

The Classical Paradigm

In order to counter the apparent decadence of contemporary art and culture, La Font de Saint-Yenne in France and Joshua Reynolds in Britain encouraged young artists to look at the art of the past. There, they believed, could be found the models of a new, noble, and edifying art that could strengthen, even repair, the moral fabric of their nations. La Font, who advocated the creation of a public art museum for this purpose, cited the works of such seventeenth-century French history painters as Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), Eustache Le Sueur (1616–1655), and Nicolas Poussin (1594?–1665) as eminent models. Reynolds singled out the Italian Renaissance artists Michelangelo and Raphael as masters for young art students to emulate. These artists, they felt, had created great works by starting out with significant subjects and eloquent conceptions and realizing them with masterful compositions and perfect execution.

If there was a common denominator between the artistic role models proposed by La Font de Saint-Yenne and Reynolds, it was their common roots in the art of Classical antiquity. Both men were well aware that Michelangelo and Raphael in the sixteenth century and Le Brun and Poussin in the seventeenth had looked to Classical art for inspiration. Reynolds, therefore, felt that the study of

Classical sculpture was as important as that of Renaissance painting. As the eighteenth century progressed, artists increasingly went beyond seventeenth- and even sixteenth-century painting to find, in antiquity, the models for a “new art.” Indeed, by the third quarter of the eighteenth century, it was Classical sculpture rather than Renaissance or Baroque painting that came to be seen as the chief paradigm for the renewal of art.

Winckelmann and Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture

The importance of Classical art, especially sculpture, as a pre-eminent model for contemporary artists was most forcefully argued by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), a German literary scholar. In 1755 Winckelmann published a short pamphlet entitled *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst* (Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture; second edition, 1756; FIG. 2-1). In it Winckelmann pointed to Classical sculpture as a model for the improvement not only of painting and sculpture but of society as a whole. While recognizing that the perfect human forms found in Classical sculpture were “idealized” representations of reality, he nonetheless believed that they were fairly true representations of the ancient Greeks, whose lifestyle he held up as an inspiration for

Angelica Kauffman, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*,
Pointing to her Children as her Treasures, c.1785 (Detail of FIG. 2.14.)





2-1 Title page of Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst*, second edition (Dresden and Leipzig, 1756). Harvard University Libraries, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

modern man. Inspired by his readings of Homer, Plato, and other ancient Greek authors, Winckelmann had formed a Utopian idea of life in ancient Greece, where "from their earliest youth, the happy inhabitants were devoted to mirth and pleasure [and] where narrow-spirited formality never restrained the liberty of manners." The Greeks, according to Winckelmann, lived simply, ate a healthy diet, and exercised regularly. This lifestyle contrasted sharply with that of those who lived in the eighteenth century, during which overeating and lack of exercise were the norm among the upper class. He also praised the loose clothes of the Greeks, as opposed to the confining, corseted fashions of the Rococo. Winckelmann suggested that the Greeks' sensible, natural lifestyle engendered healthy minds and high moral standards.

While Winckelmann's ultimate dream may have been to recreate ancient Greece in modern Europe, the aims he set in his pamphlet were more modest, confined as they were to the imitation of Greek art in modern painting and sculpture. "The only way," he wrote, "for us to become great or, if this be possible, inimitable, is to imitate the ancients." He noted that Michelangelo, Raphael, and Poussin had turned to Classical art for inspiration, and he advised the artists of his own time to do the same. From the ancient artists, modern artists could learn to draw the perfect body contour, to model drapery gently around the human form, and, more

generally, to extract the ideal from the real. A true understanding of Classical art, moreover, would help them to imbue their figures with the "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" that Winckelmann admired above all in Greek art.

Classical Art and Idealism

To Winckelmann and his contemporaries, Classical art exemplified ideal beauty, or what the French called *le beau idéal*. The notion of ideal beauty rested on the belief that nature, no matter how pleasing it may appear to the observer, is always imperfect. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato had first introduced the concept of an imperfect nature. He suggested that the Creator, or *Demiurgos*, had conceived an "Idea"—a conceptual and invisible prototype of all things. This inherently perfect and absolutely beautiful Idea was realized on earth in an infinite number of forms, always falling somewhat short of the Idea itself. For example, the Creator had formed a generic and universal Idea of a "tree." However, all trees past, present, and future are but imperfect realizations of this ideal tree.

Classical Greek artists aimed at uncovering the "Idea" in the particularized forms of nature in order to approximate its supreme perfection in their works. Their sculptures (the art form for which they are best known) present male and female bodies, supremely proportioned and without the slightest blemish or deformity. Facial features of great regularity and calm expressions complete the effect of absolute beauty as the Greeks imagined it (see FIG. 2-5).

Idealism in art is that search for perfection in nature that was initiated by the Greeks and periodically revived—first in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, then in the works of some seventeenth-century artists, such as Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) in Italy and Nicolas Poussin in France, and, for the third time, in the period under discussion, from about 1760 to 1815. "By the ideal," wrote Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779), a German painter and theorist, "I mean that which one sees only with the imagination, and not with the eyes; thus an ideal in painting depends upon selection of the most beautiful things in nature purified of every imperfection."

Revealing the ideal in nature was considered a difficult task, requiring a special insight, often equated with "genius," as well as a great deal of practice and study. The study of Classical sculpture, in which the art of ennobling natural forms had been perfected, was considered especially important. As Joshua Reynolds stated in his *Discourses*:

But the investigation of this [ideal] form, I grant, is painful and I know of but one method of shortening the road; this is, by a careful study of the ancient sculptors; who, being indefatigable in the school of nature, have left models of that perfect form behind them.



2-2 **Joseph Wright of Derby**, *The Corinthian Maid*, c.1782–5. Oil on canvas, 41 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51" (1.06 x 1.3 m). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Contour

The eighteenth-century search for the ideal was closely bound to a preoccupation with outline or contour. Recognizing its absence in nature (there are no black outlines around clouds, trees, or the human body), Winckelmann saw contour as the royal road to the ideal and the supreme means of artistic expression. Contour enabled the artist to purify reality by purging it from all physical particularities and to reduce it to its formal essence—the highest beauty human beings could achieve. Winckelmann's celebration of contour was shared by many of his contemporaries. The Dutch philosopher Frans Hemsterhuis (1721–1790) even went so far as to attach a religious significance to contour. In his *Lettre sur la sculpture* (Letter on Sculpture), published in 1769, he spoke of the sacred essence of line and the divine mission of drawing.

The renewed emphasis on outline during the eighteenth century led to a revival of interest in the Classical legend

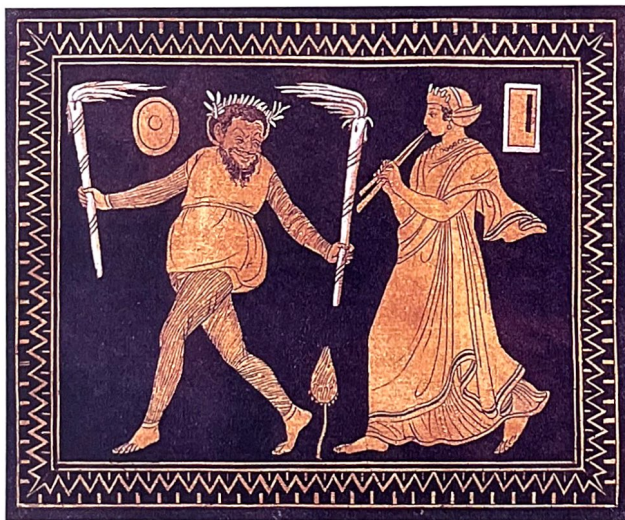
of the origin of art. According to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder (died 79 CE), the first drawing in history was made by a Greek maid from Corinth who, saddened by the imminent departure of her lover, traced the shadow cast by his face on the wall. The story, which established contour drawing as the beginning of all art, was retold numerous times and even made its way into Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. It was also a favorite subject of late eighteenth-century artists such as the English painter Joseph Wright of Derby (1734–1797), whose painting, reproduced in FIG. 2-2, shows the Corinthian maid tracing the shadow of her sleeping lover. The popularity of Pliny's story may be explained by the powerful conviction, at the time, that at its origins art had possessed a "primitive" purity, which it had lost as artists had become increasingly focused on illusionism. The attempt to recapture that purity was to preoccupy many turn-of-the-century painters and sculptors, including Jacques-Louis David and John Flaxman (see pages 55 and 64).

Archaeology and the Discovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum

The mid-eighteenth-century preoccupation with the aesthetics of Classical art—that is, its sensual qualities—coincided with a renewed scholarly interest in Classical culture. Enlightenment curiosity about the origins of mankind had led to the birth of archaeology. Because of its accessibility and its rich past, Italy was the preferred terrain for archaeological digs. Excavations along the west coast of Italy unearthed a number of ancient Etruscan tombs dating from the eighth century BCE, before the Etruscans were absorbed into the Roman Empire. Among the most exciting finds in these tombs were painted vessels of various shapes. Although archaeologists originally assumed that these vessels or “vases,” as they are usually referred to, were Etruscan, they eventually realized that the Etruscans had bought them from the Greeks. The earliest form of Western art known at the time, Greek vases seemed to take the viewer back to art’s very origins. Because their painted decorations were based on strong contour lines, they confirmed the theory that the contour represented the earliest beginnings of art.

Greek or “Etruscan” vases were widely collected in the eighteenth century. By far the most important collection was that of William Hamilton (1730–1803), the British ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples, who assembled two important collections (the first one was sold to the British Museum in 1772), both of which were widely known through lavishly illustrated catalogues (FIG. 2-3). In his preface to the second catalogue, Hamilton asserted the importance of these vases to contemporary art, claiming: “There are no monuments of antiquity that should excite the attention of modern artists more than the slight

2-3 Reproduction of an image painted on a Greek vase. Illustration in Pierre-François Hughes d’Hancarville, *Antiquités étrusques, grecques, et romaines tirées du cabinet de M. Hamilton* (vol. 4, pl. 43), 1766–67. Handcolored engraving. Private Collection.

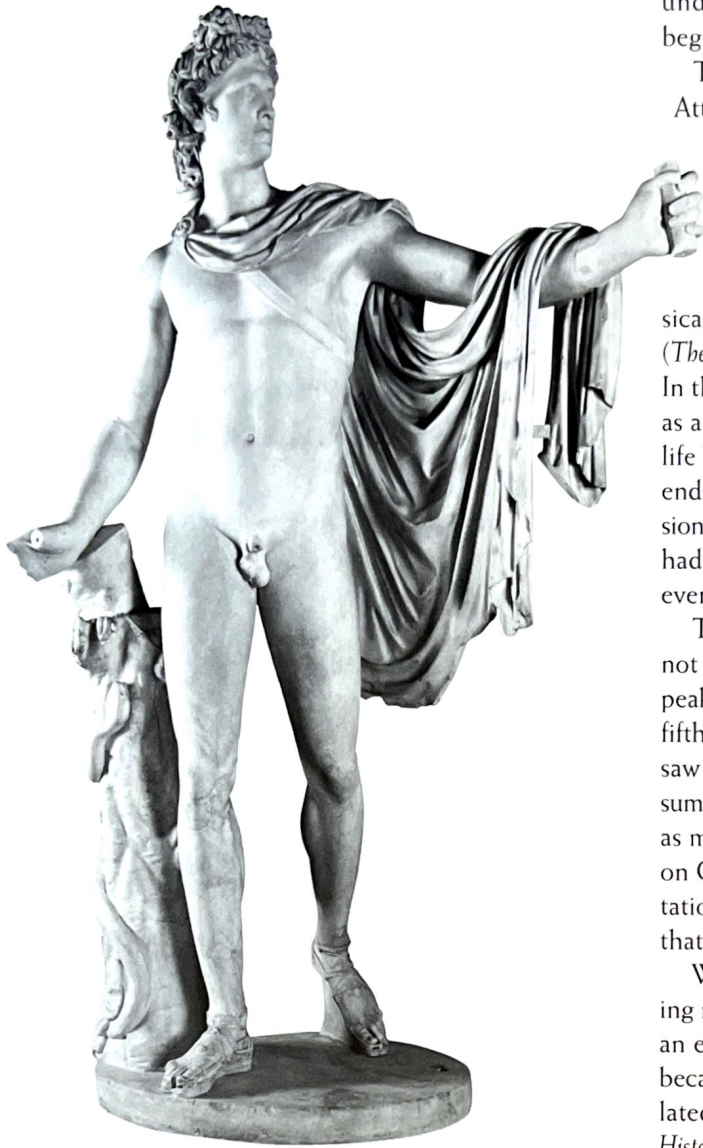


2-4 Large Garden Room, House of the Vettii, 62 CE. Pompeii.

drawings on the most excellent of these vases; they may from them form a just idea of the spirit of the ancient Greek artists.”

Of all the treasures unearthed by eighteenth-century excavations in Italy, none was more spectacular than the discovery, from 1738 onwards, of the ancient Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. These cities had been destroyed in the first century CE by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, a volcano near the city of Naples in modern-day Italy. Very well preserved, the remains of Pompeii and Herculaneum gave a convincing representation of life in Classical times. Visitors could walk through the ancient squares and streets, enter temples, theaters, and homes, and admire a wide variety of Roman artifacts and utensils.

Perhaps the most brilliant treasures found in Pompeii and Herculaneum were a number of well-preserved, colorful paintings discovered on the interior walls of the large town houses. Some of these were purely decorative, others representational (FIG. 2-4). Until their discovery, very little had been known about Classical painting since, with the exception of the small decorative paintings found on Greek vases, most of it seemed to have perished. Suddenly,



2-5 *Apollo Belvedere* (as the statue looked in the eighteenth century, before removal of restored hands and forearm). Roman copy of a Greek original of the late fourth century BCE, attributed to Leochares. Marble, height 7'4" (2.24 m). Vatican Museum, Rome.

a substantial body of Classical murals was available, and this was to have a powerful effect on scholarship as well as on the arts.

Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*

While the discovery of the Pompeian wall paintings caused great excitement, it also brought disappointment. To many connoisseurs it seemed that these paintings, frequently trivial in content and poorly executed, did not live up to the aesthetic standards of Classical sculpture. It was suggested that they represented a late phase in the development of Classical art, a phase in which that art was showing a decline. This, of course, implied that Classical art had

undergone some kind of evolution, that it had a beginning, middle, and end.

This idea was further developed by Winckelmann. Attracted by the archaeological activity in Italy, this German scholar had moved to Rome in 1755 (the year in which he wrote his *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works*). Appointed curator of the collection of antiquities owned by Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692–1779), he wrote several major books on Classical art, most importantly *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (*The History of Ancient Art*), published in Germany in 1764. In this book, Winckelmann used the biological life cycle as an analogy to trace the history of Classical art. Just as life begins with birth, progresses through adulthood, and ends in old age and death, so Classical art (and by extension all major artistic traditions, according to Winckelmann) had an origin, a period of growth and maturity, and an eventual decline.

To Winckelmann, the cradle of Classical art had been not Rome but Greece, where the birth and the glorious peak of fine art (during the so-called Classic phase of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE) had occurred. Winckelmann saw later Greek art, produced after Greece had been subsumed into the Roman Empire, as well as Roman art itself, as manifesting a decline. By focusing scholarly attention on Greece rather than Rome, he caused a major reorientation in the study of Classical art and culture, which until that time had favored Rome.

Winckelmann's contribution went beyond merely bringing new attention to Classical Greek art. His writings had an enormous impact, both during and after his lifetime, because of his unusual ability to engage the reader. Translated into many languages and frequently reprinted, his *History of Ancient Art* was widely read not only by scholars but also by artists, collectors, art lovers, and tourists, who came to Italy to admire the works of Classical antiquity. These people found excitement, not in Winckelmann's tight scholarly arguments but in his wonderfully lively descriptions of Classical sculptures. Winckelmann showed his readers that these old marble statues were actually supremely beautiful images of human figures, pulsating with life, sensual, and even sexually arousing. At the same time, he emphasized their "ideal" quality by pointing to the "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" of Classical sculpture. His description of the *Apollo Belvedere* (FIG. 2-5), one of the most famous Classical Greek sculptures in Rome (we now know that it is a Roman copy, but in the eighteenth century it was considered a Greek original), speaks of his dual emphasis on the sensual and ideal qualities of Greek sculpture:

Among all the works of antiquity, which have escaped destruction, the statue of Apollo is the highest ideal of art . . . His stature is loftier than that of man and his attitude speaks of the greatness with which he is filled. An eternal spring . . .

clothes with the charms of youth the graceful manliness of ripened years and plays with softness and tenderness about the proud shape of his limbs . . . Neither blood vessels nor sinews heat and stir this body, but a heavenly essence, diffusing itself like a gentle stream, seems to fill the contour of the figure . . . His lofty look, filled with a consciousness of power, seems to rise far above . . . and to gaze into infinity . . . The soft hair plays around the divine head as if agitated by a gentle breeze, like the slender waving tendrils of the noble vine; it seems to be anointed with the oil of the gods, and tied by the graces with pleasing display on the crown of his head . . . In the presence of this miracle of art, I forget all else . . . My breast seems to enlarge and swell with reverence, . . . and I feel myself transported to Delos and into the Lycaean groves—places that Apollo honored by his presence . . .

Greece and Rome

Surprisingly, although Winckelmann drew attention to ancient Greek art, he never visited Greece. In the eighteenth century, travel to Greece was difficult and hazardous. Unlike Italy, which had been a tourist attraction from at least the seventeenth century, Greece was largely unknown territory. Admirers of Greek art had ample opportunity to view it, however, in Italy; southern Italy had long been a Greek colony, and one could find many Classical Greek temples and sculptures there. In addition, the Romans, as well as the Etruscans before them, had widely collected and copied Classical Greek sculptures, vases, and coins, many of which were preserved in various public and private collections in Rome.

If Winckelmann never set foot in Greece, however, others, more adventurous, did feel the urge to study Greek art at its fountainhead. In 1751 the London Society of Dilettanti, a dining club of gentlemen who had made the Grand Tour of Italy (and thus become enamored of Classical art

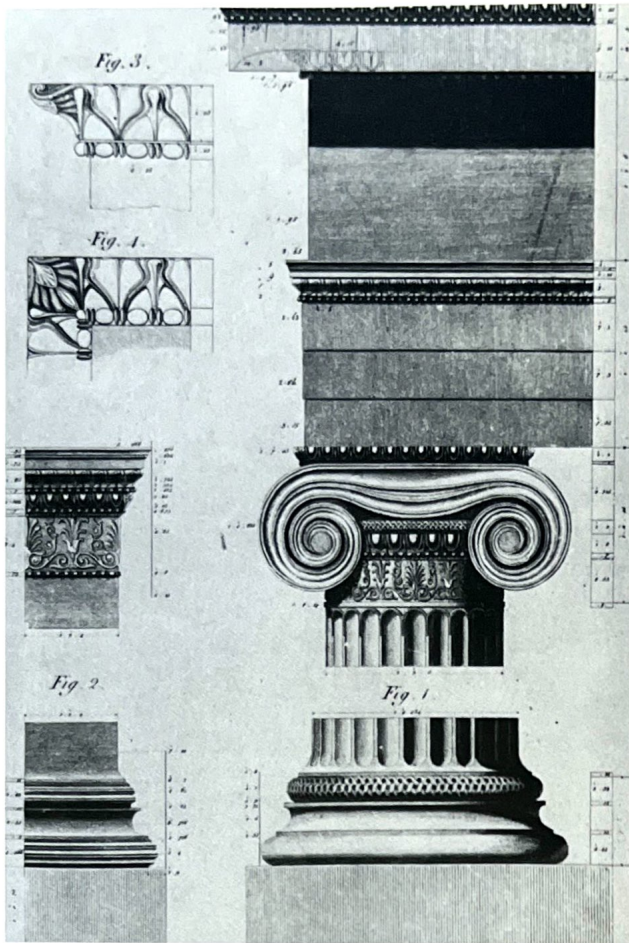
The Elgin Marbles

When western European visitors such as Stuart and Revett came to explore the antiquities of Greece, the country was still a part of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire. The Turkish rulers of Greece had little interest in Classical Greek art and culture, which was entirely foreign to their own. This explains how it was possible for visitors to Greece to remove all sorts and sizes of Classical fragments and take them home. The most extreme case of archaeological "theft" was the removal of the decorative sculptures of the famous Athenian temple the

Parthenon, by the British aristocrat the 7th Earl of Elgin. Elgin had the sculptures shipped to London to be displayed in the British Museum (FIG. 2.1-1), where, despite the strong and continued objections of the Greeks, they may be found to this day. Unacceptable as Elgin's deed was, the display of the so-called Elgin Marbles in London contributed greatly to the revival of interest in Classical Greek sculpture in western Europe and America. Moreover, it may well have saved the sculptures from damage, even destruction.

2.1-1 **Archibald Archer,**
The Temporary Elgin Room,
1819. Oil on canvas,
30" x 50" (76.2 cm x 1.27 m).
British Museum, London.





2-6 **James Stuart and Nicholas Revett**, *The Ionic Order from the Erechtheum*. Illustration in *The Antiquities of Athens* (vol. 2, ch. 2, pl. 8), 1762–1816. Engraving. Private Collection, London.

and archaeology), sponsored an expedition to Greece by two young architects, James Stuart (1713–1788) and Nicholas Revett (1720–1804). Stuart and Revett were expected to study, measure, and draw ancient Greek architectural monuments. Seven years after their return to London in 1755, they began the publication of their research in a monumental, four-volume work entitled *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762–1816). It contains precise descriptions, careful measurements, and large, folio-size engravings after Stuart's and Revett's on-the-spot drawings of Athenian temples—their plans, their elevations, and various architectural details (FIG. 2-6). These plates and the accompanying text encouraged a new understanding of Classical architecture that would influence architects far into the nineteenth century.

While Stuart's and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* were both symptom and catalyst of the Greek revival promoted by Winckelmann, there was at the same time a counter movement aimed at advancing the artistic importance of Roman art and culture. The main proponent of this movement was the Italian printmaker, archaeologist, art dealer, and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1779). Piranesi opposed Winckelmann's view that Roman art was merely a derivative of Greek art and represented the decline of Classical art. He argued instead that the Romans were quite original, and traced their artistic origins back not to the Greeks but to the Etruscans. The Romans, Piranesi claimed, had created by far the greatest architectural monuments of Classical antiquity, superior to those of the Greeks in form, in size, and in engineering. To support his argument, in 1761 he published his *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' romani* (*On the Greatness and the Architecture of the Romans*). This work, written and illustrated by



2-7 **Giovanni Battista Piranesi**, *The Aqua Marcia Aqueduct*. Illustration in *Della magnificenza ed architettura de' romani* (pl. xxvi), 1761. Etching, 7 x 11" (19 x 29 cm). Private Collection, London.

the artist, combined an argumentative essay on the superiority of Roman architecture with a set of thirty-eight etched plates. While rooted in his careful archaeological studies, these plates, like all Piranesi's etchings of Rome, were intended to highlight the grandeur of Roman architecture. His rendering of *The Aqua Marcia Aqueduct* (FIG. 2-7) emphasizes the enormous size of the ruined structure, both by an exaggeration of the perspective view and by the juxtaposition of the monument with tiny human figures, which are clearly dwarfed by its dimensions.

While the battle about the relative importance of Greek and Roman art raged fiercely among archaeologists and theorists of the eighteenth century, it does not seem to have had a great impact on most artists. With some notable exceptions, most artists seem to have followed Piranesi's advice that artists should not feel bound to a single artistic model (such as the Greek one) but should explore all forms of Classical art.

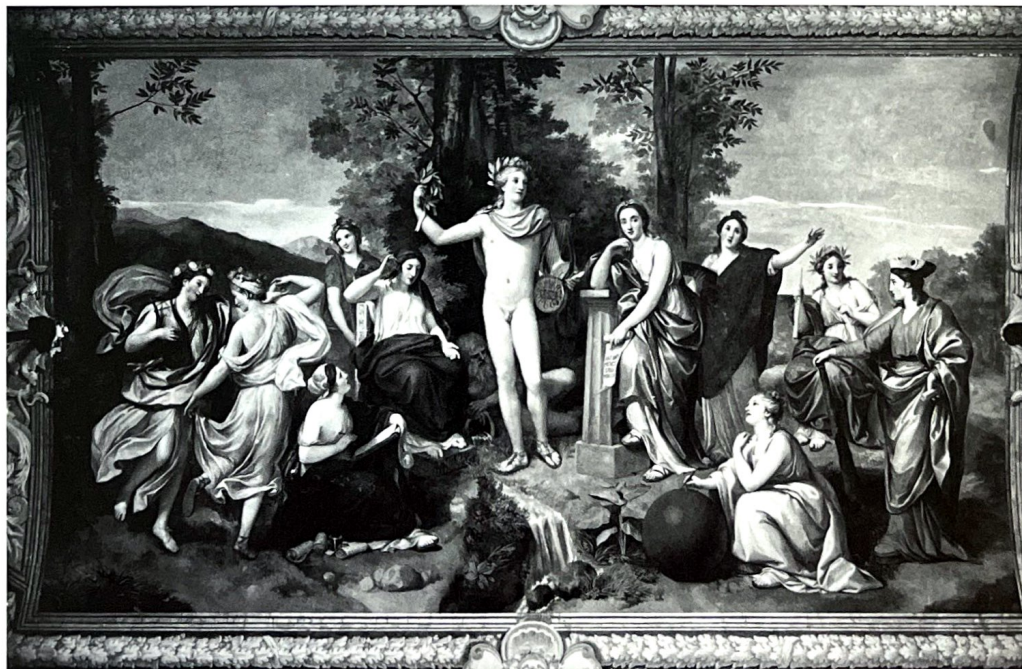
The Beginnings of Neoclassicism

Winckelmann's advice to artists to imitate the art of antiquity was first adopted in the 1760s by a number of painters from different European countries who were either working in Rome or had spent some time studying there. Rome by then had become a magnet for young artists, who flocked to the city to study the ancient monuments as well as the works of the great Renaissance masters, most notably Michelangelo and Raphael. Many of these artists entered Winckelmann's orbit and were influenced by his idea that the imitation of Classical art would foster the renewal of art.

The works that they produced are generally referred to as Neoclassical, in reference to their Classical inspiration. It must be noted, however, that the terms Neoclassical and Neoclassicism were not coined until the 1880s and certainly were not used during the eighteenth century. "Neoclassicism," like "Rococo," is itself a broad umbrella term that covers a wide variety of works whose content and form depended on artists' individual temperaments and convictions as well as on their cultural and national backgrounds. Indeed, Classical art itself meant many things to many people, not only because it manifested itself in so many different ways (Greek sculpture, Roman architecture, Pompeian wall paintings, etc.) but also because it contained so many historical associations. To the German Winckelmann, Classical sculpture was a manifestation of a Utopian past, a sort of golden age of physical and moral perfection. By contrast, to an Italian artist such as Piranesi, Roman architecture was a source of national pride. To French and British artists, whose knowledge of Classical art was often preceded by that of ancient history and literature, Greek and Roman art was often seen in the context of historical events that they either admired or despised.

The first important example of Neoclassical painting was created by Winckelmann's close friend the German painter Anton Raphael Mengs. No matter how unexciting it may look to us today, Mengs's fresco *Parnassus* (FIG. 2-8), representing Apollo and the Muses on Mount Parnassus, was, in its time, a revolutionary statement of a new art, conceived and painted in accordance with Winckelmann's precepts. The fresco was commissioned by Winckelmann's employer, Cardinal Albani, to decorate the ceiling of the reception room in his new villa in Rome. There

2-8 Anton Raphael Mengs, *Parnassus*, 1760–61. Fresco, 10 x 20' (3 x 6 m). Villa Albani, Rome.



The Grand Tour

The newly discovered ancient Roman towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum at once became an important stop on the so-called Grand Tour, the formative trip undertaken by self-respecting, wealthy young men from northern Europe, especially Britain, to further their Classical education.

Although its origins went back to the seventeenth century, the Grand Tour reached a climax after the discovery of Pompeii, during the decades from approximately 1760 to the end of eighteenth century, when the Napoleonic wars made travel to Italy all but impossible for non-Frenchmen. It was at this time that Italy, and especially Rome, became truly cosmopolitan, since thousands of travelers from all over northern Europe spent months, sometimes years, here, in rented lodgings or hotels. Special industries developed to meet the demands of grand tourism, most importantly, the trafficking of souvenirs. Wealthy travelers bought “antiquities”—sculptures, Greek vases, Roman coins, oil

lamps, and the like. Less affluent ones would buy the equivalents of today's postcards—engravings and etchings of views (so-called *vedute*) of Venice or Rome or engraved reproductions of ancient sculptures and reliefs.

A whole new category of portraiture, the “Grand Tour portrait,” was developed by the Roman artist Pompeo Batoni (1708–1787). Batoni turned out hundreds of paintings of wealthy travelers—mostly British lords and dukes—rendered against the grandiose backdrop of one or more famous Roman monuments. His striking portrait of *Lord Thomas Dundas* (FIG. 2.2-1) shows the young traveler in an imaginary architectural setting that contains some of the most famous Classical sculptures of all times: the *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Laocoön*, *Antinous*, and the so-called *Cleöpatra*. These eminent signifiers of Classical civilization lent an air of culture, refinement, and respectability to this son of a wealthy Scottish merchant.



2.2-1 **Pompeo Batoni,**
Lord Thomas Dundas, 1764.
Oil on canvas, 9'10" x 6'5"
(2.98 x 1.96 m). Collection of
the Marquess of Zetland,
Ashe Hall, Yorkshire.



2-9 **Joseph-Marie Vien**, *The Seller of Cupids*, 1763. Oil on canvas, 37 x 46 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (95 cm x 1.19 m). Musée National du Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau.

it was seen by numerous visitors who came to the villa to admire the cardinal's outstanding collection of antiquities.

It is instructive to compare Mengs's ceiling fresco with the one by Tiepolo in the vault of Santa Maria del Rosario in Venice (see FIG. 1.14), done some twenty years earlier. While Tiepolo had mustered all his technical skill to create the illusion of an aperture in the roof that offers a view all the way up into heaven, Mengs conceived of his ceiling painting as if it were a mural. Rather than denying the ceiling, Mengs emphasized it. Instead of the infinite space suggested by Tiepolo's bravura perspective tricks, visual depth is understated in Mengs's painting. The figures

occupy a shallow rectangular area, defined by a screen of trees in the back and the Castalian spring (the mythical source of artistic inspiration) in the foreground. Unlike the asymmetric "zigzag" composition of Tiepolo's ceiling painting, Mengs's *Parnassus* shows a strictly symmetrical arrangement. While Tiepolo's painting, with its gesticulating figures and fluttering angels, is dynamic, Mengs's is static, its figures seemingly frozen.

Mengs's ambitious intention in the *Parnassus* fresco was to break free from Rococo decorative painting in order to create a new, grand, and noble style of architectural painting. To do so, he looked at the ancients (his *Apollo* is a painted



2-10 **Carlo Nolli**, *The Seller of Cupids*. Illustration in *Le antichità di Ercolano* (vol. iii, pl. vii), 1762. Engraving, 9 x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (23 x 32 cm). Private Collection, London.

version, in reverse, of the *Apollo Belvedere*) as well as the Italian Renaissance masters (his composition recalls Raphael's *School of Athens* in the Vatican Palace). This dual reliance on Classical sculpture for individual figures and Renaissance painting for composition characterizes much Neoclassical painting and was strongly advocated by Mengs. Indeed, in the conclusion to his *Gedanken über die Schönheit und den Geschmack in der Malerei* (*Thoughts on Beauty and Taste in Painting*) of 1771 he advised painters to study Classical art so as to acquire a taste for beauty, and Raphael, Correggio (c.1489–1534), and Titian (c.1485–1576), in order to acquire a taste for expression, harmony, and coloristic truth.

More directly and exclusively inspired by Classical art was *The Seller of Cupids* (FIG. 2-9), by Joseph-Marie Vien (1716–1809), which was painted only two years after Mengs's fresco. A recipient of the Rome Prize, Vien had studied in Rome from 1744 to 1750, just at the time when the excitement about the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum had reached a peak. His *Seller of Cupids*, exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1763, was based on an engraving in a multi-volume book devoted to these excavations that had appeared in 1762 (FIG. 2-10). The painting presents a mirror image of the engraving (which itself is a mirror image of the Roman wall painting), though its composition is not quite as austere; Vien added various interior furnishings and replaced the Classical cage by an eighteenth-century basket. Comparing the painting with *The Gracious Shepherd*, by Vien's teacher Boucher (see FIG. 1-6), however, *The Seller of Cupids* seems sober and restrained. While the compositional lead lines in Boucher's painting are for the most part diagonal, Vien's composition is dominated by horizontals and verticals, which gives it a static rather than a dynamic feeling. Moreover, in Boucher's painting the figures are placed in a landscape that suggests infinite depth, while in Vien's *The Seller of Cupids* the figures are placed in a

shallow space, closed off at the back by an austere, windowless wall. In Vien's painting the figures are crisply set off against the neutral gray wall, while in Boucher's work the figures seem to blend into the landscape background.

Contemporary observers sensed something new in Vien's painting. One critic, aware of the artist's interest in Classical art, appreciated what Vien had gained by studying it: "a great simplicity in the positions of the figures, which are nearly straight and without movement; . . . very few and generally rather thin, lifeless draperies, which cling to the bodies; . . . [and] a severe sobriety in ornamental accessories." Vien, this critic felt, had learned a valuable lesson in austerity from Classical art, which would enhance the future of French painting. Yet while some observers admired the painting for its simplicity and sobriety, others criticized it for its immoral content. The critic Diderot, who had been arguing for a new art of moral edification, condemned the painting for its erotic subject matter. In terms of content, he felt that Vien's painting was no different from Rococo painting. In fact, Vien's theme of the sale of love to rich Roman ladies was more blatantly erotic and perhaps even more wicked than the themes of most of Boucher's paintings. Diderot was particularly indignant about the obscene gesture of the central cupid, who, marking off an arm's length with his right hand, shows the lady "the size of the pleasure he promises."

Vien's painting brought a new form, but retained the immoral content of much of Rococo painting. Conversely, *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus* (FIG. 2-11), painted in 1768 by Benjamin West (1738–1820), was new in content but only partially innovative in form. Based on a passage in the *Annals* by the Roman historian Tacitus, the painting depicts the moment when Agrippina, the young wife of the Roman general Germanicus, returns to Italy with the cremated remains of her husband (rumored to have been



2-11 **Benjamin West**, *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, 1768. Oil on canvas, 5'5" x 7'10" (1.64 x 2.4 m). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.



2-12 **Benjamin West**, *Detail of the Frieze from the Ara Pacis*, 1763? Black chalk, heightened with white, on paper, 8 x 10" (20.3 x 26.7 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art.

murdered in the colony of Syria, by order of the Emperor Tiberius himself). The painting was commissioned by the Archbishop of York from West, a young American painter who had studied for three years in Rome before settling in England in 1763. Unlike Vien's immoral *Seller of Cupids*, Agrippina is an *exemplum virtutis* (model of virtue). In honoring her husband, this good widow gives a positive moral example to her children (note the presence of the son and daughter at her side). She is also a heroine, having traveled all the way to Syria to fetch the remains of her husband so they might be buried in Roman ground. It was for that reason that, on landing in the southern Italian harbor of Brundisium (modern Brindisi), Agrippina was welcomed by a crowd of sympathizers, who came both to mourn the death of her husband and to celebrate her courage and virtue.

West's composition is centered on the brightly lit procession of Agrippina and her companions, dressed in white (the Roman color of mourning), and set off against a dark architectural background. With its figures placed in a shallow plane and their heads and feet set on two horizontal lines, this group resembles a Classical marble relief of the kind that West might have admired during his stay in Rome. Indeed, the arrangement of the figures bears a striking resemblance to a drawing by West (FIG. 2-12) of a group of patrician men depicted in the relief on the famous Ara Pacis or Altar of Peace in Rome, erected on the initiative of Emperor Augustus (FIG. 2-13).

Yet, while the central group has much of the Classically inspired simplicity and austerity found in Vien's *Seller of Cupids*, the crowd of mourners on the left suggests the Rococo style in its drama and complexity. Grouped along two crossing diagonal lines, dramatically lit (some brightly illuminated, others in darkness), and colorfully dressed, they contrast with the procession of women, as do the theatrically posed boatmen on the right. By juxtaposing

the new Neoclassical idiom with the old worn-out formulas of the Rococo, West heightens the difference between the virtuous Agrippina with her faithful followers and the ordinary mortals in the crowd.

Eighteenth-century Neoclassicism was centered in Rome, but its proponents came from all over Europe and its colonies, creating a truly cosmopolitan climate. Mengs and Winckelmann were from Germany; Vien came from France; and West from the British colonies in North America (he was born in Pennsylvania). A fourth major early Neoclassical artist, Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), was born in Switzerland. The daughter of a painter, she spent much of her youth in Italy, where her father urged her to study Classical sculpture and the works of the Renaissance masters. While in Rome, in her early twenties, she befriended Winckelmann and painted his portrait. She also tried her hand at history painting, a genre rarely practiced by women, whose training precluded lessons in anatomy and drawing from live models. (Kauffman compensated for this deficiency by drawing from statuary.)

In 1766 Kauffman moved to England, where she had instant success as a portrait painter, becoming so respected as an artist that within two years she was asked to become a founding member of the Royal Academy. Her membership of that august group led her to return to history painting, but she soon found out, as had Reynolds, that the British public had little interest in historical subject matter, except when it could be used for decorative purposes. Kauffman began to make something of a specialty of compositions that could be reproduced by copyists for the purpose of decorating walls and ceilings in the palatial town houses and country estates of the British aristocracy (see below, page 70). At the same time, she saw to it that many of these

2-13 South side of the Ara Pacis, 13–9 BCE. Marble, height 61" (1.55 m). Rome.





2-14 **Angelica Kauffman**, *Zeuxis Selecting Models for his Painting of Helen of Troy*, c.1778. Oil on canvas, 31 x 43" (80.6 cm x 1.11 m).
Brown University Library, AnnMary Brown Memorial Collection, Providence, Rhode Island.



2-15 **Angelica Kauffman**, *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures*, c.1785. Oil on canvas, 40 x 50" (1.01 cm x 1.27 m).
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia.

paintings were reproduced as prints, which could be framed and hung on the walls of middle-class homes. *Zeuxis Selecting Models for his Painting of Helen of Troy* (FIG. 2-14) is representative of Kauffman's decorative history paintings. Painted around 1778, it depicts a scene central to the theory and practice of idealism. According to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis was asked to paint a picture of the legendary Helen of Troy, paradigm of female beauty. To do so, he chose five beautiful virgins as models. From this group, he selected the most perfect features (nose, breasts, feet, etc.) of each, and amalgamated them into one ideal figure. (It was precisely this process of "selective naturalism" that was advocated by Mengs in his theoretical writings.) Yet while the subject of Kauffman's painting goes to the heart of Neoclassical art theory, its execution retains many of the characteristics of Rococo decorative painting. Though the figures occupy a relatively shallow space, Kauffman has exaggerated the *chiaroscuro* (light and dark contrast) of the painting to counteract their frieze-like arrangement. Rather than the crisp contours found in the works of Mengs and Vien, her figures have *sfumato* (fuzzy) outlines akin to the works of such sixteenth-century Italian painters as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1494?–1534). No doubt Kauffman, like West, made allowances for the conservative taste of her British clients, few of whom were ready for the severe Neoclassicism of Mengs and Vien. Indeed, the public appreciated the soft contours and svelte forms of her figures, which, according to a critic of the day, reflected the "softness natural to her sex."

That Kauffman was capable of bolder pictorial statements appears from some of the works she executed after she left England in 1781, to return to Italy, where she would spend the remainder of her life. *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures* (FIG. 2-15) may serve as an example. Comparing it with *Zeuxis Selecting Models*, one sees immediately that the figures are more monumental, the contours crisper, and the composition simpler and better integrated. Like West's *Agrippina*, Kauffman's painting deals with an example, from Roman history, of female virtue. But while *Agrippina* exemplifies the honorable wife/widow, *Cornelia* embodies the worthiness of motherhood. Standing next to a seated woman, a friend, who shows off her gold jewels, Cornelia points to her two sons, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, as her greatest treasures. It is noteworthy that Kauffman, who had worked hard at carving out a niche for herself as a female painter in a male artistic world, still considered sons more important than daughters. Note that Cornelia does not seem to include her daughter Sempronia in her "treasures"; moreover, while the two boys appear to come home from school (Gaius is carrying a paper scroll in his hand), Sempronia is playing with the jewelry. Thus Kauffman in her art appears to confirm the stereotypes that she had tried so hard to overcome in her life.

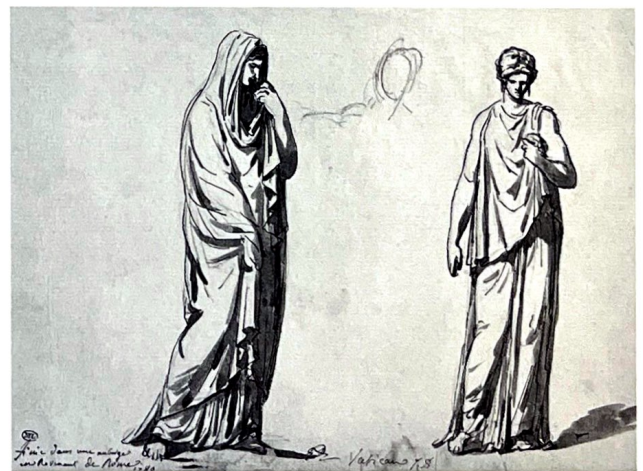
David

Perhaps the first artist successfully to combine the high-minded subject matter advocated by La Font de Saint-Yenne and Diderot with the sober, classicizing forms promoted by Winckelmann was Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). A student of Vien, David shared the ambition of most young artists of his time to study in Rome. After competing for the Rome Prize in four consecutive years, he finally won it in 1774. In 1775 he left for Rome together with Vien, who had just been appointed director of the French Academy in Rome.

Initially, David was more interested in the works of the great Renaissance and Baroque masters to be found in Rome (Michelangelo, Raphael, the Carracci, and Poussin) than in Classical art. "The Antique will not seduce me, it lacks action and does not move me," he is supposed to have told a fellow artist, Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715–1790), upon his departure for Rome. Once there, however, he became interested in Winckelmann's ideas about the purity and power of the contour in Classical sculpture and began to draw assiduously from antique statuary. His drawing of Classical statues in the Vatican (FIG. 2-16) shows his desire to capture the simple, flowing outlines of Classical sculptures that Winckelmann praised. The figures are first lightly sketched in pencil, then carefully traced with a pen in order to create strong, unbroken contours. A few brushstrokes of diluted ink ("washes") are added to suggest volume and shade.

In his paintings, David's interest in expressive contour is first seen in *Andromache Mourning Hector* (FIG. 2-17). David executed this piece three years after his return to Paris from Rome in 1780, with the intention of presenting it to the Academy. At the time, artists wishing to join the Academy were expected to submit a major work to prove themselves worthy of that honor. These reception pieces (*morceaux de réception*) were generally exhibited at the Salon

2-16 Jacques-Louis David, *Classical Statues in the Vatican*, 1780. Pen and Indian ink wash on paper, 6 x 8" (15.2 x 21 cm). Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris.





2-17 **Jacques-Louis David**, *Andromache Mourning Hector*, 1780. Oil on canvas, 9' × 6'8" (2.75 x 2.03 m). Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.



2-18 **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1785. Oil on canvas, 10'10" × 13'11" (3.3 x 4.25 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

so that the general public could form an idea of the standards that the Academy set for its members.

David's *Andromache* was inspired by Homer's *Iliad*, an epic poem that experienced a revival of interest in the late eighteenth century, when it came to be seen as the primordial Classical text. The painting depicts Andromache's wake by the side of her husband, Hector, the young Trojan hero killed by his Greek adversary Achilles. Hector's naked body, loosely covered by a red shroud, lies on a richly carved bed. The contours of his face and chest stand out boldly against the dark-green drapery in the background. Seated next to the bed, his wife, Andromache, turns her tear-stained face away from him, looking upwards as if to implore the gods in heaven. Her left hand clutches the arm of her son Astyanax, while her right arm stretches out towards Hector, in a gesture that draws attention to his heroic courage and his tragic death as a victim of war.

Like Benjamin West's *Agrippina*, David's *Andromache Mourning Hector* presents an *exemplum virtutis*. Here, too, a mournful widow is faced with the death of her husband (and the father of her child). In Homer's *Iliad*, Hector is

described as the consummate family man: a good son, husband, and father as well as a heroic soldier and an excellent friend. It is the tragedy of this great man, killed in the prime of his life, that David wished to communicate. Hence the contrast between the powerful physique and the deadly stillness of Hector's body, reminding the viewer that, in war, death strikes even the noblest and the strongest.

Compared with the eloquence of Hector's body, the figure of Andromache seems almost trite. She has all the theatricality of the late Baroque era, in which emotion is conveyed through dramatic gesture and facial expression. Expressive heads (*têtes d'expression*) were greatly valued in the Academy. One of the institution's founders, Charles Le Brun, had published an important book on the subject in 1698, and the Academy itself had instituted a special competition for expressive heads, which David had won in 1773. The figure of Andromache was most certainly conceived with David's academic judges in mind.

Once he had become a fully fledged member of the Academy, David qualified for a studio in the Louvre, where he could begin to accept students. In 1784 he received his



2-19 **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787. Oil on canvas, 4'3" × 6'5" (1.3 x 1.96 m). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

first royal commission for a painting depicting a subject from Roman history. The resulting work, *The Oath of the Horatii* (FIG. 2-18), became a turning point in his career and earned him lasting and international fame. The painting was executed in Rome during a second stay in the city in 1784–5. When it was finished, in July 1785, David opened his studio in Rome to visitors. The painting was an international sensation, widely admired by Italians and foreigners alike. The German painter Johann Heinrich Tischbein (1751–1829) wrote a lengthy review of the work for a German newspaper, in which he told his readers that “in the history of art we read of no painting that might have awakened more uproar upon its appearance than this one.”

The Oath of the Horatii was inspired by an event in early Roman history that was recounted by several Roman historians, including Livy and Plutarch. During the seventh century BCE, the kingdom of Rome had a border dispute with the neighboring kingdom of Alba. Rather than going to war, the parties agreed to resolve the conflict by means of a sword fight between three Roman warriors and three Albans. To fight this triple duel, the Romans selected three brothers, the so-called Horatii; the Albans picked the three Curiatii brothers. As fate would have it, however, one of the Horatii was married to Sabina, a sister of the Curiatii, while one of the Curiatii was engaged to Camilla, a sister of the Horatii. Thus, no matter how the

duel ended, one of the women would experience a tragic loss. As it turned out, after a bloody hand-to-hand battle, only one of the six men, Horatius, survived and was proclaimed victor. As he returned home, however, he was cursed by his sister Camilla, whose fiancé had died in the duel. Enraged by her reaction, Horatius killed her.

It was this dramatic moment (also one of the high points of a famous French seventeenth-century drama, *Horace*, by Pierre Corneille) that David was to paint for the king. Just before departing for Rome, however, he requested permission to paint another scene, showing the Horatii taking an oath on their swords, swearing that they will either win or die. This event was not recorded in Roman historical literature or in any later writings. It was a theme of David's own invention, inspired perhaps by one of several contemporary paintings by French and British artists, representing patriotic oaths. Certainly, the theme of such an oath met the demand for an art that could improve public morality and strengthen the nation. Yet, to David it also offered the opportunity to construct a picture with a minimum of action and a maximum of drama.

The scene is set in a bare stone hall, its rear wall pierced by three simple arches. Inside this austere setting, the solemn oath is sworn. In the center, the young men's father holds up his sons' swords, their blades glittering in the light that sweeps down from an invisible window high up in the left

wall. On the left, the triplets stand squarely, arms stretched out towards the swords. Their oath is silent and their lips are closed, but their eyes are intently focused on the weapons upon which their lives and their country's honor will depend. Three women occupy the right side of the painting. In contrast to the vigorous, erect bodies of the Horatii, they slump down on their chairs. Camilla, on the right, rests her head on the shoulder of her sister-in-law Sabina, who is seated in the center. A nurse embraces two children, trying to hide the awesome scene from their eyes. But the eldest child, a boy, removes her fingers to peek.

In *The Oath of the Horatii* David seems to have absorbed fully the lessons of Classical sculpture, as it was viewed in the eighteenth century. The painting exemplifies Winckelmann's ideal of "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur." Rather than being expressed in tear-stained faces or declamatory gestures, the drama of the scene is contained within the bodies themselves—the vigorous, muscular, tanned bodies of the Horatii, and the lethargic, soft bodies of the women. The contrasts between them not only show the different roles of men and women in society, but, more importantly, the two faces of war: glory and triumph on the one hand, loss and despair on the other.

David's painting is revolutionary in its powerful distillation of a complex moral question into a single, sober image. To be exact, is an individual's duty in the first instance to the public or to the private, to the nation or to the family? David has clearly articulated the choice made by the Horatii in their resolute poses and determined facial expressions. By adding the women and children, however, he has ensured that we realize at what emotional expense that choice is made.

At the Salon of 1787 David exhibited *The Death of Socrates* (FIG. 2-19). This painting of the Greek philosopher, dying for an ideal of society that was perceived as a threat by the ruling powers, is often thought to anticipate the sacrifices of the French revolutionaries of 1789. Such an interpretation, using "hindsight," however, can easily distort the meaning the work held for its contemporaries. *The Death of Socrates* was in fact commissioned by Charles-Michel de Trudaine (1766–1794), a member of the French aristocracy and an important art patron of the time. Trudaine came from an educated, literary milieu, and his choice of the subject of death probably had more to do with his interest in Classical philosophy than with his ambitions to subvert the status quo, even though, in 1789, he would be supportive of the revolution.

In David's painting, loosely based on Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates is shown in his cold, bare prison cell at the moment of his execution. Surrounded by his disciples, he is still teaching as, almost absentmindedly, he accepts the cup of hemlock, the instrument of his death. Socrates' disciples, meanwhile, are overcome by sadness and fear. Some are crying, hiding their heads in their hands, while others raise their hands in despair. The contrast between

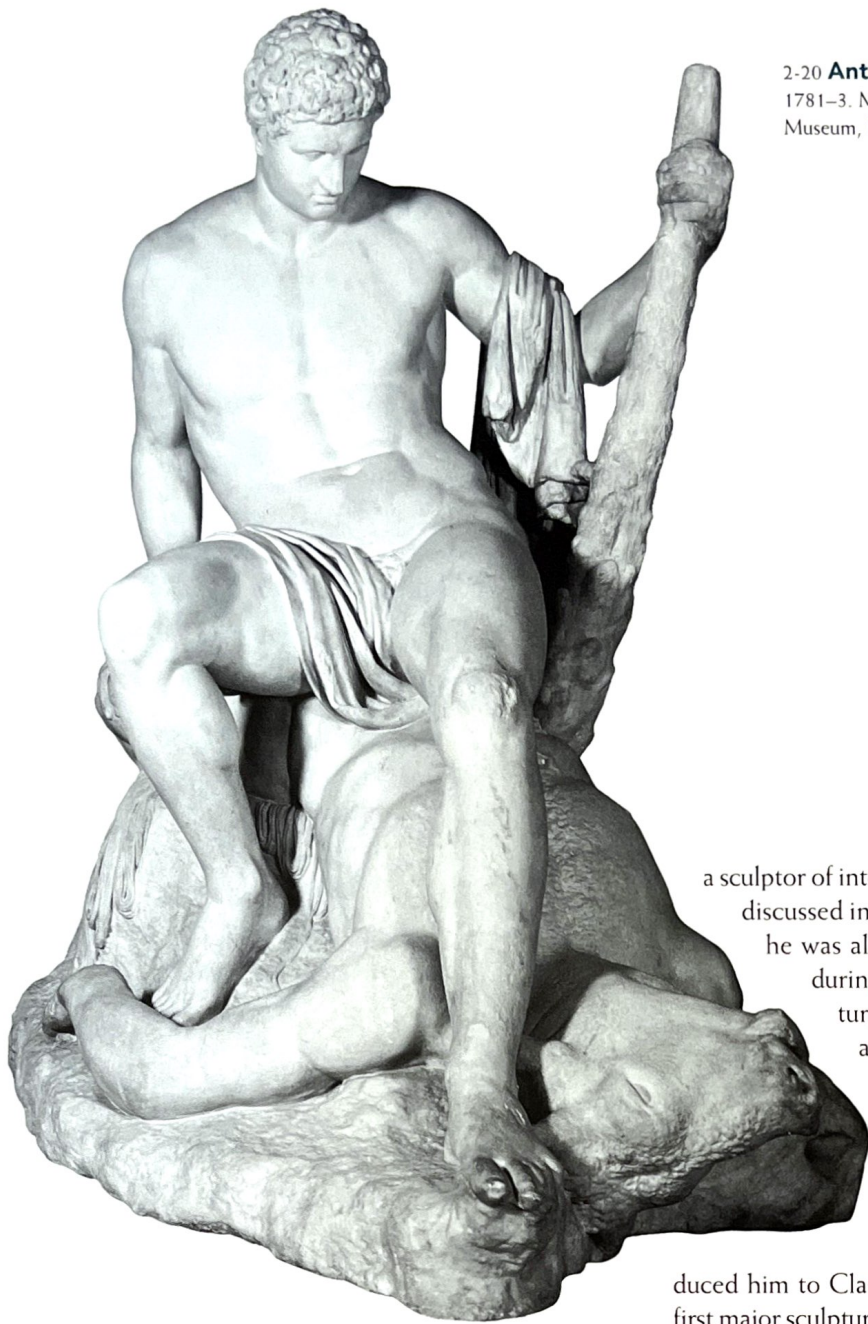
Socrates' stoic acceptance of death and the sorrow of his disciples exemplifies the philosopher's belief in the duality of mind and body. While Socrates stands for the immortality of the soul, the disciples represent the painful mortality of the flesh.

David's painting may have been inspired by Diderot, who, in his *Discours de la poésie dramatique* (Treatise on Dramatic Poetry) of 1758, had proposed that the death of Socrates would be a perfect subject for a dramatic pantomime or play without words. He even went so far as to sketch out a pantomime in a text that could almost be a caption for David's picture. Diderot's description of the grieving disciples may serve as an example: "Some wrapped themselves in their cloaks. Crito had got up and he wandered about the prison, groaning. Others, motionless and standing, watched Socrates in mournful silence while tears poured down their cheeks."

David's reliance on Diderot may explain why in *The Death of Socrates* he emphasized gesture and facial expression more than in *The Oath of the Horatii*. Even in this painting, however, the body plays an important role in showing emotion. Note, for example, how David contrasts the clothed bodies of the disciples with the semi-nude body of Socrates, covered only from the waist down in what is presumably his burial shroud. Though Socrates was more than seventy years of age when he died, David gives him a powerful torso and muscular arms, an eloquent expression of his moral strength and fortitude.

Sculpture

Because Neoclassicism was centered on Classical sculpture, one might expect great changes to have taken place in this field in the second half of the eighteenth century. In reality, the Classical influence came relatively late to sculpture. The two most important Neoclassical sculptors of the eighteenth century, the English John Flaxman (1755–1826) and the Italian Antonio Canova (1757–1822), were both a generation younger than Mengs, Vien, and West. Even David, the youngest of the early Neoclassical painters, was their senior by almost a decade. One reason for the slow acceptance of Neoclassicism was, no doubt, the general conservatism of sculpture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was largely due to the high cost of the materials, which caused sculptors to be heavily dependent on commissions and less free than painters to experiment on their own. Another reason was the considerable challenge that sculptors faced to create works that were both Classical in form and modern in spirit. On the one hand, when representing Classical subjects (Greek gods, heroes, or historical figures), the challenge was to create sculptures that possessed the ideal beauty of the antique, yet could clearly be distinguished from Classical sculpture. On the other, when depicting modern subjects



2-20 **Antonio Canova**, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, 1781–3. Marble, height 60" (1.47 m). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

(portrait busts and commemorative or funeral monuments), it was difficult to achieve likeness and idealism all at once.

The sculptors who were successful in reconciling idealism and realism did so not by imitating Classical sculpture but by capturing its spirit—by imbuing their works with the calm grandeur seen at the time as its highest achievement.

Canova

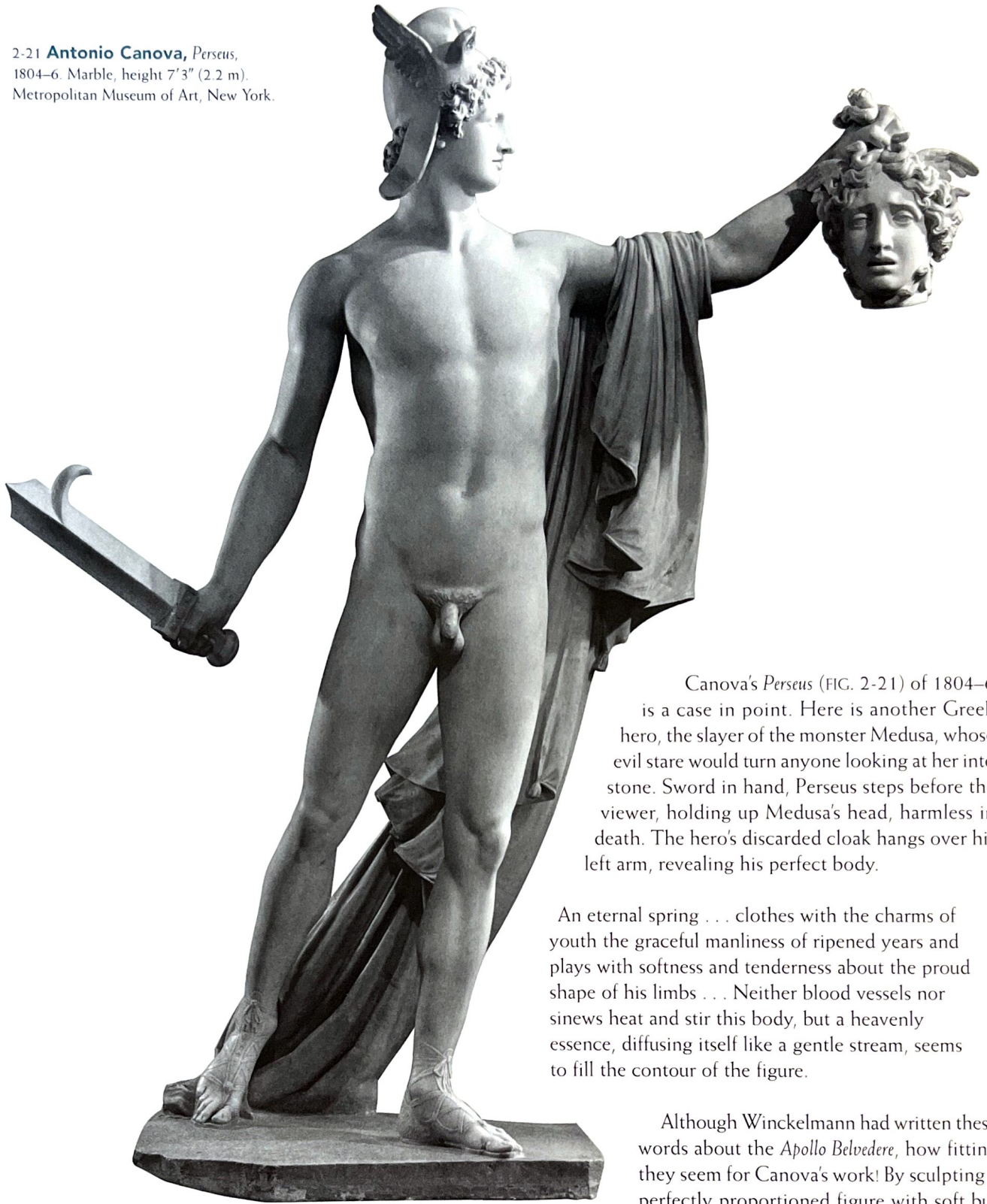
Foremost among Neoclassical sculptors was the Italian Antonio Canova, the most famous artist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, Canova may be called one of the first “stars” in the artistic world,

a sculptor of international fame whose career was widely discussed in newspapers and journals. Interestingly, he was also the only Italian artist truly to excel during the second half of the eighteenth century, at a time when Rome was perceived as the center of the European art world.

Born in the Republic of Venice (Italy did not become a unified state until 1870), Canova first visited Rome in 1779. Here he entered the circle of the Scottish painter and antique dealer Gavin Hamilton (1723–1798), who introduced him to Classical art. Thus inspired, he created his first major sculpture, *Theseus and the Minotaur* (FIG. 2-20). This is a life-size work representing the Greek hero Theseus having slain the Minotaur, a mythical monster with a man’s body and a bull’s head. Canova represents the aftermath of battle rather than the battle itself, as Baroque and Rococo artists would have done. Theseus sits upon the monster in a quiet moment of reflection. With courage and righteousness he has triumphed over the beast, but the victory has exacted a price: in killing the killer, Theseus has lost his innocence, and is forced to ponder his moral choice.

Although *Theseus and the Minotaur* was commissioned by a private collector and not publicly exhibited, it soon became widely known and admired. In its time, it was seen as the first true resurrection of antiquity. It is also, of all of Canova’s works, the one most easily mistaken for a Classical sculpture, illustrating the difficulty of creating a work that was at once Classical and modern. In years to come,

2-21 **Antonio Canova**, *Perseus*,
1804–6. Marble, height 7'3" (2.2 m).
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



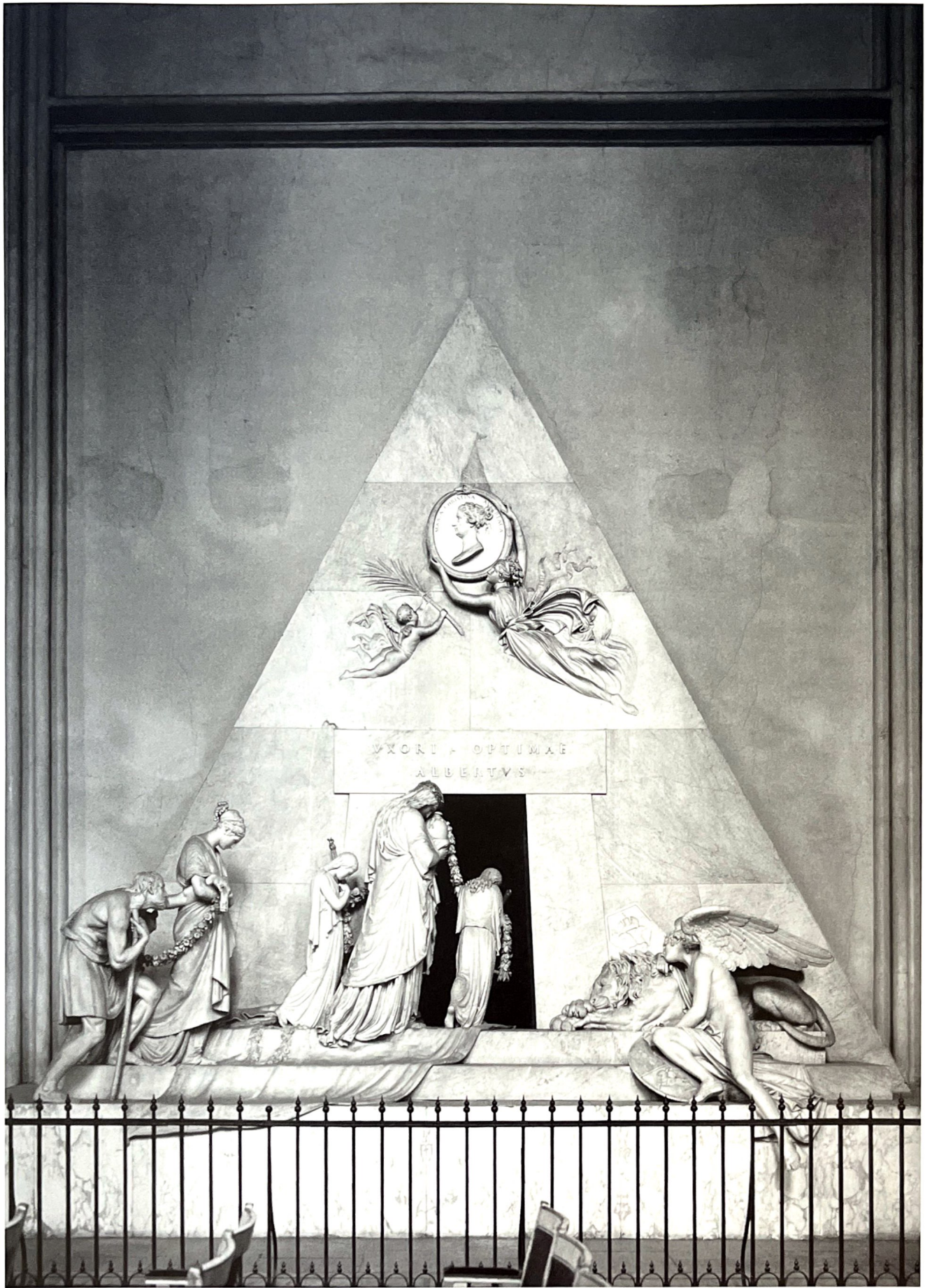
Canova's *Perseus* (FIG. 2-21) of 1804–6 is a case in point. Here is another Greek hero, the slayer of the monster Medusa, whose evil stare would turn anyone looking at her into stone. Sword in hand, Perseus steps before the viewer, holding up Medusa's head, harmless in death. The hero's discarded cloak hangs over his left arm, revealing his perfect body.

An eternal spring . . . clothes with the charms of youth the graceful manliness of ripened years and plays with softness and tenderness about the proud shape of his limbs . . . Neither blood vessels nor sinews heat and stir this body, but a heavenly essence, diffusing itself like a gentle stream, seems to fill the contour of the figure.

Although Winckelmann had written these words about the *Apollo Belvedere*, how fitting they seem for Canova's work! By sculpting a perfectly proportioned figure with soft but firmly textured flesh, Canova's work combines the ideal forms of Classical sculpture with a modern, frankly sensual, interpretation.

The successful mixture of Classical idealism and modern subjectivity in Canova's *Perseus* can also be seen in the artist's funeral monuments and portrait sculptures. Canova designed tombs for two popes and numerous celebrities. Perhaps the most original of these was the one he designed

however, Canova became increasingly successful in marrying the two. Essentially, his mature works are closer to the eighteenth-century perception of Classical sculpture than to Classical sculpture itself. That perception was conditioned by the writings of Winckelmann, whose sensual descriptions of Classical sculpture had, as we have seen, a great impact at the time.



2-22 **Antonio Canova**, *Monument to the Archduchess Maria Christina*, 1799–1805. Marble, height 18'10" (5.74 m). Augustinerkirche, Vienna.

between 1798 and 1805 for the Archduchess Maria Christina, daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor and Empress and sister of Marie Antoinette, former queen of France (FIG. 2-22). The monument, in the Augustinerkirche in Vienna, takes the form of a pyramid set against the church's wall. Near the top of the pyramid, a female deity and a putto hold up a small oval medallion bearing Maria Christina's portrait. Down below, a funeral procession slowly enters the pyramid. On the far left stand a beautiful young woman and an old man, the pair seeming to represent the course of life from the bloom of youth to the decline of old age. On the right, the winged spirit of death leans on a lion, the symbol of authority, to watch the proceedings. In the middle, a tall woman with an urn, flanked by two young girls, approaches the pyramid's door. The awesome void of death is perhaps best expressed by the little girl carrying a garland, who is disappearing into the dark cavity of the tomb.

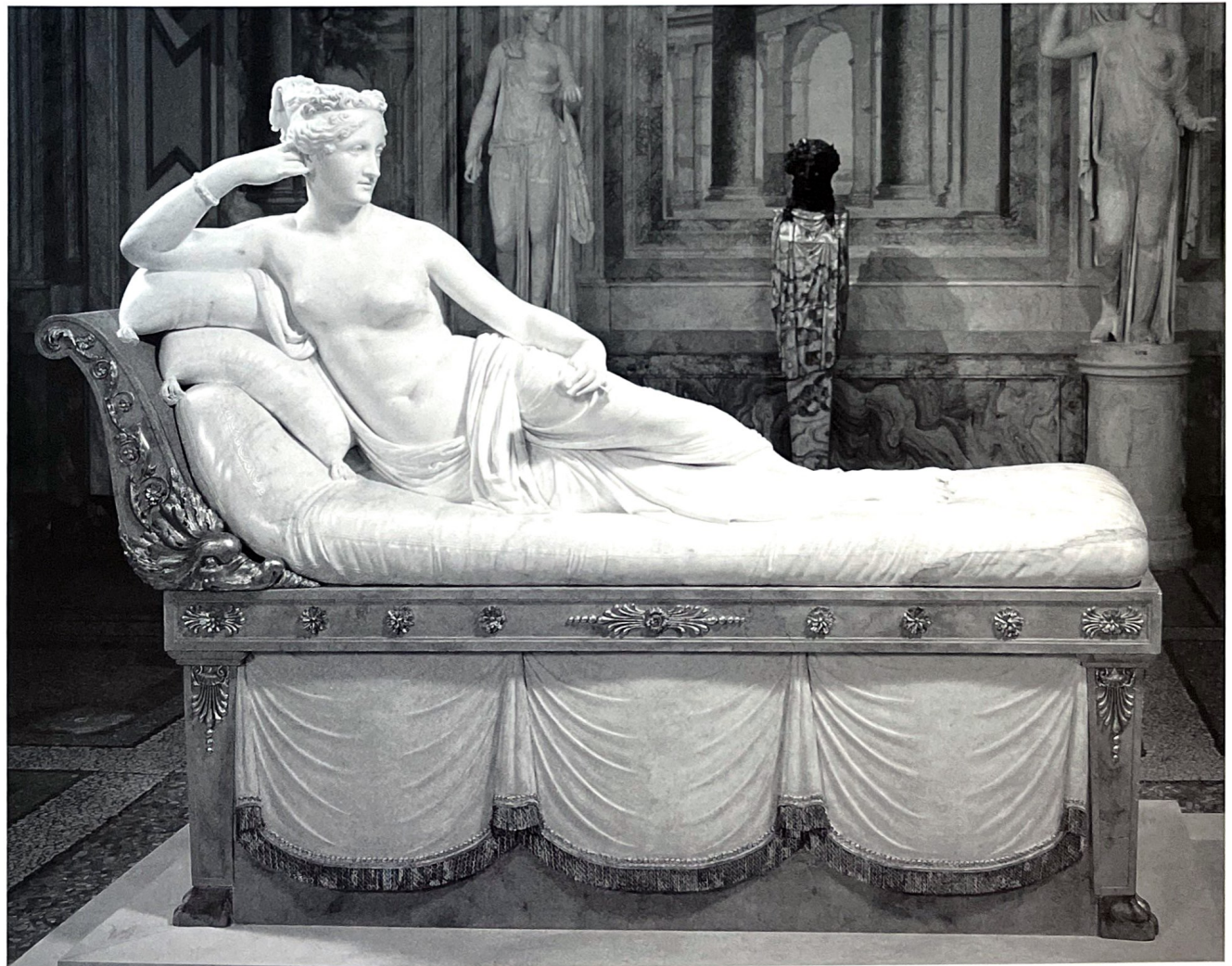
Compared with traditional tomb monuments, Canova's is remarkable for the absence of any Christian symbols of death and redemption. Neither does it make an attempt at glorifying the deceased. Instead, the tomb is a quiet,

timeless meditation on death. Canova meets the challenge of reconciling the ideal and the specific by making the portrait of Maria Christina not the center of the work but rather the pretext and inspiration for such a meditation.

Canova's *Portrait of Paolina Borghese* (FIG. 2-23) also reveals the artist's uncanny ability to marry the ideal with the real and specific. The artist portrayed Paolina (1780–1825), wife of the Italian prince Camillo Borghese and sister of Napoleon, as Venus Victorious. Reclining on an antique bed, she holds an apple, the prize of that famous beauty contest of Classical antiquity, in which Venus triumphed over Juno and Minerva. The guise of Venus, which evidently called for a high degree of nudity, was chosen by Paolina herself, who was famous for her beauty and infamous for flouting social and moral conventions.

The practice of portraying a person as a mythological figure went back to the Renaissance and continued throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this way the artist could illustrate a particular virtue of the sitter by representing him or her in the guise of the mythological figure that exemplified that virtue (e.g. the wisdom of Min-

2-23 **Antonio Canova**, *Portrait of Paolina Borghese as Venus Victorious*, 1804–8. Marble, height 5'3" (1.6 m); width 6'7" (2 m). Galleria Borghese, Rome.



erva, the courage of Hercules, etc.). Such portraits for the most part fall into two groups. Some represent their sitters realistically, recording all their physical particularities. To the modern viewer they often seem a little comical in their Classical aspirations. Others, however, are so idealized that the sitter's individuality and actual features are lost. What is fascinating about the *Portrait of Paolina Borghese* is that Canova has managed to create a figure who is individualized, but who at the same time has the timeless beauty and dignity of a goddess. He has done so by streamlining the body so as to create a beautiful flowing contour, without losing the smooth softness of the flesh. Thus Paolina is at once desirable and distant, erotic and cold, mortal and divine.

Flaxman

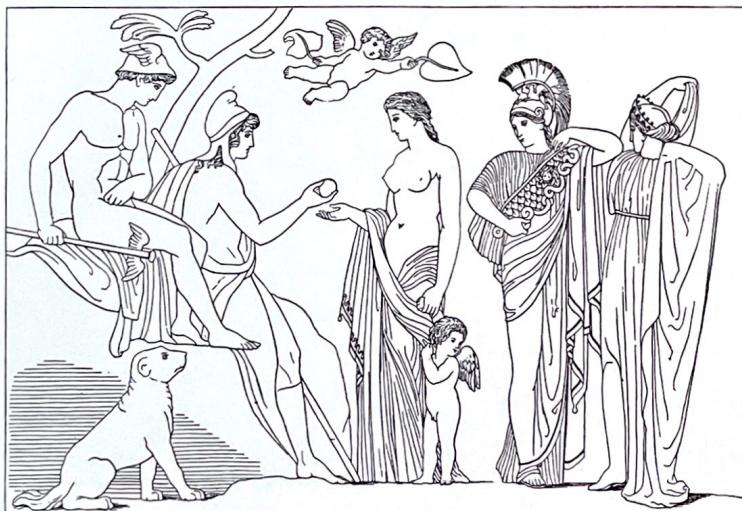
Two years older than Canova, John Flaxman never achieved the younger sculptor's stardom. If he became internationally known, it was not so much for his sculptures as for his drawings. Flaxman studied at the Royal Academy in London, but failed to win the coveted gold medal that would have enabled him to study in Rome. Instead, he was employed in the ceramic factory of Josiah Wedgwood to supply designs for the low-relief decorations that have remained the hallmark of Wedgwood pottery to this day (see page 67). Although Flaxman resented the task, it gave him the opportunity to study Classical vase paintings. These not only inspired his decorations but also taught him to think of form in terms of contour.

At the age of thirty-two, Flaxman had finally earned enough money to travel to Rome. While there, he received a commission for a set of drawings to illustrate Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Reproduced by means of engraving and published in album form in 1793, these drawings created a sensation in their time. Looking at Flaxman's illustration of *The Judgment of Paris* (FIG. 2-24) it is easy to see why. First of all, Flaxman has eliminated all shading and reduced his draw-

ings to line only. Secondly, his contours are streamlined and minimally detailed, giving the drawings a powerful simplicity and sobriety. Contemporaries saw Flaxman's illustrations as an attempt to retrace the steps of art to its very beginnings, when there was only contour (see pages 45–46). Their "primitiveness" made a good match to Homer's epic poems, which were thought to represent the origin of literature. As one fellow artist remarked, Flaxman's drawings looked "as if they had been made in the age, when Homer wrote."

Distributed, copied, and pirated all over Europe, Flaxman's illustrations brought him instant fame. After he returned to England in 1794, he was selected for several important public projects, including one for a *Monument to Admiral Lord Nelson* (FIG. 2-25) in St Paul's Cathedral, London. This monument, for which Flaxman was contracted in 1807, was one of a group commissioned by the British Parliament since 1796 to honor naval and military heroes killed in battles against the French. Produced over some eleven years, the Nelson memorial is a full-length portrait of the admiral standing on a cylindrical pedestal decorated with a relief of ancient river gods. On the left, the allegorical figure of Britannia points out the statue to two young boys; on the right the British lion growls at the viewer. Unlike Canova, who masterfully combined real and mythical figures into single works, Flaxman was not entirely successful in reconciling the real with the ideal. His Britannia, modeled after images of the goddess Minerva, is a strange companion to the two young boys carrying their school bags. The oversized lion with its excessive detail looks out of place next to the simplified low relief on the pedestal.

Flaxman is at his best in less ambitious works, such as the modest funeral monuments he designed for members of the British middle class. For these he favored the Classical stele form, a vertical slab tapering towards the top, decorated in relief. His marble stele for *John and Susannah Phillimore* (FIG. 2-26), once in a small London church, has been destroyed, but the original plaster sketch model shows two mourning women embracing each other



2-24 **John Flaxman**, *The Judgment of Paris*. Illustration of Homer's *Iliad*, 1793. Engraving by Tommaso Piroli after Flaxman's drawing. 6 x 4" (16 x 10.5 cm). Private Collection.



2-25 **John Flaxman**, *Monument to Admiral Lord Nelson*, 1807–18. Marble, over life-size. St Paul's Cathedral, London.



2-26 **John Flaxman**, Plaster sketch model of *Monument to John and Susannah Phillimore ("Two Sisters in Affliction")*, 1804. 13'6" x 7'6" (4.13 x 2.34 m). University College, London.

across a grave stone in the form of a broken column. Often referred to as "Two Sisters in Affliction," the relief expresses profound grief in an utterly simple and unaffected way. Their faces hidden, the two women lack specificity, reminding us that grief over death is common to all humanity.

The Industrial Revolution and the Popularization of Neoclassicism

The popularity of Neoclassicism during the last quarter of the eighteenth century owed much to the advent of the Industrial Revolution. New manufacturing processes made it possible to produce some goods at a lower cost than ever before. The resulting supply of inexpensive products led to the growth of a consumer economy, cultivated by industrialists who developed new marketing techniques

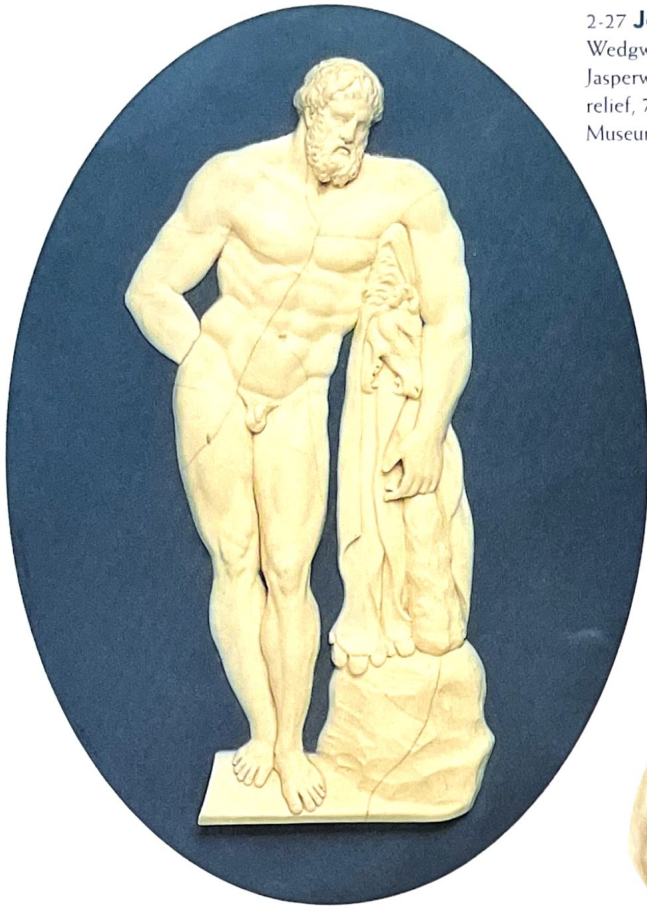
and advertising strategies. Many of the new home furnishings produced at the turn of the eighteenth century recall Classical art and artifacts in form or decoration, or both. The simple lines of Classical art lent themselves well to mass production, and the fact that Neoclassicism was fashionable in the realm of "high art" encouraged industrialists to adopt it in consumer products.

At the forefront of this development was Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795). The son of a modest potter, Wedgwood used a series of technical innovations as well as his sharp business skills to build a ceramic empire. He realized early on that by lowering the cost of production, he could increase the quantity of goods he sold. Thus he sought various ways to produce inexpensive, attractive ceramic wares that could be sold to a newly affluent middle class and even to well-to-do artisans and farmers. In addition to consumer wares, he also produced small quantities of expensive luxury products to sell to the wealthier classes. Displayed in Wedgwood's elegant London showroom, these were show pieces, demonstrating the full artistic and technical capabilities of the factory.

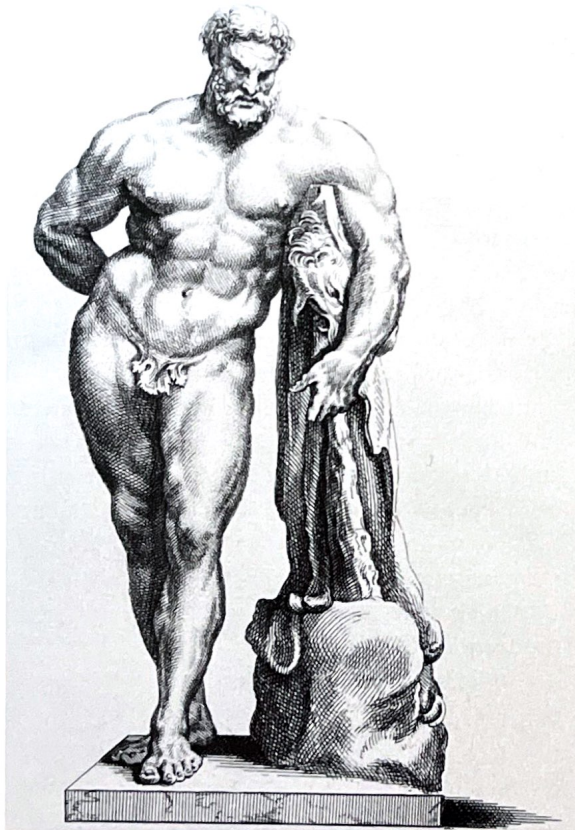
Wedgwood took a keen interest in the manufacture and the design of his pottery. An enlightened marketer, he realized that good taste would win him customers. The objects produced in his factory show simple, clean contours, and their forms and decorations are frequently inspired by Classical art. The bulk of Wedgwood's houseware was creamware, an off-white pottery with a hard, lustrous glaze. For the most part, creamware was not decorated by hand but by means of transfer or printed designs, which facilitated mass production. Wedgwood's luxury wares were entirely hand-decorated. They included vases and platters as well as wall plaques, medallions, jewelry, and the like. His most enduring invention was jasperware, a fine unglazed stoneware that was tinted in light colors (preferably blue) and decorated with low-relief designs.

Wedgwood hired trained artists such as Flaxman to design the decorations for his ceramics. These designs were made into transfers or prints for creamware, or turned into little handmade reliefs by skilled artisans for jasperware. The division of labor between designer and manufacturer was a direct result of new forms of industrial production. The old days, when objects were designed and made by a single craftsman, were over. Henceforth, manufacture became an increasingly fragmented process, in which each stage of production was left to a different person or machine.

Wedgwood's designers were told to model their work after Classical art; many of their designs were in fact adapted from vases in the collection of William Hamilton (see page 46), which was sold to the British Museum in 1772. Illustrated books showing reproductions of Classical sculptures and reliefs were another important source. A jasperware plaque representing the mythical Greek hero Hercules, probably designed by Flaxman (FIG. 2-27), shows how



2-27 **John Flaxman** (attrib.) (designer for Wedgwood), *Farnese Hercules*, 1775–80. Jasperware plaque, blue ground and white relief, 7 x 5" (19 x 14 cm). Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire.



2-29 *Hercules*. Illustration in Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité expliquée* (vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 124, pl. 62, fig. 11), 1719. Engraving. Private Collection, London.



2-28 **Glykon**, *Farnese Hercules*, third century CE. Marble, height 11'3" (3.17 m). Museo Nazionale, Naples.

Classical art was adapted to consumer goods. The plaque, in low relief, recalls a famous statue of Hercules formerly in the Farnese Palace in Rome (FIG. 2-28). The figure was copied not from the original, however, but from a plate in Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité expliquée* (Antiquity Explained), an illustrated work in five two-part volumes that was widely used by Wedgwood designers (FIG. 2-29).

The Neoclassical Home

Although Wedgwood was perhaps the most successful popularizer of the Neoclassical style, he was by no means the only one. In the late 1700s numerous manufacturers of

housewares and home furnishings began substituting Neoclassical designs for Rococo ones. Britain played a leading role in this development, since it was the first nation in Europe to industrialize and to develop a consumer class. With the new products manufactured by the firms of Wedgwood and others, middle-class Britons could emulate the Neoclassical look that was in vogue among the wealthy.

The truly rich, of course, could afford the services of personal designers such as the Adam brothers. John Adam (1721–1792), Robert Adam (1728–1792), and James Adam (1732–1794) were the sons of a successful Scottish architect, whose financial means allowed at least two of the three to take the Grand Tour. Robert, the second son, visited Italy between 1754 and 1757. There he diligently studied Italy's famous Classical monuments, while skilfully



2-30 **Robert Adam**,
Etruscan Dressing Room,
c.1775–6. Osterley Park House,
Middlesex.

cultivating wealthy British travelers who looked like potential clients. On returning to Britain he immediately became a leading architect and was especially sought after for interior architecture and remodeling. So busy was his practice that he formed a partnership with his two brothers, to carry out commissions all over the country.

The Etruscan Dressing Room in Osterley Park House, near London (FIG. 2-30), remodeled by Robert Adam in the mid-1770s, shows the complex adaptation of Classical sources that was typical of the so-called Adam style. The room has little to do with Etruscan art *per se*; instead, it draws inspiration from Classical Greek vases, Greek and Roman architecture, Pompeian wall paintings, and Renaissance decorative arts. In spite of the variety of influences, however, the dominant impression is one of order and geometry. Most decorations are painted or molded in low-relief stucco so that the walls and ceilings look flat. No mirrors here open up the interior space, as in Rococo interiors, so that the overall effect is decorative but reserved.

Although Britain led the way in reinventing the domestic interior in the latter half of the eighteenth century, architects and designers in other countries too were moving away from the Rococo toward a simpler style of decoration. In France this movement is generally associated with the reign of Louis XVI, although in fact it began well before he ascended the throne in 1774. The name "Louis XVI" is given to a style that is exemplified by the rooms of his wife, Marie Antoinette, in the royal palace at Versailles. It is instructive to compare the Queen's Cabinet Doré (FIG. 2-31), redecorated in 1783 by Richard Mique (1728–1794) and the brothers Jean-Simon Rousseau and Jean-Hugues Rousseau, with the Rococo interior designed by Boffrand in the Hôtel de Soubise (see FIGS. 1-4 and 1-5). In the latter, there are undulating walls and a curved ceiling; in the former there is a square box. There one finds curves and asymmetry, here rectilinearity and exact symmetry; there an abundance of mirrors create an "expandable" space, while here the four walls clearly define the room. Clearly, in less than two generations a revolution in taste had taken place.

Neoclassicism was, of course, more than a mere change in taste. The movement represented the final, culminating phase of the Enlightenment. It spoke at once of a new scholarly interest in the past and of a high-minded desire to change the present. The artistic break with the Rococo that the Neoclassical movement brought was also a break with what many perceived as a decadent culture that had produced it. Neoclassicism represented a return to order, simplicity, harmony, and beauty. Thus it was able to become the preferred style of the new American Republic as well as revolutionary France.





2-31 **Richard Mique, Jean-Simon Rousseau, and Jean-Hugues Rousseau**, Marie Antoinette's Cabinet Doré, Palace of Versailles, redecorated 1783. Versailles.



4-9 Cast of the First Official Seal of the First Republic, 1792. Archives Nationales, Collection of Seals, Paris.

to power. Emblems such as crowns and scepters are often found in royal portraits (such as the one of Louis XIV in FIG. 1-1), and also occur on coins, stationery, and the like. In addition, kings often had themselves represented in the company of—or, sometimes, in the guise of—allegorical or mythological figures. These embodied virtues, such as charity, justice, strength, or beauty, that rulers wished to attribute to themselves. Together, emblems, allegories, and mythological figures made up the complex iconography (visual language) of monarchic power.

Once the old regime was gone, the new republic needed a new set of images that would advance the notion of representational rule rather than absolute power. New allegories, representing liberty, equality, and fraternity, had to be created. An entirely new iconography of power emerged in the 1790s, much of it conceived by anonymous artists working in the publishing and minting industries. The allegories and emblems that were born in the wake of the revolution are found on banners, printed materials, and coins before they appear in paintings and in sculpture.

The allegorical figure of Liberty was an important image in early revolutionary iconography. It drew on classical models. The Romans had already created a personification of freedom in the form of the goddess *Libertas*. As an allegory, *Libertas* survived through the centuries, and by the eighteenth century she generally took the form of a young woman, dressed in white, with a scepter in one hand and a cap in the other. The scepter symbolized the control a free man has over himself; the cap resembled the so-called Phrygian bonnet, worn in ancient Rome by emancipated slaves to mark their newly won status as *liber* or free man.

When the King was ousted in 1792, the image of Liberty was chosen for the first official seal of the French Republic (FIG. 4-9). Designed by an anonymous artist, the seal shows a woman dressed in a Classical garment set within the words: "In the Name of the French Republic."

In her right hand, she holds a scepter, surmounted by the Phrygian cap. With her left, she grasps the *fasces* (a bundle of wooden rods and an ax, tied together with a strap). *Fasces* were carried by the Roman lictors as the badge of their power to enforce the law. To the early republicans, clearly, liberty meant not anarchy but freedom balanced by law and order.

Since the new republican government had resulted from revolutionary ideas of freedom, the image of Liberty was increasingly used to represent the French Republic. The French called their allegorical figure "Marianne," an endearing nickname that rather uncannily echoed the name of the last queen, Marie Antoinette. Strange as it may seem, both Marie Antoinette and Marianne filled the same psychological need to personify government, giving a human face and name to the abstract system of political rule.

Pierre-Paul Prud'hon

One of the few artists of stature to become involved in the creation of revolutionary imagery was the painter Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823). Ten years younger than David,

4-10 **Pierre-Paul Prud'hon**, *The Spirit of Liberty, and Wisdom*, 1791. Black crayon, graphite, and white gouache on antique white paper, 12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (32 x 17 cm). Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.





4-11 **Jacques-Louis Copia**, after Prud'hon, *The French Constitution, Equality, Law*, 1798. Engraving, 16 x 19" (40.6 x 50.3 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Prud'hon was trained in the provinces. He moved to Paris just months before the revolution, and his career was slow to start. Royal patronage had come to a halt. The aristocrats, an important group of art buyers, were emigrating to escape the threat of the impending revolution. Churches were closing as well, and there was not much work for an aspiring young artist. Only portraiture continued to be in demand, since members of the newly empowered bourgeoisie were eager to have their features memorialized.

In the hope of drawing attention to himself and his work, Prud'hon turned to revolutionary imagery. At the Salon of 1791 he exhibited just one drawing, *The Spirit of Liberty, and Wisdom* (FIG. 4-10). In it, freedom is represented not by a woman but by a nude boy, leaning against a term (an ancient boundary post) surmounted by Minerva, goddess of wisdom. In an engraving made after the drawing (in which the young man was, incidentally, given a Phrygian cap) the image is explained in a caption that tells the viewer that freedom results in wise government.

In this early drawing Prud'hon demonstrated his beautiful and highly individual drawing style. Instead of the crisp contours and sparse shading favored by most of his Neoclassical contemporaries (see the drawings by David and Flaxman in FIGS. 2-16 and 2-24), Prud'hon's drawings show soft outlines and subtle *chiaroscuro*. His unique style would not be fully appreciated until the mid-nineteenth century, when *chiaroscuro* rather than contour became admired in drawing and painting.

Starting in 1791, Prud'hon worked closely with the engraver Jacques-Louis Copia (1764–1799), who reproduced his revolutionary drawings so that they could be sold to individuals and institutions. Together, Prud'hon and Copia produced a large engraving, approximately 16 inches by 20, with a large allegorical representation of the



4-12 **Pierre Paul Prud'hon**, *The French Constitution, Equality, Law*, 1791. Black and white chalk on blue paper, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (29.6 x 46.8 cm). Private Collection.

constitution and two smaller ones of equality and law (FIG. 4-11). Although Prud'hon worked on the three drawings for this print as early as 1791, Copia's final print was delayed until 1798, owing to the constant rewritings of the constitution (1791, 1793, and 1795).

In FIG. 4-12 we see Prud'hon's drawing for the print's main image (note that the print produces a mirror image of the original). The complex allegory centers on Minerva. She turns her attention to the figure of Law, who holds a scepter with a rooster, symbol of vigilance. On the other side of Minerva, Liberty tramples the yoke and chain of slavery as she shakes hands with Law. At the same time, Liberty turns towards the graceful figure of Nature, a young bare-breasted woman with several children in tow. Nature seems to represent the natural social order, in which all men are born free and equal. Various animals complete the allegory. The cat traditionally symbolizes independence, while the biblical image of the lion and the lamb, peacefully walking together, demonstrates that in a free and lawful society everyone is safe. This complex image, like all allegories, is a teaching tool. By trying to figure out its meaning, the viewer is forced to think about the significance of the constitution itself.

Quatremère de Quincy, the Panthéon, and the Absent Republican Monument

Despite a desire to commemorate the new republic with great works of art, few monumental works were created in the 1790s. This was due in part to the frequent changes of government, which made any sustained official policy of the arts impossible. It was also partly due to the political unrest and lack of funds that the revolution left in its path.



4-13 **Jacques-Germain Soufflot**, Panthéon (formerly Church of Ste Geneviève), 1757–90. Paris.

Perhaps the most important monumental endeavor following the revolution was the transformation of the Parisian church of Ste Geneviève into the so-called Panthéon, a mausoleum for the nation's great men (FIG. 4-13). The church of Ste Geneviève had been begun in 1757, under Louis XV, according to the designs of the architect Jacques-Germain Soufflot (1713–1780). Even in its time, it was hailed as a masterpiece of Neoclassical architecture, with its centralized plan, its dome based on that of St Peter's in Rome, and its Classically inspired exterior and interior details.

The church had scarcely been completed, in 1790, when it was decided that it would become a burial place. Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, a sculptor, art critic, and revolutionary, was put in charge of this project. In a series of essays published in 1791 he had promoted the use of art for political propaganda. The Panthéon project offered a perfect opportunity to mobilize the fine arts to revolutionary and republican purposes.

To turn the church into a national mausoleum, Quatremère blocked up the windows, removed all religious sculptural decorations, and replaced them with reliefs on revolutionary themes executed by different artists under

his supervision. Thus the large relief above the main entrance, which originally represented *The Triumph of Faith*, was replaced by one of *The Motherland Bestowing Crowns on Virtue and on Genius*. Ironically, it was destroyed, in turn, after the restoration of the monarchy in 1814.

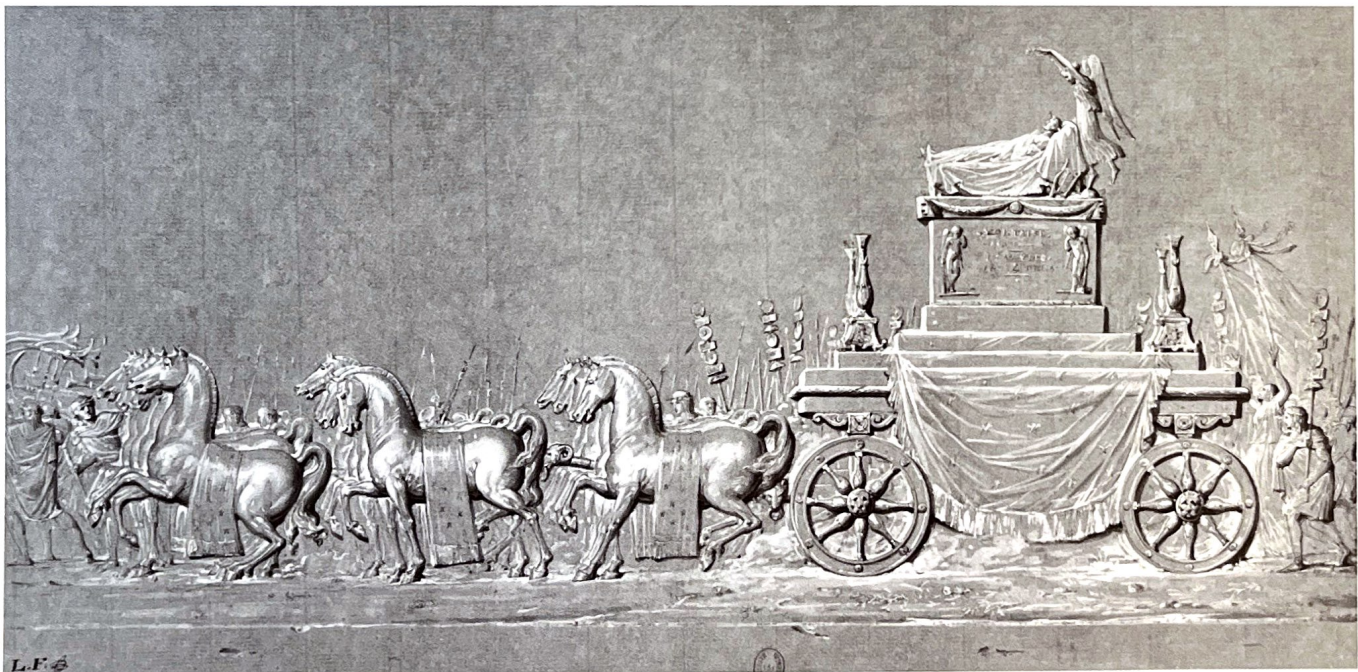
For the interior, Quatremère designed an enormous sculptural group representing *The Republic*. Like so many projects of the period, it was never finished, but an etching after Quatremère's design (FIG. 4-14) gives an idea of how it might have appeared. The group centers on the figure of the Republic, a helmeted woman resembling Minerva. In her right hand she holds a rod; in her left is an equilateral triangle, representing the equality of the three estates. She is flanked by the winged spirit of Liberty, holding a scepter and crowned with a Phrygian bonnet (left), and the winged figure of Equality trampling on a snake, the symbol of tyranny (right).

Quatremère's Panthéon became the focal point for a number of revolutionary pageants related to the burial (or reburial) of great men of the nation inside its crypt. Perhaps the most important of these funeral processions was the transfer of the ashes of the *philosophe* Voltaire from their former resting place to the Panthéon. This ceremony took



4-14 **Antoine Quatremère de Quincy**, *République Française*, design of sculptural group (unexecuted) for the Panthéon, Paris, 1793. Mezzotint, 15 x 11" (39.3 x 28 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

4-15 (below) **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Transfer of the Ashes of Voltaire to the Panthéon, 11 July 1791*, 1793. Mezzotint, 5 1/8 x 10 3/8" (13 x 26.3 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



place on July 11, 1791, and was one of the many manifestations of its kind organized by David. The artist not only designed the chariot that transported the ashes and the casket in which they were contained (FIG. 4-15), but also orchestrated the procession itself. His drawing for the funeral procession shows that the Classically inspired chariot was drawn by twelve white horses, held in check by footmen dressed in Classical garb. The casket was surmounted by an effigy of Voltaire on his deathbed accompanied by the winged figure of fame. Four empty chandeliers, on the corners of the chariot, symbolized the writer's passing.

Today, nothing but the drawing remains of the elaborate pageant of Voltaire. The same holds true for the numerous other revolutionary pageants and festivals designed by David and fellow revolutionary artists. These were elaborate but ephemeral "happenings," intended for huge popular audiences. In their transience and anti-monumentality, they were the perfect art form for the volatile world of the revolutionary period.

Demolition as Propaganda

While few, if any, great monuments were produced to celebrate the establishment of the republic, a great deal of energy and attention was given to the destruction of exist-

ing ones. For the most part, this destructive effort was focused on buildings and public sculptures that were hateful to the revolutionaries because they reminded them of the power that the king and, to a lesser extent, the aristocracy and the clergy had wielded in the past. It is safe to say that, for the revolutionaries, destruction had at least as much symbolic value as creation.

Perhaps the first building to be destroyed during the French Revolution was the medieval Bastille fortress in Paris, a feared and hated prison in which numerous political prisoners were detained by the monarchy. The artist Hubert Robert (1733–1808) painted a scene of the demolition of the fortress, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1789, a little more than a month after the building was stormed by a revolutionary mob (FIG. 4-16). Images such as this were powerful signifiers of the need to destroy the old order as a condition for the new. Indeed, erasing the past was so important that the very absence of a royal building or statue could become a positive confirmation of the new order. Several proposals were made for a monument to commemorate the storming of the Bastille. One was a simple sign that said, "Here stood the Bastille"; another was for an empty space in the place where the Bastille had formerly stood.

The Bastille was only one of many monuments and buildings annihilated or vandalized by revolutionaries. In

4-16 **Hubert Robert**, *The Bastille during the First Days of its Demolition*, 1789. Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 45" (77 cm x 1.14 m). Musée Carnavalet, Paris.





4-17 The Thirteenth-Century Room in the Musée des Monuments Français. Illustration in Jean-Baptiste Réville and Jacques Lavallée, *Vues Pittoresques et Perspectives des Salles du Musée des Monuments Français* (Paris, 1816). Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

addition to public statues of kings, many medieval churches were viciously attacked. These buildings were hateful not only because they represented the overbearing political influence of the church, but also because many of them contained aristocratic tombs. Not surprisingly, the medieval abbey of St Denis, which contained the tombs of nearly all the French kings and their relatives, was the hardest hit. In Paris, the cathedral of Notre-Dame was a prominent target. At the time, the large-scale statues of Old Testament kings on its façade were thought to be images of the French kings. In 1793 the revolutionary government ordered that they be removed. Most of the statues were destroyed or thrown into the Seine river. A few, however, were buried in a garden near by, perhaps by someone who regretted their wanton destruction. In 1977 they were unearthed during a routine construction excavation, and they may now be seen in the Musée de Cluny in Paris.

Not every revolutionary sympathizer, however, was in agreement with this wanton destruction of the past. In 1793 the abbot Henri Grégoire (one of the liberal clerics represented by David in his *Oath of the Tennis Court*) wrote his famous *Rapport . . . sur le vandalisme révolutionnaire* (*Report on Revolutionary Vandalism*). In it he argued that the destruction of monuments was not only shortsighted, because it deprived the world of so many beautiful works of art, but also counterproductive, because these very monuments could serve as pointed reminders of a hated regime.

Two years later, the young artist Alexander Lenoir (1761–1839) created a museum with the confiscated art objects and rescued fragments of buildings and sculptures—many dating from the Middle Ages—that were held in a depot awaiting destruction. By then, the destructive fervor had gone, and in years to come Lenoir's Musée des Monuments Français came to foster an unprecedented interest in medieval art in France (fig. 4-17).