became pathologized. The philosopher Kant likened it to the "perception of ghosts," but it was extended to the arts, where it then became an autonomous reign producing its own mood of perception = introspection. The nineteenth-century phrenologists were interested in this term as well, because it indicated the ability to transgress the social meaning of inspiration to arrive at an individual understanding. The latter cannot be defined in Lacanian terms but comes closer to the Romantic meaning of *empathy*, especially to the mesmeristic variant in Justinus Kerner. The well-known aestheticist Ernst Kris, in his *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York, 1952; new ed., Madison, 1988), used "introspection" in the context of inspiration, which comes close to Schopenhauer's understanding of "imagination" as an organ of "self-perception." Eberhard Th Haas (*Transzendenzverlust und Melancholie: Depression und Sucht im Schatten der Aufklärung*, Giessen, 2006) has reinforced this aspect.

² Some of the results are contained in Klaus Herding and Bernhard Stumpfhaus, eds., *Pathos, Affekt, Gefühl: Die Emotionen in den Künsten* (Berlin, 2004).

³ The psychological approach to art in the 1920s and the 1950s is a vast area which cannot be treated here. The connection between art and psychology arose even earlier, with Heinrich Wölfflin (*Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur*, Munich, 1886; new ed., Berlin, 1999) and with Wilhelm Worringer (*Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, Munich, 1908; new ed., Munich, 2007). The latter author had a decisive influence on the 1920s. Among many others, the psychotherapist Hans Prinzhorn followed his path (see Thomas Röske, *Der Arzt als Künstler: Ästhetik und Psychotherapie bei Hans Prinzhorn*, Bielefeld, 1995). In the 1950s, sixteenth-century Mannerism influenced art historians to consider psychological problems as expressed in artworks. Again, psychoanalysts played an important role, including Ernst Kris, whose *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (see note 1) has been influential. Later on, scholars like Rudolf Arnheim (*New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, Berkeley, 1986) and Ernst Hans Gombrich (*Gombrich on Art and Psychology*, Manchester, 1996) reflected, sometimes critically, the psychological empathy in writings on art. A comprehensive survey can be found in David Freedberg, "Empathy, Motion and Emotion," in *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nahsicht*, ed. Klaus Herding and Antje Krause-Wahl (Tausenstein, 2007), pp. 17–52.

⁴ See, for instance, Antonio R. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York, 2003); Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York, 1999); and Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York, 1994).

⁵ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Historische Semantik und Begriffsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1978; 2nd ed., 1979); Wolf Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte: Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeiten in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1976; 2nd ed., Frankfurt, 1978).

⁶ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* (Chicago, 1980). Although this thought-provoking book has greatly inspired me, my own conception is quite different. First, "absorption" applies best to such eighteenth-century figures as Diderot and Chardin and should not be overemphasized with regard to the nineteenth century. [Moreover, "absorption" is very different from "introspection" insofar as the first term points to a discourse between painter and beholder, whereas the latter explains the conflict of the artist with regard to his status and his worldview.]



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⁷ See Frank Zöllner, “Ogni pittore dipinge sè’: Leonardo da Vinci and Automimesis,” in *Der Künstler über sich in seinem Werk*, ed. Matthias Winner (Weinheim, 1992), pp. 137–60.

⁸ Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (London, 2001).

⁹ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago, 1992), p. 129, no. 54; for the original French wording, see Chu, ed., *Correspondance de Courbet* (Paris, 1996), p. 119, no. 54-7.

¹⁰ “Dans votre société si bien civilisée, il faut que je mène une vie de sauvage. Il faut que je m’affranchisse même des gouvernements.” Letter to Francis and Marie Wey, July 31, 1850. See Chu 1996 (French edition, see note 9), p. 92, no. 50-5.

¹¹ Werner Hofmann, “Über die ‘Schlafende Spinnerin,’” in *Realismus als Widerspruch: Die Wirklichkeit in Courbets Malerei*, ed. Klaus Herding (Frankfurt, 1978; 2nd ed., rev., 1984), pp. 212–22; Aaron Sheon, “Courbet, le réalisme français et la découverte de l’inconscient,” in *L’Âme au corps: Arts et sciences, 1793–1993*, exh. cat., ed. Jean Clair (Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 1994), pp. 280–99. Previously published in *Arts Magazine* 55, no. 6 (February 1981).

¹² Sheon 1994 (see note 11), pp. 294–95.

¹³ Hofmann 1984 (see note 11), p. 219.

¹⁴ See Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, eds., *Courbet Reconsidered*, exh. cat. (New York, The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), p. 118.

¹⁵ See Klaus Herding, “Equality and Authority in Courbet’s Landscape Painting,” in *Courbet: To Venture Independence*, trans. John William Gabriel (New Haven and London, 1991), pp. 62–98. Originally published as “Egalität und Autorität in Courbets Landschaftsmalerei,” *Städel-Jahrbuch* 5 (1975), pp. 159–99.

¹⁶ Werner Hofmann, “Courbets Wirklichkeiten,” in *Courbet und Deutschland*, exh. cat., ed. Werner Hofmann with Klaus Herding (Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, and Frankfurt, Städel Museum, 1978), pp. 590–613.

¹⁷ See Werner Hofmann, ed., with Klaus Herding, *Courbet und Deutschland*, exh. cat. (Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, and Frankfurt, Städel Museum, 1978), color pl. 13.

¹⁸ See Klaus Herding, “Gustave Courbet: *La Vague*,” in *Six chefs-d’oeuvre prêtés par Francfort au Musée d’Orsay de Paris*, exh. cat., ed. Sabine Schulze (Paris, Musée d’Orsay, 1999), pp. 16–29.

¹⁹ See Klaus Herding, “Color and Worldview,” in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), pp. 111–34. Originally published in *Courbet und Deutschland* (see note 17), pp. 477–92. For a good detail reproduction that shows the color layers and the abstract pattern therein, see Valérie Bajour, *Courbet* (Paris, 2003), ill. p. 233.

²⁰ See Klaus Herding, “Courbet, Gustave,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 8 (London, 1996), pp. 50–61; Herding, “Courbet, Gustave,” in *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler aller Länder und Zeiten*, vol. 21, ed. Klaus G. Saur (Munich and Leipzig 1999), pp. 567–74.

²¹ Letter to Bruyas, 1853, see Chu 1996 (French edition, see note 9), p. 109, nos. 53–56.

²² For this point, see Meyer Schapiro’s legendary article, “Courbet and Popular Imagery,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1940–41), pp. 164–91.

²³ See James H. Rubin, *Realism and Social Vision in Courbet and Proudhon* (Princeton, 1980), reviewed by Klaus Herding in *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 3 (1984), pp. 533–35; Rubin, “Courbet and Proudhon in *The Atelier of the Painter*,” in *Malerei und Theorie: Das Courbet-Colloquium 1979*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz and Klaus Herding (Frankfurt, 1980), pp. 175–86; Klaus Herding, “Proudhons ‘carnets intimes’ und Courbets *Bildnis Proudhons im Familienkreis*,” in *Malerei und Theorie*, pp. 153–73; Herding, “Fortschritt und



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²⁴ Partly surging indeed from popular art, as in Gauguin’s Brittany period, partly from scientific research on color and surface structure, as in Seurat’s case.

²⁵ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, “Le Salon de 1857,” in *Salons (1857–1870)*, with a preface by Eugène Spuller, 2 vols. (Paris, 1892), vol. 1, p. 30; German translation in *Realismus als Widerspruch* (see note 11), p. 162.

²⁶ “Le Salon de 1870,” in Castagnary 1892 (see note 25), vol. 1, p. 407; German translation in *Realismus als Widerspruch* (see note 10), p. 176.

²⁷ Sheon 1994 (see note 11), p. 297.

²⁸ I tried to develop this last point in an article [“Im Lichte Courbets—Landschaft als Selbsterfahrung und Zeitsignatur,” in *Die Entdeckung des Lichts, Landschaftsmalerei in Frankreich von 1830 bis 1886*, exh. cat., ed. Ernst-Gerhard Güse (Saarbrücken, Saarland-Museum, 2001), pp. 46–55] while I treated the two other points in the section on Realism of *Funkkolleg Kunst* (ed. Kunsthistorisches Institut der Freien Universität Berlin, 2005, <http://www.kunst-und-funktion.de>), and in a different way in “Truth in Courbet and Millet: A Discourse about Anti-Realism,” in *Barbizon: Malerei der Natur—Natur der Malerei*, ed. Andreas Burmester, Christoph Heilmann, and Michael Zimmermann (Würzburg, 1999), pp. 274–94; and, with a more theoretical impact, in “Mimesis und Innovation: Überlegungen zum Begriff des Realismus in der bildenden Kunst,” in *Zeichen und Realität: Akten des 3. Semiotischen Colloquiums Hamburg 1981*, ed. Klaus Oehler, 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 83–113.

²⁹ Roger Eliot Fry, “Introductory Note to Maurice Denis, ‘Cézanne,’” in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago and London, 1996), pp. 76–80. Previously published in *The Burlington Magazine* 8 (January 1910), pp. 207–8.

³⁰ Théophile Gautier, “Salon de 1853,” *La Presse*, July 21, 1853, fully quoted in Klaus Herding, “Les Lutteurs détestables. . .,” in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), p. 190. Originally published in *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 22 (1977), pp. 137–74.

³¹ Linda Nochlin, “Gustave Courbet’s *Meeting*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew,” *The Art Bulletin* 49 (1967), pp. 209–22.

³² This is a common issue in the Courbet literature. See, for example, André Fermigier, *Courbet* (Geneva, 1971), p. 59.

³³ See Michael Clarke, “Courbet peintre de paysages,” in *Courbet artiste et promoteur de son oeuvre*, exh. cat., ed. Jörg Zutter and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu (Lausanne, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1998), pp. 83–99 (for that matter, p. 92).

³⁴ Jules-Antoine Castagnary, “Le Salon de 1868,” in Castagnary 1892 (see note 25), vol. 1, pp. 280–83; German translation in *Realismus als Widerspruch* (see note 11), p. 170.

³⁵ For Champfleury, see Clarke 1998 (see note 33), p. 93. For Thoré, see Théophile Thoré, *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861–1868*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1870), vol. 1, p. 93, quoted in Herding 1991 (see note 15), p. 82.

³⁶ See Herding 1975 (see note 15).

³⁷ “Les paysages représentent presque tous ... des montagnes et des rochers qui ressemblent à des forteresses.” See Geneviève and Jean Lacambre, eds., *Champfleury, Le Réalisme* (Paris, 1973), p. 155; interpreted in Herding 1999 (see note 28), p. 285 and n. 68. For fortresslike landscape pictures by Courbet, see Mary Morton and Charlotte Eyerman, eds., *Courbet and the Modern Landscape*,



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exh. cat. (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), pl. 2 (*Landscape near Ornans*, 1864, Toledo Museum of Art) and pl. 4 (*Rocks at Chauveroché*, 1864, private collection); Herding 1991 (see note 15), p. 79, fig. 33 (*Valley with Deer*, 1866, formerly Dresden, coll. Schmeil), and p. 80, fig. 34 (*Wire Stringers' Mill on the Loue*, ca. 1860, Charlottenlund, Ordrupgaardssamlingen).

³⁸ “Ce qui date vraiment une œuvre d’art, c’est beaucoup moins l’action ou le sujet mis en scène que la nuance de sensibilité qu’elle révèle ..., les rêveurs resteront toujours plus suggestifs.” See André Michel, “Le Salon de 1886,” *Journal des Débats*, May 6, 1886.

³⁹ Daniel Catton Rich, *Seurat and the Evolution of “La grande Jatte”* (1935; repr., New York, 1969), p. 51.

⁴⁰ I am using here and applying to Courbet a statement by Timothy Mathews in “Sex and the Occult in Symbolist Art and Literature,” in *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Peter Collier/Robert Lethbridge (New Haven and London, 1994), p. 273.

⁴¹ E.g., in *Proudhon and His Wife* (painted 1865, overpainted 1867; Paris, Musée du Petit Palais) and in *The Wounded Man* (painted 1844, overpainted 1854; Paris, Musée d’Orsay), two pictures in which Courbet overpainted a woman.

⁴² Courbet never wanted to sell the picture. Informed about the love affair, his sister, Juliette, called the picture intimate, and after Courbet’s death she fought until 1890 to get it back from collector Étienne Baudry. The story of the picture and the identification of the Pose couple is not yet known within the Courbet literature; see, so far, Bettina Erche, “Fuchs in der Falle. Pauline Pose, oder: Die abenteuerliche Geschichte von Courbets Gemälde *Dame de Francfort*,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 263, November 11, 2000, supplement “Bilder und Zeiten.”

⁴³ The Metropolitan Museum of Art; see Bajou 2003 (see note 19), p. 343.

⁴⁴ Iconographic standards are no longer unequivocally fixed; ambiguity has become crucial thanks to Charles Méryon, Victor Hugo, Charles Baudelaire, people whom Courbet knew well. Like these figures, the artist lifts the veil of imagination only partially.

⁴⁵ As claimed by Abigail Solomon-Godeau, catalogue entry in *Courbet Reconsidered* (see note 14), p. 179, no. 68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Böcklin: 1883, Bayrische Staatsgemäldesammlungen; Ingres: 1856, Musée d’Orsay; Cabanel: 1863, Musée d’Orsay; Baudry: 1863, Musée d’Orsay.

⁴⁸ Klaus Herding, “The Beach at Saint-Aubin sur-Mer, 1867,” in *Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection/Fundación Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza*, ed. Javier Arnaldo, 2 vols., English and Spanish edition (Madrid, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 314–17, 375.

⁴⁹ It is extremely difficult to detect these women in the picture. They appear in detailed illustrations in *Courbet und Deutschland* (see note 17), p. 489, and in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), p. 132, fig. 53.

⁵⁰ *Courbet und Deutschland* (see note 17), p. 491, and detailed reproduction, p. 489, reprinted in my *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), p. 134 with fig. 53, p. 132. This has been overlooked in *Courbet Reconsidered* (see note 14), p. 193, where the reader is misguided by the statement that “all trace of social existence is banished.” The 1978 observation has been overlooked also in later articles by Linda Nochlin and Robert E. Herbert.

⁵¹ See Castagnary 1892 (see note 25), vol. 1, p. 397.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 396; *Courbet Reconsidered* (see note 14), p. 193. In this quotation, “nature” is used in a metaphorical way, meaning that all the artificial tricks have disappeared, so that the whole composition has become “natural.”

⁵³ Published only later, in *Fragments d’un journal intime*, 2 vols. (1883; 12th ed., Geneva, 1915), vol. 1, p. 62 (entry of October 31, 1852). I am indebted to Kerstin Thomas for having drawn my attention to this author.



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⁵⁴ Similarly, Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), who renounced a literal translation of reality into a landscape painting, inserted botanically precise branches into his pictures. See Kerstin Thomas, “Stimmung als malerische Weltaneignung: Puvis de Chavannes—Seurat—Gauguin” (PhD dissertation, University of Frankfurt, 2005), pp. 99–100 (to be published in 2007).

⁵⁵ These are the *Stream of the Puits Noir* (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1855) and *The Shaded Stream* (Musée d’Orsay, 1865); see *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pls. 11 and 14.

⁵⁶ See Klaus Herding and Katharina Schmidt, eds., *Les voyages secrets de Monsieur Courbet—Unbekannte Reiseskizzen aus Baden, Spa und Biarritz*, exh. cat. (Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1984), no. 177, pl. 44. Twenty years ago, some people disputed the authenticity of some of these landscape sketches, and perhaps they still do, but connoisseurs such as Hélène Toussaint, Margret Stuffmann, James H. Rubin, the late Jean Adhémar, Günter Busch (the doyen of the connoisseurs of nineteenth-century French art), and recently Michael Fried shared my view to a large extent. So time will come to reconsider this question with more calmness.

⁵⁷ *The Shaded Stream at the Puits Noir* (The Baltimore Museum of Art, ca. 1860–65) and *The Stream at the Puits Noir* (Columbus Museum of Art, 1865); see *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pls. 16 and 17.

⁵⁸ A symposium about landscape painting and nonobjective art at the Freie Universität in Berlin, which took place late in 2005 and was chaired by Werner Busch, came to a similar conclusion. Hopefully, it will be published in 2007. I got to know of it only through a newspaper reference by Gustav Falke: “Mehr Natur wagen, Landschaft als Gattung: Ein Berliner Kolloquium,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 285, December 7, 2005.

⁵⁹ “Mais non, monsieur Monet, vous n’êtes pas naturaliste. . . . Les arbres dans la nature ne sont pas bleus, les gens ne sont pas violets. . . et votre grand mérite est justement de les avoir peints ainsi, comme vous les sentez, par amour de la belle couleur, et non tels qu’ils sont.” Entry of August 23, 1894, in John Rewald, ed., “Extrait du Journal inédit de Paul Signac,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (July–September 1949), p. 101.

⁶⁰ “Voilà ce que voulais vous montrer,’ me dit Baudelaire, ‘voilà le point de vue.’ Était-il assez bourgeois, hein! Qu’est-ce que c’est que des points de vue? Est-ce qu’il existe des points de vue?” Quoted in Pierre Courthion, *Courbet raconté par lui-même et par ses amis*, 2 vols. (Geneva 1948–50), vol. 1, pp. 159–60. (English translation from Herding 1991 [see note 15], p. 78).

⁶¹ Maurice Denis, “Cézanne” (1907), quoted from Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel et L’arcadie*, texts collected, presented, and annotated by Jean-Paul Bouillon (Paris, 1993), p. 139. See Thomas 2005 (see note 54), p. 130. In his statement, Denis is opposing the “peintres de l’âme” and the “paysagistes,” a contrast which, as I have tried to demonstrate in this paper, does not apply to Courbet. Literally, “nature-mortiste” means a painter of still lifes; in the figurative sense, it alludes to a painter who fixates ever-moving nature so that it finally looks dead.

⁶² See *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pls. 23 and 21.

⁶³ See note 15.

⁶⁴ Günter Metken, *Gustave Courbet: Der Ursprung der Welt; Ein Lust-Stück* (Munich, 1997), especially the chapter “Das Wasser und die Träume,” pp. 45–54.

⁶⁵ See Ann Dumas in *Courbet Reconsidered* (see note 14), p. 157, no. 48.

⁶⁶ For more on this aspect, see *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pp. 103–5, pl. 40; Herding 1999 (see note 18), p. 16 (ill.) and pp. 17–29.

⁶⁷ Formerly in Paris, at Georges Petit.

⁶⁸ See *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pl. 20.



⁶⁹ These aspects are emphasized in Mary Morton, *Naturalism and Nostalgia: Hippolyte Taine's Lectures on Art History at the École des Beaux-Arts, 1865–1869* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998), especially pp. 153–54.

⁷⁰ Lausanne, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts; see Jörg Zutter and Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, eds., *Courbet artiste et promoteur de son œuvre*, exh. cat. (Lausanne, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1998), p. 46, pl. 41.

⁷¹ This is exactly what the twofold reception of Courbet mirrors: Willem de Kooning (1904–1997) and Gerhard Richter (b. 1932), the painter of our times, are on the nonobjective side, while James Ensor (1860–1949), from the 1880s on, and Chaim Soutine (1893–1943) are on the other.

⁷² As in Courbet's very Romantic picture *Fortress* (ca. 1855, Cologne, private collection); see *Courbet und Deutschland* (see note 17), no. 232, ill. p. 221.

⁷³ This is the full title of this famous picture, as exhibited in Philadelphia in 1867—it is obvious that Courbet, by this comprehensive designation, wanted to lift this work to the level of history painting. The picture is now in Tokyo, Marauchi Art Museum. For more information, see Bajou 2003 (see note 19), ill. pp. 232–33.

⁷⁴ Clarke 1998 (see note 33), p. 86.

⁷⁵ Klaus Herding, "Lautmalereien: Zu einigen unbekanntem Gedichten und Briefen Courbets," in *Kunst um 1800 und die Folgen: Werner Hofmann zu Ehren*, ed. Christian Beutler, Peter-Klaus Schuster, and Martin Warnke (Munich, 1988), pp. 233–43.

⁷⁶ Private collection; see Siegfried Wichmann, ed., *Carl Spitzweg: Reisen und Wandern in Europa; Der glückliche Winkel*, exh. cat. (Pfäffikon, Switzerland, Seedamm Kulturzentrum, 2002), p. 76, pl. 32.

⁷⁷ Oldenburg, Landesmuseum; *ibid.*, p. 159, pl. 74.

⁷⁸ Private collection; *ibid.*, p. 146, pl. 66.

⁷⁹ Private collection; *ibid.*, p. 147, pl. 67.

⁸⁰ St. Gallen, Kunstmuseum; *ibid.*, pp. 140–41, pl. 62.

⁸¹ See Clarke 1998 (see note 33), p. 98. The labels given in italics are mine.

⁸² See Christoph Heilmann and Erika Rödiger-Diruf, eds., *Landschaft als Geschichte: Carl Rottmann 1797–1850, Hofmaler Ludwigs I.*, exh. cat. (Heidelberg, Kurpfälzisches Museum, 1997), no. 153, ill. p. 295 (ca. 1847, Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen), and no. 187, ill. p. 334 (ca. 1850, Berlin, Staatliche Museen). Rottmann certainly merits being further discovered by the American public.

⁸³ One does not know if Courbet ever met with the work of William Turner (1775–1851), and certainly he did not meet with that of Karl Blechen (1798–1840). But the effect of his beach compositions comes close to Blechen's vanishing objects, and the lonesome mood is deeply anchored in Romanticism as well.

⁸⁴ November 3, 2003–February 22, 2004. See the exhibition catalogue *Aux origines de l'abstraction, 1800–1914* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 2003).

⁸⁵ See Klaus Herding, "A Note on the Late Work," in *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), pp. 135–55, p. 148. Originally published in *Pantheon* 44 (1986), pp. 75–86.

⁸⁶ This is taken from Théodore Duret's famous book, *Les peintres impressionnistes* (Paris, 1878; reprinted in Denys Riout, *Les Écrivains devant l'impressionnisme*, Paris, 1989), where this author furnished all the characteristics and all the clichés of what Impressionist painting should be. The Impressionists' main quality, from now on, was considered to lie in their passivity, or



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submissive attitude, toward the perception of nature: “selon l'état du ciel, l'angle de la vision, l'heure du jour, le calme ou l'agitation de l'atmosphère, l'eau prend tous ses tons, il peint sans hésitation sur sa toile de l'eau qui a tous les tons” (following the condition of the sky, the angle of the view, the hour of the day, the calmness or agitation of the atmosphere, the water takes all tones. So he [the Impressionist painter] paints without any hesitation on his canvas a [kind of] water which has all the tones) (1989 ed., p. 215). This kind of enduring nature depicted through a purely receptive attitude was not Courbet's goal; his intention rather was a kind of artistic fight with nature. Whenever he observed tonality, he owed these observations, like those in the blue shades, to Rubens (as revealed in a talk to Jules Castagnary, quoted in Courthion 1948–50 [see note 60], vol. 2, p. 61), more so than he anticipated the Impressionists in this, as suggested in Clarke 1998 (see note 33), p. 94.

⁸⁷ The Cleveland Museum of Art; see *Courbet Reconsidered* (see note 14), p. 205, pl. 89.

⁸⁸ National Gallery of Scotland; see James H. Rubin, *Courbet* (New York, 1997), fig. 154.

⁸⁹ See Bajou 2003 (see note 19), p. 17; *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pl. 3.

⁹⁰ See *Courbet und Deutschland* (see note 17), no. 240, color pl. 5.

⁹¹ See *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 37), pl. 39.

⁹² For *Fringe of the Forest*, see *Courbet and the Modern Landscape* (see note 36), pl. 9; for *Cliffs by the Sea in Winter*, see *Courbet: To Venture Independence* (see note 15), p. 82.

⁹³ Paul Signac, “Les Besoins individuels et la peinture,” in *Encyclopédie française*, vol. 16, ed. Pierre Abraham (Paris, 1935), pp. 16.84–87. Quoted from Thomas 2005 (see note 54), p. 177.



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