The Portrait
Painting and sculpture in France between 1850 and 1900

Presentation

What is a portrait?

Not all representations of the human figure may be considered to be portraits. When the title of the work indicates "portrait of..." or makes reference to aspects of the identity of the featured person or persons, then there is no ambiguity. Conversely, certain types of representation of characters in an allegorical or symbolic form (Death, Justice, Abundance…) are not and must not be confused with the portrait genre. But there are more complex cases sometimes a person appearing on a painting, whose identity is not mentioned in the title, is nevertheless identifiable: in this case there may indeed be a portrait included in the wider subject, for instance in an historical composition, but the painting still does not belong to the portrait genre.

Must a portrait necessarily bear a likeness? One spontaneously assumes that it should, but the history of portraiture as a whole indicates two opposing conceptions which may be called, for the sake of simplification, the realistic tendency (according to which a portrait should be morphologically as faithful as possible to its sitter) and the idealised tendency (which omits, or even transcends the sitter), either tendency may be exerted to varying degrees.

1. A short history of portraiture until the nineteenth century

Ancient Egyptian funerary art featured large groups of individualised figures, depicting both the deceased and the entourage which accompanied them in the hereafter, in a variety of scenes represented. In the Egyptian's religious-based art, the portrait served to record the image of the deceased to allow them to continue in the after life. Roman civilisation, although it continued to exhibit this link between death and the portrait (found on sarcophagi and cenotaphs), it also introduced portraiture's more mundane function which still exists today: there were sculpted busts in private houses and they played a role in political life, ensuring the priority of the main public personalities. During the Christian Middle Ages, portraiture's sacrificial status was once more in flux. Either influenced by oriental religious iconomacies, or perhaps by superstitions beliefs whereby the image was central to potentially harmful magic practices, princes and Churchmen were mistrustful of portraiture, giving so far as to make it "taboo". As if to deflect potential dangers, effigies of living people reappeared in art through the context of religious representations. The popes had their own images put beside those of the Saints and accompanying Christ or the Virgin Mary in the mosaic decors of the high Middle Ages (like Felix IV, who lived in the sixth century, in the Church of St. Cosme and St. Damiens in Rome). Later on, even laymen appeared on frescos and altarpieces as donators, financing an artwork for the glory of God; their good deeds and piety would be remembered for eternity. Later on, even laymen appeared on frescos and altarpieces as donators, financing an artwork for the glory of God; their good deeds and piety would be remembered for eternity.

In France it was not until the fourteenth century, during the period covered by the Musée d'Orsay collections, that the patronage of the Renaissance appeared. In the sixteenth century, it was the great French nobility which began to demand portraits made for the glory of God; their good deeds and piety would be remembered for eternity. Later on, even laymen appeared on frescos and altarpieces as donators, financing an artwork for the glory of God; their good deeds and piety would be remembered for eternity. Later on, even laymen appeared on frescos and altarpieces as donators, financing an artwork for the glory of God; their good deeds and piety would be remembered for eternity.
1. Explain the concept of genre in painting, providing examples of how it has evolved over time, especially as it was still largely respected in the 19th century, particularly through portraits as part of the artistic enterprise at the time. The literature teacher should warn pupils of the potential for the genre to be used in modern art contexts, for example, in the works of diarists like Saint-Simon, comedies by Molière (Le Misanthrope, for example), or even in the portrayal of characters by Balzac. For those who would like to remain more rigorously in the 19th-century, one may find in the Grand Larousse du XXe siècle (vol.16), at the entry “Portrait” a long list of literary portraits contemporary to the artworks presented at the Musée d’Orsay. The two best specific books in this respect are the Portraits littéraires by Sainte-Beuve (vol XIX published in 1848 and 1852) and the Portraits contemporains by Théophile Gautier (1847). But all the 19th-century realist and naturalist novels (Balzac, Flaubert, Zola) are rich in portraits of characters presented at different moments throughout the narratives. The literature teacher should warn pupils of the limitations of comparative study which should always be conducted with caution, keeping in mind that the differences between the pictorial and literary languages prevent them from being interchangeably.

2. In the 20th-century, literature, like visual arts and music, put a particular emphasis on the “epigraphicSIDE NOTE: This exercise is transposable to other periods.

3. Introduce the pupils to the notion of deixis. Show, for instance, how the same character (cut out from a photograph) may be perceived in different ways according to the deixis surrounding him.

4. With young pupils or for a moment of relaxation, one may introduce the concept of the portrait with poseless paintings give out a certain number of clues and ask “What is it?” or proceed through analogies with “If I were...”.

5. Encourage the pupils to notice the importance of context to recreate the situations of the portraits they are studying.

Between the visit (3 days after the visit)

1. After the visit

2. Highlight, if necessary through practical exercises, the difference between the 19th-century and the 20th-century portraits and their roles of characters whose portraits they are studying. This exercise is transposable to other periods.

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After the visit

1. Work on the notion of resemblance between a person and their portrait. One may, for instance, look at different portraits of a same person: photographs, drawings, caricatures... and consider the photographer’s or the draughtman’s objectives according to the defined context. For this work, newspapers may provide adequate materials.

2. Set up a class project on the theme of expressions. With the help of pictures made by the pupils, explain the basic morpho-physiological traits of expressions: happiness, sadness, anger, disgust... For this, the teacher may like to consult the Grammaire des arts du dessin by Charles Blanc, who superintended the Histoire de l’art et de l’amour Supérieur’s expression on the expressive power of lines, largely used by Seurat.

3. Ask the pupils to make a photograph portrait or drawing portrait of their sitter, for instance a monarch represented as a great man, or a child the image of his father” mean? Note the close terms "image," "figure," "effigy," "description;" the phrase to "sketch a portrait." Show that making a portrait is not only a question of visual art, but also an spoken description or in writing - not to mention the industrial techniques of copying that may bring the portrait outside the range of art (for instance the identity photographs made in small automatic booths).

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Before and after the visit
Primary school level

Before the visit

1. Appreciate the notion of portrait from the angle of vocabulary: what does "child of the image" mean? Note the close terms of "image", "feature", "figure", "description"; the phrase to "sketch a portrait".

Show that making a portrait is not only a question of visual art, but can also be spoken description or in writing – not to mention the industrial techniques of copying that may bring the portrait outside the range of art (for instance the identity photographs made in small automatic booths).

2. Work on the notion of resemblance between a person and their portrait.

One may, for instance, look at different portraits of the same person: photographs, drawings, caricatures... and consider the photographer's or the draughtsman's objectives according to the defined context. For this work, newspapers may provide adequate materials.

5. Set up a class project on the theme of expressions. With the help of pictures made by the pupils, explain the basic morpho-psychological traits of emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, disgust... For this, the teacher may also consult the Grammaire des arts du dessin by Charles Blanc, which expounds in particular the theories of H. de Launay and H. de Saint-Venant on the expression of power through lines, largely used by Seurat.

After the visit

1. Work on caricature, giving the pupils personal projects, which may lead them to consult newspapers or watch closely television programmes based on the use of caricature. Pupils may explain what the caricature is, its functions, this work may lead pupils to productions.

2. Encourage the pupils to notice the importance of caricature in certain kinds of portraits, in particular in full size portraits and official portraits (one may start with the phrase "the clothes make the man"). After studying nineteenth-century costumes, one may work in an interactive way, teaching the pupils about the functions and social role of characters whose portraits they are shown. Naturally this exercise is transposable to other periods.

3. Introduce the pupils to the notion of duralum. Show, for instance, how the same character (cut out from a photograph) may be perceived in different ways according to the duralum surrounding him.

4. With young pupils or for a moment of relaxation, one may introduce the concept of the self-portrait by presenting games giving out a certain number of clues and ask "Who is it?" or proceed through analogies with "If I were...".

Lower and upper secondary school

With a theme such as the portrait, rather than distinguishing between the two student levels, it will be possible to categorize the "work before and after" activities according to the study subjects to which the visit was dedicated. It was considered that the theme of the portrait could be relevant to the educational curricula of three subjects: literature, history and visual arts.

Suggestions may include:
• A) French literature
  Before the visit
  With lower secondary school pupils in particular, it may be useful to study the semantic field surrounding the portrait, defining the diverse meanings of the term (see "primary school level").
  After the visit
  1. A project on the multi-disciplinary nature of the genre may lead to fruitful comparisons between portraiture in the visual arts and the literary portrait, both in prose and in verse. The best known examples are to be found in 19th-century literature (letters of the Marquise de Sévigné, works by diarists like Saint-Simon, comedies by Maître en Le Minotin..., etc.) or, at most, in to be singled out, the collections of Caricature by Daumier. But for those who would like to remain more rigorously in the 19th century, one may find in the Grand Larousse du XIXe siècle (vol.16), at the entry "Portrait" a long list of literary portraits contemporary to the artworks presented at the Musée d'Orsay. The two best specific books in this respect are the Portraits littéraires by Sainte-Beuve (6 vol. published between 1844 and 1852), and the Portraits contemporains by Théophile Gautier (1874). But all the 19th century and realist novelists (Balzac, Flaubert, Zola) are rich in portraits of characters presented at different moments throughout the narratives, particularly in their letters. A school teacher should warn pupils of the limitations of comparative study which should always be conducted with caution, keeping in mind that the differences between the pictorial and literary languages prevent them from being interchangeable.
  2. In the 20th century, literature, like visual arts and music, put a particular emphasis on the "ego" which had become a non-negotiable feature. There is therefore possible to devise a visit exclusively to self-portraits. One may couple the study of this particular genre with that of autobiography (Les mémoires d'une robe toile by Chabrolbland...) in order to underline the relevancy of the use of a comparative method mentioned above.

B) History

Before the visit

Clarity of the social categories in 19th century French society, defining and discriminating between them will allow a better understanding of the presentation of the Musée d'Orsay. One may go deeper into the subject by evoking the manner in which social categories represented themselves and their perception of other categories.

• The social function of the portrait may occasion comments comparing 19th-century artworks seen at the Musée d'Orsay with representations from previous centuries (with paintings in the Lourve, for example).

• Otherwise, one may focus on two types of portraits:
  a) Caricature
  A genre that underwent spectacular development throughout the 19th century, caricature was a means of expression by which, under authoritarian regimes, political personalities could be criticized at the highest level without risking the kind of draconian censorship which was applied to the written word. Teachers may choose a number of caricatures of actors in the French political scene to explain the role played by images in the expression of political ideas in the 19th century.
  b) The phrase "status-mana" has been coined concerning the period covered by the Musée d'Orsay collections. The term refers to the phenomenon which was particularly active under the Third Republic: whereby the numerous and strengthening Republic fostered the cult of the personality (political figures-heads etc.) through the commission of sculpted portraits. Sculpts of "great men" spring up all over cities and public buildings, sculptures which were intended to play an important ideological role in the new regime's programme of education for its citizens.

C) Visual arts

Before the visit

1. Explain the concept of genre in painting, presenting it as a way of classifying works as it was still largely respected in the 19th century, particularly in the teaching at the Ecole des Beaux Arts (School of Fine Arts) and in academic and official circles. Indicate the nature of portraits, lose "shame" than history painting or the genre scene, but higher than animal representation and landscape art.

2. Highlight, if necessary through practical exercises, that the genre is not less about the sitter than about the artist: the work of a pretext for their research; thus they are partially or totally escape the functions listed previously, and later to innovating artistic experiments. In some cases (Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin) the portraits seem to partially or totally escape the functions listed above. This is because they mostly provide the artist with a pretext for their research, then they are less about the sitter than about the painter themselves.

3. Before the visit

1. The portraits presented in the Musées d'Orsay collections are sufficiently numerous and diverse for visitors to become aware of the different genres this genre has fulfilled in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. Building on observations made in a first stage (for example: objectives 1), the pupils can be led to classify the portraits they have seen according to the following categories, each of which corresponds to a distinct feature:
   a) Allegoric: or symbolic portraits (in which the sitter, for instance a monarch represented as "Caesar", makes the portrait instrument to serve his glorification)
   b) Ceremonial portrait, Society portrait (in which the sitter's social standing)
   c) "Manifesto" portrait (referring to a common position, an ideological statement...)
   d) Psychological portrait (attempting to render the personality of the sitter, to expose their character)

2. One may choose to devote an entire visit to the theme of self-portraits.

Objectives

1. First and foremost, this visit enables pupils of all levels to train their eye by identifying the features of the portraits presented in the nineteen-century artists. Pupils will be helped in this through paying attention to the titles of the works and by simply using their powers of observation. The following questions are a good guide to the sort of things they should be looking for:

- Can we see: a full-length portrait, a portrait limited to the bust or the face?
- Is the sitter represented: face-on, in profile, three-quarters facing, three-quarters back views?
- Has the artist chosen to represent the character(s): with clothes - with identifiable signs, in a particular setting?
- Which ones: is it: an individual portrait?

Does the artist indicate that it is:
- the portrait of a relative, acquaintance or friend?
- the portrait of a character named according to their function, title or trade?
- a self-portrait?
- a group portrait?

Does the group appear to be composed: of people related by family, intimacy or friendship?

- of people connected by professional, political or social circumstances

These questions, although naïve in appearance, provide a number of clues which are indispensable in order to move on in the reflection to the second objective.

2. The portraits presented in the Musées d'Orsay collections are sufficiently numerous and diverse for visitors to become aware of the different genres this genre has fulfilled in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. Building on observations made in a first stage (for example: objectives 1), the pupils can be led to classify the portraits they have seen according to the following categories, each of which corresponds to a distinct feature:

- "Pastoral" portrait (Zola, Mallarmé: the essence of the artist)
- Caricature (witty or polemical portrait highlighting dominant traits in the sitter's character)

5. It is particularly necessary, as one approaches Impressionist portraits and the different post-Impressionist trends, to help the pupils understand how much the portrait is a genre that lends itself to innovating artistic experiments. In some cases (Monet, Cézanne, Gauguin) the portraits seem to partially or totally escape the functions listed above. This is because they mostly provide the artist with a pretext for their research, then they are less about the sitter than about the painter themselves.
The Portrait

Painting and sculpture in France between 1850 and 1900

• Presentation
• Objectives
• Preparation and follow-up to the visit
• The visit: the artworks
• Bibliography

Presentation

Not all representations of the human figure may be considered to be portraits. When the title of the work indicates “portrait of...”, or when it evokes relations to the sitter, we should refer to such representations as portraits. In other cases, when the title is not mentioned in the title, it is nevertheless identifiable: in this case there may indeed be a portrait included in the wider subject, for instance in an historical composition, but the painting still does not belong to the portrait genre. Must a portrait necessarily wear a likeness? One spontaneously assumes that it should, but the history of portraiture as a whole indicates two opposing conceptions which may be called, for the sake of simplification, the realistic tendency (according to which a portrait should be morphologically as faithful as possible to its sitter) and the idealistic tendency (which omits, or even transcends the sitter), either tendency may be exercised to varying degrees.

1. A short history of portrait until the nineteenth century

Ancient Egyptian funerary art featured large groups of idealised figures, depicting both the deceased and the entourage which accompanied them in the afterlife. Portrait effigies of living people reappeared in art through the context of religious representations. The popes mistrusted portraiture, going so far as to make it “taboo”. As if to deflect potential dangers, or stone for their winter gardens or vestibules. If the subject was a patron. For want of a castle’s ancestral portrait, they were elevated to the dizzy heights of history painting. It was at this time and in this context that the art historian Fieschi defined the hierarchy of genres (1867), which put the portrait beneath representations of Biblical or Classical subjects (histoire painting), as well as before genre scenes (subjects from daily life). Different categories of the portrait genre were thus progressively codified, the rigid official portrait having little in common with the merely formulaic portrait enshrined in religious or historical painting. The portrait still belongs to the portrait genre, owing to the religious connotations of the ‘sacred’ image. Auguste Rodin, for instance, took great care to project a religious aura in the depiction of his many portrait heads. The sacred status was once more an issue. Either to illustrate their good works or to record the image of the deceased to allow them to continue in the after life. Religious civilisations, although it continued to exhibit this link between death and the portrait (found on sarcophagi and cenotaphs), it also introduced portraitures of exemplary function which did still exist today: there were sculpted busts in private houses and they played a role in public life, ensuring the durability of the main public personalities. During the Christian Middle Ages, portraiture’s sacred status was once more an issue. Either influenced by oriental religious iconomacies, or perhaps by superstition, whereby the image was central to potentially harmful magical practices, princes and Churchmen were mistrustful of portraiture, going so far as to make it “taboo”. As if to deflect potential dangers, efficacious living people reappeared in art through the context of religious representations. The popes had their own images kept beside those of the Saints and accompanying Christ or the Virgin Mary in the mosaic décor of the High Middle Ages (like Felix IV, who lived in the sixth century, in the Church of St. Cosme and St. Damien in Rome). Later on, even laymen appeared on frescoes and altarpieces as donators, financing an artwork made for the glory of God, their godfathers protecting them from evil spells.

In France it was not until the fourteenth century, that the portrait was freed from its sacred context. The first real portraits, properly speaking, is considered to be that of Jean le Bon, King of France, made by the painter Delacroix for his small wall panel housed in the Louvre, showing the King’s head in profile, on a neutral background, without either attributes or attributes which may be considered to be portraits. When the title of the work indicates “portrait of...”, or when it evokes references to aspects of the identity of the featured person or persons, then there is no ambiguity. Conversely, certain types of representation of characters in an allegorical or symbolic form (Mount, Death, Ambundance...) are not and must not be confused with the portrait genre. But there are more complex cases sometimes a person appearing on a painting, whose identity is not mentioned in the title, is nevertheless identifiable: in this case there may indeed be a portrait included in the wider subject, for instance in an historical composition, but the painting still does not belong to the portrait genre. Must a portrait necessarily wear a likeness? One spontaneously assumes that it should, but the history of portraiture as a whole indicates two opposing conceptions which may be called, for the sake of simplification, the realistic tendency (according to which a portrait should be morphologically as faithful as possible to its sitter) and the idealistic tendency (which omits, or even transcends the sitter), either tendency may be exercised to varying degrees.

2. The triumph and the crisis of the portrait in the nineteenth century

During the period covered by the Musée d’Orsay collections, the second half of the 19th century, when photography was still a nascent art, the portrait genre in painting and sculpture was flourishing. The bourgeois, both an actor in and beneficiary of the industrial revolution, acquired the purchasing power which allowed it to become a patron. For want of a castle’s ancestral portrait, the inhabitants of Haussmannian apartments or provincial mansions decorated their reception rooms with the portraits of their spouses and families and had their busts made in marble or stone for their winter gardens or vestibules. If they were unable to boast a prestigious lineage, they could at least be comforted that they were leaving an image of their success for posterity. Later on, they could still keep up the romantic tradition of the essential moments of life, marriage...
Le bateau de Paul (The boat). 1899–1900 
Location: gallery 41, Post-Aven school

In Post-Aven, a small town in Brittany where he had settled with a group of artists sharing his research, Gauguin set about painting the portrait of Angelo Saït, whose husband was to become mayor of the village. Madame Saït, nicknamed “the beautiful Angelique” had indeed a reputation in the region for being very beautiful.

• The painting 
Does it clearly justify its title? The portrait of the young woman occupies only part of the canvas.

• The painter’s outlook
A painting within a painting, Le belle Angelique owes much to Gauguin’s familiarity with Japanese ukiyo-e. The young woman is represented in full under her portrait. Against this background is shown a small primitive idol painted in the centre of the work by Gauguin after one of his own carvings. The painting, whose only traditional aspect is Angelique’s Breton costume, was refused by the sitter but later acquired by Degas.

Median level

Marcel Proust, 1902 
Location: gallery 57, Blanche, Boudin, Helleu

• The portrait
In his Marcel Proust, aged 21, posed for Jacques-Émile Blanche. “There was in him mere of the high-school that he had not outrun what of the craftsman he wanted to become. The disdain of his clothes was already moderated, it was the Batignolles genre of Manet’s sitter in the Peti Lousteau, the studied stiffness of a George Moore, with the affectation of a schoolboy who keeps gazing at his bold ink-edged fingers when his father has bidden”, the portraitist remembered.

• The painting
The portrait presents a face on a dark background. The clear aspect of the sculptor and Proust’s short height highlight the patrician of this static face. It is supposed this portrait was originally a full-length portrait cut at some later stage. This would explain the absence of the hands.

• The painter’s outlook
During the 1890s, influenced by Manet and Whistler, the Society portrait, began to follow the example of Japanese prints, in order to isolate the sitter’s face and hands on a dark background. The effect produced here is that of mystery. The deep and enigmatic gaze of the young Marcel Proust distances him from the levity of Baudelaire.

La Pensée (Thought). 1880–1889 
Location: Some terrace, at the level of galleries 64 and 65

• The portrait
Rodin’s work includes several portraits of Camille Claudel, as well as a few allegories inspired by his face. Here, she is wearing the traditional Breton broadcloth (or perhaps from the Berry region) habitually reserved for young bredes.

• The sculptor’s outlook
Rodin deeply marked the contours by leaving the almost unworked matter visible in the unessential parts of the work. Sometimes, in what incorrectly called a bust, the head alone is treated with infinite delicacy as it emerges from the rough rock-like stone. Certain pieces, such as La Pensée, are much of their power to this contrast.

L’âge matrice (Maternity), 1895–1905 
Location: Some terrace, at the level of galleries 64 and 65

• The portrait
Executed at a time of rupture in the relationship between the artist and Rodin, this group evokes Rodin’s repulsion from his former lover. Rodin, whom he was eventually to choose, and Camille who, to retain him, is bending forward to the point of losing her balance. Camille Claudel included a self portrait in this group, the young woman knowing well, in another sculpted version, named I, Claudine (The Un Maarried), an almost marking the tragic nature of her destiny.

• The sculptor
The three characters are rendered differently. The body of the young woman alluding to a mannerist frame, modelled with tenderness, the forms being rounded and smooth. In contrast the prodigal’s limbs are knitted and bony. Her face, with cavernous eye sockets, is particularly etched of the grimacing face of allegorical Death in Medieval art.

• The sculptor’s outlook
Looking beyond her own story, Camille Claudel was sculpting a symbolic work which invited the viewer to meditate on human relationships. The group may thus be interpreted as an allegory of time leading from one forever lost youth to an old age announcing death. This more distant interpretation of the work is possible only in part by the effect of surprise on which it stands, a sort of terrace carved in the shape of a wave. This motif is reminiscent of the sumptuous lines of Ia Juno which occupies the end galleries of the dome in the Musée d’Orsay.

The Portrait
Painting and sculpture in France between 1850 and 1900

• The visit: the artworks
N.B.: the artworks are listed in the order of the Museum’s general circuit

Ground floor

Hippolyte Flandrin (Lyon, 1809 – Rome, 1864). 
Le prince Napoléon (Prince Napoleon), 1800 
Location: gallery 1, Ingres and the Lyons

• The portrait
The prince Napoléon-Îoseph-Charles-Paul Bonaparte (1822-1891) was Érème Bonaparte’s son and Princess Mathilde’s brother. A statesman, he was a member of Parliament, Senator and a minister under the Second Empire. In contrast with the rest of the family, he had progressive, democratic and anticolonial inclinations, so that he embodied a possible “left-wing bonapartism”.

• The painting
The sitter, barefoot and the absence of pomp and ceremony in this portrait highlight the character of the face and hands. The sitter is thus endowed with a strong presence that seems to emanate from his own character, rather than from his connexion with the imperial family.

• The painter’s outlook
Flandrin’s portrait was unanimously acclaimed by the public and critics. It was praised for the quality of the painting as well as the connection between this work with one of the greatest portraits by Ingres (Flandrin’s teacher): that of Monogram Berin (Paris, Musée du Louvre). Amongst other praiseworthy, the critic Valéry Verneuron wrote “The perfection of the line, the unity, the simplicity, all those qualities transmitted by M. Ingres to M. H. Flandrin can be found in the portrait of Prince Napoleon. Despite its veiled colour, tarnished, a little sad, one cannot turn away from this painting in which all, in relation, it is an admirable case present. By his noble pose, an attitude both free and dignified, the character takes full possession of the statue.

Les portraits du âme (The Celebrations of the soul). 1851 
Location: central aisle (showcase)

• The portrait
Thirty six busts made of coloured clay, commissioned by Charles Philippe as models for lifelighthographs published in Le Charivari and La Caricature, newspapers which he was their director. They depict members of parliament who sat at the Chambre des députés at the beginning of the July Monarchy.

• The sculptor
Observe this series of small busts allows us to name the skill of caricature making. Each of these busts has been transformed in order to highlight the most characteristic. One may read the epigraphs attached to each of the busts by Maurice Cahen who revised the catalogue of Daumier’s work in 1912.

• The sculptor’s outlook
The great caricaturist, Daumier was a painter, a sculptor and a draughtsman. Some of the portraits he has done of his contemporaries represent the same character, Napoleon I.

• The sculptures
The crucial difference between those two equal representations resides in the costume: in the first case a hero dressed in a contemporary military uniform, topped by the first emperor’s famous cocked hat, and in the second he wears a Roman costume, with a crown of laurels.

• The sculptor’s outlook
Portraits of this kind met very specific codes. The effigy of a great man was sculpted to satisfy the fervour of French citizens. Emperor Napoleon III used Napoleon I as a figure-head, relying on him to support his legitimacy. Representing the great man of 1842, M. Daumier only spent periods of observation there. The way of enhancing his authority even further by placing him in line with the heroes of all powerful Antique Rome, an aura which would be indirectly reflected on Napoleon III.

La Caricature (4 Studio in the Baigneux). 1870
Location: gallery 15, Fantin-Latour

• The portrait
From left to right, Otto Schultefer, Manet sitting in front of the easel, Berthe Morisot, Edme Zola, the third character standing, from the left. Edmond and Jules de Gondran, Madame Monet.

• The painting
It is an emblematic of the atmosphere of an artist’s studio? What is to be thought of the costumes and décor? Why did Fantin choose such subjects? Very few details make up the décor: to name them and to find out their meaning.

• The sculptor
The Baigneux was the district in Paris where Manet and a large number of the future impressionists lived. Fantin-Latour, a discreet witness of those times, represented Manet, as the leader of the new school of painting around whom
he painted young artists whose painting styles were radically innovative: Renoir, Bazille, Monet, Zola… Fantin insisted on the severity of their costumes and gravity of their expressions to make them look serious and respectable. The two accessories in the scene are clues to the group’s aesthetic standpoint: the statuette of Minerva embodies Truth and loftiness to its opposite for the Antique tradition and the Japanese-style sandal pot evokes the admiration which all this generation of artists had for Japanese art.

The general atmosphere in this painting is reminiscent of the great French group portraits of the 18th century through which Fantin intended to prove the seriousness of these still much criticized artists.

• The portrait: It represents the artist’s wife. But neither the title nor the way the young woman is represented reveal the intimacy between the artist and his sitter.
• The painting: It is a full-length portrait. But this is not the full story. What does the glove, fallen to the floor, or the way the young woman is represented reveal?
Location: gallery 15, Fantin-Latour

• The portrait: The painting presents the whole family: The baron, his wife, Anna Matilda McNeill (1804–1897), their daughter, Giovanna (born in 1848) and Giulia (1851-1922).
• The painting: Execute the costumes, the disposition of the characters and the point of view. What can we infer from these about the relationship between the characters and their personalities?
• The painter’s outlook: Masterpiece of Degas’s early work, this portrait evokes the family tension revealing the opposing characters from the others. The imposing format, sober colours, the structured plays on open spaces, (clown and marvay), all go to create an atmosphere of menace, further accentuated by the hints of escape such as the curtain little dog, half out of frame. Only the almost playful position of the younger daughter, crossing one leg under her skirts, contrasts with the constrained atmosphere while her older sister seems already witness of the adult conventions.

8. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (Valenciennes, 1827 – Paris, 1870): La femme au gant, et son coquin (The Imperial Prince’s Drawing Teacher of the Year before this he painted the portrait of Madame Gaudibert). He therefore knew the child well. Is this perhaps the reason why he was not inclined to make an official portrait with its protocol for a member of the reigning family? In the contrary, in this portrait he stresses to be as near the truth as possible. The fumigations and the critics approved of his choice. “A portrait of true resemblance, unconcerned with the person’s rank or with the prestige attached to his name” (Aurier). “M. Carpeaux has concealed his science under an extreme simplicity” (Jahjer). “The noble and unpretentious attitude as well as the suppleness of the costumes” (Beigni). “The resolvedly modest will to have chosen a contemporary costume” (Théophile Gautier). As a result of its success, the sculpture was reproduced in different materials, in small format. Its popularity continued even after the fall of the Empire, but as a simple portrait of a child without name or title.

Upper level
1. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (Lowell, Massachusetts, 1854 – London, 1905): Arrangement in Grey and Black Number 1 et La mère de l’artiste (The Artist’s Mother), 1871 Location: gallery 50, Degas before 1870
• The portrait: He painted the painting the whole family: The haron Gouarra Belloci (1812-1872), senator of the kingdom of Italy; His wife and the artist’s aunt, née Clotilde Laure De Gas (1814-1887); Their children, Clotilde, (born in 1848) and Guilia (1851-1922).
• The painting: Execute the costumes, the disposition of the characters and the point of view. What can we infer from these about the relationship between the characters and their personalities?
• The painter’s outlook: Masterpiece of Degas’s early work, this portrait evokes the family tension revealing the opposing characters from the others. The imposing format, sober colours, the structured plays on open spaces, (clown and marvay), all go to create an atmosphere of menace, further accentuated by the hints of escape such as the curtain little dog, half out of frame. Only the almost playful position of the younger daughter, crossing one leg under her skirts, contrasts with the constrained atmosphere while her older sister seems already witness of the adult conventions.

• The portrait: Cézanne’s sitter is unknown. Recent research lead to several hypotheses the more likely of which is that it was an employee – cook or laundress of the house of the sitter.
• The painting: The space, presented from the front, is geometrically structured. Her dress is organised around two perpendicular straight lines: the horizontal of the belt and the vertical of the central fold starting at the chin and ending at the bottom of the painting. This play of perpendicular lines is echoed by that of the coffee pot, structured in a similar way by the vertical of the spout prolonged by a shadow and by the horizontal of the junction between its upper and lower two parts. Likewise in the edge of which is underlined in a stroke of blue, a lower end up, one of those tinsopos the lobe of whose handles are frequently bisected by a small vertical pral.
• The painter’s outlook: This painting is a particularly outstanding illustration of the artist’s famous precept according to which one should “render nature through the cylinder, the sphere, the cone”.

5. Vincent van Gogh (Groot Zundert, Brabant, The Netherlands, 1853 – Auvers-sur-Oise, Val d’Oise, 1890): Doux fillettes (Two Young Girls), 1880 Location: gallery 50, Van Gogh
• The portrait: The painting presented the two sisters painted in Auvers-sur-Oise during the last months of the artist’s life as a group portrait, Van Gogh’s closest friends of Van Gogh’s sister, Doctor Gachet, his descendant.
• The painting: Vincent van Gogh repeated it again and again in his last paintings. As a portrait a painting, he did not look for likeness. It is for other reasons that the face is repeatedly catched by two eyes. First the eyes, important of one of the girls, bored of the other. Then the expressions. The left-hand girl remains, thanks to a certain softness of her look. A child’s expression. But asymmetrical elements appear in her mouth and brows, perturbing her physiognomy. The right-hand girl was treated more roughly. The painter emphasised the rendering by using a known line that underlines quasi grotesque irregularities. Looking at the brows, mouth and nose they suggest the features of a nasty and disturbing old woman. The painting: “What I’m trying to learn, he said, is not how to draw a human face, but a mathematically exact head, but the deep expression”.

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he painted young artists whose painting styles were radically innovative: Renoir, Bazille, Monet, Zola…, Fantin insisted on the severity of their costumes and gravity of their expressions to make them look serious and respectable. The two accessories in the scene are clues to the group’s aesthetic standpoint: the statuettes of Mannerist embodiments Truth and Loyalty to testify to their respect for the Antique tradition and the Japanese-style sandstone pot evokes the admiration which all this generation of artists had for Japanese art. The general atmosphere in this painting is reminiscent of the great French group portraits of the 18th century through which Fantin intended to prove the seriousness of these still much criticized artists.


La dame en gant (Lady With Glove), 1889 Location: gallery 15, Fantin-Latour

• The portrait

It represents the artist’s wife. But neither the title nor the way the young woman is represented reveal the intimacy between the artist and his sitter.

• The painting

It is a full length portrait. But this is not the full story. What does the glove, fallen to the floor, indicate? In playing with an anecdote which may be perfectly reconstituted the painter has introduced an element of mystery which contrasts with the apparent austerity of the portrait.

Compare this work with Madame Louis Joachim Gaudibert


Madame Louis-Joachim Gaudibert by Claude Monet (see below).

• The painter’s outlook

Carolus-Duran has been close to Monet before setting out on a more official course. The full-length portrait is a mode of representation which excludes individuality but above all: all the social status of its sitter, bourgeois, and so highlighting the young woman’s elegance. …(M. Carolus-Duran, colour glitters, sparkles, bursts. The portrait of Monet L. is a display of fireworks. The full-length figure is of noble aspect…). The dress, the glove…

– Masterpiece of Degas’s early work, this portrait evokes the family tension, family bickering between the sitter’s characters from the others. The imposing format, the sober colours, the structured plays on open perspectives (clown and mirror), all join to create an atmosphere of aura, further accentuated by the hint of escape such as the curious little dog, half out of frame. Only the almost playful position of the younger daughter opposing one leg under her skirts, contrasts with the constrained atmosphere while her older sister seems already prisoner of the adult conventions.

7. Edgar Degas (Paris, 1834 – id., 1917)

La famille Bellelli (The Bellelli Family), 1858-67 Location: gallery 15, Degas before 1870

• The portrait

The painting presents the whole family: The baron and Countess Bellelli, their two sons, Giovanna (born in 1848) and Giulia (1851-1922).

• The painter’s outlook

– Masterpiece of Degas’s early work, this portrait evokes the family tension, family bickering between the sitter’s characters from the others. The imposing format, the sober colours, the structured plays on open perspectives (clown and mirror), all join to create an atmosphere of aura, further accentuated by the hint of escape such as the curious little dog, half out of frame. Only the almost playful position of the younger daughter opposing one leg under her skirts, contrasts with the constrained atmosphere while her older sister seems already prisoner of the adult conventions.

8. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (Valenciennes, 1827 – Paris, 1870)

Le prince impérial et son cheval Niéro (The Imperial Prince and his Stallion, XIX), 1865 Location: left end of the central aisle (near La Danse)

• The portrait

Napoléon Eugène Louis Joseph Bonaparte (Paris 1806 – Jukandur, 1870) as a child, represented with his dog.

• The sculpture

One may walk around it: it’s a sculpture in the round. The format of the sculpture is nearly life-size which allows an impression of proximity with the subject, further conveyed by the simplicity of the costume and of the pose.

• The sculptor’s outlook

The space, where his model sits imperiously, is limited by the curtain from which her bust stands out.

His model is in full dress and represented as the Imperial Prince’s drawing teacher of the year he before he sculpted this portrait. He therefore knew the child well. Is this perhaps the reason why he was not inclined to make an official portrait with its protocol for a member of the reigning family? On the contrary, in this portrait he stressed to be as near the truth as possible. The empress and the critics approved of his choice: “A portrait of true resemblance, unconcerned with the person’s rank or with the prestige attached to his name” (Auray). M. Carpeaux has concealed his science under an extreme simplicity” (Jahyer). “The noble and unpretentious attitude as well as the suppleness of the clothes.” (Beaucourt). “The resolutely modern will to have chosen a contemporary costume” (Théophile Gautier). As a result of its success, the sculpture was reproduced in different materials, in small format. Its popularity continued even after the fall of the Empire, but as a simple portrait of a child without name or title.

Upper level


L’enfant en gris et noir et rose (L’enfant en gris et black and Number 1) or La mère de l’artiste (The artist’s Mother), 1871 Location: gallery 50, Whistler, 1869-75

• The portrait

The painting: “…the painting of the sitter’s Mother Annie McNeil (1864-1881), sixty-seven when her portrait was made. At the time she was living in London with her daughter…”

• The painting

As in several other portraits he painted in the 1870s, the artist combined the requirements of this genre with his experiments as a sculptor. Each arrangement of forms and colours has an informative function on the image of the sitter.

• The painter’s outlook

His taste for Japanese art lead him to play with the simplification of lines and the subtle agreement of neutral tones. The other lines, simple forms and limited colour ranges were Whistler’s pictorial means. He wrote about this painting: “For me, it is interesting because it is the portrait of my mother; but she or should the public be concerned by the identity of the sitter? The portrait must be worthy on the sole merit of its composition.”

2. Paul Cézanne (Aix-en-Provence, 1839 – id., 1906)

La famille Bellelli

• The portrait

For me, it is this monumental icon of simple life” (F. Cachin).

5. Vincent van Gogh (Groot Zundert, Brabant, The Netherlands, 1853 – Auvers-sur-Oise, 1890)

Doux flâneries (Two Young Girls), 1888 Location: gallery 50, Van Gogh

• The portrait

The painting: “…the portrait of the two sisters was painted in Auvers-sur-Oise during the last months of the artist’s life. Many of his close friends of Van Gogh’s Doctor Gachet, his devoted guardian.

• The painting

Vincent van Gogh repeated it again and again in his last months. In this portrait a he did not look for likeness. It is for other reasons that the face is a slightly catch…

First the eyes, imparted of one of the girls, bored of the other. Then the expressiveness. The left-hand girl relieves, thanks to a certain softness of the lines, a child’s expression. But geometrical elements appear in her mouth and brow, perturbing her physiognomy. The right-hand girl was treated more roughly. The painter emphasized his model by using a brown line that underlines quasi grotesque irregularities. Looking at the brows, mouth and nose they suggest the features of a nasty and disturbing old woman.

• The painting

“When I am trying to learn, he said, it is not to draw a human face, not a mathematically exact head, but the deep expression”.

3. Paul Cézanne (Aix-en-Provence, 1839 – id., 1906)

La femme au gant

Location: gallery 50, Cézanne, 1871
The Portrait
Painting and sculpture in France between 1850 and 1900

• The visit: the artworks
N.B.: the artworks are listed in the order of the Museum’s general circuit

Ground floor
Hippolyte Flandrin (Lyon, 1809 – Rome, 1864):
Le prince Napoléon (Prince Napoléon), 1860
Location: gallery 1, Ingres and the portrait

• The portrait
The prince Napoléon–Joseph-Charles-Paul Bonaparte (1852–1911) was Jérôme Bonaparte’s son and Princess Mathilde’s brother. A statesman, he was a member of Parliament, Senator and a minisiter under the second Empire. In contrast with the rest of the family, he had progressive, democratic and anticlerical inclinations, so that he embodied a possible “left-wing bonapartism”.

• The painting
The somber, harmonie and the absence of pomp and ceremony in this portrait highlight the character of the face and hands. The sitter is thus endowed with a strong presence that seems to emanate from his own character, rather than from his connection with the imperial family.

• The painter’s outlook
Flandrin’s painting was unanimously acclaimed by the public and critics. It was praised for the quality of the painting as well as the connection between this work with one of the greatest portraits by Ingres (Flandrin’s teacher): that of Napoleon Berin (Paris, Musée du Louvre). Amongst other praises, the critic Émile Verneix wrote: “The perfection of the line, the unity, the simplicity, all those qualities transmitted by M. Ingres to M. H. Flandrin can be found in the portrait of Prince Napoleon. Despite its sober colour, tarnished, a little sad, one cannot turn away from this painting as it is related to, in which an admirable case prevails. By his noble pose, an attitude both live and dignified, the character takes full possession of his position.”

1. Eugène Guillaumin (Mouthard, Côte d’Or, 1842 – Rome, 1905):
Napoléon Ier et ses chefs d’armée militair (Napoléon I en Horseback in Military Costume), was sketch, undated
Location: central aisle (showcase)

• The portraits
Both opposition portraits represent the same character, Napoleon I.

• The sculptor’s outlook
The crucial difference between those two equal portraits resides in the costume: in the first case, Napoleon is dressed in a contemporary military uniform, topped by the first emperor’s famous cocked hat, and in the second he wears a Roman costume, with a crown of laurels.

2. Honoré Daumier (Marseilles, 1808 – Valmondois, Seine-et-Oise, 1879):
Les Masques de 1831 (The Celebrations of the July Mäes), 1851
Location: gallery 4, Daumier

• The portrait
Thirty six busts made of coloured clay, commissioned by Charles Philipon to serve as medals for caricatures published in Le Charivari and La Caricature, newspapers in which he was the director. They depict members of parliament who sat at the Chamber des députés at the beginning of the July Monarchy.

• The sculptor’s outlook
Observing this series of small busts allows us to understand the skill of caricature making. Each of the faces has been transformed in order to highlight a particular characteristic. One may read the epithets attributed to each of the cartels by Maurois Gaufin who published the catalogue of Daumier’s work in 1952.

• The sculpture’s outlook
The great caricaturist, Daumier was a painter, a sculptor and a draughtsman. Some of the caricatures of parliamentarians may be recognized in the lithograph series: Masques de 1831 (La Caricature, 8 March, 1832) and Le Feuille Lettisat (L’Assiette au Beurre, January, 1856). It has often been said that these busts were modelled in the Chamber itself; but it is more likely that Daumier only spent periods of observation there. It was his prodigious memory which allowed him to accurately summarise the character trait he wished to illuminate.

Un coin de studio (A Studio in the Barigoules), 1870
Location: gallery 15, Fantin-Latour

• The visit: the artworks
From left to right, Otto Scholderer, Manet seating in front of the easel, Berthe Morisot and Emile Zola, the third character standing, starting from the left. Edmond Maître, Bazille, Monet.

• The painting
Fantin-Latour was the first to accurately summarise the character trait he wished to illuminate.

The sculptor’s outlook
The Bâgoules was the district in Paris where Manet and a large number of the future impressionists lived. Fantin-Latour, a discreet witness of those times, represented Manet, as the leader of the new school of painting around whom...