

Neoclassical Art

Neoclassicism is the name given to Western movements in the decorative and visual arts and architecture that draw inspiration from the "classical" art and culture of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. The main Neoclassical movement coincided with the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. Neoclassicism is a revival of the styles and spirit of classic antiquity inspired directly from the classical period and was initially a reaction against the excesses of the preceding Rococo style.

The writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann were important in shaping this movement in both architecture and the visual arts. His books were the first to distinguish sharply between Ancient Greek and Roman art, and define periods within Greek art. Winckelmann believed that art should aim at "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" and praised the idealism of Greek art, in which he said we find: "not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty."

Neoclassical art and architecture typically contains:

Simplicity

Symmetry

Order

Idealism

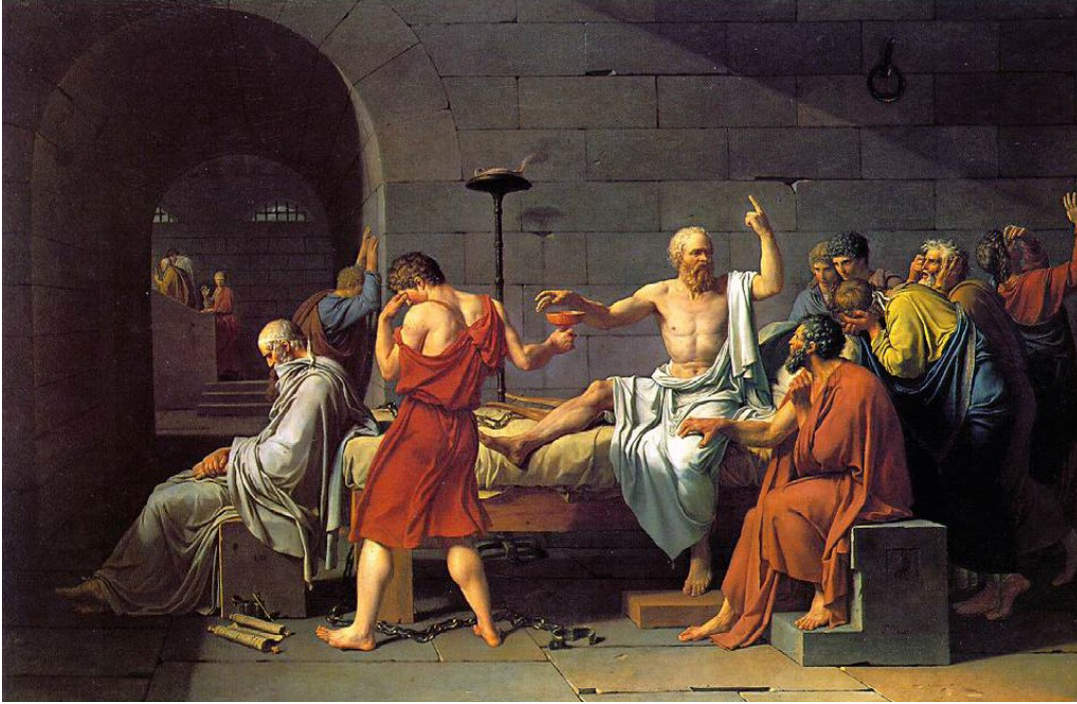
Beauty

Rococo frivolity and Baroque movement had been stripped away and replaced by a stiffer and more severe art and architecture.

Neoclassical artists, such as Jacques Louis David, preferred well-delineated form (clear drawing) and shading. Accurate drawing was considered essential and more important than painting. The Neoclassical surface of paintings appears perfectly smooth with no evidence of brushstrokes.

Neoclassicism is characterised by clear forms, sober colours, shallow space, symmetrical compositions, strong horizontal and verticals and a reference to art and subjects of the classical era. Neoclassical artists also painted contemporary subjects with references to the classical era.

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Jacques Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787,
oil on canvas, 1.3 m x 1.96 m



Antonio Canova, *The Three Graces*, 1814-17 version,
marble