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Letter to RJM from Ethel and Samuel J. Le Frak and Family

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NEW YORK, N. Y. 10021

Season's
Greetings

Art is man's most expressive interpretation of life. Through art, he approaches the sublime . . . viewing life honestly and simply.

In Gustave Courbet's portrait of Alphonse Bon, all pretense is set aside. The subject's visage is a manifestation of truth and understanding.

The ability of an artist to eliminate the irrelevant and focus onto essentials is an achievement bordering on genius, and a source of inner peace and satisfaction.

May this Holiday Season bring you the blessing of health, joy, and peace. And as you enter the New Year may you encounter only happiness.

Ethel and Samuel J. LeFrak and Family

*"Portrait D'Alphonse Bon"
By Gustave Courbet
From the Collection of
the Honorable Samuel J.
and Mrs. Ethel LeFrak*



Gustave Courbet 1819–1877

Son of rural landowners in Ornans, France, Courbet attended the local seminary until the age of 18, when he was sent to the College Royal at Besancon to study law. While at college, Courbet also attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts, directed by a pupil of the great French painter, Jean Louis David. It was at the Beaux Arts that Courbet started his legendary career, painting academic landscapes of the valley of the Loue.

In 1840, he went to Paris and there began painting free adaptation, or “pastiche” as Courbet styled them, of the works of old masters then hanging in the Louvre, especially Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Van Dyck, and Velasquez.

In 1846, according to his own words, “after having discussed the errors of the romanticists and the classicists, I raised a banner which it is convenient to call realistic art.” In accordance with his republican politics, Courbet took part in the Revolution of 1848, and later in his life, participated in the French Commune uprising of 1870, although he declared that he did not believe in wars “fought with guns and cannons.”

Courbet made a name for himself by composing landscapes, self-portraits and studies of the working and middle classes that were undergoing revolutionary social change. Courbet’s paintings expressed his sense of exaltation before the spectacle of the human body and the forces of nature, omnipresent and arresting in their material consistency, movement and agitation.

His portraits of contemporary Parisian bourgeoisie were startling for their incisiveness and honesty. Typical of Courbet’s powerful portraiture was his forceful painting of Alphonse Bon, now in the LeFrak collection. Similar paintings of Monsieur Bon, set amidst a group of his friends, are on display in the Musée d’Orsay in Paris.

From 1848 on, Courbet’s studio was frequented by such great poets and philosophers as Baudelaire and Proudhon, who was later to make Courbet’s personality pivotal in his important book, *Du Principe de l’art et de sa Destination Sociale*, published in 1865.

In the last phase of Courbet’s career, he turned to naturalism, and in 1861 opened his famous school of painting.

Courbet’s deliberate manner of building compositions in terms of volumes that exalt “thickness” rather than refinement, “density” rather than lightness, while maintaining at the same time an absolute visual, luminous, and chromatic distinctness of forms, prepared the way for Monet.