

Press Contacts

Michelle Perlin
212.590.0311, mperlin@themorgan.org

Patrick Milliman
212.590.0310, pmilliman@themorgan.org

**THE MORGAN PRESENTS FIRST MAJOR U.S. EXHIBITION
OF DRAWINGS BY THÉODORE ROUSSEAU,
MASTER OF THE BARBIZON SCHOOL**

The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon
September 26, 2014 through January 18, 2015

****Press Preview: Thursday, September 25, 10-11:30 AM****
RSVP: media@themorgan.org 212.590.0393

New York, NY, September 2, 2014—Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867) was the leading figure of a group of nineteenth-century French artists who chose the wooded landscape of the Forest of Fontainebleau as their subject and would forever be known to art history as the Barbizon School. Decades before Impressionism, Rousseau and his peers developed new ways to observe, draw,



Théodore Rousseau. *Study for The Forest in Winter at Sunset*, ca. 1846. Oil over charcoal with white heightening on paper, mounted to canvas. Private collection.



Théodore Rousseau. *Rocky Landscape, Forest of Fontainebleau*, ca. 1835-40(?). Oil on paper, mounted on board. Private collection.



Théodore Rousseau. *Sunset in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, ca. 1848-50. Oil and graphite on paper, mounted on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Gift of Helen Parter and James T. Dyke, 2003.

and paint the natural world in studies made directly from nature and composed landscape pictures intended for exhibition. Deeply Romantic in approach, the work of Rousseau ultimately added an important chapter to the history of landscape art, and elements of the Barbizon School style were then reconfigured and transformed by the next generations of great French artists: the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. Beginning September 26, the Morgan Library & Museum will present a groundbreaking exhibition devoted to Rousseau's drawings and oil sketches—the first ever at a major U.S. museum—that sheds new light on his techniques and unique perspectives on landscape imagery. *The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon* will run through January 18, 2015.

Rousseau has not been the subject of a major retrospective since a 1967 exhibition at the Musée du Louvre. Many museums display examples of his finished paintings, yet the artist's drawings and early oil studies are far less familiar. Comprising more than sixty works from public and private collections, including the Morgan and collections in the north eastern United States, this exhibition will trace the artist's path to Barbizon, from his early oil sketches in the Ile-de-France and Normandy to his mature drawings in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Rousseau's works on paper—some bucolic and evocative of a simpler, pre-industrial age; others brooding, moody, and redolent of the haunting majesty of the natural world—are both appealing and instructive. Collectively, they highlight his important contribution to the shifting conception of landscape in the wake of the Industrial Revolution.

"Théodore Rousseau occupies an important and influential place in the development of French landscape art," said Peggy Fogelman, acting director of the Morgan Library & Museum. "His was a vision of nature pure and largely unsullied by man, and his works incorporate deeply Romantic themes and moods. Throughout his career, Rousseau experimented dramatically with changing

light and atmospheric conditions—effects that would become vitally important in the work of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists who followed him."

Théodore Rousseau

Théodore Rousseau was born in 1812 in Paris, and he studied under Jean-Charles-Joseph Rémond (1795–1875), a history painter, and Guillaume Lethière (1760–1832), a neoclassical painter. In his seminal biography of the artist, the critic Alfred Sensier presented Rousseau as a figure closely bound to nature, a frequent traveler around the remote areas of France, and a man who had exceptional insight into the natural world. A prolific draftsman, he produced around twelve hundred drawings over the course of his career in a range of media, including graphite, Conté crayon, watercolor, and pastel. Rousseau's sketches and drawings reveal an artist obsessed with studying every aspect of nature, from close-up details to broader atmospheric effects.

Variety and Experimentation

During the course of Rousseau's career his pictorial strategy changed dramatically. Due to repeated rejections by the Paris Salon jury from 1836 to 1841 and voluntary abstention from the annual exhibition until 1849, he maintained his status and income by producing large compositions for wealthy patrons, some of whom had very specific ideas about the formalities and proper execution of landscape painting. Despite such constrictions, Rousseau employed a wide range of techniques to produce work that depicted diverse geography, times of day, and varying atmospheric conditions.

From around the mid-1830s, perhaps corresponding with his first rejections from the Salon, Rousseau began to devise more evolutionary procedures for preparing a landscape painting, in which the final work developed from an initial sketch, or *ébauche*, that contained at least the major elements of the complete composition. A study for the artist's massive, unfinished *The Forest in Winter at Sunset* is an example of Rousseau combining different kinds of drawing and painting media in a preparatory work, and belongs to a large set of studies and sketches for the final painting, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The earliest preparatory drawings were executed on small sheets, probably from a sketchbook and possibly outdoors, and establish the main elements of composition. They include his dramatic use of trees, both vertical and bending, and the figure of the tiny wood gatherer.

Early Career

The Untamed Landscape traces Rousseau's career, beginning with his earliest works, open-air studies of sites in the environs of Paris. He painted most of these while he was a teenager, studying informally with Rémond and Lethière. After a failed attempt to compete for the Academy's Prix de Rome in landscape, Rousseau embarked on a six-month voyage to Auvergne, a sparsely populated region of volcanic mountains in central France. With its soaring, bold profiles, hollowed-out valleys, and deep, desolate perspectives, this geologically remarkable region had a profound effect on the young landscape painter. He returned to Paris with numerous oil studies that vividly captured the rugged character of the terrain with startling points of view, vigorous brushwork, and a bold approach to color and light that impressed the Romantic art world in Paris. After the 1831 Salon, Rousseau embarked on a trip to Normandy and returned the following year. His trips to Normandy followed in the footsteps of English masters of watercolor, such as J. M. W. Turner and Richard Parkes Bonington, whose spontaneous renditions of the dramatic atmosphere of the Normandy coast, and of picturesque port towns and fishing villages, inspired many French painters of the time.



Théodore Rousseau. *Street in a Norman Town with Fragments of Gothic Buildings*, 1831-1832. Black chalk on laid paper. Private collection.



Théodore Rousseau. *Waterfall in Thiers*, 1830. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas. Private collection.

The Forest of Fontainebleau

Rousseau was most closely associated with the Forest of Fontainebleau and the village of Barbizon, where he began to work in the 1830s and later settled around 1847. The forest's woods, ancient trees, rocky plateaus and gorges provided a stunning variety of subjects for the

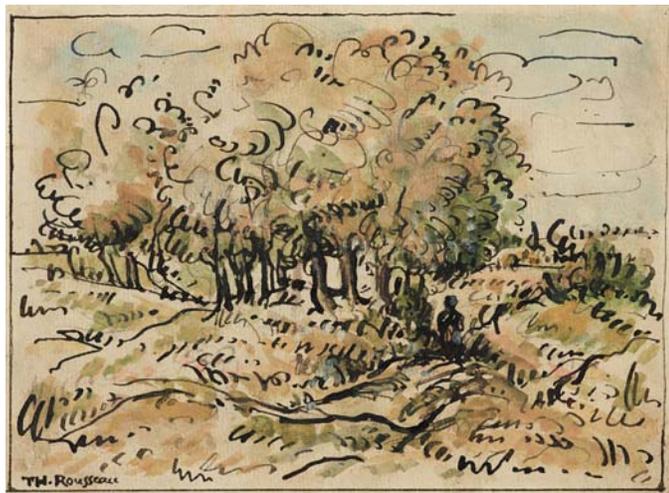
artist and his contemporaries, including Camille Corot, Jules Dupré, and Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Peña. They shared an overarching commitment to create a 'school of nature' opposed to the conventional school of the Academy. The term 'Barbizon school' was coined later in the century, though their formal aims and procedures varied.

In keeping with nineteenth-century ideas about nature as a special site of subjective feeling, Rousseau's representations of trees and woods are rich in metaphors for imaginative projection and poetic association. "I also heard the voices of the trees," Rousseau told his biographer. "The surprises of their movements, their variety of forms, and their singular attraction toward the light suddenly revealed to me the language of the forest. This entire world of flora lived as mutes whose signs I divined and whose passions I discovered."

The Forest of Fontainebleau was tied to notions about nature as a wild, unchanging realm—at the same time that industrialization wrought many changes in it as in so many other parts of the French countryside. Rousseau's Fontainebleau is remote country, untouched by the contemporary realities of modern industry and tourism. Stone quarrying, tree harvesting, planting of new species, and the creation of trails and signage for increasing numbers of visitors profoundly changed the physical fabric and rural economy of Fontainebleau and bordering areas. Rousseau was involved in efforts to create artistic preserves that would protect some of the oldest and most beautiful sites from these initiatives. The forest in most of Rousseau's paintings and drawings is an ancient, static place, transformed only by the seasons and the shifting light of dawn to dusk. His inhabitants—wood gatherers, cowherds, and fishermen—are engaged in traditional activities that leave nature undisturbed.

Rousseau and Impressionism

The enormous popularity of Impressionism has much to do with the relative neglect of Rousseau's work and that of the Barbizon School in general. Impressionism's fresh color, apparent directness of perception and execution, and detached attitude toward its subjects proved more compelling to twentieth-century viewers and critics than did Romantic notions of natural



Théodore Rousseau. *Solitary Figure in the Country* (*Promeneur dans la Campagne*), ca. 1860-1865. Pen and black ink, with watercolor, on paper. Private collection.

landscape. Yet, Rousseau's work stands at a pivotal moment.

Despite his pantheistic regard of nature, it is notable that this sentiment held the imagination of no less a nineteenth-century icon than Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). As he wrote in 1889: "This morning I saw the country from my window a long time before sunrise, with nothing but the morning star, which looked very big. [...] Rousseau ha[s] depicted just that, expressing all that it has of intimacy, all that vast peace and majesty, but adding as well a feeling so individual, so heartbreaking." Nevertheless, van Gogh, as if aware that this landscape of immensity and feeling went against the grain of fin-de-siècle detachment, added, "I have no aversion to that sort of emotion." Rousseau's preoccupation with capturing multiple iterations of nature and his fascination with changing light is an undeniable precursor to Impressionism.

Further, if Rousseau's studies of Auvergne and Normandy represent the apex of the golden age of the open-air oil study, then his late works on paper mark the beginning of the independent, finished drawing, sometimes with added color, as an item of special interest in nineteenth-century French art. The idea of drawing as a complete and final statement on paper attained added importance over the course of the century.

Public Programs

- Lecture **Théodore Rousseau's Landscape and the Sense of Place**
Rousseau was a leading figure in the development of naturalist landscape in nineteenth-century France. Amy Kurlander, independent art historian and guest curator of the exhibition *The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon*, will explore the different ways in which Rousseau understood and represented specific places such as Normandy, Auvergne, and the Forest of Fontainebleau, in the course of his career. This program is co-organized by the Morgan Drawing Institute and supported by the Franklin Jasper Walls Lecture Fund. Free with museum admission. Advanced reservation suggested.
Wednesday, September 17, Noon
- Gallery Talk **The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon**
Giada Damen, Moore Curatorial Fellow, Drawings and Prints
Gallery talks are free with museum admission.
No tickets or reservations are necessary.
Friday, November 14, 6:30 PM

Organization and Sponsorship

The Untamed Landscape: Théodore Rousseau and the Path to Barbizon is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum. The exhibition is guest-curated by Amy Kurlander, an independent art historian, and coordinated by Jennifer Tonkovich, the Eugene and Clare Thaw Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Morgan. This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of Karen B. Cohen, with additional support from the Estate of Alex Gordon and Mr. and Mrs. Clement C. Moore II. The catalogue is underwritten by the Franklin Jasper Walls Lecture Fund.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Admission

\$18 for adults; \$12 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop, Café, or Dining Room.