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Steven R. Adams

“Noising things abroad”: Art, Commodity, and Commerce in Post-Revolutionary Paris

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Abstract:

This article examines some of the changes in the ways paintings were made, circulated, and consumed in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Paris. It explores the creation of a new mode of speaking about the arts by a new constituency of art dealers, which flourished as a result of the emergence of a new class of bourgeois art lovers, economically enfranchised by the democratizing effects of the French Revolution.

“Noising things abroad”: Art, Commodity, and Commerce in Post-Revolutionary Paris

by Steven R. Adams

Item nine: Beware of purchasing dearly, cheap bargains at the perambulating shops which infest the boulevards.

Item twelve: Talk not of politics in France, it is not political.

—Francis Coghlan, *A Visit to Paris; or, the Stranger’s Guide to Every Object Worthy Notice in That Gay City*, 1830^[1]

Introduction

This article explores some of the ways in which the social, cultural, and demographic changes brought about by the French Revolution shaped the Parisian art market in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the significance of some of those changes for the subsequent configuration of French art’s history. Much has been written about the Parisian art market in the eighteenth century and much also about the market in the second half of the nineteenth century. Before the Revolution, the capital’s dealers traded mostly in pictures of established cultural and financial value supported by an artist’s place within a recognized art-historical canon. The market, as Charlotte Guichard has shown, was largely sustained by aristocratic and clerical *mécènes*, collectors whose knowledge was informed by long years of scholarship.^[2] By the mid-nineteenth century, those patterns of patronage had changed markedly. The arts had become the preserve of a newly enfranchised middle class and were sustained by a new aesthetic that insisted upon art’s autonomy. Painting and sculpture became a vehicle for the articulation of nothing other than artists’ creative convictions. Nicholas Green, Christopher Parsons and Neil McWilliam, Linda Whiteley, Robert Jensen, and others have variously shown how from around the 1830s, assertions of artists’ creative conviction—often made in the face of critical or official disapproval—were used by art dealers to provide pictures of little or no canonical authority first with an aesthetic identity and then, by extension, a market value.^[3] Such a marketing strategy had an enormous impact on the ways in which historians and critics conceptualized the history of French art. When at the end of the nineteenth century prominent art critics—Paul Mantz (1821–95), Alfred de Lostalot (1837–1909), and Louis Gonse (1846–1921), in 1889, and Emile Molinier (1857–1906), Roger Marx (1859–1913), and Paul-Franz Marcou (1860–1932), in 1900—looked back over the art of the past one hundred years, they saw the creation of an autonomous art sustained by personal sensibility as one of French painting’s most conspicuous achievements.^[4] Mid-century dealers’ commercial application of authorial sensibility had in essence been naturalized as part of a quasi-official art-historical narrative. Not least, throughout the later part of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries modernism continued to be predicated on the ideal of an autonomous art liberated from institutional imperatives and sustained largely by the unique insights of its authors.

But what of the crucial forty years or so between the end of the ancien régime and the foundation of the July Monarchy in 1830, the period in which the arts began to lose what the historian and critic Pierre-Marie Gault de Saint-Germain (1752–1842), writing in 1808,

described "as a solid base for appreciation"?[5] This article examines the erosion of this "solid base" and Parisian art critics' and dealers' attempts to construct an alternative.

The Revolution decimated the ranks of the clerical and aristocratic patrons and redistributed their wealth among a middle class bereft, it was said, of a scholarly appreciation of the arts. Deprived of this solid base of appreciation, dealers and collectors increasingly encouraged the consumption of works of art of often highly-questionable cultural capital, and invested paintings with new forms of value. The *avertissements* that prefaced exhibition catalogues published in the three decades after the Revolution often forged elaborate narratives around mainly modern and contemporary landscape and genre painting. Those narratives, of singular importance in the creation of a modernist discourse, underscored neither a work's venerable provenance nor its author's place within an art historical canon—paradigms generally common during the ancien régime—but rather the "sensibility" of the artist and collector, a fluid concept that made pictures the subject of new and subtle forms of manipulation. First rehearsed in forms as diverse as art criticism, social commentary, and comic drama, these narratives provided the foundational components of a new critical framework for the appreciation of art, a framework whose half-life extends well into the twentieth century.

The "beau règne des amateurs"[6]: The Parisian Art Market During the Ancien Régime

Before the French Revolution, works of art by well-known artists connected with one of "les trois écoles"—the Italian, the Dutch and Flemish, and the French Schools—exchanged hands for large, sometimes spectacular sums. When in November 1784, for example, the comte de Vaudreuil (1740–1817) came to sell part of his collection, it comprised works from both the Italian School and the Low Countries.[7] Not least among his collection was *The Alliance of Jacob and Laban* (fig. 1) by the Italian painter Pietro da Cortona (1596–1669)—the most expensive picture sold during the ancien régime—bought on behalf of Louis XVI for just under 36,000 *livres*[8] (about three times the annual salary of the permanent secretary for the Académie Française).[9] The collection also included some prime examples of Dutch art, including a *Fête Flamande* by David Teniers (1610–90) sold for 13,000 *livres*, and a genre scene by Jan van Huysum (1682–1749), which fetched 16,000 *livres*. [10] Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun (1748–1813), the dealer charged with organizing the event, described the collection, with justification, as "unmatched" in Paris: the auction's 83 lots realized just under 382,000 *livres*, equivalent to a year's income from a mid-size tax farm.[11] Not all picture sales were quite of this high caliber. At the lower end of the art market, it was by no means unknown for the quality of some of the pictures that changed hands to be called into question; nor were the means by which works of art acquired cultural and financial value always above reproach.[12] Dealers of the period were sometimes taken to task for writing inflated descriptions to snare gullible collectors. François-Charles Joullain's (1734–90) *Réflexions sur la peinture*, of 1786, spoke of the uninformed taste and profligacy of amateurs who, in turn, encouraged "would-be" painters to turn out "enormous quantities of pictures" with little merit.[13] The essayist Jean-Baptiste Nougaret (1742–1823) even records the presence of "orphans" at public sales who would explain their plight to potential buyers in the hope of soliciting sympathy and an inflated price for the collection of a putative late relative.[14] At the upper end of the art market, however, collecting art was seen as a culturally worthy pursuit, one in which the French nobility might take pride. Joullain described the art dealer as an informed counselor to the learned *mécène*, someone who could advise on matters of taste and connoisseurship as well as authenticity and value.[15] For the most part, as Colin Bailey has compellingly shown, there were a large number of very high quality pictures circulating on the Parisian art market of a sound provenance, made by artists

of renown with an established place in a historical canon and bought and sold by enlightened amateurs, for Paris to make a credible claim that the city was “the capital of art.”[\[16\]](#)



Fig. 1, Pietro da Cortona, *The Alliance of Jacob and Laban*. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[larger image\]](#)

From where did these historical canons derive their authority and how did such canonical values intersect with the market’s methods of classifying and consuming art? During the ancien régime, history painting of the Italian school—the first of the “trois écoles”—took priority over the others on the basis that it was an intellectual, intrinsically noble art and the preserve of an educated social elite, the origins of which could be traced back to humanist writing on arts during the Renaissance.[\[17\]](#) Italy’s greatest painters typically took their subject matter from erudite sources and addressed the mind of the informed intellectual. In France, history painting’s priority had been rehearsed in detail since the formation of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1648 and was subsequently restated in various scholarly histories of European art over the next 150 years. One latter-day and widely-referenced incarnation of this tradition, Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville’s (1680–1765) *Abrégé de la vie des peintres* of 1762, restated art’s origins in antiquity, its revival during the Renaissance and again its division into a pecking order of “three schools.”[\[18\]](#) Many of the capital’s most prominent dealers—Edmé-François Gersaint (1694–1750) in the 1720s, Pierre Rémy (fl. 1730–50) and Joullain a decade or so later—drew upon these systems of classification and broadly recognized Italian art’s standing as the centerpiece of any collection. History painting’s primacy, it seems, went almost without question, even in some instances in which the ostensibly nobler works were not originals. A copy of a work by Raphael (1483–1520) curiously took pride of place in one sale on the basis that its association with the scion of the classical tradition rendered it the noblest (but not the most expensive) work in the collection.[\[19\]](#)

This vein of socially-exclusive art criticism disparaged the lower genres of the Flemish and Dutch Schools on the basis that their execution required only uninformed imitation and appealed to the senses.[\[20\]](#) Art from the Low Countries typically depicted anecdotal scenes from everyday life, interiors, and landscapes. Meticulously finished, such pictures contained demonstrable evidence of an artist’s labor and skills, artisanal aspects of painting that the untutored amateur could appreciate with ease. Genre paintings from the Dutch and Flemish Schools were consequently located at the end of a sale of works of art, again, often irrespective

of their financial value, provenance, or historical importance.^[21] Despite the ubiquity of this method of classifying paintings, the hierarchy rarely troubled market forces, and there were numerous instances in which popular taste trumped academic dogma and the price paid for works by a well-known Dutch painter exceeded that paid for “nobler” works, especially during the last years of the ancien régime, when pictures from the Low Countries fetched astronomical sums. Adriaen van de Velde’s (1636–72) *Landscape Divided by a River* (fig. 2), bought by Louis XVI for just under 20,100 *livres* at the Vaudreuil sale, fetched well in excess of the 15,100 *livres* Lebrun paid for Nicolas Poussin’s (1594–1665) *Fête en l’honneur du dieu Pan* (fig. 3), an ostensibly far nobler painting in the Italian tradition described in the catalogue as with an impeccable provenance and said to be one of the most beautiful works by France’s most revered history painter.^[22] Petra ten-Doesschate Chu has spoken of an “underground” current of admiration for Dutch art during last years of the ancien régime. This current never challenged the cultural authority of the classical humanist tradition in history painting, but the admiration for Dutch art remained widespread.^[23] Thus, despite the vicissitudes and contradictions of collecting art in eighteenth-century Paris, there were tried and tested methods—some dogmatic, others pragmatic—of validating paintings underpinned by a canonical body of art-historical literature and, not least, an active class of aristocratic and haut-bourgeois patrons with the learning, financial resources, and enthusiasm to give the arts the support they deserved.^[24] Luc-Vincent Thierry’s (fl. 1770–90) *Guide des amateurs et des étrangers voyageurs à Paris* of 1782 listed some 40 prominent collectors active in the capital,^[25] and Joullain largely attributed France’s standing as the center of European arts and letters to the efforts of this social class.^[26]



Fig. 2, Adriaen van der Velde, *Landscape Divided by a River*. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 3, Nicolas Poussin, *A Bacchanalian Revel before a Term* (*Fête en honneur du dieu Pan*), 1634. Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London. Photo: Courtesy of Bridgman Art Library. [\[larger image\]](#)

Over the next two decades, the stock of high quality, old-master paintings from Italy, the Low Countries and France circulating on the French market diminished. The Revolutionary and Imperial wars impeded the flow of pictures back and forth from Paris, London, and Amsterdam, and the Revolution itself decimated the educated class of patrons to whom Joullain referred.^[27] As a result, pictures of lesser cultural and financial value—typically old-master paintings of doubtful authenticity, works by minor masters, and eighteenth century French works—appeared in greater quantity on the art market. Particularly prominent were French genre and landscape paintings, small pictures depicting subjects that were easily accessible to a new class of largely untutored collectors. In the absence of traditional methods of validation—evidence of a work’s provenance or the place of an artist in an historical canon—dealers exploited the market by constructing narratives known as *avertissements* set out in the preface to sales catalogues. These narratives called attention not to the work’s place in history but to the person of the artist, his personal integrity, patience, and insight, highly subjective factors that a dealer might easily project onto the works of otherwise unstable cultural value.

Trade in pictures typically took place in one of the Hôtel de Bullion’s seven salerooms.^[28] In instances where collections were large, pictures were sometimes sold at the vendor’s homes.^[29] The Hôtel de Bullion remained, however, the main location for the auction of works of art in the capital. Here, dealers prepared catalogues and traded pictures, among themselves, and with the members of the public who flocked to the Hôtel to witness what had become a popular public spectacle.^[30] Sales took place under the auspices of the official charged with ensuring the sale was conducted with propriety, the auctioneer or *commissaire priseur*, and *experts*—frequently artists or dealers—who gave assurance of a picture’s quality and authenticity.^[31] However, the professional boundaries between *commissaires*, *experts* and dealers were alarmingly fluid and the opportunities for unethical trading numerous. Gault de Saint-Germain (1752–1842) described the frenetic atmosphere in the salesrooms, and warned the inexperienced collector against buying fakes and, more particularly, to be wary of the inflated rhetoric found in sales catalogues.^[32]

How did the Revolution affect ways in which the arts were made, consumed, and spoken about? The idea that a period of informed and well-funded patronage, what Quatremère

termed the "great reign of the amateurs," ended with the aristocracy's and the monarchy's dispatch was a common refrain in the early nineteenth century.^[33] In practice, the picture was much more complicated. The outbreak of French Revolution had an immediate impact on the quality and volume of pictures bought and sold in the capital. In 1788, the last year of the ancien régime, some 10,000 pictures were sold in around 30 auctions; in the twelve months following July 1789, however, there were just over half that number of auctions with a corresponding reduction in the number of pictures sold.^[34] Thereafter, the market stabilized for the next few years. Even in the midst of the febrile political climate of 1793—with the king's execution at the start of the year and near-constant conflicts between moderates and the paramilitary left thereafter—some 5500 pictures were sold in 28 sales.^[35] The auction of the diplomat Louis-César-Renaud Choiseul-Praslin's (1735–91) collection of 300 pictures saw two paintings by the Dutch painter Gerrit Dou (1613–75) fetch 33,500 and 34,800 francs—sums comparable to those realized at many auctions during the ancien régime when the demand for Dutch art was at its highest- and fierce competition for works by Rubens, Rembrandt, and Van Dyck.^[36]

By 1794, however, the number of high-profile sales diminished markedly.^[37] Frits Lugt's exhaustive *Répertoire des ventes* records only 18 sales in 1794.^[38] The largest of this period were often the result of dealers releasing stocks of paintings, gouaches and engravings onto the market, often by minor painters.^[39] The period also saw the sale of relatively modest examples of drawings and engravings, and inconspicuous collections that formed part of the estates of artists, architects, engravers, and anonymous "citizens" of generally modest means. One such example was a collection of gouaches, drawings, and engravings—"the cabinet of a citizen"—sold in March 1795 contained works by minor figures who, as Gault de Saint-Germain later commented, would have attracted little interest even in better times.^[40] The pattern was replicated at the auction of the collection of another "anonymous citizen" a few months later in September 1795, in which the work of minor Dutch genre painters was featured alongside those of late eighteenth-century French painters.^[41] There were some instances in which paintings confiscated from émigrés and the various enemies of the Republic were sold at auction for public benefit or to help liquidate the national debt, but they were relatively few and appear to have had little direct impact on the art trade.^[42] Rather, major collections of historical significance—such as those assembled by the ducs de Condé (1736–1818), Noailles (1713–93), Breteuil (1730–1807), and Orléans (1747–93), the comte d'Artois (1757–1836), and the prince de Bourbon-Conti (1776–1814)—were impounded at the state warehouse for art, the Dépôt de Nesle, under the direction of one of Jacques-Louis David's (1748–1825) numerous students, Jean Nageon (1757–1832).^[43] During the 1790s, the old classificatory system of the "trois écoles," in which Italian art took priority over the Dutch and French Schools, continued to be used by art dealers. It is evident, however, that many of the paintings that changed hands were hardly of a quality that required a classificatory system. Commercial activity now took place mainly at the very lower end of the market, conspicuously so after 1803 when the outbreak of war with England led trade in pictures to contract dramatically, thereafter to rise and decline in step with periods of war and peace for the rest of the decade.^[44]

There were some brighter moments. The period of internal political stability following Bonaparte's *coup* of 1799 saw a brief increase in market activity and a rise in the collectors' confidence. Benjamin Péronnet records that pictures were once more being imported from the Low Countries as a result of what the *Journal des débats* described as a new period of political tranquility.^[45] Collectors were no longer vilified for harboring lavish collections of pictures,

something that would have been looked upon with some suspicion during the Republic. The same journal noted that one Citizen Robit, shamed into hiding a cache of pictures, some of which came from aristocratic collections, was now content to put the works up for public sale.^[46] Also, buying art, as Péronnet observes, could now be seen as an act of political patriotism, protecting the nation's patrimony from the rapacity of English dealers.^[47] In general, however, the French art market was depressed, in particular during the Empire, a period when British dealers began to dominate trade in pictures.^[48] Indeed, so feeble was the state of the market following the outbreak of war with England in 1803 that it was no longer possible to use once valuable pictures as financial security, and sales of pictures at the newly-reconstituted national credit agency, the Mont de Piété, were cancelled.^[49] Burton B. Frederickson's analysis of the Parisian art market between 1805 and 1815 confirms a general decline both in the volume of pictures coming up for sale and the price paid for them. Dutch paintings continued to exchange hands for significant sums but fetched a fraction of the prices that they would have commanded earlier.^[50] It is significant that when the stock of Amadée Constantin (1746–1816)—a well-established dealer trading in high-quality work for some thirty years—was posthumously sold in November 1816, it comprised largely minor works of only relatively modest value.^[51]

The political and social changes brought about by the Revolution saw the general demise of a market for the kinds of high-quality pictures bought and sold by aristocratic collectors. After 1815, however, the market revived but took a shape quite different from the one it had assumed during the *ancien régime*. With the aristocracy's demise and the rise of a class of bourgeois art lovers, a new way of collecting and speaking about art emerged, one managed by an expanding cadre of professional art dealers. The restoration of the monarchy in 1815 coincided with a near-instant revival in trade exceeding even the feverish activity of the last years of the *ancien régime*. For example, well over sixty sales took place in Paris in the twelve months following the Second Restoration of November 1815, and in excess of 10,000 lots were sold.^[52] Again, some prominent collections came up for sale and pictures of impeccable provenance by artists with a canonical place in the history of French art changed hands.^[53] Increasingly, however, paintings without an established place in art history, without provenance or proven financial value, began to find their way into the market. These included works by minor Italian, Spanish, and French artists of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, some of whom figured in canonical texts of art history but largely as addenda to more prominent masters, and, conspicuously, works by modern French painters, particularly landscapes, the only genre for which there was a sustainable demand.^[54]

Many of the French painters whose works came up for auction during the late Empire and early Restoration had benefitted from the Académie's abolition and the National Assembly's reform of the Salon in 1791.^[55] No longer a privileged venue solely for the exhibition of work by academicians, the newly reformed Salon provided an important platform for all painters potentially to exhibit their work. Among the ranks of the newly liberated were Lazare Bruandet (1755–1803), Georges Michel (1763–1843), Auguste-Xavier Leprince (1799–1826), Jacques Swebach (1769–1823), Pierre Danloux (1753–1809), Antoine-Achille Poupard (1781–1836), Alexandre Pau de Saint-Martin (1768–1834), and Constant Bourgeois (1767–1841), names that were featured regularly at the Salon and in sales catalogues.^[56] There were also hundreds of others who made a brief appearance at the Salon thereafter to return to near oblivion. It is tantalizing to speculate on the work and careers of the two Roux de la Ville sisters from the rue Françoise. The painters—one of whom, Marie-Guillemin (1768–1826), was a student of

Jacques-Louis David; the other’s first name is unrecorded—had a brief moment of glory at the Salon of 1791 with the exhibition of a couple of small classical allegories, thereafter to return to obscurity.^[57] The Roux de la Ville sisters aside (and only their obscurity prevents them from being a compelling study of Liberty’s capacity to both raise and dash professional aspirations), French painters who were enfranchised by professional deregulation typically had a sporadic education in the atelier of a teacher, sometimes well-known but more often not, and made occasional appearances at the Paris or provincial Salons. Invariably, they exhibited genre and landscape paintings that broadly followed Dutch models. Like many others, Bruandet made his *début* at the Paris Salon in 1791 when he showed four small landscapes (fig. 4). Hitherto, his career as a painter had been limited to exhibiting in the city’s trade fairs, whose origins dated back to the middle ages.^[58] Antoine-Achille Poupart, who trained among a family of artisan painters and was contracted to the Sèvres porcelain factory, also made his *début* in 1791 with a couple of landscapes with figures.^[59] The livelihoods of such painters were often precarious and sustained in part by working in the applied arts of lithography, porcelain decoration, sign painting, and carriage decoration. The expertise of such painters was sometimes limited by their artisanal training, and it was also not uncommon for artists to collaborate. Those adept at figure painting—some of whom were established associates of the Académie and whose own hitherto secure careers had also been compromised by the Académie’s abolition and corresponding expansion of the number of independent artists practicing in the capital—were contracted to add anecdotal vignettes to the work of their parvenu peers. The names of Swebach, Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714–89) and Jean-Louis Demarne (1752–1829) were frequently listed in sales catalogues as the authors of “several figures” painted onto pictures by their colleagues.^[60]



Fig. 4, Lazare Bruandet, *Landscape with Hunters*. Oil on canvas. Musée Magnin, Dijon. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[larger image\]](#)

Another debutant of the Salon of 1791, Alexandre Pau de Saint-Martin—now known primarily as Théodore Rousseau’s (1812–67) first teacher—exhibited regularly in the Paris and provincial Salons.^[61] Few of the painters from the lower echelons of the profession who made their first appearance after 1791 enjoyed financial security. Indeed, the absence of patronage led some to be cast as “forgotten minor masters,” isolated individuals sustained only by their personal insight and for whom recognition would come only later in more enlightened times, a critical trope that modernist criticism was to draw upon for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

[62] Furthermore, modernism's abiding concern with authorial conviction and the production of art for its own sake has largely repressed this vein of commercialized visual culture. When Jean Renoir recorded his father's reminiscences of decorating shop blinds and porcelain plates back in the 1850s while nursing the hopes of professional success as a painter at the Salon, he described a way of life that had first come about as a result of the 1791 reforms that gave rights to all artists to exhibit irrespective of their professional affiliation, a way of life that had been common among working-class Parisian artists for half a century.[63]

The reception of this sector of the profession was predictably met with little critical enthusiasm. Art critics on the conservative right thought that French painting had been diminished in ambition by the leveling spirit of the Republic, and they hoped that the restoration of a Bourbon monarchy modeled on that of the ancien régime might presage a revival in high-minded art for which the old order had been famous throughout Europe.[64] But the hope was in vain, and there was an evident disjuncture between the cultural aspirations of the conservative state and the buying power of a commercially-powerful middle class. Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1828), the Académie's new permanent secretary, writing in 1815, thought the arts had become a toy, "society's plaything." [65] The correspondent of the conservative *Annales encyclopédiques*, writing in 1817, complained that the large numbers of small pictures (inevitably genre and landscape paintings) shown at the Salon now made it difficult for visitors to concentrate on larger works of greater ambition by artists of genuine repute.[66] A few years later, the anonymous correspondent for the conservative journal *Annales françaises* connected the expanding ranks of the profession with a deregulated economy in the arts.

The making of art as a speculative commercial product without a patron in mind was seen by conservative critics to have had a potentially sclerotic effect on the profession and on French culture in general. Paris was already awash with artists, and without direction from informed patronage they would descend into idleness and debauchery, the correspondent warned.[67] In some instances, old political enmities were forgotten in the national interest. The Bonapartist art critic Edmé-François Miel (1775–1842), writing in *La Minerve française* in 1819, lamented the demise of the politically tendentious painting that had been supported by Napoleon's administration.[68] During the Consulate and the Empire, public projects celebrating France's military and cultural achievements harnessed the arts to a higher purpose and provided work for many artists. Since Napoleon's defeat in 1815, the nation's political and cultural standing had declined lamentably. According to Quatremère, the arts were often now little more than an "aliment of curiosity," a commodity made to offer instant gratification to an ill-tutored middle class.[69] Writing in the *Guide des amateurs*, Pierre-Marie Gault de Saint-Germain (whose wife was an accomplished painter in pastels and also made her Salon début in 1791) conceded that the Revolution had brought to an end "the great reign of amateurs" and had compromised the nation's heritage accordingly.[70] The production and consumption of art had become the preserve of the many rather than the few. Gault de Saint-Germain spoke of the feverish round of production and consumption, the "commercial circulation of an infinity of unknown objects; [that] ebb and flow through the hands of the many; often without merit or any use for the connoisseur whose role has been undertaken by an ill-informed class of men who buy and sell throughout the length and breadth of Paris." [71] Furthermore, a clause in the Treaty of Paris that marked the end of Napoleon's administration demanded the return of works of art plundered by the French armies from Italy and Germany during the 1790s and early 1800s, hitherto included in the Louvre and other major collections. Conservatives like

Gault de Saint-Germain had little time for the emperor's politics but like several prominent members of Louis XVIII's administration expressed shock to see the extent to which French cultural patrimony had been diminished by the "losses," and the conspicuous gaps left on the museum's walls.[72] For some art dealers, the stimulation of the market for works of art and the creation of a new generation of collectors was seen to offer compensation for "the losses" and the rebirth of an alternative patrimony predicated on commerce.[73] For many conservatives, in turn, the presence of great art in French collections remained of such compelling importance that its questionable origins might conveniently be forgotten.

Marchands de Tableaux

By far, the most common explanation for French art's decline was commerce, the ill-informed taste of middle-class collectors driven by nothing other, it was said, than a desire to consume. As Gault de Saint-Germain observed, pictures by artists of questionable merit who would have been unknown to aristocratic collectors during the ancien régime now featured prominently in public sales and commercial galleries.[74] Such works, furthermore, were often shown to seductive effect in what Gault de Saint-Germain described as "maisons de commerce," among a crowd of artists, other dealers, and amateurs, each embroiled in a fevered round of unbridled consumption.[75] Pierre-François Nougaret's *Anecdotes des beaux-arts* records how *brocanteurs*—traders in bric-a-brac operating at the lower end of the art market—frequently sold new paintings as old and manipulated prices at public sales. It was not uncommon for works to be given a lick of tinted varnish—what the art critic Francois-Xavier Burtin described as "the learned mist of time"—to age them and collectors were again warned against the dangers of inflated descriptions of pictures in auction catalogues.[76] Not least among art dealers' "maneuvers" were the questionable practices made possible by the absence of any consistently applied formal legislation to guard against conflicts of professional interest. During the Consulate and Empire there had been attempts to regulate the sale of art by placing the auction of goods under the direction of a government-appointed officials and establishing a clear division of responsibility between auctioneers, experts and dealers. The regulation, however, had only limited effect. A *Mémoire* published in 1811 noted a continuing tension between the roles of *commissaires-prisseurs* tasked with organizing sales, *experts* charged with authenticating works of art and dealer who bought and sold pictures either speculatively or on a specific client's behalf. [77] During the early 1800s artists, dealers, "experts," restorers, and in some instances museum officials, commonly carried out a variety of roles in the buying, authentication, and sale of works of art in which they had a palpable conflict of interest.

One art dealer who consistently exploited such conflicts of interest was Jean-Louis Laneuville (1756–1826). Laneuville is recorded as another of Jacques-Louis David's many students, painting portraits of political luminaries in the 1790s and early 1800s.[78] He predictably fell out of favor with the restoration of the Bourbons in 1814, and last exhibited at that year's Salon. In 1801, the *Journal des Arts* listed him as an "expert" charged with authenticating works of art in public sales, and in 1809 he began trading as a picture dealer, a profession he continued until his death in 1826.[79] In 1812, Laneuville was also found working closely with his son, a *commissaire-prisseur*, one of a number of instances of conflicting interests.[80] In 1822 and 1823 the Laneuilles were particularly active variously selling, authenticating, and, according to manuscript notes in sales catalogues, buying works in no less than ten sales.[81] The Laneuilles were not alone. Other manuscript entries reflect numerous potential conflicts of interest in which dealers and experts are found selling and in some instances buying the very pictures they were charged with authenticating, overseen if not by members of their own

family, then by close associates who were clearly engaged in the same process. In October 1821, for example, Amadée Constantin oversaw and authenticated the sale of his own stock of pictures; later in the same month Alexandre-Joseph Pallet (1743–1814) did the same. [82] Lebrun, Paillet, and others were commonly involved in similar practices throughout the 1820s. [83] As Lugt's *Répertoire des catalogues de ventes publiques* indicates, the practice was common and continued throughout the Restoration.

If dealers' "maneuvers" irritated some conservative art critics (and a few liberals) who insisted that art should have some morally regenerative function and be made in the service of the nation as it had in the past, *marchands de tableaux* predictably took a sanguine view of the spirit of free enterprise in the arts and the commercial opportunities it offered. Writing in the preface to *Catalogue des tableaux des trois écoles composant le cabinet de M.**** of 1816, the same Laneuville spoke of the important part played by dealers in the "renaissance" of the arts in Restoration France. [84] The period of political stability brought about by the restoration of the Bourbons led to an expansion of the art market, and amateurs, he noted, were busy forming collections at every turn. Expenditure on the arts, Laneuville assured his readers, made for a secure investment; it was a "legitimate form of luxury," and he went on to applaud the capital's picture dealers for reconciling a new spirit of commerce (exactly the free-market economy bemoaned by the *Annales'* correspondent) with a sentiment for art and a love of opulence. The "exhibition" of the pictures, he hoped, would help to encourage a new generation of buyers. And, in a brazenly self-serving appendix to the preface, he concluded that art dealers had put in place the "necessary mechanisms"—essentially the free market and encouragement of small-scale middle-class patronage—that had rejuvenated the arts in France. Laneuville even hoped for the rebirth of "noble" patronage similar to that found during the ancien régime. [85] But, the expression of hope was rhetorical and wholly at odds with the economic conditions in which he and his contemporaries operated. Very few of the amateurs that sustained Laneuville's business could claim to be from the ranks of the nobility. Sales catalogues of the 1820s show that many of the collections that came up for sale were from essentially bourgeois collectors. [86] Some collections came from retired officials who had seen service under Napoleon's administration. [87] Other collections came from humbler origins. [88] For good or ill, the kinds of pictures that appealed to a middle-class mentality, home, and pocket now largely sustained the Parisian art market. Laneuville struck a characteristically optimistic note in his preface to the sale of the collection of Jean-Antoine Verdier (1767–1839), a retired army officer, in March 1816. Once the preserve of the few, collecting was now open to "all classes of society." Even those who possess only "moderate fortunes," Laneuville reminded his readers, might confidently indulge themselves in the "personal pleasure" of collecting art. [89]

There are numerous other instances during the 1820s in which dealers capitalized on a middle-class propensity to consume art. One of the most conspicuous can be found in the posthumous sale of the contents of the studio of the now largely forgotten landscape and genre painter Jean-Louis Demarne (1752–1829) in May 1829. Some of Demarne's pictures regularly changed hands for around 2,000 francs, a high price for a contemporary landscape or genre painting (and about six months' rent on the painter's apartment on the rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau). [90] A lengthy essay accompanying the sale containing detailed assurances not about Demarne's place in some art-historical canon or his observation of academic priorities, but rather about his versatility, his international celebrity, and simple and modest personality. It appeared alongside the transcript of a five-page eulogy read at his graveside. [91] Throughout both the essay and the eulogy a conflation occurs between the artist's personality

and his work. Demarne’s interest in quotidian subject matter found in landscape and genre painting demonstrated a democratic spirit, an antipathy to establishment art, and an instinctive rather than tutored approach to painting. The Academy had “closed its doors” to Demarne, the catalogue goes on to record. His application for full membership was rejected in 1816 on the basis that the works on which his reputation was founded—meticulously painted anecdotal genre paintings—were wholly inimical to academic standards. One such work, *The Route* (fig. 5), was bought for the Louvre Museum in 1814.^[92] Demarne was known for “agreeable” pictures of everyday life in the French countryside and could regularly be found working alongside painters at the lower end of the market, adding figures to their pictures. Not least, there were records of him working as an artisan porcelain decorator. Nonetheless, as Pierre Gossuin’s (fl. 1810–30) eulogy noted, “the doors of posterity remained open” and in this instance public taste again trumped academic dogma.^[93] Demarne’s trademark attention to detail, in turn, was seen by dealers as a mark of his patience. The catalogue also listed the works found in his studio immediately after his death, and those with which he had refused to part throughout his career. His preparatory studies were said to offer collectors a privileged insight into the painter’s “spirit.”^[94] The potential of preparatory studies to offer such privileged insights was widely celebrated by critics in the second half of the nineteenth century. Bellier pointed to precisely such insights in his study of Lantara as did Sensier in his biographies of Michel and Rousseau.^[95] Indeed, Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922), in his discussion of Impressionism, underscored the importance of rapid execution as a means of capturing the primacy of experience.^[96] The attention given to preparatory works of this kind as a means of articulating artistic insight was, however, rare in the 1820s, and again attests to the importance of art dealers and dealing in the post-revolutionary period for the formation of modernist discourse in the latter part of the century.



Fig. 5, Jean-Louis, Demarne, *A Road*, 1822. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[larger image\]](#)

The catalogue also went on to describe Demarne’s pictures as exceptionally secure investments. While the value of some paintings fluctuated wildly, it claimed, those by Demarne remained stable like “banknotes.”^[97] Indeed, the catalogue pointed out that with the painter’s demise the price of his work might now be expected to rise. Here, the referent used to validate Demarne’s pictures is not his place in history but his temperament, something with which all collectors might identify. For the potential collector to empathize with Demarne’s

rejection and eventual recognition was to participate in the artist's intimate engagement with his work, to bear witness to his patience. Even to mourn his passing was to attest to his sensibility and see such sensibility as a sign of both the painter's value and that of his pictures. Curiously, as Charlotte Guichard has recently indicated, this process of personal identification with an artist and his work was not new. In the second half of the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for artists and aristocratic patrons to form highly intimate bonds fostered through the discussion of shared interests often conducted in literary salons.^[98] Such levels of intimacy, however, were never the preserve of the middle classes and never reified in what was effectively an art dealer's sales pitch. Demarne's works could hardly be acclaimed for their provenance or their contribution to an artistic canon. But they could be appreciated as objects of individual expression, ones with which the potential middle-class buyer might empathize. This process of empathy was cleverly engineered. In the aristocratic salon, empathy was an emotional transaction between friends and enthusiasts conducted in person in a private sphere. Conducted in the preface to a sales catalogue, however, a similar discourse of empathy was used by dealers in a commercial sphere to bridge the gap between production and consumption. For the untutored middle-class collector, to buy a work by Demarne was to participate in a form of personal identification cleverly and extensively set out in a sales pitch, the *avertissement*.

Perhaps one of the most historically significant examples of art's commodification—and the transubstantiation of unfettered cultural production into an embryonic form of modernist discourse—occurred at the posthumous sale of the collection of Robert de Saint-Victor (1738–1822), president of the Parliament of Rouen, in November 1822. The collection comprised some 450 Dutch and Flemish pictures, and 140 modern and contemporary works of which two thirds were landscapes. The catalogue also listed several landscapes by Lantara including a *Tempest* and a *Landscape by Moonlight* (fig. 6), along with a detailed account of the artist's life and work. While there was a precedent for narrative contextualization in the sale of works painted by artists of renown, the convention was rarely applied to modern French landscape and genre paintings, especially by those artists without a place in history. The account is of seminal importance. The idea of an autonomous art sustained by nothing other than an artist's personal integrity is typically first associated with art criticism in the early 1830s. During this period, for the first time, art was seen to have fulfilled no purpose other than to offer an insight into the soul of its creator; any attempt to harness the arts to some party's political, institutional or commercial ends was seen as tainting its essential purity. In Lantara's case, the same assertions of personal integrity are found, but they clearly have a commercial function. In the absence of a recognized place in history, Lantara's creative integrity was underscored as proof of the aesthetic and by extension the commercial value of his pictures. Lantara is described as one of the numerous untutored artists drawn to the capital in the late-eighteenth century. He emerged, Pierre Roux de Cantal's (fl. 1815–30) catalogue essay stated, "all at once, like a miracle" in the "great theatre of the fine arts."^[99] Roux observed that Lantara had no support from patrons and went on to describe the painter as "simple," "innocent," "child-like," and austere in his habits. Lantara's only training came from the "trees of the Fontainebleau forest"; a "modern Claude," he was unjustly forgotten because, Roux explains, the naïve simplicity of his pictures was out of step with degenerate tastes of the ancien régime.^[100] Again, Lantara's lack of formal training and the absence of historical or institutional legitimacy was used to create a miraculous moment of transubstantiation in which naivety and obscurity were cleverly reified as natural phenomena, a spontaneous generation of culture. Here, he

becomes a child of nature whose place in the art world is cast as wholly independent of traditional methods of aesthetic consecration.



Fig. 6, Simon-Mathurin Lantara, *Landscape by Moonlight*, ca. 1778. Oil on wood. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[larger image\]](#)

In one passage, Roux intriguingly refers to a play of 1809, *Lantara, ou le peintre au cabaret* by Louis-Benoît Picard (1769–1828), in which the painter is characterized as a drunken habitué of a humble café, one moment trading overpriced and quickly-executed sketches with the patron in return for a meal, the next haggling over the price of a painting with an art dealer.^[101] Drawing upon a raft of prejudices about an expansion in the numbers of painters and dealers practicing in the capital and the dangers of double-dealing regularly aired in the press, Picard casts the impoverished painter as being on the margins of society. Marginality of this kind—as so many critics pointed out—was the inevitable consequence of a free market.^[102] But while the antics of parvenus and charlatans were grist for the mill of comic playwrights, such was the importance of temperament and personal integrity to these new methods of validating pictures that a struggle for the artist’s soul ensued, one that lasted for well over half a century. Roux was emphatic about Lantara’s personal virtues and insisted that an artist moved to tears by the sight of a sunset could not be cast as a scheming and idle bohemian, a point he reiterated several years later in another sales catalogue.^[103]

Clearly, in a context in which so large a constituency of artists had little established cultural identity and functioned mainly on a freelance commercial basis, making works independent of any particular institutional context, a painting’s value depended on claims about its author’s sensibility to such a degree that to question the painter’s personality was instantly to raise doubts about the quality of his work. (According to a manuscript entry, Laneuville—a dealer keenly aware of the mechanisms of art’s commercialization—seems to have fallen for Roux’s sales pitch and bought a painting by Lantara entitled *Moonlight* from Saint-Victor’s collection.)^[104] The battle for the painter’s soul continued. Some thirty years later critics and historians were still fretting over Lantara’s tarnished reputation and were desperate to set the record straight when doubts were raised about his character and by extension his artistic sensibility.^[105] Emile Bellier de la Chavignerie, in his *Recherches historiques, biographiques et littéraires sur le*

peintre Lantara of 1852, like Roux, insisted that it was impossible for an artist without a refined nature to paint such sensitive and accomplished landscapes. [106]

The commodification of the arts in Restoration Paris was part of a much larger commercial and ideological project. Art critics commonly made the connection between a middle-class enthusiasm for the minor genres and a broader desire for novelties. As Nicholas Green has compellingly shown, by the mid-1820s, the district on the right bank bounded by the rue de Rivoli to the south, the boulevards Madeleine and Bonne Nouvelle to the northwest and north, and the rue Saint-Denis to the east (and at its epicenter, the Paris *passages*) had become home to some 50 of the capital's picture dealers and numerous establishments trading in *objets de luxe*. [107] The Parisian trade directory, the *Répertoire de commerce*, of 1828 listed some 200 merchants trading in "curiosities," "novelties," "trinkets" and other luxury goods. [108] Many of these establishments published "prospectuses" whose aim—as Balzac noted in his novel *César Birotteau* about the febrile commercial world of Restoration Paris—was "to make extensive use of that wealth of bills, announcements and other means of noising things abroad that are, perhaps unjustly, known by the term quackery." [109] This process of quackery—lending value to objects of uncertain worth—would, of course, have been entirely familiar to Laneuville, Roux de Cantal, and their contemporaries, all of whom used a new critical lexicon to validate works that came into their hands. Among the *marchands de tableaux* listed in the *Almanach de tous les adresses à Paris* of 1818, one Coignet from the boulevard Poissonnière was also listed as a "specialist in curiosités"; one Montigueil, an art dealer but also a purveyor of "all kinds of objects d'art and curiosités"; one Ronconi, a merchant in art, also traded in curiosités and "fine stones," and Pierre Legrand, "art dealer to the king's brother," no less, traded in "every type of *objets d'art*." [110] One dealer, however, Alphonse Giroux, showed himself as especially adept at this process of noising art and novelty abroad.

The *Almanach de commerce* of 1826 records "Giroux père et fils" as the proprietor of a "galerie" in the second *arrondissement*, where they sold pictures on the establishment's first floor and "an immense variety of tasteful and fantastic objects" on the second. [111] Eager to assert his credentials as a patron of the arts, Giroux promoted his establishment as a "permanent art collection" and encouraged students, artists, and amateurs to visit "without the obligation to buy." Such was the quality and range of the pictures on show that professors of art might well direct their students to the collection for instruction. [112] The gallery became enormously successful. It was the only commercial establishment included in Louis-Gabriel Montigny's popular guide *Le provincial à Paris* of 1825, and was listed as one the capital's major "collections" in Edward Planta's *A New Picture of Paris* of 1826. [113]

Despite Giroux's attempt to classify his business as a cultural establishment akin to a gallery, his collection was clearly selected with the demands of a middle-class buyer in mind. His stock comprised meticulously finished flower paintings, landscapes, and genre paintings, as well as lithographs and engravings, many of which were hand-colored. [114] The method of mechanical reproduction is significant. Engraving traditionally provided an accurate record of well-known works of art. The meticulously crafted engravings that accompanied Charles-Paul Landon's *Annales du Musée*, for example, recorded the various distinguished works in national collections during the Consulate, Empire, and Restoration. Here, engravings functioned as aides-memoires for celebrated works of art, and there was a clearly acknowledged distinction between the precise, linear forms of reproduction contained in the *Annales* and the original

work of art. Giroux’s publications, however, used new techniques of mechanical reproduction to simulate what—with the suspension of disbelief—began to approximate original works of art, albeit works of no particular museological celebrity. The works contained in Giroux’s *Nouvel album de lavis et des aquarelles dédiés aux jeunes amateurs*, for example, were anonymous but executed in aquatint, a method of reproduction that was sensitive to the subtle nuances of light and shade and bore something of the imprint of the authorial hand. Some editions were colored by hand using watercolor washes; others were produced in monochrome to simulate sepia drawings (fig. 7). A prospectus for reproductions using the new medium of colored lithography published a few years later in the *Répertoire de commerce* of 1828 took this method of simulation one step further. The prospectus suggested that the reproductions—made on paper with a canvas-like tooth to look like original painting—might be given a lick of varnish and mounted under glass. Not least, the medium was inexpensive and enabled “those of the most modest fortunes” to acquire them.[\[115\]](#)



Fig. 7, Alphonse Giroux, *Landscape*, from *Nouvel Album de Lavis et d'Aquarelles*, 1819. Colored lithograph. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

The absence of the pictures’ museological celebrity is, of course, important. There was never the pretense that the kind of reproductions which Giroux and his contemporaries traded were of works by painters of particular renown. For them to be so would prompt inevitable questions of about the relationship between the reproduction and the original. Who among the middle-class readers of the *Répertoire de commerce* could credibly claim to own canonical art of true renown? Rather, art’s traditional cultural celebrity was exchanged for another kind of value, one contingent on valorizing its material identity as *art*, the assertion of its viscid materiality, its stuff—the thickness of paint, the fake craquelure on the picture’s surface, in short, its fetishized commodification as art. The evidence of the workings of some hand or another was important—such works, after all, claimed a form of originality—but precisely whose did not really matter. The production of art in such quantity clearly required an expansion of the number of artists practicing in the capital, but the corollary of this growth was not fame—but anonymity.

Giroux’s example and those of his contemporaries are important. Their marketing strategies encouraged the consumption of art not simply through the creation of a highly subjective and

conveniently flexible lexicon of personal sensibility but also the creation of a cultural milieu designed especially for its appreciation. Giroux had reified the processes of consumption through the creation of a spectacular world set aside for a new bourgeois pastime, art's enjoyment. Giroux effectively created what Walter Benjamin described as the "asylum of art," an environment that divests things of their vulgar commodity character, enabling collectors to dream their way into what Benjamin describes as "a better world" and to abandon themselves to the "phantasmagoria of the marketplace."^[116]

Benjamin's example is highly pertinent to the examination of the art market in post-revolutionary France. His seminal *Arcades Project* notes in some detail the manner in which the technologies of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism combined to make seductive displays, creating "dreamlike" spaces set aside for consumption. It is, of course, only a very short distance—in terms of chronology, geography, and rituals of consumption—from the Parisian shopping arcades Benjamin describes to the "maisons de commerce" that prompted Gault de Saint-Germain's suspicions. In one section of the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin intriguingly notes how this dream-like condition of consumption required a process of "forgetting" in which the past is erased. Evidence of this process of erasure is clear. Methods of artistic consecration used in the eighteenth century in which the authority of the past was one of the prime referents for lending art value were set aside in favor of a new process, whereby value became dependent first on the creation of a new lexicon of sensibility, second on art's viscid identity *qua* art, and lastly through the creation of a phantasmagorical space for these processes of reification to operate unchallenged: the dealer's shop window; the salon; the walls of the capital's central auction house, the Hôtel de Bullion; and so on. Applied to Restoration Paris, however, the dream-like oblivion generated by bourgeois consumption played not only an economic but also a political role.

The restoration of the Bourbon monarchy saw not only the revival of the art market but also the end of twenty-two years of political conflict so painful that Vincent-Marie Vaublanc (1756–1845), the Académie des Beaux-Arts' newly appointed permanent secretary, described it simply as "la lacune," an un-nameable gap in the course of French history.^[117] This widespread desire to forget, to repress memories of the Republic and the Empire by implying that the gap was an aberration in an otherwise stable national story, was matched with a parallel desire to assert economic freedom as compensation for lost political liberty. And it is in this context that conservative César Birotteau's free-market entrepreneurialism is easily reconciled with his hatred of the politically liberal Bonaparte. Liberal in economics but intensely conservative in his politics, Birotteau, like many of his class, was content to swap the political freedoms that underpinned France's republican project, for unbridled freedom in the field of commerce. Writing in 1818, Madame de Staël (1766–1817) went some way to contextualizing Birotteau's politics, noting that in order to keep the nation on a politically even keel, French society needed common bonds to keep it together. Those bonds, however, should no longer be the abstract political concepts of liberty that so disastrously sustained the nation during the Republic and Empire, she claimed, but "property and private interest."^[118] Throughout the Restoration, the arts—especially the minor genres that could be made, circulated, consecrated, and consumed by a middle class were, as many *marchands de tableaux* so readily pointed out, a component part of this world of consumption.

Postscript: The Arthrology of Change

What of art's transition from a cultural form thought to have a "solid base" for appreciation into a commodity, and from a commodity into an object of modernist reverence? The first part of the formula is relatively straightforward. Art lost its traditional source of patronage with the Revolution. Thereafter, the arts were democratized, wealth was dispersed, and a new breed of producers and consumers emerged. Not least, the circuits of production and consumption were lubricated by art dealers' sales pitches that provided a narrative context for the appreciation of art, one predicated on the intuitive sensibilities of the artist and the consumer. Laneuville made it perfectly clear. To consume painting was to make not only a commercial but also a personal connection with an artist's work. The trope of sensibility that first emerged in the wake of the Revolution gained particular traction during the Restoration and endured thereafter in modernist discourse, but it endured in attenuated form.

Around 1830, the sensibility of the autonomous artist became a staple of radical writing about the arts. The Revolution of July 1830 that saw the end of the restored Bourbon administration and the formation of a more liberal government under Louis-Philippe (1753–1850) brought with it a call for political freedoms, among them freedom of expression in the arts. The radical journal *L'Artiste*, a platform for political and cultural freedom of expression, insisted that artists had the right to work unencumbered by the demands of the state and the market. The finest art, the journal's critics asserted, was based on nothing other than personal conviction. Artists assumed the role of Promethean torchbearers. Drunk on the heady effects of revolution, one critic speculated that if only politics would follow the lead of artists, what possibilities there were for the redemption of mankind! [119] At various times between 1830 and the turn of the nineteenth century, Lantara, Bruandet, Théodore Rousseau, Paul Huet (1803–69), Diaz de la Peña, and Jean Baptiste Camille Corot were variously cited as pioneers of a "new" or "modern" school of landscape that laid the foundations of vanguard art that eventually found form in the work of the Impressionists. [120] In the same way that Lantara's work was sustained by his simplicity and innocence, so Corot's painting, for example, was said by the art critic Paul Mantz (1821–95) to be "born of a soul that was forever young." [121] The work of Lantara's friend Georges Michel, in turn, was thought brave, honest and robust. [122] Indeed, the painter's person was even said to be visible within the heavily applied swathes of paint in his work. This vision of the modern school of landscape painting predicated on authorial instinct became an integral part of the French art market's operation. Nicholas Green and Neil McWilliam have shown how artistic temperament founded on personal conviction, a conviction often hostile or at least indifferent to the demands of the world at large, endured throughout the 1850s and 1860s and indeed remained part of the art dealer's sales pitch. [123] Alfred Sensier's (1815–77) account of Rousseau's life and death, and his rejection by the art world and posthumous recognition, offered a sophisticated narrative that underscored the painter's integrity, and the aesthetic and indeed the financial value of his work. [124] Commerce was at work but, as Robert Jensen has shown, it was often suppressed in discussions about modern art. [125]

Another shift in modernism's genealogy took place when this vision became institutionalized at the *Paris Universal Exhibitions* of 1889 and 1900. After a century of political turmoil, France looked for ways of celebrating its interest in liberty and, not least, its unbridled cultural self-confidence on an international stage but it did so in a depoliticized manner, through art. Thus, Huet, Corot, Rousseau and the generation of painters supported by *L'Artiste*, known as the

School of 1830, became the perfect advocates for freedom of expression but a call for freedom that was politically neutralized in the abstracted realm of art. Writing in the 1889 exhibition's official catalogue, Mantz made a rigid distinction between the vulgarity of commerce and the higher form of artistic consciousness embodied in personal sensibility. Michel's early work, known for its porcelain-like finish and appeal to popular taste, was thus vilified by Mantz as "small-minded." Diaz, in turn, was similarly criticized by Mantz for his capacity to turn his hand to popular, middlebrow paintings of gypsies, erotic "venuses," and flowers, but feted for his more intuitive landscapes.^[126] By the end of the nineteenth century, commerce was inimical to a genuine art of sensibility and later conspicuously rendered as kitsch by the apostle of art's autonomy, the American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–94).^[127] It is beyond the scope of this article to negotiate the discursive shifts around narratives of autonomy as they mutate through the twentieth century. But the changes in ways in which the arts were made, valorized, and spoken about in the French Revolution's aftermath are of some historical significance in that they provide a vocabulary that first enabled art to be discussed as an autonomous form of personal expression, a form that endures for remainder the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries.

Steven R. Adams is Associate Dean of Research at the School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire, U. K. He has written extensively on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century visual culture in France, spatiality and the French Revolution, and academic art in Restoration France. His research focuses primarily on marginal forms of visual culture, particularly discourses and forms of practice often marginalised by modernist art historical narratives.

Email the author s.adams@herts.ac.uk.

Notes

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All translations are by the author.

[1] Francis Coghlan, *A Visit to Paris; or, the Stranger's Guide to Every Object Worthy Notice in That Gay City* (London: Coghlan, 1830), 18.

[2] Charlotte Guichard, *Les amateurs d'art à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2008), 37.

[3] Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49. See also Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 22–25; and Christopher Parsons and Neil McWilliam, "Le Paysan de Paris': Alfred Sensier and the Myth of Rural France," *Oxford Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (1983): 42–44.

[4] Paul, Mantz, Louis Gonse, and Alfred de Lostalot, *Exposition Universelle de 1889: Les beaux-arts et les arts décoratifs* (Paris: Le Temps, 1889), 23–24; Emile Molinier, Roger Marx, and François Marcous, *L'Exposition Universelle de 1900: L'art français des origines à la fin de XIX siècle* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1900), 28.

- [5] Pierre-Marie Gault de Saint-Germain, *Les trois siècles de la peinture en France, ou galerie des peintres français* (Paris: Belin, 1808), viii.
- [6] Pierre-Marie Gault de Saint-Germain, *Guide des amateurs de tableaux, pour les écoles allemande, flamande et hollandoise* (Paris: Renouard, 1818), v.
- [7] Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, *Catalogue raisonné d'une très-belle collection de tableaux des écoles d'Italie, de Flandre et de Hollande, qui composaient le cabinet de M. le Comte de Vaudreuil* (Paris: Lebrun, 1784), 7–8.
- [8] A handwritten marginal note on page 7 of the catalogue from the Vaudreuil sale, *ibid.*, in the collection of the British Library, London, records that the picture sold for 35,901 *livres*.
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Illustrations



Fig. 1, Pietro da Cortona, *The Alliance of Jacob and Laban*. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Adriaen van der Velde, *Landscape Divided by a River*. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Nicolas Poussin, *A Bacchanalian Revel before a Term (Fête en honneur du dieu Pan)*, 1634. Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London. Photo: Courtesy of Bridgman Art Library. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Lazare Bruandet, *Landscape with Hunters*. Oil on canvas. Musée Magnin, Dijon. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Jean-Louis, Demarne, *A Road*, 1822. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 6, Simon-Mathurin Lantara, *Landscape by Moonlight*, ca. 1778. Oil on wood. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
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Fig. 7, Alphonse Giroux, *Landscape*, from *Nouvel Album de Lavis et d'Aquarelles*, 1819. Colored lithograph. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)