

David, Ingres and Goya: art in the service of Politics

Background Notes

Beth Taylor - 13 April 2013



Oath of the Horatii Jacques-Louis David



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Cultural background

The Enlightenment or Age of Reason, c.1740-1780

A time of great intellectual enquiry in France when philosophers and writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Voltaire (1694-1778) and Denis Diderot (1713-84) were advancing scientific and rational investigation, questioning orthodox beliefs about kingship, religion and inequalities in society. Radical views about individual liberty and self-determination were put forward, with learning seen as the key to progress. Diderot's 35 volume *Encyclopedie* (1751-80) provided a blueprint for the social and technological modernization of the nation.

Neo-classicism

The art of ancient Greece and Rome formed a common background and source of inspiration to Enlightenment thinkers and artists. The interest in antiquity was sparked by the archaeological discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii and by the writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68). In his *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) he wrote: "The sole way for us to become great ... is by the imitation of the ancients", emulating their "noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in gesture and expression". Neo-classical artists were encouraged to produce works which would demonstrate the heroism, nobility and self-sacrifice of ancient heroes and philosophers and the virtuous devotion of wives and children to family ideals, works which would touch the emotions of the spectator whilst educating them in model behaviour.

Romanticism, c.1798-1846

In the later 18th century it was increasingly realised that the strict rationalism of the Enlightenment ideal denied subjective experience. A new generation began to explore the potential of emotion and instinct, of suffering and sorrow, and emphasized

individual experience, feeling and expression. Romanticism often sprang from disillusion with the contemporary world, a view that flights of the imagination were preferable to reality. In art, colour and complexity were valued over line and simplicity.

Political, social and economic developments in France

The revolutionary period

Contributory factors:

- democratic ideas of the Enlightenment gaining acceptance
- France facing bankruptcy with lavish court expenditure adding to debt
- tensions between aristocracy and rising middle class
- poor blamed church and aristocracy for their plight

1788: disastrous harvest

May 1789: Estates General assembled at Versailles to address the imminent bankruptcy of the French monarchical state. Re-titled the National Assembly by the members of the Third Estate who declared in the Tennis Court oath that they would not disperse until France had a new written constitution.

July 1789: Fall of the Bastille. National Assembly re-titled the Constituent Assembly, became the de facto legislature. Enacted programme of revolutionary decrees including in 1789 The Declaration of the Rights of Man.

1789-1792: period of moderate reform challenged by radical intellectuals and militant agitators including the sans-culottes.

June 1791: Royal family attempted to escape leading to anti-royalist demonstrations in Paris. National Assembly transferred its powers to a Legislative Assembly.

1792: threat of foreign intervention - France declared war. Under pressure from Robespierre and the Jacobins a Legislative Assembly replaced by National Assembly which decreed the abolition of the monarchy and the creation of the Republic. King and Queen executed for crimes against the nation.

July 1793-July 1794 – the Reign of Terror. Power vested in 12 member Committee of Public Safety. Many thousands executed.

July 1794: political coup by deputies of the Convention. Robespierre and over 100 Jacobins guillotined.

1795: new constitution established the Directory of Five, a council of 500, and a council of elders.

The Napoleonic era

18 Brumaire 1799: coup d'état – upper chamber surrendered power to 3 consuls, the first of whom was Napoleon. In December Napoleon declared that the Revolution was over.

1800: occupied Milan, victories at Marengo and Hohenlinden

1801: concordat with Pope

1802: Peace of Amiens. Made First Consul for life.

1804: assumed hereditary title of Emperor

1805: French fleet destroyed off Cape Trafalgar. Austrians and Russians defeated at Ulm and Austerlitz, end of Holy Roman Empire.

1806: Prussians defeated at Jena and Auerstadt.

1807: Russians defeated at Friedland. European states under his control required to boycott British goods. Sent troops to occupy Spain and Portugal – start of the Peninsular War.

1808: Wellington defeated French at Vimeiro and forced French to evacuate Portugal. War in Spain continued until 1813 when Wellington routed them out of Spain.

1809: Austria declared war on France, defeated by Napoleon at Wagram. Napoleon divorces Josephine, marrying Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria.

1811: son born

1812: invades Russia, winning battle at Borodino. Moscow destroyed by fire forcing retreat with disastrous loss of troops.

1814: Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Nations near Leipzig. Forced to abdicate and exiled to Elba. Louis XVIII assumes throne.

1815: Escaping from Elba, Napoleon occupies with support of army. Defeated at Waterloo by combined English and Prussian forces. Abdicates and is banished to St. Helena.

1821: dies.

The Spanish context

A monarchical state, with wide social divisions between the nobility and the people, and with the influence of the Catholic Church reinforced by the Inquisition, Spain in the late 18th century offered only minority support for the Enlightenment ideals. Nevertheless some socially responsible aristocrats, the 'illustrados' took an interest in prudent enlightenment reform. Napoleon assumed that the Spanish would embrace his brand of liberation but the majority of Spaniards saw him as an oppressor. A strong sense of nationalism led to rebellion against the French in a campaign of resistance that lasted 6 years. Guerrilla warfare by armed civilians using ambush and night time attacks resulted in a ruthless reprisals by the French military authorities including execution without trial. Atrocities were committed by both sides in this conflict.

The war ended in 1814 with the expulsion of the French from Spain and the return of Fernando VII as an absolute monarch who restored the Inquisition and moved against any official thought to have collaborated with the French.

The artists

Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825)

Trained with Vien, won Prix de Rome. Studies there transformed his work to the neo-classical style. On return to Paris in 1780 made a member of the Academy. Made brilliant debut at 1781 salon, began to take on students. In 1789 he was working for both the Crown and the aristocracy. He welcomed the Revolutionary reforms and by 1792 had become a radical, producing paintings in support of extremist views. Imprisoned after the fall of Robespierre, he gradually regained his reputation as the leading neo-classical painter. Captivated by Napoleon when he met him in 1797, he became First Painter to the Emperor. Went into exile after the fall of Napoleon where he continued to paint portraits of other French political exiles and episodes from mythology. He died in Brussels in 1825.

Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835)

Pupil of David. Appointed official battle painter to Napoleon during his campaigns in Europe and Egypt. After the fall of Napoleon, he took over David's studio and the teaching of his students. He received many commissions from Louis XVIII. His later works were primarily paintings based on ancient myths. Gros committed suicide in 1835.

Jean-August-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867)

Trained initially in Toulouse and then joined David's studio. Won Prix de Rome in 1801 with a neo-classical painting. Undertook a series of portraits and was commissioned to paint portraits of Napoleon and to decorate his palace in Rome. Worked in Florence 1820-1824. Returned to Paris, achieving official success and honours. In 1834 became Director of the French School in Rome for 7 years. He produced few major works at this period. Acclaimed as the champion of traditional artistic values

when he returned to Paris in 1841, he attracted commissions from the crown and aristocracy. From 1856, his work was directed towards a private audience. He continued working into his 80s.

Francisco de Goya (1746-1828)

After studying in Saragossa, Madrid and Rome, from 1775-92 he was employed designing tapestries for the Spanish court. He also produced portraits and religious works. He was elected to the Academy of San Fernando in 1780 and became a court painter to Charles IV in 1789. He suffered serious ill health from 1792 to 1793, which left him profoundly deaf. He produced his first series of etchings in 1799, the year he was appointed as First Court Painter. He retained this appointment under Joseph Bonaparte, during the French occupation. From 1810, he worked on a further series of etchings, *The Disasters of War*. After the restoration of Ferdinand VII in 1814, he painted scenes from the uprising in Madrid against the French. Virtually retired from public life in 1815, further illness in 1819 – 20 confined him to his house. Here he produced a series of *Black Paintings*. He left Spain in 1823, finally settling in Bordeaux.



El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid - Francisco Goya