

Press release
Exhibition

From December 2, 2010
to February 14, 2011
Napoleon Hall

Exhibition curators

Marc Fumaroli and Henri Loyrette

Scientific curators

Guillaume Faroult, Christophe Lerbault and Guilhem Scherf

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Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1782, Detroit Institute of Arts © The Bridgeman Art Library

A season celebrating the 18th century:

- *Paper Museums: Antiquity in Books, 1600–1800*
(September 25, 2010–January 3, 2011)
- *The Louvre in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750–1792*
(November 11, 2010–February 7, 2011)
- *Antiquity Rediscovered: Innovation and Resistance in the 18th Century*
(December 2, 2010–February 14, 2011)
- *Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736–1783)*
(January 28–April 25, 2011)

Antiquity Rediscovered Innovation and Resistance in the 18th Century

As part of its 2010–2011 season, the Louvre pays tribute to the 18th century with a special series of four exhibitions. The first of these, *Paper Museums: Antiquity in Books, 1600–1800*, opens in September, followed by *The Louvre in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750–1792*, *Antiquity Rediscovered: Innovation and Resistance in the 18th Century*, and concluding with *Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736–1783)*, which opens in January 2011.

Organized around a selection of more than one hundred and fifty major works, *Antiquity Rediscovered: Innovation and Resistance in the 18th Century*, the focal event in the series, traces the emergence in Europe of the movement known as “neoclassicism”, characterized by a renewed desire to re-create the spirit and forms of ancient art. Seen as a reaction against the Parisian rococo style, which had filtered throughout the continent, this revival encompassed architecture and the arts of living as well as the visual arts, stimulated by recent archaeological discoveries and academic debates. From busts draped in the Roman style to decorative motifs derived from Greek vases, antiquity was all the rage among enlightened Europeans, with intellectuals discoursing at great length on Wincklemann’s artistic theories or Piranesi’s engravings and aristocrats from London to Saint Petersburg commissioning classically conceived houses incorporating elements of temple architecture.

However, as early as the 1760s, various alternative movements began to arise, inspired by different ancient sources, forming rival currents grouped in the exhibition under the names “neobaroque”, “neomannerism”, and the “sublime”. From Rome to Edinburgh, from Stockholm to Paris, artists expressed their individuality, offering their own visions of an antiquity rediscovered, less motivated by archaeological zeal, inspired instead by Renaissance or 17th-century ideals and sometimes even by aspects of the Middle Ages, synonymous with antiquity from a more national perspective. From the lavish fantasies explored by Fragonard to the phantasmagorical art of Fuseli, this particular rediscovery of antiquity was a journey with no holds barred.

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Edme Bouchardon, *Cupid Fashioning a Bow out of the Club of Hercules*, 1750, Department of Sculptures, Musée du Louvre, Paris © RMN



Ignazio Marchetti, after Ennemond Petitot, *Console table*, Palazzo Ducale, Colorno (Parma)



Jean-Baptiste Geuze, *Septimius Severus and Caracalla*, Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre, Paris © RMN

Nevertheless, the last quarter of the century bequeathed the enduring legacy of a new, more universal language, evidenced by a rigorous heroic style and a severity of tone, which is illustrated in the exhibition by the themes of the triumph of Mars, the notion of the “great man”, the ascendancy of the idea of virtue, and the ideal of human beauty achieved through the perfection of bodily proportions. These sections bring together masterpieces by David, Sergel and Canova, an array of furniture, architectural projects, monumental canvases and imposing marble statues, all giving expression to the new aspirations of a European society on the brink of revolutionary upheaval.

Concept of the exhibition

Set against, and often in reaction to, the graceful and light-hearted rococo style, whose influence was disseminated throughout Europe in the early 18th century particularly by artists based in Paris, between 1720 and 1730 a revival of interest in ancient art made its presence known in various ways, in England and in Italy. This exhibition addresses, in dialectical fashion, the variety of artistic and intellectual forms that spurred this resurgence of classical ideals and the development of a regenerated aesthetics.

Without attempting an exhaustive treatment of this topic, the exhibition is organized around three themes that succeed each other chronologically.

Fascination for classical art, 1730–1770

In an often contradictory, but always passionate manner, Europe turned increasingly to antiquity as a source of inspiration. First through sculpture, and in particular with the major innovator Bouchardon who, with a remarkable economy of means, was able to join a naturalistic approach with the classical heritage.

Academic and intellectual circles, spearheaded by major figures such as Winckelmann, Caylus, Diderot and Cochin, reexamined, whether to extol its virtues or criticize its achievements, this new demand for an orthodoxy based in the forms and values of antiquity. Europe debated the perfection of unearthed ancient ruins, weighed the merits of Rome against those of Athens, and occasionally set to work re-creating their lost masterpieces.

Around 1760, in painting and in sculpture, a cohesive vocabulary inspired by antiquity began to emerge, to some extent inspired by the earlier explorations of Nicolas Poussin in the 17th century, between Rome, Paris, London and Saint Petersburg. Among its main exponents were artists such as Mengs, Batoni, Hamilton, Greuze, Pajou and Clodion. Apart from finding expression in exceptional works of art, this vocabulary was embraced by many as providing moral and aesthetic precepts to guide everyday life.

The pervasive influence of the desire to restore ancient values certainly became manifest in decorative arts, especially in Paris, where the “Greek style” prevailed in the 1760s (Le Lorrain, Leleu, Vien) but, from Parma to Warsaw, this movement also took hold across the rest of Europe. Similarly, architecture was reborn in an exemplary manner, under the influence of visionaries like the engraver Piranesi, and resulted in the completion of ambitious buildings, designed by leading figures such as Chambers, Soufflot or Robert Adam.



Thomas Banks, *Falling Titan*, 1786, Royal Academy of Arts, London



Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784, Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre, Paris © RMN



Jacques-Louis David, *Psyche Abandoned*, Private collection © Private collection

1750–1790

In the latter half of the 18th century, not all European artists espoused the same devotion to antiquity as the neoclassicists, a movement that increasingly set exacting standards for all its exponents. The second section of the exhibition focuses on three main rival currents, which served to counterbalance this trend.

The first of these is a little-examined current, referred to as the “neobaroque”, which grew out of a revived interest in the leading representatives of the baroque period: Bernini, Pietro da Cortona, and the dramatic and showy works of their heirs, Tiepolo and Francesco Solimena. This current arose in Rome and the rest of Italy (Mengs and Gandolfi) and first spread to France (Fragonard, Doyen, Pajou), then on to Spain, where Giaquinto and Tiepolo had found favor, also home to the last representatives of the baroque (Luis Paret, Goya), and later England.

“Neomannerism”, a further alternative, came into being around 1750 and harked back to the great achievements of the Renaissance and the 16th century, which had themselves been inspired by antiquity. Some artists belonging to this movement would rediscover Correggio and Giambologna, Giulio Romano or Jean Goujon to create works less motivated by an interest in declamatory expressiveness or rigorous exemplarity than by sinuous virtuosity (Batonni, Julien de Parme, Cades, Nollekens, Deare, Caffieri, Allegrain, and including the young David).

The last of the three alternatives to neoclassicism is without a doubt the one with the most promising future: the “gothic” or “sublime” current. Inspired by the theories of the philosopher Edmund Burke, this movement blossomed especially in England and among artists from northern Europe living in Rome, who broke free of classical rationality, treating their patrons to a vast repertoire of specters, furies and horrid shades (Füssli, Barry, Sergel, Banks, Desprez).

Neoclassicisms, 1770–1790

The final section of the exhibition explores, in four parts, various aspects of the pure, “triumphant” neoclassicism of the 1780s, through the prism of the militaristic ethos present both in the urban landscape and in interior decoration, the example of great men, the cult of virtue, and the exaltation of heroic bodily proportions through works by Sergel, Houdon, Schadow, Julien, Canova, Ledoux, David, Drouais, Regnault and Wright of Derby, among others.

Far from attempting to survey all the important artists or the full range of aesthetic projects circulating in Europe in the 18th century, this selection of some one hundred and fifty seminal works aims above all to underscore the intense quest for renewal motivating the artists of this period, inspired by various attempts to distill the essence of antiquity or else eager to shake off their archaeological heritage to craft more singular visions of an ideal world.

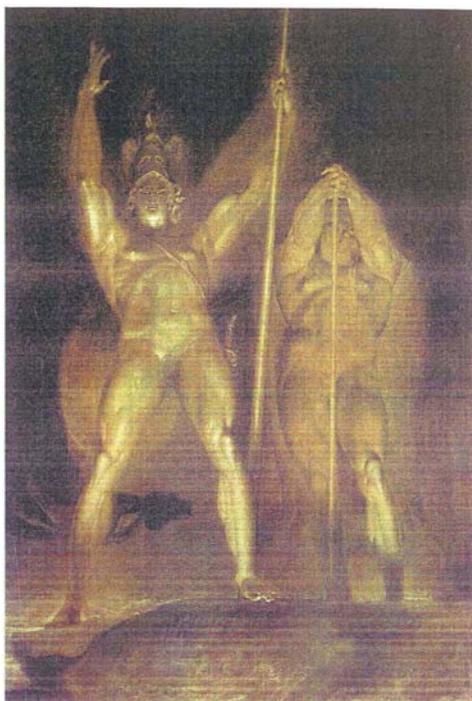
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In the auditorium du Louvre



Pierre-François Berruer, *Louis XV Rewarding Painting and Sculpture*, Department of Sculptures, Musée du Louvre, Paris © 2007 Musée du Louvre / Pierre Philibert



Thomas Lawrence, *Satan and Beelzebub*, Department of Graphic Arts, Musée du Louvre, Paris © 2007 Musée du Louvre / Martine Beck Coppola

Presentation of the exhibition

Friday, January 7, 2011 at 12:30 p.m.

With Guillaume Faroult, Christophe Leribault and Guilhem Scherf, Musée du Louvre

Art on Stage

Wednesday, February 9, 2011 at 12:30 p.m.

Louis XV Rewarding Painting and Sculpture

With Guilhem Scherf, Department of Sculptures, Musée du Louvre

Lecture series

Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. on January 6, 13, 20 and February 3 and 10, 2011

“Pourquoi l’antique chez les modernes?” (Understanding the fascination for antiquity in modern times)

This series of five lectures examines the diverse historical and geographical contexts covered by the notion of “neoclassicism” defined by late 19th-century art historians.

Concerts

Wednesday, October 20, 2010 at 8 p.m.

Soloists from the Atelier Lyrique of the Paris Opera
Program of French music.

Wednesday, January 12, 2011 at 8 p.m.

Il Complesso Barocco; Roberta Invernizzi, soprano, Romina Basso, mezzo-soprano; Alan Curtis, conductor
Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*, *Salve regina* in C minor
Leo, *Salve regina* in F major

Thursday, January 13, 2011 at 12:30 p.m.

Cambini Quartet (to be confirmed)
Works by Mozart, Haydn, Grétry, Cambini, Vachon.

Friday, January 14, 2011 at 8 p.m.

Cambini Quartet (to be confirmed); Marc Hantai, flute (to be confirmed)
Mozart flute quartets.

Wednesday, January 19, 2011 at 8 p.m.

Pages et Chantres, Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles; Olivier Schneebeli, conductor
Foncès, *Messe*; Gasparini, *Stabat Mater*; Rigel, *Duet for organ and harpsichord*; French sacred music.

Music on film

January 15, 16, 22 and 23, 2011

Gluck, l’opéra réformé (Gluck, the reformer of opera)

Film / fiction

From September 27 to October 4, 2010

“Cinema portrays the 18th century: Moral transgression and freedom”