


Gustave Le Gray



By: Lindsay Speir



"It is my deepest wish that photography, instead of falling within the domain of industry, of commerce, will be included among the arts. That is its sole, true place, and it is in that direction that I shall always endeavor to guide it."

-Gustave Le Gray

Background

- Gustave Le Gray was born in 1820 Villiers-le-Bel, France.
- He started as a painter under the influence of Picot and Delaroche.
- He became interested in photography during its early development.

Le Gray's Beginning in Photography

- Le Gray started taking pictures of nature in Fontainebleau Forest and of buildings such as the chateaux of Lourie Valley. He was also very well know for his seascape photos.
- He taught photography to Negre, Le Secq, Nadar, and Du Camp.
- In 1851 Le Gray became one of the first five photographers hired for the Missions Héliographique, a program to document French Monuments and Buildings.
- In 1851 Le Gray also help found the Société Héliographique, the first photographic organization in the world.

Architecture

- During the time of Gustave Le Gray, architecture and the industry was a very unlikely place for photography.
- When taking this picture (shown on next slide), Gustave Le Gray's point was to have a dark foreground that would highlight all the deforestation and show the bleakness and power of the factory.



Factory at Terre-Noire

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**

Seascape

- Since photography was still in a seemingly basic stage, it was very difficult to capture both sea and sky in the same picture.
- Le Gray, however, discovered that he could combine two negatives, one for the water in the foreground and another for the sky. In this, he was very successful.
- These were some of his most famous works.



Large Wave, Mediterranean Sea

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**



The Great Wave

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**



Brig on the Water

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**

Forest of Fontainebleau

- In the mid-nineteenth century, the Forest of Fontainebleau became a very popular destination for artists as well as vacationers.
- When Le Gray went to the forest to take pictures, however, he did not focus on its overall beauty. Instead he tried to emphasize the human intrusion on nature.



Study of Trees and Pathways

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**



Beech Tree

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**



The Road to Chailly, Fontainebleau

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**



Tree Study

**Photographs by
Gustave Le Gray**

A Change for Le Gray

- In 1855 Le Gray opened his first “lavishly furnished” studio.
- During the same period he became the official photographer for Napoleon III.
- Around 1858, Le Gray’s business ran into debts so he “closed his studio, abandoned his wife and children, and fled the country to escape his creditors.”



Le Gray’s photo of
Napoleon III.

Le Gray's Travels

- Gustave Le Gray started his tour across the Mediterranean with writer Alexandre Dumas in 1860.
- He then traveled to Lebanon, after being abandoned by Dumas due to a conflict over a woman.
- In 1861, Le Gray traveled to Syria where he photographed the movements of the French army for a magazine.

Le Gray's Life in Egypt

- Le Gray finally established himself in Cairo, Egypt in 1864.
- Here he became the photographer for Henri d'Artois and the future Edward VII of the United Kingdom.
- Le Gray was still very close to Nadar, his former student, and would send him letters and pictures.
- In 1867 he became a professor of drawing, but still owned a small photography shop.
- His photography business died down and he became nearly unheard of as he only produced around fifty photos in the last twenty years of his life.
- He died in 1884 in Cairo.

References

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