

strength of France abound in the Empire style. The most prevalent of these were the emperor's emblems: the Merovingian bee and the Roman eagle (FIG. 2), representations of military trophies, and Egyptian themes introduced after his famous campaign in that country. Warriors in battle, the powerful claws of a lion, helmets, swords, and axes appear on everyday objects such as clocks, light fixtures, writing tables, and ewers and basins. The walls, windows, and beds of the palaces were draped with rich fabrics embroidered with gold and silver threads, bees, shields, and other imperial emblems. Included in this exhibition are several ornate and luxurious chairs and stools with imperial emblems from Château de Malmaison and Château de Fontainebleau.

After the revolution, especially as a function of the victories under Napoleon's leadership, the military was very much on the mind of French society, and perhaps as a counterweight, feminine symbols and images were juxtaposed with images of masculinity. This exhibition examines the visual metaphors of femininity that were meant to evoke the ideas of love and seduction—images of nudity, women in motion, the swan, the butterfly, flowers, and cornucopia (FIG. 4). The swan—an ambiguous symbol of seduction, referring to both femininity and the god Apollo—was one of the favorites adopted at this time by Josephine, as well as other wealthy and cultured ladies (FIG. 6). A departure from the straight line typically used in Empire decorative arts, the curved lines found in objects such as the boat bed (a bed with the curved shape of a boat reserved generally, though not exclusively for women's chambers) (FIG. 5), was a clear allusion to femininity. Another emblem was the letter *J*, paired with a cornucopia full of fruits and flowers, which were incorporated into designs of furnishings and decorative arts made specifically for Josephine.

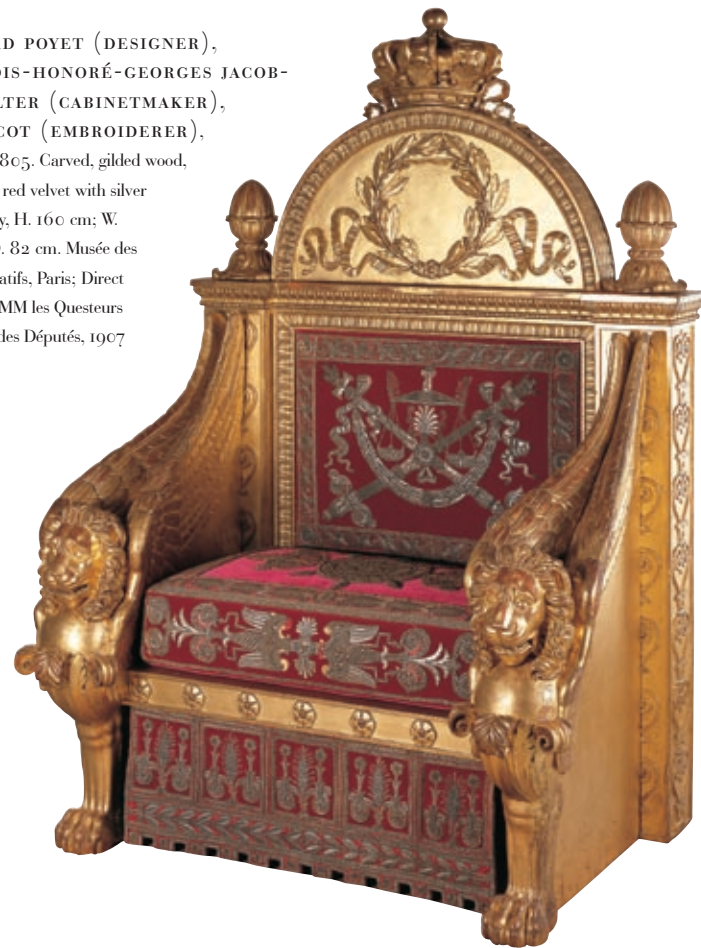
Ornamentation was an essential and clear means of communication under Napoleon's empire. The Empire style embodied a design philosophy that was driven by arts and politics. It sought to fuel and perpetuate the regime's strength and legitimacy through a united aesthetic that reinterpreted existing symbols of power. Its impact filtered into every aspect of life through architecture, interior design, furnishings, and fashion. Even after Napoleon's final abdication in 1815, the Empire style continued and was



FIG 6
 ATTRIBUTED TO ANDRE-ANTOINE RAVRIO,
 Clock: *The Chariot of Venus*, ca. 1805–10.
 Gilded bronze, enamel, and sea-green marble, H. 44 cm;
 W. 60 cm; D. 16 cm. Musée National des Châteaux de
 Malmaison et Bois-Préau, Rueil-Malmaison; Ceded by the
 Ministère de la Guerre, 1925

highly influential throughout Europe and America. *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800–1815* provides a sumptuous visual overview of a remarkably sophisticated and highly influential decorative style, as well as intriguing insight into the political, social, and economic forces behind its development and evolution.

FIG 7
 BERNARD POYET (DESIGNER),
 FRANÇOIS-HONORÉ-GEORGES JACOB-
 DESMALTER (CABINETMAKER),
 AND PICOT (EMBROIDERER),
Throne, 1805. Carved, gilded wood,
 covered in red velvet with silver
 embroidery, H. 160 cm; W.
 110 cm; D. 82 cm. Musée des
 Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Direct
 donation: MM les Questeurs
 Chambre des Députés, 1907



HENRY AUGUSTE, *The Empress's Nef*,
 1804. Gilded silver, H. 68 cm; L. 72 cm; D. 34.5
 cm. Musée National du Château, Fontainebleau;
 On deposit from the Mobilier National, Paris



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305 East 47TH Street, 10TH Floor

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SYMBOLS OF POWER

Napoleon
 and the Art of the
 Empire
 Style
 1800 1815

SYMBOLS OF POWER: NAPOLEON AND THE ART OF THE EMPIRE STYLE, 1800–1815

presents an in-depth view of the artistic style championed by Napoleon Bonaparte during his reign over France. So named because it was designed to promote the values of Napoleon's empire, the Empire style was largely inspired by the classical art and architecture of ancient Rome and Greece.

The first definitive exhibition on the subject, *Symbols of Power* presents a comprehensive selection of objects in the Empire style, including furniture, silverware, porcelain, bronzes, jewelry, costumes, textiles, architectural studies, wallpapers, metalwork, and sculpture, selected by Guest Curator Odile Nouvel-Kammerer, Chief Curator of Nineteenth-Century Art at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. The variety of these objects illustrates how Napoleon's imposed aesthetic touched upon every aspect of life during this time. Some of the most important works of the Empire period are included, among them, the empress's coronation nef (COVER)—a gilded silver container in the shape of a ship designed to hold Josephine's personal eating utensils—Napoleon's sword (FIG. 1), and his throne (FIG. 7).

Before the French Revolution (1789–99), the Bourbon monarchy of King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette was defined by decadence, inequality, and corruption. The nobility and clergy were granted special privileges while the lower classes suffered from high taxation and limited personal liberties. By 1789, the national treasury had been exhausted by the wars and material extravagance of the court, and the citizens of France demanded reparations for their suffering. The bourgeoisie and peasants alike fought their revolution with the zeal expressed in their patriotic message: “Unité et Indivisibilité de la République, Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, ou la Mort” (Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic, Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood, or Death). Revolutionaries criticized the corrupt values and frivolous spending of the previous monarchs and demanded that a new moral and stylistic rigor be adopted by France. By the end of the revolution, the nation's condemnation of



FIG 1
MARTIN-GUILLAUME BIENNAIS, *Napoleon's Sword*, 1806. Gold, enamel, steel, and tortoiseshell, L. 92 cm; W. 11 cm. Musée National du Château, Fontainebleau; On deposit from the Musée du Louvre; Département des Objets d'art



FIG 2
ANONYMOUS, *Imperial Eagle*, 1806–14. Wood and gold, H. 52 cm; W. 118 cm; D. 20 cm. Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau, Rueil-Malmaison; Fonds Napoléon

the eighteenth-century monarchy had found expression in the majestic furnishings and ornamental designs of the decorative arts.

Napoleon began his reign as the first consul in late 1799 (becoming the first emperor in 1804), soon after which he began to vigorously champion the Empire style as the embodiment of the new French state. Napoleon's enthusiasm for elements of Greco-Roman design stemmed from his desire for a style that communicated grandeur. As the exhibition shows, however, his relationship with expressions of luxury was complex. Even as he promoted a decorative program designed to dazzle the courts of Europe, he disdained extravagant expenditures (partially due to the moral strictness of post-revolutionary France).

The most influential figures in the development of the Empire style were Charles Percier and Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, celebrated architects and designers who had studied in Rome. Percier and Fontaine helped establish and disseminate the new decorative language with their very popular 1801 book *Recueil de décorations intérieures* (Anthology of Interior Decoration), which provided illustrated patterns for the forms, materials, colors, and textures that would come to characterize the Empire style. In 1804, Napoleon appointed Percier and Fontaine as his official architects and decorators. Typically designing every element of a room to fit their overall aesthetic, the two men attached immense importance to the interrelationship of architectural setting, furniture, and decoration. As presented throughout the exhibition, their designs—carried out in the palaces of the Louvre and the Tuileries, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel, the Vendôme Column, and the imperial chateaux of Versailles, Malmaison, Compiègne, and Saint-Cloud—



FIG 3 (LEFT)
DOMINIQUE-VIVANT DENON, *Napoleon's Cuirass*, ca. 1805. Steel and chiseled brass, H. 50 cm; W. 40 cm. Musée Carnavalet, Paris; Donated by Mme Marchal, 1935

together with the wide circulation of their *Recueil de décorations intérieures* assured the spread of the “official” Empire style to the growing middle class (albeit in a scaled-down and simpler form) and led to the Empire aesthetic becoming the touchstone of early nineteenth-century French decorative arts.

Characterized by seemingly conflicting qualities of sobriety and luxury, the Empire style became one of the grandest and most opulent in the history of decorative arts. Under Napoleon's direction and patronage, designers and craftsmen of the period developed a new formal language for decorative arts that fueled a renaissance of French artisans and industry. Designs inspired by the simple, symmetrical, and at times austere lines of ancient Rome and Greece were enlivened with bold and saturated colors (including black), expensive and elaborately worked materials, and ornate decoration that included animal and fantastical figures, as well as symbolic references to Napoleon's reign. *Symbols of Power* reveals Napoleon's deep understanding of the power of ancient symbols to legitimize and glorify his rule. As can be seen in the exhibition, imperial emblems, as well as military and triumphant symbols, are to be found on everything from his snuffbox to his coronation robe.

The exhibition includes a small number of works designed and produced during and immediately following the revolution—the Directoire (1795–99) and Consulate (1800–03) periods—to provide a context for the evolution of decorative arts in France in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and illustrate the hallmarks of the emerging Empire style. As is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of these earlier works with works from the Empire period, the new moral rigor that emerged during the revolution rejected the frivolous luxury of the late eighteenth century, which had become directly associated with the corrupt values and excesses of the Bourbon kings. In the design of furniture, wallpapers, and cups and saucers, images from the former monarchy, such as the fleur-de-lys, were

FIG 5 (RIGHT)
ANONYMOUS, *Boat Bed*, ca. 1804–10. Mahogany and gilded bronze, H. 107.5 cm; L. 199 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; Saint-Maurice bequest, 1905



FIG 4
MANUFACTURE DE SÈVRES, *Cup and Saucer, Bowl, and Milk Jug from the Peines et Plaisirs de l'Amour Service*, 1809–12. Hard porcelain and vermeil, Cup: H. 11.5 cm; Saucer: H. 9 cm; Diam. 16 cm; Bowl: H. 14.5 cm; Diam. 21.7 cm; Milk jug: H. 21.8 cm; L. 9.5 cm. Musée National du Château, Fontainebleau

replaced with symbols of the new France, such as the cockade (a knot of ribbon worn as a badge on hats or lapels), and patriotic phrases. The red, white, and blue tricolor flag of independence, triumphant laurel branches, and the red Phrygian cap of freedom (referring to the cap worn by Roman slaves after they were freed) were some of the most common revolutionary symbols. Elements of design were charged with meaning. By the end of the revolution, the decorative arts in France would be characterized by a new simplicity in the materials, shapes, and forms of objects as a mark of revolutionary ideals.

Napoleon appropriated emblems of power from the ancient cultures of Egypt, Greece, and Rome in order to visually and conceptually link his reign with those of grand civilizations of the past. Exemplifying this link is Napoleon's own stunning steel and chiseled brass cuirass, or ceremonial breastplate (FIG. 3). Made for him in 1805, just one year after he was crowned emperor, the cuirass features an allegorical scene of Mars (the Roman god of war) being dressed by two nude spirits. This exceptional piece not only reflects Napoleon's desire to associate himself with ancient Roman emperors but also his own active role in the French military. Napoleon's wish to associate France under his rule with the civilization of ancient Rome is also evident in the pervasive use of the Roman eagle, gods and goddesses of mythology, and other architectural forms and symbols used by the earliest Roman emperors. Napoleon admired the early Roman leaders and identified with their pursuit of peace and order through expansionist military policies.

Strong, masculine symbols reflecting military prowess and the renewed

