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GUSTAVE COURBET (1819-77) FROM REALIST MANIFESTO 1855

*French painter. Although his self-portrait Courbet with Black Dog was accepted by the Paris Salon in 1842, Courbet was in conflict with the art establishment throughout his career. As leader of the Realist movement, he departed radically from the prevalent ideas of Romantic and neo-classical painting, in choice of subject and form. Painting, according to Courbet, was 'an essentially concrete art', a 'physical language, the words of which consist of all visible objects'. Along with his fellow Realist, writer and philosopher, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Courbet proclaimed that the duty of the artist was to **focus** on the present, on modernity, rather than to reinvent or mystify the past. The following statement was made in 1855, the year the Exposition Universelle refused his entry and Courbet mounted a defiant exhibition close by, entitled Le Réalisme, G. Courbet*

The label of realist has been imposed on me just as the label of romantic was imposed on the men of 1830. Labels have never, in any age, given a very accurate idea of things; if it were otherwise, the works would be superfluous.

Without discussing the appropriateness, more or less justified, of a designation which nobody, it is to be hoped, has taken very seriously, I shall confine myself to a few words of explanation in order to prevent misunderstanding.

I have studied the art of the ancients and of the moderns without adherence to a system and without prejudice. It was not my wish to imitate the one or to copy the other; nor was it my idea to attain the idle goal of *art for art's sake*. No! I simply wished to draw from a knowledge of the whole tradition a reasoned and independent sense of my own individuality.

To know in order to create, that was my idea. To be capable of depicting the manners, ideas, and appearance of my time as I see it, in short, to produce living art, that is my goal.