

Antoine-Louis Barye (1795–1875)

Antoine-Louis Barye is among the most original artists to emerge from the Romantic movement in France. Although his work was not always appreciated by the official artistic institutions of his time, today he is recognized as one of the most important sculptors of the 19th century. He held his first public exhibition at the Paris Salon of 1827, but it was not until the Salon of 1831 that his sculptures began to receive serious critical attention. Members of the French royal family also commissioned significant pieces from him throughout the 1830s, and he received the Legion of Honor from King Louis-Philippe in 1833.

Despite Barye's remarkable initial success with critics and prestigious royal patrons, the Salon authorities rejected his sculptures for exhibition in 1837. They determined that the expressive forms and unusual subject matter of Romantic art were generally too shocking and audacious for public view. Outraged, and deprived of a commercial venue for his art, Barye created his own company and began producing decorative bronzes for the private collectors' market. After twelve years of a stable career selling limited editions of his works, the sculptor was invited to sit as a member of the jury for the Salon. In 1850, he once again exhibited at the Salon, and his work was finally greeted with the unanimous acclaim that it deserved. His bronzes were collected passionately in France and abroad; noteworthy American collectors such as George A. Lucas (1824–1909) and William T. Walters (1820–1894) purchased a number of his sculptures. Barye was awarded with the Great Gold Medal at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867. The next year, he was elected to the prestigious Académie des Beaux-Arts, the same institution that attempted to censor his art thirty years earlier.

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