

A New Look Samuel F. B. Morse's *Gallery of the Louvre*

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KNOWN TODAY PRIMARILY as the inventor of the telegraph, Samuel F. B. Morse (1791–1872) began his career as a painter. Born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, he attended Yale University, graduated in 1810, and moved to Boston. There he became the private pupil and friend of the painter Washington Allston, who introduced him to a traditional program of study that encompassed drawing, anatomy, and art theory. With Allston's encouragement, Morse went to London, where he met Benjamin West and was accepted as a student at the Royal Academy of Arts. Morse's first major painting there, *The Dying Hercules* (1812–1813, Yale University Art Gallery), earned high praise. Returning home in 1815, full of optimism and national pride, Morse confronted an artistic climate unfavorably disposed to history painting in the grand manner and was forced to turn to portrait painting for financial support. Throughout the late 1810s and 1820s, he painted portraits of clients in cities and towns along the Atlantic seaboard. His practice as a portraitist and his ambitions to advance a strong national art came together in his first great picture, *The House of Representatives* (**FIG. 1**), which he toured as a single-painting exhibition to modest, though ultimately unsatisfying, critical and popular acclaim.

In January 1826, Morse was elected the first president of the National Academy of Design, a New York institution he had helped establish. That March and April in a series of lectures he delivered at the New-York Athenaeum, he argued that "it is the principal aim of painting to *excite the Imagination* by visible reproduction of natural objects" and other phenomena observable in nature.¹ To put this theory into practice, the painter used the tools of line and color. Skill in drawing and composition could be honed at institutions such as the National Academy, while excellence in the application of color came with copying the works of the old masters, which also provided much-needed income. American artists such as West, John Singleton Copley, and John Trumbull had often supplemented their incomes by painting copies of works by



FIG. 1 Samuel Morse, *The House of Representatives*, completed 1822, probably reworked 1823, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund 11.14

COVER Samuel Morse, *Gallery of the Louvre*, 1831–1833, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection



FIG. 2 Hubert Robert, *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre*, 1796, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo credit, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY; photo, Jean-Gilles Berizzi

Renaissance and baroque artists, usually as commissions for private patrons. Morse, too, executed copies on commission, fulfilling numerous requests for reproductions of works by Titian, Rubens, Poussin, Murillo, and others. Such works funded Morse's studies abroad between 1829 and 1832—a trip that culminated in the monumental painting *Gallery of the Louvre* (**COVER**).²

Passing through Paris en route to Italy in January 1830, Morse made a brief visit to the Louvre. He may then have conceived a plan to paint one large picture containing reduced versions of the masterpieces of the collection. Morse's *Gallery* had a number of precedents, including Johann Zoffany's famed *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1772–1778, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle), which Morse had seen exhibited in London in 1814. Morse's idea of depicting the Salon Carré, one of the Louvre's grandest spaces, likewise follows in the vein of Hubert Robert's *Project for the Transformation of the Grande Galerie of the Louvre* (**FIG. 2**), painted three decades before. In a fashion similar to both earlier and contemporary views of the salon, Morse's *Gallery* depicts the space as a workshop in which an array of individuals study, sketch, and copy from an imagined assemblage of the Louvre's finest works. Returning to the Louvre in 1831 to begin the project, Morse was disappointed to find the Salon Carré hung with contemporary French paintings, as depicted in Nicolas-Sébastien Maillot's *Salon Carré du Louvre in 1831* (**FIG. 3**). Morse therefore replaced them with masterpieces from the Louvre's Grande Galerie, and he featured its entrance in his final composition.

Morse's selection of old master paintings was guided, in some measure, by the teachings of his mentors, the taste of his patrons, and his own pedagogical aims. For instance, Veronese's *Wedding Feast at Cana*, a personal favorite of Allston's that exemplified for many artists the most sophisticated and successful arrangement of colors,



FIG. 3 Nicolas-Sébastien Maillot, *Salon Carré du Louvre* in 1831, 1831, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo credit, Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY; photo, Franck Raux

is given pride of place on the wall at left, though shown at an oblique angle. Titian, another of Allston's idols, is represented by four paintings in Morse's *Gallery*. Two are quite prominent: *Supper at Emmaus* is above the gallery's open door, and *Entombment* hangs just above eye level at center right. Several artists on Morse's list of commissions are also represented by works in the *Gallery* and reflect the generally canonical taste of his American patrons and peers. Finally, this array of pictures illustrates various approaches to the treatment of light, color, line, and composition that Morse addressed in his lectures at the academy.

Working from small copies, such as that of Titian's 1539 *Portrait of Francis I* (FIG. 4), or painting images directly into his large canvas, Morse completed most of the composition in Paris. He finished the figures and the frames for the individual works within his *Gallery* sometime after returning to New York in late 1832. The artist's good friend James Fenimore Cooper appears at left in the painting with his wife and daughter. Nearby, the artist copying an unidentified landscape is thought to be Richard W. Habersham, one of Morse's colleagues in Paris. Morse included himself at the center in the role of teacher. He leans over a woman sketching who has been identified as his daughter, Susan Walker Morse. Just as the earlier *House of Representatives* is a confluence of his portrait practice and his grander, nationalistic ambitions, *Gallery of the Louvre* harmonizes Morse's activities as a copyist with his larger goals as artist and lecturer.

The recent conservation of the painting has revealed that the technical construction of Morse's *Gallery* was no less complex than its composition. Following the example of Allston, Morse experimented with various painting media and used the Titian-inspired technique of applying glazes — thin layers of translucent mixtures of



FIG. 4 Samuel Morse (after Titian), *Francis I, Study for "The Gallery of the Louvre,"* 1831–1832, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection, Gift of Berry-Hill Galleries in honor of Daniel J. Terra

oil and pigment — to achieve the richness of coloring as well as the exquisite modeling of figures within the paintings depicted in the *Gallery*. But Morse also mixed resinous materials with his pigments to approximate the deep tonal qualities of the old master paintings represented and added varnishes to expedite the drying process. Unfortunately, damages caused by these materials, combined with the stresses of rolling the canvas for transport from Paris to New York, necessitated extensive repairs that the artist probably undertook himself prior to showing the work publicly. Thus, he was both the painting's creator and first conservator.

Morse exhibited the *Gallery* first in New York City during the fall of 1833 and again the following spring in New Haven. Highly praised by critics and a few connoisseurs, this type of picture with little narrative interest was rejected by the public. Crushed by the response, he sold the *Gallery* and its frame for \$1,300 to George Hyde Clarke, a wealthy New York landowner and relative of Cooper's. Morse soon ceased painting altogether, moving on to his successful experiments with the daguerreotype and the electromagnetic telegraph.

NOTES

1 See Samuel F. B. Morse, *Lectures on the Affinity of Painting with the Other Fine Arts*, ed. Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr. (Columbia, MO, 1983), 86–87.

2 See "Commissions from America," c. 1828–1832, reel 5, Samuel Finley Breese Morse Papers, 1793–1944, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; accessed online (image 194) March 3, 2011, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sfbmhtml/sfbmhome.html>.

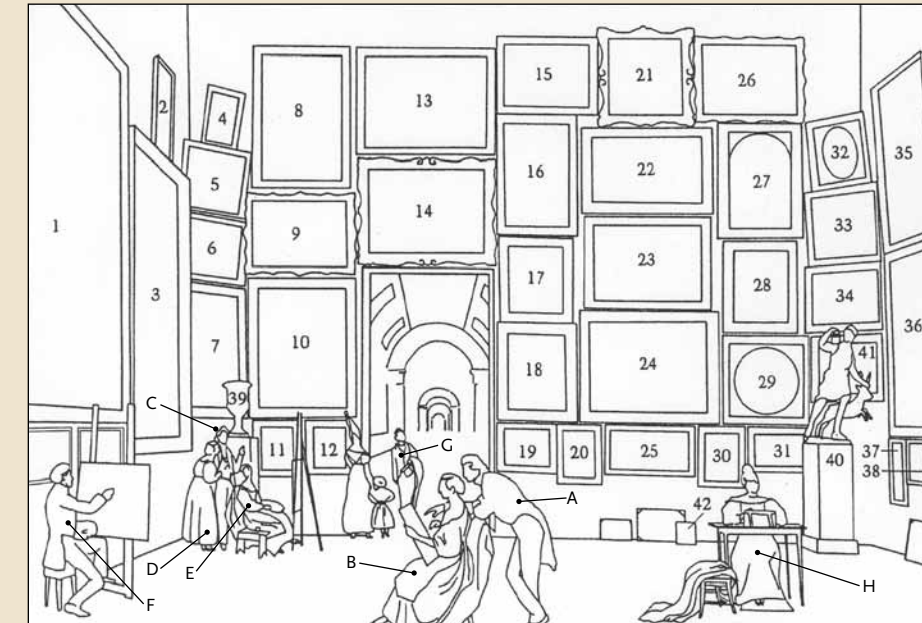


Key to the Art and People in Samuel F. B. Morse's *Gallery of the Louvre*

In an effort to educate his American audience, Samuel Morse published *Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures... from the Most Celebrated Masters, Copied into the "Gallery of the Louvre"* (New York, 1833). The updated version of Morse's key to the pictures presented here reflects current scholarship. Although Morse never identified the people represented in his painting, this key includes the possible identities of some of them. Exiting the gallery are a woman and little girl dressed in provincial costumes, suggesting the broad appeal of the Louvre and the educational benefits it afforded.

ART

1. Paolo Caliari, known as **Veronese** (1528–1588, Italian), *Wedding Feast at Cana*
2. Bartolomé Esteban **Murillo** (1617–1682, Spanish), *Immaculate Conception*
3. Jean-Baptiste **Jouvenet** (1644–1717, French), *Descent from the Cross*
4. Jacopo Robusti, known as **Tintoretto** (1518–1594, Italian), *Self-Portrait*
5. Nicolas **Poussin** (1594–1665, French), *Deluge (Winter)*
6. Michelangelo Merisi, known as **Caravaggio** (1571–1610, Italian), *Fortune Teller*
7. Tiziano Vecellio, known as **Titian** (c. 1490–1576, Italian), *Christ Crowned with Thorns*
8. Anthony **Van Dyck** (1599–1641, Flemish), *Venus Asking Vulcan for the Arms for Aeneas*
9. Claude Gellée, known as **Claude Lorrain** (1604/1605–1682, French), *Disembarkation of Cleopatra at Tarsus*
10. Bartolomé Esteban **Murillo** (1617–1682, Spanish), *Holy Family*
11. David **Teniers II** (1610–1690, Flemish), *Knife Grinder*
12. **Rembrandt** van Rijn (1606–1669, Dutch), *Tobias and the Angel*
13. Nicolas **Poussin** (1594–1665, French), *Diogenes Casting Away His Cup*
14. Tiziano Vecellio, known as **Titian** (c. 1490–1576, Italian), *Supper at Emmaus*
15. Cornelis **Huysmans** (1648–1727, Flemish), *Landscape with Shepherds and Herd*
16. Anthony **Van Dyck** (1599–1641, Flemish), *Portrait of a Lady and Her Daughter*
17. Tiziano Vecellio, known as **Titian** (c. 1490–1576, Italian), *Portrait of Francis I, King of France*
18. Bartolomé Esteban **Murillo** (1617–1682, Spanish), *Beggar Boy*
19. Paolo Caliari, known as **Veronese** (1528–1588, Italian), *Christ Carrying the Cross*
20. **Leonardo** da Vinci (1452–1519, Italian), *Mona Lisa*
21. Antonio Allegri, known as **Correggio** (1489/1494–1534, Italian), *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine of Alexandria*
22. Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, Flemish), *Lot and His Family Fleeing Sodom*



23. Claude Gellée, known as **Claude Lorrain** (1604/1605–1682, French), *Sunset at the Harbor*
 24. Tiziano Vecellio, known as **Titian** (c. 1490–1576, Italian), *Entombment*
 25. Eustache **Le Sueur** and his Studio (1617–1655, French), *Christ Carrying the Cross*
 26. Salvator **Rosa** (1615–1673, Italian), *Landscape with Soldiers and Hunters*
 27. Raphael Santi, known as **Raphael** (1483–1520, Italian), *Madonna and Child with the Infant St. John the Baptist*, called *La Belle Jardinière*
 28. Anthony **Van Dyck** (1599–1641, Flemish), *Portrait of a Man in Black* (the artist Paul de Vos?)
 29. Guido **Reni** (1575–1642, Italian), *The Union of Design and Color*
 30. Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, Flemish), *Portrait of Suzanne Fourment*
 31. Simone **Cantarini** (1612–1648, Italian), *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*
 32. **Rembrandt** van Rijn (1606–1669, Dutch), *Head of an Old Man*
 33. Anthony **Van Dyck** (1599–1641, Flemish), *Jesus with the Woman Taken in Adultery*
 34. Claude-Joseph **Vernet** (1714–1789, French), *Marine View by Moonlight*
 35. Guido **Reni** (1575–1642, Italian), *Dejanira and the Centaur Nessus*
 36. Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, Flemish), *Thomyris, Queen of the Massagetae*
 37. Pierre **Mignard I** (1612–1695, French), *Madonna and Child*
 38. Antoine **Watteau** (1684–1721, French), *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera*
 39. Unidentified Greco-Roman urn
 40. Attributed to **Leochares** (2nd century BC?), *Artemis (Diana) Hunting*, called *Diana of Ephesus* and *Diana of Versailles*, Roman marble copy of a Greek original
 41. A case of unidentified miniatures, possibly paintings and carved gems
 42. Morse's signature appears on the back of the smallest canvas turned against the wall
- PEOPLE**
- A. Samuel F. B. Morse
 - B. Susan Walker Morse, daughter of Samuel Morse
 - C. James Fenimore Cooper, author and friend of Morse
 - D. Susan DeLancy Fenimore Cooper
 - E. Susan Fenimore Cooper, daughter of James and Susan DeLancy Fenimore Cooper
 - F. Richard W. Habersham, artist and Morse's roommate in Paris
 - G. Horatio Greenough, artist and Morse's roommate in Paris
 - H. Copyist, possibly Morse's recently deceased wife, Lucretia Pickering Walker, or a Miss Joreter, who took lessons from Morse at the Louvre

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