

Daumier Biography



Etienne Carjat, French, 1828-1906
Portrait of Honoré Daumier, 1862

The French artist Honoré Daumier was a superb draftsman with a masterful ability to convey human emotion through quick yet subtle strokes of the lithographer's crayon. Daumier portrayed the events of ordinary, everyday life, indicating his deep respect for humanity and exhibiting his skills as a satirist.

Daumier was born in Marseilles, France, in 1808, but moved with his family to Paris in 1816. Under the guidance of Alexandre Lenoir, a family friend and director of the Musée des Monuments Français, he learned the basics of drawing. In 1825 Daumier studied lithography—the new, mass-media printing technique—with the printer Zéphirin Belliard. In 1828 Daumier published his first lithograph and two years later joined the staff of the political-satire journal *La caricature*, under newspaper impresario Charles Philipon. By 1835 Daumier had become one of the most feared and respected political cartoonists in France.

In the mid-nineteenth century France was in political and social upheaval, and Paris was racked by numerous revolutions. In 1830 revolt brought down King Charles X and brought to power the "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe. A year later, Parisians were already disillusioned by the new king's ignorance and corruption. Daumier created *Gargantua*, a lithograph depicting the king as a corpulent giant feeding upon the riches of his people. Because of this cartoon, Daumier was charged with sedition and sentenced to six months in prison. When he was released, he feared for his safety and focused his wit and satire on the bourgeoisie. His lithographs featured a cast of characters including businessmen, lawyers, doctors, professors, and the middle class. When *La caricature* was banned in 1835, Daumier continued to create political cartoons for Philipon's daily paper, *Le charivari*, first published in 1832. Also at this time, Daumier turned to the plight of the poor for his subject matter. He was an ardent advocate for social reform and used his artistic skill as a means of social protest.

From 1830 until 1847, Daumier was primarily a lithographer. Around 1848 he began to focus on painting, while at the same time continuing to create lithographs. Although painting was his

passion, his income came from his caricatures. The only exhibition of his work held during his lifetime was in 1878, less than a year before his death, and, unfortunately, it was a complete failure.

Toward the end of his life, Daumier was poverty-stricken and nearly blind. When he could not afford to pay his rent in Valmondois, located on the outskirts of Paris, his close friend of many years, the artist Camille Corot, secretly bought the house and then presented it to his friend as a gift. Daumier died in 1879 and was buried at public expense. A year later his body was moved to the Cemetery of Père Lachaise beside the grave of Corot, who had died four years earlier.

- The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

<http://www.phillipscollection.org/documents/education/HonoreDaumier.pdf>