allusions to the indoor art of the museums have been cast aside in favor of a luminous new outdoor world that, for him and his contemporaries, presented in the 1860s a fresh range of rejuvenating experiences to be savored in life and recaptured in art.

Painting Out-of-Doors: Toward Impressionism

The idea of painting out-of-doors, of achieving an immediate, one-to-one response between what is observed and what is recorded has a long history whose roots go back to the eighteenth century, if not before. Most artists concerned with landscape painting made drawings, watercolors, or oil sketches on the spot. Constable's small studies of changing English skies (see fig. 142), the countless painted notations after nature made in the Forest of Fontainebleau, the Hudson River Valley, or the Roman Campagna are reminders that artists before 1848 valued the possibility of a small painting providing a kind of stenographic record of unedited, documentary experience. But it was only beginning in the 1850s that the pursuit of maximum truth to the look of nature became a full-scale obsession; and only in the 1860s that painters would start to value these often arduous confrontations with the outdoors not as means to more calculated works of art to be finished in the studio but as complete ends in themselves. Constable, for instance, would make rapid oil sketches, usually *in situ*, for compositions that would then be elaborated and enlarged for public exhibition; but whether he himself thought of these swift, painted jottings as self-sufficient works of art (as was claimed by later viewers, trained after the heyday of Impressionism and valuing spontaneity over finish) is debatable. In any case, the issues here are at least twofold. There is, for one, the fervent search after 1848 for optimum fidelity to empirical experience, which includes the truths of landscape that might be transcribed either in meticulous detail or as a momentary overall impression. And there is, for another, the growing awareness of the possibility that a small, painted sketch (completed in hours, perhaps minutes, rather than days and weeks) might begin to rival in aesthetic importance, as could a drawing or a watercolor, a larger painting that was a long sequence of refinements and choices. Already in 1816, the École des Beaux-Arts established an annual competition and prize for a painted sketch (though these were conceived as shorthand versions of works to be properly finished); but it was not really until the late 1860s and 1870s, with the maturation of a group of artists whose style was to be dubbed Impressionism in 1874, that this idea finally triumphed and challenged the assumptions of what was necessary for aesthetic and empirical completeness.

It was clearly within the Pre-Raphaelite circle of the 1850s that the most painstaking and zealous efforts were made to replicate with paint on canvas the fullest optical truths of landscape. Already in narrative compositions like Hunt's *Rienzi* (see fig. 243) or Brown's *Work* (see fig. 249), the outdoor settings are exactly rendered under the glare of actual sunlight; and such goals continued to inspire many British painters working at home and abroad. A typical case is that of John Brett (1831–1902), who, following in the footsteps of countless artists and tourists, first visited and painted the Alps in 1856 and then returned, in 1858. Under the aegis of Ruskin, who was in Turin that summer, Brett painted the *Val d'Aosta* (fig. 294), a Shangri-La vista of a sun-flooded, mountain-crowned valley in the Piedmontese Alps. The fidelity to nature that Ruskin admired as the foundation of artists as different in their results as Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites was extended here to so accurate a record of a particular spot that, when the *Val d'Aosta* was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1859, Ruskin could claim that through this painting, "for the first time in history, we have . . . the power of visiting a place, reasoning about it, knowing it, just as if we were there, except that we cannot stir from our place, nor look behind us." We do, in fact, seem perched on the edge of a rock, a mountain goat and a sleeping peasant girl precariously located just below us. Beyond this, a vertiginous bird's-eye view takes in everything from the wooden Alpine cottages and cultivated fields that mark a human presence in this sunlit haven to the atmospheric mix of clouds and mountains in the remote heights. The brusque croppings of trees, rocks, and earth at the sides and the bottom suggest that accidental slice of unadulterated fact so often sought after in the 1850s and 1860s by Realist artists as unlike Brett as Manet, but the sharp-focus rendering of every vine leaf, chestnut tree, or vein of rock in what is actually a panorama some twelve miles deep pertains to the obsessive search for quasi-scientific truth in the art of landscape, a truth infinitely more microscopic and accurate here than in, say, such a relaxed, earlier view of an Alpine valley as that by Waldmüller (see fig. 163). Ruskin had written of "historical landscape," by which he meant a kind of natural history, a record of the present truths of nature in which could be read (as in geology or botany) the past and the future of what, in the mid-century, seemed a landscape whose life was being drastically altered by industrial change. Brett's faithful transcription of this sunlit fragment of a wondrous and unpolluted mountain site does indeed convey a sense of serious purpose that could inspire, without the rhetoric of Church's *Cotopaxi* (see fig. 263), grand thoughts about man and nature. Ruskin was finally unsatisfied with Brett's painting. He called it "Mirror's Work, not Man's," feeling that it lacked, especially in the soft, distant blurring of clouds and mountains, the emotional force that elevated Turner's landscapes to a higher plane; yet the *Val d'Aosta* can still make us marvel at the degree of truth to landscape that artists could attain so

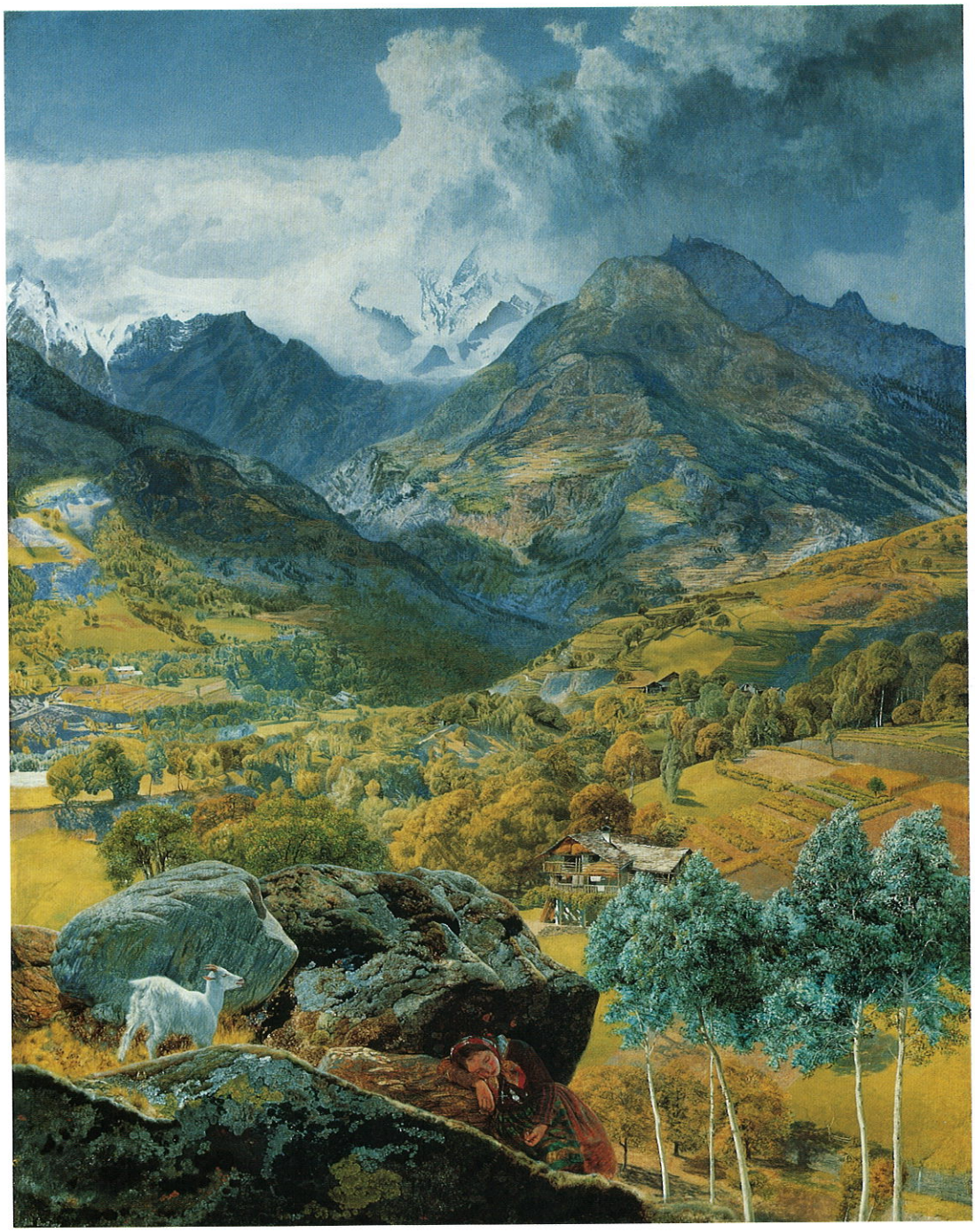

Fig. 294 **John Brett**, *Val d'Aosta*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 34½ × 26⅞". Collection of Lord Lloyd-Webber.

laboriously and could control as well through the unifying phenomena of light and atmosphere.

The fanatical detail of Brett's painting and its breathtaking fusion of the telescopic and the microscopic were often rivaled by other British landscape painters of his generation, many of whom were disinclined to bathe nature with the aerating luminosity of the *Val d'Aosta*. In what seems almost a maniacal competition for unedited landscape truth, a special prize might be awarded to Daniel Alexander Williamson (1823–1903), who was born in Liverpool, the most important provincial center for the display and influence of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, but who lived in London from 1847 to 1861, and then retreated to a village in Lancashire. There, he painted such astonishing works as *Spring: Arnside Knot and Coniston Range of Hills from Warton Crag* of 1863 (**fig. 295**), a feat of on-the-spot observation (from the exact site given in the title) all the more incredible when one realizes that the canvas is only sixteen inches wide. The abrupt leap from the smoky blue tones of the overcast sky to the riot of prismatic colors on the earth below intensifies the already eye-boggling variety of the clearest hues defining the infinite detail that extends from the yellow gorse and orange bracken of the foreground to the green, blue, and purple of the remote hills. Williamson's

Fig. 295 **Daniel A. Williamson**, *Spring: Arnside Knot and Coniston Range of Hills from Warton Crag*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 10⅝ × 16″. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

perpetually keen eye has even caught a distant flock of birds on the wing and a rabbit, which seems to have been just spotted in the foreground. The immediate impact is of a total lack of selectivity by any familiar standards (even Brett's) of landscape coherence, with the colors, in particular, being shrilly dissonant in their hairbreadth juxtapositions of the artist's complete repertory of unmodulated rainbow pigments. Yet if Williamson's little oil painting totally defies the kind of muted, instant unity achieved by many mid-century landscape sketches that blur the parts in an all-embracing tonality, it is memorable for different reasons. For here, the replication of the teeming chromatic, botanical, and geological profusion of a landscape at the peak of springtime burgeoning is seized with a passionate empathy that transcends a mere mirror image, conveying the marvels of a nature both timeless and timebound. Changing by the second and the season, these unruly, bursting tangles of rocks and vegetation also reflect, as Ruskin recognized, that the history of landscape is a far more ancient and enduring one than that of the human race.

There were other ways, however, of grasping these empirical facts, ways that, instead of re-creating, leaf by leaf, color by color, every minuscule component of sunlit landscape, chose rather the swift, momentary effect, as in the blinking of eyes yet to be focused. Such a vision was captured early by Eugène Boudin (1824–98), who spent most of his life as an artist on his native Normandy coast, where, around the shores of Le Havre, Trouville, and Honfleur, he could watch the ever-changing skies and atmosphere of the often windy beaches on the Channel, and the movements of clouds, people, boats, and water. In his own words, "Everything painted on the spot always has a strength, a power, a vividness of touch that is not to be found again in the studio." Boudin practiced very much what he preached, and in his painted oil sketches, like the *Beach at Trouville* of 1863 (**fig. 296**), a wood panel barely over a foot wide, we glimpse what appears to be a split-second record of sea breezes that gently sweep across the little painting, left to right, in a path made almost visible by the movement of the brushstrokes in the high and wide sky. The tilt of sails and smoke on the water, of parasols and blowing veils and ribbons on the shore powerfully conveys an instant response to these airborne pressures in a world that seems exhilaratingly open and fluid. Such a work radiates an unpretentious but authentic effort to depict the ephemeral sensations provided by nature and by the holiday intruders—men, women, children, dogs—who, by mid-century, came in growing numbers to the Channel coasts from Paris and London to enjoy the salubrious sea air. In so rapid an account of these coastal scenes, Boudin could use only the broadest strokes of paint, which

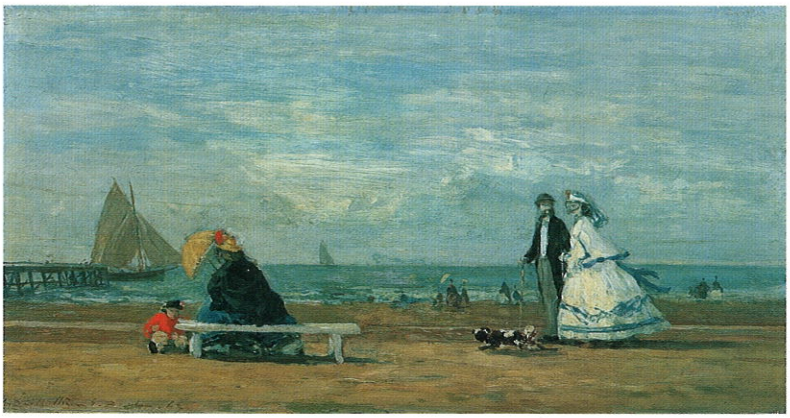

Fig. 296 **Eugène Boudin**, *Beach at Trouville*, 1863. Oil on panel, 7 × 13¾". Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 297 **Claude Monet**, *The Coastline at Ste.-Adresse*, June 1864. Oil on canvas, 15¾ × 28¾". Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota.

inevitably blurred the identity of even the royal visitors—for example, the Empress Eugénie herself—whom he painted enjoying the leisure of these fashionable resorts. By implication, the figure for him was neither more nor less important than any other element in this continuum of light and atmosphere, and a face deserved no more detail than the arc of a sunlit parasol.

From the time of their first showing at the Salon of 1859, when Baudelaire praised them, Boudin's beach scenes were well received by the public, which found his abbreviated, sketchy technique appropriate to the small-scale charm and modesty of these works. Yet this same approach, amplified to full-scale ambitions, could become far more threatening to acceptable canons of picture-making, which is exactly what was to happen in the work of Claude Monet (1840–1926), the painter whose name was later to become synonymous in the public view with the most consistent pursuit and capture of an instantaneous perception of the visible world. Monet's initial revelations of the possibilities of painting directly from nature sprung from his first contact with Boudin, his senior by sixteen years, whom he met in Le Havre in 1858 and with whom he went on excursions in the open country and on the coast to paint, with minimal time and brushwork, nature seen firsthand. As Monet was later to write about this teenage conversion, "A veil was ripped from my eyes, and in a flash, I saw what painting was about." After two years of military service in Algeria, he returned, in 1862, to Boudin and the Normandy coast; and then, back in Paris, entered Gleyre's studio, where he was to befriend a group of younger painters of his generation (Renoir, Sisley, Bazille) who were soon to share many of his goals. Visits to Le Havre, where Monet spent most of his youth, were frequent, and prompted in the mid-1860s a number of marine paintings that seem to pick up where Boudin left off. In *The Coastline at Ste.-Adresse*, painted in June 1864 (fig. 297), the wide format, the insistent

awareness of barometric pressure, the dominant sky, and the stenographic brushstroke all suggest Boudin's own sketches of this coastal region; but already a greater ambition and more intense refinement of perception can be savored. That it is more than twice the width of Boudin's sketch literally expands its pictorial ambitions; and the subtle changes of brushstroke that distinguish among choppy waves, streaky sky, mottled earth, and translucent sails convey an infinitely more probing effort to find the exact equivalent in paint for a panorama of different perceptions that range from filmy distant shores to grainy foreground, from the agitation of water to the movement of low-lying clouds.

Unlike Boudin, the young Monet was not content to remain within the agreeable and, to the public, still palatable confines of a sketchy marine painting; and like all great painters, he quickly set his sights at the top, wishing soon to vie with the most exciting new achievements of his generation, works which treated large figures in a landscape in a language of startling contemporaneity. Between 1865 and 1867, he worked first on a huge updating of Manet's scandalous *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, creating his own version (almost twenty feet wide and therefore rivaling the most imposing Salon masterpieces), which was finally dismembered and exists only in fragments and a smaller replica. Then he worked on another large painting with life-size

Fig. 298 **Claude Monet**, *Women in the Garden*, 1866–67. Oil on canvas, 8′ 4½″ × 6′ 9″. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

figures, [illegible] for the S [illegible] painting [illegible] out-of-doors were here magnified to imposing dimensions, which, among other things, made the labors involved in attaining fidelity to perceived experience worthy of a Pre-Raphaelite's most intrepid exposure to the elements. In the garden of a rented house at Ville d'Avray, Monet dug a large trench, so that the painting could be raised and lowered on pulleys in order to make the top portions of the canvas quickly accessible to the reach of arm and brush. When the sun came out, Monet had to make sure that the marvel of the whitest light on the greenest leaves could be caught instantly, a scruple which his friend Courbet, who could paint his landscapes in the comfort of his studio, found puzzling. But Monet clearly believed in a Realism different from Courbet's, or even Manet's, one that was less concerned with the new facts of modern society than with achieving a kind of visual *tabula rasa*, in which the immediate perceptions of the seen world could be seized in all their freshness and purity, a kind of innocent child's-eye view that could wonder at the most commonplace pleasures of sunlight and shadow, of clear hues unmuddled by conventional chiaroscuro modeling, of the sparkling excitement of the most contracted here and now, of a transient moment caught on the wing.

In *Women in the Garden*, such goals are aggrandized from the world of a painted sketch to the size of ambitious history painting. The product of months of work in 1866–67, it is meant to deceive us into thinking that we are savoring the fragrance of a moment. Four women, each modeled after Monet's mistress, Camille Doncieux, enjoy the pleasures of a summer day while displaying variations upon four crinolines whose starchy whiteness, even by Manet's standards, was such a glaring affront that eyes used to traditional tonal modulations might almost demand sunglasses. The more vigorous, outdoor equivalent to Whistler's muted indoor variations on the theme of white on white, Monet's women were also highly aestheticized creatures, who sit and move with studied, but casual grace and who, for activity, do nothing more than turn around a tree or whiff a bouquet of freshly picked flowers. Yet, however artificial this Arcadia of modern leisure may seem in costume and gesture, the garden setting is of a stunning visual veracity, the dappled paint spots fully achieving the months-long labors of Monet to re-create in pigment on canvas the blaze, both harsh and gentle, of sunlight as it speckles leaves and lawns or casts irregular shadow patterns diagonally across the garden path. As almost always turns out to be the case in art that seems so willfully to reject both high and low art in favor of an unadulterated response to the real world, *Women in the Garden* may, in fact, reflect a variety of old and new imagery, including the popular fashion illustrations of the Second Empire. Far more venerable, however, the mood of elegant hedonism seems a modern translation of the artificial Rococo gardens of Watteau or Fragonard into the language of nineteenth-century Positivism, which insisted on the direct accumulation of empirical data as the means to verifiable truths. How rigorous Monet's belief was in this outer structure of objectivity is suggested by the fact that his personal life in 1867–68 went from bad to worse. The birth of his illegitimate son, Jean, in 1867, occurred under such dire financial circumstances that, during a particularly brutal siege of poverty and hunger in 1868, Monet attempted suicide, an event that seems extraordinarily concealed from and irrelevant to his art.

If Monet had ample reason to despair in 1867–68, when the gulf between his most labored paintings and official acceptance seemed unbridgeable, at least he had friends who supported him such as Renoir, who actually stole bread for the Monet family, or another fellow student at Gleyre's academy, the wealthy Bazille, who bought the *Women in the Garden* (but was slow to pay for it) and tried, usually without success, to sell Monet's other work. Frédéric Bazille (1841–70), who was killed before his thirtieth birthday in the Franco-Prussian War, had worked side by side with Monet both in the forests near Paris and on the Normandy coast, between 1862 and 1865, often seeming to mimic closely the paintings of his friend and mentor. But he was soon to give his art a personal inflection, derived in good part from his continual contacts with the countryside of southwestern France, near his birthplace, Montpellier, where he would summer with his family. His *View of the Village* of 1868 (**fig. 299**) offers, as it were, a more southern version of Monet's northern outdoor figure pieces of 1865–67, and one that radiates the sense of sturdy rock, tree, and earth familiar to a gravity-bound, sunbaked, blue-skied scenery at odds with the more evanescent nature of Monet's Normandy coasts and Paris suburbs. The model here is the daughter of the family gardener at the Bazille country estate; and, like the women in Monet's garden painting, she is seen relaxing in a sun-shot, verdant landscape. Yet the effect is one of an almost archaic rigidity, with the figure, flowers in hand, seated stiffly in the perpendicular frame of a vertical foreground tree countered by a serene horizon that caps the beige and tan geometries of the distant village of Castelnau. More obviously composed (there were, in fact, many preparatory drawings for the figure) and more conventionally modeled than Monet's *Women in the Garden*, the painting was accepted at the 1869 Salon, where its surprisingly high horizon, which produces a tapestry-like effect upon the landscape vista, elicited many jokes centering upon the idea that the figure was seated in front of a flat and coarsely executed picture rather than a real view. But it could also be admired, not only by Puvis de Chavannes, who must have recognized here a variant of his own archaizing structure, but, for quite opposite reasons, by Berthe Morisot, a painter

Fig. 299 **Frédéric Bazille**, *View of the Village*, 1868 (Salon of 1869). Oil on canvas, 51⅛ × 35″. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

in Bazille's and Manet's circle, who found in it the light and sunshine, the fusion of a figure in an outdoor environment that so many artists, herself included, were seeking in the 1860s.

These were goals, for instance, sought by many younger Italian painters who, inspired by the movements to unify their country, also felt the need to band together in a distinctive national group, an urge that was officially recognized in Florence in 1861. There, the brand-new king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, inaugurated the first national exhibition, a patriotic display not only of Italian agriculture and industry but of art, a category reviewed by critics from Paris and London who were eager to tell their readers about the artistic aspects of the Risorgimento. Although the exhibition included Italian artists of the earlier nineteenth century who espoused Neoclassical and Purist styles, the cutting edge belonged to a post-1848 generation that was loosely referred to as the "Macchiaioli," because of their common exploration of the possibilities of the *macchia*, translatable as a spot or patch of color. Such broadly applied strokes of dark and light hues could create a continuous weave that fused figure and ground and that evoked, without conventional perspective techniques, a vibrant movement in a space charged with atmosphere. This patterned and simplified brushwork was used by a diverse group of artists who could even apply it tentatively to religious or historical subjects; but, by the 1860s, the freshest adaptation of this technique of color patches was in the domain of casual scenes of outdoor life, the kind of subject to which many painters of the 1860s were attracted and which seemed particularly appropriate to unpretentious little oil sketches. Such sketches were made by Giovanni Fattori (1825–1908), who, as a veteran of the Revolution of 1848, was well equipped to paint, in 1861, such a nationalist military subject as the *Italian Camp after the Battle of Magenta*, but who, between 1861

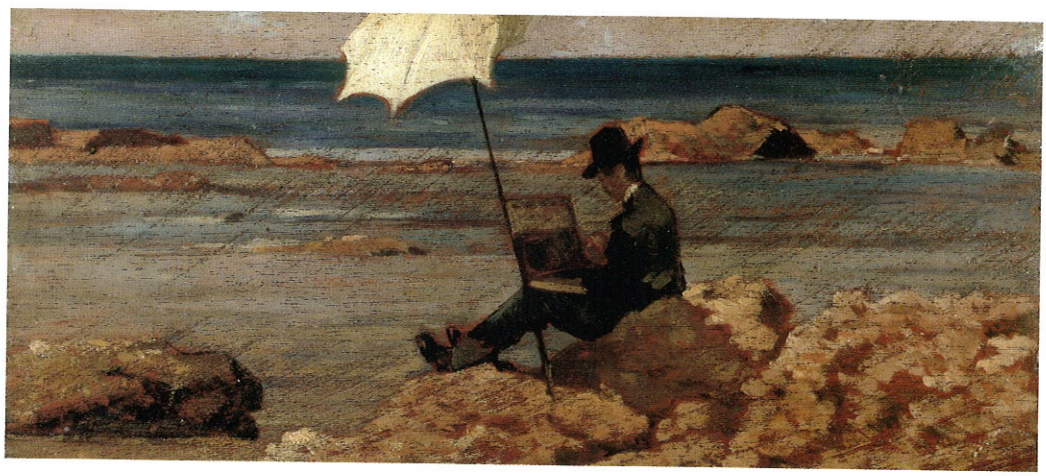

Fig. 300 **Giovanni Fattori**, *Silvestro Lega Painting*, c. 1866. Oil on canvas, 4¾ × 11¼″. Private collection.