

# BAUDELAIRE GIVES A COMMENTARY ON *MARAT EXPIRING* BY JACQUES LOUIS DAVID

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FB: On the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1793, Marat, a well-known journalist and revolutionary speaker, was assassinated by Charlotte Corday as he was working in his bath, as he often did, because he was suffering from a skin condition. The Convention immediately charges David, 1748-1825, the most popular artist of the Revolution, with the task of painting a work in homage to Marat. This work, which will become one of his most famous, presents Marat as a martyr of the Revolution. The original can be found today in Brussels' Royal Museum of Fine Arts, while a workshop copy hangs in the Louvre. In 1846, Baudelaire visits an exposition which showcases noteworthy paintings by David and Ingres. In keeping with Diderot, a writer turned art critic, he passes comment on *Marat Expiring* by Jacques-Louis David.

Reading by CD:

"The divine Marat, one arm hanging over the side of the bath and holding weakly onto his last pen, the chest punctured with the fatal wound, has just drawn his last breath. On the green rug in front of him, his hand is still holding onto the treacherous letter: "Citizen, given that I am unhappy, I have the right to your help". The water in the bath is red with blood. The paper is bloodied. On the floor, lies a large kitchen knife covered in blood. On the pitiful, wooden support which made up the relentless journalist's desk, we can read the words: "To Marat. David".

All these details are as realistic and genuine as a novel by Balzac. The drama is there, living in its lamentable horror. And yet by strange coincidence, what made this painting David's masterpiece and one of the biggest curiosities of modern art is that it is neither trivial nor vile. What is more astonishing about this unusual ode is that it is painted with extreme rapidity and when you consider the beauty in the work, this is where the mind is truly baffled. It commemorates a personable hero and is a triumph for spiritualism. Cruel-like in nature, this painting has all the elements of the ideal.

What was it then this ugliness that Death has so quickly wiped from the tip of his wing? Marat can now defy Apollo. Death just kissed him with his loving lips and he now lies in the calm of his metamorphosis. In this work, there is something both tender and poignant. In the cold air of the room, on the cold walls, around the cold and funereal bath, there is a flittering soul. Will you permit us, politicians of all parties, and even fierce liberals of 1845, to feel moved before David's masterpiece? This painting is a gift to the grieving country and our tears are not dangerous."