

NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART  
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John Walker, Director, announced today that the National Gallery of Art has acquired one of the most beautiful and impressive masterpieces of the French artist, Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), a gift from Brigadier Charles L. Lindemann, D.S.O. The painting, which is entitled La Grotte de la Loue and measures 38 3/4 inches high by 51 3/4 inches wide, is signed and, though not dated, must have been produced about 1865. It has been placed on exhibition in Gallery 76.

The scene represented is the source of the River Loue, which flows past Ornans, where Courbet was born, in the neighborhood of Besançon. It is one of the most beautiful river sources in France. The stream issues in cascades from a grotto in a 300-foot perpendicular cliff, the face of which is formed of layer upon layer of colossal rocks. Within the entrance to the grotto, as if an index to the scale of this geological wonder, is a man seen from the back, in short jacket and rolled-up trousers. He stands on a wooden pier built out into the water and is fishing near the rapids where the water rushes out at the right from the grotto.

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The fisherman seems to have been the artist's final thought in this design. Courbet painted the grotto a number of times, and the slightly earlier version in the Kunsthalle at Hamburg is almost exactly the same as the present painting in composition except that there is no man on the pier. This figure of the fisherman gives more than mere scale to the painting. Placed before the dark cavern, into which our eye penetrates farther and farther, the lone fisherman enhances the emotional content too.

This touch of Romanticism is a phase of Courbet's work little noted by art historians, accustomed as they are to emphasize his role as the father of Realism. Certainly Courbet, who prided himself on painting only the "true truth," only what he could see and grasp, did not think of himself as a Romantic. But his childhood haunts, the regions of the River Loue, which he painted repeatedly throughout his career, were so bound up with his emotional life that he came to consider his sentiment for them a part of the "true truth." The effect, however, of solidity and volume in the rocks of this grotto goes even beyond Realism. It points ahead to the conquests of the Post-Impressionists and the Cubists. Indeed it may well have been a model for Cézanne, who admired Courbet, comparing him to Michelangelo.