

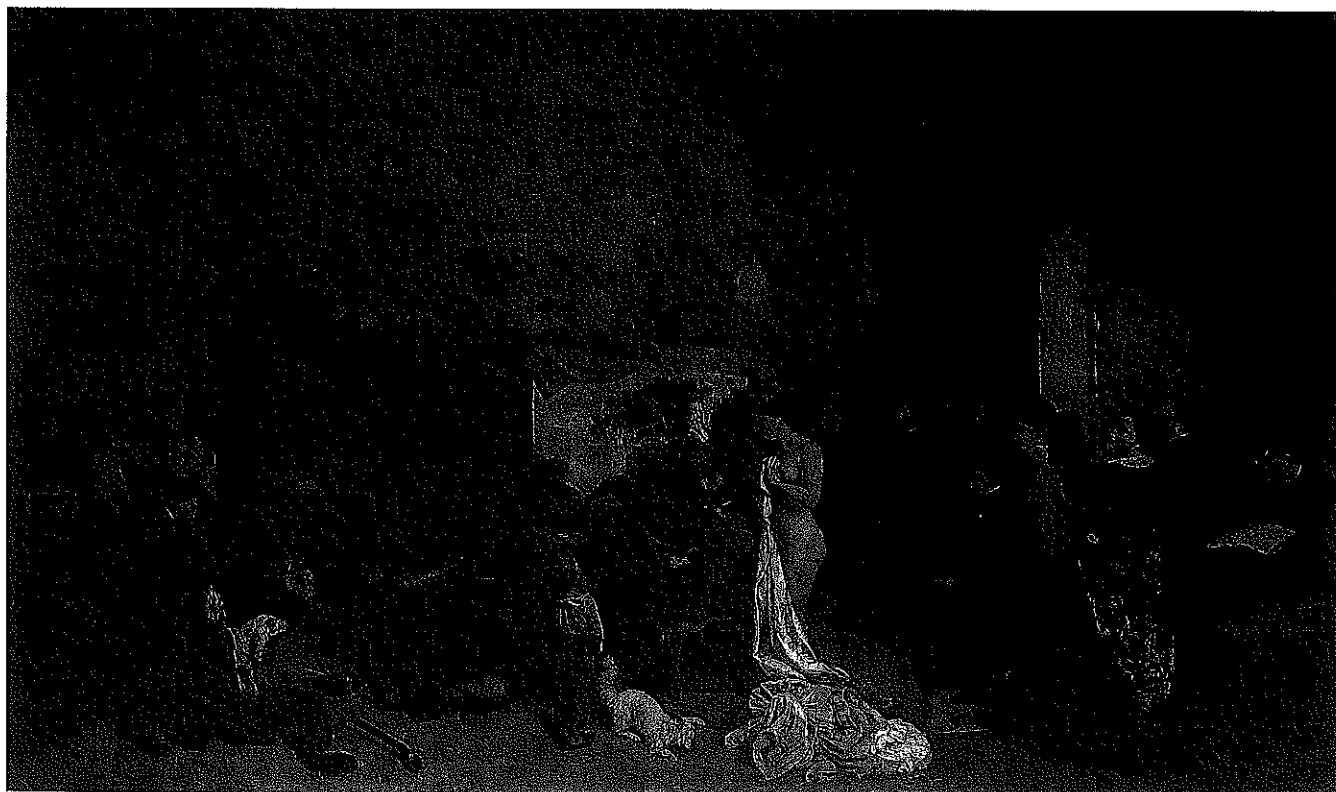
# 1

## The Sources of Modern Painting

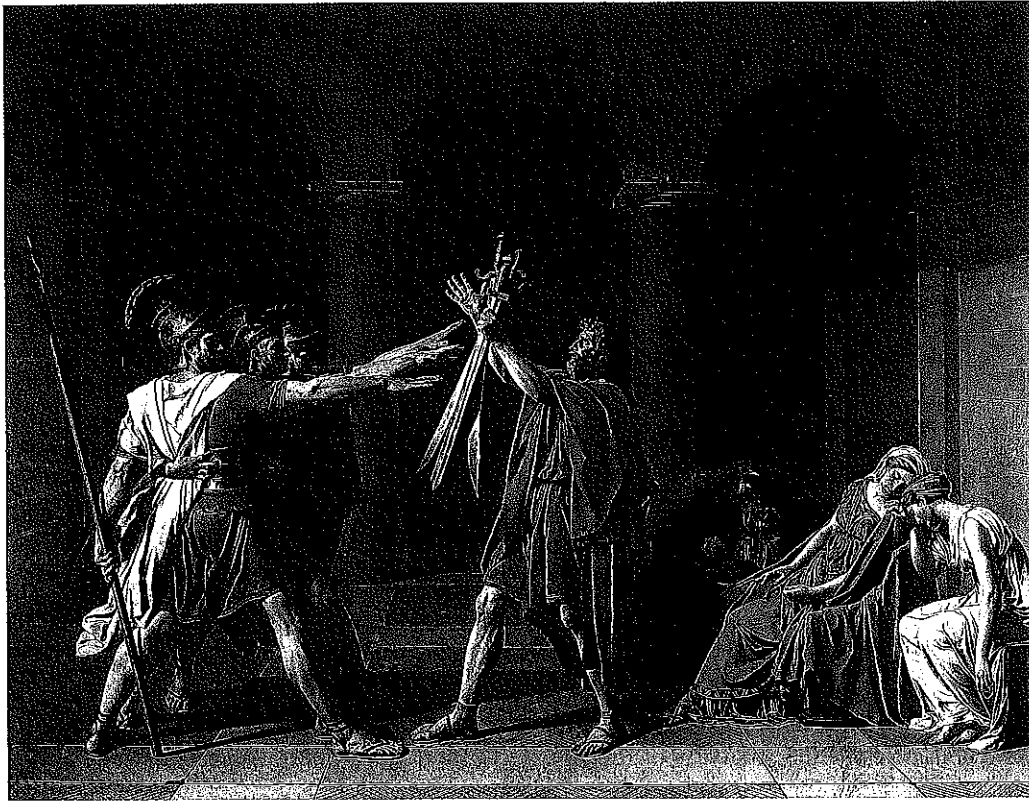
**V**arious dates have been proposed for the birth of modern art. The most commonly chosen, perhaps, is 1863, the year of the Salon des Refusés in Paris, where Édouard Manet first showed his scandalous painting *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (see fig. 2.19). But other and even earlier dates may be considered: 1855, the year of the first Paris Exposition Universelle (a kind of world's fair), in which Gustave Courbet (1819–77) built a separate pavilion to show *The Painter's Studio* (fig. 1.1); 1824, when the English landscapists John Constable and Richard Parkes Bonington exhibited their brilliant, direct-color studies from nature at the Paris Salon (an annual exhibition of contemporary art juried by members of the French Academy);

or even 1784, when Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) finished his *Oath of the Horatii* (fig. 1.2) and the Neo-classical movement had assumed a position of dominance in Europe and the United States.

Each of these dates has significance for the development of modern art, but none categorically marks a completely new beginning. For what happened was not that a new outlook suddenly appeared; rather, a gradual metamorphosis took place in the course of a hundred years. It embodied a number of separate developments: shifts in patterns of patronage; in the role of the French Academy; in the system of art instruction; in the artist's position in society. The period under discussion was one of profound social



1.1 Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio (Atelier)*, 1854–55. Oil on canvas, 11'10" × 19'7" (3.6 × 6 m). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



1.2 Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784. Oil on canvas, 10'10" × 14' (3.4 × 4.3 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

and political upheaval, with bloody revolutions in the United States and France and industrial revolution in England. Artists are, like everyone else, affected by changes in society—sometimes, as in the case of David or Courbet, quite directly. Social changes lead inevitably to changes in attitudes toward artistic means and issues—toward subject matter and expression, toward the use of color and line, and toward the nature and purpose of a work of art and the role it plays vis-à-vis its diverse audience.

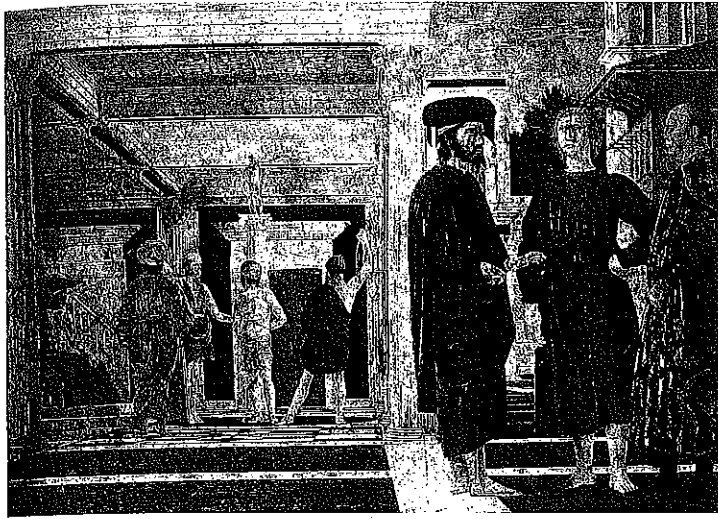
This book charts the development of modern art through examining a great diversity of works in different media—primarily painting, sculpture, and architecture, but also printmaking, photography, installation, and other art forms. It includes artists whose achievements have, with the passing of time, come to be recognized as preeminent or particularly significant, but it also looks at those whose names occur less frequently or prominently in standard histories of modern art. For example, while American artists before World War II in many ways took their cue from development in western Europe, this history covers the work of American artists throughout the whole course of modern art from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twenty-first. Likewise, although it was not until the later decades of the twentieth century that the achievements of women artists received adequate recognition, this book places the work of women artists in earlier periods in the context of their times.

This chapter provides a brief overview of premodern art from the fifteenth century onward, setting the scene for

the emergence of art forms, and approaches to painting in particular, that can be thought of as “modern.” The meaning of this term, which is also used in histories of political, economic, and social change, of literature and music, as well as in the simple, relative sense of new or recent, is not easy to define precisely. In art it is bound up with the emergence of capitalism, industrialism, and democracy, as well as the long series of reactions against forms of artistic expression that were felt to have outlived their usefulness or vigor, and the corresponding search for new modes of expression that continued unabated throughout the twentieth century.

## Changing Perspectives: From Renaissance to Baroque

A major aspect of modern art is the challenge it posed to traditional methods of representing three-dimensional space. Perspective space was a method of representing depth that had governed European art for four hundred years. Its basis was single-point perspective, perfected by Italian artists in early fifteenth-century Florence and the logical outcome of the naturalism of fourteenth-century art. It assumed a single viewpoint, with all lines at right angles to the visual plane being made to converge toward a single point on the horizon, the vanishing point. These mathematical-optical principles were discovered by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi before 1420, first applied by the painter Masaccio in 1425, and then written down by



**1.3** Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation of Christ*, c. 1450. Tempera on panel, 23¼ × 32" (59.1 × 81.3 cm). Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino, Italy.

the artist and theorist Leon Battista Alberti in about 1435. Fifteenth-century artists produced the illusion of organized depth in their paintings by using the converging lines of roof beams and checkered floors to establish a scale for the size of figures in architectural space, and to give objects a diminishing size as they recede from the eye.

Nowhere in the Early Renaissance did this science receive a more lucid or poetic expression than in the painting of **Piero della Francesca** (c. 1406–92). Mystically convinced that a divine order underlay the surface irregularities of natural phenomena, this mathematician–artist endowed his forms with ovoid, cylindrical, or cubic perfection, fixed their relationships in exact proportions, and further clarified all these geometries with a suffusion of cool, silvery light (fig. 1.3). Such is the sense of wonder produced by this conceptual, abstract approach to perceptual reality that it would continue to fascinate modern artists, from David to Pablo Picasso, even as they explored other approaches.

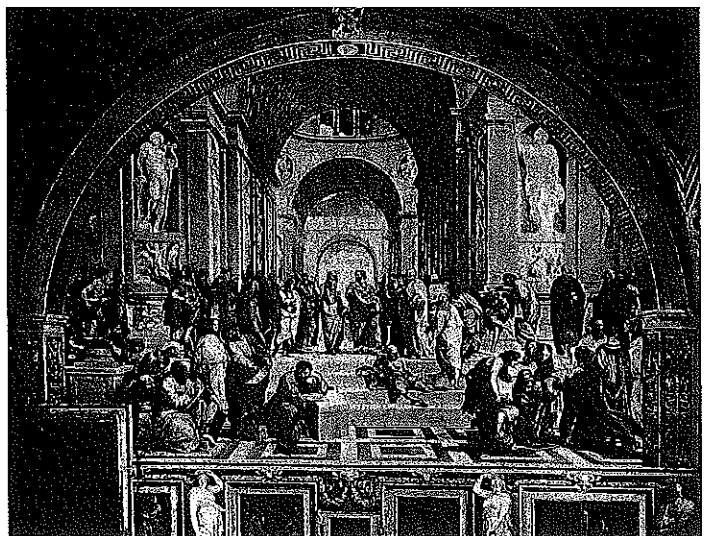
Piero and his fifteenth-century peers in Italy elaborated the one-point perspective system by shifting the viewpoint to right or left along the horizon line, or above or below it. Atmospheric perspective, another fifteenth-century technique, was developed in Flanders rather than Italy. It added to the illusion of depth by progressively diminishing color and value contrasts relative to the presumed distance from the viewer. Thus, a distant background landscape might be painted with less saturated colors, especially blues and greens, and soft contours, in contrast to strongly colored and sharply defined foreground figures (fig. 1.4). With these as their means, Renaissance painters attained control over naturalistic representation of the human figure and environment.

Early in the sixteenth century, the Renaissance conception of space reached a second major climax with **Raphael Sanzio** (1483–1520), in such works as *The School of Athens* (fig. 1.5), where the nobility of the theme is established by

the grandeur of the architectural space. For this supreme masterpiece of the High Renaissance, Raphael employed both linear and atmospheric perspective not only as devices for unifying a vast and complex pictorial space but also as a metaphor of the longing for harmonious unification. The converging lines of Raphael harmonized the divergent philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the human and the divine, the ancient and the modern, and, perhaps most of all, the searing divisions that afflicted Christendom on the eve of the Protestant Reformation.

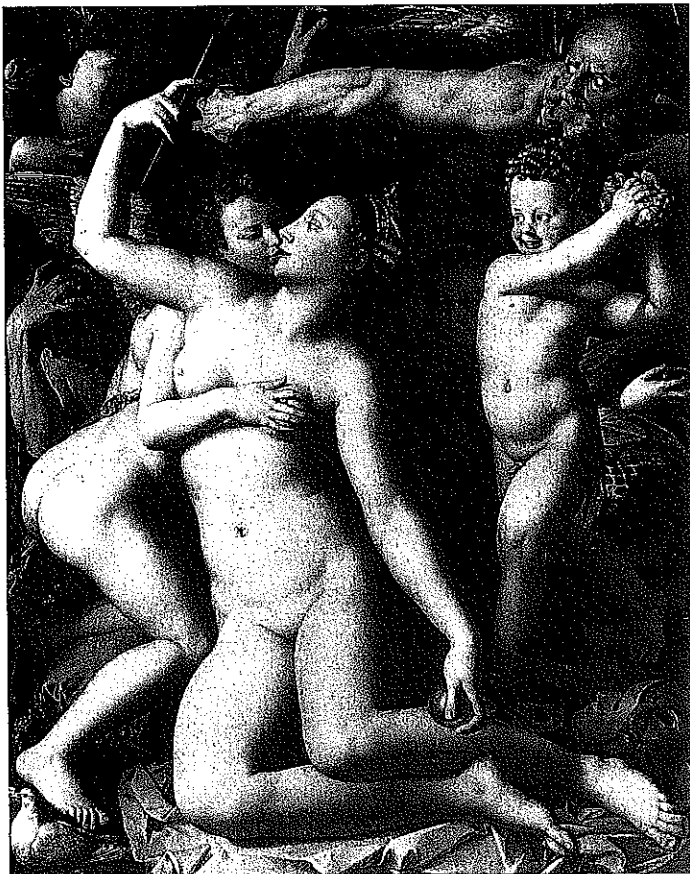


**1.4** Jan van Eyck, *Madonna with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin*, c. 1435. Oil on panel, 26 × 24¾" (66 × 61.9 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

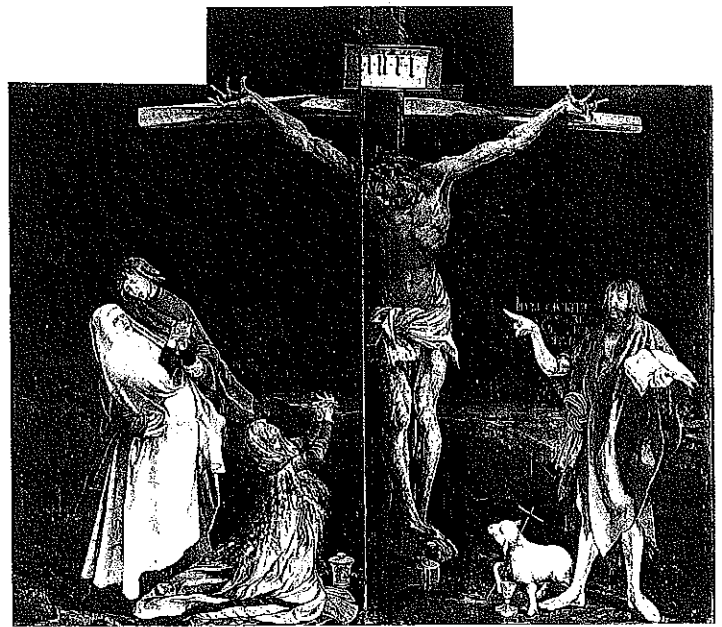


**1.5** Raphael Sanzio, *The School of Athens*, 1510–11. Fresco. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican Palace, Rome.

So exquisite was the balance struck by Raphael and his contemporaries, among them Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Titian, that the succeeding generation of painters gave up studying nature in favor of basing their art on that of the High Renaissance, an art that had already conquered and refined nature. Thus, where the older masters had looked to nature and found their grand harmonious style, the new artists discovered what the sixteenth century called *maniera* (a manner), which in the early twentieth century was defined as Mannerism. This stylistic designation describes the work of certain artists after the High Renaissance and includes the late work of Michelangelo. Mannerist paintings may include figural grace exaggerated into extreme attenuation and twisting, choreographic poses, jammed, irrational spaces or distorted perspectives, shrill colors, scattered compositions, cropped images, polished surfaces, and an atmosphere of glacial coolness, even in scenes of high, often erotic, emotion or violence. All of these qualities apply to the work of one of the finest Italian Mannerists, **Agnolo Bronzino** (1502–72), whose supreme technical skills created compositions of sensuous beauty and dazzling complexity (fig. 1.6). In their preference for allowing the ideal to prevail over the real, the Mannerists can be seen as forerunners of the tendency toward abstraction that would become a dominant trend in modernist art, whether pursued for



**1.6** Agnolo Bronzino, *Allegory of Time and Love*, c. 1546. Oil on panel, 61 × 56¼" (154.9 × 143 cm). The National Gallery, London.



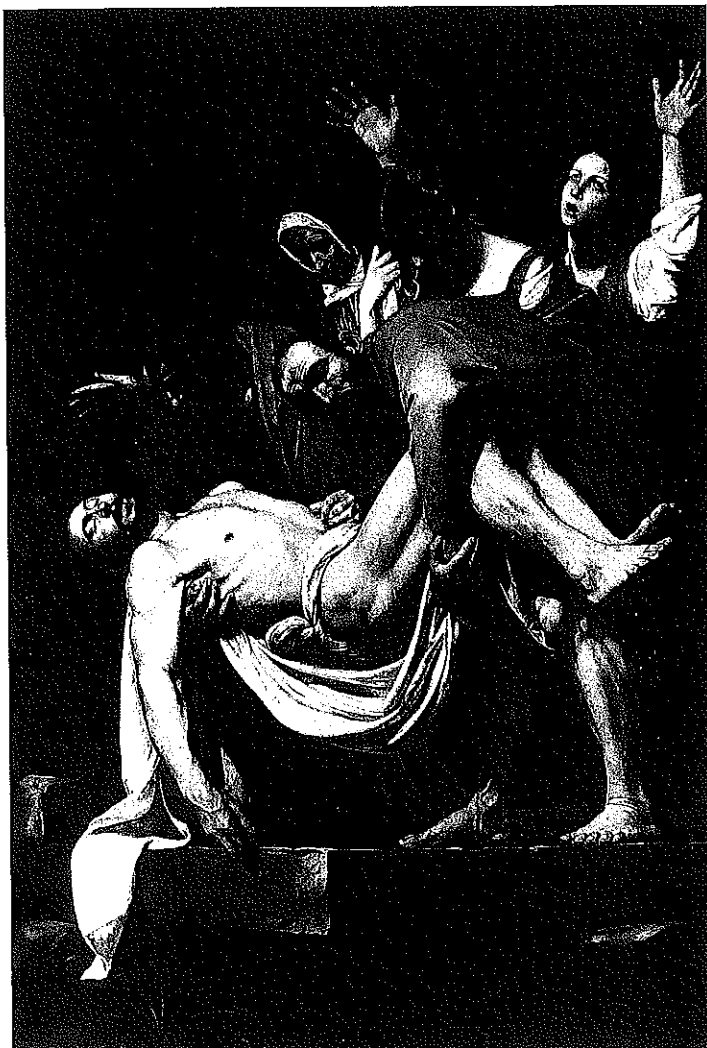
**1.7** Matthias Grünewald, *Crucifixion*, center panel of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (closed), 1512–15. Oil on panel, 9'9½" × 10'9" (3 × 3.3 m). Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France.

reasons of objective formal analysis or to express some inner emotional or spiritual state.

Emotional or spiritual necessity lay at the core of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, painted by Raphael's German contemporary **Matthias Grünewald** (d. 1528), the creator of a harrowing and moving *Crucifixion* (fig. 1.7). In this dreadful scene, set against a darkening wilderness and floodlit with a harsh, glaring light, the tortured body of Christ hangs so heavy on the rude cross that the arms seem all but wrenched from their sockets, while the hands strain upward like claws frozen in rigor mortis. Under the fearsome diadem of brambles, the head slumps, with eyes closed and the mouth twisted in agony. Supporting the lacerated body are the feet, crushed together by a heavy spike. As the ghostly pale Virgin Mary swoons in the arms of Saint John, Mary Magdalene falls to the ground wringing her hands in grief, while John the Baptist points to the martyred Christ with a stabbing gesture, as if to reenact the violence wreaked upon him. Here the unity of the human and the divine has been sought not in harmonious perfection of outward form, such as that realized by Raphael, but rather in an appalling image of spiritual and physical suffering. Placed upon the high altar of a hospital chapel in the monastery of Saint Anthony at Isenheim in Alsace, Grünewald's *Crucifixion* was part of an elaborate polyptych designed to offer example and solace to the sick and the dying. With its contorted forms, dissonant colors, passionate content, and spiritual purpose, the *Isenheim Altarpiece* stands near the apex of a long tradition that later resurfaced in the Expressionist art of twentieth-century Europe and even more explicitly in the art of the contemporary American painter Jasper Johns (see fig. 21.14).

In the seventeenth century, along with the religious Counter-Reformation, came an aesthetic reform designed to cleanse art of Mannerism's excesses and reinvigorate it with something of the broad, dramatically communicative naturalism realized in the High Renaissance. It began with one of the most revolutionary and influential painters in all of history, the Italian Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio (1572–1610). Singlehandedly, and while still in his twenties, Caravaggio introduced a blunt, warts-and-all kind of naturalism that sought to make the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith seem present and palpable (fig. 1.8). Once enhanced by the artist's sense of authentic gesture and his bold light-dark contrasts, full-bodied illusionistic painting assumed an optical and emotive power never before seen in European art. Its impact was felt with stunning force among countless Italian followers, in the Spain of Diego Velázquez, the Netherlands of Rembrandt van Rijn, and the France of Georges de la Tour.

The innovations of Caravaggio ushered in the age of the Baroque, which gave rise during the eighteenth century to such decorative artists as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

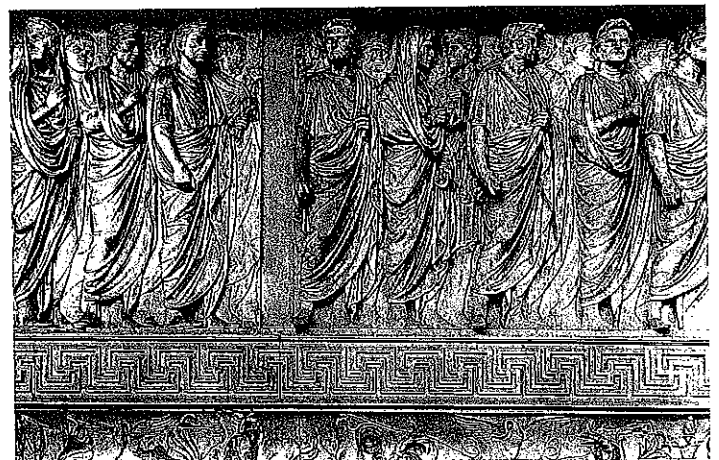


1.8 Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ*, 1602–4. Oil on canvas, 9'10¼" × 6'8" (3 × 2 m). Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome.

(1696–1770), in whose hands perspective painting became an expressive instrument to be merged with architecture and sculpture in the creation of gigantic symphonies of space, a dynamic world of illusion alive with sweeping, rhythmic movement. Tiepolo resorted to every *trompe l'oeil* trick of perspective and foreshortening learned in two centuries of experimentation in order to create the illusion of seemingly infinite space. Only with the advent of Neoclassicism at the end of the eighteenth century was there a halt in representing the expansion of space—and indeed, a desire to limit it severely.

## Making Sense of a Turbulent World: Neoclassicism and Romanticism

Neoclassicism, which dominated the arts in Europe and America in the second half of the eighteenth century, has at times been called an eclectic and derivative style that perpetuated the classicism of Renaissance and Baroque art, a classicism that might otherwise have expired. Yet in Neoclassical art a fundamental Renaissance visual tradition was seriously opposed for the first time—the use of perspective recession to govern the organization of pictorial space. Indeed, it may be argued that David's work was crucial in shaping the attitudes that led, ultimately, to twentieth-century abstract art. David and his followers did not actually abandon the tradition of a pictorial structure based on linear and atmospheric perspective. They were fully wedded to the idea that a painting was an adaptation of classical relief sculpture (fig. 1.9): they subordinated atmospheric effects; emphasized linear contours; arranged their figures as a frieze across the picture plane and accentuated that plane by closing off pictorial depth through the use of such devices as a solid wall, a back area of neutral color, or an impenetrable shadow. The result, as seen in *The Oath of the Horatii*, is an effect of figures composed along a narrow stage behind a proscenium, figures that exist in space more by the illusion of sculptural modeling than by their location within a pictorial space that has been



1.9 Detail of the *Ara Pacis*, scene of an imperial procession, 13–9 B.C.E., marble frieze. Rome.

constructed according to the principles of linear and atmospheric perspective (see fig. 1.2).

David's followers in the first half of the nineteenth century were increasingly concerned with placing an emphasis on an art of ideal subject matter. Both Neoclassicism and Romanticism (see below) could be seen as flights from the immediate world to a reality evoked from impressions of the Orient, Africa, or the South Seas; or to a fictional world derived from the art and literature of classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. The differences between the two approaches lay partly in the particular subjects selected, the Neoclassicists obviously leaning to antiquity and the Romantics to the Middle Ages or what they considered exotic, the East. Even this distinction was blurred as the century wore on, since Ingres (see below), the classicist, made rather a speciality of Oriental odalisques, and Eugène Delacroix, the Romantic, at various times turned to Greek mythology.

The clearest formal distinction between Neoclassical and Romantic painting in the nineteenth century may be seen in the approaches to plastic form and techniques of applying paint. The Neoclassicists continued the Renaissance tradition of glaze painting to attain a uniform surface unmarred by the evidence of active brushwork, whereas the Romantics revived the textured surface of Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt, and the rococo period. Neoclassicism in painting established the principle of balanced frontality to a degree that transcended even the High Renaissance or the classical Baroque of Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) (fig. 1.10). Romantic painters relied on diagonal recession in depth and indefinite atmospheric-coloristic effects more appropriate to the expression

of the inner imagination than the clear light of reason. During the Romantic era there developed an increasingly high regard for artists' sketches, which were thought to capture the individual touch of the artist, thereby communicating authentic emotion. Such attitudes were later crucial for much abstract painting in America and France following World War II (see chapters 19 and 20).

### Figure Painting

In analyzing classical, Romantic, and Realist painting in the first part of the nineteenth century, a number of factors other than attitudes toward technique or spatial organization must be kept in mind. The Neoclassicism of David and his followers involved moralistic subject matter related to the philosophic ideals of the French Revolution and based on the presumed stoic and republican virtues of early Rome. Yet painters were hampered in their pursuits of a truly classical art by the lack of adequate prototypes in ancient painting. There was, however, a profusion of ancient sculpture. Thus, it is not surprising that Neoclassical paintings such as *The Oath of the Horatii* (see fig. 1.2) should emulate sculptured figures in high relief within a restricted stage, as in the ancient Roman *Arx Pacis* (Altar of Peace) (see fig. 1.9), which David saw in Rome, where he painted *The Oath*. The "moralizing" attitudes of his figures make the stage analogy particularly apt, for David's radically distilled composition results from his attitude toward the subject—a deliberate attempt to replace the elaborate art of the eighteenth-century royal court with republican simplicity and austerity. Though commissioned for Louis XVI, whom David, as a Deputy, later voted to send to the guillotine, this rigorous composition of

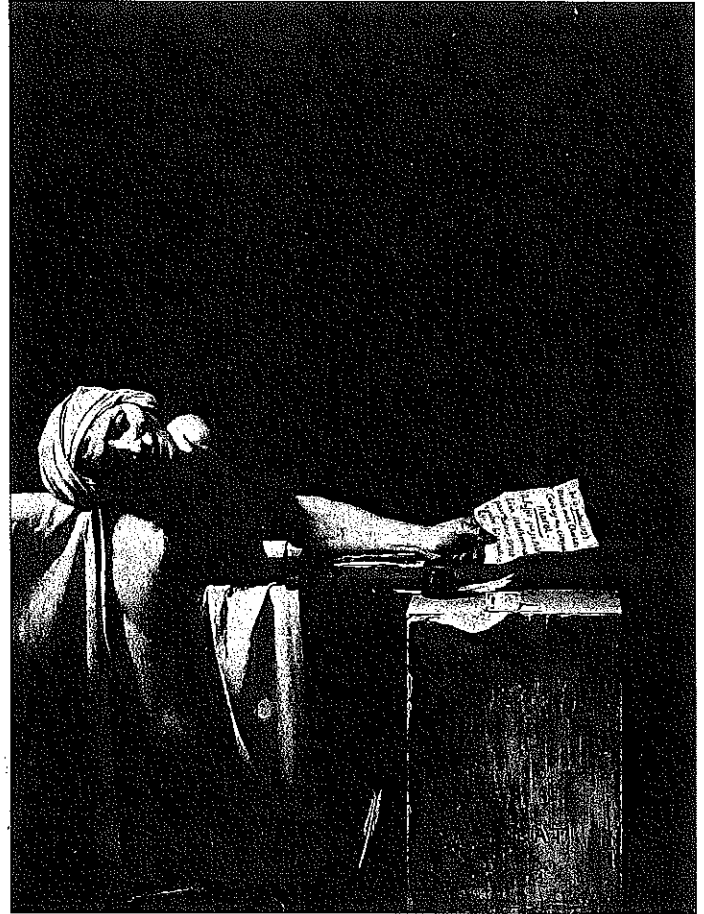


1.10 Nicolas Poussin, *Mars and Venus*, c. 1630. Oil on canvas, 5'1" × 7' (1.55 × 2.1 m). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

brothers heroically swearing allegiance to Rome came to be seen as a manifesto of revolutionary sentiment.

One of David's greatest paintings, *The Death of Marat* (fig. 1.11), contains all the elements referred to—spatial compression, sculptural figuration, highly dramatized subject. But it also reminds us of David's power of realistic presentation, a power brought to bear not on a scene from classical antiquity but, significantly, on a contemporary event. Murdered by a counterrevolutionary in his bath (where he sought relief from a painful skin disease), the revolutionist Marat becomes in David's hands a secular martyr, and a means to highly effective political propaganda. By virtue of its convincing verisimilitude, this painting forms a link between the French portraitists of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth-century Realist tradition of Courbet and his followers.

Like David, the American painter **Benjamin West** (1738–1820) turned to the *Ara Pacis* when composing his scene from antiquity (fig. 1.12). West and his contemporary John Singleton Copley, a portraitist best known for his painting *Paul Revere*, were the first artists from colonial America to achieve international distinction. Pennsylvanian by birth, West studied in Rome and settled permanently in London, where he was a founding member and eventually president of the Royal Academy, and painter to King George III, a unique distinction for an American artist. West's art was securely rooted in a European tradition that elevated history painting, depictions in the grand manner of historical or religious subjects, above all other genres. He translated his Roman sketches of the *Ara Pacis* into a sober funerary procession, the quintessence of classical dignity and repose.



1.11 Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793. Oil on canvas, 63 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (161.9 × 127.9 cm). Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.



1.12 Benjamin West, *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus*, 1768. Oil on canvas, 5'4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 7'10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (1.64 × 2.4 m). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.

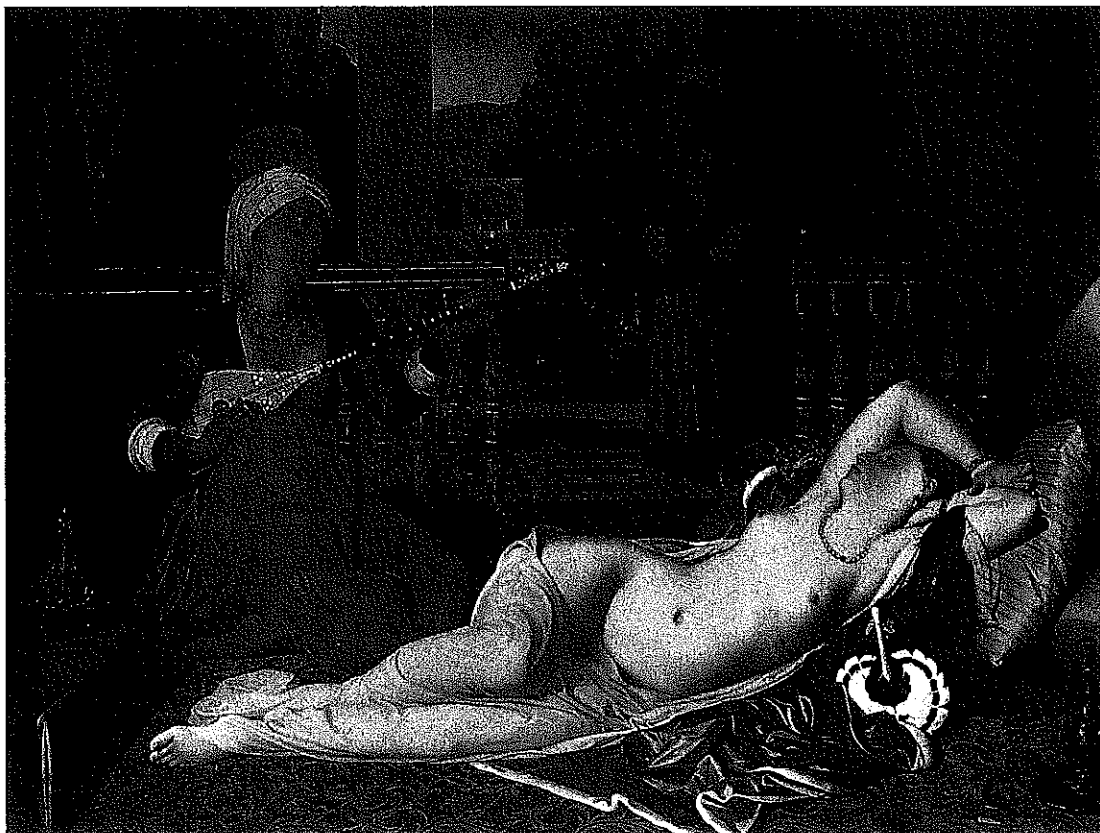
Another classicist of paramount importance to the development of modern painting was **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867), a pupil of David who during his long life remained the exponent and defender of the Davidian classical tradition. Ingres's style was essentially formed by 1800 and cannot be said to have changed radically in works painted at the end of his life. Although he was a vociferous opponent of most of the new doctrines of Romanticism and Realism, he did introduce certain factors that affected the younger artists who opposed in spirit everything he stood for. Ingres represented to an even greater degree than did David the influence of Renaissance classicism, particularly that of Raphael. Although David was a superb colorist, he tended to subordinate his color to the classical ideal except when he was carried away by the pageantry of the Napoleonic style. Ingres, on the contrary, used a palette both brilliant and delicate, combining classical clarity with Romantic sensuousness, often in liberated, even atonal harmonies of startling boldness (fig. 1.13).

The sovereign quality that Ingres brought to the classical tradition was that of drawing, and it was his drawing, his expression of line as an abstract entity—coiling and uncoiling in self-perpetuating complications that seem as much autonomous as descriptive—which provided the link between his art and that of Edgar Degas and Picasso.

One of the major figures of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art, who had a demonstrable influence on what

occurred subsequently, was the Spaniard **Francisco de Goya** (1746–1828). In a long career Goya carried his art through many stages, from penetrating portraits of the Spanish royal family to a particular concern in his middle and late periods with the human propensity for barbarity. The artist expressed this bleak vision in monstrous, even fantastic images that were the result of penetrating observation. His brilliant cycle of prints, *The Disasters of War* (fig. 1.14), depicts the devastating results of Spain's popular uprisings against Napoléon's armies during the Peninsular War. In one of the most searing indictments of war in the history of art, Goya described atrocities committed on both sides of the conflict with reportorial vividness and personal outrage. While sympathetic to the modern ideas espoused by the great thinkers of the Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, Goya was deeply cynical about the irrational side of human nature and its capacity for the most grotesque cruelty. Because of their inflammatory and ambivalent message, his etchings were not published until 1863, well after his death. During his lifetime Goya was not very well known outside Spain, despite the final years he spent in voluntary exile in the French city of Bordeaux, but once his work had been rediscovered by Édouard Manet in the mid-nineteenth century it made a strong impact on the mainstream of modern painting.

Among Goya's late works is a stunning and eerie self-portrait that, as vehicle for the investigation of a personal



**1.13** Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with Slave*, 1842. Oil on canvas, 30 × 41½" (76.2 × 105.4 cm). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.





**1.14** Francisco de Goya, Plate 30 from *The Disasters of War*, 1810–11. Etching, 1863 edition, image 5 × 6½" (12.8 × 15.5 cm). Hispanic Society of America, New York.

psyche, rather than a means to create a heroic message for public consumption, anticipates countless images of modern alienation in twentieth-century art.

The French Romantic movement really came into its own with **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863)—through his exploration of exotic themes, his accent on violent movement and intense emotion, and, above all, through

his reassertion of Baroque color and emancipated brushwork (fig. 1.15). The intensive study that Delacroix made of the nature and capabilities of full color derived not only from the Baroque but also from his contact with English color painters such as John Constable, Richard Bonington, and Joseph Mallord William Turner (see below). His greatest originality, however, may lie less in the freedom and breadth of his touch than in the way he juxtaposed colors in blocks of mutually intensifying complementaries, such as vermilion and blue-green or violet and gold, arranged in large sonorous chords or, sometimes, in small, independent, "divided" strokes. These techniques and their effects had a profound influence on the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, particularly Vincent van Gogh (who made several copies after Delacroix) and Paul Cézanne.

### Landscape Painting

Although the main lines of twentieth-century painting are traditionally traced to French Neoclassical, Romantic, and Realist art, Romanticism found its most characteristic manifestation in Germany rather than in France. Indeed, there were critical contemporary developments in Germany, England, Scandinavia, and the Low Countries throughout much of the nineteenth century. One may, in fact, trace an almost unbroken Romantic tradition in Germany and Scandinavia—a legacy that extends



**1.15** Eugène Delacroix, *The Lion Hunt*, 1861. Oil on canvas, 30½ × 38¾" (76.5 × 98.4 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.

from the late eighteenth century through the entire nineteenth century to Edvard Munch, the Norwegian forerunner of Expressionism, and the later German artists who admired him.

A number of Romantic painters were active in these countries at the beginning of the nineteenth century: the Germans Caspar David Friedrich and Philipp Otto Runge, the Danish-German Asmus Jacob Carstens, and two Englishmen, William Blake and Joseph Mallord William Turner. These artists developed very individualized styles but based their common visionary expression on the vastness and mystery of nature rather than on the religious sources traditional to much art from the Medieval through the Baroque periods. Comparable attitudes are manifest in the work of European and American landscapists, from Constable or Thomas Cole to the early landscapes of Piet Mondrian. Implicit in this Romantic vision is a sense that the natural world can communicate spiritual and cultural values, at times formally-religious, at times broadly pantheistic.

With Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), the leading German painter of Romantic landscape, the image of nature was by definition a statement of the sublime, of the infinite and the immeasurable. His landscapes are filled with mysterious light and vast distances, and human beings, when they appear, occupy a subordinate or largely contemplative place (fig. 1.16). In his ghostly procession of monks into the ruined apse of a Gothic church, Friedrich clearly draws formal parallels between the towering forms of the apse and the framing “architecture” of nature.

Although landscape painting in France during the early nineteenth century was a relatively minor genre, by midcentury certain close connections with the English landscapists of the period began to have crucial effects. The painter Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–28), known chiefly for his watercolors, lived most of his brief life in France, where, for a short time, he shared a studio with his friend Delacroix. Bonington’s direct studies from nature exerted considerable influence on several artists of the Romantic school, including Delacroix, as well as Camille Corot and his fellow Barbizon painters (see below). Although he painted cityscapes as well as genre and historical subjects, it was the spectacular effects of Bonington’s luminous marine landscapes that directly affected artists like Johan Barthold Jongkind and Eugène Boudin, both important precursors of Impressionism (see fig. 2.26). Indeed, many of the English landscapists visited France frequently and exhibited in the Paris Salons, while Delacroix spent time in England and learned from the direct nature studies of the English artists. Foremost among these were John Constable (1776–1837) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851). Constable spent a lifetime recording in paint those locales in the English countryside with which he was intimately familiar (fig. 1.17). Though his paintings and the sketches he made from nature were the product of intensely felt emotion, Constable never favored the dramatic historical landscapes, with their sublime vision of nature, for which Turner was justifiably famous in his own day. Ambitious, prolific, and equipped



1.16 Caspar David Friedrich, *Cloister Graveyard in the Snow*, 1819. Oil on canvas, 48 × 67" (121.9 × 170.2 cm). Formerly Nationalgalerie, Berlin (destroyed in World War II).



**1.17** John Constable, *The Hay Wain*, 1819–21. Oil on canvas, 51¼" × 6'1" (130.2 cm × 1.9 m). The National Gallery, London.



**1.18** Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, 1834–35. Oil on canvas, 36½" × 48½" (92.7 × 123.2 cm). The Cleveland Museum of Art.

with virtuoso technical skills, Turner was determined to make landscapes in the grand tradition of Claude Lorrain and Poussin. His first trip to Italy in 1819 was an experience with profound consequences for his art. In his watercolors and oils Turner explored his fascination with the forces of nature, often destructive ones, and the ever-changing conditions of light and atmosphere in the landscape. His dazzling light effects could include the delicate reflections of twilight on the Venetian canals or a dramatic view across the Thames of the Houses of Parliament in flames (fig. 1.18). Turner's painterly style could sometimes verge on the abstract, and his paintings are especially relevant to developments in twentieth-century art.

The principal French movement in Romantic landscape is known as the Barbizon School, a loose group named for a village in the heart of the forest of Fontainebleau, south-east of Paris. The painters who went there to work drew

more directly on the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape tradition than on that of England. In this, the emphasis continued to be on unified, tonal painting rather than on free and direct color. It was the interior of the forest of Fontainebleau, rather than the brilliant sunlight of the seashore, that appealed to them. This in itself could be considered a Romantic interpretation of nature, as the expression of intangibles through effects of atmosphere. The Romantic landscape of the Barbizon School merged into a kind of Romantic Realism in the paintings of Jean-François Millet (1814–75), who paralleled Courbet in his passion for the subject of peasants at work but whose interpretation, with primary emphasis on the simplicity and nobility of agrarian experience, was entirely different in manner (fig. 1.19). As if to redeem the grinding poverty of unpropertied farm life, he shaped his field laborers with the monumentality of Michelangelo and integrated them into



**1.19** Jean-François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 33 × 44" (83.8 × 111.8 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

landscape compositions of Poussinesque grandeur and calm. Because of this reverence for peasant subjects Millet exerted great influence on Van Gogh (see chapter 3).

Another painter who worked outdoors in the Fontainebleau forest was **Rosa Bonheur** (1822–99), who is best known for her skillful and sympathetic depictions of animals in the landscape. To prepare her most celebrated picture, *The Horse Fair* (fig. 1.20), she visited the horse market dressed as a man (for her skirts would have been a "great hindrance") and studied the animals' anatomy and movement. As was often the case with popular works of art in the nineteenth century, this painting was reproduced as a lithograph and circulated widely in Europe and the United States.

An influential French landscapist of the nineteenth century before Impressionism was **Camille Corot** (1796–1875). Only peripherally associated with the Barbizon School's, Corot's work cannot easily be categorized. His studies of Roman scenes have a classical purity of organization comparable to that of Poussin and a clarity of light and color similar to that of the English watercolorists. Like his English contemporaries, Corot spent a good deal of his time drawing and painting directly from nature. Beginning in 1825, he spent three years in Italy making open-air studies that in their delicate tonalities capture the special character of southern light. One of his best-known works from this Italian sojourn, *Island and Bridge of San Bartolomeo* (fig. 1.21), possesses a classical balance and clarity while demonstrating Corot's striking approach to form. His structures are tightly interlocking horizontals and verticals, all harmoniously defined within a narrow range of ochers and browns. The strong sense of architectural geometry, of contrasting masses and planes, emerges not by way of conventional modeling, but through a regard for form as a series of nearly abstract volumes. These small landscapes exerted a great influence on the development of the Impressionism and Post-Impressionism of Claude Monet and Cézanne. From the landscapes of his Roman period, Corot turned to a more Romantic mode in delicate woodland scenes in tones of silvery gray, Arcadian landscapes sometimes populated by diminutive figures of nymphs and satyrs (see fig. 2.25). His late portraits and figure studies, on the contrary, are solidly realized and beautifully composed, works that are closely related to the studio scenes and figures of Post-Impressionist, Fauve, and Cubist tradition.



**1.20** Rosa Bonheur, *The Horse Fair*, 1853; retouched 1855. Oil on canvas, 8' 1/4" × 16' 7" (2.4 × 5.1 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



1.21 Camille Corot, *Island and Bridge of San Bartolomeo*, 1826–28. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 10% × 16%<sup>8</sup> (27 × 16.9 cm). Private collection.

## Academic Art and the Salon

Since a large part of this book is concerned with revolts by experimental artists against the academic system, a brief summary of the official academy of art, particularly as it existed in mid-nineteenth-century France, is in order.

The term “academy,” in the sense of a school of arts, letters, philosophy, or science, may be traced back to Plato and Athens in the fourth century B.C.E. It was revived in the later fifteenth century C.E. with the renewal of interest in Platonism in Italy. During the Middle Ages and much of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, guilds were organized chiefly to protect artists’ rights as craftspeople rather than as creative artists. The origin of the modern academy of art is associated with Leonardo da Vinci at the end of the fifteenth century, after which the idea gained strength in Italy during the sixteenth century as painters and sculptors sought to elevate their position from the practical to the liberal arts. The academy in its modern sense really began in the seventeenth century, when academies of arts and letters and of science were established in many countries of Europe. They aimed to promote a rational, logical approach to these fields of human endeavor. In the case of the arts, they helped to bring about a new understanding of the term “art,” which had previously been used to mean technical skill or accomplishment, but which gradually acquired “higher” associations of intellectual seriousness.

19<sup>th</sup> × 18<sup>th</sup>

The academies that were established throughout Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought both to regulate and advance the professional practice of art, and to act as training institutions for young artists. Academic practice and theory were based on the study of officially approved models (students were required to spend many hours copying plaster casts of classical sculpture) and the belief that art was governed by rules akin to the laws of nature or grammatical structures. These precepts were challenged by the Romantic notion of individual genius, which cast the true artist as a rebel who necessarily rejected rules and conventions. In reality, the divide was sometimes less clear-cut than this: for example, Turner, the British artist who revolutionized landscape painting and was acknowledged as an important influence by many later avant-garde artists, remained a passionately loyal member of London’s Royal Academy.

The French Académie des Beaux-Arts (Academy of Fine Arts) was founded in 1648 and, in one form or another, dominated the production of French art until the 1880s. An artist’s survival could depend on his or her acceptance in the annual Salons, large public exhibitions that were open only to Academy members and held for many years in the Louvre. In 1791, during the French Revolution, the jury that judged the Salon entries was disbanded and the exhibition was opened to all artists. The results proved so disastrous that the jury was reinstated. Similar exhibitions

were staged in London by the Royal Academy, founded in 1768. In the eighteenth century it is difficult to find a painter or sculptor who is well recognized today who was not an academician and did not exhibit in the Salons, though revisionist histories of the period have carefully searched out the developments that took place outside this mainstream.

Until 1790, membership to women in the French Academy was limited to four at any given time. In fact, two of David's contemporaries, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, served there with distinction, virtually dominating the genre of portraiture in the years before the Revolution. It was thanks to the efforts of Labille-Guiard that after the Revolution the Academy ceased to impose limits on female enrollment, and by 1835 the number of women exhibiting at the Salon exceeded twenty percent. Women, however, were not admitted to the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts until the late nineteenth century, nor were they allowed to compete for the most coveted of academic honors, the Prix de Rome, an award that funded the winner's classical education in Rome.

During the nineteenth century, the Salons occupied an even more influential place. In contrast to previous centuries, they now became vast public affairs in which thousands of paintings were hung and thousands rejected, for the revolutionary attempt to "democratize" the academic Salon resulted in a very eclectic mélange that contrasted sharply with the relatively small invitational exhibitions of the eighteenth century. Although the new Salons were selected by juries, presumably competent and occasionally distinguished, they reflected the tastes of the new middle-class buyers of art, which differed markedly from those

of the aristocratic or ecclesiastical patrons of art of earlier centuries. At the same time, the authority of the academic tradition persisted, and the reputation, and even the livelihood, of artists continued to be dependent upon acceptance in these official exhibitions.

Typical Salon paintings ranged from pseudoclassical compositions, whose scale tended to attention-gaining vastness, to the nearly photographic history paintings of Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier. Among the many other genres on which the largely second- and third-rate artists of the Salon depended, particularly popular were works of extreme sentimentality combined with extreme realism and superficially classical-erotic compositions like those by William-Adolphe Bouguereau.

Although the revolution of modern art was in large degree the revolt against this cumbersome academic Salon system, it must be remembered that the leading artists of the nineteenth century participated gladly in the Salons—indeed, they could rarely afford not to. The famous Salon of 1855 devoted a room each to Delacroix and Ingres, and both were awarded grand medals of honor. Courbet may have built a separate pavilion to show *The Painter's Studio* (see fig. 1.1), which had been rejected, but he also showed other works in the official Salon. Not only did many of the Romantics, Realists, and Impressionists whom we now regard as pioneers of modern art exhibit regularly or occasionally in the Salon, but there were certainly a number of "Salon painters" of distinction, among them Henri Fantin-Latour and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (see fig. 3.13). It is also true that Édouard Manet, Odilon Redon, and Edgar Degas, and many other artists highly regarded today for their stylistic innovations, were, to one degree or another, successful Salon painters.