

# Grande Bretagne

## PARIS

commentary by  
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*Ingres at the Petit Palais; 5th Biennale des Jeunes; Tapiés at Galerie Maeght; Sarkis at Blumenthal-Mommato; Seurat to César at Claude Bernard; John Wragg at Alexandre Iolas.*

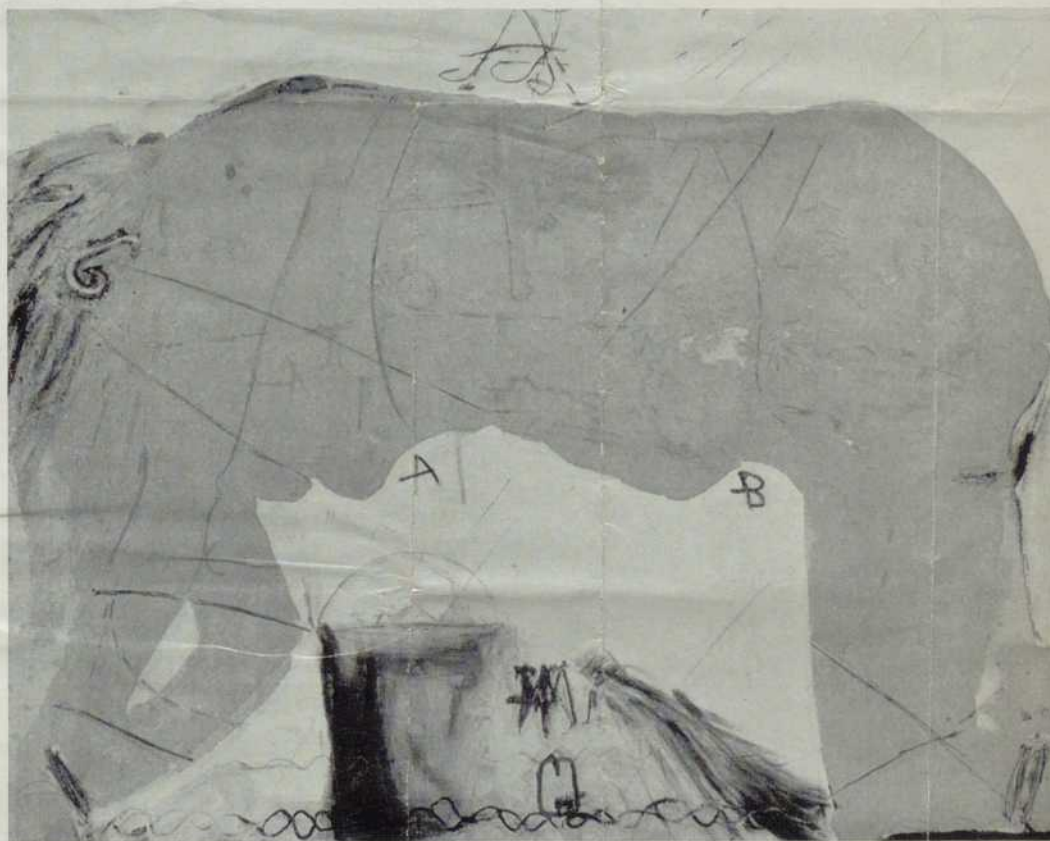
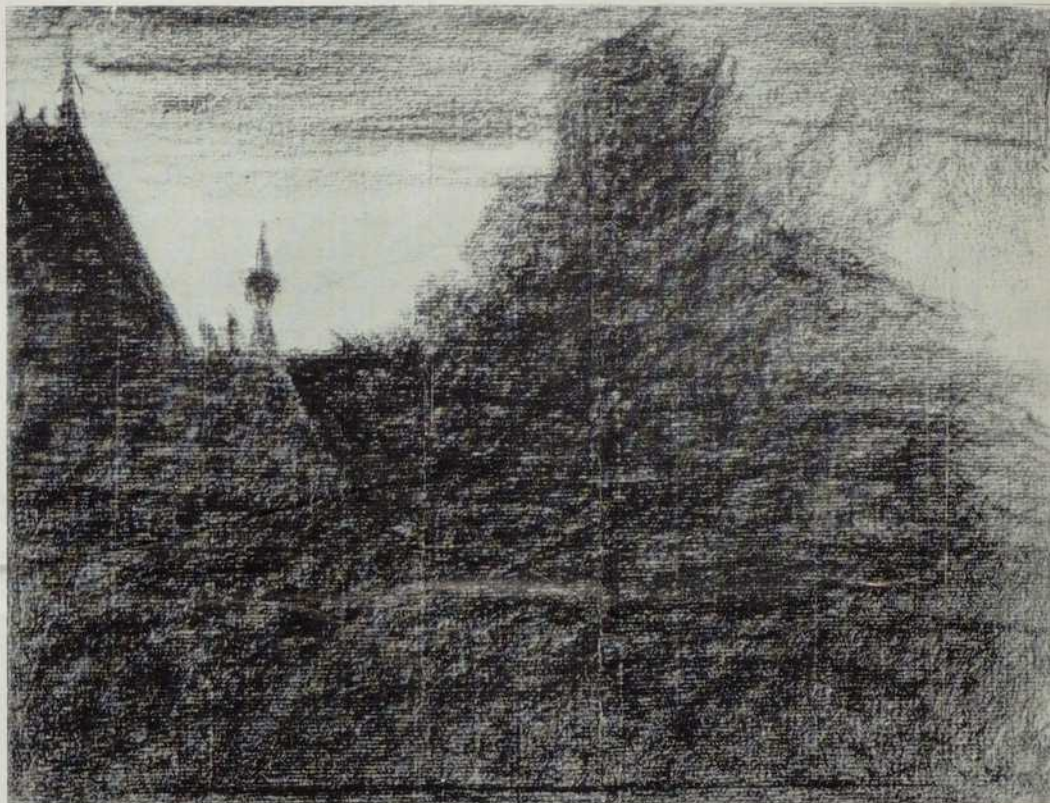
For months now, Paris has been anticipating the arrival of Jean Baptiste Dominique Ingres as though it were the coming of a once celebrated but now distressingly decrepit uncle. True, uncle was once the Napoleon of Painting. True, his contribution, like it or not, is known to be inimitable. And he will naturally get the best fauteuil in the house. But the conversation threatens to pall. Everyone knows uncle has done nothing for anyone lately, and the rumour is that his legacy has long since been spent.

This is the hundredth anniversary of Ingres' death, chronologically speaking, and of course light years away in any other respect. By 1867, Courbet was almost acceptable, Manet, Baudelaire and Flaubert were already threats, and there was Ingres smacking of the First Empire, insisting upon Raphael and offering no generic challenge to the Salon's fondest principles.

But of all things—and the painters would naturally be least surprised—uncle turns out to be loveable. Not senile at all, and really quite responsive at that. Under the circumstances it ought to be stated with maximum naïveté that Ingres was a formidably authentic vision. Most pertinent, the hero is visible. He began as a perfectionist, which is all the century asked of an artist, and yet he had the courage to become a realist. Which, in another key, is precisely what happened to Flaubert.

The gilded ladder of academic temptation was accessible to Ingres, and at times he did climb. So that *Jupiter and Thetis* became pure camp, just as did Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*. It can be added that a religious theme was certain to be fatal. But in the portraits verisimilitude prevailed and reality dictated, just as in *Bovary* and *L'Education Sentimentale*. It will be said that the drawings are the best of it all, and this may be true. Certainly, the drawings contain the pith of Ingres' most perceptive gifts and are—without slighting their plastic virtues—among the most incisive literature of the 19th century. In that sense they rank with Balzac and Jane Austen, so that the crowd at the PETIT PALAIS mirrors the eyes and jaws and souls of those drawings to an uncanny extent. Rastignac and Goriot reborn. Still, the paintings were the central struggle and they deserve a hard look even if this be uncle's more garrulous side.

Timelessness pressed upon him, yet he won the



struggle with everything that lay within time. He tried to accept the Italianate, idealized preconception that was the Salon's fatal flaw, but he survived all the same. Ironically, the half-purposeful, half-circumstantial salvation that came to Ingres parallels what was just beginning to happen

to Manet. So that in both cases the results were strangely varied. The portrait of the Duc d'Orleans, a stagelight affair intended to set the idea of kingliness above the fact of anatomy and personality, still came out as dry and solid and structural as Poussin. For that matter, the sketches for *Le*