

CHAPTER FIVE

The Arts under Napoleon

In 1799 Jacques-Louis David (see Chapters 2 and 4) 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 by 18 feet, *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 81), 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 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), the much-feared Jacobin leader, was executed and his virtual dictatorship replaced by a representative government, led by five executive directors.

After Robespierre's Reign of Terror, an 11-month period in which 17,000 people were guillotined, the Directory (1795–1799) 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 leader Romulus, on the right, and the Sabine leader Tatius, on the left. The two are preparing to duel, but the beautiful

Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *Portrait of Empress Joséphine*, 1805–09.
(Detail of FIG. 5-15.)



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

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 fighting.

David's *The Sabine Women* has often been compared with *The Oath of the Horatii*, exhibited 15 years earlier. Both paintings show events from Roman history, involving a war between the Romans and a neighboring clan. But while *The Oath of the Horatii* extols such "masculine" virtues as patriotism, courage, and honor, *The Sabine Women* seems to celebrate the more "feminine" concerns of family, peace, and collective harmony. Emphasizing women's essential roles as 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 sociopolitical 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 peace, love, 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 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, he 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 through the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. Peace was not his final goal, however; instead, 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 present-day Germany and Poland. His 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 present-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.

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 lasting renown is due, in no small part, to the architectural monuments, sculptures, and paintings that were commissioned to glorify and commemorate them. Because of the 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, as well as Napoleon, the emperors of Austria and Russia. The battle resulted in Napoleon's greatest victory: His 68,000 troops defeated almost 90,000 Russians and Austrians.

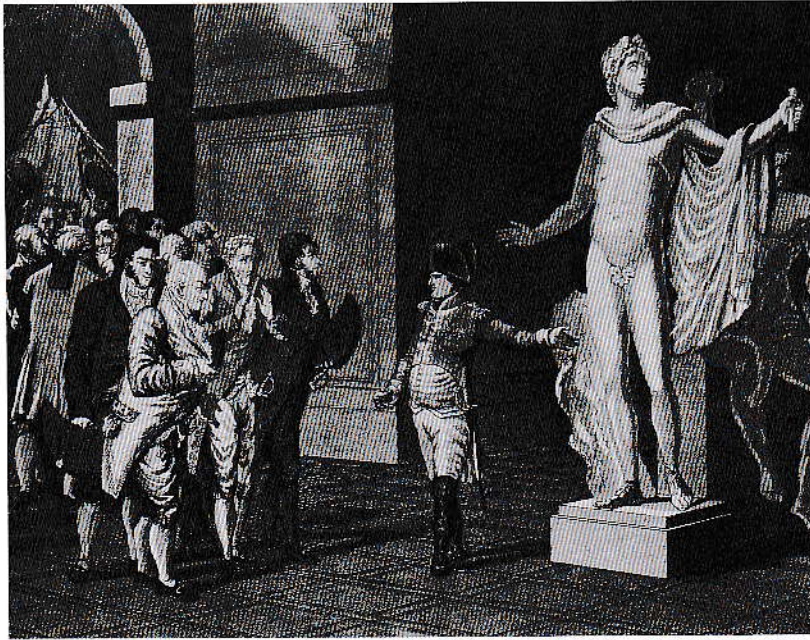
Battle of Jena, October 14, 1806. Napoleon devastated the Prussian army.

Battle of Eylau, February 7–8, 1807. The battle was fought against the Russians and Prussians in East Prussia (present-day Russia), some 20 miles south of Kaliningrad, 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 present-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.



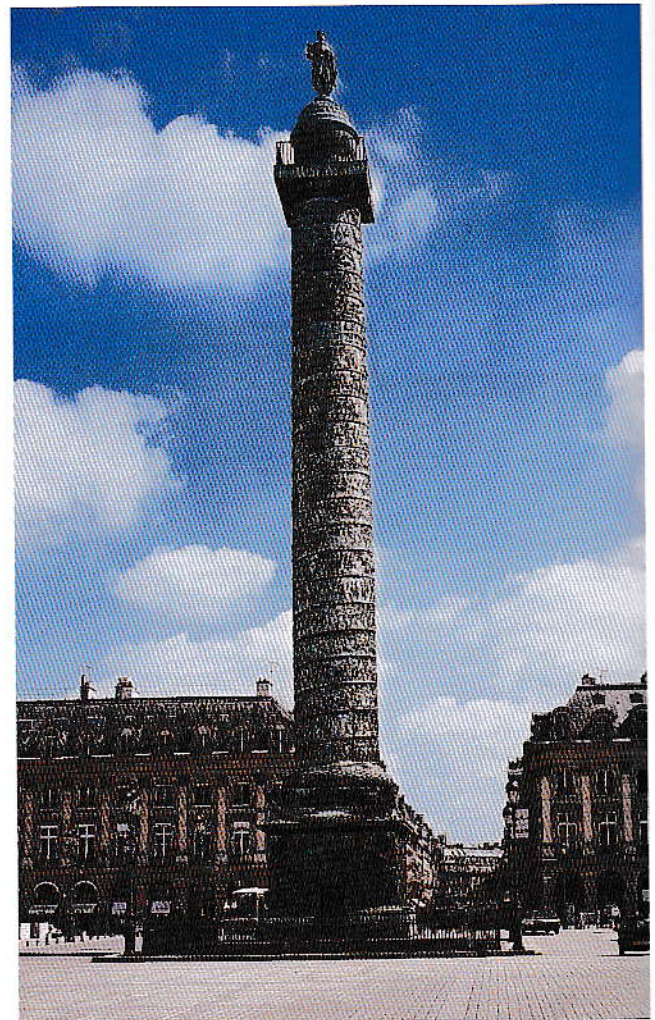
5-2 Anonymous, Napoleon Bonaparte Showing the Apollo Belvedere to his Deputies, ca. 1899. Etching with aquatint, 15½ × 16" (39 × 41 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.

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, the museum comprised the royal collections, confiscated after the revolution, in addition to hundreds, if not thousands, of artworks pillaged from the countries Napoleon had conquered. At its height, the museum contained the cream of European art, including such famous Classical sculptures as the *Apollo Belvedere* (see FIG. 2-5) and the *Laocoön*, and important Renaissance and baroque works. These included Jan and Hubert van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* (Church of St Bavo, Ghent), Paolo Veronese's *Marriage at Cana* (still in the Louvre today), 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 lesson in art history taught by the 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,



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



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

he had defeated the combined armies of Austria and Russia (see *Napoleonic Battles*, page 117). 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. Each column was decorated with reliefs depicting the respective emperor's military exploits and was 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 altogether (see page 371). 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 his rule, emulate the architecture of imperial Rome. The first was the Arc de Triomphe (FIG. 5-5), an enormous



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.

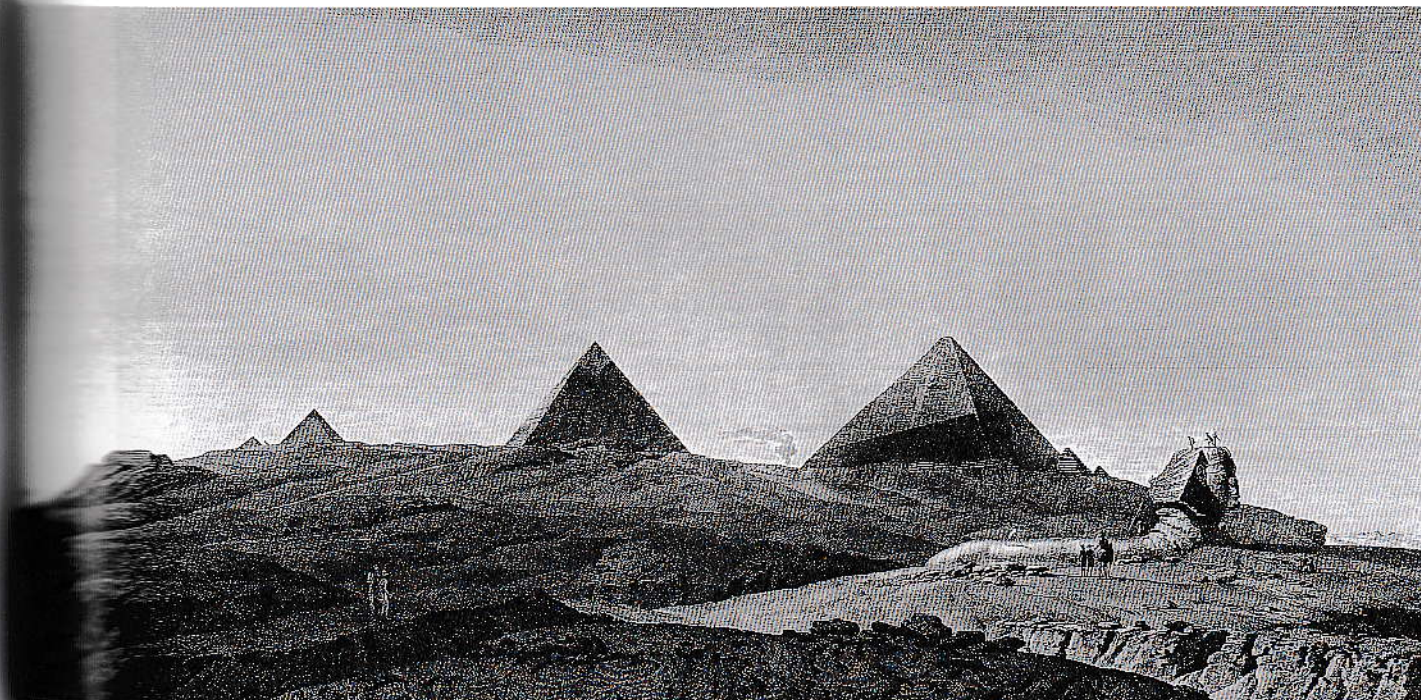
stone monument designed by the architect Jean-François Chalgrin (1739–1811) after the example of a Roman triumphal arch. Standing at the intersection of five major roads, including the famous Champs Élysées, its placement was carefully calculated for maximum visual effect. The other was a “Temple of 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 228). The would-be temple was completed according to its original design, but was turned into a church called La Madeleine (St. Mary Magdalene; 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, but also contained 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 131). 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 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 21 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 washstand was kept



5-7 *General View of Pyramids and Sphinx, at Sunset.*
Illustration in *Description d’Egypte* (vol. v, *Antiquités*, 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.



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

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 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 Salons as vehicles for propaganda; nearly all of the paintings he commissioned were exhibited there. They were public forums where he could "post" visual messages that reached the crowds of people who visited the exhibitions. The Salons, moreover, were fully covered by newspapers and magazines, which publicized events even to those who did not see the works in person. Once a 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 Carlos IV of Spain (r. 1788–1808), who intended *Napoleon Crossing the Alps at the Saint-Bernard Pass* (FIG. 5-10) for his gallery of portraits

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



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 none other than David, who had made a quick portrait sketch of Napoleon two years previously, when the general had visited his studio. This turned out to be a lucky coincidence as Napoleon refused to sit for his portrait; 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 117). 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, by the Carthaginian general Hannibal in 218 BCE and 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



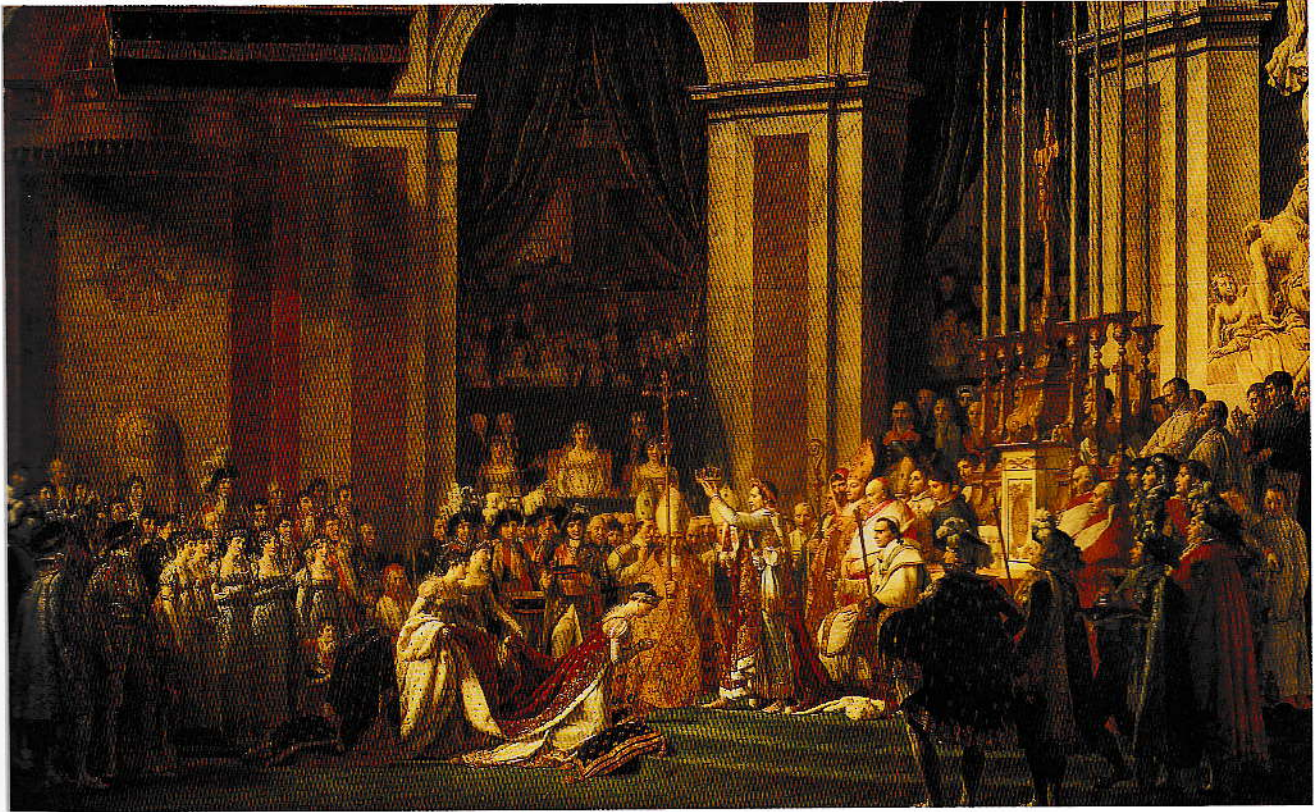
5-11 Etienne-Marie Falconet, *Peter the Great*, 1766–82. Bronze on granite base, twice life-size. Decembrists' Square, St. Petersburg.

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 (1480/85–1576) in the late sixteenth century. It was perfected in the seventeenth century by the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and the Spanish Diego Velázquez (1599–1660). In these two artists' portraits of the Spanish monarch Felipe IV (r. 1621–1665), 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 the French sculptor Falconet (see page 26) in the years 1766–82. In this sculpture, as in David's painting, rider and horse scale a mountainous rock. But while Peter the Great, presented as the energetic founder of St. Petersburg, wears civilian clothes, 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 an authority 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 1,000 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 tactful to commemorate another episode, in which he placed the crown on the head of his wife, Joséphine.

The Coronation Ceremony of Napoleon and Joséphine in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame took almost three years to paint. Measuring some 20 by 30 feet, it is composed of more than 100 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 as 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



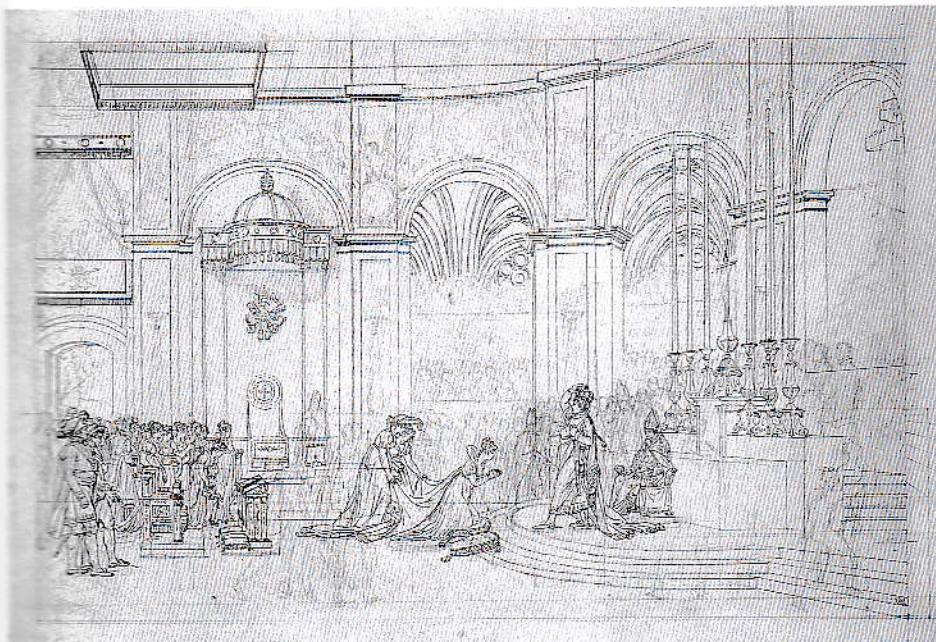
5-12 Jacques-Louis David, *The Coronation of Napoleon in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame*, 1805–07. Oil on canvas, 20'8" × 32'1" (6.33 × 9.79 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

official portrait because the emperor had much to gain by emphasizing family unity.

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



5-13 Jacques-Louis David, *Perspective Study for the Coronation of Napoleon*, undated. Pencil, pen, and ink, 20'7" × 32' (6.30 × 9.75 m). Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, Paris.

and by David's fellow artists, who placed a laurel wreath underneath it. David also had his share of critics, who felt the artist of *Brutus* and *Marat* had abandoned the revolutionary cause to become a spineless courtier. In truth, David was no different from many others who had 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).

Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (see page 108), another contemporary, was commissioned in 1805 to paint a monumental portrait of Empress Joséphine (FIG. 5-15). Since the artist often took years to finish a painting, the 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 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 foreseeing her divorce. While that is not impossible, it is also true that Joséphine lived at a time when periodically withdrawing from society for the purpose of quiet reflection was seen as a virtue. In the years 1776 to 1778, 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*. He had hailed nature as providing a temporary refuge from human society and being conducive to meditation, and had made escaping into nature fashionable. While Joséphine may have chosen the pose and the setting of her portrait to be in tune with the trends of her time, the carefully detailed wildflowers in the right foreground of the painting suggest that the natural surroundings may equally reflect the Empress's keen interest in botany.

Prud'hon also received a commission to paint Napoleon's long-desired heir, the imperial prince borne by his second



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, France.

5-15 (opposite) Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *Portrait of Empress Joséphine*, 1805–09. Oil on canvas, 8' × 5'10" (2.44 × 1.79 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.





5-16 Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *The King of Rome Sleeping*, 1811. Oil on canvas, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 22" (46 × 55.8 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

wife, Marie-Louise, in 1811 (FIG. 5-16). Pronounced the king of Rome at birth, the infant prince is shown sleeping on a patch of grass, surrounded by plants and flowers and illuminated by a radiant light. Although the painting looks surreal to the modern viewer, contemporary observers would have noticed its reference to the ancient myth of the foundation of Rome. According to this story, the goddess Rhea Silvia abandoned her twins Romulus and Remus to the wilderness, not knowing that Romulus would later become the first king of Rome. Many of the details of the portrait have an allegorical meaning. The two gigantic fritillaries (a plant sometimes called crown imperial) above the prince's knee signify his descent from two imperial houses, the French and the Austrian. The laurel in the background refers to Napoleon himself. And the radiant glow, no doubt, is the divine light that will illuminate the prince's life and rule.

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

Dominique 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. His pose is that of Jupiter, in Classical images of the king of the gods enthroned. On his head he wears his famous golden laurel-wreath crown. In his right hand he holds the golden scepter of Charlemagne, with whom he liked to be compared (see page 124); 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 Netherlandish artists Jan and Hubert van Eyck, was among the most celebrated treasures in the Napoleon Museum (see page 118). By referring to this well-known work, as well as



5-17 Jean-Auguste-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.



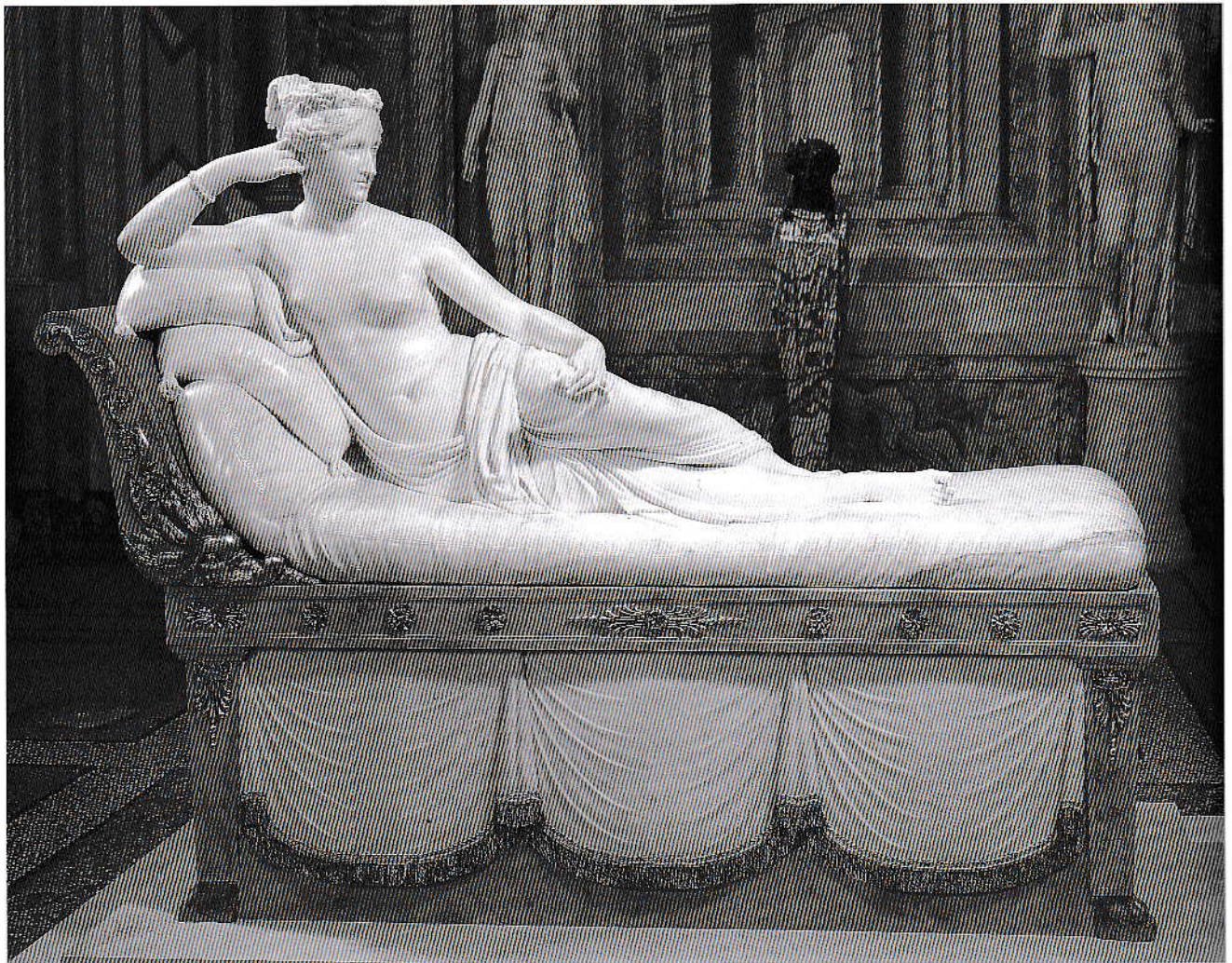
5-18 Jan and Hubert van Eyck,
God the Father, top central panel of
 the Ghent Altarpiece, 1432. Oil on
 panel, 6'11" x 2'6" (2.1 m x 80 cm).
 Church of St. Bavo, Ghent.

to Classical statues of Jupiter, Ingres 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 ruler that Napoleon had assumed in a country that had only recently rid itself of a centuries-old monarchy.

Napoleon turned not only to painters but also to sculptors for portraits of himself and the imperial family. Given the international stardom of Canova, it comes as no surprise that in 1802 he asked the artist to come to Paris to model his head in preparation for a monumental statue of himself in the guise of Mars, the Roman god of war. Canova made a colossal sculpture showing Napoleon heroically, and somewhat ridiculously, nude. Napoleon did not like it, finding it "too athletic." It was kept out of the spotlight most of the time and, after his fall, the French government sold it to England. If the emperor was disappointed by Canova, this did not prevent other members of the imperial

family patronizing the artist. Napoleon's wife Marie-Louise, his mother Maria-Letizia, and his sister Paolina, wife of the Italian prince Camillo Borghese, all had Canova sculpt their full-length portraits, invariably disguised as classical goddesses or historical figures. Most famous among them is the *Portrait of Paolina Borghese as Venus Victorious* (FIG. 5-19). Reclining on an antique bed, Paolina holds an apple, the prize in the famous beauty contest of Classical antiquity, in which Venus triumphed over Juno and Minerva. The guise of Venus, which clearly called for a high degree of nudity, was Paolina's choice; she was famous for her beauty and infamous for flouting social and moral conventions. One of the striking qualities of the work is the naturalistic rendering of the mattress, pillow, and linens on the couch. As we logically assume that this naturalism extends to the entire sculpture, we are led to believe that Paolina was as beautiful as Canova portrayed her. At the same time, the undue emphasis on the bedroom paraphernalia heightens the eroticism of the sculpture.

5-19 Antonio Canova, *Portrait of Paolina Borghese as Venus Victorious*, 1804–08. Marble, height 5'3" (1.6 m); width 6'7" (2 m). Galleria Borghese, Rome.





5-20 Antoine-Jean Gros, *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague House at Jaffa*, Salon of 1804. Oil on canvas, 17'5" × 23'6" (5.32 × 7.2 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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 as these were achieved at the cost of many lives, 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. 5-20) was one of the most successful paintings of the Salon of 1804, and launched the artist's career. Following 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 in March 1799, a plague broke out among the French troops. On May 11 Napoleon and some of his staff visited the sick in hospital. Eyewitness

accounts 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 to be a Christlike healer whose compassionate touch brings consolation, possibly even a cure, to his faithful soldiers.

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 it 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



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

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 toward Napoleon, and to the distant 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 East Prussia (present-day Russia) on February 7–8, 1807, between the forces of Russia and Prussia and those of France (see *Napoleonic Battles*, page 117). 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 to paint not 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.

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 that depicted episodes from Napoleon's campaigns. In addition, they showed numerous smaller commissioned works that were aimed at emphasizing Napoleon's qualities as a national leader and skilful administrator, as well as a solid family man.

The School of David and the "Crisis" of the Male Nude

The imperial art machine was admittedly huge, yet not all art exhibited at the Salons during Napoleon's reign was commissioned by the government. The Empire Salons, like those of the late eighteenth century, featured a variety of

works, from Classical scenes and biblical subjects to portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings.

If anything truly marked the Salons of the Empire period, it is that they were flooded by the works of David's students. Although it is impossible to say exactly how many aspiring artists were trained in his studio, their number was certainly in the hundreds. David taught for 35 years, from 1781 to 1816, so his students belonged to several generations. The first generation entered his atelier in the early 1780s. This group included the "three Gs," Gérard, Gros, and Anne-Louis Girodet. All three eventually became David's rivals, competing with him for imperial commissions.

A second generation entered David's studio in the 1790s. Several students began to rebel against the artist's strict Neoclassical training. The most vocal group of dissenters called themselves the "Primitives" or the "Barbus" (because they sported *barbes*, or beards). Instead of studying Classical Greek and Roman art and the art of the High Renaissance masters, they sought inspiration in the "primitive" art of the pre-Classical, medieval, and early Renaissance periods. Ingres, at one time, was drawn to this group, and his *Portrait of Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* (see FIG. 5-17), in its medievalizing style, is an example of the artistic tendencies of the Primitives.

The third generation, who studied with the master from 1800 to 1815, was composed largely of foreign students. Many of them came from the countries Napoleon had conquered—Germany, Spain, and the present-day Netherlands and Belgium—which were for some years officially part of the French Empire, and they encouraged the spread of David's brand of Neoclassicism across Europe. Their art would dominate European academies far into the nineteenth century.

While some of David's students followed their teacher's Neoclassical precepts religiously, others explored new directions. During the Empire period, young artists had access to a wide variety of artistic traditions, thanks to the treasures Napoleon brought together in the Louvre. In addition, a powerful alternative to David's rigid Neoclassicism was provided by Prud'hon (see pages 108 and 126), who, throughout his career, maintained an independent artistic stance. These combined influences led many of David's students to stray from the Classical principles he expounded in his studio.

Some of the works of Anne-Louis Girodet (1767–1824) show how Neoclassicism was transformed in the hands of David's students. *The Sleep of Endymion*, of 1791 (FIG. 5-22), is a dark, mysterious painting that is a far cry from David's



5-22 Anne-Louis Girodet, *The Sleep of Endymion*, 1791. Oil on canvas, 6'6" × 8'6" (1.97 × 2.6 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

5-23 *Borghese Genius (or Cupid)*.
Marble, life-size. Musée du Louvre,
Paris (formerly Villa Borghese, Rome).



clearly ordered paintings of the 1780s. It depicts a beautiful youth from Greek myth, who was put to eternal sleep by the moon goddess so that she could love him forever. The pale, languorous body of Endymion strikes a pose of ecstatic abandonment as his body is caressed by the rays of the moon. A prepubescent Eros (spirit of love) parts the branches that admit the light into the thicket where Endymion rests.

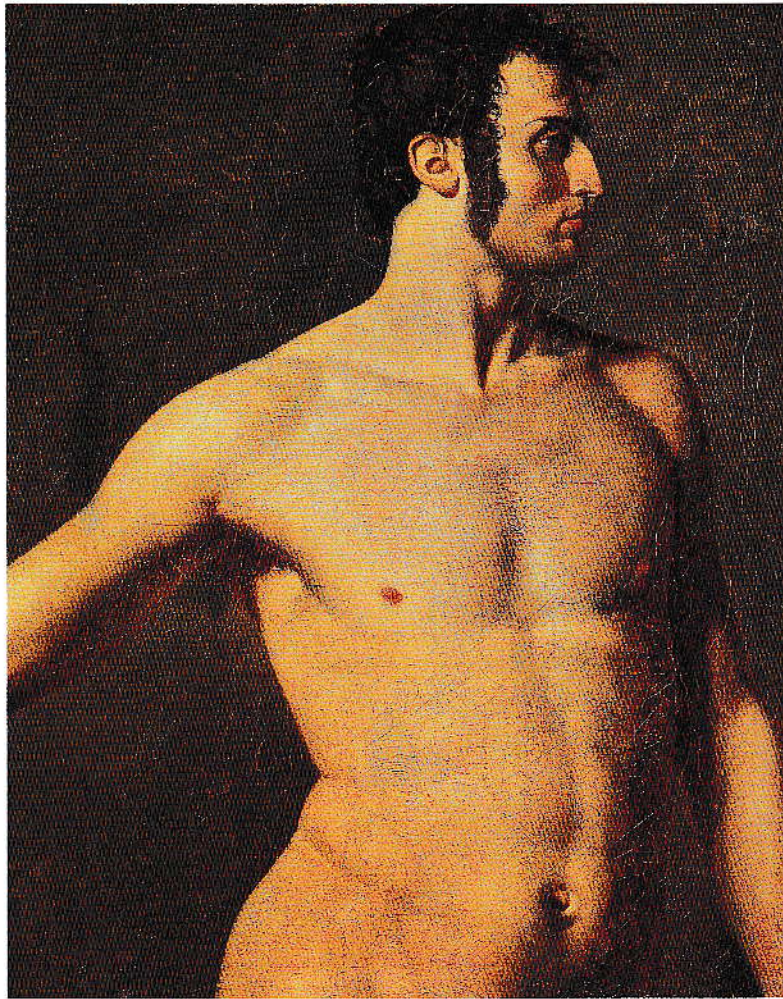
The sensuous, erotic character of this painting differs greatly from the virtuous, edifying nature of David's works. Its dynamic composition, guided by two crossing diagonal lines, is also unlike the more static constructions of David's



5-24 Jean Broc, *The Death of Hyacinth*, 1801. Oil on canvas,
70 × 49" (1.78 × 1.26 m). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Poitiers.

paintings, in which horizontals and verticals dominate. Finally, and most strikingly, the soft, effeminate body of Endymion is distinct from the toned heroic male bodies featured in the work of David.

The Sleep of Endymion was shown to much acclaim at the Salon of 1793, but Girodet had painted the work two years earlier in Rome, where he may first have become interested in the alternative representation of the male body seen in his work. Androgynous bodies (combining male and female characteristics) such as Endymion's were not unknown in Classical art. Already Winckelmann, in his *History of Ancient Art*, had concluded that there was a duality in the Greek ideal of physical beauty; that, in fact, there were two ideal modes, loosely linked to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, respectively. The first mode was masculine, heroic, and austere; the second was feminine, graceful, and sensuous. While the two modes were most clearly seen in sculptures of male and female bodies, respectively, it was possible to encounter the masculine ideal in female figures (for example, the goddess Athena) and the feminine ideal in masculine figures, such as Cupid (FIG. 5-23). Feminine traits were particularly pronounced in the adolescent youths who became lovers of gods and goddesses: Adonis, Endymion, Hyacinth, or Narcissus.



5-25 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Torso of a Man*, Salon of 1801. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (100 × 80 cm). Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

The increased preoccupation of David's students, from the early 1790s onward, with the graceful, androgynous nude has been attributed to various factors. On the one hand, it has been interpreted as an act of rebellion against David's relentless emphasis on the heroic nude. (When Girodet described *Endymion* to his guardian, Benoît-François Trioson, he wrote that the painting arose from a desire "to get away from [David's] genre as much as I possibly can.") On the other, the new emphasis on sensuality rather than austerity, on gracefulness rather than heroism, has been seen as a reflection of a larger psychocultural change following the revolutionary years.

The generation that matured in the 1790s, in the wake of the thousands of guillotine executions that had been performed in the name of the revolution, looked at life in a way that was radically different from their fathers and teachers. The virtues of the older generation—moral principle, stoic poise, rationality—had lost their appeal. The new generation was too aware of the suffering that these ideas had caused. They no longer understood Socrates' stoical indifference in the face of his execution; they no longer admired Brutus for condemning his own sons to death. They preferred sensitivity to self-possession. They

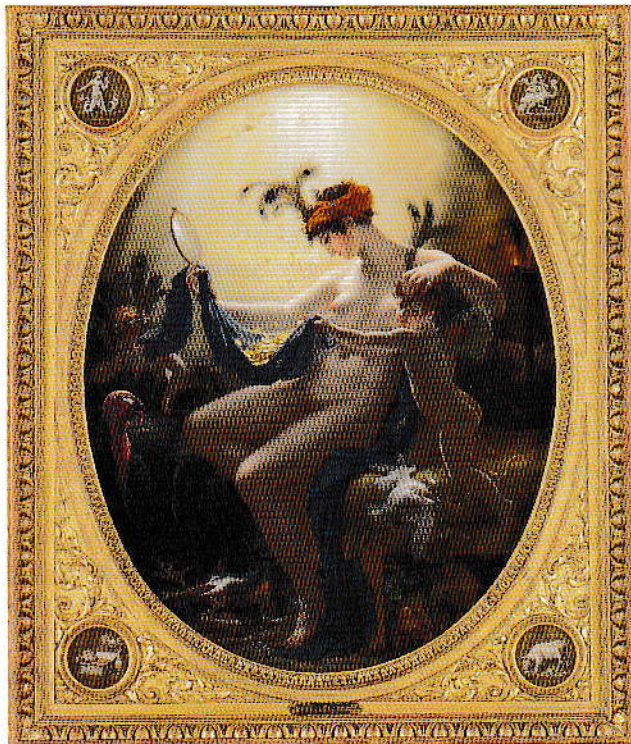
sympathized with the victim rather than the perpetrator, however heroic, however lofty the latter's goals.

It is remarkable that many of the androgynous nudes in the works of David's students are suffering. This is obvious in *The Death of Hyacinth* (FIG. 5-24), an unusual painting by David's student Jean Broc (1771–1850), who, in his youth, had belonged to the Barbus. It depicts the beautiful Hyacinth, the playmate of the Greek god Apollo, who accidentally killed the boy as they were throwing disks. In the painting, a youthful Apollo with soft curly locks embraces the lifeless Hyacinth. The androgynous bodies of the two figures are curved and soft, having nothing in common with the taut muscular bodies of, for example, the Horatii brothers in David's painting. Their embrace speaks of pathos and sensuality. The painting has a dreamlike quality that is quite different from the clarity and eloquence of David's work.

The masculine eroticism that marks Broc's *Death of Hyacinth* and Girodet's *Sleep of Endymion* has been linked to David's studio, where an all-male student body spent their days drawing and painting after male nudes under the supervision of a male teacher (FIG. 5-25). This is not to say that David's students were homosexuals; they may or may not have been. But it is fair to assume that the exclusively homosocial (same



5-26 Jean-Henri Cless, *The Studio of David*, ca. 1810. Black chalk, 17 × 23" (45 × 59 cm). Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



gender) environment in which David's students worked, and often lived, caused them to conceive of their art within a masculine frame of reference. Girodet's *Endymion* and Broc's *Hyacinth* are not far removed from the academic studies that David's students made in his studio (FIG. 5-26). In both, the nudes are "on display" for the viewer to examine, just as the male model in the studio was on display for David's students.

While the male nude was privileged in the art of the Empire, as it had been during the revolutionary period, the female nude, favored during the Rococo era, was not neglected. Female models were not allowed in the Academy, but artists had access to them in their private studios. One of the most notorious examples of a female nude at the Salons of this time was Girodet's *The New Danaë* (FIG. 5-27), exhibited during the last two days of the Salon of 1799. The painting depicts an ancient Greek princess who was loved by Zeus. According to Greek mythology, his divine love

5-27 Anne-Louis Girodet, *The New Danaë*, Salon of 1799. Oil on canvas, 25 × 21" (65 × 54 cm). Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



5-28 Anne-Louis Girodet, *The Entombment of Atala*, 1808. Oil on canvas, 5'5" × 6'11" (1.67 × 2.1 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

took the form of a shower of gold which fell into her lap and made her pregnant with the future hero Perseus. Girodet's peers immediately saw the likeness between Danaë and a contemporary star of the stage, Mademoiselle Lange. The artist had a grudge against the actress, who, at the beginning of the same Salon, had demanded that Girodet remove her commissioned portrait because, she said, it compromised her reputation for beauty. In revenge, Girodet hung in its place this painting of Lange as Danaë, greedily catching Zeus' amorous gift of gold in a shawl, before it reaches her lap. To Girodet's contemporaries, most of whom were intimately familiar with Lange's numerous love affairs, many of the details of the painting must have been meaningful and amusing. They doubtlessly understood that the turkey cock on the left of the picture represented her wealthy cuckolded husband and the mask underneath the chair, with the coin stuck in the eye socket, her lover. The little winged infant on the left is her legitimate son but the other, who helps Lange catch the coins in her shawl, is the actress's extramarital daughter.

The Transformation of History Painting: New Subjects and Sensibilities

Girodet and Broc abandoned the heroic, moralizing scenes of Roman history that David had favored for episodes from Greek mythology suffused with sensuality and emotion. They and other students of David also, on occasion, found inspiration in medieval and Renaissance history or in contemporary fiction. Girodet's *The Entombment of Atala* (FIG. 5-28) depicts a scene from François-René de Chateaubriand's short novel *Atala*, first published in 1801 and a sensational bestseller of the period. Set in the French colony of Louisiana, the book tells the story of Atala, a Christian girl of mixed European and Native American descent, who, on her mother's deathbed, made a vow to the Virgin Mary that she would remain a virgin. When Atala fell in love with Chactas, a Natchez Indian, the seemingly irresolvable conflict between desire and duty led her to poison herself. In Girodet's painting, Chactas and an old Capuchin monk are about to place her body in a freshly dug



5-29 Gerard Dou, *Woman Sick with Dropsy*, 1663. Oil on panel, 34 × 27" (86 × 68 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

grave inside a cave. While a desperate Chactas clutches the lower part of Atala's body—the part most closely associated with physical desire, the monk looks thoughtfully down on her head, which once housed her spirit. The light that falls into the cave illuminates Atala's folded hands, which hold a cross. Another cross is visible in the distance, silhouetted against the sky. Like Broc's *Death of Hyacinth*, this painting is about lost love but it also speaks to the tension between love of man and duty to God. The importance of religion in this painting is especially significant. During the revolutionary period, organized religion had been outlawed, and religious themes were frowned upon. Girodet's painting reflects the beginning, in France, of a resurgence of Christianity, which was fueled by Chateaubriand's book *The Genius of Christianity* of 1802, and made official by Napoleon through the so-called Concordat with the pope, which proclaimed Roman Catholicism the "preferred" religion in France.

Scenes from medieval and early Renaissance history were favored by a group of students in David's studio who came from southern France and were referred to as the

"aristocrats." These artists were not interested in the epic moments of history, depicted by such artists as Brenet at the end of the eighteenth century. Instead, they favored scenes from the private lives of well-known figures from the past. Inspired by popular historical anecdotes or imaginary reconstructions of historic moments of human interest, their paintings have sometimes been linked to the emergence, around the same time, of the historical novel, which likewise focused on the way individuals—real or fictional—were affected by history.

To paint their new, intimate subjects of medieval history, the aristocrats had little use for the grand style of David. Instead, they were attracted to seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings, which were exceptionally well represented in the Napoleon Museum. They especially admired Gerard Dou (1613–1675), a student of Rembrandt, for his use of subtle color combinations and his fine, miniaturist execution. Both aspects of Dou's work are exemplified in his *Woman Sick with Dropsy* (FIG. 5-29), one of the most popular pictures in the Louvre during the nineteenth century.



5-30 Fleury-François Richard, *King Francis I and his Sister Margaret, Queen of Navarre, Salon of 1804*. Oil on canvas, 30 × 25³/₈" (76.8 × 65 cm). Napoleon Museum, Schloss Arenenberg, Mannenbach-Salenstein, Switzerland.

Inspired by Dou, the aristocrats developed a polished, finely detailed style that is referred to as the troubadour style. *King Francis I and his Sister Margaret, Queen of Navarre* (FIG. 5-30), by Fleury-François Richard (1777–1852), shown at the Salon of 1804, may serve as an example. The painting depicts a moment of private exchange between François I and his beloved sister. Like Dou's *Woman Sick with Dropsy*, it shows a domestic interior lit by a single window on the left. The figures are conversing, their faces illuminated by the light that comes through the window. Although the subject of the painting is fictional, the period details have been carefully researched and are rendered in meticulous detail. Many of the troubadour painters were enthusiasts of the

Musée des Monuments Français (see page 113) and studied its contents assiduously to lend authenticity to their paintings.

The Lesser Genres: Genre, Portraiture, and Landscape

During the Consulate and the Empire, the Salons were visually dominated by large-scale history paintings. In terms of numbers, however, small-scale genre paintings, portraits, and landscape paintings prevailed (see *Painting Genres and their Hierarchy*, page 142). It is true that these genres were rated lower than history painting in the hierarchy of genres of the

Academy. But as the middle class began to grow and thrive, in the wake of the revolution, there was a new demand for such works, which, because of their modest size, were perfectly suited to bourgeois domestic interiors.

The Reading of the Bulletin of the Grande Armée (FIG. 5-31), by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), shows just such an interior (note the paintings on the wall) and is, at the same time, representative of the type of pictures that decorated it. This genre painting represents a family room in a modest bourgeois home during the Napoleonic era. The scene is centered on a huge map of Europe that is spread out on a table in the middle of the painting. An old man, seated behind the table, holds in his hand one of the numerous printed bulletins distributed by Napoleon to inform (or sometimes misinform) the public about the movements and exploits of his "grand army." Together with a standing young man, he is trying to trace on the map the movement of the troops. Several teenage boys, eager but still too young to join the army, are looking on. One of them, dressed in a Napoleonic army hat with a red, white, and blue cockade, seems torn between his sense of adventure and his love for the young woman in white standing on the right of the table. Children are everywhere in the room, their ages ranging from a newborn, suckling at his mother's breast, to the young teenagers. Their innocent games, such as cutting out paper

dolls, mounting a doll on a cat, or building a house of cards (destroyed by a dog before it could be completed) seem to prefigure adult activities and may hint at their futility. Paintings like this appealed to the middle class for their contemporaneity and their amusing and/or sentimental anecdotal details.

Of all the lesser genres, portraiture was most in demand. The new bourgeoisie liked to furnish their homes with portraits of themselves and their families. Nearly all artists of the period practiced portraiture, for the demand was inexhaustible. David and the artists of his school generally received the more important commissions.

Of all of David's students, Ingres became best known for his portraiture. His popularity as a portraitist was directly related to his ability to enhance his sitters' appearance while simultaneously creating the illusion of an incredible realism. His *Portrait of Madame Rivière* (FIG. 5-32) shows a young, raven-haired woman reclining on the icy-blue velvet cushions of a settee. She is simply dressed in the Classically inspired high-girded white dress that was fashionable at the time. But a huge, cashmere shawl draped around her shoulders and another thin, transparent veil streaming out of her dark curls add a layer of complexity to her appearance. The multiple folds in her shawl and veil form intricate patterns of intersecting lines and dramatic contrasts of light and



5-31 Louis-Léopold Boilly, *The Reading of the Bulletin of the Grande Armée*, 1807. Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (44 × 59 cm). Art Museum, St. Louis.



5-32 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Portrait of Madame Rivière*, 1805. Oil on canvas, 45 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (1.16 m × 90 cm).
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Painting Genres and their Hierarchy

"Genre" is a French word, meaning "kind" or "type." In the eighteenth century, art critics used it to refer to different kinds of subject matter in painting. Early on, a distinction was made between *peinture d'histoire* (history painting) and *peinture de genre* (genre painting) which included all other subjects. Denis Diderot called genre painters "those who busy themselves with flowers, fruits, animals, woods, forests, mountains, as well as those who borrow their scenes from common and domestic life." History painters, by contrast, depicted subjects borrowed from literary texts, such as the Bible, Classical literature, or historical works. History paintings, by their very nature, were narrative; they retold a literary story in pictorial terms, often in an attempt to highlight its moral. Indeed, for its moralizing and didactic character, history painting was considered the highest form of painting.

At the end of the eighteenth century *peinture de genre* acquired a more specific meaning and came to refer to representations of scenes from ordinary life. By the early nineteenth century, a hierarchy of genres developed, in which history painting was at the top and still life painting, which focused on the depiction of objects and nonliving natural things (cut flowers, shells, dead animals), at the bottom. Between them came the other genres—portrait, landscape, and genre painting. Portrait was generally considered second to history painting because it focused on the human figure. Landscape, more often than not, came next, particularly historical landscape (see page 142). Genre painting came before still life, because, like the portrait, it depicted human beings rather than things. The hierarchy of genres was upheld by the academies, which emphasized its importance in their teachings. At different times and in different places, academies might reshuffle the order of the hierarchy of genres, but history painting was invariably the most elevated genre.

shade that emphasize the smooth, streamlined surfaces of the face and body. The highly finished portrait creates the illusion of an almost photographic realism, which is belied, however, by the curious anatomical distortions (the elongated right arm, the absence of finger joints). One realizes that the painting is a clever deception, all in the name of sensual beauty and grace. Ingres's painting may be compared to the works of such early Renaissance Italian artists as Botticelli (ca. 1445–1510) and Fra Filippo Lippi (ca. 1406–1469), artists who likewise sacrificed anatomical correctness to graceful contours.

Of the numerous landscapes that were seen at the Salons of the Consulate and the Empire, relatively few have survived. This may be attributed to the lack of respect people had for landscape painting, which made its conservation a low priority. Within the broad field of landscape painting, the historical landscape was ranked above all other categories

(see *Landscape Painting—Subjects and Modalities*, page 188). Historical landscapes typically depict mountainous scenery dotted with Classical buildings, showing small figures in Classical dress, often acting out a historical scene. Although they had their origins in the seventeenth century, in the works of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, historical landscapes had largely disappeared in the early eighteenth century. Their revival, at the end of the eighteenth century, was due to Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes (1750–1819), who gave an important impetus to the increased prominence of landscape painting in the nineteenth century.

Landscape of Ancient Greece (FIG. 5-33) is typical of the historical landscapes that were shown in the Salons from the late 1780s to the 1820s by Valenciennes and his followers. It depicts a mountainous landscape, punctuated by Classical buildings, sculptures, and tiny figures, in Classical dress, engaged in various activities. Like most historical landscapes, it is loosely inspired by the scenery around Rome, where Valenciennes, like Poussin and Lorrain before him, had spent many years studying. It is clearly an imaginary construct, however, carefully composed to lead the viewer's eye from the figures in the foreground, along the river, toward the distant background.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of Valenciennes's painting is the artist's beautiful rendering of light—a warm Mediterranean glow that softly accents the salient points in the landscape. This sensitive rendering of light and atmosphere was informed by Valenciennes's practice of making oil studies outdoors. This was a novelty in the eighteenth century, when painters generally based their landscapes, which were invariably painted indoors, on pencil drawings and color notations. The artist's *Study of the Sky from the Quirinal Hill*, of the 1780s (FIG. 5-34), is an example of the numerous oil sketches Valenciennes made in Italy. It is marked by a sense of freshness and spontaneity that is clearly the result of direct observation. The sketch shows a panoramic view of the environs of Rome seen from the Quirinal Hill, the highest of Rome's seven hills. But the artist's focus is clearly on the sky and its large cumulus clouds drifting across the landscape. Although Valenciennes never showed his sketches in public—they merely served him as memory aids—sketching outdoors in oils helped him to recall the effects of light and atmosphere with a greater degree of verisimilitude when he was painting his finished landscapes in the studio.

Valenciennes not only reintroduced the Classical landscape; he also helped to raise the importance of landscape painting. A teacher at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1812, he encouraged a considerable number of young art students to paint landscapes, and he lobbied for a special Rome Prize for landscape painters (1816). Finally, in his well-known treatise *Éléments de perspective* (Elements of Perspective), he discussed the theory and practice of landscape painting in detail, which elevated the status and prestige of the genre and influenced French artists throughout the nineteenth century.



5-33 Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, *Landscape of Ancient Greece*, 1786. Oil on canvas, 39 × 60" (100.3 × 152.4 cm).
Detroit Institute of Arts.

5-34 Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, *Study of the Sky from the Quirinal Hill*, 1780s. Oil on paper, 10²/₈ × 14¹/₈"
(27 × 37 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

