Chapter 3 - Barbizon as a Prototype for Artists’ Colonies

In the early memoirs of George Gassies, 1907, the Barbizon artists are described as pre-eminent, “the principle colony” of landscape painters, paysagistes, and a site which evoked their acute sense of place, “a treat for the eye.” He did not, in fact, arrive in the village until 1852, when it had already been attracting artists for at least a quarter of a century and the radical pioneering stage of its ‘masters’ was almost over. Already, by 1900, “the School of Barbizon” had generated a substantial amount of literature, in the form of biographies, books, novels, newspaper articles and regular mentions in all the new art magazines. Just as significant was its international reputation, but why had this particular artists’ community hit the headlines all over the world? The answer has much to do with the nature of the new print media.

Today, Barbizon is well-established in art history as the first, independently-formed, non-religious, radical, rural grouping of artists and one highly influential in the depiction of nature, and as a precursor of impressionism. Initially, it was started by landscape painters, who made what Jean Bouret called “a comprehensive inventory of nature.” Their realism was a statement on content and methodology, but it soon came to epitomise the late-Romantic revolt against modern urban life by offering an alternative appraisal of attitudes towards the representation of the countryside. However, their actual motivations and interests were far from united, especially amongst its ‘masters.’ In addition, the chronology, particularly over the early decades, is often misleading, for many developments were not linear but complex, layered and intertwined.

Soon after mid-century Barbizon rapidly became recognised as a sort of dynamic artistic Mecca, the prime spot in an arboreal ‘sketching-ground’, for those self-imposed exiles who

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242 Lafenestre, 1907, in Sensier’s Preface, p. ix.
243 The term was first used an art dealer and author, see Thompson 1890. However, art historians, such as Nicholas Green in Exh. Cat. Norwich, 1982, claim its first use was by Arthur Tomson in J.-F. Millet and the Barbizon School (London: Bell, 1903). Yet, what is of note, and rather typical, is that writers or promoters created this designation, not the artists themselves.
244 Bouret, 1973, p. 10.
245 Bouret, 1973, p. 33, cites the critic Pierre Miqued in 1962, calling it “the bourgeois Mecca for Naturalism.”
thought themselves radical and progressive, both artistically and socially. It fulfilled an ideological niche amongst the avant-garde for artists began to resolve many practical problems of the profession, although few of its artists achieved full financial recognition in their life-times. By successfully promoting greater realism\textsuperscript{246} this loose group of painters came to be associated with a raft of revolutionary ideas that encompassed freedom of expression, free-association, free-thinking, anti-academic training and many other traditional constraints on creative development.

Barbizon was one of at least a dozen artists’ villages scattered around Paris, particularly to the south. They were seen as places of fun and work, of youthful experimentation and innovation. They nurtured a broad set of international peripatetic talents who enjoyed themselves thoroughly and, at the same time, produced some refreshingly fine art. In many ways, this handful of artists’ villages, around the forest of Fontainebleau, were interchangeable and may be considered one large amalgamated artists’ colony, for there are many examples of painters finding one village full and therefore simply walking on to the next, as in the case of the American Kenyon Cox and three colleagues who found no spare accommodation in Barbizon and so walked on to Grez-sur-Loing, on the other side of the woodlands\textsuperscript{247}.

The School of Barbizon was seen as offering a special atmosphere, unlike that which was available in the official art academies, yet it was a natural extension of their training. These Forest of Fontainebleau pioneers wanted a peaceful refuge, where they could work out their pictorial problems, worship nature in the open, live cheaply and receive peer-group support, factors common in artists’ colonies. It is no coincidence that Barbizon’s rustic school developed during heightened times of uncertainty, political, economic and social, as seen by the tensions that erupted in revolutions, riots and monetary inflation across most of Europe in 1848, not least in nearby Paris, where most Barbizonner had studied and lived prior to this rural relocation\textsuperscript{248}.

Some of the earliest Barbizon’s artists, such as Corot and Rousseau, were searching for unspoilt, timeless or pre-industrial environments. For them, it was easy to ignore the simple truth that the Forest of Fontainebleau had been a ‘managed’ royal hunting park for centuries, where logging and quarrying were also common. They could do it because of the extraordinary landscapes the forest offered. Of all the peripheral forests around the Ile de France, this proved the most fascinating. Mythologizing in the Forest of Fontainebleau was neither new nor an unusual practise, nor was the encouragement of artists to that end, for King Francis I had erected a fanciful, elegant palace, complete with court painters, as early as the sixteenth century. The royal palace and the tidy town that serviced it were positioned right in the centre of the large unpopulated forest. Only a few roads cut through this wilderness although an extensive network of bridle-paths was maintained across this hunting park (2:3).\textsuperscript{249} As one modern commentator notes, the “cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacred-ness of nature.”\textsuperscript{250} With the exception of its central town, no settlement was allowed at all in the surrounding woodlands, adding to its peculiar atmosphere. This landscape lent itself easily to the creation of myths, in part because of its royal associations, its oddly sculpted rock formations and to the fact

\textsuperscript{246} The term realism has slightly different meanings in different countries. In this study it refers to two related attitudes, one broad in use, implying a naturalism and a desire to depict things accurately and objectively; and, one relating more specifically to the movement around Courbet, in France, and Liebl, in Germany. The term carries with it suggestions of revolt against academic conventions concerning subjects, such as religion, history and mythology, and the preceeding stylistic idealisations.

\textsuperscript{247} Morgan, 1986. Kenyon Cox (1856-1919) letter of December 1877.

\textsuperscript{248} Fejtö, 1973.

\textsuperscript{249} King Louis XIV prefered state geometry in his hunting parks, with straightening roads, vistas and forest avenues.

\textsuperscript{250} Schama, 1995, p. 18.
that outlaws were known to roam these wilds. Other forests that surrounded Paris could not compete with the variety of its ‘primordial’ and romantic associations. One of the more mysterious figures to frequent this wilderness was the painter Lazare Bruandet (1755-1804), who, after a woman friend was murdered, fled into the forest and remained there for the rest of his life. The woods already had a reputation as a place of refuge, for criminals, bandits, hermits and outcasts. The king is said to have jokingly commented, after returning from the hunt one day, that he “had only seen wild boars and Bruandet.” A Balkan artist, Stomati Bulgari (1777-?), also roamed these woods around 1820, lodging occasionally at Chailly, but was notorious for sporting high Russian boots and carrying a sword. The sword is the article that really excited the imagination and was enough to increase the sensationalism, although the notion of a roaming foreign painter was extraordinary in itself.

Mountains, especially the Alps and the Apenines, had been a feature of previous romantic and classic styles, so that there may have been a lingering legacy of this imagery from notions of the Sublime. Yet, highly-elevated, limestone, karst terrain was not unusual to any traveller across the French countryside, or in most European countries, but these exposed craggy sableuse and greuseuse came to embody just the right degree of raw nature the bourgeoisie of Paris found acceptable, for rambling. Geology was still an exciting new subject at that time, boosted dramatically by the publicity given to Charles Darwin’s evolutionary treatise of 1859. The natural environment around the town of Fontainebleau is particularly well-endowed with a rich variety of escarpments, dry gorges, curious boulder-fields, natural rock piles, dense greenery and ‘ancient oaks’ that all combined to appeal to a broad spectrum of the history-minded public, including painters and patrons. These were not the normal plantation woodlands of the Ile de France, but relatively wild. The first artists went there for the individual experience, communing with nature, but soon they realised a common collective response and the idea of settlement gradually grew as a practical reality.

Why did the insignificant village of Barbizon become such a locus for artists when there were so many more attractive places in the region? Geomorphology provides only some of the answers. A village’s suitability for painters derives from a large suite of characteristics, including physical and metaphysical factors, some in balance and some in conflict, so that, for instance, they wanted a quiet retreat to work in yet it had to be accessible. Barbizon was not particularly remote, as many art historians seem to insist. The historic trunk road from Paris to Lyon, is just one kilometer away. This route was of military importance, there were substantial cavalry barracks in Fontainebleau, and so good communications were assured. A scheduled mail-coach service, known as ‘La Patache’ or bone-shaker, easily covered the 70 kilometres from the capital on a good day. The penultimate stop before Fontainebleau, on the edge of the forest, was at

251 Caille, 1994, p. 2.
252 Ibidem.
Chailly-en-Bière. From there, it was only a two kilometer hike across the plain to Barbizon. Yet, it felt cut-off and self-contained. Travellers sensed they were far away from modern life, away from the industry of the River Seine valley, removed from the urban pressures and closer to the timeless existence offered by the ancient forest. It was viewed as a step back in time. “Barbizon is a very quiet place where, with no worry of being disturbed, we could lodge and eat inexpensively.” For the pioneers, at least, this cheap rural life offered a welcome retreat from the many disruptions that were all too apparent in the metropolis, so that quiet contemplation of nature seemed a simple solution. The 1830s saw the forest’s ‘unspoilt’ nature first attracting landscape painters, such as Claude d’Aligny (1798-1871) and Théodore Rousseau (1812-67), but they were also joined, in the 1840s, by more Romantics, who enhanced the same woodlands with mythologies, seen in works by Karl Bodmer (1809-93) and Antoine Barye (1795-1875), both of whom painted it as a habitat for exotic creatures. The magic of this area therefore already attracted different styles and tones before the main wave of artists arrived after 1850.

Much of the potential of the Forest of Fontainebleau may be deduced from Napoleonic maps: the variety of its topography; accessibility by direct highways; a central town; and, the pattern of habitation, or the lack of it. An official survey map from 1822 (2:3) already shows this amount of detail, as well as Barbizon [sic], a hamlet of no more than twenty dwellings, positioned on the edge of the craggy park.258 Official maps might be difficult to view but suddenly, from c.1840, there were cheap guide-books in circulation, that were directed at the growing number of middle-class, pleasure-seekers. Prime amongst these was Denecourt’s Guide du voyageur dans la forêt de Fontainebleau, ou histoire et description abrégées de des lieux remarquables et pittoresques, 1840.

Claude François Denecourt (1788-1875) did much to generate a new set of myths about this wilderness, by popularising the woods as a tourist attraction; mapping out hiking trails; crafting a romantic nomenclature; creating promenades, belvederes and grottos. He, and others like him, were opposed by the nature lovers, such as A.M. Bois d’Hymer, who in 1832 tried to restore the ragged-ness of the woods.259 One might find this sentimentalising of the landscape too saccharin, yet it was common enough at the time, feeding the imagination and tapping into deep-seated feelings about the countryside, feelings which also related to the commercial success of the pictures that emerged from artists’ colonies everywhere. The Barbizon artists adored the nearby forest glades, the bare rocky gorges and individual ancient oaks, but Denecourt went further than anyone else in naming features, such as Caverne des Brigands; ‘The White Queen’, a tree not far from Carrefour de la Belle Epine; and, ‘The Fairies’ Pond’. One finds the same sentimentality in distant Brittany, at Pont-Aven, where the woodlands behind the artists’ village had, for example, its Bois d’Amour, although it is unclear when or who exactly started this trend

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256 Gassies, 1907, p. 18.
257 Paris underwent a huge rebuilding period around mid-century, organised, from 1852, by Georges Eugène Haussmann (1809-91), town planner under Napoleon III for the Seine Prefecture, in effect central Paris.
258 Jacobs, 1985, p. 16. quotes the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), who visited the forest in 1827, as commenting that it was “exceeding in savage variety.”
259 Schama, 1995, pp. 552-3. Also, cf. the 18th century English habit of building ruins, rustic furniture, inventing landscapings, ‘wild gardens’ and paying for resident hermits to live in artifical grottos.
Recent authors, such as Simon Schama have criticised this kind of “designed excitement”, but at that time ‘Sylvan’ Denecourt was much acclaimed by prominent aesthetes, including Théophile Gauthier, and befriended by many noted artists, such as George Sand and Rosa Bonheur.

Few of these early painters are recorded as trekking long distances, or riding a horse or travelling by river boat, so that it is reasonable to assume they took coaches to the outlying forests. At Chailly-en-Bière, the post-house, *Le Cheval Blanc*, is known to have accommodated such early roaming landscapists, including George Michel (1763-1843), who painted in the nearby woods, the Bas Breau, in the 1790s. The more exotic and mysterious Stomati Bulgari from Corfu, worked here in 1821, but it was in 1829 that the first group of landscape artists arrived to put the area ‘on the map.’ They included Edouard Bertin (1797-1871), Claude d’Aligny and Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1797-1875). Corot had been exploring this region’s woodlands systematically since 1822. It is known he lodged at a small, cheaper pension in Chailly run by the widow Lemoine, where Théodore Rousseau first stayed in 1833. In the 1860s, Monet and Renoir, preferred to lodge at *Le Cheval Blanc*. From 1837, Rousseau worked increasingly around Barbizon, and by the time he decided to settle in the village, 1848, there were already many resident artists, including d’Aligny, Bodmer, Diaz de la Peña, the Jacobs and Lédieu brothers. This amount of artistic attention before 1850 was noticeable in art exhibitions. Diaz de la Peña was already well-known in the salons as a painter of Romantic historical subjects, but after meeting Rousseau in 1837, whom he adored, he became an ardent landscapist. Corot’s charming landscapes were always popular, but although he was closely associated with Barbizon pleinairists he was never quite a member of any group. He was a genial solitary in contrast to his friend, Rousseau, who was moody, irascible, restless and, of course, the Salon’s Grand Réfusé. This assortment of painters and styles were all united by their love of nature and the traditions of the countryside. Barbizon represents the first artists’ group to be identified with a village, although there had been other ‘schools’ of art connected with the names of towns and cities, such as nearby Fontainebleau, Norwich, Copenhagen, Tervueren-Brussels and Oosterbeek-Arnhem.

The School of Barbizon came to embody an assortment of anti-establishment feelings and so became linked with a raft of late Romantic notions that include anti-academy teaching, anti-classicism, Realism, Naturalism, Socialism, free-expression, free-love and nature worship. This timely convergence of professional interests and artistic philosophies was given further emphasis by occurring alongside changing social values. Younger artists wished no longer to be the servants of an elite, in the way that J.-L. David had been with the church, the state, Napoleon Bonaparte and the production of grand machines. Instead, there was a growing interest in social issues, justice, and the character of the working classes, epitomised by the works of Gustave Courbet and Honoré Daumier. They wanted to paint the tangible reality as opposed to an idealised state. Artists were beginning to question the status quo, particularly the regulations at the art academies. For some, the idea that fellow artists might regroup independently, away from academies, in unspoilt rural settings in order to create new work, had considerably wider social attractions.

By the 1850s, it was becoming increasingly common to take painting trips into the countryside, out beyond the city limits, along the river valleys, in every direction, but particularly

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262 Bouret, 1973, pp. 80-84.
up-river and to the south. No-one was in charge or in control of events in these artists’ villages. However, at Barbizon leaders emerged with strength of character and rare talent, so well-recognised by the early 1850s as to be referred to as ‘masters,’ namely Rousseau and Millet, and the non-resident Corot. They had limited financial resources and patronage, but living was thought to be cheap in the country and one could arrange some credit at the village inn. Barbizon’s aubergiste was François Ganne, who extended credit to some regular customers, such as Rousseau. Such arrangements were standard practice in rural areas, but it became a much-exaggerated urban myth in the gossip-filled studios and cafés of Paris. This artistic community was neither a group nor a brotherhood, nor an elaborate studio system surrounding one master. There was no religious interest, as was the case with the Nazarenes. Barbizon had no church. Judging by surviving irreverent graffiti in Auberge Ganne, the residents held little respect for the clergy. Neither did they look back particularly to historical or classical models for their artistic development, but focussed on the here-and-now, primarily on landscape painting. They wanted to renew this contact with nature by painting en plein-air. “It is in the forest of Fontainebleau, in the most admirable place, we smoke pipes under the tall oaks and we paint multi-coloured boulders, you will see how beautiful it is!”

One of the factors that accelerated the development of Barbizon as an arts centre was the steady publicity it received in books and journals. One magazine cartoon pointed out the already popular trend in 1849, with “Landscape painters in the Forest of Fontainebleau.” (3:3) It is interesting to note, here, that as early as 1853 L’Illustration described this gathering of artists at Barbizon as “colonisé par les peintres de paysage,” fully half a century prior to the, supposed, first appearance in any literature of the collective noun, Artists’ Colony. This disparate group of painters had much support from within the broader movement of Romanticism, amongst such writers as Victor Hugo, J.H. Champfleury, George Sand (Elle et lui), Senancour (Obermann), R.L. Stevenson (Across the Plains) and especially Jules and Edmond Goncourt, whose novel, Manette Salomon, was largely set around Barbizon and in Ganne’s Hotel. By mid-century, intellectual support also came from art critics such as Théophile Thoré-Bürger (1807-67) and especially Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) in his regular commentaries on the Salon exhibitions, from 1845. He was amongst the first to recognise Rousseau’s innovative work, the overall trend and the

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263 In any discussion of the Barbizon School the same group of approximately a dozen names appear, most commonly Millet, Rousseau, Jacque and Diaz, who were all residents, but the ‘leaders’ also include such prominent figures as Corot, Troyon, Daubigny and Daumier, none of whom were resident in the village.
264 Caille, 1895, p.2, quotes this 1851 letter from artist Amédée Servin to George Gassies.
265 Early books on Barbizon include: Ceux de Pigeary, Barbizon, notes et souvenir, 1845; Geo. Gassies, Le Vieux Barbizon, 1852; Th. Silvestre, Histoire des artistes vivants, 1856; J.J. Guiffrey, L’oeuvre de Charles Jacques, 1866; Ainsi Ph. Burty, Theo. Rousseau, 1868; A. Piedagnel, Millet chez lui – souvenirs de Barbizon, 1876 ; and, Jules Claretie, Peintres et sculpteurs, contemporains, 1887.
267 L’Illustration, 24. December, 1853, p. 4, had the first illustrated article on Barbizon, illustrated by de Penne, with a text by Albert de la Fizelière, but in the issue of December 1849 had a previous cartoon entitled “Les Peintre de paysage de le Fôret de Fontainebleau – étude à après nature par un marchand de parapluies et de parasole.” (3:3)
268 Brockhaus, 1902, p. 802 is often cited as the first dictionary use of the term artists’ colony, or Künstlerkolonie.
By the end of the century that fame grew to mythic proportions, generated by such biographies by Georges Gassies and Alfred Sensier. By then anthologies were being published almost every decade and articles in the international art magazines were legion.

Well before the end of the century, it was Millet rather than Rousseau who received the publicity. Millet’s *The Angelus* and *The Gleaners*, lent themselves well to reproduction in print. The latter was the better picture, but *The Angelus* gained huge notoriety for entirely different reasons. Accidentally, it became the centre for international chauvinist rivalry at the Sécretan auction, in May 1889. Despite French official interest, it was sold to a consortium of Americans for the record-breaking figure of 580,000 *fr*. Then, one year later, after touring the U.S.A., it was bought back, for the even more astonishing figure of 800,000 *fr*. To put this into some kind of perspective, a Vermeer painting at the same Sécretan auction sold for only 20,000 *fr*. In an effort to reel back some of this expenditure, reproductions were made of *The Angelus* on an industrial scale, thereby publicising the school even further. However, by then, the Barbizon masters were dead and the movement was already being supplanted by artwork that was even more expressive, more spontaneous and more self-consciously colourful.

In the 1850s, word about the Barbizon painters excited much interest amongst the cosmopolitan art students. There were soon many new, private, satellite art ‘academies’ that were springing up around *L’Ecole des Beaux Arts*, which was itself full up. Barbizon attracted students from the Picot, Drolling and Coignet studios in particular. Some successful masters, such as the ever-popular Corot, also encouraged pupils to travel out from central Paris. The names of Barbizon and Fontainebleau began to appear regularly in Corot’s picture titles, such as *Landscape – The Forest of Fontainebleau*, which received much critical acclaim in the 1846 Salon. In addition, the revival of interest in fine art printing and intaglio reproduction allowed such artists as Bodmer, Chaigneau, Millet and Jacque, to publicise the name of Barbizon further afield than ever before.

Popular journalism likes to promote individual heroes and so personality cults grew up first around Rousseau and then Millet, helped by the story-telling and songs of Diaz in Ganne’s bar-room and the gushing praise of friends and biographers such as Sensier and Gassies. They evoke an atmosphere with few uncertainties and quick achievements, both respectful and earnest, yet joyous: “this ardent youth, so gay and so keen on studio pranks,... stopped joking as soon as art was being discussed and always had great respect, tending towards veneration,

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269 Mayne, 1965, pp. 108-9. As early as 1846, Baudelaire promoted Rousseau’s landscapes, “...it seems to me to be high time that he took his bow once again before a public which, thanks to the efforts of other painters, has gradually become familiar with new aspects of landscape...He loves nature in her bluish moments – twilight effects – strange and moisture-laden sunsets – massive, breeze-haunted shades – great plays of light and shadow.”

270 Sensier, 1872, and Sensier, 1881.

271 *The Magazine of Art*, 1888 mentions Barbizon and its artists in every issue. For example, January has six illustrations of Rousseau’s works; p. 37, article on *Barbizon in Winter*; p. 153, *Millet and Barbizon in Winter*; p. 154 “Rousseau’s house is now the headquarters of an artists’ club, and a billiard table is installed in his studio.”

272 These extraordinary sums were the result of international rivalry and intrigue, with the French industrialist Alfred Chauchard eventually buying *The Angelus* back in 1890 and bequeathing it to the nation in 1909, along with other paintings from his collection.

273 Corot’s Paris studio was on the rue Paradis-Poissonnière. He came late to painting, first taking lessons at the age of 26 from Archille Michallon, the first winner of the landscape Prix de Rome in 1817.
for the masters, those Gods in whom they believed so sincerely.”\textsuperscript{274} Details of money and motivation however, seem just as much taboo subjects in the Barbizon art literature as anywhere else. Typically, there is a tendency to stress the economic hardships of the struggling genius, especially with these two masters. Closer examination, however, suggests certain patterns of behaviour that are often at odds with the proclaimed generosity in character of these leaders. Rousseau was determined to paint in oils only, but this masks a stubborn refusal to work in any more commercially-rewarding mediums, such as the new lithography or with etchings, unlike many of his friends and neighbours. It restricted his career and thus his financial security. By sticking to his principles he only narrowed his opportunities further and, with respect to technique and subject, caused some repetition, though not replication, in his landscape compositions.

Much of Millet’s financial problems were also self-created. He actually received regular economic assistance from friends, collectors and dealers, much more than most of his colleagues. His artistic reputation rose quickly after moving to Barbizon, but the truth behind his migration was as much financial as aesthetic. The peasant theme, for which he is now most famous, was beginning to find buyers and so he, and his family, relocated on the back of several Salon successes, sales and a commission.\textsuperscript{275} He approached the village of Barbizon, in the summer of 1849, with a hefty sum of money in his pocket, in excess of 2,000 fr. and the prospect of having paying pupils.\textsuperscript{276} The annual rent for his Barbizon cottage was only 150 fr. If one believes that the average daily wage for a labourer in Paris at that time was nearly five francs,\textsuperscript{277} this then indicates a sound economic investment as much as a search for inspirational subjects or finding “Nature at home”, as Gautier imagined it.\textsuperscript{278}

One incident concerning the friends Millet and Jacque sheds some light on the reality of these still-competitive professional artists. In 1852, \textit{L’Illustration} magazine published a series of engravings, usually a landscape of Barbizon or the forest, done, it was said, after works by Jacque, drawn by Adrien Lavielle, whose brother Eugène lived in the village. However, Millet began to recognise they were, in fact, made after his own compositions, and without acknowledgement or any financial contribution. This caused a souring of their friendship and a number of threats were made. As these prints, \textit{Mois}, were popular and twelve more were needed to complete the series, the printers eventually offered Millet a contract for more engravings, which were published in album form under the title of \textit{Les Travaux des champs}, in 1855. Although his frustrations are fully justified in this event, he could often be irascible. A friend commented to young Monet, who was thinking of meeting the artist: “Don’t go, Millet is a terrible man, very proud and haughty. He will insult you!”\textsuperscript{279} Another example of his financial inconsistency occurred in 1854, after Millet sold three paintings to a M. Letrône for 2,000 francs.

\textsuperscript{274} Gassies, cited in Caille, 1985, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{275} His peasant series began with sketches of labourers at his family home at Gruchy, Normandy. In 1848, he had a Salon success with \textit{The Winnower}, which he sold, for 500 fr., to Alexandre Ledru-Rollin (1807-74), a prominent radical politician, and received a commission for two more paintings at 1,800 fr. This was a substantial sum compared to his average prices, c.200 fr.
\textsuperscript{276} Dates vary for when Millet started teaching students, between 1848-53, but their names are the same, the Americans Thomas Babcock and Richard Hearn, and possibly another, W.M. Hunt, who also bought two of his paintings in 1853. Hearn and Hamilton Wild’s names appear together in Ganne’s register, September 1849.
\textsuperscript{277} Rewald, 1946, p. 185, concludes that the average wage, for one day’s work of an unskilled labourer was approximately 5 fr.
\textsuperscript{278} Caille, 1985, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{279} Gimpel, 1927.
Instead of paying off his many debts or improving the home, he took his children to the sea side, for four months. It could be argued therefore, that while he made life-long complaints about his finances he also contributed greatly to his own dire circumstances.

The Barbizon pioneers were also caught up in the changing status of artists in French society, not only because of recognition of their talents but of how the role of modern art was perceived. One paradox, for example, surrounded Rousseau, who, despite his strong anti-establishment feelings, remained disappointed that he had not been awarded the Legion d’honneur, especially as his acolyte, Diaz de la Peña, had already been so honoured, in 1841. Corot, naturally enough, gained his award in 1846 and even Millet in 1868. Paris purposely made itself into a centre for high culture and the Arts, investing much in developing studios and tolerating libertine behaviour, such as nude models. The Arts became a weapon in the arsenal of international and national politics, informed by the academy. Salon membership and honours continued to be a battle-ground for many decades, especially the composition of its jury. The jury system was abandoned as part of the 1848 revolution, which allowed Courbet and Rousseau in and a moment of official fame, but this exhibition organisation soon became a shambles, never to be repeated, endorsing the hard-line critics and seeing conservatism reign once again.

After the social upheavals and continuing disappointments of the Second Empire, the action of Barbizon rebels gained a special resonance with artists everywhere. They were perceived as not only being dissatisfied with the prevailing academy system but were actively involved in building an alternative. As painters, they had found the right blend of tradition and innovation, a new creativity drawn from direct contact with nature. They also showed that fine art could now be produced in a distant village, after taking full advantage of many new technologies. The earliest pioneers in the region took the stagecoach, but when Millet and Jacque came to settle in 1849 they took one of the first trains. That year the railway reached Melun, one of the river ports along the winding upper Seine valley, just nine kilometres from Barbizon. Fontainebleau opened its railway station the following year, in which Denecourt sold his guides. Soon, almost all of the villages on the circumference of the forest were accessible by train and duly received an influx of plein-air painters.

Close analysis of Ganne’s hotel register reveals a surprising range in age, professional status and provenance. The majority of these artists may be said to fall into the category of young hopefuls, but with very few teenagers. If one examines the first page of this book, (6:3) which starts on 12th May 1848, one sees Charles Gamban, aged 46; Alexandre Guilloni, aged 30; Joseph Thierry, aged 36; and Théodore Rousseau, aged 36, all mature Paris-based painters. Forty-two guests registered that year, from May to November, with an average age of approximately 30 yrs. On 16th June the painter Louis Leroy (1792-1885) arrived, aged 54, the first of his many visits, this time with his family. The last registered entry (departure dates are not usually written, unfortunately) is a solitary teenager, Gustav Vrauvini (?), aged 16.

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280 Genthon, 1995, p. 56.
281 However, the Fontainebleau cartoon in L’Illustration 24.12.1849 suggests considerable overcrowding well before the coming of the railways to the area.
282 It was in Leroy’s article for Le Charivari, 25th April 1874, that the term Impressionism was first coined.
who describes himself voyageur. The only other non-painter amongst the forty-two lodgers was M. Victor Pontlervis, a proprietaire from Loigny.  

Most of the resident artists in the village, naturally, had achieved a measure of financial security in order to pay for their renting or buying cottages. Millet and Jacque had commissions, Bodmer was commercially sound and Diaz had achieved professional recognition before settling down here in 1836. Probably the best known, and most financially secure, of the main Barbizon group was Camille Corot (1796-1875). He was never a resident, yet he could afford to lease a studio loft at the back of Ganne’s courtyard. He first came to this forest in 1822, the same year his family allowance doubled, because of the death of his sister. On the death of his father, in 1847 he inherited a small fortune and the family chateau in the beech wood forests of Ville d’Avray, near Versailles. It was convenient for exploring and painting the southern woodlands of the Ile de France. He always enjoyed travel, including many extended working trips to Italy from 1825, which influenced his early compositions. He also enjoyed painting en plein-air and eventually developed a distinctive trademark style, of pale green, sfumato, tonal, poetic woodland scenes, greatly inspired by these forests.

Corot is important to the development of Barbizon for a combination of reasons. He represents the acceptable face of landscape painting, for the Salon and the public; a model of success, a gentleman artist with a kind, generous nature. He had all the confidence that wealth brings yet remained modest. He was much revered by the younger generation, yet he kept a certain detachment. Curiously, he had a long, loyal and respectful professional friendship with Rousseau, whom Baudelaire had publicly called Corot’s “antithesis.” Rousseau was, in many ways, his temperamental opposite, much more extreme, even “brutal” in his later style of painting. One early commentator went so far as to call Rousseau an “outlaw, an heretic....” He admired Corot’s outdoor work but not his picturesque and classical treatments. Rousseau had abandoned the formal studio as the main centre for his work, but Corot needed the calmness of his various ateliers. Corot also had a long and constant friendship with the innkeepers François and Edmée Ganne, a highly important relationship that generated much goodwill and stability in the community. Corot was just one year older than Père Ganne, and the oldest and the longest standing of his regular customers. Proof of their mutual admiration may be judged from the status Corot was given, as ‘guest of honour’ and official witness at the Gannes’ daughter’s

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283 1849 was also typical of those early years, with the arrival of Millet and Jacque, both with families. It saw 35 artists lodging at the Auberge Ganne, between May and October, peaking in density in September. Twelve of the eighteen who actually wrote in their addresses in full were from outside of Paris, including two Americans and an Irish man, who arrived on the same day, 10th September, a day that saw a total of five artists arrive. Many French artists came from the provinces: Grasse, Lille, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Bourlogne and Beaune. Twenty-two of the artists were between 20–30 years of age. The total number of hotel guests increase slightly over the next decade yet this pattern continues, but what is noticeably is that very few artists returned. Generally, they seem to stay longer, weeks rather than days, which seems to suggest that they thought either one visit was enough or they found other solutions to the accommodation problems elsewhere.

284 Caille, 1985, p. 46 cites the Goncourt brothers’s description, in Manette Salomon, of Corot’s loft: three rooms, one of which was a studio with a red velvet (“Utrecht”) covered walnut sofa, whose “arm-rests had Directoire breasted sphinxes and legs with terracotta claws”.

285 Mayne, 1965, p. 197

286 Paul Mantz in his Introduction to Sensier, 1889, p. vi.
wedding in 1859. This was despite the attendance of the other two Barbizon masters, Millet and Rousseau.

Millet and Rousseau are, undoubtedly, the two central figures of the School of Barbizon after 1850. They were not particularly charismatic, a word often conveniently used to define the leaders of many artists’ communities, but they both demanded and received solid respect for their body of work. Both promoted the topographical beauty of the place, but each expressed himself differently. Whereas, Millet found reasonable success at the Paris Salon, with his long series of peasant paintings, such as The Sower and The Winnower, Rousseau was constantly rejected for trying to promote his pure landscape paintings, rejected by the same Salon juries. The publicity each received only helped to broaden the reputation of the group, better than if it relied on the success of only one man. Something of Rousseau’s uncompromising manner may be judged from his pronouncement: “let the civilised world go to the devil! Long live nature, forests and ancient poetry!”  

1833 was the first year Rousseau came to the forest but it was also the first year he had a work accepted by the Salon. However, it was decades before a second painting by him was accepted by the authorities for this formal showing of ‘The Living Masters’, the official name for the Paris Salon. Yet, his talent was recognised by the influential poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire (1821-67), who wrote: “At the head of the modern school of landscape stands Mr. Corot. If Mr. Théodore Rousseau were to exhibit, his [Corot’s] supremacy would be in some doubt, … Mr. Rousseau adds a greater charm and a greater sureness of execution.” The following year, 1846, he again wrote of the “setbacks and underhand plotting have combined together to keep him [Rousseau] away from the Salon”. Out of this persistency and frustration, Rousseau rejected conventional Parisian art circles for a life of relative rural solitude. He moved permanently to Barbizon in 1847, living in the same small stone cottage with his common-law wife until his death in 1868.

The image of the village was consolidated when Millet arrived with his friend, the engraver Charles Jacque (1813-94), both with their families. Caille states that they lodged at Ganne’s Hotel, but their names do not appear in the register. This brought the number of resident artists’ families to at least six, an extremely high percentage in a hamlet with little over two dozen homes. The motivations of all these family men were not necessarily the same as those of the majority of visitors, who were bachelors. One can usefully divide the pressures for their relocation to the village into push and pull forces, reasons to leave the metropolis and reasons to go to a village. The city of Paris, around mid-century, was not an attractive place to live, especially for a young and growing family such as Millet’s, whose second wife already had two of their eventually nine children. In Paris there was turmoil: economic inflation, food shortages, riots and yet another virulent wave of cholera. There was general dissatisfaction with the Second Republic, urban strife and repressive political action. 1848 was a year that saw riots and mayhem across most of Europe. Typical of this mood for change was the publication, that

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288 The Paris Art Academy annual exhibition or ‘Salon’ title was officially ‘L’Exposition des artistes vivants’.
290 Sensier, 1872, p. 81. He lists the resident artists in Barbizon, by 1850, as Rousseau, Millet, Diaz, Belly, Leroy, Glerget and the American, Hughes Martin.
291 Caille, 1985, p. 34. Jacque and Millet’s names does not appear in Ganne’s hotel register in the first decade.
292 Sensier, 1972, p. 81. Residents’ names are given as Leon Belly, Clerget, Hughes Martin and Louis Leroy, yet all their names appears in Ganne’s Hotel Register for 1848 and 1849. Karl Bodmer (1809-93) also settled there with his family in 1849, buying Hunt’s house in 1856.
year, of *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.\(^{293}\) It was only one of a number of revolutionary hand-books or guides to be seen in the capital, including *L’Homme Libre*, *Le Tribun du Peuple*, *L’Humanité* and the tome *La Fraternité* written by *Travailleurs Égalitaires*.\(^{294}\) Incompetent government only fuelled the uncertainties. Riots increased in number and severity throughout the year, culminating in the provisional government ordering in the National Guard. Between June 24-26\(^{th}\) official figures estimated there were 1,460 shot dead and 11,671 arrested, imprisoned and subsequently deported.\(^{295}\) The pictures of gentle rustication personified by Barbizon landscape paintings appeared as a welcome relief from the consequences of relentless urban and industrial expansion.

Throughout the next few decades the forest of Fontainebleau was a hive of artistic activity, centred on Barbizon but spreading to include other villages, such as Moret, Montigny, Marlotte and Grez-sur-Loing. It was a grass-roots response to the troubled times yet slowly the art work achieved a general acceptance and popularity. Corot’s landscapes had long found favour because of their delicate charm, but now Millet’s peasant genre found a resonance with patrons, the general public and activists. Millet was less politically critical than, for example, Honoré Daumier, whose lithographs were much more than just a new focus on the state of the working classes and got him and his publisher, Charles Philipon, into trouble with the authorities.

Indicative of the broad appeal of Barbizon works was Millet’s early patronage: one collector was the radical French politician Ledrun-Rollin (1807-74); yet another was perhaps more resonant of the changing times, an American enthusiast named Martin Brimmer.\(^{296}\) This international element in the rise of the School of Barbizon marks it out from all previous rural art movements and was to be carried on by the best rural artists’ colonies.

The gradual artistic exploration out from the cities was apparent in other countries at this time but nowhere else was there such a concentration of artists’ villages.\(^{297}\) This migration was recognisable from the 1820s with artists exploring along the River Seine to St.Cloud and Meudon, just a short wagon ride away from the city. Île Seguin and Pont de Sèvres were the next step outwards, for painters such as Jules Dupré, Rousseau and Constant Troyon. The upper Seine and Oise valleys were then gradually explored, so that the landscapes around Pontoise, L’Isle-Adam and Vétheuil featured in many scenes: it was at Auvers-sur-Oise where Charles-François Daubigny kept his famous boat-studio. Barbizon, therefore, fits into this overall interest in the countryside out from the suburbs and just before the longer leap to the coast. Owing to the growing success of the School of Barbizon, its name was re-used in relation to other groups, as a *soubriquet*, such as ‘the Barbizon of Normandy’ for Honfleur. Just outside of Brussels, with the direct encouragement of an ex-Barbizon painter, Xavier De Cock (1818-96), another artists’

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\(^{293}\) The Communist Manifesto arrived too late in Paris to influence the overthrow of the monarchy, yet it does represent the revolutionary spirit that was fermenting all across Europe at that time. 1848 was also the year when some frustrated artists tried to break the monopoly of the Paris Salon by forming ‘The Association of Artists’ which opened an exhibition at the *Bazaar Bonne Nouvelle*, entitled *Les Gloiries des Beaux-Arts*. Hedging its bets politically with a mixture of Classicists (Géricault, Chardin, Watteau and the Le Nain brothers) and Barbizonites (Corot, Dupré, Huet and Rousseau). It was not a financial success.

\(^{294}\) Bourgin, 1973, p. 72.

\(^{295}\) Fejtö, 1973, pp. 92-93.

\(^{296}\) There were three early major Bostonian collectors of Barbizon works: William Morris Hunt, who lived in the village from 1851, Martin Brimmer and Quincy Adams Shaw, who by 1889 already owned many major Millet paintings, including two versions of *The Sower*.

\(^{297}\) Rewald, 1946, Endleaf, in the last map he shows over twenty important artists’ villages around Paris, including Auvers, Bougival, Bourron, Giverny, Villiers-sur-Morin and Pontoise.
colony flourished in the forest at Tervueren, ‘the Barbizon of Belgium’ and, similarly, at Oosterbeek ‘the Barbizon of Holland.’

In Ganne’s hotel register from 1848, one sees predominantly Paris-based artists and many visitors from the French provinces. However, it can be seen that the number of international artist lodgers quickly accelerates. Not only are there representatives from neighbouring countries, such as Belgians, Dutch and English, but also visitors from more distant provinces, for example, Christian Carl Magnussen (1821-96) from North Friesland and Lorenz Frølich (1820-1908) from Copenhagen, in 1852. As early as 1849, one can see the first American, Hamilton Wild from Michigan, soon to be another sponsor of Millet. He was followed by William Babcock (1826-99), c.1850, who lived in the village for the next twenty years. Several more Americans settled in the village, including William Morris Hunt and Edward Wheelwright. The impact these Yankees made on the artists villages and in Paris art circles is only now being properly addressed, yet they typify so well the huge demographic changes before 1900. They were enthusiastic, courageous (they had, after all, sailed over the Atlantic Ocean), talented, gregarious, convivial, open-minded, well-connected and, often, financially, well-off. Hunt and Babcock were ‘pupils’ of Millet, friends and purchasers his works. Wheelwright and the Canadian Wyatt Eaton also directly promoted Barbizon to the outside world as they wrote magazine articles. According to Lübbren, Americans formed the largest contingent of foreigners in Barbizon, 11%, but their effect was proportionately higher because they were not the usual impoverished art students. The lessons learnt at Barbizon, particularly by the foreign enthusiasts, were to be quickly transported to other parts of France and then to other countries. This received wisdom, or practical working knowledge, informed the artistic, economic and social development of all later artists’ colonies, giving them a firm model on which to build, either from direct experience or from the many descriptions available in print by the 1880s.

It is difficult to assess how united the School of Barbizon actually was, partly as its leaders retreated into their separate studios and into family situations. There were many conflicting stories and opinions on the pioneers, about the group as a whole and about the leading lights. For example, Caille writes that “They gave no lessons and taught no doctrine,” yet, Millet had several paying American pupils and Rousseau was clearly a mentor for rich Diaz. Art students did consult their masters’ sketchbooks and used their ateliers, with even the recluse Rousseau giving woodland tours. Around Millet there were a number of ironies and paradoxes. One of his American pupils, Wheelwright, for example, noted that Millet disliked peasants, the main inspirational source for his pictures, image, income and status as a painter.

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298 Oosterbeek artists’ community started as early as 1841 with the arrival of J.W. Bilders (1811-90) but its development took place over a decade later, influenced by his son Gerard Bilders (1838-65) and Anton Mauve (1838-88).
299 Gassies, 1907, p. 101. William Morris Hunt bought The Sheepshearer and The Shepherd in 1853. Millet also sold Ruth and Boaz, that year, to the American Brimmer, a work first shown in the 1848 Salon.
302 Lübbren, 2001, p. 166, calculates Barbizon was “53 % French, 11 % American, 6 % British, 8 % other nationalities.” Where the missing 22% were from remains unclear in the text.
304 Jacobs, 1985, p. 19, cites Wheelwright on Millet’s opinion that peasants: “utter want of appreciation of the charms of nature…of their often discontented and repining spirit, their low aims, their sordid views, their petty jealousies.” Millet’s peasant imagery was used by political radicals and other artists, namely Vincent van Gogh, precisely because he seemed to elevate the status of the working classes.
Compared with the later pioneers of artists’ colonies, the Barbizon masters not only had families but brought them along from the start. Diaz could afford to buy property, but Millet, Jacque and Rousseau rented cottages, at least at first. With so many resident artists’ families in the village, early on, it is difficult to distinguish the difference between colonisation and sub-urbanisation, here. This group can also be regarded as evoking the same sense of extended family as found in artists’ colonies, rather than the fraternal social structure. They were certainly not celibate. Millet had a large family and Rousseau lived with his mistress, yet there remain few, if any, overt references in their works to sex or nudity. Millet, in fact, gave up making pictures of nudes, his previous main source of income, just before his marriage and their move to Barbizon. With so many bachelors confined at Ganne’s Inn it is surprising that there are so few references to women, even in the graffiti, although one surviving pencil cartoon (8:3) in the guest-book amusingly illustrates youthful licentiousness under a parasol, presumably out of doors, dated 1876.

Women gradually became more visible during the era of Barbizon’s pioneers, not just in the traditional roles of wives, models and mistresses, but as artists in their own right. Lübbren writes that three percent of its artists were female, yet few names rose to prominence. However, just across the forest from Barbizon, above the village of Thomery, Rosa Bonheur (1822-99) bought the Chateau By, enlarged it, added two ateliers and opened an art school for women. She was famous worldwide, officially honoured in her day as an eminent animal painter, knew many of the Barbizonier and, together with Rousseau, campaigned for the conservation of the whole forest. Having found their inspirational landscape, engaged with it intimately, this new generation of artists, typically, were then united in their collective wish to preserve its beauty. Bonheur and Rousseau were amongst many artists who directly petitioned the Emperor to turn, in effect, the Forest of Fontainebleau into one of the first rural national parks.

**Human Geography**

Between 1830-60 the population of Paris doubled in size. Such a population shift was not unusual during this period. French society remained divided, as ever, some wanting more industry and wealth, seemingly at any cost, while others wanted simplicity and a better quality of life. The countryside suffered almost everywhere, but the further it was from the capital city the less hurried was the pace of change. Much scholarly interest has been directed recently towards this changing relationship with the land and how the image of nature was crafted for consumption. One seminal book, by Dean MacCannell, sees the growth of tourism as a key factor in modern culture. He argues that the search for the authentic experience reflects the loss of quality in the home life. This is a complex issue with its own dynamic economic, political, ideological and symbolic constructs. But by mid-century, 70 kilometres was still not
enough to get away entirely from the pressures of urban expansion. People had been encouraged
to go to the Forest of Fontainebleau not only by generations of artists but the popularist actions
of Denecourt, amongst others.\textsuperscript{309} However, there is no substantial evidence to suggest there was
any sort of conspiracy to create an image of the countryside, a notion becoming common in the
modern discourse amongst followers of theorists such as Nicholas Green. In fact, never before
had there been such a choice, such a variety of unrestrained representation of the countryside
from which to choose and especially in print, which now included photography.

What the Barbizon artists indicated was that simple beauty could be found anywhere,
certainly in rugged nature, yet also in the more mundane corners of everyday life, such as hens in
a farmyard, a solitary gnarled tree, a pile of rocks and labouring peasants, all subjects that found
favour. This contrasts with traditional images of rural life, such as beribboned shepherdesses on
swings, scenes of dramas and costumed historic events set in fantasy landscapes, the stuff of
standard salon art, produced by Delacroix, Prud’hon and the followers of Fragonard.

This new realism served a primary function of surveying the topography more accurately
than any previous artistic movement. They painted what they saw and attempted an objective
truth through close observation. It is hard to imagine that this simple policy could cause such
major ructions in the art academies, as it did. Proof of this may be judged by the slow official
acceptance of the Academic Landscape as a separate pictorial category in the awarding of prizes
and competitions.\textsuperscript{310} The academy finally agreed to create an extra award of a \textit{Prix de Rome},
specifically for \textit{paysage historique}, in 1817. However, it was not to be awarded annually, as
normal, but only every four years. The first winner was a pupil of Valencienne, Archille
Michallon, who was the first art teacher of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot. Thus, it was that Corot
and his friends, including D’Aligny and Bertin, first took up the regular practise of painting \textit{en
plein-air} around the Forest of Fontainebleau from the 1820s, long before the railways, organised
tourism and Denecourt’s guidebooks.

The rise of the Barbizon pioneers coincided with a re-evaluation of the regions, especially
after the divisive consequences of the Napoleonic Wars. Actually Barbizon had no distinctive
economy, gentry, industry, architecture, costume or customs. Its peasants were truly at the
bottom of the ladder. The issue of painting all the nation’s countryside, systematically, raised
questions of regional identity and therefore became closely linked with democratic notions.\textsuperscript{311}
The conceits of the Paris Art Academy are a gauge to understanding the concerns of the period,
for its leaders, patrons and connoisseurs, largely remained concentrated on the grand historical
and religious narratives. The realities of life, particularly in rural areas, did not interest them,
even the simple, yet popular, Barbizon landscapes. The inextricable spread in Realism done by
by Courbet, Daumier and Rousseau, from the 1840s, hit the right note. Even without the political
content in some of their pictures, the public saw that objective truth was a new step in showing
the real nature of a situation, done without elaboration and over-crafting of the image.

\textsuperscript{309} In 1820, Charles Remard, librarian at the Chateau Fontainebleau, wrote an area guide. Soon after, Etienne Jamin
produced his ‘Four promenades in the Forest of Fontainebleau.’ These encouraged Denecourt to publish in 1832.
\textsuperscript{310} Boime, 1986, chapter 7. Valencienne suggested three official categories for landscape painting: \textit{paysage
historique}, \textit{paysage pastoral} and \textit{paysage portrait}, later Thoré suggested another, \textit{paysage réaliste}.
\textsuperscript{311} The academician, Lavarian, as early as 1833, sought greater official recognition for the French regions and
regional art. In the Preface to Sensier’s first biography of Millet he mentions Félicité-Robert de Lammenais, who, in
1840, made demands for paintings of all French contemporary life. Lammenais went so far as to publish a socialist
magazine, \textit{L’Avenir}. Rosa Bonheur was an early convert, “my father made me read Lammenais, and Lammenais
defined everything that I have sought” cited in Ashton, 1981, p. 36.
The School of Barbizon was seen as “dominated by twin impulses of admiration and rebellion.”\(^{312}\) How political the pioneers actually were, or saw themselves, is open to question, but their images were taken up by others who were politically motivated. Corot’s life and work does not conform to any image of working-class rebellion. Similarly, Bodmer, Jacque, Barye, Gérôme and Diaz, all amongst the leaders of the group, also painted uncontroversial compositions. Rousseau was the radical interpreter of wild nature but not people, and whose work, despite Baudelaire’s praise, was seen by too few people. It was Millet, ‘the Rustic’, who was taken up by the media and radicals as an image maker. Curiously, when one examines his Barbizon works it can be seen that his focus is not in the woodland but on the farms, not in the forest but the plain. Even though he went through a landscape phase under the influence of Rousseau, Millet’s work is dominated by peasant labourers, such as *The Sowers* and *The Gleaners*.

The range of Barbizon works was also its strength. While Rousseau explored colour values, Millet and others enthusiastically explored the potential of new graphic art and design, engraving and lithography, and in doing so gained textural influences that show the beginnings of abstraction or symbolism. The use of a bold outline and the flowing treatment of form, seen in Millet’s work, owed much to the very similar crayon-lithographic technique epitomised by another talent, Honoré Daumier (1808-79), who was also a visitor to Barbizon and whose name first appears in *Auberge Ganne*’s register in September 1853. The greatness of their work lies in the elimination of the inessential, investing the ordinary with weight and dignity. These innovations were continued in most later rural artists’ communities, to a greater or lesser extent, such as Paula Modersohn-Becker at Worpswede and Ferdinand Hart Nibbrig at Laren and Domburg. Millet was greatly admired by many, for his peasant series and his Barbizon landscapes, not least by Vincent van Gogh, who copied Millet’s work, used reproductions of them and of whose biographical details he was well aware.\(^{313}\)

\(^{313}\) Roskill, 1927-9, p. 46. His enthusiasm for Millet’s work is confirmed in an early letter from The Hague, March 1882. It also mentions that he borrowed Millet’s biography from the artist Theo de Bock. It was Sensier’s of 1881.
Physical Geography

Compared to the coast, the Alps or Italy, the Forest of Fontainebleau has few extreme physical characteristics, but it does offer a rich and varied geography. Its history, as a Royal park and a wild place for brigands to hide, lent itself easily to romantic fantasy. It was this that Denecourt recognised and exploited so readily. The forest was neither vast, compared to The Black Forest for example, nor truly wild, for it had been logged and quarried for centuries. If one knew the paths then it was possible to walk across it in a day. There were not yet the large tracts of commercial pines, and broad areas of mature beech and oak were plentiful. Being further from Paris than other peripheral woodlands it was more abandoned and left to itself, apart from the many fire-breaks and trottoir. What was so special about this forest, compared to the others? The answer is relatively simple. Artists did paint in those other woods around the Île-de-France. Rousseau, for one, sold an early landscape painting in 1834, to the Duke d’Orleans, entitled The Forest of Compiègne, typical beech woodland as far from Paris as Fontainebleau, but to the North-East. Gassies has Rousseau lodging that same year in Barbizon, with seven other artists, and he is known to have lodged in neighbouring Chailly at that time. The general trend is clear, that artists were mobilising, searching out unspoilt landscapes, but only within an easy distance of Paris.

It is useful to compare Barbizon, Chailly and another early artists’ village, Cernay-la-Ville, further to the West, nearer Versailles. These seem to be the earliest major artists’ villages. Cernay, like Chailly, had an old, busy, coaching inn, as it lies on a highway to Chartres. However, it is not the route of choice to that cathedral city, as the road undulates and held a degree of difficulty, even physical risk, for the coach rider. This road winds precariously over rivers, by ravines, under escarpments and through thick vegetation in contrast to the open plains around Chailly and the straight broad highway to Fontainebleau. The Forêt Domaniale de Rambouillet, had its artistic admirers as it offered picturesque chateaux and a large old abbey on its list of attractions. Cernay’s Hotel Margat, had a friendly proprietor who hosted the transient artists. Visitors were mostly Frenchmen, but later, from the 1860s, included some notable foreigners, such as the American, Winslow Homer (1836-1910), and the Dane, P.S. Kroyer (1851-1909). Chailly and Cernay did not attract resident artists and therefore lacked settled continuity. Barbizon was just far enough away from the crowds, at least to begin with, to allow them the peace to work, to explore and appreciate the varied atmosphere.

The peculiar landscapes around Fontainebleau well suited the mood for a return to nature by the Parisian bourgeoisie, one that could be stimulating without being life-threatening. Contemporary literature shows the same fascination. For example, Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) promised “in wildness is the preservation of the world,” and forests held a particular appeal

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314 Morgan, 1986. Letter of December 31st. 1877, Barbizon: Cox and three companions had walked from the station at Melun to Barbizon, but Ganne’s pension was full so that he wrote “tomorrow we two stroll through the forest for Grez”, a matter of 12 miles.

315 Gassies, 1907, p. xvii, promotes 1834 as the first year of Auberge Ganne, with guests Rousseau, Diaz, Perrin, Jardin, Huet, Français, Decamps and Celestin Nanteuil.
for him as an “antidote for the poisons of industrial society.”\textsuperscript{316} His compatriot James Fenimore Cooper visited the Forest of Fontainebleau in 1827 and found the place “exceeding in savage variety.”\textsuperscript{317} Compared to the wilderness areas of the U.S.A. this landscape was as nothing, yet this kind of comment is typical of an imagination, prevalent at the time, that desired to attribute such ‘ancient’ places with mystical qualities. In Barbizon, Gassies wrote: “the Gorges of Apremont (12:3),... the perpetually pink heathers, the grey boulders which would become silver or golden depending on the morning or dusk hour, a few tousled birches at scattered intervals brightening up the austerity of the landscape with their white bark, made the place a delight for those who loved colours; the ‘Bas-Bréau’, an ancient cluster of tall trees whose gnarled old oaks had for centuries been respected [or at least left] by the woodcutters and under whose dense shade reigned the so poetic green darkness...”\textsuperscript{318}

Interestingly, the two most-famous Barbizon paintings, Millet’s \textit{The Angelus} and \textit{The Gleaners}, are both set out on the open plains. What Barbizon offered was a variety of landscapes and moods: a gradation from the dense ‘primeval’ jungle to the almost-featureless, airy flatlands.\textsuperscript{319} Gassies commented thus on the plain: “is not like those in the Beauce region which extend as far as the eye can see, on the contrary, it is peppered with large clumps of woods which break the monotony of the horizon.” These isolated clumps of trees and shrubs grow out of curious, yet natural, piles of boulders, called \textit{montoirs}. The most prominent one between Chailly and Barbizon is called the \textit{Roches Moreau}. They proved pictorially useful, in part as perspective devices that made a change from the traditional use of animals for staffage or objects for \textit{repoussoir}. These plains had no hedges, dry-stone walls or ditches, and, again, show no signs of industry, technology or modernity in any way.

Gassies, Chaigneau and Jacque, as well as Millet, amongst many others, captured the life of the subsistence farms and recorded the seasonal activities in detail. Jacque, in particular, took to the subject with a passion, for he not only painted chickens but started a poultry farm and eventually wrote a definitive monograph on breeding them. The pictures of the plains also exhibit a strong use of horizontal lines and a careful treatment of the sky, both features of traditional Dutch landscape painting usually completely absent from French pictorial practise. Jean Bouret points out that there was no major French study of Dutch landscape painting, astonishingly, until 1847,\textsuperscript{320} or until the rise of the School of Barbizon. It is also interesting to note that the achievements at Barbizon then reinvigorated the new Dutch painters, such as Roelofs and Israëls. The attention to the sky brought about both a general interest in natural lighting and a specific desire to capture the ephemeral nature of the atmosphere. Roelofs, for example, painted a rainbow of similar composition to Millet’s Barbizon canvas on the same subject.\textsuperscript{321} Their enthusiasm for painting nature gave way to much experimenting that added to the already revolutionary social situation in the village and its inn. Certain later canvases by Rousseau and Diaz, for example, have a dark, brooding depth and simplicity of technique that

\textsuperscript{316} Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), American essayist, social critic, writer on natural history, in \textit{Walking}, 1855, although his best known work \textit{Walden, or Life in the Woods}, 1854, also reflect a similar mood.

\textsuperscript{317} Jacobs, 1985, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{318} Caille, 1985, p. 16, cites this text from Gassies, 1907.

\textsuperscript{319} Barbizon offered a wide variety of pleasing physical feature but a few elements are absent, including water. There are a few ephemeral ponds nearby, but no streams or rivers. There were no stone monuments, abbies, chateaux, castle ruins or even a church, as with Cernay.

\textsuperscript{320} Bouret, 1973, p. 86. mentions Arsene Houssaye’s 1847 study \textit{Historie de la peintre flamande et hollandaise}.

\textsuperscript{321} Millet’s \textit{The Spring}, undated, Louvre inv.nr. RF509 is noticeably similar to Roelof’s \textit{De Regenboog}, 1975/ 75, Haags Gemeentemuseum.
predict the works of expressionists such as Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff and van Heemskerk van Beest along the North Sea coast.

**Technological innovation and modernity**

Many innovations came to fruition around mid-century that encouraged the adventurous *plein-air* artist. The most apparent of them was the spread of the railways, which not only gave access to the countryside but stimulated their search for suitable locations. Before 1849, transport from Paris to Fontainebleau was relatively simple and direct, but tiresome. There were scheduled, stage-coaches along the Seine Valley and across the plains, which ran directly through the forest, passed the palace and on south to Vichy and Lyon. The ‘Patache’ mail-coaches, owned by the company Lafitte and Caillard, were said to be uncomfortable but cheap. The mood of the coachman often decided when he might pause to off-load passengers. The high-road itself was well-appointed, as seen in one painting by Claude Monet, *The Cobblestones of Chailly*, 1865. Monet is not recorded as lodging in Barbizon, but, he did stay in the old, coaching inn, *Le Cheval Blanc*, in Chailly, from where, like so many, he need only make a short walk across the plain to the forest’s edge at *Bas Bréau*. After 1849, the quickest route to the area, from Paris, was to take the new railway to Melun, down on the banks of the River Seine, and then cover the gentle gradient up to the plains on foot, through Chailly, and on to Barbizon. This is exactly what Millet and Jacque did that first year. Later, in response to rising demand, a narrow-gauge track was laid down, the *Tacot* (13:3), which ran through the heart of Barbizon, in front of the *Auberge Ganne* and on up the high street, *Grande Rue*, in front of almost all the artists’ houses and studios, to terminate at the entrance to the forest, a square sandy clearing called the *placiaut*.

It is a common misapprehension to link simply the growth of rural artists’ colonies to the development of the railways. This assumption dismisses the fact that countries already had cheap and easy transport networks, of one kind or another. What the railways managed to do was more than to change the perception of travel: by reducing the time element, they ushered in many new perceptions and processes. Railways soon became an essential of modern daily life and commercial success for many. What art historians seem to have overlooked is that locomotive transport also represented a potent investment in the future, a kind of optimism shared by most major Barbizon artists, who began to exploit an ever wider range of innovations to help them resolve their practical and financial problems. Trains allowed the painters to reach the remoter countryside, yet also enabled village-based artists’ to maintain vital and fast communications with patrons, dealers, suppliers, printers and publishers, for the first time. The traditional discourse on the art history of this period emphasizes the way painters engaged with the traditional life and landscapes that were disappearing, but one must also emphasize the fact that many artists wished to appear modern, up to date and leaders, rather than conformists. The fitting image of the School of Barbizon is not, therefore, that of a return to some ‘golden age’, as happened with the *Nazarenes* and the *Pre-Raphaelites*, for example, but as a group at the cutting edge of change and innovation. This factor was carried further and more effectively in the development of most village artists’ colonies, such as Skagen, Laren and Worpswede.

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322 Bouret, 1973, p. 5.
323 Gentho, 1995, p. 56.
The pioneering artists who were attracted to Barbizon, and the other outlying villages, were risk-takers. They acted on probabilities, such as finding cheap lodgings and the chance of learning from the village experience. Railways eventually reduced some risks, but many had already travelled far to reach Paris in the first place, overland and by sea. When Rosa Bonheur moved to Paris from her hometown of Bordeaux, in 1829, she managed to cover the 600 kms. by stage-coach in just over two days.324 This helps put the 70 kms. from Paris to Fontainebleau into a better perspective. Ganne’s guest-book testifies from the first year, 1848, to the long distances these enthusiasts had already risked travelling. Provenances include such cities as Naples, Marseille, Turin and Bordeaux, although sea journeys may have been involved, but not with Grenoble, Beaune and Toulouse (all before 1850). The village itself was far from being modern and the inn was squalid. The earliest articles on it avoid any hard criticism, yet something of the disorder may be read in the Goncourt brothers’ novel Manette Salomon, of 1867. Auberge Ganne is described as “a lopsided cross between a café and a farmhouse, a pigsty and a farmyard, a wine merchant and a studio, which, with its thick jumble, enlivened, beaten, stirred by the rushing wind, reminds one of the courtyard of a hotel built by the brushes of Isabey.”325 Barbizon’s growth was helped by the availability of cheap building stone nearby.

The artists’ brought their new portable equipment, which was still often unwieldy, yet essential at certain times of the year. In summer, for example, the relentless sunshine necessitated a large parasol. Evidence for the popularity of much new outdoor painting equipment is legion, for example: in paintings, such as Jules Coignet’s Plein-air Artists, c.1855 (14:3); in early satirical magazines, (3:3) namely L’Illustration and Le Charivari; in a much reproduced print (7:3) of Corot ‘painting from life’; and even from surviving graffiti on the walls of the Auberge Ganne. The rush to paint outdoors itself generated further investment from manufacturers and steadily the number of artists’ suppliers rose, in Paris and every city. One recent study indicates Barbizon painters used at least twenty-four different suppliers.326 Shops now sold not only paints, canvas and brushes but all the modern paraphernalia for the pleinairists, including the new range of chemical pigments in the new, reliable, clean, tubes; practical lightweight equipment, such as collapsible easels and stools (pinchard). A contemporary magazine advertisement in 1849 offered a “Combination Sketching Seat and Easel”, “adopted for either Ladies or Gentlemen ...in a similar manner to the German Sketching Seat.”327 Graffiti in Auberge Ganne also shows the usefulness of smoking a tobacco pipe in the field, or woodlands, not so much as an aid to concentration but to ward off the persistent attention of midges and mosquitoes.

324 Krumpke, 1997, p. 89.
325 Cited in Caille, 1985, p. 42.
327 Borzello, 2000, p.120, cites the advert in The Illustrated London News, 1849. The seat was priced at 30 shillings or one and one-half pounds.
Long before the end of the century, Barbizon artwork was seen in all the modern art galleries, in the most fashionable areas of Paris, run by the new generation of art dealers, championed by Durand-Ruel in his state-of-the-art premises in the rue Lafitte. The Barbizon radicals did not object to being featured in the new illustrated magazines and were also closely associated with other exciting new developments in the media, such as colour printing and photo-gravures. Their success is tightly bound with their attitudes to the journalism, to contemporary literature, with fine-art and commercial printing. This is not to say that there were not precedents for all these actions but it shows they were exploring and exploiting the most modern methods and means to develop their careers. Modernists used modern materials.

Constantin’s recent research of the Barbizon artists’ suppliers shows they used many, possibly simultaneously. This comes as little surprise when one considers the nature of their erratic finances, such as Jacqu, Rousseau and especially Millet. Her research also reveals something of the close association painters developed with their colourmen. For example, Corot remained loyal to Colcomb-Bourgeois, initially a pharmacist on the Quai de L’Ecole. By contrast Millet patronised at least half a dozen suppliers, but probably for financial reasons. On the recommendation of Delacroix, Millet used the suppliers Haro then switched to Bellavoire’s materials, because Sensier, his friend, biographer and part-patron, made an arrangement to pay his account with them, later transferred to Blanchet’s. Not mentioned in Constantin’s otherwise thorough study, but emphasised in one colour company’s literature, is the friendship between Millet and Alexandre, the son, of the famous manufacturers Lefranc & Cie, of 64 rue de Turenne.328 Interestingly, a letter to colourman Edouralt, dated 1865,329 shows that Millet ordered the pigment Bitumen-Brown in two tubes. Bitumen was still a fashionable pigment, new, cheap but unstable, that soon deteriorated and slowly separated the compounds, as H.W. Mesdag later found out in Scheveningen. It is generally accepted that the new oil paint tubes were widely used in France only after the 1850s, although the house of Ferrod advertised them as early as 1847. It seems probable that the majority of artists in Barbizon, at its height around 1860, still used both traditional pig-skin pouches and the new tubed paints, although a few wealthier masters could afford the new products.330 This position changed by the time of most artists’ colonies, in the 1880s, as the tubes were reliable, superior and cost-effective.

Improvements in the manufacture of paints eased the artists’ preparation time considerably, enabling them to consider travel as a practical option and for much longer periods. The Barbizon pleinairists and their followers also started the habit of taking more than one canvas with them out into the field, so that, for instance they worked on one morning and one evening effect, on the same walk.331 Rousseau became famous for producing many pictures of sunsets in detail, what Baudelaire commented as “nature in her ‘bluish’ moments.”332 Karl Bodmer also favoured painting in series, often working on the same subject under different weather conditions, which resulted in one favourite old oak tree in the Bas-Bréau, an area just to

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328 Lefranc & Bourgeois, 2000, Cat., pp. 6-7. The Lefranc company was founded in 1720 and grew from sales of oil colours and varnishes, but did not adopt the tubes until 1859. Millet and Delaroche were amongst its customers.
330 Berg, 2004, implies that Corot used tubed paints as early as 1840. He took tubes on his Italian trip of 1843. Tubed oil paints were relatively expensive to begin with, but Corot was already independently wealthy, unlike the majority of the Barbizon group and those active in artists’ colonies.
331 Sensier, 1872, p. 11.
the north of Barbizon, being nicknamed *The Bodmer*. Rousseau was very protective of the whole forest, and along with Bonheur and many other Barbizon artists signed a petition and presented to Napoleon III, in order to preserve the forest. Decrees were made in 1853, mostly to stop the logging, and again in 1861, when the protected area was enlarged to 1,097 hectares. It can therefore be seen that these artists were gaining in confidence and in scope, as a direct consequence of extended working experience in the countryside, in ways that would not have occurred to them if they had remained in urban ateliers and closely followed the academy line.

Innovation was everywhere in the Barbizon artists’ community, starting with the hotel. *Auberge Ganne* had grown up because of the artists’ increasing patronage. It remained cheap, particularly if one didn’t mind sharing a room with several strangers, which seems to have been the norm. Edmée and François Ganne, the owners, were also pioneers, for neither of them had run a business before. The attitude of villagers was crucial for setting the right tone to this experiment in rural artistic creativity. These villagers seem to have welcomed the artists from an early stage, for it presented them with some financial opportunities that allayed their otherwise limited prospects. Prior to the arrival of artists, the economy of Barbizon may be said to be stagnant. It was too small to register even as a commune; there was not a church, no school and no shop. It was not so much a village as a proximity of subsistence farmers and woodsmen. Judging by the many paintings of these peasants, there seems to be more sheep kept than cattle, as there were no fences or fields, and therefore only enough work for shepherds.

Madam Edmée Ganne (1802-97) had gained some early working knowledge of wandering artists as she was employed by a grocer’s shop in Chailly, near to the busy coaching-inn, *Le Cheval Blanc*. This experience may well have given the Gannes that significant lift in their entrepreneurial step to cater for these new visitors, compared to their neighbours. Dates vary as to exactly when or even how they began to take in lodgers, yet gradually they made adjustments to their property through the 1830s to accommodate the artists and also provided the village with its first general store. The start of an official register was much later, in 1848. The number of customers had by then attracted the attention of the official district authorities, in Orleans. In order to tax it they first had to document this new enterprise, so they sent a *Gendarme*, periodically, whose name appears thereafter in the hotel ledger.

The Gannes, it seems, built up the first business in the village. They started with a cheap lodging-house and then expanded it with a grocery, selling dry goods (salt, sugar, coffee, spices, etc.) and alcohol, as well as renting out studio space. A parallel, here, may be made with Brøndum’s Guest-house, Skagen, who also had a grocery, bar and kept animals. The village inn remained the centre of the artists’ community in Barbizon, as elsewhere, but the long-term solution to cheap accommodation was not in an hotel, no matter how cheap. What is unique about the early lodging situation in Barbizon is the high proportion of resident artists. At least twelve painters bought or rented houses in its pioneering stage. The demographics of the village changed quickly around 1850, which, in effect, meant that they were all entering a new era together, the hosts and the artists, none of whom had had such experiences before.

334 Caille, 1985, p. 32.
335 Bouret, 1973, p. 48. 54 sous a day, in 1852, full board included meals, packed lunch and a bottle of wine.
336 The *Auberge Ganne* guestbooks are now in the collection of the Barbizon Municipal Museum.
337 The resident artists around mid-century were: Barye, Bodmer, Chaigneau, De Penne, Diaz, Daubigny, Gassies, Jacque, Millet, Rousseau, Séailles and Ziem. Millet and Rousseau first rented their cottages. The American William Morris Hunt (1824-79) lived in Barbizon 1853-56, selling his house to Bodmer. Léonce Chabry (1823-83) and Claude d’Aligny (1798-1871) may have leased houses according to Bouret, 1973, pp. 246-57.
The only village tradition seems to be the feast-day or fête, and even the date for this was changed after 1858, at the request of the younger generation. The celebrations were changed to May, from St. Paul’s Day (10th January). This event was the excuse for the first substantial and well-illustrated article to appear in a Parisian magazine and must have pleased the Gannes as their inn was pictured on its front page. What is often overlooked in the substantial Barbizon literature is that Père Ganne died in 1861, which left his wife to run the business for at least another decade, just when the artistic ‘climax community’ was at its height. She and her daughter Louise were the ones to provide the substantial suppers and run the whole enterprise. The novelty of being an artists’ model seems to have flattered most Barbizon farmers and shepherds, who can be identified by name. The best examples of this regular working relationship are with the farmer Benoni, also called Bellun-Benoni, whose family and farmstead was pictured by Frédéric Jacque in many engravings. Similarly, the shepherd, Père Chicorée, and his dog were frequently painted by Ferdinand Chaingneau (1830-1906). So eager was their enthusiasm that on rainy days Benoni encouraged the painters to work in his barns, which according to Gassies “looked as though it had been built for the artists; there were all sorts of things there, the large heaps of dung,…the old wooden ploughs,…the horse collars,…and the vast barn interior where wheat was still threshed with flails on the ground,…all of which delighted the colourists”.

Social Creativity

The experiments of the Barbizon artists may also be extended to their working relationships, although they were less united as a group, by comparison with later artists’ colonies. One of the basic characteristics in the social development of a successful artists’ colony was the heightened feeling of fellowship. Barbizon’s pioneers had a degree of social bonding, through sharing the same professional interest and from working together in the field. They all shared the fun of roughing it together in Ganne’s inn and very quickly turned it into their club-house. Only a few were friends prior to the relocation. Unlike the regulated schooling of an art academy or the structured hierarchy of the studio system under a master, Barbizon represents a group formation due entirely to free association. There were no rules as such. Religion, nationality, class or sex issues were not a barrier to joining this ‘school.’ It did not cost anything to enter, only the courage of one’s convictions. They were artists by mutual consent, sharing discoveries, a bonhomie yet with a background of serious professional intent. This kind of new open interaction and fellowship was enjoyed by all ranks within the artists’ community, yet it offered the most encouragement to younger, less-confident, less-experienced and less-well connected artists. They had the most to gain and to learn.

Individual motivation, amongst the Barbizon painters, is a difficult factor to define with accuracy, especially amongst a group that became so large, so varied in interest and which spanned 20-50 years. The main pioneers differed in character, provenance and intent, although they all shared many criticisms of the art authorities in Paris. As many participants were also from the provinces and other countries, it seems reasonable that they too found frustrations with their regional or city academies elsewhere. Others yet, did not like modern city life, such as Millet, who in an early letter from Barbizon wrote: “the time spent in Paris I found was mediocre. I have a weakness in preferring my thoughts and the rocks of the Apremont gorges to

338 *L’Illustration*, May 29th 1858, text by “G.F.” and engravings after pictures by Oliver de Penne (1831-97).


this hideous civilisation of stiff collars, omnibuses, people under one’s feet and other failings.”

Millet met Rousseau for the first time in Diaz’s Barbizon atelier, although it took months, according to their mutual friend Sensier, for their relationship to develop as both were rather reserved. The village inn was the central rallying point for all Barbizonnier, where all manner of issues were hotly debated and where their works-in-progress were first shown for peer-group comment. They were all firmly united by their enthusiasm for painting en plein-air, a practise some took to extremes, by painting by moonlight in the forest.

They painted together out of doors and occasionally they shared commissions, such as Bodmer’s help to Millet with a book illustration contract; and, it is recorded that Troyon and Boudin collaborated on some paintings. As the School of Barbizon became famous in Parisian art circles it attracted an ever wider variety of hopefuls, but, alas, talent is not so equally well-distributed. One example of the tragedy of over-ambitiousness occurred in Barbizon, in 1862, when both Millet and Rousseau were at the height of their powers. The following events were described in two successive letters sent by Millet to his friend and patron Alfred Sensier:

Barbizon, 18th November 1862: “The wretched Vallardi has killed himself...Louis [Fauché] had gone to Vallardi’s room at Rousseau’s, to shake him [awake] as usual,...covered in blood...”

Millet and Luniot, Ganne’s son-in-law, ran to Rousseau’s house just 100 metres down the street and called immediately for the mayor, Maire, and sent for the nearest doctor, two kilometres away in Chailly-en-Bière. Vallardi had used a pair of scissors, “struck himself over seventeen times in the heart area...Sunday night.”

Barbizon, 20th November 1862: “The wretched fellow...unhappy because he had not enough income.... He would not endure poverty.... Poverty – why, he had not even seen it in the distance. Unmarried, alone, with little fortune, Rousseau and other friends in Paris. He never knew the fearful thing [poverty] and all that comes with it.”

This tragedy illustrates a number of tensions present at that time, including: the depth of passion felt by the new generation of art students; their seriousness; the precarious nature of being a young artist in an ever more-crowded profession; and, the many ways practical assistance was given by older artists. Joining an artists’ community, even one as now-famous as Barbizon was not, in itself, any guarantee of success, but the feelings of mutual help amongst these radicals lies at the core of this independent community, as well as all later successful artists’ colonies. This incident also indicates it was standard practise for these youths to rise early for work, that Rousseau’s small home was open to students, assisting Vallardi, who, despite all this camaraderie, did not manage to raise his spirits and fell into a well of despair. The elderly Millet does not, in fact, seem to fully sympathise with the youth’s dire straits, having known poverty himself.

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341 Musée T. Hurg, Cherbourg, letter from Millet to the Cherbourg Chamber of Commerce, 10.1.1851, cited by Constantin, 2001, p. 49.
343 Sensier,Millet, 1889, p. 150.
The creation of a community club-house at Ganne’s Inn was another first and the variety of its decoration is a testament to their youthful exuberance and mental state. Many artists contributed to this free-for-all, but Diaz de la Peña seems to have revelled in the process. He was also responsible for composing an ode, 25 verses long, to their hosts, the Gannes, which he sang on festive occasions. One verse relates to an activity of no little importance to the social bonding of the community:

\[\text{C'est l’auberge du père Ganne,} \quad \begin{array}{c} 
\text{At père Ganne’s inn} \\
\text{On y voit de beaux panneaux} \\
\text{Peints par des peintres pas no-} \\
\text{Vices, et qui ne sont pas ânes.} \\
\text{Les peintres de Barbizon} \\
\text{Peignent comme des bisons} \\
\end{array} \]

At père Ganne’s inn
there you see fine panels
painted by painters who are not no-
VICES, and who aren’t asses either.
These painters of Barbizon
all paint like bisonș

The decoration of Auberge Ganne was vital to the creation of the artists’ community spirit; firstly, by making it their own, as they wanted it; secondly, as a marker for other artists; and, thirdly, as an example to other art enthusiasts. Without these paintings the building’s interior would have remained austere and Spartan. By decorating it, they also claimed it as theirs and set the whole tone for the adventure. This action also best exemplifies the mutual benefit that was necessary between hosts and artists. There is no indication that the Ganne’s paid for it. By freely decorating the hotel they showed general goodwill, undoubtedly improving the look of it and adding to the quality of life for the whole community, as all had access to this art exhibition. It raised the tone of the establishment from a shabby, cheap boarding-house to one that was mentioned with pride and attracted of cosmopolitan magazines, as early as 1853.\(^{345}\) It was not the only artists’ inn to be decorated by artists, especially around the Forest of Fontainebleau, but it was qualitatively and quantitatively the best. The nature of these decorations was not just the gift

\(^{345}\) L’Illustration, 24.12.1853. The article, entitled “Les Auberges illustrées” by Albert de la Fizelière, was chiefly about Ganne’s Inn, but mentions other artists’ villages, such as Chailly, Marlotte and Bougival, with similar establishments and already describes a surprising amount of information on the development of these groups. The article also offers a chronology of the origins of landscape painting in France, mentioning Valenciennes, Demarne and Bidault, and even includes the name of the young English pioneer Bonington, but omits his nationality.
of a few pictures out of gratitude, but an elaboration that spread throughout the building, on panels (16:3), on doors, on the walls and as amusing *trompe-l’œil* on furniture (15:3). The 1853 article is also interesting as it mentions the names of over thirty artists in total who collaborated on these decorations, including several cartouches where up to three or four artists worked collectively on a single composition. Curiously, Millet is notable by his absence, for his name is neither in any list of such group activity nor gifts attributed, although he was a friend to Ganne.

The most common participant in Ganne’s decorations was the gregarious Diaz. Of all the resident artists, he seems to have enjoyed the companionship that this inn offered and continued to participate in the revelry when the other leaders had retreated to their families and studios. Although the myth of the Barbizon artists is one of radicalism these decorations show a complex collective spirit, one that produced some surprising results, particularly as many references are made to Classical and Baroque styles. The reasons for this exuberant show of artistry warrants more research in itself, beyond the scope of this study, yet a variety of wishes may be seen to have been satisfied by the offer and acceptance of these unique works. Goodwill was being laid down. In other artists’ hotels where mostly pictures were given, for example Spaander’s Hotel in Volendam and Brøndum’s Hotel in Skagen, one can easily see from the dedications that the artist-lodgers were grateful for all kindnesses and good service, from the proprietors, their families and staff. The gift of a painting is a token of gratitude. Few other artists’ hotel art collections have survived from this early period, and none with this variety.

Caille suggests that they have to do with listlessness on rainy days. This may account more for much of the graffiti on the upper floors, but the extent of some compositions indicates they took a considerable amount of time, effort and paint. Yet, Ganne’s guest book, from the beginning, does show that these artists also visited in the winter months, when inclement weather predominated.

Whatever the individual motivation for these offerings to the Gannes, collectively they show a group investment in this as their territory, a deposit of cultural capital and a significant marker of their territory. The most elaborate decorations were on the ground floor and brightened up, what would otherwise be, a drab series of rooms. The ornamentation covered almost everything that had a smooth surface, including walls, cupboards, partitions, doors and wardrobes. Youthful humours are much in evidence, with many slightly erotic, sporting and light-hearted scenes, while upstairs there are many caricatures. Merriment was necessary in such confined conditions, where strangers shared rooms, and it helped smooth any social awkwardness and tensions amongst the lodgers.

Still visible, upstairs in Ganne’s Hotel, are many pin-holes and marks that indicate some work continued while attached to the bare plaster walls. The display of works-in-progress may also be linked to a common activity, often reordered, at the end of each day, whereby they faced peer-group comment and criticism. Works were usually propped up against the walls of the vestibule and dining room, the main communal areas. “When we got back to the inn, we submitted the studies done during the day to our friends’ sometimes harsh criticism, we would compare our work with with that of others, useful lessons for beginners and of interest to all .... This spirit helped us make progress, we would hang the new studies on the wall promising

346 Ganne’s son-in-law, Joseph-Bernard Luniot married the daughter Victoire Ganne, inherited the original inn but moved the business to a new castellated building nearer the entrance to the woods in 1870. The Luniot-Ganne Hotel was also known as the ‘Villa des artistes’. Few paintings survived this transfer but many of the decorated panels and furniture have.
347 Caille, 1985, p. 49.
ourselves to do better next day.”348 This activity also turned the hotel into a kind of seminar centre, a club-house or common-room for members, that all helped the process of social bonding. The majority of these young men had attended some kind of formal training, most frequently, of course, in Paris. Their studio practises continued here, which included early starts to the day, morning and afternoon sessions, evening-classes and group rituals to do with drinking and smoking pipes.349 Their middle-class background and education are apparent in many ways, not least in the grafitti and wall decorations, surprisingly nostalgic given the fact that these revolutionaries were acting against classicism. For example, there are Greco-Roman friezes around the fire-place, Roccoco cartouches, formal fox-hunting scenes and many frivolous shepherdesses that seem to be modelled on Meissen porcelain figures (16:3).

The Barbizon artists maintained good communications with Paris and its academy despite constant criticisms. They continued to offer works to the Salon jury. Many art students were directly encouraged to travel to the Forest of Fontainebleau from the many new private academies.350 Word spread amongst the new urban social centres, namely the boulevard cafés and bistros. The importance of the Montmarte’s Café Guerbois to the development of French Impressionism is widely recognized. Pre-dating it, one sees similar gatherings amongst the Realists at the Brasserie Adler, whose habitués also included Barbizonniers Barye, Baudelaire, Cabat, Champfleury, Corot, Daumier and Decamps. Similarly, in the café at the Hôtel Pimodan, other Romantic-Realists collected around Delacroix, Dupré, Daumier, Gautier, Millet and Rousseau. Barbizon artists’ social behaviour can be regarded as possessing elements of both the academy studio system and the cosmopolitan new café society transported to the countryside.

Sporting activity was also a useful tool for social bonding, but outdoor games seems not to be as manifest amongst French artists as it was with other artists’ colonies, such as at Giverney, Skagen and Newlyn. Some of these Barbizonniers played boule, occasionally, before dinner on the sandy placiaut. A few artists were interested in hunting, such as Olivier de Penne who ran with the hounds and, sadly, Alexandre Decamps, who died from falling off his horse while out hunting in 1860.351 Lacking any significant expanse of water in or near Barbizon there were few water pictures, which was certainly popular in many other artists’ communities, such as at Grez, yet there are many sentimental references to lake landscapes, waterfalls and boating in Ganne’s wall decorations.

At Auberge Ganne, there is one other ground-floor room of interest, the ‘Officer’s Room.’ It is also decorated, but slightly more formally. It was initiated after events that occurred in 1839, when a military camp was set up in Barbizon. However, later conflicts, in 1848 and

348 Gassies, 1907, p. 33.
349 New lodgers were asked to smoke a huge ‘peace-pipe’ and according to the colour of the smoke were judged to be classicists or colourists.
350 Caille, 1985, p. 50, recognises that fellow students in the early 1850s came from “the Picot, Drolling and Coignet studios”. The Academy Suisse and Academy Gleyre can be added to this list.
particularly 1870, had more direct effects on the community, firstly by bringing many refugees into the district. After defeat by the Prussians in October 1870, panic set in all around the capital and a general call-to-arms caused the usually ambivalent artists to make quick choices. The staunch Bonapartist Olivier de Penne (1831-97) joined the Zouaves and Gaston Lafenestre became a lieutenant (17:3). On arriving back from the coast with his family George Gassies found “that orders had been sent to form a national guard. Drilling was done on the common outside Chailly and we were sent to erect barricades across the main roads in the forest, while now and then mines would be heard going off in the distance signifying that the bridges on the Seine were being blown up.”

Millet, on the other hand, left with his family for the coast, near Cherbourg. Frédéric Bazille (1841-1870), who worked with Monet, Sisley and Renoir around the Forest of Fontainebleau, was one of those killed in action. Monet and Sisley left for London. The art dealer Durand-Ruel also left for London, for the duration, carrying the largest ever collection of Barbizon pictures. The early 1870s was also the death-knell of Barbizon as a pioneering group. Its masters were either dead or dying, and even brighter, fresher prospects were looked for and achieved in more distant colonies, mostly on the coast.

**Artists’ Groups before Barbizon**

There were ‘art schools’ and masters’ studios in the countryside prior to the Barbizon gathering, but few, if any, non-religious groups. There was even a School of Fontainebleau in the 16th century, but this was under entirely different circumstances, as they were court painters. The art academies, traditionally, did not encourage independent actions by their members and pressure was brought to bear on professional painters to conform or risk career failure. This was made possible because of the monopolistic power the art academies had on official sales, commissions and teaching methods. Any societies or special technical groups, such as engravers and printers, formed as extensions of the Academy-Salon system. There were urban clubs, friendship groups amongst painters and art student groups that shared a common interest. The Copenhagen School, for example, consisted mostly of pupils of professor C.W. Eckersberg. He influenced a close group of academy students to paint *en plein-air* and search out the edges of the country, to achieve fresh results.

Some artists were united by shared notions of rebellion, yet, at that time, most models for professional fellowship came as a result of the art academy system itself. An elite emerged, in most countries, whose talent was recognised by the reward of medals and travel scholarships, the most prestigious being the *Prix de Rome*. This instrument of the academies sponsored a three or four year period studying in Italy, usually Rome, so that they might benefit from the direct contact with classical art and antiquity, in serene surroundings and under a clear light. Consequently, Rome, throughout the nineteenth century, had a disproportionately large concentration of artists. This large international artists’ community tended to subdivide along linguistic lines, so that the

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Germans collected together, as did the Scandinavians and the British, etc. They all seem to have enjoyed their Roman experience, as may easily be seen in many paintings and sketches. For most, it was a unique social opportunity to work outside the norms of academic constraint.

One good example of a group painting, done in Rome, is worth examining a little closer, not only for its content, but as it was constantly on show, as a model of respectability, back in Copenhagen’s art academy. Constantin Hansen’s *A Group of Danish Artists in Rome*, 1837, (18:3) testifies to the common fraternal bonding shared by those in voluntary exile. Many of the ‘Golden Age’ painters of Denmark, c.1830-50, won travel scholarships and went to Italy or found family sponsorship in order to join their colleagues. The Danes usually met up in or around the huge studios of the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (c.1770-1844). He was one of the very few Scandinavian artists of the era who was at the top of the profession and naturally he acted as a focal point for them, at least until 1838, when he finally returned to Copenhagen. One of the seven artists pictured in Hansen’s group was Martinus Rørbye, who pioneered Skagen as a place of artistic interest. Another member of this group is the architect Gottlieb Bindesbøll, whose son, Thorvald, designed the famous artists’ dining room in the Hotel Brøndum at Skagen. This Rome painting is itself still rather mannered and formal, not so much because of the period’s predominant Neo-classical style, but as it was an official piece, commissioned specifically by the patriarchal Fine Art Society of Copenhagen. It was on show, almost immediately, at the next year’s Salon in Charlottenborg Palace. The primary purpose of this group portrait was not aesthetic, but, it has been suggested, intended as an illustration of how serious Danish artists were to be when abroad, that they were not frivolously wasting their sponsorships and that they were conducting themselves appropriately in such exotic surroundings.353

Most artists appear rather formally in such group pictures, yet here (18:3) the elderly Bindesbøll does sport a fez, a souvenir from his recent trip to Constantinople, perhaps. Contemporary photographs usually reveal a degree of ‘going native’, in that dress codes were relaxed, a custom also found later in most village artists’ colonies, especially the wearing of locally-made straw hats, wooden clogs and sailors’ shirts. Hansen’s painting is not the typical Freundschaftbild, which was common amongst fellow students, yet it does celebrate the travel adventure. More life-like examples of the many artists’ groups in Rome may be found, such as with Julius Exner’s *Scene in an Osteria, Rome*, 1858-59,354 and, reflecting the substantial German artists’ contingent, F.L. Catel’s *Crown-prince Ludwig celebrating in the Spanish Winecellar, Rome*, 1832, (19:3).

Part of this German-speaking community in Rome consisted of a more idealistic set of young romantics who formed a famous brotherhood; a group that was both reactionary and radical. They were passionate, pious and highly influential, although more religiously oriented than most other groups. They called themselves the Brotherhood of St. Luke, Lukasbrüder, but were commonly referred to as

353 Monrad, 1994, p. 121.
354 An earlier example that Exner would have seen was Marstrand’s Romerske Borgere, forsamlede til Lystighed i et Osteri, 1838. Prior to this Ditlev Blunck had also painted Danish Artists at the Osteria La Gensola, Rome, in 1837.
the Nazarenes because of their habit of dressing in flowing biblical gowns and sporting beards. They believed that art should primarily serve a religious or moral purpose, and they desired to return to the spirit of the Middle Ages. The nucleus of this group was established in 1809 by six Viennese art academy students and came to typify faith-based groups by adopting a strict set of rules, an uniformity of clothing, codes of ethics, acute secrecy and spirituality, communal living, a high degree of medievalism and to distance themselves physically from contemporary life. None of these factors applied to the relaxed, liberal gatherings at village artists’ colonies. Brotherhoods preferred to cloister themselves away, typically, in the case of the Nazarenes, by setting themselves up in the ruins of a monastery, in their case San Isadoro, just outside Rome. Such brotherhoods were strictly organised, often became fanatical, spending much time devising rules and rituals, as also happened with other contemporary groups, the French Barbus and the English Ancients. The Nazarenes concentrated on religious fresco work, but certain small landscape paintings were also in circulation and prove technically astute. Thorvaldsen owned some fine Nazarene works amongst his own impressive art collection, at the Villa Casa Butti, including landscapes by the Nazarene leaders Friedrich Overbeck and Peter Cornelius, which greatly impressed the young C.W. Eckersberg.

The brotherhood of the Nazarenes may also be regarded as part of the general increase in Christian Revivalism, which promoted a profound nostalgia for certain aspects of medieval life and monastic dedication, reinforced by strong patriarchal structures and celibacy. They favoured an enclosed community, or Gemeinschaft, separated from society, or Gesellschaft, not surprising in a select, even secretive, rather insular clique of students. Again, these characteristics are not apparent in Barbizon or later artists’ colonies, which tend to evoke feelings of an extended family rather than a closed society. However, many of these fraternal traits are easily identified with another, later and more famous group, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, (the ‘PRB’) which also formed out of a reaction against the values of industrial society and the soullessness of early Victorian art. As England was the first country fully to industrialise, it presented an easy target for their brand of sentimentality and histrionic fundamentalism. Their appeal combined strong morally uplifting narratives with a fine fidelity to nature. They certainly painted in the countryside, yet were urban-based. The religious fervour was also a feature of the only other English rural group of note, the Ancients, Romantics lead by the eccentric visionary Samuel Palmer (1805-81). This group venerated the religious, mystical and pastoral inspirations of the poet-illustrator William Blake. Palmer led this group of artists into the countryside and settled them into the village of Shoreham, Kent in 1828. They were charged with a sense of pantheistic fecundity and produced paintings and etchings of great charm, but this kind of artistic group, the most widely found rural model, gradually came to depend too heavily on the resources of just one personality. Soon enough the relationships alter, under the inevitable social and creative tensions, and especially, as in this case, when the money finally ran out. When Palmer became bankrupt the group disbanded.

In England, the nucleus of the Pre-Raphaelites formed from student friendships at the Royal Academy, in 1848, but, except for specific contracts and intensive field-studies, they were a London-based group of idealists. They were a disparate group, like the Barbizon group, much maligned until the sheer technical proficiency of their work elevated two of its leaders, Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais. Both men were commercially astute, with the latter becoming so

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355 The Nazarenes’ only major group commission was for Bartholdy, the German Consul in Rome, at his Palazzo Zuecari.
357 Morowitz & Vaughan, 2000, p. 2.
popular he was honoured with a baronetcy, finally accepting the presidency of the very academy that he had spent his youth criticizing, thereby becoming one of the great Victorian success stories. The Pre-Raphaelites’ legacy is broad and often contradictory, but its desire for truth to nature and a renewed sincerity expressed through detailed observation parallels much of what Barbizon and other rural groups came to represent. The School of Barbizon and the PRB worked entirely independently from each other and used different philosophical approaches, yet at the same time typify some of the period’s convergent artistic aims. However, despite the lead given to the British by several of its early eccentric visionaries, including Blake, Turner and Constable, the second half of the century saw no new British modernists. The Academy-Salon system prevailed, despite criticism, producing rather insular, technically-refined but un-progressive painters. By contrast, the followers of the Barbizon masters continually experimented with fresh ideas, blending in practical innovations to provide a sustainable platform for much modern art.

The history of artistic fraternities is long, but during the nineteenth century it was stimulated by the sheer volume of art student graduates, emerging from an increasing number of studios and academies. It is somewhat surprising there were not more major, breakaway movements before Barbizon. The dominance of the Academy-Salon System was apparent across Europe and its inherent conservatism affected all aspects of training, style, content, awards, exhibitions and state commissions. Artists continued to send works in to the annual Salons as it remained the best, sometimes the only, method of gaining the right reputation and the most important contracts. However, as an independent art market grew, these institutions all too frequently became detached from the fast-evolving political, social and cultural developments of the new buying public. This loosening of the state academy’s monopoly did not become apparent until well into the 1860s, in Paris, then decades later elsewhere. The tradition was for graduate art students to stay in contact with their old city academies. In a situation such as that found in Denmark there was only one academy in the whole country, and thus one main outlet for art. In Germany, by contrast, there were over a dozen art academies, each with its salon. Munich’s artists, for example, had a suitably fine art academy and well developed outlets for contemporary art work, as befitted its regional status. However, Catholic Bavaria was to be culturally challenged by the rise of Protestant Prussia, causing confusion and polarisation of opinion just at a time when the country was developing significantly. There was much introspection after the Napoleonic wars, but it did not stop German painters travelling over the Alps to witness for themselves the glorious and timeless landscapes of the Eastern Mediterranean lands.

It was easier for Munich’s many artists to access sublime topographies, more than Berliners, anyway. The attractiveness of Lake Chiemsee, in the Alpine foothills, for example, was a natural collecting place for painters. Its artistic ‘discoverer’ is said to be Max Haushofer (1811-66), a landscape painter who graduated from Prague’s art academy. He first visited Chiemsee as a youth in 1828. By 1836, some twenty-six landscape painters are recorded working on the lake’s island, Frauenchiemsee, but an artists’ colony, of sorts, only developed afterwards, in the 1880s. A gathering of painters at beauty spots is only to be expected, but it does not necessarily generate feeling of mutuality implicit in the formation of any group consciousness found in artists’ colonies, although it provides them with the right vocabulary. Statistically more painters took the shorter trip from Munich to the heath land village of Dachau, just fifteen kilometres north of the city. The first wave of artistic interest here was as early as the 1820s, with Wilhelm von Kobell, an early genre painter, and Johann Georg von Dillis, a landscapist. A second wave of interest sprang up in the 1870s as part of the resurgence in

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358 Aigner, 1983.
regionalism promoted by the success of Wilhelm Leibl, around whom a circle of followers formed. They tried to imitate his dry, hard paintings of simple country folk in Bavaria, known as his ‘Holbein period’, as in his best-known work *Three Women in a Church*, 1878-82.

There were few artists groups that did not have direct links to an art academy or salon. Of the non-religious art groups that did form the Norwich School, close to the North Sea coast, is particularly outstanding. This group responded to the same Romantic ideas, passions for nature and *plein-air* landscape painting, as the School of Barbizon, but they stayed in the provinces. It flourished from 1803-33 in a rather isolated provincial city, then still easily navigable from the coast and, most significantly, it had historic connections to Holland. The Norwich School formed out of the simple and common desire to record the beauty of its home region. They were a family of like-minded artists who sustained a high standard of painting over generations. At the centre were the Cromes, the Cotmans and the Stannards. It was a group that combined only a few professionally-trained painters with many local enthusiasts and a family-studio system of training. John Crome (1768-1821) was the founder of the society and its seminal member and teacher. “Crome’s evocation of the East Anglian landscape has the impact of simple truth first said. A complete lack of gimmickry lends an all-too-rare purity to his style which eluded imitation even by his most talented pupils.”

This group’s importance derives from its ability to maintain a quality of work over decades, through good organisation, instruction and a group exhibition programme. They roamed all around their countryside and coast but failed to settle in any village. They influenced many individual topographical painters and encouraged other provincial towns to invest in art schools, but only in England. This model of an early provincial artists’ colony contradicts recent theorists who are only too eager to connect such movements only with acts of anti-industrialisation and the development of railways and tourism, for Norfolk felt none of these effects at the time of their blossoming, nor were its members motivated by threats to their environment. This group simply banded together because of a “marked interest in the visual arts”, helped by the presence of a few drawing-masters.

**Positioning Barbizon**

What seems to have been overlooked in the literature concerning the School of Barbizon is that its art succeeded without, primarily, being composed for the Paris Salon. These works were far from the typical *grandes machines* of the Salons. The vast majority of Barbizon pictures were designed to appeal directly to a new discerning public and against an urban drabness, although they were never as bright as impressionist paintings became. It is no coincidence that the revolutionary years around mid-century also saw a move towards increased Realism. Courbet is not recorded as visiting Barbizon, yet this group represents a step away from classical conventions and towards certain democratic sympathies. The leaders of this group caught the spirit of change by rejecting many, but not all, academic traditions, such as polish and composition. Their work stripped away the biblical, historical, royal and classical references that underlaid traditional styles. In his landscapes, Rousseau gradually suppressed all references to the actions of mankind, such as farms and cultivated fields. Millet, on the other hand, elevated, through his figure paintings, the common man and became a figurehead for the new genre.

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359 The Norwich Society of Artists was founded in 1803, consolidating much previous activity. They met fortnightly and from 1805 they began to organise exhibitions. It was the first ever artists’ association in provincial England.
These painters enjoyed working *en plein-air*, but still finished their canvases back in their studios. *The Angelus*, in fact, took two years to complete, 1857-59, and the preliminary sketches are known to originate from Gruchy, Millet’s childhood home on the coast. Barbizon, in almost all its essential details, was a practical test-bed for a variety of informal experiments, social as much as methodological. They studied direct from nature, so that questions of light and colour authenticity had to be faced. Technological innovations greatly assisted this development, not least in their equipment and materials. New transport and communications improvements made living and working for long periods in a village more practicable. Once they got there, however, they needed the right lodgings. A cheap and cheerful village inn, with tolerant owners, was fundamental to social cohesion. Although, the School of Barbizon is usually regarded as leading directly to French Impressionism, the dynamics of the situation were complex and, like any pioneering effort, fraught with risks and dangers. The ‘Masters’ did not go there to form a group consciously, but individually sought the direct experience, the closer engagement with the countryside and the many benefits of working away from Paris. Rousseau, typically, looked to nature to provide all the inspiration he needed, so that it was his precise rendering of form and colour that was revolutionary, not his political opinions.

Barbizon was an experiment in rural freedom, yet these painters still relied on considerable urban support. These painters sold their work in Paris, not Fontainebleau or in the village. Their achievements acted as a model for other modern artists, both in it production and distribution. They successfully combined a number of new processes, such as transport, publishing, manufacturers and dealers to help create a viable sustainable alternative to the academy system. The innovations the School of Barbizon put into practise covered most aspects of the profession, from paints and techniques, to more commercial areas of the applied arts, graphics and design. The chronology of its rise shows that, although there are individual precedents for most elements of its composition, such as forming artists’ groups, a passion for nature and painting outdoors. After mid-century there was a gradual convergence and strengthening of all these factors. The artists’ acute sense of time and place was often accelerated by outside events, not least by military and civil unrest. Seeking solace in a group began to look increasingly attractive, especially for the younger individual painters and so the rise of more artists’ colonies was thus assured elsewhere.

For any new independent artistic movement to succeed, sooner or later it had to confront the difficult processes of selling its work. Before Barbizon, the Academy-Salon System held a virtual monopoly on sales, although there were a few famous studios and auction houses. The rise of the School of Barbizon coincided with the rise of a new independent sector, the Dealer-Critic System. Without this new art markets the initiative would have largely failed. The rise to fame and fortune of the Barbizon artists had much to do with the actions and investment of one young art dealer in particular, Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922). The relationship was not an easy one, it took decades and there were many fluctuations of fortune, for he went bankrupt more than once. Yet, his success encouraged imitation. His actions stimulated all participants to act with vigour, the painters, the patrons and the media, by uniting to promote contemporary modern art.

Paul Durand-Ruel finally took over the family business, a stationery and artists’ supplies shop, from his father in 1865. As his business grew he moved to successive premises nearer

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362 Founded in 1825, the stationery shop first moved in 1833 to the rue de Petit Champs, then from 1839 in the rue de la Paix, expanded business by producing its own boxed sets of artists’ materials and equipment. They then began to sell prints and small paintings. The name of Durand-Ruel does not appear in Constantin’s recent anthology of Barbizon suppliers, 2001, although their shop stopped selling paints as late as 1866.
the fashionable districts of central Paris. By 1869 his gallery was on the rue Lafitte. According to
some authors he was already selling works by Millet in 1846,363 but his first big profits came
from selling Corot landscapes. One his earliest biographers, Arsène Alexandre, points out that he
“served” Corot, Daubigny, Decamps, Dupré, Millet and Rousseau, so it must be assumed it was
in his primary capacity as an art dealer.364 In Paris, there were still precious few large
independent art galleries at that time. Schroth and Brame appear to be the only other dealers,
besides Durand-Ruel, who sold Barbizon works in around 1850. Durand-Ruel worked part-time
at the Hôtel Drouot, which was, in effect, the state auction-house, where he developed a useful
additional network of contacts. It would take at least another decade or two before the major
boom in his business, by which time the Barbizon pioneers were dead, but his further success
with the Impressionists fuelled the growth in competing dealers. Only by the 1870s were there
sufficient numbers of independent art galleries in Paris to act for the painters who later settled in
more distant, mostly coastal, artists’ colonies.

The innovations Durand-Ruel brought to his galleries were many, yet they merely extend
the accepted business practices of the day, seen in shops, department stores and by manufacturers
in new cosmopolitan cities. His gallery was not cramped and stuffed with canvases, but designed
to give space to the works on show and a relaxed atmosphere for appreciation and discussion,
something of which he learned from the Grosvenor Gallery and Whistler’s remarkable shows
there. He provided his middle-class customers with catalogues and all the necessary data to help
place the artist in the context of his oeuvre and social setting. He moved up from selling prints to
paintings, gradually, improving his knowledge of the new market and responding to its fashions.
He even rented out paintings.365 He was both “tenacious”366 and generous, for although he did
not go so far as extending credit, he did buy ‘wholesale’367 when he could, direct from the artists.
He pioneered exclusivity deals with artists and accepted works in exchange for materials. It was
not all plain sailing. His London enterprise, in 1870, escaping from the Paris Commune, was a
disaster. He did form The Society of French Artists in 1874 and produced a huge, luxurious,
three-volume catalogue which included over 300 illustrations, which was an anthology of his
favourite painters, including: twenty-eight Corots, twenty-seven Millets, twenty Rousseaus and
ten works from Diaz de la Peña. Nothing on this scale had been achieved before, outside of
official academy or salon circles. Afterwards, no major exhibition was without such a catalogue,
although it was decades before illustrations became practical additions to the process.

Just as, for instance, the Pre-Raphaelites had captured the hearts and minds of the
English, at the same time, the School of Barbizon served as a popular and convenient rallying
point, a symbol for youth, nature, simplicity and regeneration. The Barbizon masters bring to
mind the Hague School painters, who detailed the countryside, employed modesty in their
subject-matter, painted outdoors and were highly sensitive to light. Jozef Israëls and Willem

363 Herbergt, 1976. 1846 was the year Millet met Troyon and Diaz, and his first child was born, Marie. He also
began selling works at Durand-Ruel’s shop and Des Forges’ gallery.
364 Alexandre, 1911, p. 8.
365 Lethève, 1968, pp. 142-43; and, Tabarant, 1942, p. 13. Other galleries that rented out paintings include Berville’s
and the Esnault-Petterie.
366 Rewald, 1946, p. 301.
367 Durand-Ruel became famous for buying pictures in very large quantities. Such was the case with Rousseau in
1866, whom he paid the enormous sum of 100,000 francs for the entire contents of his studio. Durand-Ruel soon
resold seventy of these works for a total of 130,000 francs. Sadly this amount of attention and money came too late
for Rousseau who died in 1867.
Roelofs both visited Barbizon yet each drew different conclusions.\textsuperscript{368} The Barbizon pioneers were, in fact, still uncoordinated as a body of artists, who, while having much in common, were conveniently grouped together by the media, and, of course, shrewd art dealers, who began to see commercial advantages to placing artists together under one convenient meaningful banner.

Nevertheless, the School of Barbizon left a fascinating legacy that directly influenced not only artistic methodology, composition and ideology, but now showed how social creativity could be achieved in a village, as much as in the city. They had a strong foundation group with Rousseau, Millet and Corot, but their leadership was not necessarily charismatic. Together they acted as a model for all independent, informal, cultural gatherings, which could be made without compromising their core values and were also sustainable over decades. The relocation actually acted to give them a sense of freedom and thus regenerated their beliefs. They did this by adapting to changing circumstances and not by isolating themselves from society, as with brotherhoods. They demonstrably kept up-to-date with the latest technologies and commercial practices. Thus they became a byword for progress and an invaluable point of reference for all future artists’ colonies, as no other single movement had done before.

Chapter 4 - The Financial Imperative – Money Matters, Art Markets, Transport Improvements and other Technological Innovations

‘Fortune favours the brave.’\textsuperscript{369} Such a maxim is only useful when applied under conditions of free trade, for only then does it allow the full pursuit of self-interest. In the first half of the nineteenth century, there was little such freedom in the art profession, for the majority of artists were forced into monopolistic systems of control headed by the state art academies. During the second half of the century the crisis loomed even larger, seen by the chaos experienced in the huge annual salons, the main mechanism for sales of contemporary paintings in most countries. They had become spectacles of entertainment rather than efficient selling systems. The artists hit hardest by this structure were the young and the modernists; those that had not yet made their reputations and were, therefore, the least likely to be considered for the top contracts in the public or private sectors. The numbers of disaffected artists grew in all countries. What they required were alternative mechanisms and new marketing strategies.

Different countries developed different systems to cope with the crisis, the character of which related largely to their contrasting art histories. Yet the evolution of modern processes in selling art remained slow, despite the fact that representational images were being produced, and replicated, in larger numbers than at any time before. Born out of the deep frustrations with the state systems came the need for independent alternatives. Art societies were formed, but it was

\textsuperscript{368} See Sillevis, 1985/6.