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26-02 Gustave Courbet

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Gustave Courbet, *The Desperate Man*, detail, c.1843-45

- This is Section 26 on Nineteenth-Century French art and talk in on Gustave Courbet (1819-1877). I would warn you there are four slides containing images of female nudes one of which I had to blur to avoid being banned by YouTube.

French Kings and Republics

- **Louis XV** (King of France), 1715–1774: Died of natural causes, succeeded by his grandson Louis XVI.
- **Louis XVI** (King of France), 1774–1792: Deposed and executed during the French Revolution.
- **French First Republic**, 1792–1804: Ended as Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself Emperor, initiating the First French Empire.
- **Napoleon I (Emperor)**, 1804–1814/1815: Abdicated after defeat at the Battle of Waterloo; followed by Bourbon Restoration.
- **Louis XVIII** (King of France), 1814–1824: Restored Bourbon monarchy; died of natural causes.
- **Charles X** (King of France), 1824–1830: Abdicated following the July Revolution of 1830.
- **Louis-Philippe I** (King of the French), 1830–1848: Abdicated during the February 1848 Revolution.
- **French Second Republic**, 1848–1852: Ended when Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte staged a coup and declared himself Emperor.
- **Napoleon III (Emperor)**, 1852–1870: Defeated and captured in Franco-Prussian War; empire collapsed.

- **French Third Republic**, 1870–1940: Fell after German invasion in WWII; replaced by Vichy regime.
- **Vichy France (Regime)**, 1940–1944: Ended following Allied liberation of France.
- **French Fourth Republic**, 1946–1958: Replaced due to political instability and Algerian crisis, leading to the Fifth Republic.
- **French Fifth Republic**, 1958–present: Current system, established under Charles de Gaulle; ongoing.

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Desperate Man* (*Le Désespéré*), c.1843-45, 45 × 54 cm, Musée d'Orsay (2025-2030) then Qatar Museums

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Desperate Man* (*Le Désespéré*), c.1843-45, 45 × 54 cm, Musée d'Orsay (2025-2030) then Qatar Museums

- Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) was the **audacious and fiercely independent** founder of the **French Realist movement**. Other painters that could be classified as in this movement include Daubigny and Millet who I have included in my talk on the Barbizon School.
- Courbet was born in Ornans the only son in a **prosperous farming family**, known for his **boisterous confidence** and **physical vigour**. As a boy, Courbet swam in the river, roamed the hills, and sketched his sisters and neighbours. [1][2][3]
- At twenty-one, he **left for Paris**, rejecting the strict academicism of the École des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he **copied works by Caravaggio and Rubens** in the Louvre, teaching himself to blend the drama of chiaroscuro with the weight of everyday truth. Early self-portraits, such as ***The Desperate Man***, reveal both bravado and vulnerability—an artist determined to confront convention face-to-face.

Biography Courbet

- Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) was the **audacious and fiercely independent** founder of the **French Realist movement**. Born in Ornans, in the rugged Franche-Comté, he was the only son in a **prosperous farming family**, known for his **boisterous confidence** and **physical vigour**. As a boy, Courbet swam in the Loue River, roamed the hills, and sketched his sisters and neighbours—imagery

that would later fill his vast canvases with unidealised humanity.[1][2][3]

- Gustave Courbet never married. He once wrote to his family in 1845 expressing his reluctance toward marriage, quipping that he was "as inclined to get married as I am to hang myself." During the early 1840s, **he lived with one of his models, Virginie Binet**, for about a decade. The couple **had a son, Désiré-Alfred Emile**, born in 1847. However, the relationship ended in the winter of 1851-52, with Binet and their son leaving Paris and vanishing from Courbet's life later on.
- At twenty-one, he **left for Paris**, rejecting the strict academicism of the École des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he **copied works by Caravaggio and Rubens** in the Louvre, teaching himself to blend the drama of chiaroscuro with the weight of everyday truth. Early self-portraits, such as ***The Desperate Man***, reveal both bravado and vulnerability—an artist determined to confront convention face-to-face. Courbet **quickly gained fame, and scandal**, for his monumental ***A Burial at Ornans*** (1849–50), which depicted provincial villagers on the scale of history painting. One critic sneered that he had painted "**peasants in Sunday best**," but Courbet's Realism exposed the dignity and raw truth of ordinary life.[4][5][6][1]
- He delighted in controversy. When ***The Painter's Studio*** (1855) was rejected by the Exposition Universelle, Courbet rented his own pavilion beside it, boldly inscribed ***Pavillon du Réalisme***. His words—"**I cannot paint an angel because I have never seen one**"—became a manifesto for an age turning from idealism toward modernity. A restless bohemian, Courbet mingled with Baudelaire and Proudhon, and loved to duel, hunt, and drink Burgundy with friends in Ornans.[4]
- Throughout his life, Courbet maintained a series of **mostly short-term romantic attachments** rather than lasting relationships. His lifestyle was bohemian and independent, prioritising his art over settling down.
- His revolutionary sympathies during the 1871 Paris Commune led to six months **imprisonment** after he was blamed for toppling Napoleon's Vendôme Column. **In 1872, Courbet proposed to a young woman** he hoped would live with him and boost his social standing, but she chose to marry her village sweetheart instead. Courbet remained a bachelor until his death. In 1873, the French authorities ordered him to pay for the monument's reconstruction, an immense fine he could never afford. Faced with renewed prosecution and potential imprisonment, Courbet fled to

Switzerland in July 1873, settling in the lakeside town of La Tour-de-Peilz near Vevey. In exile, Courbet's health declined, and though he continued to paint, he lived under considerable strain. His final years in Switzerland were marked by isolation, declining income, and regret over the political consequences of his passionate republican convictions. He painted lonely alpine lakes before **dying of liver disease** in 1877, still contesting the financial penalty—unbent, defiant, and still proclaiming himself "**the proudest man in France**".[6][7]

Where he Lived

- **Ornans**, Doubs (1819–1837) – Born and raised in this small town in Franche-Comté; developed his early love of nature and rural life, later returning here frequently to paint.
- **Besançon** (1837–1839) – Studied drawing at the Besançon Academy, beginning his formal art education before leaving for Paris.
- **Paris** (1839–1873) – Moved to the capital to study law but soon devoted himself entirely to painting; often worked independently, copying Old Masters in the Louvre and forming ties with realist writers and artists such as Baudelaire, Champfleury, and Proudhon.
- **Travels in Holland** (1847) – Short stay studying the works of Rembrandt and the Dutch realists whose influence shaped his mature style.
- **Ornans** (1848–1855) – Frequently returned home to paint major early realist works including After Dinner at Ornans and A Burial at Ornans; his studio there became a centre for local models and subjects.
- **Montpellier** (1854) – Stayed with his patron Alfred Bruyas, producing *The Meeting* (Bonjour Monsieur Courbet) and *The Bathers.*
- **Paris** (1855–1870) – Maintained a studio; organised the Pavilion of Realism in 1855, a milestone in his career; created The Painter's Studio and other key realist works.
- **Normandy coast** (1865–1869) – Spent summers at Le Havre and Étretat painting seascapes such as The Wave.
- **Sainte-Pélagie Prison**, Paris (1871–1872) – Imprisoned for six months after the Paris Commune, where he painted still lifes and self-reflective works.
- **Ornans** (early 1872–1873) – Returned home briefly after prison; proposed marriage unsuccessfully and faced political persecution over the Vendôme Column case.

- **La Tour-de-Peilz**, Switzerland (1873–1877) – Fled France to avoid imprisonment for unpaid indemnities; lived in exile on Lake Geneva, painting Alpine scenes and dying there on 31 December 1877.

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *After Dinner at Ornans* (*Après-dîner à Ornans*), 1848–49, 195 × 257, Palais des Beaux-Arts

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *After Dinner at Ornans* (*Après-dîner à Ornans*), 1848–49, 195 × 257, Palais des Beaux-Arts

- ***After Dinner at Ornans*** marked the beginning of his **mature Realist style** and his lifelong devotion to portraying his **native Ornans**. Painted in the winter of 1848–49, shortly **after the revolution** that toppled the **July Monarchy**, it depicts four men seated around a table in the quiet aftermath of a meal. These are not anonymous peasants, but local friends and family—his father Régis Courbet, the town violinist Alphonse Promayet, Adolphe Marlet, and Urbain Cuenot—relaxing while Promayet plays music for them. [1][2][3]
- Courbet's scene is not dramatized or idealized; the men are rendered life-size against a dark interior, the lamplight glinting off bottles and instruments. The monumental scale (195 × 257 cm) elevates a provincial evening to the dignity of a grand history painting, a radical gesture that challenged Parisian academic taste. His inspiration came from Dutch and French masters such as Le Nain, Chardin, and Teniers, whose depictions of everyday life he had studied during his 1846 trip to Holland. Yet Courbet's intent was modern: he declared that he would paint only what he saw, grounding art in direct observation rather than myth or sentiment. [4][5][6]
- When he exhibited *After Dinner at Ornans* at the Salon of 1849, it **caused a sensation**. While conservative critics found it **crude and somber**, the realist writer Champfleury hailed it as **revolutionary truth-painting**. The painting **won a gold medal** and was **purchased by the French state**, freeing Courbet from jury submission at future Salons—a milestone that **launched his controversial**

independence. The success emboldened him to paint *The Stone Breakers* and *A Burial at Ornans*, ushering in an era when the faces and labours of ordinary rural life commanded the scale once reserved for kings and gods. [2][8][9]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Stone Breakers* (*Les Casseurs de pierres)*, 1849 (destroyed 1945), 165 × 257 cm, Formerly Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Stone Breakers* (*Les Casseurs de pierres)*, 1849 (destroyed 1945), 165 × 257 cm, Formerly Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

- *The Stone Breakers* was created to vividly depict the harsh reality of manual labor performed by the rural working class. The painting shows two peasants, a young man and an old man, breaking rocks to be used for road construction, highlighting the brutal and monotonous nature of their work. Courbet chose to omit facial details from the figures, emphasising their universality as symbols of the oppressed working poor rather than individuals. This labor-intensive scene was a groundbreaking departure from romanticised or idealized portrayals of rural life, emphasising social realism and the dignity of everyday labor.[1][5][7]
- Courbet's inspiration for this work came from his direct observations of the rural labourers around Ornans and Paris, aiming to portray their hardship truthfully. The monochromatic, gritty colour palette and the figures' ragged clothing evoke the bleakness and exhaustion of their toil. The composition and scale (170 cm x 240 cm) challenged traditional academic standards, ushering in a new approach that celebrated ordinary people and their struggles.
- It played a significant role in Courbet's career as a pioneering social realist work. Exhibited at the 1850 Paris Salon, it ignited controversy: some critics found it crude, while others praised its raw honesty. The painting was destroyed during the Second World War in Dresden, but reproductions and studies of its impact have made it one of the most important works of 19th-century realism, highlighting the injustices faced by the working class.[3][6][8]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *A Burial at Ornans* (*Un enterrement à Ornans)*, 1849–50, 315 × 668, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *A Burial at Ornans* (*Un enterrement à Ornans)*, 1849–50, 315 × 668, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

- *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50) is a monumental painting, over six metres long, that captures the **funeral of a common man** in Courbet's hometown of Ornans. It shows the moment at the graveside where mourners from all walks of life have gathered. Courbet painted this work following the **death of his great-uncle**, who likely inspired the scene, and involved local townspeople as models, including his own family members. This personal connection gave the painting an intimate and authentic feel while addressing universal themes of life and death.[1][2][5]
- Courbet's choice to depict a rural funeral on such a grand scale was radical, elevating ordinary citizens to the status traditionally reserved for monarchs or religious figures. The composition is striking: mourners, pallbearers, clergy, and the gravedigger are arranged horizontally across the canvas, creating a frieze-like effect that emphasises equality among the figures despite their social differences. Among those present are the mayor, the Justice of the Peace, Courbet's father and mother, his sisters, and veterans in revolutionary costumes, symbolising layers of French history and society.[3][4]
- The painting's realism and scale challenged the artistic establishment of the time and caused controversy at the 1850 Salon. Critics debated its social and political implications; some saw it as a democratic statement elevating rural life, while others were unsettled by its unidealised portrayal. One subtle element is a human skull placed near the gravesite, interpreted as a memento mori and

perhaps a reflection on life's impermanence and the futility of ideological conflict.[4][6]

- Overall, it marked a defining moment in Courbet's career and in the Realist movement, asserting the significance of everyday experience and ordinary people on a grand artistic scale.

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair* (*Les Paysans de Flagey revenant de la foire*), 1850–55, 195 × 261, Musée de Besançon

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair* (*Les Paysans de Flagey revenant de la foire*), 1850–55, 195 × 261, Musée de Besançon

- *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair* is a vivid and large-scale portrayal of rural life in his native Franche-Comté. The painting shows a group of farmers and villagers returning home after a day at the livestock fair in the village of Flagey, exemplifying Courbet's dedication to depicting ordinary people with unidealised honesty. The figures include both men and women, some riding horses, others leading cattle or carrying tools and goods, dressed in traditional peasant attire. Courbet's father, Régis Courbet—then mayor of Flagey—is thought to be the horseman at the centre, symbolising the insightful intertwining of family and local community life.[1][2]
- This work is one of Courbet's "highway" series paintings that sought to portray the daily life and natural environment of rural villagers on a heroic scale previously reserved for historical or mythological subjects. His use of heightened realism, rugged composition, and naturalistic lighting was a direct challenge to the Parisian artistic establishment's preference for romanticised countryside scenes. Critics initially derided the painting for the stiffness of the figures and the rough depiction of animals, but Courbet embraced this as truthful representation, rejecting idealisation or prettification.[2][5]
- The painting played a crucial role during a pivotal period in Courbet's career when he was developing his reputation as a radical realist. He revisited and reworked the composition between its first showing in 1850–51 and later in

1855, refining the arrangement of figures, notably repositioning a woman carrying a basket more centrally. This adjustment highlights Courbet's keen attention to compositional balance and the evolving nature of his artistic practice. *The Peasants of Flagey* stands as a landmark in social realism, asserting the presence and significance of rural working people within monumental art tradition.[5][1][2]

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Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), *The Bathers* (*Les Baigneuses*), c. 1853, 227x193 cm, Musée Fabre

Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), *The Bathers* (*Les Baigneuses*), c. 1853, 227x193 cm, Musée Fabre

- This is one of Courbet's three provocative works, the other two being The Wrestlers and the Sleeping Woman. The picture itself was larger than usual. He challenged the typical depictions of a nude body, with dirty feet and heavy figure. It was purchased for 3,000 francs by a man who would become his friend.
- Gustave Courbet's *The Bathers* (1853) is a large oil painting that epitomises his dedication to Realism and his rebellious challenge to the academic art standards of his time. Measuring 227 by 193 centimeters and housed in Musée Fabre, Montpellier, the work depicts a burly, naked peasant woman emerging from a small pool, with a thin cloth partly covering her lower body. She is watched by a clothed maid who prepares to remove her shoes and stockings. The scene is set in a natural landscape evocative of Courbet's native Franche-Comté.[1][2][3]
- Courbet painted *The Bathers* as part of his effort to portray ordinary life with raw honesty, rejecting the idealised and often mythological female nudes typical of the Romantic and Neoclassical traditions. The central figure's body is naturalistic, showing signs of age and weight, which scandalised critics who expected graceful classical beauty. Théophile Gautier mockingly called the figure a "kind of Hottentot Venus" and disparaged the painting for its crude realism. The stark contrasts and earthy colours added to perceptions of vulgarity.[4][1]

- Despite the outrage, the painting was bought by Courbet's patron and friend Alfred Bruyas, providing financial stability for the artist. In letters, Courbet expressed confidence that his work would make a lasting impact. The painting broke conventions not only in its representation of the female form but also by its scale—large canvases were then usually reserved for religious or historical subjects, not scenes of everyday life.[7][1]
- *The Bathers* remains a landmark in the development of modern art, influencing later painters who embraced realism and naturalism, asserting the beauty and dignity of authentic human experience.[8][9]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Wrestlers* (*Les Lutteurs*), 1853, 252 × 198, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Wrestlers* (*Les Lutteurs*), 1853, 252 × 198, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

- ***The Wrestlers*** is a striking study of physical strength and human vitality, painted during a fertile period when he was consolidating his Realist style. Measuring 199 by 252 centimetres, the painting depicts two muscular men locked in a vigorous wrestling match, their bodies twisting and straining with effort. The scene is thought to have been inspired by a bout Courbet witnessed at the former Hippodrome on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, where "French wrestling"—a form of Greco-Roman combat—was a popular spectacle.[1][2]
- He painted the work as a pendant to his controversial *Bathers* of the same year, intending the two together to explore physicality in both male and female form. Whereas *The Bathers* provoked scandal for its earthy depiction of the female nude, *The Wrestlers* focused on masculine energy and raw exertion, rendered in the warm, ruddy tones of Courbet's distinctive palette. His use of dense pigments, thick brushwork and naturalistic anatomy emphasised the texture of flesh and movement under strain, embodying his rejection of idealised Classicism.[6][8]
- Courbet himself described the painting wryly in a letter to his parents, noting that critics "have not yet said anything good or bad about it", since *The Bathers* had drawn most of the outrage. Exhibited at the 1853 Salon, *The Wrestlers* elicited less controversy but demonstrated Courbet's ambition to elevate ordinary subjects to monumental scale. Art historians have also noted its subtle erotic undertones—evoked by the close physical entanglement of the

figures—which may have contributed to the work's subdued reception among contemporary audiences.[1]

- Now housed in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, *The Wrestlers* remains an exemplar of Courbet's command of realism, movement, and muscular humanity, painted with both candour and intent to challenge aesthetic convention.[5][9]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Meeting* (*Bonjour Monsieur Courbet)*, 1854, 132 × 151, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Meeting* (*Bonjour Monsieur Courbet)*, 1854, 132 × 151, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

- ***The Meeting***, also known *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* is one of his most **personal and symbolic works**. Painted during his stay in Montpellier, it portrays the artist encountering his patron, Alfred Bruyas, accompanied by his servant Calas and a brown dog, on a sunlit country road. Courbet, with his travel gear, painting box, and walking stick, stands tall and self-assured. Bruyas, immaculately dressed, greets him respectfully, while Calas bows slightly—a subtle distinction highlighting social class and dependence.[1][3][5]
- The painting was commissioned by Bruyas, who had purchased several of Courbet's works following the 1853 Salon, including *The Bathers* and *The Sleeping Spinner*. Bruyas envisioned the scene as a tribute to their friendship and his role as the artist's supporter, yet Courbet's composition transforms this private exchange into a broader allegory of independence and mutual respect. The dignified stance and confident gaze of Courbet—sometimes interpreted as arrogant—assert his equality, even superiority, to wealth and patronage. Critics at the 1855 Exposition Universelle, where the work was shown, accused the artist of vanity, prompting the ironic nickname "Bonjour Monsieur Courbet".[2][3][6]
- Courbet intended this painting as a declaration of artistic self-sufficiency, rejecting subservience to aristocratic tastes. The clear Mediterranean light and vivid earthy colours, inspired by his first journey to the south of France, reveal both technical mastery and emotional optimism. The episode also symbolised

his short-lived harmony with Bruyas before disputes over artistic ideals cooled their friendship. Today, the painting epitomises Courbet's bold Realist philosophy—his belief that art should portray life truthfully, and that the artist must stand as an independent, self-aware creator.[4][5][1]

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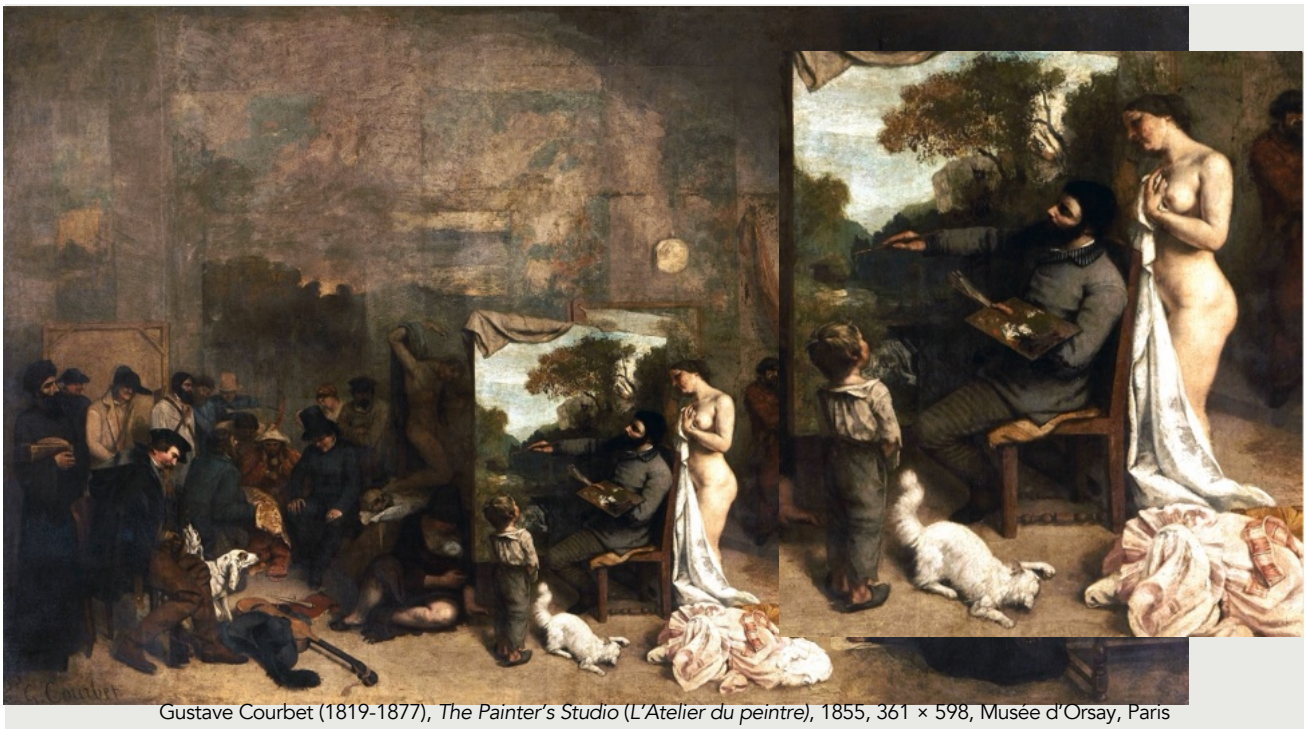
Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Painter's Studio* (*L'Atelier du peintre)*, 1855, 361 × 598, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Painter's Studio* (*L'Atelier du peintre)*, 1855, 361 × 598, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- *The Painter's Studio* had the sub-title *A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* stands as one of the most ambitious and enigmatic statements of his career. Painted in Ornans and measuring over six metres wide, it was created to summarise his artistic journey since the 1848 Revolution. Courbet described it as "the whole world coming to me to be painted."
- (CLICK) The central figure is Courbet himself, painting a landscape of his beloved Franche-Comté, accompanied by a nude female muse—representing artistic truth—and a young boy, symbolising innocence and the future of Realism.[1][2][5] (CLICK)
- On the left are figures of ordinary life: a priest, a peasant woman, a beggar, and a hunter said to resemble Napoleon III—types drawn from society's "wretched and powerful" alike. On the right appear Courbet's friends and allies—writer Champfleury, philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, poet Charles Baudelaire reading, and his patron Alfred Bruyas—representing supporters of modern art and free thought.[2][4][1]
- Rejected by the official jury for the **Exposition Universelle** of 1855 for being too large, the painting became the centrepiece of Courbet's *Pavilion of Realism*, an independent exhibition he financed himself opposite the World's Fair. Though ridiculed by many critics, it earned him admiration among avant-garde circles and inspired future breakaway exhibitions such as the ***Salon des Refusés***. Delacroix was among the few who defended it publicly.[4][9][10]

- *The Painter's Studio* represented both a culmination and a challenge: a manifesto of Realism, asserting the artist as a mediator between social classes and moral truths. It immortalised Courbet's defiance of the establishment and his enduring belief in the dignity of painting modern life.[5][9][2]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Hunt Breakfast* (*Le déjeuner à la chasse*), 1858, 207 × 325 cm, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Hunt Breakfast* (*Le déjeuner à la chasse*), 1858, 207 × 325 cm, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne

- ***The Hunt Breakfast*** (1858) is a monumental Realist painting created during his stay in Frankfurt, Germany. Measuring 207 by 325 centimetres, it depicts a convivial outdoor scene in which a group of hunters and their companions share an al fresco meal after a deer hunt. Fine tableware, game, and wine are arranged on a white cloth spread across the forest floor, with dogs sniffing about and figures relaxed in post-hunt leisure. The painting's naturalistic detail and subdued, earthy colours demonstrate Courbet's mastery in transforming an everyday social event into a major artistic subject.[1][2][4]
- Courbet painted it at a time when he was broadening his practice beyond rural Franche-Comté scenes, travelling through Germany and becoming known in European artistic circles. The composition celebrates bourgeois outdoor recreation but avoids the idealised treatment such subjects often received in traditional salon art. Instead, Courbet captured the physicality and immediacy of modern life—with heavy brushwork, realistic poses, and rich, smoky tones evoking the flavour of the forest and food rather than the heroism of the hunt.[5][6]
- At the 1859 Salon, critics admired the painting's technical proficiency but remained divided: some praised its frank realism, while others found its earthy subjects coarse and unrefined. It nonetheless influenced later artists—Claude Monet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1865–66), for instance, expanded on Courbet's approach to scale, natural lighting, and informal gatherings.[1]

- Painted in a period of relative prosperity and confidence, *The Hunt Breakfast* represents Courbet's continued assertion that even leisure, appetite, and camaraderie were worthy of artistic grandeur, rendered with the same dignity he gave to labour and landscape.[4][7][8]

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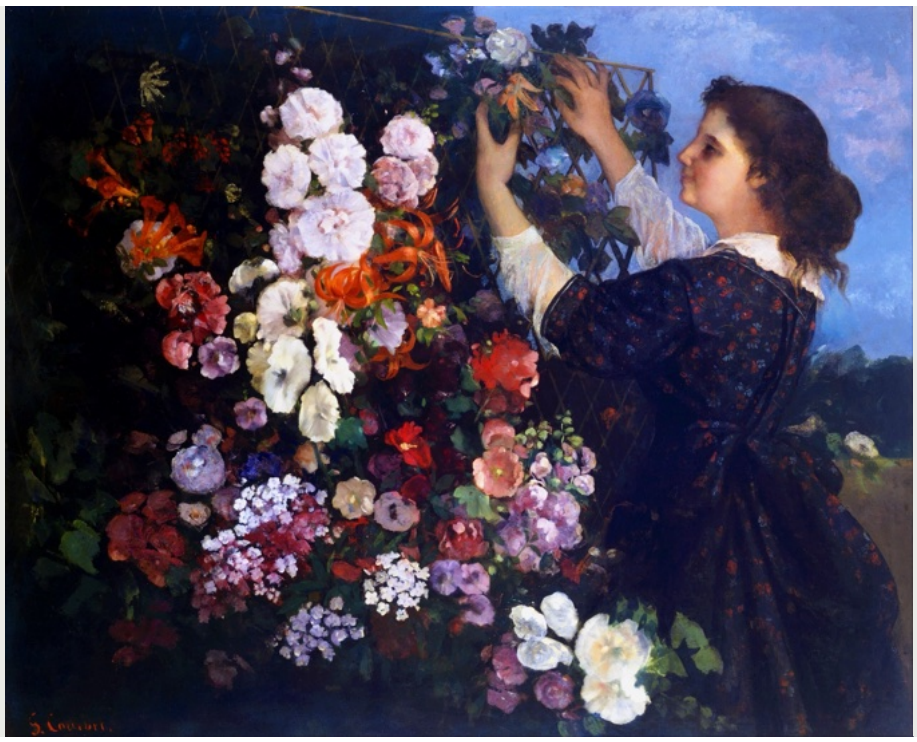

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Trellis* (*La Treille*), 1862, 135 × 110, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Trellis* (*La Treille*), 1862, 135 × 110, Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio

- ***The Trellis*** (1862), also known as *Young Woman Arranging Flowers*, marks a serene interlude in his career, painted during a productive stay in Saintes in western France. He was invited there by Étienne Baudry, a liberal landowner and patron introduced to him by the critic Jules Castagnary. The artist lived for several months at Baudry's estate, Rochemont, whose expansive gardens and greenhouses deeply inspired him. Surrounded by cultivated beauty rather than political turmoil or social struggle, Courbet turned to painting flowers and domestic subjects—a gentler side of his Realist vision.[1][3]
- The painting shows a young woman arranging freshly cut flowers on a wooden trellis, her dark dress patterned with tiny blossoms that echo the mass of summer blooms surrounding her. The scene emphasises the tactile, sensual immediacy of nature; Courbet devoted two-thirds of the composition to a dazzling abundance of petals rendered in rich, layered colour. Unlike classical allegories of Flora or mythological nymphs, this is a real woman in contemporary dress—an everyday beauty absorbed in her quiet task. Her natural pose and cheerful expression reflect the tranquillity Courbet found in his host's gardens.[7][1]
- Exhibited locally at Saintes in 1863, *The Trellis* drew considerable admiration for its vitality and freshness. It elevated flower painting—traditionally dismissed as a minor genre—to the large scale and compositional complexity of history painting. The work reveals Courbet's instinct to find grandeur in the

commonplace and to seek artistic renewal through the living world's immediacy, a theme that would reappear in his later landscapes and seascapes.[3][8][1]

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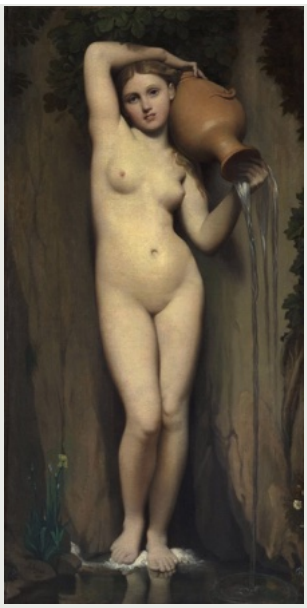

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Source,* 1856, 163 cm × 80 m (5.3 x 2.6 ft). Musée d'Orsay

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Source* (*La Source*), 1862, 120 × 74.3 cm, The Met, New York

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Source* (*La Source*), 1862, 120 × 74.3 cm, The Met, New York

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Source,* 1856, 163 cm × 80 m (5.3 x 2.6 ft). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- ***The Source*** is a celebrated oil painting that exemplifies his mature Realist style. The work depicts a nude woman standing outdoors in nature, engaged intimately with a flowing stream, her arms embracing the cascading water. Unlike traditional academic paintings that idealised the female nude with classical references, Courbet presents an honest, tactile engagement with the natural world—a real woman rather than a mythological figure.[1][2]
- The precise identity of the model remains unknown, though some speculate she may have posed for other Courbet works. The composition and setting emphasise sensuality tempered by realism, eschewing idealisation in favour of an unvarnished portrayal of flesh and water. The painting is often contrasted with Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's ***The Source*** (1856), which romanticises the subject much more stylised and allegorically.[2]
- For Courbet, *The Source* symbolises a direct communion between humanity and nature, a theme he explored in many landscapes and figures throughout his career. Painted during a period of artistic and personal maturity, it reflects his ongoing rejection of academic conventions and his embrace of everyday reality as worthy artistic subject matter.
- The painting is relatively modest in scale at 120 by 74.3 centimetres and currently resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It was part of

the collection bequeathed by Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer and remains a significant work for understanding Courbet's later approach to naturalism and the depiction of the nude.[3][4][1]

- *The Source* stands as a testament to Courbet's conviction that true beauty arises from sincere observation and respectful portrayal of the natural world

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *Woman with a Parrot* (*La Femme au Perroquet*), 1866, 129.5 × 195.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *Woman with a Parrot* (*La Femme au Perroquet*), 1866, 129.5 × 195.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- ***Woman with a Parrot*** is a notable work marking his mature Realist style, and was the first nude by the artist accepted at the Paris Salon. It features a reclining nude woman with dishevelled hair, seated on a white drapery against a dark natural backdrop. The woman's outstretched hand welcomes a brightly coloured parrot, poised mid-flight. The painting showcases Courbet's skill in rendering flesh tones and textures with naturalistic precision and sensitivity.[1][3]
- The model is widely believed to be **Joanna Hiffernan**, a **muse and lover of Courbet** and later of James McNeill Whistler. Unlike the classical, idealised nudes of the time, Courbet's depiction was candid and unvarnished. The woman's unidealised body, casual pose, and messy hair challenged contemporary norms of beauty and decorum. Discarded clothes visible on the side further emphasise a sense of naturalism and intimacy rather than theatricality.[2][7]
- The parrot, symbolically associated with exoticism and sensuality in 19th-century culture, adds a playful yet provocative element to the scene. Its vibrant blue and green feathers contrast with the muted earth tones highlighting the woman's naturalistic flesh, heightening the impression of immediacy and life. The parrot is also understood as an emblem of femininity's allure and mystery, further deepening the painting's subtext.[5][1]
- Critics initially censured the painting for lack of taste and the model's ungainly pose, but it was admired by younger artists including Cézanne and Manet. The

work still retains a capacity to provoke, testifying to Courbet's bold rejection of academic idealisation and championing of realism in portraying human subjects.[3][7]

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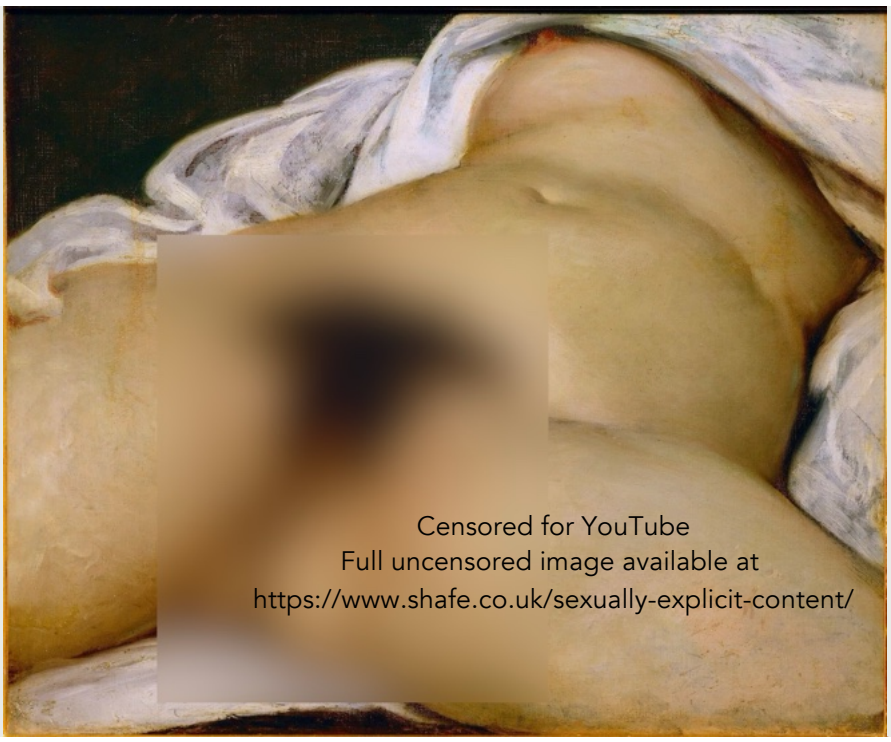

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Origin of the World* (*L'Origine du monde*), 1866, 55 × 46, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Origin of the World* (*L'Origine du monde*), 1866, 55 × 46, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- Because of YouTube's content restrictions, I can't show Courbet's *The Origin of the World* here in its original form. You can view the uncensored painting on my website — the link is in the video description.
- ***The Origin of the World*** (1866) is one of the most provocative and audacious images in Western art. Commissioned by the **wealthy Ottoman-Egyptian diplomat Khalil-Bey**, a noted collector of erotic paintings, it was executed in Paris and depicts, with uncompromising realism, the torso and genitals of a nude woman reclining on white sheets. The model's head and limbs are cropped by the frame, forcing the viewer's focus upon the intimate detail of her body. This radical composition rejects all allegory or mythological pretext, asserting the female nude as both subject and reality.[1][2][5]
- The woman's identity remains uncertain, though it has long been speculated that she might have been Joanna Hiffernan, Courbet's Irish mistress and the artist James McNeill Whistler's companion. The painter's meticulous technique and warm, amber tones recall Venetian masters like Titian and Veronese, evoking sensuality restrained by painterly refinement. Courbet's choice of title, *The Origin of the World*, symbolises not only **physical birth** but **woman's generative power and her centrality to life itself**. At the same time, the work reflects his conviction that art should **reveal truth without convention**, elevating reality over idealised fantasy.[2][5][6]
- **Hidden for decades** behind curtains or private walls, the painting passed

through several owners after Khalil-Bey was ruined by gambling debts. It was eventually acquired by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in the 1950s, who concealed it behind a landscape panel by his wife. In 1995, it entered the Musée d'Orsay, where it continues to intrigue and challenge viewers. [4][5][9]

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Wave* (*La Vague*), 1869, 46 × 55, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *The Wave* (*La Vague*), 1869, 46 × 55, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh

- ***The Wave*** (1869) is one of a series of seascapes he painted at Étretat (pronounced "etra-tah")on the Normandy coast, capturing the sea's immense power and vitality. Staying there in the summer of 1869, he became fascinated by the waves crashing against the cliffs, painting them repeatedly in different weathers and moods. Working in a rented house overlooking the English Channel, he studied the sea directly, often painting on stormy days to preserve immediacy and authenticity. The writer Guy de Maupassant famously described Courbet at work "spreading white paint on the canvas with a kitchen knife, taking a swig of cider, and returning to the storm," vividly expressing his raw realism.[1][2][5]
- Unlike romantic seascapes filled with ships or figures, *The Wave* isolates the natural spectacle itself. A single thundering breaker surges toward the viewer, its green, grey, and white mass rendered with thick brushstrokes and palette knife, embodying the physicality of nature. The absence of people heightens the elemental drama—an unflinching confrontation between viewer and nature's force. Courbet's technique gives the water almost geological solidity, fusing sea and stone in texture and strength.[6][1]
- Contemporary critics, such as Émile Zola, marvelled that Courbet had "simply painted a wave, a real wave." Later commentators saw political metaphor in the surging sea, suggesting democratic unrest rising against the old order. This series, now scattered among museums from Lyon to Edinburgh, remains a

testament to Courbet's ability to translate unbridled natural energy into paint, merging realism and emotion with unparalleled force.[3][4][8

- You might be wondering if he had seen Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, painted around 1831. It is possible as he mixed in artistic circles where Japanese prints were circulated and admired, however, Courbet was not an enthusiast of Japonisme as he favoured realism over flat, stylised patterns.

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Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *L'Immensité* (*The Vastness of the Sea*), 1869, 60 × 82.2, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, V&A Collections

- ***The Vastness of the Sea*** (1869), was painted at **Étretat on the Normandy coast**, where he spent the summer of that year deeply absorbed in the shifting moods of the sea. At this time, Courbet was exploring what he called his "marine period," focusing on elemental landscapes free from human presence. The painting depicts a serene expanse of low tide, where the reflective water merges with a dramatic sky filled with clouds tinted by purples, greys, and orange light. Its extraordinary simplicity—sea, sky, and horizon alone—embodies his fascination with the raw immensity and solitude of nature.[1]
- Courbet's approach to the canvas was physical and instinctive. Working outdoors, he applied thick layers of pigment with a palette knife rather than a brush, giving the sea's surface a sculptural texture. While earlier seascapes had shown the ocean's turbulence, *The Vastness of the Sea* captures nature's stillness with equal intensity. This moment of calm is often read as a reflection of the artist's own brief respite before the political upheavals of the early 1870s that would later end in imprisonment and exile.[1]
- The painting also reveals Courbet's admiration for British art—particularly **Constable's treatment of clouds and Turner's mastery of atmospheric light**. Critics later celebrated the painting for its visionary minimalism, which seemed to **anticipate Impressionist** explorations of light and space. It was **praised in Britain** and collected by Constantine Alexander **Ionides**, whose 1883 acquisition eventually led to its **bequest to the Victoria and Albert** Museum in

London. Through its vast emptiness and meditative tone, this work crystallises Courbet's lifelong dialogue between realism and metaphysical wonder.[3][1]

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26-02 Gustave Courbet

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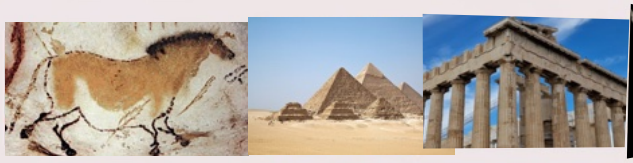
Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), *Self-Portrait* (*The Man with a Pipe*), c. 1848-49, 45.8 × 37.8 cm, Musée Fabre, Montpellier

- This is Gustave Courbet's *Self-Portrait* (*The Man with a Pipe*) painted early in his career. He described himself as "**a fanatic...disillusioned with the nonsense that made up his education**".
- He was **revolutionary and a pivotal figure** in the mid-19th century art world, central to establishing the Realist movement. His rebellion against the French Academy's classical and theatrical art styles brought him **notoriety but he gained admiration** from contemporaries in the art world and influenced artists like **Monet and Renoir**, as well as **Cézanne**. Outside of that he was **not widely celebrated** because of his politics but later, his fame grew as art historians recognised his role as an innovator and champion of Realism. He is now regarded as a **foundational figure** who helped transition European art from Romanticism to modernism.
- That brings me to the end and thank you once agin for your time and attention.



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