mourners on the near side of the momentarily empty grave, just across from the kneeling gravedigger.

Although there are still some problems in identifying several people in this assembly, each one is so individualized that we feel a totally authentic, one-to-one confrontation with a complete cast of characters who compose the small community of Ornans—the sober, balding justice of the peace in the center, with the corpulent mayor behind him; the village priest in profile with his entourage of bored choirboys and craggy-faced beadles, each wearing a brilliant red toque and turning in opposite directions; the pair of aged villagers who wear, for this state occasion, costumes of the veterans of 1793; behind them, the trio of tearful women (modeled after Courbet's sisters, Juliette, Zoé, Zélie), each of whom responds differently—one half-concealing, the second totally concealing her face with a handkerchief, the third tilting her head pensively; and not least, the insouciant half-breed hunting dog in the foreground, whose presence is neither more nor less important than that of the human participants, and whose temporary distraction from the events is neither more nor less conspicuous than the indifference of many of the human mourners. Indeed, we feel a sense throughout of totally unedited truth, like the results of a photographer who snapped a large restless group before telling them to compose themselves in a less unruly way, with everyone standing straight and facing the camera. Courbet's genius lies here in, among other things, the consistency of his vision, which refuses to idealize, to compose, to ennoble according to any familiar conventions, even those of the most doggedly literal Spanish or Dutch seventeenth-century masters in whom he found a certain historical ancestry. So insistently anti-traditional is *A Burial* that the figural composition seems an anti-composition. We sense that the edges arbitrarily crop the line-up of mourners, some of whom may stand beyond the frame, just as we feel what has been called a democratization of structure, each figure having, as it were, the same number of pictorial votes as his or her neighbor, including the dog. There are, to be sure, strong prophecies of this new earthbound society of individuals in David's *Coronation of Napoleon* (see fig. 26), but Courbet has eliminated the traditional aura of supreme authority, leaving us with a social order that seems to exist only on the level of the most ordinary mortals and that, as such, is susceptible to change.

If Courbet's vast canvas at first seems self-consciously artless, it of course is not. His tendency to polarize tonal extremes of literally funereal black and startling passages of creamy white paint (the dog, the pallbearers' robes, the women's handkerchiefs and starched bonnets) creates a coherently flattened effect of silhouetted patterns compressed against the high, rocky horizon of Ornans's new burial grounds which enclose, from above and behind, these earthbound figures. And if these figures seem disorderly in their democratic individuality (unlike, say, the more dignified choreography of rural multitudes in Breton's later *Blessing of the Wheat*; see fig. 224), they are more subtly ordered in a loose but pervasive structure that gives the left third to the clerics, the center third to prominent secular figures, and the right third to a chorus of grieving women and children. The whole composes a visual trio that reflects social facts as well as providing a solemn, wavelike rhythm of figures who weave from front to back around the grave. The epic dignity that emerges makes us understand how artists like Mary Cassatt could later recognize in Courbet's rural burial an artistic pedigree that went back to Greek sarcophagus reliefs.

But in these funerary terms, too, the painting was initially heretical. Not only did it challenge the noble with the vulgar in terms of sheer size (its dimensions approaching Couture's *Romans of the Decadence*, from the Salon that preceded the 1848 Revolution; see fig. 158), but it also challenged Christian ideas of the transcendental passage from life to death. On a visit to the Low Countries in 1847, Courbet apparently saw under way in Brussels the famous new *Triumph of Christ* by Wiertz (see fig. 152), whose gigantic apotheosis of a supernatural cast of airborne angels, archangels, and of Christ himself may have impressed Courbet as a prerevolutionary pendant to his postrevolutionary world of material facts that would extend even to a Christian afterlife. "Show me an angel and I will paint it" was one of Courbet's most quoted quips, and doubtless, such a creature could not survive a moment on Courbet's Christian soil. Christ exists only as an artifact held high above the horizon by a provincial clergyman (Colard, by name), and the soul goes to eternity in a freshly dug ditch. Far from being blasphemous, which is how it appeared to most conventionally pious eyes in 1851, Courbet's *Burial* locates the falsehoods of earlier heavens in the terrestrial truths of the nineteenth century. He records the rude facts of modern Christian ritual with such dedication and seriousness that they are finally transformed into an experience no less dignified and harmonious than a Baroque representation of a saint's apotheosis.

With *A Burial* and *The Stonebreakers* at the Salon of 1850–51, Courbet achieved a *succès de scandale*, his name suddenly a household word for everything that attacked social and artistic hierarchies through a cult of deliberate ugliness. At the next Salon, in 1852, his assault was through a painting about women and cows, originally bearing the long title *The Young Ladies of the Village Giving Alms to a Cowherd in a Valley of Ornans* (**fig. 229**). Although at first glance, it had enough superficial pastoral charm to have been purchased before the Salon opening by the Count de Morny, a major figure in the establishment of the Second Empire, that charm was immediately discerned by the Salon audience as veiling a multitude of heresies. Three young women fancily dressed for the kind of country outing

Fig. 229 **Gustave Courbet**, *The Young Ladies of the Village Giving Alms to a Cowherd in a Valley of Ornans*, Salon of 1852. Oil on canvas, 6′ 4¾″ × 8′ 6¾″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

familiar from Rococo pastorals pause in an upland pasture to offer a farm girl what seems to be a piece of cake, while their dog stops to observe a pair of cows grazing on the far side of the valley. This ostensibly innocuous image of rural charity, however, produced outraged responses. The three "ladies" of the village, or in the French word, "demoiselles," were, by Parisian standards, anything but that; for their coarse, ruddy features and hands, their pretentious, but provincially out-of-style costume, their lifted-pinkie demeanor of affected grace immediately made it clear that these were vulgar rural women who were not only artistically offensive in their almost parody-like reference to the classical group of the Three Graces, but socially so. For in 1852, it was apparent that these "demoiselles" were on their way up the ladder of economic mobility, to so high a point, in fact, that they were grandly separated, like eighteenth-century aristocrats, from the lowly cowherd, whose origins were very much their own. Millet's peasants had begun, as it were, to take on city airs. Again, Courbet told the whole truth. The women were modeled after the

Fig. 230 **The Young Ladies of the Village** (caricature from *Le journal pour rire*, April 16, 1852). Lithograph. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

same three sisters he had used as mourners in *A Burial* and were no less gross by urban standards of beauty. Even their dog, quickly recognized as a mongrel, seemed to belong to that insolent breed of the country nouveau-riche whose growing strength would make many a socially and financially secure Parisian cough nervously.

The awkward structure of the painting was equally offensive in its violation of hallowed traditions, and we may learn something of this from one of the many caricatures made of Courbet's works after the exhibition (**fig. 230**). To eyes of 1852, the figures had a wooden, doll-like stiffness (they are propped up gracelessly like scarecrows or mannequins on crude bases) that reeked not of the old masters but rather of the naïve figures in popular imagery which Courbet had explored as the visual counterpart to his rural subject. And the spatial ordering also seemed childishly inept. As in *The Stonebreakers* and *A Burial*, the conventions of perspective and atmospheric depth are flouted: the rear side of the figures almost touches the distant valley, which rises behind them, high above their heads; and even odder, the two cows, which should be located on the far side of a break in the terrain, if only to explain their diminutive size, appear to be in the foreground, a visual paradox that is further exaggerated in the caricature, which pushes these peasant's toys on wheels almost in front of the plane of the figures and dog. Courbet's greedy sense of capturing material facts with the palpable stuff of pigment made everything he recorded feel as if it were accessible to the touch, its reality verifiable in the most primitive, tactile way. Unlike the spatially remote barnyard idylls of Rosa Bonheur, Courbet's painting got uncomfortably close, imposing its coarse truths on the viewer. There were coarse truths, too, in Courbet's palette, which, as in many of Millet's peasant paintings of the 1850s, veered here toward earthy, simple colors, those of cattle, of sunbaked earth and stone, of slightly parched grass and trees, colors that set into instant opposition the blatant luxury and artifice of the hues favored by artists of more noble subject matter. And the brushwork again conveys the look of manual labor, the broad patches of gray-browns that define the background rocks almost palpably creating in thick pigment the density of the stony landscape around Ornans.

Fig. 231 **Alfred Dehodencq**, *A Bullfight in Spain*, Salon of 1850–51. Oil on canvas, 4′ 11½″ 6′ 11¼″. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau.

Although Courbet was the most conspicuous public force in this breakdown of pictorial conventions after 1848, he was hardly unique, witness *A Bullfight in Spain* (fig. 231), a painting at the 1850–51 Salon by a minor contemporary, Alfred Dehodencq (1822–82). Wounded during the revolutionary days of June 1848, Dehodencq recuperated with the help of the Spanish sun, under which he witnessed, in September 1849, a provincial version of the national sport in the village of El Escorial, which he then used as the motif for a government commission. The painting shows us not the pageantry of the Madrid bullring, but rather a more humble, rural variant, the equivalent of Courbet's funeral rites in Ornans vis-à-vis the pomp of a stately burial in Paris. Dehodencq also preferred this naïve regional truth, which he recorded with a willful compositional awkwardness that parallels Courbet's. Not only is the dramatic narrative focus on the bull diffused by the equal importance given to the participants and spectators on the sides; but the space, as in *The Young Ladies of the Village*, compresses near and far, with the ground plane tilting upward at so steep an angle that the mountain, the ruins of an arch, and the vernacular houses of the background seem almost as flatly and directly accessible in the foreground as the bullfighter, whose back faces us. Moreover, as in Courbet's work, the loose-jointed composition gains a kind of patterned coherence through the strong silhouetting of dark and light patches in the bright, even light of the sun. Not only in his subject matter, but in the candid scattering of figures and events, Dehodencq continues a long dialogue between French painters and Spain, and one that would reach greater complexities in the 1860s through Manet's reinterpretation of Spanish themes in a style of snapshot truth and immediacy that the mid-nineteenth century associated with Spanish painting from Velázquez to Goya.

Materialism versus Idealism

Even without the support of such lesser artists as Dehodencq, Courbet's art of the 1850s separated itself irrevocably from the official styles of painters in Paris who would perpetuate an ideal art based on continued faith in the mythologies of the Greco-Roman world or of aristocratic social hierarchies. At the 1853 Salon, an exact contemporary of Courbet's, Charles-François Jalabert (1819–1901), exhibited a painting that, like so many of the other hundreds on the Salon walls, would shield the viewer from the ugly, nouveau-riche girls of peasant origin—Courbet's own sisters—who had crashed the 1852 Salon. His *Nymphs Listening to the Songs of Orpheus*(fig. 232) is positively dreamlike, a mirage of a forest glen in which a rapt audience of half-veiled nymphs seems almost to waft upward in the direction of the magic sounds of Orpheus's lyre. The hazy light and mellifluous movement of powdery soft flesh and wispy draperies transport us almost literally from a gravity-bound world to the imaginative flights inspired by music and the dance, creating the kind of phantom, eyes-closed ambience that would mesmerize Parisians who attended Adolphe Adam's popular new ballet *Giselle* (1841) or those new operas of Wagner that featured siren choruses of mythical maidens who resided in Venusberg (*Tannhäuser*, 1843–44) or in the Rhine (*Das Rheingold*, 1853–54). Although Jalabert's painting stubbornly adheres to the values posited in earlier nineteenth-century paintings of Greco-Roman myth, such as Broc's *Death of Hyacinth* (see fig. 46), its new inflection of what is almost a period style, that of the then one-year-old Second Empire of Napoleon III, is unmistakable. For here, the academic conventions of marmoreal flesh and drapery have softened and multiplied into a florid hothouse that evokes a pastel world of luxurious surfeit and erotic plenty, a nostalgic whiff of the style and civilization of Rococo France.

This conspicuous consumption, so evident in the official architecture of the Second Empire (of which Charles Garnier's Paris Opera would become an international symbol), reached a pictorial height at the Salon of 1855 in the huge group portrait of the new empress of France, Eugénie, surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting (fig. 233). The artist, Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805?–73), although born and trained in Germany, was practically a subject of other European monarchs, whether Victoria, Louis-Philippe, or Napoleon III; for, like a mid-nineteenth-century Rubens, he frequented international courts and painted state portraits in a way that applauded the pomp and circumstance of royalty. Eugénie de Montijo, a Spanish countess, had married Napoleon III barely two months after his stately entrance, on December 2, 1851, from St.-Cloud into Paris as the new emperor of France; and one year later, Winterhalter reappeared in Paris, from London, to become once again an official court painter. His connections with Eugénie were particularly close, and he supported pictorially her historical fantasies by representing her, for example, in the eighteenth-century costume of Marie-Antoinette or of those French queens whose genealogical table she hoped to extend, grace, and honor. By the time of the 1855 Salon, he had completed the grandiloquent portrait of the new empress, seated in a stage-set fantasy of a woodsy retreat with an imperial assortment of one princess, one duchess, one countess, one viscountess, two baronesses, and two marchionesses. The group portrait was apparently commissioned and paid for by the empress herself, who quietly reigns over this aristocratic octet, and holds a bunch of imperial violets whose color is discreetly echoed in the trim on her dress. Like Jalabert's wood nymphs, these *grandes dames* create a powder-room ambience of billowing flesh and fabric. The cumbersome crinolines, which had just become

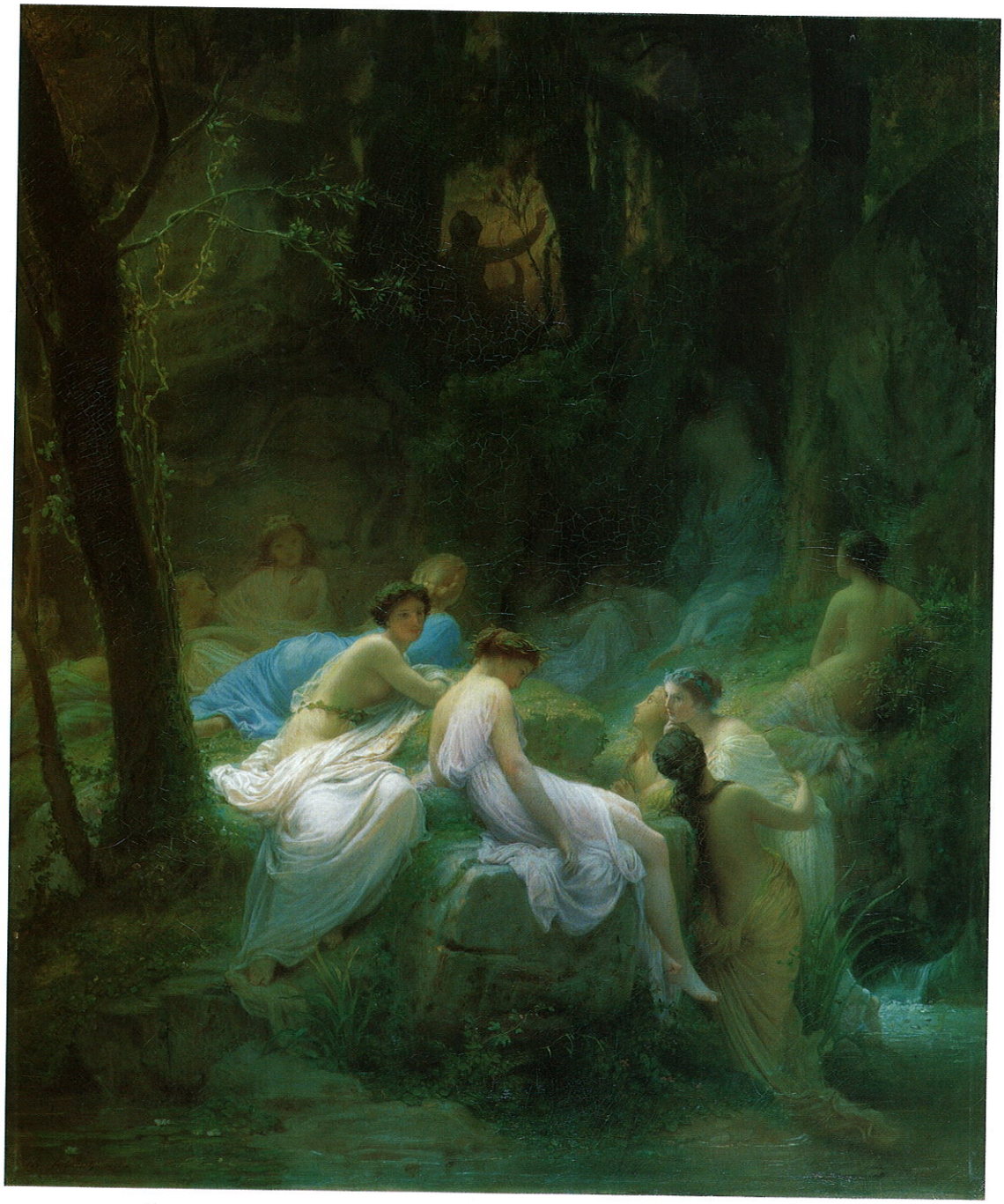

Fig. 232 **Charles-François Jalabert**, *Nymphs Listening to the Songs of Orpheus*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 40¾ × 36¾". The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

fashionable and which actually needed a concealed metal cage to support their concentric hoops and petticoats, now seem the vehicles of gauzy, airborne flutter, like the costumes of the ballet. Even the expressions, haughtily pensive and grave, have a mock-theatrical quality. Such an image of total artifice, where the iridescent pastel colors have never seen the light of day and where the tumbling floral bouquets might come from a pastry tube, aspired to nothing less than the resurrection of the gorgeous fictions and bravura brushwork of the court painters of eighteenth-century France, as if the ghost of Boucher had been summoned up and magnified to gargantuan dimensions in order to accommodate the ambitions of the new empire. For in that same year, 1855, Paris would not only see its railway line extended to the Mediterranean, but would play host to the first of its own long series of great world's fairs as well as to the state visit of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who in 1851 had inaugurated the tradition of international exhibitions at the Crystal Palace. At the Salon of 1855, which opened on May 15 as part of the Exposition Universelle, Winterhalter's painting occupied a place of imperial honor and must have been seen by many of the

over five million visitors to the fair. Its critical reception was, in fact, poor, if polite, given the identity of the sitters; but it seems that exactly those meretricious qualities which marred the painting for serious observers were those which made it a beloved popular incarnation of everything that was nostalgically, if preposterously, anachronistic about the mid-century's efforts to relive in a fantasy world another century's idea of extravagance and grace. The authentic traditions of prerevolutionary monarchy have been re-created as a pictorial operetta, both lovable and silly.

For the likes of Courbet, of course, such a painting was an evil falsehood, even though his vulgar village ladies might soon have aspired to these imperial pretensions; and, in 1855, he made publicly clear the unbridgeable gulf between an official art of historical pipe dreams and his own insistence on nothing but the most coarse, physical truth, whether of slightly soiled double chins or an ugly scattering of crushed stones. Of the group of old and new paintings he wanted to show at the official Salon, two had been refused by the selection committee, *A Burial at Ornans* and an even larger new work, *The Painter's Studio*. Courbet seized this occasion to show them in a supplementary private exhibition of forty paintings and four drawings that opened six weeks after the fair, on June 28, and that gave both French and foreign visitors an opportunity to see his doctrine of Realism with a capital *R*. Indeed, the exhibition space, off the Champs-Elysées, was identified with a big sign: DU RÉALISME (that is, "about" or "concerning Realism").

Before Courbet, establishment artists like Copley, West, and David had privately sponsored the exhibition of important new paintings to paying customers, and Géricault had shown *The Raft of the Medusa* to curious Londoners and Dubliners. Moreover, rebellious anti-establishment artists like Carstens and Blake had made efforts to find an audience by holding one-man shows in alternate spaces far from academic territory. But Courbet's enterprise combined all these traditions—official, commercial, and messianic—insofar as he was powerful enough to work inside the establishment, being well represented at the 1855 Salon, and to undermine it simultaneously with a personally sponsored display of his own revolutionary art. As his friend Champfleury wrote to George Sand in 1855, "A painter whose name has made an explosion since the February

Fig. 233 **Franz Xaver Winterhalter**, *Empress Eugénie Surrounded by Her Maids of Honor*, 1855. Oil on canvas, 10 × 14′. Musée National du Château de Compiègne.

Fig. 234 **Gustave Courbet**, *The Painter's Studio*, 1854–55. Oil on canvas, 11′ 10″ × 19′ 8″. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Revolution has chosen the most significant of his works and has had a studio constructed. It is an incredibly audacious act; it is the subversion of all institutions associated with the jury; it is a direct appeal to the public; it is liberty." Inside, the visitor was able to buy for ten centimes a catalogue that included a brief manifesto of Realism, initialed by Courbet, but probably ghostwritten by Champfleury. In it, the artist complained rightly that the name Realist had been imposed upon him and was meaningless without the works, which were what mattered. But he summed up his goals clearly: "To be in a position to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my epoch 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."

This combination of exalting the artist's own ego and of claiming, at the same time, to record the impersonal, shared realities of the world around him is monumentally reflected in Courbet's largest and most enigmatic painting, whose full title—*The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Life as an Artist* (fig. 234)—already suggests its autobiographical ambitions as well as its efforts to achieve symbolic ends through Realist means. *The Painter's Studio* dominated the one-man show not only in size (almost twenty feet wide) but also in subject; for here, at center stage, is Courbet himself, replacing the classical deities who, as in Delaroche's *Artists of All Ages* (see fig. 150), had earlier marked the apex of these pictorial pantheons. On both sides of his own ample space, the great artist-hero-revolutionary has materialized a crowded cast of characters to pay homage within the amphitheatrical sanctuary of his studio.

In a letter to Champfleury of fall 1854, Courbet wrote an indispensable description of the as yet untitled painting, identifying the figures and offering clues to the general meaning. In this tripartite structure, which reflects that of *A Burial at Ornans*, the left-hand group is composed of figures representing commonplace reality outside the studio—a Jew and an Irish beggarwoman Courbet claimed to have seen in London, a hunter, a priest, a rag merchant, a Chinese clown, and many other types who provided the raw, Realist stuff of his art. On the right, another gathering represents Courbet's audience, a circle of patrons and friends who supported his pictorial achievements and political beliefs (including Champfleury, Proudhon, and, seated at the extreme right, Baudelaire) as well as a grandly dressed society lady and her male companion, whom Courbet referred to as art lovers. In the middle, tilting what he called his "Assyrian profile" at its most flattering, rakish angle and nonchalantly ignoring the vast assembly he has summoned up, as in a séance, is the great man himself, painting a landscape. Behind him stands a half-naked model, whose clothing has fallen in a heap, whereas in the

COURBET, *THE PAINTER'S STUDIO* AND THE *PAVILLON DU RÉALISME* IN 1855

Gustave Courbet wrote to his supporter, the writer Champfleury, at the end of 1854, outlining his ambitious plans for The Painter's Studio *(see fig. 234):*

> Even though I am turning into a melancholic, here I am [Ornans], taking on an immense painting, twenty feet long and twelve feet high, perhaps larger than the *Burial*, which will show that I am not dead yet, nor is Realism, for there is Realism in it. It is the moral and physical tale of my atelier. First part: these are the people who serve me, support me in my ideas, and take part in my actions. These are the people who live off of life and off of death; it is society at its highest, its lowest, and its average; in a word, it is how I see society with its concerns and its passions; it is the world that comes to me to be painted.[42]

In April 1855, as the Exposition Universelle (the official Salon) neared, Courbet wrote in a panic to his faithful patron in Montpellier, Alfred Bruyas:

> I am at my wits' end! Terrible things are happening to me. They [the jury] have just refused my *Burial* and my latest painting, the *Atelier*, together with the *Portrait of Champfleury*. They have made it clear that at any cost my tendencies in art must be stopped as they are disastrous for French art. Eleven of my paintings have been accepted. *The Meeting* [owned by Bruyas] barely got by. They found it too personal and too pretentious. Everyone is urging me to have a private show and I have given in. I will organize another exhibition of twenty-seven of my new and old paintings, saying that I am taking advantage of the boost the government has given me by receiving eleven paintings in its exhibition. ... What is odd is that the site is enclosed within the very building of their exhibition.[43]

Six weeks after the Salon opened, then, Courbet mounted his private exhibition. The Pavillon du Réalisme, *within sight of the Exposition itself, housed thirty-nine oils and four drawings.*[44] The Painter's Studio *was number one in the catalogue, which contained this preface, probably written by Champfleury:*

> The title "realist" has been imposed on me in the same way as the title "romantic" was imposed on the men of 1830. Titles have never given the right idea of things; if they did, works would be unnecessary.
>
> Without going into the question as to the rightness or wrongness of a label which, let us hope, no one is expected to understand fully, I would only offer a few words of explanation which may avert misconception.
>
> I have studied the art of the ancients and the moderns without any dogmatic or preconceived ideas. I have not tried to imitate the former or to copy the latter, nor have I addressed myself to the pointless objective of 'art for art's sake'. No—all I have tried to do is to derive, from a complete knowledge of tradition, a reasoned sense of my own independence and individuality.
>
> To achieve skill through knowledge—that has been my purpose. To read the manners, ideas and aspects of the age as I myself saw them—to be a man as well as a painter, in short to create living art—that is my aim.[45]

As Linda Nochlin showed, although The Painter's Studio *can be read as going against the grain of the social and political assumptions of the period, it was also shrewdly commercial:*

> Courbet, by representing himself in his own painting surrounded by his past and present pictorial production, has created an allegory of his beneficent role as a producer of valuable cultural goods. The real allegory then, in the context of the Exposition Universelle of 1855, may be read as Courbet's production of himself as a countercommodity—a free and self-determined man producing objects of genuine value—for a new and relatively unfamiliar public. ... in the context of the year in which it was created, 1855, and the place for which it was intended, the French section of the [Salon], [it] may be conceived of as a kind of miniature "universal exhibition" in its own right, in which the artist displays his wares to an interested public in much the same way as Napoleon III displayed his nation's commodities to would-be buyers and investors.[46]

This plan, if plan it was, was thwarted by the rejection of the picture. Eugène Delacroix visited the private exhibit and wrote of it in his journal:

> ... I went to the Courbet exhibition. He has reduced the price of admission to ten sous. I stayed there alone for nearly an hour and discovered a masterpiece in the picture which they rejected; I could scarcely bear to tear myself away. He has made enormous strides ... the planes are well understood, there is atmosphere, and in some passages the execution is really remarkable, especially the thighs and hips of the nude model and the breasts—also the woman in the foreground with the shawl. The only fault is that the picture, as he has painted it, seems to contain an ambiguity. It looks as though there were a *real sky* in the middle of the painting. They have 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.[47]

At the close of the display, in December, Courbet wrote to Bruyas: "My exhibition has gone perfectly and it has given me an enormous importance: things are going well." In early 1856, seeking to capitalize, Courbet painted The Young Ladies of the Banks of the Seine (Summer) *(see fig. 235). The scandal this caused at the Salon of 1857 did not deter the authorities from awarding him a medal.*[48]

shadows behind the easel is a naked male model, who has awkwardly assumed the pose of Christ or of a saint in martyrdom. Next to a playing cat, a young boy, member of a future generation, looks up at the mature genius; and on the floor at the right, another child is studiously drawing a figure. All of this and much, much more have inevitably tempted historians to decipher the allegorical message promised in the subtitle, *A Real Allegory*; and both the parts and the whole have been seen as a kind of rebus. In fact, everything invites symbolic speculation. Is the left foreground still life of cloak, dagger, and guitar an allusion to the outworn trappings of Romanticism? Could the background trio of men with a gun, a fur hat, and a scythe represent the leaders of revolutionary insurrections in Italy, Hungary, and Poland? Could the scribbling child be Courbet's own illegitimate son, whom he taught to paint? Could the lay model posing as a Christian martyr signify not only Courbet's debunking of ideal, supernatural subject matter but his own role as a new secular messiah who replaces these false traditions? As to the whole, it has been interpreted as a gigantic cryptogram that, in one reading might be decoded in relation to the utopian doctrine of Fourier or, in another, as decipherable only in the context of the esoteric rituals and symbols of freemasonry, which would mean that Courbet himself had been initiated into the Masonic Temple.

But whatever new objective readings may seem most plausible, it is the subjective genius of this painting that endures. For, amazingly, Courbet has now taken over the largest pictorial arena imaginable in order to offer, among other things, a new model of an artistic and social universe of which he is the center and the sole creator. The "seven years" referred to in the title would begin with the revolutionary year, 1848, so that the artist has envisioned a statement in which public and private worlds are fused. And he has also employed a language both real and allegorical, in which the representation of gravity-bound material facts, whether people, animals, or clothing, can suddenly be transformed into fictions and ideas. The coarse-fleshed, half-clad model can become a new, Realist muse; the

Fig. 235 **Gustave Courbet**, *The Young Ladies of the Banks of the Seine (Summer)*, Salon of 1857. Oil on canvas, 68⅛ × 81⅛". Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.

car palpable
stu partly covered above by a theatrical curl of drapery, can suddenly be unveiled as a luminous vista of earth, tree, and sky; and the vast shadowy spaces of the studio, more than twice the height of the figures below, can become a dreamlike stage, in which the artist's combative public life, his own paintings and aesthetic doctrines merge with more private memories. In attempting to reconcile these extremes of the objective and the subjective, of fact and idea, Courbet not only confirmed his generation's welling belief that, in his own words of 1861, "the art of painting can only consist of the representation of objects which are visible and tangible for the artist," but also proved exactly the opposite, namely, that these objects could be symbols and that the artist might even have the license to invent elaborate iconographic programs that would no longer be intelligible to a public unwilling to go beyond the first step of recognizing what was depicted. No less a genius of Realism than Manet would pose the same problems, though in more ironic and elusive terms.

In fact, the critical reception and public attendance of Courbet's one-man show were disappointingly slight, especially vis-à-vis the fuller response to his works at the official Salon, where he was in the company not only of such masters as Delacroix and Ingres, who were honored by large retrospectives, but of an international anthology of painters from both sides of the Atlantic, from Peru to Norway, who displayed their wares alongside those of booming mid-century industries. Courbet's ego and ambitions seem to have been deflated in this year of exhibitions, and his work thereafter lost some of its polemical, revolutionary character, if not its pictorial genius. For at his next Salon, that of 1857, he showed *The Young Ladies of the Banks of the Seine (Summer)* (fig. 235), which, if not as historically or personally pivotal as *The Stonebreakers* or *The Painter's Studio*, is no less a masterpiece. Again, the subject was shocking, though this time in urban rather than rural terms. The two "demoiselles" of the French title, enjoying the leisure of a Paris summer, are hardly "proper" young ladies at all, but rather members of a rapidly growing class of city women whose nests were feathered and bank accounts enriched by wealthy middle-class gentlemen who, on formal occasions, would have been shocked by tales of loose moral standards. In a period when prostitution was rampant and could extend socially and financially from the miseries of the sidewalk to the urban palaces of the great courtesans of the Second Empire, Courbet chose the equivalents of *The Young Ladies of the Village*, namely, upwardly mobile, nouveau-riche women whose combination of grossness and opulence satirically mirrored the fancy imperial display of Winterhalter's group portrait. The near *demoiselle*, in her rush to find relief from the exertions of a hot summer day on the Seine, has taken off her hat, removed her dress, flopped down upon it, and revealed her elaborate chemise and petticoat, while still wearing her fanciest gloves. Her companion, whose underclothing for the moment is concealed, is equally blowsy and vacant in her sodden torpor. Both of them seem to have fallen clumsily to the earth in stiff, supine postures that were immediately caricatured as toppled wooden dolls and that also reflected the young ladies' sexual vocation, which might escalate, in the phrase of the time, to that of a *grande horizontale* (a "renowned horizontal lady"). And, as if these breaches of decorum in clothing and posture were not vulgar enough, the outstretched bower of hands and arms of the near *demoiselle* echoes the elegant movements of the ballet, whereas her friend puts gloved hand to fat rouged cheek in a way that recalls the conventional antique pose of serious meditation, ubiquitous in nineteenth-century classicizing art and high-minded portraiture. But these parodies, far from being thin-blooded, are vitalized by Courbet's epic sense of things physical and earthy. Against the high horizon of the Seine, a cornucopian abundance is crammed toward the spectator—the multiple layers of cashmeres and corsets, the inside and out of Second Empire dress; the bouquet of wildflowers that rounds out a lap; the sunhat suspended on a branch at the right; and filling in any hollows, a dense tapestry of grass, trees, leaves burgeoning in the summer heat. Yet, beyond this corporeality, a strange mood of reverie and daydream overtakes the painting, not only in the postures of groggy abandon, but through the distant, unfocused gaze of half-closed eyes that both seek out and avoid the spectator's notice.

If Courbet's veneration of a wealth of palpable stuff belongs to his unique flavor as an artist, it should not be forgotten that this materialism was also part of a period style that, in France, is generally associated with the Second Empire and, in the Anglo-American world, with the Victorian age. There, as elsewhere, a kind of *horror vacui* and a love of ostentatious display began to prevail in the 1850s. It can even be discerned in the late work of the noble septuagenarian Ingres, the guardian of ideal beauty who in 1855 vied for public attention with the apostle of ugliness, Courbet. Yet viewed through the lenses of period style, Ingres's portrait *Mme. Inès Moitessier* of 1856 (fig. 236) is hardly alien to Courbet's Seine-side *demoiselles*. Both paintings make us wallow in a plum-pudding richness of textures, materials, patterns that aspire to an airless density. Mme. Moitessier, of course, is a model of cool propriety in her wealthy Paris interior, and her posture alludes to classical prototypes; but she and Ingres clearly revel in her sumptuous inventory of possessions: the gilt console, the tufted damask sofa, the Chinese vase, the peacock-feathered fan, the bracelets and brooch with their enormous gems, and above all the full cascade of the rose-patterned silk dress with its embellishments of fringes and ribbons. But Ingres, like Courbet, transcends the Second Empire period look through his own genius, which

Fig. 236 **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres**, *Mme. Inès Moitessier*, 1856. Oil on canvas, 47¼ × 36¼". National Gallery, London.

here ennobles the sitter not only with the abstract, yet sensual linear circuits that command the undulant shapes of fingers, shoulders, and arms, but through an adaptation of the common antique pose of contemplative head-on-hand that Courbet was soon to spoof. Mme. Moitessier's oracular mysteries even parallel Courbet's in their suggestion of a more concealed introspective world, the other side of this materialistic coin. For her gaze, too, is elusive and remote, and her profile reflection in the mirrored background adds an even more distant layer of unreality to the graspable facts accessible to the spectator. It is telling that Picasso was to be infatuated by both these paintings, and made variations upon them. Perhaps he intuited, as their contemporaries did not, how Ingres and Courbet, starting at the opposite theoretical premises of Idealism and Realism, could often meet halfway in works that cast a spell of meditative stillness upon a mid-nineteenth-century world of the crassest material facts.

Poverty and Piety

Courbet's and Millet's need, after 1848, to transform new social realities into art was shared by countless painters of their generation who also felt that common men and women should replace kings and gods. Often, the results achieved a kind of compromise between the conventions of the past and the innovations of the present, a fusion that may be seen, for instance, in *The Fire* (fig. 237), a painting by Jean-Pierre-Alexandre Antigna (1817–78) shown at the