

Characteristics of Neoclassicism:

- Composition: figures parallel to the picture plane, like a Roman sculptural relief. Shallow space; bilateral symmetry.
- Idealization of the body: based on antique models—solid, immobile, statuesque figures whose actions appeal to reason and morality.
- Color: cold, almost metallic (or enamel-like) hues.
- Line and contour: emphasized; figures clearly delineated.
- Light: precise, evenly focused, harsh quality.
- Realism of details; great surface polish—the hand of the artist is not apparent.
- Architecture: austere, stripped down, classical (pure=not embellished).
- Purpose: paintings to hang in public place/institution (vs. Rococo smaller hôtel paintings) to educate the public (propaganda) through historical/mythological accounts.
- Portrays “universal” truths; elicits an intellectual response.

Characteristics of Romanticism:

- Seeds planted in 18th c. taste for the sentimental, the heroic, the sublime (feelings of awe mixed with terror), the fantastic, the occult, the grotesque, the macabre, voyages of the soul into dreams and the subconscious. Based on fundamental distrust of the rationalism of the Enlightenment.
- Interest in the “Gothick” world, as the Middle Ages were called at the time: considered to be the “dark ages;” time of barbarism, superstition, mystery.
- Color emphasized over line: loose, broad brush strokes show hand of the artist; strong, vibrant colors (red-orange end of spectrum).
- Composition: complex, expressive poses and gestures; revival of Baroque diagonals.
- Light: dramatic lights and darks (extreme chiaroscuro).
- Subjective view of the depths and heights of human experience in order to elicit an emotional response in the viewer.
- Record of current events that show suffering of ordinary people (as compared to events that portray “universal” truths).
- Penchant for encounter (man vs. man, man vs. nature), conflicts of violent and passionate nature.