



## *Man with a Hoe*, Jean-François Millet

### Man with a Hoe

Jean-François Millet

French, 1860–62

Black chalk and **stump** with  
white chalk on buff paper

11 1/16 x 13 3/4 in.

85.GB.115



### Questions for Teaching

Take time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

What do you notice about the man? What is he holding?  
(A hoe.)

What can you tell about the man by the way he is dressed?

What can you tell about the man by his facial expression? (*He is tired.*)

What do you notice in the **background**? Where is he? What makes you say that?

What is he doing? What makes you say that? (*The man is resting with his hands on a hoe.*)

What was he doing before? (*He is probably taking a break from hoeing the land.*)

What else catches your eye? What else does that tell you about the drawing?

What do you think the man is thinking?

### Background Information

*Sometimes, in places where the land is sterile, you see figures hoeing and digging. From time to time one raises himself and straightens his back, ...wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. "Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow." Is this the gay, jovial work some people would have us believe in? But nevertheless, to me it is true humanity and great poetry.*

Thus wrote Jean-François Millet about his favorite subject, agricultural laborers. Despite his philosophical intentions, these subjects earned him accusations of socialist leanings. When he exhibited his painting *Man with a Hoe* at the Salon of 1862, it quickly became one of the most

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controversial pictures of mid-1800s France. He probably made this drawing as a preparatory study for that canvas, now also in the Getty Museum.

In this drawing Millet concentrated on the man, showing his face as less brutish, less exhausted, and more defined than in the finished painting. He used subtle additions of white chalk to render the clouds in the sky and the sun's highlights on the farmer's shirt. Drawn on buff paper, the entire scene has a soft, hazy quality achieved with a technique known as stumping.

### **About the Artist**

Jean-François Millet (French, 1814–1875)

*To tell the truth, the peasant subjects suit my temperament best; for I must confess, even if you think me a socialist, that the human side of art is what touches me most.*

—Jean-François Millet

Born to modestly successful Norman **peasants**, Millet began studying art in Cherbourg at eighteen. In 1837 he received funding to study at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. After ten years of mixed success while he supported himself with **portraits**, *The Winnower* appeared at the Salon of 1848 and was the first of his peasant pictures to sell. In 1849 he moved to Barbizon in Fontainebleau forest, where he lived for the rest of his life, mostly in grim poverty. There he painted his most famous works, including *Man with a Hoe*. Millet portrayed the gravity, hardship, and dignity of common agricultural laborers, but, despite being described as a “Socialist revolutionary,” his viewpoint was less political than fatalistic. Between 1865 and 1869 he produced over one hundred **pastels**, considered among his finest works. After decades of struggle, he was awarded a medal at the 1867 Exposition Universelle and received the Légion d'Honneur in 1868. Millet's humanity toward peasant life deeply impressed many painters, including Vincent van Gogh.