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French Classicism in Four Painters: Where It Went and Why

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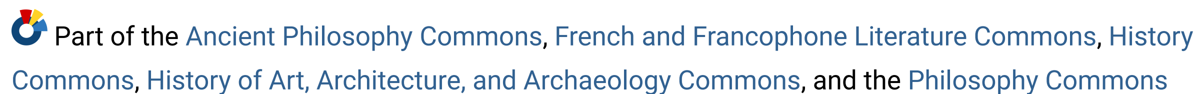
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French Classicism in Four Painters: Where It Went and Why

Senior Project Submitted to
The Divisions of Art History and Visual Culture and French Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Introduction

The ideas associated with the style of "classicism" have been muddled since Socrates proposed the idea of an *ideal* art during the classical Greek period (ca. 480-323 B.C.).[1] This was supposed to be a style which embodied the nation; one that could teach and symbolize the country's national character. Writer Rupert Lodge describes Socrates' idealistic design as,

> …a philosophy which proceeds by successive re-formulations of the fundamental aspects of experience […] it is in its future history, that philosophy, human philosophy, can expect gradually to work out its growing destiny. […] something apart, something withdrawn from human life, and superior to common humanity. […] It is in the progressive history of culture, a culminative development of human values, that it realizes its idea.

The ancient Greeks wanted a style to exemplify the "heroic" aspects of its culture that they could then preserve through narratives, philosophies, and symbols for later generations to look back to. The style proposed by Socrates was meant to re-affirm certain ideas towards reason, goodness, and expression that would positively impact future political, cultural, and sociological values of the Greek people.[2]

He and other philosophers saw earlier efforts in expressing these influences as largely unsatisfactory and hoped to consolidate and improve upon what ideals would continue to be presented to the public. This meant that the wisest community members were the ones to judge which ideals were "right." These were people who could properly judge based on these values and therefore could make proper opinions on civil life. To have the right opinion about certain ideologies, artistic or otherwise, mirrored the opinion holder as a good citizen- the ideal citizen in ancient Greece. By Plato's generation about five decades later, the general class of citizens

[1] Collette Hemingway and Seán Hemingway, "The Art of Classical Greece (ca. 480–323 B.C.)," Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, last modified January 2008, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tacg/hd_tacg.htm.
[2] Rupert C. Lodge, *Plato's Theory of Art* (1953; repr., New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1975), 123-126.

were not intellectuals with high levels of philosophical insight. Thus, what they began to ask of art and their philosophic leaders was guidance towards their societal values to build better judgements.

Plato and other ancient philosophers like Aristotle and even Pythagoras refined what was deemed as "classicism" through their definitive evaluations of Greek art, periods, and styles. Although, these philosophers become less useful when trying to graft these older ideas on to the revived classicism of the 17th century onward. In France for example, artists, philosophers, and writers used the philosophies of Socrates and Plato to create a didactic form of art, but these new French adaptations began to be altered by theories and biases of the contemporary age. The issue therefore becomes what ideas are associated with the "classical," and how are its symbols adapted to different artistic, political, and social contexts? Clearly, when comparing varying instances of French classicism to original Greek classicism, the idea of a unified style comes into question.[3]

What makes a piece of art classical? Does it have to be a primary object from classical Greece? Could it be a story or idea tied to an ancient philosopher? Is it the use of styles, themes, gestures and ornamentation invented by earlier artists? For France, the answer could change between centuries. To begin, when ancient philosophy returned to popularity during the 15th century, the emotional conflicts between good and bad, reason and chaos, became the main subjects within artistic production.[4] But what symbols from older philosophies translate to the new, and how did these artists illustrate them properly? This is where the desire and use of

[3] "The Problem of Classicism: Ideology and Power," in *The Problem of Classicism*, ed. David Freedberg, spring ed. (New York, NY: Annual Meeting of the College Art Association, 1988), 7-9.
[4] France became overall consumed by reverence for the ancient civilizations, specifically 5th century Greece's "Age of Pericles", where the style of the "classical" began.

classicism and its associated symbols begin to shift, and we can watch its evolution and reinterpretation throughout its waves of popularity in France.

The desire to teach and guide the uneducated public through the arts returned in France with the foundation of the Academy by Cardinal Richelieu.[5] Lodge explains how Plato insisted that “there should always be a place, within the constitution of the ideal community for such a leader. The leader occupies the position of the Academy […] that is, he is an expert adviser to the government.”[6] This leader can determine the limits of rationality, truth, and beauty in objects and their society, so that they can guide their state towards more power and success. Plato’s recommendations for a strong leader and philosophy of the nation were of key importance in sixteenth century France.

Emerging around this same period, notably in the philosophical writings of René Descartes, was the debate between the power of reason and feeling within ourselves and society. This conflict often relates to the morals or ethics to which a person may cling to such as empathy or courage. One would therefore gravitate towards the music, art or other cultural activities that provoke these ideas in our consciousness.[7] Whether through the motion of a figure in a painting or the tone of the actor on stage, art can find itself corresponding to unspoken values of society. Lodge poetically observes that “it is the rhythms of art which set the tempo and establish the patterns of civic life.”[8] So, similarly to the classical Greeks, art was now meant to portray certain values that the French people could look to for moral guidance.

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[5] "Naissance et jeunesse de l'Académie française," Académie française, http://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/af-naissance-et-jeunesse.pdf.
[6] Lodge, *Plato's Theory*, 127-129.
[7] Larry F. Norman, "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns," in *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 271-273.
[8] Lodge, *Plato's Theory*, 129.

Political institutions have long understood the psychological impact a work of art could have on the people, and often used the arts to establish certain moral codes or to reinstate certain sentiments for those in power. This was often done by manipulating the symbolic values inscribed by the Greek originals (from their philosophical debates, plays, and art) into their own stories. And, if the French countrymen would obey the platonic suggestion of a just opinion, they would then have confidence in their governing bodies to be the main creators of these opinions as a way of properly managing the country.[9]

Between the 16th century until the early 19th century, art openly played a role in France's view of its nation: what it is, what it could be, and where it could go.[10] The history of art has often concerned itself with a variety of subject matters and themes related to the definition of classicism, later described in terms like purity, order, rationality, and idealization. The 17th century painter Nicolas Poussin would come to exemplify how the adopted styles and ideals could be interpreted into French art. By painting secular narratives that could be interpreted in a multitude of ways (artistically, academically, socially), Poussin could have viewers reflect upon the nature of man.[11]

Of course, these terms of classicism have been understood in respect to their cultural and political relations between contexts of its production and reception throughout the style's history. Thus, when we relate the style to the rules attributed to it in France during its early development, advocates like artist Charles le Brun would argue that it is a style governed by reason.[12] From

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[9] Lodge, *Plato's Theory*, 129.
[10] France, with its tumultuous history of wars and persecution coming out of the middle ages, provides exemplary works of art and writing that spoke to classicism's underlying uses besides as decoration or entertainment.
[11] Norman, "The Quarrel," 269.; When French-Italian cultures further intertwined due to constant war over economics, religion, and geography, the countries learned from one another, notably with the uses of art for power.
[12] Kathleen Kuiper, ed., "Classicism and Neoclassicism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/art/Neoclassicism#ref284077.; "…Classicism invokes those characteristics normally associated with the art of antiquity—harmony, clarity, restraint, universality, and idealism. Because of the high regard accorded to ancient art, "classic" is sometimes used to mean that the example is the best of its type […]. In

Lebrun's perspective, then, the classical formula must be followed in order to illustrate symbols in conjunction with associated concepts like power and rationality. For instance, Lebrun and his patron Louis XIV took Poussin's method of artistic education even further by heightening certain sentimental characteristics to advertise the superiority of France in the modern world, rather than imitating Greek classicism more intensively. From there, the dialectic between classicism and power emerge as a principle reason for this style's survival in this country.

The main argument to be made will be based around these questions raised by editor David Freedberg, who asks:

> When we speak of classicism, or of the classical, do we speak of ways of describing the qualities of objects; or are we talking about relational matters, about the relations of objects to past ideals, and to forms perceived through the veils of nostalgia? Or do we speak of the very opposite-in other words, of the ways in which forms are defined for ideological motives by those who behold and use them? By those who use them for immediate political aims, or who place them in self-justifying historical relations?

Although Freedberg interrogates the question of art as a political tool, more recent debates have arisen over whether the classical style exists outside of institutionalized philosophies. France, well-known as the birthplace of the "neo"-classical style, shows that not all scholars can agree on what art is to be considered as a part of the original "classicism" movement that is usually attributed to Nicolas Poussin. For example, when discussing the artist Eugène Delacroix, considered a leader of the Romantic genre about two centuries later, questions arise as to what his personal intention were for his art, compared to how it has been interpreted by modern researchers.[13] This essay is not set out to define classicism, but to assess the important

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the visual arts, besides the general qualities associated with the aesthetic attitude of Classicism, classicizing artists tend to prefer somewhat more specific qualities; these include line over color, straight lines over curves, frontality and closed compositions over diagonal compositions into deep space, and the general over the particular."

[13] "The Problem," 7-9.

moments in French history where the style has a revival of interest, and compare this to the ideological implications classicism was meant to represent.

The aim of this thesis is to develop a more analytical and contextual approach to understanding the stylistic confusion that has collected under the heading of classicism throughout its various revivals and downturns in French art. With the example of France and its influential artists such as Nicolas Poussin, Charles le Brun, Jacques-Louis David, and Eugène Delacroix, and with the help of writers like René Descartes, Jean Racine, and Denis Diderot, we will see how the political and cultural history of a place can change the formats used to view and create art for a public audience. The discussion will not concern itself with recreating stylistic labels, but it will address the problems between the relationship of what was once regarded as the classical and what prevailing ideologies have evolved from it. It will look towards the usefulness of stylistic and philosophical approaches in French art while hopefully having readers reconsider the relevance of canons, ideals, and the analytic worth related to the genre.

Chapter 1: 1600-1750

After the Ancients and Before Poussin

Renaissance thinkers like Galileo and Descartes believed there was a decline in the arts and humanities stretching between antiquity and the late 15th century.[14] Before the 16th century, painting was often used to evoke a spiritual power in the viewer through grandiose spectacles of light, color, and figures within the composition. Writing, on the other hand, worked more to teach morals or societal rules through personalized and sentimental narratives and descriptions.[15] The philosophers believed that by mirroring (and surpassing) the exemplary works of the ancient giants like Rome and Greece, contemporary artists could restore European culture to this former grandeur.[16] Coming from ideas of the Renaissance, ancient classical art was identified to be the model that artists should study and emulate to create a modern "ideal" art. By following the modes of the ancients, while enhancing them with modern artistic techniques, the French could escape their medieval, unreasonable, and less heroic past.

While French society sought out heroic and uplifting ideologies, their nation was engaged in the Habsburg-Valois Wars with Italy for the past century. These wars were a crucial factor in introducing the French to the Italian Renaissance ideals that would be embraced in the court of King François I.[17] French artists began to exude a renewed confidence in the works they

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[14] Norman, "The Quarrel," 269.
[15] Roland Meyer, *Seneca: Phaedra* (London, England: Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy, 2002), 11.; An example of spectacular and religious art would be *The Coronation of The Virgin* by Enguerrand Quarton and a written work that spoke to sentimentality to provide a moral would be *La Belle Dame sans Mercy* by François Villon. Italian painters made great use of chiaroscuro to intensify their subject matter that often related to mythological or Christian stories.
[16] Mainly Italy and France as they were a part of the Roman and Holy Roman Empire before its collapse.
[17] Norman, "The Quarrel," 269.; French and Italian monarchs fought over obtaining several Italian city-states until 1559.

produced with a richer, more dramatic palette by following the styles of new Italian masters like Caravaggio and Titian. Literature too, changed because of these wars, as writers and playwrights wished to symbolize the sentiments of post-war France which relied on tragedy to guide the moralistic or emotional drama of their works. Notably, French playwrights began heightening the sense of tragedy through their use of stoicism, which regarded the loss of inhibitions as a defect in mankind. Making its way into mainstream French writing, stoicism inevitably influenced artist of the latter-half of the century and onwards.[18] The later 17th century artist Nicolas Poussin refers to this type of tragedy in his work and contributed to artistic theories of his period relating to emotional balance.[19]

As author and professor Larry F. Norman writes, "the period understood itself as uniquely new, or more precisely as modern, as fundamentally different from -and better than- the past".[20] There was a growing public desire for reason and order within their communities along with a willingness to entrust these standards to be implemented by the French government. Coincidentally, Plato's philosophies reemerged as Neoplatonism in Italy and made its way to France. French philosophy now argued that classical artists achieved perfection not by recreating the imperfect world perceived through the senses, but through the impeccable, eternal forms conceived in the mind.[21] This suggests that classicism which references ancient philosophies was

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[18] Meyer, *Seneca: Phaedra*, 11.; Stoicism was a system to try and give a comprehensive account of the world and man's place in it. Man's goal is to live in accordance with the natural will of god and nature to help him find his virtue; guided by reason but defied by passion which was considered a defect in judgement.

[19] Anthony Blunt, Art and Architecture in France 1500 to 1700, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1982), 219.; Even in his letters, the words reason and judgement occur constantly while the word imagination is not to be found at all.

[20] Norman, "The Quarrel," 269-271.

[21] Lodge, *Plato's Theory*, 265.; Christopher L.C.E Whitcombe, "Art and Theory in Baroque Europe," *Art History Resources*, last modified 2016.; This resurgence in respect for platonic theories came out of 15th century Florence, Italy. Plato explains, "The only kind of art for which there is a place, is the art that is functional in the institutions of the model city; the art which fosters community courage, self-control, justice, and the other virtues of good citizenship. The community which pays the piper has the duty, as well as the right, to set the standards and call the tune".

not interested in complete historical nor natural truth, but an accuracy in representing the ideological metaphors that many of these stories came to evoke. Therefore, the artistic philosophy taken from Plato's time was reconstituted to suggest to French citizens what morals and ideals they should boast as a nation to affirm their success in obtaining a platonic, impeccable world within their culture.

Establishing Paris as his court's principal residence in 1528, François I reinforced the idea of this city as the political, economic, and cultural hub of France. Norman explains of the following years, that "the vast refinements of manners and sociability, first disseminated from the Italian courts, was hailed as the hallmark of a sophisticated civilization cleansed of the barbarity that sullied past centuries."[22] Yet, as artistic intelligence and a desire for reason became more important, classicism gave a way for the upper classes to show their superiority over the less educated countrymen. By the early 17th century, the idea of a classical style was already coming into debatable fruition with the writer Charles Perrault, who argued against the contemporary use of ancient philosophy as a tool of reason.[23]

The Baroque style, which related to the style of Caravaggio and arrived in the same manner and time as the classical style, was not a genre wholeheartedly adopted in France.[24] Debatably, because of this earlier exposure to baroque techniques, French classicism and the baroque share many traits related to moralist instruction.[25] The argument for classicism was that the dramatic qualities of the baroque- directed light in architecture, rendering of ecstasy in

[22] Norman, "The Quarrel," 269.
[23] Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes…* (Paris, France: J.B Coignard, 1697), 4: 305-308.; Perrault argued against the use of ancient philosophy because it meant doubting the power and truth of God's guidance.
[24] France, 1600–1800 A.D." In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.
[25] Robert Mandrou, "Le baroque européen : mentalité pathétique et révolution sociale," in *Annales*, [899], previously published in *Persée* 15, no. 5 (1960): 898-914.

painting and sculpture, etc.- could not be employed in a nation that publicly demanded a more secular and rational style for that period. Besides the role of the monarchy in rejecting this genre, Nicolas Poussin's art may have also changed the direction of French art before Louis XIV could come into power.

After Francois I came Henry IV, who was then assassinated in 1610, having Louis XIII in power by 1624.[26] After his father's murder, Louis XIII's rule began the legacy of the Ancien Régime, the Bourbon monarchy that rule over France from 1620-1775. His rule arrived with a heated debate between the two founding principles of the French monarchy: Catholic orthodoxy and royal absolutism.[27] Queen Marie de Medici, mother of Louis XIII, and the Cardinal Richelieu (1624) were known to have ruled the country alongside one another, investing time in arguments over which national powers belonged to the church and to the monarchy, while also being great patrons of the arts.[28] Richelieu was a character synonymous with the Church, which still had a powerful influence over French culture and the king's power.[29] He did return power to Louis XIII, only accepting his influence over the country after a siege of La Rochelle in 1627. Absolutism of the monarchy was still shaken though, as revolts from nobles and royal courts known as the "Fronde" continued until the king's death in 1643.

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[26] André Chastel and Deke Dusinberre, *French Art: The Ancien Régime 1620-1775* (New York, NY: Flammarion, 1995), 9. originally published as *L'Art Francais: L'Ancien Régime 1620-1775* (Paris, France: Flammarion, 1994). ; Christopher Wright, *French Painters of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 10.; From 1620 to 1775 the Ancient Regime ruled over France and was characterized by three clearly defined reigns which all began with the crowning of a child. Henry IV came to power following a regency by his mother, Marie de Medici and was later murdered when Louis XIII was only nine. Louis XIV ascended the throne in 1643 at age five, but did not govern until 1661 for similar reasons

[27] Jessica Rader, "The Old Regime: Absolutism and Enlightenment" (speech, March 5, 2013).; The power of Kings had been limited by nobles, parliaments, and the Catholic Church. In the 16th and 17th centuries, this began to change, and Kings were now able to increase their power. New theories arose to justify royal authority. The Englishman Thomas Hobbes wrote that man was not naturally good and needed a strong central authority to keep order. Without it, society would break down into a 'war of every man against every man.' The Divine Right of kings meant Kings were justified in seizing absolute power so they could act impartially to maintain order in society.

[28] Wright, *French Painters*, 10.

[29] Blunt, Art and Architecture, 12.; His place was then taken by Queen Anne of Austria in 1843 before letting her son, Louis XIV, take on the throne.

Mainly due to the efforts of Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, the Fronde was extinguished and noble culture under Louis XIV pushed towards an aesthetic of reason and calm. This was propagated often through mediums of theater or painting that related to classical philosophy and mythology. Through his endeavors, Mazarin was able to bequeath to Louis XIV a kingdom and a team of administrators that displayed a reunified court of grandeur and excellence that would reassure the king's absolute power in the eyes of the public. This was only for appearances though, as there is much evidence of social and religious crises throughout his reign.[30] Yet Louis XIV (the Sun King), was able to fashion his court of splendor to embody the symbols of the ancients through architecture, painting, and sculpture.[31]

The tension between the baroque and classicism was classicism's representation of state power in the modern age.[32] Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin declared their conviction that government should stimulate, harbor, and guide artistic production, part of a French idea that the state should define cultural policy.[33] Artists, poets, and all those who helped produce these prestigious images, were elevated in the eyes of the State, and therefore, in mainstream French society.[34] Although his rule was surrounded by bitter aristocrats, clergy, and peasants, Louis XIV became nonetheless an incarnation of the country's energies; now, the state's grandeur was seen as a celebration of itself and their accomplishments.[35] The baroque did appeal to Louis XIV

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[30] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 11-12.
[31] Blunt, Art and Architecture, 12.
[32] Louis Marin, "Classical, Baroque: Versailles, or the Architecture of the Prince," in *Baroque Topographies*, trans. Anna Lehman (n.p.: Yale University Press, 1991), [167-168], excerpt from *Yale French Studies*, no. 80: 167-82.; The palace of Versailles, designed in part by Charles le Brun, claimed artistic inspiration from "classicism," rather than Baroque. It is true that, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, classicism in art (particularly architecture) was often considered a French shift from the great baroque style that swept over Europe.
[33] Blunt, Art and Architecture, 325.
[34] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 15; The renaissance concept of cultural renewal was earnestly adopted by knowledgeable intellectuals and the convention of attributing events to the will and glory of the king had already taken root in French culture.
[35] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 15.

through its richness and its use of grand scale, but he could not take over or claim the style which had been so largely developed to satisfy religious rather than political needs.[36]

Classicist theory by this time relied on the art of restraint- an equilibrium between emotion and reason to show a citizen's superiority in controlling their innate, distasteful desires.[37] In literature of the century, René Descartes published his treatise *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), which attempted to rank the various human emotions that gave truth to the idea of a "soul". His writing gave access to "taming" human impulses through understanding their necessity and power within daily life.[38] But the ideal of balance within classical art has never lasted long enough historically for a completely rational France to emerge, nor does it seem possible as the country's social and political situations constantly shift.[39] Therefore, while attempting to balance both impulses of freedom and restraint, intelligence and virtue, within society, art of that period sought to aid the French in understanding the importance of their rationality.[40]

Revered in the courts of Italy, the association between the monarchy and the arts was an honorable motif. The State thereby became the sole engine of artistic activity due to their economic prestige and their power over the people (including artists).[41] The prevalence of a strict

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[36] Wright, French Painters, 10.
[37] Wadsworth, "New Views," in *The French*, 173.
[38] René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul* (1649): 338-9.; These impulses include wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness, and others. He even writes, "Those perceptions, sensations or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits." He goes on to explain that our perceptions are all thoughts which are neither actions of the soul nor expressions of will, but also not evident knowledge that comes to us on our own.
[39] Wadsworth, "New Views," in *The French*, 173.
[40] Pierre Rosenburg, *La Peinture Française du XVIIe siècle dans les Collections Américaines*, de la réunion des musées nationaux ed. (Paris, France: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 1982), 1: 1.; Note: this was a commonly known problem discussed heavily in literature and other official documents of the period. Molière even wrote *La Misanthrope*, based on a character named Alceste who cannot find his place within the confines of social rules and appearances. The book ultimately ends with him in self-exile, leaving his lover who cannot pull herself away from French society.
[41] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 15.; For example, when looking at Louis XIV's construction of Versailles, the palace is the result of a production that is all at once baroque in its desire to revel in the fantastical and grandiose

classicism in France during the mid-seventeenth century compared to the takeover of the baroque across Europe was largely due to the political desires of the French monarchy. [42] The importance of Louis XIV's reign in relation to artistic meaning is because he himself used these influences. He found he could change the aesthetics and philosophies of his court, so why not spread this medium of rationality across his country? In some manner, the king's mixed style of the classical and baroque may have become a sovereign norm. If looked at from this perspective, classicism becomes a style of subjection by including metaphors relating to public life and civic values.[43]

The influential writer and playwright Jean Racine exposed the influence of the arts and cultural practices of Louis XIV's reign, but it was not universally accepted to be a style of the monarchy at this moment in time. It is true that Racine wrote, under royal command, the *Précis des Campagnes de Louis XIV*, but no one would maintain that either this piece of written praise or Charles Perrault's *Siècle de Louis le Grand* rank as one of the masterpieces in literature of this time. It is works like *Phédre* or *Le Misanthrope* which conveyed the tragic confusion and rejection of 17th century social conventions.[44] Perrault also wrote a play on the debate over French culture in his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697).

Although discussing literature, Perrault's questioning of these emerging styles and tastes revolved around all artistic disciplines. He analyzed the cultural predicament of France that he

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and classical due to its relation to antique themes that highlight the state's absolute power. Thus, while Louis XIV's preferred style related to the already prolific style of the baroque, the symbolic nature of classicism is highlighted in relation to the government.

[42] Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, 12-15; 45-53.; Absolutist monarchs such as Francois I and Louis XIV greatly admired and wished to emulate the culture and politics of Italy. Italy, at this time, began looking back to the cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome and transferred those renewed ideals to France. Painting stayed relatively unaffected, but architecture in France begins to depict Italian iconography like allegorical Virtues arranged on altar tombs and Madrid Castle (built for Francois I) which included medallions and friezes that run along the outside.

[43] Marin, "Classical, Baroque," in *Baroque Topographies*, 168.

[44] Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, 15-17; 325; Admired in Versailles, these French plays gained much more acclaim than their Italian equivalents due to the classical ideals invoked in both, along with their relations to contemporary social issues.

saw as caught between the antique, the Christian, and the modern. Perrault himself seemed to side with modernity, not denouncing the imagery of the ancients but elevating them to a new genre found in the revived, seventeenth century world.[45] He writes to a friend, "It has pleased time to push out the fashion of ancient Fables and instead focus on simple and natural feelings, full of common sense and tact; we should think this as a good thing and endorse it."[46] This opposing side of the classical style was not a minority in discourses surrounding art of the period, but the voices of those who had substantial control over artistic production outweighed the others.[47]

This is where the classical style truly becomes defined away from other contending genres of the 17th century, notably the baroque. With this hyper focus on rationality and restriction on emotion, art began to be configured around the ideas of balance and heavily evoked ancient symbols and objects that could give a form of understanding to the audience. Beginning with Nicolas Poussin, we will see how classicism went from a personal and aristocratic taste to being much more topical and important in its role in political culture. Poussin is important due to his compositions making the learning experience of art more coherent through his imitations of ancient works, storylines, and characters in part because they imbued a notion of intelligence. It is this very relationship Poussin created between the French upper classes and the passion for ancient culture in painting that paved the way for its metaphorical transition during the 18th century.

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[45] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 232.
[46] Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes*, 4: 318. ; *« Il a plu au temps de faire passer la mode des Fables anciennes et de leur substituer des sentiments aisez et naturels, pleins de bons sens et de délicatesse, je crois qu'il faut le trouver bon et s'y accommoder. »*
[47] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art,* 254-255.

Nicolas Poussin: Admirer of Antiquity in Modern France

In 1616, still under the reign of Louis XIII, Nicolas Poussin moved to Paris from Normandy for better artistic training and involvement within the city. There he met Chevalier Henri Avice of Poitou, his first Parisian patron who introduced him to members of the French elite, even allowing him to copy prints and engravings from Raphael and other renaissance masters collected in the Louvre Palace. From these prints, Poussin learned to construct figures as embodiments of certain actions or emotional states with their proper configurations in space- a figural format that was repeated throughout his career.[48] Thanks to Poitou, Poussin entered a world that concerned itself with the cultural and philosophical shifts made by the monarchy.

While still in Paris, Poussin befriended Giambattista Marino, an Italian poet, who introduced him to Italian literature and provided a better comprehension of ancient mythology. While visiting Rome in 1624 on the advice of Marino, Poussin became a part of an intellectual group run by Cassiano dal Pozzo, secretary to the wealthy Barberini family. Becoming a close friend and patron, dal Pozzo stimulated Poussin's interest in and reverence of ancient Greek and Roman civilization. Additionally, dal Pozzo was responsible for many of Poussin's commissions in Rome for company of the higher classes, greatly influencing the artist's future success.[49]

During the 17th century, Poussin's artistic style integrated Italian influences, from ancient Rome and the renaissance, into French painting, ultimately changing the path of Academic art in the country.[50] He, like French government, defined himself against the prevailing baroque art of the period by following his own path that lead to new artistic

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[48] Jonathan Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 158.
[49] Mary Sprinson de Jesús, "Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665)," Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, October 2003.
[50] James Thompson, "Nicolas Poussin," The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin 50, no.3 (Winter 1992-1993): 25.

discoveries and theories on what “French” classicism later becomes.[51] Still considered the “grand classicist” of France, what about Poussin’s artwork fits within this genre as opposed to the baroque? His painting *Abduction of the Sabine Women* (FIG.1), based on classical narratives and philosophies, displays these thematic and stylistic choices that differed from other styles of the same period. The notable subjects in the composition will present a variety of contexts that will reveal how Poussin’s personal fascination with antiquity changed the didactic choices of future artists, whether it be through a narrative theme or artistic ideology.

In the early stages of 17th century art, the most purely 'classical' pieces would have figures based on ancient sculpture, both in their types (physiognomy) and in the treatment of their drapery. Sometimes taken from ancient reliefs, these references or direct imitations of antiquity were accompanied by a symmetry in the disposition of the figures that related to the desired ideal of balance. The configural relation between the characters and the compositional space shows an emerging preference for static rather than violent poses, an explicit drama rather than drama that distracts the viewer from the scene.[52] Poussin used these ideas in his work, not only representing this interesting piece of Roman history, but to add a certain mode of understanding to the illustrated account.

In this multi-figure work, Poussin depicts the full abduction narrative condensed into one image.[53] The story involves the first Roman emperor Romulus discovering that Rome does not have enough women to sustain the newly-founded city. He decides to trick his neighbors, the Sabines, to come to a festival celebrating the goddess Consualia. With a given signal from the

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[51] Sprinson de Jesús, "Nicolas Poussin,".
[52] Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, 12.
[53] The most extensive recall of this story comes from Titus Livius (Livy), in his book Ad Urbe Condita (The History of Rome) from ca. 28 BC. It is known that Poussin had read Livy and other writers like Plutarch and Ovid to have a better grounding in ancient myths and histories. Livy spends five pages on the topic.

emperor, the Roman soldiers seized the Sabine women as their brides, which ultimately saved Rome's future population.[54] A famous and violent event relating to Rome's birth as a nation would have been well known by a classicist such as Poussin and would have been an important history to accurately depict for his audience. Besides this, since at least the 1450s the *Abduction of the Sabine Women* became a thematic narrative relating to marriage, even having scenes from the story painted on wedding chests for brides.[55]

In his depiction, Poussin displays an audience of all ages participating in the event to heighten the reality of the historical drama. The flurry of people continues into the background while the rigid architecture, made of vertical and horizontal lines, is offset by the multiple limbs and bodies in front of it. Taking place in the evening, the orange glow of the setting sun peers on to the figural stage from the top-left. In the background there is almost a haze that leads the eyes up to the clouds that transition into a vibrant, blue sky. Besides clouds shading the surrounding structures, the light that does manage to seep onto the painting's main "stage" creates a sense of foreboding as figures become trapped in the frame by the sky and architecture itself.

The foreground narrates the beginning of the abduction. Starting on the left, we see the emperor Romulus, standing above the mayhem on the steps of an Ionic building with two men behind him. He holds a golden staff in his right hand and raises his carmine cloak with his left, the signal to his soldiers to begin the capture. The emperor is still, showing no emotion as he faces the disorder beneath him. Below him on his left, we focus on a man in yellow with a blue

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[54] Titus Livius*, Ab Urbe Condita,* 28 BC, in Book 1, ed. Benjamin Oliver Foster, 9th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 1.9.

[55] Jane Costello, "The Rape of the Sabine Women by Nicolas Poussin," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 5, no. 8 (April 1947): 197-200.; During Poussin's early life in Rome, Pietro de Cortona had created two depictions with this same theme which became well-renowned throughout the country. De Cortana was from Tuscany where, in 1583, Giambologna created his sculpture of the abduction which is referenced in both de Cortana's and Poussin's work, along with other artists of the following decades. Cortana, using the baroque style, strove for an explicit, emotional narrative through his illustrations, while Poussin depicted the narrative as objectively as he could.;

cape, a lictor holding his wooden *fasces.*[56] Being in on Romulus' plan, he steps backwards and passively watches the Roman soldier grab the Sabine woman he is facing.

This woman, in a bright blue tunic, flails within a Roman's grasp. Her face turns towards the viewer, just enough to see her shocked face with furrowed brows and gaping mouth. Behind these two, Poussin repeats a similar scene of another Sabine in green who is carried away as she reaches out to the sky. Her face follows the direction of her arm, leading the viewer to notice an even further echo of this coupling towards the middle-right side of the canvas. While the women do not seem restrained in their drama, the roman soldiers do, possibly speaking to the symbolic rationality of the ancient roman state.

Returning to the right foreground, the bald man with a white beard is a Sabine elder and extremely active compared to the lictor on the far left. Shown thrusting himself upon the Roman warrior, the older man grabs him with his left hand while raising his right into a fist. The soldier, wearing a *lorica* and a blue military kilt, reacts against the attack from the older man as his arms and torso twist in his attempt to pull away.[57] He holds a knife in his right hand, arrested in motion moments before he will assault the Sabine man. Beneath this pair is the Sabine daughter of the elder who turns away from the fight above her and pulls at him for rescue. She raises her right arm up in front of her face in fear of the conflict while unaware of the child next to her on the ground.[58]

The child in green reaches his right arm out towards the woman next to him, sobbing as he falls to the ground. He leads the eyes back to the center of the foreground, where an elderly

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[56] Note: A fasces is a bundle of rods with a projecting axe blade, often carried by lictors in ancient Rome as a symbol of a magistrate's power.
[57] Mary Sprinson de Jesús, "The Abduction of the Sabine Women," Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified 2010.; Costello, "The Rape," 204.; Note: a lorica is a Roman corselet of leather that often defined the body shape underneath it.
[58] Luke David Nicholson, "Anthony Blunt and Nicolas Poussin: A Queer Approach" (doctoral thesis, Concordia University, 2011), 236. Note: Nicholson references to the older man as the Sabine's father.

woman kneels between him and another infant to the left. Also crying, he looks up towards the Sabine in blue, his mother, as she is carried away by the Roman soldier.[59] The kneeling woman holds her head while looking up in distress to a place past the viewer, stretching her arm out in the same direction.

One of the most noticeable facets of Poussin's style are his references to famous antique art. For example, Romulus' stance and stillness references famous imperial statues, most notably the *Pontifex Maximus* who carries a similar pose (FIG.2).[60] The portrayal of the blue woman and roman soldier are based on Giambologna's famous statue, *Rape of the Sabines* (FIG.3), and in the group of the elder, soldier, and daughter, Poussin also references another pose from the Italian *Ludovici Gaul* statue (FIG.4), with the Roman and old man taking the place of the suicidal Gaul and his wife.[61]

These arrangements become the narrators of the scene with a mixed choreography of heroic struggle and brute power. Poussin says in a letter to his friend Chantelou,

> Besides, if you remember the first letter that I wrote to you touching on the movements of the figures […] I think that you can easily recognize which ones are languished, amazed, those who take pity and are charitable […] read the history and the picture in order to judge whether everything is appropriate to the subject.[62]

His belief in "reading the painting" proves his decision in using characters as the narrative catalyst and inscribing a certain understanding through their placement and emotion in the piece.

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[59] Costello, "The Rape," 202.

[60] Kazerouni Guillaume, "The Rape of the Sabine Women," The Louvre.; Costello, "The Rape," 202.

[61] Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics*, 169.

[62] Anthony Blunt, *The A.W Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts*, Bollingen 7 (Washington D.C., VA: National Gallery of Art, 1958), 222-223. *« Au reste, si vous vous souviendrés de la première lettre que je vous éscris, touchans les mouvement des figures […], je crois que facillement vous recognoistrés quelles sont celles qui laguisent, qui admire, celles qui ont pitié, qui font action de charité, […] lisés l'histoire e le tableau, afin de cognoistre si chasque chose est apropriée au subiect. » ;* To André Félibien : "just as the 24 letters of the alphabet are used to form our words and to express our thoughts, so the forms of the human body are used to express the various passions of the soul and to make visible what is in the mind".

The composition is to be studied figure by figure as each one expresses its role in the story rather than being taught through words as in a novel.

While the foreground features three sets of three characters (counting the two children as separate individuals), they enact only the early stages of abduction and struggle. Just behind, though, the crowd running towards the right side of the frame enact the secondary stage of response, the action of the Sabines fleeing the attacking city. And as a finale to this moment, Poussin includes a couple near the distance between the kidnapped Sabine woman in green on the left and the father and soldier's battle to the right. Here, a Roman soldier and Sabine woman walk away from the chaos in relative calm. The soldier, with his arm around the woman's waist, points into the distance, a reference to their future life together. Poussin places the group spatially apart from the foreground (the immediate consequences of the command) to project the entire narrative within one temporal, pictorial stage. Their partnership marks the resolution to the struggle between the abducted women and their abductors.[63]

The Abduction of the Sabine Women was created for the French ambassador to Rome, Charles I de Blanchefort.[64] Being a member of the political elite, he was also a lieutenant and marshal who fought in Italian campaigns around the same time this painting was commissioned. Author Zorawar Sidhu explains that Poussin's sources were meant to "entail a notion of historical exactitude, the knowledge of which was to be transferred to both artist and viewer."[65] With a knowledge of the ancients and acknowledgment of contemporary social and political discourses, the intended effect of the painting's configuration was meant to be read by the

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[63] Unglaub, *Poussin and the Poetics*, 169-174.
[64] Thompson, "Nicolas Poussin," 25.
[65] Zorawar Sidhu, "On Negotiating Between the Virtual and Material in Art Historical Reproduction" (master's thesis, Hunter College of the City of New York, 2016), 15.; Note: de Blanchefort became a Roman and Venetian ambassador by 1636.

patron.[66] Thus, the artist's painting which is now seen as the original style of "classicism" in France, was already made in correspondence to governmental and elitist views.

From preceding styles in French art, the means of conveying a mood or an emotion had often been by individual getures, whereas Poussin maintained that it could be done through the accumulation of these gestures found in the composition.[67] As an imitator of ancient art who would reconstitute popular pieces to emphasize certain themes in his paintings, Poussin was able to translate this evocative narrative to a certain viewer, namely de Blanchefort.[68] Most often this was done through facial expression and movement as seen in the blue Sabine and the roman soldier. Although paintings cannot create sounds like music, the personal associations and understandings that come with a tune or note are the same when reading these various didactic signals within the Sabine image.[69]

Poussin certainly engaged with debates around *ut pictura poesis* (as is poetry, so is painting), a phrase most famously quoted in Horace's *Ars Poetica*.[70] The ancients were revered by Poussin as ideological models not because of blind belief in their superiority, but simply because they, more than any other age of artists, followed the laws of reason in art. Reason is what produced the more nearly perfect embodiments of platonic, ideal nature.[71] This is important to remember when the theories of Lebrun come into question, where Lebrun, who shared this admiration of the ideal, also wished to show the "expressions" of nature by denying the natural faults of humanity. Art historians have spoken of Poussin's visual rhetoric, derived from

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[66] Costello, "The Rape," 203.
[67] Blunt, *The A.W Mellon*, 226.
[68] Nicholson, "Anthony Blunt," 237-238.
[69] Sprinson de Jesús, "Nicolas Poussin,".; Blunt, The A.W Mellon, 226.; Compared to the "Theory of the Modes" linked with Poussin's name since the seventeenth century and Delacroix was to put forward much the same idea in the nineteenth century.
[70] Phillippa Josephine Plock, "Regarding Gendered Mythologies: Nicolas Poussin's Mythological Paintings and Practices of Viewing in Seventeenth-Century Rome" (doctoral thesis, The University of Leeds, 2004), 61-63.
[71] Blunt, *The A.W Mellon*, 227.

classical tradition, as it fills the image with coded emotion and mimetic gestures that elevate clarity and the intellectual nature of the piece.[72]

This ideal balance between figural form and expression illumines the dramas of Pierre Corneille and the writings of Blaise Pascal.[73] Drama and theater were perfect metaphors for how the paintings of Poussin were to be treated- as if a piece of theater. Corneille, Pascal, and even Descartes debated these cultural formulas, arguing that reason should surrender to feeling, but one should not overpower the other in artistic works of the century.[74] An example of Poussin's reference to these dramatist theories would be how the Roman soldiers are depicted as almost unfazed by the unreasonable women they are holding. It was a common motif of French writers to describe those in society who could not control their rationality as the agent of drama in their stories.[75]

Luckily, during the post-renaissance period, literature and visual art became very intertwined in terms of what cultural philosophies they reinterpreted from Italy into their own media. Like these writers, Poussin was not nearly as cold and rationalistic as the style was supposed to be, and intellectualism did not always serve as an overall control over underlying emotions. Modes of feeling and expression were commonly applied to tragedies and were gladly accepted as a source of intensity. Therefore, while ancient classicism was to be whole-heartedly stoic and based above all else on reason, the classical imitation of antiquity "was really very slight and was motivated by a desire to find subjects and themes of true, universal human value".[76]

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[72] Thompson, "Nicolas Poussin," 44.
[73] Julius S. Held and Donald Posner, *17th and 18th Century Art: Baroque Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, ed. H. W. Janson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 151-152.
[74] Thompson, "Nicolas Poussin," 4.
[75] Erica Harth, "Exorcising the Beasts: Attempts at Rationality in French Classicism," in *PMLA* (New York, NY: Modern Language Association, 1973), 19.
[76] Wadsworth, "New Views," in *The French*, 173.

Many of Poussin's patrons, mainly civil servants, bankers, and merchants, participated in or sympathized with the revival of stoic philosophy in seventeenth-century France. What these men wanted from the arts was not glamorous, romantic displays but more articulate, didactic illustrations of human behavior in the context of serious ethical problems.[77] Before returning to France from Rome, Poussin created the *Abduction of the Sabine Women*, with an emphasis on expressing gestures of the passions before maturing his art to become based above all on devotion to antiquity. Because of this concern for clarity and conciseness, Poussin had little sympathy with the baroque and its associations to exuberance.[78]

By the late 1630s, the now-famous Poussin was pressed to return to France by King Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu. He agreed to return to Paris by 1640, where he was named *First Painter to His Majesty Louis XIII, King of France*. Although a celebratory feat, this was catastrophic for his morale, as both he and the king discovered he was not a court painter, nor a painter naturally suited to complete large canvases.[79] And while the artist was well treated during his stay, the commissions he was forced to accept were not to his liking. Consequently, Poussin returned to Rome in 1642 and remained until his death in 1665.[80] The lucidity of his style, with its precise and reasoned organization, appealed to the passion for order and clarity that had by then become an important part of the France's cultural character. His personal rejection of the baroque style for his classicist technique excited the newer French artists of the later 17th century, who came to adopt and propagate his ideals during the following decades.

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[77] Thompson, "Nicolas Poussin," 4.
[78] Held and Posner, *17th and 18th*, 151-152.
[79] Michel Gareau, *Charles Le Brun: Premier Peintre Du Roi Louis XIV*, comp. Lydia Beauvais, hazan ed. (Paris, France: F.N.A.C, 1992), 13.
[80] Held and Posner, *17th and 18th*, 151-152.; The artist did make new friends and patrons in Paris, and after his return to Italy the bulk of his production left for France. Certainly inspired by his new French friends, he concentrated on more profound themes like biblical narratives and paintings of ancient heroes by 1640.

In 1648, an institution parallel to Cardinal Richelieu's beloved French Academy was founded as the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. It was placed under the (theoretical) patronage of Poussin, but the artist who embraced his notorious political independence chose voluntary exile in Rome over recognizing these official honors.[81] In founding these academies of art, especially in the 17th century, classical themes and works came to be established and defined as the standard genre for all future art students in France. Classicism thereby became closely associated with the Academy, and therefore the monarchy which wished to interject a new, "intelligent" culture for the following centuries.[82] A 20-year-old artist named Charles le Brun planned his first trek to Rome during this same period, and he soon became a grand symbol of the power held by these cultural institutions.[83]

[81] Chastel and Dusinberre, *French Art*, 11.
[82] Whitcombe, "Art and Theory," *Art History Resources*.
[83] Gareau, *Charles Le Brun*, 13.

Charles Le Brun: Artist and Activist

Born in Paris in 1619, Charles le Brun was the son of master sculptor Nicolas le Brun before becoming a pupil under baroque artists such as Simon Vouet before the age of 23.[84] Not yet under the spell of Poussin and going to Rome for the first time in 1642, Lebrun received intense training that naturally involved baroque themes featuring mythological scenes and those intended to stun and impress.[85] A good, well-known example of his early style can be seen in his *The Suicide of Cato*¸(FIG.5) which depicts an unusually gruesome (by his period's standards) depiction of Cato the Younger's suicide by disembowelment after his failed suicide by sword.[86] Even though his death is described by Plutarch in egregious terms, Lebrun has muted much of the gore and physical trauma, while heightening the sentimentality of his presentation.

The composition presents Cato, laying half-nude in his bedroom with his head leaning to his left onto the pillow as his furrowed brows show the final moments of stress before his end. The bed and his body take up most of the foreground as they turn and lean in towards the viewer. With only red velvet drapes on either side of the canvas behind him, Lebrun leaves the central background in darkness, besides the small flame shining at the left. This flame highlights the faces of two figures who emerge from the shadows. Cato's demise is indicated by these

[84] Gareau, *Charles Le Brun*, 7.; Wright, *French Painters*, 204.
[85] Wright, *French Painters*, 122.
[86] Alexei V. Zadorojnyi, "Cato's Suicide in Plutarch.," in *The Classical Quarterly*, trans. J. Murrell, modified ed., [216-217], excerpt from *The Classical Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2007): 216-30.; The death of Marcus Porcius Cato in April 46 B.C. was construed and generally admired by Cato's contemporaries as a feat of political and philosophical (specifically, Stoic) virtues; 70.8-10: "... he drew the sword and stabbed himself in the stomach. The inflammation of his hand somewhat weakened the blow, so that he did not kill himself at once, but in his throes fell from the bed and made a noise […]. The servants heard the noise and shouted out; Cato's son together with his friends rushed in at once. They were horrified to find him covered in blood with most of his entrails protruding, but still alive and with his eyes open. The doctor approached him and tried to replace the entrails […]. When Cato revived and realized this, he pushed the doctor away, tore his entrails with his own hands, opened the wound again, and died."

characters and their expressions with one figure hiding his face as he weeps into the sheet wrapped aroud his body and the other looking down intensely at the now-dead man.

With his mouth agape and eyes closed, Cato only looks to be sleeping, but when following his left arm down to the bloodied tip of his sword does the viewer realize his situation. His wound and bloodied torso are almost completely hidden in shadow, the sheets around his lower body, and his open book, presumably Plato's dialogues *On the Soul*.[87] His right arm drapes across his body, and his cupped hand speaks to his final action of reaching into his stomach wound caused by his first suicide attempt to then take out his own bowels in his final, successful attempt.

The painting speaks to political tragedy, honor, heroic virtue, and Lebrun's skill in rendering a scene that articulates these themes. Comparatively, the overall composition is different from Poussin's framing of classical subject matter. This style did not last long though, and by the time he returned to Paris in 1646, he was painting subject matter in a more "Poussinesque", and therefore "classical" style.[88] Poussin, now in his forties, knew of the younger painter and vice versa. Lebrun had high esteem for the older painter, and it is suggested that he went back to Rome with Poussin before returning alone to Paris four years later.

With active ambition and a desire to reach the summit of his art, Lebrun was said to bring almost a jealous care to the classical themes he studied on his trip in Rome. He sought to

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[87] Zadorojnyi, "Cato's Suicide," in *The Classical*, 216-217.; 68.1-5: "... having embraced and taken farewell of his son and each of his friends more affectionately than he used to, Cato retired to his room; again, his intentions seemed suspicious. Once inside his room he lay down and took in his hands one of Plato's dialogues, On the Soul. When he had read most of the book, he looked up and saw that his sword was no longer hanging over his head. (His son had removed it during dinner.) Cato called a servant and asked him who had taken the sword. The servant did not reply, so he returned to his book. A little while later, as though with no concern or haste, but casually looking for his sword he ordered the servant to fetch it. There was some delay and no one brought the sword. Cato finished the book and then called the servants one by one, raising his voice louder and demanding his sword. He struck one slave on the mouth bruising his hand and shouted out loudly and angrily […] that his son and servants were betraying him naked into the hands of the enemy […]".
[88] Wright, *French Painters*, 122-124.

immerse himself in written and artistic education capable of describing all subjects of interest that related to the ancients.[89] What he appreciated above all during this period of initiation was Poussin's advice, or rather, his art theories and works. His art became classical and filled with statuesque figures whose controlled emotion was still able to strike emotional tenors in the viewer while building more appreciation for classical stories. One example we can compare to Poussin's previous painting of the Sabines is Lebrun's *The Brazen Serpent* (FIG.6), which demonstrates how Lebrun adopted Poussin's multi-figure compositions, warm color schemes, and dramatic gestures that soon garnered the interest of king Louis XIV.[90]

Lebrun had a range of talents required for a variety of situations: flexibility, power of organizing, the ability to inspire and control a team of artists, untiring energy, and patience while working with difficult patrons. He could work with painting, sculpture, tapestries, and other mediums of art, but they would all be made for their proper function while harmonizing with each other in whatever space they were displayed. [91] Back in Paris from the 1650s to the 1660's, Lebrun worked on commissions of decorative interiors for aristocratic patrons. He began working under King Louis XIV in 1661, to paint the ceilings in the palace of Versailles.[92]

Lebrun's appointment as *First Painter of the King* was openly announced in 1666, commencing what was regarded as "the most glorious era in the history of the French Monarchy." To give a government-affiliated role to artists was part of a political scheme focusing on centralizing control of the arts while developing an official taste that emphasized certain genres. It was the First Painter's responsibility to reflect the king's, and therefore the

[89] Gareau, *Charles Le Brun*, 13.; "The medals, collections, and movements of the ancient were subject to his studious examination […] He prescribed hours to carefully reading the sacred, secular, and poetic histories" ("Il se prescrivait des heures pour lire avec attention l'histoire sacrée, l'histoire profane, et l'histoire poétique". And "Les médailles et les recueils de mouvements antiques étaient l'objet de son examen studieux. »)
[90] Wright, *French Painters*, 122-124.
[91] Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, 15-17; 322.
[92] Wright, *French Painters*, 204.

nation's glory in his work. The first Director of the Royal Academy was Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who was very supportive of Lebrun's admission into both the Royal and Academic worlds.[93]

Lebrun became one of the founding heads of the Royal Academy, moving through the ranks of chancellor and rector before becoming director by 1683. He was in frequent personal contact with the king and he was consulted directly on major artistic and architectural projects involving royal institutions. Lebrun reformed the Academy in 1663 to increase the number of admitted members with more varied talents like genre painting and other decorative arts, and the artistic hierarchy of the school needed to be adjusted to reflect the new rankings of medium (painting, sculpture, etc.).[94] Another idea of Lebrun's was to have the Academy students show their work in an organized manner every two years and began the tradition of the Salon exhibitions.[95] And while Lebrun's reorganization of the Royal Academy was extremely influential for the school's history, his installment of Academic lectures were just as important.

The implementation of these lectures in 1666 marked the most remarkable change in the Academy's artistic methodologies. In these conferences, Lebrun spoke about human physiognomy, the importance of draftsmanship, and emphasized the need to directly study nature. Soon after, the study of the human figure by all students became integral to learning at the institution.[96] Also, painting was now often viewed (and judged) according to its general

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[93] Stair Sainty Matthiesen Gallery, comp., *The First Painters of the King: French Royal Taste from Louis XIV to the Revolution*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New York, NY: Stair Sainty Matthiesen Gallery, 1985), 9-10.; It is not completely apparent when he was "officially" appointed as a head of the Royal Academy, as an official title was not previously attached to his post. The first evidence of his title as First Painter is on a baptismal certificate from 1658, but two years later he is referred to as first painter of the King and of his Royal Academy in a government document from June 10, 1660. It is also suggested his appointment was originally given in 1664 Sponsorship and employment of visual artists was controlled by the role of Superintendent of the King's Building (later changed to Director-General), within the Royal Academy.

[94] Note: History painters were given the rank of Professor, while practitioners in other genres were considered inferior and given the rank of councilors. New ranking was also made for 'connoisseurs' and art enthusiasts.

[95] Alain Mérot, *French Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Caroline Beamish, english ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 267-268.

[96] Matthiesen Gallery, *The First*, 10.

effect and the pleasure given to the eye (through color, for example) more than the intellectual enjoyment provided by a skillful artist like Poussin.[97] The most famous of these lectures were about Descartes' *The Passions*, whereas Descartes had described the internal workings of the Passions, the artist was to demonstrate how they manifested in art by showing the symbolic connection between the movements of the emotion and the movements of the character's facial muscles.[98] Once this was achieved, the artist would be free to work not as a copyist of nature who was subject to its deficiencies, but as an independent creator that could improve upon it like in the platonic ideal.[99]

This becomes apparent in one of his lectures where Lebrun stated,

> "Expression, in my opinion, is the naive and natural resemblance of the things one wants to represent. It is necessary and enters all parts of the painting; a picture cannot be perfect without Expression; it is [expression which] marks the true characters of everything; it is by means of it that the nature of the body is kept open and that the figures seem to have movement, and all that is fictive pretends to be true."[100]

For most of the 17th century, it was not enough for the artist to imitate the expressions of nature that he might see around him, he must represent ideal nature: nature not as it is, but as it ought to be. Yet societal rules insisted that the expression of even the most extreme emotions should be restrained within certain bounds, which were dependent on the age, sex or rank of the person depicted.[101] Lebrun, having an understanding in both baroque and classical art, played with these societal notions and the dictated rules of each genre (baroque: expressionist, classical:

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[97] Mérot, *French Painting*, 266-268

[98] *The Passions of the Soul* is where Descartes attempts to rank various human emotions that give truth to the idea of a "soul", giving access to understanding and "taming" the human impulses through understanding their power.

[99] Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun's Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 7.

[100] Montagu, The Expression, 112. *« L'Expression, a mon avis, est une naïve et naturelle ressemblance des choses que l'on veut représenter. Elle est nécessaire et entre dans toutes les parties de la Peinture; un Tableau ne sauroit être parfait sans l'Expression ; c'est elle qui marque les véritables caractères de chaque chose; c'est par elle que l'on distingue la nature des corps; que les figures semblent avoir de mouvement, et tout qui est feint paroit être vrai. »*

[101] Montagu, The Expression, 1-4.

restrained). These lectures mark Lebrun's separation from the classicism of Poussin and gives reason to continued arguments surrounding classicism and baroque's close relationship within the cultural history of France.

Charles Perrault praised Lebrun for his renovations of French art in his poem *La Peinture* from 1668 with the lines,

> The Arts shall arrive at their highest point,
> Led by Genius and the extreme prudence
> Of a man who was selected by the most powerful of kings
> To bring artistic fruition to them.[102]

Looking back to platonic ideas of government teaching the people through accepted modes of art, Lebrun symbolizes how these intentions were used in the modern age of France. The artist practically canonized classicism as the academic style to represent the theories and modes the Academy chose to illustrate in his period yet, his style is not completely accurate in the antique imitations that Poussin sought out in his works. Instead, Lebrun's style was meant to both teach a moral yet give an air of emotion separate from any philosophic or political teachings. The academy now looked to a style that revered the classics and their philosophies while still holding on to motifs of the baroque to convey not just rationality but sentimentality.

None of Lebrun's successors as First Painter succeeded in the same domination within the world of the academy. His authority was not unchallenged though, and when Lebrun was left to another Director, Director Louvois, who favored his baroque rivals like Pierre Mignard, his authority and control over the Academy was sabotaged and diminished within a decade. Chronologically, Lebrun's dwindling power with the academy can be compared to the dwindling

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[102] Blunt, *Art and Architecture*, 15-17, 322.
« Les Arts arriveront à leur degré suprême,
Conduits par le Génie et la Prudence Extrême
De celui dont alors le plus puissant des Rois
Pour les faire fleurir aura su faire choix »

interest in classical painting found within Louis XIV's aristocratic world.[103] This French form of classicism, which was born out of Poussin's international characteristics of the 17th century and ends in the introduction to the "precious and spiraled graces of rococo", will await its resurrection around 1750.[104] Although classicism's popularity dwindles for the first half of the next century, Lebrun changed the points of interest between ancient philosophy and the method of painting that later influenced the next generation of classical artists such as Jacques-Louis David.

[103] Matthiesen Gallery, *The First*, 9-11.; The previous Director Colbert died in 1683.
[104] Marin, "Classical, Baroque," in *Baroque Topographies*, 167.; Dying in early spring of 1690, Lebrun left an educational inheritance for later artists of the academic tradition to follow.

Figure 1: *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*, Nicolas Poussin, 1633–34, Oil on canvas; 60 7/8 x 82 5/8 in., Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 2: *Statue of Emperor Augustus as Pontifex Maximus;* Via Labicana; c. 20 AD; Marble; Roman National Museum.

Figure 3: *Rape of the Sabine Women*; Giambologna; 1581-83; Marble; 410 cm high; Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence.

Figure 4: *The Gaul and His Wife (Ludovisi Gaul)*, Ludovisi Group, c. 240-220 BCE; Marble copy of bronze original; National Museum of the Terme.

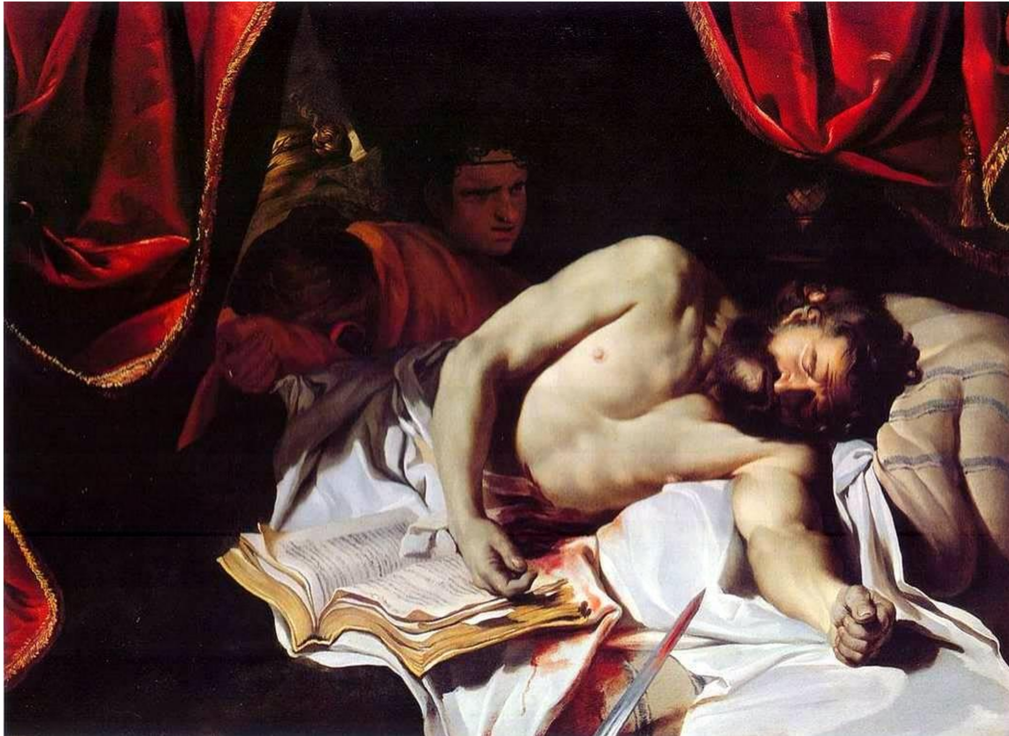

Figure 5: *The Suicide of Cato the Younger*, Charles Le Brun, 1646, Oil on Canvas, 96 X 130 cm, in private collection in São Paulo, Brazil.

Figure 6: The Brazen Serpent, Charles le Brun, 1648-1650, oil on canvas, (95.2 x 133.3), Bristol City Art Gallery.

Chapter 2: 1750-1850

Enlightenment, Academic, and Revolutionary Histories

Louis XIV was able to consolidate his power in the Versailles palace by keeping the upper classes occupied with elaborate and academic court life and further emphasizing the king's role in politics. By the latter-half of the seventeenth century though, his taste for heroic glory began to diminish in the political and artistic sphere and artists began avoiding depicting serious themes. Even before the king's death and Louis XV's claim to the throne in 1715, the art world was flooding with images from the Rococo style exemplified by the works of Francois Boucher (FIG.7). Rococo artists focused their narratives on the superfluous, natural, and erotic against Louis XIV's heroic, divine, and grandiose aesthetic appropriated from the classical and baroque.[105] This upcoming genre opposed the authoritative splendor of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century for a style of richness that did not often refer to any spiritual nor political antecedents.[106]

The age of Enlightenment in France began to take shape in the early 1700s, reaching its peak by the middle of the century.[107] With Louis XV's rule and taste for the rococo coinciding with emerging Enlightenment ideals, a new kind of discourse on art, beauty, and human

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[105] James A. Leith, *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, 1750-1799; A Study in the History of Ideas* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998), 4-5.; After the ceremonial life the upper classes endured during Louis XIV's reign, the bourgeois wished for a more natural, private life. This meant a stylistic exchange of the grave, austere, idealistic character for one more feminine and capricious. Still related to the narratives of antiquity, but now artists chose the love scenes rather than ones with noble themes. The art of Boucher and Watteau exemplify well the themes of the Rococo style.

[106] Catherine Thomas, "Les Petits romantiques et le rococo: éloge du mauvais goût," in *Romaticisme*, [43], excerpt from *Romanticisme* 1, no. 123 (2004): 21-43.; In rococo art, the artist could play with their configuration of forms, regardless of any didactic consideration as pleasure is the only value being sought. This art of extravagance was no more than a decorative amenity, and it is less solemn and freer than the academic style through its embodiment of a kind of mannered joy.

[107] Jennifer Llewellyn and Steve Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History, French Revolution, last modified 2018, https://alphahistory.com/frenchrevolution/enlightenment/.

sensibilities began to materialize. This discourse would be influenced by the role of the crown and the general philosophical problems discussed during this period that pertained to ideals of liberty, democracy, and scientific inquiry.[108] In addition, the growth of new ideas during the 18th century resulted in Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who began questioning the principles of the old regime and absolutism. In their view, governments existed to guard the nation, to protect the people and to secure their individual rights- something that was advocated by Louis XIV's reign but was never brought to fruition.[109]

Writers of the French Enlightenment were often referred to as *philosophes* ('philosophers') and therefore, the 18th-century French philosopher could be not only a person like Descartes, but also like new writers who were able to combine intellectual analysis, literature and social commentary.[110] Voltaire and the writer Denis Diderot were two such figures, distinguished for their desire to understand and advance society through their instructive yet entertaining books and plays.[111] One novel which exemplifies Voltaire's use of narrative to

[108] Jacques Morizot, "18th Century French Aesthetics," ed. Edward N. Zalta, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified April 24, 2013, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-18th-french/.
[109] Llewellyn and Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History; Liberty Fund, "Voltaire," Online Library of Liberty, last modified 2004, https://oll.libertyfund.org/people/voltaire.; Joanna Stalnaker and Jennifer Tsien, "Les maîtres du goût au siècle des Lumières," in Critique Journal, [741], excerpt from Critique 821 (October 2015): 740-50.; Views about a 'social contract' (life, liberty, and property) within the relationship between government power and individual rights became best exposed in France by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Voltaire was also one of the leading figures, making a name for himself as a poet and playwright before turning to political philosophy. He has stated "*passe[r] des épines des Mathématiques aux fleurs de la poésie*" and "*juge[r] également bien d'un livre de Métaphysique et d'une pièce de théâtre*".
[110] Llewellyn and Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History.
[111] Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.; Works of art, literature or otherwise, are often a reflection of society's ideals and prejudices, become an effective means fostering socialization. Diderot references theater as less of a place for amusement than a microcosm of society and therefore a laboratory for civil passions. In brief, art helps us to communicate with one another and facilitates a more socially-connected culture.

provoke philosophical debate would be the story *Candide, ou L'Optimisme* that sought to discuss the dangers of thinking too much on the self.[112]

In all these philosophes' writings, reason was no longer seen as only an instrument for identifying truth, but increasingly as a mental tool for evaluating judgments, including those relating to sentiment, taste, and individuality. They argued that art, not only through painting or sculpture, was as significant for humanity's education and livelihoods as scientific thought.[113] Therefore, the rococo which has been debated and rejected by certain artistic and philosophical spheres throughout the country, was only stabilized as a popular style through the elite's support for it. As Rousseau says, "Luxury rarely goes without the sciences and the arts, and they never go without it."[114] This art of splendor, to Rousseau, was an art opposed to good morals, and was the by-product of a vain country.[115] Therefore, as the luxury of the rococo era and the Enlightenment movement continued, the former distinctions between the arts and sciences further eroded while intellectual pursuits in both began to be encouraged once more.[116]

From this growing relation between the arts and sciences to create a "better" society came a renewed veneration of antiquity and a revitalized classical movement within the arts.[117] We can already see how the philosophes took from the platonic ideals surrounding taste and art as a tool of society. In the 18th century, the antique was also reintroduced as the highest model of art after

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[112] Bac de Francais, "Candide ou l'Optimisme," Voltaire, last modified 2007, http://www.bacdefrancais.net/candide-voltaire.php.; Published in 1759, Candide is a reflection on the mystery of evil and how to reconcile its existence on earth with the existence of God. Throughout this novel, Voltaire implicitly criticizes optimism and religion. This philosophical tale is based on the main character named Candide while the reader watches the evolution of his character and reflections. Voltaire even creates a certain confrontation between Optimism, personified by the character Pangloss, and Pessimism, which is personified by Martin.
[113] Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[114] Leith, *The Idea*, 11.; "*Le luxe va rarement sans les sciences et les arts, et jamais ils ne vont sans lui*. »
[115] Jules Guy, Notices, Analyses Et Extraits J.J. Rousseau, comp. C. Delagrave, 2nd ed. (Paris, FR: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1906), 17-18.
[116] Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[117] "France, 1600–1800 A.D." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/?period=09®ion=euwf (October 2003)

the Prussian scholar Johann Winckelmann and his book *History of the Art of Antiquity* was published in the 1760s.[118] His writings created a biased art history around his identifications of the different stylistic patterns in art that rose and fell throughout ancient Greece and Rome.[119]

For Winckelmann, these styles held a series of ideologically loaded dualities which contributed to classicism being seen as a style of "balance". He writes, "between the bodily or erotic and the immaterial or idea-like, between the sensuously pleasurable and the grand or manly, between a cultural ideal of refined hedonism on one hand and one of austere heroics and virtue on the other." Through his language, he incorporated the metaphors of sexuality and the politics within the foundation of the art history he was creating. Moreover, by the latter half of the 18th century, French interest in rococo art diminished as it came to be seen to contribute to a "tradition in decline". The purer classicism advocated by Winckelmann was hailed as a radical renovation of French art that was suited to a society in search of new moralistic ideals due to the intellectual fervor of the Enlightenment.[120]

A significant consequence of this revival of classical themes was the rise of Salons which produced the new literary genre of the salon review, which was meant to discuss and judge contemporary styles to their benefits in society.[121] The Salon was meant to showcase art of the Academy for the benefit of a larger public rather than private patrons. Reviewers therefore took care to represent not only their own, but the public's prevailing opinions on art and what it

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[118]Alex Potts, Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), [11].; Originally published in German in 1764, *History of the Art of Antiquity* soon acquired an international reputation with a French translation published in 1766. It presented a comprehensive synthesis of available knowledge about the visual artefacts of the ancient world. What set Winckelmann apart from his contemporaries was his ambitious attempt to redefine the history and aesthetics of ancient Greek tradition.
[119] Moses I. Finley, *L'héritage De La Grèce*, comp. Geneviève Ladjadj-Koenig (Paris, France: Tallandier, 2009), 613-617.
[120] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 6-8; 11; 21.
[121] Though the Salon was first a political and social event that (in the 1730s) was inaugurated for about one month in the Louvre's Salon Carré on August 25th to pay homage to the king, it was also a valuable guide for tracing the major trends in style and aesthetic ideas of France.

portrayed.[122] Art then came to a new field of philosophical inquiring within the realm of French philosophy: art criticism and debates over aesthetics. Interestingly, these academic institutions also contributed to ideas of art as equally important as science in bettering society. While science took care of our physical well beings and virtues, art could speak to the mind and influence public behavior. By the 1750s, the idea of art as a tool of propaganda was already in place while classicism became the preferred style once more.[123] The Enlightenment not only called for the more intellectual art of classicism but provoked the juxtaposition between the style's philosophy and the role of the government sponsoring its rebirth.

While classicism was eclipsed by the rococo during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Neoclassical generation quickly reacted against it.[124] In 1763, the influential writer and art critic Diderot also condemned it as a taste associated with a lavish elite. In fact, Diderot was among those who impelled the strong resurgence of classicism that followed through the latter half of the century.[125] This "new" classicism went further than Poussin in terms of artists' reverence and pseudo-accurate representations of ancient culture to depict contemporary ideas that often pertained to political ideologies.[126]

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[122] Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.; The growth of salon reviews was the result of a new market for journalism combined with an increasing interest in artistic matters by the public.
[123] Leith, *The Idea*, 61.
[124] Again, this term (neoclassical) was not used for this group of artists while they were alive but given to them in the 20th century. This generation relates to the classical artists coming of age prior during and after the French Revolution.
[125] Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *1648-1815* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 603-604.; David G. Irwin, *Neoclassicism* (London, UK: Phaidon Press, 1997), 4-5.; Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.; Diderot's work is a decisive landmark in the emergence of criticism; His first encounters with art were intellectual and attached utmost importance to the theme of blindness as a conceptual paradigm and as a weapon against idealism. His writings were based on two complementary beliefs: that the techniques used by a painter to produce various effects are difficult for the ordinary viewer to understand, and that it is a difficult but vital to capture, through literary language, the significant aspects of a painting.
[126] Leith, *The Idea*, 61.

An article entitled *Beaux-arts* by the Swiss philosopher Johann Georg Sulzer in 1777 defended the importance of art in relation to the nation and the idea of national character.[127] For him, art was not merely one facet of a society, but can reflect the whole of a society (its values, beliefs, and morals) within the portrayed image. In a discussion of national character and the laws and institutions that build it, he turned to the services provided by the fine arts:

> [Artists] have a thousand opportunities to awaken these fundamental maxims within us, and to etch them [into our memory] in an indelible manner; they alone, after insensibly preparing us for delicate feelings, may in moments of crisis do violence to our hearts, and bind us through a sort of pleasure to the most painful duties; they alone possess the secret, though differently, and each in their own way, to present with all the seductions that one can imagine, the virtues, the sentiments of an honest heart, and the acts of beneficence that the circumstance demands. What sensitive soul could resist them then?

The fine arts, then, could be useful when put towards guiding society. Art could exploit human emotions through beauty, but it could also do more than emphasize sensual desires, as Sulzer and others argue. Sulzer's idea contributed to a search for refined moral senses which became known as "*le goût du beau*" (taste for beauty). He did not claim that society had never made use of the arts to revive the ideals of truth and virtue, but he maintained, like Winkelmann, that ancient Greek art came closest to reproducing these national sentiments.[128] This is followed by Diderot, who stated in 1781 that the theoretical foundations of art are found in "*le retour à l'antique et au grand goût*" (the return to the antique and great taste).[129] The importance of "the

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[127] Matthew Riley, "Civilizing the Savage: Johann Georg Sulzer and the 'Aesthetic Force' of Music," in Journal of the Royal Musical Association (n.p.: Taylor & Francis, 2002), excerpt from Journal of the Royal Musical Association 127 (2002): 1-22.; Sulzer was a Swiss professor of Mathematics and philosopher. Director of the philosophical section of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, he wrote often on the ideas of aesthetics, usually related to music and other carious artforms in his works.

[128] Leith, *The Idea*, 57-62.; « *Ils ont mille occasions de réveiller en nous ces maximes fondamentales, et de les y graver d'une manière ineffaçable; eux seuls, après nous avoir insensiblement préparés à des sentiments délicats peuvent dans les moments de crise faire une douce violence à nos cœurs, et nous enchainer par une sorte de plaisir aux devoirs les plus pénibles; eux seuls possèdent le secret, quoique diversement, et chacun à sa manière, de présenter avec tous les appas que l'on peut imaginer, les vertus, les sentiments d'un cœur honnête, et les actes de bienfaisance que la circonstance exige. Quelle âme un peu sensible pourroit leur résister alors?* » This "grand gout" meant a "great" or "noble" taste, which is another way of saying "official" taste.

[129] "Diderot's Concept of Classical art," in *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists*, by June Ellen Hargrove (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1990), [91], excerpt from *Classicism and Its Antagonists*.

nation" in visual arts became increasingly emphasized, opening the way to a long tradition of literary references in painting and the social and theoretical philosophies that went along with them.[130] This language of painting as civic speech will become more important once placed in discussion with Jacques-Louis David and the Revolution.

Following the rejection of the rococo was the eventual rejection of the Bourbon monarchy of the ancien regime. With this downfall, classicism found its renewed status as a symbol of reason and superiority in public taste and that could later be used as propaganda for revolutionaries and their call to be taken seriously by the government. Poussin's successful classicist style was such a strong force in the minds of classically trained artists of the mid-eighteenth century that he is known to be a primary stylistic influence on the first generation of Neoclassicists. Thus, the revived classicism of the later eighteenth century received vital knowledge from its seventeenth century antecedents. Poussin's form of classicism was well known to this new generation, who derived much inspiration from him in its early re-development.[131]

Subsequently labelled 'Neoclassicism', the style was stimulated by a considerably increased knowledge of classical antiquity from newly published material on the subject. Starting in the 1730s, Herculaneum and Pompeii began to be excavated for the first time, and important sites on the Greek mainland and islands were published in encyclopedias as well.[132] Consequently, artists of the second half of the eighteenth century knew far more about ancient Greek (and inevitably ancient Roman) art than their predecessors who came after the fall of these empires.[133] This

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[130] Morizot, "18th Century," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[131] Irwin, *Neoclassicism*, 133; 5.
[132] William Bell Dinsmoor and William James Anderson, The Architecture of Ancient Greece: An Account of Its Historic Development (New York, NY: Biblio & Tannen Publishers, 1973), 35-37. Originally published as The Architecture of Greece and Rome. [xix].; The Botanist Tournefort left valuable records of the Aegean Islands in the 1700s, which was later placed in the books *Antiquitée Expliquée* (Antiquity Explained) by Abbé Montfaucon in the 1720s. Later examples include David LeRoy's *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* published in 1758.
[133] Irwin, *Neoclassicism*, 36-41; There were only illustrated publications of Herculeum from 1755 onwards.

expansion in knowledge about classical antiquity corresponded with influential theoretical and historical writings which contributed strongly to this change in taste against the rococo.[134]

Winckelmann, in his *History,* exemplifies the shift in stylistic ideals through his reverence of a Greek sculpture, *The Laocoon* (FIG.8). Using this sculpture group as his exemplar, he wrote: "The most eminent characteristic of Greek works is a noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in gesture and expression. As the bottom of the sea lies peaceful beneath a foaming surface, a great soul lies sedate beneath the strife of passions in Greek figures."[135] This combination of "noble simplicity and sedate grandeur" was at the heart of Winkelmann's interpretation of antique art, which then became shared by other writers and artists of the same period. For him, this was the "grand style" that he called upon the European art world to imitate.[136] Undoubtably, his aesthetic judgement advocating the imitation of Greek art became central to the emerging neoclassical style within all artistic mediums.[137]

The new Minister of Fine Arts in 1775, Comte d'Angivilliers, disclosed what philosophies the Academy would support and approve of for the undisclosed future. Inspired by the century's philosophers, the function of French art would now be to combat vice and preach virtue through careful choice of subject matter that redirected art back to worthy and noble themes. Didactic historical and heroic themes assisted the emergence of the neoclassical style.

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[134] Irwin, *Neoclassicism*, 8; Leith, *The Idea*, 37.; Diderot argued that revolves around man's need to create objects endowed with a sense of order and symmetry. This, he says, is what birthed the Fine Arts.
[135] Sidhu, "On Negotiating," 20.; Irwin, *Neoclassicism,* 34.; In his 1763 text, Winkelmann divides the art of antiquity into five stages: from the archaic period to the Sublime Style of Phidias, the Beautiful Style from Praxiteles to Lysippus, then to the Imitative Style of the Romans, before the ultimate phase of decay through the Carolingian period into the Middle ages.
[136] Winkelmann, history of art, Book XIII, Vol. 3, 129.; When Winkelmann discusses the artistic shift in Hellenistic Greece, he explains the importance of the emerging style which he describes as the art that prepared the way for the grand style, guiding the latter to sever correctness and loft expressions […] For, as in learning music and languages, the tone in on case, and the syllables and words in the other, must be sharply and clearly rendered, in order to obtain pure harmony and a fluent utterance, even so drawing leads to truth and beauty of form, not through indecisive, faint, and lightly touched strokes, but through manly, although somewhat hard and accurately defined outlines."
[137] Irwin, *Neoclassicism*, 34-35.

Unbeknownst to the governmental officials, they were in some ways guiding art towards themes that forged the arts into a potential revolutionary weapon.[138]

The Enlightenment created an ideological context for revolution as the surging political ideas created an environment where questioning and criticizing the old order was entirely expected. Yet strangely enough, no significant Enlightenment writers predicted nor suggested an upcoming revolution in France.[139] Nevertheless, treatises on morality, politics, and social order made by the philosophes triggered a wave of discussion and debate- some of which was even organized and formalized in France's salons and art circles. France's social hierarchies and inequalities were stripped of their ideological defenses between tradition and religion due to enlightenment beliefs. According to the ideas of the Enlightenment, the common public of France were born not only with certain autonomy but especially with the right to expect better government.[140]

By 1789, the revolutionary crisis came to its peak, and, on July 14th, a Parisian mob stormed the Bastille prison, which was seen as a symbol of political oppression in France.[141] The French revolution had begun, and on August 26, revolutionaries issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man which embodied the principles: *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité*, a phrase meant

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[138] Leith, *The Idea*, 77; 80-81.
[139] Most of the philosophes were long dead before conflicts erupted in the 1780s and their texts pre-dated the revolution by decades (Diderot's first *Encyclopedie* was published in 1752, and Voltaire's Letters were in 1734).
[140] Llewellyn and Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History.
[141] Leith, *The Idea,* 94-95.; Louis XVI's failure to stand by his reforming ministers, bankrupting of the country due to France's intervention in the American revolution, and the aristocratic obstruction in politics turned the now more-impoverished lower classes to an ideologically led revolt.

to signal an end to the corrupt class system.[142] Another line was crossed when, in 1793, Louis XVI was guillotined, along with scores of moderates and radicals, at the Place de la Concorde.[143]

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[142] Neil McWilliam and Catherine Méneux, "Introduction," in Actes de colloques et livres en ligne de l'Institut national d'histoire de l'art, by Julie Ramos (INHA, n.d.), excerpt from "Jacques-Louis David, … au sujet d'une statue symbolique du Peuple, 1793," *L'Art social de la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*. Anthologie de textes sources, October 12, 2018, https://journals.openedition.org/inha/6163.; "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."
[143] University of North Carolina, "French History Timeline," UNC Greensboro, http://aam.govst.edu/projects/tanstett/French%20timeline.htm.

Jacques-Louis David: Illustrator of the Political

One aspiring neoclassical artist in the pre-revolutionary era was Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), who later became known as the "artistic leader of his epoch." His career spanned over several political regimes and his personal experiences with state institutions were formative to his role as an artist and as a prominent figure of the Revolution.[144] His challenges to tradition went beyond government and into the artistic discourses of the French Academies as well. He, like his 17th century predecessor Charles Le Brun, would change the way these institutions emulated "academic" art, but not through the same channels.[145] With artistic inspiration from Winkelmann and contextual inspiration of the Revolution, he emerged with a new artistic and aesthetic vision manifested through his own reinterpretation of antique subjects. Part of this grand reformation was David's use of subject matter to illustrate political conflicts.

After completing his education at the French Academy in both Paris and Rome in the 1770s, David rose to prominence a decade later with monumental paintings like *Belisarius Begging for Alms* (FIG.9), which were based on antique themes that introduced aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic reforms in French art.[146] Created in 1781, this painting shows the academic focus on grand, figural narratives in a precise, mannered execution. The scene is concentrated by the inclusion of only four characters: A Roman soldier, the former general Belisarius with a child, and a woman handing him money. In an elaborate architectural setting of ancient Rome, Belisarius sits upon a tall, fluted column's base while gripping the youth to his chest with his left

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[144] Dorothy Johnson, ed., *Jacque-Louis David: New Perspectives* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 11-13; 35.; These regimes included the Ancien Régime, the Revolution, Republic, Directory, Empire, and the Restoration.
[145] Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 217-218; This ideal derives from Plato: reason and control always trump passion.
[146] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 35-37.

arm and raising his right out towards the woman. The perspective, while focused on the four figures in the foreground, draws back to show a landscape of mountains and roman monuments which are separated from the viewer by a wall in the middle ground.[147]

Seemingly inspired by Lebrun's studies on emotion from a century before, David shows a look of grief upon Belisarius' face and astonishment on the soldier's which is enhanced by his arms raised in surprise. Both the narrative and the expression of emotion found within this composition related to the prevailing tastes of the period. From Lebrun to Diderot, the neo-classical connection with sensibility is marked by the choice of the subjects for painting and literature with ethical or moralistic themes like charity and those that display unhappy or persecuted virtue.[148]

In his final installment of Salon criticism in 1781, Diderot wrote of this piece, that "[David] works in the grand manner, he has heart, his faces are expressive without being contrived, the attitudes are noble and natural."[149] Another critic stated: "the unfortunate victim[] of the cruel scourge who occupy […] the picture has an expression of exalted suffering that is heartbreaking. This part of the picture is worthy of Poussin."[150] David's work was celebrated because he found a middle-ground between expression, drama, and heroic rationality. His work was compared to Poussin's because of the theatrical expressions of the soldier, whose gesture also hints to his emotional state, and the inherent nobility seen within Belisarius even though he is shown at his lowest state (a beggar rather than a General). David thought that the scope of

[147] Palais Beaux-Arts, Lille, "Belisarius Begging for Alms," Palais Beaux-Arts, http://www.pba-lille.fr/en/Collections/Highlights/16th-20th-century-Paintings/Belisarius-Begging-for-Alms/(plus).
[148] Roland Mortier, "Le néo-classicisme entre sublime et sensibilité," in *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, [103], previously published in *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises*, no. 50 (1998): 97-104.
[149] "Diderot's Concept," in *The French*, 103.; "*Ce jeune homme montre de la grande manière dans la conduite de son ouvrage, il a de l'âme, ses têtes ont de l'expression sans affection, ses attitudes sont nobles et naturelles*. »
[150] Scnapper, *David*, 64-65.

ambition for this noble idea raised the composition's moralistic value, which is what was admired by Diderot.[151]

Almost a decade later, Maximilien Robespierre and his Committee of Public Safety had brought about the Reign of Terror in France.[152] Robespierre, considered a main political character in the events of the Revolution, stated, "If the mainspring of popular, peaceful government is virtue, the mainspring of the government in revolution is about both virtue and terror: a virtue without terror is fatal and terror without virtue is powerless."[153] David, friends with Robespierre and other radical Jacobins, passionately served the French Revolution and the Republic both as an artist and as a deputy to the National Convention.[154] He was a prominent figure during the Terror as well, even drawing images that depicted the assassination of the monarchy with personifications of liberty and justice (FIG.10). Although order had been mostly reestablished under the Directory (starting in 1795), French society still felt shattered, unable to return to the culture and life they had led before the war.[155]

David created his painting *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (FIG.11) a decade after the start of the French Revolution, which was infamous for its use of the guillotine to purge the aristocracy. After Robespierre's fall in July 1794, David was spared the guillotine but was imprisoned for several months in 1794 and again in 1795. It was during his incarceration that he

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[151] Antoine Schnapper, *David* (New York, NY: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1982), 62-66.; Winkelmann: "In the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs and imitators find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty..." David, like Plato, thought that in painting the idea counted more than the actual realization.
[152] University of North Carolina, "French History," UNC Greensboro.
[153] Maximilien ROBESPIERRE (1758-1794), Discours « Sur les principes de morale politique qui doivent guider la Convention », Convention, 5 février 1794. ; *« Si le ressort du gouvernement populaire dans la paix est la vertu, le ressort du gouvernement en révolution est à la fois la vertu et la terreur : la vertu sans laquelle la terreur est funeste ; la terreur sans laquelle la vertu est impuissante.* »
[154] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 35.
[155] Ophélie Lerouge, "The Intervention of the Sabine Women," Collection and Louvre Palace.; Now commonly known as *La Terreur*, waves of unfortunate bystanders were also killed, while others were put on trial and thrown into prison. The Première République Directoire was established October 26, 1795.

began thinking about painting the Sabine subject, which would demonstrate that he was a man of peace and thus in tune with the spirit of the reformed age. The canvas was finished five years later in 1799, having David re-emerge from prison as a prominent artist under the Directory.[156]

David, like his famed predecessor Nicolas Poussin, depicted a scene from the Sabine story, but one that takes place after the women's abduction by the Romans.[157] The episode of the narrative chosen by David and identified in Livy's writings occurs when the Sabine men attempted to get their women back, thus sparking a battle between the two cities. Livy writes,

> The resentment of the brides was already much diminished at the very moment when their parents, in mourning garb and with tears and lamentations, were attempting to arouse their states to action. […] The last to attack Rome were the Sabines, and this war was by far the gravest of all, for passion and greed were not their motives, nor did they parade war before they made it.

Although now content, the women's nation caused unnecessary conflict to their situation. The Sabine women are shown intervening to stop the bloodshed and, in turn, creating the much stronger, powerful Rome that David and other artists now looked back to.

In *Intervention of the Sabine Women,* David shows the women entering to stop the war raging beneath the ramparts of the Roman Capitol.[158] The background is ambiguous in its

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[156] Lerouge, "The Intervention," Collection and Louvre Palace.; Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 35.; Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *1648-1815*, 1119.; He was freed and amnestied by the Directory, but, feeling betrayed yet blameless, David withdrew from politics. He felt the Revolution had distracted him from his true calling, classical history painting, and while still in prison, David's thoughts returned to antiquity.

[157] Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *1648-1815*, 1125; David: "Let us note here, in passing, that the moment of this abduction has already been dealt with by the sensitive and precise paintbrush of Poussin, to whom the modern Romans have conferred the epithet of 'Divine'."

[158] Titus Livius, Ab Urbe Condita, 28 BC, in Book 1, ed. Benjamin Oliver Foster, 9th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 1.10-1.13.; "Then the Sabine women, whose wrong had given rise to the war, with loosened hair and torn garments, their woman's timidity lost in a sense of[1] their misfortune, dared to go amongst the flying missiles, and rushing in from the side, to part the hostile forces and disarm them of their anger, beseeching their fathers on this side, on that their husbands, that fathers-in-law and sons-in-law should not stain themselves with impious bloodshed, nor pollute with parricide the suppliants' children, grandsons to one party and sons to the other. 'If you regret,' they continued, 'the relationship that unites you, if you regret the marriage-tie, turn your anger against us; we are the cause of war, the cause of wounds, and even death to both our husbands and our parents. It will be better for us to perish than to live, lacking either of you, as widows or as orphans.' It was a touching plea, not only to the rank and file, but to their leaders as well. A stillness fell on them, and a sudden hush. Then the leaders

architecture, although we can see the battle continuing on the tops of the castle-like structure built into the distant mountain. The foreground is brightly lit, but the sky is filled with deep grey clouds that provide a similar feeling of unease as in Poussin's image. The architecture does not surround the characters, but they are still enclosed within the frame by the two armies closing in on either side of the canvas.

The battle looks hazy, as if the scene was paused amid the action; David shows the uprooted dust to heighten the intensity of the fight and the movement of the people. Within this "dust" are the striking diagonals of spears, swords, and limbs such as the arms raised with helmets in hand. Again, similarly to Poussin, the bordering armies, rays of light, and sandy background places the primary characters on a narrative stage, but now similar to a frieze-like configuration. The three main figures are that of the two nude warriors, separated by the woman in white in the center of the painting. This woman, Hersilia, holds out her arms, caught in motion as if running to stop the two men she hurls herself between.

She is the daughter of the Sabine King Tatius on the left, but also the wife of Emperor Romulus on the right. He is shown in almost complete opposition to Tatius, having his back to the audience and only identified by the she-wolf (emblem of the Roman state) embossed on his golden-silver shield. He wears a feathered helmet and raises a spear with his right hand. Hersilia's father, with his body facing the viewers, is seen only with a carmine cape, helmet, shield, and sword. He holds his shield up with his left hand, sword in right, while bending back in retaliation to the possible spear that would have been thrown at him.

In addition to the three main characters, the other female figures also take on symbolic references. A woman to Hersilia's left, shown in a pink dress and blue shawl, throws herself at

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came forward to make a truce, and not only did they agree on peace, but they made one people out of the two. They shared the sovereignty, but all authority was transferred to Rome."

Tatius's feet while holding her child. Behind them, a woman in yellow with a white headscarf separates herself from the war and raises her infant towards the sky. Below her is a woman in red, whose shawl flails behind her. She holds her arms across her face but looks out beyond Hersilia towards the audience, an admitted characterization of Terror.[159] Again, as a possible reference to Poussin's portrayal of different age groups, an older woman kneels in front of Romulus and bares her chest to him, as if sacrificing herself for peace. The youth with the horse on the right side of the image provokes interest due to the hat he is wearing, which echoes that of an 18th century French workingman.[160]

David uses the gazes of the subjects themselves to move the audience emotionally and move our eyes around the canvas. For example, Romulus and Tatius share a gaze; Hersilia looks to her husband, the nude boy with the brown and black horse looks back to them, and the baby in the middle of the foreground stares back out at the viewer with the woman in red. The painting provides a continued narrative throughout the piece through these gazes which point to the dramatic climax (Hersilia's impediment) and resolution (peace between the cities) of the story, but also through the actions of the characters surrounding the middle trio.

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[159] Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine Women: Body, Gender, and Republican Culture under the Directory," in *Art History Journal*, [405], previously published in *Art History* 14, no. 3 (September 1991): 398-430.

[160] Yvonne Korshak, "The Liberty Cap as a Revolutionary Symbol in America and France," in *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*(n.p.: The University of Chicago Press, n.d.), [53-65], previously published in *Chicago University Press Journals*, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 52-69.; Philippe Bordes, "Jacques-Louis David's Anglophilia on the Eve of the French Revolution," in *The Burlington Magazine* (n.p.: Burlignton Magazine Publications, n.d.), 134: excerpt from *The Burlington Magazine*, August 1992, 482-90.; There is a significant political and historical association attached to this cap, as its also known as the Liberty cap, the Phrygian cap, or the pileus. America reinstate the symbolic nature of the Roman cap to symbolize freedom and other revolutionary ideas that were outlawed by the British government. Of course, through this use, England became more and more aware of the allegorical apparel, depicting the cap in newspaper sketches and large paintings. With many French artists aware of British artistic and political discourse, the symbol then traveled to David's native country and its revolutionaries. Korshak writes: "Like so much of the symbolization of the eighteenth-century revolutions, the roots of the liberty cap lie in antiquity. […] The pileus became an attribute of Libertas, the Goddess of Liberty, shown seated with the cap on top of her staff, or standing and holding the cap along with her staff." Revolutionaries of the time throughout America, England, and France well appreciated the importance of effective images for conveying revolutionary ideas through symbols like this cap that were understood historically, politically, and socially.

Although the lower section of the image grasps much of the audience's attention, the picture as a whole holds more contextual metaphors. The frieze-like nature of the figures in the foreground are divided by the symbolic objects of Antiquity on the left, represented by the architecture, and Nature on the right, represented by the bundle of hay raised into the sky. The narrative is further pushed onto a symbolic stage, and therefore its subjects must be analyzed as such. Defined by the two central notions, Antiquity and Nature, David elaborates on a concept of regeneration within the image.[161] This again relates to Plato's and Lebrun's theories of imitating and then manipulating the natural through antique ideals to reach a state of perfection. The use of varying age groups also calls to an idea of regeneration, and the multiple stages of life for a woman.

As Poussin shows a gendered narrative that invokes certain cultural contexts, so does David's. The artist himself understood the iconography of family strife as a metaphor of the revolutionary process. By representing the intervention of the Sabine women who urged the men, in the name of family and peace, to stop fighting, the painting offered an imaginary resolution to the revolutionary conflict, while addressing the Directory's ideological pursuit of closure.[162] Corresponding to their periods in history, Poussin's message to women is that of feminine obligation to marriage, even if undesired, while David's deals more with conformity and the feminine duty of marriage, which they must accept for the public good even if unwanted. Moreover, like Poussin, David includes figures and movements that represent the "positive"

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[161] Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis*, 157.

[162] Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine," in *Art History*, 399; Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *1648-1815*, 1121-1122, David's recount of the Sabine intervention: "[Hersilia] cried out: Sabines what have you come to do under the walls of Rome? Here are no more daughters for you to take back to their parents, nor ravishers for you to punish […] but now that we are linked to [the Romans] by the most sacred of chains, you have come to take wives away from husbands, mothers from their children. […] But if this war was undertaken for our sake, we beg you to give back to us, from amongst yourselves, our fathers and our brothers, without depriving us, from amongst the Romans, of our husbands and our young children."

ending to the intervention: the horseman on the right is shown putting his sword back into its sheath while, further away, the hands and helmets seen in the frontal plane are now echoed in gestures of peace.[163] The inclusion of the story's conclusion suggests that a happy ending, in reality, was a possibility through an eventual compromise.

While this composition relates to antique themes and to Winkelmann's heroic ideals relating to rationality and grandeur, the content of the image also exemplifies post-revolutionary cultural discourse.[164] In the post-revolutionary era, many found that their old values and traditions were unrecognizable, with one republican writer stating "we are all ex-something".[165] And David, the ex-Jacobin, ex-leader of the revolution, and ex-minister of propaganda, uses the Sabine narrative's objective political metaphors to symbolize the socio-cultural plight of post-war France. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth summarizes,

> David confronted the spectators with the image of that ideal other to which they ought to aspire […] as a psychosexually specific fiction that sought to define what it meant to be a republican man as opposed to a republican woman and what these positions, charted as they were by the patriarchal structure of the Roman family, implied in post-revolutionary society.[166]

In case the audience needed an additional way to recognize themselves as a part of this tumultuous society, David put a large mirror (a *psyché*) across from his painting during its exhibition. This allowed visitors to see their reflection with that of the painting's, symbolizing their inclusion within the new "frame" of the Directory. By modeling traditional masculine roles in the warriors, and traditional maternal roles in the women, David raised the possibility that post-revolutionary women may be the ones to ultimately mend the shattered culture. This is

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[163] Lerouge, "The Intervention," Collection and Louvre Palace.
[164] The "Ideal Beauty" was an artistic theory stated by Sir. Joshua Reynolds' in his book Discourses on Art. In his book, Reynolds states that although in real life every object will have its imperfections, it is up to the artist to render the real into the most beautiful version of itself it can be.
[165] Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine," in *Art History*, 405; 409.; "Nous sommes tous les ci-devants."
[166] Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine," in *Art History*, 417.

defined more clearly by David's inclusion of the she-wolf on Romulus' shield, which represents the connection between motherhood and the origins of the state.[167]

Interestingly, the painter renders women's antique gowns as falling aside to reveal their flesh- breasts, legs, and thighs- yet placed amid naked men. For example, a dark-haired woman with bared breasts, kneels on the ground to the right of Hersilia and points to her three young children. Their exposing of skin does relate to symbols of the maternal, but also correlated to David's understanding of women in late 1790's Paris and in the Directory, saying himself that Hersilia is a representation of "*la patrie*". Her female entourage outline the societal anxiety of revolutionary French women, who began roaming spaces outside the homes to be involved in revolutionary activity and were not securely attached to familial nor maternal bonds.[168] The women, who are de-eroticized, clothed and austere, are given the ethical and political investment that has been denied to the males in exchange for their virtue of rationality and beauty.[169]

His *Sabine* painting, which is dated almost twenty years after his first monumental effort in his Belisarius composition, marked a change in his attitude toward classicism. His early works, he now believed, were too "Roman" in their display of physical anatomies in his effort to work out of the grand manner. In turn, he disposed the Sabines' main characters across a wide frieze, stripped them bare, and defined their bodies with clean, statue-like contours.[170] Although

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[167] Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine," in *Art History*, 405-410.

[168] Lajer-Burcharth, "David's Sabine," in *Art History*, 405; 419-420; Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Nudity à la grecque in 1799," in *Art Bulletin*, [325-326], excerpt from *Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (June 1, 1998): 311-35.; The last Jacobin uprising was in 1795, in which women took the leading role and exemplified the "apogée of female militancy" during the revolutionary decade, even though omen were banned from Jacobian political events in 1793. The association of women with the violence of the guillotine made their actions seen as repellant. Although David's painting has been seen as a powerful repression of Revolutionary feminist claims in its alignment of femininity and maternity, that latter equation of women and motherhood was undermined by the painting's foregrounding of women's prominence as public spectacle within Directory France.

[169] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 229.

[170] "Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), Biography," National Gallery of Art, https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1212.html.

the Sabine story was a Roman subject, he aimed instead for "Greek" purity, even stating to his pupil, Delecluze, “I want to create pure Greekness.” Yet David does not solely reference ancient themes, let alone Greek, in his works, but alternatively sought ideas and inspiration from images made by the artists Raphael and Raimondi of Renaissance Italy.[171] Therefore, it would be an overstatement to call David’s painting a representation of a purified classicism, especially when considering the erotically and violently charged treatment of themes that were specifically relevant to political situations of his time.[172]

Comparing David’s painting to Poussin’s, the narrative is no longer imbued with a cultural command to love, but one of war and reconciliation in the name of their country. David knew of Winckelmann’s and other writer’s discourses on artistic taste and their praise for the superiority of the classical.[173] Therefore, exemplified in the *Sabine* painting, David transforms the Antique narrative into a metaphor for contemporary and sexual politics. Notably, Tatius’ sword’s sheath is strategically placed to hide his own genitalia. This leads to the next question of why the women are clothed and not the men, with one critic even asking, “How could the warriors fight in the nude?”[174]

David uses his subjects and their nudity to represent the ideal, classical duality between political freedom and sensual eroticism that had been found in the depictions of ancient masculinity.[175] His decision to depict his male heroes nude can also be seen as an attempt to define nudity *à l’antique*, meaning, to reinvigorate the *beau ideal* with the masculine artistic tradition rather than the commonly approved female nude of his period. Interestingly, another

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[171] Schnapper, *David*, 187.
[172] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 232.
[173] Bordes, "Jacques-Louis David's," in *The Burlington*, 134: 482-90.
[174] Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis*, 156.
[175] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 9.

critic C.Z. disparages the classical heroes within the terms of a contemporary Frenchmen. He exclaims, “A dressed hero is far more imposing. If you send him nude in the middle of a public place, I strongly doubt that the dressed people who surround him, will see him with eyes other than those of his *valet de chambre*, ...” While ancient themes were popular, this proves that points the artist meant to make were not always realized by the audience in the correct manner. Therefore, in C.Z’s analysis of the character’s association to politics, Romulus and Tatius are naked and vulnerable French citizens, yet still carry heroic facades and noble gestures. For C.Z, the painting didn’t invoke an experience of uniting a nation, but a ridiculing of the bourgeois as he saw noble French citizens now exposed in front of classes below their own status.[176]

Here, the naked males embody a statuesque “grandeur” similar to Winkelmann’s ideal, while the clothed female body acts as the vehicle of feeling and expression; the men are still but are distorted by the female action.[177] David, in a reproach to the complaints on his use of nudity, explains,

> It was an accepted practice amongst the painters, sculptors, and poets of Antiquity to depict nude the gods, heroes, and all kinds of men […] If they painted a philosopher, he would be nude […] If they painted a warrior, he would be nude […] In a word, my intention, in creating this painting, was to paint the *moeurs* of Antiquity with such precision that the Greeks and the Romans, upon seeing my work, would not have found me a stranger to their customs.[178]

Looking back to *Belisarius,* one notices that all the characters are clothed; the woman is a passive object of virtue while the men hold much of the composition’s action in their gestures. This is the same for much of David’s early work, and therefore his shift to male nudity in his *Sabine* image at this point in his career is particularly interesting.[179] This beautiful and graceful

[176] Grigsby, "Nudity à la grecque," in *Art Bulletin*, 313-314; 325.
[177] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 226-229.
[178] Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *1648-1815*, 1124-1125.
[179] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 226-229.

nudity that David imposed is to work as an idealizing device that made the figure more effective in signifying heroic virtue, rather than the clothed, naturalistic image of a boy hero.[180]

Although, as the critic C.Z. says, the bourgeois of his period were not as understanding about antique fashions being brought back to their time period.[181] The writer Tonio Hölscher explains,

> War in art is not war but art. It is a view, or a spectrum of views, of war seen through the medium of the visual arts - a mental and visual construct in a medium with its own specific possibilities and rules […] Moreover, the nude bodies and light tunics of the warriors were not the normal equipment of Greek hoplites. Scholars have interpreted these features as an idealization of aristocratic warfare. They are taken as anachronistic, designed to refer back to Homeric ideals, and to elevate contemporary warriors to the sphere of heroes. […] there can be no doubt that the image is a visual construct.[182]

This analysis of Greek art is important to David's previous statements about nudity and its real and ideal connotations. Because, although David is following a tradition of elevated heroes by depicting them nude, he is not depicting his characters as they would have looked in "real life". In other words, he sacrifices historical accuracy for an "art historical" accuracy that still relates to how Lebrun used classicism to benefit the king.

The National Convention, which had voted for the death of the king and also approved David as a member of the Committee of Public Instruction, sought to use art as propaganda for the revolutionary government by keeping in touch with the changes in public taste and opinion.[183] In speeches David gave on these topics was his condemnation of the Academy, and

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[180] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 232.
[181] Grigsby, "Nudity à la grecque," in *Art Bulletin*, 313.
[182] Tonio Hölscher, The Language of Images in Roman Art: Art as a Semantic System in the Roman World, ed. Jas Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2-3.
[183] The American Historical Review; Vol. 57, No. 4 (Jul., 1952), pp. 871-892 (22 pages); David was voted to be a delegate of Paris to the National Convention during the Revolution. He spoke more than 100 times on the convention floor with over 25 different speeches. David also served as secretary of the Convention before later being offered the presidency chair.

his desire to dismantle cultural institutions that "can no longer exist in a free state."[184] Early on into his revolution of the academy, David was actually criticized for his remaking of the arts, being likened to Charles Le Brun and his role under Louis XIV. By 1791 though, his idea of liberating the channels of art for the public and in turn destroying the Academic monopoly over the art world began to be supported.[185]

With his *Sabine* image eight years later, he ignored the Salon and instead, with the mirror, set up the display in his own studio. He states in a booklet given out at his exhibition, that "Our former prejudices are no longer opposed to the exercise of public freedom. The nature and the course of our ideas have changed since the Revolution; and we will not return, I hope, to the false sophistication which repressed genius in France for so long."[186] David thought that the academic style which he came to exemplify proclaimed falsely the superiority of the state. Therefore, his work could not be analyzed outside of governmental tastes if he were to display this in the normal salon with its subconscious desire to satisfy state desires. Here, without the academic officials or critics, the public could judge for themselves without fear of going against the didactic values of institutionalized art.[187]

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[184] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 232; Jean-Pierre Mouilleseaux, "David: A Classical Painter Against the Academy and a Teacher of the French School," in *The French Academy*, ed. June Hargrove (London, UK: Associated University Press, n.d.), [131-133], excerpt from *The French Academy: Classicism and Its Antagonists*, 1990, 131-39.; Schnapper, *David*, 64-65.; When the academy, which he had helped to abolish, was reestablished under a new name (1791), he immediately became a member. David was later denounced as "tyrant of the arts" and thus needed to defend himself and the importance of his art before a hostile Convention. This may deal with the comte D'Angivilliers, a great influence over the 18th century art world under Louis XVI. He set a team of painters (David included) to work on canvases that pushed the "agenda" of the grand manner, which would illustrate the most ennobling qualities of man and of the monarchy.

[185] Mouilleseaux, "David: A Classical," in *The French*, 132-135.

[186] Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger, *1648-1815*, 1121.

[187] Mouilleseaux, "David: A Classical," in *The French*, 131-133; David himself was constantly challenged through the academy since his first showing in 1771. D'Angivilliers even rejected him from taking the vacant seat of director of the French Academy in Rome in 1787. It is said David's activism towards the government began after a refusal to host an exhibition of the artist Drouais, who died before being able to show his work in 1789.

In 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte II rose to power, ruling France for 15 years under the Napoleonic Empire.[188] The Revolution had marked an important shift in Napoleon's career, and under the Directory he was appointed head of the Army of the Interior. In 1796, he assumed command of the Army of Italy, where he began to appreciate the country's classical culture. With his continued triumphs as a military leader, he began presenting as an antique hero in the eyes of France's general public, with David himself beginning to produce portraiture of the military giant.

The artist David was a favorite of Napoleon's at the beginning of the 19th century, later appointing him to *First Painter to the Emperor* in Paris in 1804. This position would have been equivalent to the royal position Lebrun had garnered under the Ancien régime.[189] David, having escaped the Terror with his life, been imprisoned under the Directory and then released to espouse adoration for this government's ideological claim to peace and harmony (when in reality the leaders had its own agenda that only profited the few), welcomed Napoleon's *coup d'état* around 1799. David, not only in awe of his military talents and utterly terrified of his power, openly proclaimed Napoleon as his new heroic subject in the modern age.

Contending with David's call to ancient truth and virtue was Napoleon's knack for self-advertisement, which was forged into David's portrayal of the Emperor's ideal self-image. His paintings like *Napoleon Crossing the Saint Bernard* (FIG.12) in 1801 worked as military propaganda by not only showing Napoleon as a stern hero of peace, but symbolized the French

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[188] Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism, 1800-1815* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3-4.; Napoleon Bonaparte, born in 1769 on the island of Corsica, started his military career when he attended the Brienne. The Brienne, founded by Louis XIV's minister of war Saint-Germain, was one of twelve royal schools to prepare the sons of noblemen for a future military career. In 1784, Napoleon's excellence in mathematics nominated him to be placed at the École Militaire of Paris, the nomination of which, was signed by Louis XIV. The same year Napoleon was admitted to the École Militaire of Paris (1784), Jacques-Louis David painted his popular image Death of Horatii which played upon the political symbolism of the "fatherland" and the militaristic phrase of "vaincre ou mourir" (to win or die).;

[189] Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism*, 5.; 39.

military who could be stopped by no obstacle, no matter if mountains, snow, darkness, or all of the above. Napoleon, like his monarchal predecessors, used David's classicist art to encode blatant favoritism towards himself. The painter's use of realism in an imagined configuration actually helped Bonapartist propaganda because its persuaded viewers that Napoleon's "miraculous" exploits were a reality.

Napoleon's self-advertisement to the French people then looked towards heightening the effects of the "true and new" Empire. This meant that the emperor's later commissions had David eliminate ancient allegories in his works, as personifications like the winged Victory were outmoded representations that clashed with Napoleon's desire for the pseudo-accurate art David was creating for him. David's paintings became less about allegorical narratives than ideological commentaries on Napoleon's power which needed no help from ancient, idealized entities.[190]

A student of David's, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) was also in awe of Bonaparte, making effigies of the ruler as an image of eternal authority like in his painting *Napoleon on the Throne* (FIG.13). Around 1805, Napoleon gave himself virtually unchecked power by removing the ancient regime's obstacles to civil equality but also while imposing orders to counteract the rise of individualism found in revolutionary social reforms. Ingres drew from classical as well as renaissance sources to imbue a sense of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence onto his Napoleonic subject. The deification of Napoleon did not go unacknowledged, as the critic Chaussard condemned Ingres' style as an attempt "to push art back at least four centuries." Yet Ingres did follow classical values in creating Napoleon with sculpturesque shading and smoothness, a gaze of rational heroism, and that most of Ingres' painting subjects do recall classical histories. And while many legislative officials saw this

[190] Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism*, 39-43; 47.

deifying approach entirely appropriate, its ideological foray exposed the contradictions between absolutist, republican, and theological concepts found within the aesthetic of the Napoleonic regime.[191]

While many officials were glad that Napoleon had been elevated to the stance of God, it also returns to notions of Louis XIV's regime, where the rulers made themselves out to be god-like by using the academic style as a means of expressing these propagandic virtues. Therefore, while the empire wants to spout itself as new and stronger than past governments, their choice in style and taste again fell in line with stylistic metaphors that had been used before. And much like Louis XIV's reign, after the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the arts once again returned to a less reasonable and frivolous style. Although unlike the rococo, the style defined as "romantic" will not be a complete rejection of classicism and its ideals, yet solely an evolution of what manifested under Napoleon.

At a gathering in honor of Napoleonic officials in 1801, the poet Creuze de Lesser read his *Vers sur la mythologie d'Ossian* (Verses on the Ossian Myth) which dismisses the antique heros by writing: "*Farewell to the fables of yesteryear,/ The gods of the Greeks and Trojans!/Hail in their place the heroes of the clouds/ [...]/ The souls descend to converse/ With earthly heroes."*[192] This writing is important as it points to Napoleon's and the state's apparent outward dismissal of ancient Greek and Roman themes in exchange for different, otherworldly themes relating to heroism and power found in Christian (Renaissance and Medieval), and Druid art that further fit his political agendas.[193] Within ten years though, his militaristic success began

[191] Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism*, 50-54.
[192] A symbol of Scottish nationalism, the Ossianic saga told the story of the battles of the glorious king Fingal, and the woes of his son, Ossian. Described in lyrical verses, Ossian was left old and blind to lament memories and friendships of his youth. This "passionate melancholy" of Ossian's songs, as Boime describes it, evoked aristocratic nostalgia for the older hierarchal structures unthreatened by the forceful voices of republicanism. Similarly to the Homeric sagas, the Ossianic heroes carried notions of martial honor with no need for assistance from the gods.
[193] Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism*, 55-56.

to dwindle, and French society had to deal with the consequences of war (financial and personal loss, destruction of land, and internal political conflicts). What art could describe the sentiments of the people while still speaking to characteristics of power that were supposed to be found in their leader?

By 1812 Napoleon is described less like the heroic warrior of David's 1801 painting and is now depicted as an older and more compassionate yet still powerful French politician in David's *Napoleon in His Study* (FIG.14). He is presented in the uniform of a foot guard, caught in the act of leaving his study after a night of work at 4:13 am (as indicated on the clock shown in the background).[194] Napoleon no longer inhabits the body of the hero, but the arrangement of objects that order his body give it new meanings related to more sentimental heroism as his heroic physique has now been softened by stress and age. With rising political pressure from enemies like Great Britain and Russia, there was an effort to humanize the Emperor to speak to the weakening military position of France. Submitted to the emperor, Napoleon proudly exclaimed "You have indeed caught me this time, David. At night I work for the welfare of my subjects; in the daytime for their glory." Now, in this later phase of the Empire, "ideology" has changed to "sentimental reality" since David's painting of *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*.[195]

This shift in Napoleon's preferred style took its toll on David who, as seen in his *Sabines* painting, really excelled with depicting the heroic bodies he assumed to be present in ancient Greek art. Now, neither ancient Greek or Roman subject matter, nor allegorical figures or philosophical symbols that come from Plato are present in his art. Instead, he must now glorify this emperor with somber sincerity, his symbols being of his own creation. It is no wonder that

[194] Note: Grenadiers of the Foot Guard are senior infantry regiments and are commonly responsible for guarding royal families, or other state leaders.
[195] Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism*, 53-54.

by 1810 David became disillusioned with Napoleon's style and began his painting *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (FIG.15) that same year.[196]

Finished by 1814, *Leonidas at Thermopylae* was the last large painting done by David during the Napoleonic era.[197] Leonidas, the king of the Spartans is depicted with three hundred of his troops preparing to face Xerxes and his army of six hundred thousand Persians before a battle in Thermopylae. Of course, not all the soldiers are illustrated in the composition, but David adds enough "life" into the scene from the foreground to the background, much like Poussin, to give the illusion of a frenzied multitude of bodies. And all of these "lively" motifs, such as the soldier walking into the frame from the right with his spear raised and arm stretched out, the three soldiers holding out wreaths to the cloaked soldier facing away and climbing the rocks, the soldiers running to place outside the painting on the right, and the trumpeters raised above and behind them, are contradicted by the stillness of Leonidas and the other soldiers found in the center of the painting. Leonidas and his entourage still hold onto this "sedate grander" set out by Winkelmann yet uses the energy of the surrounding figures to heighten their personal heroic virtue.

David, in a brochure given out in his atelier, stressed the greatness of the soul which enabled the Spartans to sacrifice themselves for their nation by preparing for certain death with "bright and glorious countenances."[198] Spiritual commitment not only allowed Sparta to triumph in warfare, but forever in the history of humanity. David states, "This devotion by Leonidas and his companions produced more of an impact than the most brilliant victory: it taught the Greeks

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[196] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 136-141.
[197] Schnapper, *David*, 271.
[198] Mouilleseaux, "David: A Classical," in *The French*, 137-138.; Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 149.; Note: David was exiled to Brussels, Belgium in 1815 during the Restoration due to his involvement with the Napoleonic regime, and therefore was not able to be buried in France nor display his work in the Salons.

the secret of their strength and the Persians that of their weakness." Once again, David uses the classical narrative to speak to his contemporary, political contexts, as it was created when the Restoration government attempted to take back control from Napoleon in 1815.[199]

David's focus was not on the activities of the soldiers nor the objects strewn about the scene, but instead on Leonidas' soul, stating that he "meditates, with a sort of tenderness, on the imminent, inevitable death of his friends." The face, related to Lebrun's theories on emotion, were the main ways to express both metaphorical and physical expressions of the self. Leonidas is calm and stares out to the viewer with no suggestion to his inner turmoil or fear. This emphasis on the suggestive preparation of Leonidas' soldiers (to their deaths) retracted traditional compositional units based on a central physical action that would speak directly to the event taking place. He explains that he wished to portray "something more solemn, more reflective, more spiritual" which would exude what author Dorothy Johnson describes as "the calm preparations for inevitable death."

David believed that energetic movement and emotion should be excluded if the action did nothing to signify a certain emotion or moral principle. He also balanced this idea with the theatrics found in Poussin's figures as their placements and expressions were to translate understanding to his audience. This could also be a reason he shows expressive gestures in the surrounding soldiers, but kept the centralized figure as the rational, nude hero. The artist's choice not only evoked a subtler emotional tenor without needing to fall on the dramatic aspects of grimacing themes (he does not show the soldiers dying, yet the tragedy comes from knowing

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[199] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 143-144.; Napoleon, after returning to France from his exile in Elba in 1815, saw David's work and urged him to make the work available to every French soldier as a form of artistic motivation.

they will), but it also dispersed visual interest throughout the figural groups of the composition, almost fragmenting different sections to absorb the motion in relation to the narrative.[200]

It is known that David did extensive amounts of preparatory studies and sketches, yet the final composition is far less restrained from his previous works. For example, most of the figures, although not of Leonidas himself, are far livelier and more realistic when even being compared to the soldiers portrayed in the *Sabine* image. Besides the realistic attitudes of the young men seen jumping on the far right, the contrasting, more abstract figure of the soldier fastening his sandal in the forefront, also relates to the viewer perceiving the unmentioned action that will take place as a way of elevating the sentimental tragedy of the painting.[201] The figures in the Sabines, on the other hand, created a story through their gazes and gestures; their sculpturesque forms spoke to the climax of the narrative being shown.

The Enlightenment philosophies which stripped away much of the magic and mystery of the Ancien Régime continued into the views of the Restoration (1815-30).[202] Now, the Bourbon rulers were no longer seen as representatives of God, but simply as men.[203] Since this reign was tasked with calming the French public after decades of political unrest, they sought to encourage "private sectors" to create an industry to disseminate knowledge and to generate a sentiment of peace and prosperity within civil society.[204] As a consequence of Napoleon's manipulation of historical accuracy, David's art became less political while also being less accurate in his imitations of ancient works. David, who formed the modern French school, began to be opposed

[200] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 144.
[201] Schnapper, *David*, 273.
[202] Daniel R. Guernsey, *The Artist and the State: 1777-1815* (Florence: Routledge, 2007), 77.; Llewellyn and Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History.
[203] Llewellyn and Thompson, "The Enlightenment," Alpha History.
[204] Schnapper, *David*, 272-273.; Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 145.

increasingly by critics by the 1820s as his style further departed from what was done in the early nineteenth century, and even further to the Sabines and Belisarius.

Critics like Delecluze defended him by claiming David's work was not a representation of object or actions but meant to evoke thought. An advocate for David's new innovations, named Henri de Latouche stated, "David gives himself a new theory of art, for he is a creator." Latouche saw his *Leonidas* painting as a preparatory ground for energy and hesitance shown in the drama and figural poses of late nineteenth century masterpieces. Their discerning of David's art as conceptual rather than representational helps understand why Delacroix, the supposed head of the romantic movement, wanted to study with David in 1820. Delacroix even describes David 40 years later as "the father of the whole modern school, in painting and in sculpture… He still reigns in some respects and, despite certain apparent transformations in the taste of what is the school today is its manifest that everything still derives from him and from his principles."[205] Delacroix's both interest and disinterest with David and his style comes to question his definitions of romanticism and classicism, and whether one came forth from another.

[205] Johnson, *Jacque-Louis David*, 145-149.

Eugène Delacroix: Artist of Evolved Style

In the Salon of 1824, Delacroix's painting *Scenes from the Massacres at Chios* (FIG.16) was compared by critics such as Chauvin to David's *Leonidas* in their shared theme of suffering Greeks, fragmented composition, and its range of formal treatments. This composition is an imagined account of the aftermath of the Turks' massacre of the Greeks on the island of Chios in 1822.[206] And although the painting does not conform solely to neoclassical norms, there are aspects of its composition which can be seen to reference the classical motifs of both David and Poussin.

In fact, David's influence on "romantic" themes and compositions was immediately recognized by advocates of romanticism who began to praise his contributions to the style.[207] The author August Jal admits,

> If David would return to lead painting out of the crisis in which French politics and letters now find themselves, pregnant with a new and as yet undefined school, avid for new emotions, I believe that, even as he would be reviving the appreciation of forms and pure lines, he would be pacing himself at the forefront of the movement that is incorrectly termed 'romantic'.[208]

This gives insight that younger artists were not interested in David because of his antique subject matter, but more his way of composing images in a refined style to reach a point of understanding from the audience, whether contextual, historical, or metaphorical. Delacroix saw in David's work "an unusual blend of the real and the ideal", like the configuration of Napoleon

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[206] This occurred in 1822 during the Greek Wars of Independence. The massacre, of which 20,000 Greeks were killed was a retaliation after the Turkish losses caused by a Greek uprising against the Turkish occupation.
[207] Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, 149.; Delacroix even stated in a letter to author Auguste Jal almost twenty years later, that "it makes me laugh heartily at David's Greeks, apart, of course, from his sublime skill as a painter."
[208] Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, reprint. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 88.; Note: Auguste Jal was an author in history and archeology.

in the Alps. This created a sense of immediacy within the viewer that eliminated any interpretive intermediaries in the painting's message. [209]

Many of the admirers of David's later works sought to separate the master from the 'Davidian' followers who wished to imitate his style, often to less effect.[210] They saw in his art a sense of naturalism that rejected entertaining, dramatic exaggerations to create a more subjective and didactic composition.[211] Delacroix's friend Jal even went so far as to say David would have had a more successful career as a romanticist if he began painting in 1824 instead of 1781. Part of David's (critiqued) contribution to aesthetics was his tendency to present political beliefs under the guise of approved styles during periods of state censorship. This was done in part by Academic critics of the Salons, who would judge new works by how well they communicated governmental values.[212] Romantic artists now strove for an accurate depiction of the modern, which was often hidden from public view due to the institutions of culture's (the Academies') biased rejection of contemporary subject matter. Now, by using color and brushwork, the romantic artist could engage the viewer with feelings implied through subtleties found within the image.[213]

This new style depended not on antique themes to relay traditional ideas, but through feelings inscribed in expressions and poses of the figural subjects.[214] Although French classicism traced back to Poussin and his escapades in Rome, it flourished once again in the late 18th

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[209] Schnapper, *David*, 273-274.
[210] Biography.com, "Jacques-Louis David," Biography.com.; David trained hundreds of upcoming European painters, among them such future masters as Francois Gérard, Anne-Louis Girodet, and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. Even Eugène Delacroix would refer to David as the "father of the whole modern school."
[211] Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, 143.
[212] Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, 149.
[213] Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 53.
[214] Baudelaire, Selected Writings, 52-53

century with the “new” classicist David, during a period of great social and political upheaval.[215] David played a crucial role in the re-introduction of classicism in French art by firmly establishing neoclassicism as the dominant style of the country by the 1780s until at least the 1820s, when Delacroix arrived on the art scene.

David’s classicism and political manipulation of artistic institutions related to the Academies’ shift from “*le sujet d’agrément”* and *sujet galante* (the enjoyable and romantic subject) of Boucher for a restoration in *le grand goût*. This “great taste” is what was discussed by Winckelmann in his book *History,* and which is still associated to the heroic themes David evoked in his art. The reason for this shift, during a period of extreme national conflict, was to once again “combat vice and teach virtue” to French citizens, specifically through the control, regularity, and grandeur of ancient art that was equated with virtuous ideals. Classicism, as it was interpreted in later-18th century France, was the remedy for the styles perceived as frivolous, capricious, and immoral, like that of the baroque and the rococo.[216]

As both antiquity and the respected French artists who imitated antiquity came to be studied by students of art and literature under Louis XVI, the word ‘classical’ began to take on two or three different meanings. The great masters of the 17th and 18th centuries began to be referred to as classical as their works came from the ancient tradition, but, as writer Marie-Joseph Chenier says, “[they] were responsible for the glory of the Academy because they brought it to their own.”[217] What he means here is that not only were contemporary pieces of art and literature from Lebrun or Racine now considered classics because of their references to the

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[215] Richard L. Feigan, *Neo-classicism and Romanticism in French Painting 1774-1826* (New York, NY: Richard L. Feigan & Company, 1994), 3.
[216] Stephanie Mora, "Delacroix's Art Theory and His Definition of Classicism," in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), [57-58], excerpt from *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 57-75.
[217] This was stated in his *Observations on the new dictionaries of French language and the Academy* (1801).

ancients, but because they shaped the way the Academy perceived classical themes as they related to the modern age.[218]

On the other hand, French romantic writer and critic Stendhal argued that “living” classicism, meaning classically inspired works created in recent memory by these artists, should be called ‘romantic’ because there is no true contrast in the two besides the idea of modernity. This led to the interpretation proposed by writer André Gide, where classicism is perceived as an art of “subdued Romanticism”, as classicism may be more restrained in emotion, but they are not completely separate in their ideals. From comments like these, we can see that while works of art and literature were often called “classics” or “classical,” their styles did not necessarily reflect the ideals or styles of ancient classicism. Charles Nodier, a key figure of French romanticism, echoed the arguments of Stendhal, suggesting that “romanticism might be nothing other than the classicism of the moderns.”

In the Salon of 1824, the same year the definition of “romantic” was expanded in the French Dictionary to include artists “who claim to have broken away from the rules of construction and style laid down by the example of classical authors,” Eugène Delacroix displayed his painting *Massacre of Chios*.[219] Stendhal’s and other’s argument for the placement of the classical aesthetic in contemporary art are found within Delacroix’s painting, as many of his stylistic motifs can be compared to the previous masters of classicism.

The figures, for example, are grouped into triads, and there is an overall sense of balance in the foreground similar to Poussin’s *Sabine* painting. This balance is only disrupted slightly on

[218] Jean Hytier and June Guicharnaud, "The Classicism of the Classics," in *Yale French Studies*(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, n.d.), [6-7], previously published in *The Classical Line: Essays in Honor of Henri Peyre*, no. 38 (1967): 5-17.; For Chenier, writers such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Pascal, Racine, and others whose work has stood against the passing of time were still enjoyed by the public while values and morals appreciated in French society.
[219] Hytier and Guicharnaud, "The Classicism," in *Yale French*, 7-9.

the right-hand side by the Turk on his horse, possibly referencing the cavalry soldier on the right side of both David's and Poussin's *Sabine* compositions. Again, compared to Poussin's painting, there is an absence of a poignant, classical hero or subject in the center of the canvas. Instead, there is a gap in the foreground which leads into the background where the viewer can see the battle raging on into the distance.[220]

This topical choice of subject matter raised questions of its relation to tradition: in the classical tradition, subjects were usually taken from literary, mythological or historical pasts that could be viewed from the safe distance of time.[221] Indeed, many critics found the subject too ugly and distasteful, possibly because of its association to modern political discourse. The technique and artistic touch as well were seen as too rough and jarring, especially when compared to the smoothly painted, sculptural forms of David.[222] In contrast to the balance and harmony espoused in the academic tradition, the groups of figures were seen as disjointed and haphazard due to their lack of Davidian mannerisms.

The subjects were also extremely diverse in the emotions they represented: some are cold like the Turkish soldier on horseback, some passive like the nude male reclined near the center, and some devastated like the woman leaning against this reclining man.[223] To further induce emotional tension, a semi-nude woman with a clinging child appears dead in the lower right corner. Her disheveled appearance perhaps even insinuates she was a victim of rape, as it is also

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[220] Linda Walsh, Dr., "Massacres of Chios – challenging the establishment," Delacroix, https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/history-art/delacroix/content-section-3.6#.
[221] Walsh, "Massacres of Chios," Delacroix.
[222] https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/history-art/delacroix/content-section-3.6#
[223] Greek men and women are distinguished from the Turkish by the different headdresses represented in the scene. Many of the Greek women wear a scarf or head covering, while the men are giving traditional Greek fezzes of the 19th century. The Turkish soldiers are distinguished by their turbans, darker skin tone, and are the only ones seen carrying weapons.

implied from the abduction of the woman directly behind her.[224] The painting, which depicted a horribly violent event of the recent past, turned off many spectators who appreciated the distance of time and place found in similarly violent but antique stories.[225]

The critic Chauvin, also writing in 1824, displays the already contrasting views between the art of David and Delacroix by saying "I call *Leonidas* classic … and *The Massacre of Chios* romantic."[226] However, the government applauded Delacroix, going so far as to give him a medal and purchasing the painting. This shows that it was possible to pick and choose parts of the academic tradition suitable for the work the artist wished to depict. Still, the state's medal only provided a means of acknowledgement from the institution, and this recognition did not necessarily mean they approved of the artist's method nor his popularity.[227]

Despite his popularity within the romantic genre, when an admirer declared him the "the Victor Hugo of Painting," Delacroix outwardly affirmed that "I am a pure classicist."[228] The artist never regarded himself as the head of the romantic movement, believing that contemporary definitions of romantic and classic created a false dichotomy between the two schools. He wished to expand the themes associated to classicism to include traits generally deemed to be romantic.[229] Ingres, David's student who assumed the leadership of the neoclassical school after David's exile to Belgium, symbolizes how Davidian classicism of the 1820s was already evolving and merging the ideal aesthetics of classicism and other genres.

[224] Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, "Whose colour was no black nor white nor grey, But an extraneous mixture, which no pen Can trace, although perhaps the pencil may': Aspasie and Delacroix's Massacres of Chios," in Art History (n.p.: Wiley Online Library, 2008), [683-684], previously published in Art History 22, no. 5 (December 1999): 676-704.
[225] Walsh, "Massacres of Chios," Delacroix.
[226] Mora, "Delacroix's Art Theory," in *The Journal*, 59.; « J'appelle Classique *Leonidas* … et romantique *le Massacre de Scio.* »
[227] Walsh, "Massacres of Chios," Delacroix.
[228] George P. Mras, *Eugène Delacroix's Theory of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 24.; In an event held at the Luxembourg Palace, an admirer stated, « *Monsieur Delacroix, vous êtes le Victor Hugo de la peinture*,' Delacroix coldly responded, '*Je suis un pur Classique.* »
[229] Mora, "Delacroix's Art Theory," in *The Journal*, 59-60.

Ingres' acclaim was based on his adherence to academic style and method, which included classical subjects rendered with highly finished surfaces and clean contours. However, it is acknowledged that his renown persisted due to the liberties he took in the interpretation of academic classicism through his choice in subject matter and distortions of space. He could have just been another student following the stricter style of late-18th century Davidian classicism, yet he manipulated the style to speak to a less didactic and more emotional tenor through his liberated adaptations of gesture and drama. According to Delacroix, the method of execution, linear or painterly, was not a true indication of his relationship to tradition. Therefore, the fine finish and sculpturesque contours that Ingres retained in his work from his training under David was not necessarily what secured him under the title of a classical artist. Delacroix only exploits this enhancement to classicism, going further in his adaptation of what art fits within academic tradition, and why.

Like Ingres, Delacroix also departed from the stylistic program associated with the school of David, but his changes disturbed many of his fellow artists and critics. It was the artist's loose brushwork, liberal use of color, expressive rendering of subject matter, and the freedom of movement he gave to his figures that caused him to be regarded as an opponent to tradition. In actuality, he was an artist who simply utilized the classical style and its characteristics more liberally than his predecessors. Still, it was for these reasons that Delacroix's painting was labeled romantic and was seen as a complete contrast to David's classicism.[230]

So, while Delacroix's *Massacre at Chios* is a contemporary theme with heightened emotional conflict, the painting exemplifies how Delacroix still had classicism on his mind when he painted his piece in 1824. First, there are certain parallels with Sabine story in the narrative

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[230] Mora, "Delacroix's Art Theory," in *The Journal*, 59-60.

Delacroix chose. Now the narrative pertains to the new foreigners (the Romans in the *Sabine* story are now Turkish), attempting to ground themselves as the new state (Turks attempting to squish rebellion of Greek city-states), and to depict a scene of the soldier abducting the native women. The Turk on horseback is shown fighting a Greek man below him as the he attempts to take the nude woman. This figural configuration can be compared to the trio of the Sabine father fighting the roman soldier for his daughter in Poussin's *Sabine* composition.

Furthermore, Delacroix follows the characterization of women in multiple stages of womanhood, like his inclusion of the distressed, older woman in the headwrap fallen besides the infant on his mother. He does this, albeit with a more violent twist, with the child (a symbol of regeneration) holding on to the violated, deceased woman. If we consider this woman as *la patrie* as the figure of Hersilia was seen in David's painting, there could be a political metaphor of the Greek nation itself being violated and destroyed. The men in the image, shown both nude and fully covered, have an atmosphere of defeated calm. And while they do not provide the heroic, rational gaze as in the calm stare of David's *Leonidas,* the gazes on the left-hand side, where most of the men reside, juxtapose the moving action of the Turk and two women. Unintentional or not, Delacroix does provide an air of mental superiority in the male Greeks in comparison to their enemies.

Poussin and David chose narratives that glorified the beginnings of ancient Rome, including the scenes of conflict with the Sabines, but always hinting to the optimistic resolution. Delacroix, on the other hand, portrays a scene of contemporary Greece's civil conflicts. Greece, considered the very birthplace of the classical ideal that was later promulgated by the French academies, still held an imaginative attachment to French society because of its ancient past.

This composition might have been Delacroix's declaration to oppose the Turkish suppression of Greece, the country modern Europe came to idealize.[231]

Therefore, Delacroix does retain certain ideals of classicism through symbolic metaphors, but his painting is devoid of "traditional" motifs like a restrained, linear mannerism that had been added on to what the French defined in their "classical" genre. The modern audience who knew the contextual history of Delacroix's piece don't have to understand the statuesque references of Poussin's work, nor the theatric tragedy found in the light sources of Lebrun. Instead, with David's revolutionizing of the French art world, classicism became more accessible and evolved into a genre that, without its political metaphors, got lost in the in-betweens of genres like Baroque and Romanticism.

In conclusion, if we think back to the beginning of classicism in France, we can recognize several key developments. With Poussin, he did make his painting in reverence to and hopeful imitation of the ancients, although it should be remembered that his patron de Blanchefort's political agenda may have had some influence on his choice of subjects and symbols included in the work. Then, with Charles le Brun, he took Poussin's ideas about the instructional power of classical themes and their associations to political power even further by helping Louis XIV implement the style as the national art through the Academy. The Academy, a state-run institution, used the style in an attempt to establish France as a rational and refined nation in contrast to other European courts who favored the contending baroque.

And while 17th century classicism shared some commonalities with baroque art through theories of color and uses of light, classicism was meant to deviate through its linear style and

[231] Grigsby, "Whose colour," in *Art History*, 676.

balanced compositions to purposefully invoke ancient ideals of rationality and superiority.[232] In other words, the heart of classicism was never solely based around an artist's style or *tâche*, but upon the conceptual philosophical ideas that could symbolize and visually express these adopted ideals originating from antiquity. Therefore, the narratives of true classicism, always of antique origin featuring stories of political discourse and heroism, were only vessels to exemplify historical and moralistic philosophies to the nation.

Thus, in the midst of political turbulence of the 1770s, David made classicism once again an art of instruction, but unlike Lebrun, he worked outside of the state apparatus. Rather, his work let the narrative speak directly to the public and its own cultural contexts. This is why neo-classicism can be seen as its own genre, different from what was defined as classicism under Poussin. While Delacroix did take inspiration from David by his death in 1825, it was the late David of *Leonidas*, who made antique oeuvres with more romantic aspects relating to emotion or even love. Therefore, with Delacroix symbolizing the artistic discourses of modern France, classicism embarks towards a new realm of questioning and stylistic definitions by the nineteenth century. As one can readily infer from the analysis presented herein, the representation of classicism over the past three centuries has always been deeply rooted within the contextual frame of the artist and his nation.

[232] Poussin is argued to be a "classical baroque" artist by some sources who saw his use of light and bright colors as being the defining mark of French baroque art.

Figure 7 : *Brown Odalisque (L'Odalisque Brune),* François Boucher, 1745, Oil on Canvas, 53 cm (20.8″) X 64 cm (25.1″), Musée du Louvre.

Figure 8: *Laocoön and His Sons*, Agesander of Rhodes, Athanadoros, Athenodoros of Rhodes, and Polydorus of Rhodes (marble copy), c.27 AD, Vatican Museum.

Figure 9: *Belisarius Begging for Alms,* Jacques-Louis David, 1781, Oil on Canvas, 288 cm × 312 cm (113 in × 123 in), Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

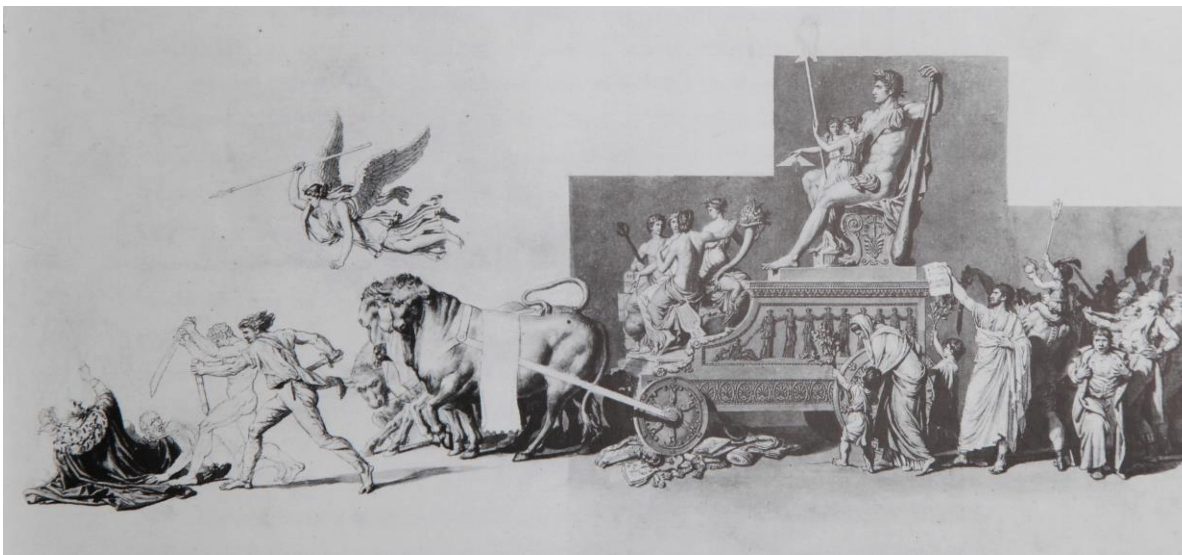

Figure 10: *Le triomphe du peuple française*, Jacques-Louis David, 1795, Graphite, Black ink and pen (*plume)*, on cream paper, Louvre Museum.

Figure 11: *The Intervention of the Sabine Women,* Jacque-Louis David, 1796-1799, Oil on Canvas, 3.85 m; X 5.22 m, Musée du Louvre.

Figure 12: *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, Jacques-Louis David, 1801, Oil on Canvas, 8’6” X 7’3”, Chateau Malmaison.

Figure 13: *Napoleon I on His Imperial Throne*, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, 1806, Oil on Canvas, 8’ 6” X 5’ 4”, Army Museum.

Figure 14: *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries*, Jacques-Louis David, 1812, Oil on Canvas, 6’ 8” X 4’ 1”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 15: *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, Jacque-Louis David, 1814, Oil on Canvas, 13′ 0″ x 17′ 5″, Louvre Museum.

Figure 16: *The Massacre at Chios*, Eugène Delacroix, Oil on Canvas, 13′ 9″ x 11′ 7″, Musée du Louvre.

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