French Art of the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries

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Tuesdays, April 17th - May 22nd
1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Room 124, Leeds House Building

Schedule of topics:

Week 1:
Introducing the Academy: The French Academy was officially established in the 1640s and is known today as the Academie des Beaux-Arts. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries it was recognized as the leading school and main exhibitor of important artworks in France. The members of the Academy were highly distinguished artists who sold their work to the most wealthy and influential citizens of France. Artists: Greuze, Chardin, Messonier, and Vigee-Lebrun

Week 2:
Rococo Art: Fulfilling a desire for frivolous and fanciful forms of entertainment for the upper class, Rococo art went against all of the values that the academy held dear. And yet, due to its popularity, the Academy was forced to recognize and make room for this style in its hallowed halls. Artists: Watteau, Fragonard, Boucher, and Mique

Week 3:
High art of the Academy: Neo-Classicism began as the reaction of the French Academy to Rococo art. It championed all the classical ideals of past art and focused on moralizing messages. Romanticism, similar to its Neo-Classical sister, uses classical figures and dramatic scenes, but with a much larger emphasis on emotion. Both approaches coincided with the French Revolution, providing artists with plenty of inspiration for their canvases. Artists: David, Cabanel, Delacroix, and Gericault

Week 4:
Portraits of Napoleon: The artist Delacroix once stated that “The life of Napoleon is our country’s epic for all the arts.” Throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century images of Napoleon permeated French art. Very much like the French Kings who came before him, the Emperor maintained strict control over his self-image, helping to create and preserve the legend that surrounded him for the better part of a century. Artists: David, Gros, Ingres, and Messonier

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Week 5:
Realism: Artists, both independent and those from the academy, felt drawn to the new style of realism. It provided them with an outlet to share their frustrations with societal issues in a creative form. Some artists took this purpose so far that it made the public uncomfortable. Others preferred to use the style to their advantage within the salon culture to create awe-inspiringly realistic images of French life in the 1800s. Artists: Millet, Courbet, Bonheur, and Manet

Week 6:
Impressionism: A new style was developed in the mid-1800s which challenged French society’s views on art. At first reviled for its un-academic qualities, impressionist artists are now some of the best known in western art history. Artists: Monet, Degas, Cassatt, Morisot, and Renoir

Recommended readings for continued learning:


Harris, Beth and Steven Zucker. “SmartHistory.” Khan Academy. 2016. Website. www.khanacademy.org

Other interesting resources:
If you’re looking for a fun, but historically accurate, fiction book try Elizabeth Kostova’s The Swan Thieves which alternates between the stories of artists from the present day and the 1800s.