

The idea of the artist in eighteenth-century France

Autor(en): **Whiteley, Jon J. L.**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Outlines**

Band (Jahr): **2 (2004)**

PDF erstellt am: **06.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-872231>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

JON J. L. WHITELEY

The idea of the artist in eighteenth-century France¹

In his *Conférence* read to the Académie in 1720, Antoine Coypel painted an ambitious portrait of the ideal artist: 'Le peintre est si noble et si élevé, qu'il semble tirer plutôt son origine au ciel même que des hommes'.² In Coypel's eyes, the nature of painting requires not only encyclopaedic knowledge of the sciences, literature and philosophy but also exquisite manners and moral excellence.³ Thus it is, says Coypel, that painters have been acknowledged by their peers and classed generally among the most honoured of mankind. 'Plus on est grand homme, plus on estime les grands hommes'. He cites the examples of Titian and Charles V, Leonardo dying in the arms of François I, Raphael acknowledged by the pope, Bernini, Rubens, Van Dyck and other painters who have been honoured throughout the ages by kings and emperors.⁴ The theme is not uncommon in eighteenth-century *Lives of the Artists*. The abbé Le Brun took up the point in 1776: 'qu'on lise les Vies de Rubens, de Lebrun, de Perrault, de Puget et tant d'autres et l'on verra que les talents distingués ont été fêtés dans tous les ages'.⁵

Coypel knew, of course, that all painters were not Titian and all sculptors were not Bernini. From a very early stage in the campaign to give French artists an honoured place among the practitioners of the Liberal Arts, a distinction was made not only between painters and artisans, but between painters and the large mass of jobbing artists and Flemish immigrants who were classed among the artisans by their professional superiors. It is well known that painters who aspired to an intellectual status did not wish to be classed with craftsmen; but even less, did they wish to be associated with a large number of their colleagues whose work and whose life-style undermined their effort to achieve social distinction.⁶

The word 'artiste', as Nathalie Heinich has demonstrated, came into use in around 1700 in place of the words 'artisan' or 'ouvrier' in order to acknowledge the distance which had long since opened up between the Academician and the craftsman.⁷ Coypel does not appear to have used the word 'artiste' but it appears fairly commonly in Richardson's *Essays and Discourses* which were translated into French soon after their publication in 1725. Richardson and his translator, Ten Kate, usually employ the word to qualify Raphael and the ancients, implying a sense of elevation in those to whom it

applied.⁸ In this sense, the word spread very rapidly through artistic discourse to fill what Nathalie Heinich has aptly called the ‘semantic void’⁹ facing the abbé Dubos in 1719 when he famously apologised for using the word ‘artisan’ to qualify painters and sculptors because he had no other.¹⁰

‘Artiste’ always implied a degree of superiority although its usefulness to painters was, in practice, limited by its shared use by artisans where it also implied a degree of excellence, ‘an ingenious workman’, to use Boyer’s definition of 1753.¹¹ Goldsmiths and other craft workers were addressed in royal decrees of the 1780s as ‘artistes’.¹² The title of Fontenai’s *Dictionnaire des artistes ou notice historique et raisonnée des architectes, peintres, graveurs, sculpteurs, musiciens, acteurs et danseurs, imprimeurs, horlogers et mécaniciens*, published in 1776, is self-explanatory.¹³ In his treatise on the art of gilding and decorating, published in 1778, Jean-Félix Watin applied the word ‘artiste’ to include both painters of historical compositions and those who decorated interiors and furniture.¹⁴ Although the word appears in nearly all dictionaries from the late seventeenth century onwards, none of the authors of dictionaries in England and France made mention of the Fine Arts until the middle of the eighteenth century. The *Encyclopédie*, as George Levitine first pointed out¹⁵, does not mention painters and sculptors in its definition of the artist: ‘nom que l’on donne aux ouvriers qui excellent dans ceux d’entre les arts mécaniques qui supposent l’intelligence: et même à ceux qui, dans certaines sciences moitié pratiques, moitié spéculatives, en entendent très bien la partie pratique’.¹⁶ Even more notable is the omission of an entry for ‘artiste’ in Marsy’s *Dictionnaire abrégé de peinture et d’architecture* of 1746.¹⁷ By this date, however, the word seems to have acquired a sense confined to practitioners of the Fine Arts. Lacombe’s *Dictionnaire portatif des Beaux-Arts*, also published in 1746, seems to have been the first dictionary to acknowledge this: ‘on donne ce nom à ceux qui exercent quelqu’un des Arts libéraux’.¹⁸ The fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* of 1762 followed suit in defining an artist as ‘celui qui travaille dans un art où le génie et la main doivent concourir. Un peintre, un architecte sont des artistes’.¹⁹

A word can have many meanings provided they are not mutually exclusive. The word ‘artiste’, at times, has meant a chemist, a scholar, a surgeon and an artisan. However, it could not exist in common use to signify a member of a class of workers who included artisans on the one hand and excluded them on the other. The new sense of the word in the mid-century which clarified the ambitions of those who practised the Liberal Arts forced a confrontation with those who used it in its traditional, more inclusive sense.

The artisans did not give ground readily. In the 1790s, the word ‘artiste’ seems to have been extended in popular use to describe a variety of manual workers and performers including acrobats, ventriloquists, barbers, cooks and others.²⁰ This phenome-

non was widely satirised²¹ although it was not an unreasonable use of a word which, in its traditional sense, applied to ‘the professor of an art, generally of an art manual’ or ‘a skilful man.’²² It was not such a novelty as was thought at the time or as has been suggested since and the backlash among artists and their friends says as much about the ambitions of the painters and their colleagues who insisted on confining the use of the word to practitioners of the Fine Arts as it says about the pretensions of bootblacks and barbers in the 1790s. Watelet and Levesque’s *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture et gravure* of 1792 gives a full definition to the new usage: ‘Artiste. Ce terme désigne un homme qui exerce un Art libéral: Artisan designe celui qui pratique un Art mécanique. Il faut observer que ces explications sont fondées sur l’usage le plus général dans le temps où j’écris; car les mots Artiste et Artisan ont dû s’employer indifféremment lorsqu’on ne distinguoit pas avec autant de précision qu’on le fait la différente nature des Arts. On nomme donc aujourd’hui un Forgeron, un Charpentier, un Maçon, Artisans, et le Peintre, le Sculpteur, le Graveur, Artistes.’²³

The distinction between painters who were inspired by noble aspirations and those who painted mechanically for a living is a commonplace of French artistic discourse. It is found in the work of Fréart de Chambray (1662), Jacques Restout (1681), Coypel (1721) and in many others.²⁴ ‘La Pratique sans principes et sans génie’ wrote Dandré-Bardon in his *Traité de peinture* of 1765, ‘dégénère en pure routine, et la routine ne constitue que l’Artisan, que nous distinguons toujours de l’Artiste.’²⁶ The increasing use of ‘artiste’ in the late eighteenth century as a term which applied to all those who practised the Fine Arts – including inferior practitioners – prevented this sense of the word from continuing in general use but the distinction which it identified between the artist of genius and the artist who had manual skill but no genius was still keenly felt by artists and critics in the 1790s and 1800s. The argument is not identical with the arguments in support of the hierarchy of genres which classified works of art by subject-matter, but it was, in large part, fuelled by the same desire to separate an intellectual ‘élite’ from an artisanal under-class.²⁷

Genius – inborn talent – became the chief feature separating the great artist from the jobbing painter. The word was chiefly used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to describe an innate faculty.²⁸ It has never lost this meaning but at an early stage it was transferred from the faculty to the person who is endowed with it.²⁹ The 1762 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* may have been the first dictionary to include this quality in the definition of an artist but by this date it had been long associated with the idea of creative work. Genius was an essential attribute of Fréart de Chambray’s noble painter: ‘Un jeune homme, [...] bien instruit dès sa jeunesse en toutes les connoissances nécessaires à sa profession [...] ne peut manquer d’être habille homme: mais après cela, si la nature le favorise du Génie de l’Art, qui est la vivacité et le caprice de l’Invention, et du

Talent de la Grace (que l'étude ne sçauroit donner), il faut par nécessité qu'il reussisse excellent'.³⁰

The idea that great art is created by the combination of learning and innate genius is taken from Leonardo, whose *Trattato* Fréart translated in 1651 and it was taken up by Roger de Piles whose *Idée du peintre parfait* begins with the crisp assertion: 'Le Génie est la première chose que l'on doit supposer dans un Peintre. C'est une partie qui ne peut s'acquérir ni par l'étude, ni par le travail'.³¹ Elsewhere, De Piles describes Genius as above rules: 'il leur commande en maître, il les rejette quand il lui plaît pour leur substituer quelque chose plus heureux'³²: but the perfect painter could not ignore them altogether and, in a passage added to the 1715 edition, De Piles seems to have drawn back somewhat from the implication of this assertion: 'Il faut donc du Génie mais un Génie exercé par les règles, par les réflexions et par l'assiduité du travail'.³³ Reynolds took up this argument in the sixth of his *Discourses*: 'What we now call Genius, begins, not where rules, abstractedly taken, end; but where known vulgar and trite rules have no longer any place. It must of necessity be, that even works of Genius, like every other effect, as they must have their cause, must likewise have their rules'.³⁴ The argument gave the eighteenth-century art school a theoretical rationale. Opposing it also provided the ground on which the value of academic art was called into question in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by those who argued for the self-sufficiency of genius.

No-one claimed that an artist of genius could be produced by rules alone. Perfect practice did not create great art. An artist of genius, on the other hand, could be a faulty practitioner.³⁵ Careful finish was equated with mere manual dexterity whereas genius, which is linked to invention, could be determined from a sketch.³⁶ Academic theorists, however, were equally convinced that even the artist of genius requires a knowledge of the basic grammar: 'le Génie sans pratique' warned Dandré-Bardon 'fait une dangereuse illusion'.³⁷ Reynolds was of the same opinion: 'The purport of this discourse', he reminded his audience in 1774, 'and, indeed, of most of my other discourses, is, to caution you against that false opinion, but too prevalent among artists, of the imaginary powers of native genius, and its sufficiency in great works'.³⁸

Like De Piles, Diderot believed that 'le génie est un pur don de la nature' but unlike De Piles, he believed that the rules of taste were inimicable to art. The man of Genius was 'continuellement gêné par la Grammaire et par l'usage' and, in a phrase that is prophetic of a later commonplace, 'il devance son siècle qui ne peut le suivre'.³⁹ Voltaire had already condemned the destructive influence of Academies in confining freedom of expression and by the 1780s, the word 'académique' had become synonymous in some quarters with submission to rules and with manual skill without inspiration. According to Watelet, artists who drew figure studies – 'académies' – without passion are not artists

but artisans.⁴⁰ In 1796, an anonymous reviewer condemned a painting by Le Barbier in similar terms: 'le style en est académique, il n'a pas beaucoup de génie, mais ce qu'il fait sent le métier'.⁴¹ One of the consequences of this increasingly common view that genius was enslaved by regulation was to subvert the ancient idea of the Academy as the guarantor of the painter's liberties and the focus for his ambition to distance himself from the stigma of manual labour.

The difference between the exalted ideal of the perfect painter which evolved in Europe in the century and a half before 1800 and the mundane reality of the artist's material circumstances provoked an increasingly shrill debate about the failure of society to acknowledge the work of the artist in terms which did not give offence to his 'amour-propre'. The debate manifested itself, above all, in the critical reviews of the Paris Salon. The resentment which these aroused in the community of artists in the Ancien Régime seems somewhat disproportionate but it was deeply felt. Coypel, in 1720, had already warned his audience of the thorns which are habitually found on the path to virtue but recalled the glorious conclusion which is the invariable reward of true talent.⁴² Genius, said Watelet, suffers the bitter consequences of public indifference but 'quant à cette injustice, il reste au moins à ceux qui l'éprouvent, un appel à la postérité, et pour consolation, un sentiment intérieur de leur mérite qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec la sotte présomption'.⁴³

Indigence and suffering were common enough in the lives of artists to justify the sense of hardship which was associated with the idea of the artist's profession in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The difficulties endured by painters in the 1790s in the aftermath of the Revolution were widely reported in the press. The painting exhibited by Jean-Baptiste Genty in 1799 which included the figure of Destitution, gnawing a bone behind the canvas in the artist's studio, no doubt illustrated the reality of existence for this minor pupil of David.⁴⁴ The long survival of the commonplace 'gueux comme un peintre'⁴⁵ must have been sustained by the difficulties facing many painters in a world where few emerged to hold positions of eminence. But while the destitution endured by many writers and painters provided evidence that great artists suffered persecution, the idea that they did so did not originate among impoverished artists but among a group of writers in mid eighteenth-century France who resented the claims of the Academies to set standards and attempted to undercut the status of Academicians by turning the popular conception of the Academician as a man of distinction on its head. When Voltaire spoke of the injustice endured by 'artistes' he was chiefly thinking of writers but the idea was quickly taken up by painters who were notoriously easy to provoke. The restrictions imposed on young painters by the Academy and by the Directeur des Beaux-Arts alienated a number of artists within the Academy while exclusion from the Salon no doubt irritated many others outside. But it seems that it was the

growth of the critical literature associated with the Salon which chiefly fed a widespread sense of injustice in the wider community of artists. In 1789, an anonymous reviewer consoled Joseph Vernet for a bad review in terms which became commonplace in the nineteenth century: 'L'envie et l'injustice s'élèvent toujours contre les génies; on leur refuse tout, même les honneurs. Poussin, le plus habile peintre de son siècle, fut persecuté; Homère vécut errant et pauvre; le Tasse fut le plus malheureux des hommes de son tems; Milton et cent autres dont le temple de mémoire fourmille, furent encore plus malheureux'.⁴⁶ In 1794, provoked by the recent sufferings of artists under the Terror, the abbé Grégoire read a list to the National Convention of the great men in history who had fallen on evil days: Homer, Kepler, Tasso, Correggio, Dante, Ariosto, Camoëns, Cervantes, Malherbe, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, all of whom 'périssent sous les lambeaux de l'indigence [...]. La vie d'un homme de génie est presque toujours semée d'épines. Il est en avant de son siècle; dès lors il est dépaycé [...]. Il est harcelé par la jalousie des demi-talens qui lui font expirer sa supériorité'.⁴⁷ The idea that Joseph Vernet – or indeed Homer or Poussin – had been persecuted or suffered mortal abuse, is debatable but it is characteristic of the genre that the desire to believe in this 'chaîne presque sans interruption de glorieux exilés', as Vigny called them⁴⁸, gave rise to a process of transformation in the art of biography in which facts and hints of little consequence become gradually transformed into a tale of incomprehension and indigence. Correggio's place in this pantheon of misery derives from an account of his death in Vasari's *Lives* brought on as a result of carrying a huge weight of copper coins in payment for a picture. The story was repeated by De Piles and D'Argenville and was the subject of a painting by Tardieu exhibited in 1806. Richardson dismissed the story⁴⁹ but it did not prevent it from becoming a popular tale illustrating the common fate of genius. It was the moral of the story which caught the attention of Chaussard in his review of Tardieu's painting in 1806. 'C'est une idée morale et instructive que de présenter l'état d'indigence où fut réduit (hélas! ce n'est que trop souvent la condition du Génie) l'état d'indigence, je le repète, où fut réduit l'Artiste dont les chefs d'œuvre payés un million après sa mort, méritèrent d'être compris dans les Articles d'un traité de paix [...]'⁵⁰

The cult of genius, particularly among David's pupils, encouraged a search for exalted originality which was, in general, satirised by critics in the 1790s when the Salon was opened to non-Academicians and to artists of little talent.⁵¹ The most savage and most humorous of these reviews were usually directed against painters who are little known today⁵² but on occasion they involved artists of greater consequence. The mixed reviews which Girodet's *Scène du Déluge*⁵³ received in 1806 prompted Girodet to publish his own anonymous review in the form of a poem, praising his picture and condemning the critics who failed to respond with enthusiasm to a work which was, as most of the

critics recognised, painted with an exalted sense of the terrible and sublime. In replying to the critics, Girodet introduced an idea which was commonplace in 1806⁵⁴ that talent is only recognised in an artist after his death and he developed it later in his long poem, *Le Peintre*, written towards the end of his life, in which he follows the career of an artist from the cradle to immortality. The idea of innate Genius is stated uncompromisingly:

‘Ce n’est point un talent, c’est plus, c’est un prodige
Nulle règle, nul frein ne le saurait lier
Il débute en grand maître avant d’être écolier.’⁵⁵

Preferring honour and glory to financial gain, despising flattery, driven by a keen sensibility, the painter sometimes aims too high, like a ‘nouvel Icare’. He is rarely recognised at his true worth in his life-time and his pleasures are not unmixed with suffering – ‘les lauriers sont toujours entrelacés d’épines’ – but he is hailed by immortal Glory in the after-life and receives his reward in heaven. The narrative moves in and out of autobiography to include a cast of famous painters whose lives illustrate the nobility of art. Girodet’s model, as Neil MacGregor has pointed out, was Le Mierre’s didactic poem, *La Peinture*, published in 1769, but the underlying sensibility is more psychologically charged than it is in Le Mierre’s poem and more marked by the personality of the author who, as MacGregor has aptly remarked, sometimes identifies with Raphael, fêted by all, and sometimes with Michelangelo, living in depression and working at night in gloomy isolation.⁵⁶

Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret, a colleague of Girodet and Ingres at David’s studio, similarly divided his thoughts between the honoured Raphael and the lonely Michelangelo. Bergeret suffered deeply from a sense of injustice and from the belief that his talent had not been recognised as it deserved. He took consolation from the prospect of posthumous fame and would have been mortified to discover that we do not rank him nowadays among the greatest artists of all time. In 1848, he published a passionate defence of artists’ rights – not least his own – which is marked by a disturbing lack of balance. He cites himself, alongside Domenichino, La Fontaine and Poussin as proof that men of genius are not treated as they deserve by their contemporaries.⁵⁷ It seems, therefore, paradoxical as one turns from the book to find that Bergeret specialised in painting images of artists favoured by wealth, friends and social success, beginning with *Honneurs rendus à Raphael*⁵⁸, exhibited in 1806, an image of adulation and an argument for the status of the artist based upon Vasari’s equally tendentious *Lives of the Artists*.

Many nineteenth-century artists painted episodes from the lives of their predecessors which celebrate the exalted status of artists in the past.⁵⁹ The artist in fiction, in the theatre and in poetry is isolated, misunderstood and stricken with poverty⁶⁰ while in painting, he is honoured and acknowledged by his contemporaries.⁶¹ In private, Ingres,

wounded by the critics who had condemned his exhibits in 1806, took consolation from the fate of others: 'Homère, repoussé, misérable, mendie. Apelles accusé par la calomnie, est sauvé par la vérité; son œuvre lui sert de justification. Phidias, injustement accusé, meurt misérablement', Socrates, Euripides, Theocritus, Aesop, Dante, Jean Goujon, 'meurent de mort violente ou sont tourmentés comme devraient l'être les méchants: Lesueur enfin! Poussin, notre grand Poussin, persecuté par un Fouquières, dégoûté, quitte la France qu'il devait orner. Et Dominiquin, et tant d'autres, et Camoëns!'⁶² In public, however, Ingres exhibited only pictures illustrating the happier moments in the lives of famous artists.⁶³

It would be an exaggeration to say that there were no images of the suffering artist exhibited at the Salon in the first half of the nineteenth century. Delacroix painted the melancholic Michelangelo. So did Couder and Bergeret, taking their source from a highly improbable tale of the blind Michelangelo touching the Belvedere torso.⁶⁴ Octave Tassaert, himself a deeply unhappy artist, painted the death of Correggio⁶⁵: but these are the exceptions. Artists, as a rule, took consolation from the misfortunes of the artists in private; they often painted pictures on the sorrows of the man of letters, following a well-established literary tradition⁶⁶: but when they painted compositions illustrating the lives of the artists, they turned more readily to a biographical tradition which ran frankly counter to this theme.⁶⁷

However much resentful artists might have taken comfort from the thought that lack of success is an attribute of genius, it is unlikely that any early nineteenth-century artist would have felt unease if he had been treated with the adulation and social success which he encountered in the biographies of past artists. The paintings of Ingres and Bergeret do not represent the reality of the artist's life but are images of an ideal. Measured against Vasari's *Life of Raphael*, the difficulties which these artists faced at certain points in their careers fell far short of this ideal but by any normal standard, they did not amount to persecution. Although it seems that the idea that the great artist is typically a victim of injustice may have been encouraged by the events of the Revolution⁶⁸, many of the difficulties which David and his pupils endured in this period were not connected with their art. As Philippe Bordes has suggested, Hennequin's astonishing picture of the tormented Orestes is 'moins une toile politique que le reflet de la personnalité paranoïque de l'auteur'.⁶⁹

In time, the idea that the artist of genius is by definition misunderstood, gave rise to a distorted view of the careers of contemporary artists which paralleled the process of distortion which had been applied to the lives of artists and writers of the past.⁷⁰ Vigny told Hugo that Girodet had been driven to a premature death by the injustice he had endured⁷¹; Thackeray, when he was in Gros's studio in the 1830s, was told that Géricault

‘pined and died for want of fame because nobody would buy his pictures and so acknowledge his talent’⁷²; David was cited by an early biographer as proof that ‘le privilège du génie, le privilège le plus incontestable, c’est d’être dénigré.’⁷³ Popularity, correspondingly, became suspect. Bergeret expressed a view which has since become commonplace: ‘L’artiste dont les ouvrages réunissent le plus grand nombre de voix se croit le plus grand. Cependant ce grand nombre de voix ne peut être obtenu que par les ouvrages qui renferment le plus de trivialités, qualités superficielles, faites d’éducation préalable.’⁷⁴

The idea of the ‘artiste maudit’ has lastingly affected attitudes to art.⁷⁵ It contributed towards the notion of the artist as a Bohemian outcast, at odds with respectable society and indifferent to material success. Only bad artists in nineteenth-century fiction earn money. Most members of the nineteenth-century Académie des Beaux-Arts and many of the nineteenth-century painters who earned wealth, honours and a respectable place in society have been demoted in the eyes of posterity while artists who worked with little recompense in the margin of their profession have become household names. These developments would have surprised Coypel and his contemporaries. While they believed that real artists did not work for gain – working for money was a mark of the artisan⁷⁶ – they had no objection to wealth and honours as such and they would have viewed the popular nineteenth-century view of the artist as a social outcast – shared in some instances by the artists themselves⁷⁷ – with particular dismay.

1 I am most grateful to Karen Junod for valuable advice in preparing this text.

2 Antoine Coypel, *Discours prononcez dans les Conférences de l’Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, Paris, 1721, p. vii.

3 Cf. the long description of the artist’s qualities in Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, London, 1725, pp. 16–36: ‘The way to be an Excellent Painter is to be an Excellent Man; and these united make a Character that would shine even in a better World than this’. Ibid., pp. 34–35; cf. also the entry in Pernety’s dictionary (taken from Du Quesnoy): ‘les qualités d’un excellent Peintre sont d’avoir le jugement bon, l’esprit docile, le cœur noble, le sens sublime, de la santé, de la jeunesse, de l’emotion, la commodité des biens, l’amour du travail et de son Art et d’être sous le discipline d’un habile Maître’ (Antoine-Joseph Pernety, *Dictionnaire por-*

tatif de peinture, sculpture et gravure [...], Paris, 1757, p. 451).

4 Coypel 1721 (see note 2), p. viii.

5 Abbé Le Brun, *Almanach historique et raisonné des architectes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs et ciseleurs*, Paris, 1776, p. 6.

6 ‘But (by the way) ’tis not every *Picture-Maker* that ought to be called a *Painter*, as every *Rhymer*, or *Grubstreet Tale-Writer* is not a *Poet*, or *Historian*: A *Painter* ought to be a Title of Dignity, and understood to imply a Person endued with such Excellencies of Mind, and Body, as have ever been the Foundations of Honour amongst Men’ (Richardson 1725 [see note 3], p. 17); cf. also Coypel 1721 (see note 2), p. iii; especially Jacques Restout, *La Réforme de la peinture*, Caen 1681 (Minkoff reprint Geneva, 1973), pp. 12–13.

7 Nathalie Heinich, ‘De l’Apparition de l’*Artiste* à l’invention des *Beaux-Arts*’, *Revue d’histoire*

- moderne et contemporaine*, vol. xxxvii, 1990, pp. 3–6; Heinich notes the use of the word ‘artiste’ to describe a painter in Bayle’s dictionary of 1699 but suggests that this use was, at first, restricted to a limited circle; see also Nathalie Heinich, *Du peintre à l’artiste; artisans et académiques à l’âge classique*, Paris, 1993, pp. 198–207.
- 8 Jonathan Richardson, ‘Essai sur la théorie de la peinture’, in *Traité de la peinture*, Amsterdam, 1728, vol. 1, pp. 30, 81, 105 and elsewhere; the word ‘artist’ appears in the original English: see also Lambert H. Ten Kate, ‘Discours préliminaire sur le beau idéal’, in *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. xl, xlix, liv and elsewhere.
- 9 Heinich 1990 (see note 7), p. 3.
- 10 Jean-Baptiste Dubos, abbé, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, 7th ed., Paris, 1770, p. 4; Abraham Bosse used the word ‘artiste’ to describe a patron of the arts: A. Bosse, *Le peintre converty aux règles de son art*, introduced by R. Weigert, Paris, 1964, p. 39.
- 11 Abel Boyer, *Dictionnaire royal françois-anglois*, Paris, 1753.
- 12 eg. *Déclaration ... qui permet aux maîtres orfèvres et à tous les artistes qui fondent, travaillent ou emploient les matières d’or et d’argent, d’établir leurs forges et fourneaux ailleurs que dans les boutiques*, 25 Aug. 1784, Paris, 1784; also *Lettres patentes ... qui accordent aux entrepreneurs des manufactures et aux artistes, la liberté d’avoir chez eux des balanciers, des presses etc.*, 28 July 1783, Paris, 1783.
- 13 Abbé de Fontenai (Louis-Abel Bonafous, dit l’abbé de Fontenai), *Dictionnaire des artistes ou notice historique et raisonnée des architectes, peintres, graveurs, sculpteurs, musiciens, acteurs et danseurs, imprimeurs, horlogers et mécaniciens*, Paris, 1776. Fontenai was aware that it was unusual to include mechanics in a work dealing with the painters and sculptors but he does not seem to have thought that it might be unusual to describe them all as artists. It would, he claims, have been an injustice if he had ‘laissé les mécaniciens dans l’oubli. On a droit de s’étonner du silence qu’on a gardé à leur égard dans presque tous les ouvrages où il est question des Artistes’, *ibid.*, p. vi.
- 14 Jean-Félix Watin, *L’art du peintre, doreur, vernisseur, ouvrage utile aux artistes et aux amateurs*, Liège, 1778, introduction.
- 15 George Levitine, *The Dawn of Bohemianism: the Barbu Rebellion and Primitivism in Neo-classical France*, London, 1978, p. 14.
- 16 *Encyclopédie*, vol. 1, 1751, p. 745.
- 17 François-Marie de Marsy, abbé, *Dictionnaire abrégé de peinture et d’architecture*, Paris, 1746.
- 18 Jacques Lacombe, *Dictionnaire portatif des Beaux-Arts ou abrégé de ce qui concerne l’architecture, la sculpture, la peinture, la gravure, la poesie et la musique*, new ed. Paris, 1753, p. 39.
- 19 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française*, 4th ed. Paris, 1762, p. 107.
- 20 See Jean-François Féraud, abbé, *Supplément du dictionnaire critique de la langue française*, CNRS facsimile 1987. Féraud notes the use of the word to describe barbers: ‘Les vrais artistes penseront que c’est profaner ce nom honorable’; George Levitine gives a list of references from the early-nineteenth century press: Levitine 1978 (see note 15), p. 14; see also Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, Oxford, 1993, p. 142; Richard Wrigley, ‘Apelles in Bohemia’, *Oxford Art Journal*, (1992), no. 15, p. 101; Maurice Schroder, *The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1961, p. 5; Heinich 1993 (see note 7), p. 204.
- 21 See [D’Hautel], *Dictionnaire du bas-langage*, Paris, 1808, vol. 1, p. 45: ‘les histrions, les plus vils bateleurs, les artisans les plus obscures, les décrotteurs même, prennent depuis quelque temps à Paris, le titre d’Artiste: on ne peut assurément pousser plus loin l’impudeur et la dérision’; see also Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Néologie ou vocabulaire de mots nouveaux*, Paris, 1801, vol. 1, p. 50. Both sources are cited by Schroder 1961 (see note 20), p. 5.
- 22 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, London, 1755, vol. 1.
- 23 Claude-Henri Watelet and Pierre-Charles Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture et gravure*, Paris, 1792, vol. 1

- (Minkoff reprint Geneva, 1972), p. 128. The same passage is cited by Levitine 1978 (see note 15), p. 14.
- 24 Roland Fréart de Chambray, *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, reprint of 1662 edition with an introduction by Anthony Blunt, Farnborough, 1968, preface; Restout 1681 (see note 6), p. 12; Coypel 1721 (see note 2), p. III.
- 25 Michel François Dandré-Bardon, *Traité de peinture suivi d'un essai sur le sublime*, Paris, 1765 (Minkoff reprint Geneva, 1972), p. xxix.
- 26 See Udolpho van de Sandt, 'Grandissima opera del pittore sarà l'istoria. Notes sur la hiérarchie des genres sous la Révolution', *Revue de l'Art*, no. 83 (1989), pp. 71-6; see also Wrigley 1993 (see note 20), pp. 285-349.
- 27 See Heinich 1993 (see note 7), pp. 171-5.
- 28 See Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, The Hague and Rotterdam, 1690, vol. 2: 'cet homme est un vaste génie, qui est capable de tout'.
- 29 Fréart de Chambray 1662 (see note 24), pp. 6-7.
- 30 Roger de Piles, *L'Idée du peintre parfait*, Paris, 1715, p. 13.
- 31 De Piles 1715 (see note 30), p. 24.
- 32 De Piles 1715 (see note 30), p. 27.
- 33 Joshua Reynolds, *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. and annotated by Edmund Gosse, London, 1884, p. 90.
- 34 'It is certainly true, that a work may justly claim the character of genius, though full of errors; and it is equally true, that it may be faultless, and yet not exhibit the least spark of genius' (Reynolds 1884 [see note 33], p. 190).
- 35 See Le Mierre, *La Peinture*, Paris 1769, p. 43: 'Le moment du génie est celui de l'esquisse / C'est là qu'on voit la verve et la chaleur du plan'.
- 36 Dandré-Bardon 1765 (see note 25), p. xxix.
- 37 Reynolds 1884 (see note 33), p. 108.
- 38 *Encyclopédie*, Paris 1757, vol. 5, pp. 582-5. Genius is defined not just as a faculty of the imagination but of the exalted imagination. The man of genius feels more strongly than the common man. This idea reappears in Watelet and Levesque's dictionary where genius is distinguished from intelligence: 'le genie au contraire semble être le mouvement d'une âme chaude, rapide, élevée, quelquefois même exaltée.' (Watelet and Levesque 1792 [see note 23], p. 393)
- 39 Watelet and Levesque 1792 (see note 23), pp. 4-5.
- 40 Anon., *Les Etrivières de Juvénal*, Paris, 1796, p. 12.
- 41 Coypel 1721 (see note 2), p. vi.
- 42 Watelet and Levesque 1792 (see note 23), p. 395.
- 43 Genty, *Portrait du C. Genty, dans son atelier, occupé a faire un tableau. Derrière la toile est la Misère, représentée sous la figure d'une femme rongant un os. Dessin.*
- 44 According to Marsy's dictionary of 1746, the saying is a translation of the Latin proverb: 'Pausone mendicior' (Marsy 1746 [see note 17], p. 60.)
- 45 Anon., *Les Elèves au salon ou l'Amphigouri*, Paris, 1789, pp. 17-8.
- 46 Henri Grégoire, abbé, *Rapport sur les encouragements, récompenses et pensions [...]; séance du 17 vendemiaire, l'an 3 de la République une et indivisible*, Paris, 1794, p. 2.
- 47 Alfred de Vigny, *Stello*, Paris, 1882, p. 390.
- 48 Richardson 1728 (see note 8), vol. 3, p. 686.
- 49 [Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Chaussard, dit Publicola], *Le Pausanias français, ou description du Salon de 1806*, Paris, 1808, p. 455.
- 50 See George Levitine 1978 (see note 15); the *Barbus* are a typical but not isolated case.
- 51 The satirical verse *Grande Assemblée des Barbouilleurs*, published in 1791, sustains a lengthy joke at the expense of artists who had been maltreated by an anonymous reviewer at the jury-free Salon: 'Robineau: On a vu de tout temps le talent, le génie / L'objet de la satire et de la calomnie / Hollain: On vante les David, les Regnault, les Vincent / Nous qui les surpassons en génie, en talent, / Nous sommes dénigrés. / Jollain: Dans le siècle ou nous sommes / On chante l'ignorance; on flétrit les grands hommes. / Chevreux: Je le vois, puisqu'enfin je suis si maltraité'.
- 52 Girodet, *Scène du Déluge*, Paris, Musée du Louvre.
- 53 Compare the verses in *The Artist*, vol. 1, London 1810, p. 15: 'Milo an Artist of some name / Enjoyed a starving kind of fame / [...] / Why did Milo's genius fail to thrive? / Why, because poor Milo was alive. / He saw collectors

- of virtue / Buy daubings Poussin never drew; / Vile copies, father'd upon Claude. / If thus, he cried, they patronize the dead / I too must die to give my children bread.
- 54 Anne-Louis Girodet, *Œuvres posthumes*, Pierre-Alexandre Coupin, ed., Paris, 1829, vol. 1, p. 53.
- 55 Neil MacGregor, 'Girodet's Poem, Le Peintre', *Oxford Art Journal*, July 1981, p. 29.
- 56 Pierre-Nolasque Bergeret, *Lettres d'un artiste sur l'état des arts en France*, Paris, 1848, p. 140.
- 57 P. N. Bergeret, *Honneurs rendus à Raphael*, Château de Malmaison.
- 58 See Francis Haskell, 'The Old Masters in Nineteenth-Century French Painting', *The Art Quarterly*, vol. xxxiv, 1971, no. 1, pp. 55-85, repr. in idem, *Past and Present in Art and Taste*, New Haven and London, 1987; Michael Levey, *The Painter Depicted*, London, 1981.
- 59 See Maurice Schroder, *Icarus, the Image of the Artist in French Romanticism*, Harvard, 1961.
- 60 As Francis Haskell points out: Haskell 1971 (see note 58), p. 68.
- 61 Henri Delaborde, *Ingres, sa vie, ses travaux, sa doctrine*, Paris, 1870, pp. 156-7.
- 62 The theme of the Homer ceiling, however, is very similar to the *Temple de Mémoire*, an eighteenth-century literary theme, linked to the idea that suffering genius receives his recompense only after death; compare, in particular, Népomucène Lemercier's poem, *Homère*, published in 1800 which includes a scene of homage by Homer's successors through the ages and ends with a crowning of the poet in the Temple of Memory.
- 63 Delacroix, *Michelange dans son atelier*, Musée Fabre, Montpellier; Bergeret, *Michelange*, Salon of 1817, no. 37; Couder, *Michelange*, Salon of 1819, no. 243; the story of the blind Michelangelo seems to have originated in Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie*.
- 64 Tassaert, *La Mort de Corrège*, Hermitage, St Petersburg.
- 65 Eg. Homer, Tasso, Camoëns, Milton, Chatterton, Chénier.
- 66 As Francis Haskell points out in Haskell 1971 (see note 58), p. 69.
- 67 See James Rubin, 'Oedipus, Antigone and Exiles in Post-Revolutionary French Painting', *The Art Quarterly*, vol. 36, 1973, no. 3, pp. 141-71; also Jon Whiteley, 'Homer Abandoned: a French Neo-classical Theme' in *The Artist and Writer in France: Essays in honour of Jean Seznec*, eds., Francis Haskell, Anthony Levi and Robert Shackleton, Oxford, 1974, pp. 44-5.
- 68 Philippe Bordes, 'Les Arts après la Terreur: Topino-Lebrun, Hennequin et la peinture politique sous le Directoire', *La Revue du Louvre*, vol. 29, 1979, p. 208.
- 69 George Levitine has documented the early and interesting case of Alexis Grimou whose life was largely invented round a few facts to conform to the idea of the artist as a self-taught and neglected genius and later as a romantic Bohemian: George Levitine, 'The Eighteenth-Century Rediscovery of Alexis Grimou and the Emergence of the Proto-Bohemian Image of the French Artist', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 2, 1968, no. 1, pp. 58-76.
- 70 Alfred de Vigny, *Correspondance*, Paris, n.d. [c.1920], vol. 1, p. 196.
- 71 William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Paris Sketch Book*, London, 1840, vol. 1, p. 107.
- 72 Charles Farcy, 'Du but et de la destination des beaux-arts', *Annales de la Société des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 5, 1845, p. 34.
- 73 Bergeret 1848 (see note 56), p. 138.
- 74 This was primarily a literary idea: see in particular Schroder 1961 (see note 20); Peter Tomory has drawn attention to the importance of Mme de Staël in introducing the idea of the isolated genius from Germany in the 1790s: P. Tomory, 'Portrait of an Artist in Difficult Times 1770-1850', *Australian Journal of Art*, vol. 5, 1986, p. 6.
- 75 Richardson, who earned his livelihood painting portraits, defended the artist's right to earn a living from his art: Richardson 1725 (see note 3), pp. 28-31; but, as he knew, this was a view which was not universally shared by those who championed the cause of painters in both England and France.
- 76 Eg. the English landscape painter, Philip Hamerton: 'The cardinal bourgeois virtues of tidiness and decency and order are always likely to be offended by the grandeur of the high artistic spirit' (P. H. Hamerton, *Thoughts about Art*, London, 1873, p. 194.)

SUMMARY

The artist's idea of the artist's place in society has often been defined in terms of the attempt by artists from the Renaissance onwards to distance themselves from artisans. In some respects, however, French artists and theorists of art from the seventeenth century onwards were even more aware of the need to distance themselves from fellow artists whose menial approach to art and whose humble life-style threatened to undermine efforts to create a case for the special status of art in its more exalted forms. This encouraged French artists to adhere to a strict version of the hierarchy of genres; to search for new words which could define these differences; to limit the use of the word 'artist'; and to insist on the importance of Genius as the inborn faculty which separated artists of worth from jobbing fellow artists.

The origins of all these attitudes can be traced to seventeenth-century sources, particularly to the writings of Fréart de Chambray who, in turn, derived his view of the status of art from Leonardo. They became the bed-rock of Academic theory. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, encouraged by writers in Germany and France who were hostile to the role of the Academies, writers and artists began to lay greater stress on the a-social character of Genius and to emphasise its self-sufficiency. This encouraged artists to create a status for themselves outside society; in particular, it encouraged them in the face of social failure – lack of financial success, public indifference and bad reviews – to adopt the belief that social failure was an attribute of Genius. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, there existed a tendency to divide artists into a mass of disreputable artisans on the one hand and a noble, socially integrated elite on the other. These were not mutually exclusive views of the artist but two sides of the same process. Among artists, as in society, there existed a large under-class alongside an 'élite'. In the nineteenth century, this distinction broke down as the idea of the artist as an outsider gained currency. As a result, the old view, implicit in Vasari's *Lives*, that honour and wealth are attributes of the great artist, was significantly reversed.

