

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM
FINE ARTS

GUSTAVE COURBET

Ornans 1819 - La Tour de Peilz 1877
French School

SLEEPING RED-HAIRED WOMAN

Oil on canvas
H. 0,57 m; W. 0,70 m
Signed lower left: *G. Courbet*
Several labels on the stretcher

DATE: 1864

PROVENANCE:

Frédéric Reitlinger (1836-1907), Paris, in 1882 and 1896
Henri Matisse, Paris, in 1929
Henri Bernstein (1876-1953), Paris, in 1936
Private collection, Paris
Alfred Daber, Parisian gallerist and collector, 1949 and 1957
Peter Nathan, Zurich
Private collection

EXHIBITIONS:

Paris, École des Beaux-Arts, *Exposition des œuvres de Gustave Courbet*, May 1882, p. 38, no. 15 « Étude de Femme pour le tableau du Réveil » (« appartient à M. Fréd. Reitlinger »).
Paris, musée du Petit Palais, *Gustave Courbet*, May-June 1929, no. 40, plate 11, « collection de M. Henri Matisse ».
London, New Burlington Galleries, *Masters of French 19th Century Painting*, 1 to 31 October 1936, no. 31, à M. Henri Bernstein.
Paris, Galerie Alfred Daber, *Courbet. Exposition du 130^e anniversaire de sa naissance*, 1949, no. 12 (ill.).
Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, *Gustave Courbet*, November - December 1949, no. 13.
London, Marlborough Fine Arts, *Gustave Courbet 1819-1877*, 1953, no. 19.
Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, *Le nu à travers des âges*, 1954, no. 9.
Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts, *Courbet*, 1954, no. 28, ill. fig. 5.
Paris, musée du Petit Palais, *G. Courbet*, 1955, no. 52, plate 48.
Paris, Galerie Alfred Daber, *Plaisir de la peinture*, 21 May – 15 June 1957, no. 15.
Kunstmuseum Bern, *Gustave Courbet*, 22 September – 18 November 1962, no. 38.
Paris, Galerie Claude Aubry, *Courbet dans les collections privées françaises*, 5 May – 25 June 1966, no. 14 (ill.).
Ornans, musée Gustave Courbet, 1996, *Courbet, l'Amour...*, no. 36, p. 85 (ill.).
Ornans, musée Gustave Courbet, 2003, *Des nus & des nues... ou les aventures de la Percheronne*, p. 38-39 (ill.).
Kunsthalle Tübingen, *Die Kunst des Handelns. Meisterwerke des 14. - 20. Jahrhunderts bei Fritz und Peter Nathan*, 24 September 2005 – 8 January 2006, no. 121, p. 172 (ill.).

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

FINE ARTS

Ornans, musée Gustave Courbet, 2021, *Courbet-Picasso : Révolutions !*, 1 July – 18 October 2021, p. 118-119, no. 21 (ill.).

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Alexandre Estignard, *Courbet : sa vie, ses œuvres*, Besançon, 1896, p. 163 (« appartient à M. Reitlinger »).

Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, p. 216-217.

Julius Meier-Graefe, *Courbet*, Munich, 1921, plate 70.

Giorgio de Chirico, *Gustave Courbet*, Rome, 1925, « Repos de la baigneuse » (ill.).

Charles Léger, *Courbet*, Paris 1929, p. 102 : « Nous pouvons citer aussi une étude de femme dormant, où la vie est concentrée dans le repos. »

Marcel Zahar, *Gustave Courbet*, Paris, 1950, « Femme endormie aux cheveux roux », pl. 5.

Robert Fernier, *La vie et l'œuvre de Gustave Courbet. Catalogue raisonné*, t. 1, Geneva, 1977, p. 210, no. 373 (ill.).

Valérie Bajou, *Courbet. La vie à tout prix*, Paris, 2019, p. 496.

RELATED WORKS:

Our painting is a preparatory study for the sleeping woman in a composition of two figures, painted three times:

Study of Women or Venus and Psyche, 1864, oil on canvas, H. 1,45 m; W. 1,94 m, refused for the 1864 Salon, collection Georges Petit in 1906, current location unknown, Fernier 1977 no. 370.

The Awakening, 1864, oil on canvas, H. 1,45 m; W. 1,95 m, Berlin, Gerstenberg collection, destroyed in 1945, Fernier 1977 no. 371.

The Awakening. Venus and Psyche, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,77 m; W. 1 m, Berne, Kunstmuseum, inv. 1519 (a variant with tighter composition), Fernier 1977 no. 533.

The Sleeping Nymph, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,61 m, Oskar Reinhart collection, Winterthur, Fernier 1977 no. 534.

Sleeping Girl, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,50 m; W. 0,66 m, Mesdag Collection, The Hague, Fernier 1977 no. 536.



Gustave Courbet, *Study of Women or Venus Pursuing Psyche with Her Jealousy* 1864, oil on canvas, H. 1,45 m; W. 1,94 m, refused for the 1864 Salon, Georges Petit Collection in 1906, current location unknown.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

FINE ARTS

A major figure of Realism, Courbet sought to paint reality without beautifying it, as an artistic reaction against Romanticism and Academism. He practiced all genres of painting (portrait, landscape, still life...) by treating subjects of everyday life with the dignity that had been given only to history subjects. At first, the public was offended by the prosaic way he depicted the ordinary, and his paintings were often rejected by exhibition juries.

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was born in Ornans, in the Doubs *department* of eastern France, to a bourgeois peasant family. After studying at the Besançon drawing school, he went to study painting in one of the independent studios in Paris, the Académie Suisse, where he worked from the live model. He also made copies after the old masters at the Louvre, with a preference for Hals and Rembrandt. His first works were essentially self-portraits. In Ornans, where he returned in 1849, he was inspired by the rural life of his native Franche-Comté. *A Burial at Ornans*,¹ refused for the 1850 Salon, is a sort of Realist manifesto where the triviality of the figures, shown on a monumental scale like the protagonists of ancient or biblical history, caused a scandal. Courbet would become involved in politics later, in particular during the Paris Commune following which he was unfairly accused of being complicit with the rebels who demolished the Vendôme Column. He was sentenced to six months in prison and a large fine. After the seizure of his property, he went into exile in Switzerland, where he spent the final years of his life.

Nudes in Courbet's Work

Courbet started painting the female figure during the 1840s.² Often shown asleep, they are almost always distant with respect to the viewer and never look at us.³ The artist caused another scandal at the 1853 Salon with *The Bathers*, showing a voluptuous woman whose flesh is full of hollows and mounds. He chose for his models the same thick and heavy bodies that Rubens had used two centuries earlier, but painted them with a rawness that the public found shocking, especially when compared to the artificial beauty of academic nudes exhibited at the Salon, such as the perfect examples of Paul Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave*⁴ and the *Birth of Venus*,⁵ by Alexandre Cabanel. Courbet coloured the skin, re-established the correct proportions of the faces, feet, hands, and fasteners and never hesitates to show the abundance of flesh and body hair.

Courbet's place and the public's perception of him changed radically from the 1860s. The provocative leader of Realism then became the most important living French painter.⁶ The eroticism of the female nude evolved with a series of paintings which for the most part were not exhibited in public during his lifetime.⁷ Some of his compositions are characterized by smooth handling and an appearance close to the idealized academic nude, such as *Sleep* or

¹ *The Burial at Ornans*, 1849-1850, oil on canvas, H. 3,15 m; W. 6,68 m, Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

² Gustave Courbet, *The Bacchante*, 1844-1847, oil on canvas, H. 0,65 m; W. 0,81 m, Remagan, Arp Museum Bahnhof, on loan from the Rau Foundation, inv. GR 1549.

³ *The Woman with White Stockings*, 1861, Philadelphia, Barnes Foundation is one of the rare exceptions.

⁴ Paul Baudry, *The Pearl and the Wave*, 1862, oil on canvas, H. 0,84 m; W. 1,78 m, Madrid, Prado Museum.

⁵ Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1863, oil on canvas, H. 1,30 m; W. 2,25 m, Paris, Musée d'Orsay, inv. RF 273.

⁶ Laurence des Cars, "Le vrai en héritage, la référence à Courbet de Manet à Cézanne", exh. cat. *Gustave Courbet*, Paris, Grand Palais, 2007 p. 59.

⁷ *The Sleepers* (1866, oil on canvas, H. 1,35 m; W. 2 m, Paris, Petit Palais) and *L'Origine du Monde* (1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,55 m, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) commissioned by Khalil-Bey, were not intended to be exhibited to the public.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

FINE ARTS

Woman with a Parrot that was hugely successful at the 1866 Salon for which it had been painted. Most of the nudes of this period nevertheless were the result of private commissions.⁸

Venus and Psyche

At the very start of 1864, Courbet set out to create a painting with life-sized nude figures for the next Salon. Our work is a study from a model who had come from Paris for one of the two women in this composition.⁹ The Birmingham Museum owns a study for the other figure.¹⁰ As a letter to Étienne François Haro confirms,¹¹ the final composition was presented to the jury of the 1864 Salon with a title that was open to many interpretations, *Study of Women*,¹² although the artist had thought of *Venus Pursuing Psyche with her Jealousy*,¹³ with a more mythological emphasis. The Jury, alleging its indecent character, refused the painting which, exhibited in Brussels the same year, was bought in 1866 for the remarkable amount of 18,000 francs by a Parisian collector.¹⁴ Following a request from a foreign collector,¹⁵ Courbet painted a replica of the same dimensions, *The Awakening*, destroyed during the Second World War. The addition of a white parrot, perched on the brown-haired woman's hand, distances this painting further from a mythological narrative. Another variant partially repeating the composition, concentrated on the two women's torsos, is at the Berne Kunstmuseum.¹⁶ Two other paintings from 1866 also derive from our composition, showing a woman's torso, the breasts facing the same direction. Another one shows a young woman sleeping in a landscape,¹⁷ the other the same woman in a four poster bed,¹⁸ identical to the one in the initial composition that had been refused for the Salon.

⁸ Valérie Bajou, *Courbet. La vie à tout prix*, Paris, 2019, p. 500.

⁹ *Exposition des oeuvres de Gustave Courbet*, École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, May 1882, p. 38, no. 15 “Étude de Femme pour le tableau du *Réveil*”, “appartient à M. Fréd. Reitlinger [belongs to M. Fréd. Reitlinger]”; “Le peintre avait fait pour cette œuvre, d’après un modèle venu de Paris, une étude qui a été exposée près du tableau, en 1882.[The painter had made for this work, after a model who had come from Paris, a study that was exhibited close to the painting.]” Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, p. 216-217; see also Valérie Bajou, *Courbet. La vie à tout prix*, Paris, 2019, p. 496.

¹⁰ Gustave Courbet, *Study for Venus and Psyche*, 1864, oil on canvas, H. 0,82 m; W. 0,65 m, Birmingham, Birmingham Museums.

¹¹ Étienne François Haro (1827-1897) was a painter, art dealer and collector of modern and old master paintings.

¹² *Study of Women* or *Venus and Psyche*, 1864, oil on canvas, H. 1,45 m; W. 1,94 m, current location unknown.

¹³ Letter from Gustave Courbet to Étienne François Haro, Ornans, 3 March 1864, Petra ten-Doesschate chu (éd.), *Correspondance de Courbet*, Paris, 1996, p. 213 : “Ce tableau représente deux femmes nues grandes comme nature. Le sujet est peu de chose, si on voulait mettre un titre ambitieux à ce tableau, ça pourrait être *Vénus poursuivant Psyché de sa jalousie*. Ce que je vous dis là n’est que pour vous donner une idée de la composition du tableau car, jusqu’ici j’ai résolu de l’intituler *Étude de femmes* dans le livret de l’exposition. [This painting shows two life-sized nude women. The subject is minor, if you wanted to give this painting an ambitious title it could be *Venus Pursuing Psyche with her Jealousy*. What I am telling you here is only to give you an idea of the painting’s composition because, until now, I had resolved to call it *Study of Women* in the exhibition leaflet]”

¹⁴ The buyer in 1866 was M. Lepel-Cointet, a stockbroker in Paris. In 1906, the painting was in Georges Petit’s collection. Its current location is unknown. Robert Fernier, *La vie et l’oeuvre de Gustave Courbet. Catalogue raisonné*, vol. 1, Geneva, 1977, p. 210, no. 370 (ill.).

¹⁵ « On sait qu’il en exécuta aussi une réplique pour un amateur étranger. [it is also known that he made a replica for a foreign collector]» Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, p. 217. Khalil-Bey also asked for a replica, but Courbet answered “no, I will paint ‘after’” and painted *The Sleepers*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 1,35 m; W. 2 m, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.

¹⁶ *The Awakening. Venus and Psyche*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,77 m; W. 1 m, Berne, Kunstmuseum, inv. 1519 (a variant with a closer composition), Fernier 1977 no. 533.

¹⁷ *The Sleeping Nymph*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,46 m; W. 0,61 m, Oskar Reinhart Collection, Winterthur, Fernier 1977 no. 534.

¹⁸ *Sleeping Girl*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,50 m; W. 0,66 m, Mesdag Collection, The Hague, Fernier 1977 no. 536.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

FINE ARTS

Rejection at the Salon, Commercial Success

To justify the refusal of the *Study of Women* at the 1864 Salon, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu¹⁹ has emphasized the analogy, developed during the Second Empire, between nudity and prostitution which increased greatly at the time. A hierarchy of prostitutes was established with, at the top level, courtesans (also called “lionnes” or “cocottes”) to be distinguished, at the bottom, from public girls working in brothels.

It is this allusion by Courbet to the most sordid expression of prostitution that clashed with his contemporaries' morality. Unlike the nudes exhibited at the Salon by Baudry and Cabanel, here we see sheets, curtains and women with dishevelled hair, slippers on their feet. The two naked women in the same bed also evokes lesbianism that was common at the time in brothels.

The author Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), who was close to Courbet around 1863-1864, commented on the painting in his treatise *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale*,²⁰ presenting it as a protest by the artist against the moral cowardice of his contemporaries.

A preference for red hair

The celebration of the female body started for Courbet with hair which occupies an important place in his hymn to beauty,²¹ with a preference from the 1840s for long tangled curls of red hair. Depictions of the Irish woman, Joanna Hiffenan, whom he probably met in Paris during the winter of 1861-1862, when she was posing for his friend James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and was the American's mistress, is probably the high point. Our painting could be the first one for which she posed for Courbet who would also paint her in *Jo, la belle Irlandaise*²² and in *The Sleepers*.²³ Here the opulence of the wild hair, the cheeks and purplish lips, the breasts spread wide and upright, give the work a definite eroticism, while the tight construction of the composition gives a strong feeling of intimacy. The obvious weight of the body which seems to abandon itself to the artist's confident touch illuminates our painting with a captivating realism.

¹⁹ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, “Gustave Courbet's Venus and Psyche? Uneasy Nudity in Second-Empire France”, *Art Journal*, vol. 51, no. 1, Spring 1992, p. 38-44.

²⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale*, Paris, 1865.

²¹ Valérie Bajou, *Courbet. La vie à tout prix*, Paris, 2019, p. 501.

²² *Jo, la belle Irlandaise*, 1865-1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,56 m; W. 0,66 m, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 29.100.63. The three other versions of this painting are at the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (F537), the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (F539), and in a private collection.

²³ *The Sleepers*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 1,35 m; W. 2 m, Paris, Musée du Petit Palais.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM
FINE ARTS



Gustave Courbet, *The Awakening* 1864, oil on canvas, H. 1,45 m; W. 1,95 m, Berlin, Gerstenberg collection, destroyed in 1945.



Gustave Courbet, *The Awakening. Venus and Psyche*, 1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,77 m; W. 1 m, Bern, Kunstmuseum.



Gustave Courbet, *Jo, la belle Irlandaise*, 1865-1866, oil on canvas, H. 0,56 m; W. 0,66 m, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 29.100.63.