

**The Art Museum in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**  
**J. J. Winckelmann's Influence on the Establishing of the Classical**  
**Paradigm of the Art Museum**

ABSTRACT

The essay discusses the German philologist, archaeologist and historian J.J. Winckelmann's theoretical influence on the conception of the Classical museum model as defined and established by the Louvre within the nineteenth-century in Paris. From its initiation, the Louvre would furnish an example for the Metropolitan and for scores of galleries around the world to replicate. This would include the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the National Archaeological Museum of Athens and the Ancient Iran Museum in Tehran. Winckelmann's historicism would encourage the implementation of new ideas and practices related to the meaning and connoisseurship of art and aesthetics in Western Europe within nineteenth-century gallery systems as they began to develop new practices for displaying art in which the singling out of specific cultures within an historic hierarchical context would become prominent. (McClellan, 3-4). The essay discusses how Winckelmann's ideas would inspire a curatorial system and condition of representation of art for the Louvre as the Classical museum paradigm established in the nineteenth-century.

In Book 1 of *The History of Ancient Art: 'The Origins of Art and the Causes of its Difference among Different Nations'* J. J. Winckelmann had brought to light the unique character of each culture from the past based upon the idea that history flowed in cycles of growth and decay. He had set this out in order to understand specific various cultures through individual scrutiny. Central to his forming an understanding of the art of this past had been his process of categorising artworks by dividing them up into a hierarchy of 'period styles' rather than as a sequence of artists. Through this, Winckelmann would conceive " ... the history of ancient art as an organic process, dividing it into four periods, each with its own style". (Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), 59). This would comprise his 'Life-Cycle' theory or 'Cycle of Culture' theory, which was defined as to proceed from the early or archaic style (before Phidias), through the sublime or grand (Phidias and his contemporaries), the beautiful (Praxiteles to Lysippas); and the long period of imitative style which lasted until the fall of the Roman Empire. (Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), 59). (His creation of a history of Greek art and a system of chronological classification in art history in this way resulted in an artistic tradition that still reigns today).

During the late-eighteenth-century, Winckelmann's ideas on art would influence the Classical or traditional art museum proto-typical framework of the nineteenth-century. While the theoretical implications within the Enlightenment period of Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theories had encouraged much of the late eighteenth-century art cognoscenti within Western Europe to think differently about beauty in relation to art, the rigid classicism and hierarchising contained within Winckelmann's theories would be influential for the invention of a system of curatorship that strongly would shape the institutional framework of the Louvre as the first real public art museum. From the nineteenth-century the Louvre would furnish an example for the Metropolitan and for scores of galleries around the world to replicate.

Winckelmann's importance for the proto-typical nineteenth-century art museum model would stem from his interest in the beauty of ancient Greek civilisation and in classifying art by hierarchy. Preceding his ideas, art galleries had "... juxtaposed works by different artists and of different genres" (Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum, Elitism and Democracy* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1997), 21-2) which had been based upon the idea that "... a painting contained the four elements of colour, design, composition, and expression and that one could best study painting by comparing each individual element". (Nancy Einreinhofer, *The American Art Museum, Elitism and Democracy* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1997), 21-2). After Winckelmann, however, during the nineteenth-century, this method was replaced by a system of hanging paintings which could reveal the "... historical evolution within national schools". (McClellan, 3).

During his lifetime, Winckelmann had felt that the art of Classical Greece had established an eternal benchmark for 'ideal beauty', which was based upon the physical attributes of its own race and believed that the "... decline of modern art was such that it doomed the contemporary artist to inferiority". (Alex Potts, "Political Attitudes and the Rise of Historicism in Art Theory," *Art History* (June, 1978): 194) In his *History of Ancient Art* (1764), called the first modern art historical text because it "framed" the subjects of history and aesthetics "heteronomously" (Kevin Parker, "Winckelmann, Historical Difference, and the Problem of the Boy," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25.4 (1992): 525) Winckelmann had stressed that the art of his time was inferior in beauty and perfection to the art of the past and held that if one could position a love of Classical antiquity (particularly Greek sculpture) above all else they would ennoble themselves and improve society. Although his writings on the art of classical antiquity had been part of a long tradition of studying the Classical past which stretched back to the Renaissance, before Winckelmann, "... each generation did not accept identical aspects of the classical past; each selected only that part relevant to its own ideas". (David Irwin, *Winckelmann Writings on Art* (London and New York: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1972), 11). In contrast, Winckelmann, however, gazed back at the past and took it as a whole. This had encouraged created a new way to look at art.

In the mid-eighteenth-century, it had been quite common for speculative philosophical discussions regarding the patterns of artistic development to take place. These were normally held by philosophers and were not usually related to the connoisseurship of art and painting. Winckelmann's role and achievement for the nineteenth-century was to unite the two. (Alex Potts, "Winckelmann's Construction of History," *Art History*, 5.4 (1982): 377-407).

By the late eighteenth-century, Winckelmann's view on the history of art would filter into Western European cultural theory, and:

... began to achieve ... widespread currency in the late 1780s. It then became enshrined in two major 'standard' publications on the visual arts, F.W.B. von Ramdohr's *Uber Mahlerei und Bildhauerkunst in Rom* of 1787, and Watelet and Levesque's *Dictionnaire des Arts de Peinture, Sculpture et Gravure* of 1788-91, incorporated in the *Encyclopedie Methodique*. (Potts, "Political Attitudes," 194)

Winckelmann's view on the beauty of the ancient Greek world gave birth to a discussion on the rise and fall of art within an historical framework, which became cited as a 'reliable index' for the broader cultural debates that would consist of many shades

of estimation of the different levels of artistic perfection existing within Western European culture and society. In relation to this, the validity of Winckelmann's 'Life-Cycle' theory was debated and the question was raised regarding whether contemporary developments in European art and culture could gainsay his theory as civilisation attempted to transform itself from its antique origins. From around this time, in Western Europe a decisive shift for museum and gallery presentation would occur as galleries previously organised to reveal the wealth of "princely rule" became occluded or "superseded", (McClellan, 3-4.) and within Vienna's Imperial Gallery, its ornate baroque gallery was transformed into the first historical survey museum, as all work belonging to an individual artist was demarcated and distinguished from other artists in the group accordingly. (McClellan, 4.) Within this, artworks through their juxtapositioning, were classified and displayed by "style" and "national school". (McClellan, 4.) Paintings belonging to different schools would be separated from each other as new aesthetic categories would be based on a new hierarchical order. This curatorial practice in the gallery would begin to take shape within the foremost centres for public art display such as the Louvre in Paris, which would incorporate into its methods for displaying art the essence behind Winckelmann's life-cycle theory by taking the idea of hierarchy and historical classification as a way to position its collection of art from collapsed (or vanished) civilisations of the world with newfound resonance.

#### THE LOUVRE

In accord with Winckelmann's love of Classical antiquity, the Louvre's would 'affect' a sober classicism which could preserve and uphold the values of ancient Greece and Rome, which, for the French would be associated with Classical beauty, truth and "... to the creation or restoration of a static and harmonious society..." (Honour, 13.) As a result, neo-classicism, as Blaney-Brown would point out "... and its values of logic, harmony and proportion..." (David Blaney Brown, *Romanticism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2001), 9.) in France, from the late eighteenth-century would find its perfect expression in the Louvre which, as Honour states, "... had been founded on unfaltering principles, a dream of classic perfection...". (Honour, 13.) Curatorially, by focusing on unique historical periods of art through its methods for displaying art the Louvre would attempt to reveal that each culture has its own distinct character. It would do this by constituting linearly, in a chronological and sequential series of rational progressions, Winckelmann's Life-Cycle theory, - (that had charted art's history from a state of healthy youthfulness towards maturity, decadence, old age and death) to display its artworks from all over the world as a series of hierarchical and progressive accomplishments. This new and extremely influential curatorial practice would parallel Winckelmann's rationalist discussions on the hierarchy of cultures and period styles brought forward by his predilection for Hellenic Classicism. As a result, after Winckelmann, within the Louvre's neo-classical ceremonial architecture, Classical art would be situated at the beginning of its display narrative of artworks. In this context, the placing of artworks in a sequential order that could comparatively present human achievement as an historical development of period styles of art Classical art at the start of the hierarchy (as a benchmark of quality) would be used to tell of the evolution of artistic accomplishments of various civilisations throughout the world. By situating Classical art at the beginning of its curatorial narrative the Louvre would define the Classical structure of the nineteenth-century or traditional art museum model. Upon entry to the Louvre, visitors would have to pass Classical Greek sculpture before finding French sculpture at the other end of the Louvre's narrative of art, that is, at the

other end of the gallery. (Gabriele Bartz and Eberhard König's *Art and Architecture: Louvre*, Cologne, Konemann Verlagesellschaft, 2005.) As a result of employing the exhibition space of the museum as the symbol of 'Western culture' in this way, the Louvre would construct its narratives of legitimacy. Yet against this new paradigm for art display, many, particularly in the nineteenth-century, had opposed it.

Rather than support the Museum's imbrication of ancient cultures, a number of artists and writers had envisaged a creative and spiritual freedom derived more from the data of human practical experience than from a history of art, which had positioned Classical art so prominently which, for them, would exist as an historical limitation. Pparticularly within the arts a widespread rejection of the new institutionalised forms of authority would occur. Theories and prescriptive doctrines such as Winckelmann's, (which had nominated that art's history be a history of styles rather than of artists) had existed as anathema for those not wishing to be judged by the standards of a supposedly superior race enforced by the institution. As a notable dissident of the idea of the nineteenth-century museum as defined by the Louvre, French writer Quatremere de Quincy would intransigently develop his criticism and analysis of its imbrication of Classical art. Quatremere in particular, castigating the Louvre as existing as a paradigm of alienated art in his *Les Considerations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (1815), had condemned the Louvre's iconographic nationalism through the imbrication of Classical statues.(Jean-Louis Deotte, "Rome, the Archetypal Museum, and the Louvre, the Negation of Division," in Donald Preziosi and Clare Farago (eds.), *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 51-65. For him, these would epitomise barbarity as they functioned to displace and dislodge the archetypal open-air museum of ancient Rome which would possess the "universal knowledge" belonging only to antiquity. For Quatremere, the continuity of Rome as the archetypal art museum had been broken down by the Louvre's displacement of the treasures of antiquity, which had existed previously in its vastness as the 'universal knowledge' of the world. (Jean-Louis Deotte, 56-59.) This was seen as problematic due to the Louvre's system of hierarchy/classification or "continuity" which would present art as a "complete series" in itself. (Jean-Louis Deotte, 54.)

Regardless, in the years immediately following the turbulence of the Napoleonic wars, an ever-increasing quantity of people from abroad visited France. Many of them would have almost certainly have come to Paris to visit its cultural institutions of which the Louvre would exist as a dominant attraction for those with a connoisseurial desire to experience much of the world's art, culture and civilisation.(Theodore Zeldin 'France 1848-1945' *Intellect and Pride*, Oxford University Press, 1980, 86.)

#### THE LOUVRE'S INFLUENCE ON THE CLASSICAL STRUCTURE OF THE 19TH-CENTURY MUSEUM

During the nineteenth-century, a number of museum directors from various countries would visit the Louvre as the prototypical paradigm of the Classical art museum and were "... greatly influenced by what they saw". (McClellan, 200.) The model of the Louvre would be influential for the conception of other museums globally and large-scale national museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York would attempt in many ways, to duplicate it. As such, from the Metropolitan's initiation in 1872 its curatorial display narrative would be arranged in an attempt to influence public taste through an appreciation of the seductive charm and extensive histories of the multitudinous master artworks displayed from various civilisations of the world. In

nineteenth-century America, the founding of a national public art museum, one based on the example established by the Louvre had embodied the aspirations of its people who had felt that they had much in common with France and its struggles for freedom during the French Revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this time, much of American society had wanted to emulate French art and culture. Due to an affinity many Americans felt they had with France after the American Civil War Americans sought to rebuild their nation by attempting to echo the processes inherent in the unification of France after the French Revolutions. (Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, 11.) All over America, in many major cities, Americans celebrated France's newly found freedom. (L. J. Reynolds, p. 11.) In New York, speeches and celebrations took place amongst hundreds of immigrants newly arrived from Europe who had rejoiced in the outcome of the French Revolutions. (L. J. Reynolds, p. 11.) Much of this spirit was also celebrated in the American literature of the period as well as being reported widely in the American newspapers. Moreover, there was a literary culture dedicated to French and European politics, culture and thought.

For American writers, the French Revolution of 1848 in particular was of great interest. Major American writers Fuller, Hawthorn, Melville and Whitman had shared and expressed through their writings a common attitude that was in support for what was going on in France. Images of war, and of the fight for freedom, became commonplace in much of their work. (Reynolds.) For these, the French Revolution of 1848 had been of great interest and many of them would visit or live in Europe during this period. As Reynolds states, "Of all the revolutions that occurred in 1848, the French revolution made the greatest impression upon the American public and American writers". (Reynolds, 5.) Included in the affinity they had felt would be support for the French Revolutionary poet Lamartine who was known to them as a peacemaker: "To many Americans ... Lamartine seemed, especially after the Red Revolution, a heroic man of peace, a living part of heaven (like the sky-hawk of Moby Dick), too divine for the world of men". (Reynolds, 97-8.) In fact, the American writer James Russell Lowell had paid Lamartine a tribute in his ode To Lamartine, 1848. (Reynolds, 98-100.) Although Lamartine came to be regarded generally as a failure for the French (for not restoring peace) this had not been how many Americans had felt. As well as the French's political struggles earlier, what these writers had all celebrated was faith in liberty and human rights which had been seen by them to have been acquired by this time by the French. As such, "The writer T.B. Read penned "France is Free", which appeared in numerous periodicals and revealed how revolutionary events quickly became literary material". (Reynolds, 10.) By the 1850s, French ideology; reasoning and political thought had become embedded in American society. Many writers either had visited or lived in Europe during this period. (Reynolds, 10.) Influential American literary figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hermann Melville, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau (among others suggesting the need for the founding of an American museum) found much inspiration in the spirit and values that the French Revolutions had for them appeared to embody. In their writings these writers all expressed support for what was going on in France. (Reynolds, 53.)

#### THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

In a desire to emulate "Old World" nineteenth-century palaces such as the Louvre, the Metropolitan's trustees constructed a museum which could house treasures similar to

those found in the great museums of Europe. As Einreinhofer states, “The influence of the Louvre was felt across Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean to the shores of America. It was seen as a symbol of the triumph of democracy, equality, and freedom: the world’s first great public museum, a palace filled with the world’s art treasures, open to all the people. The architecture and the encyclopaedic contents were powerful symbols of intellectual, moral, and democratic progress and inspired the parts of the Metropolitan Museum to strive to build a collection of similar status”. (Einreinhofer, 28.) Much like the Louvre, the interior spaces of the Metropolitan were built to be as elaborate and impressive as the enormous exterior form of the building which was designed to perpetuate the notion of art, knowledge and wealth as being central to American culture. (Einreinhofer, 24-5.) To achieve this at the Metropolitan, from very early enormous amounts of Ancient Greek and Roman art were purchased and prominently displayed in a narrative sequence which could tell the history of art in the form of a hierarchy of separate and distinct civilisations. As Carol Duncan observes, “New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example, was directly inspired by the Louvre”. (Carol Duncan, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship”, in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 99.)

These narratives would be arranged to situate American art within a museum filled with Classical masterpieces which could position the quality of the American nation’s art at the ‘pinnacle’ of high culture and refinement. Following the Louvre, Classical art would be situated at the start of a narrative in prominent parts of the Metropolitan. In this way, art would appear to progressively increase in quality and importance culminating in American art. This had reflected the Metropolitan’s trustees’ decision to “... group together the masterpieces of different countries and times in such relation and sequence as to illustrate the history of art in the broadest sense, to make plain its teaching and to inspire and direct its national development”. (Calvin Tomkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 99.) Its Classical Department established in 1909 would “actively” purchase enormous amounts of Greek, Etruscan and Roman bronzes and statues such as the archaic Greek marble statue Kouros, bronze Sleeping Eros and Roman marble Aphrodite as well as and numerous other Classical artworks for the Museum. (Tomkins., 23-5.) Visitors to the Metropolitan entering from its main entrance are flanked by Classical art and architecture on the left and Egyptian antiquities on the right. Situated ahead of this is European sculpture and decorative arts from the Renaissance to the twentieth-century and then the American Wing. A similar curatorial plan is repeated on the Museum’s second floor as visitors pass the great works of ancient civilisations in order to reach the American art section. Within the hierarchy of art, Classical art as a benchmark of quality, would be placed at the beginning of the visitor’s journey through galleries arranged to influence public taste.

#### THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF ATHENS, THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES AND THE ANCIENT IRAN MUSEUM

In addition to the Metropolitan, much of the Louvre’s system for displaying art was repeated at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (NMA). Established in 1889, the NMA would structure its art collection within a chronological hierarchical sequence of art which begins with ancient Greek artworks from Neolithic, Cycladic, Mycenaean to Roman periods from 700 BC to the beginning of the Byzantine era. By following a chronological and hierarchical system of display largely based upon

Winckelmann's historicist outlook, the Athens Museum would situate Greek art within its own history of art, which it presents as a prescriptive historical doctrine within this nineteenth-century style museum. Other disciples or adherents of the Louvre's paradigm would include the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (est. 1902) and the Ancient Iran Museum in Tehran (est. 1937).

In addition to the NMA, the Cairo Museum's arrangement of art would also follow a hierarchical system of display, and on the ground floor and opposite the entrance to the Museum a prominent symbol of ancient Classical Egyptian culture is situated. This is a statue of the Egyptian king Amenhotep IV (1351-1334 B.C.). A similar statue of the same king is situated in the Egyptian section of the Louvre. Situated around this, is a hierarchical order of ancient Classical Egyptian history devoted to form a statistical study of inheritance-as a linear progression. Its classificatory system of display based on historical continuity structured to convey the narrative of the Egyptian nation would be organised in an attempt to complete the evolutionary picture. Additionally, neo-classical architecture on the building's façade would be used to cast its visitors in the role of citizen within a city of mainly Islamic architecture. While Cairo's architecture had tended to be predominantly Islamic, the diversity of Cairo reflected a city of culture and civilisation which allowed the re-living of its history. Educated in Paris, Isma'il Pasha, known as Ismail the Magnificent (December 31, 1830–March 2, 1895) was khedive of Egypt from 1863 until he was removed at the behest of the British in 1879. While in power he greatly modernised Egypt. By admiring the architecture of Paris he would transport French ideas on his return in 1896 to Cairo. This would result in a trend which had influenced architecture from government buildings down to the vernacular of rural construction. As a result, international canons of architecture would be accepted despite their fundamental and essential nature being foreign. (Egyptian Museum, Cairo (texts by Sergio Donadoni; translated from the Italian) (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1970). In this way, the Cairo Museum as a nineteenth-century style museum furnishes its possessions and cultural heritage with historical depth and intransience. It is important to stress that the Museum was established to unify the nation by attempting to inspire and instil a sense of pride in the modern population which would derive from the situating of its heritage and cultural possessions.

In addition to the Cairo Museum, the Ancient Iran Museum's curatorial display narratives upon entry also begins as a chronological sequence of art (following from right to left) with Pre-historical Iranian art and civilisation, which culminates in the artworks of the Achaemenian Era (550 BC–330 BC). Curatorially, the Museum follows the political and ideological strategies or chronological display narratives established by the Louvre in the nineteenth-century. These are positioned strategically to show the evolution and artistic development of ancient Iranian civilisation.

## Conclusion

The framework of the nineteenth-century museum paradigm exemplified by the Louvre, Metropolitan, the NMA, the Cairo Museum and the Ancient Iran Museum all would follow the Louvre's strategies for displaying art which would, to a large degree reflect Winckelmann's theoretical influence. The hierarchical positioning of categories in art in relation to classifying different period styles of art and civilisations alongside Classical art and culture as acknowledged masterpieces that begin a narrative journey through the nineteenth-century museum had come from Winckelmann who had "... abstracted and transposed the like-cycle model onto entire cultures". (Parker, 526.) While the major nineteenth-century museums discussed here and others would be indebted to the Louvre for providing the framework of the Classical museum a great deal of the establishing and creation of the Classical art museum's overall structure had come from Winckelmann, who, as Irwin points out, would unite: "... two different interpretations of classical architecture current in the eighteenth-century: on the one hand the belief that beauty of Greek architecture was timeless and absolute, and on the other hand that beauty was relative". (Ibid., 23-4.) Thus Winckelmann's sorrow that Greek art and the nature that had produced it was dead within his time would, in a sense, be made to seem unfounded by the Louvre, the Metropolitan and scores of nineteenth-century – style museums around the globe which would "... recuperate this lost nature, this nature mort, as a form of knowledge..." by filling their galleries with Classical art. (Parker, 529.) As Irwin makes clear in relation to Winckelmann, "His 'noble simplicity' in ancient Greece finds an echo in the theories of the Revivalists". (Irwin, 24.)

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