

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAJOR DELACROIX PAINTING FROM LOUVRE

ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY MAY 15

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 19, 1979. A monument in the history of Romantic painting, Eugène Delacroix's Dante and Virgil in Hell, will be lent to the National Gallery of Art by the Musée du Louvre, Paris, for exhibition in a gallery of paintings of the French Romantic period, in conjunction with the festival, "Paris: The Romantic Epoch," at the Kennedy Center May 15 through May 26, offering opera, oratorio, chamber music, theater, poetry and dance. The paintings will go on view May 15 and remain through September 3.

Also on loan from the Louvre will be Delacroix's Portrait of Chopin and Gustave Courbet's Portrait of Berlioz, as well as Delacroix's Paganini, lent by the Phillips Collection in Washington. The paintings will be on view with other works of the period by Delacroix, Géricault, Millet, Courbet and Corot in the Gallery's permanent collection.

Dante and Virgil in Hell (6' 2 3/8" x 7' 11") by Delacroix (1798-1863) was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1822 and purchased for the state's collection. Inspired by Dante's Inferno, the painting depicts the Latin poet Virgil, wearing a laurel crown, taking Dante across the underworld's infernal lake of souls struggling to climb aboard the boat. The monumental, muscular figures are placed forward against the picture plane, bringing

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them close to the viewer. A sense of drama and movement is convincingly conveyed by strong diagonals. Small speckles of color on the bodies in the water was Delacroix's first attempt to produce an appearance of sparkling light, inspired by Rubens. Several of the poses were derived from Michelangelo and Rubens, and the boatman is based on the Hellenistic Belvedere torso.

Delacroix's Portrait of Chopin (17 3/4" x 15") of 1838, is also thought to be one of the artist's masterpieces. In loose brushstrokes, Delacroix portrayed the essence of man and music and the composer's total involvement with his art. Originally it was a double portrait depicting Chopin playing the piano while his mistress, the writer George Sand, looks on admiringly. The picture was cut in two by 1873, possibly to settle a dispute between some heirs.

Close in spirit to the Chopin portrait is Delacroix's portrait of Niccolò Paganini, the Genoese violinist who for years caused excitement in the concert halls of Europe with his virtuoso playing and eccentric manner. A very small panel (17 1/4" x 11 1/2") and painted in 1831, Delacroix attempted to evoke the total impression of a performance by Paganini, who, skeletonlike and with a cadaverous face, captivated his audiences. The portrait pointed to a new emphasis and direction in nineteenth-century French painting--spontaneity combined with loose technique, for which Delacroix greatly admired Paganini. Both Daumier and Manet learned much from this painting.

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was the most important and controversial realist painter of the nineteenth century. His Portrait of Berlioz was

painted in 1850. The subject's severe expression is accentuated by his high collar and black suit, the stern lines of his face, his thin lips, sunken cheeks, sharp nose and cavernous eyes under heavy brows. After the portrait was painted, Berlioz' mistress persuaded him to reject it.

Among paintings to be shown from the Gallery's collection of French art, widely considered to be the most comprehensive in the Western Hemisphere, will be Delacroix's Arabs Skirmishing in the Mountains and Columbus and His Son at La Rábida, Corot's Agostina and Forest of Fontainebleau, Géricault's Trumpeters of Napoleon's Imperial Guard and Millet's Leconte de Lisle.

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