

Antoine-Jean Gros's *Hercules and Diomedes*: a Return to the Baroque

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French artist Antoine-Jean Gros achieved a great deal of success during the Napoleonic Empire with his monumental, propagandistic paintings, such as *Napoleon Visiting the Pest House at Jaffa* (Figure 1) from 1804. He created many dynamic, colorful compositions that often seemed at odds with the teachings of his master, classical artist Jacques-Louis David. Gros's work frequently inspired the younger generation of painters who would pioneer the artistic movement that came to be known as Romanticism; however, shortly after Gros inherited David's teaching atelier in 1816 when the older artist was exiled to Brussels, a drastic change in Gros's artistic output occurred. During the last fifteen years of his career, he produced a number of works based on classical themes that were often perceived by critics as awkward and even comical. Gros's last major painting was no exception to this harsh criticism. *Hercules and Diomedes* was exhibited at the annual Salon of 1835, and the work was met with near universal condemnation (Figure 2). This failure with the public was exaggerated by the fact that Gros held a position as professor in the École des Beaux-Arts and, shortly after the opening of the exhibition, was named the President of the Academy of Fine Arts and Chair of the Five Academies of the Institute, making him the highest ranking artist in France. The painting was identified by many critics as a sad reminder of the deterioration of the great school of David.

A thorough examination of Gros's late career has never been conducted, and the study of his last monumental canvas, *Hercules and Diomedes*, is often eclipsed in the art historical

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literature by the attention given to Gros's death by suicide less than four months after the opening of the Salon. When Gros's classical works have been addressed, the drastic changes in his style and subject matter are attributed to the constant communication that he maintained with his former teacher, David, until the older artist's death in 1825.¹ David frequently encouraged Gros to turn his attention to classical themes, writing to him and reminding him in 1820, "Time progresses and we are getting older, and you have not yet made what one calls a true history painting."² David himself had, in his later years, turned to themes concerning the loves of the gods, and Gros's classical paintings are frequently seen as an attempt to imitate those of his teacher; however, I believe that Gros never entirely abandoned his own artistic inclinations and that, with *Hercules and Diomedes*, he tried to offer the younger generation of artists an alternative model of classicism to the outdated style of David that was closely associated with the French Revolution.

Little is known about the creation of the painting itself. Gros undertook this large project without a commission, and, only a few months earlier, he had refused a request from the government for a contemporary battle painting, stating in his letter of reply, "... I feel the need to rely on subjects more related to the study of art."³ Despite the July Monarchy's eagerness for

¹ Sara Lichtenstein vocalizes this common point of view in her article, "The Baron Gros and Raphael," *The Art Bulletin* vol 58 no 1 (1978): 126-38. "The gap between his [Gros's] natural impulses and his sense of obligation to his master has been held responsible for his decline from his characteristic mature style, based on the solid art of Rubens, to the late, emaciated, academic work that reflects the stubborn interference of David... Much of his greatness may stem precisely from his capacity to combine the Classical and Baroque, or Romantic elements in his art. This capacity seems to be inherent in his vigorous, mature style and to be lacking only in his late, academic work." The most notable exceptions to the void in scholarship concerning the artist's late career are treatments of the painting *Bacchus and Ariadne* of 1822 by Thomas Gaechtgens, "*Bacchus and Ariadne*, by Antoine-Jean Gros" *Annual Bulletin (National Gallery of Canada)* no 2 (1978-79): 62-79, and the decoration of the ceiling in the Musée Charles X, unveiled at the Salon of 1827, by Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: art in the service of French Imperialism, 1798-1836* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) 81-116.

² J.-L. Jules David, *Le Peintre Louis David, 1748-1825: Souvenirs & Documents inédits* (Paris: V. Harvard, 1880) 571-73. Also see J.-B. Delestre, *Gros et ses ouvrages; ou mémoires historiques sur la vie et les travaux de ce célèbre artiste* (Paris: J. Labitte, 1845) 307-309.

³ The letter that Gros sent in reply to the offer of the commission is quoted here. The painting was to be installed in the Gallery of Battles at Versailles upon its completion. J. Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire de la vie et de la mort du*

Gros, the most renowned artist in France, to return to the battle paintings with which he had been so successful during the Napoleonic Empire, Gros chose to focus his attention on *Hercules and Diomedes*.

It is an unusual painting for several reasons. Monumental works based upon mythology were rapidly falling out of fashion in the 1830's, and the male nude, once the foundation of great historical canvases, was progressively becoming little more than a student exercise.⁴ The newly empowered and enriched bourgeoisie needed to decorate their homes and private spaces with smaller paintings, and, as critics of the 1830's would note, they preferred images that reflected their own lives.

In addition to these issues of style and patronage, the eighth labor of Hercules had never been a popular choice for artistic representation, almost certainly due to the violent and gruesome nature of the story. According to the most well-known versions of the tale, Hercules, in a state of madness, murders his and his brother's children. In order to atone for the murders, the hero must obey the instructions of King Eurystheus, who requires him to perform twelve tasks.⁵ The eighth of these is to capture the man-eating horses of Diomedes, the King of Thrace, who cruelly feeds unsuspecting travelers to the animals. Hercules struggles with the king and, in the end, tames the horses by feeding their own master to them.⁶

Baron Gros, le grand peintre: rédigée sur de nouveaux documents et d'après des souvenirs inédits (Paris: J. Martin, 1880) 482-483. The commission was given to Horace Vernet upon Gros's refusal. The Battle of Iéna was fought in 1806 between Napoleon and the Prussian forces and was a decisive victory for the French.

⁴ The rise of the bourgeoisie, the desire for small works suited for private display, and the artistic preferences of Louis-Philippe and the July Monarchy are often cited as the reasons for the shift from large classical or historical works to smaller genre paintings. Jon Whiteley, who thoroughly examines the decline and evolution of classical subject matter in the art of the mid-nineteenth century, states that classical works had declined to "near extinction" by 1837 (10). J. Whiteley, "The Revival in Painting of Themes Inspired by Antiquity in Mid-Nineteenth Century France," diss., University of Oxford, 1972.

⁵ He is instructed by the Delphic Oracle to atone for the murders by obeying the king of Tiryns, Eurystheus.

⁶ Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 262. The earliest sources for the story are the fragmentary accounts of Pindar and Euripides in the 5th and 6th centuries BC. They do not state that Diomedes was eaten by his horses but that he was simply killed while trying to oppose Hercules. It seems that Diodorus, in the first century BC is the earliest account of this version of the story. This

The Salon of 1835 opened in the first week of March, and Gros's three submissions were among the 2,535 works listed in the *livret*.⁷ *Hercules and Diomedes*, along with *Acis and Galatea* (Figure 3) and the *Portrait of Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz*,⁸ elicited a wide variety of comments from the critics, but the monumental *Hercules and Diomedes* was noticed far more than the two smaller works. Measuring approximately twelve by nine feet, the painting would have been difficult to overlook despite the fact that it was positioned rather high in the Salon Carré and picked up a considerable glare.⁹ In the exhibition catalog, Gros offered this explanation of his subject:

"Diomedes, King of Thrace, nourished his horses on human flesh, by their devouring of the foreigners who had the misfortune to fall into his hands. Hercules, sent by Eurystheus, seizes him on his chariot and delivers him to his own horses, thus slaying him with the shades of his victims, whose skins one sees suspended on the top of the bloody trough."¹⁰

Initially, Gros's brief explanation seems to be excessively graphic, but one soon realizes that it is the verbal equivalent of the painting itself.

The massive form of Hercules occupies the center of Gros's picture. He braces himself with one leg stretched to the lower right of the canvas while the other is bent at the knee and supports the strained body of Diomedes. Three horses rear onto their hind legs as they lean over the king of Thrace to devour the flesh of his throat and chest. The two struggling figures are

general information on Diomedes is also given in Jennifer March, Cassell Dictionary of Classical Mythology (London: Cassell, 1998) 133-34.

⁷ E. F. Miel, "Salon de 1835," Le Constitutionnel, 2 Mar. 1835.

⁸ This portrait is now located at the Czartoryski Museum, Krakow.

⁹ The Musée des Augustins, where the painting now resides, lists the size as 426 cm high and 324 cm wide (13.98 feet by 10.63 feet); however, older sources (such as Delestre, Tripier le Franc and Gros himself) approximate its measurements as 12 by 9 feet. As to the location of the work at the Salon, Delestre asserts the opinion that, "L'on jugea sans voir, comme on condamne souvent sans entendre." Delestre, 426.

¹⁰ Société des artistes français, Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Architecture, Gravure et Lithographie. Des Artistes Vivans, Exposés au Musée Royal, Le 1er. Mars 1835. (Paris: Dubray, [etc.], 1835).

otherwise surrounded by the remains of a chariot on the ground to the left and a tree that is littered with tattered garments and, according to Gros's description, the skins of previous victims. Under the tree is a trough containing a body whose foot is just visible at the edge of the canvas. A few overhanging branches and a mass of dark clouds create a perfect arch that frames the crowned head of Hercules.¹¹ With a grave expression, the bearded, dark-haired Hercules looks resolutely to the upper right of the painting toward something that cannot be seen within the boundaries of the canvas, and behind him lays a distant landscape, the details of which are indistinct.

After the painting was exhibited at the Salon, Gros sent a letter to the Office of Fine Arts in the Ministry of the Interior requesting that the government purchase his work.¹² This letter contains the artist's only surviving explanation for the painting:

"It is thus on the benevolence of the Minister of the Interior that I dare to look to in reserve; my request is that you propose to him the acquisition of my painting *Hercules and Diomedes*, the painting which I had the courage to make, as a call to higher study, since success in painting seems, at this moment, to be all the more grand as they move away from this."¹³

¹¹ Hercules wears a crown of dark blue, coiled rope or fabric with at least four gold points. Contemporary reviews of the Salon and discussions of this painting in particular do not mention this element, but it seems that Hercules was often depicted with a crown in ancient and Medieval art. See Lawrence Nees, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 346. Also see Frances V. K. Stern, ed., *The Labors of Herakles on Antiquities from West Coast Collections* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Press, 1976) plates 10, 13, and 24.

¹² Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire...*, 514-15. Tripier states that the letter was without a doubt intended for Dumont; however, the actual letter was not addressed to a specific individual. Aristide-Laurent Dumont worked in the Ministry of the Interior during the Empire and as secretary of the *École des beaux-arts* under the July Monarchy. He was an amateur painter and was elected a member of the Academy in 1839. J. Balteau, M. Barroux, M. Prévost and Amand Rastoul, *Dictionnaire de biographie française* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1954): vol. 12, 202.

¹³ Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire...*: 514. Louis-Adolphe Thiers is the Minister of the Interior to whom Gros is referring. Born in 1797, he was politically active in France over the course of the century. Writing on art, literature, history and politics, he often voiced his opposition to the Bourbon Restoration while writing for *Le Constitutionnel* and later for *Le National*, which he helped co-found in 1829. Thiers actively participated in promoting Louis-Philippe as the next king during the July Revolution in 1830, and, hence, occupied several important governmental posts during the

The letter goes on to recommend that the painting be placed in one of the art schools or academies in Toulouse. From this request, one can gather that Gros intended his work to be seen as an example, specifically by the younger generation of artists who were moving progressively farther away from the standards that the French school had held only thirty years earlier.

The common assumption that Gros, at the end of his career, simply followed the precedent set by David, is far too simplistic, as can be seen through a comparison of the two artists' last major works, Gros's *Hercules and Diomedes* and David's self-proclaimed final masterpiece, *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* (Figure 4) from 1824.¹⁴ Similar to David's other late mythological paintings, the figures in *Mars Disarmed by Venus* have a common appearance and demeanor that might even be described as humorous; this is a trend that Gros never duplicates.¹⁵ David's figures are statuesque, with smooth, flawless skin. They are relaxed and lethargic, and do not possess any of the tension of Gros's struggling pair. Hercules, while still beautifully formed, could never be mistaken for one of David's pale, sculptural figures. Shadows play over his body while his muscles flex in order to control his unlucky captive. A dark setting frames Gros's hero, and loose, fluid brushstrokes are used to create and animate the clouds, trees, and drapery that surround Hercules. David, on the other hand, employs an incredibly illusionistic technique and a nearly invisible brushstroke to define his figures and their surroundings.

July Monarchy. He was eventually the first president of the Third Republic from 1871 until he resigned in 1873 to join the republican opposition; he died in 1877. Edgar Leon Newman, ed., Historical Dictionary of France from the 1815 Restoration to the Second Empire (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987) 1046-1052.

¹⁴ *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces*, 308 x 262 cm, was not painted on commission but was executed by David as his self-proclaimed last great masterpiece between 1821 to 1824. It was exhibited in Paris in 1824 along with several other earlier works that David still owned. In general, the work seems to have puzzled critics, as did most of the artist's mythological works that were painted during his exile. See Antoine Schnapper, David (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, Ltd., 1980) 299-300.

¹⁵ The reasons for the oddly casual depiction and demeanor of the figures in David's late paintings—and this painting in particular—have been discussed and debated by many scholars. Two such treatments concerning this work are Mary Vidal, "'With a Pretty Whisper': Deception and Transformation in David's *Cupid and Psyche* and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*," Art History vol 22, no 2 (1999): 214-243, and, Dorothy Johnson, "Desire Demythologized: David's *L'Amour quittant Psyché*," Art History vol 9, no 4 (1986): 450-470.

While the influence of David is certainly present during the last years of Gros's career, it does not take the form of direct imitation; rather, I would assert that Gros reflected on how best to reinvigorate the declining Neoclassical style and, in his last major work, advocated a new model of classicism by looking to the most successful painter during the age of Louis XIV, Charles Le Brun.¹⁶

As mentioned previously, the struggle of Hercules and Diomedes had never been a popular choice for artistic representation, even in antiquity,¹⁷ and very few French painters prior to 1835 had chosen to depict this story.¹⁸ Charles Le Brun, the first President of the French Academy and the First Painter to the King under Louis XIV, had painted his version the eighth labor of Hercules in 1640.¹⁹ The youthful Le Brun, only twenty-one years old at the time, was commissioned by Cardinal Richelieu to execute three works, and his *Hercules* (Figure 5), measuring approximately nine by six feet, was meant to decorate one of the chimneys in the Palais Royal.²⁰ Even though Le Brun's painting was taken from France and sold in London in

¹⁶ Gros's intense interest in Rubens as a colorist can be seen in his copy of the artist's *Le Coup de Lance* from 1619-20. Gros's copy, dated 1805, mimics not the exact forms but the shapes evoked through Rubens's use of color.

¹⁷ March, *Cassell Dictionary*...: 134, states that this was not a popular subject in art even in ancient times.

¹⁸ Andor Pigler, *Barockthemen: eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974) 108-110. Charles Le Brun painted his version of this story in 1640, and, as far as I have been able to determine, he is the only Baroque artist from Pigler's list who chose to represent Hercules's eighth task. Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre (1713-1789), who does not appear in Pigler's list, executed a version of the story in 1742 as his reception piece to the Academy. During the sixteenth century, Vincenzo de' Rossi created a series of freestanding sculptures representing seven of the labors of Hercules for the Palazzo Vecchio in Italy (c. 1562 to 1584). One of these depicts the wrestling Hercules and Diomedes; however, given the date, medium and appearance of de' Rossi's work, I believe Le Brun's painting to be a far more convincing precedent for Gros's *Hercules and Diomedes*. For de' Rossi's *Labors of Hercules*, see Ugo Muccini, *Palazzo Vecchio: Guide to the Building, Apartments and Collections* (Boston: Sandak, 1992) 38-53.

¹⁹ Le Brun became the official head of the Academy in 1663 and was given the title of *Premier Peintre du Roi* in 1664. Musée National des Versailles, *Charles Le Brun, 1619-1690 : Peintre et Dessinateur*. (Paris : Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1990) : LV-LVIII.

²⁰ The other two commissioned works, *Ravissement de Proserpine* and *Hercule sur le Bûcher Ardent*, are lost today. The exact size of the painting is listed as 276.9 x 179 cm. See Hilliard Goldfarb, ed., *Richelieu: Art and Power*. (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2002) 282.

1793, it was engraved at least once, and several studies, one of which displays the fully realized composition, remained in France.²¹

When comparing Le Brun's work to Gros's treatment of the story, the similarities are striking. The stance of the figures as well as the compositional format of the two paintings closely resemble one another. The frontal view of Le Brun's Hercules, who towers over his surroundings in the immediate foreground, is remarkably similar to Gros's placement of the figure almost two hundred years later. Heroically nude with only his genitalia veiled, Le Brun's vigorous, muscular figure struggles with determination to accomplish his task. While Gros's Hercules maintains a more upright pose, the figure's firmly planted, spread legs and muscular arm stretching across his chest strongly resemble the hero in Le Brun's work. Even the face of Gros's Hercules, with his dark, curly hair and beard, resembles that of Le Brun's hero.

The reasons for Gros to look to Charles LeBrun as a precedent for his own painting were numerous. Earlier in his career, Gros's monumental battle paintings, such as *The Battle of Aboukir*, had been compared by critics to those of Le Brun, specifically the canvases from his Alexander cycle.²² Perhaps as Gros initially contemplated a dramatic, large-scale classical work,

²¹ The painting was sold along with part of the collection of the Duc d'Orleans in London in 1793. It remained in England and was donated to the Nottingham Castle Museum in 1993. Goldfarb, ed., *Richelieu...*: 282-283. An engraving of the work was executed by Lafitte and J.-B. Tilliard. See Henry Jouin, *Charles Le Brun et les Arts Sous Louis XIV*, (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1889). While I have been unable to identify the printmaker Lafitte, J.-B. Tilliard is almost certainly Jean-Baptiste Tilliard (1740-1813), who executed engravings after Greuze, Boucher, and many other artists. Ulrich Thieme, ed., *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1907-1950) vol. 33, 171-172. Several variations and studies of Le Brun's work exist, and a very finished sketch is currently in a private collection in France; see Musée National, *Charles Le Brun...*:8-9, and Jouin, *Charles Le Brun...*: 512. As far as I have been able to find, there is no documentation for Gros having made a trip to London where he may have seen the original painting (although he may have seen it before 1793). Paul Joannides has examined the possible influences of British art on Gros's early paintings and portraiture and has also been unable to confirm whether the artist traveled to London during his lifetime (although he states that it would not have been "absolutely impossible" for Gros to have made the trip). See Paul Joannides, "Some English Themes in the Early Works of Gros," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 117, no 873 (1975): 774-785.

²² David O'Brien briefly discusses the lineage of large scale battle paintings from the Renaissance to the Napoleonic Empire and notes that Gros's early work was compared by certain critics to the battle paintings of Charles Le Brun. David O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda under Napoleon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006): 6, 56-61.

he remembered this association that the public had made between his work and that of the Baroque artist.

Le Brun's painting would have undoubtedly been receiving a renewed amount of attention in the 1830's. In 1833, Louis-Philippe had announced his plans to convert Versailles into a public museum and renovations began immediately.²³ As the primary painter who was involved in organizing and executing the decoration of the palace, Le Brun and his work would have recently been placed back into the spotlight and the public's eye as Gros prepared to paint *Hercules and Diomedes* in 1835.

There were a number of reasons for Gros to chose the work of Charles LeBrun as a model for his monumental canvas, but the most significant of these was undoubtedly LeBrun's status as the first President of the Academy. Soon after his completion of *Hercules and Diomedes*, Gros became the President of the Academy and Chair of the Institute of France. By associating his painting with that of LeBrun, I would suggest that Gros attempted to establish a legitimate, classical tradition that existed prior to the work of David. Davidian Neoclassicism was closely tied to the French Revolution, and, in the 1830's, seemed quite outdated as Eugène Delacroix and the developing school of Romantics were causing a stir at the annual Salon with their colorful, energetic compositions. Le Brun's dramatic and dynamic style would, without a doubt, be more engaging for a younger generation of artists coming of age during the rise of Romanticism.

²³ See Michael Marrinan, Painting and Politics for Louis-Philippe : Art and Ideology in Orleanist France, 1830-1848 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1988), 219. Louis-Philippe announced this plan for the Versailles museum to the public in "Rapport au Roi," Le Moniteur Universel, 5 September 1833 (Marrinan, Painting...: 219). Marrinan has also written an article that deals with the specific rooms and their respective artistic programs that were altered or created during this renovation. M. Marrinan, "Historical Vision and the Writing of History at Louis-Philippe's Versailles," The Popularization of Images, editors, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Gabriel P. Weisberg, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 113-143. Also see Thomas Gaehtgens, Versailles: de la Résidence Royale au Musée Historique, la Galerie des Batailles dans le Musée Historique de Louis-Philippe (Paris: A. Michel, 1984).

Gros's depiction of the eighth labor of Hercules placed him in line with not only Charles LeBrun, but also a more recent President of the Academy who had chosen LeBrun's *Hercules Vanquishing Diomedes* as a model for emulation. Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre painted his version of story in 1742 as his reception piece to the Academy, and one can easily recognize the obvious influence of LeBrun's work due to the clear physical similarities. Pierre went on to become the First Painter to the King and served as President of the Academy from 1770 to 1789, during which time he was constantly at odds with the young David, who bitterly felt that Pierre refused to acknowledge his talent and clear potential as artist. In a speech to the National Convention in 1793, David spoke of the corruption within the Academy and of an "old academician" who refused to admit a talented young artist for fear that his success would outweigh that of the previous generation; the episode to which he was referring involved himself and Pierre.²⁴ Gros would certainly have been familiar with Pierre's *Diomedes, Slain by Hercules* (Figure 6), which remained in the collection of the Academy until at least 1793 and existed in at least one series of prints. Gros's decision to execute a painting that would associate him not only with LeBrun but also with an artist who David deeply disliked shows his willingness to break with the ideas and opinions held by his former teacher. Regardless of David's opinion of Pierre, Gros sought to establish a recognizable classical tradition that could be linked to two of the great academic leaders of the past.

Gros's attempt to lead by example and offer the younger generation of artists a model of classicism other than that of David ended in what can only be described as a resounding failure. A monumental canvas with a mythological subject was not what the public or the critics of the

²⁴ Schnapper, *David*, 60-61. Schnapper recounts the incident in which the painting that David desired to use for his reception piece to the Academy came under dispute, and he was asked by Pierre to create another work for the Academy while he was in Paris (as opposed to Rome, where the other painting was executed). Schnapper also ties this incident to the one mentioned in David's speech to the National Convention in 1793.

1830's wanted to see from this once great artist. The recent re-exhibition of Gros's Napoleonic works at the Luxembourg Palace served to exacerbate this notion that Gros had fallen far from the position of creative genius that he had once held.²⁵ At the close of the Salon, *Hercules and Diomedes* was awarded only a First Class Honorable Mention, a distinction that was given to eighty-seven other artists including at least twelve of Gros's own students.²⁶ This embarrassment was compounded by the fact that the government failed to purchase the monumental work.

On June 25th, Gros committed suicide by drowning himself in a small tributary of the Seine River.²⁷ After his death, Gros's widow offered *Hercules and Diomedes* to the museum in Toulouse, where it remains to this day.²⁸

Hercules and Diomedes was Gros's last effort as the most prominent classical artist in France, to regain control of the French school. Looking to Charles Le Brun and his treatment of this very unusual subject allowed Gros to make use of his own talent for dynamic, colorful compositions while presenting a new, reinvigorated kind of classicism based on the style of the famous Baroque master and one-time leader of the French Academy. Unfortunately for Gros,

²⁵ With Louis-Philippe's interest in Revolutionary and Napoleonic scenes, Gros's *Napoleon Visiting the Pest House at Jaffa* was removed from the Louvre warehouse where it had resided for fifteen years and displayed along with the *Battle of Eylau*, the *Battle of Aboukir*, and other Napoleonic works by artists such as Girodet, Gerard, and Guérin at an exhibition in the Luxembourg Palace that began in October of 1830, only three months after the July Revolution. Marrinan, *Painting and Politics...*: 51-71.

²⁶ Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire...*: 515.

²⁷ For Gros's suicide, see Christopher Sells, "The Death of Gros," *The Burlington Magazine* vol. 116, no 854 (1974): 266-270, and Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire...*: 523-530.

²⁸ Augustine Dufresne discussed her intention to offer the work to the museum at Toulouse with J.-B. Delestre (Gros's former pupil, friend, and eventual biographer) in a series of letters, finally making her intentions known to the municipal council of Toulouse during the summer of 1836: "Messieurs, Avant qu'un événement douloureux vint enlever mon illustre époux aux beaux-arts, qui le pleurent, il avait exprimé le désir de voir le ministre de l'Intérieur disposer du tableau d'Hercule et Diomède en faveur de la ville de Toulouse, berceau de son enfance. Jalouse d'accomplir ce voeu sacré, je me fais un devoir, Messieurs, de vous offrir ce digne et dernier ouvrage du grand maître. C'est une faible main qui le donne ; mais elle brille de l'éclat de l'anneau nuptial de Gros. A ce titre, je vous prie de vouloir bien accepter cet hommage au nom de la cité dont vous êtes les représentants. Recevez, Messieurs, l'expression de mes sentiments de haute considération. Baronne Gros." The council notified Augustine of their acceptance of her offer in a return letter, dated 11 August 1836. Tripier Le Franc, *Histoire...*: 635-644.

audiences of 1835 had seen their share of allegorical representations and desired an art that would more directly reflect their own lives, seeing in *Hercules and Diomedes*, according to one critic, “nothing more than a phantom of the painter of the Pesthouse at Jaffa”.²⁹

²⁹ Charles Lenormant, “L’École Française en 1835. Salon annuel,” *Journal des Deux-Mondes*, 15 Apr., 1835. Charles Lenormant (1802-1859), whose interests included not only art but also history and archaeology, tended to have conservative artistic tastes, according to Andrew Shelton, *Ingres and His Critics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 31. One must imagine that Gros was hoping to gain the support of, at least, the artistically conservative faction of critics, and it is quite telling that even Lenormant could not avoid recording the confusion of the Salon audience when regarding *Hercules and Diomedes*. The critic goes on to offer his praise for Gros’s nearly flawless technique in both *Diomedes* and *Acis and Galatea*, his other mythological work of that year, “...jamais le pinceau de M. Gros ne s’est montré ni plus habile, ni plus brillant. Il y a dans les pectoraux du Diomède, dans ses rotules, une puissance de main à confondre l’imagination; les membres de la Galatée sont modelés dans le clair avec une finesse et une confiance dont aucun peintre vivant n’est capable.”



Figure 1: Antoine-Jean Gros, *Napoleon Visiting the Pest House at Jaffa*, 1804 Salon. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Figure 2: Antoine-Jean Gros, *Hercules and Diomedes*, 1835 Salon. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins.



Figure 3: Antoine-Jean Gros, *Acis and Galatea*, 1833 (1835 Salon).
Norfolk, VA, Chrysler Museum of Art.



Figure 4: Jacques-Louis David, *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces*, 1824.
Brussels, Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.



Figure 5: Charles Le Brun, *Hercules Vanquishing Diomedes*, 1640-1641. Nottingham, Nottingham City Museum; The Castle Museum and Art Gallery.



Figure 6: Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, *Diomedes, Slain by Hercules and Devoured by his Horses*, 1742. Montpellier, Musée Fabre.