

PRESS RELEASE

# BEAUTY AND REVOLUTION. NEOCLASSICISM 1770–1820

20 FEBRUARY–26 MAY 2013

Press preview: Tuesday, 19 February 2013, 11 am

Städel Museum, Exhibition House

**Frankfurt am Main, 19 December 2012.** A comprehensive special exhibition presented by Frankfurt's Städel Museum from 20 February to 26 May 2013 will highlight the art of Neoclassicism and the impulses it provided for Romanticism. Developed in collaboration with the Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung, the show *Beauty and Revolution* will assemble about one hundred works of the period from 1770 to 1820 by such artists as Anton Raphael Mengs, Thomas Banks, Antonio Canova, Jacques-Louis David, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Johann Gottfried Schadow, and Jean-August-Dominique Ingres. The major survey, whose range also comprises a number of impressive examples of "Romantic Neoclassicism," will be the first in Germany to convey an idea of the variety of the different and sometimes even contradictory facets of this style.

Based on significant sculptures, paintings, and prints from collections in many countries, the exhibition will explore the decisive influence of classical antiquity on the artists of the era. Struggling for a socially relevant art, the artists directed their attention to the aesthetics of Greek and Roman art as well as to their virtues and moral standards conveyed by history and mythology. It will become evident how the viewer could be addressed in many different ways. Two famous marble sculptures of the Greek goddess Hebe, for example, will be confronted with each other in Frankfurt for the first time: a variant by Antonio Canova (1796, The State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg) and another by Bertel Thorvaldsen (designed in 1806, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen). The two masterpieces have again and again been compared and judged, yet never exhibited together since their creation.

The exhibition is sponsored by the Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain in the context of the project "Impuls Romantik," the Hessische Kulturstiftung, and the City of Frankfurt am Main.

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Assembling a wide range of works from Gavin Hamilton's und Henry Fuseli's innovative solutions to central works by Antonio Canova and Jacques-Louis David as well as Bertel Thorvaldsen's masterpieces of "Romantic Neoclassicism," the Städel Museum's major spring exhibition offers an extensive survey of Neoclassicist art and demonstrates the unexpected vitality of an era often classified as static.

The various aspects of Neoclassicism will be explored along three lines in the Städel's exhibition. Disregarding a few exceptions, the selection of numerous loans focuses on the production of art in the city of Rome that was considered the first address for studying the ancient world by many artists, writers, and theorists around 1800 and became a center of the art world of that time. The second emphasis of the show is on representations of historical and mythological scenes. In search of a model for moral standards of behavior, the artists fathomed the core of what features as human in the ancient world's myths, which they read as poetry without religious implications. Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Oath of the Horatii*, for example – of which an oil sketch from the holdings of the Louvre in Paris will be presented in the exhibition – upholds a timelessly valid moral code, yet also relates to current political events. The show exemplifies how contemporary motifs increasingly found their way into the range of themes dealt with by Neoclassicist art. The third chapter explores an issue connected with this development, namely how feelings and passions were depicted in Neoclassicist works of art. Artists like Canova or David rendered emotions and pathos in a way unfamiliar to their contemporaries, a way which manifested itself mainly in their figures' body language. Contrary to the Baroque era, it was not the representation of affectations that artists were primarily concerned with any longer, but internalized emotions in which the viewer was to immerse himself. The artists also clearly detached themselves from the pathos of the ancient world in this way: Canova's sculpture *Theseus and the Minotaur* (1783, Museo e Gipsoteca Antonio Canova, Possagno), for example, primarily deals with the aspect of reflection after Theseus's victory and the hero's moral consciousness.

Extending across the Städel's entire Exhibition House, the generously conceived special exhibition begins with the imposing confrontation of the two famous representations of the goddess Hebe by Antonio Canova (1800–1805) und Bertel Thorvaldsen (1815–1823) on the ground floor. The difference between Canova's cupbearer hurrying near on a cloud and involved in what is going on and Thorvaldsen's introverted musing female illustrates the whole stylistic range of Neoclassicist art at the very beginning. Picking up the thread of this confrontation, the presentation in the large ground floor hall impressively visualizes the turbulent development of Neoclassicism until about 1870. The tour starts with a selection of plaster cast and bronze reproductions of antique sculptures dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; these reproductions particularly illustrate

the canon of classical antiquity emphasized by the archaeologist and art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768). Artists staying in Rome initially incorporated these famous reproductions into their works as directly as possible. In those years, the return to the ancient world frequently implied a criticism of contemporary systems of rule, especially of the courtly and ecclesiastical formal language of the Baroque age. Anton Raphael Mengs's appropriation of classical antiquity was of such an extreme degree that the artist was even able to deceive Winckelmann who described Mengs's fresco *Jupiter Kissing Ganymede* (1758–1759, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome) as an original of classical antiquity in one of his writings.

The following section comprises the rebellious works of a group of artists who also lived in Rome for some time, yet felt not inclined to follow Winckelmann's credo of "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" – though they too thoroughly studied the antique models. They aimed at capturing the viewer's attention by dramatizing their subjects, even if this meant putting up with exaggeration and distortion. The English sculptor Thomas Banks (1735–1805) – see his *The Falling Titan* (1786, Royal Academy of Arts, London) – was one this group's artists as was the Swiss-born Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), whose *Achilles Sacrificing his Hair on the Funeral Pyre of Patroclus* (1800–1805) from the Kunsthhaus in Zurich is included in the exhibition.

The shown works by Antonio Canova (1757–1822) and Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) and his pupils then ushered in a definitely calmer approach to the motifs rendered. They are characterized by formal austerity and a deliberately pointed dramatic composition. However, both the sculptor Canova and the painter David relied on completely new pictorial and iconographic means for drawing on antique subjects and attitudes – means that were to inform subsequent generations of artists all over Europe.

The presentation on the second floor of the Exhibition House highlights how the new iconography developed not least in response to the political context of the time and particularly the French Revolution. Jacques-Louis David immortalized the dead Marat as the revolution's first martyr, for example: the exhibition comprises a version by David and his workshop (Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles) as well as by Joseph Roques (1793, Musée des Augustins, Toulouse).

The works in the following room strikingly illustrate that the young art also held a revolutionary potential in terms of form: the sophisticatedly simplified scenes visualized by the sculptor John Flaxman (1755–1826) in his drawings and engravings, for example, are based on an astounding abstraction. Their reduction to mere contours was to create a furore all over Europe.

The adjacent room sheds light on the slow, yet far-reaching change in the artists' attitude toward the ancient world that occurred around 1800. The unreachability of its ideal made itself felt with increasing weight. This implied a growing abandonment of its norms on the part of the artists, whereas the viewer was granted more leeway for interpretation. The protagonist's internalization also came to play a more important role in what was going on in the picture. Consequently, masterpieces such as Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Ganymede* (1819–1821, Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen) are categorized as works of „Romantic Neoclassicism” today.

The various tendencies brought forth by Neoclassicism within the first decades after 1800 become increasingly clear in the last room of the exhibition. In spite of all discrepancies between the various artists' decisions, they shared a common denominator in looking for new ways to leave Neoclassicism behind. The idea of the ancient world was regarded with increasing detachment, unconventionally transformed, and largely ignored by more and more nineteenth-century artists. All in all, the exhibition unfolds the age of Neoclassicism as a surprisingly manifold and lively stylistic epoch whose unconditional desire for renewal and improvement became a breeding ground for Romanticism in its return to classical antiquity.

**BEAUTY AND REVOLUTION. NEOCLASSICISM 1770–1820**

**Curators:** Dr. Eva Mongi-Vollmer (Städel Museum), Dr. Maraike Bückling (Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung)

**Exhibition architecture:** Michiko Bach, Daniel Dolder

**Catalogue:** A comprehensive catalogue edited by Dr. Maraike Bückling and Dr. Eva Mongi-Vollmer will be published by Hirmer to accompany the exhibition. It will include contributions by Sergej Androssov, David Bindman, Maraike Bückling, Werner Busch, Christian M. Geyer, Alexander Kaczmarczyk, Thomas Kirchner, Eva Mongi-Vollmer, Johannes Myssok, and Marjorie Trusted; German, 360 pages, 39.90 euros.

**Audio tour:** An audio guide will be available for the exhibition; German/English, 4 euros

**General guided tours through the exhibition:** Tuesdays 11 am, Thursdays 6 pm, Sundays and holidays 3 pm

**Special guided tours on request:** +49(0)69-605098-200; [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de)

**Accompanying program:** PD Dr. Phillip Demandt, Director of the Old National Gallery in Berlin, will hold a lecture as part of the series *Standpunkte zur Kunst* at 7 pm on Thursday, 11 April 2013.

Free admission; please call +49(0)69-605098-200 to register; [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de).

For further offers see [www.staedelmuseum.de](http://www.staedelmuseum.de).

**Venue:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt

**Exhibition dates:** 20 February–26 May 2013

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**Opening hours:** Tuesday, Friday to Sunday 10 am–6 pm,

Wednesday and Thursday 10 am–9 pm

**Admission fees:** 12 euros, reduced 10 euros, family ticket 20 euros; Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays 14 euros, reduced 12 euros, family ticket 24 euros; free admission for children up to twelve years of age; groups of at least ten persons: 10 euros per person

**Online ticket shop and advance sales:** [tickets.staedelmuseum.de](http://tickets.staedelmuseum.de)

**Sponsored by:** Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain in the context of the project "Impuls Romantik," Hessische Kulturstiftung, Stadt Frankfurt am Main