

# The Industrial World Represented by 19<sup>th</sup> Century Artists

- Presentation
- Before and after the visit
- The Visit: list of artworks
- Bibliography

## Presentation

This visit is aimed primarily at history and economics classes, but it may also be of interest to literature students and any group interested in studying art in its historical and social context. It is based on the relationship between the art and the history of the period, and juxtaposes two distinct approaches. The first approach, taken by the majority of teachers and historians, is to use the paintings, sculptures and objects d'art as documents to support an argumentation. In this case, the works are selected according to the information they contain relating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Industrial Revolution. The second approach - that of art historians - tends to focus on the artwork itself. Artists do not simply relate narratives, events, and settings in the manner of schoolbook illustrations but, imbuing their works with personal or collective experiences, they surpass mere representation and transform their chosen subjects. This visit therefore endeavours to construct a synthesis between the works exhibited in the Musée d'Orsay, representative of the arts of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the major phenomenon of the era: the growing industrialisation of France and Western Europe and its related social, political and cultural transformations.

The first Industrial Revolution (end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain, first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> in Western Europe) was based on the exploitation of coal as an energy source and on metallurgy and textiles as primary industries. The second, between roughly 1880 and 1914, was based on electric energy, oil, the internal combustion engine and the production of steel. But such economic phenomena did not automatically become subjects or sources of inspiration for artists! Even followers of the Realist school, only exceptionally chose subjects from the industrial world: "social" themes were overwhelmingly represented through the portrayal of the rural lifestyle and agricultural labour, irrespective of the period or artistic movement. At the same time, our conceptions of the "industrial world" should by no means be limited to images of workers and large factories... This visit intends to take a wide-ranging look at the industrial age which includes working-class housing, work in the home - so common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century - the major arteries of transport and communication - a crucial characteristic of the industrial age, vital for commerce - and the leading players: the workers themselves, but also the industrial barons, bankers and "capitalists"... Taking such broad view of the subject, indispensable for the balance and coherence of the visit, is also sound historical practice.

## Chronological landmarks

1769-1785	Watt's steam engines
1776	<i>The Wealth of Nations</i> (Adam Smith)
1784	iron puddling [process to obtain iron or steel, light in carbon]
1792	the gas lamp (Murdock)
1798	<i>Essay on the Principle of Population</i> (Malthus)
1800	Banque de France (franc germinal: 1803)
1809	first steam powered vessel
1814	first steam locomotive (Stephenson)
1817	<i>Principles of Political Economy and Taxation</i> (Ricardo)
1822-1826	first photographs (Niepce)
1826-1830	Liverpool-Manchester railway line
1835-1840	first automatic machine-tools
1839	<i>The Organisation of Labour</i> (Louis Blanc)
1840	<i>What is Property?</i> (Proudhon)
1844	electric telegraph (Morse)
1848	<i>Principles of Economic Politics</i> (Stuart Mill)
1848	<i>The Communist Party Manifesto</i> (Marx, Engels)
1851	World Fair in London (1855, 1867, 1878: Paris)
1864	right to strike in France – International Workers' Association set-up in London (Marx, Bakunin...), the “First Internationale”
1869	inauguration of the Suez canal
1876-1890	development of the internal combustion engine
1876	Bell's telephone
1879	first electric railway (Siemens)
1879	Freycinet plan (canals, harbours and waterways)
1881	first electric power stations
1884	trade unions authorized in France (Waldeck-Rousseau Act)
1886	discovery of aluminium
1889	World Fair in Paris (Eiffel Tower)
1891	creation of the Office du Travail (govt. body to survey working conditions)
1892	working day limited to 10 hours for women and minors
1895	foundation of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)
1896	first motor show
1898	law on accidents at work in France
1900	World Fair in Paris (the Gare d'Orsay, the metro...)
1900	progressive universal reduction of the working day to 10 hours
1908	beginning of the implementation of the Taylor system in the Renault factories at Billancourt
1910	law on the first retirement pensions for workers and peasants

On the eve of the first world war, workers represented 42% (United Kingdom), 40% (Germany), 35% (France) of the active population.

In France, their number increased from one million in 1815 to three million by 1866 and to four million by 1914.

In Britain, the increase was even more dramatic: a million and a half in 1815, four million by the 1850's and nine million by 1914.

## Before and After the Visit

This relatively complex visit assumes that the pupils have already studied both the history and the main artistic movements of the period. One suggestion for continued study is to make other, similar studies on the relation between artworks and specific historical themes; the Musée d'Orsay offers analogous visits on the rural world, political power, the image of women and of children. Conversely one may follow the present theme of industrialisation in Art into other periods – the 20<sup>th</sup> century is very well covered by the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Pompidou Centre), and the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Avenue du Président Wilson) – or in other forms – a visit to an “industrial” museum for example: the Musée National des Arts et Métiers in Paris, in the mining area of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the Centre Historique Minier in Lewarde near Douai, the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie in Roubaix, the Musée d'Art et d'Industrie in Saint-Etienne, the Ecomusée in Le Creusot, and the Maison des Canuts in Lyon, etc. Also, whether still in business or not, various industrial firms with origins dating back to the nineteenth century, are open to school group visits, such as La Découverte in Decazeville, La Verrière Ouvrière in Albi, and the Menier chocolate factory in Noisiel. Finally, keeping the Musée d'Orsay's selected period in mind, one can explore a variety of buildings of different functions, which tell of the period's contemporary fabrication techniques not forgetting grand accomplishments such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Val d'Enfer in Thiers...

A comparative study between the visual arts and literature could be based on *César Birotteau* (1835) or *The Nucigen House* (1858) by Balzac, for financial systems and the development of capitalism, *The Black Town* (1861) by George Sand, *Les Misérables* (1862) by Victor Hugo, *Germinal* (1885) or *The Beast in Man* (1890) by Zola, which are set in societies and landscapes transformed by industry, or even *Hard Times* (1854) by Dickens, *Jungle* (1906) by Upton Sinclair, *An Enemy of the People* by Ibsen, for the environmental problems arising from industrialisation. In cinema, besides the pessimistic and fantastical vision in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926) and diverse literary adaptations of nineteenth-century “classics” (by René Clément, Jean Renoir, Claude Berri, etc.), the industrial saga is retraced by Anton Wajda in *The Land of the Great Promise* (1974) and by Mauro Bolognini in *Metello* (1968): both are also literary adaptations. *Modern Times* (1935) by Chaplin evokes the dehumanising effects of production line systems like Taylor's and others, implemented in America since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but still rarely in application in France before 1914, and not yet directly echoed in the artistic production of the period.

## The Visit: list of artworks

NB: the list of artworks - which is by no means comprehensive - is indicative only. The guide is free to choose which artworks support their demonstration and it is not really advisable to present more than twelve pieces in the course of a guided visit.

- Octave Tassaërt: *Une famille malheureuse (An Unhappy Family)*, 1849
- Thonet frères: curved wood furniture, from 1849 onwards
- Pierre-Auguste Renoir: *Chaland sur la Seine (Barges on the Seine)*, 1869
- Claude Monet: *Le pont du chemin de fer à Argenteuil (The Railway Bridge in Argenteuil)*, 1875-1874
- Claude Monet: *Les déchargeurs de charbon (Unloading Coal)*, 1875
- Claude Monet: *La gare Saint-Lazare (The Saint-Lazare Railway Station)*, 1877
- Edgar Degas: *Les repasseuses (The Laundresses)*, 1878-1879
- Edgar Degas: *Portraits à la Bourse (Portraits at the Stock Exchange)*, circa 1878-1879
- Jean Carriès: *Le mineur de la Loire (The Loire Miner)*, circa 1886
- Ferdinand Dutert and Victor Contamin: *Palais des Machines*, 1889 World Fair, 1/200<sup>th</sup> model by Rémi Munier, 1989
- Constantin Meunier: *Au pays noir (In the Black Country)*, 1890
- Constantin Meunier: *Puddeurs au four (Puddlers at the Furnace)*, 1895
- Fernand Cormon: *La forge (The Forge)*, 1895
- Lionel Walden: *Les docks de Cardiff (Cardiff Docks)*, 1894
- Léon Frédéric: *Les âges de l'ouvrier (The Ages of the Worker)*, 1895
- Camille Pissarro: *Dieppe, bassin Duquesne, marée basse, soleil, matin (Dieppe, Duquesne Basin, Low Tide, Sun, Morning)*, 1902
- Maximilien Luce: *Les batteurs de pieux (The Pile Drivers)*, 1902-1905
- Hector Guimard: ornamental fonts, circa 1905-1907
- Paul-Louis Delance: *Grève à Saint-Ouen (Strike in Saint-Ouen)*, 1908

## Bibliography

A few history "classics" on the industrialisation of France, its society and landscapes (1848-1914):

- Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La Révolution industrielle*, Seuil, "Points", 1975
- Pierre Guiral, *La Vie quotidienne en France à l'âge d'or du capitalisme*, Hachette, 1976
- Louis Bergeron, *Les Capitalistes en France*, Gallimard, "Archives", 1978
- Maurice Agulhon (general editor), *La Ville de l'âge industriel*, tome IV of *l'Histoire de la France urbaine* edited by Georges Duby, Seuil, 1985
- Joël Michel, *La Mine dévoreuse d'hommes*, Gallimard, 1995, "Découvertes"
- Jean-Pierre Daviet, *La Société industrielle en France 1814-1914*, Seuil, "Points", 1997.

Excellent written, photographic, audio-visual and educational documents, on the same topic:

- Gérard Noiriel, *Les Ouvriers au XIXe siècle, La Documentation photographique*, no 6079, octobre 1985
- Isabelle Lespinet-Moret, "Usines et ateliers au XIXe siècle. Les deux vecteurs de l'aventure industrielle", *TDC Textes et Documents pour la Classe*, no 736, 15 mai 1997
- Jean-Paul Fargier and Pierre Sesmat, *Le Feuilleton du XIXe siècle 1848-1914*, Musée d'Orsay/RMN/Les Films du Tambour de soie, 1998
- Madeleine Rebérioux, Chantal Georgel and Frédéric Moret, *Socialisme et utopie de Babeuf à Jaurès*, La Documentation photographique, no 8016, août 2000.

On the representation of industry in the visual arts, the bibliography is much shorter:

- *Exigences de réalisme dans la peinture française entre 1830 et 1870*, musée des Beaux-Arts de Chartres, 1985
- *Images du travail, peintures et dessins des collections françaises*, musée national Fernand Léger, Biot (Alpes-Maritimes), 1985
- Caroline Mathieu and Miriam Simon, "1889. La tour Eiffel et l'Exposition universelle", *Le Petit Journal des grandes expositions*, no 196, mai-août 1989
- *Peinture et société au XIXe siècle*, CNDP, "Diathèque sciences humaines et sociales", 12 slides with booklet, undated
- Madeleine Rebérioux, "L'ouvrier à travers l'art et la littérature", in Claude Willard (editor), *La France ouvrière*, Éditions de l'Atelier, 1995
- Dominique Schneider, Caroline Mathieu and Bernard Clément, *Les Schneider, Le Creusot. Une famille, une entreprise, une ville (1836-1960)*, Fayard/RMN, 1995
- Sylvie Gonzalès (editor), *Des cheminées dans la plaine 1830-1930*, catalogue of the exhibition in Saint-Denis, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Creaphis, 1998
- Françoise Bouchet (introduction by), *Les Grèves*. Montceau-les-Mines/Le Creusot, Écomusée du Creusot,
- \* *Des plaines à l'usine, images du travail dans la peinture française de 1870 à 1914*, exhibition catalogue, the Pau, Dunkirk and Evreux museums, Somogy, 2001.

# The Industrial World Represented by 19<sup>th</sup> Century Artists

## • The Visit: the artworks

N.B. The artworks are presented in the same order as the Museum's usual circuit

### 1. Octave Tassaërt (1800-1874): *Une famille malheureuse (An Unhappy Family)*, 1849

Location: ground level, Seine gallery

Also entitled *The Suicide* or *Young Girl Suffocating With Her Mother*, several versions of this painting exist (two may be seen in museums in Bayonne and Montpellier). The artist was himself going through difficult times while he painted *An Unhappy Family* in 1849. The economic crisis and 1848 revolution brought about a profound slump in the art market. But thanks to the director of the Beaux-Arts, this painting was bought for 2000 francs by the State (the equivalent of a year's salary for a modest-ranking civil servant), and was exhibited at the 1850 Salon. The subject was inspired by a passage of the *Paroles d'un croyant* by Lammenais (1840), the book was influential in the social Christian movement and received wide public acclaim: "snow covered the roofs; a freezing blizzard lashed the windows of the cramped and cold dwelling; - an old woman warmed her pale and shivering hands by a brazier ... - the girl spoke to her: Oh mother! You haven't always been in such misery! - And the old woman gazed at the image of the Virgin. And the girl sobbed. - A while later, two women, luminous as a couple of souls, could be seen on their way to heaven!"

The family's former position of relative wealth is suggested by a few details such as the armchair in which the mother lies dead. The man, husband and father, is absent, probably dead. Misery and ruin are therefore unavoidable, a fate common to the working classes and described in various novels (viz. *The Dram Shop* by Zola) or suggested in many realist paintings (*The Lightning* by Antigna, *What is Called Vagrancy* by Stevens...). The two women have therefore ended up in this garret under the roof, the final stage of their social downfall. The end is suggested: "work is lacking, the winter is cold and starvation approaches with its hideous and slow agony", Théophile Gautier wrote in his report on the 1850-1851 Salon. Tassaërt was fond of sad, sentimental themes and was himself to commit suicide with gas.

### 2. Camille Pissarro (1850-1905): *Dieppe, bassin Duquesne, marée basse, soleil, matin (Dieppe, Duquesne Basin, Low Tide, Sun, Morning)*, 1902

Location: gallery 19 (Antonin Personnaz's collection, bequest in 1957)

Two dark blue basins are separated by a bridge on which cars are passing. In the foreground one can see a barrow, a shed inside a wooden fence and a few figures. In the background one sees the harbour with its smoking chimneys on the right and a group of houses on the left. Impressionists often painted Normandy. Whilst Monet was interested in the cliffs on the coast, Pissarro was attracted by the harbours in Le Havre and Dieppe. He stayed in Dieppe during the summers of 1900, 1901 and 1902. His primary interest was aesthetic (he wrote in a letter "my subjects are very beautiful, the fishery, the outer

harbour, the Duquesne harbour, the Pollet, in the rain, in the sun, in the smoke"), the industrial nature of Dieppe's harbour activity being of secondary interest, despite Pissarro's active support of the libertarian cause. A modern, low angle view, accentuates the animation and activity of the harbour.

### 3. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919): *Chalandes sur la Seine (Barges on the Seine)*, 1869

Location: gallery 18, ground floor

Renoir painted this work at the age of 28, having already emerged from anonymity but not yet having received the impressive official sanction which was to come. The Seine was its true subject. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Seine had acquired the status of "National river", and was accordingly an essential element of any contemporary French landscape (viz. Fernand Braudel, *L'Identité de la France*), like forests for Germany, roads and mills, cloudy skies and seascapes for Holland, and meadows and large trees for England. The Impressionists painted mostly humanised landscapes, fields, cultivations, rivers and gentle slopes such as a one could find whilst out walking. The Impressionist landscape focused on connections and paths of communication (roads, canals, and, in the case of Monet, even railways) which conveyed a dynamic image of France, marked by the boom in trade and industry under the second Empire. The barges express the strength of the Industrial Revolution whilst giving it a more peaceful aspect than would smelting furnaces or steam locomotives. They represent a now-forgotten reality as, after peaking with the Freycinet plan (1878), waterways declined as means of transport.



1



2



3

1. Octave Tassaërt : *Une famille malheureuse*, 1849, oil on canvas, 115 x 76 cm
2. Camille Pissarro : *Dieppe, bassin Duquesne (marée basse, soleil, matin)*, 1902, oil on canvas, 54,5 x 65 cm
3. Pierre-Auguste Renoir : *Chalandes sur la Seine*, 1869, oil on canvas, 47 x 64 cm

4. Ferdinand Dutert (1845-1906) and Victor Contamin (1840-1895): *Palais des machines*, 1889 World Fair, 1/200<sup>th</sup> model by Rémi Munier, 1989 Location: at the end of the central aisle, towards galleries 22 to 27

The Galerie des machines was built for the 1889 World Fair on the Champ-de-Mars. Four hundred and twenty meters long, a hundred and fifteen metres wide and forty five meters high, it offered eight hundred thousand square metres of exhibition space, set the world record for the length of a vault and was intended to “awake an unfathomable impression of greatness and might” with a construction cost five times cheaper than brick and mortar. A circular gallery, with two electrically operated moving bridges allowed the public to look down on the machines located on the ground floor. The architect, Ferdinand Dutert, worked in close collaboration with the main engineer Victor Contamin, a specialist in the resistance of materials. The elegance of this steel architecture did not cause the same polemic as the construction, in the same year, of the Eiffel Tower. The gallery was used again for the World Fair of 1900, but was nevertheless destroyed in 1909.

5. Claude Monet (1840-1926): *Le pont du chemin de fer à Argenteuil (The Railway Bridge in Argenteuil)*, circa 1875-1874 Location: upper level, gallery 29 (Moreau-Nélaton collection)

The painting features two fundamental elements of industrialisation in France: the bridge and the railway. They dominate the landscape and hold the eyes of the viewer. Judging by the direction of the smoke which counters to that of the engine, the train is not moving very fast. This is far from being the first time Monet represented the railway: yet he approached the subject with prudence, preferring to feature the picturesque wagons with their traditional shape, to the more modern engine, usually merely suggested by its plume of smoke (*A Train in the Countryside*): the engine has been similarly avoided in this painting, where all the space is occupied by the bridge. The painting is entirely given over to the theme of passage: the flowing river, the railway, the bridge, and the train itself representing a movement which unfolds in space and also, with the changing era, in time.

6. Edgar Degas (1854-1917): *Les repasseuses (The Laundresses)*, 1878-1879 Location: upper level, gallery 31

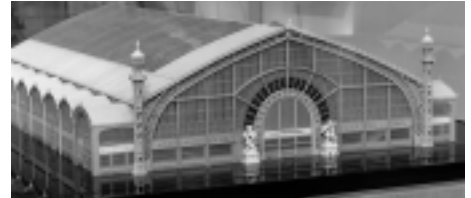
Laundresses were somewhat frequently featured in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature (Zola, *The Dram Shop*, 1877, Goncourt, *Manette Salomon*, 1867), no doubt because they were in direct contact with diverse social circles, including those of writers and artists. The two laundresses are shown here at work: one is putting all her strength into pressing with the flat-iron, heated on the big black stove visible on the right, the other is stretching and yawning, the bottle used to moisten the laundry visible in her hand. Uncharacteristically, Degas

has chosen a rough weave canvas to paint this scene, undoubtedly because of the colour effects it allowed, but perhaps also because of the subject presented. A critic noted that the colours “somewhat coarse pinks, orangey yellows and cabbage greens” were well suited for these “suburban laundresses” (Paul Jamot, *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1914). Degas’ stance has often been discussed: cruel irony? shy tenderness? Whatever the case may be, this aristocrat living in Montmartre tried to reveal social truths of his characters through painting their physical presence. Over a span of twelve years, Degas painted four different versions on the theme of laundresses.

7. Claude Monet (1840-1926): *Les déchargeurs de charbon (Unloading Coal)*, 1875 Location: upper level, gallery 32

This is another Impressionist painting devoted to the river Seine, but in a heavily industrialised landscape. The scene is viewed from the suburban train connecting Paris with Argenteuil, where Monet lived from 1871 to 1878: in the foreground, the coal deliverers are emptying the barges to supply the Clichy gas factory (which still exists). The landscape is framed by the metallic archway of the Asnières bridge, while the Clichy bridge appears in the background.

The viewpoint and the framing seem to have been influenced by Japanese prints. The theme of pedestrians passing on bridges is frequent in the work of Hokusai (1760-1849) and Hiroshige (1797-1858), although Monet’s treatments of space and colour have little in common with these masters of the Far East. Monet painted the bridge from the front, with the viewing angles looking down upon the deliverers and up towards the pedestrians crossing the Asnières bridge. He meticulously constructed a composition scanned by a rhythmic and subtle play on lines. The porters are no more than silhouettes on long, thin planks set underneath a grey sky and above greenish water. Depersonalised, they personify of the gloom of working class condition and serve as a reminder that social problems had not merely vanished with the crushing of the Paris Commune. Nevertheless, the subject of this artwork, presented at the fourth Impressionist exhibition in 1879 remained exceptional in the artist’s production.



4



5



6



7

4. Ferdinand Dutert et Victor Contamin : *Palais des machines*, 1889 World Fair, 1/200 model by Rémi Munier, 1989
5. Claude Monet : *Le pont du chemin de fer à Argenteuil*, circa 1875-1874, oil on canvas, 55 x 72 cm
6. Edgar Degas : *Les repasseuses*, 1878-1879, oil on canvas, 76 x 81,5 cm
7. Claude Monet : *Les déchargeurs de charbon*, 1875, oil on canvas, 55 x 66 cm

8. Claude Monet (1840-1926): *La gare Saint-Lazare* (*The Saint-Lazare Railway Station*), 1877  
Location: upper level, gallery 32

Like Manet and Caillebotte, Monet was interested in railway landscapes and endeavoured to portray “the poetry of railway stations” (Zola, 1877 Salon). He painted eleven different views of the platforms of the Saint-Lazare railway station, which he knew well as he divided his time between Argenteuil and Paris and often went to Normandy. This painting represents the older part of the station, built in 1841-1845 and covered with a new metallic structure in 1855, officially inaugurated in 1867 at the occasion of the World Fair. But Monet’s interest was obviously wider: he gives an optimistic, almost playful vision of industrialisation, with the blue and pink harmony of the engine fumes. He also strikes a synthesis between two themes of Impressionism: landscape and modern life.

9. Fernand Cormon (1845-1924): *La forge* (*The Forge*), 1895  
Location: middle level, gallery 55

This *Forge* by Cormon has no equivalent either in the artist’s oeuvre or in that of his fellow-artists. Bought for 2000 francs by the state (the equivalent of the yearly wages of an sub-lieutenant), the painting offers an optimistic vision of industrialisation. The representation of the smelting furnace, with its play of chiaroscuro effects, creates a sense of heroism. The division of labour makes it possible to paint workers both at rest and at labour but it was nevertheless impossible to render the noise, heat and painful character of an activity which left very few workers with the hope of reaching the age of forty. The location of the forge is not specified: the artist’s objective being to give a generalised representation of this industrial symbol. For the 1900 World Fair, Cormon, a painter awarded numerous official commissions (and who became the director of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts) was to be entrusted with decorating the vault of the Galerie des machines, covering the history of coal, from the mines to the smelting works.

10 Maximilien Luce (1858-1941): *Les batteurs de pieux* (*The Pile Drivers*), 1902-1905  
Location: middle level, gallery 56

The painter, a libertarian activist, wanted to exalt manufacturing work and to announce the dawn of a new society. He used a large format, traditionally used for history painting, considered fit for heroic representation, and a classical composition with a central scene (seven men driving a pile in a pit they have dug beforehand, in order to lay the foundations of a new building). The seven men resemble each other and share a common attitude, demonstrating the supremacy of the collective, and the strength of union and solidarity between the workers. Certain details are realistic (the coarse canvas trousers, red flannel belts, the bread

and wine – classic symbols of life and working class food – the pipe), others relate to a pictorial heroism such as the nude torsos of the workers, improbable in the early twentieth century. The pile driving method “à la sonnette”, Luce chooses to portray, is archaic and was seldom used at the time, but the imagery is a more effective than would be mechanisation in highlighting human labour whose rights the painter wished to reaffirm.

These workers are building an imaginary city: the background shows the passage from the traditional city, with its great monuments, to the modern metropolis, with its factories and smoking chimneys. The river, marking the passage of time, is ever present. But the painting also echoes the great Parisian constructions linked to the World Fair and the building of the Metro, inaugurated in 1900.

11. Constantin Meunier (1851-1905): *Au pays noir* (*In the Black Country*), 1890  
Location: middle level, gallery 56

This black country is that of the Borinage, the Belgian equivalent of the mining area of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. The painter Constantin Meunier and his friend, the writer Camille Lemonnier, discovered this landscape in 1879 and were strongly impressed, as was Vincent van Gogh later on, who was an itinerant preacher in the same region. The hills (grey, green, mauve, beige and black touches) are carved by a deep valley through which the railway passes. A low, grey sky is filled with the smoke from the chimneys of the brick built factories. Industrialisation has become an infernal landscape, entirely turned over to the exploitation of coal and entirely devoid of humans, animals or vegetation. This dirt is far removed from the Monet’s pink and lavender blue, engine fumes in his *Saint-Lazare*. Having begun with history paintings and religious scenes, Constantin Meunier became a socialist activist and turned to representing the world of work. The 1890’s in Belgium were marked by the growth of political, cooperative and trade union organisations within the workers’ movement who, following the 1895 riots, obtained partial male suffrage – made universal in 1918. This painting was bought by the French state in 1896 after the Bing exhibition that introduced contemporary Belgian artists to the French public.



8



9



10



11

8. Claude Monet : *La gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877, oil on canvas, 75,5 x 104 cm  
9. Fernand Cormon : *La forge*, 1895, oil on canvas, 72 x 90 cm  
10. Maximilien Luce : *Les batteurs de pieux*, 1902-1905, oil on canvas, 155 x 195 cm  
11. Constantin Meunier : *Au pays noir*, 1890, oil on canvas, 81 x 94,5 cm

12. Constantin Meunier (1851-1905): *Puddeurs au four* (*Puddlers at the Furnace*), 1895  
location: middle level, gallery 56  
Bronze bas-relief, 50 x 49 cm

Belgium was deeply transformed by industrialisation and its artists represented the working environment far more frequently than the French. Puddlers are metal workers who work molten iron using a long metallic bar, decarbonising it and transforming it into steel. Here Meunier shows the puddlers removing the molten steel which is to be placed in a barrow. The heat, obviously intense, explains the bare torsos of the workers. The chosen subject influenced the forms, as Octave Mirbeau remarked: "When one wants to represent Work, one is not painting a female nude, methodically draped, her profile tilted this way or that; one must erect the worker on a pedestal, with his specific costume, his anatomy distorted or exaggerated by toil and the panting of hard labour. But the time has not yet come for governments, ministries, collectors and art lovers to understand these things."

Meunier, a member of the art section of the Belgian Workers' Party, expresses manhood "strongly, in its mass" as wrote another member, the poet Émile Verhaeren. According to Gustave Geoffroy, art critic and friend of Jaurès and Clémenceau, Meunier made "a piece of propaganda by showing facts which cannot be denied". Maximilien Luce used these puddlers for a drawing published in *La Sociale* (issue number 47, April 1896), an anarchist newspaper chaired by Émile Pouget.

13. Lionel Walden (1861-1935): *Les docks de Cardiff* (*The Cardiff Docks*), 1894  
Location: middle level, gallery 58

Walden, an American, was a pupil of Carolus Duran in France. He exhibited this fascinating landscape, *Cardiff Docks*, in 1896. Cardiff was the big coal port of Wales exporting the produce of nearby mining areas, around which smelting industries, demanding large supplies of fuel, had developed. Walden played with the effects of rainy night, fog and artificial light to create an industrial landscape seemingly devoid of humanity. The silhouette of the locomotive driver is barely visible, while the railway tracks, signals, trains and boats seem to be the sole operators of the industrial machinery. In this representation of the docks - the nocturnal world where wet and shining surfaces reflect hazy lights filtered by shapeless plumes of smoke - the artist has fused an acrid poetry with the sticky triviality of a mysterious space. This railway landscape, both attractive and disturbing, makes for an interesting comparison with *Saint-Lazare Station* by Monet.



12



15