



## Picturing France

*1830–1900*

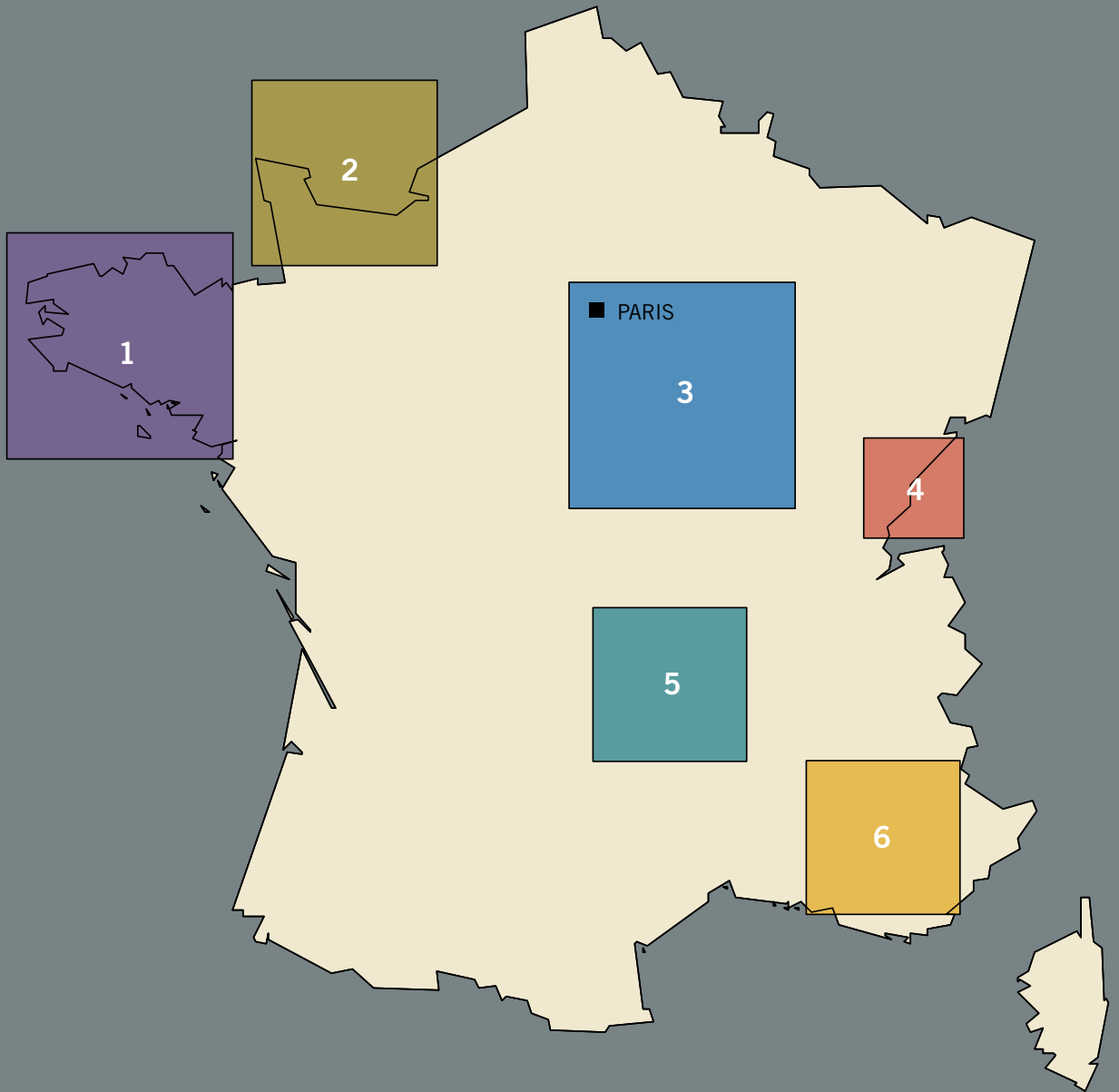


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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

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From about 1830 to the end of the nineteenth century, a period of enormous political and social change, French landscape painting was transformed. Previously, French artists had rarely painted the French countryside. The academic tradition of historical landscape was firmly rooted in Italy. But the painters included in this teaching packet were newly inspired by their own place and time. A number of things contributed to this change. Romanticism helped focus interest on nature, not simply as a backdrop for historical narrative, but as a subject worthy in and of itself. A naturalist trend helped foster less idealized depictions that were honest portrayals of the real world. At the same time, travel around France became much easier with the arrival of railroads and more common with the growth of a tourist culture.

It might seem obvious that landscape painting would entail painting outdoors, but as our period opens, artists produced only studies *en plein air* (in the open air), not fully formed paintings. They used these studies, often with notes, to produce more polished pictures in their studios. But this situation, too, was rapidly changing, and we can follow the evolution of *plein-air* painting as the century progressed.

A sense of place is not achieved by “scapes”—whether land, city, or sea—alone. Place is defined by society as well. So, we look at people, too, and examine how their lives were altered with the dramatic changes of the nineteenth century. We have already mentioned the railroad; it is only one aspect of increasing industrialization in France. Huge numbers of people moved from rural areas into cities, and particularly to Paris. Agriculture was a deeply felt part of the French national identity. Loss of peasant farmers from the countryside was troubling and at times created economic crises in rural areas. The nineteenth century was a period of centralization in France—a natural impulse, perhaps, of the autocratic regimes that governed for most of it. Old provincial prerogatives were marginalized as officials in Paris strove to standardize culture and education; regional languages, like those in Brittany and the Midi, for example, were discouraged. At the end of the nineteenth century, regionalist movements emerged in several parts of the country to protect and promote local traditions.

Drawing on the strengths of the National Gallery of Art collection, we focus largely on Normandy, Brittany, Provence, and the Île-de-France; in fact, we divide the Île-de-France into three separate sections: Paris, Fontainebleau, and the river towns. Our packet does not represent all regions of France comprehensively—we have no works from the southwest, Corsica, or Alsace-Lorraine, or from the great wine-producing areas. We look at a single painting from Auvergne and only two from Franche-Comté. Nevertheless, in the course of this journey around France, we encounter most of the styles—from realism to post-impressionism—and many of the greatest artists who flourished in the nineteenth century. This is not meant to be a survey of French painting or even a collection of “greatest hits.” Instead, we present a discussion of artists by region in an effort to explore how they represented a new sense of place and time.

Different artists, of course, were drawn to paint in various locales for very different reasons. Some were lured by scenery and aesthetics, others by solitude or personal connection to a place, some by market forces. Several of the artists we look at worked in many different places—Monet, for example, was exceptionally well traveled. Others, like Cézanne, limited their sights (and sites) more narrowly.

This booklet is organized by region, but there are many ways to approach your tour of France. Here are a few alternative “itineraries” you might consider:

- the rise of landscape painting
- the development of *plein-air* painting
- connections between earlier artists, impressionists, and post-impressionists
- the impact of industrialization and technology, including photography and new art materials, on painting and painting practices
- regional traditions and artists’ responses to them
- the effects of transportation and tourism on artists and the art market
- artists’ public and personal connections to place
- the encroaching presence of the city on the countryside



A view of Paris, looking west to the Eiffel Tower, after 1889  
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington, Image Collections, Gramstorff Archive

CD 1	Adrien Tournachon French, 1825–1903	<i>Vache Garonnaise, âgée de 5 à 6 ans, 1856</i> Gelatin coated salted paper print from collodion negative mounted on paperboard, sheet: 8 1/16 x 11 1/4 in.	National Gallery of Art, Washington Anonymous Gift 2000.122.3
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Adrien Tournachon was the younger brother of Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, a well-known artist and caricaturist whose work appeared in numerous satirical newspapers under the pseudonym, Nadar. The two collaborated briefly after Adrien opened a photographic studio, but competitive tensions arose in 1855. Adrien hoped to continue the practice alone as “Nadar jeune,” but a court ruled that Félix, who was the better known and more accomplished photographer, was “the only, the true Nadar.” Years later Nadar’s studio would be the site of the first impressionist exhibition.

In 1856 and again in 1860, Adrien made a series of photographs of prize-winning livestock at the agricultural fairs in Paris. To photograph animals that rarely stood still longer than a few seconds, he used the more rapid collodion wet plate process rather than the slower paper negative process he had used previously. At the 1856 livestock show, Tournachon succeeded in making more than 120 negatives, and printed around 50 of them to be included in an album presented to the minister of agriculture and commerce in July 1856.

This photograph of a prize-winning cow from the Garonne region was printed in the technique known as *vernis-cuit*, in which the paper is coated with layers of gelatin and tannin to give the surface the appearance of varnished leather. This image of an impressive farm animal celebrated an agrarian way of life, even as the urban structure of the French capital was being redesigned and “modernized.”