

JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID



Self Portrait 1794

Jacques-Louis David (1748 – 1825) was the greatest painter of the Neo classical movement. Through him this austere and academic style became the official art of first the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic Empire. He became closely involved in revolutionary politics, for a time acting as virtual dictator of the arts and for two decades supervising the training of generations of painters.

His embroilment in political affairs also put him at risk - he almost lost his life on the guillotine - and he died in Brussels aged 77, exiled and neglected.

The highly theoretical and intellectual nature of his art could occasionally lead to an arid and mechanical theatricality, but at its best resulted in the most moving statements of nobility of spirit and republican virtue.

Mademoiselle Guimard as Terpsichore 1774-5

An early work painted in the Rococo style.



Boucher,

Diana Leaving the Bath, 1742

When his father was killed in a duel his mother sent him to be brought up by two uncles who were architects. He expressed a wish to be a painter, rather than an architect, so he was sent to Boucher, who was a distant cousin and exponent of the prevalent Rococo style.

Boucher, however, recommended him to his friend Joseph-Marie Vien (1716-1809) a painter who embraced the classical reaction to Rococo.



Vien, Two Women Bathing 1763



The Combat of Mars and Minerva 1771

His first submission to win the Prix de Rome. which was unsuccessful. It displays many Rococo elements which he was later to relinquish, and he was in fact, years later, to repudiate the work.

After his second unsuccessful attempt he tried to starve himself to death.

The Prix de Rome was the most important award an art student could win. It entitled him to four years at the French Academy in Rome, and was the stepping stone to the highest academic distinction.

***Erasistratus Discovering the Cause of Antiochus' Disease* 1774**

In 1774 he finally found success with *Erasistratus Discovering the Cause of Antiochus' Disease*, a history painting on a subject set by the jury, depicting an episode from Plutarch's Lives in which Greek court physician Erasistratus diagnoses the illness of Antiochus, the son of Seleucus I, as lovesickness for his stepmother Stratonice.



***Hector's Body* 1778**

Usually thought of as the founder of the Neo Classical school in France, his art, like his character, was complicated by romantic tendencies. He was essentially a man of feeling and spontaneous passion, but wanted to be man of ideas and, in his painting an interpreter of ideologies.

Anton von Maron (1733-1808) *Portrait of Johann Joachim Winckelmann*

Often called "the father of archaeology" Winckelmann (1717 – 1768) was a German art historian and archaeologist. He was a pioneering Hellenist who first articulated the difference between Greek, Greco-Roman and Roman art.

"The prophet and founding hero of modern archaeology", Winckelmann was one of the founders of scientific archaeology and the first to apply the categories of style on a large, systematic basis to the history of art.



Many consider him the father of the discipline of art history, and the decisive influence on the rise of the neoclassical movement during the late 18th century. His writings influenced not only a new science of archaeology and art history but Western painting, sculpture, literature and even philosophy.

Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* (1764) was one of the first books written in German to become a classic of European literature.

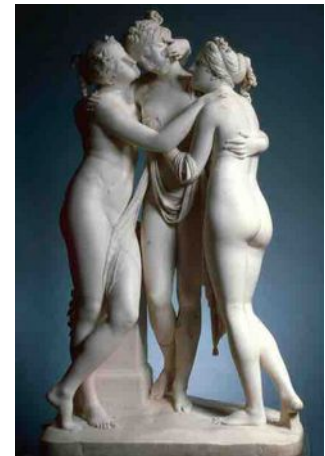
Eighteenth century French Rococo art had lost favour with philosophers like Denis Diderot, being associated with the frivolous aristocracy, its debased taste, its artifice and amorality. Diderot called for art to be responsible, to educate and uplift the public and for paintings to embody a '*grande idea*.' The French philosophers and Neo-Classical theorists looked back on the distant past as a Golden Age. Republican Rome was, misguidedly, considered a model of order, justice and morality, inhabited by virtuous citizens. Their art was thought to be a noble expression of their society, which was to be an inspiration for the future.



Canova, Hebe 1800-05

The Italian sculptor, Antonio Canova (1757-1822), is often regarded as one of the greatest of the Neoclassical artists.

He was much admired by English Aristocracy, and his *Three Graces* was commissioned by John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford and installed in Woburn Abbey.



Canova, The Three Graces 1814-17



Jean-Baptiste van Loo, The Triumph of Galatea, 1720

Examples of Rococo and Neo Classical painting, contrasting the treatment of figures, drapery, detail and background setting in subjects similarly derived from classical Greek and Roman mythology.



Kauffman, Venus Induces Helen to Fall in Love with Paris, 1790



The House of the mysteries, Pompeii

1775 -80 He was in Rome, with his master, Joseph Marie Vien, who encouraged him to change his style to Classicism.

His stay in Rome had a profound effect on him and his work underwent a major change from essentially Rococo (characterised by elegance and grace) to a more austere, sculptural Neo-Classical style.

He visited Pompeii and Herculaneum and was overwhelmed by the beauty of the wall paintings, characterised by clean outlines, plain backgrounds and frieze-like arrangement of the figures.

David, Oath of the Horatii 1784

The Oath of the Horatii is considered a paragon of neoclassical art. It immediately became a huge success with critics and the public, and remains one of the best known paintings in the Neoclassical style, which conveys a message of public duty overcoming private feeling.



The painting (3¼ metres by 4¼ metres, Louvres) depicts a scene from a Roman legend about a dispute between two warring cities, Rome and Alba Longa, and stresses the importance of patriotism and masculine self-sacrifice for one's country. Instead of the two cities sending their armies to war, they agree to choose three men from each city; the victor in that fight will be the victorious city. From Rome, three brothers from a Roman family, the Horatii, agree to end the war by fighting three brothers from a family of Alba Longa, the Curiatii. The three brothers, all of whom appear willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of Rome, are shown saluting their father who holds their swords out for them. Of the three Horatii brothers, only one shall survive. However, it is the surviving brother who is able to kill the other three fighters from Alba Longa: he allows the three fighters to chase him, causing them to separate from each other, and then, in turn, kills each Curiatii brother. Aside from the three brothers David depicts their mother and sisters. In the bottom right corner is Camilla crying. She is also betrothed to one of the Curiatii fighters, and thus she weeps in the realisation that, whatever the outcome, she will lose someone she loves.

The painting increased David's fame, allowing him to take on his own students.



The Death of Socrates 1787

The Death of Socrates focuses on a classical subject like many of his works from that decade, in this case the story of the execution of Socrates as told by Plato in his *Phaedo*. In this story, Socrates has been convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens and introducing strange gods, and has been sentenced to die by drinking poison hemlock. Socrates uses his death as a final lesson for his pupils rather than fleeing when the opportunity arises, and faces it calmly.

Although he could have escaped the death penalty by demonstrating the fallacy of the charge, as his followers urged, he declined, saying that the law must be followed. Thus, in the eyes of David and his fellow Republicans, demonstrating that the state is more important than the individual.



The Oath in the Tennis Court 1793

Studies for an unrealised painting. They show the rigorous preliminary studies he made for his paintings. The figures are drawn in the nude from artists' models to ascertain the stance, positions of the limbs and the muscles before clothing them, and the heads are worked up in paint for the portraits of the actual protagonists.

On 20 June 1789, the members of the French Third Estate, who had begun to call themselves the National Assembly, took the Tennis Court Oath, vowing "not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established". It was a pivotal event in the French Revolution.

Revolution

David was elated by the revolution and a passionate supporter of Robespierre and the far left Jacobin

club. He joined the National Convention. The National Convention was the first government of the French Revolution, created after the great insurrection of 10 August 1792, it was the first French government organised as a republic, abandoning the monarchy altogether.

As a member of the Convention he became in effect dictator for the arts and oversaw the dissolution of the French Academy, which was backward looking and largely comprised of Royalists, and replaced it with the Popular and Republican Society of the Arts. He organised and designed festivals celebrating the new Republic. Charlotte was a royalist and his extreme views put strains on his marriage and they divorced in 1794.

The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons 1789

On a canvas of 146 square feet (323 cm × 422 cm), this painting was first exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1789. The subject is the Roman leader Lucius Junius Brutus, founder of the Roman Republic, contemplating the fate of his sons. They had conspired to overthrow the republic and restore the monarchy, and Brutus himself was compelled to order their deaths. In doing so, Brutus became the heroic defender of the republic, at the cost of his own family. The painting was a bold allegory of civic virtue with immense resonance for the growing cause of republicanism.

Its themes of virtue, sacrifice, and devotion to the nation sparked much controversy when it was unveiled in the politically charged era of the French Revolution.



Brutus sits on a klismos on the left, alone and brooding, his face lost in shadow; to the right, his wife holds their two horrified daughters, while a servant on the far right quakes in anguish. Note Brutus' tense crossed feet, the scissors that lie in the workbasket in the centre of the painting, and the use of light and dark to draw a distinction between Brutus and his wife. Brutus does not look back as his headless sons, illuminated by a shaft of light from the open door, are brought into the room.

David laboured over the painting for more than two years before he considered it complete.

Marie Antoinette On The Way To The Guillotine 1793

David, along with Robespierre and other members of the convention, voted for the execution of the king. This sketch was made from David's window as Marie Antoinette was on her way to her execution, nine months after the execution of her husband. She is shown as plainly dressed and dignified, although not permitted to wear a wig to cover her close cropped hair. She was thirty eight years old.



The Death of Marat 1793

Painted in the months after Marat's murder, this is one of the most famous images of the French Revolution. David was the leading French painter, as well as a Montagnard (the radical faction ascendant in French politics during the Reign of Terror) and a member of the revolutionary Committee of General Security. The painting shows the radical journalist lying dead in his bath on July 13, 1793 after his murder by Charlotte Corday.



Marat suffered from a skin condition that caused him to spend much of his time in his bathtub; he would often work there. Corday fatally stabbed Marat, but she did not attempt to flee. She was later tried and executed for the murder.

Marat's figure is idealised. For example his skin appears clean and unblemished. David, however, drew other details from his visit to Marat's residence the day before the assassination: the green rug, the papers, and the pen. David promised his peers in the National Convention that he would later depict their murdered friend as 'writing for the good of the people'. The Death of Marat is designed to commemorate a personable hero. Charlotte Corday's name can be seen on the paper held in Marat's left hand, she herself is not visible.

Realistic as it is in its details, the painting is a methodical construction focusing on the victim, a striking set up regarded today by several critics as an "awful beautiful lie"— certainly not a photograph in the forensic scientific sense and barely the simple image it may seem - for instance, in the painting, the knife is not to be seen where Corday had left it impaled in Marat's chest, but on the ground, beside the bathtub.



The Death of Marat has often been compared to Michelangelo's *Pietà*. Note the elongated arm hanging down in both works.

After the King's execution, which David along with the Convention, had voted for, war broke out between the new Republic and virtually every major power in Europe. David, as a member of the Committee of General Security, contributed directly to the Reign of Terror. David organised his last festival: the festival of the Supreme Being. Robespierre had realised what a tremendous propaganda tool these festivals were, and he decided to create a new religion, mixing moral ideas with the Republic and based on the ideas of Rousseau.

Although the Convention lasted until 1795, power was effectively stripped from the elected deputies and concentrated in the small Committee of Public Safety from April 1793. The eight months from the autumn of 1793 to the spring of 1794, when Maximilien Robespierre and his allies dominated the Committee of Public Safety, represent the most radical and bloodiest phase of the French Revolution, known as the Reign of Terror.

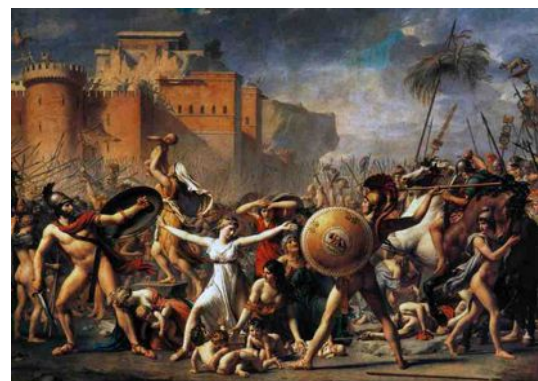


View Of The Garden Of The Luxembourg Palace 1794

In 1794, after the fall and execution of Robespierre, which brought the Reign of Terror to an end, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Luxembourg for six months. He only escaped execution only by adopting a more moderate stance, and on the intervention of his divorced wife. He was restored to favour and they remarried in 1796.

The Intervention of the Sabine Women 1799

He began planning this work, in which he attempted to develop a purely 'Greek' style, while he was imprisoned in the Luxembourg Palace in 1795, as a supporter of Robespierre. France was at war with other European nations after a period of civil conflict culminating in the



Reign of Terror. The picture represents the Sabine women interposing themselves to separate the Romans and Sabines.

Work on the painting commenced in 1796, after his estranged wife visited him in jail. He conceived the idea of telling the story, to honour his wife, with the theme being love prevailing over conflict. The painting was also seen as a plea for the people to reunite after the bloodshed of the revolution. Its realisation took him nearly four years.

After the foundation of Rome there were insufficient women to maintain the future population. Romulus and his fellow men abducted some unmarried women from their neighbouring Sabine tribe (known as the *Rape of the Sabine Women* the episode is another favourite theme of artists). When later the Sabines made war on Rome to regain their women the women themselves, now married with children, intervened between the warring parties and pleaded for peace. The episode has been treated and parodied in many forms in literature and the arts, and adapted for the musical *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.

The painting depicts Romulus's wife Hersilia – the daughter of Titus Tatius, leader of the Sabines – rushing between her husband and her father and placing her babies between them. A vigorous Romulus prepares to strike a half-retreating Tatius with his spear, but hesitates.

After the fall of Robespierre, the Convention lasted for another year until a new constitution was written, ushering in the French Directory.

The French Directory was a five member committee which replaced the Committee of Public Safety and the Convention, and ruled for four years until overthrown in a coup by Napoleon. Understanding the great power of the public image, he made David his official painter.



The Coronation of Napoleon 1806

David became the official painter of Napoleon, who commissioned him to depict his coronation at Notre-Dame de Paris. The painting has imposing dimensions, being almost 10 metres (33 ft) wide by a little over 6 metres (20 ft) tall. The work is held in the Louvre in Paris.

The composition is organised around several axes, and incorporates the rules of neoclassicism. One axis passes

through the cross with a vertical orientation. A diagonal line runs from the pope to the empress. All eyes are turned towards Napoleon, who is the centre of the composition, as he seizes the crown from the Bishop and places it on his head himself.

Napoleon at the Saint-Bernard Pass 1801

The title given to the five versions of an equestrian portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte painted David between 1801 and 1805. Initially commissioned by Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, who had been installed as the King of Spain in 1808. The composition shows a strongly idealised view of the real crossing that Napoleon and his army made across the Alps through the Great St. Bernard Pass in May 1800.



In reality the crossing had been made in fine weather and Bonaparte had been led across by a guide a few days after the troops, mounted on a mule. However, from the outset the painting was first and foremost propaganda, and Bonaparte asked David to portray him "calm, mounted on a fiery steed", and it is probable that he also suggested the addition of the names of the other great generals who had led their forces across the Alps: Hannibal and Charlemagne.

On accepting the commission for the Alpine scene, it appears that David expected that he would be sitting for the study, but Bonaparte refused point blank, not only on the basis that he disliked sitting but also because he believed that the painting should be a representation of his character rather than his physical appearance:

– Sit? For what good? Do you think that the great men of Antiquity for whom we have images sat?

– But Citizen First Consul, I am painting you for your century, for the men who have seen you, who know you, they will want to find a resemblance.

– A resemblance? It isn't the exactness of the features, a wart on the nose which gives the resemblance. It is the character that dictates what must be painted...Nobody knows if the portraits of the great men resemble them, it is enough that their genius lives there.

On learning of the request, Bonaparte instructed David to produce three further versions. A fifth version was produced by David and remained in his various workshops until his death.



The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries 1812

Bonaparte refused to sit for portraits. He had sat for Gros in 1796 on the insistence of Josaphine, but Gros had complained that he had not had enough time for the sitting to be of benefit. David had also managed to persuade him to sit for a portrait in 1798, but the three hours that the fidgety and impatient Bonaparte had granted him did not give him sufficient time to produce a decent likeness.

Gros, Capitulation of Madrid 1805

Although in the role of 'official' painter, making portraits of the Napoleonic 'court', and recording the events of the regime, it was David's old pupil, Antoine-Jean Gros (1771 – 1835), who appealed more to Napoleon himself. Although David had welcomed with enthusiasm Napoleon's reign he eventually became disillusioned with his hero, and disapproved of his looting of Italian Art treasures.



Madame Récamier 1800

This is an 1800 portrait of the Parisian socialite Juliette Récamier showing her in the height of Neoclassical fashion, reclining on an Directoire style sofa in a simple Empire line dress with almost bare arms, and short hair "à la Titus". It was begun in May 1800 but thought to be left unfinished when David learned that François Gérard (1770 – 1837, and best remembered for his portraits) had

been commissioned before him to paint a portrait of the same model; on the other hand many of David's portraits have the same bare background. The pose of a reclining figure looking back over her shoulder was later adopted in 1814 by Ingres for his *Grande Odalisque*.



Suzanne Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau 1804

Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, most commonly known as the Abbé Sieyès, was a French Roman Catholic abbé, clergyman and political writer. He was one of the chief political theorists of the French Revolution, and also played a prominent role in the French Consulate and First French Empire.



Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès 1817



Cupid and Psyche 1817

Produced during David's exile in Brussels for the patron and collector Gian Battista Sommariva. *Cupid and Psyche*, on its first exhibition at the museum in Brussels, surprised viewers with its realist treatment of the figure of Cupid.

As Romanticism (Delacroix and Géricault in France, Goya and Turner in Spain and England) gained in popularity David's style was thought to be increasingly outdated and his art went into decline.



Mars Being Disarmed by Venus and the Three Graces 1824

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 David fled to Switzerland and then, after the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, into permanent exile in Brussels.

This is his last great work. He began it in 1822 (aged 73) during his exile in Brussels and completed it three years later, before dying in an accident in 1825. He sent it to an exhibition in Paris from his exile, knowing that by then Romanticism was ascendant in the Salon.

At over 3m (10 ft) high it is an imposing work. Set before a temple floating in the clouds, Venus the goddess of love and her followers, the three Graces and Cupid, are shown taking away the weapons, helmet, shield and armour of Mars the god of war.

He allows himself to be disarmed and gives in to Venus's charms. Most of David's models for it were figures involved in the Théâtre de la Monnaie: Venus was modelled by the actress Marie Lesueur, Cupid by Lucien Petipa, Mars by a subscriber or 'abonné', and one of the Graces by the Prince of Orange's mistress.

Romanticism, and later Realism, were in the ascendancy, and these late works may be seen as the somewhat outmoded productions of an embattled artist, clinging to the past; and, ironically perhaps contain an echo of the irrelevance and, for all the seriousness of the compositions, the decadence that characterised the Rococo artists of his youth.

