

Comments on the Art Market

B Y R E H S G A L L E R I E S

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Upcoming Fairs/Shows in July

Please let us know if you want to attend one, two, or all three of our upcoming fairs/shows as soon as possible. We receive limited free tickets for both the Newport and Nantucket shows.

Up First

Hamptons Fine Art Fair

We have less than two weeks until the opening of the Hamptons Fine Art Fair. The show runs from July 11 – 14 at the Southampton Fair Ground. Rehs Contemporary Galleries will feature a wide array of fabulous works by their living artists. We are pleased to announce that several new paintings by Gail Descoeurs, Lucia Heffernan, Stuart Dunkel, Mark Lague, and others will be on display. We will even sprinkle in two or three traditional works of art.

If you want to attend the fair, please contact us for complimentary VIP tickets.

Then

The Newport Show

Just two weeks later, both Rehs Galleries and Rehs Contemporary Galleries will participate in The Newport Show, which runs from July 28 to 28 at the St. George's School.

We are very pleased to announce that Stuart Dunkel will attend on opening night and all day Saturday. Attendees can watch Stuart at work, creating some of his most desirable works of art. We have limited complimentary tickets, so please let us know ASAP if you would like to attend either Saturday or Sunday.

Finally

The Nantucket Show

Finally, during the second week of August, both galleries will exhibit a wide range of contemporary and historical works of art at The Nantucket Show. This show will run from August 9 to 12 and will be at a new location: Bartlett's Farm.

Stocks & Crypto

Somehow, we're already halfway through the year, and the markets are all in the green... I'll be the first to admit I did not expect this. And not only did I not expect this, but I'm not even sure it is appropriate – does it seem like the economy is performing well enough to be brandishing seismic returns like 14.5% via the S&P 500 or 17.5% via the NASDAQ?? Granted, the Dow has only generated a 3.7% return in the calendar year, but still, this seems a bit crazy. Wall Street has truly brushed off the concerns of a recession and plowed ahead, setting all-time highs along the way. It's worth noting that this market rally seems to be heavily driven by tech stocks, specifically those who deal in the world of AI. Before we move on, I need to update you guys on the automated trading tool I started using, Autopilot... this past month, it has generated a total return of 4.4%, more than the S&P at 2.9% and the Nasdaq at 4.1%. Astonishingly, the tracker that mimics Nanci Pelosi's trades netted a 9.1% return, while Tommy Tuberville lost me 5.1% (I have \$2,000 invested in Pelosi's picks and \$1,000 in Tuberville, which explains the overall return).

When it comes to currencies and commodities, both the Euro and Pound weakened relative to the Dollar this month... the Euro by 0.8% and the Pound by 0.4%; zooming out to the YTD, the Euro is down nearly 3.25%, while the Pound is down just .7%. Gold remained relatively unchanged for the month, with a .26% decline, but it's been on an absolute tear this year – up 13.3%. That may not sound so astronomical, but we're talking about an asset that is supposed to embody stability. Crude is up over 4.5% this past month and about 13.7% on the year.

Crypto had a down month... Bitcoin shed just shy of 10% through June, yet still is up more than 44% on the year! Similarly, Ethereum gave up almost 10% for the month but has turned in a 48% gain on the year! Litecoin is the odd man out... down nearly 12% in June, and essentially even on the year – to be exact, it is up 0.22%. I guess that's still better than a loss.

Who knows where we go from here... from what I'm reading, analysts expect the 'new records' to continue. I'll just be here hoping they're right, even if I don't see it.

Really!?

Star Wars Boba Fett Figure Shatters Record



Boba Fett

A few years ago, I covered the sale of [a rare Boba Fett Star Wars action figure](#) that fetched a jaw-dropping \$236,000. Recently, another elusive Boba Fett figure has emerged at auction and shattered that previous record, becoming the most valuable vintage toy sold at auction.

Boba Fett, the mysterious Mandalorian bounty hunter from the Star Wars saga, has held a dedicated fanbase since his introduction to the franchise. While he made his first appearance in the much-maligned 1978 [Star Wars Holiday Special](#), the 1980 film *The Empire Strikes Back* is really where the Boba Fett fandom began.

Renowned for his sleek Mandalorian armor and lethal skills, he swiftly became a fan favorite despite his brief appearance. He played a pivotal role in the original trilogy, initially recruited by Darth Vader to hunt down Han Solo and Princess Leia. His dramatic demise occurs in *Return of the Jedi* (1983), when Solo causes his jetpack to malfunction, and he falls into the Sarlacc Pit to be devoured. However, the

recent live-action Star Wars television shows indicate that this was not the complete end of Boba Fett's story.

At the recent auction, the Rocket-Firing Boba Fett action figure fetched an astonishing \$525,000, captivating collectors worldwide. This remarkable price underscores the pristine condition of the action figure, sought after for its rare "rocket-firing" feature despite never passing safety tests. Only two hand-painted prototypes produced by Kenner in 1979 exist today, making this piece a priceless relic of Star Wars merchandise. Its journey from obscurity to fame began with a Kenner employee's foresight, who rescued it from a box of discarded toys, recognizing its potential value and ensuring its legacy.

The Dark Side

Houston Museum Keeps Nazi Loot



Marketplace at Pirna by Bernardo Bellotto

One of the first stories I ever covered back in 2021 was about an eighteenth-century cityscape [central to a heated restitution dispute](#). *Marketplace at Pirna* by the Venetian painter Bernardo Bellotto is currently housed at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the administration of which has been fighting in the courts against the claims made by the descendants of Max Emden. Emden was a German Jewish department store owner who sold his three Bellotto paintings under duress during the Holocaust. And now, a recent court decision has created a roadblock as the family attempts to regain the painting.

The panel of three judges at the Fifth Circuit's Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that the MFA is allowed to keep the Bellotto painting, but not because of the validity of its legal argument. This is mainly due to a technicality. One of the reasons why the Bellotto ended up in Houston in the first place is because it got mixed-up with another painting in the havoc and confusion following the end of the Second World War. After the war, the agents of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section Unit, commonly known as the Monuments Men, confiscated several of the Emden family's paintings from Nazi hiding places. Most were returned to the family in 2019 after a commission determined Emden sold them involuntarily. *Marketplace at Pirna*, however, was not one of these paintings. The Bellotto had been mistaken for a later copy, previously owned by the Moser family from the Netherlands, and the Monuments Men gave it to the Dutch Art Property Foundation (SNK). They, in turn, gave it to the Mosers. The Mosers sold the painting to a buyer in the United States in 1952, who later donated it to the MFA Houston in 1961.

The appellate court upheld the lower courts' decisions by ruling that even though the case's root lies in a mistake, that mistake was, regardless, made by a foreign government. In what is known as the act-of-state doctrine, American courts cannot rule on an act by a foreign state within their own territory. Therefore, the court cannot act in favor of the Emden family's claim. Judge Jerry E. Smith wrote in the ruling, "The Emdens may be right: [...] the Museum may be violating the Washington Principles by refusing to return the painting to the Emdens. But, per the act of state doctrine, it is not our job to call into question the decisions of foreign nations." In short, MFA Houston can keep the painting, even if their ownership is because someone made a clerical error nearly eighty years ago.

The court did not rule on who the painting's rightful owner is, admitting that legal precedent has their hands tied. This is despite the fact that *Marketplace at Pirna* should, by any other standard, be returned to the Emden family. Of course, this could all be solved with MFA Houston returning the painting to the Emden family voluntarily instead of needlessly drawing out these legal battles, which will only shine a spotlight on the museum administration's obstinance. Publications like *ArtNet* call MFA Houston's approach [the "head-in-the-sand" position](#). Despite the criticism and the documentary evidence, the museum's website completely omits the Emden family from the painting's provenance. [The painting's webpage](#) says that the work's first recorded appearance is at the Monuments Men's collecting point in Munich. Prior to that, it simply reads, "Early whereabouts unknown." As I wrote in 2021, "By denying the Emden family's claim, even after the questionable circumstances of the work's sale were revealed, the museum is essentially stealing the painting a second time. And if the restitution went underway, would it really be such a great loss?" After three years, these words still apply.

This Past Week In Art World Lawsuits

These past few days, the art world has been abuzz with lawsuits, with those involved ranging from museums, auction houses, art schools, and proper criminals.

OMA Responds to Former Director's Countersuit



Untitled (Self-Portrait or Crown Face II), one of the Basquiat forgeries seized from the Orlando Museum of Art

On Monday, June 3rd, the Orlando Museum of Art (OMA) [finally responded to the countersuit](#) brought against them by its former director, Aaron de Groft. OMA initially fired and sued De Groft after the FBI [raided the museum](#) during an exhibition featuring twenty-five newly discovered works by Jean-Michel Basquiat. The works were seized since they are likely all forgeries. Evidence suggests that De Groft probably knew that the Basquiats were fakes and that he had conspired with the paintings' owners to get a cut of the profits from any future sale in exchange for the authentications. Though he denies it, De Groft has a history of [making miraculous rediscoveries from which he has tried to profit](#). Despite [filing his countersuit in November 2023](#), the museum has finally responded. In a recent court document, the museum states it "denies it committed any of the unlawful actions alleged in the Amended Counterclaim and denies De Groft is entitled to any of the relief sought". The parties involved have opted for a jury trial scheduled for October 2025.

Lawsuit Brought Against Christie's Over Cyberattack

On June 5th, two days after OMA responded to De Groft's counterclaim, Christie's was hit with a lawsuit over their handling of the cyberattack that forced them to shut down their website last month. We now know that the hacker group RansomHub [launched a cyberattack against the auction house on May 9th](#), shortly before [the May Marquee sales](#) in New York. Consequently, the auction house shut down its website for ten days. The auctions continued as planned, with viewers able to watch via live stream on the Christie's YouTube page instead of through Christie's Live. RansomHub claimed responsibility for the attack on May 27th, and Christie's emailed clients on May 30th explaining the situation. In the email, the company reassured clients that the attack had not compromised any financial data. This recent lawsuit alleges that while financial data was kept safe, personal information was still breached. It is estimated that the cyberattack compromised information on nearly 500,000 clients.

The lawsuit claims the cyberattack was made possible because of the "failure to implement adequate and reasonable cyber-security procedures and protocols necessary to protect consumers' [personally identifiable information] from a foreseeable and preventable cyberattack". While the lawsuit is a class action, the only member of the class now identified is Efsthathios Maroulis, a business executive based out of Dallas. The kind of data compromised in the cyber attack, known as personally identifiable information (PII), is a hot commodity on the dark web for identity theft. Maroulis has his own angle on the situation, though. The companies he's involved with are primarily digital marketing, meaning that, to do his job, his company buys personal data from data brokers to craft targeted marketing for specific demographics. His lawsuit complains that the data of those affected by the cyberattack is now worth less than before, allowing more companies to purchase this data for marketing purposes. He is asking for damages, payment of legal fees, and a court order to force Christie's to implement the necessary updates to better protect client information. Judge Jesse Furman of the Southern District of New York scheduled a pre-trial conference for September 10.

Another Guilty Plea in Morrisseau Forgery Trial

Other developments from the past week include the trial of a forgery ring that [produced fakes in the style of the indigenous Canadian artist Norval Morrisseau](#). The group's alleged leader, Gary Lamont, has already pleaded guilty in December to charges of forgery, making false statements, and defrauding the public. But now, [another of the ringleaders has done the same](#). David Voss is the one who directly oversaw the production of the Morrisseau forgeries and has now pleaded guilty to the charges associated with his illicit activities. Efforts are still underway in identifying the hundreds of forgeries the group produced and sold. The Canadian Conservation Institute, however, has found that the best way to spot a fake is by scanning the work to see if there is a preliminary drawing in pencil beneath the paint. This is one of the best ways to determine that the painting was done by the forgery ring and not Morrisseau himself.



A forgery attributed to Norval Morrisseau
(photo courtesy of the Ontario Provincial Police)

Case Dismissed in Van Gogh Restitution

With the Houston Museum of Fine Art [winning its legal battle to keep a Nazi-looted Bernardo Bellotto painting](#), there was another defeat for restitution advocates this week. A federal court has dismissed a lawsuit brought by the descendants of the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy family against the Japanese company Sompō Holdings. Due to the pressures of Nazi Aryanization laws, the family, once some of the most prominent bankers in Germany, sold their art collection under duress, [including the Van Gogh painting *Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers*](#). The family claims that when Sompō Holdings bought *Sunflowers* at auction in 1987, the company was fully aware of the painting's problematic provenance yet went ahead with the purchase anyway. The painting has since been permanently displayed in Tokyo at Sompō's museum. Despite this, the courts say that they have no jurisdiction in this matter. The Mendelssohn-Bartholdy family has not indicated if they will continue their legal battles in Japan.

UArts Closure Sparks Lawsuit



The University of the Arts, Philadelphia
(photo courtesy of Ajay Suresh)

Finally, the most recent news: Philadelphia's University of the Arts faces a lawsuit [following its abrupt closure](#) last week. Given the suspicious circumstances under which the school announced its closure, there were bound to be calls for an investigation. Appropriately, a class action lawsuit was brought against the school by nine employees, including professors and department heads. As I pointed out when I first covered the story, UArts' choosing not to tell their staff and student body about the school shutting down until the last minute might get them into legal trouble. Specifically, a company with over one hundred employees is legally obligated to give their staff sixty days' notice in advance of any mass layoffs or closures in accordance with the Worker Adjustment and Retraining

Notification Act. The plaintiffs also accuse the school of withholding wages. Eric Lechtzin, an attorney representing the former staff members, described the school's decisions as "incomprehensible", and that the situation "reflects a complete failure of leadership". On June 7, Pennsylvania Attorney General Michelle Henry announced her office would investigate the events surrounding UArts's closure. Both the Philadelphia City Council and state lawmakers are organizing hearings, initiating investigations of their own through committees.

Géricault's Horses Stirs Up Controversy

Why is a French museum sparking controversy with its ongoing exhibition of horse paintings by the Romantic master Théodore Géricault?

The Musée de la Vie Romantique is one of Paris's many small museums. Located at the base of the hill of Montmartre in the 9th arrondissement, it is dedicated to the Romantic era, with its permanent collection featuring all sorts of artworks, documents, jewelry, and other memorabilia related to the era's painters, sculptors, composers, and literary figures. Since opening as a museum in 1982, it has hosted exhibitions dedicated to all aspects of the Romantic period, focusing on figures like Frédéric Chopin and William Blake. Its current exhibit, which opened last month, is dedicated to the French painter Théodore Géricault to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of his death. Though best known for his 1819 painting [The Raft of Medusa](#), Géricault covered many subjects in his short but impactful career. One of his most prolific subjects was horses. As a student during the Napoleonic era, he often traveled to Versailles, where he spent time in the palace stables to make studies and drawings of the horses there. During his career, he painted horses [on their own](#), [at the races](#), and [in their military capacity](#). The Musée de la Vie Romantique has centered its entire exhibition on Géricault's horse paintings. However, the museum is receiving much criticism from the scholarly and curatorial community because not all the paintings are verified Géricault paintings.



Cheval arabe gris-blanc by Théodore Géricault

Some of the ninety-seven paintings in *Géricault's Horses* have widely accepted positive attributions. These include paintings on loan from the Louvre, the Rouen Musée des Beaux-Arts, and the Lille Palais des Beaux-Arts. However, the museum has included loans from private collections, making up about a third of the exhibition. None of these paintings are included in any of the three catalogue raisonnés. Furthermore, [The Art Newspaper reports](#) that only half the works in the entire catalogue have the provenance and other documents required to positively and definitively attribute them to Géricault. Philippe Grunhech, one of the foremost Géricault experts, claims that the rest "are all copies, generally of low quality, inspired by the artist's paintings or engravings".

The art dealer Jane Roberts stated they were just “a bunch of unknown daubs”, and French art journalist Didier Rykner called them “mediocre”.

While this can be blamed on sloppy scholarship or overlooked details, there is evidence that the museum may have intentionally attributed works to Géricault despite the lack of evidence. About six of the paintings in *Géricault's Horses* were all sold at auction while attributed to “follower of”, “circle of”, or “in the manner of” Géricault rather than the artist himself. There are even works indisputably attributed to other artists that have gotten the same treatment. For example, [a sketch by Géricault's contemporary Léon Cogniet](#) on loan from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Orléans is attributed to Géricault in the exhibition catalogue. The Musée de la Vie Romantique has therefore altered the attribution to either elevate them to full-fledged positive attribution, or to change the attribution entirely.

Some museum directors and curators have strongly criticized *Géricault's Horses* for this, calling it “shameful” and “a real disaster”. Daniel Marchesseau, the museum's former director, penned a letter to the exhibition's organizers, director Gaëlle Rio and art historian Bruno Chenique, saying that this mismanagement is “destroying the museum's reputation”. [Writing for Le Monde](#), Roxanne Azimi writes that studying and authenticating a work of art has a good amount of subjectivity, but that doesn't mean attributions should be thrown around carelessly. “In the absence of bibliographical references or tangible elements of provenance, however, caution prevails.” A true Géricault should languish in scholarly uncertainty because of genuine doubts rather than a student's or copyist's work be hastily given the full attribution of the master.

While some museum officials have offered explanations, citing the museum's small size and limited resources, they seem to overlook a crucial point. The Musée de la Vie Romantique is not just any museum, it is a public institution funded by the city of Paris. It is also part of the Paris Musées, which oversees fourteen museums, including the Victor Hugo House, the Petit Palais, and the Paris Catacombs. These other museums may not be the Louvre, but they have, in the past, demonstrated their commitment to maintaining high standards. They have diligently prepared exhibitions and published scholarly works and catalogues that continue to be used as references among art historians today. It is uncertain whether this scandal will cause any changes in leadership at the museum, though that eventual outcome would not be unsurprising.

Fake Modigliani Confiscated



The confiscated drawing in the style of Amedeo Modigliani

Italian authorities have confiscated a fake Modigliani drawing after its owner applied for an export license to sell it abroad.

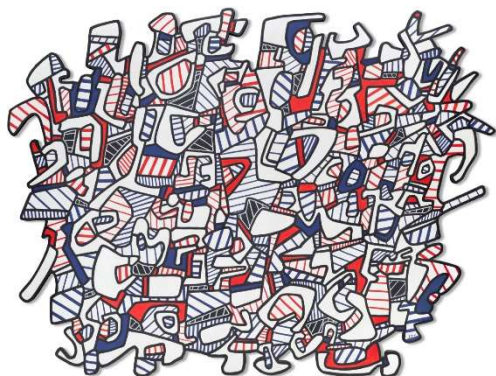
An untitled drawing, supposedly created in 1913 by Amedeo Modigliani, was seized by the Carabinieri's Cultural Heritage Protection Unit in Venice. The work's owner applied for an export license in 2022, putting its estimated value at €300,000. This indicates that they likely had plans to sell the drawing outside of Italy, and how it appeared on the authorities' radar. Modigliani is one of the more popular artists among forgers and counterfeiters, with fakes constantly popping up on the market. Some estimate that 70% of Modigliani works available today are copies, forgeries, fakes, or otherwise inauthentic. His unique style and high auction prices are likely factors in this. Sadly, Modigliani never kept records of his work, leaving a large hole in the documentary evidence about the artist's oeuvre. Art dealers and specialists, therefore, heavily rely on the artist's catalogue raisonné, compiled by Ambrogio Ceroni in 1958. However, verified Modigliani works have come to light in the more than sixty-five years since its publication, making Ceroni's catalogue raisonné seem incomplete. Regardless, it's still the best resource available to dealers and auction houses for authentication.

The confiscated drawing appears to have been a rough replica of a known Modigliani drawing from his *Caryatid* series between 1912 and 1914. These works are distinctive female nudes, always depicted with their arms raised. They are named and modeled after [the classical architectural component of the same name](#), which is a sculpture of a woman serving as a column. Modigliani, primarily known as a painter, was influenced by his friend Constantin Brâncuși and began to experiment with sculpture. These caryatid drawings were preliminary sketches for a sculpture series, of which [only one was completed](#). He referred to them as “columns of tenderness” designed to support a “temple of beauty”. The original Modigliani drawing, upon which the forgery is based, has been part of [the Philadelphia Museum of Art's collection since 1943](#). The fake is a simple pencil on paper, while the original was crafted with a distinctive blue crayon. The Carabinieri traced the forgery's ownership back to a gallery in Abruzzo, which was selling the work on behalf of a man who claimed to have inherited it from his adoptive father.

The authorities, in a meticulous process, sought the expertise of several Italian cultural institutions, including the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice, Rome's State Museums Directorate, the Università Roma Tre, and Pisa's Scuola Normale Superiore, to ascertain the work's authenticity. The drawing was officially declared a fake in January 2023, prompting the Carabinieri to initiate a criminal investigation into the forgery. However, it was not until February of this year that a court in Venice officially seized the drawing and sent it to Rome for further in-depth analysis.

The Art Market

Christie's Controversy Over Renault Auction



Lice tapissé by Jean Dubuffet

On Thursday, June 6th, Christie's Paris hosted a small sale featuring a collection of twentieth-century artworks owned by the French auto manufacturer Renault. The company began building its collection in 1967, reaching out to artists to buy and commission pieces for the benefit of their employees. This collection includes significant works by renowned artists such as Roberto Matta, Jean Dubuffet, Joan Miró, and Robert Rauschenberg. These artists were all persuaded to include their work in the Renault collection because of the company's policy that it would preserve the collection indefinitely; that once it was part of the collection, the company would not sell it. Rather, it would be displayed at Renault offices for the benefit of the employees, not to mention the general public, when the company would loan some of these pieces to museums for exhibitions.

Renault stopped buying art for the collection in 1986. Despite the initial promise to keep everything together in the company collection, Renault consigned sixty-two works to Christie's out of the 550 total pieces. According to the company, the proceeds from the sale will go towards a new cultural endowment; allowing them to buy works from contemporary artists, focusing on street art. This plan has received serious opposition.

On May 28th, the French newspaper *Le Monde* [published a letter from the estates of several artists](#), expressing that they “categorically oppose the dispersal of a significant part of this collection”. They argue that by acting in violation of the conditions under which the artists initially agreed to contribute works to the collection, the company is, in their view, “completely betraying its commitment to artists”. In addition, Delphine Renard, daughter of the collection's originator, Renault senior executive Claude Renard, spoke to the newspaper *Le Figaro*, saying that the sale “distorts and disfigures a unique ensemble”. This personal perspective from the artists and their families adds a human element to the issue, making it more than just a business decision.

The group of works were actually offered in two sales – one on Thursday and the other on Friday. The Thursday sale offered thirty-two lots by various artists, mostly European but also American and Venezuelan. It was a resounding success, with twenty-two lots (69%) selling over their estimates. Seven of these lots sold for more than double their high estimate, including [EOS XII](#), an example of *sculpture cinétique*, or kinetic sculpture, by the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely (est. €50K to €70K; hammer €320K). All three top lots were works by the French artist Jean Dubuffet. In fact, half of the top ten lots featured in the sale were paintings by Dubuffet, mainly created in the early 1970s. Two of the three top lots consisted of vinyl paint on canvas, while the number one lot, *Lice tapissé*, was made with acrylic paint on an irregularly shaped piece of Klegecell, a PVC-based foam. *Lice tapissé* just squeaked by to sell within its €1 million to €1.5 million estimate range, with the hammer coming down at €1.1 million / \$1.19 million (or €1.37 million / \$1.49 million w/p). The other two Dubuffet paintings, *Paysage avec villa et personnage* (est. €700K to €900K) and *Le Moment critique* (est. €600K to €800K), surpassed their high estimates, selling for €1.04 million and €850K, respectively. Because of the number of lots that not only sold over estimate but exponentially so, the thirty-two lots brought in €8.35 million / \$9.1 million (or €10.48 million / \$11.4 million w/p) against a pre-sale maximum estimate of €6.37 million.

The Friday auction consisted entirely of works on paper by the Belgian-French artist Henri Michaux. Half of this sale sold below estimate, while the most valuable lot, [an untitled 1981 ink drawing](#), went for €8K / \$10.2K (or €10.1K / \$12.8K w/p). Though the Michaux works had a 100% sell-through rate, Christie's fell a mere €200 short of hitting the sale's €131K minimum estimate. It served almost like an afterthought compared with the sale the previous day.

The sale has raised serious ethical concerns. As the collection's owner, Renault has the right to decide the fate of the artworks. However, the sale seems to contradict with the original intent behind the collection's inception. In the past, museums and art foundations have been prevented from liquidating any of the works they own if such a sale runs contrary to the intent or mission of the institution. The case of Renault, being a private, corporate collection, presents new, complex ethical (and possibly legal) territory, leaving some to question the boundaries of art ownership.

The sale did incredibly well, with eleven of the twenty-three available lots selling within their estimates, giving Christie's specialists a 48% accuracy rate. An additional three lots (13%) sold below, while eight lots (35%) sold above. Only one lot, an oil on canvas painting by Le Corbusier, went unsold, giving the sale a 96% sell-through rate. In total, the sale made €9.9 million, well within its presale estimate range of €7.39 million and €11.37 million. It's important to remember that a quarter of the sale's total came from the Derain painting.

Christie's Paris Old Master Sale



Le melon entamé by Jean Siméon Chardin

Normally, there wouldn't be much to write about for the Old Masters sale at Christie's in Paris on Wednesday, June 12th. However, when looking at all the numbers, something might seem a bit confusing. Nearly 40% of the lots went unsold. Yet how did it make almost double the amount of money specialists initially expected?

The Maîtres Anciens sale on Wednesday featured thirty-seven lots, showcasing a wide variety of work, from fifteenth-century religious art to paintings by John Herring Sr. And J.A.D. Ingres. However, it was an eighteenth-century French painting that dominated, and now we see why the sale went so well. Christie's specialists describe the 1760 still-life *Le Melon entamé* by Jean Siméon Chardin as a masterpiece of the artist's late career. Chardin was one of the great French still-life painters of the eighteenth century and influenced later generations of artists like the Impressionists. The painting itself has an impressive provenance, with previous owners including Guillaume-Jean Constantin, the curator of Empress Josephine's art collection. Since 1876, it has been part of the collection of the French branch of the Rothschild family. The current

owners are the descendants of Baron Henri James Nathaniel de Rothschild, who owned the painting from 1899 to 1947. With an estimate range of €8 million to €12 million, *Le Melon entamé* was set to become one of the most valuable Chardin paintings ever sold at auction. The last time a quality work by Chardin sold at auction was at Artcurial in March 2022, when [Le panier des fraises des bois](#) sold for €24.38 million w/p. Had *Le Melon entamé* sold within its estimate, the sale would have still done well in terms of the amount of money Christie initially predicted and might have been the second most valuable work by the artist sold at auction. However, a bidding war broke out, with several buyers pushing it well past the estimate. The hammer eventually came down at €23 million / \$24.9 million (or €26.7 million / \$28.9 million w/p), making it the most expensive work by the artist sold at auction.

The rest of the sale was peanuts compared to the Chardin. However, many of the works that sold still did fairly well. In second place was *L'Odalisque* by Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, a pupil of Jacques-Louis David. Though an *odalisque* was just the term used for a chambermaid for Ottoman Turkish harems, the word in the West came to refer to the concubines themselves. Paintings of *odalisques* became rather popular among Orientalist artists in France, but they almost always served as erotic paintings. Nineteenth-century painters like [Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres](#), [Eugène Delacroix](#), [Jean-Léon Gérôme](#), and [Frederick Arthur Bridgman](#) all abided by this tradition. However, Girodet's *odalisque* breaks this standard, opting instead for an intimate portrait of a Turkish chambermaid in a patterned turban. Like the Chardin, *L'Odalisque* also sold above its estimate, becoming one of the sale's surprises. Predicted by Christie's to sell for no more than €120K, *L'Odalisque* hammered at €300K / \$324.8K (or €378K / \$409.3K w/p), or two-and-a-half times its presale high estimate.

While *L'Odalisque* immediately preceded the Chardin, the sale's third-place lot came immediately after. Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting *L'alliance de la Musique et de la Comédie* stands out among the still-lives and portraits as more allegorical. Meaning *The Alliance of Music and Comedy*, the painting looks almost like a rendering of a coat of arms, with a central escutcheon and two supporters in the form of females in Greco-Roman-style robes. The figures represent music and comedy as their classical muses, Thalia and Terpsichore. The central shield, surrounded by sheet music and instruments, contains musical notes and a theatrical mask.

Everything is topped by a man's head, likely that of the French stock character Crispin, related to the *commedia dell'arte* character Scaramouche. While mythological figures and allegories were not new subjects for the time, the themes in the painting are so specific that specialists have deduced that this was a commission from a particular client of Watteau's. The painting last sold at Sotheby's Paris in October 2022 for €480K hammer (or €604.8K w/p). This means that, though it was one of the top lots on Wednesday, it took a slight dip in value after selling for just €280K / \$303.2K (or €352.8K / \$382K w/p).

There were only a few surprises at Christie's on Wednesday, one being the Girodet painting. However, the biggest surprise to sell exponentially beyond its high estimate was the sale's very first lot. [*Personnages dans une galerie antique*](#) by Hubert Robert dates to the artist's early career in the 1760s. It shows a smattering of figures in vaguely Greco-Roman dress set against a backdrop of classical architecture. The setting does not match any specific place. Rather, Robert created this fictional structure to serve as a ruin around which people live their lives, a subject that the artist would return to frequently. Estimated to sell for no more than €60K, *Personnages dans une galerie antique* worked its way up to sell for €180K / \$194.9K (or €226.8K / \$245.6K w/p), or three times the high estimate.

With thirty-seven available lots, Christie's predicted the entire sale to bring in €14.8 million at most. The final hammer price ended up being €24.89 million / \$26.9 million (or €29.1 million / \$31.5 million w/p), or about 68% higher than expected. However, one must remember that the Chardin still life comprised 92% of the sale's total. It would have made up a large percentage of the sale's total regardless of how much it sold for. Therefore, part of the sales success relied entirely on that one painting. But while Christie's made a relatively surprising amount of money from this one sale, the other numbers are slightly more disappointing. Of the thirty-seven lots, fourteen did not generate sufficient interest to sell, giving Christie's a 62% sell-through rate. Only eight lots (22%) sold within their estimates, with an equal number selling above and seven (19%) selling below. Without the Chardin, the sale still would have done well in terms of the money it made, but that is only because of the lots that sold for greatly over their estimates, like the Girodet and the Robert.

Dutch Museum Attempting Van Gogh Acquisition

A regional Dutch museum is trying to acquire a Van Gogh painting with local significance but is failing to raise the necessary funds.

The Noordbrabants Museum in the city of 's-Hertogenbosch houses an impressive collection of Dutch and Flemish art ranging from Old Masters like Hieronymus Bosch to contemporary artists JCJ Vanderheyden. The work of Vincent van Gogh has a special place in the museum mostly because of the artist's connections to the Dutch region of North Brabant. Between 1883 and 1885, van Gogh lived in Nuenen, about 20 miles southeast of 's-Hertogenbosch. There, he created close to 200 paintings, mostly landscapes and scenes of village life, such as [*The Potato Eaters*](#) and [*Parsonage Garden at Nuenen*](#). The Noordbrabants Museum has several paintings from Van Gogh's time in Nuenen but is raising money to acquire another one. *Head of a Woman*, created between March and April 1885, is said to be a portrait of Gordina de Groot, a local peasant woman who appeared in several of his paintings, including *The Potato Eaters*. Van Gogh and De Groot shared a close friendship, to the point that some deduced that they were romantically involved with one another. When De Groot mysteriously became pregnant, many accused van Gogh of being the father. Most art historians dismiss this as just village gossip.



Head of a Woman by Vincent van Gogh

The portrait was previously in a private collection in Switzerland until February 2023, when it appeared at Christie's London 20th/21st Century Evening sale. It was predicted to sell for no more than £2 million but sold for £4 million (or £4.8 million w/p). And now, just over a year later, the anonymous buyer has put the painting back on the market with an asking price of €8.6 million. The museum has received generous donations from the Dutch government and arts organizations like the Vereniging Rembrandt and the Mondriaan Fund. However, the museum has only raised about €6 million, or only about 70% of the money necessary to acquire the work.

Jacqueline Grandjean, the Noordbrabants Museum's director, stated, "This is the last chance to acquire this important heritage for Brabant before it disappears forever behind closed doors." Grandjean went on to call the portrait of De Groot "the Mona Lisa of Brabant". The museum has now called for donations from the public, with anyone able to donate money via the museum's website. Whoever donates at least €100 will receive an invitation to a museum after-hours event and have their name put up on the website for a day. Of course, this is

a tremendous undertaking for any museum. With Van Gogh's paintings fetching enormous sums on the secondary market, a museum acquiring one for its collection requires all the help it can get.

Should the Noordbrabants Museum successfully purchase *Head of a Woman*, it would be the fifth work by Van Gogh they have acquired since 2016. In fact, the museum is the only place in the region that exhibits Van Gogh's works. The museum's ultimate plan is to organize a tour to display the painting at several local and regional museums and galleries in North Brabant.

Sotheby's London Modern & Contemporary Evening Sale

Sotheby's London hosted their Modern & Contemporary evening sale on Tuesday, June 25th, featuring paintings, drawings, and sculptures mainly by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and North American artists. The auction's top lot, predicted by Sotheby's specialists as such, was a large triptych by Jean-Michel Basquiat called *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict*. The painting caught some attention in the press mainly because of something that rarely happens to a Basquiat painting; it seems to have decreased in value, according to Sotheby's. The painting's owner consigned it to Christie's in 2022, where it would appear in their New York Contemporary Evening sale that May. However, the seller withdrew the painting shortly before the auction took place. Christie's expected it to sell more than \$30 million. Over two years later, Sotheby's reassessed its value and gave it an estimated range of £15 million to £20 million. There was no great bidding war, as it took fifteen seconds for the winning bid to come through, with forty-four seconds spent on the lot. It sold for its low estimate at £15 million / \$19 million (or £16 million / \$20.36 million w/p).



Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict by Jean-Michel Basquiat

Behind the Basquiat was one of Pablo Picasso's cubist still-lives from 1922, entitled *Guitare sur un tapis rouge*. It was previously in the collection of Walter P. Chrysler Jr., founder of the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, and son of the auto industry executive Walter Chrysler. The painting was last sold at Christie's London in 2004 for £1.8 million w/p. The Picasso started at £8 million, making its way up to £9.3 million / \$11.8 million (or £10.7 million / \$13.6 million w/p) before running out of gas and the hammer coming down, falling slightly short of its £10 million low estimate - not a bad increase over the past 20 years. Behind the Picasso was one of the several Renoir paintings featured in the sale. *Bouquet de lilas* was the first of four Renoir paintings available at Sotheby's on Tuesday, this one an 1878 floral still-life. The painting has a long history of bouncing around between galleries, dealers, and private collectors, including Georges Petit, Galerie Durand-Ruel, and Lionel Pissarro. It last sold at auction at Sotheby's New York in 1987 for \$852.5K w/p. Unlike the Basquiat and the Picasso, which sold at or slightly below their minimum estimates

relatively quickly, the Renoir attracted quite a bit of attention. Bidding started at £1.3 million, and things slowly but steadily chugged along, with the painting surpassing its high estimate after just under three minutes. After eight minutes of bidding, the Renoir sold for £5.8 million / \$7.4 million (or £6.88 million / \$8.7 million w/p).

There were not many surprises at Sotheby's, but one painting towards the end seemed to draw more attention than expected. *Autoportrait en blanc* by Françoise Gilot is a self-portrait of the artist created in 1944. The work appears to have been influenced by sculpture, which was not unusual for the time as other artists like [Jean Metzinger](#) and [Fernand Léger](#) were doing the same. Predicted to sell for no more than £150K, the Gilot brought in a steady stream of bids before selling for twice that price at £300K / \$380.4K (or £360K / \$456.4K w/p). The success of the Gilot self-portrait reminded me somewhat of a different painting by the artist that [sold at Christie's Paris in April](#). *Le Concert Champêtre* selling for €1.3 million hammer was a far more important moment than you might expect. It signaled Gilot's increasing acceptance in the European market. Most of Gilot's success came from the United States, where she moved after ending her relationship with Pablo Picasso. Though not as significant of a moment as *Le Concert Champêtre* selling in Paris, the Gilot's success in London proves that the artist's reputation in Europe is drastically improving.

Overall, Sotheby's did rather well. Of the fifty available lots on Tuesday, nineteen sold within their estimates, giving Sotheby's specialists a 38% accuracy rate. An additional sixteen (32%) sold under estimate, and eleven (22%) sold above. With only four lots failing to sell, Sotheby's achieved a 92% sell-through rate. Furthermore, the house did relatively well in terms of its total, adding up to £72 million / \$91.4 million against the low presale estimate of £69.57 million.

Deeper Thoughts

UArts Abruptly Announce Closure



The University of the Arts, Philadelphia (photo courtesy of Ajay Suresh)

On May 31st, Philadelphia's University of the Arts announced that it would be closing after more than one hundred fifty years in operation.

The University of the Arts (UArts) was founded in 1876 as the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, making it one of the oldest art schools in the country. It underwent several name changes and reorganizations, becoming known as the University of the Arts in 1987 after merging with the Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts. The school has many prominent alumni and faculty, including painters like Martha Walter and Sidney Goodman.

Over the past several years, UArts has faced the problems that many art schools now face, including insufficient funding and shrinking class sizes, with the student body decreasing by 40% since 2013. The 2022-23 freshman class amounts to only 182 students. UArts's closure comes just under six months after another prestigious Philadelphia art school, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, [announced it would be ending its degree-awarding programs next year](#). Like UArts, PAFA experienced decreasing enrollment and dwindling funds. The effects of COVID-19 and poor investment decisions also play a part in why many art schools struggle. However, at least PAFA gave its student body and faculty a fair bit of notice. UArts, on the other hand, made their announcement on May 31st, saying that the school would close on June 7th. Many students and teachers learned of the school's closure through social media and [an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer](#), as the school had not sent out an official notice yet. UArts's closure came very suddenly because grants and other donations were insufficient to adequately run the school, leading to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to revoke the school's accreditation.

The school has 1,149 students, all likely shocked, unsurprisingly. [The New York Times](#) spoke to one student who said she saw the *Philadelphia Inquirer* article less than four hours after receiving an email from the university to apply for graduation as an illustration major. An official announcement went out to the student body two hours after the *Inquirer* article's publication. The email read, "The situation came to light very suddenly. Despite swift action, we were unable to bridge the necessary gaps." On Monday, June 3rd, the school hosted a town hall to answer any questions students and faculty might have. Kerry Walk and Judson Aaron, the school's president and chair of the board of trustees, have promised to help students transfer to comparable art schools. This is the same promise PAFA's administration made to its own students, some of whom were likely looking to UArts as an option. This leaves Temple University, Drexel University, and Moore College as the local options for these students.

Not only have enrolled students been left without a school, but prospective students as well. Because of the lack of communication the school's leadership exhibited, incoming students have had their futures disrupted after being assured it was secure and stable at UArts. Ben Waxman, a Pennsylvania state representative whose district covers much of Center City Philadelphia, called the closure "not only a devastating blow to our local community, but also a significant setback for the arts and education". Due to the lack of communication from the school's leadership, Waxman is now calling for an independent investigation into UArts's closure. Since the school's faculty and staff are about to lose their jobs, the school [may have violated the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification \(WARN\) Act](#), which requires companies with over one hundred employees to announce any mass layoffs or company closures sixty days in advance.

Gustave Courbet's Revolutionary Life (In 5 Paintings)

How did Gustave Courbet, a bohemian, revolutionary communard, lay some of the groundwork for modern art? I've written several times about the origins of modern art. Specifically, I enjoy looking into the lives of modernism's progenitors, those artists who helped pave the way for later generations. Previously, I've discussed several of these figures, including [the British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner](#) and [the French neoclassical artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres](#). I've also written about the Paris Salon and how its desire for uniformity and to create an objective sense of artistic taste resulted in working artists seeking greater independence. However, this is where the story of an artistic forebear and the desire for creative autonomy merge into one. This is the story of the Realist revolutionary Gustave Courbet, with his life and long-lasting legacy summed up in five of his paintings.

#1 – Courbet the Newcomer: *After Dinner at Ornans*



After Dinner at Ornans

Courbet was originally from Ornans, a small French town close to the border with Switzerland. In 1839, he arrived in Paris. Only 20 years old, Courbet spent his days at the Louvre, making studies and copies of the Spanish and Flemish paintings on display. He saw the works of the Old Masters like Rembrandt and Velázquez, who often approached their subjects in a refreshingly candid fashion. This is how Courbet learned to draw, sketch, and paint, essentially teaching himself... or at least, that's what he said later. Courbet consciously created a persona, taking on the role of a self-taught country boy. However, he was not a simple peasant by any means. His father Régis certainly had humble roots but rose to become a wealthy landowner. Courbet received his artistic training in a rather conventional way. He attended the royal college at Besançon, studying drawing and painting under Charles-Antoine Flajoulot, a pupil of

Jacques-Louis David. For those pursuing a career in the arts in the nineteenth century, one would work as an apprentice or an assistant to an established artist after leaving school. Courbet did this by traveling to Paris and working as the studio assistant for Charles de Steuben, known mainly for historical and religious paintings.

But even though he had parts of a conventional artistic education, Courbet was still fiercely independent, taking control of his artistic development as he saw fit. Insisting that he carve out his own path led him to what defined his career as an artist: his art's purpose would be to capture the experience of everyday life. While genre painting was nothing new, the Academy juries had not accepted it as a style worthy of high praise like large-scale history and religious works. This custom certainly explains why juries would so frequently reject Courbet's work for exhibition during his first years in Paris. The Academy jury rejected twenty-two of the twenty-five paintings he submitted up until 1848.

After years of submissions, however, Courbet's first great Salon success came in 1849, when his painting *After Dinner at Ornans* won a gold medal and was purchased by the state. This was rather surprising because it was a controversial work at the time. It was not controversial because of the subject matter or the artistic technique but rather because of its size. *After Dinner at Ornans* was created on an incredibly large canvas, measuring over six by eight feet. This was the kind of canvas typically reserved for more esteemed styles of painting showing biblical scenes or great moments from history. This monumentalization of the mundane was a habit Courbet would continue for much of his early career. The British art historian William Vaughan noted that Courbet did this "to emphasize that the painting of the everyday was important, and not just that it was an interesting subject but that it was as important as any kind of painting."

With *After Dinner at Ornans*, Courbet stepped out into the larger art world and offered something new and exciting at a time when French art had grown somewhat stagnant. For about twenty years, the French art scene had been divided into camps of Romanticists and Classicists, something I've touched on previously in looking at [the career of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres](#). With his scenes of the everyday transferred onto monumental canvases, Courbet brought a fresh jolt of energy to the Salon. With his gold medal, Courbet was awarded the special privilege of being exempt from the requirement to submit his paintings for approval by the Academy jury. He would only lose this privilege when they changed the rules in 1857.

#2 – Courbet the Realist: *The Stone Breakers*

After his first Salon success and the privileges that accompanied it, Courbet decided it was time to ruffle some feathers and break some rules. Or rather, break some stones. In 1850, he submitted nine paintings to the Salon, including [A Burial at Ornans](#). It is the painting *The Stone Breakers*, however, that best exemplifies Realist art. While traditional genre painting often drew on everyday life, *The Stone Breakers* broke many of the style's conventions. When showing scenes of peasant life, most continental European painters would depict an idealized version of rural attire and work. The genre scenes of previous generations would often show peasants either as [stoic figures in very clean traditional clothing](#) dutifully carrying out their work, or as revelers [frequenting a tavern](#) or [celebrating at a wedding or a festival](#). They were either symbols or caricatures rather than real people. These conventions would continue well into the nineteenth century, especially among European academic painters like Bouguereau,



The Stone Breakers

Munier, and Blaas. They aimed to create a more idealistic version of rural Europe as a counterweight to the continent's increasing urbanization and industrialization.

However, the two men in Courbet's *Stone Breakers* stand out entirely. They are wearing dirty clothes and wooden clogs, signs of poverty. Furthermore, the subjects' task of breaking rocks in the middle of a country road is not noble, like driving a plow or harvesting wheat. It is dull, repetitive, menial work, similar to the industrial labor becoming more common in France's cities at the time. Courbet was one of several artists who began to eschew working peoples' idealization. Others like Jean-François Millet and Philippe-Auguste Jeanron had previously indulged the artistic urge to romanticize French peasants but, like Courbet, were turning towards strict Realism. Courbet and these other artists saw that to be the best painters they could be, they had to paint what they themselves saw and experienced. In an 1855 exhibition catalogue, Courbet wrote that his goals as an artist were to "translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my time, according to my own estimation; to be not only a painter, but a man as well; in short, to create living art – this is my goal."

#3 – Courbet the Independent: *The Painter's Studio*



The Painter's Studio

Courbet was not afraid to send messages through his paintings. In capturing the lives of his own time's working people, Courbet made statements on social issues of the day. He would bring this style to a larger audience with the 1855 World's Fair. For the fair's arts section, the Académie des Beaux-Arts curated an exhibition of work from many of the giants of French painting, including Delacroix and Ingres. However, many artists were excluded, including some who, though young at the time, would later become the pioneers of artistic modernism, like Edouard Manet and Camille Pissarro. Though more of an established artist, Courbet had several works rejected for exhibition. If the Academy didn't understand the strength of Courbet's independent spirit, they certainly found out. Rather than sit and

complain, Courbet decided that if they would not exhibit all the work he submitted, he would have to do it himself. Next to the fair's arts pavilion on the Avenue Montaigne, Courbet set up his own independent exhibition, which he called the Pavillon du Réalisme.

This is where Courbet had a great influence on later modernists like the Impressionists. Being among the first major artists to exhibit their work independently outside the organized Salon makes Courbet one of the most important forerunners of modern art. Many see his 1855 exhibition as an inspiration for later independent exhibitions like [the 1863 Salon des Refusés](#), Edouard Manet's pavilion at the 1867 World's Fair, and, of course, [the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874](#).

The most prominent of Courbet's paintings at the Pavillon du Réalisme in 1855 was [The Painter's Studio](#). Like his other important works from the 1840s and 1850s, the canvas was enormous, measuring nearly twelve feet by twenty feet. However, it stands out among the rest of his work because it is what Courbet called a "real allegory". Obviously, in strict Realism, allegory cannot exist. So, this is more of a statement about the artist himself. The work shows Courbet [in the center, painting a landscape of the River Loue](#), which runs through his hometown of Ornans. Meanwhile, looking over his shoulder is a nude woman. Some have identified her as the muse of Realism inspiring Courbet to action. Others have claimed she represents traditional academic painting, to which Courbet has turned his back. On the other side is a small child wearing a torn shirt and wooden clogs. However, this poor boy is not looking at the canvas; he's looking at the artist. He is quite literally looking up to Courbet, representing the future of art.

On the right side of the canvas are [depictions of Courbet's colleagues](#). We see artists, intellectuals, and patrons like Charles Baudelaire and Alfred Bruyas. Meanwhile, the opposite side contains what Courbet described as "the other world of ordinary life". While some have interpreted that description as examples of different people you would find in society, others have found many references to the various types of painting. [The poor boy looking up at the artist and the beggar woman on the floor breast-feeding her child](#) are representative of genre painting. Meanwhile, the semi-nude figure peeking out behind the canvas is an artist's mannequin propped up to serve as a reference for a crucifixion painting, representing religious art. It's almost hidden, both in darkness and behind Courbet's canvas, representing Courbet's rejection not only of religious art but the importance placed on religious art by the Académie des Beaux-Arts. At the mannequin's feet, there is a skull, which was [often found in crucifixion paintings](#) to represent death. However, the skull and a collection of other objects, including a guitar, a knife, and a feathered hat, are reminiscent of Golden Age Dutch still-life paintings, of which there were likely many in the Louvre. Lastly, the most prominent figure on the left-hand side is [a portrait of the Emperor Napoleon III](#). It likely shocked audiences at the time since he wears a thick overcoat and thigh-high hunting boots, the attire of a provincial hunter or, more specifically, a poacher. This is where Courbet's politics spills out onto the

canvas. It is clearly a criticism of Napoleon III. Republicans and revolutionaries in France who supported the Revolution of 1848 viewed Napoleon III as having hijacked the revolution to transform the country into a monarchy. He is a poacher, hunting on lands that do not rightfully belong to him.

Upon seeing *The Painter's Studio*, Eugène Delacroix, the leading Romantic painter at the time, remarked that the Academy jury “rejected one of the most remarkable works of our time, but Courbet is not the man to be discouraged by a little thing like that.”

#4 – Courbet the Agitator: *L'Origine du monde*

As the 1850s became the 1860s, Courbet began to distance himself from the peasant scenes that had brought him fame and infamy. Soon, he painted landscapes, floral still-lives, portraits, and female nudes. Some saw these later works as Courbet displaying the variety of his subjects. Others saw his departure from his monumental Realist paintings as a sign of decline, that it was all downhill after *The Painter's Studio*. In 1866, however, Courbet showed everyone that he was not above controversy when he debuted *L'Origine du monde*. It was a bold departure from prevailing artistic norms, particularly in its explicit depiction of female nudity. He had done this previously with his 1853 painting [The Bathers](#), which gives us an unromanticized portrayal of female nudity devoid of any historical or mythological context. *L'Origine du monde* directly confronted nineteenth-century social taboos surrounding nudity and sexuality, challenging traditional representations of the female body in art. To Courbet, it was simply a continuation of Realism, seeking to portray subjects as objectively as possible. *L'Origine du monde* does not present the female body as imagined and painted by generations of past artists. At the time of its creation and even today, it sparks debate about sexuality, censorship, and the nature of art. Just last month, [protestors at the Centre Pompidou-Metz used *L'Origine du monde*](#) not just to criticize the sexism still present in the art world but to call out some art world figures as predators, most notably the curator Bernard Marcadé, who co-organized the Pompidou exhibition *L'Origine du monde* was a part of.



L'Origine du monde (censored)

Its enduring relevance underscores the power of art to challenge social norms and provoke critical reflection. *L'Origine du monde* is significant for its artistic merit as well as its role in challenging conventions and sparking dialogue about sexuality, censorship, representation, the male gaze in art, and even the nature of art itself.

#5 – Courbet in Exile: *The Trout*



The Trout (1873)

For a political radical, it's somewhat ironic that Courbet's career almost entirely coincided with the Second French Empire. He first came to prominence not long after the 1848 Revolution and the empire's founding a few years later. In addition, his career suffered greatly during the empire's collapse. Prussia claimed victory in the Franco-Prussian War in May 1871, leading to Napoleon III's fall from power. After the end of the war, a new republic rose from the empire's ruins. New elections brought a conservative government to power. Fearing the radical politics of the Parisian lower and working classes, they moved the government seat to (of all places) Versailles.

With the new government seemingly abandoning the city, groups of liberal republicans, socialists, and proto-anarchists formed the Paris Commune, operating independently of the national government. The Commune governed the city using mutual aid networks created during the Prussian siege of Paris months earlier. Courbet was a republican influenced by the prominent socialist figures of his day like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. While the Commune governed the city, Courbet brought together the artists of Paris to decide cultural matters as a union. Their biggest task was organizing that year's Salon, this time with far looser and more liberal rules about who could exhibit works of art and how to judge them. However, one act sealed Courbet's fate in the eyes of conservatives. During the war, before the Commune's establishment, Courbet proposed that the government relocate [the column at the center of the Place Vendôme](#) to a different part of Paris. The column commemorates French victories during the First Empire. A statue of Napoleon I sits at the monument's peak. Courbet wrote that the monument is “devoid of all artistic value” and expresses “the ideas of war and conquest” unbefitting of a republic. However, the Commune's executive committee took it further and toppled the column. A photograph of Communards [posing next to the toppled column](#) shows Courbet among them (ninth from the left). After ten

weeks, the French army marched into the city and brutally crushed the Commune. Courbet was arrested and sentenced to six months in prison because he was blamed for the Vendôme Column's destruction.

After Courbet's release, his rheumatism and alcoholism worsened. The government ordered him to personally pay for the Vendôme Column's reconstruction, which amounted to 323,000 francs (or approximately \$7.3 million in 2024). Unwilling to pay these reparations, Courbet went into a self-imposed exile in Switzerland in 1873. He would only live a few more years, but he created several important paintings in that time. His series of [twenty-one landscapes capturing the Château de Chillon](#) on Lake Geneva are well-known, yet I've chosen his *Trout* paintings to represent his life in exile. Courbet began his *Trout* series while still in Paris but continued while in his Swiss exile. In all three paintings, he captures the fish hooked on the line, with their mouths and eyes open, gills bloody. The fish are caught and dying but still alive. Some have theorized that, like *The Painter's Studio*, the *Trout* paintings have a fair amount of allegory, possibly serving as a symbolic self-portrait: beaten, bloodied, and dying, but not quite dead yet. The art critic Robert Hughes described Courbet's *Trout* paintings as having "more death in it than Rubens could get in a whole Crucifixion". Courbet would pass away in 1877 from complications brought on by his drinking. It would be over forty years before his remains were brought back to his hometown of Ornans, where he was buried in 1919.

Gustave Courbet sought to capture all observable humanity, particularly the dirty, ugly, and painful aspects. In his *History of Modern Art*, H.H. Arnason described Courbet as representing "the three-way conflict of past, present, and future more clearly than any other artist of his time." His choice of subjects and his creative independence would pave the way for later modernists, laying down part of the bedrock of twentieth-century and contemporary art. He was, in more than one way, a revolutionary. His effect on art can probably be best summed up by the French writer Emile Zola, who wrote in 1868 that after Courbet, "no-one would now dare to say that the present day is unworthy of being painted". In the past, artists used paint, marble, and bronze to show us what we once were. But it was Courbet and the Realists who decided to use their art to show us who we are and what we can be.

Rediscovered Degas Worth \$13 Million?



Éloge du maquillage by Edgar Degas

In an extraordinary find, a drawing bought online for about \$1,000 has been identified as an original drawing by the great Impressionist master Edgar Degas.

In a remarkable turn of events, an anonymous buyer browsing the Spanish online auction site Todocolección came across the drawing in December 2021. On a hunch, they contacted Michel Schulman, an art historian specializing in nineteenth-century French art and operator of [the Edgar Degas online catalogue raisonné](#). They suspected that the lot might be the original drawing by Degas, leading to them purchasing the work for €926 (or \$1,047 at the time). After examining the work, specialists have determined that the drawing is, in fact, an original 1876 pastel and gouache drawing by Edgar Degas entitled *Éloge du maquillage*, or *In Praise of Makeup*. It shows women powdering their faces while working at a Paris brothel.

Working with Spanish art specialists Joan Arjona Rey, Álvaro Pascual, and Judith Urbano, Schulman uncovered the drawing's provenance. They determined that the Spanish artist Julián Bastinos acquired the work from Degas in 1887, bringing it back to Spain. The labels on the drawing's back indicate that Bastinos had it framed while in Cairo, where he passed in 1918. The Bastinos family kept the drawing until Republican forces temporarily relocated much of Barcelona's art collections to a monastery for safekeeping during the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939). Victorious fascist troops under Francisco Franco took possession of the Degas, as indicated by [another label dated January 1939 reading "Confiscated from the Enemy"](#). The work was eventually returned to the Bastinos family the following year, after which they sold it to a businessman in nearby Sabadell. This man was the ancestor of the individual who posted *Éloge du maquillage* on Todocolección.

Schulman and the drawing's buyer announced this rediscovery last week when they exhibited it at the Institute Français in Madrid. With its rediscovery, experts believe it may be worth €7 million (\$7.6 million), with others estimating it as high as €12 million (\$13.1 million).

Van Gogh Painting Returns Home

There are two paintings by Vincent van Gogh popularly known as *The Starry Night*. Van Gogh created [the more famous of the two](#) in 1889 in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. For over 80 years, it has been part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The other painting is also recognizable, with the full name *Starry Night Over the Rhône*. It is part of the Musée d'Orsay's collection but now on exhibit back where Van Gogh first created it.



Starry Night Over the Rhône by Vincent van Gogh

The Fondation Vincent van Gogh in Arles has recently opened an exhibition called *Van Gogh and the Stars*, focusing on *Starry Night Over the Rhône* and its influence. The foundation building sits on the Rue du Dr. Fanton, maybe a minute's walk away from the banks of the Rhône that the painting depicts. Interestingly, the foundation does not have many Van Gogh works. It mainly exhibits more modern and contemporary art, organizing exhibitions to show the artist's influence on much of the art that came after him. While the foundation manages to secure loans of paintings and drawings for their exhibitions, the return of *Starry Night Over the Rhône* is an exciting moment for both the organization and Arles, a location often associated with the artist.

Van Gogh moved from Paris to Arles in 1888 for both his health and creative spirit. His first year in Arles resulted in some of his most iconic work, including [Bedroom in Arles](#), [The Night Café](#), [Café Terrace at Night](#), and his [sunflower still-lives](#). That year, he also painted *Starry Night Over the Rhône*. In a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh wrote that he had created the painting "at night, under a gas-lamp". He likely made his sketches and other preliminary drawings in situ, but probably created the finished artwork at the house he lived in a few minutes away. A popular story goes that he painted the entire work at night, attaching candles to the brim of his hat while working. However, this is a fanciful but unlikely story. Van Gogh sent the painting to Paris in September 1889 for the Société des Artistes Indépendants exhibition. For over a hundred thirty years, *Starry Night Over the Rhône* has remained away from Arles... until now.

Marking the tenth anniversary of the Fondation Van Gogh, the exhibition is a comprehensive exploration that goes beyond the painting itself. It delves into the artist's masterful use of color, offers insights into the climate of nineteenth-century France, and demonstrates how his work resonated with later artists, from [Edvard Munch](#) to [Helen Frankenthaler](#). The exhibit also features works by twentieth-century artists like Yves Klein and Anselm Kiefer, showcasing the enduring influence of 'Starry Night Over the Rhône'. Notably, Georgia O'Keeffe's 1922 painting ['Starlight Night, Lake George'](#) is a part of this diverse and captivating exhibition.

Van Gogh and the Stars will run at the Fondation Van Gogh until September 8th, offering a unique perspective on the artist's work and its influence. The iconic *Starry Night Over the Rhône* will be on display until August 25th, after which it will embark on a journey to London's National Gallery for its next exhibition, *Van Gogh: Poets & Lovers*.

The Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Counterculture



Proserpine by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

When we think of the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, a very specific image often comes to mind: a beautiful woman with long hair in a flowing, formless dress surrounded by flowers. There are also the central ideas that accompany such an image, like free love, spiritualism, and rejection of the establishment. This was made possible by many different factors converging in the prosperous post-war period. However, it may not be easy to see how a band of Victorian painters could be some of the earliest forebears of hippie culture. Yet, it's true. In 1848, a group of young British artists styled themselves as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This collection of artists formed the core of Britain's first modernist art movement, exerting influence in their own time and beyond.

The main impetus behind both Pre-Raphaelite art and the counterculture was a rejection of authority. The leading Pre-Raphaelite artists met while studying traditional, academic art at London's Royal Academy in the 1840s. The painters William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti are the most well-known today, but the group consisted of seven. It also included the painter James Collinson, the sculptor Thomas Woolner, and the critics Frederic George Stephens and William Michael Rossetti, brother to Dante. But the style was not restricted to this core group. Many other British artists would come to adopt Pre-Raphaelitism, including Edward Burne-Jones, Marie Spartali Stillman, John W.

Godward, and John William Waterhouse. Pre-Raphaelitism, however, is best explained by what it was not rather than what it was. It was a reactionary art movement, with these young artists unified not by a common goal but a common enemy. They were incredibly disenchanted by the conservative styles of art taught at schools like the Royal Academy, aiming to break conventions and bend rules. They used greater detail, employed vivid colors, and emphasized symbolism and meaning in their work, leading them to draw inspiration from poetry and literature.

But why were they called Pre-Raphaelite? The group chose the name because the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academic art establishment venerated the Italian Renaissance master Raphael. All the great painters who came after Raphael were, in their view, nothing but imitators, sacrificing their own path as artists to live up to his standards of beauty and form. In rebelling against academic painting, the Pre-Raphaelites chose to look back before Raphael to the Quattrocento, or fourteenth-century Italian art. Late medieval aesthetics in stained glass and illuminated manuscripts greatly appealed to them, as did the relative simplicity of [Botticelli](#), [Fra Angelico](#), [Verrocchio](#), and [Mantegna](#). The art critic John Ruskin, one of the Pre-Raphaelites' most ardent defenders in the press, dismissed the critics who disparaged the Pre-Raphaelites for attempting to revive what they saw as archaic art. Ruskin wrote that these artists "draw either what they see, or what they suppose might have been the actual facts of the scene they desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture-making". He argued that the Pre-Raphaelites did not want to revive older art forms entirely but rather bring back what they saw as sincerity and realism. They were not imitators; rather, the conservative art establishment was imitators, aspiring for three centuries to paint like Raphael and follow his example.

The Pre-Raphaelites first exhibited their paintings in 1849, and most critics were absolutely brutal. They saw their work as subversive, contrary to academic art conventions. When Millais exhibited *Christ in the House of His Parents* the following year, Charles Dickens was particularly harsh in his assessment. He described Millais's Virgin Mary as "so horrible in her ugliness, that [...] she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster, in the vilest cabaret in France, or the lowest ginshop in England." An article in *The Times* described the artists as having "absolute contempt for perspective and the known laws of light and shade, an aversion to beauty in every shape, and a singular devotion to the minute accidents of their subjects, including, or rather seeking out, every excess of sharpness and deformity." Furthermore, some critics and exhibition-goers believed that drawing from medieval and early Renaissance elements gave Pre-Raphaelite painting a distinctly Catholic aesthetic. British Catholics only got increased civil and political rights in 1829, but anti-Catholic sentiment remained as high as ever. One writer in *The Times* described Pre-Raphaelite paintings as "monkish follies", with even their defenders like Ruskin admitting that they regrettably displayed some "Romanist and Tractarian tendencies". It is this spirit of rebellion that fueled both the Pre-Raphaelites and the later counterculture, with the paintings of the former echoing or even inspiring the aesthetics of the latter.



Christ in the House of His Parents by John Everett Millais

Anyone looking at Rossetti's models like [Elizabeth Siddal](#), [Jane Morris](#), or [Fanny Cornforth](#) can see the typical hippie woman. Additionally, paintings like Waterhouse's [Lady of Shalott](#) and Burne-Jones's [Aurora](#) show the subjects' long hair and flowing dresses, echoing medieval romances and foreshadowing the rise of later countercultural attitudes. This influence was not limited to just women, though. Male countercultural figures like [Brian Jones](#) of the Rolling Stones sometimes opted for more formless clothing dominated by vivid colors, vibrant patterns, and floral motifs that echoed those found in works by [Hunt](#) and [Rossetti](#). However, while fantasy and medievalism impacted both the Pre-Raphaelites and the counterculture, the greater influence was Orientalism. Like other nineteenth-century European artists, the Pre-Raphaelites were incredibly fascinated with "the East." The rise of European colonialism made far-flung locales seem more accessible. Thus, painters like William Holman Hunt traveled to the Middle East to look for subjects and ways to improve their art. Hunt used his travels to collect information on the people and customs of the Levant to inform his design of Orientalist and biblical paintings like [The Scapegoat](#), [Finding the Saviour in the Temple](#), and [The Shadow of Death](#).

The counterculture's own Orientalism grew from young people's disenchantment with existing power structures. They explored non-Western religions and spiritualist practices, particularly those from South and East Asia, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Daoism. While there isn't a clear connection between Pre-Raphaelite Orientalism and the hippies' spiritual experimentation, one can see common root causes: a fascination with the unfamiliar and the exotic, looking beyond the bounds of their own society for inspiration. Though separated by a century, both groups looked to the East because of the constraints imposed by conformity.



Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
during a visit to Iowa, 1979

Also similar to the 1960s counterculture, the Pre-Raphaelites enjoyed a stronger connection to nature than their contemporary academicians. In one of John Ruskin's defenses in *The Times*, he wrote about the painting [Convent Thoughts](#) by Charles Allston Collins, focusing on how the artist depicts flowers. Most critics, according to Ruskin, "say sweepingly that these men 'sacrifice *truth* as well as feeling to eccentricity.' As a botanical study of the water lily and *Alisma*, [...] this picture would be invaluable to me, and I heartily wish it were mine." The Pre-Raphaelites, like the Romantics before them, strove to channel a connection to nature through their work. Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite artists both believed in having a profound appreciation of the natural world because of its enormity relative to human creation. These artists and the later hippies saw nature as something to live with rather than fight against. Both groups were reacting to processes like urbanization and industrialization at different stages, and created a material culture dominated by natural elements and motifs. This is why hippies were also known as flower children, and the nonviolent forms of protests they organized came with the slogan "Flower Power." Meanwhile, the Pre-Raphaelites combined their connection to nature with their attention to detail, leading to many artists using natural elements carefully and intentionally. They would

use specific kinds of plants and flowers to convey messages about their work. In the painting [Ophelia](#), John Everett Millais includes daisies representing innocence, pansies representing love in vain, and poppies representing sleep and death.

Speaking of the poppy, drug use in the counterculture of the 1960s was often a voluntary way of expanding one's mind or altering one's consciousness. In Victorian England, drug use was prevalent, though used very differently. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, opium imported from Turkey was used mainly for medicinal purposes. The advent of the Pre-Raphaelite style coincided with a boom in the opium trade in Britain. Imports grew sixfold between 1830 and 1860 while prices steadily decreased, making it more readily available. Some scholars like Suzanne Bode theorize that the widespread medicinal use of opium in nineteenth-century Britain influenced the way the Pre-Raphaelite painters created their works and impacted the way Victorian audiences interpreted them. Opium use reduces the size of the pupil and affects the way we perceive light and depth. According to Bode, the Pre-Raphaelite artists "were reproducing this physiological effect to create the unsettling, colorful, and surreal spaces of their paintings." These artists also used opium's place in the public consciousness to convey themes of sleep and death (like in *Ophelia*). Elizabeth Siddal is primarily known as Rossetti's muse and model, but she was also an artist in her own right. On top of that, she was an opium addict. Many believe that though she took opium to relieve physical and psychological pain, she was fully aware of the effect it had on her senses and how it influenced her art. This was not unusual for the time, as her contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning was also known to have been a functioning addict, using drugs like opium to fuel her creativity. In the Siddal biography *The Wife of Rossetti*, written by William Holman Hunt's daughter Violet, Rossetti was drawn into the world of casual and recreational drug use, which would later lead to his death at the age of 53 in 1882. Similar to the Pre-Raphaelites' use of opium, recreational drug use became common within the counterculture. Countercultural artists used cannabis and hallucinogens in the same way that Rossetti, Siddal, and Millais altered their senses with similar substances.



Ophelia by John Everett Millais

On top of drug use, other aspects of the Pre-Raphaelites' personal lives also courted controversy. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was divisive in his own time due to his many affairs with his models. Rossetti is almost a forerunner to the concept of free love that became commonplace in the 1960s. These attitudes on love, sex, and relationships likely came from his mother's family, as his uncle John Polidori was a colleague of Lord Byron, Mary Shelly, and Percy Bysshe Shelly, some of Britain's foremost Romantic literary figures and advocates of free love. Rossetti's most famous affair was with Elizabeth Siddal, who had modeled for many of his paintings and drawings starting in 1850. By 1854, the pair were living together in London, which was controversial since they were unmarried, not doing so until 1860. Rossetti also had a prolonged affair with Jane Burden Morris, the wife of his friend William Morris. Though Rossetti tried to keep his passions hidden, he used Morris as his model so often that things became clear to her husband. Rather than confront the pair, Morris allowed the affair to continue, leasing a country house for them to use while he was away. Rossetti was definitely the most lascivious of the Pre-Raphaelites, but he was far from the only one to lead an unconventional personal life. A good amount of controversy surrounded John Everett Millais's marriage, as his wife Effie had previously been married to John Ruskin. The annulment of the Ruskins' marriage and Effie's subsequent remarriage to Millais caused a scandal. The idea of this possible love triangle fascinates people [even today](#).



A mural in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco that shares several qualities with Pre-Raphaelite art (vivid colors and patterns, nature/floral imagery, Orientalist components, etc.)

As their careers progressed, many Pre-Raphaelite painters paved the way for twentieth-century styles like symbolism and Art Nouveau. They also influenced artists outside of Britain, as the American painter James McNeill Whistler more or less created his own Pre-Raphaelite woman in his painting [Symphony in White, No. 1](#) exhibited at [the 1863 Salon des Refusés](#). But it wasn't just the symbolists and other modernists that the Pre-Raphaelites influenced. One can link these Victorian painters to the counterculture of the 1960s. They profoundly impacted the counterculture's look, achieved mainly through Pre-Raphaelite influence on 1960s art. However, this was not painting or sculpture but more popular and accessible art forms like album covers and posters. British designers like Michael English and Nigel Weymouth actively pulled from nineteenth-century art, specifically Pre-Raphaelite and Orientalist paintings, to create their designs for [posters advertising London nightlife spots like the UFO Club](#).

It can be easy to paint with a broad brush in characterizing groups of people.

While the Victorian era has a reputation for being stuffy and prudish, it's good to remember that there were bright, lively exceptions. As such, the Pre-Raphaelites not only shared many similarities with the counterculture a century later, but in some ways would directly influence its look and its major components. It's a lasting legacy that has continued up until the present day.

Gérôme & Muenier: A French Village's Painters' Trail



Sign

In a significant addition to the area's cultural landscape, the eastern French village of Coulevon has inaugurated a new painters' trail to honor some of the area's most esteemed artists. The trail consists of [ten panels scattered around the village](#) that educate the public about the lives and works of the area's two most prominent artists: Jean-Léon Gérôme and Jules-Alexis Muenier. This trail was set up to coincide with Gérôme's two-hundredth birthday.

Gérôme, the more well-known of the two, was born in Vesoul, the main town of the Haute-Saône department. Muenier was also from Vesoul, going off to Paris in 1881 to study under Gérôme at the École des Beaux-Arts. At the time, Gérôme was one of Europe's most famous and popular academic painters, known for his [historical paintings](#) and [Orientalist works](#). On top of his teaching position, Gérôme also had a studio in the western suburbs of Paris and a country house in Coulevon, two miles away from his birthplace. Gérôme, wishing to remain in Paris permanently, decided to sell the house in 1885 to his former student, Muenier. Muenier would remain in Coulevon for most of his artistic career, gaining success painting scenes of country life in the area. His first Salon success came in 1887 with his painting [Le Bréviaire](#).

As part of the new painter's trail, one of the panels includes a Muenier painting accompanying the text. This painting is [Coulevon Looking Towards Vesoul](#), which Rehs Galleries bought and sold back in 1996. The painting's subject, a snowy country bridge, still stands today, with the painters' trail panel placed just to the side of it. The bridge spans a small river called Le Bâtard, connecting Coulevon to Vesoul's Les Rêpes district. The panels were unveiled this past weekend, with representatives from local cultural and artistic associations present. Nicolas Muenier, the artist's grandson, was also in attendance. The mayor of Vesoul, Alain Chrétien, remarked that the area's residents are lucky that "the paintings of Gérôme and Muenier are all around us since they preserve these landscapes."

Kapoor At The Cathedral

When you think of Liverpool's culture, you may first consider the area's musical tradition and unintelligible accent. Architecture might not be the most immediate thing that comes to mind, but Anish Kapoor is planning on drawing attention to one of the city's great buildings.

Liverpool Cathedral is the largest church in Britain, the eighth largest in the world, surpassing even the Florence Duomo, Saint Paul's Cathedral, and the Sagrada Família. However, unlike many major British churches, Liverpool Cathedral is a relatively new structure. While Lincoln Cathedral and Westminster Abbey have their roots in the medieval period, construction on Liverpool Cathedral first started in 1904. Liverpool has been one of Britain's most important places for centuries,



Liverpool Cathedral

but it was only elevated to city status and became its own diocese in 1880. Therefore, the city had no cathedral but used a parish church called Saint Peter's as its ecclesiastical center. The architects scheduled the cathedral's completion for 1940. However, both world wars deprived the project of materials and a workforce. In addition, German bombing campaigns damaged part of the building, which was not fully repaired until 1955. The cathedral was finally completed in 1978.

Anish Kapoor is known as an innovator in the world of sculpture and installation art. His work can be seen throughout the globe, most famously the [Cloud Gate](#) in Chicago (known colloquially as *The Bean*) and the [Orbit Tower](#) in East London, built for the 2012 Olympic Games. He's been awarded the Turner Prize and a knighthood for his work, among many other accolades. Now, he is bringing his large-scale installations to Liverpool for the centenary of the cathedral's consecration. Between August 10th and September 15th, the cathedral will host an exhibition called *Monadic Singularity*; the artist's first major solo exhibit in Liverpool since 1983. The show is named after one of the works that will be on display, a 2015 sculpture made from PVC and steel called [Sectional Body Preparing for Monadic Singularity](#) (this installation and five others by Kapoor were actually [on display in the gardens of Versailles](#) when I visited in the summer of 2015).

Featured will be a selection of works by Kapoor from over the last twenty-five years, some of them making their British debut; all of which were selected for their connection to themes such as life, death, and birth. In a way, the exhibition will not only display Kapoor's work, but the work itself will also participate in a dialogue with the cathedral. It actually seems rather fitting that Kapoor will exhibit these pieces in a cathedral since it is a place where death and rebirth are ritualized at every mass. Furthermore, the work will likely stand out against the building's stone, built according to Gothic revival designs. Organizers are planning for Kapoor's installations to be placed in the nave, the Lady Chapel, and in the ambulatories. Elisa Nocente, the cathedral's head of cultural programme, described Kapoor's art as provoking "both wonder and uneasiness". With one of Britain's most important contemporary artists contributing to the celebrations, Liverpool Cathedral's centenary seems to be one of Britain's biggest cultural events this year.

Monet's London



Londres, le Parlement, trouée de soleil dans le brouillard by Claude Monet

Though a French cultural icon, Claude Monet has a long and interesting relationship with London. His trips to the British capital greatly impacted his artistic development. He and other French artists like Camille Pissarro escaped Paris in 1870 to avoid conscription during the Franco-Prussian War. Monet traveled to London and visited the city's museums and galleries. There, he experienced British art like that of J.M.W. Turner, introducing him to forms of abstraction [that would later influence the trajectory of Impressionism](#). Monet would later return to London, renting a flat close to the Thames. During his three stays between the autumn of 1899 and early 1901, Monet created around a hundred paintings showing famous London landmarks by the Thames including Waterloo Bridge, Charing Cross Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament. Like his other series of [haystacks](#) and [Rouen Cathedral](#), these paintings were studies, depicting the same subject in different lighting and weather conditions. In a way, he was emulating Turner, who made several paintings of the Houses of Parliament [when it caught fire in 1834](#). Now, some of Monet's London paintings will return to Britain after being over a century away.

The Courtauld Gallery is one of London's top cultural institutions, known for its collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Prominent works include Manet's [Bar at the Folies-Bergère](#) and Van Gogh's [Self-Portrait with a Bandaged Ear](#). Starting on September 27th, the Courtauld will exhibit twenty-one of Monet's London paintings. Monet successfully exhibited some of them in Paris in 1904, intending to bring the exhibition to London the following year, hoping to organize it through the Dowdeswell Gallery on New Bond Street. However, these plans faltered in the end after he felt unsatisfied with many of the final works, despite the critical acclaim from the Paris show. Of the paintings featured in the Courtauld exhibition, eighteen appeared in the 1904 Paris exhibition. The gallery's curators are trying to accurately reconstruct Monet's vision for the London show he had hoped for over a century ago.

Nearly all the paintings in the exhibition will be on loan from a wide array of public and private collections based in France, Germany, and the United States. Courtauld senior curator Karen Serres called the London paintings "by far the largest and most ambitious series Monet had produced up until this point in his career". She continued that even though the paintings were never shown together in Britain, they remain "among the most significant representations of [the] city ever made". Monet enjoyed Britain, London in particular, as a place to

paint because of the country's more temperate climate and increasing industrialization. The clouds and fog, both natural and from factory smokestacks, illuminated the city with a wider range of colors than Monet experienced in France.

The Courtauld's mission is to "realise Monet's unfulfilled ambition" of exhibiting these paintings in the country of their creation. The Courtauld Gallery is just a short walk down the Strand from the Savoy Hotel, on the balconies of which Monet created many of these paintings. This fact will not be lost on the many visitors when they exit the gallery and walk along the river's Victoria Embankment. *Monet and London: Views of the Thames* will be on display at the Courtauld Gallery from September 27, 2024 to January 19, 2025.

The Rehs Family

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