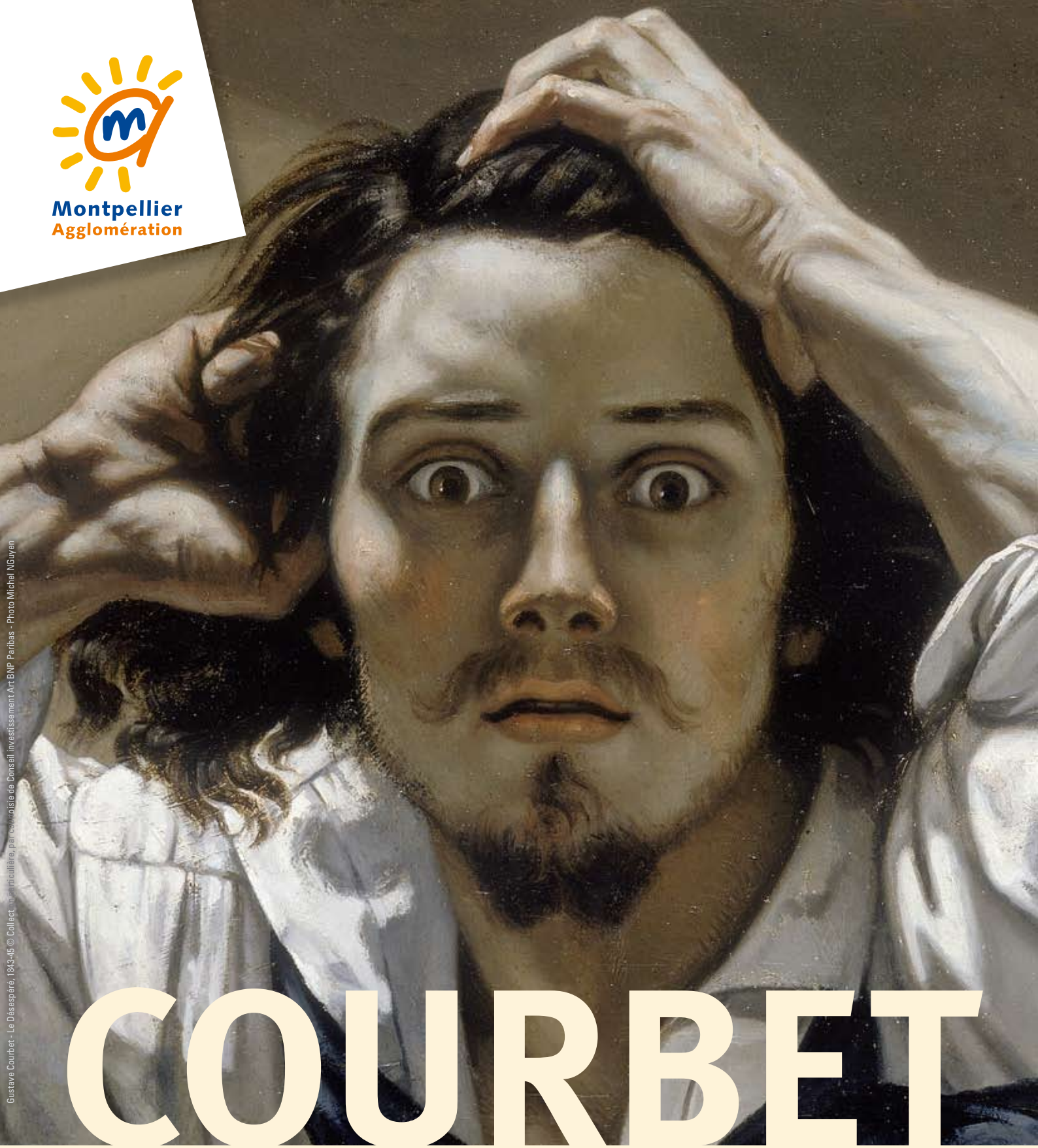

Gustave Courbet - Le Désespéré, 1843-45 © Collect. particulière, par courtoisie de Conseil investissement Art BNP Paribas - Photo Michel NGuyen

# COURBET

## Press file

THE MUSÉE FABRE OF THE MONTPELLIER AGGLOMERATION

**14TH JUNE TO 28TH SEPTEMBER 2008**

**A Courbet major exibition at the Musée Fabre**
in the Montpellier Agglomeration

# editorial

After a four year renovation project overseen by the Montpellier Agglomeration, considered one of the major museum renewal works in France, the Musée Fabre finally reopened on the 4th February 2007 to visitors from Montpellier, the Montpellier Agglomeration, the Languedoc-Roussillon region and far beyond, further consolidating Montpellier's position as a cultural European city.

Over 400,000 visitors came to admire the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions last year, far beyond the attendance objective of 250,000 visitors for the first year after reopening. This was primarily thanks to the quality of the permanent collections and the international reputation of the temporary exhibitions presented. The «Impressionism from France and America» exhibition attracted over 140 000 visitors in just under 4 months! Over 45 000 saw the retrospective for «François-Xavier Fabre, Painter and Founder of the Museum». Today, I am proud that the «Courbet» major exhibition, which has already met with resounding success in Paris and New York, is now coming to Montpellier. the Musée Fabre is henceforth one of Europe's major museums and boasts, after the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the third largest collection of works by Gustave Courbet in the world, thanks to Courbet's Montpellier based patron, Alfred Bruyas, who brilliantly supported the painter and also contributed to the museum's reputation by donating a significant amount of paintings. The artist developed a deep friendship with his patron and grew to appreciate and enjoy the Languedoc area. It is a great source of pride for us to show the artist's paintings in the museum and to emphasise the importance of the Languedoc-Roussillon region within the painter's work.

The Montpellier Agglomeration's internationally acclaimed dance and music festivals, its rich network of media libraries, the creation and modernisation of venues dedicated to contemporary music, a new 12,000 seat Zenith auditorium and the creation of a new International Dance City all serve to underline the fact that Montpellier offers high quality culture, open to all.

**Georges Frêche**
President of the Montpellier Agglomeration
President of the Languedoc-Roussillon Region

# Exhibition

## Courbet

at the Musée Fabre in the Montpellier Agglomeration

14th June to 28th September 2008

Thanks to a partnership with the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Musée Fabre in the Montpellier Agglomération is proud to host the 'Courbet' exhibition from 14th June to 28th September 2008. This event was a highlight in the Parisian cultural season attracting over 480 000 visitors at the Grand Palais in Paris. The retrospective, the first organised in France since 1977, pays an exceptional and historic tribute to this artist through a magnificent collection of 116 works which are at other times dispersed around the whole world. Courbet's Montpellier based patron, Alfred Bruyas, contributed significantly to the fortunes of the young artist and also to Musée Fabre by donating the majority of the works in his Courbet collection. The Musée Fabre is the only regional museum to be organizing such a major exhibition this summer with an unprecedented collection of masterpieces displayed through powerful thematic presentations and chronological organisation which will enable visitors to understand and appreciate the genius of this artist who made a significant impact on the history of art in the 19th century. Drawings and photographs enrich the exhibition and illustrate lesser known aspects of the artist, such as his skill in drawing, as demonstrated by a series of self portraits. Works which could not be transported to the exhibition due to their monumental dimensions, such as The Artist's Studio and Burial at Ornans, will nevertheless be present at the exhibition thanks to special films and multimedia programmes.

The Montpellier Agglomeration's Musée Fabre holds the world's third largest collection of works by Gustave Courbet, with 16 major works.

# 1. Gustave Courbet in Montpellier

The influence of the Montpellier region on the artist's work is quite remarkable. In 1853 Courbet created a scandal at the Paris Salon when he presented The Bathers, which Alfred Bruyas, an avant-garde collector from Montpellier offered to buy. This decisive encounter developed into a solid friendship between these two exceptional characters and duly drew the painter to visit the Languedoc Roussillon region. Freed of all material constraints he found inspiration and revealed a free and realist style of art, using landscapes which had rarely been featured before. Courbet went on to create some of his major works in the region such as *The Meeting* also known as *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* in which he encounters his friend, host and patron. He loved long walks and frequently strolled along the coast, which inspired scenes of fishermen's cabins, the seafront, the bridge at Ambrussum and also vineyards. This was the first time that the landscapes of the Languedoc-Roussillon region entered into the mainstream history of art.
A 'Courbet route' has been created in parallel to the exhibition to enable visitors to follow in the painter's footsteps in the Languedoc-Roussillon, from Sète to Lunel, and discover the landscapes (which are mostly unspoilt), that the painter portrayed in his most famous works and which are present at the retrospective.

*The Meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet, 1854*,
© Musée Fabre in Montpellier Agglomération
Cliché Frédéric Jaulmes

## 1.1 The exhibition

The Courbet retrospective's summer phase is taking on an exceptional dimension at the Musée Fabre. It is even having an impact on the layout of the museum's permanent exhibitions because the 1000 sq.m temporary exhibition area is not sufficient for presenting the 116 works and forty photographs by Gustave Courbet. Five additional rooms will therefore be dedicated to the artist, thus offering visitors 16 sections in which to admire the artist's work, grouped into themes and locations dear to the artist and presented in chronological order. The museum's own collection will thus be considerably enriched through this exceptional exhibition of one hundred additional works during the season.

## The exhibition tour, through 25 masterpieces by Courbet

**1 - Early years**

. Self-Portrait with ***Black Dog***, 1842, Paris, Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris

. Self portrait, ***The Desperate Man***, 1843-1845, Paris, Private Collection, courtesy of BNP Paribas Art Investment Advisory

**2 - Bohemian Paris**

. ***The Wounded Man***, 1844-1854, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

. ***Mère Grégoire***, 1855-1859, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago

**3 - Breaking away**

. ***After Dinner at Ornans***, 1848-1849, Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts

**4 - Landscapes in Franche-Comté**

. ***The Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair***, Ornans, 1855, Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

**5 - The Languedoc**

. Alfred Bruyas (Painting-Solution) known as, 1853, Montpellier, Musée Fabre

. ***The Meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet***, 1854, Montpellier, Musée Fabre

. ***The Sea at Palavas***, 1854, Montpellier, Musée Fabre

**6 - Seascapes**

. ***The Wave***, 1869, Francfort-sur-le-Main, Städelsches Kunstintitut

. ***The waterspart, Etretat***, c.a 1870, Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts

. ***The Stormy Sea***, 1873, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of European Paintings

**7 - Society portraits**

. ***The Trellis*** or ***Woman with flowers***, 1862, Toledo, Museum of Art

**8 - Hunting**

. ***The Death of hunted Stag***, 1867, Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

**9 - Drawing exhibition areas**

**10-12 - Photographs**

**11 - Female portraits**

. ***The Bathers***, 1853, Montpellier, Musée Fabre

. ***Young Ladies in the Banks of the Seine*** (Summer), 1856-1857, Paris, Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris

. ***Woman with a Parrot***, 1866, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of European Paintings

. ***Jo, the Beautiful Irish Woman,*** 1866, Stockholm, National Museum

. ***The Sleep***, 1866, Paris, Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris

. ***The Origin of the World***, 1866, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

. ***Woman in the Waves***, 1868, New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of European Paintings

**13 - The Republicans**

. ***P. J. Proudhon in 1853***, 1865-1867, Paris, Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris

**14 - Prison**

. ***Self-portrait at Sainte-Pélagie, 1872-1873***, Ornans, Gustave Courbet Departmental Museum

**15 - Exile**

. ***The Trout***, 1873, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

. ***Château de Chillon***, 1874, Ornans, Gustave Courbet Departmental Museum

**16 - Documentation room**

In order to offer a closer approach to this exceptional exhibition, special accompaniment has been developed using audio guides. Visitors are thus offered specialist commentaries on selected works in French and English. In addition, extracts from Courbet's correspondence can also be viewed, offering a further insight into the artist's life.

*The Sea at Palavas, 1854*
© Musée Fabre in Montpellier Agglomération, 868.1.24
Cliché Frédéric Jaulmes

*The Bathers, 1853*
*Huile sur toile, 2,27x 1,93 m*
Musée Fabre in Montpellier Agglomération, 868.1.19
© Frédéric Jaulmes

*The Wounded Man*
*1844-1854*
*Huile sur toile,*
*0,81 x 0,97 m*
Musée d'Orsay à Paris, RF 338
© Photo RMN / Hervé Lewandowski

*Alfred Bruyas (Painting-Solution), 1853, Montpellier*
© Musée Fabre-Montpellier Agglomération
Cliché Frédéric Jaulmes

*Juliette Courbet, c.a 1840,*
Paris, Musée d'Orsay, conserved at the Graphics Art Department of the Louvre, RF 29234
© RMN-Jean-Gilles Berizzi

*Etienne Carjat, Gustave Courbet, 1861,*
by photomechanical print of Jules Marie from the photograph by Carjat, Paris, Musée d'Orsay,
PHO 1983 40
© DR

Gustave Le Gray, *The Great Wave,*
Sète, 1857, album print,
Paris, Musée d'Orsay,
PHO 1985 127
© Photo RMN / Hervé Lewandowski

## 1.2 Special exhibition areas for drawings and photographs

### Courbet and his drawings

Courbet is renowned for his paintings but his drawings are less well known. Thanks to an exceptional collection of drawings on loan from the Musée d'Orsay, The Besançon Fine Arts Museum and the Ornans Courbet Institute, and based around the grand portrait of François Sabatier held by the Musée Fabre, visitors can explore this other facet of the artist. Courbet took to drawing at certain moments in his life: at the beginning of his career when he was experimenting with techniques and training his eye, then later on during the period of the Paris Commune, a period of national uprising and of serious difficulties for Courbet.
A special multimedia lectern has been designed to present his drawings made during the Commune period, showing all of his sketches and offering a true insight into his life while he was making his drawings.

### Courbet and photography

This major retrospective also offers an opportunity to draw a parallel between Courbet's works and the burgeoning art of photography. For the first time ever, a new perspective of his paintings and this new art form sheds light on Courbet as an avid lover of images: drawing inspiration from past masters, classical painting, romantic lithography, popular imagery, and also photography. He was fascinated by this art form for its capacity to reproduce reality and he quickly grasped the power of such images, drawing upon the resources offered by this new medium.

## 2. The « Courbet Route »

This exhibition equally offers the Montpellier Agglomeration an opportunity to promote its natural and artistic heritage on a further dimension through the creation of a «Courbet Route». This original and unique project will enable visitors to to literally follow in the footsteps of Gustave Courbet, from Villetelle to Sète. Indeed, Gustave Courbet resided in the Montpellier region on two occasions, in 1854 and 1857, thanks to his friendship with the Montpellier based art collector Alfred Bruyas. These two trips represented an opportunity for the painter to explore the coastal areas around Montpellier, from which he drew inspiration for a series of masterpieces which drew Languedoc-Roussillon landscapes into the international artistic world. Special signs have been positioned to indicate each stop on the «Courbet Route».

### 2.1 The stopping points

**Montpellier, birthplace of Alfred Bruyas**

When he first came to Montpellier, Courbet stayed with Alfred Bruyas in the heart of the city and there admired the works gathered by the collector and patron of the arts. Shortly after Courbet's departure, Alfred Bruyas built a new residence, which is today occupied by a primary school; the entry gate still carries the initials A.B.

**From Mireval to Vic-la-Gardiole**

As a symbol of his friendship with Bruyas and in celebration of his visits to the Languedoc, Courbet painted, *The Meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* in 1854. According to Fréderic Bazille the scene is located on an estate belonging to Emile Mey between Mireval and Vic la Gardiole. The painter here uses his mastery of colour to offer an unrivalled representation of the true atmosphere of southern France.

**The sea: the lagoons at Pérols, Villeneuve-lès- Maguelone and Sète**

Courbet was attracted by the marine landscapes between Villeneuve-lès-Maguelone and Sète to such an extent that these soon became a fundamental theme in his work. The painter had already depicted the sea in Normandy but here he discovered, for the first time, the intense colours of the Mediterranean which he reproduced with genius in his seascapes, which diverged from the traditional picturesque style.

**From Lunel-Viel to Villetelle**

Courbet struck up an acquaintance with François Sabatier, owner of Château de la Tour de Farges during his first visit to Montpellier in 1854. He stayed on several occasions at his friend's estate close to Lunel-Viel. François Sabatier, from a family of Languedoc winemakers, had developed a strong love of the arts and became a fervent supporter of Courbet. The portrait of François Sabatier illustrates the painter's affection for this man who was an adept of the theories of Proudhon and Fourier. At Villetelle Courbet drew inspiration from the antique ruins and the Roman bridge across the Vidourle river.

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# The « Courbet Route »

**Montpellier**
***Hecate and Cerberus,***
Parc de Grammont
Adèle Castiglione-Colonna
(1836-1879)

**Lunel-Viel**
***View of La Tour de Farges (1854),***
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

**Mireval, Vic-la-Gardiole**
***The Meeting or Bonjour Monsieur Courbet (1854),***
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

Montpellier

Mireval

Villeneuve-les-Maguelone

Vic-la-gardiole

**Sète**
***Calm sea at Palavas (1857),***
Musée Paul Valéry, Sète

**Villeneuve-les-Maguelone,**
***The Edge of the Sea at Palavas (1854),***
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

Sète

Villetelle

Lunel-Viel

**Lunel-Viel**
***Portrait of François Sabatier (1857),***
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

**Villetelle**
***The Bridge at Ambrussum (1854),***
Musée Fabre, Montpellier

**Villeneuve-les-Maguelone,**
***Souvenir of Les Cabanes (1854),***
Philadelphia Museum of Art

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## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Access**

By plane:

Montpellier-London Gatwick, less than 2 hours

**Musée Fabre opening times**

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday, from 10 am to 6 pm,

Wednesday from 1 pm to 9 pm, Saturday from 11 am to 6 pm.

Closed on Mondays and 15 august. The museum is accessible to disabled people.

**Temporary exhibition tariff *(including access to the permanent collections)***

Standard rate: 7 € / Pass'Agglo: 6 € / Reduced rate: 5 €

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Montpellier Agglomération