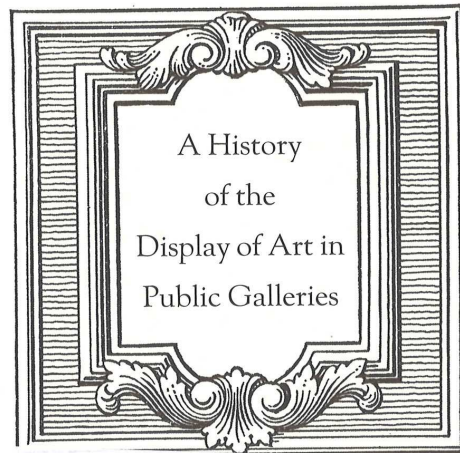


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“Beauty and Art, History and Fame and Power”

ON ENTERING THE LOUVRE

Representation in general has indeed a double power—that of rendering anew and imaginarily present, not to say living, the absent and the dead. . . . if representation reproduces not only *de facto* but also *de jure* the conditions that make its reproduction possible, then we understand that it is in the interests of power to appropriate it for itself. Representation and power share the same nature.

—LOUIS MARIN

Just as works of art require interpretation, so too do the museums in which they are displayed. But while everyone understands the need to explain visual art by identifying its iconography and social significance, and by placing individual paintings in historical narratives, the idea that museums also require such analysis is less familiar.¹ That may seem surprising, for we certainly interpret them informally. When approaching we judge the architecture. Upon entering we sense if the ingress is inviting and the floor plan easy to follow. Reading wall labels, we reflect upon the provenance of objects in the collection and the roles played by curators in organizing their display. We readily think about the visual relationships of the works of art on display. And thanks to Nietzsche's genealogy of Christian morality and Foucault's books about madness and the prison, we are very aware that institutions can be interpreted. As Alexander Nehamas writes, "Genealogy is interpretation in the sense that it treats our moral practices not as given but as 'texts,' as signs with a meaning, as

manifestations of a will to power that this interpretation tries to reveal.”² Because Nietzsche and Foucault are interested in political power, their ways of thinking are very suggestive for our present purposes.

The literature of art is devoted to individual paintings. And so the argument of my *Principles of Art History Writing* was relatively easy to work out, for identifying it merely required examining the practice of art historians. Locating my present analysis was more difficult, because although art museums have been much discussed recently, there is less articulated awareness that we interpret them as total works of art. When a painting or sculpture is given a suggestive analysis, what I call an interpretation by description, then its appearance changes before our eyes.³ For example, Rudolf Wittkower says that in Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, Cornaro Chapel, S. Maria della Vittoria, “directed heavenly light . . . sanctifies the objects and persons struck by it and singles them out as recipients of divine Grace. . . . we realize that the moment of divine ‘illumination’ passes as it comes.”⁴ When he adds that “here in the ambient air of a chapel [Bernini] did what painters tried to do in their pictures,” use real light, his account carries real art historical weight. When Adrian Stokes writes that the figures in Cézanne’s *The Large Bathers* in the National Gallery, London, could “suggest a quorum of naked tramps camped on top of railway carriages as the landscape roars by from left to right,” he changes how we see that picture.⁵ And Arthur Danto’s description of Cy Twombly’s *Leda and the Swan* projects a strong interpretation of that abstract painting, calling it “the zero degree of writing, drawing, painting, composition, somehow achieving—at its greatest achieving—a certain stammering beauty, where the base elements are possibly even transformed into elegant whispers. There is an almost Taoist political metaphor here for those who seek such things.”⁶ Much art writing—by Vasari in the sixteenth century as well as by *Artforum* critics today—is interpretation by description.

A strong interpretation changes dramatically, perhaps permanently, how art is seen. The aim of successful interpretations, Leo Steinberg writes, is “that they be probable if not provable; that they make visible what had not previously been apparent; and that, once stated, they so penetrate the visual matter that the picture seems to confess itself and the interpreter disappears.”⁷ A Marxist commentator characterized this activity in political terms: “Interpretation is not an isolated act, but takes

place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretative options are either openly or implicitly in conflict."⁸ True enough, but in our bourgeois society, debate about conflicting interpretations, including Marxist accounts, is possible. T. J. Clark's justly famous discussion of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* says: "The girl in the mirror does seem to be part of some . . . facile narrative. . . . But that cannot be said of the 'real' barmaid, who stands at the centre, returning our gaze with such evenness, such seeming lack of emotion or even interest. There is a gentleman in the mirror. . . . Who is this unfortunate, precisely? Where is he? Where does he stand in relation to her, in relation to us?"⁹ Once close concentration was focused on the relationship of the barmaid to the mirror, elaborate attention was soon devoted to Clark's questions. My *Poussin's Paintings* reinterprets *Apollo and Daphne*: "The two figures, one seeing and the other blind to his desire, face one another directly. Because our point of view is at right angles to them, we see both the desiring Apollo and the oblivious Daphne. . . . our presence is needed to link the figures, but their triangular arrangement exists independently from us."¹⁰ Earlier commentators treat Poussin as an impersonal classicist, but perhaps my interpretation will cause reexamination of that cliché.¹¹

Museum scholars, too, engage in interpretation by description, changing how the building and collection are seen. When, for example, you learn that the central domes of older museums allude to the temple of the muses or realize that walking up the entrance stairs elevates you out of ordinary reality into the art world, then you will see such domes and stairs differently. Mieke Bal analyzes the impressionist galleries in the Metropolitan Museum, noting that "part of the intended meaning of the space as it has been arranged is to be minimally visible, unintrusive; this is how the expository agent, including its authority, makes itself invisible."¹² Carol Duncan interprets the Morgan Library: "The room today preserves much of its original look, so much so, in fact, that visitors can barely examine its contents."¹³ And Albert Levi describes the Frick as "a presentation of works of art in their naked individuality, a temple of pure aesthetic experience, a virtual embodiment of the idea of *the art museum as an exclusive assembly of nothing but masterpieces*."¹⁴ Once you look, then you will find many such interpretations by description.

The styles of museum interpreters are as diverse as those of art historians. Goethe tells of his visit to the museum in Dresden, "in which splen-

dour and neatness reigned together the deepest stillness. . . . [it] imparted a feeling of solemnity . . . which so much . . . resembled the sensation with which one treads a church . . . the objects . . . seemed here . . . set up only for the sacred purposes of art."¹⁵ Stephen Greenblatt interprets the Musée d'Orsay, noting that "by moving the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces into proximity with the work of far less well-known painters. . . . what has been sacrificed . . . is visual wonder centered on the aesthetic masterpiece."¹⁶ Donald Preziosi offers a highly complex analysis of Sir John Soane's Museum, London: "You have . . . a series of progressions mapped out throughout the museum's spaces—from death to life to enlightenment; from lower to higher; from dark to light; from multiple colors to their resolution as brilliant white light. . . . Soane stands at the pivotal point of all of this."¹⁷ Elizabeth Gray Buck argues that Gustave Moreau's museum in Paris "prevented the French government from pressing his paintings into anonymous ideological service for the greater glory of France and the *patrimoine*."¹⁸ And Ivan Gaskill claims that in the National Gallery, London, "by alternating the Vermeers with church interiors" the curator "pointedly avoids a comparison between Vermeer's domestic interiors and those of his contemporaries."¹⁹

Victoria Newhouse devotes a lively book to interpretation by description of the art museum. She criticizes the Metropolitan Museum for enlarging the original front steps: "The new stairs made the façade appear to be part of a large horizontal background." And she argues that in the J. Paul Getty Museum "the excesses of the new . . . galleries underscore the shortcomings of the collection."²⁰ Just as comparative studies are important to literary scholars, so what might be called museum intertextuality, comparisons between institutions, provide essential perspectives. Douglas Davis, for example, discusses how Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, "jousts with the meaning of his interior and his factious client by covering his roof with pyramids that inevitably recall Egypt and its stark, dry landscape," showing that the museum is in a cultural desert.²¹ He is more sympathetic to P.S. 1, in Long Island City, praising the "rusticity" of the style which "springs almost entirely from its vital 'found' container," the public school building restored by the architect Shael Shapiro. Whether or not you agree, once attention is called to such features, you will probably see these museums differently. A full discussion of all the major art institutions is needed, for the two

older survey histories now are dated.²² But much can be learned, I will show, by close scrutiny of just a few museums.

Some museums displaying old paintings are spaces with a grand history of their own. When visiting we may readily move from seeing art to reflecting upon the events that took place long ago in the galleries where we stand. That is not mere idle, flighty speculation, for history can be relevant to seeing the paintings now hanging, especially when this art played an important role in the museum's history. In his discussion of "understanding a work of art," Richard Wollheim argues, "However far we go with setting down what, as we see it, the work means or is, this can never be complete, just because experience, hence our experience of the work can never be exhausted."²³ Or as Stephen Bann writes, in effectively drawing out the implications of this claim: "The search for meaning—the process that is commonly called 'interpretation'—is a virtually limitless one, which can be terminated only by the atrophy of the individual subject's desire to know. . . . To interpret the aesthetic object is inevitably to measure its participation in the multiple codes which govern the collective consciousness."²⁴ We have a natural desire that our interpretations of visual artifacts be as full as possible, and that requires taking account of the larger context in which works of art are displayed. The analogy that Wollheim draws with "working through of phantasy" will guide our discussion of the multiple codes invoked by art museums.

Henry James's memoir *A Small Boy and Others* gives a finely tuned interpretation of the Louvre: "I had looked at pictures . . . but I had also looked at France and looked at Europe, looked even at America as Europe itself might be conceived so to look, looked at history, as a still-felt past and a complacently personal future, at society, manners, types, characters, possibilities and prodigies and mysteries of fifty sorts. . . . Such were at any rate some of the vague processes . . . of picking up an education."²⁵ What we view, he suggests, are not just the individual paintings and sculptures on display, but the museum as total work of art. The architectural setting can have a richly suggestive history:

It is necessary for an appreciation of this style to remember the atmosphere in which it grew, the struggles first between Protestantism and Catholicism in the sixteenth century, Henri IV's decision to return to the Roman

Church . . . then the spreading of religious indifference, until it became all-powerful in the policy of Richelieu, the cardinal, and Father Joseph, the Capuchin, who fought Protestants in France but favoured them abroad, in both cases purely for reasons of national expediency.²⁶

Knowing that story prepares us to understand the art in the Louvre.

Nineteen Italian pictures acquired by François I, the patron of Leonardo who ruled France from 1515 to 1547, are still in the museum.²⁷ Louis XIV had a large collection of paintings and many French, Flemish, and Italian drawings. And there was a kind of museum between 1666 and 1671 in the Gallery of Ambassadors, which contained a copy of the Carracci ceiling in the French academy in Rome and some Italian paintings. But this arrangement was ephemeral—and the king did not display his newly acquired thirteen Poussins.²⁸ The French royal collection remained at Versailles.

During the Revolution the Louvre became a public art museum. “In the . . . Grand Gallery, art was transformed from an old-regime luxury, traditionally associated with conspicuous consumption and social privilege, into national property, a source of patriotic pride and an instrument of popular enlightenment,” James Sheehan writes.²⁹ In October 1792, just after the old regime collapsed, the minister of the interior wrote: “This museum must demonstrate the nation’s great riches. . . . France must extend its glory through the ages and to all peoples: the national museum will embrace knowledge in all its manifold beauty and will be the admiration of the universe. . . . the museum . . . will become among the most powerful illustrations of the French Republic.”³⁰ The French enjoyed this storehouse of treasures, which showed their greatness. Foreigners who admired art taken from many nations saw how powerful France was.³¹ About 5,000 English tourists visited the Louvre in 1802. Joseph Farington’s diary gives a detailed account, comparing Titian’s *St. Peter Martyr* to Domenichino’s *St. Jerome*; offering an elaborate commentary on Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, with remarks by his friend Benjamin West; and looking closely at the Mantegna and Terburgh.³²

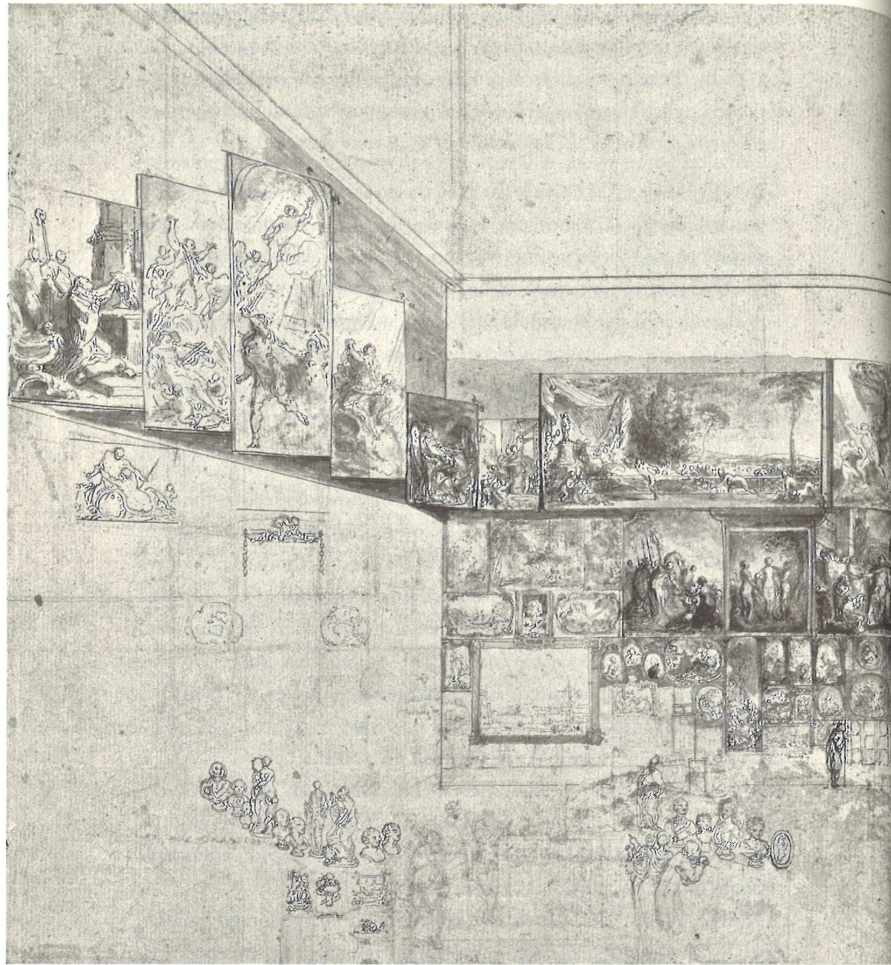
In 1803, Dominique Vivant Denon, director of the Louvre, asked Napoleon Bonaparte to inspect the new hanging: “The first time you walk through this gallery, I hope you will find that this exercise . . . already brings a character of order, instruction, and classification. I will continue

in the same spirit for all the schools, and in a few months, while visiting the gallery one will be able to have . . . a history course in the art of painting.”³³ By the mid-nineteenth century this gallery had a rich history. In 1855 the English travel writer Bayle St. John wrote about his first visit to the Louvre soon after the barricades of 1848 were removed.

Instead of being . . . the scene whereon the great tragi-comedy of Power is enacted, the focus of intrigues, and maneuvers, and jealousies, and dark suspicions, and darker actions, the home of royal pride or misery, the gay resort of courtiers and maids of honour, the tomb of virtue, the cynosure of the vulgar, the great manufactory where sickly caprice, or grasping ambition, or gloomy fanaticism, plans war against foreign states, or massacres against heretical or insubordinate subjects,—it has become the tranquil but gorgeous refuge of a prodigious crowd of objects, principally of Art. . . . We see there some fragments, at least, of the wrecks of all civilisations.³⁴

The long lines of tourists you see entering nowadays show the lasting importance of Denon’s vision. A comprehensive interpretation of the Louvre would need to consider Nicolas Poussin’s abortive decorative project for the Grand Gallery, Robert Hubert’s paintings of proposed renovations and his fantasy images showing that gallery in ruins, and Samuel Morse’s *Gallery of the Louvre* (1831–33), an ideal image showing the art that he most admired.³⁵ It would need to discuss the many accounts of the museum in fiction, Zola’s *L’Assommoir*, for example, which describes “the unbridgeable gap between art and the people.”³⁶ And it would have to describe visits by artists. “I hate to travel,” Alberto Giacometti said: “I don’t ever need to make a true trip for I find everything I need in one part of Paris, in the Louvre.”³⁷ Many artists and writers have thought of the museum as a treasure house.³⁸

Nowadays the Salon Carré, the east entrance to the Grand Galerie, contains the early Renaissance paintings introducing that sweeping historical hanging of masterpieces. Just as a symbolist poem condenses numerous richly suggestive ideas into a few words, so this room’s story reveals much about the history of absolute monarchy, the salons, and the triumph of Napoleon. Built by Louis XIV, then abandoned when his court moved to Versailles, it was transformed into a chapel for Napoleon’s marriage April 2, 1810. Inspired by the drawings of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin showing the 1765 salon, for example (fig. 3), they envisage the



3. Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin (1724–80). *The Salon at the Louvre*.
Watercolor, 1765. RF 32749. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Gérard Blot,
Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, N.Y.



Salon Carré as described in Thomas Crow's account of the French art world on the eve of the Revolution: "A public sphere of discussion, debate, and free exchange of opinion was something else again. No longer, it seemed, would non-initiates be awed at a distance by the splendor of a culture in which they had no share; a vocal portion of the Salon audience, egged on by self-interested critics, would actively be disputing existing hierarchical arrangements."³⁹ Imagine the throng of visitors looking at the dense hangings of paintings running high up the walls. That experiment will animate your reading of Diderot's commentary.

Starting at their rented home at 19 Rue La Boétie, just north of the Champs-Élysées, in July 1855, Henry and William James, who were living in Paris with their parents, walked to the Louvre.⁴⁰ The thirteen-year-old Henry and his older brother William looked at sights familiar to modern visitors—the bookshops on the quays and the art galleries on the left bank. (In *The Ambassadors* that walk is taken by a middle-aged American, Lewis Strether.) The brothers saw the paintings of Thomas Couture, Rousseau, Paul Delaroche and some now forgotten artists. As Henry James explains, "we were not yet aware of style, though on the way to become so, but were aware of mystery, which indeed was one of its forms—while we saw all the others, without exception, exhibited at the Louvre, where at first they simply overwhelmed and bewildered me."⁴¹ They entered at the Pavillon de Flore, came up the stairs to the Grand Gallery, and then walked east to the room just beyond the Salon Carré, the Gallery of Apollo.

The 1881 Baedeker guide explains that the

Salon . . . is about 70 yds. in length, was constructed in the reign of Henri IV, burned down in 1661, and rebuilt under Louis XIV. From designs of *Charles le Brun*, who left the decoration unfinished. It was then entirely neglected for a century and a half, but was at length completed in 1848–51. It is the most beautiful hall in the Louvre, and is considered one of the finest in the world. It derives its name from the central ceiling painting by *Delacroix*, representing "Apollo's Victory over the Python," a fine work both in composition and colouring (1849).⁴²

Like most first-time visitors, James found the Louvre overwhelming. "I felt myself most happily cross that bridge over to Style," he wrote, the Gallery of Apollo (fig. 4)

seeming to form with its supreme coved ceiling and inordinately shining parquet a prodigious tube or tunnel through which I inhaled little by little, that is again and again, a general sense of *glory*. The glory meant ever so many things at once, not only beauty and art and supreme design, but history and fame and power, the world in fine raised to the richest and noblest expression. . . .

The Galerie d'Apollon became for years what I can only term a splendid sense of things, even of the quite irrelevant or, as might be, almost unworthy.⁴³

An inscription notes that the museum was founded by the revolutionary legislature in 1792 and opened to the public on August 10, 1793.⁴⁴

Young Henry James thus learned that imperial cultures demonstrate their power by creating large public spaces containing many exquisitely beautiful works of art. The part of Paris near the entrance to the Louvre was described in "The Swan," a poem published five years later by Charles Baudelaire.⁴⁵ Exquisitely sensitive to the overlap of past and present, in responding to Hausmann's modernization he notes that "the Paris of old is there no more—a city's pattern changes, alas, more swiftly than a human heart."⁴⁶ He then extends his historical vision to Andromache, widow of Hector, an African woman (associated with his great love, Jeanne Duval), and all exiles. "Paris is changing, but naught in my melancholy has moved . . . everything for me is turned to allegory, and my memories are heavier than rocks."⁴⁷ The poem thus "has the movement of a cradle rocking back and forth between modernity and antiquity."⁴⁸ Like James's Louvre, Baudelaire's Paris is a container for memories. But for the Frenchman memory "brings not recognition and homecoming, but melancholy and alienation."⁴⁹

Baudelaire thus "mobilizes the dialogic resources of intertextuality in order to reassess the Cartesian *cogito* in the context of melancholy and to propound the truth of the melancholic subject, dissolved in pensiveness, as the modern successor of an outdated classical *self*; the subject of thought."⁵⁰ The Louvre has inspired art historians, artists, critics, and creative writers. And some remarkable dreams have been set in this building. Famous paintings like *Mona Lisa* inspire revealing unconscious fantasy play. So too do grand museums. Describing Poussin's landscapes, Wollheim aptly characterizes these museum fantasies: "Thoughts and



4. Interior view, the Gallery of Apollo. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, N.Y.

feelings that lie unattended to on the edge of consciousness are successively aroused and becalmed, soothed and teased."⁵¹ The architecture is a container for a rich array of feelings which knowledge of the museum's history permits us to articulate. Try this experiment—walk through the galleries focusing not on the individual works of art but upon the collection in relation to its setting. When you treat the museum as a container for historical reflection, you see the art differently.

James was not a sympathetic reader of the poet, whose view of what he called "the moral complexities of life" he found to show "rather a dullness and permanent immaturity of vision." As he explains: "He knew evil not by experience, not as something within himself, but by contemplation and curiosity, as something outside of himself, by which his own intellectual agility was not in the least discomposed, rather indeed . . . agreeably flattered and stimulated."⁵² And yet there is one revealing parallel in their literary lives. Both men transcribed unsettling dreams set in museums.

In *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), Henry James recalls a childhood memory, "the sudden pursuit, through an open door, along a huge high saloon, of a just dimly-described figure that retreated in terror before my rush and dash . . . out of the room I had a moment before been desperately, and all the more abjectly, defending by the push of my shoulder against hard pressure on lock and bar from the other side." Then suddenly the roles of pursued and pursuer reverse. "Routed, dismayed, the tables turned upon him by my so surpassing him for straight aggression and direct intention . . . he sped for *his* life, while a great storm of thunder and lightning played through the deep embrasures of high windows on the right. . . . what in the world were the deep embrasures and the so polished floor but those of the Galerie d'Apollon of my childhood?"⁵³ Very aggressive conflicts occur within the museum.⁵⁴ James's last novel, *The Outcry* (1911), describes another nearly physically violent confrontation. A newly rich American collector pursues an English nobleman: "He jerked up his arm and guarding hand as before a levelled blow at his face, and with the other hand flung open the door, having done with her now and immediately lost to sight."⁵⁵ The collector is modeled on J. P. Morgan, and there is a young connoisseur resembling Bernard Berenson.

We might interpret James's dream by looking upward in the Galerie d'Apollon to Eugène Delacroix's *Apollo Slays Python* (fig. 5).⁵⁶ When



5. Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863). *Apollo Vanquishing Python*, central panel from the Gallery of Apollo. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: G. Blot / C. Jean, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, N.Y.

in 1674 Louis XIV made Versailles his official residence, construction in the Louvre was halted. Charles Le Brun was to paint a *Triumph of Apollo*, but this project was suspended, and only taken up again in 1850 when the decoration of the Gallery of Apollo was completed.⁵⁷ Delacroix's painting complements the late seventeenth-century images on the ceiling. "The restoration of this prestigious, although never finished and by then dilapidated, part of the Louvre was a central element of art patronage by a government anxious to reassure a wary nation of its respectability."⁵⁸ Continuity through change gave the Louvre an impressive ability to adapt itself to radically changing circumstances. *Apollo Slays Python* had been in place less than four years when James visited.

In December 1915, soon after publishing *A Small Boy and Others*, in a high fever (he was dying) Henry James dictated a very strange letter.⁵⁹

Dear and most esteemed Brother and Sister,

I call your attention to the precious enclosed transcripts of plans and designs for the decoration of certain apartments of the palaces here, the Louvre and the Tuileries, which you will find address in detail to artists and workmen who are to take them in hand. . . . It is, as you will see, of a great scope, a majesty unsurpassed by any work of the kind yet undertaken in France. . . .

Napoleone [He uses the original Corsican form of Napoleon's name.]

His brother William had been dead for more than five years, the Great War had begun and Henry, frustrated by the neutrality of his native United States, became a British citizen. No doubt Henry James would take the side of order on any struggle between the sun god Apollo and his chaos-making enemy. But a more objective observer might have noted that the true division between the good powers of light and the wicked forces of darkness was as difficult to make out as in Delacroix's painting. Just as *Apollo Slays Python* reveals deep uncertainty about the powers of light, leaving it unclear whether the god will slay the still energetic Python, so in James's dream there is an unresolvable ambiguity: Who is pursued and who is the pursuer? A monster chases James, then suddenly reverses directions and is chased by the novelist across "the deep embrasures and the so polished floor . . . of the Galerie d'Apollon on my childhood."⁶⁰ Imagine Delacroix's image as projected onto the floor below and you get the setting for this drama.

Apollo Slays Python was interpreted by Théophile Gautier as a picture well suited to the former royal palace.

On reaching the centre of the gallery, do not forget to look up, and you will be dazzled by Eugène Delacroix's "Apollo Purging the Earth of Monsters," which swarm in the primitive mud. The god, springing upon his golden car, drawn by horses as radiant as fire, as brilliant as light, bends forward and shoots his arrows at the deformed creatures, the abortions of unsuccessful Nature, which writhe hideously in convulsions of agony. His sister helps him in the divine task of making light succeed shadow, harmony, chaos, beauty ugliness. . . . It might be a flamboyant and romantic Le Brun.⁶¹

In the program distributed by Delacroix when he unveiled the painting, the story seems clear: "Mounted upon his chariot, the god has already shot a portion of his arrows; his sister Diana is flying at his heels and holding his quiver out to him. Already transfixed by the shafts of the god of warmth and life, the bloody monster writhes as it breathes forth the last remnants of its life and impotent rage in a flaming cloud."⁶² The artist alludes to the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "I can aim my shafts unerringly, to wound wild beast or human foe, as I lately slew the bloated Python with my countless arrows, though it covered so many acres with its pestilential coils."⁶³ But Delacroix doesn't explain that he presents this traditional theme in an untraditional way, making the struggle as ambiguous as in Henry James's dream.

Museums preserve precious art, but Delacroix's *Apollo Slays Python* shows that the forces of destruction are within and not merely external to civilization. In that way, this painting provides an apt commentary on the history of the building in which it is installed. The poignant photographs of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre, denuded of its art in 1914 and again during World War II, show the frailty of even that seemingly very solid institution. In the seventeenth century, allegories straightforwardly identified the king with the triumphant Apollo. Under the old regime, Apollo stood unambiguously for Louis XIV, the sun king who ended civil war and established the absolute monarchy. But during the Second Empire of Louis-Napoleon, after the revolution of 1848 and the French Revolution, such an image inevitably was ambiguous.⁶⁴ Apollo struggles—but it is by no means clear that he will triumph over Python,

who is still full of energy. Indeed, just twenty years later Louis Bonaparte lost his throne and a Republic was established. Delacroix, a misanthropic pessimist, would not have been surprised. "Is it not evident that progress, that is the progressive march of things for better or worse, has at the present time brought society to the edge of the abyss into which it can very well fall, to give way to total barbarism."⁶⁵ He ridiculed his onetime friend Baudelaire for having been a revolutionary.

In obvious ways Delacroix stands to the old master painters of the seventeenth-century very much as his patron does to the absolute monarch of LeBrun's era, Louis XIV. In a remarkable act of metamorphosis, he both preserves and transforms tradition. As always, T. J. Clark writes, Delacroix "steers the subject towards his own obsessions, makes Apollo's horses rear and bristle, fills the sea with drafting bodies and the stain of serpent's blood. This is an art closed against the world, in a double sense: private imagery, and painting which aims to continue the old tradition as if the nineteenth century did not exist. Of course that could not be done."⁶⁶ Not even Delacroix could escape being of his own time. "No public painting, at least in 1851, could avoid the business of allegory altogether . . . But . . . it should be clear what was meant, more or less against the painter's will, by the victory of revolution over monarchy as that of Louis-Napoleon over Socialism. It is a reactionary metaphor."⁶⁷ This account suggests that we link the painting to the ambivalent relationship between culture and power expressed in James's dream. A museum containing violent images reveals something of its own history.

Just as museum art deals with destruction, so too it offers a setting for erotic experience, in ways many sensitive commentators have understood. In a letter of 1856 Baudelaire recorded his dream set in a museum. "I find myself in a series of enormous, interconnecting halls—badly lit, their atmosphere melancholy and faded. . . . In a secluded part of one of these halls, I find a very unusual series: drawings, miniatures, photographic prints."⁶⁸ This museum is a brothel. Carrying a book, afraid to approach the women, Baudelaire looks at drawings depicting fetuses born to these prostitutes. A living monster sits on a pedestal. In a late essay, the poet describes how "Louise Villedieu, the five-franc whore . . . having accompanied me one day to the Louvre, where she had never been before, began blushing and covering her face with her hands. And as we stood before the immortal statues and pictures she kept plucking me by

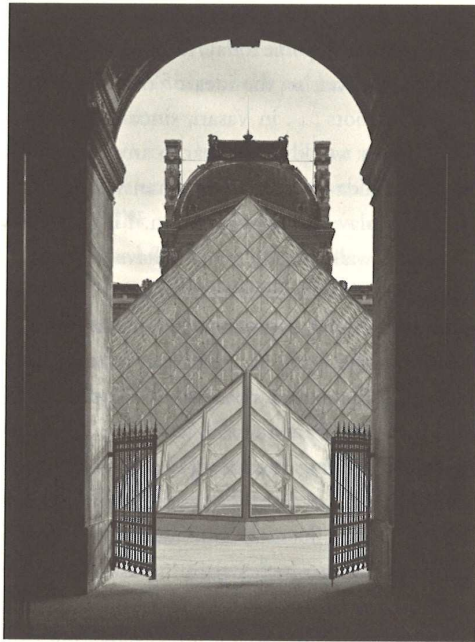
the sleeve and asking how they could exhibit such indecencies in public."⁶⁹ (The director of fine arts put fig leaves on the sculptures.)⁷⁰ This anecdote reminds us that the public collection was relatively inaccessible to poor Parisians.

Where apart from brothels might a man of Baudelaire's time have seen many naked women as in the Louvre? Even today, when visual pornography is readily accessible, museums retain their erotic potency. In her account of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Carol Duncan writes: "It is de Kooning's achievement to have opened museum culture to the potential powers of pornography."⁷¹ Because they contain many sexy pictures, museums are said to be good places to pick up dates. According to Kant's influential analysis, we respond to art by taking an aesthetic distance on its subject: "The superiority which natural beauty has over that of art, even where it is excelled by the latter in point of form . . . accords with the refined and well-grounded habits of thought of all men who have cultivated their moral feeling."⁷² In his ferocious polemical reply, Nietzsche says: "if our aestheticians never weary of asserting in Kant's favor that, under the spell of beauty, one can *even* view undraped female statues 'without interest,' one may laugh a little at their expense. . . . credit it to the honor of Kant that he should expatiate on the peculiar properties of the sense of touch with the naïveté of a country parson!"⁷³ In the Dresden *Venus* by Giorgione, for example, a picture which fascinated Nietzsche, "her hand covers her pubic hair, but whilst remaining a gesture of concealment it is no longer the classical gesture of modesty. . . . It serves as convention of pictorial seamliness by concealing the sexual fleece, but undermines the convention by depicting hand and fleece in intimate contact."⁷⁴ As a Nietzsche scholar notes: "Everything about this picture conspires to make the woman available."⁷⁵ Philip Johnson, whose career has so often been linked to museums, also has an un-Kantian view of natural beauty. When young, he "stole into a dark corner of the Cairo Museum with a museum guard for what he later called his first full-fledged, 'consummated' sexual experience."⁷⁶ A few decades later, speaking about erotic art, he said that "sex should be in pictures, why not? That slight tumescence that you feel sometimes is part of seeing."⁷⁷

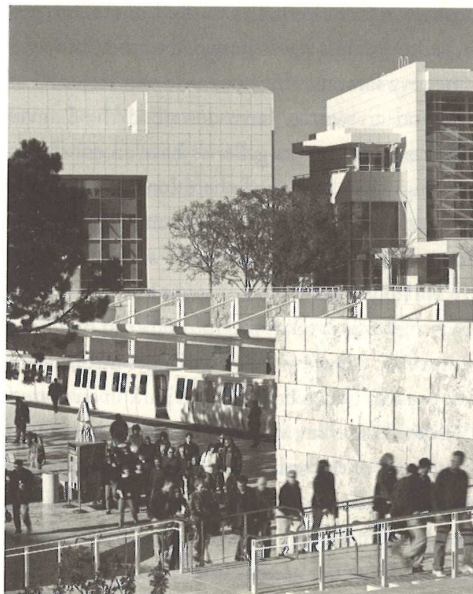
A whole history of museums might focus upon their relationship with erotic experience. *Mona Lisa*, for example, achieved its fame, in ways Mario Praz and other commentators have described in detail, as an icon

for erotic fantasies of aesthetes like Berenson. Paul Barolsky writes, "In the imagination of the Romantics and of some today, the beauty of Mona Lisa is associated with terror, but even so the idea of the connection of her beauty with terror has its roots . . . in Vasari, since he says that Leonardo's artifice in rendering her would create fear in any daring artist."⁷⁸ When recently Kimiko Yoshida photographed a transvestite coyly seated in front of the picture, he played on this tradition.⁷⁹ If you enter the Louvre as soon as it opens and walk quickly, you will have Leonardo's painting to yourself for about five minutes. "Hers is the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions," Walter Pater writes.⁸⁰ The mob of tourists who soon arrive to crowd round this small painting, looking at nothing else, have not read Pater and indeed do not know his name, but they are responding to the mystique created in part by his very influential commentary. As Darian Leader says, "The *Mona Lisa* is not so much a painting as the symbol of painting itself."⁸¹ To understand its role it helps to know that in 1695 the painting was in Versailles; that around 1750 it was neglected, but that in July 1797 Fragonard brought it from Versailles to the Louvre. In 1800 Napoleon placed it in his bedroom, but it was returned to the Louvre in 1804.⁸² And after it became very famous, this Leonardo was stolen.

Because so many artists and art writers have described the Louvre and even dreamt about their experiences, its galleries have an enormous historical resonance. Knowing what happened there long ago informs present experience. By contrast, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, completed only in 1997, is in a new American city whose most famous indigenous art form is Hollywood movies. You go into the Louvre through I. M. Pei's new pyramid, which takes you into very old buildings (fig. 6). Almost no one enters the Getty by walking. To get into Meier's building, most visitors exit the San Diego Freeway and park in an underground garage. To enter a typical older art museum, you walk up a flight of marble steps to be elevated out of the ordinary world. The Getty tram taking you from the main parking lot up to the museum is an elongated electric version of that grand staircase (fig. 7). As you ascend, you hear the swoosh of a mechanical propulsion system. Or you can walk, and then when the footpath swings out to the left, high above the hill, you



6. I. M. Pei (1917–).
The glass pyramid in
the Cour Napoléon
of the Louvre. Photo:
Erich Lessing / Art
Resource, N.Y.



7. J. Paul Getty Mu-
seum, entrance tram.
Photo: John Linden.
© 2002 J. Paul Getty
Trust.

are almost alone. When again you are close to the tram, the roar of the traffic from the very busy freeway, five lanes in each direction, blurs to become background noise, like the ocean but with a higher pitch. Viewing the nearby mansions of Beverly Hills and Brentwood and the sprawling poorer parts of L.A. in the distance, you may recall that oil from iconophobic Saudi Arabia helps make possible the never ceasing flow of traffic far below.

Almost all of the paintings on display in the Getty could be moved to the Louvre—and the European art in the Louvre might be exhibited at the Getty. But how different would these works of art appear when moved between these settings. Seen in Paris, a Poussin naturally inspires reflection upon the history of French collecting. Set in Los Angeles, that same painting rather leads to thoughts about the new wealth that makes possible the display of European old masters in Southern California. Here then are the two most different large museums of European art imaginable—a former palace housing the first grand public museum and the newest large American museum displaying old master art. At the Getty the art is old but the setting is very new. And so a different museum interpretation is called for. But like the Louvre, the Getty too is concerned with “beauty and art, history and fame and power.”

The older Louvre collection came from the French kings and upon Napoleon's imperial adventures. J. Paul Getty, the son of a prosperous Los Angeles businessman, left \$700 million to found a museum. “Modern museology,” Hilton Kramer has written, “aims to separate the art object from the accidents of ownership and let it stand permanently free in its own universe of discourse.”⁸³ But neither in the Louvre nor at the Getty is this really possible, for you need only look beyond the frames of their paintings to see how art's display depends on what surely are not entirely accidents of ownership. In Paris, as in L.A., the art on display really cannot stand free from its museum context. Like Kramer, philosophers of art following Kant often speak of disinterested aesthetic pleasure. When viewing visual art, so they argue, we detach ourselves from practical concerns. Thinking in those terms makes it impossible to understand museums. The terminology in Louis Marin's epigraph for this chapter would have puzzled James and Baudelaire, but they both understood perfectly well the connection that he makes between museums and power. “The successful unmasking of *things* in order to reveal

(social) relationships," a French leftist writes, "remains the most durable accomplishment of Marxist thought."⁸⁴ We non-Marxists can productively borrow that way of thinking for in France, a social historian has recently observed, "things are much the same three hundred years ago as they are today."⁸⁵ The monarchs, Napoleon and his successors, the presidents of the various republics—all associated displays of art with the state's interests.

The Getty is privately funded, but its trustees think of collecting as an appropriate way to display the fruits of J. Paul Getty's economic success. In L.A., too, the importance of museum tradition is thus manifest. The Louvre and the Getty, impressive buildings in great cities, display an obvious capacity for conspicuous consumption. The mere materials of painting are banal things with little intrinsic worth. But great works of art are treasures. The museum buildings in Paris and L.A. are indeed grand, but without their art they would be mere empty shells. Why then, for the Getty's trustees as much as for Louis XIV, James and Baudelaire, is there an intimate link between visual art and power? Answering that question is the concern of the next chapter.

Chapter 1: On Entering the Louvre

1. Nowadays museum hangings change frequently. I have not generally dated my examples, which are based upon more than twenty years of remembered visits.
2. Nehamas, *Nietzsche*, 108.
3. Here I extend Carrier, *High Art*, 97–102.
4. Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750*, 160.
5. Stokes, *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes*, 3:335.
6. Danto, *The Madonna of the Future*, 94.
7. Steinberg, *Michelangelo's Last Paintings*, 6.
8. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 13.
9. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 250. See also Carrier, *Writing about Visual Art*, 14–17.
10. Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings*, 131–32.
11. See Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin*, 506.
12. Bal, *Double Exposures*, 89.
13. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 95.
14. Levi, "Art Museums and Culture," 389.
15. Goethe, *The Autobiography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*, 346–47.
16. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse*, 180.
17. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body*, 89.
18. Buck, "Museum Authority and Performance," 310.
19. Gaskell, *Vermeer's Wager*, 90.
20. Newhouse, *Toward a New Museum*, 142, 217.
21. D. Davis, *The Museum Transformed*, 74, 174.
22. Bazin, *The Museum Age*, and von Holst, *Creators, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*.
23. Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, 233, 232.
24. Bann, "Meaning/Interpretation," 128.
25. James, *A Small Boy and Others*, 352.
26. Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, 321.
27. Gowing, "A History of the Louvre's Collection."
28. Schnapper, "The King of France as Collector in the Seventeenth Century," 199–200.
29. Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World*, 51.
30. Quoted in McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 91.
31. See Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum*, chapter 2.
32. Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 5:xiii, 1825, 1832, 1852. On Farington, see the editors' introduction, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, vol. 1.

33. McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 140. Before the Revolution, Denon had traveled extensively in Italy; see Denon, *Pages d'un journal de voyage en Italie* (1788). In the company of Napoleon's army, he traveled to Egypt in 1798; see Denon and el-Gabarti, *Sur l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte*, and also, for the political context, Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 28. The fullest account of his career and collecting is the exhibition catalogue Rosenberg and Dupuy, *Dominique-Vivant Denon*. See also Gould, *Trophy of Conquest*.

34. St. John, *The Louvre, or Biography of a Museum*, 10.

35. See Blunt, "Poussin Studies VI"; Kloss, *Samuel F. B. Morse*, 127–30; Raditsich, *Hubert Robert*, 131–33; and Jullian, "Le thème des ruines."

36. Nochlin, "Museums and Radicals," 36.

37. Giacometti, *Écrits*, 255.

38. See Galard and Charrier, *Visiteurs du Louvre*.

39. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 15.

40. Morton, *Americans in Paris*, 27.

41. James, *A Small Boy and Others*, 345, 346–47, 348, 348–49.

42. Baedeker, *Paris and Environs*, 141.

43. A modern account notes that "the influential figures who wrote about the ceiling, from Delécluze to Gustave Planche, expressed a few reservations at most. . . . 'We know that when we look at one of M. Delacroix's paintings we must pass lightly over the details . . . ' wrote Delécluze. . . . Charles Tillot's remarks are more interesting because he identifies the difficulties peculiar to decorative painting. . . . Should one go further and see in *Apollo Slays Python* an allegory for Delacroix himself, his work, and his ongoing struggle? As Lee Johnson has rightly noted, the idea occurred to certain critics at the time; he reports Auguste Vacquerie's words as follows: 'Assigned to paint the triumph of light—he who has caused light to triumph in the French school—he was sure to win. . . .' It is less certain that Delacroix cleverly insinuated either himself or allusions to contemporary political and social developments into the battle of the god of the arts.

This intertextual narrative looks back and forth from the picture itself to the various commentaries" (Jobert, *Delacroix*, 215–16).

44. See Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 22.

45. The elaborate literature on the poem is usefully summarized in Gasarian, "Le Cygne" of Baudelaire."

46. Baudelaire, *The Complete Verse*, 172.

47. *Ibid.*, 176.

48. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 356.

49. Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*, 160.

50. Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy*, 207.

51. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, 213.

52. James, *Selected Literary Criticism*, 27–28.
53. James, *A Small Boy and Others*, 348–49.
54. See Boon, “Why Museums Make Me Sad.” At the time of the dream, late 1910, James had been depressed. “Since the dream contained a vigorous moment of self-assertion and putting to flight of a frightening other-self (or brother) it may have helped restore to James . . . confidence and faith in himself” (Edel, *Henry James*, 445, 551).
55. James, *The Outcry*, 140.
56. Here I follow Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James*, 4–5.
57. See Laclotte, “A History of the Louvre’s Collection.”
58. Rubin, “Delacroix and Romanticism,” 42.
59. Edel, *Henry James*, 547, 552.
60. James, *A Small Boy and Others*, 349.
61. *The Travels of Théophile Gautier*, 39–40.
62. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 55.
63. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, 41.
64. See Hannoosh, *Painting and the Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, chapter 5.
65. *Ibid.*, 169.
66. T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*, 141.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Butor, *Histoire Extraordinaire*, 12.
69. Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, 92.
70. Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:1511.
71. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 123. See also Duncan, *The Aesthetics of Power*, part 2.
72. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 158.
73. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 104.
74. Melville, *Erotic Art of the West*, 110.
75. Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision*, 62.
76. Schulze, *Philip Johnson*, 41–42.
77. Quoted in Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 340.
78. Barolsky, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles*, 62.
79. See Spitz, “Tattoos and Teddy Bears.”
80. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 98.
81. Leader, *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, 4.
82. Sassoon, *Becoming Mona Lisa*, 42–43.
83. Quoted in Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 69.
84. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 81.
85. Ladurie with Fitou, Saint-Simon, and the Court of Louis XIV, 141.