The rise of landscape painting

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Presentation

To study the stages in the spectacular rise of landscape painting throughout the 19th century it is important to keep in mind the parameters of landscape painting as a specific genre.

1. What is a landscape?

Whatever its historical and cultural context, painting has very often dealt with the problem of setting objects or figures within a space and therefore has had to address the representation of depth. Artists could choose either to create the illusion, using all manner of methods rational or intuitive or, equally, they could choose to ignore it. Over time, representations of places have nevertheless been numerous: partial views of natural scenes, fields, meadows, valleys, forests, mountains…, in most cases these are merely backgrounds, stylised to a greater or lesser degree, but believable.
The use of the phrase “landscape” is only really justified when the featured place not only occupies a central place in the space of the painting by presenting a view, but above all when, rather than being a mere setting or background, it constitutes the main subject of the painting.
Despite the creation in 1816 of a Prix de Rome for historical landscape inspired by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (whose reform of the Beaux-Arts system was to lead to its suppression in 1863), the early 19th century inherited the hierarchy of genres established two centuries before by Félibien and set up as the norm by the Académie royale, in which landscape painting is situated just above still-life but beneath the “noble” genres (history painting, Genre, portraiture). Barely recognised as a specific genre, landscape painting was undervalued as it supposedly did not require those supreme artistic qualities and moral values: idea, invention, humanity.
These criteria were used to establish yet another two-fold hierarchy within the genre itself: with pastoral landscape taking second place to heroic landscape (historical or mythological). In 1859, in the chapter of the *Salon* devoted to landscape painting, Baudelaire defined landscape, studied for its own sake, as an “inferior genre” and “the silly cult of nature”.

2. The expansion of the genre in the 19th century

Following the resurge of interest in nature, which became apparent at the end of the 18th century, and the growing interest in direct observation of the surrounding environment, landscape painting went through an exceptional development during the 19th century, occupying a leading place within many artistic movements of this period. Artists, wanting to free themselves of the burden of tradition, abandoned the formal compositions of particular events or narratives in order to simply represent pieces of the natural world, identified and localised by titles. In his commentary on the 1866 Salon, remarking on the growth in plein air painting constructed partly or entirely on the subject of nature, the critic Jules Castagnary wrote of “the great army of landscape painters”.
Yet the reasons for this recourse to landscape painting were as many the artists who took it; the prevalence given to the immediacy of visual sensations and the variations and reflections of light, gave way, in the last two decades of the century, to a new conception of “the subject”. It was no longer considered as mere “material” to be copied or as a scene to be “articulated”, but as the starting point for a more autonomous use of pictorial means. Colour and brush stroke in particular were used to construct space, relief and volumes, soliciting the active participation of the viewer in the figurative interpretation of the artwork.
At the same time, the emancipation of painters from pure retinal sensation gave new importance to the spiritual dimension of landscape painting, manifested through a visionary symbolism sometimes accompanied by a return to Antiquity through a “revisited” mythology.

Objectives

1. The aim of the visit is to have the pupils observe that, through the prevalence given to landscape painting, new conceptions of pictorial practice took shape which had their sources in a new perception of the world. The development of this genre resulted from the artists’ wanting to teach people to look at the world around them by enabling them to recognise it in paintings of actual places. Yet a painting’s function is always more than a mere description; it brings into play a series of signifiers rooted in the particular pictorial device of the artwork. In this respect, realism may also be said to be a form of convention, an interpretation that obeys codes, rather than an exact replica of reality.

2. It is important to avoid presenting Impressionism as the apex of landscape painting, using it as the bench mark by which we judge the excellence of an objective vision of nature, the summit from which we hang a variety of secondary movements, either mere precursors or heirs. For this reason it is vital to identify the different movements that bloomed during the century and the remarkable variety of approaches to landscape painting by artists of many contrasting styles.

3. On making a circuit of 19th century landscape painting one notices that Impressionist works, which favoured direct perception, are no more faithful to human sight nor nearer a spontaneous perception of external reality than other styles; above all, they achieve the debunking – already initiated during the first half of the century – of traditional codes of representation, replacing them with a stronger focus on the materials with which the painter works: coloured paste, brushes, surface of the canvas, and the act of painting itself: gestures, marks and traces.

Before and after the visit

Primary school level

• Before the visit

1. Define “landscape”:
- Derived from the word “land” (territory) the term refers to the breadth of land nature presents to the observer.
- By extension, it also refers to any pictorial representation or literary description relating to this observation.

Note that the notion of “landscape” only appeared in the Western world in the 17th century.

2. Show that both definitions are connected; that our aesthetic response to an actual landscape –”How beautiful!” – is to a large degree influenced by the history of the artistic landscape.

3. What is a landscape artist?
- a painter of landscapes.
- a draughtsman who designs gardens and parks.

(In Giverny, Claude Monet was both).
Why are there no “landscape artist” sculptors?

4. Point out to the children how many different kinds of places may be called “landscapes”: wild (do they still exist?), developed, cultivated, built-up, urban. Differentiate natural attributes from those which result from human action; in the light of this, look at the coexistence in Impressionist painting of traditional subjects – mills, carts: rusticity – and modern subjects – locomotives, factories: progress – and note that the first are much more common than the latter.

5. List the different possible activities in a landscape, singling out:
- Work: rearing, ploughing, sowing, planting, harvesting, picking, horticulture…
- Leisure: walking, bathing, rowing, country party, gardening, hunting…

6. What distinguishes a landscape painting from a map, a plan or a photograph? Can a painting have a practical use, for instance to find ones way, or to study the vegetation?

• After the visit

1. In front of a landscape painting (a picture in the classroom), identify the place, time (dawn, sunset…), and season. Teach them to distinguish the permanent features, at least from a human perspective: geology, the lie of the land, water courses, architecture; from ephemera: light, shadows and reflections, mist, thunder storms, rainbows, flowers.

2. Teach the pupils to observe the importance, which will vary according to the painting, given to people, houses, trees, the sky, clouds, by studying their size and position in relation to the composition as a whole.
- What is the main subject?
- Where is it placed in the painting? (Is it always in the centre?)
- Is the artist near to it or far away?

Consider the titles; for instance:
Camille Pissarro: *La brouette* (*The Wheelbarrow*, 1881), *La gelée blanche* (*Hoarfrost*, 1873), *Les toits rouges* (*Red Roofs*, 1877)

3. Consider the reasons why the formats are almost always horizontal and not vertical (contrarily to portraits).

4. Is the horizon line visible? At what height is it situated?

5. Identify the foreground (at the bottom), the middle ground (in the centre) and the background (at the top). Compare the proximity or distance of the different subjects within the landscape:
- Which elements help us to identify the different planes and evaluate their respective proportions?
- Which of the elements divide and which of them connect (paths, barriers, rivers either parallel or perpendicular to the plane of the painting)?
- Can one distinguish as many details in the different parts of the painting? If not, why not?

6. What is the chosen viewpoint: from the ground, at eye-level, from above?
How can this factor have an influence on the placing of the horizon line and the relative quantities shown of ground and sky?

7. Have the pupils paint a fragment of what can be seen from the classroom windows – in a schematic way perhaps, as a simple colour chart – at different times of the day or year.

8. Have them draw “a cloud” from memory; then repeat the operation choosing a cloud in the sky as a model. Draw it as if it were a portrait, as if it should not be mistaken for another cloud.

Lower secondary school level

• Before the visit

1. Explain the notion of “genre” in painting: history, mythology, portrait, landscape, still-life, in the light of their hierarchy according to academic criteria (possibly drawing a parallel with cinema genres: comedy, drama, historical reconstruction, western, detective…).

2. Define the characteristic features of the “landscape” genre and its extreme limits: when the place occupied by humans and their actions vies with the setting (for instance in Eugène Delacroix: *Passage d’un gué, Fording a river* - 1848) or when the fragment of nature shown is very restrained (for instance in Edouard Vuillard: *La promenade dans le port, Le Pouliguen - A Walk in the Port* 1908), are we still properly speaking of a landscape?

3. Talk about the history of landscape painting before the 19th century and its significance often linked to the Bible: on the one hand, untamed nature, anguish inspiring chaos and terror in the face of hostile forces; and on the other, paradise lost (or irrecoverable), the enclosed garden, bountiful and protective, inspiring security and a sense of mastery.
Show that the modernity of the Impressionists, even when compared with the Barbizon group, lies in their backing away from representing nature from a moral angle to replace it with a “neutrality” of vision which had, until then, only been found in study work for landscapes.

4. Analyse the classic rules of composed, landscape painting: the segregation of the planes in space, the studio procedures for the harmonisation of light and distribution of shadows in graded tones, and the highlighting of picturesque and symbolic elements.

5. Present the transformation of physical geography caused by industrialisation and the development of fast transportation, steamboats and railways, which allowed the development of out of town bathing spots, excursions to the countryside and weekend holidays. While avoiding using artworks as mere illustrations – for the painters’ aims were not geographical – it is possible to show that Impressionist painters often prefer “connecting landscapes” featuring roads, rivers, railroads, streets and boulevards, choosing sites that are easily accessible, close to paths of communication.

• After the visit

1. Study, from the point of view of art, the question of the representation of space and the integration of characters, the various ways to suggest depth, the use, or not, of perspective and the spatial role of colour.

2. Draw a tree: where does one start and how does one associate trunk, branches and leaves? How did artists like Corot, Pissarro, Van Gogh, Cézanne or Sérusier suggest, each in his own way, a thick foliage without painting the leaves one by one? How did they solve the tension between the "global" (the general silhouette, the mass) and the "local" (the particular shape, the distinct units of the trees)?

3. At the crossroads between art and natural sciences: while scientific study is used in the teaching of drawing for human figures (anatomy and morphology), it is neglected in the art of landscape painting.
Chateaubriand: *Lettre sur l'art du dessin dans les paysages* (1852):
"The study of botany seems to me useful to the landscape painter, if only to learn the "foliation" and how not to give all the leaves of all the trees the same tone and the same shape."

4. As an emotional and aesthetic experience, "landscape" is also relevant to literature. At what point does a literary description of nature become a landscape, or even a "picture"? Identify the difference between the processes used by writers and those used by visual arts:
- the description introduces a pause, a punctuation in the unfolding of the narration, but continues in a linear direction, retaining the progressive succession inherent in writing:
Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary* (1856) Garnier-Flammarion, p. 268.
L'Education sentimentale (1869) Garnier-Flammarion, p. 397 to 400.
- the description corresponds to the viewpoint of one of the characters or of the narrator:
Chateaubriand: *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* (1841).
- the description distinguishes, through the use of vocabulary, a global overview (panorama: "the meadow", "the ocean") and precise detail (close-up: "the gnarled trunk", "the foam of the great wave") and the connection of words to the things they describe is relative: what is the average size of a hill?

Upper secondary school level

• Before the visit

1. Measure the gap between image and text, underlining the fact that in literature, nature is almost always linked with a moral jugement: the countryside, sane virtuous, and hygienic, is often contrasted to the city, licentious, vice-ridden, and corrupt; lying between the two, the suburbs tend nonetheless to be contaminated by the latter:
Guy de Maupassant: *La femme de Paul* (*Paul's Wife*, 1880); *Au printemps* (*In the Spring*,1881)
Emile Zola: *Thérèse Raquin* (1867); *L'Assommoir* (*The Dram Shop*, 1877)
There is nothing of this antinomy to be felt in painting, least of all in the works of the Impressionists who present haymaking in Brittany, a field of poppies and the Boulevard des Capucines or the Rue Montorgueuil with an equal joy of light and movement.

2. Since Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the landscape in literature has been "talkative": it has made itself, or rather ourselves, heard, for when nature speaks, it only echoes our voice. The painter Valenciennes already called for the landscape painter to metaphorically "make [nature] talk to the soul through an action of love", while another painter, Théodore Rousseau, affirmed he endeavoured to hear "the voice of trees [...] the language of forests".
This rhetoric of communion, of the dialogue between man and nature, was largely developed in poetry and literature; one can give as examples Victor Hugo's collection of poems: *Les voix intérieures* (*Inner Voices*, 1837) and Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* (*The Charterhouse of Parma*, 1839): for Fabrice del Dongo, the hero of the novel, the forests of the Côme lake are "those that speak most to his soul".
But later, in a more disenchanted period, on the eve of the First World War, it is incommunicability which prevails. To Rainer Maria Rilke, in his *Essais sur l'art* (*Essays on Art*, 1912), "[the landscape] is a life that is not our life, which does not participate in anything of ours, and which celebrates its festivities without seeing us and which we observe with a certain confusion, like guests arriving by chance and only being able to speak another language."

3. In painting, the landscape is more often mute, at least in the case of the Impressionists: their paintings offer pieces of nature, in the glory of the moment, apparently with no other purpose than that of pleasing the eye, rejoicing in the fullness of a sunny atmosphere, expressing the happiness of the scene presented by the banks of the Seine or the Normandy coast while indulging unrestrainedly in sensations of colour and light.
One may wonder why Impressionism, so shocking and scandalous to the viewers of the time who only perceived in it splashes of crude colours, later became the archetype of the most harmonious painting, the most serene, offering to the world an idyllic vision of absolute plenitude?
A possible answer lies in the easy accessibility of a style of painting that supposes no prior knowledge of mythology or literature in order to be "understood". Once the public is familiar with the use of light and bright colours and the free technique of execution which scorns a meticulous finish, then these are works which directly address the public's hedonistic sensuality, providing them an effortless and quasi-immediate "way in".

4 Standing in extreme contrast to the lyricism and poetry of the landscape are Gustave Flaubert's satire and derision:
- On the Barbizon group: *L'Éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*, 1869), part 3, chapter 1.
- and relevant to the Impressionist approach: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), Gallimard, coll. Folio, p. 88 and 382.
In the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues,* attached to the above novel, Flaubert wrote under the letter P: "Paysages de peinture: toujours des plats d'épinards !" ("Landscape paintings: always dishes of spinach!").

• After the visit

1. The pictorial landscape in the 19th century is the result of a contemplative approach in which we are given an exterior view (generally that of the city-dweller) on a domesticated and aestheticised nature.
Oscar Wilde: *The Decay of Lying* in the collection of essays *Intentions* (1891):
"Where she [nature] used to give us Corots and Daubignys, she gives us now exquisite Monets and entrancing Pissarros."
The paradox implies that nature imitates art, in so far as the painting (which includes within itself references to other paintings too) precedes our vision of nature.
This may be illustrated by mentioning the petition, signed in the early 1850's by the Barbizon painters, demanding that the clearing of the Fontainebleau forest be stopped and that the sites of Barbizon and Chailly be protected. Théodore Rousseau used his connections with members of parliament to have a decree passed to protect the site; this was achieved in 1856. The forest became something of a historical monument: an artwork derived from Rousseau's, Daubigny's and Dupré's paintings.
One should also mention Claude Monet's transformation of Giverny, in Normandy, from orchard to pleasure garden from its acquisition in 1883 until the painter's death in 1926. This garden, with its cherry trees, its water lily pond and its Japanese wooden bridge, was the sole subject for his numerous series of *Water Lilies;* according to a contemporary, Monet is reputed to have said: "My greatest masterpiece is my garden".

2. Distinguish, from the aesthetic point of view, the notion of natural beauty from the notion of the sublime: whereas Romanticism in the first half of the 19thcentury was searching for the utmost spiritual elevation and using every means to attain it - first among which was imagination – Realism, and then Impressionism, preferred to work with

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the offerings of prosaic surroundings and the everyday world.

Underline the fact that beauty and the sublime are not simply two degrees on the same aesthetic pleasure “scale”, as they cannot be compared: indeed, according to Kant, whilst natural beauty is a category of understanding, the sublime only pertains to the imagination. One cannot even say that they are opposed, since the sublime is without measure or form. It is the infinite, the colossal, the unbound, and in this way it runs counter to ones reason (or rather, *reason* runs counter to *it*, especially in the field of mathematics). One can illustrate the incompatibility of the two notions by focusing on the “object”, for whilst there may be beautiful objects, there can be no such thing as a sublime object; which is precisely why landscape was chosen as the medium through which the sublime was expressed.

List of artworks

N.B.: in the case of guided tours, this list of artworks is indicative. The guide leading the group of pupils is free to choose the works which illustrate their demonstration.

- Gustave Courbet: *L’Atelier* (*The Studio*), 1850-51
- Paul Huet: *Le Gouffre* (*The Abyss*), 1861
- Gustave Courbet: *La Vague* (*The Wave*), 1869
- Camille Corot: *Une matinée; la danse des nymphes* (*One Morning; The Dance of Nymphs*), 1850
- Camille Corot: *La Clairière; souvenir de Ville-d’Avray* (*The Clearing; Souvenir of Ville-d’Avray*),1872
- Théodore Rousseau: *Une avenue; forêt de L’Isle-Adam* (*An Avenu; Forest of L’Isle-Adam*), 1849
- Eugène Boudin: *Baigneurs sur la plage de Trouville* (*Bathers on the Beach in Trouville*),1869
- Charles-François Daubigny: *La Neige* (*The Snow*),1873
- Claude Monet: *La Pie* (*The Magpie*), 1868-69
- Claude Monet: *Grosse mer à’Étretat* (*Stormy Sea at Etretat*), 1868-69
- Gustave Courbet: *La Falaise d’Étretat après l’orage* (*The Cliff at Etretat After the Storm*),1870
- Claude Monet: *Train dans la campagne* (*Train in the Countryside*),1870
- Camille Pissarro: *La Moisson à Montfoucault* (*The Harvest in Montfoucault*),1876
- Claude Monet: *Londres, le Parlement: trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* (*London, the Houses of Parliament: shaft of Light in the Fog*), 1904
- Paul Cézanne: *Le Pont de Maincy, près de Melun* (*The Bridge in Maincy, near Melun*),1880
- Vincent van Gogh: *Chaumes de Cordeville à Auvers-sur-Oise* (*Cordeville Thatch in Auvers-sur-Oise*), 1890
- Paul Gauguin: *Paysage de Bretagne; le moulin David* (*Brittany Landscape; the David Mill*) 1894
- Paul Sérusier: *Le Talisman*, 1888
- André Derain: *Le Pont de Charing Cross* (*Charing Cross Bridge*), 1906
- Maurice de Vlaminck: *Coteaux de Rueil* (*Hillsides in Rueil*)1906
- Pierre Bonnard: *En barque* (*In a Bark*),1907
- Ker-Xavier Roussel: *L’Enlèvement des filles de Leucippe* (*The Abduction of Leucippe’s Daughters*), 1911
- Gustav Klimt : *Rosiers sous les arbres* (*Rose Plants Under Trees*),1905

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- Sophie Monneret, *L’impressionnisme et son époque*, Denoël, 1978, new edition Laffont “Bouquins”, 1987
- Pierre Miquel, *Le paysage français au XIX*^{e} *siècle; l’école de la nature*, La Martinelle, 1975
- Kenneth Clark, *L’art du paysage*, Gérard Monfort, 1988
- Roland Recht, *La lettre de Humboldt*, Christian Bourgois, 1989
- Henri Focillon, *La peinture au XIX*^{e} *siècle*, Flammarion, 1991
- Philippe Hamon, *La description littéraire*, Macula, 1991

The rise of landscape painting

La visite : les œuvres

Introduction

• Gustave Courbet: *L'Atelier* (*The Studio*), 1850-51
Location: gallery 7

"This is the world which comes to me to have its portrait painted" Courbet declared about this manifesto-setting realist painting. This may be true, but using a device not dissimilar to that used by Diego Velázquez in *Las Meninas*, Courbet represents himself painting neither the people gathered in his studio nor even his nude model, on whom he is turning his back, but… a landscape, from memory or imagination, of his native Franche-Comté to which he is giving the last touches with a flourish. The vivid luminosity emanating from his landscape, contrasting with the darkness of the studio, is emblematic of the exclusive attention given to light effects by landscape painters, which led to the magnified brightness of the Impressionists a few years later. Thus, the canvas represented in the centre of the painting is like a hole in the surface of the canvas, a window opening on the outside, further accentuated by the piece of curtain-like drapery covering the top part of the painted sky. Such a pictorial anomaly did not escape Eugène Delacroix who wrote in 1851 in his *Diary*:
"The only fault [made by Courbet in *The Studio*] is that the painting he is working on causes amphibology [is equivocal]: it looks like a "real" sky in the middle of the painting".

1. The landscape as an emotional state

• Paul Huet : *Le Gouffre* (*The Abyss*), 1861
Location: gallery 2

This composed landscape testifies to the late survival of the Romantic spirit that established affinities between the lyricism of natural elements and an emotional state often verging on the melancholic, connections that are manifested here by the metaphor of the abyss; a visual, but also linguistic metaphor: one may be said to be "au bord du gouffre" ("on the verge of the abyss"), "s'abîmer dans le désespoir" ("to be plunged in despair") or to "hit rock bottom".
There is little plausibility in the presence of such an abyss in the midst of steep rocks in the immediate vicinity of such a vast open field, particularly when it is known that Huet made studies for this painting in the Fontainebleau forest; the result is a terrifying, if somewhat affected and over-dramatised image.
"The figures should indicate that an accident, a catastrophe has occurred" Paul Huet explained, and indeed everything in the painting points to this; nature is particularly hostile: threatening clouds, anxious birds, trees shaken by the wind, agitated and frightened horses – whose instinctive sensitivity to danger is well-known. The handling is as fiery and nervous as the protagonists' horses and the scaly surface is well adapted to suggest the particular glow of a stormy sky.

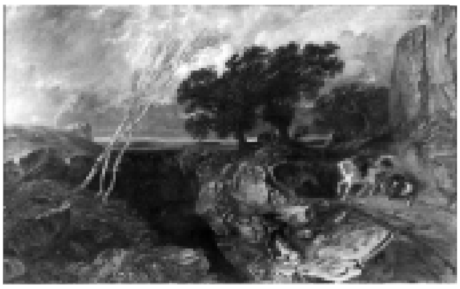
• Gustave Courbet : *La Vague (The Wave)*, 1869
Location: gallery 7

In *The Studio* (1850-51) – *a real allegory of seven years of my life* – Courbet gives prominent place to a still-life made from Romantic cast-offs: a wide-brimmed hat with black feather, a guitar and a dagger; it is hardly surprising then, that he went on to make several paintings on the eminently Romantic theme of a very stormy sea under a menacing sky, the central subject of which is a breaking wave topped with foam. Far from being merely anecdotal, here the artist uses "nature unleashed" to make a rich pictorial work in the blunt colours and greys of the storm, with the aim of transcribing the strength of the elements – solid, liquid and gas – which he renders with thick "scumbled" impasto. Rather than using symbolism to express the pangs of a tormented soul, the artist's manifest intention is to encourage a quasi-geological sensibility to the swallowing power of nature. The only evocation here of mankind's frailty in the face of the force of nature is indicated by the presence of a sailing boat in the distance and two small boats lying on their sides on the shore; we are a long way from Géricault's tragic *Raft of the Medusa*.

2. Landscape as a visible subject

• Camille Corot: *Une matinée ; la danse des nymphes* (*One Morning; the Dance of Nymphs*, 1850)
Location: gallery 5

Corot demonstrates a vivid and extremely accurate sensitivity to the atmosphere of a landscape, to the nuances of light and its soft vibrations, but his work retains the mark of tradition (he resided for a long time in Rome), both in the survival of mythological subjects and in the clear cut distinction between studies "on nature" and finished studio paintings. This dichotomy in his work was to remain a constant throughout his career, a fact Corot resented painfully, writing in 1857, about J.F. Millet's peasant scenes: "It is for me a new world in which I am lost; I belong too much to the old one".
In this painting, even though the landscape holds a prominent place it remains nonetheless the backdrop to an imaginary scene: a bacchanal of dryads. However, as lyrical heroism was no longer a dominant value in 19thcentury bourgeois society, the goddesses are only there to enliven the theatre-stage of nature. In fact, the painting may be the result of the combination of two distinct memories: on one hand that of the gardens of the Villa Farnese in Rome, on the other, that of a ballet at the Opera – hence the ambiguity of the title, the word "matinée" possibly being an allusion to daytime performances as opposed to "soirées".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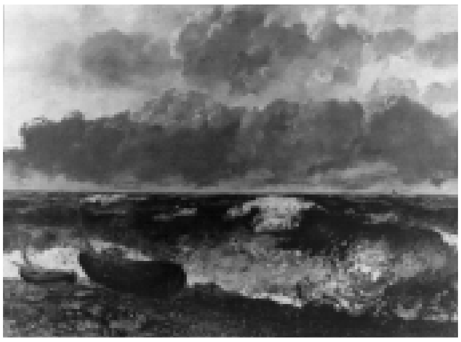
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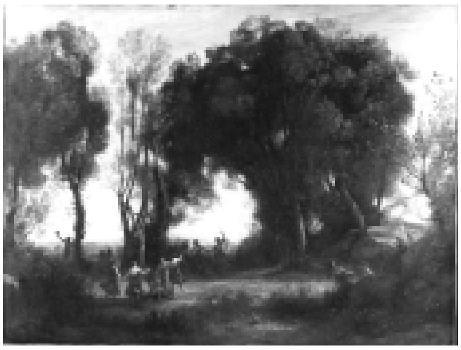
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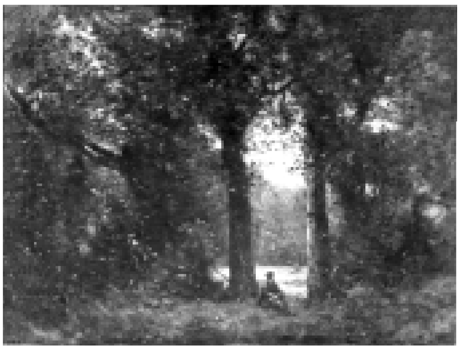
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1. Paul Huet : *Le Gouffre*, 1861
2. Gustave Courbet : *La Vague*, 1869
3. Camille Corot : *Une matinée ; la danse des nymphes*, 1850
4. Camille Corot : *La Clairière ; souvenir de Ville d'Avray*, 1872

- Camille Corot: *La Clairière ; souvenir de Ville-d'Avray* (*The Clearing; Souvenir of Ville-d'Avray*, 1872)
Location: gallery 5

The artist wrote in 1856: “[in representing] any place, any object, we should submit ourselves to our first impressions, if we have really been moved, the sincerity of our emotions will be transmitted to others”. Such declarations as these have prompted art historians to consider Corot as one of the most direct precursors of Impressionism. But whereas Impressionists base their work on the immediateness of sensation, Corot, on the contrary, works with reminiscence; the filter between nature and the artwork is no longer that of invention, but is not yet that of the retina: it is memory.
The treatment of the trees in the foreground is blurred, just like “visual” memories; the leaves are painted in an airy, velvety and impalpable way. This refreshing vegetal curtain opens on the clearing itself, the sense of depth being suggested by the contrast of light alone which creates at the same time, the density of the atmosphere.
The landscape is discreetly inhabited by two beings who are not mentioned in the title: a young woman, dressed (and therefore not bathing), whose turned head directs our gaze towards a deer, fleeing in the distance. Only one anachronistic clue: the bow lying on her lap, provides the key to the scene; she is Diana the huntress, figured here in the same way as the cow herd in T. Rousseau's painting *Une avenue, forêt de L'Isle-Adam* (*An Avenue, L'Isle-Adam Forest*, 1849). Corot seems here to confirm – unwillingly – the truthfulness of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin's statement when he wrote, in *Archipelago* (1800), of “the dissolution of mythology in landscape painting, at the moment when the gods are leaving the stage”. More prosaically, Emile Zola, in his first Salon, that of 1866, expressed the following wish: “If only M. Corot would consent to finally kill off all the nymphs in his woods, and replace them with peasant women…”
Eight years later, the naturalist critic's wish would be granted, in particular in paintings like *Le Moulin de Saint-Nicolas-lez-Arras* (*The Mill in Saint-Nicolas-lez-Arras*, 1874).

- Théodore Rousseau: *Une avenue, forêt de L'Isle-Adam* (*An Avenue, L'Isle-Adam Forest*, 1849)
Location: gallery 5

The Barbizon school was named after a locality in the Fontainebleau forest where a group of painters – Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse Diaz de la Pena, Jules Dupré, Charles-François Daubigny, and Constant Troyon – settled to escape the growing industrialisation of urban zones. They shared a common will, to feed their nostalgia for a golden age with a peaceful, rustic image of nature - a golden age much more recent than that evoked by the other Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. A degree of melancholy remains like a continuous undertone, in their evocations of an idyllic communion with a nature which is bountiful and protective.
This work, painted some time before the artist settled in Barbizon, has no other real subject than this calm and silent row of trees where a shaft of sunlight bathes the peaceful cows in a sweet and golden warmth. The attention given to the particular effects of light is not a radical novelty; in his Salon of 1767, Denis Diderot already stated: “Didn't you know […] that a landscape in which the understanding of light is not of prime importance is a piece of bad painting.” What does seem innovative in Rousseau's painting however, is the choice of an unusual light effect observed for its own sake, to which the artist lends not only a visual equivalent but engenders sensations of warmth and freshness through the use of clearly distinct and very light tones, in the division of the surface, through zones of shadows and through a brushstroke fragmented in multiple deposits of pigments.

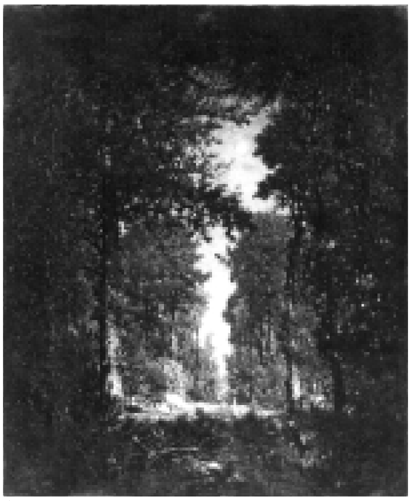
- Charles-François Daubigny: *La Neige* (*Snow*, 1873)
location: gallery 6

The large stretch of landscape visible on this long, horizontal painting which recalls panoramas, indicates the desire, inherited from romanticism, to master space as a whole whilst striving to communicate a sense of the infinite in the necessarily finite limits of a painting (in this matter, see also: Antoine Chintreuil, *L'espace*, *Space*, 1869). In the Romantic era, the artists' objective had been to create a state of communion with the sublime aspect of nature through a visual shock, which was intended to induce in the viewer an impulse of “empathy” (a capacity to feel the sentiments of someone else through identification rather than through mere understanding), a powerful emotion before the hugeness of the landscape.
Such is not really the case here, as there is no remaining pathos, no fury of the elements; the sky is not menacing, the ravens themselves are in no way threatening, nor - unlike Van Gogh's – do they convey any morbid allusions. No edifying statement, no anecdote, is to be found in this painting which simply offers the view of a desolate winter landscape. The main interest lies in the way of rendering an opaque and muffled light, together with the roughness of a winter blanket with a thick impasto of white, scraped with a knife, under the pale reddish glow of a freezing sunset, in counterpoint to the network of bare black trees, on whose branches the ravens are gathering.

3. The landscape as light phenomenon

- Eugène Boudin: *Baigneurs sur la plage de Trouville* (*Bathers on the Beach at Trouville*, 1869)
Location: gallery 16

Boudin, the painter of Honfleur and its surroundings, with whom the young Monet discovered the charms of plein air painting, made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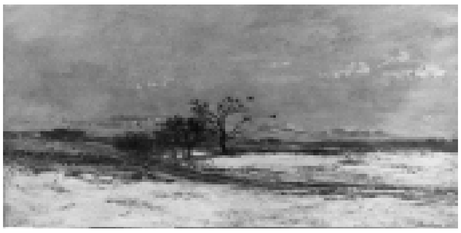
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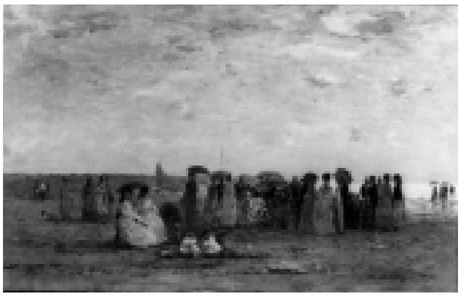
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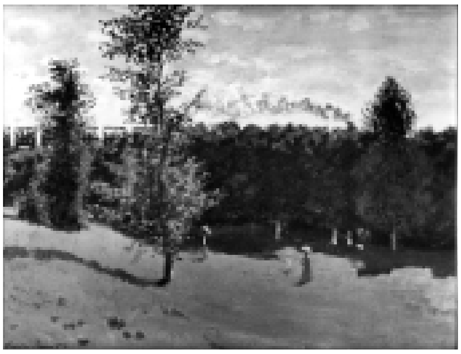
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5. Théodore Rousseau : *Une avenue ; forêt de L'Isle-Adam*, 1849
6. Charles-François Daubigny : *La Neige*, 1873
7. Eugène Boudin : *Baigneurs sur la plage de Trouville*, 1869
8. Claude Monet : *Train dans la campagne*, 1870

it a principle that all his paintings be done entirely in front of the subject which explains why his canvases are generally of a small format. They are instantaneous notations of coastlines in which almost all the space is devoted to the sky.
Seaside holidays were a growing fashion at the time, especially the Normandy coast which had became easily accessible to Parisians thanks to the development of the railways, but Boudin was less interested in the characters, whose silhouettes he painted in a few quick strokes, than in the movement of the clouds which he seized with a truly meteorological accuracy; like John Constable a few years before, he even made a note of the precise season, time, and the direction of the wind. Baudelaire, in his Salon of 1859, wrote that these studies "so faithfully caught what is most fleeting, most elusive in its shape and colour: waves and clouds […]".
It was indeed as mere studies rather than compositions, because of their small formats, their quick execution, and their unfinished quality, that some paintings by Boudin were accepted by the Salon for the galleries set aside for sketches.

- Claude Monet: *Train dans la campagne* (*Train in the Countryside*, 1870)
Location: gallery 18

This small painting, dating from before the "effective" birth of the Impressionist movement – the first exhibition of the group was only to take place four years later – is representative of the preference for the domesticated nature of the Parisian West over the "wilder" nature of the countryside outside the Paris region; the young generation of plein air painters set their easels in front of a manmade, gardenlike nature, in a word, an aestheticised nature.
In spite of the remark the critic Jules Champfleury made in his manifesto *Le Réalisme* published in 1857: "Isn't the machine, and the role it plays in the landscape, enough to make a good painting?", the emergence of an industrial subject – the railway – remains quite allusive. Here, only the wagons are visible, the engine is hidden behind a screen of greenery and only the steam is visible; the machine, which has not yet conquered in its status as an aesthetic object, is veiled behind dense trees.
On the technical level, the time not having yet come for scattered multiple strokes, the tones of a restricted palette, homogeneous and vividly contrasted, are placed in large zones according to a simplified distribution of lights and darks, rather similar from a tonal point of view to the first photographs.

- Camille Pissarro: *La Moisson à Montfoucault* (*Harvest in Montfoucault*, 1876)
Location: gallery 32

It is often thought that as far as the Impressionists were concerned the subject was anecdotal, a mere pretext for the study of luminous and coloured sensations, but this is the consequence of a modernist, formalist reading of the movement. A closer examination soon reveals they deliberately set their easels in places which enabled them to project a rather traditional vision of a picturesque, rural France, protected from the effects of industrialisation; a harmonious, serene countryside, full of peace.
Pissarro's freshness of execution, quick without being nervous, the unfinished quality leaving bare canvas showing in many places – in particular in the clouds – results from a desire to let the ochre-pink canvas play a role as texture and colour in the painting. This technique, applied to such a commonplace, everyday scene bears witness to a state of "innocence of seeing" which would soon be lost for ever.

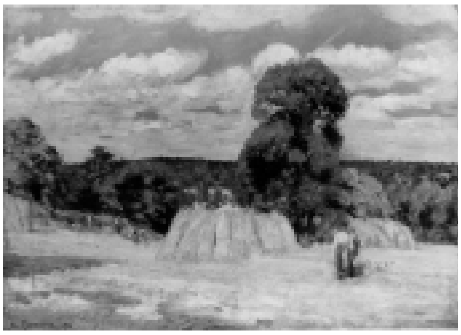
- Claude Monet: *Londres, le Parlement: trouée de soleil dans le brouillard* (*London, the Houses of Parliament: shaft of Light in the Fog,* 1904)
Location: gallery 39

Confronted with the legendary British weather and having William Turner's paintings in mind, Monet carried two fundamental principles of Impressionist technique to their ultimate conclusion: the dissolution of forms and volumes into the atmosphere, and the reciprocal exaltation of complementary colours. By the exclusive use of a simultaneous play of oranges and blues, Monet rendered palpable the density of the air, filled with its mist of light diffracting water droplets.
Considering the iridescence of the sunlight and the evanescence of the architecture within such an ethereal atmosphere, the realism of the Impressionist approach seems to consist of fidelity to optical sensation rather than to the subject. But as the impressionists had no other creed than to "paint truthfully", they were in fact sparking off the process of Painting's future liberation from an obligation to imitate nature by founding the autonomy of pictorial means. The impact of Impressionism on the generations to come, resided in the way it transgressed its initial programme (to paint the reality of sensation) and liberated brushstroke and colour from their reference to the real subject.

4. Landscape as the construction of the surface of the painting

- Paul Cézanne: *Le Pont de Maincy, près de Melun* (*The Bridge in Maincy, near Melun*, 1880)
Location: gallery 36

Born in Aix-en-Provence, the painter considered that sensation, far from being limited to the retina, was an essential part in the activity of the brain; accordingly, the artist is the "conscience of the landscape" and the painting is the transposition of a quality in the individual as much as it is of the things it represents. This is why Cézanne reproached Monet for being no more than an eye, and why the ephemeral quality of luminous phenomena was alien to his sensibility. Only the solid and permanent interested him, as is attested in this landscape of absolute immobility: Here,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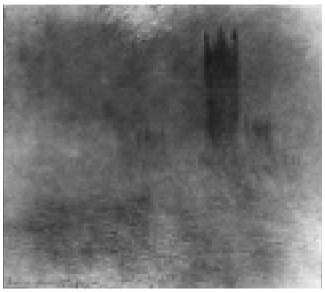
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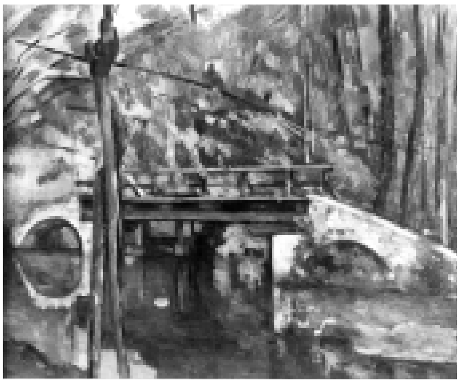
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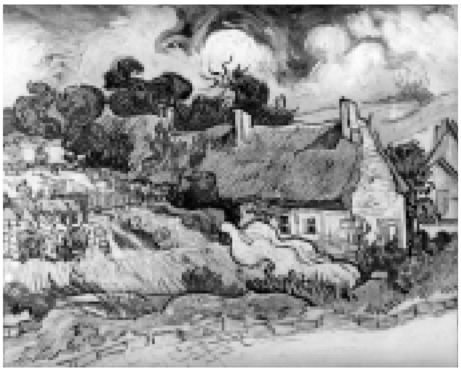
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9. Camille Pissarro : *La Moisson à Montfoucault*, 1876
10. Claude Monet : *Londres, le Parlement : trouée de soleil dans le brouillard*, 1904
11. Paul Cézanne : *Le Pont de Maincy, près de Melun*, 1880
12. Vincent van Gogh : *Chaumes de Cordeville à Auvers-sur-Oise*, 1890

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there is no breath to disturb the surface of this dark water which, like a mirror, presents a reflection of the bridge which is equally substantial. It emanates a feeling of permanency identical to that which would be inspired by the numerous paintings of the Montagne Sainte-Victoire.
Cézanne preferred isolated subjects to overviews; the span of the site is here very restrained, and the central subject of the bridge allows him to develop an architecture on the level of the canvas by giving the drawn line its importance back. But Cézanne avoids any paralysis in the movement of his lines by playing on a certain irregularity in the contours, which are interrupted, only to be continued further on. The brush strokes do not exactly follow the direction of the represented elements but inscribe an autonomous oblique rhythm, while the green hues develop from a dominant emerald, the leaves having been given the appearance of mineral splinters.

- Vincent van Gogh: *Chaumes de Cordeville à Auvers-sur-Oise* (*Cordeville Thatch in Auvers-sur-Oise*, 1890)
  Location: gallery 35

This painting was made during the most frenetic and creative period in the artist's career, a few months before the tragic end to his short life. Van Gogh left Provence after his voluntary sojourn in the asylum in Saint-Rémy and by this time was in Auvers-sur-Oise, to the North of Paris.
The landscape has here been sublimated by psychic forces: the quiet thatched houses which can still be seen in old photographs seem here to be lifted by some powerful earth tremor which dilates volumes, causing the roofs to undulate, distorting the small barrier and metamorphosing hills, trees and clouds into dancing torches. Obviously this is not a case, as with the Romantics, of the artist being upset and tormented by the grandiose landscape; on the contrary, it is he who torments and inflames everything down to the smallest hovel and the last cypress tree.
All the elements in the landscape unify in the curving of their outlines marked by frenetic sinuous lines, generating whirling rhythms which, like waves, are amplified or crash together; energising the surface of the canvas into paroxysms. In addition, the pictorial matter is worked in full impasto, in which he has carved deep furrows in parallel networks.

- Paul Gauguin : *Paysage de Bretagne ; le Moulin David* (*Brittany Landscape; the David Mill*, 1894)
  Location: gallery 44

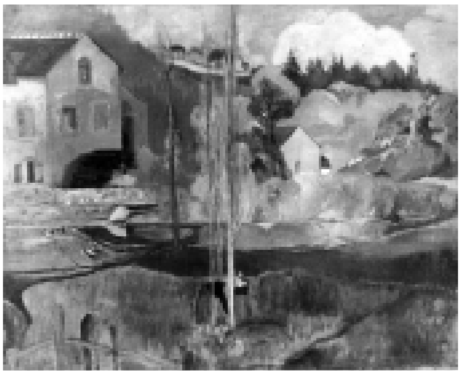
Like Cézanne and Van Gogh, Gauguin was convinced painting should not only interpret retinal sensations, and like Odilon Redon who found it "low-ceilinged", he considered Impressionism, shallow; "thought does not dwell in it". For him, painting meant using simplified pictorial means to search beyond appearances for a reality more complete and thought out, a spiritual reality which he named "abstraction". Looking at the *David Mill*, it is easily to see that the artist's interest no longer lies in the quest for the changing light, with its ephemeral variations and iridescent glitters: here nothing moves, everything is stable, unified, definitive.
The lines that combine synthetically the verticals of the houses and trees in the foreground with the sinuous and undulating lines of the meadow, stream and even the barrier, all concur to endow this Breton subject with the mythical evocation of a primitive and paradisiacal nature. The oblong forms of the hill correspond to the "bumps" of cloud, schematised in the manner of children's drawings. Stretching across each of these distinct zones, are tones which are both exalted – pure green and emerald, oranges, cobalt blue – and mostly arbitrary in their relation to reality.
The brush stroke is light, lain along on the weft of a rough canvas, and is devoid of relief, colour gradation or any indication of shade or variation in texture.

- Paul Sérusier: *Le Talisman* (*The Talisman*, 1888)
  Location: gallery 48

Painted in Pont-Aven under the "direction" of Gauguin on the cover of a cigar box – which, according to legend, seems to have arisen simply whilst making comparisons between the size of such boxes – this very small painting radicalised the approach of the "master" who was soon to leave for Tahiti in his search for a purifying primitivism.
The use of vivid colours, completely independent of the actual landscape to which the painting is still – very slightly – intended to refer, the extreme simplification of the forms disposed on the flat surface without any concern for the suggestion of any depth or relief, lead to a "landscape so synthetically formulated as to have become shapeless", according to the artist Maurice Denis for whom the painting was a revelation, as it was for his group of friends: in particular Émile Bernard, Pierre Bonnard, and Édouard Vuillard. These painters were soon to call themselves the "Nabis" ("prophets" in Hebrew) and they would nickname Sérusier's painting *The Talisman*, as its small size rather suggested some sacred icon.
In retrospect, posterity would see in this work the manifesto of pure painting, autonomous and abstract, to be connected with Maurice Denis's famous statement: "Remember that a painting, before being a battle horse, a nude woman or any anecdote, is mainly a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain way", published as early as 1914, in *Théories*.

- Gustav Klimt: *Rosiers sous les arbres* (*Rose Plants Under the Trees*, 1905)
  Location: gallery 60

At first glance, taking in the multiplicity of strokes and juxtaposed tints – yellows, greens, blues, mauves – one could take this for an Impressionist painting. Yet this work proceeds from quite a different set of aesthetics, in which the decorative dominates over the effects of light and atmosphere. The Viennese artist develops the indistinct profusion of greenery in a subtly balanced combination of naturalism and over simplicity. The perfectly square surface of the canvas (all the artist's landscapes had the same format of 110 x 110 cm) is almost entirely saturated with the uniformly flat mosaic of merging leaves and flowers. The tree tops form a dense block, independent of their trunks, yet integrating rose bushes and filling the canvas to the very edge; in a space thus overwhelmed, only the corners reveal a furtive glimpse of the horizon, just 5 cm from the upper edge of the canvas.
The overt ornamentation supplants the very landscape it obliterates, as if driven by a radical horror of emptiness.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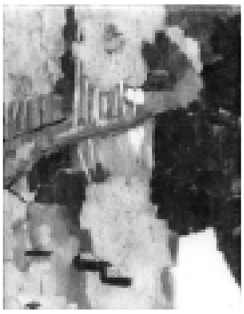
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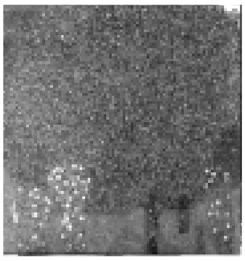
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13. Paul Gauguin : *Paysage de Bretagne ; le Moulin David*, 1894
14. Paul Sérusier : *Le Talisman*, 1888
15. Gustav Klimt : *Rosiers sous les arbres*, 1905