

The rural world seen by artists 1848-1914

- Presentation
- Objectives
- Before the visit
- The visit: list of artworks
- After the visit
- Bibliography

Presentation

This visit is structured around two poles, one being history and the other, art history and literature.

1. Transformation of 19th century rural France

- After centuries of snail-paced change, rural France's entry into the 19th century heralded an era of, if not revolution, then dramatic transformation. Whilst the ancient, rural way of life with its centuries old rhythms and customs persisted, features associated with today's countryside: mechanisation, profitability, depopulation, etc. were already beginning to take hold.
- A few such transformations:
 - the overpopulation of the countryside (circa 1840) gave way to rural depopulation, a trend which accelerated from 1870 onwards.
 - the traditional communal life bound by custom and ritual was progressively replaced by a more open way of life, suffused with individualism and urban practices.
 - aristocratic and bourgeois proprietors turned their interests to industrial property leaving more room for tenant farmers to acquire land. By 1908, 84% of agricultural property was cultivated by its owner.
 - the first technological revolution ended the exclusive use of animal and manpower. As early as the 1860s, the moldboard plough, the threshing machine, the harvester, etc. began to be used up and down the country.
 - Rural poverty was progressively succeeded by a degree of affluence, an amelioration which is noticeable in the quality of 19th century rural furniture.
- This rural transformation was dominated, from 1848 to 1914, by two contradictory social and economic phases:
 - expansion from 1850 to 1880
 - crisis from 1880 to 1914
- Despite the changes, France remained fundamentally more rural than her neighbours. Although, during the sixty years from 1851 to 1911, France's rural population had fallen from 75% to 56% of the overall population, it still represented a majority, unlike that of Germany (40% in 1911) and Great Britain (27% in 1911).

2. The taste for rural subjects in 19th century art

- This rural rooting of French society was championed in the field of the arts by an unprecedented passion for rural subjects.
- In literature, the countryside was at the heart of numerous works: Balzac's *Paysans* (*Peasants*, 1845), Zola's *La terre* (*The Earth*), George Sand's *La mare au diable* (*The Devil's Pool*, 1846), Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), Huysmans' *En rade* (*Becalmed*, 1886) and various short stories by Maupassant. The final novel to gain popularity in this series of rural narratives was written in 1904, by a genuine countryman, Émile Guillaumin: *La vie d'un simple* (*The Life of a Simple Man*).
- In the visual arts, a brief tour of the Musée d'Orsay collections is enough to confirm the importance of rural themes for painters in the second half of the 19th century. The popularity of the rural subject even exceeded that of history painting, though the latter remained the highest goal for official artists.
 - Even when painting domestic scenes ("genre painting"), artists showed a marked preference for rural settings over urban life, for all its growth and progress.
 - This was certainly true for the artists of the Barbizon school who, from 1848 onwards, settled in the countryside to paint from direct observation, and for the Realists who took their subjects from everyday contemporary life.
 - Later, in the 1870s-1890's, the new generations of Impressionists and Postimpressionists also turned their attentions to rural life – at least to the outskirts of the city - but more superficially, and with different objectives: for them, the "modern" life of cities and their inhabitants held attractions too.

3. The country-dweller as a social concept

- At the point where history and art history meet, art can often illuminate aspects of the zeitgeist. In this way the 19th century taste for rural subjects in literature and visual art reveals – and this should be stressed – as much about society's concept of country people as about the country people themselves: the resulting image, far from being cohesive, is equivocal and contradictory. The phenomenon was reflected by numerous critics in the press.
- Generally speaking – and mainly before the 1870's – two opposing visions prevailed: on one hand, artists pictured the rural community engaged in the immutable rhythm of work, habits, and customs etc. Such paintings were welcomed by the public as they reassured the viewer, presenting country people as archetypes, the incarnation of an austere and eternal work ethic, the unshakable pillars of a society as yet untouched by the turbulence of the Industrial Revolution affecting the rest of the world. The same image could be found in some of the novels of the period.
 - on the other hand, the works of certain artists (particularly early Courbet and Millet) were thought to question these values and so drew a hostile reaction. Yet, before being adopted by painters, this negative image of country people – which portrays them as primitive if not bestial – had already been explored by certain novelists (Balzac, Zola...) and furthermore, it was an attitude often shared by the bourgeoisie and city-dwellers.

Objectives

1. An interdisciplinary subject

Whilst, this visit is highly suitable for inclusion in the GCSE or A level history syllabus, it also provides art history classes with an excellent pretext for studying the main artistic movements of the 19th century: the Barbizon school, Realism and Naturalism, Impressionism and Postimpressionism.

This visit also encourages the combined study of literature and visual arts. It allows students to understand the crucial role of light in painting: Millet's use of contre-jour enables him to preserve his figures' anonymity thereby turning them into types: the shepherdess, the winnower, the gleaners... ; and Monet's real subject in his haystacks series, is the variation in the light according to the moment... Likewise, students will see that in the 19th century the literary focus on an uncompromising treatment of things rustic preceded the painter's interest in this subject...

2. An obvious point: an artwork is not an illustration

One must resist the temptation to use an artwork simply for its documentary value. It is true that paintings, with their numerous visual details, are particularly useful in contributing to our knowledge of the 19th century rural world and one might easily content oneself with using artworks as mere illustrations for the history class' textbook treatment of the Industrial Revolution and its attendant social upheavals.

However, in studying art one enters a much larger dimension which allows for more varied and open questions. Even if one discounts the intrinsic nature of the artwork, which makes its satisfactory reproduction in a textbook impossible, one must take account of the artist's motivation, personality and above all, outlook.

3. A reflection: the artist observes and then transposes reality

The work of art, be it painting, sculpture, or even photography, is not an innocent double of reality. The artist, striving neither to be reporter nor historian, does not have to pretend to be either comprehensive or objective.

Of course, artists observe reality and never more so than in the second half of the 19th century when they were championing contemporary, everyday subjects and therefore, the necessity for direct observation. It is this aspect of the artistic process which justifies subjecting each work to an historical analysis in order to gather specific data. But, having made their observations, notes and sketches on their chosen subject, the artists usually made the finished work in their studios, transposing – if not transforming – the subject according to their personal pictorial, sensual, and

semantic requirements. Therefore, when contemplating each work, one must keep the artist's objectives in mind. In this case one should be trying to discover each artist's specific attitude to the rural world.

To sum up, an artwork is a visual witness of its time: it contains the kind of details no description could fully encompass and is the manifestation of ideas, values and attitudes... but it is a highly objective and ambivalent witness and must be treated as such.

4. A method: Comparison

To fully understand an artwork's value as historical witness, it should be compared with other sources of information on the same theme - in this case, the rural world.

* Firstly one should compare what is known of 19th century rural history with what is shown in the artworks. As a rule, artists seemed to be more comfortable representing traditional rural life and showed little interest in social changes (such as rural depopulation) or in the progress of mechanisation (the introduction of the threshing machine, the harvester etc.). Further observation shows that painters most often portrayed country people at work and that, if they are shown at rest, the painting often takes on the aspect of a rural idyll.

- One should also compare the image of the rural community as it appears in literature and the visual arts: whilst many paintings clearly share the tranquil, rustic atmosphere of Sand's *The Devil's Pool*, one finds little echo in the visual arts of the darkness of Balzac's *Peasants*, of Huysmans's *Becalmed* and of Zola's *The Earth*.

- Finally - and most importantly - artworks should be compared with one another... Such an exercise practiced on Millet's *Gleaners* and Jules Breton's *The Recall of the Gleaners* for example, will highlight the pictorial differences between the works and the even sharper contrast between their respective meanings. Through this method one also finds that for Monet, Pissarro, Gauguin, Émile Bernard and Van Gogh, the rural subject was more of a pretext, a grounds for individual artistic experimentation, whereas for the painters of the Barbizon school, of Realism and of Naturalism it remains a priority (as is proved by the impact of human presence)...

N.B. This work with comparisons provides a good opportunity for pupils to develop their critical faculties.

Before the visit

Depending on the level of the pupils there are various possibilities open to teachers to prepare them for the visit to the Musée d'Orsay.

- Studying the economic and social history of France in the 19th century seems to be indispensable, the main elements being: the Industrial Revolution, the growth of cities, and the peaks and slumps in the rural economies. These broad outlines may be filled in with more detailed studies on themes such as rural population, technical progress, lifestyles, specialisations...

- Observe and analyse school textbook illustrations (or those of 19th century newspapers): the point being to understand the purpose of each image (advertisement, tract, poster, newspaper engraving, photograph, painting, map, graph... etc.) and the specificity of the information provided.

- Analyse the image of the rural community given by the great novelists of the 19th century: Balzac, Georges Sand, Huysmans, Zola, Nain...

- Practice analysis of a work of art using iconographic, pictorial, historic and semantic readings.

The visit: list of artworks

N.B. for guided visits, the list is indicative only. The guide leading the group of pupils is free to choose which artworks support their demonstration.

With two exceptions, all these artworks are paintings.

- Jean-François Millet : *Le retour du troupeau (The Return of the Flock)*, 1846
- Théodore Rousseau : *Une avenue, forêt de l'Isle-Adam (An Avenue in the Forest of L'Isle Adam)*, 1846-1848
- Eugène Guillaume : *Le faucheur (The Reaper)*, sculpture, 1849
- Rosa Bonheur : *Labourage nivernais, le sombrage (Ploughing in the Nivernais, the Dressing of the Vineyard)*, 1849
- Gustave Courbet : *Un enterrement à Ornans (Burial at Ornans)*, 1849
- Jean-François Millet : *Le repos des faneurs (The Haymakers' Rest)*, 1849
- Charles-François Daubigny : *La vendange en Bourgogne (The Grape Harvest in Burgundy)*, 1851
- Constant Troyon : *Bœufs allant au labour, effet du matin (Cattle Going to Work, Morning Effect)*, 1855
- Alexandre Antigna : *La fête-Dieu (Corpus Christi)*, 1855
- Jean-François Millet : *Des glaneuses (Gleaners)*, 1857
- Jean-François Millet : *L'Angéus (The Angelus)*, 1857-58
- Paul Guigou : *La route de la Gineste (The Gineste Road, near Marseille)*, 1859
- Jules Breton : *Le rappel des glaneuses (The Recall of the Gleaners)*, 1859
- Jean-François Millet : *Le parc à moutons, clair de lune (The Sheep Meadow by Moonlight)*, 1861
- Charles Jacque : *Troupeau de moutons dans un paysage (Flock of Sheep in a Landscape)*, 1861
- Constant Troyon : *Vendanges sur les bords de la Seine à Suresnes (Grape Harvesting on the Banks of the Seine in Suresnes)*, 1862
- Charles-François Daubigny : *La moisson (The Harvest)*, 1865
- Claude Monet : *Cour de ferme normande (Farm Yard in Normandy)*, 1865
- Jean-François Millet : *Bergère avec son troupeau (Shepherdess with Her Flock)*, 1864
- Jean-François Millet : *La fileuse, chevrrière auvergnate (The Spinner, Goat Herd from Auvergne)*, 1868-69
- Jean-François Millet : *Un vanneur (A Winnowing)*, 1866-68
- Camille Pissarro : *La moisson à Montfoucault (The Harvest in Montfoucault)*, 1876
- Jules Bastien-Lepage : *Les foins (Hay-Making)*, 1877
- Camille Pissarro : *Jeune fille à la baguette (Young Girl with a Stick)*, 1881
- Léon Lhermitte : *La Paye des moissonneurs (Harvesters' Wages)*, 1882
- Pierre-Auguste Renoir : *La danse à la campagne (Dance in the Countryside)*, 1885

- Vincent Van Gogh : *Paysanne près de lâtre (Countrywoman By the Fireplace)*, 1885
- Vincent Van Gogh : *La méridienne (The Siesta)*, 1889-90
- Paul Gauguin : *Les meules jaunes (Yellow Haystacks)* or *La moisson blonde (The Blond Hay)*, 1889
- Claude Monet : *Les meules (The Haystacks)*, 1890-91
- Émile Bernard : *La moisson au bord de la mer (Harvest by the Sea)*, 1891
- Jules Dalou : *Le grand paysan (The Big Peasant)*, sculpture, 1898

After the visit

Besides making tests or evaluations, there are various ways to expand on the theme in class:

- Making comparisons with 19th century conditions, study today's countryside and its economic and daily life,
- Study the main artistic movements featured in the visit in greater depth. As well as working through the art history sections of the syllabus this will probably require another visit to the Museum.
- Look at works on other themes by artists featured in the visit.

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• The visit: the artworks

Part 1: 1850-1870

How did artists represent the rural world during the period of economic growth? Within its traditional framework, according to the selection below.

1. Théodore Rousseau: *Une avenue, forêt de l'Isle-Adam* (An Avenue of Trees, Forest of l'Isle-Adam), 1846-48

- location: ground floor, second gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: a girl minding a herd of cattle in a forest clearing. As the majority of land was reserved for cereal growing, cowherds had to graze their animals, according to an ancient custom, along the edges of paths and in the woods (the communal lands). It was generally the girls in the community who took the cows to their daily pasture.
- observe the painting: identify and describe the rural scene; how large a place does it occupy in the overall composition? Describe and define the setting. Compare this piece with the Millet which follows.
- the painter's vision: taken superficially, Rousseau only seems to be interested in painting nature and capturing the radiant, midday atmosphere. However, Rousseau was familiar with the life and labour of the countryside and perhaps, taken as a whole, this painting shows his desire to tackle both concerns.

2. Jean François Millet: *Le parc à moutons, clair de lune* (The Sheep Meadow, Moonlight), 1861

- location: ground floor, second gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: a shepherd and his flock of sheep in an open landscape. It is night. The hut on the right is used by the shepherd as a resting place. Sheep farming was carried out in vast circuits over poor soil, waste land, fallow ground and stubble. As the flocks remained outside for entire seasons, the task of guarding them was left to men.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene; how large a place does it occupy in the overall composition? Describe the night and the effect of the moonlight. Compare this painting with the previous one.
- The painter's vision: being the son of country people, Millet lived in empathy with the rural world which he observed in his native Cotentin, in Barbizon and the Auvergne. Here, Millet took the popular subject of sheep farming and set it at night. Perhaps the moonlit atmosphere tells something of the specificity of sheep farming, the sole nocturnal, rural activity?

3. Rosa Bonheur: *Labourage nivernais, le sombreage* (Ploughing in the Nivernais, the Dressing of the Vineyard), 1849

- location: ground floor, upper gallery on the left
- the rural theme: two teams of six oxen. Whilst the herdsman goads the beasts, the ploughman leans on the plough, splitting the earth. This is the dressing of the vineyard, the first deep ploughing of the fallow ground. Such a terrain; packed down, hardened and invaded by weeds, required the full force of three pairs of oxen to carve into it.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene; identify gestures and signs which indicate the strength employed by the men and the animals; describe the landscape, the condition of the soil, the time of day... Compare this painting with that which follows.
- The artist's vision: the painting was a State commission and Rosa Bonheur spent a whole season in the Nivernais in order to paint it. Rather than chasing atmospheric effects, she strove to render with extremely accurate details, the very work of the land in all its harshness and all its serenity. Contemporary critics did not fail to draw comparisons between this painting and George Sand's romantic, pastoral novels: *La mare au diable* (The Devil's Pool, 1846), *François le champi* (The Country Waiif, 1847-1848) and *La petite Fadette* (Little Fadette, 1849).

4. Constant Troyon: *Bœufs allant au labour, effet du matin* (Cattle Going to Work, Morning Effect), 1855

- location: ground floor, upper gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: Its early morning and the oxen, already yoked, are being lead to the plough by the herdsman. In the ploughing order, this is the scene preceding Rosa Bonheur's.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene; how important is it to the overall picture? Describe the morning light and its effects; define the movement of the oxen in relation to the light, in relation to the viewer's gaze... Compare this work with the previous painting.
- The artist's vision: Troyon observed this scene in Sologne. But the precise information on rural activity is blurred by the painter's desire to capture a particular natural light effect and its consequences on the atmosphere: note the place given to the sky, the silhouettes against the light, the cast shadows, the breath of the oxen, the role of values over colours etc..



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1. Théodore Rousseau : *Une avenue de la forêt de l'Isle-Adam*, 1846-48
2. Jean-François Millet : *Le parc à moutons, clair de lune*, 1861
3. Rosa Bonheur : *Labourage nivernais, le sombreage*, 1849
4. Constant Troyon : *Bœufs allant au labour, effet du matin*, 1855

5. Jean-François Millet: *Des glaneuses (Gleaners)*, 1857

- location: ground floor, third gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: gleaning consisted of collecting the ears of corn left behind by the harvesters which meant walking the fields bent double to spot the ears. Ears with stems were made into small bundles called “gleans” whilst stem-less ears were collected in the gleaners’ aprons folded on their waist. Gleaning was an ancient right conceded by the rural community to its poorest members.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene, the attitude, gestures and actions of each gleaner; describe their costumes, their hands, their faces...; what is happening in the background? Describe the activity and think about it in relation to the gleaners. What is the role of the horseman on the right? What time of the day is it?... Compare this with the following painting.
- the painter’s vision: Millet worked at length on this theme in Barbizon, making many preparatory studies. His observation is rich, reproducing exact details and accurate movements. He contrasted, no doubt voluntarily, the roughness and modesty of the gleaners’ work and the luminous abundance of the harvest in the background. Yet Millet did not give his gleaners the air of paupers to be looked upon with pity. Their work brings them simplicity and dignity. And they are far from being portraits, the figures rather embody a type of work.
- the critics: exhibited at the 1857 Salon, the *Gleaners* stirred up conflicting opinions. “The look of greatness and serenity” noted by Edmond About became “gigantic pretensions” under Paul de Saint-Victor’s pen. The terrified critic of *Le Figaro*, saw in it “the pikes of mob riots and the scaffolds of 1793”...

6. Jules Breton: *Le rappel des glaneuses (The Recall of the Gleaners)*, 1859

- location: ground floor, upper gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: is similar to that of the previous painting, but the moment chosen is different: this is sundown when, as required by law, the gleaners finish work and carry home their harvest.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene, the expressions, gestures and actions of the gleaners; what can be said about their harvest? Describe their costumes, their hands, their faces...; identify which information indicates the hour of day and therefore the time at which they must leave; why “the recall”?... Compare this work with the previous painting.
- the painter’s vision: Jules Breton, from Courrières, in Artois, is also a child of the country. He was as passionately attracted to the theme of gleaners as Millet. But Breton was tempted to embellish reality: gracious gestures, dancing poses, plump arms, self-assured expressions, bare feet, torn clothes, bundle-like gleans... And the viewers are reassured: even the poorest respect the law; and the society who accords them such abundance, is good.

- this sense of reassurance was echoed by the critics. Théophile Gautier wrote “it is the humble livery of labour, not the ragged clothes of begging.” Napoleon III bought the painting without hesitation.

7. Jean-François Millet: *L’Angéus (The Angelus)*, 1857-1859

- location: ground floor, second gallery on the left.
- the rural theme: three times a day, the church bell interrupted work in the fields. The prayer commemorated the salutation of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary during the Annunciation. It was traditionally recited, according to Millet, “piously, cap in hand, for the departed souls of the poor”.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene, the attitude and gestures of the couple; note the spire in the distance and the interrupted work; define the impression the painting inspires.
- the painter’s vision: Millet portrays a religious ritual he has known since childhood and has certainly also observed around Barbizon. The figures’ stature, despite the painting’s small size, their discreet contemplation, heads against the sky, and the immensity of the landscape in which the tolling bell would sound for miles, all contribute to the painting’s greatness and explain its popularity.



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Part 2: 1870-1900

How did artists portray the rural world during the period of crisis? The following works indicate that the Impressionists tended to use the theme for individual exploration, whilst artists like Bastien-Lepage and Léon Lhermitte upheld the rural community's traditional image.

8. Claude Monet: *Meules, fin de l'été, effet du matin* (*Haystacks, End of Summer, Morning Effect*), 1890-91

- location: upper level, Galerie des Hauteurs, gallery five.
- the rural theme: the harvest is over and two haystacks stand in a field in the morning sun, there is neither human presence nor specific countryside activity.
- observe the painting: describe the haystacks and the setting; what conclusion can be drawn from the absence of people? Observe the treatment of light and shadow...
- the painter's vision: if Monet's oeuvre had not always featured landscape and the countryside, one might conclude from this painting that the rural subject is merely a vehicle for the artist's explorations. Indeed, during the autumn of 1890, the artist noted: "The further I go, the more I understand how hard I must work to express what I am looking for: the immediacy, above all the unity, the same light infusing everything...". Light and its fleeting effects, were what Monet endeavoured to capture on canvas and he painted a series of five plein-air paintings on this same subject.

9. Émile Bernard: *La moisson au bord de la mer* (*The Harvest by the Sea*), 1891

- location: upper level, the Galerie Bellechasse, second alcove on the right.
- the rural theme: three harvesters are working in a field on the edge of a bay, tying bundles or taking a moment to stretch. The bundles are already gathered. In the background are the scattered houses of the village of Saint-Briac.
- observe the painting: describe the harvest, the harvesters' attitudes, the shape of the bundles; how does the painter express the activity? Note the colours and how they are composed; what can be said of the light? Compare this painting with Monet's *Haystacks*.
- the painter's vision: here once again, the harvest may seem to be a mere vehicle through which Émile Bernard might test his pictorial objectives. He wrote: "One must no longer paint in front of the thing, but by recalling it in one's imagination... The simplification or synthesis is immediately overwhelming as being inherent to the idea... and by consequence, rejects detail". Yet it is interesting that of the three activities which went on at that time in Saint-Briac; fishing, tourism - which developed on the Brittany coast from 1880 onwards - and agriculture, the painter chose the latter, persisting in a traditional vision of the countryside.

10. Camille Pissarro: *Jeune fille à la baguette* (*Girl With a Stick*), 1881

- location: upper level, Galerie des hauteurs, gallery six
- the rural theme: a thoughtful young girl, dressed in country attire is sitting on a slope, holding a stick in her right hand.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene, the attitude and gesture of the girl; indicate the place she occupies in the painting; look at the colours, the shadows, the brush strokes; what can be said about them?
- The painter's vision: like Millet or Degas, Pissarro was deeply interested in the lives of his contemporaries. This *Girl With Stick* could almost be a close up of a shepherdess by Millet or Théodore Rousseau but whilst the slope and the stick are familiar, the flocks have disappeared and making identification of the girl's activity difficult. Pissarro centres his painting around this figure, which almost becomes an open-air portrait.

11. Vincent van Gogh: *La méridienne* (*The Siesta*), 1889-1890

- location: upper level, Van Gogh gallery.
- the rural theme: it is the harvesters' after-lunch siesta at midday (hence the title *La méridienne*) and a couple of labourers are napping in the shadow of a haystack.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene, the figures' positions; what kind of atmosphere emanates from this scene? Note the composition of light and shadow; look at the choice of brushstroke and paint texture. Compare this painting with the following work.
- * the painter's vision: the life of the peasant and the humblest in the community was always central to Van Gogh's preoccupations. In his early days whilst still in Holland, he painted such subjects in shades of black to express how tough their lives were. Four years later, in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he was hospitalised, Van Gogh took up the theme again. But here he copied a Millet painting dated 1852, reproduced as an engraving. He wrote to Theo, his brother: "It is not a straightforward copy, it is rather translating into another language, into colour, the black and white impressions of chiaroscuro..." indicating how the painterly objective had shifted.



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12. Jules Bastien-Lepage: *Les foins (Haymaking)*, 1877

- location: middle level, first painting gallery, on the Seine side.
- the rural theme: a vast open field, limited by the bank of the river Meuse: the location is Damvillers... Two haymakers, apparently stupefied with work, take a break on the edge of a meadow. Evidently they have just come from turning the hay to speed up the drying process.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene and its setting; note the place name written under the signature; where has the artist positioned the horizon? In what manner are the trees and grass painted? Compare this with the painting on the figures; describe the people: their positions, costumes, and their expressions; what do they suggest? Compare this with the previous painting.
- the painter's vision: Bastien-Lepage was country born – in Lorraine – and had a fondness for the rural subjects he had observed. He liked painting country people and their everyday lives even more than scenery – people occupy the entire foreground in this painting. His paintings, airing the same subjects Millet had tackled thirty years earlier, were successful. But Bastien-Lepage's image of the rural community seems tougher, "truer", more moving than Millet's. He also fuses styles using a Naturalist "finished" look on the figures, and a rapid almost Impressionist touch on the landscape and placing the horizon high in the Japanese manner, all of which earned him the admiration of Emile Zola.



12



13

13. Léon Lhermitte: *La Paye des moissonneurs (Harvesters' Wages)*, 1882

- location: middle level, first painting gallery on the Seine side.
- the rural theme: at the end of each harvesting day, the farm steward paid wages to the hirelings. The latter were called "dailies", "brassiers" or "manoeuvres" and were the countryside proletariat who often owned no land. In the background, farm buildings surround a large yard.
- observe the painting: describe the rural scene and its setting; look at each harvester individually: notice their costumes and their tools, analyse their stance, their gestures and expressions; compare the characters with one another; try and define the image of the rural community portrayed by the painter.
- The painter's vision: Lhermitte is once again a son of country people who painted his fellow countrymen; here, the people of Mont-Saint-Père, near Melun. Lhermitte chose to represent this critical moment in rural life when contact is established between the landowner and those who possess only their strength to work. Everything points to Lhermitte's respect for these people, the serene waiting, the dignity of the work in itself. This was expressed by a critic who wrote that it shows "the honest accomplishment of the holy law of work".