In Their First Joint Exhibition, the Yale Center for British Art and Yale University Art Gallery Reconsider a Century of Romantic Art

THE CRITIQUE OF REASON: ROMANTIC ART, 1760–1860
Yale University Art Gallery: March 6, 2015–July 26, 2015

NEW HAVEN—In spring 2015, the Yale Center for British Art and the Yale University Art Gallery will 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 three hundred 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.

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 John 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 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 simplistic 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 museum-goers.

CREDITS

The Critique of Reason: Romantic Art, 1760–1860 has been co-organized by the Yale Center for British Art and the Yale University Art Gallery. The curators are, at the Center, A. Cassandra Albinson, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture, and Nina Amstutz, Postdoctoral Research Associate, and, at the Gallery, Elisabeth (Lisa) Hodermarsky, Sutphin Family Senior Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings.
and Paola D’Agostino, Nina and Lee Griggs Assistant Curator of European Art; and Izabel Gass, Graduate Research Assistant, is at the Center and Gallery. The exhibition has been 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 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 the institution online at britishart.yale.edu.

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 one hundred of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than two hundred thousand objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

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 +1 203 432 0600 or visit the website at artgallery.yale.edu.

PRESS CONTACTS

Yale Center for British Art
Betsy Kim: +1 203 432 2853 | betsy.kim@yale.edu
Julienne Richardson: + 203 436 3429 | julienne.richardson@yale.edu

Yale University Art Gallery
Joellen Adae: + 203 423 0611 | joellen.adae@yale.edu

Ary Scheffer, The Retreat of Napoleon’s Army from Russia in 1812, 1826, oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery, Purchased with a gift from Richard L. Feigen, Yale BA 1952, and the Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., Class of 1913 Fund