48 **Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson**, *Ossian Receiving Napoleonic Officers*, Salon of 1802. Oil on canvas, 37 × 73½".
sée National du Château de Malmaison.

a dreary anachronism unless revitalized by the wildest
ginative leaps.

e Image of the Ruler

e hero worship surrounding Napoleon made it easier for
ists to metamorphose his physical reality into something
t might exist in a timeless realm, and no artist tested this premise more adventurously than David's greatest student, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). Even without an official commission, Ingres was impelled to commemorate the new emperor, in this case to show him enthroned in his imperial robes. While David was still working on his almost reportorial record of the earthbound facts of *The Coronation* (see fig. 26), Ingres completed, in time for the Salon of 1806, his astonishingly otherworldly image of a modern head of state (fig. 49). Located in a

Fig. 49 **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres**, *Napoleon on His Imperial Throne*, 1806. Oil on canvas, 8′ 8″ × 5′ 5¼″. Musée de l'Armée, Paris.

frozen, timeless realm, separated from his subjects on earth by his high throne and the almost magical, primitive force of the imperial eagle, heraldically outlined in the rug in front of his foot cushion, Napoleon seems to have presided for eternity. His imperturbable, frontal posture recalls, in fact, many archaic images of the supreme being, from the famous Phidian statue of the Olympian Zeus (the source, as well, of Flaxman's vision of the Greek god in his Homeric illustrations; see fig. 42), to such late medieval representations of the Christian deity as Jan van Eyck's *God the Father*, then visible in Paris as Napoleonic booty taken from Ghent. Ingres's head was as filled as Girodet's with these remote, mythic images from what must have then seemed thrillingly distant cultures, and he welcomed the official opportunity to transform Napoleon's flesh-and-blood persona into an abstraction of implacable authority. Historically supported by the trappings of French royal power (the scepter of Charles V and the sword and hand of justice of Charlemagne), Napoleon, as conceived by Ingres, is really a fictional god and emperor, interchangeable with dreams of Byzantium or Olympus. The stange archaism of this conception of a modern ruler was fully supported by the archaism of Ingres's style, which baffled critics at the Salon. They commented on the icy lunar light, the medieval stiffness of the pose, the obsessive intensity of the description of sumptuous velvet, ermine, ivory, and gold. For David, this student's work must have been no less lunatic than Girodet's, turning his own rational doctrines into a private fantasy of chilling splendor and omnipotence more suitable to an ancient than to a modern civilization. In a historical epoch when governments were crumbling and the very titles of rulers—king, president, consul, emperor—were constantly changing, Ingres's vision of Napoleon represented an extreme idealization of timeless authority, going far beyond David's more plausible Napoleonic propaganda and totally inverting Goya's vision of all-too-human monarchs.

How to represent a modern head of state in a postrevolutionary era was, in fact, a problem faced by many artists not only in France, but especially in the young United States of America, where the first president, among other founding fathers, had to be commemorated for posterity. When in 1796 in Philadelphia, the American portraitist Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) was commissioned by the English Whig Lord Lansdowne to make an enduring, official portrait of George Washington, he moved from his customarily immediate and informal approach to portraiture to something more literally stately which might resonate with the authority of Washington's role as the general-hero who had become the venerated president of a new republic (**fig. 50**). Just as David and Ingres provided their Napoleonic images with rich allusions to earlier achievement and power, so too did Stuart raise his sitter to a historical pantheon. Seen addressing Congress for the last time,

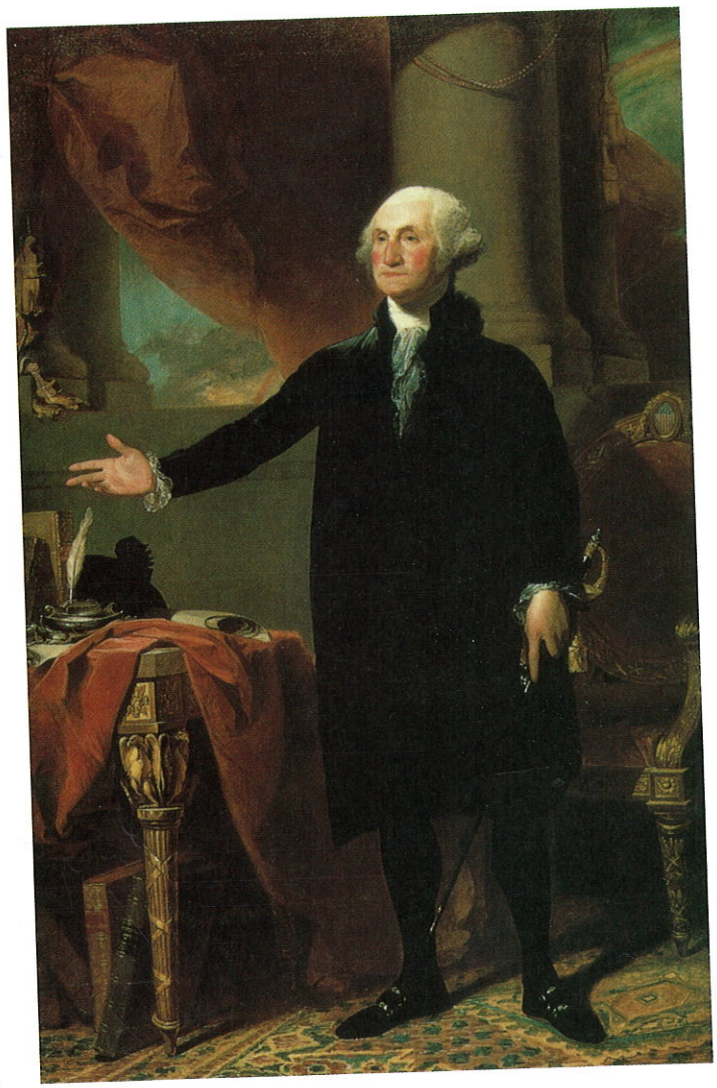

Fig. 50 **Gilbert Stuart**, *George Washington*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 96¼ × 60¼". Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

Washington strikes a pose that recalls a rich pedigree of everything from Roman imperial portraiture, in which an outstretched hand suggests both legal and military authority, to the grand full-length portraits of the French Bourbon court, from Louis XIV to Bishop Bossuet, as rendered by Rigaud. And in this tradition, Washington is surrounded by symbolic attributes of his and his country's public life—the sword, the still life of quill and papers, the American eagles and fasces on the leg of the writing table. Painted just before the advent of Napoleon, Stuart's Lansdowne portrait, whose official importance demanded many replicas, clearly introduces the difficulties and the often awkward resolutions of the modern artist's image of a temporal ruler chosen by the people and not of a divine monarch. We sense here both the rupture in tradition and the noble effort to resurrect it in what was hoped to be a brave, new world. In the case of Washington's image, it was an effort that was to reach almost Ingresque extremes of deity in the famous

Fig. 51 **Pierre-Paul Prud'hon**, *Portrait of Empress Josephine*, 1805–09. Oil on canvas, 96 × 70½". Louvre, Paris.

posthumous marble of the president by Horatio Greenough (see fig. 193).

Other alterations of earlier traditions can be sensed, too, in the portraiture of the public figures of the time. There is, for one, the surprising full-length portrait of Empress Josephine (**fig. 51**) by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823), an artist in whose work so many languorous new moods can be felt. Begun in 1805, just after her coronation and still incomplete in 1809 at the time of her divorce from Napoleon, it records not the public persona we might expect from a large painting of the new Empress of France, but a private glimpse of her alone in a wood in the grounds of Napoleon's house at Malmaison just outside Paris. Instead of meeting our gaze or staring us down, she turns away, preoccupied with her own thoughts. Even though she wears a double diadem and a fashionable white Empire dress, she seems to be caught in so private and informal a mood that we almost become stealthy intruders. The slow, serpentine rhythms of her red cashmere shawl and her elegantly attenuated body (so close to the female figural canons in Canova's sculpture; see figs. 95 and 98) suggest, with a gesture of hand poised on head, a dreamy lassitude that belongs to the introspective range of Mme. Charpentier's *Melancholy* (see fig. 45). Indeed, Prud'hon, too, uses a natural setting as a sounding board for emotions. Except for the glimpse of a rectangular classicizing base and vase at the left, a reminder of the formal, man-made world to which Josephine belongs, all is simple, unspoiled nature. Moss grows on the rugged rocks the empress uses as a chair, the flowers she studied as an amateur botanist bloom beside her, and in the background, clumps of trees are silhouetted mysteriously against a twilit sky, whose darkening tones provide a landscape corollary to the sitter's downcast mood. Far from the demands of state occasions, Josephine finds in untamed nature a refuge for what seems her somber meditations. Prud'hon's interpretation of the empress would hardly be alien to the image of a Romantic writer of her time, of a Chateaubriand or a Wordsworth in lonely reverie.

In the search for more intense emotions, extremes of passivity alternated with extremes of violence. For French artists working under Napoleon, the official demands to record the glorious moments of his military campaigns provided an especially rich vehicle for the exploration of uncommon experiences, both harrowing and heroic. Early in his career, Napoleon realized the propagandistic value of having France's finest artists commemorate his and his army's most heroic deeds, and less than three weeks after the hair-raising but victorious battle at Nazareth, on April 8, 1799, he decided that a contest should be held for the best painting of the combat. When the contest was finally organized, in 1801, the jury's decision was unanimous. The prize was won by a young student of David's, Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), who had already recorded Napoleon's heroism during the Italian campaigns. The lessons of Gros's master, David, seem so remote in Gros's large painted sketch (**fig. 52**) that we can hardly recognize the pedigree, especially by comparison with David's almost contemporary painting of *Napoleon at St.-Bernard* (see fig. 22). Instead of a frozen icon, Gros offers us the heat of battle, an orgy of bloodshed so instantaneously engulfing and chaotic that we can hardly get our bearings. Like Copley's *Death of Major Peirson* (see fig. 6), the *Battle of Nazareth* purports to present a cinematic truth, a split-second record of the brutal but potentially glamorous facts of war for the spectator at home to savor vicariously. But Gros, unlike Copley, explodes the ideal choreography of battle into a bewildering tumult of gunpowder, scorching desert sand, slashing sabers, thrusting bayonets, rearing horses, and exotic costumes. Only when the dust settles can we begin to piece out some of the harrowing action that characterized the stunning victory in the Holy Land of French troops, just five hundred strong, led by General Junot against a combined Turkish and Arab force of some six thousand men. The hero, Junot, is seen only in the distance (at the left, on a white horse), defending himself with his saber against attacking Mamluks; but this life-and-death skirmish

Fig. 52 **Antoine-Jean Gros**, *Battle of Nazareth*, 1801. Oil on canvas, 54 × 78″. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes.

is only one small episode in a desert battlefield that teems with grisly sights, like the fresh corpses of a French soldier and an Arab horse in the immediate foreground or the agonizing, sword-point desperation, in front center, of an Arab about to be slain. To add to this confusion of narrative event, French soldiers at the right are shooting outside the confines of the painting, whereas at the left, a terrified horse, his tail and mane a blur of paint, rushes outward in the opposite direction.

All sense of major and minor is lost in this centrifugal eruption of violence and death, and although the painting is meant to document and to venerate the heroism of Napoleon's army, the scene has almost a fictional character of carnage in some exotic locale. Indeed, the splendor of the Mamluks' military costumes, like the parched slopes of Mount Tabor, where the battle took place, lend the enchantment of a travelogue to a record of human courage and brutality. For Gros, the Near Eastern setting seemed to permit a relaxation from the rigors of Davidian training and an excuse to explore, among other things, an almost molten brushwork and a hot, sunbaked atmosphere that thaws the glacial emblems of David and leaves us stunned by the emotional and visual potentials of a language of impulse, movement, and disorder. For all its insistence on journalistic, military fact, and for all its patriotic message, Gros's plunge into the spectacle of hell on earth is not so different from West's vision of the horsemen of the apocalypse, seen just one year later in Paris (see fig. 39). The *Battle of Nazareth*, in fact, was prophetic, for after 1815, it was to become a touchstone of inspiration for the great rebels of French Romantic painting—for Géricault, who paid one thousand francs for the privilege of copying it, and for Delacroix, who praised it in his 1848 essay on Gros.

Like David, Gros venerated Napoleon, and in subsequent paintings, he presented a virtual sanctification of his patron's charity, nobility, and heroism. For the Salon of 1804, he recorded another episode from the Near Eastern campaigns of 1799, but one that takes us from the unfocused turbulence of the battlefield to a solemn tribute to Napoleon's supernatural courage. This time, a whitewashing was demanded, for in fact, at the city of Jaffa, Napoleon had ordered the shooting of countless prisoners whom he could not afford to house or feed. Conditions then worsened with the outbreak of bubonic plague, which spread among both French and Arabs. Acting out his own legend as almost a divinity on earth, Napoleon entered the

Fig. 53 **Antoine-Jean Gros**, *Napoleon in the Pesthouse at Jaffa*. Oil on canvas, 17′ 5½″ × 23′ 7½″. Louvre, Paris.

pesthouse at Jaffa on March 11, 1799, and tried to calm the growing panic by demonstrating that he was unafraid of contagion. He walked among the plague-stricken and comforted them, and presumably, he was even willing to touch the buboes of some of the victims in order to prove how exaggerated the fear had become. Gros's interpretation of this myth-making event (**fig. 53**) follows many earlier paintings of contemporary history in its translation of traditional Christian imagery into modern experience; but it does so with a vivid originality that almost re-creates heaven and hell. The foreground of the painting is strewn with the agonized bodies of the dead and the dying, whose semi-nudity makes associations with a Dantesque inferno or a Last Judgment all the stronger. Within this realm of the damned, Napoleon has entered with what seems not only immunity to disease, but also a miraculous power to heal, as if Christ himself or a traditional plague saint like St.-Roch had been resurrected in 1799 in the form of the leader of France. And if the image of Napoleon's miracle-working powers evokes Christian imagery, including even the conventional grouping of Christ and the doubting Thomas, so too does it reawaken traditional Western belief in the divine touch of kings, who, even during the Age of Enlightenment, were popularly considered to embody supernatural gifts of healing. Even more than David, Gros helps to add extravagant pedigrees, both Christian and monarchic, to his ruler, and at an especially opportune time. By 1804, five years after the fact, the legend had grown in magnitude, and at the Salon, it must have helped to bolster Napoleon's almost supernatural qualifications for sitting, as he was to do by the end of the year, on an imperial throne. Gros shows him imperturbable and fearless amid a scene of such revulsion that even the officer behind him holds a cloth to his face to stave off the stench. Around this holy figure, there is almost an uncanny awe and luminosity among those who have the strength to observe the miracle; and at the extreme right, a blind man, supporting himself by a column, tries to approach the general.

That the legendary scene occurs in faraway Jaffa, in the Holy Land, certainly contributed to its credibility; and Gros, expectedly, amplified the picturesque aspects of the miracle's environment. The horseshoe arches and pointed

arcades of the mosque courtyard provide a piquant variation on the familiar Greco-Roman architecture of David's noble settings, and the steep background vista of minarets and white cubic houses translates Poussin's architectural landscapes into a colorful new dialect. As for the harsh, glaring sunlight of the Holy Land, as it intensifies the lush hues of the strange native costumes with their turbans and patterned shawls, this further adds to the almost fictional glamor and sensationalism of the scene. Unlike Goya, who presents human horror with an ugly, unidealized immediacy, Gros veils his journalistic truths in exotic luxury and idealized, Michelangelesque terror. And unlike Goya, whose image of traditional Christian morality in *The Third of May 1808* (see fig. 34) is shrilly assaulted by the outrage of one who has seen it ruthlessly destroyed, Gros preserves conventional moralities by suggesting in his narrative structure of good and evil that the horrible means of war are nevertheless justified by the noble ends of Napoleonic mercy and courage. But as clear as this patriotic message is, Gros's painting also permitted, via the documentation of contemporary history, a virtual invasion of experiences that could take the spectator to a remote and sensuous world. The Near Eastern costume and architecture, the heated colors, the shattering extremes of physical and psychological sufferings—all provided a vicarious escape from the everyday realities of Paris, an escape that, for later generations, would delete entirely the political content and let the artist and spectator wallow in a distant travelogue, far from the prosaic sights and constraints of nineteenth-century life in the West.

Even under Napoleon, many artists favored with governmental commissions were happy to turn away from imperial glory to a less politicized realm. Ingres, for instance, could switch easily from the resurrection of his emperor as the Olympian Jupiter back to the classical source itself; for in the same year, 1806, he had begun to contemplate a work illustrating the passage from the *Iliad* that tells of how the nymph Thetis begged Jupiter on Olympus to aid her son Achilles in the wars taking place on earth (fig. 54). The painting was completed in 1811 in Rome, where Ingres had been living for five years at the French Academy as a winner of the Prix de Rome. Although it relocates the enthroned Napoleon to his proper origins, a well-known archaeological reconstruction of Phidias' statue of Jupiter, the painting is no less startling in its fantastic excursion to a world of primitive mythology, both terrifying and sensual. Cloud-borne, like Girodet's *Ossian* (see fig. 48), it takes the spectator to a literally Olympian height where we are confronted by Jupiter in all his omnipotent grandeur. Guarded by his symbolic eagle and spied on, at the left, by his jealous wife, Juno, he seems to have reigned for all time in splendid symmetry. In drastic contrast to this immutable giant with his ferociously leonine head, the nymph Thetis, like a cooing bird, is all quivering mobility and supplication. Viewed in profile against her god's frontality, she seems made of an eroticized, malleable flesh, which can swell and contract around him in a desperate entreaty. The contours of her profiled body, like those of some marine creature, ebb and flow, creating astonishing anatomical distortions (the goitrous throat, the elbowless arms, the invertebrate hand). Ingres has virtually re-created the human form as a vehicle of sensual manipulation and of an abstract linear pattern that, as in the outlines of Flaxman (who illustrated this and comparable scenes; see fig. 42), has an archaic quality appropriate to the Homeric subject.

Nominally Neoclassical, *Jupiter and Thetis* is a fantastic invention, not only in the clash of fearful, masculine power against highly charged feminine sexuality, but in the irrationality of this archaeologically erudite reconstruction of the Homeric world. Gravity is defied (Juno, Jupiter's left arm, and the throne itself float effortlessly on clouds); space is bizarrely contracted (Thetis fits, like the relief on a cameo, into the oddly shallow cavities of Jupiter's mighty torso and lap); figural size is arbitrary (Thetis is a pygmy next to the gigantic Jupiter); and even the level of perceived reality is contradictory (some passages of drapery, relief carving, and flesh are rendered with almost photographic minuteness of glossy, palpable detail, while others, like Thetis' Greek profile and engorged neck, are total fictions). As Ingres's obligatory Roman school piece, to be sent back to Paris for academic examination, *Jupiter and Thetis* startled the authorities, who found his reincarnation of the oddly "primitive" stylizations of early phases of Greek or Italian art, with their simple outlines and flattened spaces, eccentric deviations from proper classical canons. But as was to be the case with many artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ingres's espousal of a more "primitive" mode was a highly sophisticated choice whose complex results may belie the simplifying intentions. Throughout his long and ever more official career, which cast its shadow on the entire century, Ingres would explore with unparalleled subtlety what seemed to be the purifying stylistic regressions of painting in earlier phases, whether Northern European or Mediterranean—on the one hand, an intense, sharp-focus surface description of the visible world; and on the other, an equally intense abstraction of the linear arabesques that define a form.

Given the stylistic diversity of David's own art, it is no surprise to find how many different directions his students could pursue, evoking an entire history of Western art, from the limpid purity of Greek vase painting to the muscular energies of Rubens. Some students—often including Ingres himself—even followed the growing penchant for medieval painting and subject matter, a taste which had already taken root in the late eighteenth century but which, in France, had been temporarily squelched by the revolutionary hatred for anything reminiscent of a Christian