

Press release

Exhibition

22 September 2005 -  
2 January 2006  
Napoleon Hall



Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824), *Self-portrait* (1795), Oil on canvas, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon © RMN / G. Blot

Upon the initiative of the Cleveland Museum of Art, this exhibition was co-organized by the Louvre and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,

With the exceptional participation of the Girodet Museum, Montargis

This exhibition was made possible through the support of the American Friends of the Louvre

And the support of France Info, i>TELE and Zurban as media partners.



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## GIRODET (1767-1824)

Anne-Louis Girodet was a painter of genius, but also a rebel bent on confounding expectations. His predilection for the bizarre, his ambiguous eroticism, his literary sophistication, not to mention the mysteries surrounding his life and relations have remained a source of fascination or bewilderment. However, this artist stands as one of the most significant painters of the French school, and his contribution to the history of painting is on a par with that of his mentor Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres or Théodore Géricault. The Louvre pays tribute to this still little-known artist with a major monographic exhibition, the first of its kind on an international scale.

Girodet was rediscovered almost forty years ago as a result of an exhibition organized in Montargis to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of his birth (1967). Since this date, our perspective on this artist has been enriched, notably through the large number of doctoral theses, particularly in the United States, England, Italy, France and Germany, devoted to his life and work. It is therefore only fitting that the Louvre organize a Girodet retrospective.

This exhibition brings together one hundred paintings and drawings, from the collections of the Louvre, supplemented by numerous loans from museums in France, especially the Girodet Museum in Montargis, and abroad.

At the conclusion of its run at the Louvre, this exhibition will travel to Chicago, New York and Montreal:

- **Chicago**, The Art Institute of Chicago, 11 February - 30 April 2006
- **New York**, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22 May - 27 August 2006
- **Montreal**, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 12 October 2006 - 21 January 2007

This Girodet retrospective was conceived by Sylvain Bellenger, who serves as chief exhibition curator.

The exhibition catalogue and album are co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Editions Gallimard.

#### Chief exhibition curator:

Sylvain Bellenger, formerly the Paul J. and Edith Ingalls Vignos, Jr. Curator of European Paintings and Sculpture at the Cleveland Museum of Art, currently Chief Curator of the National Heritage Department of the Direction des Musées de France, also affiliated with the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art.

**Coordinating curator for the Paris presentation** : Sylvain Laveissière, chief curator in the Department of Painting, Musée du Louvre ;

**Coordinating curator for the Chicago presentation** : Douglas Druick, Searle Curator of European Painting and Prince Trust Curator of Prints and Drawings, The Art Institute of Chicago ;

**Coordinating curator for the New York presentation** : Gary Tinterow, Engelhard Curator in Charge of the Department of Nineteenth-Century, Modern and Contemporary Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art ;

**Coordinating curator for the Montreal presentation** : Guy Cogeval, Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



Anne-Louis Girodet (1767–1824), *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, Deputy of San Domingo* (1797), Oil on canvas, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon © RMN / G. Blot

This exhibition recognizes the prodigious talent of Girodet who, more than any other artist active at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, forged a new aesthetic sensibility for history painting. It also reveals a virtuoso of unmatched draughtsmanship and a portrait artist proficient in the application of the psychological theories of leading eighteenth-century thinkers, such as Rousseau and Lavater. Among the works shown are *The Sleep of Endymion* (1793), *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley* (1797), *Ossian and His Warriors Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes* (1801), *The Burial of Atala* (1808), *Portrait of Chateaubriand* (1808), and *Revolt at Cairo* (1810), masterpieces of a particularly prolific period, which reached its zenith under the Empire, not the least of the many paradoxes surrounding the life and work of this artist famously opposed to Napoleonic authoritarianism.

The chronological approach adopted for the exhibition underscores the departures from convention and contrasts evident in the work of Girodet, as well as the significance of the historical context, a period of political and social upheavals marked by the French Revolution, the execution of a king, the emergence and the reign of an emperor, and which culminated in the return of the Bourbons to the throne.



Anne-Louis Girodet (1767–1824), *The Sleep of Endymion* (1793), Oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre © RMN / R.-G. Ojéda

**Other exhibitions devoted to Girodet in Fall 2005**

**David's Atelier. The Louvre Drawings.**  
Musée du Louvre, Mollien rooms.  
From 22 September 2005 to 16 January 2006

**Surpassing the Master. Girodet and David's Atelier.**  
Girodet Museum, Montargis.  
From 20 September to 31 December 2005  
Further information :  
+33 (0)2 38 98 07 81

**Girodet and the Decoration of Compiègne.**  
Musée National du Château de Compiègne.  
From 24 September 2005 to 6 January 2006  
Further information :  
+33 (0)3 44 38 47 02

**Péquignot and Girodet: An Artistic Friendship.** Magnin Museum, Dijon.  
From 27 September to 31 December 2005  
Further information :  
+33 (0)3 80 67 11 10

Girodet created a style very much his own, combining intellectual refinement and sensuality. For many commentators, his paintings exemplify the **early infancy of French romanticism**, a status ascribed in literature to the works of Chateaubriand. Girodet's painting style reflected in no small measure the turmoil in French society, at a time when France was undergoing one of the most pivotal transitions in its history. And yet, his art is not directly inspired by political events. Rather than giving expression to republican civic virtues or serving imperial nationalism, his most political works paradoxically seek to **embody an aesthetic ideal breaking down the boundaries between poetry and painting**.

Politically unclassifiable and ideologically elusive, zealous and ambitious, sexually enigmatic, Girodet personifies the Romantic hero, ideally represented in his *Portrait of Chateaubriand*. Rebelling against the rigidity of artistic categories, pursuing a fascination with dreams and the spiritual realm, a passion for poetry and an eccentric classicism, Girodet twisted and transformed David's teachings. His seductive and often strange art prefigures later schools in French painting closely linked to literary movements, notably symbolism and surrealism.

This monographic exhibition, organized into sections anchored by major paintings and punctuated by thematic groupings, generally follows the artist's chronology. After Girodet's return from Italy in 1795, his life and his work became inseparable. A perfectionist, each painting received his complete attention for years on end, and we can appreciate the end results as genuine slices of life offering windows into the man himself as much as the artist. The profound differences between his paintings also reflect the evolutions, contrasts and rebellions of a life swept up in the turbulent winds of history and ambition. The historical and social context remains in evidence throughout, accentuated by the very conception of the exhibition.

### **Emblematic works**

Visitors to the exhibition are greeted by *Revolt at Cairo* on display in the rotunda, a key painting of the imperial period, spectacular and gripping, which imposes from the outset the painter's virtuosity, the sensuality of his figures, the complexity, and indeed the ambiguity of his approach.

For a long time, Girodet was merely perceived as one of several students of Jacques-Louis David. One of the objectives of this exhibition is to bring to the fore Girodet's vibrantly original personality. The close emulation of the early years, the expression of a complete osmosis of the master's ideas and techniques by his pupil, culminates in an artistic rift, apparent when Girodet won the Prix de Rome in 1789, for *Joseph Recognized by His Brothers*. From this moment onwards, Girodet will continually reassert his singularity. *The Sleep of Endymion*, the last painting of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the first of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the manifesto of this rift, introducing mystery, irrationality and sensuality into the hard, clear and civic-minded art of David. A few years later, Girodet makes the spiritual realm the subject of his painting *Ossian and His Warriors Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes*, which a stupefied David excoriated for its "diaphanous figures". *Scene of a Deluge*, a work he "commissioned for himself", is a brilliant demonstration of his extraordinary transformative treatment of history painting. In 1810, this monumental work, measuring 4.41 by 3.41 metres, received the Prize of the Decade in history painting, triumphing over David's *Rape of the Sabines* also in competition. But it was *The Burial of Atala* that would preserve Girodet's place in history. Widely acclaimed upon its first presentation at the Salon of 1808, this painting, which associated one of the most literary of painters with Chateaubriand, the most pictorial writer of the period, was often copied and is considering as exemplifying the transition from Neoclassicism to Romanticism. The preparatory studies for *Revolt at Cairo*, the studies for *Ossian*, the academic drawings for *Scene of a Deluge* and the meticulously finished drawings, which Girodet valued as highly as the history paintings themselves, enable us to appreciate his peerless draughtsmanship. The last major painting in the exhibition, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, presented at the Salon of 1819, where Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* was also first shown, is a return to the Neoclassical ideal, while at the same time serving as its fitting swan song.

### **Thematic groupings**

The organization of the exhibition also gives pride of place to thematic groupings of paintings, sketches and drawings. "**Graceful images**" brings together studies for the wall paintings of the four seasons executed for the royal palace at Aranjuez, and the later versions for the Compiègne château, as well as the Danaë in Leipzig, who Girodet represents as a naked figure seduced by a rain of flowers. The erotic agitation of female narcissism, as dominant a feature of Girodet's art as the characteristic and oft-noted homoeroticism, explodes in his sarcastic portrait, *Mademoiselle Lange as Danaë*, a bitterly vengeful attack by the artist assailing the offensive arrivistes of the Directoire era. Although Girodet himself was a wealthy man, his fortune did not attain the heights imputed by certain commentators. In order to maintain the atelier he had acquired in a former Capuchin convent, Girodet applied his talents to the painting of numerous **portraits**. Some of these commissioned portraits, recently rediscovered, are included in the exhibition, alongside others more well known, such as the emblematic renderings of Chateaubriand, Jean-Baptiste Belley, a Black deputy from San Domingo, and Jacques Cathelineau, a Vendean general. Girodet's interest in portraiture led to innovative explorations of human variety, notably those he devoted to non-Western features in his studies of heads, anticipating studies to be conducted later by Géricault and Delacroix. He also was a careful observer of children, whom no artist before him had captured with as much subtlety. A fervent follower of Rousseau's *Emile*, in his three portraits of Benoît-Agnès Trioson, Girodet evokes a melancholy and rebellious childhood fraught with interiorized psychological conflicts. Finally, a large grouping of drawings presents Girodet's **literary illustrations for ancient and classical texts** (poems by Anacreon, Virgil, Racine), which provide the fullest expression of the fusion of poetry and painting, an obsession that haunted Girodet his entire life.



Anne-Louis Girodet (1767–1824), *Benôit-Agnès Trioison* (1800), Oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre © RMN / H. Lewandowski

#### Visitor information: Place

Musée du Louvre, Napoleon Hall

#### Hours

Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and until 9:30 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays

#### Admission fees

Admission to the *Girodet* exhibition only : €8.50

Admission to permanent collections + *Girodet* exhibition: €13 before 6 p.m.; €11 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays

Free admission for youths under 18, the unemployed, and holders of the "Louvre Jeunes", "Louvre Professionnels", "Louvre Enseignants", "Louvre Etudiants Partenaires" or "Amis du Louvre" cards.

#### Further information:

+33 (0)1 40 20 53 17  
www.louvre.fr

## Related events and publications

### Publications

- Exhibition catalogue: *Girodet, 1767–1824*, edited by Sylvain Bellenger, a Musée du Louvre Editions / Gallimard co-edition, 352 p., about €49
- Album: *Girodet*, by Sylvain Bellenger, a Musée du Louvre Editions / Gallimard co-edition, 48 p., about €8

### Audioguide for the exhibition

Available in French, English and Spanish.

### Guided tours of the exhibition

For adults, classes, group leaders, children and families. Special presentations for teachers. For baccalaureat preparation classes and other students, an educational lecture will be presented in the museum auditorium by the exhibition curator on 30 November 2005 at 10 a.m., followed by a guided tour of the exhibition. Guided tours on special topics are also offered—the influence of literature on Romantic painting, portrait painting during the Romantic period, French painting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—as are detailed analyses of specific works in connection with the exhibition.

### Workshops

- Workshops for junior and senior high school classes: "Art and style, from Neoclassicism to Romanticism"
- Special family programmes: Children's workshop ("In the painter's atelier") and a guided tour of the exhibition for their parents

### Events in the Auditorium du Louvre

- **A conference** presenting the exhibition by the curators, on 14 November 2005 at 18:30 p.m.
- **A series of five conferences** on Mondays at 6:30 p.m., from 26 September to 24 October 2005
- **Two concerts:**

1/ Thursday, 27 October 2005 at 12:30 p.m.

Raphaël Christ, violin and Sarah Christ, harp  
Donizetti, Spohr, Le Sueur, Massenet, Saint-Saëns

2/ Wednesday, 30 November 2005 at 8 p.m.

Soloists of the Atelier Lyrique of the Paris Opera, accompanied by piano, with Didier Sandre, narrator

Opera arias from *Joseph* by Méhul, *La Vestale* by Spontini, *Richard Cœur de Lion* by Grétry, *Otello* by Rossini, *Iphigénie en Tauride*, *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Armide* by Gluck

In collaboration with the Atelier Lyrique of the Paris Opera

**Special event:** As part of a series of lectures devoted to François-René de Chateaubriand, a reading of *Atala* will be presented on 10 October 2005 at 8:30 p.m.