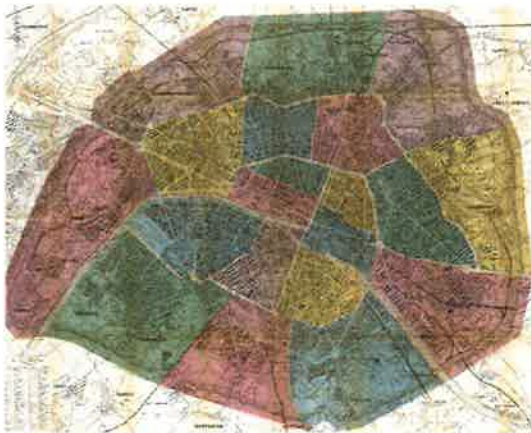


FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

and the Birth of Impressionism

The 1860s were critical years in the history of art. During this period, a small group of independently minded artists including Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Paul Cézanne set their sights on modernizing painting and blazed new trails. Among them was Frédéric Bazille (1841–1870), from Montpellier in the South of France. The role he played in the genesis of impressionism has received less attention than that of his peers, largely due

to the brevity of his artistic career. At the age of twenty-eight, Bazille surprised his family and friends by enlisting in the French army to fight in the Franco-Prussian war and died in combat before his twenty-ninth birthday. Shortly after his death, his friend Edmond Maître wrote: “Bazille was the most gifted, and the most pleasant, in every sense of the word.”

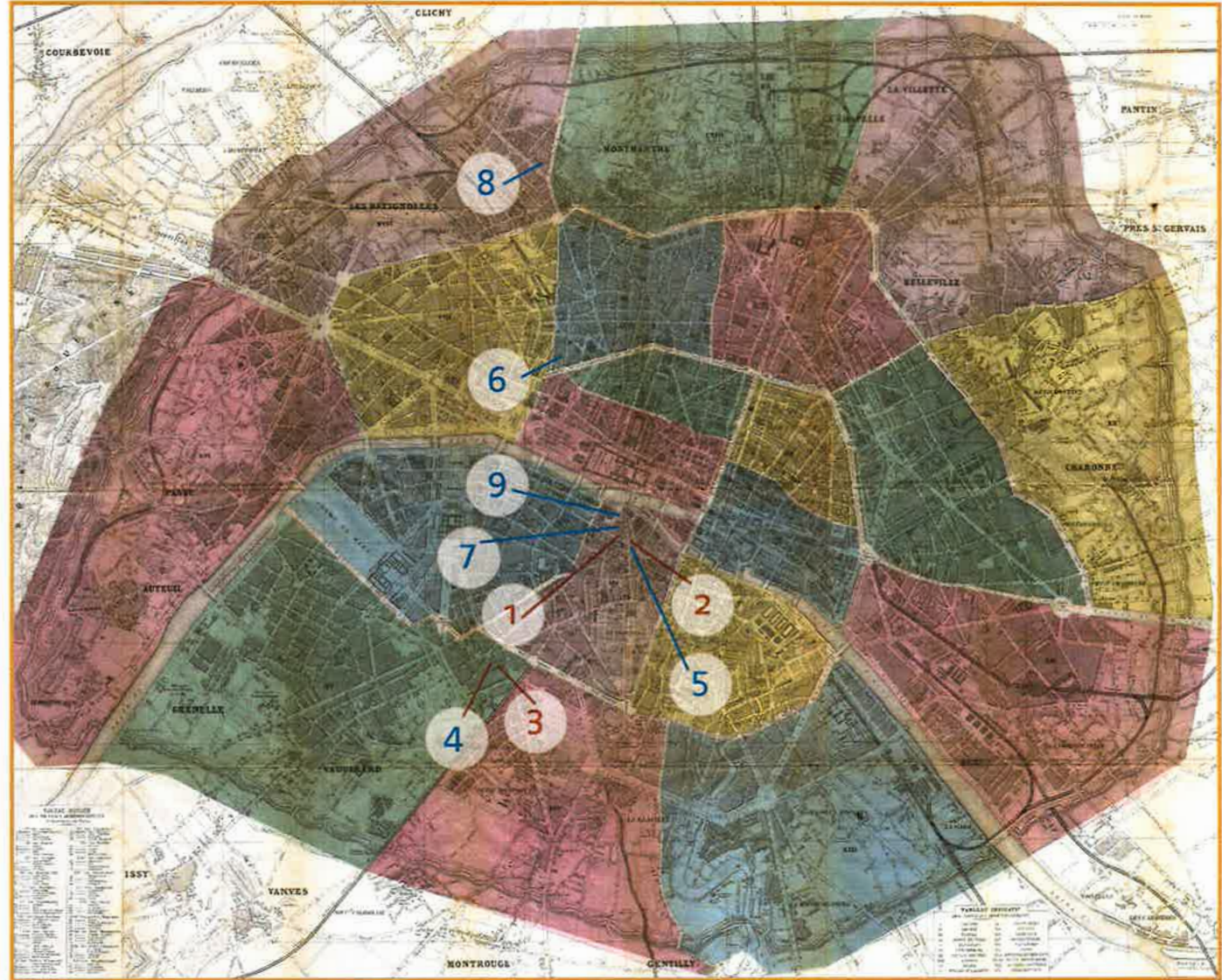


1870 map of Paris, France, with studios



Bazille’s career unfolded mainly in Paris, but also at his family’s estate outside Montpellier where he vacationed each summer and painted works pervaded by the powerful light of southern France. He wrestled with the often-conflicting desires of meeting the expectations of his upper-middle-class family and playing a part in the artistic revolution then taking place. His work bears the hallmarks of youth: it is ambitious, inventive, and rebellious, and each new painting represents a challenge; a triumph, or a failure. Bazille experimented with traditional subjects—portraits, still lifes, landscapes—but focused on modern life, writing to his parents: “The subject matter is unimportant, provided what I have done is interesting as a painting. I chose the modern era because it is the one I understand best; I find it more alive for people who are alive.” This exhibition surveys the career, spanning a mere seven years, of this promising young artist at the dawn of impressionism.

- 1 **November 1862–October 1863**
58 rue Jacob
- 2 **October 1863–January 1864**
Hôtel du Berri, 24 rue de Seine
- 3 **November 1862–summer 1864**
69 rue de Vaugirard
Studio of Charles Gleyre
- 4 **January 1864–December 1864**
115 rue de Vaugirard
Studio shared with Émile Villa, a fellow student
in the studio of Charles Gleyre from Montpellier
- 5 **December 1864–January 1866**
6 rue de Furstenberg
Studio shared with Claude Monet
- 6 **January 1866–July 1866**
22 rue Godot-de-Maurey
- 7 **July 1866–January 1868**
20 rue Visconti
Studio shared with Auguste Renoir
and occasionally Monet and Alfred Sisley
- 8 **January 1868–January 1870**
9 rue de la Paix (now rue La Condamine)
Studio shared with Renoir
- 9 **January 1870–November 1870**
8 rue des Beaux-Arts





1874

No paintings by Bazille are displayed at the first exhibition of work by the impressionist group.

1876

Munch visits Frédéric Bazille by himself to the second impressionist exhibition in memory of his friend.



Frédéric Bazille, *The Family Reunion*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Photo: Musée de la Ville de Paris.

1884

A monument is erected on Bazille's grave in the Protestant cemetery in Montpellier.



Monument erected on Frédéric Bazille's grave in the Protestant cemetery in Montpellier.

1900

Critic and historian Roger Marx republishes Bazille and includes two of his paintings in a major exhibition of French art organized for the Universal Exposition in Paris.

1905

Henri Basile gives *The Adonis Gathering* to the French state.



Frédéric Bazille, *The Adonis Gathering*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Photo: Musée de la Ville de Paris.

1910

Twenty-three paintings are shown in a special exhibition of the Société Anonyme, Harvard, under the sponsorship.

1927

Bill Peasman Chester Gale purchases Bazille's portrait of Edouard Blau, the first painting by the artist to enter an American collection, and later donates it to the National Gallery of Art.



Frédéric Bazille, *Portrait of Edouard Blau*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Photo: National Gallery of Art.

1937

Bazille's great-niece gives *Summer Scene (Bathers)* to the Tagg Art Museum, Harvard University.



Frédéric Bazille, *Summer Scene (Bathers)*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Tagg Art Museum, Harvard University. Photo: Tagg Art Museum.

1941

The first Bazille retrospective is organized by the Musée Eugène Delacroix in memory of the centenary of his birth.

1950

The Wimpston-Gallery in Paris also organizes an exhibition of his work.



Frédéric Bazille, *The Family Reunion*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Photo: Musée de la Ville de Paris.

1960s

The American anthropologist and collector Paul Mellon buys several paintings by Bazille and bequeaths them (Edmond Millaud, *The Western Remnants of Aigues-Mortes*, and *Young Women with Peonies*) to the National Gallery of Art.



Frédéric Bazille, *The Family Reunion*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 130 cm. Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Photo: Musée de la Ville de Paris.

1841

Frédéric Bazille was born on December 6 in Montpellier in southern France. His father, Gaston Bazille, was an agronomist and winegrower. He was appointed deputy mayor of Montpellier in 1867. Frédéric's mother, Camille Vialars, came from a family of well-to-do merchants and landowners. His younger brother Marc was born in 1845.



Portrait of Gaston Bazille by
Huguet-Moline (Montpellier),
c. 1860, Private collection

Portrait of Madame Gaston Bazille,
née Camille Vialars, by Huguet-Moline
(Montpellier), c. 1860, Private collection
Photos: © All rights reserved

1859

Bazille received his bachelor's degree in science, enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine, and attended the sculptor Auguste Baussan's studio to study drawing. In November 1862, Frédéric left Montpellier to pursue his medical studies in Paris. There he received instruction at the studio of Swiss painter Charles Gleyre.



Marc Bazille, Frédéric Bazille, and a friend
by H. Lavaud, c. 1867, Private collection
Photo: © All rights reserved

1863

At Gleyre's studio Bazille met Alfred Sisley, Auguste Renoir, and Claude Monet. In February, he acted in the play *La Tour de Nesle* (Nesle's Tower) by Alexandre Dumas, staged by students at the studio. Bazille copied works by Peter Paul Rubens at the Louvre and painted *sur le motif* (in nature) with Monet in Fontainebleau Forest in the spring. In Paris, Bazille frequented the salons of relatives from Montpellier who moved in avant-garde circles and introduced him to Édouard Manet.



"La Tour de Nesle" in Gleyre's Studio by Félix Régamy, caricature published in *Le Boulevard*, February 8, 1863, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris
Photo: © Musée d'Orsay/Patrice Schmidt

1864

In January, Bazille rented his first studio on the rue de Vaugirard, Paris. In June, he traveled to Normandy with Monet. On his return, he failed his exams, persuaded his parents to let him drop medicine in favor of art, and painted *Reclining Nude*. Bazille spent the rest of the summer as usual in Montpellier and at Méric, the family's summer residence, where he painted *The Pink Dress*. He returned to Paris in the fall, but not to Gleyre's studio.

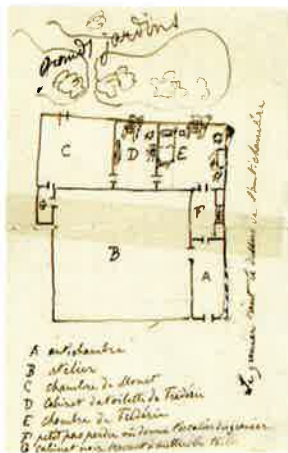


Montpellier, Domaine de Méric,
documentations du Musée Fabre
Photo: © Musée Fabre, Montpellier
Méditerranée Métropole/Frédéric Jaulmes

1865

Bazille and Monet moved into 6 rue de Furstenberg, a few floors above the studio that had been occupied by Eugène Delacroix. Opera- and theater-lover Bazille penned a play titled *Le Fils de Don César* (The Son of Don César) with his librettist friend Édouard Blau. In August, he joined Monet in Chailly, having promised to pose for him. When Frédéric returned to Paris, he met Edmond Maître, the son of a middle-class Bordeaux family, who became

his closest friend. Bazille and Monet were visited by Gustave Courbet, who encouraged them in their work.



Plan of Bazille's studio on the rue de Furstenberg, 1865/1866, Paris, Géraldine Galateau Collection

Inscribed:

- A antechamber; B studio; C Monet's room;
- D bathroom; E Frédéric's room; F staircase to the attic;
- G dark closet for storing canvases

1866

In January, Bazille and Monet left the rue de Furstenberg and Frédéric moved to the rue Godot-de-Mauroy on his own. He submitted two paintings to the Salon for the first time: *Young Girl at the Piano* (rejected) and *Still Life with Fish* (accepted). In the summer, Bazille moved again, this time to the rue Visconti with Renoir. Monet, short of funds, was an occasional lodger. Bazille, Renoir, and Sisley painted together there.



Still Life with Fish by Frédéric Bazille, 1866,
Detroit Institute of Arts, Purchased by the
Founders Society, Robert H. Tannahill
Foundation Fund
Photo: Bridgeman Images

1867

Bazille's two submissions (*The Terrace at Méric* and *Portrait of Edmond Maître*) were rejected by the Salon. Bazille and his friends called for a new Salon des Refusés (Salon of Rejected Works) and came up with the idea of an independent event to present their work freely, which was a forerunner of subsequent impressionist exhibitions. Bazille bought *Women in the Garden* from Monet. In the spring, he traveled to Aigues-Mortes to paint landscapes. During the summer, he began work on *The Family Gathering*.



The terrace at Méric, c. 1894, with Bazille's sister-in-law Suzanne Bazille, his mother Madame Gaston Bazille, his niece Laure Bazille, and his aunt Madame Adrienne des Hours, Private collection
Photo: © All rights reserved

1868

In January, Bazille moved with Renoir into a more spacious studio on the rue La Condamine, in the Batignolles district close to Manet's studio. In April, he became godfather to Monet's first son, Jean. In May, two of his paintings—*The Family Gathering* and *Potted Flowers*—were exhibited at the Salon and caught the eye of the writer and journalist Émile Zola. During the summer at Méric, Bazille painted *View of the Village* and *Fisherman with a Net*. Monet, who was in dire financial straits, bombarded Bazille with letters asking for help. The relationship between the two friends became strained.



A Studio in the Batignolles Quarter

by Henri Fantin-Latour, 1870, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

Seated: Édouard Manet (at easel) and art critic Zacharie Astruc.

Standing (left to right): Otto Scholderer (German painter),

Auguste Renoir, Émile Zola, Edmond Maître, Bazille, and Claude Monet

Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay)/Hervé Lewandowski

1869

Bazille took part in an amateur performance of *Ruy Blas* by Victor Hugo and attended the Paris premiere of *Rienzi*, an opera by Richard Wagner. In late May, Bazille's *View of the Village* was accepted by the Salon. He was championed by the Montpellier artist Alexandre Cabanel, who was a member of the jury, but whose academic paintings Bazille despised. Over the summer, Bazille focused on *Summer Scene*, which would meet with both praise and criticism at the Salon, and painted its companion piece, *La Toilette*, during the winter.



M. Bazille—Jumping into the water, hoping to wash off the color the painter splashed on them by Cham (Amédée de Noé), caricature of Bazille's *Summer Scene*, *Le Charivari*, May 15, 1870, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France

1870

Bazille moved back to the Left Bank near Maître, living alone on the rue des Beaux-Arts in the building where Henri Fantin-Latour had his studio. Bazille painted two versions of *Young Woman with Peonies* there. He returned to Montpellier in May. In August, he enlisted in a Zouave regiment to fight in the Franco-Prussian War, against the wishes of his family. (By Bazille's time, the Zouaves were mostly Frenchmen, but their distinctive uniforms reveal the regiment's origins as North African troops in service to the French colonial army.) Bazille was killed at Beaune-la-Rolande on November 28, shortly before his twenty-ninth birthday.



The Zouaves during the Attack on Beaune-la-Rolande in 1870, after Louis-Charles Bombled de Richemond, color lithograph, c. 1893, Private collection
© Look and Learn/Bridgeman Images

I have spent eight days in the little village of Chailly, near the forest of Fontainebleau. I was with my friend Monet...who is very good at landscapes. He gave me advice that has helped me a lot.

Frédéric Bazille, letter to his mother, March 1863

***Monet has popped up out of nowhere with a collection of magnificent canvases...
with Renoir, that makes two hard-up painters I am putting up.***

Frédéric Bazille, letter to his mother, March 1867

Room 4

I am having fun so far painting the interior of my studio with my friends. Manet did me himself.

Frédéric Bazille, letter to his father, January 1870

Big Bazille has done something I find really good....He is trying to do something we have tried so often to do: portray a figure in the open air, and this time I believe he has pulled it off.

Berthe Morisot, letter to her sister Edma, May 1869, regarding Bazille's *View of the Village*

I am delighted with my exhibition, my painting is very nicely placed, everyone is seeing it and talking about it. Many have more bad things to say than good, but anyway I am on my way and from now on, anything I exhibit will be looked at.

Frédéric Bazille, letter to brother Marc, 1870, regarding *Summer Scene*

It is a beautiful day....I am going to paint the city walls reflected in the lagoon at sunset on my large canvas. It will be a very simple painting and should not take very long.

Frédéric Bazille, letter to his mother, May 1867

**The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington;
the Musée Fabre, Montpellier; and the Musée d'Orsay, Paris**

**This exhibition is made possible by leadership support of
The Leonard and Elaine Silverstein Family Foundation**

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**The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the
Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities**

Free Audio Tour

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE and the Birth of Impressionism

To access the tour on your mobile device, go to nga.gov/bazille

Look for this symbol



Narrated by Earl A. Powell, director, with commentary from exhibition curators
Kimberly Jones and Paul Perrin and conservator Ann Hoenigswald

For visitors in need of headphones or devices, a limited number are available
at the Sales Shop (headphones) and Information Desk (devices)

From Montpellier to Paris

Frédéric Bazille was born into a prominent family in Montpellier. His father, an agronomist and winegrower, was deputy mayor of Montpellier and later became a senator for the department of Hérault (formerly part of the Languedoc region of southern France) and president of the Agricultural Society. Frédéric enrolled in Montpellier's Faculty of Medicine at the urging of his family, but also studied drawing at the studio of the local sculptor Auguste Baussan.

In Montpellier, the young artist had access to the collections of old master paintings at the Musée Fabre, considered to be among the best in France, as well as to the modern paintings that art enthusiast Alfred Bruyas had begun to collect in the early 1850s. Frédéric visited the private museum in the Bruyas town house and studied recent masterpieces by Eugène Delacroix and Gustave Courbet.

In 1862, at the age of twenty, Bazille left Montpellier to pursue his medical studies in Paris. As soon as he arrived there, he also enrolled at the studio run by the Swiss painter Charles Gleyre, where he met Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley. In 1864, Bazille's parents finally agreed to let him drop his medical studies and pursue a career as an artist. Around the same time, he also left Gleyre and henceforth painted independently in his own studio or with Monet.

Bazille and Monet

In the spring of 1863, Bazille accompanied Monet and other friends from Gleyre's studio to the forest of Fontainebleau, where they set their easels outside to paint directly from nature. Following in the footsteps of predecessors such as Théodore Rousseau, they continued the practice of painting directly from nature, but adopted a more objective approach that focused purely on capturing the colors and contrasts found in nature at a specific point in time. Bazille improved his eye and technique under the tutelage of the more experienced artist Monet.

The two young men traveled together on several occasions. In the spring of 1864 they made a trip to Normandy to paint and visit Monet's family in Le Havre, dining at the nearby Ferme de Saint-Siméon, a favorite stop for visiting artists. In August 1865, Bazille joined Monet in Chailly, a village located on the outskirts of the forest of Fontainebleau to pose for his monumental painting *Luncheon on the Grass* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). He took advantage of the trip to paint a few landscapes and also to depict his friend, who was confined to bed following an accident, in *The Improvised Field Hospital* (no. 26). After this trip, Bazille asserted his independence from Monet in symbolic terms and forsook the landscapes of northern France in favor of those of his native Languedoc.

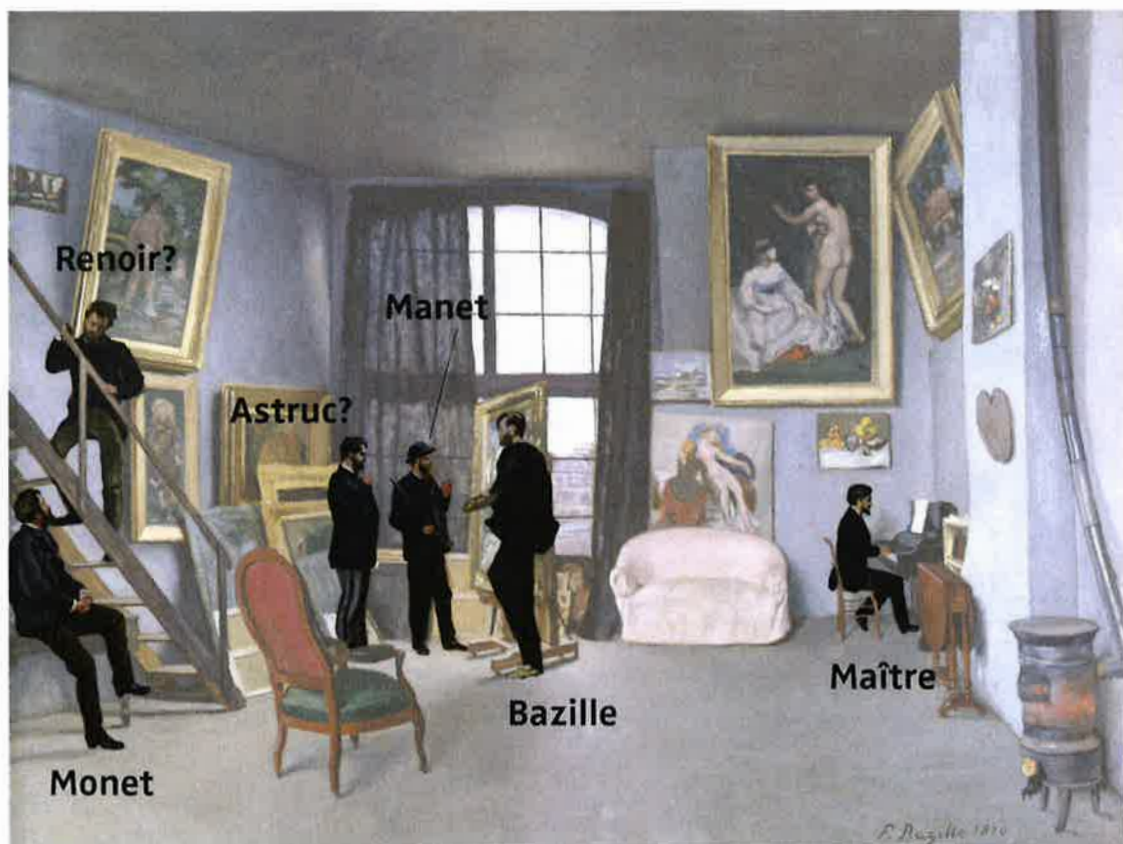
Studio Friendships

As soon as he arrived in Paris, Bazille pestered his parents for a studio in which to work. The artist occupied six studios between 1863 and 1870 and featured three of them in paintings commemorating his new life as an artist. Bazille, who received an allowance from his family, was generous to his friends and shared several of his apartments with them. In 1864, Bazille and Monet moved into the rue de Furstenberg together; in 1867, he shared lodgings in the rue Visconti with Renoir and occasionally Monet and Sisley. The following year, Bazille and Renoir moved into a more spacious studio, depicted in *The Studio on the Rue La Condamine* (no. 57), in the rapidly developing Batignolles district of northern Paris.

In these studios, the artists worked with professional female models or posed for each other when funds were short. The studio was more than a place to create art; it was also a venue for them to gather and socialize and served as a showroom in which they could put their art on display for visiting colleagues. Bazille's paintings of his studios depict several of his own works as well as those by his friends (some finished, some still in process), along with the tools of their creation. The intimate portraits that Bazille and his circle painted of one another are reminders of the close-knit community shared by these artists who were revolutionizing painting in France.

The Studio on the Rue La Condamine

Bazille shared the spacious studio depicted in the center of this wall with Renoir after moving to the Batignolles district of Paris in 1868. Paintings by Monet and Renoir are visible on the walls alongside a number of works by Bazille, many of which are on view in this exhibition: *Fisherman with a Net* (no. 47), *The Terrace at Méric* (no. 32), and *La Toilette* (no. 56), shown still under way, as well as the less visible but no less identifiable *The Fortune-Teller* (no. 54), on the floor near the window, and *View of the Village* (no. 45), resting on the easel. The painting commemorates Bazille's career as an artist as well as the camaraderie of this circle of friends, including Maître playing the piano, and likely Monet, Renoir, the critic Zacharie Astruc, and Manet, who painted the figure of Bazille standing next to the easel.



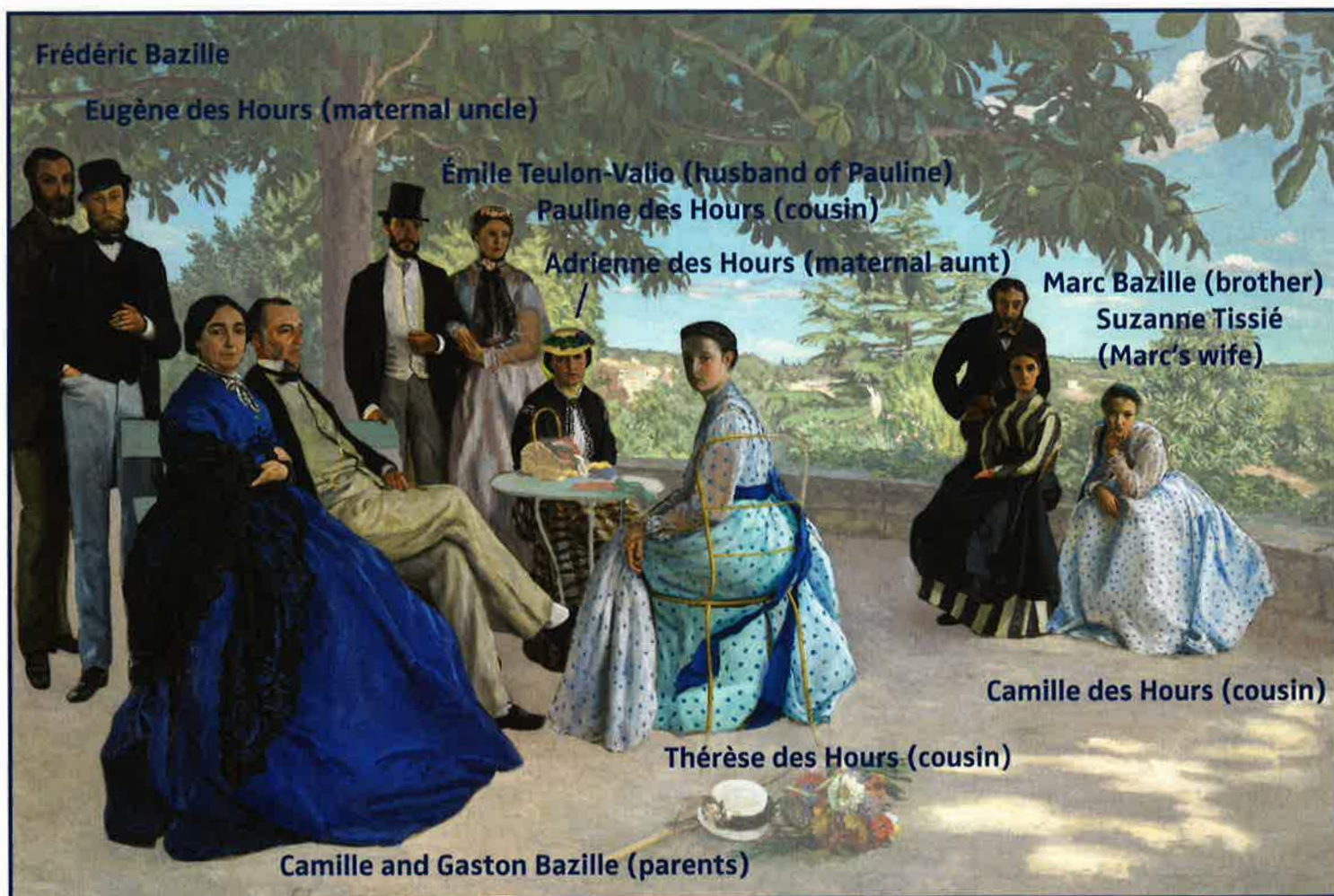
Figures in Sunlight

Bazille turned very early—at age twenty-three—to the idea of “painting figures in the sun,” portraying his young cousin perched on a parapet overlooking a village in *The Pink Dress* (no. 15). This new, utterly modern subject, which falls between portraiture and genre scenes, also appealed to Monet, Renoir, and Berthe Morisot, who all set for themselves the challenge of introducing modern figures into landscapes painted in the open air.

Bazille centered his studies of figures in sunlight on the Domaine de Méric, the family estate on the outskirts of Montpellier. He returned there every summer, using the property, nearby family vineyards, and surrounding landscape as the inspiration and setting for his most ambitious and accomplished paintings (some of which can also be seen in the adjoining gallery). Several of these paintings were created for the annual Paris Salon, the prestigious juried art exhibition where Bazille and his friends sought the official recognition that was considered essential to a successful artistic career. They included *The Terrace at Méric* (no. 32), *View of the Village* (no. 45), and *The Family Gathering* (no. 42). Although the public at large remained indifferent, these paintings drew positive comments from his fellow artists and discerning critics. Edmond Duranty wrote in 1870: “Every spring Monsieur Bazille returns from the South with summer paintings . . . full of greenery, sunshine, and simple assurance.” The critic Zacharie Astruc praised Bazille’s ability to capture “the astonishing fullness of the light—the special impression of the open air, the power of daylight.”

The Family Gathering

This painting, Bazille's masterpiece, shows his family on the terrace at Méric, their summer home on the outskirts of Montpellier. The work showcases his skill at depicting figures out-of-doors and his ability to capture the effects of dappled sunlight as it filtered through the canopy of trees. Although it was begun on-site, Bazille continued to work on the canvas for several months back in his studio in Paris, even inserting a self-portrait at the far left edge of the composition. Disappointingly, despite its scale and originality, it passed largely unnoticed when it was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1868—though it did capture the attention of the young art critic Émile Zola, who praised the painting for revealing “a real love of truth.”



The Modern Nude

Academic paintings of the female nude featured prominently on the walls of the Paris Salon exhibitions throughout the 1860s. The surprisingly immodest bodies of Venuses rubbed shoulders with virile heroes with bulging muscles. Alexandre Cabanel, who, like Bazille, hailed from Montpellier, experienced great success with his nudes, which perfectly captured middle-class fantasies. In *La Toilette* (no. 56), Bazille depicted instead a modern nude woman without the mythological pretext traditionally used to justify such figures. His portrayal nonetheless retains elements of fantasy through the luxuriousness of the sumptuous fabrics, which appear more sensuous than the woman herself.



Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
© RMN-Grand Palais/Hervé Lewandowski/Art Resource, NY

Bazille established a reputation as a painter of the male body, a subject that was largely overlooked by his fellow artists. Paintings such as *Fisherman with a Net* (no. 47), which was created for the Salon in 1869, and *Summer Scene* (no. 53), painted the following summer, are the result of his ongoing exploration of how to depict the figure in the open air. After painting family scenes at Méric, Bazille immersed himself in the natural world on the banks of the nearby river Lez, where he arranged athletic bodies in sunlight, depicting real people engaging in everyday activities—fishing, swimming, sleeping. These bold paintings are among Bazille's most original works.

Flowers

Flower painting experienced a major revival in the 1860s. Courbet, Manet, Fantin-Latour, Monet, and Renoir turned to this commercial, middle-class genre with relish. Bazille was attracted to the subject, as he had studied many species in the botanical gardens adjacent to the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier and in the greenhouse at the family estate at Méric. In pictures painted for the Salon or as presents for their circle of acquaintances, Bazille and his friends painted simple, straightforward compositions that ignored the symbolism of flowers and the moral lessons traditionally associated with the genre. What remained was the pleasure of painting studies from nature and using bold combinations of color prompted by these cheerful bouquets.

Bazille's two versions of his *Young Woman with Peonies* (nos. 61, 62), with flowers and an African model, are a clear nod to Manet's scandalous *Olympia*, depicting a modern Parisian prostitute. In contrast to Manet's painting, however, Bazille positioned the African model at the center of each composition, surrounding her with a riot of brightly colored spring flowers as she arranges them in a ceramic vase in one work, or offers them to the viewer in the other. Most prominently displayed are the peonies, which were much admired for their beauty and delicacy. Manet cultivated such flowers and featured them in a series of still-life paintings in 1864–1865 (including no. 106); Bazille likewise selected them as subjects in order to display the consummate technical mastery he had now achieved.



Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1865, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
© RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY/Patrice Schmidt

Ruth and Boaz

Paainted in the summer of 1870, this picture is one of the largest and the most meticulously planned of Bazille's career. He produced several preparatory drawings in a variety of media as well as a compositional study in oil—a rarity for the artist. More notably, the subject marks a radical departure from his earlier work. Based upon the biblical tale of Ruth who became the wife of Boaz, the painting may draw its inspiration more directly from Victor Hugo's poem *Booz endormi* (Boaz Asleep), published in his anthology *La légende des siècles* (1859):

*Boaz, overcome with weariness, by torchlight
made his pallet on the threshing floor
where all day he had worked, and now he slept
among the bushels of threshed wheat
[...]*

*Ruth, a Moabite, had come while Boaz slept
and now lay at his feet, who knows what light
from what door in the heavens finding her breast
naked, tender to its stirring as his dreams
[...]*

*All slept, all, from Ur to Bethlehem.
The stars enameled the deep black of the sky.
A narrow crescent in the low dark
of the West shone, while Ruth wondered*

*Lying still now, eyes half-opened,
under the twingeing of their lids, what god
of the eternal summer passing dropped
his golden scythe there in that field of stars.*

(Translation by Brooks Haxton in *The American Scholar*, 2001)

Aigues-Mortes

In May 1867 Bazille visited Aigues-Mortes, a medieval city in southeastern France from which the French king Louis IX set off on his crusades in the thirteenth century. Bazille's family was of the Protestant faith and would also have regarded Aigues-Mortes as a major memorial site because the ramparts had served as a prison for Protestants after King Louis XIV declared the religion illegal in 1685. Gaston Bazille had warned his son about the unhealthy conditions in the city during the "heat of August" but agreed that it was an interesting subject, as he had "never seen a painting of Aigues-Mortes."

Working rapidly, Bazille painted three canvases directly on-site, making only minor changes later in the studio. The resulting works convey the immediacy of the experience of their creation and the intensity of the southern light as it flattens forms and creates sharp distinctions between light and shadow. Bazille perfectly captured the austere splendor of the site, its luminous atmosphere, and the geometric rigor of the ramparts. Alone and far from the already overly popular locations in the environs of Paris and Normandy, Bazille found his own voice as an artist in the heart of his home territory.

A Lost Painting Rediscovered: *Young Woman at the Piano*

In 1865, Bazille embarked on a large canvas that was intended to be his first submission to the official Paris Salon. He chose a modern subject, one that held personal appeal: a girl playing a piano and a young man listening to her.

In a letter to his mother, Bazille, seemingly overwhelmed by the pressure of exhibiting publicly for the first time, recounted his struggles with this painting:

The terribly difficult part is the woman; there is a green satin dress, which I hired, and a blond head that I am really afraid of not doing as well as possible although Courbet complimented me on it when it was just begun.

His worries proved well founded and the painting was rejected. Previously believed destroyed, it has been rediscovered beneath Bazille's *Ruth and Boaz* through the use of x-radiography. With the help of the Center for Research and Restoration of the Museums of France (C2RMF), Paris, and the laboratories at the National Gallery of Art and other American museums, numerous works by Bazille have been x-rayed and a dozen lost compositions have been rediscovered. A selection of these hidden compositions can be seen at nga.gov/frederic-bazille.



X-radiograph of *Ruth and Boaz*. © C2RMF, Paris/Jean-Louis Bellec

An Unfinished Career

For Bazille, an artist who had devoted himself so completely to the depiction of modern life, the decision to delve into the realm of history painting at this point in his career seems puzzling. Was *Ruth and Boaz* simply an interlude, an experiment of sorts, for a young artist who was always so keen to challenge himself? Or did it herald a new direction in his art? Bazille had experienced moments of profound doubt. In a letter to his friend Maître from July 1869, he wrote, "I am going through a period of deep discouragement.... Things are not good and I don't know whom to be furious with." When his most recent painting, *Summer Scene* (no. 53), was exhibited at the Salon of 1870, it was met with both praise and mockery, perhaps fueling his decision to change course.

Ultimately, such debates will remain forever unresolved. On August 16, 1870, Bazille volunteered to fight in the Franco-Prussian War. He was killed during his first engagement at Beaune-la-Rolande near Orléans on November 28, just one week before his twenty-ninth birthday, bringing his promising career to an abrupt and tragic end.

10

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Reclining Nude or Nude Study

1864

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

13

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

***The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine,
copy after Veronese***

1864

oil on canvas

Commune de Beaune-la-Rolande

The collections of the Musée Fabre remained an important touchstone for Bazille. Among the museum's treasures was *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* by the Italian Renaissance master Paolo Veronese (1528–1588). In keeping with standard practice for art students at the time, Bazille made a copy of this painting as a kind of technical exercise. This choice reveals the love for vibrant color and decorative pattern that would become a hallmark of Bazille's more mature work.

17

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Self-Portrait with Palette

1865

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, restricted gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. Woods in memory of
Mrs. Edward Harris Brewer

18

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Self-Portrait with Detachable Collar

c. 1865–1867

oil on canvas

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art,
The John R. Van Derlip Fund

30

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Little Italian Street Singer

1866

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

73

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Album of drawings

c. 1863–1866

charcoal, pencil, graphite, chalk, and ink on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,
gift of Marc Bazille, 1921

74

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Album of drawings

c. 1867–1870

charcoal, pencil, graphite, and chalk on paper

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,
gift of Marc Bazille, 1921

Bazille's entire production of works on paper consists of a single print, fewer than two dozen drawings, and these two sketchbooks. The earlier of the two sketchbooks (no. 73) is very much rooted in Bazille's life as an art student in Paris. Its pages are filled with doodles and impromptu sketches. In contrast, the second sketchbook (no. 74, shown on the monitor above) is populated almost exclusively with studies for his paintings, both those he completed and those he planned but never realized. It is very much the tool of a working artist.

ANONYMOUS***Forty-Three Portraits by Painters
at Charles Gleyre's Studio***

c. 1856–1868

oil on canvas

Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris

This painting provides a glimpse into the collegial spirit that was central to Bazille's experience as a student in the studio of the Swiss artist Charles Gleyre. Produced over the course of several years, this canvas displays bust-length studies of various students painted by their comrades. Although neither Bazille nor Monet is present in the picture, both Alfred Sisley (third from the top, third column from the left) and Auguste Renoir (in profile, directly below Sisley) can be identified by their distinctive features and from the inscriptions on the back of the canvas.

GUSTAVE COURBET

French, 1819–1877

***Portrait of Alfred Bruyas,
also called *Solution Painting****

1853

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole,
gift of Alfred Bruyas, 1868

The son of a wealthy banker, Alfred Bruyas (1821–1876) spent several years in Paris where he acquired works of art and made the acquaintance of a number of contemporary artists, most notably Gustave Courbet, who produced several important paintings



for Bruyas. His collection was eventually donated to the Musée Fabre, but it was in Bruyas's home, located on the same street as the Bazille family residence, that Bazille had his first encounter with modern French painting.

Auguste-Barthélemy Glaize, *Interior of Bruyas's Study*, 1868, Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole.
Photograph by Frédéric Jaulmes

111

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

*Portrait of Bazille
at the Farm of Saint-Siméon*

1864

oil on panel

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

114

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

*Bazille and Camille
(Study for "Luncheon on the Grass")*

1865

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

8

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Soup Bowl Covers

June 1864

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

11

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Dog Rita, Asleep

c. 1864

oil on canvas

Private collection

12

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Scoter-Duck

1864

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

28

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Two Herrings

c. 1866

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Still Life with Fish

1866

oil on canvas

Detroit Institute of Arts,

Purchased by the Founders Society,

Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund

Still-life paintings were well suited for aspiring young artists because they allowed them to hone their craft in the controlled environment of the studio, without incurring the expense of hiring models. Such subjects were also very appealing to a broader audience. When Bazille made his first submission to the Paris Salon (the official, and generally conservative, annual art exhibition) in 1866, he included this painting, largely as an afterthought. Ultimately, the Salon's jury accepted this fairly traditional painting and not *Young Woman at the Piano*, his ambitious, large-scale work drawn from modern life. (An x-radiograph reveals that *Young Woman at the Piano*, long thought lost, lies beneath the painting *Ruth and Boaz*, in the final gallery of the exhibition.)

34

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Young Woman with Lowered Eyes

winter 1866–1867

oil on canvas

Private collection

50

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

*Portrait of Alphonse Tissié
in Cavalryman's Uniform*

1868–1869

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

54

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Fortune-Teller

c. 1869–1870

oil on canvas

Private collection

105

ÉDOUARD MANET

French, 1832–1883

Eel and Red Mullet

1864

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,

gift of Dr. and Mrs. Albert Charpentier, 1951

127

AUGUSTE RENOIR

French, 1841–1919

Lise Sewing

c. 1867–1868

oil on canvas

Dallas Museum of Art,

The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Beach at Sainte-Adresse

1865

oil on canvas

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia;

Gift of the Forward Arts Foundation

in honor of Frances Floyd Cocke

This painting seems to be a product of Bazille's excursion to Normandy with Monet as it was clearly inspired by Monet's painting of the same subject. Bazille did not paint it on-site, but rather in his studio in Paris the following year as one of a pair



Claude Monet, *The Seashore at Sainte-Adresse*, 1864,
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Bennett

of decorative overdoors he made for his uncle in Montpellier. The result consequently lacks the freshness and spontaneity of paintings done in the open air. While Bazille told his family that he had "learned a

lot" during his time in Normandy, he clearly struggled both with the locale and the subject and was perhaps intimidated by Monet, already an accomplished painter of marine subjects. This remains the only seascape of Bazille's career.

23

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Forest of Fontainebleau

1865

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,
gift of Mrs. Fantin-Latour, 1905

24

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Landscape at Chailly

1865

oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,
Charles H. and Mary F.S. Worcester Collection

25

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Village Street, Chailly

August 1865

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Improvised Field Hospital

August 1865

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

When Bazille arrived in Chailly in August 1865, he discovered Monet laid up with an injured leg. Bazille painted his friend dressed in a nightshirt with a bucket suspended over his wound, a curious contraption that may have been devised by Bazille, a former medical student, as a means of keeping the wound clean. Combining an array of potentially discordant patterns unified by a limited palette of browns, pinks, and white, Bazille created a portrait that communicates the easy familiarity that existed between the two artists.

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

The Beach at Honfleur

1864

oil on canvas

Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Gift of Mrs. Reese Hale Taylor

112

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

Promenade (Road to the Farm of Saint-Siméon)

1864

oil on canvas

The National Museum of Western Art,
Tokyo, Matsukata Collection

113

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

Rue de la Bavole, Honfleur

c. 1864

oil on canvas

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
Bequest of John T. Spaulding

118

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

Sainte-Adresse

1867

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Gift of Catherine Gamble Curran and Family, in Honor
of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

129

THÉODORE ROUSSEAU

French, 1812–1867

The Pool

before 1850

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole,
gift of Alfred Bruyas, 1868

16

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

***The Artist's Studio
on the Rue de Furstenberg***

1865

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

19

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Portrait of a Man

c. 1864–1867

oil on canvas

Private collection

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

A Studio on the Rue Visconti

May 1867

oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,
Richmond, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Still Life with Heron

1867

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

Painted in Bazille's studio on the rue Visconti, which he was sharing with Renoir at the time, the three pictures on this wall underscore the collaborative nature of early impressionism. Working side by side, Bazille and Sisley each created his version of the same subject, a still life featuring a heron and jays, while Renoir portrayed Bazille himself at work on his picture. Monet, a regular visitor and occasional lodger in Bazille's studio, is also referred to in the painting, in the winter landscape hanging behind Bazille's head.

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Pierre Auguste Renoir

c. 1868–1869

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Edmond Maître

early 1869

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Born in Bordeaux to an upper-middle-class family, Maître, like Bazille, had traveled to Paris to pursue professional training (in the law, in his case) at his family's encouragement. While they came from similar social backgrounds, their shared love of music was the foundation of their friendship. Bazille, who was himself a skilled pianist, recounted, "I go every evening to Maître's home, where we do choral music" and noted that they were "playing pieces by modern German musicians, almost unknown in France." In Bazille's painting of his studio on the rue La Condamine (no. 57), he portrayed Maître seated at the piano, a nod to their favorite pastime.

55

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Édouard Blau

probably December 1869

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Chester Dale Collection

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

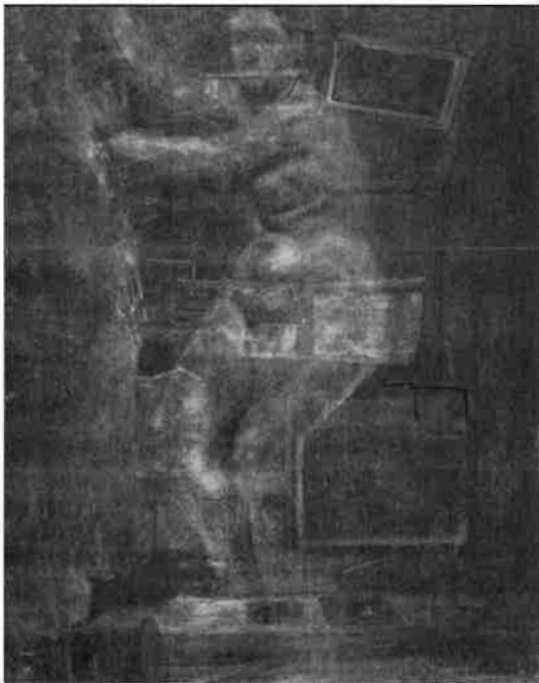
***Bazille's Studio or
The Studio on the Rue La Condamine***

winter 1869–1870

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,
bequest of Marc Bazille, 1924

Bazille painted this scene on top of an earlier composition showing a nude female figure very much like the one in Renoir's *Diana the Huntress* (no. 125), on view in a later gallery. The painting



X-radiograph of *Bazille's Studio*.

© C2RMF, Paris. Photograph by
Bruno Mottin

that lies beneath *Bazille's Studio* is either a copy by Bazille after Renoir's painting or a smaller study by Renoir for the final work—yet another reminder of the close ties between these artists. Painting over a previous work, whether prompted by dissatisfaction with the composition or merely by the desire to save money, was not an uncommon practice. The frequency with which Bazille did so, however, has only recently been revealed.

87

PAUL CÉZANNE

French, 1839–1906

The Stove in the Studio

c. 1865

oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London,

Acquired from the estate of Mrs. Helen Chester Beatty
under the acceptance-in-lieu procedure, 1992

91

JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT

French, 1796–1875

The Artist's Studio

c. 1868

oil on panel

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Widener Collection

96

ATTRIBUTED TO EUGÈNE DELACROIX

French, 1798–1863

Corner of the Studio

between 1825 and 1850

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Paris,

Gift of the Société des Amis du Louvre, 1913

126

AUGUSTE RENOIR

French, 1841–1919

Frédéric Bazille

1867

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, bequest of Marc Bazille, 1924,
on long-term loan at Musée Fabre, Montpellier

132

GILBERT DE SÉVERAC

French, 1834–1897

Claude Monet

1865

oil on canvas

Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris

134

ALFRED SISLEY

French 1839–1899

Heron with Spread Wings

1867

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, gift of Mrs. Pierre Goujon,
1971, on long-term loan at Musée Fabre, Montpellier

15

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Pink Dress

late summer 1864

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, bequest of Marc Bazille, 1924

32

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Terrace at Méric

summer 1866 – late winter 1867

oil on canvas

Association des Amis du Petit Palais, Geneva

39

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Oleanders

summer 1867

oil on canvas

Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Mark P. Herschede

42

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841 – 1870

*Portraits of the *** Family,
called The Family Gathering*

summer 1867 – early winter 1868

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,

purchased with the assistance of Marc Bazille, 1905

45

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841 – 1870

View of the Village

1868

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Landscape on the Banks of the Lez

1870

oil on canvas

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art,
The Special Arts Reserve Fund

A rare example of pure landscape in Bazille's oeuvre, this painting is among the largest the artist ever produced. Here Bazille depicts a scene he knew well: the sun-drenched shores of the Lez River situated not far from the family estate at Méric, rendered in vivid shades of green, blue, and ocher. Executed in the summer of 1870, shortly before his enlistment in the army, this is possibly Bazille's last painting.

116

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

Women in the Garden

1866

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Monet submitted this painting for exhibition at the Paris Salon of 1867, where it was rejected, along with the works of all his friends. Bazille, who had admired the work and was well aware of Monet's financial difficulties, purchased it from him for the sum of 2,500 francs to be paid in monthly installments of fifty francs. This picture, at least in part, likely inspired Bazille to create his own large-scale painting of a group of figures gathered in an outdoor setting, *The Family Gathering* (no. 42), later that same year.

119

BERTHE MORISOT

French, 1841–1895

The Harbor at Lorient

1869

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

47

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Fisherman with a Net

summer 1868

oil on canvas

Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck/Sammlung

Rau für UNICEF, Remagen

53

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Summer Scene (Bathers)

spring 1869–early winter 1870

oil on canvas

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum,

Cambridge, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. F. Meynier de Salinelles

56

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

La Toilette

1870

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

86

PAUL CÉZANNE

French, 1839–1906

Bather and Rocks

1860–1866

oil on canvas

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia

125

AUGUSTE RENOIR

French, 1841–1919

Diana the Huntress

1867

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Chester Dale Collection

128

AUGUSTE RENOIR

French, 1841–1919

Boy with Cat

1868

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

31

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Potted Flowers or Flower Study

1866

oil on canvas

Private collection

44

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Vase of Flowers on a Console

1867–1868

oil on canvas

Musée de Grenoble

59

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Flowers

c. 1870

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

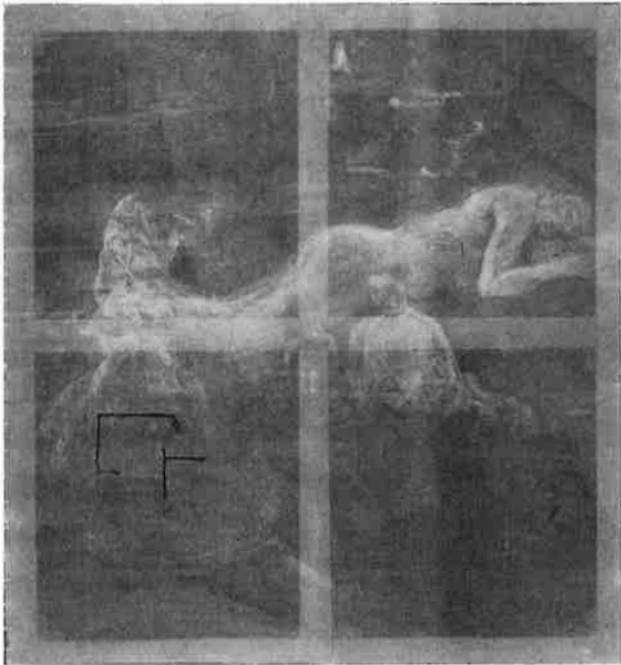
French, 1841–1870

Study for a Young Male Nude

1870, underlying composition c. 1867
oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

This curious painting is made up of two separate and distinct compositions: a scene of two women seated out of doors, their skirts visible in the lower half of the canvas, and a figure of a male nude reclining in a landscape, which was painted directly over the earlier composition, obscuring its top half. Bazille



X-radiograph. © C2RMF, Paris.
Photograph by Jean-Louis Bellec

often reused canvases from earlier paintings that he found unsatisfactory, in part as a way of saving money. An x-radiograph of the painting shows that Bazille had made significant progress on the upper half of the first composition, while the bottom half does not appear to have advanced beyond a rough sketch. Similarly, the figure of the male nude is meticulously painted, while the surrounding landscape is far less refined. Left incomplete at the time of Bazille's death, this painting provides a glimpse into the stages of the artist's cre-

ative process, from *ébauche* (a preliminary underpainting sketched out in oil) to the more polished final composition.

61

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Young Woman with Peonies

spring 1870

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

62

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Young Woman with Peonies

spring 1870

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

93

GUSTAVE COURBET

French, 1819–1877

Vase of Flowers

1862

oil on canvas

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

98

HENRI FANTIN-LATOURE

French, 1836–1904

Pansies

1874

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

106

ÉDOUARD MANET

French, 1832–1883

Peony Stem and Shears

1864

oil on canvas

Musée d'Orsay, Paris,
legacy of Comte Isaac de Camondo, 1911

110

CLAUDE MONET

French, 1840–1926

Spring Flowers

1864

oil on canvas

The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Gift of the Hanna Fund

124

AUGUSTE RENOIR

French, 1841–1919

Still Life with Spring Flowers

1864

oil on canvas

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Permanent loan from the
Foundation for Hamburger Kunstsammlungen

36

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Western Ramparts at Aigues-Mortes

1867

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

37

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Porte de la Reine at Aigues-Mortes

1867

oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase,
Gift of Raymonde Paul, in memory of her brother,
C. Michael Paul, by exchange, 1988

38

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

The Ramparts at Aigues-Mortes

1867

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

48

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Studies for a Grape Harvest

1868

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

72

FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE

French, 1841–1870

Ruth and Boaz

1870

oil on canvas

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

PAUL GUIGOU

French, 1834–1871

Washerwomen on the Banks of the Durance

1866

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Chester Dale Fund

Guigou was a staunch proponent of the practice of painting out of doors, then still novel, and specialized in paintings of his native Provence. His distinctive depictions of the sun-drenched landscape of the South of France, which were exhibited at the Paris Salon throughout the 1860s, are an important precedent for Bazille's own paintings of the adjacent Languedoc region.