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Making History: How Art Museums in the French Revolution Crafted a National Identity, 1789-1799

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**MAKING HISTORY: HOW ART MUSEUMS IN THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION CRAFTED A
NATIONAL IDENTITY, 1789-1799**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF THE ARTS**

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INTRODUCTION: ART AS A POLITICAL TOOL

Despite the frequent upheavals in the government, a consistent paradox runs throughout the Revolutionary decade of 1789 to 1799. Since the beginning of the Revolution, politicians wanted to destroy all traces and property of the *ancien régime* while preserving French culture that depended on the royal family from the beginning of the Revolution. Central to this issue is the role of art museums that were opened to the public during this period of uncertainty and violence. Art museums reflected the challenge of incorporating the old with the new through the novel methods of displaying elite collections in repurposed royal and religious buildings. The museums were visible symbols of the new French Republic, patriotism and national patrimony, which was an important task during periods of political uncertainty.

This thesis will focus on the concept of a French nation and its identity told through its collections of art housed in the Louvre palace as the Musée Central des Arts and in a former convent, renamed the Musée des Monuments Français. The repurposing of buildings and art collections represented the strength of the Revolutionary government, simultaneously promoting its role as a custodian of national property and the opposite of the *ancien régime*. Understanding the history of French political and as a cultural thought will inform a thorough analysis of how the museum commissioners applied their philosophy of art to the museums. These politically-aware museum administrators fostered nationalistic sentiments through promoting the rights and identity of French citizens and their access to treasured cultural property.

The role of art in the Revolution is often overlooked in political texts, with reason—the Revolutionary decade is an extremely rich time period with diverse interpretations and political implications. It has been said that few fields are as often revised and debated as the study of the French Revolution; this thesis will sidestep the more heated political debates to focus on how revolutionary politics played out on the

stage of museums in Paris. The only exception might be a brief discussion of class structures and the lack of understanding between bourgeois administrators and uneducated museum educators.

However complicated the political discourse may be, the Musée Central and the Musée des Monuments definitively demonstrate the political philosophy and inherent paradoxes within Revolutionary governance. The Musée Central was an encyclopedic museum that presented the entire history of great art, while the Musée des Monuments narrowed its focus to church sculptures created in France since the thirteenth century. Though vastly different in scope, the two museums promoted French identity by serving the French public through education of morals and French history, a sense of collective belonging and ownership, and the superiority of the French state as the center of culture and civilization.

In art history scholarship, the origins of the Louvre as a museum are often mentioned as prefaces to volumes of information about its storied collection. By far the most in-depth analysis of museums before and during the Revolution is Andrew McClellan's book *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics and the Origins of the Museum in eighteenth-century Paris* and related articles. McClellan focuses on the individual actors whose opinions and political sway formed the Luxembourg Gallery, the Musée Central des Arts during the Revolution and its form under Napoleon, and the Musée des Monuments Français. This was an invaluable starting point of this thesis and remained an important source throughout, especially considering the depths to which McClellan had access to primary sources. Though his book introduces many of the paradoxes and inconsistencies between Revolutionary rhetoric and practice, McClellan refrains from tying museums into the outside world of Paris during the Revolution. Missing from his works, even an article focused on nationalism and museums, was a clear demonstration of Parisian politics infiltrating and mirroring the decisions made by museum commissioners. This thesis hopes to contribute a different perspective to this exciting decade in museum studies. Where he examined individuals and departments within the museums, a broader analysis of how the changes in art collecting and display responded to and encouraged the idea of a French state has since been missing.

Carol Duncan is another scholar whose contributions to the field of museum studies and their origins cannot be understated. Her work focuses on the interactions of the visitors, the space and the art itself. She categorizes this relationship as a secular ritual that depends on court and church traditions, even in a modern state without regal hierarchies. She discusses the Louvre several times, describing it as the first “Universal Survey Museum.” This project hopes to add to her interpretation is an application of Enlightenment philosophy and more detail about how the art was actually presented. Though McClellan does mention Duncan’s work, especially her idea of rituals in a secular context, he stops short of directly addressing the role of the visitor and focuses instead on the museum administration. Engaging these authors and other scholars has allowed for previously unexplored deductions, arguments, and interpretations about the Musée Central and the Musée des Monuments.

The Musée des Monuments has less available scholarly material, mostly because the restored Bourbon monarchy closed it twenty years after it opened. However, many scholars have covered the museum’s unique approach to presenting art history, especially a history and art forms that did not belong to the canon of Western European art traditions. However, scholars tend to focus either on the museum director, Alexandre Lenoir, or his presentation of seemingly disparate art objects. While there are fascinating analyses of both of these subjects, previous scholars have only briefly discussed the fascinating shift in art historical ideology; notably, these changes include the glorification of vernacular French styles, the establishment of a medieval art canon, and adding context to a museum that will encourage a sense of historicity.

The Musée Central des Arts housed in the Louvre palace will be discussed first, as its importance to the field of museum studies cannot be understated. It was opened during a celebration of the Republic’s founding, yet was based on traditions and plans from the *ancien régime*. Though it was ostensibly a monument to the greatness of the Republican government, the museum could not have existed without the *ancien régime*. The first chapter will explore the attempts at reframing the Louvre project and fitting it to Republican ideals. The most important shift was how the museum would address the visitor; *ancien régime* planning had assumed the visitor was a royal subject and thus inferior, but the Republican museum was open to citizens of France, who were equal in

the eyes of the government. The administrators hoped the citizens of a liberated France could enjoy and educate themselves about art in a way that reflected Kant's philosophy of art judgment. The goal of the Musée Central des Arts was to showcase the entire history of art under one roof. In doing so, it also created a subtle but discernable narrative about France as the heir to a tradition of great civilizations and the future of art belonging to French artists.

Across the Seine from the Louvre was the Musée des Monuments Français, another museum that crafted a narrative about the legacy of French art. The government had established depots around Paris to organize and make sense of these massive collections in the beginning of the Revolution. One of them, housed in a convent that was turned over to the state in 1789 along with the rest of Church property, was polished and turned into a museum under the supervision of Alexandre Lenoir, a young government agent. Unlike the unbroken gallery in the Louvre, the Musée des Monuments was a vastly different style of museum that broke up five centuries of history into separate, themed rooms. The Musée des Monuments, in large part the brainchild of its director Alexandre Lenoir, presented French art and monuments, taken from churches and repossessed private collections, in a way that exaggerated emotional responses from the viewer. Unlike the Musée Central's collection, whose art belonged in an indisputable canon of fine art, even the director of the Musée des Monuments believed many objects his collection were made during a period of "hideous barbarism."¹ The Musée des Monuments popularized medieval art at a time when that period of French history was considered backwards and unworthy of study. His museum was instrumental to promoting France as a rising and progressive nation by resurrecting its gloomy origins for a dramatic comparison.

The idea of constructed and artificial narratives is present in both museum case studies. The Revolution justified its extreme political changes and modernization by recalling the history of Western civilization. Rome was used in allegories throughout the Revolution as neoclassic painters, such as Jacques-Louis David, likened the current

¹ Alexandre Lenoir, "Foreword to the 'Historical and Chronological Description of the Monuments of Sculpture,'" in *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, 1 (Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

situation to the establishment of the Roman Republic and the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy in 509 B.C.² Centuries of medieval art and the particularities of French history were given prominence and stirred patriotic sentiments in Lenoir's museum. The directors of these two museums presented the past in a way that encouraged the modern Republic.

The Musée Central was in a royal palace and displayed the finest of the royal and noble collections, but glorified the Republic and French citizens. The Musée des Monuments gathered objects taken from churches and housed them in a convent, but presented them as secular items of study. Both museums glorified the future by displaying history. The conversions from feudal and religious into Republican and secular space, art and visitors required deft handling by the museum administrators.

² Denise Amy Baxter, "Two Brutuses: Violence, Virtue, and Politics in the Visual Culture of the French Revolution," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30, no. 3 (Fall 2006).

CHAPTER ONE: THE MUSÉE CENTRAL DES ARTS

Royal Art in the Revolution

The French Revolution transferred the sovereignty of the state from the exalted status of one public figure, the king, to millions of French people. No longer trapped by feudal hierarchies, they were all equal citizens in the eyes of their new laws drafted in the first year of the Revolution, 1789. Six hundred people, without noble titles or offices in the Catholic Church, represented the French populace. Known as the Third Estate,³ they declared themselves the “Assembly of the Nation” in June of 1789 and worked in conjunction with the king before seizing complete power over the country in 1792 when the king was executed. On July 14, 1789, Parisians stormed the Bastille prison and dismantled its stone walls, physically demolishing the building that represented the king’s ability to punish his subjects. However, their violent destruction was tempered by another goal of the Revolution, spreading Enlightenment philosophy of equal rights under the law and independent, rational thinking. This declaration required that anything educational or morally beneficial should be preserved so that others can learn and appreciate it. Effectively, this barred the destruction of any sites or objects that could be of historic importance.

One of the first decrees of the Revolution was to transfer property from the First and Second Estate to the Republic of France. Suddenly, property now belonged not to a single king and the nobles of his court, but to more than twenty million Frenchmen. At the time of the Revolution, approximately one percent of France’s population, or

³ King Philip IV in 1302 first assembled three estates: the clergy, the nobles and the rest, known as the Third Estate or the Estates-General. Ultimately, the first two estates gleaned the power from the Third, because its enormous population made it unwieldy and thus decisions.

120,000 individuals, belonged to the noble class.⁴ Museums and storage centers brought together the art collections of the royal family, noblemen who fled the country, and movable objects from churches. Managing this new, massive amount of property was a concern for the state but also a chance for them to demonstrate their ability to govern and care for national property. Not only were there items of great economic worth to protect, there was also a concern for keeping culturally valuable objects that belonged to French history within the borders of France.

The Louvre palace in the center of Paris was chosen by the seven-membered Museum Commission⁵ to house the royal and émigré art collections that were transferred to the state's possession in 1793 and 1794, respectively. Not only were the art objects nationalized, the building itself was symbolically owned by the people. This newfound co-ownership of objects that had for centuries been symbols of a feudal regime would have been a dramatic event for the millions of oppressed French people. In the eighteenth century, art especially was considered an item of luxury,⁶ available only to those with decadent amounts of wealth, sumptuous taste and an education. By making the art available to everyone, it was no longer trapped by the elite but was intended for the pleasure of an entire country.

This chapter will focus on the early years of the Musée Central des Arts in the Louvre palace, starting with a brief survey of plans to create a public museum earlier in the eighteenth-century and the circumstances surrounding the opening of the public museum during the Revolution. A painting from the period will conclude this chapter because it represents many key aspects of Republican philosophy and the spirit of the times. The chapter will end at the close of the First Republic (1792-1799), before Napoleon's *coup d'état* and subsequent Consul government. Though military exploits abroad were fruitful for expanding the Louvre's collection throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the minor changes to museum philosophy under Napoleon's

⁴ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 6th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 134.

⁵ The Commission was comprised of the Minister of the Interior, Jean Marie Roland de la Platière, five artists and one mathematician. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 93.

⁶ Stanley J. Idzerda, "Iconoclasm during the French Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 60, no. 1 (October 1, 1954), 19.

direct rule are relatively insignificant and will therefore not be discussed. The seven years of the First Republic hold plenty of valuable insight into the political processes involved in the opening and interior design of the Louvre as an art museum. The intersection of politics and the art world occurred both in the government's decision to create a public museum and the promotion of nation-states through their methods of displaying art within the palace.

Choices made about the Louvre and how it was presented to the people demonstrate a deliberately constructed narrative, indicative of Revolutionary politics and shifting perceptions of what art was. The opening of the Musée Central, restoration of artworks and availability to the public supported the image of Republican virtue, but an additional narrative about France as a whole was told through the display of art within the Musée. Administrators arranged the Musée Central by schools and historical periods that constructed a timeline of art history. Though this hardly seems extraordinary today, this was a major breakthrough in the display of art. This method also promoted the individuality of nation-states, while retaining the Enlightenment notion of fine art's ability to transcend time and appeal to viewers from all eras.

Public Museum Plans and Private Collecting in the Ancien Régime

In eighteenth-century France, the word museum would have brought to mind the Musaeum of Alexandria, the epicenter of scholarship in Ancient Greece. The word in French at that time distinguished the *musée*, of which there could be many, and the *Muséum*⁷, which referred directly to the extinct campus in Alexandria.⁸ Built in the third century B.C. and destroyed completely by the fourth century C.E., the Musaeum brought together scholars of literature and the sciences under the patronage of the Ptolemies, who built palatial housing and a massive library for the visiting academics.⁹ It was tied into the image of the Ptolemy dynasty and projected the sense that they catered to the greatest minds of the time, increasing their esteemed cultural reputation abroad.¹⁰

⁷ Often capitalized.

⁸ Lee, "The Musaeum of Alexandria." 390.

⁹ Ibid., 385.

¹⁰ Ibid., 385, 391, 406.

Much like Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie* that intended to house the sum of all knowledge, the Musée Central in its original form consolidated disparate fields of knowledge. As the popularity of Diderot's project grew in French culture, so too did the fascination with the Ancient Musaeum. Throughout Europe in the eighteenth century, museums were considered a repository for the highest level of scholarship, and a way to link states to a golden age in Antiquity. Remarkably, this early definition specifically implied a collection of minds and thoughts, essentially a research center, not necessarily the organized display of physical objects as it has come to mean in modern times.¹¹

As early as 1755, several French nobles hoped to bring the royal collection back to Paris from Versailles to create "the most beautiful temple of the arts the world has ever seen."¹² Among the rumors and proposals submitted by various noblemen and ministers were a library that would occupy an entire wing of the palace, a renovated Salon for exhibiting contemporary French artists, and a conversion of the Grande Galerie into a display of the king's art collection. In the 1770s, the Comte d'Angiviller, then Directeur des Bâtiments,¹³ consulted with architects to draw up plans for converting the Grande Galerie into a space to show the art collection of the royal family. The king himself and all the necessary ministers gave their approval and financial support to the project.¹⁴

Like the regime that would follow, D'Angiviller saw the project as inherently nationalistic and for that reason purchased as much French art as possible. He preferred scenes of ancient history and of modern French history above all other categories because that was the established canon of fine art.¹⁵ At that point, royal families across Europe were turning princely collections into public museums after centuries of

¹¹ Ibid., 386, 392.

¹² Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). 51.

¹³ Comte means Count; *Directeur des Bâtiments* was the king's director general of royal buildings.

¹⁴ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 52.

¹⁵ McClellan, "Nationalism and the Museum." 33.

impressing invited guests with their art in their reception rooms.¹⁶ Examples of royal collections opening to the public include the Dresden Gallery, described as a solemn “sanctuary” by Goethe,¹⁷ the Viennese Royal Collection and the Uffizi, all of which opened decades before the Revolution in France.¹⁸ Opening the royal collection to the public was considered a gesture of goodwill by the king.

The Louvre, in the center of Paris, was a particularly obvious place to demonstrate this benevolence. On the Right Bank of the Seine in the oldest part of Paris, the Louvre palace was originally a fortress, built by Phillip Augustus in the twelfth century. François I, famous for bringing the Renaissance and its incarnation in Leonardo Da Vinci to France, razed the fortress to build a new royal residence more in tune with his time in 1546. Subsequent monarchs each added their own sections to the buildings, until Louis XIV officially moved the royal court to the palace in Versailles in 1682.¹⁹ The Grande Galerie had housed a large collection of strategic maps and reliefs since the late seventeenth century, and only a very tightly controlled number of high-ranking courtiers, ambassadors, and heads of states were allowed inside. In the decade before the Revolution, these models were removed to Hôtel des Invalides, strategically closer to the military school.²⁰ In the *ancien régime* plans, museum planners chose the Galerie²¹ and the Salon Carré for a stage to showcase the art (Figure 1). Hubert Robert’s painting, *Grande Galerie du Louvre après 1801* captures the enormity and almost infinite length of the Galerie (Figure 2). The goal was to promote French glory through both the magnificence of the architecture and the breadth and excellence of the art objects.

Though the Comte d’Angiviller was unable to realize his dreams for the Louvre, he made significant strides in its planning and prepared it to be the most magnificent art repository in all of Europe. Under his management, the French state expanded its collection to include more Old Masters from the Northern and French schools, balancing the primarily Italian artworks already owned by the royal estate. D’Angiviller also

¹⁶ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum,” *Art History (U.K.)* 3, no. 4 (1980): 453.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.

¹⁹ “History of the Louvre: From Château to Museum,” n.d., www.louvre.fr.

²⁰ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 53

²¹ At that time, the Grande Galerie was thirty percent longer than its current form.

acquired luxurious furnishings to create a heightened sense of decadence in the Louvre gallery. The king approved the installation of an art museum that would display items from the royal collection in the Luxembourg palace on the Left Bank in 1750, but it was shut in 1779 when the king's brother moved in.²²

Around the time the Grande Galerie plans were first discussed, there was already an established royal collection open to the public in another royal palace in Paris. The Luxembourg Gallery was opened, on the king's wishes, for six hours a week. It was established after complaints that the displays of art at Versailles were too crowded for viewing. Two galleries housed the Italian, French and Northern schools with a separate room for Italian masters of the Renaissance, while the French school was honored by its own space in the Throne Room. Within each gallery, paintings were hung in an eclectic manner in a way that underscored French achievement: history paintings, a genre in which French artists did particularly well, were given prominence in all schools. The Luxembourg was the first public art display in Europe to actively promote a national artistic tradition.²³ In a separate wing of the palace, also open to the public, was the Rubens's Médiçi cycle, commissioned by the palace's first owner, Marie de Médiçi.²⁴ The First Painter of the King was on hand to supervise restoration projects. Though this was a significant achievement by the *ancien régime*, it lacked the educational element that was central to the Revolution's Musée. Artists were forbidden from working on their easels in the Luxembourg Gallery. This strict order had severe consequences, because at the time, an artist's education was entirely based on a study of the Old Masters.²⁵

Private collections of art and natural history were popular in Europe at the time. Luxurious "cabinets of curiosity" could be found in the homes of distinguished Europeans.²⁶ These consisted of accumulations of artifacts from around the world, such as taxidermy animals and anthropologic objects from colonized countries. The collection as a whole reflected an image of the owner as an intelligent, worldly and wealthy person.

²² Andrew L. McClellan, "The Musée Du Louvre as Revolutionary Metaphor during the Terror," *Art Bulletin* 70 (June 1988): 302.

²³ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁶ They were actually entire rooms, not a cabinet.

Depending on the object itself and how it was acquired and displayed, they could reflect the splendor, military prowess, glory, and wisdom of their owners.²⁷ Francis Bacon listed a “goodly, huge cabinet” with natural and man-made wonders a necessary feature of a learned gentleman’s home. In the case of kings and princes, interaction with the public took place through art collections.²⁸

Eighteenth-century art collections were intended to overwhelm and dazzle the viewer, with closely hung paintings in gilded frames and different schools and subjects all intermingled. In this fashion, individual paintings could not be closely examined, nor would they stand out amongst the dozens of other neighboring paintings (Figure 3). Along with the ornate furnishings of the room, visitors were reminded of the wealth of the owner and the magnificence of the collection as a whole.²⁹ Students of art were expected to compare the vastly different styles of artists and learn from the Old Masters without ever analyzing individual paintings.

Rare and valuable things were a source of pride and prestige for their owners, as well as a way for princes to connect with their viewers and vice versa in the mutual appreciation of art.³⁰ As mentioned above, the practice of opening collections to the public certain days of a week was widely accepted in Europe and existed in the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris before the Revolution. Viewers of this art were supposed to recognize the good taste of the owner and link the quality of his collection with his social status in a highly ritualized setting.³¹ Instead of communicating the glory of the possessor to a limited group of courtiers or foreign dignitaries and scholars, installing works in a museum made these available to more social classes. However, one can assume it was only the educated and the bourgeoisie who could fully appreciate its

²⁷ Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). 94-95.

²⁸ James J. Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Oldregime to the Rise of Modernism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). 19.

²⁹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 2-6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

³¹ Dominique Poulot, “Le Louvre imaginaire: Essai sur le statut du musée en France, des Lumières à la République,” *Historical Reflections* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1991). 178.

artistic and art historical value.³² Not only did the works displayed speak to the wealth and good taste of their owner as well as the accessibility and willingness to share one's art. Open collections emphasized the benevolence of princes, underscoring the moral goodness of their role as patrons of the arts and willingness to educate others.³³

Revolutionizing the Museum Project

Though French ministers had been planning a public art museum in a royal palace for four decades preceding the Revolution, the Republican politicians in 1792 claimed credit for establishing the Musée Central des Arts in the Louvre palace³⁴ for the public's enjoyment and study. Politicians used the Musée Central as a propaganda tool to attract foreign visitors and demonstrate the Republic's ability to successfully manage and care for public property. In the midst of political turmoil, the reclamation of a central building in Paris' landscape by Revolutionary forces stood as a testament to the abilities of the new state to triumph over the despotism of the *ancien régime*.

The Museum Commission defined art as objects of history in two ways. According to the philosophy of the time, art transcended past perceptions of beauty so that art from ancient times could be appreciated in the modern world. At the same time, they believed art making was informed by the spirit of the times and the culture the artist lived in, thus the art they produced absorbed some of the historical context. Though this seems to be a paradox, it fostered the idea that civilizations could also reach a certain level of political freedom that allowed its artists to attain universal excellence in the arts.³⁵ Those designing the interior space of the Musée Central particularly valued the art created during certain historical periods of political freedom. Ultimately, the Musée

³² Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World*. 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

³⁴ Referred to in this paper as the Musée Central or Musée; the building itself will be referred to as the Louvre. The museum was housed in the Salon Carré and the Grande Galerie; these rooms will generally be referred to as the Salon and the Galerie.

³⁵ My own argument, deduced from the logic of the Museum Commission.

Central was intended to educate and enlighten citizens of a newly minted state through experiencing the arts.

The imposing and opulent palaces of the Louvre and the neighboring Tuileries represented the strength of the monarchy in the first arrondissement of Paris along the Seine. Thus, it is no surprise that they came under attack when the new political regime sought to expunge all symbols of the old. The reclamation of these spaces showed Parisians and the general audience of Europe both the strength of the new regime and, by changing the meaning and use of these spaces, the democratic ideals of the Revolution. The Louvre palace was turned into the grandest art museum in Europe, and the National Convention and subsequent Revolutionary governments met in the Tuileries until 1798.³⁶ Constantly trying to prove themselves in relationship to the long tradition of the French monarchy, politicians of the Revolution used diverse means to distinguish themselves in the public sphere, though it often meant misrepresenting positive deeds of the monarchy.

Polarizing the two political regimes required the Revolution to rewrite and manipulate the facts of the *ancien régime*. Four years after the Third Estate³⁷ reclaimed power in 1789, the Louvre palace opened as a space for the French people to take pleasure in the formerly royal collection of art that had since become their property as citizens of the Republic. To heighten the contrast between the new and *ancien régimes*, efforts were made to credit the administrative and political tasks entirely to the new regime. However, over forty years of work by the *ancien régime* laid the theoretical groundwork and practical suggestions that were adopted by the new regime. There was a heavy emphasis laid by both parties on the role the visitors would play as they entered the space, either as royal subjects or republican citizens. Even so, those roles are not so different: both manage to create a strong sense of an over-arching French identity that transcended the prevalence of regional dialects and cultures, incomprehensible to one another though all within the borders of France.³⁸

The administrators of the Musée Central used existing plans from the *ancien régime* and built on connotations already familiar to educated French citizens. Though

³⁶ Napoleon declared the Tuileries the official residence of the First Consul (i.e. his own), it was eventually destroyed in 1871. It was stormed during the Revolution.

³⁷ “Estates-General,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, n.d.

³⁸ McClellan, “Nationalism and Museum.”

changes made in the Revolution were groundbreaking in many ways, they also relied heavily on traditional messages and goals of the *ancien régime* and of other art collections in Europe. However, it has since been used universally as a model for the encyclopedic style of museum and thus deserves analysis of its founding principles. Unlike royal museums of its time, this museum emphasized the Republican nation and, in particular, underscored the democratic and republican role of the citizen. Just as d'Angiviller wanted to fill the Louvre palace with objects to inspire awe, as well as to educate French artists, the new regime also wanted to display the property of the disposed king as luxuriously as possible.³⁹ Though in many ways it was intended to show the turning away from the old and decadent regime, it absorbed the ritual paths of walking through a former palace and the presentation of property as a symbol of power. In a departure from the Luxembourg Gallery, this new form of display of art would embrace the visitor as co-owner instead of subject, and supposedly level the social hierarchy.

Visitors first entered the Musée Central des Arts on August 10, 1793, the day of an enormous festival celebrated the one-year anniversary of the French Republic. This Festival of National Unity showcased the progress made by the National Convention in only a year, including the opening of a royal palace for the use of the people and to house a vast collection of Europe's finest art objects. The opening of the Musée Central was overshadowed by myriad events of the day and the long parade route along Paris's most iconic Revolutionary sites. The organizers included art world denizens such as Jacques-Louis David, who was a master of creating these momentous ceremonies. The crowd was estimated at 200,000, dressed in the tricolors and carrying olive branches, fasces, and garlands, all symbols of their commitment to the new Republic.⁴⁰

Under the banner of egalitarianism, traditionally underserved populations of the lower classes were theoretically equal in their citizenship as the political leaders of the Revolution, who encouraged their participation in patriotic festivals. Illiterate and poorly served by the former kings, these people were now valued and equal in the eyes of their

³⁹ McClellan, "Revolutionary Metaphor." 306.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 95-96.

new government.⁴¹ From the point of view of these people, one can only imagine the joy of physically occupying the spaces and castles that had forbidden entry for centuries to the common person in Paris.⁴² Undoubtedly, this procession through Paris was delightful both for the new political glory of the Republicans and for the Parisian citizen. Enlightenment philosophy had long held that urban spaces and architecture deeply affected the people who used them. The reclamation of space was a symbolic and physical conquest. A prominent Revolutionary scholar writes that the new political arrangements practically necessitated a new configuration of space.⁴³ Exactly one year prior, the French people formed a Republic on the day they stormed the royal palace of Versailles. Opening the royal palace was a gesture to the French public that it now belonged to them.

The appropriation of a palace had consequences on how the museum organized space, which affected the role of the viewer. Royal architects in the sixteenth-century designed the interior to direct people along major axes and down long galleries.⁴⁴ In its large halls intended for ceremonies and rituals, the visitor during the Revolution would not find a series of high-ranked aristocrats and members of the royal family, but the power of the Republican state. Since the word Republic comes from the Latin *res publica* and means “public things,” it is perhaps unsurprising that a republican state would manifest itself symbolically in the display of a nation’s shared collection.⁴⁵ However, and somewhat ironically, the methods of presentation relied on *ancien régime* ceremonial space.

We should not assume that all the visitors to the Louvre were keenly aware of their surroundings and could appreciate the art they were seeing. Unlike the crowds of today, who have established expectations and some basic knowledge or interest in art history, the majority of the visitors to the Louvre in its early years knew little if nothing

⁴¹ David L. Dowd, “Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (October 1, 1951): 532–46. 542.

⁴² Mona Ozouf, *La Fête Révolutionnaire, 1789-1799*, Bibliothèque Des Histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). 149.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁴⁵ Strangely enough, no other scholars mentioned this link between the type of government and their designs for national art.

about art. For centuries, art was kept in the private domain of the educated classes. Just as the Louvre palace testified to the strength of the royal family, the accumulation of art reflected positively on its owner's identity, especially his taste and wealth. With this in mind, the new museum administrators labeled works with the name of the émigré from whom the work was expropriated. This plan backfired when some visitors mistook the name of the former owner for the subject of the artwork; thus, busts of Plato and Alexander the Great were assumed to be the Duc de Brissac and the Prince de Condé.⁴⁶ There was a lack of understanding by the administration about their visitors, however noble their intentions were regarding equal citizens and the abolition of social hierarchies.⁴⁷

When the public viewed the art in the Musée Central, one can assume bourgeois connoisseurs could appreciate it more so than any of the lower classes who had significantly less exposure to fine art before the Revolution. Even the choices about what types of art would be displayed did not serve the French people equally. The “popular arts” such as genre and landscape painting, typically enjoyed by lower classes, were essentially banned from the Louvre.⁴⁸ The Republican administrators also excluded other subjects in art, like portraits of the royal family that might encourage royalist factions in France. History paintings were also seen as an emanation of the throne,⁴⁹ because kings could craft messages and encourage positive sentiments in their patronage of certain artists who painted the monarchy favorably. Yet many of these history paintings, those that did not include explicit images of the royal family and were painted by French artists like Poussin, were not only included but also given special status in the museum. The administrators selected art they preferred, not the art that the majority of French visitors would like to see.

Though it was intended to be a monument to French greatness, the museum surprisingly did not serve the general French public as much as artists wishing to study and foreign tourists. The Revolutionary calendar redesigned the seven-day week to ten-day *décades*. The general public was allowed in for six hours, three days per *décade*, the

⁴⁶ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 9-10.

⁴⁷ Poulot, “Louvre Imaginaire.” 172-73.

⁴⁸ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 10.

⁴⁹ *Journal de Paris*, No. 89 (March 30, 1777) qtd. in Dowd. 535.

first six days open only for artists who were given special access during the three public days as well.⁵⁰ Foreigners were allowed in every day except *septidi*, the one day set aside for cleaning and general maintenance. Travelers wrote that this was an excellent system for them, because the three public days were so filled with people that one could hardly see the sculptures comfortably.⁵¹ The Minister of the Interior wrote in 1792 that the museum should house national property and be accessible to every individual. However, he also specified, “it should attract foreigners and compel their attention.”⁵² Although the museum was presented to the French public on the anniversary of the Republic’s founding, it prioritized the small minority of artists and foreign visitors. This demonstrates the ultimate desire to promote contemporary French art and use the museum as a symbol of high civilization in France that would be made clear to foreign powers and travelers. Thus, the claims made by the government and museum commissions failed to live up to their promise of making the art truly accessible to the people of France.

Enlightenment Beliefs on How to View Art

This disconnect between the museum administrators and the broader French public probably stems from the prevailing eighteenth-century attitudes about how taste in the arts could be refined. Therefore, this section will examine some of these Enlightenment philosophies as they apply to museum studies and aesthetic philosophy generally. Many of the men involved in the Revolutionary governments were well-educated in this school of thinking. Considering the lack of understanding between the administrators and the museumgoers, this section discusses the underlying premises

⁵⁰ Dominique Poulot and Voltaire Foundation, “*Surveiller et s’instruire*”: la Révolution française et l’intelligence de l’héritage historique, Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century 344 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996). 394.

⁵¹ Ibid., 394. Cites the travel writing of K. G. de Berkheim, T. C. Bruun-Neergaard and William Roots, from 1801 to 1814.

⁵² Kennedy, “Vandalism and Conservation,” 221.

behind the museum commissioner's choices and will help elucidate the miscommunications between the planners and visitors.

Philosophy of the Enlightenment laid the groundwork for massive political reform in the Revolution, best exemplified by the National Assembly's⁵³ "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," published in late August of 1789. The first article clearly states that men are born free and have equal rights irrespective of their social status. Further articles assert the power of the state and the nation as the source of laws.⁵⁴ According to Immanuel Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment?," published in 1783, men are immature when they are unable to think independently from the guidance of others. Enlightenment is the emergence from this self-incurred immaturity that requires courage and resolution to accomplish. Though he did not believe that revolutions can create lasting reform, Kant does argue that entire groups of people will have an easier time lifting themselves to enlightenment than a sole individual, provided that this group of people has political freedom.⁵⁵

Prior to the revolution, *philosophes* such as Denis Diderot, Montesquieu, Voltaire,⁵⁶ and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized the political and social benefits of the arts, for individuals and states.⁵⁷ Early planners of the museum hoped the monarchy would gift a royal art gallery to the people as a ceremonial gesture of good faith thus promoting the goodness of the royals.⁵⁸ Though the *ancien régime* did not open the museum they had hoped for, they did establish the notion that art could be used as a political device both to unify a nation and cultivate individual persons. The Revolution

⁵³ Established on June 17, 1789 by the six hundred representatives of the Third Estate.

⁵⁴ Assemblée Nationale, "Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789," August 27, 1789. The difference between the nation and the state: the former refers to people, the latter to geographic boundaries and government.

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, 1 (Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

⁵⁶ Montesquieu is almost never referred to by his full name, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, for obvious reasons; Voltaire is the *nom de plume* of François-Marie Arouet,

⁵⁷ David L. Dowd, "Art as National Propaganda in the French Revolution," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (October 1, 1951): 535.

⁵⁸ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," *Art History (U.K.)* 3, no. 4 (1980). 453.

capitalized on this *philosophe* idea when they promoted the Musée Central during the Festival of National Unity on the anniversary of the First Republic.

Access to self-education was an important goal of the Enlightenment. The French *philosophes* of the mid-eighteenth century, Denis Diderot and Jean la Rond d'Alembert especially, collaborated on the *Encyclopédie* project that sought to gather the wealth of human knowledge and in a "systematic dictionary of the sciences, arts and crafts."⁵⁹ The *Encyclopédie* was strongly anti-secular and was censored by the French state because of its implicit anti-authoritarian message. The organization and execution of this enormous project reflected the growing interest in disseminating knowledge and self-educating, two important goals taken up later in the art museums of the Revolution.

Enlightenment philosophy can be broken down into three main branches: the True, from which the *Encyclopédie* grew, the Good and the Beautiful. Diderot's entry on beauty in the *Encyclopédie* encouraged artists to create art that imitates not an idealized nature but reality.⁶⁰ This contradicted previous philosophy from the French classicism school and bridged mid-eighteenth century Enlightenment to later theorists in the Romantic period.⁶¹ The development of aesthetic philosophy was critical to the mission of creating museums in the Revolution. Goodness and beauty had been linked throughout European culture, but the relationship between the two was developed in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment philosophers, such as David Hume, began to seriously study the act of viewing art, how to determine its value and its psychological effects.

Aesthetic philosophies developed during the Enlightenment, and questions about how one forms a taste for art and whether beauty is universal or subjective were the subject of many texts. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant notes that taste is an individual matter, while beauty is universal.⁶² Taste is unlike other mental functions, because it is non-cognitive and subjective. This means that looking at art could provoke unique,

⁵⁹ Edward N. Zalta and William Bristow, eds., "Enlightenment," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011. The quote is the subtitle of the *Encyclopedia (1751-1772)*.

⁶⁰ Diderot was an active art critic during the eighteenth century.

⁶¹ The second museum discussed in this paper will examine in closer detail the experience of art and the origins of the Romantic period at the end of the Revolutionary decade.

⁶² Immanuel Kant, "Selections from the Critique of Judgment," in *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Blackwell Publishers, n.d.), 779–88.

emotional responses and does not require a conceptual framework to understand. Because beauty is normative and universal, every rational thinker has the ability to appreciate it.⁶³ The museum in the Louvre palace was established with this idea in mind, because it invited uneducated citizens of France to come and enjoy the art within its walls.

The emergent philosophy of art as a personal experience fit into the Revolution's ideological banner of liberty and equality for all citizens because it valued the individual. The Revolution also capitalized on the idea of beauty associated with order and moral truth, as had prior collectors of art who boosted their own public personas by amassing fine arts. Under the Revolution, reinforcing the value of individual ability to reason and have a subjective experience of art. In the Louvre museum, visitors were encouraged to experience art, study it in detail, and receive a moral education. Ideally, in the words of the Minister of the Interior Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière, the year before the museum opened, “[the Musée Central] will have such an influence on the mind, it will so elevate the soul, it will so excite the heart that it will be one of the most powerful ways of proclaiming the illustriousness of the French Republic.”⁶⁴ After the Louvre opened as a museum, it was indeed a monument to the glory of France as well as a tool to spread the Enlightenment by fueling sentiments towards Republican virtues.

The Republic emphasized the role of the citizen as a co-owner of art, preserving the aura of ownership but distributing it equally among the people of France. To borrow a phrase from a prominent French historian ultimate authority was transferred from “the public person of the sovereign to the sovereign person of the public” when Louis XVI called the Estates General for help.⁶⁵ Politicians of the Revolutionary era hoped that giving the appearance of co-ownership to great treasures would shape the character of its citizens.⁶⁶ If the museum was to resemble the state, its visitors should be the state actors—active participants and direct beneficiaries of the state.⁶⁷

⁶³ Zalta and Bristow, “Enlightenment.”

⁶⁴ Duncan and Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum.” 454.

⁶⁵ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 89.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶⁷ Duncan and Wallach, “The Universal Survey Museum.” 450.

As early as the mid-seventeenth century, the Enlightenment school of philosophy began challenging long-held notions about mankind and religion. Rational, scientific reasoning uprooted faith and dogma. Republican politicians were also keenly aware that eliminating the Church from France deprived citizens of traditions and rituals. The national festivals, emphatically secular but simultaneously a replacement for Catholic rituals, brought together members from different social strata and rallied them around the founding principles of the Revolution, *Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité*. By shifting ownership from individuals to the state, there was also a heightened sense of national identity linked to patronage, as the objects were valued not for their original purpose, such as the glorification of a rich patron, as much as their artistic or historic significance. The word *patrimoine*, translated as heritage in English, refers to this collective pride in a nationally shared heritage amongst the fraternity of the French.

By the *ancien régime* standard, the act of viewing art and walking around the various rooms implied one type of role the viewer should play, the old role of a spectator to France's glory. This was what d'Angiviller intended: "virtue and patriotic sentiments."⁶⁸ After the Revolution, another role was given to the citizens of France who came to the Louvre. Like the owners of curiosity cabinets earlier in the century, the state and the citizens' co-ownership of the massive art collection demonstrated France's commitment to the arts and therefore civilization and the spiritual education the arts afforded.

However well-intentioned this goal was, it is clear that the equality of citizens in museums was in name only. Aristocratic installations of the *ancien régime* invited judgments of taste, both the taste of the viewer and the owner, and were marked by exclusivity throughout Europe. Opening a museum to the public, by contrast, addressed all visitors as rational agents who come seeking pleasure and enlightenment, along the Kantian belief that art does not require context or exterior knowledge. This assumed that even uneducated people were able to appreciate the types of art represented in the museum. These museums also represented the state itself, and therefore visitors were

⁶⁸ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 82.

equal in its eyes, as all citizens are equal.⁶⁹ As a new kind of public space that responded to the change in the role and status of the viewer of art, it changed the meanings behind the artworks displayed.

Though at times the museum's administration put into practice the abstract philosophy of aesthetics, this prevented them from making the art in the Musée Central truly accessible to the crowds of French people. Though it is probably true that the paintings were beautiful and appealing to the viewers, it is unlikely that an uneducated French citizen would understand the implications of Republican co-ownership or how the arts were supposed to uplift their morals.

Displaying Art

Established as a subject of rational discourse and objective classification, art in the Louvre was supposed to be hung in a way that rendered its messages of a free society and beauty embodying goodness most clearly. The organizational scheme encouraged both informative and pleasurable experiences. The rituals of moving through the former palace transformed expectations about art and how to view it. Like in many other situations, however, the idealism of the Revolutionary planners was not carried out in full. The didactic messages and strict delineations between schools and emphasis on Republican values were sometimes lost in order to create aesthetically pleasing arrangements. Art that represented the monarchy or the Church was allowed to hang on the walls, in spite of its tainted origins. Before discussing instances of failed republican values, it is helpful to first discuss the novel approaches that succeeded and have since become standard in museums around the world.

The new style of displaying art in the Louvre represented a shift in the way people thought about art and how art should be best appreciated. The Jacobins,⁷⁰ anxious

⁶⁹ Carol Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum: The Louvre and the National Gallery," in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, ed. Claire J. Fargo and Donald Preziosi (Ashgate Pub, 2004). 255.

to keep the Musée Central from resembling the decadence of an *ancien régime* cabinet of curiosities, wanted to minimize the appearance of frivolity by setting up the Louvre as a place of study for artists.⁷¹ Artists were welcome to set up easels, formerly a forbidden act in the Luxembourg Palace and art collection of the *ancien régime*. The artists preferred art in the Grande Galerie hung anachronistically, with paintings from different artists, time periods, and schools juxtaposed and with little space between them (Figure 3). This allowed the artist to study different techniques of canonized artists without having to move.

The connoisseurs,⁷² as mentioned before, preferred to use the same type of order as was once used to organize cabinets of curiosities and natural history. This scientific, taxonomic approach was ultimately decided on. It positioned individual paintings in relation to each other based on their place in time, rather than their actual pictorial content.⁷³ The connoisseur approach was also different from previous ideas about art collecting because it held that art of all time periods could be organized taxonomically, instead of organizing anachronistically based on subject matter or theme. Somewhat paradoxically, this simultaneously emulated organizational schemes of a cabinet while also encouraging education and access to culture of the lower classes. Though the Revolutionary politicians often tried to prove that all their actions were the polar opposite of the *ancien régime*, preexisting plans to educate and make culture accessible from the royal planners informed the way they presented art in the Musée Central.

A key figure in the new style of classifying art was Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who published his most important works in the 1760s. Goethe likened him to Columbus, the discoverer of forgotten lands— in this case, Ancient Greece.⁷⁴ According to Winckelmann, truly excellent art, such as that of Classical Greece, could transcend history and inspire modern artists. The excellence of Greek art was a result of

⁷⁰ Robespierre led the Jacobins during the Terror (1793-1794) before his execution and the fall of the society's place in French politics. The regime was famous for egalitarianism to the extreme, violence and terrorism.

⁷¹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 106.

⁷² i.e., those who did not create art, but were generally involved in its sale, ownership and patronage.

⁷³ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 106-108.

⁷⁴ Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World*. 10.

the climate in which it was created. The Mediterranean sky, warmth of the region, the purity of its sunlight, the graceful and athletic physiques of the Greek people, and the quality of religion and literature all inspired Greek artists to achieve unequalled and inimitable degrees of artistry.⁷⁵ Above all, their free society liberated the souls of artists to express themselves without restraint. Winckelmann's theory of art history challenged the popular work of Giorgio Vasari, whose biography of famous artists had served as the only tool of art history since its publication in 1550. For Winckelmann, it was the art itself that was the protagonist of art history, not the artists.⁷⁶

Winckelmann also established the practice of using one's eyes to study art, committing himself to precise study and analysis of artistic details. He believed that the study of individual pieces, in their original form and not mere reproductions, could illuminate profound ideas about beauty.⁷⁷ It follows that making art available to the public would encourage autodidacts among all social classes—Winckelmann himself came from lowly beginnings but became one of the most influential art historians of his time through his opportunities to view art first-hand and draw his own conclusions.⁷⁸ Though Winckelmann's writings suggested excellent art could be universally understood and appreciated, aesthetic philosophers pointed to the subjectivity of experiencing art and emphasized the individual's critique and the spiritual experience over socially shared meanings and interpretations of art.⁷⁹ Winckelmann and other philosophers of aesthetics present us with the first idea of an art historian, because they discuss how one should interact with art.

The museum commissioners decided how art should be studied. Most of them were artists and had read in the works of Winckelmann and Enlightenment thinkers. One aspect they had control over was the presentation of national schools and time periods in art history. The different schools and even individual artists were not given equal status in museums and art criticism until the end of the nineteenth century. Four eras were

⁷⁵ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture," in *The Art of Art History*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World*, 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

given especially monumental treatment in the best spaces, exhibited in a way that showed off their grandeur. These included Ancient Egypt, the birthplace of the first signs of human achievement; Ancient Greece, the establishment of classic ideals; the Italian Renaissance that refined the color and forms of Greece; and recent accomplishments by France that heralded the future of art.

At the time, it was widely accepted among art historians and historiographers that art historical periods experienced the same pattern of rise and fall as Empires: beginning with humility, rising to golden age and perfection and eventually an inevitable decline.⁸⁰ Winckelmann made a similar analogy, but instead compared art styles to organisms, which are born, reach maturity, and eventually die.⁸¹ The Galerie contained art of past civilizations that had already left behind their best years. The hierarchy and art historical narrative established favored the “primitive” Egyptian style as the predecessor to Ancient Greece and the rebirth of art in the Italian Renaissance. The Salon at the end of the visitor’s trip through the Louvre created the appearance that foreign schools had already had their moment and were in decline, but that France would continue to flourish well into the future.⁸²

Drawing heavily from Winckelmann’s ideas about art as histories of culture, the use of ancient art in the Louvre was intended to convey a specific message about the citizens of France as the heirs to artistic perfection first seen in the ancient Mediterranean region. The long axis of the Grande Galerie, so helpful in directing crowds, also served as a linear timeline of the history of art. Progress in art was an indicator of the progress of the civilization under the assumption that free civilizations produced the finest art.⁸³

Louvre administrators made decisions about what to put on display with the philosophy of the Revolution in mind. Ideally, the art shown to the new citizens of France should instruct them about morals and act as a positive influence on their minds

⁸⁰ McClellan, “Nationalism and the Museum.” 37-38.

⁸¹ Donald Preziosi, ed., “Art as History: Introduction,” in *The Art of Art History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2009). 14.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸³ Duncan, “Princely to Public.” 254.

and souls.⁸⁴ However, the significant collection of religious art and portraits of the monarchy, commissioned from great artists, complicated this didactic aim. Jacques-Louis David in particular argued for the removal of paintings that “could only encourage bad taste and error,” that is, paintings produced during the Regency whose taste that preferred effeminate and decadent styles. He worried that art students would mistake these styles for good art and embrace their frivolity.⁸⁵

An example of the administration selectively choosing what to display is the Medici cycle painted by Peter Paul Rubens, a series of large paintings commissioned in 1621 for the glorification of Henri IV and Marie de Medici.⁸⁶ The Revolutionaries now considered the king and queen tyrants, and museum administrators worried that some citizens of France would feel sympathetic towards royal glory from these portraits and the Republican spirit would be muddled by the corrupt past. As a compromise, because of the paintings’ value and because Rubens’s reputation was so great, the two least religious paintings were put on display. Taken out of sequence in this way, they lost their religious undertones and served as harmless examples of Rubens’s great genius.⁸⁷

At first, it is unclear how art could be transcendental, viewable by all cultures, as well as mired in the political or cultural climate within which the artist worked. The concept of artistic genius solved this problem: truly excellent art could be appreciated no matter its origin, and truly great artists could only operate with political freedom. Though the museum ordered artworks by school or time period in the Galerie, viewers could appreciate individual works of genius outside of the time in which they were created.

By creating a linear progression of the arts, and emphasizing the link between political liberty and excellence in the arts, the administrators demonstrated France’s place in this newly constructed history. By setting French artists at the end of the Grande Galerie, the end of the visitor’s tour, it was clear that the French were to inherit the brilliance in artistic traditions established by two millennia of the finest achievements in

⁸⁴ Emmet Kennedy, “Vandalism and Conservation,” in *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1989), 221.

⁸⁵ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 106-107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

art. Throughout the Revolution, there had been strong propagandistic allegories linking the current upheaval to the birth of the Roman Republic and the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy in 490 BC. Politicians used ties to Rome as a reference point, metaphorically clothing themselves in Roman tradition and terminology to establish their strength as a modern Rome, a civilization already well respected and known.⁸⁸

The Louvre museum was a groundbreaking experiment in a new type of didactic artistic display already gaining traction in royal art collections in Germany in the last half of the eighteenth century. Its fruition abandoned the primary intention to gather professional scholars together under one roof, but it also attracted and educated artists, tourists and interested Parisians. The taxonomy used in natural history cabinets found another application in the division of art into art historical periods and schools. In the scientific analogy, regional schools were considered genera and great masters as species. Added narratives, like the idea that the classical ideal of Greek art could be reproduced throughout the centuries, gave direction for the historical progression towards perfection.⁸⁹ According to this philosophy, everything, including the beautiful, could be rationally classified and organized by an analysis of color, design, composition and expression.⁹⁰

Conserving a New Heritage

The notions of heritage and art conservation changed as a result of the Revolution and establishment of the Republic. Opening the Louvre palace as a public art repository required the Revolution to conserve what had been the property of very few people in the monarchy and what now belonged to an entire country. Prior to 1789, heritage implied private ownership and a system of bequests and inheritance passed along a family line. From this perspective, there was no collective ownership, and conservation of objects

⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007). 261.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁹⁰ McClellan, "Revolutionary Metaphor" 309; McClellan, "Nationalism and Museum," 31.

was the concern of an elder generation considering what their heirs would receive. The French state controlled by the Revolutionaries confiscated Church property in 1789 and all the properties of émigrés and the royal family when the monarchy fell in 1792.⁹¹ This opened up a market for privatization, and many contemporary writers feared the possibility that valuable objects would end up in the hands of those who knew nothing of their worth.⁹² This tenuous situation led to the systematic state sponsorship of conservation that would keep the fine art and other treasures within France and ceremonially give them to the public in the form of a museum. This policy implied that the Revolution was liberating the products of human genius, historically accessible to only a privileged and corrupt few, and returning them to their rightful owners, the people.

Supporting conservation had the added benefit of promoting the stability of the new political regime both in France and abroad. The Girondin⁹³ minister of the interior and *philosophe* Dominique Garat wrote to the Musée Central Commission in 1793 that the Musée Central des Arts would prove “to the enemies as well as the friends of our young Republic that the liberty we seek, founded on enlightenment and progress, is not that of savages and barbarians.”⁹⁴ In the midst of the Terror and wars abroad, the Musée would be a clear sign of moral and intellectual progress, as well as a sign of a solid administration and the continuation of France as a center for the arts. Garat encouraged the Musée Commission to have the Louvre ready for its grand opening on the first anniversary of the birth of the Republic.

Within the walls of the Louvre was an origin story told through art history, created by linking the current French state to the past as they defined their future. By tracing France’s origins in the past, the Revolution could also prove that the political

⁹¹ Dominique Poulot, “The Birth of Heritage: ‘Le Moment Guizot,’” *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 2 (1988).

⁹² Puthod de Maison Rouge (October 1790), qtd in Poulot, “The Birth of Heritage.” 40.

⁹³ A Republican political group, at the height of their influence in 1791-1792, that was popular outside of Paris and who strongly opposed the radicalism of the Jacobin party, who seized control of France and put an end to Girondin power in 1793.

⁹⁴ Andrew McClellan, “The Responsible Republic - Art, Conservation and the Musée Central during the French Revolution,” *Apollo-The International Magazine of the Arts* 130, no. 329 (July 1, 1989): 6.

ideologies and Republican virtues were ancient as well as modern. Though this seems to be a paradox, it was an effective way for the politicians to persuade the French public and foreign countries of their authority. Politicians went to extremes, sometimes violent, to demonstrate their commitment to a new state and their hatred of the *ancien régime*. Reverting to ancient traditions and acting as though modern France was the golden era of the reincarnated Roman Republic bolstered their claims and lent them credibility.⁹⁵

The pressing need to return damaged paintings and sculptures to their original brilliance likewise reflected the philosophy that art of the past should be seen in all its glory in the present and exist for future study.⁹⁶ Beyond simple repairs, conservators at the time were encouraged to investigate the materials and techniques used by the Old Masters to match the tools used to clean and touch up paintings.⁹⁷ Conservation encouraged even greater study of their methods, all while promoting the image of a responsible Republic.

One can assume that the Museum Commission had to have been aware of how foreign audiences would think about the museum, and how they could present the French government in a positive way to these travellers. The museum presented art as part of an unprecedented new system that allowed movement through each room as though the visitor was moving through time. In this way, individual paintings and entire schools could be judged for their artistic value. This opened the door to value judgments and preferential treatment to some schools over others. French art was presented as both the present and the future of art history. This message was intended especially for foreign tourists, whose governments were afraid of the political climate in France and the destruction of the aristocracy by the bourgeoisie. Using cultural goods as a form of diplomacy or as a way of exporting political values is known as “soft power,” a contemporary term often used to describe international relations in the globalized world. Though the phrase did not exist in the eighteenth century, the idea is certainly detectable in the efforts made by governments to attract foreigners to witness their cultural power.

⁹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*. 261.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 109.

The museum encouraged nationalism and patriotic sentiments among French citizens but also exported the values of the Republic abroad.

The political climate in Paris was perceived as completely unstable abroad, which is why the government wanted to use the museum to change their international image. This insecurity reached its peak during the Reign of Terror when there were thousands of “traitors” publicly executed by the vicious Commission of Public Safety. The uncertainty of France’s future when the Reign of Terror came to an end became the subject of a painting by Hubert Robert. A French landscape painter active in the last half of the eighteenth century, Robert was favored by both the *ancien régime* and eventually the Académie during the Revolution, though he was imprisoned for a short time during the Terror. Robert was on an advisory committee when the Museum Commission planned the Grande Galerie’s conversion into a space to house the immense art collection. He created a series of paintings between 1795 and 1805 that focused on the Grande Galerie, some suggesting windows to improve the lighting and possible ways to break up the space with a series of arches.⁹⁸

One of Robert’s paintings, *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie en ruines*,⁹⁹ (Figure 4) speaks to both the uncertain political climate in the years following Robespierre’s Reign of Terror and the charm of grandeur fallen into decay.¹⁰⁰ The Terror threatened to plunge France back into the decay of the *ancien régime*. Robert’s imagined Galerie in ruins proposes a disturbing image of the future in which the achievements of the Revolution are all but forgotten. In his painting are several figures: a painter, taking advantage of the lack of roof and excellent lighting; two women strolling casually and two others warming themselves by a brazier, while two figures in the foreground seem to be examining a bust of Athena. The painter points his brush to the *Apollo Belvedere*, who is positioned in a way that his arm gestures to the length of the Galerie in complete disrepair. The sculptures are recognizable: Michelangelo’s *Dying Slave* leans against broken vases on the right, a bust of Rafael sits at the feet of Apollo and so on. The

⁹⁸ Biliana Kassabova, “The Louvre in Ruins: A Revolutionary Sublime,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 54, no. 2 (2014), 82.

⁹⁹ “Imaginary View of the Grand Gallery in Ruins”

¹⁰⁰ Kassabova, “In Ruins,” 78.

building and the art are monumental and speak to the glory of civilizations that one would think are timeless and the epitome of classic.

Robert suggests that the creeping plants on the roof could swallow these masterpieces whole and that they could break without protection or a concerned audience. The painter alone seems intent on capturing the Apollo's likeness, perhaps afraid that it too could be destroyed. Without the Republic to care for and conserve the art, the Louvre and the national treasures of France that included the greatest achievements by man might be injured or forgotten.

The principle of *Liberté* meant that the people's minds were unshackled from Church dogma and feudal society, allowing them to take their first steps in shaking off the Kantian phrase of self-incurred immaturity. *Égalité* in museums encouraged the idea that everyone had some ability to appreciate art and the national collection should therefore be made available. Finally, *Fraternité* spoke to the co-ownership of patrimony, the belief that all citizens are heirs to the national treasures and that their government must therefore do what it can to protect this inheritance.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MUSÉE DES MONUMENTS FRANÇAIS

An Epidemic of Vandalism

In the first three years of the Revolution, from the calling of the Estates General in May 1789 to the execution of the king in August 1792, the government leaned towards protecting cultural heritage. However, their legislation contained confusing and contradictory messages; for instance, a decree in June 1790 requested the immediate removal of bas-reliefs on a statue of Louis XIV in the Place Victoire¹⁰¹ because they depicted four French provinces in chains. But it also contained an article that explicitly forbade destruction of *monuments*¹⁰² from the *ancien régime* generally.¹⁰³ The collapse of the monarchy on August 10, 1792 triggered vandalism across France that would last for the next year, initiated by ecstatic mobs toppling statues of French kings in Paris. However, as already noted in the previous chapter, museums were created during this period as well, thus presenting an inconsistency in the government's attitude towards objects from the *ancien régime*.

The fate of medieval art was particularly ominous during this time, because it was widely considered not only to represent the Church and the patronage of the monarchs, but also a "barbarous" taste. Yet, government commissions established a storage depot that not only preserved medieval objects but also cultivated interest in the

¹⁰¹ Located in the center of Paris (1^e *arrondissement*).

¹⁰² The word "monument" in these Revolutionary years had a different connotation than it does in modern English. *Monuments* or *monuments historiques* encompass a broader range of objects, including the movable, and generally refer to an item of historical interest. This chapter will use the word *monument* in its expanded French meaning. See Poulot, "Naissance du Monument Historique" and Sax, "Preservation as Public Duty" for more information.

¹⁰³ Stanley J. Idzerda, "Iconoclasm during the French Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 60, no. 1 (October 1, 1954), 15.

study of the Middle Ages by artists, scholars, and the general public when it became a museum. Objects from the Middle Ages were taken from churches across France when ecclesiastical property was nationalized in 1789 by official decree. Along with items taken from churches liable to be attacked by the mobs mentioned above, this accumulation of medieval art was taken to a convent on the Left Bank of Paris known as the Petits-Augustins.

This chapter will focus on the collection under the direction of Alexandre Lenoir, an aspiring and artistic young man keen on using the revolution for his professional glory. His twenty-year term as director of the Musée des Monuments Français, as the depot became known, had lasting implications for the field of medieval studies as an academic discipline, as well as how objects of historical interest could be presented in an exciting way to a broad audience. Considering the amount of personal influence he exerted on displaying the collection in the convent, an examination of Lenoir and his philosophy is essential to understanding the museum.

Analysis of the rooms in the repurposed convent and Lenoir's unique interpretation of historic *monuments* underscores the paradigm shift in the field of art history during the Revolution, though in a significant departure from the presentation of fine arts in the Musée Central. Much like the conversion of the royal Louvre palace into a republican museum, the revolutionary government adapted a religious space to present nationally owned property taken from churches across France. Though many items had been created for religious purposes, their use in the revolutionary decade was exclusively as objects of artistic or historic merit. Thus, they were stripped of their function and religious content, similar to the Rubens portraits of the Médici family shown as objects solely for the appreciation of Rubens's mastery and not the glorification of the Médicis. Lenoir cleverly relied on the history of the *monuments* to encourage visitors to feel as though the rooms of his museum were recreations of the past, with the *monuments* brought to life by dramatic lighting and period-inspired architecture.

Though the Legislative Assembly discussed mass destruction with dismay, they officially allowed it and even encouraged the disappearance of any symbols of the *ancien régime* the day after the king's execution in August of 1792. They suggested the public destroy visible monuments "raised to ostentation, prejudice and tyranny" that

“offend the eyes of the French people,” to melt down statues to recuperate the bronze for cannons and destroy all other “traces of feudalism” found in churches or public spaces.¹⁰⁴

After encouraging roughly twenty-five million people to destroy monuments of feudalism at their whim, the government created the Monuments Commission with thirty-three members to “conserve those items which have a particular interest for the arts.”¹⁰⁵ This was a rather ambiguous clause and did not transmit well to the French people at large, who were destroying whatever they came across and at a rate faster than the Minister of the Interior could record their activity.¹⁰⁶ The inconsistency of preserving art and demolishing *monuments* was never quite clarified. Only when vandalism was stopped entirely did it become clear that many *monuments* could have, and perhaps should have, been saved by the claim of artistic interest.

It is unknown how long this attitude of eradicating icons of tyranny would have lasted, had it not been for the intervention of an abbot-turned-politician, the Abbé Grégoire, in 1794. At the request of the revolutionary government, he researched and prepared an account of the selective erasure of French history for eight months that was then published in August of 1794.¹⁰⁷ The first of his three reports was titled, “Report on the Destruction Brought About by Vandalism, and on the Means to Quell It,” and goes far beyond the simple transcription of major damages. Abbé Grégoire argued that destroying art and monuments was akin to destroying history itself, that it encouraged willful ignorance, was inherently unpatriotic and stifled French genius and glory.¹⁰⁸ He suggested the creation of committees and museums to protect *monuments* from further destruction and as a way of keeping the property of the French people in France, arguing

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16. Quote taken from *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17. Quote taken from the same source.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph L. Sax, “Heritage Preservation as a Public Duty: The Abbé Grégoire and the Origins of an Idea,” *Michigan Law Review*, no. 88 (1989), 1143-1144.

¹⁰⁸ Henri Grégoire, *Rapport sur les destructions opérées par le Vandalisme et les moyens de le réprimer* (Paris: Convention Nationale, August 31, 1794). Though this document is essential to understanding this period of iconoclasm, it has never been translated into English. See Sax, “Preservation as Public Duty,” 1144, for further commentary on this subject.

that their liberation from private estates makes them the property of all French people since they belong to none.¹⁰⁹

Abbé Grégoire's call to end the destruction largely cured the mentality of violence to *monuments*. Of all the arguments he made, the most effective and best remembered is the coining of the term *vandalisme* that recalled the sacking of Rome and theft of valuables by the Germanic tribe, the Vandals. Propaganda produced by the Revolution alluded to the Roman overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy and the establishment of the Roman Republic—thus, a suggestion that the Republic may fall into a Dark Age, like after the fall of Rome, was an effective heuristic for the revolutionary mobs to stop looting. In his memoirs, he wrote that he “created the word to destroy the thing,” though it has found its application in outbreaks of destruction after the Revolution. Specifically, vandalism and those who commit acts of vandalism¹¹⁰ were likened to pillaging armies after a war. An underlying assumption¹¹¹ in Abbé Grégoire's argument is that, unlike a military conquest that captures another territory, the French vandals were seriously harming their own heritage and *monuments*. This cultural self-destruction could then be discussed in terms of anti-nationalism and anti-Republicanism. If, as Abbé Grégoire claims, repossessed property belonged to all of France, its people must be accountable for its preservation and its attackers must be charged with harming the shared fortune.

The substantial weight of Abbé Grégoire's opinions was helped by his active involvement in Revolutionary politics. His political career began with the first meeting of the Estates General in 1789 at Versailles, the first whiff of the upcoming Revolution, where he was a representative of the clergy. Two years later, he became the president of the National Assembly and was named a bishop of Blois by the revolutionary

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. “*Que le respect public entoure particulièrement les objets nationaux, qui, n'étant à personne, sont la propriété de tous.*” He suggests that this attitude is already in practice in Italy, where people are used to caring for their national property.

¹¹⁰ Sax, rather amusingly, translates *fripons* (Grégoire's term) to “blockheads” in his text—rascals or scoundrels are other possible translations.

¹¹¹ Original to this essay

government.¹¹² His voice was undoubtedly respected because of his position and his reports were potent means of preventing further destruction.

A young Parisian, Alexandre Lenoir, put Abbé Grégoire's arguments into practice. Lenoir actively fought to protect monuments that bore signs of the hated royal family for the sake of the historic record. His campaign to save objects from destruction benefitted from this shift in government attitudes championed by a well-respected politician. He gained recognition for his heroic acts to save objects from mobs in 1790, four years before Abbé Grégoire's reports.

Lenoir's most notable rescue mission occurred at the basilica of Saint-Denis, north of Paris. Since the sixth century, the abbey of Saint-Denis was the mausoleum of French kings. To honor the first anniversary of the death of the monarchy by regicide, the Convention¹¹³ ordered the wreckage of the tombs, corpses, and all affiliated royal *monuments* held at the abbey. Metals such as bronze and copper, often taken from statues of kings, were melted down for cannons and the lead in the roof was stripped away.¹¹⁴

The Monuments Commission was tasked with demolishing the royal bodies and tombs at Saint-Denis and preserving any objects of artistic merit; again, a confusing command to follow. Instead of merely erasing the small *fleur-de-lis*, the symbol of the French royal family, the Commission obliterated entire tombs and statues that might have had artistic worth.¹¹⁵ Though the bodies of former kings and queens were tossed in pits or burned with chemicals, the tombs were saved by the Monuments Commissioners to be sent to the Petits-Augustins repository.¹¹⁶ Lenoir took notes on the destruction and prevented as much unnecessary harm as he could, directing *monuments* to his museum. A drawing from a few years after the Saint-Denis pillaging shows Lenoir protecting the tomb of Louis XII with his bare hands, perhaps based on an incident at the Sorbonne

¹¹² Sax, "Preservation as Public Duty," 1147.

¹¹³ The name for the government at the time, see Appendix B for a full timeline.

¹¹⁴ Emmet Kennedy, "Vandalism and Conservation," in *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1989), 206.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

when he was stabbed by a bayonet while protecting Richelieu's tomb (Figure 5).¹¹⁷ Lenoir's single greatest rescue was to stop the destruction of Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* sculpture that was a part of Pope Julius II's tomb, another near-victim of vandals' hammers. The statue was given to the Musée Central at the great reluctance of Lenoir.¹¹⁸

In a span of five years, Alexandre Lenoir added his personal philosophy and an original organizational scheme to what was otherwise a mere storage depot for *monuments* unfit for the Musée Central. He oversaw a team of architects and artisans and wrote that he was personally involved in almost all aspects of planning, construction and placement of the *monuments*.¹¹⁹ This transformed the assortment of national property into a coherent collection, and helped redefine what belonged in the museum and therefore had a place in the history of art. Eventually known as the Musée des Monuments Français, the *monuments* gathered at Petits-Augustins were among the first medieval objects to be seriously studied by academics and enjoyed by artists, tourists and French visitors. His contributions to the field of medieval art notwithstanding, Lenoir also presented these objects in a completely new format, by transforming rooms in the convent into embodiments of an entire century of French artisanship. This reconfiguration of display, use of a religious building for secular study and major personal efforts to preserve *monuments* for posterity make Lenoir a curious contrast to the museum administrators at the Musée Central.

Lenoir and Medieval Art: Finding their Place

At the start of the Revolution, Petits-Augustins was not originally intended to be a museum,¹²⁰ nor could it be anticipated that the thirty-year-old Alexandre Lenoir would become a director of a popular museum. An unlikely candidate for the position, Lenoir was selected primarily because of his mentor Pierre-Gabriel Doyen, a moderately distinguished painter of historic scenes and friend of the Mayor of Paris during the

¹¹⁷ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 159.

¹¹⁸ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 156-157.

¹¹⁹ Lenoir, "Foreword." 732.

¹²⁰ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 160.

Terror, who was also an artist by training.¹²¹ Lenoir abandoned his painting career, and, like many others, capitalized on the uncertainty and upheaval of the Revolution to accomplish professional aspirations. With Doyen's help, he secured himself a position inventorying the works at the Petits-Augustins. To the mild annoyance of the Commission des Monuments,¹²² Lenoir began publishing dissertations and catalogues of the objects in his collection, highlighting the diversity of materials, colors and historical periods represented.¹²³ He was an industrious and inventive worker and eventually gained the respect of the Commission des Monuments.¹²⁴

Though Lenoir was initially unsympathetic to pre-Renaissance art,¹²⁵ it appears that he came to appreciate his collection.¹²⁶ He fiercely protected and defended it against the Comité d'Instruction Publique¹²⁷ that was determined to erase some of blatantly monarchial items.¹²⁸ He believed it was his mission to make the best collection that he could and to save as much as possible, occasionally "saving" objects that were at little risk of being destroyed. Unfortunately for him, the antiquities and finest paintings and sculptures he saved were taken to the Musée Central.

The public and government positively received Lenoir's transformation of Petits-Augustins from an unused convent to an organized storage facility with museum-quality arrangements. It opened as a depot the same day as the Musée Central across the river in

¹²¹ Dowd, "Art as National Propaganda," 537. Four artists were members of the National Convention during the Terror as well.

¹²² Their chief complaint was that he did so without official approval, though one could imagine he was over-stepping his bounds and disrupting Commission hierarchies.

¹²³ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris.*, 162.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 155-160.

¹²⁵ It should be noted that it was François I (1494-1547) that truly brought the Italian Renaissance to France—literally, by housing Leonardo Da Vinci in a royal castle towards the end of the artist's life. Lenoir wrote that François I "created the arts in France;" previously, the French school was "plunged into the most hideous barbarism." See: Alexandre Lenoir, "Foreword to the 'Historical and Chronological Description of the Monuments of Sculpture,'" in *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, 1 (Blackwell Publishers, 2000): 733.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

¹²⁷ Committee of Public Instruction

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

the Louvre palace, August 10, 1793.¹²⁹ By April of 1796, it would open as a full-fledged museum, the second most popular in Paris after the Musée Central.¹³⁰ In the meantime, drastic changes were made to the collection. Lenoir finally realized that his depot would never become an official part of the Musée Central. He found a niche for himself and the collection by exerting control over many aspects of the museum's arrangement and display of *monuments* that was distinct from the Musée Central's approach. He had initially divided the works into four categories: Celtic antiquities, ancient sculpture, medieval and post-Renaissance *monuments*. However, by the time Petits-Augustins was officially a museum, various arts commissions had relocated everything but French art from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century out of the Petits-Augustins and into the Musée Central.

It should be noted that many decisions Lenoir made, as well as most of his communications with his governmental patrons, were politically minded. He knew that his situation was tenuous, as he clearly placed himself in opposition to the Jacobins who wanted to destroy every trace of the monarchy. He pulled strings to get his appointment as director of the depot by using his sway with his mentor. In spite of his dislike for medieval style, the opportunity to make a name for himself must have been irresistible. One can still sense the compassion of a collector from his tone and eagerness to constantly add and improve his collection.¹³¹

Though working towards the same cause, Abbé Grégoire and Alexandre Lenoir held fundamentally different beliefs about the role of arts in public society. Lenoir wrote that the arts would encourage nation-state building, because it should make the masses subservient to authority.¹³² Abbé Grégoire argued quite the opposite; in his reports, the arts will raise the people to a higher level of intellectual maturity, a belief consistent with many Enlightenment philosophers.¹³³ Some have argued that Lenoir's rather odd statements about art's effect on the public come from his desire to fit a mold of Revolutionary politics without really understanding what they were. However, it was the

¹²⁹ The celebrated one-year anniversary of the regicide

¹³⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹³¹ Ibid., 161

¹³² Sax, "Preservation as Public Duty." 1165.

¹³³ Ibid., 1165.

Abbé Grégoire who suggested the clever plan to preserve art so that it could be mocked, “condemning them to a sort of eternal pillory.”¹³⁴ Lenoir firmly believed that his museum would be a place for instruction, where artists and the public would have a place other than the official Académie to learn about the arts.¹³⁵ To have his collection of royal items during the Revolution, he had to reject the idea that the sculptures venerated the patrons and claimed instead that their merit was purely art historical.

Alexandre Lenoir became known as the medieval art historian and collector, which was a difficult situation to be in at the time. Medieval art was seen as a step backwards in human progress, and a curator would therefore need to be cautious about how he displayed it during the forward-thinking Revolution.¹³⁶ A great quantity of all the art produced in France was medieval,¹³⁷ and as long as the idea of universal standards of art was generally accepted, this large portion of France’s patrimony was at great risk of being expunged from the record. It was never acknowledged in the eighteenth century to be as worthy as other time periods or forms of art. Previously, the only reason for which medieval art was kept was for an odd sense of curiosity in the barbaric, bizarre and blatantly unreasonable style.¹³⁸ Abbé Grégoire argued that seemingly unimportant or ugly *monuments* might have unexpected value to historians. Now, due to Lenoir’s efforts, these *monuments* had a place where they could be represented and even more of a reason for them to no longer be destroyed. That the Petits-Augustins depot opened to the public around the same time as the peak of vandalism is an odd coincidence,¹³⁹ an example of the paradox that the government encouraged destruction and preservation at the same time. Perhaps the wide success of the Musée des Monuments preceding Abbé Grégoire’s reports helped them gain traction with the public.

¹³⁴ Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images*, 241.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 167.

¹³⁶ Poulot, “Revolutionary Vandalism,” 206.

¹³⁷ Greene, “Alexandre Lenoir,” 221.

¹³⁸ Poulot, “Revolutionary Vandalism,” 206; Greene, “Alexandre Lenoir,” 220-21.

¹³⁹ Unfortunately overlooked by scholars that I read

Crafting the Historical Narrative

Lenoir decided to arrange objects together according to the century of their creation. Though this seems reasonable today, it would have been a shock to visitors and the various Commissions involved in the museum. In contrast, the Musée Central expected visitors to examine isolated works or small groupings of one artist's work within a grander scheme of the school and period and in a long, continual gallery. At the Musée des Monuments, the entire room was to be taken in, all at once, as an experience of history. Lenoir often wrote that he sought to "charm" the visitor. The Musée Central's administrators intended individual works to be analyzed, whereas Lenoir hoped the aggregation of *monuments* in a room would become the object of study.

Ultimately, arranging rooms by century is a contrived narrative imposed by the curator, and fell out of favor when the Musée des Monuments closed. Centuries themselves are artificial structures of time that have no real connection to the events within them. In the Musée des Monuments Français, some styles were overrepresented relative to the number of years they occupied in a given century. Other *monuments* had no relation to the styles or artifacts they shared a space with.¹⁴⁰ This issue of presenting a piece of history in a room would remain unresolved until the opening of the Cluny Museum a generation later. Its period apartments were relatively authentic reconstructions of real rooms in history.¹⁴¹ For instance, Lenoir presented the tomb of François I in a manner that suggested its location at Saint-Denis, whereas the Cluny reconstructed his bedchambers.

The funerary fragments Lenoir salvaged belonged to enemies of the Republic, which forced him to re-contextualize them as objects that glorified the artisan and not the patron. For the most part, Lenoir was allowed to retain tomb monuments and sculptures that dated as recently as the early seventeenth century.¹⁴² Though the Musée Central confronted the same issue, they could make an easier claim of creative genius when the

¹⁴⁰ Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 84-86. Unfortunately, no specific

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 241.

artist was already recognized internationally as a master of the fine arts. In Lenoir's Musée, there was no real canon of medieval art to appeal to,¹⁴³ thus making it more challenging for him to claim the merit of *monuments* that were created in an unpopular taste and for men considered tyrants by his contemporaries. Vernacular traditions were emphasized over universal styles.¹⁴⁴

Like his contemporaries, Lenoir believed in the cyclical theory of history: civilizations rise from primitive states towards a civilized order in their golden age, fall into fatal decadence and are then reborn.¹⁴⁵ The reign of Louis XIV was the epitome of decadence, and the Revolution was the rebirth. The arts rose and fell with the cycles of history, which is why Lenoir grieved the loss of major Renaissance and Antiquity pieces when they were transferred to the Louvre. Without the ability to start from Ancient times, he began in the thirteenth century and built, room by room, each century thereafter up to the seventeenth.¹⁴⁶ The visitor entered the introductory chamber first, with a range of historical objects and periods represented (Figure 6). Perhaps Lenoir's guests were supposed to grasp the idea of evolving and advancing progress that France had already made by comparing objects, assuming that the less attractive *monuments* were from an earlier time. Every room attested, in some measure, to the rising growth of French art from its barbaric thirteenth-century origins to the modern Age of Reason.

To borrow Winckelmann's philosophy that art is a series of organic stages from birth to maturity to death,¹⁴⁷ Lenoir was resurrecting these dead art forms. This metaphor is made more obvious by the prevalence of tombs and other funerary monuments in the Musée des Monuments, yet is not discussed by recent scholarship. Unlike the Musée Central, the objects on display at this museum belonged to the past.

¹⁴³ The idea of presenting art that belongs to a canon is not explicitly addressed in McClellan or others, but is a point worth making, and underscores the higher adversity Lenoir faced, compared to his counterparts at the Musée Central.

¹⁴⁴ Lenoir, quoted in Dominique Poulot, "Naissance du monument historique," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1954-) 32, no. 3 (1985): 441.

¹⁴⁵ Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, 181.

¹⁴⁶ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 180-181. He wanted to add the eighteenth century but it was never completed.

¹⁴⁷ Donald Preziosi, ed., "Art as History: Introduction," in *The Art of Art History* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

The art in the Louvre transcended time, but these *monuments* were best appreciated when their origins in the former times was heightened.

The rooms demonstrated a narrative of French progress since the twelfth century, beginning in shadowy superstition and leading to the Enlightened and rational era. He inserted stained glass into many rooms, and although not all of it was exactly authentic, it quite literally illuminated each room to a different degree. Lenoir noted in 1806, “the farther one goes toward the centuries which approach our own, the more the light increases in public monuments, as if the sight of sunlight could only suit educated men.”¹⁴⁸ Clearly, there was a narrative at work. Lenoir was demonstrating the uplift of France through the centuries, proving the idea that French civilization was attaining higher ground.

The space dedicated to the thirteenth century, the first of the historical rooms, is a fascinating example of how the director and visitors perceived pre-Enlightenment France. In it, there were thick columns and groin vaults, and the ceiling was painted a deep blue with stars (Figure 7). Ceilings and walls were individually designed with the idea of representing how periods would appear in that century. The stained glass filtered very little light into the room. According to Lenoir, this symbolized “the magic by which men maintained in a perpetual state of weakness human beings whom superstition had struck with fear.”¹⁴⁹ By physically manipulating the room, he dimmed the sensory ability of his visitors. Because he believed that Frenchmen of the thirteenth century were likewise metaphorically blinded by their faith. He also discouraged academic appreciation of the objects in the room because according to him, the artists were relatively unknown, and “timid” “servile copyists of nature.”¹⁵⁰ However, in his foreword to the museum catalogue, he admitted that the thirteenth century “began to establish some sort of unity and to give form to their statues. Here we find the origins of

¹⁴⁸Qtd. in Greene, “Alexandre Lenoir and the Musée Des Monuments Français during the French Revolution.” 213.

¹⁴⁹ Greene, “Alexandre Lenoir,” 213.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 213.

Moorish architecture in France.”¹⁵¹ Of course, Lenoir would not want to suggest that French artisans were poor craftsmen; rather, he implies that the tight grip of religion and limits imposed by feudal society held back the skills of artisans and prevented the full mastery of achievement. Because the people of the time were incapable of thinking clearly, their art suffered as well, and the director saw no reason to credit it as worthy of close examination.¹⁵²

Many visitors were greatly impressed by this unique organizational scheme and the idea of experiencing history. Artists, historians and tourists visited the museum and wrote about how this perspective on history was new and exciting compared to dry literature and facts of traditional history studies. An often-cited example is the historian Jules Michelet, who wrote that the Musée des Monuments Français gave him the first vivid sense of history when he visited as a child. He stated, “I was not altogether certain that they were not alive, all those marble sleepers, stretched out in their tombs...I felt it possible that I would suddenly see Chilpéric and Frédégonde raise themselves and sit up.”¹⁵³ A German dramatist, August von Kotzebue, felt that it was “impossible to walk through this dark place of tombs without being seized by a secret terror.”¹⁵⁴ The moodiness encouraged interest, and one Englishman remarked that it would be an especially charming place for children to learn about history.¹⁵⁵ Visitors as varied as foreigners and Napoléon and his wife Joséphine, were enamored with the charming vision of medieval history that foreshadowed the nostalgic sentiments of the Romantic era. Though Lenoir’s claims that he was only preserving monuments for educational value acted almost as an excuse while he was accumulating items in his collection, it is true that there was a significant didactic aspect of his museum when it opened to the public. Unlike the Musée Central, this museum was faced with the more difficult task of

¹⁵¹ Lenoir, “Foreword.” The Moorish element is the ogive arch, brought to Europe by the Crusaders. This would be a defining feature in French church architecture, especially in the Gothic period, because it allowed for rib vaulting.

¹⁵² McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 182.

¹⁵³ Haskell, *History and Its Images*. 252. Chilpéric was a sixth-century king, Frédégonde was his wife.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, The English visitors, according to Lenoir, favorably compared his museum to Westminster Abbey (Greene 217).

encouraging interest in an audience that had traditionally shunned this style of *monuments*.

Though Lenoir did not hold a very high respect for the “superstitious” people of the Middle Ages, he at least presented the work of their artisans in a way that inspired emotional responses and curiosity. He included busts of those he believed contributed to the progress of French history. In the seventeenth-century room, for example, he placed busts of the canonized artists Le Sueur, Pierre Puget, Jacques Sarrazin and Nicolas Poussin¹⁵⁶ above the door, while statues of Jean-Baptiste Colbert and Charles Lebrun and dozens of other great men populated the room. Lenoir’s veneration of the dead extended beyond his museum. While disinterring Henri IV at Saint-Denis, he recounts, “I took his hand with a certain respect, which I couldn’t prevent, although I was a real republican.”¹⁵⁷ This statement shows his conflicting desires to promote the prominent figures of the age he studied while remaining anti-royal. The practice of venerating great men was akin to a secularized sainthood. It was during this time that the Sainte-Geneviève church was turned into the Panthéon, a mausoleum for famous Frenchmen—again, a complete transformation of a sacred space into an ostensibly nonreligious, equalizing ground for honored citizens to rest.¹⁵⁸ In some ways, juxtaposing the sacred and kingly objects with the property of untitled people or the works of unknown artisans democratized French history.¹⁵⁹

The Jardin Élysée was an important part of the museum design that Lenoir added to the Petits-Augustins (Figure 8). Moving away from any remaining neutrality in his vision of history, the garden was intended to stimulate the senses and the emotions of the visitor. The Jardin Élysée became the resting place of major figures from France’s Golden Age, as the tombs of Molière, Jean de la Fontaine, Jean Mabillon and Bernard de

¹⁵⁶ The only painters of their time whom Lenoir believed escaped the decadence of Louis XIV’s influence, and thus the only that he could, with his Republican ideals, appreciate.

¹⁵⁷ Lenoir, quoted in Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*; McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 217

¹⁵⁸ Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory 1648-1816: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Art in Theory 1 (Blackwell Publishers, 2000). 710.

¹⁵⁹ Haskell, *History and its Images*, 247. However, the objects of “commoners,” or any lesser known figures, were more likely than not crafted on-site by the artisans working in the museum.

Montfaucon were relocated to this site.¹⁶⁰ It was a “calm and peaceful garden” abounding with trees, “death masks and cinerary urns placed on the walls combine to give this pleasant place the sweet melancholy which speaks to the sensitive soul.”¹⁶¹ Again, he demonstrated his skill in creating an atmosphere with an inherently emotional evocation. He believed that the Elysian concept was inherently melancholy because dreams of pleasure are only illusory and can never be fulfilled. However, there was a noble pleasure in considering the course of human’s progress and one’s place in it.¹⁶² Lenoir praised these men for their intelligence, virtue and talent, glorifying and immortalizing them at a time when the country was turning away from belief in a Christian afterlife.

Lenoir made every attempt to collect the ashes, not just the tombs, of the great men who were ushered into his garden. The most popular remains were those of Héloïse and Abelard,¹⁶³ whose tomb was constructed using disparate parts of destroyed medieval *monuments* (Figure 9).¹⁶⁴ Visitors flocked to the tomb. Napoléon’s wife Joséphine adored the tragic, antiquated love story and visited frequently. Their tomb can be taken as an example of what the rest of the garden was like; though not an authentic artifact, it did encourage an emotional and human engagement with history.

Criticisms of Lenoir and the Musée des Monuments

Alexandre Lenoir took objects whose only relation to each other was the century they were created in and a loose definition of the idea of French ownership. He blended these styles to create a patched-together notion of a “century.” This is an artificial and heterogeneous scheme in the sense that these objects had little if any connection to each other before they were brought together. There was no sense that this century’s room ever truly existed in history; it was, without a doubt, the reconstruction made for the

¹⁶⁰ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 221.

¹⁶¹ Lenoir (1800), quoted in “Lenoir, Alexandre-Marie (1761–1839),” *The Oxford Companion to Western Art*, no. Generic (2001).

¹⁶² Greene, “Alexandre Lenoir.” 218.

¹⁶³ Characters in a real-life romantic drama: two star-crossed lovers who realized their love could not exist in their society and joined an abbey and a convent, though it meant sacrificing their relationship.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

present. The *monuments* themselves were also inauthentic. Lenoir employed skilled craftsmen to decorate the rooms and make adjustments to the objects themselves. Modern scholars discourage these changes; however, they must be situated in the late eighteenth-century, when museums were just emerging as institutions.

The *monuments* were disconnected from a greater whole when they were saved and the context of the abbey or the church they came from was lost when they were displayed in the modified convent.¹⁶⁵ Many critics attack this absence of context, blaming Lenoir for rewriting history and inappropriately constructing a fake version of each century.¹⁶⁶ By presenting them solely as objects of artistic merit, the *monuments* were deprived of their original function and sense of purpose. The strongest voice in this call for resituating the museum's objects and returning them to their original place was Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy. After the museum closed, likely due to Quatremère's influence, objects were given back to the returned émigrés to be kept in private collection, replaced in churches or given to the Musée Central. As early as 1802, when the Church was reintegrated into French culture by Napoleon, many of the sacred artifacts were returned to their original sites.¹⁶⁷ According to Quatremère, even spoils of war had no place in Paris, but should be returned to Italy or wherever they came from. This is the opposite of a point made by Abbé Grégoire in his reports and echoed by other authors. Grégoire believed that the French Republic should be the true home for any works of genius solely because France was the most enlightened country and therefore the only worthy home for artistic excellence.¹⁶⁸

Any ulterior motives behind Lenoir's rescue missions are naturally difficult to detect, making it hard to analyze why he became so invested in the Musée des Monuments. Given the political turbulence and uncertainty of the time, he could easily have felt truly concerned for many objects that, in hindsight, would most likely have survived "the axe of the destroyers and the scythe of time."¹⁶⁹ Although some other pieces were lost to his enthusiastic collecting and creative adjustments, there is quite a

¹⁶⁵ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 178-79.

¹⁶⁶ Haskell, *History and Its Images*, 247.

¹⁶⁷ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 194.

¹⁶⁸ Grégoire, *Rapport sur les destructions*.

¹⁶⁹ Lenoir, "Foreword," 733.

bit to be said for the quantity and quality of objects he saved from ruin. Though most of the paintings and metalwork he salvaged were later taken out of the depot, the sculptures he collected were at a very real risk before they were taken into his custody. He himself said that he would rather leave objects where he found them, but he felt that they were no longer safe. He did not want to risk their destruction where they truly belonged, even if it incurred some damage in transporting them to his museum.

Critics accused Lenoir, often quite reasonably, of rewriting history and fabricating stories in the name of education.¹⁷⁰ Lenoir had a narrative in mind that was reflected in stylistic choices made in each room. For instance, he artificially heightened the impression that the Renaissance was impending in the fourteenth-century room while leaving the thirteenth-century space dark and gloomy. The fourteenth-century room had six windows with richly colored glass and high ceilings, in direct contrast to the low groin vaults and dim lighting of the previous room. In Lenoir's mind and in his museum, this century expressed the shift from heavy vaults with its "elegant and slender ogive arches" and rib vaults (Figure 10).¹⁷¹ The fact that this room was created well after the Renaissance is quite obvious to most historians, and Lenoir admits he was projecting his own idea of what the precursor to the Renaissance should have looked like.¹⁷² The signals of the impending Renaissance were expressed through the slender architecture and light of the room, and are arguably overemphasized through the narrative. In the next room, he actually physically recut or created new sculptures until they conformed with his ideas of how they should look as proto-Renaissance objects.¹⁷³ The museum was always intertwined with how Lenoir perceived history, and his "creative restorations" represents how Lenoir refused to allow anything to disrupt his narrative.

A major criticism presented by recent scholars is that workmen at the museum created reconstructions and complete fabrications of *monuments* according to Lenoir's instruction. As Francis Haskell said, after the wave of Terror and the pressing need to

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 247.

¹⁷¹ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*. 183.

¹⁷² Dominique Poulot and Voltaire Foundation, "*Surveiller et s'instruire*": *la Révolution française et l'intelligence de l'héritage historique*, Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century 344 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996). 395.

¹⁷³ Haskell, *History and Its Images*. 247.

rescue items fell away, it was likely that Lenoir made more antiquities than he was rescuing.¹⁷⁴ In his catalogue foreword, he proudly announces that he “succeeded in rebuilding and restoring more than two hundred monuments;”¹⁷⁵ one wonders how creative he was in “rebuilding.” For instance, the tombs of Héloïse and Abélard in particular were probably entirely artificial. His catalogue mentions that he carved their names on a fragment of Héloïse’s tomb. The other sections of the tomb were crafted from other medieval fragments, none of them original to Héloïse’s tomb.¹⁷⁶ Even their corpses were not originally in the same tomb, though this change is perhaps more easily forgiven, given their love story.

A few eighteenth-century art scholars and writers complained about the dim lighting and odd combination of styles they found at the Musée des Monuments, perhaps because it was relatively ill-suited to a study of art history compared to a bright, neutral space like at the Musée Central. However, Lenoir does deserve credit for devising a new way of looking at *monuments*. Though the Musée des Monuments is inauthentic by modern standards, the century rooms did warm the non-specialist visitor to the study of history. The education he provided was not completely fact-based, but it did provide an engaging atmosphere and interest in further study.¹⁷⁷

Like the Louvre, the rooms at Petits-Augustins were open for artists to come and study the collection, thus making it a part of the future of French art.¹⁷⁸ Unlike the Louvre, the Musée des Monuments encouraged artists to study works not painted by the canonized Old Masters, but to take inspiration from other, previously ignored sources. Though modern scholars appreciate the fact that the Musée des Monuments was welcoming to artists, it is also important to remember that the works these artists were encouraged to study were unlike what they had learned in their formal education and opened the door for new styles in art-making.

¹⁷⁴ Haskell, *History and its Images*, 247.

¹⁷⁵ Lenoir, “Foreword.”

¹⁷⁶ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*: 180.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew McClellan, “Nationalism and the Origins of the Museum in France,” *Studies in the History of Art*, 1996, 35.

It is true that there was an element of narration, and current museum critics and directors would never agree with his destructive revisions and recreations. However, he was without precedent in his new idea of a museum. Unlike the Louvre, his museum gave medieval art a context and a place in the course of French history, when some of his contemporaries refused to acknowledge that it was even worth looking at or considering as art. Taken as a storyteller in unusual circumstances and not as a traditional museum curator, Lenoir threaded a fascinating and inspiring narrative through otherwise disparate and unwanted pieces of French monuments.

The Path to Romanticism

It is a testament to the greatness of the museum that scholars have compared the Musée des Monuments favorably to both the ruins of Rome and the cult of great men buried in Westminster Abbey.¹⁷⁹ Though the sculptures within were sometimes used as a lesson on how not to sculpt, artists, historians and passing visitors certainly had much to learn from the museum and its enigmatic director. The museum existed for only two decades, but it inspired the next century.

The research and collecting of medieval art the Musée inspired took hold in the public imagination and in private houses. The medieval art collector Du Sommerand's estate was given to the French state after his death in 1842. It had been housed in the Hôtel de Cluny, and the state turned it into a museum that stands today.¹⁸⁰ Its architect, fittingly, was the son of Alexandre Lenoir, who was sketching designs for the museum no more than seventeen years after his father's museum was shut down.¹⁸¹ Many scholars hold Lenoir as a champion and defender of art and history on the verge of extermination at the hands of an unruly and discordant regime. The famous historian François Guizot even went so far as to describe Lenoir as the founder of historical studies.¹⁸² The idea of reconstructing the past beyond listing facts and figures of important kings and battles, but narrating the psychological and moral aspects of lives,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸⁰ Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, 82.

¹⁸¹ Haskell, *History and its Images*, 249.

¹⁸² Ibid, 250.

had an indelible impression on the study of history for future generations, and for the public imagination.

Lenoir's museum ushered in a paradigm shift for historians, who often refused to give any serious thought to the Middle Ages before he brought them back to life.¹⁸³ The past could now be reconstructed, reinterpreted and re-experienced. Lenoir's museum directly influenced several historians and students of history, but it also did much to alter the public opinion towards medieval art. Within his dimly lit rooms of pre-Renaissance France, the viewer had an emotional reaction. Lenoir operated during the transition from Enlightenment, scientific objectivity regarding the Dark Ages as barbaric and the romantic and idealized projections by the nineteenth century into the mysterious past.

The two museums presented here both attracted foreign tourists and local commoners with their novel forms of display and quality of collections. The Louvre museum responded to universal standards of beauty in art and displayed objects from all over Europe and the French colonies abroad, and was thus a sort of national museum catering to an international crowd.¹⁸⁴ By contrast, the Musée des Monuments Français held primarily French sculptures, exalting objects rarely displayed before in a museum setting and redefining the national canon. Set into a dramatic context, history came to life, and had personalities and emotions. It also promoted a sense of French identity, as Lenoir narrated the upward growth of French civilization. France observed an interest in studying its early history, within the same decade that it broke with all traditions and history.

Lenoir's endeavor represents a key shift in historiography and art history. It is best understood as the intersection of national politics, a Catholic reaction to the Revolution, and the first taste of Romanticism,¹⁸⁵ already growing in Germany and England. Revolutionaries were afraid that France was not yet a nation, void of the structure and identity of the monarchy, and wanted to make it into one.¹⁸⁶ Because many

¹⁸³ Poulot, "Naissance du monument," 423-24.

¹⁸⁴ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum," 455.

¹⁸⁵ Dominique Poulot, "Naissance du monument historique," 441; McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 194-95.

¹⁸⁶ Poulot, "Naissance du monument historique," 441; Duncan and Wallach, *Universal Survey Museum*, 461.

aims of the First Republic were not achieved until the Third Republic, some contemporary historians make the claim that the Revolution can thus be taken as a sort of mission statement for an ideal France. Within that mission statement, there was a direct call for redefining the identity of the nation. Ties with the papacy in Rome improved after Napoleon seized control of the France and Catholicism with its emphasis on tradition and ritual found its place again in French life. With the military conquests of Napoleon Bonaparte in Belgium, Egypt and Italy, France asserted itself on the battlefield. But at home, it needed to project a sense of orderly and responsible governance, signals that the Republic was a success.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ McClellan, "The Responsible Republic," 6.

CONCLUSION

The politicians of the French Revolution were desperate to break all visible signs of the *ancien régime*, yet they were limited by their role as protectors of what was now the property of the state. These two conflicting impulses were resolved by creating museums that opened to the public in a ceremonial gesture in the Festival of National Unity. In a span of ten years, there was both rampant vandalism and unprecedented conservation projects that became some of the most popular museums in Europe. Though many foreigners and French citizens perceived the Revolution as a bloodbath, this violence was tempered by the government's interest in establishing cultural centers for the education and liberation of the people. Echoing the call for *Liberté, Égalité* and *Fraternité*, the museums addressed the visitor as a rational and free agent who has inherited their nation's patrimony.

The two museums presented in this study vary in their methodology of displaying national property, yet both present a narrative of French greatness. The Musée Central existed in a timeless sphere and contained art believed to be so genius that its subject matter transcended time and the politics of the patrons. The Enlightenment dream of creating a Musaeum on par with ancient Alexandria that would be a research center for scholars, not amateurs, eventually died out. In its place was the notion that the museum should be a monument to attest to France's glory¹⁸⁸ by projecting the state's power outward and existing as a place for artists to learn. Instead of elite and famous scholars, like at the Musaeum of Alexandria, the general public was invited to learn. At the same time, the Musée des Monuments encouraged a reexamination of a vernacular and less-celebrated past that belonged to the French people. This Musée also enabled a better

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 92-93.

understanding of national history and identity for the previously discordant subcultures in France.

To return to Hubert Robert's painting of the rubble of a nearly-forgotten Louvre, one can sense the fear of uncertainty. Try as we might, historians will never be able to truly understand this aspect of our studies, because we can look at the past knowing already knowing the results of the Revolution. Viewing art¹⁸⁹ like this gives us some access into the very real trepidation that Robert felt. By presenting the Louvre not as a fortress for the protection of art or a symbol of a stable and just state, but a decrepit ruin largely ignored by the crowds, Robert projected his worry for the future of France and art onto this scene. Though the museum stands today, his fears were not unjustified. Politicians could calm or direct the masses in Paris, but the fate of the country seemed tenuous, even for a man whose career had generally transitioned well from the *ancien régime* to the new. As an artist, the loss and destruction of art would be painfully felt. In this painting, the emotional reaction that Lenoir hoped to inspire for amateur art historians is connected to the Louvre's desire for a timeless canon in which genius can be found even amongst the overgrown plants.

The French Revolution unified the population and defined their identity through culture. This was an important step in creating the abstract concept of a modern nation.¹⁹⁰ The Revolution liberated and equalized the French people by unchaining them from the feudal and hierarchical past and provided them with a hopeful future in their cultural spheres. It also selectively engaged moments in the history of Western civilization and narrated the history of France to justify the credibility of the new state. The Louvre served to tie this unstable period to the legacy of established and classic civilizations like Rome and Athens. The Musée des Monuments complemented this story by celebrating the cultural heritage that made France unique.

Napoleon's armies looted countries across Europe and sent their trophies home in grand parades, but without the Revolutionary establishment of museum structures, this art could not have been well appreciated. Under his rule, the dream of an enlightened

¹⁸⁹ In a far more cognitive way than Kant would ever endorse

¹⁹⁰ Lord Acton, "Nationality," *The Home and Foreign Review*, 1862. He argues that there was a complete rejection of the past—I believe that it was manipulated to promote the French state.

public became a reality with the introduction of public schools across France. The Romantic school of art also came forth during this period. Much like Robert's scene, ruins of old glory dominated much of the contemporary art. As Diderot instructed in his *Encyclopédie*, artists sought out the sublime in nature, turning away from their history paintings and looking for new inspiration.

The drastic transformations of the palace and the convent demonstrate the power of the French Revolution and the willingness for change in the minds of the people. Though seemingly impossible, these spaces morphed into world-class museums in a matter of months that rejected the building's history while simultaneously using the ritual spaces defined by the architecture. The seven years of the First Republic had an enormous effect on the modern museum and the use of national patrimony as soft power diplomacy. They proved that even the most terrifying regime could generate lasting impacts in the cultural world. As the nineteenth century progressed towards more defined nation-states, a modern nation's unique identity told through art collections became an essential tool to compete with each other.

For artists, these museums were an opportunity to learn from Old Masters and study undiscovered or forgotten techniques. From a political perspective, the government used museums as a clever way of diverting foreign attention away from domestic instability. In philosophy, these museum administrators took abstract notions of aesthetics, especially universal beauty and subjective taste, and applied them to how museums should address the viewers of art. Likewise, they redefined the role of the art historian by changing how visitors interact with art. Sociologically, even the lowest classes of French society could unlock the treasures of their country that had been kept in private collections. For art conservators, this period was a milestone in the realization that conservation was essential for any collector. The importance of the two museums presented here can only be understood by crossing academic disciplines and realizing the full scale of their ingenuity.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Pietro Antonio Martini, *Salon of 1785*. Engraving, 1785, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

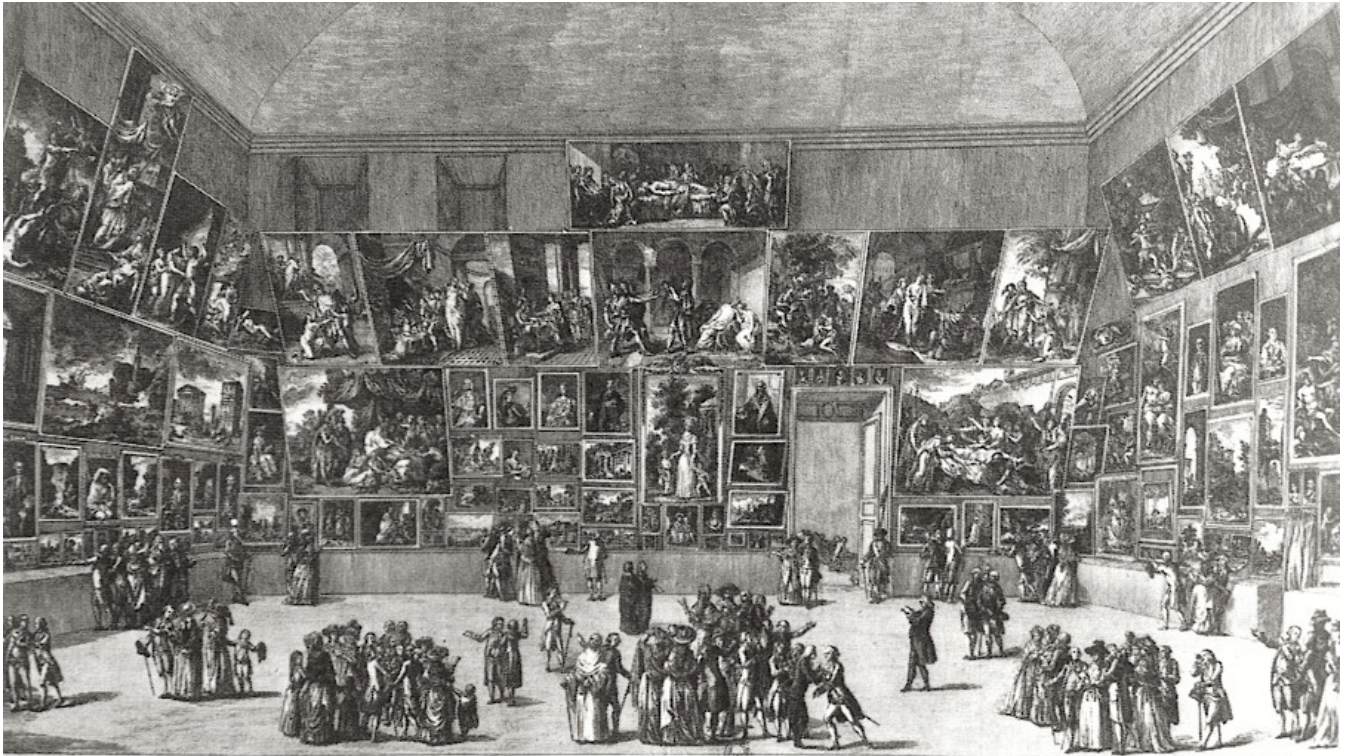


Figure 2: Hubert Robert, *Grande Galerie du Louvre après 1801*. Oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 3: Anonymous, *Electoral Gallery, Mannheim*. Drawing, 1731, Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie, Université de Paris.



Figure 4: Hubert Robert, *Vue Imaginaire de la Grande Galerie en Ruines*. Oil on canvas, 1796.



Detail



Figure 5: Pierre-Joseph La Fontaine, *Lenoir Defending the Tomb of Louis XII at Saint-Denis*. Drawing. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



Figure 6: Réville and Lavallée. *Salle d'Introduction*. From *Vues pittoresques et perspectives des salles du Musée des monuments français*, Paris, 1816.



Figure 7: Jean-Baptiste Réville and Lavallée. *Salle de XIIIe siècle*. From *Vues pittoresques et perspectives des salles du Musée des monuments français*, Paris, 1816.



Figure 8: Réville and Lavallée. *Jardin*. From *Vues pittoresques et perspectives des salles du Musée des monuments français*, Paris, 1816.



Figure 9: Réville and Lavallée. *Tomb of Héloïse et Abélard*. From *Vues pittoresques et perspectives des salles du Musée des monuments français*, Paris, 1816.



Figure 10: Réville and Lavallée. *Salle de XIVe siècle*. From *Vues pittoresques et perspectives des salles du Musée des monuments français*, Paris, 1816.



APPENDIX B: TIMELINE OF THE REVOLUTION

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: PHASES AND DATES¹⁹¹

Estates General (3 Orders: Clergy, 300 reps.; Nobility, 300 reps.; "Third Estate," 600 reps.)

May 5, 1789: After bad harvests and costly wars, King Louis XVI is forced to convene this ancient assembly in order to raise taxes.

National Assembly (1789-1791)(3rd Estate declares itself the "Assembly of the Nation," June 17, 1789)

June 29, 1789: Tennis Court Oath. National Assembly resolves not to disband until it has written a constitution.

July 14, 1789: Bastille stormed and taken by a Paris mob.

July 19-Aug. 3, 1789: Great Fear. Peasants attack noble manors.

Aug. 4, 1789: Nobles in National Assembly renounce feudal rights; Jacobin Club formed.

Aug. 27, 1789: Assembly issues Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Oct. 5-6, 1789: King Louis brought from Versailles to Tuileries palace in Paris

July 12, 1790: Assembly issues Civil Constitution of the Clergy, requiring elections and oaths.

June 20-21, 1791: King flees to Austria, is caught at Varennes.

Aug. 27, 1791: Austria and Prussia call for support of French King ("Declaration of Pillnitz")

Sept. 1791: National Assembly issues Constitution; elections are held.

¹⁹¹ Adapted from <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/4c/frrev.h96.htm> with changes

Legislative Assembly (October 1791-August 1792)(Constitutional Government by elected officials)

Apr. 20, 1792: France declares war on Austria and Prussia.

Aug. 10, 1792: Paris mob storms royal palace; Commune siezes Assembly; Legislative Assembly falls. Minister of Justice Danton purges thousands of presumed traitors. First Republic of France is formed.

Sept. 20, 1792: French army stops Prussians and Austrians at Valmy (Belgium).

National Convention (Sept. 1792-1795)(elected by universal male suffrage to rewrite constitution)

Sept. 21, 1792: Convention abolishes monarchy and declares France a republic.

Oct. 1792: Revolutionary calendar introduced; Sept. 22, 1792=day 1.

Jan. 21, 1793: Convention condemns and executes the King.

Feb. 1793: Convention declares war on 1st Coalition of Austria, Prussia, Britain, Holland and Spain.

Feb. 1793: Counter-revolutionary revolt in the Vendee begins.

March 1793: "Reign of Terror" by Committee of Public Safety (Robespierre) begins.

August 10, 1793: Musée Central des Arts and the Depot in the Petits-Augustin convent open to the public during the Festival of National Unity

Aug. 23, 1793: Levy-in-Mass (military draft) instituted.

Fall 1793: Dechristianization, administrative reform

June 26, 1794: French victory over Austrians at Fleurus (Belgium).

July 28, 1794: "Thermidor:" Robespierre executed, end of terror, Jacobins purged.

Feb. 21, 1795: Churches reopened.

Aug. 22, 1795: New constitution is adopted, forming the Directory.

Directory (1795-1799)(New constitution has 2 houses: Council of Ancients and Council of 500)

Oct. 5, 1795: Napoleon's "Whiff of Grapeshot" save the Directory from a royalist mob.

Sept. 4, 1797: Coup d'état removes royalists from Directory.

Oct. 17, 1797: French defeat Austrians in northern Italy and make peace.

1798: French capture Switzerland, Rome and Naples; suffer bad defeat in Egypt (Aug. 1).

Spring 1799: 2nd Coalition of Austria, Russia, Turkey and Great Britain drive French Army back.

Nov. 9, 1799: Napoleon's coup d'état abolishes Directory and establishes Consulate.

Relevant Political Factions:

Girondin: Members were businessmen, lawyers, intellectuals and journalists. Proposed a military plan to spread the Revolution that was later taken up by Napoleon.

Jacobin: Wanted a centralized Republic and national power. Members were moderate bourgeoisies.

Montagnards: Extremist faction within the Jacobin club that ultimately brought down the Girondins, beginning the Reign of Terror.

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