

DAUMIER REVEALS ALL:
Inside the Artist's Studio

In 1901, Gustave Geffroy began his admiring review of an exhibition of work by Honoré Daumier (18018-1879), held at the École des Beaux-Arts, with a description of the artist's studio at 9 Quai d'Anjou. This space was Daumier's primary residence from about 1846-1860, the period during which Daumier was most active as a caricaturist for the satirical journal *Le Charivari*. Geffroy described for the reader the experience of walking through the yellow door and coming upon the narrow, tiled windows to the right overlooking the Île Saint-Louis. Gazing through these vistas onto "the living world of Daumier's work"—the horses, running children, women sitting on the riverbanks, criminals, washerwomen, bourgeoisie—Geffroy cast Daumier's studio as prismatic, a space through which a discovery of the outside world happened from within.

Yet, in over 60 lithographs, Daumier turned his back to the window, instead using for source material the very space within which he worked. Popular since the Renaissance, depictions of the studio typically emphasized the artist's brooding mind, a place of Romantic imagining, individual melancholia, or an eroticized, Bohemian Salon. Instead, in his caricatures, Daumier unmasked such stereotypes, in order to reveal the trials of his occupation and that of his colleagues. Intended to humor and entertain, Daumier's lithographs of the artist at work are revealing of the artist's everyday routines, as well as his career ups and downs, as played out in his studio.

Monsieur Daumier, votre sérié... est... charmante...

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Monsieur Daumier, your Robert-Macaire series is delightful. It's an exact picture of the thieves of our period... the faithful portrait of innumerable crooked characters one finds everywhere - in business, in politics, in bureaucracy, in finance, everywhere! everywhere! The scoundrels must bear you quite a grudge... But you have the esteem of honest people... You haven't been given the Cross of Honor yet?... That's really shocking!

This lithograph depicts the fictional scoundrel Robert Macaire, made popular by Daumier and his publisher, Charles Philipon, through serial publication in *Le Charivari* from 1836-1838. Here Macaire bombastically interrupts an artist who sits at his lithography desk drawing directly onto a stone. Although the caption is addressed to “Monsieur Daumier,” the artist’s face appears more akin to Philipon, perhaps a reference to their collaboration. Nevertheless, while the background elements—the casts, sketches, easel, and palette—exhibit Daumier’s activity in painting and sculpture, the artist’s incredulous expression confronted by the touting Macaire suggests his weariness of unscrupulous art patronage.

Quand on a brûlé son dernier cheval!

Published in *Le Charivari* on February 8, 1845

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.511

When the last easel has been burned!

Part of a larger body of seasonal caricatures, Daumier here depicts the theme of the artist’s winter hardship with special sensitivity. Forced to burn their canvases in order to stay warm, two impoverished artists hop in an awkward dance in order to fight the brutal cold, making their poverty more somber and pathetic.

The pear shaped head on the wall behind them is a reference to Louis Philippe, as depicted in caricatures by Philipon and Daumier in the 1830s. This allusion suggests the artists’ leftist political leanings, and functions as a criticism of the state’s insufficient support of independent artists.

Le premier portrait payé

Published in *Le Charivari* on June 18, 1844

Gift of Albert and Dana Broccoli, 1985.48.2537

The First Paid Portrait. I think it will be nice...quite nice actually...I think we will be satisfied...above all I was trying to get Monsieur's Greek nose right!

For many artists, portrait commissions were an economic necessity. Daumier here depicts the young artist who has just secured his first paid portrait, squinting hard at his patron in order to ensure that both will be satisfied—the bourgeois sitter, with his likeness, and the artist, with the size of his commission. However, Daumier lampoons the artist, who struggles between fidelity and flattery, incapable of idealizing his caricatured sitter’s bulbous nose into a formulaic, classical “Greek nose.”

Seule manière de faire poser un enfant avec fruit

Published in *Le Charivari* on August 24, 1847

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.597

The only way to make a child pose: with fruit.

In contrast to the earlier ideal of the artist as a learned gentleman patronized by the cultural elite as perpetuated by the French Academy, the nineteenth-century independent artist had to deal with the vastly different tastes of new art patrons: the increasingly affluent bourgeoisie. In several lithographs throughout the 1840s and 50s, Daumier dealt with their eagerness and pride in having their portraits made, while simultaneously revealing the genre as entirely constructed. Here the disgruntled artist waits to resume his depiction of the patron's child, presumably sweet-seeming in his portrait, but in reality, a brat requiring tasty bribes.

Mais si, ma femme...monsieur dessine un paysage...

Published in *Le Charivari* on November 13, 1846

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.574

But of course my dear, I can assure you, Monsieur is painting a landscape... isn't that so, Monsieur? You are painting a landscape?

Not all artists' studios were constrained by walls. During the middle of the century, new paint technologies allowed greater freedom to landscape artists, such as the Barbizon school of painters with whom Daumier was closely affiliated, wishing to work out of doors. However, visitors from Paris arriving by steam train could interrupt their artistic tranquility, as evidenced in this lithograph. Here, a pretentious middle-class man, assuming the position of the scrutinizing art amateur, asks the obvious question as to what the artist renders. The artist clearly loathes the fact that he and his work have become tourist attractions.

Madame, j'ai bien l'honneur!...

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Published in *Le Charivari* on January 26, 1848

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.634

Madame, I have the honor.

In depicting the use of sculptural models in the artist's studio, Daumier reveals the awkwardness and artificiality of history painting (Daumier himself studied in the studio of Alexandre Lenoir (1761-1839), and was taught to draw by copying plaster casts made from Greek and Roman sculpture). In this lithograph, Daumier pokes fun at the inexperienced viewer's confusion over pictorial and real space. Bowing courteously to a statue dressed *à l'antique* for a large history painting, the well-dressed bourgeois visitor confuses the subject of the painting with the modeled figure, thereby naïvely dispelling the mystique of history painting.

L'artiste – voilà qui est terminé!...

Published in *Le Charivari* on April 20, 1852

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.986

The Artist: -There now, it's finished....

The Bourgeois: -It still provokes a strange feeling in me to see myself like that in clay...

Although an ancient practice, the making of death masks experienced revitalization in the nineteenth century, as portraits became the favored genre of the bourgeoisie. Molded directly from the deceased's face with wax or plaster, the mask was assumed to be the portrait *par excellence*, a direct transcription of the subject's features. While lampooning the wide-eyed patron disconcerted by the uncanny resemblance, Daumier also sympathizes with the resigned artist who has had to trade in his skills (evidenced by the traditional portrait bust in the background) due to a faddish notion that the exactitude of death masks captured a sitter's qualities more accurately than could be achieved freehand, by the artist.

Le Distrain

Published in *Le Charivari* on May 5, 1841

Gift of Albert and Dana Broccoli, 1985.48.2504

The Absent-Minded. This artist, after having been to the Salon, is seized by a sublime inspiration and approaches his canvas. All of a sudden there are tones of music, the most piquant effect, the most delicate touch

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promising a masterpiece. Two, three, four hours later and something as appealing as a Titian, Michelangelo is left to posterity...Afterwards, once his excitement has subsided, he realizes...he had forgotten to use the brush.

As a type, the Bohemian artist shunned creature comforts, alienating himself from the real world and over indulging in fantasy. With face and arm tensed, this old, but well-dressed artist is plunged into reverie about the masterpiece he will create. Yet, after a period of imaginative intoxication, his ambitions remain unrealized—he, in fact, does not even hold his brush in his hand! Although Daumier respected the Romantic imagination, he here targets its deceptive and paralyzing aspects.

La Dame qui cultive les arts

Published in *Le Charivari* on April 5, 1846

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.427

A lady who devotes herself to the arts.

The Gentlemen in Chorus: It's charming..... It's charming..... It's chaaaaarming.....

In series such as *Les Bas Bleus* (in English, Blue Stockings), Daumier ridiculed the feminist movement and maligned women for their artistic, literary, and political aspirations at the expense of their domestic responsibilities. In this sarcastic image, Daumier depicts a female artist proudly showing off her work to two male onlookers, who parrot praise for the painting, despite the incredulous looks on their faces.

La dernière semaine avant l'ouverture du salon...

Published in *Le Charivari* on May 9, 1857

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.1322

The week before the opening of the art exhibition.

Chorus: Courage, let's finish the work! That's what friends are here for.

The Salon, the annual art exhibition held in Paris that attracted visitors from all over the world, was of paramount importance to artists who lacked financial support or recognition and needed official exposure. The frantic collaboration of three artists trying to finish a large history painting by the Salon deadline comments on the desperation and camaraderie that the Salon inspired. However, their group activity also evokes a sense of mass production and raises questions about creative individuality and authenticity, particularly in such monumental paintings.

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M. Prudhomme visitant les ateliers...

Published in *Le Charivari* on March 20, 1855

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.1212

Monsieur Prudhomme pays a visit to the studio before the opening of the exhibition. - I may be wrong.... but isn't this a landscape?.... charming, absolutely charming.... had I taken up the profession of a painter, I would have painted landscapes only. It's by far more decent, but why does the sun have so few beams?

- It is the moon, Monsieur.

- Of course, charming, charming. At last, these are the kind of paintings one may also show to the ladies.

In this lithograph, Daumier spoofs the iconographic tradition of the visitor to the artist's studio, derived from the legend of Alexander the Great visiting Apelles' studio as a tribute of success. Monsieur Prudhomme, Daumier's stock character representing the antithesis of the refined and supportive patron, stands in evaluation of the artist's work, harshly criticizing its dim lighting. The artist plainly corrects Prudhomme's mistaken interpretation, who then embarrassingly deflects his self-endowed responsibilities for evaluating the painting to female viewers, to whom he now believes this romantic work would appeal.

Vue prise dans un atelier...

Published in *Le Charivari* on May 4, 1855

Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.1219

View taken in a studio a few days before the opening of the exhibition.

This lithograph makes clear the feelings of frustration and anger experienced by artists in response to Salon rejection, indicated by the giant "Refusé" prominently stamped on the back of a canvas. For many artists, the Salon was the only opportunity to present their work to the greater public in the hope of securing sales and future commissions. In response to the tightening Salon restrictions and increasingly conservative juries, many artists opened their own exhibitions outside of the official venues, sometimes, as was the case for Horace Vernet (1789-1863) and Ary Scheffer (1795-1858), in their own studios.

Marche triomphale!...

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Gift of Robert M. Light, 2010.51.1218

Triumphal March!

In 1855, the annual Salon was held in conjunction with the Universal Exposition, for which the Palais des Beaux-Arts was built in order to host the increased entries. In contrast to the downtrodden working-class painters who carry their works mule-like, a confident top-hatted entrant strides forward like Winged Victory. Based on the idiosyncratic beard and miniature canvases, this artist is thought to represent Ernest Meissonier (1815-1891), a contemporary of Daumier famous for his small, finely detailed historical genre paintings, who exhibited at the Salons of 1852, 1855, and 1857.