

Arnaud Ferron

Salute of the French Fleet off Cherbourg with View of Frankfurt with the Old Bridge from Sachsenhausen, 2025

Two pictures from 1858 in the Städel Museum collection

Gustave Le Gray

Salute of the French fleet off Cherbourg, 1858

Albumen print mounted on cardboard

21.9 x 29.9 cm

Courtesy of Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

STF117

Gustave Courbet

View of Frankfurt with the Old Bridge from Sachsenhausen, 1858

Oil on canvas

53.5 x 78 cm

Courtesy of Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

SG1140

Taken during Gustave Le Gray's tenure as official photographer of Napoleon III and the Second Empire, *Salute of the French Fleet off Cherbourg* records a naval ceremony between France and Britain, two empires who expanded their reach in Asia that same year. The seascape photograph is a notable example of combination printing, an early form of photographic manipulation used to balance different exposures. Le Gray famously printed his seascapes from two negatives on a single sheet of paper: one exposed for the sea, the other for the sky.¹

Unlike its technological mastery, the picture depicts sailing ships that would soon be rendered obsolete by the rise of steamboats and the coming decline of the Age of Sail, a shift accelerated by the opening of the Suez Canal.

View of Frankfurt with the Old Bridge from Sachsenhausen was painted during Courbet's stay in Germany, in search of independence from Napoleon III's Second Empire, whose honors he would later refuse. In a letter to his family dated December 21, 1858, Gustave Courbet wrote: "I could only write insignificant things, full of unhappiness, nothing very interesting. I ramble through foreign countries to find the independence of mind that I need and to let pass this government that does not hold me in honor, as you know. My absence has been very good".²

Though Courbet is widely regarded as the founder of the Realist movement, which rejected Romanticism in the wake of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, *View of Frankfurt with the Old Bridge from Sachsenhausen* portrays a proto-impressionist, pastoral view of the Frankfurt Main River, emptied of buildings and passersby.³

¹ The Great Wave, Sète (1857) by Gustave Le Gray. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Object Number: 1976.646. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/261941>. Accessed 27 June 2025.

² Gustave Courbet, *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, edited and translated by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu. The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

³ Klaus Herding, "Courbet in Frankfurt. Debatten über Malerei 1851-2011" in Christian Freigang, et al. (eds.), *Das neue Frankfurt: Innovationen in der Frankfurter Kunst vom Mittelalter bis heute*. Kramer, Waldemar, 2010.

Overture: Städelschule Graduate Exhibition

Städel Museum, Frankfurt

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