



THE LESSON OF INGRES

Via Amaury-Duval

By R. H. Ives Gammell

People have alleged, gentlemen, that my atelier was a church. Very well, then, let it be a church, a sanctuary dedicated to the cult of beauty and excellence, and may all those who have joined it and then left or dispersed, in a word, may all my pupils wherever they may be and at all times disseminate truth.

— Ingres

A few years ago I had occasion to excerpt and annotate for my own use the most relevant passages in Amaury-Duval's captivating reminiscences¹ of the towering genius with whom he was long associated, first as a pupil and subsequently as a major painter seen at close range over a period of years by an astute and cultivated mind who had become a knowledgeable craftsman himself by the time he sat down to record his memories. Chancing on my notes more recently, it occurred to me that, translated and accompanied by a commentary, the result could interest those of my pupils who do not read French. My attention had focused on passages relating to Ingres as a teacher of painting, a subject of the gravest import to potential painters today. For the present lamentable state of the painter's art is directly due to the misdirected teaching dispensed in art schools everywhere for the last forty years. As a result of this continuing exigency, the greater part of the vast, slowly accumulated lore, which made possible five centuries of great painting, has been dissipated, perhaps irretrievably lost. Therefore any reliable information relating to the kind of training on which that painting was based has become of critical importance to every person aspiring to be a serious painter.

Now, Ingres may justly be considered the last very great practitioner of this lost art, and the store of painterly wisdom at his disposal was very large indeed. But his atelier was operative for only nine years, which is probably the chief cause of his relatively limited influence as an instructor. In the course of his book Amaury-Duval attributes Ingres' qualified effectiveness as a teacher to certain intellectual idiosyncrasies which he very penetratingly analyzes. These irregular limitations, however, may not fully account for the comparative insuccess of his rather brief Paris venture as head of an atelier. I shall have occasion to cite other factors which I believe also contributed to the great artist's partial failure in this capacity. Nevertheless, no matter how we estimate the impact of the direct teaching which Ingres dispensed during those nine years, the influence of the esthetic doctrine disseminated through his widely publicized precepts and of the artistic ideals manifested in his pictures has been incalculable and continues to make itself felt today, however haltingly, I confidently expect their prestige to augment with the passage of time and these pages are written with that in mind.



The twentieth-century reader will understandably ask who this Amaury-Duval was, for his once considerable reputation has been in eclipse for many years. Eugene Emmanuel Amaury-Duval (1808-1885) was the scion of a well-to-do family established in Paris. His father had founded a highly regarded periodical, *Le Decade Philosophique*, which made him a figure in the intellectual life of the capital. This achievement, no doubt in conjunction with his personal distinction and charm, brought about the elder Amaury-Duval's election as a *member libre* of the Academie des Beaux-Arts. This *Academie* was, and still is, the fine arts section of the Institut de France as that company was reorganized under the Restoration. It consisted of thirty-four artist members, fourteen of whom were painters, and also of a small nuclear of men chosen for their personal eminence and their interest in the Fine Arts, the *membres libres*. Amaury-Duval, *pere*, also headed the Fine Arts division at the Ministry of the Interior which then supervised the French Academy in Rome. In the exercise of his functions he had occasion, in 1804, to intercede in behalf of the twenty-four year old Ingres who was then awaiting travel money due him as recipient of the *Prix de Rome*. The sum had been withheld by the Ministry, short of funds because of Napoleon's campaigns, but it was paid as a result of this timely intervention.

These circumstances all conspired to make a session held at the Institut in 1825 the occasion which started off the younger Amaury-Duval's artistic career as an Ingres pupil.

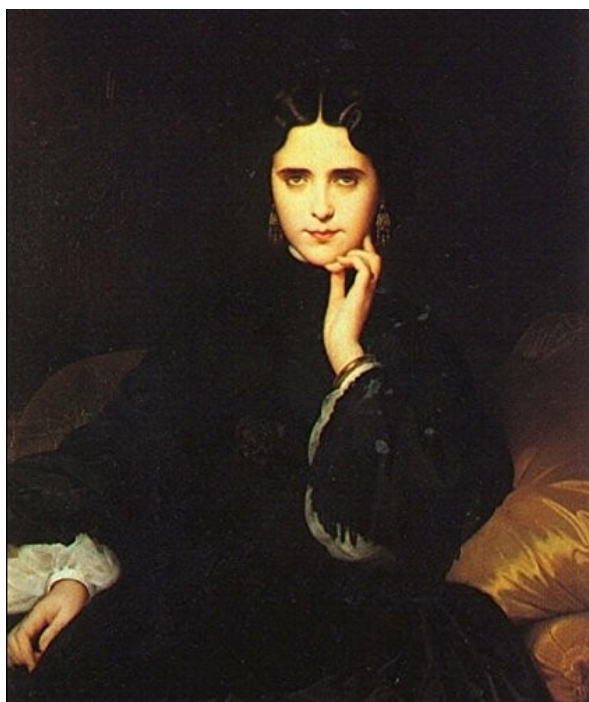
In the fall of that year the seventeen-year-old lad, intent on becoming a painter, had begged his influential parent to arrange for his admission to the studio of the Baron Gros, beyond question the most distinguished painter among David's earlier pupils and at that moment at the park of his fame. Gros, of course, belonged to the Institut de France and M. Amaury-Duval intended to accost the artist now made a baron, at the end of the session in question. But a fortuitous incident diverted his attention to his one time protegee, Ingres, who had now become a celebrated painter himself. He had, in fact, recently returned from Italy trailing clouds of glory and been elected a member of the prestigious assembly which was about to call its meeting to order. But before we take up Amaury's own narrative of what transpired in its corridors we can profitably examine the professional standing ultimately attained by the beginner through whose eyes we shall presently observe goings-on charged with significance for painters of today and tomorrow.

As I have only been privileged to see one



canvas by Amaury-Duval I am forced to rely on the estimate of Maurice Denis (1870-1943), a

painter associated with the Symbolist group who had a considerable reputation not so long ago. Denis wrote an eloquent estimate of our painter-author,² praising his mural paintings which adorn several Paris churches and one or two chateaux in the country. He rates these murals among the best things of their kind painted in France during the mid-nineteenth-century. He even deems that these decorations were instrumental in forming the noble art of Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), which is indeed high praise from a man who considered himself a disciple of the great Puvis. I do not know these murals by Amaury-Duval, even in reproduction, but I have examined a portrait by him in the Louvre and photographs of one or two easel paintings of his. They are clearly the work of a talented man carefully schooled in drawing and composition who does not appear, in



these canvasses at any rate, to have evolved a very personal art of his own. His accomplishment is far from negligible, however, and would almost certainly have been inferior had he studied with a less exacting teacher, so we shall be reading a commentary written by a working painter who knew what he was writing about. His readers should also give him due credit for being a highly cultivated man of the world who could see life in a broad perspective.

Page 2: It is interesting to read, for instance, that in 1825, when our recorder was finishing the French equivalent of our high school, painting

was regarded as a very hazardous profession proffering small financial reward whereas, by 1878, when he was writing his reminiscences, established artists vied on equal terms with the most prosperous merchants. That state of affairs was to continue until the Great Depression of 1930. Throughout the intervening years every painter who had mastered his craft, and there are never very many capable of so doing for it is a singularly difficult and elusive affair, could rest assured of a good livelihood. But the popular concept of the art of painting has altered so radically since that disastrous year that the position long occupied in the community by qualified painters is scarcely comprehensive today. At present, for example, the commendation of art critics and the market value of contemporary pictures, both of them supposedly reliable certificates of artistic merit, actually climb in inverse ratio to the degree of knowledge and professional skill apparent in the works under consideration. Coincidentally the unremitting toil and severe intellectual discipline which were once part and parcel of a painter's apprenticeship no longer prevail in this field and the extensive cultural range, which formerly enable artists to consort on equal terms with men eminent in letters, science and politics, is scarcely evident. The incident presently before us provides



a good example of a type of interaction among these groups which was routinely commonplace until fairly recently.

Page 6: We now return to the stately building which houses the Institut de France. The reader will recall that the young Amaury, as he was familiarly called, had chosen the atelier of **Baron Gros** as his preferred place of study and that his father had planned to approach David's brilliant pupil at the close of a *séance* of the Institute. But

during the session he chanced to fall in with a M. Varcollier to whom he mentioned the project. Now this Varcollier, presumably also a *member libre* of the august company, had known Ingres at Rome in 1818 when he himself, then a young writer enthralled by the fine arts, happened to be courting one of the painter's sisters, Mademoiselle Stamaty. She is the beguiling



young lady who sits at the piano in what is perhaps Ingres' most perfectly pencilled portrait group, *La Famille Stamaty*, now in the Louvre.

Students of Ingres' portraiture will recall M. Varcollier's own rather severe countenance in the find oil which Ingres also did during that Italian period. Understandably biased in favor of his old friend, now a distinguished academician settled in Paris, Varcollier exclaimed, "Why Gros? He is old. (He was fifty-four.) Go to Ingres, who is about to open an atelier. He is the one man today capable of teaching painting in a manner susceptible of regenerating our declining school and restoring it to a noble and lofty plane." The advice turned out to be sound. M. Amaury-Duval followed it and his son was the first pupil enrolled in the new school. These interrelated developments contributed to the quite special relationship which subsisted between this disciple and his kindly disposed, but intimidating, teacher for many years to come.

Page 17: The humorless, intensely earnest little man presently interviewed the lad in his studio. He expressed pleasure on hearing that the prospective pupil had had no prior teaching.

"That is all to the good!" At least you have not acquired any bad habits which would be very difficult to break." The comment voices a principle, universally appreciated among professional painters, which has now become meaningless. So the reader must be reminded that, from Masaccio to the twentieth-century Boston Painters, this art was first and last understood to be an interpretation of visual experience and consequently aspiring practitioners were constrained to train their eyes to perceive visual phenomena accurately while simultaneously developing the skills and know-hows needed to transcribe their impressions in terms of line, values and color. This complex and multiform operation involves a close coordination of mind, eye and hand which, to be fulfilled, must be initiated in adolescence. Most people realize that an early start under qualified supervision is mandatory for musical virtuosi, as well as for many championship sports. It is also common knowledge that in these activities a faulty method, stroke or stance ingrained at the start can ruin a career. But this principle obviously does not apply to the inspirational types of painting which took over after World War II wherein eminence lies within easy reach of ten-year-olds and octogenarians alike. Before that it was generally understood that the maximum age to begin professional training was eighteen or nineteen, although a few exceptionally gifted painters have managed to compensate by their innate artistries and great industry for the technical clumsiness occasioned by their late beginnings.

During the interview Ingres noticed that his young interlocutor was glancing at an engraving of his own masterly "Vow of Louis XIII" and exclaimed, "Ah! No, it is no pastiche. It is not a copy. It carries the imprint of my claw. I certainly admire the Old Masters. I bow down before them especially the greatest of them all [Raphael]. But I do not imitate them. I have suckled their milk, nourished myself on them. I have tried to assimilate their sublime qualities, but I do not make pastiches of their works. I do believe, however, that it was from them that I learned to draw."

Thereupon, he handed Amaury some engravings by Marc Antonio Raimondi to copy. The reader should note that before the day of photographic reproductions these admirable engravings were commonly given to beginners as



models for the basic training of the eye and hand. In our present context, which aims to contrast the older curriculum and the painters it engendered with current art teaching and its alumni, this introductory discipline, abandoned in the early years of our century, deserves a lingering glance. Certainly, Ingres made much of it in his school and commended it to the young Degas thirty years later. And I further point out that the great man himself had started that way. His father was a reasonably competent painter and sculptor as well as something of a musician, who encouraged the artistic aspirations of his small son, getting him out of bed at six o'clock to practice two or three hours on the violin, after which he was made free to choose engravings from his father's portfolios and copy them. This the boy did, "now in black or red chalk, now in ink."³ In all such practices the results depend on the working method and this need must be painstakingly inculcated by the teacher. In this wise was Ingres' first pupil enrolled and henceforth I shall restrict my quotations to passages more or less relevant to Ingres' instruction. Let me repeat, however, that the entire volume is eminently worth reading for those interested in the subject.

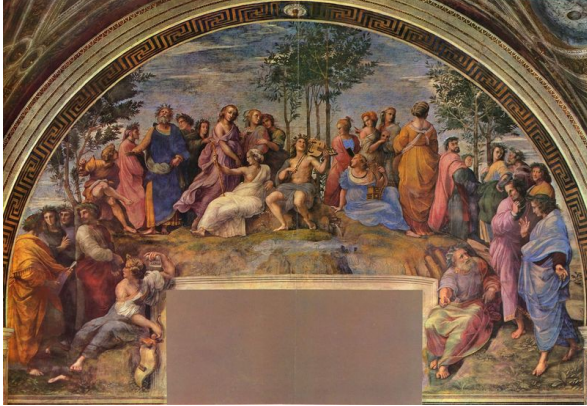
Page 26: The pertinence of the following excerpt will become apparent as my overall

picture takes shape. It concerns a fellow pupil of Amaury's, Sturler by name, with whom he remained in contact throughout his professional life. Of this young fellow he writes, "He had followed M. Ingres' counsels so closely that he had assimilated the naivete of the [Italian] primitives to the point of abandoning the use of models for fear of being too realistic. Ingres commented, 'I told you to take this long,' indicating the length of his finger, 'but you have grabbed as long as that.' And he pointed to his extended arm." The significance of this incident, to which I shall return, will escape a reader unaware of the fascination which the style of **Giotto** and his disciples exerted over a certain segment of David's pupils at the turn of the nineteenth-century, Ingres himself among them. This wholly justified admiration for the great Giotto was a natural reaction away from David's particular classicism based too exclusively on Graeco-Roman statuary and it contributed an important element to Ingres' artistic development, one which he cultivated during his subsequent visits to Florence.⁴ Amaury-Duval



and Sturler were to carry on a post-Ingriste version of Fiottesque archaism which Denis signalizes in their church decorations. Maurice Denis, whose own decorative art presents his personal application of the concept enlivened by colors echoing the still recent Impressionist observation, lauds Amaury-Duval's murals but attributes the failure of Sturber's to his feeble draftsmanship. The atelier incident indicates that the master recognized Sturber's misapplication of his directives and foresaw the trouble towards which the young man was heading.

Page 36: One evening, when Amaury's parents were entertaining at dinner M. Ingres, M. Thiers and M. Migner, the conversation turned to Raphael and Ingres made the following arresting declaration, "But I would give all his madonnas, yes, sit. All of them . . . for a fragment of the



Disputa, of the School of Athens, or of the Parnassus. And the Loggie, sit, and the Farnesia! They (presumably all the frescoes) should be cited."

Now, the pre-eminence of Raphael's murals has been quite universally recognized by the twentieth-century painters, although Ingres himself certainly does appear to have been more directly influenced by the madonnas, whose marvels he nowhere belittles. But one wonders why he had no reservations about the Farnesina frescoes, where Giulio Romano's hand too frequently predominates, and his inclusion of the Loggie, hastily executed by Raphael's assistants after scanty indications from the then overworked master, is nothing less than shocking. Possibly the young Amaury's memory was at fault. The boy was in no position to differentiate among these products of Raphael's studio at that date.

Page 37: One of the guests evidently sounded off on the subject of painting. Possibly M. Thiers was the culprit, for the noted historian and future president of France was dabbling in art criticism at the time, so when Amaury saw M. Ingres on the following day the poor man had obviously passed a sleepless night. He immediately launched into the following diatribe about art critics, which even today remains a classic of its kind. Certainly, countless painters have shared his sentiments.

"Those are the people who pass judgment on



us, who insult us, without having learned anything or observed anything, impudent and ignorant as they are. Whenever one of these gentlemen sees fit to pick up mud from the street and throw it in our faces what can we do, we who have been toiling, studying, comparing for thirty years, we who show a picture to the public which, though it may be imperfect, and the Lord knows how aware I am of that! Is at least honest,



conscientious, wrought with all the respect due to art? . . . Well, then, I ask you, what can we do, we who know no other trade, who are not writers and are therefore incapable of retorting?" What indeed!

Page 38: While Ingres was painting the official portrait of the Duc d'Orleans, heir apparent to the throne of France, of which there are several replicas, the artist insisted that the general's uniform worn by this royal personage be entirely stripped of its embroidery and he amused his sister by wishing to substitute cloth buttons for the regulation metal ones. The prince did not accede to the latter request.

Page 43: Working in the class Amaury early on met with a striking example of Ingres' shortcomings as a teacher for beginners. The master kept telling the boy that his drawings lacked halftones (*demi-teintes*), but he did not, perhaps could not, demonstrate what those mysterious halftones were. So they remained imperceptible to the puzzled student, as they

inevitably do to ever tyro until his eyes have been duly unsealed by an experienced painter. And for some time the bewildered fellow made no progress. He finally acquired his first awareness of those vitally important adjuncts by chance from one of the more experienced students. During his next criticism Ingres' only comment was, "That's the idea. Now you're off. That's fine."

Amaury-Duval concluded retrospectively that it is difficult for an artist of Ingres' stature to simplify his teaching sufficiently to meet the understanding of a novice. He develops this proposition interestingly, "I will go further and submit that the charisma of genius asserts itself as an authoritative force capable of inhibiting a pupil's individuality and riveting him in a grip which allows his personal development no play. To grasp the validity of this hypothesis we need only compare great painters like Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Paul Veronese, with their own teachers and then with the pupils they themselves taught." I think his reasoning is based on a faulty premise. Of course great geniuses surpass their teachers and tower above their pupils. Nevertheless, Leonardo, Rembrandt, Rubens and Raphael left a progeny of admirably trained pupils. True, they are all dwarfed, except perhaps Van Dyck, by the colossal stature of their masters. But they knew their trade well. Therefore I cannot conclude that greatness in itself incapacitates a teacher of painting. Ingres' intellectual limitations unquestionably interfered with his teaching as we shall see again and again. But that applies to an individual case.

Page 45: When Amaury began to draw and paint from nature, he found that he could learn more by watching and questioning advanced pupils than from the precepts dispensed by M. Ingres. He complains that the latter dealt exclusively with "the major principles of art; line and mass, indicating the action of the model in a few lines, simplifying all details within the lights and the shadows which is to say keeping them subordinate to those two paramount divisions, the mass of light and the mass of shadow. Hence he continually urged us to look at nature through half-closed lids." But all this constitutes the very core of sound teaching. Such directives instill those "good" visual habits which the prospective painter should acquire as early as possible. What, then, did Amaury expect from him? From time to time this pupil betrays an incomprehension

surprising in a man of his general intelligence.

Ingres, he goes on to relate, corrected the shapes with his fingernail leaving a deep furrow whose exactness flabbergasted the class. “The rapidity with which he indicated the main lines of a figure in action was truly prodigious. He used to tell us that one must become capable of drawing a man falling off a roof.”

This startling injunction may well be a reference to the now forgotten practice of memory training, a discipline which Ingres recommended, apparently without ever specifying how it should be exercised. This immensely valuable drill had fallen into disuse by the time I was a student and I only turned to Lecoq de Boisbaudran’s⁵ useful but insufficiently explicit book in desperation when I was forty, too late to derive the maximum benefit from its suggestions. I nevertheless owe much of such ability to draw as I ultimately acquired to the memory training habits I cultivated thereafter. Later still, in my old age, I unearthed an additional device which I believe susceptible of giving spectacular results. It consists of closing my lids like the shutter of a kodak immediately after registering a visual image instantaneously. I noticed that which practice the retention of the image could be considerably prolonged. It is on record that Meissonier studied galloping horses in this manner and Degas appears to have done something similar. I surmise that Ingres had this type of a thing in mind when he made the remark quoted above and I urged serious students to explore the avenue patiently and persistently, undismayed by the initial difficulty.

Page 46: Amaury-Duval was privileged to watch one of the greatest draftsmen of all time in action and his reportage makes fascinating reading. He relates how one day Ingres made use of the class model, a boy of ten or twelve, to find a gesture he needed. “While the lad posed standing on one leg the artist indicated the general outline. But, inasmuch as the unsupported leg was naturally always in motion, M. Ingres kept sketching in another leg. Consequently, in the brief period of time during which the child could hold the pose, M. Ingres performed the astounding feat of getting the ensemble down on paper and two extra legs as well.”

A number of such multi-limbed figure drawings may be seen in various museum collections. “I have also heard,” adds Amaury, “of a comment made by Horace Vernet in the

course of a conversation with other painters. ‘They say that I paint rapidly,’ he [Vernet] proclaimed, ‘but if you had ever watched Ingres, as I have, you would consider me a mere tortoise.’ Ingres erased often, was never satisfied, sobbed like a child before his canvas. Perhaps his very facility encouraged him to begin again from the very start anything that failed to satisfy him; certain as he was of his ability to recapture the image very quickly.”

Page 58: And here we have a very revealing anecdote indeed. The formidable little man appeared quite unexpectedly at a Sunday session which the boys had secretly arranged at the atelier to try their hands at painting with one of their number serving as a model. The master had not as yet authorized the use of colors. But when he caught them at it he expressed his pleasure at their industry and proceeded to criticize their efforts. The student whose work displayed the most sophistication had acquired a systematic approach from another teacher whom Amaury does not name. Ingres reacted sharply and unfavorably. “Here I detect an inclination to dexterity,” he said, ‘a propensity to ... I will not say the unspeakable word which I do not allow in my atelier.’ But, notwithstanding all this palaver, I distinctly heard the word *chic* signifies painting



done by rote, from know-how, with little or no preference to nature itself, a procedure regarded as mendacious, dishonest and reprehensible by painters working in the grand tradition of impressionism whose probity resides in respect for visual truth, Ingres went on.

“Watch out there, you are slipping into it. You have indicated here something which I do not see [in nature]. Why do you underscore it? Because you know it is there [as distinct from actually seeing it]. Have you been studying anatomy? There now! That is what that dreadful science leads to, that horrendous science which I cannot think of without loathing. Had I been obliged to study anatomy, gentlemen, I would never have made myself a painter. Just copy nature naively, like a simpleton, and that in itself will amount to something.” I daresay these standards are no more comprehensible to the anarchic painters of our time than the moral code on which decent conduct of life was formerly based is acceptable to our proponents of ethical nihilism. The fact remains that the art of Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, Leonardo, Velasquez and Vermeer blossomed from comparable attitudes.

But Ingres’ strictures regarding anatomical studies demand thoughtful evaluation. For more than a century painters and art critics have pondered, each one after his own fashion, over Ingres’ aversion for everything that is subcutaneous in the human body, even when awareness of inner structure is a professional must. Be it said right away that his own knowledge of the ghastly science was certainly extensive, as his drawings and paintings abundantly testify. Painters and critics both point out his relatively weak feeling for articulation and the undeniable fact that this master of line inclined to stylize contours to the detriment of their structural significance. But he did not do this from ignorance or carelessness. It is therefore amazing to find a draftsman so splendidly equipped encouraging his pupils to shun anatomical studies. Before suggesting a psychological motivation, however, I will quote from an analogy of his precepts a more balanced statement of his position.

Henri Delaborde⁶ cites, without giving its source or date, this exemplary declaration on the subject. I consider complete familiarity with the skeleton important, inasmuch as the bones constitute the body’s framework and determine its proportions when establishing constants as

points of orientation for the draftsman. I set less value on knowing the muscles. Treating them with excessive science can impair the sincerity of a drawing and turn its expressiveness into conventionalized shapes. It is nevertheless important to understand the arrangement and disposition of the muscles so as to avoid errors of construction in that area too.” This epitomizes the issue to perfection and raises further questions concerning his emotionally toned bias against anatomy.

For we note that at one point his students chipped in to buy themselves a skeleton for classroom use. This was done, be it said, against Amaury’s advice, although M. Ingres had authorized the purchase himself. On his next visit the master did not notice the new acquisition at first, “but when he came to criticize a boy who was working in its immediate proximity,” Amaury related, “I detected an expression of genuine horror on his face. While he corrected the drawing, which happened to be right in front of the skeleton, he closely resembled a man standing with his back to a fireplace while his legs are scorched by its excessive heat. The next day that student got no criticism at all and the following week the *massier* announced to the class that M. Ingres would not reenter the studio as long as “that ghastly object” remained.” He thus deprived his class of a property of whose educational value he was profoundly aware. This cannot be explained on rational grounds.

Now, we read elsewhere that in Italy, whenever he and Mme. Ingres found themselves obliged to pass a deformed beggar on the street the good lady shielded her husband’s eyes from the distressing spectacle with her shawl and led him by the hand past the mis-shapen creature. And Amaury-Duval further recounts how, at a performance of *Oedipus Rex*, he watched the great painter sit enthralled by the piece until the blinded kind entered with his eye socket bloodied. Thereupon Ingres covered his face and never looked at the stage again until the curtain fell.

Page 68: Amaury adduces these episodes as indicative of Ingres’ hypersensitivity to ugliness, which in a sense they obviously are. But by the light of twentieth-century psychiatry we are more apt to say that he suffered from a very common phobia, in his case associated with physical deformity, blood and the human skeleton. Apparently this quirk overtook him in middle

life, perhaps triggered by some traumatic experience long after he had completed his anatomical studies.

Page 80: Amaury here quotes Ingres about copying. “Make simple sketches after the Masters,” he used to tell us. ‘It is a way of looking at pictures intensively, of examining them with great thoroughness. But why waste time reproducing a painting, something which can be done with patience? While you are analyzing the procedure you lose sight of the essential thing, the element which constitutes the masterpiece.’ ” All well and good. But copying in order to study procedure *per se* can also be rewarding. Ingres may not have emphasized this element or Amaury may have failed to grasp the differentiation. He not infrequently shows this kind of obtuseness in matters related to painting. Amaury-Duval asserts that Ingres made only two copies, the Farnesina fresco of “Mercury” and the Titian “Venus” in the Uffizi. But we know that he also made several others.

Page 84: Speaking of Ingres’ technical methods he writes:

“Painters understand that in David’s school shadows were painted with glazes of transparent pigment so thin that in places the surface of the canvas itself shows through. M. Ingres had painted his first pictures using this method, probably actuated by his teacher or by the very human inclination to do as those about you are doing. Later on, a more careful examination of the masters [in Rome] and their methods led him to abandon this way of painting while he was in Italy. There he conceived a hatred of transparent

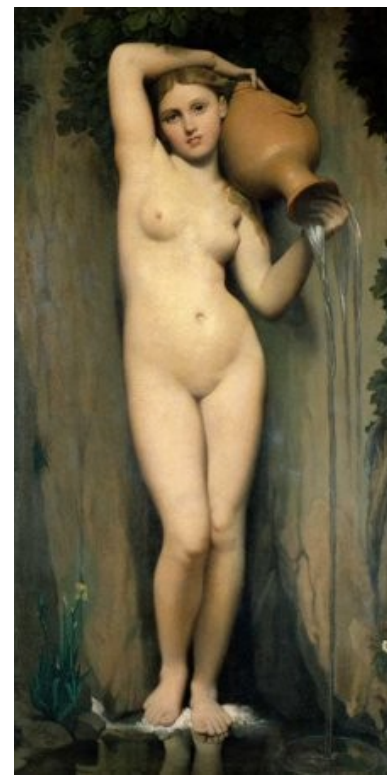


shadows so violent that he had his *Prix de Rome* picture brought from the Ecole des Beaux Arts to his Paris studio in order to repaint all the shadows in opaque pigment. And then he enjoined his

pupils to make their shadow opaque. ‘Gentlemen, put white in your shadows.’ ”

This is a characteristic example of Ingres’ single track mentality, which in a teacher may become serious defect. He should have explained that both methods are susceptible of producing excellent results. Most of the great Italians made their shadows opaque, whereas many Flemish and Dutch masters, Rubens most notably, kept them transparent. The two procedures create different effects. This should be pointed out to students and the advantages of each explained. But our tyrannical school master simply laid down a law to be obeyed.

Page 86: About *La Source*: In a studio corner



he kept the study of a nude young girl brushed in on a yellowish canvas which had been left bare as a background. It is impossible to convey the charm of this lay-in made from life, in Florence I believe ... of a young girl holding and twisting strands of her hair with both hands. And this study became *La Source*, after he had altered the gesture of the arms by giving her an urn to carry and thickening the lower limbs with the intention, perhaps, of eliminating an aspect which he had deemed too naturalistic. Only the torso remains intact. But what a loss! And how happy one would be if it were possible to recover the marvel I once admired which exists under the retouches

which he made late in life.” (Ingres was reputedly seventy-nine when he revamped *La Source*. Wildenstein tells us,⁷ without giving his authority, that he was probably assisted in the task by Paul Balze and Alexandre Desgoffes.)



Page 87: Amaury also remembered the Oedipus as it first was, before Ingres added the background figure fleeing in terror. The pupil took the liberty of telling his master that the new personage made the tete-a-tete gripping by introducing a new spectator, so to speak. Amaury remembered that Ingres had replied that he felt the additional character was “quite Poussinesque.”

Page 88: Examining a study which Ingres had made before his first trip to Rome, Amaury-Duval commented on the change apparent in the pictures painted after his arrival in the Italian capital. “ ‘That is because I had not seen Italy, when I made that picture,’ Ingres told us, ‘whereas this other study is the first one which I painted under the spell of the [Italian] Masters. I had been misled and I had to reeducate myself.’ Then, changing his tone, he went on, ‘Not that I fail to do justice to my illustrious teacher, Monsieur David, but obviously his personal bias led him in another direction. I have followed the path of the Masters, gentlemen, the path of Raphael, who was not a man but a god come down to earth.’ ”

Page 91: And now our recorder launches into a penetrating and carefully thought through analysis of Ingres’ limitations as a teacher. “It was unfortunately impossible to have a discussion with Monsieur Ingres. This man, wholly guided by intuition and inspiration, by his very nature impassioned, whose language could be colorful and often eloquent, found himself completely bereft of logic whenever he was pressed in argument, as often happened in my presence. He would break off abruptly like a man

who ceases to understand. He could preach but he could not reason. What he should have said [in a given instance], and what would have been the simple truth, was that he himself, brought up as he had been among painters reacting forcefully against eighteenth-century teaching principles and who therefore slighted the appearance of nature and made all their figures conform to canons established by the Apollo Belvedere and the Venus de Medici, had had the capacity, laudable and rare at the time, to appreciate that. Nature herself was sufficiently beautiful, varied and inexhaustible to be mined indefinitely. He proclaimed that it was possible to learn the art of deciphering nature’s marvellous text but that it required genius to do this properly and also in a fashion of one’s own.

“He so detested the stereotyped beauty which lies within nearly everybody’s reach in approximately the same degree that he laid it down, as an inviolable principle, that every pupil must copy, slavishly copy, just what was before his eyes. And the great man never suspected that, if he himself had copied his model in all simplicity, as he used to phrase it, he would merely have ended up with a result similar to what is obtained by a mediocre photographer. But he took good care not to do so since he, unconsciously perhaps, would now and then eliminate some detail while simultaneously emphasizing another which impressed him and out of which he created an element of beauty. In a word, his work was a complete compendium of his impressions.”

And, of course, his pictures are just that, compendiums of his impressions. In this passage Amaury-Duval designated the painterly approach we currently call impressionism, a word which had only just been fabricated when he wrote his book. Ingres was in fact what Degas was to call himself, a linear impressionist. But this particular eye-witness appears not have understood, perhaps because Ingres had failed to make it clear in his presence, that the selectivity he admired in his master’s work can only be exercised effectively by a painter who has first learned to render visual truth with impersonal accuracy. Had he read Delacluge’s excerpts of David’s teaching, which he evidently had not, he would have discovered that the earlier teacher had stressed fidelity to nature in his classes as emphatically as his own pupil Ingres did later. This same directive has characterized all genuinely fruitful teaching

throughout the great centuries of European painting. And it is also true that the great teachers correlated their intensive study of visual truth with frequent reference to the ways in which their great predecessors had been faithful to nature when they painted their masterpieces. Amaury himself has duly recorded that Ingres insisted on his pupils' starting off by copying engravings of fine pictures. He also quotes the master's claim that he had taught himself to draw by studying the eminent Italians. Yet, this disciple did not appreciate, it would seem, that these studies complemented and rounded out the "slavish copying" of the model which Ingres insisted upon in the atelier. He also failed to see that, when it is divorced from the discipline imposed by prolonged strict fidelity to nature, the study of masterpieces along usually condemns a painter to imitative mannerisms and studio tricks. "The masterpieces of antiquity were made from nude models such as we have before us in Paris today. You must find the secret of beauty in truth." [Janmot] "I send you to the Louvre so you will learn to see nature from antique statues because they themselves are nature. You must live on them, devour them." [Balze] "Love the true because it is likewise the beautiful." "His [Ingres'] intent was to recreate the antique by studying nature. And so all of his impassioned and imperious teaching boils down to realism." [Janmot] And there are still others.

In fact, Ingres' recorded maxims abound in this sense. Unfortunately, their picture-making wisdom is not readily apprehended by the uninstructed reader. That is why I expatiate on the point at such length and shall return to it again. It is the very cornerstone of Western painting and, although it still receives grudging lipservice in some quarters, the full meaning and application of the principle are no longer understood.

Page 94: When Amaury once suggested that he wished to study at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* with a view to winning the *Prix de Rome*, Ingres exposed. " 'Now do not go to the *Ecole*,'⁸ cried Monsir Ingres, 'I am telling you, it is a place of eternal damnation and I know!'" Whereupon he unfolded all the grotesque ineptitudes of institutional instruction, dispensed as it was by five or six painters who visited the school in rotation. Consequently each instructor told the pupils exactly the opposite of what his predecessor had preached during the anterior

month. And the *chic* (improvising or faking), the mannerisms, everything except sincerity and beauty! Mere dexterity, nothing more.' " But the reader should bear in mind that Ingres was speaking of the *Ecole* as it functioned under the Restoration and in the reign of Louis-Philippe. We today have learned to think of the *Ecole* as it was after its reorganization in 1863, a very different place.

Page 126: Here Amaury characterizes M. Ingres as "a temperament which was impressive and indomitable whenever art was at stake but became totally deprived of logic, even of common sense, as soon as art ceased to be in question ... An incompletely integrated intelligence fully under control in one department only." And later, speaking of this man as a

Page 129: teacher, he goes on to say, "As a professor he could be faulted for absence of breadth in his ideas, yes, even for a certain pettiness which he had doubtless picked up in ateliers where stupid and envious rivalries masquerading as emulation are fomented." The reader inevitably wonders what ateliers Amaury-Duval had in mind. In Paris Ingres had only frequented the atelier of Louis David where the sort of thing he refers to could hardly have been a marked feature. I do not know what he means in this instance.

Page 131: And later he laments, "If only he had made us welcome in his own studio! If only he had shown us all his methods, if we could have seen him at work and, above all, had he but made use of us as his assistants his output might have been tremendous and his influence could well have been vastly greater than is actually the case. But there existed no solidarity between this master and his pupils. We were neither supported nor defended by him as we should have been, as indeed we would have been had we formed a group held together by his guidance. Instead there was no common bond uniting us. Each disciple went his own way in accordance with his fancy and Ingres bore the brunt of our mistakes, as he himself said.

"The master-pupil relationship has always seemed to me something exceedingly difficult and complex. When the teacher is a run of the mill painter who knows his craft and simply transmits it with no ulterior objective in mind everything goes along smoothly and the students work in complete freedom. Since the master has no very clear cut ideas himself the pupil remains

free to formulate ideas of his own in accordance with his particular temperament.

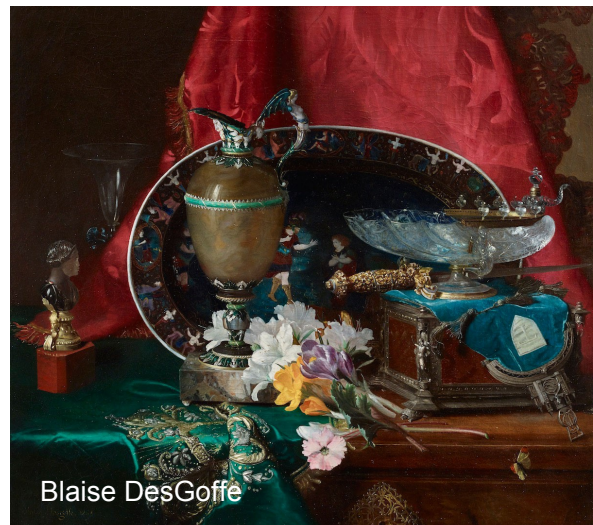
“But the entire situation alters when your guide exerts the influence which emanates from a major talent and maintains an ideal to which he adheres with the despotic willfulness of genius. Then one can only listen, submit and obey what amount to commands. Should the master condescend to demonstrate details of execution, a gesture which these men of great talent make rather seldom, you take note of his every word. If Monsieur Ingres waxes enthusiastic about a certain *gris laqueux* (a grey made with an admixture of Madder Lake) in the half-tones of flesh, from that point on you perceive all halftones as being of that hue only. When he proclaims that Indian Red is a pigment fallen from heaven you hasten to cover your palette with Indian Red. When he points out beautiful elements in the human figure this teacher does not say, ‘I myself find,’ or ‘Artists in general have considered such a formation beautiful for such and such a reason,’ as an ordinary instructor would put it. No. He asserts, ‘This forehead is beautiful because it is low. This torso is fine because it is short.’ And so naturally you do not discuss the matter and you lower all your foreheads and truncate all your torsoes.”

“I have excerpted this long passage integrally because it carries an important lesson to teachers. The kinds of art instruction weighed by Amaury all vanished nearly half a century ago and I flatly assert that no real revival of painting as a fine art can take place until a painter sufficiently knowledgeable to dispense teaching of that caliber proffers it to very talented young people. But, as in time of famine and destitution it is futile to discuss culinary refinements, so now, when the very survival of this art is in question, it seems superfluous to refine upon Amaury-Duval’s carping criticism of his extraordinary teacher. But his vivid and authentic report may serve to underline the magnitude of the task which lies ahead before any painting of enduring worth may reasonably be expected to reappear. The reader must bear in mind, however, that Amaury-Duval’s theory of art teaching reflects his dissatisfaction with the only instruction he ever received in that field and which happened to come from a preceptor of a most exceptional blend, a man in whose make-up towering artistic genius had been incongruously harnessed with an intellect singularly circumscribed by both its

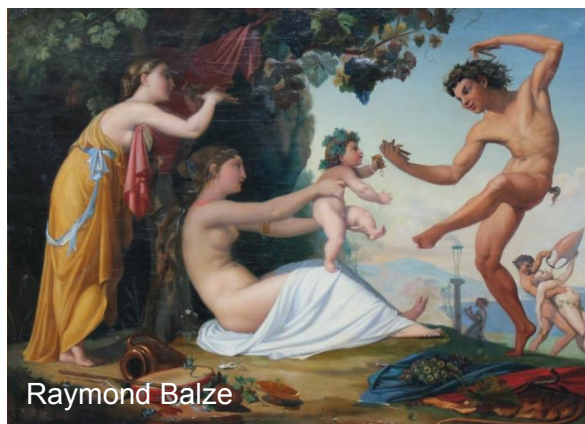
native constitution and its primary education.⁹ Having been dominated throughout his student years by a formidable personality, this only moderately successful artist conjured up in his old age a contrasting fanciful teacher-image supposedly capable of dispensing liberal guidance which would have proved more stimulating. But those of us who, almost a century later, actually experienced the teaching doled out by “ordinary” painters (*un artiste ordinaire sachant son metier*) such as Amaury visualized, men who simply attempted to impart their skills without simultaneously establishing a well thought through theoretical basis, soon discovered that such teaching operates in as sterile a vacuum as its opposite configuration which consists of talk and ideology divorced from practice. At the beginning of our century both of these maimed presentations of a complex and elusive profession were instrumental in disintegrating the very art which they professed to be passing on.

Of course, nothing in all this palliates M. Ingres’ dictatorial stance which Amaury projects in rather terrifying detail. Our scribe persuades us that the student body as a whole, which totaled about eighty in the course of those nine years, were disadvantaged by their master’s incapacity, or unwillingness, to analyze his own working procedures or to weigh these procedures against alternative methods, as he should have done, instead of dismissing the latter out of hand.

(Page 133): We certainly cannot condone his conduct when we read that whenever a pupil, for any reason, failed to follow his directions by manifesting an inclination to follow his color sense, for instance, or by preferring Rubens to Raphael, the unfortunate youth brought down a

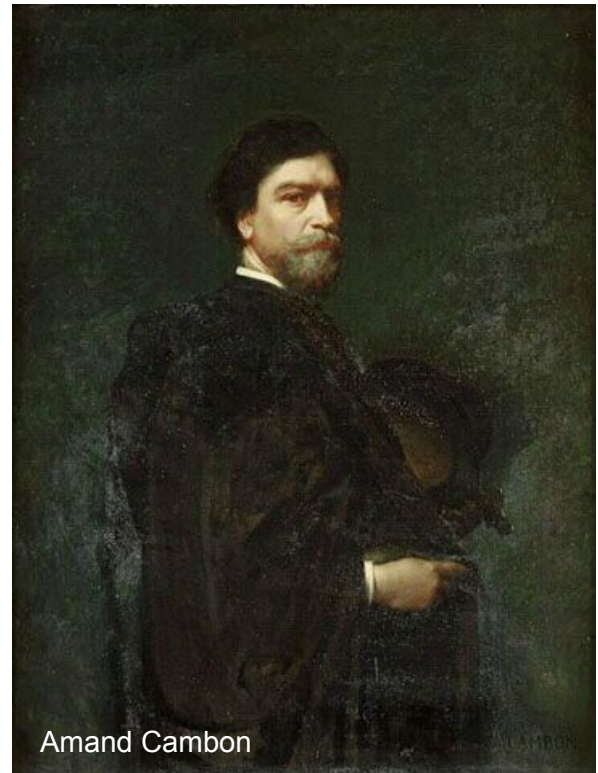


torrent of invective from the awe inspiring mentor. "He is an apostate, a Judas! This is a man



who worships false gods, a fellow you no longer greet on the street!" Such disproportionate reactions are indeed intolerable in an educator of the young.

At this point we can probably check Amaury's portrayal against testimonials emanating from other sources. While in general they corroborate our author they differ on certain issues. Their evidence certainly invalidates his complaint that Ingres failed to use his pupils as assistants. Perhaps none became sufficiently proficient to render such services during the nine years that Ingres maintained an atelier in Paris, but those who followed him to Rome in 1834 assisted him there and thereafter. Both Flandrins, the Balze brothers, Amand Cambon and Blaise Desgoffes and several others worked regularly on the



master's canvasses. The character of their collaboration is set forth in a letter of 1854 in which Ingres rejoices in the amount of work he is able to do "with the help of my two pupils (Paul and Raymond Balze) who paint so to speak as I do and, who under my constant supervision, are responsible for the sound craftsmanship in my pictures while I for my part do the finishing."

Obviously this little group was closely associated with the master as he worked. Now, Amaury-Duval returned to Paris in 1836 and he tells us that from then on he met his former teacher



infrequently and for the most part at social occasions. We may assume that he was quite unaware of the later activities in the Ingres studio. Furthermore, there is abundant evidence that in the years of his great influence Ingres, instead of dissociating himself from his pupils, as Amaury reports, often battled valiantly to advance those of whom he had reason to be proud.

I have already mentioned that the number of pupils who passed through the Paris atelier came to about eighty. No productive painter can admit more than a handful of pupils to the privacy of his workshop as frequently as the best teaching demands. Perhaps the size of his class militated against the effectiveness of Ingres' instruction more than any of the factors enumerated by this disciple to whom he once said, "Do you realize that I think of you as a son rather than as a pupil?"

Page 135: It is fascinating to read that Ingres completed the "Apotheosis of Homer," a formidable undertaking by any standard, in a year. Later on, he made a single alteration which

Amaury considered regrettable. The mantle of Moliere, originally of a flowered material, he repainted a solid brown.

Page 137: "Delacroix was said to have been so profoundly impressed by his scrutiny of the *plafond d'Homere* that he insisted on having the *Grand Gallerie* of the Louvre opened, willy-nilly just for him, so he could spend an hour there



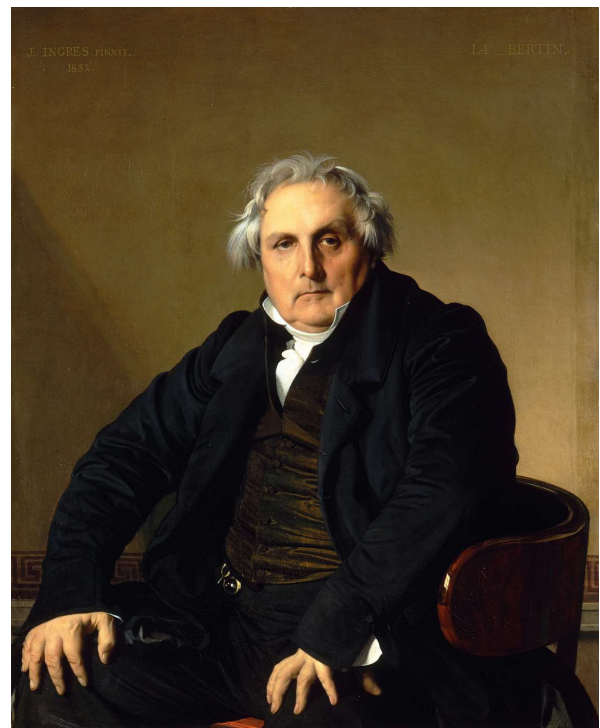
before the Rubens canvases ‘in order to regain his strength,’ as he put it.”

Page 138: This last tidbit was apparently only hearsay. But Delacroix in person related the following directly to Amaury-Duval himself. “I had the chance to examine that ceiling closely when it was laid out on the floor. I have never seen a similar technical performance. Like the works of the old masters, it is made out of nothing. And yet, seen from the proper distance, the totality is there.” This fine tribute to Ingres’ mastery rendered by a leader of a faction to whom the classical esthetic was abhorrent redounds to the credit of both artists. Even during this conversation Delacroix also mentioned that when he chanced to meet Ingres in the room which houses the masterpiece the uncompromising little man greeted him frigidly. And the tale spread abroad that as soon as the unwelcome intruder had left Ingres summoned a custodian and shouted. “Throw open all the windows. The place reeks of sulphur.”

Hereupon Amaury-Duval gives us his own estimate of Delacroix, as it stood at the time he was writing these reminiscences, some ten years after that fulgurating personage had terminated his earthly career. “At any rate those of us who took to works of art for something other than felicitous color combinations, those whom a Turkish rug beguiles but does not enkindle, have a substance of justification for not rating Delacroix’ undeniable talent as highly as certain critics do.” This understatement, not untinged with irony, will evoke a chuckle from many readers today. Then as now, there were thoughtful picture lovers who shared Amaury’s tepid reaction to Delacroix’ canvases and their number has doubtless increased as a result of the steady deterioration of their once beautiful color due to that painter’s dependence on notoriously impermanent pigments and injudicious mixtures.

Page 139: Delacroix’ singularly insecure flair in all matters literary and artistic is exemplified by another anecdote of Amaury’s. The two men found themselves in adjoining seats at a concert where the music of Berlioz was being played. The older painter saw fit to characterize the work as “noise,” an estimate which posterity has by no means endorsed. He then added, “Oh! I know, they often liken me to him. But ... “I have neither merited this excessive honor nor this indignity.”¹⁰

And Amaury rightly cautions the reader against taking the outbursts of such very talented



men too seriously and to bear in mind the influence of their passing moods. He adds, “I have not always seen Delacroix enthusiastic about Ingres and I have often heard Ingres speak of Delacroix’s talent as something apart while assailing his artistic bias only.”

Page 145: The portrait of **Monsieur Bertin**, as we now see it in the Louvre, was painted in less than a month but before he began work on that canvas Ingres had spent a considerable amount of time on another start with which he was dissatisfied. “He used to weep,” M. Bertin told me, “and I spent my time consoling him.” But when Amaury first saw the finished portrait in Ingres’ studio he could not understand its purplish tonality. Subsequently he had occasion to examine the painting frequently and at one time made a copy of it. “And I can now explain a phrase of M. Ingres which I did not in those days understand. “Time takes charge of finishing my paintings.”

This portrait has now entirely lost the aspect which once dismayed me and this is the reason. The Madder Lakes which M. Ingres habitually used do not last long because the exposure to light causes them to fade. Oil, on the other hand, yellows. So his paints, losing their purplish hue with the passage of time and taking on a golden tonality from the action of the oil, have gained in their general appearance if not specifically in their coloring.”

Now, for a painter all this makes uncommonly interesting reading. Amaury was mistaken in thinking that Madder Lakes fade on exposure to light. The change is caused by the action of lead in the white pigment with which it has been mixed. Hence, these lakes are permanent when used in glazes or with colors not derived from lead. This has now been well understood in studios for so long that one is amazed to find it was not suspected in Ingres' circle. However that may have been, Amaury leads us to believe that all of Ingres' flesh tones initially had a rosininess which they now have lost. The idea that Ingres, or any other painter, was able to calculate accurately the interaction of fading lakes and yellowing oil in the sensitive area of flesh tones is simply untenable. So it follows that the color of the human skin which we see in his pictures today differs radically from what his brush put down. I do not recall any twentieth-century art critic who has taken this into consideration in his estimate of Ingres as a colorist.

Page 179: Once at a dinner attended by Ingres and Amaury-Duval a guest spoke slightly of Watteau. "What!", exclaimed M. Ingres. "Do you realize, sir, that Watteau is a very great painter? Are you familiar with his work? I have all of Watteau [in engravings] at home and I consult him. Watteau! Watteau! This outburst in praise of



a painter Ingres might have been presumed to dislike contravenes the usual view of Ingres' narrow artistic spectrum. But Delaborde¹¹ tells us of a contrasting episode when the testy genius pulverized an interlocutor for having praised Watteau excessively. Painters are frequently guilty of these seeming self-contradictions regarding a particular artist who has been discussed under different circumstances and in different contexts. When challenged, however, most of those whom I have known personally were able to coordinate and justify their

conflicting estimates. Amaury calls Ingres "a man often carried away by his fervor but who would never have been the personality he was had that same fervor been lacking." Fervor is a characteristic of dedicated artists.

Page 233: Amaury discredited the legend that Ingres prized his violin playing above his painting. He even heard the painter say, "I have neither the skill nor the dexterity of the true musician but I bow on the right note."

Here we have the source of Ingres' much quoted and puzzling comment on his early



portrait of Mlle. Riviere. Referring to the picture, painted in 1805, Ingres said to his pupil in 1855 "I think that if I ever did a good thing, it is that portrait." Amaury did not see the painting himself until after Ingres' death, at which time he thought it "the weakest thing, indeed the only weak thing which he turned out in that first and admirable manner to which we owe the portraits of Mme. Devaucay and of M. and Mme. Riviere." I came to a similar conclusion myself when I first saw that strange transmogrification of a young girl which appeared in the Louvre some sixty years ago and I have found no reason to change my estimate on my countless subsequent visits. Amaury was convinced that the painter never set eyes on the canvas after he had delivered it to the girl's parents on completing it. Painters are extremely prone to carry inexact memories of some early work into which they once put their best efforts but never have occasion to see again. Art critics today unite in praising this bizarre and impossibly constructed caricature of an adolescent.

And now we are confronted by the enigmatic personality of George Lefrancois who calls for a digression. Born at Caen in 1805, and therefore Amaury's senior by three years, this young man came to Paris where he first studied five years under Hersent, then briefly with Cognier, and

only joined Ingres' atelier in 1832. There he doubtless always seemed a Johnny-come-lately in the eyes of Ingres' earliest pupil. I stress these related dates because they may have fomented jealousies which explain the mutually hostile attitudes of the two students. The newcomer rapidly became Ingres' favorite disciple and continued on close terms with the master until he died accidentally by drowning at Venice in 1839, Henry Lapauge, whose biography of Ingres is still authoritative,¹² calls this Lefrancois Ingres' most promising pupil and he considers his early death a calamity to French painting. Lapauge's estimate of the relationship between master and pupil is born out by certain facts. When Ingres went to Rome in 1836 to take over the directorship of the Ville Medici, Lefrancois accompanied him and Mme. Ingres on the journey. Later on the two men made trips together to visit Italian towns. The naturally aloof great man obviously held this exceptionally well educated student in great esteem.

Amaury, on the other hand, detested his fellow pupil. In this reminiscences he charitably masks his identity under the pseudonym of Franck and then proceeds to paint a scathing image of a man whom he characterizes as a troublemaker given to backstairs gossip bordering on the dangerous. He will not even allow him the status of art student, but calls him "one of our associates who was primarily a friend of M. Ingres, since I cannot claim ever to have seen a line from his pencil." Now, this is, in all conscience, an amazing statement to make about a classmate who had frequented the atelier for four years and who claims in his letters, as we shall presently see, to have been a dedicated draftsman. Whereupon Amaury goes on to say, "He was, however, quite learned and he had captivated M. Ingres through a kind of professional surefootedness, for self assurance always made an impression on M. Ingres." This caustic thumbnail sketch of a master-pupil relationship evokes a specious type of busybody intent on pulling his teacher's leg which I recall as a familiar adjunct of art classes sixty years ago. But, though I find the delineation completely convincing, I believe that it in no way detracts from the validity of Lefrancois' firsthand testimony, of which I proffer the following excerpts.

"M. Ingres professes to head a school of painting stemming directly from Raphael Ganzio

of Urbino. He has that artist's name always on his lips and refers to him as his master. He would have us look to Raphael's works for inspiration at all times, thereby learning to see nature as he saw it and so to evolve a high style of our own without ever relinquishing a scrupulous fidelity to the model. He outlaws finicky indications and demands broad statements of dominant forms.

"He backs up his criticisms with examples culled from recognized masterpieces. In so doing he becomes animated, kindles, gets carried away and at those times his language is often impressively fervid and elevated."

And Lefrancois gives us an admirably concise description of a curriculum which began with copying engravings of fifteenth and sixteenth-century masters "usually rather heavy in character. The primary goal was to give him [Ingres] a drawing 'with sensitive outlines and simple shading whose finish must have breadth rather than elaboration.' The pupil then graduated to drawing casts of the Minerva, of works by Phidias, the Brutus and a selection of the best heads and statuettes. Ingres did not permit his pupils to work from nature, which is to say from the living model, until their studies from the antique were well advanced. So the students were obliged to draw constantly from the great masters, 'to eat a lot of them,' in his own phrase."

After a year in the Ingres atelier (1833) Lefrancois confesses, "I used to draw impatiently, driven by a mad desire to manipulate paint. Today this craving no longer goads me and I am ready to go on drawing, I believe, for the sheer joy of drawing and of understanding what M. Ingres calls the overall character of the forms, their purity, or however you will have it." He concludes with this picture of his teacher. "This man, for all of his fifty-three years, has the feverish activity of a young man. He often says that the master must be the leading pupil of the atelier and preach by example. He has all the fire of a southerner in his artist's enthusiasm and his lessons are never flat or dreary. He is severe in the interest of art, gentle and courteous in all his dealings with his pupils and readily accessible."¹³

This account of Ingres and his teaching is indeed admirable for its clarity and concision. We recognize the teacher Amaury has brought so visibly before us, but he is here depicted "without his warts," so to speak, probably as he himself wishes to appear to his class. It is a stately portrait brushed in by Van Dyke whereas Amaury

gives us a Holbein in all its revealing detail. However, the substance of the teacher's message is set down here in a few lucid sentences which constitute an important document in themselves. But how are we to interpret the good Amaury's assertion that he himself had never beheld so much as a line drawn by this self-proclaimed devoted draftsman? I am unable to harmonize these discordant statements made by two fellow students both supposedly writing in good faith, but I find myself prepared to take Amaury at his word and to trust his judgment.

And to Amaury's eloquent critique we now return. "The world has been informed that M. Ingres was a Greek of Pericles' era who had strayed into the nineteenth-century, a conceit which strikes me as clever rather than just. No man so opposed to idealization, so overt a worshipper of moods induced by his aptitude for assimilation ... His reaction from his master David occurred so promptly that the pictures which he painted before leaving for Italy had already revealed his more exacting search for truth ... Study of the great Italians only intensified a deeply ingrained natural bent and made him realize that he had been misled.

"Monsieur Ingres was a devotee of nature and like all lovers he became blinded to certain defects inherent in even the most beautiful things. These defects, which we should more properly call nature's idiosyncrasies, he dared to meet head on and he knew how to make them interesting by his interpretation as well as by his amazing execution.

"And this came at the very moment when David's progeny stood at the peak of a popularity attained by seeking beauty exclusively in classical antiquity and allowing almost nothing human to subsist in their sugared representations of nature ... It is difficult to visualize now [fifty years later] how radically the works of M. Ingres differed from those of his contemporaries. I have no hesitation in saying that this aspect of visual truth had an effect on the public of that era similar to the one made on us today by certain works of the contemporary young school." Inasmuch as these words were written in the eighteen-seventies he must be referring to the paintings of Courbet and the early Impressionists, which makes the parallel very instructive if we appreciate that all of them shocked the public by a return to and an extension of visual truth. In both cases innovations engendered painting

which has proved to be of enduring value. It should also be noted that, beginning with Post-Impressionism, all the succeeding isms have moved further and further away from visual truth. The difference is crucial. *Caveat emptor*.

Page 280: Amaury then refers to "the school of David" whose tenets M. Ingres repudiated throughout his life and he tell us, surprisingly, that Ingres' "first admirers were Gericault and Delacroix, together with all the innovators who longed to shake off the yoke of the Institut, who hailed in Ingres a master in whose company they might be victorious. Politics make strange bedfellows, goes the adage.

But Ingres' attitude towards his teacher was more ambivalent than Amaury apparently suspected. A passage in Delaborde¹⁴ informs us that Ingres at sixty "still spoke of 'the mighty David and his great atelier' with tears in his eyes and that he once wrote: 'David based his teaching on the soundest and most uncompromising principles applied with total integrity.' And elsewhere, 'David has been the only master of our century.' Delaborde further points to the *Homere deifie* (1865) in which David is pictured standing among the most eminent painters of all time with Ingres himself portrayed virtually at his feet.

How, then, shall we reconcile such contradictions? I think in this way. When Ingres was speaking of David's pupils he usually had in mind the followers of that master's later years, years which happened to coincide with Amaury-Duval's adolescence. These epigones of David, as they just may be termed in the pejorative sense of that word if we withhold Ingres himself from their ranks, were conspicuously inferior to their predecessors in artistic caliber and they traduced the spirit of David's teaching in their misinterpretations of it. When Ingres referred to David, however, he had in mind the great teacher, the prestigious creator of *Les Sabines* and *Le Sacre*, the dedicated leader who had launched him on his career.

Amaury-Duval now continues in his best vein. "I will not say, then, that Ingres was a romantic. But I do assert that he was never a classicist in the generally accepted sense of the term. The only really fitting epithet for him is the recently coined one, *realist*. I must add that he was a realist after the fashion of Masaccio and of Raphael." This characterizes Ingres and his art to perfection.





Page 281: Further on, Amaury betrays the confusion prevailing in cultivated Parisian circles during the eighteen-seventies regarding exotic types of art when he writes, “Sixty years ago M. Ingres admired the Japanese paintings which a young new school now believes it has just discovered. We can see proofs of that in the portrait of Madame Riviere and in the *Odalisque Pourtales* about which critics wrote ‘This work resembles the tinted drawings that occasionally adorn Arab or Indian manuscripts.’

The comment attributed to art critics misses



its target completely, for Ingres’ arabesques have nothing in common with the contours which we find in the illuminated manuscripts of India or of



Persia. But Amaury is equally wide of the mark when, writing in 1878 or thereabouts, he cites Japanese paintings as the fountainhead of the linear style Ingres evolved in the first decade of the nineteenth-century. The paintings and prints of Japan were not seen in France until 1862. One infers that Amaury had little eye for art forms of the East, be they Near East or Far East, and classed them in a single category.



Strangely enough there are indeed striking similarities between Ingres' linear patterns and those which fascinate us in the prints of Kiyonaga, Utamaro, Toyokuni and their ilk, none of which could he have seen. Even the works of Botticelli, whose flavor seems to permeate the pictures he did at this period, could only have been known to him by engravings before he passed through Florence in 1806.¹⁵ The source from which he derived his phenomenal personal feeling for linear arabesques should be sought in Greek vase paintings which he studied intensively through that decade.

Page 282: And now Amaury gives us an excellent summing up of his master's art with which I conclude these excerpts,

"Most people consider a figure well drawn because it measures the given number of heads with the muscles all in their place and the limbs proportionately related to one another. But these things in no way add up to a finely drawn figure. Photography gives that complete accuracy, but no one dreams of contending that a photograph is well drawn. What constitutes drawing, and this also applies to color, is the artist's interpretation of the objects which he depicts in accordance with the impression made on him by certain beauties, or certain aspects which to him appear beautiful, and which he stresses, thereby making them apparent to eyes less sensitized than his own and compelling their acceptance through the power of his genius.

"The impression which nature makes on the eye of a great artist and which he renders with the means at his command necessarily varies very

greatly according to the temperament and psychic disposition of each painter. If accuracy constitute the ultimate of drawing there would be no diversity among artists. Imagine some one's portrait painted by ten great painters. The ten portraits would all resemble the sitter yet no two of them would be alike in drawing or in color. Accuracy, then, would come down to a mere question of measurement for painting and this would be even more applicable to sculptors. We would never obtain the widely divergent ways of drawing to be found in Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo nor would we have the color of Veronese which differs from that of Titian or of Rubens.

Fortunately these great men cared little about accuracy. They treated nature high handedly. Errors of drawing, the crassest incorrectness, exaggerations and superfluous muscles all abound in the works of Michelangelo ... I blush as I refer to these sublime errors by one of the greatest geniuses in the history of art as mistakes.

"Like these admirable artists, M. Ingres discarded the academic knowledge he had acquired at school. He evolved a personal draftsmanship all his own, of dubious accuracy, strange if you will have it so, but his very own, which transmits his impressions and compels us to share them."

"Whether an artist's temperament compels him to give precedence to form or to color the essential thing is that he observe a fresh aspect of nature and that he successfully impose his way of seeing on the beholder. His is a master only when he has the capacity to do this. Every illustrious painter has possessed that faculty but not one of them has been more essentially truthful (*vrai*), more accurately (*exact*) than another."

I cannot allow this last statement to pass unchallenged for it beclouds the most crucial point in the exposition of a major, albeit presently little understood, truth. Indeed, many twentieth-century readers will inevitably interpret that final sentence to mean that its writer, and by inference his teacher Ingres, believed an eccentric rendering of something seen to be the hallmark of a master painter. Taken in this sense the words even appear to endorse the contemporary brands of art criticism which equate as great masters as Velasquez, Vermeer, El Greco, Ingres, Dali, Matisse and sundry present-day celebrities. It is simply inconceivable that Amaury-Duval, and even more inconceivable that his master Ingres,

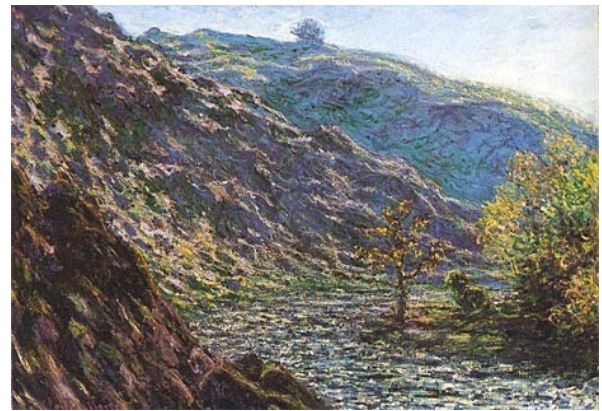
ever harbored ideas remotely sympathetic to such thinking. As the question at issue is vital to the comprehension of Western painting it behooves us to examine it in detail.

The painterly working approach which Amaury adumbrates without ever quite coming to grips with it and all too cursorily, it seems to me, to be readily comprehended by twentieth-century readers, mirrors the driving force which energized Western painting throughout its great centuries. The impetus of this art originates in the rapture and wonderment which the visible world arouses in the creative type of mind that turns to painting for self expression. The way an artist of that disposition integrates his emotional responses to what he sees with his objectively understood ocular observations establishes the character and quality of his art. All the painters whom the passage of time has consecrated as great masters, and also most of the lesser luminaries in the hierarchy of painting, have recognized this art to be basically an art of seeing which derives both its language and its dominant subject matter from visual experience. They realized clearly that the interpretation of visual phenomena, which is to say the rendition in line, tone or color of things observed by the artist, was the touchstone of painting, regardless of any subsidiary messages the painter might also wish to convey. Although the personal imprint of the artist dominates his work the relation which his interpretation of visual material bears to objective truth remains a major determinant of his artistic stature, as art history demonstrates. But Amaury's assertion that all illustrious painters have been essentially truthful and accurate in equal degree is simply untenable. Visual truth in its totality participates in the ineffable mystery of Creation and eludes even the greatest geniuses. But some of them have certainly perceived more of its essence than others and tower artistically above their fellow craftsmen accordingly.

What, then, is this visual experience which has been the lodestar of Western painters for five hundred years? Their masterpieces proffer the answer to those with eyes to see. When such eyes are lacking discussion of the subject is as futile as explicating a great symphony to an auditor with no ear for music. In both cases the inter-locutor either accepts reverently and uncritically what he is told or he shrugs it off as something perhaps true but tediously irrelevant. Enjoyment of either art presupposes some innate aptitude in the

listener as a starting point toward appreciation. This inescapable fact of life is blandly ignored by egalitarian propagandists of mass culture. Readers with an inclination for pictures, however, may find that the following considerations throw some light on the puzzling variety of representation observable in the work of great painters.

In the first place, these readers should appreciate the very gradual process whereby painters developed their capacity to observe the external world as it actually appears to the human eye in contrast to the cognizance that we ordinarily take of it. The painterly perception was very slowly evolved by a succession of geniuses extending from the era of Giotto to the times of Claude Monet, for it was during the latter's



lifetime that the art of seeing reached what we still have reason to believe will remain its maximum extension. Now, Amaury fails to point out that throughout this long evolution all the painters who eventually attained enduring eminence began their careers by learning to render nature as accurately as the expressive means then available to the profession permitted. Meanwhile, from time to time an outstanding genius would extend those means by surpassing his predecessors in his grasp of some previously unperceived aspect of visual truth. Each successive new revelation would then be rapidly incorporated into the generally accepted language of painting. As a result of this cumulative process its vocabulary was actually more extensive at the turn of the twentieth-century than at any time in history. So when he studies the representational element in a painter's pictures the questioner should always bear in mind the point in this long progression at which that particular artist was working.

He should also take into consideration the specific intent of the artist when the picture being

examined was painted. Portraiture, for instance, calls for depiction differing in kind from what is appropriate to mural decoration whereas the type of picture whose essential function is to illustrate a story requires something else again. Raphael, for example, a master who practiced all three genres supremely well at the summit of his career, demonstrates their different treatment in the “Jurisprudence”, in the “Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione” and in the “Transfiguration.” Broadly speaking, however, it is fair to say that the vast majority of painters have been content to follow the representational modes accepted in their time and which they had learned by serving long apprenticeships under practitioners who were thoroughly competent themselves. Now, fresh ways of seeing nature, once they have been assimilated into routine art teaching, have a way of crystallizing into formulas which mediocre artists apply by rote with ever decreasing direct observation and steadily growing artificiality until a new leadership emerges to renew contact with the generative source from which painting derives its vitality, i.e., the manifestations of nature in their inexhaustible variety. Ingres provides an outstanding example of such a revitalizing guidance.

I believe that any visually perceptive lover of pictures who has been able to trace this recurring pattern through the course of Western painting will be prepared to accept a principle formerly recognized as an axiom in all informed studios. In fact, only a few decades ago the need to propound a reasoned justification for anything so self-evident and so repeatedly demonstrated did not exist. The principle was accepted as part of the wisdom of the profession. It is this. The personal stylizations which a painter imposes on his rendition of visual impressions, sometimes calculatingly and sometimes unconsciously, are unlikely to carry lasting significance unless two factors are operative. He must first have acquired the capacity to see truly what he has observed in the model. Otherwise his statements will inevitably reflect his own visual shortcomings and blundering incompetence, both of them characteristic traits of the late nineteenth-century *avant-garde* schools from the Nabis and Post-Impressionists on through the modernistic sects pullulating in every quarter today. The

second factor, whose effectiveness depends on the existence of the first, is not easy to define. Yet it constitutes the gist of all Ingres’ teaching which was almost exclusively addressed to making this very thing comprehensible to his pupils in terms of craftsmanship. The attribute in question sets the tone of a painter’s art much as a man’s religion, or his irreligion if he prefers to call it that, ordains the course of his life. I shall resort to the term integrity, in its dictionary sense of “adherence to a code of moral or artistic values.” For the genuine artist art has a moral code of its own whose infraction is abhorrent to him. Ingres’ intransigence in this regard, his withering contempt for compromise, has become legendary. But it has been a dominant trait in all good painters for centuries.



This austere visual morality, as it may justifiably be designated, fortified and energized Western painting for five centuries, imparting to its masterpieces a vitality and a rectitude which still compels the admiration of the civilized world. It is this essentially painterly virtue which invests a Velasquez dwarf, a Dutch interior by Vermeer, a jug on the table beside two apples by Chardin, a decrepit old woman by Rembrandt with a grandeur that raises these humble subjects to the esthetic level of Titian’s “Assumption” or Leonardo’s “Last Supper.” Conversely, its absence consigns the high-falutin matter of a



LeBrun, a Mengs or a Benjamin West, as well as the impeccable surface workmanship of a Bouguereau, to the purlieu of art history. Yet writers whose art criticism derives its authority from their literary eminence and their gift for words, Gautier, Baudelaire or Ruskin, for example, seem scarcely aware of this cardinal



element in a visual art which they like to expound. So they regularly praise or denigrate pictures in accordance with their personal reactions to the subject matter on grounds chiefly psychological, historical or religious. Such disquisitions tell us a good deal about the men

who wrote them, in the case of the three above-mentioned personalities interestingly enough in themselves to command the reader's attention. But they cast little light on what the painters in question were trying to do or on the degree to which they attained their goal. It is not, properly speaking, art criticism at all.

And it is indeed extremely difficult to explain the psychic motivation of this painterly integrity to one who does not share it or to point out its pictorial expression to a person for whom such things do not exist. But its nature may certainly be inferred from Ingres' talk as reported by Amaury-Duval and, perhaps even more, from some other precepts of the master which I have culled from Delaborde's anthology.¹⁶

"Work primarily to satisfy the dictates of your own conscience alone and then, beyond that, a handful of people. That is the duty of an artist, for art is not only a profession, it is likewise an apostolate."

"I destroy more than I create and I obtain good results all too slowly because I prize the true above all things and I find beauty only in truth, the truth which shapes the beauty we discover in Homer and Raphael."

"If my works have been and are of any worth, it is because I have felt obliged to put them back on the work bench twenty times over and I have polished them with excessive care and sincerity."

"Figure out the secret of the beautiful from the true and lay hold of it at that source."

"It is in nature that you may discover the beauty which constitutes the dominant objective of painting. You must seek it here and not elsewhere. It is no more possible to conceive an idea of beauty other than or superior to the one presented by nature than it is possible to imagine a sixth sense."

"The phrase ideal beauty, so misunderstood in our time, simply denotes visible beauty, the beauty of nature."

"Love the true because it is likewise beautiful."

"If you want to see that leg as ugly I know perfectly well that you can justify the result. Take my eyes and will find it beautiful."

And the high ethical tone of his understanding of painting transpires in his most celebrated dictum:

"Drawing is the probity of art."

These injunctions leave no room for doubt

about the exacting nature of the art whose great manifestations now hanging on museum walls still compel the admiration of the civilized world, in many instances several centuries after they were painted. All these major works carry the stamp of powerful personalities whose exceptional innate aptitudes were first subjected to the discipline of strict apprenticeships followed by industrious careers dedicated to the unrelenting pursuit of visual truth. We know this to have been so from the written records, but if this testimony were lacking the determinants of these paintings are apparent in their makeup. The inestimable wealth of their content reveals itself gradually to those who in all humility follow the leadership of the masters who created them. Ingres voiced the attitude of his fellow artists, his predecessors and likewise successors. I can testify that the many admirable painters who are still doing good work in the early decades of our century adhered to his high standard of integrity. They differed among themselves in their interpretations but they agreed in regarding sincere devotion to visual truth as a *sine qua non* of professional respectability. Awkwardness, errors and misjudgments they condoned as the regrettable lapses of earnest workers frustrated by a heartbreakingly difficult task. But in their eyes compromise motivated by laziness, indifference or financial greed debarred a painter from the fellowship of serious artists in much the same way that cheating at cards places a man outside the bounds of gentility. In those years even the secondrates paid lip service to this professional ethic.

For several decades now influentially situated persons supposed to possess expertise in matters artistic have been trumpeting that this centuries old concept of painting has served its purpose but is hopelessly superannuated. A new and superior kind of painting has been evolved in keeping with the times. This brave new art can be inculcated, apparently, in children at grammar school and related there in their immature minds to the "creative" scribbling they are taught to do in class by starchy eyed teachers. Later on countless art schools offer stimulating courses to young people who have a taste for dabbling with paints and whom they instruct in activities which bear no relation whatever to the Fine Art of painting pictures. Of the latter the instructors have no serviceable knowledge at all. The resulting "art", everywhere in evidence today in museums, sales galleries and picture exhibitions, needs no

comment. The works speak for themselves. They signalize the end of the road. The only way leading out of this morass is by returning to an approach similar to that advocated by Monsieur Ingres and his compeers. There is no other exit.

Footnotes

¹*L'atelier d'Ingres* par Amaury-Duval, Paris, 1878.

² Les élèves d'Ingres. In a collection of essays entitled *Theories, 1890-1910*, par Maurice Denis. Rouault et Watelet, Paris, 1890.

³Quoted by Norman Schlenoff in *Ingres, Ses sources littéraires*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1956.

⁴A few hours before Ingres developed symptoms of the respiratory illness which carried him off at the age eighty-six, he was copying a "tracing" of one of Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua. This drawing is now in the Musée Ingres at Montauban. See Lapage, *op. cit.*, page

⁵*The Training of the Memory in Art* by Lecoq de Boisbaudran.

⁶*Ingres* by Henri Delaborde. Paris, 1870, page 129.

⁷*Ingres* by Georges Wildenstein, Phaidon, 1958, p.228 Ingres criticized at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*, for a time beginning in 1829.

⁹For Ingres' educational background see: "Ingres, ses sources littéraires," by Norman Schlenoff. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1956, pp. 26 ff.

¹⁰This is my clumsy translation of an Alexandrine couplet, obviously familiar to educated Frenchmen, which I vaguely recall without being able to place.

¹¹*Delaborde, op. cit.*, p. 68

¹²Henry Lapage. *Ingres, sa vie et son oeuvre*. Paris, 1911. On Lefrancois see page 246. ff.

¹³These extracts were culled by Henry Lapage (see *op.cit.*) from letters written by Lefrancois to a Monsieur Elonis, a painter himself, who was conservator of the Caen Museum. These letters were shown to Lapage by a descendant of Elouis. They presumably still exist and one wishes they were published in full.

¹⁴*Delaborde, op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁵Ingres painted the Mme. Riviere in 1805. I have no reason to think that Botticelli paintings had ever been engraved at that time, but they may have.

¹⁶ *Ingres par le Vicomte Delaborde*. Paris, 1870. The reader will note that this book was published eight years before Amaury-Duval's. The latter must have read it.

(Set by Paul Ingbretson and Diana Licht)