

Transition to Romanticism

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the transition to Romanticism. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, compare and contrast the stylistic characteristics of Romanticism with Neoclassicism, and identify examples of Romantic works of art. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

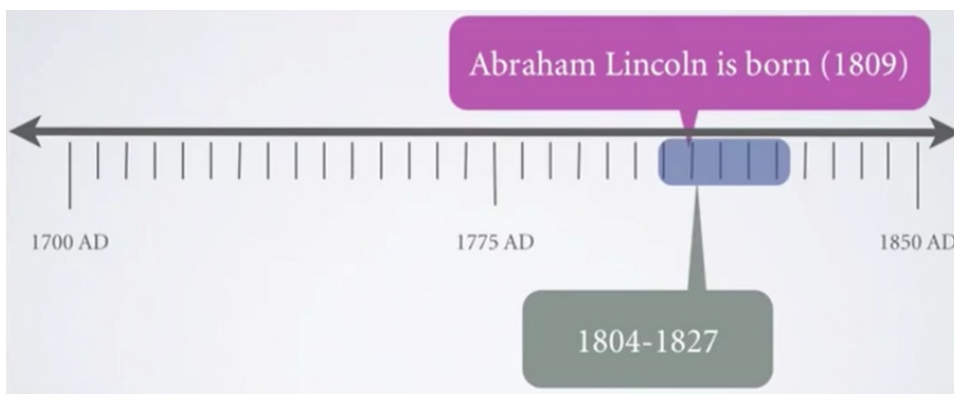


BIG IDEA

Romanticism is an age of feeling as contrasted to Neoclassicism, which is an age of reason.

1. Period and Location: The Transition to Romanticism

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from between 1804 and 1827 and focuses geographically on Paris, France.



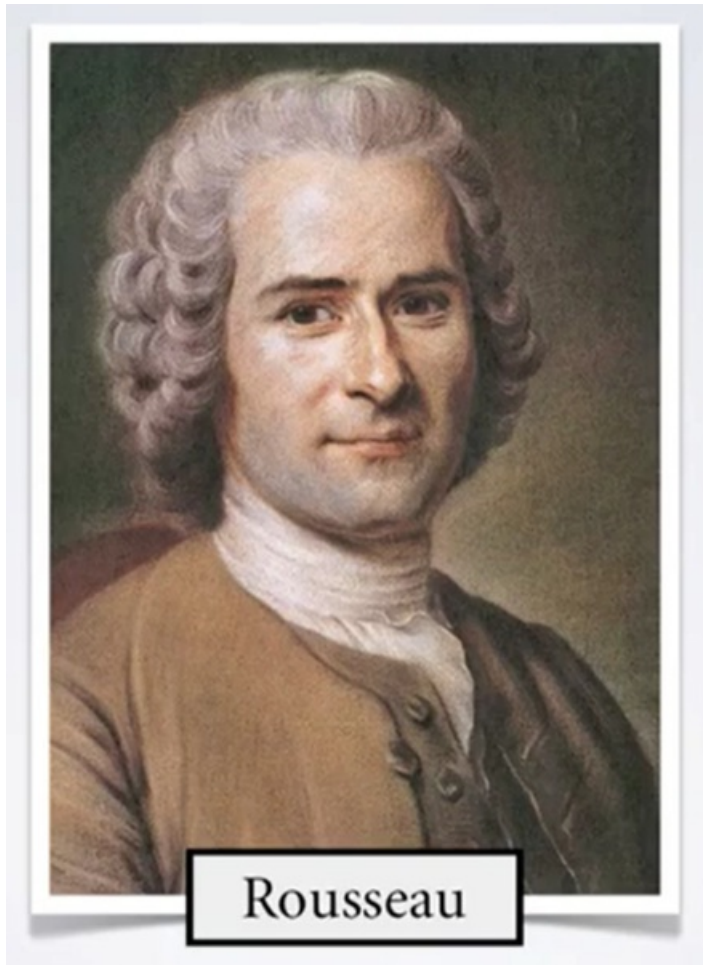
2. Romanticism: Characteristics and Influences

Romanticism has the following characteristics:

- A strong sense of imagination
- Appreciation of nature
- Depictions of the sublime

- A noticeable break from the ubiquitous scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment

One of the major influences of this time was the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. You may remember his name from previous discussions of Neoclassicism and his role in the French Revolution. His ideas about individualism and the natural man were important influences on the development of Romanticism, as were his religious views in finding the presence of God in His creation.



TERM TO KNOW

Romanticism

A transformative late 18th-century intellectual and artistic movement originating in Europe; characterized by imagination, the exaltation of the common man, and appreciation of nature.

3. Transition to Romanticism: Examples

3a. Antoine-Jean Gros

This first painting is by a student of Jacques-Louis David, named Antoine-Jean Gros. Although Gros is largely considered a Neoclassical painter, this particular example illustrates the transition from strictly Neoclassical to something different—and that “something different” is what becomes Romanticism.

This is a history painting in that the scene is based on an actual event: Napoleon visiting his troops dying of the plague in Jaffa, Israel.



Napoleon at the Pesthouse in Jaffa by Antoine-Jean Gros

1804

Oil on canvas

Notice how the attention is pushed to the foreground, creating a theatrical sensation like in David's "Oath of the Horatii." The architecture is **exotic**, and accurately illustrates the influence of Islam in this region. For example, notice the keyhole arch on the far left.

Gros' palette is noticeably livelier than David's, using a lighting scheme that's closer to Romanticism than Neoclassicism in its effect. Consider, too, the subject matter. Napoleon is portrayed almost Christ-like in his heroism, in the way he's shown touching or healing the sick.



DID YOU KNOW

In reality, Gros was ordered to create the painting as a supposed form of damage control. Rumor had it that Napoleon actually ordered the troops to be poisoned, and it has been suggested that Gros may have been aware of this action when he painted Napoleon as smaller in comparison to the sick troops and the foreign doctors.



When taken in this particular context, the depiction of Napoleon may seem even more artificial, almost as if the image of the officer behind him—the one with the rag to his mouth—is much closer in depicting Napoleon’s true sentiments.



TERM TO KNOW

The Exotic

Foreign, unusual, and excitingly strange.

3b. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a student of Jacques-Louis David, desperately desired to be considered a classicist in the tradition of his idol, Raphael. However, the spirit of the time was perhaps too influential. His paintings, shown in these next two examples, illustrate the change from the classical-inspired works of the Neoclassical to the more exotic influence that appears in Romanticism.



HINT

Keep in mind that there is an overlap between Neoclassicism and Romanticism. It wasn’t as if one stopped and the other started. Even in the following two examples, you’ll notice that the more classically-inspired painting comes 14 years after the more romantically-inspired painting.

The first example, the “Apotheosis of Homer,” appears almost as an example of an enthroned Christ or Zeus image. Homer is seated among a “who’s who” of artist figures from history, showing him elevated from the status of a man to the level of a god.



Apotheosis of Homer by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

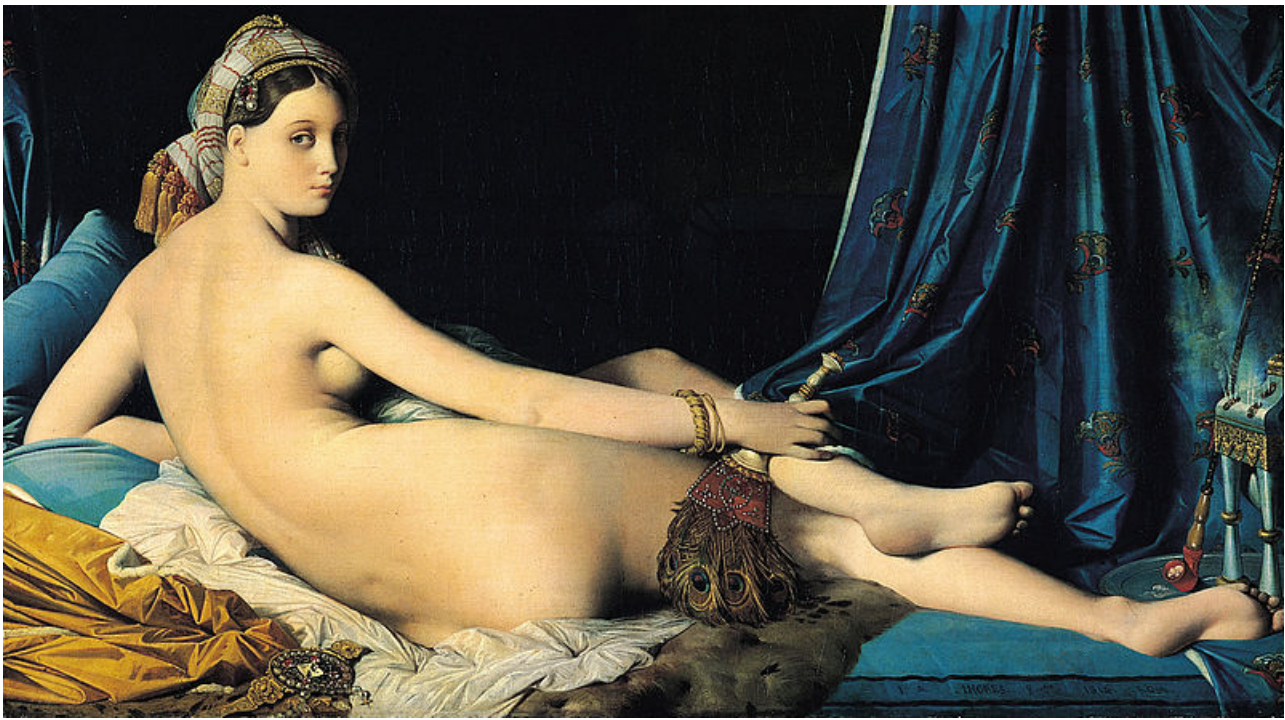
1827

Oil on canvas

At first glance, it appears very classical in its composition, and in many ways, it is. For instance, the backdrop contains examples of classical architecture, perhaps even more Neoclassical in design, with their dark lack of ornamentation and free sculpture and minimal pediment sculpture.

On the other hand, the painting is very busy. The central figure of Homer and the personifications of his literary works—the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—form a triangle that anchors the composition. The scene becomes rather chaotic as you move further away. There isn't a logical flow among the subjects like you see in Raphael's "School of Athens," for example.

Placing this next example in context, Napoleon's military campaigns reintroduced Western Europe to the culture of Islam, particularly from Northern Africa. The idea of a harem was likely quite exotic and appealing on some level, and Ingres took this idea and blended it with a French interpretation of a pleasure slave. He takes the Classical notion of a reclining nude mythological figure and flips it—literally and figurative—from a depiction and appreciation for the female figure to a tantalizing image of a nude woman.



Grand Odalisque by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

1814

Oil on canvas

She has her back to the viewer, and the lack of complete exposure is intended to heighten the eroticism of the painting. It's an example of the exotic, which came to be so closely connected with the stylistic characteristic of Romanticism, from an artist who preferred the association with and the design ethic of the Neoclassical.

3c. Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix

The work of Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix, an artistic rival of Ingres, illustrates a return to emotion and drama—something that essentially hadn't been seen in paintings since the Baroque period. In this first example, called the "Death of Sardanapalus," death hasn't actually occurred yet, but it is imminent.



Death of Sardanapalus by Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix

1827

Oil on canvas

The entire composition is arranged on a diagonal, with the apathetic Sardanapalus reclining on an elaborate divan while chaos ensues around him. He has decided to burn himself and his prized possessions, which include his slaves, horses, and harem, rather than face defeat.

Notice how one of the women throws herself on the bed, pleading for mercy, while the others are aggressively forced to remain inside as the area begins to fill with smoke. This is an example of the **sublime** and the juxtaposition of the beauty of the material possessions and human forms against the horror of the drama taking place and the sensation of impending doom.



TERM TO KNOW

Sublime

An aesthetic quality in nature during the 18th-century, distinct from beauty, expressing awe and fear simultaneously.

3d. Théodore Géricault

This final example, Théodore Géricault's painting "Raft of the Medusa," is reminiscent of the work of the Baroque artist Peter Paul Rubens. The diagonally-arranged composition forces the viewer to deal with the imagery of death and despair in the foreground that rises in a mass of people, and the desperation and depiction of hope in being rescued, shown in the figure of the man waving his shirt in the air to a passing ship.



Raft of the Medusa by Théodore Géricault

1818-1819

Oil on canvas



DID YOU KNOW

The subject matter is based on an actual historical event. The ship *The Medusa* went aground off the coast of Western Africa on July 5, 1816. More than 140 people were forced to construct a raft in order to survive, but only 15 actually lasted through nearly two weeks at sea.

This painting is another example of the sublime. You can see the juxtaposition of the terror from the wave about to strike the crew against the beauty of the sea and sky; the unspeakable horror—the horror being that the crew had to resort to cannibalism to survive—contrasted with the sheer awe and the relentlessness of the human spirit.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about the **transition to Romanticism**. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms, as well as how to describe the **characteristics and influences of Romanticism**. You also learned how to compare and contrast the stylistic characteristics of Romanticism with Neoclassicism, and identify **examples of Romantic works of art** through the exploration of works by **Antoine-Jean Gros, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix, and Théodore Géricault**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



TERMS TO KNOW

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