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## Originality and Freedom: The 1863 Reforms to the École des Beaux-Arts and the Involvement of Léon Bonnat

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Abstract:

This article examines the involvement of the French artist Léon Bonnat in the debate provoked by the controversial government reforms to art instruction at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1863. Unlike the scholarly literature that addresses the two camps in the controversy, this study explores an individual, academically trained painter's participation, and his understanding and practice of artistic originality and freedom, two concepts central to the debate. In contrast to most of his peers, Bonnat supported the reforms and presented himself as a challenger to certain pedagogic practices, but he eventually reconciled to the academic system that he came to represent.

## Originality and Freedom: The 1863 Reforms to the École des Beaux-Arts and the Involvement of Léon Bonnat

by Alisa Luxenberg

The school where you go to draw only two hours per day, . . . the school where you don't paint, don't sculpt, don't engrave, cannot boast of forming the talents that it crowns but that are trained elsewhere by masters [who are] often strangers to this special school that is no more than a kind of open field where students of various masters come to fight for the Prix de Rome.

—Louis Auvray, 1864[1]

On November 13, 1863, the French government decreed massive reforms of the French national art school, the École des Beaux-Arts, which included dramatic changes in its relationship with the Institut de France (particularly its Fourth Class, the Académie des Beaux-Arts)[2] and the latter's campus in Rome. From the moment of their proclamation, these reforms have been debated and studied, largely within broader narratives about political agendas, artistic freedom and originality, and modernity. The reformers[3] considered the École's existing program of study to be a failure because it offered only sporadic, inconsistent, and abstract instruction, lacked courses in medium-specific techniques (and, for architecture students, any experience with managing a worksite), and held too many, frequently unproductive, competitions. To the government, the negative consequences of this training had been evident for years: the large numbers of struggling École-trained artists who continuously petitioned the state for work; the multiple years when no scholarships to Rome were awarded due to the poor quality of the students' works; the unimpressive artworks of the scholarship students (*pensionnaires*);[4] and the perceived superiority of rival Britain's industrial arts and design.[5] When even academicians, École faculty, and administrators admitted to the mediocrity of their best students' works, it signaled a deep, systemic failure in French art education.

The 1863 reforms proposed to change the curriculum, teaching corps, and competitions at the École to bring much-needed improvements for training the next generations of French artists. Perhaps the most visible change was the establishment of medium-specific ateliers within the École itself that would teach, for the first time in the school's history, painting, sculpture, architecture, and engraving.[6] Previously, the only practical exercise at the École was a drawing class, taught by a rotation of faculty. Students were expected to learn the practical skills of their medium *extra muros*, usually in a teaching studio that charged fees. The number of École competitions was to be reduced (the prestigious Prix de Rome competition would continue, though with changes), and students were required to attend non-studio courses as a means to cultivate their general education.

Earlier that year, an important administrative shift paved the way for the reforms, but passed unnoticed in the June lull after the Salon and before artists went on summer vacation. This change removed the Académie des Beaux-Arts' de facto authority over the École through its selection of faculty, usually from its own ranks.[7] Instead, professors would be appointed by the government, as they were at universities and other state teaching institutions. In another

tactical move, the reformers delayed publishing the decree, which was mostly drafted by mid-September, until after the annual judgments of the Prix de Rome and the *envois*, works by *pensionnaires* sent from Rome.[8] The academicians and École faculty largely and harshly rejected the entire decree.

Heralded as progressive in large part for their opposition to the time-honored conservative Académie des Beaux-Arts, the reforms were long believed to have modernized the École,[9] particularly through the ateliers and their first heads (called chefs or, more colloquially by students, patrons) who were not longtime academicians, suggesting that aesthetic standards were changing. More recently, scholars, led by Alain Bonnet, have investigated the texts, actions, and controversies of the 1863 reforms to challenge this general perception that the reforms transformed École training.[10] These scholars show that nearly every proposed reform—the ateliers being the exception—was either never implemented or overturned by 1871. Nor did the actual instruction in the classes and ateliers change significantly, despite the availability of new methods such as that of Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran at the “Petite École,” the drawing school for industrial artists and designers, which also served as a kind of prep school for the École des Beaux-Arts or “Grande École.”[11]

The controversy over the reforms raged for more than half a year, and the artist who will be at the center of my study, described it as “[the] great question that occupies my world and fascinates it to extremes. Brochures, articles in special issues rain down from each side, [and] they comment on every aspect of the new reforms.”[12] Though he attests to the debate’s broad currency, scholars have rarely investigated the opinions of individual artists and their impact.[13] In fact, a number of artists, architects, and art schools reacted to the decree.[14] The lacuna in the scholarship is due in part to the lack of a paper trail, as most artists had little reason to document their opinions and discussions, and to the modest careers of some of these respondents.

Consequently, we have much to learn by examining the involvement of the painter Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) in the reform controversy. He was an alumnus of the École, where he studied from 1854 to 1857, a Prix de Rome finalist (1857), and an ambitious artist who launched his career in Paris in 1861 after three years of study in Rome (1858–60). Bonnat is generally thought of as an academic painter (though he has also sometimes been called a Realist). He acquired numerous official positions and honors, among them École professor, academician, and the Légion d’honneur. By investigating and evaluating Bonnat’s intervention in the debate, I intend to demonstrate that, despite the accepted notion that academic artists—to use that problematic term[15]—were a homogenous group that held comparable views on crucial aesthetic and pedagogical matters,[16] this was often not the case. Indeed, I show that approval of or resistance to the reforms by artists does not always square with conventional categories of conservative and progressive or academic and modernist. Rather, artists’ attitudes toward the reforms were nuanced and depended on numerous factors, both theoretical and practical, and both personal and commonly shared.

My study will contextualize Bonnat’s involvement in the debate in relation to his own artistic training, the art he was making in the early 1860s, and his future pedagogical activity. It relies heavily on his correspondence, much of it unpublished, to his non-artist friend Arnaud Détrouyat in Bayonne—to whom he had to explain the debate—and to Ernest Chesneau, an

art critic in Paris writing on the reforms. It begins with Bonnat's foray into the reform controversy and his position vis à vis those of his academic peers and mentors. Next, I explore three principal problems within academic training that Bonnat identified in letters, some earlier than the 1863 decree. His opinions on these issues are then evaluated in relation to his experience in the Rome Prize competition and to key works of art that he made while in Rome. I propose personal and practical motivations for his unusual involvement in the debate, and demonstrate the impact he made on an important pro-reform critic. Lastly, I briefly consider Bonnat's teaching activity and incorporation into the academic ranks as further evidence of the failed attempt at reform and of the capacity for conflict and reconciliation within the academic system.

### **Bonnat's Response to the 1863 Reforms**

Bonnat's earliest known response to the decree is brief and rather neutral, except for his hearty approval of the appointment of Joseph-Nicholas Robert-Fleury (1797–1890) to direct the École.<sup>[17]</sup> Bonnat liked and respected this painter who had become his mentor in 1857.<sup>[18]</sup> An academician since 1850, Robert-Fleury was cast as a dupe by Viollet-le-Duc for accepting the directorship, and a modern scholar calls him a traitor.<sup>[19]</sup> Both of those views seem reductive and overlook his genuine commitment to the students, which few academicians and École professors demonstrated.<sup>[20]</sup> As director, he personally restored the evening drawing course, against the administration's wishes and without help from his sulking colleagues.<sup>[21]</sup> By 1865, Robert-Fleury realized how ineffectual he was with a faculty opposed to the reforms, and asked to be re-assigned to Rome,<sup>[22]</sup> where he could continue to mentor students. He was named director of the Rome campus at the end of 1865.<sup>[23]</sup> In homage, Bonnat painted his mentor's portrait (fig. 1) in the pose and guise of an Old Master, and inscribed it to the sitter's son Tony (1837–1911), also an artist and Bonnat's friend.<sup>[24]</sup> In comparison, it would be 16 years before Bonnat painted the (posthumous) portrait of his own master Léon Cogniet (1794–1880). To signal Robert-Fleury's—and his own—openness to less conventional models, the portrait emulates the art of Rembrandt and Hals in its dark, limited palette, harsh naturalism, bold light-dark contrasts, and broad brushwork that, in some parts, barely covers the ground color or defines forms like the hands.



Fig. 1, Léon Bonnat, *Portrait de Joseph-Nicholas Robert-Fleury* (Portrait of Joseph-Nicholas Robert-Fleury), 1865. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

Like Robert-Fleury, Bonnat shortly found himself in a highly awkward position concerning the reforms. Writing to Détroyat in the days following the decree, Bonnat candidly admitted his enthusiastic opinion of the reforms, and to having signed a letter to Napoléon III in favor of the decree. The letter to the emperor applauds “the liberal principles . . . of the decree . . . [that] position instruction as one of the highest needs of the time” and “Your Majesty [for having] understood that freedom is the most dynamic element of progress in the arts.”<sup>[25]</sup> Bonnat did not foresee that the letter would be published, in the official newspaper *Le Moniteur* no less, or that his artist-friends would reject his views.

That blessed signature is in the process of causing me disagreements with all my friends. Where I only saw a question of transforming [the École’s] studies, wholly to their benefit, they see an act of profound intrigue, and they associate me with people who want to destroy the Institut, the Rome prizes, freedom itself and, consequently, [with] . . . the death of art. It is very serious and I will have trouble getting out of it.<sup>[26]</sup>

Whereas the letter Bonnat signed had 109 names,<sup>[27]</sup> a mere six of which were École students, the anti-reform petition that appeared later collected nearly 300 signatures, mostly from students.<sup>[28]</sup> Bonnat’s opinions were clearly in the minority at the École. And Bonnat would not be directly affected by the reforms, as he had finished his studies but was not yet teaching, which makes his engagement with the debate all the more striking.

The authors of the decree were similarly caught off guard by student hostility to their proposals. The reformers expected strong resistance from École faculty and academicians, who saw their essential function as safeguarding the traditions and values of *le grand art*<sup>[29]</sup>—high-minded historical and allegorical subjects on a substantial scale—through their selection of faculty and curriculum, judging the competitions, and directing the Rome campus. But the reformers had assumed that students would be pleased with having practical instruction in their mediums within the École, and for free, rather than paying to attend an atelier outside the school. The presence among the protestors of an artist like Alfred Sisley might surprise us today because we know that he soon abandoned the academic path. The reforms, however, threatened to do away with the Rome prize in historical landscape painting to which he, while studying in Gleyre’s atelier, may have aspired.<sup>[30]</sup> The debate could produce odd bedfellows. The painter Paul Chenavard (1807–95), a student of Ingres, and the liberal art critic Jules Castagnary (1830–88) both opposed the reforms, not in accord with the Académie or the students, but because they considered the reforms impractical and founded on outdated Romantic ideals.<sup>[31]</sup> Motivations among supporters of the reforms also varied, as we will see by examining and comparing Bonnat’s words and actions.

Both Bonnat and his anti-reform friends were startled by the very different careers of his co-signatories on the letter, as he described them, “a crowd of decorators, of entrepreneurs who are not only unknown but whose profession has almost nothing to do with art.”<sup>[32]</sup> They were mostly architects within the circle of Viollet-le-Duc, older Romantic and Barbizon artists like Barye, Daubigny, and Huet, and a few young Realists like Bonnat and the sculptor Bartholdi.<sup>[33]</sup> If Bonnat bristled at the way in which the academicians discounted the pro-reform position by belittling the signatories as nobodies, he himself did

not seem to know them well or think highly of them. Despite his admiration for academicians like Ingres, Bonnat showed courage in dissenting from them and his peers.

In an extraordinary act, Bonnat reached out to an art critic embroiled in the controversy. This was not just any pro-reform art critic, but Ernest Chesneau (1833–90),<sup>[34]</sup> a spokesperson for the chief arts administrator, Nieuwerkerke.<sup>[35]</sup> Although Chesneau claimed to speak for the artists who approved of the decree as “a fair and dynamic measure,” he was firmly linked to the administration’s reformers.<sup>[36]</sup> Chesneau’s aesthetic preferences ran toward Realist and Naturalist art but he also championed Gustave Moreau, and progressive art critics like Philippe Burty congratulated him on his “excellent” article on the reforms.<sup>[37]</sup> Fortunately for posterity, Bonnat described at some length his interaction with Chesneau in private letters to Détrouyat, and he wrote at least two others to the critic, one of which survives, and the other was partially quoted in the 1887 Bovet sales catalogue.<sup>[38]</sup> Four of these letters are transcribed and translated in the appendices that follow this article.

### Academic Problems

Bonnat saw three cancers within the academic system: partisanship, routine, and entitlement. He was not the only one to perceive them, and the reforms aimed to reduce or eliminate all three, to some extent. What Bonnat brought to the debate was his recent knowledge and experience in Paris and Rome, and he could supply concrete instances of such problems to non-artists like Chesneau. In Rome, Bonnat knew the *pensionnaires* and their routine. He attended the live-model sessions at the Villa Medici, and became particularly close with painters Jules-Élie Delaunay (1828–91) and Émile Lévy (1826–90), sculptor Henri Chapu (1833–91), and printmaker Joseph Tourny (1817–80).<sup>[39]</sup> In 1863, Bonnat had some perspective on his training, having completed his studies and exhibited in four Salons (1857–63) where his art was assessed. In his view, these three problems within art instruction impeded the development, originality, and critical judgment of students, thwarting their potential to produce great public art.

### Partisanship in the Rome Prize Competitions

Bonnat understood the decree as an attempt to weaken or eliminate the partisanship of the academicians who rewarded their followers rather than the best talents.

This is really about the Institut, especially when one only gets in there by seniority or friendship. It is about raising the level of art, of seeking the truth and not [about] being more or less hostile to a clique . . . Anyway! It’s an obligation to say what one thinks. I said it, too bad for those who aren’t happy about it.<sup>[40]</sup>

He goes on to lament that the reforms had not come fifteen or twenty years earlier, when “independent” artists like Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803–60), Eugène Delacroix (1799–1863), Ary Scheffer (1795–1858), and Robert-Fleury were available to be hired as École faculty to implement a new curriculum.<sup>[41]</sup> Although these four artists are generally considered Romantics, their art had widely differing styles and subjects, though Bonnat perhaps exaggerated their openness to all artistic talent and willingness to teach. But it is not clear that Bonnat thought that malignant partisanship among academicians corresponded to the specific styles they practiced;<sup>[42]</sup> rather, he detected a group mentality that infected most of the artist members.

Bonnat refused to change his position on the reforms, at least partly on ethical grounds, admonishing those who would “be angry with me for having had the courage of my conviction.”<sup>[43]</sup> He was especially pained by charges of “playing up to Nieuwerkerke or to the Administration, and this accusation almost makes me regret my signature.” He sounded exasperated by his friends’ prediction that Nieuwerkerke<sup>[44]</sup> would take total control of the École by naming artists to run it who were loyal to him. Bonnat believed that the École and the Académie already operated in a similarly exclusive manner, as evidenced by mediocre, uninspiring artists like Signol and Jean Alaux<sup>[45]</sup> among their members: “Bah! Why does the Institut elect men like Signol, Alaux, and others? Well, too bad. I hope this makes them furious. Maybe I will never be in the Institut, but that will not be so bad.” If supporting the reforms threatened his chances of election to the Académie, as his friends reminded him had happened to the sculptor François Rude (1784–1855), Bonnat questioned the value of such membership, revealing a deepening ambivalence toward the institutions that he had admired.

Nowhere was the Académie’s partisanship more evident than in the Prix de Rome competition, the most prestigious of all held at the École, and its scholarships at the French Academy in Rome. The Académie oversaw the Rome prizes, which reflected its values: mastery of the human figure and large-scale narrative composition, knowledge of antiquity and the Old Masters, and traditional techniques, especially finished surfaces. Most finalists and winners were students at the École who attended a handful of private ateliers headed by academicians. The critic Achille Fouquier condemned the jury’s decisions as self-serving: “The members of the Institut, who nearly all have a little theory of beauty and a large atelier, reinforce their principles through their students.”<sup>[46]</sup> Many believed that the Rome juries rewarded persistence more than talent, choosing the eldest repeating candidate, though this is not born out by the facts.<sup>[47]</sup> More frustrating was the jury’s inability to identify future masters like Théodore Géricault and Jean-François Millet who, in 1816 and 1839, respectively, did not make it to the final round, and Thomas Couture who did on four occasions (1836–39), but failed to win once.

Several of the 23 articles of reform in the 1863 decree addressed the Rome competition and scholarships. To create more objective juries, the reforms proposed to limit their number of academicians and chefs of the new ateliers, so that masters were not judging their own students. To inhibit students from spending more than five years competing for these scholarships and having nothing to show for it, the reforms lowered the maximum age of competition from 30 to 25, forcing students to compete earlier and for fewer years. The age limit gave non-winners more time to adjust their practice to alternate career paths, and aimed to reduce the temptation for the jury to reward diligence over talent. And to offer more variety and choice to the *pensionnaires*, the reforms altered the required residence at the Villa Medici from four years to two, encouraging students to travel to study the art that best contributed to their artistic development.

Bonnat himself was sorely disappointed with the Prix de Rome experience, even during his most successful candidacy in 1857. The young painter acknowledged the weaknesses in his final-round canvas, *The Resurrection of Lazarus* (fig. 2),<sup>[48]</sup> and sought jurors’ advice on how to improve his work. They told him, he reported, that



Fig. 2, Léon Bonnat, *La Résurrection de Lazare* (The Resurrection of Lazarus), 1857. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[larger image\]](#)

I have qualities of energy, color, [and] truth and that, while conserving these qualities, I have to try to give something more graceful and robust to my compositions, to make fewer stiff guys, then try again to get deeper inside a character like Christ in such a way that he doesn't look like just anybody. To that last remark I could have replied that I hate what is banal, and that I believe a head, just because it has long hair and a pointed beard that are well painted, to be less a Christ than my head which at least has some expression.

Old Cogniet repeated the words that a big name from the Institut was saying about me to everyone. "Will he persevere? We'll see."[\[49\]](#)

Bonnat disagreed with the jury about his figures appearing common and without character, and with cause, for the heads in his canvas have naturalistic physiognomies and express different reactions to the miracle. He objected to the implication that he had neglected the spiritual narrative, and his private correspondence shows that he cared deeply about religious subjects and matters.[\[50\]](#) At the crux of his disagreement with the jury was the friction between competing notions of emulation and originality, of acknowledging traditions and being master of one's metier while creating unique works of art in one's own manner.[\[51\]](#)

As Alain Bonnet has discussed, the concept of originality was absorbed into École training and the broader artistic discourse, but with fluid and sometimes contradictory meanings.[\[52\]](#) He demonstrates that academic doctrine held originality to be an innate disposition and therefore unteachable, while the reformers conceived of it as part of every artist's individuality that could be nurtured if released from emulation of a strict canon.[\[53\]](#) In his justification for the 1863 reforms, Nieuwerkerke blamed the purposeless competitions for stunting students' originality as they tried to please their masters: "This personal originality, a quality so essential to artists, which current teaching tends barely to develop, is further impeded . . . by the system of competitions in practice at our School, . . . that has become the principal focus of students and professors."[\[54\]](#) Bonnat's frustration in 1857 with the vague criticism he received and the questioning of his commitment is palpable in his underlining and colloquial term "*père Cogniet*." His words resonate with the widespread suspicion that



students, especially in the Rome Prize competitions, were rewarded more for persistence and emulation than talent and originality.

The jurors' advice for fewer "stiff guys" and more robustness seems equally applicable to that year's winning canvas (fig. 3) by Charles-François Sellier (1830–82).<sup>[55]</sup> Sellier's central Christ figure is ramrod straight with a profile head and less modeled in light and shade than any in Bonnat's canvas. Furthermore, by placing the smaller Lazarus figure off to the left, in a frontal position and shrouded in darkness, Sellier obscured its relationship to the larger Christ. It seems that Sellier's figures were not held to the same standard as Bonnat's. On the other hand, Sellier's canvas was a departure from Rome prize works, most obviously in its light effects. Instead of an even lighting of figures in the foreground plane, or more dynamic spotlighting that unifies figures in multiple planes to convey the story, Sellier's painting features two sharp-edged areas of differently colored illumination in two separate planes: the reddish zone covering the bust of Christ in the central middle ground, and the greenish architectural opening in the upper right background. The rest of the composition is painted in a murky reddish brown that is difficult to read. For some observers, this lighting made the picture original or just bizarre.<sup>[56]</sup> Nevertheless, a traditional source of emulation for these lurid and sharp-edged zones of light was his own master Cogniet's celebrated painting of 1843, *Tintoretto Painting His Dead Daughter* (fig. 4).

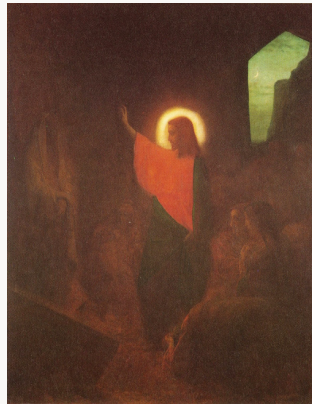


Fig. 3, Charles-François Sellier, *La Résurrection de Lazare* (The Resurrection of Lazarus), 1857. Oil on canvas. École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 4, Léon Cogniet, *Le Tintoret peignant sa fille morte* (Tintoretto painting his dead daughter), 1843. Oil on canvas. © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, Bordeaux. Photo: F. Deval. [\[larger image\]](#)

In his first letter to Chesneau, Bonnat provided an example of the Académie's partisanship during the same Prix de Rome competition of 1857. He recounted how Louis-Hector Leroux (1829–1900) was ranked first in the first-round vote by the Painting Section, but then this judgment “was broken by the bulk of the Institut, that is to say, by the musicians, architects, and sculptors,”<sup>[57]</sup> to give the top prize to Sellier. Bonnat's account is confirmed in the written report on the juries' decisions.<sup>[58]</sup> The painting students demonstrated that they understood perfectly their professors' criteria and tastes by predicting the precise ranking of the top four candidates.<sup>[59]</sup> Thus, when the final vote by the entire Académie (painters, sculptors, architects, and musicians) reversed the top two candidates, Bonnat expressed a painter's frustration by asking, “Isn't there something illogical about that, that the vote of a musician, even one in the Institut . . . should have the same weight as that of a painter? Can Mr. Halévy have as much knowledge of painting as Mr. Delacroix?”<sup>[60]</sup> But the art critic Paul Mantz, no apologist for the Académie, praised the jury for having “had the courage to forget its own tradition . . . [in] rewarding the work of Mr. Sellier for the adventurous and truly eccentric effort of [his] talent.”<sup>[61]</sup> Whereas Bonnat viewed the final vote as uninformed Institut partisanship, Mantz saw it as a newly progressive judgment.

Leroux was exactly the kind of student that the reforms were intended to protect from an ineffective curriculum. Leroux contended for the Rome prize an astounding nine times, from 1851 to 1859, until his 30th year, and never won. If he had won in 1857, he would have been 33 and approaching middle age when he returned from Rome to establish a career and perhaps support a young family. (*Pensionnaires* could not be married.) In comparison, Bonnat was rare among École students who came close to winning the Prix de Rome and voluntarily stopped competing before turning 30.

### **Routine and the *Envois***

On his first visit to Chesneau, Bonnat suggested how to improve the Rome scholarship experience. He did not seek to eliminate the Rome program or even to abandon its curriculum, for he saw the benefit of studying there. However, instead of emulating the graceful, decorous forms of the academic paragon, Raphael, he set himself to drawing after

more extreme models such as Michelangelo's muscular, tensed figures (fig. 5) and the naïve, awkward ones of "primitives" like Signorelli. Bonnat's primary idea was to eliminate the *pensionnaires'* deadening routine in order to liberate their originality.



Fig. 5, Léon Bonnat, *Drawing after Michelangelo's Damned, Sistine Chapel*, ca. 1858–60. Ink on paper. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

I am convinced that every time one gives artists their freedom and suppresses the spirit of routine, art will benefit. We, the young [artists], will draw from our heart and find there motifs of originality [and] of personality, [and] an emotion that can't reach us through the constraining recipes of the teaching that we've been given up to now. [\[62\]](#)

Bonnat insisted that advanced students like *pensionnaires* benefited more from independent exploration than imposed exercises like their annual *envois*.

In his first letter to Chesneau, Bonnat addressed the requirement of *envois*, but, unfortunately, the Bovet catalogue does not cite his words. But some years earlier in Rome, the artist commented upon this traditional practice.

We weren't surprised here by the lack of success of the painting *envois*. The exhibition [of them] was rather sad. The *pensionnaires'* mistake in general is to make *envois* exclusively to fulfill the requirements. Do they ask for a figure? One makes a figure in two or three months, sometimes in a few weeks, and sends it. [\[63\]](#)

Most *envois* were examples of emulation, copies of Old Master works or studies of a single figure on a substantial scale. Bonnat seemed to bemoan the practice as a waste of time and effort when he called them "figures" rather than "pictures," indicating that the *envois* were mere exercises, not finished works fit to submit to the Salon or sell to patrons. He took a different approach to his study in Rome, and in effect, turned his loss in Paris into freedom in Rome.

Showing his ambition and challenge to the academic curriculum, Bonnat set and met goals that surpassed those of the *pensionnaires*. In three years, he produced three history paintings,

original compositions on a large scale. His first painting (fig. 6) was *The Good Samaritan* (1858), a two-figure subject that indicated his desire to make meaningful religious pictures. The narrative may have echoed with him personally, considering the displacements and kindness that he and his family experienced.[64] It is the most traditional among his three history paintings from Rome, in its more pyramidal composition, unified figures, and muted palette. Bonnat's interest in naturalism emerges in the convincing articulation of human anatomy and the large equine head poking into the foreground. After its exhibition at the 1859 Salon, he dispatched this canvas to his hometown in thanks for its financial support of his artistic education.[65]

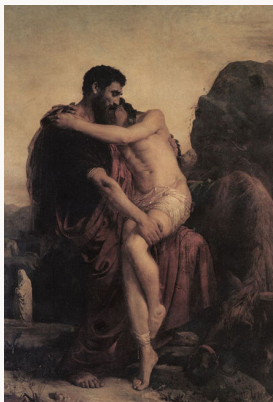


Fig. 6, Léon Bonnat, *Le Bon Samaritain* (The Good Samaritan), 1858–59. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[larger image\]](#)

In his next painting (fig. 7), Bonnat took on a more complex three-figure subject on a slightly larger canvas. Most significant is that he chose the biblical narrative *Adam and Eve Finding the Corpse of Abel* that had been assigned for the final round of the 1858 Rome competition. He obviously meant to vindicate his artistic skills by measuring them against those (fig. 8) of that year's winner Jean-Jacques Henner (1829–1905).[66] The two canvases share a naturalistic rendering of the nude figure, the parents' pained expressions, and inky shadows that evoke the tragic theme. But Henner's canvas, with its well-proportioned figures arranged in a unified pyramid set within a pleasant wooded landscape, is conventional. The even lighting and relatively polished surface temper the frank rigidity of Abel's corpse.



Fig. 7, Léon Bonnat, *Adam et Ève retrouvant le corps d'Abel* (Adam and Eve finding Abel's corpse), 1860–61. Oil on canvas. Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, Lille. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, New York. Photograph by Philippe Bernard. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Jean-Jacques Henner, *Adam et Ève retrouvant le corps d'Abel* (Adam and Eve finding Abel's corpse), 1858. Oil on canvas. École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

In contrast, Bonnat created three large, dissimilar nudes in distinctive poses strung across the near foreground of a murky, barren land. Inspired by his studies of Michelangelo, Adam's coiled, contorted pose and exaggerated musculature seem barely contained within the horizontal format, and contrast sharply to the withdrawn pose of Eve and the splayed, bony figure of Abel. The dark, muted palette, dim lighting, and more roughly worked surface all heighten the atmosphere of violence and grief. Critics recognized the painting's original manner in comparison to the current taste for "fresh and smiling tones," seeing in it "the strong manner of Zurbarán"[67] and "strong lessons of Michelangelo." [68] Some critics were moved by this picture that "had nothing academic about it, and breathed deeply of the poetry of ancient times," [69] and Auguste Cordier called it "perhaps the best canvas in the entire Salon." [70] *Adam and Eve* earned Bonnat his first medal (*deuxième classe*) at the Salon and first purchase by the state, and it was sent to the art museum in Lille, an area long associated with Northern painting and strong naturalism. Through this canvas Bonnat advertised his development beyond student exercises and his distinct aesthetic.

In his third history painting (fig. 9), the enormous *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew* (1862), Bonnat attempted another religious subject.[71] The canvas depicts a colossal, muscular nude in the near foreground, surrounded by multiple secondary figures, but here in a more hierarchical, neo-Baroque composition that would read easily as an altarpiece. Although the picture was sent back to France by early 1861, Bonnat was dissatisfied with its tonality, and probably worked on it further that year. Impatient to show his *Saint Andrew* in the non-Salon year of 1862,[72] Bonnat exhibited it in June at Martinet's gallery,[73] and the following March at the Salon. The critics mostly passed quickly over this huge canvas to heap praise upon his genre painting of an Italian girl,[74] but the state purchased it and awarded Bonnat another second-class medal. The artist had offered the *Saint Andrew* to Bayonne, and the state honored his promise.[75] With these three paintings, Bonnat rebuked the practice of the *envois* as he looked to launch his career back in Paris through the Salons and sales.



Fig. 9, Léon Bonnat, *Le Martyre de Saint André* (The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew), 1862. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[larger image\]](#)

### Entitlement at the Villa Medici

Bonnat saw the students' lazy approach to the required *envois* as evidence of their sense of entitlement and immaturity that the Villa Medici fostered. In an 1858 letter from Rome, he articulated his opinion of the *pensionnaires*.

They think that having won a scholarship is enough to make them great painters. Meanwhile they should have seen that they had to work to get the award and they should know that nothing is obtained easily. Generally, they act too much like lords, taking it far too easy. Fortunately, there are exceptions. Baudry worked like a madman. . . . At the academy, one remains a schoolboy too long.[76]

But few *pensionnaire* were rewarded for trying to make something more of their *envois*, as Anne Wagner has demonstrated through the example of the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827–75).[77]

In protesting the 1863 reforms, the Académie argued that an important part of the Rome experience was the *esprit de corps* and generosity that developed among the *pensionnaires*, and

that these qualities aided them in their artistic development and later benefited the French art system as they took on official positions within it. This special bond, the academicians insisted, would be harmed by the reforms' reduction of the number of *pensionnaires*, the years of study, and the time spent together on the Rome campus. Chesneau refuted the Académie's idealized image of *pensionnaire* camaraderie with a recent example of a student who was ostracized by the others.<sup>[78]</sup> Without naming the student, the critic described him as living at the Villa Medici, but ignored by the *pensionnaires*, and never invited to share a meal with them or to visit in their rooms. That student was the painter Pierre-Louis-Joseph de Coninck (1828–1910) and the details of this episode must have come from Bonnat, who befriended de Coninck.<sup>[79]</sup> Of Dutch parents, de Coninck competed for a Rome scholarship from 1852 until 1858, and though several times a finalist, he never placed first. In 1858, out of time and desperate, he boldly asked the Académie for a special dispensation: to give him a scholarship that had not been awarded.<sup>[80]</sup> The academicians, wary of setting a bad precedent, consulted with the administration, then granted de Coninck up to two years' residence at the Villa Medici, but without board or stipend. Thus, the student was compensated for his diligence, but assigned an inferior status. It seems hypocritical of Chesneau to exploit de Coninck's case, for, like Leroux, he was exactly the kind of student the reformers wanted to direct away from history painting and toward a sustainable art career.

#### **Bonnat's Impact on the Public Debate**

What led Bonnat to contact Chesneau rather than another pro-reform critic? First, the painter and critic may have already met.<sup>[81]</sup> If not, Bonnat knew Chesneau's name, because the critic praised his paintings on more than one occasion that year.<sup>[82]</sup> Called shy by some of his students,<sup>[83]</sup> Bonnat may have felt more at ease speaking his mind to someone his own age (30). It was Chesneau's job to defend the decree, and to do so, he needed tangible instances of the failures of academic training. Only an artist who had studied in the system could supply these, but that artist had to be capable of a critical perspective. Bonnat had such information from studying at the École, pursuing the Rome prize, and interacting with *pensionnaires* in Rome. The critic and the painter did not agree on everything, but both considered the École's preeminent function to be training future artists in *le grand art*, though Chesneau thought it was already in decline.<sup>[84]</sup>

Still, it was a risky move on Bonnat's part, and he enumerated the suspicions his contact with Chesneau could arouse: that he was a traitor to the École; that he wanted to destroy the Academy in Rome and adversely affect his friends there; that he was cozying up to the administration for his own ambitions; or, that he was settling a personal score. That Bonnat willingly courted this danger might signal a genuine desire to help improve French artistic training, or guilt at exposing the internal dynamics of an artistic system in which he had participated and still desired to triumph.

Since the late 18th century, French artists were increasingly aware of the crucial role that art criticism could play in their careers, and many cultivated or built friendships with supportive writers.<sup>[85]</sup> Examples of artists who influenced art criticism are rarer, especially when the writing did not concern their own art. Bonnat had an important impact on Chesneau's articles, not only by providing concrete evidence of the Leroux-Sellier decision and the ostracizing of de Coninck, but also through his general ideas and advice. Bonnat said he urged the critic "to explain . . . what the problem was and in what way we had to find a

remedy for it,” and warned him to drop his “satirical tone,” by which I believe he meant exaggeration or sarcasm. Bonnat maintained that the students and more open-minded academicians “are blinded by the Institut that spouts fire and fury, and don’t see the truth, they don’t notice that routine is replacing originality and life.”<sup>[86]</sup> Similarly distorted rhetoric, he seemed to believe, perhaps naïvely, would not win them over to the reformers’ plan.

When Chesneau responded to the anti-reform diatribe by the Académie’s secretary, the archaeologist Charles-Ernest Beulé (1826–74),<sup>[87]</sup> Bonnat claimed to a friend that the second page “was nearly written by me.”<sup>[88]</sup> The ending of Chesneau’s article does indeed reiterate the lofty ideas in Bonnat’s letters to him.

If all the ardor, all the passion is not extinguished in the hearts of the younger generations, if it is right that the art of a great era and of a great people should no longer struggle under the efforts of academic routine, we are confident that in the near future the self-interested opponents of the excellent measure that has been taken will be overcome.

The Decree of November 13, in maintaining and broadening the teaching of tradition, without excluding the free demonstration of individual genius, has, by this alone, restored the courage, the trust, and the hope in all the young and elevated souls who from this moment forward feel inviolably protected.<sup>[89]</sup>

The young painter seemed proud to have taken this initiative and been listened to, and, trusting in the critic’s powers of persuasion, predicted a positive outcome: “After tomorrow all the young fellows will be on our side.”<sup>[90]</sup> Unfortunately, he and Chesneau were to be rudely disappointed.

Chesneau’s article of January 1864 again followed Bonnat’s advice, and staked the future of the reforms on the judgment of younger artists.<sup>[91]</sup> In his second letter to the critic, Bonnat pointed out that Ingres, who was staunchly opposed to the decree, had departed from the aesthetic norms established by his own master, David, and proposed holding up Ingres to the students, not as a stylistic paragon, but as a methodological model for reforming academic conventions.

Couldn’t one apply [the model of Ingres] very clearly to this generation, to do what one wants which is to kill the old mentality [that is] incapable of producing beautiful and original works and [that] only leads to absolute banality as well as worthless conventions? Couldn’t one exhort [the students] to become men and to have the courage to find in themselves [and] make the effort to produce personal works in front of which they could say with pride, “I was the one who made this, I was the one who thought this.” No more routine, no more banal instruction!<sup>[92]</sup>

Chesneau paraphrased Bonnat’s idea thus:

Ah, poor young fellows, pulled on one side by the authority of a great name toward the errant ways and errors of David, and on the other in the name of the discontented toward the negation of all painting, of all art, toward Mr. Courbet. . . . Go, dear young fellows, get close to Mr. Ingres, learn from him the prestigious art of linear beauty; go



to Delacroix, Veronese, Rubens, Rembrandt, Raphael, learn from these masters and life and movement, color and style. But above all, never desert your own school. Reflect, work, look at the masters and even more at nature; become painters by the technical skills of your art, and men by deep thought, and keep yourselves equally far from all factions. With this sacrifice, be convinced, you will make, you also, great works of art, and you will illustrate a new era in French art that will have commenced with the decree of November 13.[93]

These ideas failed to convert someone like Ingres to the reformers' side, for he did not see himself as having overturned the art or principles of David,[94] and he did not support Delacroix's election to the Institut. Moreover, celebrating only Ingres and Delacroix could have caused bad blood among the other academicians who were tacitly demoted to second-rate status.

The student faction also remained unpersuaded by Chesneau's exhortations. The administration promoted the new ateliers and limited competitions as offering greater freedom to students to explore and experiment, while the non-studio courses provided a broader knowledge base on which they could draw to vie for and satisfy various artistic commissions. The letter that Bonnat signed specifically describes the reforms as granting students *more* freedom in their studies. However, the students perceived *less* freedom in having to study primarily with one master at the École and to choose that master from only three options, rather than the greater range of instruction available outside the École. Both sides used similar words like "freedom" and "originality," but they understood them differently.

The students' opposition to such highly personal forms of teaching took a hostile turn once the École's mandatory course in the history of art began in late January 1864. It was taught by the reformer Viollet-le-Duc, who abandoned the traditional content of artistic biography, anecdotes about beauty, and concentration on the classical and Renaissance eras. Instead, he extolled the rationality and utility of various styles and periods—but especially medieval architecture—the study of nature, and practice-based solutions. In a second petition dated February 25, 1864, more than 250 École students signed to complain that they saw,

in the creation of this unique course a negation of any freedom of learning [and] the imposition of a necessarily exclusive doctrine, because it emanates from a single man, and it substitutes [Viollet-le-Duc's] personal values for an ensemble of doctrines born through consent of a large number of artists [and] a true reflection of the times.[95]

The students accused Viollet of forcing an untested historical narrative and aesthetic preferences on them.[96] From the first day, he was literally forced out of the classroom by student jeering and jostling, and he finally resigned in April.[97] Bonnat's intervention did not help the reforms succeed, but he did influence the government-approved argument that defended them.

### **Bonnat as Challenger**

The question to pose now is, what led Bonnat to embrace the reforms and stand apart from

his peers? For in many ways, Bonnat was a conventional and ambitious student, respectful of traditions and institutions in his objective for an official career in painting large religious works for the state and church.[98] He did not question the function of the École to produce fine artists of the most complex subjects, figurative and historical. In his student letters, he repeatedly invoked the “glory” of official success, such as exclusive membership in the Institut. However, from a young age, he had experiences that differed from those of his peers at the École.

Instead of commencing his training at a provincial art school and progressing to the École in Paris, Bonnat studied abroad. After bankruptcy in Bayonne, his father moved the family to Spain to start anew, and a fourteen-year-old Bonnat joined them in Madrid, where he became one of the few French artists to study in the Spanish academic system. While the Madrid art academy followed practices similar to the Parisian one, the young Frenchman had to learn in a foreign language and culture, without close friends or examples to follow. His aesthetic models were the Spanish Old Masters, who were not embraced within French academic training. He progressed sufficiently to land a government commission at the tender age of 19,[99] but his studies were interrupted in 1853 when his father died.[100] At 20, Bonnat became the head of his family that consisted of his mother, younger sister, and younger brother.

It was with this heavy expectation that Bonnat began his studies at the École. His training in Paris was only possible due to a stipend provided by his hometown of Bayonne.[101] Once again, he had to learn a new system with different models, now Poussin and Delacroix. It seems reasonable to speculate that Bonnat’s broader experiences and prior adjustments in his artistic formation made him more open—or less resistant—to the reforms than were École students and alumni who only knew one curriculum, one set of models, one vocabulary.

Alongside the École, Bonnat enrolled in one of the largest and best-known ateliers, that of Cogniet, an academician and professor at the École.[102] A Grand Prix winner himself, Cogniet had several students who obtained Rome scholarships,[103] which attracted ambitious students like Bonnat. He duly competed for the Rome prize, first in 1854,[104] and made it to the final round in 1857. But as Bonnat’s earlier letters imply, rather than helping him to improve, his paternal substitutes of professors and academicians failed and doubted him, as perhaps his own father had through bankruptcy, infidelity, and early death.[105] Bonnat found another way to Rome, as, once again, Bayonne came to his aid, extending his funding.[106] His letters convey a sense of urgency to learn his craft and earn a living, and familial obligations weighed heavily in his decisions to cease competing at age 24 and spend only three years in Rome, fewer than *pensionnaires* did.

Moreover, Bonnat was not impervious to the attractions of the *pensionnaires*’ life, and he looked back on this period of his life with great nostalgia.[107] He made friendships there that he valued and maintained for the rest of his life—*esprit de corps*, indeed. He even admitted to envying some of the *pensionnaires*’ routine, like the annual show of the *envois*, because their work was hung in favorable conditions and was reviewed by academicians as well as journalists.[108]

For Bonnat, the ideas behind the reforms confirmed his path and the benefits of training abroad and independently in Rome. If he became close with several *pensionnaires*, he also befriended independent artists like Félix Lionnet (1832–96), Gustave Moreau (1826–98), and Edgar Degas (1834–1917), who attended the live-model sessions at the Villa Medici (it saved them from hiring a model), but did not revere the academic system.<sup>[109]</sup> Bonnat also met with Spanish artists who were studying in the Eternal City.<sup>[110]</sup>

Bonnat took advantage of some of the new courses offered at the École after 1863,<sup>[111]</sup> and looked to widen his knowledge base, as the reforms encouraged. He read widely, from historical and religious texts to contemporary poetry and newspapers, and he was curious about new philosophies and political matters. In 1861, he listened to the views of Eugène Pelletan (1813–84), a journalist of the political opposition.<sup>[112]</sup> Elected Deputy of the Seine in 1863, Pelletan condemned the École reforms, more from political duty than any informed opinion on the arts.<sup>[113]</sup>

If Bonnat set his sights on triumphing at the official Salon, he also showed in alternate venues when it suited him. He joined the new Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, a social club begun in 1862 that organized independent art exhibitions in the gallery of its founder Louis Martinet.<sup>[114]</sup> A former artist (and non-voting member of the Académie), Martinet ran a print gallery where, since 1859, he sponsored shows of past and living artists like Chardin, Ingres, and Manet.<sup>[115]</sup> Exhibiting there, Bonnat's painting was seen in the company of works by provocative artists like Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet.<sup>[116]</sup> Continuing to exhibit there in the Salon year of 1863, Bonnat was elected to the club's executive committee by 1864.<sup>[117]</sup> In exploiting alternative venues, Bonnat seemed motivated to display his artwork as often as possible to reach patrons and to elicit reviews that he read avidly,<sup>[118]</sup> quite unlike the more calculated exhibition practices of Manet, who selected certain subjects for distinct audiences and to signal the complex relationships between his works.<sup>[119]</sup>

In 1863, Bonnat had a very good Salon. He submitted the allowed maximum of three paintings and all were accepted: the large religious picture, *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*; a female portrait (*Mme L\*\*\**); and an Italian genre painting, *Pasqua Maria*. Not only did he earn a Salon medal, he sold all three paintings.<sup>[120]</sup> Bonnat was positioning himself as a history painter, while showing versatility in other genres to insure some income. But despite his post-Rome success, he did not feel supported within the Parisian art world. In November 1862, he confided to a close friend, "I can't manage to get the smallest commission. . . . I see my wings clipped by this lack of resources and security. It isn't fun, I assure you, to live from day to day and not know what will become of us in the immediate future!"<sup>[121]</sup> In 1863, he felt wronged when he did not win a first-class medal at the Salon,<sup>[122]</sup> and unsettled by the inconsistent treatment from an arts official.

The director of fine arts at City Hall . . . welcomed me wonderfully, showering me with congratulations on my exhibition. The next day the city commission met and voted to give me an order worth 6000 francs; I was told of the matter by members of the committee. Not receiving any official word . . . I went three days ago to see the director, and this fine gentleman treated me like a bull in a china shop, and in the phrases he deigned to mutter to me, I understood that the prefect had not yet ratified

the committee's vote. That's the world. It's sad to see such unintelligent directors of fine arts.

Except for these few enemies, who, unfortunately, have great importance in my life, I only half-heartedly regret what happened.[123]

From the elation of learning that the state purchased his *Saint Andrew* and that the city voted him a splendid commission for a religious painting,[124] his bubble was rudely burst when he did not obtain the gold medal and the arts administrator (probably Courmont) treated him coldly.

His mentor in Bayonne, the artist-publisher Romain Julien, interpreted the official patronage lavished on Bonnat as compensation for the elusive first-class medal.[125] Accepting Julien's explanation may have assuaged Bonnat's affront at being passed over for a medal, but it also meant acknowledging that official decisions, like the Académie's, did not necessarily reward merit. As for the director's cold shoulder, the insecure Bonnat seems to have overreacted. Nonetheless, each occasion that Bonnat perceived the jury's unfairness or the administration's volatility disturbed his faith in the system: a year later, he still bitterly recalled the "stolen" first-class medal.[126]

Bonnat's failures to win top prizes at the École and Salon may have led him to be critical of the system. He never won a single competition in drawing or painting at the École. In criticizing academic training, he seemed to call into question those artistic talents that were certified by its awards, but he also exposed himself to charges of sour grapes. His criticism derived from his experiences, but he avoided supplying personal tribulations to Chesneau as evidence of the failures of the academic system. At the same time, the patronage and praise his art earned by 1863 made him an advertisement for the reforms, an École alumnus who created his own accelerated path toward *le grand art* without the imprimatur of a Rome scholarship.

#### **Coda: Bonnat's Pedagogy and Assimilation**

As indirect outcomes of the reforms, opportunities to teach at the École and serve as Rome juror came Bonnat's way, as did the invitation to direct an independent atelier. In 1864, he was appointed to the jury of the Prix de Rome for the first two stages of competition.[127] He had just turned 31; the minimum age for École professors was 30. Some of its faculty, still angry over the changes imposed by the reforms, refused to teach, and Robert-Fleury likely hired or recommended his mentee. Bonnat taught as a *suppléant* (substitute) for 16 sessions in 1865–66, and then as *titulaire-peintre* (tenured painter) for 3 sessions in 1867–68.[128]

In 1867, the painter Ernest Hébert (1817–1908) succeeded Robert-Fleury as director of the French Academy in Rome, and had to step away from the private atelier that he had inherited from Cogniet. Hébert's students asked Bonnat to become their patron, and he accepted, but expressed a highly antagonistic attitude to both the École and Hébert, already an academician.

I am taking over from Hébert the directorship of his atelier, formerly Cogniet's atelier, the only one that had some significance outside those at the École. Hébert

didn't want me to, but the people decided. . . . I am thrilled, this could be magnificent, we could empty the École ateliers. We'll see.[129]

Bonnat presented himself as an intruder—"Hébert didn't want me to"—even though they had studied under the same master in the same system.

It was not long before Bonnat realized the difficulty of being an effective teacher, a realization that caused him to reflect on his own artistic development.

I come to see that it is nearly to chance that I owe my progress. A miserable engraving! in the *Magasin pittoresque*, twenty years ago, made me see better, in painting!! than the Velázquez and Ribera that I was studying every day. In Rome a bad photograph representing a steer lying down made me understand what a picture is, what makes it so that an object is powerfully modeled to the detriment of nearby objects that are sacrificed! When I was going to Mr. Cogniet [and] floundering, a beggar that I saw at the corner of [the rue de] Paradis Poissonnière, his head wrapped in a scarf, made me understand that systems are worthless and that there is only beautiful, good, and healthy nature with its strong and simple tones that is worth [studying]. . . . On the Rue de La Paix I encountered a lady with dark hair wearing a Parma violet hat, and I understood what color is. Go give lessons and guide people after similar examples. Well, I do my best.[130]

Unlike Chesneau, who published on various aspects of artistic education, communicated with Lecoq de Boisbaudran, and pondered the proper training of all artists as he joined the new Union Central des Beaux-arts Appliqués à l'Industrie,[131] neither Bonnat, nor the arts administration, nor the École was able to imagine new methods of instruction to cultivate future artists for a society in transformation.

As Alain Bonnet contends, the general dissatisfaction with artistic training[132] and the contentiousness over the reforms derived from the unwillingness of either the state or the École and Académie to confront the central, thorny question: for what should the École prepare its students?[133] Léon Bonnat never doubted the school's focus on *le grand art*, even as much of his success came from his genre painting (fig. 10) and portraiture. By the time he was made professor at the École, Bonnat's perspective on his training in Paris had shifted. He admitted having had little practical or theoretical instruction, for the elderly and frail Cogniet rarely came to the atelier. But rather than condemn this absence, Bonnat presented it as a virtue.



Fig. 10, Léon Bonnat, *Pèlerins au pied de la statue de Saint-Pierre à Rome* (Pilgrims at the foot of the statue of Saint Peter in Rome), 1864. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, New York. Photo: René-Gabriel Ojéda. [\[larger image\]](#)

I was very surprised by this type of negligence, of this abandonment that left us in doubt, indecision, and nearly absolute ignorance on the path to take. Since then, I've come to think that this neglect was only a perception, and very likely intentional. [Cogniet] knew that one learns well only what one learns on one's own, in trying, in seeking. He thought that mutual learning is the most efficient teaching, and finally and above all, he did not want to impose on his students his way of seeing, of understanding, and of interpreting life.[\[134\]](#)

Bonnat now seemed in full agreement with the anti-reform students who reviled Viollet: a master must not impose his particular aesthetic on students. Bonnat even spoke of Cogniet as a reformer, despite the latter's opposition to the 1863 decree.[\[135\]](#) The Romantic concepts of originality and freedom had created a stalemate over artistic education, in which a supporter of reforms like Bonnat believed that a hands-off approach to art instruction was beneficial for protecting these virtues, while in reality it perpetuated the same ineffective training.

Bonnat adopted an antagonistic posture in his *Adam and Eve*, his dark, Spanish manner, the reforms debate, and his private atelier, but he was ultimately reconciled with the academic system. After being elected to fill Cogniet's seat at the Académie in 1881, he was named professor at the École in 1882, and closed his atelier. The fear that his support for the 1863 reforms would bar him from the Institut proved unfounded, and by allowing diverse and once challenging artists into their fold, the Académie could publicize its support for artistic freedom and originality. Once inside the Académie, Bonnat did not attempt to reconstitute academic instruction, even after becoming head of an atelier in late 1888 and director of the school in 1905. Nor did he have success guiding his students in the Prix de Rome; not one of his pupils from either his independent or École atelier ever won a scholarship.[\[136\]](#) Even the Luxembourg, the state museum of contemporary art, was not particularly welcoming to his history painting.[\[137\]](#) Bonnat can serve as an example of the tensions and contradictions within the academic realm, especially concerning artistic education, that were repeatedly debated and dissipated through the Romantic rhetoric of originality and freedom.

## Appendix A

Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouyat, December 30, 1863, Private collection, France

Partial transcription:

Maintenant passons à ma grande question, question qui absorbe mon monde et le passionne avec violence. Les brochures, les articles dans les revues spéciales pleuvent de tout côté, l'on commente sous tous leurs aspects les nouvelles réformes.

Je te dirai que je suis complètement rassuré sur l'interprétation que l'on pouvait donner à mon adhésion. . . .

Il n'y avait qu'un homme assez moqueur et assez habile pour répondre à Beulé, c'était About\* qui aurait pu sans restrictions se livrer à son amour de la satire [*sic*] et de la moquerie.

. . . Je fus retenu dans mes démarches [vers Chesneau] par scrupule. Je ne voulais pas d'un côté aider à démolir l'école de Rome, plusieurs pensionnaires étant mes amis, et je ne voulais pas surtout en faire, ou avoir l'air d'en faire une question personnelle. J'hésitais quand parut le premier article de Chesneau . . . J'allai le voir [parce que ce n'est plus une question que je fournirai des preuves contre l'École]; il me reçut poliment et je lui dis ma façon de voir sur Rome et les améliorations qu'à mon avis il faudrait introduire. Rentré chez moi je lui écrivis; j'avais oublié une foule de choses. Je lui écrivis une seconde lettre le lendemain l'engageant bien montrer aux jeunes gens en quoi consistait le mal et de quelle façon il fallait y remédier. Tous les jeunes gens qui sont hostiles aux nouvelles réformes, [et] ces membres trop sains pour qu'il ne faille pas les leur faire accepter, ils sont aveuglés par l'Institut qui jette feu et flamme et ne voient pas la vérité, ils ne voient pas la routine prenant le lieu et la place de l'originalité et de la vie. J'engageais Chesneau à laisser de côté son ton satyrique [*sic*] et à tâcher de réchauffer notre génération. Il me répond ces jours-ci: "Vos deux lettres m'ont fait le plus grand plaisir. Elles m'ont confirmé dans cette pensée que le talent est inséparable d'une certaine chaleur d'âme et d'esprit. J'ai profité de quelques-uns des renseignements que vous avez eu l'obligeance de m'apporter" (la seconde page de son article est presque écrite par moi).

" . . . [il faut] cesser cette guerre de personnalités . . .

Je suis un peu souffrant, pardonnez-moi de ne pas répondre plus longuement à vos excellentes lettres. Je vous le répète, elles m'ont beaucoup touché. Et lorsque le jeudi vous passerez devant chez moi, souvenez-vous, je vous prie, que j'aurai toujours le plus grand plaisir à causer avec vous . . ."

Voilà. Je voudrais être à sa place. Après demain tous les jeunes gens seraient pour nous.

Mes amis de Rome sont furieux contre moi et me disent surtout les Toni que Rude n'a jamais été de l'Institut pour avoir, dans sa jeunesse, fait partie d'une société qui voulait démolir l'Institut. Il s'agit bien d'Institut, surtout si l'on n'y arrive que par ancienneté et camaraderie. Il s'agit de relever le niveau de l'art, de rechercher la vérité et non d'être plus ou moins hostile à une coterie. Il est fâcheux que ce Décret novateur n'ait pas été au Moniteur il y a quinze ou vingt ans. À cette époque il eut été très facile de lui donner un corps. Les gens de talent en dehors de l'Institut abondaient et l'on n'aurait pas un besoin (comme aujourd'hui) de recourir [*sic*] à des membres de

l'Institut pour trouver des professeurs. Decamps, Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, Robert Fleury étaient entièrement indépendants. Aujourd'hui ce sera très officiel. Il n'y a que Robert Fleury qui tiendra; les autres qui avaient d'abord accepté la direction des ateliers, sont entraînés par le mouvement général de l'Institut et ont donné, donnent, ou donneront leur démission.

Enfin! c'est un devoir de dire sa façon de penser. je la dis, tanpis [*sic*] pour ceux qui ne seront pas contents.

Translation:

Now let's move on to my great question that occupies my world and fascinates it to extremes. Brochures, articles in special issues rain down from each side, [and] they comment on every aspect of the new reforms.

I will tell you that I am completely reassured about the interpretation that they could give to my position. . . .

There was only one man mocking and skillful enough to respond to Beulé, that was About\* who could have unrestrictedly indulged his love for satire and sarcasm.

. . . I held off in my plans [to approach Chesneau] from scruples. On one hand, I did not want to help destroy the school in Rome, several [of its] scholarship students being friends of mine, and above all I did not want to make of this, or give the impression of making it a personal issue. I hesitated when Chesneau's first article appeared . . . I went to see him (because it is no longer a question of me providing evidence against the École); he received me politely and I told him my way of seeing Rome and the improvements that, in my opinion, would have to be introduced there. Having returned home, I wrote to him; I had forgotten loads of things. I wrote him a second letter the following day urging him to explain to the young fellows what the problem was and in what way we had to find a remedy for it. All the young fellows who are hostile to the new reforms, or those members [of the Académie] too sound not to have to accept them, they are blinded by the Institut that spouts fire and fury, and don't see the truth, they don't notice that routine is replacing originality and life. I urged Chesneau to put aside his satirical tone and to try to stir up our generation. He answered me these last days: "Your two letters gave me the greatest pleasure. They confirmed for me this idea that talent is inseparable from a certain fervor in soul and mind. I took advantage of some of the information that you had the kindness to bring me" (the second page of his article is nearly written by me).

" . . . This war of personalities must end. . . .

I am slightly unwell, forgive me for not responding at length to your excellent letters. I tell you again, they touched me very much. And on Thursday when you pass by my house, please remember that I will always enjoy chatting with you . . ."

There you have it. I would like to be in his position. After tomorrow all the young fellows will be on our side.

My friends from Rome are furious with me and, above all, those with Toni\*\* tell me that Rude was never in the Institut for having, in his youth, belonged to a club that wanted to destroy the Institut. This is really about the Institut, especially when one only gets in there by seniority or friendship. It is about raising the level of art, of seeking the truth and not [about] being more or less hostile to a clique. It's regrettable that this reforming decree was not in the *Moniteur* fifteen or twenty years ago. At that time it would have been very easy to give it legs. Talented men outside of the Institut



abounded, and one wouldn't have needed (as today) to turn to members of the Institut to find professors. Decamps, Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, Robert Fleury were entirely independent. Today this reform will be very official. There is only Robert Fleury who will hold to it; the others who initially agreed to direct the [new] studios are caught up in the general reaction of the Institute and submitted, are submitting, or will submit their resignation.

Anyway! It's an obligation to say what one thinks. I said it, too bad for those who aren't happy about it.

\*Edmond About (1828–85), Parisian journalist, novelist, and art critic known for his satirical and anti-clerical writing. Bonnat met him in Rome in 1858, and did not like him. Soon after this, About published on the reforms, "Coteries," *La Vie Parisienne* January 23, 1864, 49–51.

\*\* Tony Robert-Fleury

## Appendix B

Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouyat, December 8, 1863, Private collection, France

Partial transcription:

Il y a quelque temps, au fait, tu étais ici, un de mes amis se présente chez moi, me demande si j'approuve le nouveau règlement de l'École des Beaux-Arts et sur ma réponse enthousiaste en faveur des nouvelles mesures il exhibe une lettre à l'Empereur que je signe immédiatement. Cette bienheureuse signature est en train de me brouiller avec tous mes amis. Là où je n'avais vu qu'une question de transformation dans les études, tout aux avantages de ces dernières, on voit un acte de profonde courtoisie et l'on m'associe aux gens qui veulent démolir l'Institut, le prix de Rome, la liberté même et par suite, pour nous, la mort de l'art. C'est fort grave et j'aurai de la peine à m'en tirer.

La lettre signée par moi et autres a été publiée dans le Moniteur. Immédiatement l'Institut est accouru à Compiègne et, la lettre en main, a prouvé à l'Empereur que de tous les signataires il n'y en avait que deux ou trois ayant de la valeur que le reste était parfaitement inconnu, et que l'on pouvait l'opposer à ces deux ou trois noms tout ce que la France contenait de noms illustres.

On me reproche d'avoir mis mon nom à côté de celui d'une foule des décorateurs, d'entrepreneurs qui non seulement sont inconnu [*sic*] mais dont le profession n'eut rien moins que de l'art.

À ces reproches je réponds par [illegible]: Quand je crois une idée bonne, je la soutiens et la défends. Quant [*sic*] même, dusse-je être seul de cet avis. On ne peut pas m'en vouloir d'avoir eu le courage de mon opinion . . .

Mais ce qui me fait de la peine c'est qu'on m'accuse de faire la cour à Nieuwerkerke ou à l'Administration, et cette accusation me fait presque regretter ma signature.

L'on me dit aussi que le décret en question éteint toute espèce de direction de l'Institut, sur le goût, sur les Études. . . . L'administration Nieuwerkerke sera toute puissante et nommera les gens qui lui seront dévoués ce qui ne sera pas toujours une

preuve de Talent, etc. etc. Que sais-je!!!!

Ah Bah! pourquoi l'Institut nomme-t-il des gens comme Signol, Alaux et autres?  
Ma foi tan [*sic*] pis. J'espère qu'on les laissera être furieux. Peut-être ne serai-je jamais  
de l'Institut, mais le mal ne sera pas bien grand.

Translation:

It was some time ago, in fact, while you were here, one of my friends appeared at my house, [and] asked if I approved of the new regulations for the École des Beaux-Arts, and upon my enthusiastic reply in favour of the new measures, he showed [me] a letter to the Emperor that I immediately signed. That blessed signature is in the process of causing me disagreements with all my friends. Where I only saw a question of transforming [the École's] studies, wholly to their benefit, they see an act of profound intrigue, and they associate me with people who want to destroy the Institut, the Rome prizes, freedom itself and, consequently, for us, [with] the death of art. It is very serious and I will have trouble getting out of it.

The letter signed by me and others was published in the *Moniteur* [*universel*]. Immediately, the Institut ran to Compiègne and, the letter in hand, proved to the Emperor that of all the signatories there were only two or three having any merit [and] that the rest were entirely unknown, and that they could put up against these two or three names all the famous names that France possessed.

I am reproached for having put my name alongside those of a crowd of decorators, of entrepreneurs who are not only unknown but whose profession has almost nothing to do with art.

To these reproaches I answer by [illegible] When I believe an idea is good, I support it and defend it. All the same, even if I am alone in thinking this way, they cannot be angry with me for having had the courage of my conviction . . .

But what bothers me is that they accuse me of playing up to Nieuwerkerke or to the Administration, and this accusation almost makes me regret my signature.

They also tell me that the decree in question closes off any kind of direction from the Institut over the taste and over the studies [at the École]. . . . Nieuwerkerke's administration will be all powerful and will name men who are loyal to him which will not always be proof of talent, etc. etc. What do I know!!!!

Bah! Why does the Institut elect men like Signol, Alaux and others? Well, too bad. I hope this makes them furious. Maybe I will never be in the Institut, but that will not be so bad.

## Appendix C

Léon Bonnat to Ernest Chesneau, December 26, 1863 (A 6374, Collection Frits Lugt, Fondation Custodia, Paris). This letter also appeared in the Alfred Bovet sale. See Étienne Charavay, *Lettres autographes composant la collection de M. Alfred Bovet* (Paris: Charavay Frères, 1887), 639–40, cat. no. 1701, item 2, partially photographed.

Full transcription:

Encore moi, Monsieur, cette fois je tâcherai d'être plus court. Permettez-moi de vous soumettre quelques idées que je crois bonnes.

M. Ingres qui crie tant contre le nouvel état de choses a été le premier à s'affranchir des règles imposées par la queue de David. Ce n'est qu'à force s'étudier les maîtres, en s'affranchissant de l'esprit de routine qu'il est parvenu à produire ses oeuvres si imposantes et si belles. Ne pourrait-on pas le présenter comme modèle à la jeune génération? Ne pourrait-on pas lui appliquer bien clairement, à cette génération sur ce que l'on veut c'est tuer ce vieil esprit incapable de produire des oeuvres belles et originales et ne conduisant qu'à la banalité absolue qu'à une convention de mauvais aloi? Ne pourrait-on pas les exhorter à devenir des hommes et à avoir le courage de puiser en eux-mêmes, de faire ses efforts pour produire des oeuvres personnelles devant lesquelles ils pourront dire avec orgueil = C'est moi qui ai fait ça, c'est moi qui ai pensé ça. Plus de routine, plus d'enseignement banal! Dites leur donc, Monsieur, qu'une tête de Leonard avec son divin sourire vaut mieux que toutes les oeuvres des Signol, Blondel, Hesse et autres.

Notre école est en décadence si on la compare à ce qu'elle a été sous Louis XIV, sous l'Empire, en 1830. Ça vient du manque de foi dans le beau, ça vient du manque de chaleur dans les jeunes gens qui cherchent à gagner de l'argent plutôt qu'à produire de belles choses. On leur dit que le nouveau décret tend à tuer le grand art et à baisser encore le niveau. Dites-leur, Monsieur, je vous prie, que des recettes ne peuvent que produire un semblant de grand art. Le grand art se trouve dans leur conscience, dans leur coeur. Qu'ils s'écoutent et qu'ils deviennent des hommes. qu'ils se livrent, sans arrière-pensée et tout entiers, à l'étude des grands maîtres, de la nature, et leurs oeuvres seront du grand art.

Pardonnez-moi d'insister sur ce sujet, si j'insiste c'est que je sais des bruits que l'on fait courir—bruits faux—l'on dit que le grand art est mort, c'est faux.

Veillez m'y croire, Monsieur, et agréer, je vous prie, l'assurance de ma considération distinguée.

23 rue Turgot

Ln Bonnat

Translation:

It is I again, Sir, this time I will try to be briefer. Allow me to submit to you some ideas that I think are good.

Mr. Ingres, who cries out so much against the new state of things, was the first to disobey the rules imposed in the wake of [J.-L.] David. It is only by virtue of studying the old masters, in escaping the spirit of routine that [Ingres] came to produce such imposing and beautiful works. Couldn't he be presented as a model to the younger generation? Couldn't one apply [the model of Ingres] very clearly to this generation, to do what one wants which is to kill the old mentality [that is] incapable of producing beautiful and original works and [that] only leads to absolute banality as well as worthless conventions? Couldn't one exhort [the students] to become men and to have the courage to find in themselves [and] make the effort to produce personal works in front of which they could say with pride, "I was the one who made this, I was the one who thought this." No more routine, no more banal instruction! Tell them therefore, Sir, that a [mere] head by Leonardo with its divine smile is worth more than all the works by Signol, Blondel, Hesse, and others.

Our school is in decline if one compares it to what it was under Louis XIV, under

the Empire, [and] in 1830. This comes from a lack of faith in the beautiful, it comes from a lack of passion in young fellows who look to earn money rather than to make beautiful things. They're told that the new decree will kill great art and lower the level even more. Tell them, Sir, I beg you, that recipes can only produce a resemblance to great art. Great art is to be found in their conscience, in their heart. If they would listen and become men who allow themselves, completely and without second thoughts, to study the great masters, [and] nature, [then] their works will be great art.

Excuse me for insisting on this topic, but if I insist, it's because I know the rumors that are being spread — false rumors — they say that great art is dead, that's wrong.

Please believe me, Sir, and accept, I beg of you, the assurance of my special consideration.

23 rue Turgot

Ln Bonnat

## Appendix D

Léon Bonnat to Ernest Chesneau, December 23, 1863 (present location unknown). This letter is partially described and published in Étienne Charavay, *Lettres autographes composant la collection de M. Alfred Bovet* (Paris: Charavay Frères, 1887), 638, cat. no. 1701, item 1.

Full transcription of the catalogue entry, where citations from Bonnat's letter were given quotation marks:

Superbe lettre, qui fait le plus grand honneur à ce célèbre artiste. Elle a été écrite à l'occasion de la réorganisation de l'école de France à Rome. Bonnat donne de piquants détails sur le peintre Hector Leroux et sur l'esprit de corps des pensionnaires de l'école. Il rappelle que Leroux obtint le premier prix dans la section de peinture, mais que cet arrêt fut cassé par l'Institut en masse, c'est-à-dire par les musiciens, les architectes et les sculpteurs.

“N'y a-t-il pas là quelque chose d'illogique, et la voix d'un musicien, quoique de l'Institut, quand il s'agit de juger un peintre, devrait-elle avoir la même valeur que celle d'un peintre? M. Halévy peut-il avoir en peinture des connaissances aussi positives que celles de M. Delacroix?”

(Ceci se passait en 1857 et Hector Leroux n'eut que le second prix.)

Il discute la nécessité pour les élèves de faire des envois. Il est partisan des nouvelles mesures prises relativement à l'école de Rome. Considérations à ce sujet.

“Je suis convaincu que toutes les fois que l'on laissera de la liberté aux artistes et que l'on étouffera l'esprit de routine, l'art y gagnera. Nous, jeunes, nous puiserons dans notre cœur et y trouverons des motifs d'originalité, de personnalité, une émotion que ne sauraient nous donner les recettes compassées de l'enseignement que l'on nous a donné jusqu'à présent.”

Translation:

Superb letter which does the greatest honour to this famous artist. It was written on the occasion of the reorganization of the French school in Rome. Bonnat gives spicy details about the painter Hector Leroux and on the *esprit de corps* of the *pensionnaires* at the school. He recalls that Leroux obtained first place in the painting section, but that this vote was broken by the bulk of the Institut, that is to say by the musicians, architects, and sculptors.

“Isn’t there something illogical about that, that the vote of a musician, even one in the Institute, when it concerns judging a painter, should have the same weight as that of a painter? Can Mr. Halévy have as much knowledge of painting as Mr. Delacroix?”

(This happened in 1857 and Hector Leroux only got second place.)

He discusses the need for students to make *envois*. He is in favor of the new measures taken in relation to the school in Rome. Considerations on this subject.

“I am convinced that every time one gives artists their freedom and suppresses the spirit of routine, art will benefit. We, the young [artists], will draw from our heart and find there motifs of originality [and] of personality, [and] an emotion that can’t reach us through the constraining recipes of the teaching that we’ve been given up to now.”

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## Notes

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[1] “L’école où l’on ne va dessiner que deux heures chaque jour, sans être vu du professeur qui reste dans son coin, l’école où l’on ne peint pas, où ne sculpte pas, où l’on ne grave pas, ne peut se vanter de former les talents qu’elle couronne et qui se sont formés au dehors chez des maîtres souvent étrangers à cette école spéciale qui n’est qu’une sorte de Pré-aux-Clercs où les élèves des différents maîtres viennent lutter pour le Prix de Rome.” Louis Auvray, “Chronique des Beaux Arts,” *La Revue artistique et littéraire* 6 (January 1864): 12.

[2] I will use the shortened French forms “École,” “Académie,” and “Institut” when referring to these specific institutions in Paris. The Institut de France was made up of different academies divided into five classes; the Académie des Beaux-Arts was the Fourth Class.

[3] The small circle of men behind the reforms consisted of: the comte de Nieuwerkerke, newly appointed surintendant des beaux-arts; the architect E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc; and, the writer and art lover Prosper Mérimée. They had the support of comte Walewski, minister of state; maréchal Vaillant, minister of the imperial household; and Henri Courmont, director of fine arts. Each had somewhat distinct motives for seeking “the destruction of the aristocratic republic of the École.” Prosper Mérimée, Letter [probably to Henri Courmont], September 18, 1863, Nieuwerkerke Collection, The Wallace Collection Archive, London (hereafter, NP, WCA). I thank the Wallace Collection library staff for their kind assistance.

[4] In 1846, 1848, 1852, 1853, 1855, and 1862, no Rome scholarships in history painting were awarded. Philippe Grunchev, *Le Grand Prix de Peinture, 1793–1863* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1983), 251, 257, 275, 278, 290, 323.

[5] Government-sponsored reports from the international expositions in London in 1851 and 1862 as well as the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855 unfavorably compared French industrial arts and design to those of Britain. Anne McCauley, “Photographs for Industry: The Career of Charles Aubry,” *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 14 (1986): 161–72 provides an illuminating discussion.

[6] Three ateliers each for painting, sculpture, and architecture, one each for intaglio printmaking and gem carving. For critical studies of the atelier, see Alain Bonnet and others, eds., *Art et transmission: L’atelier du XIXe au XXIe siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014); and France Nerlich and Alain Bonnet, eds. *Apprendre à peindre: Les ateliers privés à Paris 1780–1863* (Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2013).

[7] The two administrative actions were taken on June 23 and 29, and did not provoke a reaction. In one, the oversight of the Institut de France (and thus, the Académie des Beaux-Arts) was moved from the Ministry of the Imperial Household and of Fine Arts to the Ministry of Public Instruction—not an anodyne gesture, because it meant that the Académie was under separate direction from that of the École and the French Academy in Rome. Counter-intuitively, these two pedagogical institutions remained in the Ministry of the Imperial Household and of Fine Arts. In the other action, for the first time since the *ancien régime*, the Fine Arts division was made a superintendency, and Nieuwerkerke was named superintendent. This position gave him authority over the two art schools, allowing him to circumvent the Académie’s traditional one. Alain Bonnet, *L’Enseignement des arts au XIXe siècle: La réforme de l’École des beaux-arts en 1863 et la fin du modèle académique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006), 163.

[8] The reformers may have expected the academicians’ and critics’ assessments of these works to be negative, as they often were in recent years, and bolster their case for much-needed reform. For the jury decisions and critics’ assessments, see Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 326, 436–37.

[9] Albert Boime argued for understanding the evolution of the freer, sketchy technique of the Impressionists as depending partly on certain academic ideas and exercises, which he linked to the 1863 reforms. Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), 181–85; and Albert Boime, “The Teaching Reforms of 1863 and the Origins of Modern Art,” *Art Quarterly*, n.s., 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 1–39.

[10] Bonnet, *L’Enseignement*; Dominique Poulot, Jean-Miguel Pire, and Alain Bonnet, eds. *L’Éducation artistique en France: Du modèle académique et scolaire aux pratiques actuelles XVIIIe-XIXe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010); Jean Laurent, *À propos de l’École des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1987), esp. 125–39; and Bruno Foucart, “L’Enseignement des arts et la réforme de 1863, ou fallait-il faire quelque chose?” introduction to *Débats et polémiques: À propos de l’enseignement des arts du dessin*, by Louis Vitet, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, and le comte de Nieuwerkerke (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1984), 7–25.

[11] Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1802–97) authored *L’éducation de la mémoire pittoresque et la formation de l’artiste* (Paris: Librairie Sociétaire, 1848) and *Lettre à un jeune professeur: Sommaire d’une méthode pour l’enseignement du dessin et de la peinture* (Paris: Vve A. Morel et Cie, 1876). Viollet-le-Duc discussed Lecoq’s method in Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, “Un cours de dessin,” *L’Artiste*, n.s., 5, no. 10 (November 7, 1858): 154–56, and favored its implementation at the École. Boime, *Academy*, 181–82. For a modern discussion, see Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, “Lecoq de Boisbaudran and Memory Drawing: A Teaching Course between Idealism and Naturalism,” in *The European Realist Tradition*, ed. Gabriel P. Weisberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 242–44, 277–89.

[12] Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouat, December 30, 1863, Private collection, France (hereafter, PCF); [Appendix A](#).

[13] The exceptions are Viollet-le-Duc, who helped to craft the decree, Nieuwerkerke, himself a sculptor, and the academicians and École faculty who reacted within their institutional capacities.

[14] The file “Réorganisation de l’Académie de France à Rome,” F/21/613, Archives Nationales de France, Pierrefitte (hereafter, ANF), contains letters from individuals like the Paris architect Émile Vaudremer (1829–1914) and the engineer with architectural training Auguste du Peyrat of Toulouse, as well as form letters from provincial art schools. Vaudremer, Grand Prix in 1854, warns that the reforms to the Prix de Rome would most adversely affect provincial and poor students, but these provincial schools supported the reforms.

[15] I use this term not in a stylistic application, but to refer to artists who trained primarily within the École des Beaux-Arts and pursued an official career.

[16] Albert Boime, “Un Unpublished Petition Exemplifying the Oneness of the Community of Nineteenth-Century French Artists,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 345–53, contends that artists from academic and independent camps united to protest reforms to the Salons also enacted in 1863. The evidence in this article counters that a multiplicity of positions among academically-trained artists on a single issue was not uncommon.

[17] “Grand changement dans la direction des études picturales à l’École. Tu as peut-être lu le décret Robert-Fleury directeur. Je suis enchanté, pour cet homme excellent, pour moi et pour l’art.” (“Big changes in the supervision of pictorial studies at the École. You have perhaps read the decree[,] Robert-Fleury [is] director. I am delighted for this excellent man, for myself, and for art.”) Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouat, November 19, 1863, PCF.

[18] “Lorsqu’il [son tableau *Le Bon Samaritain*] sera à Paris, je t’écrirai afin que tu aies l’obligeance de prier ton père de vouloir bien le voir et de me corriger comme il avait la bonté de le faire alors que je lui portais des études. Voilà déjà deux ans!! que Madame Gué me présenta à ton père.” (“When [my painting *The Good Samaritan*] will be in Paris, I’ll write to you to ask your father to go see it and correct me as he so kindly did when I brought him my studies. It’s already two years!! that Mme Gué introduced me to your father.”) Underlining in original. Bonnat to Tony Robert-Fleury, January 15, 1859, Manuscrit 542, doc. 2, Fonds de Patrimoine, Médiathèque de Bayonne (hereafter, FPMB). Robert-Fleury *père* also provided Bonnat with a letter of introduction to the director of the French Academy in Rome. “Monsieur Schnetz m’a très bien reçu dis-le à ton père, je te prie, et remercie-le de ma part car c’est à sa lettre que je suis redevable de cet accueil.” (“M. Schnetz received me very well, please tell your father, and thank him for me because it was his letter to which I owe this welcome.”) Léon Bonnat to Tony Robert-Fleury, February 23, 1858, Ms 542, doc. 1, FPMB. A student’s master (patron) usually fulfilled these duties, but Cogniet had a large atelier and suffered from poor health.

[19] Foucart, “L’Enseignement,” 7, 14. Neither Nieuwerkerke nor the new *chefs d’atelier* have been so characterized.

[20] Robert-Fleury claimed that he was reluctant to take the position and had to be persuaded by Nieuwerkerke. Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury, “La vérité sur l’École des beaux-arts,” manuscript note cited in Eugène Montrosier, *Peintres modernes: Ingres, H. Flandrin, Robert-Fleury* (Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1882), 92.

[21] *Ibid.*, 96.

[22] Foucart, “L’Enseignement,” 14.

[23] In Rome, Robert-Fleury’s wife soon fell ill, leading him to resign in 1866. In a gesture of friendship, Bonnat accompanied Mme. Robert-Fleury back to Paris while her husband stayed on to arrange for the repatriation of their affairs.

[24] Donated to the State by Mme Tony Robert-Fleury in 1921, the portrait was exhibited in 1874 at the Cercle de l’Union Artistique, Place Vendôme. See N., “Exposition de Peinture au Cercle de l’Union Artistique,” *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, March 7, 1874, 91. It also appeared in the 1878 Exposition Universelle and the 1924 Bonnat retrospective at the Grand Palais, both in Paris.

[25] “Les principes libéraux sur lesquels reposent les termes du décret du 13 novembre leur ouvrent un nouvel horizon et placent l’enseignement à la hauteur des besoins de l’époque, en laissant d’ailleurs à toutes les individualités les moyens de se produire sans entraves et sans avoir à compter avec des privilèges. Votre Majesté a compris que la liberté est l’élément le plus actif du progrès dans les arts, aussi est-ce avec joie que nous venons mettre à ses pieds

l'expression de notre reconnaissance." Les Artistes, "À l'Empereur," *Le Moniteur universel*, November 29, 1863, 1439.

[26] Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouyat, December 8, 1863, PCF; [Appendix B](#). Bonnat explained that he would be delayed in writing about the news, like the reforms, due to his uncle's serious illness. Bonnat to Détrouyat, November 19, 1863.

[27] Bonnet, *L'Enseignement*, 208, counts around 140 signees.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] The term appears in Léon Bonnat to Ernest Chesneau, December 26, 1863, A6374, Collection Frits Lugt, Fondation Custodia, Paris; [Appendix C](#). It was applied specifically to religious painting by C. de Sault, "Salon de 1863: Tableaux d'église," *Le Temps*, July 8, 1863, 2. Chesneau used it in one of his articles on the reforms. Ernest Chesneau, "Le Décret du 13 novembre et l'École des Beaux-Arts," *Le Constitutionnel*, November 24, 1863, 1.

[30] Boime, *Academy and French Painting*, 62–63, discussed Sisley's motivation for signing. Sisley's fellow Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Degas's friend James Tissot aspired to a Rome scholarship, and not without cause. They also studied with Charles Gleyre (1806–74) whose student Xavier-Alphonse Monchablon (1835–1907) won the 1863 Premier Grand Prix. See Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 326.

[31] Boime, "Teaching Reforms," 28n23.

[32] Bonnat to Détrouyat, December 8, 1863; [Appendix B](#).

[33] Bonnet, *L'Enseignement*, 208–9. The Gleyre student J. C. Beauvevie also signed it.

[34] Chesneau served in this capacity from 1855 to 1865. Philippe Saunier, "Ernest Chesneau," in *Dictionnaire critique des historiens de l'art actifs de la Révolution à la Première Guerre mondiale*, ed. Philippe Sénéchal and Claire Barbillon, updated October 12, 2011, accessed January 12, 2017, [www.inha.fr](http://www.inha.fr).

[35] Comte Alfred-Emilien O'Hara de Nieuwerkerke (1811–92), of Dutch parentage, was a French sculptor, academician, and chief arts administrator. The best source is Françoise Maison, ed., *Le comte de Nieuwerkerke: Art et pouvoir sous Napoléon III*, exh. cat. (Compiègne: Musée National du Château de Compiègne, 2000).

[36] "Je suis l'interprète d'un grand nombre d'artistes qui n'ont point hésité et, de coeur et d'esprit, ont approuvé la mesure si juste, si énergique que M. de Nieuwerkerke a vaillamment motivée dans son remarquable Rapport." ("I am the spokesman for the large number of artists who did not hesitate, in heart and mind, to approve such a fair and dynamic measure that M. de Nieuwerkerke bravely explained in his remarkable Report.") Chesneau, "Le Décret," November 24, 1863, 2.

[37] Philippe Burty to Ernest Chesneau, November 30, 1864 [*sic*, probably 1863; the date 1864 appears to have been added later]; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, in which he praised Chesneau's response to the Académie's protests: "Je veux vous féliciter tout chaud tout brillant de votre excellent article de ce matin . . . Le Beulé est un cuistre [?], . . . mais vous avez très bien fait de le laisser de côté vers le milieu de votre article." ("I congratulate you warmly and brightly for your excellent article this morning . . . Beulé is a pedant [?], . . . but you did well to leave him aside by the middle of your article.")

[38] Étienne Charavay, *Lettres autographes composant la collection de M. Alfred Bovet* (Paris: Charvay Frères, 1887), 638, cat. no. 1701, item 1.

[39] See Alisa Luxenberg, "Léon Bonnat (1833–1922)" (PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1991), 82–93. Others in his circle were Félix-Auguste Clément (1826–88), Jules Didier (1831–92), and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827–75).

[40] Bonnat to Détrouyat, December 30, 1863; [Appendix A](#).

[41] *Ibid.* Some of these artists had attended the École, vied for the Rome prize, or become academicians (Robert-Fleury and Delacroix), but Bonnat considered them independent because their careers had not depended on academic awards.

[42] For example, Bonnat berated the academician Émile Signol (1804–92) not for his hard-edged classicism but his humiliating treatment of students.

[43] For this and all quotations in this paragraph, see Bonnat to Détrouyat, December 8, 1863; [Appendix B](#).

[44] Nieuwerkerke had not trained at the École and did not show loyalty toward it as many alumni did. He owed his membership in the Académie to his administrative positions and to his long liaison (ca. 1845–69) with Princesse Mathilde, first cousin of Napoléon III and an avid art collector.



[45] Alaux (1785–1864) won the Prix de Rome of 1815, and was director of the French Academy in Rome from 1846 to 1852.

[46] “Les membres de l’Institut, qui presque tous ont une petite théorie du beau et un grand atelier, et ont à soutenir leurs principes par leurs élèves.” Henry Fouquier, *L’Art officiel et la liberté: Salon de 1861* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), 23.

[47] Bonnet, *L’Enseignement*, 100. Yet, it is logical that a 28-year old with 10 years of practice might satisfy a jury better than a 22-year-old competing for the first time.

[48] “Mon tableau sera le plus monté de ton. Là y a le plus rouge, le plus bleu, le plus vert, etc. etc. Malgré ce défaut je crois qu’il ne serait pas trop mauvais si mon Christ . . . n’avais pas l’air . . . d’un ministre protestant. Mes deux femmes ne sont pas fortes, et mon Lazare doit être un des meilleurs.” (“My picture will be the most colorful. It will have the most red, the most blue, the most green, etc. In spite of this defect I think it wouldn’t be too bad if my Christ . . . didn’t look like . . . a Protestant minister. My two women are not strong, et my Lazarus must be one of the best.”) Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, September 20, 1857, PCF.

[49] “MM. Robert-Fleury, Cogniet et Hittorff n’ont fait que me répéter . . . qu’il y avait en moi des qualités d’énergie, de couleur, de vérité et qu’il fallait tout en conservant ces qualités tâcher de donner plus de gracieux et plus d’ampleur à mes compositions, faire moins de bonhommes droits, puis tâcher encore de bien me pénétrer du type comme du Christ de manière à ne pas faire un qui ressemble à n’importe qui. À cette dernière remarque j’aurai pu répondre que je déteste ce qui est banal et que je crois qu’une tête parce qu’elle a les cheveux longs et la barbe pointu[e] peint[s] très bien être moins un Christ que ma tête qui au moins avait une expression quelconque.

Le père Cogniet m’a répété la phrase qu’un M. de l’Institut disaient [*sic*] à chaqu’autant à ce qu’il paraît, en parlant de moi. ‘Perseverera-t-il? nous verrons.’” Underlining in original. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, September 29–October 3, 1857, PCF. Jacques-Ignace Hittorff (1792–1867) was an architect and academician.

[50] Around that time Bonnat read Renan who published his controversial *Vie de Jésus* in 1863, and Elme-Marie Caro, *L’Idée de Dieu et ses nouveaux critiques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: L. Hachette, 1864).

[51] See Marc Gotlieb, *The Plight of Emulation: Ernest Meissonier and French Salon Painting* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and “The Pedagogy of Emancipation: Teachers and Students in Nineteenth-Century France,” in Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel, eds., *Memory & Oblivion: Proceedings of the XXIXth International Congress of the History of Art* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 2:847–53 for valuable discussions of these concepts.

[52] Alain Bonnet, “La valeur d’originalité et son introduction dans l’enseignement des beaux-arts,” in *Peut-on enseigner l’art?*, ed. Fabrice Douar and Matthias Waschek (Paris: École Nationale et Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and Musée du Louvre, 2004), 19–54.

[53] *Ibid.*, 22–25.

[54] “Cette originalité personnelle, qualité si essentielle aux artistes, que l’enseignement tend si peu à développer aujourd’hui, est encore entravée de la manière la plus regrettable par le système des concours en usage dans notre École, et qui est devenu la principale affaire des élèves et des professeurs.” comte de Nieuwerkerke, “Rapport au ministre de la maison de l’Empereur et des Beaux-Arts,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 15, no. 6 (December 1, 1863): 566.

[55] Occasionally the artist’s name is given as Charles-Auguste Sellier.

[56] See Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 430–31.

[57] Paraphrasing of Léon Bonnat’s letter to Ernest Chesneau, December 23, 1863, in Charavay, *Lettres autographes de M. Alfred Bovet*, 638, cat. no. 1701, item 1; [Appendix D](#).

[58] The report is reprinted in Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 297–99. According to protocol, the Painting Section, which included one architect (Hittorff) and one musician (Halévy), took a non-binding vote. The final vote included all the academicians in the Fourth Class, and had various options: no prizes, or up to three of the following: one or two *Premier Grand Prix* which guaranteed a scholarship, and a *Premier* and *Deuxième Second Grand Prix*, which offered exemption from military service. Bonnat, who doubted that any prize would be awarded that year, came in third in both rounds, as *Deuxième Second Grand Prix*.

[59] Bonnat to Détröyat, September 20, 1857: “Leroux / Sellier / Bonnat / Ulmann.” Student reaction to the final judgment was partly due to personal alliances; they liked Leroux and not Sellier. This partisanship was unusual in that students from the same atelier like Sellier and Bonnat usually pulled for each other. Bonnat explained further that Sellier had behaved badly during the painting competition. “On n’aime pas Sellier et puis tu dois te souvenir des bettises [*sic*] qu’il fit en loges.” (“Sellier isn’t liked and you must remember the stupid things he did in the final round.”) Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, September 21, 1857, PCF.

- [60] Bonnat to Chesneau, December 23, 1863; [Appendix D](#).
- [61] “[L’Académie] a eu le courage d’oublier sa propre tradition, au point de récompenser dans l’œuvre de M. Sellier l’effort aventureux et véritable excentrique d’un talent.” Paul Mantz, “École des beaux-arts: Les concours; les envois de Rome,” *L’Artiste* 2, no. 5 (October 4, 1857): 75–76, reprinted in Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 431.
- [62] Bonnat to Chesneau, December 23, 1863; [Appendix D](#).
- [63] “L’on n’a pas été étonné ici du peu de succès des envois de peinture. L’exposition ici était assez triste. Le tort des pensionnaires en général est de faire les envois exclusivement pour remplir les conditions exigées. Demande-t-on une figure? On fait une figure en deux ou trois mois, quelquefois en quelques semaines, et on l’envoie.” Léon Bonnat to Bernard-Romain Julien, October 19, 1858, Ms 542, doc. 3, FPMB.
- [64] Luxenberg, “Léon Bonnat,” 17–18, 48–53. After going bankrupt, Bonnat’s father moved the family to Madrid, and when he died in 1853, the family moved back to France, and ultimately Paris.
- [65] Vincent Ducourau, *Album Musée Bonnat* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2004), 28.
- [66] Bonnat may also have been personally drawn to the story, as he mourned the early death of his beloved Spanish cousin Agustín Bonnat y Alinari (1831–58).
- [67] “Sa tonalité sombre . . . rappelle la forte manière de Zurbaran . . . La faveur est aux tons frais et rians de l’aquarelle et de la fresque.” Louis Peisse, “Le Salon de 1861: IV,” *Le Constitutionnel*, June 22, 1861, 1.
- [68] “l’auteur, nourri aux fortes leçons de Michel-Ange.” Léo Lagrange, “Salon de 1861,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 10, no. 59 (June 1, 1861): 262.
- [69] “Son tableau . . . n’a rien d’académique, et respire bien la poésie des premiers âges.” Hector de Callias, “Salon de 1861: V,” *L’Artiste* 9, no. 11 (June 1, 1861): 243.
- [70] “peut être la meilleure toile de tout le Salon.” Auguste Cordier, “Le Salon de 1861,” *La Critique française*, June 15, 1861, 511.
- [71] The canvas measures 3.02 m by 2.23 m. Bonnat likely had in mind the new church of Saint Andrew that was planned for Bayonne.
- [72] The Salon was generally held every two years prior to the reforms of 1863, when it became an annual exhibition.
- [73] “Société nationale des beaux-arts: Première Exposition des Sociétaires Fondateurs,” *Le Courrier artistique* II, June 15, 1862, 2, reports Bonnat’s *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew* in the current show.
- [74] *Pasqua Maria* (1863), dimensions unknown, present location unknown. It was reproduced in engraving.
- [75] Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouyat, July 26, 1863, PCF, in which the artist explains that the state bought the painting even though the Salon catalogue listed it as belonging to the city of Bayonne.
- [76] “Ils croient que le titre de pensionnaire suffit pour faire d’eux de grands peintres. Cependant ils ont dû voir qu’il fallait travailler pour arriver au prix et ils devraient penser que rien ne s’obtient sans peine. En général, ils travaillent trop en grands seigneurs, en prenant largement leurs aises. Il y a heureusement des exceptions. Baudry était un travailleur, (un rageur). . . . À l’académie l’on reste élève-écolier [struck through: enfant] trop longtemps.” Underlining in original. Bonnat to Julien, October 19, 1858. The painter Paul Baudry (1828–86) won the 1850 Grand Prix de Rome. Grunchev, *Grand Prix*, 268.
- [77] Anne Middleton Wagner, *Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: Sculptor of the Second Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), esp. 157–74.
- [78] Ernest Chesneau, “Les réformes de l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts et la réponse de M. Beulé,” *Le Constitutionnel*, December 29, 1863, 2.
- [79] “Tu dois avoir une esquisse de De Coninck parmi les trois ou quatre petites toiles que j’ai confié à ta garde. De Coninck en a besoin.” (“You should have a sketch by De Coninck among the three or four small canvases that I asked you to keep. De Coninck needs it.”) Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouyat, February 25, 1859, PCF.
- [80] Bonnet, *L’Enseignement*, 100. This fascinating case can be followed in Dossier De Coninck, F/21/609 Grands Prix, ANF. The scholarship was intended for an engraver.

[81] “Le nouveau critique d’art promet (Constitutionnel du S[oir]) de revenir à mon sujet.” (“The new art critic [of the] *Constitutionnel du S[oir]* promises to return to my subject.”) Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détrouat, May 11, 1863, PCF.

[82] Ernest Chesneau, “Contemporary Art: The Exhibition at 26 boulevard des Italiens,” *L’Artiste* 1, no. 4 (February 15, 1863): 73–76, translated in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *The Art of All Nations: 1850–1873* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1981), 387–88, lauded Bonnat’s “very particular feeling for color” and found “he has constantly progressed.” Later that year at the Salon, Chesneau praised Bonnat’s painting again. “M. Bonnat, un jeune homme qu’il faut suivre attentivement; sa petite toile, l’*Ébat* (petite auprès de son *Martyre de saint André*), a de bonnes qualités de mouvement et de couleur.” (“Mr. Bonnat, a young man who must be followed closely; his small canvas *Frolic* (small compared to his *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*) has good qualities of movement and colour.”) Ernest Chesneau, “Salon de 1863: III,” *Le Constitutionnel*, May 5, 1863, 2, reprinted in Ernest Chesneau, *L’Art et les artistes modernes en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1864), 164.

[83] For example, the American painter studying in Paris, Thomas Eakins, called Bonnat “the most timid man I ever saw in my life and has trouble to join three words together.” Eakins, letter to his father Benjamin Eakins, September 8, 1869, cited in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:51–52.

[84] “Le grand art était à peine représenté au Salon de 1863 . . . ces grandes études sont viciées dans leur principe, qui est l’enseignement de l’École des Beaux-Arts.” (“Grand art is barely represented at the Salon of 1863 . . . the principles of these elevated studies are polluted by the teaching at the École des Beaux-Arts.”) Chesneau, “Le Décret,” November 24, 1863, 1.

[85] For different approaches to the emerging role of critics, see Michael Orwicz, *Art Criticism and Its Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994); and Nicholas Green, “Dealing in Temperaments: Economic Transformation of the Artistic Field in France during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” *Art History* 10, no. 1 (March 1987): 59–78.

[86] Bonnat to Détrouat, December 30, 1863; [Appendix A](#).

[87] Charles-Ernest Beulé, *Réponse de l’Académie des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Imp. de F. Didot, 1864); and Charles-Ernest Beulé, “L’École de Rome au dix-neuvième siècle,” *Revue des deux mondes*, December 15, 1863, 916–38.

[88] Bonnat to Détrouat, December 30, 1863; [Appendix A](#).

[89] “Si toute ardeur cependant, si toute flamme n’est pas éteinte au coeur des jeunes générations, s’il est juste que l’art d’une grande époque et d’un grand peuple ne se débatte pas plus long-temps sous les efforts de la routine académique, un prochain avenir confrontera, nous en avons l’assurance, les adversaires intéressés de l’excellente mesure qui vient de s’accomplir.

Le Décret du 13 novembre en maintenant, en élargissant l’enseignement de la tradition, sans exclure les libres manifestations du génie individuel a, par cela seul, rendu le courage, la confiance, l’espoir à toutes les âmes jeunes et hautes qui se sentent désormais inviolablement protégées.” Chesneau, “Les réformes,” 1.

[90] Bonnat to Détrouat, December 30, 1863; [Appendix A](#).

[91] “C’est eux [les artistes] en réalité qui nous diront le dernier mot de la question; eux seuls le possèdent et peuvent le prononcer. Nous ne doutons pas de leur bonne volonté, ni de leurs efforts.” (“It will be [the artists] in reality who will have the last word on the question; they alone have it and can pronounce it. We do not doubt their willingness or their efforts.”) Ernest Chesneau, “Le Décret du 13 novembre: La protestation de l’Académie des beaux-Arts et le réponse du ministre de la Maison de l’Empereur et des Beaux-Arts,” *Le Constitutionnel*, January 12, 1864, 2.

[92] Léon Bonnat to Ernest Chesneau, December 26, 1863; [Appendix C](#).

[93] “Ah! pauvres jeunes gens, sollicités d’un côté par l’autorité d’un grand nom vers les errements et les erreurs de David, de l’autre au nom des mécontents vers la négation de toute peinture, de tout art, vers M. Courbet. . . Allez, chers jeunes gens, allez près de M. Ingres, apprenez de lui l’art prestigieux des beaux linéaires; allez vers Delacroix, Véronèse, Rubens, Rembrandt, Raphaël, apprenez de ces maîtres et la vie et le mouvement, et la couleur et le style; mais surtout ne désertez jamais votre propre école; réfléchissez, travaillez, voyez les maîtres et plus encore la nature; devenez des peintres par la technique de l’art, des hommes par la méditation, et tenez-vous également loin de tous les partis. À ce prix, soyez-en convaincus, vous ferez, vous aussi, de grandes oeuvres, et vous illustrerez dans l’art français une ère nouvelle qu’aura datée le décret du 13 novembre.” Chesneau, “Le Décret,” January 12,

1864, 2. Bonnat admired Courbet and may not have agreed with Chesneau's evaluation of his art here.

[94] J. A. D. Ingres, *Réponse au rapport sur l'École Impériale des Beaux-arts adressé au maréchal Vaillant, Ministre de la Maison de l'Empereur et des Beaux-arts* (Paris: Librairie Académique, Didier et Cie, 1863).

[95] "Voient dans la création de ce cours unique la négation de toute liberté d'enseignement; l'imposition d'une doctrine forcément exclusive, puisqu'elle émane d'un seul homme, la substitution des appréciations personnelles à un ensemble de doctrines nées de l'assentiment d'un grand nombre d'artistes, reflet véritable de l'époque." Les Artistes, "À Son Excellence M. Le Ministre d'État," *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, February 25, 1864, 102–3. It was published later as *Réclamation des élèves de l'École des beaux-arts au sujet de la réorganisation de leur école*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Lainé et Havard, 1864), 37.

[96] See the enlightening discussion by Phillip H. Walsh, "Viollet-le-Duc and Taine at the École des Beaux-Arts: On the First Professorship of Art History in France," in *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 85–99.

[97] When the government modified the reforms to appease students and academicians, Viollet felt betrayed and became highly critical of both sides in the debate.

[98] For an overview of Bonnat's art and career, see Luxenberg, "Léon Bonnat."

[99] Elías Tormo y Monzó, *Las viejas series icónicas de los reyes de España* (Madrid: Blass, 1917), 268, app. 1, dated the command to 1852. See also Alisa Luxenberg, "Un francés entre 'Los Reyes de España': Léon Bonnat y su 'Retrato de Fruela II,'" *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 11, no. 29 (1990): 67–76.

[100] Luxenberg, "Léon Bonnat," 48, 53, 55.

[101] *Ibid.*, 53–54.

[102] École faculty taught month-long rotations in the single drawing course for all of the painting and sculpture students.

[103] Grunhech, *Grand Prix*, 220, 243, 272, 297, 316, 326.

[104] Bonnat competed in 1855, evidenced by the *esquisse de composition*, *The Death of Ananias* (Bayonne, Musée Bonnat-Helleu), but he did not advance to the final round. It is not known if he competed in 1856; no competition work has been identified.

[105] Bonnat's father had a son from an extramarital liaison. Luxenberg, "Léon Bonnat," 25n57. Bonnat remained devoted to his mother, who mostly lived with him until her death in 1897.

[106] *Ibid.*, 80–81. The duration of funding was not specified, but *pensionnaires* typically spent five years in Rome.

[107] Back in Paris, Bonnat belonged to the Cald'arrosti, meaning "hot roasted," a reference to the roasted chestnuts sold in the streets of Rome. Luisa Capodiceci, ed., *Gustave Moreau: Correspondance d'Italie* (Paris: Somogy and Musée Gustave Moreau, 2002), 206n5, states that the social group was formed in 1861 and included Tony Robert-Fleury, Bonnat, Leroux, De Coninck, and *pensionnaires* Carpeaux and Henner who gathered for dinners.

[108] "La seule chose que j'envie aux pensionnaires est l'exposition des envois, exposition annuelle, et, où les tableaux étaient bien placés, l'on a la faculté de voir et d'étudier à son aise les défauts et les qualités, ce qui n'arrive pas toujours dans une exposition publique. Je leur envie un peu aussi le rapport de l'Institut." ("The only thing I envy the pensionnaires for is the exhibition of the *envois*, an annual exhibition and where the pictures are hung well; one can comfortably see and study their weaknesses and their qualities, which doesn't always happen in a public exhibition. I also envy them a little the Institut's report.") Bonnat to Julien, October 19, 1858.

[109] Luxenberg, "Léon Bonnat," 84–91. Moreau competed for the Rome Prize in 1848 and 1849, and Degas studied briefly at the École, but the three artists seem to have met and become friends in Italy, perhaps through Delaunay. Bonnat's friendship with Degas seemed to wax and wane over the years, but that with Gustave Moreau grew stronger. Moreau named Bonnat to the board of his posthumous bequest that became the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris.

[110] Bonnat attested to being welcomed by Spanish painters in Rome. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détroyat, February 6, 1858, PCF. The Spanish painters Eduardo Rosales (1836–73), José Maria Casado del Alisal (1832–86), and Vicente Palmarioli (1834–96) were in Rome at the same time as Bonnat.

[111] Hippolyte Taine replaced Viollet-le-Duc in the École's art history course and adopted a traditional format, which, according to Bonnat, was a waste of his intellectual powers. "Hier, je me trouvais à l'École des Beaux Arts assistant à un cours de Taine . . . il m'a fait un peu de peine, la tâche qu'on lui fait remplir est au dessous de lui, et il est triste de voir un homme à appréciations si fines et si justes, si élevés mêmes, passant son temps à raconter à deux cents jeunes gens des anecdotes et des histoires puisés dans Lanzi et Vasari." ("Yesterday I found myself at the École des Beaux Arts attending a class by Taine . . . I felt a little badly, [seeing] the task that he had to fill was beneath him, and it is sad to see a man of such fine and fair, even elevated judgment, passing his time recounting anecdotes and stories from Lanzi and Vasari to two hundred young men.") Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, February 2, 1866, PCF.

[112] "J'irai ce soir lire l'article de Scherer dont tu me parles à moins toutefois que je n'aille entendre Pelletan à la rue de la Paix, ce qui doit bien avoir son charme." ("This evening I will go read the article by Scherer that you told me about, unless I were to go hear Pelletan in the rue de la Paix, which should be delightful.") Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, May 18, 1861, PCF.

[113] Ernest Chesneau, *Le Décret du 13 novembre et l'Académie des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1864), 1, mentions that Pelletan spoke against the decree in the January 20, 1864 session of the Corps Législatif.

[114] Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, *Catalogue* (Paris: J. Claye, February 1864), 5–15, reprinted in *National Fine Arts Exhibitions, Modern Art in Paris: Two-Hundred Catalogues of the Major Exhibitions Reproduced in Facsimile in Forty-Seven Volumes*, selected by Theodore Reff, vol. 33 (New York: Garland, 1981).

[115] Holt, *Art of All Nations*, 379–81.

[116] *Ibid.*, 382; and Carol Armstrong, *Manet/Manette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 71–121.

[117] See Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, *Catalogue*, 9.

[118] In 1864, Bonnat exhibited paintings in the Exposición Nacional in Madrid (works in this show were required to have been executed in Spain), and that same year, he helped organize and showed some pictures, including *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*, in the first Exposition Franco-Espagnole in Bayonne.

[119] Armstrong, *Manet/Manette*, critically examines Manet's exhibiting practices.

[120] As previously mentioned, the state bought his *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew* and gave it to Bayonne. Gabrielle de Cassin, a wealthy Bayonnaise then living in Paris, purchased his genre painting for 2,500 francs. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, June 3, 1863, PCF. The portrait of Mme Labat, wife of Bayonne's mayor, was a pendant to one of her husband, both commissioned. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, November 12, 1862, PCF.

[121] "Je suis plein de force et d'envie de peindre, et je ne puis arriver à avoir le moindre petit bout de commande.

Je voudrais vivre et je vois mes ailes coupées par ce manque de ressources et de sécurité. Ce n'est pas drôle, je t'assure, de vivre au jour le jour et de ne pas savoir ce qu'il sera de nous dans l'avenir le plus rapproché!"

("I am full of energy and want to paint, and I can't manage to get the smallest commission.

I would like to live [but] I see my wings clipped by this lack of funds and security. It isn't fun, I assure you, to live day to day and not to know what will become of us in the immediate future!") Bonnat to Détröyat, November 12, 1862.

[122] "Cette injustice ne me toucherait nullement si aux yeux de quelques gens et surtout de l'administration une lère médaille n'avait de la valeur." ("This injustice would not affect me at all if in the eyes of some people and above all the administration only a first [place] medal had value.") Underlining in original. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détröyat, July 8, 1863, PCF.

[123] "Je vais voir le directeur des Beaux-Arts à l'Hôtel de Ville. Il me reçoit à merveille, ne sait quelle[s] félicitations m'adresser au sujet de mon Exposition. le lendemain la commission de la Ville le réunisse et me vote un travail de 6.000 fr.; je suis prévenu de la chose par des membres de la commission. Ne recevant pas de nouvelle officielle de la commande de la Ville je vais trouver le Directeur il y a trois jours, et ce brave Mr. me reçoit comme un chien dans un jeu de quilles, et dans quelques phrases qu'il daigne me gromeller [*sic*] je comprends que le préfet n'a pas ratifié le vote de la commission. Voilà le monde. Il est triste de voir des directeurs des Beaux-Arts aussi inintelligents.

A part ces quelques ennemis, qui n'ont malheureusement que trop d'importance pour moi, je ne regretterais que très médiocrement ce qui a eu lieu." Underlining in original. Bonnat to Détröyat, July 8, 1863.

[124] The command was a religious painting for a Parisian church where one of Cogniet's best works hung; Bonnat was free to choose an episode from the life of St. Vincent de Paul. Bonnat to Détroyat, July 26, 1863.

[125] Ibid: "J'accepte de grand coeur l'interprétation de Mr. Julien: Nieuwerkerke . . . sait fort bien ce qui s'est passé au sujet de ma médaille ratée et il a voulu sinon me consoler du moins me faire voir qu'il attachait du prix à ce que je fais." ("I wholeheartedly accept Mr. Julien's interpretation [which was that] Nieuwerkerke . . . knew very well what happened with my not getting the medal and he wanted, if not to console me, at least to make me see that he values what I do.")

[126] "Je me souviens d'une certaine lère médaille que tout le monde me donnait également et qui finit par fort bien passer en mains autres que les miennes." ("I remember a certain first [place] medal that everyone thought I would win and which ended up in somebody else's hands.") Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détroyat, June 7, 1864, PCF.

[127] Register of instructors, École des Beaux-Arts, F/21/487, ANF; and "Les Concours pour les Prix de Rome," *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, April 17, 1864, 124.

[128] The term *titulaire peintre* seems ambiguous, given the few classes taught by Bonnat; the permanency indicated by tenure does not appear to have applied.

[129] "Je succède à Hébert dans la direction de son atelier, ancien atelier Cogniet, le seul atelier qui ait quelque valeur en dehors de ceux de l'école. Hébert ne voulait pas de moi, mais le peuple a décidé. . . . Je suis enchanté, ça peut être magnifique, on pourrait faire désertir les ateliers de l'École. On verra." Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détroyat, January 3, 1867, PCF.

[130] "J'en arrive à voir que c'est presque au hasard que j'ai dû mes progrès. Une méchante gravure! du magasin pittoresque, il y a vingt ans, m'a fait mieux voir, en peinture! que les Velasquez et les Ribera que j'allais étudier tous les jours. à Rome une mauvaise photographie représentant un boeuf couché me fait comprendre ce que c'est qu'un tableau, ce qui fait qu'un objet est puissamment modelé au détriment des objets voisins qui sont sacrifiés! quand j'allais chez Mr. Cogniet à une époque où je ne savais à quel saint me vouer, où je pataugeais, un mendiant que je vois au coin du Paradis Poissonnière, la tête enveloppée dans un foulard, me fait bien comprendre que les systèmes ne valent rien et qu'il n'y a que la belle, bonne, et saine nature aux tons puissants et francs qui ait de la valeur. . . . Rue de la Paix je rencontre une dame brune avec un chapeau violette de Parme, et je comprends ce que c'est que la couleur. Allez après des exemples semblables donner des leçons et guider les gens. Enfin, je fais de mon mieux." Underlining in original. Léon Bonnat to Arnaud Détroyat, December 31, 1869, PCF.

[131] For example, Ernest Chesneau, "De l'enseignement des arts du dessin," *Le Constitutionnel*, November 15 and 22, 1864; Ernest Chesneau, "Éducation générale et l'éducation de l'artiste," *Revue de France*, February 28, 1874; and Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran to Ernest Chesneau, 1866, Inv. 2003-A.2840, Collection Frits Lugt, Fondation Custodia, Paris.

[132] In 1831, the government charged a special committee of academicians to consider the feasibility of proposed reforms to the École, some of which were comparable to those of 1863, but the committee stalled the effort through its inertia. Interestingly, the *secrétaire perpétuel* of the École at that time was Léonor Mérimée, father of the 1863 reformer, Prosper. In 1862, a committee that included several academicians was asked to provide advice to the government on art-related issues, including possible improvements to French art schools. No final report was issued, but the state's effort clearly looked forward to the 1863 reforms. See Bonnet, *L'Enseignement*, 179–80.

[133] Ibid., 318.

[134] "J'étais très étonné alors de cette espèce de négligence, de cet abandon qui nous laissait dans le doute, dans l'indécision, dans l'ignorance presque absolue sur la voie à suivre. J'ai pensé, depuis, que cet abandon [*sic*] n'était qu'apparent et très probablement volontaire. Il savait que l'on n'apprend bien que ce que l'on apprend soi-même en tâtonnant, en cherchant. Il pensait que l'enseignement mutuel est le plus efficace des enseignements, et enfin, et surtout, il ne voulait pas imposer à ses élèves sa manière de voir, de comprendre et de traduire la vie." Léon Bonnat, "Notice sur M. Léon Cogniet," *Chronique des arts et de la curiosité*, February 24, 1883, 60.

[135] Cogniet's opinion on the reforms shifted. He withdrew from the special advisory council that was set up by the 1863 reforms, but in his letter of resignation, he stated that he was favorable to certain changes, like the creation of painting ateliers, dividing teaching by medium, and the separation of administration from faculty. Léon Cogniet, *Lettre de M. Léon Cogniet à S. E. Le Ministre de la Maison de l'Empereur et des Beaux-Arts* (Paris: Ad. Lainé et J. Havard, 1863), n.p. But his renunciation did not identify specific problems, and used vague and inflammatory language.: "Les deux premières séances du Conseil m'ont suffisamment édifié, Monsieur le Ministre, et j'ai acquis la conviction que la tâche qui lui est d'abord imposée est celle-ci: *Sur des bases indécises, la plupart fragiles ou funestes, improviser un nouvel assemblage des*

*éléments dispersés qui constituaient l'École que deux siècles avaient faite, de l'avis de tous, la première de l'Europe, et que quelques lignes ont renversée.*" ("The first two sessions of the [advisory] council have sufficiently edified me, Mr. Minister, and I believe that the task that is now imposed on it is this: *On uncertain foundations, the majority [of which] are weak or destructive, to improvise a new collection of scattered elements to constitute the École, which, for two centuries was considered by everyone the leading [art school] in Europe, but that a few lines have toppled.*" Italics in original. Cogniet may also have changed his mind about heading a new atelier, for his name appears in lists of the new studios and their heads, in Manuscript notes, NP, WCA.

[136] His student Hubert-Denis Etcheverry (1867–1950) earned second place in 1891.

[137] Bonnat's first painting to be bought for the Luxembourg was his portrait of Cogniet in 1881. Many lesser-known artists, including foreigners, had paintings in that museum before Bonnat did. It is true that many of Bonnat's state-owned paintings were hanging in official or public buildings, but others were sent to provincial museums. In 1886, Bonnat donated his *Job* (1880) to the Luxembourg, but it would have been difficult to find a collector to buy this religious picture of an emaciated old nude. His third painting to enter the Luxembourg was atypical of his oeuvre, the landscape *Pays basque St. Jean de Luz* (1898), bought by the state in 1899.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1, Léon Bonnat, *Portrait de Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury* (Portrait of Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury), 1865. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)





Fig. 2, Léon Bonnat, *La Résurrection de Lazare* (The Resurrection of Lazarus), 1857. Oil on canvas.  
Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Charles-François Sellier, *La Résurrection de Lazare* (The Resurrection of Lazarus), 1857. Oil on canvas. École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 4, Léon Cogniet, *Le Tintoret peignant sa fille morte* (Tintoretto painting his dead daughter), 1843. Oil on canvas. © Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, Bordeaux. Photo: F. Deval. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 5, Léon Bonnat, *Drawing after Michelangelo's Damned, Sistine Chapel*, ca. 1858–60. Ink on paper.  
Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)

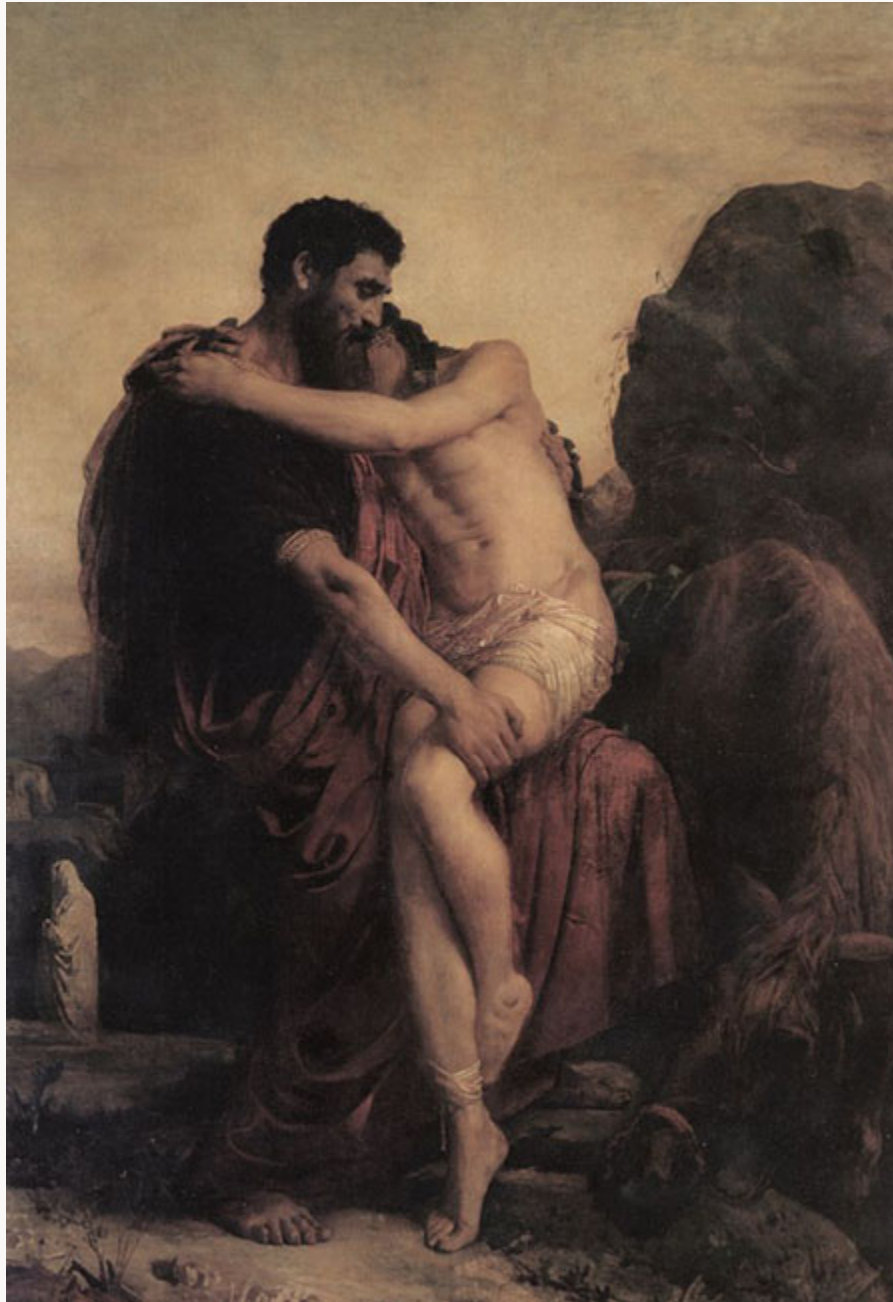


Fig. 6, Léon Bonnat, *Le Bon Samaritain* (The Good Samaritan), 1858–59. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, Léon Bonnat, *Adam et Ève retrouvant le corps d'Abel* (Adam and Eve finding Abel's corpse), 1860–61.  
Oil on canvas. Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, Lille. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, New York.  
Photograph by Philippe Bernard. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Jean-Jacques Henner, *Adam et Ève retrouvant le corps d'Abel* (Adam and Eve finding Abel's corpse), 1858. Oil on canvas. École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, Léon Bonnat, *Le Martyre de Saint André* (The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew), 1862. Oil on canvas.  
Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. [\[return to text\]](#)





Fig. 10, Léon Bonnat, *Pèlerins au pied de la statue de Saint-Pierre à Rome* (Pilgrims at the foot of the statue of Saint Peter in Rome), 1864. Oil on canvas. Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne. © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, New York. Photo: René-Gabriel Ojéda. [\[return to text\]](#)