

My favourite painting Harry Meade

The Death of Marat by Jacques-Louis David



Harry Meade is a leading event rider and part of Britain's silver-medal-winning team at last year's World Championships. He will be competing in the Blenheim Palace International Horse Trials this weekend

I studied History of Art at Bristol University and neo-Classicism particularly appealed to me. Its idealism presents a style that is reassuringly simple and the subject often provides a didactic example of how to live. I find David's *Death of Marat* aesthetically beautiful and its ordered simplicity appealing. It contains no hyperbole or hot air; it is an image of death in its purity. I like the idealised realism—in the same way as Munnings painted every horse to look conformationally perfect. I loved my days at Bristol and this painting reminds me of a very happy time in my life



The Death of Marat, 1793, by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), 64in by 50in, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

John McEwen comments on *The Death of Marat*

JEAN-PAUL MARAT (1743–93) was the French Revolution's most popular political agitator, with his 'newspapers' (more like today's blogs) and posters. David was its official artist, dictator of art and master of ceremonies. Marat spent some of his pre-revolutionary adult life in London, where he was a doctor and scientist as well as author and journalist. In Paris, David's austere neo-Classical paintings sensation-ally opposed Rococo gaiety.

Both enjoyed Court patronage, but their radicalism was galvanised by the revolution.

They voted for the execution of Louis XVI in the National Convention and were at the height of their political power in 1793, the frenzied year of the King's execution and onset of the Terror.

Marat, a notoriously ugly man, was dying from a chronic skin disease, only alleviated by immersion in water. He worked sitting in a bath with a sheet to protect him from its copper sides. David was familiar with this sight. When Marat was stabbed to death in his bath by Charlotte Corday, who had travelled from Caen determined

to kill him, he became overnight the revolutionaries' principal martyr. A public picture was demanded and David supplied this propagandist masterpiece, with its sacrificial reference to the dead Christ and Marat's ugliness and diseased skin idealistically transformed.

This accorded with the cry of the Parisian mob at Marat's state funeral: 'O cor de Jesus, O cor de Marat.' The picture was commissioned on July 14, the day after the assassination, finished by October 14 and unveiled at the Convention on November 14.