

# HISTORY IN ART

## Eugène Delacroix 1798–1863

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1798 – Eugène Delacroix is born in a village near Paris, most likely the son of Talleyrand, the former clergyman and then politician and diplomat.

1805 – His “legitimate” father, Charles-Henri Delacroix dies, and in 1814, his mother dies too, leaving Eugène an orphan at 16. But he is protected by Talleyrand throughout his early career.

1815 – He begins his training as an artist, initially as a Neo-Classical artist but then he is enthused by Romanticism, particularly after seeing Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*.

1822 – His painting *The Barque of Dante*, influenced by Géricault’s work, causes a sensation at the Paris Salon.

1824 – Another Romantic work, *Massacre at Chios*, reflects his outrage at a shocking event during the Greek War of Independence. Like many Romantics in Europe, Delacroix feels very strongly that the Greek cause is just and two years later he produces *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*.

1827 – He paints another controversial work, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, inspired by Byron’s play *Sardanapalus*. It is exhibited in the Paris Salon the following year, and like his earlier works it divides the critics, some very positive, some very negative.

1830 – He produces a dramatic commemorative painting following the July Revolution that year. *Liberty Leading the People* is much admired when first exhibited but soon removed from public exhibition because it is deemed inflammatory and likely to provoke further violent uprisings.

1832 – Delacroix visits Spain and Morocco. He finds the people of North Africa inspiring and their culture informs many of his paintings in future, including *Sultan of Morocco* (1845).

1833 – He begins work on commissions to decorate public buildings in Paris, including the parliament, some libraries and churches. His frescoes give him great satisfaction as he feels he is following in the footsteps of great fresco painters of the past.

1838 – He exhibits another disturbing painting in the Salon: *Medea Preparing to Kill Her Children*.

1840 – His health shows signs of deteriorating as a result of an exhausting schedule. He increasingly relies on his housekeeper Jeanne-Marie (Jenny) le Gaillou to look after him and ensure that he doesn’t work too hard. He continues to produce some fine paintings, based on his trip to North Africa, mythological scenes and also Shakespearian subjects.

1862 – Delacroix takes part in the setting up the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. The aim of the organisation is to break away from the stifling art establishment in France and to allow artists to be less dependent on commissions.

1863 – Delacroix dies at his country retreat in Champrosay, cared for to the end by his housekeeper Jenny.