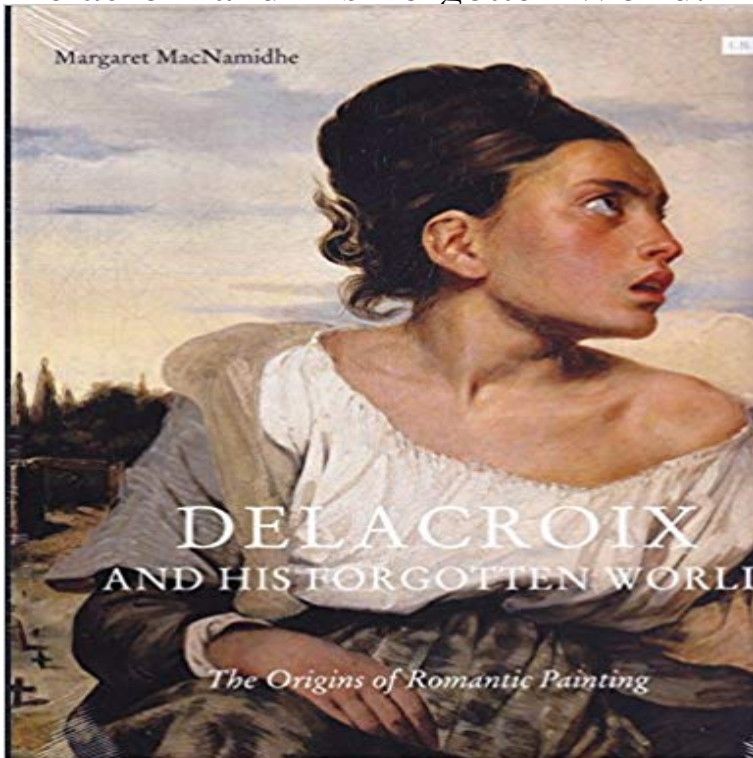


Delacroix and His Forgotten World: The Origins of Romantic Painting



The image of Eugene Delacroix as an august artist with an august oeuvre was initially frozen into place by posthumous tributes and it has continued to the present. He was one of the finest yet least understood painters of the nineteenth century, the golden age of the French Romantic movement. He is remembered best for his masterpiece, *La Liberté guidant le peuple*, but few of his works have received the kind of constant, fascinated revisiting that has sealed the iconic status of Theodore Gericault's *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, for example. This book is one of the first to look carefully at individual paintings by Delacroix, especially at one of his most important works - a key but often overlooked painting from early Romanticism's heyday, *Scene des massacres de Scio*. The *Scio* ostensibly depicts an episodic aftermath of violent events from the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832) but its slumped figures and subdued atmosphere do nothing to earn this description. Its defining characteristic figures that appear simultaneously overwrought and utterly listless remains unexplained by the attention to political contexts, gender roles, or other concerns that have articulated the reception of Delacroix. Margaret MacNamidhe brilliantly argues that the *Scio* represents an effort to furnish new models in a tradition that had become increasingly problematic. The paintings mass of bodies arguably defines Delacroix's contribution to French painting: his ebbing interest in depicting a purposeful, singular subjectivity, his increasing concentration on groups simultaneously trapped by and released from the most anguished of circumstances. As well as offering a close reading of his paintings, *The Origins of Romantic Painting* also captures a history of the competing, sometimes baffled versions of Delacroix, from his champion Charles Baudelaire, to painters such as

Edouard Manets close contemporary, Henri Fantin-Latour; the neo-impressionist Paul Signac, and on to the twentieth-century art criticism of Clement Greenberg. In this study, MacNamidhe singlehandedly revives Stendhals long-neglected writings on painting as well as theatre. Thus his captivating, exasperated tone is heard at last, via descriptions of paintings not only by Delacroix but also by Delacroixs now overlooked peers. MacNamidhe thus combines art theory, theatre and philosophy to help illuminate Delacroixs great project and to rethink Delacroixs reputation as a Romantic, along with his position in French painting as a whole. What if the characteristics of the Scio turned out to be the rule, not the exception? What if our understanding of the 1820s has been confined to a repetitive tradition of interpretations? Drawing together art criticism, art theory, philosophy, literary criticism and theatre, MacNamidhe demonstrates that Delacroix was a more complicated and rewarding painter than he has been taken to be. What emerges from this fascinating, original study is a wholly new way of thinking about French painting in the 1820s and beyond. MacNamidhe compels a rethinking not only of Delacroixs place in art history, but also of Romanticisms place in the tradition of French painting.

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