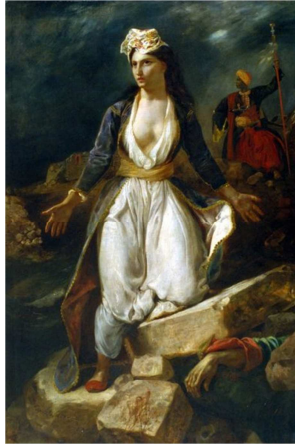


Exhibition: *Delacroix's Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*

On View: November 16, 2014–February 15, 2015

Location: Ahmanson Building, Plaza Level



(Image caption on page 3)

(Los Angeles, October 29, 2014)—The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Delacroix's Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*, featuring the monumental painting, on view for the first time in Los Angeles. Painted in 1826 by Eugène Delacroix, the leading French Romantic painter of the day, *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* is one of the most celebrated French paintings of the 19th century. The work is held in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, France, and has seldom traveled.

“This exhibition is an extremely rare opportunity to showcase a masterwork by one of the 19th century’s most important painters,” said Leah Lehmbek, curator of European Painting and Sculpture at LACMA. “The picture itself is profoundly rich with political, cultural, and artistic detail, and therefore speaks to a range of issues through its engaging dramatic context.”

The exhibition focuses on the singular painting with works from LACMA’s permanent collection to supplement the painting’s narrative. *Delacroix's Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* is organized in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Los Angeles’s sister-city relationship with Bordeaux.

Background

Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi was executed in 1826, shortly after the event it commemorates. During the Greek war of independence from Ottoman occupation, Turkish

troops besieged the city of Missolonghi, Greece. The Greeks, decimated by famine and disease, attempted an escape that ended in tragedy at the hands of the Turks.

Delacroix, like many European artists and intellectuals, was a fervent supporter of Greek independence. In direct response to the fall of the besieged city, the artist created *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* in about three short months in time for an exhibition at a private gallery in Paris, which was erected solely to plead the Greek cause. Along with over 200 paintings exhibited alongside it, *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* was intended to generate support and persuade the politically conservative French monarchy to change their course of tacit acceptance of the massacre of thousands of Greek citizens. Two years later the French joined British and Russian forces and permanently ended 400 years of Greek subordination to Ottoman rule.

The picture is dominated by a confronting, emotional, over life-size allegory of Greece, who stands with bended knee at center, pleading for help. Her foot, bearing a red slipper, points to the blood-stained ruins of the exploded city, and the hand of the dead is an indication of the bodies beneath the rubble. At the upper right, a triumphant turbaned warrior proudly bears his sabre and standard as a strong and noble pronouncement of victory.

Wearing a blue velvet coat over a flowing white chemise, the central figure's costume refers directly to the colors of the Greek flag. Carefully, it also makes a pointed reference to the Virgin Mary, who is traditionally clad in blue and white. Greece is decidedly Christian in comparison to the Muslim Turkish victor in the background, and their opposition is as reductive as white to his black. Whereas these opposites tend to make for a simplistic understanding of the nuances of a complex political event, they nevertheless allow the picture to be read at its most basic level as a clear entreaty to the French people to connect to the figure of Greece. This connection is further emphasized in her resemblance to Marianne, the figure of the French republic: born of the revolution and cemented permanently in Delacroix's masterpiece created just four years later, *Liberty Leading the People*.

The painting of a female allegory of suffering Greece succeeded in conveying the plight of the Greeks to the French public. Reflecting on current politics, a strong interest in non-European cultures, and even in English literature, this richly dramatized plea for help, was, from the first, a politically engaged propaganda painting.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux, under the auspices of FRAME (French Regional American Museum Exchange), in celebration of the Sister Cities anniversary program, *Bordeaux–Los Angeles: A 50 Year Partnership*.

The organizers are grateful for the special collaboration of the Mairie de Bordeaux, the City of Los Angeles, and Sister Cities of Los Angeles. The exhibition was supported in part by Chaucer Logistics Group.



About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 120,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles which also contains the Page Museum and La Brea Tar Pits and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Image caption: Eugène Delacroix, *La Grèce sur les ruines de Missolonghi*, 1826, photo © Musée des Beaux-Arts-mairie de Bordeaux. Cliché F. Deval

Press Contact: press@lacma.org 323 857-6522

Connect with LACMA



@lacma