THE QUASI-OPEN COMPETITIONS OF THE QUASI-LEGITIMATE JULY MONARCHY

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The July Monarchy competitions reflected the status, ambition, and history of the Louis-Philippe regime in 1830. The government announced its platform of principles in the context of its official art.

Perhaps no episode in the history of nineteenth-century French painting contributes to a clearer understanding of the interaction between art and politics than the series of quasi-open competitions commissioned by Louis-Philippe’s regime for the Chamber of Deputies in September 1830. The new decorative scheme designed for the renovated Salles des Séances, whose construction had begun the previous year under Charles X, launched the art policies of the July Monarchy with a declaratory statement of its up-to-the minute ideological position. Fresh from success and anxious to stamp its impress on events, the government announced its platform of principles in the context of its official art. While it was a prudent platform formulated in negative terms, it was still unmediated by the pragmatic concerns and responses which would arise during its implementation.

Recent studies by Michael Marrinan, Michael Paul Driskel, and Neil McWilliam have shown the close connection between Louis-Philippe’s art program and his need to consolidate his monarchy, lacking a firm foundation in either the hereditary or elective principle. He achieved his throne through a series of skillful intrigues and maneuvers in the chaos following the July Days of revolution. The completion of the Arc de Triomphe, the designation of the Église Sainte-Geneviève as a pantheon for French heroes, the mural cycle for the church of La Madeleine, the conversion of the Palace of Versailles into a museum of history—all embodied aspects of the king’s intention to manipulate art and history to validate his claims to rulership. They served to placate the opposition, draw parallels between 1789 and 1830, and retell history to make Louis-Philippe’s usurpation the inevitable outcome of France’s political evolution.

When the Duc d’Orléans appeared before a joint session of the two chambers on 9 August to accept the crown as Louis-Philippe I, King of the French People, the curtain was dropped on the Revolution of 1830. Those who negotiated and orchestrated his rise to power now shifted to a defensive operation. Their foremost objective was to keep the new monarchy in power by defending the king and revised charter against their enemies. All public officeholders were required to swear an oath of loyalty to the king and of obedience to the charter. Failure to do so was perceived as equivalent to resignation. Moderates under Charles X who joined the new government now formed the dominant “parti de la résistance,” whose strategy was based on the idea that the revised charter went as far as the government ought to go in appeasing popular sentiment. Their spokesper-

son was François Guizot, the Minister of Interior who wrote the program for the competitions in defense of the regime’s acquired position.

While the government paid lip-service to a middle course between Right and Left, monarchy and republic, it aimed at reinforcing and expanding the privileges of the powerful bourgeoisie over and against the laboring classes on one hand, and the old-guard aristocracy on the other. This did not mean, as it is often given in the conventional reading of events, that businessmen came to dominate the government, but that the regime threw its weight behind those landed proprietors and professionals who joined with businessmen in investing in industry and commerce and did not live off rents alone. Guizot’s cry of “Enrichissez-vous!” asserted the idea of a new society in which wealth counted for more than titles and glorified those who held it, manipulated it, and put it to productive use. Whereas under Charles X speculation might be condemned, under Louis-Philippe it would be encouraged and praised. The list of quotations of the Paris Bourse jumped from 38 securities in 1830 to 260 in 1841, and the increase of enterprises such as insurance, building construction, ironworks, coal mines, canals, and the first railway lines accustomed the public to the idea of owning shares.

At the same time, the government had to wrest credit from the artisanal and other working-class groups who actually did the fighting on the barricades during the “Three Glorious Days” of 27, 28, and 29 July. Louis-Philippe owed his rule in large part to the economic slump of the late 1820s, and now had to contend with widespread working-class unrest. The revolution broke out just when the depression was beginning to lift and it set back the recovery. Workers found that the revolution did not improve their situation, and they publicly—often violently—expressed their discontent over what they perceived as the regime’s disregard for their sacrifices. Indeed, the government began immediately to manipulate the press accounts of the July Revolution by expanding the category of “the people” (formerly defined as the laboring classes) who battled on the barricades to include the middle classes who were barely involved in the fighting. As a result of the regime’s effective myth-making, to this day it is difficult for the historian to penetrate the stereotype of the 1830 revolution as the victory of a representative turnout of the French populace.

The new king reduced somewhat the voting qualifications in a mock display of democratic generosity, but this change increased
the electorate only to around 200,000 voters—enfranchising mainly the new industrial and land-owning bourgeoisie. The lowered tax generally favored the upper middle class—now le pays légal—and it was for this class that Louis-Philippe articulated his domestic policy in terms of the juste milieu. As Guizot, then Prime Minister, defined this concept in 1835:

"Our policy... the policy of the juste milieu, is essentially inimical to absolute principles, to consequences carried to the extreme. We ourselves are the living embodiment of this idea; for, allow me to remind you, we have fought for freedom as we have for order... The policy of the juste milieu must be defended against all excesses; yes, it rejects absolute principles, extreme positions; it is adaptable to the divers needs of society; it manages to stay abreast of ongoing social changes, and in turn engages in conflict when necessary."

Guizot's doctrine of the juste milieu pretended to mediate between "extremes" of absolute monarchy and republicanism, order and liberty, a formula for securing the work of the July Revolution while abandoning forever the principle of revolution itself. This self-serving definition of moderation and compromise, expressed philosophically by Victor Cousin's Eclecticism, now became the dominant ideology of the privileged elite and ran into the very roots of the social structure.

Guizot attempted to actualize this concept for both the minority who believed actively in its legitimacy and the wider public which needed evidence of the government's superiority over other alternatives. He deployed painting, sculpture, and architecture to transform the regime's imperfections and limitations into an apparent absolute to which admiration, gratitude, and devotion were due. Art was a potent means for clothing the government in the trappings of paternal authority because of the involvement of several of the king's most influential administrators and advisors in matters concerning the fine arts. Guizot, Thiers, Cousin, Royer-Collard, Montalivet, and Cavaë all either wrote art criticism and collected, or participated directly in the formulation of official art policy.

It was in his capacity as Minister of Interior in September 1839 that Guizot conceived of a set of decorations for the Salle des Séances in the Chamber of Deputies that would declare the regime's political platform before the assembled members of parliament. On 25 September he submitted the following proposal to Louis-Philippe for authorized approval:

"Désirant soumettre mes idées à l'approbation de votre Majesté, j'ai pensé devoir me renfermer exclusivement dans notre histoire législative pendant la révolution française. C'est là que les députés doivent chercher des exemples, et la France qui se press pour les écouter, des motifs d'attache à nos institutions constitutionnelles.

L'avènement de votre Majesté au trone, et le Serment, prononcé par Elle en présence des deux chambres, ont diglement clos la série d'événements à laquelle nous devons nos garanties politiques.

Un tableau représentant la séance royale du 9 août 1830, au moment où le roi prète serment, serait placé au-dessus du bureau de la chambre.

La résistance au despotisme et la résistance à la sédition déterminent les limites des devoirs d'un député. Deux sujets destinés à représenter les deux exemples les plus frappants de l'exercice de ces devoirs, m'ont paru les plus conviviaux pour accompagner l'acte solennel du serment du Roi.

Mirabeau répondant, au nom de l'assemblée constituante, au grand-maître des cérémonies, dans la séance du 23 juin 1789, et Boissy d'Anglas la tête du député Féraud, que lui présentent les révoltés de parisial: tels sont les sujets qui m'ont semblé répondre de la manière la plus heureuse à l'idée du double devoir; ils ont, de plus, l'avantage de se prêter au développement de la peinture historique.

And Guizot concludes in the final paragraph:

"Des tableaux d'un intérêt aussi national ne peuvent être proposés par le gouvernement sans exciter la rivalité des artistes les plus distingués. Un concours public peut seul prévenir les réclamations et satisfaire l'ambition de tous."
the government's encouragement of the younger members of the art community deflected the residue of revolutionary ardor (which was manifested in several works shown at the 1831 Salon) into the safe, orderly channels of official art. The Administration baited the hook with the prize of 2,000 francs for the first and 20,000 francs for the last two contests, and a chance to do a monumental canvas (approximately 20 by 15 feet) for a site of national importance.

The competition juries were also patterned after the concept of the juste milieu: they were initially composed of 15 members, of which seven were designated by the Administration and eight elected by the contestants immediately after the public exhibition. These 15 were to make a preliminary selection of the sketches and then proceed to select six more members, bringing to 21 the number of jurors in the final panel. Despite the conservative cast of these juries, there was a fair sampling of the contending schools. Romantics like Delacroix, Louis Boulanger, Tassaert, and Devéria, classicists like Couder, Abel de Pujol, Heim, and Le Théâtre (the last two were the only members of the Academy who participated), and juste milieu types like Court, Vinchon, Horace Vernet, Champmartin, and Amy Scheffer all competed in one or more of the competitions.

The opening paragraph of Guizot's proposal already exposes the regime's innermost concerns in the month following the accession of Louis-Philippe. Guizot deliberately confined his program to French legislative history during the Great Revolution of 1789. It is there, he explained, that the deputies must find their examples or case-studies justifying the present attachment to constitutional institutions. Thus the principal goal of the commission was to persuade parliament not to waver in its support of Louis-Philippe's limited monarchy, and to seek justification for its existence by retracing the historical progress of the Great Revolution from its initial successes to its ultimate failure. The regime looked upon the deputies as a fervent minority of true believers who could help it in its transition from a state of quasi-legitimacy to a state of legitimacy. The scheme was directed to them above all, and then to the French people who would take their cue from them. Louis-Philippe's legitimacy would attain its full maturity and highest degree of efficacy in the general acknowledgment of its assimilation of the lessons of 1789.

The subject of the opening competition—Louis-Philippe Swearing an Oath of Fidelity to the Revised Charter—was to be the focus and linchpin of the program. It was destined to be hung above the speaker's rostrum in the Chamber. Guizot saw this historic occasion as the closing of the "series of events to which we owe our political guarantees." By this he meant that the emergence of the new dynasty had fulfilled the promises of 1789, and the need for further political reform was henceforth obviated. Thus the first contest, depicting the royal ceremony of 9 August 1830 before the peers and deputies, attempted to legitimate the new king by revealing him as the final and highest stage in the evolution of French representative government. As opposed to Charles X who tried to alter the course of political progress by subverting the constitutional principle, Louis-Phi-
public. The Girondins (the counterparts of the juste milieu in this period) were recalled, and laws against the émigrés were allowed to lapse. These events coincided with widespread misery, evoking the worst days of 1789. The prices of staples went up so rapidly that the Convention doubled the daily allowance of the members of the Convention. Crowds thronged at the bar of the Convention crying “Du pain!” On 1 April 1796 the popular classes became exasperated by the inflation, unemployment, monetary devaluation, the poor harvest, and widespread reports of graft. The distribution of bread took place later than usual and was reduced by one-half. A furious crowd composed mainly of women and children invaded the National Convention and repeated the demand for bread. Members of the Right blamed the Left for provoking the current situation, promised a change, and temporarily restored order. But the occasion was used as another pretext to indict the Left, and the radicals were systematically eliminated. On 19 May only two ounces of bread were awarded the populace, and a furious crowd—recalling for contemporaries the tumult of 14 July 1789—again rushed upon the National Convention. The multitude pressed for bread and the restoration of the democratic constitution of 1789, as well as for amnesty for citizens arrested in the attempt to redress the current crisis. They carried banners and placards (including tags on their hats and bonnets) bearing the slogan: “Du pain et la constitution démocratique de 1789.”

Féraud, a deputy of the center-right, was profoundly disturbed by the uprising and tried to resist the onrush of the crowd—at one point even throwing himself down on the ground to obstruct their movement. He was overheard to cry: “Kill me, but do not violate the liberty of the assembly!” When the demonstrators approached the tribune where the seat of the president was located, Féraud tried to mount the platform to protect him. In the scuffle a woman named Aspasie Carlemgelli, confusing Féraud for a reactionary deputy named Fréron, shot and killed him. Féraud’s corpse was then decapitated and the head mounted on the end of a spike. The frightened president of the Convention quickly retired, and Boissy d’Anglas, secretary of the Convention, was obliged to replace him.

Boissy d’Anglas was a deputy of the Third Estate from Ammonay. He was a moderate during the Revolution, supporting the detention and banishment of the king and finally opting for a full reprieve. After the fall of the Girondins, he called for resistance to the Jacobin-dominated Convention, and only influential friends among the Jacobins prevented his demise. He continued to oppose the Jacobins after Robespierre’s execution, and later aided in the formulation of the new Constitution which restored property qualifications for the electorate and generally favored the newly rich. (It may be said to have hearkened to the doctrine of the juste milieu.) When on 20 May 1795 he found himself surrounded on all sides by a hostile crowd waving the pike with Féraud’s head in front of his face, the frightened Boissy d’Anglas tried to remain as impassive as possible and coolly saluted the head of his colleague. His demeanor had a quelling effect on the demonstrators who gradually dispersed. While Boissy d’Anglas was now heralded as a savior who averted a second Terror, in fact the Convention owed its stability to the few surviving leftist who promised measures which calmed the crowd and were later guillotined when the danger had passed.

Boissy d’Anglas thus came to symbolize for the juste milieu the ideal of the moderate standing up to the onslaught of anarchy and sedition, the other side of the July Monarchy’s two-headed coin of “resistance.” Limits on the rights of the people were as critical to its program as limits on the prerogatives of monarchy. The last two competitions answered to the deepest ideological interests of Louis-Philippe as he pursued his path to legitimacy. They essentially apprised his adherents and would-be supporters of what he intended to freeze out as king. Ultimately, this meant a middle course embodying the values of the bourgeoisie and their aristocratic allies who wanted to set upon their economic and political objectives unconstrained by either royal privilege or popular demands. Guizot’s contests were, and remain, precious testimony to the July Monarchy’s political platform.

The critical reception of the actual entries further informs us of their importance to the regime. The first contest closed on 1 December; the 26 sketches were exhibited the week of 3–10 December, and in the middle of the month the jury was convoked to judge them. It is clear that the government wanted the Oath of Louis-Philippe painted as documentary, recorded with as much of the original detail as possible. The reviewer of the Journal des débats, a faithful adherent of the new regime, criticized one contestant for displaying the scene in allegorical trappings. Allegory, he felt, was appropriate for revealing “religious mysteries” (a phrase reflecting the government’s early anti-clericalism), but the oath of Louis-Philippe “is a highly intelligible fact, and it is necessary to express it very intelligibly in painting.” The same critic complained about certain painters whose treatment of the figures was not in keeping “with the physiognomy and manners of the French people in 1830.” Hence Louis-Philippe’s accession to the throne was not the result of a supernatural event or an event of Divine Right, but the logical outcome of history which required fidelity to the historical and visual facts of the ceremony.

The Royal Session itself was certainly not an unostentatious affair; the regime went to great lengths to make it an imposing and memorable occasion. Peers, deputies, the military, the king and his family, and privileged onlookers stood in solemn testimony against a splash of tri-color drapery, then broke into shouts of “Vive le Roi!” when the Duc d’Orléans finished the final words of his oath. Four marshals of France presented to the new king the symbols of his office: the crown, the scepter, the sword, and the hand of justice. In view of the wished-for solemnity, it is not surprising to find that official critics looked for this character in the sketches. One reviewer reacted in outrage to Scheffer’s sketch, with its faceless blobs of streaking paint, declaring: “M. Scheffer no doubt wishes to make merry at the expense of the partisans of the contest . . .” (Fig. 1). He was more favorably disposed to Devéria’s entry which preserved the air of pagentry in the festive tri-color setting. His sketch appeared “rich in harmony and done in colors as Venetian as one might have wished . . .” While Devéria’s entry ultimately gained him a commission for the Musée de Versailles, the actual winner of the first competition was Amable-Paul Coutan whose winning sketch stood out “for its color, light effect, and at the same time for its skill in uniting masses and details.” His was the heaven-sent answer to the aesthetic demands of the juste milieu.

Coutan’s final work (completed by Court in 1837 following his friend’s death) shows that he managed to depict the portraits of many of the peers (seen on the left) and the deputies (seen on the right) who, as Marrinan rightfully suggests, seem anxious “to securely fix their places in the visual record” (Fig. 2). The result resembles an “over-sized group portrait” of the founders of the July Monarchy. Here again the government attempted to aggrandize its supporters, to assure them of the legality of their historic decision and thereby affirm its own legitimacy. Their compliance in the usurpation had made them “accessories after the fact” and they had no
alternative but to defend the new regime. Under Louis-Philippe, the parliament became a docile instrument of the executive power. The electoral body of 200,000 voters was won over easily by the dominant group who consistently gave a majority to the latter's candidates, thus insuring the relative stability of the ministries. Coutan's flattering homage to the peers and deputies both recognizes their complicity in the new regime and secures them to it in perpetuity.

Following this first contest, the question arose about conditions and restrictions to be imposed on the definitive version. Should Coutan, for example, have to conform to his original sketch, or could he modify it for the final picture? Significantly, the whole relationship of the sketch to the finished work in the competitions became a topic of intense controversy. The more bravura style of artists like Devéria and Delacroix threw into question the Academic demand for highly polished artifacts, and raised questions about the value of the sketch in relation to the finished painting. Some critics maintained that the jury should concentrate not only on sketches but on the completed canvas as well, while others felt that the sketch merited preeminent consideration. A critic in the second camp noted that the "intellectual component"—the idea—of a painting places the artist in a category above the simple artisan, and that execution in the long run counts for less. Hence the idea, expressed compositionally, much be regarded as essential:

Now in a sketch it is easy to judge this intellectual component since this is its function; and philosophically speaking, we may say in general that the prize should go to the contestant who displays the most superiority in composition.

While the debate over sketch and finish would reverberate throughout the century, it assumed a special importance in the official competitions. As shown in the response to Scheffer's preliminary work, the government required intelligible ideas for purposes of communication. It respected the coloristic qualities of the sketch for its lively and modern look, but ultimately its main need was accuracy in details to convey its message. Delacroix revealed difficulty in reconciling these demands, but no doubt the government's position and the debate it engendered helped clarify his thinking on the sketch and its capacity to inform the final work.

The second contest, based on the theme of Mirabeau and Drame-Brézé, closed on 1 February 1831. Among the 38 entrants (an increase of almost 50%) were Delacroix, Court, Amaury-Duval, Chenavard, Louis Boulanger, Tassart, and Abel de Pujol. This time, however, critics were less enthusiastic and complained about the static quality of the compositions. One writer observed that the sketches of Delacroix and Boulanger were more overworked and "meticulously finished than their previous pictures." There was a conspicuous uniformity in the turnout, with almost all of the contestants more or less expressing the same compositional idea. Of course the subject itself, although embodying a study of sharp hu-
lectuals searched for solutions to the burning public issues of the moment. The upheaval from below was real, and Louis-Philippe’s “resistance” would also have to be real. Indeed, during all the period of the competitions, demonstrators took to the streets for higher wages, attacked customs barriers, tore up tax lists, rioted against grain prices, and devastated royal and privately owned forests. The regime faced a major crisis in September which centered around the fate of Charles X’s ministers who had been imprisoned. As their impending trial drew near, the entire Left united in demanding the death penalty as punishment for the crimes of the fallen monarchy. The king, however, wanted to spare the lives of the ministers, and he manipulated the Chambers to request the abolition of the death penalty for political crimes. This act aroused the enmity of the popular classes; angry crowds gathered throughout the second half of October, and again in December (when the trial opened), threatening to take matters into their own hands if appropriate justice were not meted out.\(^{40}\)

In March 1831 the new Prime Minister, Casimir Périer, delivered a speech before the Chamber of Deputies whose keynote was “Order internally, without the sacrifice of liberty. . . .”\(^{41}\) This reflected the regime’s ideological commitment, and found expression in Guizot’s expanded decorative scheme for the Salle des Séances.\(^{42}\) James Pradier had been commissioned to sculpt two allegorical figures, Liberty and Public Order, destined to occupy niches flanking the picture of the Oath of Louis-Philippe and complementing the images of Mirabeau and Bossy d’Anglas. Below Liberty, a relief showed Louis-Philippe Arriving at the Hôtel de Ville (where he received his investiture as lieutenant-general of the kingdom and was endorsed by Lafayette); below Public Order, another relief depicted Louis-Philippe Distributing the Standards to the National Guard, the municipal troops used to quell civil disorders. As Guizot.\(^{43}\) had expected in his proposal for the supplementary decorations, the two statues by Pradier correspond to “the two fundamental ideas of our constitution,” while the subject of the National Guard reinforces the concept of Public Order with its “most complete and most popular expression.” To complete the ensemble, Guizot proposed allegorical figures of Force and Justice in relationship to Liberty, Public Fortune and Peace in relationship to Public Order. Thus the ideological “balance” of the juste milieu found its expression in Guizot’s aesthetic symmetry.

Périer’s speech, which translated the visual program into political reality, included the dictum: “What society needs is legalized order and power,” and less than one month later he passed a riot act, enabling any crowd to be forcibly dispersed after three warnings. The same month Périer addressed the deputies, a worker was arrested for shouting in the streets, “Vive Napoléon II!” When asked why he demonstrated, the worker replied that he had no bread and looked forward to prison where he would be fed.\(^{44}\) Périer’s idea of “liberty” was thus confined to the liberty of the privileged groups typified by his own family, who were both landowners and industrialists. They knew that credit, the mainspring of business enterprise, could not exist without confidence in the future, and the latter rested on social stability. For business leaders and their network of support this meant an orderly, disciplined, and powerless work force. While the July Days inspired an unprecedented wave of working-class protest, labor repression became the major focus of the new regime.

The spectacle of a discontented people claiming their right to the decent life to which they felt entitled by a change in regimes was all too real during the period of the competitions. The widespread hunger, poverty, and unemployment during the aftermath of July were expressed in uprisings and disorders throughout France, culminating in the full-scale insurrection in Lyons at the end of 1831.\(^{45}\) Beginning in mid-August, Paris was the scene of a series of strikes and labor demonstrations for better wages and working conditions. On the 25th of August a crowd of 600 locksmiths persuaded their fellow workers to stage a walkout in support of higher wages and an eleven-hour day. The next day, as a crowd of 2,000 of them petitioned employers to accept their demands, the authorities called out the National Guard to restore order. Similar strikes continued on into the months of September and October, intensified by the issue of the trial and punishment of the imprisoned ministers of Charles X

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which soon became the focal point of popular protest against the government.

By October, riots had become commonplace: on the 20th of that month 136 people were arrested for “fomenting social disorder.” During the same period, the king congratulated the National Guard for their zeal in maintaining public order and protecting French people from “a band of insane agitators.”\(^{46}\) Guizot responded to the widespread agitation by employing a form of “newspaper” to prepare the deputies for repression. In the parliamentary session of 20 December he claimed that “our revolution” is pure, and “with the aid of liberty and publicity we will dispel all conspiracies, secret associations, and dangers of every kind.”\(^{47}\) Meanwhile, at year’s end the official press reported a series of riots and anarchist activity in Paris and several provincial towns. The Moniteur universel of 30 December noted that all the goals of the insurrection had been achieved, and no further agitation was necessary. It could not accept the appeal of a minority, in the name of that same holy insurrection, to a power higher than the present king, and to order as it was currently constituted. It disavowed these “self-styled insurgents” and their claims to the heirship of the July Revolution.\(^{48}\) Indeed, Guizot could
Fig. 10. Charles Monet, Journée du 1er Prairial de l’an III, 1797. Engraving by Helen in the Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Now claim that "the spirit of revolution, the spirit of insurrection, is a spirit radically opposed to liberty..." The interval between the Mirabeau and Boissy d'Anglas contests (2 March 1831), nearly 100 workers demonstrated before the Palais Royal (then the residence of the royal family) and shouted: "De l'ouvrage ou de pain!"—a reenactment of the scene in the National Convention in 1795. Twenty people were arrested and the remainder dispersed, all described in the newspaper as enemies of order and public peace. On the same day that the Moniteur announced the formation of the new jury for the Boissy d'Anglas competition, it reported a demonstration by metal workers in Toulon demanding higher wages. The newspaper was alarmed over the ensuing riot in which was heard the cry, "aux armes!"

This background helps put into proper perspective the critical evaluation of the concluding competition. The most controversial of all, it also enjoyed the largest turnout and included Delacroix, Court, Lami, Vinchon, and Le Thière. Delacroix's entry received warm praise from several critics including one who extolled the sketch as "one of the most beautiful compositions ever encountered in painting" (Fig. 7). Delacroix's friend, Louis Boulangere, wrote a panegyric on the work noting the connection between the sketch qualities and the mood of the subject:

To begin with, at first glance—an indispensible quality of a composition—the general design of the masses is in perfect harmony... The overall tone is also so appropriate that it de-

Fig. 11. Tellier, Boissy d'Anglas at the National Convention, 1831. Sketch, Musée National du Château de Versailles, Versailles.

clares something terrible even before we are able to distinguish exactly what it is that the canvas represents...

Only the influential critic Delécluze, writing for the Journal des débats, took exception to the general enthusiasm over Delacroix's sketch. He was especially disturbed by the painter's handling of the crowd: "Since there is no principal and sharply determined grouping to draw one's gaze and help organize the thought, this confusing disposition of so many persons overstrains one's attention." While Delécluze here seemed to be thinking out loud in aesthetic terms, in point of fact he had in mind the sense of the unrestrained mass, akin to Boulanger's intuition of "something terrible" implied in the color and restrained character of Delacroix's brush.

The opening paragraph of Delécluze's review betrays his underlying fears of this "something terrible" as an actual presence:

Without calling them cowardly, it would be possible to find more than one member of the chamber of deputies for whom the view of the picture representing Boissy d'Anglas, presiding over the Convention, 1st of Prairial, Year 4 of the Republic, might induce recurring nightmares. This bloody head of Ferraud (sic), thrust on the end of a pike; this menacing, furious crowd, killing even in the sacred enclosure of the deputies; this entire spectacle is too terrible, too hideous, we must admit, to become the daily preoccupation of the attention of those of our compatriots to whom we entrust the defense of our rights and interests. Delécluze's last line suggests the "holding operation" of the parti de la résistance, and thus expresses the real fears held by those newly arrived in government. Delécluze confessed that all the severed, stained, bloodied and jagged heads horrified him and gave him nightmares. In this instance, where the onrushing multitude and their action on the floor of the National Convention was inherently dramatic, he would have preferred a theme more aligned with traditional history painting. For him the Boissy did not accord well "with the proprieties of art, nor with the taste of those who are in a position of having to look at it every day of their lives."

The ultimate winner of this heat was Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Vinchon; he presented the agitators in static, tightly controlled groups, wearing the garb of crazed and moronic types (Fig. 8). At the same time, he alluded to the venality and gullibility of the popular classes. Marrinan rightly called attention to the motif of the left of the picture showing agents bribing one of the rioters; but he considers it as "an invention added by the artist." In fact, this was one of the most common arguments used by the regime to explain the contemporary disorders. As one pro-government pamphlet observed about the noisy aftermath of Louis-Philippe's accession:

The honest republican party, with the noble Lafayette at their head, had declared for a limited monarchy; but hypocrisy and Jesuitism, under a republican mask, were already on the alert to foment discontent among the needy, to strengthen shades of differences among the liberals, and to sow dissension and distrust among all. The same pamphlet declared that the tumultuous events naturally caused the rich to flee Paris, and led to the closing of businesses, high prices, and widespread unemployment:

These continued causes have operated in throwing many workmen out of employment, and the opportunity has not been neglected by that party who are hostile to the present happy state of affairs. The activity and malignancy of these incendiaries render them more formidable than their numbers. Money is not wanting to abet their dark designs... Priests and ex-gendarmes are the agents, whose vocation it is to seduce the ignorant into acts of insubordination and riot, and the different wineries outside the barriers are the scenes where their treacherous toils are spread for the unwary.

Thus it is not surprising to find that the critic of the Moniteur universel commented favorably on Vinchon's conceit:

It is above all both ingenious and true for the artist to have represented in one corner of the interior one of those anarchists of the period receiving money from a mysterious person whose hand alone is visible: here, properly speaking, is the leitmotif of the subject and the secret of all riots. The critic's stress on this motif demonstrates to what extent the par-
participants in the contests picked up on the regime’s ideological position. It followed that then, as now, seditious uprisings and demonstrations of the popular classes were inspired by bribery and intrigue on the part of a few nefarious agents serving the conspiratorial aims of domestic and foreign enemies. Here Vinchon’s cruelly drawn faces, with their frenzied and delirious expressions, provided a pictorial illustration of their susceptibility to treasonous offers. Their actions lack a sustained purpose: two rioters tear up the written proceedings with gusto, a buxom woman embraces her leering lover, and a young woman tries to restrain her crazed mother from jumping into the fray (Fig. 9).

Further evidence that this represented more a contemporary reading than the result of historical research may be seen by comparing Vinchon’s work with prints done contemporaneously with the episode. While Helman’s engraving of 1797 after the drawing of Charles Monnet was used as a reference by several of the contestants, its portrayal of the rioters is far more sympathetic (Fig. 10). The poses of the working-class women and men possess far more dignity than those of the 1831 sketches; the insurgents are shown banded together in common cause, making a concerted demand rather than engaging in random violence. Helman’s engraving further attests to the critical role of women in organizing and carrying out the demonstration. One could never guess from Vinchon’s painting that the women in the crowd invaded the Convention with an avowed goal.68

Indeed, this is the case of all the other examples available at the moment. All the rioters seem to take off on their own trip, acting without logic or purpose. While Tellier’s composition does show a disheveled woman presenting a petition to Boissy, it is clear that the charging mob is bent more on aggression than on solicitation (Fig. 11). Tellier also depicts several agents in the left background offering bribes to the rioters and giving them their cue to “act.” In the center foreground, a pillar with the word “discrétion” has been torn down. Fragonard’s entry portrays the crowd “a-whooopin’” and “a-hollerin’” as if it were a barn-raising celebration (Fig. 12). Rather than act collectively, their movements collide and oppose one another. As if to apostrophize the scene, he adds the grisly touch of a dog in the center foreground licking up the blood spilled by Féraud’s corpse.

The reviewer of the Moniteur universel faulted Caminade for “imperfectly rendering the terrifying disorder of a sedition,” while he appreciated Thomas’ sketch for having grasped “the maddened spirit of the multitude.” Court’s entry, perhaps one of the most grotesque of all, ranked second in the preliminary selection but was highly favored by the critics.69 He sent the finished version to the Salon of 1833, and the same year participated in the publication of a pamphlet recounting the event of Boissy d’Anglas to show that his picture—reproduced with a key to the figures—was an accurate reconstruction of history.70 One of the authorities it invoked was Adolphe Thiers, a central figure in the founding of the July Monarchy and a prominent member of the Administration. His Histoire de la révolution française, first published between 1828 and 1827, related the event with a pronounced bias against what he described as the “lowest rabble” of Paris.62 It is no wonder that the critic of the Moniteur—perhaps still reeling from the inscription following the funeral of General Lamarque in June 1832—called Court’s insurgents a “disgusting horde” whose faces and gestures betray “the exact nature of their feelings.”73 As in the case of his Mirabeau and Dureux-Brézé, Court relied on exaggerated facial and bodily gestures to make his point; this time the bulging eyeballs, fiendish smirks, and wild gesticulations create a comic-opera effect with everybody singing a different aria at the same time (Fig. 13). The reviewer also recognized just left of Boissy a royalist disguised as a revolutionary—a corrupting agent whose powdered wig stuck out under a red bonnet. He laughs and seems to whisper to the president (see most clearly in an engraving, Fig. 14): “Well, well! What do you think of your republic now?” One year later, the same critic could detect in Vernet’s L’arrivée du duc d’Orléans au Palais-Royal le 30 juillet 1830 the face of “one of these schemers always ready to profit from a revolution by sidetracking it and plunging us into anarchy...”74

It may now be wondered why Delacroix’s sketch, sharing several of the features of those of the other participants and generally favored by the critics, went down to resounding defeat. It ranked 11th out of 18 in a preliminary selection by the jury and was eliminated on the first ballot. It certainly catches the terrifying magnitude of the crowd as described by Thiers, disclosing it as a frenzied throng pouring uncontrollably like a tidal wave (Thiers called it “des flots de la plus vile populace”) through the vast interior in the direction of the speaker’s rostrum. The mass of insurgents swoops in a powerful arc moving outward from the left side and swings in again suddenly near the center of the composition, stopping short before the stalwart figure of Boissy d’Anglas.

Like his fellow contestants, Delacroix shows no sympathy for the rioters; they do not act in concert in behalf of a petition but as a raging mob hellbent on destruction.76 Their attitudes and facial expressions (where these can still be made out) are undignified and crude. How then does his crowd differ from the others? Whereas his rivals broke down the swelling populace into distinct groups and individuals, Delacroix’s “rabble” fuses into an undifferentiated mass. Here the observations of Boulanger and Delécluze anticipated the perceptions of the jury members voting the outcome of the final selection. Delacroix’s mob does not project itself through terrifying grimmaces or menacing gestures, but through its capacity to function as a truly spontaneous, irresistible mass. As in the case of his Liberty Leading the People, Delacroix, despite his own innate conservatism, actualized in visual terms the political potential of the popular classes. Louis-Philippe’s regime lived under constant apprehension that a chance demonstration might get out of hand, as in July 1830, and overthrow it. Delacroix’s sketch brought home in powerful pictorial form this capacity of the laboring classes, and reminded the government of the haunting heritage of its rise to power.

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Fig. 12. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard, Boissy d’Anglas at the National Convention, 1830. Sketch. Private Collection, Paris.

Fig. 13. Joseph-Désiré Court, Boissy d’Anglas at the National Convention, 1833. Final version. Musée de Rouen, Rouen.
Delacroix’s famous “lettre sur les concours” is a crucial document acknowledging the impact of the juste milieu pressures on his work. It is commonly assumed that the letter was prompted out of bitterness over his failure in the Boissy d’Anglas competition, but this is an erroneous assumption deriving from ignorance of the contest dates. Delacroix’s letter was published in the 1 March issue of L’artiste—almost two months prior to the jury’s decision on the Boissy d’Anglas sketches in late April. Delacroix’s letter thus focused on his reactions to the Mirabeau contest, one in which he felt he had compromised himself. It was the Mirabeau entry he had in mind when he considered the debilitating effect of public opinion on the artist’s germinal inspiration:

The artist, confined to his studio, works at first with inspiration and full of that sincere confidence which alone can create masterpieces; but should he happen to glance outside and see the montebanks’ stage on which he must appear and the judges waiting for him, immediately his impulse leaves him... He alters and spoils his work, he wears himself out, trying to civilize and polish it so as to give no offense.

Delacroix’s letter is thus as much an indictment of the juste milieu pressures as a diatribe against the concept of competitions. While he made a supreme effort in the Boissy d’Anglas contest to overcome these pressures, he overstepped the bounds of official ideology and condemned himself to failure.

Similar to the case of Mirabeau and Dreuix-Brézé, the third contest carried a topical reference to the living descendants of one of the protagonists. Boissy d’Anglas’ sons represented the family in both chambers: the eldest, François, sat in the Chamber of Peers, while the youngest, Jean-Gabriel-Théophile, sat in the Chamber of Deputies for the department of Ardèche. Both ardently defended the new regime: François was among the first of the peers to swear fidelity to Louis-Philippe, and Jean-Gabriel-Théophile seized the initiative in criticising the agitation of the opposition. Their support ultimately predisposed the government to award the town hall of Annanoy (Ardèche) — represented by Boissy d’Anglas père at the National Convention in 1795 — with Vinchon’s prize-winning picture. As defenders of the juste milieu moderation and vociferous in their denunciation of the popular demonstrations, the Boissy d’Anglas brothers became the symbolic counterpart of Dreuix-Brézé.

The brothers, together with André Tavernier, the mayor of Annanoy and also deputy of Ardèche, negotiated the transference of Vinchon’s picture. When the artist learned that his painting was being sent to the town hall in Annanoy, he fell into a deep depression. He grasped that in the interim between the contests and the execution of the final picture, the government had begun to alter its declaratory policy of September 1830 in response to evolving political developments. Marrinan pointed out that the inscription of April 1834 made the Administration question the prudence of hanging Vinchon’s painting in the Chamber of Deputies. It also tried to cancel Hesse’s commission in 1836, but it was too far advanced for the artist to destroy it. Finally, it was decided to install only the Oath of Louis-Philippe, retain the sculpture, and cover the other spaces with a patterned fabric.

The implementation of the government’s platform of principles was seen in the bloody events of June 1832 and April 1834. The ruthless suppression of these uprisings and the systematic destruction of the secret associations in 1834 exposed the shallow liberal rhetoric of the regime. While the government justified its action as the putting down of anarchy, its critics countered with cries of despotism. Louis-Philippe now had to hear himself compared with his predecessor, Charles X. The government moved to adjust its developing position in the realm of the fine arts: it tried to force David d’Angers to modify his design for the Panthéon by removing some of the more controversial characters, including Lafayette, now an outspoken opponent of the regime. What had been official orthodoxy in 1830, when David first gained the commission, had now become totally alien in the changed political climate of 1837. The memories, even the safe ones, of the First Revolution were no longer cherished as examples of inspiration — a realistic fear given the outburst of sentiment for 1789 during the Revolution of 1848 which toppled Louis-Philippe. Ironically, one of the most ardent republican strongholds proved to be the department of the Ardèche. Its large Protestant community had supported the left ever since 1789, and it may have been this tendency that predisposed the Boissy d’Anglas family — also Protestant — to install Vinchon’s painting in the town hall of Annanoy as an example and a warning.

Thus the original platform of principles upon which the government based its competitions manifested the urgency of the newly arrived regime. Then its main objective was to preserve its power, and this meant a holding action. Its policy of “resistance” was assimilated in the proposal for the competitions. Those in the Administration perceived their function as one of shelter for the king and the revised constitution. They saw as their principle sources of opposition the Bourbons and their agents, the Catholic clergy and Jesuits, Bonapartism, and above all, popular discontent. These threats pre-occupied the thoughts, deliberations, and energies of the king and his first ministers, and they are clearly reflected in the quasi-open competitions of 1830-1831.

All this is summed up in the king’s speech to the National Guard one month after the inauguration of the contests. After congratulating the Guard on their energetic zeal in maintaining law and order, he elaborated:

It is time to show ourselves worthy of our French heritage in defending our institutions against the attacks of anarchy, after having so gloriously vanquished those of despotism. It is in this way that we will realize the hope that I have proclaimed with such joy, that henceforth the Charter will be a verity.” Here in the proverbial nutshell are the themes of the contests stated
in their order of priority. If we examine the architectural sketch for the proposed decorations, the three images of the contest may be read synchronically as an ensemble of static components, and diachronically as an historical progression (Fig. 15). Moving from left to right, we pass from despotism (the motive force for overthrowing Charles X) to the oath of Louis-Philippe (the consequent inauguration of the July Monarchy), and finally to sedition (the motive force for the consolidation of the government). The July Monarchy competitions cast into visual terms the scenario written by the authors of the new regime.75

Excursus on the Copy of Delacroix’s Boissy in the Smith College Museum of Art

The problem of the authenticity of the Smith College version of Delacroix’s Boissy d’Anglas still vexes scholars (Fig. 16). It was questioned long ago by Lorenz Eitner, Maurice Séruillaz and Lee Johnson, the last two hypothesizing that it was a replica painted by a strange hand, most probably that of Delacroix’s pupil Andrieu.76 While no one would dispute their general conclusion, the tenor of this attribution seems to me off the mark. The Smith College sketch is a remarkable work which not only indicates a profound grasp of the original but in some ways surpasses it. The enthusiastic copist actually heightened the onrushing drive of the insurgents by widening the gap between the spectators seated at the left and the crowd with a flowing ribbon of light pigment. At the same time, the main group at the right has been subtly transformed to adjust better to the sweeping arc, the light and dark contrasts have been accentuated, and there has been considerable variation in the color scheme. Andrieu would have been too timid to alter the master’s work in this way. Indeed, the vitality and distinctiveness of this sketch-copy stand out sharply when it is compared with a known sketch-copy by Andrieu executed during his collaborative work with Delacroix in the Old Hôtel de Ville (Fig. 17). The latter not only lacks energetic movement and striking contrasts, the brush technique is much drier. While this lone example does not necessarily preclude Andrieu’s authorship of the Smith College sketch, it seems to me highly unlikely that he—or, indeed, any of Delacroix’s major pupils—could have made a replica of such power.87

The logical candidate for authorship of this work is the “painter-poet” Louis Boulanger.88 Nineteenth-century critics admired Boulanger...
The Boissy d'Anglas stands as a turning point in the work of both Delacroix and Boulangier. The latter's wholehearted reception of the work attests to both his conservative instincts rooted in the distrust of the crowd and his intuitive grasp of the connection between the sketch qualities and the narrative effect. His article for L'artiste demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the picture; it is probable that he executed this replica in preparation for his written description. The copy should be seen as a pictorial analogue to his verbal homage.

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8. A. Murrin, "The politics of the July Monarchy," in the exhibition catalogue, "The painting and sculpture of the 18th century," Paris, 1914-15, pp. 116-119. The essay was originally written for the 100th anniversary of the French revolution and was later translated into English.


12. The rough drafts for the project are found in Paris, Archives Nationales F 584, and give more detail on the subjects. The final proposal was published in the newspaper on May 29 and followed the next day by the regulations and deadlines. See "Partie officielle, Rapport au roi, Le Moniteur universel, 31759, 29 September 1830." The final project is found in the archives of the Ministry of Fine Arts and was later translated into English.


15. A. Murrin, "The politics of the July Monarchy," in the exhibition catalogue, "The painting and sculpture of the 18th century," Paris, 1914-15, pp. 116-119. The essay was originally written for the 100th anniversary of the French revolution and was later translated into English.