Scheffer, Ary 🔓

(*b* Dordrecht, Feb 10, 1795; *d* Argenteuil, June 15, 1858).

L. J. I. Ewals

Dutch painter, sculptor and lithographer, active in France. He became a French citizen in 1850. He received his earliest training in the studio of his parents, Johann-Bernhard Scheffer (1764–1809) and Cornelia Scheffer (1769–1839), who were both artists, as was his brother Henri Scheffer (1798–1862). He then attended the Amsterdam Teeken-Academie (1806–9). At the first Exhibition of Living Masters in Amsterdam in 1808 he showed *Hannibal Swearing to Avenge the Death of his Brother Hasdrubal* (Dordrecht, Dordrechts Mus.), a predominantly monochrome and loosely executed painting, which reveals his familiarity with the Dutch pictorial tradition.

From 1811 Scheffer lived in Paris, where he became a pupil possibly of Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, then of Pierre Guérin, and attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He participated in the Paris Salons from 1812 to 1846. Initially his style and choice of subject-matter conformed to Neo-classical principles, as in *Eurydice Dying in the Arms of Orpheus* (exh. Salon 1814; Blois, Mus. Mun.). Later he renounced Neo-classical ideals, as did his friends from Guérin's studio, Géricault and Delacroix. On the basis of his large painting *Gaston de Foix Dying on the Battlefield after his Victory at Ravenna* (Versailles, Château), exhibited at the Salon of 1824, Scheffer was recognized as one of the most important representatives of the Romantic school.

In the period following the Restoration (1815), the State and the bourgeoisie were the most important patrons in France. Scheffer sold nearly all of the history paintings he exhibited at the Salons to the French government, including the *Burghers of Calais* (1819; Paris, Pal. Bourbon), *St Louis, Himself Afflicted with Plague, Visiting his Sick Soldiers* (1822; Paris, St Jean–St François), *Gaston de Foix* and *St Thomas Aquinas* (both 1824; Paris, Petit Pal.) and the *Souliot Women* (1827; Paris, Louvre). His often rather sentimental genre pieces, such as the *Soldier's Widow* (exh. Salon 1822; untraced), were very successful with the bourgeoisie and became widely known through engravings and his own lithographs. He also painted many portraits, notably of the leaders of the liberal Republican opposition, with whose ideas he sympathized (e.g. *General Lafayette*, 1819; Château de Lagrange-Bléreau; Washington, DC, Capitol Bldg). Among the most famous of his works is his *Death of Géricault* (1824; Paris, Louvre).

The high point of Scheffer's career coincided with the period of the July Monarchy (1830–48). Since 1822 Scheffer had been giving drawing lessons to the children of Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans. When the Duc came to power during the Revolution of 1830, the artist found himself in an influential position. He received important commissions for the Musée Historique at Versailles and was asked to paint portraits of the royal family (e.g. *Marie-Amelia;* Chantilly, Mus. Condé). His greatest successes during this period, however, were the religious and literary subjects he sent to the Salon and that formed an increasingly important part of his output. In particular the many compositions inspired by Goethe's *Faust* consolidated his fame (e.g. *Marguerite*, exh. Salon 1831; Paris, priv. col.).

In spite of his many successes, Scheffer never developed a definitive style. After his initial attraction to Romanticism, around 1830 he turned to such Dutch masters as Rembrandt for inspiration, as exemplified in the *Weeping Man* (exh. Salon 1834; Paris, Louvre). Subsequently he executed his famous *Francesca da Rimini* (exh. Salon 1835; London, Wallace), notable for its warm palette and balanced play of line. Most of his later works are sober compositions of only a few half-length figures. Some, such as *SS Augustine and Monica* (1845; exh. Salon 1846; versions, London, N.G.; Paris, Louvre; Dordrecht, Dordrechts Mus.), are in a predominantly light palette, without any picturesque effects; others, for instance the *Ecce homo* (1856; Paris, Louvre) and *Calvin* (1858; Nijmegen, priv. col.), are warmer and display soft chiaroscuro effects.

Although Scheffer was attacked during and after the 1830s by such art critics as Gustave Planche, Charles Baudelaire and Jules Husson Champfleury because of his hesitant style, melancholy subjects and occasional technical defects, he remained one of the most popular painters of his generation. He was a sympathetic and generous man of wide interests. His circle of friends included such politicians as Lafayette, Guizot and Cavaignac, the prelate Monseigneur Sibour, the composers Liszt and Chopin, the writers Lamartine and Lamennais and many other influential figures whose portraits he painted. His protégés included Théodore Rousseau and Octave Tassaert; he taught Marie d'Orléans, Charles Landelle, Auguste Legras (1817–87), Jules Adolphe Goupil (1839–83), Giuseppe Devers (1823–82), Louis Gallait (1810–87), his cousin Arie Johannes Lamme (1812–1900) and his son Dirk-Ary Lamme (1839–79), François Emile de Lansac (1803–90), Charles Verlat and many others. It is not surprising that sculptors, such as Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, were among Scheffer's pupils; from the 1830s he himself sculpted occasionally. He designed tombs for his mother (Paris, Montmartre Cemetery), who died in 1839, and for the *Crown Prince Ferdinand Philippe, the Duc d'Orléans* (Dreux; cenotaph at Chapelle St Ferdinand, Neuilly-sur-Seine), who died in 1842.

Scheffer's artistic importance lies in his attempt to achieve a synthesis of the various styles that divided the French school. Iconographically, his work constitutes a mirror of the political, literary and religious contexts within which it was created. His daughter bequeathed many of his works to the city of Dordrecht to form the Ary Scheffer Museum, now in the Dordrechts Museum.

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External resources

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