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**« Les pommes en pleine air de Gustave Courbet:
Emblematizing the Massacred Communards of the
1871 Semaine Sanglante »**

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History and Criticism

Stony Brook University

May 2009

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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I argue that the piled up, rotting apples in Gustave Courbet's painting, *Nature morte aux pommes* emblematizes the tens of thousands of executed communards during the Paris Commune of 1871. Courbet's repressed and despairing state of mind during his incarceration influenced his decision to paint banal fruit in an incongruous landscape. Courbet's participation as leader in arts reform and his roles in the radical Paris Commune government also contributed to Courbet's choice of plein air setting. The apples are emblematic of the isolation, and repression Courbet and his fellow communards suffered. They are a memorial to the aspirations of those who struggled hard for a better way of life.

Research began after seeing Courbet's painting *Nature morte aux pommes*. I took detailed formal analysis notes of the image and thirty+ digital photographs, which augmented my theory development.

Readings focused on Courbet's aims to reform the arts, coupled with his equally radical activities in the 1871 Paris Commune Government. Examination of his incarceration closely informed my theory. Research at the Bibliothèque National in Paris at the Richelieu and François Mitterrand supplemented and expanded my background knowledge in these areas. Access to Courbet's letters significantly enlightened my hypothesis.

Dedication

On this date of May 18, 2009,

I dedicate this master thesis to my parents.

To my dad Donald L. Scott who; as an artist, introduced me to the arts as a youth and inspired my interest and love in the arts;
and to my mom, Donna M. Scott who supported my dreams and loved me unconditionally.

I know they would be proud.

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List of Abbreviations

- 1) GND: Government of National Defense, (French): Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale
- 2) FDA: Federation of Artists, (French): Fédération des artistes
- 3) *Nature*: abbreviation for Courbet's painting, *Nature morte aux pommes*
- 4) Abbreviations of, 'Pommes paintings,' 'les pommes,' or 'pommes': refers to Courbet's three paintings of apples in this study: Figure 3: *Nature morte aux pommes*, Figure 4: *Pommes*, and Figure 5: *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre*

Acknowledgements

Still life with apples, or Nature morte aux pommes, 1871 – 1872,

Gustave Courbet, oil on canvas, dim: 59 x 73cm, (23-1/4 x 28-3/4 in.), signed and dated bottom left: 71, G. Courbet; and right: Ste-Pélagie, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Van Gogh Museum Enterprises B.V.

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Introduction

Scholars and critics alike suggest that the œuvre of Gustave Courbet (June 10, 1819–December 31, 1877) (Figure 1) 1864, spanning from the early 1840s through the 1870s conveys Courbet's political philosophies and beliefs, intentionally or unintentionally.¹ His lifework includes portraits, figural compositions, landscapes, hunting scenes, and nudes.² Let us suppose that he did express his politics in (some of) these works, overtly or not, such as in his controversial figural work, *Burial at Ornans*, 1849–1850 (Figure 2). Why did Courbet turn to painting fruit, a subject he had not painted before in his career, while incarcerated at the Sainte-Pélagie prison in Paris beginning in the late fall of 1871? It is accurate to conclude that fruits would stand for the least likely objects that could express a political philosophy.

So how might these works of fruit embody Courbet's political views? Is it possible that these works are emblematic of his political ideologies given Courbet was a political individual overtly and covertly, socially and artistically? At the heart of this study are Courbet's paintings of apples, *Nature morte aux pommes*, 1871–1872 (Figure 3), *Pommes*, 1871–1872 (Figure 4), and *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre*, (sometimes called, *Nature morte aux pommes*,) 1871–1872 (Figure 5) painted during his incarceration. Could these works in fact be representative of the isolated and repressive environment in which Courbet found himself during his imprisonment at the Sainte Pélagie prison? Is it

¹ Courbet was active in local politics for most of his life, including the 1848 Revolution and the Paris Commune, although in 1848, he expressed his political views more adroitly in his paintings than through his political activism. Scholars and critics from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who have written about (or criticized) Courbet for the politics in his works (and life), range from Michael Fried, Albert Boime, Linda Nochlin, Georges Riat, Hollis Clayson, Paul B. Crapo, to Meissonier.

² Gustave Courbet's œuvre from the most recent retrospectives—held at the Réunion des Musées Nationaux and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, October 13, 2007–January 28, 2008; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, February 27–May 18, 2008; and the Communauté d'agglomération de Montpellier/Musée Fabre, Montpellier, June 14–September 28, 2008— can be categorized as (1) early self portraits, (2) private and historic figures, (3) manifestos (e.g., *Burial at Ornans*), (4) landscapes, (5) later portraits, figures, and still-life flowers, (6) nudes, (7) hunting scenes, and (8) still life, and the landscapes and portraits painted during his self-imposed exile in La Tour de Peilz, Switzerland.

conceivable that his seclusion and repressed imprisonment motivated his choice to paint fruit, a subject quite removed from his œuvre of the 1840s, and 1850s working class subjects?

The historically political circumstances of the Prussian Siège (September 19, 1870–January 28, 1871), the Paris Commune (March 18, 1871–May 28, 1871),³ and Courbet's role as arts reformer and committed communard, informed the nature morte paintings of pomes. How are familiar works from his established œuvre prior to his incarceration—such as *Burial at Ornans*, (Figure 2) *After Dinner at Ornans*, 1848 – 1849, (Figure 6) or *The Stonebreakers*, 1849, (Figure 4) emblematic of his politics? Most importantly for my analysis how might these paintings of pomes set outdoors next to brooding dark trees inform the political in these works.⁴ These questions about this small group of paintings and their direct associations to Courbet's politics, his activities during 1870 and 1871, and his incarceration will be the driving discourse of this analysis.

This thesis will look specifically at the nature of these plein air fruit paintings (Figures 3, 4, and 5) ostensibly painted at Ste Pélagie prison.⁵ Courbet's

³ Most scholars of the Paris Commune concur that the end of the Commune was May 28, 1871. Some historians place the beginning as March 26, the Commune's inauguration day, in lieu of March 18, the date that the local civilians and communards captured the cannons on the hill of Montmartre. This is the same day that President Thiers (of the Versailles or conservative government) ordered government agencies to Versailles. See John Hicks and Robert Tucker, Revolution and Reaction: The Paris Commune 1871, 1973, p. xviii.

⁴ Courbet was appointed temporary president (Courbet's designation) of the Commission artistique pour la sauvegarde des musées nationaux ("sauvegarde" translates to "safeguard") and held the position from September 6, 1870, to December 1, 1870. He was reappointed temporary president of the Fédération des artistes on March 18, 1871 ending May 23 1871. The end date, May 23, 1871, of the Fédération des artistes (henceforth referred to as the FDA) is suggested by a report submitted by Barbet de Jouy on June 1, 1871, the Louvre's imperial curator (earlier dismissed by the FDA,) who then, "ordered the two deputies of the federal committee of artists, who had settled in the museum since the 16th (1871), to go back to their meeting hall, and I had them watched over closely by the security guards." The report was filed with the Minister of Public Instruction. See Gonzalo J. Sánchez, Organizing Independence, The Artists Federation of the Paris Commune and Its Legacy, 1871–1889, 1997, p. 56. The two deputies were likely Jules Dalou and Jules Héreau, the delegates appointed to the Louvre on May 4, 1871, who were probably at the Louvre on the 16th when it reopened.

sister Thérèse-Zoé Courbet Reverdy (known as Zoé by Courbet) remarked in a letter to Courbet's friend and art collector, Alfred Bruyas, that he had never painted fruit before⁶ and that she had brought fruit to him while he served time at Ste Pélagie.⁷ Courbet also painted nature morte works of fruit at Dr. Duval's clinic, where he served the last two months of his six-month prison term on parole.⁸

During this period at Dr. Duval's, he painted both fruit and flower arrangements. This was not the first time Courbet had painted floral arrangements in his career⁹ (Figures 8 & 9) however, his paintings of fruits, were a new subject for him. Although there is debate whether these fruit paintings were completed at the prison or at Dr. Duval's, I am convinced that the plein air pommes works were painted during his prison term including his prison parole at Dr. Duval's and my argument is premised on this assumption.¹⁰

⁵ Chu, p. 455. Chu states in note 7, "It is possible that several of the still lifes inscribed 'Ste Pélagie' were actually done in Neuilly at the Maison de Duval." (This is Dr. Duval's home and clinic located in Neuilly, France, outside of Paris, where Courbet recuperated from surgery and served the balance of his prison term on parole.)

⁶ Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Courbet, the Commune, and the Meanings of Still Life in 1871," Art Journal, 1996, p. 32.

⁷ Chu, p. 454. In a letter to his sister Juliette dated March 3, 1872, Courbet wrote, referring to an earlier time period, "My sister bought me some apples, pears, and grapes, which served me well at Ste Pélagie," confirming that he had apples as a subject to paint while incarcerated at the prison.

⁸ Chu, p. 634. Courbet was transferred to Dr. Duval's nursing home in Neuilly on December 30, 1870, where, in late January, he was operated on by Dr. Nélaton for hemorrhoids.

⁹ In the spring and summer of 1862 and 1863, Courbet produced some nature morte floral tableaux at the residence of his friend, Etienne Baudry, at Chateaux de Rochemont in the Saintonge region. He painted a series of floral nature morte and is known to have never worked on isolated floral arrangements previously in his career. He produced twenty or so canvases of floral paintings. See Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, Courbet Reconsidered, 1988, pp. 148–149 for the floral series and rare works of floral arrangements. Also see <http://www.europeanpaintings.com> for the number of floral nature morte produced by Courbet during this period.

¹⁰ Hélène Toussaint, Gustave Courbet, 1819–1877, 1978, p. 187. Toussaint acknowledges Courbet's "sisters and friends" brought fruit and flowers for him to paint. However, she suggests that the painting, *Nature morte aux pommes*, was likely painted at Dr. Duval's in the early

Addressing the political context, we should acknowledge that the Fédération des artistes (or FDA), an arts organization to place artists in charge of the arts, which Courbet was acting president in the spring of 1871, was an initiative under the Commune, (but not of the Commune).¹¹ The Commune was the governing political body to which Courbet was a dedicated member during the spring of 1871.

Courbet's original aims for arts reform were, in part, to (1) secure control of the Salon and exhibitions, including the space of exhibitions, museums, and art collections, as well as appointments of directors and curators; (2) gain control for the artists of the educational system for the arts beginning with abolishment of the École des beaux-arts, among other institutions, and 3) free the artists to market their art, establish independent exhibitions, and control the pricing of their works.¹² (See Appendix A, Courbet's first draft of Arts Reforms). According to Courbet's plan, these measures were designed to benefit the artists, not promote the regime of the empire, a political act in itself.¹³ By the end of the Commune, on May 28, 1871 and Courbet's subsequent conviction on September 2, 1871, for complicity in the fall and destruction of the Vendôme Column, measures toward these ends were suspended.

Assertion of the Thesis

This thesis will demonstrate that the apples in *Nature morte aux pommes* (Figure 3), *Pommes* (Figure 4), and *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre* (Figure 5), represent rotting, dead, piled-up, executed communard bodies. I will argue

months of 1872. His sister Zoé, writing to Bruyas about his medical condition in January, February, and May 1872, mentions Courbet was painting flowers and fruit.

¹¹ See Sánchez, p. 49.

¹² Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Letters of Gustave Courbet, 1992, pp. 410 & 411.

¹³ Paul B. Crapo, "The Problematics of Artistic Patronage Under the Second Empire: Gustave Courbet's Involved Relations with the Regime of Napoleon III," Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 1995, p. 160.

that Courbet's repressed and despairing state of mind was influenced by a repressive environment while he was incarcerated at the Ste Pélagie prison. This led to his producing nature morte paintings of innocuous fruit in lieu of paintings of the struggling working class represented in his figural tableaux that I believe suggest his political and cultural ideologies. For example, in *Burial at Ornans*, (Figure 2) the political subtext suggests that Courbet has monumentalized the peasantry and working class in the painting, controversial for a subject of this period, 1849 - 1850. Exhibiting this work exemplified the recent struggles of the rural population and reminded the bourgeoisie of the dramatic social and political changes now occurring.

The model for the piles of dead communard bodies I credit to the mass executions by the Versaillais troops after their entry into Paris at the perimeters on May 21, 1871.¹⁴ I will further argue that Courbet's exposure to the horrors of massacre during the final week of attacks in Paris, combined with his incarceration, influenced his decision to paint fruits in a landscape. Indirectly, his political engagement during the Commune—as a Commune member, officeholder, and FDA president—also influenced his choices.

Thesis Theory

I will argue that these fruit paintings are emblematic of what I consider to be Courbet's repressed rebellious nature that expresses, through the apple paintings the oppression that he experienced. I will establish that Courbet's uncommon choice was the result of his incarceration. Courbet at this time was neither engaged in his duties as president of the Fédération des artistes nor in

¹⁴ Bertrand Tillier and John Hicks cite May 21, 1871 as the day that the Versailles armies entered Paris. See Tillier, *La Commune de Paris, Révolution Sans Images ? Politique et Représentations dans la France Républicaine, 1871–1914*, 2004, p. 498. See also Sánchez, who cites the date of Versailles troop entry as May 22, p. 56; and see Hicks and Tucker, ed., *Revolution and Reaction: The Paris Commune, 1871*, 1973, p. xx – xxi. Hicks documents that the Versailles armies entered Paris at 3:00 a.m., May 21. (This period is called the “Semaine Sanglante” or “Bloody Week.”)

his official duties for the Commune.¹⁵ Courbet is imprisoned following a tumultuous and horrific time of individual and collective struggle.

Paradoxically, he chose not to paint symbolic compositions of his Franche-Comté heritage (i.e., *Burial at Ornans*) representing the struggles of the working class; instead he painted fruit! This choice suggests that he denied his earlier propensity to paint allegorical and iconographic figural tableaux to represent the losses of the working class and petit bourgeois in this time of political passion.¹⁶ In making this choice, Courbet confirmed that the state suppressed his desire to paint what he had witnessed.

Courbet's failure to reform the arts in Paris, the consequential failure of the Commune government, coupled with his incarceration, caused him to feel defeated, which I suggest was instrumental in the change of his artistic program, albeit temporary. This failure and sense of loss, I believe, also played a role in his selection of piled apples and other fruits set in a landscape before and under trees (in lieu of being set on a table top in an interior setting). Intentionally or unintentionally these objects emblemized the tens of thousands of executed fellow communards during the final days of the Paris Commune.¹⁷

I will assert that, given Courbet's repressed, imprisoned surroundings, he was perhaps searching for ways in which to express the rebellious nature of his Franche-Comté countrymen¹⁸ and fellow communards and thus to document in painting, with impunity from the Versailles government and his opponents, the horrific executions of the Semaine Sanglante. What implicit forces of coercion

¹⁵ Courbet was mayor of the sixth arrondissement of Paris and member of the Committee of Public Education, both associated with the Commune.

¹⁶ By 'losses,' I refer to losses of life, of the executed, of the right to vote, of free education, of equal economic opportunities, among other rights not provided by the conservative government.

¹⁷ Many of the communards were executed during Bloody Week at Luxembourg Gardens and at the Père Lachaise Cemetery, (see figure 21) both in Paris and both in park settings with trees. Courbet included a tree in each of the three paintings I will examine, which may reference these site executions. See Albert Boime, Art and the French Commune: Imagining Paris after War and Revolution, 1995, p. 199.

¹⁸ As referenced in *Burial at Ornans*, *After Dinner at Ornans*, and *The Stonebreakers*.

within the prison system might have caused Courbet to abandon figural and landscape paintings, and paint banal apples and other fruits? Before we address these coercive forces, let us take a careful look at the essential image in this study, *Nature morte aux pommes* (Figure 3). In order to emphasize my argument of rotting bodies, I will give an acutely detailed description of the composition, color use, and some theoretical representation of the painting.

A Portrayal of Apples

Piled and lying on what appears to be relatively flat ground are seventeen apples in various stages of decay and decomposition. We can see that some of the apples, especially to the lower left, are positioned atop at least two other apples (Figure 10). The supporting apple on the left is primarily yellow, the most yellow in color in the pile. It is perhaps the youngest of the collection with only a splash of red near its frontal core and to the right side behind three decaying spots.¹⁹ The supporting apple on the right is primarily red and presents only beginning stages of decaying blemishes in its frontal quadrant. The yellow color on its left side emphasizes the early process of decay on the apple it supports (just above) but acts to underscore the decaying pit festering on the apple piled atop it.

Two other apples that are heaped upon others are the central red apple with the fresh green leaf delicately brushing its top and possibly the apple behind and to its right (Figure 11).²⁰ The central red apple first appears to have no

¹⁹ I argue that it is young because the majority of apples are red with some exhibiting larger or smaller portions of yellow, suggesting an early stage of growth from yellow to full red color. In comparison to *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre*, there is a distinct yellow apple or, for instance, a 'yellow transparent', or mature apple set among mature red apples. This is relevant because it references the young who perished in the Commune executions during Bloody Week, by the Versailles troops.

²⁰ It is possible that this apple simply sits on a mound of ground as it draws closer to the tree in the background. However, the manner in which the apple to its rear right touches the apple to its lower right suggests the central apple (the red apple with the leaf touching it) is elevated to some degree. We simply cannot see any other apples in the dark palette of Courbet's tableaux.

decomposition on its body; however, upon closer observation, we see in the right foreground shadow a couple of dark pockets and one to the left just under the streak of highlight. Although the pocket to the lower right may be the core of the apple, we think not because it is not deep enough and possesses no stem.

As we look even closer, we notice that none of the apples has a stem attached, the “lifecord” that attaches each of them to their lifeblood, the tree. Some leaves are strewn in the right foreground, looking quite haggard and dried up, brittle, and without life (Figure 11). A spindle-like twig that seems to reach out toward them like bony fingers appears buried and lifeless under the agglomeration des pommes. Could this be a subtle reference to a piled and buried body whose arm and hand reaches out for life, a life that exists no longer, the executed life of a communard?

What are we to think about the apples’ positions just before and under a tree? Have they dropped from above, limb by limb, branch by branch, and lain there for a time while they became inconsumable? Can this dropping action correlate to dead corporeal bodies dropping as they are shot in an execution line and randomly falling into a heap of dead and suffering communards? As we consider this theory, I would like to address other possible forces that may have caused Courbet to paint inert, putrefied fruit.

The Coercive Affect of the *Panopticon*

In an attempt to understand the notion of oppression that is articulated in Courbet’s choice of innocuous apples, I maintain that this theory is informed by Michel Foucault’s interpretation of Jeremy Bentham’s prison system, the *Panopticon*,²¹ or *Inspection House* 1782 – 1867, (Figure 12) (See Appendix B,

²¹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1979. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and his Panopticon prison system began early development in the 1770s in his book, *Rationale of Punishment*. Bentham’s prison system focused on, according to Janet Semple, the “safeguarding of the interests of the criminal,” which “was to be one of Bentham’s main preoccupations in his Panopticon scheme.” See Janet Semple, *Bentham’s Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary*, 1993, p. 26. Quoting Bentham, “The labour obtained by the force of fear is never equal to that which is obtained by the hope of reward.” See Semple, p. 24, for the early

Jeremy Bentham's Twelve Principles of Punishment). Paul Rock, in his book History of Criminology, quotes Bentham describing his plan of prison inspection from Bentham's Letter I, titled Idea of the Inspection Principle, from Bentham's "Panopticon; or, The Inspection-House."

Within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection. The more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment have been attained. Ideal perfection would require that each person should be in that predicament during every instant of time.²²

In Bentham's Letter VI, titled Advantages of the Plan Bentham characterizes the inspection plan as an "apparent omnipresence of the inspector, combined with the extreme facility of his real presence."²³ Foucault addresses this constant watchfulness of Bentham's Panopticon prison plan in his book Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, and specifically in his chapter Panopticism.

Panopticism, as interpreted by Foucault, is a mechanism of power, a power over people and society. It is an "image of discipline, a design of subtle coercion."²⁴ By the later eighteenth century in pre-Revolutionary France, police used discipline in a functionary role to control revolts, plots, and opposition movements by the people. Discipline, argues Foucault, is a type of power and applied to houses of correction in the nineteenth century.²⁵ Central to understanding Foucault's interpretation of discipline and the undercurrent that I

development of the Panopticon system in the 1770s, and p. 27 for the quote by Bentham. (See Appendix B for Bentham's Twelve Principles of Punishment.) See also Paul Rock, History of Criminology, 1994, pp. 40–49. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, or Inspection House, was first published in London in 1791.

²² Rock, p. 101.

²³ Rock, p. 106.

²⁴ All other citations of Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's *Panopticism* refer to the text, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.

²⁵ Foucault, p. 215.

believe is important for understanding Courbet's fruit works is Foucault's argument that "discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals," and "must neutralize the effects of counter-power." Foucault suggests that mastering forces of organized multiplicities, such as agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, and coalitions,²⁶ is the aim of the power of disciplines.

Foucault's notion of the disciplines of power is directly applicable to the actions of the Versailles government in May 1871 during the *Semaine Sanglante* that resulted in crushing the Paris Commune. Consequently, the attacks on Paris beginning on May 21, 1871 by the Versailles government under President Adolph Thiers (Figure 13) and troops commanded by General MacMahon, ended Courbet's efforts to reform the arts by sustained governmental controls over all aspects of the arts.

Foucault's focus—on arresting and regulating movements; dissipating compact groupings and neutralizing counter-power; controlling revolts, plots and opposition movements by the people and their coalitions; and emphasizing the mechanisms of power and power over people and society is apropos for understanding the control and oppression of Courbet and his fellow arts reform colleagues and fellow communards by the conservative Bonapartist government. The conservative courts also played a role that ultimately put a stop to Courbet's actions by finding him guilty of complicity in the destruction of the Vendôme Column and by sentencing him to six months in prison.

The notion of power disciplines by Foucault suggests a kind of de-individualization upon those repressed individuals by the very government that oppresses them. In Courbet's case, his jailors at the Ste Pélagie prison prevent him from having models in his cell and from painting altogether. Although I acknowledge Bentham's eighteenth-century prison system is not strictly applied to Courbet's circumstances at the Ste Pélagie prison as Bentham's

²⁶ Foucault, p. 219.

model describes, I would argue that there is evidence of an implicit coercive force by prison guards upon Courbet's freedoms during his imprisonment. The evidence for this will be discussed in the section on *Incarceration, Oppression, and Despair*. I further assert that Courbet's political and cultural ideologies, rooted in his working-class background of Ornans and the Besançon region where he was raised, was submerged in his composition of fruit, a product of the coercive forces he sustained in prison.

Courbet's sociopolitical ideologies originate from the philosophies of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 1809–1865 (Figure 14) an avowed anarchist²⁷ and philosopher of the realist movement in the nineteenth-century and a positivist theoretician.²⁸ To help understand Courbet's intentions in painting naturalistic, decomposing apples, an examination of his sociopolitical ideologies and philosophies will be useful.

Courbet's Sociopolitical Ideologies

Courbet and Proudhon: Shared Philosophies

Courbet's political philosophies are inevitably tied to the arts; and it is often difficult to have a discourse about his politics without including a discussion about the meaning of his works or his proposals to reform the arts²⁹.

Courbet's political philosophies and his intent as a Realist artist to study the world in which he lived and to play an active role in directing its course is Proudhonian in nature. In Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's Philosophie du progress (1853), he urged artists as leaders of society, to produce didactic works, which

²⁷ Alan Bowness, "Courbet's Proudhon," The Burlington Magazine, 1978, p. 123

²⁸ See Jeffrey Kaplow, writing about Proudhon's connection to the Realist movement in art in mid-nineteenth-century France in his essay, "The Paris Commune and the Artists," cited in John Hicks and Robert Tucker, Revolution and Reaction: The Paris Commune 1871, pp.152 – 153.

²⁹ Whether they be works produced in the late 1840s and early 1850s that embraced images of the peasantry and working class, i.e., *Peasants Returning from Flagey*, *The Stonebreakers*, or *After Dinner at Ornans*, or the new works of fruits produced following the Commune failure, there is a propensity to read some tenor of politics in his works.

would educate their fellow citizens and better mankind as a whole.³⁰ The paintings *Burial at Ornans* (Figure 2) and *The Stonebreakers*, 1849 (Figure 7) are didactic because Courbet emphasizes labor concerns of the peasantry (*The Stonebreakers*), and issues of "moral regeneration of mankind,"³¹ (*Burial at Ornans*), both everyday occurrences in the life of the peasantry and the working class.

Comparing socio-politically imbued works, such as *Burial at Ornans* and *The Stonebreakers*,³² to *Nature morte aux pommes*, (Figure 3) demonstrates, in the latter example an oblique quality in this work and the other pommes paintings, and why I see the paintings of *les pommes* as being banal and innocuous while also aggressive and passionate. Ultimately, it results in a break with Courbet's artistic program. Similarly, I believe Courbet used the pommes paintings as expressions of the visible realities of the tragedies during the *Semaine Sanglante*. By using apples and various fruits Courbet puts down on canvas his philosophy of painting 'today's realities,' within a Proudhonian philosophy.

Proudhon advocated a different kind of art than that of the state, as he acknowledged, the state aims to glorify Napoléon's Empire. History, religion, and mythological subjects were the officially accepted themes by the Salon and government who controlled which works were accepted and which were not. Courbet, on the contrary was against any art work of the past. "Any epoch should be reproduced by its own artists, by the artists who have lived in it. I hold the artists of one century radically incompetent to reproduce the things of a preceding century."³³ For Courbet, this goes to the notion of the Realist

³⁰ Crapo, p. 241.

³¹ Cited by Kaplow, in Hicks and Tucker, p. 151

³² See the discussion of Michael Fried, Courbet's Realism, below.

³³ Cited by Kaplow in Revolution and Reaction, p. 150.

movement and of painting everyday subjects as they are, with no embellishments, as in *After Dinner at Ornans*, (Figure 6). Jeffrey Kaplow, applying a Proudhonian approach in his essay, "The Paris Commune and the Artists," suggests that, "the artist was to be a translator, rather than a creator."³⁴ For Courbet, I believe that his use of the apples was a translation of real events with real objects rather than a creation. As Courbet saw it, "The art of painting...should consist solely of the representation of objects visible and tangible to the artist."³⁵

Freedom and independence were hallmarks of Courbet's philosophies derived from Proudhon. Proudhon was against central government and against authority in any form. He viewed society as a "network of mutual undertakings between individuals," and liberty of an individual was his first principle.³⁶ During the June days of the 1848 Revolution, Proudhon's sympathies were with the insurgents; however, he continued to preach peaceful reconciliation during the June revolt.³⁷

Courbet and the Philosophy of Freedom

Courbet, as like Proudhon was against state control, particularly regarding its impact on artists and art. In a letter dated June 23, 1870 (about a month before France officially declared war with Prussia, July 19, 1870), to Maurice Richard, the Minister of Arts,³⁸ in response to being decorated with the Légion d'Honneur Medal, Courbet makes clear his distaste for the honor and further establishes his philosophy with an emphasis on freedom.

³⁴ Cited by Kaplow in Revolution and Reaction, p. 150.

³⁵ Cited by Kaplow in Revolution and Reaction, p. 150.

³⁶ Bowness, p. 123.

³⁷ Steven K. Vincent, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French republican Socialism, 1984, p. 181.

³⁸ Chu, pp. 382–383, letter 70-21.

Allow me therefore, Monsieur le Minister, to decline the honor that you believed you were bestowing on me. I am fifty years old and I have always lived in freedom. Let me end my life as a free man. When I am dead, they must be able to say of me, 'That one never belonged to any school, to any church, to any institution, to any academy, and, above all, to any regime except the regime of freedom.' ³⁹

Freedom for Courbet was in negating the state in all circumstances.⁴⁰ Courbet was persistent in assuring that artists, rather than the state, guarantee this freedom; he proclaimed: "The revolution seeks only to obtain this goal."⁴¹ Also in the letter to Richard, Courbet expresses his strong artistic convictions, which tie his politics to his artistic independence and those of his fellow artists.

My artist's feelings also goes against my accepting an award that is granted to me at the hand of the state. The state is incompetent in matters of art. When it takes on itself to give out awards, it is usurping the public's taste. Its intervention is entirely demoralizing, fatal to the artist whom it misleads as to his worth; fatal to art, which it confines within its official conventions and which it condemns to the most sterile mediocrity. The wise course would be for it to stay out of it. The day it lets us be free, it will have fulfilled its duty toward us.⁴²

During a campaign speech on March 26, 1871, for the position of Communal Counselor, Courbet gave a talk reflecting his political philosophy and references the impact of Proudhon.

I have always concerned myself with social issues and the philosophies related to them, marching on this path alongside my comrade Proudhon. Denying the false and conventional ideal, in 1848, I carried the flag of Realism, which alone puts art at the service of man.⁴³

³⁹ Chu, p. 379, letter 70–19.

⁴⁰ Sánchez, p. 26.

⁴¹ Ibid, Sánchez, p. 26. A clear statement by Courbet as to where his convictions lie.

⁴² Chu, p. 379, letter 70–19.

Courbet's Art and Sociopolitical Meaning

Tying Courbet's sociopolitical ideologies to his art, Michael Fried writing in Courbet's Realism, points to the criticism and support of Courbet's art in the service of politics. He credits Proudhon and other writers as "championing his [Courbet's] art on the grounds of what they took to be its politically progressive content."⁴⁴ Courbet's political ideals are articulated rather astutely in his manifesto painting *Burial at Ornans*, (Figure 2) but a more subtle expression of Courbet's political values was articulated in his *pommes* works. In an interrelated analysis, Meyer Schapiro examines the apples of Paul Cézanne, (1839 – 1906), which I believe has direct associations with Courbet's nature morte apple paintings, which will be examined below. In addition, I will also look at an analysis by Fried of Courbet's *Nature morte aux pommes* painting and related fruit tableaux from Fried's anthropomorphic point of view.

In examining the nature morte paintings with apples by Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906), Meyer Schapiro asserted that, "An artist's habitual choice of a type of theme points to a connection of its qualities with what are loosely called his values or outlook."⁴⁵ He further maintains in the case of Cézanne that the role of apples, "May...be regarded as a deliberately chosen means of emotional detachment and self control."⁴⁶ I agree with Schapiro's theories, and believe that we can extend his arguments to the fruit paintings of Courbet, (Figures 3, 4, and 5). I have demonstrated that Courbet's choice in painting *les pommes* express his ideals or values and his ideologies. As Schapiro brilliantly pointed out the choices (in my view, by Courbet) are a, 'deliberately chosen means of emotional detachment and self control.' This is clearly articulated in *Nature morte aux pommes*, (Figure 3) as I believe Courbet detaches himself from the executions

⁴³ Georges Riat, Gustave Courbet, 2008, p. 207.

⁴⁴ Michael Fried, Courbet's Realism, 1990, p. 255.

⁴⁵ Meyer Schapiro, Modern Art, 1978, essay, "The apples of Cézanne: an Essay on the Meaning of Still Life," p. 15

⁴⁶ Schapiro, p. 13

by replacing the piled executed bodies of his fellow communards with the beat-up, scattered, and rotting apples.

Isn't this the ultimate in self control for an artist who was accustomed to painting 'today's realities,' the raw life of the working class, lacking in accoutrements and embellishments, the latter found in the state sanctioned works of the aristocratic Rococo of the pre-Revolutionary period of the eighteenth-century, (Figure 15) *The Lover Crowned*, 1771 -1773, by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, (1732 – 1806). The sense of raw life expressed in the pommes paintings are at the heart of Courbet's œuvre, and are expressed plainly, but at the same time obliquely in his pommes paintings, which differs from Courbet's figural works previously cited. Courbet's apples demonstrate their oblique quality by *not being* corporeal human corpses.

Courbet's pommes paintings therefore, reflect an emotional detachment to that very fact of not being figures, but apples. Courbet's decision to produce works articulating raw life was driven by his desire to say something about human-kinds' aspirations and struggles, and as his comrade Proudhon advocated, to teach society something useful about the human condition through works of art. These didactic messages are more conspicuous, it appears in Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*, (Figure 2) and *The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair*, 1850-55 (Figure 16). *Nature morte aux pommes* and the other pommes works cited in this paper are more analogous to what Schapiro suggests that they exhibit a sense of emotional extrication for Courbet. It was hard for Courbet to convey his failures, losses, and despair, in the Commune, reform of the arts, and his imprisonment. So in his self control, as Schapiro alluded to in his analysis of Cézanne's apples, Courbet uses his apples to articulate in an oblique manner these tragedies that have befallen Courbet, his fellow communards, and the French working class.

I have argued for a conscious unintentionality on Courbet's part to paint fruit that represented dead communard bodies executed during the Semaine Sanglante. Michael Fried, in considering Courbet's nature morte works of fruit

from an anthropomorphic point of view, argues that analysis of anthropomorphism in Courbet's nature morte works; does not represent a product of conscious intention.⁴⁷ Fried further contends that they represent a, " 'Corporealizing' of the representational field—a projection of bodily feeling into various elements within it—that might well find displaced expression in imagery of that sort."⁴⁸ The notion of 'displaced expression' is entirely possible in Courbet's *Nature morte aux pommes* and the two other pommes works. As I have shown, this notion of 'displaced expression' is demonstrated through the use of banal apples and was a way for Courbet to express himself obliquely, and yet; at the same time to express his passion.

Fried, while considering *Nature morte aux pommes* by Courbet, in part, interprets the painting as a "corporeal relation between painter and beholder,"⁴⁹ but fails to see the socio-political meaning in this work. Fried does, however, acknowledge the incongruent scale and refers to the apples as, "pieces of fruit of indeterminate size."⁵⁰ Fried does interpret one of Courbet's other nature morte paintings, (*Apples, Pear and Pomegranate*), 1871 – 1872 as having body parts; however, he makes no reference to them as piled dead bodies. Rather, he analyses them as human anatomy and breasts of female nudes, and to Courbet's 1860s paintings of nudes.⁵¹

As far as the issue of 'conscious intention,' is concerned, we can only suggest Courbet's intentions based on the many factors of his work for the Commune, arts reform, and his incarceration, which were manifested in his state

⁴⁷ Fried, p. 241

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 241

⁴⁹ Fried, p. 248

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 248

⁵¹ Fried, p. 246. Quoting Fried, "The pear in particular evokes the image of a female breast; the apple to its right suggests an abdomen and navel; while the apple to its left, appears to gaze at us with an unblinking eye." (See Fried's intensive theoretical interpretation of Courbet's fruit still life paintings in the chapter, "Courbet's Realism.")

of mind, that of grave disappointment, despair, and the defeats Courbet suffered.

Moreover, Schapiro is closer to the theory proposed in this paper as he describes works of still life as symbols of “mementos of the ephemeral and death.”⁵² The piled apples under and before trees relate directly to the notion of a *memento mori* and may convey in Courbet’s apple tableaux, a memorial to the cause, and to those who lost their lives for the cause of freedoms.

Whether the political is represented in Courbet’s works of art is a question scholars will continue to address. But as we will see, Courbet was as much a political administrator as he was a champion for the cause of reforming the arts and for the cause of freedoms to his fellow communards and the working class of France.

Courbet’s Poli-Cultural Activities, 1870–1871

Politics and Art Reforms

Reform of the arts was a cause that consumed Courbet for much of his life, especially in the months prior to Napoleon III’s surrender at Sedan (September 4, 1870). According to Historian Paul B. Crapo, in his 1995 essay, “He [Courbet] was an ‘artiste engage’ acting on the firm conviction, developed over a lifetime, that artists must administer the fine arts themselves in order to promote more effectively the artistic life of the nation and to secure their own well-being.”⁵³ Antecedents for his proposals are rooted in the French Revolution and the proposals of the French republicans. The various political groups of that period shared ideals of (1) civic virtue, (2) Rousseauian equality, (3) direct democratic procedures, (4) patriotism, and (5) revulsion of aristocratic values.⁵⁴

⁵² Schapiro, p. 19

⁵³ Crapo, p. 157.

⁵⁴ Sánchez, pp. 17 & 18.

Jacques-Louis David (1748 – 1825) and his Commune des arts intended to “republicanize” the arts as a first attempt at reforms.⁵⁵ The critic Amaury Duval sought to define the notion of art républicaine in 1794.⁵⁶ Based on the tenets of patriotism and virtue, Duval defined art républicaine as a hope for cultural renewal hinging on republican convictions and sensibilities that fostered sincerity, simplicity, and grandeur of spirit.⁵⁷ Duval emphasized an art that spoke to an entire population, not only the privileged aristocratic few.⁵⁸ The tenets of artistic republicanism that were developed by Duval, David, and others, stressed the pedagogical and utilitarian aspects of the fine arts. The new approach was considered an effective way to communicate social and political meaning during revolutionary times.⁵⁹

The nineteenth-century origins of these tenets were, one could argue spurred by Napoléon III, (1808 – 1873). Through Napoléon’s arts policies, he required that artists’ works reflect glory on his regime, a long-held tradition of French monarchies.⁶⁰ The requirements to narrow and maintain the traditional requirements of an artist’s subjects held by the official Salons to religion, mythology, history, and portraiture stifled artists like Courbet, Honoré Daumier, (1808 – 1879) and Jean-François Millet, (1814 – 1875) and their sense of independence to paint the ‘realities of the day.’ Paradoxically, Napoléon’s policies helped establish the need for arts reforms to guarantee artistic freedoms.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Sánchez, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Sánchez, p. 15.

⁶¹ Works of art not representing the state sanctioned subject matter were often rejected at the official Salon, the place where an artist gained exposure and recognition in the market place.

Courbet began active engagement in the discourse of arts reforms in early 1870. He corresponded with Jules de La Rochenoire, an active participant of arts reform for the Salons from 1869.⁶² Courbet wrote to La Rochenoire in March 1870 criticizing his lack of revolutionary arts reforms.⁶³ As a corporatist,⁶⁴ Courbet argued that enjoying freedoms meant negating the state in all situations. Courbet found that La Rochenoire's reform articles for the Salon exhibition of 1870 ceded too much control to the state, which was counterproductive to the measures Courbet had in mind.⁶⁵

Courbet found the articles to be problematic, even those Courbet sanctioned. In the articles he saw as exceptions, Courbet exclaimed, "I see no revolution in it." Courbet cited ten of the twenty-six articles and offered a warning to La Rochenoire: "You must understand one thing: all those articles pertain only to form and will not change in any visible way what has happened until now."⁶⁶ (See Appendix C and Courbet's responses to three of La Rochenoire's articles.) Although Courbet agreed with ten of La Rochenoire's twenty-six reform articles, he thinks the reforms do little to give the artist independence or freedom in the marketing of their works. This is the reason for Courbet's characterization of La Rochenoire's constitution as being too much about form. Earlier in the reforms process, Courbet had expressed

Hence, arts reform was in part aimed at changing what kinds of works were accepted so that the independent artist could earn a living at their craft.

⁶² Chu, p. 659.

⁶³ Chu, p. 369, letter 70-10. This followed a letter written by La Rochenoire to Courbet asking for his candidacy for the 1870 Salon Jury. Courbet replied that it was time for artists to regain their independence. See Chu, p. 365, and note 1, p. 366.

⁶⁴ Corporatism stresses an economic and stylistic individualism for artists, i.e., in democratic Salons to options for public art. See Sánchez, p. 26.

⁶⁵ See Chu, pp. 369–372, letter 70-10. Courbet responds specifically to those measures cited in La Rochenoire's Constitution, p. 372. The 'constitution' according to Chu, by La Rochenoire appears on p. 372 and is a translation of the published proposal as it appeared in the journal *Revue artistique et littéraire* of January 1870.

⁶⁶ Chu, p. 369, letter 70–10, dated March 9, 1870.

disappointment to the new Minister of Fine Arts, Maurice Richard that his [Richard's] reforms since 1868 had not gone far enough toward true change.⁶⁷

Courbet's reasons for developing and establishing arts reforms became more urgent by early 1870 because his contemporaries did not share his radical changes. Crapo articulates the concerns of Courbet and the current deficiencies for artists and excessive control by the imperial government.

His prime institutional target was, inevitably, the regime's fine arts administration. Nieuwerkerke's ill-fated attempts to subsidize his art and to protect him had convinced Courbet that no artist could create *bona fide* art within the stultifying confines of the imperial establishment. His very notion of the artist's calling necessitated, therefore, that he rebel against the constraints imposed by the Salon, the Academy, and the arts administration. All these institutions were designed to serve the greater glory of the regime—and of the emperor who stood at its apex but in no way promoted art or benefited artists.⁶⁸

It is ironic that Napoléon III and his arts administration, which curbed artistic freedoms of artists, would also play a role in Courbet's ambitions to reform the arts. By the summer of 1870, Napoleon III was embroiled in a war with Prussia; and by early September 1870, Napoleon III would surrender at Sedan and provide Courbet and his fellow artists an opportunity to acquire the artistic autonomy they sought.

⁶⁷ Chu, p. 366, note 3. See letter 70–05, dated February 15, 1870, to Jules Castagnary. At this stage, Courbet had expressed hope that the petition La Rochenoire was preparing to send to Minister of Fine Arts Richard would have more radical modifications for Salon exhibitions.

⁶⁸ Crapo, p. 160. The Comte de Alfred-Emilien Nieuwerkerke (1811 – 1892) was appointed general director of museums in 1849 and also superintendent of the Fine Arts Administration, a post he held until the fall of the Second Empire, (1851 – 1870). Biography information from Chu, p. 655.

The Inseparability of Courbet's Arts Reforms and Politics

Linda Nochlin suggests that Courbet's political and artistic practices are inseparable,⁶⁹ and the same is true for his arts reform practices, coupled, as they were, to his political activities. In the spring of 1871, Courbet participated in the Paris Commune, where he held a committee position on the Committee of Public Instruction. This committee is tied to his work with the Fédération des artistes, the arts reform organization that was rooted in the Commission artistique organized in the fall of 1870. Courbet, speaking of his role with the FDA, claimed, "I was president of the arts and needed something to fulfill my mission . . . I was the intermediary between the Commune and the artists with complete authority to offer an example of moderation and tranquility to both parties."⁷⁰

Less publicly active, but personally intentional were Courbet's activities and ideological beliefs involving the Vendôme Column destruction. Nochlin's notion of inseparability informs my contention that politics is represented in *Nature morte aux pommes*, including Courbet's views on the symbolism of the Colonne Vendôme. Exploring Courbet's multiple poli-cultural roles will help to understand his choice to paint piles of apples while incarcerated and on prison parole. Beginning at Napoléon's surrender to the Prussians in early September 1870 also begins Courbet's commitments to reforming of the arts.

On September 6, 1870, two days after Napoléon III surrendered to the Prussians, three hundred artists convened to protect the museums' arts collections in Paris. They demanded that the control of the imperial administrators be rescinded.⁷¹ Courbet became the leader of this artist

⁶⁹ Linda Nochlin, "The De-Politicization of Gustave Courbet: Transformation and Rehabilitation under the Third Republic," *OCTOBER*, 1982, p. 76.

⁷⁰ Sánchez, p. 47. Courbet is speaking of his role with the Fédération des artistes in 1871. This quote is taken from notes to Courbet's attorney, Maître Lachaud, in the summer of 1871. Activities specific to the period of the Prussian Siege, September 19, 1870–January 28, 1871, and the Paris Commune, March 18, 1871–May 28, 1871.

⁷¹ See Chu, p. 386, note 1. Sánchez, p. 30, cites Philippe Burty a founder of the new arts organization in the journal *La Rappel*, dated October 1, 1870, as stating that three hundred

organization, officially titled "Commission artistique pour la sauvegarde des musées nationaux."⁷² He became fully engaged in his work of reforming the arts under this commission and was, according to Hollis Clayson, an "exemplary republican bureaucrat, politician, and preservationist. He also stopped painting."⁷³

Protection of the Arts

On September 20, 1870 Courbet was in charge of the Commission artistique, and a delegation that worked with the Louvre curators to protect sculptures from possible bombardment by the Prussian siege. Jules Simon, the Minister of Fine Arts, took this action following the Commission artistique delegates' complaints that the curators were not cooperating with them.⁷⁴ An inspection by the delegates on September 9, 1870 recommended, in lieu of crating sculptures (as Chief Curator Ravaisson was preparing), to gabion or abut

artists convened on the "day after 4 September, a large group of artists gathered together, after having issued a public appeal . . . they appointed a public committee to watch over . . . museums." He further quotes the painter Félix Ziem present at the above-mentioned gathering, as claiming they met on September 4, and all three hundred artists unanimously agreed that the protection of the museums' paintings, be taken away from the imperial administrators. This date contradicts Chu, note 1, "On September 6, two days after the proclamation of the Third Republic, the artists of Paris had appointed a committee to safeguard works of art in national museums in and around Paris." See also Clayson, pp. 201 and 202, confirming the date given by Chu. Crapo, p. 148 indicates that Courbet helped convene the artists on September 6, 1870.

⁷² For the official title see Sánchez, p. 29, and see Clayson, p. 199. Both Clayson, pp. 15 & 202, and Sánchez, p. 30 cites Courbet as "head" of the new commission. Chu says Courbet was "elected president of that committee," referring to the Commission artistique, p. 386, note 1; and in a letter to his family, p. 385, letter 70-24, dated September 7, 1870 Courbet states that Jules Simon the Minister of Fine Arts also had a role in electing him president of the commission. Crapo states that Courbet, "agreed to serve as president and member of the executive committee," of the Commission artistique, p. 148. Sánchez acknowledges that Courbet's "self-aggrandizing title of *président des arts* was contested," see p. 31.

⁷³ Hollis Clayson, Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under the Siège, 1870 – 71, 2002, p. 199.

⁷⁴ Sánchez, p. 35.

the windows with sand bags from within to protect the statues in the sculpture galleries⁷⁵ (Figure 17).

On September 19, 1870, Ravaisson had continued to prepare crates for the statuary and other ineffective measures, which resulted in Simon's placing Courbet in charge.⁷⁶ However, Simon and the Government of National Defense (the Commune government) retained Ravaisson, along with all the other museum curators, against the desires and protests of Courbet and the Commission. Simon took this action in order to fashion a balance between the work of the new Commission artistique and the imperial appointees. As more information about Ravaisson's administration at the Louvre and its questionable safeguarding activities came to light, it became clear to the Commission delegates and Courbet that pressing matters of security and possible cronyism—among the museum staff, the former Minister of Fine Arts, Nieuwerkerke; and Empress Eugénie—would become a top priority in the safeguarding of the works of art.

The political passions of Courbet go directly to the suspicious actions by the imperial appointees that he and the delegates uncovered at the Louvre and by the actions of the empress in her veiled attempts to “protect” the state's artistic treasures. Courbet and the artists of the Commission artistique were working to effect a change in the way in which the arts administration was managed for the intent of preventing just such a case of imperial abuses and cronyism.

Courbet and the Commission artistique were gravely concerned that treasures from the national collections at the Louvre were possibly being stolen or misused by the empire and its arts appointees. There was direct evidence

⁷⁵ This gabioning (or abutment) was done in the windows of the Louvre with sand bags to reinforce protection of the sculptures. (See Figure 17.)

⁷⁶ Crapo, p. 153. Ravaisson had placed grass padding on the exterior of windows as protection for the sculptures. By the 20th Simon had replaced these with sandbags in the interior as a much better protection, p. 153 & 154, and see Figure 17 from Clayson p.205.

collected by the Commission delegates that Nieuwerkerke and Empress Eugénie were using arts and decorative arts to furnish their personal residences. This was an abomination to Courbet and the Commission who already perceived the regime of Napoléon as neglectful toward the rights of the working class.

Courbet, concerned about the safeguarding of the Louvre collections acknowledged that, "When the disaster at Sedan arrived the empire's inner circle had been removing belongings for at least a month, and the empress, in her countless luggage vans, had taken even the Tuileries's curtains."⁷⁷ As the empire's curators began crating and shipping works of art to be sent off to Brest and Toulon for "safekeeping," the delegates and Courbet became suspicious of their intentions.⁷⁸ Both the Arts Minister Simon and the Commission delegates, the latter with a degree of bias toward those thought to be culpable in these 'questionable' activities, carried out the investigation into these possible offences with urgency.

Of specific interest to Courbet and the delegates were three issues of museum business at the Louvre: (1) questions about the inventories of paintings, (2) the shipment of paintings to Brest, and (3) the contents of twenty-nine crates discovered in the apartment of the former Minister of Fine Arts, the Comte de Nieuwerkerke.⁷⁹ In addressing these questions of safeguard, it is important to keep in mind the aims of the members of the Commission artistique, including the delegation and Courbet in their efforts to effect reforms of the arts and their determination to oust the imperial appointees and replace them with Commission members.

⁷⁷ Sánchez, p. 33.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 33. A month prior to the empress removing belongings from the Louvre, would place the initiation at about early August, 1870. One key suspicion was their concern that these objects were destined to be sent to London, Empress Eugénie's place of exile, although this never took place (see below). See also Crapo, p. 148.

⁷⁹ Crapo, p. 151.

In order to preempt the actions of the imperial appointees and to demonstrate the serious nature of their role, the subcommittee on preservation of the Commission artistique inventoried the museum's collections shortly following Napoléon's surrender on September 4, 1870. They discovered that only two thousand of the fourteen thousand paintings (a little more than 14 percent) of the Louvre's collections were ever shown to the public.⁸⁰ The delegates charged that "the Imperial regime was able to perpetrate the many abuses which have been reported numerous times."⁸¹ Some of the most serious concerns of the Commission artistique were the alleged abuses by the empress herself.

Prior to her husband's surrender to the Prussians on September 4, 1870, Empress Eugénie had begun ordering the contents of the Louvre transported elsewhere. Although this seems like the appropriate thing for the head of state to do, according to Clayson the Empress was "masquerading as a concerned cultural preservationist, [all the while] she was actually husbanding her dwindling symbolic resources."⁸² Following the French defeat in Sedan, the empress ordered the Comte de Nieuwerkerke to pack up the most important works in the museums and send them into hiding. However, Alfred Darcel, the keeper of the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Art at the Louvre, halted the shipments; and Léon Gambetta, the newly appointed minister of the interior, officially suspended the shipments.⁸³

Did the Commission go too far in its concerns about the empire in their efforts to protect national arts treasures? Were the efforts of the empress to have Nieuwerkerke send works off for protection after her husband's surrender

⁸⁰ Crapo, p. 33. In their report to the general assembly at the Sorbonne on September 9, 1870 they claimed previous reports that works of art had been found in "offices of the curators and public servants, in shops and national palaces," p. 33.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 33

⁸² Clayson, p. 200.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 200.

to the Prussians an act of altruism for the state at large? Or were her concerns rooted in maintaining her precious royal lifestyle, much the same as they were for Marie-Antoinette, albeit under quite different circumstances? Probably not, as one of the Louvre curators explained, "Tableaux had been borrowed throughout the Second Empire to furnish imperial residences."⁸⁴ The motivations of the empress were surely far from altruistic in nature given her personal enjoyment of works of art and objets d'art in the imperial residences (Figure 18). But the man to whom the state, arts institutions, its citizens, and artists entrusted to protect these treasures, the Comte de Nieuwerkerke, was liable for his own transgressions regarding the protection of the arts.

The Commission had discovered crates in the apartment of the former Fine Arts Minister, Nieuwerkerke, to which the Louvre curators claimed no knowledge.⁸⁵ On September 14, 1870 the Commission appealed to the prefect of police to place official seals on the crates for their accounting.⁸⁶ To validate their concerns about the suspicious actions of the curators and the Comte de Nieuwerkerke, nine days later, the Commission "called on the prefect to cordon off the Louvre archives in order to secure the documents [they believed] would detail the Empire's art thefts and the malfeasance of the curators."⁸⁷ These measures represent the raw independence of the Commission and of Courbet, steps they felt were necessary in order to take control of the arts and the artists' destinies while exposing the abuses of the state.

⁸⁴ Clayson, p. 201.

⁸⁵ Crapo, p. 154. This is an example of possible cronyism, where the imperial appointed curators claimed ignorance of the crates (of works of art) in the private residence of the Minister of Arts, who was also an imperial appointee!

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 154.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 154.

Courbet, Cronyism, and the Barrier to Arts Reform

On September 24, Minister Simon set up the Archives Committee with the intention to “inspect the Louvre archives and trace to their sources any frauds that may have been committed by functionaries of the fallen government.”⁸⁸ This act by Simon followed the second general assembly of artists on September 18, 1870 sanctioned by Courbet and Philippe Burty.⁸⁹ The Commission artistique, and especially Courbet and Burty, perceived that an Archives Committee was necessary due to their beliefs that there “lurk[ed] evidence of the problematic imperial arts policies.”⁹⁰

Simon named six members to the committee; four were imperial administrators plus Courbet and Burty from the Commission artistique.⁹¹ As Crapo makes clear, a lengthy report following the inspections was filed stating that “the Louvre’s collections had suffered no losses and that the curators had discharged their duties honestly and competently.”⁹² Considering this outcome, Crapo eloquently observed of Courbet, “He had discovered, first and foremost, that a moderate republic—like the *Gouvernement de la Défense Nationale*⁹³—was not ‘progressive’ enough in its philosophy to permit the major overhaul of the fine arts establishment he advocated.”

Burty’s response to the outcome of the Archives Committee was, “[an] admission of failure . . . [but] stopped short of demanding the dismissal of the empire’s museum employees, [which] had been the intention [of the *Fédération*

⁸⁸ Clayson, p. 204. For confirmation of Clayson and the committee’s official title: *Commission d’examen des Archives du Louvre*, see Crapo, p. 154.

⁸⁹ Clayson, p. 203. Note: the Prussian Siege into France began on September 19, 1870.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁹¹ Sánchez, p. 36. Clayson cites that Burty and Courbet were adjunct members of the Archives Committee, see p. 204.

⁹² Crapo, p. 156. See Sánchez, p. 37 and Clayson, p. 204.

⁹³ Direct quote from Crapo, use of the French spelling of the Government of National Defense.

des artistes organization] all along.”⁹⁴ Courbet, resigning from the Archives Committee, sent his letter of resignation⁹⁵ to Minister Jules Simon, published in the December 1, 1870 issue of the commune journal *La Rappel*. The letter is here cited in its entirety to demonstrate the full scope of Courbet’s disappointment and frustrations.

On no account can I approve passage of the emperor’s acts, nor can I lend my support to the men who have served him so well, in spite of the apparent order they have been able to bring to the regularization of the acts of that *abominable regime*.

Our committee’s work will, nevertheless, be useful, as it records, *however superficially*, the existence of what art objects remain to us. One can keep it for reference, though it makes *no mention* of the already long-standing deterioration of our paintings, such as the restoration of the Rubenses.

In the hope that I can continue to be useful, I am happy to stay with the committee with which I have been entrusted by the artists in assembly and in which I have been confirmed by all. I wish to remain able to report to them, in a timely fashion and with full knowledge of the facts, on the matters that concern them, *something that our Archives Committee attempted to do in vain*.⁹⁶

In Simon’s efforts to strike a balance between the work of the experienced (conservative) imperial administrators and the (radical) artist members of the newly formed Commission artistique during their joint work on the Archives Committee, he negated the work of the Commission artistique. In his final decision he supported the conservative views of the Archives Committee, declaring that there was no fraud committed by the members of the Louvre curatorial staff. The circumstances of Comte de Nieuwerkerke and Empress

⁹⁴ Sánchez, p. 37.

⁹⁵ Burty sent a letter of resignation to the journal *La Rappel*. Both letters were published December 1, 1870, in an article titled “Les Archives du Louvre.” See Chu, p. 401, note 1. Neither Courbet nor Burty signed the report due to their grave disappointment. See Crapo, p. 156.

⁹⁶ Chu, p. 401, letter 70–36, dated December 1, 1870 Paris, to Jules Simon. Emphasis is mine. The committee to which Courbet refers in the last paragraph is the Commission artistique.

Eugénie are prime examples of imperial personages—one in a position to act on imperial orders, the other to give those orders—each looking out for the other's interests in a traditionally time-honored allegiance to the crown.

The issue of cronyism that so concerned Courbet, Burty, and the members of the Commission delegation is one that impeded their aim to reform the arts and artists, which goes to Courbet's life-long aim of independence for artists. The favoritism in the royal household was well documented by the commission, and it must have seemed to Courbet and his fellow commission members that cronyism and class distinctions triumphed once more. This was an important issue for Courbet, if he and the Commission artistique, and later the Fédération des artistes, (1871) had succeeded it is possible that he would not have found himself painting rotting fruit in prison the following year.

Courbet and Burty resigned from the Archives Commission by December 2, 1870. The Commission artistique served as a model for the arts reform organization, the Fédération des artistes, later initiated and led by Courbet⁹⁷ during the Paris Commune in the spring of 1871. The Prussian siege of Paris was turning into an all-out bombardment of Paris preventing the commission members from meeting by the end of 1870. The Commission waned because of the attacks, especially once the Prussian troops invaded Paris and President Adolph Thiers signed an armistice with Prussia in January 1871. Courbet's involvement in politics once he became a member of the Paris Commune would be ramped up in the spring of 1871. Courbet's efforts to reform the arts would become more tied to the political process, eventually leading him into an evermore restricted and confined existence, that of a prisoner under common law.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sánchez, p. 38.

⁹⁸ Chu, p. 439, letter 70–35.

Courbet, the Commune, and the Fédération des artistes

On March 18, the Central Committee of the National Guard took control of the city of Paris,⁹⁹ the same day that President Theirs' government fled the city to Versailles. Courbet issued a letter to his artist colleagues, which would begin the process of establishing the new arts organization. His introduction states,

My dear fellow artists,
You have done me the honor, at your meeting, of appointing me your president. I am calling you together here, on behalf of the committee that was assigned to assist me, to report to you on our inspection and our actions. We will also take advantage of this meeting to submit to you various insights that arose during the exercise of our duties, in a proposal to you for a new reorganization of the Fine Arts Administration, intended to promote the Exhibition and the interests of art and artists.¹⁰⁰

Courbet directs the course of this reorganization of the fine arts with a more autonomous intent. By his admission of promoting exhibitions designed for the "interest of art and artists," he continues with the duties that he partook for the Commission artistique the previous year, but with more bravado. In his next statement, he makes his aims evermore transparent.

The preceding regimes that governed France nearly destroyed art by protecting it and taking away its spontaneity. That feudal approach, sustained by a despotic and discretionary government, produced nothing but aristocratic and theocratic art, just the opposite of the modern tendencies, of our needs, our philosophy, and the revelation of man manifesting his individuality and his moral and physical independence. Today, when democracy must direct everything, it would be illogical for art, which leads the world, to lag behind in the revolution that is taking place in France at this moment.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Sánchez, p. 40. See also Chu, p. 407, letter 71–5, note 1.

¹⁰⁰ Chu, p. 406, letter 71–5.

¹⁰¹ Chu, p. 406, letter 71–5.

Courbet's views and ideological focus were timely, and expressed the desire for freedom for artists. The art of modern philosophies that Courbet alludes to in his letter is an art that differs significantly from the aristocratic and theocratic art that Courbet mentions in his letter. It was time, according to Courbet to put arts in the past sanctioned by the state, works of religious subjects by Nicolas Poussin (1594 – 1665), *The Finding of Moses*, 1651, and aristocratic works by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684 – 1721), *The Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera*, 1717. It was also time for democracy to reign, not solely for the independence of artists, but for mans 'moral and physical' independence as well. Courbet spoke of this freedom to the communard population at large established on the hill of Montmartre that same day, proclaiming their independence from the regime of despotism, in Courbet's words.¹⁰²

Democracy, freedom, and individuality were the doctrines of this new government, the Government of National Defense or as it would come to be called, the Commune. Freedom of choice in their leaders was a significant step for the people who had tolerated a lack of suffrage rights for most of their lives. The election of the Commune Assembly, a centrist leaning body of the Commune, officially established on March 28, 1871 was a political movement.¹⁰³ On April 19, 1871 a "Declaration of the French People" (also titled "Declaration of the Commune") officially announced the Paris Commune (See Appendix D).

On April 7, 1871 Courbet published an open letter in the Commune journal, *Le Rappel* that spoke of his mission for artists, and art that would be discussed at the next meeting. (See Appendix A for Courbet's mission

¹⁰² Theirs' opposition government had gone to the hill at Montmartre to take possession of the cannons stored there. The Communard National Guard was not on duty when Thiers' troops arrived without horses and equipment to take the cannon. General Le Comte, who had led the troops to Montmartre, was seized by a local rebel crowd. Later joined by General Thomas the two generals were later shot and killed by the revolutionary element. The Communard National Guard took control of the cannons, and Thiers' troops fled along with Thiers to Versailles. See Edward S. Mason, *The Paris Commune: an Episode in the History of the Socialist Movement*, 1967, pp. 124–125.

¹⁰³ Mason, 170–171.

statement.) He called for self-administration by artists and proposed his ideas, which he said corresponded to the “spirit of the Commune.” Courbet further called on artists to “assume control of the museums and art collections,” which had been the intention of the Commission artistique during the Siège of Paris in the fall of 1870.¹⁰⁴ On April 12, 1871 the Commune authorized Courbet to restore the museums and sanctioned the election of the arts delegates. “The Commune authorizes citizen G. Courbet, elected president of the society of painters by a general assembly, to restore as quickly as possible to their normal state the city’s museums. The Commune will give permission to the forty-six delegates that shall be elected tomorrow, Thursday, 13 April, in a public gathering.”¹⁰⁵

That gathering was held on April 13, 1871 and four hundred artists attended.¹⁰⁶ In initiating the second arts organization, Courbet had revised and augmented his first manifesto to reform the arts with more details.¹⁰⁷ It was published in the *Journal Officiel de la Commune* on April 15, 1871 and included a preamble to his fellow artists.¹⁰⁸ It was titled the Fédération des artistes de Paris, the forthcoming title of the arts organization.

The artists of Paris adhering to the principles of the Communal Republic are forming a federation. Such a rallying of all artistic intelligence will have as its base the free expression of art, released from all government supervision and all privilege; the equality of rights between all members of the federation; the independence and dignity of each artist safeguarded by all through the creation of a committee elected by artists through universal suffrage.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Sánchez, p. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Sánchez, p. 44.

¹⁰⁶ Sánchez, p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ The revised manifesto provided more details and included the following heading titles: “Formation of the Committee,” “Length of Mandate,” “Monuments and Museums,” “Exhibitions,” “Education,” “Publicity,” “Arbitration,” and “Individual Initiative.” See Sánchez, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 61.

This manifesto would universally guarantee artists the freedoms to act on their behalf, to no longer have the state control their need and right to market their work, and to have the right in their prison cell to paint in freedom without restraint or coercion.

The four hundred artists at this gathering ratified Courbet's manifesto.¹¹⁰ This broad and comprehensive declaration of artist's rights and self-organization that Courbet proposed was seen as the beginning of dramatic change for the artists of Paris and for France. The Commune, headed by the Central Committee, sanctioned Courbet's position as president of the Fédération des artistes, and his stature was further strengthened when he was elected as a member of the Commune on April 16, 1871.

The next day, the Commune elected him president of the Executive Committee of the Fédération des artistes. Its members appointed him the special delegate for the fine arts at the time of his election and a member of the Committee of Public Education on April 21, 1871.¹¹¹ To augment his political involvements, the Commune appointed him mayor of the sixth arrondissement on April 23, 1871.¹¹² The bond between the political and the arts for Courbet was becoming ever stronger, especially with his eager involvement in the Commune government. Despite the fact that Courbet said he was not political and denied political involvement, a letter to his family dated April 30, 1871, contradicts this notion.

Here I am, thanks to the people of Paris, up to my neck in politics: president of the Federation of Artists, member of the Commune, delegate to the Office of the Mayor, delegate to [the Ministry of] Public Education, four of the most important offices in Paris. I am

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 61.

¹¹¹ Chu, p. 418, letter 71–15, note 1. See also Sánchez, p. 47, who uses the title, "Committee on Public Instruction," likely the same as "Committee of Public Education." See also Frédérique Desbuissons in the Musée d'Orsay Catalogue, Courbet et la Commune: Paris, 13 mars–11 juin, 2000, pp. 10 & 12.

¹¹² Sánchez, p. 47.

in seventh heaven. All the government bodies are organized federally and run themselves. And it is I who presented the model for it with artists of all kinds. I am obliged to carry out energetically all this work that has been entrusted to me and toward which I have so inclined all my life.¹¹³

In her concluding remarks, Clayson speaks to the consensus of scholars on Courbet's roles as member of the Commune and President of the *Fédération des artistes* in which he was active.

Courbet's life and work was defined entirely by his active engagement with the Paris Commune: he headed up the *Fédération des artistes* in the spring of 1871. For Courbet, leading the Artists Federation during the Commune echoed and stemmed from his labors at the helm of the *commission artistique pour la sauvegarde des musées nationaux* during the war. He was furthering his mission to transfer control of the arts in France from the state to the artists. In his case, radical republican commitment linked his activities during the four months of war to his work as a politician and artist in the spring of 1871.¹¹⁴

Clayson places strong emphasis on Courbet's commitments to the Paris Commune because of its direct association with the *Fédération des artistes*, the *Commission artistique pour la sauvegarde des musées nationaux*, and the activities in which Courbet engaged to achieve his goals of, as Clayson points out, transferring the arts in France to the control of artists. As affirmed by Crapo, "When interpreting Courbet's participation in the highly charged events of 1870–1871, it is crucial to recognize that these artistic considerations largely motivated his undertakings and that he embraced political activism essentially as the means by which to achieve desired reforms in art."¹¹⁵ Courbet's political and cultural activities gave credence to his proclamations of freedom, independence, and individuality for his fellow Communards and artists.

¹¹³ Chu, pp. 416–417, letter 71-15.

¹¹⁴ Clayson, p. 364.

¹¹⁵ Crapo, p. 157.

The tide began turning against Courbet, however, because his political activism would pose a threat to the opposition, the commune's sovereignty, and the rights of his fellow artists, and to Courbet himself. Courbet became increasingly caught up and committed to the business of the Commune in part because the Fédération des artistes had grown and was doing well as an organization.¹¹⁶ During a meeting of the Fédération on April 20, 1871, President Courbet called for a motion demanding that the group and all museum personnel pledge allegiance to the Commune or else be revoked. The motion was vigorously contested and then adjourned. Courbet further asserted at a meeting on April 25, 1871 that he was the mediator between the Commune and the Fédération, serving as liaison between the two bodies because of his post hoc title as the Commune's deputy to the fine arts.¹¹⁷

Courbet was now more a liability to his fellow artists in the Fédération des artistes due to their disagreement with his demands. Courbet's radical political practices and philosophies would ultimately provoke an end to his aims to reform the arts and the Commune, and would land him in jail with greater boundaries than he or his artist colleagues and fellow communards had ever been accustomed.

Political Passions Boil Over

Courbet remained a member of the Fédération until the last day of its existence, May 21, 1871 the day the Versailles troops invaded Paris and the Semaine Sanglante began. The Fédération fired the curators of the museums on May 14, 1871 fulfilling Courbet's April 7, 1871 pledge.¹¹⁸ Three days later on May 17, 1871 the Commune, in adhering to Courbet's April 7, 1871 program, posted the following notice, quoted in Sánchez: "Citizens wishing to work toward the

¹¹⁶ Sánchez, p. 48.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 48.

¹¹⁸ Sánchez, p. 55.

reorganization of education and obtain posts as drawing and modeling professors are invited to present themselves at the headquarters of the federal committee of artists, the 19th, 20th, and 21st of May, 1871 from noon to two o'clock."¹¹⁹ Effectively, this act was a further step in the artists taking control of their destinies in the arts. The *Semaine Sanglante* commenced on May 21, 1871 and these proposals did not come to fruition, as the streets of Paris became a bloodbath (Figure 19).

Estimates of dead communards ranged from seventeen thousand to forty thousand.¹²⁰ These estimates included massacres that took place following the end of Bloody Week, May 21 to May 28. As Boime attests:

Although the civil war ended on 28 May, the killing continued unabated. People were shot on the lamest pretext, and anyone accused of being a communard, or who resembled a communard leader, or sheltered an insurgent, or anyone with blackened hands, which could only have been caused by a certain type of rifle, was in immediate danger. In the two days following 28 May over 2,000 Parisians were summarily executed. Those taken prisoner and trundled off to Versailles fared little better; confined to squalid cells and denied appropriate food and water, many died of suffocation as well as from starvation and disease¹²¹ (Figure 20).

Boime's detailed description of the risks of execution that communards faced in the streets of Paris goes directly to Courbet's exposure to these executions, which if he in fact witnessed them first hand likely pained him severely. Courbet

¹¹⁹ Sánchez, p. 57.

¹²⁰ Chu, p. 421, letter 71–18, note 1, estimates the number of dead at 20,000. In Olin Levi Warner's firsthand account of the executions, he states, "The soldiers of Versailles murder twenty thousand men, women *and children*. . . ." emphasis mine. See Albert Boime, "Olin Levi Warner's Defense of the Paris Commune," 1989, p. 20 of Warner's manuscript. Mason estimates the total between 10,000 and 15,000, p. 294; and Boime estimates the same number as Chu, 17,000. Recent scholarship suggests that (earlier high) estimates of 30,000 to 40,000 executed is possible. CAA Conference, Los Angeles, CA, February 25–28, 2009, Jeannene M. Przyblyski, "Looking Ahead and Going Nowhere? Photography, Revolution, and the Paris Commune of 1871," presented at the colloquia, "Art and the Memory of Revolution, 1789–1939," February 27, 2009, West Hall meeting Room, 502B, Level two.

¹²¹ Boime, p. 5.

played a significant role fighting for the realization of his political ideologies and philosophies. So for Courbet to witness these outrageous atrocities of humankind, as will be demonstrated below in the section, *Theory and Meaning* it was likely that he would find a way in which to express his indignation to these atrocious injustices. Courbet had done so in his *Burial at Ornans* (Figure 2) and similar works while looking at the plight of the peasant and working class population of France. It would seem bizarre and rather out of character for him not to address the gravest violence to humankind in a period in which he was most active.

In the previous eight months and especially the last week of the Versailles siege of Paris during the *Semaine Sanglante*, Courbet was exposed to the carnage happening all around him.¹²² It is probable that some of his communard friends and artist colleagues were exposed to the executions of communards and would have shared stories among each other of the slaughter by the Versailles troops. People were rounded up and shot at the various parks in Paris, such as Luxembourg Gardens; the corpses were generally left in piles as they brought in more communards to be executed (Figure 21).

This image, *Shooting Communist Prisoners in the Garden of the Luxembourg*, published in the Illustrated London News—accessible to Courbet either in this reproduction, or in other communard or official newspapers of the day—is a model for the piles of perishing apples in Courbet's painting *Nature morte aux pommes*.¹²³ Edward S. Mason, in his 1967 book on the Paris Commune and emerging socialism describes the methodology of the executions at the Luxembourg Gardens during Bloody Week. "The executioners shot during the day and it was only after night fall that the tumbrils¹²⁴ carted away one day's

¹²² See Chu, p. 421, letter 71-19 and p. 443, letter 71-39 for passages where Courbet talks about witnessing the Communard executions. Cited in this paper pp. 53 & 54.

¹²³ Mason, pp. 285 & 286.

¹²⁴ Tumbriel is a cart or vehicle carrying political prisoners.

harvest to make way for the next.”¹²⁵ Mason cites an eye witness named Maxime Vuillaume who describes the location at the Gardens of the Luxembourg.

“Crowded between a long wall and the end of a grove of trees, a mass of men was surrounded by soldiers.”¹²⁶ The wall in Figure 21 is clearly visible and the grove of trees appears as a dense backdrop described in this passage by Vuillaume. Piles of dead communard bodies are the results of a day’s worth of executions by the Versaillais troops, leaving a direct model for Courbet to have seen first hand, heard from fellow prisoners, and read about in local journals.

The location of the Luxembourg Gardens where many of the massacres took place is in the sixth arrondissement of Paris (Figure 22). It is slightly southwest of the city center near the River Seine. Courbet’s temporary residence¹²⁷ at the time of the *Semaine Sanglante* was in the third arrondissement just northeast of the city center and quite close to the River Seine. Courbet was equally as close to Père Lachaise Cemetery where massive executions took place. In terms of walking distance, Courbet was a brisk fifteen minute walk to Père Lachaise Cemetery, and was a brisk twenty minute walk to the Luxembourg Gardens.¹²⁸ The infamous *Murs des Fédérés* at Père Lachaise, where on May 28, 1871 one-hundred and forty-seven people were lined up before this wall and shot, is another location Courbet would have learned about from multiple sources (Figure 21).¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Mason, p. 285.

¹²⁶ Mason, p.286

¹²⁷ At 12 rue St. Gilles in the third arrondissement. See map Figure 22.

¹²⁸ Time estimates are given based on my personal walking experiences in Paris while studying there for six months, and are quite accurate.

¹²⁹ Mason, p. 295

Period of Detachment and the Colonne Vendôme

For the next several months Courbet had no access to painting and no access to his painting tools until months after his conviction. Courbet had willingly sacrificed his artistic process for the sake of his aims to reform the arts for the previous nine months. According to Clayson, Courbet was, "A man at the height of his career and influence at the end of the Second Empire (1870) whose output as a visual artist was completely *détraqué* by the events of 1870–1871."¹³⁰ What then, would Courbet produce when next he had a chance to paint?

Courbet was arrested on June 7, 1871 for his alleged involvement in the destruction of the Vendôme Column, (May 16, 1871), for usurping public office, and for causing incitement of citizens against each other. Courbet was transferred from prison to prison prior to his trial in August 1871. The trauma of the Commune and the executions of thousands, and Courbet's failure to succeed in getting any substantial measures enacted to reform the arts, must have affected his outlook on the future. As I argued in the section *Courbet's art and sociopolitical meaning*, Courbet was now detached from the executions, and from his other failures. As he wrestled through this period of separation his sole aim once incarcerated at the Ste Pélagie prison by October 1871, was to paint. Courbet was an artist with an œuvre filled with meaning about the plight of the peasantry and working class, now he needs his paints to express the inhumanity that is buried and yearning to be liberated.

The toppling of the Colonne Vendôme preceded the events of Bloody Week (Figures 23 & 24). This extraordinary event would exact a cost upon Courbet greater than the cost of money, a cost it seemed that he was not entirely prepared to pay. The charges and trial that followed would have a surprising end result for him, from his point of view and would, I argue, usher in

¹³⁰ Clayson, p. 364.

a transition to a new artistic program, one that would signify an internal model of suppressed aggression.

To situate the following proposition by Courbet in the context of the discussion of his passions, relevant background on Courbet's views of the Colonne Vendôme will be useful. We learn that Courbet did not relish protecting the Colonne Vendôme while he was president of the Commission artistique in the fall of 1870. On September 14, 1870 Courbet wrote the Government of National Defense and made his recommendations for the disposition of the Column.

Proposition to the members of the Government of National Defense:

Citizen Courbet, president of the artist's committee charged with the preservation of the national museums of works of art, appointed by a general assembly of artists:

Whereas the Vendôme Column is a monument devoid of any artistic value, tending by its character to perpetuate the ideas of wars and conquests that were part of the imperial dynasty but that are frowned on by a republican nation;

Express the wish that: the Government of National Defense will be so kind as to authorize him to unbolt that column, or take itself the initiative thereto by charging with that task the administration of the Artillery Museum and by having the materials transported to the Hôtel de la Monnaie.¹³¹

Following counter proposals from the GND (Government of National Defense) and Minister of Fine Arts, Jules Simon, both of which Courbet rejected, he replied on October 5, 1870 in defense of his radical republican views about the symbolic nature of the column and further defined his proposals for it.

I did not request that the Vendôme Column be broken. I wanted to have that mass of melted cannon that perpetuates the tradition of conquest, of looting, and of murder removed from your street—called the rue de la Paix. I see no harm in transporting the reliefs to a historical museum or in arranging them in panels on the walls of the courtyard of the Invalides¹³² (Figure 25). Those brave souls

¹³¹ Chu, p. 388, letter 70–27.

¹³² The *Invalides* was a hospital built by Louis XIV in the seventeenth century for injured military.

have earned those cannon at the price of their limbs.¹³³ The sight will remind them of their victories—if you want to call them victories!—and especially of their suffering. It will be a long time before we agree on the true sense of the word “democracy”! A statue! Continuous misunderstandings and returnings to the monstrous mistakes of the past! Seriously, is this monument, that will perpetuate hatred and conservatism in us, a strenuous effort and step forward toward universal socialism?¹³⁴

It is unclear whether Courbet himself was actually present at the fall of the Vendôme Column. If so, making him potentially complicit in its destruction. Riat states that, “Some say they saw him with the other members of the commune wearing a straw hat, and playing with a cane worth forty sous. Others, such as Castagnary, denied it.”¹³⁵ Castagnary was Courbet’s closest friend and confidant, and would assist Courbet during his trial. According to Nochlin, fellow communard Jules Vallès had a rather different point of view. Writing under the pen name “Jean de la Rue,” a week after Courbet’s death Vallès wrote, “The day the Column was toppled, he was there, at the *Place*, with his twenty-sou cane, his four-franc straw hat, his ready-made overcoat . . . ‘It’ll crush me as it falls, you’ll see!’ he said, turning to a group of friends.”¹³⁶

¹³³ The Vendôme Column was made from the melted-down Austrian and Russian cannons conquered in the battle of Austerlitz. See Chu, p. 393, note 5, and see Riat, p. 199. The Battle of Austerlitz was fought by French Emperor Napoléon Bonaparte in Vienna December 2, 1805. See Price, p. 132.

¹³⁴ Chu, pp. 392–393, letter 70–32. These objections of Courbet written in the fall of 1870 were deep-seated. Like his fellow republicans, Courbet had a severe distaste for the image of Napoléon on the top of the Vendôme (Figure 30). Although Courbet’s statement about the Vendôme Column refers to “the tradition of conquest, of looting, and of murder,” and references Napoléon I, not his grand nephew Napoléon III, Courbet had his reasons for expressing these passionate ideas, as demonstrated by Riat. “[T]he Minister of Interior, Champagny, ‘begged Napoléon [Bonaparte I] to allow the Emperor’s own image to crown the column [instead of Charlemagne], thus the conception of the monument is the apotheosis of Napoléon I.’ It was this aspect of being a personal apotheosis and not collective as was the aim of the Arc de Triomphe, which made the enemies of the imperial government hate the column.”¹³⁴ The enemies in this case are Courbet and the Communards. (See Riat, p. 199).

¹³⁵ Riat, p. 213.

¹³² Nochlin, p. 76.

Although there are similarities in the physical description of Courbet from both Riats' and Vallès' sightings of him at the Place Vendôme it is also certainly possible that his fellow communards would likely have attempted to protect their identities, and Courbet's, for fear of prosecution. In the case of Vallès, he may have felt a sense of immunity from prosecution by merely writing an obituary. Moreover, as Nochlin makes clear, Vallès was a fellow communard whose intentions were to protect the achievements that Courbet attained as a proud member of the Commune.¹³⁷ Ironically, the toppling of the Vendôme Column concerned Courbet little while preparing for his trial, which we will examine briefly as we move to the heart of the theory: his oppression while incarcerated and the emergence of a new artistic program expressing Courbet's suppressed aggressions and passions.

Incarceration, Despair, Oppression

From Prison to Prison, "They've killed me!"¹³⁸

According to Sánchez, Courbet's trial and conviction was representative of the early, moral-order Republic's repression targeted at artists and communards¹³⁹ (Figure 26). The statistics show that there were 34,772 dossiers of incrimination at military tribunals prosecuting communards.¹⁴⁰ Courbet was one of those arrested on June 7, 1871, at the home of A. Lecomte at the address of 12 de la rue Saint-Gilles (Figure 22) in the third arrondissement.¹⁴¹ Courbet

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.76

¹³⁸ Riat, p. 223. Courbet in response to a fellow prisoner after the outcome of Courbet's trial where he was found guilty of complicity in the destruction of the Colonne Vendôme.

¹³⁹ Sánchez, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 108. Chu states, "According to an official statistic, 43,522 suspected Commune sympathizers were taken prisoner in the months immediately following the entrance of the Versailles into Paris, though further arrests were made later on," p. 444, note 1, letter, 71-39.

¹⁴¹ See Chu, p. 420, letter 71-17. Courbet informing Castagnary of his arrest. In note 1, Chu identifies the person and address where Courbet was arrested and had stayed since May 23,

was immediately taken to the Conciergerie, and as Riat describes, “paraded in a carriage taken to Headquarters to verify his identity, then to cells at the Prefecture—number 24 and interrogated by M. Berillon, police commissioner of the Palais de Justice.”¹⁴² The primary charges against Courbet were, (1) participating in an uprising and inciting citizens to take up arms against each other, (2) usurping public office, and (3) being an accomplice in destruction of the Colonne Vendôme.¹⁴³

In mid-June Courbet was taken to Versailles at the Grand Écuries, or Grand Stables (Figures 20 & 27), where he was held until his return to Paris and transferred to the Mazas Prison on June 30, 1871. It was not until the end of July 1871 that he was taken back to Versailles at the Orangerie jail to stand trial¹⁴⁴ where he was defended as being non-political.

Testimony in Courbet’s defense followed his attorney’s strategy in painting Courbet as non-political, with actions and intentions held solely for the purpose of the arts. After September 4, 1870 Etienne Arago the mayor of Paris testified, “To me he is an artist and not a politician. I do not believe that he has changed. He was a painter of great talent, and he still is.”¹⁴⁵ He added, “As mayor of Paris,

1871. See also Musée d’Orsay Catalogue, p. 57; and see Riat, p. 215 for information on the date and place of arrest. (A. Lecomte is listed by Chu in note 1, letter 71-17 as, “a certain A. Lecomte, a maker of musical instruments,” who lived at the address of arrest. (No documentation is provided as to Lecomte’s first name and I found no other source documenting his first name.)

¹⁴² Riat, p. 215.

¹⁴³ Riat, p. 220. See also Sánchez, p. 108 who states that Courbet was formally charged on July 14, 1871 with two counts: (1) destruction of the Vendôme Column and (2) “illegitimate usurpation of public functions,” to which Courbet claimed innocence.

¹⁴⁴ English translation, original in French from the Musée d’Orsay Catalogue, p. 57. « Il est ramené à Paris le 30 juin, à la prison Mazas , et ce n’est que vers la fin du mois de juillet qu’il est de nouveau envoyé à Versailles à l’Orangerie du château, transformée pour l’occasion en maison d’arrêt. » According to Chu, p. 430, note 3, Courbet was transferred to Versailles July 21, 1871 and he stood trial beginning August 7, 1871 along with fifteen other communards. Courbet took the stand in his defense on August 14, 1871.

¹⁴⁵ Sánchez, p. 109.

I have seen many demonstrations, disturbances, and riots, and M. Courbet has never appeared before my eyes during those terrible moments.”¹⁴⁶

Others testified on Courbet’s behalf, mentioning his work for the protection of the arts, but did not tie this work to his arts reforms, a dangerous path to take if mentioned in testimony since it implied the usurpation of the existing arts administrations.¹⁴⁷ Charles-Alexandre Lachaud,¹⁴⁸ Courbet’s attorney, persevered with his strategy to characterize Courbet as non-political and argued that, “you could not do anything without being a member of the Commune. It was the painter who was in the commune more than the citizen.”¹⁴⁹ The latter statement is clearly an on going attempt by Courbet’s attorney Lachaud to characterize Courbet’s role in the Commune as an artist not a politician.

On September 2, 1871, the Council of War found Courbet guilty, “Of having, during the month of May 1871, in Paris, become an accomplice, through the abuse of authority, to the destruction of the Column of the Place Vendôme, a public monument.”¹⁵⁰ Courbet was unanimously sentenced to six months in prison, fined five hundred francs, and forced to pay the costs of the trial to the Public Treasury out of his personal wealth for the present and future.¹⁵¹ A day after the sentence was read, Courbet wrote to his family with hope and a positive outlook in his tone. “I don’t know yet whether it will be a pure and

¹⁴⁶ Chu, p. 429, letter 71–26.

¹⁴⁷ Sánchez, p. 109.

¹⁴⁸ Chu, p. 651. Lachaud (1818–1882) was considered a brilliant defense attorney.

¹⁴⁹ Sánchez, p. 110.

¹⁵⁰ Riat, p. 223

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 223. See also Musée d’Orsay catalogue, p. 57.

simple acquittal or a computation of exile . . . but I won't serve the prison term that is almost certain."¹⁵² But, Courbet was wrong.

By September 22, 1871 the artist began serving his sentence at the Ste Pélagie prison. While writing to his friend and strongest advocate, Jules Castagnary, he seemed perplexed at his conviction, given the evidence. "In spite of my efforts, and those of my codefendants, and those of my lawyer, that court has decreed that I was responsible for the fall of the Column. This fate was allotted to me, in spite of the factual evidence."¹⁵³ But the evidence was there, in the eyes of the court.

Looking at the evidence, the date of the decree to destroy the column might have resulted in Courbet's acquittal. On April 12, 1871, the Commune issued the decree: "The column of the Place Vendôme will be demolished."¹⁵⁴ Four days after the release of this decree, Courbet became a member of the Commune, April 16, 1871.¹⁵⁵ His role as accomplice to the destruction could not factually be justified since he was not a member of the Commune at the time the decree was proclaimed. And no witness came forward to testify that Courbet, in fact, was present during the *chute de la Colonne*.¹⁵⁶ Since this was the one charge for which Courbet was convicted, he understandably felt betrayed and distraught. "They've killed me, my poor Monteil, these people have killed me, I can feel it; I will never again do anything worthwhile," Courbet said to one of his codefendants regarding the trial outcome.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Chu, p. 437, letter 71–32.

¹⁵³ Chu, p. 439, letter 71–35.

¹⁵⁴ Riat, p. 210.

¹⁵⁵ Chu, p. 634. Courbet is elected to the Commune in the supplementary elections.

¹⁵⁶ French for 'fall of the column.'

¹⁵⁷ Riat, p. 223.

This expression of despair by Courbet began earlier in the summer when Courbet was ailing with medical issues and transferred from prison to prison. In mid-July while at Mazas prison he wrote to a friend about the 'calamity of his mother's death.'¹⁵⁸ On July 27, 1871, after Courbet's transfer to Versailles in preparation for his trial, he wrote to his sisters, Juliette and Zélie, "This terrible news (about his Mother's death), coming on top of the state of mind in which I already found myself, has plunged me into the deepest despair."¹⁵⁹

On September 6, 1871 Courbet was transferred back to the prison of the Orangerie at Versailles. By mid-September 1871 he was in ill health and requested again to be transferred to the military hospital at Versailles. He was concerned because the Orangerie at Versailles was one of the most notorious improvised jails created after the Commune to hold the excess prisoners,¹⁶⁰ and his health was none the better because of the conditions (Figure 20).

In the month of October 1871 after transfer to his final destination the Ste Pélagie prison on September 22, 1871, he wrote to a friend about being locked up and in chains every night surrounded by thieves and murderers. He also laments of his misfortunes besides being incarcerated.

I have been robbed, ruined, defamed, dragged in chains through the streets of Paris, of Versailles. I have been reviled, heaped with abuse. I have rotted in solitary confinements that drain you of your mental and physical faculties. I have slept amid the rabble on the vermin-infested ground, been transported and retransported from prison to prison, in hospitals with people dying all around me, in Black Marias, in cells too small for a body, [always] with a rifle or revolver at my throat, for four months.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Chu, p. 428, letter 71–25. Courbet speaks of his "enormous afflictions" and the "irrevocable calamity" of his mother's death, June 3, 1871 before he was arrested and in Paris. In a letter from mid-July, 1871, letter 71–24 he speaks of having "lost everything," his atelier in Ornans having been "burgled by the Prussians," his "paintings" being "completely damaged from having been moved so often," and "rotting in cellars," and fearing that his "future has to be rebuilt."

¹⁵⁹ Chu, p. 429, letter 71–26.

¹⁶⁰ See Chu, p. 438, letter 71–34, and note 1.

¹⁶¹ Chu, p. 443, letter 71–39.

Courbet's despair nourished his desire to paint his emotions and the subjects at hand were fruits and flowers. The restraints, both physical and mental experienced in prison prevented Courbet from painting the figural, but resulted in him painting a cluster of decomposing apples. The following section will explore the hegemony of his prison life, which I believe resulted in Courbet's curious paintings of fruit.

Incarceration: Restraining 'counter-power'

Courbet's incarceration at the Ste Pélagie prison was a period of inactivity for Courbet, which, after the intolerable circumstances he had already experienced during his early incarcerations, trial, and conviction, must have been quite difficult to endure. Courbet had been engaged in significant activities throughout; he was a man who prided himself in working to legitimately reform the arts and participated in the founding of a new and potentially prosperous government, a government for the people. As indicated, Courbet's work for the Commission artistique, the FDA, and the Commune kept him occupied with multiple tasks, committees, and essential government duties. Yet now he sat in prison, in chains, his actions often monitored so that he hesitated to write to family and friends.¹⁶² Courbet was constrained in his life like never before. After a year of no art production, the lifeblood of his career, he would soon find that his desire to produce art was inhibited by his jailors.

The first mention by Courbet and his desire to work and obtain his tools to paint was in a letter to his sister Juliette, a few days after his arrival at Ste Pélagie, on September 29, 1871. "I will try to work. I'll try to get my paints and work a little."¹⁶³ The second passage to this is in a letter to Castagnary, written

¹⁶² See Chu, letter to sister Juliette, mentions that his letters are censored, p. 441, letter 71-38, and letter to his friend Lydie saying although he is writing to her, he is giving it to someone who will visit him because of the monitoring of his time and his letters, p. 443 & 444, letter 71-39.

¹⁶³ Chu, p. 441, letter 71-38.

likely in October,¹⁶⁴ and is more telling of the inhibitive nature to which he is encountering.

Something incomprehensible has come up: they are preventing me from working, on purpose, notwithstanding my requests and my sister's. M. Valentin¹⁶⁵ doesn't want me to. This is all the more frustrating as I have had an idea, which is to paint bird's-eye views of Paris,...as I would do for seascapes. But—and it is an unprecedented and unparalleled outrage—I am not allowed to have what I need to work with, and I am the only one treated this way at Ste Pélagie, where everyone is forced to work.¹⁶⁶

In a revealing passage of Courbet's letters on this subject is a letter to his lawyer, M. Lachaud dated October 25, 1871. After signing the letter at the end, Courbet adds the following passage. "I am in every kind of pain: all the guards are preventing me from working at Ste Pélagie and from carrying out here what I had planned."¹⁶⁷ Courbet then adds in another paragraph that he is given the right to paint, but is unhappy with the details of the restrictions. "They just authorized me to paint in my cell without leaving it, without any kind of light or model. Their authorization is useless for in that case I have no other motifs than God Almighty and the Holy Virgin."¹⁶⁸

There is a Foucauldian "discipline of power," suggested in the constraints placed upon Courbet in not allowing him to have either the tools or models to paint. The restrictive nature of imprisonment, isolation, and the watchfulness of Courbet by the guards directly relate to Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's Panopticon as being a "discipline of power." Could it be argued, however, that

¹⁶⁴ Chu, p. 445, letter, 71-40 in note 1 points out that though Courbet dates this letter 'August,' it is likely it was written either at the end of September or in early October, 1871 following his transfer to the Ste Pélagie.

¹⁶⁵ The Prefect of Police in Paris, Chu, p. 445, letter 71-40, note 3.

¹⁶⁶ Chu, p. 444, letter 71-40.

¹⁶⁷ Likely a reference to his plan to paint bird's-eye views of Paris.

¹⁶⁸ Chu, p. 446, letter 71-42. The references to religious figures as Chu states likely reference religious images found in Courbet's cell.

Courbet is acting in a self-indulgent manner, requiring his brushes, paints, and models in his prison cell? Perhaps not, because for Courbet restraining his painting, inhibiting him from putting down on canvas his expressions of the recent traumatic events he experienced, was a crucial loss for him.

This inhibition by his jailors was particularly stifling after the tremendous administrative activities that kept Courbet from painting for more than a year. Courbet's failure to provide a more equitable livelihood for all, followed by the crushing blows of defeat to the Commune and the FDA, caused Courbet deep disappointment, and following an unjust imprisonment resulted in a deep sense of despair weighing heavily on Courbet's mind.

The Bonapartist government that placed him in prison, according to Courbet, "bore him a special grudge."¹⁶⁹ This 'special grudge' correlates to Foucault's assertion that "discipline must neutralize the effects of counter-power." After all, Courbet was instrumentally involved in the aims of the Commune as a member, to overthrow the conservative government of the Third Republic (1870 – 1914) following the Siège by the Prussians (from the fall of 1870 to January 1871), as mayor of the sixth arrondissement, and as member of the Committee of Education, among other committee memberships he held, both part of the Commune government. Courbet was a crucial operative in organizing the Commission artistique in 1870 and the FDA in 1871. Thus, Courbet's administrative activities are construed as a "revolt" and a "counter power"¹⁷⁰ against the conservative government.

Under the Third Republic, the government was justified in its repression of Courbet's artistic expressions and its will to keep Courbet under surveillance at all times. In prison every night he was "locked up in irons as thick as my arm,"¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Chu, p. 444, letter 71-39. Reference to Courbet in his letter about the monitoring of his person while writing a letter, suggesting control over his actions.

¹⁷⁰ Foucault, p. 219.

¹⁷¹ Chu, p. 442, letter 71-39.

which goes to the notion of physical control or a 'mechanism of power' over another individual.¹⁷² Given Courbet's highly respected positions in the FDA and Commune, and his standing within the art community, these restrictions against painting, against working for the cause of equal rights can be seen as a most restrictive act against Courbet's nature.

Marshal MacMahon, Commander of the Third Republic government, which suppressed the Commune revolt during the Semaine Sanglante, (May 21 – May 28, 1871) had the power to apply this 'mechanism of power' over Courbet, even if in subtle ways. I believe that the fruit paintings, specifically his *Nature morte aux pommes*, are derived from Courbet's despair over the surveillance at the prison, and of the failures of the Commune and arts reform.

Courbet's power to paint his ideological beliefs and philosophical convictions through an expression of the recent tragedies was being inhibited by the state; something Courbet had encountered most of his life. By November 2, 1871 his jailors gave Courbet the tools to paint. In briefly describing what Courbet painted while in prison, Riat suggests that during Courbet's time at the Pélagie, "He painted a whole series of flowers and fruits. They were strongly drawn, vigorously colored, but in a somber style, reminiscent of his early work; his thoughts, like his cell, were dark."¹⁷³ This notion of the *dark* that Riat refers to is evident in Courbet's various *pommes* paintings. A formal analysis of his works of apples will bear out the assertions that Courbet's movements and right to paint while incarcerated were impinged upon. This, I believe resulted in his careful selection of the subject matter and scrutiny of the setting of *des pommes*. Because what the *pommes* paintings actually represent is the repression of an entire social structure, the peasantry, and the working class.

¹⁷² A reference to Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's *Panopticon*.

¹⁷³ Riat, p. 226

Emblematizing *des pommes* of Gustave Courbet

Looking at the painting *Nature morte aux pommes*, (Figure 3) the first thing noticeable about the painting is that there is an immediate sense of the “dark” as seen in Courbet’s earlier works, particularly of the late 1840s and early 1850s works to which Riat seems to refer.¹⁷⁴ The contrast of the red apples against the somber background strongly emphasizes the quality of the dark. But what is obscure about it and at the same time expresses Courbet’s passions about this work from a formalistic point of view? The oblique quality is in the fact that he paints fruit, not figures.¹⁷⁵ What could be more obscure than expressing his despair and detachment than painting fruit?

As for the passion in the work, it is contentious in its formal aspects. The composition, scale, proportion, and incongruous plein air setting are stunning if not insistently planned out. The incongruity of the composition, the apples that are too large in relation to the tree in this setting, are like human corpses lying beneath a tree, piled and slain. The same can be said of the painting, *Pommes*, (Figure 4) with a smaller pile of apples positioned before a brooding dark tree in the background. The composition lays out the apples in the foreground, large and bulbous with the tree set in a shallow space not far behind the pile of apples. The apples, (and pear to the right rear) in varying degrees of red, bruised gold, and yellow demonstrate a significant contrast between the heavy, dark tree trunk and the ground on which they lie, as Riat suggests, implying Courbet’s dark early works, and his thoughts in his cell.

What is significant about the apples in their placement and composition is that the apples loom large, as if upon a table surface in the front of the picture plane; yet they rest upon the soil of an outdoor setting before a tree. The apples

¹⁷⁴ I think it can be said that in all phases of Courbet’s oeuvre there is an element of ‘the dark.’ Though it is not present in every painting of each of his categories, i.e., manifestos, hunting scenes, or landscapes.

¹⁷⁵ Though he was not provided models in his prison room he certainly was not devoid of figures to paint. He had guards and other staff at the prison who could have sat for him.

as grouped together all conform to their scale and proportion, but the tree's scale and proportion in relation to the group of fruit is discordant. It is uncertain if the tree is set back as in a middle ground, or in the foreground with apples nestled to its' trunk.

This is a rather peculiar and incongruous setting for the apples. The pictorial surface plays with our notion of perspective and scale with these large apples jumping out at us. This jarring scale and proportion suggests the scale of human corpses, positioned before and under a tree. This suggests Courbet was painting something more corporeal than simple apples.

In *Pommes*, (Figure 4) the fruits are equally as large in proportion and scale as they are in *Nature* (Figure 3) and the work is particularly dark with little contrast between the ground, tree and sky behind. The tree is less defined in the background, but still appears to have the same distorted pictorial scale as the tree in *Nature*. *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre*, (Figure 5), 1871 – 1872 or, *Red Apples at the Foot of a Tree*, seems to make the point about the fruit huddling toward the tree and its dissonant nature.

Theory and Meaning

Depictions of fruit piled and scattered under a tree is a seemingly subtle expression of the nature morte genre in art history (Figures 28 & 29) for the average viewer. In the instance of Courbet's pommes paintings, they are expressive of the recent cultural and political turmoil, the losses in human terms, and the defeats suffered by Courbet professionally and personally. The common place nature of groups of apples would not, at first glance seem to be emblematic of Courbet's political views, nor of his repressive and isolated incarceration from the Concergerie, to Versailles, ending at the prison of the Ste Pélagie. The arguments presented do, however emphatically suggest the possibility of the socio-political in the nature morte fruit tableaux. To corroborate this theory, we need a link between Courbet, his paintings, and the catastrophe of the thousands executed that might convince us these works suggest the

carnage of dead corporeal communard bodies. That link is evident if we look beyond the obvious interpretations of these paintings by attributing a broader meaning that considers the French society at large.

We know that Courbet's sister Zoé brought fruit to Courbet to paint while he was in prison at Ste Pélagie.¹⁷⁶ We do not know what biological condition it was in, (i.e., whether it was fresh, bruised, or otherwise), nor do we know what color the fruit was when he begins to paint it (i.e., all yellow, partly yellow, or all red). We can hypothesize that he began the tableaux at Ste Pélagie with the apple groups only, (say for instance set on a table top) then later, perhaps--while at Dr. Duval's-- added the trees and landscape in the background.¹⁷⁷ But these are moot points without specific evidence. To suggest the theory is feasible, we need to test these assertions, to know if Courbet had any first or second hand exposure to the mass executions of his fallen Communards.

In a letter dated mid-June 1871 and addressed to Pierre Dorian while Courbet was incarcerated at the Conciergerie in Paris, Courbet referenced a mutual friend, Prosper-Victor Considérant¹⁷⁸ who Courbet suggests must have spoken [to him, (Dorian)], "at length about me [Courbet] and the deplorable events that I had to witness, without being able to prevent them."¹⁷⁹ In another letter to his friend Lydie Jolicerc¹⁸⁰ dated early October [(?)] 1871, while at the Ste Pélagie, Courbet wrote, "Since the world began, the earth has never seen such a thing. Among no other people, in no other period of history or other era

¹⁷⁶ See my note 10.

¹⁷⁷ This theory may account for the incongruity in the skewed scale and proportion of the fruit to the tree.

¹⁷⁸ Prosper-Victor Considérant (1808 – 1893) was a Fourierist, Journalist, and politician who founded various socialist journals.

¹⁷⁹ Chu, p. 421, letter 71-19.

¹⁸⁰ Lydie Joliclerc, born Chenoz, (1840 – 1897), good friend to Courbet especially during his later years. The month is in question by Chu.

has one seen such a massacre, such vengefulness.”¹⁸¹ These passages indicate Courbet did witness the massacres in Paris, albeit it is possible that Courbet saw the images in news reports, heard the stories from friends, either first or second hand. This suggests that the apples and other fruits in his tableaux *Nature*, *Pommes, rouge au pied d'un arbre*, and *Pommes*, represent vanitas, or the passage of time in the corporeality of dead Communard corpses.

It further suggests the passage of an era of revolution and of the reform of the arts for Courbet and his fellow communards. Both were losses for Courbet that caused him despair, much like the passing of his mother. The trees as background imply slain bodies strewn and piled at park or garden locations such as the Luxembourg Gardens, (Figure 21) and the Père Lachaise Cemetery.¹⁸² For Courbet and his fellow communards, it was the loss of their ideal of a better society, one with equal rights and opportunities for all, fought for on the barricades of Paris.

Ultimately, these unusual paintings are Courbet's manifestation of loss and anger toward an ever repressive government that suppressed a radical faction of a society in their efforts to achieve a better life. Through the pictorial plan and curious perspective of the three pommes tableaux, they equally manifest Courbet's buried passions, indeed, Courbet even referenced his unusual compositions in a letter to his sister Juliette dated March 3, 1872. "Here," Courbet observed, "I had the idea of doing some curious paintings of fruits."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Chu, p. 443, letter 71-39. See also note 2, Chu states, "On the Commune massacre, see Serman," (1986, 517 – 24).

¹⁸² Although Figure 21 of the executions at the Luxembourg Gardens does not explicitly show large trees positioned in the direct background of the executed, (they're behind the wall) it is possible that this image does not represent every execution location at the park used by the Versaillais soldiers for their shootings of Communards. I want to make clear that what I am suggesting in my theory is simply Courbet's use of the trees as background, and not that he is specifically painting the grounds of the Luxembourg Gardens or the garden areas at the Père Lachaise Cemetery. Since Courbet painted from life, it is possible that he painted trees from the gardens at Dr. Duval's clinic to complete the paintings.

The defeatism Courbet suffered, it seems to me, is revealed in these rotting, decomposing apples, as he appropriates the apples for the dead friends and colleagues of the Commune.

Conclusion

On December 30, 1871 Courbet was transferred to Dr. Duval's in Neuilly outside of Paris where he painted nature morte tableaux, about thirteen canvases,¹⁸⁴ a few of which may have been the same nature morte works discussed in this study. Soon he would move on to his landscape paintings, and paint a few still life paintings of trout. Before Courbet could move forward there was one more gnawing obstacle with which he had to cope.

Twenty-three deputies of the Chamber of the parliament proposed a bill that required Courbet to pay for the expenses to reconstruct the Vendôme Column.¹⁸⁵ On February 19, 1873, a bill on the Vendôme Column was placed on the parliamentary agenda.¹⁸⁶ By May 30, 1873 the National Assembly adopted the bill for reconstruction of the Vendôme. The bill charges the government to begin work only after a civil tribunal has determined the extent of Courbet's financial responsibility for the column's rebuilding. It was also to be crowned with a statue of Napoléon I¹⁸⁷ (Figure 30). The final blow to Courbet and his hopes to remain in France came on June 19, 1873. The minister of finance, Pierre Magne, ordered the sequestration of all Courbet's property in France.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ Chu, p. 454. Courbet is at Dr. Duval's and this suggests that Courbet painted these works there.

¹⁸⁴ Chu, p. 453, letter 72-4.

¹⁸⁵ Chu, p.471, letter 73-1. Courbet writing to Castagnary January 16, 1873 about a notice in the journal Siècle.

¹⁸⁶ Riat, p. 233. See Chu, p. 488, letter 73-18, note 5. Castagnary informed Courbet of the Vendôme reconstruction bill being placed on the agenda of the Chamber.

¹⁸⁷ Chu, p. 499 & 500, note 1. See Riat, p. 234

¹⁸⁸ Chu, p. 501, letter 73-33, note 1.

Courbet had produced many paintings since leaving Dr. Duval's and now much of his production was being taken by the state in lieu of reparations for the rebuilding of the Vendôme Column. Courbet had vacillated about leaving for Switzerland in June and two days before his departure in July he wrote to Castagnary about attending his trial in his defense. He reiterated to Castagnary that at the War Council during his trial on August 17, 1871, a fellow communard, Paschal Grousset had testified that Courbet was not to blame for the fall of the Vendôme Column.¹⁸⁹ Two days later, July 23, 1873 Courbet arrived in Switzerland, avoiding payment for the reconstruction of the Vendôme Column. Courbet lived there in self-imposed exile, for the remainder of his life. Courbet would not replicate the fruit paintings again, thus establishing the beginning and the end of a brief foray into an artistic program.

Concluding Theoretical Analysis

The small group of nature morte fruit paintings I have considered and theorized in this study represent a significant role in Courbet's artistic program. I sought to demonstrate that they were emblematic of Courbet's despair, his passions, his defeats, and his failures through a most trying time in Courbet's life. The works also emblemize Courbet's political philosophies in having the freedom to express his views in a free society. The apples are about the isolation and repression Courbet and his fellow communards experienced during their incarceration, but are equally emblematic of the inequitable lives the peasantry and working class encountered on a day to day basis.

It is impossible to prove definitively whether the meaning that I have proposed is true or possible. There has not been a comprehensive study or similar interpretation of Courbet's apple paintings by scholars that considers these paintings by employing this method. It is reasonable to suggest, however,

¹⁸⁹ Chu, p. 510, letter 73-42, note 1. According to Chu, this claim was later reiterated in an open letter to The Times on June 23, 1874.

that, beyond the intention of an artistic program, these works may well have symbolized the ephemerality of life--in this case, the lives of executed Communards. The apples symbolize the tens of thousands massacred during the Semaine Sanglante, and specifically in Courbet's pommes paintings the piles of rotting, dead communards. The visual notion of "piles of corpses" is ever clearer when considering Mason's recounting of the executioners doing their shooting during the day, leaving bodies of young and old piled up and waiting for the carts to remove them for the next day's executions.¹⁹⁰

We have letters written by Courbet that reveal he was exposed in some form, possibly as an eye witness to these executions, or at least to the aftermath of the heaps of bodies. This horrible sight would have affected him gravely, as it would be unknown to him at the time of his exposure who he might have known in the plies of the dead; possibly his fellow communards, commission artistique, or FDA members, that could have been amassed in the mounds of rotting corpses. So while incarcerated he paints apples and various fruits, decomposing, rotting, and strewn under trees. Courbet is isolated, repressed, and despairing defeated at reforming the arts that drove his passions for years. Guards at the Ste Pélagie prison have power over his actions, movements, and thoughts (as in the monitoring of his letters) so Courbet abandons the figural subjects of his controversial past and in expressing his outrage of the massacres, he chooses to paint banal innocuous fruit to represent his fallen Communards.

These paintings of apples represent a paradox for Courbet, by simultaneously articulating his passions in an oblique manner. Courbet could not paint the figural works he was so accustomed to because as he said, he was not allowed models to paint. For Courbet, it seems, the fruit paintings represent a memorial to the aspirations of those who struggled hard for a better way of life. Choosing apples that were not unspoiled, healthy, and resting on a plate to be consumed, but rather were decaying and resting upon the earth underneath

¹⁹⁰ Mason, p. 285.

trees like so many tossed carcasses, demonstrates Courbet's yearning to teach his fellow communards and the working class that the struggle for equality is worth the sacrifice. For Gustave Courbet this representation of still life possessed a meaning that was ephemeral in nature and enduring in scope.

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Appendix – A
Mission Statement for Artists,
By Gustave Courbet, April 7, 1871¹⁹¹

- Artists to assume control of museums, and art collections
- Artists from the twenty-two arrondissements of the Seine shall appoint two delegates per arrondissement to form a new committee and determine its ad-hoc jurisdiction
- This assembly appoints museum directors, curators, and personnel
- This assembly advises on annual exhibitions, dates, duration, and appointment of an administration board. Exhibitors to have responsibility for choosing admission jury
- The Fine Arts section of the Institute shall be abolished and will henceforth be a private association
- The École des beaux-arts and the École de Rome shall be abolished. The Parisian building shall be available to students for studies, allowing free choice among their professors. The city of Paris shall allocate funds for a contest, providing the winners the means to study the arts and arts of other nations
- The city of Paris shall no longer hold authority over the provinces
- Drawing teachers of the parochial schools of Paris shall be appointed by delegates on the basis of competitive examinations
- Delegates shall organize a contest for commissions of art works. For promotion, a newspaper will be published called the *Arts Monitor*
- Artists may exhibit there work separate from the majority
- The general assembly and the jury shall preside over the distribution of the prizes, awarded by an official report listing every exhibitor
- Honor crosses and all types of medals shall be abolished

¹⁹¹ Chu, pp. 410 – 411, letter 71-9

- Exhibition space shall be given to the lowest-bidding private company; funds exceeding the expenses will transfer to raffle tickets, sold in lieu of entrance tickets. The raffle drawing will be at the conclusion of the exhibition
- Artists submitting works of art shall set the price for each work, printed in a book when consent is given and winners of the raffle shall freely choose a painting corresponding to the winning ticket. A painting selected at a higher price can be chosen as long as the raffle holder pays the difference.
- Government bodies of Paris will speak to the exhibition committee regarding their acquisitions or commissions and the committee will refer them to the assembly. Provincial cities will also comply, unless they speak directly to the artist
- The exhibition space may be used for alternative purposes for the remainder of the year ten days after the exhibition
- Exhibitors may store their canvases there for a fee to the administration. The space may be used for exhibitions of private galleries, old or modern paintings, and of art objects, perhaps resulting in a permanent exhibition

APPENDIX –B

Jeremy Bentham's Twelve Principles of Punishment

These principles are derived from Bentham's analysis of penal policy and practice and resulted in his conclusion that the most acceptable form of punishment was 'active or laborious' imprisonment. The principles and conclusions originate in his book, Rationale of Punishment.¹⁹²

Punishment:

1. Should be variable both in intensity and duration
2. Equable, imposing a roughly equal degree of pain independent of circumstance
3. It should be commensurable (a greater offence should attract a greater penalty)
4. It should possess 'characteristicalness' (have some obvious connection with the crime, perhaps by analogy)
5. It should be exemplary to deter others
6. It should be frugal (keeping a man inactive in prison is an expensive waste of productive power; shooting him is cheap, but 'everything he might be made to produce is lost')
7. A punishment should tend to reform the criminal, not encourage him in his vices
8. It should prevent him repeating his crime
9. It should be convertible to profit to compensate for the wrong
10. It should be popular to avoid public resistance to the law
11. It should be simply described and easily understood
12. And it should be remissible for those unjustly convicted¹⁹³

¹⁹² Janet Semple, Bentham's Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary, 1993, p.26

¹⁹³ Semple, pp. 26 & 27

Appendix – C

Three of Jules de La Rochemore's 'articles of constitution,' and Gustave Courbet's responses¹⁹⁴

Article 19 : The administrative expenses will be borne by the state.

Courbet's response: Freedom consists of doing without the state under all circumstances (the revolution seeks only to attain this goal.) Men should only and continually be answerable to themselves. In that passage you regress and you are outside the current movement.

Article 22 : The state will make its acquisitions freely and it will maintain the prerogative to utilize the funds allotted by the Chambers to enrich our museums with the most remarkable works of the Salon.

Courbet's response: The state is subordinate to the French people and should do what only they desire. When a city in France wants a painting, it turns to the state, which is its business agent, and this business agent turns to the painters' committee, which determines which is the appropriate painting and what its price is. The state must not take the initiative.

Article 23 : The Minister of fine Arts will retain all his rights to [give] encouragement and honors.

Courbet's response: A monstrosity. The Ministry of Fine Arts is a fetish that could be respected by Africans only. The Ministry of Fine Arts will bestow the rewards and the honorable mentions that the committee, appointed by the painters, tells it to bestow, as in Munich.

Courbet adds at the end of his critique, "There is an article missing from your constitution. Intelligence is found in all classes of society but independence is found a hundred times more often among the poor than among the rich."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Chu, p. 369 – 372, letter 70-10. Courbet wrote to La Rochemore and his responses to La Rochemore's articles of his 'constitution.'

APPENDIX – D

“Declaration of the French People” or “Declaration of the Commune”¹⁹⁶

- The recognition and strengthening of the Republic, which is the only government compatible with the rights of the people and the free and ordered development of society
- The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all districts of France, assuring integral rights to each district, and to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and aptitudes, as man, citizen, and worker
- The autonomy of the Commune shall have no limits other than the right of autonomy equally enjoyed by all other communes adhering to the contract, and by whose association together French Unity will be preserved
- The rights inherent to the Commune are: voting for the Communal budget, receipts and expenditure; fixing and assessment of taxes; control of local services; organization of local magistrates, police and schools; administration of property belonging to the Commune
- Selection by ballot or competition with the responsibility and permanent right of control and dismissal of magistrates and all communal and civil servants of all grades. Absolute guarantee of individual freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom to work. Permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free expression of their ideas. Organization of urban defense and of the National Guard, which elects its leaders and is solely responsible for the maintenance of order on the city
- Paris asks nothing further in the way of local guarantees, on the understanding that the large central administration delegated by the federation of communes shall adopt and put into practice these same principles

¹⁹⁵ Chu, p. 370, letter 70-10.

¹⁹⁶ David Thomson, France: Empire and Republic 1850 – 1940: Historical Documents, 1968, pp.186 – 187. The Declaration was written by Pierre Denis.

- The Unity which has been imposed on us up to now by the empire, the Monarchy, and Parliamentarianism is nothing but despotic centralization, and is unintelligent, arbitrary, and burdensome. The Political Unity which Paris desires is the voluntary association of all local initiatives
- The Communal Revolution, begun by popular initiative on March 18, ushers in a new era of experimental, positive, scientific policy
- It spells the end of the old world with its governments and its clerics, militarism, officialdom, exploitation, stock-jobbing, monopolies, and privileges, to which the proletariat owes its servitude, the country its ills and its disasters.



Figure 3, *Nature morte aux pommes*, 1871 – 1872, Gustave Courbet, (1819 – 1877), oil on canvas, dim: 23-1/4 x 28-3/4 in., source : Gustave Courbet, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 419