



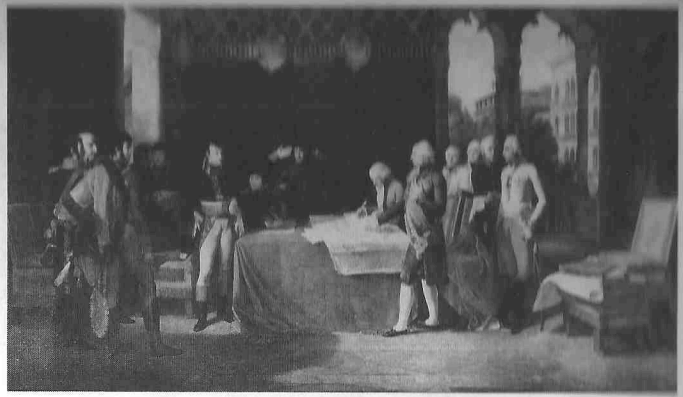
2.1 Antoine-Jean Gros, *Bonaparte at Arcole*,
1796, sketch. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

2 The Iconography of Napoleon

Gros's early portrait of the dashing young commander in chief raising the standard on the bridge of Arcola has something tentative and indecisive about it; Bonaparte's tight-lipped expression as he twists his head towards his army signifies his condemnation of the troops for not responding to his call in this crucial and costly campaign in Lombardy in 1796 (fig. 2.1). Gros had been with Napoleon at the battle of Arcola and witnessed the murderous fire of the Croats that pinned down the French and kept them from boldly following their leader.

French artists played a cunning game with Napoleon's cultural demands, dutiful in recentering the hero but careful also not to omit the impact of the enemy other. The artists of the Bonapartist era had experienced too much historical change within their young lifetimes to blithely ignore the consequences of political action. Yes, they were subject to, as much as purveyors of, the propaganda that rationalized the content and purpose of war for the masses of French people, but the decades of upheaval between 1789 and 1814 furnished the dramatic examples of historically conditioned existence—of history that affects daily survival and immediate preoccupations.

This ambivalence is displayed in Guillon Le Thièvre's *The Preliminary Peace Treaty at Leoben*, a work widely praised in the Salon of 1806, portraying a conspicuously cheeky Bonaparte dismissing the position of his Austrian adversaries (fig. 2.2). Commissioned for the Corps législatif, it might well have been a representation of Napoleon confronting his domestic opposition as well. Leoben, Austria, less than one hundred miles from Vienna, served as the site for the signing of the preliminaries of the Treaty of Campo Formio by Austria and the French republic on 18 April 1797.



The treaty dictated the fate of the Italian peninsula, represented in the large map of Italy on the table in the center of the composition.

Fresh from victory at Rivoli and the Treaty of Tolentino by which the pope ceded Bologna, Ferrara, and the Romagna to the French, Napoleon brazenly invaded Austria at great peril to himself and his troops. He was playing a dangerous game in hostile territory, and he knew it. After minor triumphs at Neumarkt and Unzmarkt and within striking distance of Vienna, he abruptly proposed armistice and peace terms to Erzherzog Karl von Österreich, the Austrian field marshal. Bonaparte bluffed his way through this affair, although he enjoyed the advantage of a terrified populace in the Austrian capital. There was notable opposition to his offer, however, from the Austrian chancellor, Franz de Paula de Thugut, who had helped organize the first coalition against the French revolutionary government. But Austria's allies, England and Russia, were preoccupied with internal problems at the time, and Thugut resigned himself to opening negotiations with Napoleon.

Bonaparte himself represented France, already dictating the terms to the Directory. His behavior was disdainful to the Austrian envoys, and when the latter declared in one of their articles that they recognized the French republic, the French general interrupted them to demand that this article be stricken from the record. "France has no need of being recognized," Napoleon stated, gesturing heavenward, "she is like the sun on the horizon, and those who do not see it are blind." And he continued, "The French people are masters of their fate; they have made a Republic; perhaps tomorrow they will establish an aristocracy, the day after, a

monarchy. That is their inevitable own right; the form of their government is strictly their own affair."¹

Le Thièrè depicts Napoleon at the hub of French and European politics, as true in 1806 as it was in 1797. Chaussard interpreted Napoleon's gesture as one that addressed the crowd, seemingly saying, "If we are not in agreement on some point, I am continuing my march, and in this direction is the path to victory."² Chaussard appreciated the manner in which the French protagonists of the painting were disposed and the visible discomfort of the Austrians seeing Napoleon as effective at the conference table as on the battlefield, thus embodying "the interests and the glory of the French nation."

At the same time, however, Le Thièrè locates Napoleon well to the left of center, and his position is sustained by the formidable bloc of French officers standing behind him. Without this formal and narrative backup, Napoleon would cut a weak figure in the composition. This is especially evident in the pyramidal shape of General Murat, standing tall in the left foreground and literally providing Bonaparte with pictorial as well as moral support. Yet even within the French camp there are awkwardnesses revealing disagreements and fear. Guillon Le Thièrè self-consciously represents Napoleon using intimidation to persuade the Austrians to conclude the preliminaries of peace before they realize the weakness of his position. His speedy terms ultimately cost him dearly in granting his adversaries a foothold in the Venetian territories, which led to further war. Austria secretly coveted Venice, heretofore a neutral state, and happily surrendered the Milanese in exchange. So while appearing to dictate peace as he menaced the Austrian capital, Napoleon concluded a bargain favorable to the enemy; additionally, he increased the commitments of the French government in Italy and destroyed any hope of a quick return to normality in the peninsula.

The new realism of the Bonapartist period is seen in the account of Barras, the wily Jacobin turned director, who interrupted his memoirs of the Revolution with a reference to the bloody battle at Eylau, free-associating from there to a comparison of the marquis de Sade and Napoleon. For him the butchery at Eylau smacked of the philosophy of de Sade, but on an order of magnitude undreamed of by the aristocratic profligate. Barras then recounts the anecdote of one of the Italian directors of the Roman republic, the physician Camillo Corona, who sought exile in Paris after the Directory fell. Corona visited the Salon of 1808 and was so

struck by the view of David's *Coronation of Napoleon* and Gros's *Battlefield of Eylau* hanging face to face that he exclaimed in outrage, "Coronation and Slaughter! That's the story of his life!"³

While Barras had plenty of axes to grind and exaggerated as all writers of memoirs do, this anecdote holds up under scrutiny because it belongs to a wider field of discourse that embraced a consensus of criticism permissible under the Napoleonic regime. The catalogue description of Gros's painting itself did not shirk from the tragic consequences of the event: it observed that the emperor surveying the aftermath of the battle was "filled with horror at the sight of the spectacle," and this text is followed through in the image, with the entire foreground covered with the dead and wounded (see fig. 5.1). Although the statement made certain that the audience understood that, at the time Napoleon passed in review, "the French troops were bivouacking on the field of battle"—that is, they were the self-proclaimed victors of this internecine destruction—it could not deny what the foreign press had reported to its readership and what had been leaked to the French public earlier that year. Even the government's attempt to contain the damage by underestimating the loss of troops backfired because the conservative body count was bad enough. But what is important here is the evidence that the historical progression and understanding since the Revolution could no longer sustain the supersensible image of the invincible ruler of the ancien régime or the overinflated idealism of the Revolution.

The Battle of Eylau was perhaps a turning point, along with the Spanish insurrection that same year, that revealed huge chinks in the Napoleonic armor; plenty of paint and ink was spilled previously in the effort to mythologize the "Little Corporal" and even to adorn him with divine attributes. For the first time the unprivileged strata of French society experienced France as their own country, as their self-created fatherland which now demonstrated its superiority to the privileged strata of outmoded feudal societies. This invested Napoleon with a mythic component for which there existed only an outmoded symbolism and which was bound to clash with the innovative restructuring of the social order. The demand for a new realism to accommodate the new data of experience and the desire to retain the mythic components of tradition stamp the Napoleonic imagery with its hybridized tension.

Napoleon and David

One way to map this development is to examine the Bonapartist activity of one of Napoleon's favorite artists, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825). To marshal visual practice Napoleon summoned David, then perhaps the most celebrated painter in France. David was ultimately appointed first painter to the emperor at the end of 1804, the equivalent of the royal position under the old regime. The artist was to receive enormous sums for his official commissions: for example, 52,000 francs for the *Distribution of the Eagles* and 65,000 francs for the *Coronation*—extraordinary when we learn that a well-paid artisan then received about a franc a day! At this moment, David was already a prosperous landowner who identified himself with the bourgeois supporters of Napoleon. Having escaped the Terror with his life, he had thrown in with the Directory and even designed a flamboyant costume for the directors, which Barras especially wore with pleasure. His *Sabines* project, which spanned the duration of the Directory, gave visual form to its ideological claim to restore peace and harmony within the republic and had for its own agenda a speculative venture wholly consistent with those who profited most from the short-lived government. But by the end of 1799, David shared the widespread feeling of his peers that scandal-rocked France was without adequate leadership, civil or military (Napoleon was still in Egypt) and welcomed Bonaparte's coup d'état of *brumaire*, which carried the general to supreme civil power.⁴

Impressed, like everyone else in his social milieu, with Bonaparte's talents and utterly frightened of him, David openly proclaimed him as his new hero. David's earliest work for Napoleon is frankly propagandistic, starting with the *Napoleon Crossing the Saint Bernard* executed in the years 1800–1801 (fig. 2.3). The work was commissioned for the library of the Hôtel des Invalides, the veterans' hospital which at that time was undergoing extensive refurbishing to transform it into a monument to Napoleon's army. David's painting depicts the dramatic moment of the traversal of the Alpine pass of Saint Bernard foreshadowing the First Consul's decisive victory over the Austrians at Marengo in June 1800. On 14 May the first French columns climbed the pass, pulling behind them the cannon in sledges made of hollowed logs, and by 22 May the maneuver was completed. The Austrians, surprised and cut off from the rear,



2.3 Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Saint Bernard*, 1801: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Replica of original at Musée national du château de Versailles.

fell back on the village of Marengo, where they were finally routed the following month.

David depicts Napoleon, who himself suggested the idea, on a rearing horse directing the operation across the difficult passage. The forelegs of the rearing animal point to a large slab of rock in the mountainside in which the name of Bonaparte is carved neatly in capital letters just above the more crudely rendered names of his predecessors who similarly mastered the treacherous Alpine crossings, Hannibal and Karolus Magnus (Charlemagne). David's image recalls the earlier equestrian portrait of Count Pottoki (vol. 1), except that the "Corsican upstart" is compared to imperial geniuses of the past, proving that in the present age brains and talent count for more than birth and privilege. The myth of Napoleon as the embodiment of the revolutionary credo had already been energetically shaped by David in contemporary cultural practice.

The representation of the event, however, has been manipulated to slant history in Napoleon's favor. Bonaparte actually crossed the Saint Bernard with the rear guard on a mule led by a peasant from Bourg-Saint-Pierre. The image of the hero spurring the troops on by pointing to some distant summit would indicate total mastery; in fact, the campaign came close to being a total wipeout for the French as a result of the First Consul's blunders. While military historians still dispute the actual facts (notably edited by Napoleon in his dispatches from the front), Napoleon himself declared on 15 June that the battle appeared hopeless, but at the last minute a sudden reversal saved his army. It seems that, through faulty intelligence about the state of bridges over the Bormida River, he ordered two divisions under Desaix and Lapoype to the south and north to trap the Austrians, when the enemy suddenly emerged before Napoleon and the now outnumbered French in an open plain. By the time Desaix returned, Napoleon's troops had been overrun and were wildly retreating. Eyewitness accounts of Napoleon's reaction at this moment contradicted the image of the indomitable hero; he sat by the roadside in nervous tension, flicking with his riding whip the dust cloud raised by his stampeding troops. Desaix, however, managed to spearhead a counterattack and, with some courageous behavior from Kellermann's heavy cavalry, managed to beat back the Austrians. Napoleon never did do justice to Desaix, killed in this battle, and took full credit for the victory. This special talent for self-advertisement forged David's portrayal into Napoleon's ideal self-image. As

Laurette Junot rhapsodized, "The index of his powerful hand extended to [Saint Bernard's] icy summits, and the obstacles disappeared."⁵

David nevertheless tried to retain a firm foothold on reality. In the middle distance we see the French columns slogging up the pass, pulling behind them the cannon in improvised sledges, and revealing some of the difficulties and hardships of this arduous undertaking. He painstakingly reproduced the uniform Napoleon wore at Marengo right down to the seams on the breeches, and he ingeniously showed the raised hand of the First Consul without a glove in contrast to the other holding the reins, which gives an irregular cast to the scene.

Ironically, it was Carlos IV of Spain who commissioned from David the first version of the picture. Bonaparte immediately ordered copies of it, and in September 1801 the painter exhibited two versions, one for the king of Spain and the other for the First Consul. Since Marengo, French supremacy on the Continent received recognition from France's neighbors. Napoleon's acquisition of Tuscany put pressure on Spain's Italian possessions and gave him diplomatic leverage with the Spanish court. After the battle of Marengo he succeeded in driving out of office in Madrid a ministry hostile to France. This helped reinstate the ambitious Godoy, the "Prince of Peace," who supported French interests. Napoleon gained his object on 1 October 1800 through the treaty of San Ildefonso, confirmed by the treaty of Lunéville in February 1801, in which Spain declared itself ready to cede Parma and its dependency Elba to France, to give up Louisiana, and even to constrain Portugal to break its alliance with England and close its ports to British ships. A Spanish army led by Godoy and reinforced by a French auxiliary corps invaded Portugal and forced the Portuguese king to sign a treaty closing his harbors to England and requiring him to pay France a large indemnity. Given this French pressure on Spain, which was exploited by Godoy for his own self-aggrandizement, we may well imagine that Carlos IV ordered the painting of Napoleon at this propitious moment to ingratiate himself with the First Consul. One other piece of confirming evidence is the Spanish king's gift of sixteen horses to Napoleon in 1800, including a fiery Arabian steed named El Jorنالero that may be the one ridden by the French ruler in David's picture.⁶

David began the work in the final days of 1800, a period marked by the notorious assassination attempt on Napo-



2.4 Charles Thévenin, *Passage of the French Army across Saint Bernard, Commanded by His Majesty the Emperor, the 28 Floréal Year 8 of the Republic*, 1806. Musée national du château de Versailles.

leon's life by the explosion of the *machine infernale*.⁷ The crude homemade explosive device went off prematurely, and thus Bonaparte's life was spared. David's charging equestrian is thus the *héros éternel* thwarting the *machine infernale*, rising phoenixlike out of the Alpine snow and ice, intrepid and indestructible. David's historical distortion pits Napoleon against the elements of wind and snow, with the general's cloak swirling around him like a magical force impelling him forward. Chaussard observed that the wind-swept cloak seemed to take "the form of the wings of an eagle, an ingenious idea."⁸

We can get some idea of the role David's picture played in shaping Bonapartist propaganda, by looking at another text of Chaussard that interprets for the audience of the Salon of 1806 a later version of Napoleon crossing the Saint Bernard. This was Charles Thévenin's *Passage of the French Army across Saint Bernard, Commanded by His Majesty the Emperor, the 28 Floréal Year 8 of the Republic* (fig. 2.4). It is far more consistent with popular engravings of the event which visually focused less on the personality of Napoleon than on the conception of the landscape as obstacle to be overcome (fig. 2.5). Thévenin's work, while still locating Bonaparte in the center of the work, shows him surrounded by his general staff, gesturing them forward towards "the peak of the crossing . . . the goal of their labors and the pathway to glory." Chaussard sees the miracle of Caesar and Hannibal repeated in contemporary terms and even "surpassed." And he continued in the same eulogistic mode: "Very well! a hero, far above all those of antiquity

2.5 *Passage of the French Army across Saint Bernard*, 1800, engraving. Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



by the scale of his plans, the profundity of his combinations, has dared to attempt this crossing and confront every danger; his comrades-in-arms, electrified by his genius, excited by his courage, follow him joyfully; they have overcome every obstacle; under such a chief nothing is impossible to Frenchmen."⁹ Reading backward from 1806, Chaussard praises the French troops who brave every climactic change from the burning heat of the desert to the frozen wastes of the north. The lesson of Saint Bernard is its eloquent testimony to the capacity of the Napoleonic soldier to "triumph over every imaginable obstacle, to ward off the very elements, and, in a word, to transcend nature itself."

Here both the painter and the critic base their narrative on the David, taking its original idea as the point of departure for a secondary interpretation that depended on a conglomeration of the initial encoding into blatant propaganda. It was purchased by the government and served a very special role in attempting to persuade its viewers of the "reality" of Napoleon's seemingly "miraculous" exploits. Drawing liberally upon the lengthy catalogue introduction, Chaussard picks up on the authentic topographical features scrupulously rendered by Thévenin. The painter not only made sketches directly at the site, but he included a variety of local human and landscape motifs, including Saint Bernard dogs, the hospice and cabins for weary pilgrims, a sutler with two exhausted and frostbitten children, as well as a graveyard for those who perish in the mountain.

The catalogue entry stresses Thévenin's "great exactitude" in the rendering of the mountain and its panoramic geographical setting, the upper third of the valley leading to the hospice and just contiguous with the region of the Valais. This geological specificity was informed by both the artist's own sketches and those of geographers assigned to the expedition, and points further to Napoleon's own interest with this science and the special place he made for geologists and geographers on his military incursions. Naturally, they were indispensable to his success in the field, but often he commissioned veteran geologists who carried on their own independent research. The special interest in Alpine geology in this period as a model for understanding the origin of rock formations could be exploited to add a "scientific" veneer to the military venture.

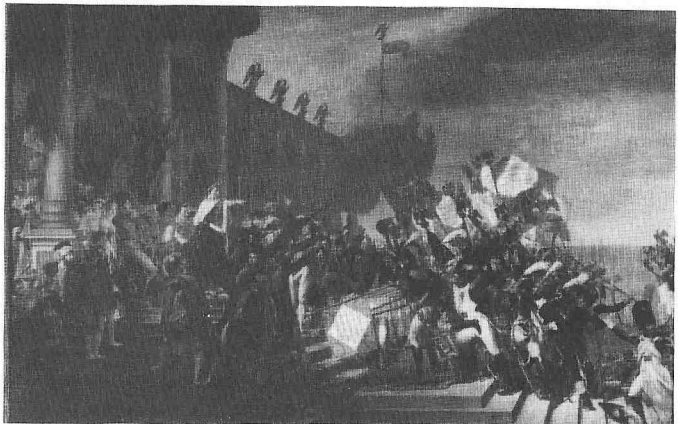
David's imprint of Napoleon's name in a rock outcropping literally "fossilizes" the event and forms the factual counterpart to the falsified action of the protagonist. Here

the authentic-looking inorganic environment camouflages the purposefully erroneous projection of the organic bodies. This conceptual dualism had to be retained in order to juggle the various metamorphoses of Bonaparte, from general to First Consul, and from First Consul to emperor—a series of avatars that corresponded as well to the contradictory stages of the political evolution from republic to authoritarian government, a process belied by the preservation of the name of the republic in official documents. (This is seen in the catalogue entry for Thévenin's picture in 1806 which has the "emperor" leading the troops of the "republic" across Saint Bernard.) The transmittal of "truth" took place in the peripheries of civil, military, and cultural life, in areas that barely affected the falsified center.

Distribution of the Eagles

No more striking example exists of this conceptual dualism than David's *Distribution of the Eagles*, a painting of an event that occurred three days after the coronation, which the artist also represented as part of a formidable package of imperial iconography (fig. 2.6). (The *Coronation* will be discussed in a later section.) The ceremonies were organized by Percier and Fontaine and took place on a huge grandstand set up against the facade of the Ecole militaire at the Champ-de-Mars. This was a tribute to all branches of the army wherein the regimental commanders took an oath to the emperor to defend to the death their standards mounted with eagles and stay on "the road to victory." According to the program, the emperor said, "Soldiers, here are your flags; these Eagles will be your rallying point; they

2.6 Jacques-Louis David, *Distribution of the Eagles*, 1810. Musée national du château de Versailles.



will be wherever your emperor deems them necessary to protect his throne and his people. You will swear to guard them with your life." At this point, the colonels holding the eagles were to raise them in the air and shout in unison, "We swear!" The oath was then repeated by all the military and civil deputations to the sound of artillery salvos, and the solemnities ended with the return of the eagles to their respective regiments.

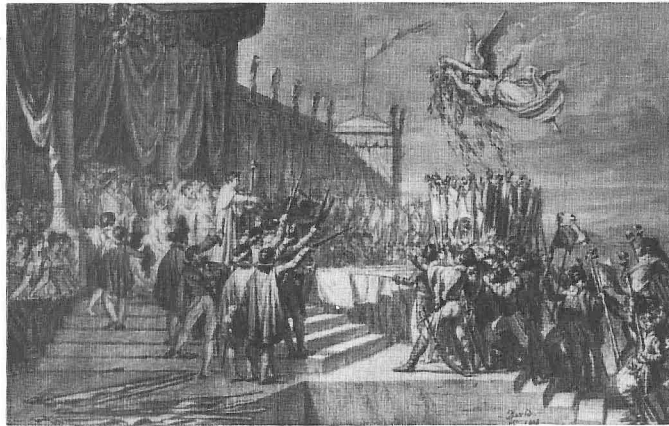
David's role as depicter-in-residence was spelled out two years later with Austerlitz in mind: "Never was an oath better kept. What a variety of stances and expressions! There never was a finer subject for a painting. How it fires the painter's imagination! It is the forerunner of the immortal battles which marked the anniversary of His Majesty's coronation. Posterity looking at this painting will be astonished and marvel, "what an emperor!"¹⁰ It should be recalled that this production was David's third representation of an oath, each portraying a critical stage in recent French history and inevitably referring back and forth to each other. (This is most obvious in both the preparations and final design of *Distribution of the Eagles*, which depend on motifs derived from its two predecessors.) What is critical in David's statement is the obvious appeal of the oath motif and its objective realization for him in material history. My earlier volume, *Art in an Age of Revolution*, showed how the *Oath of the Horatii*, a prerevolutionary work, and *Oath of the Tennis Court*, a revolutionary work, folded into each other; David himself encouraged the connection by exhibiting them together. I need not rehearse the arguments here, except to point out that both represented oaths sworn in behalf of the unity of the reformed state newly expanded to embrace an heretofore excluded citizenry. Thus the oath in these works connoted patriotic commitment to the principle of the commonwealth rather than of the anointed ruler. The *Horatii* contains a military subtext ostensibly derived from antiquity but actually based upon the new discipline promoted by the French army after the Seven Years' War, whereas the *Tennis Court* applied that standard to forge a highly disciplined and committed civil body capable of taking control of the political apparatus. In the later work the fraternal oath binding the initiates has been transmogrified into contemporary life, signifying that present reality had caught up with ideality. The final oath picture maintains reality as the exciting cause, but it subverts the "national" priorities of Rousseau's social contract to align itself with the narrower inclusive model of the old

regime. And it does so by rejecting the allegorical model of antiquity as a token example for the present and deliberately forefronting it in modern military life in imitation of the old Roman standard-bearers.

The series of oath pictures may be seen as the coding of key developments in the history of the Revolution and its culmination in Napoleonic authoritarianism. The ancient Roman republican model served as a standard for the moderns, authentically realized in the *Tennis Court* oath, but the collapse of the Revolution paved the way for a despotic figure swollen with the blood of military and foreign conquest indispensable for the retention of his hold over the French people. As under the old regime, obedience and loyalty were sworn to the sovereign. It is by no means fortuitous that the last and final oath was both contemporary and almost exclusively military; the *vaincre ou mourir* implied in the *Horatii* was literally written into the Napoleonic ceremony of the eagles and symbolically demonstrated the ascendancy of the military over the civil domain and the force of arms over collective expression. The civil pride of French nationalism won during the Revolution had been displaced onto pride in battlefield glory, and the welfare of the French citizenry taken as a whole became subordinated to the prestige of the troops. Symbolically this was further represented by shifting the ancient paradigm from the republic to the empire.

David completed a major drawing in December 1808 for the emperor's approval (fig. 2.7). Between that time and the initial completion of the definitive tableau in October 1810 Napoleon requested two basic changes: he asked

2.7 Jacques-Louis David, *Distribution of the Eagles*, 1808, drawing. Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



that David eliminate an allegorical personification depicted in the sky above the flags, and at the last minute ordered that the portrait of Empress Joséphine be removed, since he had by then been divorced and remarried to Marie-Louise of Austria. Here in a nutshell are the perimeters of Bonapartist visual and historical "truth." The winged Victory hovering in the air and strewing laurel leaves on the flags was for Napoleon an outmoded form of representation that clashed with his sense of the "true" and the "new." The picture was less an allegory of the state than an ideological commentary on the power of Napoleon, who needed no help from idealized entities. Yet his sense of realism could not extend to the historical past which he was in the process of manipulating to justify and legitimize his hold on power. Joséphine, who had actually been present at the event, had to go because her presence belied his claim to dynastic succession now embodied by Marie-Louise. Joséphine no longer had a historical place in Bonapartist ideology, and the documentary record had to be falsified. This entailed eliminating her ladies-in-waiting as well and replacing them with a group of ambassadors, including Mohammed Said-Heled of the Ottoman empire, who looks upon the occasion with an obvious irritation. It was hardly secret that Napoleon had planned an eastern expedition and the partition of the Ottoman empire that would involve France, Russia, and Austria. Austria's desire to share in the spoils was one of the motivations for Franz I's gift of his daughter to Bonaparte. David (who was not present at the ceremony) himself went to great lengths to document the event with precision, but wound up being "complicit" in the historical manipulation. Indeed, David had his own agenda in reconstructing the ceremony: at the top of the pyramid of military corps we see the conspicuous display of the flags of the Twelfth and Ninth regiments, which were commanded by sons-in-law of David.

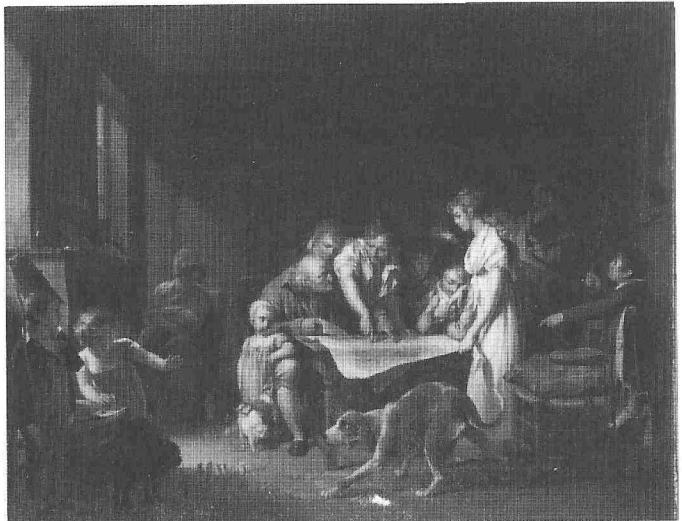
This family pride in the opportunity for participation in the Napoleonic machine represents the more popular side of the epoch. Bourgeois artists like Louis Boilly encouraged their sons to attend the Bonapartist military academies where they were certain to get a sound general education. The same year that David sketched his composition for *Distribution of the Eagles*, Boilly submitted several Napoleonic subjects to the Salon in the hopes of gaining a commission or sale. One was the *Departure of the Conscripts in 1807* and another, the grandiose *Reading of the Bulletin of the Grand Army* (figs. 2.8–9). Despite the insatiable appe-



tite for human sacrifice brought on by interminable wars, many of Boilly's recruits can still muster a sense of heroism and adventure. It is symptomatic of the period, however, given the numerous cases of desertion and even rebellion in the military, that at least one critic called the mood of zealousness "unnatural."¹¹ Indeed, despite Boilly's attempt to ingratiate himself with the regime in 1808 there are enough contradictory elements in the work to indicate the painter's ambivalence. At the far right of the composition, a blind man led by his dog obviously "sees" more clearly than the silly conscripts, while the majordomo energetically raising his baton hardly gets the response from the parade of recruits commensurate with his gesture.

The other work depicts the interior of an artisanal

2.9 Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Reading of the Bulletin of the Grand Army*, 1808. The St. Louis Art Museum.





3.10 Antoine-Jean Gros, *Portrait of the First Consul*, 1802. Musée National de la Légion d'honneur, Paris.

household in which several generations follow on a map of Europe the march of the imperial armies.¹² The reason for their intense absorption is not merely their patriotic duty but the absence of a son, who is at the front. The "XII Bulletin" in the grandfather's hand refers to the German campaign, celebrated at the Salon of 1808. In the background, a mother nurses her infant beneath Canova's bust of Napoleon as First Consul, while in the center the grandfather and his son—the woman's husband—argue the location of the troops. Nearby a young woman, possibly the betrothed of the man at the front, listens intently, neglecting both her knitting and the attentions of a would-be suitor. In the foreground children's war games are disrupted by a feuding dog and cat. Despite the visible strain on family life caused by Napoleon's military ventures, the work endorses the patriarchal family structure, unified under the emperor's aegis. Rarely represented in Napoleonic salons, this depiction of the working class acknowledges the heavy sacrifices made by this group during the bloody years 1807–8.

Napoleonic Effigies

The various avatars of Bonaparte constitute another means of mapping the political transformations. The profile of the leader became synonymous with the state, and the kinds of information processed and communicated in the portraiture at a given time provide an index to the ideological developments. Gros's portrait of the First Consul became the prototype for the official type, and replicas and variants were distributed for display in institutional spaces (fig. 2.10). This version, dated year 10, was completed sometime after the Peace of Amiens on 25 March 1802. Young Bonaparte is shown with his body facing the viewer, his head turned three-quarters to the right, and his right hand pointing to a list of treaties that have been enacted under his general- and consulship. More precisely, his index finger strikes "Lunéville," the site of a peace treaty of February 1801 which gave France German territories on the left bank of the Rhine, Belgium, Luxembourg, and control of nearly all of Italy. It symbolized the complete failure of the Second Coalition to stop Bonaparte, and it momentarily isolated England. The way was now open for a truce with that country on terms favorable to the French. The last name on the list is "Amiens," where the signatures were exchanged in March 1802. The First Consul's action is decisive; his feet stand far apart, his left arm is bent at almost a right

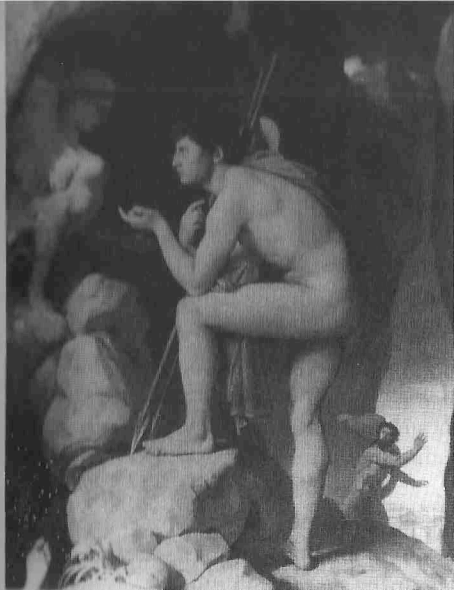


2.11 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon I on the Imperial Throne*, 1806. Musée de l'armée, Hôtel des Invalides, Paris.

angle as his left hand grasps a pair of gloves, and his right arm thrusts towards the table. These signifiers communicate a telling gesture to an unseen visitor in his interior space. He forcefully drives home the point that Lunéville was the precondition for Amiens, although his own motivation for the latter was his need to buy time to complete the work of political organization in the annexed territories. It is this military competence and capacity for strategic planning that Gros conveys: an energetic leader who makes his point effectively and acts decisively. The empty room and simple uniform convey a Spartan quality more in keeping with revolutionary imagery than with the imperial pomp of the next phase.

The most impressive example of the later stage is Ingres's portrait, *Napoleon I on the Imperial Throne* (fig. 2.11). A student of David, Ingres (1780–1867) early placed his brilliant gifts at the service of the emperor. One of Ingres's most telling examples in this regard is his *Oedipus and the Sphinx* originally done in 1808 as a proof of progress that every Prix de Rome laureate was obliged to send regularly to Paris (fig. 2.12).¹³ The hero's encounter with the sphinx reenacts the symbolic confrontation between good and evil, intelligence and guile. The hybrid bestiality and malevolent expression of the Sphinx is reinforced by the human debris of its victims. Ingres carefully confines these negative allusions to the periphery or to the shadows, allowing the elegant and well-proportioned figure of Oedipus to dominate the scene. Imagine the hero in a cowboy hat and white suit and you will grasp Ingres's intention. Oedipus is both taut and relaxed, ready to draw his trusty javelins should sly old Sphinx engage in foul play while he works out the riddle.

The source of Oedipus's youthful confidence and swagger derives from Ingres's identification with Bonaparte, seen most vividly in the artist's design for *Napoleon on the Pont de Kehl* (fig. 2.13). The scene depicts the emperor on the threshold of the Rhine, an allegory of his plan for a confederation of Germanic states adjacent to the river. Ratified in July 1806, the plan was meant to dissolve the Holy Roman Empire. Napoleon's shield carries the no-nonsense inscription "reddition ou destruction" (surrender or destruction) and displays the menacing image of the Napoleonic eagle crushing the double-headed Hapsburg eagle in its talons (an allusion to Austerlitz). The following year, on 9 July 1807, Napoleon signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Czar Alexander, who he completely charmed and won over. The



8.12 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, 1808. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

terms of the treaty included France's acquisition of the Ionian Isles—the collective name for the seven Greek islands—with the result that France now controlled major territories associated with classical antiquity.

Ingres's awe of Bonaparte—or, at least, his calculated vision of awe—manifests itself in his 1806 *Napoleon I on the Imperial Throne*, which projects the emperor as a transcendental being on a celestial throne. His attempt to join the effigy of Bonaparte to an image of eternal authority has elements of both the eerie and the grotesque. The emperor is shown in his coronation robes and carrying all the trappings of dynastic rule: the imperial regalia, the scepter of Charles V, and the hand of justice and the sword of Charlemagne. Ingres's image corresponds to the hierarchical order Napoleon imposed on French society to counteract the excessive individualism of revolutionary social reforms. He reasserted the authority of the state and reaffirmed the social dominance of the middle class. While removing the Old Regime's obstacles to civil equality, Napoleon imposed a system to assure himself virtually unchecked power. Indeed, it was the Corps législatif which commissioned this image—owning up to its lack of independence and total subservience to Napoleon.

To convey a sense of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, Ingres drew from classical as well as Christian sources. The emperor's frontal pose derived from an engraved Roman gem representing Jupiter and published in the *Recueil* of the comte de Caylus (vol. 1, 1762, plate 46). At the same time, the rigid symmetry and heavy draping

8.13 Engraving after Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon on the Pont de Kehl*, 1806. Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.





2.14 Jan van Eyck, Ghent altarpiece, 1432, tempera and oil on panel. Saint Bavo, Ghent.

recall Jan van Eyck's image of God the Father at the top of his Ghent altarpiece, exhibited in Paris as part of the war booty during the years 1799 to 1816 (fig. 2.14). A great admirer of van Eyck, Ingres could not have made the point of Napoleon's unquestioned power more explicitly.

The allusion to van Eyck's altarpiece carries still another reference to Napoleon's imperial ambitions. The emperor hoped to make Paris the art center of the Grand Empire as well as its political capital. Napoleon considered looted art treasures of the enemy to be legitimate trophies of war and, therefore, rightful possessions. Such masterpieces were carefully gathered in the Louvre or sent to provincial museums. Art appropriations were included in peace treaties to give these transfers the semblance of legality. In addition, Napoleon proclaimed himself savior of oppressed countries whose annexation to the new political body made Paris their mutual capital. Thus he had a practical as well as moral pretext for enriching the national treasures and preserving the defeated country's cultural heritage.

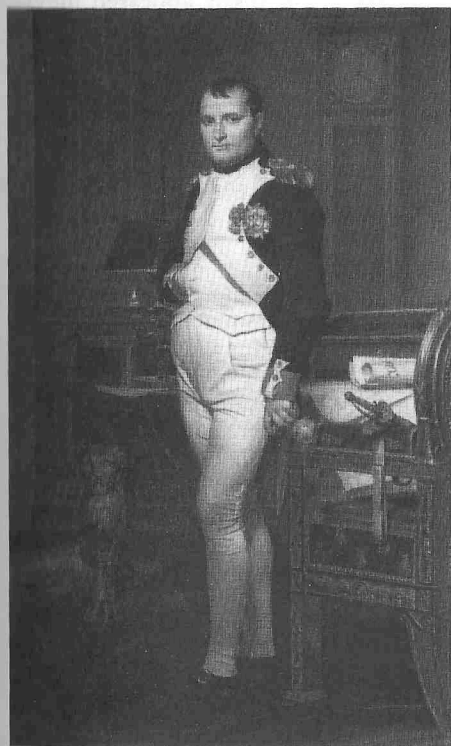
Napoleon, who believed in the destiny of his "star," is accompanied in Ingres's picture by an astrological forecast of his rise to power. The carpeted step, covered at the base of the throne with the imperial eagle, is fringed with medallions of the zodiacal signs. At the left of the picture are the signs of Scorpio, Libra, and Virgo, while at the opposite side we can make out Pisces and Taurus. Scorpio (23 October–21 November), lying at the base of the throne and mirrored in the gilt socle, clearly alludes to the coup of 18 *brumaire* (9 November) which brought Napoleon to power, while Taurus must allude to the moment when he was proclaimed emperor (18 May 1804). Thus Napoleon's unearthly image is accompanied by an astrological chart affirming that his fate was indeed written "in the stars."¹⁴ Here the Corps législatif and Ingres combined to mask the emperor's despotism and rule by force.

Ingres's astonishing deification of the emperor, however, suffered a backlash. Chaussard condemned it as an attempt "to push art back at least four centuries," and he stated that his negative impressions "agreed with those of the crowd."¹⁵ The bizarre effects and pictorial complexities turned people away discontented. Yet Chaussard's frustration with the picture had more to do with its failure to produce *his* ideal of the emperor than with a "bad" painting *per se*. As he stated, "The character of a great man—that heroic physiognomy, his mobility of expression, that pro-

fundity of genius, those lightning gleams of inspiration—did this not offer sufficient difficulty to surmount?" In short, Ingres's attempt to deify Napoleon fell back on an archaizing, "Gothic" model out of keeping with the modern Napoleonic state. For the closed-circuit world of the reactionary Corps législatif and the subservient painter the approach was entirely appropriate, but its unchecked foray into absolutist and theological sources ran smack into the residual republican components of the imperial system and exposed the contradictions of the regime.

Perhaps the most well-known avatar was the one commissioned by Alexander Douglas, heir of an illustrious Scotch family (fig. 2.15). It was commissioned in 1810 and completed two years later, right in the middle of the war with England. Why the marquis of Hamilton ordered the flattering image of the emperor remains open to speculation, but there are a few clues in the historical record. He considered himself the true heir to the throne of Scotland, and identified with powerful rulers. His will ordered that he be embalmed, buried in an ancient Egyptian sarcophagus, and interred in a colossal mausoleum. His evident admiration for Napoleon is seen in the fact that his extensive art collection included busts, miniatures, intaglios, and Sèvres vases with images of Bonaparte and his family. Lord Douglas was a loyal member of the Whig party, whose oppositional strategy called for attestations to Napoleon's invincibility on land, thus indirectly arguing for peace rather than for intervention.¹⁶

The full-length portrait of Napoleon represents him in the blue uniform of a colonel of the Grenadiers of the Foot Guard, in the act of leaving his study where he has passed the night at work, as indicated by the candles, which have burnt low and are flickering, and by a clock, which registers 4:13 A.M. The emperor did in fact work long hours and go with little sleep. David explained his painting to Alexandre Lenoir: his hero had been up all night drafting the *Code Napoléon* (shown rolled up on the table at the right) and has been so absorbed in his activity that he does not notice it is dawn until the clock strikes four. Then, without a moment of rest, he rises to put on the imperial sword on the sofa to the right and review the troops. When the work was submitted to the emperor before being dispatched to Scotland, Napoleon responded with pleasure, "You have indeed caught me this time, David. At night I work for the welfare of my subjects; in the daytime for their glory."¹⁷



2.15 Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon in His Study*, 1812. Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

The effectiveness of this basically flattering political allegory in 1812 lies in its capacity to allow for unflattering features. Napoleon seems to stand before us without physical idealization, his hair thinning, his body stooping and thickening around the waist, his cheeks puffy and pasty. He is no longer the dashing First Consul of Gros's portrayal. At the same time, Napoleon, with his characteristic right hand tucked into his jacket, dominates the picture space articulated by a series of parallel vertical lines. The sofa that he has just pushed aside in rising forms a powerful diagonal that now seems to pin him against the table. He is hemmed in by the furnishings of his study which also lock him into his work. Napoleon is literally a prisoner of his domestic obligations, which make him neglect his troops.

Thus by 1812 Napoleon is portrayed as less the decisive warrior than the compassionate statesman. He is assigned a "nighttime" slot, that is, in behalf of his subjects, with good reason: by 1811 the Continental system was beginning to disintegrate and war with Russia appeared inevitable. This called for a more humanized version of the emperor, which answered to both the ideology of the parliamentary opposition in England and the reality of the weakening military position of France. David makes use of allegory and metonymy to convey the legislative side of Napoleon, but in this later phase the proportion of "reality" to "ideology" has been reversed from what it had been during the time of the crossing of the Alps. The idealization is no longer centered in the body of the hero, but in the arrangement of objects that orders that body and gives it meaning.

Napoleon and the Ossianic Literature

David's distorted projection of Napoleon crossing the Saint Bernard pits the hero against the elements of wind and snow. The meteorological effects and icy heroism convey an Ossianic touch that points to another layer of Napoleon's self-flattery. Even Ingres's chilling portrait reminded one critic of the cold white light of "moonbeams." It may be recalled that the Ossianic epic had been pieced together from fragments and linked in a fictionalized structure by James MacPherson, who reached an audience of conservative Scots as a symbol of Scottish nationalism. The Ossianic saga told in mournful verse of the battles of Fingal, a glorious king, and the woes of Ossian, his son, who was