

**A216\_1   Art and its histories**

**Musée du Louvre**

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978-1-4730-0637-9 (.epub)  
978-1-4730-1405-3 (.kdl)

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## Introduction

This course will help you to understand how major art collections are brought together over long periods of time and why particular pieces gain notoriety.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 2 study in [Arts and Humanities](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/find/arts-and-humanities?utm_source=openlearn&utm_campaign=ol&utm_medium=ebook).

## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

* understand how the Grand Louvre has come to be as it is
* critically discuss the claim that the collections in the Louvre constitute a significant part of the canon of Western European art
* ask questions of museums and collections that are appropriate to art history.

## 1 Themes and issues in the history of art

This course introduces you to a number of themes and issues in the history of art, taking as its pretext a visit to the Louvre in Paris. It asks three kinds of question:

1. How did the Grand Louvre (as the modernised Louvre is called) – its buildings, paintings and sculptures – come to be as it is?
2. How should we respond to the claim that the collections in the Louvre constitute a significant part of the canon of Western European art?
3. What can we, as art historians, do with a museum of this kind? (What are appropriate questions to ask of any museum and its collections?)

The Louvre is structured as a series of activities, each associated with a video clip taken from the original TV programme. In addition to watching the clips, you’ll be asked to tackle a number of questions that should help you clarify your thoughts and understanding of the material presented on the clips.

Start of Activity

**Activity 1**

Start of Question

Think of an art museum you have visited recently. Ask yourself how aware you were of the building and the history of the collection when viewing the works. Do you think that the context of works of art and the types of decision which went into their acquisition are relevant to an understanding of their meaning?

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 1](" \l "Session1_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 2 The Louvre

## 2.1 Introduction

The original TV programme was divided into an introduction and seven sections, each preceded by a simple question that appears on screen. To help you to explore this material, we have split the programme into eight clips, each associated with an activity. Once you have completed all the activities, you will have viewed the TV programme in its entirety and considered some of the questions explored in the original OU course.

Activity 2 deals with the whole history of the buildings from medieval castle to the ‘pyramid’. Activities 3–5 deal with the ancien régime from the sixteenth century to the French Revolution in 1789, looking at the relationships between the acquisition of works of art, their display and the patronage of contemporary art. Activities 6–8 cover the creation of the Louvre as a museum under Napoleon I and its gradual transformation into the modern Louvre.

A list of the principal artists and works shown on video is given in Section 3.

Start of Activity

**Activity 2**

Start of Question

Watch the first segment of video. This clip has been created from the introduction to the original TV programme, and it asks a number of questions about the experience of visiting the Louvre. As you watch, consider the following questions:

1. What are these people doing here; what are they looking for? Are they interested in the Venus de Milo as an example of late Hellenistic Greek art, or as an icon of feminine beauty recognisable from twentieth-century popular culture? Are they here just to say they’ve seen the Mona Lisa, or to evaluate it as an example of an early Renaissance portrait?
2. How does the museum, and the authority behind the museum, guide their quest and manage the cultural exchange? What sort of transaction is being managed here?
3. Are they in a position to make up their own minds, or are their judgements determined by what the curators are telling them?

Think about these questions and jot down your own views.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 1

[View transcript - Clip 1](" \l "Session2_Transcript1)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

## 2.2 Activities 3 to 5

Start of Activity

**Activity 3**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, make a few notes on what you’ve learnt about how the present buildings of the Louvre came about.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 2

[View transcript - Clip 2](" \l "Session2_Transcript2)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 4**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, use your own words to explain how the royal collection was formed.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 3

[View transcript - Clip 3](" \l "Session2_Transcript3)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 5**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, jot down a few thoughts on how royal patronage promoted art practice.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 4

[View transcript - Clip 4](" \l "Session2_Transcript4)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

## 2.3 Activities 6 to 8

Start of Activity

**Activity 6**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, make a few notes on what you’ve learnt about how the taste of the court was challenged by a new public.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 5

[View transcript - Clip 5](" \l "Session2_Transcript5)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 7**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, make some notes on what you learnt about how the royal collection was transformed into a state museum.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 6

[View transcript - Clip 6](" \l "Session2_Transcript6)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 8**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, make a few notes on how the Louvre was adapted to meet the needs of a mass audience.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 7

[View transcript - Clip 7](" \l "Session2_Transcript7)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

## 2.4 Activities 9 and 10

Start of Activity

**Activity 9**

Start of Question

Watch the next segment of video. Once you’ve watched the video, jot down some notes on what you learnt about how the Grand Louvre meets the needs of today.

Click to view video

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Clip 8

[View transcript - Clip 8](" \l "Session2_Transcript8)

End of Media Content

End of Question

End of Activity

Start of Activity

**Activity 10**

Start of Question

Before tackling this activity, you might like to review the notes you made in the preceding activities and, perhaps, view the video clips once again. When you’re ready, consider the following questions:

1. Do visitors ‘like’ the art in the Louvre in the same way that the people responsible for putting it there ‘liked’ it, and what were the motives of those who first collected the art?
2. The programme presents examples of four interlocking kinds of historical narrative:
   * history of the building
   * history of the royal collections
   * royal and state patronage of art and architecture
   * history of the museum.

Can you identify ways in which these narratives intersect?

End of Question

[View answer - Activity 10](" \l "Session2_Answer1)

End of Activity

## 3 Principal artists and works

Michelangelo, Slave, known as Rebel, sculpture, c.1513, acquired 1794

Michelangelo, Slave, known as Dying or Asleep, sculpture, c.1513, acquired 1794

Venus de Milo, sculpture, late Hellenistic, acquired 1827

Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa, painting, 1501–6, acquired 1519

Cimabue, Maestà, painting, c.1270, acquired 1814

Diana of the Louvre (also known as Diana of Versailles), sculpture, Roman copy of Greek original with seventeenth-century restorations, acquired by Francis I c.1530s, acquired by Louvre 1798

Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XIV, painting, 1701, acquired 1701 (commissioned by king)

Unknown French artist, Paris Parlement altarpiece, c.1452, acquired 1789

Titian, Francis I, painting, 1537, acquired 1538 (commissioned by king)

Raphael, Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist (also known as La Belle Jardiniere), painting, 1508, acquired 1530

Andrea del Sarto, Charity, painting, 1518, acquired 1518 (commissioned by king)

Raphael, Saint Michael and the Dragon (also known as Saint Michael Confounding the Devil), painting, 1518, acquired 1518 (commissioned by the Pope as a gift for the king)

Giuseppe Castiglione, View of the Salon Carré in 1861, painting, 1861, transferred from Ministry of Finance to the Louvre 1933

Titian, Le Concert Champêtre, painting, 1510, acquired 1671

Naked Mercury Attaching his Sandal, sculpture, antique, acquired 1797

Venus of Vienne (also known as Crouching Aphrodite), sculpture, probably Roman copy of Greek Hellenistic original, acquired 1848

Coysevox, Crouching Venus, sculpture, 1685, acquired 1685 (commissioned by king)

Titian, The Entombment, painting, 1525, acquired 1662

Peter Paul Rubens, The Disembarkation of Marie de’ Medici, painting, 1622, acquired 1693

Nicolas Poussin, The Rape of the Sabines, painting, 1685, acquired 1685

Charles Le Brun, The Queens of Persia at the Feet of Alexander (also known as The Tent of Darius), painting, 1660–1, acquired 1661

Charles Le Brun, The Conquest of Franche Comté, 1660, acquired 1660 (commissioned by king)

Charles Le Brun, The Battle of Arbella, painting, before 1673, acquired 1673 (commissioned by king)

Jacques-Louis David, The Sabine Women, painting, 1799, acquired 1819

Eugene Delacroix, Scenes from the Massacre of Chios, painting, 1824, acquired after the Salon 1824

G.P. Panini, Gallery with Views of Ancient Rome, painting, 1758, acquired 1944

Nicholas Coustou, Borghese Gladiator, sculpture, copy of antique, 1683, acquired1874

Nicholas Coustou, Farnese Hercules, sculpture, copy of antique, 1683, acquired 1874

Nicholas Coustou, Apollo Unveiling a Bust of Louis XIV, sculpture, 1688, acquired1793

Guillaume Coustou, The Horses of Marly, sculpture, 1739–49, acquired 1794

Pierre Puget, Alexander and Diogenes, sculpture, 1689, acquired 1833

Pierre Puget, Milo of Crotona, sculpture, 1670–82, acquired 1824

Decorative roundels in Salle de Mars, new entrance to Musée Napoleon, 1800, featuring:

1. Milo of Crotona by Puget
2. Moses by Michelangelo
3. Apollo Belvedere (antique)
4. Colossus of Memnon

Apollo Belvedere, sculpture, antique, acquired 1797

Eugene Deveria, Puget Presenting his Statue of Milo of Crotona to Louis XV in the Gardens of Versailles, oil sketch for mural, 1832, acquired 1833

Nicolas de Largillierre, Charles Le Brun, painting, 1683–6, acquired 1793

F. Girardon, Louis XIV on Horseback, sculpture (bronze maquette for the statue in the Place des Victoires destroyed during the French Revolution), 1692, acquired 1784

François Boucher, Diana Bathing, painting, 1742, acquired 1852

Jacques-Louis David, The Oath of the Horatii, painting, 1784, acquired 1784

Jean Antoine Watteau, The Pilgrimage to Cythera, painting, 1717, acquired 1790s

Hubert Robert, The ‘Salle des Saisons’, painting, 1802–3, acquired 1964

Hubert Robert, The Grande Galerie in Ruins, painting, c.1801–5

Benjamin Zix, The Marriage Procession of Napoleon and Marie-Louise through the Grand Galerie, painting, 1810 (Musée Ceramique, Sèvres)

Eustache Le Sueur, Saints Gervasius and Protasius before Anastasius, painting, 1652,acquired 1793

Dionysus and the Infant Bacchus, sculpture, antique from the Borghese collection, acquired 1809

Borghese Gladiator, sculpture, antique from the Borghese collection, acquired 1809

Paolo Veronese, The Marriage at Cana, painting, 1562, acquired 1798

Andrea Mantegna, Calvary, painting, 1457, acquired 1798

Bulls of Khorsabad, sculpture, Assyrian, excavation began 1843

Nyke of Samothrace, sculpture, Hellenistic, acquired 1863

Hubert Robert, Projected Redesign of the Grande Galerie, painting, 1796, acquired 1975

François Biard, Four O’Clock at the Salon (also known as We’re Closing), painting, 1847

Hubert Robert, The Grande Galerie, painting, 1795, acquired 1948

Hubert Robert, The Grande Galerie in the Course of Restoration, 1796–9, acquired 1946

## Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying the arts and humanities. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

## Acknowledgements

This course was written by Professor Tim Benton

Presenter: Tim Benton. Producer: Nick Levinson. Production Assistants: Tricia Cann and Judy Collins.

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## Solutions

## Activity 1

#### Discussion

Here are some thoughts of my own:

* Some would argue that confronting works of art requires little more than close attention, some imagination and patience. These are indeed indispensable requirements. On the other hand, few people feel completely at ease in a public place as august, authoritative (literally ‘palatial’) and imposing as the Louvre. Whether this environment provokes awe, respect, a sense of inferiority or annoyance will depend on you. Do you feel comfortable in a museum? Do you talk in hushed tones or can you chat freely about a painting? Do you feel guilty looking at the labels, as if you ought to know who painted the pictures?
* If part of the message we get from going to a museum is that important, knowledgeable and well-educated people have selected these things because they believe them to be ‘good’, it must be of interest to find out why they thought they were of value. If it turns out that the original reasons for commissioning or acquiring works of art were of a kind unlikely to be shared by modern viewers, we can ask ourselves questions about how our ‘taste’ is formed.
* Of course, it may be that whatever we find out about the value of works of art to those in authority will not influence our perception of them and may have nothing to do with why we ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ them. This will probably depend on how closely we’ve looked at the works and how much we know about them – in modern parlance, how much ‘ownership’ we feel for them.

[Back to - Activity 1](" \l "Session1_Activity1)

## Activity 10

#### Answer

1. It would be surprising if most visitors to the Louvre had in mind when looking at Raphael’s Saint Michael slaying the Dragon that Francis I was Grand Master of the Order of Saint Michael and that this was a reason not only for the papal gift to the French king, but also for the king to display it prominently in his palaces. Similarly, much of the work commissioned by Louis XIV had a specifically propagandist function. On the other hand, the reasons which might have motivated the Duke of Gonzaga, Charles I of England and Louis XIV of France to admire Correggio’s so-called Sleep of Antiope may not have been very different from those which set Zola’s fictional Boche and Bibi la Grillade into ‘paroxysms’.

Those in authority may have had special motives for commissioning or celebrating particular works of art, but from an early stage in the history of the French royal collections we find kings and their advisers operating as ‘connoisseurs’, trying to pick winners from the available talent. If the subsequent history of taste is to be trusted as a measure of value, some were better at this than others. Many of the best-known paintings in the Louvre were acquired in the reigns of Francis I and Louis XIV. Both kings were highly preoccupied with their image, and used artists and craftsmen to project their splendour in paintings and palaces.

From the directorship of Vivant-Denon in the First Empire, criteria for acquiring work became more specialised. As Pierre Rosenberg (Director 1994–2001) explained, Vivant-Denon’s guiding idea was that the art in the national collection should be organised on art-historical principles and presented to a mass public. The problem is that if you exclude the potential of military conquest, the very best art in Europe was simply not for sale. When Napoleon’s armies brought to the Louvre a selection from Italy, Germany and the Netherlands of the best antique and Renaissance art at the end of the eighteenth century, the Louvre was briefly the centre of the art world. Many foreigners who visited Paris during this period were persuaded that this fabulous collection should never be broken up. Only after Napoleon’s final defeat at Waterloo in 1815 were the victorious allies persuaded to return the art treasures to their owners. Nevertheless, over 100 ‘stolen’ works, in addition to the Borghese collection of antique sculptures which came to France by the marriage of Napoleon’s sister, remain in the Louvre today. Does the modern visitor pause when admiring Veronese’s huge Marriage at Cana or Cimabue’s Maestà or Mantegna’s Crucifixion predella to ask how these works got there? And yet, although military might made these acquisitions possible, the process of selection depended on professional critics and artists who accompanied Napoleon’s armies with lists of works to acquire.

1. Here are some examples of mine where the narratives intersect:
   * Although the Louvre and the Tuileries were royal palaces until the French Revolution, they were also partly public. The royal collection of paintings (the Cabinet du Roi) and the Galerie des Antiques could be visited on request. Furthermore, Louis XIV housed his academies of art and architecture in the Louvre, thus giving the collection new functions for teaching.
   * As the royal collection grew, it became a key source of inspiration for the artists employed by the Crown. When the Académie royale was founded in 1648, pupils were trained by copying works in the royal collection. In the 1660s the professors like Charles Le Brun developed their art theory through lecturing on works in the collection. Stylistic debates between more classical and more painterly artists were waged around the ‘cases’ of famous painters in the collection (for example, Poussin and Rubens).
   * The very authority of the Académie royale and the appeal to ‘good taste’ which stood the Crown in good stead when it could be seen that it was making ‘good’ choices could also turn against the Crown when its taste was questioned in the eighteenth century as decadent and frivolous. References to antiquity and to Renaissance prototypes were used by Jacques-Louis David to mock royalty and evoke republican virtue. The development of the tradition of biennial Salons in the Salon Carré in the Louvre was a tangible symbol of the art world escaping from the control of the monarchy. The public who attended these Salons engaged in fierce aesthetic and political debate.
   * Even in the heyday of royal patronage, it is a mistake to assume that royal whim was everything. Painters like Charles Le Brun or sculptors like the Coustou brothers might fit well into the royal propaganda machine, but the career of a maverick like Puget can only be explained if Louis XIV and his advisers are assumed to be genuinely anxious to discover and support good artists wherever they could be found.
   * By contrast with the Puritans after the execution of Charles I of England, the French revolutionaries decided that the significance of the discredited monarchy’s art collection was too important to be lost to the nation. So, although many of the best works in the royal collection were either overtly propagandistic for monarchy or explicitly religious, they were housed and prominently hung in the new museum as great works of art. Vivant-Denon’s policy of exhibiting the collection by ‘schools’ (Italian, Netherlandish, French) makes sense in this context. It was preferable to celebrate the collection as ‘Art’ than as a reminder of bygone days of tyranny and superstition.
   * One of the arguments for supporting a national museum from the start was that all the best modern French artists should be allowed to copy the great works of the past, as the king’s academicians had been allowed to do in earlier times. So, although most painters who came to copy in the Louvre were not ‘state artists’, and indeed often saw themselves as ‘avant-garde’, the relationship between the collection and the practice of art remained as a key feature throughout the nineteenth century. Many important ‘modern’ artists, such as Cézanne and Picasso, spent days in the Louvre copying.
   * The substantial investments which post-revolutionary heads of state (from Napoleon III to Mitterrand) have committed to the Louvre can be understood as shrewd investments in public respect.

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# Clip 1

## Transcript

TIM BENTON

This is Paris, the cultural capital of the world, as the travel brochures would say. It’s the centre for exchange, exchange of commodities and ideas. People work here, and come to shop and meet friends. The architectural style of this shopping centre is modern, expensive, lined in fine materials, with aesthetic surprises. We come out into a large space. Here there are no shops.

This is a monumental space, a space which imposes a measure of awe. It’s also a space for peoples from many different races and countries, that are attracted by one thing, they’ve come to see one of the wonders of the modern world.

Rising up to ground level, it’s clear that we’re in a modern building, a construction of stainless steel and glass. Outside this modern building turns out to be a pyramid, surrounded by palatial buildings on each side. These are the buildings of the Louvre, an erstwhile royal palace.

I.M. PEI

The pyramid was a very controversial subject, back then in 1984/85. But the form of the pyramid, people tend to confuse that with Egypt. I think that’s actually inaccurate, it’s not true. Er the Egyptian pyramid is enormous, number one, secondly it’s solid, it’s a stone. It’s a place for the dead. This pyramid at the Louvre is just the opposite it’s glass, it’s transparent.

I think the transparency is very important here, not only for the functional reason of bringing light into the reception at the hall, but also to be able to see through, so that you can see the entire complex of the Louvre.

TIM BENTON.

Through the labyrinth of courts and corridors, the public fans out to find the objects of desire, the sources of cultural capital, the magic artefacts, whose intellectual ownership confers prestige and power. This is what we’ve come to see - art.

What are these people doing here, what are they looking for? A disturbing masterpiece by Michael Angelo, or an occasion for courtship?

Are they interested in the Venus de Milo as an example of late Hellenistic Greek art, or as an icon of feminine beauty recognisable from twentieth century popular culture? Are they here just to say they’ve seen the Mona Lisa, or to evaluate it as an example of an early Renaissance portrait?

How does the museum, and the authority behind the museum, guide their quest and manage the cultural exchange? What sort of transaction is being managed here?

Well part of the deal I get from going to a museum is to get some culture, to confirm my claims of sophistication. Part of being cultured seems to involve knowing about art, being able to identify and give some account of the most beautiful and significant works.

But who decides which the most beautiful and significant works are - can I make up my own mind on the matter, or do I have to accept the judgements handed down by museum curators and experts.

These women are clearly absorbed by Cimabue’s altar piece of the Virgin and Child. Are they in a position to make up their own minds, or are their judgements determined by what the curators are telling them.

The people who selected these things - the taste makers if you like - have been making their choices over thousands of years.

These antique statues have been copied, collected, bought and sold since antiquity. And this long process adds its own authority, an authority which tells us to admire these works not only as antiquities, but also as examples of beauty. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the selectors were kings and their advisors, choosing or commissioning paintings for personal reasons.

Alternatively, they were commissioned as propaganda statements, to make a point, or impress visitors. Others were archaeologists or art historians, primarily interested in understanding past cultures.

Later, especially after eighteen hundred, there were professional museum curators trying to fill out the collection, as if to illustrate the pages of a history of art. Or there were dealers, offering the fruits of a lifetime’s taste to the nation.

Now the argument runs that what finished up in the Louvre as a result of this process of selection, was part of what is known as the canon of art, and authoritative selection of paintings and sculptures.

Well we don’t have to accept that this received opinion, but we can try and find out how these judgements were made, and why. Now my approach is going to be to ask a series of questions of the Louvre, the kind of questions that you yourself might ask the next time you visit the museum or art gallery.

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# Clip 2

## Transcript

TIM BENTON.

Let’s start with the physical context of the museum.

How did the present building of the Louvre come about?

The origins of the Louvre were as a fortress guarding the westward approaches to Paris, along the river.

The medieval Louvre with its picturesque towers and massive bulk came to represent a symbol of the royal power in Paris, holding out against revolts. The remains of this old Louvre, lost for four hundred years, have been excavated and now form part of the new Louvre.

Today’s museum not only displays it’s collection of art, but also its own history.

When Francis I decided that his old fortress needed humanising, the first bit to go was the Round Dungeon, the Keep. In 1546, just before he died, he replaced the west side of castle courtyard with a wing in the new Italian Renaissance style, by the architect Pierre Lesco. Inside, the new wing offered elegant classicising state rooms like this one, now known as the Hall of the Cariatides. Many dramas in French history unfolded in this room, while it was still part of the royal palace.

By 1590 a new wing had been added leading down to the walls on the riverbank. A new palace had also been built outside the walls to the west, called the Tuilleries after the tile ovens in the area. A grand plan developed, to link up the partially built Louvre to the new palace with long wings on both sides.

One of these was built, but it would take another two hundred and fifty years before this project was finally completed. The long gallery along the river, always known as the Grande Gallery, was nearly a kilometre long, crossing the city walls and moat. The scale of the Grande Gallery is still astonishing. From this woodcut the state of the Louvre and the Tuileries under Henry IV can be grasped, with parts of the old fortress still standing.

The fortress was then demolished, and under Louis XIII a start was made to extend Francis I’s wing into a great square court, the Court Carré. Although the completion of the Court Carré took over a century, the original style of Lescau’s sixteenth century wing was generally respected.

In the 1660s the main problem was the construction of the east facade, intended to present an imposing front to the city and to house a grand new suite of rooms for Louis XIV.

Work was still unfinished when in 1674 Louis XIV decided to move his court out of Paris to the Palace of Versailles.

Following the French revolution in 1789, the palaces of the Tuileries and Louvre took centre stage in events. With the king a prisoner in the Tuileries, and eventually executed in January 1793, the palace was declared a national monument, and part of the Louvre given over to a central museum of the arts.

Napoleon commissioned his architects to complete the grand plan, but it was left incomplete until Napoleon’s nephew seized control of the government in 1851, subsequently declaring himself Emperor Napoleon III. By 1866 the Louvre was finally complete with the enclosure of the whole palace and the construction of two new wings. Napoleon III made the Louvre and the Tuileries into a single enormous building of state, housing suites for himself and his family, as well as ministry buildings, state meeting rooms, several museums and academies.

It all ended badly of course with a disastrous Franco- Prussian war of 1870-71 - Napoleon’s defeat and exile and the Paris commune of 1871 - in the course of which the Tuileries and several other buildings of state were gutted by fire. The ruins of the Tuileries stood for ten years, but in the end this royal palace was pulled down.

And this is how the Louvre remained, for a hundred years, in gentle decline. The museum shared the buildings with the Ministry of Finance, and several other state institutions, until in September 1981 President Mitterand announced a plan to dedicate the whole building to the museum. This project came to be known as the Grande Louvre. The Ministry of Finance was moved out to a new building at the Bourse. Perhaps if you think that this is how the Louvre might have been redesigned by a modern architect, the question of tradition and continuity comes into focus.

By comparison the pyramid, designed by the American architect I.M. Pei, is an exceptionably discreet external expression of an enormous transformation inside and underground - where thousands of cubic meters were excavated - to make space for the new museum.

I M PEI.

I remember when I went to the Louvre back in 1951, my first experience with the Louvre, there were only two little toilets in that huge museum, and you don’t find it. One simply did not find those things, you know.

So it didn’t function as a museum, so the museum brief was a very very important one, in order to make it work as a museum a very major intervention had to take place. When I met Mr. Mitterand, President Mitterand at that time, I told him yes, I say something could be done to make it function well as a museum, though we have to dig under Napoleon Court.

And that was the first step. Now if he at that time told me, Mr. Pei, I don’t think that is possible, and then I would have said then I’m sorry there’s nothing could be done. But he was very understanding so he said I can understand what you meant very well, that’s fine.

TIM BENTON.

Now here’s a puzzle. When we the British cut off the head of our King Charles I, he had the finest collection of paintings in Europe. But Oliver Cromwell sold them off, and pretty soon most of them found their way through the dealer network into the collection of Louis XIV. So most of these paintings are not in a British Museum, but in the Louvre. But when the French put their king, Louis XVI to the guillotine in 1793, they decided to form a national art museum out of the royal collection.

Why? Well it’s a complicated story.

The revolutionaries knew that there had to be a complete break with the age of royal tyranny. On the other hand, they considered it the right of free men and women of France to have access to the great works of art of the past.

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# Clip 3

## Transcript

NARRATION:

How was the collection formed and to what extent was its nature conditioned by royal patronage. Some of the most famous paintings in the Louvre were collected by Francis I.

He commissioned this portrait of himself from the Venetian artist Titian in 1537. Now was it just that Francis had a good eye. He also acquired Raphael’s La Belle Jardiniere painted in 1508, now generally considered one of the most important works in the Louvre. He kept his faith with paintings in an intimate part of Fontainebleu, the bathrooms, where he could enjoy them in the company of his mistresses, and closest courtiers.

Once in the collection however, paintings like these became a valuable asset which could be shown off to visiting dignitaries as a sign of the kings culture.

This painting by Andrea Del Sarto, the Italian painter, was done in France in 1518 for the king. The subject is an allegory of charity, a virtue which wealthy kings could hope to acquire. Paintings could flatter a king and make him seem powerful.

Across the Grande Gallery a painting of St. Michael and the Dragon by Raphael was commissioned by the Pope as a gift for Francis I. Now, as grand master of the order of St. Michael, Francis had a particular interest in this warlike angel.

Leonardo da Vinci also came from Italy to France, where the king gave him his own chateau, and is thought to have brought with him the most famous painting in the Louvre, the Mona Lisa. It’s popularly said that Leonardo died in Francis’s arms. Raphael, Titian, Leonardo, these were among the most famous living artists in Europe.

In other words, what Francis was collecting, was at the time modern art.

It’s a remarkable thing that Francis’s judgement has held up, and these works have been valued as central to the canon of art, not only by subsequent royal patrons, but also by their revolutionary and republican successors.

The paintings collected by Francis I formed the core of the most prized selection of works, which were displayed in the Salon Carré from 1840 onwards. In the Salon Carré were also paintings that had originally belonged to Charles I of England, and had been acquired by Louis XIV.

With their secular subject matter and sensuous treatment, some of these works were specifically designed to wet the tastes of secular patrons. Titian’s Fète Champêtre had originally been in the court of the Gonzaga, in Mantua, when in 1627 a large part of the Gonzaga collection came to England.

Here is another one that came by the same route, Correggio’s Venus, Satyr and Cupid, often wrongly called the Sleep of Antiope. Painted in 1524, it passed through Charles I collection and then via Cardinal Mazarin to Louis XIV.

Francis I was also a keen collector of antique sculpture. He had this antique statue of Diana repaired. We can see that Diana was originally holding a bow, but the restorer added a deer, to make associations with Francis’s favourite sport - hunting - even more obvious.

In the next century, Louis XIV’s wealth and power allowed him to extend the royal collection of antique sculptures. An antique type much favoured by the court, was the Crouching Aphrodite. This is one that was discovered in Vienne in France in the seventeenth century.

The kings collection of antique sculptures provided models for his artists. This sculpture was commissioned by the king for Versailles in 1685 and was signed by Coysevox, with the signature in imitation of Phidias, written in Greek lettering.

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# Clip 4

## Transcript

NARRATION:

How did royal patronage promote art practice.

Now part of the point of collecting antique and Renaissance art was to train up artists to use their skill in the service of the crown. From 1600, for two hundred years, the kings painters were given lodgings in the Louvre.

In 1648 the Royal Academy of Painting was founded to give these artists a proper training, and this too was housed in the palace of the Louvre. Now artists received into the academy were guaranteed a job for life. A key part of the training were the lectures administered by the academicians evaluating and explaining paintings in the royal collection.

For example, on the 7th May, 1667, the kings first painter, Charles le Brun, lectured on Raphael’s St. Michael and the Dragon, praising Raphael for his composition, for his depiction of the human body as if motivated by the divine spirit.

A month later, the painter Philippe de Champaigne chose Titian’s Entombment, a recent acquisition by Louis XIV, this time praising the Venetian artist’s use of colour and light and shade. Philippe showed how Titian had daringly cast shadow over Christ’s upper body and head, while dramatising the tragedy of Christ’s death by illuminating his lifeless legs and feet.

Comparing the skills of different artists at composition, drawing, colour and expression, became a staple form of debate which informed current art practice.

An amateur painter and critic, Roger de Piles, even drew up tables of scores out of twenty. This set the cat among the pigeons, since he was a fanatical fan of the Venetian colourists, and of Rubens.

In 1622, Rubens had been commissioned to paint a cycle of huge paintings, commemorating the achievements of Marie de Medici, mother of King Louis XIII.

Compared with most French artists, Rubens commanded a hugely expressive range, a vibrant use of colour, and an acute observation of the body. For composition and expression, de Piles awarded Rubens eighteen and seventeen out of twenty, equalled only Raphael, while for colour he gave a mark of seventeen, only bettered by the Venetian artists Titian and Giorgione. Only for drawing did he mark him down, to thirteen.

By contrast, the French painter Nicolas Poussin, who spent most of his working life in Rome, was admired for his knowing references to antique sculpture and reliefs. De Piles gave him seventeen for drawing, and fifteen each for composition and expression, but only six for colour. Nevertheless it was following Poussin’s erudite example that French academic art aspired to emulate and outdo the Italian Renaissance. Charles le Brun, the king’s first painter, spent three years in Italy with Poussin, and tried to learn from his master’s style.

French painters and critics returned to the comparative analysis of Poussin and Rubens, for the next hundred and fifty years. It’s notable that an artist actively involved in the revolution, Jacques Louis David, should have chosen to paint in a style heavily influenced by Poussin and antique sculpture.

His version of the Sabine Women, which depicts the women trying to stop their Roman husbands from fighting their Sabine brothers, is as cold as a Roman marble frieze, but packed with emotional power.

By contrast, Eugene Delacroix, in the 1820s, borrowed heavily from Rubens, in his use of colour, and dramatic composition. He closely studied Rubens’s Marie de Medici cycle.

So, having ready access to these works in the Royal Collection formed the basis of an artists education.

Just as artists like Poussin studied the antique, so painters later were to study Poussin, Rubens, and the Italian artists of the Renaissance.

Under Louis XIV and his ministers, there was a symbiotic relationship between the collection of antique and Renaissance art, the development of artistic education under the Royal Academy, and regular employment of the best artists in public commissions for the king. When carried out with vigour and conviction, these three strands of royal policy produced great advantages for the king, as a form of propaganda, celebrating the kings achievements. It also formed the tradition of high art, which could be handed on to later generations.

An important part of the painter’s or sculptor’s education remained the trip to Rome as pensionnaire of the French school. Young painters and sculptors were sent there by the Royal Academy to copy the best examples, and this was all part of the process of preparing painters and sculptors for work in the kings service.

Among the young sculptors who studied in Rome, were the brothers Nicholas and Guillaume Coustou.

GENEVIEVE BRESC: Curator of Sculpture (Translation)

The Coustou brothers won Academic scholarships to Rome. This was the great encounter with the Antique. Nicholas Coustou copies the Borghese Gladiator - copied the Farnese Hercules - at the time in the great collections in Rome. Back in France, they joined the Royal Workshops.

They followed the highest level of careers. They were ‘associated’ and then ‘received’ in the Academy on presentation of a masterpiece - it was just like the old guild system - but at the same time a way of flattering the king. Nicholas Coustou’s masterpiece was this sculpture: Apollo unveiling a bust of Louis XIV, after a model by Le Brun - a perfect example of court art.

TIM BENTON

Among the notable works of Nicholas’s younger brother Guillaume, are these horse tamers, loosely based on the famous sculptures placed on the Curinale Hill in Rome.

But you didn’t have to follow the traditional route to receive royal patronage.

The sculptor, Puget, began his career carving figureheads in the naval dockyards in Toulon. His reputation spread, and the king gave him two great blocks of marble to fashion as he pleased.

This is a most unusual subject. Alexander the Great, on whom Louis XIV modelled himself, had gone to see the great philosopher Diogenes, who lived, naked, in a barrel. When Alexander and his retinue arrived, he asked the philosopher how he could help him, and Diogenes replied - just get out of my light. Now since Louis XIV also represented himself as the sun king, this is a potentially treasonous representation.

In the other great block of marble, Puget attempted a great and terrible episode from classical legend. It represents the antique athlete Milo of Crotona, who in his old age tries to tear a tree down with his bare hands. His fingers are trapped, and he’s attacked by a lion. This work has always been seen as a key piece in the royal collection of French sculpture.

Puget’s unconventional career and troubled personality allowed him to be presented as a heroic genius, in the mould of Michael Angelo.

When the entrance hall of the new museum was decorated in 1800, Puget’s Milo is shown as the representative of French sculpture, to be compared with Michel Angelo’s Moses. The antique Apollo Belvedere in Rome and the Colossus of Memnon, in Egypt.

In designs for frescos decorating the nineteenth century Louvre, the Milo crops up again and again, as a talisman for the supremacy of French sculpture.

This portrait of the king’s first painter, Charles Le Brun, in a sense sums up the whole career of a successful official artist. On the table is an engraving of his painting, the Tent of Darius. It was this painting which so impressed the king, that he took him on as court painter. The portrait also shows le Brun’s classical training.

We can see a bronze statuette of the Borghese Gladiator, very like the one Nicholas Coustou made in Rome two years before this portrait was painted. Coustou had copied it from the famous life sized bronze Hellenistic statue which was then in Rome. Doing studies of this kind was how young artists developed their skills.

Behind it are representations of the great works of painterly propaganda which le Brun carried out for Louis XIV. You can see the conquest of the Franche Conté, from the Gallery de Glaces in Versailles, where le Brun painted the vault with scenes celebrating military victories.

To see this side of le Brun’s work in the Louvre, we can look at these enormous paintings of the conquests of Alexander the Great, commissioned in 1673, which Louis would have interpreted as an allegory of his own military prowess - and nobility. These paintings flattered the king by analogy.

It may seem surprising that these examples of royal patronage, were given pride of place in the new central museum during the French Revolution.

In complete contrast, the full sized bronze statue of the king by the sculptor Girardon, of which this is the study, was demolished during the revolution, along with many explicit celebrations of royal authority.

The reason the le Brun painting survived, was because they were allegorical. The virtues of Alexander which they extolled could be detached from the king, and be seen as universal examples of heroism and courage.

Le Brun’s heads were based on his comparative study of the depiction of emotions. It was the ability of art to convey complex emotional states, le Brun claimed, which set art above poetry.

By the mid eighteenth century, the very series of high art which had been developed by the Royal Academy began to be used against King Louis XV and his court. Critics began to assert that the kings collection was too important to be hidden away in the royal palaces. The king had a duty to raise the level of public taste by putting on show the best works of the past.

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# Clip 5

## Transcript

NARRATION:

how was the taste of the court challenged by a new public?

As early as 1699, the Royal Academy organised a public exhibition in the Louvre and this was the origin of the regular public exhibitions which came to be known as the Salon.

From 1737, regular exhibitions of work in the Salon Carré were reintroduced, and it was the public admission to these exhibitions which allowed for the circulation of criticisms of royal painters.

Serious critics began to accuse the royal painters of debasing the classical tradition, and producing erotic, frivolous art for the courtiers. Artists like Boucher pandered successfully to these tastes and became extremely wealthy.

This criticism took on strong political overtones. Many of the kings political opponents supported those critics who argued, that art was too important to be left to court patronage.

It was in this atmosphere that the young Jacques Louis David carved out a reputation for himself. His large severe paintings took subjects from antique pre-imperial Rome, proclaiming republican virtues.

With their imposing scale and dramatic compositions, they were designed to dominate the competition in the Salon. As the imagination of the public was caught by this spectacle of artistic conflict, and as the profession of art critic grew in importance, the Salon came to play a significant and potentially de-stabilising role in Parisian society. But before the Crown could take action to meet its critics, the events of 1789 changed everything.

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# Clip 6

## Transcript

TIM BENTON

With the execution of the king in January 1793, the decision was taken to make the royal collection accessible to all, and this happened on the 10th August. After 1793, the collection was expanded with confiscations from churches, and aristocratic families.

Michel Angelo’s Slaves had been in the possession of French aristocrats since the seventeenth century, and were confiscated during the Revolution. They quickly became star attractions in the new central museum.

Fra Bartolomeo’s Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine had belonged to the Church of Notre Dame in Autun.

Another category of works which came into the Louvre, were those reception pieces submitted to the academy by academicians. This is Watteau’s Isle de Cythere.

The first real director of the Musée Central of the Louvre, was the engraver and art collector Vivant Denon. The present director of the Louvre, Pierre Rosenberg, considers Denon’s contribution to have essential.

PIERRE ROSENBERG

What was his great idea in a certain way, a very simple idea first to open the museum to everyone, and to make it a sort of democratic institution. There were examples before but the idea was not works of art hanging together, er chosen by the taste of the ruler of the prince, but trying to explain through work of art the history of art. Sculpture Gallery

That means the schools the division in northern school Italian school and French school, the chronology from Giotto you go to Masaccio and from Masaccio to Leonardo da Vinci and from there to Caravaggio and so on and so on, I mean this idea of an evolution of art history.

TIM BENTON

And Denon soon had enormously more to work with to create his history of art.

In addition to the kings collections, the central museum was swelled by an unheard of booty, the product of a systematic policy of trophies of conquest, extracted from the defeated nations of Europe.

To measure the extraordinary completeness of these acquisitions, you only have to look at Panini’s representation of the treasures of ancient Rome, painted in 1758, forty years before Napoleon’s conquest of Italy - almost all the famous antique sculptures depicted here - to see which generations of artists and cognoscenti had had to travel to Rome, were crated up and dispatched to Paris by art historians travelling with Napoleon’s armies.

In the Louvre, the best works of sculpture were displayed along a suite of galleries with, in pride of place at the end, the most extraordinary of the ancient treasures, the Laocoon.

It was almost as if Rome itself with its two thousand year old history, had been transported to Paris.

In this extraordinary painting, Hubert Robert imagined how the Grande Gallery would look in ruins after some future cataclysm. We can see some of the new acquisitions lying around, being rediscovered anew by artists and archaeologists. An artist is sketching the Apollo Belvedere. While in another corner, one of Michael Angelo’s Slaves lies unnoticed.

Works acquired by revolution or force of arms, Robert seems to be saying, could as easily be lost again in the next turn of fate.

Napoleon’s newly acquired art treasures were put on display all along the Grande Gallery, on the occasion of his marriage to Marie Louise of Austria.

Many of Raphael’s best paintings, including the Transfiguration, featured in the trophies of conquest, which doubled the Italian Renaissance collection.

Further on came some spectacular Flemish works, including Rubens’s Descent From the Cross, his most famous work. And these works were then compared with the best achievements of French classicism, including the huge canvas of St. Gervasius and Pritasius by Le Sueur.

This painting, commissioned by the crown for the church at St. Gelda in Paris, had been confiscated during the revolution.

Although most of these works had to be re-patriated after the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the French managed to hang on to a significant number.

An Italian collection which the French were able to keep was that of Prince Borghese, which was acquired for the marriage of Napoleon’s sister.

After the return of the Laocoon, the Dying Gall and the Apollo Belvedere, the statues from the Borghese collection such as this Dyonisius and the infant Bacchus, became the most famous antiquities in the Louvre.

The Borghese Gladiator, one of the most celebrated antique sculptures, which we’ve already seen as a model for Nicholas Coustou, and shown in pride of place on the bureau of Charles le Brun, finally came to France with this collection.

Of the Renaissance paintings confiscated in Italy, the largest was Veronese’s Feast of Cana. It seems that its size prevented it being sent back to Venice in 1815. Throughout the nineteenth century it had pride of place in the Salon Carré.

In the case of this wonderful 14th C painting by Cimabue, which was taken from the Church of St. Francesco in Pisa, it’s likely that the Italians were not interested enough in art at the early period to demand its return. So this is a case where military seizure may have saved the painting from destruction or neglect.

This Calvary by Mantegna, is a predela, that’s to say a small painting at the bottom of a larger altarpiece. The curator’s managed to keep the predela, when the main altarpiece had to be returned to Italy. Again, Denon was ahead of the game in valuing Mantegna’s work, at a time when early Renaissance art was not yet in fashion.

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# Clip 7

## Transcript

NARRATION

How was the Louvre adapted to meet the needs of a mass audience?

After the final defeat of Napoleon, the monarchy was restored in France and Louis XVIII, Charles X and Louis Philippe all contributed to the decoration and the completion of the buildings, and the enlargement of the collection.

Now this was a time when most nation states were founding national art museums in imitation of the Louvre, and it quickly became a matter of fierce rivalry to secure the best works. In the Louvre the priority was to replace those crowd pulling masterpieces which had had to be returned after 1815.

An early success was the so-called Venus de Milo, obtained by a mixture of diplomacy and force in 1820. This statue immediate becomes a symbol of beauty, and takes a prominent place in all future organisatons of the Louvre.

After an undignified scramble between French British and German agents, a magnificent collection of Egyptian antiquities was assembled by the French Consul Champmollion, and donated in 1827.

The French developed an ambitious policy of funding expensive archaeological expeditions, substituting by peaceful means for Napoleon’s conquering armies.

In 1847, after a high profile archaeological expedition in Khorsabad, the first two bulls from the Palace of Sargon were installed. By the mid century these discoveries were no chance finds, but the products of systematic competitive endeavour.

And in 1863, the Nyke of Samothrace was discovered, and sent to Paris by Consul Champmollion.

The Louvre quickly established itself as a site for a number of different audiences. This is how Hubert Robert imagined the new art public when the museum was first opened. Art lovers and middle class cognoscenti rub shoulders with foreign or provincial visitors, copyists, and art students.

(Quote from letter by Prince Mirza Aboul Taleb Khan)

“ This museum is paid for at public expense, and the public is freely admitted. It’s purpose is to disseminate a taste for the arts, and to establish their sanctuary in the French capital, also to make the government popular.”

TIM BENTON. (Quote from writer Jules Fleury)

“ The visitors, a turbulent and unseemly mob, can best be described by the words of the psalm, they have eyes but see not. This ignorant public has the special talent of stopping before the very worst paintings. They’re either provincials or foreigners. It’s rare that fashionable Parisians visit the Louvre on open days.”

But this is how the realist novelist, Emile Zola, describes a visit by a working class wedding party from Montmartre.

“ Their guide called a halt in the middle of the Salon Carré. ‘You will only find masterpieces here’ he whispered quietly, as if in a church. Gervaise asked for the Feast of Cana to be explained. ‘It’s stupid not to put the story on the labels’ he said. Coupau stopped in front of the Mona Lisa, which he declared looked like one of his aunts. Boche and Bibi la Grillade sniggered, stealing glances at the nude women. The thighs of Antiope, more than anything, sent them into paroxysms”

TIM BENTON.

All our great contemporary painters have nourished their talent in this one gallery, and if they’ve not all been able to equal their masters, they have at least been encouraged to follow them, by studying their masterpieces.

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# Clip 8

## Transcript

NARRATOR

So throughout the nineteenth century, the Louvre had tried to satisfy contradictory aims. To an extent it retained the state and royal associations of the Louvre and Tuileries Palaces. Until 1980 it continued to house the Ministry of Finance. The old Louvre presented the visitor with hideous circulation difficulties. There was only one entrance, on the south side.

JEAN LEBRAT (Translation)

I.M. Pei took this into account and said ‘the entrance must be at the centre of gravity of the collections’.

I M PEI

Why centre of gravity? from that point, it’s almost the shortest distance to the three pavilions. Richelieu, Denon and Sully. If you’d put the entrance let’s say at the centre of Napoleon Court, that is the place where the entrance should be.

And then people can then go down and and see exactly where they are, and how they should go about visiting the museum.

I think the entrance to a great museum, has to be appropriate to the Louvre, and we simply couldn’t do anything that is above ground that is grand enough to do justice to that requirement. By excavating Napoleon Court we put the reception hall quite far down, nine meters below ground. And so therefore with the pyramid we have a tremendous volume. That volume gives Napoleon Hall the kind of importance that it deserves.

JEAN LEBRAT (Translation)

The Louvre is the museum of Paris. It’s the great museum of France. When I went to Japan I was struck how travel agents sell the Pyramid of the Louvre as an essential part of the European tour.

TIM BENTON.

So already, this building has become a symbol of French identity.

In a similar way, works which have been acquired over the years from other cultures, have taken on French citizenship. To question their value is in a sense to challenge the authority of the state.

I asked Jean Lebrat if the Mona Lisa is in any way French.

JEAN LEBRAT: (Translation)

I believe she is profoundly French. You can’t imagine her leaving here - even to go to England!

TIM BENTON.

The canon of works in the Louvre - here is the result of a long process of selection and rejection. Although chance and political factors played an important role in deciding what’s in the Louvre, a continuing process of discrimination and debate either validates or challenges the selection and subtly adjusts the pecking order of the canon, as it’s presented to the public.

And this is a process to which we’re all entitled to participate.

PIERRE ROSENBERG

Museums are not sterilised, they are moving they’re changing they’re transforming, so why not here say that the move will be finished in 1998? I agree this because I have to say so, but in reality I know perfectly well that the museum will be never finished by chance, it’s a living institution and if it could be finished it could prove that the museum would be dead.

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