

The Persistence of Neoclassicism

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Borne along by the Revolution and Empire, the formal rigour of Neoclassicism had been the embodiment of the official art of Napoleon's reign in David's coterie. A whole generation of artists had trained in the master's studio, conveying a rational aesthetic that was gradually to fall into abeyance under the attack of Romantic modernity. Prud'hon (1758-1823) and Girodet (1767-1824) had already moved away from mythological and virtuous subjects to tackle an art tinged with strangeness. While Romanticism emerged from a desire to break with academic canons, the persistence of classicism as embodied by Ingres was due to his teaching that continued within the official institutions.

The former Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was renovated in 1796 as the "Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts" (National School of Fine Arts). Having been in turn "Royal", "Imperial" or again "National" depending on the political upheavals of the time, this institution formed the cornerstone of artistic education throughout the nineteenth century. After all, the strict academic tenets based upon the practice of drawing offered a set of artistic formulae that were easy to teach. Moreover, despite the amount of criticism it received, the set course that went from being accepted at the School to the consecration of the Prix de Rome was a system of reference recognised by all.

The Salon, "a periodic exhibition of living artists" was the only place that the artists could gain exposure, along with official orders for public buildings and works purchased by the State in these very Salons and placed in museums. A panel made up only of members of the Academy of Fine Arts drew up a list of works suitable for display – while the criteria for selection stipulated the respect of academic rules, the panel was not so rigorous. Yet artists as important as Delacroix (1798-1863) or Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867) would be censured by this institution.

Room Ingres and the Ecole des Beaux-arts

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Romanticism and Classicism

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Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) and Ingrism

Ingres is often thought of as the last exponent of Neoclassicism, as opposed to Delacroix's Romantic modernity. Loyal to the manner of David (1748-1825) under whom he trained, Ingres would remain true to the same smooth and refined style throughout his life. Marked by his master's classicism, he discovered the art of the Renaissance and of Raphael in Italy when he won the *Prix de Rome*. While he had known every official honour and may be considered the advocate of an outmoded academism, the formal rigour of his painting and his quest for an absolute aesthetic would have repercussions far beyond his century, paving the way for artists who – from Matisse to Picasso – would take inspiration from his work.

The two studies* held by the Musée Fabre bear witness to Ingres's desire to compete with the great decorators of the past. The *Apotheosis of Homer* (fig.1) met with a feverish reception at the 1827 Salon where Romanticism was the prevailing taste and brought huge fame to the artist. The venue of the painting – a ceiling in the Louvre – and its subject – the glory of the illustrious poet of antiquity – were a powerful indication of the painter's ambitions. *Jesus Among the Doctors* (1842-62) (fig.2) is the product of a slow process of maturing and reveals a refined reflection on religious painting that is tinged with humanism. Purchased by Alfred Bruyas who wished to add this artist to his collection, these two paintings are composed of fragments brought together by Ingres towards the end of his life to satisfy a large clientele of art lovers.

Painted one year before his death, *Antiochus and Stratonice** is a reinterpretation of a youthful commission from 1834, the year before he left for Rome (fig.3). The repertory of



fig.1- Auguste Dominique Ingres
Apotheosis of Homer
Paris, Musée du Louvre
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fig.2- Auguste Dominique Ingres
Jesus Among the Doctors
Montauban, Musée Ingres
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English translation by Susan Schneider

* An asterisk indicates that the work mentioned is displayed in the room

archaeological objects and the arrangement of the figures in a frieze testify to the artist's admiration for Greek art, which he seeks to transcend through the luminous brightness of the scene and an extreme stylisation of forms.

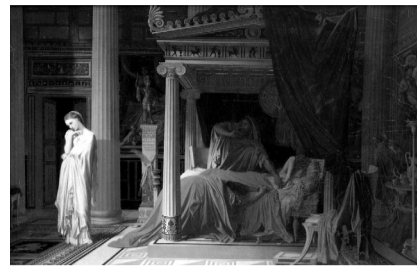


fig.3- Auguste Dominique Ingres
Antiochus et Stratonice
Chantilly, Musée Condé
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The Development of Academism

While Ingres actually had few pupils despite his fame, his artistic formulae were nonetheless diffused by his many disciples and admirers. Henri Lehmann* (1814-1882) was one of the happy few who trained with the master and would retain an orthodox Ingrism ; his was a strange, mellow art with Byzantine influences, and his fondness for the working drawing (*épure*) led him to forms of a simplicity, even primitivism, close to the English Pre-Raphaelites or the German Nazarenes.

Rather than Ingres himself, it was the artists who adopted his aesthetic requirements and trained in studios capable of passing on his artistic teaching who propagated the Ingresque model. One of them, François-Edouard Picot (1786-1868), was to play a particularly important role. A forgotten painter today, he was trained by Vincent and David and in his teaching played a large part in the spread of the precepts of Neoclassicism as opposed to Romanticism. Over five hundred pupils went through his studio and many of these would then go on to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Several of the artists in this room were his pupils. Léon Bénouville* (1828-1886), Alexandre Cabanel* (1823-1889) (see also Room 34) and Ernest Michel (1833-1902) all went through the ranks of an exemplary academic education and, winners of the Prix de Rome, enjoyed important official careers. They cleverly complied with the strictly classical-style register imposed by the system of the Beaux-Arts, a repertoire conducive to exalting tasteful morality and the ideals of classicism.

Classical Landscapes Here to Stay

The fact that the Prix de Rome for historical landscapes was maintained until 1863 allowed the tradition of French classical landscapes to survive. Since Poussin's day, the stay in Italy had remained a strong source of inspiration in the contact with the countryside around Rome and Florence. In their paintings, Edouard François Bertin (1797-1871)* and his pupil Eugène Buttura (1812-1852)* look for a compromise between nature and style : *View Taken in the Apennines** is probably one of the finest triumphs of the artist in which his grandiose vision of the Italian model is perceptible. The scope of the composition combined with the dramatic effects of the steep contours heralds the expressive naturalism of the Barbizon School. Paul Flandrin (1802-1902)*, who trained with Ingres, travelled in the French provinces in search of new motifs. Adhering to the quiet monumentality of the formulae of classical landscapes, he drew his inspiration from Gaspard Dughet to transform the countryside around Lyon or Provence into a mythical Arcadia.

Neoclassical Sculpture

The figure of Canova (1757-1822) (Rooms 22-27) was to influence the art of sculpture profoundly. The pure lines of his contours and the classical inspiration of his models guaranteed the continuity of an elegant Neoclassicism. His focus being female beauty, James Pradier (1790-1852) produced both large marble sculptures in the round destined for the Salon and more intimate statuettes intended for a public of amateurs. Taking his subjects from mythology, his heroines were a pretext for representing carnal nudes. Thus *Nyssia** is styled on Greek Venuses in the contours of the smooth flesh of the queen unveiled with sensuous delicacy ; the extraordinary tresses accentuate the erotic dimension of this representation of the chaste tragic heroine in Théophile Gautier's narrative.

This search for the ideal is also to be found in the work of Jules Legendre-Héral (1796-1851), a sculptor from Montpellier, when he tackles *Giotto Drawing a Ram's Head on the Sand**. Emblematic of nineteenth-century tastes for picturesque historiography, the interpretation of Vasari's tale of the revelation of the painter's genius is a tribute to the pioneer of Italian painting.