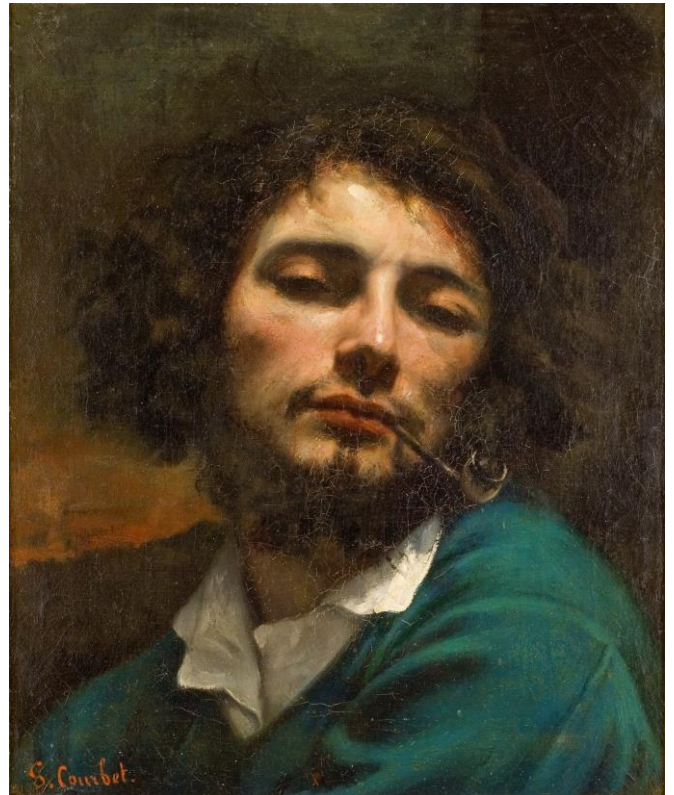


Press material

Museum Folkwang

I, GUSTAVE COURBET
Painter and Rebel
17 July – 8 November 2026



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Date: 16 July 2026, 11.00 am

Press information

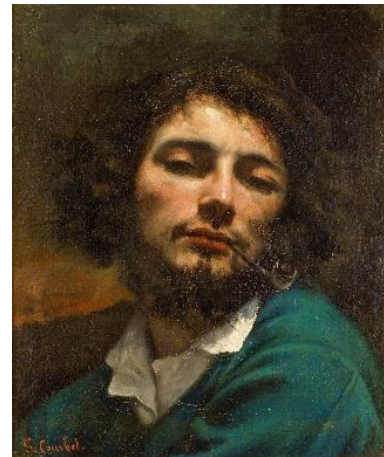
Museum Folkwang

Gustave Courbet in Essen: the Museum Folkwang presents a major retrospective of the pioneer of modern art

Essen, 16 June 2026 – Museum Folkwang is dedicating a major retrospective – *I, Gustave Courbet. Painter and Rebel* – to one of the most influential artists of the 19th century. From 17 July to 8 November 2026, the Museum Folkwang will be exhibiting 100 works from all periods of the French artist's career – including 85 paintings. The exhibition is complemented by drawings by the artist, as well as a carefully curated selection of historical photographs and contemporary documents.

The exhibition focuses on **Gustave Courbet's (1819–1877)** significance as a pioneer of modern painting. Courbet was not only an artistic innovator, but also helped shape a new self-image of the artist as an independent, outspoken and public figure. He rejected the idealised aesthetics of his time and instead depicted the lives of ordinary people and social reality in his art.

Courbet viewed painting as a form of resistance: his approach to traditional pictorial genres and his painting technique, which often allows the material presence of the paint to shine through, make him one of the most important exponents of realism. Courbet grew to become a role model for subsequent generations of artists far beyond France's borders.



Gustave Courbet
L'Homme à la pipe, c. 1849

The extensive exhibition in Essen features around 90 works, including major pieces such as *Le Fou de peur* (1844), *L'Après-dînée à Ornans* (1849), *Jo, la belle Irlandaise* (1866), *L'Origine du Monde* (1866) and *L'Homme à la pipe* (1849). Spanning some 900 square metres, the exhibition brings together loans from international museums and collections, including Musée d'Orsay in Paris, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo, Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin and Musée Fabre in Montpellier as well as from numerous private collections.

The Retrospective

For Museum Folkwang, the retrospective presents a unique opportunity: it ties in with the museum's significant collection of French art. For example, Cézanne's *The Bibémus Quarry* from the Folkwang Collection in Essen will be shown alongside works by Courbet. This allows visitors in

Museum Folkwang

Essen to experience first-hand Courbet's influence on the development of modern painting.

The exhibition's nine sections are devoted to the key stages of the artist's life and the central themes of his work. It explores key motifs in Courbet's extensive oeuvre: self-image and landscape, social reality, the public sphere, nude depictions as well as politics and exile.

The exhibition opens with Courbet's striking self-portraits, which trace his development from a young, as yet largely unknown artist to a central figure in the French art world. He portrays himself as a rebel, a dreamer or a loner, thereby consciously shaping his public image as an artist. Major works such as ***Le Fou de peur*** reveal just how closely his self-image and artistic programme were intertwined from the very beginning.

Another focus is on the landscapes of his home region, Franche-Comté, around his birthplace, Ornans. Courbet saw direct observation of nature as a means of depicting reality and of approaching an unadulterated truth through his painting. The landscapes, rock formations, caves and waterfalls became the starting point for his new conception of nature. With his material-focused, impasto style of painting, Courbet developed a visual language that paved the way for modernism.

Equally influential are Courbet's depictions of social reality. Works such as ***L'Après-dînée à Ornans*** mark his radical break with academic ideals: instead of historical or mythological subjects, the focus shifts to everyday people and social reality.

Courbet's conflict-ridden relationship with the Academy and the Salon, as well as his deliberate assertion of his independence as an artist, are the focus of the following sections of the exhibition. Hunting scenes and seascapes reveal his fascination with nature in all its forms: from dramatic depictions of animals to the powerful wave scenes of the French coastline.

A separate gallery is devoted to portraits and nudes of women. Courbet broke away from the ideals of academic beauty and depicted women with a directness that was unprecedented at the time.

Rather than idealised beauty, the focus is on real physicality, the materiality of the painting style and the immediacy of the figures. At the same time, he draws on traditional pictorial conventions and develops them further – for example in ***Jo, la belle Irlandaise*** or ***L'Origine du Monde***, in which Courbet radicalises the directness of the nude and focuses exclusively on the female genitalia.

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A separate chapter explores Courbet's engagement with the then-fledgling art of photography: historical photographs by leading French photographers such as Gustave Le Gray and Henri Le Secq, drawn from the Museum Folkwang's internationally renowned photographic collection, are juxtaposed with Courbet's landscapes, seascapes and still lifes. These comparisons open up new perspectives on Courbet's artistic vision and reveal the close links between painting and the medium of photography.

The exhibition then explores Courbet's political activism during the Paris Commune and his conviction. It concludes with works from his exile in Switzerland. These works speak of the loss of his homeland and the melancholy of his final years, yet at the same time of the unbroken creative energy of an artist whose influence extends well into the modern era.

"The exhibition presents Courbet as a driven figure who took on various roles, studied the history of painting, revitalised art and strove for success – not by conforming, but as a rebel and revolutionary – in art as in life.

The fact that so many exceptional international loans from museums and private collections are coming to Essen is a great success and the result of close collaboration with the Leopold Museum in Vienna and numerous lenders," says **Peter Gorschlüter, Director of the Museum Folkwang**.

Under the High Patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, and the Honorary Patronage of Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

Leopold and Folkwang

I, Gustave Courbet. Painter and Rebel is being organised in collaboration with Leopold Museum in Vienna. The exhibition has already attracted around 130,000 visitors in Vienna. It will be on display at the Museum Folkwang from 17 July.

Museum Folkwang

I, GUSTAVE COURBET

Painter and Rebel

17 July – 8 November 2026

Opening: Thursday, 16 July, 7 pm

In collaboration with the Leopold Museum, Vienna.

Main sponsor: E.ON

Sponsors: GENO BANK ESSEN and Bankhaus Bauer

Funded by: Ministry of Culture and Science of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia

Admission: €16 (regular) / €12 (reduced)

Tickets: museum-folkwang.ticketfritz.de

Guided tours (Visitors' Centre): +49 201 8845444, info@museum-folkwang.essen.de

The catalogue is published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne (price: € 39,90)



The **Courbetorial** is the new, free digital companion to the exhibition. It was developed in collaboration with Google Arts and Culture. It can be accessed via the app or the Museum Folkwang website.

Opening hours:

Tue–Sun 10am–6pm

Thu and Fri 10am–8pm

Closed on Mondays

Press images are available at www.museum-folkwang.de/en



Gustave Courbet

L'Homme à la pipe, c.

1849

Oil on canvas

45,8 × 37,8 cm

© Musée Fabre de

Montpellier Méditerranée

Métropole / Photo Frédéric

Jaulmes



Gustave Courbet

Jo, la belle Irlandaise,

1866

Oil on canvas

54 × 65 cm

© Nationalmuseum,

Stockholm

Photo: Nationalmuseum

Biography

Gustave Courbet (1819 – 1877)

Museum Folkwang

Born in **1819** in the rural region of Franche-Comté, **Gustave Courbet** moved to Paris in **1839**. Instead of seeking admission to the state art academy, he attended private academies and continued his education through self-study.

Despite his critical stance towards the state-regulated Salon exhibitions, he starts submitting his paintings to the Salon in **1841**. Following several rejections, Courbet makes his Salon debut in **1844**. There, his paintings first attracted attention and recognition. In doing so, he positioned himself in opposition to academic conventions and was consequently attacked and mocked by conservative art critics. In his works, Courbet repeatedly responded to political events and social upheavals in France. Between **1848** and **1855**, he produced his groundbreaking, socially critical works; by this time at the latest, it was clear that he viewed art and politics as inextricably linked.

From **1856** exhibitions outside France become increasingly important for Courbet. The artist spends most of **1858** abroad. From August 1858 onwards, he spends several months in Frankfurt, where he exhibits and works, but also frequently participates in hunts. Courbet does not return from Frankfurt until February **1859**. At the **1861** Salon in Paris, Courbet shows several paintings with hunting motifs which are based on his time in Frankfurt and resonate with the critics.

France's defeat in the war with Prussia marks the end of the Second Empire, and the Third Republic is proclaimed in Paris **1870**. Under the new Republic, Courbet becomes politically active. After the suppression of the Commune, Courbet is arrested and tried for his participation, especially for his alleged role in the destruction of the Vendôme Column. Courbet is sentenced to six months imprisonment and a fine.

Courbet left France in **1873** and spent the final years of his life in exile in Switzerland. Many of his later paintings depict scenes from La Tour-de-Peilz and the landscape around Lake Geneva. Courbet's health deteriorates rapidly: he suffers from edema and cirrhosis of the liver. The artist dies on December 31, **1877** and is laid to rest in La Tour-de-Peilz. Only in **1919**, marking the 100th anniversary of his birth, his remains are moved to Ornans.

Wall texts

Museum Folkwang

Introduction

Gustave Courbet (1819–1877) is a central figure in 19th-century European painting. The cultural and political upheavals of his day are visible in his life and works. He turned against the idealized art of Classicism and Romanticism and instead placed everyday life and people from his immediate surroundings in the centre of his work. He repeatedly championed social issues and political renewal. His reinterpretation of traditional pictorial genres made Courbet one of the most important representatives of Realism. With his painterly technique, thanks to which the paint remains visible and tangible, he became a role model for subsequent generations of artists.

Born in 1819 in the rural region of Franche-Comté, Courbet headed for Paris in 1839. Instead of training at the art academy he taught himself and attended private academies. From 1844 onwards, he regularly exhibited at the Salon, the most important state-organized exhibition in France. There, his paintings repeatedly caused a great stir. Courbet opposed academic conventions and was attacked by conservative art critics. At the same time, he arranged his own exhibitions and both inside and outside France found new opportunities for displaying and selling his works.

After 1870 he became politically active and assumed political offices but after the Paris Commune fell into disfavour with the new government. He was sentenced and after spending time in jail went into exile in Switzerland, where he died in 1877. The exhibition presents Courbet's drive to overcome the academic painting of his day and establish art as an independent voice in the bourgeois public sphere. He made use of various artistic strategies, including scandals, to draw attention to his painting and garner recognition for it, even staging himself in changing public roles. In the exhibition, this is especially clear in his self-portraits and in the sheer variety of pictorial themes with their references to photography and to images in popular culture.

The exhibition has arisen in cooperation with Leopold Museum, Vienna, and was curated by Hans-Peter Wipplinger and Niklaus Manuel Güdel; Anna Brohm, Hans-Jürgen Lechtreck, and Sonja Pizonka have adapted it for the Museum Folkwang show.

Under the High Patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic and the Honorary Patronage of Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

A digital exhibition guide, the Courbetorial, is available by scanning this QR code

Self-portraits

A remarkably large number of self-portraits by Courbet have survived. The majority of these works were produced between 1840 and 1855 and document his development from a young, largely unknown artist to a key figure in the French art world. Courbet experimented as early as the 1840s with the European traditions of portrait painting and in the process steadily refined his painting technique: For someone who was a newcomer to painting, his own face was an obvious model to choose as it was cost-effective. At the same time, he used these images to stage himself as an artist in changing roles and in this way attract attention – as a pipe-smoking rebel, as a lone wolf plagued by fear, as a man wounded by the suffering of the world, as a melancholic dreamer, or as a sensitive musician.

Until well into the early 1850s, Courbet regularly submitted self-portraits to the official exhibitions at the academy, and the public thus swiftly associated his facial traits and appearance with his artistic development and agenda. The self-portraits served him not only as a terrain in which to practice and a space for experimentation, but also as an instrument for marketing and positioning himself in the art world. By around 1855, after some of his pieces had gone on show in his own “Pavillon du Réalisme”, Courbet had found his feet and sufficiently established himself as an artist, so he henceforth painted very few self-portraits. He subsequently increasingly relied on the medium of photography to polish his public image and sought the assistance of professional photographers to this end.

Ornans

Courbet produced about a third of his entire œuvre in his home region of Franche-Comté, in particular around his native Ornans. Even after he had shifted the main focus of his life to Paris, almost every year he returned to his hometown for several months and regularly went out exploring the region, always taking his painting utensils with him.

Be it solitary brooks or waterfalls, greened high plateaus or valleys, dense forests or rock formations: For Courbet, representing nature and his own, purportedly undistorted view was a strategy for depicting reality and approaching an authentic truth with painterly means. With this approach, Courbet parted company with the popular idealizing and carefully composed landscape painting such as was taught at the academies and promoted by the Paris Salon.

Courbet regularly emphasized how obvious and indeed compelling it was for him to repeatedly paint this familiar countryside. He succeeded in reproducing complex natural structures by using a painting technique that hinged on applying thick paint for the surfaces of rocks and water as well as trees and bushes and then truly moulding them with his palette knife.

Rock Formations

Courbet's painting *The Roche Pourrie, Geological Study* was a piece commissioned by reputed geologist Jules Marcou, who, like Courbet, came from the Jura region. The latter's special interest was in the Roche pourrie rock formation not far from Salins-les-Bains, which featured a strikingly unusual combination of ironstone and limestone. He had Courbet capture the wild, almost chaotic structure of the stone in a painting, and the work thus unites scientific curiosity with artistic aspirations.

Courbet remained true here to his own concept of landscape painting: He underscores the direct, sensory experience of nature and avoids placing the subject matter in some larger landscape context. In the process, he relied carefully on the effect of space: Although the rock formation dominates a large part of the picture, by representing a bridge and a small figure in the background, Courbet generates a feeling of proportion and depth.

Courbet's work was an important point of reference for Paul Cézanne. Both artists shared a similar relationship to their respective home countryside, which they were forever exploring anew, and both had an enduring fascination for the mineral as the constant force in nature. Cézanne's painting *The Quarry at Bibémus*, which depicts a quarry outside Aix-en-Provence, and which arose about three decades later, takes up Courbet's stylistic strategies. A direct comparison clearly shows how modern Courbet's approach was.

Social Realities

For Courbet, art and politics were inextricably linked. Between 1848 and 1855, he produced his trailblazing works that were critical of society, bringing him fame as a political painter and strongly influencing the concept of realism.

Courbet firmly rejected the academic convention of idealized representations typical at the time, focussing his attention instead on common people and everyday scenes. In a phase in history characterized by profound social and political upheaval, he sympathized with the February Revolution of 1848 in France and joined the protagonists' calls for better political and social conditions, in particular for the working population. Courbet himself, the scion of a prosperous landowning family, liked to depict himself as an artisan of art.

He regarded his realism as a form of resistance – as an artistic means for visualizing social reality and triggering change. The public, accustomed to idealization and romanticization with smooth surfaces, careful compositions coupled with historical and mythological themes, was initially unsettled by his representations of things that were ostensibly trivial and his blunt gaze at social realities. Courbet self-confidently pursued his new, provocative style and used the scandal to make his own works known. He refused, however, to be pigeonholed in terms of a specific painterly technique or pictorial theme, although he has nevertheless gone down in the annals of art history as one of the most important proponents of realism.

Academy and Salon

L'Académie des beaux-arts, the state academy of fine arts in Paris, had been a central institution in French culture since the 17th century. It regulated training in art and established binding norms covering a hierarchy of genres, with history painting at the top. The academy's Salon, first organized in 1725, was a major exhibition that took place in the Louvre until the end of the 1840s, and thereafter in other ostentatious Parisian buildings, and encompassed only those works selected by a jury made up of academy members. The jury also awarded medals and was in charge of acquisitions on behalf of the state.

Courbet, who had both trained in private academies and taught himself, had a fruitful, albeit often conflict driven relationship to both institutions. From 1844 onwards, he regularly exhibited at the Salon and received minor awards. Above all, though, he used it as a stage for artistic confrontation, with many of his contributions provoking fierce responses on the part of conservative critics owing to the large-scale representation of everyday themes, his unconventional brushwork, and his novel form of composition.

When some of Courbet's key works were excluded from the exhibition at the Paris World's Fair in 1855, he decided to display them in the "Pavillon du Réalisme" he himself instigated and which served to present and sell his output. It was an act of artistic self-empowerment levelled against the official, ostensibly non-commercial exhibition practices. Courbet also intensively sought out exhibition opportunities both outside Paris and abroad.

The Hunt

Courbet was an enthusiastic hunter and was able to draw on his own experiences for the 100-plus images of the hunt he produced. Hunting interested him not just as a new element of bourgeois life; indeed, the painter felt the figure of the hunter also embodied something of his own view of himself as a daring artist with a close bond to nature. Even after moving to Paris, each year Courbet spent several weeks in his native region of Franche-Comté, where he visited his family and friends from his youth, painted in his studio in Ornans or “en plein air” (under an open sky), and went hunting in the nearby forests.

In the images in this group of works, Courbet knowledgeably shows the different phases of a hunt. He also made use of stuffed animals, butchers’ wares, and photographs as models for his depictions of animal bodies, and it is striking how his artistic approach often differed: Courbet presents the fugitive stag moving dramatically against a wide landscape. Meanwhile, the animal that has been killed is similar to traditional still lifes, depicted as a trophy, while the hunter and dogs rest in the dark interior of the forest.

From 1857 onwards, Courbet repeatedly submitted hunting pictures to the Paris Salon. They were very well received by the public and collectors alike, and this prompted the artist to likewise include deer or other wild animals in some of his landscape paintings in order to enhance their effect.

Seascapes

Courbet first experienced the sea in 1841 in Normandy. He was emphatically impressed by the ocean’s expanse and the power of the waves, and he later repeatedly spent time on the coast of Normandy, for example in Le Havre, Étretat, Trouville, Deauville, and Honfleur. Moreover, while visiting his most important patron Alfred Bruyas outside Montpellier, he painted several seascapes on the Mediterranean coast.

Courbet preferred the term “seascapes” (paysages de mer) to the usual designation at the time, namely “marine pictures”, which he felt was overly narrow and commercial. His paintings show the sea in all manner of moods, from stormy with dark, high waves and waterspouts through to calm, bright scenes that are almost Impressionist in their impact. Only rarely did he add figures, and usually to indicate how small humans were compared to the power of nature.

In his representations of waves and coasts, the paint itself becomes an important pictorial theme. Courbet often worked with a palette knife and applied the paint in several layers, which resulted in an especially sculptural effect. He knew just how virtuoso his technique was and how popular his seascapes, which is why he repeated and varied individual motifs on several occasions.

Jo, the Beautiful Irish Girl

Joanna Hiffernan came from a lower middle-class Irish family that moved to London in the early 1840s from an Ireland that was in the grips of poverty. There, she made connections with the Bohemians and artists’ circles, and in 1860 she met painter James McNeill Whistler, becoming his partner and favourite model and thus a central point of reference. In the winter of 1861, the couple travelled together to Paris where, prior to moving to London in 1859, Whistler had spent four years training as a painter and had come into contact with Gustave Courbet and his circle. In Paris, Whistler began painting *The White Girl* (later: *Symphony in White*), the first of several portraits of Joanna that were to bring him and his partner international fame.

In the autumn of 1865, Whistler, Hiffernan, and Gustave Courbet met in Trouville for a working sojourn. Impressed by Hiffernan’s personality and appearance, Courbet painted a portrait of the

“belle Irlandaise”. He never parted with the picture and shortly before his death he wistfully reminisced about the time. Since he repeated the composition in several versions, it is not possible to say exactly which painting arose directly from the first encounter with Hiffernan.

Nudes and Portraits of Women

Courbet depicts women in a way that flew in the face of the conventions of the academic painting of his time. Instead of idealized beauty, he focussed on real corporeality, a technique that emphasized materiality and the real presence of the figures. This can be seen, for example, in how he presents the open tresses of the hair of Jo, the Beautiful Irishwoman or in the close-to-real-life representation of the *Young Bather*. At the same time, Courbet repeatedly reverts to pictorial conventions if only to develop them further. For example, his painting *Female Nude with Dog* is firmly in the lineage of depictions of Venus, the Goddess of Love, while removing it from its mythological context. Courbet's depictions of the nude are central to his œuvre due to their immediacy and realism. In *The Origin of the World* Courbet succeeded in radically advancing the directness of the nude. The close cropping of the image means we see neither a face nor limbs, and the eye is directed exclusively to the female torso with her genitals placed full centre. Courbet's realism is concerned less with anatomical accuracy than with the sensual presence of the subject.

Springs

The pictures of grottos and springs have a special place in Courbet's œuvre. They depict scenery from the French Massif du Jura, an environment defined by karst rock in Franche-Comté and characterized by deep ravines, waterfalls, and cave systems. Courbet had known the countryside since childhood, and during his stays in Ornans he repeatedly revisited it in order to paint it in the changing light of day and in the different seasons. He does not reproduce the springs as part of some rural idyll, but as stark and at times almost inaccessible places where the water bursts powerfully forth from the cliffs.

Courbet's interest in phenomena relating to geological history is manifest in the painterly representation of layers, erosion, and flow movements. His impasto application of the paint presents the viewer with rocks that are rough, almost tangible surfaces, while the water seems to be a flowing element moved by light and shadow. In these paintings, Courbet takes a decisive step toward a new understanding of landscape painting that seeks less to depict a distanced overview and more to kindle a direct sensory experience.

The images of grottos and springs are to this day accorded a symbolic dimension, too, and can be read as cyphers of the original, the hidden, or the unconscious mind. Such interpretations are also highly productive when applied to other works and workgroups by Courbet, for example his painting *The Origin of the World* or *The Young Bather*.

Courbet and Photography

Courbet is one of the very first artists whose œuvre can be linked to photography. The technical process of Daguerreotyping developed by painter and inventor Louis Daguerre was first presented to the public in 1839 in Paris, and photographers Étienne Carjat and Félix Nadar were for many years among Courbet's friends. He was very interested in photographs and the potential technical reproduction offered.

As of about 1855, he started using photography increasingly for self-presentations and to spread his “mask”, as Courbet termed the image of himself disseminated in the media. He also had photographic reproductions made of some of his paintings, which he then sent to members of his

family and friends or offered for sale to visitors to his exhibitions. They were thus part of his self-marketing efforts and helped to spread his image as an artist.

Courbet recognized the benefit of photographic templates for painting and possessed his own collection of photographs, including nudes and pornographic images. Contemporary critics cited photography, which they viewed with disdain, when accusing the artist of producing paintings that, comparable to photographic images, did not go beyond the mere reproduction of reality. They claimed the works lacked inventiveness, compositional creativity, and substantive meaning.

The correspondence between certain formal features in Courbet's works with those of 19th-century photography, such as the choice and staging of the themes, the cropping, or the use of light, all point less to his direct adoption of photographic images and more to an intense artistic exploration of the aesthetic potential of the new medium.

Exile and the Final Years

After France's defeat during the Franco-German War and the arrest of Napoleon III, the Republic was declared in Paris on 4 September 1870. Two days later, Courbet assumed the chair of the Republican Art Commission. While Paris was under siege, he had endeavoured to ensure art was protected and also became involved in cultural politics.

On 18 March 1871, the Commune de Paris was founded as an uprising against the capitulation and the government, with one of its most symbolic acts being the demolition on 16 May 1871 of the Vendôme Column, a Napoleonic monument. Although Courbet did not join the Commune until after the corresponding resolution had been taken, he was made responsible for the demolition, leading to his arrest on 7 June 1871 and subsequent sentencing on 2 September to six months in jail and a fine. He was initially taken to Paris's Sainte-Pélagie prison and later moved to a clinic in Neuilly. After his release in March 1872, he was forbidden from participating in official exhibitions and was therefore only able to present his works to a very limited extent. Politically stigmatized and isolated, he initially retreated to Ornans.

When the lawsuit on the Vendôme Column was re-opened and the threat of claims for heavy damages was in the air, Courbet decided to emigrate. On 23 July 1873, he went into exile in Switzerland and settled in La Tour-de-Peilz on the shoreline of Lake Geneva.

The works Courbet created there before his death on 31 December 1877 are replete with memories and melancholy. For commercial reasons, he also repeated certain themes, such as views of Château de Chillon and of Lake Geneva, and these paintings simultaneously attest to his isolation and his yearning for his homeland. In his late works, he remembers landscapes he painted in France, and in the final years of his life he increasingly dedicated himself to the exact reproduction of light and its reflection on surfaces of water or in the sky.

Drawings

Neglected for many years by art critics, Gustave Courbet's drawings form a little-known part of his œuvre. Until recently, there were assumed to be less than one hundred of them, a comparatively small number, but recent research has revealed there to be as many as 140. This very fact explains why the painter was usually described as being indifferent to the printed arts, even though he regularly drew using a variety of techniques, and even exhibited charcoal drawings at the Salon.

Among the drawings, a special place must be accorded to his drawn reproductions: Some of the sheets are "ricordi" (memories) of his own paintings, namely subsequent drawings Courbet made in order to commit a composition to memory or to document it. *The Sculptor* or *The Lovers in the*

Country are striking examples of this: The drawing bears a reciprocal relationship to the painting, oscillating between memory and independent status.

Courbet exhibits an astonishing virtuosity in his large, standalone drawings that are almost exclusively made using charcoal. Starting from a blackened grounding, which he brightened using an eraser, he has shapes emerge from the darkness. The hitherto unpublished *Portrait of Jean-Antoine Beuque* displayed here for the first time is an especially impressive example.

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Museum Folkwang

Gustave Courbet

Published by

Niklaus Manuel Güdel and Hans-Peter Wipplinger

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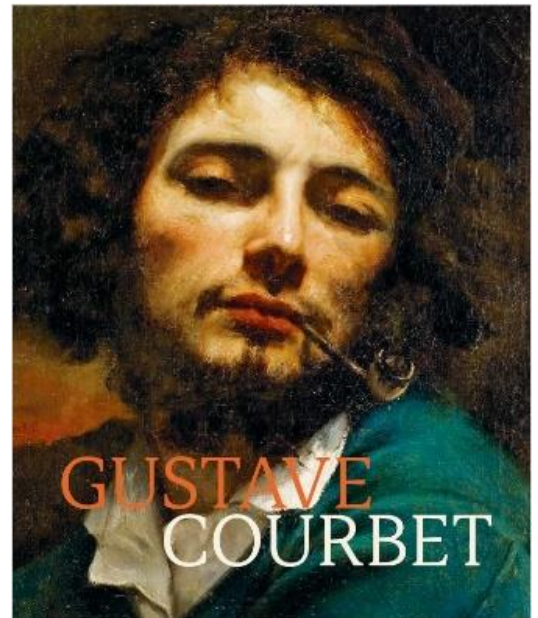
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Museum Folkwang

I, GUSTAVE COURBET

Painter and Rebel

17 July – 8 November 2026

Opening: 16 July, 7 pm

Under the High Patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, and the Honorary Patronage of Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

In cooperation with Leopold Museum, Vienna.

Concept and curatorial team, Leopold Museum Vienna (Dates: 19 February – 21 June 2026)

Curators: Niklaus Manuel Güdel, Hans-Peter Wipplinger

Conceptual and research support: Anne-Sophie Poirot

Assistant curator: Lili-Vienne Debus

Adaptation and curatorial team, Museum Folkwang, Essen (Dates: 17 July – 8 November 2026)

Anna Brohm, Hans-Jürgen Lechtreck, Sonja Pizonka

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Group tour, 60 mins: €80 plus admission

Tours in foreign languages: €100 plus admission

Guided tour, 60 mins: €30 plus admission

Accompanying programme

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of events and educational activities. Dates can be found at www.museum-folkwang.de



Courbetorial

The *Courbetorial* is the digital guide to the exhibition.

Access it via the app or the Museum Folkwang website.

Exhibition area

980 m²

Number of rooms

9 + 1 Education room

Number of exhibits

85 paintings

14 drawings

8 photographs by contemporaries (including Henri Le Secq and Gustave le Gray)

Historical prints, postcards and letters

Museum Folkwang

Lenders

Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck / Sammlung Rau für UNICEF, Remagen, Germany
Art Cuéllar-Nathan, Zug, Switzerland
Belvedere, Vienna, Austria
Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, Besançon, France
C. Baehler, Mex, Switzerland
Collection Eric Turquin, Paris, France
Collection M. Urbain, Paris, France
Collection Nicolas Schilling, Neuchâtel, Switzerland
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany
Institut Gustave Courbet, Ornans, France
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium
Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, Germany
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland
Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, Switzerland
Kunstmuseum The Hague, The Hague, Netherlands
Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland
Leopold Museum, Vienna, Austria
MAH Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Geneve, Geneva, Switzerland
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Belfort, Belfort, France
Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Pontarlier, Pontarlier, France
Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France
Musée de Dieppe, Dieppe, France
Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai, France
Musée de la Grande Saline, Salins-les-Bains, France
Musée départemental Gustave Courbet, Ornans, France
Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, France
Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France
Musée des Beaux-Arts Marseille, Marseille, France
Musée des Beaux-Arts Le Locle – MBAL, Le Locle, Switzerland
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lons-le-Saunier, France
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims, France
Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France
Musée Jenisch Vevey, Vevey, Switzerland
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain
Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany
Museum für Kunst und Geschichte Freiburg, Freiburg, Switzerland
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Sweden

Museum Folkwang

Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, Lille, France
Collection Andreas Gerritzen, Bremen, Germany
Collection Emil Bührle, Zurich, Switzerland
Collection Oskar Reinhart »Am Römerholz«, Winterthur, Switzerland
Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany
Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
The Mesdag Collection, The Hague, Netherlands
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, USA
The National Museum of Norway, Oslo, Norway
Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany
Werner Coninx Stiftung, Zurich, Switzerland

As well as numerous private lenders who wish to remain anonymous.

Publication

Gustave Courbet

Organiser: Niklaus Manuel Güdel and Hans-Peter Wipplinger

ISBN: 978-3-7533-0966-8 (EN), 978-3-7533-0965-1 (GER)

Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne

Book trade price: € 39,90

Hotel packages for visitors to the exhibition:

Sheraton Essen Hotel

Hotel Franz

Art Hotel Koerschen

Atlantic Congress Hotel

Spark by Hilton

Information and booking:

https://www.visitessen.de/reiseangebote/hotelpauschalen/startseite_hotelpauschalen.de.html

Directions

Transport connections from Essen Central Station:

Tram and underground lines 103, 106, 107 and U11 towards Bredeney or Messe Gruga to the Rüttenscheider Stern stop (the Museum Folkwang is signposted. Walking distance approx. 7 minutes).

Museum Folkwang

On foot from Essen Central Station:

15 minutes' walk from the south exit of Essen Central Station. Follow the signs.

By car:

Navigation information: Bismarckstraße 60, 45128 Essen

(Subject to change!)

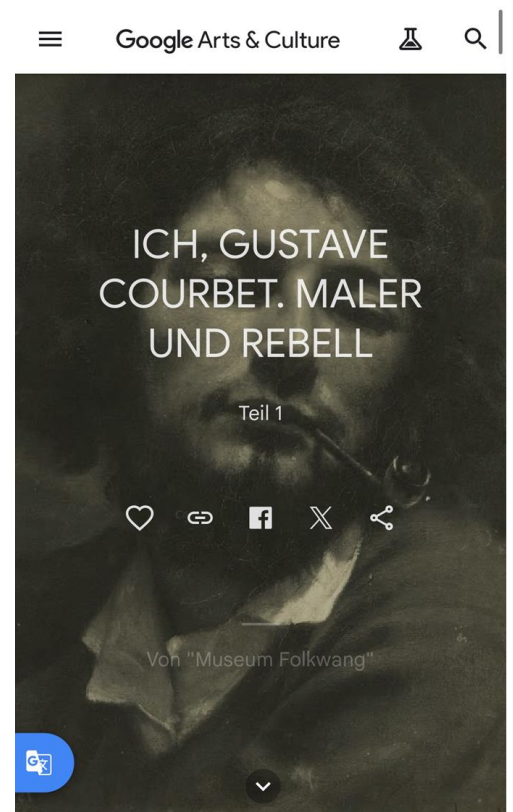
Courbetorial

Museum Folkwang

The *Courbetorial* is the digital companion to the exhibition *I, Gustave Courbet. Painter and Rebel*. It offers in-depth insights into Gustave Courbet's life, work and legacy, inviting visitors to explore key themes of the exhibition individually – from his radical visual language to his engagement with art, society and politics.

For this, Raphael Westermeier has recorded literary texts by Charles Baudelaire, Lord Byron and Marie Louise Kaschnitz that relate to the exhibition.

The Courbetorial was created using Google Arts and Culture



Museum Folkwang

Museum Folkwang



Museum Folkwang, Chipperfield-Building
© Museum Folkwang, Foto: Giorgio Pastore

Cézanne, Modersohn-Becker and Gauguin meet works by Rothko, Pollock, Richter and Fritsch: Museum Folkwang is one of the most renowned German art museums with an outstanding collection of 19th-century painting and sculpture, classical modernism and art after 1945, as well as photography. In addition, Museum Folkwang houses comprehensive collections of graphic art, archaeology, world art, decorative arts and the German Poster Museum. Museum Folkwang is particularly renowned for its international exhibition programme.

In 1902, Museum Folkwang (Old Norse Folkvangar: people's hall) was founded by Karl Ernst Osthaus (1874-1921) in the industrial town of Hagen. After Osthaus's death, the collection was acquired by the newly founded Folkwang-Museumsverein for the city of Essen and in 1922 was united with the Städtisches Kunstmuseum to form the new Museum Folkwang. As a place for collecting and communicating new and the latest art, the museum achieved world renown in just a few decades.

Under the title *New Worlds. Dialogue of the Arts*, visitors today experience the tradition-rich collection in a new guise: painting meets photography, sculpture or graphic art and enters into previously unseen and inspiring constellations with world art and posters. In this way, new worlds literally open up in front of favourite works or as yet unknown objects.

Opened in 1960 and designed by architects Werner Kreutzberger, Erich Hösterey and Horst Loy, Museum Folkwang's original building is regarded as one of the most significant museum buildings of post-war modernism. Characterised by its transparent design, light-filled courtyards and strong connection between interior and exterior space, it was expanded in 2010 with a new wing by David Chipperfield. Respecting the principles of the original architecture, the extension provides additional exhibition spaces and public facilities, creating a contemporary museum complex that seamlessly unites historical and modern architectural visions.

Museum Folkwang is the first German art museum of this size to offer all visitors free admission to its collection. This free admission is complemented by a varied programme of events and educational activities, featuring many free offerings. As a pioneer in sustainability, Museum Folkwang introduced the so-called 'Climate Ticket' in 2024. This gives visitors the opportunity to offset part of their carbon footprint.

Museum Folkwang

Direction and Organisation

Director: Peter Gorschlüter

Deputy Director and Artistic Coordinator: Hans-Jürgen Lehtreck

Collection Ownership: City of Essen and Museum Folkwang Association (Folkwang-Museumsverein e.V.), jointly owned in equal shares

Building

Old Building: Designed by Werner Kreutzberger, Erich Hösterey and Horst Loy; opened in 1960

Extension Building: Designed by David Chipperfield Architects; opened in 2010

Total Exhibition Space (including the original building): approx. 6,200 sqm

Exhibition Hall 1: 1,400 sqm

Exhibition Hall 2: 870 sqm

Collection

Painting, Sculpture and Media Art Collection (19th, 20th and 21st Centuries):
approx. 990 paintings, 370 sculptures, 220 video works

Prints and Drawings Collection: approx. 13,200 drawings and prints

Photography Collection: approx. 65,000 photographs

Archaeology, Non-European Art and Decorative Arts: approx. 1,800 objects

German Poster Museum: approx. 350,000 posters

Contact

Museum Folkwang

Museumsplatz 1, 45128 Essen

www.museum-folkwang.de

Opening hours

Tue – Sun 10 am – 6 pm,

Thu, Fri 10 am – 8 pm

Mon closed

Visitor's Office

T +49 201 8845 444

info@museum-folkwang.essen.de

Press information

Museum Folkwang

New Commissions: Contemporary Perspectives at Museum Folkwang

Katharina Frisch, *Hahn und Podest*
Since March 2026



Katharina Frisch
Hahn und Podest, 2013/2019
Polyester, steel, paintolyester, 375 x 200 x 200 cm
Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery
Photo: Ivo Faber, Museum Folkwang, Essen
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2026

With the acquisition of Katharina Fritsch's ***Hahn und Podest*** (2013/2019), Museum Folkwang is expanding its collection with a pivotal work of 21st-century art. From March 2026, the two-part sculpture, standing at nearly four metres tall, will be on display in the collection rooms. *Hahn und Podest* is considered one of the most striking works by the internationally renowned sculptor.

The vibrant blue Hahn was originally created in 2013 as a commission for the Fourth Plinth programme in London's Trafalgar Square. In the version developed in 2019 for indoor display, the animal rises on a tall, light-green plinth. In this version, the sculpture can now also be seen at the Museum Folkwang. Together, *Hahn und Podest* reach almost four metres in height: the 215 cm cockerel, cast in hand-polished polyester, presides over the viewers below, projecting a presence that is both proud and fragile. The monumental enlargement of animals plays a central role in the artist's work. *Hahn und Podest* is in line with key works such as *Elefant* (1987) and *Rattenkönig* (1992) and is one of the artist's most important recent works.

Katharina Fritsch (b. 1956, Essen, Germany) is one of the most important figures in contemporary sculpture. The artist established herself early on as part of a new tendency within European sculpture. Her figurative sculptures dissolve the boundaries between the ordinary and the bizarre or uncanny, touch on culturally deep-rooted dreams and nightmares, recall religious myths, fables and fairy tales, and evoke childhood memories.

Museum Folkwang



Yussef Agbo-Ola
BÍBÍ: 3 Seed Altar, 2025
Photo: Jens Nober, Museum Folkwang,
Essen
© Yussef Agbo-Ola

Yussef Agbo-Ola, *BÍBÍ: 3 Seed Altar* Since winter 2025

With *BÍBÍ: 3 Seed Altar* (2025), the Museum Folkwang has added a site-specific installation by the artist and architect Yussef Agbo-Ola to its collection. The work was created specifically for one of the museum's inner courtyards and combines art, architecture and living nature to form an ever-changing space of experience. Planted with climbing plants that grow, wither and renew themselves, the installation is constantly transformed by the interplay of sun, rain, wind and insects.

BÍBÍ is inspired by the internal structures of the seeds of Nigerian medicinal plants found in the Òmò Forest. The form of the altar draws upon microscopic cellular architectures, translating nature's hidden patterns into an immersive sculptural structure. The work alludes to the invisible processes of germination, fertilisation and transformation that take place beneath the earth's surface. At the same time, as a space for contemplation, it invites reflection on the relationships between humanity, nature and ecological cycles.

Yussef Agbo-Ola (b. 1990, Newport News, Virginia, United States), who lives and works between London, Lagos and the Amazon region, explores natural energy systems, cultural rituals and ecological interconnections through his interdisciplinary practice. Operating at the intersection of art, architecture and anthropological research, his work has been presented internationally at leading institutions and exhibitions. With *BÍBÍ: 3 Seed Altar*, Museum Folkwang expands its collection with a work that brings together ecological inquiry, spiritual references and participatory spatial experience in a particularly compelling way.

On Sunday, 21 June 2026, 4 p.m., artist Yussef Agbo-Ola will inaugurate his installation *BÍBÍ: 3 Seed Altar* with a musical performance.

Museum Folkwang

Kate Newby, *I'm asking*
Since June 2026



Kate Newby
I'm asking, 2026
Concrete, oxide, found glass (Essen)
17,85 m and 19,77 m
Good Sound, 2026
Glass, produced at Ateliers Loire (Chartres)
118,0 x 228,6 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Art:
Concept
Installation view;
Photo: Museum Folkwang, Tanja Lamers

From June 2026, Museum Folkwang presents ***I'm asking***, a new site-specific installation by artist Kate Newby (born 1979), known for her materially driven practice that engages closely with place and process. Developed especially for Museum Folkwang, the project brings together glass and concrete in a subtle intervention that responds directly to the architecture and conditions of the site.

For this commission, Newby selected the transitional area between the museum's original building, opened in 1960, and the extension completed in 2010. Despite their different periods of construction, both buildings share the formal language of modernist architecture, characterised by clean lines, rectangular courtyards, and expansive glass façades.

Drawing on glass and concrete, two key materials of modernist architecture, Newby creates works that foreground touch, process and perception. In ***Good Sound***, hand-drawn lines and fingerprints embedded in the glass surface respond to changing light and movement, while its linear forms extend outdoors in the concrete sculpture ***I'm asking***.

Kate Newby (b. 1979, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand) lives and works in Texas, USA. She is among the most internationally recognised artists of her generation and is known for her site-responsive works that engage architecture, materiality and subtle perceptual shifts.

Press images are available for download at www.museum-folkwang.de/en

Press contact Anna Rutten, T +49 201 8845 160, presse@museum-folkwang.essen.de

Press Images

Museum Folkwang

The images may only be used in the context of current reporting on the exhibition ***I, Gustave Courbet. Painter and Rebel (17 July – 8 November 2026)*** in Essen in 2026. Longer series require special arrangement with the Museum Folkwang. The images may not be cropped or altered in any way. Images on the internet may not exceed a resolution of 72 dpi with a maximum size of approx. 20x20 cm. The publication in social media must be requested independently from the respective rights holders before use. The reproduction of artworks for marketing purposes (e.g. promotion of tourist trips) is not permitted. The copyright notice, as indicated next to the images, must be adopted. We kindly request a copy be sent to us.



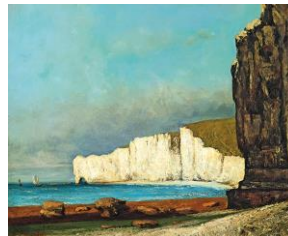
Gustave Courbet
L'Homme à la pipe, c.
1849
Oil on canvas,
45,8 × 37,8 cm
© Musée Fabre de
Montpellier Méditerranée
Métropole / Photo: Frédéric
Jaulmes



Gustave Courbet
La vague, 1870
Oil on canvas,
45 × 59 cm
© Museum Folkwang,
Essen



Gustave Courbet
Le Fou de peur, c. 1844
Oil on canvas,
60,5 × 50 cm
Photo: Børre
Høstland/Nasjonalmuseet,
Oslo



Gustave Courbet
Paysage côtier, 1866
Oil on canvas,
46,2 × 55,6 cm
© Leopold Museum,
Wien, Photo: Leopold
Museum, Wien



Gustave Courbet
Jo, la belle Irlandaise,
1866
Oil on canvas
54 × 65 cm
© Nationalmuseum,
Stockholm
Photo: Nationalmuseum



Gustave Courbet
L'Après-dînée à Ornans,
1848/49
Oil on canvas
195 × 257 cm
Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts
© bpk | GrandPalaisRmn |
Philippe Bernard

Museum Folkwang



Gustave Courbet
L'Origine du monde, 1866
Oil on canvas
46 × 55 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
© bpk / GrandPalaisRmn /
Hervé Lewandowski



Gustave Courbet
Bouquet d'asters, 1859
Oil on canvas
46,6 × 61,5 cm
Kunstmuseum Basel
© Kunstmuseum Basel,
Gift of the Amerbach-
Stiftung
Photo: Jonas Hänggi



Gustave Courbet
Chiens de chasse avec lièvre mort, 1857
Oil on canvas
92,7 × 148,6 cm
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York
H. O. Havemeyer
Collection, Gift of Horace
Havemeyer, 1933
© bpk | The Metropolitan
Museum of Art



Gustave Courbet
La Fileuse endormie, 1853
Oil on canvas
90,5 × 117 cm
© Musée Fabre de
Montpellier Méditerranée
Métropole / Photo:
Frédéric Jaulmes



Gustave Courbet
Le Château de Chillon,
1875
Oil on canvas
62 × 92,4 cm
Ville de Lons-le-Saunier,
musée des Beaux-Arts,
France
© Collection Musée de
Lons-le-Saunier/Jean-Loup
Mathieu



Gustave Courbet
Femme nue au chien,
1861/62
Oil on canvas
65 × 81 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
© bpk / GrandPalaisRmn /
Hervé Lewandowski

Please find further images online via www.museum-folkwang.de