

Romanticism in Sculpture

Throughout the 1820s, Romantic artists began questioning the sources of influence as well as the codes of representation that belonged to the Neoclassical artists of the previous generation. The “ideal beauty” of the Neoclassical style was primarily derived from ancient Greek and Roman art. The French Romantics, by contrast, wanted to devise new artistic means for expressing intense feelings and personal experiences. Barye’s own Romantic veneration of passionate emotion and untamed nature is clearly reflected in his preference for modeling his sculptures after scenes from the animal kingdom.

Conservative detractors often accused the artists of Barye’s generation of seeking “the beautiful in the ugly” because their revolutionary aesthetic distanced itself from the accepted principles that had been inherited from the classical tradition. Indeed, the Romantic movement was an attempt to establish new paradigms for representation that sought inspiration in art from periods and regions well beyond the classic Greco-Roman era. Barye’s turbulent and multifaceted compositions demonstrate his unique customization of approaches used in the eras of Mannerist and Baroque sculpture. He also sought inspiration in Greek art that predated the classical period. His reference to these extravagant styles allowed him to capture violent momentum and raw realism in his bronze sculptures.

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