

Gustave Courbet The Stonebreakers

Painted in 1849

Inspired by the "complete expression of human misery" in an encounter with an old road worker in tattered clothes and his young assistant

Courbet painted these ordinary people in an attempt to portray the French people as a political entity. In this way Courbet's republicanism showed through in his work.

Courbet, much like Caravaggio in the seventeenth century, violated rules of artistic propriety by setting every detail of his lowborn workers' wretched state before the viewer.

Courbet painted the road workers life size on a large canvas



An Early Sludge Hammer



An Early use of a Hoe

Courbet painted without any apparent sentiment; instead, he let the image of the two men, one too young for hard labor and the other too old, express the feelings of hardship and exhaustion that he was trying to portray. Courbet shows sympathy for the workers and disgust for the upper class by painting these men with a dignity all their own.