



Victims of Posterity. Identifying Gaps on 19th- Century French Art History with Wikidata

DISCUSSION PAPER

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a historiographical investigation of nineteenth-century French art using Wikidata. It draws on a dataset of over 12,000 artists who exhibited at the Paris Salon between 1848 and 1880, each identified and, where possible, aligned with Wikidata entries. This alignment allows for both a quantitative analysis of artists' posthumous visibility—assessing their presence in Wikidata and the completeness of their entries—and a qualitative evaluation of the data itself. Using OpenRefine, Wikidata entries were compared with specialized sources such as the Getty Research Institute's Union List of Artist Names, providing insight into the reliability of basic biographical information and the broader documentation available.

The dataset was then subjected to ordinal regressions to identify the factors and criteria influencing whether an artist is documented on Wikidata, as well as the quantity and quality of this documentation. Three key patterns emerge: first, women artists remain largely invisible in historiography, reflecting the professional and institutional barriers they faced during their lifetimes. Second, artists highly recognized in their own time tend to maintain substantial posthumous documentation, showing the durability of reputations and the traces historians rely upon. Third, association with modernity is a particularly strong factor in ensuring posthumous recognition, confirming the influence of a modernist paradigm in nineteenth-century art history.

By precisely objectifying these historiographical biases, this study aims to encourage further research that challenges the canonical narratives of art history and supports the emergence of new perspectives and interpretations.

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(1) INTRODUCTION

Created in 2012, Wikidata has established itself as an increasingly popular tool for cultural heritage institutions, which can use it to semantically structure their collections and/or contribute their own specialized data. Beyond these uses, this knowledge graph is above all a source for the humanities that could be described as “tertiary”, as it extracts and converts into data information gathered from secondary literature—which itself creates knowledge from primary sources (archives and other testimonies). In this respect, Wikidata appears to be an ideal raw material for examining art historiography, as already demonstrated by Goldfarb (2020) on the narratives shaped by Wikidata, by Zhitomirsky-Geffet & Minster (2023) on ethical issues in the collections of the Met and the Rijksmuseum, and by Kaiser (2021) on the Künstlerhaus exhibitors. In this study, we likewise propose to draw on Wikidata to interrogate the historiography of a period particularly rich in rediscovery and methodological renewal: nineteenth-century France.

In many respects, the nineteenth century can indeed be considered the golden age of French art.¹ Yet, despite this evident and enduring interest, the historiography of this period remains largely fragmentary, particularly regarding the artists themselves. This issue is not new: as early as 1866, the art critic Charles Blanc highlighted the fleeting nature of memory within a short timeframe, measured in decades rather than centuries, as it affected nineteenth-century French artists:

When we come to reread old Salons, one thing distresses and discourages us: to see how the reputation of an artist, judged by his contemporaries, is subject to the revisions of posterity. A painter who has been honored at the most brilliant exhibitions, praised, celebrated and acclaimed, is now buried in the catacombs of our memories. (Blanc, 1866)

This observation, far from being refuted over time, appears instead to have been confirmed. In fact, even among the 619 painters most highly recognized in their time—having received awards between 1848 and 1880—more than half (331) have never been the subject of any scholarly study, whether an article or a university thesis (Dupin de Beyssat, 2022, p. 394). More generally, most painters who exhibited at the Salon, and were thus regarded as professional artists, have scant or no foundational documentation, such as birth and death dates or places (Dupin de Beyssat, 2023). This article therefore aims to characterize, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the existing historiography on nineteenth-century French artists, drawing for this purpose on the Wikidata knowledge graph. From this perspective, Wikidata is considered here as a simple “record” of the knowledge produced and disseminated by academic and professional art history, without engaging with the issues related to the mechanisms through which such knowledge is transmitted and reused within a database constructed on a voluntary and amateur basis. The historiographical biases identified will therefore be considered as those of mainstream historiography and not as flaws specific to Wikidata as a volunteer-driven initiative.

Section 2 presents the context and motivation for this study, demonstrating how it seeks to address research questions relevant to both art history and information and communication sciences. Section 3 describes the dataset, while Section 4 details the methods used to collect, enrich, and analyze the data. Section 5 discusses the results, focusing on the factors influencing artists’ posterity in Wikidata, and Section 6 outlines the applications and implications that can be drawn from this study.

(2) CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

This paper aims to answer research questions that are relevant to two distinct disciplinary fields: art history, particularly the history of nineteenth-century French art, and information and communication sciences.

¹ At the *Institut national d’histoire de l’art* library in Paris, one of the oldest and biggest libraries for art history, works on the 19th century account for a quarter of publications on French art on the open-access shelves; among monographs on artists, those dedicated to artists active in the 19th century occupy more than 10% of the shelves.

Since the 1980s, with the development of a social history of art inspired by sociology to examine not only the conditions of production but also the reception of art, an entire area of research has focused on how art history constructs the posterity of artists and their works. The foundational works of Haskell (1976, 1987, 2000) paved the way for a history of taste, accounting for its fluctuations and the fundamentally contingent nature of the selections made by art history—selections that are neither fixed nor absolute. In the early 2000s, attempts to write histories of art history as both an academic discipline and a museographic practice—its defining specificity within the humanities—reinforced this perspective (Barbillon et al., 2008; Barbillon & Sénéchal, 2000–2024; McWilliam & Passini, 2023; Passini, 2017; Pommier, 1995; Therrien, 1998). These studies have shown how discourses are embedded within specific social and institutional histories that, in turn, shape them. While such scholarship covers all periods and themes of art history, nineteenth-century art has proven to be a particularly fertile and sensitive ground for challenging established art-historical narratives. Indeed, many of the key figures involved in major efforts to renew the methodological and canonical approaches to art history have focused on the nineteenth century: Boime examined the academic doctrine (1980, 1986); Haskell studied the history of the Salons and exhibitions (1981); while the foundational studies of Nochlin (1963), Clark (1973b, 1973a, 1984), and Melot (1980) focused on nineteenth-century painters. In 1987, the controversy surrounding the opening of the Musée d'Orsay (*Le Débat. Orsay: Vers un autre XIXe siècle*, 1987), as analyzed by Vaisse (1987), brought to light debates over the inclusion of previously marginalized artists and works, revealing divergent perspectives on the legitimacy of their recognition. Today, the historiography of nineteenth-century French art remains contested, with increasing calls for more inclusive narratives that address historically overlooked groups, such as women and BIPOC artists. Our article thus seeks, in its own way, to engage with the complex historiography of this period by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: Which artists have been most favored by historiography, and which have been forgotten?

RQ2: What criteria enable an artist to achieve posterity?

RQ3: What gaps remain in the historiography of nineteenth-century French art?

In information and communication sciences, the question of data quality constitutes a particularly fertile field of research. Within this context, the case of Wikidata—which has rapidly established itself as one of the most popular open, general-purpose, and non-domain-specific knowledge graphs—has naturally been the subject of numerous studies. The literature review proposed by Piscopo & Simperl (2019) summarizes the propositions and conclusions put forward in the many works devoted to Wikidata. It shows, in particular, that the dimensions of accuracy, defined as the extent to which data is accepted as true, and completeness, defined as the extent to which data contains all relevant elements, are among the least studied in research assessing data quality in Wikidata. Indeed, with the exception of Färber et al. (2017) and Shenoy et al. (2021), accuracy is largely neglected by scholars in this field. This is due in part to the fact that it is difficult to capture within a disciplinary literature that tends toward circularity, especially since assessing accuracy requires comparing Wikidata's content with information from more analog sources—a task not always amenable to automation or programming. Completeness, by contrast, has been the subject of more numerous studies (Ahmeti et al., 2017; Balaraman et al., 2018; Galárraga et al., 2017; Prasojo et al., 2016), but these share the limitations noted above: they tend to treat completeness as an absolute criterion to be met, even though, particularly in historical contexts, it actually depends on the information that is both (1) effectively available (i.e., preserved) and (2) effectively uncovered (i.e., published and studied by scholars). Drawing on our specific expertise as an art historian specializing in nineteenth-century France, having collected significant unpublished data on the population of artists exhibiting at the Salon, our paper hopes to correct this flaw by assessing the quality of Wikidata considering the following research questions:

RQ4: To what extent is Wikidata faithful to the historiography on this subject?

RQ5: To what extent does Wikidata reproduce or correct historiographical biases?

RQ6: How can Wikidata serve as a tool for identifying gaps that need to be filled?

This paper relies on a dataset listing the 11,347 artists who exhibited their works at the Paris Salon between 1848 and 1880 (see section 3.1 for the data collection method). It contains 11 variables, which are divided into two groups: variables related to the artists' profiles and careers, and variables related to their presence in Wikidata.

(3.1) INDEPENDENT VARIABLES RELATED TO ARTISTS' PROFILES AND CAREERS

- *Gender*: Indicates whether the individual is female or male. Gender was determined by the presence of “Mlle,” “Mme,” and/or feminine titles of nobility in the Salon catalogs, which identified female artists. Conversely, the absence of these markers indicated male artists.
- *Origins*: Indicates the artists' geographical origins, based on their places of birth as listed in the Salon catalogs. Birthplaces were classified into four categories: (1) individuals born in the Paris region, coded as “Paris area”; (2) individuals born in metropolitan France outside the Paris region, coded as “Provinces”; (3) individuals born in Europe outside metropolitan France, coded as “Europe”; and (4) all others, including those born in colonies of European states, coded as “Other.” Artists whose place of birth was not specified were coded as “NA” (“Not assigned”).
- *Longevity at the Paris Salon*: Serves as an indicator of the duration of an artist's career. This was measured by counting the number of Parisian *Exposition de peinture et de sculpture* in which the artist participated. This measure is not necessarily equivalent to the time span between the first and last recorded participation. For example, Ernest Lami de Nozan (1801–1877) exhibited in only three Salons over the 27 years between his first appearance in 1850 and his last in 1877. Longevity was classified into four categories: (1) “ephemeral” careers (1 Salon); (2) “short” careers (2–5 Salons); (3) “medium” careers (6–10 Salons); and (4) “long” careers (more than 10 Salons).
- *Awards*: Indicates whether the artist won at least one award during their career. Awards considered include the Prix de Rome, granted by the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* since the late 17th century to fund several years of study in Rome (Dupin de Beyssat, 2025b; Grunchev, 1986; Reynaud, 2011; Verger, 2019), and Salon medals, awarded systematically since 1804 (Dupin de Beyssat, 2022, p. 65–129, 2025a). Artists meeting at least one of these criteria are coded as “TRUE.”
- *Authority*: Indicates whether the artist held at least one position of authority during their career. This includes being elected to the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, appointed as a Salon jury member (Dupin de Beyssat, 2025c), and/or appointed as a teacher at the Paris *École des Beaux-Arts* (Bonnet, 2006, p. 343–345; Chappey, 1996). Artists meeting at least one of these criteria are coded as “TRUE.”
- *Modernity*: Indicates whether the artist is considered “modern.” Artists linked to any of the following movements were coded as “TRUE”: Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Barbizon School, Impressionism, and Pont-Aven School.

(3.2) DEPENDENT VARIABLES RELATED TO ARTISTS' PRESENCE IN WIKIDATA

- *Wikidata*: Indicates whether the artist has an individual entry in Wikidata. If so, artists are coded as “TRUE”.
- *Number of Wikidata Statements*: Records the number of statements contained in the artist's Wikidata entry. The values were grouped into intervals of 25.
- *Number of Wikidata Links*: Records the number of links contained in the artist's Wikidata entry. The values were grouped into intervals of 10.
- *Completeness of Wikidata Entry*: Assesses the completeness of the biographical information (place and date of birth; place and date of death) included in the artist's Wikidata entry. It is divided into three categories: (1) “absent” when no basic biographical information is provided (including when no entry exists); (2) “incomplete” when at least one of these basic biographical details is missing; (3) “complete” when all basic biographical information is provided.
- *Accuracy of Wikidata Entry*: Assesses the accuracy of the basic biographical information provided in Wikidata. It is based on a comparison with the authority records in the Union List of Artist Names developed by the Getty Research Institute. The evaluation was as

follows: (1) “high” when there is complete agreement on the dates of birth and death; (2) “medium” when there is partial disagreement; (3) “low” when there is total disagreement; and (4) “none” when no such data are provided.

This dataset allows us to measure the impact of different variables relating to an artist’s profile or career on the likelihood of their posterity in Wikidata, characterized both qualitatively (accuracy and completeness of the data) and quantitatively (number of links and statements).

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics for the variables. In total, the dataset comprises 11,347 individuals. As expected, male artists constitute the vast majority (76.9%) of the painters considered. Regarding geographical origins, the distribution is relatively even, with a slight majority born in the provinces and a minority of foreign-born artists. Career lengths are more unevenly distributed: a large majority of artists had either ephemeral (41.6%) or short (37.6%) careers, together accounting for 73.9% of the total. Careers spanning more than five Salons are therefore exceptional. The same holds true for the receipt of awards (8.5%) or appointments to positions of authority, which is even rarer (.8%), thus portraying a highly diverse yet imbalanced population in terms of recognition during their lifetime. Finally, being considered a modern artist constitutes an additional distinction, with only 2.0% of individuals meeting this criterion. Moreover, these descriptive statistics provide a primary result concerning the posterity of nineteenth-century French artists in Wikidata: only one third of them have an entry, and the quality and completeness of these entries vary considerably. Having a digital posthumous visibility is therefore the exception rather than the rule, and the task now is to uncover the criteria that determine access to it.

	ABSOLUTE NUMBER	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ARTISTS
Total artists in dataset	11 347	
<i>Variables related to artists’ profiles and careers</i>		
Men artists	8 725	76.9%
Women artists	2 622	23.1%
Artists born in the Paris area	3 348	29.5%
Artists born in the provinces	4 236	37.3%
Artists born abroad	2 283	20.1%
Artists with no attributed place of birth	1 480	13.0%
Artists with ephemeral careers at the Salon	4 717	41.6%
Artists with short careers at the Salon	4 272	37.6%
Artists with medium careers at the Salon	1 280	11.3%
Artists with long careers at the Salon	1 078	9.5%
Artists who won awards	1 080	9.5%
Artists who held an authority position	94	.8%
Artists considered as moderns	224	2.0%
<i>Dependent variables related to artists’ presence in Wikidata</i>		
Present in Wikidata	4 157	36.6%
No biographical information	7 266	64.0%
Incomplete biographical information	422	3.7%
Complete biographical information	3 659	32.2%
Low accuracy	654	5.8%
Medium accuracy	1 347	11.9%
High accuracy	208	1.8%
Number of links [1–10]	3 073	27.1%
Number of links [11–20]	261	2.3%
Number of links [21–30]	50	.4%

Table 1 Summary descriptive statistics of the different variables.

(Contd.)

	ABSOLUTE NUMBER	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL ARTISTS
Number of links [31–40]	23	.2%
Number of links [41–50]	8	.1%
Number of links [> 50]	30	.3%
Number of statements [1–25]	1 081	9.5%
Number of statements [26–50]	1 593	14.0%
Number of statements [51–75]	677	6.0%
Number of statements [76–100]	270	2.4%
Number of statements [101–125]	111	1.0%
Number of statements [126–150]	50	.4%
Number of statements [> 150]	119	1.0%

REPOSITORY LOCATION

[10.34847/nkl.67512 myq](https://nkl.67512.myq)

REPOSITORY NAME

Nakala

OBJECT NAME

Typically the name of the file or file set in the repository.

FORMAT NAMES AND VERSIONS

CSV

CREATION DATES

2023-06-13 to 2025-09-01

DATASET CREATORS

Claire Dupin de Beyssat (musée d'Orsay): data collection, coding, alignment, and enrichment

LANGUAGE

French

LICENSE

CC BY-SA 4.0

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2025-09-18

This dataset can be reused in several ways. In its raw form, it can serve as the basis for statistical analyses of varying complexity, drawing on the variables and categories already presented in the article, and possibly refining their classifications. It can also be used in a more advanced manner by re-exploiting the reconciliation data with Wikidata to extract additional information and/or identifiers from other reference databases. The collected Wikidata identifiers may likewise serve as a foundation for merging with other datasets—for example, to identify Salon exhibitors in other art-historical databases covering related corpora, such as students registered at the *École des Beaux-Arts* (Reg-Arts, 2021) or laureates of the Prix de Rome (Lechleiter, 2019), whose records include precisely these identifiers; or to reconcile with library catalogues—such as those of the INHA—which frequently specify the subjects of artist monographs, thereby extending the scope of historiographical analysis.

(4) METHODS

(4.1) IDENTIFYING SALON ARTISTS WITH THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY'S SALONS DATABASE

The dataset used in this article is drawn from the *Salons* database (*Salons 1673–1914, 2006*), developed by the Musée d'Orsay and the Institut national d'histoire de l'art. This database provides a transcription from the catalogues of the *Expositions de peinture et de sculpture*, listing all exhibiting artists and the works they presented. I conducted a systematic extraction of records corresponding to artists who exhibited in the “Painting” section between 1848 and 1880.

Because the database constitutes more of a straightforward digitization of the Salon catalogues than a fully structured dataset, the collected data required cleaning and correction. In particular, it was necessary to individualize each artist, as they could appear in the database under multiple variations of their name. For example, Victor-Louis Le Gentile is recorded as “Legentile (Victor),” “Le Gentile (Victor),” and “Le Gentile (Louis-Victor).” This disambiguation work was essential to avoid distorting the count.

For each of these artists, I then sought to collect a set of descriptive information. Some of this information—such as gender or geographical origin—appears in the biographical notes of the Salon catalogues. Others, such as career longevity at the Salon (i.e., the total number of exhibitions in which the artist participated), were determined by calculating data from the *Salons* database. Still others were obtained through more extensive archival research, repertories, or supplementary catalogues—for example, information on awards received or positions of authority held.

(4.2) ALIGNING AND RETRIEVING DATA WITH WIKIDATA VIA OPENREFINE

In parallel with these elements characterizing the profile, practice, and production of the painters who exhibited at the Salon between 1848 and 1880, I then aligned these records with Wikidata. To do so, I used the open-source software OpenRefine's reconciliation functionality to match each individual to their corresponding Wikidata entry. From these reconciliations, I was able to extract the basic biographical information for each artist, which served to estimate the accuracy and completeness of Wikidata. Finally, using a SPARQL query, I retrieved the number of links and statements associated with each of these entries, in order to assess, in a more quantitative way, the artists' presence on Wikidata.

(4.3) RUNNING ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS

The statistical analysis method employed seeks to identify the factors influencing access to posterity on Wikidata for nineteenth-century artists. As all the variables we aim to test are ordinal, meaning that their categories are structured according to a given order, excepting for the first variable, “Present in Wikidata”—a dummy variable, we applied ordinal logistic regressions to our dataset, that allows us to estimate the probability of falling into one category or another based on several given variables.

More formally, we run the following cumulative link (proportional odds) model:

$$\text{logit}[P(Y_i \leq j)] = \theta_j - (\beta_1 X_{i1} + \beta_2 X_{i2} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ik}), j = 1, \dots, J - 1$$

where:

- Y_i denotes the ordinal dependent variable for artist taking ordered values 1, 2, ..., J (e.g., “None”, “Low”, “Medium”, “High”);
- $X_{i1}, X_{i2}, \dots, X_{ik}$ be the k explanatory variables for that artist;
- $P(Y_i \leq j)$ is the cumulative probability of artist i being in category j or below;
- θ_j is the threshold (cutpoint) separating category j from category $j + 1$;
- β_m is the coefficient measuring the effect of the m -th predictor on the log-odds of being in a higher category;
- The proportional odds assumption implies that the β coefficients are constant across all thresholds j ; that is, the effect of each explanatory variable is assumed not to vary depending on where the cutpoint is drawn in the ordered outcome.

We first tested the probabilities of being present or not in Wikidata, before refining the analysis by calculating the likelihood of having more or less accurate and more or less complete information, and then by estimating the chances of having none, few, or many links and statements.

(5) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in [Table 2](#), most coefficients remain stable across these five specifications. Some variables appear to have little influence on the probability of presence in Wikidata, as well as on its quality and quantity—most notably the artists’ origins, which constitute only marginally positive or negative factors. By contrast, variables relating to gender, career length, recognition, and modernity emerge as decisive.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE	PRESENCE	ACCURACY	COMPLETENESS	NUMBER OF LINKS	NUMBER OF STATEMENTS
<i>Artist gender</i>					
Woman artists	– 1.768***	– 1.847***	– 2.060***	– 2.994***	– 3.970***
<i>Artist’s origin (omitted: NA)</i>					
Paris area	– .068	– .082	– .041	.194	– .002
Provinces	.113	.100	.174*	.008	.114
Abroad	.579***	.760***	.673***	1.630***	.808***
<i>Artist’s Salon longevity (omitted: Ephemeral)</i>					
Short	.789***	.778***	.775***	.380*	.754***
Medium	1.667***	1.500***	1.571***	1.113***	1.432***
Long	2.511***	2.128***	2.527***	1.084***	1.798***
<i>Artist recognition</i>					
Artist awarded	1.860***	1.813***	1.896***	2.317***	1.706***
Artist holding authority	1.561*	.974**	1.769**	2.383***	2.931***
Artist considered modern	4.436***	2.169***	3.366***	3.568***	2.709***

Table 2 Regression results.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$;
 *** $p < 0.001$.

(5.1) THE INVISIBILIZATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS

The most striking result is the clear discrimination faced by women painters in their access to posterity: being a woman artist drastically reduces the likelihood of having documentation on Wikidata and has an even more negative impact on the quality and quantity of that documentation.

As Nochlin (1971) demonstrated in her foundational article “Why Are There No Great Women Artists?”, this invisibilization of women can be explained by the significant barriers they faced in accessing the profession and achieving recognition during their lifetimes. Indeed, when comparing the longevity of women’s and men’s careers at the Salon, it becomes evident that women painters tended to exhibit for shorter periods than their male counterparts. While the proportion of women exhibiting only once (44.1%) is similar to that of men (40.8%), the disparity grows as careers lengthen: only 3.9% of women exhibited at more than ten shows, compared with 11.2% of men. This pattern raises questions about dilettantism among women artists; in fact, many women abandoned their artistic careers upon marriage. Most women exhibitors presented themselves as “Miss,” and 57.7% exhibited exclusively under this title, never as “Mrs.” For example, Nélie Jacquemart, despite winning medals at the Salon, ceased exhibiting in 1881—the year of her marriage to Édouard André—and is now better known for her role as a collector than for her work as a portrait painter.

While women exhibit for shorter periods than men, they also tend to receive less recognition during their lifetime than their men colleagues. Of the thousand or so artists who have won awards during their careers, only 71 are women. As a matter of principle, they were excluded

from the Prix de Rome, since they were not allowed to study at the *École des Beaux-Arts*: this rule deprived them of an award that was as prestigious as it was selective, and which was still a decisive factor in achieving both official and academic recognition in the second half of the nineteenth century. But they were also at a disadvantage when it came to winning the medals awarded at each exhibition: only 2.7% of women won medals, compared with 11.6% of men exhibitors (Dupin de Beyssat et al., 2023). In fact, women artists suffer multiple discrimination. On the one hand, they predominantly work in genres (still life, portraiture) and techniques (watercolor, pastel, porcelain painting) considered to be minor, and statistically less often and less well rewarded than history, genre and oil painting. But even if for those practices, they were less awarded than men: at the 1879 and 1880 Salons, although the rules explicitly reserved medals for painters of minor genres, none of the four still-life painters who benefited from this measure was a woman. On the other hand, while perseverance appears to be a key factor in achieving recognition for men—20.1% of those with medium-length careers and 49.2% of those with long careers received medals—this does not hold true for women: only 23.0% of those who exhibited at more than five Salons were awarded a medal.

The erasure of women in art historiography would therefore seem to be explained, not by their gender *per se*, but by the perceived insignificance of their careers. This explanation, however, is unsatisfactory on two counts. First, although art historians claim to apply criteria different from—or even contrary to—those of the nineteenth century, in practice they clearly replicate the judgments of their predecessors when it comes to women or at least adopt standards that systematically disadvantage the work of female artists. Second, the regressions conducted show that being a woman remains a disadvantage all else being equal—that is, even when women achieve a level of recognition that should ensure their posterity. Indeed, while women represent 6.6% of artists awarded at the Salon, they constitute only 3.2% of those awarded artists who actually have a Wikidata entry. As a tertiary source, Wikidata therefore reflects both the current state of the field and the persistent sexist biases that continue to characterize nineteenth-century art history. It should be noted, however, that numerous initiatives within the Wikipedia ecosystem seek to address this inherited misogyny in art-historical writing. Since 2014, the Art + Feminism project has aimed to correct gender bias on the English-language version of Wikipedia by organizing annual edit-a-thons, which have resulted in the creation or enhancement of more than 30,000 entries. The *Les Sans Pages* project pursues a similar initiative for the French-language Wikipedia, organizing francophone “Art + Feminism” workshops that likewise focus on creating and improving pages devoted in particular to women artists. These initiatives, laudable as they are, nevertheless face the limitations of existing knowledge—that is, the information already explored and published by dominant historiography—and therefore cannot, on their own, fully redress the gender biases that continue to affect women artists, as we have observed.

(5.2) THE ENDURING WEIGHT OF INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

The second key finding highlights the strong correlation between recognition obtained during an artist’s lifetime and their subsequent posterity. A long career, the receipt of an award, or holding a position of authority all significantly increase the likelihood of substantial and high-quality documentation on Wikidata. Recognition indeed leaves tangible traces: members of the *Académie des Beaux-Arts*, for instance, benefit from the institution’s systematic efforts to preserve their memory—upon their death, a eulogy is delivered and published, providing a detailed biography that later serves as a source for historians.² Likewise, the *École des Beaux-Arts* maintains archives on its teaching staff, offering rich material for study.

Beyond mere referencing, lifetime recognition appears to be a decisive factor in securing a prominent position among the best-documented artists. Thus, 66.5% of those recognized during their lifetime benefit from high-quality documentation on Wikidata. More than half have entries containing over 50 statements, and 17.2% are described by more than 100 statements. Among the 100 artists with the highest number of statements, two-thirds also enjoyed significant recognition during their lifetime.

² For instance, (Aubry, 1936; Besnard, 1915; Breton, 1886; Dagnan-Bouveret, 1901; Humbert, 1907; Sabatté, 1936; Vollon, 1898).

This second result may appear counterintuitive in the portrait it draws of historiography, since the all-too-obvious achievement of institutional recognition has long hindered the study of its recipients. In the history of art, particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, an artist's "success" was often equated with venality, opportunism, consensuality, and conformism, and therefore regarded with suspicion. As a result, the undeniable importance of these artists on the French art scene in the nineteenth century was later erased by twentieth-century art historians preoccupied with modernity. It was not until 1989, a century after his death, that Alexandre Cabanel—the most influential figure in the art world of his time—was the subject of an exhibition in his hometown of Montpellier, and even then, the show focused exclusively on his drawings. A full retrospective did not take place until another twenty years later, once again at the Musée Fabre. Similarly, Jean-Léon Gérôme, who died in 1904 and was no less important than Cabanel, was not the subject of an exhibition until 1972, and then only in the United States. His hometown organized a retrospective in 1981, and it was not until 2010 that the Musée d'Orsay hosted a monographic exhibition dedicated to him. More recently, Rosa Bonheur and James Tissot have finally received national recognition with major retrospectives at the Musée d'Orsay.

This undeniable delay in the historiographical consideration of "successful" artists has, however, been partly corrected since the 1970s and 1980s, as Vaisse has sought to explain (Vaisse, 1981). The reasons are multifactorial: first, the art market, eager to renew its stocks at a time when modern works were becoming scarce; second, a localist rationale, which encouraged provincial museums and universities to take an interest in artists born in their region; and third, the rise of a social history of art—including feminist art history—that directed scholarly attention toward neglected figures and works. Although these efforts have not yet fully remedied the historiographical gap that long disadvantaged such artists or rebalanced the literature, they nonetheless appear to have borne fruit in the realm of knowledge graphs, ensuring that many of these long-overlooked figures now hold a prominent place among the artists documented on Wikidata.

(5.3) THE MODERNIST PARADIGM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART HISTORIOGRAPHY

Finally, the third significant result is the very strong correlation between being considered "modern" and having a comprehensive, high-quality Wikidata entry containing a large number of links and statements. This highlights the existence of a true paradigm in nineteenth-century art history that overwhelmingly privileges the study of so-called modern artists and their works. The modernist reading of the period—one that envisions Romanticism, Realism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and the avant-gardes as successive stages in a teleological progression culminating in abstraction—has, in fact, led to the over-representation of artists associated with "the modern" in both historiography and Wikidata. Unsurprisingly, the podium of nineteenth-century French painters with the highest number of links and statements is dominated by those accorded a foundational, central, or pioneering role in these modern movements. These included Camille Corot (75 links and 610 statements), Claude Monet (150 links and 605 statements), Pierre-Auguste Renoir (112 links and 592 statements), Gustave Courbet (80 links and 545 statements), Eugène Delacroix (118 links and 528 statements), and Paul Gauguin (130 links and 521 statements).

However, even within these movements, modernist fascination has benefited only a handful of artists, who monopolized the attention of art historians and heritage institutions. Of the fifty-nine participants in the Impressionist Exhibitions held between 1874 and 1881, many remain little known—for example, Antoine-Ferdinand Attendu, whose Wikidata entry is of poor accuracy, and Louis Lattouche, whose entry is of only medium accuracy. A similar imbalance can be observed within the Pont-Aven School: while Gauguin is extensively documented on Wikidata, the entries of Ernest Chamaillard and Émile Jourdan are far less developed, containing only forty-five and fifty-three statements, respectively. The same pattern holds true for the Nabis and for the Symbolist nebula.

This pronounced yet lacunary modernist bias appears to stem from the persistence of a paradigm that confines the artists and works deemed worthy of documentation and study to a relatively small circle. For scholars, it remains far easier to focus on artists and works that are

already well documented. Such cases often benefit from the publication of primary sources that further simplify research—for example, the edition of Courbet’s correspondence (Chu, 1996) or the digital edition of Delacroix’s correspondence produced by the Centre André Chastel and the Musée Delacroix (*Correspondance d’Eugène Delacroix*, 2010). By contrast, studying a little-known painter is a far more laborious, thankless, and sometimes even disappointing endeavor. As a knowledge graph, Wikidata tends to reproduce this dynamic by privileging access to resources on artists who are already well studied and documented.

(6) IMPLICATIONS/APPLICATIONS

The study of nineteenth-century French art historiography using Wikidata has several implications and potential applications. On one hand, it addresses the challenge of assessing data quality within Wikidata; on the other hand, it highlights the knowledge graph’s potential for revealing historiographical gaps.

(6.1) ASSESSING DATA QUALITY IN WIKIDATA

This article proposes a method to address the long-standing challenge of assessing data quality in Wikidata, an issue widely noted in the literature. Wikidata is a generalist knowledge graph, collaboratively managed and populated; most studies have highlighted the difficulty of estimating the accuracy of its contents, often relying on internal Wikidata methods for such evaluations. Our study demonstrates that, to effectively assess—and if necessary, improve—the accuracy of data, it is essential to draw on specialized platforms rather than generalist ones. Leveraging our expertise in the specific field of art history, we were able to mobilize the appropriate tools and resources within this domain. The productivity of this approach, evidenced by the fine-grained results it produces, suggests that generalist knowledge graph data should be compared with domain-specific databases and reference resources rather than with other generalist knowledge graphs, which may replicate the same limitations.

This method is particularly suitable given the extensive existing referencing of external resources within Wikidata. Most artist entries in Wikidata already link to identifiers in specialized art history databases, such as the ULAN, as well as online biographical dictionaries like Benezit or Artcyclopedia, museum catalogs and directories (for example, the Musée d’Orsay and the Museum of Modern Art, New York), and more specialized databases like AGORHA, developed by the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art, or the RKDartists database from the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie.

It is, however, worth noting that even specialized databases are not exempt from gaps and errors. At the time of data collection, among the 4,157 artists recorded in Wikidata, 1,036 (24.9%) were absent from ULAN, 612 (14.7%) from Benezit, and 1,575 (37.9%) from the Musée d’Orsay’s directory. This demonstrates that Wikidata’s volunteer-based model, by drawing information from broader and more diverse sources than professional databases, can in some cases prove more comprehensive. Wikidata may also contain more accurate information than art-historical databases—for example, the ULAN entry for Louise Abbéma lists her year of birth as 1858, whereas archival sources, Wikidata, the Musée d’Orsay, and secondary literature all agree on the date of 1853. Our study therefore encourages strengthening this interoperability between generalist knowledge graphs and expert databases and exploiting it to improve the quality of data in both a reciprocal and dynamic manner.

(6.2) USING WIKIDATA TO IDENTIFY GAPS IN ART HISTORIOGRAPHY

Our study highlights the usefulness and effectiveness of Wikidata in identifying gaps in the historiography of art. Wikidata functions as a lens revealing the biases that have shaped knowledge production on nineteenth-century French art. Statistical analyses allow us to precisely objectify the criteria and factors that have governed the writing of nineteenth-century art history to date. In this sense, Wikidata provides a foundation for reflecting, in a second step, on methods to correct these historiographical biases and to move beyond or, as Pollock (1999) would say, “differentiate” the established historiographical canon. Several avenues can be pursued.

Firstly, by moving away from the predominance of the monographic approach in art history. Rooted in the discipline's long tradition—shaped since the Renaissance largely through biographies and *catalogues raisonnés*—this approach, while offering the undeniable advantage of precise material for reconstructing an individual artist's career, tends to isolate the artist and reinforce a mythologized vision of the creator. In contrast, a macroscopic perspective seeks to reconstruct the art scene as a whole, capturing its full complexity. Quantitative and digital methods make it possible to collect, process, and analyse large corpora of artists and artworks. By broadening our technical and conceptual toolkit, we can apprehend, map, contextualize, and characterize these datasets, thereby producing—if not a complete panorama—at least a more expansive and representative portrait of nineteenth-century art.

Secondly, by turning our attention to “ordinary” artists and productions. In sociology, ordinary artists are defined as those who manage to earn a living from their artistic practice without attaining fame or fortune. A macroscopic approach makes it possible to identify a vast community of such artists and, by extension, the trajectories and productions that in fact represent the norm of what an artistic career looked like in the nineteenth century. This approach thus seeks to move beyond the fascination with “geniuses” and “masterpieces”—whether so designated by their contemporaries or by later art historians—and instead to accord equal interest to the most common, less exceptional practices, careers, and profiles.

Finally, at the intersection of these two recommendations, by paying careful attention to the selection of case studies. While the essence and interest of art history lie first and foremost in the careers of individual artists and the works they produce—and these should not be neglected—a macroscopic perspective can enhance microscopic analysis. It enables the identification of representative or exceptional cases, the examination of how they integrate and circulate within their environment, and the evaluation of their positions within larger systems. In this way, qualitative and quantitative approaches can interact and complement each other, opening the way for new histories of nineteenth-century art.

Taken together, these avenues of inquiry would make it possible to write a history of nineteenth-century French art that is not simply a disguised exercise in historical art criticism—one that separates the wheat from the chaff, distinguishes “good” from “bad” art, or “true” artists from impostors. As a genuinely historical science, art history needs to take into account all actors and all objects, without discrimination of any kind, and accords them the place equivalent to that which they historically occupied within their field. The next phase of this research will therefore focus on applying these principles through the continued expansion of the dataset available, in collaboration with GLAM institutions to enhance the quality of their data and facilitate its integration into Wikidata, as well as through the development of visualization, dissemination, and analytical tools that will make these new perspectives both actionable and shareable across the field.

(7) CONCLUSION

This paper aims to leverage Wikidata's functionalities to objectify the state of nineteenth-century French art historiography. Focusing on a corpus of roughly 12,000 painters who exhibited at the Paris Salon between 1848 and 1880, and through alignment and enrichment of their data in Wikidata, a substantial dataset was assembled that allows for both quantitative and qualitative characterization of the posthumous recognition of these artists.

Regression analyses applied to different variables reveal key structural tendencies within the historiography. First, a pronounced misogynistic bias emerges against women artists, who are particularly discriminated against and hindered in their access to posterity. Second, the analyses highlight the enduring effect of institutional recognition obtained during an artist's lifetime on their subsequent posthumous reputation. Finally, statistical treatments demonstrate the pervasive influence of the modernist paradigm, which strongly favors artists considered “modern” in both study and knowledge production.

Overall, the study illustrates the productivity and relevance of using Wikidata as a lens to interrogate art historiography, helping to identify gaps that may require further attention. Additionally, it contributes to efforts aimed at assessing data quality within Wikidata and other

knowledge graphs, emphasizing the value of comparing generalist datasets with resources and databases developed specifically for a given field of expertise.

Beyond these findings, the dataset underlying this study constitutes a valuable resource for art history, offering the opportunity to examine the population of Salon painters and their posthumous reception from multiple perspectives. Its potential for reuse, reconciliation, and integration with other datasets provides raw material for comparative studies across different periods or national contexts, and could also support the development of dynamic data exploration and visualization tools. By providing both a methodological framework and a rich, reusable dataset, this study demonstrates how Wikidata can contribute to data-driven approaches, facilitate a more inclusive writing of art history, and support ongoing efforts to evaluate and improve data quality within knowledge graphs.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Claire Dupin de Beyssat: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing

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