Wilhelm Leibl, *Peasant Boy* (1876–77)

Abstract

Peasant Boy dates from a period in Wilhelm Leibl's career that precedes his attainment of a style easily identifiable as realism. In 1869, Leibl had traveled to Paris, where he came into contact with Gustave Courbet (and probably also Édouard Manet) and admired the Frans Hals paintings that he saw in the Louvre. In 1870, Leibl returned to Munich. By 1873, he had retreated to the Bavarian countryside, which offered the peasant subjects that dominated his art for the next two decades. The subject of this painting—not to mention the pose—is unspectacular. A seemingly shy boy slouches on a chair that is too high and too deep for him: indeed, he hangs as much as he sits. This work impresses the viewer not by its technical virtuosity but rather by its simple beauty—its rendering of a peasant model, awkward and vulnerable, in complex but unadorned hues of beige and brown. The hues are not contained by strict contours: instead, at least from the boy's waist downward, they flow into the background, leaving only brushstrokes to define the form. In this way, *Peasant Boy* indulges a pure, painterly impulse, and thereby anticipates certain aspects of German Impressionism. Likewise, Leibl's work gestures towards Impressionism by eschewing explicit social commentary and focusing instead on the external appearance of people and objects. As the artist once wrote, "I paint human beings as they are, so the soul is there in any case." (Françoise Forster-Hahn et al., *Spirit of an Age: Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin*. London: National Gallery Company, 2001, p. 156.)

Source

Source: Wilhelm Leibl, *Bauernjunge* [*Peasant Boy*]. Painting (1876–77).
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