

DIDEROT, ART, AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ETHOS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interdependent relationship between Diderot's writings on art, the art of eighteenth-century France, and the times that produced them both. Accordingly, the study falls into three principal related sections, with each enlarging upon a specific facet of the topic. Proceeding from the premise that both Diderot and the paintings he discussed belonged within a particular cultural context of tastes, ideas, and historical facts, the first principal division, "Diderot in the Scheme of Things", begins as a brief survey of the artistic realities that prevailed in France prior to the approximate period spanned by the Salons in order to present a general view of the eclectic body of art on which he based the substance of his commentaries.

The related section on "Diderot's Aesthetics" specifies a certain problem in discussing Diderot's writing on art and demonstrates that Diderot's artistic notions cannot be treated from a general aesthetic standpoint but can be understood only in terms of the individual criticisms themselves. The "Essay on Painting" presents a compendium of the themes and ideas that Diderot applied in those individual criticisms. Both the section entitled "Diderot's Aesthetics" and the one dealing with the "Essay" present transitional introductory material for the second major division, "The Salons: 1759-1781", which deals with individual criticisms of specific paintings to show Diderot's critical method at work

in a varied range of representative works and to show in what way Diderot fails to understand the paintings before him in the idiom of the artist.

On the basis of this conclusion, it would be easy to dismiss much of his commentary on the ground that it is quaint but inadequate; the final major division builds on this possible conclusion, however, to explore a further facet of the Salons and shows, through its focus on the Salon of 1767 that Diderot's commentaries were not merely criticisms of art but of society as well and that his attitude toward the needs and faults of society conditioned his approach to art. In its substance, this section offers the view that because of--rather than in spite of--its polarities and inconsistencies, Diderot's thoughts on contemporary art provide a faithful reflection in small of identical conflicts and aspirations in the larger context of eighteenth-century French society. Diderot's values and the values of his time emerge from his application of those values to contemporary art. With art as the matrix, the values of the man and those of the society present themselves at the conclusion of the study as a mosaic of concepts in opposition--a mosaic where each conceptual element attains its meaning in juxtaposition, rather than in harmony, with the others.

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INTRODUCTION

A literature professor once advised his class that if they wanted to discover the spirit of an age or period, its code of values--social, moral, and artistic--they would not find those characteristics to be obvious in the best works of the time, but in the worst. The best works of art possess a quality that abstracts them from time and place, that preserves them from becoming obsolete or commonplace; the worst offerings, on the other hand, tend to be transparent: the "strings" show, and we are more aware of what the artist is trying to do than we are of what he has done. Subtlety is gone. In the best, form is a vehicle for content; in the worst, form is content. In eighteenth-century France, this principle of looking to the best for content and to the worst for form is borne out in a comparison of the works of Chardin and Greuze, but it is Diderot's judgment of them, more than the works themselves, which gives us the greatest insight into the values of the time.

Germain Bazin has written that at its highest levels, the painting of a country is also a portrait of its spirit and soul.¹ But experience shows that the greatest among works of art address themselves to spiritual or humanistic ideals rather than to nationalistic ones; they speak to the man, not to the citizen, and might--more accurately--constitute a portrait of the spirit and

soul of man. Thus, the best art of a country may, in fact, tell us very little about the spirit of that country: Rembrandt's portraits, for example, reveal very little about Amsterdam and its values and tastes: the fact that he died alone in abject poverty reveals much more.

When art is being made to order, however, it does serve as a direct and valid reflection of the values of the time, and in eighteenth-century France, the existence of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture provides us with a case in point. In the early eighteenth-century, as in the time of Louis XIV, the output of the Academy did not extend to all levels of society; to the extent that specific paintings were ordered by and executed for specific patrons, painting reflected taste, but it was the taste of an elite and not of society at large. With the appearance of the biennial Salon exhibitions in 1737, art became a public affair, no longer merely a craft in the service of the king; it was offered for praise, for criticism, and for sale. For painters without patrons there was a public to please. The eighteenth century was characterized by continuity and by change: To what extent, then, did painting as a whole reflect the thought of the society in which it was produced?

Jean Starobinski has observed in this regard that in order to capture the "living reality" of the eighteenth century, one cannot consider either the art or the thought of the time in isolation, that the two are indivisible, having a common historical and social origin.² Later in the same study, he appears to combat this conclusion by warning that it has often been insufficiently stressed that art, "at any historical period whatsoever, is not a direct

expression of the universal state of a given society: it is primarily the prerogative of the wealthy who order and appreciate works of art according to the criteria of their own taste and culture."³ The problem, in resolving the apparent contradiction, is neither to prove nor to disprove either statement, but rather to consider them as equal and opposite truths. The paradox existing, therefore, that art reflects the thought of the time, and that art is primarily the prerogative of the wealthy and reflects the taste of a particular social class, how can one set out to demonstrate with validity that the social and aesthetic thought of a period is embodied in its painting? Would one look to the best of the paintings or to the worst of them to illustrate the spirit of the age? The best would perhaps embody the enduring ideals of man, while the worst would present the popular forms; neither would be wholly representative. Would one be able to detect exaggerations or omissions of the thought that it is supposed to reflect and thereby gauge to what extent art also fails as a reliable index to contemporary thought? As this question applies to eighteenth-century France, perhaps the complex interrelationship between art and thought can best be understood with the help of a contemporary, one who was neither artist, nor aristocrat, nor merely citizen, yet very much in tune with the ideas of the time, someone who was both participant and observer. Although Diderot did not set out in his Salon commentaries to approximate art and society, his writings on art provide us with a more representative accounting than any purely historical or antiquarian correlation of the two, because he judges according to contemporary values, and tells us--through his praise and blame--

to what extent those values are present, wanting, or distorted in the paintings he discusses. Time has not necessarily corroborated his judgments as to what was best and what was worst in the painting of his time, but as he stood before the best and the worst of it, attempting both to understand it and to inspire it, he established a concentricity of art and Enlightenment thought, not by a scholarly superimposition of the two, but by bringing the vicissitudes of Enlightenment thought to bear on the art of his time and by judging it accordingly. This study will examine Diderot's writings on painting in order to identify the values underlying his judgments and to indicate to what extent his values coincide with the social and aesthetic values of his time.

DIDEROT IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS

The twentieth-century observer who looks at a painting which once hung in the Salon of the Academy of France might not only see different elements in that painting than Diderot saw, but might also expect--because of his historical and cultural perspective--far different qualities than Diderot, in his time, expected. Art itself may be as old as mankind, but man's conception of what it is and what it ought to do changes with the generations; and just as the criteria of taste vary with the passage of time, so the ways of looking at a painting vary as well. Both Diderot and the paintings he discussed were situated in and conditioned by a specific cultural context of social conditions, prevailing tastes, and philosophical ideas; any discussion of the views that Diderot brought to bear on the paintings he discussed, therefore, would perhaps assume more meaning within the context of a familiarity with the artistic realities of the period.

Art exhibitions in eighteenth-century France contributed significantly to the development of modern criticism in that they provided opportunities for critical reports, representing a new form of art criticism, uniquely adapted to the purpose which it was intended to serve, where the procedure no longer consisted of inserting judgments between the facts referred to and the "rules of art"--as had been the case with ancient and medieval treatises and Renaissance "Lives" of artists--but of writing extraneously and with relative informality to give a personal opinion upon a group of works and artists.

The first of these critical reports was an essay by La Font de Saint-Yenne¹, entitled Reflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France², which appeared in 1747 and expressed the author's lament that the genre of historical painting had fallen into neglect during the decade since the Salon exhibitions of painting and sculpture began in 1737. Saint-Yenne's attachment to historical painting was born of a belief that it was the highest form of painting because it was the only vehicle capable of transmitting noble ideas to posterity.³ He attacked the frivolous taste of his day, catered to and in a sense sustained by those artists who seemed to prefer prostitution of their art to outright starvation as martyrs to Saint-Yenne's favorite cause. Had it not been for the popularity of rococo art and all its attendant evils of patronage, superficiality and eroticism, historical painting would not have had to suffer the abuse of neglect or indifference that now existed. His attack against the fashionable rococo was also an appeal to the artists to restore honor and dignity to their art by portraying noble themes capable of instructing the mind and inspiring the soul.⁴ The essay was badly received by artists who had grown acutely sensitive to criticism during long years of underexposure to the public gaze, when practitioners of fine arts and crafts labored at the court in the sheltered workshop of the King. Saint-Yenne, for his part, nursed traditional academic tendencies and was possessed of a constitutional incapacity for the appreciation of contemporary art. It remained for Diderot to add the touch of authority when, twelve years later, he began the writing of the first of his biennial Salon commentaries. Not only were his literary credentials more impressive than Saint-Yenne's to begin with, but his prejudices were more in-

teresting as well. Unlike Saint-Yenne's, Diderot's opinions were not intended for publication in his own country, but for private circulation in Friedrich Grimm's Correspondance littéraire, whose subscribers included francophile princes throughout Europe. Diderot was a man of letters writing for other men of letters, so that his theoretical and practical preparation for discussing and evaluating art, though limited, was not of paramount importance to his reading audience.

Although Diderot's approach to painting was not so exclusively puritanical as was Saint-Yenne's, a tension does exist in his own commentaries between the merits of traditional art and the vogue of the moment. This tension reflects in general the artistic state of affairs in France, the co-existence of classical and rococo art, each genre produced by and depicting a unique system of values. Although the two genres and value systems were, from almost every standpoint, at odds with each other, Diderot's values and tastes as an art critic derived from both of them.

More than a hundred years before Diderot began his novitiate as an art critic, Louis XIV had established Versailles as the nucleus of French culture, the pivot point of an authoritarian regime, and a place for the solemn celebration of the religion of monarchy. Statues, galleries, marble halls, and mirrors framed the attendant ceremonials. Where wealth concentrates in the hands of a few and where lack of industrial development precludes investment elsewhere, the only other outlet--human nature being what it is--invariably becomes the adornment of abode and person. In keeping with both the insatiable taste for finer things and with the aura of formality that pervaded the place, Louis founded, in 1648, the Royal Academy of Painting and

Sculpture. Deriving as it did from an edict of the King, the Academy possessed and exercised more authority than a mere professional organization could have exercised. With this official recognition and sponsorship, painting had, in one sense, come a long way: Through all the ages of Greece and Rome, golden and otherwise, painters were considered with the contempt deemed befitting manual laborers, and they were somewhat less despised than actors and cut-purses on a rapidly-descending hierarchical scale. For succeeding centuries, painting had been a trade under the guild system, and now--to judge from the stated purpose at the founding of the Academy--the art of painting was once again to be favored, this time with an organization to define and maintain professional standards. Not stated was the fact that this centralization was part of a uniform control of all creative activity, whose function from that time forward would be to further the glorification of France in the person of the King.

What Diderot referred to in his commentaries as "academic art" had its beginnings here. Lectures and discussions at the Academy were held for the purpose of formulating generally valid and comprehensive rules as part of a program of keeping artists in the paths of strict artistic respectability. The doctrines of the Academy were inflexible with regard to acceptable style and subject matter. The art of classic Antiquity was held to be perfect and was the model to be imitated; Nature, if observed at all, was to be compared with classic forms and corrected accordingly; only noble subjects, drawn from poetry or ancient history, were to be depicted, and for expressive and structural purposes, drawing ranked above color. Thus the academicians idealized Nature by imposing an idea of beauty upon it, specifically, the beauty of ancient art, actual examples of which,

moreover, they had never seen. The doctrine of decorum forbade the depiction of the violent, the ugly, or the base, because classicism also concerned itself with the effect of art upon the audience. This principle derived by analogy from Horace's writings on the drama, wherein he suggested that the purpose of art is to combine pleasure with instruction, thereby giving art a moral utility through pleasure. Saint-Yenne picked up this same theme when he saw, some years later, that historical painting was falling by the wayside. While academic doctrines were themselves inflexible, they were somewhat more difficult to enforce in actual practice because the doctrine of the imitation of Nature was--in and of itself--so vague that it was construed to allow almost all kinds of representation, from naturalism to abstract idealism and everything in between.

The importance of academic art in any discussion of the artistic climate of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France is that it subsumed the principles of classicism, the first of which was imitation and subsequently, impersonality and conformity to rules. Artists who painted in the classical style were then, in a sense, absent, since no hint was permitted on the canvas of their own ideas, lives, or experiences. As for conformity to rules, this was a precondition of successful imitation, since the selected and "recognized" aesthetic qualities of the masterpieces had been codified and systematized as rules. And finally, the Academy's inductive process of rule-making echoed the classical belief in the effective existence of absolute values in matters pertaining to the creation of art.

In art, the formation of an academy is one sign that the golden age is past; it indicates that the spirit of the time is primarily reproductive and antiquarian and only secondarily--or accidentally--

creative. Diderot was aware, even at the time he was serving as Grimm's Parisian critic, that another golden age was past:

Quand voit-on naître les critiques et les grammairiens?
Tout juste après le siècle du génie et des productions
divines.⁵

Even before Louis' death, the Grand Manner had begun to pall, and the King's taste itself had shifted to a preference for more youthfulness and spirit and less seriousness in art. This shift in taste was to grow and endure as the rococo tradition for many years to come. With the death of the King and the coming of the Regency, the nobles and courtiers abandoned Versailles and descended upon Paris. With the center of cultural life now shifted from the court to the city, the upper classes--newly freed from an intensively ceremonial and ritualistic life--exercised their own taste, avoiding the gravity and austerity of historical painting and falling heavily for capricious, pretty, and feminine themes. Art kept pace with demand, as a certain amount of it always does, and to satisfy the new taste of the aristocracy, it was engaged more heavily than ever in the service of the fantastic and the erotic. Each represented, after all, a means of escape: fantasy, the removal of one's attention from contemporary life, and eroticism, a means to a change of fare. Literature and theater of the time abounded in comparable motifs with impersonations, disguises, mistaken identities, and the siege and surrender of virtue. The artist Boucher excelled in the execution of such themes with his portrayals of buxom shepherdesses and pink-bottomed goddesses. The settings were fanciful but the glances and gestures were most realistic.

In its preoccupation with decorative pleasantries and glorified nudity, or simply with languid prettiness, the rococo style expressed

the special society for which it was set to work, where mundane values constituted the highest moral code. Large-scale adornment of aristocratic lodgings created a great demand for paintings which quite naturally were sought after, in turn, by state officials, cardinals, social pretenders, visiting nobles, and lesser aristocrats.⁶ With a clamoring and socially-climbing clientèle whose needs and interests did not extend to artistic originality, there was more competition among the customers than among the craftsmen. Mediocrity had established its dominion over a florid acreage of canvases, and painting had extended the scope of its interests all the way from the boudoir to the bonbonnière. This, then, was the rococo, certainly livelier and more colorful than anything the Academy had produced theretofore; it was, after all, created to appeal to surfeited aristocratic tastes; it was lavish and erotic, but in an impeccable and sophisticated way; and although its content may have been shallow from a thematic point of view, it was by no means an unworthy successor, in that respect, to the academic classicism of the golden age.

Although Diderot seldom had anything favorable to say about Boucher,⁷ there was a place in his heart for rococo subjects with their forthright appeal to the senses, just as there was a place in his mind for the noble subjects of historical painting whose characters were drawn from history or classical literature, and whose noble themes served a useful, moral purpose in depicting worthy examples for the masses. As a study of his Salon commentaries will show, Diderot, as a critic stood between both worlds, nourished by both of them, seeing the faults in each, and yet unable to choose finally between them.

Saint-Yenne had no such difficulty, as we have seen from the substance of his critical writings in Reflexions,⁸ published in 1747.

Those writings, in fact, represented the beginnings of a reaction against the fashionable rococo--a reaction which was gaining momentum during the middle years of the eighteenth century and which paved the way, along with the influential writings of the German archaeologist, Johann Winckelmann, for the new cult of antiquity which culminated in the neo-classical style of Jacques-Louis David. The reason that such writers as Saint-Yenne and Winckelmann could have so much influence in France during their own time and that Diderot's writings on art should have only marginal influence, gaining indirect exposure only through publication of his other works, can be found in the fact that the Correspondance littéraire--which contained all his writings on art--was circulated outside France and was not published until after his death. The activities of the three men were related, however, in that Saint-Yenne and Winckelmann helped to forge the cross-currents in the art which formed the basis of Diderot's Salon commentaries. Even though his commentaries were innocuous as a contemporary influence, they contributed outside France to the same assault against the rococo that the works of Saint-Yenne and Winckelmann waged from within.

The German archaeologist, Winckelmann, rhapsodized at great length about the unique and unattainable perfection of Greek art and because of his zeal and the eager credulity of his reading audience he influenced the tone of art criticism for two centuries to come. He was, first of all, an archaeologist, and it was largely through his efforts, especially his Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Art in Painting and Sculpture (1755)⁹ and his most important work, History of Ancient Art (1764)¹⁰ which contained descriptions of the very recent discoveries (1762-64) at Pompeii and Herculaneum, that the taste for things antique capti-

vated the popular European imagination, and the movement that posterity knows as neo-classicism was born.

Admiration for the Ancients had existed long before this, of course, in literary as well as artistic circles, but the discovery of actual examples of ancient art (even though these artifacts proved to be Roman and not Greek), fostered a sense of the immediate presence of antiquity and, what is more important, this discovery supplemented with actual physical illustrations what the western world had known only indirectly through Greek and Roman writers for more than eighteen hundred years. If classicism was born of, and perpetuated by, a veneration for the ideals of the antique past, neo-classicism was made possible by the temporarily-subdued presence of that entrenched classicism in the first instance and to the new science of archaeology in the second; and to the architectural, sculptural, literary, and moral ideals preserved by and characteristic of classicism, could now be added--legitimately--the pictorial. And Johann Winckelmann, who never saw an original piece of Greek painting in his life, furnished an impetus to the flowering of art criticism throughout eighteenth-century Europe and propagated with renewed solemnity the everlasting prejudice that the only possibility of greatness in art lay in imitation of the Ancients.

To give some parenthetical insight into both the soundness of Winckelmann's views and the historical facts that conditioned them, it should be noted that the Pompeian excavations actually yielded Roman copies of Greek works. No Greek painting had survived into the Christian era, and of Roman painting, the only examples at Pompeii were frescoes that had been buried in 79 A. D. They included no surpassing art--as paintings--and served the only purpose that,

for example, a painted view from a painted balcony can serve. The only "idea" these frescoes expressed--a pre-eminent element of content that Diderot, too, associated with ancient art--was probably not so much a representation of morality or virtue--a notion cherished by opponents of the rococo--as of milady's wish to extend or multiply her horizons. Winckelmann, then, knew ancient art almost exclusively through Roman copies and, of course, Latin literature. The actual discovery of authentic Greek art did not properly begin until 1800 when Lord Elgin plundered the Acropolis to carry sculptures home to London.

The neo-classic reaction to the rococo was to find its most devoted and accomplished exponent and practitioner toward the end of the century in Jacques-Louis David, who later became the official painter of the Revolution, and whose single most genuine contribution to art and humanity was that he saved Fragonard from the guillotine. In the meantime, mid-century was a period when Diderot's critical activities coincided with the confluence of at least four trends in painting: (1) The timely death of academic classicism had not yet come: there remained the irresistible magnetism of classical antiquity, made all the more accessible by the availability, to the right person, of the prestigious Prix de Rome; (2) the rococo successor to classicism, for all its light-hearted depictions of the carefree rich gamboling and disporting themselves by day and by night or masquerading as country folk, nevertheless preserved of its forerunner the very French legacy of the bienséances: the voilent and the lowly or common were scrupulously avoided; the rococo, moreover, retained pretensions to classical respectability in that like the historical and mythological subject matter hawked by the Academy, the subject

matter of much rococo painting derived as well from a source in antiquity--namely, fable. (3) The scientific spirit was in the air, and the endless possibilities of scientific investigation for the furtherance of empirical knowledge and, therefore, of progress, gained new and more enthusiastic adherents day by day. So when Winckelmann's writings about the recently-unearthed villas and their art treasures began to circulate in Europe, the fad for the copying of antique art and ideas spread quickly in their wake. The old reverence for things classical was now supplemented with the new reverence for science. The respectability and infallibility of such a worthy combination was something that was not to be questioned. Neo-classicism satisfied the scientific mind--if that mind cared for art at all--just as surely as the rococo found an echo of responsive warmth in the bosom of the aristocracy. Partly as a reaction to the artificiality and excesses of the aristocracy, partly as an adjunct to the rise of the bourgeoisie, partly as an inevitable result of the popular cult of Nature, and partly as an adjunct of seventeenth-century Dutch painting, there arose a fourth very popular artistic current: genre painting, or scenes of daily life. To the Arcadian scenes of the old classicism, the glittering fantasies of the rococo, and the scenes of imagined antiquity now depicted with a new precision and authenticity, was added with a boldness born of confidence-in-numbers--the commonplace. Just as a particular style of artistic expression reflects not only the artist but the culture that produced it, so it was with the Protestant Dutch painters of the seventeenth century who specialized in portraits, landscapes, and genre scenes in deference to John Calvin's dictum that man should not paint or carve anything except what he could see about him, so that God's majesty might not be cor-

rupted by fantasies. All this was swept along with a tide of sentimentalism from England, so that the genre held great appeal not only for those who were philosophically or emotionally involved with the cult of Nature and the simple life, but for those people as well for whom such pictures reflected their own way of life--either sentimentally or with a certain spiritual comprehension--depending upon whether the artist involved was a Greuze or a Chardin. This, then, was the eclectic body of art on which Diderot based his judgments, and these were the times that shaped his thoughts.

DIDEROT'S "AESTHETICS" AS KEY TO HIS CRITICISM

The eighteenth century saw the advent not only of art exhibitions but of the discipline of aesthetics as well. That branch of philosophy which Baumgarten originated¹ and dubbed was significant at the time in asserting the independence and validity of imagination when such a notion was (officially) unthinkable, if it was taken seriously at all. Aesthetics is properly a branch of philosophy and not of art; as they pertain to criticism, aesthetic speculations and "truths" are often far too abstract to serve as criteria for the criticism of art anyway; as a "science of the imagination", it has little application to actual works of imagination and represents at best, for critical purposes, a respectable authority to be summoned in time of need. Diderot's aesthetics, then are not of an abstract metaphysical stripe; in fact, in searching for a word to characterize Diderot's aesthetics--the values or principles with which he approached art--one would have to

conclude that they are elusive: consistently present, but inconsistently applied. This intellectually-seductive elusive quality has ensnared some critics and tempted them to compile an aesthetics which they might then attribute to Diderot.

Nature, goodness, truth, and beauty are proper to any philosopher's conundrum, and Diderot cast them in the likeness of the Trinity in Le neveu de Rameau:

L'empire de la nature et de ma trinité . . . le Vrai qui est le Père, et qui engendre le Bon qui est le Fils; d'où procède le beau qui est le Saint-esprit.
(Cited by H. Mølberg in Aspects de l'esthétique de Diderot)²

The eminently cosmic scope of this concept as well as its intrinsic vagueness, as Diderot uses it, invites its citation by some critics as the pivot point, the base, and the essence of his aesthetic philosophy. But since Diderot's references to all the different arts occur throughout his works, and since examples used to support it are drawn from as wide a sector, this view must hold either that all the works circumambient to this "trinity" are expositions and illustrations of it or that it is the summa of the circumambient works; alas for such interpretations, Diderot's eclectic thought does not lend itself to such solemn pigeon-holing.

The term aesthetics implies more systematization and coherence than Diderot's ideas on art actually have, and their diffuse and often contradictory nature creates a void which quite naturally has attracted two flourishing critical industries: exegesis and apologetics. The success of both enterprises depends upon distortion: the exegete must impose a superficial order according to a preconceived notion of what form that order ought to take and then derive a meaning from his

manipulations; the apologist must defend inconsistency without examining its possible merits and without admitting of its possible hazards. But any series of observations, maxims, judgments, ripped untimely from their context and planted--for incubation--in the critic's procrustean bed, are doomed to come up smelling of contrivance, since the selected comments unfailingly support the interpretation advanced.

More flexible and resilient than his interpreters, Diderot does not insist upon arranging the other aspects of his thought according to the exigencies of a triune vagary from Le neveu de Rameau. Diderot, in spite of all the efforts of exegetical and apologetic criticism, is often inconsistent, often vague, and those who wish to distill his ideas on beauty, truth, etc., are forced by the nature of the material to catalogue his uses of these terms in their various contexts, for want of a precise and final definition. In like manner, any attempt to understand the principles by which he judged the contemporary art of the Salons must deal with specific instances; the key to Diderot's art criticism lies not in a pre-conceived and -formulated aesthetics but in the individual criticisms themselves. In the meantime, Diderot's strength is not so much that he can withstand attack as that he can survive such defenders.

THE ESSAY ON PAINTING:

SYNOPSIS

Diderot's interest in painting and sculpture cannot be separated from his interest in the other fine arts--poetry, music, and theater--since he utilized characteristics and terminology from all of them in discussing any one of them. Thus, in evaluating painting he seeks, harmony, the attribute of music, facial expression of sentiment and appropriate gesture, deriving from his interest in theater; and poetry, the mysterious expression or communication of a truth, or the imaginative portrayal of just about anything. His "Essay on Painting", written to follow the Salon of 1765, sets forth his notions on what painting is and what it ought to be. He insists that the artist as a man of genius, should be free of rules; then he proceeds to formulate some rules of his own: that it is the duty of the artist to render virtue palatable, to render vice odious, to depict a great maxim, to teach a moral lesson, to depict fanaticism, to depict modesty, to display nudes, to cover them up, to be savage, to be sublime. His aesthetic ideas neither constitute a unified system nor combine to form a consistent conclusion about the nature of art, because Diderot envisions for it two internecine roles: art as free expression; and art as propaganda. And opposed as he may be to the academic restrictions imposed upon painting, he nonetheless approaches his subject as a theorist--not just of painting--but of the arts in general and the cosmos in particular.

The "Essay on Painting" was written to follow the Salon of 1765, and it contains many of the ideas already expressed during the course of the four Salons from 1759 through 1765. A familiarity with the

themes and thoughts of this essay will enhance anyone's appreciation of Diderot's commentary on the Salons as well as provide insight into the prejudices and principles he invoked in evaluating art.

THE ESSAY ON PAINTING: 1765

Nature, which Diderot will later stipulate as the model for all painting, appears at the beginning of the essay as the personification of self-sufficiency and benignity:

La nature ne fait rien d'incorrect. Toute forme, belle ou laide, a sa cause; et, de tous les êtres qui existent, il n'y a pas un qui ne soit comme il doit être.¹

This is not so much to say that all's right with the world, but that, more accurately, Diderot reflects a dominant ideal of his time--that Nature is coherent, that Nature makes a sense unto herself, and that ultimately, all the answers can be found there. Having renounced the principles of religion as a basis for man's participation in the eternal, Diderot must invoke Nature in its stead with the artist as intercessor and oracle, with art as the translation of the eternal--whether it be the true, the good, the beautiful, or all three--into human terms. The substitution is incomplete, however, because Diderot does not admit of the possibility of a spiritual role or content for art, instead of--or alongside--an aesthetic one.

Nature as the model for art is nothing new, of course; the idea, in fact, is a commonplace in a variety of schools of thought, represented by Aristotle, Democritus, Lucretius, Seneca, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Leonardo, and Dante.² Ever since Aristotle delivered him-

self of the famous judgment that art is the imitation of Nature, mimesis--the imitation or representation of Nature--became the canon of art not only for the ancient Greeks but for countless generations to come.

Having established--or, more accurately, retained--Nature as the model, Diderot proceeds to treat of color and characterizes as follows one who has a feeling for color:

Celui qui a le sentiment vif de la couleur, a les yeux attachés sur sa toile; sa bouche est entr'ouverte; il halète; sa palette est l'image du chaos. C'est dans ce chaos qu'il trempe son pinceau; et il en tire l'oeuvre de la creation . . .³

Even granting all the indulgences of poetic licence, this characterization requires quite a bit of sympathy to accept literally; its implications, however, may prove to be of more assistance in assessing Diderot's critical values; first, this characterization of the artist indicates Diderot's genuine flair for the agonistic--not only in the finished artistic production but in its creation as well--an attitude which he develops further in his Salon commentaries. But even beyond revealing his flair for the agonistic, this image of the artist reveals Diderot's notion of the artist as a lonely and sensitive individual--a free spirit--whose existence comprises the pursuit and subsequent rendering of an ideal. He does not, at this point, go on to state whether that ideal is moral or aesthetic, social or artistic.

The phenomenon of "false color" is, according to Diderot, the inevitable result of copying the work of masters and not nature, since the artist ceases thereby to use his own eyes.⁴

Although he often proclaims his ideas in thunderous prose,

Diderot nevertheless shows occasional indications of an awareness of his limitations as a pundit on art, which is especially evident in some of the half-serious chapter titles in the essay, such as: "Mes pensées bizarres sur le dessin."; "Mes petites idées sur la couleur."; "Tout ce que j'ai compris de ma vie du clair-obscur."; and "Ce que tout le monde sait sur l'expression, et quelque chose que tout le monde ne sait pas."⁵

His next section deals with expression, which he defines as the general image of a sentiment. In this context he sees the inevitable connection between theater and painting, since all the emotions--hatred, anger, curiosity, love, admiration--"paint themselves" on the face, and from this, the formulation that an actor unacquainted with painting is a bad actor, just as a painter unacquainted with acting is bad.⁶ In his Salon commentary of 1759, however, he dashes a painting of "Jason and Medea" quarreling over custody of the children, by Carle Van Loo--no less a personage than Director of the Academy--as being "a theatrical decoration in all its falsity".⁷ Every station in life has its own character and its own expression,⁸ servants and soldiers, concubines and kings; savages live without laws and without prejudices, and their features should, therefore, be vigorous and pronounced; the task of the artist, then, is to be as faithful to natural occurrence as possible when depicting representatives of the different stations of life. Diderot's emphasis in this instance is upon features, facial expression, and the mutual appropriateness of facial expression and circumstance. But with his theatrical orientation to facial expression, he neglects appropriate "artistic expression" of which the look of the face is only an accessory. Facial expression and gesture are appropriate both to the

theater and to painting, but painting is fundamentally a medium of color, light, and form, with gradations of emphasis to suit expressive purposes. As a result, it is usually when the artist is interested only in the physical--rather than the spiritual--reality, that his emphasis is on the actuality of the face rather than on the aspects and pictorial treatment of that face which reveal the character or soul. But this oversight on Diderot's part is the natural consequence of his denial of spiritual values.

Every age has its tastes, and Diderot affirms that his have changed:

Des lèvres vermeilles bien bordées, une bouche entr'ouverte et riante, de belles dents blanches, une démarche libre, le regard assuré, une gorge découverte, de belles grandes joues larges, un nez retroussé, me faisaient galoper à dix-huit ans. Aujourd'hui que le vice ne m'est plus bon, et que je ne suis plus bon au vice, C'est une jeune fille qui a l'air décent et modeste, la démarche composée, le regard timide, et qui marche en silence à côté de sa mère, qui m'arrête et me charme.⁹

Keeping in mind Diderot's stated preference for virtue and modesty, his retraction of it seven pages later is, if not exactly surprising, at least worthy of note in expressing his thought that a trace of paganism must be present in any representation of the Divinity, without which it will be cold and empty: He laments that if our religion weren't a sad, flat metaphysics, if our painters and sculptors could compare with those of the Ancients, if our priests weren't stupid bigots, if this abominable Christianity hadn't been established by murder and blood, if the joys of our paradise weren't reduced to an impertinent beatific vision of who-knows-what, if hell offered more than gulfs of fire, hideous gothic demons, and gnashing teeth, if our paintings could be of scenes other than those of

atrocities and disgusting butchery, if our ideas of modesty hadn't proscribed the sight of arms, thighs, breasts, etc., in the spirit of mortification; if artists and poets weren't enchained by frightening words of sacrilege and profanation, if Mary had been the Mother of Pleasure or if--as Mother of God--it had been her beautiful eyes, breasts, and hips that attracted the Holy Spirit to her; if Magdalene had had a love affair with Christ; if at the wedding Christ had, between wines, explored the bosom of one of the bridesmaids and St. John's bottom, wondering if he would remain faithful to John; how different our painters, sculptors, and poets would be, with what a different tone we would speak of the charms which played such a great and marvelous role in the history of our religion and of our God; with what a different eye we would look at the beauty to which we owe our birth, the incarnation of the Saviour, and the grace of our redemption.¹⁰ Diderot's vision of the world--since-Eden turned upside-down is, to say the least, extraordinary, not so much because it represents the nadir of taste and a rather embarrassingly dogged prurience, but because he sees in Christian mythology so many more voluptuous possibilities than it actually delivers; so that it appeals neither to his reason nor to his senses. This subject is, of course, close to Diderot's heart, and his breathlessness comes through in his style. One is tempted to observe that the passage is longer than the Begats, but without the suspense. There is suspense, however: where, oh where, is the independent clause? Not even a serpent for comic relief.

One is at a loss to evaluate Diderot's conviction on the question of Christian art and its inferiority to ancient art, when con-

fronted with his remark from the Salon of 1763:

Qu'on me dise, après cela, que notre mythologie prête moins à la peinture que celle des Anciens! Peut-être la Fable offre-t-elle plus de sujets doux et agréables; peut-être n'avons-nous rien à comparer, en ce genre, . . . mais le sang que l'abominable croix a fait couler de tous côtés est bien d'une autre ressource pour le pinceau tragique.¹¹

If the function of art is--as it was for the theater--to teach virtue and extoll morality, the pictorial display of fanaticism would surely have the didactic function of teaching tolerance by inverse example:

Étale-moi les scènes sanglantes du fanatisme.¹²

It would also have an aesthetically pleasing dramatic quality:

Les crimes que la folie du Christ a commis et fait commettre sont autant de grands drames et bien d'une autre difficulté que la descente d'Orphée aux enfers . . .¹³

But for all its dramatic quality, it would still lack that pagan savor and the pragmatist in Diderot is once again at odds with the pagan aesthete in him:

Pour notre paradis, j'avoue qu'il est aussi plat que ceux qui l'habitent et le bonheur qu'ils y goûtent. Nulle comparaison entre nos saints, nos apôtres et nos vierges tristement extasiés, et ces banquets de l'Olympe . . . Sans contredit j'aime mieux voir la croupe, la gorge et les beaux bras de Vénus que le triangle mystérieux; mais où est, là-dedans, le sujet tragique que je cherche? . . . Jamais aucune religion ne fut aussi féconde en crimes que le christianisme . . . pas une ligne de son histoire qui ne soit ensanglantée. C'est une belle chose que le crime et dans l'histoire, et dans la poésie, et sur la toile et sur le marbre.¹⁴

Diderot feels, then, that nothing is instructive which does not first appeal to the senses; which in turn creates a dilemma whose only possible resolution is not pictorially feasible: Christianity for content; nudes for form. Appealing it might be, but for instruction, one would have to look elsewhere. As desiderata, Diderot can neither reconcile nor choose between homely and modest portrayals of virtue--all the more necessary, having discarded the spiritual principles of religion--and his equally zealous relish for Olympian flesh and Christian blood. The polarity is at work throughout the Salon commentaries as well, where Diderot, transcending consistency, lavishes praise upon the neo-classical taxidermy of Vien and at the same time, upon the homiletic confections of Greuze. And in 1781, after the last of the Salons, he will write that he would gladly forego the pleasures of seeing beautiful nudities if he could hasten the moment when painting and sculpture and the other fine arts would inspire virtue and purify morals.

Il me semble que j'ai assez vu de tétons et de fesses; ces objets séduisants contrarient l'émotion de l'âme, par le trouble qu'ils jettent dans les sens.¹⁵

Un tableau, une statue licencieuse est peut-être plus dangereuse qu'un mauvais livre; la première de ces imitations est plus voisine de la chose.¹⁶

In spite of the fact that the above two quotations stand as a disclaimer to Diderot's fondness for marble, canvas, and poetic flesh, they cannot be taken as a retraction of that fondness, but simply as the underside of a continuing and circular dialogue between pragmatic moral principles and a Graeco-Roman love of pleasure. Since no clear-cut understanding of Diderot's critical values can be

drawn from such inconsistency--except for the fact that his values alternate between the pleasure-loving and the puritanical--one must look beyond the contradictions to find an underlying concern; this will prove to be more productive of a positive conception of his value judgments--namely, that as a critic, Diderot is still a philosophe, and he remains consistently and fundamentally more concerned with subject matter than with artistic technique, more concerned with what the artist has done than with how or why he did it, more concerned--in other words--with practical than with aesthetic considerations. Were he to approach painting from an internal and structural standpoint rather than from an external and subjective one, the conflict would quickly lose its focus and his values would no longer do violence to each other. Whereas the twentieth-century observer might seek a truth concealed beneath the appearances, the eighteenth-century philosophe focuses his concern upon the appearances themselves; and those appearances, as we know, appeal by turns to his social consciousness and to his sensitivity to beauty.

In the essay section on composition, Diderot sets forth his ideas on subject matter, arrangement, and general tone. Once again, we can see that his concern in this regard does not center upon composition as a structural element but as an illustrational one: That the "expression" of a painting (presumably this means the sentiment or idea expressed), can be fortified through the use of accessories, Diderot illustrates with an example wherein an old gnarled tree outside a cottage would, by its presence and form, convey an impression of the inhabitant of the cottage. This kind of subtlety is, unfortunately, not consistently present throughout

his prescriptions on composition. His fondness for virtue-building brushwork, and his dictum that the canvas must present--or tell--a moral lesson all but excludes the possible exercise of any imagination; the "statement" of the tableau must be clear, and the idea must be moral; it must say something to him and there must be no doubt on his mind of what it is saying.

. . .il faut encore que ton idée ait été juste et conséquente, et que tu l'aies rendue si nettement que je ne m'y méprenne pas, ni moi, ni les autres, ni ceux qui sont à présent, ni ceux qui viendront après.¹⁷

One antithesis of this statement occurred in 1763 when he wrote in a tone of exasperation, having just seen a kaleidoscopic canvas by Boucher:

Entre tant de détails, . . .l'oeil ne sait où s'arrêter . . .Quand on écrit, faut-il tout écrire? quand on peint, faut-il tout peindre? De grâce, laissez quelque chose à suppléer par mon imagination.¹⁸

Despite the apparent contradiction here--and this is not to minimize the fact that a contradiction does exist--a closer examination will reveal an explanation more basic than the fact that Diderot cannot make up his mind. In seeking a solution, we are confronted once again with his dual set of values--the aesthetic or sensuous and the practical: the problem is not necessarily that he cannot decide between frivolity and profundity--but simply that one set of values will not do for the understanding or discussion of both types of painting. He retains one set of values for the depiction of virtue; this is no place for implicit statements--they must be, rather, so obvious that the man of the street can understand them. The more

sensuous themes call up the other value system; such themes have no need to be explicit; they are calculated to appeal to the senses and not to the mind; they must stir the imagination, whereas "moral" painting must leave no room for doubt. Taken alone in its context, then, his statement from the essay that what is on canvas should not be equivocal or indecisive, is dogmatic, does not allow for extenuating circumstances, has, therefore, very limited application, and comes back to haunt him whenever he feels the need for imagination. For this reason, Diderot's criticisms of art can be understood more clearly through his values as implied in the "Essay" than through his values as stated therein.

Affinities of ideas, he suggests, will determine the appropriate accessories for the painting: a violent wind, for example, is appropriate to a painting of ruins, since it would suggest the vicissitudes of life and the ephemeral nature of man and his endeavors. This perception is a valid one, and although during the course of the Salons, he often praises paintings of ruins that are nothing so much as paintings of ruins, his idea is sound and in 1781, after the last of the Salons, he will write again that if the painting of ruins does not remind him of the vicissitudes of life and the vanity of the works of man, the painter has created nothing but a formless pile of stones.¹⁹

Continuing his discussion of composition and accessories, he supposes a tomb as the central figure of a painting; a traveller and his dog will be resting on its steps, a woman will sit there nursing a child, and other travellers will stop and read the inscription on the tomb while their horses browse on daisies. The intent in this instance is to convey the notion that life is a voyage and the tomb

a place of rest. But here also the subtlety of his early suggestions on accessories is gone; even to an eighteenth-century mind, the presence of a tomb carries with its rather dark dignity the equally dark susceptibility to desecration. This desecration could be as fortuitous as pigeon-droppings or as ludicrous as Diderot has envisioned it: the roosting of master and dog and the nursing of a child on the steps of a tomb conveys roughly the same impression as the sight of a bust of Beethoven sporting a fedora. As for the tomb and its significance, Diderot would have painting become the medium of the cliché, expressing itself in hackneyed symbols; if, as he says in the Salon of 1761,²⁰ the sight of ruins and tombs should inspire reverie and melancholy, he should also have been aware, concerned as he was with taste, that a failure to use that faculty judiciously could also result in catastrophe; to Diderot, this tableau might connote repose; to others, a rather distasteful glimpse of the end of the trail. This is one flaw in singling out painting as the medium for communicating pithy maxims and pious saws: the same painting will convey different "maxims" to different people--if it successfully conveys any at all--depending entirely upon the personal experience and perceptive awareness of the beholder. For this reason, art cannot be a didactic medium and remain art: it ceases to be expression and becomes illustration instead. Paintings, for many of the people who look at them, are either pretty or ugly. Diderot has apparently glimpsed an idea of this nature when he says toward the end of the same essay:

Et quelle différence encore de la sensation de l'homme ordinaire à celle du philosophe!²¹

He has recognized the possible difference in degrees of perception, but he never fully grasps--or acknowledges--its implications, whether of the ultimate or inevitable fate it spells for his envisioned pedagogic painting or of the possibilities it suggests for the positive and instructive role of a critic. The man who is insensitive to nature, moreover, will likewise be insensitive to art, further restricting the scope of didactic effectiveness:

La nature, ni l'art qui la copie, ne disent rien à
l'homme stupide ou froid, peu de chose à l'homme ignorant.²²

But Diderot merely encounters the difficulty, mentions it, and moves on without altering his idea of the artist as instructor.

His next point is that the painting of a theatrical scene--that is, of a stage and actors--is insufferable and nothing short of cruel satire. In the arts of imitation, there must be something savage, brutal, striking, and vast, but there should be no mixture, in painting, of real and allegorical figures which, he says, gives to history the aura of a "conte".²³ Following Diderot's reasoning in this case by applying what we know of his dual value system, we may presume that he means that the interposition of imaginary figures--no matter how real may be the qualities they represent--detracts from the explicit statement required of an historical painting. Unless the allegorical figures in question wear their titles like banners across their respective chests, there is room for interpretation of just who or what they may be. We may understand from this that Diderot's insistence upon the purity of the genre derives not from aesthetic but from very practical considerations.

Painting has in common with poetry the fact that it must contain

morals.²⁴ Sixteen years later, he would mention poetry, this time with reference to taste in general:

On retrouve les poètes dans les peintres, et les peintres dans les poètes.²⁵

This, in turn, is reminiscent of Leonardo's statement:

Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is painting which is heard but not seen.²⁶

Diderot goes on to remind everyone who takes up pen, brush, or chisel, that their goal is to render virtue attractive, vice repulsive; to celebrate great actions, to honor wounded virtue, to assail unscathed vice, and to frighten tyrants²⁷--in short, by carrying the implications to their logical conclusion--to fulfill the functions of secular priests.

Demanding to see spread before him bloody scenes of fanaticism, Diderot exhorts artists thereby to show both to sovereigns and to populace what they can expect from the "sacred preachers of lies", saying that while the figures themselves may be mute, they make him speak with himself.²⁸ This alone might be considered as the raison d'être for all art--the inducement to contemplation--but Diderot does not use it in that context, because for him, as we have seen, art needs not so much a raison d'être as it does a practical application.

Having dictated some principles of imitative art, Diderot casts another sidelong glance at antiquity: he reflects that nudes, which were associated at that time with the classical and rococo styles and content, recall a remote, a simpler and more innocent age, with untamed morals, more appropriate to the arts of imita-

tion.²⁹ The natural state, with its "untamed morals" connotes drama to Diderot--that arresting and absorbing quality that also, ideally, stimulates the imagination and at the same time instructs the mind; but the transition from theory to practice will show the very real difficulty of portraying innocence, simplicity, nudity, and savagery --with a moral lesson thrown in--all on one canvas. Instructive art must, of course, appeal to the mind, but it is useless if no one pays it the slightest heed, hence the need for some arresting dramatic quality; the difficulty of the theory lies once again in its practical application: the dramatic and poetic qualities required to lure the observer into enlightened ways conflict directly with explicit statement.

The sensualist then yields to the pragmatist as Diderot asks:

Mais que signifient tous ces principes, si le goût est une chose de caprice, et s'il n'y a aucune règle éternelle, immuable, du beau?

Si le goût est une chose de caprice, s'il n'y a aucune règle du beau, d'où viennent donc ces émotions . . . qui forcent de nos yeux les pleurs de la joie, de la douleur, de l'admiration . . . ?³⁰

Diderot realizes--at times, as this example shows--that emotion cannot be evoked or explained according to rule. In this instance, he attempts to integrate emotions and aesthetics, to approximate sensitivity and intellect, and to understand one in terms of the elements of the other. Taste is indeed a capricious thing, conditioned by many factors of background. But what disturbs Diderot in this example is not so much the unpredictability of taste itself as the fact that he sometimes likes paintings which his principles indicate he ought not to like at all. Diderot goes on, in the next paragraph, to attempt to define the aesthetic qualities by associating them in

a context:

Le vrai, le bon et le beau se tiennent de bien près.
Ajouter à l'une des deux premières qualités quelque
circonstance rare, éclatante, et le vrai sera beau,
et le bon sera beau.³¹

Having established the context, Diderot considers next a definition
of taste:

Une facilité acquise par des expériences réitérés, à
saisir le vrai ou le bon, avec la circonstance qui le
rend beau, et d'en être promptement et vivement tou-
ché.³²

The definition, unfortunately, is circular, since it is constructed
from the original unknown quantities; but it does reveal that in his
insistence on "some rare and striking circumstance", he seeks a dra-
matic quality in beauty, rather than a spiritual or moral quality,
and yet expects it to produce a moral effect. Those with an onto-
genetic turn of mind who want to see a method or at least an evo-
lution in Diderot's thought on this aesthetic troica would not be
cheered to find that after sixteen years, in his "Detached Thoughts
on Painting" (1781) only the wording is changed, and his "aesthetics"
still consists not in analysis but in definition:

Le beau n'est que le vrai, relevé par des circonstances
possibles, mais rares et merveilleuses . . . Le bon n'est
que l'utile, relevé par des circonstances possibles et
merveilleuses.³³

But notions of such ethereal purity can only exist in a vacuum and
need, therefore, some rather special referents before they can take
on any meaning whatsoever. The addition of the term "useful", is,
therefore, a good stroke in that it brings things once more earth-

ward, but as a pragmatic value, simply inserted, it is inadequate to lend meaning or give real focus to the aesthetic values. The passage is significant, though, in showing the dual direction of his thought: the aesthetic and the pragmatic, the eternal verities and the temporal. Diderot loves beauty and virtue, but he loves productivity and usefulness with equal zeal; as a result, he has tried to work productivity into that vast scheme of temporal and eternal verities, but as argument, as definition, and as logic, it does not withstand examination. The continuing, circular dialogue between mundane and ethereal values does, however, give insight into the confusion--that for more than twenty years existed in his mind --as to the nature of art, the role of aesthetics, and their relationship to moral values.

Sensitivity is, of course, necessary to taste, but it can also be a hindrance, according to Diderot; the capacity for discernment diminishes with increasing sensitivity, since a person possessed of extreme sensitivity is moved by everything. In this case, reason can be helpful in rectifying a hasty judgment, but the conclusion of his essay is that the only way to appreciate a work of genius is to compare it immediately with Nature, and that the only one who knows how to do that is another man of genius.³⁴ This is not altogether satisfying as a conclusion; on the other hand, there is, perhaps, no reason to suppose that it is a conclusion rather than simply another idea that happens to appear at the end of the essay. At any rate, he seems to be relegating art to the tender mercies of genius, both for giving it its original content and for truly appreciating the merit of that content. His formula of "comparing it immediately with Nature" is characteristically vague, and

it is difficult to determine whether he is prescribing a resemblance to actual natural occurrence, or whether instead he simply means that the work of art is not something that can be understood on its own terms, but which must be experienced in a context larger than itself before it can have meaning. It does not require a genius, however, to condemn or praise a painting strictly according to the degree of resemblance it bears to "real life". For many people this might be the only criterion in judging a painting, but as with his essay, Diderot's Salon commentaries will show that he does not limit himself to this, or any other, single criterion; renderings of Olympian dalliance and frolic which are mythological rather than real or natural, often move him to warm applause.

Perhaps the clearest means of understanding Diderot's use of the word--and the concept-- of Nature is by considering it as a designation and principle, representing an alternative to formulated rules as a standard of judgment, even though the "formulated rules" remain, for the most part, unspecified. His insistence upon nature as model arises as much from the influence of classical writers and currently popular ideas as from Diderot's impatience with what he might call academic art; but the Academy remains a favorite target, with whose products he contrasts the daily experience of life which, "through its subtle calculations, creates elements of geometry that the Academy could never grasp."³⁵ The Academy represents for Diderot the omnibus category for a monolith of atrophy, intolerance, and reaction; yet nearly all the painters whose paintings he discussed in the Salon commentaries were members of the Academy in one capacity or another. Some he liked; some he disliked; nevertheless, Diderot's broadsides against "academic art"

remained broad, and his grievances were never specified. Sixteen years later, in his "Detached Thoughts on Painting", he asks Aristotle's pardon, and submits that it is vicious criticism to deduce exclusive rules from perfect works, as if there weren't an infinity of ways to please.³⁶ He is not this tolerant in actual practice, but his constitutional distaste for rules as strictures remains constant. As constant as his pragmatism; because later in the same essay he states that no art can reach any degree of perfection without practice and without a large number of public schools of drawing and design.³⁷ Diderot disliked formulated rules and yet, in nearly every paragraph throughout the essay, he has attempted either to formulate rules of his own or to apply notions he already accepts; the difference is that they are of a personal--and not of an institutional--nature. Nevertheless, in proposing schools of drawing and design as a solution to the problem of creating a viable national art similar to that of the Ancients, Diderot fails to see that technique, as an educational commodity, is much easier to manage than inspiration; that the tension between spontaneity and standardization--between the natural and the academic--cannot be alleviated by more and better institutions, but must eventually be resolved within the individual artist, because it is he--and not the rule-thumping theoretician--who is the only rapport between the thought and the image.

THE SALONS: 1759-1781

DIDEROT'S TASTE AND METHOD

Diderot's commentaries on the biennial Salons of the Academy were destined for the Correspondance littéraire, a miscellaneous informative sheet circulated to titled francophiles in Germany, Sweden, Poland, and Russia by his friend Grimm, a German-Parisian man of letters who made a profession of collecting--for his select subscribers--notes of literary and artistic events in Paris. These art exhibitions had been established in 1737, in a sense freeing art from the confines of the Academy, and exposing it to the public. The Correspondance littéraire which contained Diderot's commentaries,¹ however, was not published until 1812 and thus had no immediate influence within his own country.

The relatively brief and sketchy Salon of 1759 coincides with Diderot's novitiate as an art critic. The Salons of 1761, 63, 65, and 67 are much longer, and treatment of paintings discussed is increasingly thorough with the passing years. Their length prompted Grimm to complain and to urge his friend to abbreviate his comments and observations, since all had to be copied again by hand once they were received. Diderot, who claimed to be suffering from the lassitude of encroaching age, said that Grimm's request would be an easy matter to arrange. He was also busy with other projects, and the Salons from 1769 to 1781 are accordingly brief.

Not only do Diderot's Salon commentaries provide us with a contemporary view of the art of his time and with an illustration of his

progress and difficulties in becoming a critic, but they also serve as concrete illustrations of the application of his critical values which underlay the principles enumerated in his "Essay". The substance of those principles might be summarized as follows: (1) Neither formulated rules nor the paintings of other masters--but Nature itself-- must be the model for art; this is not so much a call for realism in the stylistic sense, as it is a plea for artistic freedom from the strictures of rules. (2) The artist is a man of genius; (but this idealized attitude does not cause Diderot to approach the paintings of the Academy painters with anything resembling deference or awe). (3) Christianity is insipid, on the one hand, offering nothing to appeal to the senses; on the other hand, it is a veritable artistic wellspring with its ruck of episodes dealing in fanaticism and bloodshed, whose explicit depiction would pit the practice of Christianity against itself by disgusting its followers and leading them away--a translation, in effect, from superstition to knowledge. (4) Cold, stupid, or ignorant people will neither receive nor understand the intended message. (5) All artists have a social duty to disseminate moral ideology. From his discussions in connection with these principles, we may conclude that Diderot has a dual set of values and envisions a dual, and conflicting, role for art--as free expression and as propaganda--that is, as a medium for the diffusion of ideas. The concept of utility, which is fundamental to his system of values, does not appear "officially"--that is as a formulation--until 1781 in his sequel to the Salons, the "Detached Thoughts on Painting".² But while utility may not yet have been formulated as a principle for the judgment of painting, it appeared as a value--an unspecified or unnamed criterion--in many of his critiques.

Having formulated these principles bearing on the subject matter of painting, Diderot does not on that account remain bound by them. As general observations and opinions, they have little potential for specific application, but the value systems that formed them can be seen to be at work in his "capricious taste". By the time Diderot wrote the "Essai", moreover, he had covered four Salons as Grimm's Parisian correspondent, but in the beginning--in 1759--his theoretical preparation was literary and his technical preparation practically nonexistent. Such a lacuna does not make him a philistine by any means, but its existence does explain why so often his critiques seem more to be reactions than judgments. On the other hand, the spontaneous candor of "I don't like it" cannot be dismissed ungratefully.

The paintings discussed in this section were chosen because (1) they form a representative sampling of the various genres exhibited in the Salons and show Diderot's critical method at work in a varied yet restricted field, and (2) illustrate, through their several examples that Diderot does not proceed from a standpoint of structure, theme, or style, to understand the paintings in terms of the idiom of the artist.

SELECTED COMMENTARIES

Although some apologists would present Diderot to the world as a humble, well-meaning, magnanimous critic who looked for beauty instead of faults, they do so by camouflaging the abundantly-illustrated fact that he was also a master of insult, an ability which probably owed the candor of its expression to its anonymity. The humility is

reserved for opening and concluding remarks to each Salon, but the merciless apostrophes and asides are an integral part of the text, as a chronological survey will show:

Voici, mon ami, les idées qui m'ont passé par la tête à la vue des tableaux qu'on a exposés cette année au Salon. Il y en aura de vraies, il y en aura de fausses. Tantôt vous me trouverez trop sévère, tantôt trop indulgent. (Introduction., Salon 1761)¹

(Of J.-B. Pierre) Je ne sais ce que cet homme devient. Il est riche; il a eu de l'éducation; il a fait le voyage de Rome; on dit qu'il a de l'esprit; rien ne le presse de finir un ouvrage: d'où vient donc la médiocrité de presque toutes ses compositions? (Text, Salon 1761)²

Oui, j'aimerais mieux perdre un doigt que de contrister d'honnêtes gens qui se sont épuisés de fatigue pour nous plaire. (Conclusion, Salon 1763)³

Parce qu'un tableau n'aura pas fait notre admiration, faut-il qu'il devienne la honte et le supplice de l'artiste? (Conclusion, Salon 1763)⁴

Qu'un morceau de toile soit barbouillé ou qu'un cube de marbre soit gâté, qu'est-ce que cette perte en comparaison du soupir amer qui s'échappe du cœur de l'homme affligé? (Conclusion, Salon 1763)⁵

Réservez notre fouet pour les méchants, les dangereux, les ingrats, les hypocrites, les concussionnaires, les tyrans, les fanatiques, et les autres fléaux du genre humain. (Conclusion, Salon 1763)⁶

Cela est misérable . . . Cachez-moi cela, M. Hallé: on dirait que vous avez barbouillé cette toile d'une glace aux pistaches. (Text, Salon 1765)⁷

Vous venez à temps, Chardin, pour récréer mes yeux que votre confrère Challe avait mortellement affligés. (Text, Salon 1765)⁸

Voici mes critiques et mes éloges. Je loue, je blâme d'après ma sensation particulière qui ne fait pas loi. Dieu ne demanderait de nous que la sincérité avec nous-mêmes. Les artistes voudront bien n'être pas plus exigeants. (Introduction, Salon 1767)⁹

Le fils de Vernet est un des pointus les plus redoutables. Il entre au Sallon. Il voit deux tableaux. Il demande de qui ils sont. On lui répond de Hallé; et il ajoute vous en. Allez vous en. Cela est aussi bien jugé que mal dit. Je vous le répète sans pointe; M. Hallé, si vous n'en savez pas faire davantage, allez-vous en. (Text, Salon 1767)¹⁰

Monsieur Baudouin, vous me rappelez l'abbé Cossart, curé de St-Rémi à Dieppe. Un jour qu'il était monté à l'orgue de son église, il mit par hasard le pied sur une pédale, l'instrument résonna, et le curé Cossart s'écria: 'Ah! ah! je joue de l'orgue; cela n'est pas si difficile que je croyais.' M. Baudouin, vous avez mis le pied sur la pédale, et puis c'est tout. (Text, Salon 1767)¹¹

(Of "Head of an Old Man" by Fragonard) M. Fragonard, quand on s'est fait un nom, il faut avoir un peu plus d'amour-propre. (Text, Salon 1767)¹²

It is easy to see that sometimes he is mordant, and sometimes his prose rings with all the fervor of a malevolent revivalist-gone-berserk. And it suggests that the critical profession was deprived of one of its most picturesque and engaging devices by the advent of libel legislation. But Diderot had no personal axe to grind with the painters themselves, and his commentaries were not intended for reading by the general public. He even shows traces of a live-and-let-live turn of mind in the observation that just because a painting has not pleased us, it ought not necessarily to be the shame of the painter. But Diderot approaches art as a philosophe with all the inclinations of a social reformer whose program does not leave much room--in the actual practice of art criticism--for a tolerant

relativity. An exemplary object of Diderot's revolving ire is Boucher who, in 1765, succeeded Van Loo as director of the Academy. He was a fashionable painter of the time who catered to social climbers and courtesans with fleshy, idyllic scenes. It was useless to look to Boucher for a moral, of course, because his real subjects were charm and prettiness; he was a first-rate painter in a second-rate genre--wish fulfillment. In the course of twenty years, Diderot's opinion of him has come full-circle:

Quelles couleurs! quelle variété! quelle richesse d'objets et d'idées! Cet homme a tout, excepté la vérité. (1761)¹³

. . .ceux qui sont étrangers au vrai goût, à la vérité, aux idées justes, à la sévérité de l'art. Comment résisteraient-ils au saillant, aux pompons, aux nudités, au libertinage, à l'épigramme de Boucher? . . .Les gens d'un grand goût, d'un goût sévère et antique, n'en font nul cas. (1761)¹⁴

Et puis une confusion d'objets entassés les uns sur les autres, si déplacés, si disparates, que c'est moins le tableau d'un homme sensé que le rêve d'un fou. (1765)¹⁵

J'ose dire que cet homme ne sait vraiment ce que c'est que la grâce; j'ose dire qu'il n'a jamais connu la vérité; j'ose dire que les idées de délicatesse, de l'honnêteté, d'innocence, de simplicité, lui sont devenues presque étrangères . . .qu'il n'a pas vu un instant la nature . . .qu'il est sans goût. (1765)¹⁶

J'ai dit trop de mal de Boucher; je me rétracte. (1781)¹⁷

Having given a moment to a survey of Diderot's inconsistencies, it is time for an examination of his method. The modern reader may avail himself of illustrated editions of Diderot's text, but Grimm's subscribers could not, and as a result, most of the critiques begin

with a routine description of the painting: who or what is placed at left or right, foreground or background. After the description, the judgment. All his notions, from his admiration for the Ancients to his appreciation of filial virtue occur, regroup, and intermingle in the course of the critiques.

Summing up his Salon commentaries for the first session, 1759, Diderot sighs, "How amazing the Ancients are!" And the Moderns? "All design and no idea."¹⁸ Diderot maintained from the beginning of the first Salon, that there was more to painting than arranging figures, that the first and most important thing was to find a great idea; he accorded the artistic virtue of *idea* to the Ancients, seeing little more than wall decoration in what was before him. But the important consideration here is to understand the terms of Diderot's comparison: he had never seen any ancient painting, since none existed. At the time of the 1759 Salon, moreover, the Roman frescoes and mosaics at Pompeii and Herculaneum were still relatively unknown, since Winckelmann's famous work publicizing and praising them did not appear in print until 1764. Accordingly, Diderot's notion of ancient art was necessarily limited to sculpture: to Roman copies and Roman originals as well as to his personal idea--derived from wide reading of classical writers--of what ancient art must have been like. But in ancient times, the word was more highly esteemed than the image, and even during the Middle Ages, painting was one of the crafts, superintended by the guilds, and not an "art". Diderot's judgment, therefore, is based on an essentially unknown quantity: the real nature of ancient art. The quality, real or imagined, that he seems to cherish above all in "ancient art" is not sublimity of execution but

sublimity of concept, with an exclusive emphasis on an intellectual idea.

In 1761, Diderot praises a bust of Falconet; the two adjectives--and, presumably, criteria--are "beau" and "ressemblant".¹⁹ Still, he says, art should be sublime, not just tolerable, and the best way to get at that is to disdain French costumery; Grimm's appended comment in 1761 contains the further observation that to sculpt a child in French costume is a cursed, flat thing befitting a barbarian or Gothic sculptor.²⁰ Such calculated arrogance in art is harmful to any pretensions to the sublime, unless the word and concept of sublime connote only that clothes make the man. In comparing the French with the Ancients, then, Diderot was essentially comparing painting with sculpture, which is not quite fair. But the comparison goes beyond that: Diderot's admiration for the Ancients is an affair of the heart--and head--even though it is not based on an accurate idea of ancient art; he is drawn more to the historical or literary person than to the qualities of the image as art:

Qui est-ce qui attache vos regards sur un buste de Marc-Aurèle ou de Trajan, de Sénèque ou de Cicéron? Est-ce le mérite de ciseau de l'artiste ou l'admiration de l'homme? . . . il faut qu'un portrait soit ressemblant pour moi, et bien peint pour la postérité.²¹

Another misconception Diderot brought with him into the Salons was of the nature of the so-called creative process itself. We have already seen one characterization drawn from his "Essay on Painting" of 1765, which conveys an unfortunate image of the artist in all his grape-eyed, slack-jawed frailty, daubing away.²² His rendering of the Artist in the Salon of 1761 verges to a lesser degree on

caricature, but in both cases, the element of caricature is merely Diderot's way of dramatizing what in his opinion ought to be the artist's physical and emotional involvement in the creative process:

Avant de prendre son pinceau, il faut avoir frissonné vingt fois de son sujet, avoir perdu le sommeil, s'être levé pendant la nuit, et avoir couru en chemise et pieds nus jeter sur le papier ses esquisses à la lueur d'une lampe de nuit.²³

Although gymnastics and inspiration do not necessarily coincide, Diderot's concept of the artist plying his art does convey his belief that the artist should be enthusiastic, spontaneous, and never beyond the grips of his "idea". Realistically speaking, however, even a session of feverish creativity is made possible only through an accumulation of knowledge and skill on the part of the artist, and not through trance-like submission to forces beyond his control.

One of the first paintings he discusses in 1759 is "The Bathers" by Carle Van Loo.²⁴ He and other minor artists who labored in the shadow of Watteau, Chardin, Fragonard, et al, had found, in their own work, a visual compromise between the seventeenth-century academic tradition and the demands of the new taste for fantasy and eroticism. In a moment of largesse, Diderot once said that the critic should suggest improvements in the work under critical examination, and in this instance, he is as good as his word: With regard to the bather on the left (see Fig. 1), he does not like the folded fingers of the hand, and suggests that they be extended or that the face be made to rest on the flat of the hand. But he has not looked at it long enough. If her hand--with or without the ex-

tended fingers--were moved, it would throw her entirely off-balance; the resting of her face on her hand would be a theatrical gesture and imply more meaning than the painting actually delivers. Even with its defects, however, he finds it to be a "voluptuous tableau", what with the bare feet, the thighs, breasts, and buttocks, and admits that it is perhaps not so much the talent of the artist that holds him as it his own vice.

Diderot condemns a monastery scene by Jeurat: "Carthusians in Meditation,"²⁵ because it does not convey his conception of what a monastery scene ought to do to him: it lacks silence, savagery, divine justice, an idea, profound adoration, ecstasy, and terror. And he suggests that since the painter's imagination has obviously failed him, he should have gone among the Carthusians to see things first-hand. Despairing of such painters, whose works lack "truth"--in this case, silence, savagery, ecstasy, and terror --Diderot writes:

S'il y a peu de gens qui sachent regarder un tableau,
y a-t-il bien des peintres qui sachent regarder la
nature?²⁶

As a purview of the artistic affairs of the time, the question is profound indeed, but even Nature could hardly produce such a profusion of theatrical moods and props in one location, as he has specified. Diderot sometimes condemns theatricality, sometimes praises it without naming it, and sometimes exacts it when it is not there. The latter point is in operation in his judgment of "Carthusians".

Two years later, in his discussion of L.-M. Van Loo's "Portrait of the King",²⁷ (Fig. 2) Diderot suggests that all the ermine

around the upper part of the figure makes it seem shorter, and that this is the wrong kind of clothing to show the majesty of a king. The problem of the artist in such a case is to paint a picture of the king that is, unmistakably, a picture of the king and not, perhaps, a picture of the local grocer who has just won a lottery prize. The element of majesty must be emphasized while at the same time pomposity and ostentation must be kept to a minimum or eliminated if the artist is to strike that difficult balance between the sublime and the ridiculous. He accomplishes this primarily through the use of accessories that are recognizably regal, and ermine is a standard item in the royal sartorial paraphernalia, since for centuries it has symbolized the honor and purity peculiar to the king's exalted station. The ermine, the fleurs de lis, the scepter, and the stately classical columns in the background, as well as the presence of the throne--all are accessories which suggest the personage of the king. Compositionally, however, the actual person of the king is more difficult to manage; since kings traditionally wear more clothing than other people anyway, the structural problem is to make the king look as though he is actually wearing all the heavy drapery and not as though he has just emerged from beneath it, planting his scepter triumphantly on terra firma. While ermine is appropriate kingly garb, therefore, it must be handled in such a way, compositionally, that it does not look as heavy as it actually is, and Diderot's objection to its heaviness is well-founded. The sight of the royal thigh beneath all the yardage of fluff is reassurance that the king is, in fact, there; but the mass of drapery on the floor at his left detracts from the verticality that would best serve to convey an impression

of loftiness and majesty: it exerts instead a downward pull and even the vertical accents of the columns and throne do not preserve the figure of the king from the relentless encroachment of swish-swash. As for Diderot, in spite of his objections, he will list this among the excellent paintings in his recapitulation of the Salon of 1761.

Concerning "The Publication of the Peace, 1749" by Le Romain, Diderot says that he has never approved of mixing real and allegorical figures; that the real ones lose their "vérité" next to the allegorical ones, which in turn lend an obscurity to the entire composition. Diderot had an acute distaste for all such paintings, although he readily admitted to their redeeming qualities, when he could discern any. Their very obscurity invariably sparked his imagination to outrageous comparisons which tend to endow the paintings under consideration with much more life than they originally possessed. In "Publication", the figure of Peace descends from the sky to present an olive branch to the king. Included among the allegorical figures are Generosity, Discord, and a couple of rivers. Unimpressed by the awesome pretensions of the subject-matter, Diderot computes its actual, if not intended, effect:

On prendrait au premier coup d'oeil le monarque pour
Thésée qui revient victorieux du Minotaure, ou plu-
tôt pour Bacchus qui revient de la conquête de l'Inde;
car il a l'air un peu ivre.²⁸

Besides creating obscurity of meaning, the juxtaposition of real and allegorical figures detracts from the dignity of the real figures because they appear "flat and ridiculous" while the figures from antique legend or mythology evoke pleasant historical or

literary associations. Finally, this division between real and allegorical figures does violence to the unity of the picture:

Le contraste de ces figures antiques et modernes
ferait croire que le tableau est un composé de deux
pièces rapportées, l'une d'aujourd'hui, et l'autre
qui fut peinte il y a quelque mille ans.²⁹

Nevertheless, Diderot admires the artist's rendering of certain figures, declares that it has been painted boldly and forcefully, and advises Grimm not to miss it.

Diderot brings out his big guns for his discussion of J.-B. Pierre's "Descent from the Cross". (Fig. 3) He begins with a lament of Pierre's dogged mediocrity and then finishes him off with an accusation of plagiarism and a withering comparison with Carrache, who although Diderot gives no further indication as to his identity--was Annibale Carracci, sixteenth-century Italian eclectic who founded a flourishing academy of art at Bologna, and whose artistic ambition consisted of establishing a standard for recognizing and formulating what was best in the art of the past, and of illustrating that standard in his own work. The Carracci painting in question (Fig. 4) hung in the Palais-Royal and, Diderot submits, was undoubtedly well known to J.-B. Pierre. Diderot goes on to apostrophize Pierre and to cite the following similarities: In each painting, the Mother of Christ is seated; in each, she is dying of grief; all the action of the other figures centers upon this grief; the head of the Son rests in the Mother's lap; the other women are alarmed at the peril of the dying Mother. Diderot's comparison continues with the observation that from the background of Carracci's painting, St. Anne rushes toward her

daughter screaming, her face a mixture of traces of long-standing sorrow and despair, but that since Pierre has not dared to copy the master to such an extent, he has instead created the same effect by placing an old man in the background of his picture. Having injured Pierre with his enumeration of the similarities between his painting and that of Carracci, Diderot goes on to add insult by considering the differences: Pierre's Christ looks like the victim of a drowning or an execution, whereas Carracci's is full of nobility; Pierre's Virgin, moreover, is cold and contorted, compared to Carracci's, and Diderot cites the following properties of Carracci's Virgin as proof: Her motionless hand resting on the Son's chest, her drawn face, fainting air, half-opened mouth, and closed eyes. After all this, Diderot dispatches him with a stern rebuke:

Sachez, monsieur Pierre, qu'il ne faut pas copier,
ou copier mieux.³⁰

Actual comparison of the two paintings weakens Diderot's accusation considerably. The crucifixion is a traditional subject in painting, as is the descent, which suffices in itself to make accusations of plagiarism rather difficult to substantiate. Diderot has noticed that Pierre has placed an old man in the picture instead of St. Anne, but he has missed two of the most important physical properties that distinguish Pierre's offering from that of Carracci: (1) the shape--that is, the actual length/width dimensions of the canvas--and (2) the presence, in Pierre's painting, of the cross itself. Pierre's elongated canvas, combined with the dominating presence of the cross gives the major emphasis to verticality; whereas the emphasis in Carracci is horizontal: no one is standing

--a motif which the trees along the horizon repeat abstractly in their patterns of curved and broken lines. But the basis of Carracci's design is in the emphatic diagonal extending from lower right to upper left and created by the supine inclination of the body of Christ and, in turn, of His Mother. The diagonal movement, then, extends from the feet and cloth at the lower right through Christ and His Mother and stops with the young woman behind her, (presumably the Magdalene), the direction of whose glance carries the eye and the attention to St. Anne who expresses her concern and alarm with the operative gestures of open mouth and outstretched hands. The presence of St. Anne and the woman next to her counter-balance the non-axial placement of the other three figures. Parallels and smaller accents of the main diagonal occur in the placement of the hands of all the figures except St. Anne whose hands serve structurally to unify the parallel diagonals formed by the two groups of figures. The underlying structure of the composition, then, is that of an ellipse extending diagonally from lower right to upper left. But the formal or technical excellence of a painting does not preserve it from ruin, and in the Carracci, the plethora of hands and open mouths casts a wooden theatricality on the gestures and expressions. The identical positions and expressions of Christ and His Mother, with their heads tilted back, eyes closed (mercifully), and mouths open conveys no expression of sorrow whatsoever. The static quality of strong horizontals may reinforce a statement of sorrow or death, but cannot alone create that statement, and Carracci's juxtaposition of alarmed concern and mass rigor mortis does not create it either. There is in Carracci, unfortunately, more symmetry than

sincerity, and the structural perfection of the composition is not accompanied by a corresponding depth of genuine feeling.

Pierre's composition is neither so obvious nor so simple as Carracci's. The key element of Pierre's design is the head of the Magdalene, or young woman, at the apex of the lower quadrant of the picture. The upper quadrant is dominated by the cross, whose presence in the middle distance reinforces the central position of the Magdalene by its vertical accent on the median line. The accessory figures on the left, through the linking patterns of the arms with ^{each} other and with the ladder, serve to connect the lower figure group of Christ, His Mother, and the Magdalene with the other dominant figure, which is the cross. Horizontal accents in the cross and in the basin in the right foreground emphasize the recumbent position of the body of Christ and its counterpart in the slumped position of His stunned Mother. Nearly every figure is twisted at the waist or shoulders, illustrating an element of design known as contrapposto, which contributes to the overall spiral movement that characterizes the composition, and which even acts upon the cross itself: the cross occupies, first of all, a plane which is diagonal to the foreground, beginning the twisting movement; on the far side of the cross, the wind pulls the cloth backward, continuing the twist. But the contrapposto of the old man, who alone occupies the right quadrant, repeats inversely the position of the cross, offsets its twisting motion, and returns the eye and attention once again from the background of the somber and foreboding sky to the figure group at the foot of the cross. Compositionally, the picture is a controlled exercise on the part of the artist: The psychological focus of the painting is the Mother of Christ; but from

the standpoint of structure, and not of theme, the three key figures are the Magdalene at the center; the cross itself, which occupies the upper quadrant of the picture and dominates the action below; and the old man; if the twisting movement of the composition has its vortex in the cross itself, it is the figure of the old man which serves to unify the upper and lower figure groups by offsetting the twisting motion of the cross and returning the eye to the foreground. This is all the more apparent if we imagine the cross facing in the same direction as the old man, in which case the entire complicated structure begins to lose focus. There is no stagey stiffness in Pierre's work, but rather a circular turbulence which underlies the physical and emotional atmosphere of the moment. So if Pierre borrowed from Carracci, he certainly improved upon his find, not because complicated structure is superior, necessarily, to simple structure, but because in painting, thematic content is preferable to theatrics.

If structural analysis suggests an exercise in geometry rather than the creation of a work of art, it must be borne in mind that artists in all periods have recognized the importance of mathematical values and relationships in building up their compositional patterns, from the two-dimensional universe of the Byzantine icons, to Leonardo's pyramid, Titian's right triangle, Raphael's ellipse and Poussin's stately diagonals. When Diderot discusses composition, he seems to understand the term to refer sometimes to subject matter or content, sometimes to the arrangement of the figures; he does not relate these elements to structure, however, so much as he does to ideology; as a result, he is not concerned with how a painting is put together, but with what it says, which is fine, but lacking any

structural or technical principle on which to base judgment, it is much easier to "mis-read" that statement. Far from being an exercise in geometry, a familiarity with some of the properties of composition enables one to see that much deeper into the painting before him and, most importantly, to comprehend it in the idiom of the artist. Of course, composition is thematic as well as structural, and--as can be seen from the comparison between Carracci and Pierre--good form does not necessarily presuppose good content.

Diderot's discussion of Vien's work in the Salon of 1763 provides an interesting contrast between traditional religious and neo-classical art; it also provides a telling illustration of the appeal that neo-classical art held for the educated eighteenth-century man. In his opening remarks, Diderot writes that it is so difficult to produce something even mediocre, and yet so easy to sense that mediocrity, and that this is the role of the critic, but fortunately, Diderot sees in Vien a painter whom he can praise almost without reserve, whose paintings have elegance, grace, innocence, delicacy, simplicity--all joined to a purity of design, truthful color and lifelike flesh. Diderot is, of course, strongly attracted to the subject matter provided by Antiquity, or what were--more accurately--renderings of Antiquity grounded in the contemporary imagination.

Vien's extremely bad "Wardrobe Dealer" (Fig. 5) strikes Diderot as possessing the following qualities: infinite intelligence, elegance, tranquility, finesse, and exquisite accessories; nothing is comparable for lightness of touch, and the background well characterizes the location of the scene.³¹ Alas, except for the fact that the scene and contents are too stiff and cold to melt, this

could be a snapshot from the wax museum. The flowers, incense, and masonry are more suggestive of the mausoleum than of the ancient hearth. The only thing of interest is the gesture of the cupid, and Diderot suggests that the standing woman is, in tucking up her toga, returning the salute. She is also, it should be noted, showing off the classical drape of her garment, an element which is essential to any painting with classical pretensions whose only other noteworthy quality is that it is monumentally inert.

Yet Diderot sees in it a work of delicacy and "infinite taste". Were he to judge it by his other set of standards--based upon nature as the model--he would have to condemn it. Characteristically inconsistent, he writes, in 1767:

Réformer la nature sur l'antique, c'est suivre la route inverse des Anciens qui n'en avoient point; c'est toujours travailler d'après une copie.³²

But having paid lip service to nature, he turns around and pays homage to many more mythological productions before the Salons end. Vien's work was outstanding, however, as an example of the neo-classical trend in eighteenth-century artistic thought, with its meticulous attention to archaeologically-accurate detail, as well as, of course, its conscious "imitation of the Ancients", which had perforce to be grounded in imagination; as such, it is an exemplary neo-classical production--a cross between fantasy and the classicism of academic formula. While it may strike us today as being calculated and inert, it earned a place of favor in the hearts of men like Diderot, not because it had anything to say, but because it was a little piece of antiquity-revisited. Although it was with reference to oratory that he wrote, Diderot's words--that the mind,

occupied with given and imaginary objects, will always lack fire, warmth, and depth, and only rhetoric would remain³³--might be applied with equal justice to characterize the neo-classicism of his day.

Art was reflective, in Diderot's time, of the coexistence of several currents of thought: the rococo, with its frivolity and the neo-classical with its intellectual seriousness, both provided--through wish-fulfillment and authentic reconstruction of antiquity--a means of escape from contemporary life. But there was also the cult of Nature, the simple life, the common man and concurrently--with a declining philosophical credence in religion--a renewed emphasis on morality. Genre painting--scenes of daily life--appeared in the Salons as early as 1737, but gained wider popular acceptance with the passing decades. Both its origin and its popularity were due in part to a certain moral indignation toward the frivolity and excesses of the aristocracy and partly to the fact that these paintings represented the artists' particular way of looking at the world. Greuze's work partakes largely of the former category--that of reaction against the rococo--although he had begun his career as a rococo painter. He turned to genre painting with a magic combination of didactic pretense and sentimental expression; Chardin impersonated the latter attitude, because his painting did not derive so much from philosophical persuasion as from temperament: he was a bourgeois, and the world he painted was his own world, comprehended and rendered in his own particular way. Yet for all his apparent love of simplicity and common goodness--as a study of his work will reveal--he neither preached nor patronized, and in letting his subject matter speak for itself, he established himself as a master of

eloquent understatement.

Then there is Greuze, master of overstatement and folksy anecdote. He was not only the most popular artist of his day; he was also, characteristically, the worst. He catches Diderot's eye in 1761 with "The Paralytic", which Diderot immediately appreciates as being a "tableau de mœurs". "The head of the paralytic is of a rare beauty."³⁴ (So rare, in fact, that Greuze must use the same head in at least a half-dozen more paintings.)

In the recapitulation of the Salon of 1761, Diderot discusses at length another painting by Greuze, the most popular painting of the Salon, entitled "The Father who has just paid the dowry of his Daughter". (Fig. 6) Apparently believing that one picture is worth a thousand words, Diderot proceeds to turn the scene over in print, providing dialogue, and even offering a manly wager that the fiancée (the daughter) owes her forward look to Mother Nature and not to any coalition of elastic straps. The scene, he says, is beautiful, just as it must have happened, and he tells us that the old man is saying to his future son-in-law: "Jeanette is sweet and good; she will make you happy; see that you do the same for her."³⁵ In an apparent effort to extract as much domestic pulp as possible from this situation, Greuze has pulled out all the props: the chicks on the floor in the foreground act as a counterpoint to the tear-stained mother and her brood: one chick has left its mother, brothers, and sisters, and is sitting on the saucer. Once again, Greuze seems to summon up for Diderot all the old theatrical associations, because he does not see the figures in the painting as units of a structural or thematic composition, but as actors in a drama. Theatrical effect does not, for this reason, seem inappropriate to him in a painting.

In 1763, Diderot looks at another Greuze confection, "Filial Piety", (Fig. 7) and declares:

C'est vraiment là mon homme que ce Greuze . . . D'abord ce genre me plaît; c'est la peinture morale. Quoi donc! le pinceau n'a-t-il pas été assez et trop longtemps consacré à la débauche et au vice? Ne devons-nous pas être satisfait de le voir concourir enfin avec la poésie dramatique à nous toucher, à nous instruire, à nous corriger, et à nous inviter à la vertu?³⁶

The same white-haired old man, too venerable for words, is the center of this picture; every other figure inclines toward him. Diderot mentions that the sheet hung up to dry which forms the backdrop, is a good stroke, suited both to the subject of the painting and to its general effect. And indeed, the sheet which hangs diagonally behind the figures exemplifies Greuze's expert use of structural devices to suit his compositional purposes. The son-in-law, the daughter, and the poor old faithful wife, all strain attentively in the direction of the old man, and their bodies form parallel accents to the major diagonal of the sheet above them, but the effect of the regularity of these parallels is--not surprisingly--stiff. The attitudes of their bodies and the direction of their glances carry the eye to the old man who reclines before them in frail incapacity. Greuze has further emphasized his central--and obviously, most beloved--figure, in his use of light gradation: he has a pale complexion, white hair as luminous as a halo, and rests against a light-colored bolster; all the other figures are modeled in darker tones, even the sheet--that peasant touch par excellence--that hangs above them all. The old man obviously receives all this attention and adoration with beatific gratitude. Greuze's folk epic would not be complete, however, without that

breath of the barnyard that is his signature. In the dowry episode, the hen and chicks filled the bill; in "Filial Piety", the delegate from the animal kingdom is a mother dog who gives suck in the foreground as an apparent obligato to the steady drip, drip, drip of the milk of human kindness.

During the Salon of 1767, Diderot remarks that

. . . avec du génie il est presque impossible de faire un bon tableau d'après une situation romanesque, ou même une scène dramatique; ces modèles ne sont pas assez voisins de nature; le tableau devient une imitation d'imitation.³⁷

Significantly, however, he does not think of Greuze's work in this context at all. To Diderot, Greuze's staged sermonettes are neither fictitious situations nor dramatic scenes, but life itself, and with moral lessons thrown in. He never loses his taste for Greuze, and his taste for the sentimental is faithfully summed up in his critical--or uncritical--ecstasies over "Girl Mourning her Dead Bird", in the Salon of 1765.

La jolie élégie! le joli poème! la belle idylle
Tableau délicieux! le plus agréable et peut-être le plus intéressant du Salon. Elle est de face; sa tête est appuyée sur sa main gauche: l'oiseau mort est posé sur le bord supérieur de la cage, la tête pendante, les ailes trainantes, les pattes en l'air.³⁸

Diderot proceeds to apostrophize the girl and carry on an imaginary conversation with her regarding her tears, love life, etc. So although he may sometimes disapprove of literary anecdote and mawkish theatricality in painting, it is precisely those qualities which he admires in Greuze--not as literary, but as instructive; not as mawkish, but as sweet and moral. Greuze chastises ingratitude ("The

Punished Son") and pictorially extolls generosity, industry, charity, gratitude, and faith, but the personification of any vice or virtue is a difficult thing to manage without the aid and consequent destructiveness of exaggeration. In his choice of subject matter and ambiance, Greuze shows a loving partiality to his peasant characters, but characters they remain, and one is left to wonder how much Greuze knew or understood about real people; in trying to make his characters represent admirable qualities, he has abused the tolerances of a mute medium by substituting histrionics for humanity.

Certain similarities in subject matter in Greuze and Chardin merely serve to emphasize the differences in their expressive content: In contrast to the staged incidents in Greuze's painting, those of Chardin appear as plausible events--not staged but observed --and with humor and sympathy. For Chardin, nature--or life--is people and things as they occur--ordinary and commonplace things which he sees and portrays in a special way. His works contain all the dignity and simplicity that Greuze tried in vain to convey; if Chardin succeeded where Greuze failed, it is because he speaks the proper language of the painter--through light, color, and form--- instead of borrowing the language of the stage.

The virtue that Diderot sees in Chardin's still-lives is that they are so lifelike, they do not look painted. In the Salon of 1759, he sums up Chardin's work in two words: "nature" and "truth", adding that one day his paintings would be sought-after. Diderot's consistent emphasis on "nature" and "truth" indicate that it is the pictorial fidelity to natural occurrence in Chardin's work, rather than its thematic content, that arouses his admiration. For this reason, perhaps, Diderot consistently neglects Chardin's people in

favor of his still-life subjects. One notable example in the Salon of 1759 is his very passing mention, without further elaboration on any of them, of several of Chardin's works, among them a masterpiece, "The Young Artist". (Fig. 8)

Il y a de Chardin un retour de chasse; des pièces de gibier; un jeune élève qui dessine vu par le dos; une fille qui fait de la tapisserie; deux petits tableaux de fruits; c'est toujours la nature et la vérité.⁴⁰

The first most striking aspect of the painting is its texture: the surface is extremely coarse, as though painted on an underlayer of thick impasto, giving it a resemblance to rough plaster, and it is against this uncomfortable surface that Chardin projects his young artist. Sitting flat on the floor, his legs stretched out before him, his sketch book in his lap, he leans forward, his head bent down, and sketches. His inclined position forms the diagonal angle that is the key to this composition and that leads directly away from the picture plane and into the heart of the composition itself. This diagonal, reinforced by the parallel accent of the portfolio he holds against his knees, leads the eye through the folds of his coat in the extreme foreground directly to the sketch on the wall in the background. The attitude of the figure in the sketch, and especially the knee, the left elbow, and the direction of the gaze, direct the attention of the observer to the third important element of the composition--the empty, waiting canvas on the right, whose major function is thematic, rather than structural.

Another thematic or psychological focus is the young man's coat, which bears all the signs of neglect, including a hole near the sleeve; that the artist considered this element to be important to

his theme is indicated by his placement of it directly in the on-looker's line of sight between the extreme foreground and the sketch on the wall. Chardin has created a character study without showing the physical or facial characteristics of the young man; his personal qualities must be inferred from the objects with which he surrounds himself. The torn coat is an image of self-sacrifice and self-neglect, which is further accentuated by the coarse surface texture of the canvas. His character qualities are reflected, then, in the negligence of his dress, the attitude of his body, and his concentration and absorption in the work at hand, which is an experience of the imagination rather than of the flesh.

Past, present, and future are indicated pictorially by the stages in the process of artistic creation: (1) the model sketch, (2) the sketch underway, and (3) the waiting, empty canvas; yet only one action is taking place. Chardin has painted a picture of a young man drawing a picture of a picture, which indicates an empathetic point of view on the part of the artist, and infuses the work with both depth and lightness; and most importantly, he has amply depicted the qualities of patience and industry without the use of agonistic gesture and expression. If, for Chardin, Nature is people and things as they occur, it is not for him the model from which he attempts to reconstruct the false idealism of personification; rather, it is the source of the ample reality of commonplace people and things whose uncommon qualities he expresses through textures, colors, and the nature of their activities, to portray the best of what lies deepest in them, and at the same time to suspend them in a monumental quietude.

In 1761, Diderot says of Chardin that he is always a faithful

imitator of nature, in his own rough and abrupt style; but that he depicts a lowly form of Nature--common and domestic.⁴¹ This idea does not occur to him with regard to Greuze's work because Greuze depicts explicit moral lessons; Chardin's implicit statements require more of the observer than passive recognition. He goes on to complain that Chardin has lately been neglectful of hands and feet and seems content to depict his thought in "four strokes of the brush". Here lingers a bit of the old academism, which held that all should be polished and perfect; it did not admit of individual style; nor, from time to time, does Diderot. In 1763, upon seeing a still-life, Diderot praises Chardin for being an excellent colorist who understands the harmony of colors and reflections.⁴² He was to mention Chardin again in 1765 in connection with color, in his "Essay on Painting":

. . .celui qui copiera d'après Greuze sera gris et violâtre; celui qui étudiera Chardin sera vrai.⁴³

While Greuze composed his rustic rhapsodies-in-puce, Chardin was able to achieve--even with widespread use of greens and browns--a brilliant effect of color by juxtaposing, rather than blending, the hues, so that each functions at maximum intensity, in the manner of a mosaic, and all are radiant, even when subdued.

In 1765, Diderot remarks that still-life painting belongs to old men or to those born old; it demanded only study and patience--no verve, little genius, little poetry, a great deal of technique and truth, and that was all. As an observer, Diderot has seen no more and no less than many people see in a still-life, but as a genre it represents a special area of activity for artists by

occupying that middle ground between conventional subject matter and abstraction, and in eighteenth-century France, the still-life represented a subtle evasion of the established rules of painting which specified acceptable genres and, to a certain extent, prescribed subject matter as well.

Still-life arrangement is partly intuitive, partly mathematical, and partakes more of the qualities of tactile concentration than of rational comment. Chardin was the first artist to devote himself exclusively to still-lives (after 1750 until his death in 1779) as studies in purely formal relationships of color, reflection, texture, and arrangement. Chardin's still-lives are deceptively simple: displacement or re-arrangement of any single object might upset a balance whose existence had been imperceptible at first, and would necessitate other changes to compensate for the disturbed relationships. Regarding Chardin's still-life, Diderot instructs his friend Grimm:

Choisissez son site; disposez sur ce site les objets comme je vais vous les indiquer, et soyez sûr que vous aurez vu ses tableaux . . . ils sont tous de la même perfection.⁴⁴

A revealing means of testing Diderot's formula is to try to imagine Chardin's "Attributes of Music" from Diderot's description of it:

. . .une foule d'objets divers, distribués de la manière la plus naturelle et la plus pittoresque.⁴⁵

The inadequacy of Diderot's oversimplified conclusion indicates that a re-examination of the premises should have been in order, that there is more in Chardin's still-lives than "study, patience, and perfection".

In a work that has become a standard in art criticism, Roger Fry

aptly characterizes Diderot's reaction to Chardin's work:

Diderot's theory of art was a purely literary one. He regarded painting as an expression of moral values, even of the inculcation of morals, and says that the only thing that matters is that the figures should express the emotions and that these should be of an improving and salutary kind . . . He adds that if the figures also comprise an harmonious group, he, for one, gets an additional pleasure, but that this is of no real importance. What was such a critic to do in front of a Chardin still-life? He was, in fact, too sensitive to beauty not to recognize Chardin's quality and he takes refuge in an alternative theory of truth, to nature, of mere imitation.⁴⁶

One might well conclude from this, therefore, that while Diderot appreciates the quality of Chardin's work, he does so for the wrong reasons, but if he mistakes Chardin's insistence upon the pricelessness of commonplace things for a mere pictorial statement that there are no useless objects in nature,⁴⁷ Chardin has at least partially succeeded nonetheless. Although Diderot failed to recognize its potential, Chardin's work would have bridged the gulf that yawned between the ignorant man and the educated man: The appeal of Chardin's work lay not in reason but in intuition and communicated, somehow, to everyone:

. . . ses compositions appellent indistinctement l'ignorant et le connaisseur . . . On s'arrête devant un Chardin comme d'instinct, comme un voyageur fatigué de sa route va s'asseoir, sans presque s'en apercevoir, dans l'endroit qui lui offre un siège de verdure, du silence, des eaux, de l'ombre et du frais.⁴⁸

Just as the "Lullaby" is the most un-Brahmsian piece of music Brahms ever composed, so Fragonard's "Head of an Old Man" (Fig. 9) is alien to all the other paintings of that artist, in style, subject matter, and tone. Ordinarily, his taste ran to the mythical,

the idyllic, and the lucrative lace-and-cotton candy subjects so popular in his time, beneath whose soft and dimpled exteriors there beat no heart at all. Diderot had admired Fragonard's "Corésus and Callirhoé" in the Salon of 1765, but in 1767, he sees his "Head of an Old Man" as a disappointing anti-climax to it--weak, soft, yellowish, and with no vigor:

Ce vieillard regarde au loin. Sa barbe est un peu monotone, point touchée de verve; même reproche aux cheveux, quoiqu'on ait voulu l'éviter. Couleur fade. Cou sec et raide. Monsieur Fragonard, quand on s'est fait un nom, il faut avoir un peu plus d'amour-propre.⁴⁹

The "Head of an Old Man" is, nonetheless, an excellent painting. His eyes are closed (not looking in the distance) and his chin rests upon his chest. The parallel diagonals formed by the folds of his clothing and by the angle of his beard accentuate the downward movement of his head; moreover, the very presence of the beard is a key compositional element: If we imagine him without it, his chin will not seem to touch his chest at all, thus disturbing the restful, contemplative motif. His head bows from the base of the neck, so that it does not simply droop but is actually thrust forward, a movement which preserves the inclination of the head from lethargy. The yellowish color Diderot refers to in no way detracts from the whole, but complements instead the peaceful motif by illuminating it in a gentle, languorous way. But a significant and pronounced turbulence coexists with all the superficial calm. Boldly-slashing brushstrokes define the facial features and the hair, whose uncompromising dishevelment bespeaks a tempestuous nature. Rather than falling vertically downward, moreover, his clothing seems instead to flow out before him

until it becomes part of the circumference of the picture itself.

This turbulent expression of serenity indicates that Fragonard's aim is not so much to create a revealing portrait of an actual person and personality, as it is to penetrate an abstraction: proceeding from the heroic motif of the profile image and from stylistic suggestions of the subject's temperament, the indirect luminosity which has no source and yet infuses the entire composition, through the angularity of a downward movement which accentuates decline, and finally going beyond that to the very shape of the picture--the circle--which serves as an almost protective benediction upon the aging man; the circle which suggests repose and at the same time, having neither beginning nor end, connotes eternity.

Autant d'hommes, autant de jugements.¹

DIDEROT AS CRITIC

From the above examples, chosen from the several Salons which Diderot discussed, we can see illustrated the thesis that Diderot did not set out as a critic to understand the works of art before him in terms of the language of the artist. He brought other values with him, values which conflicted as often with each other as they did with the art to which he applied them. His treatment of the works before him, therefore, was descriptive and judicial rather than analytical in tone.

But somewhere among the critical snorts and hallelujahs there lay in Diderot an awareness of the unattainability of infallible judgment. Insofar as standards exist in his critical thought, both his Salon commentaries and his essay on painting are a study in perpetual motion. In the final analysis, he judges according to his predilections and his taste, which he himself has defined as a capricious thing. Of his critical judgments he writes, in his concluding comments to the Salon of 1763,

J'ai senti, et j'ai dit comme je sentais. La seule partialité dont je ne me sois pas garanti, c'est celle qu'on a tout naturellement pour certains sujets ou pour certains faires.²

Critical modesty surfaces again during the same Salon in the remark that while a painter might say to him that he was missing many of the beauties of the paintings, he would have to say that there are so many things that depend on technique, it would be impossible to judge without having tried it himself.³ Later, in 1767, he reflects on the dif-

ficulty of achieving understanding between the creator and the critic:

Rappelez-vous toutes les études, toutes les connaissances nécessaires à un bon peintre, à un peintre né, et vous sentirez combien il est difficile d'être un bon juge, un juge né en peinture.⁴

Diderot sees as further and conclusive proof of the ultimate non-existence of infallible judgment--his own or anyone else's--the public demonstrations of taste--or lack of it--going on around him. In 1765, for example, he espies--and describes at great length and in glowing terms--three sketches, three "masterpieces", by Greuze. After describing the second of them, he laments the mediocrity of public taste:

Avec tout cela, le goût est si misérable, si petit, que peut-être ces deux esquisses ne seront jamais peintes, et que si elles sont peintes, Boucher aura plutôt vendu cinquante de ses indécentes et plates marionnettes, que Greuze ses deux sublimes tableaux.⁵

But Greuze had a public to please, as did Boucher, and the sketches in question were before long painted as pictures, not because of any influence on the part of Diderot, but because of the realities of supply and demand. Popular judgment, then, because it is bad, is inimical to the perfection of art because it serves to perpetuate mediocrity:

. . .il ne faut que se promener une fois au Sallon, et y écouter les jugements divers qu'on y porte, pour se convaincre qu'en ce genre comme en littérature, le succès, le grand succès est assuré à la médiocrité, l'heureuse médiocrité qui met le spectateur et l'artiste de commun niveau.⁶

Difficult as it may be for the theorist in him to accept, the sad truth is--and he has said it elsewhere--that only a handful of men of taste will appreciate masterpieces, while the stupid, ignorant, and vulgar will merely glance at them.

Je m'écriais: Ô Vernet! Ô Chardin! Ô Casanove! Ô Lutherbourg! Ô Robert! travaillez à present, suiez sang et eau, étudiez la nature, épuisez-vous de fatigue, faites des poèmes sublimes avec vos pinceaux, et pour qui? Pour une petite poignée d'hommes de goût qui vous admireront en silence, tandis que le stupide, l'ignorant vulgaire, jettant à peine un coup d'oeil sur vos chefs-d'oeuvre, ira se pâmer, s'extasier devant une enseigne à bierre, un tableau de guinguette.⁷

But for all the finality and disgust in the tone of his comments, this disappointment does not cause him to reject his notion that art should instruct the people, nor does his insight into the outrageous co-existence of masterpieces and mediocrities prevent him from heaping scorn upon Fragonard's "Head of an Old Man" two pages later. He is, in fact, as guilty of ignoring masterpieces as anyone else, but he has just cleared the first hurdle of the aspiring critic: the realization that artistic merit and public^{taste}/rarely coincide.

As a critic, as a judge, Diderot knows the weakness of his position and preparation, but he feels, nonetheless, that technical knowledge can be acquired. He put it this way in the course of the first three Salons (1759-63):

Voulez-vous faire des progrès sûrs dans la connaissance si difficile de technique de l'art? Promenez-vous dans une galerie avec un artiste, et faites-vous expliquer et montrer sur la toile l'exemple des mots techniques; sans cela, vous n'aurez jamais que des notions confuses.⁸

He followed his own advice and learned from the artists, but the technical and creative principles with which he became familiar were never systematized in his mind; he could not, therefore, approach painting from principle or theory based on the medium, and instead brought with him principles and theories of his own. He once said that "anyone who knows how to judge a poet can also judge a painter".

Unfortunately, he tended to judge the painter by the poet's rules, with the inevitable literary bias in his approach: In neo---or pseudo---classical paintings he sought illustrations of Homeric vignettes, of odes, and of the mythological hordes at work and play; his pragmatic side dictated a literary approach as well: that of exacting of a figurative medium the literal functions of didacticism; but he missed the implicit statements of Chardin and fell heavily for the oratorical distortions of Greuze. A knowledge of the principles of art--from the point of view of the artist and not the philosopher--would have brought with it a knowledge of the limitations and potentialities of painting as a mute medium, but for Diderot, the illustrational values transcended those of creativity and experience.

No less important to the critic than a knowledge of the derivative rules of the medium is a familiarity with trends and influences. Far from turning criticism into a purely academic pursuit, this critical orientation provides each work with a valid chronological and cultural context. It does not necessarily imply a teleological viewpoint, but it does imply an ability to distinguish another version of the same old thing from a work that is actually expressive and original in its choice and treatment of subject matter. Often perceiving neither what the artist was trying to do nor how he was doing it, Diderot discussed and evaluated painting without the perspective that the critical insights proper to the genre would have given him. His ignorance of trends and influences fostered the lacuna that existed in his thought between classical art and that of his own time; rather than seeing a succession of cultures, values, styles, and world views, he saw a juxtaposition of the ideal and its revival. Greek painting did not

exist; Roman painting was fresco and at best, decoratively functional; Diderot's models for artistic perfection, then, were not actual works of art from the Graeco-Roman past, but literary vapors from the classical pundits. His ideal, therefore, was dubious both as to existence and to merit; lacking this perspective, he failed to recognize that in subject matter and in treatment, the re-appearance of this antique "ideal" in eighteenth-century France, which tried only to recapture the classical look without assuming the point of view that produced it, was less a revival than an exhumation.

As neo-pagan, as moralist, and as cosmic theoretician, Diderot confronted the plastic arts with a curious hybrid of values; but hybridization implies synthesis, and in his thought on art, this did not exist. He neither acknowledged nor applied a universal principle, but saw art through the revolving, perpetual-motion focus of the cosmic theorist and the polarized distortion and discontinuity of the neo-pagan who could not synthesize ethics and aesthetics. Diderot knew that it is often easier to create a work of art than it is to understand both the mechanics and the meaning of what has been created, and because he judges spontaneously, subjectively, and according to his taste, one tends to learn more about him, his prejudices, his way of seeing things, and his theories--however diffuse--than about the paintings under study. Diderot's success as a man of letters in compiling his "impressions" and his "failure" as a critic to elucidate the paintings surveyed in the idiom in which they were conceived, can be attributed in large part to his personal conception of the function of the artist and from that, of the critic. In looking to art to supply literal statements of intellectual and moral precepts, Diderot looked also to the artist whose hand would guide

the chisel or brush to supply that moral content. In keeping with his notion of art as instruction, the moral lessons depicted had to be explicit; otherwise, they would be totally lost on the ignorant or the unfeeling. Although this was out of step with his concept of vague sublimity, etc., and although he was occasionally aware that mediocrity was almost always assured of popular success, nevertheless, he looked to the artist to conceive the idea, to depict the maxim, and thereby to sway the masses. Impractical, impossible--yes--but important, nonetheless, in his concept of himself as critic: He exacted of painting the depiction of maxims and ideas, not in the idiom of painting, but in the idiom of literature and the stage--in allusion, in gesture, and in literal statement; with the artist as illustrator of morality, with everything already explicit, there ought to have been--following that line of reasoning--no necessity for clarification or explanation at all. His theory--of the motivated artist and his moral art--rested, then, on a premise of visibility and not of potential.

Given his idea of the painter as instructor, it becomes easy to understand why Diderot, as a critic, set out neither to interpret painting nor to understand it but to judge it--to look, in each painting, for an explicit moral, an idea. If the idea or the moral were visible to him--and immediately so--it was a good painting; if not, it was bad. There was no further meaning to consider. Diderot once compared himself, as a critic, to a "beggar stirring in the sand to find a flake of gold",¹⁰ but without knowledge of the nature of the terrain, he was dazzled instead by all that glittered.

Combien de motifs secrets et compliqués
dans notre blâme et nos éloges¹

DIDEROT'S VALUES AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ETHOS

Fellows and Torrey credit Diderot with the creation of "modern French art criticism as a literary genre"²; the truth of the statement is undeniable, as far as it goes, but ^{it} is interesting to note that they do not credit him simply with the creation of modern French art criticism, but go on to qualify that by saying that he created it as a literary genre. Unfortunately, art criticism as a literary genre is much like brain surgery as a literary genre: quaint but useless. To attribute to Diderot, then, the creation of art criticism as a literary genre is effectively to dismiss the substantial achievement that the Salon commentaries represent: Diderot was not a critic in the sense that he spoke or even completely understood the language of the painter, but as a "philosophe" he was a critic of life and of the times in which he lived; this attitude framed his viewpoint in looking at art, and in the course of his commentaries, he recapitulated the vicissitudes of Enlightenment thought by bringing the current fashions, prejudices, ideas, and theories to bear on the art works before him.

The Salons owe their longevity not only to bibliophiles--who would have preserved them anyway in keeping with an innate reverence for dead things--but to their subjective nature as well. This subjectivity makes Diderot interesting as a writer but rather more difficult to deal with as a thinker and critic: Partly as a consequence of a certain volatility in his temperament, partly because of the informality of his purpose in writing both the "Essay" and the Salon commentaries, and also because of certain dianoetic impossibilities in his thought, Diderot's

opinions on art appear as an ever-shifting series of inconsistencies, contradictions, and aesthetic and ideological incompatibilities which cannot be reconciled, even in retrospect, simply by deciding that one view was the real one. But it is precisely this quality in him that makes Diderot a representative man of his time, a true Enlightenment mind, where conflict and contradiction are fundamental to the ethos: The period of time approximately spanned by the Salons was one of transition from a stately classicism to a light-hearted rococo and a return to Spartan severity, from the decline of authority to the ascendancy of free inquiry, from belief in God to belief in man; and insofar as it was a time where ideas collided headlong with ideas in a dynamic, combative atmosphere of debate without resolution and confrontation without issue, Diderot embodied it and French art reflected it in the themes that it depicted. Diderot participated in the life of his time to the extent that he wanted very much to see changes done in it; his attitude toward society, its needs and faults, conditioned his approach to art; the Salons represent, therefore, the convergence of his values with the life of his time as reflected in its art.

As illustration of this point, the Salon of 1767 deserves special consideration apart from the other Salons and from Diderot's other writings on art for at least three reasons: (1) The Salon of 1767 represents Diderot's maturity as a critic; between 1759 and 1765, he wrote extraneously, never assembling in one place the principles he actually invoked in the course of the critiques, but following the Salon of 1765, he wrote the "Essay on Painting" which did represent such a compilation of principles; the Salon of 1767 offered him the

first opportunity after the formulation of these principles actually to apply them. Besides following chronologically the "Essay on Painting", the Salon of 1767 represents Diderot's last and greatest effort as an art critic: It is the longest and most thorough of all the Salon reviews, and after 1767 the Encyclopédie and ill health diverted much of his energy and attention. (2) The Salons have one advantage over the Encyclopédie in serving as a reflection in detail of the spirit of the age: Politics and religion were warmly-debated issues and Encyclopedia articles dealing with these topics were heavily censored, and references to them were concealed, where they were included at all, under less combustible headings. The Salons, on the other hand, were sent out of the country to Germany, beyond the reach of the censors' authority and were not published in France until the nineteenth century. Diderot knew in writing the Salons that he could speak his mind with impunity; such was not always the case with the Encyclopédie. The two works are completely different, of course, in what they set out to accomplish, but both reflect the spirit of the age; the important point to bear in mind, however, is that where censorship poses no immediate threat, there is a minimum of distortion in that reflection. That he does not intend to keep strictly to the paths of art criticism, Diderot announces early, in a reminder to Grimm that the writings are to be kept confidential; he lists among his reasons:

Dites que les préjugés nationaux n'étant pas plus respectés dans mes lignes que les mauvaises manières de peindre, les vices des grands que les défauts des artistes, les extravagances de la société que celles de l'Académie, il y a de quoi perdre cent hommes plus épaulés que moi.³

In this Salon, then, Diderot treats art and society simultaneously,

as they are and as they ought to be. Finally, (3) the Salon of 1767 contains, in Sezneec's words, "the entire vocabulary of Romanticism"; it contains lengthy paraphrases of Burke, whose ideas on the "sublime" strongly influenced Diderot's thought⁴, although he never named the author or the work. Burke furnished the elements, but Diderot applied them as criteria not only in judging some of the paintings in the Salons, but in setting a new direction for that art.

Le beau tableau, dira le peintre!
 La pauvre chose, dira le littérateur!
 et ils auront raison tous les deux¹

THE SALON OF 1767

Concepts in opposition formed the essence of the eighteenth-century ethos: there was the lingering quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, the conflict between reason and intuition, a tension between the spiritual and the temporal, the sentimental and the sensual, and all were closely connected with liberty and happiness, which in the eighteenth century were both abstract ideals and practical material goals. The quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns represented a challenge of traditional authority; the further challenge of religious authority asserted the right of the individual to seek truth for himself apart from revelation; if truth could make man free, it could also make him happy: the practical side of the abstraction of truth was knowledge, and with the progress of science and the accumulation of knowledge, man could not only create a better world, but could better his own lot therein.

Diderot did not, of course, discuss these concepts in abstraction, but their currency is obvious in the various viewpoints he assumes in evaluating the paintings and in the subject matter of his frequent digressions and "detached thoughts":

Mais laissons-là la peinture, mon ami, et faisons un peu de morale.²

Je ne vous décris pas ce tableau, je n'en ai pas le courage; j'aime mieux causer un moment avec vous des préjugés populaires dans les beaux-arts.³

"Popular prejudice" in the fine arts was frequently synonymous with fashion; in fact art and fashion were indivisible to such an extent that Diderot sometimes saw the only hope of improvement in complete obliteration of contemporary practices and a return to chaos, from which some progress toward perfection might be expected.

Il y a dans l'art comme dans la société, les fausses grâces, la minauderie, l'afféterie, le précieux, l'ignoble, la fausse dignité ou la morgue, la fausse gravité ou la pédanterie, la fausse douleur, la fausse piété . . .⁴

Diderot reinforces the equation of falsity with fashionable society in noting that artists who allow themselves to become slaves to fashion condemn themselves to producing petty fabricated reflections of a petty society:

. . .nos temps . . .très corrompus ou plutôt très-maniérés . . .Précautionnons donc nos artistes . . . contre . . .l'influence de nos petits usages, de nos petits moeurs, de nos petits manèquins nationaux.⁵

Accumulation of wealth was indistinguishable from the rest of material progress, but luxury impeded the perfection of painting by enslaving it to fashion and to garish tastes:

N'oubliez pas parmi les obstacles à la perfection et à la durée des beaux-arts, je ne dis pas la richesse d'un peuple, mais ce luxe qui dégrade les grands talents, en les assujettissant à de petits ouvrages, et les grands sujets en les réduisant à la bambochade; et pour vous en convaincre, voyez la Vérité, la Vertu, la Justice, la Religion ajustées par La Grenée pour le boudoir d'un financier.⁶

Perhaps the key word in this passage--as it applies both to art and to society--is "ajustées": In the rococo style, the personifications

of truth, virtue, and justice were not treated as historical subjects or personages but as voluptuous damsels masquerading, in a sense, as spiritual entities. They had been adjusted to suit the new taste, and what had once formed the substance of monumental subject matter now was merely titillating. Monumental painting had suffered from neglect during the early years of the century because the source of patronage had shifted from the court to the city. The workshops at Versailles were closed down, and neither the Church nor the increasingly secular society offered itself as a dependable patron. Artists were therefore compelled to do smaller paintings which would appeal to the wealthy private patrons who frequented the art exhibitions.⁷ From the idea that luxury engenders decadence in art, Diderot turns to a consideration of the ideal model, which exists neither solely in the imagination of the artist, nor in the monuments and paintings of Rome, nor in the countryside of provincial France. This facet of Diderot's thought on art and its sources presents itself as a hybrid of neo-classical and romantic values: The ideal model of nature--"la belle nature"--did not exist in nature. The everyday face of nature was a corrupted form of its ideal counterpart, and it fell to the artist to seek out and reproduce this "belle nature". If nature was corrupted, the degree of distance that separated it from the ideal state could be measured in terms of the advancement of civilization. This desired model could not be revived solely through the spontaneous imitation of the Ancients; it becomes corrupt and is lost,

et . . .ne se retrouverait peut-être chez un peuple
que par la retour à l'état de Barbarie; car c'est la
seule condition où les hommes convaincus de leur
ignorance puissent se resoudre à la lenteur de leur

tâtonnement; les autres restent médiocres parce qu'ils naissent, pour ainsi dire, scavants.⁸

Thus, artistic purity could not be achieved in imitation, but in a return to rudimentary nature. If man could somehow shed the learning and sophistication that culture had bequeathed to him, he would find himself returned to the source without the vitiating influence of any model other than nature. Diderot characterizes creation from the void, the unaided, spontaneous creation, as "tâtonnement", a concept which explains for him the unexcelled greatness of Greek culture:

Je prétens que la raison principale pour laquelle les arts n'ont pu dans aucune siècle, chez aucune nation atteindre au degré de perfection qu'ils ont eue chez les Grecs; c'est que c'est le seul endroit de la terre ou ils ont été soumis au tâtonnement; c'est que, grâce aux modèles qu'ils nous ont laissés, nous n'avons jamais pu, comme eux, arriver successivement et lentement à la beauté de ces modèles.⁹

This return to a barbaric age constituted a sort of "sensory rejuvenation", because, as Starobinski points out, as eighteenth-century man wearied of seeking live sensations in rapid succession, he turned toward the image of the greatness of the past where primitive worlds were lost paradises of energy and intensity.¹⁰

Mais ce grand goût est comme
le tranchant d'un rasoir . . .¹

PROGRESS AND REVERSION

It was an age of belief in material progress, but with an equal and opposite belief in the salvation of humanity through a reversion to the natural state. Most people, who concerned themselves with such considerations at all, belonged either to one persuasion or to the other. Diderot walked between them and embraced them both.

Perhaps the past could not be equalled, but the present could certainly be improved. Diderot reflects this attitude in castigating the artists who modeled their paintings exclusively on the works of the Ancients:

Serviles et presque stupides imitateurs de ceux qui
les ont précédés, ils étudient la nature comme parfaite,
et non comme perfectible.²

Modern artists had been rendered servile imitators in looking to the Greeks as a source of perfection, rather than to nature as that source. But it was a circular dilemma; nature had to be perfected, according to the eighteenth-century canon for art; nature rendered in art was not to be common, imperfect nature, but "la belle nature" of which, unfortunately for future originality, the Greeks had provided the first and most "perfect" interpretations. If the Greeks had not existed to be copied, the moderns, obliged to confront "une nature difforme, imparfaite, viciée", would have had to arrive at an original model by themselves, a model which would have belonged uniquely to them. As it was, the works of the Ancients remained as a perpetual

monument to their artists and assured, by their continuing existence as models, the mediocrity of all artists to come.

But this was the reverse of the eighteenth-century idea of progress: nature and society were perfectible, but only because they had evolved from perfection into corruption; it was the perfectly respectable alternative belief for the atheist who could not accept the Biblical account of the Garden of Eden. Progress was possible from the present, but the eighteenth-century man did not necessarily consider his society to be the pinnacle of all that had preceded it. Diderot's concept of returning to barbarism of the type from which the Greeks had emerged to rise to such artistic heights, is neo-classical in that he attributes perfection to the Greeks and sees history as a long decline from a superior state of things. At the same time, his concept is also romantic insofar as he seeks perfection not in copying what has already been perfected, but in reversion, in a flight from civilization and society toward the purity and intensity of the beginning of things.

Even though he believed in progress, Diderot did not believe it could continue indefinitely without the advent, at a certain point, of decadence; and he felt that contemporary art and society had reached such a point:

On trouve les anciennes routes occupées par des modèles sublimes qu'on désespère d'égaliser. On écrit des poétiques; on imagine de nouveaux genres; on devient singulier, bizarre, maniéré; d'où il paraît que la manière est un vice d'une société policiée, où le bon goût tend à la décadence.³

One could believe in progress while at the same time longing for a reversion to the fundamentals, because even reversion represented a

form of progress. Nevertheless, progress was inevitably cyclical because of the predictable consistency of human nature:

A l'origine des sociétés, on trouve les arts bruts, le discours barbare, les mœurs agrestes, mais ces choses tendent d'un même pas à la perfection, jusqu'à ce que le grand goût naisse; mais ce grand goût est comme le tranchant d'un rasoir, sur lequel il est difficile de se tenir. Bientôt, les mœurs se dépravent; l'empire de la raison s'étend; . . . les arts se corrompent par le raffinement.⁴

Refined taste and a corresponding refinement in the arts had done their damage. Perhaps refinement was most objectionable to Diderot because it indicated a stasis; it neither progressed toward something newer and better nor undercut the influence of the Ancients by looking at nature as though it were new. Instead it preoccupied itself with itself, creating endless variations of hackneyed classical themes, moving neither forward nor backward and producing only a stagnant artistic flotsam.

. . .l'empire de la raison s'étend¹

REASON AND INTUITION

Diderot believed in reason, in the possibilities that its application held for the development of mankind and the improvement of his world; whereas applied reason in the form of natural and social science would aid society, it would prove to be inimical to art; the practices of the Academy were a perfect example of the deadly influence of reason upon art:

Si j'avais la Raison à peindre, je la montrerais arrachant les plumes à Pégase et les pliant aux allures de l'Académie. Il n'est plus cet animal fougueux qui hennit, gratte la terre du pied, se cabre et déploie ses grandes ailes, c'est une bête de somme, la monture de l'abbé Morellet, prototype de la méthode. La discipline militaire naît quand il n'y a plus de généraux; la méthode, quand il n'y a plus de génie.²

With the growing importance of the individual personality in art and letters, of personal feelings and personal expression, tending away from the general type toward the unique particular, method represented the aridity of the philosophic spirit which sought narrow, strict, and rigorous comparisons and when applied to art, tended inevitably to standardize, to impose the lowest common denominator. And vigorous art was as incompatible with a materialistic society as it was with the philosophic spirit:

Le règne des images passe, à mesure que celui des choses s'étend. Il s'introduit par la raison une exactitude, une précision, une méthode, pardonnez-moi le mot, une sorte de pédanterie qui tue tout . . . Il est incroyable le mal que cette monotone politesse fait à la poésie.³

But since society was materialistic and since the philosophic spirit permeated it, Diderot looked to the artists to reinvigorate the emotional aspect of art, since people did not habitually respond to the irresistible magnetism of cold logic. People in general found logic to be eminently resistible, in fact, so that if one wanted to communicate to the masses, it had to be not so much on a level which they would understand but to which they would respond; art was to be a function of the emotions and not of the intellect; and the artist, as custodian of moral and emotional values, would teach and inspire morality by the appeal of the subject matter of his paintings to the emotions of his audience.

En un mot, la peinture est-elle l'art de parler aux yeux seulement? ou celui de s'adresser au coeur et à l'esprit, de charmer l'un, d'émouvoir l'autre, par l'entremise des yeux. Ô mon ami, . . . la plate chose qu'un morceau de peinture bien fait, bien peint.⁴

. . .les mœurs se dépravent¹

MORALITY AND ANTIMORALITY

It was axiomatic with Diderot that if art were to be improved, morality must improve; the axiom was reciprocal, and the operations of the two were indivisible. This is one reason for Diderot's impatience with Boucher, who at the time of the writing of the Salon of 1767 was Director of the Academy. Diderot acknowledged that Boucher could have been the best among all the artists had he wanted to be; failing that, Boucher's themes and techniques merely confirmed Diderot's belief in the indivisibility of art and morality, and in the fact that there was need for improvement in both.

Je ne sais que dire de cet homme-ci. La dégradation du goût, de la couleur, de la composition, des caractères, de l'expression, du dessin, a suivi pas à pas la dépravation des mœurs.⁵

Poetry, of course, was the quality that Diderot felt to be characteristic of the uncorrupted society, where vigor and virility had not yet become ossified, quaint ornamentation of an effete civilization. Reason and refinement, then, went hand in hand as adjuncts of civilization, in destroying this "poetry"--the same poetry which Diderot wished to see infused into contemporary art to make it once more an effective means of communication rather than the mere manufacture of ornament:

Il y a dans la poésie toujours un peu de mensonge; l'esprit philosophique nous habitue à le discerner, et adieu l'illusion et l'effet. Il n'y a plus moyen de faire des contes à nos gens.²

Of an age characterized by a fascination with opposites, the polarity between reason and intuition was but one facet. This duality was, in turn, closely connected--as Diderot indicates--with another problem: that of telling stories, of communicating to people through anecdote. Philosophy and poetry, reason and intuition continued to contend with each other in a society which tended toward increasingly intricate refinement. If the corruption of art and the philosophic spirit were undesirable by-products of the refinement of culture, they contributed to--and were characterized by--a degeneration of morals; hence the importance of the problem: "Il n'y a plus moyen de faire des contes à nos gens."

If the country was divided between bored aristocrats and busy bourgeois, it was also divided between the moral values of these two groups--between libertinism, which was both intellectual and anti-moral, and the moral virtues of modesty, fidelity, and productivity. There were defectors from both camps, of course, but in general, the divisions remained, and Diderot, characteristically, partook of the values of both. Rococo art was frankly libertine; genre paintings reflected the values of the middle class; classical art was inbred, involuted, aloof, and irrelevant; but there was a significant current in French art--as well as in Diderot's thought--which represented a respectable compromise between the sensuousness of the libertine code and the sentimentality characteristic of the bourgeois taste:

Greuze me dit, je voudrais bien peindre une femme toute nue, sans blesser la pudeur; et je lui répons, faites le modèle honnête. Asseyez devant vous une jeune fille toute nue; que sa pauvre dépouille soit à terre à côté d'elle et indique la misère; qu'elle ait la tête appuyée sur une de ses mains; que de ses yeux baissés deux larmes coulent le long de ses joues; que son

expression soit celle de l'innocence, de la pudeur et de la modestie; que sa mère soit à côté d'elle; que de ses mains et d'une des mains de sa fille, elle se couvre le visage; ou qu'elle se cache le visage de ses mains, et que celle de sa fille soit posée sur son épaule; que le vêtement de cette mère annonce aussi l'extrême indigence; et que l'artiste, témoin de cette scène, attendri, touché, laisse tomber sa palette ou son crayon. Et Greuze dit, je vois mon tableau.³

The subject was treated in the Salon of 1769 by Baudouin, Boucher's son-in-law and protégé, which fact in itself is adequate commentary on the possibilities Diderot's suggested painting held for the furtherance of morality through art. Just as Diderot's sensuous nature conflicted with his reason and his fondness for virtue, so Boucher represented a threat to that virtue in his application of art to the illustration of mundane and sensuous themes. So long as Diderot maintained his urgent belief in the need for "moral painting", Boucher continued to intrude where and when he was most unwanted:

Cet homme ne prend le pinceau que pour me montrer des tétons et des fesses. Je suis bien aise, d'en voir; mais je ne veux pas qu'on me les montre.⁴

Diderot looked neither to the philosophes nor to the public to reinvigorate art but to the artists themselves, because while on the one hand he lumped contemporary artists together as "servile imitators", he cherished on the other an idealized notion of the artist as a man of genius, a lonely, melancholy figure whose life was touched with poetry because he lived according to extremes and functioned according to instinct. Diderot's artist was melancholy because he was an extremist, and extremism was ultimately incompatible with happiness:

Oui, mon ami, j'ai bien peur que l'homme n'allât droit au malheur par la voie qui conduit l'imitateur de Nature au sublime. Se jeter dans les extrêmes, voilà la règle

du poète, garder en tout un juste milieu, voilà la règle du bonheur . . . Il est d'expérience que la nature condamne au malheur celui à qui elle a départi le génie.⁵

This notion of the artist as a man of genius, a lonely, melancholy figure misunderstood by society but who pursues his ideal nevertheless, indicates the direction that Romantic thought was to take in the following century. Paradoxically, in Diderot's thought, it was the man of genius, unhappy by definition, who must lead the ordinary man to happiness by "inspiring" in him a love of moderation. But was such communication possible between the passionate man of genius and the insensate common herd:

Quelle différence, m'écriais-je, du génie et du sens commun, de l'homme tranquille et de l'homme passionné!⁶

Not only do the two stations remain diametrically opposed but, as Diderot indicates in his appraisal of common sense and the things that go with it, the man of feeling--whether he be artist or philosopher--would not, in honesty, choose to exchange places with the peaceable, simple man because, as he states, the things that go with that estate are antithetical to his conception of the attributes of "l'homme passionné":

C'est qu'il faut d'abord avoir le sens commun, avec lequel on a à peu près ce qu'il faut pour être un bon père, un bon mari, un bon marchand, un bon homme, un mauvais orateur, un mauvais poète, un mauvais musicien, un mauvais peintre, un mauvais sculpteur, un plat amant.⁷

The man of feeling must eschew the plodding, the conventional precisely because such a man, by definition, functions by the intensity of his emotions, his imagination, and his instinct.

Diderot seems, moreover, to be advocating a kind of hypocrisy whereby the artist would lead one life and advocate quite another. But Diderot never exalts deception; at odds here are not honesty and hypocrisy, but the romantic and the moralist: the romantic in him preferred to leave the man of genius to his own moods and creations; the practical moralist was somewhat more strict, urging the artist to devote his labors to the morally-instructive and inspirational anecdote; the values underlying both attitudes were reflected in corresponding genres exhibited in the Salons.

...Est-il hiéroglyphique?¹

DISGUISE AND DISCOVERY

Diderot implies that common sense is the bane of anyone who would be a great artist or a great lover; common sense, like virtue, is easily admired but possessed only with difficulty because, requiring discipline, both are constantly at odds with the temptations and gratifications of the flesh. According to the bourgeois ethic, it was not sufficient to look good; one must be good as well; appearances were not enough. The more rigorous the ethic, the more elaborate the evasion, and in eighteenth-century France this evasion took the form of the double life, a combined life-style and sophisticated game that expressed itself in the popularity of the mask, of theatrical disguises and dual identities, the social necessity of either having or being a mistress, and of the courtly practice of masquerading as peasants-for-a-day.

The necessary corollary of such a practice--both in art and in life--is surprise, or discovery. Diderot went to some lengths to uphold the bourgeois ethics of hard work, moral discipline, and utility in painting; and rococo painters, for their part, adorned their figures with rustic garb, sprinkled their erotic posturings with burlap and straw, transfigured both eroticism and reality, and abstracted them to a universe of pure fantasy. Erotic themes frequently centered around an incident where two participants were either spied upon or discovered, depending, probably, on whether the discoverers were aspirants or spoilsports. The following is a detailed example of the treatment of such a theme. Works which undertake to tell an edifying anecdote

require clarity, but the following example illustrates Diderot's insistence upon clarity of situation, not so much because such clarity would help the painting fulfill its instructive potential as to fulfill its erotic potential by minimizing confusion and speculation; and we can see from Diderot's remarks about "Une jeune fille endormie, surprise par son Père et sa Mère" that if it does not tell a clear story, it does at least suggest one, combining titillation with a rustic setting.

La jeune fille est couchée, sa gorge est découverte, elle a des couleurs, sa tête repose sur deux oreillers . . . Il paraît que ses cuisses sont séparées; elle a le bras gauche dans le lit, et le bras droit sur la couverture, qui se plisse beaucoup à la séparation des deux cuisses, et la main posée où la couverture se plisse . . . À droite sur le devant, c'est un panier d'oeufs renversés et cassés. Sur cette inscription "Une jeune fille endormie, surprise par son Père et sa Mère", on cherche des traces d'un amant qui s'échappe et l'on n'en trouve point; on regarde l'impression du père et de la mère pour en tirer quelque indice et ils n'en révèlent rien. On s'arrête donc sur la fille. Que fait-elle? Qu'a-t-elle fait? On n'en sait rien.²

Seeing no clear indication of what is actually going on in the painting, Diderot indulges in the pleasant task of suggesting possibilities:

Elle dort. Se repose-t-elle d'une fatigue voluptueuse? Cela se peut. Le père et la mère appelés par quelques soupirs aussi involontaires qu'indiscrets, reconnaîtraient-ils aux couleurs vives de leur fille, au mouvement de sa gorge, au désordre de sa couche, à la mollesse d'un de ses bras, à la position de l'autre, qu'il ne faut pas différer à la marier? cela est vraisemblable. Ce panier d'oeufs renversés et cassés est-il hiéroglyphique? . . . Encore une fois le père et la mère auraient-ils eu quelque suspicion de la conduite de leur fille? Seraient-ils venus à dessein de la surprendre avec un amant?³

Diderot was apparently not the only visitor to the Salon for whom this

painting created problems of interpretation; the limits of speculation seemed to depend, in fact, only upon the amount of time one had to devote to the subject:

Reconnaîtraient-ils au désordre de la couche qu'ils étaient arrivés trop tard? . . .Voilà ce qui me vient à l'esprit, parce que je ne suis plus malin. Mais d'autres ont d'autres idées; tous ces plis, l'endroit où ils se pressent ...Eh bien, ces plis, cet endroit, cette main? Après? Est-ce qu'une fille de cet âge-là n'est pas maîtresse d'user dans son lit de toutes ses lumières secrètes sans que ses parens doivent s'en inquiéter? ...Ce n'est donc pas cela; qu'est-ce donc? ...Voyez, Monsieur Le Prince, quand on est obscur combien on fait imaginer des sotises.⁴

Paintings such as this constituted a kind of gentleman's agreement between the artist and the patron; what would have been forbidden in written form was quite acceptable and avidly sought after in painted form. Whatever Le Prince's paintings may have lacked in explicit statement, they more than compensated for it in suggestion, so that their erotic potential was not fulfilled by the observer's looking at the paintings but by his thinking about them. The element of surprise, although not explicitly depicted in this peaceful scene is nonetheless present in the broken eggs which suggest a frantic scramble on someone's part and also serve, perhaps, a hieroglyphic function, as Diderot suggests: unless the daughter customarily made her bed in the pantry, there is no other reasonable explanation for the presence of the eggs in her room. Such surprise, of course, was much more easily enjoyed vicariously, even though the pleasure it suggested was of the flesh. Thus in painting, if not in life, the penalties of pleasure could be as enjoyable as the pleasure itself.

The critic and the connoisseur in Diderot can be seen to contend with each other in his description of a painting with a similar theme; Baudouin's "La Chaumière":

Au centre de la toile et du tableau, une vieille, le dos courbé, le visage allumé de colère, les poings sur les côtés, gourmandant sa fille étendue sur une botte de paille qu'elle partage avec un jeune paysan, pauvre lit que je troquerais bien pour le mien, car la fille est jolie . . . son élégance jure avec le lieu et la condition des personnages . . . tout ceci bien peint, mais très-bien peint, n'est qu'un amas de contradictions, point de vérité, point de vrai goût.⁵

The painting appeals to Diderot in the delectability of its subject matter, but disappoints him in those aspects which would stand in contradiction to his intellectual moral sense. Surprise or discovery was merely one of the hazards of personal enjoyment and thus became a common theme in the painters' repertoire, appearing in conjunction with amorous escapades in rustic, contemporary, or mythological settings. Other paintings with similar titles in the Salon of 1769 bear out the continuing popularity of the theme of discovery of forbidden enjoyment; painted by La Grenée and destined for the King's bedroom were "Vulcain qui surprend Mars avec Vénus"; "Psyché qui surprend l'Amour endormi"; "Jupiter et Junon endormis par Morphée", the latter of which appeared in 1767. In the same year, disguise and discovery combined in Mme Therbouche's "Jupiter métamorphosé en Pan, qui surprend Antiope endormie". The names and places varied from canvas to canvas but the activity remained the same; it represented the perfect compromise between participation and escape--enjoyment with impunity.

Nous aimons le plaisir en personne,
et la douleur en peinture.¹

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE TEMPORAL

But Diderot sought to inspire art to move in a new direction, which constituted the major reason for his reaction against rococo, although he often enjoyed it personally. The tension in Diderot between morality and antimorality was not only reflective of the conflict in society between middle class and aristocratic values, but also of the dichotomy between neo-pagan and religious principles which characterized the increasingly secular eighteenth-century society, and which underlay Diderot's search for a vehicle of lay morality as well as a sybaritic disdain for the mortification of the flesh.

He was fully aware at the same time that it was as useless to look to the fashionable painting to disappear overnight as it was to attempt to suppress it:

Je sais que celui qui supprime un mauvais livre ou qui détruit une statue voluptueuse, ressemble à un idiot qui craindrait de pisser dans un fleuve, de peur qu'un homme ne s'y noyât. Mais laissons-là l'effet de ces productions sur les mœurs de la nation, restreignons-le aux mœurs particulières.²

Better lessons would be conveyed by busts, statues, and portraits of men who had served their country well as counselors, as men of letters or the fine arts; but the rococo would never fulfill this function; it was fashionable, it appealed to a certain taste, but the fact that it also appealed to instinct assured its continued popularity.

Besides expressing itself in favor of the anecdote, Diderot's reaction against the rococo also took form in a fondness for neo-classical painting. In mid-eighteenth-century France, reaction against rococo painting was fairly widespread; in disapproving of the subject matter of rococo painting, Diderot reflected the growing influence of bourgeois values in French society in the second half of the century. Certainly most contemporary painting and sculpture failed to satisfy Diderot's emphasis on utility, which was also one of the most honored values of the middle class. Works of art which idealized--or even disguised--the amorous escapades of a bored aristocracy were radically incongruous with the virtues of labor, discipline, and chastity cherished by the bourgeoisie.³ In Diderot's Salon of 1767, the urgency of the need for "useful" moral painting can be measured in the intensified severity of his criticisms. He retains his fondness for flesh without relinquishing his allegiance to the utopian principle that moral painting would evoke a moral society.

Se jeter dans les extrêmes, voilà la règle du poëte,
garder en tout un juste milieu, voilà la règle du bonheur.¹

MELANCHOLY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

That such utopian moral principles would even venture into print suggests a tenacious optimism; it was matched, characteristically, by a tenacious pessimism, whereby one might pursue happiness in full knowledge and resignation that he would never find it. In painting, the inevitable end of the search for happiness lay in a state of melancholy. Every attainment of man was accompanied by its retraction: the utopian idyll with its classical setting yielded to the ravages of time, and ruins--just ruins--appeared in French painting; peaceful landscapes became violent seascapes where man's insignificance was silhouetted dramatically against the whirlwind and the tempest. This was the poetry, the grandeur, the sublimity that Diderot sought in painting; it was not nature, nor was it "la belle nature"; it was the nature of violent and irrational extremes. Such painting inspired Diderot to reverie and reflection, (which is what he expected a good painting to do); a seascape by Vernet prompts him to reflect:

Au loin, des pêcheurs . . .chacun . . .suivant des
routes contraires quoique poussé par un même vent:
image de l'homme et du bonheur, du philosophe et de
la vérité.²

But to begin at the beginning, the utopian concept held that the world was perfectible, but this could not be so if man were not also perfectible, and from that, the corollary of utopianism--that perfect societies could be filled with happy people, that if all else tended

toward perfection so also did the lot of man:

Tout être tend à son bonheur . . .³

But in what, exactly, did happiness consist? And at what point did liberty become license? The eighteenth century had a tendency, in its mores and folkways, to confuse happiness with pleasure; the pursuit of happiness was only another face of the flight from boredom, the search for novelty. At the same time, and tending--in appearance, at least--in the opposite direction, was the flight from artificiality, back to nature, to something original, fundamental, and pure.

O sauvages habitants des forêts, hommes libres qui vivez encore dans l'état de nature et que notre approche n'a point corrompus, que vous êtes heureux si l'habitude qui affaiblit toutes les jouissances et qui rend les privations plus amères, n'a point altéré le bonheur de votre vie.⁴

The key word is "l'habitude", the deadly, numbing companion to daily life, to which only savages and libertines could be immune--savages, because in the state of nature, a utopian state, habit and boredom did not yet exist; libertines, because habit held no power over those who searched endlessly for novelty. It would seem, from this, that society tended in two opposite directions, but in reality the two penchants--toward nature and toward novelty--overlapped. In a moral climate where mundane values were supreme, where the frantic pursuit of novelty and pleasure was matched by a manifest dread of boredom and monotony, virtue became the novelty to be sought after and assumed all the exoticism of a savage in his forest, because virtue was the proper attribute of the natural man; it vanished with the corrupting influences of civilization:

Si tout concourt à perfectionner, tout concourt à corrompre.⁵

How could eighteenth-century man recapture the lost primordial innocence? How could he, enmeshed in the refinements and polite contrivances of urban society, become a man again? In what is perhaps the darkest passage in all the Salons, Diderot suggests that it is the province of art to restore the virility to an effeminate society. The sadness comes from the knowledge that even this restoration is only make-believe:

Enchaînés dans l'enceinte étroite des villes par des occupations ennuyeuses et de tristes devoirs, si nous ne pouvons retrouver dans les forêts notre premier asyle nous sacrifions une portion de notre opulence à appeler les forêts autour de nos demeures; mais là elles ont perdu sous la main symétrique de l'art leur silence, leur innocence, leur liberté, leur majesté, leur repos.⁶

The wish to escape refinement and contrived symmetry, to be closer to nature, expressed itself in the popularity of the jardin anglais, where the geometrical symmetry of arrangement which had typified the seventeenth-century jardin français yielded to a more "natural" arrangement; but it was still only an arrangement and could not finally alleviate the fundamental sadness:

Là, nous allons contrefaire un moment le rôle du sauvage, esclaves des usages, des passions, jouer la pantomime de l'homme de Nature.⁷

But if art could not transform reality, it could at least aid in the escape from it:

Dans l'impossibilité de nous livrer aux fonctions et aux amusements de la vie champêtre, d'errer dans une campagne, de suivre un troupeau, d'habiter une chau-

mière, nous invitons à prix d'or et d'argent le pin-
 ceau de Wouwermans, de Berghem ou de Vernet à nous
 retracer les moeurs et l'histoire de nos anciens
 aïeux. Et les murs de nos somptueuses et maussades
 demeures se couvrent des images d'un bonheur que
 nous regrettons.⁸

The affluent rococo society consisted in materiality, consuming things,
 reveling in the pleasures of the senses and for want of escape or fur-
 ther variety consumed itself; happiness was a nostalgic memory, an
 elusive phantasm that disintegrated at the touch of the cultured man
 and went away to dwell with the poor in spirit:

. . . Nous sommes dévorés par l'ambition, la haine, la
 jalousie et l'amour; et nous brûlons de la soif de
 l'honneur et de la richesse, au milieu des scènes de l'in-
 nocence et de la pauvreté, s'il est permis d'appeller
 pauvre celui à qui tout appartient. Nous sommes des
 malheureux autour desquels le bonheur est représenté
 sous mille formes diverses.⁹

The unattainability of happiness may well have occasioned a
 genuinely heartfelt sense of loss on Diderot's part, but as a current
 idea, it served also to direct one's preoccupation inward, where one
 could indulge in the exquisite loneliness of melancholy. Even pain
 could be pleasant, but the sweet innocence of poverty remained sweet
 only so long as it was unattainable. No one really wanted to be poor;
 participation in the fashionable monodrama of melancholy demanded that
 one be comfortable and long to be poor, thus paying to the things of
 the spirit the homage of hypocrisy. In reality, the poor were miser-
 able and dull; in poetry, they were noble, the salt of the earth; it
 was to this poetic, idealized notion of the poor that Diderot alluded
 when he referred to the "poor"; but as we have already seen,¹⁰ when the
 focus reverted to the melancholy, poetic man, "l'homme passionné", the
 poor, common man suffered from the comparison:

Ô bienheureux mortels, inertes, imbéciles, engourdis; vous buvez, vous mangez, vous dormez, vous vieillissez, et vous mourez sans avoir joui, sans avoir souffert, sans qu'aucune secousse ait fait osciller le poids qui vous pressait sur le sol où vous êtes nés. On ne sait où est la sépulture de l'énergique; la vôtre est toujours sous vos pieds.¹¹

Even though Diderot addresses them as "bienheureux mortels", neither he nor anyone else would voluntarily exchange places with them; in fact, the very inconsequentiality of their lives serves as illustration and justification of Diderot's stated belief:

. . .garder en tout un juste milieu, voilà la règle du bonheur . . .¹²

Happiness, like common sense and virtue,¹³ was not worth having; happiness was dull; the pursuit was exciting, but attainment unthinkable. Melancholy was erected as a barrier against the fortuitous encroachment of happiness: melancholy could preserve the delicious agony indefinitely, because the object of the pursuit, of the search, remained of necessity indeterminate:

Quelquefois il erre . . .saisissant tout, renonçant à tout . . .¹⁴

The search centered perforce upon a vague object because once one determined what he wanted, there was a chance that he might find it. The pursuit of happiness was one thing; the attainment of it meant inertia. Like the idealized poor, the noble savage of the forest, the neo-classical pretensions to Antique grandeur, and the erotomania of the rococo, melancholy derived from fantasy; it was not born of a saddening confrontation with reality but of a refusal to confront that reality; in the poeticized state of melancholy, one could be

both an observer of life and a participant, but never a victim. One assumed mental anguish as a defense against physical pain; loneliness as an alternative to overt (and unpoetic) rejection of the company of other men.

Se jeter dans les extrêmes, voilà la règle du poète ...¹⁵

Rustic poverty, happiness, and melancholy were all extremes: poverty and happiness both represented extensions of middle-class values: poverty was the romanticized, idealized face of frugality; happiness was the exalted, perfected distortion of what was in reality mere routine contentment. Melancholy, with its vague searching and its endless prolonging of emotion, derived from the "ennui" of the aristocracy. Poverty was picturesque, but melancholy was a state of mind, and the perfect vehicle for incorporating melancholy into the visual arts was the depiction of scenes which would inspire nostalgia, reverie, and sadness. The man of feeling saw in nature a reflection of his moods and emotions--in whirlwind and tempest and brooding sky. Paintings of nature where untamed, unyielding elements seethed, smoldered, and exploded reflected this attitude and framed its fantasies; but this Nature with its impenetrable passions was a counterfeit, as the jardin anglais was a counterfeit, but calculated to stir the emotions, to move man to bethink himself of the shortness of time. Paintings of ruins, the pictorial counterpart of oblivion, also served this end and, since they depicted the aftermath of the ravages of time rather than the ravages themselves, they provided a framework for the projection of nostalgia and reverie. Vernet's brooding skies and churning surf and Robert's ruins brought melan-

choly into painting; the one by reflecting its moods; the other by inviting its celebration.

Tending in the opposite direction from the instructive anecdote, this artistic current reverted to the principle of pleasure; and once again, in keeping with that principle, suggestion was more evocative than explicit imagery:

L'obscurité ajoute à la terreur . . . La nuit dérobe les formes, donne de l'horreur aux bruits . . . met l'imagination en jeu, l'imagination secoue vivement les entrailles; tout s'exagère . . . La clarté est bonne pour convaincre; elle ne vaut rien pour émouvoir.¹⁶

The pleasure associated with such motifs derived from emotion and sensation rather than from the intellect:

Monsieur Robert, vous ne savez pas encore pourquoi les ruines font tant de plaisir, indépendamment de la variété des accidens qu'elles montrent . . .¹⁷

Whereas on the one hand, art portrayed nature as an embodiment of the passions, it also served the taste for melancholy through overt imagery where ruins appeared as the emblem of vicissitude, and served an almost hieratic function in purporting to evoke specific emotions through their very presence.

Les idées que les ruines réveillent en moi sont grandes. Tout s'anéantit, tout périt, tout passe, il n'y a que le monde qui reste, il n'y a que le temps qui dure. Qu'il est vieux, ce monde! Je marche entre deux éternités. De quelque part que je jette les yeux, les objets qui m'entourent m'annoncent une fin et me résignent à celle qui m'attend.¹⁸

If ruins represented the vicissitudes of time, they also represented a haven where one might wander in imagination, experiencing terror

or languor, according to the suggestion of the image. The celebration of melancholy had an iconography proper to itself:

Monsieur Robert, souvent on reste en admiration à l'entrée de vos ruines; faites ou qu'on s'en éloigne avec effroi, ou qu'on s'y promène avec plaisir.¹⁹

Ruins were emblematic and stirred the imagination because of the ideas one customarily associated with them:

. . .Raison de leur noblesse et de leur grandeur . . . Ici, il se joint encore aux objets un cortège d'idées accessoires et morales de l'énergie de la nature humaine, de la puissance des peuples . . . Cela sembloit devoir être éternel. Cependant cela se détruit, cela passe, bientôt cela sera passé.²⁰

Paintings of ruins served their purpose if they caused one to reflect upon the brevity of his span, but they also invited one to shed the petty annoyances of everyday life, to assume the tragic passions of the daydream, and indulge in vicarious emotional experience:

Nous aimons, sans nous en douter, tout ce qui nous livre à nos penchants, nous séduit et excuse notre faiblesse.²¹

But unlike rococo painting, which also dealt in vicarious emotional experience, ruins represented the demise of society with all its artificialities and vices and good intentions. For the man who wished to flee those vices, the motif of the ruin appeared as the fulfillment of his wishes: the life of society became bearable as long as one remained mindful that its ills were terminal.

The motif of the ruin represented all these things to Diderot: Where monuments built by the titans of the earth to endure throughout eternity were destined to serve an uninterrupted succession of heirs

to their names, their titles, and their pageantry, Diderot saw an escape from daily life, a solemn reminder of death, a place for the indulgence of daydream and melancholy, a stronghold of innocence, an altar for the celebration of remorse.

Il n'y a de leurs travaux, de leurs énormes dépenses, de leurs grandes vues que des débris qui servent d'asyle à la partie la plus indigente, la plus malheureuse de l'espèce humaine, plus utiles en ruines qu'ils ne le furent dans leur première splendeur.²²

Past grandeur fades and the poor in spirit inherit the earth, as Diderot turns from the attraction of the cult of melancholy to the concept of utility. While the art of his time presented many fascinating diversions for Diderot, his concept of utility is never totally engulfed, nor do its attendant values of modesty and discipline suffer from permanent neglect. In a century characterized by an aimless and self-perpetuating pursuit of pleasure, Diderot attempted to evoke an art which would give that pleasure a purpose. Society and its usages consisted in a state of polite hypocrisy and cynical pretense, a society in which

Le grand homme n'est plus celui qui fait vrai, c'est celui qui sait le mieux concilier le mensonge avec la vérité; . . . jusqu'à ce qu'un philosophe poète dépèce l'hipogrife et tente de ramener ses contemporains à un meilleur goût.²³

Eighteenth-century French society was a fabric of concepts in opposition: with man's need to progress, to overcome the problems associated with earthly life, there appeared a counter-current of reversion, expressing itself in the human need to cling to the earth. In the age of reason and belief in all its potentialities, intuition was also prized as a creative instinct, which could only function

and bear fruit apart from the aridity of logic. One group honored morality; another fashioned a life-style around antimorality. Fantasy vied with reality as discovery invariably betrayed disguise. The worlds of the flesh and of the spirit were far apart, but in an increasingly secular and decadent society, spiritual values were all the more urgently needed to the extent that they were flouted or scorned. The pursuit of happiness was doomed to end in disappointment, because in the never-ending search for novel emotional stimuli, the stasis of contentment seemed almost bovine when compared to the noble sentiment of melancholy.

Diderot's thought revolves around all these polarities and oppositions as he examines the art of the Salons. Critics who dismiss his commentaries strictly because of their inconsistencies, and those who patronize him by minimizing those inconsistencies do him equal injustice. Inconsistency and contradiction formed the essence of his world view:

Le beau tableau, dira le peintre! La pauvre chose, dira
le littérateur! et ils auront raison tous les deux.²⁴

It is no accident that Diderot was a man of many dialogues, a form he turned to frequently in discussing the art of his time, indicating his belief that there are at least two sides to every issue, each of them worthy of consideration.

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35. *ibid.*, p. 142.
36. *ibid.*, p. 233.
37. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 286.
38. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 145.
39. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 66.
40. loc. cit.
41. *ibid.*, p. 125.
42. *ibid.*, p. 222.
43. Oeuvres, Vol. X, p. 470.
44. Salons, Vol. II, p. 111.
45. *ibid.*, p. 112.
46. Fry, Roger, Characteristics of French Art, London, Chatto and Windus, 1932, p. 66.
47. Salons, Vol. II, p. 113.
48. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 128-29.
49. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 280.

DIDEROT AS CRITIC

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 89
2. *ibid.*, Vol. I. p. 248.
3. *ibid.*, p. 123.

(DIDEROT AS CRITIC)

4. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 278.
5. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 159.
6. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 278.
7. *loc. cit.*
8. Oeuvres, Vol. XII, "Pensées", p. 113.
9. Salons, Vol. I, p. 10.
10. *ibid.*, p. 209.

DIDEROT'S VALUES AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ETHOS

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 70.
2. Fellows, Otis E. and Norman L. Torrey, eds., The Age of Enlightenment, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1942, p. 288.
3. Salons, Vol. III, p. 64.
4. see May, Gita, "Diderot and Burke: a study in aesthetic affinity", PMLA, Dec. 1960, pp. 527-39.

THE SALON OF 1767

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 87.
2. *ibid.*, p. 69.
3. *ibid.*, p. 277.
4. *ibid.*, "De la manière", p. 338.
5. *ibid.*, p. 238.
6. *ibid.*, p. 56.
7. Leith, The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France 1750-1799, p. 7.
8. Salons, Vol. III, p. 61.
9. *ibid.*, p. 63.

(THE SALON OF 1767)

10. Starobinski, The Invention of Liberty 1700-1789, p. 188.

PROGRESS AND REVERSION

1. Salons, Vol. III, "De la manière", p. 336.
2. *ibid.*, p. 61.
3. *ibid.*, "De la manière", p. 336.
4. *loc. cit.*

REASON AND INTUITION

1. Salons, Vol. III, "De la manière", p. 336.
2. *ibid.*, p. 154.
3. *ibid.*, p. 153.
4. *ibid.*, p. 117.
5. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 75.

MORALITY AND ANTIMORALITY

1. Salons, Vol. III, "De la manière", p. 336.
2. *ibid.*, p. 157.
3. *ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
4. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 78.
5. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 148.
6. *ibid.*, p. 149.
7. *ibid.*, p. 308.

DISGUISE AND DISCOVERY

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 215.

(DISGUISE AND DISCOVERY)

2. loc. cit.
3. loc. cit.
4. loc. cit.
5. *ibid.*, p. 202.

THE SPIRITUAL AND THE TEMPORAL

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 144.
2. *ibid.*, p. 199.
3. Leith, The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France, p. 7 *passim*.

MELANCHOLY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

1. Salons, Vol. III, p. 148.
2. *ibid.*, p. 146.
3. *ibid.*, p. 148.
4. *ibid.*, p. 152.
5. *ibid.*, p. 238.
6. *ibid.*, p. 139.
7. loc. cit.
8. loc. cit.
9. loc. cit.
10. see *supra.*, p. 91, nn. 6 and 7.
11. *ibid.*, p. 222.
12. *ibid.*, p. 148.
13. see *supra.*, p. 91.
14. Salons, Vol. III, p. 222.
15. *ibid.*, p. 148.

(MELANCHOLY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS)

16. *ibid.*, p. 165.
17. *ibid.*, p. 228.
18. *loc. cit.*
19. *ibid.*, p. 234.
20. *ibid.*, p. 118.
21. *ibid.*, p. 229.
22. *ibid.*, p. 246.
23. *ibid.*, p. 248.
24. *ibid.*, p. 87.

ILLUSTRATIONS



7

- 6. CARLE VAN LOO. Médée
- 7. CARLE VAN LOO. Baigneuses

Carle Van Loo

"The Bathers"

Figure 1

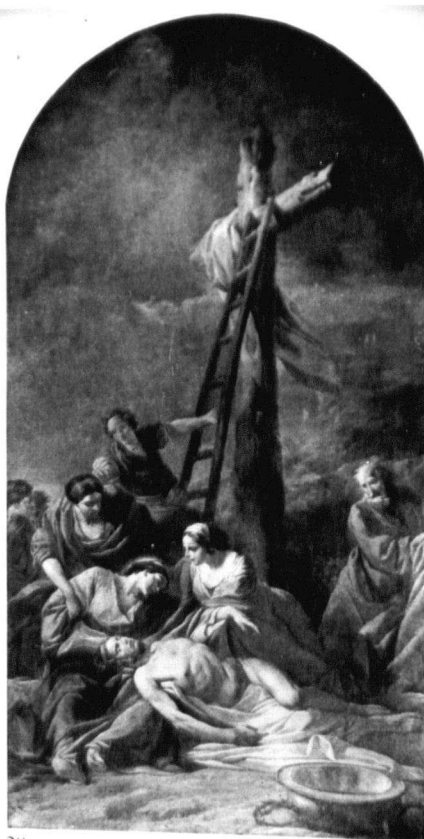


22. L.-M. VAN LOO. Le Roi

L.-M. Van Loo

"Portrait of the King"

Figure 2



28

J.-B. Pierre

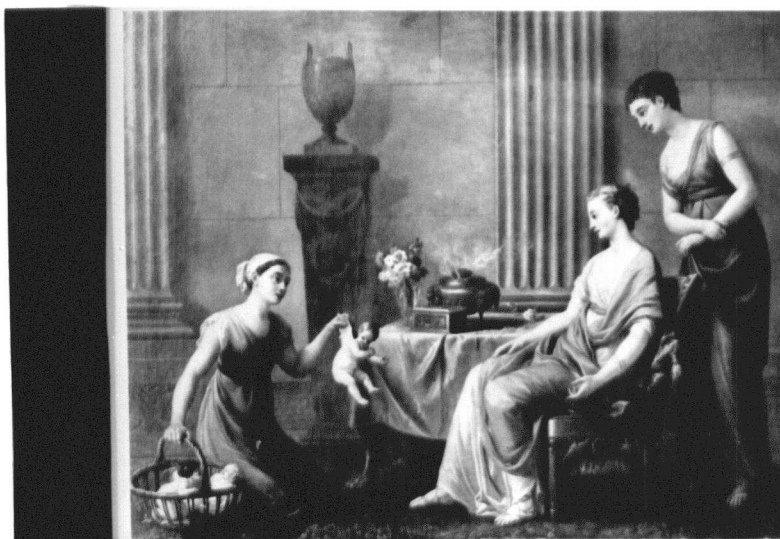
"Descent from the Cross"

Figure 3



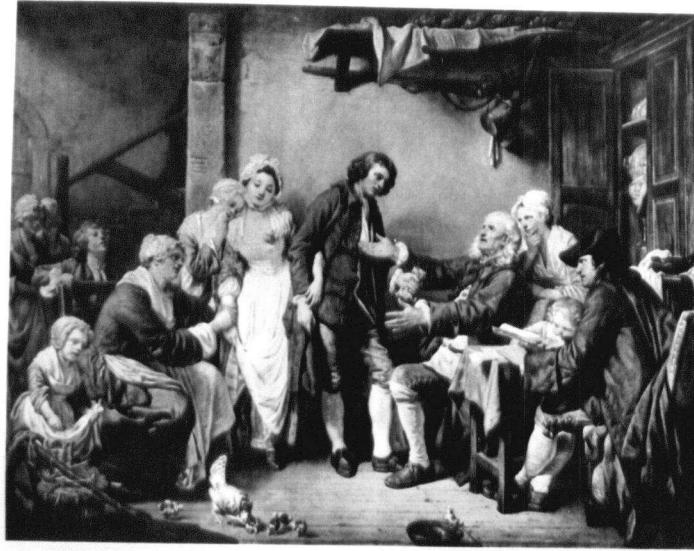
Carracci: "Descent from the Cross"

Figure 4



Vien: "The Wardrobe Dealer"

Figure 5



64. GREUZE. L'accordée du village.

Greuze: "Father who has just paid the dowry of his Daughter"

Figure 6



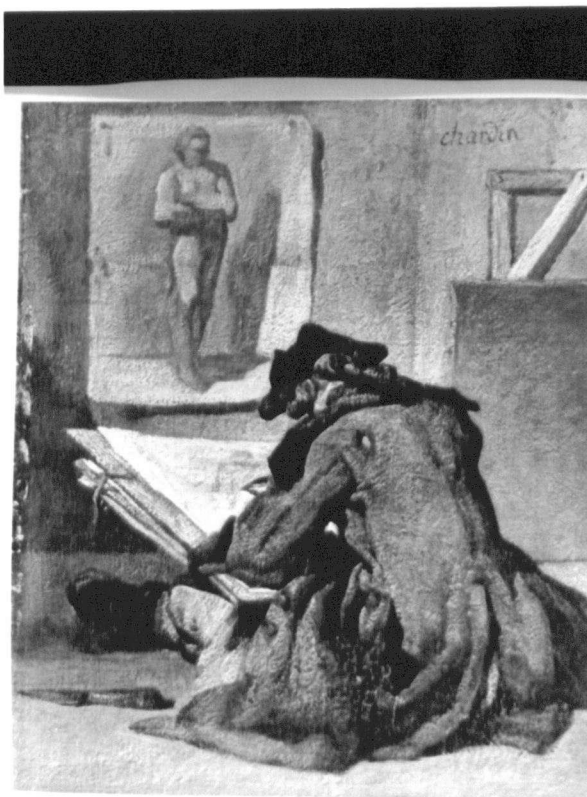
Greuze: "Filial Piety"

Figure 7

Chardin

"The Young Artist"

Figure 8



004 CHARDIN Le jeune dessinateur



63

Fragonard: "Head of an Old Man"

Figure 9