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Philippe Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, in association with the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass., 2005. xvii + 379 pp. 80 color and 88 black and white illus., notes, bibliography, and index. \$ 50.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-9311102-60-x.

Review by Heather McPherson, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Philippe Bordes's meticulously researched catalogue, published in conjunction with the exhibition, *Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile*, on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum Los Angeles, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown in 2005, provides an illuminating account of David's post-revolutionary career and the complex multi-layered relationship of art, politics, and history during the Napoleonic era. In particular, the exhibition highlights the range and complexity of David's late work which has only come to be appreciated in the last twenty years (p. x). David's reputation as a leading proponent of Neoclassicism has long rested primarily on his heroic history paintings from the 1780s. One of the catalogue's particular strengths is Bordes's encyclopedic knowledge of French history and visual culture of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period. Drawing on recent rediscoveries and new archival sources, including unpublished letters by David and the administrative correspondence of Vivant Denon, he is able to offer a more complete and nuanced account of art and cultural politics under the Empire (pp. xi-xii).<sup>[1]</sup> *Empire to Exile* offers a compelling revisionist account that sheds new light on the last twenty-five years of David's artistic career. Beginning with his determined *Self-Portrait* of 1794, holding a brush and easel, painted while he was in prison, and concluding with François Rude's posthumous bust of the artist (1826-31), Bordes's exemplary catalogue enriches and complicates our understanding of David's creative imagination and his modernity and seeks to redefine his place within early nineteenth-century art.

Bordes's scholarly but very readable catalogue contextualizes and supplements the exhibition it documents by discussing (and illustrating) numerous works that were not on display. That is particularly useful since David's largest most ambitious canvases painted under the Empire, namely *The Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine* (1805-08), *The Distribution of the Eagles* (1808-10), and *Leonidas at Thermopylae* (1814) could not be lent.<sup>[2]</sup> The catalogue, which is organized chronologically and thematically, is divided into seven sections each of which includes an essay outlining the broader historical and artistic context, followed by detailed catalogue entries for each of the twenty-seven paintings and twenty-nine drawings in the exhibition. The opening essay, "Art after Politics," succinctly traces David's remarkable self-reinvention and transformation as a painter in the 1790s following his release from prison in 1795. That shift is exemplified by the *Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799), with its timely message of national reconciliation and its Greek-inflected style and heroic nudity. Under the Directory David's interest in fashion and luxury goods surfaced in his portraits notably those of Madame de Verninac and Madame Récamier, the celebrated beauty and salonnière, which remained unfinished. When David exhibited the *Sabines* in 1799 he charged an admission fee, boldly asserting the independence of genius and the artist's right to charge the public for viewing art in an evolving increasingly market-driven system.<sup>[3]</sup>

The next two sections, which discuss David's service under Napoleon and portraits of the Consulate and Empire, form the centerpiece of the catalogue. "In the Service of Napoleon" evenhandedly reexamines David's complex, often frustrating artistic collaboration with Napoleon, which Bordes cogently characterizes as a "parallel strategy of recovery and cover-up," in which David sought to put the Terror behind him and Napoleon strove to efface the memory of his ruthless rise to power (p. 20). David's enthusiastic embrace of Napoleon has often been denounced as opportunistic and sycophantic but, as Bordes shows, David both ably served Napoleon and created art that resisted or circumvented politics. Against the shifting terrain of war and politics, Bordes scrutinizes the elusiveness and instability of Napoleon's image in the myriad portraits he commissioned, focusing on the complex history of the *Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine* and the *Distribution of the Eagles*. As Bordes reminds us, despite his preeminence, David did not work in artistic isolation and was obliged to compete with his peers, notably his pupil, Antoine-Jean Gros, whose *General Bonaparte at Arcole* (1796) became the emblematic image of Bonaparte as military hero. By contrast, David's project for a whole-length portrait (c.1797-98) was never completed.[4] Ironically David's iconic depiction of Bonaparte as conquering hero in *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at Grand Saint-Bernard* (1800-01), was commissioned by Charles IV, king of Spain, rather than Napoleon himself.[5] In this brilliant propagandistic portrait steeped in historical fiction, art and politics are thoroughly conflated. With the declaration of the Empire in 1804, David was named first painter to Napoleon. Of the four ceremonial pictures he was commissioned to paint, only two, the *Coronation* and the *Eagles*, were completed. The history of the *Coronation* and the transformations it underwent is indicative of the artistic rivalries and court politics with which David contended and the compromises he was obliged to make in the service of Napoleon.[6] When it was finally exhibited in 1808, the *Coronation* was an immense success. Napoleon was dazzled by its visual impact and dramatic sweep, and spectators were transfixed by David's illusionistic restaging of the coronation. David's other iconic image, *The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries* (1811-12), commissioned by the 10<sup>th</sup> duke of Hamilton, forms a civic pendant to *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps*. Rather than a dashing military hero, the emperor is pictured as a hardworking enlightened statesman toiling through the night to complete the Civic Code.

Though officially categorized as a history painter, David painted portraits throughout his career. From the 1790s on, portraiture came to occupy an increasingly prominent place within his oeuvre. Furthermore, as Bordes points out, David took an unconventional attitude toward his portraits and was keenly aware of their value as artistic statements and their exchange value (pp. 125-27). Although many of the portraits he painted under the Consulate and the Empire were of family and friends, he received high fees for portrait commissions. In his portraits, especially his portrayals of women, David was confronted with the dialectic between idealism and objective observation. Ranging from the sober, reductivist *Portrait of Cooper Penrose* (1802), a lucrative private commission, to the dazzling official *portrait d'apparat* of Antoine François in full court regalia, his portraits provide an invaluable historical and personal record. Although David's portraits have attracted the attention of scholars in recent years, they remain an understudied aspect of his art that merits further investigation. In the 1810s David also painted a gallery of family portraits that are direct and unflattering in their unvarnished realism. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries, David valued portraits as artistic and historical statements grounded in visual truth. It is in his portraits especially that he boldly manifests his modernity through his directness, psychological intensity, and technical virtuosity.

In "Antiquity Revisited," Bordes considers David's complex and evolving engagement with antique forms and themes after 1800. Works such as *The Anger of Achilles* (1819), with its dramatic close-up format, cropped life-size figures, and unresolved psychological tensions, highlight his capacity for artistic renewal and his sometimes disquieting recasting of the antique in modern terms. In *Cupid and Psyche* (1817), in which realism and myth uneasily co-exist, the snarky Cupid seemingly smirks at the viewer. David's propensity for experimentation and reinvention is particularly evident in his late drawings, which are discussed in greater detail in Dorothy Johnson's and Mark Ledbury's essays in the symposium proceedings. These intense autonomous drawings, which explore the extremes of

expression, have long perplexed scholars and resisted interpretation. With their heavy stumping and rejection of grace and finish, they challenge preconceptions about the practice and significance of drawing for David. His forceful yet oddly disjunctive *têtes d'expression*, primarily drawn from memory, remain perhaps his most enigmatic works.

The final two sections are devoted to "Portraits in Exile" and "The Image of the Artist." Following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, David lived in exile in Brussels until his death in 1825. Like the late drawings, the portraits painted in Brussels pose perplexing problems of context and interpretation. Although Bordes links David's intensified preoccupation with color to Flemish influences, he does not fully address the question of David's late style as evidenced in works such as the double *Portrait of Zénäide and Charlotte Bonaparte* (1821) or *Mars Disarmed by Venus* (1824). The impact of exile and David's production from the Brussels period, which were examined by a number of speakers at the symposium, clearly merit further scholarly investigation.

*Empire to Exile*, which builds on and complements the encyclopedic 1989 Paris retrospective, rectifies many misconceptions about David's post-revolutionary career and demonstrates the aesthetic range and complexity of his late works.[7] In particular, it highlights David's constant reinvention as an artist and his complex engagement with the past, enhancing our understanding of how David responded to and negotiated the abrupt political and social changes that swept across France in the early nineteenth century. Bordes's splendid catalogue and the exhibition it accompanied have established a new benchmark for reevaluating David's post-revolutionary works, too long relegated to the margins of art history. It is an essential resource for scholars of French art and culture that will serve as a springboard for further investigations of David's late work and the recognition of his seminal and still underappreciated position in the history of portraiture and early nineteenth-century art.

## NOTES

[1] Philippe Bordes and Mark Ledbury are preparing a critical edition of David's writings.

[2] Drawings and preparatory studies for the *Coronation*, the *Eagles*, and *Leonidas* were on display. David's last major work, *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* (1824), was also missing. Several key portraits, notably those of Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès and Alexandre Lenoir, both painted in 1817, were also absent. Many of these lacunae were taken up at the symposium cosponsored by the Getty Research Institute and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, held 24-25 June 2005 at the Clark in Williamstown, Mass. See Mark Ledbury, ed., *David after David: Essays on the Later Work* (Williamstown, Mass: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, distributed by Yale University Press, 2007).

[3] In the booklet he distributed to visitors, David invoked the model of the greater freedom enjoyed by English artists and the "noble independence that suits genius" as justification for his innovative exhibition venture (p. 20).

[4] The project is known through a recently discovered sketch (1796-97; Musée du Louvre) that documents David's early fascination with Bonaparte. David originally intended to paint a canvas celebrating the Battle of Lodi.

[5] Though not commissioned by Napoleon, David's heroic depiction met with his approval. Five versions of the composition were painted, one of which hung at Saint-Cloud and another in the library at the Invalides.

[6] As David's preparatory studies attest, he originally intended to represent Napoleon crowning himself as he in fact did. David modified the controversial pose and instead represented a chivalrous Napoleon holding the crown over Josephine's head.

[7] See Antoine Schnapper, Arlette Sérullaz, and Elisabeth Agius-d'Yvoire, eds. *Jacques-Louis David 1748-1825*. Exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989).

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