

JL David 1748 - 1825

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1748 – Born in Paris on 30 August, quai de la Megisserie, son of Louis-Maurice David, haberdasher by trade and later tax farmer for Normandy. His mother Marie-Geneviève, née Buron, comes from a family of builders. Her brother François Buron is an architect in the royal forest and water civil service and her brother in law is a well-known professional architect Jacques-François Desmaisons. On her mother's side she is related to the famous Rococo painter François Boucher.

1757 – Death of David's father at 35. At 8 David is sent as a boarder to the convent of Picpus. His mother's brother, François Buron is asked to supervise the child's education. He will attend the prestigious collège des Quatre-Nations. His talent for drawing seems to destine him for an architect's career like that of his uncles.

1764 – Studies drawing at the Academy of St Luke (Paris painter's guild). His mother's relation, François Boucher, advises the family to apprentice him with the rising star of Paris painting Joseph-Marie Vien.

1766 – David enters Vien's studio and also studies anatomy, composition and perspective under Jean Bardin at the Royal Academy. His fellow students are Jean-Baptiste Regnault, François-André Vincent and François-Guillaume Ménageot. Michel-Jean Sedaine, family friend, secretary of the Academy of Architecture and playwright becomes his new protector. David develops a tumour on his left cheek possibly as a result of a sword fight with a fellow student.

1769 – Wins third prize for the prestigious academic competition, the Prix de Rome.

1771 – Receives 2nd prize for Combat of Minerva and Mars, a composition judged by the jury too weak for the 1st prize, which is won that year by Joseph-Benoît Suvée.

1772 – Fails to win 1st prize again. He is devastated over this failure, which is due to a rigged jury. He is persuaded by one of the jurors, Gabriel-François Doyen, not to commit suicide!

1773 – Fourth failure with the Death of Seneca. Peyron wins first prize. David receives a consolation prize for a pastel of a head of "Pain". He develops a deep aversion and bitterness towards the Royal Academy.

1774 – Wins at last the Prix de Rome.

1775 – 1780. Leaves for Rome to study at the French Academy in the company of the new director, his teacher, Joseph-Marie Vien. On his way to Rome he discovers the masters of Italian Renaissance art in Parma, Bologna and Florence. In his first year in Rome he studies drawing and works from antique monuments and statuary. In the later part of his stay he advances to oil painting (Hector 1778, Patroclus 1780). A 1779 visit to Naples and Pompeii will convert him to the new neoclassical style inspired by Antiquity. His St Roch Interceding with the Virgin Mary 1780, is the first oil painting to impress visitors to his Roman studio and later the Paris art critic Denis Diderot. Leaves for Paris.

1781 – Presents Belisarius Begging for Alms to the Academy and to the Salon of 1781 where it obtains a great success and is praised by Diderot.

1782 – Marries Marguerite Charlotte Pécoul, daughter of a well to do builder, Charles-Pierre Pécoul, who endows the bride with a generous dowry (50 000 livres) and furnishes David's new studio at the Louvre. She will bear him 4 children altogether. David begins teaching young painters in his studio (Fabre, Girodet, Drouais).

1783 – He is admitted into the Royal Academy and presents his "reception piece"; The Grief of Andromache.

1784 – With his father-in-law's financial help he returns to Rome with his wife and student Jean-Germain Drouais. He paints his most celebrated early masterpiece The Oath of the Horatii, a Roman history painting, to fulfill a royal commission dating from 1781. The painting ends up being much larger than the stipulated size, earning its author the reputation of an undisciplined rebel. The Oath is exhibited to an enthusiastic public in his studio in Rome.

1785 – The Oath is shown at the Paris Salon where it also meets with a great success, establishing David as the

leader of the new neoclassical school. His notoriety provokes the envy and jealousy of his peers.

1786 – The Prix de Rome is cancelled as all the painters come from David's studio and his candidature for the post of director of the French Academy in Rome is rejected.

1787 – Shows at the Salon another successful picture, *The Death of Socrates* commissioned by a liberal aristocrat, Plessis-Franc, in direct competition with another version of the same subject by Peyron commissioned by the King. This is David's revenge over his erstwhile rival for the 1773 Prix de Rome.

1788 – *The Love of Paris and Helen* is delivered to the King's brother the comte d'Artois. Death of his favorite pupil, Drouais, of smallpox.

1789 – Brutus's tough attitude in *The Lictors Returning the Bodies of Brutus's Sons* is considered politically too sensitive in the feverish climate of the year of the meeting of the Three Estates to be shown at the Salon. The superintendent of the King's Buildings the comte d'Angiviller forbids its exhibition. The press accuses the royal authorities of censorship and the painting is exhibited after all. The painting has a great impact on fashion, coiffures à la Brutus become all the rage as powder is abandoned and Jacob designs Roman furniture inspired by that in the painting. David is introduced since 1786 to the liberal portion of Paris high society: Chénier, Bailly, Condorcet, Madame de Genlis, and the future champions of Revolution, Barère, Barnave and Alexandre de Lameth.

1790 – David commemorates the first revolutionary act the Oath of the Tennis Court (21 June 1789) on a vast canvas (10 by 7 meters) representing the 630 deputies of the Third Estate transforming themselves into the first national assembly. As the pace of the Revolution accelerates the project is eventually abandoned. The necessary funds are never raised and many of the original deputies fall into disgrace, are arrested and later executed. David joins the Jacobin club on the left wing of the Revolution. He heads the 'Commune of the Arts' and becomes director of the Salon now renamed the 'Salon of Liberty' (1791). He militates for the abolition of the hateful academies. Mme David in disagreement with her husband's politics leaves him.

1791 – David is among the signers of the petition demanding Louis XVI's destitution. He tries unsuccessfully to get himself elected as a deputy of Paris. He virtually stops painting leaving many portrait commissions unfinished. 1792 - His politics become more radical and he falls out with his former liberal supporters. He is at last elected as the 20th deputy of Paris on the new Convention. He sits with the 'Mountain' the most radical political party of the Convention. He is named head of civic and revolutionary pageants and continues his fight against the authority of the Academy.

1793 - He votes for the death of the King in January 1793. His wife divorces him after this. After the assassination of the deputy Louis-Michel Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau, who had also voted the death of Louis XVI by a royalist, he organizes Saint-Fargeau's funeral and paints him on his deathbed. His most famous revolutionary work is, however, *The Death of Marat*, commissioned by the Convention to honor the radical newspaper publisher assassinated by Charlotte Corday. David also stages his funeral. David is named president of the Jacobin club and secretary of the Convention. He takes an active part in the Terror and countersigns 300 orders of arrest. He joins the infamous committee of Public Safety and participates in prisoners' interrogations.

He does nothing to save old patrons like Trudaine, Lavoisier or the duhessse de Noailles but is instrumental in protecting Dominique Vivant Denon, later director of the Louvre, the painter Fragonard and his royalist student Antoine Jean Gros.

1794 – David is named president of the Convention. He organizes the last great revolutionary pageants including the ceremony to the 'Supreme Being' ordered by Robespierre for June 1794 at the Champ de Mars. He designs the costumes of the new officials of the republic. After 9 Thermidor and the fall of Robespierre David is arrested and imprisoned in the Luxembourg palace where he paints his self-portrait looking puzzled and defiant. His students and even his former wife, Charlotte, petition for his liberation.

1795 – David is released and takes refuge in the countryside (St Ouen) in the house of his brother in law Charles Sériziat. He is definitely amnestied in October, rejoins the Institute (new name of the academy) and exhibits at the Salon portraits of Sériziat and his wife. He begins his great post-revolutionary Roman history painting the *Sabine Women* (finished in 1798). The painting launches a new fashion among young art students for Greek 'primitivism'. A new assistant, Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, joins David's studio. David will exhibit the *Sabines* in a hall in the academy of architecture charging the public to see it until 1805. He makes over 66 000 francs enabling him to buy a country property in Marcoussis.

1797 – David meets the young general Napoleon Bonaparte fresh from his victorious Italian campaign.

1798 – His first portrait of Bonaparte remains unfinished. He is David's new 'hero'.

1800 – For the King of Spain he paints his celebrated equestrian portrait of Napoleon on the Grand-Saint Bernard,

which will be much copied.

1801 – David falls afoul of the new authorities of the Consulate because of the implication of former students in an anti-Napoleonic plot. He is put under surveillance by Fouché's police.

1803 – David is made Chevalier of the New Legion of Honor.

1804 – He receives the official commission for 4 great pictures commemorating the day of Napoleon's coronation as Emperor of the French. Only two will be completed, the Coronation and the Distribution of the Eagle Standards. He is named "First Painter" to the Emperor, a mostly honorific post without its Ancien Régime prerogatives. True power over the art world is now wielded by the director of the Louvre, Vivant Denon.

Removed from the Louvre, now the new Imperial Museum, along with all the other artists he is given the church of Cluny in which to paint the vast Coronation (10 by 6 meters).

1808 – The exhibition of the Coronation is the great event of that year's Salon. David is promoted to Officer of the Legion of Honor.

1809 – David is obliged to paint the now repudiated Josephine out of his second great Napoleonic picture, The Distribution of the Eagle Standards.

1810 – David's relationship with Napoleon and the official authorities deteriorate. The fees demanded for the Coronation and the Distribution are judged exorbitant. He is excluded from the committee for the organization of the new Ecole des Beaux Arts. His Coronation wins first national prize in a competition for best painting of the decade 1800-1810, but David is offended that his Sabines should be classed below Girodet's Deluge which wins the History prize.

1814 – The year of Napoleon's abdication David exhibits the prescient Leonidas at Thermopylae, the picture of a famous ancient Greek defeat.

1815 – During Napoleon's brief return to power, the "Hundred Days", David is restored to his position of "First Painter".

1816 - 1824 – Refusing to accommodate himself to the new Bourbon regime by renouncing his revolutionary past, David leaves France for Belgium where he finds himself in the company of other fellow regicides like Barrère. He abandons the direction of his Paris studio to his pupil Gros. He continues refusing overtures from Louis XVIII and even the King of Prussia Frederick-William. In his last years he expresses his enthusiasm for Flemish and Dutch art which he discovers in Brussels. He paints many portraits and a few sentimental mythological pictures. In 1822 he paints, for a group of American investors, a copy of the Coronation of Napoleon. His health deteriorates after 1820.

1825 – His hands are paralyzed by an aneurism and he stops painting. He dies after catching cold in Brussels on October 26.

1826 – The French government refuses the return of his remains to France. He is buried in Brussels. His wife Charlotte dies a few months after him on May 26.