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CHAPTER ONE

The Politics of the *Règlement*

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Exhibition of the Works of Living Artists, which was popularly called the Salon, remained the most important venue for the display and reception of contemporary art. Opening in Paris in the spring, the exhibition put several thousand works on view – paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints – in the Palais de l'Industrie on the right bank of the Seine (Figure 1). Screened by a jury and installed by the administration of fine arts, the objects in the Salon were spread through some twenty rooms, and over a six-week period, attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

By the 1860s, the Salon had become an enormous and problem-ridden exhibition. As the practice of art grew increasingly democratic, the Salon had broadened in its constituency and spiraled upward in size – from 485 works in 1801, to nearly two thousand works during the 1820s, and to between four and five thousand works in the 1860s.[1] Even by the standards of the late twentieth century, this was a staggering number of objects to engage, and one can only imagine the deadening experience that viewing the Salon must have been: room after room of artworks were heaped together on the thin organizing principle of the alphabet, creating a conglomeration of objects that filled the walls to some thirty feet above the ground. The gigantism of the exhibition had reached such proportions that whether there were three thousand or five thousand works, the number was far too great to be comfortably viewed.

Complicating the situation was the economic role that the Salon played in shaping an artist's career. Although complaints about its size were universal, it remained the most important commercial venue for the visual arts. Private galleries existed at the middle of the nineteenth century (Figure 2), but though they were fast becoming reputable establishments, they could not compete with the Salon in terms of the size of the audience or the impact on public response. Whereas an exhibition installed by Louis Martinet or Paul Durand-Ruel might draw a thousand viewers and attract a few short notices in the press, this response could not compare with the massive public and the extensive reviews that the Salon received.

When the artists who became known as "the Impressionists" first attempted to exhibit their works, it was to the Salon that they necessarily turned. Most of them made their début in the mid-1860s, the year 1866 being the first time that all of the group's major figures submitted paintings to the Salon. They entered a situation that was often described as resembling a "civil war," and they became quickly identified as contributors to the fray.[2] Through the period covered by this study, the late 1860s and the early 1870s, Impressionist works gathered an increasingly politi-

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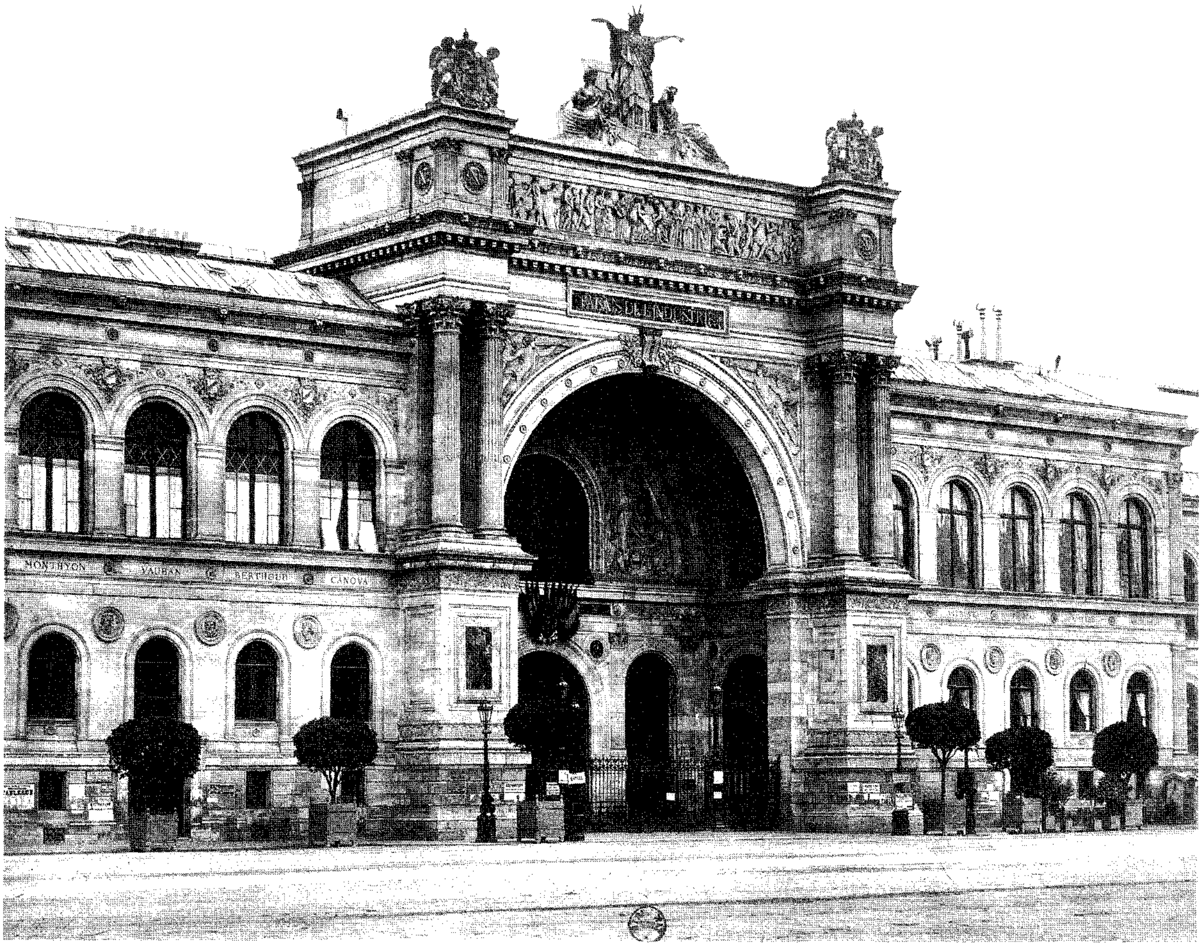

Figure 1. Palais de l'Industrie, c. 1855. (© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.)

cal charge; their makers were characterized as "rebels," "radicals," or "insurgents," despite the fact that there was very little that was overtly political about the works.

In approaching the subject of modernist painting at the Salons of the later 1860s, this chapter begins with an analysis of the structure of the administration of fine arts, the agency that set the regulations for the Salon. Then, because so many of the Salon's rules had deeper implications, the discussion turns to a close reading of the *règlement*, the official statement of the rules. In a sense, the detailed exegesis of the regulations becomes an argument in its own right: for it was in this document that the politics of government became the politics of art.

In the 1860s, the art world was a tightly structured microcosm of political life in the Second Empire. Through a complex network of interrelated agencies, every aspect of the making and exhibiting of art came under control of the administration of fine arts. The vertical chain of command, the framework that gave order to the numerous official *bureaux*, had a brilliant simplicity to its distribution of power, and several administrators held virtually complete responsibility

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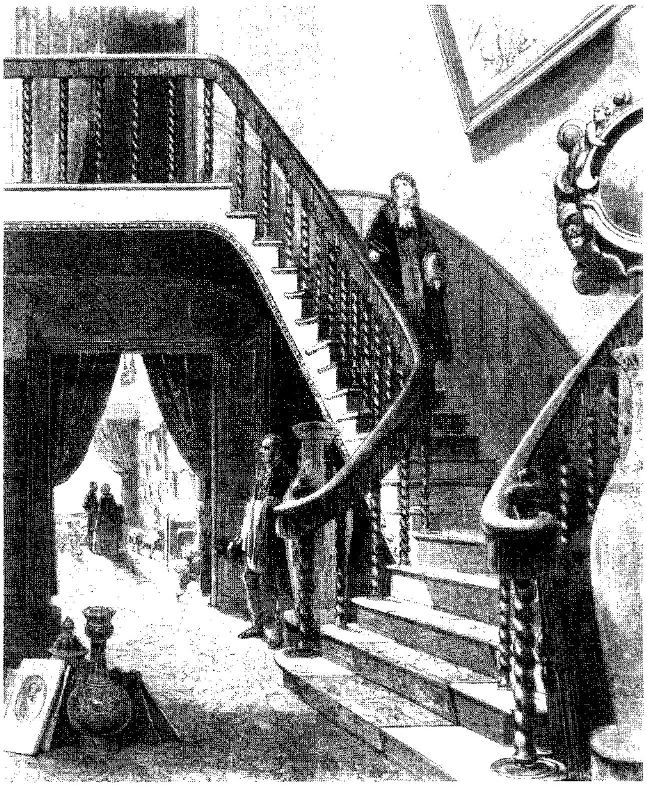
for establishing the country's policies. Though terms like "the government," "the state," "the administration" evoke the image of some enormous bureaucratic machine run by legions of functionaries who were nameless, faceless, and interchangeable, the reality was very different. Power was firmly located in the upper levels of the ministry of fine arts, and artistic policy was set by a small group of men who sought little counsel outside their own *bureaux*.

As the government was then organized, a straight line of command extended from the throne of Napoléon III into the upper echelons of the administration of fine arts. Heading this branch of the cabinet was the minister of fine arts, who was directly appointed by Napoléon III and who – like all ministers under the Second Empire – functioned as an instrument of imperial power rather than an independent, autonomous executor.[3] In 1866, Jean-Baptiste-Philibert Vaillant (Figure 3) filled this role, which then carried the title *Ministre de la maison de l'empereur et des beaux-arts* (Minister of the Imperial House and of the Fine Arts). Reporting to Vaillant were both the network of national museums – or "imperial" museums, as they were called under the Second Empire – and the various agencies that constituted the office of fine arts.

Figure 2. *Rooms in the Photographic Establishment of M. Legray, 35, boulevard des Capucines,* 1856. (© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.)



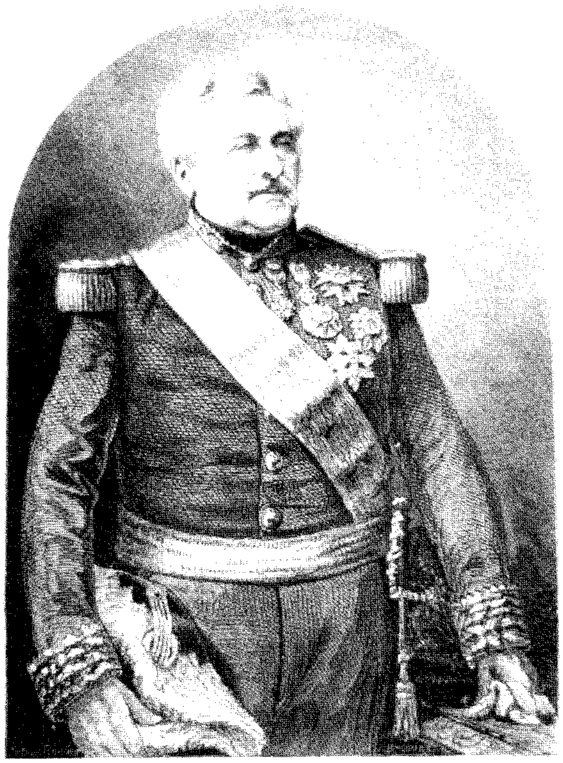


Figure 3. Portrait of le maréchal Vaillant. *Le Monde illustré,* 15 June 1872. (Photo: Author.)

Directly beneath Vaillant, and actually formulating much of the administration's policy, was Alfred-Émilien, comte de Nieuwerkerke (Figure 4). A man of Dutch origin, and supposedly descended from an illegitimate offspring of Holland's House of Orange, Nieuwerkerke had stud-

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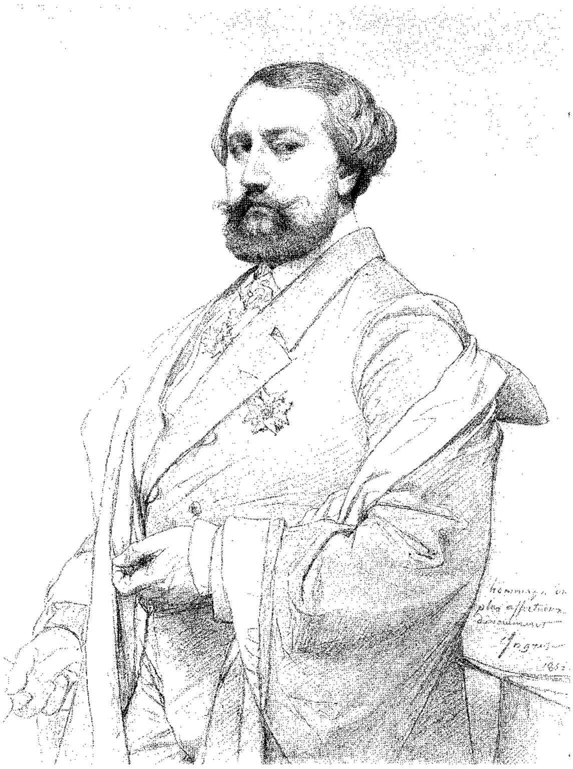
ied sculpture in the 1840s and had exhibited at the Salon. However, it was his well-known alliance with the Princesse Mathilde that became the determining factor in his career. When her cousin Louis-Napoléon became president of the Second Republic, he named Nieuwerkerke to head the museum administration, under whose rubric the Salon fell. Nieuwerkerke held the position until 1863, when his powers were greatly enhanced and he was given the title Superintendent of Fine Arts. In a bureaucratic reorganization that was equated with a coup d'état, the various fine-arts offices were centralized and brought more directly under Nieuwerkerke's control.[4]

Thus, though each branch of the administration had its own complex bureaucracy, in the end they all answered to the ascending triumvirate of Nieuwerkerke–Vaillant–Napoléon III. This was true of the Louvre, which reported to Nieuwerkerke in his capacity as head of the museums; it was true of the École des beaux-arts, the official training school for the fine arts, which reported to Nieuwerkerke in his capacity as president of its advisory council; and it was true of the Salon, which fell under the museum administration and thus also reported to his office.

Next in command was Philippe de Chennevières (Figure 5), who served as Nieuwerkerke's deputy in certain aspects of the administration of fine arts. By birth and by passion a *normand,* Chennevières settled in Paris in the mid-1840s and began to publish short stories and essays on the history of French art. Like Nieuwerkerke, Chennevières vigorously claimed an aristocratic pedigree, though the origins of his title were clouded in ambiguity. At the time of his birth, his father was registered as "unknown," and Chennevières acquired the right to the designation "marquis" through his mother's marriage when Chennevières was two.[5]

In the 1840s, he moved on the periphery of the bohemian counterculture, as was then fashionable for a Romantic young man with literary or artistic aspirations. He entered the administration of the Louvre in 1847, but never progressed beyond the entry level. In 1852 he was appointed by Nieuwerkerke to run the Salon, and in 1861 he was named curator of the Musée du Luxembourg.[6] Housed in the east wing of the Luxembourg Palace, the Musée du Luxembourg was the official exhibition space for contemporary art and was often thought of as the waiting room to the Louvre. By tradition a ten-year period had to elapse after an artist's death before works in the Luxembourg could be considered for the Louvre, and it was in the Luxembourg that the works purchased at the Salon were placed on view. Each year, from February through July, Chennevières handled the day-to-day management of the Salon, and it was his responsibility to see to its organization, installation, and dismantling.

Figure 4. J.-A.-D. Ingres, *Portrait of Nieuwerkerke,* 1856. Graphite and white chalk. The Fogg Art Museum. (Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.)



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Perhaps most surprising about this period in the history of the Salon is the fact that, despite its overwhelming importance as an institution, there were no administrative procedures for establishing the regulations each year. Nieuwerkerke's office enjoyed near autonomy, with few checks and balances and little pressure to demonstrate its accountability.[7] Within the bureaucratic hierarchy, Nieuwerkerke answered only to Vaillant, who had little interest in matters of artistic policy, and Chennevières answered only to them both. Chennevières's *Souvenirs,* written later in his life, remembered Vaillant as one of those rare ministers who refrained from meddling in the fine arts and left the decisions to better minds. In a passage from his reminiscences, Chennevières looked back on his experiences and offered the reader this observation from his many years as an administrator:

> [I]n former times, the best Minister of Fine Arts was the one who, profoundly impressed by all the diverse manifestations of public opinion, of the importance of the role of the Arts in our country, made no pretence of knowing anything about it. He thought only of supporting the Arts warmly with his patronage, without thwarting them with his own personal taste. It was thus that under the Empire, I recall, the best and most suitable Ministers, those of whom M. de Nieuwerkerke made the best use on behalf of the artists, were M. de Persigny and the maréchal Vaillant. . . . In truth, in truth I say this to you, there is nothing more deadly for the arts than a half-wit infatuated with himself, who feels authority in his hands! A Director, an Intendent, a Superintendent of the Fine Arts is obligated to be competent; but a Minister, unless he devotes himself day and night to his office, and resolutely turns his back on politics, a Minister should, like the Chamber [of Deputies] feign blindness, blindness toward the choice of artists and the managing of works, with discernment for the general benefit of the country.[8]

For the Salon of 1866, Vaillant ran true to form, and though the rules went out over his signature, they were the work of Nieuwerkerke and Chennevières. By this time, the two men had collaborated on the Salon for fourteen years. Their letters and official correspondence suggest a fairly smooth working relationship, in which Chennevières, though clearly subordinate, could directly influence the establishment of Salon policy. Together, he and Nieuwerkerke had a good understanding of the political implications of the rules, and they knew how to manipulate the press in promoting the administration's policies.[9]

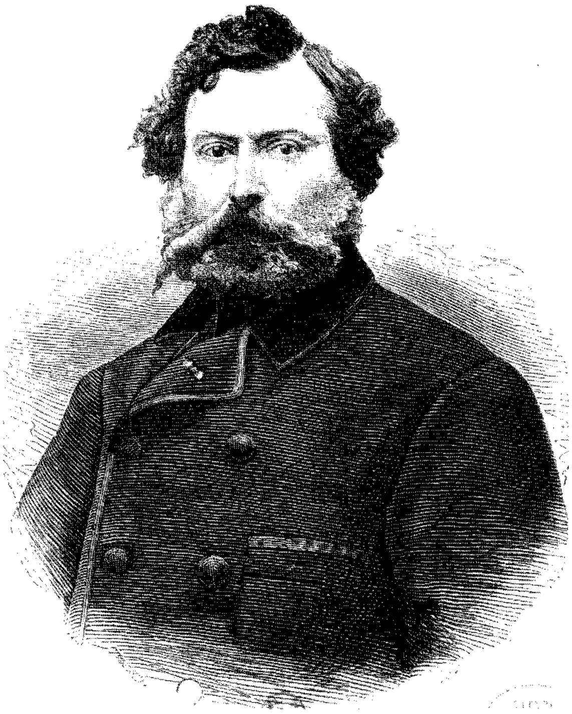

Figure 5. Portrait of Philippe de Chennevières, after a photograph by Hélios. (© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.)

The way in which the regulations for the Salon of 1866 were arranged shows something of the autocratic informality with which policies could be determined in the upper reaches of the fine-arts administration. At this point in his career, the marquis de Chennevières led the easy life of the gentleman-administrator. He commuted between Paris and the Normandy town of Bellême, where his wife remained and raised their young children.

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Even as his power in the capital increased, he never gave up his attachment to the region of his birth.[10] In 1865, he spent the first part of the summer reorganizing the installation of the Luxembourg, and when the gallery reopened to the public at the end of July, he wrote to Nieuwerkerke and asked to leave Paris for as long as he could be spared. At the end of his letter he brought up the question of the regulations for 1866, noting that they should be decided quickly because artists were uneasy about how the Salon would be organized. As Chennevières pointed out, however, the urgency of setting the regulations need not stand in the way of his leaving for Bellême: the mails were good and, in the event of a crisis, he could catch a coach and return to Paris by the end of the day.[11]

Once resettled with his family in Bellême, he sent back a copy of the proposed regulations and offered his thoughts on the changes to be made.[12] Nieuwerkerke seems to have responded positively, for many of the recommendations were accepted and made their way into the regulations for 1866. The concentration of power in the upper reaches of the administration allowed these men a great deal of latitude: there was no advisory committee to consult, no artist delegation to take into account, no interference from Vaillant or Napoléon III. Rather, the regulations that affected the careers of thousands of artists were arranged exclusively by two would-be aristocrats writing across the miles.

By the 1860s, the format of the *règlement* had been standardized by Nieuwerkerke and Chennevières, though individual regulations and their wording varied from year to year. In the usual sequence of events, the *règlement* was published several months before the Salon, first in *Le Moniteur universel,* the newspaper of record, and then in many of the periodicals that carried art-related news. Often in the 1860s, the announcement of the regulations was greeted with long articles analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the provisions for the year and, increasingly, complaining about the inequities of the current system.

By tradition, the regulations were divided into three sections, the first covering the general organization of the exhibition and the procedures for submission; the second, the jury and its operations; and the third, the medals and awards. Many of the provisions carried profound political and ideological implications, and there was nothing in the regulations that had not been carefully thought out by Nieuwerkerke and Chennevières. As a register of the administration's temper each year, the rules comprise an eloquent document, in which some subtle change in phrasing could speak loudly of the crises of the year before. The emendations could be subtle, but they gave vivid witness to the tensions between tradition and reform, privilege and democracy, that animated the politics of the Salon. (The complete *règlement* for the Salon of 1866 appears at the end of this chapter, along with an English translation.)

For 1866, the schedule for the Salon and the procedures for submitting works remained essentially as they had been since 1864. As before, the exhibition was to be held in the Palais de l'Industrie and to run for six weeks from the first of May till the middle of June. An "immense cage of stone and glass," the Palais de l'Industrie had been erected for the Exposition universelle of 1855; the building was located on the Champs-Élysées, close to the Seine and just west of the Place de la Concorde (Figure 6).[13] In the time since 1855, the building had come to be utilized for a wide variety of purposes, and agricultural fairs, horticultural events, and a mammoth equestrian show succeeded each other through the year (Figure 7).

The building's one virtue was its size – the vast interior spaces could contain the thousands of works that the Salon now comprised – but its character as a multiuse "industrial palace" unfortunately highlighted the increasing problem of the commercialization of the visual arts.[14] Though the administration tried to erase the building's industrial connotations by referring to it officially

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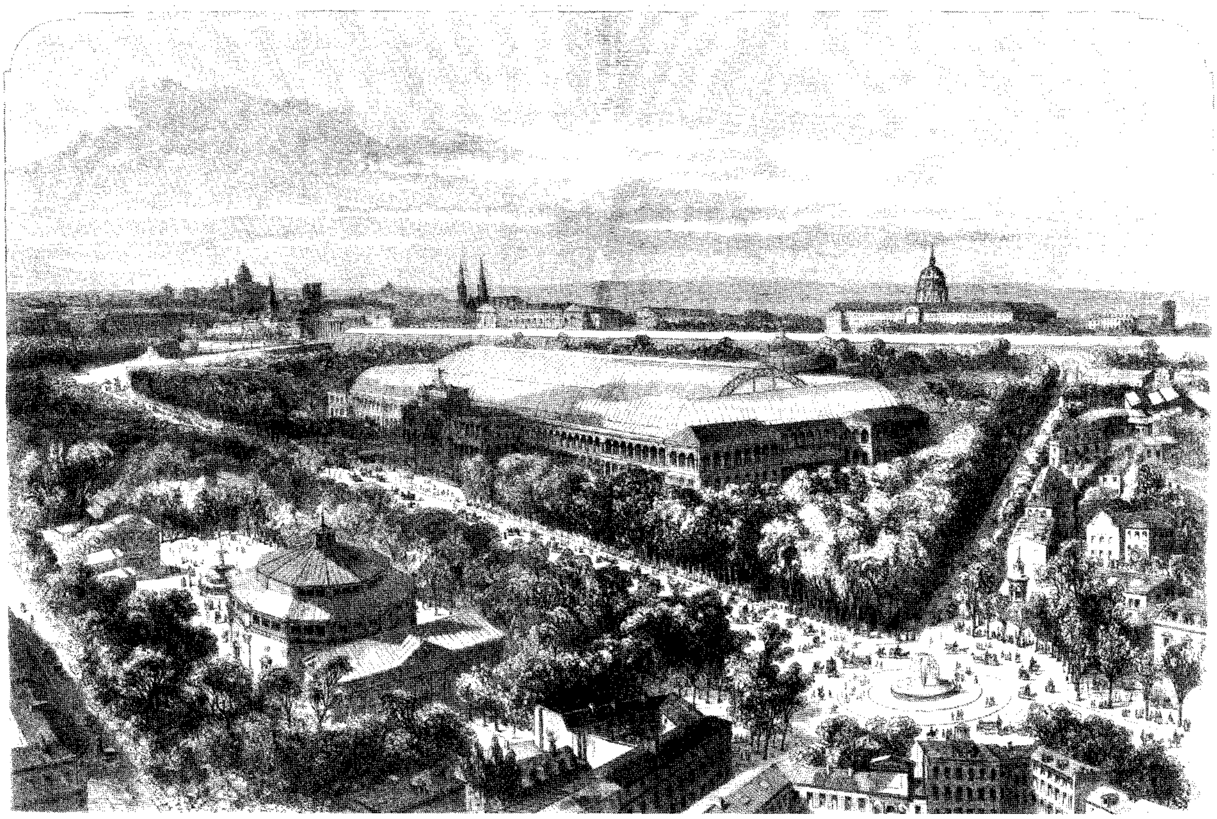
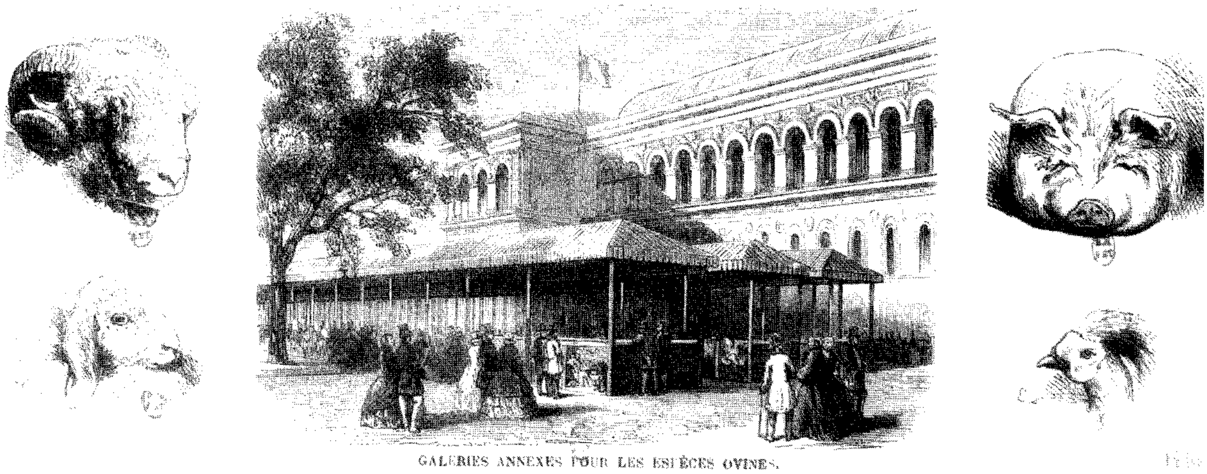


Figure 6. Palais de l'Industrie, aerial view from the northwest, c. 1855. (© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.)

Figure 7. Agricultural competitions at the Palais de l'Industrie. (© cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.)


GALERIES ANNEXES POUR LES ESPÈCES OVINES.

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as "the Palais des Champs-Élysées," the stigma of the marketplace could not be so easily removed. In their reviews of the Salon of 1866, critics would often regret the grim environment in which the works of art were installed each year. Maxime Du Camp looked back fondly to the days when the exhibition had been held in the Louvre, and Victor Fournel criticized the present building as "this palace for doing everything, in whose eclectic bowels exhibitions of horses, swine, sheep, poultry, insects, flowers, cheeses, photographs, and paintings succeed one another by turns."[15]

As to the timing of the Salon, it had often been a spring event, since its beginnings in the seventeenth century.[16] Though the schedule varied somewhat through the mid-nineteenth century, certain practical considerations determined that the Salon could not open much earlier than mid-April or close much later than mid-June. Most important were conditions in the Palais itself: in winter the galeries could be drafty and glacially cold; in summer they became steam rooms and the public complained about the heat. Then, too, the habits of Parisians came into play and affected the closing date, since the affluent public, the potential buyers for the works on view, usually left for the country in June, to escape the city heat and – as one writer put it – "to watch the leaves grow and to breathe the scent of the first flowers."[17] As had been the case in the immediately preceding years, the administration scheduled the Salon of 1866 to open on the first of May and close on the twentieth of June.

According to Article 2 of the *règlement* the works of art were divided into six categories. The first consisted of paintings, which were separated from the smaller media – drawings, watercolors, miniatures, enamels, porcelains, and cartoons for stained-glass windows. These works were grouped together as the second category. Sculpture, along with medallions, constituted the third division, architectural drawings the fourth, and engraving and lithography the fifth and sixth.

Each artist was permitted to submit two works in any of the designated categories, a regulation that necessarily affected the size and composition of the Salon. In 1863, painting and drawing had been collapsed into a single category, and artists had been limited to the submission of three works overall. Then, in 1864 the rules had changed: the number of submissions had been set at two works in each category, and drawings had become a separate section. This arrangement encouraged a slightly larger Salon, but virtually ensured that the increase would occur only in the smaller media. Though painters could now theoretically submit twelve works – two in each category – the fact remained that only two of the submissions could be in oil. Moreover, though it was not unknown for painters to submit sculpture to the Salon, the likelihood was great that they would expand the number of their submissions by sending additional works in the categories of drawings or prints. The situation was similar for sculptors, and whereas they had been able to submit three large-scale works in 1863, they now found themselves in the position of being able to exhibit a greater number of works, but having to restrict their large-scale submissions to two. The effect of the regulation was to decrease the number of works in the painting and sculpture galleries, by cutting back the submissions from three to two, while offering artists the consolation of exhibiting further works in the rooms devoted to the smaller media. The mention of cartoons for stained-glass windows was an innovation of Chennevières in 1864 and reflected his attempt to encourage the making of religious art and the resuscitation of traditional art forms and techniques.[18]

The remainder of the first chapter of the regulations specified the additional restrictions on submitting works. Excluded from the exhibition were copies (except those in a different medium, in enamel, porcelain, or drawing); anything that had been previously exhibited at the Salon; paintings without frames; and works in unbaked clay. Submissions could not be made anonymously or on behalf of an artist who had died before the Salon of 1865. A work could not be retouched after it had been registered, nor could it be retracted

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without special permission. According to the regulations, an appendix to the catalogue would list the decorative paintings and sculptures that were executed for the country's public structures over the past year and could not be removed for exhibition. In this way, the administration could highlight the decorative projects that had been funded by the government and publicize support for monumental art.

The second part of the regulations, and by far the most controversial section, concerned the procedures by which works were to be admitted to the Salon. This aspect of the rules was closely tied to the political history of France and, consequently, was the part of the regulations that changed most frequently during the nineteenth century. At the end of the July Monarchy, the Salon had been selected by a jury made up exclusively of members of the Académie des beaux-arts, the fourth division of the Institut de France (Figure 8). In those years, the Academy comprised fifty men, who were strictly divided according to specialization: fourteen painters, eight sculptors, eight architects, four engravers, six musicians, and ten "free" academicians, the latter including museum administrators and writers on the arts. The number of academicians was invariable, and a new member could be added only when a previous academician died.[19]

With the declaration of the Second Republic in February 1848, the jury had been abolished and the Salon had become an "open" exhibition, to which all works were accepted automatically. In the spirit of the "beautiful revolution" of the February days, the administration took its mandate to the limit, razing the exhibition's hierarchical structure and rendering all participants theoretically equal. Yet what made the Salon of 1848 historically less significant than it might have been was the fact that though the jury had been abolished, the works to be exhibited were already on hand. In other words, artists had selected their submissions thinking that they would be seen and evaluated by a jury, which would be composed solely of members of the Academy. One can only imagine how different the exhibition would have been had the artists known in advance that their works would not be scrutinized, and if at the time of submission a republican government had been in force.[20]

In the following years, as the Second Republic became more conservative, the rules governing the jury had gradually narrowed once again. In 1849 the jury for admissions was restored, elected at that point by the vote of all exhibitors, and the same regulation prevailed at the Salon of 1850–1 (so-called because it opened at the end of December 1850 and ran into the beginning of the next year).[21] In 1852, the number of elected jurors was reduced to half, with the administration reserving to itself the right to appoint the rest.[22] Furthermore, the voting population was restricted, and only artists who had previously exhibited at a Salon ("except the Salon of 1848") could participate in the election. (The exclusion of the Salon of 1848 was the increasingly conservative administration's way of separating itself from the liberal republicanism of February 1848.)

Under the Second Empire, the rules tightened further. After 1855, the Salons became biennial, a change that was justified on the grounds that increasing the intervals between exhibitions would give artists more time to prepare and would, thus, raise the level of works on view. In practice, the measure operated to encourage artistic conservatism by limiting the occasions on which an artist could exhibit and stiffening the consequences of rejection: being turned down for a single Salon meant a four-year hiatus between an artist's appearances before the public. From 1857 through 1863, the Salon was again placed in the hands of the Academy of Fine Arts, though the six musicians in this section of the Academy were excluded from participation.

Discontentment with the conservatism of the Salon reached a peak in the spring of 1863, when the great number of works rejected by the jury caused Napoléon III to intervene. In an attempt to defuse the massive criticism of the jury, he created the first Salon des refusés ("Salon of the Reject-

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ed"), in which all artists who had been excluded could exhibit their works.[23] In the fall of 1863, as part of the centralizing of the fine-arts agencies, the Academy was removed from its position as the Salon's jury.

After 1863, the Salon became annual once again, and in 1864 three-quarters of the jury were determined by election, though only artists who had been recognized by the establishment could vote. The latter included those who had received medals at previous Salons, been inducted into the Legion of Honor, or been elected to the Academy of Fine Arts. The jury was divided into four sections – one for painting and drawing, and one each for sculpture, architecture, and prints – with the works judged only by the jury for the relevant category. This was a change from the time of the Academy, when the entire jury had evaluated all of the works, and it was an attempt to address one of the ancillary problems created by the increasing size of the Salon: that more works submitted meant more works for the jury to judge. In addition to the jurors chosen by the artists' vote, the administration reserved the right to name several men to serve on each of the Salon's juries.

Basically the same arrangement governed the Salons of 1864 and 1865. In 1866, however, at Chennevières's suggestion, the size of the jury was enlarged, doubled in all sections but sculpture. Now, twenty-four jurors were to compose the painting section, twelve to serve for sculpture, and eight each for architecture and prints.[24] Of these, three-fourths would be chosen by election, with the remaining quarter appointed by the administration. In a letter to Nieuwerkerke (3 August 1865), Chennevières explained that the expansion of the jury "would avoid the accusations of camaraderie and favoritism" that some artists had made in 1865, even though – Chennevières said – he thought such accusations had been wrong.[25]

The suggestion that the jury be increased was a canny response to the complaints that had been voiced in previous years: it guaranteed a slightly broader jury and a few new participants in each section, but, because the voting was done by the country's élite, the policy ensured that the diversity of the jury would not be very great. From his years as organizer of the Salon, Chennevières seems to have learned that it paid to grant an occasional concession, particularly if it would result in little actual change.

In the rules for 1866, Article 17 identified in the following terms those artists who could vote: "Able to take part in the election of the jury will be exhibiting artists [who are] members of the Institute, [are] decorated with the Legion of Honor, or [who have] obtained a medal at previous Salons." The wording of the regulation is highly significant for the way in which it defined and described the voting population. In practical terms, the stipulation that the voters be exhibitors excluded those members of the Academy who rarely participated in exhibitions (a problem particularly among the older members), as well as nonartist members of both the Academy and the Legion of Honor. The intent behind this part of the regulation was to keep the election under control of the artists, by barring from participation the six musician members of the Academy of Fine Arts, the ten so-called free members, and those named to the Legion of Honor for achievements in other areas – unless the men in question were willing to exhibit. (This is the point behind the caricature by Honoré Daumier reproduced in Figure 8.) More complex in its implications, however, was the way in which the regulation had been phrased.

As the official art world was then structured, an artist bent on success worked his way through the system in clearly defined phases. At the lowest level, he satisfied the jury's expectations and gained entrance to the Salon. In the next step, he solidified his reputation through the winning of Salon awards. When a specified number of medals had been secured (see the discussion of medals below), he became eligible for the Legion of Honor and applied for admission to it. If he was named to the Legion of Honor, further possibilities opened up, and he could move through the organization in grades, passing from Chevalier (fairly common), to Officer (rare), to Commander (extremely