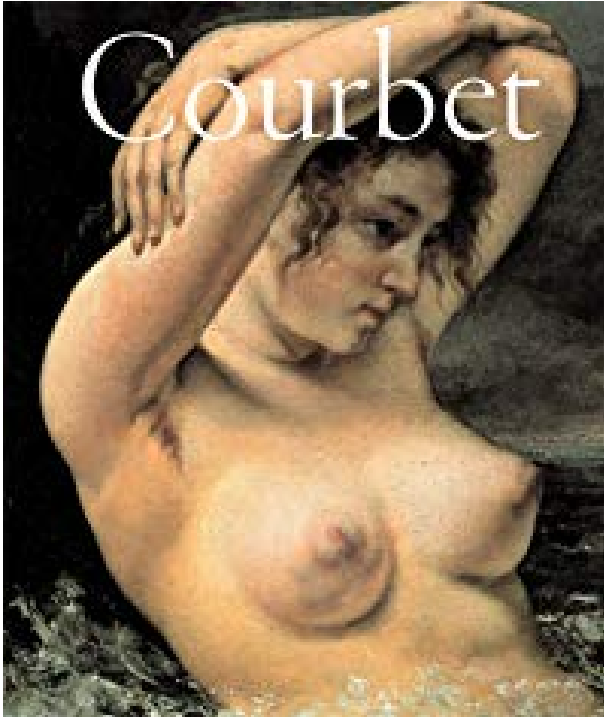


Courbet



ISBN10:	0789209772
Author:	Segolene Le Men
Language	English
Genre:	Art
Published:	March 25th 2008 by Abbeville Press
Goodreads Rating:	4.50
ISBN13:	9780789209771
Pages:	400

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When Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) began his career in the late 1840s, French painting was dominated by two competing styles: neoclassicism, exemplified by Ingres, and romanticism, exemplified by Delacroix. Courbet, a dynamic and boundedly self-confident man, proud of his rural origins and guided by his strong Republican beliefs, quickly established a third way. Rejecting the historical and literary subjects of the prevailing styles as too remote from actual experience, Courbet instead depicted scenes of everyday life, particularly among the peasants and the working class, with a naturalism then considered shocking. His paint handling was correspondingly direct: disdaining equally the idealized contours and cool tones of the neoclassicists and the expressive line of the romantics, he laid on his colors almost roughly, often with a palette knife instead of a brush. While Courbet's brand of realism bears a family resemblance to those of his contemporaries Daumier and Millet, its scope is much broader: his masterworks range from the *Burial at Ornans* (1850), a heroically scaled depiction of a villager's funeral, to the very different *Origin of the World* (1866), a detailed close-up of the female anatomy, and he also painted many straight landscapes, portraits, and still lifes. This lucidly written monograph from noted art historian Segolene Le Men provides a new understanding of how Courbet's life and milieu shaped his vast oeuvre. Le Men organizes her text both chronologically and thematically: while the five chapters correspond to the successive phases of Courbet's career, each comprises several subsections that discuss individual aspects of his work. This hybrid approach allows Le Men to present an expansive and multifaceted view of Courbet's realism, emphasizing its evolving relations with the various ideas and artistic currents of its time. With some three hundred stunning color illustrations, including all of Courbet's most important paintings and many fine examples of his draftsmanship, this is the definitive study of a painter whose spirited pursuit of an independent aesthetic path has led many critics to call him "the first modern artist."