



Fig. 13 **Louis Durameau**, *The Continence of Bayard*, Salon of 1777. Oil on canvas, 10' 9¼" × 7' 6¾". Musée de Peinture et de Sculpture, Grenoble.

in West's painting of 1773. Here, the story concerns the Chevalier Bayard's exceptional virtue and kindness. One night, his valet had brought for the Chevalier's pleasure a beautiful young lady; but on seeing her tears, Bayard learned that although she was in financial straits dire enough to sell herself, she was in fact a lady of honor and high birth. In response, he gave her separate sleeping quarters and then offered her mother enough money for a dowry and trousseau that would ensure a proper marriage for her daughter. This last scene, whose sentimental mixture of uncommon chastity and charity is almost Victorian in its resolution, is played out in a "period reconstruction" typical of the late eighteenth century. The costumes are those used on the French stage for the many new dramas set in the Middle Ages; and the setting, with its beams, tapestries, and paneling of pointed arches, provides a late Gothic interior whose attenuated laciness parallels the neo-Gothic designs of many late eighteenth-century architects. Again, as in Lagrenée's scene of Roman virtue, the postures and gestures have a minuet-like sweetness and grace that recall the pleasurable world of the reign of Louis XV.

Jacques-Louis David

It took a genius to make great art from the various new interpretations of history, drama, and morality so apparent in the 1770s and 1780s. His name was Jacques-Louis David, and his life-span, 1748–1825, crossed and reflected every major change in French art and politics from the reigns of Louis XV and XVI through the Revolution, Napoleon, and finally, the Bourbon Restoration. The perfect example of what the French call an "artiste engagé," that is, a committed artist, David came to believe, even before the Revolution, that the power of his work could serve human needs far more important than those of aesthetic delectation alone; and, after 1789, he painted primarily to propagate first Republican and then Napoleonic faith. His beginnings were slow, and his early choices hesitant. In 1777, the year of those paintings by Greuze, Lagrenée, and Durameau discussed above, he was still a student in Rome, in the middle of a five-year sojourn (1775–80) under the aegis of the French Academy. There he labored not only on the absorption of the lessons of Greco-Roman art and the old masters of Italian painting from Raphael through Caravaggio, but on what he planned to be an enormous painting on the kind of Homeric subject *The Funeral of Patroclus*, that, from the mid-eighteenth century on, became a touchstone of seriousness to which only the most ambitious artists could aspire. In 1779 David finally completed a large painted sketch of this lugubrious scene from the *Iliad*, and deemed the result worthy of sending home to Paris for academic judgment (fig. 14). A fascinating reflection of many crosscurrents in the late 1770s, David's painting looks in all directions. At first glance, the tripartite composition seems confused and crowded: in the center, Achilles mourning Patroclus before the wooden funeral pyre; at the left, the killing of twelve Trojan princes to add to the sacrifice; and at the right, not only another sacrificial procession of animals, but the attaching of Hector's corpse to a chariot that will drag around the walls of Troy. The fluttering light and agitated brushstrokes almost belong to the Rococo world of Boucher or a Fragonard. But underneath this restless surface of rolling clouds, picturesque silhouettes, and animated figures, there is a sense of solemn, epic drama that constantly counters the initial impression of flickering pageantry. The grave rhythms of sacrificial processions, the full-blooded energies of the chariot-bearing horses, the gloomy sky—such passages are straws in the winds of David's mature style.

That style was swiftly to crystallize in time for David's first opportunity to show his work to the Paris public, at the Salon of 1781. He included among his dozen entries the two-year-old *Funeral of Patroclus*, but must have realized that relative to his latest work, this was hopelessly old-fashioned. (In 1782, in fact, instead of executing, as planned,



Fig. 14 **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Funeral of Patroclus*, 1779 (Salon of 1781). Oil on canvas, $37\frac{1}{2} \times 87\frac{1}{4}$ ". The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

larger version of this already sizable painted sketch, he used it as a tabletop for lunch and then quickly sold it.) Of the more recent paintings exhibited, it was the newest, the *Belisarius* of 1781 (fig. 15), that proved the most startling and prophetic; for here, suddenly, all of the diffuse energies of the 1770s joined forces in a work whose rock-bottom clarity of form and narrative structure inaugurates the high-minded vision of a new and great artist. At the last Salon he reviewed, Diderot was lucky to see what was virtually the youthful answer to his long-standing prayers for a noble, edifying art, and he quickly proclaimed David's genius.

The legend of Belisarius was noble and lachrymose. He had been a victorious general under Justinian, but was then falsely accused of treason, banished, and, according to even more extreme accounts, blinded. In his pathetic later life, when he wandered about as a beggar, he was one day recognized by a former soldier. It was this moment that David chose to paint. The legend was especially popular in the late eighteenth century, not only because of its dramatic ingredient of grim misfortune, but because it offered a historical counterpart to the contemporary scandal of a French general, the Count of Lally, who, after mismanaging a French expedition in India, was wrongly convicted of treason and executed in 1766, but then officially exonerated in 1781, the year of David's painting. It was the kind of parallel between contemporary events and distant history that David's art would evoke more and more as the Revolution approached.

David's distilled account of a Byzantine ruler's injustice seems to take place in the kind of Roman milieu already envisioned by the masters of seventeenth-century French classicizing painting and drama. With the genius of a stage director who can extract maximum narrative and pathos

from minimal means, David has here told an intricate story with a cast of only four. In ironic distinction to the heart-rending group of a woman giving alms to a blind old beggar and his child companion, the soldier at the left suddenly recognizes this former hero from another world of armies and battles. The solemn motif of tensely raised and outstretched arms and hands is orchestrated for multiple meanings (surprise, charity, desperate need), just as the four figures offer a rich spectrum of human types and ages. All of this drama is measured in lucid shapes and rhythms that, as in Poussin, permeate every last detail. The rectilinear masonry of the ground plane, the cylindrical columns, even the beggar's diagonal stick resting on the cubic block at the right (with its noble Latin inscription—*DATE OBOLUM BELISARIO*, "Give a coin to Belisarius")—all these purified planar and solid geometries define an ideal realm of perfect volumes and intervals. Within this immutable environment, the figures are no less concise in their interplay of gesture and emotions, transforming what might be simply a sentimental drama by a follower of Greuze into tragic theater worthy of Corneille or Racine.

David's power to re-create a complex story as a timeless emblem, at once frozen and passionate, reached its height in the *Oath of the Horatii* (fig. 16), a work that might well qualify as a point of no return in the history of painting, and that, like a visual manifesto, seemed to propose a totally new order. Recognizing that he wanted to create an epochal masterpiece, David actually returned to Rome in 1784 to immerse himself in an antique milieu appropriate to the Roman legend he was to illustrate. When the painting made its private debut in David's Rome studio in that year, all the connoisseurs who came to see it knew that something momentous had happened; and when in the



Fig. 15 Jacques-Louis David, *Belisarius*, Salon of 1781. Oil on canvas, 9' 7¼" × 10' 4¾". Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

following year, 1785, the *Horatii* was seen at the Salon, all of Paris was electrified by this pictorial call to arms.

It is a tribute to David's genius that, even without knowing the convoluted narrative of the Horatii legend, the modern spectator can instantly grasp the two-part theme: among the men, a patriotic emblem of swords and oath taking; among the women, a wave of grief and abandonment. The family collisions of a work like Greuze's *Father's Curse* (see fig. 11) have now resulted in an absolute rift between male and female worlds: a virile strength that leads from the home to the battlefield, and a feminine passivity that remains sorrowfully within the domestic confines of mothers and children. In a perfect stage space that revives the rational clarity of Renaissance one-point

perspective systems, we see first the noble father, Horatius, who will hand over swords to his triplet sons after they take their oath to fight for their country against the enemy Curiatii (who, with mythical coincidence, are also triplet brothers). United by this patriotic cause, the group of four men presents a military discipline of mind, soul, and body. Their wills are as controlled as their tautly outstretched limbs; together, the quartet becomes a tense fusion of clashing metal and muscle, a heraldic pattern of crisscrossing arms, weapons, forked legs. By contrast, the group of women is united in slow, descending rhythms that flow in rounded patterns through flesh and drapery. Even without knowing the rest of the complex story—that the sister, Camilla (far right), is betrothed to one of the Curiatii who will be killed

in battle by her own brother who, in turn, will slay her for mourning one of the enemy and then be exonerated by his father for this patriotic crime—we sense in the women the tragic events to come, though their grief is overshadowed by the men's energetic rally of allegiance to the state.

For all its utopian newness and clarity, the *Horatii* is hardly the first painting of its time to express the concerted moral force of a group of Roman men who swear their fidelity to a higher cause. Already in the 1760s, the Scottish artist Gavin Hamilton (1723–98) had painted comparable themes that were disseminated throughout Europe in engravings. His *Oath of Brutus* (fig. 17), in fact, with its polarity between a vengeful group of Roman oath takers and an expiring Lucretia (who has taken her own life after the dishonor of having been raped by Tarquinius), is probably the pictorial nugget of David's own choice of theme and legend. But, as in David's other recastings of earlier classicizing images by Hamilton and his French contemporaries, the debt to his sources is more than repaid. Hamilton's

tentative steps in the direction of a classical nobility of style and subject take on, in David, a passionate authority. The somewhat flaccid anatomies and smoothly generalized surfaces of the earlier work are replaced, in the *Horatii*, by a masterful, almost Caravaggesque, realism of light and texture that sharply records and differentiates the palpable facts of hair, flesh, muscle, metal, drapery; and the circuitous, swaying movements of Hamilton's figure groups are changed into postures of heraldic clarity and permanence. It has also been convincingly suggested that David was inspired by a group of six antique warriors he saw at the Palazzo Farnese in Rome, a work now usually identified as the *Tyrannicides* but that was thought in the 1780s to represent the very theme of David's painting, the opposition between the Horatii and the Curiatii. This image of the stark confrontation between two pairs of triplets was rendered in a taut, geometric style whose archaic flavor perfectly suited David's goals of severe simplification. Similarly, even the architecture in this Roman atrium seems stripped to a stark



Fig. 16 Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784 (Salon of 1785). Oil on canvas, 10' 10" × 14'. Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 17 **Gavin Hamilton** (engraving by Domenico Cunego), *Oath of Brutus*, 1768. Engraving, $11\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$ ". British Museum, London.

purity; its unfluted, baseless Doric columns regress beyond the intricacies of the engaged, fluted columns in the *Belisarius* as if to reach the very rudiments of architecture. Indeed, David's impulse to purge his painting of all that was inessential, and to arrive thereby at the basic alphabet of form and feeling, was characteristic of the most thoroughgoing innovations in all the arts of the 1780s, whether the architecture of Ledoux or the sculpture of Canova.

Given the stunning impact of the *Horatii*, with its virtual proclamation of a new aesthetic and moral order, it is no surprise to find immediate and potent repercussions. Of these, the most memorable is *Marius at Minturnae* (fig. 18), completed in Rome in 1786 by the short-lived Jean-Germain Drouais (1763–88), who, as an intimate friend and protégé of David, had assisted the master in painting parts of the *Horatii*. If anything, *Marius* pushes David's drastic simplifications even further. In this story from Plutarch, the noble Roman general and consul is seen as a political refugee, after the state has unjustly sentenced him to death. But the Cimbrian soldier who has come to execute him is unable to do so, for the actual confrontation with a



Fig. 18 **Jean-Germain Drouais**, *Marius at Minturnae*, 1786. Oil on canvas, $9' \times 12' 2"$. Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 19 **Joseph-Benoît Suvée**, *Death of Admiral de Coligny*, 1787. Oil on canvas, 10' 9½" × 8' 8".
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.

Like many of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's and Étienne-Louis Boullée's projects for vast civic buildings in some as yet unbuilt utopian world, *The Tennis Court Oath* never, in fact, passed from this conceptual stage to the huge painting David envisioned. Finally, the most ambitious and high-minded project in his entire career was abandoned. The principle, however, of translating the venerable themes of the Western tradition, whether Christian or Greco-Roman, into a language that could be of immediate service to contemporary political causes was to be continued. Thus, in 1793, the bloodiest year of the Reign of Terror, David was called upon to mourn and commemorate in paint a series of martyrs who had lost their lives for the Republic. In the greatest of these, the *Death of Marat* (fig. 21), David took on the staggeringly difficult task of turning a gruesome murder into timeless art. An obsessively committed Jacobin, Jean-Paul Marat suffered from a skin disease that obliged him to do most of his political work in the soothing waters of his bathtub. On July 13, 1793, Charlotte Corday, an adherent of his political foes, the Girondists, gained access to his apartment and killed him with a butcher knife. A political martyr was instantly made, and elaborate rites that virtually translated a Christian sanctification into a secular one took place in Paris three days later. As a friend

of Marat's who shared the same political goals, David was both personally and patriotically committed to the pictorial record of his death, and the painting, completed three months after the murder, reflects both private and public passions. In the foreground is a rude wooden packing crate that not only establishes, like the cube in the foreground of the *Belisarius* (see fig. 15), a solemn and abstract geometric module for an ideal image, but also becomes a surrogate tombstone, upon which is inscribed À MARAT, DAVID. L'AN DEUX, in the simplest Roman lettering. A personal dedication of the artist to his friend, it is also a kind of public funerary monument. Its date, the year two, proclaims the event as occurring in the second year of the new French revolutionary calendar, which, like David's new art, was to inaugurate a new epoch in the Western world. This metamorphosis of common fact into eternal symbol continues in the treatment of Marat's corpse itself, which not only bears all the marks of a real murder—the knife wound on the right side, the hand still holding a quill, the ghastly pallor of the skin—but also transcends these empirical details to enter a more heroic realm in which the body begins to recall not only the martyrdom of Christ or his saintly disciples, but the no less venerated corpse of one of those Homeric heroes—a Patroclus or a Hector—whom David



Fig. 20 Jacques-Louis David, *The Tennis Court Oath*, Salon of 1791. Pen and brown ink and brown wash on paper, 26 × 42".
œuvre, Paris (on long-term loan to the Musée National du Château de Versailles).

Fig. 21 **Jacques-Louis David**, *Death of Marat*, 1793. Oil on canvas, 63¾ × 50⅜". Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts/Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels.



had painted before the Revolution. The ascent from the natural to the supernatural here leads us to the haunting upper half of the painting, which becomes a mysterious void, a nowhere environment, illuminated by an almost holy light that, from an unspecified source above, is cast upon the poignant terrestrial facts below. Atheists though they were, David and Marat, like so many other fervent social reformers of the modern world, seem to have created a new kind of religion. Lenin's tomb in Red Square is one of the most overwhelming of these pious mutations from the secular to the sacred.

David's allegiances followed breathlessly the political events of his country, and in the figure of that Corsican upstart Napoleon Bonaparte, he found, as did most of his compatriots, a new hero to worship. He also found a new patron, who demanded, like the revolutionary leaders before him, that official art support the goals of the ruler and the government. In his first full-scale commission for the new First Consul of France, David was to record a glorious military event of May 20, 1800: Napoleon leading his

troops in victory across the perilous Alpine pass at the Grand-St.-Bernard (fig. 22). As in *Marat*, documentary fact turns into ennobling political fiction. Shown "calm on a fiery steed," as he himself requested, Napoleon belongs here to a venerable tradition of equestrian portraiture in which, as in the legend of Alexander the Great taming the wild horse Bucephalus, monarchs and noblemen serenely master their horses. But David has suddenly inflated the image to give a sense of uncommon energy and authority, the new hope of France. As antlike foot soldiers crawl the way upward into the narrow pass at the left, Napoleon and his horse majestically dominate this fresh plan of leadership. Horse and rider, their heads now on the same level, are fused in a disciplined combination of animal power and human control; and both rise upward, with rearing hooves and upraised hand, toward a symbolic future as utopian as that promised in *The Tennis Court Oath*. Even nature contributes to this momentous recognition of France's new ruler: a gust of icy wind seems to sweep the horse's tail and mane and Napoleon's cloak together in a dramatic as-

to an unseen goal. And the Alpine vista of snow-capped mountains and a stormy blue-gray sky (a sublime natural setting which had already elicited powerful emotional responses among late eighteenth-century artists and spectators) again contributes a heroic backdrop against which the figure of Napoleon and his horse seem all the more heated, not only in the almost Rubensian warmth of their colors and textures, but in the passionate domination of their destiny. In even more literal terms, David has inscribed in the icy rocks of the left foreground BONAPARTE HANNIBAL KAROLUS MAGNUS, thereby providing a historical pedigree for Bonaparte in the evocation of two great military

and political heroes, Hannibal and Charlemagne, who, centuries before, had prophesied his triumph in their own arduous crossing of the same Alpine pass. This kind of noble genealogy is bestowed upon Bonaparte in other ways as well, for the sharply chiseled profile silhouette of horse and rider has an ideal clarity that is virtually Greek in character, a modern reincarnation of the Parthenon marbles. That Napoleon actually crossed the Grand-St.-Bernard pass on a mule (as later nineteenth-century artists would render the scene) is one of many indications of David's—and Napoleon's—ability to transform the prose of everyday facts into the rhetorical poetry of historical myth.

◆ CHALLENGING APOLLO: DAVID AND THE MARTYRDOM OF JEAN-PAUL MARAT ◆

Passionate supporter of the French revolutionary cause, Jacques-Louis David created in oil paint a secular martyr out of his murdered friend, the leading Jacobin Jean-Paul Marat. The success of David's picture (see fig. 21) depended in good part on its swift production, which immediately tapped into the public grief over the death of the politician and editor. Its popularity also stemmed from the range of textual information within the image that dramatically unlocked the story. As such, it provides a good example of how an image functions as a narrative, combining moralizing tale with sentiment. In addition to the text on the writing desk, there are two letters clearly visible. Charlotte Corday's deceitful letter (in his left hand) appealed to Marat's generosity so that she could gain entry to his apartment:

*du 13 juillet, 1793
Marie anne Charlotte
Corday au citoyen
Marat*

*It suffices that I am
truly Unfortunate
for me to have a Right
to your benevolence⁵*

Marat's own letter on the desk reveals his altruism and patriotism:

*You will give this banknote to the
mother of five children whose
husband is off defending the
fatherland [de la patrie].⁶*

On July 15, 1793, two days after Marat's murder, David addressed the National Convention, and by extension, the public, when Marat's embalmed corpse was presented under a damp sheet in the church of the Cordeliers. David's lines presage how he would construct the picture to show Marat in a virtually sacred light:

*He met his death, this friend of
yours, giving you his last morsel of
bread; he died without even having
enough money for his own funeral.
... Come gather round, all of you!
mothers, widows, orphans,
downtrodden soldiers – all you he
defended, to his own peril.
Approach! and contemplate ...⁷*

In August and September of that year, David painted the picture. It was displayed on October 16, 1793 atop a sarcophagus in the courtyard of the Palais du Louvre. Pinned to the sarcophagus were Gabriel Bouquier's stirring lines of verse:

*People, Marat is dead; the lover of
the Fatherland,
Your friend, your supporter, the
hope of the afflicted
Has fallen under the blows of
blighted infamy.
Weep! But remember that he must
be avenged.⁸*

In the next century, the writer and critic Charles Baudelaire turned his attention to the painting. He avoided the populist and nationalist rhetoric of

the Revolution, adopting a poetic prose style that chimed with the image itself:

The *divine* Marat, one arm hanging out of the bath, its hand still loosely holding on to its last quill, and his chest pierced by the *sacrilegious* wound, has just breathed his last. ... The bath water is red with blood, the paper is blood-stained; on the ground lies a large kitchen knife soaked in blood; on a wretched packing case, which constituted the working furniture for the tireless journalist, we read: 'À Marat, David'. All the details are historical and real, as in a novel by Balzac; the drama is there, alive in its pitiful horror, and by a strange stroke of brilliance, which makes this David's masterpiece and one of the great treasures of modern art, there is nothing trivial or ignoble about it. What is most astonishing ... is the fact that it is painted extremely quickly, and when one considers the beauty of its design, it is all the more bewildering. ... this painting has the heady scent of idealism. What has become of that ugliness that Death has so swiftly erased with the tip of its wing? Marat can henceforth challenge Apollo; Death has kissed him ... and he rests in the peace of his transformation. There is in this work something both tender and poignant; a soul hovers in the chilled air of this room, on these cold walls, around the cold and funereal bath.⁹

Fig. 22 **Jacques-Louis David**, *Napoleon at St.-Bernard*, 1800. Oil on canvas, 8' 11" × 7' 11". Musée National du Château de Versailles.



Although glorification of Napoleonic events was more the rule than the exception in French painting from 1800 on, it is worth noting an alternative view of the same military campaign by another artist of David's generation, Nicolas-Antoine Taunay (1755–1830). Painted in 1808 as a wall decoration (fig. 23), it shows not the famous hero but a different side of military life. Against a ravishing Alpine landscape of falling snow and pine trees, we see a woman bandaging a wounded soldier's leg, as a dog and other soldiers look on and another Good Samaritan tends to the impromptu bonfire. Taunay's reading of the facts of history, of the often poignant realities of the everyday, was prophetic of the new century, which slowly undermined the myths of Napoleon and his successors by recognizing that the ordinary activities or wartime hardships of nameless men and women were no less worthy subjects for painting than the high moments in the lives of a ruler extolled by Plutarch or the lives of Napoleonic generals and consuls.

David himself, for all his genius in turning contemporary events into new historical myths, had essentially an artistic vision that seized the palpable, here-and-now fact. Even in the *Horatii*, we sense this intense realism of detail, whether in the harsh differentiation of textures of flesh, hair,

plumes, or metals, or in the irregular cracks of the atrium floor; and in *Napoleon at St.-Bernard*, too, the vision keeps moving from the ideal, emblematic image of mythic horse and rider to the particularities of gilded tassels, tautly held reins, glistening hooves and boots. It may not be a surprise, then, to realize how frequently in his portraiture David could record a specific human presence with a total candor that almost prefigures photography. Thus, in 1802, two years after *Napoleon at St.-Bernard*, David could swiftly fulfill a business-like commission to paint, for two hundred gold louis, the portrait of an Irish merchant and collector, Cooper Penrose, then visiting Paris (fig. 24). The result is disarming in its seeming artlessness and truth. Against a dark monochrome background that offers no distraction from the essential facts of a portrait situation, Mr. Penrose sits before us with the startling immediacy of a one-to-one confrontation. His aging head, whose expression reveals the strain of someone not used to posing for posterity, is placed somewhat lower than in traditional portrait formulas, and his legs and chair seat are cropped by the lower edge of the frame at an unfamiliar and graceless point. This surprising rejection of even the customary placement of the figure in a routine portrait is supported by the penetrating

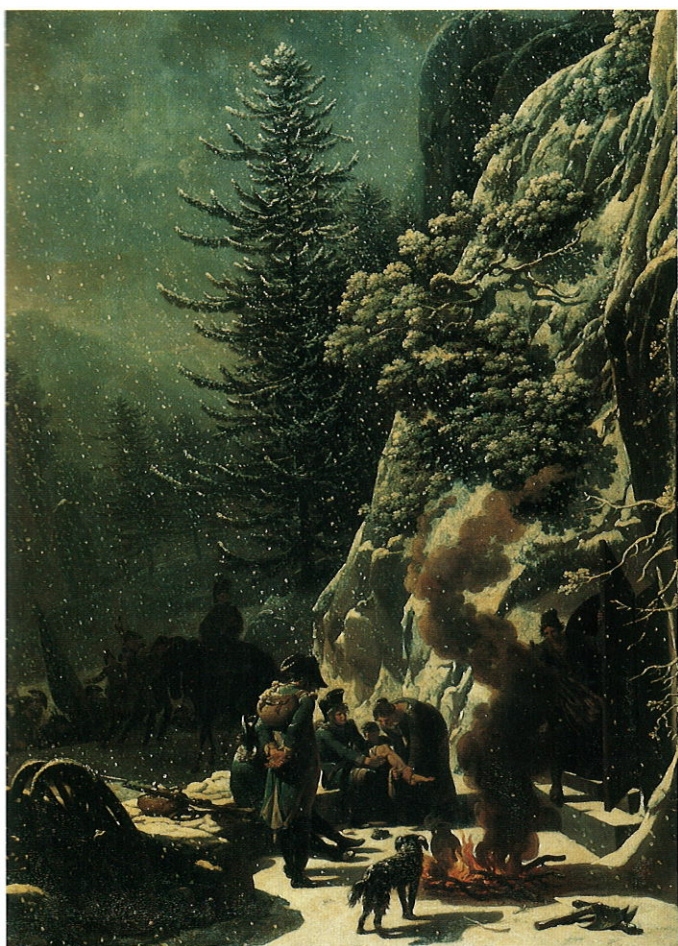


Fig. 23 **Nicolas-Antoine Taunay**, *French Army Crossing the St.-Bernard Pass*, 1808. Oil on canvas, 73 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 65 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Musée National du Château de Versailles.

observation of what seems to be nothing but the truth: the fidgeting of the wrinkled hands, the sense of constraint and slight discomfort in the way Mr. Penrose sits up in a chair as stiff and sober as his clothing (he was of Quaker background). In what must have been the most casual of portrait commissions, David has wiped the slate clean of earlier pictorial artifice, leaving us with an image of such intense respect for fact that were he to rise from the dead, the sitter, we feel, would be instantly recognizable. Such an experience of a particular human being, presented, it would seem, without the veils and distortions of art, is only matched at the time in the portraiture of David's great contemporary Goya.

Nevertheless, the pendulum of David's art, even in the domain of portraiture, could swiftly swing back to icons of such frozen perfection that we feel the human race has been crossbred with deities from Olympus, an illusion often fostered in the terrestrial world of 1800 by the adaptation of Neo-Greek clothing and furniture. In his Juno-like image of Mme. Henriette de Verninac of 1799 (fig. 25), the frontal but remote stare of the sitter (who happens to have been the older sister of the then one-year-old Delacroix)

is as elevated from mundane matters as the slowly coiling rhythms of serpentine limbs, shawl, and robe perfectly locked into the profile of a modishly antique chair. This at once elegant and aloof austerity is further underlined by the slate blankness of a totally flat wall plane, against which only the thinnest of linear moldings, the artist's signature and date, and a few geometrically patterned floor tiles provide any decorative relief at all. Yet even here, for all the marble chill of an immobilized figure who seems to reign from the otherworldly climes of a rigorously abstract and eternal order, the sharp-focus details of a foreshortened arm, of vibrantly wayward strands of curling hair, of a nervous fringe at the bottom of a shawl speak of David's underlying contact with immediate visual experience. David himself, at least in principle, clung to the traditional hierarchies of the academy, which would locate a portrait below an image of important human events; and when he heard that M. de Verninac proposed that his wife's portrait be exhibited at the next Salon, he objected to being represented there by a mere portrait, especially when he was exhibiting outside the Salon (and also, in the tradition of West and Copley, for a fee) an ambitious history painting, *The Sabine Women*, which fully amplified the Greek

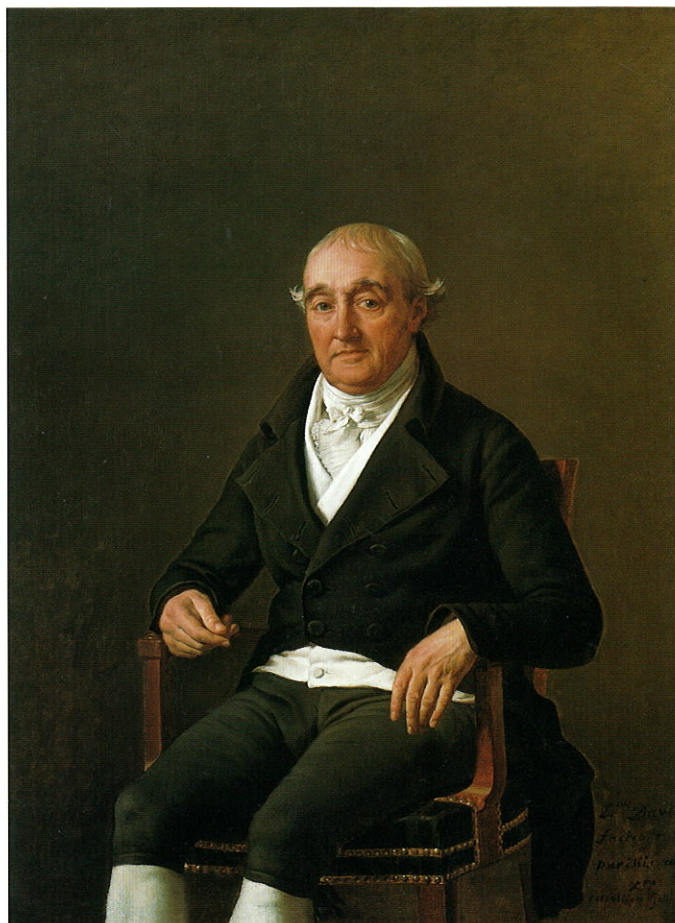


Fig. 24 **Jacques-Louis David**, *Portrait of Mr. Cooper Penrose*, 1802. Oil on canvas, 51 \times 38". The Putnam Foundation, Timken Museum of Art, San Diego.



Fig. 25 **Jacques-Louis David**, *Mme. Henriette de Verninac*, 1799. Oil on canvas, 56¼ × 43¼". Louvre, Paris.

style of *Mme. de Verninac* and which could elevate the spectator as well with its recounting of ancient classical legend.

Still, it was the urge to record a more earthbound vision that began to accelerate in David's art after 1800, an urge that reached fruition not only in his later portraiture but in his official commissions to document the pageantry of Napoleon's reign. As the emperor's First Painter, David was called upon to commemorate in huge canvases the epoch-making events at the beginning of the Empire. Of these, the imperial coronation, which took place at Notre-Dame Cathedral on a miserable winter day (December 2, 1804), was the most important historically and the most demanding pictorially. David, with much assistance from his enormous studio, labored for three years on this immense canvas, finally completing it in time for exhibition at the Salon of 1808 (fig. 26). Not the least of the problems was exactly which moment of Napoleon's coronation rites to choose for posterity. At the last minute, to the surprise of all the spectators, Napoleon, instead of permitting Pius VII to crown him (for which reason the pope, almost as a political prisoner, had been sent from the Vatican to Paris), decided

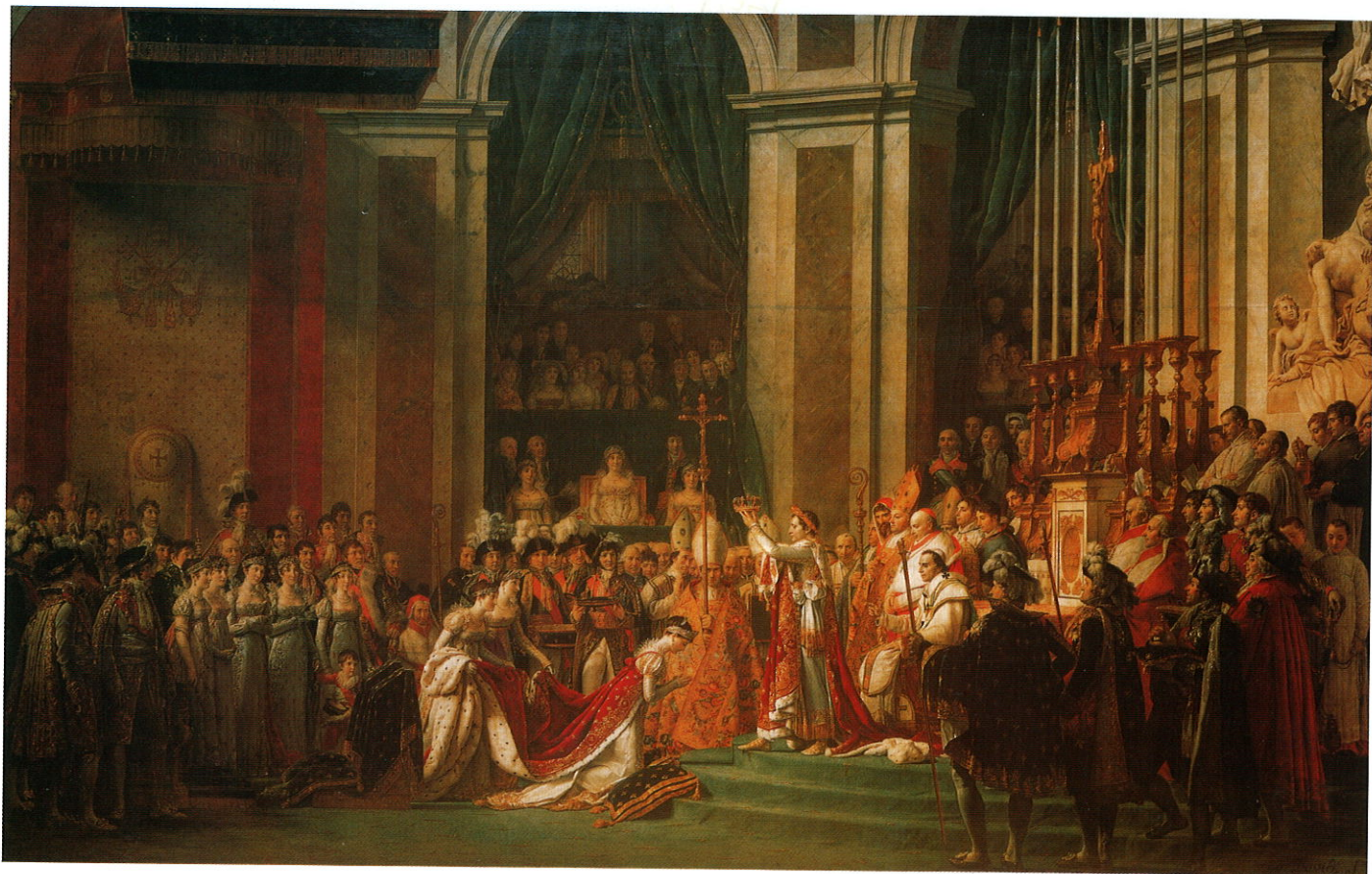


Fig. 26 **Jacques-Louis David**, *The Coronation of Napoleon*, 1805–07 (Salon of 1808). Oil on canvas, 20' × 30' 1½". Louvre, Paris.

to usurp holy authority and to crown himself. Since this moment was a prickly one, it seemed advisable to record, in its place, the more gracious aftermath of Napoleon crowning the kneeling Josephine.

In his rendering of this vast spectacle, David again seemed now to outweigh inherited myths with observable facts. To be sure, the general format of this glittering display of ermine, velvet, brocade, and jewels evoked many glorious prototypes, of which Rubens's *Coronation of Marie de Médicis*, a classic of the French national collection, was the most conspicuous, not only in its sense of traditional royal pomp and circumstance but in the vibrant warmth of its palette. Moreover, the silhouetting and singling out of the imperial protagonists, with their Augustan profiles and frozen postures, provide an ideal, heraldic contrast to the oblique movements of the crowds that surround them. But apart from these allusions to distant monarchs and empires, the ceremony, as recorded by David, has an astonishing sense of journalistic truth, as if a photographer had been sent in to document it fully. Like a dollhouse

reconstruction of the event (and David, in fact, used just such a model to assure the accuracy of setting, costume, and figure placement), the painting seems crammed with particularities that often have the ugly ring of unidealized fact. The cathedral interior itself (with its rendering of a gilded crucifix and, on the extreme right, a Baroque marble *Pietà*, by Nicolas Coustou, ironically reminiscent of the *Death of Marat*) is like a stage set that is separated from the crowds of players below. And amid the surfeit of imperial and clerical costumes, we are constantly jarred by the prosaic truths of individual faces and movements, from the sallow, nervous head of the pope himself, seated behind Napoleon with nothing to do, to the portraits of bishop, cardinal, or acolyte, each one of whom is as distinct a human fact as Cooper Penrose. And within the court itself, there is a disturbing disjunction between the trappings of aristocracy and the mundane faces and figures who now bear this inheritance of regal grandeur. The nouveau-riche world of the nineteenth century seems to have its origins in this glittering pageant, in which somehow the great traditions of



Fig. 27 **Louis-Léopold Boilly**, *The Public at the Salon of the Louvre*, begun 1808. Oil on canvas, 31 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 35 $\frac{3}{8}$ ". Private collection.

Baroque painting have been hardened, stilled, and soured by the harsh light of truth. Intentionally or not, David seems to have seized here the rupture between the splendors of a monarchic past and the realities of a modern present. It was a devastating insight rivaled only by Goya in his portraits of the Spanish court, and it pinpointed a conflict between inherited myths and contemporary experience that was to be even more apparent in the art of David's many students.

As a fascinating footnote to David's huge show-stopper, a painting by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845) offers a very different angle of vision (fig. 27). A painter who specialized in the depiction of anonymous Parisian crowds who might be watching conscripts going off to a Napoleonic war or pleasure-seekers roaming the boulevards, Boilly chose to record David's painting from the viewpoint of the hundreds and thousands of spectators who had come to see it at the Salon of 1808. The subject here is the ever-growing audience that attended the ever-increasing size of public exhibitions. Dressed in their Sunday best, these anonymous spectators, a small part of what must be a vast whole, seem to be milling about the galleries, usually paying more attention to each other than to the painting while also trying to keep their children from becoming restless. The off-center placing of David's painting and the arbitrary cropping of the dense crowd, right and left, give the impression of a casual, journalistic record of public art life in Paris, an offshoot of those eighteenth-century engravings that depicted the crowds at the Salons, but that focused more on the works exhibited. In terms of traditional hierarchies, Boilly's painting falls into a far more modest rank than the grand subjects David preferred, representing only nameless city-dwellers of all ages who are eager to see what the newsworthy event of Napoleon's coronation actually looked like. And Boilly's manner of painting is similarly more homely, since, like many of his French contemporaries, he revives the exquisite craftsmanship of rendering on a miniature scale the polished, immaculate look of those seventeenth-century Dutch paintings that also depicted ordinary urban life in modest dimensions, paintings more suitable for private than for public consumption. Seen against the grand-style rhetoric and size of David's art, Boilly's small canvases may shrivel to the level of inconsequential charm. But seen against the art of the mid-century, they may be viewed as an unpretentious prophecy of the way in which the commonplace facts of Parisian public life would become a primary theme for such major artists as Daumier, Manet, or Degas.

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

In many ways, the art of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828) may be considered a close and often sinister

parallel to David's. The two long-lived artists were almost exact contemporaries, both having been born into an eighteenth-century world that was to question more and more the divine right of kings; both having recorded, though from drastically different vantage points, the Napoleonic era and both surviving beyond 1815, to end their careers with a private art of growing disconnection from the decade of political change they had witnessed. Trained in a provincial Rococo style, Goya, had he not been a genius, might have rotted away as an anachronistic court painter to the succession of Bourbon monarchs who tried to preserve a revolutionary status quo in Spain. But he quickly began to explore not only private worlds of strange commentary on true or imagined events, but also offered, in official commissions, the most sharply accurate mirror of the lapse of the great religious and monarchic traditions of the West.

Called upon in 1788 to paint a Christian deathbed scene for the Borgia Chapel in Valencia Cathedral, he turned inside out the rituals of Catholicism. The seventeenth-century patron saint Francis Borgia is shown exorcising a dying impenitent who is assaulted by demons, but the Catholic theme of repentance and miracle work becomes, in Goya's hands, a kind of voodoo rite.



Fig. 28 **Francisco de Goya y Lucientes**, *St. Francis Borgia Exorcising a Dying Impenitent*, 1788. Oil on canvas, 11' 8" × 10'. Valencia Cathedral.