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The Museum of French Monuments 1795-1816: 'Killing art to make history' (Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1400-1952)

Alexandra Stara

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The first volume in two centuries on Alexandre Lenoir's Museum of French Monuments in Paris, this study presents a comprehensive picture of a seminal project of French Revolutionary cultural policy, one crucial to the development of the modern museum institution. The book offers a new critical perspective of the Museum's importance and continuing relevance to the history of material culture and collecting, through juxtaposition with its main opponent, the respected connoisseur and theorist QuatremÃ¨re de Quincy. This innovative approach highlights the cultural and intellectual context of the debate, situating it in the dilemmas of emerging modernity, the idea of nationhood, and changing attitudes to art and its histories. Open only from 1795 to 1816, the Museum of French Monuments was at once popular and controversial. The salvaged sculptures and architectural fragments that formed its collection presented the first chronological panorama of French art, which drew the public; it also drew the ire of critics, who saw the Museum as an offense against the monuments' artistic integrity. Underlying this localized conflict were emerging ideas about the nature of art and its relationship to history, which still define our understanding of notions of heritage, monument, and the museum.

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