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THE SUBLIME AND THE BEAUTIFUL IN THE  
WORKS OF CLAUDE-JOSEPH VERNET

THESIS

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By

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This thesis examines the roles of the sublime and the beautiful in the works of eighteenth-century French landscape painter Claude-Joseph Vernet. An introduction to the study, a history of the sublime and beautiful, and an overview of the way these ideas are portrayed in Vernet's calm and storm pendants are provided. How commissions for these pendants relate to theoretical developments of the sublime and beautiful and how Vernet became aware of these ideas are addressed. The thesis shows Vernet was not dependent on British patrons or on the century's most influential aesthetic treatise on the sublime and the beautiful by Edmund Burke, because Vernet started painting such themes well before Burke's treatise (1757) and did so in response to French patrons.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) was well known in his time as an artist who studied and represented in his landscape paintings the variety of atmospheric effects, weather, geography and human activities in nature that evoke different moods in a viewer. Born in Avignon, France, Vernet learned to paint in his youth, first from his father, and later in the studio of a local painter. In the early 1730s he traveled to Italy and remained there for nineteen years. It was in Italy that he established his reputation as a landscape and marine painter, receiving numerous commissions from the English who were traveling on the Grand Tour. Also well regarded in France, Vernet participated in the Paris Salons from 1746 until his death forty-three years later.

Central to this study is the idea that aspects of Vernet's works correspond with particular aesthetic ideas that were popular during the eighteenth century. Fascinated by nature's variety, Vernet often composed paintings as interrelated sets of two or four works in which the effects of nature contrasted and complemented each other. It is in the contrasting pairs particularly that one can see a relationship with the eighteenth-century aesthetic ideas of

the sublime and the beautiful. The beautiful was associated with qualities in nature or art that evoked in the viewer feelings of tranquility, tenderness, or affection, while the sublime was connected with the conflicting feelings of awe or terror combined with pleasure. Vernet's depictions of fearful storms tossing ships like toy boats with people scrambling to find shelter, paired with tranquil scenes of ports bathed in a Claudian light with fishermen casting their lines from embankments, perfectly illustrate the concepts of the sublime and the beautiful.

Theoretical writings about the sublime exist as far back as the first century, but those were devoted to rhetoric, not art or poetry. In the eighteenth century the sublime and the beautiful were redefined as aesthetic ideas and applied to nature, art, and poetry. The greatest strides in aesthetic theory took place on English soil. Joseph Addison's essays on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" in The Spectator (1712) explored beauty and sublimity derived either directly from nature, or through the contemplation of objects representing nature, such as a painting or poetry. Edmund Burke was the first theorist to thoroughly analyze the sublime and the beautiful and publish his findings in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757). The English patrons on the Grand Tour with whom Vernet associated would probably have been aware of such popular

aesthetic theory. Burke's treatise was important in British literary circles and influential elsewhere. A translation of the Enquiry was published in 1765 in France and Denis Diderot's reviews of a Salon of 1767 reflected Burke's ideas.

While the Enquiry has long been considered the document which shaped the taste of the second half of the eighteenth century, this study shows that sublime and the beautiful affected taste many years prior to Burke's famous treatise. Additionally, it shows that taste for the sublime and the beautiful was not just an English phenomenon, but was fashionable in France as well.

The sublime and the beautiful are ideas central to the understanding of eighteenth-century art. In my exploration of the literature, no one has conducted an in-depth study of the role of the sublime and the beautiful in the works of Vernet. Whether Vernet was influenced by Burke's treatise on the sublime and the beautiful, or by his English patrons' knowledge of the subject, or he learned of the ideas from French sources had not been explored prior to this study. An analysis of the role of the sublime and the beautiful in Vernet's works increases our understanding of his art in relationship to his time.

Additionally, the sublime and the beautiful are important to art history because they take a prominent place in the emergence of Romanticism. J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851)



was just one Romantic who later pursued the sublime and the beautiful in his own portrayal of storm-tossed ships and Claudian landscapes, not in pairs as Vernet, but as individual works. Consequently, this study of the role of the sublime and the beautiful in Vernet's works leads to a more thorough understanding of the foundations of Romanticism.

Recently, for the first time, discussion of the sublime and the beautiful was included in two general art history survey texts. The fourth edition of History of Art (1990) by H.W. Janson included a mention of Burke's treatise and the concepts of the sublime and the beautiful within the context of eighteenth-century painters. The ninth edition of Art Through the Ages (1992) included a section on the sublime and used quotes from Burke's Enquiry as an introduction to Romanticism. Inclusion of these ideas in art history survey texts shows their importance to the understanding of the history of art even at the elementary level and the fact that knowledge of them is becoming more widespread.

#### Statement of the Problem

This thesis examines the role of the eighteenth-century conceptions of the sublime and the beautiful in works of Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789).

### Methodology

To understand the role of the sublime and the beautiful in the works of Claude-Joseph Vernet, it was necessary (1) to read literature dealing with the sublime and the beautiful in the eighteenth century in both primary and secondary sources, (2) to study Vernet's works by means of viewing paintings, drawings, and prints by and after Vernet and by looking at reproductions, (3) to develop a chronology of Vernet's art to study the evolution of the sublime and the beautiful in his career, (4) to try to establish how Vernet became aware of the sublime and the beautiful.

Literature on the topic of the sublime and the beautiful written both during the period and about the period is abundant. The bibliography provides a list of sources that were studied. Viewing actual works required travel since no United States museum contains more than a couple of works by Vernet. (Appendix A provides titles, dates, and whereabouts of Vernet works in museums in the United States). Works that were studied directly include the Dallas Museum of Art's Mountain Landscape with Approaching Storm (1778), The Currier Gallery of Art's The Storm (1759), Coast Scene: Morning (1760) at the Chicago Art Institute, Landscape with Waterfall and Figures (1768) at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, engravings after Vernet held at the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, and finally, View of the Villa at Caprarola (1746) at the

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Most of the discussion of Vernet's works in chapter three is based upon the paintings I viewed firsthand. Reproductions from sources including exhibition catalogues, museum permanent collection catalogues, and other printed sources were examined for works that could not be seen firsthand. The Kimbell Art Museum's Witt Library Photo Collection and the Amon Carter Museum's New York Public Library: The Artists File served as secondary sources for viewing Vernet's works. The task of establishing how Vernet became aware of the sublime and the beautiful was approached by analyzing commissions for calm and storm pairs listed in Vernet's records, published in Lagrange.

#### Review of the Literature

Lagrange's Les Vernet, Joseph Vernet et la peinture au XVIIIe siecle (1864) includes information about Vernet's life, career, and patrons. Additionally, it lists commissions for Vernet's works taken from Vernet's own manuscripts. Ingersoll-Smouse's Joseph Vernet: peintre de marine (1926) compiles three hundred fifty-seven illustrations of Vernet's works, and supplements Lagrange's book by listing titles, descriptions, and dates of paintings by Vernet that are not found in the artist's commission records. She described her book as a catalogue raisonné and the work can be accepted as such given the standards of art

historical scholarship in 1926. The only modern scholar to publish extensive research on Vernet is Philip Conisbee, now curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His writings on Vernet include a short article for the Currier Gallery of Art Bulletin (1977) on their painting The Storm, which briefly mentions the relationship between Vernet's works and the sublime and the beautiful. Conisbee is the author of an exhibition catalogue for a 1976 exhibition of Vernet's works in London. Most recently Conisbee contributed a chapter on eighteenth-century French landscape painting with a portion devoted to works by Vernet in Claude to Corot: The Development of Landscape Painting in France. Conisbee has mentioned more than once a relationship between Vernet's works and the sublime and the beautiful, but to date, an extensive study of the topic has not been conducted by any scholar.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE SUBLIME AND THE BEAUTIFUL

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the sublime and the beautiful in the eighteenth century by exploring the background of each term, and to follow the development of the sublime and the beautiful from their classical meanings into expressions of aesthetic experience. Theories of sublimity and beauty did not originate with the eighteenth century. In ancient Greece, Aristotle believed order and symmetry were the foundations of beauty:

The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree.<sup>1</sup>

Renaissance artist, architect, and theorist Leon Battista Alberti, also stressed a need for order and clarity, as well as symmetry, harmony and proportion of parts to constitute beauty:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, Poetics 8.1078b.1-2, cited in Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, eds., Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964; reprint, Phoenix edition, 1976), 96.

<sup>2</sup>Moshe Barasch, Theories of Art: From Plato to Wincklemann (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 124-5.

. . . beauty is the harmony of all parts in relationship to one another.<sup>3</sup>

The sublime, as a style of rhetoric, was also discussed among the ancients, and a third-century treatise attributed to Longinus in Greece was solely devoted to the topic.<sup>4</sup>

In the eighteenth century these concepts were discussed widely, but only portions of the classical conceptions of the sublime and the beautiful remained in the later era's understanding of the words. The terms took on new meanings and made a transition from logically-based to emotionally-based experiences. Walter Jackson Bate's From Classic to Romantic described the eighteenth century as a "transitional meeting ground between two dominant epochs of thinking."<sup>5</sup> Classical humanism, which dominated the thinking of men through the seventeenth century was, in the eighteenth, giving way to Romanticism. One can also see this transition in the evolution of ideas of the sublime and the beautiful during the eighteenth century.

### The Sublime

On the Sublime, also called Peri Hupsous, is attributed

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<sup>3</sup>Barasch, 124, citing Leon Battista Alberti, De re aedificatoria II.13.

<sup>4</sup>On the Sublime, also known as Peri Hupsous was written by Longinus in the third century A.D.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), 1.

to a Greek theorist named Longinus and is believed to have been written in the third century A.D. The treatise was written as a manual for the technique of persuasion in writing or oratory known as the sublime style. However, Longinus did not invent the sublime style. Cicero's De Oratore and Orator, written in the first century B.C., stated that oratory consisted of three divisions defined as *gravis*, *medius*, and *subtilis*, or the great, middle and plain. Of these three styles the sublime was synonymous with the "great." Other ancient treatises made only slight variations on this theme and the three-part division of style was still well known throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Many who wrote of the sublime style referred to it as the "great" or "grand" style of rhetoric. Samuel Monk's The Sublime, still the most exhaustive study of the sublime and its evolution, traced the translations of Longinus's treatise in order to show its popularity and, indeed, its increase in popularity as the eighteenth century grew near. Samuel Monk wrote that Longinus is "well within the tradition of ancient rhetoric when he treats the sublime style as emotive in purpose and as capable of being expressed both in ornamental and in simple language."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Samuel Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (Modern Language Association of America, 1935; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor Paperback, 1960), 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

However much Longinus's treatise has in common with the tradition of oratory, it also has a direct relationship with the development of the sublime as an aesthetic concept in the eighteenth century.

Longinus's On the Sublime is an important work to this study because, in the minds of most scholars, it is the root of all aesthetic theories concerning the sublime in the eighteenth century. Emotions such as fear, awe, and astonishment combined with contradictory feelings of delight or joy, were the products of the sublime in Longinus's time as well as during the eighteenth century. The sublime stirred the soul and elevated the mind. For Longinus, the primary objective of the sublime was to persuade a listener to a particular point of view. In the eighteenth century the sublime was no longer thought of as a style of rhetoric used for persuasion. It had become a source of aesthetic experience that was sought for that purpose alone.

Although On the Sublime went through several editions over the centuries, it remained somewhat ignored until the eighteenth century. It has often been said that some of Longinus's popularity in eighteenth-century England was because his writing provided a defense for the love of English poetry, which frequently did not conform to the rules set down by Neoclassicism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Monk, 26.



More pertinent to this study is what Longinus wrote regarding the sublime. Two aspects of On the Sublime that are of particular importance for the study of the eighteenth-century conception of the sublime are Longinus's discussion of the effect of the sublime on the emotions of a listener, and his recognition that the sublime could be encountered in nature. Longinus described the experience of the sublime as one which:

. . . not only persuades, but even throws an audience into transport . . . for the mind is naturally elevated by the true Sublime and so sensibly affected with its lively strokes, that it swells in transport. . . .<sup>9</sup>

It is evident from the portions of On the Sublime that have been extracted and quoted here that although Longinus was writing about the sublime style, he also recognized the sublime as an emotional experience for the listener. The idea of the audience being thrown into transport is frequently found in writings about the sublime in the eighteenth century. The idea that the sublime produced the effect of elevating the mind and that it affected the senses was also part of the eighteenth century's understanding of the experience of the sublime.

Longinus wrote about how the sublime affected the soul:

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<sup>9</sup>Monk, 12, citing Longinus, On the Sublime, 3.

. . . the soul is raised by true sublimity, it gains a proud step upwards, it is filled with joy and exultation . . .<sup>10</sup>

Much of the writing of the eighteenth century on the topic of the sublime included the idea that the sublime affected the soul. Joseph Addison, who co-edited and contributed essays to a paper called The Spectator in the early eighteenth century, wrote about sublimity in 1714:

. . . We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them.<sup>11</sup>

Edmund Burke wrote of his feelings upon the sight of a flood in Dublin:

It gives me great pleasure to see nature in these great, though terrible scenes. It fills the mind with grand ideas and turns the soul upon itself.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to its impact on the soul, Longinus emphasized the power of the sublime in controlling the audience. He said:

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<sup>10</sup>J.T. Boulton, introduction to A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful by Edmund Burke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), xlv, citing Longinus, On the Sublime, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Donald F. Bond, ed., The Spectator Vol.III (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 540.

<sup>12</sup>Monk, 87, citing Edmund Burke in A.P.I. Samuels, The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of Edmund Burke (Cambridge, 1923), 84.

In most cases it is wholly in our power either to resist or yield to persuasion. But the Sublime endued with strength irresistible, strikes home, and triumphs over every hearer.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, Edmund Burke wrote in A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, published in 1757:

. . . [the sublime] is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.<sup>14</sup>

Still, Longinus's objective was to persuade a listener to come to realize a particular point of view. The emotional response of the listener to the sublime in the style of rhetoric was secondary to the purpose. The sublime served as a means to an end. During the eighteenth century, the sublime grew to be recognized as a delightful experience employing senses and emotions and sought solely for the purpose of attaining pleasure.

Longinus's recognition of sublimity in nature is also important for a study of the eighteenth-century sublime.

Longinus wrote:

Nature impels us to admire not a small river that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, and the Rhine; likewise the sun and the stars surprise us, and Aetna in eruption commands our wonder.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Monk, 12, citing Longinus, On the Sublime, 3-4.

<sup>14</sup>Boulton, 39.

<sup>15</sup>Monk, 17, citing Longinus, 145-147.

This passage from On the Sublime shows not only a recognition of nature as a source for the sublime, but it also hints at the elements of the sublime. The vastness of large rivers, or of the ocean produces the sublime. The infinity of space also produces the sublime. The contemplation of powerful and violent volcanic eruptions is productive of this experience.

The wonders of nature--particularly its wilder features--were of great interest to the eighteenth-century person. A new appreciation for mountains beginning in the late seventeenth century replaced the prevailing attitude which had long considered mountains as ugly blemishes on the earth's surface.<sup>16</sup> This new delight in mountains was often expressed by people who traveled to Italy on the Grand Tour and wrote of their experiences journeying through the Alps. In 1688, John Dennis wrote of his travels through the mountains:

We entered into the Savoy in the Morning, and past over Mount Aiguebellette. The ascent was the more easie, because it wound about the Mountain. But as soon as we had conquer'd one half of it, the unusual height in which we found our selves, the impending Rock that hung over us, the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roar'd at the bottom, gave us such a view as was altogether new and amazing. . . . The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, viz., a

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<sup>16</sup>See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959) for a thorough discussion of this topic.

delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled.<sup>17</sup>

Travelers wrote about the magnificence of the ocean with equal enthusiasm. Joseph Addison wrote about his feelings for the ocean in The Spectator, no. 489:

Of all the objects I have ever seen there is none which affects my imagination so much as the sea or ocean. . . . When it is worked up in a tempest, so that the horizon on every side is nothing but foaming billows and floating mountains, it is impossible to describe the agreeable horror that rises from such a prospect.<sup>18</sup>

These passages illustrate the taste for wild nature that was developing in the late seventeenth century and came into full vogue during the eighteenth century. While Longinus hinted at aspects of nature that produce the sublime, it was not until the eighteenth century that anyone would thoroughly investigate what elements produced the sublime or why. Most scholars emphasize that Longinus's treatise is only the "point of departure" for the eighteenth-century aesthetic idea of the sublime. Samuel Monk and James T. Boulton, two scholars who have researched and written about the aesthetic developments of the sublime during the eighteenth century, agreed there can be little

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<sup>17</sup>Nicolson, 277, citing John Dennis, Miscellanies in Verse and Prose (London, 1693).

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 306, citing Joseph Addison in The Spectator, no. 489.

doubt that Longinus's On the Sublime triggered an interest in the sublime in nature. On the Sublime was widely read especially in the early eighteenth century and there was little interest in "natural sublimities" prior to this period.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Boulton remarked that Burke must have been sure his readers would be so familiar with Longinus that he barely mentioned his name in his Enquiry.<sup>20</sup> What is more likely to be true is that by the time Burke wrote the Enquiry, the sublime had become disconnected from Longinus, who had written primarily about the sublime style of rhetoric. Boulton has discussed the idea that many of the writers of the eighteenth century were not satisfied with Longinus's explanation of the sublime. John Dennis, an eighteenth-century author who wrote a treatise on the sublime in poetry, believed Longinus "had 'no clear and distinct idea' of the sublime."<sup>21</sup> John Baillie, whose Essay on the Sublime was published twelve years before Burke's Enquiry, wrote that in Longinus's On the Sublime:

the Bulk of the Performance relates more to the Perfection of writing . . . Besides, Longinus has entirely passed over the Inquiry of what the Sublime is, as a thing perfectly well known, and

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<sup>19</sup>Monk, 17.

<sup>20</sup>Boulton, xliv.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., xlviii, citing John Dennis, The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (n.p., 1704), 9.

is principally intent upon giving rules to arrive at an elevated Turn and Manner.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph Addison, who was also known to have been influenced by Longinus in his critical method, did not mention the Greek treatise in his essays which dealt with the sublime and the beautiful, entitled "The Pleasures of the Imagination," from The Spectator nos. 411-417.

Translations of Longinus had existed in England in the seventeenth century, but it was Nicolas Boileau's translation in France in 1674 that, in the minds of most scholars, was the major influence in the popularity of Longinus's treatise in the eighteenth century. Boileau is credited with having established the term "sublime" as one to be used in criticism and is also responsible for clarifying the distinction between the sublime style of writing or speaking and the sublime as a concept. However, it has been pointed out that Boileau's work is not in any way a treatise on aesthetics. It was up to followers in the eighteenth century to make progress on establishing the term "sublime" as one to be applied to an aesthetic experience. Another important aspect about Boileau's treatise is the idea that the sublime was still part of the beautiful. It would also be up to the eighteenth century to establish a difference.

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<sup>22</sup>Boulton, xlv, citing John Baillie, An Essay on the Sublime (n.p., 1747), 2.

The beginning of the transition from rhetoric to aesthetic experience of the sublime occurred after Boileau. In France in 1732 Silvain wrote Traité du Sublime, the first French treatise to show a move away from rhetoric to aesthetic. However, it was little known within France then and had no impact on unfolding developments concerning the sublime either in Silvain's own country or in England.

Although the document that started the transition of the sublime from rhetoric to aesthetic was written by a Frenchman, the greatest strides in this transition appear to have taken place in England. Some speculate that the neoclassic influence held fast in France longer than in England. It was, indeed, in England that one sees the earliest evidence of a distinction between the sublime and the beautiful.

#### The Beautiful

Up to this point this discussion has focused solely on the evolution of the sublime and has not touched upon the beautiful. In Boileau, as well as in early writings on the sublime in poetry by John Dennis, the sublime was considered to be an aspect of the beautiful, the highest form of beauty.<sup>23</sup> Research into the concept of beauty and the beautiful must begin properly in ancient Greece. Aesthetics scholar E.F. Carritt wrote that "in the time of Socrates

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<sup>23</sup>Monk, 54.



people were evidently used to discussing whether particular works of art were beautiful."<sup>24</sup> This statement shows that certain standards for beauty might have existed even before any formal theories were established. Although each time period has had its own philosophy of beauty, the ideas set forth by ancient philosophers concerning beauty have often been influential.

In many ways the concept of the beautiful during the eighteenth century bears great similarities to classical ideas of beauty. Qualities such as symmetry, clarity, order, and the harmony of parts to a whole were properties still associated with beauty in the eighteenth century as they were in ancient times. However, there are other ways in which the eighteenth-century theories of beauty differed greatly from those which grew out of the classical tradition. The great shifts in thinking that were taking place during this century of transition are again illustrated in the greatly different approach this century took to its analyses of beauty.

Scholar of aesthetics Jerome Stolnitz said that prior to the eighteenth century "beauty was the single most important idea in the history of aesthetics."<sup>25</sup> Most

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<sup>24</sup>E.F. Carritt, Philosophies of Beauty (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), xxiii.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Edwards, ed. Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: The Macmillan Company and Free Press, 1967), s.v. "Beauty," by Jerome Stolnitz.

scholars agree that this history has its beginnings in the writings of Plato. Plato's ideas are scattered among many of his writings including the Republic, Philebus, and Laws. For Plato, the qualities that make up an object or idea cause beauty. Some of these qualities include its symmetry, usefulness for its purpose, goodness or perfection, and the harmonious relationship of its parts to the whole. These formal qualities were the basis for beauty and could be understood rationally. The response a viewer or listener might have when contemplating a beautiful object could indeed be pleasurable, but it was only because the object was made up of qualities deemed beautiful. For the ancient philosophers, beauty was entirely within the object. An excerpt from Aristotle's Rhetoric illustrates these ideas:

In a young man beauty is the possession of a body fit to endure the exertion of running and of contests of strength; which means that he is pleasant to look at; and therefore, all-round athletes are the most beautiful, being naturally adapted both for contests of strength and for speed also.<sup>26</sup>

The emphasis ancient philosophers placed on these formal qualities in the creation of beauty can be seen in many instances. Beauty was recognized in art as well as in nature. In his Poetics, Aristotle wrote a section on the type of poetry known as tragedy, in which he described it as

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<sup>26</sup>Arist. Rhetoric 1.1361b.1-12, cited in Hofstadter, 96.

being a whole composed of parts. The parts are "Fable or Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and melody . . ." <sup>27</sup> After having established the names of the parts he discussed the proper construction of each in order to make good tragedy. It is in these sections that he also discussed beauty:

A well-constructed Plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and ending in it must be of the forms just described. Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude . . . . <sup>28</sup>

The discussion of beauty was not limited to philosophical circles. Classical sculptor Polyclitus developed a canon of proportions that instructed the artist on the proper proportions necessary to make sculpture based on the human figure. In his Canon (known today only through the writings of a second-century A.D. physician) the artist described the relationship of the parts of the figure to each other and to the whole. This Canon helps to illustrate further the emphasis the ancients placed upon rules, structure, and harmony as well as the relationship between beauty and art.

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<sup>27</sup>Arist. Poetics 6.1.1450a.9-10, cited in Hofstadter, 97.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 6.2.1450b.33-37, cited in Hofstadter, 97.

The classical ideas of beauty have influenced the way many other centuries have conceived of beauty. This was particularly true from the Renaissance through the seventeenth century. Leon Battista Alberti relied heavily on classical ideas of beauty when he wrote treatises in the fifteenth century on painting and architecture in which he employed the ideas of order, proportion, and symmetry in the creation of art. It is because the classical theories of beauty were so influential on time periods directly preceding the eighteenth century that the changes taking place regarding beauty in that era are so significant.

As I stated earlier, many of the ideas regarding classical conceptions of beauty still existed during the eighteenth century. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Shaftesbury (1667-1713), devoted a discussion to beauty in his writings which were published in a three-volume work entitled Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1709). Shaftesbury's writings strongly show the influence of classical ideas of beauty:

. . . the same Shapes and Proportions which make Beauty, afford Advantage, by adapting to Activity and Use. Even in the imitative or designing Arts . . . the Truth or Beauty of every Figure or Statue is measur'd from the Perfection of Nature, in her just adapting of every Limb and Proportion to the Activity, Strength, Dexterity, Life and Vigour of the particular Species or Animal design'd.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Boulton, lxiii, citing Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times III (6th ed., 1737), 180.

This passage shows a strong parallel to Plato's ideas of beauty. Shaftesbury wrote that shape, proportions, and fitness make beauty. Classical ideas of beauty were strong even a bit later in the century. William Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty (1753) contains some of the same principles.

Hogarth wrote that fitness, variety, uniformity, simplicity, intricacy, and quantity all "cooperate in the production of beauty . . ."<sup>30</sup> However, an important change is noted in the writings of Hogarth. He explained that these qualities produce beauty because they elicit particular responses in the viewer. This is indicative of the change from beauty being considered an objective property of an artwork to beauty being regarded as a subjective experience of a viewer.

During the course of the century many different theories evolved which endeavored to explain why objects are beautiful. For the most part, these theories have something in common. They illustrate the trend of thinking about beauty as something that affects human senses and emotions and causes pleasure or delight.

Early in the century Joseph Addison wrote that the "very first discovery of it [beauty] strikes the mind with an inward Joy, and spreads a Chearfulness and Delight

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<sup>30</sup>Walter J. Hipple, The Beautiful, The Sublime, and The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press), 57, citing William Hogarth, Analysis of Beauty (London, 1753).

through all its Faculties."<sup>31</sup> In this passage it is evident Addison believed one perceives beauty by an immediate response that does not involve rational thought. The subjective language Addison used suggests that beauty has an effect on the spectator. It "strikes the Mind." He further said, "there is nothing that makes its way more directly to the soul than Beauty."<sup>32</sup> Further, Addison distinguished two kinds of beauty. It is difficult to determine his reason for doing so because he did not give examples to differentiate the two, and their effects seem to be relatively alike. However, the second kind of beauty which Addison described is important to mention because he brought into this section some of the qualities which are elements of the classical conceptions of beauty. Addison wrote:

There is a second kind of beauty that we find in the several Products of Art and Nature, which does not work in the Imagination with that Warmth and Violence as the Beauty that appears in our proper species, but is apt however to raise in us a secret Delight, and a kind of fondness for the places or Objects in which we discover it. This consists either in the Gaiety or Variety of Colors, in the Symmetry and Proportion of Parts, in the Arrangement and Disposition of Bodies, or in a just Mixture and Concurrence of all together.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Hipple, 19, citing Joseph Addison, The Spectator, no. 412.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Bond, 543-544.

Two ideas from Addison's words are important to note: Addison considered symmetry, proportion, and order to be aspects of beauty because they raise "delight . . . or fondness." Secondly, Addison placed color in a position of greater stature in determining beauty than any of the supporters of classical theories of beauty. Addison wrote that "among these several kinds of Beauty the Eye takes most Delight in Colors," and then offered the example of the pleasure one finds in the setting or rising of the sun.<sup>34</sup> One can plainly see in Addison's writings the ideas coming to the forefront in aesthetics in the eighteenth century.

It was Edmund Burke's writings in his Enquiry that offered the greatest challenge to the classical conceptions of beauty. As J. T. Boulton expressed it, "Burke compelled his age to rethink the position that traditional attitudes had led it to adopt."<sup>35</sup> Boulton wrote that Burke "tries to isolate the aesthetic experience."<sup>36</sup> Burke believed that qualities frequently associated with beauty should not be confused with beauty itself. They are merely factors in creating beauty. Burke's idea of beauty was "some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by

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<sup>34</sup>Bond, 544.

<sup>35</sup>Boulton, lx.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., lxv.

intervention of the senses."<sup>37</sup> This passage from the Enquiry illustrates again the idea that beauty is directly involved with sensory perception of objects rather than rational thought. Beauty affects the viewer, and what determines beauty is not rules of proportion or symmetry, but how the object affects the emotions of the viewer.

In certain parts of the Enquiry Burke made clear his opposition to the classical ideas of beauty. He argued that proportion cannot determine beauty, because "pleasing proportions are infinitely various."<sup>38</sup> He also disputed the idea that fitness determines beauty by offering a humorous example.

For on that principle, the wedgelike snout of a swine, with its tough cartilage at the end, the little sunk eyes, and the whole make of the head, so well adapted to its offices of digging, and rooting, would be extremely beautiful<sup>39</sup>

This passage shows very well the incongruity of classical ideas of beauty and the ideas emerging in the eighteenth century. Classical theories of beauty did not take emotions into account. In the eighteenth century they became what mattered most.

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<sup>37</sup>Hipple, 94, citing Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry (London, 1757).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>39</sup>Boulton, 105.



The Sublime and the Beautiful

Jerome Stolnitz contends that beauty lost its central role in aesthetic theory during the eighteenth century because the approach to aesthetics changed. During this period people became more aware of their emotional responses to objects and ideas, and beauty was only one of many aesthetic experiences. Sublimity held considerable attraction for people of the eighteenth century and the two concepts were often discussed in tandem.

Perhaps because the term "sublime" was still associated with rhetoric in the early eighteenth century, Joseph Addison never employed the term sublime. However, what he wrote about the "great" others soon came to label as sublime. In No. 412 of The Spectator Addison discussed the pleasures of the imagination which "proceed from the sight of what is Great, Uncommon, or Beautiful."<sup>40</sup> He associated greatness with objects in nature such as "open Champain Country, a vast uncultivated Desart, of huge Heaps of Mountains, high Rocks and precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters" where one is struck with "that rude kind of Magnificence which appears in many of these Stupendous works of Nature."<sup>41</sup> He associated greatness with emotional

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<sup>40</sup>Bond, 540.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

responses such as "astonishment" and "Amazement."<sup>42</sup> By contrast, Addison associated beauty with "satisfaction . . . Complacency . . . Joy . . . Chearfulness," and described it as giving a "finishing to anything that is Great or Uncommon."<sup>43</sup> Addison described beauty as something that makes its impression immediately upon the senses without "any previous Consideration" of the mind.<sup>44</sup> Although Addison did describe certain distinction between the great and the beautiful, it is evident that there was still some confusion as to what exactly the differences were. In some sections he considered the great to be an aspect of the beautiful, and he also indicated that the sublime and the beautiful could coexist. For example, some passages in Paradise Lost were "beautiful by being sublime."<sup>45</sup> Addison is important because his writings triggered the interest in the sublime and the beautiful as separate experiences. Addison's influence was directly felt by Mark Akenside, who published a poem entitled The Pleasures of the Imagination in 1744. Samuel Monk has credited this poem with "establishing the sublime and the beautiful in the public's

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<sup>42</sup>Bond, 540.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 542.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Hipple, 19, citing Addison, The Spectator no. 412.

mind."<sup>46</sup> However, it was not until the 1750s that there was a treatise that clearly defined the sublime and the beautiful.

In A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757), Edmund Burke set out to distinguish the sublime and the beautiful by examining the nature of the two experiences and their causes. Burke realized that the sublime and the beautiful were different but not opposite experiences. He hypothesized that pleasurable experiences can come from two sources. There is a purely positive experience that causes pleasure and a pleasurable experience that comes from the removal of pain or fear. These are described in Burke's treatise as those pleasures of "society" and those of "self-preservation." Burke explained that smelling a rose is a purely positive experience. The sublime is also a delightful experience, but it involves contradictory feelings of awe, fear, or terror. The contemplation of a steep and rocky precipice can evoke fear, but if one feels one is relatively safe from danger, then the fear becomes sublime.

Although Burke concentrated his efforts on analyzing the passions in humans, most scholars have pointed out that his theory cannot be considered Romantic because of his scientific approach. His approach bears similarities with

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<sup>46</sup>Monk, 70.

the theories expounded by the Enlightenment philosophers. He conducted his study through the direct observation of nature by "examining the passions in our own breasts."<sup>47</sup> By doing so he sought to discover laws of nature that ruled emotions. The failing in his approach is that he believed that a particular object will evoke the same emotional responses in every viewer. He believed that was true because the sensations such as sight, smell, taste, and hearing are the same for each person and that all passions were caused by the senses. What is important about Burke's theory is not so much that his was the ultimate theory on the sublime and the beautiful. Indeed it has been demonstrated that Burke's theory met with heavy criticism even during his time. Burke's theory was original and it challenged many of the existing ideas about beauty and of beauty and sublimity together. And this was the first deep analysis to question what beauty and sublimity are and what causes them. The Enquiry was widely read and had considerable influence on thought concerning aesthetics. Regardless of Burke's influence, his Enquiry represents simply the attraction which the sublime and the beautiful held for people of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>47</sup>Boulton, 1.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ANALYSIS OF SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL WORKS

BY CLAUDE-JOSEPH VERNET

Now that the development of the sublime and the beautiful as aesthetic ideas of the eighteenth century has been established, it is time to examine how the sublime and the beautiful are represented in the works of Claude-Joseph Vernet. This chapter provides an overview of the artist's career as well as the major themes he explored as a painter, among them the pairs of calm and storm scenes that evoke the sublime and the beautiful.

Througout his career Vernet was exclusively a painter of landscapes and marines. The earliest works known to be by his hand, completed when he was seventeen, depicted local sites around Aix-en-Provence.<sup>1</sup> Although Vernet's training as a painter began in his native France, his career truly flourished only after he went to Italy in 1734 at the age of twenty. Vernet travelled to Rome with the financial support

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<sup>1</sup>Letters between the Marquis de Caumont and Mme. de Simiane in 1731 record Vernet's earliest known commission. Two of the works remain in situ at the Hôtel de Simiane in Aix-en-Provence. The works, known as La Fontaine de Vancluse and A Roman Arena probably portray local sites. Philip Conisbee, Claude-Joseph Vernet 1714-1789 (London: Greater London Council, 1976), [2], [17].

of Joseph de Seytres, the Marquis de Caumont<sup>2</sup>, a nobleman from Aix-en-Provence. Although one of Vernet's objectives in travelling to Rome was to make drawings after antique sculpture for the Marquis, letters from a friend of the Marquis indicate that Vernet was distracted from this task by the lure of commissions he was receiving on his own in Italy.<sup>3</sup> By the early 1740s Vernet was quite busy working on commissions for his own clientele. Throughout the 1740s and into the early 1750s Vernet remained in Italy completing commissions for a large group of patrons among whom were government officials, church officials, royalty and nobility of France, Italy, and England.

The landscapes and marine subjects Vernet painted were chiefly those of the sights in and around Rome and Naples. Often compared with seventeenth-century painters of the Italian landscape, particularly Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, and Gaspard Dughet, Vernet painted more contemporary views characterized by a naturalism not sought by his predecessors, but keenly sought by eighteenth-century spectators. Long after he returned to France in the 1750s Vernet continued to paint the Italian landscapes for which he became famous. Within the genre of landscape painting

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<sup>2</sup>Vernet may also have been sponsored by the Comte de Quinson. See Philip Conisbee's Claude-Joseph Vernet, 1714-1789, [2].

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., [1].

Vernet explored three major themes over the course of his lifetime: views, actual and imaginary; the Four Times of Day; and pairs of contrasting storm and calm scenes. The latter two themes are the most important in this paper, because it is in these works that one sees traits of the sublime and the beautiful. However, I have provided an overview of all three themes so that the reader will better understand the artist's full range as a painter as well as gain insight into the ways in which those works evocative of the sublime and the beautiful relate to the works in the rest of his oeuvre. Additionally, all three themes serve to illustrate how the artist fulfilled the popular demands of patrons for particular themes.

### Views

The first theme outlined above is that of view painting. It is a well-established fact that during the eighteenth century there was a significant demand for painted views. In Italy foreign tourists were particularly interested in taking home paintings and prints which portrayed the places they visited. Almost immediately after Vernet arrived in Italy he was commissioned to paint and draw views and he continued to do so throughout his life. Vernet painted views within the city of Rome as well as the surrounding countryside. He also painted sites in Naples, particularly coastal scenes. Among the popular attractions

Vernet was commissioned to paint were Mt. Vesuvius and the Falls at Tivoli. While some views were based on actual places specified by patrons, other views were imaginary. Vernet composed these scenes from his imagination, but they were based upon his own careful observations of nature. An imaginary view was just as real to the viewer as a scene based on an actual site, because it evoked the feeling of a place one might encounter.

Among imaginary scenes are Vernet's Landscape with Waterfall and Figures (1768, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore), shown in figure 1, and Mountain Landscape with Approaching Storm (1775, Dallas Museum of Art) shown in figure 2. Both of these works, completed many years after Vernet returned to France, depict rocky, mountainous landscapes. Vernet's portrayal of the wilder aspects of nature is one reason for comparisons historians have made between Vernet and his seventeenth-century predecessor, Salvator Rosa.<sup>4</sup> Vernet frequently depicted settings which included rocky cliffs, cascades, tree trunks left jagged

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<sup>4</sup>Philip Conisbee compared the two artists in "Salvator Rosa and Claude-Joseph Vernet," Burlington Magazine CXV (1973): 789-94. Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring considered Vernet an imitator of Rosa in Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa on English Taste, 1700-1800 (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1965), 69-70.





Figure 1. Landscape with Waterfall and Figures, 1768.  
Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.



Figure 2. Mountain Landscape with Approaching Storm, 1775. Dallas Museum of Art.

after a storm, rock arches, and other Rosa-like motifs.<sup>5</sup> In his earlier years his palette was similar to Rosa's, one which was dominated by browns and ochres.<sup>6</sup> It has been pointed out that while Vernet and Rosa painted similar subjects, the two artists' painting styles differ greatly, Vernet's being more "fluid and translucent."<sup>7</sup>

Both Landscape with Waterfall and Figures and Mountain Landscape with Approaching Storm illustrate Vernet's naturalistic representation of the landscape. Although these works were composed in the studio, each presents to the viewer a scene which appears to be real. All of the elements of nature have been painted with careful consideration of the actual colors and textures observed in nature. In Landscape with Waterfall and Figures one can imagine being sprayed by the water as it falls down the rock cliff. One feels the coolness of the rocks and grass as the warmth of the day departs at sunset. The naturalistic qualities of Vernet's landscapes set him apart from his contemporaries in landscape painting. The landscapes of the Rococo painters--particularly Boucher and Fragonard--often presented the viewer with sweetness and artificially

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<sup>5</sup>Vernet was occasionally asked by patrons to paint scenes in the style of Rosa, and Vernet even copied a painting by Rosa for a patron in the 1740s. See Conisbee's "Salvator Rosa and Claude-Joseph Vernet," 789-94.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 790.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 793.

contrived landscapes. The Walters Art Gallery exhibits Landscape with Waterfall and Figures in a room with paintings by these Rococo artists. The contrasts could not have been more clear. Boucher's landscapes in particular were thickly laden with paint of Rococo candy pinks and blues. In comparison with these painters, Vernet's naturalism in portraying landscape is intensified.

Though not based on any particular view, this scene contains all the elements of the typical Italian rocky landscape. The waterfall may even have suggested the falls at Tivoli, a popular tourist attraction. In both pictures aqueducts can be seen in the distance and in the Dallas picture, a natural rock arch is found slightly to the left of the center. Motifs such as these are common among Vernet's landscapes. Patrons, particularly those familiar with the landscape after having spent time in Italy, would easily imagine themselves part of these scenes.

Vernet's figures further help to make his scenes seem real to the viewer. In both pictures, Vernet has painted fishermen, washerwomen, and goat herders tending to daily activities. One finds these figures in nearly all of Vernet's works and they help to make the scenes seem ordinary. One expects to encounter figures such as these as opposed to the biblical or mythological figures in the works of Vernet's seventeenth-century predecessors. The aristocratic class of the eighteenth century was charmed by

the idea of the rustic life. Perhaps Vernet's inclusion of these rural figures signals this trend in popular taste. One frequently finds fashionably dressed figures in Vernet's paintings as well. Perhaps the viewer was intended to identify with these figures.

Vernet's naturalism is equally evident in The Villa at Caprarola (The Royal Family of Naples) (1746, Philadelphia Museum of Art) shown in figure 3. This work was ordered in June 1746 by the Cardinal Acquaviva for the Queen of Spain. Unlike Landscape with Waterfall and Figures and Mountain Landscape with Approaching Storm, this painting is based upon an actual view, that of the Villa Reale in Portici, today a residential and resort area a few miles from Naples. The painting celebrates the Queen of Spain's visit to her villa. In the painting one sees the magnificent villa atop a hillside at the far right. An array of smaller buildings decorates nearly the whole length of the downward sloping hill to the left corner of the canvas. A group of fashionably dressed men and women populate the foreground of the picture. It is easy to see that, although this work was completed much earlier in his career than the previous two pictures, Vernet was already skillful at portraying the landscape of Italy. The landscape is lush and green and the scene is bathed in an atmosphere of golden light which creates an overall warmth. This effect is enhanced by the



Figure 3. The Villa at Caprarola (The Royal Family of Naples), 1746. Purchased by the Edith H. Bell Fund, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

bright touches of light on the figures in the foreground and by the contrasting coolness of the areas in shadow. As is true of most of Vernet's paintings, his figures in The Villa at Caprarola are contemporary, adding to the naturalism of the scene. In addition to the usual fisherfolk and washerwomen, Vernet features a group portrait of the Royal Family in this scene.

In 1752 Vernet received perhaps his most important commission. The patron was the King of France and the commission involved the painting of a series of topographic works based on the various commercial ports of France. The objective of the commission was to celebrate the commercial activities of each port as well as to instruct the viewer about these activities. The commission took Vernet nine years to complete and resulted in fifteen paintings.

The series, known as *The Ports of France*, stands apart from the rest of Vernet's oeuvre because of the strictly topographic nature of the works and because of their purposefully didactic qualities. Much admired by critics in the eighteenth century and even during the following century, the works were copied as prints and distributed widely. The Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, houses several prints after works by Vernet, many of which are from *The Ports of France* series. First View of Toulon (Port Nine, or the Arsenal of Toulon, View from the angle of



Figure 4. First View of Toulon (Port Nine, or the Arsenal of Toulon, View from the Angle of Artillery Park), 1755. The Louvre.  
of Art.



Artillery Park) (1755, The Louvre; engraving after original painting, 1760, Peabody Museum), figure 4, shows many of the characteristics common to the group. Like the others, it is characterized by a broad expanse of sky. Most views from this series look out onto the harbor from the land, but some provide the viewer with a glimpse of the port from the sea. The atmosphere of most of the scenes is generally clear with a predominance of blue tones. The golden Italian light is absent. These scenes do not contain washerwomen and fisherfolk common to the Italian countryside. Instead, Vernet portrayed figures carrying out the work activities of the particular port. In this scene of an arsenal, uniformed men move cannon balls and load cannons. Vernet's usual figures are not entirely absent--this scene contains fashionably dressed figures strolling in the foreground.

#### The Four Times of Day

Vernet had the opportunity to capitalize on his ability to paint diverse weather and atmospheric effects when he painted a second major theme--the Four Times of Day series, which he produced in sets for various patrons throughout his career. Exploring different effects of atmosphere, geography, and weather "and linking them to the times of day, was something new."<sup>8</sup> The Four Times of Day typically

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<sup>8</sup>Alan Wintermute, ed., Claude to Corot: The Development of Landscape painting in France (New York: Colnaghi USA, Ltd.), 173.

illustrated morning, midday, evening, and night. Often the morning scene would be portrayed in mist, the midday in full sun, the afternoon in storm, and the evening in moonlight, but the scenes varied with each commission. The four scenes usually depicted fishermen and washerwomen going about their daily routines. The settings might be landscape or seascape according to the wishes of the patrons or the imagination of Vernet. Usually one scene involved a storm.

Morning (1760, Chicago Art Institute) is part of a Four Times of Day series (figures 5,6). In this work one is acutely aware of the tranquility and quietude of the scene. It must be very early in the morning as it is still quite dark. The setting is a harbor. All of the foreground figures are in darkness casting a strong silhouette against the glowing yellow sky. The campfire provides another strong contrast of light and dark. Unlike Landscape with Waterfall and Figures, where one's eye tends to study the variety of details within the picture, the viewer of Morning is met with an overwhelming and singular feeling of stillness and calm. This is a day just beginning, and everything in the scene is marked with the stillness of dawn.

The three pendants to Morning are also marines. It is believed that the works were commissioned in 1759 by

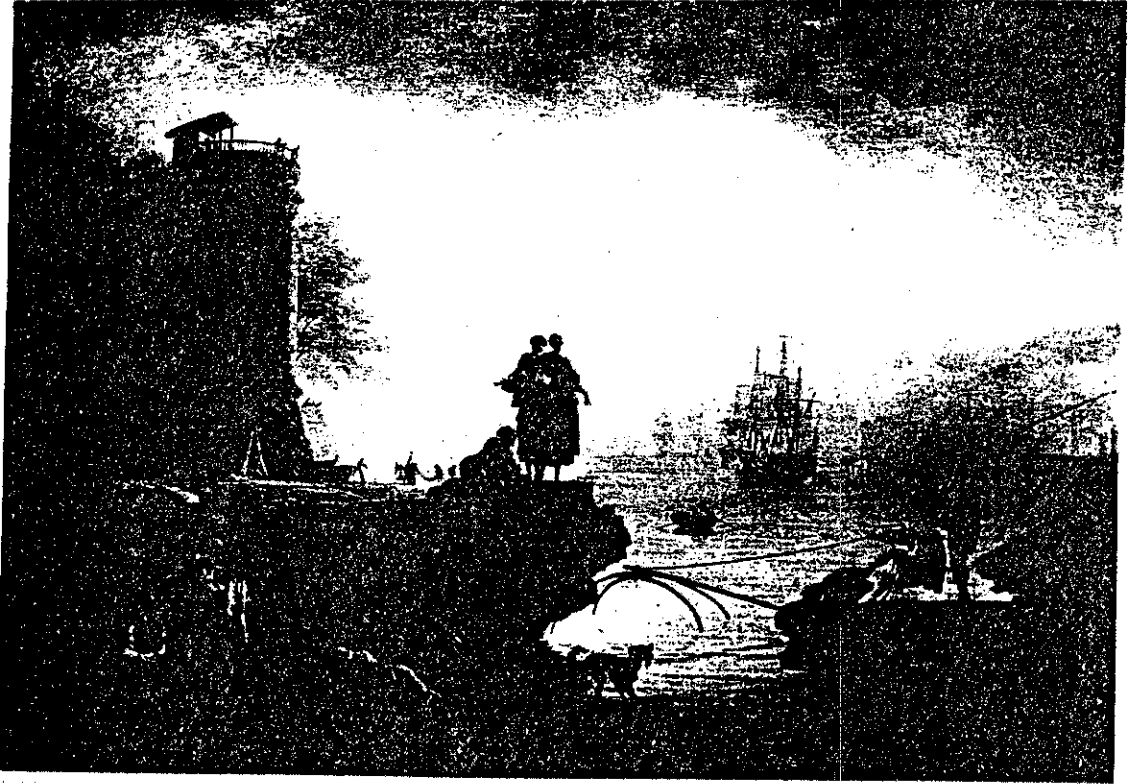


Figure 5. Top: Morning, 1760. Chicago Art Institute.  
Bottom: Tempest At Midday, 1760. Present location unknown.

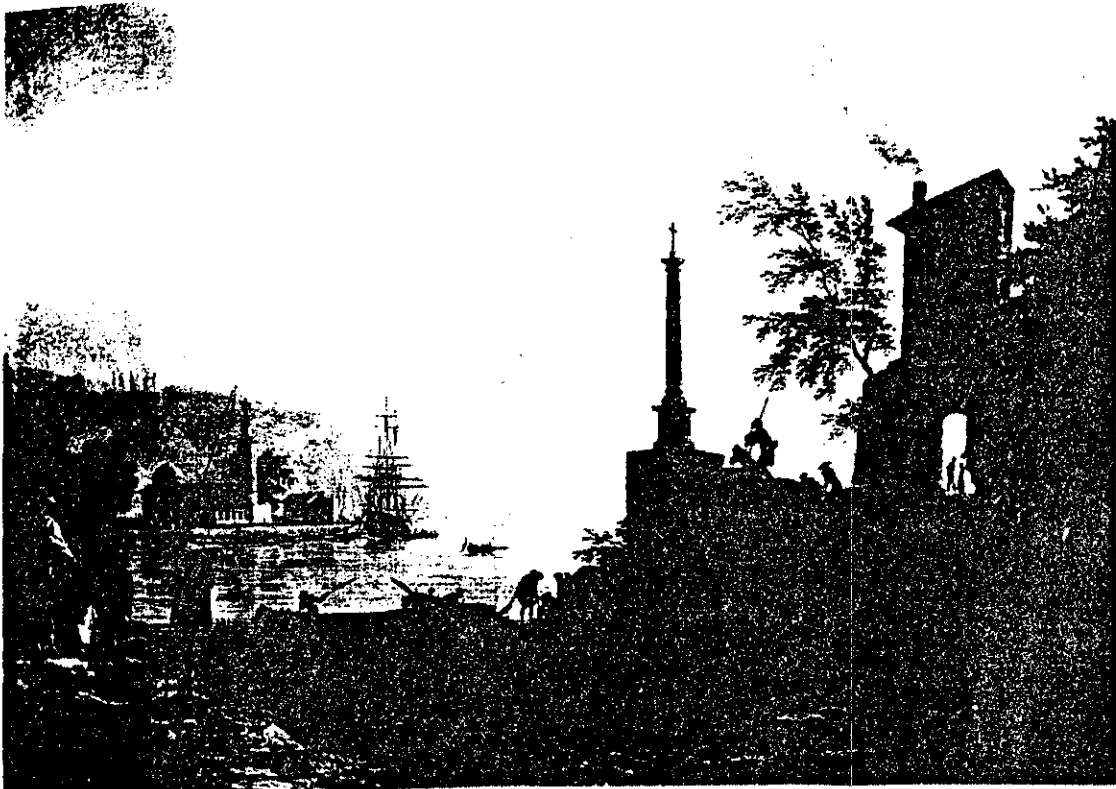


Figure 6. Top: Evening, 1760. Bottom: Fire at Night, 1760. Present locations unknown.

M. Journu of Bordeaux.<sup>9</sup> Tempest at Midday presents a violent storm. Ships in the distance are tossed to and fro and the figures in the foreground struggle to escape drowning and reach dry land. In the third scene, Evening, Vernet has presented another calm port scene. It appears that the fishermen are winding down their daily activities. The final piece in the series is Fire at Night. In this scene Vernet used the same strong light and dark contrasts with figures silhouetted against the sky as he did in Morning.

Morning suggests to the viewer a mood or feeling of overwhelming tranquility. In fact, each of the four paintings is marked by a predominant mood. Vernet's vivid scenes not only depict varying qualities of nature, but contain an emotional element, which affects the senses of the viewer. As people were becoming more aware of senses and emotions during this century, these works allowed the viewer to experience a gamut of sensations. While Morning and Evening encourage overall feelings of tranquility, Tempest at Midday and Fire at Night inspire fear and awe.

The Four Times of Day series provided the viewer with the chance to experience nature's variety. But a third theme Vernet explored offered the viewer just two contrasting experiences. It is in these calm and storm

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<sup>9</sup>Léon Lagrange, Joseph Vernet et la Peinture au XVIIIe Siècle (Paris, 1864), 342.

pairs in particular that the eighteenth-century viewer experienced the duality of the sublime and the beautiful.

### Sublime and Beautiful Pairs

Before Vernet, seventeenth-century French landscape painter Claude Lorrain had painted interrelated pairs . . . usually morning and evening scenes which contained subtle contrasts of color and light effects. Scholars have generally described Lorrain's pairs as contrasts between a golden warm morning light and a clear cool evening light. Indeed there are many examples of Claude-like pairs in Vernet's own commissions. Many scholars have suggested Vernet's stylistic similarities with Lorrain were responsible for his appeal, especially to the English, who admired Claude so fervently. But Vernet explored a theme which his seventeenth-century predecessors had not and could not have. He depicted scenes which portrayed the eighteenth-century notion of the sublime and the beautiful.

Together, Sunrise (1759, Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison) and its pendant The Storm (1759, Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester), figures 7 and 8, are visual demonstrations of the sublime and the beautiful. In Sunrise, the scene is set in a small port, inlet, or cove. A rocky cliff frames the scene on the right as does another, topped by a stone structure, on the left. Buildings are visible through hazy



Figure 7. Sunrise, 1759. Elvehjem Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin - Madison.  
Robert Gale Doyon Fund and Elvehjem Endowment Fund purchase, 1977.109.



Figure 8. The Storm, 1759. The Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH: Jennie F. Fracker and Inez M. Olney Funds, 1977.27.



golden light in the distance. Fishermen are grouped around. As day breaks, it appears the heavy clouds that cover the expanse of the top quarter of the canvas may be giving way to the sunshine which glows as haze in the distance. The mood is calm.

In The Storm one views a group of people apparently washed ashore from a ship during a storm. A craggy cliff frames the right side of the picture. A large rocky island is in the central portion of the background. Dark and threatening clouds loom heavily in the sky. Rain in the distance angles sharply toward the right. A craggy tree, broken and twisted juts out from the cliff on the right and the wind blows its branches to and fro. Ships in the distance are angled sharply. In the foreground several apparent shipwreck survivors struggle to pull luggage ashore and fight to walk against the strong wind. A woman and a man are perhaps trying to revive an unconscious woman.

The Storm has all the qualities necessary to produce the sublime--fear, terror, awe, fright, and the distance necessary to feel safe. Burke thought the ocean itself was "an object of no small terror" and terror to be "the ruling principle of the sublime."<sup>10</sup> Vernet used such elements as jagged edges, sharp angles, rough textures, and darkness to increase the terror of the scene. Interestingly, Burke

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<sup>10</sup>Boulton, 58.

discussed many of the same elements in his Enquiry as qualities productive of the sublime.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Sunrise contains many of the elements Burke considered necessary to produce the beautiful--smoothness, gradual variation, delicacy, clear and mild colors including pink reds.<sup>12</sup> Of smoothness Burke said, ". . . a quality so essential that I do not now recollect any thing beautiful that is not smooth."<sup>13</sup>

It is also important to remember that the figures in these scenes also play an important role. In Sunrise, the figures are calm and their poses are relaxed. In Storm, the postures and gestures of the figures including the dog indicate fear and despair. Their diminutive size also enhances the impression of nature's great power. As was true of the figures in the imaginary view scenes, the figures of these scenes were probably meant to be read by the viewer as figures with whom they could identify--tourists much like themselves travelling by sea.

As was true of pictures belonging to the Four Times of Day series, these works were meant to be hung side by side. One can imagine the effect they had on the viewer. In one

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<sup>11</sup>In parts II and IV of the Enquiry Burke discussed qualities productive of the sublime including darkness and obscurity. See Boulton, 57-87, 129-160.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 114-117.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 114.

scene nature is calm and tranquil, and life appears balanced and harmonious. In the next scene one is reminded of the terror and power of nature. Throughout his career Vernet painted many of these strongly contrasting pairs.

Additionally, it is often the case that within the larger sets, such as the Four Times of Day, one finds pairs of storms and calms. The occurrence of calm and storm pairs designed to offset one another within the larger sets is no coincidence; Many instances were found in the record of commissions wherein Vernet recorded the set of four as one pair consisting of two landscapes, and the other pair was to consist of two marines, specifically a calm and storm.

It was pointed out earlier that Vernet is set apart from Claude Lorrain in his depiction of calm and storm pendants because Lorrain did not paint storm scenes. It is important to understand that storm scenes were not completely absent during the previous century. Seventeenth-century landscape painter Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675) was known as the "inventor of a new genre, the storm landscape."<sup>14</sup> However, his scenes were not paired with calm scenes. Nicholas Poussin (1593/4-1665), though usually considered a history painter, also painted storm scenes to create a mood that would supplement his narrative scenes.

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<sup>14</sup>The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood. Gaspard Dughet: called Gaspar Poussin, 1615-1675: A French landscape painter in Seventeenth-Century Rome and his influence on British Art. (London: Greater London Council, [1980]), p. 5.

When Vernet painted his calm and storm pairs, the mood created by the scene was no longer a supplement to story, but an experience to be enjoyed by itself. The sublime and the beautiful were part of a new ideology--one in which the variety of human sensations and emotions was recognized and valued.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PATRONAGE FOR SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL WORKS

BY CLAUDE JOSEPH VERNET

The sublime and the beautiful did play a role in Vernet's work, particularly in the calm and storm pendants, but also in the Four Times of Day series. However, some questions remain to be answered. Was the artist consciously representing these ideas? Was he exploring a personal interest in the sublime and the beautiful? Was he led into his involvement with the sublime and the beautiful by patrons who specified these elements in pictures?

Although the artist never wrote anything to indicate he was working with a theme based upon these aesthetic ideas, it is likely that Vernet was conscious of his portrayal of the sublime and the beautiful. The sublime and the beautiful permeated eighteenth-century taste. It is difficult to believe Vernet was not aware of the sublime and the beautiful in his own work. However, it does not appear Vernet was exploring his own interests when he painted his calm and storm pendants. Rather than satisfy a personal desire to represent the sublime and the beautiful, Vernet's goal was to fulfill the demands of his patrons. Mostly aristocrats, Vernet's patrons were likely influenced by the

aesthetic fashions of the day in which the sublime and the beautiful played a critical role.

Vernet's depictions of wild nature paired with calm scenes perfectly exemplify the portrayal of the sublime and the beautiful. We recognize this only after thoughtful study of the topic, but it would have been instantly recognized by the eighteenth-century viewer. There can be little doubt that Vernet's patrons, who had cultivated a taste for the sublime and the beautiful, sought the portrayal of these experiences in the calm and storm pendants they requested from the artist. It is with this in mind that we look upon the commissions for Vernet's calm and storm pendants as the sources of the sublime and the beautiful in his work.

The idea that Vernet's portrayal of the sublime and the beautiful was the result of contemporary taste poses another question. What can be learned about the phenomenon of the sublime and the beautiful in eighteenth-century society by studying the portrayal of these ideas in Vernet's work? Two important questions related to this topic that can be addressed by studying Vernet's commissions for calm and storm pairs. First, did the taste for calm and storm pendants coincide with or result from theoretical developments of the sublime and the beautiful? Second, how widespread was the taste for the sublime and the beautiful prior to Burke's treatise?

Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, published in 1757, was the first treatise of the period to analyze thoroughly the sublime and the beautiful as aesthetic experiences. Burke not only defined the sublime and the beautiful, but determined what experiences produced the sublime and the beautiful. It is important to remember that Burke, however original in his approach, was studying a phenomenon that had been influencing taste since the beginning of the century. What evidence can Vernet's commissions for calm and storm pendants provide to support the existence of taste for the sublime and the beautiful prior to Burke's treatise? Many studies have focused on the popularity of the sublime and the beautiful in England. Certainly, it was in England that the greatest strides toward developing aesthetic theories were first made. However, Samuel Monk wrote, "thought throughout the whole of the eighteenth century was strikingly cosmopolitan."<sup>1</sup> Still, no one has studied the effect of the sublime and the beautiful on taste in countries other than England. Because Vernet had an international clientele, we have the opportunity to examine how strong the taste for the sublime and the beautiful was among patrons from other countries.

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<sup>1</sup>Monk, 2.

At this point it is necessary to explain the methodology used here and to point out the limitations of the study. Two sources were used for research on this chapter. Vernet's record of commissions published by Lagrange in Joseph Vernet et la Peinture au XIIIe Siècle (1864) is an invaluable source of information on the artist's career. Vernet began recording his commissions upon his arrival in Rome in the 1730s. For each commission Vernet recorded the name of his patron, the number of works ordered, any size requirements and media, as well as descriptions of the subjects the patrons requested.

As a primary source, the record of commissions is in many ways an ideal research tool; however, it has limitations. Vernet probably did not record every commission he completed. There is evidence to indicate that he indeed did not record all of his commissions.<sup>2</sup> Because of this it is necessary to supplement the research regarding the number of calm and storm pendants with additional information found in the catalogue raisonné compiled by Ingersoll-Smouse in 1926. A number of works signed and

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<sup>2</sup>Ingersoll-Smouse has indicated in several sections of her catalogue that Vernet exhibited several works in the Salons that can not be identified in his list of commissions. This is particularly true during the late 1750s, 1760s, 1770s and 1780s. See Florence Ingersoll-Smouse, Joseph Vernet: Peintre de Marine, 1714-1789 (Paris, 1927), Vol. I: 90, 93, 95, Vol. II: 2, 17, 24, 26, 29, 40. Additionally, Appendix B of her catalogue lists a large number of works signed by Vernet, but not identified by year or commission.



dated by Vernet, but not associated with the commissions were documented in this source.

In many cases Vernet's descriptions are very detailed, while in other instances there is insufficient information for the researcher to determine the subjects of commissions. There are dozens of commissions for which we know Vernet was to complete pairs of works, but he only recorded them as "two paintings" or "two marines." It is unknown whether the pendants were calms and storms or not. We do not know whether the patrons were simply not specific regarding subjects or whether Vernet simply did not write down the details. Again, the catalogue raisonné supplemented my research, but it was not possible to identify all the works commissioned with works known at that time. When providing the reader with numbers of each type of subject Vernet was commissioned to paint for a given period of time, the number of pairs for which we do not have sufficient information is also given. While we can come to no conclusions about these works, it is important to keep their existence in mind.

Because of these variables, this study is by no means foolproof. However, focusing upon the information that is available, it is possible to fulfill the objectives outlined above--to determine how the requests for the calm and storm pendants relate to theoretical developments of the sublime and the beautiful, and to determine how widespread the taste

for the sublime and the beautiful was among his international clientele.

### The Incidence of Calm and Storm

#### Pairs in Vernet's Career

As one studies the commissions Vernet recorded during the 1730s, it becomes apparent that these years were not very busy for Vernet. Between 1734 and 1739 he recorded only five commissions. In addition to those listed in the commissions, Ingersoll-Smouse documented five other works signed and dated by the artist. The facts that Vernet was just beginning his career, was in a foreign country, and had no established clientele to date explain this low rate of commissions. According to Lagrange, the few commissions Vernet did receive during the 1730s were largely from people from France with whom he had connections. Some of these patrons were not in Italy, but made their requests of Vernet by letter. Lagrange believed that Vernet's commissions of the 1730s were "commissions of complacency" designed only to keep the artist busy in Rome.<sup>3</sup>

The first two commissions in the record for 1735 and 1736 were ordered by French noblemen from or near his hometown Avignon. These commissions are described only as pairs of marines. The third commission, requested by Major Sturler, involved drawings of local sites such as the

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<sup>3</sup>Lagrange, 27.

Colosseum and a portion of the Palace of Nero. The fourth commission may have been Vernet's first English patron; it was listed by Vernet as, "M. Dania, Anglois."<sup>4</sup> M. Dania ordered three works consisting of a single canvas and a pair in 1738. The description for the single painting shows the patron wanted "rocks, cascades, etc."<sup>5</sup> The subjects for the pair of works are unknown. The Duc de St. Aignan was considered by Lagrange to have been Vernet's first important patron. He had recently become the French ambassador to Italy. He ordered several works from Vernet around 1738 including one seaport that was to make a pendant to three other works Vernet had made previously, and two views commemorating particular occasions in the ambassador's life.

There is no evidence to indicate any sublime and beautiful pairs in the form of calm and storm scenes were commissioned or completed during the 1730s. However, two of Vernet's patrons requested paintings of subjects associated with the sublime. The Duc de St. Aignan requested a pair of works, the first depicting a caravan to Mount Vesuvius and for its pendant, the interior of the mountain.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, in 1738 Vernet was asked to paint a single tempest and an eruption of Vesuvius for his protector, the

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<sup>4</sup>Lagrange, 322.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Marquis de Caumont. It is important to remember that in 1732, Silvain published his Traité du Sublime. This document was the first treatise in France to distinguish the rhetorical sublime, which addressed a high style of writing, from the natural or aesthetic sublime, which referred to an emotional experience.

The 1740s were far more prosperous years for Vernet. Between 1740 and 1749 Lagrange transcribed from Vernet's records eighty-seven commissions, a marked difference from the 1730s.<sup>7</sup> Another thirty-three commissions involving sets and individual works are recorded in Ingersoll-Smouse. Of these one hundred twenty commissions, seventy-three were listed as pairs. Eleven of the pairs were described as views, thirteen as calm scenes paired with other calm scenes, and twenty-nine pairs listed simply as marines or paintings. Most importantly, twenty-two pairs can be confirmed as calm and storm pendants. In addition to the calm and storm pairs, five Four Times of Day scenes known to contain calm and storm pendants were recorded during the 1740s.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Lagrange, 323-331.

<sup>8</sup>Additional sets from the Four Times of Day series and groups of four of unknown subjects are listed throughout Vernet's commissions. Only those known to contain calm and storm pendants have been included in the statistics.

The first calm and storm pair was commissioned in 1740 by the Duc de Crillon, a French nobleman from Comtat.<sup>9</sup> The information given in the commission describes the pair only as two marines, but the pair was later identified as a calm and tempest in the Duc de Crillon's collection.<sup>10</sup> Two years after this first commission for a calm and storm pair, Vernet made a tempest as a pendant to a work already made for M. Pichon, another French patron.<sup>11</sup>

Vernet recorded ninety-two commissions during the 1750s;<sup>12</sup> an additional forty-one sets or individual works completed during that period were listed by Ingersoll-Smouse, bringing the total number of works or sets commissioned to one hundred thirty-three. This decade must certainly have been the busiest period in Vernet's career--in addition to a large number of commissions for various patrons, it was during the 1750s that he began working on the *Ports of France* series for the King. Of the one hundred thirty-three works or sets commissioned during the 1750s, thirty-four can be positively identified as sets which contain calm and storm pendants. Of the seventy-eight

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<sup>9</sup>See commission no. 6, Lagrange, 323.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 483.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 323.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 331-342.

commissions listed as pairs, twenty-five could not be identified by subject.

During the remaining three decades of Vernet's career it would appear that the artist suffered a decline in the number of commissions he received. However, Ingersoll-Smouse indicated that there were probably many more works completed during the 1760s and 1770s than Vernet actually recorded, because a number of works dated during these years not recorded in the commissions were exhibited at the Salons.

Vernet recorded fifty-nine commissions between the years 1760 and 1769.<sup>13</sup> Ingersoll-Smouse has recorded an additional thirty works or sets completed in the 1760s bringing the total number to eighty-nine. Out of these eighty-nine, twenty-one can be confirmed as calm and storm pendants. Four of these twenty-one were Four Times of Day sets, while the remainder of the commissions have been confirmed as calm and storm pairs or single works commissioned as pendants to works made earlier. Ten individual storms without pendants are recorded in Ingersoll-Smouse. It is possible that these paintings were originally pendants to other works. Vernet listed eighteen pairs in which the subjects were left up to his imagination.

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<sup>13</sup>Lagrange, 342-350.

During the 1770s Vernet recorded only thirty-one commissions.<sup>14</sup> Ingersoll-Smouse listed an additional fifteen works or sets completed during this period. Out of these forty-six commissions, nineteen can be confirmed to have calm and storm pendants. Fifteen of these were pairs, and three were Four Times of Day sets. A single calm landscape scene was commissioned to make a pendant to a fire at sea that Vernet painted for the patron earlier. Vernet recorded nine pairs that could not be identified by subject, and a number of individual calms and storms not associated with pendants were listed in Ingersoll-Smouse.

Finally, in the 1780s Vernet recorded thirty-seven commissions.<sup>15</sup> Ingersoll-Smouse listed an additional seventeen works or sets completed during this period. Out of these fifty-four commissions, twenty-six involved calm and storm pendants. Twenty-two of these commissions were pairs, two were pendants to works made earlier, and two were Four Times of Day sets. Vernet listed five pairs with no known subjects and a number of single tempests with no references made to pendants.

From this study of Vernet's commissions and additional works listed by Ingersoll-Smouse, we can conclude that the taste for calm and storm pendants was cultivated as early as

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<sup>14</sup>Lagrange, 350-354.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 354-358.

the 1740s and rose to the height of popularity during the 1750s. In the remaining three decades of Vernet's career, calm and storm pendants were requested less frequently, but still held a significant place in Vernet's commissions. It therefore appears that the taste for these calm and storm pendants is an expression of the awareness and the taste for the sublime and beautiful among Vernet's patrons. With this in mind, one can conclude that the popularity of the sublime and the beautiful was established prior to the publication of Burke's Enquiry.

One might think that Vernet would have received even more commissions for calm and storm pairs after Burke's Enquiry was published. Instead, fewer calm and storm pendants were recorded for those decades. It is likely that many of the pairs of unknown subjects listed in the commissions were truly calm and storm pendants. It is also possible that Vernet simply did not record all of his commissions, particularly considering the drop in the total number of commissions after the 1750s. Figure 9 on the following page shows the relationship between the total number of works commissioned and the total number of calm and storm pairs for each decade of Vernet's career. The number of sublime and beautiful pairs remains fairly consistent with the total number of works commissioned for each decade.



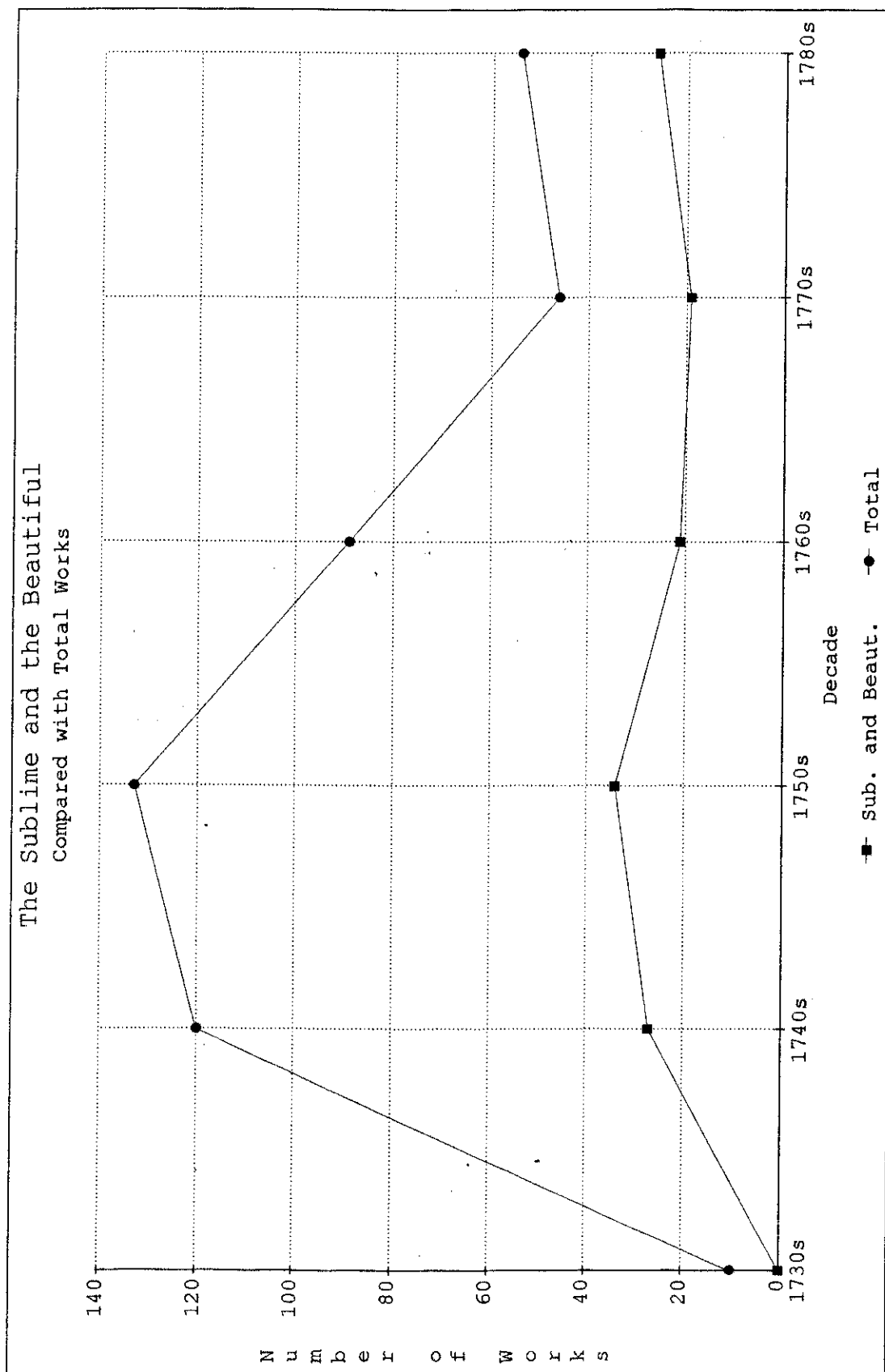


Figure 9. Number of commissions involving sublime and beautiful pendants compared with the total number of commissions by decade.

While the number of requests for calms and storms is one indicator of the taste for the sublime and the beautiful, other indicators are present in Vernet's commissions. The subject descriptions of works patrons requested bear similarities with aesthetic theories of the sublime and the beautiful presented during the eighteenth century. In many cases, the descriptions Vernet recorded are infused with those emotions commonly associated with the sublime and the beautiful. Usually considered a stronger emotion, the sublime received the greatest attention. A commission for a pair of works requested by English patron M. Tilson around 1748 expresses the element of fright, a feeling commonly present in the sublime, with the storm scene he requested:

two marines . . . one must represent a great tempest, most frightful, the other a calm . . .<sup>16</sup>

In another commission in 1752, the Frenchman M. le Chevalier Louthez requested a set of four works. It is evident in the description Vernet recorded, that the qualities productive of the sublime set forth by Burke five years later, were already established in the mind of this patron:

. . . four paintings[,] two in marines [the first] represents a moonlight scene with rocks . . . and some fire . . . the other a tempest with a large

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<sup>16</sup>Lagrange, 329-330.

mountain in the background obscured by the shade  
of a cloud . . .<sup>17</sup>

According to Burke, fires, tempests, and mountains were all objects associated with the sublime. Obscurity was also a quality Burke strongly associated with the sublime.

Throughout this paper the pendants that express the sublime and the beautiful have been referred to as calm and storm pieces because Vernet painted such a large number of these. However, as one may conclude from the previous commission by M. Louthez, not all of the pendants which can be considered sublime and beautiful are tranquil seaports and tempests. Occasionally Vernet painted different subjects that were equally evocative of the sublime and the beautiful. One such pair was commissioned by an Italian patron, Valenti Gonzaga, listed by Vernet as "M. le cardinal secrétaire d'Etat."<sup>18</sup> The pair is described as

. . . one mist and the other another kind of fog  
of fire, both in the style of the most picturesque  
and capricious that I can make . . .<sup>19</sup>

Fire was part of another commission by M. Peilhon in the early 1750s:

. . . two paintings . . . one must represent a  
fire and the other a sunset . . . one sees the  
disc of the sun as it begins to be hidden by the

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<sup>17</sup>Lagrange, 334.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

horizon of the sea and in a reddish atmosphere . .  
 . .<sup>20</sup>

It is often the case that the sublime is described with more zeal than the pendant representing the beautiful. In this case the beautiful was of great concern to the patron. One will remember that beauty, prior to the eighteenth century was judged by rational means. During the eighteenth century it began to be perceived through the senses. Burke considered color to be an indicator of beauty. This patron's description also reveals a concern with color.

One will also remember Burke based his entire treatise on the idea that people's senses are acted upon through the contemplation of objects and that the emotions come later. A tendency of commissions of the 1750s is for descriptions to include adjectives indicating warmth or coolness of a scene. These descriptions show that people were becoming more aware of sensations. In the following instance a sensation of cool wind was a significant factor:

Six paintings ordered in January 1750; one must represent sunrise in good clear weather with a cool wind and the sea a little agitated, another a sunset with the effects of unusual lights, . . . another a most horrible tempest . . . the other a moonlight scene. These four make the four times of day.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Lagrange, 336.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 331.

Sources for Vernet's Sublime and  
Beautiful Commissions

Over the years Vernet's international clientele included patrons from Austria, France, England, Italy, Ireland, Prussia, Sweden, Holland, Russia, and Poland. Some of these countries are represented in Vernet's commissions quite frequently, while others appear only once or twice. In this section we will determine what countries are most commonly represented in Vernet's commissions and whether or not the patrons were commissioning calm and storm pendants.

Table 1 on the following page shows that the French accounted for the largest portion of commissions throughout the artist's career. The English made up the next largest portion of Vernet's commissions. While other countries are represented in the commission records, their numbers are not significant overall. Italy accounted for a relatively large number of the commissions during the 1740s, but very few thereafter. Overall Italy was responsible for nineteen of Vernet's commissions; Holland seven; Ireland six; and the remaining countries, five or fewer. While we think of Vernet's clientele as international, the majority of his patrons were from France and England.

Table 1.--Paintings Commissioned by Decade and by Country of Patron

	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	Total
Austria	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
England	1	18	21	19	4	0	63
France	7	46	75	43	26	35	232
Holland	0	0	1	4	1	1	7
Ireland	0	1	5	0	0	0	6
Italy	0	18	0	0	1	0	19
Poland	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Prussia	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Sweden	0	0	2	2	1	0	5
Unknown	2	34	28	21	12	21	118
Total	10	120	133	89	46	54	452

Note: Statistics include commissions listed in Lagrange in addition to individual works or sets identified in Ingersoll-Smouse.

During the 1740s the French commissioned forty-six works and sets, while the English accounted for eighteen works and sets. It is during the 1740s that Italian patronage was at its peak; eighteen individual works and sets were commissioned by Italian patrons. The greatest number of commissions involving calm and storm pairs during the 1740s came from French patrons. The French commissioned ten of twenty-seven commissions for sets including calm and storm pendants during the 1740s. Six of the commissions for calm and storm pendants were requested by the English, and only one set was commissioned by an Italian patron. Vernet completed an additional ten commissions for calm and storm pendants during the 1740s for patrons that cannot be identified by country. The distribution of commissions

involving calm and storm pendants by country and by decade is shown in table 2 below.

Table 2.--Sublime and Beautiful Paintings by Decade and by Country of Patron

	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	Total
Austria	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
England	0	6	5	6	3	0	20
France	0	10	13	9	11	16	59
Holland	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
Ireland	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Italy	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Poland	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Prussia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Sweden	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	10	11	4	4	7	36
Total	0	27	34	21	19	26	127

Out of ten commissions involving calm and storm pendants completed for French patrons, nine were pairs and one additional commission was requested for the Four Times of Day set. Vernet received his first commission from an English patron in 1738, but he did not have many English patrons until the mid-1740s. Three of six commissions for calm and storm pendants completed for English patrons during the 1740s were calm and storm pairs and three were commissions for the Four Times of Day series. Only one commission for a calm and storm pair came from an Italian patron during this decade. The remaining commissions involving calm and storm pendants could not be identified by country of patron.

The number of commissions made by Vernet's French patrons in the 1750s rose to seventy-five, while those made by the English rose only to twenty-one. Irish patrons commissioned five works and the patrons from each of the other countries requested two or fewer. Vernet received thirty-four commissions confirmed as calm and storm pendants during this decade. The French were responsible for thirteen of those commissions. The number of commissions for calm and storm pendants requested by English patrons during the 1750s decreased to five.<sup>22</sup> Four of the five commissions made by Irish patrons included calm and storm scenes. An additional country is represented among those requesting calm and storm pendants during the 1750s; Austria requested one calm and storm pair. Only two of the commissions made by the French were Four Times of Day sets, and one of those requested by the English were commissions for this theme. Vernet's Irish patrons requested three sets of the Four Times of Day during this decade. Eleven commissions for calm and storm pendants could not be identified by country.

During the 1760s English patrons commissioned nineteen works, while the French commissioned forty-three. Dutch and

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<sup>22</sup>However, the English commissioned eight groups of four and three pairs which could not be identified as calm and storm sets. The decrease should not be read as a lack of interest in calm and storm pendants among the English since such a large number of sets cannot be identified by subject.



Swedish patrons accounted for a handful of other works. Twenty-one commissions involving calm and storm pendants were recorded for the 1760s. The French accounted for nine of those commissions, while the English requested six. Two of the commissions made by the French were requests for the Four Times of Day series, including the set to which Morning (1760, Chicago Art Institute) belongs. The remaining calm and storm pendants requested by the French were either pairs or single works made as pendants to works previously painted. The two commissions for calm and storm pendants made by patrons from Holland were both Four Times of Day sets. Although it is not documented in the table, ten individual calms and storms with no references to pendants were completed during the 1760s for unknown patrons.

Vernet's French patrons requested twenty-six works or sets during the 1770s, while the English requested only four. Nineteen commissions have been confirmed to have included calm and storm pendants. Three of the four commissions made by the English included calm and storm pendants--all pairs. The French requested three Four Times of Day sets and the remaining eight French commissions with calm and storm pendants were pairs or a single works made to be pendants for other pieces. The commission requested by the Polish patron included a calm and storm scene. Four commissions could not be identified by country of patron.

Vernet received thirty-five commissions from French patrons during the 1780s, one commission from a Dutch patron, and three from Russian patrons. This is the only decade during which no commissions by the English for Vernet's paintings were recorded. Twenty-six commissions made during the 1780s involved calm and storm pendants. The French accounted for sixteen of them.

We have established that the French were the most consistent of Vernet's patrons from the beginning until the end of his career. The English held a smaller but significant share of commissions during the 1740s, 1750s, and 1760s but requested far fewer works during the 1770s and none during the 1780s. While the Italians accounted for fifteen percent of Vernet's commissions during the 1740s, they did not continue to request works from Vernet after he left Italy in the early 1750s with the exception of one commission from the 1770s. Other countries, such as Holland, Poland, Ireland, Austria, Sweden, and Russia, are represented in Vernet's commissions, but patrons from these countries did not request works from Vernet frequently enough to make up a large portion of his clientele.

Similarly, the share of commissions for calm and storm pendants was greatest among the French and English. Table 3 on the following page shows a percentage breakdown of the distribution of commissions for sublime and beautiful paintings by decade and by country of patron. In the 1740s



approximately thirty-seven percent of the total number of commissions involving calm and storm pendants belonged to French patrons. Approximately twenty-two percent of calm and storm pendants were commissioned by the English, while only about four percent belonged to Italian patrons. Another approximately thirty-seven percent could not be identified by country.

The percentage of calm and storm pendants requested by the French rose slightly in the 1750s and 1760s. French commissions for calm and storm pendants rose to approximately fifty-eight percent during the 1770s, and sixty-two percent in the 1780s. Commissions for calm and storm pendants requested by the English dropped slightly in the 1750s, but rose again in the 1760s. The percentage of commissions for calm and storm pendants requested during the 1770s by the English dropped to fifteen percent. In the 1780s Vernet received no commissions from English patrons. Other countries represented in Vernet's commissions account for only small percentages of the overall total of commissions for calm and storm pendants. These percentages show that Vernet's French patrons accounted for the greatest number of calm and storm pendants overall as well as during each decade. While the statistics might give the impression that Vernet's English patrons were less interested in calm and storm pendants than the French, one must take into consideration the total number of requests made by English

patrons was much lower than the number made by the French and dropped considerably during the last two decades.

This part of the study has shown that Vernet's most consistent patrons were the French and the English and that patrons from both of these countries were commissioning works evocative of the sublime and the beautiful. Other countries represented in Vernet's commissions made up only a handful of his total number of commissions. Even so, many of these commissions included calm and storm pendants.

Two striking discoveries were made in this chapter regarding the taste for the sublime and the beautiful: Vernet's patrons were requesting calm and storm pendants as early as 1740--seventeen years prior to the publication of Burke's Enquiry. This fact shows that the taste for the sublime and the beautiful was well established prior to Burke's treatise. Even more startling, however, is the fact that the French were more enthusiastic patrons of the sublime and the beautiful than the English, and they were the first of Vernet's patrons to request calm and storm pendants. We might expect that the sublime and the beautiful affected taste among the English prior to Burke's treatise because many English writers were discussing the ideas in the early part of the century. Addison's essays, "Pleasures of the Imagination," were widely read in England when they were published in 1712. We know the essays inspired Akenside to write a poem by the same title in 1744.

However, we know of no such treatises expressing interest in the sublime and the beautiful in France. Boileau's translation of Longinus' On the Sublime (1674) focused on the rhetorical sublime. Silvain's Traité du Sublime (1732) was the first publication in France that signalled a move away from the Longinian idea of the sublime and progress toward an understanding of the sublime as an aesthetic idea. Still, Silvain did not discuss the beautiful. Our statistics show that although the French were not writing about the sublime and the beautiful, they were interested in these aesthetic ideas.

Literature on the topic of the sublime and the beautiful has indicated that the English were the first to turn the term "sublime" into one that applied to aesthetic experience rather than a style of rhetoric, and that the English were the first to understand the beautiful and the sublime as separate experiences. Whether the French came to these same conclusions apart from the English or were influenced by the English has not been determined. There have been no studies that investigate the taste for the sublime and the beautiful in France. Although we cannot be certain of the origin of the taste for the sublime and the beautiful in France, we can speculate on how this taste was spread there. Perhaps the taste for the sublime and the beautiful spread in much the same way as it did in England. A study of French poetry and travel journals might reveal

the same enthusiasm for mountains and oceans as it did in England. Within the scope of this study we may also find a source for the spread of taste for the sublime and the beautiful. We could certainly accept the idea that Vernet's paintings and prints may have popularized these concepts in France. We know that Vernet's portrayal of the sublime and the beautiful in his calm and storm pendants were known in France in the 1740s since his first patrons for such commissions were living in France when they made their requests. Certainly, Vernet's paintings were seen by others and the taste for such pairs was stimulated. This theory is supported by the idea that Vernet identified many of his patrons as relatives and friends of earlier patrons. Additionally, Vernet's paintings received even wider exposure when they were exhibited in the Salons from 1746 until his death in 1789.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Vernet scholar Philip Conisbee has briefly mentioned upon different occasions that Vernet's calm and storm pendants bear direct correlation to the eighteenth-century aesthetic concepts of the sublime and the beautiful.<sup>1</sup> However, when I began my research, no one had previously conducted an extensive study of the roles played by the sublime and the beautiful in Vernet's work. The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a more thorough investigation of the sublime and the beautiful in the work of Claude-Joseph Vernet. This was accomplished by studying the aesthetic theories of the sublime and the beautiful, by studying the artist's works, and by analyzing the commissions for works that expressed the sublime and the beautiful.

In Chapter Two I presented a summary of my findings on the development of aesthetic theories of the sublime and the beautiful. Armed with a thorough understanding of these ideas, I demonstrated in Chapter Three how the sublime and the beautiful were portrayed in the calm and storm pendants of Claude-Joseph Vernet. The more difficult and intriguing

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Conisbee, "The Storm by Claude-Joseph Vernet," The Currier Gallery of Art Bulletin (1977): 22. Conisbee mentioned the same idea later in Claude to Corot, 94.



work was left for the research of Chapter Four--attempting to determine the sources of Vernet's use of these aesthetic concepts.

When I began my research I admit to having had certain expectations regarding the information I would find. Burke's Enquiry (1757) has long been considered the most influential document on the sublime and the beautiful during the eighteenth century. It is widely held that his writings on this topic shaped the period's taste for the sublime and the beautiful. Although I found no evidence that Vernet was directly influenced by Burke, I believed that patrons' knowledge of Burke's essays might have influenced Vernet's depictions of calm and storm pendants. I expected to find that commissions for calm and storm pendants would have increased after the Enquiry was published. These links between Vernet and Burke were suspected not only because Vernet's art so closely parallels the ideas in Burke's treatise, but also because in each instance when Philip Conisbee has mentioned the sublime and beautiful in connection with Vernet, he referred to Burke. To my surprise, there was no tie between Burke and Vernet. Vernet began receiving commissions for calm and storm pendants during the 1740s and the number of calm and storm commissions during and after the 1750s did not increase significantly.

Another of my objectives was to determine who among Vernet's international clientele commissioned sublime and beautiful pairs. My research for Chapter Two led me to believe that taste for the sublime and the beautiful began in England. Most of the treatises written during the eighteenth century on this topic were written by the English. Although Samuel Monk believed any aesthetic thought during the eighteenth century was common throughout Europe, he wrote that the sublime did not interest the French as it did the English.<sup>2</sup> When I began to analyze Vernet's commissions, I expected to find the English requested more sublime and beautiful pendants than any other country represented and that they requested them long before patrons from other countries. Once again I was surprised by the outcome of my research. The French emerged as the forerunners in requesting the calm and storm pairs from Vernet and requested them before the English or any other country represented in Vernet's commissions.

This thesis has changed our understanding of the sublime and the beautiful. Since a large number of Vernet's commissions for calm and storm pieces pre-date Burke's Enquiry, we know that the sublime and the beautiful influenced taste prior to the second half of the century when Burke's treatise was known. Additionally, the idea

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<sup>2</sup>Monk, 37.

that the French were not interested in the sublime has been proven to be false. The French requested calm and storm pairs from Vernet with great vigor and were the first of his patrons to do so. So the sublime and the beautiful was indeed a widespread phenomenon even though the theoretical treatises developed in England.

This thesis has also served to change our understanding of Vernet. Philip Conisbee is the lone authority who has mentioned the sublime and the beautiful in relation to Vernet, and he has done that solely in passing and only in a few instances. Most of the scholarly research on Vernet to date has portrayed the artist in three ways. He is known for supplying the English with views of Italy as souvenirs of the Grand Tour. He is recognized as a painter who was interested in depicting the variety of atmospheric and geographic aspects of nature expressed repeatedly in his *Four Times of Day* series. He is also recognized for his skill as a topographer demonstrated in his *Ports of France* series. This study shows that Vernet's contribution to art was even greater. His calm and storm pendants are a visual interpretation of important aesthetic ideas that were shaping the taste of the century and were the first step toward the Romantic art.

APPENDIX A  
LIST OF MUSEUMS IN THE UNITED STATES  
THAT HOLD WORKS BY VERNET

LIST OF MUSEUMS IN THE UNITED STATES  
THAT HOLD WORKS BY VERNET

(All works are oil on canvas unless it is stated otherwise.)

CALIFORNIA PALACE OF THE LEGION OF HONOR, SAN FRANCISCO  
The Bathers, 1786

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO  
Coast Scene: Morning, 1760

CURRIER GALLERY OF ART, MANCHESTER, NH  
The Storm, 1759 (pendent to Elvehjem Museum's Seaport: Calm, 1759)

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART  
Mountain Landscape with an Approaching Storm, 1778

FOGG ART MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE, MA  
Two drawings

ELVEHJEM MUSEUM OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON  
Seaport: Calm, 1759 (pendant to Currier Gallery's The Storm, 1759)

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM, OMAHA, NE  
Shipwreck on the Coast of Boulogne, 1763

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART  
Harbor Scene with Fishermen and a Grotto, n.d.  
Six engravings by or after Vernet  
Four drawings by Vernet

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART  
Imaginary Landscape: Italian Harbor Scene, 1746

PEABODY MUSEUM, SALEM, MA  
Prints  
Les Dangers de la Mer, 1775  
View of the Port of Marseille, 1762  
Vue del la Ville d'Orleans, 1761  
And four more port scenes

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART  
Villa at Caprarola, 1746  
Landscape: Repairing a Church, n.d., (Attributed to Vernet)  
Marine, n.d. (three scenes attributed to Vernet)  
Shipwreck, 18th cent. (School of Vernet)  
Coast Scene: A Storm, 18th cent. (Follower of Vernet)  
Coast Scene, 18th cent. (Follower of Vernet)

TIMKEN ART GALLERY, SAN DIEGO  
A Seaport at Sunset, 1749

TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART  
Evening, 1753

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM, HARTFORD, CT  
The Storm, 1787  
Fishing at Night, n.d.

WALTERS ART GALLERY, BALTIMORE  
Landscape with Waterfall and Figures, 1768

APPENDIX B

A CHRONOLOGY OF CLAUDE-JOSEPH VERNET (1714-1789):  
THE SUBLIME AND THE BEAUTIFUL IN HIS WORK

A CHRONOLOGY OF CLAUDE-JOSEPH VERNET (1714-1789):  
THE SUBLIME AND THE BEAUTIFUL IN HIS WORK

- 1674 Nicolas Boileau published Traité du Sublime ou du Merveilleux dans le Discours Traduit du Grec de Longin, his translation of Longinus' Peri Huspous. This translation is often credited with spreading the popularity of Longinus in England and in France, and with beginning an interest in the aesthetic aspects of the sublime.
- 1712 Englishman Joseph Addison wrote "Pleasures of the Imagination" published in The Spectator. In these essays, Addison distinguished the sublime from the beautiful when he wrote about the "Great, the Beautiful, and the Uncommon." Addison is often credited as the first person to distinguish these two aesthetic ideas, paving the way for Burke and other scholars.
- 1714 Claude-Joseph Vernet was born on August 8 in Avignon, France.
- 1732 French theorist Silvain published Traité du Sublime. Dissatisfied with Longinus' interpretation of the sublime and with the association of the sublime solely with rhetoric, Silvain studied the sublime as an "expression and evoker of emotions that represent the grandeur of the soul of man."<sup>1</sup> The work is important as an indicator that there was interest in the sublime as an aesthetic idea in France early in the eighteenth century.
- 1734 Vernet travelled to Italy under the protectorship of Joseph de Seytres, the Marquis de Caumont.
- 1738 The Duc de St. Aignan requested a pair of works involving a trip to Mt. Vesuvius and the interior of the mountain. In the same year, the Marquis de Caumont requested that Vernet paint an eruption of Vesuvius and a tempest.
- 1740 The first calm and storm pair listed in Vernet's commissions was requested by the Duc de Crillon in France.

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<sup>1</sup>Monk, 42.



- 1752 Vernet returned to France to begin an important commission for the King of France. For the next nine years, Vernet worked on the fifteen paintings which make up the *Ports of France* series.
- 1757 Burke published A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful in England.
- 1767 A French translation of Burke's Enquiry was published in France.
- 1789 Vernet died in France.
- 1864 Leon Lagrange published Joseph Vernet et la Peinture au XVIIIe Siècle.
- 1926 Florence Ingersoll-Smouse published a catalogue raisonné, entitled Joseph Vernet: Peintre de Marine.
- 1976 A retrospective exhibition entitled *Claude Joseph Vernet, 1714-1789* is shown in London.

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