

Fantin's Failed Toast to Truth

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Let me begin by describing a picture that no longer exists. The painting is large and full of figures, an ambitious submission to the Paris Salon of 1865. The setting is strange: there are indications of an artist's studio or some other austere bourgeois interior, but one that opens onto blue sky and warm light in the upper background, staging a phantasmagoric interplay between interior and exterior realms. A group of eight to ten artists and writers are gathered in this space, clustered around a nude female figure hovering over them as if just descended from the heavens in a burst of cottony clouds. Arching above the nude's head, a label in clear block letters identifies her as "VERITE," spelling out the chaste nobility of her nudity in a room full of men. It is not clear whether the men share the nude's sunlit environment, and this spatial ambiguity is just one aspect of the broader clash of "pure fantasy" and "reality" that makes the picture perplexing.¹ Arranged around a table covered in a white tablecloth and adorned with an elaborate floral bouquet, the men hold glasses of blue wine, a popular drink among the revolutionaries of 1848. They propose a toast to Truth, their muse, who—despite the luminous aura painted around her—looks more like a studio model than a supernatural deity. Her hair is a strident orange-red, and she faces the viewer with a mirror in one hand. The men are dressed in dark suits, with the exception of James McNeill Whistler, who looks out from the center foreground in a richly patterned Japanese robe. Two standing men in top hats flank the composition on either side, one of them turning his back to the viewer. The painting's creator, Henri Fantin-Latour, is seated in the lower left foreground; his body turns toward Truth as he gestures to her with his right hand while his head cranes back over his right shoulder to address the viewer. The still-life painter Antoine Vollon is featured among the group, gazing in our direction through heavy lids, his expression thoughtful and sensitive, while Édouard Manet stands next to Truth, a figure not unlike the one in his painting *Olympia* (1863–65), exhibited at the same Salon. The remaining figures likely include the critic, painter, and sculptor Zacharie Astruc, engraver and painter Félix Bracquemond, the painter Louis Cordier, the novelist and critic Edmond Duranty, and the painter and lithographer Armand Gautier, all of whom associated themselves with the movement known as realism.

This is the most elaborate description of *The Toast! Homage to Truth* (1865) that can be reconstructed from its remains, given that Fantin destroyed the painting in a fit

of frustration soon after the Salon ended.² It is a speculative description, of course, but its main outlines are reliable enough to suggest a truly remarkable and unusual painting. All that remains of the picture are three portrait fragments the artist elected to save: the portrait of Vollon, the portrait of Whistler, and Fantin's self-portrait (figs. 1a–c).³ As a result, scholars have devoted little attention to the painting and the larger project it represents, despite the many sources of available evidence surrounding its development and critical reception.⁴ The painting was not well received, by critics or the general public, and the thirty-five (mostly scathing) critical reviews it garnered are essential not only to our ability to reconstruct its appearance but also to our understanding of its perceived failure as a group portrait and artistic manifesto. Even more illuminating are the thirty-odd preparatory drawings preserved in the Musée du Louvre,⁵ and a previously unknown pen-and-ink sketch in the collection of the Getty Research Institute that I believe to be the clearest representation of the final composition. These drawings detail the long and meandering genesis of this most ambitious and disastrous of Fantin's group portraits, revealing the profound challenges the genre posed to artists of his historical and social situation. In particular, the drawings represent a range of efforts at expressing a notion of artistic truth, a notion that was at once individual (Fantin's own) and collective (supported by a select group).

The history of *The Toast!*'s development, failure, and ultimate destruction exemplifies several key problems surrounding group portraiture in its mid-nineteenth-century moment. With this work, Fantin continued to investigate the tense relationship between individuality and collectivity, self-portraiture and group portraiture, already at work in his first group portrait, the *Homage to Delacroix* of 1864 (fig. 2). In this ambitious, manifesto-like statement for the Salon of 1864, Fantin reconceived the Dutch model of group portraiture as a declaration of artistic identity, both his own and that of his fellows.⁶ The conflict was between the artist's personal ambition and his desire for an association—with a group of colleagues and with Delacroix—that would nurture and give greater meaning to his individual enterprise. But *The Toast!* raised the stakes of this project significantly by being more explicitly, and more outlandishly, a representation of Fantin's personal philosophy of art. The challenge was therefore not only to find a way to integrate self and group, to intermingle them without undermining either one, but also to make this delicate relationship contribute to, and somehow comment on, the artist's vision of truth.

Fantin's tentative solution was to explore the individual-group problem through a multilayered trope: the mirror in Truth's hand. Wielded both as a triumphant attribute for the figure and as a compositional device through which the artist could meditate on the nature of portraiture, Truth's mirror became the work's central metaphor, a lens through which the individual could come to terms with his own image as well as his place within a larger society of artists. In drawing after drawing, the confrontation between one or more members of Fantin's group and the mirror of Truth provides the composition's central drama. As a reflective, representational device inaccessible to the viewer's gaze, it



Figs. 1a–c. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). Fragments of *The Toast! Homage to Truth*, 1865, oil on canvas.

a. *Self-Portrait*, 36 × 32 cm (14 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.). Private collection. Photo courtesy Brame & Lorenceau, Paris

b. *James McNeill Whistler*, 47 × 37 cm (18 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ in.). Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1906.276a–b). Photo: Freer Gallery of Art

c. *Portrait of Antoine Vollon*, 30.2 × 18 cm (12 × 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay (RF1974–17). Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY



Fig. 2. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). *Homage to Delacroix*, 1864, oil on canvas, 160 × 250 cm (63 × 98½ in.). Paris, Musée d'Orsay (RF1664). Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

acts as another metaphorical portrait surface in which individual faces among the group might be reflected, but within a frame that is private and privileged, unseen by those outside the painting's inner world. The multiple variations on this theme throughout the many sketches leading up to the final work show that Fantin struggled to represent the idea of an artist's individual—but also collective—relationship to artistic truth. This balancing act generated endless compositional challenges as he tried to develop a livelier, more interactive model of group portraiture than the one he had exhibited in 1864.

In the first group of drawings, begun in May 1864, Truth holds out her mirror to a large group, as if the attribute were a symbol of triumph (figs. 3, 4).⁷ Pressed together at her feet, her audience clamors below like a crowd at a rally. In figure 3, one of them holds up a standard with the word “VERITE,” which faces Truth's mirror in the upper half of the composition as if answering it—reflecting the mirror's meaning while also labeling the picture's subject. But what is most notable about these early drawings is that Truth presents her mirror to a mob of people in an open, perhaps outdoor, setting.⁸ Fantin originally conceived the work as a mass homage, envisioning Truth as a public leader able to manipulate the crowd with her mirror-wand.

Later drawings, from November 1864 to early January 1865, abandon the public setting for the interior space of the studio and also shift from a collective to a more individualized audience for Truth. In this second phase of sketches, Fantin experimented with a one-on-one encounter between Truth and a single figure in the group, with other

figures looking on (figs. 5, 6).⁹ The privileged figure facing Truth and her mirror is almost invariably a painter, holding a brush and palette and/or standing at an easel, and often resembles Fantin. More important than the issue of identification, though, is the way the scenarios are composed so that it is unclear whether the painter is transfixed by the nude (and hence Truth) or by his own image reflected back at him in the mirror—or, indeed, by a heady combination of both. As viewers, we cannot see the mirror’s reflective side and therefore cannot know if the painter is enthralled by Truth or self, and this very ambiguity poses the possibility that the two might be understood as one and the same, or that Fantin meant to provoke reflection on just this point. The theme of specularity, or reflexivity, has multiple layers of significance here, suggesting that visual artists are forced to look at *themselves* rather than—or at least at the same time as—the reality (the truth) they are striving to represent, as if the realist project must necessarily fall back on, and draw its strength from, the task of self-portraiture. This conception of realism complicates Émile Zola’s famous definition of art as “a fragment of nature seen through a temperament.”¹⁰ Zola’s phrase suggests that realism is a seamless convergence of two entities that are otherwise split, or even opposed—nature (Zola’s notion of truth) and temperament (his notion of self). What Fantin’s conceit suggests, taking the idea further, is that realism requires the artist to look at truth and also at himself—that self-portraiture, and thus self-analysis, subtend any honest depiction of things—and that the two sights, self and truth, are often difficult to resolve. By experimenting with isolated self-reflection within a collective composition, Fantin’s studies for *The Toast!* reveal how this self-truth conflict was deeply imbricated in the self-group conflict that drove his group portraits. Fantin’s struggle to define his version of realism and its relationship to truth was inseparable from his struggle to define his relationship to his artistic peers.

On the one hand, this second group of drawings seems to resist notions of collectivity by using Truth’s hand-mirror as a visual device of exclusive enlightenment and privilege. (Moving Truth into an artist’s studio already makes the point that access to her is restricted.) On the other hand, the mirror is a subtle solution for implementing hierarchy in a group portrait without separating out, elevating, or enlarging any particular figure, thus preserving an overall sense of democratic unity. If Fantin had wanted to paint a wholly self-centered group portrait, he could have hewed more closely to his model: Gustave Courbet’s *The Painter’s Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up a Phase of Seven Years of My Moral and Artistic Life* (1855), exhibited in the artist’s self-mounted one-man show a decade before.¹¹ The ambitious, first-person tone of this work’s lengthy title pervades its pictorial structure, which centers on Courbet himself painting at his easel with a nude model—a “real allegory” for truth—peering over his shoulder. Unlike Courbet, who made himself the isolated centerpiece of the group gathered in his studio, Fantin pushed his self-portrait to the margin and abandoned the one-on-one encounter between painter and Truth so that Truth could address a more public, collective audience. Fantin also chose to emphasize the communal act of toasting instead of artists observing and drawing private inspiration from Truth.¹²



Fig. 5. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). Study for *The Toast! Homage to Truth*, 5 December 1864, charcoal and crayon on paper, 29.9 × 37.8 cm (11⁷/₈ × 15 in.). Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre (RF12397, fol. 5r). Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

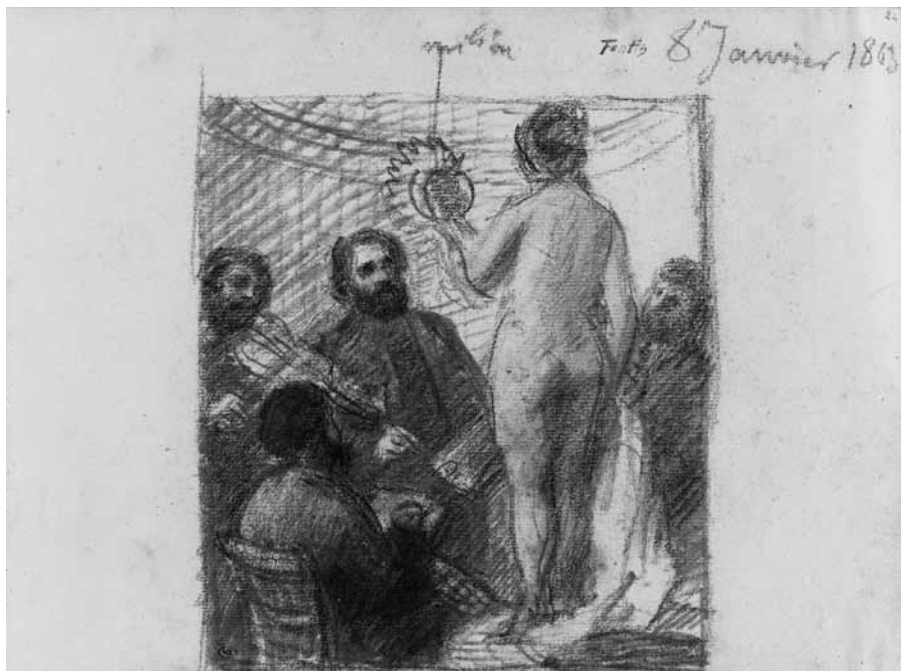


Fig. 6. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). Study for *The Toast! Homage to Truth*, 8 January 1865, charcoal and crayon on paper, 29.9 × 37.8 cm (11⁷/₈ × 15 in.). Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre (RF12415, fol. 17v). Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY

studio of the previous drawings to a more classical, civic architectural space); and Fantin seems to have had second thoughts about Truth's mirror privileging a single artist among the group, especially if he were that artist. His note in the margin for a possible title, "To Truth, our ideal!" (*A la Vérité, notre idéal!*), suggests this sketch was an effort to show a more collective toast to Truth, an ideal shared by the men depicted in the portrait and perhaps also by the public that it was intended to address. From this point forward, the encounter between the artist and the mirror of Truth is triangulated to include the spectator, raising the question of artistic truth from another direction: As viewers, is our truth an impartial reality? Or is it what we see of ourselves—what we already know, an accumulation of what we have seen before in previous pictures and personal experiences?

The drawing of 16 January was not the final revision. A pen-and-ink drawing sketched into a letter Fantin probably wrote in early February 1865 represents a more advanced state of the composition (fig. 8), likely made after the painting was under way. The letter is severely cropped, making the remaining fragments of text very difficult to decipher into sentences, but its provenance in British collections suggests it may have been one of the many letters Fantin addressed to Edwin Edwards or Whistler while *The Toast!* was in progress.¹³ Another possible recipient is the German painter Otto Scholderer, a close friend of Fantin with whom he kept up a lively and lengthy correspondence from 1858 until 1901. Scholderer's letter to Fantin from Frankfurt dated 14 February 1865 confirms that he had recently received at least three sketches of the composition in progress, the latest of which he describes in terms closely matching the Getty drawing: an image of a female nude surrounded by men in black inscribed with the word "VERITÉ."¹⁴ If the Getty document was sent to Scholderer, then this is the drawing that provoked an uncommon critique from Fantin's most trusted friend: Scholderer found the representation of Truth heavy-handed, especially with her prominent "Verité" label, and warned Fantin that he was "going too far," that the picture might actually do harm to the very friends and colleagues it meant to support.¹⁵

Until now, the best approximation of the final composition was a small oil sketch, probably done around the same time. However, a poor black-and-white reproduction of this *esquisse* is all that remains,¹⁶ and the Getty drawing is much more informative because it is so crisply drawn in pen. The drawing is very similar to the oil sketch in almost every compositional respect, and it also hews closely to Fantin's helpful description of the final composition (or what he planned as the final composition when he began painting, anyway) in his letter to Edwards on 3 February.¹⁷ Truth appears amid a nest of clouds set against a dark background, her left arm resting on a cloud and her right hand holding a small round mirror. She no longer raises the mirror aloft; instead she holds it rather more modestly near her knee, at the composition's approximate center. Compared with the drawing of 16 January, the composition is simplified, with darkness and clouds replacing the previous drawing's architectural details. In this revision, the interior space is once again intimate, narrow, and ambiguous, and the focus more fully on the group of men surrounding Truth's table.



Fig. 8. Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904). Sketch for *The Toast! Homage to Truth*, ca. late January–early February 1865, ink on paper, 12 × 8.1 cm (4³/₄ × 3³/₁₆ in.). Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute (850433)

The Getty sketch also confirms Fantin's final adjustment to his placement in the painting: in the drawing of 16 January (see fig. 7), he appears at far left, just outside the perimeter of the men seated or standing around the table. A list of ten names appears in the left margin of the drawing, identifying ten of the eleven figures appearing, including Truth. Fantin's name is not among them. This and his extremely marginal placement suggest he felt ambivalent about including his portrait at all.¹⁸ But in the Getty drawing, as in the lost oil sketch, he reasserts his presence, moving himself up to the table to share the foreground with Whistler. Seated at the lower left corner of the table with his back to the viewer, he reaches out his arm and points his finger toward Truth while at the same time looking over his shoulder. His gesture is meant to instruct his viewers where to look, but only after filtering their attention through him. When seen in light of his description of the painting in the letter of 3 February, the artist's placement is revealing, for it reinstates a subtle hierarchy among the gathered men—a hierarchy that places the painter himself at the peak of importance, even if he is not in the central or most immediately visible position:

In front of the table, standing, hand on his hip, a glass in hand, Whistler dressed *en japonais*; me, *the number one*, turning around and showing Truth, then around us, people with glasses in hand, raising a toast to Truth! They drink to Truth their ideal and by one of those licenses permitted to painting which are one of its charms, their Ideal, the subject of their toast appears for he who looks at the picture. It is pure fantasy mixed with reality.¹⁹

According to this description, Fantin's conception of the painting as a group portrait and as a representation of "truth" had fundamentally changed. After attempting many other, more absorptive compositions in which the figure of Truth could be seen only from behind—and in which, as a result, the precise nature of her encounter with the artists around her was inaccessible to the viewer, lost in the invisible surface of her mirror—Fantin decided to open up the painting to his public, addressing viewers directly with a more frontal composition. And unlike the earlier sketches, here Fantin portrays himself neither as the central figure of the privileged artist nor as a marginal figure relegated to the painting's outermost edge. Instead, he has found a compromise solution in which Whistler and Truth take center stage²⁰ but Fantin's leading gesture and pointedly outward glance still secure his place as the "number one" artist in the image. He has the honor of *revealing* Truth: it is he who allows us to see her, and his assertion that "the subject . . . appears for he who looks at the picture" makes clear how much he valued this position. According to his conception, the open composition he eventually chose meant that only those who view the painting from the outside—only those occupying *his* position as the artist standing before the image and facing in—could see Truth in all her glory. What Fantin seems to have wanted was an image of truth that was both collective and all his own.

It is important that the artist's position inside the painting reflects his stance outside it as well, as the "painter-beholder" (to borrow Michael Fried's now-classic term)

whose inside-outside status acts as our relay, drawing us into the painting and encouraging us to see it *through his eyes*.²¹ Indeed, in the closest approximations we have of the painting, Fantin is the only figure acknowledging Truth's presence. In fact, he is the only one who seems aware that she is there. In a letter to Edwards written on 15 February 1865, well after he had begun the painting, Fantin makes this idea explicit: "You are right, I am the only one who will see her. . . . Banquo did not frighten Macbeth so much as Truth frightens me."²² For him, *The Toast!* was ultimately about *his* relationship to Truth, not the audience's, and this relationship was an anxious one, as the Macbeth remark reveals. The notion that he would be the sole member of the group able to see Truth indicates that the idea behind his collective homage ultimately was egocentric. Despite Fantin's anxiety about his placement in the group, so evident in the progression of drawings, and despite his efforts to couch his metaphors of individuation in a composition premised on collective unity, a statement like this suggests that the group he selected was summoned as a supporting cast for his own self-portrait. This is the aspect of the painting that irritated the critics. They called the work "a crisis of pride," lamenting "these apotheoses of one's own personality, these beer-mug paradises where the artist claims the role of God and Father, with his little friends as apostles."²³

The critical onslaught against *The Toast!* struck a raw nerve in Fantin, as a realist and as a painter of portraits and groups in the 1860s. A conception of realism that placed self and self-reflection at the center of things, as these drawings and the destroyed painting did to varying extents, was at odds with group portraiture, seen as collaborative and collective, not narcissistic in nature.²⁴ It was also at odds with realism's own claim to depict the "real" and "true" material world. The drawings for *The Toast!* meditate on some of realism's central issues: Are self and truth reconcilable? Are they one? Is the artist's subjectivity, his personal vision or style, a problem for realism, an artistic philosophy claiming to offer direct transcription of visual experience onto the canvas? Or is subjectivity the very essence of an artist's image of the "real"? These are classic questions about realism, a movement notoriously difficult to define. They are also questions at the core of Fantin's oeuvre, split virtually down the middle between lyrical, Wagnerian fantasies painted from imagination and portraits and still lifes in which every anatomical and botanical detail is transcribed from life with meticulous care. Finally, they are questions that made group portraiture all but impossible for an artist who took them so seriously. In the end, Fantin's personal and collective homage to truth was so fraught with awkwardness, uncertainty, and changes of mind, so invested with untenable allegorical claims to realist "truth," that it could not hold together. Although it is not surprising that Fantin saved the portraits of himself and Whistler, the leading artists in his picture (why he saved Vollon is more of a mystery),²⁵ the fact that the painting ended up as three separate, individual portraits—currently held in three different collections, no less—poignantly epitomizes its failure: a failure to embody the paradoxical idea of a privileged yet shareable truth.

Notes My sincere thanks to T. J. Clark, Anne Wagner, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful critiques and suggestions. Research for this article would not have been possible without the generosity of the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, and the department of Special Collections, Getty Research Institute. All translations are my own.

1. “C’est de la phantasie pure mêlée de réalité...” Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 3 February 1865, *Copies de lettres de Fantin à ses parents et amis, par Victoria Fantin-Latour*, Bibliothèque Municipale de Grenoble, R.8867 Réserve (hereafter cited as BMG), fascicule 2, 63.

2. My description is drawn from Fantin’s annotated preparatory sketches in the Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF12393, 12395, 12397–12403, 12405–12408, 12410–12412, 12415–12417, 12418–12420, 12425, 12467, 12485–12486, 12568, 12647–12648, 12801), his correspondence (especially the letter cited above), and various Salon reviews describing the final picture, including: Félix Derière, “Beaux-Arts: Salon de 1865,” *Le siècle* (2 June 1865): 1: “Derrière eux, une jeune fille d’un blond ardent est debout, appuyée sur un fauteuil. C’est la Vérité telle qu’elle sortit un beau jour de son puits.” Louis Leroy, “Salon de 1865 IV,” *Le charivari* (13 May 1865): 2: “Le Toast représente cinq ou six jeunes gens vus à mi-corps, tenant tous un verre à la main. Au fond, dans une lumière du Bengale, la Vérité se dresse triomphalement.” Francis Aubert, “Salon de 1865: III Les Jeunes,” *Le pays* 135 (15 May 1865): 3: “ces gens-là, rangés autour d’une table sur laquelle on a mis une nappe blanche pour la solennité, boivent un coup de bleu à la vérité qui apparaît sous la forme d’une petite canaille laide et bête... Au fond le ciel bleu (il paraît que la table est en plein vent), etc., le tout de grandeur naturelle.” Ch. Bataille, “Le Salon de 1865,” *L’univers illustré* 441 (14 June 1865): 374: “Les thuriféraires boivent du bleu-authentique, la vérité l’exige, mais ils sont lugubres sous leurs accoutrements. Parmi les enfants de chœur terribles, je distingue Zacharie Astruc, un critique très paradoxal et très-primésautier; M. Amand Gautier, le peintre énergique des *Folles de la Salpêtrière*...; puis M. Whistler [*sic*], le spirituel elumineur de la fameuse *Chinoise*. La tête fine de M. Whistler [*sic*] jaillit, ironique et railleuse, d’une robe japonaise traitée avec un grand respect des étoffes.” A. de Bullemont, “Salon de 1865: La peinture d’histoire,” *Les beaux-arts* (15 June 1865): 353–54: “Ainsi M. Fantin voudrait nous persuader que la Vérité c’est cette grosse fille rousse aux chairs flasques, aux yeux gris, et que le vrai c’est le vin bleu qu’on boit aux barrières, dans ces verres communs... Parmi les buveurs, citons MM. Manet, Whistler, Cordier et Gautier.” A.-J. du Pays, “Salon de 1865 (quatrième article),” *L’illustration* 1164 (17 June 1865): 384: “la Vérité nue, dans une auréole de lumière... Le titre du tableau *Le Toast* et le geste de l’artiste qui indique du doigt la Vérité (à qui tout le monde tourne le dos) ne rendent pas la scène très intelligible... Le peintre semble n’avoir pas eu grande confiance dans la clarté de son sujet, car, au-dessus de l’apparition lumineuse de cette figure de femme nue, il a écrit en gros caractères: VERITE.” Amédée Cantaloube, “Chronique du Salon de 1865,” *Illustrateur des dames et des demoiselles* (18 June 1865): 195–96: “Le peintre resterait alors seul en face de sa création.” Louis Auvray, “Salon de 1865,” *Revue artistique et littéraire* (15 July 1865): 26: “ces prétendus réalistes buvant du petit bleu à la santé de la Vérité, qui est là toute nue... Parmi les réalistes qui figurent sur cette toile, buvant un litre en l’honneur d’une Vérité rousse, on nous assigne M. Fantin, l’auteur de cette peinture: il occupe le centre de la toile, assis, le dos au public, et la tête tournée vers le spectateur. Puis, M. Manet, jeune homme blond, vu de face, le verre à la main; et sur le premier plan, M. Whistler est en costume chinois... Cette composition offre encore les portraits de quatre à cinq réalistes, entre autres ceux de MM. Cordier et Gauthier [*sic*], et de deux autres vus de dos.” Gonzague Privat, *Place aux jeunes! causeries critiques sur le Salon de 1865: Peinture, sculpture, gravure, architecture* (Paris: F. Cournol, 1865), 62–63: “Le portrait de M. Whistler, vêtu d’une robe noir baignée de fantastiques arabasques, est un morceau de peinture comme l’on en fait peu.” Some, although not all, of these reviews are available in the *Album de Coupures de Presse: Critiques sur*

l'œuvre de Fantin-Latour, vol. 1, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Est. Yb3-2746-8. The album was assembled by the artist's wife, Victoria Dubourg Fantin-Latour, who may have intentionally omitted some of the negative reviews.

3. The portrait of Vollon is in the collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, and the portrait of Whistler is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. The current location of the portrait of Fantin is unknown. According to the Galerie Brame & Lorenceau, Paris, it was acquired from the H. E. Ten Cate collection in Holland in 1958 by a Dr. S. Leonard Simpson of London. Its most recently documented location is in a private collection in Japan.

4. The literature on *The Toast!* is limited, but important work has been done. Atushi Miura's chapter "*Le Toast—hommage à la vérité* (1865) de Fantin-Latour: Deuxième manifeste mal accepté," in his unpublished dissertation, "La représentation de l'artiste autour de Manet et Fantin-Latour" (PhD diss., Université de Lille III, 1996), 59–91, tries to reconstruct the painting through the Salon reviews, a few of which I discovered thanks to his thorough research, and also investigates the issue of Truth's alleged "vulgarity." Léonce Bénédite's article, "Histoire d'un tableau: 'Le Toast', par Fantin-Latour," *La revue de l'art* 17 (10 February 1905): 121–36, concentrates primarily on the preparatory drawings, describing the evolution of the composition through its various stages, and is therefore of great use only to someone unable to view the drawings. His conclusion is that *The Toast!* was a turning point in Fantin's oeuvre, after which we can see a distinct division in his practice between realist and allegorical/fantastical subjects. Douglas Druick's catalog entries on seven of the preparatory drawings and the painted fragment depicting Vollon provide a very good overview of the project and its failure, highlighting several of the problems Fantin confronted while working on it, including Truth's similarity to a studio model and the challenge of reconciling realist portraiture and allegory. Douglas Druick and Michel Hoog, *Fantin-Latour* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1983), 181–92. Finally, Michael Fried analyzes several of the preparatory drawings in his chapter "The Generation of 1863" in *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 203–12, where his focus is on the "divided structure of *denial of* and *direct address to the beholder*" (196) characterized by Fantin's painting in the 1860s in general and embodied in the sketches for *The Toast!* in particular. Fried's account has informed my reading, although I approach the problem of the work's relationship to its viewers, and the role of the artist in the picture, in different ways. For recent commentary on Fantin's group portraiture, see Vincent Pomarède, "Friends' Gatherings," in *Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904)*, exh. cat. (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2009), 240–44, and Pierre Vaisse, "Fantin-Latour: Les portraits collectifs," in *Fantin-Latour, de la réalité au rêve* (Lausanne: Fondation de l'Hermitage, 2007), 43–47.

5. The thirty sketchbook sheets in the Musée du Louvre listed above (see note 2) include the drawings directly related to the composition of *The Toast! Homage to Truth*. Several other drawings dating from the second half of 1864 and the first half of 1865 can also be considered studies for *The Toast!*, although they do not feature the allegorical figure of Truth: RF12394, 12404, 12409, 12413–12414, 12519, 12637, and 12650–12651 in the Musée du Louvre, Paris; and Inv. B1445a-b in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon. This is because Fantin was also considering painting an homage to Baudelaire titled *Un Anniversaire*, including a group of artists and writers raising a toast to the deceased poet's image. This idea was abandoned for the 1865 Salon but eventually migrated into Fantin's studies for his fourth group portrait of poets, *Corner of a Table*, exhibited at the Salon of 1872. For more on the unrealized Baudelaire picture, see Luce Abélès, *Fantin-Latour: Coin de table, Verlaine, Rimbaud et les Vilains Bonshommes* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1987), 13–16, 49, and my "The Art of Association: Fantin-Latour and the Modern Group Portrait" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 267–75.

6. For an in-depth analysis of this painting and the French reinvention of Dutch group portraiture, see my chapter "The Self in Group Portraiture" in *Art of Association*, 37–105, for which Alois Riegl's "Das holländische Gruppenporträt," *Jahrbuch des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 22 (1902): 71–278, translated

by Evelyn M. Kain and David Britt as *The Group Portraiture of Holland* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), is both inspiration and foil.

7. Besides the two drawings illustrated here, sketchbook sheet RF12485, Musée du Louvre, Paris, includes two similar drawings showing Truth standing above a crowd. The inscription on figure 3 confirms Fantin's interest in a swarming crowd of artists gathered around Truth: "des têtes portraits se pressant en foule / peintres sculpteurs / musiciens savants littérateurs / beaucoup foule."

8. The allegorical nude with her arm held high, the standard, and the rowdy mass are all echoes of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Guiding the People* (1830; Paris, Musée du Louvre), depoliticized to become an arcane artistic manifesto.

9. Besides the two illustrated here, the following sketches represent an encounter between Truth and one, two, or three particular artists among the group: RF12393, 12398, 12399, 12400, 12401, 12402, 12403 (recto and verso), 12405, 12406, 12408, 12410–12412, and 12416–12417, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Truth's mirror is not always directed at the painter. Sometimes she simply faces him, aiming her mirror elsewhere, while he stares up at her, transfixed by her image (e.g., RF12399 and 12401). This seems to me further evidence that the relationship between artistic Truth and the artist's self(-image) was one Fantin struggled with in various ways.

10. "Une œuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament." Émile Zola, "Proudhon et Courbet," in idem, *Mes Haines: Causeries littéraires et artistiques* (Paris: Charpentier, 1923), 25.

11. More than any other painting of the latter half of the nineteenth century, *The Toast! Homage to Truth* invoked Courbet's legacy and the profound impact of *The Painter's Studio*. The relationship between the works is complex and deserves considerable discussion, for which I have no space here. (See my "Art of Association," 106–67.) Suffice it to say that the elaborate mise-en-scène of Courbet's enormous self-portrait within a group portrait provoked widespread reflection, and quite a bit of confusion, about the relationship between the painter and society at large. At the same time, its perplexing subtitle declared its ambition to reconcile allegory and realism, then considered to be at opposite poles of the stylistic spectrum, and to do so in the charged symbolic space of the artist's studio. Fantin's *Toast* took up the same impossible challenges with less successful results, raising doubts about realism's underlying aims and collective identity. For more on Courbet's painting, see the extensive bibliography in the catalog entry by Laurence des Cars in *Gustave Courbet* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 220.

12. An even closer and more recent model for *The Toast!* may have been Courbet's planned submission to the Salon of 1864, *The Source of Hippocrene*, irreparably damaged in a studio accident before it could be shown. The painting represented a nude Parisian model in a mythical landscape around whom gathered several contemporary poets, including Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and Alphonse Lamartine, drinking from the Hippocrene's waters for inspiration. A farce of the apotheosis genre, the work was intended to condemn "poetry's hatred of realism" and vice versa: the modern nude was shown spitting into the fountain, poisoning its Parnassian waters and all who drank them. It is possible that Fantin's *Toast* was partially inspired by Courbet's canvas—he could easily have been aware of the painting before it was destroyed, as he followed Courbet's activities closely at the time—but his gathering of artists was more reverential to his realist allegory of Truth. For more on *The Source of Hippocrene*, see Paul Galvez, "Painting at the Origin," in *Looking at Landscapes: Courbet and Modernism, Papers from a Symposium Held at the J. Paul Getty Museum on March 18, 2006* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), www.getty.edu/museum/symposia/courbet_modernism.html, 8–11. Courbet discusses the painting in letters to Jules Castagnary (18 January 1864) and Urbain Cuenot (6 April 1866) in *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, ed. and trans. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13. The letter with the drawing was purchased by the Getty Research Institute at auction from Christie's, London, in 1986. The previous owner was a Mrs. E. M. Gordon of Biddlesden Park, Brackley, Northamptonshire, England, and her collection was formerly part of the archive of Smith, Elder & Co.,

a London publisher. A letter from Edwin Edwards sent from Cornwall dated February 1865 suggests that Edwards had recently received a drawing of *The Toast!* from Fantin, since his knowledge of the composition exceeds Fantin's detailed description of it in another letter of 3 February. (Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, BMG, fascicule 2, 63, and Edwin Edwards to Henri Fantin-Latour, February 1865, private collection, Paris.) To my knowledge, the drawing to which Edwards refers is neither in the Louvre nor with the rest of Edwards's correspondence, and therefore could be the Getty document. Whistler likewise indicates he received a sketch of the painting from Fantin around the same time, but he does not describe it. (James McNeill Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, February/March 1865, Library of Congress, Pennell-Whistler Collection, PWC 1/33/21.)

14. Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, Frankfurt, 14 February 1865:

Votre esquisse m'a donné bien à réfléchir, je trouve qu'elle est superbe à peindre, tous ces portraits en noir autour de la femme nue sont superbes à peindre, seulement, je ne suis pas d'accord avec le sujet, c'est-à-dire, que vous voulez faire de votre tableau un tableau de sujet en écrivant à lettres le nom de la vérité, quant à cela votre esquisse que vous m'avez envoyée l'autre jour m'a plu mieux, c'était plus clair comme sujet cela s'expliquait de soi-même, aussi le toast, l'autre esquisse, cela était clair. Maintenant je ne veux pas dire que la dernière esquisse (celle que vous venez m'envoyer) n'est pas aussi jolie à peindre que les autres, mais je vous dis franchement, je ne suis pas pour un sujet qui a besoin de l'explication, la peinture doit s'expliquer elle-même, maintenant quand vous voulez le peindre sans y mettre le nom de la vérité, je suis parfaitement de votre avis; le catalogue ou le nom à lettres c'est la même chose à la fin. Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas fait un des deux autres esquisses, surtout l'autre définition de la vérité aurait fait un grand effet, était-ce plus long à faire?

Scholderer and Fantin's correspondence is soon to be published as Mathilde Arnoux, Thomas Gaetgens, and Anne Tempelaere-Panzani, eds., *La correspondance d'Henri Fantin-Latour et Otto Scholderer* (Paris: Centre allemand de l'histoire de l'art, 2011). My sincere thanks to Mathilde Arnoux for allowing me to review this collection of letters prior to publication, and to Sylvie Brame for giving me access to the correspondence in 2005. See also Mathilde Arnoux, "La leçon de Courbet: À propos de la correspondance entre Henri Fantin-Latour et Otto Scholderer," in *Courbet à neuf! Actes du colloque international organisé par le musée d'Orsay et le Centre allemand d'histoire de l'art à Paris, les 6 et 7 décembre 2007*, eds. Mathilde Arnoux et al. (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2010), 281–98. My guess is that Fantin sent sketches of *The Toast!* to several of his friends soliciting feedback, and that Edwards, Whistler, and Scholderer all received a drawing similar to the one in the Getty collection. Any one of them could have been the recipient of this particular sketch, but the fact that Fantin's correspondence to Edwards has been carefully documented (BMG, fasc. 2) and that none of it matches the sentence fragments visible around the Getty drawing leads me to believe that this illustrated letter was addressed to Whistler or Scholderer. Fantin's correspondence to Scholderer prior to 1871 has long been lost. Some of Fantin's letters to Whistler are preserved in the Birnie Philip Collection, Glasgow University Library, but none from the period 1864 to 1865.

15. "Quant au service que vous voulez rendre à nous tous, je ne peux en juger si cela sera un en vérité, peut-être vous allez déjà un peu trop loin." Otto Scholderer to Henri Fantin-Latour, 14 February 1865; published in Mathilde Arnoux, Thomas Gaetgens, and Anne Tempelaere-Panzani, eds., *La correspondance d'Henri Fantin-Latour et Otto Scholderer* (Paris: Centre allemand de l'histoire de l'art, 2011). Scholderer's warning turned out to be true. After the disastrous reception of *The Toast!*, Fantin wrote: "moi, je suis détesté des peintres. . . [O]n dit que je soutiens Manet, pour lui être nuisible. . ." Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 26 June 1865, BMG, fasc. 2, 89.

16. The oil sketch is reproduced in Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 210. It is unclear when it was lost, but definitely after Bénédite's article of 1905, since he mentions the "red veil" floating behind Truth in his description of it. Bénédite, "Histoire d'un tableau," 131.

17. Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 3 February 1865, BMG, fasc. 2, 63:

Voilà la disposition: Dans un fond sombre un nuage éclatant descend, il s'ouvre et au milieu apparait la Vérité, une brillante de jeunesse, d'un bras elle s'appuie sur ce nuage, de l'autre tient un miroir, un peu de draperie blanche cache la partie inférieure du corps. Dessous elle, qui coupe la figure une table avec des fleurs, fruits, verres, bouteilles, instruments de musique, palette, attributs des arts et des sciences. Devant la table, debout, la main sur la hanche, un verre à la main, Whistler en japonais, moi le n° 1 me retournant et montrant la Vérité, puis autour, des gens, le verre à la main, qui portent un toast à la Vérité! Ils boivent à la Vérité leur idéal et par une de ces licences permises à la peinture et qui sont un de ses charmes, leur Idéal, le sujet de leur toast apparaît pour celui qui regarde le tableau. C'est de la phantasie pure mêlée de réalité; mon invention est seulement venue de ceci: Je cherchais un motif pour mettre dans une toile, le plus de choses agréables à peindre. Et bien il y a là, la femme nue, la table couverte de fruits, de fleurs etc. Tous les portraits autour, autant de têtes, dont on pourrait faire des chefs-d'œuvres, la belle robe de Whistler. La disposition vous paraîtra bien simple, eh bien, cela m'a pris un temps énorme, et les essais de toute sorte cela ne peut se dire. Je peux vous le dire, c'est la première fois que je suis content de ce que j'ai trouvé.

18. Fantin's tentative self-placement begs comparison to Édouard Manet's self-portrait at the far left margin of *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (1862), a picture that Fantin knew well and for which he probably posed. For syntheses of the research on this painting and Fantin's possible involvement, see Nils Gösta Sandblad, "La Musique aux Tuileries," in *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception*, trans. Walter Nash (Lund: New Society of Letters, 1954), 17–68, and Françoise Cachin et al., *Manet 1832–1883* (New York: Abrams, 1983), 122–26.

19. Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 3 February 1865, BMG, fasc. 2, 63.

20. Fantin's uncertainty surrounding the placement of each figure was made more anxious by the pressure of personal relationships and his own vanity or ambition vis-à-vis the group. His explanation for placing Whistler in the central foreground while painting the rest of his colleagues clustered behind the table on either side of Truth reveals the delicate interpersonal implications of the composition, as well as the combination of self-interest and the desire to please others that was behind its arrangement: "Whistler devant la table, ceci est une courtoisie assez excusable. Il est très content ordinairement d'être en avant, il m'a toujours été si utile, j'ai été si peu aimable durant mon séjour chez lui, puis cette robe japonaise, sera au premier plan, bien jolie à peindre. ... puis encore Whistler est si connu ici! Puis sa Japonaise au Salon, tout cela m'a donné ce premier plan." Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 15 February 1865, BMG, fasc. 2, 66.

21. Fried makes a similar point in his analysis of several of the drawings for *The Toast!*, interpreting the two figures in top hats—described by critics as depicted from the rear in the final version—as "emissaries from the space *in front of* the picture." For Fried, these figures are in conflict with "the otherwise mainly frontal structure of the work as a whole," establishing a "double relation to the viewer" that he interprets as transitional between Courbet's absorptive realism and Manet's "facing" modernism. Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 198–222. I agree with Fried that Fantin's various ways of engaging or excluding his viewers (and this includes viewers *inside* his works as well, as in *The Toast!*) constitute one of his group portraits' most compelling features, and want to open this problem further to consider what I believe drove Fantin's indecision more than his split allegiances to Courbet and Manet: the problematic relationship between self and group, individualism and collectivity, in a personal manifesto intended for the Paris Salon.

22. "Vous avez raison, il n'y a que moi, qui la verrai. ... Banquo ne fit pas tant peur à Macbeth, que la Vérité pour moi." Henri Fantin-Latour to Edwin Edwards, 15 February 1865, BMG, fasc. 2, 68.

23. "M. Fantin-La-Tour *traverse* (je veux l'espérer) une crise singulière, assez fréquente chez les natures artistes : la crise de l'orgueil." Ernest Chesneau, "Beaux-Arts: Salon de 1865: III. Les

Excentriques—M. M. Manet.—Fantin-Latour.—Whistler.—Lambron.—Biry.—J. Tissot.—Courbet,” *Feuilleton le constitutionnel* (16 May 1865): n.p. [1–2]. “Ces apothéoses de sa propre personnalité, ces paradis de la chope, où l’artiste tient le rôle de Dieu le Père, et les petits camarades figurant les apôtres, ne sont peut-être pas une assise bien rassurante pour une religion nouvelle.” Ch. Bataille, “Le Salon de 1865,” *L’univers illustré* 441 (14 June 1865): 374.

24. Like Courbet, Manet, and Edgar Degas, Fantin was a great admirer of seventeenth-century Dutch group portraits, much in vogue in mid-nineteenth-century France. Critics like Théophile Thoré and Hippolyte Taine hailed Dutch group portraits as images of egalitarian democracy and collective harmony; Rembrandt in particular was seen to embody pro-republican sentiments dear to French artists and writers. See Théophile Thoré (pseud. William Bürger), *Musées de la Hollande: I. Amsterdam et La Haye, études sur l’école hollandaise*, vol. 1 (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1858), and Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l’art dans les Pays-Bas* (Paris: G. Baillière, 1869). For more on Rembrandt’s reputation in nineteenth-century France, see Alison McQueen, “Politicizing Rembrandt: An Exemplar for New Aesthetic Values, Realism, and Republicanism,” in idem, *The Rise of the Cult of Rembrandt: Reinventing an Old Master in Nineteenth-Century France* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2003), 109–21. For a pioneering study of the influence of Dutch group portraiture on French painting, see Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *French Realism and the Dutch Masters: The Influence of Dutch Seventeenth-Century Painting on the Development of French Painting between 1830 and 1870* (Utrecht: Haentjens Dekker & Gumbert, 1974), 49–61.

25. Vollon appears nowhere in Fantin’s correspondence. The nature of their relationship is unknown.