VI

The Copy

THE ACADEMIC COPY

THE imitative procedure was fundamental to the Academic curriculum. Initiated on the elementary level, it continued through the advanced degrees of instruction at the Academy at Rome. Copying was also important to the successive government administrations, for both political and artistic reasons. Minor copy commissions numbered in the thousands; and major copies, such as those commissioned for the Musée des Etudes and the Musée des Copies, were considered significant works of art. During the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, the official and Academic emphasis on the copy, as a vehicle both for dispensing political patronage and for indoctrinating younger cadres of artists, elevated it into a recognized institution enjoying a status comparable to that of original creations.

This attitude was explicit in the Academy's approach to copying:

> Making a good copy – a work of art in its own right, worthy of the original chosen as model – requires skill in analysing the design, colouring and general technique of the old master's work. . . . It requires, in fact, the dexterity and discernment of a consummate artist.[1]

The copy was a faithful and painstaking reproduction of the original based upon preoccupation with the executive process. It was the most finished form of execution, where each step was calculated in advance. An artist generally began a copy by tracing the model's contours on a sheet of gauze mounted on a free-standing easel, or directly on to a sheet of tracing paper covering the pictorial surface of the original. There were other methods, even more complicated than these, which show the care with which the copyist proceeded.[2]

This intense preliminary effort was followed up by a carefully executed *ébauche* or grisaille. Copying was further equated with *fini* by virtue of its laborious and scientific execution. The Academy's having placed a premium upon patient and diligent labour makes the copy's high place in its instruction understandable. The calculated procedures involved, as well as preparation and application of traditional technical methods, were consistent with the Academy's aims. The copy represented the fruit of long attention and analysis. Yet it is in the latter sense that the copy differed from finished Academic originals. Whereas finished work of Academicians represented premeditation and reflection upon an impression derived from inspiration, the copy was from its inception a premeditated piece of work. It lacked all pretence to originality

and spontaneity, and indeed negated these qualities. The meticulous exercise of the eye and hand as the artist carefully repeated the original was exactly the kind of dutiful study required in finished works. When the copyist reproduced the work of a Velazquez or a Rubens, of course, the spontaneous characteristics of the original had to be painstakingly reproduced. Regnault regretted having copied Velazquez' *Surrender at Breda* that he had not chosen a model

> containing more elaborate and finished areas of execution. . . . But I had undertaken a long and laborious task, for nothing is so difficult as to copy a work which was itself painted with ease and carried off with such marvellous assurance.[3]

This painstaking reproduction of a painting was therefore admirably suited to the instruction of the nineteenth-century Academy, and its practice represented the core of its curriculum.

The Academy stressed systematic copying in preparation for a definitive work, so that the qualities of an old master were assimilated and reflected in the work. Students were required to look for a model 'presenting forms similar to those of the subject which they wish to treat'.[4] He then attempted to repeat the technical stages underlying the finished surface, beginning with what he construed as the original *ébauche* process and then devoting his attention to the surface.[5] In all this the student was advised to work with a 'disposition of mind and body' similar to that of his model.[6]

The reverence for the old masters and the ritualistic approach to copying can be likened to a form of sympathetic magic.[7] In the concept popularized by Sir James Frazer, the primitive believes that the identity of a person is not limited to his physical being but embraces also everything associated with it, and everything that can evoke his presence in another person's mind. In the thought of the primitive, the shadow, name, footprint, dress or portrait of a person are just as integral a part of him as his body. To 'contact' any of these things is to affect him as if he were literally to 'be in touch' with a person's corporeal presence. At the same time, the primitive believes that he can incorporate a person or an object simply by imitating it. The imitation assumes a magical quality – a sympathetic contact; and the primitive then supposes that the thing imitated and the imitation are one and the same.[8]

Frazer originally classified these two attitudes rather naïvely under the separate headings of 'contagious magic' and 'imitative magic'.[9] Later investigation showed that both principles of association involved here – contiguity and similarity – may be included in the more comprehensive concept of *contact*.[10] Association by contiguity is contact in the literal sense; association by similarity is contact in the metaphorical sense. It should be evident at once that in the copying practice both principles may be operative; on the one hand, the object imitated is the original product of an old master in the presence of a disciple, and on the other, copying itself is the paradigm example of imitative procedures in the figurative sense.

And if we can allow for an element of 'magic' in the Academic practice of copying, many heretofore neglected aspects of this convention will come to light.[11] Is it not

likely that a young artist who was taught to copy 'touch for touch, stroke for stroke, and colour for colour', would feel that he was identifying with, and incorporating the outstanding qualities of an old master he revered?[12] Degas enjoined the student to become 'thoroughly imbued' with the Florentine painters of the fifteenth century, and Fantin-Latour copied so intensively in order 'to keep on the right track'.[13] Through magical sympathy the copyist was enabled to enter into a personal relationship with his 'ancestor'. As Ingres advised his pupils: 'Go to . . . the old masters, talk to them – they are still alive and will reply to you. They are your instructors; I am only an assistant in their school.'[14] Monticelli, who believed in metempsychosis, felt that in a former existence he had been a Venetian painter in Renaissance Italy, and he copied the Venetian colourists to acquire their vocabulary of forms and ideas.[15] In considering themselves the spiritual heirs of the old masters, pupils attempted to unveil the older methods and implant them in their own. At the same time, the masters disclosed even their personal defects to the copyist; this allowed him to feel equal – through incorporation and familiarity – with his models.[16] Indeed, the copyists often felt superior because they had discovered these defects.[17]

The Academy itself encouraged this fetishistic view of the copy; it stated in the *Dictionnaire* articles: 'Between the model and the artist a secret relationship springs up, producing in the latter vibrations that might be compared to a string instrument.'[18] The goal of the copyist was 'to wrest from Genius its secret'.[19] Sigalon wanted 'to identify himself completely' with Michelangelo, and eventually came to consider himself a distant relative of the master.[20] Baudry, an ardent copyist who reproduced many of the works of Raphael and Michelangelo, once said with respect to his copying Raphael: 'In the silent conversations we have held together he has taught me the secret of his grace and of his admirable style'.[21] Regnault, embarking on an extensive copying programme in Madrid, wrote: 'I should like to devour Velazquez whole'.[22] Carolus-Duran, another painter who assiduously copied Velazquez, was reported to have made strange gestures with his brush while working – as if engaged in a duelling bout – gestures which 'were often accompanied by appeals to the shade of Velazquez'.[23]

Many of the artists were possessive about their copies, and in this they perhaps reflected the opinion of Constable's friend Leslie:

> Artists should copy and be surrounded by their copies rather than their own works, and thus gradually acquire principles not to be communicated in any other way, as good manners are acquired by living in the best society.[24]

Cézanne quoted Couture as saying: 'Keep good company, that is: Go to the Louvre'.[25] And in this connection, Desboutin's preoccupation with copies is revealing. Just prior to his association with the Impressionist group, he transformed his Italian villa into a museum where he surrounded himself with his copies. A prolific copyist, he wished to imbue his personal works with the feeling and mood of the old masters.[26] Here the copy seems to take the form of a fetish conveying *mana* ('mysterious power') to original works.

That the practice of copying led often to the copyist's assuming a superior attitude towards his model is also apparent from the literature.[27] This was due, in part, to the Academy's eclectic policies as well as to its didactic approach. The Academy taught the pupil to seek a combination of the best qualities of different schools with the intention that his work should be superior to the product of any individual one. In this way the Academy thought it could rival and even surpass the works of its predecessors.[28] Young Prud'hon planned to copy a number of masters, including Raphael, Titian and Rubens:

> Some for their grace and elegance of drawing, their refinement and sublime naturalness of expression; others for their ravishing colours and harmony of composition, the magic of chiaroscuro, and so on and so forth. In short, I shall try to take a little from everyone according to my ability.[29]

And after copying Pietro da Cortona's ceiling in the Gran Salone of the Palazzo Barberini, he could write that his reduced version was 'at least as good as the original, if not better. . . .'[30] He claimed he did as much as possible to remedy Cortona's drawing, especially in the draperies.

The Academy's approach to copying emphasized literal reproduction. As an American pupil of Bouguereau taught his own students:

> Not only see to it that the same subtleties of perception and representation are preserved in your copy, but that they are attained in the same way. Use the same brushwork or other execution. Use the same pigments in the same places, with the same vehicles; . . . try to see not only how the painter did a certain thing but why. So that as you work, you follow him in the working out of his problem, and make it your problem also.[31]

It is not surprising that in recreating the old master's image, the copyist often considered himself the equal of his model. Leslie certainly echoed the French attitude when he wrote: 'Were the study of pictures alone sufficient to make great painters of us, we are bound to surpass all our predecessors'.[32]

Sigalon felt that he could improve the colour of Michelangelo and Mottez observed Giotto's clumsy errors and the impurity of Raphael's drawing.[33] A painter commissioned to copy Verrocchio's *Baptism* for Blanc's Museum of Copies wrote of the work's 'stiff and clumsy passages' that he was eager to adjust.[34] Henner, who copied a Holbein for the same institution, remarked while standing before the *Erasmus* that the ear was badly attached and the jaw insufficiently studied.[35] Charles Blanc once wrote about a copy by Stéphane Baron after Raphael's *Feast of the Gods*:

> There is . . . no reason to be surprised that the fresco has not the same gentle, engaging aspect as the great master's decorations in the Vatican apartments. I should point out that these faults are not corrected, or even softened, in M. Stéphane Baron's copy, as he has confined himself faithfully to reproducing what he saw. . . .[36]

That copyists could improve on their model was a basic assumption held by the Beaux-Arts Administration commissioning copies for churches and civic buildings: the Inspector of Beaux-Arts in 1851 complained that a copyist reproduced the 'defects' of a Jouvenet painting.[37]

The success of the copying practice can only be understood in terms of the curriculum. The popular and independent systems taught copying as the point of departure for art instruction, deriving the idea from the long-existent traditional approach. The role of the copy is precisely explained in the *Dictionnaire*:

> Analysing a master's technique seems to be the most instructive way of acquiring a specific outlook of one's own. Grappling with difficulties, even when achieving only partial success, is not a sterile process. . . . Anyone who has devoted himself to copying sincerely and with application knows how thoroughly one comes to understand one's model – just as in literature one knows an author better when one has tried to translate him.[38]

Here the Academy disclosed its firmest position with respect to artistic pedagogy; in no other area could it speak so authoritatively. The basis for the Academy's dogmatic assertion is the copy's profound historical role in both official and Academic contexts. The practice of copying as a French institution began with the establishment of the Academy at Rome. The constituting edict specifically stated that pensioners 'shall work entirely for the King, copying pictures of great masters and statues of antiques, and making drawing of buildings. . . .'[39] Colbert wrote to the Director in 1672: 'Make the painters copy everything beautiful in Rome; and when they have finished, if possible, make them do it again.'[40]

The original Academy at Rome was thus founded on the royal need for elegance and luxury at Versailles; Rome was to provide the models, and pensioners were workmen in the service of the King. Colbert insisted that pensioners devote as much time 'to copying fine originals as to developing their own genius'.[41] Colbert had created a factory for the reproduction of Italian masterpieces, a tradition that continued deep into the eighteenth century.

Even at this early stage, the mechanical practice of copying possibly led to a disrespect on the part of the pensioners toward their models. They often considered themselves the equal of Renaissance masters. As La Teulière wrote:

> As to their abilities, . . . it is well to take note of those who, guided by overmuch conceit of themselves, fall so short of humility as to believe, after eighteen months' stay in Rome, that they are the equals of Raphael and Michelangelo.[42]

Yet it surely was the nature of the institution itself that developed this attitude of the pensioners. A century after the foundation of the Academy, the Directeur Général des Bâtiments, M. d'Angiviller, wrote to Vien, then Director: 'Such men as Coysevox, Bouchardon and Coustou made copies finer than the originals, if that be possible'.[43]

The Academy's 'factory' for copies continued through the mid-eighteenth century,

and was perhaps stimulated further under the guidance of De Troy, who supervised reproduction of Raphael's works for the Gobelins. And the rules of 1775 maintained the primitive official outlook requiring painters and sculptors to make copies for the royal houses.[44] The pedagogical isolation of the copy in the curriculum did not develop until the eighties, when Lagrénée, Vien's successor, discouraged the routine practice to enable pensioners to make 'new originals'. But the copy remained the culminating requirement for the pensioners until the second decade of the nineteenth century.

In 1817, Thévenin wrote that pensioners found it exceedingly difficult, after four years of study, 'burning with desire to create', to have to confine themselves to copying.[45] It was still the culminating requirement for the State, and merely a workmanlike task to which pensioners had been assigned since the seventeenth century. Thévenin requested that the Academy at Rome organize its curriculum around personally creative work for the pensioner. The results of this request represent a turning point in the development of nineteenth-century French art. The Academy of 1817, now an independent entity concentrating its energy and weight upon the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Academy at Rome, decided to alter the role of the copy in the curriculum. The following year, the copy was made a requirement only during the fourth year of a pensioner's five-year stay to prepare him for the culminating test, 'a historical painting of his own composition, with several life-size figures'. The copy was to be joined with 'a sketch for a painted composition'.

The most significant implication of the new ruling was the relegation of the copy to an instrumental role in the curriculum from being its chief end. It became the critical prelude to an original work, in order that the original creation be invested with the qualities of the copied masterpieces. The fact that the copy was now assigned along with a painted sketch further shows the Academy's shift of position. As an original, creative work, the sketch thus counterbalanced the copy, and the two practices were meant to serve as preparation for the final work of the fifth year.[46] The final examination for the pensioner was an original creation; and the copy and sketch served as its preparatory phases.

THE COPY AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE SKETCH

The changing social taste and the consequent transformation of painting techniques led to a shift of emphasis from the rational and ordered to the spontaneous and original in art, thereby transforming the copying practice and giving it a fresh direction. This metamorphosis is seen already in the two working manners of Géricault and Delacroix. Both had a dual manner of copying – finished and sketchy.[47] Undoubtedly, Delacroix inherited this compound method from Géricault, and it is significant that the artists who most stimulated the rise of the aesthetics of the sketch also preferred

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Through every step in the training of an artist the practice of copying played a paramount role: he began by reproducing engravings and prints, and later, when he advanced to painting, he was assigned to copy heads after the old masters or the work of his *patron*. Pupils were further advised to visit regularly the Louvre and to make *croquis* of great works in their notebooks. With the exception of this last practice, elementary copying in the above applications took the form of manual exercises.

In the Academic curriculum the copy *qua* copy had a greater significance as a self-contained object charged with two quite specialized purposes. First, the practice of copying aimed at developing the pupil's power of invention by the study of the old masters' compositions, and second it aimed at familiarizing the pupil with the technical procedures of the old masters. Aside from life drawing, it was perhaps the core of the curriculum. At this stage the pupil had acquired a certain degree of proficiency in drawing, and began to emancipate himself from the mechanical exercises. The master now shifted the emphasis from his personal instruction to the study of old masters congenial to the pupil's individual temperament. Copying was also considered indispensable to developing the imagination, to helping the pupil amass compositional ideas and to interpreting nature originally, 'which demands a faculty of interpretation that the study of the works provided by the old masters is well calculated to develop'.[84]

During the July Monarchy, the atelier day usually terminated at noon or one o'clock and, from then until four, when the drawing session at the Ecole began, the students made pencil or oil sketches in the Louvre.[85] Copying thus took place every day, although for the most part it was practised outside the confines of the atelier, constituting an essential part of the pupil's homework. The master often received his pupils at his home to inspect their copies executed outside the atelier. When they worked in easel proportions he would periodically visit the Louvre and examine their work.

If the pedagogical significance of the copy was never contested, the manner of reproducing models was not always clearly defined for the pupil:

> How is he to copy them? On a large or a small scale? Should he spend much time on drawing before he comes to colour, or on colouring before he composes? Should he devote more attention to one part than another?[86]

A simple sketch would suffice in some cases, and, in others, only a literal translation of the original would do. Ingres, who professed a loathing for the *métier*, advised:

> Do simple, quick sketches from the old masters; it is one way to look at them and study them properly. But it is a waste of time to reproduce a whole painting which anyone can do with a little patience. While you become involved in its technical procedures you lose sight of the main point, the essence of the masterpiece.[87]

Ingres himself made several scrupulous painted copies, however, and was an ardent supporter of the early Museum of Copies, founded by Thiers. He personally supervised the execution of the Raphael Stanze and Loggia copies by Raymond and

Paul Balze, and considered the painted copy the cardinal proof of an artist's understanding of the model. He once affirmed, 'a good copy is better than a bad original'. His ambiguous position is typical of the nineteenth-century Academician and, in part, is due to the policy of the Academy itself.

In principle the Academy took a hard line with respect to copying. As will be shown in a later chapter, the Academy believed that only an exact copy had a 'practical importance for the artist's education'. It concluded that the most perfect copy 'would be an identical reproduction of the original', and it rejected the interpretative copy as a 'commonplace industry'.[88] The copy became for the Academy a doctrinal element of crucial import; the painted copy was seen as 'the necessary complement of a classical education', and the pupil beginning the practice at the initial stage of the painting programme was forced to retain the controlled techniques absorbed in the drawing programme.[89]

In practice the Academicians did not always adhere to the stern requirements for the copy laid down by the Academy. Drölling first advised executing 'a great number of random sketches from classical works and Poussin', and then led the pupil to make small, carefully painted copies after the masters.[90] This lack of consistency was due in part to the split curriculum of drawing and painting. The study of old masters ran like a continuous thread through woof and warp of the teaching fabric, and the master had to stress the 'quick' copy in the form of a pencil sketch for the beginner. Only when he commenced painting could the pupil be allowed to paint the 'academic' copy.

More independent artists, such as Delacroix and Couture, affected a kind of compromise and advised their pupils to make rapidly executed painted sketches after works in the Louvre.[91] But while they recommended this practice for absorbing the compositional ideas of old masters, they also assigned carefully executed copies for studying material techniques. Even in the sketch assignments, the degree of finish they required varied according to individual assignments.[92]

Perhaps the primary source of the ambiguous stance of the masters towards the techniques of copying was the commercial advantage the literal replica offered the pupil. The official copy provided a steady source of income for the neophyte, as well as an opportunity for the beginner to break in professionally. Masters, always sensitive to their pupils' financial needs, not only prepared them to accept official copy commissions, but often intervened on their behalf to induce the administration to award their pupils such commissions. In many cases a simple request from a pupil of an Academician was taken into consideration by the bureaucracy, which attests to the uniform practice of copying in the atelier curriculum.[93]

COMPOSITION

The most original innovation of the nineteenth-century Academic curriculum was the compositional programme. It has previously been noted that 'composition' is synonymous with 'sketch' in the Academic terminology. As a self-sufficient entity in the