



Honoré Daumier *The Republic*, 1848



Léon Comte *La République*, 1848

draftsmen, his work is remarkable for its directness and immediacy of his composition. His keyhole view grips the viewer more effectively than the more conventional perspective of story painting.

Although Daumier achieved fame for his political cartoons and his satirical depictions of the bourgeoisie, the man whom Baudelaire described as the most important of the 19th-century French painters was not a man of letters. He was a man of the people, a man who lived in the heart of the Parisian underworld and who supported his family as a cartoonist and painter.

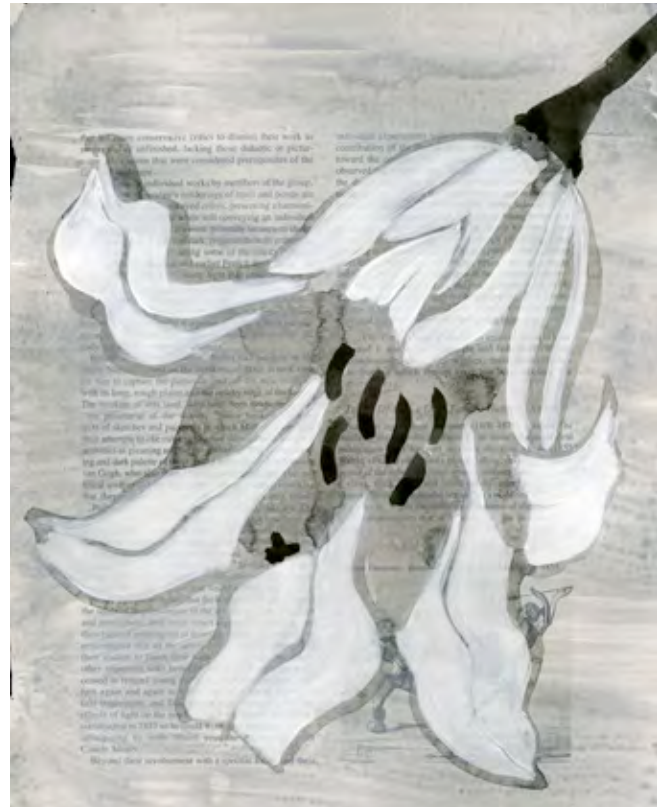
Daumier's political life began in the 1840s, but information about his life is scarce. Like other progressives, he was critical of the Salon and its jury system. In 1847, his name appeared in connection with a plan for alternative

exhibitions. The activities of the organizing group were called the "Salon des Refusés" and they February Revolution of 1848. The collapse of Louis-Philippe's government led to the establishment of the short-lived Second Republic, and the few years who attempted to implement the principles of the Revolution in a practical form. Characteristically, Daumier turned to the streets of Paris for his inspiration. In *The Uprising* (facing page), an unfinished painting, he depicts an orator leading a tidal wave of workers and top-hatted members of the bourgeoisie in a reference to the initially wide spectrum of support for the Revolution. The composition is somewhat reminiscent of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830, pp. 42-45). Daumier avoids the literary specificity of Delacroix's work, and the simple massing of figures in the painting the taut intensity of a political poster.

In another work, executed in response to a government-sponsored contest for a painting honoring the Republic, Daumier rejects the contemporary in favor of a timeless and monumental form. His personification of the Republic harks back to the symbolic language of the Revolution of 1789, but his harsh outline, somber color, and crude application of paint are in sharp contrast to the idealized forms and slick execution of Neoclassicism—as one can see by comparing his work with that of Gérôme, a follower of

A Lily Blooms in Winter





Detail: I.2018.I-4





THE MOUNTAIN
LAKE SYMPOSIUM
AND WORKSHOP

ART IN LOCALE

RAY KASS & HOWARD RISATTI



FRESCO WORKSHOP, 1989

ALSTON (STONEY) CONLEY

Alston Conley came to Mountain Lake in 1989 to give a workshop on fresco painting so we could learn skills that we anticipated using for another John Cage workshop, which, unfortunately, he did not live to do. In the text below, Conley describes the process by which he became an "itinerant fresco teacher," able to pick up the tools of his trade and travel to the Virginia mountains.

I discovered fresco as a student at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1977. I had been making fragments of contemporary walls in building plasters and paint. At Skowhegan I noticed how brilliant the colors were and how the pigments bonded to the plaster surface. Wanting to learn more about the technique, I read the chapter on fresco in Ralph Mayer's *The Artist's Handbook* and started gathering materials.¹ The plaster, slaked fresco lime, was the hardest thing to find; no art store sold the material. I found a source in western Massachusetts for quick lime, the calcium oxide powder used to make fresco lime by the process known as "slaking"—i.e., mixing water with quick lime plaster to create calcium hydroxide (the desired slaked fresco lime) and then aging the resulting plaster. Mixing quick lime with water during slaking produces lots of heat, steaming off some of the water and creating the possibility of an explosion because of the chemical reaction $\text{CaO} + \text{H}_2\text{O} = \text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2 + \text{Heat}$.

Armed with appropriate fresco-making materials, I used two fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown in the winters of 1978 and 1979 to make a series of true fresco panels with actual slaked lime, shaped as fragments of walls from imaginary civilizations. Then in the summer of 1980 I worked at

Alston (Stoney) Conley, *Shrine*, 33,
June 1980, fresco on panel, x 21
x 1 in. (83.2 x 53.4 x 2.54 cm).

the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture as the co-dean of students with my wife Mary Armstrong. George Schneeman taught fresco that summer and it was our first meeting.² Best known for his collaborations with poets, Schneeman made small frescoes on cast cement forms, often circular shapes (cast in garbage can lids) one inch or more thick, upon which he would apply his top intonaco painting surface. I was still making my wall fragments with wood lathing and the traditional three layers of plaster. I added white cement and horsehair to the first coat that was then pressed through the openings between the wood laths so that the plaster, squeezing around the inner sides of the laths, would hang securely in place. I needed a strong structural first layer, and the additives provided that.

I spent the 1981–82 academic year on a Fulbright grant in Florence, where I finally got to see the Italian masters' frescoes and visit behind-the-scenes at the Sistine Chapel during its historic restoration.³ Frescoes aren't known for being portable, so I borrowed Schneeman's technique of casting small, round cement "tondos" as well as trying fresco on Masonite panels. When I returned to the U.S., I started making icon-shaped panels of polystyrene, which was readily available as insulation panels. I discovered a new cement product called Conproco Structural Skin; it contained small plastic fibers, an alternative to horsehair, which added strength. I also used the material Acrylic 60, which when mixed with the Conproco increased its ability to stick to a nonporous material like the polystyrene panels. These materials allowed me to become an itinerant fresco teacher as they were much more portable.



¹ Ralph Mayer, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques*, first edition (New York: The Viking Press; 1940) 5th edition revised and updated with Steven Sheehan (New York: Viking Penguin; 1991).

² Schneeman (March 11, 1934 — January 27, 2009), who was born in Minnesota, was largely a self-taught artist influenced by Italian Renaissance painting. He worked in various media including collage, egg tempera, and fresco and was especially well known for his collaborations with New York poets including Peter Schjeldahl, Anne Waldman, Larry Fagin, and Ted Berrigan. He exhibited at Holly Solomon Gallery in Soho during the 1970s and early 80s.

³ My experience with the Sistine Chapel started at Skowhegan when I gave a fresco demonstration to visiting lecturer Leo Steinberg, a well-known Modern Art critic and art historian with particular expertise in the Italian Renaissance. Steinberg suggested I visit the Sistine Chapel and get up on the scaffolding while the current, somewhat controversial restoration was in progress. He wrote me a letter of introduction. On weekends the Vatican was letting those in the field onto the scaffolding to see the restoration work. When Mary and I went to Rome we were given a tour of the conservation process, which had reached the middle of the ceiling. They were cleaning Adam and Eve and the Serpent, and on one side was the fresh, bright color of the clean surface and on the other the dirty painting. In the middle of the Michelangelo-designed scaffolding was a dentist-office-like chair that leaned back and was equipped with a light with a magnifying glass. Here the conservators

