Painters, the Salon, and Critics, 1848-1870

- Presentation
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Presentation

The years 1848-1870 form a pivotal period in the history of French art. Inheriting the main trends of the first half of the 19th century: romanticism and neo-classicism, it culminates the birth of impressionism.

Profusely marked by the academic tradition, this period was characterised by the persistence of structures that constitute what was called the “Beaux-Arts system”: Artists were drawn to define themselves in relation to this system. Most of them accepted its rules and – generally – won both public and critical favour. Others, without completely calling the whole system into question, evolved on its fringe and consequently met more difficulties in having their work accepted.

The Beaux-Arts system

It was based both on principles and institutions:

1. Principles

In order to meet the requirements of the Academy, which were taught at the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) and asserted in the choice of laureates of competitions and in the Salon jury, painters had to observe a certain number of principles. These progressively became so rigid that little by little some artists and critics rebelled against what had become a role.

The slightly belated critical approval bestowed in the twentieth century on the “innovating” trends of the last quarter of the 19th century resulted in a rejection of the principles of the Academy as a whole, and the word “academicism” has since taken a pejorative connotation (with the phrase “art académique” that has become its synonym). The polemic accompanying the opening of the Musée d’Orsay, accused of “re-establishing” academic painting, would suggest the debate remains open.

What were the requirements painters had to meet?

- Respect the hierarchy of genres:

Formulated by Fülöp (the histographer, architect and theorist of French classicism) in 1667, the hierarchy of genres considered history painting to be “the great genre”. History paintings included paintings with religious, mythological or historical subjects that conveyed a moral message. Next came, in order of decreasing worth: scenes of everyday life (called “scènes de genre”), portraits, landscapes and finally still-lifes. The hierarchy of genres had a corresponding hierarchy of formats for history paintings, small format for still-lifes.

This hierarchy, maintained by the academy, was progressively called into question during the 19th century. In his report on the 1846 Salon, Thiébaut Gau tier already stated that: “Religious subjects are few; there are significantly less battles; what is called history painting will disappear.” The glorification of man and of the beauties of nature, this seems to be the aim of art in the future.”

- Support the prevalence of drawing over colour:

The affirmation of this prevalence dates back to the birth of academicians. The point was then to highlight the spiritual and abstract quality of art: lines are not to be found in nature. Artists used them, like outlines and shadows, to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. Colour, being present in nature, was confined to a subsidiary role and its study was not deemed to be necessary. “Drawing makes up three quarters of a work of a dominical painting”, Ingres affirmed. In his Essai sur l’art des douze classes, published in 1867, Charles Blanc admitted that though colour is essential to painting, its place was secondary: “the union of drawing and colour is required to engender painting, as the union of man and woman is to give birth to humanity; but drawing must keep its supremacy over colour.

Otherwise, painting will go to ruin; it will be damned by colour as humanity was by Eve…”

- Deepen one’s study of the nude:

Artworks had to have a finished aspect. For this, they had to look smooth and the touch be impeccable. Ingres noted: “The touch, however clever it may be, must not be apparent; otherwise it prevents illusion and freezes everything. Instead of the object that is represented, it shows the process; instead of thought, it exposes the hand”.

- Imitate the elders, imitate nature:

It is by imitating old masters that one may, still according to Ingres, imitate nature: “One must always copy nature and learn how to see it well. It is for this reason that studying the antiques and old masters is necessary, not in order to imitate them, but, once again, to learn how to see. (…) You will learn from antiques how to see nature because they themselves are nature: so you must live on them, feed on them”.

2. Institutions

- The School of Fine Arts

The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, created in 1668, opened, under its direct supervision, the École des Beaux-Arts. The teaching given to students was based solely on drawing after live models and antique sculpture. The teachers were all members of the Academy. The candidates wishing to enrol in the École des Beaux-Arts (women were admitted only from 1897 onwards) had to pass a competitive examination consisting in drawing a nude figure after a live model.

Each year pupils were invited to take part in numerous competitions that constituted the stages before the supreme gratification that was the Prix de Rome. Paradigmically, while only drawing was taught at the School, several of these competitions were based on painting. The subjects given were mostly drawn from mythology and Greek and Roman history, or from the Bible. Pupils were expected to acquire the knowledge necessary to deal with these subjects, through the courses taught within the School. For example, for the year 1857 (the year when Millet painted Gleaners – see the cavatil), the subject of the historic landscape competition was “Jesus and the good Samaritan”, and that of the historic composition was “Saint-
Lazare’s Revue des arts in 1864. They were aimed at countering the influence of the Salons and promoting the sale of art through the organization of independent exhibitions. The Salon des Refusés, organized in 1863, was the first of these exhibitions and was characterized by its rejection of traditional art standards, allowing artists to challenge the dominance of the official Salons. The Salon des Refusés was particularly significant because it provided a platform for artists who were excluded from the official Salons due to their avant-garde styles or political views. This exhibition marked the beginning of the impressionist movement and became a significant event in the history of art.

The first Salon was organized in 1667 by Colbert. The Salon was initially intended as a mechanism for artists to showcase their work and to gain recognition and official recognition. The Salon evolved into a periodical exhibition by living artists, and it was named after the Salon Carré in the Louvre, which was the site of the first Salon. Over time, the Salon became a major event in the art world, attracting a large number of visitors and serving as a venue for the sale of art. The Salon was also a site for the official teaching of art, with the Salon des Incassables being the main forum for discussion of art theory.

Painters were paid for their works, and the selection process was based on the quality of the artists’ work. The Salon was a site for the dissemination of new ideas and the promotion of emerging artists. It also played a role in the development of the art market, as it was often the first opportunity for artists to sell their work to the public. The Salon was also a site for the promotion of art as a social and cultural phenomenon, with artists and critics often participating in discussions about the significance of art in society.

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Lazare’s Revocation”. The famous Prix de Rome (one year awarded for each technique: painting, sculpture, engraving, architecture, musical composition) that constituted the pupils’ highest ambition allowed the winners to enjoin – with a state grant – five years in the Villa Medicis in Rome, and guaranteed their subsequent career supported by official commissions. Criticised as early as the mid-nineteenth century and blamed for encouraging perseverance rather than talent, the Salon was reformed in 1863. The teaching of drawing retained its supremacy, but painting and sculpture workshops were also opened. Private workshops existed in parallel to this official teaching. Until the 1863 reform, these were the only places where pupils could learn the techniques of painting. After painting workshops were introduced within the School, these independent workshops submitted and allowed young artists to escape the yoke, unbearable for some, of academic teaching. The most famous of these workshops were the Swiss Academy, opened in 1815, the workshop directed by Charles Gleyre from 1844 onwards and the Julien Academy that operated from 1868.

• The Salon

The first Salon was organised in 1667 by Colbert. Defined as a “periodical exhibition by living artists”, it was named after the Salon Carré in the Luxembourg (where the works of living artists were bought the pieces that would enter the Musée du Louvre) and opened in 1815, the workshop opened.

At the same time by the official Salon (that Napoleon III authorised a “Salon des Refusés” in 1863, the jury proved so severe (3000 pieces fluctuating insistance on the respect of academic members of the Academy. The selection made by the death of their creators), museums outside Luxembourg (where the works of living artists bought the pieces that would enter the Musée du Louvre, where it took place until 1848. It occupied the public.

• Art criticism

Art criticism developed as soon as the Salon began to be organised regularly, around 1750, taking the form of newspaper reports. In the mid-19th century, artistic production was abundant and the number of artworks submitted for the Salon rose significantly. The number of visitors went up correspondingly, and the increasing difficulty they felt in judging the worth of what they saw explains their interest for the reports offered to them in newspapers. Critics played the part of mediators between artists and the public.

Periodicals specialised in the artistic field multiplied (12 titles in 1850, 20 in 1860), and daily newspapers included columns devoted to exhibitions from the Salon and then from exhibitions. Most writers were journalists who occasionally practiced art criticism, but a few specialised in this field. In the French tradition after Diderot, writers also set out to give their opinion on the Salons (Th. Gautier, Th. Baudelaire, E. Zola, J.K. Huysmans…).

If most commentators went no further than an iconographic description of the paintings, the concern to shape public taste and to take sides was often clear. The newspaper’s political bent, the personal convictions of the critic, the affinity existing between some of them and certain artists, all gave their commentaries a polemical tone.

Objectives

• Learn how to look at an artwork. Though an obvious element in any museum visit, it is essential to insist on this aim. No teacher would ask a pupil to discuss the qualities of a literary text without having ensured he had mastered the mechanisms of reading. It is not so commonly admitted that one has to learn how to analyse a picture before appreciating the aesthetic qualities of a plastic work.

• Study the historical context of pictorial creation for the years 1848-1870, partly through the Beaux-Arts system and the importance of art criticism.

• Understand that “taste” is determined by the social, historical and cultural context of each age, and changes between the time an artwork is created and its posterior reception.

• Try to establish a personal critical judgement avoiding a simplified appreciation of artworks in terms of entirely good or bad.

• Prepare the visit by multi-disciplinary activities (literature, history and visual arts) and allow – in particular – touchers of 19th-year pupils to tackle beforehand the part of the history programme concerning cultural and artistic transformations.

Method

• Before the visit – provide the necessary historical elements to understand the theme of the visit, with the help of the above information.

• Show, through more recent artworks, including contemporary ones, how difficult it is to make an aesthetic judgement. It is possible to further the discussion by evoking the gap that exists today between artistic creation and criticism, and the taste of the general public for “sure” values (museum frequentation, attendance of large retrospective exhibitions).

• In the museum – suggest a task of comparative analysis. The proposed circuit is based on “pairs” of paintings that were comparable in these themes and iconography but that were given a different critical reception.

• N.B. : this comparative method is not risk-free : some teachers will point out the difficulties linked to the nature of this exercise.

• Art criticism

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• N.B. : this comparative method is not risk-free : one should avoid defying that there is necessarily a “good” and a “bad” painting, and extrapolating from the chosen artworks that the whole production of an artist fits into a single category : an artist may evolve during his career.

• Plan a second visit to the Musée d’Orsay during which you will follow the path of a writer and art critic (Baudelaire, Zola, Huysmans…).

The visit: list of artworks

N.R. when following a guided tour, this list of artworks is for information only. The guide conducting the group of pupils is free to pick the pieces that support his demonstration and may, in particular, not restrict himself to the period 1848-1870 to include pieces of the impressionist movement.

Thomas Couture :

• Les Romains de la décadence, 1847

• Gustave Courbet :

• Étude de femme nue, 1846-50

• Alexandre Cabanel :

• Nana, 1866

• Édouard Manet :

• Olympia, 1863

• Jean-François Millet :

• Des Glaneuses, 1857

• Jules Breton :

• Le rameur des glaneuses, 1859

• Édouard Manet :

• L’Oiseau de Feu, 1862

• Carolus-Duran :

• Le drap au point, 1869

• Camille Corot :

• L’Aube. La danse des nymphes, 1850

• Claude Monet :

• Femmes au jardin, 1867

• Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres :

• La Source, 1849

• Gustave Courbet :

• La Source, 1868

After the visit

Suggestions

• plan a second visit to the Musée d’Orsay continuing with the collections of paintings.

• plan a visit to the Musée d’Orsay during which you will follow the path of a writer and art critic (Baudelaire, Zola, Huysmans…).

• consider a follow-up work on the French literature of novelists who were also art critics. study a novel in which the main character is a painter: Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu (The Unknown Masterpiece) by Honoré de Balzac ; L’Oeuvre (The Artwork) by Émile Zola ; Ma vie segundo by Jules and Édmond de Goncourt.

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What were the requirements painters had to meet?

• Respect the “hierarchy of genres”:
  Formulated by Fführung (the historiographer, architect and theorist of French classicism) in 1667, the hierarchy of genres considered history painting to be “the great genre”. History paintings included paintings with religious, mythological or historical subjects that conveyed a moral message.
  Next came, in order of decreasing worth: scenes of everyday life (called “scènes de genres”), portraits, landscapes and finally still-lives. The hierarchy of genres had a corresponding hierarchy of formats: large format for history paintings, small format for still-lives.
  This hierarchy, maintained by the academy, was progressively called into question during the 19th century. In his report on the 1846 Salon, Théophile Gautier already stated that “religious subjects are few; there are significantly less battles; what is called history painting will disappear…” The glorification of man and of the beauties of nature, this seems to be the aim of art in the future”.

• Support the prevalence of drawing over colour:
  Théophile Gautier also stated that “only those who have looked at nature, those who have seen how to see it can paint”. It is by imitating old masters that one may, still according to Ingres, imitate nature: “One must always copy nature and learn how to see it well. It is for this reason that studying the antiques and old masters is necessary, not in order to imitate them, but, once again, to learn how to see. (…) You will learn from antiques how to see nature because they themselves are nature: you must live on them, feed on them”.

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  Each year pupils were invited to take part in numerous competitions that constituted the stages before the supreme gratification that was the Prix de Rome. Paradoxically, while only drawing was taught at the School, several of these competitions were based on painting. The subjects given were mostly drawn from mythology and Greek and Roman history, or from the Bible. Pupils were expected to acquire the knowledge necessary to deal with these subjects, through the courses taught within the School. For example, for the year 1857 (the year when Millet painted Gleaners – see the cavat), the subject of the historic landscape competition was “Joseph and the pond Samarian”; and that of the historic competition was “Saint...
9. Camille Corot (1796-1875):

- Location: Millet, Rousseau, Corot gallery, ground floor, on the left (3rd gallery).

- “It is the poetry of nature I seek, from Corot, and not its description. It is to this poetry Mr. Corot is gifted for” (L. Princeteau, Le Constitutionnel, Dec. 5, 1863).

- “One day people will say ‘for Corot,’ for this artist has successfully played various melodies of a new kind: aubade of before 1865, sublime instrument, school harmonies are sympathetic, that is called nature” (P. Baudry, La Politique nouvelle).

- This painting offers us the eyes of Corot on nymphs on a fresh lawn in the shadow of beautiful trees bathed in a pewter-white sky, nymphs on a fresh lawn in the shade of beautiful trees. This painting offers to our eyes the dance of dancers of the Opera ballet he was familiar with, and whom he sketched many times), he did not accept the demands of academic painting. One of them, Frédéric Bazille, whose work was rejected (like that of, among others, Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir, Cézanne), wrote to his mother: “My paintings are rejected from the Exposition. Do not grieve too much over that. On the contrary, the fact that they have been rejected is to me a matter of pride. I have been given a good lesson, I am rejecting it. Too many young people are drawn in this way against it:”

10. Claude Monet (1840-1926):

- Location: Monet, Bazille, Renoir before 1870, on the ground floor, on the left.

- “The 1867 Salon jury proved particularly severe with the painters who, like Monet, did not accept the demands of academic painting. One of them, Frédéric Bazille, whose work was rejected (like that of, among others, Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Renoir, Cézanne), wrote to his mother: “My paintings are rejected from the Exposition. Do not grieve too much over that. On the contrary, the fact that they have been rejected is to me a matter of pride. I have been given a good lesson, I am rejecting it. Too many young people are drawn in this way against it:”

- “The quality of painting is in perfect harmony with the subject matter of painting.”

- N.B.: within each “pair”, the artworks appear in different ways and are not identified. These words: “Here is democracy in Art”;

- “At the 1865 Salon, caused such a scandal that, very early on, the painting was displaced and hung as high as possible on the wall to pacify public and critics.

1. Gustave Courbet (1819-77):

- Location: Monet, Bazille, Renoir before 1870, 1865-75, 1870 gallery.

- “His characters, although partly inspired by Ingres and Thomas Couture, are represented without idealism or sentimentality, with the accessories that appear there as a token of the desired character not as the decor, the accessories that appear there as a token of the desire to indicate their social rank;”

- “This painting according to the hierarchy of genres; - the format is the large format reserved for history painting according to the hierarchy of genres; - the complete title of the painting is Painting of Human Figures; History of a Burial in Orans; - Courbet declared: “The only possible history in contemporary history,” - observe the moment of the painting: the characters are represented without being idealised (all 46 characters are identified, all were inhabitants of Orans), the contemporary costumes, the expressions of the faces, the landscape itself life-like. The paintings are on the same plane: church officials, bourgeois and common people. There is no trace of grandiloquence in the expression of grief; - quotations and references: antique like statues, grandiloquence in the expression of grief, in the countryside. Texts used to accompany these engravings on Orans, advancing one to attempt publicising an attitude of dignity, modesty, decorum and to avoid affectations.”

- “The painting The Birth of Venus by Alexandre Cabanel, presented at the 1865 Salon, was immediately bought by Napoleon III for his private collection and entered the Musée du Luxembourg in 1865. (Olympus by Edouard Manet, painted in 1863, presented and received without minglings at the 1865 Salon, caused such a scandal that, very early on, the painting was displaced and hung as high as possible on the wall to pacify public and critics.

2. Gustave Courbet (1819-77):

- Location: on the ground floor, to the right, opposite the Courbet gallery.

- “At the 1863 Salon, caused such a scandal that, very early on, the painting was displaced and hung as high as possible on the wall to pacify public and critics.”

- “Venus reigns at the 1863 Salon. Painters and sculptors have endeavoured, crying out another, to move towards the source of all beauty. It is Mr. Cabanel who in general best suits the public, his Birth of Venus is the greatest success in the exhibition.” (C. De Saule)
faithfulness to the reference to Antiquity: the sea and the waves reminding Venice was born of the foam of the sea, the presence of capuli accompanying her and celebrating the birth of Venus; the ideal of Cyprus in the background; - contrasts with traditional pictures, Calcnel represented the goddess lying down. Taking out her mythological attributes, what is left is a nude woman, highlighting her charms by stretching her body... But**The Birth of Venus by Manet** Calcnel (...) charms and seduces one without existing desire** according to the commentary of the critic Arvey. The morality seems to be safe... But can we not find here a large part of hypocrisy?

4. **Edouard Manet** (1832-1883):

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5. Jean-François Millet (1814-1875): *Les glaneuses* (Glaneuses), 1857

7. Édouard Manet (1832-1883):

6. *Olympia* (1863)

8. Carolus-Duran (Charles Duran, a.k.a.): (1838-1917)

9. Édouard Manet exhibited 14 paintings at Manet's Boulevard des Capucines, including *Olympia*.

4. *Les glaneuses* (Glaneuses), 1857

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faithfulness to the reference to Antiquity: the sea and the waves reminding Venus was born of the foam of the sea, the presence of cupids accompanying her and celebrating the birth of Venus; the island of Cyprus in the background; contrary to traditional pictures, Cabanel represented the goddess lying down. Taking out her mythological attributes, what is left is a nude represented the goddess lying down. Taking out - contrarily to traditional pictures, Cabanel Venus ; the island of Cyprus in the background; accompanying her and celebrating the birth of the foam of the sea; the presence of cupids - the title of the painting reinforces this anonymity: - the heavy figure (a caricature of the painting by Baudin was captured).

5. Édouard Manet (1851-1883): 

Location: Luxembourg, first caught the attention of the exhibition jury.


Location: Chauchard 2 gallery, on the left on the ground floor, behind the Millet, Rousseau, Corot gallery.

"Vous lez observez les figures: the woman carrying a bundle of wheat on her head is beautiful in her expression, her lines and her attitude: the groups are spread in a fitting way that does not suggest calculation, in framed, this is a good piece of painting."

"Finally, that kind of art may be extremely loyal; it is not mine, and we will certainly not endeavour to plead Mr. Manet’s cause in front of the exhibition jury." (Paul Mantz).


"Je comprends bien, amis, que le Désir balance; Entre tant de beautés que partout on peut voir, L’auguste jeune fille en qui la flamme veille"

9. Charles Duren (1844-1927): 

Location: Faustin-Latour, Whistler gallery, ground floor, on the left behind the Manet before 1870 gallery, on the right side of the portrait of Mrs D…

"With Mr Carolus-Duran, colour is glittering, sparkling, burning. The portrait of Mrs D… is a fireworks display. The full length figure has a noble aspect. (...) When the gaze of the painter falls on Spanish women, so he paints the land of the moors and doesn’t consider a little more." (E. Mauz, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1870).

"Since the portrait of the Lady With Glazen […] must be seen to judgment in the Luxembourg, first caught the attention of the artistic world, one can say the lesser has never formed an exception."

"I can well understand your wavering desire; the grave pose that anchors the figure in reality; the glance that seems to dare the spectator; the realism of the stage costume.

Observe the use of bright colours laid in flat strokes, particularly on the skirt. ("Those paintings that reveal in him an ambivalent vigour but which, in their red, blue, yellow and black medley of colour, are a caricature of colour, and not colour itself!" P. Mantz).

2. Édouard Manet - Olympia, 1863

3. Édouard Manet - The August medal and bought by Napoleon III.

5. Jean-François Millet (1814-1875): Des glaneuses (Gleaners), 1857

Location: Millet, Rousseau, Corot gallery, ground floor, on the left (5th gallery).

"There are scrawny dress dressed as hags planted in a field, and, like scarecrows, they have no faces: their physionomies tanned by the biting breathes of the air, those hands rough and coarse to the touch." (Paul de Saint-Victor).

"All is drawn with coal all around and soft soap in the floor, on the left (3rd gallery)."

"When, tired of dreaming, Olympia awakes, (...) the title "Olympia" and the five lines by Astruc - the glance that seems to dare the spectator; in a word, this is a good piece of reality."

"Elegant Parisians, stop by this painting and read the quatrain:"

"With Mr Carolus-Duran, colour is glittering, sparkling, burning. The portrait of Mrs D… is a fireworks display. The full length figure has a noble aspect. (...) When the gaze of the painter falls on Spanish women, so he paints the land of the moors and doesn’t consider a little more." (E. Mauz, Revue des Deux Mondes, 1870).

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At the 1860-61 Salon, Camille Corot presented four paintings, including [Exposition: The Dances of nymphs (4 Morning. The Dances of nymphs), Mich. D'Orsay], which announced the new style of painting he was developing. This painting was bought by the State. It is the only painting by Corot that was to enter national collections during his lifetime.

In 1861, Camille Corot set out to paint a large-format piece on which he represented a group of characters in a landscape. The painting applied for its exhibition at the 1867 Salon with the title Femmes au jardin (Females in the Garden). The following is a description of the painting:

**Location:** Millet, Rousseau, Corot gallery, ground floor, on the left (3rd gallery).

- **Theme:** The Dances of nymphs (4 Morning. The Dances of nymphs), unattributed.

- **Description:**
  - **Celebrity:** Camille Corot (1796-1875):
  - **Title:** Au jardin (In the Garden)
  - **Medium:** oil on canvas
  - **Size:** 107 x 144 cm

- **Exhibition:** 1867 Salon
- **Jury:** Camille Corot represented a group of characters in a landscape. The painting had a successful showing at the 1867 Salon with the title Au jardin (In the Garden).

- **Criticism:**
  - **Positive:** The painting was bought by the State. It is the only painting by Corot that was to enter national collections during his lifetime.
  - **Negative:** Camille Corot's work was rejected by the jury.

- **Explanation:** The painting was rejected by the jury due to its large format (7.3 meters by 4.6 meters).

- **Analysis:**
  - **Characteristics:** The painting is considered to be one of Corot's masterpieces.
  - **Subject:** The painting depicts a group of women dancing in a garden setting.

**Exhibition Notes:**

- **At the 1867 Salon, Camille Corot's painting was exhibited at the 1867 Salon and was bought by the State. It is the only painting by Corot that was to enter national collections during his lifetime.**

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