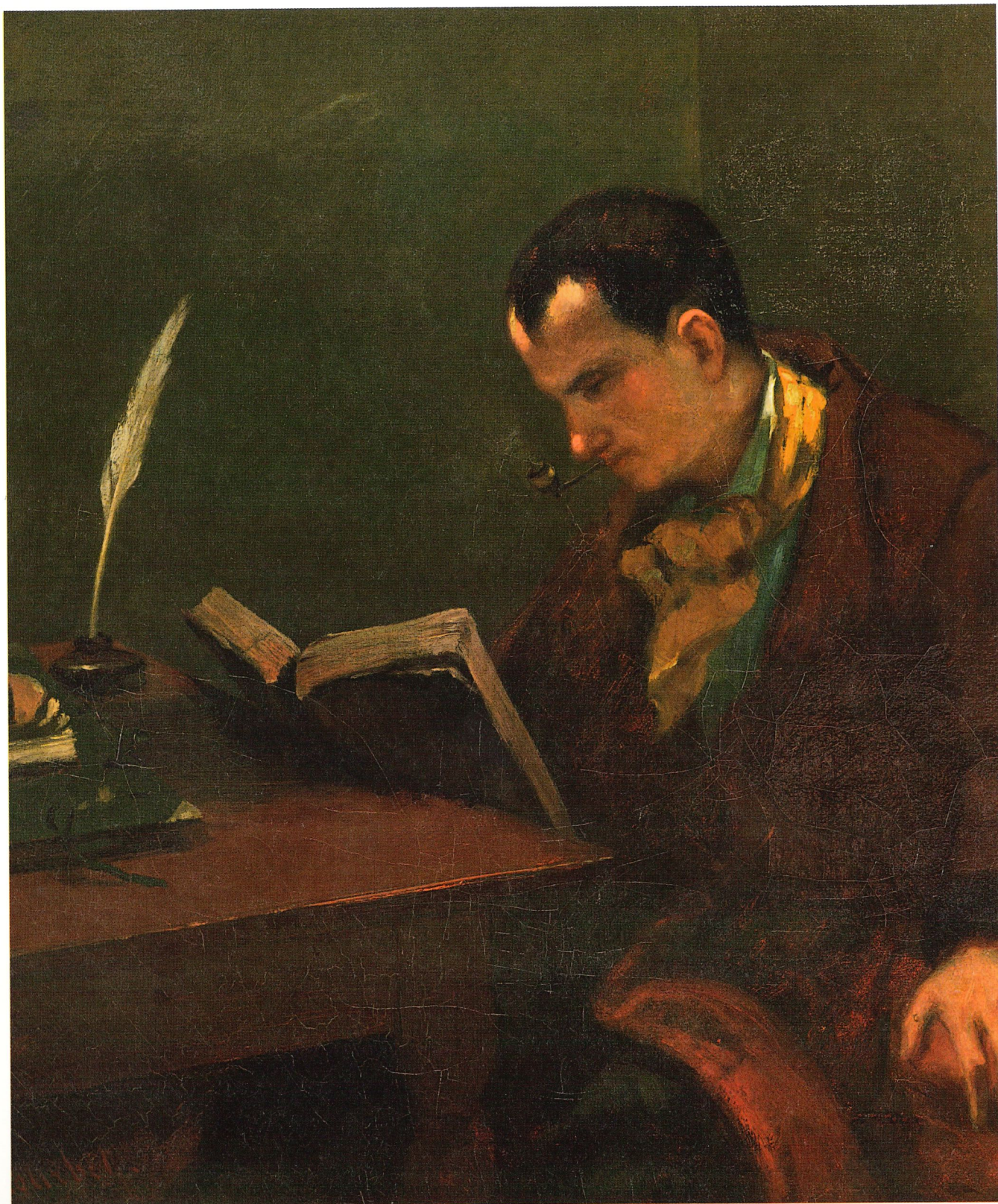




0.1 GUSTAVE COURBET *Portrait of Baudelaire*, ca. 1848. Oil on canvas, 20⁷/₈ × 24 (53 × 61). Detail

INTRODUCTION: CRITICAL ART AND HISTORY

THE FIRST MODERN CENTURY

THE ART, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN DISCUSSED IN THIS BOOK was made in Europe and North America during a period of rapid and profound social and political modernization. The close of that epoch, now more than a hundred years distant, did not, of course, end the drama. In fact, far from slowing down, the dynamic of change begun in the nineteenth century was accelerated in the twentieth. Soon the terms “imperialism,” “assembly line,” “mass culture,” and “total war” entered the modern European and American lexicons, supplanting an earlier vocabulary that included “nation,” “industry,” “popular,” and “revolution.” Yet if actions and words were shifting their arenas and changing their meanings, the basic facts of crisis and everlasting uncertainty remained the same. Indeed, even more than before, Karl Marx’s Shakespearian-sounding phrase from the *Communist Manifesto*—“all that is solid melts into air”—summed up the experience of vast multitudes of people awed and displaced by modern forces of social and economic change. If nineteenth-century history and culture remain compelling today, it may be because the twentieth century—and now the early twenty-first—witnessed still greater and more rapid political and cultural transformations. We thus look backward with mixed feelings of nostalgia and recognition, anxiety and familiarity, anger and longing. The first task before us, therefore, is to put the nineteenth century succinctly in its place.

In Western Europe, the end of the eighteenth century marked the final dissolution of feudalism—a primarily agricultural and rigidly hierarchical productive and social order that had survived for seven hundred years. In the place of feudalism, there now arose a modern capitalist and bourgeois economic and social edifice. (The situation in Eastern Europe was somewhat different: there feudalism was intensified in the early modern period, and only disappeared *de facto* from Russia after the 1917 Revolution.) This epochal reconfiguration of economy and society—long in coming but no less dramatic in the end for its gradual preparation—was marked by outbreaks of violence and insurrection. Populations long oppressed sought the freedoms promised in liberal doctrines; communities long isolated—like the Ornans depicted by the French Realist Gustave Courbet—were brought into conformity by centralized nation-states.

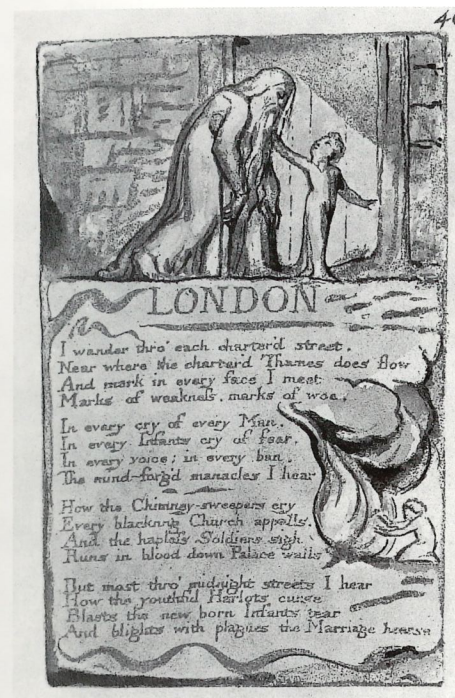
Beginning in 1776, and continuing for a generation, wars of colonial independence—inspired by Enlightenment principles of political consent and social contract—were waged and won in North and South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. These victories in turn rebounded in the core nations of Europe, accelerating already existing demands for social justice, economic equality, and political enfranchisement. Across Europe and the Americas, absolutist monarchies fell or were toppled, to be replaced by dictatorships, constitutional monarchies, and republics.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the social and political upheaval that had begun with the bloody dispatch of the French Bourbon monarchs in 1793 (the event that appears in retrospect as the exclamation point at the end of the feudal sentence) was becoming more democratic, inclusive, and organized. In 1848, the increasingly self-cognizant working classes of France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and England rose up in arms (or in the latter case formed a mass political and protest movement) to combat the vestigial aristocratic, and the new bourgeois, elites who maintained economic and political dominance. A decade and a half later, the slave plantation system of agriculture in the southern United States was overturned by black women and men motivated by the sting of the lash, and by whites driven in some cases by moral outrage and in others by economic calculation. In addition, the efforts of women to achieve emancipation began to rival in intensity the ongoing class and racial struggles.

But the “age of Revolution,” and the succeeding “age of capital,” as the historian Eric Hobsbawm called them, were not only periods of noble or elite retreat and retrenchment. The nineteenth century also inaugurated the age of imperialism—an epoch when the nation-states of Europe and the United States began to organize and coordinate their economies in order to exploit their own populations more productively, and to seize the raw materials, labor, and markets of the rest of the globe more efficiently. Democratic, revolutionary successes were often quickly reversed: emancipation and enfranchisement were rolled back with startling rapidity, and whole populations—generally darker skinned and most often living in the Southern Hemisphere—were brought into subjection. In the United States, the genocide of Native Americans reached its apogee by 1890 (the year of the Wounded Knee Massacre), even while large numbers of new European and Asian immigrants—often themselves displaced by pogroms of one kind or another—arrived at Atlantic and Pacific harbors. Lynch law, white supremacy, and Jim Crow (the popular name for the U.S. system of racial segregation) also reached their pinnacle in the 1890’s. Emergent ideologies of racism and Eurocentrism—along with legions of missionaries, bureaucrats, diplomats, police, vigilantes, soldiers, and sailors—were marshaled to support this reactionary enterprise. The occasional artist too was enlisted in the effort, though in the case of Paul Gauguin in French Polynesia, with decidedly mixed results.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, violence, political struggle, social change, and periodic crisis seemed entrenched in the West. Though no major wars raged, present and future prospects were unclear and unsettled: many artists and writers described their time as an age of “transition,” a period of “decadence” or a “penultimate age,” implying that the approaching millennium would bring sweeping changes to an unstable or even degenerate world. Economic cycles of boom and bust followed close upon each other; new agricultural and industrial technologies for better and worse transformed countryside and city alike; and as the twentieth century dawned, the restlessness and overt and underlying violence that had characterized the former century was fully internationalized. The cyclical economic decline from 1873 to 1895 temporarily disrupted cooperation between the big political powers, and by the eve of World War I (1914), nearly the entire non-European world was divided up into colonies for the benefit of a half-dozen Northern and Western imperialist nations. Yet imperialism notably failed to secure either peace or generalized prosperity; rather, it generated its own antinomies. World wars between the imperialist nations were fought; broad (though fragile) alliances were forged among oppressed European and non-European peoples; and metropolitan bourgeois culture itself was on the point of being dethroned. The twentieth century was by far the most bloody and destructive in human history, and scholars are remiss if they do not investigate the first modern century in the sanguinary light cast by the second.

ART AND EMANCIPATION, ART AND REACTION

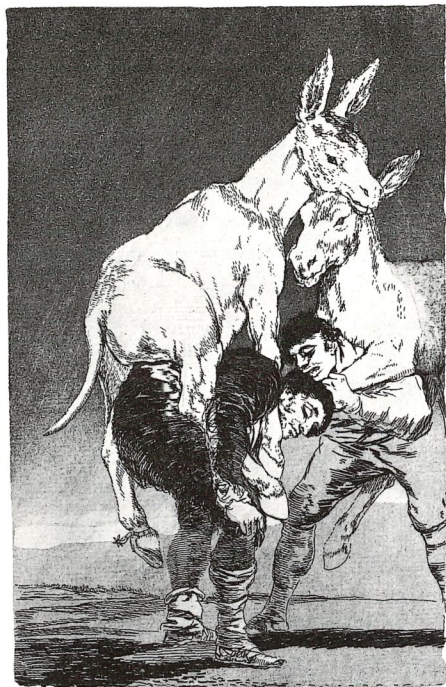


0.2 WILLIAM BLAKE *Songs of Experience*, Plate 46: “London,” ca. 1794. From hand-printed book, 4¼ × 2⅝ (11.3 × 6.8)

The nineteenth century in Europe and the United States was punctuated at its beginning, middle, and end by revolutions—political, industrial, and cultural—and by the less violent struggles of workers, women, and indigenous peoples for freedom and equality. It was also an age of economic modernization and political consolidation among the major political and economic powers—a gathering of imperial strength and speed in advance of new drives for global domination in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The visual arts of the epoch were also indelibly marked by restiveness, change, modernization, rebelliousness, and the re-imposition of authority; they too were shaped and figured by the irruption of classes and interests formerly excluded from the domain of national culture, and by efforts to vanquish this insurgency. (The insight into links between the ethics, politics, and economic life of a society and its art, we shall soon see, was itself a signal achievement of the age.) No longer the reliably pliant vehicle of entrenched elites, art was often now the contradictory, unpredictable, and critical voice of diverse individuals, subcultures, and interest groups. For the first time in European history, painting and sculpture, as well as the new reproductive media (lithography, wood engraving, and photography), were available as instruments of democracy as well as of domination. Even architecture and design, the social arts par excellence, and the ones most dependent upon the patronage of the wealthy, the entrenched and the powerful, were regularly employed to satisfy the practical and ideological needs of subordinate or dissident classes and class-factions. Apartment blocks, union halls, train stations, department stores and libraries—as well as wallpapers, textiles, glassware and metalwork—now served multiple, and often antagonistic masters.

The democratization of art—that is, the emancipation of artists from the controlling institutions of church and state—and resistance to capitalist modernization were phenomena that could be observed at the very beginning of the nineteenth century. The prints, drawings, and paintings of the English William Blake and the Spanish Francisco Goya, for example, offer clear instances of the critical attention of artists to the cultural and political crises and realignments of the moment. Each man was responsive, first of all, to his own conscience and his own talent. In Blake’s illustrated poetic books such as *America* (1793) and *Europe* (1794), and in the unpublished *The French Revolution* (1791), he celebrated the figures of the Abbé Sieyès (French author of *What is the Third Estate*) and Thomas Paine (American writer of *Common Sense*) and lamented the failure of his native country to embrace the revolutionary upwellings in the United States and France. And in “London” from *Songs of Experience* (ca. 1794), he described the combined tyrannies of commercial property, state religion, and cold, merciless reason—“I wander thro’ each chartered street,/Near where the chartered Thames does flow . . . /In every voice: in every ban,/The mind-forged manacles I hear.” Blake’s ingenuous illumination for the poem, which depicts an aged and enfeebled figure of London led by the beard by a small child, recalls similar images of innocence, experience, and inversion of morality—in J.-L. David’s painting *Belisarius Begging Alms* (1781), and at the conclusion of J.-J. Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* (1755): “For it is manifestly contrary to the laws of nature, however defined, that a child should govern an old man, that an imbecile should lead a wise man, and that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities.” Blake was every bit as revolutionary a figure as David and Rousseau, but far more distrustful of the power and institutions of the state than either the Jacobin artist or the peripatetic *philosophe*. He believed that ordinary men and women—drawn together by will, love, benevolence, and sexual desire—could be the instruments of millenarian transformation.

In Francisco Goya’s series of etchings, the *Caprichos* (1799), he condemned the prevailing ignorance and prejudice of the Spanish monarchy and clergy, espoused tolerance, and preached economic and political reform. “You who cannot” (*Caprichos* 42),



0.3 FRANCISCO GOYA *Caprichos* 42: "Tu que no puedes" ("You who cannot"), 1796-7. Etching and burnished aquatint, 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ (21.4 x 15)

is the caption for a print that depicts two laborers, bent over and with eyes closed, carrying asses on their backs. The men are being crushed by their burdens, but they are not yet ready to set them down and right the injustice. Less certain than Blake that simple artisans and workmen could combine to topple kings, but also less distrustful of reason and enlightenment, Goya asserted his own right and responsibility, in his words, to "censure human errors and vices . . . and at the same time exercise [his] imagination." Goya saw himself as a reformer, guided by reason and the zeal for independence; Blake regarded himself as a prophet whose trumpet blasts could help bring down the walls of a corrupt, modern Jericho. But despite these and many other differences, Goya and Blake also had much in common: they each found ways to embody revolution in the technique and forms as well as the subjects of their art. Each represented the political and social crises of their day in the language of solar and Manichean metaphors: Light erases Darkness, Day combats Night, God confronts Satan, Master opposes Slave, Orc (Blake's personification of desire) battles Urizen (his figure of oppressive reason), Truth (Goya's preferred allegory) strives to vanquish Ignorance. Perhaps most remarkable of all, however, is the fact that Blake and Goya represent their themes and protagonists dialectically; that is, they describe them as various and mutable. Neither light nor dark, reason nor unreason, neither God nor the devil are singular and eternal; like the dawning modern age itself, they are multiple and protean, contingent upon the political and social perspectives of the spectator and upon fast-changing historical events.

Blake and Goya were surely exceptional, among nineteenth-century artists, for their intellectual independence and political perspicacity. Yet even reactionary figures, such as the arch-Classicist J.-A.-D. Ingres, often manifested so active and perceptive an engagement with the facts of modernization and social change, that their art too must be called critical. Ingres's *The Apotheosis of Homer* (1827), for example, appears to represent Classicism as a timeless canon of physical beauty and formal perfection passed down, generation to generation, from archaic Greece, through the Christian Middle Ages, to modern, enlightened France. Yet a closer examination of the picture suggests that it represents at the same time the cultural and ethical divide then increasingly felt to exist between the antique past and the modern present.

Exhibited in 1827 at the Salon Carré of the Louvre palace (the most prestigious venue in Paris for the display of works of art), the *Apotheosis* depicts the blind Homer, enthroned before an Ionic temple and crowned with laurel by a winged Victory (or Fame). At his feet, in postures that recall the figures of *Day* and *Night* from Michelangelo's Tomb of Giuliano de' Medici, are seated allegorical representations of the *Iliad* (beside a sword) and the *Odyssey* (with an oar resting on her lap). To Homer's immediate right are the three great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and to his left the poet Pindar (offering the lyre) and the sculptor Phidias (with left arm extended, holding a mallet). Ranged around and below these Greeks are other ancient and modern luminaries indebted to Homer: Apelles leads Raphael by the hand, Virgil guides Dante, Molière (holding the mask of drama) stands beside Racine, and Shakespeare accompanies Poussin (in the left foreground, pointing to Homer). Omitted from the picture, but everywhere implicit, is Ingres (he included himself in a preliminary version), who as recent Academician and proud recipient of the *Légion d'honneur*, saw himself as the honored heir to Poussin, Raphael, and, especially, the Greeks. In 1818 the artist proclaimed: "In matters of Art, I have not changed. Age and reflection have, I hope, strengthened my taste, without diminishing its ardor. I still worship Raphael, his century, and above all the divine Greeks." For Ingres, therefore, ancient Greece represented both the childhood of Europe—the origin of a European classical culture that flourished from the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries—and the full swell of a maturity that could never be superseded.

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Commissioned for the ceiling of the newly decorated room of Egyptian antiquities in the Louvre, *The Apotheosis of Homer* proclaims Classicism an indisputable canon guaranteeing a stable cultural foundation for the present. The painting suggests that present French and European culture is the culmination of a continuous line of development beginning in archaic Greece, and passing through the Roman empire, the Christian Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the time of Louis XIV, and the present age of Charles X. The painter and critic Etienne Delécluze described the static and retrospective aspects of the *Apotheosis* in his Salon review for the 1828 *Journal des débats* when he praised Ingres for dispensing with the pretension of artistic originality in his painting and instead graciously accepting the formal "archetypes" provided by all the great personages he represents. Delécluze writes:

The individual originality of these men is incontestable, but what placed them beyond all comparisons were the era and circumstances under which they lived. Homer found himself at the ideal point for giving life to mythological traditions; Dante for fixing the poetic theology born in the fifth century; Shakespeare for transfusing the ideas of the south into northern brains; Phidias for clothing symbolic idols with man's image; and Michelangelo for *incarnating* the Middle Ages. But once all these great combinations have been fashioned and fixed, all that can be done is to modify the archetypes indefinitely.

This subtle crafting and modification of the Classical corpus of "archetypes," according to Delécluze, was Ingres's achievement. Yet this was clearly an achievement more of a negative than of a positive kind: it involved the erasure of historic and artistic difference and dissonance and the substitution of a bland and conflict-free Classicism. Banished from the Classical tradition in Ingres's painting are the irrational pessimism of Euripides, the devastating loneliness of Dante (as he leaves behind his guide Virgil on the threshold of Paradise), the alienation of Hamlet, and the stunning anticlassicism of the aged Michelangelo; what remains is only costume, cliché, and hollow splendor. In thus purging from the Classical past and present all that gave it complexity and vitality, Ingres's *Apotheosis* comes to resemble an attack upon, more than an homage to, the legacy of Homer, and it should not surprise us that most critics of the painting found it objectionable. "Is this," they must have asked themselves, "all that remains of Classicism, the prized institutionalized system of artistic training and moral instruction?"

Indeed, if we now look again at the *Apotheosis of Homer*, we notice how much more it resembles a crude pastiche than an ideal paradigm of Classicism. Figures are ranked in rigid bands echoing the horizontal and vertical steps in the foreground and columns in the background; they hold hands but fail to interact or engage the viewer, despite the grotesquely abbreviated *repoussoirs* in the extreme foreground. Can there be any other explanation for the flatness, awkwardness, and stiltedness of the picture than that Ingres was recording—poignantly, reluctantly, perhaps even helplessly—the breakdown in the authority of the Classical tradition in the modern world?

Delécluze himself half understood the problematical nature of the *Apotheosis* when he described its painter's technique as "submitting less to the laws of linear perspective than to laws of a perspective that one could call *chronological* . . . in giving more relief to the modern figures and gradually weakening his colors as he reaches the semi-fantasy figures of Orpheus and Linus, who are on the furthest plane of the picture." In the hands of Ingres, the ancient world is one of blindness, shadows, and loss; the great monuments of Greek antiquity are destroyed—the Athena Parthenos, the Colossus, the entire *oeuvre* of Apelles—and there are no comparable modern works to take their place. Indeed, the further you enter the modern world, as the art historian Norman

Bryson has written, elaborating Delécluze, “the more the nobility and generality of countenance evident in such figures as Phidias and Apelles gives way to the ironical peering and sardonic expressions, at their nadir in the busy scribbling and sarcastic ‘smile of reason’ of Voltaire [at the lower right corner].” Bryson’s word for this representation of absence or loss is “desire,” but the passivity of the term seems to me somewhat misleading: I am more persuaded that what is at work is an active, restless, and critical intelligence. Ingres saw and felt (however much he may have lamented) the weakness and vulnerability of the Classicism of his day and could not avoid depicting it. At about the same time, the French architects Etienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux also recognized and expressed in their buildings and monuments the arbitrariness of the signs of the prevailing language of classicism, producing what their contemporary, the English architect George Dance the Younger, called an “architecture unshackled” (see Chapter 7). Precisely such a knowledge of cultural crisis and change—featured in the art of conservatives such as Ingres as much as in the work of radicals such as Blake, Goya and Ledoux—is the distinguishing trait of the most salient art and design of the nineteenth century. This is the art I am calling *critical*. It is an art that does not merely describe a surface appearance, but exposes the design and form of an historical, social, and ideological edifice—what the early nineteenth-century philosopher Hegel in his *Logic* (1813) called “an objective universal” or a “concrete totality.” (This concept of totality was given greater historical and class specificity in the writings of the twentieth-century philosopher and critic Georg Lukacs.) In this way, the art and design of a Blake, Goya, Ledoux or Ingres at the beginning of the century, or a Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec or Horta at the end, may be seen as generating its own interpretations: it provides its own frames of reference and highlights the salient modes of social and material life by means of which its forms, lines, and colors may be understood. Van Gogh described the awkward meeting of city and country in a series of small paintings of Montmartre made in 1887; at about the same time, Toulouse-Lautrec summarized in a number of paintings and posters the nascent struggle over urban popular culture. His *Ambassadeurs*, *Aristide Bruant* (1892) depicts a proletarian idol in the process of becoming a modern celebrity. Victor Horta in his Maison du Peuple conceived and built a headquarters for the Belgian Workers’ party whose forms summarized at once the imperatives of heart and head—will and intelligence—needed to drive any popular movement for social and political justice. Critical art, in short, provides its own theory, and the critical art historian needs only to follow where it leads.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORIGINS OF CRITICAL ART HISTORY

In the nineteenth century, scholars and critics for the first time divined and theorized the interconnections between seeing and knowing, and between vision and society. Marx, Ruskin, Baudelaire, Morris, Mallarmé and a number of other authors and critics, explored the links between art, perception, and history. The most complete and widely influential discussion of the question is found in the writings of Marx. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 he wrote that the transformation of the alien, objective world into a subjective world of consoling “human reality” depends upon the state of development of the human senses:

Just as music alone awakens in people the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear . . . for this reason the senses of the social person are other than those of the non-social person. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of people’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form . . .) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses—the practical senses (will, love, etc.)—in a word, *human* sense—the

humanness of the senses—come to be by virtue of *humanized* nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.

Marx’s point is that while humans by virtue of their nature as humans have senses and perceptions, these are rude and unformed in the absence of their specific development and cultivation, which only occurs historically and in community with their fellows. Moreover, all the senses are differently developed according to the nature of the particular society in which the person lives: a capitalist society in which the sense of *having* dominates is clearly different in its sensual or perceptual capacities from a forager, horticultural, feudal or communist society which does not subscribe to the same concept of private property. And finally, Marx stands his argument about the impact of society upon the human senses on its feet by arguing that the cultivation of the senses—whether in the form of art, music or literature—in its turn plays a significant role in the historical unfolding of a society. Giving material form to our sensual instincts or capacities, both theoretically and practically, “is required,” he writes, “to make people’s *sense human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance.”

A similar formulation of the link between history and material culture—or between art and society—was independently achieved less than a decade after Marx by the moral philosopher and esthetician John Ruskin. An important figure in the revival of architecture and the arts in mid-century Britain and in its medieval revivalism, Ruskin wrote in his essay “On the Nature of Gothic and the Function of the Workman therein” (1853), “The art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues. The art or general productive and formative energy of any country, is an exact exponent of its ethical life. You can have a noble art only from noble persons, associated under laws fitted to their time and circumstances.” In *Saint Mark’s Rest* (1884), he further observed that critics and spectators of works of art needed to understand and synthesize all the characteristic, expressive forms of a given epoch. He wrote that: “Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others; but of the three, the only quite trustworthy one is the last. . . . Art is always instinctive . . . [and we can understand it] at a glance (when we have learned to read).”

Ruskin’s art history and criticism is accordingly finely tuned to the subtlest formal and historical nuances of the works of architecture, painting or sculpture that fall beneath his gaze. His analysis of the painter J. M. W. Turner’s images of the sea, for example, proceeds from a consideration of fragmented, vaporous or liquid paint surfaces, to a discussion of geological, meteorological, and moral truths. His examination of *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839) and *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844) highlights the “cold deadly shadows” of the one, and the dynamic of historical “progress and decline” in the other. The basis of these combined esthetic and ethical opinions is Ruskin’s appreciation of art as a form of labor; like Marx, he believed that creative and productive work is one of the defining activities of humans, and that to deny the one is to degrade the other. Ruskin’s insight was later summarized in a sentence by his student, the author, designer, and political activist William Morris: “Yet the essence of what Ruskin then taught us was simple enough, like all great discoveries. It was really nothing more recondite than this, that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its social life, and that the social life of the Middle Ages allowed the workman freedom of individual expression, which on the other hand our social life forbids him.”

At about the same time that Marx, a German, was composing his notebooks addressing the historical character of the senses, and the Englishman Ruskin was



0.4 JOSEPH MALLORD WILLIAM TURNER
Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway, 1844. Detail of Plate 5.20

publishing his radical view that every age had its own unique vision and art which corresponded to its peculiar ethical and social life, a French poet and journalist was suggesting many of the same things. It was Charles Baudelaire who provocatively argued that artists and writers be resolutely of their own time; it was also he who established the model of the critic who is profoundly and passionately engaged with his subject and his epoch. Jettisoning any notion of Classical "archetypes," as found for example in Delécluze, and setting the tone for future critical encomiums to modernity, he wrote at the conclusion of his review of the 1845 Paris Salon exhibition: "The true painter we're looking for will be the one who can snatch from the life of today its epic quality, and make us feel how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots. Next year let's hope that the true seekers may grant us the extraordinary delight of celebrating the advent of the *new*!"

With this essay, and others that followed, Baudelaire, as well as later nineteenth-century critical thinkers and writers such as Morris and Stéphane Mallarmé, discovered that vision itself, as well as the artistic forms that are its sensual embodiment, is not given for all time—as the arch Classicists believed—but is contingent upon a host of changing historical and ideological factors. The "ideological" nature of seeing has a very contemporary sound to it, but in fact this concept too is a product of nineteenth-century thought, as the critic Raymond Williams and others have argued. By "ideology" is meant here the characteristic bodies of knowledge, belief, imagery, and expression that are created by a particular social class at a given moment in history. Ideologies arise largely unbeknownst to their subjects as a set of workaday assumptions or commonsense notions about the world. They provide their possessors with a coherent image of their lived relation to social reality, and thus may be an effective (because surreptitious) instrument for the domination of one class or group by another. Ideologies both follow from economic and political power, and are a tool for achieving that control. "The ideas of the ruling class," wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (the first to theorize ideology), "are in every epoch the ruling ideas." The mid-twentieth-century political theorist Louis Althusser offered a brief but compelling example of one of the ideologies that arose at the dawn of the nineteenth century but which is still vital to class stability today:

[According to] the ideology of *freedom*, the bourgeoisie lives in a direct fashion its relation to its conditions of existence: that is to say, it comprehends its real relation (to the laws of a liberal capitalist economy), but *incorporates* it into an imaginary relation (the idea that all people are free, including "free" workers).

By this example of the way in which the ideology of freedom masks the severely circumscribed liberties of workers in a liberal capitalist economy, it can be seen that ideology *per se* is powerful precisely because it is both an imaginary representation of social and material relations and an actual lived relation to reality. Ideologies are thus like mimetic works of art in their dualism of illusory and real; they represent reality in a conventional and an historically contingent fashion. Modern art and scholarship are critical precisely to the degree that they interrogate or expose the ideological circumstances of dominant forces of political and economic modernization and consequent cultural modernity.

Taking their cue from contemporary artists and critics themselves, the authors of this book intend to consider nineteenth-century art critically—that is, to travel freely between the formal surface and the social-historical depth of works of art, architecture and design, and pay considerable attention to the space in-between. As a result, chapters include longer and more detailed examinations of individual artworks and careers

than is usually the case in books that survey nineteenth-century art. Without that close attention, the actual critical purchase of works of art on the social and material relations of their moment would be invisible. Artists, like everyone else, are human agents—they make their own history, though not under circumstances of their own choosing, in isolation from their fellows, nor apart from the ultimately controlling authority of nature. The devotion of whole chapters to Goya, Van Gogh, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Cézanne, and large blocks of text to David, Courbet, Cassatt, Eakins and William Morris, is thus intended both to highlight the historical constraints these artists faced, and to expose the surprising extent of their artistic and ideological self-emancipation. Their critical purchase on modernity is exceptional and demands close attention.

The combined social-historical and monographic perspective taken in this book is found in many scholarly books devoted to individual artists and movements, but it has generally not been used in surveys of nineteenth-century art. The authors of most earlier survey texts, beginning with Julius Meier-Graefe (1904), Richard Muther (1907) and Léonce Bénédite (1910), and extending to Robert Rosenblum/H. W. Janson (1984) and Lorenz Eitner (1988), were empiricists in the sense that they based their research methods upon the model of investigations in the natural sciences. They proceeded by induction, collecting art historical data—artists' names and biographies, anecdotes, titles of artworks, genres and subjects, key dates, stylistic developments, and the documented responses of patrons, critics, and the public—and then assembled them into "long chains of deductive reasoning," in the words of empiricism's parent, Descartes, in the confidence that "there can be nothing so remote that we cannot reach it, nor so recondite that we cannot reach it, nor so recondite that we cannot discover it." Fritz Novotny's idiosyncratic volume for the Pelican History of Art (1960) generally conforms to this model. Although he frames his chronological survey (1780–1880) with references to the "spiritualization" of art in the hands of Immanuel Kant and Cézanne (in this he recalls Meier-Graefe), he nevertheless speaks of his own approach in purely scientific terms. For Novotny, scholarly (scientific) method and subject matter are perfectly merged, since he sees the nineteenth century as "defined [by] the study of the external appearance of nature. [It is] the century of Naturalism." John Rewald's *History of Impressionism* (1946; 4th revised edition, 1973)—though an indispensable survey of the events and personalities that belong to that movement—is similarly hampered by absence of consideration for the larger social and material forces that give meaning to the facts. Thus, in his introduction, Rewald approvingly cites the words of the nineteenth-century French political historian Fustel de Coulanges: "History is not an art, it is pure science. . . . Like all science, it consists in stating the facts, in analyzing them, in drawing them together and in bringing out their connections. The historian's only skill should consist in deducing from the documents all that is in them and in adding nothing they do not contain."

Naive empiricism, however, can only provide, in the words of the twentieth-century philosopher Max Horkheimer, "a sum-total of facts [which] is there and must be accepted," instead of the conscious and unconscious "activities of society as a whole." For the critical art historian interested in holism, a scientific approach functions as a kind of sieve which holds back from view the large social, economic, and political forces shaping and defining art production, while permitting, and obsessing about, only the formal, biographical, and patronage factors to pass before the scholarly gaze. Some recent surveys of nineteenth-century and modern art, to be sure, have taken a broader and more synthetic approach to their subjects.

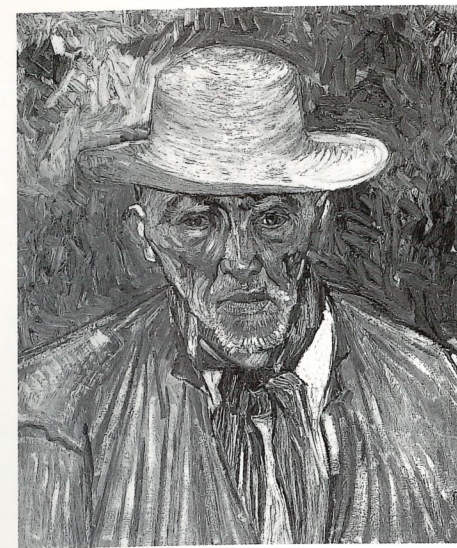
In the introduction to Robert Rosenblum and H. W. Janson's *Nineteenth-Century Art* (1984; English edition *Art of the Nineteenth Century*), Rosenblum rejects "the purist tyranny of abstract and absolutist systems," insisting that "art historians should

be as flexible, various, and comprehensive as possible in their approaches, and be willing to consider anything from the history of technology to the abiding mysteries of genius and psychology as potentially illuminating their ever more vast subject." True to their words, Rosenblum and Janson are more inclusive than their predecessors in their near encyclopedic attention to diverse artists outside the established canon and in their wide-ranging discussions of the many sources and documents of art history. Among the relevant themes for study cited in his introduction, Rosenblum lists the Bible, opera, ballet, tuberculosis, syphilis, prostitution, and photography. Yet, however open-minded these authors are, their overall goal and achievement is similar to that of survey authors that came before: it is to construct a more or less unified art historical mechanism that functions noiselessly and without friction, and in which modern contradiction and superfluity—as well as totality—is as nearly as possible eliminated.

Rosenblum and Janson's signal achievement—notable as well in Petra ten-Doesschate Chu's *Nineteenth-Century European Art* (2003)—was to have cogently discussed a considerable amount of Salon and academic art in addition to now-canonized modern, and to have extended their purview well beyond France. They generally abstained, however, from making critical judgments, or from trying to identify the links between artworks and their ambient social or political contexts or networks. In his *Modern Art, 1851–1929: Capitalism and Representation* (1999), Richard R. Brettell is far more responsive to the insights of recent scholars and critics from outside art history. Eschewing biography and chronology and de-emphasizing the "movement-based history of modern art," Brettell offers a challenging collage of art historical themes, methods, contexts, and forms. His book takes seriously the Marxian aphorism, cited earlier, about the volatility of formerly solid traditions and institutions, and interrogates a very large number and range of works created from between 1851 (the year of the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London) and 1929 (the year of the public opening of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the stock market crash.) Unlike the art historian T. J. Clark, whose elegiac *Farewell to an Idea—Episodes in the History of Modernism* (1999) interrogates just a handful of paradigmatic works across nearly two centuries, Brettell recognizes that socio-economic modernization, cultural modernity, and modern art occurred in many different places and took many, varied forms.

In his ambitious and highly achieved series of books devoted to the *Social History of Modern Art* (1988–), Albert Boime has sought to include "the 'Salieris' [as opposed to the Mozarts] of the art world, the so-called mediocrities who have been ranked according to what only can be considered an arbitrary and even capricious standard." The statement, however, purports to a breadth that cannot possibly be achieved, even by so capacious and adroit a scholar as Boime: if the entirety of an epoch's cultural production is equally worthy of study, how can the project ever have boundaries? How can the writer avoid the historicist nightmare of simply re-presenting the entirety of the historical record—unchanged, undistilled, and endless? In addition, Boime would abjure the responsibility to which the art historian, of all scholars, must attend: the discrimination of major from minor, primary from secondary, instrumental from incidental, and critical from accommodating.

But by this relative indifference to formal quality, the social historian of art is guilty of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. By dismissing judgments of artistic and formal significance as merely "arbitrary" and "capricious," Boime is reverting to the empiricist (or neopositivist) position of dichotomizing content (seen as primary) from form (secondary). Boime himself undercuts this view in his introduction to the first volume of *A Social History of Modern Art* when he describes visual art as "essentially a language of signs that transmits ideas." Since all languages are social constructions, the formal language of art too must be imbued with social content. Far from merely reproducing pre-existing ideas, then, artistic form is an essential determinant of just



0.5 VINCENT VAN GOGH *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 21 1/2 (64.5 x 54.6)

what is expressed, and thereby plays a formative material role in the evolution of society and history. No mere obedient servant (even less, passive mirror) of ideology, artworks are one instrument with which humanity makes and remakes itself. In this way, formally innovative works of visual art may in fact be judged more significant than conservative ones because they played a greater role in bringing about (or, at least, compellingly addressing) historical change.

To many late nineteenth-century spectators in Paris, London, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, and elsewhere, the innovative, modern art, architecture and design examined in this book was in fact an affront to dominant ideas and institutions. It was seen as a challenge to ruling ideas about hierarchy and value, and as the forward, cultural wedge of insurgent classes and communities. Modern art and design—which was, to be sure, only a subset of all the art created during a century of modernization—was often exhibited at popular venues: rented halls, pavilions, tents, expositions, artists' studios, bars, restaurants, and circuses. It was promoted by an intimate community of artists, designers, critics, and patrons, and seemed to represent at once longings for a past age when manufacture was artisanal not industrial, and dreams of a future time when craft labor would be voluntary, not forced by motives of need or profit. Modern painters, sculptors and designer, in addition, sought to establish closer connections between their works and the new, mass public than was possible at official venues, and to stave off the challenge posed by the new reproductive media that seemed to foreclose imagination and invention. These modern artists accepted as a matter of course what artists at the beginning of the century had struggled to achieve—freedom of thought and action—and tried to make their works an instrument for critical reflection and sometimes even for social change. This last especially proved chimerical, but the ambition—and the names Courbet, Van Gogh, Seurat, Morris and Toulouse-Lautrec are apposite here—reveals one more sense in which much nineteenth-century art may be called critical: to reckon with totality as did Goya and Ingres is one definition of critical; to attempt to change the world through art, as did Courbet and Van Gogh with depictions of proletarian labor and peasants, is another. 0.5

This survey does not, however, focus only on modernist works. It includes for example, discussions of late Federal Period and antebellum painting and sculpture in the United States, Georgian and early Victorian English landscape etchings and engravings, Native American ledger art, and photography. In all cases, however, the art and material culture under review is seen to engage many of the same contentious political and artistic questions concerning modernization that arose in the first modern century but that still reverberate in our own; these issues include the value of local versus national, and popular versus elite cultures, industrialization versus environmental preservation, the question of the existence of a "canon" of great authors and artists, and concerns with the artistic representation of sexuality, social class, gender, and race. Nineteenth-century artists, like artists today, also confronted the emergence of new techniques for the mass-reproduction and distribution of their works, and the vexing question of the politics of public exhibition and museum display. In addition, artists were engaged with the forms and imagery of mass and non-European culture—for example, with cartoons and caricatures, broadsides and posters, magazine illustration and advertisements, and with Native American, Oceanic and African art forms.

An insistence on the commonalities between art issues past and present may appear overstated, but the constellations are compelling. Indeed, we believe that if our texts stimulate consideration of contemporary issues concerning power, modernization, and the representation of class, race, and gender, they will have in fact succeeded in engaging more fully a nineteenth-century art in which there emerged a new historical and critical understanding of society and culture which we share today.

CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM

• 1 •

PATRIOTISM AND VIRTUE: DAVID TO THE YOUNG INGRES

THOMAS CROW

THE CULT OF CIVIC VIRTUE

IN 1781, NO ONE IN FRANCE HAD THE SLIGHTEST IDEA that a revolution would begin before the decade was out, an upheaval of every social institution which would not spare the traditional fine arts. But artists were ready in advance to overturn old norms and customs of art-making. Over the next eight years, the French public would confront a novel idea of the artist's vocation: no longer the dutiful servant of the state and the church who defines success in terms of official favor, the new-model artist (invariably assumed to be male) vaunts his independence from the dictates of royal patrons and postures of conformity; he speaks over the heads of insiders and bureaucrats to make contact with the large audience who thronged the spaces of the public exhibitions, the so-called Salons, which took place in the old palace of the Louvre every two years. By virtue of this appeal, the perceived character of this audience begins to change. Where it had been a floating and passive crowd, it becomes the embodiment of active public opinion, a palpable force with a role—even a dominant one—in determining the success of painting or sculpture.

This new common ground between artist and audience can be defined by two terms: patriotism and virtue. To understand them, however, it is necessary to reconstruct their specific power and use in the period. Patriotism did not carry the chauvinistic overtones which encumber the word today; nor did virtue connote a priggish or self-satisfied private morality. Devotion to the nation, to *la patrie*, represented a universalized allegiance to one's fellow citizens and to the idea of the general welfare, usually at odds with obedience to the dictates of the state and accepted social custom. The duty of the artist was to set an example of individual emancipation, to break free, at least subjectively, from government patrons who represented only a self-seeking minority. Nor was one's art to

be slavishly adjusted to the contingent habits and costume of one's country; to mirror one's compatriots as one found them would be merely to reproduce and endorse all the defects of an unequal society. An ideal was therefore required, and the republics of ancient Greece and Rome were called on to provide a counter-example to a corrupt present. An artist who could live up to these demands would thereby demonstrate a civic virtue worthy of comparison with the self-denying heroes of antiquity.

The philosophical and political debates of the 1760's and '70's had separated the inheritance of Classical antiquity from its normal role of providing symbols of authority and rule. In the previous century, Louis XIV had customarily been likened both to Alexander the Great and the sun god Apollo; Classicism was a catalog of pomp and magnificence. But in these years approaching the Revolution, Classical culture was more likely to call to mind a toughened citizen-soldier or a stoic philosopher living in voluntary poverty with whom an ordinary Frenchman with some education might identify. The very words patriotism and virtue summed up this change.

This growing gap between the Classical tradition and the needs of the ruling order created a new space in which painters could operate. The artist who recognized this first and exploited it with the greatest power was Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). In 1781, he was 33 years old, still considered a young and relatively untried artist. He had undergone the lengthy and laborious training required of any ambitious aspiring painter, which included years of long sessions devoted to drawing from prints, then from plaster casts of ancient sculpture, and finally from the live model. This sequence of study elevated the inheritance of Classical art over the direct evidence of living nature, which the young student could only approach once he had thoroughly absorbed an

idealizing abstraction. All of David's formal artistic education took place within the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which had been established under Louis XIV to organize and perpetuate a clear hierarchy of ambition and honor among artists. Only those painters capable of producing complex narrative compositions on Classical themes ('history paintings' as they were called) could aspire to the highest rewards that the state could offer.

The culmination of a successful youthful career, which David reached at the age of 26, was the Rome Prize. This gave the winner a scholarship period, lasting three years or longer, at the French Academy in Rome. There the best young artists were given their final induction into the great tradition, now surrounded at first hand by the remains of ancient art and the exemplary classicizing art of the Italian Renaissance. David had extended his stay for nearly six years, and when he returned in 1781 he seemed more than ready to take his place in the normal succession of history painters, one whose first loyalty would be to the established traditions of the Academy and its duty to embellish the aura of the monarchy.

His first painting for the Salon, however, began to probe the potential of traditionally Classical subject matter to exploit the new dissenting constructions of patriotism. He produced a large canvas on the theme of the blind *Belisarius* begging for alms. This character was the actual Roman general largely responsible for the Emperor Justinian's extensive conquests. According to legend, Belisarius became the victim of jealous intrigue at court. Falsely believing him guilty of treason, the Emperor ordered that he be blinded and dispossessed. In David's painting, an old soldier who had served in his victorious campaigns recognizes the fallen leader in his pitifully dependent condition. The painting amplifies this veteran's shock of recognition through the contrast between the magnificent triumphal arch, redolent of glory and rule, with the fall from glory enacted in a beggar's abject acceptance of charity from a passing woman.

The theme of *Belisarius* was not just any item from the catalog of ancient virtue. The writer Jean-François Marmontel had published a novel with that title in 1767, in which the exiled general is made to deliver lengthy monologues denouncing the social evils that his creator believed were eroding the vitality of the French state: official religious intolerance, a parasitical nobility, the reign of luxury over civic virtue, and the domination of favoritism over merit. Eventually, the sanity of his message induces the mighty again to seek his counsel: Justinian himself comes in secret, in the company of his heir Tiberius, to listen to his once and ever-faithful general, who can no longer see him.

This hopeful parable of the ruler coming to his senses was not ungrounded in political reality. Marmontel's embattled novel had attracted the support of certain embattled state

officials who believed that reform was necessary in order to put the French monarchy back on secure social foundations. The character of *Belisarius* thus provided David with a means to put his feet in two camps at once: both that of dissenting patriots outside the corridors of power and that of a small group of reforming bureaucrats who were themselves isolated and on the defensive within the government. David needed to appeal to this latter group, as it happened to include the administrator responsible for the Academy and the visual arts. David obligingly put his stress on emotions of pity and sentimental regret, his hero's misery and its contrast with an exalted former state constituting a mute appeal for a renewal of lapsed royal benevolence—and nothing more incendiary.

A CALL TO ORDER

The success of the *Belisarius* with both camps demonstrated how the Salon exhibitions, with their free and open access to everyone, could put vivid images of the virtue of the ancients into public circulation. The reduction of a complex story to a few figures and eloquently simple gestures was itself viewed as a reproach to the profusion of subsidiary figures and ornament in older academic art, which seemed more about the vanity of display than the communication of moral truth. In terms of David's career, it had the effect of securing the first of a regular succession of state commissions for large-scale narrative paintings: he had arrived as a history painter.

With that arrival came a large number of students attracted by his synthesis of daring political allusion with impeccable command of the Classical tradition. While aspiring artists received their formal training in drawing at the Academy, they acquired their practical instruction in making paintings in the studio of an individual master. David had served his apprenticeship with the most rigorous Classicist of the older generation, Joseph-Marie Vien. With his own students, he took devotion to the example of the ancients beyond strictly artistic concerns to include the philosophical and practical organization of studio life as a whole. In contrast to the authoritarian hierarchy observed by other masters, David encouraged a far more open, egalitarian atmosphere. At a time when most young artists abandoned formal education in their early 'teens, he laid down the requirement that all of his students know Latin and thus have independent access to Classical learning. His studio, rather than the hidebound Academy, would provide their primary locus of intellectual discussion and moral identity. Together they began to act on the belief that modern French artists could behave as had the artists of the Greeks, who (so it was argued) were granted creative liberty and thus were inspired to express the ideals of their communities in perfected physical form.



1.1 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Belisarius Begging Alms*, 1781. Oil on canvas, 9' 5¹/₈ × 10' 2⁷/₈ (287.3 × 312.1)

In a short time, David's studio began to preempt the functions of the Academy. When his most favored apprentice, Jean-Germain Drouais (1763–88), came to compete for the Rome Prize in 1784, both master and pupil treated the result as a foregone conclusion. When Drouais was predictably successful, they effectively declared themselves independent of the state by financing the journey from their own resources. The bond between them was so tight that David accompanied him to Rome and remained for nearly a year. Two other students also made the trip, so that something of the same close-knit studio environment could be transferred to Italy.

During his time in Rome, he completed, with Drouais's assiduous assistance, the work that would give him his breakthrough to dominance over French painting for the rest of his long life: *The Oath of the Horatii Between the Hands of Their Father* (1785). His subject matter came indirectly from the seventeenth-century tragedy *Horace* by Pierre Corneille, a touchstone of Classical drama known by any educated French person in the way that *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* would be known in the English-speaking world. The narrative of the play concerns the triplet champions of early Rome, summoned to settle the war with neighboring Alba by combat with that



1.2 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *The Oath of the Horatii Between the Hands of Their Father*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 10' 9⁷/₈ × 13' 11¹/₄ (329.9 × 424.8)

city's champions, their own cousins, the likewise triplet Curiatii. In the tangled ties of kinship that gave Corneille his tragic material, the wife of the youngest Horatius, the only warrior of the six to survive, was sister to the Curiatii, while his own sister, Camilla, was betrothed to one of his victims. She became one in her turn when Horatius finds her mourning her beloved and kills her on the spot.

As fixed in a surviving preparatory drawing, the subject which had been assigned David was the father of the clan successfully defending his son before the Roman people for the latter crime. This is a free adaptation of Corneille's final scene, where the elder Horatius pleads for his son's pardon before the king of Rome. But the final composition does not depict the event described in his commission. The defense of the murderous victor is forgotten; the new subject is a pledge by the three sons to triumph or die for the honor of Rome, an

event imagined by the artist to have occurred before the fateful combat (this oath appears nowhere in the play or in any of Corneille's ancient sources). In order to equal the visual impact of any other painting in the Salon, he enlarged without permission the previously agreed dimensions of the canvas by fifty percent.

Thus David was also taking over responsibility for setting the scale and subjects for his paintings, despite their being paid for by the state. This went hand in hand with calculated defiance at the level of style. His invention of the oath-taking allowed him to distill the complexities of the story into a striking unity, an almost primitively elemental configuration of bodies. It would demonstrate how much strength history painting could gain from an austerity of means that seemed at one with the stoicism of these early Romans. At the same time, David took advantage of the inherent problem faced by



1.3 PIERRE PEYRON *The Death of Alcestis*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 10'8 × 10'6 (327 × 325)

history painters in communicating to the Salon audience from the heights of the room (all large canvases were hung near the distant ceiling, as can be seen in contemporary engravings). Like no one else's painting, it would beam its narrative across the spaces of the crammed exhibition, and leave its starkly calligraphic configuration of male bodies as a permanent image in the memory of its viewers.

The abrupt transitions and dialectical sharpness of the new painting, its austere and declamatory voice, stood in pointed contrast to the intricately embellished pictorial rhetoric of his academic colleagues. An example would be *The Death of Alcestis*, shown in the same Salon by his principal rival Pierre Peyron (1744–1814), whose theme, taken from the drama of Euripides, is a wife's self-sacrifice so that her husband might live. David's innovations made Peyron's compactly interwoven grouping of figures, emerging from a darkened, softening atmosphere, seem a thing of the past, too subtle and self-involved to make an impact in the civic arena. That David retained a similar mode of composition in his self-contained group of female figures, but exclusively there, made the contrast all the more emphatic.

David's withdrawal from Paris and his gathering of the independent forces of his studio helped strengthen his resolve to overturn the accepted conventions of narrative in painting. The impact of the painting is inseparable from its violations of his audience's habitual expectations as to how such a scene should be organized. It implicitly rejected the developed compositional skills of generations of academic painters. To

press all of the figures into the same foreground plane, to join the male and female groups with no mediating transitions or mutual recognition between them, to offer no release into deep space beyond the starkly symmetrical colonnade—by every contemporary standard, these were all daring and dissonant simplifications.

It was through this rhetoric of style that David's painting spoke most forcefully to feelings of patriotic discontent with the established cultural order. In the eyes of its admirers, its harsh notes and impatience with compositional subtleties elevated the mind and moved private emotions away from center stage; the pride and inflexibility of the early Romans, so foreign to modern mores and so telling a reproach to them, had come alive on canvas.

THE ENTERPRISE OF WOMEN

The initiatives of David and his group depended on a large and secure level of state subsidy for history painting, the sheer scale of which left room for dissenting gestures. Such support had been in place for no longer than a decade. Previously official sponsorship of the highest genre had been more often a matter of lip service rather than actual funds; artists relied on income from private commissions for portraits and decorative works. From 1775 onwards, however, the ambitious male talents of the new generation were drawn into the production of highminded (and usually mediocre) public paintings, and this left a vacuum in the other genres of art. Almost instantly a cohort of talented women came to the fore. The year 1783 saw the admission of two women to the Academy (there were places for only four)—Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749–1803) 1.6 and Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842). In terms of 1.4 both quality and patronage at the highest levels, they would go on to dominate portraiture during this final decade of the Old Régime—including portraits of the royal family, which were virtually equivalent in status to Classical history paintings.

The latter artist, 28 years old at the time of her reception, had the easier path to recognition. Her father, Louis Vigée, had been a portraitist and teacher in the lesser Academy of St. Luke (the survivor of the old artists' guild). By the age of 15, her precocious talent was attracting well-born and wealthy clients, and in 1779 she sealed what would be a continuing relationship with the young Queen Marie-Antoinette. She married a successful art dealer, J.-B.-P. Lebrun, and conducted herself as a significant figure in society, presiding over her own soirées and attracting regulars from the upper spheres of Parisian culture and state administration. The reigning tone was one of elegant simplicity on antique models.

Vigée-Lebrun and David maintained a wary social relationship; the latter's education and style made him a natural

colleague, but his patriotic commitments occasionally caused him to recoil from her cozy alliance with the royal house. Her portraits indeed served as a medium for the incorporation of certain Enlightenment attitudes into the style and self-image of the ruling elite. She moved the genre away from conventional attitudes and costume intended to convey rank and station, toward a cultivated disdain for affectation and a corresponding emphasis on individual feeling. Her self-portrait with her daughter (1789) set a kind of standard in this new pursuit of innocent candor. In it she defines herself in terms other than those of her energetic professional prowess. The clothes are simple and unpretentious; they belong to no precise social location but serve to suggest an imaginative community of grace and feeling; the natural freshness of skin is at one with the natural spontaneity of the embrace.

The compression and intertwining of the two figures into a compact oval at the same time represents a survival of one of the favorite devices of Rococo decorative artists from the early decades of the century: a familiar old form is made to perform a new duty. And Vigée-Lebrun's version of the natural is characterized throughout by a reassuring consistency and absence of the unexpected. Having already demonstrated that sort of reliable performance early in her career, she was handed one of the most important and most delicate public commissions of the 1780's.

This was not a didactic history painting, but a state portrait 1.5 of the Queen with her children. By the middle years of the decade, Marie-Antoinette had become a focus for popular resentment against state policies and the government's endless crisis of indebtedness. A tide of published political dissent took delighted advantage of her reputation for unprincipled extravagance and scandalous public behavior, particularly in the company of her rakish and reactionary brother-in-law, the Comte d'Artois. Vigée-Lebrun's portrait displays the traditional pomp of regal portraiture, provided by the setting in the Versailles Palace with the magnificence of the Hall of Mirrors visible to the left. The Queen's pose is properly upright, and the artist has arranged the group into the solid pyramid ordained by the most sanctified academic teaching. That seriousness of bearing and self-presentation was crucial in the intended effect of the painting, in that the King's foreign wife was widely seen to have distracted the amiably simple monarch from his paternal devotion to the nation.

The portrait's stress on her role as mother was meant to answer further charges that she had failed in her conjugal duties. The studied precariousness of the baby's seat in her lap, flanked by gestures of loving emotion from the older children, was designed to show the Queen as not only having grown into her role as mother to the royal heirs but as being a

good mother in the natural, nurturing manner celebrated by the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility. It was no fault of the artist's competence in rendering this balancing act that the state, out of fear of a negative public response, withheld the portrait from the official opening of the Salon of 1787. Any positive benefit was annulled in the general ridicule, and the empty space in the hanging was quickly equated with the looming fiscal deficit. Vigée-Lebrun herself left France at the first outbreak of the Revolution and found an eager clientele at princely courts throughout Europe.

The career of Labille-Guiard followed a substantially different course from that of her more luminous rival, and it demonstrates the widening options that opened up (albeit grudgingly and briefly) to women artists during this decade. She was six years older and had received her most important training from a history painter, F.-A. Vincent, rather than a specialist in the portrait genre. She achieved a rank not unlike Vigée-Lebrun's, in 1785 becoming portraitist to Mesdames, the King's unmarried aunts, but her sense of vocation displayed a greater intellectual and professional gravity.

This she projected with confidence and conviction in the self-portrait which she submitted to the Salon of 1785. At 1.6 over six feet in height, the canvas presents her on a queenly scale of her own. Instead of any comforting domesticity, she



1.4 ELISABETH-LOUISE VIGÉE-LEBRUN *Portrait of the Artist With Her Daughter*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 41³/₈ × 33 (105 × 84)



1.4 ELISABETH-LOUISE VIGÉE-LEBRUN *Marie-Antoinette With Her Children*, 1787. Oil on canvas, $9\frac{1}{4} \times 84\frac{5}{8}$ (275 × 215)



1.6 ADÉLAÏDE LABILLE-GUIARD *Self-Portrait With Two Pupils*, 1785. Oil on canvas, $83 \times 59\frac{1}{2}$ (210.8 × 151.1)

adver-tises herself as already a teacher and master of her genre: two attentive students hover behind her chair. The setting is unabashedly a place of work, as the prosaic stretcher bars and tacked canvas make plain. A sculpted bust of her father in the severe Roman mode (from an actual work by Pajou) looks on, but no living male intrudes on the studio's enterprise. This would have been a point of some importance to the artist, since both she and Vigée-Lebrun were subject to the slander that men had actually produced their paintings, a back-handed but galling tribute from a sexist culture. Labille-Guiard's link to Vincent remained intimate—they would marry in 1790—so she was especially vulnerable to this reflex suspicion. The finery of her dress and hat, perhaps incongruous to modern-day eyes, would have been deemed an expected and correct outward sign of status and accomplishment. At the same time she encourages a worthy simplicity in the dress of her students.

This self-portrait stands as a reminder that enlightened pedagogy as a feature of the artist's new intellectual independence was not necessarily limited to the erudite pursuits of male Classicists. Labille-Guiard herself took a sympathetic

part in the coming Revolution and painted one of the few known portraits of Robespierre.

THE CIRCLE OF MEN

After his return from Rome, David was some time in reorganizing the collective work in his own studio. A combination of injury, illness, and indecision prevented him from making a start on an equivalent successor to the *Horatii*, 1.2 though he had a royal commission in hand. In the end, he capitalized on new friendships in order to keep his name before the public at a lower cost to his time and resources but with little or no lessening of impact.

Early in 1786, a wealthy young jurist named Trudaine de la Sablière, a scion of one of the country's most distinguished families of royal administrators, presented himself as the patron of David's *Socrates at the Moment of Grasping the Hemlock* (1787). He paid more than handsomely for the honor of commissioning it: 7000 livres to begin with, according to one report, augmented to 10,000 livres in the end as an 1.7



1.8 JEAN-GERMAIN DROUAI *The Dying Athlete*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 49¼ × 71¾ (125 × 182)



1.7 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Socrates at the Moment of Grasping the Hemlock*, 1787. Oil on canvas, 51⅞ × 77⅞ (129.9 × 195.9)

expression of his delight with the results (this for a cabinet-sized picture when the state was paying only 6000 livres for a full-scale historical canvas like the *Horatii*).

The story comes from the writings of Plato, who had been a student of the martyred philosopher, and more recently from a retelling of the suicide by the French *philosophe* Denis Diderot. Despite its stark prison-setting and theme of self-sacrifice, the *Socrates* calls into question the tendency to classify all of David's history paintings of the 1780's under the heading of an austere and militant virtue. His formal choices were made within a rhetorical conception of painting, one in which style was less the mark of an artist's unique personality and more a considered adjustment to the demands of the subject matter and the occasion. This smaller canvas, offered as an emblem of personal friendship, called for a more harmonious and interwoven compositional order.

In philosophical terms, it is a more complex theme than the tale of the *Horatii*, emblemizing subtle constitutional and moral questions in place of Corneille's broadly brushed nationalist legend. It catches the ambivalence Trudaine

would display toward any expansion of the principle of free expression to incorporate popular participation in political life (he would go to the guillotine in 1794 for that reluctance). The suicide of Socrates is the result of a prior and more fundamental renunciation of political action under conditions of democratic sovereignty: from the moment of his indictment forward, he accepts without resistance the judgment of the democratic assembly the better to reject the legitimacy of the authority behind it. What more fitting purchaser to have than the man who would go on to translate the American *Federalist Papers* into French, including James Madison's strictures against unrestrained factions and the potential "tyranny of the majority" in democratic legislatures?

The treatment of the male body is also changed from the strained austerity of the *Horatii* in a way that corresponds to masculine bonds in Greek society and in Platonic thought. The figure of the anonymous cupbearer—in its scale, placement, color, and sensual attractiveness—functions as a balancing element of the composition equal in weight to the figure of Socrates himself, a Ganymede assisting at the



1.9 JEAN-GERMAIN DROUAIS *Marius at Minturnae*, 1786. Oil on canvas, 9' x 12' 2 (274.3 x 370.8)



1.10 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 10' 7 1/8 x 13' 10 1/8 (322.9 x 422)

passage to immortality. In Plato's account of the suicide, the jailor bearing the poison is only a minor, anonymous presence, but this prominence given to the physical for its own sake evokes another facet of Plato, one in which the contemplation of the beautiful male body is enlisted for the purposes of enlightenment. The speeches of the participants in Plato's *Symposium* describe the contemplation of the beautiful male adolescent by the mature citizen as a potential means to lead the mind upward from the realm of the sensual to an understanding of universal good. Though Socrates is allowed his "philosophical" refusal of the sexual seductiveness of Alcibiades, there is a great deal of humorous carousing and delicious reminiscence of erotic feeling on the part of the wealthy Athenians present. And in the end the sexual abstinence of Socrates is meaningful only because of the palpable desire stimulated by the proximity of the beautiful male beloved. In David's painting, Socrates reaches for the cup and for the boy in the same gesture.

1.30 Later, in his monumental history painting *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (1814), David would put on display his under-

standing of the central place held by same-sex *eros* in the warrior culture of ancient Greece. The *Socrates* likewise is meant to be a Greek painting, not a Roman one, imbued with a sophisticated scholar's appreciation of "Greek love." Trudaine was the center of a circle famous for both its intellectual sophistication and its lavish entertainments; it was a milieu in which the serious pursuit of political wisdom was bound up with the cultivation of a lightly carried erudition amid multiple temptations of the table and the bed. David plainly enjoyed the attention of this company, and his painting is a tribute to and document of one ideal of leisured, disinterested masculine fellowship, which had many points in common with Plato's. And the beauty of the *Socrates* is how many of these points it manages to touch within such a compactly legible image.

A VIOLENT PATRIMONY

Despite the distractions of such erudite and worldly company, David's most important bonds remained the working relationships of the studio. A new arrival, the twenty-year-old Anne-Louis Girodet (1767–1824), painted a number of the background figures in the *Socrates*, and other talented students were in the wings. But David's aspirations for his group—and for many observers the hope of French painting—were centered on the distant Drouais, who was engaged in his own struggle to assert his independence against the constraints imposed by the French authorities in Rome. In practical terms, however, a lone student isolated in a foreign environment was dependent on the Academy, and his earliest Roman painting conformed to the first of its requirements: a painted study of the male nude to be submitted to the judgment of the academic

elders back in Paris. Barred by entrenched authority from devoting his talents to the highest genre of narrative historical painting, he set about elevating this obligation to the same exalted plane.

Drouais's *Dying Athlete*, completed in 1785, transformed 1.8 the balanced studio pose on which it is based into a tense internal drama. As depicted, the wound is all but invisible, but the entire body is organized to mark the spasm of pain that energizes the figure. Although the body as a whole seems fully drawn out along its continuous lower contour, it is in fact twisted unnaturally at the center along a harshly incised transition. Its languid extension is violated at the center of the torso in a contraction that reads as an involuntary one of pain. The raking light further throws that area into shadow so that the body is divided by zones of light and dark as well as by its disposition in space. The light is the zone of control; despite the wrenching pain, the warrior's reaction to it is

limited to the dark zone; he resists and contains it so thoroughly that the overall composure of his figure is undisturbed. The effort it costs the warrior is registered in the contrast of the supporting right hand with the left. What had been no more than the model's fatiguing effort to maintain the pose, becomes an inner determination to hold the body upright to the end, to refuse collapse into unconsciousness.

This is the mark of the hero, and it is meant to enlarge the aura of heroism beyond exploits of the fictional warrior to take in the suffering artist's achievement as well. After Drouais, it would become a pattern for young artists to use the single male figure as a primary focus for their early ambitions and self-definition as artists. They would develop its potential as a carrier of complex meaning far beyond anything their elders had attempted at the same stage of life. But Drouais was also impatient to test himself directly against his master's example. With David's encouragement, he worked in secret, neglecting his obligatory student work in order to throw himself into a project beyond his years and station, one plainly intended for the public arena of Paris.

1.9 The subject which they chose together was a moment in the life of Gaius Marius, a general and consul of the late Roman Republic. This episode comes in fact from the decline of Marius' career into corruption and tyranny. Under a sentence of death by the Roman Senate, he faces down his executioner by the sheer force of his presence; in the next moment the soldier drops his sword and flees. The malign side of the "hero" is not, however, immediately apparent, resembling as he does the severe but benevolent patriarch of the *Horatii*. Its minimalist pairing of two soldierly male characters extended David's Corneillian esthetic—the dialectical sharpness, abrupt transitions, self-aggrandizing utterance, and single-minded stress on pride and inflexibility in the mores of ancient Rome—to a degree that eliminated even David's small allowances for prevailing taste.

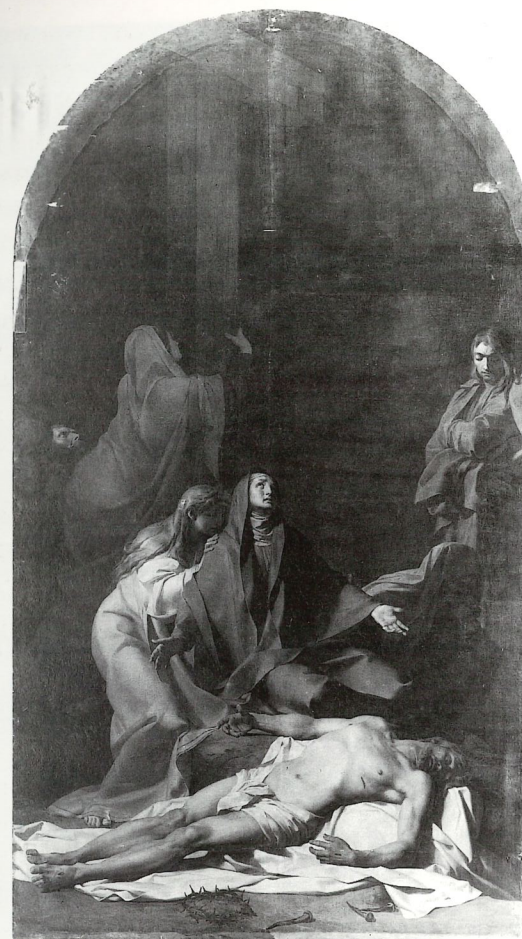
But the *Marius* (1786) at the same time reveals something of the tense emotional and psychological interplay between the two artists. It is figured most of all in the cloak with which the young soldier shields his face, which Drouais uses as a device to turn his painting diametrically against its model in the *Horatii*. The theme of the latter painting was one of solidarity between the generations, the authority of the father passing to his sons along with the swords: David's heroes were engaged in rapt attention to the tense point of contact between them, and the vision of the spectator was vicariously engaged with the same intensity. But when that same spectator puts himself or herself in the place of either protagonist in the *Marius*, the effect is blindness and isolation. The deceptively noble face of Marius was one that Drouais refused to contemplate; he put an abyss, a cancellation of vision, between that implacable visage and himself.

This simultaneous affirmation and denial, vision and blindness, left unresolved at the heart of the painting, and all the visible signs of the strain involved in controlling the refractory materials that went into its making, worked in the end to its advantage. Despite its moral ambiguities, the impression it conveys of a bristling, barely contained energy could readily be understood as the sign of virtue condemned to perpetual struggle in an unjust society. When the *Marius* was put on display in the Drouais family home in the early spring of 1787, public response was wildly enthusiastic. The painting was capable of creating the excitement of a Salon triumph without the necessity of a Salon. Thomas Jefferson joined the stream of spectators and came away overwhelmed by the experience: "It fixed me like a statue a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, I do not know which, for I lost all ideas of time, even the consciousness of my existence." The intensity of the painting, which is in large part a result of its unresolvable contradictions of meaning, temporarily banished rational reflection from at least one spectator otherwise eminently capable of it.

Drouais never had the opportunity to overcome this anxiety of influence in a comparable painting, nor could he fulfill the hopes of his Parisian admirers. Early in 1788 he died of smallpox while still in Rome. His death at the age of 26 was widely ascribed to his zealous overwork in pursuit of ideal artistic virtue; David was inconsolable. Those unrealized expectations and the circumstances of his death were romanticized into legend that had a powerful effect on several generations of young artists who followed him. Like him, they would want success early and on terms guaranteed not by training and experience but by special inner qualities which set the artist apart from the routine existence and dulled perceptions of others. It would henceforth be the burden of the modern artist perpetually to be called on to demonstrate that exalted state.

TRAGEDY AND THE REPUBLIC OF EQUALS

There was an unintended coincidence between David's grief over the loss of a virtual son and the theme of the painting he was preparing for the Salon of 1789, and this surely made his engagement with the subject even more intense. In his *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, the hero is the founder of the Roman Republic, Junius Brutus (namesake of Caesar's assassin), as he might have received the beheaded corpses of his two male heirs, executed at his own order for treason against the new political order. It was through the blood ties of their mother, who was related to the expelled king, that the two sons had been enlisted in the plot to restore



1.11 JEAN-BAPTISTE REGNAULT *Lamentation of Christ*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 13'11 3/8 x 9'1 3/4 (425 x 233)

the monarchy. Under the law that Brutus had himself brought into being, a sentence of death was mandatory, and the law obliged him to deliver it and to witness the execution.

1.12 Like the *Horatii*, the painting concerns the rigor of a father who must contemplate the sacrifice of his male offspring for the good of the country. But where their end in the former is heroic, here it is ignominious. And David exploits an even starker syntax of disassociation in order to call the categories of male heroism into question. The immobile central actor vacates the center of the composition and sits in a shadowy corner; other key elements of the action are likewise scattered to the sides of the canvas, most conspicuously the grief-stricken female nurse at the far right. One great gap occupies the center; across it, the opposition between male and female, between clenched angularity and supple, curvilinear form, verges on disassociation. Meaningful connections are made not so much in the actions and expressions depicted, but rather in the mind of the viewer, which is activated by the gaps and silences between separate and distinct elements. The

formal dismemberment of both composition and surface becomes not only means but metaphor, for the dismemberment of Brutus' sons is the unseen event which defines all of the living figures, and the dismemberment of the family unit—glossed over in the *Horatii*—is its consequence.

By virtue of its disruptions of normative order in technique and composition, the painting can be decidedly ambivalent about the costs of the hero's political resolve. The grieving women as a group (who alone catch the light), the unheard protest of Brutus' wife (whose outstretched hand stabilizes the entire composition), are treated with as much if not greater sympathy. The painting allows room for both halves of the Greek historian Plutarch's famous judgment on his action, that it "cannot be sufficiently condemned or sufficiently praised," that Brutus' character was at one and the same time "that of a god and that of a savage beast," which is to say, simultaneously above and below the human community. It encompasses a truly tragic recognition that the social body can come into being only by means of a temporary transgression of the condition of humanity itself; and as the existence of society violates the continuum of nature, so nature will have its revenge.

David's *Brutus* may be the closest the art of painting has ever come to rendering tragedy in its own, pictorial terms



1.12 ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET *Pietà*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 11' x 9 1/2' (335 x 235)



1.13 ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1791. Oil on canvas, 19³/₈ × 24¹/₂ (49 × 62)

rather than merely illustrating those of the stage. At the same time, however, it questions one of the fundamental assumptions of tragic drama going back to Aristotle: that great passions are the property of the well-born. The nurse, isolated at the far edge of the composition in her own private world of sorrow, is the chief formal and thematic counterweight to Brutus himself. The tension visible in her jawline, neck, and shoulder, the lean and austere grandeur invested in her body, oppose the smooth, uninflected rendering of Brutus' wife, making the response of the noble matron seem somehow histrionic and inadequate by comparison.

The power of that figure becomes even more striking in the light of evidence that it was not painted by David but by a new recruit to the studio, François Gérard (1770–1837). Likewise, as crucial a detail as the head of Brutus may have been painted by Girodet. In any event, the two young painters had been drawn into an intimate collaboration parallel to that between

David and Drouais on the *Horatii*. It is today an old-fashioned expression to refer to the students or followers of an artist as constituting a "school." But it is important to restore the basic meaning of the word in this instance: no less than the circle of Trudaine, David's studio had become a place of collective learning and experiment within the Classical tradition, but with the added pressure and risk of a high-stakes project to be accomplished and tested in public. And the practical character of their interaction generated a different kind of art, an interrogation of the idea of civic virtue which is a world away from the comfortable philosophical pieties of the *Socrates*.

These were lessons to which Girodet in particular was attending—the concentration of bodily eloquence within contours of a compact geometric simplicity, the evocation of inexpressible sorrow and loss through absence and a drastic reduction of pictorial incident. Through his aristocratic

family he gained a commission, unusual for such a young artist, to paint a large-scale work (11½ feet in height) on the subject of the Virgin with the dead Christ. In so doing, he was responding to the other major event of the 1789 exhibition, which had seen something of a revival (temporary of course) in large-scale religious painting. Twenty-one canvases, more than half of those in the "historical" category, had been commissioned by the state or by various church bodies on Christian subjects. A *Lamentation of Christ* by Jean-Baptiste Regnault, a state commission intended for the main altar of the chapel at Fontainebleau, received the largest share of attention before the late arrival of the *Brutus*. Enthusiastic admirers in the press found much to praise in the contrast between the shadowed background with its suggestive mystery and the vividness of the foreground group of figures with its startling juxtapositions of color and unsettling naturalism in the treatment of Christ's body.

Girodet's painting was on a directly analogous subject and was almost as large. His conception both pays homage to Regnault, his master's rival, and challenges him in the Davidian terms of austere rhetorical grandeur. The shift in subject from the public scene of deposition and lamentation to the private mourning of the Virgin allows him to reduce the elements of the story to a laconic minimum. Like Drouais's

Marius, it plays its two highlighted figures, marked by vividly saturated hues, against a large field of indistinct gloom penetrated by a narrow beam of illumination. For both fledgling history painters, this device allowed them to avoid the complications that come with a large complement of figures and at the same time gain the instant sense of gravity and profundity conveyed by darkness and isolation. Even more than Regnault, he has forsworn obvious Christian symbols; there are virtually none in the painting. The accessories are Classical or natural: shroud, sarcophagus, cavern, dawn. Girodet has fused the bodies of Virgin and Christ into one continuous outline, a union of life and death expressed in basic bodily terms. And the open expression of sorrow in Regnault's Virgin is transformed into a veiled inclination of the head, the eyes in shadow, the neck conforming to an oppressive horizontal line, in a direct echo of the veiled form of Brutus' grieving servant.

But for all of the painting's indebtedness to rhetorical ideas present in the *Brutus*, the moody gloom and quiet of Girodet's *Pietà* represented a marked departure from what anyone would have expected of the Davidian group. It was a precocious and risky painting, particularly in its effective manipulation of a vast area of virtually featureless painted surface, and was as impressive in its way as Drouais's *Marius* had been. In a Classical manner, Girodet boldly carves his signature in a fictive inscription at the foot of the sarcophagus, proudly appending his age of 22.

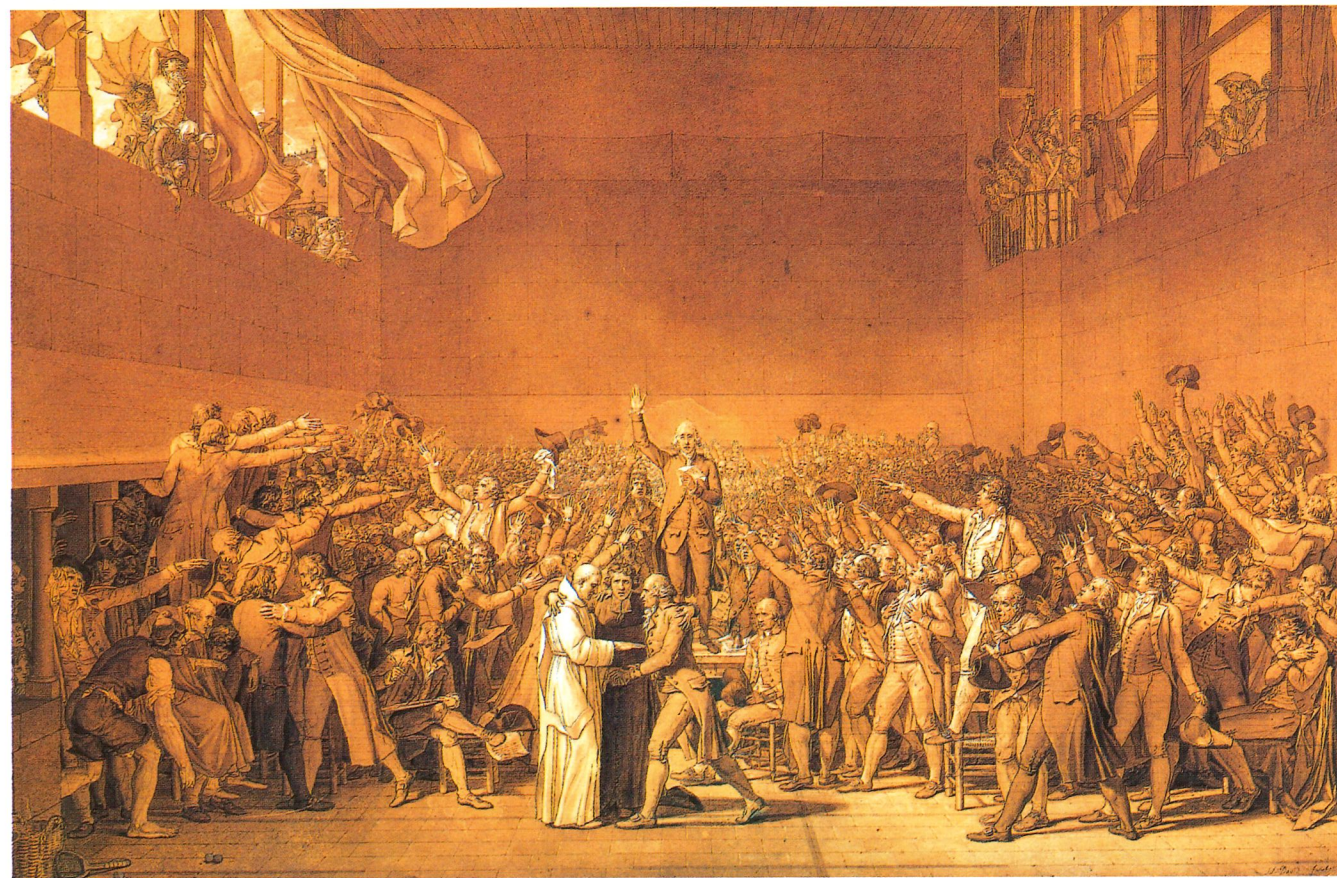
FIGURES OF REVOLUTIONARY VIRTUE

The curtailment of religious painting was but one effect of the changes in the French art world set off by the taking of the Bastille in 1789. David and the painters in his circle were sympathetically engaged with the Revolution from the start, but decisive changes in their art were slow in coming. Reform-minded artists in Paris put their initial energies into a drive for egalitarian reorganization of the Academy, including open access to the Salons. The first important artistic innovation would take place in Italy rather than France, generated out of the momentum established in David's studio in 1789.

Girodet, having won his Rome Prize, left Paris in 1790 determined to extend the independent identity he had staked out in his *Pietà*. In order to live up to the ideal of precocious genius, he had to contend not only with David's powerful influence on him, but with Drouais's example as well. The intransigent attitude he displayed in Rome, his expressions of contempt for the Academy and its teaching, followed the path laid down by his late colleague. And like Drouais, he had to manifest that resistance while meeting the requirement that he paint the male nude. How then was he to imitate Drouais's example of independence and his transformation of the academic nude into an emblem of that independence without falling into a dependent imitation of his predecessor?

He found his subject in a realm of mythology far removed from the vigilantly martial world of David's and Drouais's Roman heroes. His painting, completed in 1791, depicts Endymion, the beautiful boy with whom the moon goddess Selene fell into desperate infatuation. In some accounts she put him into perpetual sleep so that he would always be available to her nocturnal visits. Girodet has rendered her as immaterial moonlight, whose passage through the overhanging branches is facilitated by a smiling figure with the combined traits of Eros and Zephyr.

He stated repeatedly, in letters written during and immediately after his work on the picture, that this was to be a work owing absolutely nothing to David's example and that he would spare no effort necessary to achieve this independence. It is difficult to cite a prior instance in which that very modern form of youthful rebellion is expressed so vividly and insistently by an artist. And he evolved its form through what amounts to a systematic reversal of almost every one of the salient traits of Drouais's prototype in the *Dying Athlete*. The athlete had been tense, maximally alert, disfigured, and suffering, yet ready with his weapons. Endymion, by contrast, is drained of tension, never conscious, physically flawless, and in a perpetual state of bliss, with weapons discarded in the foreground. The hard daylight delineated the body of the athlete with an unnatural clarity; the soft moonlight envelops the body of Endymion with a diffuse but entirely natural obscurity.



1.14 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *The Oath of the Tennis Court*, 1791. Pen, bistre wash, and white highlights on paper, 26 × 41³/₈ (66 × 105)

More than Girodet realized, his painting reached beyond the *Brutus* back to the philosophical world of David's 1.7 *Socrates*. Its apparent androgyny is more precisely the narrowing of a total ideal of human beauty into an exclusively male realm, a move which pays homage not only to the homoerotic bias of ancient Greek culture but also to the bonds of exclusively masculine fellowship within the studio itself. Girodet had set out to prove that the internal complexity of potential appropriate to the hero could be articulated even without Drouais's intercutting between the poles of grandeur and beauty, that it could be accommodated entirely within the latter category. The result is a body that is removed from life yet never decays; that is subject to perpetual repetitions of sensual pleasure yet is never exhausted by them; that is trained like an athlete of antiquity for war yet remains forever untouched by violence, knowing death only in the midst of ecstatic animation of the nerves, muscles, blood, and skin.

As he was completing the *Endymion*, Girodet was also becoming an active participant in the Revolutionary process. He would go on to lead Republican artists in violent clashes with the Vatican. So it is difficult to draw obvious connections between political and esthetic commitments. The younger

artist's preoccupation with ideal mythology markedly contrasts with David's simultaneous immersion of his art into the flow of living history back in Paris. In 1791, in the first Salon of the Revolution, his master showed a highly finished drawing which predicted a new kind of history painting. This was the *Oath of the Tennis Court*, celebrating the moment 1.14 during the Estates General of 1789 when the delegates of the Third Estate pledged themselves to remain in permanent assembly until they had achieved a constitution: they would "die rather than disperse until France was free." To capture the moment David conceived a vastly multiplied oath of the Horatii, which now bound the assembled representatives of the nation to a new foundation of civic order.

The source of the commission was not the state, but an unofficial political body, the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution," more commonly known, after the old monastery in which it held its meetings, as the Jacobins. Its commission to the artist was organized as an expression of the national will: the gargantuan final picture, with life-size foreground figures, was to be paid for by three thousand subscribers, who would receive a print of the image. The canvas was to hang in the National Assembly itself, to hold

before the nation's legislators both the foundation of their authority and an ideal model of the general will in operation.

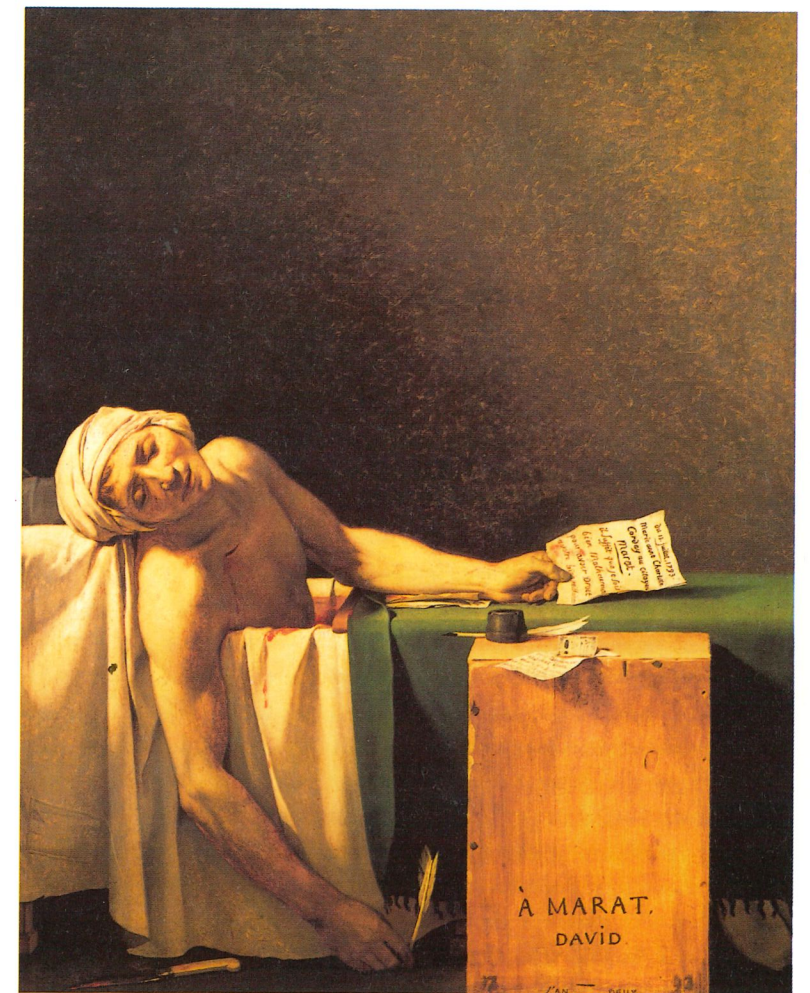
Both act and image hark back to the antique models of patriotic fervor and self-sacrifice which David had figured so vividly in his earlier work. But this literal bonding of art and the primal moment of Revolutionary public life proved to be less a way forward than a cul-de-sac for history painting. The lesson of David's experience is that when the artist forsakes the distance of metaphor, the actual public sphere will perpetually escape representation. This was the fate of the Tennis Court project. To finish it would have required an impossibly stable political consensus. After the King tried to flee France to join the external enemies of the Revolution, the Jacobins split into antagonist monarchist and republican factions (the more radical group retaining the name); the dream of accord emblemized in the *Oath of the Tennis Court* had vanished. Amid the growing factional struggles, perpetual economic crisis, and panic induced by military attacks on France, today's hero was likely to become tomorrow's traitor.

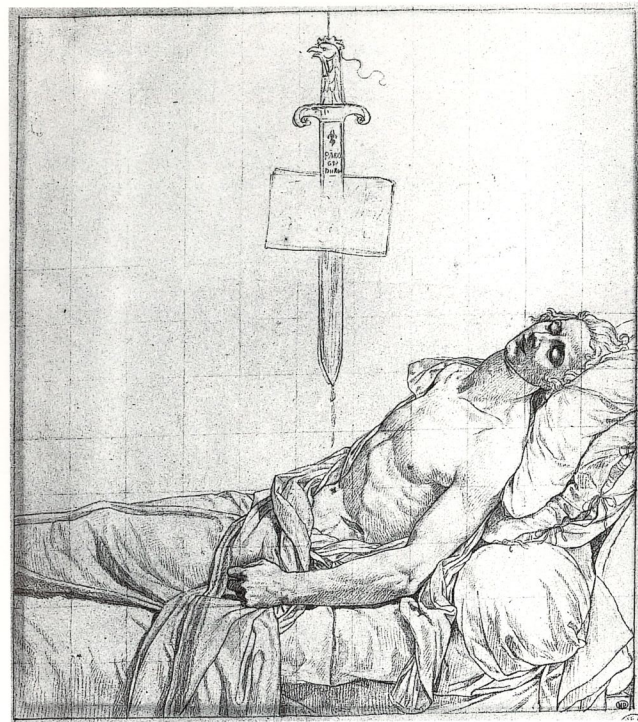
This process of historical change would not stand still to accommodate the atemporal and time-consuming medium of painting. By 1792 David had all but abandoned his canvas with only a few of the central figures sketched in the nude. His pupil Gérard won a state competition with a similar project to memorialize the effective moment of the monarchy's downfall, *August 10, 1792*, but likewise never moved to the stage of working it up on canvas.

FIGURES OF REVOLUTIONARY DEATH

The vicissitudes of these projects were part of a general upheaval affecting virtually every aspect of conceiving, making, and viewing art. Both the practical and esthetic ambitions of painters and sculptors had been formed for generations within stable governing institutions that took responsibility for training, advancement, housing, and—for the most favored artists—assuring a livelihood. That tradition

1.15 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Marat at His Last Breath*, 1793. Oil on canvas, 63³/₄ × 49¹/₈ (160.7 × 124.8)





1.16 ANATOLE DEVOSGE after JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID
The Death of Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau, 1793.
 Pencil on paper, 18½ × 15¼ (46.7 × 40)

and those institutions were suddenly overturned, and by 1792 a new Republican government was instructing young artists to despise everything for which the old order had stood. The church, long a source of patronage, was under siege. A puritanical austerity in private life was encouraged and increasingly enforced as a sign of civic virtue, while a succession of revolutionary regimes asked artists to invent forms for philosophical and ideological messages wholly new to public art. Unfortunately, those regimes lacked the will and money to pay for what they required, and artists were forced back on their own resources in the midst of a shattered economy.

Some artists and craftworkers found employment in a novel and enormous enterprise of symbol-making: the creation of the great Revolutionary festivals, with their myriad floats, costumes, temporary architecture, and sculptural props. David, as he was drawn into the radical political leadership, took on the role of supervising this entire apparatus as the organization of political pageants and ceremonies turned into a year-round industry. But he would eventually return to painting at the behest of his political allies, and in doing so came to affirm the value of his pupil Girodet's concentration on the eloquent male body.

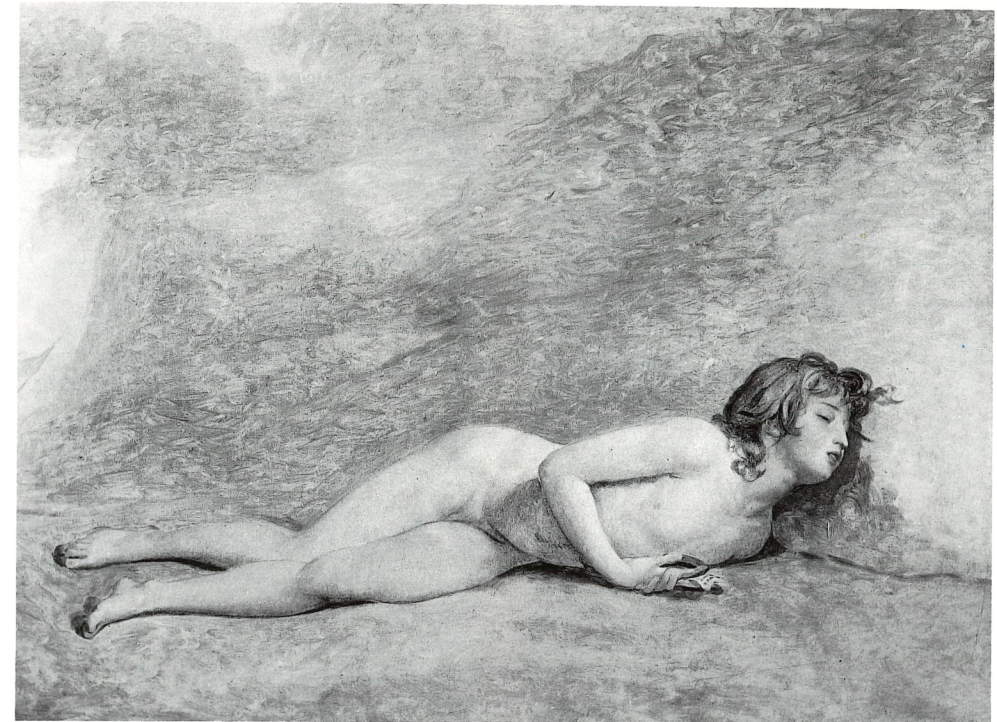
Early in 1793, following the King's execution, a royalist soldier had murdered a deputy, Lepelletier de Saint-Fargeau,

who had voted for the death sentence. David was called upon to paint a memorial to the political martyr and produced a rather conventional image of the Classical hero on his deathbed reminiscent of his own fallen *Hector* from 1783 (and gave over most of the actual painting to Gérard). That summer another, more incendiary assassination took place. The extreme populist writer and deputy Jean-Paul Marat was attacked in his bath by a counter-Revolutionary zealot named Charlotte Corday. Marat was the hero of the organized *sans-culottes*, the movement of artisans and workers in the poor neighborhoods of the city. A major symbolic tribute was required, and David again was summoned to produce a painting to stand in for the lost martyr. But the Revolutionary leadership, of which the artist was a part, was worried about the demands of the popular movement and its propensity to spontaneous violence. The Terror was about to begin, but in their view terror had to be strictly controlled from above.

David put that ambivalence into paint. In his *Marat at His Last Breath*, the martyr is the saintly "Friend of the People." The papers on the edge of his rude writing stand show that he had been dispatching some money to a soldier's widow when surprised by his killer (whose own false letter requesting an audience he still holds). His nudity could be read as both a metaphorical and actual mark of heroic stature, in that he typically carried on his duties through the pain of an excruciating skin disease, which he could soothe only by immersion in a medicinal bath. While the subject's passion for equality and fraternity is plain, he is past all action and the image is meant to console its viewer far more than incite him or her to a rage for vengeance.

Marat's pose, the instruments of violence, the inscriptions, the plain wood of the upright box, the insistently perpendicular compositional order, all conjure up Christ's sacrifice without leaving the factual realm of secular history. For guidance in this delicate task, he called on the absent Girodet's experiment in religious painting from 1790, in which his pupil had already diminished overt Christian trappings in favor of atmosphere and the body's own eloquence. Amid numerous borrowings, the most obvious sign of David's reliance on Girodet's *Pietà* is the tracing of the contour along the head and shoulders of the Virgin into the line of the sarcophagus; in a startling transposition, this has become almost precisely the line of Marat's head and body as it emerges above the bath—the key division of the composition between a lower zone full of incident and an upper zone of shadowy, meditative stillness.

For the third of his Revolutionary martyr portraits, the *Death of Bara* (1793), David returned to the Classical canon to imagine a boy-victim of the counter-Revolution as an unblemished, eerily beautiful ephebe, suffering but without visible wounds, dreaming more than dying, near to but not



1.17 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *The Death of Bara*, 1793. Oil on canvas, 46½ × 61 (118 × 155)

within the fury of combat. The regard of the artist, with which we are invited to identify, appears to have scandalously little to do with civic virtue or battlefield heroism, despite the charge to the painter. The sensuality of the body seems to go beyond a youthful beauty appropriate to its age and innocence, and commentators have assumed with near unanimity that the painting suffers from an overbalancing from public to private preoccupations.

But his response first of all must be understood in terms of the special circumstances of the 1793 commission. The young Joseph Bara, who had actually died in ambiguous circumstances, was a contrived martyr. How was David to move from the celebration of mature victims—Lepelletier and Marat—who were significant historical actors, known personally to the artist, to the representation of an unknown boy? How was he to ennoble what was at best a trivially unlucky act of bravado? How was he to find a fresh form for the abstract stereotypes of outraged innocence and the sacrifice of youth with which he was forced to work, following Robespierre's unreal dictum that "the French alone have thirteen-year-old heroes?"

Once again, when faced with a demanding and unconventional assignment, he looked to the work of his students. In this instance, he was responding to the nude academic study as transformed by his own followers, the late Drouais and Girodet in particular. In their hands, it had become a

privileged emblem of virtue and self-sacrifice in youth, and their vision of physical perfection carried with it a statement of anti-authoritarian originality in style and conception.

If David had needed a vivid reminder of this potential, he received one in the summer of 1793 when Girodet's *Endymion* was finally seen, to great success, in the Paris Salon. His pupil's inspired interplay of conceptual oppositions in the realm of abstract and ageless beauty would have corresponded to the difficult combination of ideas, and conditions bound up in the Bara commission. It had made concrete the longstanding ideological association between the physical perfection achieved by the ancients and their free society of equal, active citizens. Though this is not to say that the translation was entirely successful or that the *Bara* could be said to have functioned as a legible icon of utopian virtue. In fact one can see in it a collapse of this intimate dialogue within the inherited rhetorical codes of Classical art.

Certain aspects of the painting have undeniable power: the nervous scumbling applied simultaneously to the body and its setting continued David's recent ventures into extreme gestural freedom in the remarkable Revolutionary-period portraits of Madame Chalgrin and Madame Pastoret. Here it permitted him to appropriate, by means of a maximally porous rather than maximally sealed technique, Girodet's atmospheric unity of figure and ground. But when it came to

the suppression of the genitals—imperative in view of the mandate that David represent outraged innocence—the result was less happy. The overall illumination and blond light deprived David of Girodet's device of veiling shadow; his response was to take the boy's body and break it in two, simultaneously to figure its suffering and to downplay its sex. The body is twisted unnaturally at its center, subjected to a wrenching discontinuity, which marks the body's violation, the bayonet wound to the midsection that killed the boy. This device, along with the shadowed abdomen, directly recalls the abrupt inner displacement of Drouais's *Athlete*, which David superimposed over the undisturbed imaginary wholeness of the *Endymion*. Much of the strangeness of the image is derived from the clash of these two incompatible bodies in one.

1.8

LEAVING TERROR BEHIND

There was no opportunity for a public response to David's *Bara* because Robespierre's government was overturned in the summer of 1794, one day before the scheduled festival in honor of the child-martyr. This Thermidorian Reaction (so-called because of the month in the Revolutionary calendar in which it took place), ended the period of radical change, and republican France entered a five-year phase of indecisive collegial government. David, as a close associate of the fallen Jacobin leader, had narrowly escaped the same sentence of death. As it was, he was sent to prison and remained in confinement for more than a year. Gaining his full freedom late in 1795, David soon recovered his lost position and large teaching studio, but his circle would no longer be the dominant nexus of practise it had been before Thermidor.

Without David to provide a center, the various components that had gone into the collective work of the old studio split apart. Without the critical spirit of the 1780's or the political commitment of the early '90's, these dispersed elements came to express narrower, more obvious and usually more conservative interests. In the Salon of 1795, the first under the new order, the great consensus success was a new *Belisarius* by Gérard. This painting (now lost) harked back to the pathetic qualities of David's own version of 1781, but exaggerated that pathos by imagining that the blind outcast's young guide had been killed by a snake; Belisarius is left without aid, carrying the boy's corpse through a deserted wilderness.

1.18

1.1

Gérard was painting for the Salon because he, and all of his generation of young artists, had seen their career interrupted by war in Europe. The French Academy in Rome had been sacked by pious Romans early in 1793 (Girodet had narrowly escaped the scene with his life) and had remained closed ever since. The Revolutionary reforms of the exhibition system meant that painters who would normally have been continu-



1.18 after FRANÇOIS GÉRARD *Belisarius*, 1795. Engraving, 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ (46.5 × 34.5)

ing their studies in Italy were free to make precocious careers in Paris. The ineffectual efforts of the government to sustain a program of public commissions meant that the artist's professional survival depended upon early public recognition.

This state of affairs encouraged a volatile, speculative approach to subject matter and style. The success of Gérard's *Belisarius* encouraged a number of young artists to produce their own similar elderly victims. As that success was seen as a matter of emotional effect rather than reflection on history and virtue, the identity of the outcast could be altered at will. Fulchran-Jean Harriet gave the theme a turn into the landscape sublime in 1796, offering an *Oedipus at Colonus* in which Belisarius' dead guide is replaced by an unconscious Antigone. Despite its source in the tragedy of Sophocles, the harsh, windswept environment is unrelieved by the presence of Theseus (the hero of the Athenian polis) or any other sign of the blinded exile's final reconciliation with civic culture.

In David's *Brutus*, the sorrow of any individual actor is only one element in a larger complex of causes and effects addressed to the viewer's active understanding; emotional responses are elicited—and deepened—through cognitive apprehension of the inevitability of that suffering. In these paintings of the 1790's, by contrast, individual pain and loss

are isolated and exploited for sheer intensity of effect. This cult of emotion savored for its own sake revealed its compatibility with the politics of reaction in the painting that enjoyed the most enthusiastic response in the 1799 Salon. Pierre-Narcisse Guérin (1774–1833), seven years younger than Girodet, was the first artist of the period to come to prominence who had not studied with David. He had received his training in Regnault's studio and won the Rome Prize in 1797. Still unable to travel to Italy, he set to work on a *Return of Belisarius to his Family* for the Salon. The subject corresponds exactly to a passage in Marmontel's Enlightenment novel, the same text on which David had drawn for his public debut in 1781. But Guérin went further than had Gérard in suppressing the earnestly political implications of his source, to the point of effacing the identity of Belisarius altogether. After the painting had been completed, he altered the identity of his hero by the simple measure of restoring his sight and inventing a new name and personal history out of whole cloth.

1.20

Now the subject was one Marcus Sextus, proscribed by the dictator Sulla during the civil wars of the late Roman Republic. After the fall of his persecutor, he returns home to find his wife dead and family shattered. Public response to this fable in 1799 was overwhelming; crowds surrounded it;



1.19 FULCHRAN-JEAN HARRIET *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 61 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 52 $\frac{3}{8}$ (156 × 133)



1.20 PIERRE-NARCISSE GUÉRIN *The Return of Marcus Sextus*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 85 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 95 $\frac{1}{2}$ (217 × 243)



1.21 (left) PHILIPPE-AUGUSTE HENNEQUIN
Allegory of August 10, 1799. Oil on canvas,
88 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 68 $\frac{7}{8}$ (224 × 175). Detail



1.22 after PHILIPPE-AUGUSTE HENNEQUIN *The Remorse of Orestes*, 1800. Engraving, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ (39 × 56.5)

visitors attached poems to its frame; art students decorated it with laurel garlands. The allegory was patent to everyone: for Sulla, read Robespierre; for Marcus Sextus, read the moderate émigrés who had fled the Revolution but were beginning to return under the more lenient and conciliatory regime that came after Thermidor. In order that nothing cloud that meaning, the artist avoided choosing a hero whose complex character and fate would be well-known from literature and artistic precedent. Here there were no troubling ambiguities; the concept was simple and designed for a predictable effect. In stylistic terms, Guérin's painting was a recycling of David's signature devices from the previous decade (David was heard to say that Guérin "had been listening outside my door"), with something of a Girodet-style nocturne thrown in for melancholy effect. But in moral and intellectual terms, it was a violation of what had been the most deeply held beliefs within David's circle about the responsibility of history painting to interrogate and translate the complex inherited specifics of its themes.



1.23 FRANÇOIS GÉRARD *Cupid and Psyche*, 1798. Oil on canvas,
73 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 52 (186 × 132)

But to see the Directory period as leading to a simple victory of reaction would be misleading, despite Guérin's conspicuous triumph. Even in that Salon, the jury awarded the first medal to Philippe-Auguste Hennequin (1762–1833), an unreconstructed Jacobin, for his massive *Allegory of August 10*. This canvas (now sadly mutilated) memorialized the insurrection which brought about the final overthrow of the monarchy as "The Triumph of the French People," and transferred the symbolic language of the Revolutionary festivals into the medium of painting. That artist went on to have a similar success in 1800 with his *Remorse of Orestes*, a mythological narrative that was an equally transparent allegory of the persecutions suffered by those still loyal to the patriotic cause.

Hennequin, who was of Drouais's generation, had remained something of an outsider throughout his career. After a brief, unhappy time in David's studio, he made his own way to Rome, was caught up in the Revolution in Lyon, and was imprisoned in 1795 for his part in the ultra-leftist "Conspiracy of Equals" led by Gracchus Babeuf. Only on his release in 1797 did he begin his career as an exhibiting artist in

the Paris Salon. Both of his prize-winning canvases demonstrated that his loyalty to a learned Classicism as the natural expression of popular democracy was as dogged as his Jacobinism. At the same time his irregular training manifests itself in a naive awkwardness in drawing and a tendency toward labored handling and an undisciplined accumulation of figures and incidents. In the densely packed, agitated composition of the *Orestes*, the technical shortcomings worked much more to his advantage in conveying the terrifying impasse of its hero. Orestes suffers the torments of the Furies because he has fulfilled his divine obligation to avenge the murder of his father; in that his mother was the murderer, he has nevertheless committed a crime abhorrent to the human community. As an allegory of the persecutions suffered by the followers of Babeuf (and by leftist democrats in general), it uses the complexity of its tragic source in a way that contrasts with Guérin's avoidance of any known referent that might complicate his message. Hennequin makes his complaint, to be sure, but shares with his viewer a recognition that necessity never removes the moral stigma of murder.

That Hennequin could enjoy success with such defiance of political orthodoxy—and even normal standards of competence—is a sign of the disarray and fragmentation that characterized culture in this period. Any previous honors an artist might have received could not guarantee continued recognition and support. Intense competition brought about splits between former close friends such as Girodet and Gérard. The former's arduous return from Italy—plagued by delays, malaria, and dangers from enemies of France—consumed more than two years. Finally reaching Paris in 1795, he found himself unable to capitalize on the high reputation that his *Endymion* had prepared for him. Wealthy speculators and military contractors were now in a position to command and direct the work of artists for whom little public support was forthcoming. There was as a result a corresponding license in matters of painterly style that rendered moot the freedom and individual distinction that Girodet had struggled so hard to attain within official structures. In fact, the cultivation of originality had largely passed from the culture of art into the fashions of an extravagant, youth-conscious, and apolitical elite. Gérard proved himself far more adaptable in recording the carefully constructed images of its leading figures, as in his portrait of Madame Récamier (1805). The style was for dress and coiffure after the antique, but this was Classicism exploited for its elegant simplicity and flattering eroticism, not for its association with civic virtue.

Public life was marked by a willed forgetting of the rigors and austerities of Robespierre's Republic of Virtue. The resentful Girodet was forced to witness the superficial appearance of his *Endymion* establish a corresponding fashion



1.24 ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley*, 1797. Oil on canvas, 63 × 45 (160 × 114.3)

1.23 in history painting. His rival Gérard led the way in capturing the *Endymion's* sealed envelope of flesh and delivering it to a strain of precious eroticism that sought a place beyond the vicissitudes of political orthodoxy. The latter's *Cupid and Psyche* was the center of attention in the Salon of 1798. Its landscape setting is outside of time; the bodies exhibit the immunity to temporal corruption appropriate to mythical beings. The innocent Psyche is about to feel the first kiss of an invisible Cupid, and the erudite viewer is meant to take pleasure in this metaphysical conceit, while the frozen stillness and all of the hovering on the edge of physical contact and of awakening carnal desire amount to a heightening of the sexual tension inherent in the subject.

Girodet's contribution to the same exhibition clashed with his old companion's recourse to mythological refinement. In

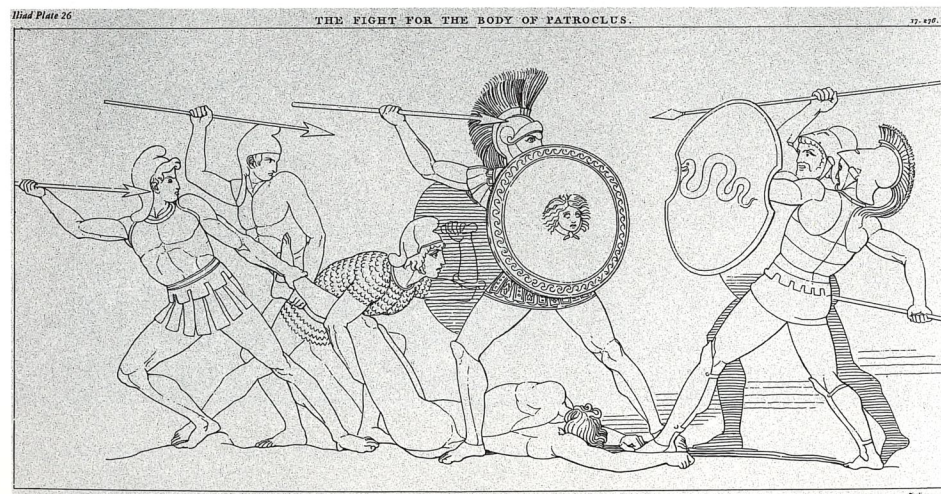
perhaps the last of the great Revolutionary portraits, fully comparable to David's *Marat*, he depicted Jean-Baptiste Belley, representative to the French National Assembly from the colony of Saint-Dominique (present-day Haiti). It would be better to say that this is a double portrait contrasting the living and the dead, the African and the European, the force of action and the force of ideas. Belley leans against a splendid commemorative bust of Abbé Raynal, the great Enlightenment advocate of political reform, which the artist has imaginatively erected on a hilltop of the Caribbean island. Raynal's liberationist ideas and his arguments against colonial exploitation had prepared the ground for Belley's decisive intervention in the Assembly in 1794, when he won approval for the abolition of slavery in the colonies and full citizenship for blacks.



1.25 CONSTANCE CHARPENTIER *Melancholy*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 52 × 66 (132 × 167.6)

The Belley painting celebrates a heroic triumph of Enlightenment ideas and the principle of equality. The rhetorical antitheses of the paired portraits raise its ambitions to the intellectual and moral standing of history painting. But unlike the *Marat*, Girodet's work was a willful, individual exercise, and a lonely one. It found no echo even within the reconstituted studio of David. There the shift away from contemporary history had taken an even more exaggerated turn toward an archaizing Classical culture and the simplified graphic conventions of Greek vase painting, Pompeian frescos, and early Renaissance art. The graphic innovations of the English sculptor and draftsman John Flaxman (1755–1826) were a crucial instrument in the separation of the Classical tradition from political and moral reflection on the present. That artist's illustrations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, produced for Roman patrons during the 1790's, were distinguished by an austere reduction of pictorial description to the play of contour and two-dimensional pattern. Neither he nor his English sponsors saw Classicism as bound up with the recovery of republican liberties in the present; his imagery belongs to a realm before history even begins. And the admirers of the abstract intelligence of his designs tended to view all subsequent compromise with empirical experience as a corruption of the pure origins of the tradition.

Gérard showed conspicuous attention to this esthetic current in the *Cupid and Psyche*. Constance Charpentier (1767–1849) was one emergent artist who was able to take its potential further. She, along with a number of other women, had taken advantage of a Revolutionary loosening of the rules in artistic instruction to develop skills in the allegorical realm of history painting. In the past, they would have been barred from the study of the model and so from academic training.



1.26 JOHN FLAXMAN, "The Fight for the Body of Patroclus," from *Illustrations to Homer's "Iliad,"* 1793. Engraving, 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 13 (16.8 × 33.6)

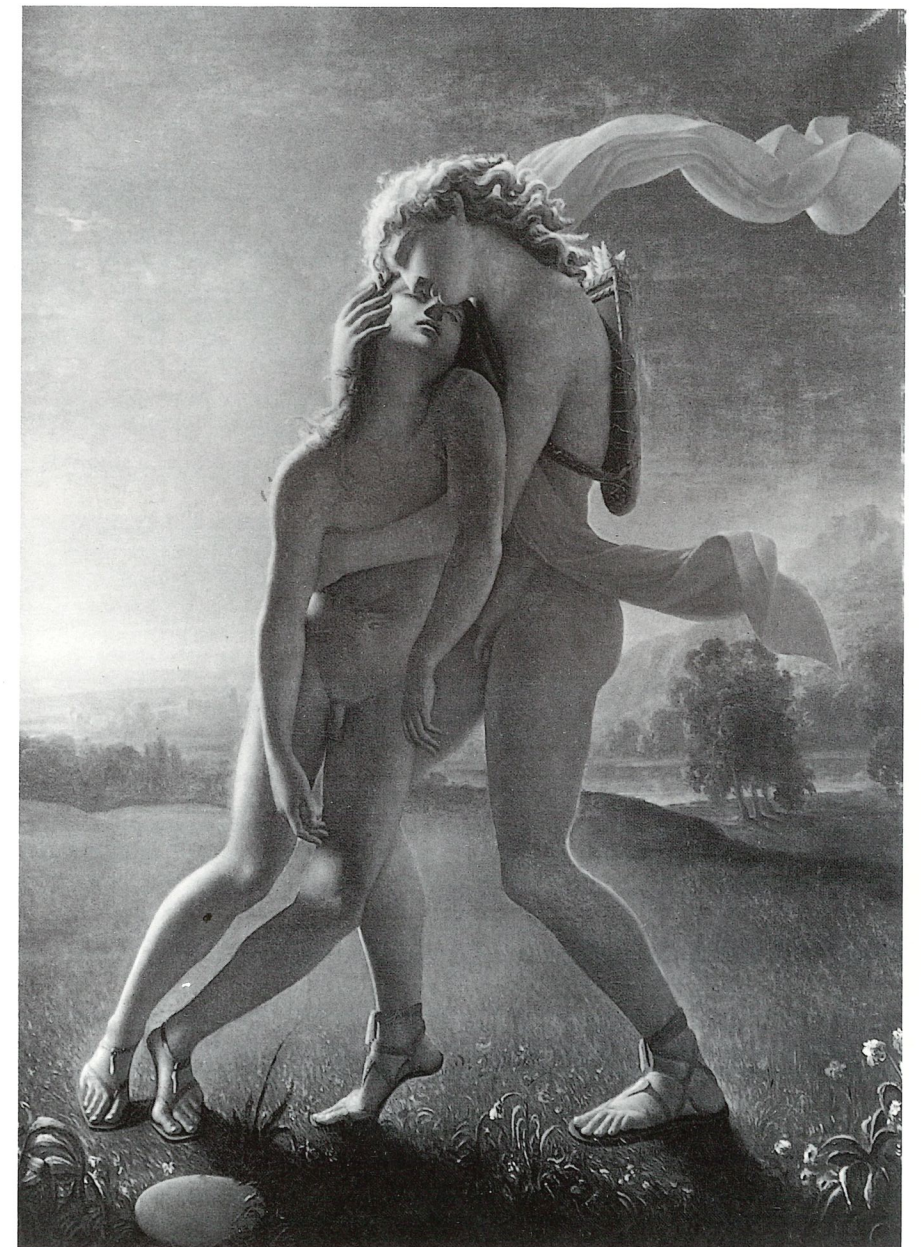
Before 1789, David had unsuccessfully fought against that restriction, but in the new environment, Charpentier had been able to study with him and with Gérard, establishing herself as a regular exhibitor in the Salon. In a work entitled *Melancholy*, which met with an enthusiastic public reception in 1801, she found a striking way to translate Flaxman's graphic linearism into painting. She accomplished this by building the work out of two opposed conventions of illusion and by a manifest inconsistency of illumination. The single, dejected female figure, garbed in a simple Greek gown, is saturated with light to the point that internal modelling and details are suppressed. The startling and unreal contrast with the darkly atmospheric forest setting concentrates all of the pictorial stress onto the contours of the figure. That boundary between light and dark is the passage which effects an ingenious reconciliation between a subjective poetics of ambiguity and the control of Classical rationalism (bringing up to date the Enlightenment equation between nature and the forms of ancient art). As a viewer, one is given the vague background in which to indulge in reverie oneself; at the same time the figure provides a surrogate with which one can identify, but less as a full-bodied presence than as an interruption in the field of dreaming. It bends physical form toward signifying the essentially mental condition of melancholic reverie.

In the same year, a painting appeared from one of the new male Davidians, *The Death of Hyacinth in the Arms of Apollo* by Jean Broc (ca. 1780–ca. 1850), which likewise manipulated light to suppress plasticity in pictorial illusion. Its mythic source, best known from the Latin poet Ovid, recounts the jealousy of the wind Zephyr: filled with unrequited passion for Apollo's boy lover, he causes the god's discus to swerve and kill the beautiful Hyacinth. Broc's concentration on ideal adolescent nudity continued what Gérard had begun three

1.23 years earlier in the *Cupid and Psyche*, and he adopts the same low viewpoint that reduces the background to simple bands of meadow and sky in a poetic never-never land. But the backlighting has the effect of reducing even further the weight and surface texture of flesh: the edges of the bodies are drawn with light rather than the dark tones that normally indicate the recession and disappearance of three-dimensional form.

This is a device already exploited by Girodet in the figure of Zephyr who hovers over Endymion; Broc went further by making it the governing logic of his entire composition. It gave him the means to solve the same conceptual problem faced by Charpentier, that is, how to make the obdurately empirical

1.27 JEAN BROC, *The Death of Hyacinth in the Arms of Apollo*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 70 × 49 $\frac{1}{2}$ (177.8 × 125.7)



medium of oil painting approximate the elemental simplicity of the decoration on Greek ceramics or of Flaxman's drawings. The rippling sequence of fingers on Apollo's right hand, joined to the faces of the lovers in double profile, is a passage of conspicuous virtuosity in this regard. In terms of the painting's theme, reversal as a formal procedure underscored a frankness in celebrating the reversal of normative heterosexuality. It transforms the Platonism of David's *Socrates*—that same-sex desire among males is a path to mental concentration and knowledge of abstract truth—into its own anti-naturalistic visual idiom.

The proponents of these ideas formed something of a self-contained sect within the studio (variously called the



1.28 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 12'8 × 17'¾ (386 × 520)

Primitives, Meditators, or the Bearded Ones) and did not share in the sort of collaboration and trust enjoyed by the first generation of pupils. Their cultivation of virtue was an inwardly directed and exclusive affair. David, on the other hand, never wavered from his commitment to public art and a public role for the artist; even while in prison he was preparing sketches for his next great history painting. But at the same time he was as attentive as Gérard had been to the ideological force of this newly purified, Hellenic Classicism.

1.28 The result was a massive canvas, completed in 1799, the *Intervention of the Sabine Women*. It was very much David's intention that this subject be distinguished from the better-known rape of the Sabines, famously depicted by Poussin and Rubens among countless others. That prior event was the beginning of the narrative trajectory which David captured near its end. The early Romans, a rough and exclusively male lot, needed women in order to perpetuate their community; to this end they employed a ruse to steal the wives of their

neighbors. It is three years before the Sabine men are able to mount a successful counter-attack, and in that time marriages have been established between the Romans and their captives and a new generation has been born. As the two armies meet and their respective leaders—Romulus for the Romans and Tatius for the Sabines—prepare for single combat, the women throw themselves into the midst of battle, pleading for reconciliation between the two states. At the center is Hersilia, wife of Romulus himself.

In a pointed reversal of the value system which governs the *Horatii* and *Brutus*, the existence of irreconcilably divided loyalties here guarantees a happy ending. The *Sabines* was conceived at David's most desperate hour as a bid for rehabilitation, and it was designed for maximum public appeal. He saturated the scene with screams, shouts, and confusion, making the spectator's experience approximate that of spectacular melodrama. In place of tragic parsimony of incident, the composition offers profusion of detailed illus-

tration and tempts one's attention toward a deep landscape setting. The most sentimentally affecting element of the story, the children deliberately placed in harm's way, stare directly out at the spectator.

All of this finally is in keeping with the premeditated message of the painting and its essentially strategic conception: none of the copious incident and detail serves to alter the conclusion one is to draw from Hersilia's plea for peace between Romulus and Tatius. The message of harmony is given in advance; everything else in the composition is there as illustration of its necessity. In its most radical phase, the new French Republic had come to be personified as a woman; Hersilia is that personification resurrected as an ideal mother of healing and nurturing, clad all in white.

The suspended conflict appears all the more as a suspension of history itself by virtue of David's startling decision to depict his warriors in the nude. While this was believed to conform to an ancient Greek practise, it had no historical pertinence to a Roman subject. But he took the step, late in the compositional development of the painting, to appropriate the idealizing Hellenism being promoted by his students. The design of the principal triad of figures could be a vignette from Flaxman. The effect of its paradoxical delicacy and formalized balance is to remove the memory of actual conflict and violence to a safer realm of myth.

David's mode of exhibiting the painting achieved a further gathering of power to himself. His response to the lack of state



1.29 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Napoleon at the St. Bernard Pass*, 1800. Oil on canvas, 8'10⅞ × 7'7¼ (270.8 × 231.8)



1.30 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, 1814. Oil on canvas, 12'11¾ × 17'5 (395.6 × 530.9)

funds for the support of art was to ignore the Salon of 1799 altogether and arrange an independent showing of the work in his own space, charging an admission fee to every visitor. Owing to this isolation and personal control over its display, David for the first time was able to present one of his large-scale paintings at eye-level rather than at the top of a crowded Salon hanging. He further exploited these new circumstances by placing a standing mirror opposite the painting. The spectators were invited to use the reflection in order to achieve a distanced, totalizing view of the narrative; at the same time they would see themselves as participants in the action behind them. This is the first of more than one trick he would later play with mirrors in his private exhibitions in an effort to mystify and spectacularize the act of viewing. Having designed a work that maximized the potential for such effects and that reinforced rather than tested the beliefs of its audience, he made the next logical move in financially speculating on the successful appeal of his strategies. He was handsomely repaid for his effort: the painting stayed on view for five years and financed the purchase of a substantial country house and land. The entrepreneurial artist of the nineteenth century was well and truly launched.

THE SUBLIME OF AUTHORITARIANISM

A month before the opening of David's exhibition of the *Sabines* in the last month of 1799, the constitutional government had fallen in the coup of 18 Brumaire. Emerging



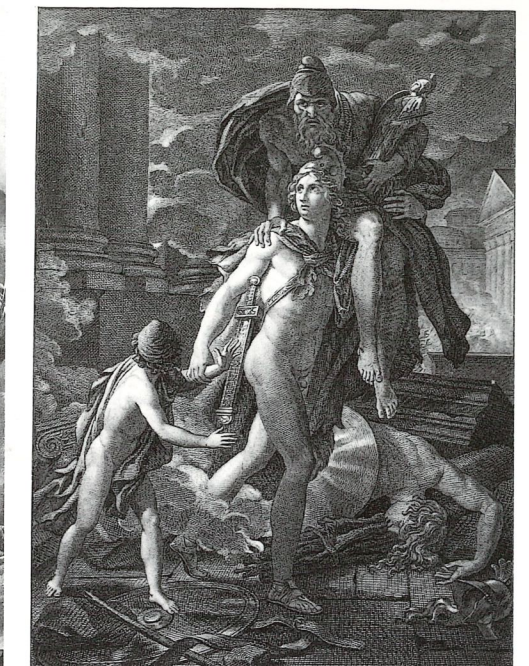
1.31 FRANÇOIS GÉRARD *Ossian*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 72 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 76 $\frac{1}{2}$ (184.5 × 194.5)



1.32 ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET *Ossian Receiving the Napoleonic Officers into Valhalla*, 1802. Oil on canvas, 37 × 73 $\frac{1}{2}$ (93.9 × 186.7)

as leader of a new regime was the charismatic young general Napoleon Bonaparte. Careful at this point to preserve republican forms, his faction came up with the title of First Consul; it evoked the chief executive office of the Roman Republic, one first occupied by Brutus. Napoleon was no stranger to David: he had visited the artist's studio in 1797 and given a mighty impression as an exemplar of martial virtue. On assuming power, he made an immediate effort to bind David to the new government as its official painter. The first successful product of that alliance was the portrait (1800) of the general, calmly seated on a rearing charger, crossing the Alps over the St. Bernard Pass. The actual crossing was a more prosaic affair on the back of a donkey, but plainly the rhetorical requirements of leadership were to prevail over accuracy: carved in the stone are the names of Hannibal and Charlemagne, who had followed the same route to Italian conquests. The setting of natural sublimity of course does more than serve historical commemoration: as in Harriet's *Oedipus*, the wild terrain and turbulent weather are meant to lend action and drama of an irrational kind to the sheer presence of the main actor.

At the same time, however, the wind-blown cloak and broken clouds remain superficial effects laid over an obdurately stable and Classical substructure. Even the perilous slopes and shafts of light arrange themselves in a rigid X-shaped armature which fixes Napoleon firmly in his seat. Soon the republican painter discovered that his deeper moral



1.34 (above) JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID and FRANÇOIS GÉRARD *Aeneas Carrying Anchises From the Ruins of Troy*, late 1790's. Engraving, 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ (24.5 × 15.5)

1.33 (left) ANNE-LOUIS GIRODET *The Deluge*, 1806. Oil on canvas, 14'1 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 11'2 $\frac{1}{4}$ (431 × 341)

and artistic preoccupations were at odds with the Bonapartist vision of public art. By 1802, David had begun work on a major new historical canvas. The subject was Leonidas at Thermopylae, the hero being the leader of that small band of Spartans who held off the entire Persian army at a narrow pass, but at the cost of every Greek soldier. He chose the moment of reflection and preparation before the battle, and continued the pre-Revolutionary line of ancient leaders who sacrificed everything for virtue and the welfare of the community. Napoleon, on seeing the picture in preparation, dismissed the entire idea as a painting of losers. David suspended work on the *Leonidas* for a decade and soon was diverted into the wearying and esthetically thankless task of glorifying the new Emperor's rite of coronation in 1804. The outcome was an overbearing enormous canvas enumerating every dignitary present at the pompous ceremony in Notre-Dame (and though he made a study of the arrogant self-

crowning itself, David ended by shifting his moment away from any suggestion of usurpation to the aftermath when the freshly Imperial Bonaparte turned to crown his consort Josephine).

This was painting as duty, and it was performed as such. It returns to a conception of rhetorical elevation as copious magnificence in the accumulation of ornaments and witnesses to glory. But much Napoleonic painting was conceived without this sort of clear brief. As political legitimacy devolved into the charisma of one man, painters were presented with a qualitatively new situation. Although he was convinced that art mattered, the ruler himself could not be exactly sure of what he wanted until he saw it. His identity and self-image—general to statesman, Consul to Emperor—were continually subject to change. Artists' initiatives were bound to take on a speculative character, and speculation could as easily turn out wrong as right.

Gérard, typically, was first to take advantage of the Consul's known enthusiasm for the *Ossian* poems. These were claimed as the rediscovered epic cycle of an ancient Celtic bard of that name, though they had actually been produced a half-century earlier by the Scottish writer James Macpherson. Because invented to eighteenth-century requirements, true believers could take the Ossianic as more pure and primitive even than the poetry of archaic Greece, and the *primitifs* of David's studio put them on a level with the works of Homer and Hesiod. Even those who doubted the announced provenance of the verse appreciated it precisely for its modernity: its evocations of a dark and primal northern world inhabited by heroes and spirits corresponded to a growing cult of subjectivity and irrationalism. In a painting destined for Bonaparte's country retreat at Malmaison, Gérard makes his Ossian a blind and bereft old man, conjuring from his lyre the memories of lost parents and children, who surround him as ghostly spirits in a moonlit miasma. With the wild setting, eerie nocturnal lighting, and subject matter of fevered imaginings in an elderly survivor, Gérard distilled the developments of the 1790's into a cloudy fantasy unconstrained by Classical logic or structure.

1.31

1.32

Girodet had a good claim to being the most experimental painter in his generation, and his rivalry with Gérard was intense. He seized on the First Consul's decorating plans for Malmaison as a chance to rehabilitate his career as a history painter, seeking at the same time to surpass his old friend and studio-mate in the Ossianic stakes. Not content with replicating the other-worldly setting and mood of the poems, he sought to incorporate Napoleon's contemporary concerns into the invented mythology. In his 1802 painting, French commanders, killed in recent campaigns, arrive in a Valhalla presided over by the blind Celtic bard and packed to the breaking point with ghosts and spirits. The upper zone is dominated by elements of overt allegory after Hennequin (if more suavely handled) in the floating personification of republican liberty and the victory of a Gallic cock over an Austrian eagle. These are only the beginning of a catalog of allegorical correspondences to persons and recent political events, ingeniously conceived but nearly impossible to decipher without the guidance of a detailed inventory. In a further burst of conspicuous invention, Girodet conceived the entire atmosphere and lighting of the scene according to his understanding of electric luminosity, using recent discoveries of science as a spectacularly vivid equivalent to the afterlife.

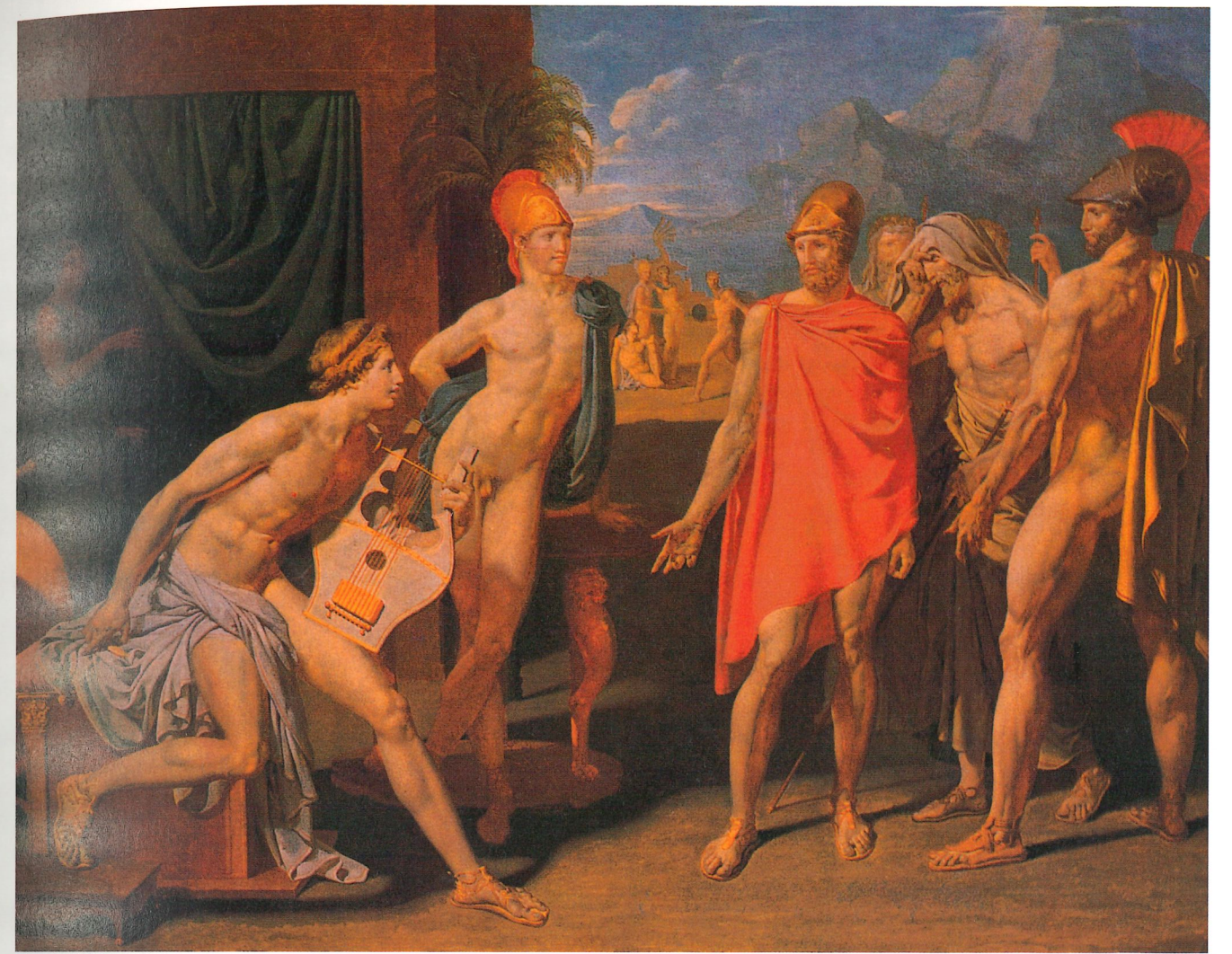
All of Girodet's prodigious natural ability was on show in the painting, which deploys the resources of illusionism to construct a dense tissue of physical impossibilities. The packed accumulation of figures is relieved by a translucent delicacy in their rendering: "figures of crystal," in the words of David, who praised his old pupil's originality to his face,

but dismissed it to others as outlandish and undisciplined. Contemporary evidence suggests that Gérard's more straightforward illustration of strictly Ossianic themes found greater favor both in public and with the First Consul. Two former adherents of the Davidian *primitifs*, the twin brothers Franque, would later adopt the same arrangement as a formula to depict Napoleon himself being beckoned by spirits in a dream to return from Egypt in 1799 and save France by assuming power.

The setback may well have been beneficial to Girodet in that he turned away for a time from political subject matter and from appeals to the ruler's immediate interests. For the Salon of 1806, he prepared an immense *Deluge*, a terrifying emotional drama in a turbulent and darkly primitive world. In contrast to his *Ossian Receiving the Napoleonic Officers into Valhalla*, he reduced the drama to a configuration of elemental simplicity and unmistakable meaning. This subject,



1.35 JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES *Napoleon on the Imperial Throne*, 1806. Oil on canvas, 8'8½" × 63" (265.7 × 160)



1.36 JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES *The Ambassadors of Agamemnon Visiting Achilles*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 43¼ × 61" (109.9 × 154.9)

centered on the burden of a strong young father, struggling to support a parent, a spouse, and a child simultaneously, had become a popular one in the immediately preceding period. Regnault had shown a small canvas on the subject alongside his *Lamentation* in 1789; there the man carries his father on his back and is therefore unable to seize hold of his wife and son as the current sweeps them away. Contemporary viewers were prepared to overlook the curiously sluggish current, and it became one of his most popular works: he eventually painted several replicas to meet demand from collectors. Not for the first time, of course, Girodet took cues from the success of this artist and pushed the same material toward a more extreme and ambitious statement.

Regnault's conception of the scene, in that it stresses the emotion of irretrievable loss, fits within the category of sentimental subjects, and its compact dimensions are those of a cabinet picture. Girodet, by contrast, wanted to maximize

both the drama and the physical impact of terror in a canvas of outsized, aggressively public scale. The size of his figures is grander than life. He stacked them vertically, which corresponds to the perilous fall along the cliff face and allows the canvas to tower over the spectator. So that the scene would conform to the requirements of high drama, he chose a moment when his central male figure has not yet lost his grip on the wife and child. The aged father has become the very embodiment of dead weight, already inert and corpse-like, clutching a futile bag of gold; he exerts monstrous strength from a withered body that seems beyond age. Thanks to this death grip of the past, the frail support of the vital younger generations is about to fail, and all the characters are poised on the brink of oblivion in the rushing torrent.

Consistent with his public ambition, Girodet took advantage of an established Classical prototype—the motif of the Trojan hero Aeneas carrying his father and leading his son

1.34 from the burning ruins of the city, precisely as rendered by Gérard for a series of printed illustrations to Virgil's *Aeneid* in the later 1790's (in which both he and David had also collaborated). But Girodet has reversed the meaning of the motif from one of filial devotion to one of fatal conflict of obligations. If one defines expressive dissonance in any art form in terms of departure from a settled sense of harmony, then this painting is maximally dissonant within the conventions of history painting. The artist has stretched the internal contrast of age and youth virtually to the breaking point—just as the man's arm is being pulled to its limits. The terrified expressions defy every Classical norm of composure, a quality heroic actors had been assumed always to exhibit even in extreme pain. Muscles bulge and tendons strain. An outsized, funereal cloak swirls in a freakish whirlwind.

To compare the *Deluge* to David's conception of the Spartan leader Leonidas is to see how thoroughly Girodet had seized and transformed the conventions of heroic nudity. For David, the hero gathers and contains his strength within himself in order to exert it at will; for Girodet, the hero, such as he remains, is a victim, his strength arrayed as a conduit across which uncontrollable, nonhuman forces exert themselves: among these is the sexual desire which binds him to his mate and to the next generation. The larger community, with its veneration of constraining authority and wealth, is a threat to his survival. But this is less a motif of youthful rebellion than a figure for the finality of human isolation. At this point Girodet had finally set his art against the rationalist, communitarian precepts of his formation in David's circle. This was recognized by conservatives in the fine-arts division of the Institute, the umbrella cultural organization under Napoleon's Empire, who despised the Jacobin associations that still clung to the Classical canon. In a competition to select the best works of art produced during the first decade of Bonapartist rule, the jury preferred the *Deluge* to David's *Sabines*.

DREAMS BEYOND HISTORY

1.35 In the same year that Girodet exhibited the *Deluge*, an artist of the next generation made his own dramatic bid for official favor. Repeating the former's own tactics in 1802, J.-A.-D. Ingres (1780–1867) sought to appeal directly to the self-regard of Napoleon and to distinguish himself from the competition by a conspicuous display of esthetic originality. The painting was *Napoleon on the Imperial Throne* (1806). In its conception, Ingres sought to actualize in esthetic terms the kind of pedigree which David had etched into the rock of the St. Bernard Pass, one extending back through the Emperor Charlemagne and the origins of Frankish kingship to Roman

antiquity. As Bonaparte had clothed his usurpation of absolute power in ancient formalities, so Ingres proceeded to represent his body within pictorial conventions appropriate to ancient times. The painstaking precision of detail, which gives the symbolic accessories a weight equal to the man, was likened at the time to the manner of Flemish "primitives" like the Van Eycks. The hieratic frontal pose is arranged in the manner of Byzantine and early medieval ivory carvings of quasi-divine rulers. The Emperor's face is mask-like and displays a waxen pallor; the figure as a whole is imprisoned within a rigid geometry that finds its ultimate point of reference in ancient renderings of the colossal statue of Zeus, sculpted by Phidias from gold and ivory as the cult image at Olympia.

Ingres had been a pupil in David's studio during the late 1790's. His winning Rome Prize painting of 1801, *The Ambassadors of Agamemnon Visiting Achilles*, had displayed a striking command of the rhetorical distinctions basic to the Davidian project. At the beginning of the epic, the greatest warrior among the Greek army at Troy withdrew from the war after a petty argument with his commander. Both Achilles and his companion Patroclus display the languidly ephebic grace appropriate to noble bodies that have withdrawn from the fray and are therefore free to manifest the homoerotic attraction that binds them in comradeship. Patroclus, the transitional figure and the first to reenter the battle, playfully sports the helmet of Achilles, an anticipation of the disguise that will lead to his death at Hector's hands. The entreating warriors, driven by the Trojan forces to the very brink of defeat, display the hardened musculature and indented contours of bodies marked in strife. Such competition paintings had to be completed in a matter of weeks with no models or preparatory drawings permitted in the cell-like individual studios. As a consequence, few could stand up to exacting judgment; but Ingres's entry achieved a deservedly high reputation. Not only did it contend successfully with the authority of Flaxman's Homeric engravings, the English artist himself saw and praised the result.

By the middle of the decade, Ingres had extended the rhetorical conception of form in a new direction: over the repertoire of body types derived from antique models, he imposed a set of distinctions derived from the historical change in artistic styles over time, including nonclassical ones. According to this logic, if one were treating subject matter from a particular period or evoking ideas associated with it, one would adopt the manner of its art. The pastiche of styles in his enthroned Napoleon was a demonstration of this approach. It did not find immediate favor, earning the young Ingres a stubborn reputation as an eccentric medieval revivalist. Bonaparte's negative reaction completed the parallel with Girodet in 1802: the Emperor found the naked

1.37 JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES
Jupiter and Thetis, 1811. Oil on canvas,
11'4³/₈ × 8'5¹/₄ (347 × 257.2)



archaism of his claim on power embarrassing when projected with such scrupulous fidelity by the powers of art.

1.36 Conveniently this setback coincided with the reopening of the French Academy in Rome, and Ingres was able belatedly to take up the scholarship he had won five years before (and he contrived to remain in Italy for the next fifteen years). His first painting of the nude, to be sent back for inspection in Paris, extracted the Classical prototype from beneath the Bonapartist trappings and expanded it into an overwhelming totem of masculine power. The subject matter of his *Jupiter and Thetis* (1811) concerns the divine intervention that lay behind the desperate entreaties of the Greek warriors to the reluctant Achilles. The latter's divine mother is shown supplicating the chief of the gods to strengthen the Trojans and teach the Greeks a lesson for Agamemnon's high-handed mistreatment of her son. The jealous Juno looks on and plots her revenge.

The common source in the Olympian Zeus makes a pair of Ingres's enthroned Napoleon and his Jupiter. They illustrate

the double-sidedness of artists' subservience to an absolute authority. The dependent adoration of a dominant political figure easily transmutes itself into a personal fantasy of power and domination, and both are equally aspects of isolation and vulnerability. In this case, as so often, that domination is exercised over a woman, a diminutive figure who is turned into an impossibly sinuous and compliant emblem of submission. Ingres's imagination of untrameled strength, encouraged by the cult of the First Consul/Emperor, helped remove the rational constraints on the linear Classicism of the period. Because its approach to the human figure devalued inner substance in favor of pliable outline, it offered little resistance to the compulsions of private desires. The emphasis on silhouette in the figure of Thetis differs markedly from that achieved by Charpentier in her figure of Melancholy, in that it is not a product of the signifying structure of the painting as a whole; rather it proceeds from exaggeration and distortion, and the suppression of internal anatomy is just that, a

diminishing of the body's structural resistance to the artist's command.

- 1.2 Certainly Ingres's personal expansion of pictorial rhetoric into self-conscious archaism was an ingenious extension of the practises within which his education had taken place. But historical circumstances were such that, in contrast with David's sharpening of Classical rhetoric in the *Horatii*, it did not trigger a new collective dialog. Nor could any painter have accomplished this. As individual artists became more detached and competitive, career patterns began to show the strains of maintaining an entire tradition by means of the frail emotional and intellectual resources of any single individual. Girodet's technical innovations in the *Endymion* 1.13 had probably had the greatest individual impact on the art of the next decade, but his own art veered erratically and unpredictably between styles and themes. The baffled responses of his audience left him feeling bitter and misunderstood. Ingres, on the other hand, dealt with the erosion of community and stable benchmarks of Classical practise by refusing the very principle of development and change. He would obsessively return to favorite motifs and compositions, seizing any opportunity to try out small refinements in replicas and repetitions in other media. In one famous instance of this, he inserted the torso and head of

his anonymous nude study of 1808, the so-called *Valpinçon Bather*, almost without alteration into the midst of his crowded *Turkish Bath*, painted more than fifty years later, by which time the context from which it took its meaning had changed enormously. 1.38

Girodet and Ingres were among the most committed Classicists of the early Empire, yet the art of both remains remarkable for its highly subjective and idiosyncratic character, its insistent revelation of the irreducible creative personality. That these are traits which have come to define Romanticism in art should be enough to underscore the point that the greater part of the Romantic legacy was in fact engendered within the project of later Classicism by artists who were determined to remain faithful to its traditions, indeed, who could not imagine a serious art outside of those traditions. Both artists cultivated an exactingly polished technique in finishing the surfaces of their paintings, building up glazes so as to banish as far as possible individual gestural imprints in the paint. A "licked" finish would become one of the clichés of conformist academicism later in the century, but in the cases of its two originators, their obsessiveness with a sealed surface reads as a holding action, a determined imposition of an impersonal discipline over the involuntary exposure of the self.



1.38 JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES *The Turkish Bath*, 1862.
Oil on canvas, diameter 42½ (108)

· 2 · CLASSICISM IN CRISIS: GROS TO DELACROIX

THOMAS CROW

FORCE OF ARMS

THE ROMANTIC STYLE IN THE USUAL SENSE OF THE term—energetic brushwork, linear order giving way to the impact of color, elevation of contemporary and exotic subject matter to epic intensity—arrived in the first decade of the nineteenth century. But it was as much a product of the translations and distortions of the Classical inheritance as was the art of Girodet and Ingres. Its chief innovator, Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), was likewise a student of David and loyal to Davidian values all of his life. The most distinctive achievements of his career were attained against that loyalty under the pressure of political contingencies.

In age Gros fits between Girodet and Ingres, and this had a decisive impact on his formation. Girodet had been among the last of the Old-Régime students to have at least the better part of the normal period of training in Rome. Ingres was able belatedly to enjoy his after the French Empire had consolidated control of Italy. Gros's time came just at the point when Rome was closed to the French in 1793. He did manage to travel to Italy, spending time in Florence and in Genoa while those cities remained friendly territory (in the latter, he spent time with a weary Girodet recuperating on his long journey back to France). There was plenty to see and absorb, but he was denied the crucial opportunity to hone his drawing in a supportive institutional environment amid the monuments of Rome. In order to remain safely in Italian territory for as long as he did he needed protection, and the Bonaparte brothers looked after him; for a time in the late 1790's, he held a noncombatant's post with the army that left him ample time to practise his art (from this Gros has latterly acquired an exaggerated reputation as a soldier-artist).

That myth of Gros's early life would, however, have followed naturally from the painting with which he estab-

lished his reputation on returning to Paris in 1801. The new Consulate decided to undertake a program of large-scale painting glorifying the successes of the French army and to that end proposed a competition in 1801 for paintings to commemorate the victory of a small party of 500 French against massed Arab cavalry numbering 6000 at the Battle of Nazareth two years before. Gros's sketch, to the consternation 2.1 of many critics, took the prize. What they could not grasp was the absence of a clear center to the composition and to the depicted action. General Junot himself is well to the rear, shown in individual combat with a Mameluke horseman rather than in overall command of the operation. The entire composition is made up of such vignettes, the unifying principle of the painting coming from strong notes of color repeated at intervals and rhythmic interlacing of the episodes achieved through surface handling of the paint.

The absence of a more solid underlying structure was not simply Gros's choice; it proceeded in part from the government's lacking any precise account of the battle. In place of a coherent verbal overview, it provided some anecdotes of individual acts of bravery, more often by common soldiers than by officers. This sort of record conformed to a mode of celebrating French victories that had persisted from the more democratic phase of the Revolution: the success of republican arms was attributed to the commitment of the citizen soldier fighting out of patriotic devotion rather than coercion or greed. Within this propagandistic mode, Junot's valor would be equal to that of the anonymous soldiers in the foreground, and so Gros faithfully rendered it. He augmented these with two scenes of his own invention designed to proclaim a basic humanity and idealism underlying the French adventures abroad: a vignette of Arabs about to decapitate a helpless European was contrasted to one of a French soldier protecting a surrendering captive from being shot.