

Citation

TRANI Elsa, "Montpellier's Fine Arts Society", translated by Adèle Verdier and edited by Alexandra Woolley, *Les papiers d'ACA-RES, Brefs historiques*, put online in March 2020.

Elsa TRANI
Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier III

Montpellier's Fine Arts Society

The foundation of Montpellier's Academies was quite hesitant. Between 1679 and 1806, six Drawing Schools came one after another. During the Seventeenth Century, the first ones did not get adequate support and were consequently, short-lived. During the Enlightenment, artistic education was disrupted by the French Revolution and the different Regimes that followed. A School was re-established under the Convention in February 1795 until 1802, then under the Empire in 1806.

During the Seventeenth Century, Montpellier could have been one of the first provincial cities to welcome a Royal Academy, just after the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* was created in 1648. One of its founding members, Sébastien Bourdon (Montpellier, 1616-Paris, 1671) was from Montpellier and when he returned home in 1649, Montpellier's governor, the Earl of Aubijoux (1606-1656) submitted him with the project of directing a local Academy. But Bourdon, who was already too involved in the Parisian Academy, had to return to Paris. The painter was more inclined to the idea in 1657, during his second stay, but he was faced with attacks from local artists who were opposed to the project and it was buried once and for all.

A second attempt was initiated in 1679. The artist Jean de Troy from Toulouse (Toulouse, 1638-Montpellier, 1691) in competition with the *capitouls'* painter, Jean-Pierre Rivalz (Labastide d'Anjou, 1625-Toulouse, 1706), created an Academy of Painting, Sculpture, Engraving and Architecture in Montpellier, with the financial support of the *États du Languedoc*. In 1676, the School relied on the King's patent letters but did not seek the approval of the Parisian *Académie royale*. The School stayed open for nearly ten years, until the death of Jean de Troy in 1691. At the end of the Seventeenth Century, the most talented local artists, such as Hyacinthe Rigaud (Perpignan, 1659-Paris, 1743), Jean Ranc (Montpellier, 1674-Madrid, 1735) and Jean Raoux (Montpellier, 1677-Paris, 1734) pursued their careers at the *Académie royale* of Paris.

In 1706, Montpellier welcomed the *Société royale des sciences*, but did not have an Art Academy until 1737 which was re-established thanks to the painter and architect Jacques Giral (Montpellier, 1684-?, 1749), who had studied at the *Académie royale* and then in Rome. His School was recognised by the *Académie royale*, as indicated by the minutes from the 30th of August 1737 and of the 4th of April 1738.

However, if it is a known fact that the painters Joseph-Marie Vien (Montpellier, 1716- Paris, 1809) and Étienne II Loys (Montpellier, 1724-id., 1788) attended the School, little information remains on it. Vien pursued his education in Paris, whereas Loys was awarded the first prize in Drawing at Toulouse's Fine Arts Society in 1747. He became "*peintre associé*" for three years and taught at the Academy of Marseille in 1761, before being dismissed the same year. Montpellier's Academy apparently closed on the death of Giral in 1749.

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During the second half of the Eighteenth Century, Étienne II Loys taught the art of drawing to amateurs. He gave private classes to Jean-François-Xavier Atger (Montpellier, 1758-id.,1833) and to the Viscount of Saint-Priest (Paris, 1714-Montpellier, 1785), but after his outrageousness in Marseille, he was excluded from the Fine Arts Society. This was founded in 1779, thanks to the art merchant Abraham Fontanel (Mendes, 1740-Montpellier, 1819), who received financial support from high officials. The Academy based itself on those of Toulouse and Marseille for the organisation of its drawing classes but dealt differently with its administration. Mainly funded by local sponsors, the school provided free education in the old *Collège des Jésuites*, currently known as the Fabre museum. During its eighteen years of existence, the school trained painters from Montpellier, among whom the French Academy member-to-be François-Xavier Fabre (1766-1837), and encouraged healthy artistic competition among students, with awards and exhibitions. In 1787, the Academy became part of the School of Arts and Civil engineering until the French revolution. Artistic education then reappeared with the *École centrale*, on the 7 ventôse an III (25th of February 1795), only to disappear again in 1802. A free and local School of Drawing finally opened in 1806, which was then completed with a School of Painting funded by the Academy member François-Xavier Fabre, when he moved back to Montpellier in 1825, and where he created the Fabre museum in 1828.

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