The Académie Royale Art Collection

Deadline: Sep 30, 2022

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Our book aspires to highlight the importance of the art collection that the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture assembled in the century and a half of its existence (1648-1793) and show that this unique, yet almost entirely unstudied, body of works is essential to our understanding of eighteenth-century art and institutional practices.

The Académie royale art collection consisted mainly of reception pieces – the works that young artists submitted for examination by the academic jury to become full members of the institution. It also included miscellaneous donated artworks as well as portraits of the Académie's patrons that the institution frequently commissioned from current members. Around 300 paintings and some 30 sculptures were on display in the Académie's rooms at the Louvre and daily surrounded the artists who lived and worked there. The latter could also consult a rich collection of engravings at the Académie's print room.

The collection was a unique corpus for multiple reasons. Firstly, as almost all the prominent old regime artists were members of the Académie royale, it united such iconic reception pieces as Watteau's Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera (1717), Chardin's Ray (1728) and Greuze's Septimius Severus and Caracalla (1769). Secondly, these and other examinational works now offer invaluable insights into academic reception practices and aesthetic values as much as the commissioned portraits of the Académie's patrons – into its behind-the-scenes personal networks. Finally, the hang of the works in the Louvre is an outstanding example of eighteenth-century curatorial work: since the collection's arrangement was decided upon by academicians themselves, it stands an important 'internal' counterpart to the Académie's public display, the Salons.

After the French Revolution, this one-of-a-kind body of works got dispersed and is shared today by the Louvre, the Versailles, the ENSBA, and several French regional museums. Thankfully, however, two detailed descriptions are still extant: in 1715, when the collection was housed on the Louvre's ground floor, it was documented by Nicolas Guérin (Paris: J. Collombat), and in 1781, when it moved to the first floor, it was recorded by Antoine-Nicolas Dezallier d'Argenville (Paris: De Bure). In 1893, the two descriptions were republished as one volume by Anatole de Montaiglon. Two key critical works on the collection are the exhibition catalogue Les peintres du roi, 1648-1793 (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000) and Hannah Williams's monograph Académie Royale: A History in Portraits (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

The present book is part of the project run by the DFK Paris in collaboration with the Centre Dominique-Vivant Denon (Louvre) and the INHA that aspires to reconstruct the collection digitally and build a database of the works that constituted it.

We invite contributions that define the role of the Académie royale art collection and discuss its history and arrangement. Issues of our interest include but are not limited to:

- Collection arrangement: How did the hangs of the collection on the first and the ground floor of the Louvre differ? What were the guiding principles of the collection's arrangement? What role did genre play in it? What was the function of different rooms and how did the works adorning the room reflect it? Did the arrangement reflect the Académie's institutional hierarchy? How did prints, sculptures, and paintings that formed the collection work together?

- Instructive function of the collection: How did these sculptures, paintings, and prints, seen by the Académie's students on day-to-day basis, influence their work? What message (if any) did they convey?

- Reception pieces: What role did the reception play in the artist's career? What was the canon of academic reception pieces? How did it help crystallise the academic genre classification?

- Commissioned portraits: Who were the Académie's patrons whose portraits the institution commissioned from its members? What role did these patrons play in the history of the Académie royale? How were they related to each other and what was their specific interest in sponsoring the institution?

- Conférences de l'Académie royale: How do the lectures that the members regularly delivered at the Académie royale relate to the collection? How do both reflect the Académie's institutional and aesthetic values? What is the significance of the Salle d'Assemblée as the centre of the institutional life of the Académie royale?

- Dispersal of the collection: How were the works constituting the collection distributed after the French Revolution? What were the unique stories of these paintings, prints, and sculptures post-1793?

Contributions are welcome in English or French and are expected to be between 5,000 and 15,000 words in length. If you are interested, please send a short 300-word abstract and a brief 50-word biography to Sofya Dmitrieva sofya.k.dmitrieva@gmail.com by September 30, 2022. The deadline for selected contributions will be March 31, 2023.

Reference:

CFP: The Académie Royale Art Collection. In: ArtHist.net, Aug 1, 2022 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/37263>.