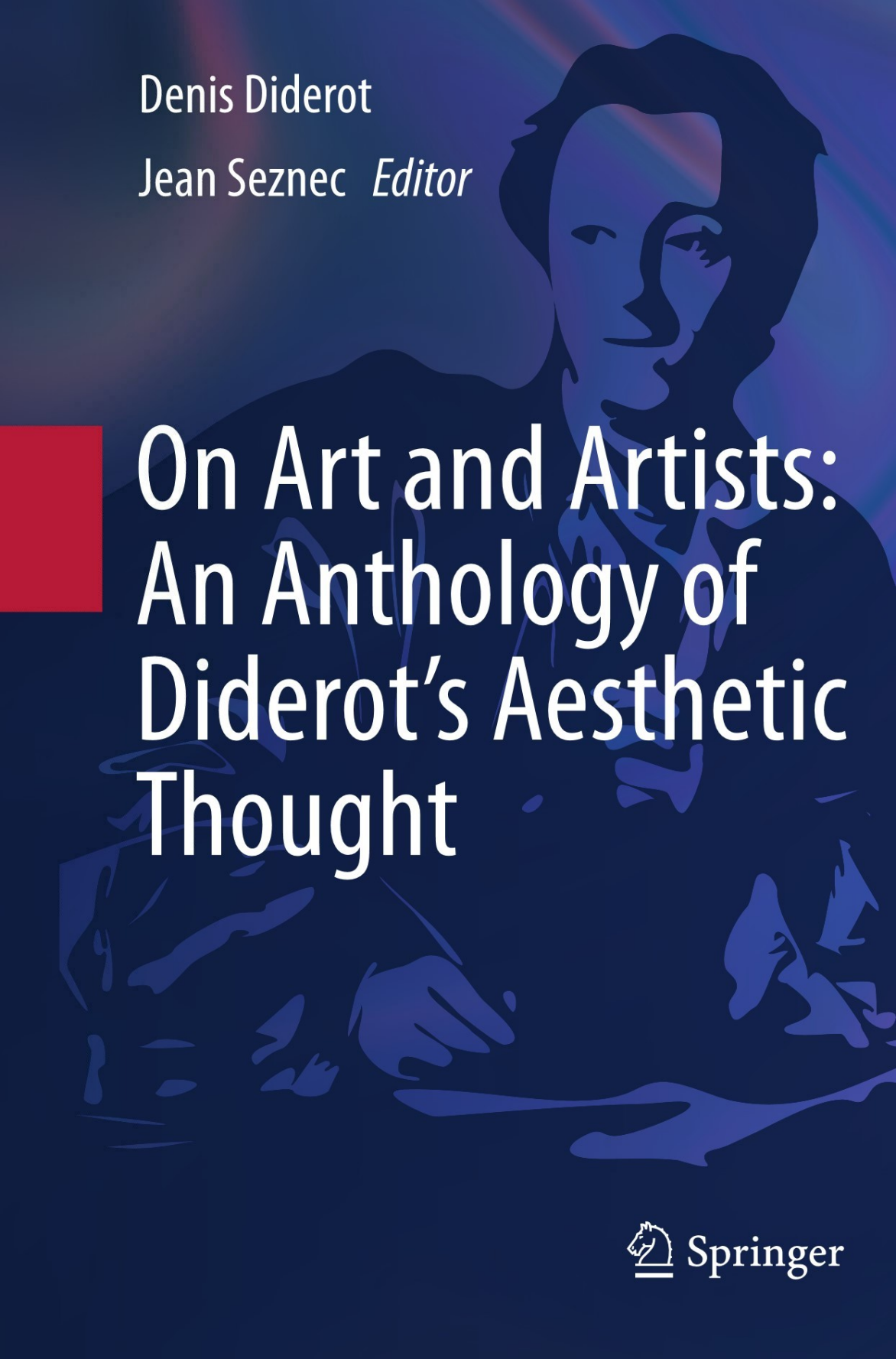
Denis Diderot
Jean Seznec Editor
On Art and Artists: An Anthology of Diderot's Aesthetic Thought
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Edited by Jean Seznec†

Translated by John S.D. Glaus

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Denis Diderot†

Editor
Jean Seznec†

Translator
John S.D. Glaus
Ombudsman of the Euler Society
Washington, DC, USA
restinn@roadrunner.com

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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

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3. A. Fontaine, Les doctrines d'art en France de Poussin à Diderot, 1909.
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5. P. Vernière, "Diderot et Hagedorn", Revue de littérature comparée, 1956, pp. 239–254.
6. Correspondance littéraire, éd. Tourneaux, IV, p. 17, Salon de 1763, début.
7. Correspondance générale, éd. Roth, V, pp. 143–144.
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9. Préface aux Conférences de l'Academie royale.
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12. G. May, "Diderot devant la magie de Rembrandt", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, September 1959.

13. Salon de 1767, dans l'oeuvre complètes, XI, p. 115.
14. J. Rouge, "Goethe et l'essai sur la peinture de Diderot", Etudes germaniques, 1949, pp. 227–234.
15. J. Pommier, "Les Salons de Diderot, et leur influence au XIXe siècle: Baudelaire et le Salon 1846", Revue des cours et conférences, 1936, pp. 289–306, 437–452.
16. M. Gilman, The idea of poetry in France from Houdar de la Motte to Baudelaire, Cambridge, MA, 1958; G. May, Diderot and Baudelaire critiques d'art, Genève-Paris, 1957.

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