

Genre Scenes on the Eve of the French Revolution and during the Empire

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Since the seventeenth century, Northern European painters had enjoyed a universal reputation in this genre through their capacity for evocation and the precise, delicate nature of their workmanship : in the eighteenth century they were to become the essential reference for later artists. Antoine Valedau therefore was equally interested in collecting works by both seventeenth-century Northern European painters – Berchem, Gerrit Dou or Ter Boch – and those by minor contemporary artists – Taunay, Swebach or Demarne – thus highlighting the relations linking the two schools. With their pleasing subject matter and smooth, careful style of painting, these artists were able to win over a bourgeois clientele and enjoy great success up to the Restoration ; they were now worthy to be featured alongside the most promising painters of the time in the depiction of the Parisian art scene compiled in 1799 by Louis Léopold Boilly (1761-1845) in the *Gathering of Artists in Isabey's Studio*.

Room
Demarne

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Neoclassicism

Nicolas Antoine Taunay (1755-1830)

The son of a chemist and enameller at the Sèvres Manufactory, Taunay was trained in history painting with Brenet and Casanova. A friend of Demarne, he lived in Italy as a pensionnaire of the king (1784-87). Partial to the Italian bambocciate, he drew his inspiration as much from the seventeenth-century Italian picturesque genre as from the colourism of Teniers. With harmonious shades of brown, his figures form closely-knit groups on a ground (architecture or sky) that make his chromatic palette quiver in a charming evocation of Flemish rural scenes.

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Jean Louis Demarne (1752-1829)

In the course of his long and prolific career, Demarne was to tackle many genres of landscape. In the most classical tradition, he produced mythological landscapes bathed in bright light with an orderly composition in the manner of Poussin (1594-1665). Yet his speciality was a naturalist, picturesque manner inspired by the Dutch landscape painters : atmospheric effects build up the background perspective and his meticulous style depicts a scene tinged with realism. Indeed, more than real landscapes he depicts nature recomposed, as much as a slice of daily life.

Jacques François Swebach, known as Desfontaines (1769-1823)

Like Taunay and Demarne, Swebach, also known as a painter of battle scenes, developed a miniaturist style in these small-format works in which his long experience as painter at the Sèvres Manufactory is apparent. In his portrayals of aristocratic, elegant society, he reproduces with topographic precision the plain of Longchamp* or the atmosphere of streets in Paris. And, as a loyal heir to Henri de Valenciennes (1750-1819), he makes the air resound with his deep perspectives.

Antoine Berjon (1754-1843), a Painter of Flowers

With the vogue for the precise painting of the Northern schools, the genre of still life enjoyed huge popularity during the Empire and the Restoration. Like the Danish artist Jensen* (1800-1856), a painter of porcelain, Berjon* from Lyon took up the Dutch tradition of the painters of flowers. To the herbalist's precision of these paintings he brings a pictorial delight in refined colourings, which is not unlike the style of Chardin (1699-1779).