

**Antiquity Matters!**  
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**Stiff Upper Bodies: The Use of Greek Combat Sport in Early Victorian Art.**

Early Victorian representations of the struggling male body in art have their foundations in the Classical casts at the Royal Academy, where aspiring artists would have to copy from representations of statues such as the *Laocoön* and *Pancrastinae* (or *Wrestlers*) to gain entry into the school. This paper is a discussion of how these works influenced three of the period's painters; William Mulready, John Everett Millais and William Etty, as well as how their own works representing the struggling male body were interpreted by audiences of the time. The events of the Napoleonic Wars and French Revolution caused many areas of British life to come under scrutiny due to fear of a growing 'national effeminacy'. As such the combat sports, as well as the art world, were seen as a way to offer an image of national strength for the people of Britain. At the same time, the high climate of satire in paintings and the press, lead to questions over these representations; does the struggling male body display the strength of the nation, or a subversive look at the underlying weakness of such displays? By coming to grips with these images of grappling in the works of Mulready, Millais and Etty this paper will attempt to illustrate how classical representations of the struggling male were both idealised and utilised for national strength, and at the same time questioned and satirised by those who depicted them.