

Part 2
1815–1848

PAINTING

Retrospection and Introspection: The Congress of Vienna and Late Goya

By 1815, both the grandeur and the horror of the Napoleonic epic could at last be thought of in the past tense, and the Congress of Vienna could finally try to reconstruct the map and the rulers of Europe in the long shadow of those traditions that had been ruptured by both the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Boundaries were changed; kings were restored to thrones that had been usurped; and thinking Europeans were alarmed by the growing frictions between the swiftly changing realities of nineteenth-century experience and the anachronistic efforts to revive a remote world where kings, emperors, and church were united in unshaken faith and power.

Working with or against the reactionary mood of their patrons and governments, artists mirrored these collisions of past and present. In 1815 in Vienna—the very seat of these attempts to turn the clock back to a world that existed long before 1789—a young German artist, Heinrich Olivier (1783–1848), encapsulated in a small gouache the most retrospective extremes of art and politics east of the Rhine. It represents the imperial rulers of Prussia (Friedrich Wilhelm III), Austria (Franz I), and Russia (Alexander I) united in the so-called Holy Alliance, in which they swear to resurrect and, if need be, defend in battle a pre-Napoleonic world (fig. 106). Olivier had been in Paris between 1807 and 1811, and he had later fought against Napoleon, experiences that are both reflected in this neo-medieval and nationalistic work. If the patriotic and military fervor of these vows recalls the *Oath of the Horatii* (see fig. 16), as well as many other oaths of allegiance, the setting, costume, and miniaturist style recall the French Troubadour Style (see figs. 55 and 67) as well as the medieval art that was newly exhibited in Paris at the Musée des Monuments Français. But all

of this has now crossed the Rhine, relocated in what seems a newborn world of German medieval splendor, where, from Romanesque foundations, ornate Gothic vaults and stone carvings surge overhead in an emblem of national glory and military strength. It is the look of patriotic rebirth, rooted in venerable medieval traditions, found in many neo-Gothic architectural projects designed,

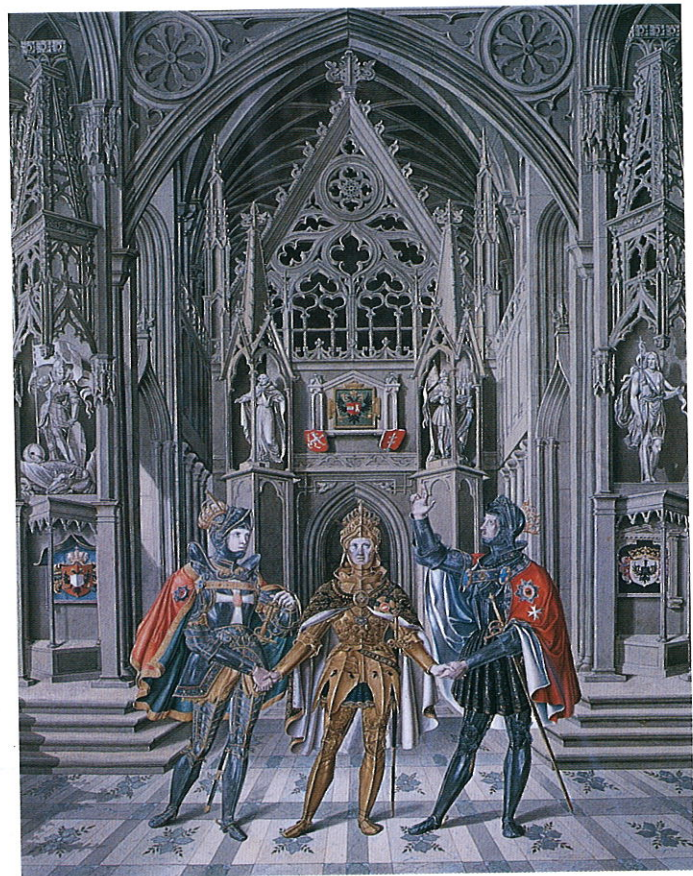


Fig. 106 **Heinrich Olivier**, *The Holy Alliance*, 1815. Gouache on paper, 17½ × 14". Staatliche Galerie, Dessau.



Fig. 107 **Paulin-Jean-Baptiste Guérin**, *Portrait of Louis XVIII*, Salon of 1819. Oil on canvas, 8' 10" × 6' 8". Musée National du Château de Versailles.

after 1815, by Karl Friedrich Schinkel and his German contemporaries.

This retrospective style, with its nationalistic associations, has many pictorial counterparts in France, which, after the final surprise of Napoleon's return for a hundred days in the spring of 1815, could at last settle back into a period of true Restoration. In the official paintings of the restored monarch Louis XVIII—a gouty brother of the unfortunate Louis XVI—the clock has again turned back to a prerevolutionary world, creating royalist illusions that, it was hoped, might convince French spectators that little, if anything, had happened between 1789 and 1815. Typical of such state portraits of Louis XVIII is that by Paulin-Jean-Baptiste Guérin (1783–1855) for the Salon of 1819 (fig. 107). Attempting to resurrect the great Baroque tradition of official portraits of Bourbon monarchs, Guérin mimics the look of Rigaud's state portraits of Louis XIV and Louis XV, offering Louis XVIII in what is presumably an uninterrupted sequence of royal images. But the stiffness of the posture, the specific truth of an old man's head, the hardened surfaces of ermine and velvet coronation robes are jarring intrusions in this feeble survivor from a

Baroque world, subtly undermining the propagandistic intention.

For Charles X, who in 1824 succeeded the short reign of his elder brother, Louis XVIII, these historical retrospections were even more elaborate, now reaching back to a medieval as well as a Baroque past. Following the traditions of his Bourbon ancestors, this "ultraroyalist" king arranged an elaborate coronation for himself on May 29, 1825, at the traditional medieval site for this sacred rite, Rheims Cathedral, thereby hoping to eradicate the memory of Napoleon's coronation at Notre-Dame in 1804, which David had transformed into a major icon of French history (see fig. 26). It was one of the many ironies of the chameleon politics of nineteenth-century artists that it was François Gérard (1770–1837), a student of David (and one who had earlier made art for both revolutionary and Napoleonic patrons), who was commissioned to paint this extravagant neo-medieval ceremony that would presumably provide a historical graft onto roots existing before 1789. In a huge canvas that was promised for the Salon of 1827 but not completed in time for view (fig. 108), Gérard matches Charles X himself in an effort to revive the combination of hallowed medieval traditions and Bourbon pageantry. The choir of Rheims Cathedral is meticulously rendered, with the hard, linear precision of many neo-Gothic projects of the period, but the flurry of excitement among the representatives of the reunited church and state (who are shown at the moment when all shouted "Vive le roi!") resurrects the grand and fluent Baroque rhythms of figural groups gracefully agitated by the impact of this exalted ceremony.

Although many artists such as Gérard and Olivier espoused in their work the mood of fervent and usually nationalistic retrospection, many others clearly felt the underlying contradictions of Europe as reconstructed by the Congress of Vienna. It was predictable that Goya, above all, would sense, as he so often did before 1815, the hollowness and hypocrisy of a modern world that preserved the pomp and circumstance of decadent traditions; and his work for the newly restored Bourbon king, Ferdinand VII, the son of Goya's former patron Charles IV, chillingly bears this out. In 1815, Goya was commissioned to commemorate a meeting of the junta of the Royal Company of the Philippines, then a Spanish colony. The result was one of the most subtly devastating comments ever made by an artist on officialdom, on the pompous gathering of authorities to determine the fate of others (fig. 109). In the dead center of the canvas, whose vast dimensions (more than thirteen feet wide) and sweeping one-point perspective suggest a virtual extension of the spectator's space into the council room, we see Ferdinand VII himself, a tiny figure seated haughtily against a round-back chair a trifle larger than those that fan out around him. But this foreboding image of power is so remote that it becomes a