

Sublime Immersion  
in Langlois's 1831 *Panorama of the Battle of Navarino*  
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Unfamiliar to many twenty-first century audiences, panoramas were a popular mode of entertainment throughout the nineteenth century, from their invention in 1787 to their presence in the universal expositions of the fin-de-siècle. As a mimetic medium, panoramas promise to seemingly “transport” patrons to distant sites the instant that they enter the panorama rotunda. Situating panoramas within the broader context of popular media, media historians often cast them as precursors to cinema<sup>1</sup>. While this proposed lineage has its legitimacy, it minimizes the fact that panoramas are experiences that demand the physical presence of the viewer in a fully enclosed architectural space with the spectacle present on every side. The full circularity of the panorama demands that viewer change position, moving the body and shifting the gaze to see the entire canvas<sup>2</sup>. As such, “viewing” a panorama is not a strictly optical activity, even in the earliest iterations of the medium.

It was in 1831, with a panorama depicting the naval battle of Navarino, that the French painter Colonel Jean-Charles Langlois (1789-1870) expanded panoramic technologies to seek the subject's complete kinesthetic engagement. In addition to the usual representational codes appropriate to nineteenth-century trompe-l'œil painting, Langlois introduced non-visual modes of address that undermined the conventional positioning of the viewing subject as a removed observer exerting the power of the gaze over the observed object. Incorporating technologies of representation from theater and dioramas, Langlois placed props and faux terrain between the painted canvas and the visitor on the central platform in all his panoramas. In the Navarino panorama, this platform was constructed to replicate a ship's deck. The “battle” even extended beyond the rotunda to include the rooms connecting it to the ticket office. The narrative exceeded the two-dimensionality of painting, escaping the edges of the canvas, and demanding more than the optical engagement of the visitor-subject. The ideal subject was an actor or participant within the narrative of the panoramic spectacle. The intangible threshold between real and fake, animate and inanimate, subject and object, became confused. Like most nineteenth-century panoramas, none of Langlois's original panorama canvases survive. Preparatory paintings and architectural plans are still extant, as are the observations of critics and visitors preserved in newspaper articles, private letters, and memoirs. Beneath the rhetoric proper to these genres lies a consistent phenomenological emphasis that is absent from accounts describing prior panoramas. In his seminal *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) proposed that sensing is a “living communication with the world,” and that the “coexistence” of the body with the sensible world is a kind of back-and-forth process of mutual confirmation and exchange between the perceiving body

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doing the sensing and the object which demands to be sensed<sup>3</sup>. I propose that this model of mutual reinforcement lay at the heart of Langlois's panorama of the Battle of Navarino. As a spectacular entertainment that proclaimed a mimetic capability to produce illusionistic spaces indistinguishable from "reality," it was crucial that a panorama concealed its process of signification. Langlois's panorama both achieved that concealment and deepened the emotional investment of the ideal visitor-subject through the phenomenological dialectic, experienced as an immersion within the narrative constructed by the panorama's transparent processes of signification. Langlois achieved what Roland Barthes famously termed a "reality effect" by introducing sensory signals into the panorama, cueing visitors into a deeper acceptance of the constructed narrative as "real"<sup>4</sup>.

In the pages that follow, I explore Langlois's debut panorama in 1831 from an art-historical perspective, focusing on its immersive qualities. My purpose in this essay is three-fold. First, I highlight a moment in the genealogy of immersive media by uncovering the innovations that Langlois introduced to the preexisting panoramic medium. Second, I call upon extant visual evidence and the observations of contemporary visitors to propose the ideal visitor-subject's felt experience in Langlois's first panorama. Third, I suggest that the immersive techniques utilized in that panorama of the Battle of Navarino achieved a fleeting suspension of disbelief culminating in an experience of the sublime for visitors, while the panorama itself participated in a rhetoric of the sublime in exceeding the bounds of two-dimensional pictorial representation<sup>5</sup>.

By "sublime," I intend the premodern philosophical-aesthetic concept that eludes precise definition, but which involves an ineffable transcendence "beyond" the self. What I have in mind is less the fear-laden phenomenon posited by Edmund Burke than the transportive exultation of the Greek-speaking rhetor Pseudo-Longinus<sup>6</sup>. His circa 40 CE treatise is interested in the concept's application in oration, but Pseudo-Longinus's characterization of the sublime as an interpersonal blending and transcendence is well-suited to understanding the responses of visitors to Langlois's panorama and the role of bodily experience in linking sublimity and immersion. The emotional, optical, spatial, and kinesthetic immersion of the visitor-subject within the panorama's narrative opened up the possibility of a sublime experience. I refer to this sublimity as the immersive sublime in recognition of the means whereby the sublime is accessed in this case<sup>7</sup>.

Patented by the British portraitist Robert Barker (1739-1806) in 1787, a panorama at its simplest (Fig. 1) consists of a rotunda with a large, continuous canvas suspended from its entire 360' interior perimeter and pulled taut<sup>8</sup>. Usually, this canvas is painted with a landscape or city view using mimetic representational codes, relying on linear perspective and optical illusions to simulate distance. Visitors are confined by a railing to a platform in the rotunda's center, accessed from a lower level via stairs. A canopy over the platform blocks the canvas's top edge from view. Similarly, the height of the viewing platform is calculated to keep the lower edge out of the visitor's line of sight. Skylights illuminate the canvas but are not visible from the platform due to the interposed canopy. The ideal result of these efforts is that visitors perceive themselves to be in a vast, open space rather than an architectural enclosure. Preventing ripples in the canvas, hiding its edges, and avoiding cast shadows or hotspots from the skylights are essential tactics for disguising the panorama's materiality and creating a transparent, denotive signifier that follows the conventional pictorial model of a "window" onto another

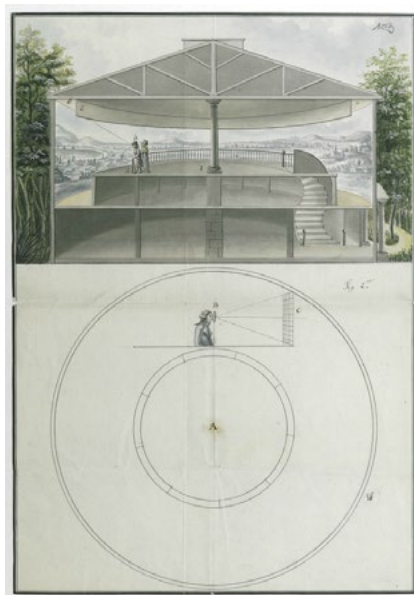


Fig. 1 - Robert Fulton, *Dessin pour brevet d'importation, un tableau circulaire, nommé panorama*, 48.5x33 cm, ink and wash on paper, 1799; Courbevoie, France, Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle. © Archives INPI.

space. Maintaining distance between the canvas and the visitor was critical for the painted perspectival devices to maintain their transparency.

The French painter Pierre Prévost (b. 1764) was responsible for popularizing panoramas in Paris after the medium's importation from London in 1799<sup>9</sup>. By Prévost's death in 1823, the novelty had worn off<sup>10</sup>. Paris's sole panorama struggled to survive financially, closing soon after. The circular building in which Prévost had exhibited his panoramas was demolished and the patents sold<sup>11</sup>. By 1830, the panorama copyright was in the hands of one Jean-Charles Langlois. A soldier and member of Napoleon's elite Old Guard, Langlois had moved to Paris in 1817 following the former emperor's second exile in 1815<sup>12</sup>. There, Langlois entered the atelier of leading painter and arch Bonapartist Horace Vernet (1789-1863)<sup>13</sup>. Under the tutelage of Vernet and celebrated artists Baron Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835) and Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson (1767-1824), Langlois trained as a painter of military subjects<sup>14</sup>. He soon returned to active duty, but maintained parallel martial and artistic careers for the rest of his life. When Langlois first began his painterly studies, Prévost's panorama was still open and located in the jardin des Capucines, just a few steps from Girodet's studio<sup>15</sup>. On February 15, 1830, five years after the closure of Prévost's enterprise, the ambitious Langlois formed a company (*société*) to exhibit battle panoramas of his own design and execution<sup>16</sup>. Meeting with great success, he would operate Paris's sole panorama establishment until his death in 1870.

Langlois's first panorama opened in early 1831 with a representation of the Battle of Navarino, an episode from the recent Greek War of Independence, in which the Greek populace rebelled against the hegemony of the Ottoman Empire<sup>17</sup>. Hoping to maintain a favorable balance of power in the Mediterranean, Great Britain and France had joined Russia in enforcing an armistice between the Ottomans and Greeks. On October 20, 1827, the allied fleets engaged the Turko-Egyptian Ottoman navy in battle in the Bay of Navarino off the Greek

coast<sup>18</sup>. After over three hours of chaotic, close-quarters combat, the Ottoman fleet was annihilated, effectively ending the war<sup>19</sup>.

The victory held particular significance for the French<sup>20</sup>. Allied on equal footing with its former conquerors, France was restored to its position as a leading power. It was an important moment of militaristic and political self-assertion on the global stage following France's devastating defeat in the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and its subsequent occupation by enemy troops<sup>21</sup>. The Battle of Navarino quickly inserted itself into popular culture, commemorated with prints, maps, paintings, medals, and other paraphernalia available for various budgets. Langlois's choice of the battle for his panorama's debut was thus a shrewd appeal to a patriotic ideology that could transcend the then-deep political divisions in France and interest a wide audience who would have read about the battle in newspapers, seen prints and paintings, known participants, or even served themselves.

Immersion is a constantly moving target. Audiences demand ever-more sophisticated diversions as existing technologies and codes become passé and unconvincing. What was strikingly novel to Langlois's patrons in 1831 may seem "primitive" by twenty-first-century standards. To better understand contemporary nineteenth-century responses to Langlois's panorama of the Battle of Navarino, it is useful to look at a skillful but conventional painted representation of the topic that would have been available to Parisian audiences at that time. The French government commissioned a painting of the battle by *peintre officiel de la marine* Ambroise Louis Garneray, sending him to Navarino Bay and offering the expertise of the French commander, Vice-Admiral Henri de Rigny<sup>22</sup>. Visual analysis of Garneray's painting (Fig. 2) in comparison with extant paintings by Langlois also serves to demonstrate the latter's prioritization of emotional affect, an interest which emerged in his panorama.



Fig. 2 - Ambroise Louis Garneray, *Bataille de Navarin, 20 Octobre 1827*, 179x262 cm, oil on canvas, 1831; Versailles, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, inv. MV 1795. Photo © D. Arnaudet; G. Blot; Réunion des musées nationaux.

Garneray's 1.8 by 2.6-meter painting places the viewer above the Ottoman battery on the island of Sphacteria. The geographical specificity lends a sense of authenticity to the scene, but this gesture towards realism is balanced by the elevated removal from the bustling artillery in the foreground. The allied ships are scattered about the Ottoman fleet that arcs across the turquoise bay. Clouds spouting from the ships's sides and an explosion in the distance are the only obvious indications that a battle is taking place. Closer inspection reveals a fireboat at the left edge of the canvas and a sinking mast among the ships closest to the fortress, but the scene does not smack of violence and danger. After the battle in 1827, most of the major newspapers had run descriptions of the action, including the position of each ship, and many contemporary viewers would have known what to look for in Garneray's painting. Viewers without familiarity of the battle's minutiae, however, would have struggled to decipher the action<sup>23</sup>. Much of the painting's success is contingent upon the viewing subject bringing with him or her knowledge that is external to the painting.

Garneray's interest in presenting a complete view of the battle necessarily minimizes the human presence due to the scale of the massive ships and large bay<sup>24</sup>. The critic for the *Journal des débats* approved of Garneray's handling of the topic, praising the "religious exactitude," which, while "a little cold," is more appropriate for this historical subject than "the vagueness and confusion that could have been added in searching to produce a greater effect"<sup>25</sup>. For both Garneray and this critic, adherence to the official record of events takes precedence over truth of emotion and experience.

Langlois also produced a painting of the Battle of Navarino shortly after news of the victory arrived in Paris. The canvas was located until recently at the Greek Embassy in Paris, where access was limited, and photographs are unavailable. Fortunately, in 1837 the French government commissioned Friedrich Bouterwerk to produce a copy for the Musée historique de Versailles<sup>26</sup>. In this painting (Fig. 3), ships fire on one another in the distance, sending plumes of cannon smoke into



Fig. 3 - Friedrich Bouterwerk after Jean-Charles Langlois, *Bataille de Navarin, explosion de la frégate égyptienne 'L'Isonia,' 20 octobre 1827*, 1837. Oil on canvas, 178 x 158 cm. Versailles, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, inv. MV 1796. Photo © D. Arnaudet; Réunion des musées nationaux.

the air between the blue sky and emerald sea. Some vessels have caught fire and a dramatic explosion in the background shoots flames, smoke, and shrapnel into the air. However, this naval battle is simply a backdrop for the human drama of Ottoman sailors escaping a sinking ship. The explosion compositionally highlights the red-tunicked man in the foreground, poised on the edge of the wreck. His form visually links the ship battle in the distance with the near remains of the sinking vessel. He suggests a temporal as well as formal connection; the distant ships breaking apart under enemy barrage will soon be like the shattered hull, and their crews, too, will be abandoned to the sea.

Langlois's approach to the topic is opposite Garneray's. He lowers the viewer's perspective to sea level, where the waves lap against the edge of the canvas, and the emotions of individual sailors are visible. While the figure in red prepares to dive into the water, a tumult occurs behind him as men try to escape the sinking wreckage. Some, trapped in loose rigging, beg their comrades for help, but it is every man for himself. With his expansive perspective, Garneray minimizes the damage and destruction wrought during the battle. In Langlois's painting, the wreckage of ropes, masts, and planks litters the water. Garneray presents facts and information in visual form, whereas Langlois concentrates on the experiential and human, a focus that he would carry forward into his panorama.

Both Langlois's and Garneray's paintings of the Battle of Navarino were exhibited at the 1831 Salon de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts, which opened on May 1<sup>27</sup>. The previous Salon had taken place from November 4, 1827, to April 26, 1828, which meant that many artists desirous of exhibiting works about the battle had had to wait until 1831 for the next Salon<sup>28</sup>. Before the public had an opportunity to see any of them, however, Langlois's panorama opened on January 25, 1831, with his own interpretation of the Battle of Navarino<sup>29</sup>. In the next three months before the Salon began, as many as 28,900 people visited Langlois's panorama, making it for many the standard against which the Salon paintings would be compared<sup>30</sup>. The presence of Langlois's painting of the Battle of Navarino at the 1831 Salon served as both an affirmation of his legitimacy as an artist and an advertisement for the full panorama. The new building at no. 40 rue de Marais was slightly wider and shorter than Prévost's now-demolished structure (Fig. 4)<sup>31</sup>. Langlois made other adjustments to the preexisting pattern of panoramas, solving problems that had plagued past



Fig. 4 - Jean-Charles Langlois, *Combat navale de Navarin*, 43 x 63.5 cm, oil on paper mounted on canvas, c. 1830; Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2005.1.4. Langlois bequest, 1872.

establishments and pursuing ways to push the panorama's transparent processes of signification further. He painted thinly on a fine weave of canvas that allowed the subtle penetration of light to disguise the materiality of fabric and paint<sup>32</sup>. Frosted glass in the skylights prevented the formation of spotlights on sunny days while preserving the light fluctuations from passing clouds that added a naturalistic quality to the panorama<sup>33</sup>. Gas lamps ensured that the illumination was not dependent upon clear weather. Unseen vents circulated air through the otherwise enclosed rotunda<sup>34</sup>.

The rue de Marais building had two floors. The rotunda, in which the painted panorama canvases were suspended, formed the upper story. The ground floor included the entrance and exit to the street, a ticket office, and a corridor that led to a stairway, which, in turn, led to the center of the rotunda's viewing platform. This architectural layout was typical for buildings designed for the exhibition of panorama canvases.

In Robert Barker's London panorama, the stairs and platform were kept relatively dim. Visitors emerging from the closed stairwell were to be shocked when the brightly illuminated canvas came into view. The affective success and marvelousness of Barker's panorama relied heavily on this initial unbalancing of the visitor, as one frame of reference was suddenly removed and replaced by another<sup>35</sup>. The end of the staircase was the boundary between the "real" world of London and the fantastic world of Barker's panorama. The corridor leading to the rotunda and the stairs themselves were functionally necessary non-spaces, merely conduits to the real attraction.

Langlois recognized untapped potential in the intervening space between the ticket office and the panorama platform. The height and diameter of the platform created considerable unused space below. Rather than emphasizing a break between reality and representation, why not make that distinction as seamless as possible and seek a deeper immersion of the visitor? Accordingly, Langlois's building replaced the simple staircase into the rotunda with a series of rooms through which visitors passed to arriving at the rotunda proper. These rooms were decorated to match the topic of the panorama. For the naval battle of Navarino, visitors went through a series of "cabins" and "decks," imitating the interior of a French ship of the line (Fig. 5)<sup>36</sup>. The result is described in the *Journal des artistes*:



Fig. 5 - Jean-Charles Langlois, *Bataille navale*, approx. 29 x 43 cm, oil on paper mounted on canvas, c. 1830; Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2005.1.3. Langlois bequest, 1872

Look, we are in the 18-gun battery. There is the wardroom. The order has been given to stow the hammocks for battle, and the partition that normally separates the wardroom from the battery has been removed. At left, or rather to port, we see the full length of the battery: the cast-iron pieces, just one of which weighs no less than a thousand [kilograms], the cannonballs that kill once and for all, etc., etc.<sup>37</sup>.

The account discloses not only the appearance of the sub-platform rooms, but also the way in which those rooms were experienced as part of a narrative that culminated in the main platform's view of the "battle." "The order has been given," "the partition [...] has been removed" are statements that locate the current moment within a temporal continuum and identify acts that occurred at specific points prior to the writer's encounter with the space. The arrangement of the lower gun deck signals to the visitor that "something" has happened in anticipation of a subsequently happening "something else," thus instilling expectation within the visitor. This awareness of an always-about-to-happen is sharpened by port-holes in the walls that invite visitors to look "outside" at the conflict, only to deny the visitor's gaze with fogged-up glass. Instead, the visitor must seek satisfaction for their curiosity elsewhere.

"A small staircase, replacing the ladder, takes us to the upper gun deck", the *Journal* continues. "Here is the officer's mess and its gallery. All the furniture and utensils are where they should be, the telescopes, the compass, the peg boards, etc. To the right, or starboard, there is the chart room. At left is a sailor's hammock hanging near the captain's cabin. A new staircase takes us up to the deck. From there we are going to see the battle"<sup>38</sup>. Again, the visitor's surroundings further the narrative. The collection of specialized tools and instruments contributes to the general reality effect. Mess, chartroom, and cabin are empty of the officers who are the proper inhabitants, suggesting their presence elsewhere, and creating a sense of a larger narrative space that can accommodate that "elsewhere".

Upon arriving at the viewing platform, visitors found themselves on the "forecastle" of the "ship" through which they had just passed. The rotunda's structurally necessary, central supporting beam doubled as the foremast while the conventional umbrella above became the ship's sails. The forecastle abutted the rotunda's wall, and the remainder of the "ship" was a two-dimensional, painted illusion. Visitors were prevented by the structure of the ship rather than by a railing from approaching the place where physical and painted ships merged. The encircling canvas was painted with a trompe l'oeil painting of the raging naval battle, a continuation of the same narrative that filled the rooms leading up to the platform. Thus, if we consider a panorama in its broad sense as not simply the circular, painted canvas but as the attraction in its entirety, then Langlois's panorama began the moment that ticket holders left the box office. The building itself formed the bounding frame for the panorama's expansive narrative fantasy.

The panorama's blurring of reality and representation is exemplified by the confusion surrounding the ship-platform's origin. Keeping with the documentary claims of the panoramic medium, visitors were reassured that the painted battle was arrayed on the canvas as it would have appeared from the deck of the *Scipion*, a French vessel that had participated in the real battle of Navarino. The 82-gun *Téméraire*-class French ship of the line had caught fire during the battle when an Ottoman fireship – a vessel set ablaze and launched at enemy ships – lodged against the *Scipion*'s fore<sup>39</sup>. The crew extinguished the flames and the



*Scipion* kept up its bombardment without flagging, but the vessel's fore sections had to be replaced later in drydock. According to some sources, Langlois purchased the forecastle and part of the *Scipion*'s gun deck from salvage<sup>40</sup>. While I have been unable to confirm or refute this claim, it was adopted as fact by multiple sources.

The identification of the ship-platform with a specific vessel contributed to the panorama's reality effect and appealed to the visitor's sense of pride by connecting the vicarious experience on the panorama-*Scipion* to the details of official reports and newspaper articles. Conflating ship and platform, battle and panorama, visitors became imaginary participants in the famous event and could claim some small measure of the national praise for themselves. Regardless of whether Langlois did, in fact, incorporate parts of the real *Scipion* into the panorama, visitors who believed this to be the case had their experience indelibly shaped by that belief. The fact that that (supposed) material was in the panorama specifically because of the damage the *Scipion* had sustained during the Battle of Navarino made the ship-platform into a kind of touchpoint that cut through time and space to connect the 1827 battle with the 1831 panorama. Standing on the ersatz-*Scipion*'s deck, visitors were inserted into the climax of the battle narrative that had begun when they first entered the building, gaining momentum as they passed through the "cabins" below the platform. This positioned the visitor physically and conceptually within the panorama's narrative fiction in a radical redefinition of the spectator's role vis-à-vis the spectacle.

Placed on the large circular platform, patrons of Barker and Prévost's panoramas were surrounded by the image with its mimetic representations, but they were entirely separate from the world that it depicted, engaging with it optically across a distance. Whether it was behind, in front, or to the side of the viewer, the narrative was always "over there," another realm that existed beyond the canvas's surface. The panorama canvas was laterally curved in an endless loop, but its still acted as a bounding wall that kept the fiction safely on the other side of the surface plane. Inside the rotunda, but not enmeshed within the fabric of the panorama's narrative, viewers were encased as in a shell, enclosed but untouched. The viewing platform, separated from the painted canvas by a large gap and a railing, clearly belonged to the viewer's space and the "real" world.

In sharp contrast, the narrative presented in Langlois's panorama of the Battle of Navarino exceeded the limits of the canvas, flooding the entire building as if the fiction had broken through the dam that separated reality and representation. The spaces that connected the panorama rotunda to the outside world were not subordinate to the panorama canvas in terms of their significative function. They sparked curiosity, set the tone, and established a narrative that overwhelmed the visitor's space. These rooms prepared the visitor's imagination for the rotunda, where the canvas's two-dimensional imitation of three-dimensional space required greater flexibility and acceptance. The "cabins" and "decks" below the platform were transitional spaces in more than the architectural sense: they were spaces in which the visitor experienced a transition within their perception.

Although the canvas of the Battle of Navarino panorama does not survive, several associated studies by Langlois are preserved in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen, giving us further insight into Langlois's treatment of the battle. The most polished painting, cataloged as *Combat navale de Navarin* (2005.1.4), shows the battle well underway, judging from the damage sustained

by the vessels (Fig. 6). Assorted debris float lifelessly in the foreground. A skeletal mast pierces the murky green water's surface to the right, its ropes drooping like torn sinews. Dark, billowing smoke from a fireboat partially obscures three massive ships of the line. One, on the far left, tilts listlessly as it sinks. In the right distance the prow of another ship is just visible, silhouetted against the reddened smoke and flames engulfing it. There is a haunting quality to the scene, heightened by the dramatic contrasts of light and dark, that speaks to Langlois's skill in creating a mood.

The graveyard-like painting of the wrecks in *Combat navale* differs sharply from the activity in a less finished oil sketch, *Bataille navale* (Fig. 7). Rather than an ominously flat surface, loose, thick, rapid brushstrokes depict a roiling sea whose foam-crested swells meld with fluffy smoke pouring from the ships' cannons, mixing in its turn with blue-grey clouds and the dirty brown smoke of burning ships. Tall, spindly masts emerge from the haze here and there in the background. In the foreground, sailors in a packed rowboat pull survivors of a nearby wreck out of the water. The rowboat tips upward, climbing a swell of water displaced by the rapidly sinking ship, the oarsman in the prow straining against the wave. They seem to be aiming for the still unsubmerged mast at left. A cluster of dark, energetic brushstrokes suggests additional survivors clinging to the rigging as they await rescue. Ripped from the protective hulk of an operational frigate, the men are helpless, caught in a combat of giants. While the more finished *Combat navale* overwhelms with the quiet despair of an aftermath, the sketch of the rescue captures the anxious hope of a climax. Will the rowboat reach the stranded sailors in time? Will they all fit in the overloaded vessel?

By representing a battle across a broad swath of canvas and respecting the facts of the historical battle, vignettes like those in the extant oil studies and important figures or ships were dispersed around the perimeter of the rotunda. Patrons had no ideal position from which to view the image. Conventional paintings, like those



Fig. 6. Jean-Charles Langlois, *Explosion navale de Navarin*, 21.5 x 16 cm, oil on canvas, c. 1830. Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2005.1.2. Langlois bequest, 1872.



Fig. 7. Attributed to Jean-Charles Langlois, *The rotunda of the rue des Marais-du-Temple*, cross-section with the platform and the panorama of the Battle of Navarino, 28.2 x 33 cm, watercolor on paper, 1831. Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Histoire de Paris, inv. res. d. 7696. © Photothèque des Musées de la ville de Paris.

displayed at the Salon, are best viewed from a position squarely in front of the canvas, set back a few feet – the same position from which the painter would originally have created the work. There is no such position of authority in a panorama. Due to the curvature of the canvas, the image is best viewed directly rather than askance, but in massive rotundas like Langlois's, the degree of curvature is slight enough that even this indirect perspective onto the canvas is barely distorted. The panorama's inability to give visitors a sense of self-importance through a vantage point built specifically around them as an individual contributed to the unmooring of the visitor-subject from reality – and from their sense of safety. In taking away the privileged vantage of the individual, the panorama destabilizes the subject, adding an edge of fearfulness that is essential to the sublime<sup>41</sup>. In a reflection of the structure of the Kantian sublime, the panorama's visitor finds him- or herself set into an environment that is not only appears much larger than they are, but which, in denying the reassurance of a privileged view, draws attention to the fact that the world does not, in fact, revolve around him or her. The structure of the panorama makes the visitor-subject aware of themselves as an object within a realm of other objects-part of the flesh of the world, to borrow Merleau-Ponty's expression. Langlois's panorama fully exploited this edge of tension by offering the disoriented visitor grounding in sensory cues that bolstered the panorama's narrative, creating a kind of dialectic of phenomenological unmooring and anchoring.

Langlois solicited the visitor's emotional investment through physical entanglement within the space of the illusion itself. Barker's panorama had depended upon shock and surprise, its relationship to the viewer and the real world was one of opposition, contrast<sup>42</sup>. Langlois's panorama sought an alliance with the visitors, asking them to create and complete the narrative fiction in a cooperative partnership. If the visitor is invited to be part of the spectacle, and, in fact, cannot avoid being included, then, by implication, the visitor is a necessary component of the spectacle – an element for which the designers have planned and on whom they rely for the completion of the project. Barker's panorama was a presentation; Langlois was a participatory project. The fiction of the panorama was brought to life through the presence and cooperation of the visitor. He or she, in a sense, awakened or ordained the fiction. This in turn suggests that Langlois's panorama was not about passive, optical consumption. Rather, visitors were addressed by the spectacle in terms of a bodily, phenomenological experience of the world in which the visitor's habitation of space, kinesthetic awareness, and empathy are not only welcomed but necessary for the panorama to reach its full potential.

This emphasis on the visitor as a sensing body and not just as a perceiving eye becomes clear in examining contemporary nineteenth-century reviews of the panoramas. It was a standard trope of panorama criticism to conflate signified and signifier, writing as if what the panorama depicted was reality. Thus, rather than saying, "I've been to see the panorama of Athens," a critic might write, "I was in Athens". This rhetorical collapsing is consistent between reviews of Langlois's panoramas and those by his predecessor, Prévost<sup>43</sup>. What differs are the (re)viewers' experiences. For example, the critic of *Le Miroir* spends his essay on Prévost's panorama of nineteenth-century Athens discussing not the panorama but ancient Athenian history<sup>44</sup>. Similarly, the reviewer for *La Foudre* lectures about the requirements for citizenship in ancient Athens<sup>45</sup>. These writers are interested not in their experience at the panorama per se, but in their historical knowledge. The

panorama of nineteenth-century Athens acts as an index of the Ancient Greek past, visible in the painting only as ruins. Each writer appreciates the panorama in so far as he is emotionally detached from it, in the sense that the painted perspective allows the critic to formulate a mental perspective from which to better contemplate their own learning.

The descriptions of Prévost's panoramas are radically different from the reactions to Langlois's panorama, which emphasize the sensory immediacy of the illusion—its immersive and transportive quality. The writer for the *Gazette des ménages* recognizes his involvement in the panorama's drama and the shift which has occurred: "[...] move up a little, lean against the railing that holds you back, you will be an actor in this admirable scene. Between the cold stillness of the former panorama[s] of Prévost] and the smoldering canvas of Monsieur Langlois, there are worlds and centuries; there is the full distance between a labor of patience and a work of genius"<sup>46</sup>. The visitor's physical and conceptual immersion within the extended realm of the narrative made visitors aware of their embodied habitation of space in a way that Barker and Prévost's panoramas did not. In those panoramas, viewers' attention was externally directed. Ideally, they would be so fascinated with the spectacle and engrossed in the thoughts that it conjured that they forgot themselves.

In the case of Langlois's panoramas, the focus and interest dramatically shifted to the localized experience of the visitor-subject. The visitor is no longer looking at the spectacle as something separate and distinguishable as existing in its own discrete sphere of pictorial fiction. As in Merleau-Ponty's formulation of sensing, the visitor's active perception stimulated and was stimulated by received sensory input<sup>47</sup>. By emphasizing kinesthetic and spatial awareness, Langlois's panorama of the Battle of Navarino anchored the visitor's attention in the narrative and unmoored them from their reason, carrying them, however fleetingly, beyond themselves and beyond reality in a sublime moment of transcendence. This transportation beyond the self paradoxically occurred *through* the self<sup>48</sup>.

The Navarino panorama's engagement of multiple senses stands out in contemporary descriptions. One reviewer reported being greeted by the strong smell of tar on the "gun-deck". As a material used to seal hulls, tar was intrinsically associated with ships, ports, and the sea. Potent and unignorable, the smell would have helped to counter any wandering attention, snapping the thinking mind out of its thoughts and into the present moment of sensation. With scent closely allied to memory, the odor of tar was a sign that would viscerally evoke the experience of being at sea<sup>49</sup>. Visitors could also reach out and touch the cold, smooth cast-iron cannons, on which a thin sheen of condensed humidity whispered of the surrounding waters<sup>50</sup>. Drafts of cool air circulating through the rooms brushed against skin like a breeze. The temperature inside the rotunda was usually the same or lower than the exterior air, unwarmed as it was by the sun<sup>51</sup>.

Encouraged by these sensory aids that simultaneously focused the visitor's physical awareness and solicited their suspension of disbelief, the visitor's imagination could supply what was missing in the panorama's simulation of the naval battle. The *Gazette littéraire* testifies to the imaginative momentum created by these sensory cues in its review. "Navarino, where there are 60- and 80-gun ships, frigates, schooners; Turkish, French, and Russian ships; ships blasted sky-high, others sinking into the abyss; broken masts, dead men, slaves, blood, smoke, noise even—because there was noise, even if it is impossible for me to confirm that there was actually any in reality"<sup>52</sup>.

Here, in Langlois's panorama of the Battle of Navarino, imagination "enslaves the judgment," as Pseudo-Longinus had written some 1600 years earlier. The ability of the orator to use his own imagination properly gives him the ability to visualize his words and overwhelm the listener's reason, projecting that visualization into the listener's mind. "Under strong agitation and feeling, you seem to see the things you speak of, and bring them before the very eyes of the audience"<sup>53</sup>. The sublimity of the orator's message spills out of the spoken words and fills other senses as well, so that the listener "sees" what he is hearing. In the same way, Langlois employed his own imagination and the talents of his creative team of painters, carpenters, and craftsmen to create a visual illusion that overflowed the canvas and filled not only the rotunda but the building, enslaving the judgement of the audience just as Pseudo-Longinus had prescribed.

Indeed, the *Gazette des ménages* testifies that "the grandeur of the spectacle, the illusion it produced, the immensity of the composition overwhelmed us, transported us. Our eyes found themselves full of tears, our heart beat forcefully, as in the presence of that that which is truly beautiful, truly sublime"<sup>54</sup>. The panorama overwhelms the audience's reason by invading the viewer's personal physical space with the narrative. Thus, the *Gazette littéraire's* writer insists he could hear the silence ring with the noise of a battle.

In his memoirs, author and photographer Maxime du Camp recalls his intense reaction to the Navarino panorama as a child, filled with wonder and fear at everything he witnessed.

I still remember the emotion which seized me as, still a small child, I was taken to [...] a vast rotunda where I saw my first panorama by Langlois, that of the Battle of Navarino. It was extraordinary with animation, spirit, and fury. What tumult! But what silence! I was frightened by it. What! The column of water raised by the cannonballs never went down, the glow of the same cannon still burned, the captain of the ship, Milius, never lowered his arm raised in a gesture of command; this motionlessness turned me to ice, because I found it supernatural<sup>55</sup>.

Du Camp says he was "seized" with emotion, a verb which suggests being physically gripped, suddenly under the power of another. The silence and motionlessness are frightening because of their incongruity with the general sense of activity. In other words, the panorama in its entirety so effectively produced a convincing impression of motion and liveliness that the lack of sound and motion—a lack which is natural for a painting or object—seems disconcertingly *unnatural*. The material reality of the panorama as a space of paint, canvas, and wood, became unreal thanks to Langlois's meticulous orchestration of visual, spatial, haptic, and aromatic sensory cues that targeted kinesthetic and bodily awareness, plunging visitors into the battle, immersing them in the fiction, overwhelming their reason, and transporting them beyond the common and natural into the sublime and super-natural.

- 1 I am indebted to curator Caroline Joubert and all the staff at the Musée des Beaux Arts de Caen, without whose generous assistance this essay would not have been possible. I am also grateful to the staff of the library and Salle General Niox at the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, who went far out of their way to accommodate me and brought many new materials to my attention. Many thanks also to the peer reviewers of this article's initial draft for their feedback. Any errors are my own. For example, Huhtamo 2013; Robichon 1985: 78; Comment 1999: 67, 75.
- 2 Cinema is a descendent of the diorama, which, unlike panoramas, demanded a stationary audience whose positioning within a theater-like space had to be minimized in order for the spectacle – visible only directly in front of the audience through a large, window-like opening – to be successful in its claim to reality. For further discussion of the diorama, its positioning of the audience, and the socio-cultural implications of that positioning, see Crary 1990; 1999.
- 3 Merleau-Ponty 1945: 53, 209, 222.
- 4 Barthes 1968: 84-89.
- 5 While the present article is limited to the consideration of sensorily and spatially induced immersivity, the panorama as a medium is bound up with a myriad of issues like consumerism, imperialism and colonialism, race, gender, propaganda, etc. These themes are addressed by Charlesworth 2017; Comment 1999; Crary 1990; 1999; 2002; Hornstein 2017; Huhtamo 2013; Oleksijczuk 2000; 2011; Schwartz 1998; Wood 2001, among others.
- 6 Burke 1759; Stebbing & Pseudo-Longinus 1867.
- 7 For full discussion and examples of the immersive sublime, see Clute 2021.
- 8 Robert Barker, Apparatus for Exhibiting Pictures, Great Britain patent GB1612, issued July 3, 1787. Some sources, referencing Bapst 1891, incorrectly list June 16, 1787, as the patent's issue date. It is more likely the date that the patent was filed.
- 9 French patent no. 150, applied February 25, 1799, granted to Robert Fulton on April 26, 1799; "Panorama," *Journal des arts, de littérature et de commerce*, September 6, 1799.
- 10 "M. Prévost, peintre des Panoramas," obituary, *Le Miroir des spectacles, des lettres, des mœurs et des arts*, January 13, 1823: 3.
- 11 *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, July 20, 1825, 3; Bapst 1891: 19. The fate of Prévost's canvases is unknown.
- 12 The dates and details of Langlois's military training and career are given in his Légion d'Honneur record, dossier LH/1470/47.
- 13 Horace Vernet, August 22, 1818, pièce 57, dossier Langlois, Yh 163, Ministère de la Défense, Service historique de la Défense, Vincennes.
- 14 Vapereau 1858: 1025.
- 15 Miel 1817-1818: 346-347. Girodet's studio was located at number 51 or 55 rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, depending upon the source, cf. *Salon des artistes français* 1815: 44; Pérignon 1825: np.
- 16 Robichon 1992: 12-13; Letter from Langlois to a government minister, December 9, 1832, F21 8, Archives nationales, Paris, reprinted in Joubert & Robichon 2005: 61.
- 17 Jardin & Tudesq 1983: 68.
- 18 Vaulabelle 1869: v. 7, 401.
- 19 Chassériau 1845: v. 1, 401.
- 20 France had persuaded a reluctant Britain to seek the full emancipation of Greece rather than a mere cessation of hostilities. France also led a military expedition to Morea in 1828 to supervise the departure of the remaining Ottoman forces from the Peloponnese and to reconstruct destroyed infrastructure. Jardin & Tudesq 1983: 69; Ladimir & Moreau 1856: v. 5, 79-81.
- 21 Jardin & Tudesq 1983: 68-69.
- 22 E. C....x, "Beaux-Arts. Gravure", *L'Observateur*, December 29, 1827, 524-526.
- 23 The entry in the official Salon livret provided the title "Bataille de Navarin, site peint d'après nature, vue prise de la pointe sud de l'île de Sphactérie." The accompanying note gave the number and type of vessels comprising each navy, and the colors flown by each nation's vessels. *Salon des artistes français* 1831: 67.
- 24 The pseudo-documentary approach taken by Garneray is, to some extent, determined by its function as a government-commissioned commemoration of the battle, but this was also Garneray's typical artistic approach.
- 25 "Beaux-Arts", *Journal des débats*, May 14, 1831. "On y a observé l'exactitude presque religieuse avec laquelle l'auteur a su conserver aux bâtiments des deux flottes, [...] les places respectives qu'elles occupaient. Ce mérite, si recommandable dans un sujet de cette nature, a peut-être mis un peu de froid dans l'ensemble de la composition; mais, pour nous, nous préférons de beaucoup cette retenue dans la peinture d'un sujet où les moindres détails ont une grande importance historique, au vague et à la confusion que l'on aurait pu y mettre en cherchant à produire plus d'effet."
- 26 Comparison with an engraving after Langlois's painting confirms the fidelity of Bouterwerk's copy to Langlois's original.
- 27 *Salon des artistes français* 1831. The Salon included two other paintings by another *peintre officiel*

- de la marine, Louis Philippe Crépin, depicting the battle and its aftermath.
- 28 *Salon des artistes français* 1827. This does not appear to be the case with Garneray's painting, however, as the May 14, 1831, *Journal des Débats* reports, "cette dernière composition a déjà été offerte au public une ou deux fois."
- 29 *Gazette de France*, January 24, 1831, 3.
- 30 Clute 2021: 164-165, n. 578; Robichon 1982: 648.
- 31 Hittorff 1842: 7-8.
- 32 Hoefer 1866: 431-432.
- 33 Bapst 1891: 23; Comment 1999: 48. This was especially a problem in the London panoramas, according to Hittorff 1842: 11-12.
- 34 Comment 1999: 48.
- 35 Wood 2001: 102-103. See also Oleksijczuk 2000.
- 36 Hornstein (2017: 108) suggests that Langlois used "seventy-four decommissioned cannons provided by the French navy". This is impossible for multiple reasons, not least because the panorama's structure would be crushed by the weight of 74 naval cannon, totaling 125 to 2738 tons, depending on the model. The simulated gun-deck in the panorama held only 18 cannons, likely a combination of one or two real cannon or papier-mâché props, painted flats, and a *trompe-l'œil* mural representing a long deck with additional cannon.
- 37 "Panorama de la bataille de Navarin", *Journal des artistes*, January 30, 1831. "Voyez; nous sommes dans la batterie de 18; voici la chambre du conseil; le branle-bas de combat a été ordonné, et la cloison qui sépare ordinairement la chambre de la batterie a été enlevée. À la gauche, autrement dit, à babord [sic], nous voyons la batterie dans toute sa longueur, les pièces en fonte dont une ne pèse pas moins d'un millier, les boulets qui tuent pour de bon, etc., etc."
- 38 "Panorama de la bataille de Navarin", *Journal des artistes*, January 30, 1831. "Un petit escalier, qui remplace l'échelle, nous conduit dans l'entre-pont [sic]. Voici la salle à manger du commandant, et sa galerie; tous les meubles et ustensiles sont à la place qu'ils doivent occuper: les longues vues, la boussole, les tables à roulis, etc. À droite, ou à tribord, voici l'office. À gauche, est un hamac de matelot suspendu près de la chambre du capitaine. Un nouvel escalier nous conduit sur la dunette. De là nous allons voir le combat."
- 39 Although the *Scipion* belonged to the 74-gun class, it was actually equipped with 82 cannon, as was the case with several other ships-of-the-line at the time. Chassériau 1845: vol. 1, 401.
- 40 Of the nineteenth-century sources, Bapst 1891: 23 and Bourseul 1874: 14 claim the platform is the authentic *Scipion*. The January 30, 1831, issue of *Journal des artistes* (82) and Hittorff 1842: 8 seem to assert that the platform was entirely new, having no material relation to the real ship. Among modern scholars, Schwartz 1998: 154 believes the platform to be the actual *Scipion* whereas Robichon 1985: 59 and Hornstein 2017: 108 side with Hittorff.
- 41 Kant 1781: §28.
- 42 Wood 2001: 102-103.
- 43 For example, a review in the *Gazette littéraire* begins, "je viens d'assister au combat de Navarin".
- 44 "Panorama d'Athènes", *Le Miroir*, November 21, 1821.
- 45 Le Bédouillère [pseud.], "Le Panorama d'Athènes," *La Foudre*, 1821, 8-13.
- 46 "Panorama de Navarin", *Gazette des ménages*, no. 21, February 17, 1831, 81. "[...] avancez un peu, poussez la barrière qui vous retient, vous serez acteur de cette admirable scène. Entre la froide immobilité du vieux Panorama et la toile brûlante de M. Langlois, il y a des mondes et des siècles; il y a toute la distance d'un travail de patience à une œuvre de génie".
- 47 Merleau-Ponty 1945: I, §3, II, §§1-2.
- 48 Cf. Jones 2006.
- 49 Hertz & Schooler 2002.
- 50 The possibility of touching the cannons comes from the review in the *Gazette littéraire*, which says: "dans une véritable batterie de dix-huit canons; comptez-les si cela vous convient, touchez-les si la fantaisie vous en prend[...]" The condensation is my own extrapolation based on observation of the ambient temperatures inside extant panorama rotundas.
- 51 This is the case in extant panorama rotundas as well. Even the small Wocher-Panorama in Thun, Switzerland, which was rebuilt in the 1960s, is unheated. Visitors are offered blankets to keep warm while inside, and the panorama is closed during the winter months.
- 52 *Gazette littéraire*, March 3, 1831, 220. "Navarin, ou il y avait des vaisseaux de 60 et 80 canons des frégates, des goélettes, des embarcations turques, françaises et russes, des navires crevés et sautant aux nues, d'autres s'abimant dans les flots, des mats brisés, des hommes tués, des esclaves, du sang, de la fumée, du bruit même, car il y avait du bruit, bien qu'il me soit impossible d'affirmer qu'il y en ait eu réellement".
- 53 Stebbing & Pseudo-Longinus 1867: 57.
- 54 "Panorama de Navarin", *Gazette des ménages*, no. 21, February 17, 1831, 81: "La grandeur du spectacle, l'illusion produite, l'immensité de la composition nous ont dès l'abord saisis, transportés;

nos yeux se sont trouvés pleins de larmes, notre cœur battait avec force, comme en présence de tout ce qui est vraiment beau, vraiment sublime”.

55 Du Camp 1883: 143-144. “Je me rappelle encore l’émotion dont je fus saisi, lorsque, étant petit enfant, on me conduisit, aux environs du boulevard du Temple, dans une vaste rotonde où je vis pour la première fois un panorama de Langlois, qui était celui de la bataille de Navarin. C’était extraordinaire d’animation, de fougue et d’emportement. Quel tumulte! Mais quel silence! j’en fus effrayé. Quoi! La colonne d’eau soulevée par les boulets ne s’affaisse jamais, la lucur du même canon brille toujours, le capitaine de vaisseau Milius n’abaisse pas son bras dresse par un geste de commandement; cette immobilité me glaçait, car je la trouvais surnaturelle”.