Patrick Bade - French Romantic Painting, Part 1 Theodore Gericault

- It's one minute past the hour, good morning. So over to you, Patrick, looking forward to you continuing the presentation from, where are we today? From Sunday. Thank you.

- Yeah, that's right.

- [Wendy] Yeah.

Visuals are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Thank you, Wendy, thank you, Judy. So we're going back to the studio of Jacques-Louis David, and he was one of the most influential teachers in the history of Western art. He taught over a very long period, starting in the 1780s, and continuing 'til his death in Brussels in 1825. So he taught several generations of artists. The emphasis was very much on drawing from the nude figure, and it was an extremely effective, if somewhat constricting, method that he taught. Sometimes people say to me, "Oh, I can't draw." And I say to them, "Well, if you had a time machine, and you could go back to one of these academic studios in the early 19th century, and you have 10 years to spare, and you're prepared to work very hard, that you would be able to draw." And so that's something that pretty well all these artists trained in France in the 19th century could do very, very well. This is where I left off last time, this is Baron Gérard. And there is the little sketch, fleeting pen and ink sketch, that I showed you last week that I bought in Paris, and a rather more elaborate and carefully-executed drawing by Baron Gérard on the right-hand side.

Now, this is also by Baron Gérard. This is a painting that really made his reputation. It was his breakthrough picture. It's "Cupid and Psyche" and it initiates a subgenre of Neoclassicism that art historians have worked rather wonderfully nicknamed the Erotic Frigidaire. And it's very smooth, I think it's slightly kinky, the idealised, smooth, homogenised kind of eroticism. And this is a style that's very popular at the end of the 18th, beginning of 19th century. Now we move on to another David pupil of the 1780s. And this is an artist called Girodet Trioson. He's rather an eccentric figure. I find him interesting because he blends what might seem to be two contradictory trends. His style is definitely Neoclassical. He's picked up his technique and his method from David. But the mood is one of Romanticism, with a capital R. This is his self-portrait and he looks mean, moody, rebellious rockstar, you know, the perfect Romantic. His most ambitious picture was painted for Napoleon, and it's a very, very weird picture. It shows the ancient Scottish hero, Ossian, receiving Napoleonic General. So it's a bizarre idea, really. Now, Ossian, I imagine many of you know, is one of the most famous literary fakes. It was a man called James Macpherson.

And in 1760, he published this text, claiming that he discovered it and that it was by an ancient Scottish poet who was a kind of Celtic equivalent of Homer. But in fact, he'd written it himself. It was a long time before that was discovered, and it was a favourite bedside book of Napoleon.

So there are quite a lot of these Ossianic subjects in France in the early years of the 19th century. This is, I suppose you could call this an example of the Erotic Frigidaire. This is Girodet Trioson and it's the death of Atala. And it's inspired by another famous Romantic text, Chateaubriand, "Atala." Well, the full title is "Atala, ou Les Amours de deux sauvages dans le désert," the love of two savages in the desert. And it's the classic example of Romantic idealisation of the noble savage, this idea that goes back to Rousseau, of course, that human beings are naturally good and it's civilization that corrupts them. Now I have to make a rather embarrassing admission that when I was 13 years old, this was my favourite painting in the world. I used to sit in the school library looking at a reproduction of this painting, and I just thought it was amazing.

So I don't know what that says about me at the age of 13? A bit worrying, I think, if I knew a 13 year old who liked this painting quite so much. Now, this artist, this is Guérin, G-U-E-R-I-N, who was not a product of David's studio, but very much a product of the same method. And this was his breakthrough painting and it's called "The Return of Marcus Sextus." And it's a story of an ancient Roman hero who was exiled and he was allowed to come back, but discovered that his beloved wife had just died. So this is another example. We saw a couple last week in David's work, of works which are based on ancient history or legend, but which clearly have a contemporary political meaning. 1799, a lot of the aristocrats who'd been banished or fled from the revolution, they were beginning to trickle back, and it was often for them a very bitter experience. So that's what I think this painting is really about. Another interesting figure on the ages of Neoclassicism is Prud'hon. He was a fellow Jacobin of David. The Jacobin, the most extreme element in the French Revolution.

But like David, as the political times changed, he moved very swiftly with them and changed his allegiance to Napoleon once Napoleon had taken par. This is an allegorical paint. It's his most ambitious and important painting, it's an allegorical painting. It's called "Justice and Vengeance Pursue Crime." Now, he's less interesting, I think, as a painter than as a draughtsman. The other very well-known painting by him is this portrait of Josephine Bonaparte. But most of his paintings are actually ruined by the use of bitumen and other substances that have broken up the surface and darkened the pictures. So nowadays, I think he's particularly appreciated for his drawings, and they are just fabulously beautiful. This is a drawing of his mistress, Constance Mayer. And he has this amazing sfumato technique. Sfumato is an Italian term that means smokiness, when it's slightly blurred. And it's so blended, the black chalk on the white chalk on the tinted paper, that you get this incredibly subtle and soft transitions. Here is another example. And these unfinished drawings, these are interesting because they show you how he did it with, you know, multiple layers of crisscross of the chalk and the charcoal. Here's another unfinished drawing by Prud'hon.

And the last of these Napoleonic artists, these late Neoclassical artists that I want to mention is Baron Gros. Like David, he really offered himself to Napoleon for the purposes of glorifying regime, so he's a propaganda artist. This is not a very good reproduction, I'm afraid, I couldn't find one, oddly enough, on the internet. But it's in the Louvre for us, so next time you get to the

Louvre, you can go and see it. It's in the Grand Gallery and it's one of a pair of huge, huge pictures that are glorifying Napoleon. It shows Napoleon in the plague house in Jaffa. Now, Napoleon had these brilliant victories in Italy and the government of the directorate realised he was a threat, and so they decided to send him off on a foreign adventure, and they sent him to Egypt and he won a stunning victory, the Battle of the Pyramids, in the site of the pyramids, and he conquered Egypt. But then, of course, Nelson went down there and he destroyed the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile in 1798. And the French army found themselves stranded, and then they were infected by bubonic plague and many of them died of the plague. And what this image shows you is Bonaparte ignoring the dangers of infection and going into the plague house and actually reaching out to touch the bubonic sores. So he's presented as a Christ-like figure who can miraculously cure the sick with his touch.

And this is a total lie. This did not happen. In fact, Napoleon had, many of his soldiers who were sick, he actually had them poisoned and killed because they were just a nuisance and they were hampering him. And ooh, now I think I want this one. Yes. This is the pair of the picture, it hangs opposite in the Louvre. And here again, Napoleon is depicted as a kind of superhuman, God-like figure after his terrible victory, the Battle of Eylau. This is when French defeated the Prussians and it was one of the hardest-won battles of the Napoleonic Wars, with a terrible, terrible death toll. So you see Napoleon, untouched by all of this, riding across the fields filled with the dead and the dying. And the most remarkable part of the picture, really, is the lower part with all the bodies and the dying people. Well, Napoleonic regime, you know how it ended, in disaster. There's that famous quote, I'm sure Judy's given it to you, about Hitler and Napoleon having bad geography teachers who didn't tell them about the Russian winter. And in both of them, you could say, ultimately, that was the key thing that defeated them, was the vastness of Russia and its climate. And the drawing you see on the right-hand side is by Géricault, who's the main figure I'm going to talk about today.

So something that he did not directly experience but he would've heard about, which is the terrible retreat from Moscow through the bitter winter with, once again, Napoleonic armies ravaged by disease. So Géricault is an artist, he reaches maturity just at this point, immediately after the defeat of the Napoleonic regime. And I want to emphasise this very much, and he's the key figure of a French Romantic painting. Romanticism is not a style. As I said, you can have Neoclassical Romantic painting, you can have a very painterly Romantic painting. Romanticism is a mood, it's a feeling, it's an attitude to life. It's a revolution of sensibility. It starts in northern Europe, particularly Britain and Scotland is very important, and Germany. These are the countries where Romanticism gets going. It's delayed in France. The French had other things on their mind between 1789 and 1815, like conquering the world. So there's this incredible surge of energy, often very destructive, that came out of the French Revolution and that enabled the French to spread out and conquer Europe from the Atlantic, almost until, well, they did conquer Moscow. So that vast area of the world that the French were able to conquer before then falling back in on themselves. And so a French Romanticism is delayed. And when it comes, it comes with a sense of exhaustion and disillusion, which is different from Romanticism in other places. The key word of French Romanticism is ennui.

And ennui is not boredom. If you look up ennui in the dictionary, it will say it's boredom. It's much more than that. It's exhaustion. Now, if my very dear friend Marina is listening to this, she does wonderful ennui. I phone her almost every day and there's this wonderful sigh that she gives me, and it's a French Romantic sigh. It's the sigh of ennui. Now, here is Géricault. And I'm going to start off back to front by telling you that he died in January 1824, age 33. So he died very young. It's a good thing, it's a good career move for a Romantic to die young. A high portion of them did so. Think Chopin, think Keats, think Shelley, think Byron, think Schubert. It's not good for a Romantic or a rockstar, who's kind of our equivalent of a Romantic, to get old. There's something terribly undignified about a Romantic or a rockstar, say, Wordsworth or Mick Jagger, reaching old age. So on his deathbed, he said, "If only I had just painted five paintings, but I've done nothing." And that's another thing about Romanticism, is this sense of aspiring to incredibly great things and there being a kind of gap between aspiration and achievement. In fact, he only exhibited three paintings in his lifetime. And he had painted one large picture, which is certainly a masterpiece, but it's a flawed masterpiece, and I think he was very aware of that fact. Now, I'm just amazed that nobody's done a Hollywood movie about him, he'd be such a fantastic subject. He was very handsome, very charismatic, women adored him. Again, like a rockstar, he was very self-destructive.

He lived a very self-destructive life. He liked riding dangerous horses. That was one of the things that did him in, in the end. He died excruciatingly of tuberculosis of the spine, which had been exacerbated by a riding an accident, falling off horses. On the right-hand side, you can see what a beautiful man he was. And on the left is a painting by somebody else of Géricault on his deathbed, completely ravaged by his terrible disease, looking rather like an AIDS victim. So he came from the upper bourgeoisie, was very well-educated. Wanted to become an artist, entered the studio of Guérin, who I've just been talking to you about, the man who painted "The Return of Marcus Sextus." And he would've acquired this Davidian technique through careful drawing and painting from the nude, usually the male nude. Now, the one in the National Gallery, it's usually in the basement. They'll very rarely show it upstairs because they're not absolutely sure it's by him. Because if you have a situation where you have the nude model and you've got, what, 10, 20 or more students day after day, carefully drawing or painting from this model, those of you who've done live drawing classes will know, the position of the feet is chalked on the floor so that when the model has to rest or when he comes back the next day, he can go into exactly the same position. So you've got 30 artists all receiving the same kind of instruction, all painting the same figure in the same pose, and a lot of them very competent.

So if the painting is not effectively signed, convincingly signed, it's actually very difficult to know who. I think one on the left is definitely accepted as by being by Géricault, and the one on the right is not. So it's very prescriptive and a lot of artists regarded it as a straightjacket. So you could say, I mean, Géricault's the first really to rebel against it, but all the way through to Impressionism you have one generation of artists after another going through this training and the more adventurous then eventually rebel against it. And one way for artists to escape from the straightjacket was to look at the art of the past, to look at the old masters. And in that sense,

of course, Géricault had a fantastic advantage because wherever the French went in Europe, they, I don't know, do you say this phrase in English? In German, you say, "You steal like ravens." Anyway, the French stole like ravens. Everywhere they went, everything that could be moved, they stole it. You know, they emptied out the museums of Italy and they brought it back. So when Géricault was a student, the Louvre was, well, it's still the greatest museum in the world by far, but it would've been twice as great. The amazing thing is that after Napoleon was defeated the first time, the French were allowed, at the Treaty of Vienna, to keep all their ill-gotten, stolen goods. And it was only when, because Napoleon came back from Elba and had to be defeated a second time at Waterloo after that, then the French were forced to give back a lot of the masterpieces that they'd stolen. So here is a copy of a Titian. Actually, this is still in the Louvre, by Géricault. And somebody asked last week if David was influenced by this picture or the original of this picture, the Caravaggio entombment, and I said I wasn't sure about that. But obviously, Géricault was because he made this rather looser, freer copy of the Caravaggio. He already is a student, although this Caravaggio is not particularly painterly, but Titian is, of course, he showed distaste for painterly artists.

And his nickname in the studio was "Cuisinier de Rubens," "Rubens's Cook." Now, the right-hand picture is his debut picture at the salon in 1812, that fateful year, although this would've been the summer of 1812, it would've before the disaster of the winter. And it shows a charging cavalry officer. It's amazingly confident debut for a young artist. In the same salon was this, the painting on the left, by Baron Gros, much older artist, of General Murat, who was made King of Naples by Napoleon. So you can see Vesuvius smoking in the background. And just compare these two pictures between artists of two different generations and how bold and free and exciting. General Murat, he literally looks like a stuffed shirt. The horse looks stuffed, he looks stuffed. It's really a sort of stodgy painting. And here are some details. Wow, look at that. This, I mean, the excitement of the application of the paint. Look at that horse's eye and the wonderful freedom of the scumbling in the tousled mane of the horse.

It's really an exciting, confident piece of painting. So he's very much interested in the military. And during the so-called Hundred Days, the Hundred Days were the hundred days of the return of the Bourbon monastery, monarchy in 1814, before, then, Hitler comes back. Hitler? My God, I'm losing my marbles. Before Napoleon comes back from Elba. And so during this period, Géricault joined the royalist guard. So at that point, he's a Bourbon supporter, but later I think he changes his mind and nostalgically looks back to the great days of Napoleon. He paints lots of pictures. He likes this rather masculine, macho world, and he likes the uniforms. So there are a lot of these military pictures. And of course, the other thing that he loves is horses. He's one of the supreme painters of horses, but very, very different from our George Stubbs. George Stubbs is a wonderful painter of horses. He really knew about horses. He wrote a book called "The Anatomy of the Horse" and he learned about horses by dissecting them and doing detailed drawings of their bodies as he skinned them and dissected them. So he knew everything about horses. But there's a superficial similarity in these two pictures of the horse in profile, but how different. The Géricault is a horse of sensibility. It's a horse of feeling.

And Géricault really identifies, this is a horse that's terrified by a thunder and lightning storm. You can see the lightning in the background. Quite a small picture. It's in the National Gallery in London. And although this is a good reproduction, you want to really go and see it, it's so amazing. Again, the staring eyes of the horse. It's snorting and all this foam is coming out of its nostrils. It's absolutely amazing. You can see the horse is sweating with fear. And the way Géricault uses his painterly technique to suggest the wet, sweating pelt of the horse. Look at the horse's body language and compare it to the Stubbs. You see the tension in the horse's body language. So he really understands horses. He really identifies with them. And his paintings of horses are always portraits of an individual horse. So he's obviously been to big stables and we've got, well, we've got seven horses here. And every single one is a portrait of an individual horse. Here are horses' backsides. These are not generic horses' backsides, they're individualised portraits of horses' backsides. And again, here is an in-your-face portrait of a horse that he actually knew. He loves everything about horses.

He likes thoroughbred horses, he likes working horses. This is a drawing made of carthorses in London. You can see St. Paul's Cathedral in the background and the smog and the pollution of London in the early 19th century. And I find this an incredibly poignant drawing. You could say this is the funeral of a horse that has died and it's on the way to the knacker's yard. Here's the next painting, the second of the three paintings that he exhibited in his lifetime. It was another very fateful year, this is 1814. This is the year that the whole Napoleonic empire just collapses in on itself and when the allies actually invade French soil. And whether consciously or not, it's another one of his paintings, there are so many in this period, that seems to have its finger on the pulse of the time to reflect what's going on at the time. So unlike the triumphant, charging calvary officer of his first exhibited painting, this is a wounded calvary officer who's leaving the battlefield. The painting on the left, which is in a Swiss collection, is interesting. The same size and format and in composition, seems to be appended to the wounded calvary officer on the right-hand side. But it's much more freely and crudely painted.

And it's painted not on a canvas, but on rough planks of wood. And it's been suggested that that painting was made as a shop sign for a blacksmith. Now just after the Napoleonic Wars, there are a lot of these very dark, turbulent erotic scenes. They're quite small pictures. I think he's one of those people that equates sex with violence. There are many scenes of rape or where the lovemaking seems to take rather a violent form. He was going through a very depressed time just after the Napoleonic Wars, and that had probably to do with the political situation of France, but it also had to do with a drama in his private life. He was having a very dangerous and illicit love affair. It was potentially a huge scandal. There was an illegitimate child from the love affair. That child was never able to discover, and the child lived into adulthood, old age, actually. And he knew that Géricault was his father, but he never knew the identity of his mother. And that was only discovered, I think, in the late 20th century. But I mean, it's very typical of Romanticism, of course, to have a kind of a forbidden, illicit affair. Think Byron, think Wordsworth, and so on. But the name of the child was Hippolyte.

And this was a clue because his mother, the relationship was an incestuous one and his mother

was actually Géricault's aunt. So the family wanted to hush up this affair and they thought, "Well, we've got to get rid of him, we've got to send him off somewhere." So they sent him off to Italy and he spent the years 1816-17 in Italy, which would've been a normal part of an artist's education in the early 19th century, and he did the usual things. He studied the art of the past. You can see from the top, the drawing there, you've got the Apollo, no, you've got the torso of Belvedere from three angles. In fact, he seems to be comparing two types of male nude beauty, the ephebe, the slender boy, and the muscular, mature man, as in classical art. And on the right-hand side, as you can see, he's obviously taking a close look at Michelangelo. But Italy, I think, meant more to him than just the art of the past. I mean, Italy is, I don't know why I don't go there more often, really. It's so wonderful just to walk down the street in Italy. All your senses are kind of quickened. People are so beautiful, and not in a pretty way, but Italians are just amazing to look at. Old people are beautiful. Children are beautiful.

Babies, Italian babies are incredibly beautiful. And I think, you know, he was just bowled over by everything he saw in the street, you know, the beggars and the simple people. Like a lot of Romantics, of course, he had a very morbid side to him. And as we shall see, wherever he went, he was all, if there was a public execution going, oh, he wasn't going to miss that. And this is a drawing of a public execution in Rome. So he's thinking, "Right, I've got to paint a masterpiece. I've got to." He says, "I want to astonish the world." He wants to paint an astonishing picture. And throughout his period in Rome, he toyed with the idea of painting an event that took place every year in Rome, the race of the riderless horses in the Corso. And he's toying this idea and doing numerous studies, numerous versions of it. This is one of the earliest versions, which probably shows you it very much as it was, with the people wearing contemporary clothing and the grandstand in the background. And throughout this year or so that he's playing with this subject, what's interesting is that it moves away from reality and it becomes this version you can see.

You've got a strong diagonal composition. Here, the composition is being pulled around in a rather classical way, parallel to the picture's surface. Here, you've got the classical buildings in the background. It's a very friezelike treatment of the figures, very sculptural. And they're no longer wearing contemporary clothing. They're wearing some version of ancient clothing. And so this is a gradual evolution of the subject. But in the end, he abandons it and he doesn't paint that, he doesn't choose that subject for his debut masterpiece. He comes back to France in 1817 and he thinks, "No, I've got to paint a subject. It's going to be huge, it's going to be amazing. It's going to be astonishing. It's going to be controversial. And it's not going to be one of those boring, cliche subjects that you get all the time at the salons from ancient history. It's got to have modern relevance." And he picked up a bestselling, sensational book about a contemporary scandal, the Fauldès scandal. Fauldès was a provincial politician who got involved in corruption and intrigue. He was lured to a brothel.

He was murdered in the brothel. His blood was fed to pigs and his body was thrown into the river. So, well, that's a pretty sensational subject. And, yeah, he toyed with this subject and he made a whole series of drawings going through different incidents in the story. So he's living the

story, he's investigating the story like a journalist. This is the conspirators planning the murder. Here is the murder in the brothel. Here is the body being dragged to the river to be thrown into the river. But having spent some time on this, again, he decided, "No, no, this is not it. I can't really get what I want." I mean, it's certainly sensational enough. But he wants a subject that can have some kind of universal, moral meaning. And this was it. This is "The Raft of the Medusa," which is one of the great masterpieces of 19th century French painting, now in the Louvre. He again got the subject from a very sensational book about an actual contemporary event. The Medusa was a ship, a flagship of a convoy that was taking French settlers to the colony of Senegal, and it had the misfortune to be captained by a very incompetent, aristocratic naval officer. Now, when Napoleon was finally got rid of, the new regime, which were the old regime, the Bourbon regime, didn't feel that they could trust all the officials, the generals, the admirals, the ministers, and so on, who'd been associated with Napoleon. And also, there were all the aristocrats who'd been out in exile since 1789, they all came back again and they all thought, "Well, we've been loyal and we want to be rewarded."

So that's what happened. The government ministers, generals, people high up. Of course, it's a story we're very, very familiar with it at the moment on both sides of the Atlantic, that people are appointed for their loyalty and not for their competence. So this ship was captained by a completely incompetent naval officer. He not only lost the convoy he was supposed to be escorting, he managed to wreck his ship on the sandbank off the coast of Africa. The ship began to break up. So the captain ordered the ship's carpenter, from the timbers of the ship, to make a raft. It's actually rather bigger than the one you see in this picture. It was 65 feet by 35 feet. And there was a little boat, a little lifeboat. So the aristos got into the boat and they forced the rest of the people on the ship, there was 149 men and one woman, were forced to get onto this raft. Since they got onto it, it actually sank, so they were in water up to their waists. And the aristocrats promised to row the raft to the nearby African coast, but it was obvious that was not really going to happen. So they cut the ropes and they waved goodbye and they said, "Bye-bye!," thinking, "That's it, we're leaving these people to certain death."

And in fact, on the first night, 20 people already died because the timbers were not very securely tied together, so people fell between them and they got crushed. So 20 people die on the first night. The next night, a kind of a battle, a feud or a mutiny or whatever, breaks out amongst the remaining people on raft. Another 65 people dead. The third day, they've run out of food, so they start eating the dead bodies and drinking their own urine. They did have wine and they are French, after all. And but they eat out the wine, you can see the wine barrel, they eat out the wine with recycled urine. Then a few days later, there were 28 people still alive. But, they were running out of wine and they were running out of meat. And so the healthiest of the 28, the healthy 15, picked out the weaker ones and they chucked them overboard. Then, day 13, this is the moment we see on the, they spotted ship. So they climbed and they wave coloured rags to attract the attention of the ship. Ship didn't seem to see them, it sailed past, but it had seen them, and it came back and it rescued them. 15 people were taken off the raft alive, of which further five died of the effects of exposure. So other words, 10 survivors from the original 150 people. And it just turned into a huge political scandal.

So you can imagine it was actually a very, very provocative subject for Géricault to paint and to send to the salon. Once again, he did same thing. He went through the whole story in his mind. He made lots of drawings of different episodes. And I think that it was a partly that he was looking for which is the best moment for him to paint in the story. But also, I think he just wanted to really live the whole thing. So this is the second night, when the fight brokes out. Very influenced, as you can see, by his memories of Michelangelo's "Last Judgement ." He can hardly have imagined that he could have sent this to Louvre. But this is the moment when cannibalism breaks out and they start eating the dead bodies. This is the moment he finally chose, which is spotting the rescue ship in the distance. And then he follows through the approach of the rescue boat, people actually climbing off the raft into the rescue boat. And then this incredibly poignant drawing, I think, oh God, this is such an amazing drawing, of the raft after everybody's got off it, just left abandoned, floating on the Atlantic ocean. Now, it took took him six months to get to this point. And here is an oil sketch, which is basically the composition for the final picture. But as you'll see, he tinkers with it. He changes it. He had eight months to paint the picture, from this moment until the opening of the salon.

And he knew it was a race against time. So he called in his hairdresser and he had all his hair shaved off because he didn't want to be tempted to go out clubbing. And so we can see the composition changing slightly. The diagonal tilt to the raft is gradually lifted. I think he then felt that the composition didn't work because it needed some counter-diagonals. So the most important one of these is the body. If you look up, top left, in the bottom right-hand corner of that, you can see a body falling off the raft that creates a very important counter-diagonal. Again, once he'd started work on the final canvas, he had models come into the studio and he used the Davidian method of drawing and painting from live models. The drawing for the figure in the right-hand corner, falling off the raft, was actually posed for by Delacroix, who I'll be talking about on Sunday. Now, he felt the artificiality of this method and he wanted to maintain his sense of horror in the subject. So in order to do that, he haunted hospital, the worst hospitals in Paris, made studies of people dying, like this man dying of a fever. Incredible picture, it's in the Chicago Art Institute. Absolutely amazing.

Once again, I mean the way he, the skin, the sort of parchment-like skin over the bone and the sweat of the fever. It's just amazing. And this is a drawing of a corpse. And most controversially, of course, he went to the morgue and he picked up severed limbs and heads from the morgue. And a number of these studies, they are extraordinary, extraordinary pictures. And they were controversial, of course. Delacroix later said to somebody who was repelled by them, he said, "No, no, these pictures are the best argument you can find for understanding beauty." And what Delacroix meant to say is beauty is not prettiness. A nice painting of cute baby or a vase of flowers, that's not beautiful, that's pretty. This is beautiful. It's sublime, which is beauty with an element of terror mixed in. So the picture was sent to the salon in 1819. Of course, it was, like so many pictures in the 19th century, the reaction of the critics depended on their politics. It's just like America or Britain today. Everything was incredibly partisan. So if you supported the Bourbon regime and the royal family, you hated the picture.

And if you hated the royal family and the Bourbon regime, you loved the picture. But I think it's a painting which can carry a much bigger meaning than a partisan one. It can really carry a bipartisan one. The great French 19th century historian Michelet, he said, "It's all of France that has embarked on this raft." And you could say, "No, no, it's not just all of, it's all of humanity that's on this raft." Of course, it's such a potent, powerful image of the helplessness of the human condition, that it's been endlessly used by political commentators. Sorry this is such a blurred thing. This from The Guardian. Especially in the Brexit, I mean, it's been used multiple times for Britain cutting loose from Europe, setting off on its raft into the ocean. Here's another one actually from the Irish point of view. So it's, again, a very Romantic theme, man against nature. The fragility, the helplessness of man. I mean, the Romantics were really the first people to understand that the industrial revolution had raped nature and that raped nature cannot be ultimately controlled. Nature will have its revenge on us. And so it's a big theme of the Romantics of, as I said, the fragility, the helplessness of man, the ruthless power of nature. Shipwrecks are very popular, natural disasters.

Turner, bottom right-hand side. Again, Turner, an anti-slavery picture, actually, the one on the right-hand side of slave victims being thrown overboard. And, of course, Caspar David Friedrich, "The Wreck of the Hope," it's got a similar underlying meaning of the cruelty, the power of nature, and the fragility and helplessness of man. Another picture where I think one could do a whole talk, really, a very interesting compare and contrast between Goya, Goya's "Third of May." Actually, it's painted five or six years earlier, but it's a modern history painting. I mentioned last week, it's actually all the week, yes, last week. It's actually an American artist, Benjamin West, who first develops this new genre of the modern history painting. But the genre reaches its height in the early 19th century with Goya, with Géricault, and as we shall see on Sunday, with Delacroix. And move on, I think. So he shows the picture. He naively seems to hope that it would be bought by the state. Well, I mean, there was no way that was going to happen. So he took it to London and he exhibited it in London, it was sensational success in London. People paid a lot of money to come and see it. Well, obviously, the British really enjoyed a large picture which seems to not exactly celebrate, but expose French naval incompetence. Now Géricault, like many Continentals in the 19th century, was bowled over by London.

I mean, London was already a world city. It was the most highly-populated city in the world. It was the most international city. And he kept a sketchbook and you can see how he's amazed walking around the streets of London that you can see all these different ethnic types and costumes. As usual, of course, he wasn't going to miss a public hanging. Hangings were public in London up until the 1840s. And like many Europeans, he was impressed or shocked by the contrast of London, the wealth, the squalor, the incredible contrast of great richness and great poverty. And he's one of the first artists, if not the first great artist, to really exploit the new graphic medium of lithography. And he makes a wonderful series of lithographs of London scenes. And of course, England being the country of horseracing and horseflesh, that was another aspect of England that appealed to him. But what next? How do you follow up "The Raft of the Medusa"? He needs another subject that's modern, meaningful, epic.

He toys with the idea of the Greek War of Independence. Of course, Byron is involved in that. And this is a drawing he made of plague victims at Missolonghi during the Greek War of Independence. Another big Romantic theme, of course, is anti, oh, no. This scene actually shows, you could make a comparison between this and Beethoven because this shows the Spanish Inquisition opening up its prison and political prisoners or religious prisoners of the Spanish Inquisition coming out into the open air, very much like the "Prisoners' Chorus" in "Fidelio." But the thing, and I really regret he never got to paint it, he wanted to paint a great picture denouncing the slave trade. And he made a few sketches and he also made a whole series of oil paintings of Africans. And they're so beautiful, they're so dignified. The one on the right-hand side came up for sell at Christie's and I was so sad that the National Gallery didn't attempt to buy it. I thought, "If I were Black and I went to the National Gallery and I saw my people as represented by Hogarth, I would never want to go there again." And it would've been wonderful if they could have had one of these paintings that are so noble in the National Gallery collection. I want to finish off by looking at a series of six portraits, apparently there were 12 but only six survive, of mad people. Now, we know that Géricault, himself, had mental health problems and he was being treated by a doctor called Dr. Georget.

And this was a time, I suppose as a result of, partly the Enlightenment, but also of Romanticism, Romanticism was very fascinated by mental illness and madness, when mental illness was being treated more objectively, more sympathetically than it had in the past. And it's assumed that Géricault made these pictures for Dr. Georget as part of, really, as a medical experiment. He was studying these people as objectively as he possibly could to try and understand their condition, their psychological, mental condition. And they're all very, I mean, they're annotated, their very specific form of mental illness that they had. For instance, the one on the right-hand side suffered from folie de grandeur. He imagined he was a great general. This guy, so sad, so pathetic. This is a paedophile kidnapper. And these two women, again, one I can't remember which is which, one suffers from a sort of manic envy and the other one is a compulsive gambler. And just look at their faces. To me, these are amongst the greatest portraits ever painted. I'd put them right up with the greatest portraits of Rembrandt and Velázquez. They have an extraordinary humanity, an extraordinary truthfulness.

There is a comparison, Velázquez on the right-hand side of a dwarf, if that's the right, I don't know quite what you call them these days. But he was a court dwarf who suffered, in fact, from mental illness. Now, my last images. This is the death mask or this beautiful man ravaged by his terrible disease. And on the left is the last drawing that he made. And you can see, it's described, "La main de Géricault." And this is a drawing that he made on his deathbed of his left hand, the hand's still looking actually very vigorous. When I was writing my MA thesis on Puvis de Chavannes, I had permission to use the cabinet des dessins in the Louvre. And so I went there to look at the drawings of Puvis de Chavannes, but I could request anything wanted. And the very first drawing that I requested was this. So I had the great privilege of, in my hand, holding the hand of Géricault, and I found that, really, a very moving experience. So, I'm stopping and we have just a few minutes, I think, to answer questions and I see there are some.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: "Is it true that Bonaparte shot the Sphinx and damaged its nose?"

A: I don't know, it's a famous quote, isn't it, that Hitler and Napoleon had bad history teachers?

"Hitler had a bad history teacher, as well," from Dennis.

Yes, I know Mick Jagger is alive, but I'm just saying it might have been a better quote, I shouldn't say something like this over the internet. I'm just saying it's undignified to be a rebel, Romantic rockstar and get to old age that I'm sure Jim Morrison will leave a better legend.

Q: "Tiger and leopard skins are interesting on the saddles of the two military officers sitting on their horses. Is there any significance or symbolism, apart from wealth and luxury?"

A: Well, yes, I think, you know, obviously tigers and leopards are pretty fierce animals. So I suppose there's that aspect of it.

Q: "How do we know that the cavalry officer is wounded?"

A: Well, he looks in a bad state and that is the title of the picture. The title is "Wounded Cavalry Officer Leaving the Field of Battle."

Q: "Who raised the illegitimate child of Géricault in his mother's absence?"

A: I know he was sent away and there was some kind of financial arrangement made for him. I don't know all the details. You'll have to follow that up. Right.

Where do we go from here? Right. Somebody says I'm not losing my marbles. At the moment, I really feel I am, I think it's a lockdown thing. I know a lot of people think they're losing their marbles.

Q: "Do you think Géricault was influenced by Fuseli in rearing horses?"

A: He was definitely influenced. He would've seen Fuseli, not for the rearing horses that he exhibited, that first one, because he hadn't been to England then. But when he came to England, he would've seen Fuseli. And we know that he was influenced by an image of, God, I am losing my marbles. Oh! The great English horse painter. There is actually a Géricault, which is a version of it.

Q: "Why is 'The Raft of the Medusa' so big?"

A: I think he wanted it to be, that's what those paintings were like. If you walk down that gallery,

the Grand Gallery in the Louvre, they're all are huge.

You know, the Delacroix's "Liberty Leading the People," the Gros. It was, if you want to make a statement at the salon, you had to think, Stubbs, sorry, was the person I'm thinking of.

"I meant the painting of the raft." Yes. Is that it? Don't seem to have any more questions. So that-

- Patrick?

- I think that's it, Wendy.

- Fantastic.

- Yeah.

- Thank you, another beautiful presentation.

- Good, thank you.

- Really, another fantastic, moving evening.

- Thank you, Wendy.

- And you know what? We've all been in this situation where, honestly, I sometimes don't even know which day it is. It's like one day just rolls into the next.

- Yeah.

- So at least we have our marbles, even if we misplace them from time to time.

- Well, I want to thank you for helping me keep them because this really keeps me going, doing all of this.

- Oh my goodness. Me too, me too.

- Yeah.

- And all our wonderful participants who check in every day.

- Yeah.

- And to Judy and to Shawn and to Carly, everybody that's helping us, keeping us going, hang in

there, there is light at the end of the tunnel and I certainly look forward to seeing you soon.

- Yeah. Thanks.

- Thank you, everybody.

- Bye-bye!

- Thanks for joining us-