



## **Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment**

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*Anne L Poulet*

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Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1826) has long been recognized as the greatest European portrait sculptor of the late eighteenth century, flourishing during both the American and French Revolutions as well as during the Directoire and Empire in France. This lavish exhibition catalog, now available in paperback, contains more than 100 color plates and 200 halftones which illustrate every stage of the sculptor's fascinating career. Accompanying the images of Houdon's masterworks are four insightful essays that discuss Houdon's views on art as well as his prominence in the highly varied cultures of eighteenth-century France, Germany, and Russia. From aristocrats to revolutionaries, actors to philosophers, Houdon's amazingly vivid portraits constitute the visual record of the Enlightenment and capture the true spirit of a remarkable age.

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400 pages

Review

"The catalog contains important new documentary information, and the entries cast clear light on both the works exhibited as well as related versions throughout the world. The show is an extraordinary achievement; it makes a contribution of permanent value to the study of a very great artist." - Andrew Butterfield, New York Review of Books; "The essays detail Houdon's artistic development and provide insights into his working methods and his relationships with his subjects, a group that included Moliere, Diderot, Voltaire, Franklin, and Napoleon. In 1783, a critic said of Houdon's portrait busts of contemporary celebrities: 'M. Houdon lacks only the means to make his portraits speak, since, as for likeness, he lacks nothing.'" - New York Times Book Review; "It's often said that there's no such thing as a perfect exhibition.... But it must be said that if there is one, this is it. Poulet has obtained just about every significant Houdon sculpture extant, winnowing the selection carefully to secure the version closest to the artist's hand and eliminating lesser ones, pirated casts, and outright fakes. The catalog is a feat of comprehensive and scrupulous research as well as an enthralling exercise in connoisseurship. Taken together, they give us the definitive portrait of Houdon - a speaking likeness, as it were." - Eric Gibson, New Criterion" About the Author

**Anne L. Poulet** is the curator emerita of the department of European decorative arts and sculpture of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. **Guilhem Scherf** is the chief curator of sculpture at the Musee du Louvre.

**Ulrike D. Marthies** is an independent art historian in Boston. **Christoph Frank** is a scholar in residence at the Max Planck Institute in Rome. **Claude Vandalle** is a curator of sculpture at the Musee de domaine national de Versailles. **Dean Walker** is the Henry P. McIlhenny Senior Curator of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. **Monique Barbier** is an independent art historian in Paris.

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