

## Romanticism and the Birth of Modern Art – Part II - Delacroix

Gericault and Delacroix had between them something of the same tense combination of family circumstances and rivalry that had existed in the circle of Jacques Louis-David. Delacroix had lost his father in infancy and his mother in adolescence. Born in 1798, he shared Gericault's birth into a family of haute bourgeois republicans. His father was Napoleon's Foreign Minister, his brother a general in the army and his eventual protector, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, the most cunning and mercurial diplomat of the era. He was truly an *enfant du siècle*, a son of the Empire and grandson of the Revolution, coming of age in an era of tumultuous transition and acute disillusionment, for the young idealist. Like Gericault he also took his early training in Guerin's studio. They became acquainted there in 1817 and Delacroix posed for one of the slumped boys in the left foreground of the *Raft*. When Gericault received a state commission for a Sacred Heart of Jesus, he surreptitiously passed it on to his

grateful protégé. However, the ambition of the younger Delacroix quickly surpassed such routine works and he rushed to complete a major work for the 1822 salon, rather than competing for the Grand Prix de Rome.

The result was *The Barque of Dante and Virgil*, a strikingly original painting on the literary theme from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, depicting the two poets passage with Phlegyas, the ferryman of the lake, surrounding the fifth circle of hell. Having postponed his pilgrimage to Rome, a right of passage thought essential for the successful development of the ambitious painter, he must now demonstrate that he could achieve the considerable intellectual and technical demands of the highest genre in other ways. Cultivation of the most advanced literary taste was just that recourse, as he now showed a preference for Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe and Byron over the legacy of French Classicism of Racine and Voltaire.

*The Barque of Dante*, of 1822, illustrating Canto VIII of the *Inferno*, was Delacroix's first exhibited painting and it immediately established him, after Gericault, as a prodigy of the French Romantic movement. The fact that

the Interior Ministry immediately acquired the work for the recently constituted Museum of Contemporary Art in the Luxembourg Palace, which at that time also housed Rubens's renowned *Medici Cycle*, guaranteed its future iconic status; as such it became one of the most copied of Delacroix's paintings. On seeing the painting for the first time, the critic Adolphe Thiers, the future prime minister of France said, 'In my opinion, no picture is a clearer revelation of future greatness than M. Delacroix's *Le Dante et Virgile aux Enfers...* There you have all the egoism of misery, the despair of hell... Apart from the poetic imagination, the author has another, artistic imagination, which one might call the graphic imagination.... He throws his figures on the canvas, he groups and bends them at will, with the boldness of Michelangelo and the abundance of Rubens'. Of course, the inspiration for this great painting was his friend Gericault's *Raft*. Indeed, all of his major work of that decade can be read as a meditation on one, or other aspect of this work, which filtered for him virtually all the previous tradition of historical painting. The damned souls clinging to the Barque, recall, the desperate survivors



on the fringe of the raft and again the same pyramidal compositional structure is employed, the poet's hand beckoning gesture toward a distant horizon being the apex.

In understanding the circumstances in which the essence of French Romanticism came into being, it is important at this point to emphasise to what extent both Gericault and Delacroix were operating outside the accepted parameters of the artist/academy/patron relationship.



This was in part possible because of the model of precocious success of their Revolutionary period predecessors, Gerard and Guerin, when the opportunity to go to Rome was closed off by war and the Revolutionary exhibitions removed all the old restrictions on entry. For quasi-aristocratic painters such as the young Gericault, painting appeared to be an attractive and feasible venture. And as the normal routine of training played a minimal part in his development, the next step was to move permanently outside the confining discipline of the Prix de Rome, with its prescriptive rules and humiliating submission to repeated judgement. As Gericault quickly recognised, turning one's back on the Academic establishment and going it alone could incur considerable sacrifice, but this was a risk that Delacroix was willing to take.

With little experience, few learned routines to follow and a diminished fund of concrete knowledge, no ambitious young painter could ignore traditional demands for elevated intellectual content. So each painting became a speculative exercise, where it was imperative that public attention be seized with an effective combination of the familiar and the strikingly novel. Delacroix's *Dante and Virgil*, fulfilled nearly all of these requirements, in a canvas of modest dimensions. For those unfamiliar with the *Inferno*, it may be enlightening to understand how Delacroix interpreted Dante's narrative in Canto VIII. Dante describes the beginning of the journey as such:

"There on the filthy waters", he replied (Virgil),  
 "E'en now what next awaits us mayst thou see,  
 If the marsh-engendered fog conceal it not"  
 Never was arrow from the cord dismiss'd  
 That ran its way so nimbly through the air  
 As a small barque, that through the waves I spied  
 Towards us coming, under the sole sway  
 Of one that ferried it, who cried aloud  
 "Art thou arrived, fell spirit? – "Phlegyas, Phlegyas  
 While we our course o'er the dead channel held,  
 One drenched in mire before me came and said,  
 "Who are thou, that thus comest ere thine hour?"  
 I answer'd, "though I come I tarry not:  
 But who art thou, that art become so foul?"  
 "One, as thou seest, who mourns", he straight replied.  
 To which I thus: "In mourning and in woe,  
 Curse spirit! tarry thou. I know thee well,  
 E'en in this filth disguised" Then stretch'd he forth  
 Hands to the barque; wherof my teacher sage (Virgil)  
 Aware, thrusting him back; "Away! down there  
 To the other dogs".

Dante's *Inferno*, had been for centuries one of the most widely read books and like Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, a rich source of narratives for the artist and would remain so, no more famously than for Rodin's masterpiece, *The Gates of Hell*.



*The Raft of the Medusa*, oil on canvas, Theodore Gericault, Louvre

Delacroix exploits the narrative to recall the plight of the *Medusa* survivors' suffering sins with the punishments of hell, as Gericault had quoted Dante's cannibalistic Ugolino in the vignette of the older man cradling the nude adolescent at the front of the raft. The damned souls clinging to the barque call directly to mind the bodies on the fringe of the raft.

For the Salon of 1824, Delacroix moved to capitalise on his huge public success with a painting on a truly monumental scale, *The Massacre at Chios*. The subject came from recent events in the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Turks, which began in 1821 and would continue for most of the decade. It was the revolutionary struggle which would famously enlist the poet, Byron, who perished at Missolonghi in that same year. The Greek cause provided a rallying point for disaffected liberals in France as well, who grew increasingly resistant to the oppressive regime of the Bourbon King, Charles X. Some two years before, the population of the Island of Chios had been subjected to a brutal campaign of retaliatory terror, its towns burnt to the ground and its inhabitants murdered, or sent into slavery. In its sentiments, the painting was at one with those of the *Raft of the Medusa*, and Delacroix regarded the painting as an homage to Gericault.



The vast painting, 14x12 feet did however reveal how difficult it would be to build so directly onto the *Raft of the Medusa*, without devoting the equivalent degree of immersion in the subject and so the critics noted with near unanimity, that the work lacked any focus of effective action, leaving one's attention divided by fragmented vignettes and most of these do little to evoke the specific outrages of the Turks. One mounted warrior carries away a naked woman and prepares to slay her male defender, but his haughty demeanour, splendid costume and easy command of a spirited horse fascinate, more than repel. In Delacroix's defence, these were the stock images in the journalistic and literary responses to the massacres and he and his friends had no first hand knowledge of the barbarous events.

The salon of 1824 became famous for other reasons, as being the year when a host of English landscape painters, most notably John Constable, who was awarded a Gold Medal for *The Hay wain*, which had been bought earlier by the French dealer, John Arrowsmith. Other notable recipients were Samuel Prout, Copley and Thales Fielding, and last, but by no means least, Richard Parkes Bonington, who having arrived with his family in Calais in 1816, as a fourteen-year-old, had after training in the atelier of Louis Francia, followed by that of Antoine-Jean Gros, thereafter rapidly become one of the most sought after landscape painters in the watercolour tradition. By 1824, he was painting with equal facility in oils, so much so that in a review of the 1824 Salon, a critic could write that the 'artist had created a mania'. Having friends in common, it was inevitable as Bonington's aura expanded, that he would become more acquainted with Delacroix, but it was in London in the Summer of 1825, that their friendship really blossomed. Although of quite different backgrounds and temperaments, they shared a passionate interest in post-classical history, British art and literature, as well as a sincere

admiration for each other's talents. There are virtually no biographical accounts of Delacroix during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that fail to mention the marked influence of Bonington on his French compatriot, despite his premature death from Tuberculosis in 1828.

Delacroix's Journal entries reflect over several decades his admiration for both the man and his art. He gave his appreciation of Bonington an especially fulsome airing as late as 1861 in an extensive biographical notice in



which he submitted, 'No one in this modern school and perhaps ever before, has possessed that lightness of touch that, especially in watercolours makes Bonington's work a type of diamond that flatters and ravishes the eye, independent of any subject and any imitative intent'.

Earlier, after Bonington had taken up Delacroix's invitation to join him in his Paris studio in January 1826, he admitted to his friend Charles Soulier, 'There's a great deal to be learnt from the company of the lad and I promise you I am the better for it'. At that time Delacroix had on his easel, *The Execution of the Doge Marino Faliero*, Wallace Collection, a scene from 14<sup>th</sup> century Venetian history, which had recently been made famous by Byron. Thereafter, the two friends would learn from each other, exchanging ideas, Delacroix realising the depth of Bonington's watercolour expertise and how this might be used to good effect in his oil painting. Painted in 1827, *Woman with a Parrot*, was just such a small easel painting, the first of many orientalist works, this one with a harem theme. According to his journal entries of the time, the artist had apparently suffered a sentimental, or sensual crisis between

1825-27, which led him to paint many more, or less erotic works. It's thought that the young model may have been Mademoiselle Laure, who also appeared prominently in *The Death of Sardanapalus* and even more so in *Greece Among the Ruins of Missolonghi* (not illustrated).



*The Death of Sardanapalus*, Louvre, 1827.

Delacroix's next major enterprise was the contemporaneously much maligned, *Death of Sardanapalus* now regarded as one of his masterpieces. In terms of depicting a teeming scene of death and destruction into a coherent composition, the painting represented a major step forward from his disappointment with *The Massacre at Chios*. The link to Byron remains, now in literary rather than biographical terms. The story of the last Assyrian King, committing suicide rather than submit to conquest, was the subject of Byron's poem of 1821, which was translated shortly thereafter and performed on stage in Paris. Whilst Byron's hero is accompanied in death only by a favourite concubine, who voluntarily accepts her fate, Delacroix returns to the ancient legend of a licentious monster, indolently observing the execution of his orders, that the destruction of his possessions and the women of his harem take place before his eyes, as the massive pyre is set alight.

Again, the critics had reason to complain. This time, there was almost a surfeit of action and troubling ambiguities of space, which with the sustained intensity of hue, conflating blood with fire, enforces an overwhelming feeling of claustrophobic menace. The turbulent, swirling action, with the accompanying foreshortened perspective, appears to be spilling out of the picture before the viewer. The portrayal of a woman being brutally murdered in the foreground and the orgy of violence against women would by today's standards, be distasteful. Sardanapalus sits at the top of his bed, looking

disinterestedly at the swirling chaos of death and destruction surrounding him. This man is definitely not the hero-like Horatios, in the *Oath of Horatio*, and in almost everyway possible, Delacroix's painting is the complete antithesis of the Neoclassical tradition, which favoured rigid construction of compositional space, classical figures, subdued colours and above all, moral authority. Nevertheless, *Sardanapalus* is now regarded as one of Delacroix's masterpieces and the epitome of Romanticism.



*The Oath of the Horatio*  
Jacques Louis-David, Louvre



*The Combat of the Giaour and Hassan*, oil on canvas, 1826, Art Institute, Chicago

This is a wonderful early example of Delacroix's skill in imbuing compositions with both energy and colour. Orientalism had initially become popular as propaganda related to Napoleon's conquest of Egypt. Inspired by Lord Byron's poem, *The Giaour*, this work is among the finest of his early battle scenes. The painting depicts the poem's dramatic climax, when the Venetian Giaour (a Turkish word for a non-Muslim) avenges his lover's death at the hands of the Turk Hassan. Weapons poised, the two enemies face off in mirroring poses, the Giaour in swirling white and Hassan with his face hidden. With its exotic costumes, intense drama and strident colours and forms, the painting is the most revered of the six known versions Delacroix based on Byron's poem.



*Liberty Leading the People*, oil on canvas, Louvre

On 28 July 1830, the simmering discontent with the reign of the reactionary Charles X finally boiled over and precipitated violent insurrection. The ruling political class, fearing another full blown revolution, reacted quickly and installed the deposed King's cousin, Louis Philippe, in what became known as the July Monarchy. The impressive *Liberty Leading the People*, was Delacroix's response.

Yet again, there are vestiges of the *Raft of the Medusa*, the pyramidal compositional structure, this time moving forward, the bodies, one partially clothed, almost spilling out of the composition. The personification of Liberty, the bare-breasted amazon, careless of all modesty, tricolour in one hand and musket in the other, wearing a Phrygian cap, charging over the barricade, would remind some older contemporary viewers no doubt of the part that women played in the 1789 Revolution. At her feet, a

kneeling, revolutionary looks up, almost in awe, whilst on her left, a bowler-hatted, hunting-rifle carrying gentleman, with Delacroix's features strides purposely forward. On the other side, a boy, the young hero, Gavroche, of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, pistols in either hand, represents the future and hope. To his left is the image of Notre Dame, with on top the Tricolour.

Once again this painting was not only revolutionary in conception, but also in finish, open brushwork visible throughout, the complete antithesis of the smooth Academic finish of David and Ingres. The French Government bought the painting in 1831 for 3,000 francs, with the intention of displaying it in the throne Room of the Palais du Luxembourg, as a reminder of the "Citizen King", Louis-Philippe of the July Revolution. However, it was not on show for long, before the Government became fearful of its inflammatory message and so after the June Rebellion of 1832, the painting was returned to Delacroix. It was exhibited in 1848, after the Republic was restored in the revolution of that year and then again in the 1855 Salon. In 1874, the same year as the first Impressionist Exhibition, it finally took its rightful place in the Louvre.



*Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, oil on canvas, Louvre

Despite the antagonism that Delacroix was still suffering from the Academic establishment, the initially liberal regime of Louis-Philippe smiled benignly on Delacroix. In the wake of France's invasion of Algeria in 1830, Delacroix travelled to Morocco, via Spain and Algeria in 1832, as part of a delegation under Charles, Compte de Morny, sent by Louis-Philippe to negotiate a treaty with the Sultan Moulay Abd al-Rahman. In contrast to Delacroix's imagined Near East, inspired by literature and the accounts of such artist friends as Gabriel Decamps, North Africa was a veritable revelation, a

vibrant orient as beautiful as antiquity. On arriving in Morocco, he exclaimed 'I'm like a man in a dream, seeing things he fears will vanish from him'. Every aspect of life fascinated him and he later recalled to Silvestre, 'Morocco will always remain fixed in my mind, the men and women of this beautiful, strong race will be present in my memory as long as I live. It was in them that I truly discovered the beauty of the ancients'. True to this admission, Delacroix returned over the next three decades to his North African adventure for the subject of almost eighty paintings, *Women of Algiers*, the Louvre being the first of three renowned paintings to follow his return, a painting that would have had as equally a profound influence on later generations, as the *Barque of the Dante and Virgil*.

Although able to gain access to the homes of the Jewish community, the Muslim community prevented such access to foreigners. However, just before his return to France, he was able surreptitiously to gain entry to a household in Tangiers. The Moorish women of that lodging dressed resplendently for the occasion, enabling Delacroix to make several detailed watercolour studies. The painting was the sensation of the 1834 salon and it subsequently became the most celebrated and copied of the painter's orientalist's pictures, in addition to inspiring a plethora of literary works. The painting was also regarded as a significant harbinger of the Aesthetic, of Art-for-Art's -Sake, movement of the 1860's. Painters decades later from Degas, Renoir and Cezanne to Vincent van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso, waxed lyrical about this painting, which probably more than any other painting to date by Delacroix marks a pivotal point in his experiments with colour theory.



*Convulsionists of Tangiers*, oil on canvas, 1838, Minneapolis

While in Tangier Delacroix encountered members of the Aissaoua, a Sufi brotherhood founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Mohammed Ben Aissa.



*The Jewish Wedding in Morocco*, oil on canvas 1841, Louvre

Annually in August, followers of the sect converge on his funerary monument in Meknes, depicted as much later Theophile Gautier would confirm, ‘a furious torrent of Aissaouas, writhing in their convulsions of sacred epilepsy, hideously demented, followed on by only a few guardsmen, who protect their frenzy’. Delacroix’s *Convulsionists of Tangiers* commenced as early as 1837, may have been in part a response to his friend Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps’s *Punishment of the Hooks* of 1837, now in the Wallace Collection. The freedom of Delacroix’s brush-work is however a far cry from Decamps’s much more finished touch. Whilst critically disparaged in Paris, it nevertheless received much more favourable notice from an English review in the Times.

*The Jewish Wedding*, exhibited at the 1841 Salon, was one of the most ambitious paintings to result from his Moroccan sojourn, where he was granted privileged access to this celebration, where he made copious notes and sketches to ensure authenticity. The painting depicts events after the formal wedding, where dancing is a significant feature of Jewish weddings, as it is customary for guests to dance and entertain the couple. The musicians are at the centre of the composition, with the women on one side and the men on the other.

Proving to be too expensive for the individual, who originally commissioned it, Delacroix sold it to the heir to the French throne, Ferdinand-Philippe, Duc d’Orléans, a leading collector of contemporary art, who had fought in North Africa. It was a painting that Renoir famously copied in 1875. Victor Choquet, an other enthusiastic Delacroix collector, was already suggesting to all who would listen, that in his vibrant sense of colour and animated brushstroke, Renoir was his natural successor. The copy is a statement of the allegiance the then young painter felt to the Romantic master.



***The Last Word of Marcus Aurelius***, Lyon, 1844, 12x8 ft, painted for the 1845 Salon, depicts the last hours of the Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, a Stoic, whom Delacroix much admired. His son, Commodus, whose arm he grabs, appears to ignore him; the painting represents the end of the Roman Empire. It's a painting influenced not only by David, but Caravaggio's, *Death of the Virgin*.



***Basket of Flowers***, oil on canvas, Metropolitan, 1849

During a period of political unrest in post-revolutionary Paris, Delacroix retreated to his country house, where he painted a series of flower paintings for the 1849 Salon, of which *Basket of Flowers* is one of the finest, proving especially influential for the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.



*Bathers*, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum, 1854.

This small easel painting, is a beautiful poetic fiction, very much in the Rococo tradition, inspired perhaps by Narcisse-Virgile Diaz de la Pena, anticipating and undoubtedly influencing such scenes by both Renoir and Cezanne. It is also a succinct demonstration of Delacroix's ethos, that 'The most beautiful works of art are those that express the pure fantasy of the artist'. It was commissioned by a Parisian dealer, who proposed a 'bain champetre', with very detailed instructions for a chaste sensuality, that the artist more, or less adopted. The painting merges a recollection of an encounter with Moroccan women, doing their laundry by a stream, the Naturalistic treatment of the landscape in



the Champlosay forest, near Delacroix's country retreat and a bathing incident from Torquato Tasso's poem, *Jerusalem Delivered*. However, Delacroix's parallel motive, for him a rare occurrence, was to critique Gustave Courbet's celebrated and scandalous *Bathers* of 1853, which he found deficient in its 'coarse realism and lack of sentiment'.

Finally, after three decades of painting, Delacroix was honoured at the 1855 Universal Exhibition in Paris, organised at the behest of the Emperor Napoleon III, with a special exhibition of his works.

Up to now, no mention has been made of the many decorative mural schemes for which Delacroix was commissioned. Following his initial Salon successes, he secured with the sponsorship of Adolphe Theirs, a series of mural decorations that would challenge him for the next two decades, in the Libraries of the Deputies Chamber in the Palais Bourbon and in the Luxembourg Palace.

***Jacob Wrestling the Angel***, mural, oil and wax on plaster, Church of Saint-Sulpice 1857-61

Religious commissions also materialised, *Jacob Wrestling the Angel*, being critically viewed as the most significant mural completed by a 19<sup>th</sup> century painter, only to be truly appreciated by viewing it in person. At 25x16 feet, it is the most admired of his three works in the Chapelle des Agnes, for the moving depiction of spiritual struggle makes it a supreme achievement.

Here he once again made use of the lessons of the master manipulator of water-colour, his deceased friend Bonington; to capitalise on the luminous reflective properties of a white, or near white surface, characteristic of water-colour paper, Delacroix complained that he almost gave himself lead poisoning in preparing the expansive walls of the in Paris, with a white lead ground. A positive consequence, however, was his ability to dispatch in twenty minutes 'with celerity and freshness', the translucent still-life in the foreground, just one of many innovative techniques that would captivate the Neo-Impressionists, Georges Seurat and Paul Signac.

One imagines also that the image of Jacob wrestling with the Angel in Gauguin's masterpiece, *The Vision after the Sermon*, was as a result of having viewed Delacroix's monumental masterpiece.



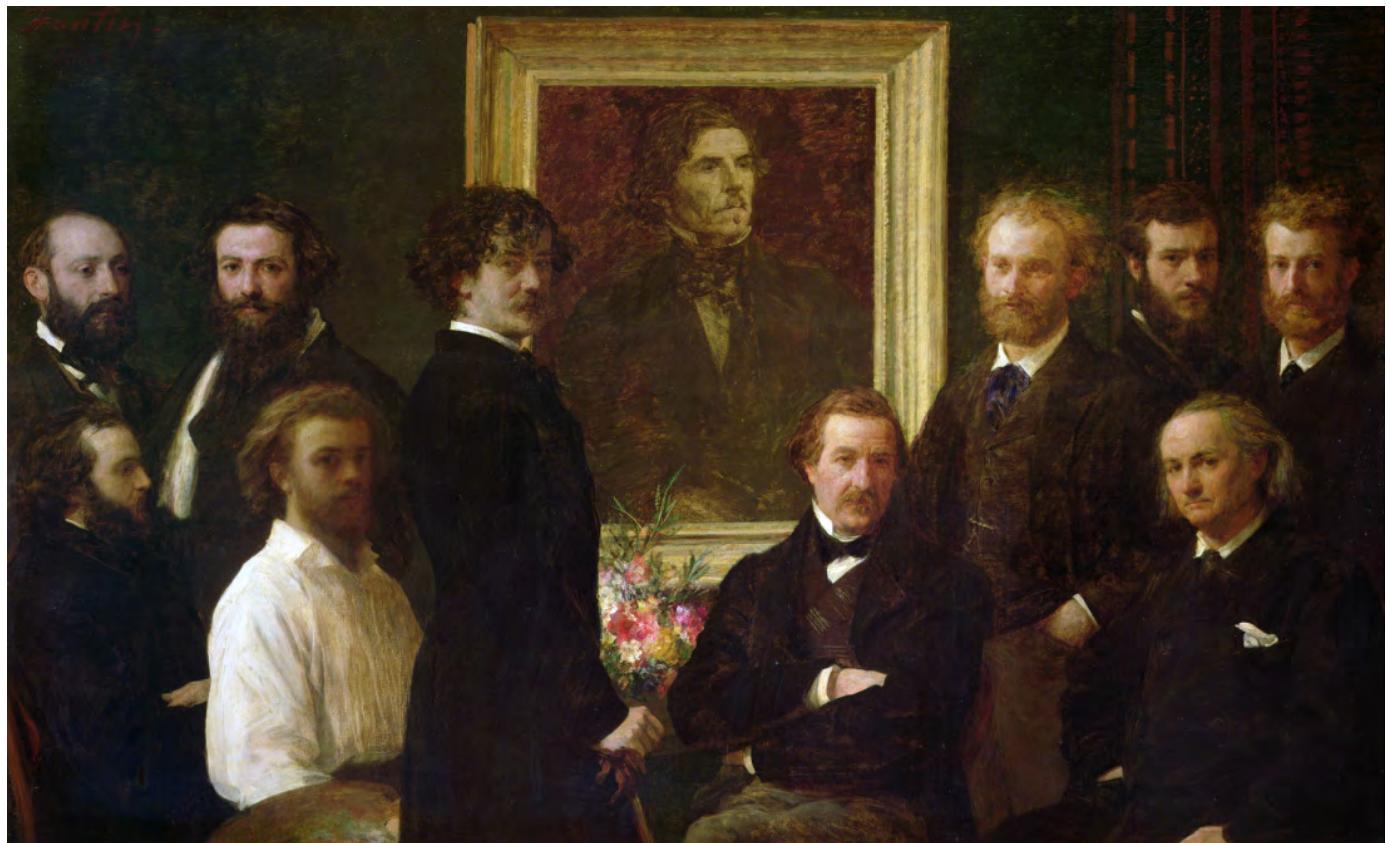
**The Lion Hunt**, painted in 1861, is one of four such pictures, inspired by the exploits of a celebrated hunter, Jules Gerard and influenced by several such paintings by Rubens, or the more likely seen engravings of these pictures by Pieter Claesz Soutman.



Painted in 1621, **The Lion Hunt**, in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, by Peter Paul Rubens.



*Ovid among the Scythians*, painted in 1862, the year before his death, is one of a number of late easel paintings in which Delacroix returned to themes previously elaborated in decorative programs for which he was commissioned, the first being in a pendentive for his decoration for the Palais Bourbon, Paris. Its freedom of execution imparts an immediacy of touch and expression more typical of a sketch than a finished painting. There is a similar painting, but earlier treatment of the narrative in the N.G.



*Hommage à Delacroix* was painted by Henri Fantin-Latour (the artist more famous for his wonderful flower still-lifes), in 1864, a year after Delacroix' death. The homage was the idea jointly of the artist, Baudelaire and Edouard Manet, all of whom attended the funeral that year of unquestionably the most celebrated 'Refuse' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The group portrait depicts the younger artists and progressive literary figures, closely circling a portrait of the deceased artist. Seated from right to left are Edmond Duranty, Henri Fantin-Latour in a white shirt, Jules Champfleury and Charles Baudelaire and standing from right to left, Louis Cordier, Alphonse Legros, James Whistler, Edouard Manet, Félix Bracquemond and Albert de Balleroy. Manet and Whistler, the most prominent painters standing on either side of Delacroix's portrait had only recently scandalised the establishment at the 1863 Salon des Refusés with respectively, *Le Déjeuner sur L'Herbe* and *Symphony in White No 1*. Both painters would set themselves against the Academy and the Establishment painters, carrying forward the torch for progressive art.

The service was modest, with very little official recognition and the dearth of official honours to their hero greatly dismayed his devotees. Baudelaire immediately rendered a moving panegyric in a series of three journal articles and in a published eulogy at the time of his atelier paintings, his first biographer and confidant, reflected:

**'Thus expired, almost smiling, on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1863, Ferdinand-Victor-Eugene Delacroix, a painter of high breeding, who had a sun in his head and a thunderstorm in his heart; who over forty years touched every chord of human passions and whose grandiose, suave and terrible brush went from saints to warriors, from warriors to lovers, from lovers to tigers and from tigers to flowers'.**

He was buried in Père-Lachaise Cemetery and a monument produced by the sculptor Jules Dalou was placed in the Jardin du Luxembourg, in 1890, with the pedestal engraving, *A Eugene Delacroix 1798-1863 ses admirateurs*.

So, what is the legacy of Delacroix? He arrived at a time, when the Academic tradition had become stale and stilted, over-dependent on prescriptive employment of Classical models. The conventional formulas of French painting so defended by conservative critics were valueless if the artist's imagination did not touch the viewer. For William Hazlitt, the brilliant and influential British essayist, visiting Paris in 1824, the works of David's School then hanging in the Luxembourg Palace, were 'bad translations of sculpture into a language essentially incompatible with it'. He further felt that David's paintings were also lamentably French in their, 'little, finical manner without beauty, grandeur, or effect, meagre and constrained in expression, aberrant in colouration and affected and theatrical in their figures' false attitudes'.

Nevertheless, Hazlitt did find relief in Delacroix's *Barque of the Dante*, 'a truly picturesque work in composition and effect and shows a real eye for Rubens and Nature, the forms project, the colours are thrown into masses'. Hazlitt's publication of *Table Talk*, in French, a series of essays on the fine arts, including, *On the Pleasure of Painting* and *On the Picturesque and Ideal* etc, were for Delacroix invaluable aids from which to draw inspiration for both his art and his later theoretical writings. The idea that painting was pleasurable, to the extent that it enraptured the eye and had little to do with orthodox notions of what was beautiful in Nature, or ethically appropriate to art, was central to British theories of vision, had already begun to make ground in British academic circles, with Turner already pushing the envelope of acceptability. Indeed, Delacroix would restate in the very last *Journal* entry of his life, '**The first merit of a painting is to be a feast for the eye**'. And like Turner, for Delacroix, this often demanded, even excused novel manipulations of technique, colour and form, typically seen in *Sardanapalus*, a brilliant example of bright colours, swirling forms and animated brushwork.

The progenitors to whom he looked to for inspiration were the Venetians, Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese and of course the Baroque Rubens, with his exuberance, rather than Raphael, with his refined *Disegno*, and his contemporary followers, Ingres and Ary Scheffer, with in his words, their

archaic imitations, where preoccupation with contour and finish extinguished the vitality of the finished painting.

His approach to subject matter, the dramatic poses of his figures, his emphasis on expression and emotion, his exploration of natural light in his outdoor landscapes, such as in the *Bathers* and his dramatic use of colour laid the foundation for the work of the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, Expressionists and the Symbolists. Specifically, Delacroix's division of tones would have an enormous impact on the work of Pissarro, Renoir and Monet and his awareness of the power of complimentary tones led ultimately to the colour theories of Georges Seurat. Emulation followed even in his own lifetime, with the copy that Manet painted in 1854 of the *Barque of the Dante* and later after his death, in 1875, Renoir's copy of *The Jewish Wedding in Morocco* and his earlier *Odalisque* of 1870 owe much to Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*. Both Paul Cezanne and Vincent van Gogh, idolised him, most famously seen in Vincent's version of Delacroix's Pieta, from a series of prints sent by his brother Theo to the asylum in St Remy.

In addition to his huge body of oil paintings, watercolours, sketches and studies, successive generations

of artists and art historians have been especially fortunate to have at their disposal Delacroix's *Journals*, which he completed on an almost daily basis between 1822-4 and from 1847 until his death. So we are privy to Delacroix's perspective on culture, society and life, from the most prosaic anecdotes that Russians were smoking cigarettes of green tea, to an analysis of the terribly uneven quality of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. The only conspicuous gap in his entries, was at the end of 1849, when after the death of his beloved Frederick Chopin, he retreated in silent mourning to his country retreat. His *Dictionary of Fine Arts*, was partially a belated attempt to cement a legacy of some sort, after decades of being cold-shouldered by the Academic establishment.

Ironically, his belated election to the Institut de France on 10 January 1857, was to fill the vacancy left by Paul Delaroche, an immensely popular painter, he disdained for his impoverished imagination and laboured technique.

One of Delacroix's more remarkable virtues was the consistency of his



perspective over decades of technical exploration and art-historical analysis. Another was the incredible range of theoretical writings with which he was familiar, from Voltaire to Hippolyte Taine, Addison to Stendhal and Immanuel Kant to Madame de Staél. In fact, most of Delacroix's panegyrist were literary men and as Baudelaire claimed following his funeral:

**'Amongst the crowd that assembled to pay him his last honours, you could count many more men of letters than painters. To tell the blunt truth, these latter have never perfectly understood him.'**

**Delacroix was a man of general education, as opposed to the other artists of the today, who for the most part are sad specialists, mere artisans'.**

Notwithstanding, there is hardly any 19<sup>th</sup> century painter of note that followed Delacroix, who if he were alive would not acknowledge the degree to which their art was in some way influenced by his vision.

**'Oh! Young artist, you want a subject? Everything is a subject; they are your impressions, your emotions before nature. You must look within your self and not around yourself'. Delacroix**

**'Delacroix's palette is still the most beautiful in France, and I tell you no-one under the sky had more charm and pathos combined than he, or more vibration in colour. We all paint in his language'. Paul Cezanne**

**'He understood that his epoch was one of pure expression, that Romanticism is among other things only a triumph of sentiment over form...He created colouristic expression!'. Odilon Redon**

**'Delacroix was passionately in love with passion, but coldly determined to express passion as clearly as possible'. Baudelaire**

As a postscript, there has been little mention of Delacroix's personal life. He was a melancholic dreamer, a solitary nature lover, who enjoyed going for long walks and observing nature. He undoubtedly had lovers amongst his many female models, but the most fascinating relationships were with Frederick Chopin and his lover George Sand, born Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, known to her friends as Aurore.

Sand was one of the most renowned and popular writers in Europe in her lifetime, being more renowned than either Balzac, or Hugo in England at the height of the Romantic Period in the 1830s and 1840s. She was one of the most notable of the 19<sup>th</sup> century women who chose to dress like a man in public, much like her near contemporary Rosa Bonheur, the renowned French animal painter. She had many affairs, most notably with Chopin, although she was a notable absentee from his funeral in 1848. Although there has always been speculation over the precise nature of the relationship between Sand and Delacroix, nothing substantive has ever come to light.

Delacroix's devoted housekeeper, Jenny Le Gillou, entered his service around 1835 and was the only one who lived by his side, shielding him from the worries of everyday life. He had been in fragile health for sometime, probably from tuberculosis, but during the winter of 1862-63, he suffered from a serious throat infection, which led him to seek the advice of his Paris doctor, who advised him that there was nothing more he could do. Realising the seriousness of his condition, he wrote his will, leaving a gift to each of his friends and sufficient money for his trusted house-keeper Jenny Le Gillou to live on. He also inserted a clause expressly forbidding any representation of his features, whether by a death-mask, drawing, or photography. He died in his Paris apartment on Rue de Furstenberg, his house-keeper remaining faithful to his last breath, in the small hours of the morning.

Thus passed into art history folklore, the beating heart of the French Romantic movement.