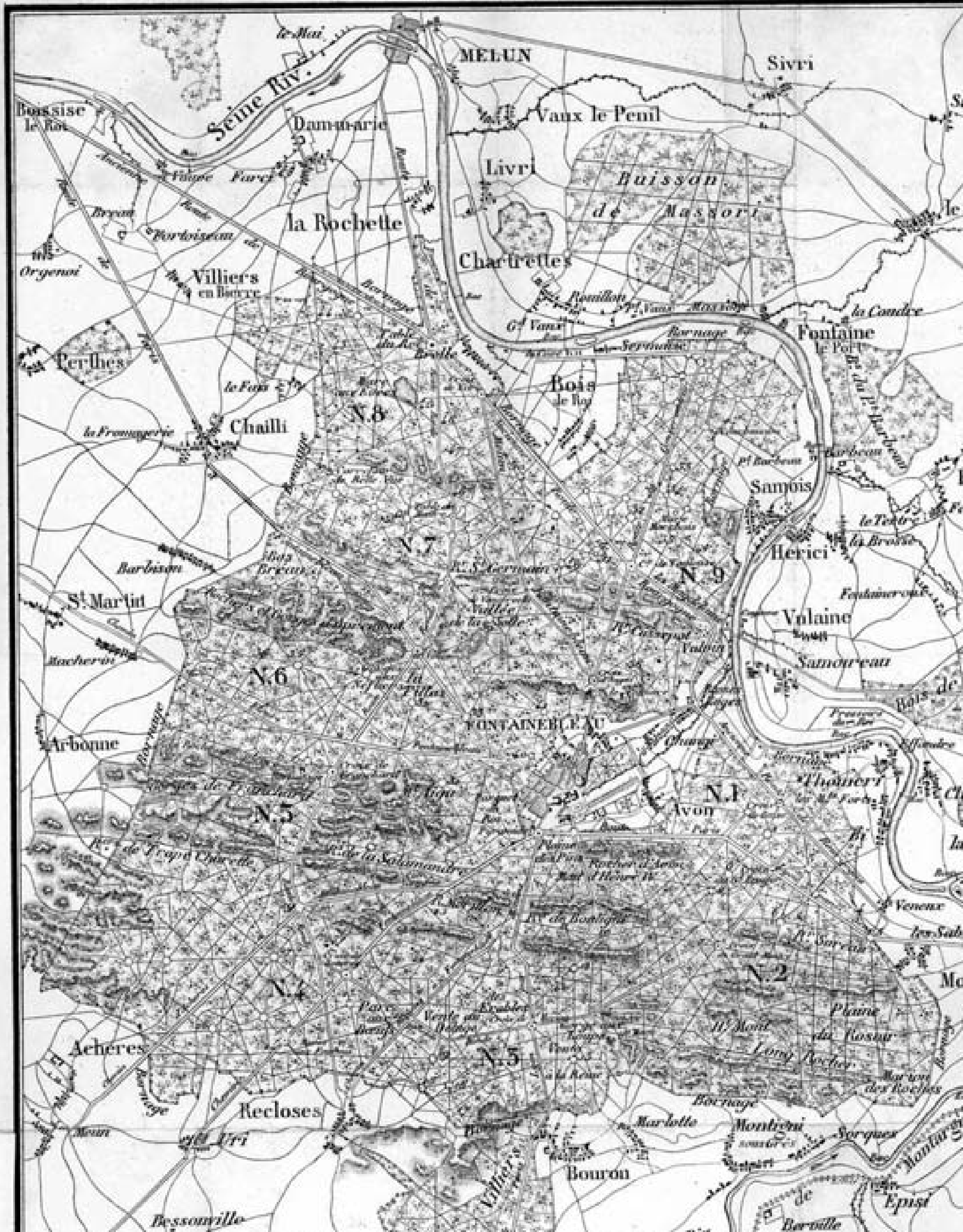
CARTE DE LA FORÊT DE FONTAINEBLEAU



Encounters with Nature in the Forest of Fontainebleau

Many French painters' engagement with France's countryside began about 60 km (40 mi.) south of Paris, in the forest surrounding the town of Fontainebleau. Originally a hunting preserve of French kings, in the nineteenth century this ancient forest met new needs for a growing middle class. As industrialization displaced and reordered rural economies, the conception of nature changed. An older, romantic ideal of raw, awe-inspiring power would be increasingly moderated by bourgeois views of nature as a restorative balm for the world-weary.

E. Jamin, *Fontainebleau* (Paris, 1838)
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

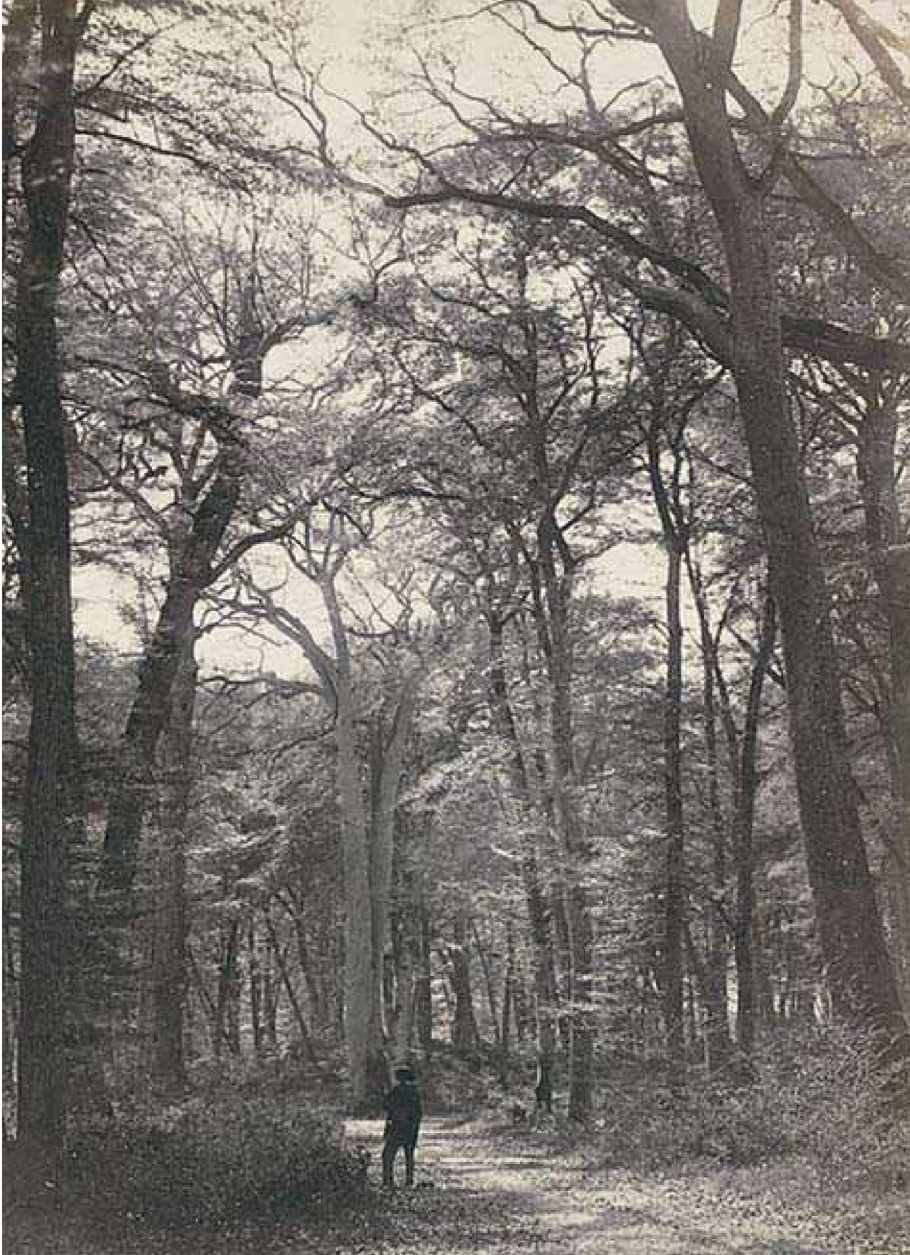
Large numbers of city dwellers—accommodated by a growing rail network—traveled to find comfort, contemplation, and recreation in the woods. Guidebooks describing nature itineraries expanded outward from Paris as new track lines were laid. Appearing in 1837, Etienne Jamin's *Quatre promenades dans la forêt* was among the earliest guides to the Fontainebleau forest. Already, however, photographers and painters had been making regular artistic expeditions there. For those living in Paris, the forest was an easy day's jaunt a full decade before an 1876 guidebook noted:

Fontainebleau offers all the beauties of nature joined together close to Paris: imposing views and a grandiose bleakness, majestic forests and century-old beeches, clearings where heather grows among the sand and sandstone; pools and mossy ponds. The forest of Fontainebleau is a veritable school of contemporary landscape painting. There is not a single artist among the most famous who has not passed through it.[1]

Most of the artists we encounter in this section were associated with the so-called Barbizon school (see p. 37). Gathered at the rustic Ganne Inn, they helped make a new kind of landscape art.

View of the Fontainebleau forest
Kimberly Jones

slide 9 CD 19	Constant Famin French, c. 1830–1900	*Forest Scene,* c. 1865 Albumen print from collodion negative mounted on blue paper, 9 ¾ x 7 ¼ in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Gift of Joyce and Robert Menschel 2004.42.1



Painters were not alone in traveling to Fontainebleau. Photographers explored the forest and its environs with their cameras. Constant Famin, whose prints first appeared in 1863, was among this group. A specialist in landscape and scenes of rural life, Famin seems to have operated a studio in Paris.

Background: Fontainebleau and the forest

- Today the forest of Fontainebleau encompasses about 28,000 hectares (69,000+ acres) and has been a part of the UNESCO Man and Biosphere preserve since 1986.
- By the beginning of the 11th century, it was a royal hunting preserve, called the Bière forest.
- A succession of ever-grander hunting lodges evolved into the magnificent chateau in Fontainebleau, where François I (1494–1547) introduced Italian Renaissance art and architecture to northern Europe.
- Planting began around 1720, and from the late 18th century some areas of the forest were devoted to the harvesting of pine.
- By 1820 three villages had begun to attract painters: Marlotte, Chailly, and Barbizon; in the 1840s a rail line near these locations made access easier.
- The forest terrain is quite diverse, with deep woods, sandy desertlike stretches, bogs, ravines, and boulders worn into fantastic shapes.
- The rock is largely sandstone and supplied many of the cobbles used to pave the streets of Paris.
- The forest remains home to stag, roe deer, fox, wild boar, and an especially rich diversity of insects, including 1,700 species of butterfly.
- Its current tree population is approximately 45 percent oak, 40 percent pine, and 10 percent beech.
- Visited by about 13 million people each year, 'Bleau, as young enthusiasts call it, is a world-class site for boulder climbing.

Vocabulaire

auberge (f): inn

blaireau (m): badger (also, shaving brush)

bloc (m): boulder

calcaire (m): limestone

cerf (m): stag

chasse (f): hunt

chêne (m): oak

forêt (f): forest

grès (m): sandstone

hêtre (m): beech tree, beech wood

papillon (m): butterfly

pin (m): pine tree

randonner: to make an excursion or tour (especially on foot)

renard (m): fox

rocher (m): rock

sable (m): sand

sanglier (m): wild boar

Read about expeditions to Fontainebleau in 19th-century literature:

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Manette Salomon,* 1866
Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale,* 1869

Visit Barbizon, the Ganne Inn, and artists' studios:
www.barbizon-france.com (in French and English)

Learn more about the ecology and future of the forest:
www.onf.fr/fontainebleau (official site of the French National Office of Forests, in French)

Get a feel for bouldering. Find maps, trail information, difficulty ratings, and message boards; register to see video of boulder climbs, or post your own:
http://bleau.info/ (in French, English, and Dutch)

The Works

reproduction slide 10 I CD 20	Alphonse Jeanrenaud French, 1818–1895	*Fontainebleau,* c. 1860s Albumen print, sheet: 12 ⅝ x 10 ¼ in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington The Amy Rose Silverman Fund and Funds from an Anonymous Donor 1999.70.1

Consider this

What landscape features in Jeanrenaud's photograph lead your eye deeper into space?

- *path*
- *rocks*
- *light of sky*
- *dark trees on either side*

Where is the area of sharpest focus? Where do the objects appear blurred? What impact does this distinction have on the illusion of spatial depth?

Where was the photographer standing when he made this picture? How does his vantage point affect our experience of the picture?

- *enhances effect of recession*

Photographers and painters often worked together in the forest. Imagine their discussions about this scene and how their different media would affect their images.

Like many early photographers, Alphonse Jeanrenaud experimented with various photographic techniques and materials and published some of his findings. This is an albumen print, made by coating the paper surface with egg white, sensitizing it with silver nitrates, and exposing it to the negative. Prized for rich, brilliant tones and clarity of detail, the albumen printing process allowed Jeanrenaud to render in exquisite detail the specific character of trees, vegetation, and rocks, and especially subtle transitions of light and shade. Like his colleague Eugène Cuvelier, who also made photographs of the Fontainebleau forest, Jeanrenaud sought to capture not specific points of interest but rather the subjective experience of the forest as a place of quiet meditation and aesthetic contemplation. In this photograph the personal and experiential quality of the forest is conveyed not only through the delicate rendering of light but also through the composition itself. Trees gently frame a curving path that invites viewers to enter imaginatively the forest's refuge.

slide 11 CD 21	Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot French, 1796–1875	*Forest of Fontainebleau,* 1834 Oil on canvas, 69 ⅛ x 95 ½ in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.109

The small figure in the foreground of this large-scale picture seems a bit of an afterthought—awkward, almost too small—and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, in fact, added the woman over an area already painted with plants. She is a bit surprising, with her dangerously low-falling chemise, untied locks, and intent concentration on what looks to be an illuminated manuscript. Audiences, who saw her at the Salon of 1834, would have recognized her right away as Mary Magdalene, the fallen woman who became the great penitent. The long tresses, book, and revealing décolletage point to her identity. In 1834 audiences, and the artist himself, still expected a finished landscape—especially one destined for the Salon and of such imposing dimension (almost 8 feet long)—to be more than a mere recording of nature. Corot added the Magdalene to give his picture the kind of serious purpose expected of it by Salon juries.

Even without the figure of Mary Magdalene, however, this painting is far from a mere recording of nature. Although it relies on oil studies that Corot painted outdoors in the Fontainebleau forest, this is a painting made—physically and mentally—in the studio. It does not portray a single spot but is an arrangement of landscape elements composed from various studies and from memory. A clear recession of forms, the stream that draws the eye to a light-filled distance, the *repoussoir* effect of dark masses on either side, the bright focus on the figure—all these echo the classical conception of a landscape made two hundred years earlier (see opposite). What has sometimes been called Corot's "instinctive classicism" sets him apart from the Barbizon painters.

CD 22 | **Claude Lorrain** | French, 1600–1682

Landscape with Merchants, c. 1630
Oil on canvas, 38 ¼ x 56 ½ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.44

The Barbizon school

Between about 1830 and 1870, a number of artists were associated with the forest of Fontainebleau, and especially the village of Barbizon, where they gathered at a small inn run by the Ganne family. They were never a formal group, and not all of them painted the forest per se, but these young artists shared a new approach to landscape. They emerged from the so-called Generation of 1830. As the July Revolution was deposing a conservative monarch, they were themselves overturning long-held artistic traditions. They looked to Dutch landscapes of the seventeenth century and to John Constable's views of the English countryside (shown in Paris at the Salon in 1824). Constable's fresh naturalism encouraged these young French painters to express their vision of nature without academic convention or idealization—abandoning the classical tradition that had long dominated French painting. On the one hand, their choice of humble subjects over heroic themes fit well with the aims of realism, but their celebration of peasant life—and especially their deeply personal connection to nature — evidenced a romantic sensibility too. Barbizon regulars included Théodore Rousseau, Jean-François Millet, and Narcisse Diaz (and others not discussed here). Charles-François Daubigny was also a frequent presence, although his favorite subjects were along the Oise River. Somewhat older, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot had sketched in the forest from the early 1820s and inspired younger painters working there. As all these artists moved toward a more natural approach, they placed greater emphasis on painting outdoors and applied a freer technique than the smooth finish of academic art. Their legacy would become the *plein-air* painting of impressionism. They, however, did not seek an immediate "impression" of nature. Instead, the Barbizon artists hoped to reveal nature's deeper character, the rugged and enduring unity underlying all of its changing aspects.

reproduction slide 12 I CD 23	Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot French, 1796–1875	*Rocks in the Forest of Fontainebleau,* 1860/1865 Oil on canvas, 18 x 23 in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Chester Dale Collection 1963.10.110

Corot painted this canvas some thirty years after *Forest of Fontainebleau*, and he did so right in front of the scene. Grains of sand stuck in the paint are proof, though its vivid sense of place is testament enough. This is a humble corner of the woods, perhaps near the Gorges d'Apremont. But, these are not the famous rock formations or ancient oaks that drew most painters (or tourists). Corot was attracted instead to secluded areas and to images of struggling life—these trees manage to grow from meager spaces between the boulders. Light and air circulate through the entire space, creating an enveloping atmosphere, unlike the heavy wooded shade that attracted Barbizon artists. A bit of bright sky breaks through the leaves, and the sun filters down; it seems not to punctuate the darkness but to shimmer and dance in the cool shade. It was the freshness and immediacy of works like this that attracted younger artists. Corot's unselfconscious observation of a direct experience in nature positioned him, at age seventy, among the avant-garde. He bridged an old and new way of looking at landscape, between the classical tradition and the sensory approach of the impressionists. He was instrumental in a new acceptance of unembellished nature and the freer style of *plein-air* painting.

When Corot was a younger man, such *plein-air* works would have been created as studies only. Although he never meant it for exhibition or sale, Corot did, however, consider *Rocks in the Forest of Fontainebleau* an independent work of art—insofar as it was self-sufficient and freestanding, not simply a tool for the production of a "real" painting.

Consider this

Describe Corot's *Rocks in the Forest of Fontainebleau* using the photographic terms of focus and out-of-focus. Why do you think Corot adopted this treatment?

- *perhaps influence of photography, but also to create a sense of atmosphere*

Is there any evidence of sunlight? If you touched the rocks would they be warm or cool? Would the grass be dry or wet? What sounds might you hear in this place?

What words or kinds of words express the mood of the painting?

If Corot had wanted to use this painting as a sketch, the basis for a more traditional work to be carried out in his studio, what changes would produce the sort of classical composition exhibited at the Salon?

- *organizing space into clear zones for foreground, middle ground, background*
- *adding* repoussoir *and other devices that lead the eye into space*
- *including figures and literary or historical references*

A feel for light

CD 24 | Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

Bridge on the Saône River at Mâcon, 1834
Oil on paper on canvas, 9 ⅞ x 13 ¼ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection 1970.17.22

The affinities between these two light-filled spaces are clear — both are painted using a technique of *peinture claire*, in which pigments are built up on a light-colored ground. It was Corot's feel for light that attracted such younger artists as Morisot. Berthe Morisot painted her sister Edma during a trip to the Brittany coast in 1869. Remove Edma from the scene and Morisot's painting becomes even more like Corot's study, painted three decades before in southern Burgundy while Corot was en route to Italy. Each composition is divided into a triad of land, water, and sky.

CD 25 | Berthe Morisot

The Harbor at Lorient, 1869
Oil on canvas, 17 ⅛ x 28 ¾ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection 1970.17.48

CD 26	Théodore Rousseau French, 1812–1867	*Sunset from the Forest of Fontainebleau,* 1848 Oil over graphite on paper laid down on canvas, 12 11⁄16 x 18 1⁄16 in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Gift of Helen Porter and James T. Dyke 2003.70.1

No artist is more closely associated with the forest of Fontainebleau than Théodore Rousseau, who made the village of Barbizon his permanent home. This is an oil study for an official government commission given in 1848, an important work for the artist, who had seen most of his earlier works rejected by more conservative Salons. The final, much larger painting was exhibited in 1850–1851 and is now in the Louvre (below).

This look from inside the forest to a clearing is a composition Rousseau repeated often. Rousseau does not idealize; yet, this is not some chance corner of the forest. Even if based on studies made outdoors it is an artfully arranged scene. Rousseau sought to express the abiding structure and permanence of nature, not its incidental appearance. His oil study, which on first glance can look almost monochromatic, is painted in a muted range of tones with strong, short strokes. It has a freshness that is rarely translated to Rousseau's final canvases, which he worked and reworked to express his deeply personal connection with nature.

Théodore Rousseau

Exit from the Forest of Fontainebleau at Sunset, c. 1848
Oil on canvas, 55 7⁄8 x 77 3⁄4 in.

Paris, Musée du Louvre/Scala/Art Resource, NY

The academic tradition and Salon painting

For most of the nineteenth century, painting and sculpture in France were dominated by the official arts establishment, embodied by the Academy (Académie des Beaux-Arts). It ran the official art school, awarded prizes to young artists (and largely controlled their fates), and sponsored the official juried exhibitions known as Salons. Its influence was enormous — the Academy prescribed what painting should depict and how it should look. The original Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture had been founded in 1648 under Louis XIV. It set out a hierarchy of genres that promoted history painting (figure paintings with elevated themes taken from ancient history, mythology, and the Bible) as the highest achievement of art, since it required learning and imagination. Further down the ranks was portraiture, which relied on the physical appearance of the sitter but which also communicated intangible qualities of personality and character. Landscape and still-life painting were regarded as essentially imitations of what the artist saw, which in the Academy's eyes turned the artist into a mere copyist of nature.

The style of painting promoted by the Academy followed the classical tradition of Renaissance Italy. Successful students were awarded the Prix de Rome, which granted the winner a year's stipend to study in Italy and learn from such masters as Raphael. Two of the most prominent French painters of the seventeenth century, Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin (who was the founding director of the royal Academy), spent most of their careers in Italy, using the scenery of the Roman countryside as settings for history paintings. At different times, debate raged within the Academy about the relative primacy of line or color, with the former usually ascendant. Line was thought to be disciplined and cerebral while color was considered a blandishment for the senses. Academic compositions were harmonious and carefully controlled, their receding planes easily "read." Depictions were naturalistic and detailed but highly idealized and artfully contrived — nature was actively transformed into art. Academic expectation also dictated a refined and polished finish; individual brushstrokes were so blended as to be invisible. Avant-garde artists in the nineteenth century would challenge all these conventions.

Poussin's art was a foundation of the French classical style favored by the Academy. This scene is taken from Greek and Roman mythology. It is painted in a naturalistic but idealized manner, with a high degree of finish, an emphasis on line to convey legible forms, and an ordered, almost geometrically conceived composition.

CD 27 | Nicolas Poussin | French, 1594–1665

The Feeding of the Child Jupiter, c. 1640
Oil on canvas, 46 ⅛ x 61 ⅛ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.2.21

CD 28	Narcisse Diaz de la Peña French, 1808–1876	*The Edge of the Forest at Les Monts-Girard, Fontainebleau,* 1868 Oil on canvas, 38 ½ x 49 $^{7}/_{16}$ in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Chester Dale Fund 2000.37.1

This painting depicts a well-known area at the edge of the forest, where the oaks were ancient and beautiful. The scene has a grandeur unembellished by any hint of human anecdote, even though the clearing was often used for resting flocks. Although Narcisse Diaz de la Peña would have made outdoor studies on the spot, his finished work was painted in the studio and probably incorporates landscape elements sketched elsewhere around Fontainebleau. The warm tones of green and brown, and shimmering light are all typical of his late paintings. His richly painted surface — thickly applied pigment encrusts the old trees almost like lichens — impressed younger painters with its boldness. So did his feeling for light, here breaking through gathering storm clouds to fall on tree trunks and a boggy pool.

Photography and painting

Since the announcement of photography's invention in 1839, painting and photography have been engaged in a productive, mutually informing dialogue. The value of photography for documentary purposes was recognized from the outset; for example, the French government commissioned Charles Marville to record old sections of Paris slated for demolition. But even in the earliest days of the new medium, many photographers set about to make photography an art. A number of French photographers had been trained as painters: Louis Daguerre was a designer of stage sets and panoramas, Eugène Cuvelier studied with a landscape artist, and both Charles Nègre and Gustave Le Gray trained under the noted academic painter Paul Delaroche. Early photographers modeled their compositions and often their subject matter on painting. They were seeking to give their images the same power of expression that painting possessed, whether rendering insight into the character of a portrait subject, detailing the familiar narratives of genre scenes, or forging a romantic connection to nature.

Painters, for their part, responded to the new medium in various ways. Several, including Degas, became proficient with a camera themselves, while others, like Courbet, used photographs as preparatory studies for paintings. Corot, who collected photographs, also experimented with a printmaking technique called *cliché-verre* that uses a hand-drawn photographic negative. Other artists adopted the visual effects of photography; for example, the soft, feathery texture characteristic of prints made from paper negatives finds parallel in paintings and pastels by Corot and Millet. Degas' photographs likely reinforced his use of casual poses and unusual perspectives. Eadweard Muybridge's sequential photographs of animals and people in motion also seems to have informed Degas' painterly exploration of time, sequence, and motion. Other painters responded to photography's unexpected blurring of moving objects, adopting sketchy brushstrokes to convey speed, movement, and the pace of modern life.

Read more about early photography and photographers at:

http://www.mediahistory.umn.edu/photo.htm

Oaks, artists, and nature preserves

Ancient oaks — and the artists who admired them — helped preserve the forest of Fontainebleau for France and all who visit today. In 1861 Rousseau and other Barbizon artists, concerned that the oaks were being logged to allow commercial planting of pine, petitioned the emperor to intervene. Napoleon III's proclamation designated 1,000 hectares (about 2,500 acres) of the forest as "*séries artistiques,*" the first official action in history to protect a natural site. (Yellowstone in the United States, the first national park, was established in 1872. Its creation was also spurred by artists, especially Thomas "Yellowstone" Moran whose paintings communicated the site's grandeur in a way no written account could.)

CD 29 | Eugène Cuvelier, French, 1837–1900 | *Forest Scene,* early 1860s, Salted paper print from paper negative, 7 5/8 x 10 1/8 in. | National Gallery of Art, Washington, Patrons' Permanent Fund 1995.36.71

Eugène Cuvelier's technical prowess and ability to sensitively render light and atmosphere are evident here. Although nominally a description of trees, his photograph's main subject is the feathery, luminous appearance of dappled, silvery light as it filters through the twisted skein of delicate branches.

slide 13 CD 30	Charles-François Daubigny French, 1817–1878	*Studio on the Boat (Le Bateau-atelier),* 1862 Etching, plate: 5 1/16 x 7 1/16 in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Gift of Joan Lees in memory of Edward Lees, M.D. 1981.58.14

In 1857 Charles-François Daubigny bought a river ferry, the "Botin," and outfitted it as a floating studio. Corot was named honorary admiral; Daubigny's son was cabin boy — and, it appears from some of the artist's etchings of life aboard, chief fish-catcher. The studio boat gave the artist a platform for views he could not paint directly on land. He sailed "Botin" up and down the rivers of France until his death. Other artists, including Monet, would also equip studio boats.

Daubigny associated with the Barbizon painters, but this is not a forest scene. Like many of his works, it shows a spot along the Oise River, near the village of Valmondois, where Daubigny grew up. Probably it was painted mid-river from Daubigny's studio boat, which afforded him a good vantage for painting the luminous sky and watery reflections. These plays of light and air are his main preoccupation, not the tiny washerwomen, barely visible on the bank on the left. They may have been added as a concession to public taste.

CD 31 | Charles-François Daubigny

Washerwomen at the Oise River near Valmondois, 1865
Oil on wood, 9 ½ x 18 ⅛ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Gift of R. Horace Gallatin 1949.1.3

Monet in Fontainebleau

Drawn to the works of Corot and the Barbizon painters, Claude Monet and other impressionists-in-the-making also painted in the forest of Fontainebleau during the early 1860s. It was the setting of Monet's most ambitious work to date: a twenty-foot canvas that was never publicly exhibited. The painting was so large he had to lower it into a trench in order to work on it outdoors. Left to settle a debt with his landlord, it was ruined by moisture and neglect. Today, only fragments survive, along with painted studies and drawings, including the two illustrated here.

The oil study captures the brilliant light that dapples the ground and dances off an elegant young couple. They are Monet's future wife Camille and Frédéric Bazille, a friend and fellow painter. The pencil sketch lets us place them within the broader composition: approaching other fashionable young Parisians gathered for a picnic. This road, often painted, led through the forest to the village of Chailly. In the shadows is a server, hired from one of the many local catering firms that could provide all the accoutrements of a forest outing. After extension of the train from Paris to Melun in 1849, Fontainebleau and villages like Chailly became easy suburban jaunts. While Corot and the Barbizon artists continued to paint its ancient oaks and time-formed rocks, the forest had long since become a place where the bourgeoisie encountered nature on its own terms—a place for tourists, guided by books and signposts, and populated with numerous amateur painters. Monet's Fontainebleau subject, despite its forest setting, was really modern life.

CD 32 | Claude Monet

Bazille and Camille (Study for "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe"), 1865 | Oil on canvas, 36 5⁄8 x 27 1⁄8 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection 1970.17.41

CD 33 | Claude Monet

The Luncheon on the Grass, c. 1865
Black chalk on blue laid paper, 12 x 18 7⁄16 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1995.47.60

The Artists

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

French, 1796–1875

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

Self-Portrait at the Easel, 1825 | Oil on canvas, 12 ½ x 9 ⅜ in.

Paris, Musée du Louvre/Scala/Art Resource, NY

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot links the classicism of France's past with the naturalist impulses that drove nineteenth-century art. He was born in Paris, where his father was a prosperous cloth merchant and his mother a dressmaker. His father hoped he would enter the clothing trade, but Corot was uninterested in business. A small income allowed him to study art instead. His first teachers were painters in the academic tradition, which sought to elevate the natural world into a more ideal state through narrative and lucid composition. They hoped to enhance the status of landscape painting itself — held in lower esteem than grander pursuits of history painting or even portraiture — by incorporating historical or biblical themes. After Corot these aims would fall away. He was, as Baudelaire wrote about him in 1845, "at the head of the modern school of landscape."[2] Corot lived nearly eighty years, and was productive almost until his death — he saw French landscape transformed, in large measure by his influence.

Today, Corot's most admired paintings are outdoor studies, most made during many trips to Italy (the first in 1825) and around various parts of France. He traveled a part of almost every year, often in the company of Rousseau or other painters. The fresh vision of his works painted directly from nature had a profound impact on fellow artists, but they were shared with few others. For the Salon and his many eager buyers, Corot instead offered "historicized" landscapes in the academic tradition, peopled with figures from myth, the Bible, or ancient history, and "composed" landscapes. These composed scenes, most set near his home at Ville d'Avray, were part fact, part memory. Their soft atmospheres and diaphanous trees are as much evocations of mood as of place; yet, they were informed by his constant work outdoors.

Eugène Cuvelier

French, 1837–1900

Born in the northern city of Arras, Eugène Cuvelier was first introduced to photography by his father, Adalbert. Although he made his fortune in manufacturing, the elder Cuvelier was also an amateur painter and an accomplished photographer. While the young Eugène most certainly learned the practice of photography from his father, his training in the studio of landscapist Constant Dutilleux encouraged a broader interest in art and especially the aesthetic of *plein-air* painting.

In 1856 Cuvelier visited Barbizon for the first time, and three years later he married Louise Ganne, the daughter of the Barbizon innkeeper whose auberge served as the gathering place for Corot, Millet, Rousseau, and other painters. Alongside his fellow artists, Cuvelier explored the forest of Fontainebleau with his camera, creating some of the most astonishingly sensitive and lyrical of all nineteenth-century landscape photographs.

Although he was a member of the Société Française de Photographie, and occasionally exhibited his photographs, Cuvelier does not appear to have sought commissions, operated a studio, or sold his work to the public. Instead, creating photographs for himself and his friends, he made few prints from his negatives and lavished great care on them, achieving a tonal and surface richness rarely found in the work of commercial nineteenth-century photographers.

Charles-François Daubigny

French, 1817–1878

In M. Armand Dayot, ed. *Le Second Empire (2 Décembre 1851–4 Septembre 1879)* (Paris, n.d.), 254

National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

Charles-François Daubigny was born in Paris but raised along the Oise River. Son of a landscape painter, he was too poor to enter a teaching studio. As a teenager he supported himself by doing illustrations for a publisher and working for a painting restorer. At the same time he was making landscape sketches in the countryside outside Paris. After 1848 he began to spend time in Fontainebleau with Rousseau and other Barbizon painters, but it was the Oise—not the forest—that would become his enduring subject. Daubigny and Corot became lifelong friends, traveling and painting together often. Corot's influence helped Daubigny to focus on landscapes and to paint directly from nature.

By the late 1850s, Daubigny was accepted as a major landscape artist, but some critics were displeased by what they termed an increasingly "lazy" style, which resulted from his *plein-air* practice. They believed his works were insufficiently finished and too casually composed. Daubigny's approach reflects a shift in the way landscape—and the landscape painter—was viewed. Nature was being examined in a more materialistic, less romantic light, while the artist himself de-emphasized his subjective role to become a more "scientific" observer. In this respect Daubigny's response differed from the intensely personal one of Rousseau—and this objectivity marked his modernity. Younger artists were increasingly trying to transcribe nature's changing surfaces rather than interpret its deeper mysteries. Over the next decade, Daubigny would be accused of rendering only "impressions" of nature, and in 1864 exhibited, for the first time, a *plein-air* painting at the Salon without a title that specifically labeled it as a "study." Daubigny's honest observation of nature and his free handling were very influential on the generation of artists who would soon embrace the name "impressionist."

Narcisse Diaz de la Peña

French, 1808–1876

In M. Armand Dayot, ed. *Le Second Empire (2 Décembre 1851–4 Septembre 1870)* (Paris, n.d.), 254

National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

Narcisse Diaz de la Peña's Spanish parents fled to France in the wake of Napoleon's wars on the Iberian peninsula. The family settled in Bordeaux, where Narcisse was born, but his parents died young and he grew up in a foster home near Paris. At age thirteen an infected insect or snake bite led to the amputation of Diaz' left leg. It apparently did not affect his general good humor and generosity, and he was held by friends as something of a bon vivant. After apprenticing as a porcelain painter, he began in the late 1820s to study with a history painter in Paris and to copy works in the Louvre. Most of Diaz' early pictures were sentimental and romanticized idylls that he was able to dash off with speed. About 1835 he started to explore the forest of Fontainebleau, becoming a close associate of Rousseau and a regular summer visitor at Barbizon. Quickly, the forest, its heaths, deep

woods, and strong effects of light and shade became Diaz' preferred subjects, and remained so for the duration of his career. His paintings enjoyed popular success—greater than the less conventional and more melancholic canvases of Rousseau, for example—and he retired to the French Riviera a wealthy man, sharing his reward with colleagues who were less financially secure.

Alphonse Jeanrenaud

French, 1818–1895

Little is known about Alphonse Jeanrenaud. A former naval officer, he resided in Paris and became a member of the Société Française de Photographie in 1855. Throughout the 1860s he exhibited photographs of diverse subjects, including architectural views and landscapes. Jeanrenaud's most admired works are sensitive landscapes. Ernest Lacan, editor in chief of *La Lumière*, the journal for the Société Française de Photographie, praised him as "possessing to a very high degree a feeling for Nature that characterizes true landscape artists."[3]

Jean-François Millet

French, 1814–1875

Jean-François Millet

Self-Portrait, c. 1845–1846 | Charcoal and pencil on paper, 12 ½ x 17 in.

Paris, Musée du Louvre/Bridgeman Art Library

Jean-François Millet was born to a prosperous farm family in Normandy. He received a strong classical education and kept up a lively interest in literature his entire life. He first studied art with a local portrait painter before going to Cherbourg for more professional training. In 1837 the city awarded him a stipend to continue study under a well-known history painter in Paris. He returned to Cherbourg after two years to work as a portrait painter—portraitists were about the only artists who could support themselves in smaller communities. Struggling financially, he moved back and forth several times over the next few years between Paris and Normandy. To attract more buyers he started painting bucolic idylls with a hint of eroticism.

In 1848 Millet painted the first scenes of farm labor that would later become his best-known subjects (see p. 65). Spurred by an outbreak of cholera in 1849, he moved from Paris to Barbizon, becoming a close friend and associate of Rousseau and other artists working in the forest. Millet was unusual in the group for his focus on the human figure. The large scale of his peasants gives them a kind of monumental gravity. Their faces are generalized rather than individual, idealized but not pretty. Abstracted into motionless compositions, their actions take on the color of archaic ritual. Millet's art is often linked with the social themes of realism, but his outlook was quite different. His paintings are not records of actual life but interweave memories from his childhood on the land in Normandy. Although his sympathy for the peasants he painted was deeply felt—and his work would inspire social realists in the twentieth century—Millet's motivation had little to do with politics (and he was rather pessimistic about the possibility of progress). His concerns were more aesthetic, centered on the powerful drawing and compositional intensity that made his art modern.

Claude Monet

biography, p. 68

Berthe Morisot

biography, p. 69

Théodore Rousseau

French, 1812–1867

Nadar | French, 1820–1910

Carte-de-visite photograph

Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum/Bridgeman Art Library

Théodore Rousseau grew up in Paris, where his father worked in the clothing trade. Already as a boy, he was sketching trees in the Bois de Boulogne, the large park on the west side of the city. At age thirteen he was sent to live and work in a family-owned sawmill in the Jura (see section 4). He thrived in this rugged region of eastern France and on his return to Paris determined to become a landscape artist. He studied with several painters of historical landscapes, but the idea that landscape needed somehow to be "elevated" with myth or biblical stories was at odds with his passion for nature as a living thing. By age sixteen Rousseau had already made excursions to sketch in the forest of Fontainebleau. In the mid-1840s, he made Barbizon his permanent residence.

Rousseau's naturalism was not a sensory response — not the kind of rapid transcription that was beginning to inflect Daubigny's works and would become a touchstone of impressionism. Instead, Rousseau's approach was one of long, meditative study. He understood nature as a process of constant growth, death, and rebirth. In trees he saw fellow creatures and nobility:

I also heard the voices of trees… this whole world of flora lives as deaf-mutes whose signs I divined and whose passions I uncovered; I wanted to talk with them and to be able to tell myself, by this other language — painting — that I had put my finger on the secret of their majesty.[4]

After some early success at the Salon, Rousseau's pictures were systematically excluded after the mid-1830s, perhaps in part because of his strongly republican politics and perceived role as "leader" of the Barbizon painters whose aims were counter to those of the academicians serving on Salon juries. The Revolution of 1848 at least briefly created a more receptive climate for his work, but Rousseau still had to wait long — almost to his death — for official recognition.