In the nineteenth century, caricatures of works of art became familiar to the art-loving public and were especially ubiquitous around the time of Salon exhibitions. Charles Léger’s pioneering Courbet selon les caricatures et les images, published in 1920, was the first study of such images. He proposed the topic as an important area of investigation because these caricatures, ridiculing both subject and style, show us how works of art appeared to contemporaries, and often are more revelatory than written art criticism. These cartoons usually appeared first in the periodical press but were frequently later reprinted in small livrets resembling the official Salon catalogue. But, whether they were published in periodicals such as Le Journal pour rire or Le Charivari, or issued as livrets, they satirized the entire world of art, including artists, works of art, the Salon jury, and the art-viewing public. Caricatures of works of art were always the most popular; Cham’s send-up of Manet’s Olympia (fig. 1), shown in the 1865 Salon, is a well-known example of the genre, but the nineteenth-century public took an avid interest in the lives of artists as well as in the works of art they created. Henry Murger’s Scènes de la vie de Bohème, which he began publishing in 1845, popularized this new media attraction and inspired what might well be the most influential depiction of artists’ lives, Giacomo Puccini’s opera La Bohème (1896). There has been a growing interest in this subject, the avid focus on the artist as a public figure in art and literature, which a recent colloquium termed “The ‘Mediatization’ of the Artist.”
In contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to depictions of art-making and studio practice. And yet shifts in the practice of making art in the nineteenth-century were all observed and commented upon by contemporaneous artists in caricature. Since the public was, for the most part, familiar only with the final product, the work of art seen in exhibitions, these cartoons served to reveal aspects of studio practice that previously had been unknown to them.

Nineteenth-century depictions of art production differed enormously from those that had been published in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* a century earlier, where the processes of art were represented in a respectful and idealized mode. The engraving *Dessein, Figures Grouppées* (fig. 2) for example, shows two idealized models posing in the studio. The pose of the lower figure has an outflung arm that, although an effective rhetorical gesture, would be impossible for any human being, even a professional model, to hold for very long. The public, in viewing images such as this, might well think that the artist had reproduced precisely what was seen. And yet, the reality was that studio models used a vast array of props and supports, which academic artists regularly transformed into the staffs, boulders, and trees of their compositions.
The existence of the supports that models needed to maintain difficult poses could not be disguised in photographs as easily as in the engravings of the *Encyclopédie*, however. Gaudenzio Marconi (1841–1885), an Italian photographer resident in Paris in the late nineteenth century, specialized in photographs of models in traditional academic poses, which for decades served as instructional tools for art students. In *Nu masculin assis* from the 1870s, Marconi’s model needs two supports, one for each hand. While photographers could not disguise the existence of these studio props, academic artists could easily eradicate this reality. In Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Le travail du marbre, ou l’artiste sculptant Tanagra* (fig. 3) the sculptor’s model appears to be posing without any support whatsoever for her outstretched arms, a pose impossible for a model to hold for the length of time necessary to complete the sculpture.
For caricaturists, this vast distance between the ideal and the real was a prime subject for ridicule, and they attacked it with enthusiasm. Gustave Doré (1832–1883), in his 1850 series Les mœurs des peintres (fig. 4) seems to have taken especial delight in emphasizing the studio reality in all its artificiality and absurdity. He shows us the same rhetorical poses as in academic painting, but here Doré reveals the tools and technology – even the model’s exhaustion – that were necessary to produce these paintings. Doré draws attention to the vast distance between the lofty aspirations of art and the often-pedestrian methods of achieving those aims.
Honoré Daumier (1808–1879) had much the same attitude as Doré towards academic subjects. In his series *Histoire ancienne*, fifty lithographs published in *Le Charivari* between 1841 and 1843, he redrew scenes from classical literature, emphasizing the absurdity of their subjects by placing them in modern situations. His *Pygmalion* for example, demands comparison to Gérôme’s later *Tanagra*, since both take as their subject the sculptor and his model, but Daumier accompanies his image with a mock elegiac verse: “O triomphe des arts! quelle fût ta surprise, / Grand sculpteur, quand tu vis ton marbre s’animer / Et, d’un air chaste et doux, lentement se baisser / Pour te demander une prise.”

To underscore the contrast between high art and real life, Daumier shows the model reaching down for a pinch of the sculptor’s snuff. Daumier drew numerous caricatures of artists at work, including *Scènes d’atelier*, a series of four lithographs published in *Le Charivari* where he depicts art production in terms similar to Doré. Most striking is the cartoon where he shows an artist trying to arrange his model for a religious painting depicting the second-century martyr Saint Gervais (fig. 5). The figure’s pose, reclining with a raised arm, would clearly be possible only with the assistance of the rope support shown dangling from the ceiling – but even then it would be uncomfortable to maintain for very long. The model protests: “Comment, St Gervais a pris cette position là... ça ne m’étonne plus s’il a passé pour un fameux martyr!” Daumier clearly wants the viewer to understand the difficulties of the actual process of making art – as well as the vast distance between the image that we see in the finished painting and the mechanics of its studio production. He emphasizes this by depicting the pedestrian reality of the artist’s studio with its primitively constructed model’s stand and block support for the model’s head. The studio décor itself undercuts the tragedy of the martyr’s death with paintings and sculptural casts displayed on the wall. The model for Saint Gervais looks less like a martyr than an impoverished Parisian trying to earn a bit of cash by posing for the artist. Daumier has neglected nothing that might increase the irony of the scene, even clothing his artist in fashionable plaid trousers that add a frivolous note that contradicts the solemnity of the martyrdom he is about to depict.
Henry Monnier (1799–1877) does something similar in _Intérieur d’un atelier_ from his series _Récurrences_ of 1826 where he depicts an artist’s studio during a pause when the models are resting (fig. 6). The female model is shown taking advantage of her free time by doing some sewing. Her fashionable hat and stockings hang from the back of her chair, while the male model, half clothed, his hairy legs attentively delineated by Monnier, smokes his pipe. The counterpoint between real and ideal is underscored by the canvas the artist is painting, where we see these models transformed into gods and goddesses in the theatrical poses typical of such works. The contrast of the poses of the painted figures with the relaxed and natural poses of the models resting in the studio is further emphasized by the rhetorical flourishes of the casts of antique sculpture displayed on the shelf behind the artist’s easel. These casts were a standard part of studio equipment, and served as models for academic artists; to further accentuate this absurdity, Monnier has positioned the cast of a leg framed by a graceful figure on each side.
On one level, these cartoons present humorous “behind the scenes” views of studio practice, but there is another, more serious level that demands consideration. Since paintings of historical, mythological, and religious subjects were familiar to all Salon visitors, caricaturists could use these subjects as vehicles to attack the academic art establishment and the aesthetic hierarchy it upheld. The public no doubt imagined models and settings as idealized as those depicted in the finished works displayed in the Salon, and yet implicit in these caricatures is the contrast between the truthfulness of the models’ appearance and pose – which the caricaturist takes pains to show us – and the deceit through which they were transformed into an insincere idealism. The end result of the academic artist’s labors is here demonstrated to be a work of art that has nothing to do with real life. How better to attack the falsity and irrelevance of academic standards than by demonstrating the mechanics of how these works were actually produced! Cartoons like these mounted a relentless attack on the grand classical tradition as being inherently dishonest in its essence. And here it is worth noting that the caricaturists themselves came from the generation that produced the first challenge to the academic dominance of official exhibitions. Daumier, Doré, and Monnier, all born between 1799 and 1808, were part of the French generation that supported oppositional movements in art against the standards of the Academy – so it was by no means innocent humor that represented these academic standards as ridiculous, objects of raucous laughter.

The transformation of the real into the ideal had long been an essential part of the art-making process. Claude Monet (1840–1926) told of being criticized by his teacher Charles Gleyre (1806–1874) for drawing a model exactly as he was: Gleyre said to him: “C’est trop dans le caractère du modèle. Vous avez un bonhomme trapu: vous le peignez trapu. Il a
The sculpture casts on the shelf behind Monnier’s academic artist show the ideal forms that Gleyre counseled Monet to substitute for visual experience—and that Gérôme, who had attended the École des beaux-arts, faithfully depicted in his Tanagra. Cartoons like Monnier’s can be seen as the younger artist’s revenge, turning the tables on conventional art practice and having the last laugh.

In painting, the polar opposite of the practice of idealizing the model was represented by artists of the Realist camp, of whom Courbet was the most notorious. Courbet was clearly the butt of Thomas Couture’s 1865 La Peinture réaliste where the realist painter sits on a cast of the head of an idealized god while taking as his model a pig’s head. Here the academic camp reverses Monnier’s joke: we no longer laugh at the absurdity of the transformation of reality into the idealized figures of history painting, but now the butt of the joke is the precise representation of those quotidian models in all their vulgar realism. For while it was accepted that the Academic artist should transform and idealize his models, the Realist artist was accused of purposely choosing models where idealism was neither necessary nor even desirable. Courbet was the epitome of the Realist artist, so it is no surprise that his painting L’Aumône d’un mendiant à Ornans caused a sensation at the Salon of 1868. The contrast of his alms-giving beggar to idealized Salon figures was immediately apparent to the public. This feature was emphasized in a cartoon by Bertall (Charles-Albert d’Arnoux [1820–1882]) that appeared in Le Journal amusant, where Courbet’s beggar is juxtaposed with a classical Académie (fig. 7); Realism and Idealism are here each taken to an extreme.
The theme of the Realist artist’s work as “true” constituted a complement to that of Academic art as “false” and became an equally fertile topic for caricaturists.

In Daumier’s series Les artistes à la campagne (1865), we can see that the problem of the poor fellow posing as Saint Gervais has been reversed. Here the model posing for a Realist artist who is drawing a genre scene complains that his position is too easy: “–Voyons, c’est y fini?... c’est tout d’même fatiguant de se reposer aussi longtemps qu’ça....”¹⁹ This model really is a farm laborer; he is not being forced into an artificial pose pretending to be someone he is not, and so he needs none of the supports so necessary for the Académies. Because of this, his pose – and the resulting work of art – is authentic. The message to the viewer is that this artist draws and paints exactly what he sees, namely, real life. Daumier offered a similar message in Les Paysagistes where the artist tells an awkward farm woman who has interrupted her work to come and gawk at him, her sickle still in her hand, “N’bougez pas... vous êtes superbe comme ça.”²⁰ On a superficial level, the joke in these cartoons is that the Realist artist actually prefers models who are lacking in elegance and grace; this is funny only because it contrasts with the conventional belief of Daumier’s audience that artists had an obligation to choose more elevated and idealized subjects. On a more serious level, however, Daumier is proposing that Realist artists’ works are more authentic, less mannered and artificial because of their decision to paint “real life.”

This point of view was further accentuated by caricatures of landscape artists at work. In terms of landscape, art practice in the nineteenth century differed greatly from preceding traditions, largely because the invention of paint in tubes allowed artists to work directly from the motif. Earlier artists painted only sketches out-of-doors, while...
creating works for exhibition in the studio. The ease of travel, with railroads linking every part of the country, encouraged landscape painting to be sure, but we should also note the role that cartoonists played in publicizing and familiarizing the general public with the practice of plein-air painting. The Romantic generation, which produced the Barbizon School, France’s first plein-air movement of landscape painters, also produced the cartoonists who “explained” – albeit in a humorous way – their work to the public. Their caricatures, although witty, served to legitimize this new art form by emphasizing both the hard work of being a landscape artist and the authenticity of the paintings they produced.

The periodical L’Artiste, founded in 1831, supported both Romanticism and landscape painting, and often included prints of landscape scenes as a bonus to subscribers. So it is not surprising that it published what might well be the earliest caricature of landscape artists at work, a drawing by Eugène Giraud (1806–1881), Les Paysagistes. Although witty, it is far too mild to be called caricature. Giraud emphasizes these artists’ physical stamina and seriousness of purpose as, burdened down with equipment, they brave sun and wind, traipsing through the countryside looking for a motif. Fifteen years later, Daumier drew a similar image for Le Charivari, À la recherche d’une forêt en Champagne (fig. 8) again emphasizing the difficulty of landscape painters’ enterprise, showing them bent over with heavy backpacks traversing a difficult terrain.

Fig. 8: Honoré Daumier, À la recherche d’une forêt en Champagne (DR1725), lith. and ed. Aubert, published in Le Charivari, August 19, 1848, hand-colored lithograph, 21.8 x 25.8 cm, London, British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Why are these images even considered humorous? No doubt because the very concept of artists trudging through the countryside looking for something to paint was shockingly new to an audience that had been accustomed to the idea of artists’
inventing and idealizing their motifs, not walking around looking for motifs to present themselves, ready-made for transcription onto canvas.

In 1849, Daumier published another cartoon, *Les Artistes*, showing landscape artists looking for a motif, again emphasizing the laborious aspects of their profession. Here we see them in the middle of nowhere, carrying their painting gear, hungry and unable to find either a motif or some place to eat. One artist asks the other, who stands on a rock surveying the barren countryside, “– Aperçois-tu un lieu civilisé où on puisse espérer une omelette de douze œufs ?...” The lookout responds “– J’n’aperçois seulement pas un chat...,” which brings forth the rebuke “– Cherche donc plutôt une poule....” This is amusing, to be sure, but it also serves to underscore the landscape artist’s identity as a hard-working explorer who ventures into the unknown, braving discomforts, and even hunger, in order to return with pictures that provide authentic visual experiences for urban dwellers who remain in the comfort of their homes. The humor of works such as these comes from the public’s mental comparison of the effete studio artist (whom we saw [see fig. 5] clad in fashionable plaid trousers) with these stalwart adventurers.

In the field of portraiture, the real and the ideal were on a constant collision course that was even more evident than in the realm of landscape painting. We might assume that portraiture would involve an accurate transcription of the physiognomy of the sitter, and, indeed this is the joke in *Un Français peint par lui-même* (fig. 9) a cartoon from Daumier’s series *Scènes d’atelier*: he shows the artist looking in a mirror and producing exactly same image, even including the artist’s scowl. The reason this is funny is because the truth is that, when it comes to our personal appearance, we are all classicists, we all want to be idealized. Daumier exploited this tension in numerous cartoons that focus on the practice of portraiture. In *Croquis d’expressions* (fig. 10) an artist worries that his sitter might attempt to swat away the fly that has landed on his nose. “Que diable, Monsieur, ne bougez donc pas les mains, vous perdez la pose,” he says – as though the artist were like a photographer who must make an exact copy of what he sees. The clearest statement of this real/ideal contradiction comes from another cartoon in the series *Croquis d’expressions* where a very plain woman complains to the artist who has just completed her portrait: *Dieu ! quel nez vous me faites !* (fig. 11). Despite her dissatisfaction with the nose the artist has painted, Daumier shows us clearly that, in fact, he has quite accurately reproduced her features.
Fig. 9: Honoré Daumier, *Un Français peint par lui-même* (DR1722), from the series *Scènes d’atelier*, lith. and ed. Aubert, published in *Le Charivari*, March 29, 1849, lithograph, 21.6 × 23.1 cm, Paris, Musée Carnavalet. © Musée Carnavalet/Roger-Viollet.

Fig. 10: Honoré Daumier, *Que diable, Monsieur, ne bougez donc pas les mains, vous perdez la pose!* (DR502), from the series *Croquis d’expressions*, lith. Aubert, ed. Bauger, published in *La Caricature provisoire*, November 1, 1839, lithograph, 29.5 × 22.8 cm, Paris, Maison de Balzac. © Maison de Balzac/Roger-Viollet.
The net result was that by the late nineteenth century, studio practice was no longer a mysterious process that almost magically created finished works of art. The work and the procedures that artists traditionally employed either to reproduce or to idealize visual experience had become familiar to the general public. And so, although the Realism that dominated the art of the second half of the nineteenth century is usually credited to the influence of photography, we must also acknowledge the concerted effort by generations of caricaturists. They demonstrated ceaselessly that works of art are constructed, not through any exalted inner vision of the artist, but either through the tricks and deceptions of academic artists, or through the hard work and careful observation of their colleagues, artists whose project was to bring art into conjunction with modern life.

NOTES

2. These Salons in caricature were, more recently, the subject of an exhibition and catalogue by Thierry Chabanne (ed.), *Les Salons caricaturaux*, Paris, RMN (« Les Dossiers du Musée d’Orsay »).

3. Henry Murger published *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* in the revue *Le Corsaire-Satan* from March 1845 to April 1849, then as one volume under the title *Scènes de la Bohème*, Paris, Michel Lévy frères, 1851; the definitive title was used from 1852 on. Giacomo Puccini composed the music for *La Bohème*, which premiered in Turin on February 1, 1896; the libretto was written by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa based on Murger’s tales. On bohemia, see Jerrold E. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830–1930*, New York, Viking, 1986.


5. Illustrations for the *Encyclopédie* were published as separate volumes; the illustrations for *peinture* and *dessin* were included in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, *Recueil de planches sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts mécaniques*, with leur explication, II/2, t. 3, Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand, 1763, s. v.


8. The series *Mœurs des peintres* (Painters’ Customs) is catalogued in the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France as *Suite de sept planches à plusieurs sujets sur les mœurs des peintres*, dated 1850; its publication history is unknown. It is listed as *Les peintres* in Gabriele Forberg (ed.), *Gustave Doré: Das graphische Werk*, vol. 2, Munich, Rognier und Bernhard, 1975, n° 1204.


10. The fifty lithographs comprising Daumier’s series *Histoire ancienne* (Ancient History) (DR 925–974) were published in *Le Charivari* between December 1841 and January 1843. *Pygmalion* (DR 951) appeared in *Le Charivari* on December 28, 1842. [“Oh, triumph of the arts! What a surprise / Great sculptor, when you saw your marble come alive / And with a chaste, sweet voice, slowly bend down / to ask for a pinch (of your snuff).”] On the series, see Jenny Squires Wilker’s 1996 dissertation for the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, published as *Daumier’s “Histoire Ancienne:” French Classical Parody in the 1840s*, Ann Arbor, UMI, 1999.


12. “Well, if St. Gervais really held this painful pose, it doesn’t surprise me that he’s considered a famous martyr.”

13. Monnier’s series *Réccréations* was published by Geraldon-Bovinet in London and Paris beginning in 1826; numbering is irregular but there are over thirty hand-colored lithographs. The *Bibliographie de France* continued to list them, irregularly, until 1840. For a searchable database of prints announced in the *Bibliographie de France* (the record of the Dépôt légal) for the years 1795–1880, see “Image of France, 1795–1880,” *The ARTFL Project*, [online] URL: artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/version-francaise.

14. [François] Thiébault-Sisson, “Claude Monet,” *Le Temps*, November 26, 1900; the date is usually given, incorrectly, as November 27, 1900. An English translation was published as *Claude Monet*. 

---

L’Image raillouse
An Interview. 1900. Translation of an Article by Thiébaut-Sisson (sic), Published in Le Temps, Paris, 27 (sic) November, 1900; no further publication information is given. ["This is too much like the model. You have before you a short, thickset man: you paint him short and thickset. He has enormous feet: you render them as they are. All that is very ugly. Always remember, young man, that when one draws a figure, one should always think of the antique. Nature, my friend, is all very well as an element of study, but it offers no interest. Style, you must understand, there is nothing else but style."]

15. Thomas Couture, La Peinture réaliste [Realist Painting], 1865, oil on panel, 56 × 45 cm, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland, [online] URL: onlinecollection.nationalgallery.ie/objects/8363/la-peinture-realiste.

16. The National Gallery of Ireland identifies the sculpture the artist sits on as Jupiter, though it seems more likely to be Apollo or Adonis; Jupiter is usually depicted as an older man. The work is often titled The Realist or The Realist Painter.


18. Bertall’s cartoon was titled Les Curiosités du Salon de 1868 and was published on the front page of Le Journal amusant, May 30, 1868, as part of his series Promenades au Salon de 1868; it appeared in three installments in Le Journal amusant, May 16, 23, and 30, 1868.


22. Honoré Daumier, À la recherche d’une forêt en Champagne [Looking for a Forest in Champagne] (DR1725) was published in Le Charivari on August 19, 1848 as part of his series of six lithographs Les Artistes.

23. Honoré Daumier, Aperçois-tu un lieu civilisé où on puisse espérer une omelette de douze oeufs?... [- Can you see a civilized place where one could hope to get a twelve-egg omelet?... – I don’t even see a cat... - You should be looking for a chicken...] (DR1727), from the series Les Artistes, lith. & ed. Aubert, published in Le Charivari, May 24, 1849, lithograph, 21.5 × 25.8 cm, San Francisco, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, [online] URL: art.famsf.org/honor%C3%A9-daumier/aper%C3%A7ois-tu-un-lieu-civilise%C3%A9-o%C3%B9-puisse-es%C3%A9-une-omelette-de-douze-oeufs-jneper%C3%A7ois.

24. Les Artistes (DR1727), Le Charivari, May 24, 1849.

25. Croquis d’expressions, a series of 100 lithographs, was published by Aubert in 1838–1839 and included 55 lithographs by Daumier (DR466-521), the rest by Plattel and Platier.
INDEX

Index géographique : France
Mots-clés : classicisme, réalisme, caricature, satire, atelier
Index chronologique : XIXe siècle
Thèmes : classicisme, réalisme, caricature, satire, atelier

AUTEUR

PATRICIA MAINARDI

The City University of New York