



# Letters of Gustave Courbet

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## **Letters of Gustave Courbet** Gustave Courbet

The French Realist painter Gustave Courbet (1819-77), a pivotal figure in the emergence of modern painting, remains an artist whose interests, attitudes, and friendships are little understood. A voluminous correspondent, Courbet himself, through his letters, offers a tantalizing avenue toward a keener assessment of his character and accomplishments. In her critical edition of over six hundred of the artist's letters, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu presents just such a look at the inner life of the artist; her unparalleled feat of gathering together all of Courbet's known letters, many heretofore unpublished and untranslated, is sure to change our evaluation of Courbet's creativity and of his place in nineteenth-century French life.

Beginning when Courbet left his provincial home at eighteen and ending eight days before his death in exile in Switzerland, this correspondence enables readers to follow the artist's development from youth to mature artist of international repute. Addressed to correspondents such as the poet Charles Baudelaire, the painter Claude Monet, the writers Champfleury, Victor Hugo, and Théophile Gautier, the political theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the politician Jules Simon, the letters offer numerous insights into Courbet's life and art as well as the cultural and political activity of his day. In fascinating detail, they present the artist's relation to the contemporary media, his deliberate choice of subject matter for Salon paintings, his preoccupation with photography, and his participation in the Commune.

Besides collecting, translating, and annotating the letters, Chu provides an introduction, a chronology, biographies of persons appearing frequently in the letters, and a list of paintings and sculptures mentioned in the letters. Her work is an essential resource of immediate use to historians of art and culture, political and social historians, and readers of biography.

Petra ten-Doesschate Chu is professor and head of the Department of Art and Music at Seton Hall University.

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