Jean François Pierre Peyron was one of the few eighteenth-century painters who, rather than entrusting his work to others to reproduce, took the matter into his own hands. In contrast to the majority of his contemporaries, Peyron did not rely on engravings of his paintings to disseminate his art. Instead, he revolutionized the art world by producing etchings himself, a practice that allowed him to control every aspect of the process, from the conception of the work to its eventual delivery. This innovative approach not only helped Peyron’s work to reach a wider audience but also established him as a master at etching.

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The Death of Socrates

The Death of Socrates

The Death of Socrates is one of Peyron’s most famous works and is considered a masterpiece. It depicts the moment when Socrates, a philosopher, was condemned to death by the Athenian authorities for his teachings. The painting is a powerful representation of the central theme of the story, depicting Socrates’ stoic acceptance of his fate.

Peyron’s depiction of Socrates is characterized by his classical knowledge and his portrayal of the central figure. The painting is executed with great care and attention to detail, conveying the emotional and moral message of the story. Peyron’s use of chiaroscuro and his ability to create a sense of depth and volume contribute to the overall impact of the work.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Jean François Pierre Peyron painted another version of the “Death of Socrates” after the 1776 Salon?

2. Why was Socrates a popular subject to depict in the visual arts and literature?

3. Is it important to study the art of this period? Why or why not?

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Jean François Pierre Peyron
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The Death of Socrates
1788, oil on canvas, 39 x 53 1/2 in.

Joslyn Art Museum® Omaha, Nebraska
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