



TITLE: ***Orpheus Before Pluto***
ARTIST: **attr. to Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863)**
DATE: **c. 19th century; 1820s**
SIZE: **15 1/2 x 12 1/4; framed 21 1/2 x 18 1/4 inches**
MEDIUM: **paper affixed to canvas; pencil and oil sketch**
ACCESSION #: **58.3**
Additional works in the collection by the artist? Yes ___ No X



CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

This work has been *attributed* to the artist Delacroix, meaning the artist of the work has not been unequivocally established. Though some contest the attribution to Delacroix, citing issues of style and the handling of paint, the museum decided the work's documentation as a Delacroix deserves mention. Attribution (if debated) must be included so as to present as clear and accurate a record as possible.

In this small sketch, the artist depicts Orpheus playing his lyre for Pluto and Proserpina in the underworld. This scene comes from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the story of the way love drove Orpheus to the underworld to visit his snake-bitten wife. Orpheus plays his lyre before the king and queen of the underworld in the hopes that his beautiful song will convince them to return Eurydice to the living world. Orpheus's wish is granted but only on the condition that he not look back while leaving the underworld. In the end, Orpheus looks back to make sure Eurydice is behind him and thus she slips back into the underworld forever. In his sketch, Delacroix adeptly portrays emotion through the use of loose brushwork, knowledge of light and shadows, and colorful yet vaguely formed figures. The eye is at first drawn to Orpheus, the lightest figure, and then falls on the other shadowy and obscure characters.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"We work not only to produce, but to give value to time."

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Eugène Delacroix can be credited with the start of the French Romantic School. Delacroix was a skilled artist, specializing in both paintings and drawings. His paintings encompassed emotional brush strokes and thorough knowledge of color. He was concerned with the movement and romantic elements of his art rather than clean lines and ordinary subjects.

Delacroix illustrated many works from writers such as Shakespeare and Goethe. Delacroix was inspired by Rubens and artists of the Venetian Renaissance such as Titian. Delacroix didn't join contemporary artists in painting primarily classical subjects; he traveled to places such as North Africa to gain knowledge about far off lands. Many of Delacroix's paintings effected a significant impact on society. Whether it was his powerful symbol of the French Revolution in *Liberty Leading the People*, or his heart-wrenching statement of civil ruin in *Massacre at Chios*, Delacroix knew how to shock his viewers.

Delacroix's work foreshadowed elements of the Impressionist and Symbolist movements with his expressive brushstrokes and deep interest in all things exotic. His technique of painting contrasting colors with small brushstrokes to create vibrant images particularly influenced the artists of the Impressionist movement, and his many well-written *Journals* display his thoughts about matters of life and politics. After completing an impressive oeuvre, Delacroix died in Paris in 1863.

MEDIA DESCRIPTION

Sketch: Not necessarily pencil on paper, a sketch can be done in any medium. It is a preliminary exercise in which an artist plots out the composition of a work and tests various configurations before finding the one which will be the completed work. *Note:* Because this work is done on paper and then affixed to the canvas, rather than painted directly onto the canvas, it is difficult and costly, virtually impossible, to clean or restore. Paper is delicate. Usually restoration allows removal of layers of dirt and soil to reveal a work's true colors. Delacroix's original colors would have been bright and clear, rather than murky and brown as they now appear.

RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Romanticism: a literary, musical, artistic, and intellectual movement which began in Europe in the late 18th century, coalesced around the 1820s and continued into the mid-late 19th century. In art, it represented a revolution against the academic traditions of Neoclassicism, embodied in the works of artists such as Nicolas Poussin and Jacques-Louis David. Delacroix is recognized as the quintessential Romanticist with his heavy impasto, lively use of color, and animated brushstrokes.

REFERENCES

- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/508675/Romanticism>
- <http://www.lib-art.com/artgallery/9068-sketch-for-attila-eug-ne-delacroix.html>
- Hopmans, Anita. "Delacroix's Decorations in the Palais Bourbon Library: A Classic Example of an Unacademic Approach." *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1987), pp. 240-269. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3780620>



Delacroix, sketch for *Attila and His Hordes Overriding Italy and the Arts* (1843-47), Palais Bourbon, Paris

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: K-5

Strand B: Creation & Communication
Standard: The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of visual arts.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT
ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN: K-5

Session Activity: Artists use sketches in order to create fully developed, mature and complete works of art. Making sketches helps to solve problems of composition, of proportion, and of perspective. Students will create preliminary drawings of their favorite stories from Greek or Roman mythology. They will then discuss their drawings with the class and critique each other's works, describing the things they like and offering one suggestion to each artist for his/her translation to an alternative medium. Using their classmates' suggestions, they will create more refined, final works in the media of their own choosing (for example, paintings or mini-installations, like tableaux).

Objectives:

1. Students will learn the value of self-critique and of revision in creating a finished work.
2. Students will be able to coalesce their classmates' suggestions and to integrate them into their final products.

Materials: sketch paper, pencil, oil pastels; possibly watercolors, oil paint, watercolor paper and/or canvas; any other materials necessary for completion of final works.

Activity Procedures: Explain to the students the stories of Pluto & Proserpina and of Orpheus & Eurydice. Have them choose one of those, or another story out of Greek/Roman mythology. Students will then draw their compositions. When they finish, they will display their preliminary sketches to the class and critique each other's work. After the critique session, students will recreate their refined final works again with paper and pencil, watercolors, oil on canvas, or three-dimensional materials.

A LESSON IN CONNOISSEURSHIP
ART HISTORY LESSON PLAN: 6-12

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: 6-12

Strand D: Aesthetic & Critical Analysis
Standard: The student assesses, evaluates and responds to the characteristics of works of art.

Vocabulary:

Connoisseur: a person who is very knowledgeable about a certain subject to the point of being able to make an authoritative judgment.

Attribution: the act of assigning the hand of a particular artist to a work of art based on careful research and review of documentation.

Provenance: an artwork's origins and history; also, the documentation containing this information.

Discussion:

- The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a connoisseur as an "expert; one who understands the details, technique, or principles of an artwork and is competent to act as a critical judge." Today we use the term connoisseur loosely—one can be a connoisseur of classic films, Indian food, or anything one enjoys. One European tradition that led to the establishment of Art History as a field of study is the tradition of connoisseurship, i.e. the ability to be knowledgeable and well-versed in a certain genre, artist, or movement. **Is there a subject of which you are a connoisseur? Do others come to you with questions about a certain topic? How do you think connoisseurs are useful in the art world?**

Activity Procedures:

- Become a connoisseur of art of the Romantic Period (mid-to late 1700s through mid-1800s). This art is characterized by dynamic compositions using diagonal lines or atypical organization, lots of emotion, an interest in the supernatural or exotic, the power and beauty of nature, a break with classical traditions such as strict mathematical perspective or a break with the influence of reason emphasized in the Age of Enlightenment. **How do Romantic artists reuse or reinterpret classical stories or motifs in order to show them as obsolete or sentimental? Ex: Compare Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* (late 1630s) with Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819).**
- Take time to look at the following works, and analyze them in class regarding composition, light, emotion, subject matter, adherence to tradition, etc. Then decide which are of the Romantic Period and which are not. Your teacher will tell you the correct works. Then discuss why you may have placed certain works under the Romantic umbrella. *Rape of the Sabine Women* (1637-38) by Nicolas Poussin, *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (1648) by Claude Lorrain, *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784) by Jacques-Louis David, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) by Caspar David Friedrich, *The Third of May 1808* (1814) by Francisco Goya, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) by Eugène Delacroix, *The Nightmare* (1791) by Henry Fuseli.



Delacroix, detail of finished frieze *Attila and His Hordes Overriding Italy and the Arts* (1843-47), Palais Bourbon, Paris

Objectives:

1. The student will think critically to analyze works of art in order to identify the characteristics of Romanticism.
2. The student will utilize prior knowledge and knowledge acquired through discussion to attribute works of art to the Romantic Movement or not.

Session Activity: Delacroix's *Orpheus Before Pluto* has been attributed to the artist by seasoned professionals in the art history and museum fields. However, they relied on careful formal analysis of the work and scant documentation, using their own expertise to decide the work's authorship. When a work's authorship is disputed, connoisseurs are often asked to make attributions. In this activity, students will discuss the concepts of connoisseurship and attribution, then become connoisseurs themselves in an exercise of attribution.