

Realism

Realism (or naturalism) in the arts is the attempt to represent subject matter truthfully, without artificiality and **avoiding artistic conventions**, implausible, exotic and supernatural elements.

The Realist movement in French art flourished from **about 1840** until the late nineteenth century, and sought to convey a **truthful** and **objective** vision of contemporary life. Realism emerged in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1848 that overturned the monarchy of Louis-Philippe and developed during the period of the Second Empire under Napoleon III. As French society fought for democratic reform, the Realists democratized art by depicting modern subjects drawn from the **everyday lives of the working class**. Rejecting the idealized classicism of academic art and the exotic themes of Romanticism, Realism was based on **direct observation of the modern world**.

In keeping with Gustave Courbet's statement in 1861 that "painting is an essentially *concrete* art and can only consist in the representation of real and existing things," Realists recorded in often gritty detail the present-day existence of humble people, paralleling related trends in the naturalist literature of Émile Zola, Honoré de Balzac, and Gustave Flaubert. The elevation of the working class into the realms of high art and literature coincided with Pierre Proudhon's socialist philosophies and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, which urged a proletarian uprising.

Jean Baptiste CAMILLE COROT

Paris 1796 – Ville-d'Avray 1875)



Florence



Colosseum from Farnesian Gardens 1826



Piediluco lake, 1826 cm 22 x 41, Oxford, The Ashmolean Museum

Water falls at Terni 1826
cm 36 x 32
Roma, Banca Nazionale
del Lavoro





Landscape with Lake and Boatman, 1839
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum

Landscape, Setting Sun
(The Little Shepherd) -
Camille Corot 1840
Metz, Musées de Metz





***Souvenir of Riva*, 1865-70 cm 64,1 x 92,2 Cincinnati, Taft Museum of Art.**



View at Narni (1826)



The Bridge at Narni (1826) Preliminary oil sketch

He was one of the leaders of the Barbizon School and a master of *plein air* painting.

The Barbizon school, which existed between 1830 and 1870, acquired its name from the French village of Barbizon.

It was here that an informal group of French landscape painters gathered. Other great luminaries from this group were Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, Charles-François Daubigny and Constant Troyon.

Corot was born in Paris in 1796. Camille's parents were members of the so called *bourgeois class*.

His father managed to purchase the hat shop, which his mother had worked in.

After leaving college his father arranged a number of apprenticeships for his son with a number of cloth merchants but Camille never settled and disliked the business practices inherent in that type of work.

"...I told my father that business and I were simply incompatible and that I was getting a divorce..."

The one thing that Camille did gain from working with textiles at the cloth merchants was it taught him about colours, patterns, textures and design and it could be that it was then that he began to explore painting as a possible career.

The view at Narni vs Bridge at Narni

Corot came upon the town of Narni, on the River Nera in September 1826. This Roman *Bridge of Augustus* was built in 27 BC, and was one of the two tallest road bridges ever built by the Romans. The Narni Roman Bridge was 160 m long and its remaining arch is 30 m high.

If we look at the preliminary oil sketch above we can tell it is a first attempt as the foreground is formless in detail. Maybe this is due to the fact that, as a *plein air* artist, he was not concentrating on the details close to where he stood or sat at his easel. His concentration would be solely focused on what he saw in the mid-ground and the background and he would have been absorbed by the aspects of light and shade at the very time he was putting brush to canvas. This sketch of Corot's was highly acclaimed by artists and critics for its naturalness and for its captivating breadth of vision.

When Corot returned to Paris the following year he set to work on his final oil painting of the bridge at Narnia. He decided to put forward two paintings for exhibiting at the 1827 Paris Salon.

He wanted them to be two contrasting works. One would depict a morning landscape whilst the other would depict an evening landscape. For the morning landscape he submitted his final *View at Narnia*, whilst putting forward *The Roman Campagna (La Carvara)* as the evening landscape scene.

This latter painting is presently housed in the *Kunsthaus*, Zurich. This final rendition of the painting, *View at Narni*, is much larger, at 68cm x 93cm than his preliminary oil sketch, *Bridge at Narni*, which only measures 34cms x 48cms.

When Corot set about “transferring” the details from his preliminary sketch on to the canvas for his final version he had to tread a fine line when it came to topographical integrity and idealised perfection.

This was the normal practice of landscape artists of Corot’s days. It was expected of the landscape painter not to just depict a photo-like depiction of a scene, but bring to the painting what the likes of Claude Lorraine had done before – a neoclassical ennoblement.

The artist had to bring an academic approach on his initial vision. Look how Corot has changed the foreground from being a steep slope in his preliminary sketch, which was how it was, to terracing and as was often the case in academic landscape works he has added a path, in the left foreground, and on it we see some sheep and goats.

Corot has added shepherds tending their flock and near to the cliff edge, he has added a couple of umbrella pine trees synonymous with and symbolic of the Roman countryside. This final version has now become a typical example of a Neoclassical landscape.

Corot must have liked the final version, for it remained with him and hung in his bedroom until he died. The art historian of the time, Germain Bazan, commented on the difference between the two versions saying of the original plein air oil sketch:

“...a marvel of spontaneity in which there is already the germ of Impressionism, [while] the Salon picture, even though it is painted in beautiful thick paint and with great delicacy, is nonetheless a rather artificial Neoclassical composition...”

Kenneth Clark compared the two saying that of the two versions:

“... it [the preliminary sketch] is as free as the most vigorous Constable ; the finished picture in Ottawa is tamer than the tamest imitation of Claude...”



The Narni bridge

HONORE DAUMIER

Marsiglia, 1808 – Valmondois, 1879



The Uprising

c. 1860 Oil on canvas, 87.6 x 113 cm; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.



The Third-Class Carriage 1863-65 Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 90.2 cm - The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Honore Daumier, a French artist, was deeply interested in people, especially the underprivileged. In *Third-Class Carriage* he shows us, with great compassion, a group of people on a train journey. We are especially concerned with one family group, the young mother tenderly holding her small child, the weary grandmother lost in her own thoughts, and the young boy fast asleep. The painting is done with simple power and economy of line. The hands, for example, are reduced to mere outlines but beautifully drawn. The bodies are as solid as clay, their bulk indicated by stressing the essential and avoiding the nonessential. These are not portraits of particular people but of mankind.

The third class carriage demonstrates Daumier's renowned sympathy for the poor. Although a bitter caricaturist of the bourgeoisie and politicians, Daumier drops the satire and draws a sensitive picture of the poor. A family sits together in the third class car, folded in on themselves, isolated and absorbed in thought.

Daumier intended to capture the plight of the working-class not through drama but through the quiet moments of their everyday lives. One sees the hardness of their lives through their clothes, the weariness of their posture and their facial features, particularly the grandmother.

Analysis/1

The **background** takes up **more space than the foreground** and is highly detailed. From what little one can see of their dress, it is presumed that those in the background are of a higher class station. They talk animatedly amongst themselves and a few are turned toward the direction of the third-class passengers but no one engages them directly.

The family of four sits in the opposite direction, which emphasizes their **isolation** from the rest of the travelers. There is also a comparative **stillness** in their movements, which most scholars have interpreted as **tiredness**. There is a window in the foreground and although the light reaches the family, one can interpret that they are far from the window, and therefore, possibilities.



Analysis/2

The fact that there is a partially covered-up window far away from them also makes them appear much more isolated. The choice of the four family members is very revealing: there is **only one male figure**. He is young and thus it is presumed that the older male figures who would have been in the family's lives are either dead or have left them - leaving the women are on their own. The grandmother sits next to a nursing mother, which suggests a completion of the life cycle.



Analysis/3

For such a crowded background, the family on the bench seems to exist in its own quiet space, which is helped by the seating left open next to the boy towards the lower-right hand corner. There is also a little bit of empty bench on the left by the mother's side. The family figures are drawn in larger proportion than their distance from the rest of the passengers would warrant, which gives them a more commanding presence.

The upper-third of the painting is left blank, which suggests a space that is cavernous when it comes to height, but very cramped when it comes to length. The windows towards the upper-third left hand side of the painting provide a relief from the heaviness of the train car.



Analysis/4 Use of colour

This painting is unfinished, so Daumier's true intent cannot be known.

However, from the browns in the background and the various shades of brown, black and green that Daumier has used, to start on the passengers clothes, one can assume that it is a somber color palette.



Analysis/5 use of light

The lighting provides a nice and unexpected contrast to the somber tones. The grandmother and mother are left unfinished. One wonders what the effect would be if the upper half of the mother and grandmother had been painted in. Because the painting is unfinished we have no way of knowing if it would have maintained its sunny character.



Analysis/6 Mood, tone and emotion

The mood of the painting is one of transit itself. One is on the move but also resigned and waiting for something to happen, for example, they might be en route to a new job or to a friend's house. For the people in third-class carriage, what awaits them is less ideal than for most.





Gustave Courbet

Ornans 1819 - La Tour de Peilz 1877



The Desperate Man- self portrait



Stonebreakers - 1849



Gustave Courbet. *A burial at Orans*. 1849-1850.

314 x 663 cm Orsay Museum Paris

His **Stonebreakers** represented workers, as he had seen them, in **monumental form**. The Stone Breakers, painted in 1849, depicts two ordinary peasant workers. Courbet painted without any apparent sentiment; instead, he let the image of the two men, one too young for hard labor and the other too old, express the feelings of hardship and exhaustion that he was trying to portray. Courbet shows sympathy for the workers and disgust for the upper class by painting these men with a dignity all their own.

The Stonebreakers, **destroyed during the bombing of Dresden in 1945**, was the first of Courbet's great works. The Socialist philosopher Proudhon described it as an icon of the peasant world. But for Courbet it was simply a **memory of something he had seen**: two men breaking stones beside the road. He told his friends the art critic Francis Wey and Champfleury: "It is not often that one encounters so complete an expression of poverty and so, right then and there I got the idea for a painting. I told them to come to my studio the next morning."

Many of Courbet's paintings focus on everyday people and places in daily French life. Courbet painted these ordinary people in an attempt to **portray the French people as a political entity**. In this way Courbet's republicanism showed through in his work. Courbet truthfully portrayed ordinary people and places, leaving out the glamour that most French painters at that time added to their works. Because of this, Courbet became known as the leader of the Realist movement.