IN THEIR FIRST JOINT EXHIBITION, THE YALE UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY AND THE YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART RECONSIDER A CENTURY OF ROMANTIC ART

The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760–1860

Yale University Art Gallery: March 6–July 26, 2015

December 18, 2014, New Haven, Conn.—In spring 2015, the Yale University Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art present their first major joint exhibition, bringing together treasures of the Romantic art movement from their respective collections. *The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760–1860* comprises more than 300 paintings, sculptures, medals, watercolors, drawings, prints, and photographs by such iconic artists as William Blake, John Constable, Honoré Daumier, David d’Angers, Eugène Delacroix, Henri Fuseli, Théodore Géricault, Francisco de Goya, John Martin, and J. M. W. Turner that expand the view of Romanticism as a movement opposed to reason and the scientific method. The broad range of works selected challenges the traditional notion of the Romantic artist as a brooding genius given to introversion and fantasy.

Exhibition Overview

The exhibition’s eight thematic sections juxtapose arresting works of art that reveal the Romantics to be attentive explorers of their natural and cultural worlds as well as artists deeply engaged with the mysterious and the spiritual. Two sections of the exhibition explore the tension between subjective expression and scientific description in the Romantic era. “Nature: Spectacle and Specimen” showcases works that straddle the line between art and science; these range from spectacular views of Mount Vesuvius to anatomical and botanical studies. George Stubbs’s *A Lion Attacking a Horse* (1770), for example, presents an exacting depiction of mammalian anatomy while dramatizing the wildness of its subjects in a highly theatrical composition. “Landscape and the Perceiving Subject”—one of the largest sections in the show—boasts some of the most breathtaking works in Yale’s museum collections. In this section, paintings such as Constable’s *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames—Morning after a Stormy Night* (1829) exemplify how the Romantics used their careful observation of nature, space, light, and weather to evoke mood and meaning.
“Distant Lands, Foreign Peoples” reveals the artist as an explorer, fascinated by remote worlds. The Romantics came of age in an era of colonial expansion, travel, trade, and ethnographic study, which led to both scholarly discourses and popular fantasies concerning non-Western cultures and locales that stimulated the artistic imagination. “The Artist as Social Critic” complicates the notion of the Romantic artist as an isolated dreamer removed from society and politics. Using dissident political imagery, many artists of this period became vociferous social critics, carrying out the Enlightenment mission of free thought and action. Works like Géricault’s *Retour de Russie* (Return from Russia; 1818) serve as scathing indictments of war and Imperial ambition.

“Religion after the Age of Reason” illustrates the changing approaches to sacred themes in the Romantic era. Diverse compositions reveal that the Romantic engagement with religion was not a naive reversion to mysticism but rather a means of individualizing biblical themes and religious experience to extend their cultural relevance. Complementing this section is “The Literary Impulse,” which showcases a range of works inspired by literature, from classical mythology to modern poetry.

“Beyond Likeness” focuses on Romantic portraiture, which emphasized the psychological state of the subject, evoking an empathetic relationship between sitter and viewer. Finally, “The Changing Role of the Sketch” features objects that illustrate how technical processes changed in tandem with widening ambitions for art. Favoring direct perception over highly constructed compositions, the Romantic sketch would come to be reflected in a broad range of developments in modern art, from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism.

In addition to bringing together outstanding works from the Yale Center for British Art and the Yale University Art Gallery, the exhibition features select loans from important private collections and from Yale’s Lewis Walpole Library. *The Critique of Reason* celebrates the richness and range of Romantic art at the University, representing it afresh for a new generation of museumgoers.

**Related Programs**

**Members’ Preview**
Wednesday, March 4, 4:00–6:00 pm
Exhibition curators
Registration required; please call 203.432.9658 or email art.members@yale.edu.
Lecture
Thursday, March 5, 5:30 pm
“Song without Words: The Romantic Experience”
Joseph Leo Koerner, the Victor S. Thomas Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University
Romantic art is perhaps best defined by its refusing definition. Intensifying the subjective nature of human experience, Romantic artists reached toward willfully indeterminate goals. They launched their work as songs without words—that is, as open-ended expressions that each individual viewer creatively completes. In the opening lecture for the exhibition, Joseph Leo Koerner, B.A. 1980, the Victor S. Thomas Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, puts words to some of the pictures on view. Reception to follow. Generously sponsored by the Martin A. Ryerson Lectureship Fund.

Exhibition Tours
Wednesday, March 11, 12:30 pm
Nina Amstutz, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Yale Center for British Art, and Lisa Hodermarsky, the Sutphin Family Senior Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings, Yale University Art Gallery

Wednesday, March 18, 12:30 pm
Paola D’Agostino, the Nina and Lee Griggs Assistant Curator of European Art, Yale University Art Gallery, and Izabel Gass, Graduate Research Assistant, Yale University Art Gallery and Yale Center for British Art

Gallery Talks
Thursday, March 27, 1:30 pm
“What Is Romanticism?”
Exhibition curators

Wednesday, April 15, 12:30 pm
“Baudelaire between Romanticism and Photography”
Carol Armstrong, Professor, History of Art, Yale University

Performance
Thursday, March 26, 5:30 pm
“Music, Poetry, and Romanticism”
Join us for an evening of chamber music and poetry readings in conjunction with the exhibition.

Exhibition Credits
The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760–1860 is organized by Elisabeth (Lisa) Hodermarsky, the Sutphin Family Senior Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings, Yale University Art Gallery; Paola D’Agostino, the Nina and Lee Griggs Assistant Curator of European Art, Yale University Art Gallery; A. Cassandra Albinson, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, Yale Center for British Art; Nina Amstutz,
Postdoctoral Research Associate, Yale Center for British Art; and Izabel Gass, Graduate Research Assistant, Yale University Art Gallery and Yale Center for British Art. Made possible by the Art Gallery Exhibition and Publication Fund and the Robert Lehman, B.A. 1913, Endowment Fund, as well as by funds from the Yale Center for British Art Program Endowment.

**Yale University Art Gallery**
The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

**Yale Center for British Art**
The Yale Center for British Art houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of British art outside the United Kingdom. Presented to the University by Paul Mellon (Yale College Class of 1929), the collection of paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, rare books, and manuscripts reflects the development of British art and culture from the Elizabethan period onward. Visit us online at britishart.yale.edu.

**General Information**
The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission is free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at www.artgallery.yale.edu.

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