



Dess[e]ins de Greuze



September 17, 2025-January 4, 2026

As a prominent 18th painter and draftsman, Jean-Baptiste Greuze has been recognised one of the masters of sentimental genre painting and portraiture. Trained in Lyon and then Paris, he enjoyed dazzling success with his paintings extolling domestic virtue and sensitivity, which appealed to an audience enamored with morality and emotion.

A keen observer of human behavior, Greuze placed great importance on drawing. His sketches reveal his fine lines, accurate expressions, and careful staging. Whether preparatory studies or independent works, they demonstrate his taste for narrative and character psychology.

This exhibition invites you to discover different facets of his art, as well as some of his Burgundian followers.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze

(1725-1805)

1725, August 21	Born in Tournus
circa 1750	Trained in Paris under Charles-Joseph Natoire, after an initial apprenticeship in Lyon
1755	Accredited by the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture as a "painter of particular genre" ; first successes at the 1755 Salon
1755-1757	Trip to Italy with Abbé Gougenot
Salon of 1761	<i>L'Accordée de village</i> (<i>The Village Bride</i> , Paris, Louvre Museum)
Salon of 1763	<i>La Piété filiale</i> (<i>Filial Piety</i>) or <i>Le Paralytique</i> (<i>The Paralytic</i>) (both Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum)
1766	Publication of <i>Cahier de Têtes de différents Caractères</i> (<i>Book of Heads of Different Characters</i>) by Pierre-Charles Ingouf, based on drawings by Greuze
1769	Greuze presents <i>Septime Sévère reproaching his son Caracalla for attempting to assassinate him in the Scottish Highlands</i> (Paris, Louvre Museum) as his admission piece to the Academy; he is accepted as a genre painter, not a history painter, as he had hoped
1771 to 1793	Greuze no longer exhibits at the Salon; his works are displayed in his studio at the Louvre and known through prints
1777	Presentation of <i>La Dame de charité</i> (<i>The Lady of Charity</i> ; Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts) in his studio
1777-1778	<i>Le Fils ingrat</i> (<i>The Ungrateful Son</i>) and <i>Le Fils puni</i> (<i>The Punished Son</i>) (both Paris, Louvre Museum)
1782	Commissioned by the son of Catherine II of Russia, the future Paul I, of <i>La Veuve et son curé</i> (<i>The Widow and Her Priest</i> ; Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum)
1800	Greuze exhibited again at the Salon, but doesn't enjoy the same success
1805, March 21	Death of Greuze in his studio at the Louvre

Greuze, portrait painter

From his first Salon in 1755, Greuze caught the attention of the Academy for the quality of his portraits. Often compared to Antoon Van Dyck (1599-1641), he was considered one of the best specialists of his time.

Greuze focused on the expression of his models, without idealization, and showed great talent in the representation of skin tones and fabrics.

In addition to his portraits for private clients and his self-portraits, he excelled in the representation of children and young women, subtly conveying the innocence, emotion, and sensitivity characteristic of the Age of Enlightenment.

His studies of faces, often in red chalk or pastel, were hugely successful and widely distributed through prints. These studies, with their supple and vibrant lines, testify to his interest in psychological analysis.

Study, detail, compose

The young Jean-Baptiste Greuze trained through contact with the ancients and Italian painting, but also with the art of the Northern schools, which sparked a new craze in France during the 18th century. His early works, produced after his stay in Italy (1755-1757), reveal this dual influence, combined with a personal and sensitive approach.

In keeping with academic tradition, Greuze produced numerous anatomical studies to hone his compositions. He fragmented bodies and isolated faces and hands in search of the most accurate expression. His preparatory sketches were then reused in numerous works, with slight variations.

Greuze paid particular attention to emotions and gestures. The artist also specialized in “expressive heads”, often rendered in red chalk: some are merely studies for paintings, while others appear to be works in their own right, sought after by art lovers.

Morality and virtue

In the second half of the 18th century, thinkers and art critics such as La Font de Saint-Yenne and Denis Diderot encouraged a return to a more virtuous life. Marmontel's *Contes moraux* (*Moral Tales*), published in 1761, fueled discussions during the gatherings organized in Madame Geoffrin's Parisian salon.

Presented at the Salon of 1761, the painting *L'Accordée de village* (*The Village Bride*), commissioned by the Marquis de Marigny, Superintendent of the King's Buildings, was a great success and drew praise from Diderot. Greuze became the leading representative of moral and virtuous painting.

Inspired by contemporary bourgeois dramas, he gave his genre scenes an unprecedented narrative and emotional intensity, similar to that of history painting.

He emphasized the expressiveness of his characters, producing numerous preparatory studies in order to move the viewer and present them with a model of virtue.

Philosophy Sleeping

In 1759, Greuze married Anne-Gabrielle Babuty (1732-1811), the daughter of a prominent Parisian bookseller. She served as his model on several occasions until their divorce in 1793.

At the 1765 Salon, the artist presented a large pastel entitled *La Philosophie endormie* (*Philosophy Sleeping*), which has since disappeared and is now known only through prints. Madame Greuze is depicted dozing in an armchair, wearing a cornette, with her little dog on her lap.

Nearby, a table is laden with philosophy books; one of them is still open, leaning against her right hand, suggesting that she fell asleep without finishing her reading. The work is a delicate allegory: philosophy, personified, falls asleep, weakened not by physical fatigue, but by the contemplation of knowledge.

Several preparatory studies have been preserved, including that of the dog, which would be used in other works later on, and that of Madame Greuze's sleepy face.

At the school of Greuze

Burgundian heirs and followers

Jean-Baptiste Greuze's influence extended far beyond Paris. He became a reference point for many artists in Burgundy, particularly in Dijon, where several painters and draftsmen followed his sensitive and realistic style.

Claude Hoin (1750-1817) stands out as one of the most faithful followers. A portraitist and genre painter, Hoin continued Greuze's art with his intimate scenes and expressive figures, spreading the sentimental aesthetic that made the master so successful. Other artists from Dijon, such as François Devosge (1732-1811) and Anne-Louis Dubois de Beauchesne (1758-1835), perpetuated this taste for touching narratives and moral painting.

Greuze's influence also owes much to the engravers of his time. Thanks to prints based on his compositions, his works circulated throughout Europe and reached a wider audience. These engravings, produced by artists such as Jean-Jacques Flipart, Jean-Georges Wille, Pierre-Charles Ingouf, and Jean-Charles Le Vasseur, helped make Greuze an icon of pre-Romantic sensibility.

To mark the 300th anniversary of his birth, the Magnin National Museum invites you to discover different facets of the art of Jean-Baptiste Greuze (Tournus, 1725 - Paris, 1805) through a selection of around forty works (drawings, prints, pastels, painting, miniatures).

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Exhibition

from September 17, 2025, to January 4, 2026

Every day except Monday, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

and from 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., except December 25 and January 1

Free entrance

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