

Art Review

“Romantic Art from 1760 to 1860”

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Exhibition view
at the Yale University Art Gallery

From 1760 to 1860, Europe and the Americas experienced enormous social, economic, political, and intellectual changes. The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest museum in the Western hemisphere, conducted a symposium and exhibition of 300 art works from this 100-year period. The March until July 2015 exhibition was entitled *The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760-1860*. It reflected artistic responses to the American and French Revolutions, the Industrial Revolution and its technical impact

on visual arts, the Napoleonic Wars, the expansion of colonialism, and the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism. Seminal publications by Immanuel Kant, Charles Darwin, Edmund Burke, and the rise of the scientific research in German universities contributed to the development of a modern world reflected in the fine arts.

The 5-month exhibition, curated by Elizabeth Hodermarsky, Paola D’Agostino, Cassandra Albinson, Nina Amstutz, and Izabel Gass, combined art objects from the Yale University Art Gallery with others from the Yale Center for British Art. The works contrasted reason and knowledge with fantasy and spirituality as the Western world, in the words of Kant, critiqued itself. The societal shifts followed the overthrow of absolutist monarchies and the rise of fragile democracies based on a new social contract



A Lion Attacking a Horse, 1770
George Stubbs, Oil on canvas, 47 x 57 in.

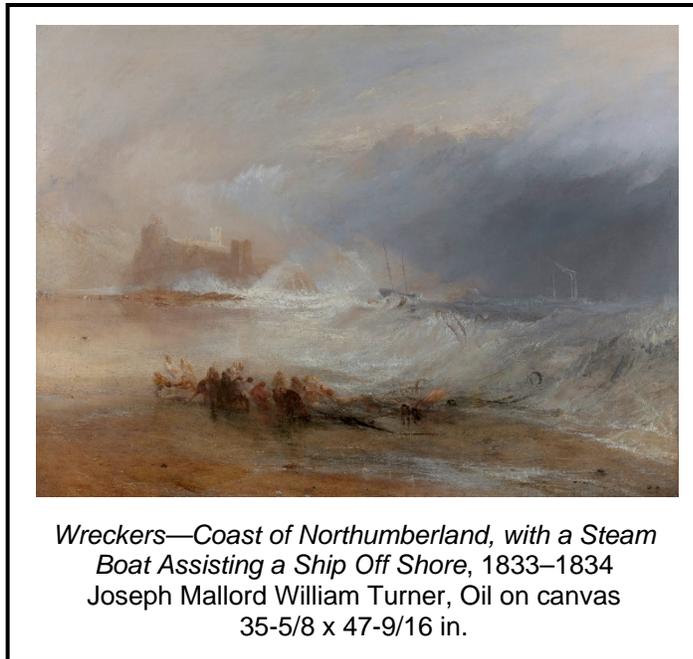
that evolved into the current struggle for equity and cultural diversity. The class struggle erupted again in the European Revolutions of 1848. The exhibition was organized around related themes and featured works by prominent artists including William Blake, Théodore Géricault, Francisco de Goya, John Constable, Honore Daumier, Eugene Delacroix, and Joseph Mallord William Turner.

The first theme was “Nature: Spectacle and Specimen” and reflected the growth of scientific investigation of the morphology of organic and inorganic matter. Extensive anatomical illustrations and global topography were generated by naturalists. George Stubbs’ oil painting, *A Lion Attacking a Horse* (1760), reflects a contextualization of animals in action albeit much smaller than the overwhelming background forces of nature. The pure white stallion is reacting to a concealed lion in a battle for survival.

The next theme, *Landscape and the Perceiving Subject*, traced the move away from using landscapes to show heroic or mythical human actions. Landscapes that focused on nature and the interaction of artist with natural forces evolved, as did landscape tourism.



Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night, 1829
John Constable, Oil on canvas, 48 x 64-3/4 in.

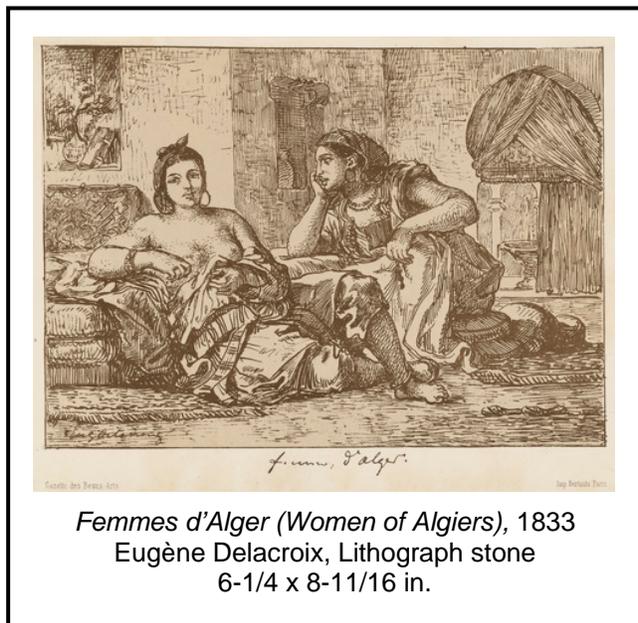


Wreckers—Coast of Northumberland, with a Steam Boat Assisting a Ship Off Shore, 1833–1834
Joseph Mallord William Turner, Oil on canvas
35-5/8 x 47-9/16 in.

John Constable's *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night* (1829) is a deeply personal painting. Constable completed the work as his wife Maria lay dying from tuberculous. The large scale painting is a tribute to his marriage and the aftermath of a storm that metaphorically takes away his spouse whom he had known for 30 years. Although Constable's family is devastated, life goes on. A shepherd boy and a cow herder graze their stock beneath a vigorous tumult in the clouds, with sunbeams of hope breaking through.

Joseph Mallord William Turner's *Wreckers – Coast of*

Northumberland (1833-34) is a testimony to people's perseverance against the forces of nature. Wrecking or salvaging the remains of any vessel that floundered was a major industry in Britain during the 19th century. Turner, who spent much of his life on the seashore, showed two forces in mortal combat, an anthropomorphic ocean who destroyed boats and took lives and the working class men who fearlessly battled the raging seas to reap the harvest of a ship's cargo and personal possessions.



Femmes d'Alger (Women of Algiers), 1833
Eugène Delacroix, Lithograph stone
6-1/4 x 8-11/16 in.

During the expansion of European colonialism, the art world reflected the Western fascination with exotic cultures as shown in the theme *Distant Lands, Foreign Peoples*. The cultural arrogance and ethnocentrism of Western Europe is best illustrated by exaggerated or fictionalized artworks of scenes and subjects from Orientalism, which at that time included Greece, Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa. Detailed drawings, water colors and paintings of people and scenes that only existed in the minds of European artists proliferated and were consumed by viewers anxious to experience a culture

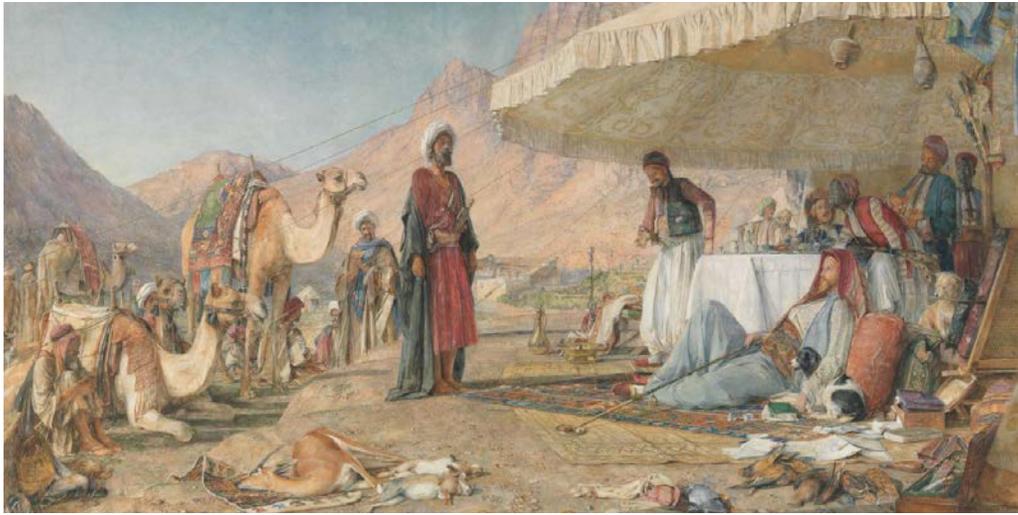
through stylized images. Eugène Delacroix's 1833 lithograph, *Women of Algiers*, was completed after the artist visited Algeria, following the French colonial invasion and occupation in 1830. Delacroix created an erotic and exotic scene in an Algerian harem, but it is debatable if he was allowed to visit one during his travels.

Delacroix was able to employ Jewish women as models as they were a tolerated minority in Islamic society. His 1833 lithograph, *The Jewess of Algiers*, was a portrait of one of two sisters he used in his Algerian works. The mistress is seated comfortably barefoot above her Black Sudanese servant or, more likely, slave. The servant is wearing shoes, which indicates she can go outside the home to shop, while the dignified mistress lounges around the home in a carefree state. The wife is well attired and spends her time idly waiting for her husband's attention. Europeans believed



Juive d'Alger (Jewess of Algiers), 1833,
Eugène Delacroix, Lithograph stone
10-1/8 x 7-7/8 in.

superior Western societies provided opportunities for females to participate in refined domestic arts and other intellectual interests, providing the end results were used to entertain family and friends.



*A Frank Encampment in the Desert of Mount Sinai. 1842—
The Convent of St. Catherine in the Distance, 1856, John Frederick Lewis
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper, 26-1/4 x 53-1/2 in.*

A Frank Encampment in the Desert of Mount Sinai (1842), a water color by John Frederick Lewis, is an example of stylized and idealized encounters between the West and the Orient. A confident Sheik Hussein greets the lounging British Viscount Castlereagh in his tent. Lewis lived in Egypt for 10 years and understood social status in Islamic society. His depiction of the Sheik as an independent dominating figure standing over an English Lord was so offensive to British cultural superiority that Lord Castlereagh rejected the watercolor he had commissioned Lewis to complete.



*Retour de Russie (Return from Russia),
1818, Théodore Géricault
Lithograph w. tint stone, 17-1/2 x 14-1/4 in*



*Y son fieras (And they are like wild beasts)
ca. 1810-20, Francisco Goya
Etching and aquatint, 6-1/8 x 8-1/4 in*

The lengthy Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) support the theme of the *Artist as Social Critic*. Newspapers, magazines, gazettes, and pamphlets described the horrors of war and other social ills, but only artists and illustrators could visually document the excesses and brutalities in Spain and Russia inflicted by the French armies. Théodore Géricault's *Return from Russia* (1818) and Francisco Goya's *And They Are Like Wild Beasts* (1810-20) depicted the pain and suffering French soldiers experienced in Russia and the same horrors they inflicted on the population during their invasion of Spain.



Mazeppa, 1823
Théodore Géricault with Eugène Lami
Lithograph, 8-1/8 x 6-1/4 inches

The late 18th and early 19th centuries witnessed the appearance of literary giants such as Goethe, Byron, Scott, Shelly, Stendhal, Dumas, Hugo and others. Artists like Theodore Gericault took literary themes that praised and elevated the romantic values of individual spirit and energy over the rational mind of the Enlightenment. An example was Gericault's 1823 lithograph of *Mazeppa*, which captured the strength and struggle of the young Ivan Mazepa, a Ukrainian Cossack who was tied backwards on a wild horse as punishment for adultery with Madame Falbowska. There is no basis for the alleged punishment although Victor Hugo in a poem and Franz Liszt in a symphonic poem used the fictitious events in literary and musical creations.

The declining nobility and the rising bourgeoisie were not immune to artistic criticism: Honore Daumier's 1833 bronze bust of Jean-Marie Fruchard and his 1834 lithograph of a police massacre in Paris were considered scandalous caricatures and exposés of the monarchy of King Louis-Philippe. The reluctance of the nobility to share power with urban masses fueled the 1848 popular uprisings in France, Italy, Germany, and Austria, which were ruthlessly suppressed by reactionaries in the same year.



Jean-Marie Fruchard: Disgust Personified, ca. 1833, Honoré Daumier, Bronze, 4-3/4 x 5-1/8 x 4 inches



Rue Transnonain, le 15 avril 1834, Honoré Daumier, Lithograph, 13-3/8 x 18-5/16 inches

Conclusion

The 300 works in this extensive exhibition, *The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760-1860*, give resonance to the historical assertions that the Western world did not make a seamless transition into the modern age via an Industrial Revolution. The American and French Revolutions were precursors to military catastrophes and monumental clashes that followed. Napoleon's invasions and occupations devastated Europe for 12 years, and the US Civil War (1861-65) was the most costly America ever experienced. European imperialism expanded as the armament industries became mechanized, and Western culture was forced on other nations and people through the barrels of naval cannons and army rifles. It was neither reason nor superior beliefs that spread Western culture, but brutal force and mass production of quality goods. The world of visual artists generally reported and chronicled events and transitions representing more social lag than intellectual innovation. The Romantic period in the visual arts did not completely liberate the human spirit in the critique of pure reason. The ruling elite still controlled and sponsored the fine arts, and it was not until the latter part of the 19th century that mass media began to advocate for the masses.

Acknowledgement, Artworks and Resources

Materials and reproduced images from the exhibition are from the collections of the Yale University Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art to which we are grateful.

Artworks

1. Exhibition view at the Yale University Art Gallery
2. *A Lion Attacking a Horse*, 1770, George Stubbs, Oil on canvas, 47 x 57 inches
3. *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night*, 1829, John Constable, Oil on canvas, 48 x 64-3/4 inches
4. *Wreckers—Coast of Northumberland, with a Steam Boat Assisting a Ship Off Shore*, 1833–34, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Oil on canvas, 35-5/8 x 47-9/16 inches
5. *Femmes d'Alger (Women of Algiers)*, 1833, Eugène Delacroix, Lithograph stone, 6-1/4 x 8-11/16 inches
6. *Juive d'Alger (Jewess of Algiers)*, 1833, Eugène Delacroix, Lithograph stone, 10-1/8 x 7-7/8 inches

7. *A Frank Encampment in the Desert of Mount Sinai. 1842—The Convent of St. Catherine in the Distance*, 1856, John Frederick Lewis, Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper, 26-1/4 x 53-1/2 inches
8. *Retour de Russie (Return from Russia)*, 1818, Théodore Géricault, Lithograph with tint stone, 17-1/2 x 14-1/4 inches
9. *Y son fieras (And they are like wild beasts)*, ca. 1810-20, Francisco Goya, Etching and aquatint, 6-1/8 x 8-1/4 inches
10. *Mazeppa*, 1823, Théodore Géricault with Eugène Lami, Lithograph, 8-1/8 x 6-1/4 inches
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12. *Rue Transnonain, le 15 avril 1834*, Honoré Daumier, Lithograph, 13-3/8 x 18-5/16 inches

Resources

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The Romantic Tradition in British Painting 1800-1950, Blake and Reynolds
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/t/the-romantic-tradition-in-british-painting-1800-1950/>