
Title of Object

Caretaker's Cottage in the Forest of Compiègne

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Paul Huet

Country: France

Date of Object: 1826

File Created: 10/15/2016

Accession Number: 2001.233

Author of File: Meg Ubel

Material/Medium: Oil on canvas

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Paintings

Last Updated/Reviewed: 3/9/2017

Culture: French

Tour Topics

Group 4, Highlights 1600-1850, passion-place, Passion for place, Romanticism, Romantic Movement, landscape, European art, nature, French art, genre scene, gamekeeper, Power/Status, Royal hunting preserve

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. While looking at this painting, think about the painting we just looked at (Cottage on Fire).

What is different?

What is similar?

What is one word you would use to describe the trees? What about the sky?

(Discuss Forest of Compiègne, actual location)

(Discuss Paul Huet, childhood, passion for nature and sketching en plein air)

2. Now look at this painting more closely. What are some smaller details you might notice upon closer inspection?

3. (Explain Romanticism vs. Neoclassicism, emphasis on personal view of nature that expresses emotional state of the artist)

Based on what you see here, how do you think Huet felt about being in this place?

What are some other ways that artists can express their emotional state to the world? (music, books, dance, performance art)

4. (Discuss Salon of 1824, Huet's enthusiasm for Constable's work, show image of The Hay Wain painting)

In looking at The Hay Wain painting that Huet would have seen at the Paris Salon, what can you see that Huet might have been inspired to emulate in The Caretaker's Cottage?

(Explain a bit about Constable's technique, British landscape school, Huet's role as a link - he took his passion for nature and incorporated some British elements)

Discuss Huet's involvement with the Romantic Movement and friendships with other Romantic artists and writers, including Delacroix.

Transition (for Group 4 tour): Here we've seen how Paul Huet depicts an actual place in the French forest in a personally expressive way. Next up on our Grand Tour is Africa, where we'll see how his friend Delacroix painted a considerably more exotic scene.

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

1. This oil painting depicts a specific landscape site in the Forest of Compiègne, near Paris. The forest was a royal hunting preserve, and the cottage seen in the painting was the gamekeeper's residence.

2. The painting is primarily executed in deft, bold brushstrokes and gives an overall feeling of drama and the overwhelming power of nature, particularly in the rendering of the trees and sky. The paint is applied fairly thickly in spots, adding to this feeling. The dark, brooding colors of the trees contrast with the bright white and blue of the sky. The glimpse of white of the cottage in the lower left corner breaks up the mass of the forest and balances the expanse of white billowing clouds in the upper portion of the picture.

3. A number of details become apparent upon closer inspection, helped by smaller dappled brushstrokes and flecks of white. These details include: the wisteria vine on the cottage wall, laundry hanging in the window, chickens and ducks by the pond, a horse and rider on the road, a small dog or other animal sitting under the trees, and figures working or playing by the haystack.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

1. "Between 1800 and 1900, French landscape painting underwent a remarkable transformation from a minor genre rooted in classical traditions to a primary vehicle for artistic experimentation. Some of the most important trends in the development of modernist art, such as the elevation of contemporary subjects, the rejection of illusionism, and the emphasis on the act of painting, first emerged in the

landscapes of this era.” (Met museum, landscape painting) Paul Huet was a key figure in the history of landscape painting in the French Romantic era, and provided a link between the independent landscape artists at the end of the 18th century and the Barbizon School of painting (about 1830-1870, which aimed to make the landscape its own art form).

2. Huet was born in 1803 in Paris, lost his mother as a young boy and was raised by his father. Showing an artistic bent from an early age, he spent many hours sketching en plein air (‘in open air’, or outside) in various locations around Paris, including the Parc de Saint-Cloud. Huet studied drawing and painting with established masters, but became frustrated with conventional teaching and prevailing artistic rules.

In 1819 Huet met the British landscape artist Richard Parkes-Bonington, a fellow student in the studio of Antoine-Jean Gros. Rather than working indoors under Gros’ tutelage, the pair preferred to go out into nature and paint from life. Huet and Bonington formed a close artistic friendship, exchanged ideas and collaborated on paintings, some of which appear to be nearly identical.

In 1822 Huet befriended Eugene Delacroix in Paris as both were involved in the Romantic Movement. Huet also became friends with Romantic writers such as Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo and was a devoted Republican.

In 1824 Huet attended the Paris Salon (the official juried exhibition of the French Academy of Fine Arts) and saw three landscapes by John Constable, the celebrated British landscape artist, including *The Hay Wain*. Huet was fired with enthusiasm over Constable’s work, saying “what one only dreamed of yesterday suddenly came to life in the most beautiful form possible”. Constable’s landscapes were authentic scenes full of specific details (trees identifiable by species), small vignettes that were revealed upon closer inspection (people, animals, boats), and dramatic skies with accurately rendered cloud formations (Constable studied meteorology and was known for doing extensive on-the-spot cloud studies - he felt the sky was the landscape’s “chief organ of sentiment”). He used flecked, dappled brushwork to create a shimmering luminosity in his paintings. His quote: “Painting is for me but another word for feeling”. Huet adapted aspects of this style, while also incorporating aspects of the Old Masters, such as Rembrandt and Rubens.

3. Huet was inspired by the French countryside, and traveled widely in the French provinces throughout his life. He was particularly fond of Normandy with its grandiose and wild scenery, and from 1822 he painted and sketched in the Forest of Compiègne. On these trips he worked constantly and would paint and sketch en plein air extensively in watercolor, pastel, and pencil to capture the changing seasons and weather conditions. Only later in life did he travel to Italy (where he reportedly found the skies too serene), London and the Netherlands.

4. The Forest of Compiègne is located about 37 miles north of Paris, and is now a national forest. The forest is thick and deep, with oak, beech and hornbeam being the primary tree species. At the time of the painting, the forest was a royal hunting preserve similar to Windsor Great Park near London. The cottage in the painting was the residence of the gamekeeper. The Forest of Compiègne later became well-known as the site of the Armistice for WWI on 11/11/1918. The location chosen for the surrender was a clearing deep in the forest so that the proceedings would not be overrun by journalists or hostile crowds.

5. Romanticism is a term meant to describe a period in art history that emerged to counter the Neoclassicism of the Enlightenment era. The emphasis was on nature, emotion, struggle, sometimes

violence - leaning away from reason, order, rationality and cool, cerebral idealism. The Romantics had a passion for nature as a metaphor something true, pure and simple. Romanticism is rather a vague term meant to cover a huge diversity of art at the time - from horrifyingly explicit disaster scenes (e.g. shipwrecks with dead bodies in the water) to rural landscapes like those of Constable. These landscapes were meant to be a highly personal view of nature that expressed the psychological and emotional state of the artist at the time.

Baudelaire wrote about Romanticism in 1846: "Romanticism lies neither in the subjects that an artist chooses nor in his exact copying of the truth, but in the way he feels... Romanticism and modern art are one and the same thing, in other words: intimacy, spirituality, color yearning for the infinite expressed by all the means the arts possess." (Khan Academy)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Paul Huet was a principal intermediary between the French and British landscape schools during the revolutionary decade of the 1820s. From 1822, he sketched in oil regularly in suburbs of Paris. In the year that this early masterwork was painted he was sharing a studio with Eugene Delacroix and Richard Parkes Bonington.

This painting is Huet's most ambitious early work and a mélange of the different styles that vied for his attention at this moment. The impression on Huet of the English landscapes shown at the 1824 Paris Salon, especially those of Bonington and John Constable, was profound, although he continually sought to temper the English manner with inspiration from a medley of old master sources, including Claude, Rubens, and Rembrandt.

A number of similar subjects by Huet, in a variety of media, are known, yet this is the only one identifiable with a specific landscape site. During several centuries, the forest of Compiègne, northeast of Paris, was a royal hunting preserve, much like Windsor Great Park near London. The "caretaker's cottage" was the residence of the gamekeeper.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Prop: Image of *The Hay Wain* by John Constable

Sources:

19th Century Art, Rosenblum and Janson - book in docent library

The Barbizon School, Jean Bouret - book in Mia library

Oxford Art Online - database through Mia Library: "Benezit Dictionary of Artists", "askART", "Grove Art Online"

Met Museum, "Romanticism": http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/roma/hd_roma.htm

Met Museum, The Transformation of Landscape Painting in France (1800-1900):
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/lafr/hd_lafr.htm

Khan Academy: "Romanticism in France": <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/romanticism/romanticism-in-france/a/romanticism-in-france>

Forest of Compiègne: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_of_Compi%C3%A8gne