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Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson, "Coriolanus Taking Leave of His Family"



Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson

Coriolanus Taking Leave of His Family, 1786

oil on canvas

44 7/8 x 57 1/2 in. (44 7/8 x 57 1/2 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington

New Century Fund, Gift of Edwin L. Cox – Ed Cox Foundation, and Chester Dale Fund

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The Gallery has acquired an exquisite example of French neoclassical history painting by the celebrated painter Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767–1824). *Coriolanus Taking Leave of His Family* (1786) was painted as an entry in the competition for the Prix de Rome, the Royal

Academy of Painting and Sculpture's most prestigious prize. Once owned by the chemist Antoine Lavoisier and seized after his execution during the French Revolution, it was thought lost until it came up for auction last year.

Girodet's painting depicts the legendary Roman general Gaius Marcius Coriolanus bidding farewell to his family after he was banished from the city in the 5th century BCE. With its radical simplification of form, the work demonstrates the artist's masterful assimilation of his teacher Jacques-Louis David's groundbreaking neoclassicism. Contrasting the general's stoic acceptance of his fate with his family's grief, it offers a profound meditation on the tragic, irresolvable tension between familial ties and civic duty.

Coriolanus Taking Leave of His Family transforms the Gallery's collection of 18th- and 19th-century paintings. History painting, which portrays historical, mythological, or religious subjects, was the most ambitious genre of painting in France for more than two centuries. Girodet's painting is the first French neoclassical example of this genre to enter the Gallery's collection and represents one of the most significant examples of its kind in the United States. Currently being treated by Gallery conservators, it is in excellent condition—unlined, still on its original stretcher, and likely untouched since it was first painted.

Press Release

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