

# Landscapes in the Early Nineteenth-Century

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Himself an eminent landscape painter, François-Xavier Fabre brought together a unique ensemble of works, mainly painted in Italy by his contemporaries – whether French or from Northern Europe. Emblematic of the revival of landscape painting, this set forms one of the treasures of his collection. The spirit of the Enlightenment fostered by Diderot had fundamentally challenged the hierarchy of genres, yet the greatest reform was to come from the painter Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (1750-1819). In 1800 he published a decisive work, *Eléments de perspective pratique à l'usage des artistes*, which promoted his conception of landscape painting and made composition directly on location an essential stage in the training of the novice landscape painter: in this way, the artist had to capture an atmosphere or a portion of landscape that was not a work in itself, but which would be reused in the studio to compose the final oeuvre worthy of display. In fact, the painting he exhibited was inspired by noble, heroic subjects in which study from life is perceptible (fig.1), but which also seeks to transpose the virtuous qualities of Neoclassical history painting to the art of landscapes. This experimentation proved decisive for a whole generation of young artists in Italy at the time who were avid for stylistic nobility and truth.



fig.1- Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes  
*Study of the Sky at Quirinal*  
Paris, Musée du Louvre  
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Room  
Gauffier

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Neoclassicism

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## Tuscany, a New Artistic Hub

Ill at ease with history painting, Louis Gauffier (1762-1801) became interested in landscape painting from a very early stage. Overtaken by the Revolution, he took shelter in Florence along with a number of his contemporaries – Fabre, Boguet, Castellan – attracted by the rich cosmopolitan clientele living in Tuscany. All enamoured of the idea of liberty, they enthused over the wild natural and romantic landscapes found around the Abbey of Vallombrosa. They recorded their impressions in pen and ink or graphite drawings and these formed the basis of more ambitious future compositions. The pictures offered here by Gauffier go beyond simple sketchy studies to convey a panoramic vision that retains great freshness of inspiration. It is in the sublime dimension issuing from these grandiose landscapes that he draws the range of their historical composition.

## Rome and the Classical Legacy

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Eternal City remained a hub for artists from all over Europe, drawn by the grandeur of the vestiges of antiquity and the beauty of the Latium countryside, an inexhaustible source of inspiration since the seventeenth century. They also came to seek the models of Poussin, Claude Lorrain or Dughet. The figure of Hackert (1737-1807) dominated the German community. The *Park of Ariccia*\* provides a remarkable example of topographical precision and poetic idealization. His fellow countryman, Reinhardt (1761-1848), tends more towards a heroic vision of landscape peopled by nature in a more picturesque and tumultuous form. Exponents of Northern European trends, Voogdt (1768-1839) and Verstappen (1773-1853) were followers of the open-air study, yet the peaceful picturesque quality of the genre scenes of artists like Berchem or Swanevelt, and the luminism of Claude Lorrain showed through in their works. And it was for a Russian clientele that Matveiev (1758-1826) painted his “souvenir pictures” whose analytical treatment recalled Hackert. As for French artists, while some like Denis (1755-1812) or Chauvin (1774-1832) favoured a descriptive style of painting with the kind of rustic realism that attracted clients hungry for Italian images, their forte remained the genre of historical landscapes inherited from Poussin and the Bolognese painters. One of the main exponents was Boguet (1755-1839) – along with Michallon (1796-1822) – who dominated the Italian landscape at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their interpretation of a mythological subject set in an idealized Italian rural scene is as much the product of seventeenth-century classicism as the fruit of their experience on location.