Cézanne's Dream of Delacroix's Apotheosis

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Vilified Artists

Cézanne's idea of painting an apotheosis of Eugène Delacroix, an artist he revered, was to haunt him from the year following Delacroix's death on August 13, 1863 right up to 1904. Until the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, which honored Delacroix, like Ingres, with a gallery in the Palais des Beaux-Arts all to himself, his admirers had typically cast him as an artist vilified by the establishment—notwithstanding his many triumphs and the political protection he had long enjoyed. Charles Baudelaire's critique of the 1855 Exposition thus included the following lament: "Never has an artist been more fiercely attacked, more ridiculed, more thwarted."[1] Théophile Gautier, writing in the same year, overdramatized in a similar vein when he opined that for nearly a quarter of a century, Delacroix had been subjected to "a deafening tumult of insults, diatribes, and mockery."[2]

Reviewing the great Delacroix retrospective of 1864 for *Le Moniteur universel*, Gautier revived the legend of the artist despised and rejected by the public and denied the critical acclaim due to him: "Now that silence surrounds this great name—one of those that shall not be forgotten by posterity—it is impossible to imagine the tumult, the heat and dust of battle in the midst of which he lived. Each of his works provoked a deafening clamor, a storm of criticism, furious debate."[3] Gautier even cited some of the invective leveled at Delacroix, as well as naming some of those paintings of his that the Salon jury had thought fit to reject. But which nineteenth-century artist did not have to endure such treatment? That Delacroix was admitted to the Académie des Beaux-Arts as Paul Delaroche's successor only after a ninth attempt, in 1857, wounded him deeply; but his frustrating struggle was not mentioned by his admirers.[4] To perpetuate the legend of martyrdom, Gautier insulted everyone in the art world from the

administration to the art-loving public and the critics; and Jules Dalou, in his monument to Delacroix erected in the Jardin du Luxembourg in 1890, cast the martyr's triumph in bronze.

Henri Fantin-Latour, a specialist in floral still lifes and portraits, began his own glorification of Delacroix shortly after the artist's death.[5] A first sketch of September 11, 1863 shows the coronation of a bust surrounded by various standing and seated figures.[6] The idea of crowning the bust of a great painter originated in the frontispiece to Nicolas Chaperon's famous suite of engravings after Raphael's *Loggie* of 1649.[7] There, Chaperon depicts himself as an admirer of Raphael sitting at the foot of his pedestal, while on the other side of the monument the winged figure of Fama places a laurel wreath on the bust of the great artist. Fantin-Latour included the allegorical figure of Fama in several sketches, one of which is dated October 2, 1863.[8] Instead of an allegory, however, Baudelaire suggested placing Delacroix in the midst of a gathering of poets, musicians, and painters.[9] This idea followed the template of the secular apotheosis, notably that of the *Apotheosis of Homer* that Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres painted for the Louvre in 1827.[10] Fantin-Latour eventually opted for just such a gathering of writers and fellow painters assembled before a portrait of Delacroix. In addition to Fantin-Latour himself, the painting unveiled at the Salon of 1864 shows Louis Émile Edmond Duranty, James McNeill Whistler, Jules Champfleury, Édouard Manet, and Charles Baudelaire, among others, standing in front of a gold-framed bust portrait of the great Delacroix himself.

The Plan

When, exactly, Cézanne began planning an apotheosis of Delacroix is not known. Adrien Chappuis dates the first sketches that can be assigned to such a project to the second half of the eighteen-sixties.[11] Cézanne presumably learned of Fantin-Latour's *Hommage à Delacroix* only through the Salon of 1864. Perhaps he was struck by both the public's favorable reception of the painting and the censure of those critics who attacked the supposed misuse of Delacroix for the propagation of a style of realism à la Courbet, whose violent handling of color the young Cézanne was then emulating.[12] Like countless other artists, Cézanne had copied Delacroix's *Barque of Dante*, acquired by the state from the Salon of 1822 for the Musée royale du Luxembourg.[13] Cézanne mentions a copy after Delacroix, probably of this painting, in a letter to Numa Coste, a childhood friend, dated February 27, 1864.[14] He is also known to have drawn portraits of Delacroix after a photograph (cat. 23, fig. p. 49 and cat. 24 recto, fig. p. 50). But perhaps the most important inspiration for him was the *Apotheosis of Henry IV* by Peter Paul Rubens, and specifically the group at left featuring Jupiter, Henry IV, and Saturn as an allegory of time, which Cézanne drew in 1864–65.[15]

Even earlier evidence of an apotheosis project is supplied by a watercolor drawing in the British Museum **(fig. 1)**.[16] This shows a man standing under a tree at left, his arms raised as if applauding, and kneeling next to him a figure with hands folded as if in prayer. Viewed from behind, a third figure with knapsack, broad-brimmed hat, and walking stick, and accompanied by a dog enters the picture field from below. Some distance away there is a parasol under which a seated figure is working at a board propped up on the ground at left and a painter with hat standing at an easel at right. The composition ends with a tree at right. The centerpiece, however, is the group flying through the sky to the right. This comprises two figures on a cloud supporting a reclining third, while a fourth figure armed with brush and palette flies on ahead of them, glancing back at the group behind him.

FIG. 1
The Apotheosis of Delacroix, 1878/80, later enlarged, pen and brown ink, watercolor heightened with white over graphite, on paper, 20 × 23.3 cm
British Museum, London, inv. 1987,0620.31, RWC 68, sketchbook 18 × 24

FIG. 2
The Entombment, after Eugène Delacroix, 1866/67, graphite, on paper, 18 × 24 cm
British Museum, London, inv. 1980,0726,12, Ch 167, sketchbook 18 × 24

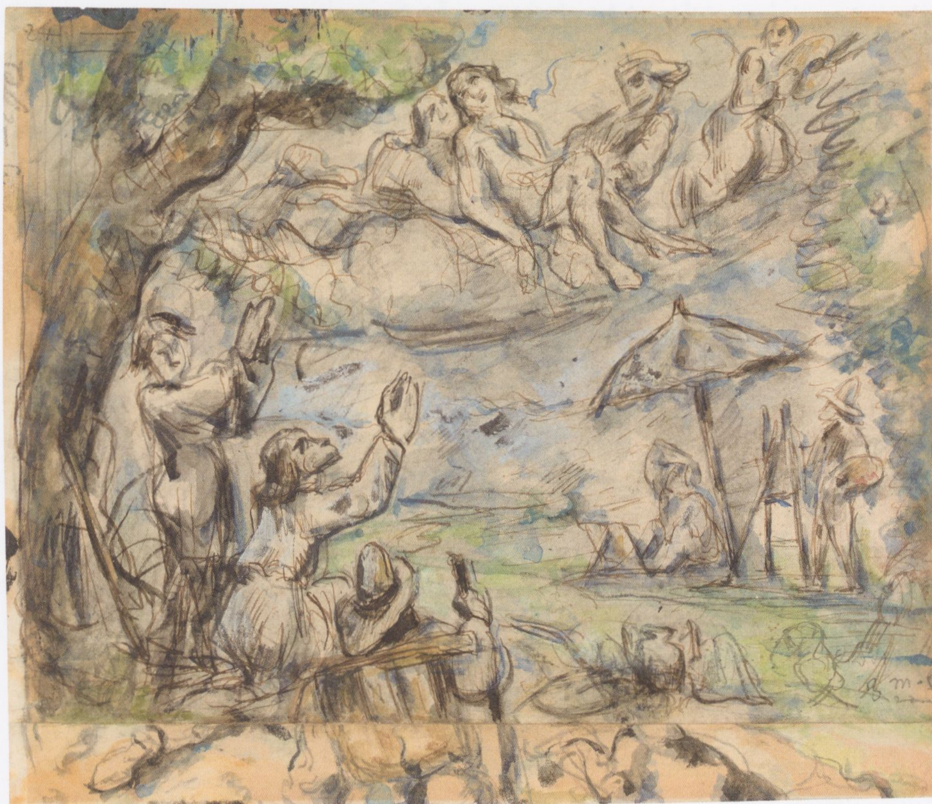

FIG. 1

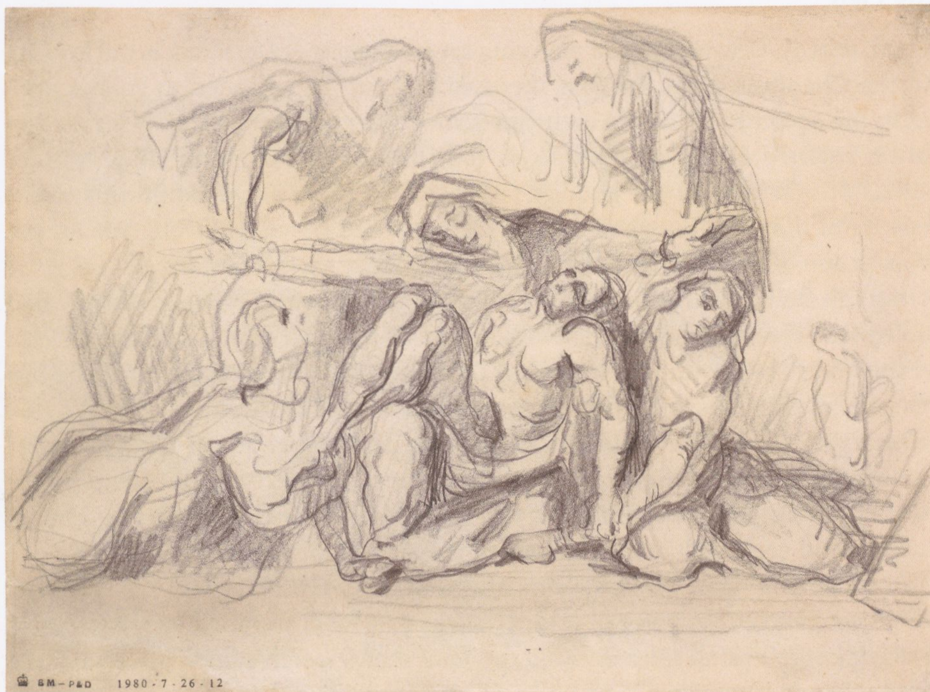

FIG. 2

The group in the sky is a variant of Delacroix's mural in the church of Saint-Denys-du-Saint-Sacrement in Paris, which he painted in 1843–44.[17] Back in the eighteen-sixties Cézanne had produced a sketch after this painting **(fig. 2)**—or a reproduction of it—that he then used for his planned apotheosis of Delacroix.[18] In his sketch, however, he reduced the number of figures to the two supporting the body and replaced the body of Christ with that of Delacroix; he also inverted the composition, thus reversing its dynamic. Alone this substitution of Delacroix for the dead Christ attests to a level of veneration verging on deification that is to be found neither in Fantin-Latour's painting nor in Jules Dalou's monument to Delacroix of 1890 in the Jardin du Luxembourg.[19] The figure with a walking stick and hat with other figures sketched in around him recurs on another drawing (cat. 46 recto, fig. p. 71) that Chappuis dates to 1866–67.[20] Also dated to that period is a drawing by Cézanne after the plafond of the Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre (cat. 45 recto, fig. p. 70), which Delacroix executed in 1850–51.[21] That giant ceiling painting shows the sun god riding in a chariot pulled by four horses against the sun rising above dark clouds. Assisted by the other gods, Apollo has drawn his bow and is taking aim at the monstrous Python. Cézanne's sketch (cat. 43 recto, fig. p. 68) shows two variants of the kneeling man with raised arms that he later included in the watercolor sketch for the apotheosis of Delacroix, as well as two detailed studies of the tilted-back head, and another three head studies.[22]

When Cézanne returned to his plan for an apotheosis of Delacroix in the eighteen-seventies, he must have felt himself to be a target of the same kind of critical derision as that to which Delacroix was supposedly subjected in 1863 and 1864. In 1877, for example, Georges Rivière wrote the following in a piece for *L'Impressioniste*: "For the past fifteen years, the artist most maligned and maltreated by press and public alike has been Cézanne. There is no insulting turn of phrase that has not been linked to his name, and the peals of laughter provoked by his works continue to reverberate to this day."[23]

The Oil Sketch

In 1894 Cézanne had himself photographed in his Paris studio **(fig. 3)**.[24] Standing on the easel is an oil sketch of his apotheosis of Delacroix. The painter is holding a palette and a bouquet of brushes in his left hand and a single brush, which seems much too large for the work perched on the easel, in his right. Clearly, this is just a pose: the painter working on an apotheosis of Delacroix. Yet the fact is Cézanne was not making any progress at all on this self-imposed task. One reason for this was his tendency to be hypercritical of his own work. Émile Zola noted in his review of the Salon of 1896 how the "genius behind this great, failed painter"—he is referring here to his personal friend, Cézanne—was gradually becoming apparent.[25] It seems that in his final years of creativity, Cézanne internalized this verdict. Although the aging hermit of Aix-en-Provence also saw himself as a pioneer, as the "primitive of a new art," he nonetheless remained plagued by self-doubt.[26]

As to the other reasons, we can only speculate. The official unveiling of the monument to Delacroix in the Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris in 1890 is unlikely to have encouraged Cézanne in the pursuit of his project. Dalou's sculpture shows a wreathed Apollo, god of the arts, seated at the base of the plinth and applauding, and facing him the winged god of time, from whose arms a nude female figure writhes free. True to tradition, this latter figure would have been Veritas, the personification of truth, which always comes to light in the end; but here truth has been supplanted by Fama—fame—who presents the bust of Delacroix both with a wreath symbolizing his immortal glory and with the palm frond of martyrdom. Delacroix himself is portrayed realistically with a scarf wound around his

FIG. 3
Anonymous, Paul Cézanne in His Paris Studio, 1894, photograph, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

FIG. 4
Apothéose de Delacroix (*The Apotheosis of Delacroix*), ca. 1894, oil on canvas, 27 × 35 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, on permanent loan to the Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, inv. RF 1982 38, R 746, FWN 687

FIG. 3

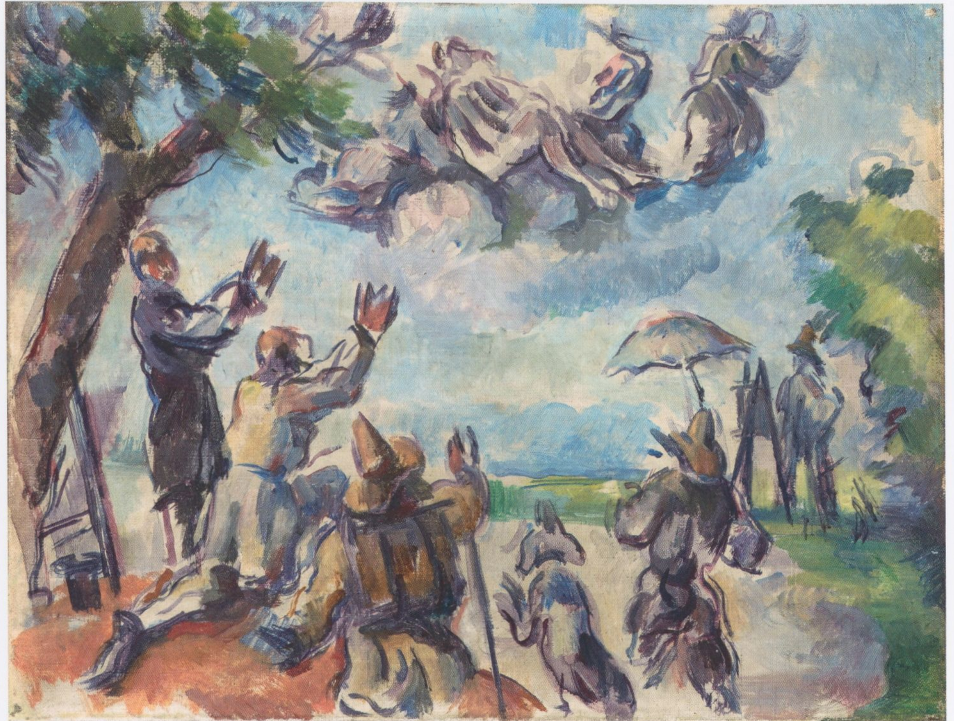

FIG. 4

FIG. 5
Émile Bernard, Paul Cézanne in Front of *Les Grandes Baigneuses*, March 1904, photograph, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

FIG. 5

neck—a nod to the painter's constant fear of catching a cold.[27] An exceptionally large exhibition comprising several hundred works by Delacroix was held at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1885 in order to raise funds for the monument. However, Dalou chose a conventional allegory worthy of the seventeenth century transmitted into the late nineteenth century.

The young Émile Bernard, by his own confession an ardent admirer of Cézanne, apparently saw the oil sketch in Aix-en-Provence in the same state as that evident in the aforementioned photograph of 1894 **(fig. 4)**. He went on to supply identities for the various figures included in the composition: standing at left, his top hat set down on the ground behind him, is the collector Victor Chocquet, a personal friend of Cézanne; the figure kneeling in prayer alongside him is nameless, while the man with a walking stick and broad-brimmed hat accompanied by a leaping dog is Cézanne himself. To the right of him and wearing a similar style of hat is Claude Monet, while the artist working at the easel is Camille Pissarro.[28] The group in the sky comprises the master himself with the tools of his trade being "carried away by angels."[29] Bernard follows his description with the claim that Cézanne had wanted to do him the honor of substituting him for Chocquet, who had already had his photograph taken in preparation for his inclusion in the painting. Few scholars have lent much credence to his assertion, however. Bernard, moreover, concludes that it was not greatly to be regretted that Cézanne never actually painted the apotheosis of Delacroix, as the composition was not especially original and its execution would have taken time away from the beautiful still lifes on which Cézanne's reputation rested.[30]

The art dealer Ambroise Vollard, who in 1895 staged the first major exhibition of Cézanne's works in Paris, attended the 1899 auction of Chocquet's estate. There he purchased a large watercolor by Delacroix for 1,325 francs, apparently with the intention of presenting the floral still life to Cézanne, who as he well knew admired it deeply, in exchange for a work by him.[31] Cézanne thanked Vollard for "the magnificent gift" in a letter dated January 23, 1902,[32] in which he also expressed his hope that he would soon have finished work on his own floral still life, which he planned to exhibit at the Salon later that same year. In early April, however, he again wrote to Vollard to say that he was not happy with the results of his work and would not be releasing the painting after all. Finally, in a letter dated January 9, 1903 that is full of self-doubt mingled with hope, he informed the art dealer that he had had to abandon the painting with flowers altogether.[33] At the same time he assured Vollard that he was working hard and could already see the Promised Land ahead of him, even if he still felt bound to ask: "Will I be like the great leader of the Hebrews, or will I be able to enter?"[34]

Artistic Dreams

In 1904 Bernard photographed Cézanne, by then diabetic, ailing, and resigned, in front of the first version of his *Grandes Baigneuses* (*Large Bathers*), the work that now hangs in the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia **(fig. 5)**. After the exhibition of 1895 at Vollard's, Cézanne had begun painting a major new work—willfully disregarding the dangers of deliberately embarking on a masterpiece, described all too vividly by Honoré de Balzac in his novella *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu (The Unknown Masterpiece)* and Émile Zola in his novel *L'Œuvre (The Masterpiece)* of 1886, both of whom have just such an endeavor end in the tragic death of the artist. Back in the eighteen-sixties, Cézanne had drawn portraits of Balzac and Frenhofer—the painter in his novella—in typical poses (cat. 15 recto, fig. p. 41 and cat. 16 recto, fig. p. 42). Not until relatively late did he attempt a large project of his own, however—a project that over the next ten or eleven years would spawn three

versions of the same composition, of which the first two show evidence of torturous overpainting, while the last remained unfinished. Those three permutations of the *Grandes Baigneuses* became a major preoccupation of Cézanne's—alongside the landscapes, portraits, and still lifes—towards the end of his life. In fact, he was still struggling with the large canvases in 1904, when Bernard visited him in Aix-en-Provence and reminded him of the unfortunate Frenhofer in Balzac's novella. Cézanne thereupon stood up, Bernard recalls, pointed his finger at his own breast, and without saying anything further identified himself as Frenhofer.[35]

The figural group of bathers on a large canvas was one of Cézanne's enduring art dreams; the other was the apotheosis of Delacroix.[36] The one dream, that of depicting figures in harmony with nature, he was incapable of achieving—or so the chronic doubter believed—while the other he had to abandon for good. When he reverentially copied Delacroix's floral watercolor between 1902 and 1904, he had not yet given up his plan for an apotheosis.[37] But we know from his letter to Bernard dated May 12, 1904 that by then his doubts were getting the better of him: "I don't know wether my precarious health will ever allow me to realize my dream of painting his [Delacroix] apotheosis."[38] By the beginning of the following year, he had begun to despair. Roger Marx, who in his article about the *Salon d'automne* penned for the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in December 1904 had been full of praise for Cézanne, received a moving letter of thanks from the artist dated January 23, 1905. The expressed gratitude, however, was followed by a formal renunciation: "My age and my health will never allow me to realize the artistic dream I have pursued all my life."[39]

Hanging on the wall of Cézanne's studio in Les Lauves was a photograph of Delacroix's painting *The Death of Sardanapalus*, as is evident from a photograph taken by Henri Roger-Viollet in around 1907.[40] Ambroise Vollard, too, describing a visit to Cézanne's former studio in 1896, also mentions seeing photographic reproductions and prints of works by Nicolas Poussin, Luca Signorelli, Èugene Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Peter Paul Rubens, Pierre Puget, Jean-Louis Forain, Pierre Paul Prud'hon, and Thomas Couture.[41] In 1964 Sara Lichtenstein produced a list of the many reproductions found in Cézanne's studio.[42] His interest in paintings, drawings, and sculptures by various artists is also borne out by the many drawings that he made after them.[43] Cézanne might even be said to have ventured into the realm of appropriation—at least to the extent that he developed his own drawing style by working from the paintings and sculptures of other artists. Yet these drawings are copies only in the sense of Delacroix's own practice of free and faithful appropriation.[44]

The fascination with Delacroix was no more ephemeral for Cézanne than it was for many other artists; his drawn and painted copies in fact attest to his lifelong veneration of the artist.[45] The catalogue raisonné of Cézanne's paintings up to 1904 includes twenty-six different references to Delacroix; that of his watercolors seven, and that of his drawings sixteen.[46] In his account of Cézanne's visits to the Louvre in 1904, Bernard observed how in Veronese he had learned "contrasts, tonal oppositions," while "If he goes to look at Delacroix again, it's to follow the blossoming of his vivid effects of color. And he affirms, 'Delacroix was imaginative and sensitive to colorations.'"[47] That much had been known since Baudelaire, but it was reaffirmed in 1899 by Paul Signac, who included Cézanne in his genealogy of neoimpressionism.[48]

Despite Cézanne's lifelong admiration for Delacroix, his relationship with Nicolas Poussin has generally been deemed the more important.[49] Cézanne himself supported this view when he declared: "Imagine Poussin redone entirely after nature—that's the classical I mean." Unfortunately, this clear articulation of his objective as a painter is known to us only second-hand, relayed by interlocutors

such as Joachim Gasquet.[50] Cézanne drew figures from Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego II* (*Arcadian Shepherds*) (cat. 133 recto, fig. p. 165 and cat. 135 verso, fig. p. 167), a photograph of which he had hanging in his studio, as well as from paintings by both Rubens (cat. 132 verso, fig. p. 165) and Veronese (cat. 35 recto, fig. p. 61). The connection between him and Poussin was certainly common knowledge among the art historians of the late nineteenth century. Roger Marx, writing in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1904, even posited a historic link between the artist in Aix-en-Provence and Poussin, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Gustave Courbet, and Honoré-Victorin Daumier.[51] Significantly, it could well have been Delacroix who defined the legacy of the great French painter in Rome. In his essay of 1853, for example, he tried to present Poussin not as a classical French painter, but as one of the boldest innovators in the history of painting.[52] Delacroix, moreover, described Poussin's life like that of a nineteenth-century artist—like his own, in other words. Poussin, he declared, had pursued his goals as an artist unerringly and in defiance of the unremitting hostility of the art world, the consternation of his native France, and the vicissitudes of fortune. As in the case of Delacroix, it seems that Cézanne, too, must have seen his own fate reflected in that of his great forebear.

1 Baudelaire/Gautier 1998, 101.

2 Ibid., 81.

3 Ibid., 158.

4 A member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris since 1832, Delaroche had been active in the department of painting, Fauteuil XIII. See http://www.academie-des-beaux-arts.fr/membres/ (accessed: 5.1.2017).

5 Cf. exh. cat. Paris 2016, cat. 41, 102–103.

6 Exh. cat. Paris 2011b, cat. 23.

7 Nicolas Chaperon, *Historiae Acta a Raphaele Urbin* (Rome: Petrus Mariette, 1649).

8 Exh. cat. Paris 2011b, cat. 27–29, 33, 35, and 36.

9 Leribault 2011, 36–42.

10 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Homère déifié (L'Apothéose d'Homère)*, 1827, Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. 5417), originally intended as a ceiling painting for the Salle Clarac.

11 Ch 174, 175; cf. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2005, 111–129.

12 Cf. exh. cat. Paris/Ottawa/San Francisco 1982, 165–178; Hattendorff 1998, 17–46.

13 Cf. exh. cat. Paris 1993, 250–259; R 172, FWN 615.

14 Cézanne Correspondance, 111; cf. Cézanne Letters 2013, 114–116.

15 Ch 102.

16 RWC 68.

17 Johnson 1981–2002, vol. 5, nos. 562–564.

18 Ch 167; cf. Ch 188. The verso of this drawing, with sketches of a dog and a study for the painting *L'Après-midi à Naples*. A woodcut by Alexandre Pothey after Delacroix's drawing was published in the magazine *L'Illustration* dated August 29, 1863.

19 Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2005, 114–116.

20 Ch 175.

21 Ch 195; Johnson 1981–2002, vol. 5, no. 578.

22 Ch 174.

23 Quoted from Rewald 1986, 112.

24 Cf. RWC 68. Rewald refers to the publication of Delacroix's *Journal 1893–1895*, and to the death of Chocquet in 1891.

25 Zola 1991, 467–474, see esp., 468. "Les parties géniales de grand peintre avorté."

26 Cf. Cézanne Conversations, 161; cf. Conversations with Cézanne, 160. The utterance, "Je ne suis, peut-être, que le primitif d'un art nouveau," was relayed by Joachim Gasquet.

27 Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2005, 114–116.

28 Cf. the two drawn portraits of Chocquet, Ch 394, 395, which Chappuis dates to 1875/77 and 1877/81.

29 Cézanne Conversations, 69; cf. Conversations with Cézanne, 69.

30 Ibid.

31 R 894, FWN 882; cf. Jensen 2006, 29–47. Delacroix's watercolor of 1849 is now in the Louvre (inv. RF 31 719).

32 Cézanne Correspondance, 244; cf. Cézanne Letters 2013, 309; cf. exh. cat. Winterthur 2015, 223. ". . . le magnifique cadeau. . . ."

33 Cézanne Letters 2013, 325; cf. Cézanne Correspondance, 292. "J'ai dû lâcher vos fleurs dont je ne suis pas bien content." The reference is to the *Vase of Flowers*, since 1958 in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (inv. 1958.10.2). Cf. R 893, FWN 881.

34 Cézanne Letters 2013, 325; cf. Cézanne Correspondance, 292.

35 Cézanne Conversations, 65; cf. Conversations with Cézanne, 65.

36 Cf. exh. cat. Basel 1989.

37 The copy (R 894, FWN 882) is now in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow.

38 Cézanne Letters 2013, 336. Cf. Cézanne Correspondance, 260.

39 Cézanne Letters 2013, 350; cf. Cézanne Correspondance, 311–312; Marx 1904, 458–474.

40 Cf. Andersen 2003, 472.

41 Vollard 1919, 98.

42 Lichtenstein 1964, 55–56.

43 Cf. cat. 96–152, fig. p. 149–177.

44 Cf. Bätschmann 1996, 24–33.

45 Cf. Badt 1956, 215–233.

46 Cf. Freudenberg 2012, 49–62.

47 Cézanne Conversations, 33. "Delacroix est un imaginatif et un sensitif de colorations."

48 Signac 1978, 35–64.

49 Cf. Cézanne Conversations, 80 (Bernard), 84 (Jourdain), 91 (Rivière and Schnerb), 97 (Osthaus), 122, 129, 150–151, 159 (Gasquet), 179–180 (Denis). The link between Cézanne and Poussin was asserted by all the leading scholars of the age. See also, Shiff 1984, 175–184; exh. cat. Edinburgh 1990; Kropmanns 2012, 65–72. In the more recent literature.

50 Cézanne Conversations, 150. "Imaginez Poussin refait entièrement sur nature, voilà le classique que j'entends."

51 Marx 1904, 463; Cézanne Letters 2013, 350; cf. Cézanne Correspondance, 311–312.

52 Delacroix [1853] 1988, 209–255.