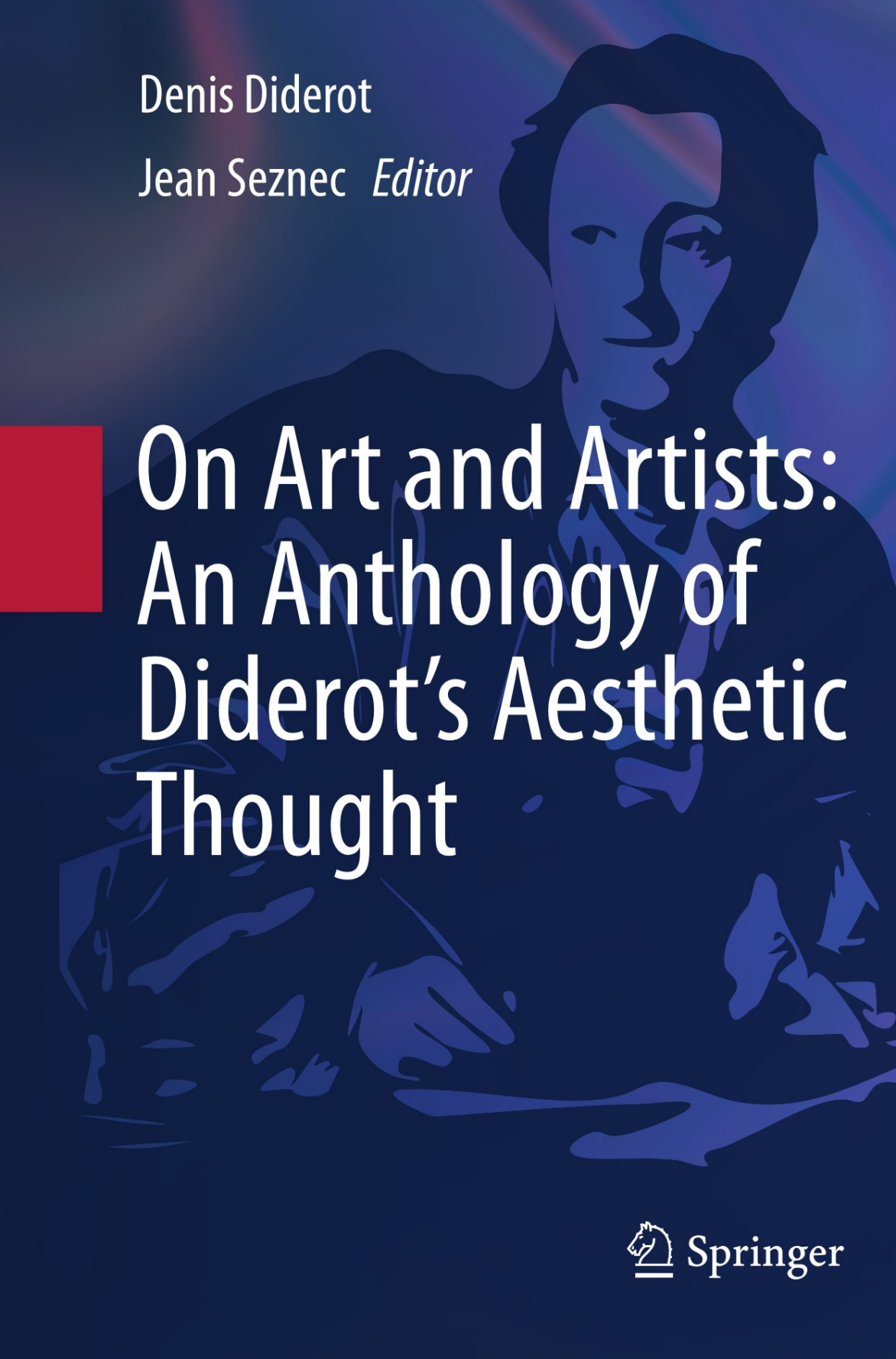

Denis Diderot

Jean Seznec *Editor*

On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought

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Introduction

The public's opinion of Diderot as an art critic has always been exaggerated. Because he led the cause for Greuze and painting standards, and that tears welled in his eyes as with the rest of his century in front of *le Paralytique* and the *Accordée de Village*, he was judged: a unrepentant writer; to him a painting was just an excuse to carry on talking.

His case is being revisited. To start with, we have passed judgement concerning the efforts of his methods which the philosopher revealed early on when he attempted to introduce himself to the problems in art. He taught himself through de Vinci, Jean Cousin, Roger de Piles, Fréart de Chambray and Le Brun. At the same time he provided for his visual education by visiting the royal and private galleries, the Luxembourg, the Palais-Royal, the connoisseur's exhibits, Gaignat, Watelet, Choiseul. However, his first esthetical writings, *Letter concerning the deaf and mute* and his *Philosophical Research on the origin and the nature of beauty (1751)* which became the article *Beauty* of the *Encyclopédie*, he still challenges the problems "at the summit" and through speculative discussions. There he contradicts Batteux; here, Hutcheson and Shaftsbury and he appear to reduce the impression of beauty to an intellectual exercise – the perception of relationships. However, in 1759, his friend Grimm entrusts him with a project that will force him to acquire "thoughtful notions concerning painting and sculpture" and to refine "art terms, so familiar in his words yet so vague in his mind".

It was a matter of providing an expository account in the *Correspondence littéraire* of the exhibits which occurred every 2 years at the Louvre and where the pieces sent from the artist members of the Royal academy appeared. These are the beginnings of the Salons where Diderot, by infusing his vitality into a genre so ineffectually, treated by Lafont de Saint Yenne, l'Abbe Leblanc, Caylus, Fréron (amongst others) and by Grimm himself and will go on to create art criticism in France.

He fulfilled this task of *salonnier* on nine occasions, with interruptions until 1781, notwithstanding certain significant dips in his enthusiasm and self-confidence. The first Salon in 1759 is but an outline; those of 1765 and 1767, which inflate proportionately as the volumes are edited with certain lightness by an author who is thoroughly possessed of his abilities. From 1771 onwards Diderot is tired and

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must mine through contemporary pamphlets or with anonymous collaborators so as to supplement the vein which is collapsing. Marginal to the *Salons,* so as to provide something in their stead or more likely as a crowning achievement, he composed two "treatises on beauty in the arts". The first, the *Essays on Painting* was completed in 1766 and is the fruit of his experience as a "professional" art critic; the second, les *Pensées détachées* sur la peinture, remains unfinished and is the outcome of his visits to the Dutch, German and Russian (1773–1774) galleries and from Hagedorn's lecture.

These treatises do not possess any systematic characteristic, but it is at this moment that he begins to worry as he says to "produce their titles" since what right does a writer have to pronounce anything on a statue or a painting? This objection had prevented him from undertaking his first *Salon*. In 1758 he wrote concerning *Cochin's Voyage to Italy* as follows:

> "I know of no work which more appropriately makes our readers more suspect when they speak about art…. They have no understanding about drawing, about lighting, about coloring, or anything thing about harmony, or about brush strokes, etc. In the blink of an eye they are prepared to praise the production of a poor nude and by failing to take note of a work of art ignore it, or to become all wrapped up in a painting, good or bad, as long as it is an ideal social event, not even notice its astonishing quality. In such a way, whether it is their criticism or their praise, the color apprentice in some workshop would laugh."

Diderot saw the danger but thought that he could confront it. It is that art is not all contained in the technique (as he says) It contains an ideal or moral element – "the subject, the passions, the characters" – for which the admirer is as good a judge and often better than the artist himself, since the verdict in this case, belongs to all men of taste. "That the artist should display any irony and raise his nose to me for involving myself in his techniques in good cause; but if he should contradict me when it is the ideal of his art, then will he be able to get his revenge." Thus the writer who becomes the art critic does not have to learn everything, "since the ideal is not learned and he who knows how to judge a poet can also judge a painter." What he is missing is knowledge of the trade, a very trying knowledge no doubt, but one nonetheless that can be acquired and that Diderot does not despair to acquire. The ways are not lacking, neither are the masters. "Do you wish to make sure progress of knowledge as difficult as in art technique? Walk through a gallery with an artist and have him explain and show you examples of technical terms; without this you will never have any else but confused ideas. That this same artist, "talented and truthful" should accompany us to the Salon:" He should allow us to see and say everything at our leisure. And then he should from time to time shove our nose into beautiful things that we might have snubbed and on the ugly that might have made us ecstatic". Thus one will acquire after categorization the ability to discern. Finally after visiting the workplaces and by watching the artist work and by listening to him, the writer will be exposed to the problems and the secrets of its ways.

Here is Diderot the apprentice, the same Diderot who runs about the factories to have the plates drawn of the *Encyclopédie* and who has had himself taught by the artisans themselves concerning their tools and processes. His apprenticeship into the "profession" of art, he did under the greatest artists who guide him through the

Salon. It is Chardin, the "tapissier" of the exhibits, that is to say the person in charge of hanging the canvases; who takes the moment to point with his finger the beautiful spots and the weak ones. It is Falconet before his departure for Russia. Diderot saw La Tour paint, he questioned Pigalle, and he visited Boucher, Cochin, Le Moyne, Vernet, and Lagrenée. To his artist friends, he not only borrowed a vocabulary, but according to his expression "even their eyes" He received "the light from these art people, amongst who many who find him valuable and who tell him the truth". He took great advantage of their lessons to the point of being able to return the favor against his masters. "If it should happen that I insult the artist, he writes in 1765, it is often with the weapon that he himself had sharpened: I asked him a question".

The Proceedings were destined, as we have seen to the *Correspondence littéraire*, from there appeared a singularly difficult situation for their author, because this bi-monthly handwritten page, was exclusively reserved for the foreign subscriptions, that is to say for a far away public which had not seen the exhibited works. It was necessary to describe each one of these works before making any commentary. However from this necessity, Diderot established his virtuosity. To illicit images, he summoned all the resources to his pen. With authority, and a majestic rapidity, he began by exposing the subject of the canvas, "establish the décor", places the people; from there, he goes on to the expressions, to the characters, to the draperies, to color, to the distribution of shadows and lights". However it was necessary to enliven this first concern and how to hide his boredom? – By constantly changing.

In order to describe a *Salon* either at my convenience or yours, he wrote to Grimm in 1763, do you know what we would need my friend? All possible types of taste, a sensitive heart that could be charmed, a soul susceptible to an infinity of enthusiastic differences, a variety of styles which answer to a variety of brushes; the ability to be substantial and voluptuous as with Deshays, simple and true like Chardin, delicate as Vien, sad like Greuze, create all possible illusions like Vernet; and tell me where is this Vertumne?

This Vertumne, this wonderful *girouette*, sensitive to all these sways – is himself; and he knows it. The work continues, he confides to Sophie Volland in 1765; it is serious and it is light; there is knowledge, pleasantries, some nastiness, some truth, I even enjoy it myself. It is certainly the best things that I have done since I have become serious cultivating the arts, irrespective of the way in which it is looked upon, either due to the diversity of the tones, the variety of objects and the abundance of ideas which have never, I imagine passed through any other head than my own. It is a place of pleasant thoughts, sometimes fickle sometimes feisty. Sometimes it is like a fireside chat other times it is everything that one can imagine as eloquent and profound."

In effect, everything is there, from the loftiest meditation to the crudest mischievousness (since with Diderot, "the satyr's hoof is always acceptable"). It is not enough for him to seek out from one *Salon* to the next, a new format hoping to preserve as he says, "the selection of an original format would re-charm the interest of a used material." Once inside a Salon and going from one painting to the next,

he alternates not only the tones but all of the literary genres – discourse – satire – narration – rhetoric – all with an inexhaustible ingenuity. A Greuze is made into a melodrama; a Vernet into a pastoral poem; a Fragonard into a dreamy Platonic myth. Better yet as Sainte-Beuve said, Diderot has created a language unique to each. "This execution of this work, separate and superior which is the mark of any great artist is that when he recognizes it in one of them, he is the first to feel it and to translate it with astonishing words as well as a singular, new vocabulary as though he were its inventor…"

However, his great resource is his digressions. "I will not describe this painting to you, I haven't got the courage. I should rather chat with you about the most recent gossip on the arts…" Thus is unleashed a brilliant hiatus; they were everywhere in the *Salons* and about everything. "One never knows with a head like mine where the driest question will lead?" and like an unmanageable hunting dog, Diderot goes off in all directions, "hunting down any game that comes up in front of him." The relationship between drawing and canvas, the masses and the crowds, the light–dark, the use of allegory, academic teaching, the nude, the clothes, the way-in-which – it is the flight of the paradox, a fleet of impetuous improvisations, and then from far, far away the return to those themes that are dear to his heart: antiquity, genealogy of painting and pantomime, the mutual respect of the marvelous Christian and the marvelous Pagan, the rivalry between painter and poet, the eternal controversy of ***ut picture poesis***.

These digressions are just as much gossip; in fact the Salons are entirely conversations. He spoke them before writing them and he continues, while writing, to speak. The echo of his discussion still vibrates, the speakers have left, but Diderot replies, argues, hails as always, as though Grimm were still there or Abbé Galiani or Prince Galitzin. The trembling, the accentuation, the inflexions of lively speech, there – more than literary metamorphosis is the source of renewal.

"It was certainly one of Grimm's great disappointments" said Diderot, "to see a piece which certainly did not appear to have been made to be ignored, shut up in his boutique as he called it". This was in effect the fate of the Salons, during their author's lifetime. They were circulated only outside of France, and if in France they were communicated surreptitiously "under the coat" to some rare, privileged person, they never knew the great day of publication. Diderot consoled himself to the fact that at least the critics could not hurt the artists, since they would not read them… In the end his sacrifice brought him a reward, free from the fear of offending or causing them any wrong; he could express himself without constraint, by renouncing publication he gained his freedom to speak.

The official hierarchy had no bearing on his opinions. A first painter of the King, director of the Academy, provides him with nothing more than a simple agreement; on the contrary the more elevated the title more severe is the criticism and then the artist who is admirably rewarded is no longer ill-treated. However there is yet another tradition that Diderot appears to respect: thematic hierarchy. "If equally perfect, a portrait of de la Tour has more merit than a Chardin". Why? Because portraiture is above still-life, as a country-scene with people is above a portrait and the historical composition is above the country-scene. This is academic dogma as

it was previously formulated by Félibien and Diderot and is in general agreement even though it occasions him to prefer a domesticated bourgeois scene, and by being so "under-rated", to an episode from a fable, to roman history or from the Scriptures. The importance that he attaches to the subject, from conception, in relation to the execution, is a consequence of this principle and not the simple effect – as has been too often said – as to avoid being too literary.

"Remove the magic from art and the Flemish and Dutch paintings are nothing else but horrid stuff. Le Poussin would lose all its balance but *le Testament d'Eudamidas* would still be sublime". In other words scenes that have no other purpose than being painted and color will disappear, in stead of an historic composition which contains an idea, guards an intrinsic value since it preserves it significance.

However it is necessary that the idea is noble, robust, and a well directed *mise en scène* with just the right feeling for the moment, the site and the décor and should contain an enthusiasm which retains the spark of the first inspiration. It is in that direction that the great painters of the eighteenth century excelled, they are excessively rare where the artists single contribution to the weakness of concept and the lack of ideas, falsely assigned to culture and thought. If the works of the Ancients possessed such great character, it was because they all frequented philosophical schools. Diderot the philosopher is desperate to see his contemporaries involved with piteous subjects or ruin great ones. For example, has there ever been a greater one than the Conversion of Saint Paul? But in which painter's head will such a scene be conceived and disposed of so that it astonishes? And who will take the episodes from the Iliad and give those illustrations dignity? It will not be a Challe, petty and cold, or a Lagrenée, too dainty to imagine heroes and gods which demand a great understanding, "poetic exaggeration"; neither will a Doyen be up to the task, despite his vigor. Diderot gives up: he re-does the canvas. "Here is what I would have done as the painter, the painting that Homer would have inspired in me…"

Furthermore, his interest for historical painting is not exclusive and his respect for it contains reservations. He is aware of the merits and difficulties of other genres. He discusses the particular problems inherent in the countryside, battles, portraits, domestic scenes and in still life and since even though his thought is turned towards the speculative principles in art, "he is not neglectful of the artists who appear to have no other talent but painting, any other ambition than real magic". He dreams of a fusion of genres. He appears at times to wish to historically adorn all of them and to be introduced everywhere, even into the portrait, the incident, the anecdote, the dramatic element. At times, with a better perspective, he wishes that the copyist's humble truth of nature penetrates the vast heroic compositions, too often unreal and hollow and confers to this poetic machinery probity, solid prose; we find again "The dramatist seeking the formula for a middle-class tragedy, Ah, if only a sacrifice, a battle, a triumph, a public scene could be told with the same veracity in all its details as a domestic scene of Greuze or Chardin!"

There is yet another hierarchy: that whose constituents are the old masters in relation to the contemporaries. Diderot, whose visual memory is focused to the point of obsession, has fixed in his mind an entire imaginary museum composed

"of masterpieces brought together in the capital" and all of those who he has learned to know "while leafing through the immense portfolios of drawings". Still he regrets not knowing more. How this art critic would have benefited from this vast experience!" "Let me imagine" he writes to Grimm, "that on the return from a trip to Italy, with an imagination full of old masterpieces that were produced in that country. Allow for a moment that all the French and Flemish schools are familiar to me …, and then I could give you a brand new type of Salon…" At least his trip to Russia will have brought him, albeit later, the occasion to discover other masters and other masterpieces at The Hague, in Düsseldorf, in Dresden and in Saint Petersburg.

However, to Diderot this happens to provide more examples and models: the old school productions become lodestones in order to rank the modern painters. There is hardly a subject that has not be exploited by a great master: a descent from the Cross, a resurrection of Lazarus, a judgement of Paris exposed at the Salon call immediately for comparisons which are sometimes bruising ways suggestive, since "these comparisons advance us ever more closely to the knowledge of art". Moreover, Diderot mines his répertoire of masterpieces to better understand his problem involving this concept or that execution, his memory pointedly furnishes the name of the illustration in question. Ah! If he only could have memorized even more exemplary paintings! "I would bring back the mannerisms of the best known artists of centuries past or I would let him make a modern painter and have him do or better yet have him paint like some master the most similar to his own. If there were some instruction, a figure, a head, a character, an expression borrowed from Raphaël, Carraches, Titian or some other I would still recognize the plagiarism and I would denounce it." In the end a comfort with the masters provides for the best descriptive process, the best analytical instrument and the surest foundation of aesthetic judgement. "Perhaps I have not seen as much as I should have for greater fairness", concludes Diderot. Was he as fair as to the painters of his time?

He is conscious – and that awareness – is one the difficulties of the profession. Chardin provides him with the reminder of the painful and long apprenticeship that is demanded in the formation of a painter and the uncertainty of a career upon which talent is so dependent. Even rarer is the advice to maintain an awareness of time and place. Contemporary French art is the product of an age that is to say of shared conditions and influences. Diderot is fully informed of this relativity. He takes notice of the impression of certain economic, social and intellectual factors. He perceives the dark side of luxury, the actions (evil in his eyes) of amateurs and money makers, the limits imposed to public taste by an artificial civilization, foreign attraction, the weakening of academic traditions and the impoverishment of the Academy itself, the "crushing" effect of alternate preoccupations and of calculating for the necessities, the desiccating breath of philosophical thought; the enemy of poetry and imagination. Despite all these causes of decay, the French school "is still far from decline". Diderot has to defend it occasionally against the unfairness of Webb and Hogarth and against Grimm's aspersions. "No one paints anymore in Flanders. If there are painters in Italy and Germany they are not united; they seem to emulate less and are encouraged less… France is the only country where this art is self-sustaining, and

even with some brilliance"; the remark holds true for sculpture. Certainly Diderot's judgments are subject to revision. He shared the infatuation of his age: he rambled about Vernet; he raved in front of Greuze. Yet even concerning these fashionable favorites and those who were closest to his heart, he had reservations and harshness. He had trouble encouraging Greuze to tearful comedy as well as trouble swooning over counterfeit ingénues. He recognized that his true genius was in his portraits and his drawings, inferior to Chardin's as a colorist, the day when he insinuated himself to historical painting Greuze condemned his talent. Diderot also condemned weakness in his cherished Vernet, the ease with which this *fa presto* gives to his compositions give an impression of "factory-made". Neither does he spare his friend Cochin with his allegorical nonsense and his cardboard figures. The enthusiastic criticisms are tempered by the memory of the masters. Posterity has been able to humble some of those he had exalted, but in general it hardly rehabilitated his victims. In spite of Chardin's generous recommendations: "slowly and with kindness… slowly…" Diderot casually executes those mediocrities that his colleague critics lavish with conventional niceties. Since he will not be heard by the artists, he takes advantage by telling them brutally – the truth.

However, to what purpose one might ask is the value of truth that one cannot hear? In effect, Diderot could not exercise any direct influence on the direction of taste, at least not by his writings, but he did register this point: he was a witness. The period which covers his *Salons* records a decisive phase in the evolution of French art. It establishes the end of the fad of the light and frivolous and once again begins a return to great, severe, antiquity: there is a surge as well to replace love and nymphs with virtuous heroes selected from national history. Finally, they are witness to Boucher's decline and the accession of David. However, Diderot promotes "highbrow taste" as opposed to the "petty taste". It is not that he is unaware of Boucher's seductiveness not his talent. He could have been the first if he had wanted, because "this man had everything, except the truth". Everything is wrong in his pastoral scenes, beginning with color, but what he especially lacks is the serious and the serene. His characters are "incorrect to bas-relief". At his last Salon of 1781, Diderot stops in front of David's *Bélisaire*. Finally! Here is a painter who paints with his heart: "This young man displays great mannerisms which drives his work… His attitudes are noble and natural; he draws, he knows how to throw a drape and how a fold falls… He has soul". One day, Diderot avowed that he would find a painter who spoke like a Spartan. This happened with David and with it the French school came full circle with Poussin's austerity and at the very summit of historical painting sits, in Diderot's opinion, the *Testament d' Eudamidas*.

We should beware, since this Poussinist is a Reubenist at times. Temperamentally he is so. One might say that it is also where his heart is. He savors passion, flashes of heat, colors' daring after having advocated wisdom, drawing and peaceful harmony. He waivers between the two great canvases of Saint-Roch, the *Prédication de Saint Denis* and the *Miracle des ardents*; and if it appears that he is handing the crown to Vien – David's teacher – it is not without regrets; since if he is compared to Doyen, Vien is gray, cold, gutless and still. There is a personal sadness which embraces his sight when seeing *Ruines* of Hubert Robert; they stir his soul like the

Tempêtes of Vernet. He dreams, he shudders, and he drives toward a new pictorial and literary age; he is a prelude to Romanticism's sighs and shivers, he is the annunciation of its storms and its tombstones. Furthermore, he knows other spells to bring about the "trembling of the soul" and to provoke "holy horror". This admirer of the bas-relief has understood the virtue of the undefined, of shadow, of the mysterious imitation of nature. He shivers at the thought of "this great silence of forests where man passes through the domain of demons and gods".

Even Diderot himself was the first to admit that he was "pilloried by contradictions". From there came his grandeur. This *Pantophile* was greedy to love everything, his overflowing genius could neither remain a prisoner to these principles nor to these conventions which appeared to insist on limiting his taste. Thus, the "common nature" of the Northern painters provoked in him a certain humanistic ideal of formal dignity: however he felt Rembrandt's magic. He deplores that the lesser Dutch masters never leave the kitchen or the tavern, but he kneels in front of a Teniers. Facing a Chardin, all his dogmatic prescriptions crumble: "Chardin is not an historical painter, but he is a great man… It is this one here who is the painter!" The acknowledgement escaped him like a confession: household utensils, a jar of olives, and a sliced meat pie. Apparently there is nothing that can attach to the critic, nor retain him. No heroic or theatrical episodes to exalt him, no anecdotes to touch his virtuous and sensitive heart, no capsizing to make him tremble, and no moon rays to make him dream. But somehow in front of these scraps, Diderot stops "instinctively… as would a traveler tired from his trip will sit without even being aware, at a spot where he finds a grassy seat, some silence, some water, some shade and freshness…" If there is nothing ungrateful in nature, are there no subjects? Is it therefore "allowable for Chardin to depict a kitchen with a maid bent over her barrel washing her dishes"? With one blow distinction and categories vanish but not only those of style but also those of "technique" and the "idealized". Since Diderot might have thought at first that with Chardin everything appeared fictitious, virtuosic, finally manufactured; without a doubt what he feels in front of his canvases it is not the marvel of a the tour de force: it is an emotional sustenance. "Painting" according to his own definition, "is the art of traveling to the soul through the intermediary of the eyes and if the effect ends with the eyes, the artist has accomplished the least important part of the way." Furthermore, with Chardin the effect goes right to the soul. A mysterious ray emanates from his "silent compositions". Diderot discovers that there is a sublime technique; and Chardin as supreme artisan explains to him that the great artist "does not paint with color, but with feeling". In truth concerning all the major concerns of aesthetics, we find Diderot prey to rich variations. For example we find him distancing himself from simplicity's doctrine of imitation so as to direct himself to the aspect of "interior model": the artist does not copy, he translates or rather he re-creates.: he proportionally modifies nature according to this model secret; and the sun which lightens his work – this "orchestrated lie" which we call a work of art – is not of the real world, but rather of his reality. Similarly with instructions that we follow throughout all of his work, Diderot has evolved concerning the respective role that he assigns in artistic creation to the intellect and its sensitivity. Is a genius

he who abandons himself to the chanceful folly of enthusiasm? Is it he who, by remaining master of his ways, combines them methodically to produce a sure illusion? Now we find ourselves at the *Paradox of the comedian.* Diderot is one who attempts to establish a growing refusal to accept the primitive impulse of inspiration, and seeks the conciliation of opposites; in such a way that as a moment ago he dreamed of melting onto the canvas as tragic poetry and reality, style and History, he aspires to *sobria ebrietas*, lucidity at the moment of exaltation. Such an artist would have resolved the dilemma by combining "a profound reasoning to order, a violent thought in the execution"; and from Rubens to Poussin, from the most impetuous to the most contained of genius', Diderot congratulates "these rare men… who have been able to find a certain temperament of judgement and of inspiration, of warmth and wisdom, joviality and self-possession". "Without this absolute sense of balance", he concludes, "according to whether enthusiasm or reason predominates, the artist is extravagant or cold". Is the prescription not also valid for the critic himself? The critic "touched, transported, babbling" is he the best judge? He is the happiest; but the best is probably "the quiet observer of nature", unruffled and unforgiving; "when reason modulates the sudden judgement of sensibilities". However, if one must decide between two bowls, Diderot concludes that it is still better to be extravagant than cold. One saying that is appropriate is that that generosity with him will always win. With a nature such as his, the profession as critic is in the end, "an unappealing and sad profession, precisely because it allows for too few occasions to satisfy his enthusiasm. "I was born", he says "as one with sight or who reads a beautiful thing and becomes light-headed, transported made supremely happy"; and one who's impatience to share devours him:

> I read for myself and my friends … that I listen and that I look, that I feel. If a beautiful line strikes me, they will know about it. If there is some enchanting sight in front of my eyes, I think on the theme that I shall tell them. To them I have dedicated the use of all my senses and all my faculties: and that is perhaps the reason for which everything is exaggerated, everything is enriched a little in my imagination and in my speech: sometimes they reproach me for it, how ungrateful!

At the Salon, unfortunately too often mediocrity provokes his indignation or his sarcasm; he is obliged to revert to trickery for the sake of details; then he blames himself of being devious. As soon as he is able to give himself to praise, he exults: "Praise God! Here is a man about whom we can say nice things!". "The enormous and difficult task of criticizing beautiful women", here he is in his element. At this point there is no longer any question of keeping one's head: unless one is mindless. How can one not become fired up in front of a Rubens? And why should one not wish to communicate this fever, unknown to dogmatic critics or those who are flatly reasonable? The great artist himself gives little instruction for what measure and how to correct: these are the shortcomings of the tamed, civilized artist. To observe the rules is the nature of talent itself, but "who will dictate the rules to a genius? It will not be me", proclaims Diderot, "since there is not one that he cannot infringe upon successfully".

By this passionate soul, by this heightened sense of self, by this freedom apart, Diderot surpassed himself, he moved ahead of his time... He was not contented to

merely supply to the Romantics themes and accessories. In 1831, when *l'Artiste* published fragments of the *Salon* of 1763, it was observed that Diderot, "whilst germinating the ideas of his century he brought into play the searing questions of our times". Thus it came to pass, in effect of his aesthetic views as his scientific and social foresight: the nineteenth century received its inheritance and recognized its truths. In 1796, Goethe and Schiller were enthralled to have discovered the *Essays on painting*, however, thought Goethe, "this magnificent book addresses itself to the writer rather than the artist". Seemingly to discount him, Diderot the literary genius went to encounter the great pictorial genius of the next century: Delacroix, where for example he treats the role of light, the blending of reflected colors and the ability to avoid visual dissonance assumes Diderot's same expressions and appears to provide the reply. Baudelaire, who claims him as his model in his *Salons*, reveals in turn a true and deep affiliation: among so many affinities that they share, there is this talent to mimic sympathy which allows them to conjoin farfetched talents and styles; this identical ability leads them to elaborate a critical language molded after pictorial expression, to invent a vocabulary capable of translating impression within its nuances and in its singularity. This research of equivalences, is it not the theory of correspondences in action? Diderot is truly the catalyst here, and who, in front of a painting speaks not only of discord, but of echoes, noise and silence.

Furthermore there are so many pages that provide a near sound of the future! Such remarks noting the luminous effect in the countryside, on the appearance of objects according to sky tones and moments of the day, appear to say to these painters who knew how to capture in the *blink of an eye*… To read Diderot is to feel at any moment, among other delights, the surprise of seizing at its very core, the freshness of the idea, the feeling, that art form that we have since seen blossom. In his time he has truly been one of the "secret apostles", one of the members of the "small invisible church" which sows for posterity.'

Notes

1. J. Proust, "L'initiation de Diderot", Gazette des beaux-arts, April 1960.
2. J. Seznec, "Le 'Musée' de Diderot", Gazette des beaux-arts, May 1960.
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Fig. 1.1 Jean Martial FREDOU (1710–1795), after Louis-Michel VAN LOO (1707–1771), *Louis XV (Louis XV, king of France and Navarre – wearing the Royal Mantle in 1760)*, Versailles, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

Definitions

Beauty

Beauty Is the Perception of Relations

Beauty is a term that we apply to many forms; yet irrespective of the difference that exists between these forms, we must either apply another meaning to the term beauty or it is necessary to identify an element of beauty which is noticeable within each of these forms.

This quality cannot be one of the numbers of those things which constitute its specific difference, since where there would only be one beautiful person, or at least one beautiful type of person.

However, among the mutual qualities of all beings which we call beautiful, what would we choose as the one thing of which beauty is the sign? Which one? It is evident, so it seems, that it cannot be other that the things whose presence makes all of them beautiful. Whose frequency or rarity if it is susceptible to frequency and rarity, would make them more or less beautiful; the absence of which ceases to make them beautiful; which cannot change its nature without changing the type of beauty; and for which the opposite quality would make the most beautiful discomfiting and ugly; that in one word by which beauty begins and increases, which varies to infinity, declines and disappears. However, there is only the notion of relationships capable of these effects.

When it is outside of me, I call beauty, everything that possesses within itself what will awaken within my understanding the idea of relations; and beauty in relation to me, all which awakens that idea.

When I say, everything that possesses, I mean that within it that will awaken within my understanding the idea of relationships or everything that awakens that idea, as it is necessary to distinguish the forms that are within objects and the notion that I have of them. My understanding does not put anything into things and does not take anything away. Whether I think of or do not think of the face of the Louvre, all of the parts which make it up have no less or no more of that form, or this or that arrangement within themselves; that there were men or that there were none, she

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-0062-8_2,

would not be any less beautiful, but only for being would it be possible, made of bodies and intellect as we are; since for others, she could possibly be neither beautiful nor ugly, or not even be ugly. From which it follows that even though there is not absolute beauty, there are two types of beauty which relates to us: a real beauty and a perceived beauty.

When I say, everything that awakens within ourselves the idea of relationships, I am not inferring that, in order to call something beautiful, what are the types of relationships that rule; I am not demanding that one who sees a piece of architecture is capable of knowing what even the architect could even miss, but more in the case as one number is to another, or that someone who is listening to a concert and knows more than the musician as to one sound is to another sound in its relations of two is to four or that four is to five. It is sufficient that he perceives and feels that the parts of this architecture and that the sounds of this piece of music have relations, either between themselves or with other objects. It is the indeterminacy of these relationships, the ease with which to take hold of them and the pleasure that accompanies their perception, which makes one imagine that beauty was more an affair of feelings than of the intellect. I can dare say that every time that a principle would be known to us from our earliest childhood and that if we made it a regular and immediate habit to those things outside of ourselves, we would believe to have guessed by feeling; however we would be forced to admit our mistake where on the occasion where the complication of relationships and the novelty of the object would suspend application of the principle: then pleasure will wait to allow itself to be felt when the intellect has declared that the object is beautiful. However the verdict, in this case is almost always relative beauty and not real beauty.

When one considers the relationships in customs and one has moral beauty or they are considered in the works of literature and we have literary beauty; or they are considered within pieces of music and one has musical beauty; or they are considered in nature and we have natural beauty; or they are considered within the mechanical works of man and we have artificial beauty or we consider them as representations of works of art or nature and we consider them as artificial beauty; within whatever context, when one considers the relationships in a same object, beauty will take on various meanings.

Beauty in Nature and Art

… The Abbé was seated beside me and was in his usual rapturous state concerning nature's charm. He had repeated a hundred times a quote concerning beauty and I mentioned that the commonness of this praise addressed itself to many objects.

I said Abbé, you call this rocky escarpment beautiful; the forbidding forest that is all around, you call it beautiful; the torrent that whitens the shore and which makes the gravel shimmer, you call it beautiful; the noun beauty, you attribute it, as to what I have noticed, to man, to animal, to plants, to stones, to fish, to birds, to

metals. However, you would admit to me that there is no physical connection between these things. Where does this common quality come from?

– I do not know, and you are making me think about it for the first time.
– It is a very simple thing. Your general effusiveness comes, dear Abbé, from a few impressions or common feelings excited within your soul by totally different physical connections.
– I understand: admiration
– Add: and pleasure. If you look closely, you will find that the objects which cause astonishment or admiration without providing pleasure are not beautiful and those that do provide pleasure without causing surprise or admiration are no more so. The spectacle of Paris in flames would horrify you; after some time, you would wish to walk through the ashes. You would experience the horrible tortures of seeing your friend die; then after some time your sadness would force you to his grave and you would sit. There are complex feelings and that is the reason why there is no beauty except for objects that can be seen or heard. Separate sound from any ancillary or moral notion and you will take away its beauty. Stop the eye at face value of a picture for which the feeling goes neither to the intellect nor the heart and it will have lost its beauty. There is yet another distinction to be made: it is the object in nature and the same object in art or as a facsimile. The terrible conflagration in the midst of which men, women, children, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, strangers, citizens, all perish, plunges you into a depression; you flee and turn your eyes away and you close your ears to the screams. The desperate onlooker to a tragedy afflicting so many loved ones, perhaps would cause you to risk your own life as you attempt to save or find their fate in the flames. That one should depict the story of this calamity on canvas and your eyes will be joyously transfixed.

Salon of 1767, Vernet article, XI, pp. 115–116

God and the Artist

The space contained between the rocks in the torrent, the rocky path and the mountains to the left formed a lake alongside which we were walking; it was from there that we contemplated the entire marvelous scene; during this time there appeared in that part of the sky that one could see just between the sprig of trees of the rocky shelf and the rock with the two fishermen, a light cloud that the wind carried along in time… then looking towards the Abbé:

In good faith, I asked him, do you think that an intelligent artist might have dispensed with placing that cloud precisely where it is? Can't you see that he establishes for our eyes a new dimension, that he announces a space hither and thither; that he is pushing the sky back and that he is pushing other objects to the forefront? Vernet would have known all of this. The others, by cluttering up their skies with clouds have only though of breaking the boredom. Vernet wants the one that we see to have motion and magic.

– You say Vernet's name so nicely; Vernet, I would not leave nature and run after his picture. Irrespective of how sublime he is, he is not God.
– I agree; however if you had gotten to know the artist a little better, he might have perhaps taught you to see in nature the things that you do not see. How many things you would want to take back! How many things that art would suppress those things that spoil the entirety and trouble the effect, how much it would bring us closer and would so increase our enjoyment.
– Really! Seriously do you think that Vernet has nothing better to do than to be the master copyist of this scene?
– I believe it.
– Then tell me how he would undertake to make it more beautiful.
– I don't know, and if I did I would be a greater poet and a greater painter that him; but if Vernet would have taught you to better see nature, then nature on its behalf, might have taught you to better see Vernet.
– But Vernet will never be any more than Vernet, a man.
– And for that reason, all the more amazing, and his work all the more worthy of admiration; it is without question a great thing this universe; however when I compare it to the energy of creative production and if it were that I had to be in awe, it would be that its work is not more beautiful and yet more perfect. It is the opposite when I think of man's lack of strength, of his lack of means, at the neglect and the shortness of his life, and to the certain things that he has undertaken and accomplished…

Beautiful Nature and the Ideal Model

[In his preamble for the 1767 Salon, Diderot explains to an artist that art is not a copy, but rather an alteration of nature; that he follows an internal model, on which our predecessors had elaborated.]
… All of this is nothing more than metaphysics.

– Ah! You fool, don't you think that your art has some metaphysics? Does this metaphysics, which has as its object nature, beautiful nature, the truth, the original model to which you conform under penalty of being nothing else but a portraitist, is it not the most sublime metaphysics. Leave that reproach that those idiots who do not think, make to those profound men who do think.
– Without putting myself into a bottle, when I want to make a statue of a beautiful woman, I have a number of them undress; all of them offer beautiful parts and deformed parts; I take the most beautiful parts from each.
– And how are you so sure?
– Because of its conformity to antiquity and the fact that I have studied it a great deal.
– And what if antiquity did not exist, how would you do this? Do not answer me. Listen to what I say, because I am going to try to explain to you how our

predecessors, who had no antiquity went ahead; how you have become what you are and the reason why you follow the path, good or bad that without ever having researched its beginning. If what I have told you before is true, the most beautiful model, the most perfect, either man or woman, would be a man or a woman superior in all life's various functions, and would have arrived at the age of perfect development without ever having exercised any of them. But as nature has not shown us this model, neither totally nor partially; as she produces all of her works spoiled; as all the most perfect which come from her workshop have been subjected to conditions, functions, needs which have even deformed them more; as by the savage necessity to preserve and reproduce themselves they distanced themselves more and more from the truth from the first model, from the intellectual image, in such a way that there is none, that there never was, and that there could never be a whole, nor by consequence a single part of a whole which has not suffered; do you know my friend, what your oldest predecessors did? Through extended observation, by a consummate experience, by the comparison of what organs are and what their natural functions are, with an exquisite tact, by taste, an instinct, a kind of inspiration provided to a rare genius, perhaps due to some project, normal to idolatry, to raise man above his condition and by imprinting him with a divine character, a character exclusive of all the subservience of our wretched life, poverty, pettiness and miserable, they began by feeling the great alterations, the most grotesque deformities, great sufferings. Here is the first step which has only reformed in general the animal system, or some of the principal parts. By the passage of time and by a slow and sluggish walk, by a long and difficult attempt, by a deaf notion, secret, by analogy, the result of an infinity of successive observations, from which memory is erased and from which the effects remain, reform has extended itself to the smallest parts and there are those ones which have gone even further, and from those to even smaller ones, nails, eye lids, lashes, hair erasing relentlessly and with an astonishing determination the alteration and deformities of an unforgiving nature either within its beginnings or by the necessities of its conditions, ever distancing itself from the portrait, truly a false line, to elevate from the true and ideal model of beauty to the true path; true line, ideal model of beauty, which did not exist anywhere except in the minds of the Agasias, Raphäels, Poussins, Pugets, Pigalles, Falconets; ideal model of beauty, the true path, for which underling artists can only gather incorrect ideas, more or less on the mark from antiquity or from the works of nature that are incorrect; ideal model of beauty, true line, what these great masters cannot seem to inspire their students as rigorously as their conception; ideal model of beauty, the true path, above the fray whence they can throw themselves whilst playing in order to produce the chimera, the sphinx, the centaur, the griffon, the faun and a medley of all natures; above which they can come down to produce the different portraits of life, work, the monster, the grotesque, each according to the amount of lies which their composition demands and the effect that they must produce; in such a way that it is a question devoid of meaning to ask whether one must be near or far from the idealized model of beauty, from the true line, ideal model of beauty, true line of

> the non-traditional, which nearly entirely disappears with the man of genius; which produces for a moment the intellectual, character, the taste for the works of a people, a century, a school, the ideal model of beauty, the true line, for which the man of genius will have a more or less rigorous notion, according to the climate, the government, the laws, the circumstances and who would have seen its birth; the ideal model of beauty, the true line which is corrupted, which is lost and may not be re-discovered perfectly by a people except through a return to barbarism; since it is the only condition where men, convinced of their ignorance can allow themselves the slowness of the trial and error; the others remain mediocrities, precisely for the reason that they are born, so to say, intellectuals. Servile and nearly stupid, imitators of those who preceded them, they study nature as thought perfect and not as thought it were perfectible, they seek her, not in order to draw nearer to the ideal model and the true line, but so to draw nearer to the facsimile of those who had possessed her. It was the most competent amongst them that le Poussin said that he was an angle in comparison to the Ancients. The scrupulous imitators of antiquity have their eyes constantly affixed onto the phenomenon, but none of them seem to know the reason. They have somewhat been aloof to their model and slowly but surely they have distance themselves further from a fourth degree as portraitists, and as copyists they have tumbled to hundredth.

But will you tell me that it is impossible for our artists to rival our predecessors? I think so, at least by following the road that they follow, by not studying nature, by not seeking it out, in finding its beauty only through antique copies even as sublime as they are irrespective of the fidelity that the image can be of the picture that they have. Reform nature over the old is to take the opposite path of the past that did not have one. Which means to always work off of a copy? And then my friend, do you not think that there is any difference between being part of the primitive school and that of the secret one, to take part of the national body, to be warmed by its heat, and been overcome by its views, its proceedings, the ways of those who have made the thing and simply seen the finished product. Do you not think that the is no difference between Pigalle and Falconet in Paris in front of the ***Gladiator*****,** and Pigalle and Falconet in Athens in front of Agasias? It is an old tale, my friend that to have formed this real or imagined law that the past has called the rule and that I call the ideal model or the true line, that they had searched through nature, borrowing from her form a myriad of individuals the most beautiful parts from which they composed a whole. How would they have recognized the beauty of its parts? From these which are rarely shown to our eyes, as the stomach, the upper back, the motion in the arms and buttocks from which the ***poco più*** or ***poco meno*** (a little more or a little less) are felt by such a small group of artists who do not possess the identity of those beauties of popular opinion which the artist finds at birth and which provides for his decision. There is nothing but a hair's breadth that separates beauty of one form and its deformity on the other; how did they acquire that certain something before launching off to seek the most beautiful but rare figures in order to compose a whole? This is what it is about; and when they found these forms by

what incomprehensible way did they manage to bring them all together? What real measurement allowed them to scale the figures to exactly the correct size? Doesn't it make it a little pretentious to propose such a thought that these artists possessed the deepest sense of beauty that they pursued the ideal model faithfully to the fountainhead before creating one beautiful thing? I am going to say that this step is impossible: absurd. I am stating that if they had possessed the ideal model, the true line in their imaginations, they would never have found any part that would have made them happy. I state that they would have been nothing more than portraitists of those that they would have copied. I declare that it is not infinity of lesser isolated portraits that one raises oneself to the original model and neither from the parts, nor the entirety of the whole; that they followed another route and that the one that I have just mentioned is that of the human spirit in all its seeking….

Salon of 1767, X, pp. 11–15

… Our predecessors, once one has gotten to know them well, become the irrefutable judges of our contemporaries. Whatever happens to me and to others, I advise you, my friend, to distance yourself from Raphaël's Virgins and the Guide who surrounds you in your library. What I should like to see on one side of the ***Farnese Hercules*** between the ***Medici Venus*** and the ***Pythian Apollo***; on the other the ***Torso*** between the ***Gladiator*** and ***Antinoüs***; here the ***Faun*** who has found a child and looks at it against the ***Laocoon*** by itself; the ***Laocoon*** which Pliny has said and with good reason that: ***opus omnibus et picturae et statuariae artis praeferendum***. Here are the apostles of good taste in all countries: here are the masters of Girardon, of Coysevox, of Coustou, of Puget, of Bouchardon; here are the ones that cause the brushes to fall from the hands of those who believe that they are destined and who feel art; this is the company that is good for you. Ah! If only I were rich!

Observations on sculpture and Bouchardon, 1763, XIII, p. 45

[But Diderot's admiration does not lead him to Winklemann's fanaticism].

… Such is Winckelmann, when he compares the older and modern productions. What doesn't he see in this trunk of man that is called the Torso! The muscles that inflate on his chest are nothing more than the undulations of waves of the sea; his large curved shoulders, it is a large concave arch, which one does break, but rather becomes strengthened by the loads which we place onto it. What of his sinews? The ropes of the ballistae that hurled boulders to immense distances are a spiders' web in comparison. Ask this wonderful enthusiastic person which way, Glycon, Phidias and the others were able to accomplish such beautiful and perfect works and he will say: "Through a feeling of freedom, which raises the soul and inspires it to such great things by the gratitude of the nation, by public acclamation, sight, study, incessant imitation of beautiful nature, the respect of posterity, the headiness of immortality, hard work, the gentle influence of customs and climate and genius". There is without a doubt no point of his response that can be challenged. But rather ask him a second question and ask him if it is better to study the ancients rather than nature, without knowledge the study and the taste with which the ancient artists

with all the possible advantages which they possessed, would have only left us with mediocre works: "Antiquity, he would say without hesitation, antiquity"; and there all of a sudden the man who has the greatest intellect, passion and taste is annoyed in the middle of the Toboso. One who snubs antiquity for nature risks being petty, weak and stingy with a drawing; with character, with drapery and expression. He that neglects nature for antiquity risks being cold, lifeless, without any of these truths that are hidden and secretive that are only seen in nature alone. It appears to me that antiquity should be studied so that we might better see nature.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 417–418

False Art

[The artist, as we already know, recreates nature rather than copies it; he is constrained, however by not being able to reproduce natural harmony, of introducing certain artificiality into his work].

There are "connoisseurs" who because of their demanding taste pretend that this type of art is deceptive and without any model which even approaches it in nature. I cannot see to deny it, since I cannot remember ever having seen anything faintly resembling this magic; however it is so sweet, so harmonious, so permanent, so lively that I look, admire and keep quiet. But since nature is one how can you conceive, my friend, that there are so many different ways of imitating it and that we approve of them all? Would it not be that in the knowingly impossible and able to make it absolutely precise, that there is a sufficient clearing to allow for art to wander and that within all poetic production, there is a little deceit for which the limit is not and never will be determined. Allow art the liberty of space which is approved by some yet denied by others. Once we have admitted that the artist's sun is not that of the universe and will never be haven't we engaged onto evidence from which follows infinitely many consequences? The first is not to ask of art beyond its resources; the second pass judgment with extreme caution of any scene that appears to have everything just right.

Salon of 1767, Article Casanova, XI, pp. 185–186

Assemble helter skelter all sorts of items and colors, some washing, fruit, liquids, paper, books, cloth and animals and you will see that air and light, these two universal harmonies, will blend them all with, and I do not know how, hardly noticeable reflections. Everything will blend together, the disparate will weaken and your eye will not criticize anything of the whole. The musician's art which by playing the perfect chord bring to one's ear the dissonance of *ut, mi, sol, si, re, ut* has come to this, whereas that of the painter will never be so. That is because the musician sends the sounds himself and that that which the painter mixes on his palette is not flesh, blood, wool, sunlight or air from the atmosphere but earth, sap from plants, burnt bones and metallic lime. Based on this is the impossibility of rendering the imperceptible reflections of some onto others; for him there are

contrasting colors which will never reconcile. From this develops the individual palette, a thing, a technique particular to each painter. What is this technique? It is the art of preserving a certain amount of dissonance, of brushing aside art's truly highbrow obstacles. I challenge the most talented among them to hang the sun or the moon in the middle of his composition without blotting out those two stars with fog or clouds; I challenge him to choose his sky as it truly is, sprinkled with starry brilliance as one finds in the calmest night. From there the necessity of selecting a certain number of colorful objects; even after this choice, no matter how much good they can do, the best canvas, the most evenly composed, is it not just a collection of counterfeit which mask one another. There are some objects which win out and others that lose and the great magic consists of coming very close to nature and to allow that everything loses or gains proportionally; but then it isn't the real scene that one sees, it is so to say a translation.

Salon of 1763, article Deshays, X, pp. 187–188

Art and Pantomime

Diderot as dramatic author conceived of the theater as a series of "living panels"; as an art critic he attached extraordinary importance to historical painting which allowed him to appreciate, within the content of a canvas, the choice of the dramatic "moment" and expressive attitudes.

… If the spectator is at the theater as though he were in front of a picture or if various paintings were to succeed one another as though by magic why should there not be as much pathos from the scene of the philosopher who is seated at the foot of Socrates' bed and who fears to see him die than the wife and daughter of Eudamidas in Poussin's painting? Apply the laws of pictorial composition to pantomime and you will see that there are the same.

In real action when there are a number of people participating, all of them will disposed in the most natural fashion; but this way is not always the most advantageous for the painter, not the most striking for the person who is viewing. From which it becomes necessary for the painter to alter the natural state and to reduce it to an artificial state: and why should it be any different on stage? If it is, then theater is a declamatory art! When everyone is master of his role, there is almost nothing done. One must place the figures together, to draw them closer or spread them apart, to isolate or group them together and to produce a succession of paintings, all composed in such a way that it is great and true.

In which way would the painter not be of service to the actor and the actor to the painter? …

Concerning dramatic poetry, VII, p. 385

… He, who walks through a gallery of paintings, creates without realizing the role of a deaf person who would be amused watching mutes who are communicating

on subjects that they know. This is one of the points under which I have sought to view paintings that were presented to me, and I found that it was a sure way to know the amphibological actions and the motional miscues which are immediately affected by the coldness or the action of something poorly organized, and to seize, in a scene freshly painted all the mistakes of a boring game.

A technique, which is appropriate to the theater and that I use here helps this idea remind me of an experience from which I gained more insight concerning motion and gestures than all the lectures in the world. In the past I went to a great many performances and I knew by heart most of the important plays. The days that I had decided to study the movements and gestures, I sat in the third tier, since the further I was from the actors the better I was seated. As soon as the curtain was raised and when the moment arrived when all the others spectators were prepared to listen, I put my fingers in my ears, not without surprising most of the people who were around me, and who not understanding what I was doing, stared at me as though I was insane, who came to a comedy not wanting to hear it? I was not embarrassed by these opinions and I held my ground with my ears firmly plugged as far as the action and the actor's playing appeared in accordance with the play as I remembered. I only listened when I was drawn off-track by the gestures or that I thought I was. Ah! Sir, that there are few actors who can accomplish such a test and that the details into which I can delve would be humiliating for most of them. However I more enjoy of speaking to you about the trap into which everyone around me fell when they saw my tears fall at the sad parts continuing to keep my ears plugged. Then they all gave up and the less curious struck up a question to which I answered "that everyone should have their way of listening and that mine was to plug my ears to better listen"; laughing to myself concerning the bizarreness that my apparent or real behavior caused and when more so of the foolishness of some of the younger crowd who also placed their fingers in their ears to listen in my way, and who were astounded that it did not have any success. Irrespective of what you think of my way, I ask you to consider that if, to honestly judge the intonation, that one must listen to the speech without seeing the actor and that it is natural to believe that to judge the gestures and the movements, one must consider the actor without hearing the speech.

Letter concerning the Deaf and Dumb, I, pp. 358–359

The Sublime

[At the time of the Salon of 1767, bored with the fearful tastes of a rationally extreme and policed period, Diderot sets sail towards a type of primitive and wild beauty. Burke's essay on the Sublime helps him to define the criteria of this emotion which "astonishes the soul" and which will be dear to the Romantics].

All which astonishes the soul, everything that invites a feeling of terror, leads to the sublime. A vast plain does not cause astonishment as does the ocean, as a calm one less than the stormy one.

Darkness adds to terror. Shadowy scenes are rare in tragic compositions. Technical difficulties arise to make them even rarer in painting where, furthermore they are ungrateful and of effects that can only be judged by the masters. Go to the Academy and make a proposal only to paint this subject as simple as it is; ask that they show you Love floating above the globe during the night, holding and shaking its torch causing sheets of fiery drops entwined with arrows to come through the cloud which supports her.

Night steals forms, gives horror to noises; even if it is nothing more than a leaf in the depth of the forest, it places the imagination in gear, the imagination knots the guts; everything is exaggerated. The wary person enters cautiously, the coward stops, shivers or bolts; the brave heart places his hand onto the hilt of his sword.

The temples are faintly visible. Tyrants do not show themselves and we cannot see them and their atrocities are judged greater than those of nature. The sanctuary of the civilized and savage is filled with shadows. It is truly an art when one is able to self impose and thus say:

Quod latet arcane non enarrabile fibra

A. Persii Flacci, sat. V, v. 29

Priests place your altars and put up your buildings in the depth of the forest. The screams of your victims should pierce through the shadows. Your mysterious, ritualistic and bloody scenes should only be lit by the glow of funeral torches. Clarity is a good thing for convincing, but it is useless to feeling. Clarity, irrespective of the way that we understand it, blocks enthusiasm. Poets, speak ceaselessly of eternity, of infinity, of immensity, of time, of space, of divinity, of tombs, of our ancestors, of hell, of darkened skies, of deep seas, of thunder, of lightening that exposes the naked. Be dark. The great sounds heard from afar, the cascading waters that one hears without seeing, the silence, the solitude, the desert, the ruins, the caverns, the muffled sounds of drums, the whack of the cane at intervals, the wait of an interrupted bell, the shriek of birds at night, those of the ferocious animals in winter during the night especially when they are mixed with the murmur of the winds, the moaning of a woman in labor, all screaming that stops and starts, which starts up again with a burst and which ends snuffed out; there is in all of this, something horrible, great and hidden.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 146–147

Style

[This piece was written at the end of 1768, in anticipation of serving as an appendix to the Salon of 1767. Diderot rejects all attempts to separate art from its primitive model].

The word style can be taken both in a good and bad way; but almost always in a bad way if it is alone. One says: to have style, to be affected and that is a vice; but

one also says: he has a great style; it is in Poussin's style, of Le Sueur, of Guide, of Raphäel, of Carraches.

I am only mentioning painters, but style takes place in all genres, in sculpture, in music, in literature.

Yet there is a primitive model which is not in nature, and which is only vaguely and confusedly part of the artist's understanding. There is between nature's most perfect being and this primitive and somewhat vague model latitude to which artists diverge. From there the different styles of the various schools and to some of the masters of these same schools: style of drawing, of lighting, of draping, of organizing, of expressing; all are good and all are more or less near to the ideal model. The Médici *Venus* is beautiful. Falconet's statue of *Pygmalion* is beautiful. It appears only that these are two various types of beautiful women.

I prefer the beautiful woman of our predecessors than the woman by our modern painters, because she is more woman. Furthermore what is a woman? Man's first home. So make sure that I can appreciate this characteristic in the heaviness of the hips and small of the back. If you seek elegance, the slim at the expense of this point of form, your elegance will fail and you will be seen as affected.

There is a national style which is difficult to abandon. One is tempted to take as beautiful nature that which we have always seen: however the primitive model does not belong to any century, from any country. The closer that the national style draws towards that style the less deprived it will appear. Instead of displaying man's first residence, you have shown that of pleasure.

What is it that ruins nearly all of Rubens' compositions, if it is not that nasty and material Flemish nature that he imitates? Perhaps it is less offensive in Flemish subjects; perhaps the lecherous, flabby and stretched is alright in a Silesian, or of a Bacchante and other disgusting creatures; it would succeed very well in an orgy.

It is that all mistakes are not wrong; since there are changes of age and condition. A child is a mass of undeveloped flesh; the old man is gaunt, dried out and bent. There are inherent improprieties. The Chinese man has his little slit eyes; the Flemish woman has a large rear and heavy breasts; the Negro with his broad nose, big lips and kinked hair. It would by being subjected to these differences that one avoids style from slipping away. If style is an affectation, which part of painting cannot sin because of this default!

Drawing? There are those who draw in a round way, and those who draw in a square way. Some make their figures long and slim; others make them short and stout; or those that stand out too much or those that just are not at all. The one who has studied skinned cadavers always reveals the underside of the skin. Certain artists lacking imagination have only one position for the body, a foot, a hand, a back, a leg, and a head that one finds everywhere. Here I recognize the natural slave and there I see the slave from old.

Chiaroscuro? How affected to collect all of the light onto one object and to throw the rest of the painting into the shadows? It appears that these painters have never seen anything except through a hole. Others will have expanded their light and darkness; but they always ceaselessly fall back always into their ways, their sun is immobile. If you have never seen the small circles of reflected light of a prism from a gallery ceiling, you have just the right idea of the fluttering.

Color? But the sun of art is not the same as the sun of nature; the light of the painter is that of the sky; the palettes flesh the same as mine; the eye of the artist the artist's eye, someone else's eye; how could there not be style in color? How can there not be one that is too bright, another too gray, a third altogether too dull or somber? How can there not be a technical vice resulting in mismatches; the vice created by the school or the master; an organizational vice if the colors do not mix proportionally?

Expression? This is the one that is principally accused of being affected. In effect expression is affected in a hundred various ways. There is in art as there is in society, the insincere manners, mincing, studied mannerisms, preciousness, disgraceful, undignified, arrogance, a false demeanor or pedantic, mimicked pain, false piety, all of the vices are passed through, all the virtues, all the passions; sometimes these faces appear in nature, but they are always unpleasant when imitated; we demand that a man is a man even during the most violent torture.

Appendix to the Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 370–372

Genius and Inspiration

What Is Genius?

There is within men of genius, poets, philosophers, painters, orators, musicians, I do not know what particular quality is in their soul; secret, indefinable without which nothing of greatness or of beauty is created. Is it the imagination? No. I have known impressive and fertile imaginations which promised much and contained nothing or little at all. Is it judgement? No. There is nothing more ordinary than sensible men whose works are cowardly, insubstantial and cold. Is it intellect? Intellect says pretty things but does only small ones. Is it warmth, vivacity, ardor? No. Overly passionate people get lost too often to do anything that is of value. Is it sensitivity? No. I have seen those whose soul was immediately and profoundly affected who could not listen to an enlightened tale without jumping out of themselves, transported, drunk, crazed; a pathetic characteristic, without shedding a tear and who stuttered like children, either they spoke or they wrote. Is it taste? No. Taste erases defects rather than produces any beauty; it is something that we more or less acquire, it is not something that springs from nature. Is it due to certain conformity of head and guts, a certain way that moods are made? I will agree, insofar as neither I nor anyone else will admit to any precise notion and that we join in the spirit of observation. When I say as in the spirit of an observer, I am not talking about the little daily exchange of words, of actions and moods, this ploy so familiar to women who possess it to a degree so much superior to the hardest heads, to the greatest souls, to the most vigorous genius. This is the subtlety that I compare to the art of passing kernels of corn through the eye of a needle; it is a miserable little daily task for which all utility is domesticated and driven by minutiae in which a servant cheats his master and his master cheats those whom

he is a servant by escaping from them. The intellectual viewer of which I am speaking does so effortlessly without complaint; he does not look; he sees; he learns, he extends himself without studying; there is no phenomenon present but they have all assumed to be like him and what he keeps is a type of knowledge that the others do not have; it is indeed a rare person who says: this will be successful… and it succeeds… this will not be successful.. and it does not succeed; this is true or this is false… and it happens that it is as he says. He is remarkable in the important things as in the trivial. This type of prophetic spirit is not the same in all facets of life; each state has its own. It does not always guarantee a failure, but the failure that it occasions does not entail distain and it is always preceded by uncertainty. The man of genius knows that he casts all to the wind and he knows it without having calculated the chances for or against; the outcome has all been done in his head.

Concerning genius, IV, pp. 26–27

Before grasping his brush, he should have trembled from fright at least twenty times over his subject, lost sleep and will have gotten out of bed during the night and have run in a bed shirt and barefoot and thrown onto paper his drawings in the glow of a night lamp.

Salon of 1761, X, p. 145

…Beware of those people whose pockets are full of wit and who give it away at all occasions. They are not possessed, they are not unhappy, somber, melancholic and speechless; they are neither awkward, nor stupid. The finch, the swallow, the linnet and the canary chatter and twitter all day long. When the sun sets, they furrow their heads under the wing and there they sleep. It is then that the genius lights his lamp and that the lonely bird, wild and untamable, whose feathers are earthy and dull opens his beak, begins his song fills the swamp and melodiously breaks the silence and night's darkness.

Salon of 1765, article Carle Van Loo, X, p. 251

A Composed Genius

I have seen La Tour paint; he is calm and cool; he does not torture himself; he doesn't suffer, he is never breathless; he doesn't contort himself as would the modeling enthusiast on whose face one can see the succession of works that he proposes to offer and which appear to come from his soul into his head and from his head onto the clay or his canvas. He does not imitate the gesticulations of the possessed; he is not like the man who disdainfully raises his eyebrow when his wife looks wistfully at him, neither does he become ecstatic; he does not smile when working; he remains collected, furthermore his imitations are warm. Would we obtain from a long and opinionated study a better understanding of La Tour? This

painter never produced anything inspired; he has the genius of technique; he is a marvelous machinist…

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 151

Inequalities of Inspiration

What is inspiration? It is the art of raising a part of the veil and showing men an ignored corner or moreover a forgotten part of the world in which they live. The inspired one himself is sometimes uncertain if the thing that he is speaking about is real or a fictitious, if in fact it existed outside of himself. At that point he is at man's limit and at the extremity of art's resources. But how is it that the most common minds feel these bursts of genius and can suddenly conceive that which I have so much difficulty in capturing? The man the most subject to the access of inspiration could himself not understand what I write concerning the work of his mind and the effort of his soul if he were cold-blooded; I could understand, for if his demon came and suddenly seized him, perhaps he would find the same thoughts as I and perhaps the same expressions; he would say that he never knew, and that it was from that moment only that he would begin to understand me. Despite the impulse which is pressing, I do not dare follow any further for fear of becoming of at state of mind and falling into those unintelligible things. If you should still hold dear to the reputation of your friend, and that you do not wish for them to take him as insane, I would ask you so kindly as to not let everyone see this page. It is one of those pages written at the moment, which belongs to a certain frame of mind that only comes once.

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 208

…You will tell me how is it that there can be such inequality between the poet, the orator, the painter, the sculptor and how they are so different from one another? Perhaps it is the thing of a moment; the state of the body, the state of the soul, a small domestic dispute, a touch from his wife in the morning before going to the studio: two drops of fluid lost which held all the fire, all the heat, all the genius a child who said or did a mistake; a friend who was unkind, a mistress who might have welcomed a stranger a little too warmly; what do I know? A bed that was too cold or too warm, a blanket that falls off the bed during the night a pillow badly placed under the head, a half glass of wine too much, an upset stomach, disheveled hair under the hat; and goodbye to inspiration. There is chance involved in chess and to all other intellectual games. And why shouldn't there be? The sublime idea that presents itself, where was it the moment before? Why it is that it comes or doesn't come. What I do know is that it is so much part of fate in the life of the poet or artist that it could not have arrived any sooner or any later and that it is absurd to suppose that it is precisely the same in another, in another life, in another order of things…

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 142

The Drawing and the Finished Work

…How is it possible that a young pupil, incapable of painting a poor work, can produce a marvelous drawing? It is that the drawing is the outcome of warmth and genius and the painting the outcome of work, patience, extended studies and the consummate experience of art. Who knows that which natures herself appears to ignore; in introducing the different stage of advanced age and to preserve the life of youth? A story will make you better understand what I think of drawings than a long tale of the metaphysical subtleties. If you should send these pages to women who are perhaps unaware of what they are, warn them to stop, or only to read what follows when they are alone.

M. de Buffon and M. Président de Brosses are no longer young, but they were once; when they were young they sat down to table early and they stayed for a long time. They loved good wine, and they drank a good deal. They loved women and when they were drunk they went to see the girls and when they were in their pleasure palace and undressed, the little president, who was no taller than a Lilliputian uncovered to their eyes an award so astonishing, so prodigious, so unexpected that all shrieked in admiration. However, after we have been greatly admired, one should be thoughtful. One girl amongst them, after having silently reviewed the little president, told him: "Monsieur, here is something very handsome one must agree, however where is the power that is going to push this?" My friend, if one presents you a canvas with a comic or tragic scene, take a few steps around the painter and ask him as did the ***la fille de joie*** to Président des Brosses: it is very beautiful, without a doubt, but where is the power? If it is a finance project always ask where the power is. For the outline of a novel, a speech, where is the power? Where is the power in the sketch for a painting? The sketch does not commit as strongly since it is undefined, it allows for more freedom without imagination which sees all that it pleases. It is the story of children who look at clouds which is what we all are more or less. It is the case for vocal and instrumental music. We hear what this one says and we say to the other what we want…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 245–246

Views on Sculpture

Difficulties of Sculpture

It appears to me that the judgement brought to bear on sculpture is much more severe than that which brought onto painting. A painting is valuable even if by lack of a good sketch it excels in color, even if deprived of strength and coloring or by a better design it can become through an expression or by the beauty of its composition: one cannot forgive the sculptor: should the piece sin in the smallest way.

It is nothing more; the smallest tap of the chisel poorly done will reduce the greatest work to a mediocrity without being able to save it: on the other hand the painter goes back to his work and corrects it as much as he likes.

But there is one condition, without which one would not deign stopping in front of a statue, those are the purity of the proportions and the design: no bending on this point. One day we spoke to the sculptor Falconet of the difficulty of the two arts: "Sculpture, he said, was once more difficult that painting, today that has changed". However today there is a great number of excellent paintings and soon we will have counted all the excellent statues; it is true that there are more painters than there are sculptors and that the painter can cover his canvas with figures before the sculpture can thin out his block of marble.

There is another thing on which I am sure that you will agree, my friend, that is that the affected, which is always insipid is much more so in marble or in bronze than in color. Oh! What a ridiculous thing an affected statue can be! Is the sculptor thus condemned to a more rigorous imitation of nature than is the painter?

Add to that he only provides us with one or two figures of the same color and eyeless, onto which all of our attention and all of the criticism of ours is focused. We walk around his work and we seek out the weak point.

The material that he uses appears due to its solidity and because of its durability seems to exclude any fine or delicate ideas; the thought must be simple, noble, strong and great. I look at a painting, but I must communicate with a statue. The ***Venus of Lemnos*** was the only work that Phidias dared to sign his name.

Sculpture cannot imitate all of nature. If the center of gravity moved too much from the base, the weight of the upper parts would break the piece. Without the club that supports the ***Farnese Hercules***, its rendition would have been impossible; but for this one time where the support is a happy accessory, how many times is it ridiculous? Look at the enormous trophies that have been placed beneath the horses at the terrasse des Tuileries. What a contradiction between these winged animals which are vaulting as fast as they can and these immobile supports that remain!

Thus the sculpture is deprived of so many positions that are found in nature…

Observations on sculpture and Bouchardon, 1763, XIII, pp. 40–41

Its Limits and Its Merits

It appears to me, my friend, that sculptors are more locked to the past than painters. Is it that our past has only left us some beautiful statues but that their paintings are only known to us through the descriptions and the witness of their writers? There is an entire difference between the most beautiful line of Pliny and the ***Gladiator*** of Agasias.

I still appears to me that it is more difficult to judge sculpture than painting and if my opinion is true, has to make me even more wary. There are very few men of art who are able to appreciate a beautiful from a common piece. Without a doubt

the ***Dying Athlete*** will touch you, soften you, and perhaps even strike you so violently that you will neither be able to leave it nor look away; if however you had to choose between this statue and the ***Gladiator*** whose beautiful lifelike action, but is not meant to strike your soul, and would make both Pigalle and Falconet laugh if you preferred the former over the latter. A great figure, alone and all white; it appears so simple. There are so few of these which could make the comparison of the work against nature so much easier. Painting reminds me, in a hundred different ways, what I see and what I have seen. It is not the same for sculpture. I would dare to buy a painting based on my taste, on the basis of my opinion. If it were a statue, I would rely on the sculptor's recommendation… So you think, you would say to me, that sculpture is more difficult that painting? I am not saying this. To judge is one thing and to do so is another. Here is the block of marble, the figure is in it; one must bring it out. Here is the canvas it is flat and onto it one must create. It is necessary that the image comes out, advances, takes relief; when I turn around it and if it is not me then it is my eye; it must be alive. But you add – painted or modeled… Alright… And the modeled one must be alive, without any of the resources that are on the palette which give it life. However of these resources, is it easy to use them? The sculptor has everything when he has the drawing, his expression and the ease of using the chisel. With these ways, he can succeed with a nude figure. Painting demands other things as well. As for the difficulties to overcome in the more composed subjects, it appears to me that they increase in greater number for the painter than for the sculptor. The art of grouping is the same, the art of draping is the same; but the chiaroscuro, but the planning, but the scenery of the place, but the skies, but the trees, but the currents, but the accessories, but the depths, but the colors and all its incidences? ***Sed nostrum non est tantas componere lites***. (But ours is not to bring together such offerings).

Sculpture is made as much for the blind as it is for those who can see. Painting is available only to the eyes. On the other hand, the former certainly has more or less objects and fewer subjects than the latter. On can paint whatever one chooses. The severe, serious and chaste sculpture chooses. Sometime she plays around an urn or a vase; even in the great compositions full of pathos, one can see in bas-relief children who frolic in a font that is about to receive human blood; but it is all played out with a certain dignity. She is serious even when she teases. Undoubtedly, she exaggerates; perhaps even exaggeration suits her better than she does to painting. The painter and the sculptor are two poets, but this one never charges. Sculpture neither suffers the fool, nor the burlesque, neither the pleasant nor rarely the comic. Marble doesn't laugh. She is elated with both fauns and sprites she is very gracious in helping the satyrs to remount old Silenus on to his horse; or to support his disciple's unsteady steps. She is voluptuous, but never trashy. She still maintains within her voluptuousness a something of the sought-after, of rarity, of exquisiteness which tells me that her work is long, trying and difficult; and that, since it is permitted to take ones brush to add to the canvas a frivolous idea that can be created in an instant and erased with a breath, it is not the same with the chisel, which by depositing the artist's thought onto a hard, rebellious material and of eternal duration, must have made a thoughtful choice,

original and out-of-common. The pencil is more at liberty than the brush, and the brush more at liberty than the chisel. Sculpture presupposes a more opinionated and deep enthusiasm, more of the strong inspiration but curbed in its appearance more of the hidden and secret fire which brews inside. It is a violent Muse, but silent and hidden.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 418–420

The Sculptor's Temperament

One day as Falconet was showing me the pieces of the young student sculptors who had competed for the prize, he was surprised at seeing my astonishment at the strength of expression and character, of the greatness and the nobility of these works coming from under the hands of these children of nineteen and twenty years of age: "Just wait ten years from now, he told me, and I can promise you that they will not know anything more about this.". It is that sculptors require a longer time with the model than painters and that, either due to laziness, or greed or poverty, the ones or the others no longer call for her after they are forty-five years old. It is that sculpture demands simplicity, an inspired rustic innocence that one cannot maintain after a certain age: and there is the reason why sculptors degenerate quicker that the painters, unless of course this rusticity is natural and from their character. Pigalle is stocky and Falconet is even more so. They will do well until the end of their lives. Le Moyen is polite, sweet, mannered, and honest; he is and will remain mediocre.

Salon of 1765, x, pp. 423–424

Views on Architecture

Architecture, Mother of the Arts

It is not the point here, my friend, to examine the character of the different styles of architecture, even less so to balance the advantages of Greek and Roman architecture against the privileges of Gothic architecture and to show you this by cause of the expansiveness of its space within by the height of the vaults and the lightness of her columns; destroyed outside by the imposition of mass by the many and the poor taste in ornamentation; to allow the analogy of the darkness of the colored glass to have value against the incomprehensible nature of the adored being and the sober ideas of the adulator.; but also in some way to convince you that with architecture, there is neither painting, nor sculpture and that it is art that has no model under the sky to which the two imitator arts of nature owe their origins and their progress.

Take yourself back to Greece, at the time when an enormous beam of wood held up by two trunks of squared off tree formed the magnificent and superb entrance into Agamemnon's tent; or without going so far back into the past, situate yourself between the seven hills when they were covered by thatched cottages and that these cottages were lived in by thieves which were the ancestors of the munificent masters of the world.

Do you think that anywhere in these cottages either a good or bad painting could be found? Certainly you do not believe it.

And the gods, better adored perhaps than when they came from beneath the chisel of the greatest masters, what do you think of them? Greatly inferior and worst hewn, without a doubt than these formless logs of wood which the carpenter has made more or less a nose, some eyes, a mouth, some feet and hands and in front of which the people of our villages say their prayers.

Well then, my friend, count the temples, the cottages and the gods will stay in this miserable state until there is some great public calamity; a war, a famine, a plague, the public's wish, the consequences of which you will see an ***arc de triomphe*** raised to the victor, a great stone enterprise consecrated to the gods. Firstly, the arch of triumph and the temple will only be noticed because of their bulk, and I do not believe that the statue that will be erected will have any noticeable difference over the former except that it will be larger. It will certainly be larger since it will be necessary to the host in his new residence.

In all times kings emulated the gods. If the god had a vast residence; the sovereign's estate would be at a higher level; the great emulated their sovereign and would raise theirs; the notable citizens emulates of their great would do the same and within less than a century one would have to leave the confines of the seven hills to find a cottage.

But the walls of the temples, of the master's palace, the mansions of the heads of State, the estates of the rich citizenry will provide everywhere large bare surfaces that need to be covered.

Those worthless homes gods no longer fill the spaces that we have given them; one will have to tailor others.

They will be decorated as best they can; one will cover the walls with paintings that have been badly done.

However, taste increasing with wealth and luxury, soon the architecture of temples, palaces, mansions, houses will improve and sculpture and painting will follow its progress.

I wish to bring some of these ideas to the present.

Name me just one culture that has statues and paintings, painters and sculptors, without palaces not temples, or temples where such worship has banished colored canvas and sculptured stone.

However, if it is architecture which has given birth to painting and sculpture, it is thanks to these two arts that architecture owes its high degrees of perfection and I advise you to be wary of the architect who does not draw well. Where would this man have trained his eye? Where would he have learned the exquisiteness of proportion? From where might he have fathomed the ideals of greatness, simplicity, noble, heavy, light, slim, serious, elegance and serious? Michelangelo

was a great drawer when he conceived of the plan for Saint Peter's façade and dome in Rome and our own Perrault was a superior drawer when he imagined the Louvre's colonnade.

Essay on Painting, X, pp. 510–512

Architecture and Location

I have often asked myself why the open and isolated temples of the past are so beautiful and have such a great effect. It happens that all four sides were decorated without any upset to its simplicity; that they were accessible on all parts, the very image of secure: the kings even close their palaces with doors; their imposing character was insufficient to guarantee them from the evil of men. It is that they were located in isolated places and that the fright caused by a surrounding forest coupled with dark superstitious ideas, moved the soul with a particular feeling. Gods did not speak in the hubbub of the city but chose the silence and solitude. It is that the homage of men was transported in a more free and secretive way. There were no set days when one congregated; or if there was the conversations and the hubbub made less imposing since the silence and solitude were no longer there.

If I had to design Louis XV's place where it is, I would have been sure not to cut down the trees. I would have preferred that one lives within the depth and obscurity between the columns of a great peristyle. Our architects have no imagination; they are only aware of what are accessories which are only brightened by the local and adjoining objects. It is just like our theatrical poets who have never known how to reveal location on the stage.

Essay on Painting, X, pp. 495–496

Architecture and Its Destination

There is an entire body of knowledge neglected by those who are at the head of the administration: it is that of architecture. Furthermore it is they who order public monuments, who select the artists, to whom the plans are submitted and who decide what should be executed. How will they be able to perform this part of their function which touches so closely upon the honor of the nation in the present as well as the future, if they lack principles without foresight and without taste? It will cost immense sums and in the end all we will have are small and shabby buildings. There is no foolishness that last longer and which are more noticeable that those that are done in stone and marble. A poor piece of literature slips by and is forgotten; however a ridiculous monument remains for centuries with the date of the reign when it was constructed. One's sight must be fore-shortened or very extended to neglect this point. Large buildings have multiplied all over France. There is practically no city of prominence where a square is not needed, a statue in bronze of the

monarch, a city hall, a fountain and it has not even occurred that one great and beautiful thing would better honor the nation than a flurry of ordinary and common monuments. Actually we are in the midst of constructing a square in Reims. It was not dependent on M. Soufflot, who is the head of our architects that one would be unable to see Louis XV encapsulated in a niche at the extreme end of the colonnade which would be then be hidden by houses.

Happily this project was rejected; the ideas of the provincial engineer were preferred. He thought that that a marketplace is best suited to a commercial town. Consequently, the ground floor is to have spacious vaulted boutiques; above the vault there will be erected a simple and solid Doric border onto which a balustrade will be placed and which will circle the entire square, and will hide a certain amount of the attics, the view of which is most time unpleasant and where the inhabitants of the town, who are not to occupy the intersections and on others non holidays can see the public ceremonies, those, such as the coronation of our kings and others that happen more frequently. Here I will make two observations: the first is that most of our artists have only general and vague ideas about pediments, capitals, columns, cornices, casements, niches; never any individual ideas. They would never think of asking themselves, what is the principle reason for my building? What will go on there? What are the circumstances under which the contest will occur? From where it follows that the building that they are constructing is beautiful, but that one spot is no more or less convenient than another; certainly much different than the famous architect who built the temple of Minerva on the citadel in Athens. From whatever place one looked at the building one recognized it as a temple, and one could even tell that it was that of Minerva's and that it was the temple of a citadel. Architecture is a limited art, so it is said; yes it is in the minds of architects; but of it I know of none other as extensive. When one brings into the project the consideration of time, place people, locations one will note the infinite variations of filled and empty spaces, forms, ornaments and everything having to do with art. It stands to reason that empty spaces must nearly never have any relations to filled spaces in a building that is designated for grain storage. It is likewise for a store, for a hospital, or an arsenal and for any other type of building. What in the world has happened to those rigorous proportions that those idiotic faint of heart artists are frightened to steer from? In order to destroy them forever, I should require (and it is certainly demanding a sensible thing) of those who must construct a building to ask that the nature f the building be identifiable from as far away as it is noticeable. Architecture is not the same as the other types of imitative arts; there are no existing models in nature after which one can judge its productions. What I must be able to see in a building when I look at it, is not the cavern which acted as a shelter to primitive man, nor the cabin that he made to house himself and family when he started to … but its solidity and its current needs. If the use for the building is new then the building will probably have been poorly made. Or it will distinguish itself as so totally different as to look like nothing that has been seen anywhere else.

The monument of the Place de Reims, 1760, XIII, pp. 27–29

Fig. 2.1 Jean-Baptiste Siméon CHARDIN (1699–1779), (*Grace before the meal*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

The Condition of Art

Emulation and the Virtue of Public Exhibitions

Never should we forget the memory of the person who, by bringing about this public exhibition of paintings, excited the need of artists to emulate, prepared all of the levels of society especially men of taste a useful exercise and a sweet pastime and forced the retreat of the decadence of painting and by more than a thousand years and made the nation more educated and more difficult to overcome in this genre.

It is the genius of one, alone, who perfects artists. How was it that the ancients had such great painters and such great sculptors? It is that the rewards and honors woke the talents, and that the people accustomed to looking at nature and comparing the productions of art were a formidable judge. Why such great musicians? It is because music is part of the general education: a lyre was presented to all well-born children. Why such great poets? It is because there were poetry contests and there were crowns for the winners. We should institute amongst ourselves such contests and that it should be hoped that such honors and the same rewards would soon see the fine arts rapidly advance to perfection.

Salon of 1763, X, p. 159

One Should Institute a Contest

On a Same Theme for Artists

There is a painting by Vernet which seems to have been painted only so that it should be compared to this one and to allow for the appreciation of these two artists. I wish that these encounters were more frequent. What sort of progress would be not making in the knowledge of painting? In Italy, often musicians compose to the same lyrics. In Greece, a number of dramatic poets treat the same subject. Perhaps if we gave rise to the same struggle between painters what passion

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it would be to go to the Salon! What arguments there would be amongst us! Everyone would apply themselves to champion their preference, what brilliance, what confidence in our taste would we not have acquired! Furthermore, do we not believe that the fear of second place would not stimulate the desire to emulate between artists and to bring them to reach even further?

Salon of 1767, article Loutherbourg, XI, p. 278

Luxury

Sane Wealth, Which Comes from Agriculture, is the Only One Which Is Useful to the Fine-Arts; The Spendthrift Buyer Degrades Them

Grimm And what is this important question?

Diderot The influence of luxury on the fine arts; you will admit that they have become marvelously mixed up.

Grimm Marvelously!

Diderot They have seen that the fine arts owed their birth to wealth. They have seen that the same reason that produced them, strengthened them, drove them to perfection, finished by degrading them, bastardized them and destroyed them; and they divided themselves into different parts These spread themselves as their birthright, perfected, surprising and created the defense of luxury, that those were attacked by the bastardized, degraded, impoverished and vilified fine arts.

Grimm The there were others who used luxury and its trappings to deplore the fine-arts and it was not the least absurd.

Diderot And during that night when they fought each other…

Grimm The attackers and defenders exchanged such even blows that one cannot tell which side came out on top.

Diderot It is that they only knew one type of luxury

Grimm So! You wish to speak of politics

Diderot And why not? Suppose a prince had the good sense to believe that everything that came from the earth and therefore returned to it. And that he provided for his favor to agriculture and that he ceased to be the father and instigator of the great moneylenders.

Grimm I understand; that he rids himself of the farmers-general in order to have painters, poets, sculptors and musicians. It this what you mean?

Diderot Yes, sir and that they are good and always to have good ones. If agriculture is the most sought after vocation men will either be dragged or their great interest will push them. There will be neither fantasy, nor passion, nor prejudice nor opinions that will hold up. The best possible land use

will emerge, its diversified production will be abundant and multiply and will lead to the greatest possible wealth and the greatest wealth will give birth to the greatest luxury; since we cannot eat gold, what possible use can it provide if not to increase the pleasure of the infinite numbers of ways to be happy, with poetry, painting, sculpture, music, mirrors, tapestries, gildings, porcelain and cash? Painters, poets, sculptors, musicians and the many dependents arts come from the earth. These are also Cérès' children and I tell you that no matter which art they flourish from, they will blossom and blossom forever.

Grimm You believe that.

Diderot I will do better than that, I will prove it, however beforehand, allow me to insist on a thought and that I tell you from the bottom of my heart; that he who makes the venality of these points come true should be damned forever.

Grimm As well as he who builds the first industry on the ruins of agriculture.

Diderot Amen

Grimm As well as he who after having degraded agriculture, will not load up the customs with all sorts of duties.

Diderot Amen

Grimm As well as he who creates the first great taxman of their innumerable family.

Diderot Amen

Grimm As well as he who makes it easier for insane and dissolute monarchs to make ruinous loans.

Diderot Amen

Grimm As well as he would suggest the ways to break the sacred ties that bind with an irresistible bait of doubling, and tripling, making tenfold their fortunes.

Diderot Amen. Amen. Amen. At the same time that the nation was struck by these disasters, the communal mother's breast dried up, a small part of the nation feasted on its wealth while the larger part languished in poverty.

Grimm Education had no foresight, without direction, without a solid grounding and without a general and public goal.

Diderot Money by which one obtained everything became the measure by which everything was measured. One had to have money; and what else? More money! When there was none one imposed the impression and made the impression that one had.

Grimm From some there came an insulting ostentation and a type of epidemic hypocrisy of wealth from others.

Diderot That is to say another type of luxury; and it is this one that degrades and annihilates the fine-arts, because the fine-arts, their progress and their duration demand a real opulence, but that this type of luxury is nothing more than the death mask of an almost general misery, which it accelerates and aggravates. It is under the tyranny of this luxury that talent

> remains buried or is misplaced. It is beneath such conditions that the fine-arts are the castoffs of underling conditions; it is by an edict of extraordinary circumstances, as perverted as they are subordinate to a fantasy and at the whims of a handful of rich men, bored, fastidious whose taste is as corrupted as their customs or abandoned to the mercy of the indigent masses which try by poor productions of all types to give themselves the credit and relief of wealth. It is in this century and under this reign that an exhausted nation cannot undertake any great enterprise, nothing that possesses spiritual support and elevated the soul. It is because of this that there are no great which are born or are obligated to scrape and bow so as not to die from hunger. It is for this reason that there are a hundred paintings for easels instead of a great composition and a thousand portraits for a piece of history; mediocre artists swarm and the nation chokes.
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> *Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 85–88*

… This luxury, which you rail against, isn't it the one that supports the chisel in the hand of the sculptor, the palette in the artist's thumb, and the incense burner? Yes many works, and many bad works. If the values are corrupted, do you think that taste can remain pure? No, no this cannot be; and if you believe it, then it is that you have ignored the effect of virtue on the fine-arts. What do I care of your Praxiteles or your Phidias? Of what value are your Apelle? Why should I care about your wonderful poetry? Should I care about the richness of your clothes if you are evil, if you are poor and if you are corrupt? O! wealth the measure of all merit! O! dark luxury, child of wealth! Destroyer of all taste and values; you even stop the gentle rolling hills of nature. The rich fear multiplying their offspring. The poor fear multiplying their unfortunate. The cities are losing people. We leave a daughter to become an old maid. One would have to sacrifice a horse and carriage or a feast studded table for her dowry. One is alienated from one's inheritance; to double one's income one forgets those closest. Have we announced through the streets an edict which promises to double one's interest for some capital, therein the child of the house pales; the next-of-kin shivers or cries; this mass of gold which were his will now be lost for the public good and with it the hope of an opulent future. Because of this family members are estranged. And why should their children love them and respect them during their lifetime, cry for them when they are dead, fathers, parents, brothers, family, friends who did everything that they could for their own well-being yet nothing or anyone else? It is at this moment, my friends that there are no friends, fathers that there are no fathers; brothers and sisters, that there are neither brothers nor sisters! – Thus, without a doubt a pernicious luxury and one against which I allow you and our philosophers to engage. However is there not one other who might conciliate with values, wealth, comfort, the splendor and the strength of a nation? – Perhaps. O Cérès, the painters, the poets, the sculptor, the tapestries, the porcelain and even the cash, ridiculous taste can grow between your seeds.

Satire against Persian style luxury, Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 92–93

The Collectors

They Reduce the Artist to Slavery

Ah! My friend, collectors are such a cursed race! However I must give you an explanation and allow me to refresh myself since I have the opportunity. This race is declining here where she has lasted too long and created too much damage. It is these people who have created reputations topsy turvy; those who thought to put Greuze to death by grief and starvation, those who have galleries which cost them nothing, with a glow about them or more likely a pretense which costs them nothing, who are the middlemen between the wealthy and the poverty-stricken artist, who extort from talent by the protection they provide; who either open or close doors, who use their needs so as to pass the time; who force their contribution, who steal their best works for pittance; who are always on the scent and ambush them behind their easels; who have secretly condemned them to begging to maintain them in slavery and dependency; who constantly preach of the modest wealth, as a reminder to the artist and the men of letters; if wealth was united just once with talent and the intellect, they would be nothing; wealth is derisive and ruins the painter and the sculptor if they have some standing and they refuse their protection and advice, who distract and upset him in his studio by their unwelcome presence and the inappropriateness of their advice, that they discourage him and attempt to snuff him out and that they keep him as tightly as they can against the cruel alternative of sacrificing either his genius, his pride or his good luck…

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 7

They Keep for Themselves Works That Should Be Displayed for Public Enjoyment and Education and to Inspire Competition

Vernet had executed eight large paintings for M. de Laborde. By some gossip which one never hears, the rich man when ordering them insisted that these paintings once hung in his gallery would never be removed. So they were never released and Laborde closed his ears to the public's demands. What can one say about this cruel abuse of necessity where the artist needs to sacrifice the resources of his talent or his fame? The modern Midas who only knows money thought that money was the most important part of a man's honor not that he should possess a great soul and a liberal character. What was he not asking, what was he not saying: "Vernet which of the two do you prefer to have created a masterpiece for nothing or a creation that you were paid its weight in gold? He might have seen the artist hesitate in his choice". But that is my condition. Your condition, M. de Laborde is unfair, antipatriotic and dishonest. You deserved what the artists would have given you for your money. How could you possibly demand that he finds a talent which

would deprive him of his most powerful defense? Do you not think that there is a difference between the man who works for an immense public that judges him and the man who works for an individual who condemns his works only to be rivited by a blank stare? But my friend, examine the possible consequences of this strange example, if it were to be imitated.

No more Salons, no more models for the students, no more comparisons between one another, these students will no longer hear neither the judgement of the masters nor the criticisms of the amateurs of the intellectuals, nor the voice of that public that some day they would one day need to satisfy.

The idiot and the villain who wish to take away education from youth and an entire nation from its enjoyment. But there is worse.

I have no idea how it is done, however it is truly rare that a crowd gathers in front of a mediocre painting, nearly as rare as our exuberant youth to group around an ugly woman at the Tuileries. She has a way about her.

No more Salons; and the crowds will be deprived of an annual viewing where it came to perfect its taste and will remain stuck where it is. However, you know better than me how the national taste bears influence on the progress of art. Art remains miserable within an idiotic nation. It rapidly progresses with educated people. And why would an artist tire himself from fatigue and hard work with an idiotic audience when he could be acclaimed with less cost? He will tell himself: "I succeeded, that's enough".

No more Salons, no more competing between the masters, there would be an end to the rivalry that produces such great efforts, an end to the fright of public rejection. If the artist should lead the individual who hires him by the nose, his goose is cooked.

I have witnessed thanks to M. de Laborde, the moment when due to a lack of paintings we would not have had an exposition this year. In the minister's place, I would have thought that the support of the arts in France maintained the likelihood of this institution's existence. I would have thought that its demise would advance decadence by a hundred years. I would not have suffered some craze which would cause its interruption. I would have had some words with the individual who preferred isolation to an entire people. Perhaps you might have seen the first stab at liberty and propriety which would not have made a difference to me.

Salon de 1769, XI, pp. 385–387

They Dispise Taste by Prefering Minor Scenes and Belittling the Great Ones

On the right is a novice of thirteen or fourteen, bent to the ground, veiled, the left arm placed on an open book larger than her; the other arm hangs with the hand on the knee, the index finger of the hand I think is pointing to the book. In front of her

is Truth, her senior by a few years, completely nude, desiccated, pasty complexion, without teats, a manful body, the arm and index of the right hand are pointed to heaven and this arm which short is not unseemly but is three or four years younger than the rest of the figure; behind Truth is Genius tumbling on a cloud. Well then, my friend, haven't you understood anything at all? This should torture your soul and then tell me how much common sense it has in there. I'll bet you that Lagrenée doesn't know any more than we do. And then, who ever throught of displaying Religion, Truth, Justice, the most venerated of beings, the oldest beings of earth that are treated with such puerile symbolism. In all good faith, is this their character, their expression? Monsieur Lagrenée, if a student form the Raphaël or Carraches School had done as much, would he not have had his ears pulled nearly off his head; and the master would he not have said: "You little fool, to whom will you give grandeur, solemnity and majesty, if it is not to Religion, Justice and Truth? But, replies the artist, don't you know that these virtues are to lintels above the doors for the Inspector General for Finances".

Salon of 1767, article Lagrenée, XI, pp. 50–51

… One must not forget that amongst the obstacles and the durability of the fine arts, I am not speaking of the wealth of a people, but of that luxury that degrades great talents by subjecting them to minor works and great subjects by reducing them to puppetry; and in order to convince you, look at Truth, Virtue, Justice and Religion adjusted by Lagrenée for the boudoir of some financier. Add to these causes the depravity of customs, this frenetic need for universal gallantry which can do nothing more than support the works of vice, which would condemn a modern artist to poverty, in stead of a hundred masterpieces whose subjects would have been borrowed from Greek or Roman history. We will say to him: "Yes, it is beautiful, but it is sad a man who places his hand into a flaming brazier, consuming flesh and dripping blood: Enough! That's horrible who do you expect will look at that?"

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 8

Climate and Costume

The Academic Model

[Diderot denounces unequivocally not only the rules maintained by the educational studio, which he would like to correct but also revive through the direct study to a more familiar reality.]

We never see nudes; religion and climate are against it. We and antiquity differ a great deal; those who had baths, gymnasiums, cared little for modesty, gods and goddesses created with human models, a hot climate, a liberal following. We

know nothing else but what are beautiful proportions. This knowledge does not come from a young prostitute or a soldier of the guard that we seek out four times a year and by that this knowledge is acquired; only to have the tweaks corrupt the forms. Our thighs are cut by garters, our women's bodies are strangled by bodies, and our feet are disfigured by shoes that are too narrow and tight. We have two opposed standards for beauty: one of convention and one from study. This contradictory judgement, from which we term beauty in the street and amongst ourselves is one that we would call ugly in our studio, and what is beauty in the studio is one that would displease us in society which does not allow us to have a certain edge to our taste, since we do not wish to believe that we are abstracting our preferences nor that we should have any without presumption.

Salon of 1761, X, p. 118

… And after having been at the academy for the last seven years drawing models, do you think them well-spent? Do you want to know what I think? This is it, during those harsh, cruel years during which one develops a style in drawing. All of these poses; academic, constrained, forced, arranged, all of this action coldly and awkwardly expressed by some poor soul and it is always the same poor soul, paid to come three times a week to disrobe and to be modeled by a professor. What in the world do these positions and actions have in common with nature? What does the man who pulls water from the well in your courtyard; have in common with the one who, not having the same weight to lift simulates awkwardly the same action with his arms raised on the stage at the academy? What does the one who is staging his death here with the one who is dying in his bed or who is bashed on the head in the street? What does this school wrestler have in common with the one on my street corner? This man who begs, who prays, who sleeps, who thinks, who faints at will, what does he have in common with the peasant who is beaten to the ground work-weary, with the philosopher who meditates by his fireside, with the man who faints in the crush of the crowd? Nothing, my friend, nothing.

I should like in order to escape from here to saying that to complete the absurdity; they sent the students to learn poise to Marcel or Dupré or to some other master dance teacher. Somehow nature was forgotten; the imagination was filled with action, positions and odd positions, staged, ridiculous and frozen. They are all contained and will come out to attach themselves to the canvas. Every time that the artist takes up his pencils or his brush, these unhappy ghosts will awaken and come before his eyes and he will not be able to distract himself and it will be a huge event if he is able to exorcise them from his head. I knew a talented young man who, before putting the smallest line onto his canvas, went to his knees and said: "My God, deliver me from the model". Today it is a rare thing to find a canvas with a certain number of figures without finding, here and there, some of those figures, positions, actions, academic profiles which are like a sudden death to a man of taste and who cannot

impose onto those for whom the truth is foreign then blame the eternal study of the model by the school.

… This is the way in which I should like to see a drawing school administered. After the student learns to draw from the print and from a clay model, I would keep him for two years learning from the academic model of the man and woman. Then I would expose him to children, adults, grown men, the aged and subjects of all ages, all sexes, taken from every way of life, in one word, all the possible types of nature. Subjects would arrive at the door of my academy in throngs as long as I pay them well, if I am in a country of slaves, I would make them come. Within these different models the professor will take care to inform them of the daily wears and tears that life, the way of living, their condition and age have brought to the models. My student would only see the academic model every two weeks and the professor would allow the subject to pose as he chooses.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 465 and 467

The Positive Philosophical Intellect

The philosophical intellect is it useful or unnecessary to poetry? An important question nearly decided by these few words.

It is true. There is more imagination in the barbarians than there is in those who are policed; more imagination in the Hebrews than the Greeks; more imagination in the Greeks than in the Romans, more imagination in the Romans than in the Italians and the French and more imagination in the English that the latter. Everywhere there are signs of the decadence of imagination and poetry, to the extent that the philosophical spirit has made progress: we cease to cultivate the things we dislike. Plato chased away the poets from his city. The philosophical spirit needs more narrow comparisons, stricter, more rigorous; its progress is the enemy of movement and figures. Its reign of images passes insofar as that of things extends. It introduces by reason an exactness, a precision, a method, forgive the word, a type of pedantry which will kill everything. All civil and religious prejudice dissipates; and it is amazing how much incredulity takes from poetry's resources. Customs are self enforcing, the poetic and picturesque uses of the barbarians ceases; it is incredible the harm that this monotonous politeness does to poetry. The philosophical spirit brings with it a dry and sententious style. The abstract expressions which contain a great number of phenomenons are multiplied and take the place of figured expressions. The sayings of Seneca and Tacitus overcome everywhere animated descriptions, from the paintings of Tite-Live and Cicero; Fontenelle and La Motte to Bossuet and Fénelon. Which type of poetry according to you demands the greatest imagination? The ode no doubt. It has been a long time since odes have been done. The Hebrews did them and they are the more passionate. The Greeks have done them, but already with less enthusiasm than the Hebrews. The philosopher reasons, the enthusiast feels. The philosopher is sober, the enthusiast is

drunk. The Romans imitated the Greeks in this poem but the comic relief is nearly buffoonery. At five o'clock under the trees at the Tuileries, there you will find dispassionate speakers placed in parallel one next to the other and each row perfectly measured off between each, as neat and trim in their proposals as in their allure; foreign to the torture of the poet's soul, that they will never experience, and you will hear Pindar's dithyrambic meter treated extravagantly and the eagle sleeping under Jupiter's scepter which is balanced between his feet and whose feathers shiver with the harmonic accents when put in ranks of boyish images. When will we see the birth of critics and grammarians; directly after the century of genius and divine productions? That century was eclipsed never to reappear; it is not that Nature, which produces oak trees as large as before, cannot produce antique heads; but this astonishing head shrinks while subject to the general law of a ruling pusillanimous taste. There is but one happy moment; the one where there is enough imagination and freedom to be salacious yet enough wisdom and taste to behave.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 131–132

I am afraid, my friend, that the prediction of England's Grand Chancellor is on the verge of becoming true in France; and that is that philosophy, poetry, the sciences and fine-arts head to their decline the moment, within a population, when the heads are focused to other objects of interest, such as administration, commerce, agriculture, imports, exports and finance. Your friend Raynal can boast to have been the hero of the revolution.

Sæpe sinistra cava pædixit ab ilice cornix
Virgil, *Bucol. Ecol. I, verse 18*

Amidst this calculating feeling, the taste for ease is spreading and enthusiasm is disappearing. I would not have lived long only to have tastes and customs changed three or four times in France. Taste for the fine-arts requires certain distaste for fortune, domestic needs must be neglected, a certain upset of the brain, an insanity which increases day by day. One become wise and boring, one says wonderful things of the present, one focuses everything to the shortness of ones existence and its duration, the feeling of immortality, the respect for posterity are words empty of all meaning which evoke smiles of pity; one wants to enjoy, after oneself the flood. One gives a talk, one examines, one feels little, one reasons a great deal, one measures everything with the most scrupulous logic, methodically and even with the truth; and what do you expect from the arts, whose very base is exaggeration and lies and become among men who are ceaselessly occupied by realities and the enemies of imaginary ghosts that their very breath dissipates? The science of Economics is a beautiful thing, but it will dull our senses.

Salon of 1769, XI, pp. 450–451

The Ruin of the State

Have I told you that our poor Painting Academy was on the verge of closing its school? Michel Van Loo has not been paid, the professors have not paid, the model has not been paid and would have stopped presented himself to the students had not some individuals, who animated with a sense of goodwill, took it upon themselves to pay his wages from their own purses. The small profit of the book, which is sold at twelve sous at the entrance to the Salons, has been the only source of revenue for the Academy for some years now. At the view of such a disorder, of poverty and of a general decrepitude, I cannot help my self in sighing.

Salon of 1769, XI, p. 461

Fig. 3.1 Jean-Baptiste Siméon CHARDIN (1699-1779), (*The Jar of olives*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

Criticism

Can a Literary Person Be an Art Critic?

His Ignorance of the Vocation Appears to Prohibit Him

… I have seen as many and more paintings than you have, and I have looked at them in greater detail; they are as well placed in my imagination as within their frames. My head has catalogued more than any of the potentates of the world could acquire. I am a man of letters as you are. The qualities that you ask for in a good judge: a great love of art, a subtle and penetrating intellect, solid thinking, a sensitive soul and a rigorous fairness. I can flatter myself that I possess them to the same degree as you who is given to being a connoisseur, since you intend to teach others to appreciate it and it would be ridiculous to provide lessons about things that we know nothing. So! With that said if we wish to be truthful to each other, we will admit that after having read your work, and even after having done everything that it said, one still cannot tell the difference between a mediocre copy and a sublime original, and you are proposing to cover the walls of one's bureau with insignificance and that one will learn to appreciate a piece that costs ten thousand francs even if it is only worth one hundred pistoles, and a painting that one has paid one hundred pistoles as though it were worth ten thousand francs.

… Would it not be more worthwhile and less difficult to draw and paint from ones tender youth? Because I tell you that he who from the moment of seeing the model has held a palette for one or two years at the Vien or Lagrenée studios will know more than you or me. While you and I are stuttering about the painting, he will have understood; he will have seen, looked and judged with greater quickness and certainty. When we have exhibited the different pieces which have competed for the prize, all the children arrive; they run past all the easels and say without hesitation; "Here is the best"; no comment is necessary to say that they are right.

What should one do with your treatise on the way in which to judge painting? Buy it, read it, mediate on it, conform to its principles and believe that after one has been subjected to it all that you have prescribed, one realizes how little one knows and that when one wishes to acquire a painting, one will do well to have asked a

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
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first order artist and an honest merchant, if there are any, and be consumed, and all of this with the likelihood of being duped in the most heinous way…

… So, Monsieur L'Abbé, insofar as we have not handled the brush, we will never be anything more than happy in our conjecturing and believe me, we should speak softly in the studios for fear that the color-makers will burst out laughing.

The manner in which to judge works of art, posthumous work of l'Abbé Laugier; Proceedings appeared in the Correspondance littéraire in December 1771, XIII, pp. 98, 100, and 101.

How Diderot Taught Himself, Due to His Function as a Salonnier

If I possess any thoughtful ideas concerning painting and sculpture, it is to you, my friend that I owe them;

I would have followed the lazy crowd at the Salon; I would have thrown a superficial and distracted glance at the works of our artists, in one word it would have been like throwing something precious into the fire, or I would have praised to death some mediocre work, approving and disdainful, without seeking out the motives of my indulgence or of my distain. It is that task that you proposed to me and focused my eyes to the canvas and made me circle the marble. I gave the impression the time to arrive and to enter. I opened my soul to its effects. I allowed myself to be penetrated. I gathered up the old man's warrant and the child's thought, the verdict of the man of letters, the worldly man's comment, and what the people wanted, and if it so happens that I hurt the artist, it is often with the weapon that he has sharpened himself. I asked him and I understood what was the exquisiteness of drawing and nature's truth. I conceived of lights' magic and shadows. I knew color. I received the feeling of the flesh. Alone, I meditated on what I saw and heard and then these terms of art, unity, variety, contrast, symmetry, planning, composition, characteristics, expression, so familiar in my words, so vague in my mind, came under control and were established.

Salon of 1765, X, p. 233

Contained Within the "Ideal" Part of Art, Can the Literary Person Be the Better Judge than the Artist Himself

No, my good friend, I do not know how to draw, nor paint nor to sculpt, however I do choose one thing; I plan in my head, I see action, the position of each figure; I see very clearly and very distinctly every figure, I cannot tell in my mind if the drawings are well or poorly done, but I have a sense since they are perfected within my imagination and how they can be in the imagination of another; and if I were

not fearful of being too emotional, I should dare to offer that there is one who has never held a pencil, but whose imagination is so enflamed, so tenacious, so correct, so well taught by looking at nature and great models, who has never existed and that an artist will probably never exist as an artist capable of creating on a canvas or in marble, as lively, as strongly or as correctly as the figures in his mind or mine. Were I to suggest this idea, I doubt if anyone would in good faith contradict me; and don't you think that this man would be a severe and wise judge? Don't you think that the entire model that is wandering in my understanding would not be as fearsome to the artist as all those from antiquity? My friend, without out-doing myself, that everything that I write about and that everything that is far from what I imagined! Are you aware of the defects of these minds as patently organized? It is to demand more of art than it can possibly do; ignorance because off the fact of not having touched the work; then they would have felt how much the resources of color, chisel, words would have short-changed their concepts, and after panted in approaching the model, which was inside of themselves and which they looked for the figure that they would have made outside of themselves, they would have shouted: "That is not what I was thinking, but that is the best that I can do!" When will he be satisfied with his work or yours? It is when time will have cooled his imagination; then and only then will the sub-standard models cease to exist, he will no longer be fearful for the composition of his work, and he himself will become enthusiastic of his work. "Oh! That is so beautiful!" he will exclaim, "Where in the world did I find that? I never thought that it was this good"

I wanted to have the experience of what I felt by taking a docile hand which would bend to the suggestions of my imagination. I brought in a student, I ordered him and he obeyed and you will see what his hand lead by my head produced; first of all I am comfortable to mention that I chose a subject dealt with by three or four talented people. The student did only what I told him to do. The saddle was in the middle of my *cabinet*, and his fingers molded the clay according to my instructions; the picture was in my head, I compared the work to the picture in my head and I said: It's this or it is not this. You will see if this work is not a thousand leagues from our artists; the baked work is on my mantelpiece and it is soon to be cast in bronze with these words.

.. Let's say in a few words what one should expect from the writer and the artist in judging, for example, historical painting. There is the drawing and on this point I feel that the opinion of the artist will be much different that that of the writer; I would even be tempted to say that that of the sculptor will be differently critical than that of the painter since a mistake in the marble will be infinity more serious than on the canvas. It is to be assumed that the sculptor has been very careful; color being within the resources of the painter, certainly the painter will be a better judge that the sculptor and the sculptor will hardly have that advantage over the writer except that he will have seen and looked with greater detail at an infinity of pieces. I will say as much of the magic involved with chiaroscuro; perspective, irrespective of what piece it happens to be a demanding science in which all three can be equally profound; as to the invention and execution of draping, it is still the painter and draughtsman more so than the writer, if he possesses any wisdom he will allow

the former their say; however I believe sincerely, without wishing to harm the artist, that generally concerning characters, passions, motion, styles, the rest which belongs strictly to the ideal, that the writer will be the better judge than the painter or sculptor, because he has passed all his life in reading, in meditation, in thought, in imagining; since habits, customs, ways, morals, politics, man's passions, their effects are more familiar to him than to the painter and the artist; since he has applied to this study all of the time that the artist has divvied amongst his different functions; because he has, by nature all of his mind and the science of ideas that the artists can have, and that he has searched even amongst the painters and the historians and the poets, and the ways of living and seeing and meditating, man at leisure as well as in action; what the artist has over him in the technical parts, he has over the artist in ideals; thus isn't it rare that the writer listens to the artists on these points and that the artist should consult the writer on the others…

Letter to Falconet, 2 May 1773, published by Dieckmann and J. Seznec: The Horse of Marcus Aurelius, in the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 1952, pp. 211–233.

The Artist Recognizes Implicitly the Superiority of the Writer on This Point

I went to Petersburg. I embraced Falconet, at the same time that I stepped ashore. However, I was very ill. A few days later, when I was out of danger, I saw him again. He invited me to come to his workshop to see the monument to the Czar; well my friend, why are you inviting me to look at a work of sculpture? I am only a writer, a philosopher and you are well aware of that. I went alone. I gave myself all the time necessary to see, to feel and to judge. I stayed for three hours wandering around the monument. I will give in to my first impression […] I admire the connection of nature and poetry, of nature preserved in all her bearing, of poetry carried to the sublime ideal, of force and grace, wisdom and life, the details and the whole; after having given myself to its beauty, I look for the defects. Finally I come back, the artist awaits my verdict, and I can neither be flattered nor humiliated. I am not an artist. I embrace him and reveal to him how what he has done has pleased me. He beams: "Oh! My friend, how you have relived me! Those three tortured hours that you have made me wait!" Why have these hours been so cruel and long, if it was not to me and those of my kind that you have wished to please? Roslin is your associate; Roslin has studied horses, Roslin will also come to workshop. Tell the truth; tell me if you fear his opinion as much as mine, and if you will allow him the right to torture you for three hours. I don't believe it. Why is that? It is because you know more than he does concerning the different parts of art, and that I know more than him on composition and its poetic side…

The artist and the man of letters, fragment published by H. Dieckmann, Inventory of the Vandeul Estate and the unedited works of Diderot, 1951, pp. 230–231.

The Idea and the Way to Do It. Diderot Purveyor of Subjects

Priority of the Idea

It is the same in painting as it is in music; you have rules for composition, you know all the chords and their inversions; the modulations link at your will beneath your fingers, you have the art of binding together the most disparate chords; you produce when you wish the rarest and most refreshing harmonies. It is a great deal. But, these horrible or voluptuous sounds, which at the very moment that they astonish or charm my ear, bring to the very depth of my heart either love or terror, dissolve my senses or rattle my guts; do you know where to find them? What in the world is the most beautiful thing in the world to do if one has no idea? A painter's worth. What is a beautiful idea without doing it? The value of a poet. First the thought and the style will follow.

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 312

Meanwhile Diderot is interested with the problems inherent to production as is shown by, for example, the next passage.

The method, (of painting) that Loutherbourg, Casanove, Chardin and some others, some of the old regime some more modern, used is time-consuming and difficult. After every brush-stroke or large brush or thumb the artist must distanced himself from his canvas in order to judge the effect. Up close, the painting appears to be a splash of un-formed colors sloppily applied. Nothing is more difficult than to assure that this care and detail is aligned within the big picture. If the forceful sweeps are isolated and allow themselves to be felt separately, then the overall effect is lost. It takes such art to avoid such pitfalls! What work it takes to introduce, between infinity of forceful eye-openers, a general harmony which binds them together and saves the painting from the pettiness of form! What a great deal of visual dissonance to prepare and to soften! and then how does one preserve one's genius, save one's passion throughout the course of such an extended period? I do not dislike this type of collision.

Salon of 1763, X, p. 200

Diderot Thinks as a Painter

Chardin, Lagrenée, Greuze and others have assured me (and artists do not flatter writers) that I was practically the only one in the mix whose images could go directly onto the canvas as they were arranged in my head.

Lagrenée asked me "Give me a subject for Peace", and I answered: "Show me Mars wearing his armor, his back tightened by his sword belt, his handsome face, noble, proud and his hair tousled. Standing next to his side have Venus, but a nude Venus, large, divine, voluptuous; throw one of her arms softly around the shoulders

of her lover and that by smiling with an enchantress' smile, she shows him that the only piece of armor that is missing is his helmet in which birds are nesting. I understand, said the painter; I will show a few sprigs of hay coming from underneath the female; the male will be perched onto the visor, guarding; and my painting will be done".

Greuze has told me: "I should really enjoy painting a woman entirely nude without offending decency"; and I answered him: "Paint the honest model. In front of you seat a young girl completely nude; that her miserable heap of clothing is by her side indicating poverty; she should have one of her hands supporting her head, and from eyes lowered eyes two tears run their course down her beautiful cheeks, her expression is entirely innocent, decent and modest; that her mother should be next to her; with her hands and one from her daughter she hides her face with her hands and that the other hand of her daughter rests on he shoulder and that the mother's clothing is also an expression of extreme poverty so that because the artist is softened and moved as a witness of this scene, drops his palette or his pencil"; then Greuze said: "I see my painting".

This apparently comes from what my imagination has been subjected by the true rules of art for a long time for having seen the production; that I have made the habit of arranging the figures in my head as though they were on the canvas; perhaps it is that I transpose them onto a great wall that I look at when I write; that for a long time so as to judge whether a woman who passes by is well or poorly fitted in her clothes, then I imagine her in a painting and little by little I have seen attitudes, groups, passions, expressions, of motion, depth, perspective the plans to which art can accommodate itself; in a word that the definition of a well-ordered imagination should be able to extract itself from the ease from which the painter can make a beautiful painting from what the writer has conceived.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 74–75

He Also Knows to Conceive as a Sculptor

…The artists have made me responsible for the tomb that the King has ordered for the Dauphin. Me! Me! Silence concerning this. One must not spoil the opportunity to serve by an indiscretion. This is my third attempt. You will tell me who one pleases you the most. First you must know that the monument must be placed in the middle of the Cathedral at Sens and that somehow there must be a visual relationship when the two spouses are united.

… Finally, Cochin wrote to me concerning these three projects that I sent to him, these three fine children, strong, handsome, well-stated, but difficult to dress up. He adds that he will not make the decision but rather the Court, where there is much flattery but few people with taste. He fears that poor taste abetted by flattery will ask only that these sculptures faintly resemble one another, which unfortunately will only make the monument to appear flat and bleak. I answered that these faint

resemblances which poetry alone will dispose of at her will by presenting the scene as natural and truthful and would only provide it with increased beauty and pathos; whose physiologies change in ten years and that, as they remain what they are today, so the figures will be large, noble and beautiful, greater will flattery find them to resemble one another.

To avoid this trough of similarities, Cochin asked that by always preserving the given state of the future joining of the two spouses, that I would imagine a fourth project where there were only symbolic figures. I did it and here it is.

Build a mausoleum. Place two urns, one closed the other opened. Between these two urns seat eternal Justice who places with one hand the eternal crown and palms onto the closed urn. And who has the other urn on his knee and in the other hand holds the eternal palm which will one day cover the other urn. This is what the past would have called a monument.

Imagine that near to this monument Religion is standing, trampling Death and Time at its feet. Death is enveloped in its drapes with its face turned to the ground; Time has a different attitude, infuriated by a monument raised to conjugal tenderness in our time and striking it with its scythe breaks into pieces.

Religion displays the urns to Conjugal Bliss and says: *Here lay his ashes, one day here too will be yours, and the same honors that he received are your destiny*.

Conjugal Bliss, despairing, has hidden its face into Religion's bosom. She has dropped the two torches to her feet, one of which is extinguished and the other still burning. A beautiful, large child, nude, symbolizing the family, has grasped one of her arms to which his mouth is secured.

This is the one of the four that Cochin liked the most. The idea of the urns has a certain noble and ingenious appeal to him. The fact that Death is trampled under foot by Religion, and Time infuriated against the monument, the two speaking figures and this large nude child, along with the two other figures, form an interesting group. You cannot imagine how the broken scythe turned his head.

I have a fifth one in my head. It is the one that I call my own; isn't it possibly yours? I won't come to any conclusions because of the differences in our tastes. I enjoy strong impressions and the picture that I am going to describe will make you shiver.

Imagine a mausoleum at the top of a hill where one arrives only after a climb. There, I imagine a cenotaph or a hollow grave from which one can only see the top of a head covered by a shroud, with a large arm hanging down. Conjugal bliss has already covered the first steps and hastens to grasp the arm.

Religion prevents him by pointing to the sky, while a large nude child, to who Conjugal Bliss has tenderly turned its eyes, contains the child within a fold of its garment. The child looking heavenward screams.

What is the point, if you don't mind, that these people suffer with a dying Gladiator, Niobé, Latone's children pierced with arrows, and Laocoon pulled apart by snakes, if their eyes are turned away? For me, this is what I call sculpture.

Letters to Sophie Volland, 3 and 20 February 1766, in the Diderot's general correspondence, ed. G. Roth, VI pp. 41–42, 102–104.

He Can Improve the Artist's Concept as Well as Guide Him

Oh! How precious Falconet's little group is! This is the piece that I would have in my cabinet if I really wished to have a cabinet. Would it not be worth sacrificing everything at once? But let us move on. Our collectors would rather buy charms; they would rather decorate their cabinets with twenty mediocre pieces than to have one beautiful one.

The painting I am telling you about, which it is useless to mention that it is Pygmalion at the feet of his statue that comes to life. It is the only one at the Salon and it will not have a second for a long time.

Nature and the Graces themselves deal with the statue's pose. Her arms fall softly to her sides, her eyes begin to open, her head is slightly tilted to the ground or more so towards Pygmalion who is at her feet, life opens within her with a gentle smile which graces her upper lip. How innocent she is! She has her first thought; her heart begins to warm, but soon it will beat. What hands! What supple skin! No it is not marble; feel it under your finger and how easy it gives way to pressure. There is so much truth to the hips. What feet! How soft and delicate!

A small cherub has seized one of her hands which he doesn't kiss but devours. How vibrant! What passion! What malice in this cherub's mind! Perfidious thing, I know you, for my happiness I wish to never see you again.

On bended knee with the other up, the hands grasped tightly in one another, Pygmalion is in front of his work and stares. He seeks in the eyes of his statue the confirmation of the miracle that the gods have promised. How beautiful her face is! O Falconet! How did you manage to place surprise into a piece of white stone, with joy and love melted into one? As the gods, when they gave life to the statue, you renewed the miracle by raising the sculptor. Come let me embrace you, but be fearful that like Prometheus' crime, perhaps a vulture awaits you. As beautiful as the figure of Pygmalion is, one would be able to find other talent, however one would never find as beautiful a head without genius. To have done the group as a whole is admirable. It is a matter that the sculptor was able to withdraw three different types of flesh. That of the statue is neither that of the child nor the flesh of Pygmalion.

This piece of sculpture is very perfect. Furthermore, at first glance, the statue's neck appears a little thick and the head a little too heavy. Others confirmed my position. Oh! How difficult life is for the artist. How unforgiving and flat the critics are! Had this piece been buried underground for thousands of years and had just been taken out and had the Greek name Phidias, broken, smashed with no feet or arms, I would admire it with admiration and in silence.

While thinking on this subject, I imagined another composition which follows:

> I would leave the statue as she is except that I would have all of her actions reversed from right to left the same as she is from left to right.
>
> I should keep Pygmalion's expression and character, but I would place him to the left; he has seen the first signs of life within his statue. He was crouching and he arises slowly, until he is at the height of her heart. He places the back of his left hand and seeks out the heart

beat; furthermore his eyes are fixed on his statue waiting for them to open. By doing so it is no longer the statue's right hand that the little cherub devours. It seems to me that my idea has novelty, a rarity and is more energetic than Falconet's.

Salon of 1763, X, pp. 221–223

Qualities of a Critic

Imagination and Memory

I see a tall mountain covered by a thick, old and deep forest. I can see and hear the cascading noise of a torrent, whose waters dash themselves against the sharp features of a boulder. The sun dips to evening; it changes the water drops into as many diamonds as they hang from the uneven ends of the stones. The waters, furthermore, after having traversed those obstacles which slowed them, travel and meet at a vast and long flume which leads it to a machine some distance away. It is there under the enormous millstones that man's most ordinary substance is prepared. I can see through to the mill and see the great cogs between the millwheels as it churns the water, I can peek though the weeping willows and see the top of the owner's thatched roof; I look inside myself and I dream.

No doubt that the forest which leads me to the beginnings of the world is a beautiful things; no doubt this boulder an image of the constancy and durability, is a beautiful thing; without a doubt these water drops transformed by the rays of the sun, broken and decomposed into as many shimmering and liquid diamonds, are a beautiful thing; without a doubt the noise, the dashing waters which break the mountain's vast silence and its solitude, brings to my soul a violent tremor, a secret terror, is a beautiful thing!

However these weeping willows, this thatched cottage, these animals foraging in the pastures, doesn't this entire picture of utility add nothing to my pleasure? What of the difference between the feelings of an ordinary man and that of the philosopher! It is he who reflects and sees in the tree in the forest, the mast that one day will stand arrogantly against the storm and winds; that within the bowels of the earth the raw ore that will one day bubble in the depths of the burning furnaces and will be given form, and the machine that RAKE the earth and those that destroy the inhabitants; into the rocks and boulders from which will arise the palaces of kings and temples to the gods; in the waters of the torrents, sometimes fertile silt sometimes the ravages to the countryside, the formation of streams, rivers, commerce, the inhabitants of the universe bound together, their wealth transported from one riverbank to another and from there dispersed to the corners of the continents and his fluid soul will move suddenly from the sweet and voluptuous emotion of pleasure to the sensation of terror, if his imagination should makes the oceans rise against him.

This is the way that pleasure will increase proportion to the imagination, to sensitivity and knowledge. Nature nor art which copies it, say nothing to the man who is stupid or cold, and little to the ignorant man.

What then is taste? It is an acquired faculty by repeated experiences, the seizure of the true and the good with the circumstance which makes it beautiful and to be instantly and deeply touched.

If the experiences which determine judgement are present in the memory, one will experience enlightened taste; if the memory has passed, and nothing remains but the impression, one then has tact, instinct.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 518–519

Sensibility

… Experience and study these are the first things, and from the one who makes and the one who judges. After these I expect sensitivity However we see in those who practice justice, charity, virtue for their own self-interest, spiritually and due to a taste for order without experiencing the deliciousness and the voluptuousness, in the same way it is possible to have taste without sensitivity. When sensitivity is extreme it has lost its ability to discern, everything roils it indiscriminately. One will tell you coldly: "That is very nice!" The other all emotional, transfigured, heady"

….Etiam stilliabit amicusex oculis rorem, saliet, tundet pede terram.

Horat., de Arte poet., v, 430, 431

He will stutter unable to find the expressions which reveal the state of his soul.

The happiest is, without a doubt, the latter. The best judge? That is another thing. Men, who are cold, severe and aloof observers of nature, often are better aware of the delicacy of the strings that must be struck; they are enthusiasts without commitment; it is man and beast.

Essay of painting, X, pp. 519–520

The Pleasure to Praise

In his first Salon (1759) Diderot claimed: "I love to praise. I am happiest when I am able to admire…" However, this is a rare pleasure.

To be a critic is a sad and boring job! It is so difficult to produce even a mediocrity; it is so easy to sense a mediocrity! Then there are always people like Fréron picking up trash like those who walk the streets with wheel barrows. God be praised! Here is a man about who we can say good things almost endlessly. The most favorable light under which we can imagine a critic is like some wretch with a stick in his hand poking in the riverbeds to find some gold nugget. That is not the job of some rich man…

Salon of 1763, article on Vien, X, p. 177

Indulgence

Oh my friend, what arts there are that imitate nature, either with speeches, as does eloquence and poetry; or with sounds, as does music; or with colors and a brush, as does painting, or with a pencil as with drawing, or with the spatula and clay, the chisel, stone and metals as with engraving; the beveled-blade for fine stones, staplers, buffers and awls for engraving; these are arts that require a long study, are laborious and difficult!

Let us remember what Chardin said to us at the Salon: "Gentlemen, Gentlemen, a little kindness. In all the paintings that are here seek out the worst and be aware that those two thousand unfortunates crushed their brushes in despair of doing so poorly. Parrocel who you call a scribbler, and actually is if you compare him to Vernet; this Parrocel is furthermore a rarity relatively speaking to the many of those who abandoned their careers after they entered with him… If you would be so kind to listen to me, you will learn perhaps to be forgiving..."

Chardin told us if you recall that one of his associates whose son was a drummer in a regiment told those who asked that he had left painting for music, then in a more serious vein, he added: "All the fathers of these untalented and unfocused children do not take it as lightly. What you see is the result of the works of a small number of those who have fought with more or less success. He who has not been subject to art's difficulties has never produce anything worthwhile; he, who, like my son experienced it too early, does nothing at all. And believe me that the upper levels of society would be empty if one were only admitted after as challenging test to which we are submitted."

But I said to M. Chardin you should not take it out on us…

Mediocribus esse poetis,Non homines, non di, non concessere columnae.

Horat. on poetic Art., v. 300

However this man who irritated the gods, man and columns against the mediocre imitators of nature did not ignore the difficulties of the trade.

> So, he answered, it is better to believe that he warned the young student of the danger that he faces rather than advising him as an apologist to the gods, man and columns. It is as though he were saying: "My friend, be careful, you do not know your judge". He knows nothing but that does not make him any less cruel. Goodbye, Gentlemen. A little kindness, a little kindness.

Salon of 1765, X. pp. 233–236

Frankness and Charity

…Furthermore, do not forget that I guarantee neither my descriptions, nor my opinions on anything; my descriptions, because there is no memory on earth that can faithfully recollect so many different compositions; my opinions because I am not an artist, nor even collector. I am only telling you what I think and I tell you this in

all frankness. If it so happens that I contradict myself, it is due to the fact that I was diversely affected, equally impartial when I praise and that I dedicate a something well-done, when I blame and when I track off from my criticism…

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 288

There it is my friend, everything that I saw at the Salon. I am telling you this as I write. Correct, reform, lengthen, shorten, I approve of everything that you do. I could have been wrong in my judgement, either due to a lack of knowledge, either due to a lack of taste; however I protest that I do not know any of the artists that I spoke of before except through their works and that there is not one word within these sheets that has been dictated by hatred or flattery. I felt and I wrote as I felt. The only partiality which is one that I could not guarantee is the one that one has naturally for certain subjects or for certain scenes.

You will have undoubtedly noticed as I have, that even though this year's Salon offered a great many productions, there was much mediocrity and rubbish, and that all said, it was less opulent than the preceding one; that those who were good have remained good, with the exception of Lagrenée, those who were bad before have remained so and that the truly bad ones are no better than before.

You should especially remember that it is for my friend and not for the public that I write. Yes, I should rather lose a finger than to sadden honest people who have tired themselves to the bone just to please us. Just because a painting has not grabbed out admiration, must it become the shame and torture of the artist? If it is correct to have some criticism for the painting, it in better still to manage the income and well-being of the artist. That an area of canvas is a scribbling or that a block of marble is ruined, what is that in comparison to the bitter sign that escapes from the afflicted man's heart? These are some of the mistakes that do not deserve the public's correction. Let us reserve the whip for the evil, the dangerously insane, the ingrates, the hypocrites, the tyrants, the fanatics and the other human plagues; however how important it is that our love for the arts and letters and for those who cultivate them be as real and immutable as our friendship.

Salon of 1763, X, p. 226

Opinion and Posterity

It is an odd thing to listen to the diverse comments coming from the crowds which have gathered at a Salon. After having taken a tour to see, it is necessary as well to make the rounds just to listen.

The people of the world glance disdainfully and look bored and only stop at the portraits of which they presently own the originals. The man of letters does the opposite he passes rapidly over the portraits but the great compositions focus his entire attention. The people see everything but agree on nothing.

It is when they meet one another on leaving that one hears pleasantries. One will say: “Did you see the Marriage of the Virgin? What a beautiful piece.

– No, but what do you think of the Portrait of the countess? It is that one that is wonderful.
– As for myself, I do not know if the countess was only painted. I would amuse myself around a portrait but I could not have too much of an eye or too much time for the Joseph of Deshays or the Paralytic of Greuze!
– Oh yes! It is the one who is next to the staircase and to whom they are going to give extreme unction…” This is the way that everything happens without praise and without blame: he who seeks public approval is crazy…

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 169–170

Monsieur Desportes wait until Chardin dies and then we will look at you. I am not worried about either this piece or the one which has a marble table where one sees books lying down with a big folder spread out which serves as a stand to a music book against which is a violin; on the left is a garland of white primrose, fruits, prunes, some grape seeds and roses. However I prefer the first. You can see how difficult and raw it is. So! Within the twenty thousand people that our painters attracted to the Salon, I will wager that there are not fifty who are capable of distinguishing these works from those of Chardin. Well then work, give yourself some hardship, erase, paint, re-paint; and for who? For that small invisible congregation of the elected who drag the votes of the multitude, what will be your answer and who will sooner or later assure the artist to his proper rank. Awaiting this he is mixed in with the crowd and he dies before our secret apostles have had a chance to convert the idiots…

Salon of 1765, X, p. 322

Fig. 4.1 Étienne-Maurice FALCONET (1716-1791), (*Pygmalion et Galatea*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

History

The Great Style

To the frustration of Diderot the humanist, those that paint historical scenes have a mean streak due to Homer.

What a beautiful subject, my friend. It is *Ulysses recognizing Achilles in the midst of Lycomedes' daughters* using a ploy which we all know. Imagine a group of young women whose curiosity is pricked by the jewels that the masquerading merchant has spread before them; amongst them you notice one more lithesome than the others, and forgetting the woman's clothes with which her father Pélée had used to fool the searching Greeks, and listening to nothing but her own courage and her natural ways, seizes a scimitar and pulls its half way from its scabbard and suddenly assumes a martial position. You can see Déidamie look on her with a mixed look of anxiety and surprise. One can see the jaded Ulysses, his head in his hand, looking at her while smiling and saying to himself "Here is the one that I am looking for…" So my friend, you can see I don't know how many beautiful things are in your head but there is not a single shred of it on Hallé's canvas…

…But one of the general defects of the composition is that the figures as they are measured for the immense space of the canvas are much too small and resemble puppets. One might believe it to be the part of a country scene or some architecture for which the historical subject is but an accessory. Déidamie displays a sad indifference since she does not know how to acknowledge Achilles' gender and is possessed of a shocking aloofness. The painter has made her size disproportional, which achieves the result of reducing the size of a figure in the forefront. One might have said to Halle what was once said to an actor who played Agamemnon who, in order to appear taller, stood on his tiptoes. Finally, there is no style in this painting. You will perhaps ask me what I understand by style in painting. That is a very unwise question to ask from a man who has recommended that I be short, but be assured don't be afraid. Style as a subject within a sacred or profane, the historic or fabulous, consists of identifying physiologies, the correct facial expressions, clothes that reflect the times, customs and the passage of time.

Salon of 1769 article on Hallé, XI, pp. 395 and 396

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
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… But tell me if you don't mind, who is that thin, shameful, without expression or character, lying under this tent? – It is king Scilurus. – That is a king, a Scythian king? Where is the pride, the direction, the judgement the undisciplined part of the wild man? He is a beggar. And these three maudlin, hideous, and flat figures with hoods which reach to the ends of their noses, could you enlighten me as to whether they are really part of the scene or just some poor illustrations lit as you see on our streets who this poor devil has chosen to decorate the inside of his tent? And you will call this the wife, the daughters of Scilurus? And what of the other three nude figures seated outside to the right in front of the reclining man, are they three from the galleys, three creeps, and three thieves escaped from the Conciergerie? They are horrible. They are frightening. What contortionists! What pained looks! They are at their oars. That the whole thing should be shot with arrows, and I defy anyone to say anything differently. This is a terrible painting from all points of view, drawing, color, effects, composition; poor, gritty, limp, a piece of scrap from Gautier press; there is nothing but yellow and gray. There is no difference between the bed linen and the children's skin; the rower's frail legs are enough to scare you; it should be wiped clean. There in the countryside, decimated by the Intendants and taxes, in the most poverty-stricken provinces, the lice infested Champagne; there where the taxes and military billeting have suffered the most; there were the pastor eats like the rest and hasn't a penny to give to his poor; at the door of the church or presbytery under the cottage where that unfortunate lacks bread to live and straw to sleep on, that is where the artist would have found better models.

Salon of 1769, article on Hallé, XI, pp. 28–29

…As for your *Augusta*, Monsieur Van Loo, it is terrible. Is it that there was not a student in your studio who dared to tell you that he was too rigid, shameful and short; that he had too much color which made him look like an actress, and that these red drapes that you used to decorate him wounds art and throws the painting of balance? This is an Emperor! With this long palm which he holds against his left shoulder, it is a *quidam* of the brotherhood of Jerusalem which is returning in procession. And the priest that I see behind him, what does he want with that little coffer, looking foolish and bothered? This senator distracted with his robes and his paper, which is turning his back to me, has a full figure that is given by the ampleness of his robes and makes it appear narrow at the bottom and fluted at the top. So what does all of this mean? What is the point? Where is the subject?

To close the temple of Janus is to declare a general peace in the empire, a rejoicing, a holiday; I have looked over the canvas very carefully and I cannot see the slightest shred of joy. It is cold, it is tasteless; there is a mournful silence, a sadness by which to perish, it is a vestal funeral.

If I were to have made this painting; I would have given greater expanse to the temple. My Janus would have been great and handsome. I would have displayed a tripod at the temple's door; young children crowned with garlands would be burning incense. There, one would have seen a great priest, a venerated expression across

his face, his robes and with character. Behind this priest I would have grouped others. Throughout time priests have been the jealous observers of rulers; these would have been seeking out that which they needed to fear from their new master. I would have focused their attention onto him. Augusta, accompanied by Agrippa and Mycenae would have ordered to have the temple closed, and would have made the gesture to do so. The priest, with their hands grasping the rings would have been prepared to obey him. I would have assembled a riotous crowd that the soldiers would have found difficult to contain. I would also have wanted the scene to be bright. Nothing adds to the splendor of the moment like the light of a beautiful day. The procession of the Saint-Sulpice would never have started on a sad and cloudy day like this one.

Salon of 1765, article on Carl Van Loo, X, pp. 239–240

… In the middle of a colonnade to the left, one will find mounted on a pedestal a bronze Alexander. This statue imitates a bronze, but it is flat. Where is its nobility? Where is the pride? It is puerile. The style of the Belvedere Apollo should have been chosen and I have no idea as to what nature was selected. Close your eyes to the rest of the composition and see if you recognize the man destined to be the victor and the master of the world? Cesar is standing to the right. Is that Caesar? For the love of God! That is some other fellow. It is a money-lender, a killjoy, an upstart from which no one should expect anything great. Oh! My friend, it is truly rare to find an artist who can deeply penetrate the soul of his subject! And consequently, no enthusiasm, no idea, no affinity, no effect; they have rules that kill them, the entire thing has to pyramid; there has to be a great deal of light in the middle; there has to be great masses of shadows on the side, there has to be soft haft tints, fleeting not dark; they need contrasting figures; it is necessary that each figure has a certain motion to the parts; those that don't know this … should go get screwed. Caesar has his right arm extended, the other to his side, all looks are tender and turned to the heavens. It would seem to me Maître Vien, that leaning against the pedestal with his eyes fixed onto Alexander filled with admiration and regrets; or if you like, the head bent, humbled, thoughtful and with admiring arms, that that would better say what he has to say. Caesar's head has already provided a thousand antiques, why would one craft one for the imagination which is not even beautiful and which without any sort of label would make the subject unknown? More to the right and the forefront one sees an old man, his right hand placed on Caesar's arm; the other animated by speech. What is this *cicerone* doing there? Who is he? What is he saying? Maître Vien don't you think you should have seen it necessary to keep Caesar isolated, and that this episodic big-mouth destroys the sublime moment? In the background, behind these two figures, there are some soldiers. Then more to the right, in the distance more soldiers seen from the back with a ship at dockside with the sails rigged out. The fact that the ship has the sails rigged is fine; however if there is a burst of wind, to hell with the ship. To the left, at the foot of the statue there are two women crouching. The eldest to the front seen from the back with the face in profile; the other seen in profile and is engaged in the scene. On her knee is

a child holding a rose; the former is trying to keep her quiet. What are these women doing there? What is the meaning of the child with the rose? How sterile! How lacking! And this child is too cute, too chubby, too pretty, and too small. It is a Jesus-child…

Salon of 1767, article on Vien, XI, pp. 43–44

The Sword or Bellone Presenting His Horses' Reins to Mars

What does all this mean? Nothing! Or at least not a great deal. On the left we see a young fifteen year old Mars, on whose head is the appropriate well-worn helmet which takes away from his thin body. He appears to be tipped backwards as though he were frightened of Bellone or her horses. His right arm is pushed onto his shield and the other arm is held forward toward the reins that are being given to him. To the left is Bellone's fat, heavy, massive nasty stable girl who is leaning in the opposite direction to Mars in such a way that the feet of these two figures were they stretched to meet would form a large V as the letter. An interesting way of grouping! Would it not have been better to leave Mars standing up proudly and to have shown this aggressive goddess thrusting towards him and presenting the reins? Behind Bellone, in the background, are two wooden horses who would like to neigh, froth at the mouth to breathe through the nostrils, but cannot do it, since they are made of a hard wood and well polished. The rest of the piece especially Mars is very vigorous and the all relies more of the fine touch than the costume. But where is the god of wars character? Where is that of Bellone? Where is the vivacity? Where can one recognize in this piece the god whose war cry is like that of ten thousand men! Compare this painting with that of the poet who says: "His head came from the mist, his eyes burning, his mouth agape, his horses breathed fire from their nostrils and the iron of his lance pierced the body". And this Bellone is this beastly goddess who only breathes for blood and guts, the one that the gods have bound her arms to her back and forged the chains that she tries to always break and which are only loosened when the heavens are upset and want to punish the earth? There is nothing more difficult to imagine than these types of figures; they must have big characters, they have to be beautiful and at the same time they have to inspire terror. Modern painters abandon this symbolism to Rubens' passion and brush. There is nothing else but the strength of its expression and its color that can possibly support this.

Salon of 1767, article on Lagrenée, XI, pp. 48–49

… The thing that shocks me in such a subject is the infantile nature of the characters; yes I should much rather have peasants and their wives in their rustic setting than the bastard race which is orphaned from everywhere, from any time and from any country; rather than the Cérès who instead of displaying herself within her

character, her action, her clothing, the disarray and simple cut of her hair, of some grandeur, of vitality, of countryside and of the divine, is nothing but a swamp nymph, a corner wet-nurse with fine linen and no breast, that this Triptolème, who far from being nervous, tanned, half-naked, passionate, proud and noble, his head disheveled surrounded by a royal band, is nothing but a snotty-nosed kid of eighteen , all too pretty and well fixed as for his first communion, these false squatters who appear to have nothing in common with reality. It is the insincerity that dulls me, which removes the truthfulness from the canvas, its place in time, its force, its character and which has reduced what might have been magnificent accessories to nothing. This man has ignored the goal of his art; he doesn't know that it is a poem; he doesn't know that all poems exaggerate reality; he doesn't know what is real. He has travestied Cérès and Triptolème, two beings as old as the world. This is something that would have made one of the Carraches frown, who would have painted over this great scene so badly treated with sweeping brushstrokes if it had been presented to them by some pupil.

Salon of 1769, article on Lagrenée, XI, pp. 400–401

Paganism and Christianity

Which is more favorable to the fine arts? Diderot who has given contradictory answers to this question came to the conclusion of the superiority of the "genius of Christianity", but for reasons that are not those of Chateaubriand.

… If our religion were not such a sad and boring metaphysic; if our painters and our sculptors were men to compare to painters and sculptors of old (by that I mean good ones; since there were also poor ones and even more than us there is Italy where they make the best and the worst music); if our priests were not stupid bigots; if this abominable Christianity had not been established by murder and by blood; if the joys of our paradise were not reduced to an impudent beatific vision of I do not know what, that we do not understand nor do we get along, if our hell offers other things besides the pits of fire, hideous and gothic demons, shrieks and gnashing of teeth, if our paintings could be other than than scenes of atrocities, those skinned alive, a hanged man, spitted alive, grilled, a disgusting butchery, if all of our saints were not veiled to the end of their noses. Nor our ideas of innocence and modesty proscribed to a peek of arms, of thighs, of breasts, of shoulders, all nudity; if the desire of mortification had not withered these breasts, softened these thighs, made the skin sag, ripped these shoulders; if our artists had not been chained and our poets contained by those frightening words of sacrilege and blasphemy; if the virgin Mary had been the mother of pleasure or as the mother of God had those beautiful eyes, her beautiful breasts, her beautiful rear been those things that attracted the Holy Spirit onto her and if that had been written in a book about her history; if the angel Gabriel swaggered around with his great shoulders if the Magdalene had had some amorous adventure with Christ; if, at the wedding party

at Cana, between two wines, and not abiding to conformity, had run his fingers over the throat of one of the bridesmaids and over the buttocks of Saint John who then uncertain if he would remain loyal or not to the apostle with the slight shadow on his chin; then you would see what our painters, our poets and sculptors are made of and the tone of voice that we would use when describing his charm, which would play such a great and marvelous role in the history of our religion and our God; and in which way would we look at beauty to which we owe birth, incarnation and the grace for our redemption. However, we will continue to use the expression of divine charm and divine beauty: however without the pagan touch that our habits with the old world poets still play in our poetic minds, would be cold and meaningless.

Essay on Painting, X, pp. 492–493

… That someone should tell me after this, that our mythology lends itself less to painting than that of our great past! Perhaps the fable offers more sweet and enjoyable subjects; perhaps we have nothing to compare in these genre as with the *Judgement of Paris*; however the blood that the abominable cross has allow to be spilled all over is also another resource for the tragic brush. Without a doubt there is something sublime about Jupiter's head; it really required a certain genius to find the character of a Eumenides as the old school has left us; however what about these isolated figures when compared to the scenes where one must show a spiritual alienation or religious dogma, the atrocity of religious intolerance, an altar spewing incense in front of an idol, a priest coldly sharpening his knives, a layman complacently flaying the skin of another by scourging, a crazed person offering himself joyfully to all the tortures that are shown him and defying his executioners, a frightened people, children who strain from the scene and return to their mother's chest, special guards dispersing the crowd; in one word all possible incidents in these sorts of spectacles! The crimes that the insanity of Christ has committed and allows to be committed are as great as dramas but of an altogether difficulty that the descent of Orpheus to Hell, the splendor of the Elysian Fields, the tortures of Tenarus or the temptations of Paphos. In one style see all that Raphaël and the other great masters have gotten from Moses, the prophets and the evangelists. Should genius finds but an empty field with Adam, Eve, his family, Jacob's descendents and the details of patriarchic life?

As for our Paradise, I admit that it is as boring as those who are there and the happiness that they taste. No comparison between our saints, our apostles and our virgins sadly ecstatic and the Olympian banquets where a nervous Hercules, leaning on his club looks amorously at the winsome Hébé; where Apollo divinely handsome with long hair, holds the enchanted guests by strings; where the master of the gods, being intoxicated by a nectar poured from a filled cup from the hand of a young boy with ivory shoulders and thighs of alabaster, allows the heart of his jealous wife to fill with disappointment. Without hesitation I much prefer to see the rump, throat and the beautiful arms of Venus than the mysterious triangle; however where in all this is the tragic content that I am

looking for? It is a crime to need the talents of Racine, Corneille and Voltaire. Never has there been a religion so filled with crimes as Christianity; from Abel's murder to the torture of Callas, there is not one line of its history that has not been bloodied. Crime is a beautiful thing in history, in poetry, on canvas and in marble…

Salon of 1763, X, pp. 184–185

Christian Characters Are Lacking and Spiteful; However the Great Masters Ennoble Them by Borrowing from Ancient Characters

Webb, the elegant and tasteful man that he is, has written in his *Reflections on painting* that the subjects taken for the holy gospels or from the martyrlogues can never provided for a beautiful painting. This man has neither seen the *Massacre of the Innocents* by Le Brun, nor the *Massacre* by Rubens, nor the *Descent from the Cross* by Annibal Carraches, nor *Saint Paul preaching in Athens* by Le Sueur, nor I don't know what apostle or disciple ripping his clothes from his body as a pagan sacrifice, nor the Magdalene wiping our Savior's feet with her beautiful hair, nor the same one voluptuously laying on the ground in her cave by Correggio, nor a crowd of holy families more touching, more beautiful, more simple, more noble, or ones more interesting than the others, nor my Virgin of Barroche, holding a nude upright infant Jesus on her knees. This writer did not expect that one might ask him why Hercules choking the Nemedian lion would make a good painting and that Samson doing the same would not? How can one paint Marsyas skinned alive and not Saint Bartholomew? Why Christ writing with his finger in the sand the absolution of the adulterous woman in the middle of the shamed Pharisees and why that would not be a great painting, as beautiful as Phyrné accused of impiety before the Aréopage? Our Abbé Galiani, who I enjoy as much when listening to him support a paradox as when he proves a truth, thinks like Webb; and he adds that Michelangelo felt the same way; that he disapproved of flat hair, Jewish beards, physical characteristics that were pale, thin, nasty, common and traditional to the apostles; that he had substituted the ancient character, and that he had sent to the religious, who had asked him for a statue of Christ, the Farnese Hercules with a cross in his hand, and that in other paintings, our good savior is the thunderous Jupiter, Saint John, Ganymede; the apostles, Bacchus, Mars, Mercury, Apollo, etcetera. I should first of all ask the question: Is the fact real? What precisely are these pieces? Where does one see them? Next, I would try to find if Michelangelo was able, with some thinking, place the figure of the man in opposition to his customs, his history and his life. Were not the proportions, the characters, the figures of the pagan gods set as a function of their positions? As for Jesus Christ, poor, sad, scared, fasting, praying, devotional, suffering, beaten, whipped, scarred, scourged could he have been tailored after a nervous thief who had started by

strangling snakes in the cradle and spend the rest of his life full tilt over the roads with a club in his hands, smashing monsters and ravaging virgins? I simply cannot allow the metamorphosis of Apollo into Saint John without displaying the Virgin full-lipped luxuriating and languishing eyes, with a charming neck, arms, feet, hands, shoulders and the thighs of Venus. The Virgin Mary, Venus with the cute behind does not sit well with me. However here is what Poussin did; he attempted to give certain nobility to the characters according to the customs of the age in proportion to antiquity, he has blended with talent the Bible with pagan gods of our ancient fables with the people of modern mythology of which only knowing and experienced acknowledge and with which the rest are satisfied…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 334–346

Two Summits of Religious Painting of the Eighteenth Century

The public was divided between this painting by Vien and that of Doyen on the ***Epidémie des Ardents***, intended for the same church. Assuredly, these are two beautiful paintings, two great representations. I will describe the former; and one will find the description of the latter in turn.

To the right is an architectural assembly line, the front of an old temple, with its platform in the front. Above a number of steps which lead to this platform, towards the entrance to the temple, one sees the apostle of Gaul preaching. Standing behind him are some of his disciples or followers; at his feet, turning to the right of the apostle on the left in the painting, a little into the background are four kneeling women, seated, crouched, one of whom is crying, the second listens, the third meditates and the fourth is ecstatic, in front of her she is holding her child who she is holding with her right arm. Standing behind these women in the background are three old men two of whom are speaking together and seem to be arguing Continuing in the same direction, there is a crowd of listeners, men, women, children, seated, standing, laying, crouched, kneeling all allowing for the same expression to pass over their faces with a different nuances, from uncertainty which hesitates to persuasion which admires, from a stare that bears down to astonishment which is bothered; from compunction which softens to repentance which afflicts.

To allow one to have an idea of this crowd which occupies the entire left side of this painting, imagine from the back, crouched on the last steps, a woman admiring with her two arms stretched towards the saint. Behind her, on a lower step and well to the back, there is a man kneeling, listening, inclined and acquiescent with his head, arms, shoulders and back. All the way to the left, there are two large women standing. The one to the front is listening; the other is grouped with her by her right arm placed on the left shoulder of the first; she is looking; apparently she is pointing to one of her brothers amongst this group of disciples or followers placed standing behind the saint.

On another plane, between them and the two figures that occupy the forefront and one that we can see from the back, are the head and the shoulders of an old man , astonished, prostrate, admiring. The rest of this person is hidden from view by a child, viewed from the back and belonging to one of the large women who are standing. Behind these women, we see only the heads of the remaining audience. In the center of the painting, in the background in the distance is a stone masonry very tall with different people, men and women leaning over the parapet and looking to see what is happening in the forefront. Above towards heaven, Religion is seated on some clouds with a veil drawn across her face holding a chalice in her hands. Above her with its wings spread a great angel is descending with a crown which he is about to place on the head of Denis.

Here then is the plan of this composition. Religion, the angel, the saint, the women who are at his feet, the audience who are in the background, the two large figures of the women who are standing, the old man bent towards their feet and the two figures, one of a man the other of a woman, seen from the back and positioned entirely to the forefront, this path descending softly and serpentine-like largely from Religion to the bottom of the composition to the left, where it back sweeps from where it forms circularly and in the distance, a type of sanctuary around the saint and which ends at the woman positioned from in the forefront, her arms directed towards the saint and which the interior space of the scene: the joining line proceeding clearly, neatly, easily, seeking the composition's principal elements, which it only neglects the masonry on the right corner, as well as the old men who indiscreetly interrupted the saint, who conversing amongst themselves and arguing to the side.

Let us continue with this composition. The apostle is well-placed, he has extended his right arm, the head is slightly bent and forward; he is speaking. This head is imposing, tranquil, simple, noble, sweet, with a hint of the peasant but truly apostolic. That is concerning the expression. As to the whole, it is well painted, well filled in, the beard is full and with a hint of humor. The drapes or the great white gown which falls in parallel and straight creases is very beautiful. If it reveals less of the nude than we should want, it is because there are layer after layer of clothes. The entirety of the figure collects to itself all of the force, all the brightness of light and grasps the first look. The general tone is perhaps a little sad and too balanced.

The young man who is behind the saint, has been well drawn, well painted; his purity should be likened to Raphaël and possess a marvelous nobility and adds to the head's character which is divine. Also he is well colored. It has been mentioned that his drapery is a little heavy; that is possible. The remaining acolytes are good support next to him in terms of form and color. The women who are crouched at the saint's feet are sallow and choppy. The child of one of them who is being embraced appears made of wax. Of these two people who are conversing in the background they have too pale a coloring, are cheap, in character and draped poorly; but the rest seems alright.

The women to the left who are standing and massed together have something that is bothersome to them. Their clothes flutter marvelously over the nude which it caresses. The woman seated on the steps with her outstretched arms towards the saint is strongly colored. The brush stroke is beautiful and her vividness send the

saint a vast distance. The figure of a man, kneeling behind this woman is neither less beautiful not less vivid which helps to set her well in the image.

It is said that these last two figures are too small for the saint especially for the figures which are standing to her side.

As for the background it is in perfect harmony with the rest which is neither common nor easy.

This composition is truly in contrast to that of Doyen's. All of the qualities which are missing in one of these artists, the other has. What rules here is the most beautiful harmony of color, peace, a charming silence; it is all of the magic secrets of art, without affectation, without ostentation, effortless; this is praise that we cannot deny to Vien. However, when we turn our eyes to Doyen, who we see as somber, vigorous, boiling and passionate; one must admit that in the ***Prédication*** all is not of value except a weakness that is somewhat superior in its execution, weakness that Doyen's strength bring out, but a well blended weakness which also brings about in its turn all of the inconsistencies of his rival. These are two great athletes who are running a great race. The compositions are one and the other like the personalities of the two men. The Vien is large and wise like Dominiquin; beautiful heads, properly drawn, beautiful feet, beautiful hands, well hung drapery, simple and natural expressions; nothing painful, nothing ostentatious neither in the details nor in the composition's plan; wonderfully peaceful. The longer one looks at it, the more one enjoys looking. It seems to be both Dominiquin and Le Sueur. The group of women to the left is very well done. The figures which show their heads appear to have been done after the former of these masters and the group of young men which is to the right well colored is in after Le Sueur. Vien connects with you and allows you the time to examine him. Doyen is more prickly to the eyes appears to tell the viewer, hurry up, uncomfortable that the impression left by one object might be destroyed by another before having totally embraced the whole and by that the charm vanishes. Vien has all of the parts which are characteristic of a great painter; nothing is neglected in this beautiful painting. This is a resource for the young painters in their studies. If I were a professor, I would tell them: " Go to Saint Roch, look at the ***Prédication de Denis***, allow it to penetrate you, however pass quickly in front of the painting of the ***Ardents***, it should be a flash to the mind which you are not yet able to imitate".

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 29–33

… The first incident which strikes us is that of a mad man who is rushing from the door of the hospital; his face is lit by the glow of the torch and his naked arms are stretched towards the protecting saint. Two strong orderlies seen from the back stop and restrain him.

To the right, on the steps, more onto the front of the pavement is a large corpse that we can only see from the back. He is completely nude, his two long arms are yellowish, and his head and his hair hang down towards onto the massive stone portico.

Below at the lowest part of the terrace at right angle to the pavement is an open sewer out of which are the two feet of a corpse and the two handles of a stretcher.

In the middle of the pavement, in front of the doors of the hospital, there is a kneeling mother, the arms and eyes turned towards heaven and the saint, the mouth partially opened and a weeping look which implores the health of her child. She has three of these women surrounding her; one seen from the back holds her up from under her arms and joins her eyes with a prayer to the painful screams of her mistress, The second more into the background and face front takes the same action. The third crouching all the way onto the massive portico, her arms outstretched, the hands clasped implores from her side. Behind her standing is the husband of this despairing mother, holding her son within her arms. The child is devoured by the pain. The father affected has his eyes turned towards heaven, *expectando si forte sit spes*. The mother has taken one of the hands of her child; thus the composition presents at this place in the center of the massive, at some height above the terrace which forms the outside part and the lowest part of the painting, a group of six figures, the pained mother, help up by two of these women, her child which she holds by the hand, her husband in whose arms the child's is writhing in pain and a third follower kneeling at the feet of her mistress and her master.

Being this group, a little more to the left onto the background of the massive, at the place where the stairs descend and they lose height and as well the supplicating heads of the inhabitants.

All the way to the left of the painting on the terrace, at the foot of the stair is a strong man who is supporting a sick naked man from under his arms, a knee to the ground, the other leg extended, the body is balanced backwards, its suffering head, the face turned towards the heavens, the mouth filled with screams is shredding the back of his right hand. The one who is helping this convulsive sick man is seen from the back with only the profile of his head, the back of his head is uncovered, his shoulder and head naked, he implores with his left hand and with his looks.

Still on the terrace, at the foot of this massive pavement, a little more to the back that the preceding group, there is a dead woman, the feet are stretched out next to the convulsing man, the face turned to the sky, the entire upper part of her naked body, her left arm stretched on the ground and wrapped with a large rosary, her thin hair and her head on the pavement. She is lying on a coarse blanket; there is some straw, some drapery and a cooking ladle. From the side, to the back one sees her child bent with her eyes fixed onto the face of her mother; he is horrified, his hair are on his forehead, he is looking to see if his mother is still alive or whether he has no more mother.

Beyond this woman, the pavement drops off and breaks and descends to the inside right corner of the massive pavement, to the sewer, to the cave from where we see emerging the two handles of the stretcher and the two legs onto which they have been thrown

… It is a remarkable idea, very poetic that these two large naked feet which come out from the cave or the sewer; furthermore they are beautifully well drawn, and well colored, very real. However the interior top of the cave is empty and if they wished for me to believe that it was stuffed with corpses, they should have

mentioned it. There is nothing to these two legs as there is to Rembrandt's two arms that he raised from the bottom of Lazarus' tomb. The circumstances are different. Rembrandt is sublime by only showing the two arms, one might have had the same effect by showing me more than two feet. I simply cannot imagine a full place which appears empty.

It is also a beautiful and poetic idea that this man whose head, two arms and hair hang along the pavement. I know that some sensitive viewers have turned away in horror, but that does this do to me, who is not following them and who enjoyed seeing Homer with crows gathered around a corpse pulling the eyeballs out of the head and batting their wings happily? Where else will I see horrific scenes, frightening scenes if it is not in a battle, a famine, pestilence or an epidemic! Had you asked advice from the people with small refined tastes who fear strong emotions, you might as well have brushed over your madman who is escaping from the hospital, over the sick person flaying him against the massive pavement, and I would have burned the rest of your painting…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 165–166, 172

I had told you that the public was divided between who was the best between Doyen and Vien; however since everyone is knowledgeable about poetry and that few know too much about painting, it appeared that Doyen had more admirers than Vien. Motion stirs deeper that rest. Children require motion and there are many children. One feels more from the *internee* who shreds his sides with his own hands to the simplicity, nobility, truth, and grace of the great figure who is listening in silence. Perhaps this is more difficult to imagine and more difficult to do than to imagine. It is not the pieces of violent passion which are noticed from superior talent of the actor who speaks nor does exquisite taste come from a the spectator who claps his hands.

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 40

Modern History

Why Painters Are Not Amenable to Modern History

… Painters just throw themselves into pagan mythology; they lose the taste for natural events in life; and they only take out their brushes for indecent, insane, extravagant, idealistic scenes, or only those void of interest; furthermore what do I care about the dishonest adventuring of Jupiter, Venus, Hercules, Hébé, Ganymède and the other fabled gods? Would not a comic trait taken from our habits, would not a pathetic trait taken from our history means anything more to me? I'll admit, you say; why, then do you add, since art turns itself so rarely in this way? There are many reasons my friend. The first is that real subjects are infinitely more difficult

to treat and that they demand a taste of astonishing truth. The second, it is that the young students prefer and should prefer the scenes from which they can bring those from their first studies. The third it happens that the nude is not in out painting nor in sculpture and that the nude is not part of our customs. Fourth, it is that there is nothing so nasty, so poor, so sad, and so ungrateful than our clothes. The fifth, it so happens that these mythological natures, fabulous, are grander and more beautiful, or better said, more neighborly to the conventional rules of drawing. But there is one things that would surprise me if we were not such pillars of contradictions, and that is that we give license to painters that we refuse to poets Greuze will give an exposé concerning the canvas on which is the death of Henri IV; he will show the Jacobin who is thrusting the knife into Henri III's stomach and this is all without formality and that we will not permit the poet any license whatsoever to put something similar in a play.

Salon of 1767, article Lagrenée, XI, pp. 57–58

[One of the objections is the one concerning clothes. Diderot develops this point]

There is no such painting by a great master that has not be degraded, by the peoples' clothes, by hairstyles *à la française*, some well painted, some well composed as there were at one time. One might say that the great events or great actions were not for people who were so strangely dressed, and that for men who looked so stuffy would not have had the desire to extract themselves from situations. It is only appropriate for puppets. A gathering of these puppets would do just right at a parade at the consular assembly. One could never imagine the smallest amount of brains in all those heads. For me, the more that I should look at them more I should see the thin strings attached to the top of their heads.

Be careful since you might very well say that some character with a proud head, noble, pathetic and terrible might slip under your wig or hat. You can only be a little furious. You can only pretend to be serious or majestic.

If our painters and sculptors were furthermore forced to seek out their subjects in the history of modern France, I say modern since the first Franks had maintained a certain something of the simplistic in matters of dress and painting and sculpture would quickly follow into decadence.

Imagine a pile at your feet, all the remains of a European, those stocking, those shoes, those undergarments, that suit, that hat, that scarf, the garters, that shirt; just hand-me-downs. The remains of a woman would be a whole store. Nature's suit is skin; the further we get from this clothing the greater is one's sin against taste. The Greeks were so uniformly dressed could not suffer to have clothes in the arts. It was nothing more than one or two pieces of cloth haphazardly thrown over the body.

I repeat that it will take nothing more than to subject painting and sculpture to our dress and to lose these arts that are so enjoyable, so interesting, so useful in many ways, especially if they are not used constantly to focus the peoples' attention or to display dishonest actions and the atrocities of fanatics which do no more than corrupt customs and infatuate men and poison them with the most dangerous prejudices.

I should really like to know what future artists in a thousand years will say about us, especially if those wise men that lack vision and taste reduce us to only the study of our dress.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 216–217

Diderot Proposes a Subject in Modern History

A third artist told me: "Give me a historical subject"; and I replied: "Paint the death of Turenne; dedicate to posterity the patriotism of M. de Saint-Hilaire. In the background of your painting place the outsides of a fortress under attack; that the upper portion of the fortification is covered by great amounts of steam or reddened thick smoke; that this red and flaming smoke begins to inspire terror; I should see on the left a group of four figures, the dead maréchal being readied to be carried off by his adjutants, one of which drapes his right arm on to the general's leg while turning his head away; the other supports the general from underneath his arms and gives way to his complete anguish; the third more collected with his left arm he seeks out the right arm of his comrade; that the commander should be half raised with his legs hanging and that his head should be bent completely backwards, disheveled. On to the right we should see M. de Saint-Hilaire and his son; M. de Saint-Hilaire in the forefront and his son behind, that he should be supporting his father's broken arm, that this arm should be wrapped with the torn sleeve and that there should be traces of blood on the sleeve and that there should be drop of such on the ground and that the father should appear to say to his son whilst showing him the dead maréchal: ' It is not for me my son that you should weep, it is for France's loss of the death of this man'; that the son's eyes are fixed onto the maréchal. That is not all. Behind this group have a lackey holding the bridle of the maréchal's black and white horse. He is looking at his dead master with large tears streaming down his face."

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 75

Allegory

I will not suffer, the mix of allegorical and real beings, unless it is as an apotheosis or some other subject of pure inspiration. From here I can see Rubens' admirers grow faint, but I don't care as long as good taste and truth look favorably on me. The mixing of allegorical and real beings gives history a sense of the fantastic or in other words, this defect is the cause of disfiguring most of Rubens' works. I simply do not understand them. What is that figure that is holding a bird's nest, Mercury, a rainbow, the zodiac, the satyr in the room of a woman in labor? One might think of having illustrated words saying what they meant as they come out of their mouths as it was with the old castle tapestries.

I have already given you my opinion on the Reims monument, executed by Pigalle to where my subject brings me. What is the meaning of this porter slouched over these bundles and this woman who leads a lion by its mane? The woman and the animal pass by the sleeping porter; I am sure that some child will cry out: Mummy, this woman is going to have her beast eat the poor man there. I am not sure if this was his intention, but that will happen if the man does not wake up or the woman takes another step. Pigalle my friend take your hammer and smash this association of strange beings. If you want to have a protector king, then he should be one of Agriculture, Commerce and the People. Your porter who is sleeping on the bundles is Commerce. On the other side of the pedestal slay a bull and have a farmer resting between his horns of the animal and you will have Agriculture. Place between one and the other a good fat peasant who is suckling a child, then I will recognize the People. Is not a slain bull a beautiful thing? Is not a half dressed resting peasant a beautiful thing? Is it not a beautiful thing to see a well-rounded peasant woman with large breasts? Would not this composition offer your chisel all sorts of possibilities? Do you think that this will not touch me or interest me more than all of your symbolic figures? You will have displayed the monarch as protector of the foundational conditions as he should be, since it is they that constitute the flock and the nation.

Essay on Painting, X, pp. 500–501

The Triumph of Justice

One sees Justice to the right in the background. A glowing light surrounds her; around her slightly to the back is Prudence, Concord, Force, Charity, Vigilance; she holds her scales in one hand, a crown in the other, and comes forward on a chariot pulled by wild unicorns that are pulling to the left. The charging chariot smashes the symbolic monsters of evil, of the destroyer of society; Fraud which is recognized by its mask and from whose hands has dropped the banner of Revolt has seized one of the reins. Envy and Cruelty have been assigned as serpent and wolf; Envy has been toppled with its head on the ground and its feet in the air, and its serpent has it wrapped in its coils. It is in the forefront, to the left at the feet of the unicorns. Together, on the same side, its haggard eyes turned onto Justice, the wolf stands above Justice with a dagger in its hands; Cruelty is spread onto the clouds and partially hidden from view. All of these figures occupy the bottom of the canvas and have been placed to the left and the right, to the forefront with a great deal of motion and passion. At the forefront, near Justice's chariot is naked Innocence, her arms and eyes extended to Justice she follows her carried on clouds; she has a lamb following her.

The overall effect of this painting hurts ones eyes. This is an example of the "butterfly effect" at its worst. The lights are poorly blended and without thinking. They appear here and there like flashes of lightening that hurt the eyes. However this painting was not done by a child; there is color, there is inspiration and even passion. Justice is stiff; she is holding her scales in an affected way; it would appear that she

is holding them to be looked at. The position of her arms appears to be that of a dancer as in a line whose is about to make the loop; a ridiculous idea that is reinforced by the greenish circle that she is holding in her left hand, which apparently the artist wished to be a crown. Innocence with her long yellow threads which flow from her head disguised as hair is thin, pale, dry, bland, with facial expressions that denote a grimace, weepy and unpleasant. What does she have to fear being next to Justice? This entire parade of symbolic figures is lacking in light and color which effectively does not highlight Justice. Oh! What a disgusting animal the lamb is! Then there is Envy, enveloped by the snake and even though she is topsy turvy she is beautiful, robust and well-drawn. The two preceding figures have not been sinless in terms of their drawing. Cruelty seen from the back possesses a very rich coloring. The entire scene is managed with enthusiasm. All is well-planned and positioned and nothing is missing except for intelligence and Rubens' brushstroke, art magic, distinctive planning, depth. The unicorns are well thrust forth; but what I truly do not like is the mix of men, women, gods, goddesses, animals, wolves, lambs, snakes and unicorns. First, in general it is cold and has little interest. Second, because it is always unclear and often intelligible. Third, an empty mind lacking imagination makes anything it wants into an allegory, nothing is simpler to imagine. Fourth, one only knows to praise or to make beings that have no model within existing nature. What! Is the subject of Innocence imploring help from Justice not beautiful enough, simple enough to provide an interesting scene filled with ethos? I would give all of this clutter for unique incident of an old world painting, where one would see Calumny, with its haggard eyes advancing with a lit torch in its hand, and dragging Innocence by her hair past the figure of a terrified child whose stare and arms were stretched to heaven. If I were to compose a painting for a criminal courtroom, an inquisition type of room where intrepid crime, subtle, resilient sometimes escapes and sometimes destroys and at other times innocence that is timid, frightened, alarmed; instead of inviting men who have become cruel by habit, by redoubling the effort with a ferocity by displaying hideous monsters which they must destroy, I should have pages through history; in the absence of history, I would have delved into my imagination until I would have pulled out some similarities capable of inviting them to commiseration, to warning, to feel the weakness of man, the atrocity of capital punishment and the cost of a life…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 309–311

The Process of Description

Comparison

Pierre, my friend, your Christ with his pale and rotting head looks like something that has spent at least the last two weeks in a fishnet at Saint Cloud. He is terrible! He is shameful! As for your women and the rest of your composition, I will admit

that there is some beauty, character, expression strong coloring; but put your hand on your heart and swear and be glorious to the truth. Your Descent from the Cross is it not an imitation of that of Carrache which is at the Palais-Royal and one that you know well? In the painting by Carrache there is, as in yours, Christ's mother seated. In the Carrache this mother is dying from pain, as she is in yours. This pain is attached to the action of every other figure in the Carrache, as it is in yours. The head of her son is lying on her lap in the Carrache, as it is in yours Monsieur Pierre. These women are frightened for fear of the outcome that awaits this dying mother; as are yours. The Carrache has in its background a Saint Anne who has thrown herself towards her daughter while crying out loud and one sees within the face the traces of acute pain mixed with those of despair. You have not dared to copy your master to that point; however you have placed a man in the background of your painting which has the same effect; with the difference that your Christ, as I have already mentioned, appears to have be drown or tortured and that the one by Carrache is noble. That your Virgin is cold and appears contrived in comparing it to Carrache! Look at his picture and you can see the hand placed onto her son's chest, the haggard face, the near faint, the mouth cracked opened, the eyes closed; and what do you say about Saint Anne? Realize this, Monsieur Pierre that one must either make a better copy or not make a copy at all; and irrespective of the way in which it is done, one must be true to ones models.

Salon of 1761, X, pp. 114–115

Dialogue

"What if I were to buy up everything here of Monsieur Lagrenée's, what do you advise me to select?

– Nothing
– I want to buy, you say.
– We will get back to that and see. Say, since you have money to place in paintings bad and mediocre, I should want; yes I should want that *Bacchus and Ariane* or that *Diane and Endymion*
– But there is no life or expression
– Hasn't Lagrenée taught you to do without?
– But look at Ariane's left arm, it is unbelievably rigid. She is so unhappy and without life. Bacchus is aiming to be Saint John. And this Love, what is he doing there? It would appear that the artist, not being able to infuse love into them, has placed it on the side.
– Do not buy it
– However these two little pieces are better painted than the others; the color appeals to me, they seems to be from a healthier palette and I simply love to no end this Endymion who appears to be drawn and painted to ravish.
– Why don't you buy it?

– But you haven't said anything about this *Union of Painting and Sculpture.*
– They seem to be well grouped
– And what if I took this one?
– Take it.
– But these two figures are the same color; the heads are shameful they have no more character and style that if they no apparent, the one is so perfectly the other especially in color, the stroke appears so equal that their skins appears to blend in certain places, there needs to be connection but not so much.
– Then don't take them.
– But, I would like that… you do not speak any more about Lagrenée, I've had enough.
– You enjoy saying it. My legs would have entered my body, I would have sacrificed my eyes and lost my time in front of these paintings which have interrupted my boredom and when I wished to speak of them, you simply say : ' I don't want to hear about it!…' Nothing doing. You will hear about it…
– I am not listening.
– You should know that there is a very modest *Virgin among the Angels*; a small Virgin's head of little character.
– I am not listening to you.
– A twenty year old Infant Jesus.
– I am not listening to you.
– Not enough when you look and not enough effect when you leave. When you run away, I'll follow. You will have known that in the *Bathing of the Infant Jesus*, the Virgin is poorly done, that her position is bad, that she has the head and the arm of a peasant; that from the head to the feet, her child is a piece of brick from an ungainly drawing but of a very equal brick… You are covering your ears? I will scream. You should know that in the *Virgin who has Jesus and Saint John playing with a lamb*, has nothing, no great defects , no great beauties; it could be mistaken for a piece of enamel, which in general all of Lagrenée's paintings have a little of that…
– You are quiet. Thank God, you have said it all.
– Excuse me; in the Infant Jesus bathing, there is a little angel holding a blanket which is could not be more beautiful.… True, my friend but you are unfair. You, you can go to the devil; and when you leave you can hand over your apron, you can give me your tools and I'll go to work and when you come back, would you like to take look at my work. There is a *Hercules* and an *Omphale*.
– Also of Lagrenée?
– Of course; as well as the Three Graces, Thalia, Euphrosine and Aglaé. I haven't the nerve to show you what I might have advised the artist to hide.
– Now there is some honesty.
– However, there are certain drawn elements in these Graces, that our young libertines would not show any distain even though they are nude. Despite Naigeon, the one who is holding the crown of flowers is very pretty; a pretty head, well rounded. I do not even dislike the one that has turned her back. Oh! But the third

one who is in the middle, she is a little sullen and it is necessary that I shall leave her to all who will say and do whatever they please. Her members are rigid and her head is like a thin biscuit, and the rest…

– And the rest?
– Oh! So now you want me to say something and I have nothing more to say.
– Come on, finish you are dying to do so.
– The overall effect is like a dry brush, a heavy reddish brown color, with a weak balance, no melding and no half-tints".

Salon of 1769, XI, pp. 404–406

The Dream

[*Diderot feigns to have seen the episode of the great priest Corésus sacrificing himself to save Callirhoé in a dream, which inspired Fragonard*].

…While the unfortunate destiny of man and he cruelty of the gods or their minions, since gods are nothing, preoccupied me, and that I wiped a few tears away which had escaped from my eyes, , there was a third acolyte who entered wearing white as the others with his head crowned with roses. How beautiful this acolyte was! I do not know if it was his modesty, his youth, his sweetness, his nobility which caught my attention, but he appeared to overtaken the great priest himself. He was crouched at some distance to the fainted victim and his soft eyes had focused onto her. A fourth acolyte, also dressed in white came and was next to the one who had come to support the victim; he placed a knee to the ground and onto his other knee he placed a large basin which he held by the rim as though he were presenting it to capture the anticipated bloodletting. This basin, the location of the acolyte and his action were only too obvious in designating this cruelty. Increasingly more people arrived at the temple. Even men who are born with compassion seek to exercise this penchant.

I distinguished towards the rear, near the left interior column, two aged priests standing yet remarkable so much so due to the oddity of their head clothes as much by the severity of their character and the gravity of their stance.

Nearly outdoors, against the inside column on the same side, stood a woman alone; a little further and further outdoors, was another woman with her back against a wall with a young child on her knees. The beauty of this child, perhaps more was the singular effect of the light which illuminated them, the child and his mother which have been marked in my memory. Beyond these women, however within the interior of the temple there were to other spectators. At the front of these spectators, precisely between these two columns, directly in front of the altar and its fiery brazier, there was an old man whose character and gray hair struck me. I have no doubt that the back space was filled with people, but from the spot that I occupied in my dream and in the cave, I could not see any more.

Grimm

It is that there was nothing more to see; that all of the people that were there were in Fragonard's canvas; and that they were in your dream, located just as they were in his painting.

Diderot

If it is true then what a beautiful painting by Fragonard! But listen to the rest.

The sky was shining with an ultimate clarity. The sun appeared to cause the crowd to push forward by its light into the temple and seemed to enjoy the fact that it focused onto the victim, while the vaults were darkened by the thick shadows which extended over our heads and mixing with the air, with the light, produce a sudden horror. Through the shadows, I saw a hellish demon, floating; I saw him. A pair of bloodshot eyes bulged from his head. He held a dagger in one hand and in the other he was shaking a burning torch. He screeched. That was Despair; and Love, fearless Love was being carried on his back. At the moment that the grand high priest unsheathes his sacred knife; he raises him arm; I believe that he is about to strike the victim; that he is about to plunge it into the chest of he who scorned him and that heaven had delivered to him. Not at all: he kills himself. A general scream pierces and shreds the air: I see death and its effects wandering over the cheeks and onto the forehead of this tender and loving unfortunate; his knees weaken, his head falls back and one of his arms is hanging, the hand still holds the knife which has been thrust into his heart. All looks are on or fear to look onto him; everything is touched by pain and fright. The acolyte, who is at the foot of the candelabra, his mouth gaping, looks fearfully. The one who is supporting the victim looks away and has terror on his face, the one holding the fateful basin looks up with frightened eyes. The face and the extended arms of the one who appeared to me to be so handsome reveal all his pain and fear. These two old priests, whose cruel looks were often fed by the bloody spray which washed the altars, could not turn away from the pain, to the general commiseration, to the fright; they feel sorrow for the victim, they suffer, they are appalled. This solitary woman, leaning against one of the columns, seized with horror and fear, has suddenly turned around and the other who had her back to the plinth has fallen down, one of her hands is to her eyes and the other arm appears to push the horrid scene from her sight. Surprise and fear are painted onto the faces of the spectators separated from her. However nothing equals the horror and pain of the old man with gray hair. The hair on his face appears to be standing on end; I still believe that I can see him by the light of the fiery brazier that illuminates him, his extended arms over the altar. I can see his eyes, I can see his mouth, I can see him rushing forward; I can hear his screams, they awaken me, the canvas fades and the cave disappears.

Grimm

Such is Fragonard's painting; there it is in all its glory.

Diderot

Truthfully?

Grimm

It is the same temple, the same plan, the same people, the same action, the same characters, the same general interest, the same qualities, the same defects. In the cave you only saw the facsimiles of people, and in his canvas Fragonard would not have shown you anything more than similarities. That was a beautiful dream that you had; it is a beautiful dream that he painted. When one displaces one perspective for just a moment, one always fears that it will collapse as yours did and that these interesting and sublime ghosts will vanish like those in the nights.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 402–404

Fig. 5.1 Jean-Baptiste Siméon CHARDIN (1699–1779), (*The Ray*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

The Countryside

The Qualities of a Landscape Artist

The Complete Landscapist

Mr. Juliart, you think that all it takes to be a landscape artist is to throw a few trees here and there, terrace the land, put up a mountain, show some streaming water which is blocked by some boulders, extend a field as far as the eye can see, light it up with the sun and the moon, draw a pasture and place some animals within the pasture? Do you not think that these trees should also be strongly felt; that there is a certain poetry in imagining them, according to the subject matter, lithesome and elegant, or broken and cracked, hanging, hideous; whereas here they are pressed together and dense, it is important that they be majestic and beautiful, as opposed to few and separate, air and light must circulate between their branches and trunks and that their layering should be warmly painted; that these waters, by imitating the limpidity of natural flowing, must show me as through a mirror, the almost image of the surrounding scene in which the light must tremble on their surface; and that they must foam and whiten when they encounter an obstacle; that one must know how to create this foam; provide the mountains an imposing view; to open them up by suspending the craggy summit above my head and dig caves, to strip them in one place and cover them with moss in another, prick its summit with bushes and practice poetic license, which through them reminds me of the ravages of time, the vagaries of things and the age of the world. The effect of your way of lighting must be striking, that the limited fields must, in their disintegration extend all the way to where the horizon melds with the sky and that the horizon plunges into a never ending distance? Even a countryside which has its boundaries also have their magic, with solemn ruins, the factories should unravel a picturesque and lively imagination with interesting figures and real animals and that each of these things is nothing if the total is not enchanting, insofar as that it is made up of several locations here and there in nature if they do not offer a romanesque view as though it were the only one on earth. You haven't figured out that a landscape is either flat or wonderful, where the intelligence of the light is not superior then the

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-0062-8_6,

painting is bad; that a landscape with little color and consequently of little effect is a very poor painting; that a landscape which says nothing to my soul, which is not in its finer points of overwhelming strength, a of surprising truthfulness is a very bad painting; that a landscape where the animals and the other figures are poorly done is a very bad painting, if the rest pushed to the highest degree of perfection cannot redeem these defects to which one must pay attention, to the light, the color, the objects, the skies of the time of day, of the seasons,, that one must been expansive to paint skies, to fill the sky with clouds which are sometimes thick, sometimes light, to invade the atmosphere with fogs and so lose objects, to dye the totality with the sun's light, to construct every manner of natural incidents, all possible field scenes, to bring about a storm, to inundate a field, to uproot trees, to display a cottage, the flock, the shepherd swept away by the waters; to imagine the scenes that evolve from this devastation, to show the losses, the dangers and the help in interesting and comforting ways. See how Poussin is marvelous and touching, when next to a pastoral scene, he laughingly focuses my attention to a grave where I read: *Et in Acadia ego!* Then see how serious he becomes when he shows me in another painting a woman coiled by a serpent who is pulling her down to the bottom of the water. If I were to ask you for a dawn, how would you go about it? As for myself, Monsieur Juliart, though it is not my business, I would show the gates of Thebes from a hillside view; in front of the gates there would be a statue of Memnon; surrounding the statue would be people from all walks of life attracted to the statue in order to satisfy their curiosity and feel its resonance with the first rays of the sun. Seated philosophers would be drawing astronomical figures in the sand; women and children would be laying and asleep, others would have their eyes fixed on the horizon at the sunrise; one might see in the distance those hastening their pace for fear of arriving too late. This is how one might describe a moment in the day. If you should better enjoy simpler, common and less grandiose, send a woodsman into the forest; ambush the hunter, beat the bush for wild animals away from their lairs; beat them to the entrance to the forest that they are looking back to the fields from which the break of day is forcing them to return; lead the peasant with his horse load of provisions; cause the horse to stumble under its load, paint the peasant and his wife in an attempt to raise the animal. Brush into the scene anything that you wish. I haven't spoken to you about, fruits, flowers or any rustic labors. I should never end. Presently, Monsieur Juliart, tell me if you are a landscapist.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 160–162

The Intelligence of Light

If it happens that we take a walk through the Tuileries, or the Bois de Boulogne or some place else away from the Champs Elysées underneath some of these old trees that were spared amongst so many others that were sacrificed because they

blocked the view from Pompadour's hôtel; at the end of a beautiful day where the sun's oblique rays penetrate the dense foliage, whose interlaced branches stop, bend, break, shatter and disperse them onto the trunks, onto the ground, between the leaves and produce around us an infinite variety of strong shadows, less obscure, more obscure, bright, brighter and absolutely brilliant; then the paths from darkness to shadow, from shadow to the light, from the light to great brilliance are so soft so touching, so marvelous that the aspect of the branch, a leaf, stops the eye and pauses the conversation even at its most interesting moment. Our steps stop involuntarily, our looking walks onto this magical canvas as we say to ourselves: "What a painting. Oh! This is so beautiful!" It appears that we consider nature to be a result of art and in return if the painter can repeat the same spell onto the canvas, it appears that we are looking at the effect of art as though it were that of nature. It is not at the Salon, it is in the depth of a forest, between the mountains that the sun darkens and brightens and it is there that Loutherbourg and Vernet are great.

The sky spreads a common tint onto objects. The atmospheric vapor is discernible from afar; when it is near to us it is less noticeable; around me objects keep all of the force and variety of their colors; they are less apt to have atmospheric tint from the sky; from afar, they disappear, are extinguished; all of their colors become indistinct; and the distance which induces this confusion, this monotony, shown them off as gray and grayish, of a flat white more or less lit, dependent on the location of the light and the effect of the sun; it has the same effect as that of speed with which a globe covered with different colored patches revolves, when this speed is great enough to blend the patches and reduce their particular impressions of red, white, black, blue, green to a unique and simultaneous impression.

The one who has not studied and felt the effects of light and shadow in the fields, in the depth of the forests, on the houses in villages, on the roofs of towns, day and night, should drop his brushes here; he should especially stay away from being a landscape artist. It is not only in nature, it is on trees, it is on Vernet's waters, it is on Loutherbourg's hills that the moonlight is most beautiful.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 475–476

A Morning After the Rain

Prelude to a Storm at Sunset

At the center of the canvas, an old castle; near the castle, cattle going to the fields; behind, a lackey on horseback is leading them; to the left, some boulders and a path leading through the boulders. The pathway is well lighted! To the right, far

off is a sliver of countryside. It is beautiful; beautiful lighting, wonderful effect, however the effect is difficult to experience unless one has lived in the country. One would have necessarily have needed to see, at morning, that misty and gray sky, that sadness in the air, which foretells of bad weather for the rest of the day. One might remember this pale and sad aspect that the previous nights' rain had deposited on the fields and which provide a mood to the traveler who, at dawn, arises and with nightclothes and cap, opens the shutters of the inn to take note of the weather and the day that the sky appears to promise. The person who has not seen the sky darken at the approach of the storm, the cattle returning from the fields, the gathering of clouds, a dull reddish light illuminating the tops of the houses; and who hasn't seen the peasant shut himself up in his cottage, and who hasn't heard the shutters slam from all sides of the houses; who hasn't felt the fear, the silence and the solitude of that moment suddenly descend onto the entire hamlet, he who hasn't knows nothing of the beginning of The Storm by Loutherbourg.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 369–370

Artificial Nature: Boucher

The Shepherds of the OPÉRA-COMIQUE

…At the center of the canvas, a shepherdess, Catinon, in a cute bonnet, who is leading a donkey, one can only see the head and the back of the animal. On the animals back are some rags, baggage, and a pot. The woman holds the animal's halter in her left hand; in the other she is holding a basket of flowers. Her eyes are fixed on a shepherd seated to the right. This great finder of blackbirds is on the ground; on his knee is a cage, in the cage are a number of small birds. Behind the shepherd, towards the back, a stone, plaster and joist factory, a kind of sheep pen, deposited there not knowing why. Surrounding the donkey are sheep; towards the left, behind the pen, a rustic fence, a stream, some trees, some countryside. Behind the pen, some more trees and more countryside. Towards the bottom front all the way to the left, there is a goat and some sheep, and all of this is pleasurably helter-skelter: this is the best lesson to give to a young student on the art of destroying all impression by force of objects and work. I am not going to mention neither color nor figures or any other details; it is just as I described. My friend, isn't there a police force at the Academy? If in the absence of a painting steward who might prohibit its entrance, would it be possible to kick it through the gallery, down the stairs, through the courtyard until the shepherd, shepherdess, the pen, the donkey, the birds, the cage, the trees, the child and the whole countryside is in the street? Unfortunately no! It must remain where it is, however indignant, good taste must nonetheless make the brutal yet justified execution thereof.

Another Pastoral Setting

Same Grandeur, Same Form and Same Merit as the Preceeding One

So my friend, do you think that my vicious taste will be kinder for this one? Not at all. I hear it cry out inside of me: "Out of the Salon, out of the Salon!" I have tried to repeat Chardin's lesson: "Lightly, lightly"; then it becomes vexed, and cries out even louder: "Out of the Salon!"

It is a delirious picture. To the right, towards the front, it seems always to be Catinon or Favart the shepherdess, lying down asleep with an inflammation of the left eye. Why fall asleep in such a damp place with a small cat on her lap? Behind this woman, beginning at the edge of the canvas and forcing its way through in different ways are some turnips, cabbages, leeks and a jar of earth with some sassafras in the pot and a large slab of stone and on this slab of stone a large vase with a garland of flowers and trees and greenery, and some views. In front of the sleeping girl, a shepherd stands above her looking; he is separated from her by a simple rustic fence, in one hand her is hold a basket of flowers; in the other a rose. There my friend, what is a little cat doing on the petticoat of a peasant girl who is not asleep in the doorway of her cottage? And the rose in the peasant's hand, is it not of an inconceivable platitude? Why doesn't this fool lean over, why, does he not make the effort to steal a kiss on that mouth that is just waiting? Why doesn't he come forward gently? Do you think that this was all that pleased the painter which he threw onto the canvas? Oh! Goodness no! Isn't there something else beyond perhaps countryside? Can't we see smoke rising behind the trees apparently from the neighboring hamlet?

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 260–261

In Boucher's Defense

The old athlete did not want to die without going into the arena one more time; that is Boucher that I want to say. There was a painting by the artist as the Marche de Bohémiens or a Caravane after Benedetto di Castiglione, a painting of nine feet wide and six feet high.

People were remarking still of the richness, the ease, the passion; I myself was surprised that there was not even more, since in old age men seemingly descend into senility, platitudes and foolishness, and in old age the insanity directs them more and more towards violence, extravagance and fantasy. Oh what an insufferable old man I will become, if God lets me live!

At the bottom of the painting one should have placed a clown that one sees at the gateway to the games at the fair: who might have been shouting: "Come closer,

Gentlemen, it is here that you will find the rowdy …" Do you like figures? There is profusion; there are also horses, donkeys, mules, dogs, birds, herds, mountains, factories, and a multitude of incidentals, a prodigious variety of actions, motion, draperies and adjustments it was the greatest crowd that you ever saw in your life.

However this crowd created a very beautiful pictorial composition. The groups were bound and distributed with intelligence, a well balanced and vast chain of light ruled amongst them; the bits and pieces were spread about considerately and done with good taste; nothing appeared forced, the touch was both bold and spiritual, the great master was everywhere; especially in the sky, warm, light, real was enthusiastic and sublime.

If my friend should find someone who says that the Boucher's *Caravane* was one of the best paintings at the Salon, that he should not contradict him; if he should find someone who tells him that Boucher's Caravane was one of the worst paintings at the Salon he should contradict him even less. I am going to amuse you for a moment by placing these two people together.

– "Are you disputing the points that I have found within
– Boucher's painting?
– No; but do you think that there is color?
– No; it is weak and dull
– And the impression?
– There is none.
– And that magic which adds the depth to the canvas, which advances or retracts objects, which places them on different planes, which puts some space between the planes and which circulates the air between the figures?
– All right, it is missing, it is a thin box where the caravan is enclosed, squeezed, suffocated.
– What of perspective, which provides everything with its real identity?
– There is none.
– And those figures behind the donkey, at the third level, what do you think?
– They are too strong.
– What about this man who is running across the front?
– That he is too small for the space he occupies.
– What of the principal figure?
– Which one? The woman mounted on her horse?
– Precisely.
– That, even though her blouse is a little too large, she seems well adjusted, well combed, her face seems pleasant enough and one cannot, refuse praise to those who surround her to the rear.
– Yes, but their skin tone?
– Oh, I will agree that it is gray and somewhat dull.
– Le Bourdon was able to use these grays to his advantage; Boucher knows them but overuses them. The missing piece in this work is that the mass of shadows should be more defined, more forceful tones in the groups in the forefront. I have no idea why I am distinguishing the different planes in this painting since there

are none. When reflections are too numerous and diverse on masses it destroys the effect. What about the woman who is seated in the front, do you think that she is well done, the same color as the one in the middle? Do you not think that in its place a more colored figured and perhaps male figure would have been of better contrast against the others and might have brought them out a little more?

– I cannot deny your comments; however, on the other hand you will agree that this piece is thoroughly well-drawn.
– In some manner.
– What a rare thing it is that an artist has been given the opportunity to support himself in such a way. To be able to have the passion of a young man!
– But what position do you wish for me to take concerning a passion that leaves me cold? What does all this say to my heart and my spirit? In this pile of incidents, where is the one which focuses me, pricks me, stirs me, and interests me?
– This is precisely the criticism that I gave to Chardin who mocked me.
– Leave Chardin to say what he wishes; it is bad, and Chardin knows it. Le Castiglione is strong but this painting is dull".

Both of these speakers have their points.

Salon of 1769, XI, pp. 387–389

Nature and History

Praise for Vernet

What an enormous variety of scenes and figures. What streams! What skies! What magic! What effect!

If he lights some fire, it is the place where its brilliance would appear to have to extinguish the rest of the composition. The smoke rises thickly, dissipates little by little and is lost in the air at an immense distance. If he projects objects onto the crystal seas, he knows how to make them vanish at greater depths without making them lose neither its natural color nor its transparency. If he allows for light to dim, he knows how to plumb it, one can see it shake and shimmer at its surface.

If he places men into action, you see them act.

If he spreads clouds into the air, how lightly they are suspended! How they move according to the whim of the wind! What space exists between them and the heavens!

If a fog rises, the light is diminished and in its turn the entire misty whole is imprinted and colored. The light darkens and the vapor becomes luminous. If he brings about a storm, you will hear the whistling of the winds and the crashing of the waves; you will see them rise against the rocks and whiten them with their foam. The sailors cry out; the sides of ships are ripped open; some fling themselves into the water; others, exhausted are displayed on the beach. Here the spectators

raise their arms in supplication to the heavens; there a mother clutches her child to her breast; others expose themselves to the danger of saving their friends or relatives; a husband holds his wife in his arms who appears half-dead, a mother's cries for her drowned child, furthermore the wind contours the clothes and one can discern the forms; crates of goods rock on the water and the passengers are dragged into the depths.

It is Vernet who knows how to gather storms, open a cataract in the sky and flood the earth; it is also he who knows how, when it pleases him, to dissipate the storm, calm the seas and restore serenity to the heavens. Then it appears that nature has escaped from chaos and alights as it were from some spell and reassumes all her charm.

How her days are peaceful! How her nights are quiet! How her waters are transparent! It is he who creates the silence, the freshness and the shadow in the forests. It is he who dares place the sun or the moon in his firmament. He has stolen nature's secret; everything she produces, he can repeat.

… There is the production of this genius and the speed of execution which are inconceivable. That he might have used two years to paint just one of his works would not be surprising but there are twenty of the same qualities. It is the universe displayed under all her faces, at all times of day, in all light.

I do not always look, I listen sometimes. I heard a viewer of one of these paintings who said to his partner: "Le Claude Lorrain appears even more pointed …" and his friend replied: "Agreed, but he is less real".

This response did not appear correct. The two artists when compared are equally true; however le Lorrain has selected rare moments and more extraordinary phenomenon.

But then are you saying that you prefer le Lorrain to Vernet? Because when one picks up the pen or the brush it is not to show a common thing.

I agree; but consider the fact that Vernet's great compositions are not from a free imagination but rather as a commissioned work, it is some think that local must be given as it is, and note that even in these pieces Vernet displays another side of himself, another talent than le Lorrain due to the unbelievable number of actions, objects and particular scenes. One is a landscapist, the other a painter of history and the leading force in all the parts of painting.

Salon of 1763, X, pp. 201–202 and 203

How Poussin Raises a Landscape to the Dignity of History

… Furthermore this Vernet, as ingenious and productive as he is, remains distant to Poussin in what concerns the ideal. I will not mention his Arcadia, or his sublime inscription: *Et ego in Arcadia*. "I also lived in wonderful Arcadia". But here is what he showed in another landscape, perhaps even more sublime but less well-known. He also knows, when he cares, how to throw you into horror and fright in the middle of a country scene! The meaning of his canvas is focused by a noble

countryside, majestic and immense. There is nothing else but boulders and trees; but they are imposing. One's eye travels over a multitude of planes from the closest point to the scene which is the most imbedded. Within one of these planes, to the left, all the way into the background, there is a group of travelers who are resting, who are speaking amongst themselves, some seated, some reclining; all feeling a sense of security. On another level, more to the front, and occupying the center of the canvas, there is a woman who is washing her laundry in a river; she is listening. In a third level, more to the left and altogether in the forefront, there was a man crouching; but he is rising and casting looks that are mixed with anxiety and curiosity towards the left and the forefront. He too has heard it. All the way to the right, there is a man standing, transfixed with horror and ready to flee; he has seen something. But what is it that has impressed this terror? What has he seen? All the way to the left and forefront, he has seen a woman lying on the ground, coiled by an enormous serpent who is devouring her and who is dragging her into the water from where her arms, head and hair are floating. From the placid travelers in the background to this last spectacle of terror, what an expanse, and within this expanse what an expression of dissonant passions all the way to you who is the ultimate object, the reason for the composition! The beautiful whole! The wonderful all! It is a solitary and unique idea that has given birth to this painting. This landscape, or I have made a great mistake relates to the passage of time in Arcadia and one may write under it φοβός (fear); and under the former χαί έλέος (pity).

These are the types of scenes that one must be able to imagine, when one attempts to be a landscape artist. It is thanks to this imagination that a pastoral setting becomes as interesting as or even more that a historical fact…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 280–281

The Picturesque: Loutherbourg

To the right the scene depicts the summit of an old castle above the rocks. Within these boulders, three walkable arcades. Along these arcades, a torrent, of which the waters, narrowed by another mass of rocks which are even more in the forefront, come crashing, bounding and whose foam covers a goodly quarter of brute rock and which eventually break off into smaller rivulets off the sides of this obstacle. This torrent, these waters, this massive formation provides a very good, picturesque effect. Beyond this poetic place, the waters spread and form a pond. Beyond the arcades, a little to the back and to the left, one sees the summit of another boulder covered in thick set brush and wild plants. At the base of this boulder is a traveler leading a horse loaded with luggage, he appears to be climbing towards the arcades by a path which cuts through the rock, on the torrent's edge. There is between the horse and him, a goat. Below the traveler, more to the forefront and to the left, one sees a peasant woman riding a mule. The young mule is following her mother. Entirely to the front at the edge of the pond formed by the torrent's water, on a corresponding level at the interval which separates the traveler who leads his horse and

the peasant woman forked over her donkey, is a shepherd who is leading his animals to the pond. The scene is closed off to the left due to a massive rock formation covered by thick bushes, and it assumes its depth from the starkly rising covered mountains that are seen in the distance; and that are found placed between the crags to the left and the factory to the right.

Vernet was able to exceed Loutherbourg but not by ease, or the effect or all of the technical appeal, his compositions would still be more interesting than those of his rival. This one only knows how to introduce shepherds and animals into his paintings. What does one see? Shepherds and animals; always shepherds and animals. The other sows people and incidents of all kinds, and these people and these incidents, even thought they are true are not the natural state of fields.

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 279

Battles, Ruins and Shipwrecks

The Painter of Battles Must Be a Poet and Dramatist

To the right, all the way into the semi shadow, there is a castle covered with smoke On can only see the top that is being scaled and a moat into which the attackers are being thrown and where one can see them falling pell-mell. By going to the moat from the left, the ground rises, and one can see that on level ground flags, drums, broken weapons, bodies, a mix of combatants forming a great mass from where we see a white horseman half thrown, dead and falling backwards onto the his horse's rump; more towards the rear, more by profile is a dark rider, whose horse has stumbled, and is dying; caught up in the smoke and the bursting reddish glow one, recognizes the effect of cannon shot. On the two flanks and to the rear there are individuals fighting, actions which are less contained, faint so as to highlight the main force. Within this grouping the white rider is seen from his horse's back. To front and center of the fighting, the dead, dying, wounded are distributed helter skelter on the ground. I am looking through a number of other situations.

This is a type of painting where there is neither the unity of time, nor the unity of action nor unity of place. It is a spectacle of differentiated incidents which in no way imply any contradictions. The artist is thereby obligated to shown even more poetry, passion, invention, genius so that he is less encumbered by rules. It is essential that I find variety everywhere, passion, and extreme excitement. There can be no other interest. Fright and sadness must come to me from all points of the canvas. If one were not able to be focused by the communal actions (I called communal actions all those where a man is threatening or who kills another), but one should imagine some personal characteristic of generosity, some sacrifice of life for the conversation of another, one might elevate my soul, one might hold it, perhaps one might even force the shedding of my tears. I prefer a battle that is lifted from history rather than an imaginary battle. In the former there are principal people whom I know and that I am looking for.

The type of battle is that of expression. This one is beautiful, very beautiful and she is strongly colored; there is a great intelligence linking practically all of the parts of art. This reddish cloud, which takes up the greater part of the back, is very real. With all of this, there is a routine planning which is indicative of a nearly incurable sterility, on top of which a uniformity of incidents, which neither interest nor are of equal interest. I would rather insinuate a remark in the middle of this concerning a placid general, oblivious of the danger that surrounds him, so as to assure the glory of the great day; having an eye over all, a proud head and giving orders no differently in battle than he would at the palace. I should rather see some of his principal officers intending to form a shield with their bodies. My own understanding of a battle is not the ambush of pandours or hussars: I have a much greater idea.

Salon de 1767, article Loutherbourg, XI, pp. 271–172

The "Poetry" of Ruins

Moral Associations

Oh what beautiful and sublime ruins! How solid yet at the same time what lightness, sureness, ease of brushstroke! What effect! What grandeur! What noblesse! Someone should tell me to whom these ruins belong, so that I can steal them away; the only way one can acquire when one is poor. Alas!

They probably only provide for a small amount of happiness to the stupid rich who own them; and they would provide me with such happiness! Oh what an indolent owner and blind husband. What ills do I do to you when I covet charms that you either ignore or neglect! With what astonishment and surprise I see the broken vault, debris superimposed onto the vault. The persons who erected this monument, where are they? What has happened to them? Into which great dark silent pit will my eye wander? To what enormous distance does that part of the sky go that I can see through the opening! The astonishing graduations of light! One does not become weary from looking. Time stops for he who admires. How little I have lived! What a short time my youth has lasted!

It is a great vaulted gallery given onto the interior by a colonnade which goes from right to left. Towards the middle of its length, the vault has been broken and reveals above its fracture the remains of a superimposed building. This long and vast factory still receives light from its opening at the back. To the left, outdoors, a fountain; above this fountain, an antique seated statue, underneath the pedestal of this statue there is a raised basin on an earth foundation; around this basin, in front of the gallery, in the space between the columns, there is a crowd of small figures, in small groups, small diverse scenes. Some are taking water, some are resting, some are strolling, and there is conversation. There is movement and noise. Furthermore, I will give you my opinion, Monsieur Robert; in a moment. You are a talented man. You will excel, in fact you excel in your genre. But study Vernet. Learn from him how to draw, to paint, to make your figures interesting; and since

you are devoted to painting ruins, be aware that this genre has its poetry. You have absolutely ignored it. Seek it out. You have the know-how but the ideal escapes you. Do you not have the feeling that there are too many figures here? You should eliminate at least three-quarters. You should only keep those which will add to the solitude and silence. A man alone, who would have wandered into these shadows, his arms folded across his chest with his head bent forward, would have had a greater impact on me. The darkness alone, the majesty of the building, the grandeur of the factory, the vastness, the peacefulness, and the resounding silence would have caused me to tremble. I could never have stopped myself from dreaming underneath this vault, to sit between the columns, and to enter into your painting. However there are too many nuisances. I stop. I look. I admire and I continue. Monsieur Robert, you still do not understand why ruins provide so much pleasure, independently of the variety of accidents that they bring to light; I am going to tell you what immediately comes to mind.

The ideas that ruins awake in me are important. Everything is obliterated, all perishes, all passes. There is nothing but the world that remains. Time, is all that remains. How old is earth is! I move between two eternities. No matter where my eyes fall, the objects that surround me speak of an end and resign me to the one that awaits me. How can my transient existence be of comparison to this boulder that is collapsing, or this small valley that is being dug out, or this tottering forest, or of this weakened mass suspended above my head? I can see the marble tombstones disintegrate into dust; and I do not wish to die! I envy the weak tissue of flesh and bones rather than a general law for the pouring of a bronze! A torrent is dragging one nation over another to the depths of a common abyss; I pretend all alone to stop on the edge and cleave the waters that rush by my sides.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 228–230

This is noble and great, and if you apply to the remaining architecture the principles that I have just established, you will be able to make reason of their nobility and their greatness in smaller detail. Here, is still assembled to these objects, a procession of ancillary and moral ideas concerning the energy of the human spirit and of the power of people. What masses! It was thought only to be eternal. However, this is being destroyed, it is passing, soon it will have passed; and it has been a very long time since an innumerable number of men who lived, moved about, armed themselves, hated each other, surrounded these monuments, and is no more. Amongst those men there was a Caesar, a Demosthenes, a Cicero, a Brutus, and a Cato. In their place, there are snakes, Arabs, Tartars, priests, ferocious beasts, brambles and thorns. Where once crowds and noise ruled, there is nothing else but silence and solitude. Ruins are more beautiful at sunset than in the morning. Morning is the moment when the world's scene will become tumultuous and noisy. The evening is when she will become silent and peaceful: So! Well I am not going to plunge into the depths of analogies and feelings, the analogy which secretly moves the artist in the choice of his incidentals! But stop! I must finish.

Salon of 1765, X, p. 308

… Nearly all artists who paint ruins will show you around their solitary factories, palaces, cities, obélisques or other fallen structures, a strong wind that is blowing; a traveler who is carrying a small bag on his back who is passing through; a woman bent by the weight of her child wrapped in rags, who is passing through; men speaking on horseback with their chins beneath their coats, who are passing throught; who suggested these props? An affinity of ideas. Everything passes; man and man's home. Change the type of ruined building; in place of the ruins of a city suppose that it is a great tomb, you will find that there is a different affinity of ideas that the artist will use as props altogether different from the former. There the tired traveler will have laid down his bag at his feet, he and his dog will be seated in the shade of the tomb; the woman, stopped and seated, will give her breast to the child; the men will have dismounted and leave their horses to pasture in freedom, will be lying down, will continue their conversation or will enjoy themselves in reading the inscription on the tomb. It happens that ruins are places in peril and that tombs are types of oasis; it is that life is a trip and the tomb is the resting place; that man should be seated where the ashes of man are resting.

It would absurd to have the traveler pass along the front of the tomb and to stop him in front of the ruins. If the tomb has a number of anything around which are in motion it should be either birds which glide above at a great height or others diving through, or workers whose work hides the meaning of life, and who are singing far away. I am only speaking about the painters of ruins. The historical painters, landscapists vary, contrast, mix their props as ideas meld together, unify, get stronger, oppose and contrast in their understanding.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 494–495

Romantic Shipwrecks

It was a Storm; oh! My friend, what a storm! There is no more beautiful setting than rocks placed to the left, between which ships went and broke apart with spewing foam; in the middle of these roiling waters, one could see the two feet of some unfortunate who was drowning among the ship's debris, and one trembled; over there was the floating body of a woman enveloped in her draperies and we trembled; in another spot, a man who fought against the waves that dashed him against the rocks; and we trembled; on these rocks the spectators were painted in terror, especially the group placed on the rock's point furthest into the sea. I will not mention that these figures were as alive, as correct and as grand as those of Vernet, but they were beautiful. As to the sky, good Lord, one might be fooled because of its vivacity and lightness. This Loutherbourg is the best that I have seen, and that is to have said a great deal of good. Oh! If this artist decides to travel and to look at nature!

Salon of 1769, XI, p. 432

Oh! Saintly prophet, raise your hands to the skies and pray for a friend in danger, say to God: "If you see within your eternal decrees that wealth will corrupt Denis'

heart, do not spare the masterpieces that he idolizes, destroy them, and bring him back to his original poverty"; and I will ask the heavens from my side: "O God! I resign myself to the saint prophet's prayer and you your will! I abandon everything; take back all of it; yes, everything except the Vernet. Oh! Leave me the Vernet! It is not the artist, it is your work. Respect the work of friendship as well as yours. Can you see the lighthouse, can you see the adjacent tower rises to the right; do you see the old tree that the winds have torn. This mass of things is so beautiful! Overlooking this hidden mass, can you see the green covered rocks? That is how your powerful hand made them that are the way that your merciful hand covered them. Look at the uneven terrasse, which descends from the base of the rocks towards the sea. It is the image of degradations that you have allowed time to exercise over the most lasting things of the world. Would your sun shine in any other way? God! If you destroy this work of art, it will be said that you are a jealous God! Take pity on these few on this side. Isn't it enough to have shown them the bottomless pit? Have you saved them only to lose them? Listen to the prayer of this one here who thanks you. Support the efforts of he who is gathering together the shameful remains of his fortune. Close your ear to the ranting of this fool; too bad! He promised such great returns; all he thought of was rest and retirement; he had embarked on his last trip. A hundred times on his trip, he had calculated on his fingers the depth of his fortune and had even arranged for some work; and then all his hopes were dashed; there was hardly what was necessary to cover his nakedness. Be moved by the tenderness of these two spouses. Look at the terror that you have inspired in this woman. She is grateful for the harm that you have not allowed to go her way. Furthermore, his child too young to be aware of the danger to which you have exposed him, he, his father and his mother, take care of the faithful friend on the trip, he reattaches the collar onto the dog. Be gracious to the innocent. Do you see that mother who has just escaped from the waters; it is not for herself that she trembled but for her child. See how she holds it close to her breast; see how she embraces it. O God! Acknowledge the waters that you created. Acknowledge them when you breath makes them rise and when your hand calms them. Acknowledge the dark clouds that you brought together, and when it pleased you dissipate them. Already they are separating; they are off in the distance, already the glow of the morning star arises onto the face of the waters. I sense calm with the reddish horizon. How far this horizon is! It is not confined by the sea. The sky descends from above and seems to surround the globe. Finish lighting this sky; finish giving back calm to the sea. Allow these sailors to cast again their ship once run aground back to the sea; be apart of their work; give them strength, and let me keep my painting. Leave it to me, as you will the rod with which you will punish the vain man. Already it is no longer me that they come to visit or they come to listen to: It is Vernet that they come to admire at my home. The painter has humbled the philosopher."

O my friend, the beautiful Vernet that I own! The subject is the end of a storm without devastating consequences. The waves are still roiling; the sky is covered in clouds, the sailors are occupied with their ship that has run aground; the local inhabitants come running from the nearby hills. What spirit this artist has. It only took him a few principal figures to provide for the moment that he selected. How truthful this

scene is! How everything has been painted with lightness, ease and strength! I wish to keep this token of his friendship. I want my children to pass it on to their children, their children to their children and to those who will be born from them.

If you can see the beauty of the whole of this piece, how everything is in harmony; as the effects are linked; as everything is given meaning without pretension, as these mountains to the right are ethereal, as these rocks and the buildings placed on top of them are handsome, how this tree is picturesque; how this terrace is bright; how the light breaks up, how the figures are disposed, true, active, natural, lively, how interesting they are; the force with which they are painted; the purity with which they are drawn; how they detached themselves from the back; the enormity of this space, the reality of these waters, these clouds, this sky and this horizon! Here the bottom is deprived of light and the front is lit, contrary to popular technique. Come see my Vernet; but do not take it away.

Regrets concerning my old dressing gown, IV, pp. 10–12

Fig. 6.1 Jean-Baptiste GREUZE (1725–1805), (*The Village financée*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

The Portrait

The State and Appearance

La Tour's Ideas

I was leaving the Salon, I was tired. I went to see La Tour, this special individual who began to learn Latin at fifty-five, and who abandoned the art in which he excelled to plumb the depths of metaphysics which ended in disturbing his mind. I found him paying tribute to Restout's memory; he was painting a portrait from one he had painted and which he was not satisfied. "Oh! What an interesting game I am playing! He told me. I can only be a winner. If I succeed, I will have the praise of a good artist; if I fail, there will remain that of a good friend". He admitted to me that he owed a great deal to Restout's advice, the only man with the same talent as himself who really appeared to communicate; that it was a painter who had taught him to turn a head and to circulate the air between the figure and the background by reflecting the lit side in the background and the side on the darkened side"; that either because it was Restout's fault or either his own he had all the trouble in the world to understand how the principle worked, despite his uncomplicated character; for when the reflection is too strong or too weak you are not allowing nature, you are painting; that you are either weak or strong and that you are no longer truthful nor in harmony…

I wanted to know from him what he meant by embellish nature, and I had the satisfaction to see that a man who had overcome an ungrateful nature which opposed his progress and who had excelled by the sheer force of work and thought, had precisely the same ideas as my own.

The professors of our school, he told me, make two terrible mistakes: the first is to introduce this principal too early to the students; the second is to propose this without making any connection; from which it happens that amongst these students, some are subjected as slaves to the proportions of antiquity, to compass and ruler from which they never escape and are forever false and without feeling; the others abandon themselves to a freedom of imagination which delivers them to the false and mannered a place which leaves them no better.

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
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"This is what I understand is meant, he continued, by embellishment of nature. In nature as consequentially in art, no lazy being. However, every being must have suffered more or less from the fatigue of being; it carries an imprint more or less defined. The first point to really be gained is an understanding of this impression, in such a way that if it depends on painting a king, an army general, a minister, a judge, a priest, a philosopher, a porter, that these people appear to be part of their state as much as possible; but as the change incurred in one has more or less influence on the others, the second point remains to give to each the right measure of change which is his due; in such a way the king, the judge the priest are not only king, judge, priest from the head up or character, but are also of their state from the head to their feet. Add to this long, painful, difficult study a taste which is not so set that it does not allow the artist's fantasy a great enough leeway, a little exaggeration, enough so that the composition of the scene with all its people are marvelous, and it will be said of your figures, as those of Raphaël that, even though they probably do not exist anywhere else, it appears that they have always been seen…" So you see that this is exactly what I established in my preface to the Salon of 1767.

Salon of 1769, XI, pp. 411–413

[This "state of character", Diderot locates, for example with the priests painted by Durameau in his canvas: Death of Saint François de Sales, today at Saint-Nicolas de Chardonnet].

… To the left are two priests administering last rites. The one at the forefront touches the uncovered feet of the dying saint with holy oil. He is absolutely in the sincerest state of character. He is a real person. He is great without exaggeration. He is handsome, even though he has a large nose and his cheeks are sunken and gaunt, since he has the character of his state and the expression of his ministry. One believes to have seen a hundred priests which resembles this one. This is one of the strongest proofs of the foolishness of convention and of provoking interest by enclosing nearly within the rigorous limits of existing nature chosen with such little care. I will say as much for the other priest, who is above this one, more to the back and who is reciting a prayer, a rosary in his hand, while his brother priest administers. There are behind these two principal figures, whose positions, vestments, drapes and folds are so correct that one could not imagine them any differently, a sacrament carrier and other ecclesiastical assistants, with candles, torches and the cross. It is the very thing. It is the moment's reality.

Salon of 1767, XI, p. 314

The Usual Expression

Once in a while one takes stock of one's face. The face is accustomed to assume the character of dominant passion. Sometimes as well we get it from nature, and we must keep it as we receive it. It was his desire to make us good and to provide us with an evil face; or for us to be evil and to provide us with a good face. I lived for a longtime in the faubourg Saint-Marceau and I saw children with charming faces.

At the age of twelve or thirteen, these eyes full of sweetness had become intrepid and blazing; that agreeable little grin had somehow become twisted; this neck so well rounded, had become inflated with muscles; these cheeks once large and well-balanced were now spread with hardened areas. They had taken on the looks of the alleys and the markets. By the simple force of them being there, in swearing at one another, in fighting one another, and to mess up one's hair for nothing, by doing so they contracted, for all their life the air of insipidity, impudence and anger. If the soul of a man or whether nature has placed onto his face the expression of well-being, of justice and of liberty, you will feel it, because you carry within you images of these virtues, and you will acknowledge he who announced them. This face is a letter of recommendation written in a common language to all men.

Every state of life has its character and its expression.

The savage has his established traits, vigorous and pronounced, hair which stands on end, a bushy beard, a defined proportion in his stature; what could possibly have altered his state? He hunted, he ran, he fought against the wildest of beasts, he dominated, he saved, he reproduced his own kind, the only two natural occupations. He possesses nothing which is either vain or shameful. There is a sense of pride mixed with ferociousness. His head is straight and erect, his focus is direct. He is the master of the forest. The more that I think of him, the more he reminds me of the solitude and genuineness of his residence. If he speaks, his gesture is imperious; his speech is short and to the point. He is without laws and prejudices. His person is quick to anger. He is in a perpetual state of siege. He is supple, he is agile; furthermore he is strong.

The characteristics of his companion, her looks, her grooming are not that of a civilized woman. She is nude without being aware. She has followed her husband onto the plains, onto the mountains, she participated in his exercise, and she carried his child in her arms. No clothing supported her breasts. Her long hair is thin. She is well proportioned. The voice of her husband was thunderous while hers is strong. Her looks appear furtive, she can conceive of fright more easily. She is agile.

In society every level of citizenry has its own character and expression; the artisan, the noble, the common man, the man of letters, the robe, the judge, the military.

Amongst the artisans, there are group customs, appearances for store and work shops.

Every society has its government, and every government has it's dominate characteristic, real or supposed which is its soul, its support and its motive.

The republic is an egalitarian state. A member looks at himself as a version of the king. A republican will be lofty, hardened and proud.

Within the monarchy, where one commands and where one obeys, the character, the expression will be that of affability, of grace, of sweetness, of honor, of gallantry. Under despotism, beauty will be that of the slave. Show me pretty faces, subdued, timid, serious, supplicating and modest. The slave walks with his head bowed; he always appears as though the sword is ready to strike.

A portrait may appear sad, somber, melancholic, and serene since these are permanent states; however a portrait which laughs lacks nobility, characterless, perhaps even false and consequently a joke. The laugh is fleeting. One laughs on occasion; but one is not in a state of laughter.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 486–487

Concerning Ones Own Portrait

Me. I like Michel; but I much prefer the truth. It resembles me; it says to those who cannot recognize it, as the gardener at the Opéra-comique "It is that he has never seen me without my wig". Very alive, it is the sweetness, with its vivacity; but too young, head is too small, pretty like a woman eying, smiling, affected, *faisant le petit bec*, heart-shaped lips; nothing of the experienced color of the Cardinal de Choiseul; and this expensive clothing to ruin a poor intellectual, especially if the tax assessor wants to collect on his dressing gown; the writing desk, the books, the accessories as much as it is possible, when one wanted brilliant colors and having them blend harmoniously; bubbling seen up close, strong from afar, especially the flesh tones. As for the rest, pretty hands well shown, except for the left which was not drawn. We see it face on, his head is uncovered; except for the affected gray hair piece which give him the appearance of an old flirt who is being nice; it is the posing of a secretary of State and not of a philosopher. The mistake of the first moment influences the rest. It was that silly Madame Van Loo who had come to gossip with him while he painted which transferred onto the painting and ruined everything. Had she only gone to the harpsichord and played a prelude or sung,

Non ha ragione, ingrate,

Un core abbandonato

Or some other similar piece, the sensitive side of the philosopher would have taken on a whole different attitude, and the portrait would have been different. Or better yet, he should have been left alone and only to be lost in his dreams. So then his mouth would have been a little open, his distracted look would have been transported elsewhere the work in his head which so occupied him would then be painted onto his face and Michel would have done a good thing. My handsome philosophers, forever you will be a valuable witness from the friendship of an artist an excellent artist and an excellent man. But what will my grandchildren say, when they come and compare my dismal works with this smiling, affected, effeminate, old flirt? My child, I warn you that this is not me. In one day alone I had more than a hundred different appearances coming from what came from within me. I was peaceful, sad, dreaming, tender, violent, passionate, and enthusiastic; but I was never as you see me there. I had a big forehead, very penetrating eyes, quite large features, a head very much in the character of an ancient orator, a friendliness which often came close to silliness, I appeal to the rustic nature of times long past….

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 20–21

Portraits and Models

This artist not only has a strong brush but color as well but the way he sets things are stiff, his heads have no soul, his props are placed haphazardly and tastelessly and infinitely out of place with everything else. His *Portrait de l'archêveque de*

Reims is beautiful, very moving; it was a work that required great patience; but it is certainly towards *M. Bertin, Ministre* that one appreciates the time, work and the effort. The details are refined and produced with the greatest accuracy but without effect, but it is sublime for the rigid and starchy, the way in which man composes himself before the artist, the way in which he holds his head, his eyes, his mouth, his body, his legs, his arms and his hands; which is a proposal for the model but not for the students. In fact they should place in front of them and next to a Van Dyck and to make the strongest possible point which is the difference of a beautiful and simple nature and precious nonsense. Another great painting of three figures, where we see a woman, her brother-in-law and her husband who are forced together by art rather than by a common action is Roslin's trash; no mass points or effect, the furthest parts are treated in the same way as though they were close to the eye; same shadows, same lights and consequently no depth. The man who is leaning on the back of the woman's chair is huge, but badly put together; his head is not on his shoulders, the eyes seem unfocused; the brother-in-law looking towards the right, the man with the large stomach towards the left, and the woman towards both which is ridiculous. These people do not know what they are doing; the woman touches the harpsichord keys with one hand, without hearing and with no one listening. Many other portraits of the same painter about which we must keep quiet, because they are of the same quality, the postures apparently taken after a model and who had provided the face five or six times to the artist and who has filled in the rest as he could; no truth, no simplicity, no matches…

Salon of 1769, article Roslin, XI, pp. 417–418

The Portrait and History

As long as the painter portraitist will produce only resemblances without composition, I will not say much, however when they will feel that to interest others one requires action, then they will have tap into all the talent of historical painters and they will interest me independently of the value of their created resemblance.

There has come about a singular argument between the artists and *les gens du monde*. The latter have pretended that the principal value of a portrait was to be well-drawn and well-painted. So! What do we care, said those that the Van Dyck's resemble or do not resemble? Are they any less a masterpiece in our eyes? The value to resemble is fleeting; it is the brush which astonishes within that moment which the work captures for eternity.

It is a very sweet thing for us; we replied to them, to find the real image on the canvas of our fathers, others, of our children, those would have benefited the human race and whom we grieve. What was the first origin of painting and sculpture? It was a young girl who with a piece of charcoal contours her lover's head whose silhouette was projected onto a bright wall. When choosing between two paintings, one poorly painted but resembling Henri IV and the other a *faquin de concessionaire* or of an

idiot author miraculously painted, which one would you choose? What draws your attention to a bust of Marcus Aurelius or of Trajan, of Seneca or of Cicero? Is it the value of the chisel or the admiration of the man? From where I conclude this piece that it is that a portrait must resemble for me, and be well painted for posterity.

Salon of 1763, X, pp. 170–171

… Another word concerning portraits and portraitists. Why a historical painter is is he likely to be a poor portraitist? Why would a sketcher on the Pont Notre-Dame be able to capture a resemblance any easier than a professor at the academy It is because the latter has never faithfully recreated nature; he has the habit to exaggerate, to weaken, to correct his model; it is also that his head is filled with rules to which he is subject and which direct his brush even without his notice, and the fact that he has always altered the forms in accordance with these rules of taste and he continues to change them; it is that he blends with the traits that he sees and that he forces himself in vain to copy rigorously, those very traits borrowed from the antiques that he studies, the paintings that he has seen and admired and from those that he himself has done; it is that he has knowledge; and that he is free and that he is not able to reduce himself to the position of the slave and the ignorant; it seems that has his way, his habit, his color to which he habitually returns; it seems that he executes a caricature beautifully and that the sketcher, in contrast executes a caricature in an ugly way. The portrait which resembles by the sketcher dies with the person; the one by the talented man lasts forever. It is due to this latter that our nephews create the images of the great men who have preceded them. When the taste for the beaux-arts becomes common in a nation, do you know what happens? It is then that the public's eye conforms to the eye of the great artist and that exaggeration leaves to them the entire resemblance. There is no misleading him says nothing: this eye is too small, too big, this muscle is exaggerated, these forms are not correct; this eyelid is too noticeable, the ocular pits are too high: he is abstracting of what the knowledge of beautiful has introduced into the copy. He sees the model, where it is not perfect and he in full admiration. Voltaire writes history as the great statuaries of old made the bust; as the knowledgeable painters of our times paint portraits. He makes larger, he exaggerates, he corrects the forms; is he correct in doing so? Is he wrong? He is wrong to the pedant; he is correct for the man of taste. Right or wrong, it is the figure that he paints which will remain for the men of the future.

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 152–153

The Downfall of the Portrait

… If it is true that an art cannot support itself except by the original principle which gave it birth, medicine by empiricism, painting by portraiture, sculpture with the bust; then its appears that the distain for the portrait and the bust announce the

downfall of the two arts. There are no great painters who did not known how to do a portrait: witness, Raphäel, Rubens, Le Sueur, and Van Dyck. No great sculptors who did not know how to create a bust. All students begin as art began. One day Pierre said: "Do you know why we history painters do not do portraits? It is because they are too difficult".

Essay on painting, X, p. 507

Fig. 7.1 Jean-Baptiste DESHAYS (1729–1765), (*Saint André escorted by the executioners to be bound and whipped on the rack*), Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

The Type

True Subjects

I am not a monk; I'll admit however that I will gladly sacrifice the pleasure to look at beautiful nudes if I could bring about sooner the moment where the most decent and moral painting and sculpture might think of competing with the other beaux-arts, in which to inspire virtue and to purify customs. It appears to me that I have seen enough nipples and buttocks; these seductive objects corrupt the soul's emotions by the upset that they heap onto the senses.

Random thoughts on painting, XII, P. 84

Painting has this in common with poetry but it appears that it has not yet taken the advice that both of them must appear to possess good customs. Boucher has no doubt; he is always vicious and attaches no importance. Greuze is always honest and the crowds are always surrounding his paintings. I should dare to say to Boucher: If you only want to attract some cheeky 18 year old, then you are right, my friend, continue to paint buttocks and breasts, but for the greater good and myself, it will be hard to expose your work to the great light of the Salon, we will let you go off to some hidden corner to find Le Prince's charming Russian and that young innocent figure next to his. Do not make the mistake, that painting would more easily make me sin in the morning than all the rest of your whores. I have no idea where you are going to hang them, but there appears no way to stop, especially when one has made it a health case.

I am not a scrupulous person, sometimes I read my Petronius. I enjoy Horace's satire *Ambubaiarum* just as much as the next person. I know by heart at least three-quarters of the short cheeky madrigals of Catullius. When I picnic with my friends and that my head is in a little stupor from the white wine, I quote a short epigram by Ferrand. I forgive the poet, the painter, the sculptor and even the philosopher a moment of passion and insanity; but I do not think that one should always dip one's brush in it and pervert the goal of the arts. One of the most beautiful lines of Virgil is also one of the best directives for the imitative arts, it is this one:

Sunt lacrymae reum, et mentem mortalia tangent

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-0062-8_8, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

One should write above the door of one's workshop the words: *Here the unhappy find the eyes to cry for them.*

To render virtue tasteful, vice shameful, ridicule pointed, that is the focus of all honest men who take up the pen, the brush or the chisel. That some evil person lurks within society and that his conscience bears some secret infamy, here he will find his punishment. The good people will assess him at their insistence on the hot seat. They will judge him and call him forward. He will be embarrassed, blanch and stutter; he must submit to his own verdict. If his steps take him to the Salon he should fear to look at his canvas. It is also your responsibility to celebrate, eternalize the great and beautiful episodes, to honor unfortunate and wrinkled virtue to wilt happy and honored vice, to frighten tyrants.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 501–502

Artists if you are concerned by the length it takes to complete your works, I recommend that you stay with honest subjects. Everything that speaks to men of depravity is made to be destroyed; and most assuredly destroyed then the work will attain a greater perfection. There are practically no more of the infamous yet beautiful engravings that Jules Romain had composed according to that vile Artin. Propriety, virtue, honesty, scruples and the small innocent superstitions sooner or later fall onto the dishonest creations. In fact, who is among us that owns a masterpiece of painting or sculpture capable of inspiring debauchery does not avoid looking at one's wife, one's daughter, one's son? Who has not thought that this masterpiece could not possibly pass into someone else possession who would be less attentive to its charms? Who has not said in the depth of his heart, that that talent could have been better used by not producing the work and that there would be some justification in getting rid of it? What reward is there between a painting or a statute that is as perfect as could be imagined and the corruption of an innocent heart? What if these thoughts, which are not entirely unreasonable arise, but I am not saying in a bigot, but rather in a well-to-do man, I am not saying religious, but a spiritual man, but an atheist, older, on the edge of heading to the grave, what then happens to this beautiful painting, the beautiful statue, the group surrounding the satyr enjoying a goat, this little Priape that has been found at Herculaneum; these two precious works that antiquity has given to us according to the views of Baron Gleichen and abbé Galiani, who knows what exactly? There, in one brief instant the fruits of great rare talents are broken into pieces. Who of us will blame the honest and barbarian hand which would have committed this kind of sacrilege? It will not be me, who however cannot ignore that which one cannot criticize; the little influence that the beaux-arts have on customs in general; their independence from the will and the examples of a sovereign, the momentary resorts of ambition, danger, patriotic spirit; I know that he who suppresses an evil book or who destroys a voluptuous statue is likened to an idiot who would worry about pissing into a river for fear that a man might drown; but let us leave here the effect of these works on the national conscience; lets us restrain ourselves to our particular habits. I cannot hide from myself the fact that an evil book or a prurient illustration that chance might offer to my daughter would be sufficient to make her dream and that I would lose her.

Those who populate our public gardens with the lewdness of prostitution have no idea what they are doing! Furthermore there is so much scribbling on the statue of the *Venus aux belles fesses* which is in the Versailles woods, so many dissolute actions by these descriptions made because of the debauchery even to our own idols; insults which even mark the lost imaginations, an odd mixture of corruption and barbarism instruct us sufficiently of the pernicious impression left by these works. Do we believe that the busts of those who have well deserved the recognition of the nation, arms in hand, on the benches in the courtrooms, as the monarch's council, in a career of letters and fine arts, cannot provide a better lesson? Why don't we find the statues of Turenne and Catinat?

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 189–190

The Russian Baptism

Here we are, Good God, it is a beautiful ceremony. This great silver baptismal font makes such a great impression. The function of these three priests, who are all three to the right, standing, has great dignity. The first holds the new born underneath his arms, and plunges him into the font by his feet. The second holds the censer and reads the sacramental prayers; he reads well as should an old man by holding the books at a distance from his eyes. The third looks attentively at the book. As for this fourth one, who spreads the aromatic smoke from the burning brazier placed near the baptismal font, do you notice how richly and nobly he is dressed? How naturally he moves? You will admit that here are four truly venerable heads. But you are not listening to me. You are not paying attention to these venerable priests and the holy ceremony; and your eyes are fixed onto the god-father and god-mother. I am not upset with you. It is certainly the case that the god-father possesses the most truthful character and the most honest that is possible to imagine. If I were to find him away from this situation, I should not be able to defend myself from seeking him out as well as his friendship. I tell you that he will be my friend. As for the god-mother, she is so nice, so decent, so sweet… that will make her… you say, my mistress, if I could…And why not? – And if they are married, there then is your good Russian friend… you are embarrassing me. But as well, that in the place of the Russian, or I should not allow my friends to get close to my wife or I should be correct in saying: my wife is so charming, so nice, so attractive… and you should forgive your friend?

Oh! No. But this is not an entirely constructive conversation, all through the most serious ceremony of Christianity; the one which regenerates us in Jesus-Christ, by washing away the sin that our grandfather committed seven or eight thousand years ago?

Come along, my friend! Be happy! See how well the godparents are doing their jobs. They are imposing; they are pious without being bigots. From behind the three priests, there are obviously some parents, some witnesses, and some assistants. What a beautiful study of heads Poussin would do here! Since they all

have the same characteristics of his. – What do you mean to say about Poussin's studies? – I want to say that I forgot that I was speaking about a painting. And this young acolyte who has extended his hand to receive the vessel filled with holy oil that another presents to him on a plate, agree that he has placed it in the most simple way as well as the most elegant; that he extended his arm with ease and grace and that from all points he cuts a charming figure. How well he holds up his head. How well the head is placed. How well his hair is groomed, what a distinguished physiology he has. He stands straight, without any affectation whatsoever. How well and simply dressed. This man who is beside him and who is leaning over and who has found an open case, it is apparently the father or some assistant who is seeking the necessary garb to diaper the baby as soon as he is out of the font. Look closely at this child who has everything necessary to be a beautiful child. The young man that I see behind the god-father is either his page or his valet; and this woman seated in the background to the left, on his side, it is either the mid-wife or the nurse. For the one which we can barely see through the drapes, there is no mistake; it is the woman in labor to which the aroma of the perfumes which are burning will give a terrible head ache, if you are not careful. It was a great ceremony and a beautiful canvas. I am ashamed that the color is too brassy and reddish, and that the background is too brown; that the light passage … But it is important that the man gets through in some places. As for the rest, the composition has support; the figures are interesting even the color is strong. I can swear to you that the artist executed this one during a period of time when he was healthy; and that if I were young, free and if this honest Russian were proposed as my brother-in-law, and for a wife this young girl who is modestly holding a candle next to him with just the right touch of ease, as much as that would be needed so that my little Russian could, when it pleased her, sleep in late and I would be her company on the same pillow, and raise without difficulty those little babes that these venerable schismatic fathers would come to anabaptize at my home every nine or ten months; goodness, I am tempted to go and see what the weather is like in that country.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 383–385

Feigned and True Moral Painting

Baudoin

The Feelings of Love and Nature, Allowing Time for Necessity

To the right in the forefront, the end of a bed which one calls misery's bed. In the back, someone; the nose is covered by a coat and is holding a bundled new born. A little further to the back towards the left, whose head is covered in

black, wearing a cape, with mittens, a mid-wife presents the child to this person and is about to leave. In the center, at the forefront, is a young girl sitting on a chair, groomed, in pain, holding one hand of her child which they are taking away and squeezing the hand of the father. Situated a little to the left, on a stool, and seen from the back, a friend, leaning towards the birth mother, giving strength to what she is about to do; all the way to the left, in front of a small table, a young man seen from the back, holding the hand which is offered to him, his head leaning into his other hand, or perhaps thrown back into the other, I am not sure which of the two and with an attitude of despair. He is near to a windowed door which provides light to the mid-wife's room, in which we see numbered beds.

I have already mentioned in the preceding Salon what I thought of this painting, I said that the scene located in an attic where misery had already relegated a poor father, a poor mother having just given birth and reduced to giving up her child would be technically more favorable. It is not the roof tiles, the rafters, the spider webs that are nasty; it is the mix of wealth and poverty. A peasant in clogs, leggings, wet, filthy, dressed in burlap, a stick in his hand, head covered with felt, works well. A lackey, in his worn livery, his gray stockings, his shammy pants, his rimmed hat, his stained clothes, is disgusting. As to Baudouin's morals and those that I imagine, it is the difference between good and bad. An emotionless painting; no truth and weak in all points of execution. – However the figures have proportion and motion. – Alright. – The new mother is proper. – Too proper shouldn't there be some disarray in her hair and her clothes which reflect the preceding scene? – She has a painful look about her face and her arms are well drawn. – But aren't her feet too small and discolored due to the strength of the cushion which is supporting them; and is the child's head being held the way that it should? Is this the way that one holds and feeds a new born? And this bed of misery is it heartfelt? Why does this mid-wife appear so distant from her work? I should like her better suffering from the labors of her work. It is all this dressing up, which belittles, and the ugly which chases away the natural. What is needed is more original taste, a much more real feeling of the truth so as to release the real from these subjects…

Salon of 1767, XI, pp. 192–193

… This *Honest model* is much more you and undoubtedly more correct, but the color is dull. The cloth covering this young girl blends very well with the light, but why did you not make everything larger and with more taste? You are running as fast as you can to make the expression right, which you fail to achieve, you nitpick and are too mannered and that is all. To extend oneself one doesn't have to be great. As for the subject the way in which you have treated it is old fashioned, this woman is not a mother, it is some shameful creature who plies some evil trade. One cannot understand anything of this movement in such a pathetic and restful scene. A young naked girl seated on the painter's stool, her head leaning into one of her hands, allowing two tears to run down her cheeks, the other arm is resting on her mother,

her rags are brushed to the side of her, this good woman in tatters is hiding her face in her apron, the painter stops his work to gaze tenderly onto these two figures and all was said. Believe me, allow Greuze to do these subjects.

Salon of 1769, XI, p. 425

Greuze

Finally I have seen our friend Greuze's painting; but it was not without some difficulty; he continues to attract the crowds. It is *A father who has just paid his daughter's dowry*. It is a sad subject, and one is overtaken by a sweet emotion while looking. The composition appeared very beautiful: it was just the way it was supposed to happen. There are twelve figures; each in its place and is doing what it should. How well they are all linked! How well they sway and are together as a pyramid! I don't care a bit about this condition; however they come together in a piece of painting by chance, with having the painter having had the idea to introduce them in that way, and without having sacrificed anything, that truly pleases me.

To the right of the one who is looking at the painting is a scrivener seated a little table, his back to the spectator. On the table are the marriage contract and other papers. Between the scrivener's legs is the youngest child of the house. Then as we continue and follow the composition from right to left, there is an older daughter standing and leaning on the back of her father's chair. The father is sitting in his chair. In front of him is his son-in-law holding the dowry bag in his left hand. The betrothed also standing has a limp arm passing through that of her fiancé; the other arm is held her mother who is seated a little lower. Between the mother and the fiancée, a younger sister is standing, leaning on the fiancé with an arm thrown over his shoulders. Behind this group, a young child standing on tip-toes in order to see what is happening. Above the mother, to the front is a young girl, seated who has small pieces of cut bread in her apron. All the way to the left in the very background and far from the scene, two servants are standing and watching. On the right a very clean pantry with all the regular items that one might find there making up the background. In the middle, an old firearm hanging from its peg; next a wooden staircase which leads to the upper floor Towards the front, on the floor, near to the mother's feet, a hen leading her chicks to which the little girl is throwing her bread; a bowl filled with water and at its edge a chick his beak in the air so as to let the water that he has just drunk go down his gullet. That is the general disposition. Let us go to the details.

The scrivener is dressed in black, pants and stocking of color, frock coat with flaps and a hat on his head. He really has a sly and quibbling look about him as would appear for a peasant in this profession; he cuts a good figure. He listens to what the father is saying to his son-in-law. The father is the only one speaking. The rest are listening and are quiet.

The child who is in between the legs of the scrivener is an excellent touch in the truth of his action and the color. Without taking any interest with what is happening, he looks at the papers with their scribbling and walks his little hands over them.

One can see in the older sister, who is standing and leaning on the back of her father's seat that she is smitten with pain and jealousy concerning what has been passed over her by her younger sister. She is holding her head in one of her hands and she has thrown a bewildered, sad and raging looks to the betrothed.

The father is an old man of sixty, gray hair, a kerchief twisted around his neck; there is a gentleness about him that is very endearing. His arms are stretched out to his son-in-law, he is speaking to him in a heartfelt way which enchants all; he appears to be saying: "Jeanette is sweet and wise; she will make your happiness, think of makings hers…" or some other remarks on the duties of marriage… Whatever he is saying is certainly touching and honest. One of his hands, which we see revealed, is tanned and brown; the other which is on the inside is white; such is nature.

The painter has provided the fiancée with a charming figure, decent and reserved; she is marvelously dressed. Her white linen smock could not be better done; there is even a small touch of the expensive in its finish; but it happens to be the day of betrothal. One really has to see how the folds of all the cloths of this figure as well as the others are very real. This charming girl is not rigid; but there happens to be a slight soft fluidness in her figure and in all her members which fills her with grace and makes her real. She is pretty, really; very pretty. A neck around which one sees nothing else; but I'll wager that there is nothing there that supports it and that it stands of it own. More about her fiancé, and she would have appeared less decent; more about the mother or her father and she would have appeared false. She has her arm half passed under that of her future husband, and the end of her fingers fall and rest softly on his hand; that is the only mark of tenderness that she give him and perhaps without being aware of it herself; it might be the idea of the painter.

The mother is of good peasant stock who is approaching sixty but who looks very healthy; she is dressed comfortably and marvelously. With one hand she is holding her daughter's upper arm; with the other she grasps just above the wrist; she is seated, she is looking at her daughter from top to bottom; she is having difficulty letting go, but it is a good match. Jean is good boy, an honest worker; she has no doubts that her daughter will be happy with him. Happiness and tenderness are mixed into the goodness of this wholesome mother.

As for the younger sister who is standing next to the fiancée who is embracing her and who is grieving on her chest, is an entirely interesting person. She is really upset to be separated from her sister, and she is crying; however this incident does not sadden the composition; to the contrary it adds to that which is touching. There is taste and good taste to have imagined this event. The two children, one of which seated next to the mother enjoy throwing bread to the hen and her little family and the other who is straining onto her tiptoes and is stretching her neck forward to glimpse the on-goings, are charming; especially the latter. The two servants, standing at the back of the room, nonchalantly leaning one against the other, seem to say with an attitude of facial expression: "When do you think it will be our turn?"

What of the hen which has lead her chicks into the middle of the scene, and who has five or six little ones, as does the mother at whose feet is also looking at her six or seven children and this little girl who is throwing bread and who is feeding them;

one must admit that all of this is charmingly disposed with what is going one, the situation and the people. This is ingenious as a small piece of poetry.

It is the father to whom the looks are primarily focused; then the husband or the fiancé, then the betrothed the mother, the younger sister or the eldest, all according to the person who is looking at the painting, next the scrivener, the other children, the servants and the background; absolute proof of good planning. Teniers is perhaps the better painters of customs. It would be easier to find scenes or people by this painter; however there is so much more elegance, gracefulness and a more enjoyable nature in Greuze. His peasants are neither crude like those of our good Flemish fellow, nor mystical like those of Boucher…

Salon of 1761, X, pp. 151–155

[But Diderot is no less appreciative of the pretentious ingénues of Greuze, as the *Young girl grieving over her dead bird* and is pleased by his ambiguous play].

When one sees this piece, one says: Delightful! If one stops, or that one returns, one says Delightful! delightful! Soon one is surprised to find oneself speaking to the child, consoling her. This is so true that this is what I remember saying to her at different times. "But my little one, your pain is very deep and thoughtful! What does this dreamy sadness mean! What! For a bird! You aren't crying, you are deeply wounded; and the thoughts carry your wounds. There my little friend, open your heart, open up your heart to me; tell me the truth, is it really the death of this bird that forces you to retreat into yourself? You've lowered your eyes; you're not answering me. Your tears are ready to flow. I am not a father; I am neither indiscreet nor punishing… Ah! So, I realize that he loved you, he swore his love to you and he swore it a long time ago. He suffered a great deal: the way to see suffering of those we love… Let me continue; why are you closing my mouth with your hand? … Unfortunately, that morning your mother was absent. He came; you were alone; he was so handsome, so passionate, so tender, so charming! He had so much love in his eyes! So much truth in his expressions! He spoke those words that go straight to the heart! And while saying them, he was on his knees: I can still believe it. He held one of your hands; from time to time you felt the warmth of some tears which fell from your eyes and which ran the length of your arms. Still your mother did not return. It is not your fault; it your mother's fault… He doesn't want your pretty tears… But what I am saying to you is not to make you cry. Why are you crying? He made you a promise; he will not allow anything to happen to what he promised you. When one has been given the happiness to meet a charming child like you, and become one, so as to please him; it is for life…- and my bird?…- You smile". (Oh! My friend, how pretty she is! Oh if you only could have seen how she laughed and cried!). I went on. "So! As for your bird! When one loses oneself, does one remember one's bird? When it came time for your mother to return, the one you loved left. How happy he was, contented, and transported; how difficult it was for him to tear himself away from you! How you stare at me! I know all this. How many times he stood to leave and sat down again! How many times he said goodbye without leaving. How many times did he go only to return! I just saw him at his father's: he is overwhelmingly happy, a happiness in which everyone participates, without putting up any resistance….

-And my mother? – Your mother? He had just left when she returned; she found you entranced, as you were a little while ago. One is always that way. Your mother was speaking to you, and you were not listening to what she was saying; she told you to do one thing and you did another. A few tears welled in the corners of your eyes; or you held them back, or you turned your head away to wipe them away furtively. Your unending daydreams made your mother impatient, and she scolded you and that gave you the opportunity to cry without restraint and to relieve your heart… Shall I continue, my dear? I fear that what I will say will continue your pain. You want me to? Your mother was upset with herself for making you unhappy; she came to you and took your hands, she kissed your forehead and cheeks, and you cried even more. Your head fell onto her and your face which continued to blush, there just as it is doing now, was hidden in hers. How many calming things your mother said to you, and how much these kind words hurt! Furthermore your canary wanted to screech, to warn you, to call you, to bat its wings, to complain of your forgetfulness, you didn't see him, you didn't hear him; you were thinking other thoughts. His water or feed went unfilled and this morning the bird was no more… You are still staring at me; is there anything left for me to say? Oh, I hear, my sweet thing; that bird, it is he who gave him to you; oh well, he will find another just as beautiful… That is not all: your eyes are fixed on me, and are filling again with tears; what else is there? Speak I can't guess…- What insanity. Don't worry about anything, my poor girl; it can't be; it won't be!"

What! My friend, you are laughing at me! You are making fun of a serious person who presently is consoling the child in a painting who has lost her bird, or the loss of anything that you wish? Can you see how beautiful she is! How interesting she is! I hate to trouble her. In spite of that, it will not displease me to be the cause of her pain.

The subject of this poem is so refined, that many have not heard it; they thought that this young girl was crying because of the canary. Greuze has already painted the same subject; he had placed a tall girl in white satin in front of a cracked mirror who appeared deeply saddened. Do you think that there will be as much gossip spoken about the young girl and her tears at the loss of a bird, than the sadness of the girl in the broken mirror in the last Salon? I am telling you that this child is crying over a different cause. First, you heard her, she agrees and her thoughtful pain says the rest. This pain! At her age and for a bird…

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 343–345

The Type and History

Anecdotal Necessity

The scene is in the depth of a forest, underneath a type of tent formed by a great sail suspended by the branches of a tree; one can see a large cradle, a moving bed on wheels readied to be pulled by horses; more to the back, behind the rolling bed

and the horses, some of our sorcerers. Outside the tent, at the right forefront on the ground, a horse's bridle, sheep, a cage of chickens; at the center of the painting, more in depth, a Russian and his woman standing. To their side an old woman who is telling their fortune. Behind the old woman, more to the forefront, a naked child, laying on his diapers and his blanket; some chicken, some bales and baggage. The scene ends at left by some trees, one far away from the forest and then some countryside.

The same good points the same mistakes as the former paintings; and then where is the interest in such a composition? I must reimburse your trouble with a domestic adventure. My mother, still a young girl was either going to church or coming back; her maid was leading her arm. Two gypsies stopped her, took her hand and predicted wonderful children as you can expect; a young husband who would be madly in love with her, who would love only her as sometimes happens; wealth; their was a line in the palm which said and never lied; a long and happy life as was told by another line as true as the first. My mother listened to these beautiful things with a great deal of pleasure, and perhaps believed them, when the thin one told her: "Mademoiselle, come look closer, can you see this little mark. – I see it. – Well, this mark means…- What? – If you are not careful one day you will be robbed". With that prediction she was done in. When my good mother arrived home, found that her pockets had been cut off.

Show me an old grifter who captures the attention of a young and enchanted innocent, while another old woman empties her pockets; and if each of these figures has the right expressions, you will have made a painting…

Salon of 1767, Le Prince, XI, pp. 202–203

The Respective Merits of the Historical Painter and the Scene Painter; Their Differences Are Those between Poetry and Prose

The greater the size of the painting, more it requires the study of nature. Furthermore who amongst them will have the patience to finish it? Who will fix the price when it is finished? Look through the works of the great masters and you will see a hundred spots where the sparseness of the artist comes through next to his talent where among some of natural truth there is an infinity of things that are routinely executed. These are even more damaging since they are side by side with others. They are the lies made even more shocking through the presence of the truth. Oh! If only a sacrifice, a battle, a triumph, a public scene could be made with the same reality in all its details as a domestic scene of Greuze or of Chardin.

It is under this point of view that the work of the historical painter is infinitely more difficult than the genre style. In are infinitely more types of genres that defy our criticism. What battle scene painting could support the portrait of the King of Prussia? The genre painter has his scene presented in front of his eyes constantly; the historical painter has either never seen, or only briefly glanced at his. One is

only the pure and simple imitator, a copier of communal nature; the other is, so to say, the creator of an idealized and poetic nature. He walks a very difficult line to keep. On the one side he falls prey to meanness; on the other he falls into the outrageous. We can say of one, *multa ex industria, pauca ex animo*; and of the other to the contrary, *pauca ex industria, plurima ex animo*.

The immensity of the work renders the historical painter negligent in the details. Where is the one of our painters who worries about how he makes the hands and the feet? He is aiming, he will say, for the general effect, and these miseries will not help. That was not the case for Paul Veronese, but it is the way he was. Nearly all the great compositions are outlined. However, the hands and feet of the soldier who is playing cards in his battalion are the same as those who are marching into combat, who are fighting in the fray…

The genre and historical painters do not exactly admit to the distain that they feel towards each other, but we can guess. The latter thinks of the first as narrow-minded, clueless, non-poetic, no greatness, without spirit, no genius who drags themselves after nature which they dare not lose sight of even for a moment. Poor copyists who would gladly compare our Gobelins artisans, who choose their strands of wool one by one in order to form the real blend, to make the sublime man which is behind him. In listening one thinks that they are petty people with nasty stories, little domestic scenes taken from the street corners to who one can say little except that it is the mechanics of their art and who are really not much unless they have taken this point to the nth degree. The genre painter from his point, sees the historical painter as someone romantic where there is neither reality nor truth. Where everything is outrageous, which has nothing in common with nature, where falseness comes unraveled, and the characters are exaggerated, who have not existed anywhere as well as the incidents which are entirely fictitious as in the entire subject matter which the artist has never seen except in his empty head as well as in the details which he has gotten who knows where in the style which is called great and sublime and which has no model in nature or in the action or movement of the figures so far from the real action and motions. You can tell my friend, that it is the quarrel of prose and poetry, of history and the epic poem, of heroic tragedy and bourgeois tragedy, and of bourgeois tragedy and of gay comedy.

It appears that to divide painting into painting categories of genres and historical painting is reasonable, but I would have liked to have researched more in depth the nature of the things within this division. The genre painters are undistinguished from those who only paint, flowers, fruits, animals, forests, mountains and those who borrow their scenes from communal and domestic life; Teniers, Wouwermans, Greuze, Chardin, Loutherbourg, Vernet are also genre painters. However, I disagree that the *Father who is reading to his family*, and the *Ungrateful Son*, and the *Betrothal* of Greuze: that the *Marines* of Vernet, which provides all kinds of incidents and scenes, are just as much paintings of history as is the *Seven Sacraments* of Poussin, the *Family of Darius* of Le Brun or *Suzanne* of Van Loo.

Essay on painting, X, pp. 505, 507–508

Fig. 8.1 Joseph Marie VIEN (1716–1809), (*The Love Marchant*), Château de Fontainebleau © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

Still Life

Chardin

He, who is a painter, is the one who is a colorist.

At the Salon there are a number of small works by Chardin, they represent nearly every fruit, along with the accessories for a meal. It is nature itself; the objects appear to jump out of the canvas and of a reality to trick the eyes.

One that is especially worthy of our attention, is to be seen as we are climbing the stairs. The artists has placed on a table an antique Chinese vase, two biscuits, a jar full of olives, a basket of fruit, two glasses half full of wine, an orange with a pâté. To look at the paintings of others, it seems that I have to invent some eyes, to see those of Chardin, I only have to look with those that nature gave me to be well served.

If I wanted my child to be a painter, this is the painting that I would buy. "Copy this one for me, I would tell him, copy it again". But perhaps nature is more difficult to copy.

It seems that this porcelain vase is porcelain; it seems that these olives are really separated from the eye by the water in which they are floating it seems as though all one would have to do is take the biscuits and eat them, the orange only to cut it open and squeeze it, this glass of wine and drink it, these fruits only peel them and this pâté to slice it. It is the one who hears the harmony of colors and reflections. Oh! Chardin. It isn't white, or red or black that you are mixing on your palette; it is the substance of the objects themselves, it is the air and light that you place on the tip of your brush and that you fix onto the canvas.

After my child copied and recopied that work, I would have him focus on the gutted stingray by the same master. The object is disgusting, but it is really the ray's flesh, it is its skin, it is its blood; any other aspect of this painting would have no affected on it whatsoever... Monsieur Pierre, look very carefully at this work when you go to the Academy, and learn if you can the secret of saving by talent alone the disgusting nature of certain things.

One does not understand anything of this magic. It is the thick layers of color applied one over another and whose effect seeps though from underneath to the top. Other times, one might say that it is a vapor that has blown onto the canvas; other places light foam has been thrown. Rubens, Berghem, Greuze, Loutherbourg

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will explain this far better than I can; all of them will allow you to feel the effect through your eyes. Come closer, all gets blurry, flattens and disappears; distance yourself and all recreates and is reproduced.

It was told to me that Greuze was walking up the stairs at the Salon and seeing Chardin's work that I have just described, looked and passed by giving a large sigh. This praise is shorter and better said than mine…

Salon of 1763, X, pp. 194–195

Here you are again, the great magician with your silent compositions. How eloquently they speak to the artist. Everything they say to him regarding imitation of nature, the science of color and harmony. How the air circulates around these objects! The sun's rays are no better at saving disparate entities than the beings that she lightens. He is the one who is not aware of amicable or unfriendly colors.

If it is true as the philosophers say, that there is nothing real but our feelings, that neither the emptiness of space, nor the solidness of bodies is perhaps nothing in itself than what we experience; that these philosophers should teach me what difference there is for them at four feet from your paintings between the Creator and you. Chardin is so real, so true, so harmonious that even though one sees on his canvas but inanimate nature, vases, bottles, bread, wine, water, grapes, fruits, pâtés he supports and whisks you away from two of the most beautiful Vernets, next to his they cancel out. That, my friend as it is in the universe, where the presence of a man, a horse, an animal does not upset a bit of rock, of a tree or a stream. The stream, the tree, the bit of rock are less interesting than the man, the woman, the horse, the animal, but they are equally as real.

My friend, I must tell you an idea which has just struck me and perhaps will not come back in the next moment; and that is that the painting that we call genre, should be that of old people or for those who are born old. They require but study and patience. No passion, little genius, no poetry, a great deal of technique and truth and that is all. Furthermore, you know that when we put ourselves to what is named after its usage rather than experience, the research into the truth, philosophy is precisely that which turns our temples gray and where we would be ill-pressed to write a love note. Think about the similarities of philosophers and genre painters. In consideration, my friend about this gray hair, I saw my gray hair today and I screamed as Sophocles must have screamed when Socrates asked him how his love-life was:

"A domino agresti et furioso profugi". I have escaped the wild and incensed master.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 299–300

Place on a stone bench a reed basket full of plums around which is a string turned into a snare and toss some walnuts, two or three cherries and bunches of grapes.

Chardin's method is very peculiar. It appears to have something in common with something that is thrown together, which when up close one cannot tell what it is,

and that as one distances oneself the object is created and becomes nature itself. Sometimes it is as appealing up close as it is at a distance. This man is superior to Greuze as much as there is distance between the heavens and the earth, but in this point only He has no style; I am mistaken, he has his own. But since he has a style all of his own, then it stands to reason that there are times when he should be wrong, but he never is. Try as hard as you can to explain that to yourself. Do you know if there is a literary style that is sufficient for everything? Chardin's style of painting is in reality the easiest of all; but there is no living painter not even Vernet who is as perfect in his own.

Salon of 1765, X, pp. 303–304

Ideal and Technique

Art has its rules which temper all precedents. It is rare that morals have to be sacrificed to technique. It is neither to Van Huysum nor Chardin that I am addressing; in genre painting one must burn everything to effect. However genre painting is not without enthusiasm; it is just that there are two types of enthusiasm: the enthusiasm of the soul and that of the vocation. Without one the concept is cold; without the other the execution is weak; it is their joining which renders the work sublime.

Random thoughts on Painting, XII, p. 88

It appears to me that when one picks up the brush, it would be necessary to have some sort of guiding, ingenious, delicate or striking idea and to propose some sort of effect, some impression. Having a letter to mail is such a common occurrence that it must be raised to some particular circumstance, or by some extraordinary method. There are very few artists who have ideas, and there is not one who can do without them. Yes, without a doubt, it is allowed for Chardin to show us a kitchen with a servant leaning over her barrel rinsing her dishes; but one must see how real the action of the servant is, how her bust designs the upper portion of her figure and how the folds of her petticoats underline everything that is underneath. One must see the astonishing reality of all the household items and the color and the harmony of all this little composition. No middle or interesting ideas, an original subject or a special to do; the best would be to bring the two together; the striking idea and the wonderful execution. If the height of technique was not there, Chardin's ideal would be nil…

Salon of 1765, X, p. 295

Roland de la Porte is precisely one of those painters who lack this "sublime": he is nothing more than a producer of trompe-l'oeil.

As to Roland de la Porte, he is another victim of Chardin. The people were ecstatic at the viewing of a bas-relief representing the head of an emperor and painted with its border on a background which represents a board. The bas-relief

appears absolutely detached; this is a surprising effect and the crowd is made of people who are easily surprised. They are unaware how easy this illusion is. The provincial fairs are full of these types of genre painted by these young German dabblers, that one can pick up for an écu and who are really not giving anything away.

Salon of 1763, X, p. 205

Fig. 9.1 Joseph VERNET (1714–1789), (*View from the horbour of New Rochelle*), Paris, Musée de la Marine © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

Diderot in the Painter's Space

By responding to Grimm's requests, Diderot consented to write about art at the Salon of 1759 for the readers of the *Correspondence littéraire*. An order to deliver? Absolutely; but, finishing the theoretical and practical adventures of a new theater, the circumstances, and the brilliant vintaged spectacle of the squared Salon was convenient to Diderot and it could provide a foil for him. He would get a taste for this; he would return to but not without grumbling about an even greater task which an abundance of ideas made even more difficult to decide. The occasion offered Diderot to speak as he liked to speak: to a specific person, at a specific moment, in front of a series of specific objects, whilst thinking of listeners' at distances in space and time. All pretexts were primed, and first of all the challenge that the "silent" arts defy speech and the occasion to answer by allowing the painters, sculptors to quarrel on their ways of translating into images poets, dramatists and historians…

Grimm invited Diderot to place himself at the cutting edge where the two forms of communication – imagery and spoken language – mutually placed themselves to the test. This was an animated sequence for Diderot's thought. So many things in painting appear unmentionable and indescribable; such as accentuation and rhythms in poetry appear non-representable. And yet the desire for expression, the exigencies of materialization, all want to happen without establishing a happy means between saying and drawing. Each in its turn, the legitimacy of the image and that of the word are seen to be placed in question. To lead this debate, such as it was started more abstractly in the *Letter to the deaf and the dumb*, it was necessary for philosophical art criticism to deploy a multiform, warm and fluid language to operate on different fronts through rapid changes. For Diderot to take a Salon in to consideration it would be necessary to split himself, it would be necessary to become a multiple person speaking a number of languages: it would be to submit oneself to the principle of variability that he would put to the stage, in Rameau's nephew under Vertumne's guidance. However, at the debut of the 1763 Salon, it is as critic, that is to say Diderot himself who is to appear as a Vertumne: in addressing Grimm, he writes:

> To describe a Salon at my leisure as well as yours, do you know my friend what it will take? All sorts of taste, a heart sensitive to charms, a soul which is capable of embracing many things enthusiastically, a variety of style which responds to the variety of brushes; to be able to be great or a voluptuary with Deshays; simple and true with Chardin, delicate with

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> Vien, sympathetic with Greuze, create all the possible illusions with Vernet. So tell me where that Vertumne is […]

The ability to sway oneself to the will of the different styles of artists is a very heady drink; yet to make its accounting, in the form of a long letter or a series of letters to his friend Grimm, necessarily obligates one to assemble and to make for its convergence towards the recipient everyone of these successive experiences. The friend's function who is awaiting their receipt is not only to arouse multiple selves, it also calls for the inverse, the formulation of decision, the stabilization of concepts, a clear expository where impressions have become fixed and determined. The vocal rumblings which had always existed around painting, here with Diderot they become clearly audible; they were revived, leaving a durable impression on the page. By freely orchestrating them in all their polyphonic measure, Diderot annexed art criticism to literature; it was as though he had created it. And he thanks the friend who forced him to look less superficially, to listen to what others had to say, to force the conversations with the connoisseurs and the painters and to systematically order the acquired knowledge:

> It is the task that you proposed to me that focused my eyes onto the canvas and made me walk around the marble. I gave the impression enough time to arrive and enter. I opened my soul to the effects, I allowed myself to be penetrated. I collected the old man's saying, the child's thought, the opinion of the man of letters, the word of the homme du monde and the rights of the people; and if it so happens that I wound the artist it is often with the weapon that he himself has sharpened. I question him and I understood what is finesse in drawing and the truth in nature. I was able to conceive of the magic of light and shadow; I found out about color; I acquired the sensation about flesh. Alone, I meditated on what I saw and heard, and the terms of art, unity, variety, contrast, symmetry, arrangement, composition, character, expression, so familiar in my mouth but so vague in my soul, became defined and fixed.

The recipient finds himself as creditor of all of Diderot's progress. He is awarded a part of the proceeds of the finished work; he even has the rights to look. Diderot concedes the right to correct him; remold and censure." […] Cut, tailor, slice, gnaw and leave from this only what you want.

As we know, Grimm did not deny himself of inserting his commentary, his restrictions, and his clarifications. In the duo his holds the position of accompanist; he keeps a cool head, he is perspicacious, often peremptory and sarcastic. But there is another Grimm that already appeared in the text: the one that Diderot allowed to converse fictively, the one who appeared to play freely as a foil amongst other occasionally invented speakers. For the one who knows to enjoy the strategies of discourse, the *Salons* provide for a passionate reading; between the apparent submission to the desires of his editor friend, the honest frankness both unwise and lively, the implicit target of a distant public, the overheard conversations, gossiped, provoked, Diderot employed all the forms of verbal communications, so as to compensate for the fundamental difficulty of transition between painting and the spoken word. Diderot describes, prescribes, judges, corrects; he dreams of a painting better conceived, steps back to expose a theory or to explain an anecdote. One is grateful to him for not believing that he is in possession of an infallible method and

to look for years for a more adequate language which was better informed of the "technique" of painting. He believed at first that the description (*ecphrasis* according to the Pliny and Philostratus tradition) was without necessary explanation:

It is a little far-fetched to believe that the aptitude of the reader would be able to compose according words alone, an image that he has never seen. And Diderot does on occasion know to renounce "the annoyance of these parasitical words" which he never stops using: "struck, pasty, real, natural, well-colored, well-lit, warmly done, cold, hard, dry, and unctuous". At the Salon of 1765, Casanove provides him with the idea to describe without description by asking him how to describe well:

> How can I transport you to the base of these massive rocks that touch the sky? How will I show you this great vaulted bridge supported underneath by rafters and thrown up to the summit of these great rocks towards this old castle? […] But perhaps in total despair of ever realizing within your imagination of so many moving and stationary objects, that there they are, and I have done it; if it is, then praise God! […]

Diderot is only taking advantage of a well-known resource through rhetoric: preterition which is a summary mention of a thing while professing to omit it. One simply cannot erect it in a system. In the Salon of 1767, Diderot touched onto a procedure which calls for the imaginary introduction of the spectator into the interior pictorial space; which is one of his customary temptations:

> It is a fairly good way to describe paintings, especially pastoral settings, as to enter onto the place of the scene through the right side or the left side, and advancing onto the border towards the bottom to describe the objects as they present themselves I am very annoyed with myself for not having used this earlier. […] I would say to you: Walk until you find the large boulders to your right […] follow your path […].

Analysis and enjoyment are transformed by an accompanied walk in to topographical relief established during a lively promenade in the description of the objects as they are revealed what happens to the overall whole, the unique "moment" which Diderot considers to be the distinctive feature of good painting? The moment is distributed and is listed in the succeeding narrative. A novel is outlined. It is the same for an historical painting. According to Diderot, the painter's moment must include traces of the preceding moment and an indication of the moment to come. It usurps a lapse of time. Therefore a painting is read according to the rules of rhetoric: Where is the action? Affected by which causes?, with what intentions?, with what feelings?, at what time of day? By which means? Etc. There are consequences for the painters who do not know how to make themselves easily understandable. Diderot is unforgiving. Yet, at the end of the Salon of 1767, he speaks of "his conscience tormented with remorse"; he is ready to identify everything that he has said, "bad or good". He protests his good faith, of his impartiality. Circumstances excuse him; since he has to write from memory, from notes that were sometimes contradictory; from overwork, he did not "listen" […] from friendship or from hate". It was that he had to write "on the fly, […] in the middle of a group of pests, they annoyed me, they stopped me from seeing and feeling […]". And Diderot accuses the insufficiencies of language when memory fails:

> At any moment I could be in error, because the language does not provide me with any expression of truth. I am abandoning a storyline, lack of words which make many of my reasons; I have in the bottom of my heart something, and I say another. This is the advantage of the man living in solitude, he speaks with himself, he investigates himself, he listens to himself and he listens to himself in silence, his secret feelings develop slowly, here he finds the real voices which cause the scales to fall from their eyes and who bring them along. O Rus, quando te aspiciam?

Such is the paradox. To find the truth, one should leave Paris and live in the country. But one must live in the cities to acquire the essential qualities to the artist: "those delicious odors which arise from the depth of a sewer". In the style of Montaigne, he offers his last excuse, which consists of the suggestion of the variability of self, the evenness of his sincerity despite the change of tone:

> In the end do not forget that I do not guarantee neither my descriptions, nor my verdict on anything; my descriptions, because there is no memory on earth that can faithfully remember as many diverse compositions; my verdict, because I am neither artist, nor even a connoisseur. I am telling you only what I think and I am telling you in all honesty. If it so happens that once in a while I contradict myself, it so happens that from one moment to the next I was diversely affected, equally impartial when I praise as when I retract a statement, when I blame as well as when I reverse my criticism.

After the fireworks of the Salon of 1767, Diderot professes modestly: "[…] Mostly ignorant of one Salon over another, I am more reserved, more shy […]." The humility is without pretense: over the years, Diderot learned to measure the entire distance which separates the principles of "the man of letters" (or the connoisseur) and the artist's income. However, let us not believe that Diderot does not allow himself any authority. To the extent that he feels himself to be a poet, he is determined to propose the idea. Furthermore the idea is indispensable to the artist, to the point that he does not wish to confine himself to the skills of his profession: "What is something beautiful without an idea behind it? The worth of the painter. What is a beautiful idea, without the ability? The worth of the poet." This opposition (which inscribes itself as syntaxically within the structure of a clause inverted by another clause) suggests a complementarity and fixes the attributes of the poet-critic. He possesses at the very least the ability to consciously express what the artist has accomplished within his instinctive unconscious, - under the directives of the "demon" who works within him. Apostrophant Bouchardon, Diderot defines the characteristics of the philosopher.

"Your thinking is undoubtedly confused, Monsieur Bouchardon. Without even noticing you have conformed to the constant laws of nature and the observations of physics: your genius did the rest; the philosopher has brought it to your attention and you cannot prevent yourself in conceding to his thinking. And here as well is the philosopher's task; since what is required for the parts and the mechanics of art, one must be an artist to appreciate the value.

The philosopher knows his limits; he is also aware of what are his rights and his powers. Chardin the Salon's "tapissier" demands the critics' indulgence: "be kind, be kind". Diderot turns around and compares him to Diogenes who asked for "charity for statues" to eventually lower himself to the point of subjecting himself for human garbage. As for himself, Diderot has no desire to indulge, and he expects to exercise philosophical jurisdiction without any kindness:

> Taste is deaf to prayers. What Malherbe has said about death, I can nearly say for the critic: everything is subject to his law.
>
> The guard who is posted at the Louvre gates
>
> Who cannot defend our kings.

Aesthetic criticism and political critics; it belongs to a unique and same empire which opens to criticism. In what regards painting, Diderot passes energetic verdicts of expulsion; he unhooks the painting: "Get out of the Salon!", "To the Pont Notre-Dame!" He is vehement that he deposes despots and tyrants. Should one be concerned that critical omnipotence should be compared to death? In fact Diderot expects to bring judgement in the name of values. His criteria are well-defined; he separates the living works from the stillborns; those which are barely breathing are sent to the flea market. One cannot be so categorical without having within oneself, a pretty precise idea of what is a successful painting. Despite all of the contradictions for which Diderot is accused, all the verdicts he renders reveal a certain coherency. One must agree to apply in his regard the same philosophical diligence that he recommended to himself when presented with Bouchardon's brilliant ideas.

The Salons of the Royal academy of painting brought together all that art conceived as the most seductive to the pleasure of the eyes. The evidence of beauty's taste the taste for variety was a part of the spectacle. There was a complete inventory of the known types of art; sources for inspiration, respected models, and great groupings of thematic families were mentioned within the pamphlets. The co-existence of an idea of contrasts that the spirit of the period would accept within a more or less hierarchal system; the opposition between stylized painting and historical painting only operated within the first partition of the scheme: style painting would consist of all that one can bring into "common nature" (everything that corresponds in literature to low brow and middle brow temperaments) and would be subdivided into categories which will each require actual specialists: flowers, animals, rustic countryside or seaside, pastoral settings or battle scenes, ruins or perspectives thereof, images from faraway countries, interior scenes, table corners; historical painting will use idealized nature as did highbrow literature in the religious scenes, in mythology and allegory, in the "great mechanics" of ancient Greece and Rome, the portrait as well will vary: it will be a face, a bust, a full portrait; the choice might be the neglected look or an accessory, one might place together escutcheons and apparels, one might choose to represent so and so recent writer (Crébellon father) as a Roman… Another source of variety: drawings, sketches, everything that can please without having been brought to the perfection of a finished production. To which are added the different genres of sculpture; then there are engravings and tapestries… Diderot is already prepared to like everything; diversity enchants him; the opposites of "low brow nature and the common" and "idealized nature" cause him to reflect; but he feels that one might do better to distinguish between "inanimate nature "and "animated nature". Concerning the ideal, he is more willing to provide a physiological definition (the compatible accomplishment of functions) which he intellectualizes or spiritualizes. He admires antiquity, but he is not disposed into believing that the study of antiquity can or should be substituted to that of immediate nature. In 1769, he was happy to have heard La Tour say "that the furor to embellish and exaggerate

nature dissipates as one acquires experience and ability, and that there would come a time when one would find it so beautiful, so altogether, so enmeshed, even in its defects, that one would be directed to paint it as it was seen […]" The hierarchy of styles discounts itself to the point that there is nothing. Diderot was able to write that: "Chardin is not a painter of history, but he is a great man." What Diderot really appreciated in Greuze's "moral painting" was the accurate interaction of "genre" and the imperative of "history" – that is to say the impact of "highbrow" emotions and of "base and common nature (still referred to a "subordinate"), illustrating what he he attempted in the "bourgeois tragedy". This does not impede Diderot to be exalted in front of the beautiful and poetic exaggeration of traditional historical painting. And if Greuze is not listed among the professors of the Academy because of his *Septime Sévère*, Diderot does not take up his defense: "Greuze came out of his genre: meticulous imitator of nature, he did not know how to elevate to that type of exaggeration demanded of historical painting." Diderot, who does not forget the great models, simply does not like Teniers, Ostade or Wouwermans more than Poussin, Le Sueur, or Carrache. As long as every category of painting is treated according to "the way to do it" and the harmony that it requires, he likes them and accepts them all: he is a "pantophile".

Factually, for him the arts are bound to the life of feelings. And feeling is not really feeling unless it is mobile, variable, able to be excessive and deployed in a thousand different ways. "Painting is art having arrived at the soul through the eyes. If the effect has stopped at the eyes, the painter has only taken us along a part of the path." (Rousseau says nothing less about music.) The greatest split is that which is established between the attraction of the sensual and the representation of the sacred. Diderot's imagination allows him to move from one to the other without difficulty. As a schematic example of this, let us open the text of the first Salon (1759): the way in which the booklet is set out is to allow Diderot to go from the *Baigneuses* of Carle Vanloo to Jeaurat's *Les Chartreux en meditation* seamlessly. The appreciations with their rapid delivery are revealing. Concerning the *Baigneuses*, despite their defects, it is the confession of a seduction, perhaps too easily obtained: "There is certain voluptuousness in this painting, nude feet, thighs, breast, buttocks, and it is perhaps less of the artist's talent than our own vice which stops us." Almost immediately afterwards there appeared another imperative demand regarding Jeaurat's *Les Chartreux*: Diderot regrets not having found any "silence", something "savage" which "reminds us of divine justice". He complains of a lack of perception to any "profoundly deep adoration; no inward contemplation; no ecstasy; no terror". Sensuousness and terror are the two opposing extremes that Diderot wishes to experience in looking at the paintings at the Salon. Painting, as with theater, as with poetry, must awaken an emotion, through the scene that it presents or represents. The minimum value of painting and its empathetic characteristic are interdependent; the truth of the representation is judged by the virtue of the intensity of the emotion which is derived, and vice versa. The "pure" pictorial qualities (those that our eyes of today are able to see) are not ignored by Diderot; but they are subordinate qualities; a better way to say it is they are necessary conditions but not sufficient. Concerning the multiple plays of light, solar or lunar, on mist, the "droplets" which

play on the rays, on the reflections, the passages, the transparencies, the relationships to the bodies, the colors, the shadows, the backgrounds all of these remarks were gathered together from the *Salons* and in the *Essays on painting* and they contained an extraordinary acuity; they are statements to Diderot's attention to detail, a sensitivity of the eye which can pass judgement to the chromatic mastering of the brush. How easily we might be tempted to narrow the distance which keeps him from the modern. However, Diderot is no less attentive to the readable implications of legends suggested by the man who composes them: the rhythmic or luminescent qualities are never of a separated existence; they have been put to work in order to allow for the existence of space, moments of the day, flesh, actions, accessories, etc. He is aware of what is lone and external to the painting. Subjects, motives, anecdotes are provided in order to distinguish within their persuasive imitations. The affective response of the viewers now enters into the composition along with the pictorial work by allowing for different variables and thus new forms of enjoyment.

This agitation, insofar as there is a visual prompt, is sustained by the resonance of an imaginary foil against the other senses. We are well aware of how much Diderot was interested in vicarious and sensorial interactions. *The Letter to the blind* contained an inquiry concerning the substitution of touch for sight. In what concerned two paintings by d'Oudry representing *bas –reliefs*, Diderot recalls the problem: "The hand was touching a flat surface and the eye appeared under the spell on the relief: in such a way that one might have asked the philosopher about these two senses which appeared to contradict each other, as to which one was lying." *The Letter to the deaf and dumb*, amongst other subjects, questions the correlations between speech and visual image. "The senses are nothing more than touch; all of the arts an imitation. But every sense touches and every art imitates in such a way that is proper to itself." It is by an ever so light stroke that nature animates and diversifies itself into infinity of ways and degrees, and which calls man to see, to hear, to sense to taste and to feel that he receives the impressions which are preserved in his organs which he distinguishes later by words and which he remembers later by these same words or images." How would this part which is so important to painting, "the feeling of flesh" remain uniquely tied to the only imitation of visible appearances? Already there are considerable difficulties: "[…] it is flesh that is difficult to do; it is the unctuous white, equal throughout, being neither pale nor flat; it is the mix of red and blue which seeps imperceptibly; it is blood and life that are the despair of the colorist." But what will increase the pleasure of the spectator, is the play of skin stroked by drapes and hair, it is the flesh touched by a hand. Thus in the *Madeleine* of Lagrenée: She has her arms folded on her chest; her long hair coils down across her neck; only her arms and a portion of her shoulders are exposed. When in her pain, her arms tighten across her chest and her hands against her arms, the ends of her fingers dig lightly into her skin. […] This slight scarring that her fingertips make onto her skin have been done with exquisite delicacy.

However this tactile effect develops all of its voluptuary attraction only at the moment when the viewer is himself tempted to touch; when imitation has achieved perfection, when the painter has rendered "the thing itself", the gesture

becomes unimaginable; but it is not the unreality of the moment which stops him but rather a motive of decency. Here is *The Young Girl weeping for her dead bird* by Greuze:

> *Oh what a beautiful hand! The beautiful hand! The beautiful arm! See the truth in the details of these fingers, of the nail imprint and this softness and the shade of red* from which *the blushing from the face has colored the delicate fingers, and how charming in its entirety. One might come close to kissing the hand if one did not respect this child and her pain.*

It is nearly the same for marble, when the sculptor accomplishes the exploit of having made it living and breathing, as it is wanted precisely in the fable of Pygmalion:

> What hands! What softness of the skin! No, it is not marble. Apply your finger, and the material that has lost its hardness, will give way to your impression.

The illusion has softened marble, it has abolished the flat surface of the painting so that an arm, a head, a leg "leave" the painting opportunistically, or that the viewer can penetrate into the countryside, spread himself out in the shade, listen to some musicians' flute, pleasantly converse. What absolutely enchants Diderot in 1763 within Chardin's art is that the surface of the canvas allows itself to be invaded in two particular directions: by the represented objects and by the spectator:

> It is nature itself. The objects appear to be out of the painting, and of a trueness to fool the eyes.

A painting which is a perfect imitation is a double tautology of reality; the object is no longer the captive of the figure; it becomes available to the hand for a practical use:

> It so happens that this porcelain vase is porcelain; it happens that these olives are really separated from the eye by the water in which they float; and that there is nothing more than to take these biscuits and eat them; to peel and squeeze this orange, this glass of wine, and drink it; these fruits, peel them; this pâté, to put it to the knife.

It does not take much for the smell, the appetite and the taste become part of the issue, the moment at which the hand advances in the positive gesture which breaks the contemplative rest of the "inanimate natures". It is metaphorically within a dreamy dimension to satisfy another thirst, which in Diderot's mind, Chardin's painting offers rest in a happy countryside:

One stops in front of a Chardin practically on instinct, as would a tired traveler on the road goes to sit, without even noticing, in a spot which offers a little greenery, some silence, streams, shadows and coolness.

Some silence! Added to the spatial and tactile values, here is Diderot adding the benefit of an acoustic register. All of the sound intensities, from silence to bedlam; all possible vocal expressions, from a murmur to screams explode, allusively but nonetheless strongly as an echo to the attentive perception of the painted works. Painting does not find itself credited of the literal tridimensionality, of relief and the volume that it uses "in order" to make the illusion, but it becomes a space, traversable, traversed: then as the air begins to circulate, voices and sounds can come into existence. Silence cannot become audible - in order to create a halo surrounding voluptuousness and the "delicious rest", or to heighten the sense of

terror – except by its contrast the most diverse of voices: : eloquent or touching hyphenation (with Greuze), sounds of torrents (with Loutherbourg), voice of oracles, or even (in the Baptism of Christ that Diderot has replaced instead of Brenet and Lépicié) the voice of God shouting from heaven : "This is my well-loved son." By adding the acoustical dimension to all the others allows the painting to achieve a total spectacle: a spectacle enlightened by the "painter's sun", which most assuredly is not and must not be "universal", however one which, if it rules over a group of figures and of more or less harmonized locations, will be perceived as the light of nature itself. If the painter has been able to seize our complete focus of our senses, he has produced a world and he may be, as Vernet, compared to the supreme beings:

> It is likened to the swiftness of the Creator; it is like nature for truth. […] His productions, buildings, clothes, actions, men, animals; all is real. […] One might say of him that he begins by creating the countryside and that he has men, women and children in reserve and which he populates his canvas as one would populate a colony, and then he provides them with time, sky, season, happiness, sadness whatever he pleases […]

The triumph of pictorial magic is that we will forget that we are standing in front of a painting; we are exploring the truth of the world's feelings. As it is in the wonderful "Vernet's walk" of the Salon of 1767: Diderot feigns to leave Paris and to travel while conversing with a friendly abbé through the enchanting countryside. Admiration for the painter requires that we leisurely travel through a universe, that we talk endlessly, without forgetting to return to our point of departure. The landscapist creator has opened a natural space however, the thrust that drags us only assumes all its price at the condition that we know ourselves to be indebted for our pleasure due to the perfection of skill. "Vernet's walk" is a stunning mystification which owes its enchanting power to the demystification that his reader expects, and that Diderot has wisely sustained. The real effect is aroused by an illusion of conscience. From where the opposite possibility to perceive exterior reality (Les Tuileries, Bois de Boulogne) as an aesthetical illusion The play of light in the trees is so enchanting that one believe to be looking at a work of art; in what appears to be an exchange of positions, the world of direct perception and the represented world are substituted one for the other and slip one underneath the other: real greenery becomes "a magic canvas":

> Our steps stop involuntarily; our eyes track across the magic canvas, and we exclaim loudly: what a painting. Oh! How beautiful! It appears that we are to consider nature as the result of a work of art. And reciprocating, if it so happens that the painter repeats for us the same enchantment on the canvas, it appears that we look at the effect of art as though it were nature. It is not at the Salon, it is in the depth of a forest, and among the mountains that the sun casts shadows or brings light, is where Loutherbourg and Vernet are greatest.

Within this interpenetration, the sum of feelings of delectable objects is extended and diversified. In the very forefront of our senses, our imagination, our memory, our desires which opens a heightened universe; the one of nature illuminated by art, the one of art confirmed by nature. It requires genius to produce this universe; and it requires no less for its perception. By defining the inspiration, Diderot takes up and revives an old metaphor:

> What then is inspiration? It is the art of lifting a corner of the veil and to show men an ignored or forgotten corner of the world in which they live. The one who is inspired is he himself unsure sometimes if the thing he is telling is real or fictitious and if it ever existed outside of himself; he has then achieved the ultimate goal as expressed within man's nature and the place where art's resources have run their course.

Genius stands alone. It cannot be appreciated except by returning it to the immediacy of nature. And who knows how to bring it to its starting point? Another man of genius.

If there is any uncertainty concerning the revealed thing – is it fictitious or is it real? – then it so happens that it is not only magnified but more vast: at once a mental thing *(la pittura è cosa mentale,* said Vinci) and a material object, the one and the other being the effects of the same energy spread in the world, within man, who belongs to the world – and consequently in art which mobilizes the most refined faculties in man. To the inspired person the greatest happiness is to see and to provide for viewing, to "show to men" what has remained hidden. Who would be surprised? The inspired man is fashioned in Diderot's own image From the *Bijoux indiscrets* to the *Encyclopédie*, from *la Religieuse* to the *Neveu de Rameau*, Diderot is animated by the need to divulge, to a stripping of self, to an intrusion into the most intimate redoubts. It is the evidence of truth that most assuredly attracts him above all else: metaphorically the raised veil is indicative at the first level to knowledge and not to an aesthetic enjoyment.

However for Diderot, aesthetic enjoyment is a process to knowledge. That is why (and we will have to return to this) he does not show any distain for the association of beauty, truth and utility. Beautiful painting is that which allows one to know within a fictional context a varietal sensibility to phenomenon: gradations of light, landscapes of the earth and the oceans, the gloriousness of flesh, sad occurrences, – "[…] feelings, passions, signs, gestures […]". It will demonstrate, within the continuity of the same momentum, the objectified figures bound to the painter's feelings. It will be a double revelation: worldly things and the conscience of the one who sought to bring them together. What an enormous pleasure to hear Chardin, who places on his canvas "the thing itself", and to say that one paints "with feeling". Let us imagine nature as a principle of the diversification of beings, let us allow it to act within us as a principle of ideal unification: the painter's work will reveal a varied order, and a fertile soberness. It will be altogether rich and terse. Then, our enjoyment will confirm that the painter has revealed the world in all its truth. The shivers caused by our fright before the stormy clouds or the sparkle of foliage constitutes its decisive proof, its guarantee of authenticity.

Even though that is where the attraction lies, Diderot perceives the dangers for painting. Of course he is sensitive to beautiful skin and is partial to voluptuousness. Certainly variety thrills him. But he imposes his conditions: it must be that grace and voluptuousness must not exclude "severity"; that the painter should not stray from "high brow" taste; and that variety does not become a profusion of accessories. Neither is Diderot indifferent to Boucher's seductive figures nor to the magic of his palette; unfortunately nature is not there, nor is the true unity; the sparseness of these charms say nothing, absolutely nothing. Diderot is ceaseless in reproaching

Boucher precisely for this reason: he finds him to be "a big showoff", "a deadly enemy of silence", but that there is not one painting that "speaks" as he would have hoped. Certainly one must be "a little insane", to have an "unbalanced mind" to practice the arts; without it there can be no true genius. But Diderot is not indulgent when he describes Boucher's landscapes in terms of the "dreams of an insane person". Rococo sensuality (of which certain pages of the *Bijoux* defined their contributions towards fashionable irony) is nothing more than an insignificant busy swarming:

> One asks oneself: but where has one seen shepherds dressed so elegantly and with such luxury? What subject matter has ever brought together in the same place, in the midst of the countryside, under the arches of a bridge, far from anywhere, women, men, children, cattle, cows, sheep, and dogs, bales of hay, water, fire, a lantern, bed warmers, pitchers, and caldrons? What is that charming well-dressed, clean and well-figured woman doing there? […] What a display of mismatched objects! One really senses the absurdity; despite all that one can hardly be dragged away from the painting. It sticks to you. One returns to it. It is such an enjoyable sin. It is a priceless and rare extravagance. There is so much imagination, effect, magic and ease.

This is too much disparatity to make any sense, and the appeal to the senses in wishing to be becomes too provocative, affectatious and simpering. As a declaration against Boucher's women in terms that Baudelaire will be able to pick up in order to inversely praise facial makeup.

"He dares to show me nudes; I always see their red, the beauty spots, the pompoms and all the accessories for the toilette." The exposed skin which causes us emotion according to the "very highbrow" should be a flesh of surprise; a flesh that we perceive at the moment when within the canvas it flees from furtive stares (as with Suzanne who sees the spectator while she is undressing for the old men); or a flesh which casts its rays with a serene peacefulness, as with the philosophic Phyrné that Diderot imagines to place against that of Baudoin's, the painter responsible for so many "little disgraces":

> He who stands up against the gods should not fear to die. I would have done that in grand, upright and fearless fashion. […] One would have sent that from my head to my toes. When the speaker had lifted the veil which covered his head, one would have seen her beautiful shoulders, her beautiful arms, her beautiful throat and because of her demeanor I would have had her participate into the action of the speaker at the moment when he said to the judges: "You who are seated as though you were the vengeance of the offended gods, look at this woman that they deigned to make, and, if you dare, destroy their most beautiful work."

If to expose what is underneath seeks to marvel, to provoke admiration towards the god-like body, then Diderot praises paganism to simply accomplish this gesture: the nude and even voluptuousness do not compromise anything in great poetry. However, in order not to appear absolutely impartial, Diderot expresses his exasperation due to erotic solicitation addressed to common lust (which he calls vice) The seductive display or tawdry half-nudes are to him unbearable. Boucher, once again is the guilty party: "This painter only uses his brush for breasts and buttocks. I am comfortable to look at them, but I do not want anyone showing them to me." Then, all is diminished and degraded. Here the danger concerns the common attitude,

the "moral values" of the nation, and for reasons that have nothing to do with prudishness; it has to do with the sum total of the values which are related to the activities of thought, to the relations between individuals, between social classes, to the abuse of wealth. When he refers to Boucher and Baudoin, then the condemnation of the state of civilization flows spontaneously from Diderot's pen. Significantly, the names of Boucher and Baudoin are associated with the implication to "great wealth" and actresses that is to say those even against who Diderot launches his sarcasm in *Le Neveu de Rameau*:

> […] His elegance, his affectations, his romantic gallantry, his flirtations, his taste, his easiness, his diversity, his brilliance, his rosy cheeks, his debauchery must captivate the lesser painters, their little women, young people, other worldly people, the crowds of those who are alien to true taste, to the truth, to correct thinking to the rigors of art; how will they resist this salient to libertinage, to sparkle, to pompons, to breasts, to buttocks and to the epigrammatic Boucher?

What do you expect that this artist should throw onto his canvas? What he has in his imagination. And what can there be in the imagination of a man who spends his life with the youngest of prostitutes? The gracefulness of his shepardesses is the gracefulness of de la Favart in *Rose et Colas*: that of his goddesses is borrowed from Deschamps.

Painting risks being reduced to fan panels; it will become nothing more than a trinket amongst many others. Architecture has already followed this path, with the fashion of "little apartments": "Luxury and poor morality which partitions palaces into little redoubts will destroy the beaux-arts." Luxury and poor morality: these are the economic and moral causes which have been confused which give rise to the perils: "If moral standards become corrupted, do you think that taste can stay pure? No, no this simply cannot be; and if you believe that, it is due to the fact that you have ignored the effect of virtue on the beaux-arts. […] Ah! Wealth the measure of all worth! Ah! fatal luxury, child of wealth! You destroy all, taste and morals […] in the arts the evil corruptor has a name: style. *"Style is to the arts what corruption is to the morals of a people." Diderot has outlined a definition of style which precedes what Goethe will write in a famous essay: which concerns an imagination emancipated from its subordination from nature: the artist then remains "without any precise model"*. Thus does Boucher when he sends the model to work. The hand is free to express the artist's capriciousness, his personality independently of the represented object it is then that the romanesque prevails: "Everything that is romanesque is false and affected." Furthermore, having forgotten that "nature" is a characteristic of an advanced civilization: it is a "vice of a society which is too organized". Greuze himself, so frequently praised, is not free of stylization: At first Diderot was under the charm whilst looking at the *Young girl throwing a kiss out the window*. But it is "so easy to be stylistic while seeking grace". And in 1769 Diderot corrects himself: "It is a stylized figure; it is a light shadow, thin as a leaf of paper which has been blown onto a canvas."

The policed society, if it needs be placed under scrutiny, is not blemished only by the excess of luxuriant sensuality. It is also characterized through the development of intellectual activities. Is it necessary to include this aspect in the

general accusation? Then accordingly philosophy itself, would paradoxically have contributed to the decline of the arts. The danger is not issued uniquely from the depraved appetites of a class of hedonists, but from the excess derived from thought itself, which is a substitute to our first contacts with the natural world. Diderot (as with many of his contemporaries) formulates a philosophy of history which is not at all that of continuous progress: he asserts that on many occasions that the surge of philosophical reasoning, of industry, of peaceful commerce and great financial interests correspond to a period of decline in the arts; here is Diderot's shortened version of the history of civilization:

> At the beginnings of societies, one finds raw art, barbaric speech, and rudimentary customs; however these things all tend towards the same perfection, until such time that great taste is born; however this great taste is like a razor's edge onto which it is difficult to balance. Soon customs are corrupted; reason's empire is extended […].

One cannot possibly imagine a more categorical association of moral corruption and intellectual perfection. The outcome even affects culture's style.

> […] Speech becomes epigrammatic, ingenuous, laconic, and sententious; the arts corrupt themselves through refinement. One finds the old roads blocked by sublime models that one is desperate to equal. One writes poetics; one imagines new genres; one becomes a singularity, bizarre, stylized […].

The philosophers carry their part of the responsibility: they have displaced the artists, and they are still involved in poetry and frivolous spirits:

> In the small portion of the population which meditates, which reflects, which thinks, which uses as the unique measure of its esteem for the truth, the good, the useful, to cleave the words, philosophers are disdainful of fiction, poetry, harmony, antiquity. […] If it so happens that a man with some originality, of a subtle intellect, while discussing, analyzing, deconstructing, corrupting poetry with philosophy and philosophizing with some small literary works of poetry, gives birth to a style that the nation follows; from which arises a crowd of insipid imitators taken from this bizarre model […].

At the moment when the great *Encyclopédie* enterprise was coming to an end, Diderot, in an attempt to give full measure to an after-thought, asks himself if the triumphant *Enlightenment* was not accomplished to the detriment of the arts.

All about there is decay to that spark of imagination and of poetry; to the measure that philosophy has progressed, we have ceased to cultivate that which we hate. […] The philosophic spirit requires comparisons that are more restricted, more disciplined, more rigorous, its discrete pace is the enemy of motion and figures. The reign of images passes to the extent that that of things expands.

Two years later, in 1769, Diderot will charge back: this time he notes the beginnings of the period of "economic science", and he will see philosophy itself sharing the unfortunate destiny of the beaux-arts; not withstanding some small interests, instant gratification, the discrete calculations of intelligence and the restrictions of egotism:

> One becomes well-behaved but boring; one speaks elegantly of the present, one brings everything to the moment of ones existence and its duration; one's feelings about immortality, the respect for the past are words devoid of any sense and which provide a piteous laugh. One wants to enjoy oneself after the flood. One waxes, one examines, one feels little and thinks too much, one measures everything in scrupulous details according to method, logic

> and truth. So what do you expect that the arts which all are based in exaggeration and lies should become among men who are obsessed with reality and the enemies of ghosts and the imagination, which their breath alone makes disappear?

The condemnation is brought against he who, in the evolution of traditions and ideas, has brought along expansive and enthusiastic ways, feeling and thought is against a new way of enjoyment, shorter in its bounds and simultaneously against a new logic also attached to a shorter measure of reality. And it is with another morality of pleasure and another intellectual activity that Diderot writes to Falconet: "Let us not circumscribe the sphere of our enjoyment."

The appetite for hidden pleasures and the tyrannical nature of cold reasoning are the consequence of civilization and philosophy: art is being badly led. However, Diderot is not willing to renounce the title of *philosophe* willingly. It is his identity, that which he created and the one by which others recognize him: "[…] I am called le Philosophe!" Neither does he have any intentions of renouncing the ideal of *le grand goût* within the arts. He must support another philosophy, different from the one in which the arts have suffered. As such he has to imagine another art or at least another relation with works of art.

It is necessary to bring up that although thinly veiled throughout Diderot's writings are a series of new propositions, which correspond to the direction, to a large extent, as to what direction art will take at the end of the XVIIIth century.

A philosophy which is capable of overcoming a drought which condemns it to the strict application of rational rules discovers within feeling the truth which can provide guidance to a moral life, and which will provide laws to the arts. Philosophy is reconciled to the arts which in turn spurs language's eloquent activity. By inviting painters to think, is at the same time to invite them to feel and to make feelings, that is to say, emote.

That is the testimony of the *Fils naturel* and of the *Père de famille*; it is also the one that Diderot visualizes as an incarnation in the great family scenes by Greuze. The philosopher has certainly (at least at some moment) identified himself with the painter:

> This Greuze is really my man. […] Firstly, the genre pleases me. It is moral painting. What then, has the brush not been consecrated to debauchery and vice long enough? Should we not be satisfied to see it finally compete with dramatic poetry to touch us, to instruct us and to invite us to virtue?

These famous statements might have allowed one to believe that moral instruction, according to the philosopher's wish which was the goal that painting having become the simple method should assign itself at the very most to believe some of Diderot's passages. Does the painter have the responsibility to invent color and harmony so as to embellish an idea which he would have already received from the philosopher? One is not mistaken to speak of moralizing painting; and one must recognize that, with Greuze, the subordination of painting to its edifying effect is no less catastrophic than similar methods used by Diderot in his middle-class tragedies. However, one must be careful not to provide a too restrictive definition to Diderot's intended moralizing. When he attacks "debauchery" and "vice" it is not

directed to sensuality but rather to its diminishing, and its flighty nature. It is not the moral lesson but more so the intensity of emotion which constitutes the ethical element to which Diderot attaches himself. In front of the scene that Greuze offers to him, the thought process of the spectator abdicates and allows itself to be overwhelmed by enthusiasm, emotion, tears. He is experiencing a superior psychic force which is deployed among the theater of family figures. Who cannot see that in these paternal figures struck or threatened by death that the entire social group is in danger? The emotion that the viewer shares with the distraught group works to reinforce the bonds that could have been broken. For those amateurs tired of dissolute pleasures, there is something new to be had from a fright that confirms the cohesion of elementary social roles (father, mother, and children) through the dramatic evocation of their peril… However, this pertains only to a part of a program of correction what the philosopher intends as opposition to the corruption of morals standards. Let us say that it is educational instruction that he intends for "the nation", that is to say to the middle class families who have to insure (as Diderot himself) the education of their children. The program of reforms is to be at the same time general and minimal, to involve a good son's approach as well as the benefits to doing well. But it is important that in the Salon of 1765, after having praised Greuze one more time for having given "morals to art", Diderot arrives at a point to address a much less harmless standard. In order to excuse the painter's unbearable character, here are some statements that could just as easily belong to Jean-François Rameau:

> […] I do not hate great crimes, firstly because one can make truly great paintings from them as well as tragedies; but then, it is that the great and sublime actions and the great crimes contain the similar characteristics in the energy. If a man were not capable of burning down a city, another man would not be able to throw himself into the inferno to save him. If Caesar's soul had not been possible, that of Cato would not have been any more likely. Man is born as a citizen of the shadows as well as of the heavens; he is a Castor and Pollux, a hero and a scoundrel, Marcus Aurelius, Borgia […]

This energetic morality, which is to say the opposition of vice and virtue, and the one that Diderot considers as the first condition of the greatness of art. One must admit that the "Moral enforcer project" that Diderot places in opposition to the frivolity of fads goes just to that point, and neither is he indifferent to the fact that he has considered Greuze accordingly whose painting apparently appears to conduct itself to a more stringent standard. Since moral energy requires the conflict between vice and virtue so as to show that it is sustained by their conflict while transcending it at the same time. In opposing the loss of direction, against women's adjustments which means absolutely nothing, Diderot suggests "interesting action". He finds it certainly, in Greuze's type of scenes, especially when the "domestic and bourgeois" assume a tragic dimension. However the most intense interest is the one which incites frantic passions, the unleashing of primitive forces, fanatical or barbaric feats. In order to cure contemporary art of its insipidness, one should rediscover the great original creations, those which should still be able to erupt in the souls of artists, since nature has remained unchanged behind the ephemeral institutions and has remained what it was at the times of the ancient "savagery".

The project to return to the original energies, of a re-generation of art through the resources of a nature taken back to its full vigor has been shown to us on many occasions; it is the dream of a philosophy that does not wish to remain captive of a moderate wisdom that no longer invites exaltation. The great antique works show the road to follow even if it is taking a wrong path by fawningly imitating ancient works instead of imitating true nature of which they were nothing more than the first witnesses. Furthermore, Antiquity offers a connection which has been lost between artists and philosophers: "Why is it that the works of the Ancients have such great character? It is because they attended the philosopher's schools." Heroic simplicity – associated to active tension and the efficacy of sober eloquence – finds it model on Greek soil: To paint as the Spartans spoke."

Only it is a dream and Diderot knows it very well: "The philosopher reasons, the enthusiast feels; the philosopher is sober the enthusiast is drunk." Diderot would like to become this hybrid; an enthusiastic philosopher. What would happen? Enthusiasm, for the better, will find itself escorted by a sober thoughtfulness, which both observes and praises. He will have lost his "naïve" purity. The distance between them cannot be removed; it is across a great historical expanse that the Ancient's passionate energy fascinates us as it does. Regret, nostalgia are forever unable to disappear from our feelings. In his praise of the "enormity", of the "savage", and of the "barbarian", here there is a clear statement of the what differentiates him as a civilized modern, dedicated to philosophy, that is to live separately from the initial energy but to speak and to represent it. This separation at the end of Essays on Painting, finalizes with the concept of a volunteer creative process, which predates the theory of the "great comedian". It is not a question of reconciling enthusiasm and thought by mixing them, but rather to do well that the clearest thinking, awareness, talent achieves the ability to evolve images, gestures, the accents that will provoke terror and tears: "The icy gentlemen, severe and calm observers of nature are often better acquainted with the delicate threads that must be tugged. They create enthusiasts without being them; it is the man and animal." He philosopher artist, who believes that the primordial energies have disappeared, exploits that feeling of loss and takes advantage at a distance, of the knowledge he has acquired of an entirely revolutionized world so as to be absolutely sure in copying the purity of the lines and its momentum. Within this mimicry, the research of intensity goes hand in hand with the feeling of fiction. In concerning the pagan divinities brought up by our modern poets, Diderot lucidly remarks: "We have but one feigned faith for these gods of the past." Painting also practices this simulation. Similarly to tragedy, it wishes to make one shiver. However a fright can but be born from the acquiescence to illusion: the gods of Homer and Virgil instead of a real belief only ask for an aesthetic faith:

> Why does art accommodate itself so nicely to fabled subjects despite their improbability? It is for the same reason that spectacles are much better accommodated to artificial lighting than to that of daylight. Art and its lights are the beginnings of glamour and illusion.

Diderot allows providing a collectivity to Christian subjects which are not opposed to each other. Christianity which he calls our mythology unfolds in about the same

way and can provide for the same passionate mimicry as pagan stories. Diderot, the unbeliever cannot spare the irony when speaking of "the blood that the abominable cross has caused to flow", or the "crimes that Christ's insanity committed and allows to be committed". Fanaticism itself can be justified by the intensity of the passion that it inspires.

> It is crimes that must be attached to the talents of Racine, Corneille and Voltaire, and never has there been any religion that was as plentiful in crimes as Christianity. From Abel's murder to Colas' torture, there isn't a single line of its history that is not bloody. Crime is such a beautiful thing, as well as in its history, in its poetry, on a canvas and into marble.

When formulated in these terms, the moralization of art flip-flops into an aesthetic of morals and religion. The thoughtful distancing that Diderot wishes to inject between the cold technical control and the enthusiastic generating work is found once again in the interval which allows him to imagine the object of belief or of moral attitude as an aesthetic object: this interval, which allows crime to be a "beautiful thing", disconnects him from reality, transforms it into fiction so as to provide an enjoyment which is at the same time upsetting yet subjectively removed. An unbeliever in real life, Diderot does not disqualify the pathos of religion in painting: he enhances it, he provides the painters with advice as a decorator and scenery production so as to amplify the dramatic effect. Sometimes he finds inspired formulas, which reveal at the same time his disbelief and his sense of appropriate rhetoric to a cause, which he does not hold close to his heart. Here is speaking accordingly about the *Baptême du Christ* of Lépicié, advising all at the same time mystical processes and reproaching the painters because of their lack of enthusiasm and their inability to seize a moment of inspired insanity:

> My first dilemma must be to preserve Christ's character of goodwill, and to save him from this flat and piteous traditional figure from which I am permitted to distance myself only with the greatest of care. My other concern, is to know if I will show it or if I will hide this meaningless dove that they call the Holy Ghost; if I show it I can't guarantee its meanness by increasing its size a little, making its head, its feet and its wings with a little fun and surrounding it with a stunning light… But are these people crazy? Don't these people ever talk to one another? Oh! Certainly not and if their works remain speechless, it is because they have never said a word.

The philosopher in the hypocritical soliloquy where he places himself in the painter's space, take offense to he who does not learn from the soliloquy of the visionary genius. Diderot on occasion recognizes that the liturgical ceremony moves him. However it is the ceremony which impresses him and his aesthetic person; nothing at all to do with the proper religious meaning of the ritual:

> I have never witnessed that long line of priests in sacramental robes, those young acolytes dressed in their white gowns knotted ropes with their large blue stoles and throwing flowers in front of the Holy Sacrament, this crowd which precedes them and who follows in a religious silence, so many men whose foreheads are prostrated to the ground; I have never heard this serious and pathetic chanting given by the priests with the affectionate responses by the vocal multitudes of men, women, young girls and children, without my guts tying up in knots which did not thrill and to which tears did not well up in my eyes. I do not know what but there is something grand, somber, solemn and sad.

In this statement that we have just read, the qualifiers define the altogether profane enjoyment of a spectator's conscience that "enthusiasm" has made possible from the view of a people transported by religious emotion. Diderot does not participate in the crowd's elation; he does not participate in devotional gestures: he sees it as something beautiful at which to look. His thrills are due to a totally different nature. The acknowledgement goes hand in hand with the seductive mendacity of the spectacle. And the page that we have just read ends on an ironic note addressed to Grimm: "My friend, if we love truth more than the beaux-arts then let us pray to God for the iconoclasts." As before the philosopher would have proved, by the very accent which he gave to his confidence that he is capable of proving the most heartfelt astonishment without ceasing for as much to being a philosopher.

The philosopher's great privilege when facing his work is to exhibit the ability towards intellectual independence. In any case it is the resource which permits the viewer, should he put his hand to the pen, to have the last word; and, even if a painting should appear to be hopeless, or that finds that he finds an occasion has panned brilliantly, or of a "corrected version" which is mentally substituted on a same subject as a genius work against a failed one. There was a poorly done work by Carle Vanloo in 1763 which retains the philosopher's attention twice. *Les Graces*, which appear overweight, provides the opportunity to explain the natural tinting of brunettes and blondes, then allowing him by the lesson provided on the matter of skin tones, he goes down memory lane concerning his paramours in a laudatory sort of way which enlists the use of pleasure which is not apparent in the painting:

> Those spicy brunettes, as we know them, have skin that is firm and white, but of a whiteness that is without transparency and without sparkle. It is this that distinguishes them from the blondes whose very fine skin, sometimes allows one to notice the sparse filigree veins that and toned with the fluid that circulates within them has a bluish tint in some places. Where has the time gone where my lips followed the neck of the one who I loved, these light traces which diverged from the sides of lily-white skin and which went and disappeared towards a beauty mark? The painter never knew these beauties.

In order to say something superior to the painter, Diderot allows his thoughts to flow at the mercy of his own law. Certainly, the one who is speaking here is a philosopher friend of sensuality more so that of virtuous severity. And even if the thought frees itself from the work it remains subject to the seduction of desire. Philosophical thought is most assuredly happier when it intervenes not in its disagreement, but in its cooperation with the painter, to mentally complete the work which would have biased and incited its free activity. Diderot tastes this pleasure in front of beautiful drawings. The drawn work, he remarks, addresses an appeal to the imagination of the viewer: the work of our dream prolongs the artist's intention and it is here that we find a source of unexpected pleasure that we find in ourselves:

> Why does a beautiful drawing appeal to us more than a beautiful painting? It is because there is more life and less forms. At length that one introduces forms, life disappears. […] The drawing does not attach us perhaps as strongly and because being unfinished, it allows more freedom to our imagination which sees everything that pleases it. It is the story of children who look at the clouds, and we are all that more or less. It is the case in vocal music and of instrumental music; we hear what that one says, we make the other say that what we want.

Diderot's preference, however, goes to the finished works which possess "the forms of old age" and which have conserved "the life of youth", "warmth" and the "genius" of the first wave. There is a little off-handed anecdote that Diderot recalls on this occasion, he allows it to be understood that the drawing remains, in his eyes, inadequate and that the exercise of the projective imagination will never be anything more than an unrequited pleasure. The charm of the undetermined does not mobilize all of the energies that Diderot would wish to use… Diderot prefers using his freedom to engage a dialogue with the Young girl crying over her dead bird and to tell her his story, an attempt to console her, with the full conscience that this amounts to a daydream, a tale that he tells to himself(similarly as he told the sad story of his Nun). He has not forgotten that he is speaking to "a child in a painting". When he expresses within an unrealistic condition which is the desire to introduce himself within this story of lost virginity ("I should not be too disappointed in being the cause of her anguish"), it is not the correct erotic word – one of which- one must remember, but rather the stray and fantastic impulse to rejoin, to the depths of his soul, the life and the conscience of a fictitious being.

We have dutifully noted the predilection of Diderot's contemporary painters for people in a state of being intensely absorbed: meditation, inward looking, reading, extreme focus, surprise and overwhelmed. Contained in the expression of this kind, the represented figures isolate within themselves, or within the relationships that they establish with other persons. They exclude the spectator, they do not directly (theatrically) draw his attention. However the state of scrutiny makes them interesting (with the emphatic meaning that this period assigned to this term: in this way the psychological interrogation is intensified on the nature of feelings and that the art of the painter has known as a whole to express and hide.

In regards to the philosopher, this is superior by all that, in him, which is the spoken form. And that which speaks, in fact, within the figure having been absorbed is the mystery of a subjectivity which demands to be interpreted all the while refusing to allow it to be guessed. Furthermore the interpretation on behalf of the viewer cannot venture through except in a parallel state of the imagination. An altogether particular pleasure has emerged: on the one hand it has to do with the fascination of participating in the life on the canvas and a return to self. The entrance into the imagination offers the possibility of dual absorption: that which measures with the suggested passion of the painter and that one which monologue and digresses, as an aside to the emotional content. One is offered an opportunity to partake of the sympathetic moment nearly shivering and almost simultaneously in becoming the author of a derived internal discourse from where the intellect develops its creative faculties. (In many ways the image appears as a secularization of the spiritual exercise instituted by Ignatius of Loyola.) The philosopher, even if he is prepared to welcome the beauty of great crimes, will find even greater emotion by recognizing his double or his model. A wise man reduced to poverty and on his deathbed, remitting to his friends the care of his wife and daughter: Poussin's ***le testament d'Eudamidas***. Socrates preparing to drink hemlock – a scene that Diderot proposes to the dramatists and that the painters will appropriate… These are moments of serene willingness saddle-backed to death and outlined by art, where the spectator discovers a plentiful supply of energy and by which he is

silenced into a grateful pleasure. Contemplating beings that are transfixed by the ultimate thought, the look penetrates into the scheme of monumental moral greatness.

It is stylized painting and more particularly landscape which more times than not incite Diderot to make Diderot the philosopher appears in the text. Chardin (one who ceaselessly returns) is the occasion to call upon the philosophers witnesses, so as to place the author of the marvelous similarities next to that of the creator: the painter is God, and God is a great painter:

> If it is true as the philosophers say, that there is no reality but that of our senses, of neither the emptiness of space, nor the substance of bodies perhaps has nothing in itself of what we feel, that these philosophers should teach me what the difference there is for them at four feet from your painting, between the creator and you?

However Chardin himself is a philosopher. The reason that Diderot provides is perhaps a little short; it subtracts from the warmth of the genius' domain the research into the truth of "inanimate objects". The philosopher is considered, this time, as the one who no longer has access to the upheaval of love:

> […] This painting which is called genre should be that of old men or of those who are born old; it only asks for study and patience, no passion, little genius, little poetry, a great deal of technique and veracity, and that is all. Furthermore as you know that the time that we spend at what is properly called the research of truth, philosophy is precisely where our temples gray and from where we would surely have the misfortune to write a gallant letter.

What! Philosophy should so limit itself to a dispassionate exactness? Does Diderot forget the enthusiasm that he so often displayed in front of Chardin's picture? The harmony of colors which he celebrated does it not belong to poetry's reign. The light, the way in which the air circulates around the objects, does it not have anything to do with genius? This cold concept of "genre" painting holds that the viewers thought process cannot add anything, no sensuous reminiscences, no great moral idea: all that remains is the miracle of vision which manifests the precise presence, the "thing itself"… Chardin says that "one paints with feeling": Diderot is perfectly capable of expressing this chaste and sober outlook; however, he is not able to be content, or to confine the philosopher within this area only.

The countryside – as stylized painting which includes animate beings- will allow him to place the philosopher in another role:

> Genre painting is not without enthusiasm; it is just that there are two types of enthusiasm; the enthusiasm of the soul and that of the profession: Without one the concept is cold; without the other the execution is weak; it is their fusion that makes the work sublime. The great landscaper has his particular enthusiasm; it is a type of sacred horror. His caves are deep and dark; his rocky escarpments threaten the sky; the torrents rush over with crashing sound, from afar it breaks the lofty silence of his forests. It is there that the lover has left his loved-one; it is there that her sighs are only heard to herself. It is there that the philosopher, seated or walking slowly draws inward into himself. If I stop and look onto this mysterious imitation of nature, I shiver.

The lover and the philosopher are they present in the landscaper's canvas? Or in Diderot's imagination? The answer is perhaps provided for in this passage of the

Essays on painting, where the philosopher and the lover survive according to the good pleasure of the viewer, in the interior of some fictional locations made up of words, places prohibited to the painter, which are situated at equal distance from the "real" of narrative fiction and pictorial figures:

> It is certain that those high mountains, those ancient forests and those immense antique ruins are imposing. The ancillary ideas that they awaken are important. When I am ready I will bring down Moses or Numa. The view of a torrent which crashes with great noise between the sharp escarpments, which are whitened by its froth, would make me shiver. If I am not able to see it, and am able to hear it's crashing. It would be thus that I should remember that these outbursts so famous in history had occurred. The world remains and its exploits are nothing more than a useless lost noise which is lost and amuses me. If I find a green prairie, with tender and soft grasses, a stream which refreshes a corner of the forest which promises me some silence, freshness and some secret, my soul will soften; I will remember that who I love; where is she, I would write to myself; why am I here by myself?

This new mountainous landscape resembles in very point to that one which we have previously seen; it is the ideal landscape into which one can read allegorically of the eternity of the world and the ravage of time as destructor; before this *vanitas* of open sky, the spectator once again responds with a shiver, since in virtue of these "ancillary ideas", he has superimposed to the images of landslides and of crumbling the figures of the great legislators whose duty it was to bring lasting institutions to men; the green countryside is also recognizable by the light of a literary and pictorial tradition: it is a *locus amoenus*, which invites one to dream of the missing friend. The solitude brings up a voluptuous regret. The "ancillary ideas", are the more or less voluntary associations. Today, we would call them connotations. It belongs to the painter, to the musician to suggest them, through the careful choice of evidence. However, these added ideas do not actuate fully except in the receptor – a spectator, reader or listener's conscience. It would only take a little of that "ancillary idea" which occurs, and should not come to oppose the pledges of eternal love and the mutability of the world as can be found in the *Supplément* or in *Jacques le Fataliste*:

> The first pledge that two carnal beings made to each other, were made at the foot of a boulder which was crumbling into dust; they swore their constancy to a sky which is never the same; everything happened within them and around them, and they believed their hearts freed from its sinfulness.

The thoughts which thus follow the thread of the "ancillary ideas" frees itself from the present, and raises itself to the level of philosophical contemplation *par excellence*, which is that of the genesis, the destruction, of the metamorphosing of worlds. The "poetic of ruins" excites from Diderot an historical vision which happens to be the exact corollary of the cosmo-biological vision that he lends to d'Alembert and Saunderson:

> Here, he still attaches a parade of accessories and morals of the energy of human nature, of the power of people: what masses! This appeared to have to be eternal, however this self-destructs, this passes, and soon this will have passed, and there will have been a long time that the innumerable multitude of men who lived, agitated, loved, hated protested around these monuments, are no longer […]

Dragged by this eloquence, Diderot, parades the names of those who, before him, were supremely eloquent – in words or deeds – and who belonged to a civilization destroyed by the vicissitudes of history:

> […] Among these men there was a Caesar, a Demosthenes, a Cicero, a Brutus, and a Cato. In their place, there are snakes, Arabs, Tartars, priests, ferocious beasts, brambles and thorns […]

In his "sweet sadness" the philosopher, provides himself with the big pictures of the dead leaders, the philosophers, the nations, in his thoughts he offers them a memorial; he includes himself in the future among the dispersion of things and beings, all the while safeguarding, by conjecture, the possibility of an aesthetic look, surviving all disasters so as to enjoy at full depth an imaginary future:

> We attach our views to the leftovers of an arch of triumph, of a portico, of a pyramid, of a temple, of a palace and we return to ourselves, we anticipate the ravages of time, and our imagination disperses across the world the buildings in which we live; at the moment solitude and silence reign around us, we are all that remain of a nation which is no longer; and here is the first line of the poetics of ruins.

"To come back to oneself: it is the act of reflection itself. But has Diderot, having let go of the painting he was contemplating, become self-absorbed and immobilized in a silent relationship with himself? Certainly not. He starts a monologue, to "anticipate" an attempt to look beyond him. Let us look at a last text of Diderot on painting, where once again Diderot places himself in front of an ideal mountain […]." The forests, the boulders, the cascade are found again. To which are added herds, a windmill hidden by the greenery. The beauty of the location invites a meditative mood. "I go into myself and I dream." What will the dream be made of? Nothing which directly approaches the private life. The work of this dream will consist of throwing a second look onto the beauty of the countryside and to find the imperfections in the natural state which it offers. Its immediate beauty is not a complete beauty. It will be necessary that to the beautiful is added utility and that for this; the witness is transformed explicitly into philosophy – the delegate of the "*Eglise invisible*":

> But these willows, this cottage, these animals which pass nearby, this utilitarian spectacle, shouldn't it add something to my enjoyment? And what difference is there between the feelings of the ordinary man and the philosopher? It is the one who is thoughtful and who sees through the tree in the forest as the mast that will one day hold its head against the storm and winds; in the bowels of the mountain, the raw metal that will one day boil at the bottom of the burning furnaces and will assume the shape of the machinery which have spread over the world and of those which destroy the populations; in the rock, the mass of stone which one day will be raised as the palaces of kings and temples to the gods; in the torrential waters, sometimes fertility sometimes the ravages of floods; the formation of streams and rivers; commerce, the inhabitants of the universe bounded together, their treasures brought from riverbank to riverbank and from there dispensed into the depth of the continents; its fluid soul will go from the sweet and voluptuous emotion of pleasure to the feeling of terror if its imagination comes to raise the oceans.

This time, the anticipated dream does not project the future ruins of the great capitals: by thoughts' decree:

In order to embellish the virgin nature that he contemplated, he submits it to all the technical activities to which it can be attached according to the terms in the *Encyclopédie* at the level of "employed nature": he calls together all the industries of civilization, he recognizes beforehand a world transformed by the efforts of man. One has to note that this preview of the future is not brought about by a universal leap of optimism; ambiguity is written everywhere; metal structure is everywhere and destroys, architecture will provide shelter to the kings and gods, the movement of water will bring fertility of floods; commerce will bind us with faraway continents, or will be interrupted by storms. The expansion of civilized activity is constantly doubled due to the risks of failure, and that which brings about an obstacle is not only that which remains untamed in nature, rather the destructive force that that civilization carries within itself: war, the return of superstition. The vast canvas that deploys itself to the philosopher contains an abridged version of an entire philosophy of history which is not willed by a certain progress. Every conquest has as its counterpart a possible disaster. "The destiny which rules the world wishes that all should pass. Man's happiest condition, happiest state, has its end. Everything carries within itself a secret seed of destruction." Since it only concerns itself, in any state of being, than the spectacle revealed by the imagination, it is for the "fluid soul" the occasion to provoke in oneself the alternating motion between two aesthetic experiences – voluptuousness and the sublime. It is as we have seen the contrast that Diderot was seeking, from one painting to another when he visited the Salons. And it is now that the synthetic emotion growing from the thought of the vicissitudes of humanity while it applies itself in controlling nature and menaced in return by the cruelty of the "ocean's waves". The terror was born at first by the roaring of a mountain torrent; was eventually amplified by the dimension of a tumultuous sea which defined the opposing limit of the destinies of human endeavors. When the "ancillary ideas" had finished linking themselves one to another, the ultimate of painting addresses itself in front of us – an even more imaginary picture than the mountainous landscape depicted under our eyes. At the end of its journey, the productive dreaming has neither, in front of her, the exterior nature, nor a finished painting. Most certainly she is reminded of Vernet's and Loutherbourg's storms, but she has substituted a possible painting, which also happens to be a painting impossible to paint, since no artist would be able to represent by a shipwreck the forests which provided the masts for the ship which is now sinking.

For Diderot, a painting which is worthy to be loved is that which "stops" and "fixates" him, the ones which requires him to return incessantly to a lofty or magical scene and it is in its entirety, the one which incites him to invent, within an echo, other paintings, images which have not yet found their painter, and which the language engineers with its own resources, both over abundant and lacking. Diderot takes support from the paintings at the *Salon* to write about other paintings, as he will draw from *Tristam Shandy* to write *Jacques*.

> This comes apparently from what my imagination has long been subjected to by looking at productions; and that I have taken the habit to arrange my figures in my head as though they were on the canvas and that perhaps I have transported them and that they are on a wall that I look at as I write[…].

One can see from here what reproach one can make against Diderot; too often he has given preference to his own figures, to the beings and forms that he projected onto his great wall to the detriment of the paintings hanging on the walls of the square Salon. Too often he was absent from the real paintings (that he judged insufficiently imitative) to rejoin those absents paintings which were forming in his mind – that is to say from his pen -, and which they imitated, miraculously as "true nature" and would have exaggerated and embellished more than harmony demanded. But the critic, on the other hand, could he withstand the temptation to take his own turn in painting? How many times have we not heard it repeated: *Anch'io son pittore?* The free range of thinking that Diderot develops as a platform for the works of art projects him as a adventurous theoretician (who proceeds by small approximations) and a rivalry of artists (who know only too well that the ability "of doing" is not anything that he has). This situation of unarmed rivalry has the advantage of producing a verbal acuity which plays with that which it judges and describes, and wickedly concocts when the desire overtakes him. If it were true that art criticism was established for the first time in Diderot's Salons, then it must be admitted that it owes its coming, more so to its submission to the examined and judged works than to its aptitude to deploy a world of words and thoughts throughout the collections of painted and sculpted objects to which it was required to given an accounting. Within his criticism Diderot brings together the picayune attention and the unfaithful casualness which reclaims other pictures (let us guess – those of David undoubtedly, but perhaps already those of de Girodet and of Prudhon) and who draws them according to his fantasy. The critic, one might say, is born by attributing to himself the facility to supplant art, to speak in its place, all while regretting the periods where art was the product of naïve energies. The critic looks to the past towards a "happy childhood" where he was expect to attain "[…] the thing, but the pure thing, with the least change". However force is best considered, as does Schiller that the "naïf" belongs to a lost world: "He holds onto nearly nothing; often the artist is so close, but he is not there." Antiquity, nature, the naïf are for Diderot models that are distancing themselves; as a counterpoint, the critic takes possession of his specific powers; she is hushed by the imagination of space and time, she provides the edicts for her refusals, she gives voice to her desire. The criticism becomes a type of second art, an art above the arts. In the late *Detached thoughts on painting* (1776–1781), Diderot takes back, certainly a writing style that he had broken from his youth; however one begins to notice the type of fragment where Romanticism, particularly that from Germany, will express its sentiment that it will be impossible for the unfettered conscience to be subservient to a determined form, closed upon itself. Thus in the texts on art, as in the *Nephew* and especially in *Jacques*, one finds the breaking through of the power of this negative freedom which will be designated as the following under the title of Romantic irony. Only thing is that romantic irony, exhausts itself in the stupor of its refusal; it does not participate itself in the work. He, Diderot, as with the other painters that he speaks about, can say "a man of the profession": too involved with flesh and forms to abandon him to an unsubstantiated freedom, too free to be subjected to the Academy's precepts, or to not introduce the marvelous into the determinism which

he himself claims. He is not a talkative amateur; he is admirably aware of composition, allowing for decomposition into his compositions. Those are the letters of credit which authorize him to provide an answer to all of the artists of his time, to call upon them with the most casual familiarity, peer to peer. Being in possession of such an aptitude to draw the illusion, to disavow it, to renew it, he has the right to ask of all who, in other material, on the canvas or into marble, should follow as he does the truth far outside from fiction and attain this ancient "voluptuary", this "rigor" which the most adequate nouns for our time are generosity and sense.

Fig. 10.1 René GAILLARD (around 1719–1790), after François BOUCHER (1703–1770), (*Bacchus' sleeping priestesses*), Paris, Musée du Louvre © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

The Averted Look: Diderot and the Boundaries of Representation

What can the painter represent? Does he have the power and the right to represent? The question is as well an aesthetic one as it is a moral one. During a long period of time, it was attempted to reduce Diderot's admiration for Greuze and his disgust with Boucher. It suffices, however to take into account the entirety of the Salons in order to take note that the enthusiasm breeched by Greuze is short-lived and that the diatribes against Boucher go hand-in-hand with the acknowledgement of his talent. One can equally well insist on the critic as moralist, who seems prepared to burn Baudoin's overtly libertine canvases.

> "Everything that preaches depravity to men is made to be destroyed, and as assuredly as the painting is destroyed so the work will be much improved." The Carrache prints after l'Aretin have been promised to the fires and the Ancient erotic statues are worthy of a similar fate. This is what Diderot's answer would have been to the question as to what the painter should not represent.

A parallel thought on the respective powers of poetry and painting assigns to the first movement and abstraction or generality, to the second a concrete presence, the particular reality, fixed in one of its moments. Thus the evocation of Neptune by Virgil in the first song of the *Aeneid* or that of Venus on which opens the *De rerum natura* do not appear to be translatable into painting. *Summa placida caput extulit unda* : the poet's five words allow the reader's imagination a freedom that could not respect any pictorial composition. With Lucrèce, the intercession by Venus to Mars in favor of peace causes the reader to react spiritually to the motion of the erotic games played by the divine couple: in this succession of instants the drawing or the painting will only be able to seize one or the other. The pagan gods are the incarnate complex realities which solicit diversely the imagination and the material representation reduced to some of their elements. This would be the second answer to the question as to what the painter does not have the power to represent.

However, that which interests Diderot and that which interests us in him are not those dogmatic replies which he sometimes gives to us, but rather the exploration of the limits of the representation, the thoughtfulness on the game of showing and suggesting a concrete presentation and allowing imagining. This aesthetic problem cannot be properly designated to Diderot or to painting. He raises the points of rhetoric as those of reticence or the aposiopesis as the equivalent in rhetoric of the "reticence

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
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or suppression": which suspend its meaning only to support it. The *Encyclopédie* defines the *aposiopesis* as similar to the equivalent in rhetoric of the "reticence or suppression": Then there follows the example of *Quos ego Virgilian*. Of poetry to painting, the painter Timanthe can serve as illustration. Jaucourt remembers the Greek artist's invention: "It is Timanthe who is the author of this famous painting of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, that so many writers had celebrated and that the great masters had looked upon it as a great master piece. No one had ignored that to be able to better understand the father's excessive pain from the victim, he imagined to allow it to be represented with a veiled head, allowing the spectators with the care to judge that which was happening at the depth of Agamemnon's heart. *Velavit ejus caput,* say Pliny, *et sibi cuique animo dedit aestmendum*. Everyone still remembers how this idea was so well-used in the Germanicus of Poussin". Even according to Jaucourt's terms, Painting is not content by simply giving something to look at, it also provides something to think about, above and beyond that which is in front of the eye.

Timanthe's invention remains as the important issue during the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1756, the *Correspondence littérair*e tells its readers that Carle Van Loo has undertaken a *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*. Grimm fears that there will be a comparison between the old and modern painters:" Who could possibly flatter themselves of having found a more wonderful idea than that of the ancient painter who, desperate to express Agamemnon's pain during the horrible ceremony of sacrifice, hides his face with a veil? One of the painters of our school, I believe that it was Coypel, having to deal with the same subject, had repeated the thought; and having thought it necessary to embellish it, he place the veil between the father and the daughter, but instead of hiding Agamemnon's face in this fashion, he turns him to the side of those who are looking at the picture, undoubtedly to say to them: You see, gentlemen my painter is no more talented that the one from antiquity. Nothing is as ridiculous as it's factitiousness or anything colder than this canvas." Instead of bringing the viewer towards the sacrifice, Agamemnon's position breaks the fascination. The look becomes critical and the emotion is lost.

Van Loo's canvas, which today can be found in Potsdam at the Neues Palais was exhibited at the 1757 Salon and launched a polemic into which were embroiled Caylus, Toussaint, Cochin (son)… Agamemnon raises his arms to the heavens, Clytemnestra faints. Grimm remained unappreciative of the choice of these positions and made a suggestion to Diderot who wished to have Ulysses intervene so as to provide a dynamic to the scene: "M. Diderot would have wished to see him embrace Agamemnon at this terrible moment, so as to hide him, with a feigned piety, from the horror of the scene: this would have been admirably portrayed from Ulysses' person." Diderot wished to renew Timanthe's invention by a psychological device by having it assumed by Ulysses. Thus it would no longer be the painter who would steal the unapproachable, the unpreventable pain from the viewer; rather it would be a figure from the painting which would hide from the father the sacrifice of his daughter and would place the viewer in the position as voyeur, witness at the same time of the sacrifice and the impossibility of viewing it, enjoying simultaneously the violence and the prohibited, the taboo and its violation.

The debate concerning painting, instigated by Grimm interested Diderot because of the theater. *Le Fils naturel* and *les Entretiens* explain the theoretical

propositions dating from 1757. Diderot defends drama or domestic tragedy at the expense of antique or classical tragedy. A reversal of fortune, for example, should affect the modern viewer as much as "the sacrifice of a child on the altars of the gods in Athens or Rome". But in one case as in another, it is a matter of knowing that one "should reveal to the eyes" and what should be banished to the "back scenery". Diderot quotes Racine's *Iphigénie* which relegates the sacrifice away from the scene and into an oral recitation. However, despite the choice in favor of modern drama, the ancient scene of sacrifice continues to haunt the writer who returns to it twice during the remainder of the *Entretiens*, successively evoking the pain of the father and the mother. The modern option if not a bourgeois one, exacerbates the pathos on the stage by ignoring Agamemnon's princely dignity. "Remember the principles that I just laid down concerning plausibility and that sometimes one has to choose what to show the viewer and what to hide from his view." Diderot does not seek to placate the scene's violence, but rather by distancing the decorum, restrains them.

The end of the proposal seeks once again to increase the scene's energy through the addition of music. Diderot imagines Clytemnestra singing her pain by having the piece set within an opera. The music would allow for the externalization as well as the sublimation of the painful convulsion which remains inaccessible to plastic expression.

The reference to the painter Timanthe was offered by Diderot in a letter of 1758 to Mme Riccoboni with concerns of the theater and also in regards to the *Elegy to Richardson* which refers to the novel, since the aesthetic problem overflows into the division of styles. The discussion with Mme Riccoboni is a question concerning the playing of actors. The philosopher underlines the importance of gestures and movement which shift the imagination into gear and for which the suggestion overrides that which is directly shown. "What a remarkable head Timanthe has painted in Iphigénie father! If I had this subject to paint I would have grouped Agamemnon with Ulysses and the father, under the pretext of supporting and encouraging the Greek chief at such a terrible moment, would have hidden from view the sacrificial spectacle with one of his arms. Van Loo did not even think of it."

Richardson's elegy does not compare drama but rather the novel to painting. Diderot appends to Clarissa's death, "To all of those who do not wish to be moved nor to shed tears, turn your eyes away from this despairing scene that we are about to present here." In order to realize the emotive quality which takes hold of the reader, he cannot prevent himself by once again resurrecting *Iphigénie*. However, the scene is less focused on the condition of the parents rather than the body of the young girl. "Suppose that on the canvas we had represented a young girl leaning over an altar, the head thrown back, the hair waving, the eyes half-closed, and the lips pale and deathly colored, offering her exposed breast to the sacrificial knife prepared to strike." Richardson has imagined this intriguing scene, the rape of Clarissa has lead Diderot to erotize about the sacrificial scene. Iphigénie's panting body is detailed. Any mention of the impossible or prohibited look is accompanied with a complimentary and opposite approach: the irrepressible desire to look. "That there is an entirely armed body of people who shiver around this scene; some turn away others push forward to be witnesses." The sexual drive and its censure have

materialized within different persons. Finally, Agamemnon intervenes, protected by Ulysses and Clytemnestra who has become but a scream. An oral dimension has been joined to the canvas as thought it were in Racine's play. The *summum* of art finds itself situated in the overextension of its resources and the stamping out of any other art. Ulysses is not satisfied to embrace Agamemnon so as to" hide him from the horrifying spectacle"; he speaks to him as well to "prevents the victim's gasps from reaching his ear".

The sacrifice scene is all the more haunting in the Salons due to the critic complaining that the decadence of customs and the collapse of art. The pretentious progress of society would be nothing else than the loss of primitive energy; a source of good and bad in either case. In 1751 Diderot admitted that the eyes are more scrupulous than the imagination, and the effects of painting are more restrained than those of poetry. "In fact who could possibly support on a canvas the view of Polythemus chomping through the bones with his teeth of one of Ulysses companions? Who could possibly look without horror at a giant of a man holding a man between his teeth and the flowing blood onto his beard and his chest? This painting would only recreate cannibals. This nature would be admirable for Anthropologist's, but would be anathema to us. A dozen years later, the proceedings from Webb's book takes up the same example by modifying the tonality. What was prohibited as impossible in 1751, is nothing but noted and not without regret. "Our customs have weakened through constant enforcement. […] We would indeed turn our eyes in horror from the page by an author or the canvas of a painter who would show us the blood of Ulysses' friends flowing from the two sides of the mouth of Polythemus, streaming onto his beard and his chest and which would allow us to hear the cracking of their bones broken under his teeth." Similarly to Iphigénie and her mother's screams, the sound of breaking bones delineate, as much aesthetic as moral, pictorial figuration. However Diderot borrows Homer's figurative detailing to suggest the untenable the violence is displaced in the pupil's images in tearing out the eyes of the corpses by batting their wings. The beating of the wings facilitates the metonymic sliding into place. The critical jubilation in describing this scene which returns in the *Paradox sur le comédien* is worthy of the Homerian warriors who work together in exciting themselves. The figurative eye socket nearly becomes that of the viewer. It allegorizes the fluctuating limit of art, beyond a certain period of time art, is able to see.

The nostalgia of a barbaric heroism is accompanied in Diderot by the acknowledgement of the aesthetic realism of Christianity, as though an energetic transference was at times accomplished by pagan sacrifices to Christian martyrs. The philosopher does not relinquish an iota towards religious fanaticism; however the art critic admires martyr scenes. Forty years before Chateaubriand, Diderot chants of a certain genius in Christianity. "[…] never has there been a religion that was as fertile in crimes as Christianity. From the murder of Abel to the torture of Calas, there is not one line in its history that is not bloody. Crime is a beautiful thing as it is in history as in poetry, as well as on the canvas and in marble". An astonishing declaration of the anticlerical Diderot, even more so as there is an obscure link which leads from the indignation of the militant to the admiration of the aesthete. When, in the

Encyclopédie, he wished to express his horror for the massacres provoked by religious intolerance, he finds an implicit reference to Timanthe. He composes an article dedicated to the Saint Bartholomew, discretely placed under the letter "J" where it is neither expected nor found; "Day of the Saint Bartholomew (Mod. Hist.). It is this day, forever damned, for which the incredible crime remains in the annals of the world, hatched, mulled over, prepared during two years, as it consumed thousands of lives on the 24 August 1572, in the capital of this kingdom as well as our largest cities and even in the palace of our kings… I haven't got the strength to say anymore. When Agamemnon saw his daughter enter into the forest where she was to be burned alive, he covered his face with a fold of his robe…" The rhetorical figure has a militant intention: it aims to strike the reader, to galvanize his adherence to a policy of tolerance. However it is the identical imagery which serves to the critic to place within a scene the atrocious subject matter which he calls forth at will in the beaux-arts.

Such scenes possess a triangular construction. The executioner imposes suffering, the victim is subjected to it, the witness or walk-on observes it in the position of he who observes the painting. The first point can be occupied by a "priest icily sharpening his blades" or by a "priest cold-bloodedly ripping the skin from another with a whip", the second by "a crazy man offering himself joyously to all the torture that he is shown and defying his torturers". "A frightened people, children turning away and falling on to their mothers' chests" constitute the third point. This last point serves a function at the same time as to mediate and to intensify. It provides as a transition from the real and fiction and induces the scenes' pathos. Michael Fried insists on the illusion of closure to the dramatic or pictorial scene; however the people enacted as the frightened witnesses showcase the spectator in the scene or on the canvas.

Thus it is with the martyr of Saint André painted by Deshays. "A mother closer to the scene practically guarantees the child's anxiety. One must see the look. The one that the child is preparing at the interior of the painting, it is the second degree look of the viewer and the critic. "One suffers greatly in seeing him", adds Diderot who recognizes the ambivalence of the closeness. made of rejection and desire, the compass direction and the backtracking. The aesthetic strength of the painting is born from its contrast. Saint John's decapitation, painted by Pierre disappoints the critic, since Herodiade does not really constituted the cruel point; the head has been bled dry" from which there is not one drop of blood", a young girl who is holding the platter "turns her head away": "that is good". However, this gesture will only assume all of its sense when contrasted or rather juxtaposed to the pleasure or to the icy evil of doing evil. Furthermore, Herodiade appeared to be horrified: that is not the case. Firstly, it is necessary that she is beautiful, but then it must be a beauty that is somehow tied to strength, to cruelty, with coldness and a joy to ferocity". Diderot quotes as an example Judith of Rubens who calmly thrusts the sword through Holopherne's throat." Great effects are born everywhere there are voluptuous ideas intermingled with terrifying ideas", as he writes to Sophie Volland shortly after; voluptuary ideas or desire, horrifying ideas or the averted look. "It is then that the soul extends itself to pleasure and shivers in horror. These variegated

feelings contain it in a totally bizarre state; it is the intention of the sublime to overwhelm us in a totally extraordinary fashion."

The two great Salons of 1765 and 1767 were supported by scenes of sacrifice. The one of 1765 establishes an implicit parallel between *Le Sacrifice de Jepthé* by Lagrenée as listed in the pamphlet and *Le grand prêtre Corésus s'immole pour sauver Callirhoé* by Fragonard. A biblical subject is compared to an ancient one, Lagrenée's failure to Fragonard success. It was, however, a beautiful subject that Lagrenée had chosen. When he asked himself about the aesthetic paradox, Du Bos had underscored the tragic resources, from the first page of *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*: "The pathos represented in the sacrifice of Jepthé's daughter, bound together in a border, makes for the most beautiful ornament for an office that one had wished to make comfortable with the furniture. A poem whose subject is the violent death of a young princess enters into the planning of a festival." In the *Henriade*, a similar scene denounces the crimes of superstition, Voltaire denounces fanaticism.

"He dictated to Jepthé the inhuman oath. To the heart of his daughter he directed his hand."

Lagrenée's *Jepthé*, as a captive of his oath, prepares to use the dagger at the altar "where his daughter lay out in front of him, her throat revealed". The pathos is however, defused by the presence of soldiers and old men who appear calm and indifferent. "These two soldiers, lazy and placid spectators of the scene are useless". A young man kneeling holds the cup into which the blood will flow; "Without a frown, without pity, without commiseration, without revolt". Within such a context, the father no longer appears as the victim of a destiny's tragic irony, he is nothing more than an assassin. The scene is no longer sublime but flatly atrocious. There isn't a person who encompasses the emotion of terror, the refusal without which desire is not permitted to be express. The calmness of a Judith or of a Salomé marked the paroxysm of cruelty; those of the witness detracted all the tension from the scene. Peacefulness leads either to the sublime or to failure. Poussin had played even more subtly by placing on the same canvas calm travelers since they were unknowing of the drama that unfolded just a few steps from them, and the witnesses "filled with terror" at the spectacle of the woman being dragged by a sea serpent to the depths of a lake.

Lagrenée's mistake is perhaps also having poorly selected the moment, the fundamental element in painting, since it allows for a spatial art to appropriate its duration. Diderot proposes to substitute for the moment of death the instant preceding it. The young girl approaches the altar, "weakening knees", her father, waits for her not having understood the fatal, irreversible gesture. This failure of Lagrenée acts as a foil to Fragonard's success: success in the balancing between the duration and the instant, between the pity and that which has not yet been named, sadism. Fragonard has chosen the final moment when Corésus is at the altar and turns the knife away from the victim that he should have killed and turns it on himself. In an attempt to place the value of the aesthetic strength of the painting and transform the work of art into a literary mode, the critic retraces as in a dream the history which leads to tragic and unexpected unfolding of this story. The physical convolution is

communicated from the intended victim to the victim who is offered as a proxy. Callirhoé arrived at the altar "her trembling knees could not support her"; the grand priest joins her, raises his knife and he strikes himself, "her knees fail, her head falls back". A perfect reversibility of the executioner and his victim, male and female, but there is also a pulsation of love and violence, of desire and censorship.

The introduction of the duration due to the recital aids Diderot to analyze the double movement of the viewer. In the first time the people converge. "The men born compassionate seek within the cruel spectacles the exercise of that quality". Men, women and children arrive to find a seat for the spectacle. However the very imminence of the blow and the theatricality of the reversal of the situation cause the public's horror. "Everyone's eyes are either riveted on him or fear to look at him". The acolytes observe, with shock, the older priests "whose fearsome looks must have been fed so often by the bloody mists with which they blessed the altars, could not withstand the pain, to the commiseration with and to the ultimate fright". An artistic and moral work of art: even the most hardened are emotionally distraught, even those who stand as hardened zealots are emotionally softened. A woman brings her hands to her face. A scream finishes the scene; there is a buckling of emotion, the limitation of the painting and the dream's ending, Diderot awakens. The sadistic curiosity of each spectator is justified through the grand priest's sacrifice. The desire to see violence, not to perpetuate it is legitimized from the moment that the executioner reveals that a lover is willing to give a life for the one that appeared to be the victim. The violence imposed to the woman is inversed through the identification with her Art's proper direction, is to say and to conjure up as scandalous contradictions as possible. Diderot has confided an explanation concerning the dream at work as the *Rève de d'Alembert* weaves dreamlike pictures of the extreme advances of materialism.

The proof of the importance of what this theme of sacrifice means to Diderot and its recurrence in the Salon of 1767 are under the form of details that are attached. In the death of Turenne, subject that the critic suggest to a painter, one identifies the aide-de-camp who "hold his arm while turning his head" in some atavistic precursor to the preceding acolytes. The sensation of pity is attributed to the spectators in *Le Miracle des ardents* of Doyen. The painter increased the number of sick and dead for the greater pleasure of the salonnier, who noted:" I know that some squeamish viewers had turned their heads in horror. But what in the world does it do to me who is not at all like them, and who took pleasure to see in Homer the eyeballs surrounding a corpse, by ripping the eyes out of their sockets while beating his wings with joy?"

Diderot interrupts the analysis of Doyen's painting so to digress into a passage of the Iliad, already quoted in Webb's proceeding given four years earlier.

A corpse has greater shock value on the canvas rather than in a text, but the eyes ripped out by birds turns out to be as violent in poetry as in painting. "I close mine (adds Diderot who lingers on this insufferable and fascinating image) so as not to see these eyes pecked at by the crow beaks, the bloody trailing, purulent, half attached to corpses' sockets, the other half dangling from the voracious bird's beak. The writer rivals Homer and Deshays. The symmetry between the person

performing the sacrifice and his victim is found here between the caved-in eyes and the look of the spectator. The unremitting of "I'll close my eyes" allows the critic to prolong the insupportable with a minute description and to be as jubilant as the bird: "This cruel bird beating its wings is horribly beautiful." The rhetorical figure is not reticence, but rather the oxymoron. The scene is sublimated; the simply horrible is morphed into the horribly beautiful. This art, says Diderot, which fixes the imagination's focus, consists of playing to the limits of representation. "It is Timanthe's which hides Agamemnon's head. It is Tenier's which only allows you to see the head of a man cropping up from behind a hedge. It is the one by Homer that is quoted in the passage." Heroics blend at the least of limits, the sublime to the grotesque and the grandiose to the obscene. Painting bonds itself to dreams: she shows what we cannot see, which is what we see when we close our eyes.

If the Salon of 1767 reached its pinnacle with Corrhéus and Callirhoé, the one in 1767 found Vernet's masterpieces at the top of its lists. As in one case as in another, the pictorial creation, which knows to liberate the servile imitation of nature is achieved by literary imitation which liberates itself from a servile description of painting. The sacrificial tone of 1765 is replaced by a storm, but it always requires to show higher forces (religious rites in one case, forces of nature in another) which overtake the individual and to place death with the context. The violence with the canvas engages Diderot to return to the fiction of dreams to present scenes of Fragonard or Vernet's storms. The dream would be an image above and beyond all images and all words. "I saw or I thought I saw, everything that you could possibly expect a vast expanse of sea opening before me. I was lost on the shore dumfounded by a ship in flames. I saw the rowboat approaching the ship and fill with men and then distance it. I saw those unfortunates that the rowboat could not take on board waving, running along the deck, screaming". The scenes encompass a litany of "I saw" which tells at the same time the struggle of men against the elements and the one that places them against each other. The fight to survive has nothing to envy against the horror of the Homeric clashes. However the viewer's presence is a pivotal device to aesthetic sublimation. "And this terrible spectacle had attracted to the shore and onto the rocks the inhabitants of the countryside who in turn looked away." One also finds here the double standard of curiosity and pity, the desire and refusal to look. An averted look is a look which is distracted. Sublimation is an attempt at distraction, the sublime exalts or terrifies the viewer who feels himself successively denied as an individual and force as though capable of understanding that which he is incapable of grasping. The theorists of the sublime affect the storm's example.

In the way that Lagrenée acted as a foil to Fragonard in the interior of the Salon of 1765, Loutherbourg's shipwrecks serve as foils, two years later to those of Vernet's. Diderot is sensitive to the relationship that binds the storm's spectators and victims. "Along an expanse of this jetty rising straight upwards above the waters, a man was kneeling and bent over who was throwing a rope to some unfortunate who was drowning. There is something that was well thought out. On the end of a precipice, another man who has turned his back to the sea, who is using his hands to hide his face from the horror of the storm; this is still well done". However the criticism which is given to Loutherbourg is technical; he is unable to make the

seamless appearance between air and water. The salonnier is perhaps equally disappointed by a scene which does not reach the very source of an aggressiveness to bother his conscience that is to say in his relation with others.

There happens to be another example borrowed from the 1767 Salon which helps to understand the negative side of what Diderot expects from painting.

In his *Massacre of the Innocents*, Ollivier has represented a massacre instead of showing it, as Lebrun did as a scandal of the massacre. His people are fixed, they have gestures without any motivation, or, to use Diderot's terms, motion but no expression. Homer's memory whispers once again the image of the ripped-out eye, a mother jumps to her son's eyes, but this later one appears to be ill "in the hands of an oculist who is performing a surgical operation". The son of the artisan helper of Langres, specialist in surgical tools, the author of the letter concerning the blind is well aware of this medical the technicality with contrasts against the birds primeval cruelty in Homer. The scenes of drowned or saved children, under Vernet's brush and even Loutherbourg, succeed there where Ollivier's fail; they provoke an intensive emotional investment, congruent to the sacrifice of the daughter by the father. Diderot proposes to Hubert Robert, the painter of ruins, to add a child who would kill himself by falling from a wall and would be brought back to the parents. The carnal bond of parents to children is deep enough, visceral enough so that ever spectator feels touched by the painting and that its dream is being brought along to that particular scene.

This is the recurrent motif through the last Salons until their decline which will be a part of the *Pensées détachées sur la peinture*. Timanthe's idea appears now to be unfashionable. "The painter Timanthe, after Euripides, has cast a veil over the head of Agamemnon. It was well done; but this ingenious accessory was disabused from its first appearance, and one should not return to it". If Diderot appears to be distancing himself from Timanthe's veil, it is because he appears to have found other means. He has put together a seemingly endless array of averted looks. It is now the time to question oneself on the stakes of this pictorial figure which the philosopher affects. The first is on the order of psychoanalysis or moral. The scenes of cruelty which he finds convenient are those which substitute to one erotic object a desire for an indirect object of desire. The cause displaces an immediate sexual brutality for a more elaborate violence. The nightmares of incest and child killings, of rape and sadism are sublimated through the intervention of a civic or religious imperative. The sacrificial scene, for example, legitimates the presentation of the young girl's body, naked, panting, and repulsed by the aggressiveness. René Démoris has analyzed this process of substitution and displacement. Timanthe's veil is the allegory of this ambivalent desire, at once challenged and accepted.

The second stake is philosophic. It concerns the major mutation from which modern aesthetics emanates. From a definition of art as an imitation and to the idea of rational clarity succeeds a definition of art as creation and energy. The relationships between art and nature are no longer simple transparency. They correspond to the transference of a force, an emotion, of an activity. The veil which hides and which reveal at the same time is to the image as a creative act which cannot be reduced to an object that is to be reproduced. The aesthetic emotion is of greater

import than that of its reproduction, it animates and allow for the imagination to guess at the face which is hidden. The voyeuristic mechanism that Diderot describes in the Salons engages the drama of painting. The critic enjoys finding sketched on the canvas a situation in which is can find himself as much as a spectator. He appreciates the witnesses and the actors that are offended by that which passes before their eyes. Inversely, he rejects the superficial people, the indifferent viewers, all those who see without reacting, and all those who are not involved, that the scene somehow does not concern them. Those are the servants which encumber the bride's wedding night by Baudoin, the stragglers who stray through the Hubert Roberts' ruins without appreciation of their greatness., the two legionnaires who upset the drama which is being played out between Alexander, Campaspe and Apelle, the king, his mistress and the artist, and more generally all of the people, "useless and lazy" which unhinge the intensity of the painting, and break the concentration of the spectator and cause him to be indifferent. Diderot wants to surprise the scene as well as be surprised by it, either the protagonists are alone or that they are, or whether the spectators are dragged along despite themselves by a spectacle which violates and repulses them.

Thus begins with Diderot the story of vision which will haunt our modern views until Georges Bataille. The eye is that to which we are the most attached (the pupil of our eyes) and that which assures us a rational possession of the real. The look serves Descartes as a metaphor of a thought which must be clear and distinctive. However, Diderot questions the blind point of rationality, the core of blindness which is the foundation of Cartesian lucidity. The first person as philosophical materialist and atheist in his work is a blind mathematician, Saunderson in the *Lettre sur les aveugles*. Refuting the proof of the existence of God and by an order transcending the beauty of the universe, shred by shred he reconstructs a material system of the world. In a later supplement to the *Lettre*, a young blind man boasts that music is an art form beyond appearances, not as a transcendent truth but rather as a reality that is neither clear nor distinct. Diderot's paradox on painting consists of dragging the art of forms and colors into this vortex and to allow it to represent or more or less suggest that which is seen or beyond being seen.

The passage of this eye, curious to the point of being distracted, passes through Sade who takes them up by distorting those themes dear to Diderot. The Sadian scene which is appropriately naming a tableau, is defined as a concentration of focus which does not support indifferent or useless bodies. Similarly to Diderot, Sade is obligated to conduct the dynamic of desire through a veil and reticence. Within the confines of the boudoir everything is said and everything is done, the worst is not only shown, but demonstrated. The libertine has necessarily to sometimes isolate himself in a secret office or to whisper into the ear of an accomplice. He really cannot accomplish worst than he does but he is capable of turning up the ratchet at an orgy. Under the traits of Agamemnon or of the Sadian *roué*, the Father disrobes to better impose himself and to increase his daughter's suffering.

The dialogue that Huysmans engaged in with the painter Gustave Moreau could constitute a further milestone to this story. The hero of *Á rebours* dreams in front of a watercolor that he has purchased, *L'apparition* is where Gustave Moreau has

placed Salomé and the head of her decapitated victim. "In a gesture of terror, Salomé attempts to rebuff the terrifying vision which nails her, immobile, right to the floor; her eyes dilate, her hand grips her neck." Her eyes dilate, fixing "the pupils as vitreous balls" of Saint John, "seeing, in some way focused on the dancer". The painter seizes the improbable exchange between life and death, desire and disgust, vice and virtue. Huysmans is self revealing when he says: "stunned, thoughtful, and disconcerted, by this art with overreaches the limits of painting". The distinctive feature of the art critic is to become part of the limits of pictorial representation, to provide a view to the horizon where writing, painting and music are interwoven.

The end scene that Villiers de L'Isle-Adam had imagined for Clair Lenoir is found with the same plan. Doctor Tribulat Bonhomet observes, from "the just about dead eyes" behind the blue glasses, are Claire's pupils on her death bed. He penetrates them with some monstrous instruments and discovers the husband in the painting brandishing with outstretched arms the head of his lover whilst chanting like an Indian a war cry. The pupil would have captured like a photographic plate, the last image as seen by the dying woman. Photographic technique is new, but the base scream remains within the horizon of the painting. The reader viewer is invited to seize a look which seeks the look of horror in a scene in which he dies. The multitude of intermediaries, the contrast between the living doctor's dead stare and the frightening stare of dead, the name play of Claire Lenoir between the clarity of the visible and the blackness of the invisible attenuate and reinforce the terror. Fright and curiosity said Diderot.

In Bataille's novel, the eye, traditional organ of clarity and to lucidity is associated to organic and sexual mysteries. The intrigue of the history of the eye ends with the accident which costs the Spanish torero his life and then ends with the stoning of the Spanish priest. On the one hand there is the confrontation with animalism: "one of the horns penetrates the right eye and the head. […] The entire crowd was standing. The right eye hung from the corpse." On the other hand, the confrontation with the divine: Sir Edmond, like the bull, blinds the priest: "He forced his fingers into the orbit and pulled out the eye, tearing out the stretched ligaments. He placed the little white globe into the hand of my friend." The scene is, literally and in all senses, blinding: for the tortured person, for the actors in his being put to death, for the reader. Diderot brought up Homer who he indicted with inhuman violence, unpreventable. Bataille assumes it through the intermediary of the human being who has abandoned the ideal of *Enlightenment*. The optimistic atheism of the Encyclopedist drew the horizon or the line through which pictorial representation in order to deploy all suggestively; the mystical and desperate atheism of Bataille locks itself in the paroxysms which project art and literature to the very limits of significance. The history of this fascination for blindness demands a detour through the cinema. Luis Buñuel's *Le Chien andalou* heads the list with the eye sliced by the razor. The most recent painting which subscribes to this logic that Marc Le Bot sums: The game of *colin-maillard* haunts the painting of Cremonini as the metaphor for all painting: the children's game and paintings become as an apology for desire and the pleasures of blind discovery, the old insanity of a

tortured person whose memory is nearly lost: his eyes punctured, he continues to fight in tatters. In just an anxious way, Antonin Artaud says of his eyes that he draws in the form of black holes that they are like the "cave openings of our oncoming death". Giacometti pierces through with a drill. Francis Bacon appear to crush them, they are dotted with monstrous pustules". Through forms and colors, painting allows for the feeling of forces, abstractions, significance. The visible tends towards the invisible. Painting seeks to seize anything that exceeds the look.

Fig. 11.1 Joseph VERNET (1714–1789), (*The four parts of the Day: Night or Moonlight*), Versailles, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

Composition According to Diderot

Denique sit quodvis simplex duntaxat et unum

As long as there is unity, why should I care.?

During the Salons of 1763, Diderot allowed himself to unwind with a short remark concerning the painting, *La Chasteté de Joseph* by Deshays which to him was the most captivating of the entire exposition.

"Assemble helter skelter all sorts of items and colors, some washing, fruit, liquids, paper, books, cloth and animals and you will see that air and light, these two universal harmonies, will blend them all with, and I do not know how, hardly noticeable reflections. Everything will blend together, the disparate will weaken and your eye will not criticize anything of the whole. The musician's art which, by playing the organ the perfect chord of C bring to one's ear the dissonance of ut, mi, sol, ut, sol#, si, re, ut has come to this, whereas that of the painter will never be so. That is because the musician sends the sounds himself and that which the painter mixes on his palette is not flesh, blood, wool, sunlight or air from the atmosphere but earth, sap from plants, burnt bones and metallic lime. Based on this is the impossibility of rendering the imperceptible reflections of some onto others; for him there are contrasting colors which will never reconcile. From this develops the individual palette, a thing, a technique particular to each painter. What is this technique? It is the art of preserving a certain amount of dissonance, of brushing aside art's truly highbrow obstacles. I challenge the most talented among them to hang the sun or the moon in the middle of his composition without blotting out those two stars or fog or clouds; I challenge him to choose his sky as it truly is, sprinkled with starry brilliance as one finds in the calmest night. From there the necessity of selecting a certain number of colorful objects."

From the very distillation of painting itself – that of being only an imitation of nature, a copy – flows the necessity for the painter, contrary to the musician who actually produces sounds to compose his canvas, that is to say to chose not only the subject of his painting, the objects to represent but also the way in which to manage them. During this interlude, composition appears as being at the very core of the "doing" of the artist: as with all imitating art, painting must provide a principal seat to composition for which everything is dependent on the artist's palette. A painter's

D. Diderot, *On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought*,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-0062-8_12,

entire talent rests on his ability to compose his work tastefully, similarly to the dramatist who relies on his ability to contain his plays within the stage with room to spare.

"From here, one hundred to one that a painting in which one has dictated the layout to the artist will be a poor painting, because one is pointedly asking him to devise an entirely new palette. It is a point in common that exists between painting and drama. The poet uses his subject in relation to the scenes into which he uses his talent and from which he believes he will gain the most advantage. Racine never filled his canvas with Horace; Corneille never filled his canvas with Phaedra.

Composition is at the foundation and is the principal of the imitative arts: without it there is no good theater, nor any painting which is beautiful. Composition determines the work's subject, but it is the strength of the idea by which it is structured, then comes coloring, lighting and shadows the drawing and the expression from which it is composed are brought to reality. It is so much so that the expression "composition" has become the designation for painting itself: flowing from Diderot's pen in the language itself, a composition is equally indicative of a particular pictorial work.

From the very start we understand that the notion of composition is fundamental to Diderot's aesthetic thinking. It has nonetheless been forgotten in general commentary, perhaps in reason due to the position that Diderot provides for it in the general content of the *Essays regarding painting*. After having treated drawing, color, chiaroscuro and expression, it is only in chapter five of the *Essays* where Diderot mentions its examination as one of the essential components of beauty in painting. However, given that chapter six concerning architecture is a later addition, which probably dates from 1773, one must consider that this "paragraph" is the last prior to the conclusive corollary on the formation of taste and the relationship of taste and beauty. Chronologically, composition comes after all the rest in the *Essays*: after drawing, coloring, light and expression. In the title of the chapter that he chose, Diderot – "Paragraph on composition in which I hope to mention it"-, appears no even to be the focus of this passage. Thus, composition appears, at first glance to be a forgotten item; Diderot himself attempts an excuse, in as much that he mentions the possible neglect in the title by not being exclusive in its treatment. Why dedicate an entire chapter to composition, when the author himself does not provide any intention of doing so? If the author has chosen not to speak about composition, then should one consider this chapter as a superfluous and redundant outgrowth of the Essays? Should one consider as it appears that Diderot is inviting us to discuss composition which is necessarily to discuss or re-discuss everything? If such is the case, is it not admitting that the treatment of this is useless and of no purpose and that everything has already been said in the preceding chapters?

In reality the paragraph of the Essays on painting dedicated to composition completes Diderot's analysis which has been previously linked to his aesthetic. This chapter synthesizes, in the sense that it assembles and unifies all of the preceding developments and constitutes the keystone of this small treatise.

One should recall that for Diderot beauty is nothing else than the perception of relations, as he distinguishes at least two great types of art: production arts and imitation arts. Music for example produces sounds which do not attempt to reproduce natural sounds, but which must associate themselves harmoniously between themselves. Painting on the other hand is an art of imitation: it seeks to imitate, to copy, to reproduce nature. Diderot promotes within the imitative arts an aesthetic founded of the principle of truth: the artist must seek above all else nature's reality within truthful imitation, there the represented object must express the model, which so to say is to copy its exterior – which in today's terms would mean with: realism – but equally to allow for the feeling of this "passionate cry" from the subject's interior, a cry which is in part muffled by the carnal envelope and furthermore reveals through this same physiognomy, by this same flesh which is colored either comes to life or is tarnished by spent passions. To produce a truthful imitation of nature, the artist must consequently seek to represent the expression, "image of feeling", and he must seek to represent it faithfully, with its inherent colors, with the light which is most susceptible to reveal it and to best provide its foil. It is equally so that the viewer can feel the entire impact of this true imitation, that is to say that the painting must be unified in spite of the profound diversity of different elements which it represents, in spite of the irreducible variety of details and the accessories which compose it. It appears in fact that the artist must know how to manage the space on his canvas, to provide each element(accessory of central, figure or object) the place where it belongs, to provide a hierarchy for these represented objects, but still - and above all – to create a unity within the painting. Furthermore this is precisely the multifaceted task of composition for Diderot. We will attempt to show, in the contents which follow the importance of this statement, which we believe to be at the same time its principle, foundation and at the center of the aesthetic as defended by the salonnier.

The Ambiguties of Definition Concerning Composition Within the *Encyclopédie*

In volume III of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot had already conscientiously developed his concept of composition in painting, which he defined as "the part of this art which consists of representing a subject of any kind, onto the canvas, taking full advantage of the conditions." This definition is primarily striking due to the vagueness which it characterizes. Composition is a "part" of painting and consists of representing a subject in the best possible way on a canvas. This could very well suggest the definition of painting itself: effectively, what is painting for Diderot if not the most advantageous representation of a subject? The reader must therefore be surprised to learn that composition is not only a part of the painting but one which also shares the same definition. Is it to say that composition would undertake a relation of perfect transformation with painting? How does one begin to understand this curious definition concerning composition as a part of the painting which makes

this one which is the essence of itself? The reader must be surprised as well of Diderot's willfulness to remain vague: "what does the expression "in the most advantageous way" mean? What does the idea of advantage mean?

The important point to remember is that Diderot does not define composition in a traditional sense as the spatial distribution of elements onto the canvas. The definition that he provides is more complex: certainly the painting's composition returns to "the distribution of figures" the artist's ability to represent a subject while occupying "advantageously" all the space available in his painting; however above all and to the point, the composition consists as well in its representation of itself. Composition is not the only vehicle to dispose of elements onto the canvas or the only thoughtful distribution of the parts of a painting, but it consists as well and also to "represent". Otherwise said, the underlying significance of the term "composition" reduces its meaning to the only suggested one by the artist in organizing his painting: a figure here, another there; in the foreground a detail, in the background the protagonists highlighted by a natural or artificial light, all of which is constructed around axes and vanishing points and points of perspective. Diderot does not renounce this traditional meaning, but he enriches it: to compose is already representing. This is what is confirmed in a passage among others from the Salon of 1761 where Diderot comments on Deshays painting entitled *Saint Benoit near death receiving the viaticum at the altar:*

> The distribution of the figures, the color, the facial characteristics, in one word the entire composition would give me great pleasure, if Saint Benoit were as I wished; that he appears as the moment requires. He is dying. He is a man who has been embraced by the love of his God which he has just received at the altar despite his failing forces. I want to know if it was required of the artist to have painted him as upright and stiff on his knees; I ask myself if, despite his face's pallor, he was not given a few extra years; I ask if it might not have been better that his legs were exposed under him, and that he might have been supported by two or three friars; that he might have had his arms a little extended, the head bent backwards, with death on his lips, and his face bathed in ecstasy by the rays of his joy.

However, my friend, had he given a stronger expression to his Saint Benoit, how would it have reacted to the rest. This slight change to the principal figure would have influenced all the others. The celebrant, instead of being upright, would be pitiful and bent over […] Here is a good show of painting which should be used to subject the eyes of young student so that they see that by changing only one circumstance one changes all the others or else truth vanishes. One would make for an excellent chapter on power and unity. One would have to preserve the same guidelines, the same figures and propose the execution of the painting according to the different intentions that one might given to the supplicant.

It should be read very clearly that Diderot does not reduce composition to the unique distribution of figures which he rigorously states as the prescription. Composition extends equally to color, expression and light. From that fixed idea flows what becomes the subject of the painting and that which determines its execution as well. Consequently the composition is not a simple ordered plan of the contents (a way in which to present and to distribute the elements onto the canvas); it is in of itself a modular representation, it determines the "to do" for the artist.

Composition does not simply dispose and manage those objects to be represented on the canvas; it must already represent them, that is to say, copy them, imitate them, and reproduce them. The composition is already part of the pictorial execution. For Diderot composing is a performance. The term is to be understood as an action. To compose is already to have made the canvas real by accomplishing the act of painting. Or, more precisely composing is the act by which the painter moves from the impression that he has conceived and which determines the subject of his painting to its realization. Diderot thereby layers complexity to what is commonly understood from the word composition. However, be careful: there are a number of times when Diderot uses the term composition to designate what he understands to be a prescription. Therefore it is important to remain cautious when reading him and to consider that composition is as a preliminary sense synonymous with order; then within the scope of a more ample and rigorous concept a determination of the artist's "to do" which includes at least the prescription, the sketches, the color, the light and the expression. We will attempt then, on the one hand to contain the restricted sense that Diderot often lends to the term of composition (that of prescription) and on the other hand to hone down little by little the larger definition, and undoubtedly more accurate, as composition is the criteria for beauty in painting, this something in a painting is unified by its variety, the grace to which the spectator can perceive the relations between the beings, this grace which is bestowed so that a painting may be perceived as beautiful.

The following is the definition of composition that Diderot provides for in the *Encyclopédie* confirms our interpretation:

> Composition, in painting; is the part of this art which consists of representing on a canvas any subject in the most advantage manner. It supposes: 1. that we are thoroughly aware either from nature, or from history or from our imagination everything that there is know on the subject; 2. that we possess the genius which is able to use all of these givens with appropriate taste; 3. that we maintain the study habits from the art manual since without them other talents have no meaning. A well-composed painting is a contained whole with a single point of view, from which all the parts compete to the same end, and perform by their mutual correspondence a whole that is as real as the members of an animal's body.

While only directing our interest to the three purported competencies in order to compose well, and by containing the examination of this definition, one notices that composition requires firstly and above all a near exhaustive knowledge of the selected subject. Composition thereby presupposes know-how, but not erudition – as Diderot will explain clearly, for example in his thoughts on the utility of anatomical studies and those who have been skinned: "The study of the flayed has undoubtedly its advantages: but is it not to be suspected that the flayed remain perpetually etched into the imagination; that the artist should not become pig-headed by the vanity of believing that he is a know-it-all; that his blind eye should no longer be able to stop at the surface; that in spite of skin and fats, he is able to see the muscle, where it starts, where it is attached and where it leads; that he should not state stridently, that he should be neither hard nor dry, and should I find those damned flayed people in the bodies of his women? Since there is only the exterior to show, I should like it, if one might teach me to see it correctly; and that I should be rid of this perfidious notion that I must forget." It can be seen that

Diderot's relation to science and knowledge is ambiguous; one must be knowledgeable, but wisdom and an excess of science can obstruct the artist. The importance for the artist is to know how to use his knowledge, and to know when to release it when the opportunity arrives. Knowledge implies in order that the artist is able to make good use that he is capable of becoming detached. Inversely for Diderot wisdom would have an enslaving effect on the painter vis-à-vis his own knowledge, since it would stimulate pride and arrogance of the will to show him as smart rather than true. Knowledge is essential only in the fact that it allows the artist to imitate reality. Without knowledge, an artist cannot be true and his composition will be neither authentic, nor correct nor real. To be captive of one's own intelligence deprives the artist of his aptitude to see with simplicity and honestly nature as it really is externally and superficiality.

The second assumption is a certain genius to good composition. However, it is not the same genius that Diderot mentions in his selected thoughts on painting as the power of invention but of genius as a certain facility with which to link his composition and his choices with taste. The artists must then have taste, that is to say that he must be capable of making use of truth and good with those circumstances which make them beautiful. The artist who is aware of how to compose realizes that this second assumed competency flows from the first: before having taste, one must know the true and the good and know how to recognize them. Taste and genius are in fact closely connected: a genius must have taste, even though one can have taste and not have genius. It is there that Diderot makes the distinction between enlightened taste and instinctive taste: "If the experiences which determine judgement are present in ones' memory then there will be an enlightened taste. If memory, no longer serves but an impression remains, then one will be sensitive to instinct. Genius requires an enlightened taste, and it is to the painter to use his talented faculties, as much to the service of his composition, while remaining within the confines of his impressed idea and with the impressions that emanate from the canvas, to the service of what is true and what is good.

Finally, Diderot's third and last supposition concerns the artist's technical ability which must possess, through his work and efforts, all the talents in painting, notably those of drawing, coloring, and planning. Nothing could be more strongly worded than Diderot's statement that: all the "other qualities" of a painter, all the artist's manifest talents would remain "ineffectual" without this knowledge of "the artist's guide" which is constituted by composition.

Planning as Guarantee to Comprehension

A second difficulty arises when comprehension is relative to composition as definition as Diderot provides for it in 1753 in the *Encyclopédie's* Volume III, which begins as we have already mentioned with the advantageous use of the adverb. In which way can we say that a subject is represented advantageously? What does it mean to represent a scene to its advantage? It is precisely to this question that

Diderot replies implicitly, when he writes in the first paragraph of the chapter on composition in the *Essays on painting*: "We are possessed of only a certain measure of wisdom. We are only capable of a certain amount of focus." To represent a subject in an advantageous way, it is firstly to represent it while taking into consideration the public's ability for which it has been painted, that is to have been painted for its public. Art only exists for its destination. If consideration for the target public and the viewer is absent there will be a serious flaw that the artist can remedy only by bringing about a sustained effort to his composition. Or, more precisely, when the composition, in its contained sense as a managed effort of the different compositional elements which ease its viewing by the targeted public.

What is this wisdom? In his "*Essay on the origin of human knowledge*, Condillac defines it as: *"The facility of use that one knows to use to recall to seize ones object with greater ease […]; that which is only done by the imagination when connected to thought and analysis". At the time when he wrote, wisdom is looked on as this intellectual faculty by which the latter recalls an object with ease, thanks to one's imagination, thinking and analysis*". However, as Diderot assures us that we are never fully nor perfectly in possession of wisdom; the ease with which we understand an object thanks to our imagination, our thinking and our faculty to analyze, lacks in its totality. To the contrary: Diderot presupposes humanity's finite capacity and its implications to the intellect; not only are we incapable of grasping with any serious ease a sense of the object on the canvas, but above all that our intellect is finite, limited, contained. It tires and is incapable of being focused onto the object which is presented to it through the intermediary of its visual sense if only for a short moment. Diderot's point of departure regarding this thought is the double postulate

At the same time relative to anthropology (man is a finite, limited and contained being) and to cognitive psychology (our concentrative efforts to sustain our focus on certain objects are themselves limited). At least that is what he wishes to show us through the many digressions that pop up throughout the texts of the *Salons* and which he makes a point to justify by blaming his weariness and his desire to rest: *"And now for another short lapse, if you don't mind. I am in my writing-room from where I have to see all these paintings. To do this tires me, but this digression give me peace."*

It is the intersection of this double presumption on the one hand and art's public vocation on the other that Diderot deduces that the painter must necessarily in order to present his subject advantageously on the canvas: it is because he makes art for a public and because this public is by nature limited that he must plan his painting in order to make them accessible, readable, intelligible. Even before envisioning order as a criterion of beauty, Diderot presents this order as a criterion of intelligibility. From this point the salonnier suggests to the painters that he criticizes, to present a hierarchy of ideas onto the canvas: the main idea must rule over the ancillary ideas to which they are subordinate. : *"The Death of Virginia by Doyen is a huge composition in which there are many beautiful things. Its shortcoming is that the principal figures are small and the ancillary items are large."* It is incumbent to the artist to place value on his main idea, to make it clear, luminous, evident.

In order for a work of art to be perceived as beautiful, it is required that it be understood. At least that is what Diderot implies when he reproaches Rubens' art of mixing real beings and allegorical beings and from that becoming totally incomprehensible: *"I simply cannot hear them. […] One should make things come out of each one of their mouths, as we see in our old castle tapestries those legends in which they say what they want."*

Consequently, the first rule according to the salonnier is to guarantee the ability of understanding the canvas. Why, according to Diderot must one understand a work before finding it beautiful? That is precisely what he explains at the very end of his *Essays on Painting* when he shows that taste, with which he envelopes and judges a work is acquired by experiences which are kept in our memory and which always act as a foil to the sensitive or sensorial perception. Taste for Diderot is not simply the fact of finding something nice in such or such a scene, but is rather the ability to make a reasonable admission of the relations between the work's subject and its natural model and those among the different parts of the work. If taste is a thing of relationships then it would not be purely aesthetic (that which is neither purely nor exclusively included in sensation). It requires a process of elaboration by the imagination, thought and analysis. It requires repeated experiences and the use of memory. Taste is an intellectual pursuit not simply one of sensibility. From there proceeds the necessity for a work to be comprehensible prior to being beautiful. The understanding of a work is the prerequisite to its beauty and it is this understanding of the composition, as the primary rule, which realizes and guarantees. Composing a painting is, to begin to organize in such a way as to provide understanding and by such, to make it potentially beautiful in the eyes of the viewers. Composing a painting is to think and organize it in such a way as to make evident the relationships which constitute it.

Planning as Value-Added Interest to a Painting

The term *advantageously* has still a second meaning: when one says that something is represented to its advantage, one means that it is represented in such as way as to seduce and interest. The object or the scenes that are advantageously represented are worthy to incite the viewer's interest as well as retain his attention. In invoking the law of interest Diderot makes mention of this concern: "*Every scene has an aspect, a point of view more interesting than another; it is from there that it must be seen. Sacrifice yourself to this aspect, to this point of view to which all the aspects or points of view are subordinate, and so it should be.*" By representing a scene or an object advantageously, it is also to represent them in such as way as to enhance that aspect which would be the greatest interest to the viewer.

Now the traditional question is asked: when the artist creates, he is generally alone, locked away in studio, far from the look of those who will be his admirers or his detractors. How he is able to know in advance what will interest his public?

His first requirement for that is to not consider only the intellectual interests of the spectator, since that might only be addressing an infinitely small part of the public, only those individuals endowed with a powerful understanding:

> When one creates a poem, a painting, a comedy, a history, a novel, a tragedy, a work for the people, one must not imitate authors who wrote treatises on education. Considering two thousand children, barely will there be two that can be brought up on their own principles. Had they thought, they would not have conceived of an eagle as the common model for a general institution.

Here once again we find the requirement for considering art's destination, the public to which a composition necessarily addresses itself; when composing the artist must keep in mind the spectator's nature, his capacities and his strengths. We have already flagged the fact that in Diderot's art has firstly and above all a social calling and because of this entitlement it must have a pedagogical access that is the reason why Diderot implicitly criticized Rousseau who had proposed in *Emile* or *On Education* some educational principles which addressed only the smallest parts of humanity's elite since it made the assumption that the child would be so wise, perspicacious and lucid that he would always be able to extract all the information from himself and through his own experiences; which can only be the case for a rare number of individuals. In opposition to Rousseau, Diderot believes that one must look to expose (that is to say present to the public), to address oneself to a larger audience and show to "any man with common sense". If an artist wishes to display a work he must address the representative individual, that is to say neither to the individual with limited intellectual capacity (to a "stupid" person) nor to the erudite man and exclusively rational (as the "philosopher", or "PhD" or the "intellectual"). The artist addresses himself to the man of simple common sense, to any individual of good will. The use of the Cartesian term "common sense" which as everyone knows since the publication *Discourse on the method* is "the best thing ever given to the world"; it appears to invite one to think that artists must address themselves to every man and not exclusively to those of letters, or only to enlightened souls and to honest men. Art must be popular. Otherwise said, art must address itself to man, in all of his complexity, in all his dimensions: simultaneously with his sensitivity, to his imagination and to his rationality. The mature individual, one who has bound together understanding, imagination and sensitivity, he who has studied deeply, he for which reason is exercised and whose sensitivity is developed will have a better appreciation for painting: "Pleasure is increased in proportion to the amounts of imagination, sensitivity and knowledge; Neither nature nor the art which copies it say anything to the stupid or mean-spirited man, and little to the ignorant man. At first hand it is that the painter seeks the effect to produce: "Let us return to our prescription, as to the content of figures. One should, one must sacrifice a few for the greater technical good. Up to where? I do not know. But I do not want it to cost the least thing to expression, to the subject's effect. Touch me, astonish me, tear me, make stumble, cry, and shiver, make me indignant first." The composition must not interfere with the viewer's emotion. It is through emotion that the painter can involve the greater public. But how can he possibly guess the

emotions, the feelings, and the impressions? It is here that Diderot intervenes with the "rule of energies and interest:

> That the artist maintains this law of energies and interests, irrespective of the extensiveness of his painting, his composition will be truthful throughout. The only contrast of which taste will approve is that which results from energies and interests which are inherent since no other is required.

The interesting presentation of a scene is that which is true, that is to say a scene which is as varied and energetic as its model (no more – which would be theatrical and false – no less – which would be sad and bland):

> What is it that captures my attention? It is the participation of the crowd. I could never refuse so many who invite me. My eyes, my arms, my soul are lifted up in spite of myself where I see their eyes, their arms and their bonded soul. I should better like if it were possible, to roll back the moment of action in order to sense the energy and rid myself of the lazy.

The composition determines the choice of subject dependent on two criteria: the first is truth, the second is energy:

"It is necessary for the imitative arts to have something of the untamed, brutish, striking and enormous." Compositions must be "energetic" and "worthy of interest" It is particularly interesting to note that for Diderot, interest and energy are paired: a scene is interesting (for understanding) and energetic (stimulating to the senses) at the same time. A work which communicates emotions cannot be without interest. It would be as though understanding gave its full attention only to that which emitted strong emotions. Or more precisely that everything happens as though understanding was stimulated by emotions felt by ones senses and brought to life by the imagination. The intelligence of a composition is therefore not in opposition to its energy mandate. Contrary to what one might think, the composition will be understandable intelligent and – according to Diderot – interesting insofar as its energetic or emotional mandate is alive, strong, wild or uncouth. Everything is held together: the dimensional plurality of a work is implied by something else. Thus Diderot condemns the works that would be more rational than emotional. One simply cannot cloister interests and energies and there is no work that would be interesting without being energetic; or an energetic work that would not be interesting, since if a work suffers from a "conceptual weakness", or "a paucity of idea" then "it is impossible to receive any strong emotion or a deep feeling. Diderot challenges this idea, commonly bandied about today, according to which there would exist, on the one hand purely intellectual works which they alone would contain an artistic value and would only be of interest to the literate and on the other hand those paintings which are alive and energetic destined alone to that emotional public which does not think. To the contrary, Diderot demands that art binds all the necessary and sufficient qualities to interest every human being:

> The prescription for poetry, as well as for painting, supposes a certain temperament of judgement and of wit, warmth, wisdom, stupor and a certain coldness for which there are few examples in nature. Without this rigorous balance according to which enthusiasm or reason predominates, the artist is either extravagant or cold.

Composition as Unifier

Radical understanding demands a requirement, which supposes the dual forfeit of cold esotericism and boisterous extravagance and implies another; that of unity which Diderot formulates with this famous quote: *"The primacy of the well-defined idea must exercise its rule over all others."* The political metaphor used here has strength. Of course the reader of the period is immediately attuned to the reverberation prompted by Voltaire's *enlightened despot*. Painting, the imitative arts as the body politic are modeled from natural organisms. Consequently paintings must be bonded by a coercive entity, which as the single manifest idea directs and unifies the entire composition. As it is the same way in politics that a city with power would be condemned to disintegration, in painting a canvas where each idea would seek to overturn all the others, would in similar fashion lead to anarchy, disorder and chaos. In other words, whereas in politics the relations between individuals are guaranteed and insured by the State and its binding power, in painting the relationships between the parts of the canvas are guaranteed through the submission of all the elements of the painting to the primacy of a strong idea. Without this principal idea, there would never be any relations between the parts and the painting would not be beautiful since beauty is nothing else but the perception of relations. Subsequent to the primary idea, beauty demands the unification of all ancillary ideas. It is based on the model of the well-managed city by a wise or enlightened despot, a beautiful painting demands unity, coherence and cohesion.

However, this unity is not as far as one might suppose from the subtraction of the parts or ancillary ideas. The primary idea must not be tyrannical and reduce the enjoyment of the secondary ideas to nothing. The painting which does not provide a unique idea is bland or either a sketch, a drawing, a prep work, a thought on the way to best expression of a particular idea. In individual thoughts on painting, Diderot hounds this demand for unity:

> Nothing is beautiful without unity, and there is no unity without submission. It appears contradictory, but it is not.

The unity of all arises from the submission of the parts and from that submission harmony is born which supposes variety. There is as much difference between unity and uniformity as there is between a beautiful melody and its make-up.

We can understand him; unity does not suppress variety. It is in that that there lies the difference between these two distinct concepts: that of unity (which supposes the integration of a plurality, see even a multiplicity at the heart of an entity) and that of uniformity (which refuses and denies plurality). The painter must then become the agent who enforces the primacy of his canvas' idea: he must exercise a coercive process on the ancillary ideas in such a way as to submit them to the unique rule of the enlightened despot which is the principal idea. The artist must subordinate the parts to the whole; he must provide a hierarchy for the represented elements to serve the idea which constitutes the subject of the painting. Thus this

hierarchy provides the springboard to the composition. Or, more precisely, this hierarchy of order allows us to understand the near link between the two notions of prescription and composition: prescription provides organization to the painting; it distributes the elements onto the canvas. Composition provides the varietal unity to this reality. It assembles the elements, it regroups them, and it provides for an ordered all – a coherent system.

For that the composition must be "simple and clear". Clarity and understanding are implied by the unity of variety and harmony. It is important to truly understand the meaning of the word "simple" in all its connotations: simple, of course means similarity, but equally easy to understand, accessible to a simple man of common sense. It is with this vocabulary that Diderot articulates his first requirement of understanding with the criteria of absolute appreciation for a painting: its unity.

The sense of the word *advantageously* used by Diderot to define composition once again changes here and in a practically imperceptible sense of meaning: the composition has to and above all else be intelligible. Its role was to place at value the subject of technique so that it would be identified and understood by the community of mortals; then the composition was also intended to interest and provide emotional content for the spectator. Composition must presently unify the scene. The noun *advantage* or the adverb *advantageously* reveals three different meanings (but bound to one another) within the context of Diderot's writing: in its first interpretation, the advantage refers to the public's appreciation and to a system of appreciation; in its second meaning, the term is practically synonymous with *interest* and reflects the intellectual and conceptual wealth of the idea to which it applies; finally in a third appearance, when advantage is a systematic return to unity and coherence. The word substitution that we underline here is critical; it allows us to contain as an entity the multiple senses (more likely the richness and complexity of sense) of the word *composition*, at least in the way that Diderot defines the word in the *Encyclopédie.* Since it allows a subject to be understandable, moving and interesting, composition also necessarily allows it to be harmonious and beautiful.

The second paragraph of chapter five of the *Essays on Painting* sanctions the wording of the rule of unity. Nothing is allowed to crowd the painting. Every element that is there has to have its place, [to compete] to a common end, with a statement, both simple and clear. The absolute convergence of all the details of the painting, their concordance, "the participation of the multitude" is the conditional possibility for the understanding of the painting, which is the sole grantor of its simplicity and therefore of its unity. From there the necessity to apply Occam's razor to painting: "By consequence no lazy figure, no superfluous accessory." To prohibit an indolent character does not mean – and this is to be easily understood – that it is not permitted to shown persons or beings who are at rest, who are exhausted and are inactive; it is a matter of affirming that every represented object(that it be a human being, an animal or simply a vegetable or mineral) must be significant within the work's general architecture and that it must have its place and function within the scope of the painting and must direct ones sight and the interpretation of the work. In other words, one must banish the unnecessary, since what is not necessary in comprehending the work at first glance risks to dull its meaning and especially to break its

harmony. Only the necessary must remain. The *Encyclopédie* already defined the accessories as "things that are introduced into the painting, such as vases, armor, animals, which without being entirely necessary serve a great deal to embellish it, especially when the painter knows where to place them without upsetting the formalities". In his *Essays on Painting*, Diderot defines his thoughts: these accessories which can be used to embellish the painting must not be superfluous; they must not be without a relation to the rest of the canvas. They must participate to the beauty of the painting that is to say to its coherence, to its harmony. The accessories must be called by the internal necessity of the painting: Who suggested these accessories? An affinity of ideas." Diderot steps back very implicitly. Voltaire who affirmed in his poem *Le Mondain*, a true manifesto of his artistic thoughts, that the superfluous was something "that was very necessary". Voltaire appreciated effect for effect's sake even if this effect was to obscure the painting's meaning to a large part of the population. Diderot defends the ideal of absolute coherence: all within a same painting must be unified around one idea; all must be articulated, linked around the primal sense. The Latin genesis of the word composition reveals that it is an act of placing together; to place aside certain elements which would remain disparate, heterogeneous if the painter was not able to organize his painting around a principal idea with direction. The term composition is significant in so far as it gives rise to this organization of diversity surrounding the unity of the central theme. When composing a painting, it is to provide a unity of sense and to refuse categorically all juxtaposition of any elements which have no links with one another: "It is because of a lack of ideas, which makes one use fake accessories". In a work of art everything must link with necessity.

This happens to be one of the revealing elements of Diderot's classicism, which remains faithful in more than one point of view to Malherbe, La Bruyère or Boileau, that is to say that to which tradition will later call Classicism. One must respect formalities, decorum and the coherency of the artistic piece. The unities of action, place and time must not only guarantee that the work is convincing but also serve it effectively. The superfluous slows the action and disturbs understanding by distracting the attention of the viewer onto useless details: "It is necessary within a composition that the figures are linked, that they go forward, that they retreat without the intermediary of tricks that I call hooks or replacements."

The absolute rule of beauty is that of unity, and Diderot illustrates this after the critique of a painting by Poussin: "Le Poussin has portrayed in the forefront of the same painting, Jupiter seducing Callisto and in the background a seduced nymph carried off by Juno. It is a mistake unworthy of such an intelligent painter." Diderot condemns what we term kinematical painting (painting in motion or painting of motion), one in which Uccello notably proved himself during the Renaissance, that is to say the type of painting that narrates the progression of an action and represents this same action during its unfolding. The nymph Callisto whose name in Greek means "the most beautiful" was one of Artemis' followers and had taken an oath of chastity. Zeus saw her and fell in love. He disguised himself and by pretending to be Apollo seduced the young girl. Hera, filled with jealousy transformed Callisto into a bear since she had struck a blow to the sacrament of marriage. However in

order to save Callisto and Arcas from his wife's vengeance, Zeus changes both of them into stars or rather into the constellations of the Great and Small Bears. According to Diderot, Poussin's mistake, was not that that he chose to represent this myth, but rather to have wanted to integrate too much of the story onto the canvas and by doing so made it difficult to read as well as comprehend. The forefront of the work represents the seduction's episode while the background shows the punishment resulting from such unbridled liberality. This mistake is all the more noticeable since the way in which the scenes are presented are different: the action's representation in the forefront is frivolous and light-hearted whereas that of the background is tragic. This second state disguises Poussin's general tone which without this threat would be nothing more than a pastoral scene. A mixture of moments, mixture of actions but equally a mix of genres, moods and tone; these are the faults that to Diderot's thinking offend since Poussin is reputed for his compositions which are still witness to the disjoint between Poussinist and Reubenist and as such does not respect the rule of unity or simplicity: a mistake unworthy of such an intelligent painter." "The painter has but one moment, and it is no less allowed for him to embrace two moments as two actions." This time Diderot means what he says and takes up the classic vocabulary which served to spell out the rules of literature most notably that of drama, to be aware of the three rules of unity. It is the drama writer as opposed to the reluctant poet who takes up the rules in order to comment and judge the pictorial works. The *Encyclopédie* article on composition was, in this case, even more clear:

> A well-composed painting is a whole contained within a point of view where the parts compete towards a same end and form by their mutual correspondence a whole as real as that of the parts of an animal's body; in that way a dab of paint cannot make figures thrown together haphazardly, without proportion, without intelligence and without unity it does not deserve to be called a composition any more than a sketch of legs, noses, eyes on a piece of cardboard deserves to be called a portrait or even a human figure.

From where it elicits, that in his composition the painter is subject to the same laws as the poet is in his; and that maintaining the three unities, of action, place and time is no less important in historical painting than it is for dramatic poetry."

Let it be understood that a work is a whole; that for Diderot is to say, it is a coherent system in which all of the parts are harmoniously integrated. A painting is almost an organism, thought out similarly to an animal's body, in which every organ has its function and where nothing is useless or insignificant: Nature does not make anything incorrectly. Beauty or ugly have their reasons, and of all the beings that exist, there is not one that is not the way it must be." Composition can be understood equally as a necessary derivation of the imitation of nature: nature is an organized system where everything that exists has its place; therefore art must be concerned to assign to each represented element its proper place at the core of all which envelops it. A misplaced detail at the heart of the painting would be for Diderot like a monster at the heart of nature, an alien being which disturbs the general harmony: Everything is linked, everything is supported. […] It is no longer a painting, it is nature, it is a portion of the universe that one has in front of them."

A painting is conceived by Diderot as based on the model of nature, which it copies and enlarges. Thus the representation is not a bland reproduction of its model; imitation is not a useless and vain similarity: it enriches nature.

Furthermore Diderot ripples his theory and his prohibition of multiplying the iterative moments of action: "There are a very few circumstances where it is neither against the flow of truth nor against the importance of returning to the moment that no longer is or to give rise to the moment that is about to happen. The suddenness of the catastrophe surprises man in the middle of what he is doing; he is in the catastrophe, he is still in his doing." One must not read this statement as a reiterative point but rather as a simple explanation. In effect there exists situations where the representation of the immediate past of imminent future is neither contrary to the rule of imitation ("against reality") not against that of comprehensibility ("against interest") nor to that of expression ("against emotions"). Diderot's choice in using catastrophe is as enlightened as it is paradoxical, since in its structure "cata- strophe" designates an occurrence to which one cannot return. A catastrophe is a major event which changes the course of history, which profoundly upsets the order of things, and which prevents the ability to return to the past. In fact it is paradoxical to think that, to represent such an act, it is legitimate to embrace simultaneously the moment prior and the moment after of the catastrophe, since it is precisely the catastrophe which radically sets apart the before and after. But this paradox is better revealed when we refer to this other passage of chapter four of the *Essays on painting* concerning expression when Diderot sometimes recommends painting the expression of passion onto a face from the preceding moment. This exception is the only hiatus from authority that he gives for drawing and expression. Consequently one may find on a face traces of past passion and that of the present passion.

However, necessarily it must be natural, that is to say that this conjunction of expressions or of actions be natural, and that it is empirically observed throughout nature. This happens to be the area in which Diderot finds the paintings that he likes most; he enjoys the natural mix of feelings due to the rapid succession of happenings and/or of emotions. The result, is an expression where two distinct moments of action are blended and in confusion and are the real triumph when the painter has successfully accomplished this "tour de force" in representing a person whose traits reveal to the viewer contradicting emotions. It is this that he admires in the "birth of Louis XIII from the Médici Gallery at the Palais du Luxembourg, since within this composition, Rubens "has shown within the mother's face the delight of having brought a son into the world, and traces of the painful state which came first." The exception to this rule is provided by nature herself and whose course is continuous. Catastrophes reveal a natural wholeness and it is therefore even more wondrous to show this link and this continuity. Here the rule of unity implies the respect of unity and of worldly continuity. But such representation is extremely difficult since the artist must display a mastery of the highest degree of the wisps and expressive tones.

Composition as Determinant of the Artist's "Must"

If composition is that which is to determine the subject and organizer of the elements in a canvas, then it must be unified, simple and clear, energetic and interesting. But the composition, in terms of the pictorial execution, in terms of the "must" for the painter equally implies an excellent mastery and strong technical knowledge; this is Diderot's explanation as he follows his thoughts on the artist's virtuosity based on a parallel between the singer's interpretation and the painter's technique: "If the execution of an *aria di bravura* makes me uncomfortable, a demonic and tormenting violin, causes me anguish and saddens me. I demand from the singer as mush ease and freedom as possible. I want the musician who glides his fingers over the strings with such ease that I should have no doubt whatsoever of the difficulty of the piece. I must have a pure and trouble- free pleasure; and I turn my back to a painter who proposes an emblem or some person to help me to figure it out."

Here Diderot speaks of the necessity to disguise technical difficulty: the ease of execution, even when it is *aria di bravura*, that is to say a particularly difficult part to sing, must be done in such a way so that it is not felt that the singer is accomplishing anything in front of our eyes. The audience must be entirely indulged in its own pleasure without there being any doubt as to the total work that was required for such a performance. All of the elements of a canvas must be bound one to the other and linked one to the other as likened to the notes on a page of music which are laced one to the other and whose lengths follow one after the other. An absolute fluidity is necessary, continuous between all the points of the painting; and the focus onto the painting must be as simple and fluid as the listening to the *aria di bravura.* It is very noticeable the point to which all of Diderot's aesthetic is subordinate to the spectator's opinion. Here Diderot passes judgment on the works of art by adopting the viewers point of view, from he who receives the work and all the advice with which he showers the artists are as much proof that he is not allowing the point of view as creator but rather from the point of view of pleasure from he who sees. In fact this is why Nietzsche takes him to task in *The Genealogy of Morals* (III-6), when the German philosopher after having affirmed that art is "a stimulant from the force of the will", that it is "an exciter of want", condemns all these bad art theoreticians who bridle the artist's creative force in order to elicit the viewing pleasure of certain degenerate viewers, who are incapable of understanding that art, which they believe to be nothing more than a vile imitation of nature, first and foremost produces a strong "counterfeit power" :

"Art is the greatest counterfeit power; it magnifies the world's mistakes." For Diderot, art must primarily flatter the viewer's sense, as it is clearly implied in the inflated afore-mentioned sentence which establishes a parallel between the delivery of *aria di bravura* and a pictorial representation, the pleasure must not be hampered by the desire to communicate a message, either by the insinuation of an emblem or word impressions. Once again we find his classical taste and once again he is Racine's heir who states that the primary rule is to please. By this opposition

between the importance of addressing the viewers' sensitivity and the reluctance in obliging him to reason through word glyphs that is to say etymologically (λογοζ, logic and γρτφοζ enigma) a logical riddle. The word riddle denies a sensible sensitivity and emotive quality of art and too often leads the artist to cold and powerless paintings. To be energetic, this means interesting, it also means that the paintings are wild and savage. It means that they should exalt and enthuse. Of course, "there can be taste without sensibility, in the same way that there can be sensibility without taste. When sensitivity is taken to the extreme and lacks discernment then everything upsets it indiscriminately". The paintings which only play on an emotional keyboard are beyond the pale and misleading. That is because according to Diderot, taste is neither simply on the sensitive side nor is it unique to understanding:

> What is taste? A facility acquired through repeated experiences, something which takes hold of the true or the good at that moment and makes them beautiful and then to be immediately and suddenly striking.

If reason is a determining factor in the ability to grasp beauty, pleasure must likewise be quick, immediate and directly striking. If sensitivity was the only thing to appreciate beauty, then it would allow for taste with emotion but without discrimination. However, reason alone would likewise lack the promptness and strength to self-ignite: it would judge without feeling. Reason and sensitivity must therefore enrich themselves by mutually directing themselves to create taste. It is the junction of reason and sensitivity which constitutes taste: reason determines taste's verdict, but it is sensitivity which savors and become inebriated by beauty. In the *Treatise on Beauty*, he will return onto this thesis and will show that the perception of relationships, which constitute beauty, are always achieved through understanding, but that by habit – and thanks to the artist's talent – the viewer believes that the perception of beauty is due to feelings:

> When I mention everything that wakes the idea of relationships within us, I do not mean that to call a person beautiful, it is necessary to appreciate what are the types of relationships that are apparent; I do not demand that he who sees a piece of architecture is in a position to insure even what the architect can ignore; that this part is to that one there as this number is to that number or that he who goes to a concert will know more than the musician himself, that this note is to that note in the relation of two to four or of four to five. It is sufficient that he perceives and feels that the parts of this architecture and the sounds of the piece of music have relationships, either with themselves or with other things. Due to the unclear nature of these relationships, the ease with which they are acknowledged and the pleasure that comes with their perception have allowed us to imagine that beauty was associated with feeling rather than thought. I dare to acknowledge that every time that some principle is made known to us from our earliest age, and that we by force of habit make an easy and immediate awareness of those things outside of ourselves we believe that we perceive them due to our feelings; however we will be forced to admit our mistake when there were times when the complication of the relationships and the novelty of the object will suspend the application of this principle; it is then that pleasure will be delayed to allow itself to be felt; and that understanding will state that the object is beautiful.

Even when the spectator is not clearly conscious of the instant when he perceives the relationships within himself but if he "believes" that he perceives these relationships

only through feelings, then this belief comes from the subject's imagination which is in the habit of being aware of a certain type of relationship and pushes it towards the appreciation of beauty with the immediacy of sensitive perception and allows him to believe that there might exist within himself something similar to a particular internal instance of a sensitivity which would be capable of making a proof of beauty and recognize it wherever it appeared. That at least was Hutcheson's thesis that Diderot refuted in the article "Beauty" of the *Encyclopédie*, the theme that would be taken up again in the *Treatise on Beauty*.

Effectively for Diderot there cannot be any internal sense of beauty and this notion which is defended by Hutcheson is but an illusion: when by habit the spectator's taste judges in a near immediate way, this does not mean that this decision is the expression of sensibility (as it is when a person smells an unpleasant or pleasant odor). It is in an opposite way that understanding becomes habitual by repeated experiences carrying this type of decision and that it is presently capable of judging with an astonishing speed which might cause one to believe that this automatism has its basis in sensitivity. However, in a similar fashion that a man who has learned to count no longer has to think in order to find the solution to a mathematical operation of the type "$2 \times 2 = 4$" is nearly automatic; similarly a person with experience will rapidly deliver his thoughts decisively on taste and quasi-instinctively concerning a type of painting that he has learned to appreciate.

As for Diderot beauty, as to the perception of relationships, cannot be touched by sensitivity:

> But what do you mean by relationship? One might ask me […]. A relationship in general is an operation of understanding which considers either a being or a quality in such a way that this quality supposes the existence of another being or another quality.

If beauty is nothing more than the perception of real relationships and if the relationships are an act of understanding, then it is necessary that the judgement of taste be brought on by understanding and not by sensitivity:

> When I say that someone is beautiful because of the relationships that we have noticed, I am not talking about the intellectual or fictitious relationships that our imagination maintains, but the real relationships that are and that our understanding takes notice of through the help of our senses.

Therefore the senses are the way in which to access beauty. The possible condition of the perception of beauty; however a statement of taste is pronounced through understanding. It is an understanding that perceives real relationships, but it is the senses which stop at the objects that are worthy of interest. Sensitivity awakens understanding and brings it to its attention through the pleasure that it procures and of the potential interest of an object and of its eventual beauty. However, when does one know whether an object is beautiful or not, only understanding will decide? Sensitivity's role is to inhibit the viewer's flow of ideas, to fix his gaze and to invite him to place his thought onto the object of his attention. It is in this way that Diderot considers that the true art critic as he who can reconcile the observer's qualities with an aloof rationality and those of the emotional observer that are lively and enthusiastic. A great salonnier appears to be the one that human nature has fully

endowed in both the rational and sensitive domains; beyond the strong necessity of an eclectic taste often raised by commentators, Diderot demands that the salonnier be: "a cold, severe and unruffled observer of nature". The best viewer is one who can dominate his feelings and not allow them to be engulfed by feelings of pleasure or dislike which they provide. The perfect viewer is he whose feelings are mastered, which appears to make him all the more perspicacious: "When sensitivities are extreme, they are no longer discerning."

If the knowledgeable spectator must not submit to a drunkenness of feelings, it is due to, and Diderot willfully acknowledges, the feelings that are the first to grasp objects chronologically and provide pleasure or dislike: "If the scene is one that is clear and simple and fits all together, I will be able to grasp its totality at a glance but that is not enough. It is important that it is varied and it will be insofar as the artist has rigorously observed nature." The first demand is to seize the scene "with a glance", that means in an instant, within the immediacy of the moment, within that precise moment. It is through sensitivity that I am first of all going to grab hold of a work: the immediate sensation stops the viewer, surrenders him to a passion more or less intense and imprints his memory:" What colors! What variety! What a wealth of objects and ideas! This man has produced everything but the truth. There is not one part of his compositions which separate us from the others; that it is pleasing, the whole seduces. One asks, but where has one seen shepherds dressed with such luxurious elegance? What a subject to ever be assembled in the same place in the countryside under the arches of a bridge, in the middle of nowhere; women, men, children, oxen, cows, sheep, dogs, bails of hay, water, fire, a lantern, heating grates, pails and pots? What in the world is this charming, well-dressed, clean and buxom woman doing? Is it her children who are playing and sleeping? The man who is balancing the fire will it tip onto his head? Is it her husband? What is he going to do with these hot embers? Where did he get them from? What a hodge podge of disparate objects. We sense the absurdity; in spite of it all one cannot escape the picture. It attaches itself to you. One comes back to it. It is such a pleasant sin. Its extravagance is so inimitable and so unique. There is so much imagination, effect magic and ease!"

It is the canvas by Boucher entitled *Pastorales et Paysages* that Diderot is commenting; it appears that everything seems to be off the mark, not quite true, even absurd, except for the overall composition, which makes that in spite of everything the work is a success. The look of the spectator has been stopped by the painting, and it will haunt his soul. Sensitivity's role is apparent: it consists in captivating the spectator who might be passing in front of the canvas without stopping and without paying attention. The color, the light and shade or even the drawing play a very important role in the suspension of belief and its ability to capture the spectator: however in Boucher's painting it is the composition, the effect of the total which stops the salonnier. The senses force the spectator's look to the painting; they capture his attention. Then, to be able to understand a painting in its unity so that the vision provides an immediate pleasure, the composition must be unified, "an idea which is clear, simple and bound together", it is necessary that understanding can perceive the relationships. It is the second moment of aesthetic pleasure, the

one which is precisely involved in the judgement of taste: at the moment of understanding where the purely sensitive approach gives way to the rational decision founded on experience, memory, and knowledge. It is here that the painting must exhibit its wealth, with the rich and varied images of nature in spite of its unity. Even though absurd, that is to say non-truthful, Boucher's painting is successful because it captivates the spectator with its wealth and variety.

In order to bring out the extraordinary variety that resides at the very core of a unit, Diderot enjoyed referring to Leeuwenhoek's experiments with the microscope which showed that one could find a myriad quantity of organisms in a drop of water, which indicated life's extreme diversity as well as the infinite wealth of nature in the tiniest places: "when Leeuwenhoek looked at a drop of water for the first time, he found a rich and unknown world: forms that wriggled about, things that lived, an unexpected fauna that the instrument suddenly made available to observation". One remembers how Leibniz, who proposed the same definition of harmony, had already been impressed by these same experiments which vindicated the infinite variety at the core of the unit. Subject to the image of a nature whose wealth is all the more extreme and varied than it is unified, art must, in order to satisfy the demands of the senses capture the attention of the spectator by being varied. The conception of art, notably of painting and the imitative arts is totally encyclopedic (as to the definition that he gives this word in the article "*Encyclopédie*" in the *Encyclopédie*).

An Enlightened Aesthetic

According to Diderot on the one hand the essential for a painting is to understand concept of a vibrant idea in order to realize the painting and on the other hand is to deliver the goods. Since by not accomplishing the task, the *philosopher salonnier*, completely misses the point of the painting, as he suggests clearly in a commentary on *La Publication de la Paix* by Jean-Jacques Dumont nicknamed le Romain:

> The painter had a very strong idea, but he simply could not pull it off. He even rose his hero onto the body of Discord whose thighs are trampled by the figure's feet. But after having placed one of his feet onto the thigh, why didn't the other press down onto the chest? Why wasn't this action used to crush him […]?

Romain's work is sinful according to Diderot due to the compositional defect which does not allow him to heighten the sense of value of the core idea that he wished to represent: that of a king who is a protector, pacifist, just and close to his people. As Diderot explains in the Salons of 1763, "there is a big difference when coming across a good idea and the making of a beautiful work. If the core idea is necessary and must exercise its rule over all others, it must possess a sufficient condition for the success of the painting, it is essential that this idea is put to good use with grace and that it provides the opportunity for a successful composition. It has been said, the painting's composition could determine the core and principal idea of the canvas; we currently see that the composition is the way in which it is pieced together as a

pictorial application and its translation into a plastic and artistic idiom. A composition is that part of art by which the artist enlightens the despotism of the core idea: it is by his honesty to composition that the painter will know to transform the rule of his inspired idea with skillful management. It is only by allowing all of the paintings elements to unite in a coherent and beautiful whole that the artist will achieve a beautiful painting. The essential is to have a construct which will unite all of the elements that constitute the painting. By this Diderot defends what we might be able to call an aesthetic of completeness. For him the artistic productions must contain – and harmonize amongst themselves – all of the elements that make them up: drawing, color, expression, lights, planning:

> When nature is imitated, there is the technical and there is the moral. The moral verdict belongs to all men with taste: the technical belong only to the artists.

For a work of art to be beautiful it must be complete and satisfy the senses as much as the inner self: "The most beautiful thought cannot please the spirit if it wounds the ear." It must by right respond to an evaluation of criteria as well as to techniques (relative to the artist's "to do") as to morals (relative to the choice of the ideas represented and the way in which they are represented). The notion of composition at least the way in which Diderot understands it in the richness of its conceptualization, realizes this completeness or at least a certain degree of arts accomplishments. It permits the consent, its appropriateness and the joining of technique and morality of talent and of taste as well as all the virtues of a painting. While assembling all of the scattered parts of a work in one entity and by realizing that the unity of the composition is the true vault stone of the entire artistic edifice. It is the one that directly determines everything that is of moral order in the painting; it is also the one that puts to work all of the elements which are technically involved. It is this that permits the intellect to be entirely satisfied and the sensitivity to be justly, promptly and strikingly touched and seduced.

Envisioned to be within the continuity of his encyclopedic works, Diderot's aesthetic thoughts contain teaching and moral instruction. The *Encyclopédie* had as its essential task to instruct and to reassemble all knowledge and in such a way to produce a pedagogical work. It searched in order to shine for the opportunity of all and to enlighten humanity. Within its encyclopedic dimension, art shares with this monumental project its moral objective: a work of art must have a virtuous and moral implication. This demand is furthermore underscored as part of the meaning of taste as the ease with which one can take hold of the good. From that point one has a better understanding of Diderot's preference for morality painting. According to him, to be effective it is necessary for art to have its customs: Painting has this in common with poetry, and it appears that not everyone is aware that both of them must be *bene moratae*: they must have customs." Diderot repeatedly complaints of the recurrence of breasts, buttocks, thighs and nude feet in painting and that everything is directed to the voluptuary and greed. In 1759, for example, as he criticizes Restout's *Les Baigneuses*, Diderot encourages the quality of the composition, drawing, color, however despite all that he cannot help but reproach this work: "The color has a great deal of sparkle. The women occupied in serving the principal figures are touched with reserve; real, natural and beautiful, without causing any

distraction." If the painting is absent of virtue but good, it cannot please, irrespective of its aesthetic or plastic qualities: "To render virtue pleasant, vice odious, the ridiculous striking, that is the point of all honest men who use a pen, a brush or a pair of scissors". Every work of art that attempts to detour morality and virtue, is in Diderot's eyes nothing more than an art pervert's achievement:

> I am not a scrupulous person. Sometimes I read my Petronius. I enjoy Horace's satire, *Ambudaiarum* at least as much as any other. I know by heart at least three quarters of Catullius' infamous short madrigals. When I go out on a pique-nique with my friends and that I get a little tipsy because of the white wine, I can recite an epigram by Ferrand without blushing. I can forgive the poet, the painter, the philosopher a lively insane moment: but I do not believe that one should always be dipping one's pen, and by doing so pervert the reason for the arts.

Worse still, any art that incites vice and debauchery is "dangerous":

> I am not a monk; but I swear that I would gladly sacrifice the pleasure of seeing beautiful nudes, if I could bring about the moment when painting and sculpture became more decent and increasingly moral and would think of competing with the other arts in order to inspire virtue and to screen morals. It appears to me that I have seen enough breasts and buttocks; these seductive objects roil the soul's emotion by the trouble that they cast into the senses.

This moral vocation for art illuminates Greuze's famous praises by Friend Diderot: "This Greuze, he is really a good friend. […] Firstly the style is really pleasing to me. It is moral painting. What! Hasn't the brush been a captive of debauchery and vice long enough? Shouldn't we be satisfied to finally see it in competition with dramatic poetry for our feelings, for our teaching, to correct us and to invite us to virtue? Greuze, my friend: courage! Paint morally, and always do it that way."

Diderot praises Greuze not only because of his moral qualities, but also because of his technical competence which appears to flow from it: "Besides his genius for art that we cannot deny him that one can see that he is very chaste in his selection of accessories." By reason of the united and awarded qualities, Greuze's paintings are revealed to be truly masterpieces: "This painting is beautiful, very beautiful, and misfortune to he who considers it to have been done with nerves of steel!"

When the idea that the artist has promoted is good and virtuous, when imitation is true, when the composition is whole and harmonious, with what Diderot calls the canvas' "moral", is achieved and that the artist, through his talent has made the drawings graceful, the colors vibrant, the lighting sufficient, and furthermore that the technique and moral are in accordance and correspond, then art has been lifted to its greatest degree of perfection and the work is that of a genius. And it is precisely the art of composition, seen in all its dimensions that we find here and which make, or not, the genius of the artist.

As Conclusion

The notion of composition, as we have seen, is essentially Diderot's aesthetic thoughts. Even the very choice of the subject matter, composition has an influence on the determination of the idea and seeks to make a correspondence between the

paintings' moral content and the artists' technical competencies and to his ability "to do". The composition rules the harmony of coloring, the lighting and expressions. In this, it is at the very foundation of the artist's style and talent. As management, composition is the necessary component of beauty: it makes for an understandable canvas, and in this way, interesting. As an action of composition or as the "to do", composition renders paintings energetic and, by that, emotional and heady. Composition unites moral with the artist's technical abilities and unifies the painting's entirety. It might as well be said that the notion of composition is a pivotal notion of Diderot's aesthetic. It is that which maintains the underpinnings of all rules dictated by the *salonnier*: it is the principal operator of the rule of unity, to which if we were to add that of truth, all the others would follow. Composition, when it is well followed, leads to its highest degree of perfection.

Notes

1. Horace, *Poetic art*, verse 23, quoted by Diderot in *Essays on painting*, Hermann, Paris, 1984 (re-issued 2007), p. 76.
2. Diderot, *Essays on painting*, p. 76.
3. "If one were to offer a painting to choose at the Salon, here is mine; look for your own. You will find smarter ones, perhaps even more perfect ones; but for a more seducing one, I defy you." *Salon of 1763* in *Essays on painting,* p. 211.
4. Ibid., pp. 212–213.
5. Ibid., p. 213.
6. In the *Unattached thoughts on painting*, the plan of the total appears inverted in relation to those of the *Essays*: Diderot leaves the analysis of taste and the role of critic, in order to immediately bring up the notion of composition in art but before speaking of coloring, chiaroscuro and other traditional themes which Hagedorn speaks about in his *Reflections on painting.*
7. *Essays on painting*, p. 53.
8. Even though Diderot bends in structuring his proof and his proposal, one can still consider that the Essays on painting are structured in such a way as to propose the reader to an in depth foundation of questions and common notions on painting (drawing, color, chiaroscuro in order to arrive at more complex yet less widely known notions, which require an more experienced eye and a more finely honed aesthetic sense. By following this method, the chapter dedicated to composition is constituted as pivotal between the points bearing specifically to painting, and those which are more general and more philosophical, concerning beauty.
9. *Essays on painting*, p. 39.
10. *Encyclopédie*, III, 772a, DPV, vol VI, Hermann, Paris, 1976, p. 475 sq.
11. In the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot defined painting as *"an art, which by lines and colors represents an equal and contained surface, all the visible objects"* (Volume XII, 267a). In relation to the definition of composition, Diderot replaces the notion of canvas by that of a plain homogenous surface and allows for painting to within the act of representing. The two definitions are very close from the conceptual point of view; the only notable exception of importance is the reference to the idea of *advantage*, to which we will return.
12. In his foundational treatise of 1441, Leon Battista Alberti wrote: "composition is the operation by which the parts are disposed amongst themselves to form the pictorial work" (*De pictura*, p. 35, trans. Danielle Sonnier, Allia, Paris, 2007).
13. Recurrent theme off of Diderot's pen.
14. Diderot writes very clearly: the composition "consists of representing a subject of any kind, onto the canvas, taking full advantage of the conditions." (We have made the underline).
15. In *Essays on painting*, Salon 1761. pp. 136–137. (We have made the underline).

16. *Encyclopédie*, III, 772a. DPV, volume VI, p. 475.
17. *Essays on painting*, p. 14.
18. Unattached thoughts on painting, sculpture, architecture and poetry in *Heroes and Martyrs*, Hermann, Paris, 1995, p. 385.
19. Essays on painting, p. 78.
20. Ibid., p. 53.
21. We will return to this point in the following.
22. This text was written only 20 years before Essays on painting of Diderot. This chronological nearness allows us to anchor ourselves strongly to the meaning to this same word by Condillac then by Diderot especially if we consider to what point Condillac text has profoundly influenced the philosopher Encyclopedist in his letter to the Deaf and Dumb and markedly more in his Letter on the Blind.
23. Condillac, Essay on the origins of human knowledge, Alive, Paris. 1998, p. 100.
24. Salon of 1763, in Essays on painting, p. 212.
25. Salon of 1759, in Essays on painting, p. 102.
26. Essays on painting, p. 58. See as well concerning this subject the Salon of 1761, p. 114: "You know that I have never approved of the mix of real and allegorical beings […] Real being lose their truth against allegorical beings, and these always thrown some mystery into the composition." There is a toss-up between the clarity of the composition and its intelligibility.
27. Remember: taste is the ease with which to perceive beauty, that is to say a facility to perceive relationships: "What is taste? An ease which is acquired through repeated experience, to grab hold of the true and good along with those circumstances which gives it beauty, which is immediately and thoroughly felt." (Essays on painting, p. 78).
28. Essays on painting, p. 68.
29. Listing which places all the forms of art onto a same platform (without gradation). From this point of view for Diderot there is no difference between the highbrow arts and the lowbrow arts. All are to be seen by the people.
30. Essays on painting, p. 53.
31. Jean-Jacques Rousseau began the preface to his treatise on education by pointing out that he has already been criticized for not having proposed realistic goals: "Propose what is feasible was all that they repeated. It was as through they said to me: propose doing what we are doing…" Cf. Emile or On education, GF, Paris, 1966, p. 33.
32. Essays on painting, p. 54.
33. Ibid., p. 78.
34. Note that in this passage that Diderot is not speaking of composition but rather on management. He does not intend to speak of composition in its larger purpose, but only concerning the organized disposal of elements onto the canvas.
35. Essays on painting, p. 57.
36. Ibid., p. 56.
37. Essays on painting, pp. 57–58.
38. Ibid., p. 56.
39. Ibid., p. 62.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Unattached thoughts on painting, "Concerning composition and the choice of subjects", in Heroes and Martyrs, Hermann, Paris, 1995, pp. 387–388.
43. Essays on painting, p. 54.
44. There exists another meaning to the word "simple", that of non-composite. But it would be misrepresenting to lend a word which Diderot uses here with precision: composition must not be uniform, rather unified. It must preserve the elemental diversity and variety.
45. Essays on painting, p. 59.
46. Ibid., p. 57.
47. Ibid., p. 54.

48. Diderot recognizes however that there are certain figures which are more pertinent to representation than others, more interesting and strongly than others. He admits to his disinterest for the lazy in a painting: "I should rather, if it were possible, […] to rid myself of the lazy. As for those who are idle, unless the contrast is sublime, a rare case, I want nothing of them. Even when the contrast is sublime, the scene changes and the idle become the principal subject." (Essays on painting, p. 58).
49. It is necessary to repeat that by eliminating the superfluous does not mean uniformity to the canvas: beauty presupposes a preexisting variety. But one must not simply…?.
50. Encyclopédie, I 69b, quoted in Essays on painting, p. 257.
51. Essays on painting, p. 51.
52. Salon of 1761, in Essays on painting, p. 125.
53. Essays on painting, pp. 31–32.
54. Ibid., p. 54.
55. Arcas is the illegitimate love child between Zeus and Callisto.
56. At the end of the XVIIth century and during the XVIIIth, the followers of Poussin who considered that drawing prevailed in painting over all other dimensions were violently opposed to Rubens' loyalists. For the latter, color possessed primacy over composition and on the accuracy of tracing. Within this debate, Diderot's position appears to be in the middle or at least ambiguous: on the one hand he acknowledges that "it is drawing which gives beings form; it is color which gives them life" (Essays on painting, p. 18), that color is "the divine breath" which "animates" the represented objects and that one is stopped in front of a painting due to its vivacity and the force of its colors and that a great painter must be a great colorist; however as an aside he criticizes Rubens for his compositions: "this defect [of composition] ruins most of Rubens' compositions for me" (Essays on painting, p. 58). Against the zealots for drawing and those who would dispose of color, Diderot promotes a compositional aesthetic, that is to say an aesthetic of completeness, an aesthetic which integrates, brings together and unifies all the qualities which make a beautiful painting.
57. Essays on painting, p. 54.
58. Ibid., p. 54.
59. Encyclopédie, article, "composition". Cf. DPV, volume VI, pp. 475–476.
60. Essays on painting, first sentence, and p. 11.
61. Ibid., p. 30.
62. As Diderot grows older he exhibits sensitivity to this continuity of art and nature, notably in developing his taste for the art of illusion and trompe-l'oeil.
63. Essays on painting, p. 54.
64. Essays on painting, p. 54.
65. Cf. quotation concerning the unpleasantness that a viewer has when contemplating an emblem or a cipher.
66. Preface to the play Bérénice.
67. Essays on painting, p. 79.
68. Ibid., p. 78.
69. Published in 1772, the Treatise on beauty is essentially a retake of the article "Beauty" of the Encyclopédie edited about 1750. Cf. DPV, volume VI, p. 135 sq.
70. Article "Beauty" of the Encyclopédie, DPV, volume VI, and p. 157.
71. This should be well-noted: Diderot states that when the spectator has the impression of judging beauty by feeling(and not by understanding), this takes away from the viewers imagination who is assimilating the ease to judge by habit and the immediacy of pleasure felt by a sensitive nature of the perception of beauty. However, in reality this perception of relationships applies always and necessarily on a principle established by understanding in such a way that whenever an individual is found plunged into the perplexity to judge the beauty of an object (because the object appears new to him), he suspends his judgement and waits for his understanding should "pronounce" itself concerning the relationships that he perceives before confirming that the object is beautiful.

72. Article “Beauty” of the Encyclopédie, DPV, volume VI, and pp. 160–161.
73. In effect, Diderot distinguishes the real relationships (those which any understanding is obligated to take note of as making an integral part of the examined object),, the perceived relationships (those that any man is obligated to note as not be part of the definition of the object, but as placing into a relation of the object to be examined with other beings or other qualities) and the fictitious or intellectual relationships (those which have no foundation in things or in nature, but in the intellect inherent to he who projects onto the object relations with other beings and other qualities). The intellectual or fictional relationships are the product of the imagination: they are projections of the intellect onto things: real or perceived relationships are discovered through understanding.
74. Article “Beauty” of the Encyclopédie, DPV, volume VI, and p. 162.
75. Essays on painting, p. 79.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., p. 55.
78. Salon of 1761, in Essays on painting, p. 120.
79. Frequently Diderot pens the expressions which mean, stop or suspend: “the eye has stopped” (Essays on painting, p. 30), the focus of the spectator is as though it were captured by the painting. Its curiosity is aroused.
80. “This word means the linking of knowledge: it is composed of the Greek preposition ***εν***, in and the substantives ***κυκλος***, circle and ***παιδεια*** knowledge. In effect the end result of an encyclopedia is to gather the scattered knowledge from the surface of the earth.” (Encyclopédie, III, DPV, Volume VII, p. 174). The encyclopedia has as its objective to unit knowledge in an organized system, in a coherent whole in such as way as to allow for the progress of the human race.
81. Salon of 1761 in Essays on painting, pp. 114–115.
82. Salon of 1763 in Essays on painting, p. 222.
83. Unattached thoughts on painting, in Heroes and Martyrs, p. 391.
84. Ibid.
85. Essays on painting, p. 59.
86. Salon of 1759, in Essays on painting, pp. 92–93.
87. Essays on painting, p. 60.
88. Ibid., pp. 59–60.
89. Unattached thoughts on painting, in Heroes and Martyrs, p. 394.
90. Unattached thoughts on painting, in Heroes and Martyrs, p. 392. See also concerning this subject the Salon of 1767, p. 288.
91. Salon of 1763 in Essays on painting, pp. 233–234.
92. Ibid., p. 239.
93. Ibid., p. 238.

Fig. 12.1 Jean-Baptiste GREUZE (1725–1805), (*The Paralytique as cared for by his family*), Le Havre, Musée des Beaux-Arts André Malraux © Hermann – Maya Rappaport

ERRATUM TO:

Denis Diderot†

On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought

Edited by Jean Seznec†

Translated by John S.D. Glaus

Much to our regret the authors of the additional chapters on Diderot's aesthetics are not mentioned in this book. This is a mistake and therefore their names are given below.

The *Introduction* was written by the editor, Jean Seznec.

Diderot in the Painter's Space was written by Jean Starobinski.

The Averted Look: Diderot and the Boundaries of Representation was written by Michel Delon.

Composition According to Diderot was written by Arthur Cohen.

All other chapters were written by Denis Diderot himself.

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