

# Diderot, Rousseau and the politics of the arts in the Enlightenment

GERARDO TOCCHINI



CONCOURS pour le PRIX de l'Étude des TÊTES et de l'EXPRESSION.  
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In mid-eighteenth-century Paris, the Encyclopedists launched a campaign to radically redefine the public dimension of all 'imaginative' arts, starting with music – with the *querelle des bouffons* – then theatre, the novel and finally the visual arts. *Diderot, Rousseau and the politics of the arts in the Enlightenment* exposes the correlation between the prejudices and hierarchies of the political and social system of the time and what D'Alembert calls 'literary superstitions'. The book reconstructs the role of Diderot and Rousseau, *frères ennemis*, as they engaged in a dispute that was above all else political, despite revolving entirely around forms of artistic expression. Throwing a light on this important cultural event is all the more necessary because the essentially political dimension of Diderot's *Salons* has since the nineteenth century been completely obscured from view. Indeed, at first misunderstood and then totally neglected, for over two centuries their true significance has been systematically ignored by the aesthetic-idealist school of criticism.

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