

# HISTORY IN ART

## Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot 1796–1875

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1796 – Corot is born in Paris, the son of successful business-people: his father is a wig-maker, and his mother is a milliner. He struggles academically at school and shows little inclination towards drawing or painting until he is 19.

1815 – He produces his first watercolour paintings but his father insists he train in a more reliable profession than art, and he becomes an apprentice to a draper. He also takes drawing classes in the evenings at the Académie Suisse.

1822 – Corot’s parents at last give him the chance to be a painter and he enters the studio of the landscape artist, Achille Atna Michallon. Michallon encourages him always to reproduce what he sees in front of him; thus he prefers to paint from nature *en plein air* – near Paris by the Seine or in the forests.

1825 – He travels to Italy for the first time, where he learns from Italian historical landscape paintings. He paints oil sketches of many of the famous landmarks in Rome. He submits his first work to the Salon from Rome, *The Bridge at Narni*, and it is accepted. In future years he is a regular exhibitor at the Salon, with about a hundred of his paintings being accepted.

1829 – He begins spending time with other artists at Barbizon in the forest of Fontainebleau. He also travels to other parts of France to paint.

1834 – Corot visits Italy again and produces works in a distinctly Neo-Classical style with elements of history painting, although always within a landscape setting. But he always produces very natural-looking landscapes rather than idealising them.

1837 – He paints his first nude, prefiguring his switch to more paintings of the figure later in his career.

1840 – Corot begins to find his Salon entries often rejected and the critics lukewarm towards his art, and he struggles financially while he fails to sell many of his works.

1845 – He is championed by the poet and art critic Baudelaire, who describes him as a “leader of modern landscape painting”.

1847 – He receives the cross of the Légion d’Honneur and the year after, a second-class medal from the Salon. Other artists begin to speak out in his favour, including Delacroix. His fortunes begin to pick up and he is soon more financially stable. Despite the occasional setbacks in his life, throughout he remains good-humoured and enjoyable company, with many friends.

1848 – Corot becomes a member of the Salon jury, a sign of establishment acceptance. But his *plein-air* approach is increasingly adopted by the avant-garde, and will be an essential aspect of the Impressionists from the end of the 1860s. One of his students is the so-called “father of

Impressionism”, Camille Pissarro, and another who later received his advice and support was Berthe Morisot.

1860s – He continues with his idiosyncratic landscapes, many of them featuring peasants involved in their work or leisure – but sometimes mythological figures, sometimes biblical. He also paints classical nudes which are unconventionally placed in a rustic setting. And he paints more portraits, somewhat overlooked at the time but which are now highly regarded. His total output is huge and by the end of the life, he is very rich, and involved in charitable works including helping provide the now-blind artist Honoré Daumier with a house, and giving assistance to the widow of the artist Jean-François Millet.

1875 – Corot dies and is buried in Père Lachaise Cemetery.