

A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk



- Welcome. This is one of over 200 talks on the history of Western Art. I have arranged the talks chronologically starting with cave art through to art produced in the last few years.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



26-01 THE BARBIZON SCHOOL

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

Jean-François Millet,
The Gleaners, detail,
1857, Musée d'Orsay

- This is Section 26 on nineteenth-century French art and the first talk is about the Barbizon School. I start with early influences, then its foundation in Barbizon in the 1840s, Jean-François Millet and rural Realism in the 1840s and 50s and finish with the transition to Impressionism in the 1860s and 70s.
- The Barbizon School started with the Romantic sensibility for nature's mystery and added realism based on direct observation and painting outdoors.
- The deaths of Theodore Rousseau (1867) and Millet (1875) marked the School's effective end, though its methods directly shaped the working methods of the Impressionists.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbizon_School

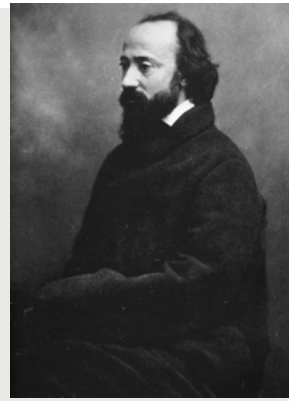
<https://www.christies.com/en/stories/the-barbizon-school-collecting-guide-21911a4479c94d6d91be6b618d18b59c>



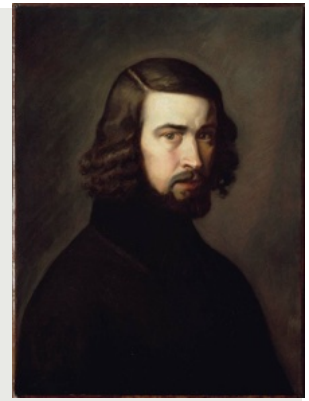
Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Self-portrait*, c. 1835, 33 × 25 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Vasari Corridor



Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867) photograph by Félix Nadar (1820-1910), 1855-59



Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878) photograph by Félix Nadar (1820–1910)



Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *Self-Portrait*, c. 1840-41, 63.5 × 47 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Self-portrait*, c. 1835, 33 × 25 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Vasari Corridor

Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867) photograph by Félix Nadar (1820-1910), 1855-59

Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878) photograph by Félix Nadar (1820–1910)

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *Self-Portrait*, c. 1840-41, 63.5 × 47 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

- Here we have the four leading figure of the Barbizon School — Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867), Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878) and Jean-François Millet (1814-1875). All very different yet they shared a commitment to nature as truth. Their work emphasised truthful, direct observation rather than idealised or classical treatments typical of earlier art movements. This made them part of the broader **Realist movement** in art. Realism was an over arching artistic movement and ideology of which the barbizon School was a prominent part. Turning to the artists:

- **Corot** was **refined and even-tempered** and acted as the movement's elder humanist. He was a man of modesty and kindness, he balanced classical training with lyrical sensitivity, painting directly from nature while preserving harmony and structure. His landscapes sought serenity and inner poetry rather than realism alone, revealing his belief that nature was a conduit to spiritual reflection.[1]

- By contrast, **Rousseau** was the School's **uncompromising visionary and unofficial leader**. Intensely independent and often melancholic, he battled the Salon's rejection of his work for years. Rousseau's defiance stemmed from moral conviction—he saw landscape as an expressive and moral medium, able to convey the sublime integrity of the natural world against modern artificiality. His leadership fostered a close fellowship among Barbizon painters where he inspired loyalty and experimentation.[2][3]
- **Daubigny**, more **cheerful and pragmatic**, bridged the classical calm of Corot and the spontaneity of Rousseau. Although not a permanent resident of Barbizon, he shared its ethos of working *en plein air*. His accurate depiction of natural light and atmospheric tone influenced Monet, Pissarro and Van Gogh, anticipating the next generation's fascination with transient effects.[4]
- Finally, **Millet** provided the movement's **social conscience**. A resilient Norman peasant by origin, he endowed labouring figures with quiet dignity, transforming rustic toil into a moral narrative. His empathy for rural hardship and his religious gravitas tied the School's naturalism to human endurance. [5][3][4][1]
- They all met in the **Auberge Ganne**, an inn in the village of **Barbizon**, near the **Forest of Fontainebleau** and about 50km from Paris. It played a central role in the artistic life of the Barbizon School. Established around 1824, it became a gathering place and residence for many painters who worked "en plein air" (outdoors), capturing nature directly on their canvases rather than painting in their Paris studios which was the normal practice. It is now a small museum of the Barbizon School.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste-Camille_Corot

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Théodore_Rousseau

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-François_Daubigny

<https://www.thetimes.com/culture/art/article/a-forgotten-painter-who-still-left-a-lasting-impression-p5zr37xgq?t=1760874525428>

<http://www.atelier-daubigny.com/CharlesFrancoisDaubigny.en.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-François_Millet

- [1](<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Camille-Corot/Years-of-success>)
- [2](<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodore-Rousseau>)
- [3](<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/rousseau-theodore/>)
- [4](<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Francois-Daubigny>)
- [5](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Fran%C3%A7ois_Millet)
- [6](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste-Camille_Corot)
- [7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%A9odore_Rousseau)
- [8](<http://www.thefamousartists.com/jean-francois-millet>)
- [9](<https://www.westmont.edu/corot-man-behind-masterpiece>)
- [10](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-Fran%C3%A7ois_Daubigny)



John Constable
(1776–1837), *The Hay Wain*, 1821, 130.2 × 185.4 cm, National Gallery, London

John Constable (1776–1837), *The Hay Wain*, 1821, 130.2 × 185.4 cm, National Gallery, London

Origins and Early Influence (1820s–1830s)

- I begin with the origins and you may be surprised I have selected John Constable and ***The Hay Wain*** (1821). In some ways this says it all. Today often regarded as chocolate box, then it was revolutionary. It was exhibited in the 1824 Paris Salon titled ***Landscape: Noon*** and inspired young French landscape painters to seek truth in nature rather than follow in the old-fashioned idealised academic landscapes tradition. And it was not just young revolutionaries, he was awarded a gold medal presented by King Charles X no less. The medal was awarded in absentia as Constable never travelled abroad and had a lifelong distrust of the French although they were the only ones to truly admire his work. It was admired for its loose, dynamic brushwork and its vibrant but natural colours. However, although he achieved a new level of international fame he was not a major success in Britain and failed to find a buyer. It was sold to a **John Arrowsmith**, an Anglo-French dealer, for £250 along with two other paintings by Constable.
- It was a **key inspiration** for the artists who formed the Barbizon School. Constable inspired a shift to naturalism away from idealised classical landscapes. His practice of creating detailed, open-air oil sketches to capture the fleeting effects of light and atmosphere was a precursor to the plein air (painting outdoors) approach adopted by the Barbizon artists.
- In essence, *The Hay Wain* helped change the course of French art by validating

a direct, naturalistic approach to landscape that had a profound impact on the **Barbizon School**, which in turn paved the way for the **Impressionists**.

But I haven't really explained what motivated the artists of the Barbizon School. Remember landscape had been one of the lower genres, the highest was history painting. The Barbizon artists rejected the hierarchy of genres entirely. They saw in nature a moral and emotional truth. This was not nature as divine creation in a traditional Christian sense, nor as a strictly scientific subject of study. Instead, they understood nature as a living, expressive force to be engaged with sincerely and visually, a site of truth, labour and feeling, a stage on which human presence and living things were combined.

- Their concern was fidelity to sensory experience—the light, atmosphere, and transient moods of the countryside—which, of course, laid the groundwork for Impressionism. For Corot, it was poetic communion; for Rousseau, a moral seriousness about authenticity; for Daubigny, it was the accurate depiction of natural light to convey the original emotion, and for Millet, a sympathetic realism extending to peasant labor within the landscape.

NOTES

- Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, Camille Corot, Narcisse Diaz, Jules Dupré, and Constant Troyon, were influenced by Constable's techniques and his elevation of natural landscape as a worthy subject in its own right.
- Eugène Delacroix the leading figure of French Romanticism was a major admirer of Constable's work. He reportedly made several visits to the dealer John Arrowsmith's gallery to study *The Hay Wain* before the Salon opened. Delacroix was so impressed by its freshness and handling of light that he is said to have repainted parts of his own major work for the Salon, *The Massacre at Chios*, to incorporate the techniques he observed. He later called Constable "the father" of modern French landscape painting.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hay_Wain



Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1834, 175.6 × 242.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1834, 175.6 × 242.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Origins and Early Influence (1820s–1830s)

- *The Forest of Fontainebleau* marks Corot's move toward working directly from nature, anticipating the Barbizon School's plein-air approach.[2][3]
- It is one of the earliest French landscape paintings that show the turn from academic idealisation toward the **truthful yet poetic observation** that defined the Barbizon School. Painted for the 1834 Salon, it reflects the influence of John Constable's fresh, naturalistic brushwork and honest study of weather and light of ten years before. Corot's trees, dappled shade, and broken handling of paint show this English inheritance, though he retained a serene classical balance alien to Constable's emotional turbulence.[1][2][3]
- (CLICK) The reclining young woman in the foreground—loosely interpreted by critics as a rustic Mary Magdalene—was not typical of Constable, who avoided overt narrative or sensual presence within his landscapes. Corot's inclusion of a half-reclined, peasant-clad figure connects the painting to the French academic tradition of elevating landscape through allegorical or biblical association. At the same time, her contemplative pose embodies the union between humanity and wilderness that would become a Barbizon hallmark.[3][1] (CLICK)
- When first exhibited, it earned moderate praise for its sincerity and tonal harmony but puzzled conservative critics by its absence of heroic narrative. Later writers recognised it as a pivotal fusion of realism and lyricism—the moment

Corot transformed Constable's naturalism into a distinctly French poetic vision.[6][1][3]

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Fontainebleau_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Fontainebleau_(painting))

[1](<https://www.nga.gov/artworks/46584-forest-fontainebleau>)

[2](<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows-t13896/in-depth-salisbury-cathedral-from-the-meadows/legacy-influence>)

[3](<https://www.myddoa.com/forest-of-fontainebleau-camille-corot/>)

[4](<https://www.fontainebleau-tourisme.com/en/barbizon-2/>)

[5](<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbizon>)

[6]([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Fontainebleau_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Fontainebleau_(painting)))

[7](<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/28/arts/design/28font.html>)

[8](<https://eclecticlight.co/2015/10/28/trees-in-the-landscape-3-corot-the-crossroad-to-modern-art/>)

[9](<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/barbizon-school/>)

[10](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g196559-d12514923-Reviews-Foret_De_Barbizon-Barbizon_Seine_et_Marne_Ile_de_France.html)



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), *Les hauteurs de Sèvres — Le chemin Troyon*, 1835-40, 23.5 x 36.8 cm

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796-1875), *Les hauteurs de Sèvres — Le chemin Troyon*, 1835-40, 23.5 x 36.8 cm

Sold for \$352,800 on 24 May 2023 at Christie

- Corot painted this on his **return from Italy** and it is typical of his vision of **timeless rural contentment** appealed strongly to the French sensibility and their **rustic simplicity** offered an alternative to the bustle of modern life. People were **disillusioned with the materialism** of the modern world, **with war, industrialisation** and the seduction of pleasures. Corot found tranquility and peace in the forests of Fontainebleau about 40 miles southeast of Paris. There he painted directly from nature recording the changing effects of light on the landscape.
- The work was **commissioned** from Corot by a friend, M. Preschez, who was a solicitor from Coulommiers. It is a study of mid-day light at the height of summer. Corot often used the **device of a path turning up and away** into the distance and the woman draws out attention into the scene which is embraced on either side by lush foliage and counter-balanced by what looks like a person in a vineyard. In the distance purples, greys and pinks carry us up into the summer sky (based on Christie's description).

REFERENCES

<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6424039>



Jules Dupré (1811–1889), *Landscape with Cattle at Limousin*, 1837, 78.7 × 130 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Jules Dupré (1811–1889), *Landscape with Cattle at Limousin*, 1837, 78.7 × 130 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- *Landscape with Cattle at Limousin* conveys the **early dynamism of the Barbizon spirit** that emerged from the Romantic landscape traditions. Painted soon after Dupré's **formative 1834 trip to England**, where he encountered **John Constable's vigorous skies** and broken atmospheric light, the work translates Constable's realism into a more theatrical French idiom.[1][3]
- The composition unfolds across a **wide, low horizon**, its rhythm built from swaying trees and grazing cattle animated by wind and cloud movement. Light gathers and disperses as pale cumulus gives way to darker clouds, setting an emotional tone midway between observation and drama. Dupré's brushwork is emphatic and textural, his contrasts of bright illumination and shadow add a dramatic touch to the landscape—a quality contemporary critics recognised as distinct from **Corot's calm classicism** or **Rousseau's meditative stillness**. [6][1]
- The Limousin region, one of rural France's most **unspoiled heartlands**, provides landscape of rolling tree-covered hills, fertile pasture, and peasant livestock—subjects that suited Dupré's interest in nature's grandeur expressed through the everyday. In this painting, he abandoned any anecdotal narrative to focus on elemental forces: wind, light, and weather. [2][5][8]
- When exhibited, Dupré's landscapes were praised for their vitality and this painting stands today as a vital bridge between Romanticism and the direct plein-air observation that would characterise the fully mature Barbizon School.[3][8][1]

NOTES

Artist and context

- Jules Dupré (1811-1889) was a French landscape painter born in Nantes and later based at L'Isle-Adam near Paris. ([Encyclopedia Britannica][1]) He began his career decorating porcelain in his father's factory and at Sèvres, before shifting to painting landscapes. ([Britannica Kids][12]) Dupré was a central figure in the Barbizon School — a group of mid-19th century artists who brought nature and rural life into prominence in French art. ([Encyclopedia Britannica][11]) Influenced by British landscape painters, particularly John Constable during a visit to England in 1834, he learned to imbue landscapes with a sense of movement, energy and atmospheric drama. ([National Gallery][13])
- Created in 1837, "Landscape with Cattle at Limousin" is an oil on canvas measuring 78.7 × 130 cm and is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Robert Lehman Collection). ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][4]) The scene depicts cattle grazing or being tended in the Limousin region of central France under a dramatically shifting sky. Dupré uses a low horizon line and a broad expanse of sky, thereby emphasising the sweep of nature and the movement of light and weather. ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][14]) The chromatic structure is striking: warm earth tones of foliage and cattle link visually, while the turquoise-blue of the sky and the onset of darker clouds suggest tension and dynamism. ([media.clarkart.edu][15])

Meaning and influence

- The painting exemplifies Dupré's approach: rural life is not merely idyll, but part of a larger drama of nature — weather, light, time. His tree-dominated compositions and moving clouds echo Dutch seventeenth-century landscape traditions but filtered through the direct observation and expressive freedom of the Barbizon School. ([media.clarkart.edu][15]) By focusing on ordinary cattle in a stretch of French countryside yet framing them within a sweeping sky and expressive brushwork, Dupré bridges Romanticism's emotional intensity with a more naturalistic attention to rural life.

Reception and anecdotes

- Dupré's work, though initially overshadowed by more lyrical landscape painters like Camille Corot or more epic ones like Théodore Rousseau, came to be admired for its "tragic and dramatic" dimension of nature: as

one early source wrote, "If Corot stands for the lyric and Rousseau for the epic ... Dupré is the exponent of its tragic and dramatic aspects."

([Wikisource][16]) An interesting anecdote: Dupré and Rousseau travelled together in 1844 through the Landes and the Pyrenees, but their friendship later soured — partly because Rousseau resented Dupré's election to the Légion d'honneur in 1848. ([tuttartpitturasculturapoesiamusica.com][17])

Moreover, Dupré's early training in porcelain decoration may have influenced the fine tonal harmonies in his later canvases, while his English trip in 1834 was pivotal in his ability to render "movement in nature."

([Britannica Kids][12])

- While specific contemporary reactions to *Landscape with Cattle at Limousin* are less documented, the painting typifies Dupré's style and has been cited in modern essays on "energy" in his work: the sweep of the sky and the grounding of the daily rural scene generate a lively tension. ([Lapham's Quarterly][8]) Its provenance (Lehman Collection, acquired into the Met in 1975) places it among the major works available to international audiences, helping to establish Dupré's reputation beyond France. ([Wikimedia Commons][19])
- In sum, this picture shows Dupré's mature ambitions: not simply to record a tranquil pasture, but to charge it with nature's forces, to elevate cattle and fields into the realm of expressive landscape. It stands as a key example of how the Barbizon School paved the way for later landscape developments, including impressionistic interest in light and atmosphere.

REFERENCES

[1](<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459099>)

[2](<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jules-dupre/landscape-with-cattle-at-limousin-1837>)

[3](<https://www.pubhist.com/w13176>)

[4](<https://www.meisterdrucke.uk/fine-art-prints/Jules-Dupr%C3%A9/851733/Landscape-with-Cattle-at-Limousin.html>)

[5]([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jules Dupr%C3%A9 - Paysage avec du b%C3%A9tail au Limousin \(1837\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jules_Dupr%C3%A9_-_Paysage_avec_du_b%C3%A9tail_au_Limousin_(1837).jpg))

[6](<https://gallerix.org/album/Met-3/pic/glr-360147>)

[7](<http://collections.artsmia.org/art/65029/the-pond-jules-dupre>)

[8](<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/landscape-with-cattle-at-limousin->

[jules-dupr%C3%A9/-gHjeE8RO3vplg?hl=en](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jules-Dupre))

[11]: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jules-Dupre> "Jules Dupré | Landscape Painter, Impressionist, Barbizon School | Britannica"

[12]: <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Jules-Dupr%C3%A9/321957> "Jules Dupré - Students | Britannica Kids | Homework Help"

[13]: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/jules-louis-dupre> "Jules-Louis Dupré (1811 - 1889) | National Gallery, London"

[14]: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/459099> "Jules Dupré - Landscape with Cattle at Limousin - The Metropolitan Museum of Art"

[15]: https://media.clarkart.edu/1955.727_EuroCat.pdf ""

[16]: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Dupr%C3%A9%2C_Jules "1911 Encyclopædia Britannica/Dupré, Jules - Wikisource, the free online library"

[17]: <https://www.tuttartpitturasculturapoesiamusica.com/2015/05/Jules-Dupre.html> "Jules Dupré | The Barbizon school of painters | Tutt'Art@ | Pittura * Scultura * Poesia * Musica"

[18]: <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/energy/art/energy-jules-dupre> "Energy: Jules Dupré | Lapham's Quarterly"

[19]: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AJules_Dupr%C3%A9_-_Paysage_avec_du_b%C3%A9tail_au_Limousin_%281837%29.jpg "File:Jules Dupré - Paysage avec du bétail au Limousin (1837).jpg - Wikimedia Commons"

[Image](<https://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/rl/original/DT3114.jpg>)

[Image](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3d/Jules_Dupr%C3%A9_autoportrait.jpg/250px-Jules_Dupr%C3%A9_autoportrait.jpg)

[Image](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eb/Jules_Dupr%C3%A9_-_The_Cottage_by_the_Roadside%2C_Stormy_Sky_-_1894.1058_-_Art_Institute_of_Chicago.jpg)



Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña (French, 1807-1876),
Le Bas-Bréau, forêt de Fontainebleau, 1846, 70.5 × 130 cm,
 Musée d'Orsay

Narcisse Diaz de la Pena (1807-1876), *Le Bas-Bréau* (pronounced "bah-brey-oh"),
forêt de Fontainebleau, 1846, 70.5 × 130 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Foundation in Barbizon (1840s)

- The French painter **Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña** (1807–1876, pronounced "Nahr-sees Ver-jeel Dee-ahs day lah Pain-yah.") holds a **significant place** in the history of nineteenth-century landscape art. Born in **Bordeaux** of **Spanish immigrant** parents, he **lost both parents young** and even suffered the **amputation of a leg** after a reptile bite in his youth. ([JAMA Network][1]) He began his career as a **porcelain-painter at Sèvres** and later studied by copying works in the Louvre before shifting to landscape painting. ([National Gallery][2]) By the early **1840s** he was working in the forest of Fontainebleau, joining the Barbizon School of painters who made direct study of nature. ([musee-orsay.fr][3])
- The painting shows a **clearing** within the Fontainebleau forest, with **cattle drinking in a pool of still water** framed by tall trees and dappled woodland light. The scene reveals Diaz's fascination with forest light and shadow, his penchant for rich colour and atmospheric depth: here, the placid herd and reflective water ground the viewer while the dense foliage and arched branches evoke both calm and mystery. The choice of the Bas-Bréau locality places the work firmly in the Barbizon-forest tradition, yet Diaz's handling is **more decorative and vivid** than some of his peers. Through the saturated greens, warm browns and shimmering trunks he suggests the forest as a living, almost **enchanted space** where nature and the pastoral mingle.

- In terms of reception and influence, **Diaz was celebrated** in his day as a “colourist enchanté” whose **works commanded high prices**. He won medals at the Salon and was made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1851. ([Artwork Archive][4]) His forest scenes, such as the present painting, helped pave the way for later Impressionists: the **young Pierre-Auguste Renoir admired him** and was helped by Diaz in the woods of Fontainebleau in the 1860s. ([Wikipedia][5]) Anecdotally, it is said that **Renoir was being harassed by youths in the forest when Diaz intervened with his walking-stick**—an incident that cemented Renoir’s gratitude. ([Wikipedia][6])
- Critics, however, often accused Diaz of **superficial virtuosity** and an **over-decorative approach**, and some of **his colours have sadly not held** well over time, Monet allegedly remarked on how beautiful his paintings once were. ([Wikipedia][6])

REFERENCES

<https://art.thewalters.org/object/37.64/>

[1]: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/1910087> "Forest of Fontainebleau, Autumn: Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña | Humanities | JAMA | JAMA Network"

[2]: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/narcisse-virgilio-diaz-de-la-pena> "Narcisse-Virgilio Diaz de la Peña (1807 - 1876) | National Gallery, London"

[3]: <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/oeuvres/les-hauteurs-du-jean-de-paris-195> "Les Hauteurs du Jean-de-Paris - Narcisse Diaz de la Pena | Musée d'Orsay"

[4]: <https://www.artworkarchive.com/profile/van-every-smith-galleries/artist/narcisse-virgile-diaz-de-la-pena> "Artist: Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Pena | Artwork Archive"

[5]: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcisso_Virgilio_D%C3%ADaz_de_la_Pe%C3%B1a "Narcisso Virgilio Díaz de la Peña"

[6]: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcisse-Virgile_D%C3%ADaz_de_la_Pe%C3%B1a "Narcisse-Virgile Díaz de la Peña"

[Image](https://image.dma.org/iiif/2/production_objects_4256152_8973019_image.jpg/full/full/0/default.jpg)

[Image](https://d3d00swyhr67nd.cloudfront.net/w1200h1200/collection/CIA/CIA/CIA_P_1978_PG_94-001.jpg)



Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867), *The Forest of Fontainebleau: The Oak at Bas-Bréau*, 1849, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Theodore Rousseau (1812-1867), *The Forest of Fontainebleau: The Oak at Bas-Bréau*, 1849, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Foundation in Barbizon (1840s)

- Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867) was a key figure in the Barbizon School. He was **born in Paris** and initially trained under academic masters (such as Jean-Charles Rémond and Guillon Lethière), but he soon broke away from their classical conventions. ([National Gallery][1]) In the 1830s he began repeatedly painting the forests around Fontainebleau, in particular the wooded area of **Bas-Bréau** (pronounced “bah-brey-oh”), and from 1844 he based himself in the village of Barbizon at the forest’s edge. ([National Gallery][1])
- The painting typifies his recurring subject of **ancient oak trees standing in quiet majesty** in the Bas-Bréau glade. Although precise documentation of this exact title is elusive, one catalogue lists a work “Cluster of Tall Trees Overlooking the Plain of Clair-Bois at the Edge of Bas-Bréau” dating from about 1849–52, giving good correspondence of date and place. ([Getty][2])
- A tiny figure emphasise the trees’ grandeur and nature’s primacy. The work represents not merely depiction of a landscape, but Rousseau’s deeper devotion: he described himself as “a man of the forests”, seeking to render the “echoes” that trees and woodlands left in his soul. ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][3])
- Reception of Rousseau’s landscapes was **initially hesitant** — he was repeatedly **excluded from the Paris Salon** in the 1830s and early 1840s — but from

around 1848 onwards he achieved recognition, won medals, and inspired younger artists. ([National Gallery][1]) His focus on honest, specific places such as Bas-Bréau helped elevate landscape painting in France.

- **Rousseau complained** of commercial felling of the Fontainebleau trees, petitioning the Duke of Morny, and his activism led in 1861 to the designation of an “artistic reserve” for the forest — arguably **one of the early nature-preservation measures in Europe**. ([Petit Palais][4])
- In short, this oak painting exemplifies Rousseau’s dual ambition: to show nature as it is — the quiet dignity of trees, the subtle interplay of light and shadow in the forest — and simultaneously to awaken a sense of reverence (and responsibility) in the viewer. Its legacy lies in bridging the Romantic sensibility for nature’s mystery with a realism rooted in direct observation, paving the way for later developments in landscape art.

REFERENCES

<https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109AXY>

<https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring08/new-discoveries-theodore-rousseaus-forest-of-fontainebleau>

[1]: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/theodore-rousseau> "Théodore Rousseau (1812 - 1867) | National Gallery, London"

[2]: https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/rousseau/rousseau_checklist.pdf
"1"

[3]:
<https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/api/collection/p15324coll10/id/59291/download> "PIERRE ETIENNE THEODORE RoussEAu"

[4]: https://www.petitpalais.paris.fr/sites/default/files/content/press-releases/press_release_theodore_rousseau.pdf "Press Release"

[Image](<https://emuseum.mfah.org/internal/media/dispatcher/417087/full>)



Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867), *The Forest of Fontainebleau: Morning*, 1849-51, 97.5 × 134 cm, The Wallace Collection

- *The Forest of Fontainebleau: Morning* exemplifies Rousseau's devotion to the Fontainebleau forest, a subject he explored over decades. The painting captures the **forest's dense, misty interior at dawn**, emphasising the interplay of light through trees and the intricate textures of foliage and earth. Rousseau's meticulous brushwork conveys both the monumentality and the intimacy of the landscape, inviting the viewer to contemplate nature's quiet rhythms.
- The work reflects Rousseau's philosophical approach: he saw the forest as a living entity, where each tree and path held spiritual significance, a perspective influenced by Romantic literature and contemporary natural sciences. Anecdotally, **Rousseau would often camp in the forest for weeks** to study the effects of light and weather, demonstrating an almost obsessive dedication to fidelity in his landscapes.
- Initially, Rousseau's work was **undervalued by the conservative Salon juries**, but by the 1850s his paintings, including this depiction of Fontainebleau, gained appreciation for their emotional depth and technical mastery. Today, *Morning* is celebrated as a quintessential Barbizon landscape.

REFERENCES

<https://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMP/eMuseumPlus>



Constant Troyon (1810-1865), *Watering Cattle*, 1850s, 122.3 × 162.5 cm, The Wallace Collection, London

Constant Troyon (1810-1865), *Watering Cattle*, 1850s, 122.3 × 162.5 cm, The Wallace Collection, London

- Constant Troyon (1810–1865) was another **important figure** of the French Barbizon School. He was born in Sèvres near Paris and initially trained in **porcelain decoration**, which honed his precision and attention to surface detail. He later **studied under** landscape painter **Camille Roqueplan** but was largely **self-taught**, developing a distinctive style that combined careful observation with a dynamic, painterly approach. Troyon became particularly renowned for his **animal studies**, inspired by Dutch 17th-century painters such as **Aelbert Cuyp**.
- *Watering Cattle* shows his skill at **integrating animals within a naturalistic landscape**. We see a herd of cattle pausing at a riverbank under a luminous sky, their reflections subtly mirrored in the water. Troyon's handling of light and texture gives a sense of both **stillness and quiet vitality**, elevating an ordinary pastoral scene to a poetic meditation on rural life. We see in the water a dog, some cattle and a cart carrying hay, pulled by oxen and attended by two men. The painting reflects mid-19th-century France's growing fascination with nature and the countryside, a counterpoint to urban industrialisation.
- Troyon's work was celebrated by contemporaries, including Rousseau and Millet, for its fidelity to nature and expressive immediacy. His paintings were exhibited at the Paris Salon, earning **critical acclaim** and influencing later artists such as **Rosa Bonheur**.
- Anecdotally, Troyon once reputedly insisted on spending days in the fields

sketching cattle in all weather, reflecting his commitment to firsthand observation. *Watering Cattle* is in The Wallace Collection, and is admired for its serenity and synthesis of animal portraiture and landscape.

REFERENCES

<https://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=65278&viewType=detailView>



Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890), *The Sower*, 1888, 32.5 x 40.3 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *The Sower*, 1850, 101.6 x 82.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *The Sower*, 1850, 101.6 x 82.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890), *The Sower*, 1888, 32.5 cm x 40.3 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Millet and Rural Realism (1850s–1860s)

- Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) was born in Gruchy (pronounced “grew-she”), Normandy, the son of a peasant farmer and his early life immersed him in agricultural labor, an experience that profoundly shaped his artistic vision. After studying in Paris, he returned to rural settings, committing to portray the dignity and harshness of peasant life with a realism that was unusual for the period.
- *The Sower* (1850) demonstrates his interest in the **heroic aspect of manual labor**. A solitary peasant scatters seeds across a vast field, his body straining with physical effort. The low horizon, dominant figure, and dramatic sweeping gesture convey both the monumental scale of rural toil and a near-sacred reverence for the farmer’s work. Millet’s focus on the ordinary worker elevated everyday labor to a symbolic act of endurance and continuity with nature, reflecting social realities of mid-19th-century France, a period of rural poverty and industrial change.
- The painting **shocked contemporary audiences** for its stark realism, and even **caused a scandal** when exhibited at the 1850 Paris Salon; critics derided it as **crude**,
- (CLICK) yet it influenced later generations, including **Vincent van Gogh**, who

admired Millet's earthy palette and emotional resonance. Millet's work bridged Romanticism and Realism, and *The Sower* remains a compelling symbol of the nobility of labor, inspiring both artistic and social commentary well beyond his lifetime.(CLICK)

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sower_\(Millet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sower_(Millet))

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0029v1962#details>



Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *The Gleaners*, 1857, 83.5 × 110 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Later Phase and Transition (1860s–1870s)

- *The Gleaners* is among **Millet's most celebrated works**. It portrays three women bent over in the field, collecting leftover sheaves of wheat after the harvest. The composition emphasises the figures' monumental forms, their bodies echoing the undulating lines of the landscape, while the background shows the broader harvest in a golden light. Millet's earthy palette and careful attention to physical labor imbue the scene with a quiet dignity, elevating routine toil to heroic, almost timeless significance.
- Technically, Millet contrasts the **warm, detailed foreground** of the gleaners with a **luminous, airy background**, using subtle gradations of light to guide the eye across the painting. The juxtaposition of intimate human effort and expansive landscape enhances both realism and emotional resonance.
- At the 1857 Paris Salon, the painting **provoked debate**: critics admired the **technical mastery**, yet many viewers were unsettled by the **emphasis on rural poverty**, interpreting it as a **political statement** in the aftermath of the 1848 revolution.
- Artists such as Gustave Courbet and Vincent van Gogh admired Millet's work, with Van Gogh calling him "**the true painter of the earth.**" Today, *The Gleaners* remains a seminal Realist work, celebrated for its combination of social empathy, technical skill, and enduring poetic power.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gleaners



Jean-François Millet
(1814–1875), *The Angelus*,
1857-59, 55.5 × 66 cm,
Musée d'Orsay

Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), *The Angelus*, 1857-59, 55.5 × 66 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Millet and Rural Realism (1850s–1860s)

- Millet trained at the **École des Beaux-Arts** in Paris, he **moved away from classical** urban subjects, seeking instead a **naturalistic representation** of the countryside. His approach, blending realism with lyrical sensitivity, influenced social realists and **inspired** artists such as **Vincent van Gogh**, who admired Millet's ability to convey the spiritual dignity of everyday toil.
- *The Angelus* (1857–59) is Millet's most famous work. It depicts two peasants pausing in their field at dusk to say the Angelus prayer over a basket of potatoes. The subdued palette, soft twilight, and solemn postures evoke contemplation and reverence, highlighting the rhythm and spirituality inherent in rural labor. Millet himself claimed the painting aimed to "**show the dignity of labor and the humanity of the peasant.**"
- Upon its exhibition, the painting received **mixed critical responses**; some **dismissed its simplicity**, while the **public embraced its emotional resonance**. It later became emblematic of French rural idealism, famously **admired by Salvador Dalí for its "mystical symmetry."**
- Millet's treatment of light, atmosphere, and ordinary life directly influenced the Impressionists, particularly in their depictions of rural and working-class subjects. Artists such as **Renoir and Pissarro** drew from Millet's focus on natural settings and authentic human activity, integrating a lyrical realism that bridged

the Barbizon tradition with modern French painting. *The Angelus* thus stands as both a devotional and artistic milestone, reflecting Millet's enduring impact on nineteenth-century art.

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Angelus_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Angelus_(painting))

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/langelus-345>



Paul Huet (1803-1869), *Le Gouffre, paysage, (The Abyss, Landscape)*, 1861, 125 × 212 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Paul Huet (1803-1869), *Le Gouffre, paysage, (The Abyss, Landscape)*, 1861, 125 × 212 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- The painting *Le Gouffre* (pronounced “goofre”, meaning “chasm” or “abyss”) *paysage* (1861) by Paul Huet presents a dramatic moment of nature’s fury: **a yawning chasm, horses rearing, wind-swept trees** and a lone rider peering over an abyss. It is **Romantic fantasy** but with new elements.
- Paul Huet (1803-1869) studied under Guérin and Gros but broke from their neoclassical style to become a key figure of French Romantic landscape painting. ([Wikipedia][2]) He was deeply interested in the wild and the sublime, and his admiration for British landscape painters such as John Constable helped introduce new sensibilities to France. ([National Gallery][3]) **He worked often in the forest of Fontainebleau**, and his colour, light and brushwork paved a path that would influence later innovators of plein-air painting and even herald aspects of Impressionism. ([musee-leondierx.re][4])
- In *Le Gouffre*, Huet gives us nature unleashed. According to the museum’s commentary, the land appears to split open “as in a diluvian landscape”, that is, a flooded landscape. ([musee-orsay.fr][5]) The rider, clad in archaic costume, along with two terrified horses and bent trees, evoke both danger and a sense of human vulnerability. One anecdote: Huet himself wrote of a sketch for the work: **“it shows a chasm, an abyss ... this is the title I will most certainly give to this picture.”** ([musee-leondierx.re][4]) The work is an allegory of the artist — physically fragile, perhaps misunderstood — confronting the elemental forces of nature and existence. ([musee-orsay.fr][5])

- Exhibited at the Salon of 1861 the painting already employed a Romantic idiom that many considered by then somewhat outmoded. ([musee-orsay.fr][5]) While Huet's earlier role as innovator was appreciated, this work found itself somewhat **stranded between Romantic dramatic gesture and the emerging realism** and naturalism of the later 19th century. Nevertheless, its bold composition and emotional intensity secured Huet's place as a transitional figure — bridging Romanticism to the later Impressionist emphasis on nature's changing moods.
- In summary, Le Gouffre is both a striking vision of nature's power and a subtle self-portrait of an artist at a turning point. It encapsulates Huet's lifelong fascination with dramatic landscape, his technical daring, and his place in the arc of 19th-century French painting.

REFERENCES

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-gouffre-paysage-1056>

[1]: <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-gouffre-paysage-1056> "Le Gouffre, paysage - Paul Huet | Musée d'Orsay"

[2]: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Huet "Paul Huet"

[3]: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/paul-huet> "Paul Huet (1803-1869) | National Gallery, London"

[4]: <https://www.musee-leondierx.re/en/the-masterpieces-huet-paul> "Paul Huet"

[5]: <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/oeuvres/le-gouffre-paysage-1056> "Le Gouffre, paysage - Paul Huet | Musée d'Orsay"

[Image](<https://cdn.mediatheque.epmoo.fr/link/3c9igq/ghg1atweteshxvk.jpg>)

[Image](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/Paul_Huet.jpg)



Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), *The Banks of the Oise, Auvers*, 1863, 37.5 × 67 cm, The Met

Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), *The Banks of the Oise, Auvers*, 1863, 37.5 × 67 cm, The Met

- Charles-François Daubigny (1817–1878) was a French landscape painter associated with the Barbizon circle and often regarded as a **key precursor of Impressionism**. ([Encyclopedia Britannica][1]) Born in Paris into a family of artists, he learned early from his father Edmond-François and uncle Pierre, and later studied under Jean-Victor Bertin and Jacques Raymond Brascassat before carving his own path. ([Wikipedia][2]) Over time he moved away from academic historical subjects toward painting “en plein air” and capturing transient effects of light, especially in his river and marsh scenes. ([Encyclopedia Britannica][1])
- This modestly sized work (oil on wood panel) comes from Daubigny’s period of deep engagement with the Oise (pronounced “wahz”) valley after acquiring property in Auvers (pronounced “oo-VER”) around 1860. ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][3]) His **habitual boating expeditions** on the river enabled him to observe shifting reflections, vistas, and skies from intimate vantage points. ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][3]) The painting presents a **serene riverbank view**: trees and foliage border the river, its surface silvery and still, with delicate reflections and glimpses of water lilies and small boats. ([The Metropolitan Museum of Art][3]) The composition suggests a balance between close observation and painterly freedom: brushwork varies—from **blended passages to visible strokes** and even wiping techniques—creating a subtle vibration of surface. ([Nelson Atkins][4]) Though likely worked over in the studio, the core idea would have been **sketched or studied outdoors**. ([The Metropolitan

Museum of Art][3])

- In the mid-19th century French Salon system, **landscapes had been regarded as lower genre**, so **Daubigny's success** signified **changing tastes**. ([Encyclopedia Britannica][1]) He was gradually seen as the great "river painter" of his time, bridging Barbizon concerns for nature with what the Impressionists would soon more radically explore. ([Nelson Atkins][4])
- Though not this exact work, Daubigny showed at the 1863 Salon and participated subsequently as a **jury member**—he later **famously resigned from Salon jury** when works by **younger Impressionists (like Cézanne or Pissarro) were rejected**. ([Wikipedia][2]) He also offered encouragement to Monet, Pissarro, and Cézanne. ([Rehs Galleries][5])
- Anecdotally, a legend circulated (probably a humorous invention) that Daubigny indicated his opinion of a painting by the number of ducks he painted in it—one duck: "fair," two: "good," three: "very good." ([Wikipedia][6]). I am not sure what it says about this ductless painting though.

REFERENCES

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436080>

[1]: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Francois-Daubigny>

"Charles-François Daubigny | Impressionist Landscapes, Barbizon ..."

[2]: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-Fran%C3%A7ois_Daubigny

"Charles-François Daubigny"

[3]: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436080> "Charles-François Daubigny - The Banks of the Oise"

[4]: <https://nelson-atkins.org/fpc/nineteenth-century-realism-barbizon/510/>

"Daubigny, The Banks of the Oise"

[5]: <https://rehs.com/eng/bio/charles-francois-daubigny/> "Charles-François Daubigny (1817 - 1878) - Rehs Galleries"

[6]: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles-Fran%C3%A7ois_Daubigny

"Charles-François Daubigny"

[Image](<https://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/ep/original/DP-19019-001.jpg>)

[Image](<https://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/rl/original/DP-34472-001.jpg>)

[Image](<https://uploads6.wikiart.org/images/charles-francois-daubigny/the-studio-on-the-boat-1861.jpg%21Large.jpg>)



Claude Monet (1840-1926), *The Studio Boat*, 1874, 50.2 × 65.5 cm, Kröller-Müller, Netherlands

Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), *The Boat Studio*, 1867 and 1872, 171.5 × 147 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Charles-François Daubigny (1817-1878), *The Boat Studio*, 1867 and 1872, 171.5 × 147 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Claude Monet (1840-1926), *The Studio Boat*, 1874, 50.2 × 65.5 cm, Kröller-Müller, Netherlands

Later Phase and Transition (1860s–1870s)

- Daubigny's 1874 painting, *The Boat Studio*, is a landscape of the **Oise** (pronounced "wahz") **River near Auvers** (pronounced "oo-VER"), featuring his studio boat, Le Botin (pronounced "boat-an"). However, this name is likely a confusion with Claude Monet's 1874 painting of his own studio boat, *The Floating Studio*, which was inspired by Daubigny's creation and the latter's 1860s series of etchings titled *The Boat Trip*. Daubigny used his actual studio boat, Le Botin, to paint river scenes, and later **installed it in his garden** after a **second boat** replaced it on the river.
- (CLICK) **Monet was inspired by Daubigny** to acquire a studio boat in 1872. Monet painted ***The Floating Studio*** (also sometimes referred to as *The Studio Boat*) in 1874, depicting himself at work on his own studio boat. This work marked a shift in Monet's work, as it was a studio creation rather than a pure en plein air observation, and is sometimes seen as a step beyond pure Impressionism. (CLICK)
- Daubigny's approach was a major influence on the Impressionists and his work is sometimes considered a precursor to the movement.

REFERENCES

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/le-bateau-atelier-265237>

<https://krollermuller.nl/en/claude-monet-monet-s-studio-boat>



Charles Emile Jacque (1813 - 1894), *The Shepherdess*, c. 1869, pastel on brown wove paper, 52.6 × 94.9 cm, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Charles Emile Jacque (1813 - 1894), *The Shepherdess*, c. 1869, pastel on brown wove paper, 52.6 × 94.9 cm, The National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

- **Charles Émile Jacque** (1813–1894) was a French painter and etcher, associated with the Barbizon School, renowned for his intimate depictions of rural life. Born in Paris, Jacque initially **trained as an engraver** but shifted to painting and etching, particularly focusing on **pastoral scenes and domestic animals**, which became his hallmark. His work is notable for its careful observation of nature, subtle tonalities, and the emotional resonance of humble subjects. Jacque was closely linked with fellow Barbizon artists such as Jean-François Millet and Théodore Rousseau, sharing their devotion to realism and the depiction of peasant life.
- *The Shepherdess* shows a young shepherdess tending her flock, **her posture relaxed yet attentive**, set against an understated landscape. The **pastel technique** allows Jacque to capture both the **softness of the figure** and the **delicate textures** of the pastoral environment. This work reflects his enduring fascination with rural labour, rendered with a dignity and quiet introspection that elevates everyday life to art.
- Jacque's art was **well received in his lifetime**, particularly **among collectors** drawn to the poetic realism of the Barbizon School. **He exhibited widely at the Paris Salons** and inspired younger artists who admired his sensitive treatment of animals and rural figures. An interesting anecdote is that Jacque often drew inspiration from his travels in Normandy, where he observed shepherds and livestock firsthand, blending documentary observation with a romanticised

sensibility.

NOTES

- Why were pastel so popular — they were quick, with no drying time, brighter, non fading colours and reminded the bourgeoisie purchaser of 18th century aristocracy who purchased pastels. So they were practical, affordable and suited the aesthetic demands of the new middle classes.

REFERENCES

[https://rehs.com/Charles Emile Jacque A Shepherdess Resting with Her Flock.html](https://rehs.com/Charles_Emile_Jacque_A_Shepherdess_Resting_with_Her_Flock.html)



Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, (Recollection of Mortefontaine), 1864, 65 × 89 cm, Louvre Museum

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875), *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, (Recollection of Mortefontaine), 1864, 65 × 89 cm, Louvre Museum

Later Phase and Transition (1860s–1870s)

- I end with Corot's *Souvenir de Mortefontaine* (1864) is a seminal work that exemplifies his transition from neoclassical precision to a more emotive, impressionistic style. We see a tranquil lakeside scene in the village of Mortefontaine (pronounced "morta-fon-ten"), located in northern France. The composition features a woman and children near a reflective body of water, enveloped by lush trees and soft light. Notably, Corot did not paint this scene en plein air but instead relied on his recollections, blending memory with imagination to evoke a serene atmosphere.
- The painting is recognised as **one of Corot's masterpieces**, showcasing his ability to merge reality with poetic vision. Its soft brushwork and subtle lighting anticipate the **techniques later employed by the Impressionists**. Corot's engagement with **early landscape photography**, which often featured **blurred details**, may have influenced the indistinct features in this work, suggesting a deliberate attempt to recreate photographic effects in paint ([Wikipedia][1]).
- *Souvenir de Mortefontaine* was purchased directly from Corot by **Napoleon III in 1864** and initially displayed at the **Palace of Fontainebleau**. It was later transferred to the Louvre in 1889, where it remains today ([Wikipedia][1]).
- While Corot was a pivotal figure in the Barbizon School, *Souvenir de Mortefontaine* represents a **shift towards a more personal and imaginative**

approach to landscape painting. This evolution reflects the broader transition in 19th-century art **from strict realism to more subjective interpretations**, paving the way for the Impressionist movement. Therefore, while not the literal end of the Barbizon School, this work marks a significant point in the evolution of landscape painting, bridging the gap between realism and impressionism.

- It is an example of Corot's lyrical late phase, merging realism with poetic tonality; a gentle close to the movement.

REFERENCES

[1]: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souvenir_de_Mortefontaine "Souvenir de Mortefontaine"



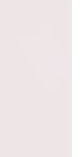
26-01 THE BARBIZON SCHOOL

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot *Les hauteurs de Sèvres*
— *Le chemin*
Troyon, detail,
1835-40

- The Barbizon School was most active between the 1830s and 1870s. Its main leaders died in the 1860s and 70s, Rousseau died 1867 and Millet died in 1875. Daubigny and Jules Dupré died in the 1870s and 1880s.
- The school effectively came to a close as these artists died or their styles evolved, overlapping with the rise of newer movements like Impressionism, which was deeply influenced by **Barbizon's naturalistic plein air painting** but moved beyond it in style and technique. The artists of **Barbizon laid the groundwork** for this transition **rather than abruptly ending**; their community dispersed, and their influence persisted in subsequent generations.
- That brings me to the end of this talk on The Barbizon School, an influential French art movement that paved the way for Impressionism.
- Thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to recording my next talk. I am now in the final year of my mammoth six year project that started at the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 when I had to stop giving my weekly art history classes. I think these 250 talks occupying about 200 hours give a brief overview of the history of Western art.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

