

REVOLUTION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In the eighteenth century, growing dissatisfaction with the political system in Great Britain, France, and Colonial America led to sweeping changes. In Britain the king's prerogatives gradually came to be exercised by a cabinet responsible to Parliament, while in North America thirteen of Britain's colonies successfully revolted against George III. The monarchy in France was also overthrown in armed revolution. As political power was shifting from the Crown and the nobility, the Industrial Revolution was bringing a new prosperity to the middle classes.

Despite the republican fervor of the French Revolution, which began in 1789, the revolutionary government did not endure. After a series of political upheavals, General Napoleon Bonaparte established himself first as dictator (First Consul) in 1799, then in 1804 as Emperor Napoleon I. Napoleon's subsequent military conquests redrew the map of Europe and radically altered its political life.

These enormous changes reflected an attitude, which developed during the eighteenth century that valued scientific inquiry both into the natural world and into human life and society. Reason became the touchstone for evaluating nearly every civilized endeavor, including philosophy, art, and politics. By extension, nature, which was thought to embody reason, was also evoked to corroborate the correctness—and goodness—of everything from political systems to architectural designs. It was generally believed that people are inherently reasonable and that if given an opportunity and if their ignorance were dispelled they would choose what is reasonable and good. These beliefs led cultural historians to call the eighteenth century the Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason.

Two of the most influential theorists of the Enlightenment were the French philosopher and critic Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Diderot published criticism of the Royal Academy's biennial Salon exhibitions in the popular press, decrying what he considered the empty pomposity of the Baroque period and the frivolity of the Rococo style, calling instead for an edifying art that would glorify virtue. To forge this new artistic expression, artists sought models in classical antiquity, the Renaissance, and even the Baroque period. Raphael and Poussin were held in high esteem, but by far the most influential artist was Michelangelo, Michelangelo's art was heroic, serious, and certainly edifying, and it reflected unparalleled virtuosity. Many late-eighteenth-century artists felt the need to come to terms with his example, often by deliberate imitation.

Another manifestation of the eighteenth-century spirit of inquiry that profoundly affected both art and literature was the development of **historicism**, or the consciousness of history. Literate people increasingly valued accurate descriptions of historical events, which resulted in greater accuracy in the depiction of not only classical subjects but also Gothic, Romanesque, and various Asian styles.

Around 1750 Rococo tendencies in art and architecture, responding to the general longing for a noble and serious mode of expression, gave way to a restrained and formal style of representation referred to as the **Grand Manner**. This term encompassed not only the new style but also the more restrained modes of seventeenth-century classicism, the monumental stillness of Greek sculpture, and the dignified gravity of Roman painting. Thus, the Grand Manner was not a radical change but essentially a shift toward greater reserve and formality. It was an important change, however, for it signaled a movement toward true Neoclassicism.

The theoretical basis for the specifically classical style called Neoclassicism emerged in Rome in the 1760s. It was stimulated in part by new discoveries in excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum, Roman cities buried by the first-century eruption of Mount Vesuvius. The leaders of the Neoclassic movement were German and British expatriates, primarily the German archeologist and art critic Johann Winckelmann (1717-1768), the German painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), and the Scottish artist and archeologist Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798). Winckelmann was the movement's main propagandist, and although he never visited Greece himself, his ideas influenced nearly every artist who worked in Rome during the 1750s and 1760s, whether Italian or foreign. Winckelmann was the first antiquarian, or scholar of antiquities, to distinguish between Greek and Roman styles of architecture and sculpture, and he considered the Greek superior. As a result, artists in Rome began to emulate Classical models more closely, particularly those thought to be Greek. The Neoclassicism that developed in Rome was characterized by Classical subject matter, formal dependence

on antique sources, heroic nudity in sculpture, and the use of pure line in painting and drawing. These qualities were generally accompanied by an underlying moralism that exalted the virtues associated by the moderns with Republican Rome: moral incorruptibility, patriotism, and courage.

In the late eighteenth century the French artist Jacques-Louis David developed a distinctive Neoclassical painting style by bringing together his study of Classical sculpture in Rome and of academic realism at the Royal Academy, one of a number of academies—official societies of learned persons founded to advance the arts—established in Europe during this period. The first public showing of this work, in 1781, was enthusiastically received, and Diderot declared the young man a genius.

Despite the dominance of classicism in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much art of that period was imaginative and "irrational"—a strain of expression called Romanticism because many of its themes were taken from medieval "romances"—novellas, stories, and poems in Romance (Latin-derived) languages. Thus, the term *Romantic* suggests something fantastic or novelistic, perhaps set in a remote time or place, and a spirit of poetic fancy or even melancholy. Many paintings and sculpture combined elements of Neoclassicism and Romanticism. Indeed, because Neoclassical and Romantic art are both characterized by "remoteness in time or place," it can even be argued that the overriding impulse in European and American art from roughly 1725 to 1875 was Romanticism and that Neoclassicism was simply one of its sub-categories. In fact, Neoclassicism itself embodies many contradictions, and some Neoclassic art exhibits such clearly "Romantic" qualities as eroticism, violence, and expressive formal distortions. Many artists also moved from one style to another, perhaps painting in a very Baroque vein for one work, then in a Neoclassic manner for another.

ACADEMY EXHIBITIONS During the seventeenth century the French government founded a number of royal academies for the support and instruction of students in literature, painting and sculpture, music, dance, and architecture. In 1667 the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture began to mount occasional exhibitions of the members' recent work. These exhibitions came to be known as Paris Salons because they were held in the Salon d' Apollon ("Salon of Apollo") in the Palais du Louvre. After a reorganization of the Royal Academy in 1737 the Salons were held every other year, with a jury of members selecting the works that would be shown. As the only public art exhibitions of any importance in Paris, the Salons were enormously influential in establishing officially approved styles and in molding public taste, and they helped consolidate the Royal Academy's dictatorial control over the production of fine art.

In England the Royal Academy of Arts was quite different. Although chartered by King George III in 1768, it was a private institution independent of any interference from the Crown. It had only two functions, to operate an art school and to hold two annual exhibitions, one of art of the past and another of contemporary art, which was open to any exhibitor on the basis of merit alone. The Royal Academy continues to function in this way to the present day.

In France the Revolution of 1789 brought a number of changes to the Royal Academy. In 1791 the jury system was abolished as a relic of the monarchy, and the Salon was democratically opened to all artists. In 1793 all of the royal academies were disbanded and in 1795 reconstituted as the newly founded Institut de France, which was to administer the art school—the Ecole des Beaux-Arts—and sponsor the Salon exhibitions. The number of would-be exhibitors was soon so large that it became necessary to reintroduce some screening procedure, and so the jury system was revived.

In 1816, with the return of the monarchy after the defeat of Napoleon I at Waterloo, the division of the Institut dedicated to painting and sculpture was renamed the Academie des Beaux-Arts, and the old Academy was in effect restored. During the following years, this new Academy exerted enormous influence over artistic matters, just as the old one had in the past. As time went on, increasing numbers of artists began to protest its control of the Salons. In response to the growing dissatisfaction, Emperor Napoleon III established the Salon des Refuses ("Salon of the Rejected Ones") in 1863 to exhibit work that had not been accepted by the Academy's jury. The opening of an officially sanctioned alternate exhibition greatly changed the artistic climate of Paris, encouraging increasing number of independent exhibitions and, ultimately, breaking the absolute dominance of the Academy.

The Romance of Science. Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-1797) from about 1765 had experimented with such nocturnal light effects as moonlight and candlelight, and he painted several carefully observed views of Mount Vesuvius erupting at night. One of his best candlelight scenes is *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery* (fig. 26-20), which shows a group of enthralled observers of a mechanical model of the solar system, with a lamp to represent the sun. Wright was Romantically fascinated with science and industry, and he depicted scientific experiments and factory scenes with a brilliant **tenebrism** (use of shadow) reminiscent of the work of Georges de La Tour. Wright's paintings are a remarkable combination of Baroque style and contemporary subject matter.



26-20. Joseph Wright. *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery*. 1766. Oil on canvas, 4'10" x 6'8". Derby Museum and Art Gallery, Derby, England

Innovations in construction technology and materials such as iron enabled architects and engineers to build new kinds of structures whose designs both contributed to and reflected the Romantic fascination with science during this period.

History Painting. European academies had long considered history painting, with subjects drawn from classical literature, the Bible, and mythology, as the highest form of artistic endeavor, but British patrons were reluctant to purchase such works from native artists. Instead, they favored Italian paintings bought on the grand tour or acquired through agents in Italy. Thus, the arrival in London in 1766 of the Italian-trained Swiss history painter Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) was a great impetus to those artists in London aspiring to success as history painters. She was welcomed immediately into Joshua Reynolds's inner circle. In 1768 Kauffmann was one of two women artists named among the founding members of the Royal Academy (see "Women and the Academies in the Eighteenth Century," below); the other, Mary Moser (1744-1819), was also of Swiss heritage.



26-21. Angelica Kauffman. *Zeuxis Selecting Models for His Picture of Helen of Troy*. c. 1765. Oil on canvas, 32 1/8 x 44 1/8". The Annmary Brown Memorial, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Kauffmann had assisted her father on church murals and was already accepting portrait commissions at age fifteen. Then, in a highly unusual move, she embarked on an independent career as a history painter. She first encountered the new classicism in Rome, in the circle of Johann Winckelmann, whose portrait she painted in 1763, and where she was elected to the Academy of Saint Luke. Kauffmann's style of painting figures was not derived from Renaissance models but was based loosely on the figure types found in Roman wall paintings in the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Her lyrical classicism is typified by *Zeuxis Selecting Models for His Picture of Helen of Troy* (fig. 26-21) of about 1765, which illustrates a paradigm of classical idealization: the Greek painter Zeuxis seeks the most beautiful features of many women in order to paint a perfect image

of Helen of Troy. The woman picking up a brush at the right is thought to be Kauffmann's self-portrait. In England Kauffmann married the painter Antonio Zucchi, who was working for Robert Adam, and she, too, provided paintings for Adam's projects and decorated ceramics and furniture in the Neoclassical style.

WOMEN AND THE ACADEMIES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY Although several women were made members of the European academies of art before the eighteenth century, their inclusion amounted to little more than honorary recognition of their achievements. In France, Louis XIV had proclaimed in the founding address of the Royal Academy that its intention was to reward all worthy artists, "without regard to the difference of sex," but this resolve was not put into practice. Only seven women were awarded the title of academicien between 1648 and 1706, the year the Royal Academy declared itself closed to women. Nevertheless, four women had been admitted to the Academy by 1770, when the men became worried that women members would become "too numerous" and declared four women members to be the limit for any one time, noting, however, that the Academy was not obliged to maintain that number. Young women were not admitted to the Academy school or allowed to compete for Academy prizes, both of which were nearly indispensable for professional success.

Women fared even worse at London's Royal Academy. After the Swiss painters Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffmann were named as founding members in 1768, no other women were elected until 1922, and then only as associates. Johann Zoffany's 1771-1772 portrait of the London academicians shows the men grouped around a nude male model, along with the Academy's study collection of Classical statues and plaster copies. Propriety prohibited the presence of women in this setting, so Zoffany painted their portraits on the wall. In more formal portraits of the Academy, however, the two women were included.



Johann Zoffany. *Academicians of the Royal Academy*. 1771-72. Oil on canvas, 47 ½ x 59 ½ ". The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, Windsor, England.



26-22. Benjamin West. *Death of General Wolfe*. 1770. Oil on canvas, 4'11 1/2" x 7'. The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa Gift of the Duke of Westminster, 1918. While West was still working on this canvas, George III made it clear that he would not buy such a painting showing British heroes in modern dress. Joshua Reynolds, president of the Royal Academy, called on West at his studio and begged him not to continue this aberration of "taste." When the painting was exhibited at the Academy in 1770, Reynolds apologized for his error in judgment, and George III commissioned a replica from West after he learned that the original had been purchased by Lord Grovesnor. West painted four more replicas but made the largest amount of money by far in royalties from an engraving after the painting.

Angelica Kauffmann's devotion to history painting was shared by her American friend Benjamin West (1738-1820), who, after studying art in Philadelphia, traveled to Italy in 1759 and became a pupil of Anton Raphael Mengs and met Winckelmann, then settled permanently in London in 1763. West acted with generosity and encouragement toward fellow Colonial artists, and his studio became a veritable "American academy" abroad. A founder of the Royal Academy, West exhibited at its 1770 Salon his remarkable history painting *Death of General Wolfe* (fig. 26-22), West's re-creation of a recent historical event as though it were happening before the viewer's eyes shocked contemporaries but was well received. General Wolfe had been killed in 1759 in a battle with the French for control of Quebec during the Seven Years' War. West depicted Wolfe in his red uniform dying in the arms of his comrades, although contemporary accounts record that Wolfe died in a field tent with only two or three men around him. Thus, even though West's painting is powerfully naturalistic, it is not "factual," nor was it meant to be. The Grand Manner intended to convey not an anecdotal report of the battle but a larger truth about the valor of the fallen hero, the loyalty of the British soldiers, and the justice of their cause. West included a figure of a Native American to locate the action in North America and to provide an "objective" observer of Wolfe's death. The dramatic illumination increases the emotional intensity of the scene, as do the poses of Wolfe's attendants, arranged to suggest a Lamentation over the dead Christ. The rhetorical power of the work so strongly impressed the great Shakespearean actor David Garrick that he is said to have enacted an impromptu interpretation of the dying Wolfe in front of the painting at the Academy's exhibition hall. West also painted scenes of antiquity in a strong Neoclassic style, typifying an eighteenth-century tendency for artists to work in more than one manner.



At the 1766 exhibition of the London Society of Artists, the organization that preceded the Royal Academy, West had seen and admired a painting by a young American, who was in fact the most important portrait painter in the British colonies at the time, John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). After corresponding with Copley and arranging his membership in the Society of Artists, West encouraged him to travel to Italy and invited him to visit London as well. Copley arrived in England in 1774, then journeyed on to Italy. With the coming of the American Revolution, Copley's family fled to London, where the artist joined them and remained for the rest of his life.

After coming to England, Copley

abandoned his colonial portrait style (see his portrait of Paul Revere, above) for a career as a history painter. One of his most celebrated paintings was *Watson and the Shark* (fig. 26-23), painted in 1778 to commemorate Brook Watson's escape from a shark attack in the harbor of Havana, Cuba. Following the example of West, Copley staged the event with intense drama, depicting the terrifying moment when the shark was closing in for the kill. The background for the classical pyramid of figures is a distant view of Havana, with Morro Castle at the right. In what looks like an eighteenth-century version of the biblical story of Jonah and the Whale, the ferocious creature rushes on Watson, shown as an idealized nude with his hair trailing in the water. The harpooner has raised his spear, and the sailor at the center risks being thrown into the shark-infested waters in his effort to balance the weight of his mates leaning forward to rescue Watson, but their outstretched hands have not yet reached the youth. Each figure in the boat is a careful study of emotion and action.



26-23. John Singleton Copley. *Watson and the Shark*. 1778. Oil on canvas, 6' 1/2" x 7'6 1/4" National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Ferdinand Lamot Belin Fund

West and Copley belonged to a generation of Americans who sought their fortunes in Europe, where they believed they could find a more cultivated patronage than in America. The next generation of American artists who traveled abroad, however, were able to earn their livings in the United States or to work in Europe for American patrons, as improving economic conditions and political stability after the American Revolution made the arts an important part of life in the United States.