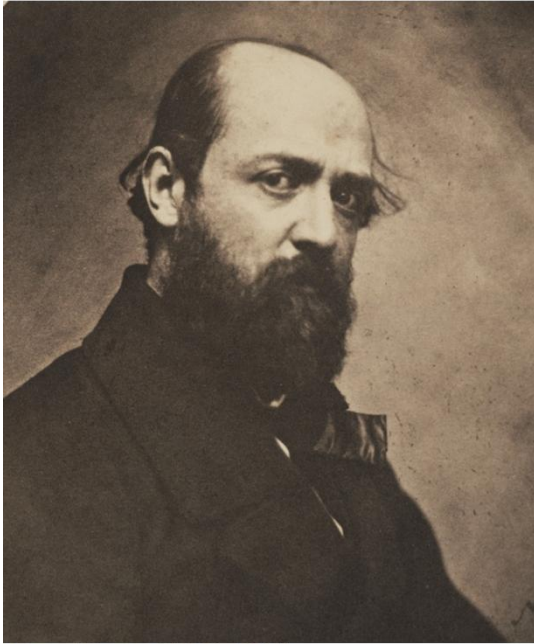


COURBET IN MARLOTTE!



Henry Murger (1822-1861)



Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

We are now very familiar with the story of Henry Murger, to whom we owe the artistic renown of our town. We also know of the bohemian lifestyle he adopted in Paris, before spreading it to Marlotte. Finally, we know that during his Parisian years, he encountered many artists. Among them, during the 1840s, Murger rubbed shoulders with Gustave Courbet, whose home was only a few hundred meters from his own. Moreover, the two artists met with others at the Andler-Keller brasserie, at 28 rue Hautefeuille, in the 6th arrondissement of Paris, where they devised grand artistic and social theories.

Less well-known is Courbet's visit to Marlotte in 1861. The reason for this visit by the painter, whose reputation was already established, is documented in the touching article below.

Marlotte's Violets¹

One afternoon in the spring of 1861, a man passing through Marlotte wanted to revisit the little house where Henry Murger, who had died in Paris a few months earlier, had lived the last years of his very short life. With tears in his eyes, he entered the neglected garden where the lilacs planted by Anaïs, the poet's last muse, bloomed melancholically. With no

¹ This anecdote was published in issue 61 of the *Friends of Gustave Courbet* bulletin, 1979, and translated by the Amis de Bouron-Marlotte.

hope of seeing the front door open, the visitor mechanically let the knocker, already reddened by rust, fall.

It was the voice of a little peasant woman, about fifteen years old, who, from the path, answered him: "Sir, there is no one here. We haven't seen a tenant since Mr. Murger's death. Did you know him?" and, showing him a basket filled with small flowers picked in the forest of Fontainebleau: "Buy my violets and I will say a prayer for him." – "Here, my child, here are ten francs. Give me your basket and your violets, I'll take them to Paris. "

The next day, the walker from Marlotte asked a caretaker at Montmartre Cemetery to point out Murger's grave: "Turn left, don't lose sight of the Cavaignac monument, and at the third alignment, look for number 46; it's there."

The stranger stopped in front of the tomb of the champion of joyful poverty and unsung talent; he placed the little peasant girl's violets on the stone and seemed to dream for a long time. As he left, he handed his card to the caretaker and slipped him a few words of recommendation. The latter greeted him so respectfully that five or six gravediggers, who were working nearby, also uncovered their heads as the visitor passed by.

This man was Gustave Courbet.

This moving and delicate story is recounted in a small periodical by the poet and columnist Armand Lebailly, who himself was to die of consumption and poverty in 1864, at the age of twenty-six. Prophetically, he ended it thus: "Gustave Courbet offered flowers to Murger, he who will soon fill his country with laurels."