Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Nineteenth Century European Art
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Chapter Five

The Arts under Napoleon

In 1799 Jacques-Louis David organized a special exhibition to present to the public *The Sabine Women* (FIG. 5-1), a monumental painting on a Classical theme. The exhibition, for which he charged an entrance fee, was held in a meeting room in the Louvre, which the government had placed at the artist's disposal. Measuring nearly 13 feet by 18, *The Sabine Women* occupied one long wall of the room. Against the opposite wall, David had placed a large mirror, in which visitors saw themselves reflected against the backdrop of the painting. Becoming one with the painted figures, even if only for a moment, must have given them a heightened sense of the actuality of the painted scene.

Although paying exhibitions of contemporary art were common in Britain in the late eighteenth century (see page 79), they were unprecedented in France. The Academy had traditionally prohibited such initiatives, believing that commerce would taint the ideals of the artistic profession. Since this institution had been abolished in 1793, David did not break any existing rules, but he was severely criticized by those who felt that it was wrong to put a price on seeing art.

For David, charging a fee was a necessity. He had painted *The Sabine Women* without a commission or the prospect of a buyer. The painting had taken him nearly five years, on and off, to complete. During this time, his own political situation had changed dramatically. In 1794 the ruling Jacobin party, of which he had been a prominent member, had been defeated, and David was thrown in jail. While he was imprisoned, Maximilien de Robespierre (1758–1794), president of the Jacobin-controlled National Convention, was executed. His virtual dictatorship was replaced by a representative government, led by five executive Directors.

After Robespierre's "reign of terror," an eleven-month period in which 17,000 people were guillotined, the Directory (1795–9) was a period of healing and reconciliation. David's *The Sabine Women* was intended as a metaphor for this process. The painting represents a scene from the legendary beginnings of Rome, recounted by the Greek writer Plutarch. Romulus, the founder of Rome, organized a large feast, to which he invited the neighboring clan of the Sabines. At the end of the feast, the Romans, who had a shortage of females, abducted the Sabine women and made them their wives. Three years later the Sabines attacked Rome in revenge. The battle would have been disastrous for both sides, had not the Sabine women intervened. Throwing themselves and their children between the combatants, they called for reconciliation. They showed the men that the children were a compelling reason to make peace, for they were both Roman and Sabine.

David's painting shows the opposing parties against the backdrop of Rome. Dominating the fray are the Roman

Jacques-Louis David, *The Coronation of Napoleon in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame,* 1805–7. (Detail of FIG. 5-12.)

5-1 **Jacques-Louis David,** *The Sabine Women*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 12′8″ x 17′2″ (3.85 x 5.22 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

leader Romulus, on the right, and the Sabine leader Tatius, on the left. The two are preparing to duel, when the beautiful Hersilia, the daughter of Tatius and the wife of Romulus, intervenes, stretching out her arms as if to push them apart. A powerful and dynamic figure, Hersilia seems to embody the idea of peace—not as the mere absence of war, but as something worth struggling for. Hersilia is not the only woman to throw herself into the melee. All around her, women and children stand in front of the combatants to block them; some grab the men's legs to prevent them from fighting.

David's *The Sabine Women* has often been compared with *The Oath of the Horatii*, exhibited fifteen years earlier. Both paintings show events from Roman history, involving a war between the Romans and a neighboring clan. While *The Oath of the Horatii* extols such "masculine" virtues as patriotism, courage, and honor, however, *The Sabine Women* seems to celebrate the more "feminine" concerns of family, peace, and collective harmony. Emphasizing women's essential roles of life givers and nurturers, the painting suggests that peace and love, not war, hatred, and destruction, guarantee the survival of human civilization. In so doing, it reflects the changed socio-political climate of the Directory, when the French people abandoned the pursuit of the lofty, puritanical ideals of the revolution for the more "humble" concerns of safety and happiness.

The Rise of Napoleon

In spite of a promising beginning, the Directory was ultimately unable to deal with the many problems that plagued the republic. In 1799, the year in which David exhibited *The Sabine Women*, a parliamentary coup ended the government. The uprising was led by one of the Directors, with the military backing of a young general named Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821). A new government, called the Consulate, was introduced. It called for a stronger, more effective executive branch comprising three consuls, the first of whom held most of the power. Within days of the coup, Napoleon had emerged as a leader, becoming First Consul in 1800, and again in 1802, when he was granted this position for life by a national referendum. Still not satisfied, in 1804 Napoleon assumed the title of Emperor, an action that ensured that his power would eventually be inherited by his son.

As First Consul, and later as Emperor, Napoleon had two main concerns. First, he intended to reform completely the administrative duties of the French state. This involved reorganizing national and regional governments, drawing up a civil legal system (the so-called Napoleonic code), and revamping all civil services, including police, mail delivery, tax collection, and public education.

Second, Napoleon sought to establish a French hegemony throughout the world. When he came to power, France was still involved in a war, begun by the revolutionary government, against an anti-French coalition of several European countries. Through a series of military conquests, and some clever diplomacy, Napoleon ended this war with the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. Peace was not his final goal, however; rather, he saw the treaty as a means of expanding France's power. In the hope of creating markets for French goods abroad, he intended to establish colonies and trading posts around the world. This brought him into renewed conflict with several European powers, which eventually resulted in war and Napoleon's conquest of the greater part of western and central Europe.

At the height of his power, in 1810, Napoleon ruled over all the countries on the western coast of Europe, from the Netherlands in the north to the Iberian peninsula in the south, as well as over Italy, Austria, and most of modern-day Germany and Poland. Napoleon's hegemony came to an end in 1814, when, attacked on all fronts, France capitulated and the emperor was officially deposed. Exiled to the Mediterranean island of Elba, he attempted a comeback in 1815. But he was defeated at Waterloo in modern-day Belgium and exiled again after less than four months—a period known as the Hundred Days.

Vivant Denon and the Napoleon Museum

Having risen from complete obscurity to the height of power, Napoleon was the quintessential upstart, who felt the need to bolster his persona and his regime through vast amounts of propaganda. Thus he turned to the arts, not because he felt a particular affinity for them but because he realized their enormous promotional potential. During Napoleon's reign, numerous buildings and monuments emblematic of his power were constructed. Many canvases were painted showing his likeness, or presenting glorified images of his government and military exploits.

While Napoleon took an intense interest in these projects, he delegated most of the details to Dominique Vivant Denon (1747–1825). The Emperor had known Denon, an amateur artist and collector, since his early years as a general. In 1799, when Napoleon had led an army to conquer Egypt for France, Denon had joined the expedition as an "artist-reporter," charged with the visual recording of aspects of the campaign.

It was to Denon that Napoleon entrusted the creation of the most spectacular monument to his military might, the Napoleon Museum. Housed in the Louvre, one of the former royal palaces in Paris, this museum comprised the royal collections, confiscated after the revolution, in addition to hundreds, if not thousands, of art works pillaged

Napoleonic Battles

Napoleon's fame as a general was linked to a series of military victories, the names of which, to this day, have a ring of success. Their reputation was vastly enhanced by their glorification through architectural monuments, sculptures, and paintings, which lent them lasting renown. Because of the enormous propaganda that surrounded his victories, Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo became an event of worldwide importance.

Battle of Marengo, June 14, 1800. Victory over the Austrians in northern Italy.

Battle of Ulm, September 25–October 20, 1805. Major strategic triumph over the Austrians in Germany.

Battle of Austerlitz, December 2, 1805. Also called the Battle of the Three Emperors, since it involved, besides Napoleon, the emperors of Austria and Russia. Napoleon's greatest victory, because his 68,000 troops defeated almost 90,000 Russians and Austrians.

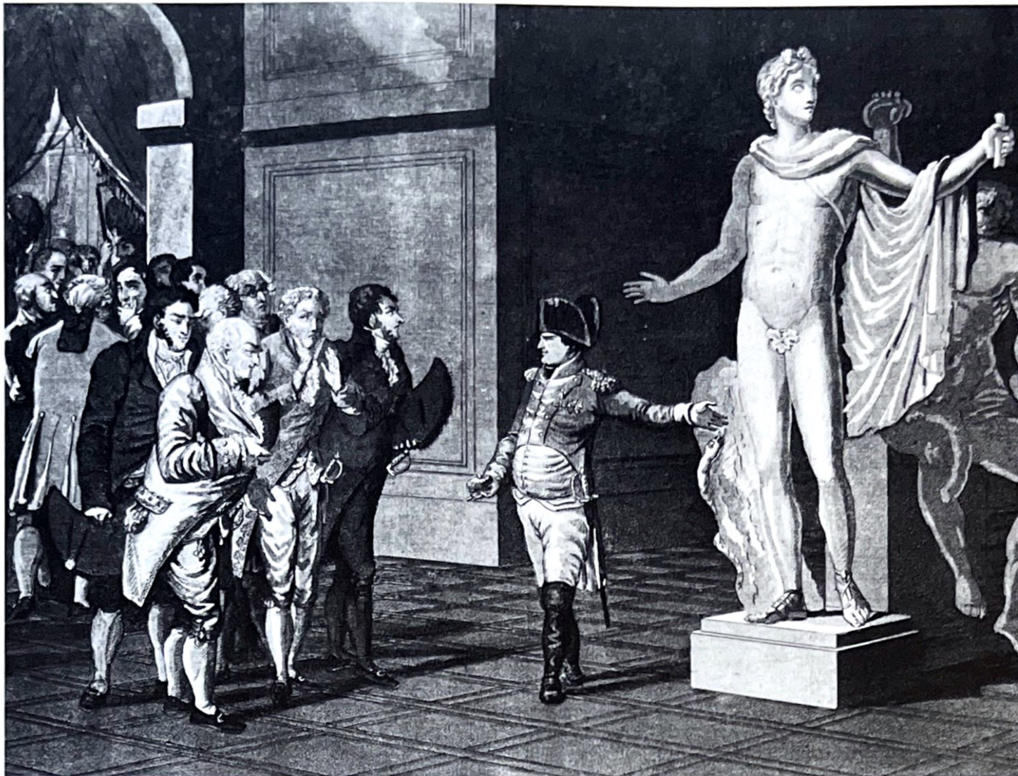
Battle of Jena, October 14, 1806. Napoleon devastated the Prussian army.

Battle of Eylau, February 7–8, 1807. The battle was fought against the Russians and the Prussians in East Prussia, some twenty miles south of present-day Kaliningrad (Russia) and resulted in a stalemate. Each army lost between 18,000 and 25,000 men.

Battle of Wagram, July 5–6, 1809. Victory over the Austrians, which led to the Treaty of Schönbrunn.

Battle of Borodino, September 7, 1812. Battle against the Russians, in which Napoleon won by a narrow margin. The Russian army was able to regroup, however, and eventually managed to drive the French out of Russia.

Battle of Waterloo, June 18, 1815. Napoleon's final battle, fought in modern-day Belgium against the combined forces of the international coalition that had formed against him. Napoleon's defeat ended the Hundred Days of his restoration after his escape from exile on Elba.



5-2 **Anonymous,** *Napoleon Bonaparte Showing the Apollo Belvedere to his Deputies*, c.1899. Etching with aquatint, 15⅓ x 16" (39 x 41cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Départment des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.

5-3 (below) **Jacques Gondouin and Jean-Baptiste Lepère,** Vendôme Column, 1806–11. Bronze plaques on masonry core, height 130' (43.5 m). Place Vendôme, Paris.

from the countries that Napoleon had conquered. At its height, the museum contained the cream of European art, including such famous Classical sculptures as the *Apollo Belvedere* and the *Laocoön*, and important Renaissance and Baroque works. These included Raphael's *Transfiguration* (now in the Vatican Pinacoteca, Rome), Paolo Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* (still in the Louvre today), Jan and Hubert van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (Church of St Bavo, Ghent), and Peter Paul Rubens's famous triptychs *The Raising of the Cross* and *The Descent from the Cross* (both in Antwerp Cathedral).

While contemporary visitors were awed by the living art history lesson taught by the Napoleon Museum, Napoleon himself used it to advertise the prestige and wealth that his military conquests had brought to France. A contemporary print shows Napoleon as First Consul, leading some visitors through the museum (FIG. 5-2). Stopping at the *Apollo Belvedere*, he proudly says: "There it is, gentlemen, two million."

Napoleonic Public Monuments

To commemorate his military exploits, Napoleon initiated several sculptural and architectural monuments in Paris. Perhaps the most important of these was the Vendôme Column (FIG. 5-3), a 130-foot-high bronze column decorated with a spiraling sculptural relief. The monument was designed and executed by a team of architects and sculptors, coordinated by Vivant Denon. The immediate occasion for the column was Napoleon's famous victory at Austerlitz, where, in 1805, he had defeated the combined armies

5-4 Trajan's Column, 113 CE. Marble, height 125' (38.1 m). Rome.

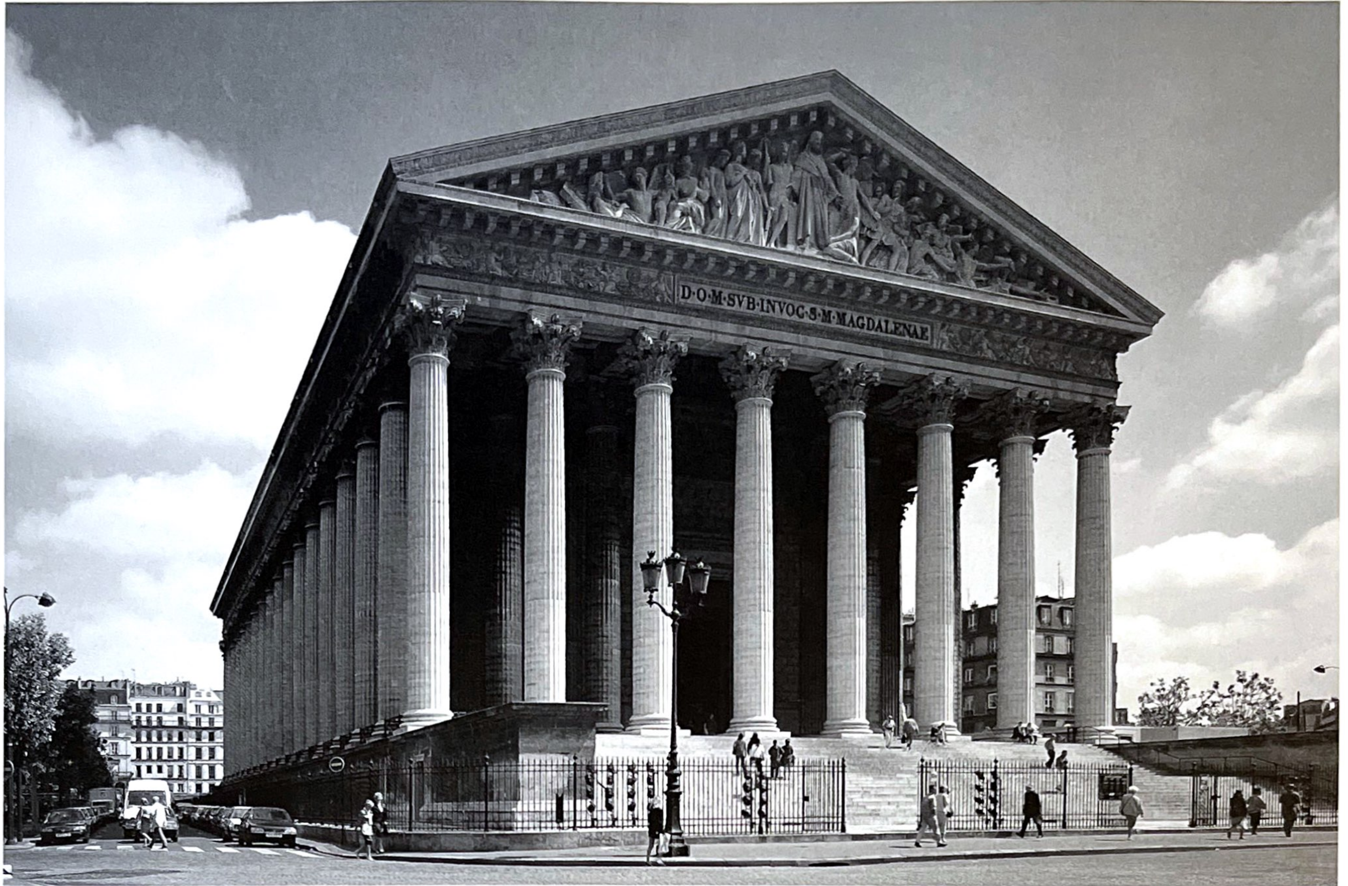
of Austria and Russia (see *Napoleonic Battles*, page 113). The bronze for the monument came from confiscated enemy cannons. Originally called the Column of the Great Army, it was erected in one of Paris's most famous squares, the Place Vendôme. The location was significant because here, earlier, had stood an equestrian statue of Louis XVI, destroyed by revolutionaries in 1792.

The Vendôme Column was inspired by Trajan's Column in Rome (FIG. 5-4), which commemorated the ancient Roman Emperor Trajan's victory over the Dacians—a people who lived in eastern Europe. Both columns were decorated with reliefs depicting in each case the emperor's military exploits and surmounted by his full-length portrait. Like Trajan, Napoleon was attired in Roman military dress.

Because of its assertive claim for imperial power, the Vendôme Column became one of the most contested monuments of nineteenth-century Paris, particularly after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. With every new regime, the column was altered until, during the Commune of 1871, it was dismantled (see page 373). Reconstructed some years later, however, it can again be seen in Paris today.

The Vendôme Column illustrates Napoleon's strong identification with the ancient Roman emperors. Like them, he saw himself as both a civic and a military leader. Moreover, at the height of his power, he ruled over a territory that roughly overlapped with the Roman Empire. Napoleon's preoccupation with Roman imperialism explains his general preference for Roman rather than Greek art. In addition to the Vendôme Column, two other monuments, initiated during Napoleon's rule, emulate the architecture of imperial Rome. The first was the Arc de Triomphe (FIG. 5-5), an enor-

5-5 **Jean-François Chalgrin,** Arc de Triomphe, 1806–36. Limestone, height 164' (50 m). Place de l'Etoile, Paris.



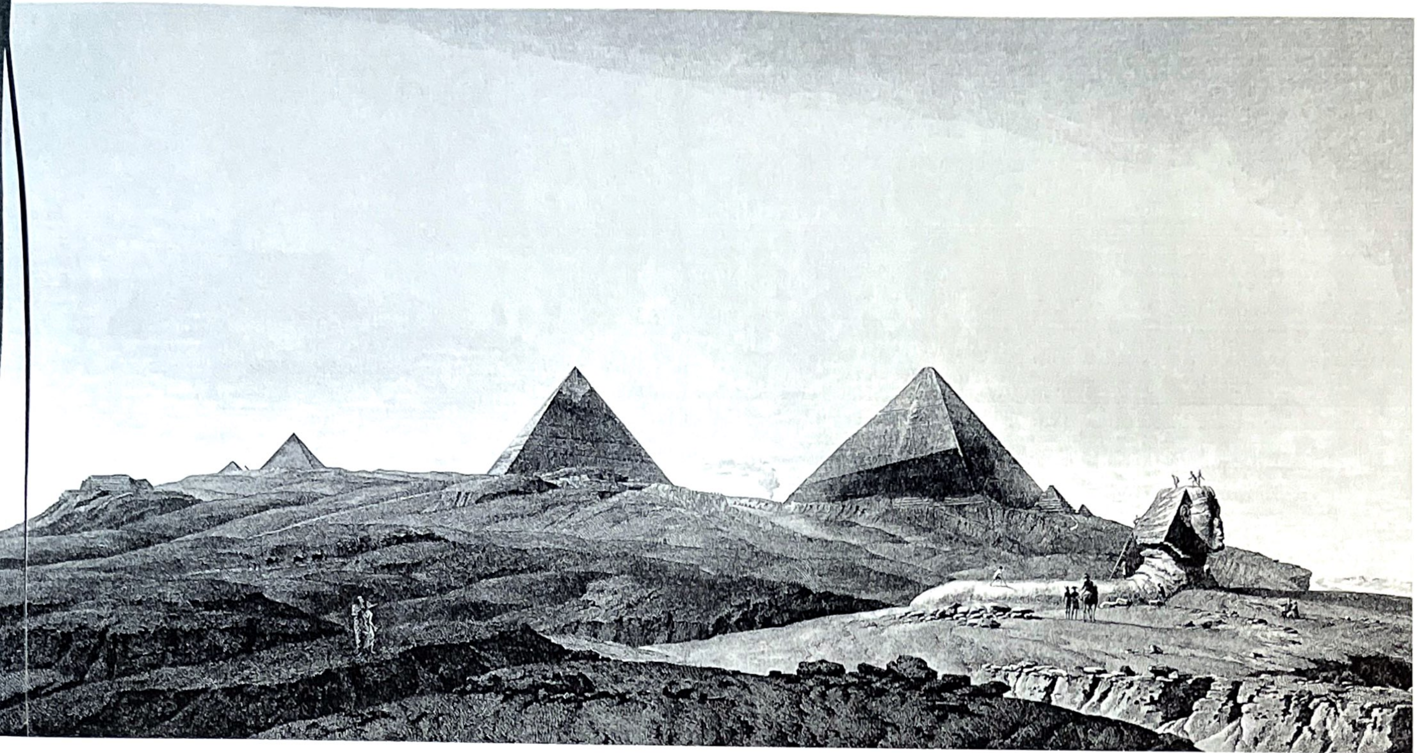
5-6 **Alexandre-Pierre Vignon,** Church of La Madeleine, south front, 1807–45. Place de la Madeleine, Paris.

mous stone monument designed by the architect Jean-François Chalgrin (1739–1811) after the example of a Roman triumphal arch. Standing at the intersection of five major roads, including the famous Champs Elysées, its placement was carefully calculated for maximum visual effect (for more on this monument, see page 229). The other was a "Temple of Glory," to honor French soldiers. Designed by the architect Alexandre-Pierre Vignon (1763–1828), this building took the form of a Roman temple, complete with the tall platform and colossal, monolithic Corinthian columns typical of Roman religious architecture. Neither monument had been completed at the time of Napoleon's fall. The arch was finished in 1836, during the July Monarchy (see page 225). The would-be temple was completed according to its original design, and turned into a church, called La Madeleine (FIG. 5.6).

Empire Style

Napoleon's preference for ancient Roman art led to the so-called Empire style, often seen as the final phase of Neoclassicism. This style was indebted to monumental Roman architecture and sculpture, and also used elements derived from Egyptian art. As a young general, in 1798, Napoleon had led an expedition to Egypt which was intended to wrest control of the Ottoman Empire from the British (see page 208). Although the Egyptian campaign was a military failure, it led to an upsurge of interest in Egypt, thanks in large part to the publications of artists and scholars who had accompanied Napoleon on his campaign. Vivant Denon, who had joined the expedition as a recording artist, published his popular *Voyages dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* (Travels in Lower and Upper Egypt) in 1802. A more scientific and comprehensive *Description d'Egypte* (Description of Egypt) in twenty-one volumes was published between 1809 and 1828 by a team of scholars working for Napoleon.

The richly illustrated tomes resulting from the Egyptian expeditions (FIG. 5-7) fostered an interest in Egyptian art among artists and designers. The influence was felt most strongly in the decorative arts. Napoleon's residences in the palaces of Compiègne, Saint-Cloud, and Malmaison (the last inhabited by his first wife, Joséphine) were furnished and decorated in a hybrid style, typical of the Empire period, containing both Classical and Egyptian elements. A washstand (FIG. 5-8) at Malmaison combines a Classical Roman tripod construction and stylized Greek "palmette" motifs (on the pitcher and washbowl) with Egyptian gilded bronze sphinxes. The use of luxurious materials, including mahogany, gilded bronze, and Sèvres porcelain, is also characteristic of the Empire style. The



5-7 (above) *General View of Pyramids and Sphinx, at Sunset.* Illustration in *Description d'Egypte* (vol. v, *Antiquities*, pl. 8), 1822. Private Collection, London.

5-8 Washstand. Mahogany and gilt bronze, with Sèvres porcelain pitcher and washbowl, 1802. Height 11" (96 cm). Musée du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, France.

washstand was kept in Empress Joséphine's bedroom at Malmaison (FIG. 5-9), which exemplifies the Empire style in its solemn richness and the predominance of red and gold tones. Empire interiors such as this have, as one writer put it, "both the cold splendor of an Egyptian tomb and the sumptuousness of the Byzantine."

The Imperial Image

Throughout his reign Napoleon commissioned a large number of paintings that were strategically planned to glorify his military exploits and to exalt his qualities of leader, administrator, and protector. It was part of his stated policy that art should treat subjects "of national character," that is, subjects that extolled the French nation, of which he himself was firmly at the helm.

More than any eighteenth-century ruler, Napoleon appears to have understood the potential of the Salon as a vehicle for propaganda; nearly all of the paintings he commissioned were exhibited there. It was a public forum where he could "post" visual messages that reached the crowds of people who visited the exhibition. The Salon, moreover, was fully covered by newspapers, which publicized the event even to those who did not see the works in person. Once the Salon was over and the commissioned works were returned to the state, they were frequently installed in museums or public buildings for everyone to enjoy. Inexpensive print reproductions of the most famous works were distributed throughout the Empire.

Ironically, the first heroic image of Napoleon was not commissioned by the great man himself but by King Charles IV of Spain (ruled 1788–1808), who intended *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at the Saint-Bernard Pass* (FIG. 5-10) for his

OPPOSITE
5-9 **Louis-Martin Berthault,** Empress Joséphine's Bedroom, c.1810. Musée du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison.

5-10 **Jacques-Louis David,** *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at the Saint-Bernard Pass*, 1800–01. Oil on canvas, 8'11" x 7'11" (2.72 x 2.41 m). Musée National du Château de Versailles, Versailles.

gallery of portraits of great military leaders. Proud to be included in that famous gallery, Napoleon immediately ordered several copies for himself. He also demanded that he be painted "sitting calmly on a spirited horse." The artist entrusted with the portrait was no other than David, who had made a quick portrait sketch of Napoleon two years earlier, when the general had visited his studio. This turned out to be a lucky coincidence as Napoleon refused to sit for his portrait, because, as he said, "No one inquires whether portraits of great men are likenesses. It is enough if their genius lives on in them."

The commission for *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at the Saint-Bernard Pass* was triggered by the general's celebrated victory in 1800 on the Marengo plain in northern Italy, where he had crushed the Austrian army (see *Napoleonic Battles*, page 113). Napoleon had led 28,000 men across several Alpine passes, including the treacherous Saint-Bernard pass. Such a feat had been accomplished only twice before in history, once by the Carthaginian general Hannibal in 218 BCE and another time by the Frankish king, and later emperor, Charlemagne, in 773 CE. To remind the viewer of these famous antecedents, Napoleon had David inscribe the names of Hannibal and Charlemagne on the rocks in the foreground, together with his own.

In David's portrait, Napoleon is poised on a rearing horse, which he controls, flawlessly, with only one hand. The scene is clearly contrived, since Napoleon is known to have crossed the Alps on a mule. The motif of a ruler on a rearing horse had been introduced by the Venetian painter Titian in the late sixteenth century. It was perfected in the seventeenth century by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599–1660).

5-11 **Etienne-Marie Falconet,** *Peter the Great*, 1766–82. Bronze on granite base, twice life-size. Decembrists' Square, St Petersburg.

5-12 **Jacques-Louis David,** *The Coronation of Napoleon in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame,* 1805–7. Oil on canvas, 20'8" x 32'1" (6.29 x 9.79 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

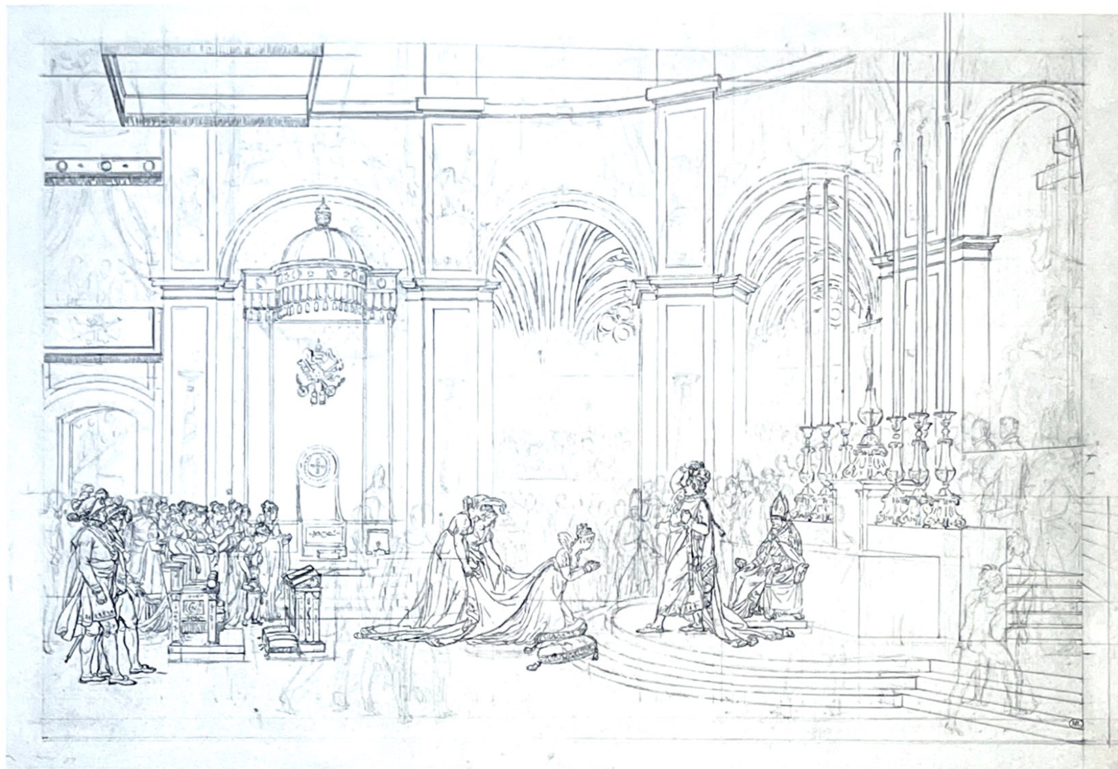
In these two artists' portraits of the Spanish monarch Philip IV (ruled 1621–65), the king's easy manipulation of a spirited animal serves as a metaphor for his skilful control of an unruly nation.

Napoleon undoubtedly had these portraits in mind when he ordered David to paint him "sitting calmly on a spirited horse." He and David may also have recalled the famed "Bronze Horseman," the equestrian statue of *Peter the Great* (FIG. 5-11), erected in St Petersburg by Falconet (see p. 24) in the years 1766–82. In this sculpture, as in David's painting, Czar Peter and his horse scale a mountainous rock, demonstrating courage in the face of adversity. While Peter the Great wears civilian clothes, however, Napoleon is shown as a military leader, urging his soldiers on with his outstretched right arm.

On the strength of this portrait and on account of his reputation as one of the greatest living painters in Europe, David was appointed First Painter to the Emperor immediately after Napoleon assumed the title. His main commission was to commemorate the crowning ceremony with a huge painting (FIG. 5-12). The coronation of Napoleon and Joséphine on December 2, 1804, was carefully planned by Napoleon. No less a figure than the Pope was to put the crown on his head. Thus he intended to create a historic link between his rule and that of Charlemagne, the first emperor of France, who had been crowned by the Pope roughly one thousand years earlier. Yet, while Charlemagne had traveled to Rome to be crowned, Napoleon made Pius VII come to Paris. During the ceremony, in a final affront to papal dignity, he did not wait for the Pope to place the crown on his head, but impatiently took it from him and crowned himself. In David's first sketch of the coronation (FIG. 5-13), this moment is represented, no doubt at Napoleon's request. The Emperor was later persuaded that it would be more tactful to commemorate another episode, in which he placed the crown on the head of his wife, Joséphine.

The Coronation of Napoleon took almost three years to paint. Measuring some 20 feet by 30, it is composed of more than one hundred life-size portraits, many of them full-length. The composition is carefully orchestrated to reflect each person's power and rank. It was thus a reflection of the actual ceremony, which had likewise been planned according to the strictest protocol. The painting does not, however, represent the coronation exactly as it happened. For instance, Napoleon's mother, Maria-Letizia, did not attend the ceremony, since she was angry with Napoleon over his treatment of his younger brother Lucien. Yet in David's painting she sits on a low balcony in the center. Her presence was necessary in the official portrait, because the Emperor had everything to gain by emphasizing family unity.

Together with Napoleon, the Empress Joséphine takes center stage in the painting. Kneeling to receive her crown,



5-13 **Jacques-Louis David,** *Perspective Study for the Coronation of Napoleon*, undated. Pencil, pen, and ink, 20'7" x 32' (6.29 x 9.79 m). Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris.

she wears a gold-embroidered white dress with an enormous red velvet train, studded with golden bees (Napoleon's emblem) and lined with ermine fur. The Emperor stands on a platform so that, short as he is, he towers over the archbishop of Paris, on his right, and over Pius VII, who is seated behind him.

Upon its completion, *The Coronation* was exhibited at the Salon of 1808, where it was widely admired by the public and by David's fellow artists, who placed a laurel wreath underneath it. David had his share of critics as well, many of them former revolutionaries who felt that the artist had abandoned the revolutionary cause to become a spineless courtier. What had happened to David, the radical painter of Brutus and of Marat? In truth, he was no different from numerous other revolutionaries who had enthusiastically welcomed Napoleon as the first outstanding revolutionary leader, and who went along with him even as he terminated the republic and assumed a power that surpassed that of the former kings.

David was not the only painter harnessed to shaping the Emperor's public image. Many of his contemporaries became rivals for imperial commissions. David's student François Gérard (1770–1837), for instance, was commissioned to paint Napoleon wearing his imperial robe, to be distributed in painted and engraved copies throughout the French empire (FIG. 5-14). This recalled earlier portraits from the *ancien régime*, such as the official portrait of the "Sun King" Louis XIV (see FIG. 1-1) by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743).

5-14 **François Gérard,** *Napoleon the Great*. Reproduction of the artist's official portrait, known in multiple versions. Engraving by Auguste Desnoyers. Musée du Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison.

Prud'hon, another contemporary, was commissioned in 805 to paint a monumental portrait of Empress Joséphine FIG. 5-15). Since he often took years to finish a painting, he work was not completed until 1809, the year in which Napoleon decided to divorce his wife because she had not borne him any children. The portrait was thus not shown at the Salon of 1810, the year in which Napoleon married his second wife, Marie-Louise of Austria. Joséphine is seated on a mossy rock, presumably in the garden surrounding the château at Malmaison. She wears a high-waisted, low-cut dress in the Empire fashion. A red cashmere shawl protects her from the rock's damp coldness and

-15 **Pierre Paul Prud'hon,** *Portrait of Empress Joséphine*. 1805–9. Oil on canvas, 8' x 5'10" (2.44 x 1.79 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

5-16 **Pierre Paul Prud'hon,** *The King of Rome Sleeping,* 1811. Oil on canvas, 18⅛ x 22" (46 x 55.8 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

strikes a bright note in a painting that shows mainly dark and muted colors.

In the nineteenth century Joséphine's pensive expression and her pose, which echoes traditional allegories of Melancholy, were attributed to the Empress's foreboding of her divorce. While that is not impossible, it is also true that Joséphine lived in a period when periodically to withdraw from society for the purpose of quiet reflection was seen as a virtue. In the years 1776–8, the well-known French philosopher and novelist Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) had written a series of essays called *The Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. Rousseau had hailed nature as a temporary escape from human society and as a place conducive to meditation, and he had made escapes into nature fashionable. It is possible that Joséphine wished to have her portrait painted in the park for that reason. She may have wished to project an image of thoughtfulness.

Prud'hon also received a commission to paint Napoleon's long-desired heir, the imperial prince borne by his second wife, Marie-Louise, in 1811 (FIG. 5-16). Pronounced th King of Rome at birth, the infant prince is shown sleepin on a patch of grass, surrounded by plants and flowers an illuminated by a radiant light. Although it looks surreal t the modern observer, contemporary observers would hav noticed the painting's reference to the ancient myth of th foundation of Rome. According to this story, the godde Rhea Silvia abandoned her twins Romulus and Remus to th wilderness, not knowing that Romulus would later becom the first king of Rome. Many of the details of the portra have an allegorical meaning. The two gigantic fritillaries plant sometimes called "crown imperial") above the Prince knee signify his descent from two imperial houses, the Frenc and the Austrian. The laurel in the background refers t Napoleon himself. And the radiant glow, no doubt, is th divine light that will illuminate the Prince's life and rule.

Of all the portraits of Napoleon and his family, perha the most unusual one is the *Portrait of Napoleon on his Imperi Throne* (FIG. 5-17), painted by David's student Jean-Dominiqu

5-17 **Jean-Dominique Ingres,** *Portrait of Napoleon on his Imperial Throne,* Salon of 1806. Oil on canvas, 8'9" x 5'3" (2.66 x 1.6 m). Musée de l'Armée, Palais des Invalides, Paris.

5-18 **Jan and Hubert van Eyck,** *God the Father,* top central panel of the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432. Oil on panel, 6'11" x 2'6" (2.1 m x 80 cm). Church of St Bavo, Ghent.

Ingres (1780–1867) and exhibited at the Salon of 1806. This painting was not commissioned by the Emperor himself but was probably painted on the artist's own initiative, though it was bought by the French Legislature before it had even been shown in the Salon. Dressed in a sumptuous robe, the Emperor is seated on a gilded throne, the curved back of which forms a halo around his head. In his right hand he holds the golden scepter of Charlemagne; in his left is the ivory hand of justice used by the French medieval kings. His strictly frontal pose gives the painting an iconic quality that has been compared with that of *God the Father* in the famed Ghent Altarpiece (FIG. 5-18). That monumental painting, by the fifteenth-century south Netherlandish artists Jan van Eyck and Hubert van Eyck, was among the most celebrated "stolen treasures" in the Napoleon Museum. By referring to this well-known work, Ingres—no doubt in an effort to please the Emperor—suggested that Napoleon was a godlike figure, omnipotent and endowed with divine wisdom. Ruler and judge, he embodied both legislative and executive powers. No other portrait of the Emperor so blatantly exposed the position of absolute, superhuman monarch that Napoleon had assumed in a country that only recently had rid itself of a centuries-old monarchy.

Antoine-Jean Gros and the Napoleonic Epic

In addition to exalting the Emperor's image, Napoleonic propaganda was also used to record his deeds. Napoleon, forever the general, took enormous pride in his military victories. He was mindful, however, that these were achieved at the cost of many lives so that images of war could easily turn into negative propaganda. To avoid this, all war paintings were carefully planned by his artistic advisors, so that Napoleon would appear both as a military genius and as a humane leader, mindful of his soldiers.

Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), a student of David, became Napoleon's favorite artist when it came to recording his military exploits. Gros's *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague House at Jaffa* (FIG. 5-19) was one of the most successful paintings of the Salon of 1804, and launched the artist's career. Upon his failed attempt to conquer Egypt, Napoleon and his generals had moved their armies to neighboring parts of the Ottoman Empire (in present-day Israel and Syria). After a successful assault on Jaffa and the ruthless massacre of its inhabitants (March 1799), a plague broke out among the French troops. On May 11 Napoleon and some of his staff visited the sick in the hospital. Eyewitness accounts

5-19 **Antoine-Jean Gros,** *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague House at Jaffa,* Salon of 1804. Oil on canvas, 17'5" x 23'6" (5.32 x 7.2 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

5-20 **Rembrandt van Rijn,** *Christ Healing the Sick* ("Hundred Guilders Print"), c.1650. Etching, drypoint and burin, 11 x 15$\frac{5}{16}$" (27.8 x 38.8 cm). Rembrandt House, Amsterdam.

differ as to the purpose of the visit. According to some, Napoleon wanted to assess whether the soldiers should be transported or left to die in Jaffa. Others claim that the general wanted to boost the morale of his troops.

It was important to Napoleon that the visit should be seen in the most positive light, especially because of the negative press he had received for the Jaffa massacre. In *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague House at Jaffa* the general stands inside the courtyard of the hospital building with two of his officers. While the latter are disgusted by the sight and smell of the mortally ill, Napoleon has taken off his glove and reaches out to touch one of the plague-stricken soldiers. Even though little was known about the transmission of contagious diseases at the time, this must have been seen as a death-defying gesture. Napoleon appears like a holy healer whose compassionate touch brings consolation, possibly even a cure, to his faithful soldiers. Gros's painting recalls Rembrandt's famous etching of *Christ Healing the Sick* (the so-called "Hundred Guilders Print"; FIG. 5-20) of c. 1650, which was much admired at the time.

The success of Gros's painting at the Salon of 1804 was due to the fact that it brought something new to history painting. Not only did the painting depict a contemporary event rather than an episode from ancient history—still a novelty in France—but the drama of the work set it apart from the work of David and his followers. Gros played up the exotic setting, the Islamic courtyard with its imposing arches and stained-glass windows, and the colorful costumes of the Arabic hospital staff. He also emphasized the stark contrast between the dapper uniforms of Napoleon and his officers and the pale, sickly bodies of the patients. Most of these sufferers are concentrated at the bottom of the painting, forming, as it were, a threshold of pathos that the eye needs to cross before scanning the rest of the painting. In the lower left, a hooded figure sits hunched up in a pose of despair derived from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. In the lower right, a young cadet cradles the body of a dead comrade. Between them, the naked body of a weeping man draws a diagonal line that leads our eye up towards Napoleon, and to the revolutionary flag that signals the glorious cause.

Gros continued to create powerful propaganda with his monumental *The Battle of Eylau* (FIG. 5-21), shown at the Salon of 1808. This painting commemorated a battle that took place in Russia on February 7–8, 1807, between the forces of Russia and Prussia and those of France (see *Napoleonic Battles*, page 113). Napoleon desperately needed some positive publicity for this battle, which had ended in deadlock and cost as many as 50,000 lives. Again, he and his advisors decided to emphasize his humanity in the wake of the bloodbath caused by his military ambitions. Gros was asked not to paint the battle itself but its aftermath, when Napoleon, now Emperor, visited the battlefield to console his soldiers and to instruct those who had the strength to attend to the wounds of their Russian victims. Once again, Napoleon is represented as a saintly figure, who spreads sympathy across the battlefield to warm and revive his soldiers. Gros has successfully captured the bleakness of a north Russian winter, with darkly dressed figures set against a drab backdrop of mist, mud, and snow. Only a few red hats enliven this otherwise gloomy picture.

5-21 **Antoine-Jean Gros,** *The Battle of Eylau*, Salon of 1808. Oil on canvas, 17′1″ x 25′ 9″ (5.21 x 7.84 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Gros received many more commissions for large-scale pictures of battle scenes, and established an excellent reputation as a painter of Napoleonic propaganda. But he was not alone. The Salons of the first decade of the nineteenth century were dominated by large-scale works commissioned by the imperial government and depicting episodes from Napoleon's campaigns. In addition, they showed numerous smaller commissioned works that were aimed at showing off Napoleon's qualities as national leader and skilful administrator, as well as a solid family man.