

Daumier and the Salons of 1840 and 1841

by ED LILLEY

THE DAUMIER EXHIBITION that toured France and North America in 1999–2000 attempted, with considerable success, to do justice to the impressive range of the artist's output. Two small lithographs included in the exhibition were considered worthy of their own section, entitled 'The Caricatural Salon of 1840'.¹ The justification for this, entirely legitimate, is that while Baudelaire's article 'Salon caricatural' of 1846 is often considered the first of its type, Daumier's work, while more restricted in scope, has an undeniable prior claim.² His prints (Figs. 18 and 19) show the *Ascension of Christ* and the *Pilgrimage of St Roch*, although neither subject figured in the work of any artist represented at the Salon of that year. This was, of itself, rather unusual, in that caricatures with specific titles tended to poke fun at particular works on show via the familiar strategy of exaggerating certain characteristics of the piece in question. Before the Impressionists, the most consistent target of such attacks was Gustave Courbet, who added left-wing politics to artistic innovation, providing a powerful magnet for the satirists and for opponents of his political and/or artistic position.³ Daumier's prints were published in the weekly magazine *La Caricature*, the *Pilgrimage* on 5th April and the *Ascension* on 26th April 1840.⁴ The latter seems the simpler work, since it relies for its humorous effect on the fact that Christ's ascent has been faster than the artist's draughtsmanship. This is a basic visual pun, perhaps with the potential to offend the ultra-religious but in fact with antecedents in imagery not produced for comic effect. A relatively obscure example is a sixteenth-century Netherlandish painted glass roundel (Fig. 20). The 'simplicity' of Daumier's image ignores the inscription, 'D'après le Tableau original de M. Brdtkmann', to which we will return: needless to say, no artist of that name was represented at the Salon of 1840.

The *Pilgrimage of St Roch*, ascribed to the equally fictitious Pétral Vilermomz, is a puzzle from the outset. St Roch is traditionally thought of as the patron saint of plague victims and is usually depicted curing the disease or intervening on behalf of those afflicted by it. Jacques-Louis David's representation of the latter scene is among the better-known examples of this theme.⁵ According to tradition, St Roch came from Montpellier and decided as a young man to embark on a pilgrimage to Rome. He entered Italy at a time of plague and cured many sufferers by praying for them. Then, while in Piacenza, he succumbed to the illness himself and left the city to live alone in the forest. Here he was nursed by a dog, who brought him bread and licked his wounds. On his recovery, St Roch returned to Montpellier where he was



18. *Ascension of Christ*, by Honoré Daumier. 1840. Lithograph, 34.4 by 24.6 cm. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

imprisoned as a spy, in some accounts at the behest of his own uncle. In true saintly self-abnegation, he refused to reveal his real identity and died five years later. Daumier obviously knew the story of the saint, for he depicts the faithful dog which took care of the sick man, whose withdrawal from society is represented very bluntly by a large wall, rather than by the traditional forest. While St Roch incontrovertibly went on a pilgrimage, at least in accounts of his supposed activities, this aspect of his life was not considered sufficiently significant to have attracted many artists and Daumier's theme is thus unusual. The catalogue of the 1999–2000 Daumier exhibition has an ingenious explanation for the choice of the theme of St Roch, if not the depiction of this particular episode. It notes that the fashionable Parisian church of Saint-Roch, on the smart rue Saint-Honoré, 'was being transformed into a veritable museum of religious art',⁶ and that Daumier was mocking the revival of religious art and, in particular, the decoration of the interior of Parisian churches. Religious art certainly became more visible in the 1830s, its representation at the Salons doubling during the decade from five to ten per cent, an increase that would

¹ H. Loyrette *et al.*: exh. cat. *Daumier 1808–1879*, Ottawa (National Gallery of Canada), Paris (Grand Palais) and Washington (Phillips Collection) 1999–2000, p. 201.

² Baudelaire is generally credited with the 1846 publication, but his co-authors, Théodore de Banville and Auguste Vitu, deserve recognition, especially because the association of particular sections of the text with an individual author is largely conjectural. The woodcuts are the work of Raimond Pelez.

³ C. Léger: *Courbet selon les caricatures et les images*, Paris 1920, has recently been supplemented by T. Schlessler and B. Tillier: *Courbet face à la caricature*, Paris 2007, as a repository of the original imagery. The most incisive commentary on caricatures of Courbet and his work is K. Herding: 'Courbet's modernity as reflected in caricature', in *idem: Courbet: to venture independence*, New Haven and London 1991, pp. 156–87.

⁴ In the earlier 1830s *La Caricature* had been relentless in its attacks on the bourgeois monarchy and on the king himself, Louis Philippe. Daumier's work for the original radical paper had contributed to its demise in 1835 following the enactment of harsh new laws controlling the press. The periodical that re-emerged in 1838 and continued, sporadically, until 1843, retained its sense of humour but not its political bite.

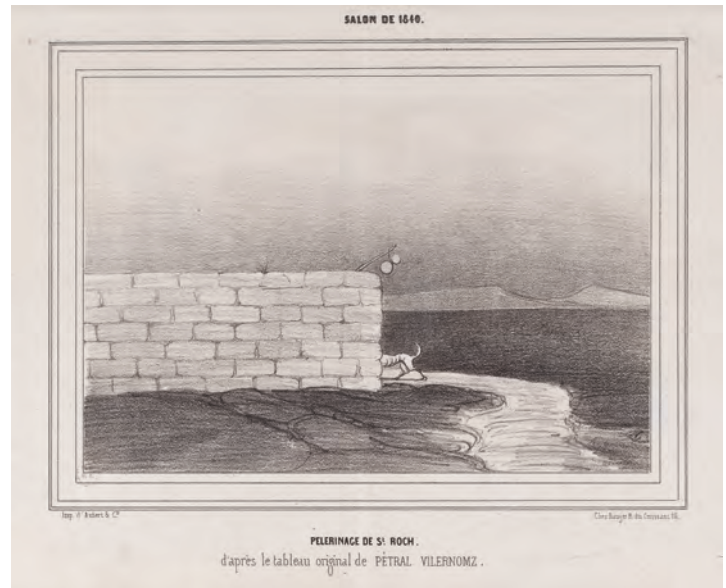
⁵ David's painting is in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Marseille. T. Chabanne: exh. cat. *Les Salons caricaturaux*, Paris (Musée d'Orsay) 1990, p. 50, notes that the artist Jean-Louis Bézard showed both a *St Roch priant pour les pestiférés* and an *Assomption de la Vierge* at the 1840 Salon but sensibly does no more than suggest that a connection with Daumier's work is potentially credible.

⁶ Loyrette, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 201.

have been genuinely noticeable, particularly given its often considerable scale.⁷ But while it is indeed very likely that the general choice of religious art as a subject for caricature echoes the rising visibility of that genre, the invocation of the church of Saint-Roch on rue Saint-Honoré is less convincing. It initially became known as a repository for art in the eighteenth century when it became the home of some particularly remarkable sculpture. It continued to attract art in the nineteenth century, at that stage mostly paintings, but virtually all of those postdate 1840.⁸ It seems unlikely that Daumier chose his theme by predicting the future.

It has long been known that the *Ascension* was re-used as a caricature of the Salon of 1841, appearing in *Le Charivari* on 1st April with a new title proclaiming its depiction of the 'Salon de 1841'. Not even Loys Delteil's immense catalogue of Daumier's graphic work mentions the second appearance of the *St Roch*, however, although it too was used again in *Le Charivari*, appearing on 7th April.⁹ The re-use of material in this way was rare but not unprecedented. Paul Gavarni's *Voilà un triste Salon*, for example, also appeared twice, in *Le Figaro* on 10th March 1839 and again in *Le Charivari* on 19th March 1840.¹⁰ The substitution of 1841 for 1840 was not, however, the only change in the second presentation of Daumier's prints. In 1841 each was accompanied by a hitherto unremarked explanatory text. Daumier's lithographs are frequently accompanied by a caption, generally not written by the artist himself. The inclusion of a separate text is much rarer, but it seems probable that it also was produced by someone other than Daumier himself. In the case of the *Ascension*, the text warns against the imitation of contemporary German art. 'Today, the first of April, after extraordinary difficulties and an immense amount of work, *Le Charivari* can finally bring its subscribers a facsimile of the work of the sublime Brdthmann, the much-loved student of Overbeck and the founder of the famous Saxe-Hildburghausen School. This tour de force of Superficialism, where draughtsmanship and colour appear at their greatest abstraction, is sure to be heartily applauded by Messieurs Perignon, Chassériau, Petit and Amaury Duval, painters both French and aesthetic. Never has the sublime been attained by simpler means. A few clouds between two feet and four lances are sufficient for a German artist to produce a masterpiece, and a warning to the French School' (see Appendix 1).¹¹

It is only fitting that the fictitious Brdthmann should be associated with an equally fabricated school of painting, although Saxe-Hildburghausen had existed as a tiny autonomous duchy between 1680 and 1826, when it was incorporated into Saxe-Meiningen. In the light of the fact that a German state was not then in existence, in mid-nineteenth century France 'German' painting meant Nazarene painting. It was routinely described as an art of ideas rather than of material substance, and was seen as the direct antithesis of the practical, craft-based art that was allegedly produced in France. Overbeck was thus an obvious name to produce, the more so, arguably, because his work had featured in the 1838 Salon.¹² According to Pierre Vaisse, the nineteenth-century



19. *Pilgrimage of St Roch*, by Honoré Daumier. 1840. Lithograph, 24.6 by 34.4 cm. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

French attitude to German art was more or less set in stone until the 1860s by Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. 'In Germany, to cultivate the arts means to be concerned with literature more than with visual artists. In all respects, the Germans are stronger with theory than with practice'.¹³ All the French artists named in the text were represented at the Salons of 1840 and 1841 and are presented here as victims of the supposed German penchant for 'aestheticism' over 'craft'. This stance may have little or nothing to do with Daumier's original intentions, and he may well have been simply targeting the increasing amount of religious painting then appearing at exhibitions. Whether or not German art was on Daumier's mind, however, it seems to be a meaning, at least, that could legitimately derive from Daumier's print.

St Roch also had its explanation in *Le Charivari*. 'This production of the modern Dutch school has outrageously been rejected by a jury that we have long associated with ignorance and bad faith. Monsieur Pétral Vilernomz is a young painter of whom much is expected: the naive simplicity of this painting is not lost on real connoisseurs and we hope that art lovers with a mature judgment will appreciate the beauty of the saint who passes behind' (see Appendix 2). There is nothing to indicate that Daumier intended to show a rejected work but there is every indication to explain why a commentator might have concentrated on this aspect. In fact, the jury for the 1841 Salon was relatively liberal, but this was as a direct result of the savagery of its immediate predecessor and the uproar that resulted from the mass rejections in 1840. On that occasion, there were 2,147 exclusions from 3,996 submissions, an attrition rate of more than fifty per cent that far exceeded anything encountered previously.¹⁴ Why might rejection have been associated with a Dutch artist?

⁷ B. Foucart: *La Renaissance de la peinture religieuse en France (1800–1860)*, Paris 1987, pp.76–77.

⁸ See J.-P. Babelon: *L'église Saint-Roch à Paris*, Paris 1972, for more on the works of art in the church.

⁹ L. Delteil: *Le peintre-graveur illustré*, Paris 1906–26. The work of Daumier comprises ten of the thirty-one volumes in this series (vols. XX–XXIX).

¹⁰ Chabanne, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.53. The same source does note the appearance of Daumier's *St Roch* in *Le Charivari* in 1841, but fails to mention its original appearance in *La Caricature*.

¹¹ All translations are by the present writer.

¹² Overbeck's presence was modest, as he was represented only by a drawing depict-

ing *La Mirade des roses*. Théophile Gautier also noted, in his review of the 1837 Salon, the availability from Parisian print-sellers of lithographs after works by Overbeck; see L. Hamrick: 'Gautier et les "peintres qui pensent" en Allemagne', in W. Drost and M.-H. Girard, eds.: *Gautier et l'Allemagne*, Siegen 2005, pp.191–204, esp. p.202.

¹³ G. de Staël: *De l'Allemagne*, Paris 1810, quoted in P. Vaisse: 'L'art allemand vu par les Français à l'époque de Théophile Gautier', in Drost and Girard, *op. cit.* (note 12), pp.131–50, esp. p.136: 'En s'occupant des arts, en Allemagne, on est conduit à s'occuper plutôt des écrivains que des artistes. Sous tous les rapports, les Allemands sont plus forts dans le théorie que dans la pratique'.

¹⁴ W. Hauptman: 'Juries, protests, and counter-exhibitions before 1850', *Art Bulletin* 67 (1985), pp.95–109, esp. p.100.



20. *Ascension of Christ*. Netherlands, c.1580. Painted glass, diameter 22 cm. (University of Bristol).

There can be little doubt about the significance of Dutch art for the leading practitioners of landscape art in France in the 1830s and 1840s, the variously named Barbizon School or School of 1830. Jacques Foucart provides an astute summary: ‘The museums, travel, auction sales, reproductions, copies, collections, the response of critics at the Salons, the love of prints, the indirect but instructive evidence of landscape painting manuals, all inform us of the high esteem in which Dutch landscapists of the Golden Age were held in France between 1800 and 1850’.¹⁵ Of course, the reference here is to the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape school and not to a contemporary painter, but the crucial aspect is the acknowledgement of the importance of Dutch art for nineteenth-century French landscape painting. This could occasionally lead to plagiarism or pastiche – Constant Troyon’s engagement with Paulus Potter springs to mind in this context – but more commonly admiration for Dutch landscape painting would lead to a degree of emulation. One of the Barbizon School’s chief exponents, Théodore Rousseau, was decidedly taken with the example of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting. In the present context, it is not, perhaps, coincidental that he was becoming known as ‘*le grand refusé*’. After initial success at the Salon from 1831 to 1835, Rousseau’s work was rejected in 1836, 1838, 1839, 1840 and 1841. He made no further submissions until 1849, when a new regime, the Second Republic, was in power. In the mid-1840s, Rousseau and Daumier became close friends, and although this was not yet the case at the beginning of the decade, Daumier knew the landscape painter¹⁶ and would have been aware of the Salon’s rejections. This is not

to say that Daumier necessarily intended to make his lithograph look like a work by Rousseau, but it might suggest that he was intending the *Pilgrimage of St Roch* to look like an example of advanced landscape practice in 1840. Even the religious subject-matter need not rule this out, as Daubigny, for example, was represented at the 1840 Salon by a landscape figuring St Jerome.¹⁷ Landscape painting of the 1830s and 1840s was arguably concerned with presenting a radically new representation of the natural world, utilising a compositional style far removed from previous practice. Greg Thomas has noted the innovations evident in Rousseau’s *Descent of the cows from the high plateaux of the Jura*, which was unsurprisingly one of his first Salon rejections, in 1836. ‘Rousseau’s severely anticlassical narrative of cows descending from highland pastures was an intentional assault upon the mythical visions fabricated by Bidault and his academic associates. The *Descent*’s blunt, cramped, dark, vertically oriented, and fir-covered precipice destroyed almost point by point the Italianate aesthetic that was so integral to the visual comprehension of classical narrative meaning’.¹⁸

The *Descent* was an (in)famous work, and there is no suggestion that Daumier was referring to it in his *St Roch*. Even more mundane compositions, however, were a novelty in the 1830s, as Greg Thomas again draws out in respect of the *Limousin pastures*, a work of 1837 by Rousseau’s close colleague Jules Dupré: the title ‘underscores the local character of the scene and the meaninglessness of the site in French culture; the Limousin landscape was not famed for anything and was not featured in national guidebooks’.¹⁹ There is even less to identify the landscape in Daumier’s print, but such exaggerated emphasis on the ‘meaninglessness’ of the site is precisely what one would expect from a caricature. It is doubtful that Daumier was referring to the embellishment of a Parisian church that was yet to occur, and much more plausible that he was commenting on developments in contemporary landscape painting.

Appendix

1. Commentary on Honoré Daumier’s print of the ‘Ascension’ (Fig.18). (*Le Charivari*, 1st April 1841).

C’est aujourd’hui 1er avril que le *Charivari*, après des peines et des travaux inouïs, peut enfin donner à ces abonnés un *fac-simile* du sublime Brdthkmann, le disciple chéri d’Overbeck, et le fondateur de la célèbre école de Saxe-Hildberghausen, Ce critérium de la peinture simpliste, où le dessin et la couleur sont représentés par la métaphysique la plus élevée, ne peut manquer d’être vivement apprécié par MM. Pérignon, Chassériau, Petit et Amaury Duval, peintres français et esthétiques. Jamais on n’atteignit au sublime avec des éléments plus simples. Des nuages entre deux pieds et quatre fers de lance suffisent à un peintre allemande pour produire un chef-d’œuvre. Avis à l’école française.

2. Commentary on Honoré Daumier’s print of the ‘St Roch’ (Fig.19). (*Le Charivari*, 7th April 1841).

Cette composition de l’école hollandaise moderne s’est outrageusement vue refusé par un jury dont nous avons depuis longtemps stigmatisé l’ignorance et le mauvais vouloir. M. Pétral Vilernomz est un jeune peintre d’une haute espérance; la simplicité naïve de ce tableau n’échappera pas aux vrais connoisseurs, et nous espérons que les amateurs d’un jugement mûr s’apercevront de la beauté du saint qui passe derrière’.

¹⁵ J. Foucart: ‘L’inspiration hollandaise’, in J. Sillevius and H. Kraan, eds.: exh. cat. *L’Ecole de Barbizon: un dialogue franco-néerlandais*, Ghent (Museum voor Schone Kunsten), The Hague (Haags Gemeentemuseum) and Paris (Institut Néerlandais) 1985–86, pp.21–34, esp. p.32: ‘Les musées, les voyages, les ventes, les reproductions, les copies, les collections, les réactions des critiques d’art aux Salons, l’amour des estampes, le témoignage indirect mais si instructif des manuels d’enseignement du paysage, tout nous renseigne à l’évidence sur l’extrême faveur dont jouissent en France les paysagistes hollandaise du siècle d’or entre 1800 et 1850’.

¹⁶ A. Sensier: *Souvenirs sur Th. Rousseau*, Paris 1872, pp.44–45.

¹⁷ This work, now in the Musée de Picardie, Amiens, is in fact titled *Paysage; saint Jérôme* in the Salon catalogue, reinforcing the links between religious painting and landscape painting.

¹⁸ G. Thomas: ‘The topographical aesthetic in French tourism and landscape’, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 1/1 (2002); see www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring02/198-the-topographical-aesthetic-in-french-tourism-and-landscape. Rousseau’s painting is in the Musée de Picardie, Amiens.

¹⁹ Thomas, *op. cit.* (note 18). Dupré’s work is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.