

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM  
FINE ARTS

**JEAN BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT**

Paris 1796 - Ville d'Avray 1875  
French School

**THE MARNE AT CHÂTEAU-THIERRY**

Oil on canvas  
H. 0,22 m; W. 0,37 m  
Signed lower left: *COROT*

DATE: 1855-1860

PROVENANCE:

Collection L. Lhermitte (en 1905)  
Collection privée, France

LITTERATURE:

A. Robaut, *L'œuvre de Corot, catalogue raisonné et illustré*, Paris, 1905, t. II, p. 312,  
no. 1015 (ill.).

EXHIBITED:

Galerie Schmidt, *Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot dans les collections privées : peintures-dessins*,  
cat. exp. 24 avril-9 juillet 1996, no. 33 (ill.).

With hindsight, we tend to think of Corot as the precursor of Impressionism.<sup>1</sup> However, he is incontestably a classical artist with a realist side and even sometimes allowing some romantic tendencies to be glimpsed. In his work, he united the notion of classical beauty with truth and feeling.

Like Chardin before him, Corot emphasized the importance of sentiment in artistic creation. He thus advised his students: "Beauty in art is the truth bathed in the impression we have received in the appearance of nature. I am touched when looking at an ordinary place. While seeking conscious imitation, I never lose the emotion that captivated me. The real is a part of art; the feeling completes it. With nature, look first for the form; after that, the relations or variations of shades, colour and execution; and all of this is to be submitted to the feeling you sensed."<sup>2</sup>

After the death of his first master, Achille-Etna Michallon (1796-1822), Corot spent three years in the studio of Jean-Victor Bertin (1767-1842). This painter passed on the conception of classical landscape he had received from Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (1750-1819). In this

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<sup>1</sup> Already, Zola considered Corot to be the first painter to break away from classical landscape as inherited from Poussin and the pioneer of plein air painting and of the "true feeling [...] of nature" (Emile Zola, *Mon Salon. Les paysagistes*, 1868).

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Robaut, Etienne Moreau-Nélaton, *L'œuvre de Corot : catalogue raisonné et illustré*, Paris, 1905, t. I, p. 72.

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way, Corot learned to work *in situ* to compose, and then in the studio to create landscapes to serve as the setting for a historical, biblical or mythological story.

Plein air painting was practiced by painters of historical landscape from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Studies painted by Corot during his first period in Italy, between 1825 and 1828, are striking in their verve and modernity. These small studies, it should be recalled, were not intended to be shown to the public. After 1835, Corot's fame was established, not by these sketches but by the fully developed compositions he exhibited at the Salon.

Corot visited Château-Thierry in the Aisne departement for the first time for his nephew, Léon Chamouillet's wedding in June 1856. Subsequently, he stayed regularly with his nephew, in particular during April 1863. Corot created several paintings there, especially five general views of the town, dated by Alfred Robaut to the years 1855-1865.<sup>3</sup> The silvery palette is entirely typical of Corot's paintings created after 1850. Robaut catalogued our painting and dated it to 1855-1860<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Robaut, *L'œuvre de Corot : catalogue raisonné et illustré*, Paris, 1905, t. III, no. 1016 to 1020.

<sup>4</sup> A. Robaut, *L'œuvre de Corot, catalogue raisonné et illustré*, Paris, 1905, t. II, p. 312, no. 1015 (ill.).