



Daumier

Sarah Symmons

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Ranked alongside Ingres by Baudelaire as the finest draughtsman in Paris and matched as a political caricaturist in the nineteenth century only by Goya, Honoré Daumier worked for opposition newspapers throughout the Second Empire, one of the most corrupt and flamboyant periods in French history. He won fame, notoriety, and so a prison sentence, for his prodigious output of caricatures of prominent politicians and his relentless lampooning of the hypocrisy and pretensions of contemporary Parisian moeurs.

Sarah Symmons both examines Daumier's role as a professional newspaper artist and explores his more personal body of work, which remained largely unknown during his lifetime. Investigating his series of watercolours and oils of the ordinary citizens of Paris, of the railway travellers, mountebanks and washerwomen who also people his caricatures, she finds a tragic monumentality far removed from the journalistic cynicism of much of his newspaper work. This quality they share with his more ambitious studies of the dispossessed, of fugitives and emigrants, and of the heroically absurd wanderings of Don Quixote.

Often choosing to paint the simple everyday life he saw around him, Daumier was a model example of le peintre de la vie moderne, while his use of pictorial understatement and his painstaking search for absolute simplicity gave many of his pictures an experimental, 'unfinished' quality, which discouraged official recognition, but led to such artists as Picasso, Steinlen and Paul Klee to study his work closely during their formative years. Sarah Symmons has produced a comprehensive analysis of Daumier's career as a painter, sculptor and caricaturist, documenting his striving for the stark and truthful simplicity which gives his finest work an air of universality and permanence, while reflecting the anxieties and insecurity of his own life and times.

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