

## 2

# Realism, Impressionism, and Early Photography

**I**n the industrial expansion of the nineteenth century, the new and prosperous middle class assumed a larger and larger part in every arena of European and American life. Although governmental patronage of the arts persisted, official commissions and state purchases were a feasible income source for only a limited number of artists, and by 1880 the French state relinquished its control over the ever-popular Salon exhibitions (see chapter 1). The new patrons were predominantly the newly rich bourgeoisie. Fundamentally materialistic in its values, this increasingly dominant segment of society had less interest in the fantasy of Romantic art than in a kind of pictorial verisimilitude that could convey meticulous visual facts verifiable in the external world of here and now. Such developments in the market and in the attitudes of the public consumers of art helped bring about the eventual demise of history painting. Private collectors did not covet large, cumbersome scenes from antiquity, but preferred the genres of portraiture, landscape, and scenes from daily life.

### **New Ways of Seeing: Photography and its Influence**

The public taste for visual fact served as an all-important stimulant to the research that finally brought about the invention of the first practical photographic processes. In August 1839, **Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre** (1789–1851) publicly demonstrated a new mechanical technology for permanently fixing upon a flat surface and in minute detail an exact tonal, if not full-color, image of the three-dimensional world. From that time, Western painters would hardly be able to create new imagery without some consciousness of the special conditions introduced by the medium of photography (literally “drawing with light”). Nor, it should be added, would photographers ever feel altogether free to work without some awareness of the rival aesthetic standards, qualities, and prestige imposed by the age-old, handwrought image-making processes of painting and drawing.

Long before anyone had ever seen a daguerreotype, painters had already anticipated many of the salient characteristics of photographic form: a snapshotlike cropping of figures by the framing edges (see fig. 2.34); motion arrested or frozen in full flight or midstep in a way seldom perceptible to the naked eye; a related “stop-action” informality of human pose and gesture; ghostly residual or afterimages left in the wake of speeding objects; imagery defined purely in terms of tone, free of contour lines; wide-angle views and exaggerated foreshortening; and, perhaps most of all, a generalized flatness of image even where there is depth illusion, an effect produced in normal photography by the camera’s relative consistency of focus throughout the field and its one-eyed (monocular) view of things.

None of these characteristics, however, became a commonplace of painting style until the mass proliferation of photographic imagery made them a ubiquitous and unavoidable feature of modern life, and photographic conventions became synonymous with the “modern” way of looking at life. The most immediate and obvious impact on painting can be seen in the work of artists eager to achieve a special kind of optical veracity unknown until the advent of photography, a trend often thought to have culminated in the “instantaneity” of Impressionism, and resurgent in the Photorealism of the 1970s (see chapter 24).

Other artists, however, or even the same ones, took the scrupulous fidelity of the photographic image as good reason to work imaginatively or conceptually and thus liberate their art from the requirement of pictorial verisimilitude. Some saw the aberrations and irregularities peculiar to photography as a source of fresh ideas for creating a whole new language of form. And among painters of the period were some accomplished photographers, such as Edgar Degas and Thomas Eakins. Photography could also serve painters as a shortcut substitute for closely observed preparatory drawings and as a vastly expanded repertoire of reliable imagery, drawn from whatever remote, exotic corner of the globe into which adventurous photographers had been able to lug their cumbersome nineteenth-century equipment.



2.1 Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, *An early daguerreotype*, taken in the artist's studio, 1837. Société Française de Photographie, Paris.

Meanwhile, early photographers found their work relating closely to painting, just as painters were bound up with photography. Buoyed by pride in their technical superiority, photographers even felt compelled to match painting in its artistic achievements. For painters enjoyed the freedom to select, synthesize, and emphasize at will and thus attain not only the poetry and expression thought to be essential to art but also a higher order of visual, if not optical, truth. In one of the earliest known photographs, Daguerre, who was already famous for his immense, sensationally illusionistic painted dioramas, had sought to emulate art as much as nature. The reality he chose to record was that of a still life arranged in a manner conventional to painting since at least the seventeenth century

(fig. 2.1). This was a daguerreotype, a metal plate coated with a light-sensitive silver solution, which, once developed in a chemical bath, resulted in a unique likeness that could not be replicated, but that recorded the desired image with astonishing clarity.

Simultaneously in England, the photographic process became considerably more versatile when **William Henry Fox Talbot** (1800–77) discovered a way of fixing a light-reflected image on the silver-treated surface of paper, producing what its creator called a calotype. Talbot invented a technique that converted a negative image into a positive one, a procedure that remains fundamental to photography. Because the negative made it possible for the image to be replicated an infinite number of times, unlike the daguerreotype, painting-conscious photographers such as **Oscar G. Rejlander** (1813–75) could assemble elaborate, multifigure compositions in stagelike settings. They pieced the total image together from a variety of negatives and then orchestrated them, rather in the way history painters prepared their grand narrative scenes for the Salon (fig. 2.2). Indeed, Rejlander emulated not only the artistic methods and ambitions of academic masters, but also their pretensions to high moral purpose. British photographer **Henry Peach Robinson** (1830–1901) used sketches (fig. 2.3) to prepare his elaborate exhibition photographs, which he compiled from multiple negatives (fig. 2.4).

But just as the Realist spirit inspired some progressive painters to seek truth in a more direct and simplifying approach to subject and medium, many enlightened photographers sought to purge their work of the artificial, academic devices employed by Rejlander and concentrate on what photography then did best—report the world and



2.2 Oscar G. Rejlander, *The Two Ways of Life*, 1857. Combination albumen print. Royal Photographic Society, England.



**2.3** Henry Peach Robinson, *Sketch for Carrolling*, 1886–87. Pencil on paper, 13 × 25" (33 × 65.5 cm). Royal Photographic Society, England.



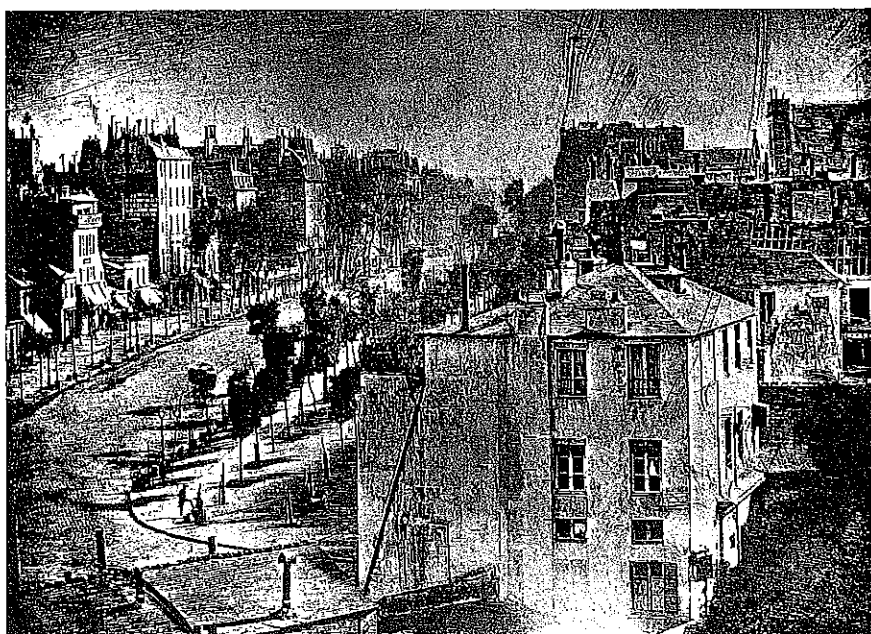
**2.4** Henry Peach Robinson, *'Carrolling'*, 1887. Combination albumen print. Royal Photographic Society, England.

its life candidly. The practitioners of this kind of documentary photography achieved art and expression through the choice of subject, view, framing, light, and the constantly improving means for controlling the latter—lenses, shutter speeds, plates, and processing chemicals. Even the work of Daguerre and Talbot (figs. 2.5, 2.6) shows this taste for creating a straightforward record of the everyday world, devoid of theatrics or sentiment. Their first street scenes already have the oblique angles and random cropping of snapshots, if not the bustling life, which moved in and out of range too rapidly to be caught by the slow photosensitive materials of the 1830s and 1840s. Contemporaries called Daguerre's Paris a "city of the dead," since the only human presence it registered was that of a man who stood still long enough for his shoes to be shined and, coincidentally, his picture to be taken.

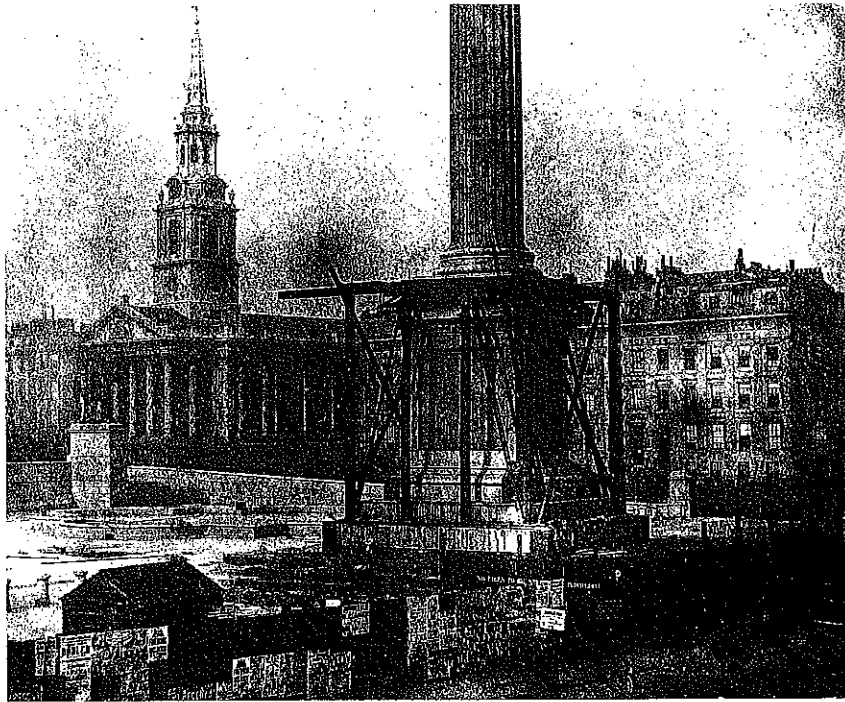
Among the first great successes in photography were the portraitists, foremost among them France's **Nadar** (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon; 1820–1910) and England's

**Julia Margaret Cameron** (1815–79), whose powerful personalities gave them access to many of the most illustrious people of the age and the vision necessary to render these with unforgettable forthrightness and penetration (fig. 2.7). A prolific writer, as well as caricaturist, hot-air balloon photographer, and dynamic man about Paris, Nadar wrote in 1856:

Photography is a marvellous discovery, a science that has attracted the greatest intellects, an art that excites the most astute minds—and one that can be practiced by any imbecile. ... Photographic theory can be taught in an hour, the basic technique in a day. But what cannot be taught is the feeling for light. ... It is how light lies on the face that you as artist must capture. Nor can one be taught how to grasp the personality of the sitter. To produce an intimate likeness rather than a banal portrait, the result of mere chance, you must put yourself at once in communion with the sitter, size up his thoughts and his very character.



**2.5** Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, *Boulevard du Temple, Paris*, c. 1838. Daguerreotype. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.



**2.6** William Henry Fox Talbot, *Trafalgar Square, London, During the Erection of the Nelson Column*, London, England. 1843. Salt print from a paper negative, 6¼ × 8¾" (17.1 × 21.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



**2.7** Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon), *Sarah Bernhardt*, 1864. Photograph, 9¾ × 9¾" (23.8 × 24.5 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Cameron liked to dress up her friends and family and reenact scenes from the Bible and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (a series of poems based on the legends of King Arthur) as photographed costume dramas, styled in the manner of Pre-Raphaelite painting (fig. 2.8). She also approached portraiture with an intensity that swept away all staginess but the drama of character and accentuated chiaroscuro (fig. 2.9). Throughout her work, however, she maintained, like the good Victorian she was, only the loftiest aims. In answer to the complaint that her pictures always appeared to be out of focus, Cameron stated:

What is focus—who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus—My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real & ideal & sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry & Beauty.

In America the daguerreotype experienced wild popularity from the moment the first instruction manuals and equipment arrived on the East Coast. The many commercial photographic studios that sprang up, especially in New York and Philadelphia, gave rise to hundreds of amateur photographers. They provided inexpensive portrait services to sitters who could never have afforded a commissioned painted portrait. An American propensity for visual fact guaranteed the particular success of the daguerreotype, at least on an economic if not on an aesthetic level. From the countless efforts of anonymous photographers emerge forthright records of ordinary citizens and valuable likenesses of extraordinary personalities, such as a portrait of the eminent abolitionist writer and orator Frederick



**2.8** William Holman Hunt, *The Hireling Shepherd*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  $\times$  43 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (76.4  $\times$  109.5 cm). Manchester City Art Galleries, England.

Douglass (fig. 2.10). An escaped slave, Douglass informed his eloquent public protests against slavery with firsthand experience. He was an adviser to President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and afterward became the first African-American to hold high office in the United States government. The photograph of Douglass as a



**2.10** Unknown photographer, *Frederick Douglass*, 1847. Daguerreotype, 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "  $\times$  2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (8.3  $\times$  7 cm). Collection William Rubel.

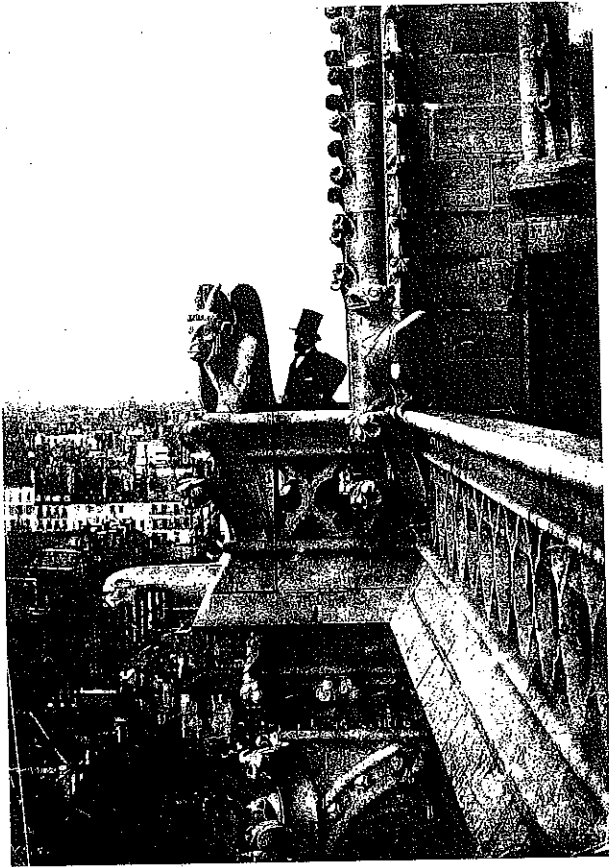


**2.9** Julia Margaret Cameron, *Mrs. Herbert Duckworth as Julia Jackson*, c. 1867. Albumen print, 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ "  $\times$  9 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (34  $\times$  24.4 cm). International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

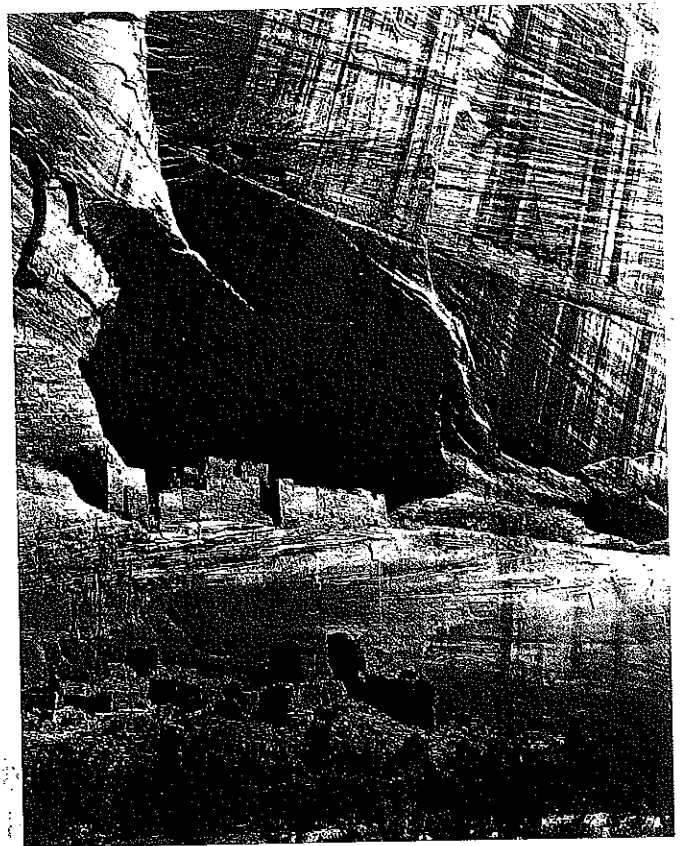
young man was taken at the end of a lecture tour he had given in Great Britain and Ireland in order to avoid recapture in America. Like the best daguerreotypes, it possesses tremendous appeal by virtue of its unaffected, straightforward presentation of the sitter.

Documentary pursuits were well served by photography's representational integrity. When the French photographer **Charles Nègre** (1820–79) dragged his heavy paraphernalia high up among the gargoyles of Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral (fig. 2.11), he created an image of extraordinary visual juxtapositions and architectural





**2.11** Charles Nègre, *The Gargoyle of Notre Dame*, Original negative 1840s or 1850s, reprinted 1960. Calotype,  $13\frac{1}{4} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$ " (33.3 × 23.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**2.12** Timothy O'Sullivan, *Ancient Ruins in the Cañon de Chelle*, 1873. Collodion print,  $10\frac{1}{2} \times 8$ " (27.6 × 20.3 cm). National Archives, Washington, D.C.

interest. Documentary photographers could provide eager audiences with images of the relatively unknown western American landscape (fig. 2.12), the wonders of ancient Egypt, or the exotic backstreets of old China.

When it came to war, photography robbed armed conflict of the operatic glamour often given it by traditional painting. This first became evident in the photographs taken by Roger Fenton during the Crimean War of 1853–56, but it had even more shattering effect in the work of Mathew Brady (1823–96) and such associates as Alexander Gardner, who bore cameras onto the body-strewn fields in the wake of battle during the American Civil War (fig. 2.13). (Because the required length of exposure was still several seconds, the battles themselves could not be photographed.) Now that beautifully particularized, mutely objective—or indifferent—pictures disclosed all too clearly the harrowing calm brought by violence, or the almost indistinguishable likeness of the dead on either side of the conflict, questions of war and peace took on a whole new meaning. When Brady's photograph is compared to a contemporary Civil War scene by one of the greatest American painters of the era, Winslow Homer (see fig. 2.48), it becomes clear that photography brought home the graphic reality of war in a way no painter could.



**2.13** Mathew Brady, *Dead Soldier*, Civil War, c. 1863. Gelatin-silver print. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## A Chastened Vision: Realism in Art

As a medium of communication, as well as expression, photography was both the product and the agent of the powerful social changes that had been taking place in Western civilization since the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Along with photography, and its popularization of pictorial imagery, came the immense expansion of journalism, as newspapers and periodicals were in some measure liberated from government censorship. A new kind of journalism and a new kind of critical writing were everywhere evident. Many of the leading authors and critics of France and England wrote regularly for the new popular reviews.

These changes in attitude are perhaps best seen in the emergence of the caricature—the satirical comment on life and politics, which became a standard feature of journals and newspapers. Although visual attacks on individuals or corrupt economic or political systems have always existed, and artists such as Goya have been motivated by a spirit of passionate invective, drawings that ranged from gentle amusement to biting satire to vicious attack now became a commonplace in every part of Europe and America. These images could be cheaply disseminated through the popular medium of lithography. Just as the rise of Realism in art and the seemingly opposed expansion of the inflated Salon picture were closely allied to the emergence of large-scale bourgeois patronage, so were the expansion of the newspaper and journal and the popularity of the daily or weekly caricatures of the problems—and sometimes the tragedies—of everyday life.

### France

The greatest of the satirical artists to emerge in this new environment was **Honoré Daumier** (1808–79), who, although best known for some four thousand lithographic drawings he contributed to French journals such as

*La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*, was also an important painter and sculptor. But while Daumier was concerned with all the details of everyday life in Paris, and his satire is thus rooted in realistic observation, he cannot be called only a Realist. His paintings dealing with themes from the writings of Cervantes and Molière place him partly in the Romantic camp, not only for his use of literary subjects but also for the dramatic chiaroscuro he employed to obtain his effects. This drama of light and shade transforms even mundane subjects, such as *The Third-Class Carriage* (fig. 2.14), from simple illustration to a scene of pathos. The painting is a crucial example of French Realist art in its sympathetic depiction of contemporary working-class life.

Daumier's studies of the theater, of the art world, and of politics and the law courts range from simple commentary to perceptive observation to bitter satire. His political caricatures were at times so biting in their attacks on the establishment that they were censored. For a caricature he did of King Louis Philippe, the artist was imprisoned for six months. The profundity of Daumier's horror at injustice and brutality is perhaps best illustrated in the famous lithograph *Rue Transnonain* (fig. 2.15), which shows the dead bodies of a family of innocent workers who were murdered by the civil guard during the republican revolt of 1834. With journalistic bluntness, the title refers to the street where the killings occurred. In its powerful exploitation of a black-and-white medium, as well as the graphic description of its gruesome subject, this is a work comparable to Goya's *Disasters of War* (see fig. 1.14).

Like Daumier, **Gustave Courbet** (1819–77) inherited certain traits from his Romantic predecessors. Throughout his life, he produced both erotic subjects that border on academicism and Romantic interpretations of the artist's world in many self-portraits. But most important, he created unsentimental records of contemporary life that secure his place as the leading exponent of modern Realism in painting. These works possess a compelling physicality



**2.14** Honoré Daumier, *The Third-Class Carriage*, c. 1863–65. Oil on canvas, 25¼ × 35½" (64.1 × 90.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**2.15** Honoré Daumier, *Rue Transnonain*, April 15, 1834. Published in *L'Association Mensuelle*, July 1834. Lithograph, 11½ × 17½" (29.2 × 44.5 cm). Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

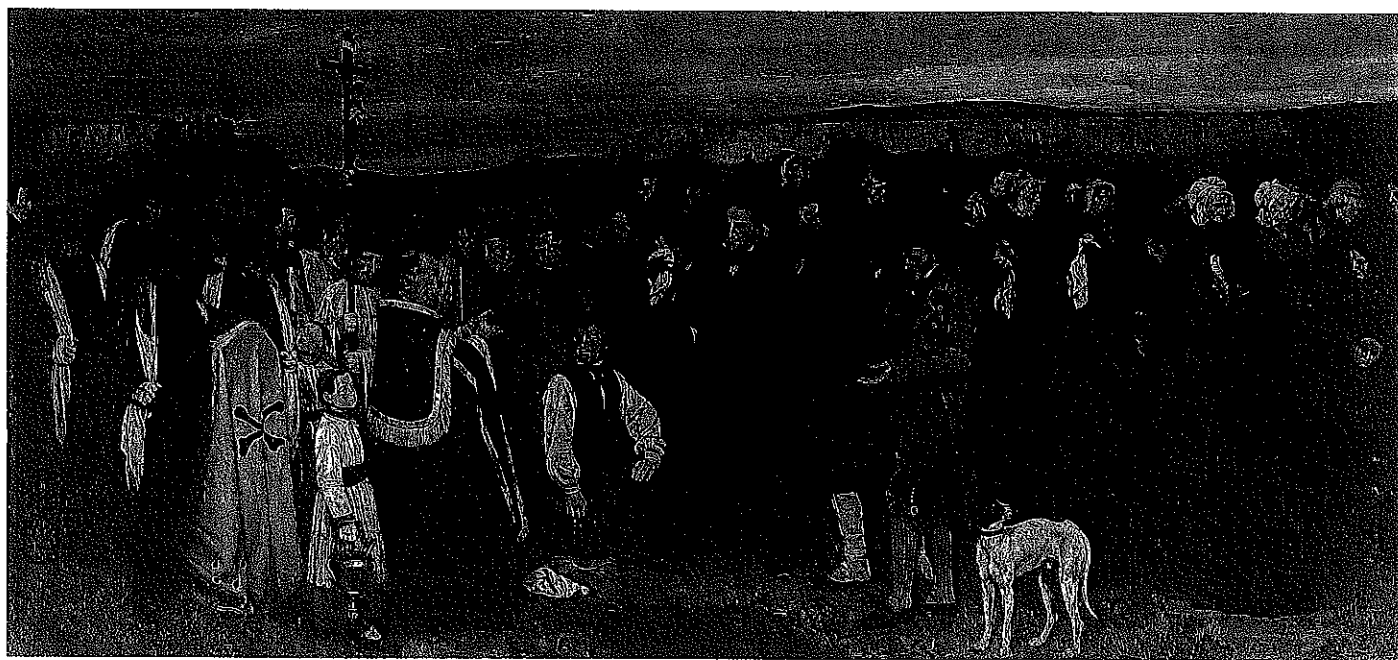
and an authenticity of vision that the artist derived from the observed world. Most notably, Courbet insisted upon the very material with which a painting is constructed: oil paint. He understood that a painting is in itself a reality—a two-dimensional world of stretched canvas defined by the nature and textural consistency of paint—and that the artist's function is to define this world.

*A Burial at Ornans* (fig. 2.16) is significant in the history of modern painting for its denial of illusionistic depth, its apparent lack of a formal composition, and an approach to subject matter so radical that it was seen as an insult to everything for which the venerable French Academy stood. In his assertion of paint texture, the artist drew on and amplified the intervening experiments of the Romantics, although with a different end in view. Whereas the Romantics used broken paint surfaces to emphasize the intangible elements of the spirit or sublime natural phenomena (see fig. 1.18), Courbet employed them as a means to make the ordinary world more tangible. The *Burial* documents a commonplace event in Courbet's small provincial hometown in eastern France, but its ambitious size conforms to the dimensions of history painting, a category reserved for the noblest events from the past. Courbet's casual, friezelike arrangement of village inhabitants, made up mostly of his friends and relatives, is an accurate depiction of local funerary customs (men and women are segregated, for example), but it carries no particular narrative message. It was not only this lack of compositional hierarchy and pictorial rhetoric that outraged French critics. Courbet's representation of ordinary residents of the countryside did not coincide with established Parisian norms for the depiction of rural folk. These are not the ennobled peasants of Millet (see fig. 1.19) or the pretty, happy maids of traditional academic painting.

Rather, they are highly individualized, mostly unattractive, and aggressively real.

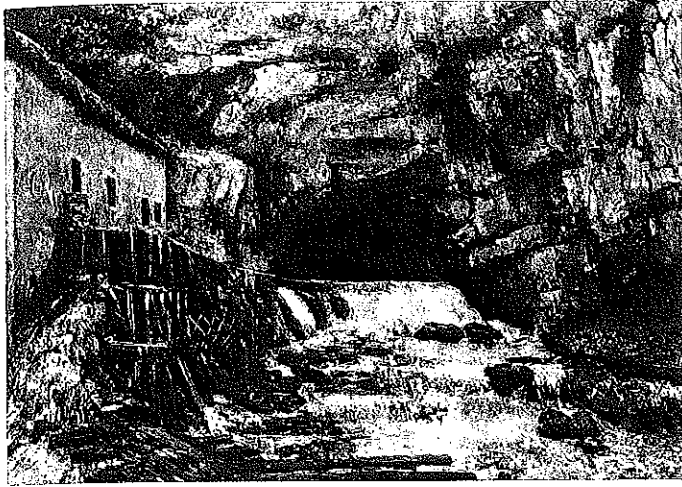
Combined with his unorthodox approach to formal matters, Courbet's Realism in his unpolished treatment of working-class subjects was associated with left-wing dissidence. Any art-historical consideration of Realism is inextricably tied to the tumultuous political and social history during this period in France, the country where Realism developed most coherently. Following the devastating defeat of France's imperial government by the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, Courbet took part in the popular uprising that resulted in the short-lived, radically republican Paris Commune. As head of the Federation of Artists, he proposed the peaceful dismantling of a Napoleonic monument in Paris, the Vendôme column. After the column was actually toppled and destroyed by the Communards, the conservative regime that brutally suppressed the Commune imprisoned Courbet and held him financially responsible for the damage. To avoid confiscation of his work, the artist eventually fled to Switzerland.

In a group of landscapes of the 1850s and 1860s, *The Source of the Loue* among them (fig. 2.17), Courbet had experimented with a form of extreme close-up of rocks abruptly cut off at the edges of the painting. A view from the artist's native province of Franche-Comté, *The Source* may owe something to the emerging art of photography, both in its fragmentary impression and in its subdued, almost monochromatic color. Courbet's landscape, however, combined a sense of observed reality with an even greater sense of the elements and materials with which the artist was working: the rectangle of the picture plane and the emphatic texture of the oil paint, which asserted its own nature at the same time that it was simulating the rough-hewn, sculptural appearance of exposed rocks.



2.16 Gustave Courbet, *A Burial at Ornans*, 1849–50. Oil on canvas, 10'3½" × 21'9" (3.1 × 6.6 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





**2.17** Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Loue*, 1864, Oil on canvas, 39¼ × 56" (99.7 × 142.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In his later career, Courbet experimented with many different approaches to the subjects of landscape, portrait, still life, and the figure. His ability to combine precise observation of nature with the aggressive, expressive statement of the pictorial means culminated in a group of seascapes of the late 1860s. In such works as *The Waves* he translated an unrelieved expanse of open sea into a primarily two-dimensional organization in which the third dimension is realized as the relief texture of the projecting oil paint. Like *A Burial at Ornans*, this seascape is not structured around a central pictorial focus. Indeed, it is devoid of all human presence and concentrates, to a degree previously achieved only by Turner, on sea and sky, all tangibly evoked with vigorous strokes from Courbet's palette knife.

## England

The paintings of the English colorists Constable, Turner (see fig. 1.18), and Bonington had a profound influence on the French Romantics, particularly on the Barbizon School of landscapists and, eventually, the Impressionists. Constable's textural statement of brush gesture was well adapted to Romantic narrative and landscape, out of which Courbet's painting emerged. The radiant color used by the Englishman was a revelation. When *The Hay Wain* (see fig. 1.17) was shown at the 1824 Salon in Paris it caused a sensation, even sending Delacroix back to his studio to rework one of his paintings. Its sun-filled naturalism, however, was premature for the French Realists and Romantics. With the exception of Delacroix, they continued to prefer the more subdued color harmonies and the less vivid light of the studio when painting the out-of-doors. From early in his career, Constable dedicated himself to the close observation of the life and landscape around his father's property in Suffolk. Yet his bucolic visions of the English countryside rarely make reference to the harsher realities of agricultural life during a period of economic strife and civil unrest among agrarian workers.

That task would be left to later English painters such as Ford Madox Brown (see fig. 2.18). Constable could produce accurate, unaffected nature studies composed entirely in the open air (a half-century before the Impressionists), while remaining committed to the study of the landscapes of the seventeenth-century French classical painter Claude Lorrain. The paint texture of his *Hay Wain* is direct and unconcealed to a degree rarely observed in painting before his time, but his landscapes are still seen with the eyes of the Renaissance-Baroque tradition. Space opens up into depth, and paint is converted into fluffy, distant clouds, richly leaved trees, and reflecting pools of water.

During the early decades of Queen Victoria's long reign (1837–1901), the social and artistic revolution that fueled the Realist movement in France assumed virtually religious zeal, as a group of young painters rebelled against what they considered the decadence of current English art. They called for renewal modeled on the piously direct, "primitive" naturalism practiced in Florence and Flanders prior to the late work of Raphael and the High Renaissance, which they saw as the beginning of what had become a stultifying academic tradition. **William Holman Hunt** (1827–1910), John Everett Millais (1829–96), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82) joined with several other sympathetic spirits to form a secret, reform-minded artistic society, which they called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The ardent, if not monkish, Pre-Raphaelites determined to eschew all inherited Mannerist and Baroque artifice and to search for truth in worthwhile, often Christian, subject matter presented with naive, literal fidelity to the exact textures, colors, light, and, above all, the outlines of nature.

For *The Hiredling Shepherd* (see fig. 2.8) Hunt pursued "truth to nature" in the countryside of Surrey, where he spent the summer and fall of 1851 working en plein air, or out-of-doors, to set down the dazzling effect of morning sunlight. Reviving the techniques of the fifteenth-century Flemish masters, Hunt laid—over a white wet ground—glaze after glaze of jewel-like, translucent color and used the finest brushes to detail every wildflower blossom and blade of grass. Late in life, he asserted that his "first object was to portray a real Shepherd and Shepherdess ... sheep and absolute fields and trees and sky and clouds instead of the painted dolls with pattern backgrounds called by such names in the pictures of the period." But it seems that he was also motivated to create a private allegory of the need for mid-Victorian spiritual leaders to cease their sectarian disputes and become true shepherds tending their distracted flocks. Thus, while the shepherd, ruddy-faced from beer in his hip keg, pays court to the shepherdess, the lamb on her lap makes a deadly meal of green apples, just as the sheep in the background succumb from being allowed to feed on corn. Gone are the smooth chiaroscuro elisions, rhythmic sweep, and gestural grace of earlier art, replaced by a fresh-eyed naturalism.

Although he never became an official member of the Pre-Raphaelites, **Ford Madox Brown** (1821–93) was

introduced to the group by the precocious young poet and painter Rossetti. The large canvas *Work* (fig. 2.18), which preoccupied him for several years, is Brown's monumental testament to the edifying and redemptive power of hard toil. Like Hunt, he relies on a microscopic accuracy of detail to deliver his moralizing message. At the center of the sun-drenched composition are the muscular laborers who dig trenches for new waterworks in the London suburb of Hampstead. A proliferation of genre vignettes circle around this central action of the painting; these reinforce Brown's theme with emblems of the various social strata that made up contemporary Victorian society. At the far left, for example, is a ragged flower seller followed by two women distributing temperance tracts. In the shade of a tree at the right, an indigent couple tends to their infant while in the background an elegantly dressed couple rides horseback. The two men at the far right are portraits: the philosopher Thomas Carlyle and a leading Christian Socialist, Frederick Denison Maurice, "brainworkers" whose relatively conservative ideas about social reform dovetailed with Brown's own genuine attempts to correct social injustice. His painting is the most complete illustration of the familiar Victorian ethic that promoted work as

the foundation of material advancement, national progress, and spiritual salvation.

## Seizing the Moment: Impressionism and the Avant-Garde

The various scandals surrounding Courbet's life and work had introduced the public to the idea of a radical, often shocking, alternative to academic Salon art that was more or less closely identified with left-wing politics. From this time onward the idea of an artistic avant-garde, or vanguard, became firmly established. Each new wave of avant-garde art was greeted with outrage by conservative public opinion—an outrage that frequently turned to acceptance, and even admiration, with the passing of time and the arrival of newer, yet more shocking, developments in art.

### Manet and Whistler

Although he probably would have been sympathetic to Brown's left-wing politics, Édouard Manet (1832–83) was a realist with an artistic temperament far from the Englishman's accumulation of exacting detail. Despite his commitment to depict subjects of modern life in a modern



**2.18** Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1852, 1855–63. Oil on canvas, 4'5" × 6'5 1/8" (1.35 × 2 m). Manchester City Art Galleries, England.

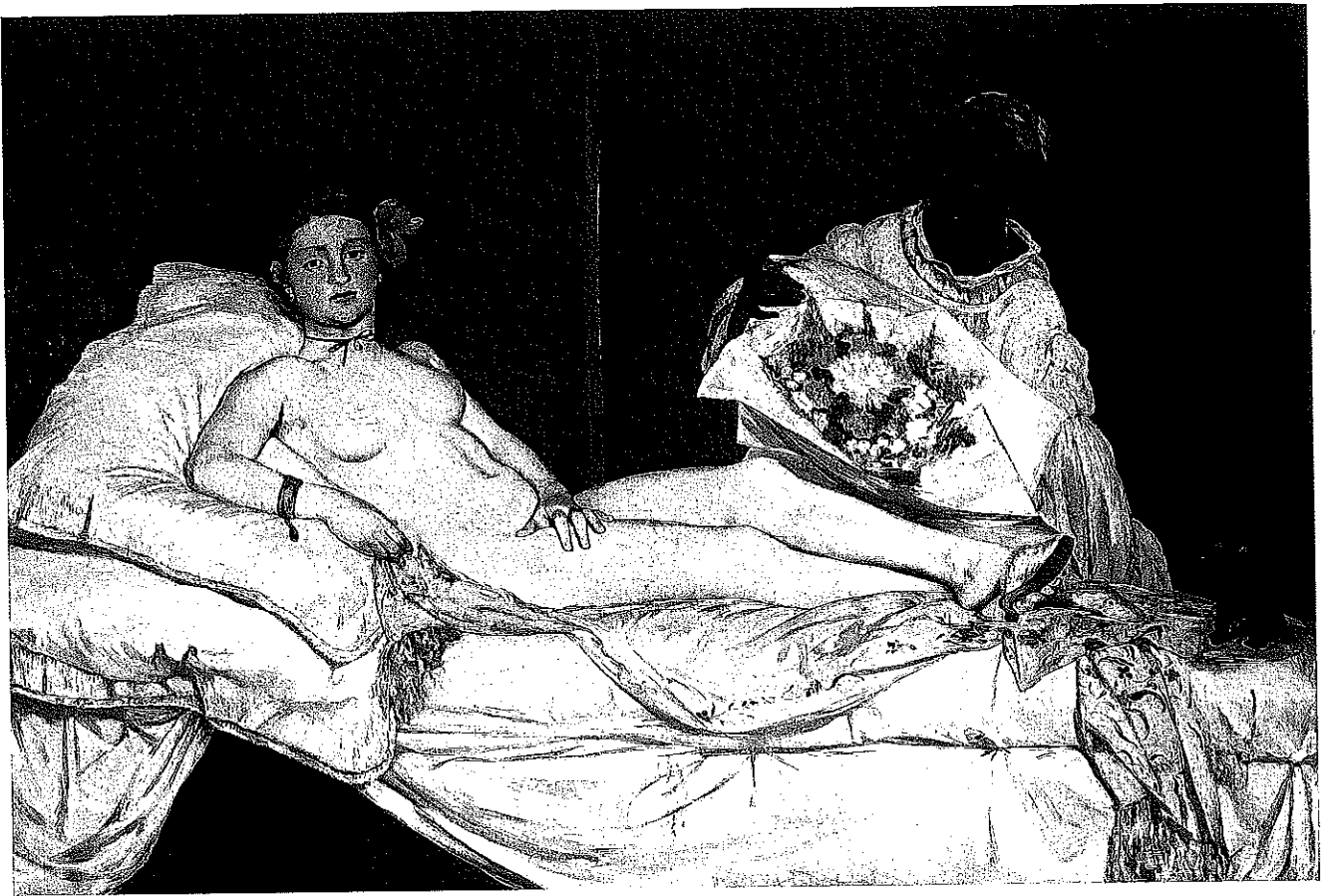


2.19 Édouard Manet, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* [luncheon on the Grass], 1863. Oil on canvas, 6'9 $\frac{1}{8}$ "  $\times$  8'10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (2.1  $\times$  2.7 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

style, Manet sought recognition through the Salon. He never exhibited with his fellow Impressionists in the eight independent exhibitions they organized between 1874 and 1886. Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (fig. 2.19), rejected by the Salon of 1863, created a major scandal when it was shown in the Salon des Refusés, the exhibition mounted by the state that year to house the large number of works barred by jurors from the main Salon. Although the subject was based on Renaissance academic precedents—Giorgione's *Pastoral Concert* (1510) and an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi of *The Judgment of Paris* (c. 1520), after a lost cartoon by Raphael—popular indignation arose because the classical, pastoral subject had been translated into contemporary terms. Raphael's goddesses and Giorgione's nymphs had become models, or even prostitutes, one naked, one partially disrobed, relaxing in the woods with two men whom Salon visitors would have recognized by their dress as artists or students. The woman in the foreground is Victorine Meurent, the same model who posed for *Olympia* (see fig. 2.20) the men are Manet's relations. Manet clearly abided by the convictions of his

supporter Charles Baudelaire, the great poet and art critic who exhorted artists to paint scenes of modern life and to invent contemporary contexts for old subjects such as the nude. But in his ironic quotations from Renaissance sources, Manet created what seemed to be a conscious affront to tradition, and by failing to encode his contemporary scene as idealized allegory, he seemed deliberately to flout accepted social convention.

Manet ostensibly adopted the structure of Raphael's original composition, with the bending woman in the middle distance forming the apex of the classical receding triangle of which the three foreground figures serve as the base and sides. However, his broad, abrupt handling of paint and his treatment of the figures as silhouettes rather than carefully modeled volumes tend to collapse space, flatten forms, and assert the nature of the canvas as a two-dimensional surface. Manet's subject, as well as the sketchiness of technique, infuriated the professional critics, as though they sensed in this work the prophecy of a revolution that was to destroy the comfortable world of secure values of which they felt themselves to be the guardians.



**2.20** Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 4'3" × 6'2¾" (1.3 × 1.9 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Manet's *Olympia* (fig. 2.20), painted in 1863 and exhibited in the Salon of 1865, created an even greater furor than the *Déjeuner*. Here, again, the artist's source was exemplary: Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which Manet had copied as a young man visiting Florence. *Olympia*, however, was a slap in the face to all the complacent academic painters who regularly presented their exercises in scarcely disguised eroticism as virtuous homage to the gods and goddesses of classical antiquity. Venus reclining has become an unidealized, modern woman who, by details such as her ribbon and slippers, as well as her name, would have been recognized as a prostitute. She stares out at the spectator with an impassive boldness that bridges the gap between the real and the painted world in a startling manner, and effectively shatters any illusion of sentimental idealism in the presentation of the nude figure. *Olympia* is a brilliant design in black and white, with the nude figure silhouetted against a dark wall enriched by red underpainting that creates a Rembrandtesque glow of color in shadow. The black maid-servant brings flowers offered by a client; the cat clearly reacts to her. The volume of the figure is created entirely through its contours—again, the light-and-dark pattern and the strong linear emphasis annoyed the critics as much as the shocking subject matter. Even Courbet found *Olympia* so unsettling in the playing-card flatness of its forms, all pressed hard against the frontal plane, that he likened the picture to “a Queen of Spades getting out of a bath.”

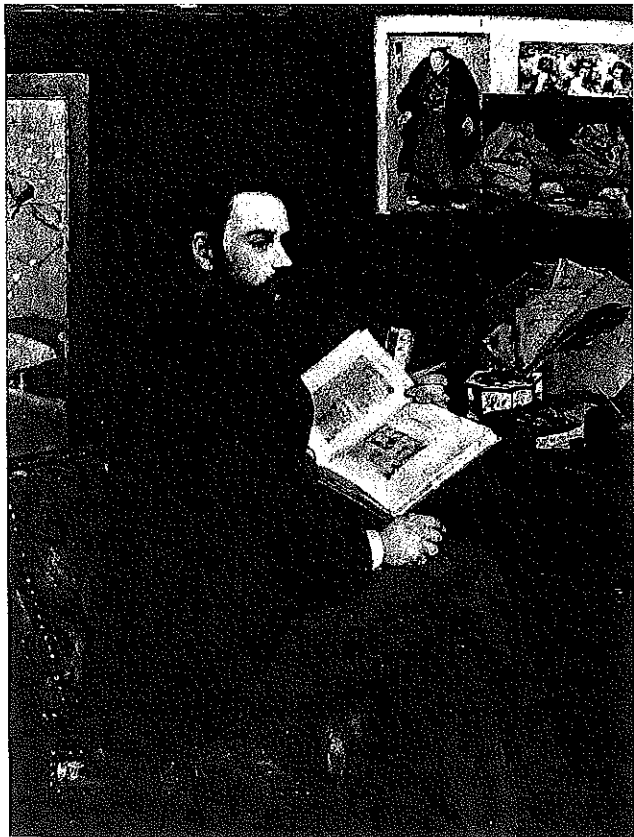
*Portrait of Émile Zola* (fig. 2.21), an informal portrait, continues the Realists' critique of the academic concept of the grand and noble subject, carrying the attack several steps further in its emphasis on the plastic means of painting itself. Zola, the great Realist novelist and proponent of social reform, was Manet's friend and supporter. Manet included in the work certain details that are perhaps more revealing of his own credos than of those of the writer who had so brilliantly defended him against his detractors. On the desk, for example, is the pamphlet Zola wrote on Manet. The bulletin board at the right holds a small print of *Olympia*, behind which is a reproduction of *Bacchus* by the seventeenth-century Spanish master Velázquez. Beside *Olympia* is a Japanese print, and behind Zola's figure is seen part of a Japanese screen. The Japanese print and screen are symptomatic of the growing enthusiasm for Asian and specifically Japanese art then spreading among the artists of France and throughout Europe. In the art of Asia avant-garde French painters found some of the formal qualities they were seeking in their own work. Manet's conscious “appropriation” of the work of older artists, sometimes for the sake of homage as well as irony, has become a major strategy of Postmodern artists (see fig. 26.2).

After photography, the most pervasive influence on the nineteenth-century advance of modernist form came from Asian art, especially the color woodcut prints that began

finding their way west shortly after the American naval officer Matthew Perry had forced open the ports of Japan in 1853 after two centuries of closure to Western vessels. With their steep and sharply angled views, their bold, snapshotlike croppings or near-far juxtapositions, and their flat-pattern design of brilliant, solid colors set off by the purest contour drawing, the works of such masters as Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai, and **Andō Hiroshige** (1797–1858; fig. 2.22) struck European eyes as amazingly new and fresh. These prints reinforced the growing belief in the West that pictorial truth lay not in illusion but in the intrinsic qualities of the artist's means and the opaque planarity of the picture surface.

The attraction of this art for Manet is evident in every aspect of the *Portrait of Zola*. The critic Henri Fouquier denounced the picture in the newspaper *Le National*, declaring: "The accessories are not in perspective, and the trousers are not made of cloth." The criticism contained an obvious but remarkable truth: the trousers were not made of cloth; they were made of paint.

By the mid-1870s Manet had turned his attention to plein-air painting in which he sought to apply his brush-sketch technique to large figure compositions and to render these in full color that caught all the lightness and brilliance of natural sunlight. Although he did not show in their exhibitions, he had been in close contact with



**2.21** Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Émile Zola*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 57½ × 44¾" (145.1 × 114 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



**2.22** Andō Hiroshige, *Moon Pine at Ueno* from *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, 1857. Color woodcut, 13¾ × 8¾" (34.9 × 21.9 cm). The Brooklyn Museum, New York.

the Impressionists Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, and Camille Pissarro (see below). Like Degas, Manet was predominantly a painter of the human figure, not a landscapist like his friend Monet. But in the 1870s he moved gradually away from his modernizations of past art to contemporary genre scenes, which he composed in the heightened palette and loose brushwork of the Impressionists.

Closely allied to his friend Manet in the search for a new pictorial reality suitable for "a painter of modern life" was the American expatriate artist **James Abbott McNeill Whistler** (1834–1903). Whistler, who trained in Paris and resided in London, exhibited a painting at the 1863 Salon des Refusés that caused a critical scandal rivaling the one incited by Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Much more than Manet, however, Whistler transformed Japanese sources into an emphatic aestheticism, in which Japanese-inspired style (*japonisme*) became the means to express a lyrical, atmospheric sensibility. Even so, in an authentic Realist manner, he consistently painted what he had observed. Whistler's approach was evident in the early 1860s, when he made pictures like *Symphony in White No. II: The Little White Girl* (fig. 2.23), where *japonisme* makes its presence felt not only in the obvious décor of an Asian blue-and-white porcelain vase, painted fan, and azalea blossoms, but also in the more subtle, and more important, flattening effects of the nuanced, white-on-white rendering of the model's dress and the rectilinear, screenlike divisions of the architectural framework. Further reinforcing the sense of



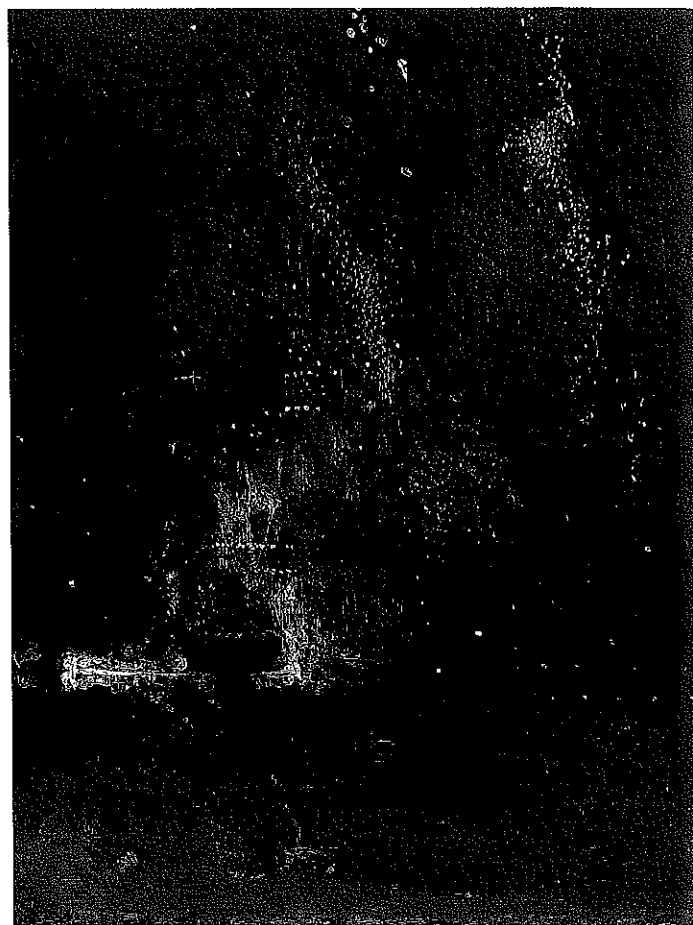


**2.23** James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White No. II: The Little White Girl*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (76.5 × 51.1 cm). Tate Gallery, London.

an overriding formalism is the off-center composition, with its resulting crop of the figure along two edges of the canvas. To emphasize his commitment to the principle of art for art's sake, an art committed to purely formal values, Whistler gave his pictures musical titles—arrangements, symphonies, and nocturnes—thereby drawing analogies with a more immaterial, evocative, and nondescriptive medium. Such analogies were very much in the spirit of late nineteenth-century Aestheticism, summed up in 1873 in the English critic Walter Pater's dictum, "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music." This approach emphasized the formal qualities of art as being more important than subject matter, and indeed Whistler's aim was to create not a duplicate of nature, but rather what he called "an arrangement of line, form, and color first." By the mid-1870s, when the artist had settled permanently in London, his painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (fig. 2.24) seemed so purely abstract that it prompted the art critic John Ruskin to accuse Whistler openly of "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." Whistler brought a libel suit against the critic and won a token judgment, for indeed he had worked from an observed subject, the fiery bursts and glittering sparks of a nocturnal fireworks display sprayed over a midnight sky.

### Impressionism and its Antecedents

A great part of the struggle of nineteenth-century experimental painters was an attempt to recapture the color, light, and changeability of nature that had been submerged



**2.24** James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875. Oil on oak panel, 23 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (60.3 × 46.7 cm). The Detroit Institute of Arts.

in the rigid stasis and studio gloom of academic tonal formulas. The color of the Neoclassicists had been defined in local areas but modified with large passages of neutral shadows to create effects of sculptural modeling. The color of Delacroix and the Romantics flashed forth passages of brilliant blues or vermilions from an atmospheric ground. As Corot and the Barbizon School of landscape painters sought to approximate more closely the effects of the phenomenal world with its natural light, they were almost inevitably bent in the direction of the subdued light of the interior of the forest, of dawn, and of twilight. Color, in their hands, thus became more naturalistic, although they did choose to work with those effects of nature most closely approximating the tradition of studio light. However, the increasingly delicate and abstract, almost monochromatic tonality of the post-1850, proto-Impressionist landscapes painted indoors by Corot (fig. 2.25), so different from the clear colors and structural firmness of his earlier Italian work (see fig. 1.21), may well have been an attempt to imitate the seamless, line-free value range of contemporary photography, a medium that greatly interested him. In their smoky tissues of feathery leaves and branches, the moody, autumnal, parklike scenes painted by



**2.25** Camille Corot, *Ville d'Avray*, 1871–74. Oil on canvas, 21½ × 31½" (54.9 × 80 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

the aging Corot seem to be painterly counterparts of the blurred landscape photographs of the period.

One of the few French landscapists of the mid-nineteenth century determined to work away from the forest in full sunlight was **Eugène Boudin** (1824–98), who painted the fashionable vacationers at seaside resorts around Le Havre, Normandy, with a direct, on-the-spot brilliance that fascinated both Courbet and Baudelaire (fig. 2.26). It inspired Claude Monet, Boudin's student and friend, and, through Monet, the movement of Impressionism.

Artists had always sketched in the open air and, as we have seen, some such as Corot and the Barbizon painters made compositions entirely en plein air, though even these artists usually completed paintings in the studio. The Impressionists were the most consistently devoted to plein-air painting, even for some of their most ambitious works, and to capturing on canvas as faithfully as possible the optical realities of the natural world. However, the more the Realist artists of the mid-nineteenth century attempted to reproduce the world as they saw it, the more they understood that reality rested not so much in the simple



**2.26** Eugène Boudin, *On the Beach at Trouville*, 1863. Oil on panel, 10 × 18" (25.4 × 45.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

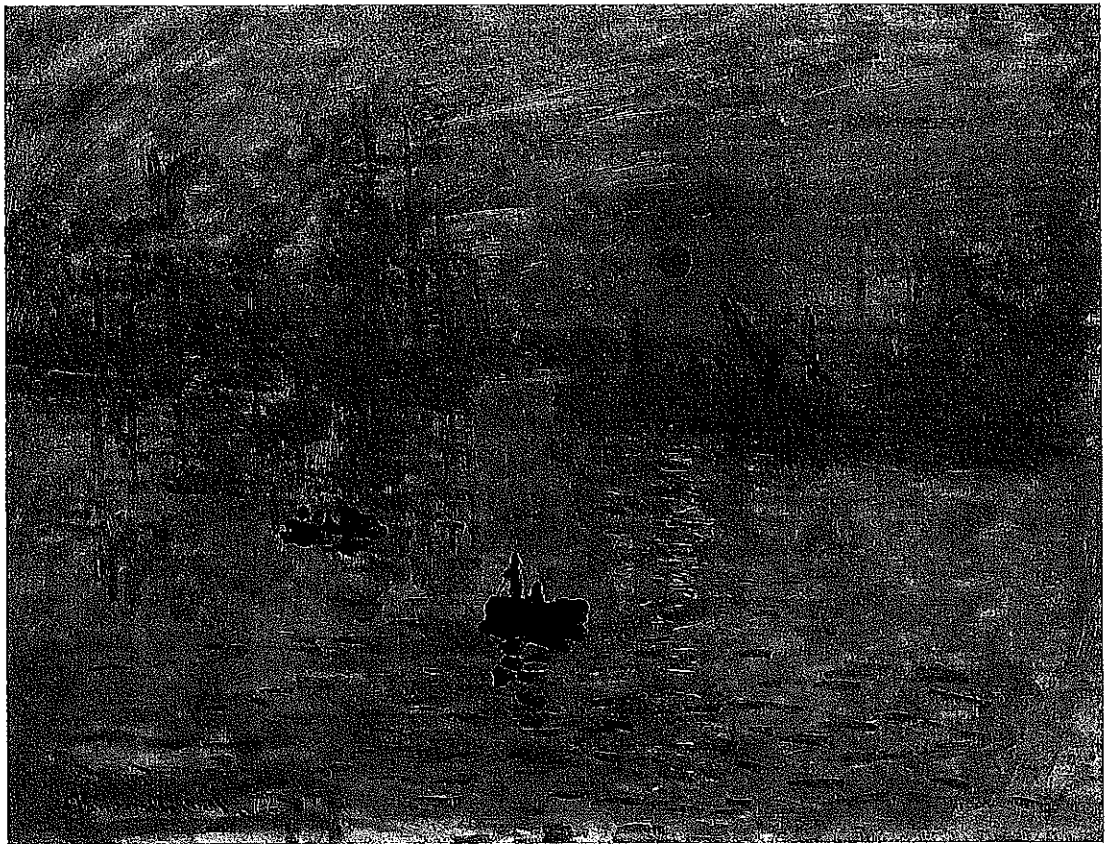
objective world of natural phenomena as in the eye of the spectator. Landscape in actuality could never be static and fixed. It was a continuously changing panorama of light and shadow, of moving clouds and reflections on the water. The same scene, observed in the morning, at noon, and at twilight, was actually three different realities. Further, as painters moved out of doors from the studio they came to realize that nature, even in its dark shadows, was not composed of black or muddy browns. The colors of nature were the full spectrum—blues, greens, yellows, and whites, accented with notes of red and orange, and often characterized by an absence of black.

In the sense that the artists were attempting to represent specific aspects of the observed world more precisely than any before them, Impressionism offered a specialized view of the world, based on intense observation as well as new discoveries in the science of optics. But Impressionism was much more than this. Behind the landscapes of Monet and the figure studies of Renoir lay not only the social realism of Courbet and the romantic realism of the Barbizon painters but also the significant sense of abstract structure that had appeared with David and Ingres and developed into a new aesthetic with Courbet and Manet.

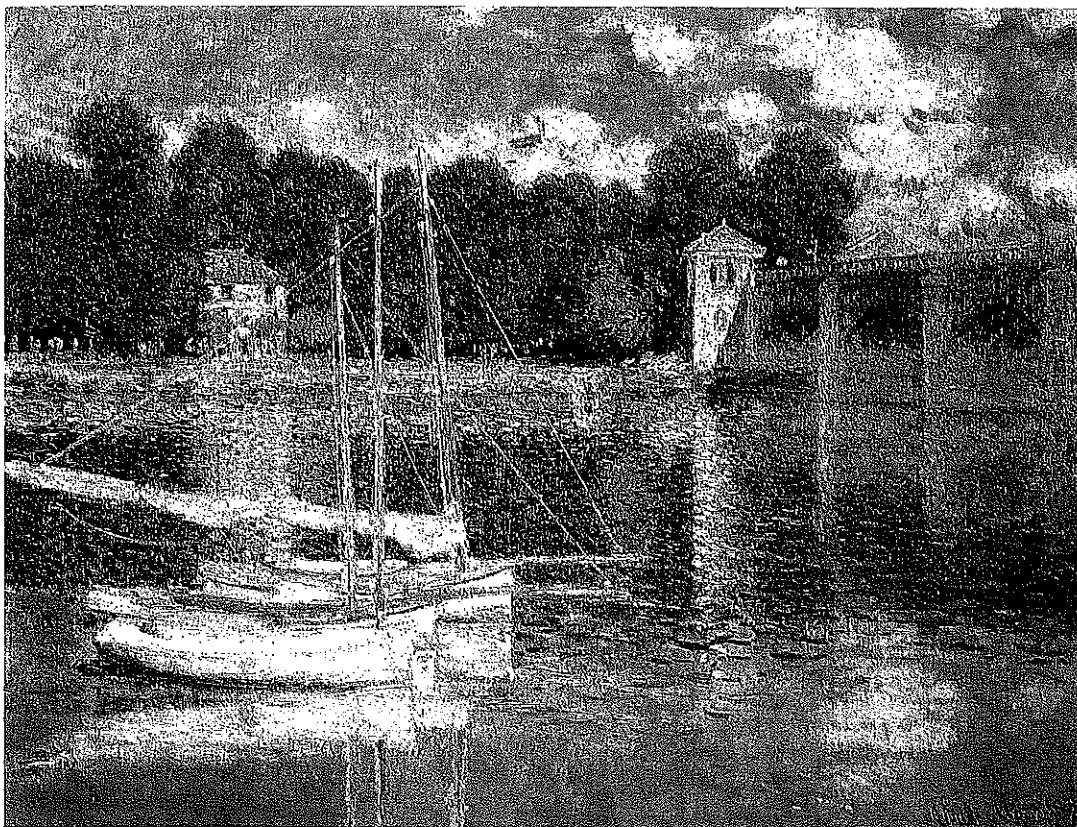
Louis Leroy, the satirical critic for *Le Charivari*, was the first to speak of a school of "Impressionists," a term he derisively based on the title of a painting by **Claude Monet** (1840–1926) (fig. 2.27) that was included in

the first Impressionist exhibition at the studio of the photographer Nadar in 1874. The show marked a significant historical occasion, for it was organized by a group of artists outside the official apparatus of the Salon and its juries, the first of many independent, secessionist group exhibitions that punctuate the history of avant-garde art in the modern period.

Monet's painting offers a harmony of sky and water, an example of the type of atmospheric dissolution later explored by Whistler in his *Nocturnes* (see fig. 2.24). It is a thin veil of light gray-blue shot through with the rose-pink of the rising sun. Reflections on the water are suggested by short, broken brushstrokes, and the ghostly forms of boats and smokestacks are described with loose patches of color, rather than gradations of light and dark tones. *Impression: Sunrise*, for Monet, was an attempt to capture the ephemeral aspects of a changing moment, more so, perhaps, than any of his paintings until the late Venetian scenes or *Waterlilies* of 1905. *The Bridge at Argenteuil* (fig. 2.28) might be considered a more classic version of developed Impressionism. It represents a popular sailing spot in the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil, where Monet settled in 1871. Scenes of contemporary leisure were a mainstay of Impressionist subject matter. The painting glistens and vibrates, giving the effect of brilliant, hot sunlight shimmering on the water in a scene of contemplative stillness. Monet employed no uniform pattern



**2.27** Claude Monet, *Impression: Sunrise*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (45.1 × 55.2 cm). Musée Marmottan, Paris.



**2.28** Claude Monet, *The Bridge at Argenteuil*, 1874. Oil on canvas, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (60 × 80 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

of brushstroke to define the surface: the trees are treated as a relatively homogeneous mass; the foreground blue of the water and the blue of the sky are painted quite smoothly and evenly, while the reflections of the tollhouse in the water are conveyed by dabs of thick yellow impasto; the boats and the bridge are drawn in with firm, linear architectural strokes. The complete avoidance of blacks and dark browns and the assertion of modulated hues in every part of the picture introduce a new world of light-and-color sensation. And even though distinctions are made among the textures of various elements of the landscape—sky, water, trees, architecture—all elements are united in their common statement as paint. The overt declaration of the actual physical texture of the paint itself, heavily brushed or laid on with a palette knife, derives from the broken paint of the Romantics, the heavily modeled impasto of Courbet, and the brush gestures of Manet. But now it has become an overriding concern with this group of young Impressionists. The point has been reached at which the painting ceases to be solely or even primarily an imitation of the elements of nature.

In this work, then, Impressionism can be seen not simply as the persistent surface appearance of natural objects but as a never-ending metamorphosis of sunlight and shadow, reflections on water, and patterns of clouds moving across the sky. This is the world as we actually see it: not a fixed, absolute perspective illusion in the eye of a frozen spectator within the limited frame of the picture window,

but a thousand different glimpses of a constantly changing scene caught by a constantly moving eye.

Monet's intuitive grasp of the reality of visual experience becomes particularly evident when a work like *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris* (fig. 2.29)—painted from an upstairs window in Nadar's former studio—is compared with contemporary photographs of a similar scene (fig. 2.30; see fig. 2.5). Whereas both camera-made images show "cities of the dead," the one because its slow emulsion could record virtually no sign of life and the other because its speed froze every horse, wheel, and human in midmovement, Monet used his rapidly executed color spotting to express the dynamism of the bustling crowd and the flickering, light- and mist-suffused atmosphere of a wintry day, the whole perceived within an instant of time. Still, far from allowing his broken brushwork to dissolve all form, he so deliberated his strokes that simultaneously every patch of relatively pure hue represents a ray of light, a moment of perception, a molecule of atmosphere or form in space, and a tile within the mosaic structure of a surface design. With its decorative clustering of color touches, its firm orthogonals, and its oblique Japanese-style or photographic view, the picture is a statement of the artist's sovereign strength as a pictorial architect. Monet's is a view of modern Paris, for throughout the Second Empire Louis-Napoléon, through his Prefect of the Seine, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, undertook a major program of urban renewal that called for the construction of wide boulevards and new



**2.29** Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris (Les Grands Boulevards)*, 1873–74. Oil on canvas, 31¼ × 23¼" (79.4 × 59.1 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.



**2.30** Edward Anthony, *A Rainy Day on Broadway, New York*, from the series *Anthony's Instantaneous Views*, 1859. One-half of a stereograph. International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

sewers, parks, and bridges. While the renovations generally improved circumstances for commerce, traffic, and tourism, they destroyed many of the narrow streets and small houses of old Paris. Life in these bustling new *grands boulevards*, and in the cafés and theaters that lined them, provided fertile subjects for the painters of modern life.

The artists associated with the Impressionist movement were a group of diverse individuals, all united by a common interest, but each intent on the exploration of his or her own separate path. **Auguste Renoir** (1841–1919) was essentially a figure painter who applied the principles of Impressionism in the creation of a lovely dream world that he then transported to the Paris of the late nineteenth century. *Moulin de la Galette* (fig. 2.31), painted in 1876, epitomizes his most Impressionist moment, but it is an ethereal fairyland in contemporary dress. This scene of a commonplace afternoon Sunday dance in the picturesque Montmartre district of Paris is transformed into a color- and light-filled reverie of fair women and gallant men, who, in actuality, were the painters and writers of Renoir's acquaintance and the working-class women with whom they chatted and danced. The lights flicker and sway over the color shapes of the figures—blue, rose, and yellow—and details are blurred in a romantic haze of velvety brushwork that softens their forms and enhances their beauty. This painting and his many other comparable paintings of the period are so saturated with the sheer joy of a carefree life that it is difficult to recall the financial problems that Renoir, like Monet, was suffering during these years.

The art of the Impressionists was largely urban. Even the landscapes of Monet had the character of a Sunday in the country or a brief summer vacation. But this urban art commemorated a pattern of life in which the qualities of insouciance, charm, and good living were extolled in a manner equaled only by certain aspects of the eighteenth century. Now, however, the portrayal of the good life no longer involved the pastimes of the aristocracy but reflected the pleasures available even to poverty-stricken artists. But the moments of relaxation were relatively rare and spaced by long intervals of hard work and privation for those artists who, unlike Cézanne or Degas, were not blessed with a private income.

Though born into a family belonging to the *grande bourgeoisie*, **Edgar Degas** (1834–1917) was in fact far from financially secure, especially after the death of his father in 1874. He thought of himself as a draftsman in the tradition of Ingres, yet he seems to have had little interest in exhibiting at the Salon after the 1860s or in selling his works. On the contrary, he took an active part in the Impressionist exhibitions between 1874 and 1886, in which he showed his paintings regularly. But while associated with the Impressionists, Degas did not share their enthusiasm for the world of the out-of-doors. Even his racehorse scenes of the late 1860s and early 1870s, which were open-air subjects, were painted in his studio. Though he produced extraordinary landscapes in his color monotypes,





**2.31** Auguste Renoir, *Moulin de la Galette*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 51½ × 69" (130.8 × 175.3 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

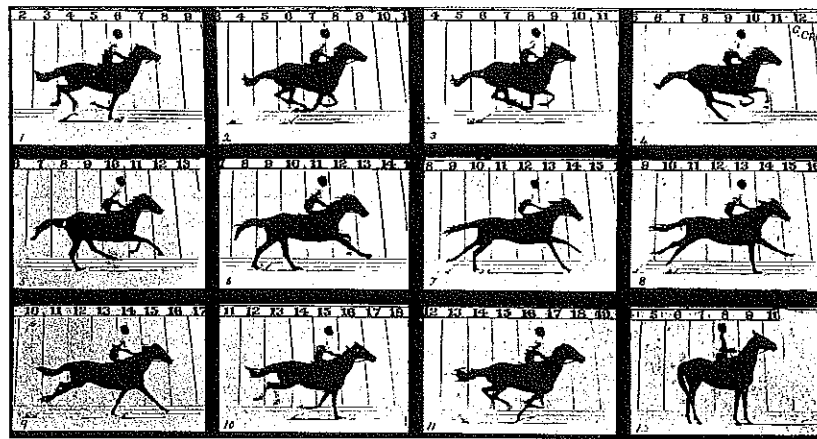
drawing horses and people remained Degas's primary interest, and his draftsmanship continued to be more precise than that of Manet's comparable racetrack subjects.<sup>65</sup> This was particularly true in later works, where Degas became one of the first artists to exploit the new knowledge of animal movement recorded in the 1870s and 1880s by Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) and others in a series of stop-action photographs (figs. 2.32, 2.33). These images made forever obsolete the "rocking-horse"

pose—legs stretched forward and backward—long conventional in paintings of running beasts.

When Degas became really interested in light and color—light organization, an interest that arose from his enthusiasm for the world of the theater, the concert hall, and the ballet, he expressed it in terms of dramatic indoor effects. Theater and ballet gave him unequalled opportunities for the exercise of his brilliant skill as a draftsman, for the exploration of artificial light, and for creating an

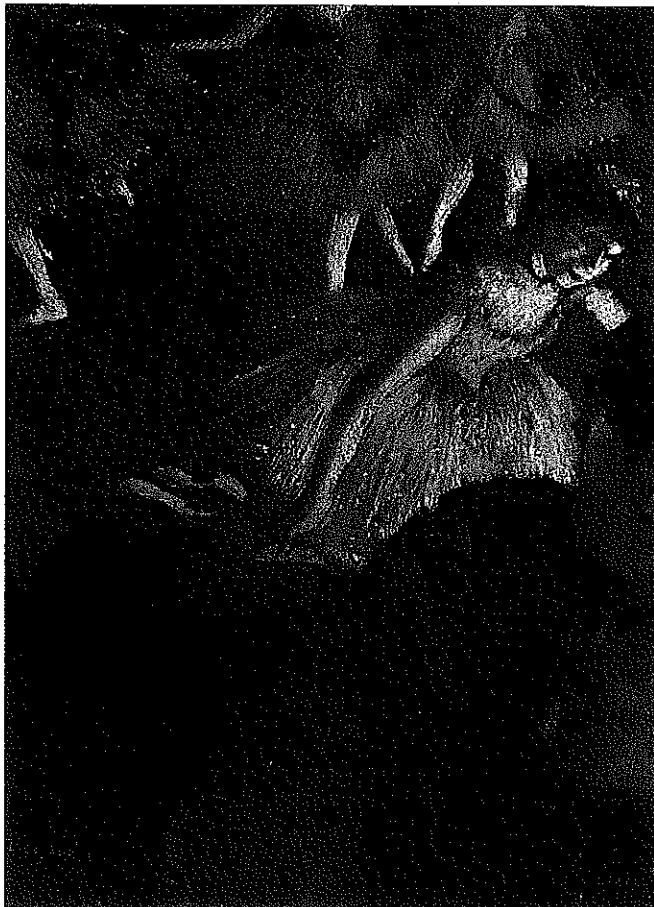


**2.32** Edgar Degas, *The Jockey*, 1889. Pastel on paper, 12½ × 19¼" (31.8 × 48.9 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.



**2.33** Eadweard Muybridge, *Horse in Motion*, 1878. Wet-plate photographs.

essentially abstract organization from the costumes and motions of ballet dancers. Degas was a student and avid collector of Japanese prints and was strongly influenced by their patterns. He was also an accomplished photographer, and earlier than almost any other painter, he discovered how to use photography as a means for developing a fresh, original, even oblique vision of the world. The pastel *Ballerina and Lady with a Fan* (fig. 2.34), for instance, could be a photographic fragment vividly translated into color, but what appears casually conceived is in fact precisely constructed. This dance scene, like many others



**2.34** Edgar Degas, *Ballerina and Lady with a Fan*, 1885. Pastel on paper, 25 1/2 × 19 1/4" (63.8 × 48.9 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

created by Degas during the 1880s and 1890s, is presented from above, with the woman in the loge acting as the observer who, when our vantage point as viewers is taken into account, also becomes part of what is observed. The performers in blue in the background are abruptly decapitated and the bowing ballerina in the foreground is truncated from the knees down. The rhymes created between forms—the fan and the tutus, for example—and the juxtaposition of forms, such as the faces of the spectator and the foreground dancer, which are actually separated by considerable distance, are typical of the ingenious visual puns Degas made in these works to reinforce the essentially two-dimensional nature of the image. By concentrating on the members of the audience as well as the performers in many of his ballet pictures, Degas could exploit the social and psychological nuances of theater life, where seeing was as important as being seen.

In addition to being a skilled draftsman, painter, and photographer, Degas was also an accomplished printmaker and sculptor (see fig. 6.2). Increasingly, during the 1880s and 1890s, he employed these media to explore commonplace subjects: milliners in their shops; exhausted laundresses; women occupied with the everyday details of their toilet: bathing, combing their hair, dressing, or drying themselves after the bath. In a work like *The Tub* (fig. 2.35) Degas goes beyond any of his predecessors in presenting the nude figure as part of an environment in which she fits with unconscious ease. Here the figure is beautiful in the easy, compact sculptural organization, but the routine character of her pose takes away any element of the erotic, while the bird's-eye view and the cutoff edges translate the photographic fragment into an abstract arrangement reminiscent of Japanese prints. When Degas exhibited this work among a group of similar pastels in the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, many critics responded to them with descriptions, such as comparisons to animals, that betrayed a virulent but commonplace misogyny. In his unflattering, naturalistic depictions of women, Degas had failed to create the eroticized objects of desire that inhabited academic paintings of the nude and that were, as feminist art historians have pointed out, designed for consumption by a predominantly male audience. While



**2.35** Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1886. Pastel on cardboard, 23 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 32 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (60 × 82.9 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Degas's pastels were destined for the same viewers, they transgress accepted norms of "femininity" and, in their monumental simplicity, are among the most moving treatments of the nude in modern art.

Two painters who showed regularly with the Impressionists and who identified strongly with the Manet-Degas orbit were the Frenchwoman **Berthe Morisot** (1841–95) and the American **Mary Cassatt** (1845–1926). Unlike her brother-in-law Manet, Morisot exhibited in all but one of the eight exhibitions organized

by the Impressionists. Despite considerable success in her lifetime, the first retrospective of her work in the twentieth century did not take place until 1987. Morisot's subject of choice, like that of Cassatt, was modern domestic life, one arena of Parisian life to which these upper-class women could gain unrestricted access at a time when women were subject to severe limitations on their involvement in public life. They brought to their subjects an unsentimental detachment that male artists reserved for the street or the café. Morisot frequently employed her family members as models, as in *Hide and Seek* (fig. 2.36), which portrays her sister Edma during a stroll in the country with her daughter. Morisot joined Monet and Renoir in banishing black from her palette and developed a unique style of sketchy, deftly applied strokes to realize scenes and figures as materializations of light and color. The Philadelphia-born Cassatt, who arrived in Paris with her wealthy family in 1866, had an almost Japanese love of line, but often used it with the painterly freedom of Manet and the high-keyed color of the plein-air Impressionists. In her skewed perspectives, intimate views, and photographic cropping, however, she was at one with Degas, her closest artistic associate (fig. 2.37). Like Degas, she was a keen observer of the theatrical world, and she possessed a strong graphic sensibility which made her a highly successful printmaker. Like Morisot, Cassatt generally kept to mother-and-child subjects, but the sensuous immediacy and directness with which she treated them betrayed the daring modernity of her whole approach to art. Cassatt's elite social status



**2.36** Berthe Morisot, *Hide and Seek*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (45.1 × 55.2 cm). Collection Mrs. John Hay Whitney.



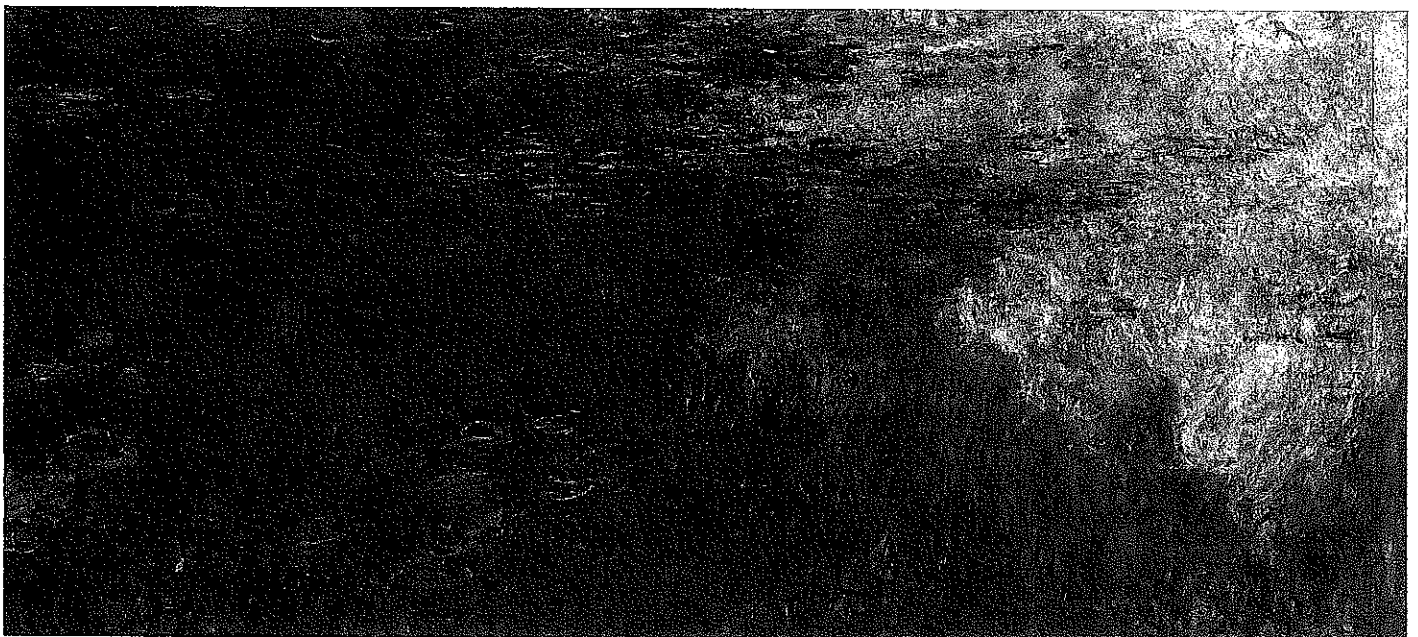
**2.37** Mary Cassatt, *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 35 × 51" (88.9 × 129.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

permitted her to play the all-important role of tastemaker to American millionaires, whose acquisitions of Impressionist masterpieces helped to elevate standards of art appreciation in the United States, as well as establishing the foundations of the great collections of modern art now accessible in American museums.

By the mid-1880s, the Impressionists were undergoing a period of self-evaluation, which prompted Monet and his circle to move in various directions to renew their art once again, some by reconsidering aspects of traditional drawing and composition, others by enlarging or refining the premises on which they had been working. Foremost among the latter stood Monet, who remained true to direct visual experience, but with such intensity, concentration, and selection as to push his art toward antinaturalistic subject-

ivity and pure decorative abstraction. In series after series he withdrew from the urban and industrial world, once so excitingly consistent with the nineteenth century's materialist concept of progress, and looked to unspoiled nature, as if to record its scenes quickly before science and technology could destroy them forever. Monet magnified his sensations of the individual detail perceived in an instant of time so that, instead of fragmenting large, complex views like that in *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris* (see fig. 2.29), he broke up simple, unified subjects—poplars, haystacks, the façade of Rouen Cathedral—into representations of successive moments of experience. Each, by its very nature, assumed a uniform tonality and texture that tended to reverse objective analysis into its opposite: subjective synthesis. In a long, final

series, painted at his home at Giverny, in the French countryside, Monet retired to an environment of his own creation, a water garden, where he found a piece of the real world—a sheet of clear liquid afloat with lily pads and flowers, and reflections from the sky above—perfectly at one with his conception of the canvas as a flat, mirrorlike surface shimmering with an image of the world as a dynamic materialization of light and atmosphere (fig. 2.38). In these late, deeply pondered masterpieces, Monet's empirical interest in luminary phenomena had become a near-mystical obsession, its lyrical poetry often expressed in almost monochrome blue and mauve. As single, all-over, indivisible images, they also looked forward, from 1926, when the long-lived Monet died, to the late forties and fifties, the time of the New York Abstract Expressionists, who would produce a similarly "holistic" kind of painting, environmental in its scale but now entirely abstract in its freedom from direct reference to the world outside (see fig. 19.10).



**2.38** Claude Monet, *Les Nuages (Clouds)*, 1916–26. Oil on canvas, left panel of three, each panel 6'6¼" × 13'11¾" (2 × 4.3 m). Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris.

## Nineteenth-Century Art in the United States

At the opening of the twentieth century, American painting and sculpture, like their counterparts in Great Britain, lagged considerably behind the most progressive developments in continental Europe. American artists historically lacked the critical support systems of established art academies (therefore many studied abroad) and a tradition of government patronage. Despite the shortcomings of its art apparatus, American culture had sporadically generated major figures, such as Benjamin West (see fig. 1.12) and John Singleton Copley in colonial times, and the late nineteenth-century expatriates Whistler, Cassatt, and John Singer Sargent (see fig. 2.46), capable of holding their own in the European art capitals. After the Civil War Americans had proved vigorously original in architecture and through this medium (see chapter 4) had made a decisive contribution to the visual arts. But that promising start was brought to a halt by the same academic bias that had held so many painters and sculptors in thrall to outmoded aesthetics inherited from the classical and Romantic past. While the more self-assured and talented European artists grew strong through resistance to the tyrannical academy, Americans generally felt the need to master tradition rather than innovate against it. While the absence of such a tradition could lead artists into the pitfalls of provincialism, it also provided opportunities for greater freedom of expression. American artists were aware that, to progress in their art, it would be necessary to achieve their own artistic identity, assimilating influences from the generative centers in Europe until these had been transformed by authentic native sensibility into something independent and distinctive.

### Early American Artists and the Hudson River School

Many American artists of the nineteenth century saw art as a means to define the American national character as a distinct quality. American history and culture seemed at this time to be curiously polarized between the material and the mystical. In the colonial period, and for some time after, Americans most consistently expressed their artistic personality in some form of Realism.

**George Catlin** (1796–1872) was particularly concerned with national identity, but in a manner quite apart from the landscapists of the Hudson River School (see below). He abandoned a successful practice as a portraitist for wealthy white patrons in Philadelphia to paint the individuals and culture of America's indigenous populations. For six years Catlin traveled west of the Mississippi, executing portraits and scenes of daily life among more than fifty Native American peoples. Then thought to be on the verge of extinction (due to aggressive government policies to "remove" them from United States territories), Native Americans were a source of tremendous curiosity for European Americans. Catlin presented his paintings,

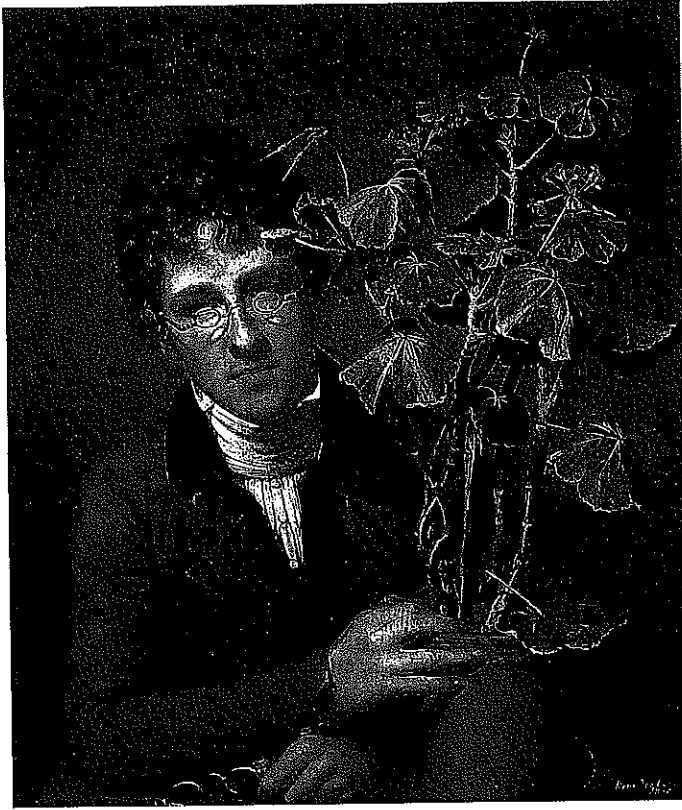
together with actual costumes and artifacts, in a famous "Indian Gallery" that toured the United States and Europe, bringing images of an exotic world to audiences who felt nostalgia for the disappearance of America's native inhabitants while for the most part sanctioning their obliteration. Among Catlin's many paintings of tribal leaders is a striking portrait of the chief of the Blackfoot tribe, *Buffalo Bull's Back Fat* (fig. 2.39), which was shown in the Paris Salon of 1846 and admired by the poet and critic Charles Baudelaire. While Catlin's paintings stand as important ethnographic sources because of their accurate depictions of Native American dress and custom, they are also powerful examples of the art of portraiture.

The American taste for realism occasionally grew so obsessive in its concern for the integrity of palpable things that reality, once scientifically measured, delineated, or actually dissolved, entered the realm of the ideal, thereupon becoming a vehicle of feeling, intuition, or metaphysical meaning. This tendency is evident in the rivetingly precise portraiture of John Singleton Copley and in the almost magical illusionism of *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* (fig. 2.40), painted by **Rembrandt Peale** (1778–1860). Peale was the son of Charles Willson Peale, an enlightened man of many talents, chiefly interested in natural history and painting. Charles helped to found the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia and headed an extraordinary family dynasty of artists. Like his father, Rembrandt (most of the seventeen children were

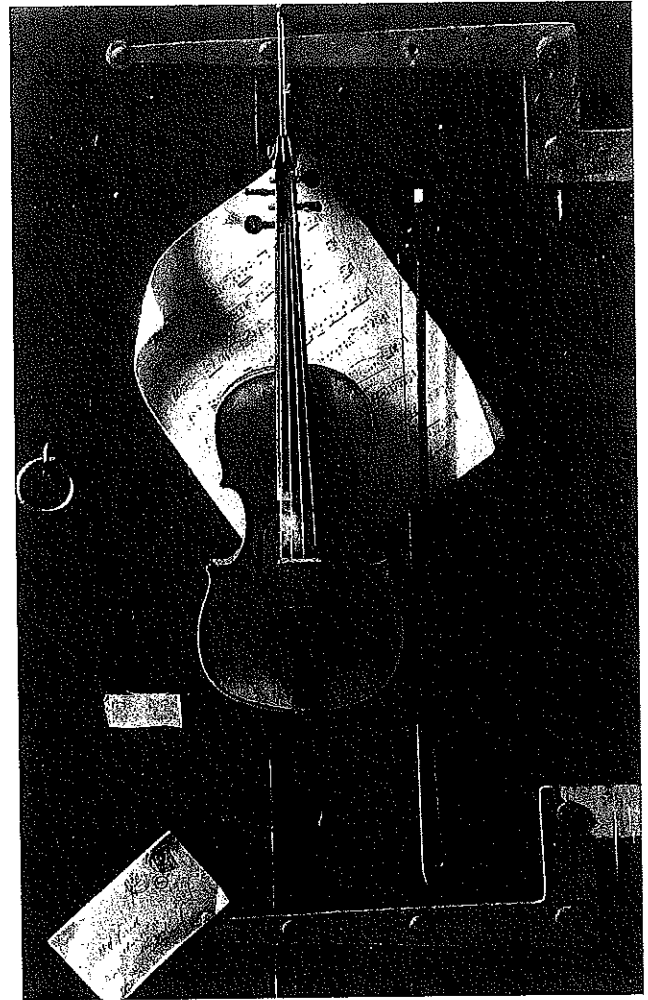


**2.39** George Catlin, *Buffalo Bull's Back Fat, Head Chief, Blood Tribe*, 1832. Oil on canvas, 29 × 24" (73.7 × 61 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

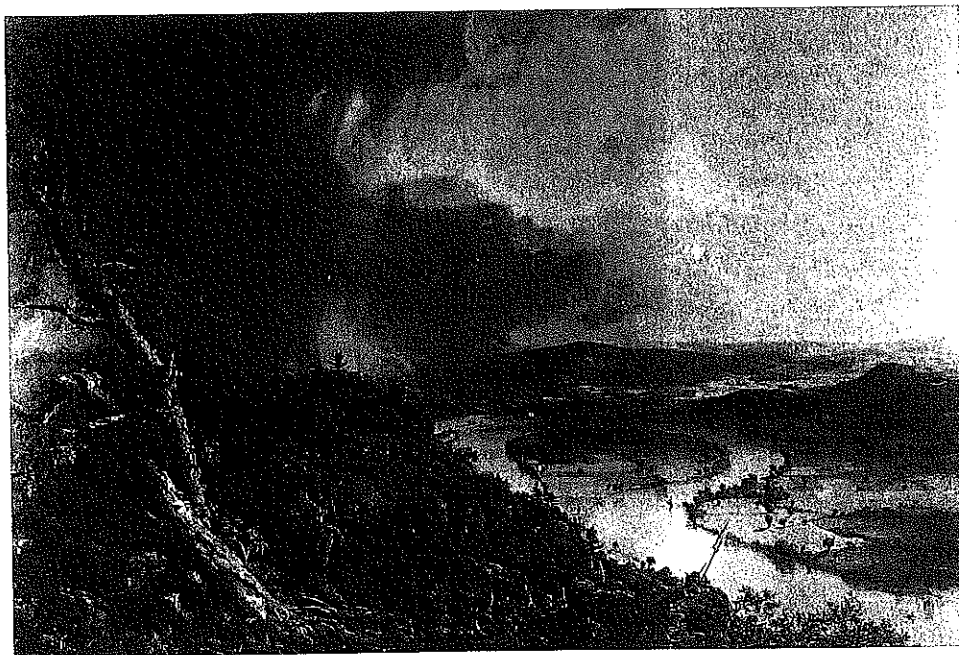




**2.40** Rembrandt Peale, *Rubens Peale with a Geranium*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 24" (71.7 × 61 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



**2.41** William M. Harnett, *The Old Violin*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 38 × 24" (96.5 × 61 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



**2.42** Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow* [*The Connecticut River near Northampton*], 1836. Oil on canvas, 4'3" × 6'4" (1.3 × 1.9 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

named after old-master painters or famous scientists) excelled at portraiture, though he also tried his hand at history painting. His touching and meticulous portrayal of his farsighted younger brother, a botanist who posed with what was purportedly the first geranium specimen to enter the country, is his greatest work. The two interests of the Peale family—science and art—are brought together in this

freshly conceived composition, just as the two genres of still life and portraiture are seamlessly merged.

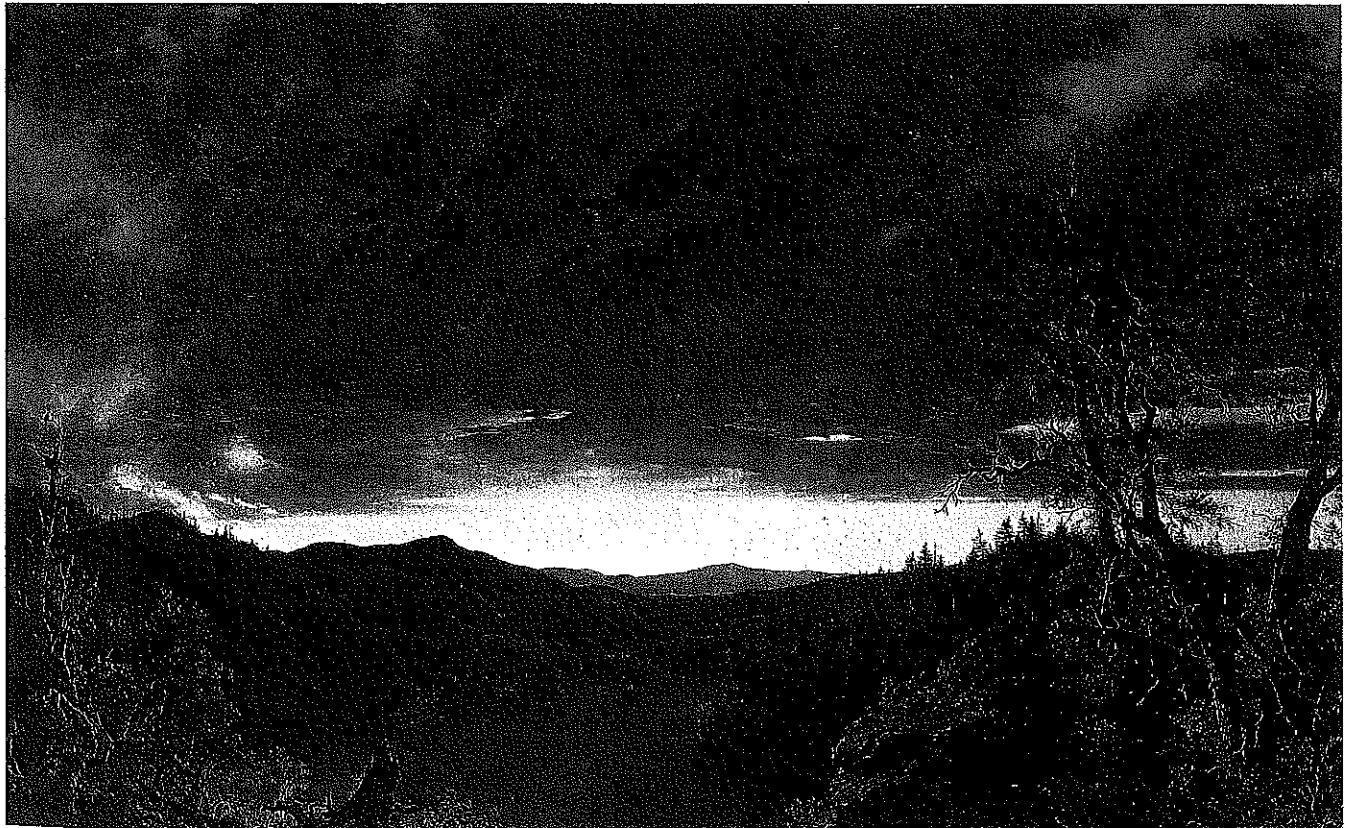
An obsessive concern with exactitude in American art, as a means of revealing the true nature of things, emerges dramatically in the *trompe-l'oeil* painters of the late nineteenth century, most notably John Frederick Peto (1854–1907) and William Michael Harnett (1848–92).

The latter's *The Old Violin* (fig. 2.41) is a *tour de force* of verisimilitude, visual deception, and classical simplicity. While Harnett's still lifes delighted the public, nineteenth-century critics often condemned the work as old-fashioned illusionism bereft of elevating moral content. It was not until the thirties that Harnett's reputation was resurrected, when a taste for Surrealism and abstraction revised attitudes about his technical wizardry and highly structured formal organization. Harnett's examination of the nature of visual perception reemerged in the later twentieth century in the Superrealist art of Richard Estes and Duane Hanson (see Figs. 24.71, 24.76).

America's greatest artistic achievements in the mid-nineteenth century came in the development of a kind of landscape painting that merged elements of scientific Realism with idealized, even religious interpretations of nature that owed much to European Romanticism, notably the work of Turner (see fig. 1.18). This occurred particularly in the works of the so-called Hudson River School, a diverse group of artists (not a literal school or association) who worked in New England and upstate New York. For the most part, their landscapes presented the young American republic as a land of pristine wilderness which, by virtue of its majestic scale and untouched beauty, seemed suffused with divine presence. Artists thus invested landscape painting with moral meaning and used it as a vehicle for defining America's national identity as a new "Promised Land." *The Oxbow* (*The Connecticut River near*

*Northampton*) (fig. 2.42), an icon of American art that established a virtual formula for landscapes of the Hudson River School, was painted by its founder, **Thomas Cole** (1801–48). *The Oxbow* offers a vast panoramic view of a famous bend in the Connecticut River from a stormy promontory where, amid the rocks and tree trunks, Cole has depicted himself at his easel. Symbolically, the storm clouds at left have passed over the fertile, cultivated fields on the banks of the river, signs of a benign human presence in nature where dwell, according to Cole, "freedom's offspring—peace, security, and happiness." More than the artists who followed him, Cole expressed through his paintings serious doubts about the country's expansionist tendencies, which resulted in the destruction of wilderness as new frontiers were settled.

Cole's greatest protégé was **Frederic Edwin Church** (1826–1900), who reinforced his fine-art education by traveling extensively, mostly in North and South America, and by studying the theories of Alexander von Humboldt, a famous German naturalist who called for a "heroic landscape painting" that would bring scientific accuracy to the depiction of nature's grandest scenes. Church was a master of virtuoso, highly theatrical interpretations of those grand scenes, from volcanos in the Ecuadorian Andes to icebergs in the Arctic north. In *Twilight in the Wilderness* (fig. 2.43), he translated a blazing sunset into a sublime vision of biblical proportions, implying, as had Cole, a spiritual, pantheistic view of nature. It has also been suggested,



**2.43** Frederic E. Church, *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 40 × 64" (101.6 × 162.6 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art.

however, that the fiery skies of the painting could portend the imminent conflagration of the Civil War. Though it is difficult to imagine in today's art world, *Twilight* caused a sensation when it, like Church's other masterpieces, was exhibited by itself in a New York gallery, where visitors paid an entrance fee to see the artist's newest creation.

**Robert Scott Duncanson** (1821–72), Church's contemporary, was from Cincinnati, where a thriving landscape tradition in the Hudson River School style had developed. Born into a poor family of free African-American tradespeople, Duncanson was a serious advocate of the abolitionist movement, frequently donating his work in support of antislavery causes. In the art of painting he was self-taught, though in nineteenth-century America this

was often the case with white artists as well (Cole, for example). Like his fellow painters in the East, Duncanson took the valleys and rivers of his own region as the subjects for his landscapes (fig. 2.44). The tranquillity of mood in *Blue Hole, Flood Waters, Little Miami River* and the symmetrical organization of its composition suggest a classical vision of landscape in the manner of the seventeenth-century French artist Claude Lorrain.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the tight, descriptive style of the Hudson River School had been transformed in the hands of artists like **George Inness** (1825–94) into something more subjective and less dependent on the phenomena of the natural world (fig. 2.45). An admirer of the French Barbizon painters, Inness painted unpretentious subjects in a highly poetic style far from the grandiose statements of Frederic Church. For him, nature is the domesticated landscape, rather than untamed wilderness, and it is filled with evocative atmosphere and soft harmonies of green and gold. The way in which formal concerns supersede the need for literal transcription in Inness's work has parallels with many American and European artists at the end of the nineteenth century, who were creating the foundation for twentieth-century abstraction.



**2.44** Robert S. Duncanson, *Blue Hole, Flood Waters, Little Miami River*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 29¼ × 42¼" (74.3 × 107.3 cm). Cincinnati Art Museum.

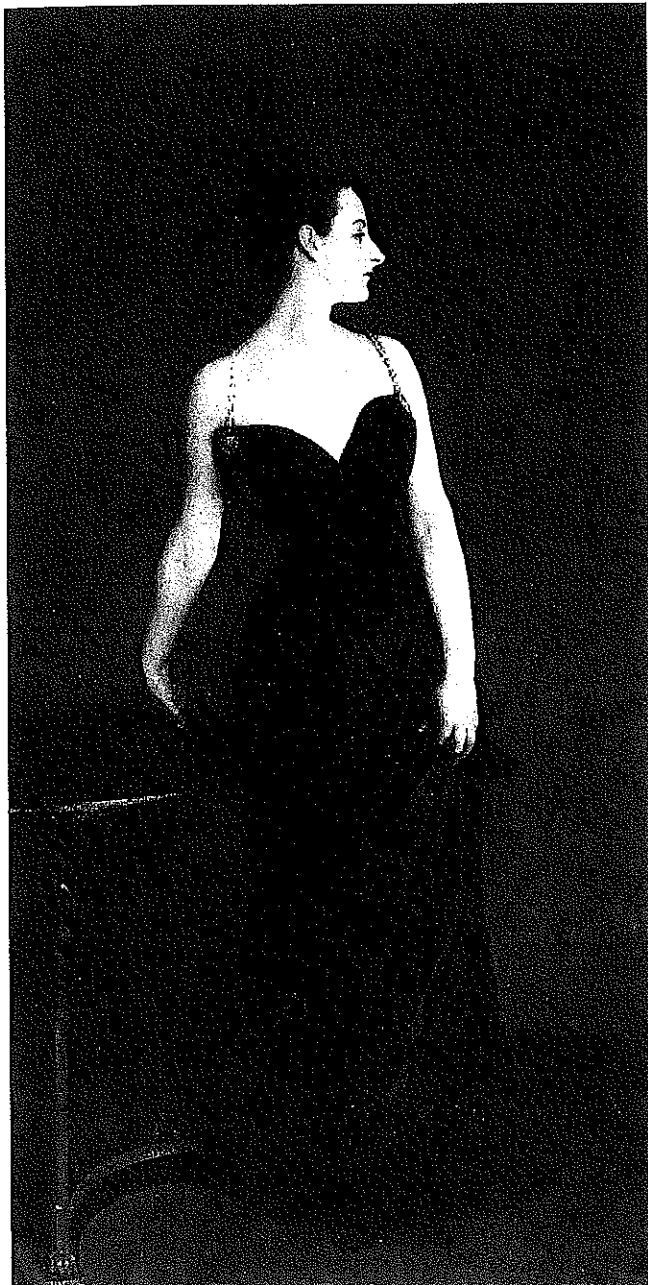
### New Styles and Techniques in Later Nineteenth-Century American Art

Whatever the developments in painting and sculpture back home, no artists had sensed the coming of the new more presciently than glamorous expatriates such as Whistler and Cassatt, whose histories belong within the context of their European contemporaries. Born to American parents living abroad, **John Singer Sargent** (1856–1925) also spent most of his career in Paris and London, though he received



**2.45** George Inness, *Sundown*, 1894. Oil on fabric, 45 × 70" (114.3 × 177.8 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

many portrait commissions from leading American families. His flashing, liquid stroke and flattering touch in portraiture made him one of the most famous and wealthy artists of his time. Moreover, in a major work like *Madame X* (fig. 2.46) Sargent revealed himself almost mesmerized, like a latter-day Ingres (see fig. 1.13), by the abstract qualities of pure line and flat silhouette. At the same time, he so caught the explicit qualities of surface and inner character that the painting created a scandal when publicly shown at the Salon, for in addition to the figure's already décolleté dress, Sargent had placed the left-hand strap off her shoulder. To placate an offended public, he adjusted the strap as seen here after the Salon closed. The experience



**2.46** John Singer Sargent, *Madame X (Mime Gautreau)*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 6'10½" × 3'7" (2.1 × 1.1 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

prompted the artist to leave Paris eventually and establish his practice in London. In his most painterly works, meanwhile, Sargent carried gestural virtuosity, inspired by Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez, to levels of pictorial autonomy not exceeded before the advent of the Abstract Expressionists after World War II.

Americans who chose photography as their medium of expression stood out in the international Salons organized for exhibiting the new camera-made art, and indeed often won the major prizes and set the standards for both technical mastery and aesthetic vision. This will be seen in the images of Man Ray, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, and Edward Weston, reproduced in later chapters as examples of the best work of its kind. Meanwhile, Whistler, Cassatt, and Sargent also had their American peers in photography, principally Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934) and Clarence H. White, both of whom worked in the Impressionist manner favored by many of the so-called Pictorialist photographers during the later nineteenth century (fig. 2.47). Like Cassatt, Käsebier



**2.47** Gertrude Käsebier, *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*, c. 1900. Platinum print on Japanese tissue, 9½" × 5½" (23.8 × 13.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



**2.48** Winslow Homer, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 24 × 38" (61 × 96.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

specialized in the mother-and-child theme, while White aligned himself with the elite social content of Sargent's portraiture and the Orientalizing aestheticism of Whistler's musical "arrangements." The camera offered an unparalleled capacity to render the reality so beloved by Americans, while it also could easily transform visual facts, as Käsebier and White did with their soft focus, and thus endow them with the special meaning characteristically sought by American artists.

More exclusively rooted in American experience than Whistler, Cassatt, and Sargent, and thus more representative of the point of departure for American art in the twentieth century, were Winslow Homer (1836–1910) and Thomas Eakins. As an illustrator for *Harper's Weekly* magazine in New York, Homer, a virtually self-taught artist, was assigned to the front during the Civil War. In his illustrations and in the oil paintings he began to make during the war, Homer tended to focus on the quiet moments of camp life rather than the high drama of battle. A landscape laid waste by those battles is the setting for the artist's greatest early work, *Prisoners from the Front* (fig. 2.48). At the left, three Confederate soldiers—a disheveled youngster, an old man, and a defiant young officer—surrender to a Union officer at the right. Although Homer's painting represents a fairly unremarkable occurrence in the war, it achieves

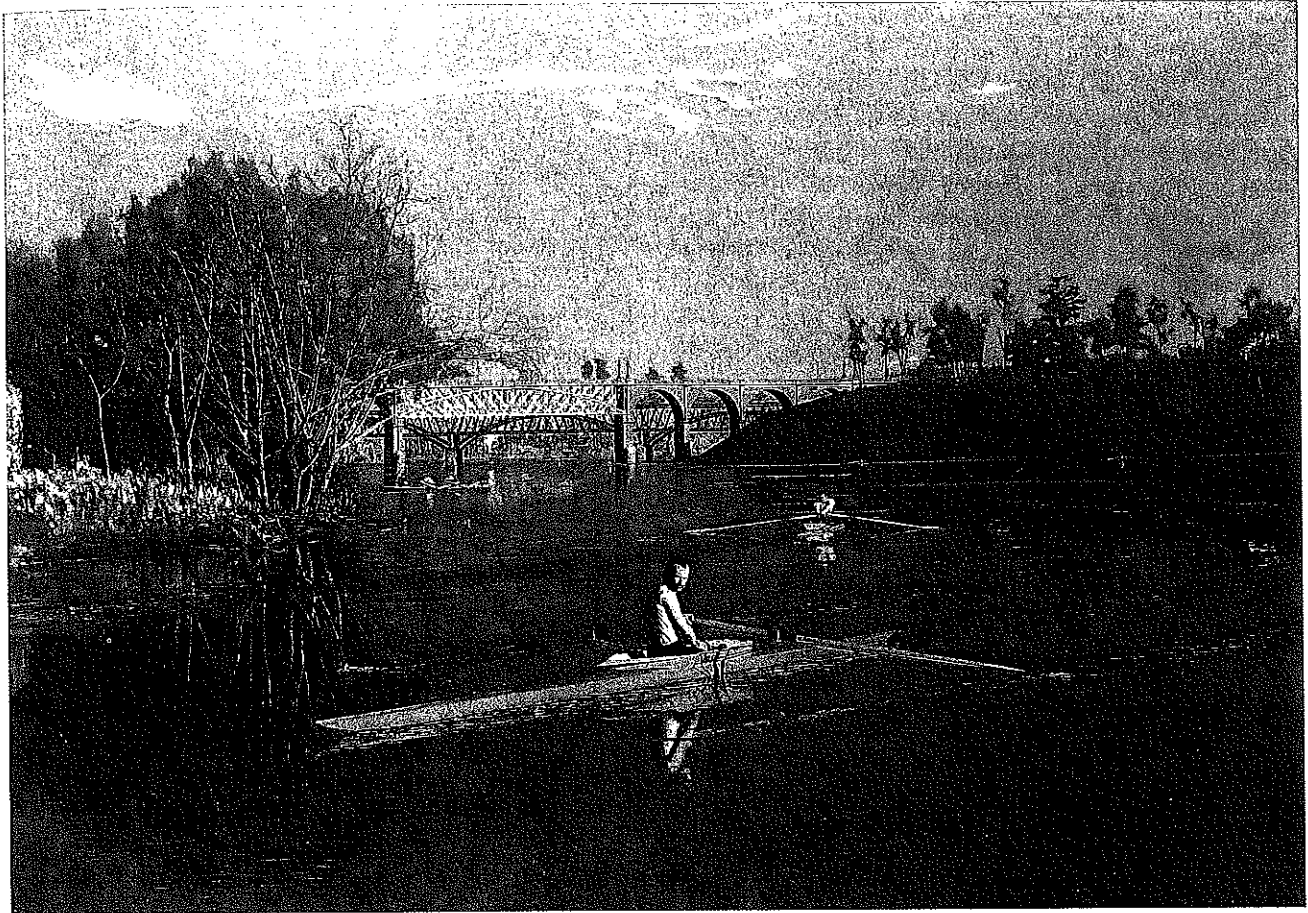
the impact of history painting in the significance of its theme. His subtle characterization of the varying classes and types of the participants in the tragic conflict alludes to the tremendous difficulties to be faced during Reconstruction between these warring cultures.

In 1866 Homer traveled to Paris, where *Prisoners from the Front* was being exhibited. While he shared in the practice of plein-air painting and some of the subject matter of the Impressionists, Homer always insisted on the physical substance of things, rarely allowing paint to disintegrate form. Much of his mature work centered on the ocean, either breezy, sun-drenched watercolors made in the



**2.49** Winslow Homer, *The Fox Hunt*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 38 × 68½" (96.5 × 174 cm). The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

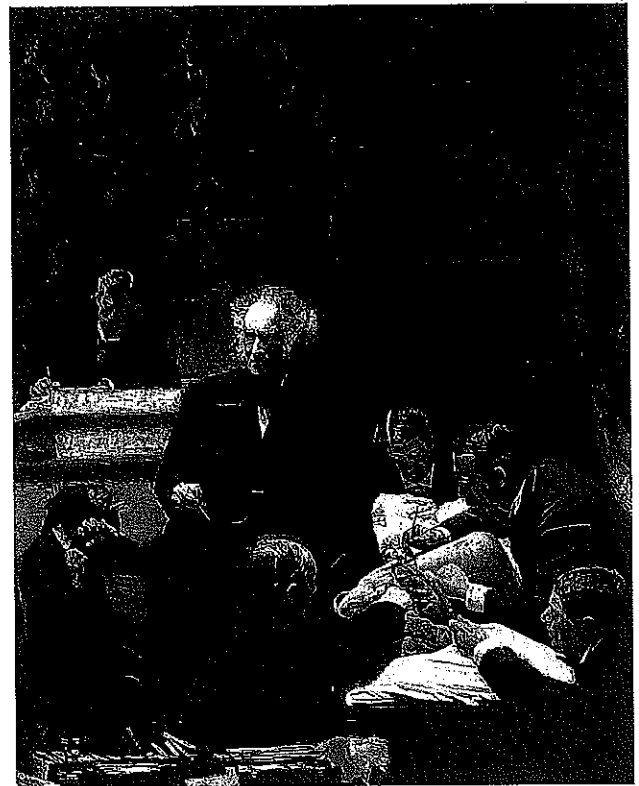




**2.50** Thomas Eakins, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 32½ × 46¼" (82,6 × 117,5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Caribbean or dramatic views of the human struggle with the high seas off the coast of Maine, where he settled in 1884. In *The Fox Hunt* (fig. 2.49), the struggle between the forces of nature plays itself out in a haunting drama featuring a fox, weakened by the deprivations of winter, descended upon by hungry crows. The sparseness of this striking composition, with its graceful silhouettes, cropped forms, and slanted perspectives, attests to Homer's sophisticated knowledge of *japonisme* as well as his ability to extract great emotional intensity from the simplest of scenes.

In his determination to fuse art and science for the sake of an uncompromising Realism in painting, the Philadelphia painter **Thomas Eakins** (1844–1916) all but revived the Renaissance tenets of Leonardo da Vinci. Not only did Eakins dissect cadavers right along with medical students (a traditional method of artistic training) and join Eadweard Muybridge in his studies of motion with stop-action photography (see fig. 2.33), especially those devoted to human movement, but he even had an assistant pose on a cross in full sunlight as the model for a Crucifixion scene and provided a nude male model for his female drawing students, a step that forced his resignation from the august Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Eakins's extraordinary early painting *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (fig. 2.50) was his first treatment of an outdoor subject. In the foreground the artist's friend, a celebrated oarsman, pauses



**2.51** Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 8' × 6'6" (2,4 × 2 m). Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia.

momentarily while rowing on Philadelphia's Schuylkill River and looks toward the viewer; in the middle distance, Eakins has depicted himself midstroke, also looking at us. A crystalline light and carefully ordered composition lead us into this rational pictorial space, in which each detail is keenly observed and convincingly rendered. Eakins has here produced a Realism that transcends mere illusionism by way of a magical clarity, as if time were suspended in a single instant.

Eakins was arguably the greatest American portraitist of the nineteenth century, and his large painting *The Gross Clinic* (fig. 2.51) is a masterpiece of the genre. The artist looked to the seventeenth-century precedent of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* for his heroic portrayal of a distinguished surgeon performing an operation before his class. Like Max Schmitt, Dr. Gross looks up during a break in the action. In the midst of the dark, richly hued painting, light falls on his forehead, the intellectual focal point of the scene, and, even more dramatically, on

the details of the surgery. The work is instructive for the ways in which artists can signify gender difference. The only female observer of the event, the mother of the patient, turns away in horror. Unlike the dispassionate male participants, she is overcome with emotion and reduced to a passive role, just as were the female members of the Horatii family in David's painting (see fig. 1.2).

**Henry Ossawa Tanner** (1859–1937) was an African-American artist who, by the end of the nineteenth century, had achieved significant international distinction. During the so-called Harlem Renaissance of the twenties, he was recognized as the most important black artist of his generation. Though he studied in Philadelphia with Eakins, whose portrait style profoundly influenced his own, Tanner found a more accepting atmosphere in his adopted city of Paris. He exhibited widely during his lifetime, including at the Paris Salon, and eventually befriended members of the avant-garde circle around Paul Gauguin in the rural artists' communities of Brittany. The French government

awarded him the prestigious Légion d'honneur. Tanner's best-known work, *The Banjo Lesson* (fig. 2.52), was probably made during a trip to Philadelphia, when he said he painted "mostly Negro subjects," a genre he felt had been stereotypically cast by white artists. With a loose weave of elongated strokes, Tanner softly defines the central pair of figures, bathing them in a light that imparts a spiritual stillness to the scene, a light not unlike that used in the many compositions of religious subjects that make up the bulk of Tanner's work. The painting overcomes the stereotypical treatment of banjo-playing, as entertainment for a white audience, and instead focuses on the passing on of a tradition.

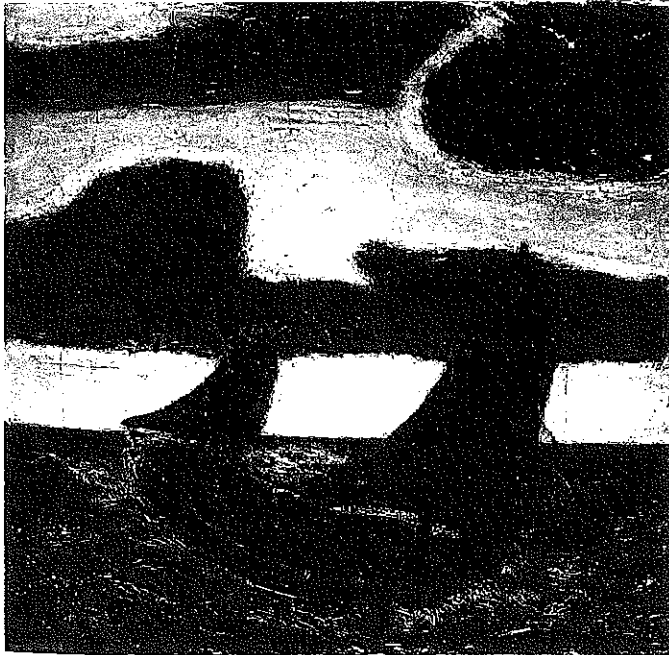
In the art of **Albert Pinkham Ryder** (1847–1917) the sense of dream is utterly dominant, even in paintings so overloaded with the material substance of thick paint that, as the critic Lloyd Goodrich has written, "a tiny canvas weighs heavy in the hand." This was the product of years spent in a trial-and-error process of working and reworking a single picture, carried out by a painter who declared that "the artist should fear to become the slave of detail. He should strive to express his thought and not the surface of it. What avails a storm cloud accurate in form and color if the storm is



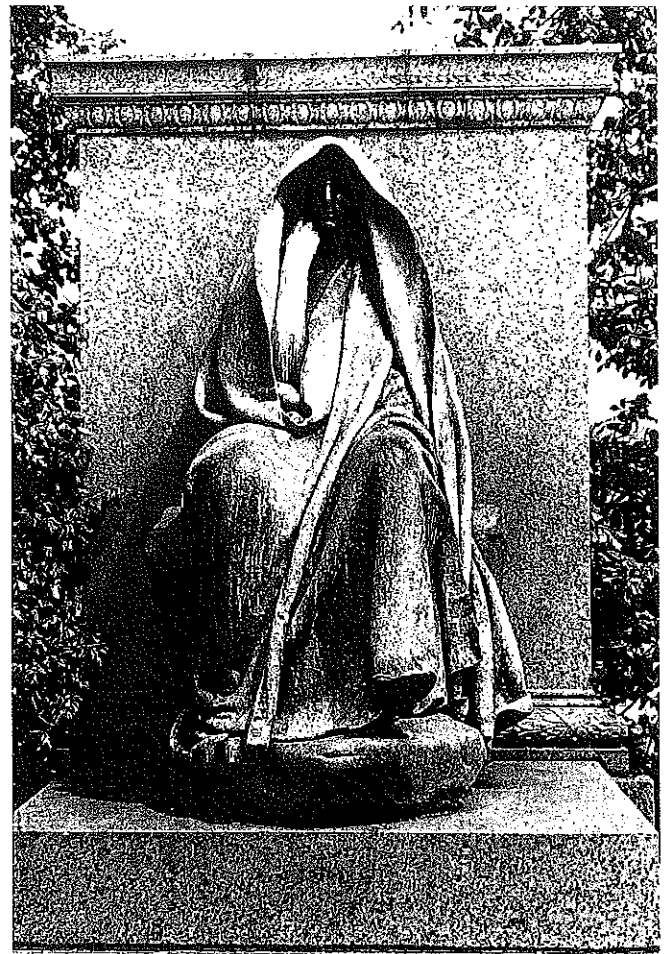
**2.52** Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Banjo Lesson*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 49 × 35½" (124.5 × 90.2 cm). Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia.

not therein." The storm Ryder wanted was of the sort stirred up by the German composer Richard Wagner, whose sublimely Romantic music deeply touched the artist, as it did many of his contemporaries. Ryder, a solitary figure, was unfortunately a dangerously experimental technician, applying wet paint on wet paint and mixing his oils with what was probably bitumen, so that his pictures did not dry properly, but have gone on "ripening" until they have actually darkened and decayed, ironically destroying many of the exquisite nuances he had sought in endless modifications. What remains, however, tends to dramatize the extraordinary reductiveness of the final image (fig. 2.53). With all detail refined away and the whole simplified to an arrangement of broad, dramatically contrasted shapes, a painting by Ryder often evokes the convoluted, emotional rhythms of Rubens and Delacroix as well as the Gothic, visionary world of German Expressionism. Little wonder that Ryder was featured in the famous 1913 Armory Show in New York as a progenitor of modernism, as well as the painter whom the young Jackson Pollock most admired among all his American pictorial forebears.

As for American sculpture during the later nineteenth century, it was nothing if not prolific, especially in public commissions. The expanding economy led to innumerable sculptural monuments and architectural decorations, though these mostly followed the academic traditions of Rome or Paris. **Augustus Saint-Gaudens** (1848–1907)



**2.53** Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlight Marine*, c. 1890s. Oil on panel, 11 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 12" (28.9 × 30.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**2.54** Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Adams Memorial*, 1886–91. Bronze and granite, height 70" (177.8 cm). Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington, D.C.

received academic training in New York, Paris, and Rome, though, contrary to most nineteenth-century academic sculptors, European or American, he took fresh inspiration from sculptures of the Renaissance, notably those of Donatello. By infusing the classical tradition with his own brand of naturalism, Saint-Gaudens produced a number of first-rate portraits and could enliven the most banal of commemorative or allegorical sculptural monuments. But the request he received from the author Henry Adams to create a memorial to his late wife, who had committed suicide, presented challenges quite apart from the usual equestrian statue or portrait made from life (fig. 2.54). The sculptor's inspired solution, stimulated by Adams's interest in Buddhism, was an austere, mysteriously draped figure that seems to personify a state of spiritual withdrawal from the physical world. With eyes downcast and a face shrouded in shadow, the sculpture constitutes an unforgettable image of eternal repose.

