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## **Musealizing Napoleon (1837–2011): From Traditional Representations to a Dualistic European Master Narrative**

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### **Abstract**

The paper will successively establish why national museums in the past generally constructed the image of Napoleon as a “*Grand homme*”, a heroic leader and patron of the arts, providing a more unified, consensual vision and tendentiously hagiographic presentation of Napoleon than the more divided domain of general written historiography. It will also show how permanent presentations and temporary exhibits in the last two decades have attempted to revise different aspects of the museum’s master narratives of Napoleon by desacralizing the representation of his physical body, underlining his role in one of Europe’s most horrific wars and examining from a political point of view the artistic productions of his time and thus moving towards a more dualistic narrative. These recent museographical reinterpretations of Napoleon’s role in exhibitions held across Europe seem to have allowed him to incarnate many ambiguous aspects of the European idea and the sometimes-contradictory nature of its history as his memorial role as moved from the national to a more European paradigm.

Napoleon Bonaparte's life has been told and retold, no other historical figure outside of Jesus has inspired so vast a bibliography. He has become nearly inseparable from the narratological epithets that so often accompany his name – they are the epic and the legend of the hero and the ogre. He has been ascribed a status of mythological and even christological proportions, representing alternatively the modern Prometheus or Satan, the Saviour or the Anti-Christ, and the new Augustus or the new Neron. Yet, the story of Napoleon is short - in just under twenty years he built and lost an Empire. During his own lifetime, his name came to represent a whole era: in the 2010-2011 exhibition *Napoleon und Europa, Traum und Trauma* in Bonn, the quotation that greeted the visitor in both English and in German at the entrance was Hegel's famous description of his encounter with Napoleon "I saw the emperor – that world-soul – riding out of the city to reconnoitre. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse reaches out across the world and dominates it" (1806).

Indeed for the romantic generation and beyond, Napoleon's biography became an idea of history itself – that of a world where man's destiny was his own – capable of reinventing and changing society (Martin, 2002: 16). So, despite the brief period that he represents in the long history of Europe, the Napoleonic era can be considered an essential part of the master narrative of the political origins of several European nations (François, 2010: 137) - as self-determined entities, born of the will of an independent people. Thomas Nipperdey's (1983) famous opening quotation "Am Anfang war Napoleon" referred to the history of Germany, but is easily transposable to the history of many other European countries, France of course but also Italy, Holland, Belgium (though yet to be existent as such) etc. Yet beyond its place in the memory of individual nations, the Napoleonic era is doubtlessly very much at the core of what Claus Leggewie (2009) has termed as the European battlefield of memory, as he asks to what extent "Is European memory divided between European nations, as a 'shared memory'?" (Leggewie, 2009: 1). Indeed Napoleon is equally essential to any understanding of political and historical relationships between France and England (Semmel, 2004), Austria, Spain, Portugal and indeed Europe as a whole.

The founding master narratives of Europe, as recently analysed, have appeared as largely negative: Leggewie cites the Holocaust, soviet totalitarianism and other equally traumatic historical contexts as the principal master narratives that have contributed to a sense of a united Europe (see also Kaiser, 2011). European historiography deals predominantly with some of the darkest issues of history of the twentieth century (Mazower, 2000), so much so that Europe appears to have built its identity out of a common resistance to adversity (Leggewie, 2009: 2):

For the nationally-minded, Europe is essentially a free-trade zone that acts collectively only in the case of attack from outside; worth commemorating are, if anything, wars against external enemies and internal barbarians such as the Nazis.

The development of a representation of a European Napoleon (as opposed to tradition nationalist visions), in stark contrast to the most absolute of internal enemies, Hitler, establishes him as a quintessentially ambiguous enemy. Indeed no other European historical figure has been recognized as having played such an important part in forging the history of modern Europe - both through his modernizing administrative reforms and out of concerted reaction (i.e. the Battle of the Nations, 1813) to his menacing political and military activities. François Étienne

recognizes a distinctive European memory, from that of the distributed and diverse national memories related to Napoleon (2012, 386), he writes:

At times held in common, at other times an object of division, even of conflict, this memory is, in the literal sense, shared and entangled. If memory of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars has this double national and European dimension, it is primarily because these wars – through the movements of troops and of civilian populations and the resulting contacts between them – were shared experiences in the fullest sense of the term.

Due to the particular nature of collections related to the figure of Napoleon, national museums and temporary exhibitions move between these national and European dimensions in a particular way that we will try to examine here. The visual force of Napoleon's place in European museums is largely due to his own efforts to style his place in history through imagery - for example by establishing himself as the successor of a prestigious genealogy of rulers that included Charlemagne (Lentz, 2005 : 11). The most famous of these images is of course Jacques-Louis David's *Bonaparte crossing the Alps* (1800), this iconic image indeed exists as five copies, hanging in the museums of Versailles, Malmaison, but also in Berlin (at the castle of Charlottenburg) and in Vienna (at the Museum of the Belvédère – formerly in the Palace of the Cisalpine Republic in Milan). European museums have of course retained through their collections shared images that Napoleon promoted through his controlled artistic patronage which produced vast series of propagandistic history paintings and economically drove the development of an international artistic *Empire* style that has since been considered in direct relation with his person. It follows that the narration of the Napoleonic Empire using a common basis of visual and material heritage in national museums and in museums of national importance constitutes an excellent subject for a transnational study. However, in order to establish necessary limits in dealing with this very vast comparative subject both chronologically and geographically, the analysis of these displays has focused on how the physical representation of Napoleon is established and museographically contextualized.

Museums contribute in a very singular way to the historiography of Napoleon mainly because they use specific media to develop their narratives. In the case of Napoleon these are the collectables that have been used in private and public contexts of display to commemorate, illustrate and narrate Napoleon's life and times in a material cult that began with his exile to Saint Helena. They make up a limited set of categories that tend to provide all of the displays related to his person with similar visual focal points and so also suitable points of comparison between the museographies of different museums and exhibitions. Napoleon's hats for example represent one of the most obvious visual signs related to his figure and may be found in nearly every display of his personal effects. An essential element of his civil and military attire, he had at least four hats made every year unwittingly yet conveniently providing future collections with a fair number of models. Karine Huguenaud (2007) classified the categories of material objects related to Napoleonic collectionism as historical souvenirs (such as personal effects and manuscripts); militaria (objects related to the Napoleonic wars) ; and artistic objects (fine arts, history paintings, portraits and decorative arts). These categories have also contributed to structuring this essay, leading us to first consider his physical representation as a cult of the man himself, secondly in relation to his role as a man of war and lastly as an important figure in the world of culture and the arts.

Napoleon's presence in the museum is exceptionally widespread and strong. He is indeed the only figure in European history for which we find thematically dedicated museums not only in his country of origin but also internationally. In France of course there is an important network of Napoleon museums (*musées Napoléoniens*) all related to former homes or residences. In Monaco there is also a Museum of Napoleonic souvenirs established by the Prince Louis II, grandfather of the current prince (see tables for details on all of these institutions). However, we also find a *Museo Napoleonico* in Italy run by the municipality of Rome, left to the city by members of the Napoleon family and two of Napoleon's homes on the Island of Elba are today labelled as "national" Italian museums. For the French historian Ferdinand Boyer, it appeared as most natural that of all European countries, Italy, as the theater of Bonaparte's early glories, should be particularly attentive to establishing museographical installations relating the history of Napoleon (Boyer, 1955 : 93).

Switzerland too became home to the *Napoleonmuseum* in the castle of Arenenberg, in the canton of Thurgau, former home of the exiled daughter in law of Napoleon, Hortense de Beauharnais and one should also mention the existence of a *Museo Napoleonico* in Havana, in Cuba. Whilst across the channel, in London, Apsley house, the residence of the Duke of Wellington run by English Heritage as a national collection with the V&A, is also a house museum dedicated to the memory of the Empire, from the British perspective of the victory at Waterloo. It has been included here as a counter narrative to the other house museums for indeed we find there a very strong presence of the figure of Napoleon himself making it a particularly interesting if somewhat ambiguous monument to British victory. Alongside these museums entirely dedicated to Napoleon himself and to the Napoleonic era, we have taken into account narratives of the Napoleonic wars as established in several major national military and history museums (cf. table 2). Lastly, careful consideration has been given to the wave of major historical exhibits dedicated to the personality of Napoleon that have been organized by national museums across Europe (and indeed internationally in Brazil or in Japan for example) and which have flourished in the last decade in the context of the bi-centennial celebrations/commemorations of the major battles of the Napoleonic wars (cf. table 1). From the creation of the so-called Napoleon museums and house museums directly related to him and the development of military and history exhibits to these most recent historical exhibits we have considered the long evolution of displays as developed since the creation of the museum of national history in Versailles in 1837.

The museum's narrative has been, as far as this is really possible, considered against the background of the gigantic historic production dedicated to Napoleon. Even a very superficial overview of written historical narratives dedicated to Napoleon clearly shows that from the outset two visions, two master-narratives expressed firstly by artists and writers of the romantic generation (Ferber, 2005) and later by historians established a split attitude – "for and against" Napoleon (Geyl, 1976).

The *master narrative* may be defined as the overreaching messages about the past that motivate the museum's general programme and structure its display(s), they "were (are) intended to enable mastery of the messy and complicated real world." (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 24). As underlying ideas or principals, they structure stories, great and small, general and particular, bringing them together to make them intelligible. Megill (2007, 33) situates the master narrative in the context of



the rise of nations in the 19th century : “In each case there was a master narrative that was seen as running through the nation’s history – the master narrative of the nation’s movement from its early beginnings, through the rise of national self-consciousness, to its current struggle for recognition and success.” That of Napoleon’s place in European history has been divided between the vision of the ogre, Napoleon as a premonitory figure of Hitler’s Europe, which has alternatively been held up against that of the emperor-administrator, author of the civil code of law and also instigator of a united modern political Europe (Petiteau, 2002: 19).

By adopting this long chronological perspective on the displays related to the figure of Napoleon and by attempting to examine the difficult intersections between national and European histor(ies), this paper will examine the evolution of his museographical representation towards the confrontation of its master narratives with narrative strands up until excluded from the story on display. The case of Napoleon illustrates how a theme whose museography has traditionally been exceptionally monolithic has come to be handled in a way that is illustrative of a reflexive attitude to the past – which simultaneously identifies and provides a critique of its own master narrative.

### **The Real and the Represented Bodies of Napoleon – the *Grand Homme* on Display**

Napoleon’s tomb across the courtyard from the *Musée de l’armée* in Paris is perhaps the clearest illustration of how small the distance can be between religiously paying homage to so-called great men and their historical representation in the museum. In the French context, one of the public museum’s first functions was to provide public displays of the relics of the lives of great men or *grands hommes* (Poulot, 2010). It has represented and narrated their lives through the material remains of their physical existence (Bodenstein, 2011: 11), artistic renderings and souvenir objects so that their biographies could be considered and most importantly experienced as part of a *historia magistra vitae* (Hartog, 2003: 84).

In the first part of our study we will focus on narratives related to the display of personal belongings and historical memorabilia in what one might call the museum’s “heroic regime” in a material transposition of one of the historical regimes presented by François Hartog (2003) in his well-known typology. He developed his notion of heroic historicism on the basis of the anthropological studies of societies of the Fiji islands undertaken by Marshall Sahlin, where the role of the leader subsumed all of the community’s history and where one man counted for everyone, constructing a past that could be described as fundamentally anthropomorphic (Hartog, 2003: 38-42).

### **The *Grand Homme* as a National Hero**

The return of Napoleon’s ashes to France from Saint Helena in 1841 coincides with the beginning of a long tradition of public displays related to the figure of Napoleon in a ritual context that he had in a sense himself established. Indeed Napoleon ordered the transfer of the important army generals, Turenne and Vauban, to the Dome part of the church of the *Invalides*. It was here too that he organized the display of battle trophies such as flags and arms, and that he distributed the famous medals of the Legion of honour for the first time. So, when his ashes

returned to France in 1841 during the July Monarchy long discussions took place before the Invalides (rather than the Pantheon) were chosen as their last resting place (Humbert, 2005, 35).

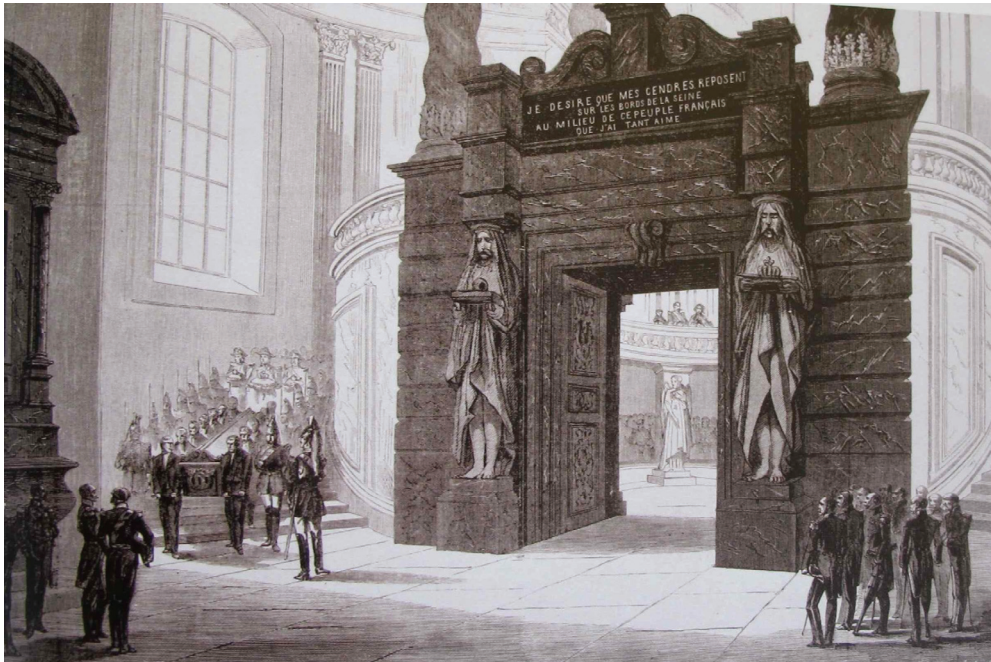


Figure 1: Engraving by Adam Jacob, 1861. Napoleon's ashes being transported to Visconti's tomb in the dome of the Invalides. Photo F. Bodenstein.

Louis-Philippe had already positioned Napoleon as a key figure in the presentation of France's history in the *Musée d'histoire de France* at Versailles that opened in 1837 (Constans, 2001, 20). In the *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, Napoleon had also expressed his own museographical project for the gardens of Versailles where he claimed that his intention had been to replace the sculptures and fountains by panoramas representing his most triumphant victories.

In Louis-Philippe's museum the Napoleonic wars occupied thirteen rooms, vividly illustrated with portraits and battle scenes that chronologically followed the rise and fall of his Empire (although of course Waterloo was as good as absent). The most sumptuous room was the *Salle de Marengo*, dedicated to the second Italian campaign – centred on the above-mentioned painting by David *Bonaparte crossing the Alps* and the *Salle de la Coronation*.



Figure 2: Alexandre de Laborde, "La salle Marengo" *Versailles ancien et moderne*, p. 351.  
Photo F. Bodenstein.

In 1839 Alexandre de Laborde published a monumental guidebook of the museum with illustrative *vignettes* showing the displays and including long historical accounts of the events illustrated by the paintings. His description of the vestibule space dedicated to the sculpted representation of the Emperor highlights a specific mode of display in this narration of the Napoleonic wars.



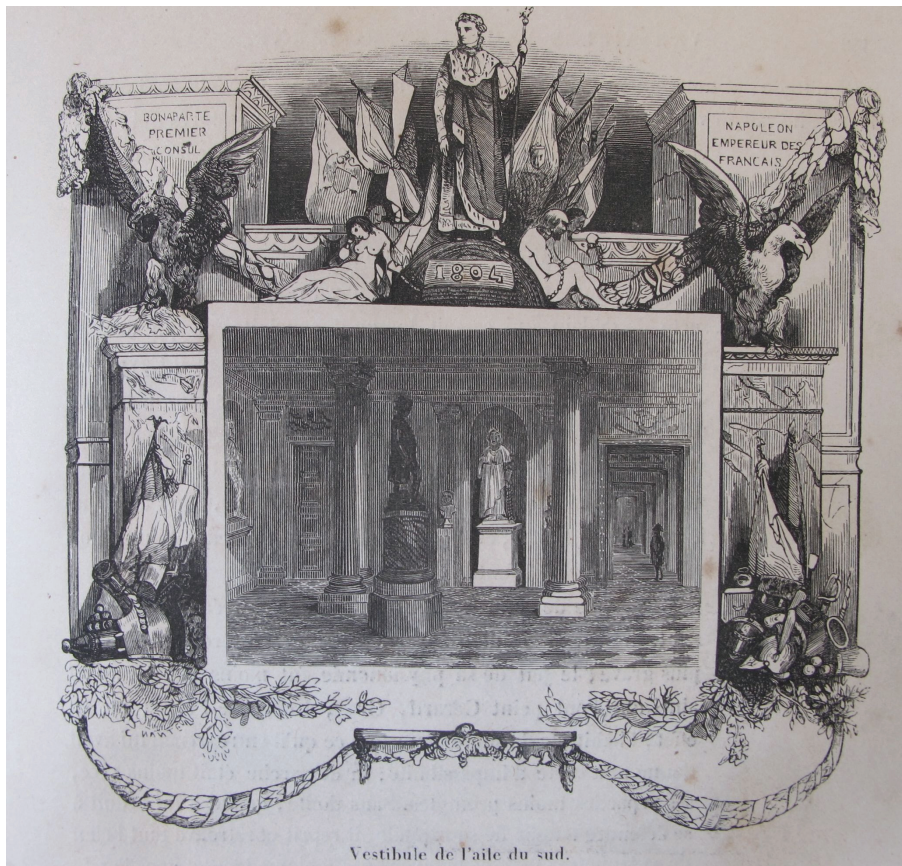


Figure 3: Alexandre de Laborde, “Vestibule de l’aile du sud” *Versailles ancien et moderne*, p. 337, Photo Felicity Bodenstein.

Here in this liminal space, devote attention was paid specifically to the figure of the *Grand Homme* as an isolated element outside of any chronological narrative (de Laborde, 1839: 337, translation by the author):

Let us suspend for a moment the history of the great man to which all of these rooms are dedicated, and stop here close to his statue surrounded by the busts of his family and those closest to his throne. The noble simplicity of this vestibule allows us to take a break from the profusion of the paintings and study with more care his physical traits represented by three busts and two statues.

On the introductory page to the presentation of recent French history in the south wing, we find a vignette that shows Napoleon himself visiting the museum, standing at the door of the room dedicated to the year 1796.

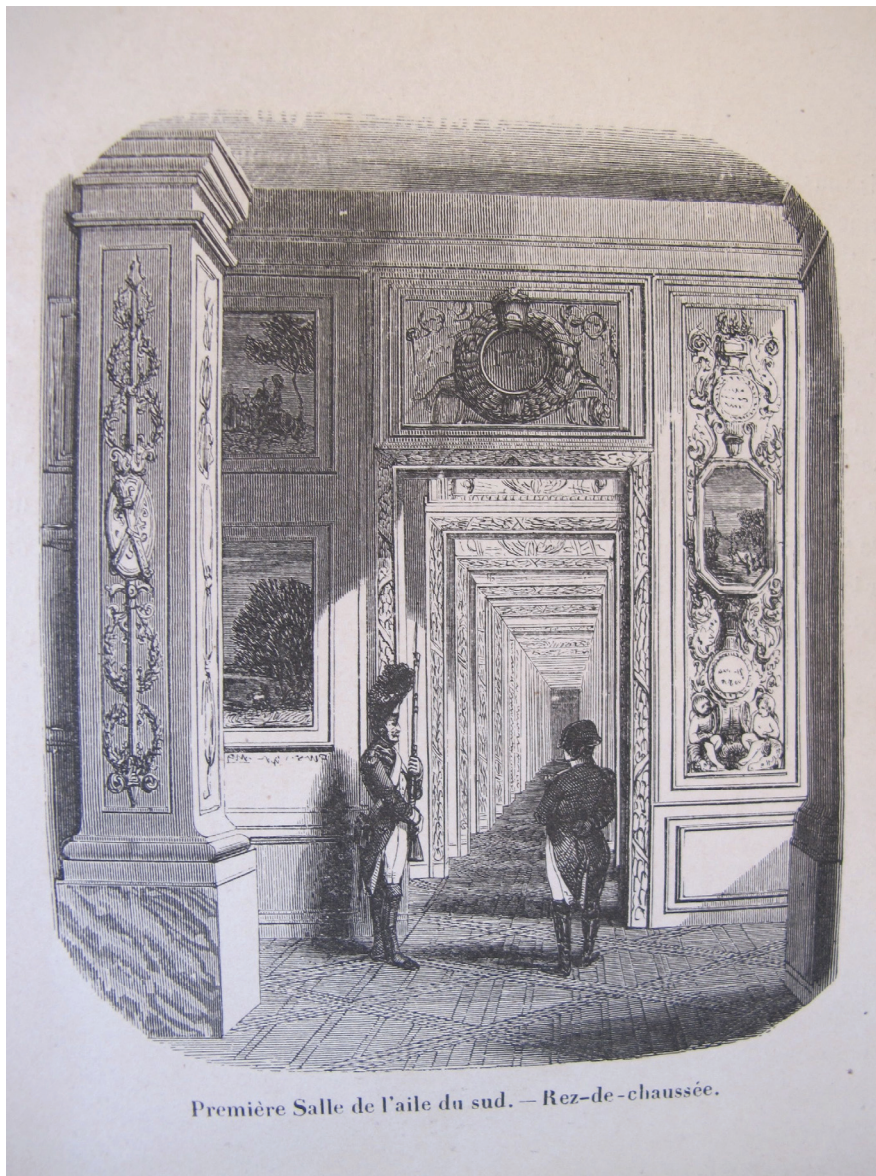


Figure 4: Alexandre de Laborde, “Première Salle de l’aile du sud” *Versailles ancien et moderne*, p. 327, Photo F. Bodenstein.

The museum of French history at Versailles clearly fed into the popular appeal of the Napoleonic era and the translation of his earthly remains to the *Invalides* four years after the opening of the museum was part of the same political strategy. The transfer of Napoleon’s ashes was indeed the paroxysmal moment of a transformation of his memory that began with his death in 1821. Very quickly, Napoleon’s posthumous popularity was to reach extraordinary heights – the ‘black legend’ of the tyrant, that had dominated for some time after the defeat of Waterloo, gave way to a veritable cult that produced an exceptional bounty of material objects (Hazareesingh, 2004: 74):

The most striking feature of the Napoleon cult was its sheer scale. In the years between 1815 and 1830 thousands of coins and medals, hundreds of thousands of busts and small statues, and millions of images representing Napoleon were sold, distributed, and exchanged across France.



His aura as a national hero took on a force that Louis-Philippe attempted to harness for the improvement of his own image (Humbert, 2005, 35).

However whilst the return of Napoleon's body had been the work of Louis-Philippe, the architecture of the tomb itself was designed and opened to the public during the reign of Napoleon's nephew, Louis-Napoleon also known as Napoleon III. The monumental sarcophagus in red porphyry stone was literally set into an explicit evocation of his most glorious victories – as the names of the battles were incrustated into the mosaic floor surrounding the sarcophagus. His most prominent civil achievements were illustrated in the series of low reliefs created by the sculptor, Charles Simart, and set into the wall of the circular ambulatory that allows the visitor to walk around the tomb without being in direct contact with it.

Upon entering the ambulatory, two scenes are dedicated to his burial on the island of Saint Helena and the arrival of his ashes in Paris. They are followed by ten scenes that each represents Napoleon as a godlike figure bestowing his gifts of administrative and cultural modernity on the French nation. The presentation was accompanied by an extravagant gilded display case – which stands empty today in the chapel of Napoleon's son, the *roi de Rome*. It had been especially designed to receive the most important relics and trophies kept in the *Invalides*, the hat from the battle of Eylau and the sword carried by Napoleon at Austerlitz (Hussadis, Robbe 2010, 66).



Figure 5: The display case created to hold the souvenirs of Napoleon.  
Photo F. Bodenstein.

Concomitantly to the construction of the funerary monument by the architect Louis Visconti in the Dome church of the *Invalides*, a memorial type display related to the figure of Napoleon was also established in the Louvre with the opening in 1853 of the *Musée des Souverains*.

This museum, an outright expression of state propaganda, was indeed the result of Napoleon III's desire to legitimate his reign by underlining his direct affiliation with Napoleon and by presenting himself as a central figure in the nation's long genealogy of power. It was the first time in France that historical memorabilia became the principal concern of any museum's official acquisition policy.

In 1853, Horace de Viel-Castel, the museum's first director, expressed his satisfaction at the striking overall effect that the room dedicated to the souvenirs of Napoleon should to his mind have on its visitors. Indeed, the lighting and decoration had been designed to produce a contemplative atmosphere that called for religious silence just as one might observe in the presence of a funerary monument. For Viel-Castel it was a cenotaph, and the direct counterpart to the tomb at the *Invalides*. It was destined to be a place where the lessons to be learnt from the man's great destiny might best be absorbed, as remarked upon by one contemporary journalist who clearly described his visit to the museum as a pilgrimage (quoted by Granger, 2005: 334).

According to Viel-Castel, the Napoleonic souvenirs needed no introduction or explanation; for as he claimed, the history of France's most popular hero was fresh in everyone's minds and hearts. He considered that the personal objects presented in the museum had the power to recall a whole period, inciting visitors to recall their own forgotten family stories (Viel-Castel, 1853: 189-190, translation by the author).

No guide is needed to tell the story of this popular hero; it is in everyone's mouth; it impresses upon all whose fathers were the soldiers of the great captain. In only a few hours one could have collected thousands of unwritten anecdotes, stories passed down from generation to generation by the companions of the conqueror at Austerlitz, and which one day will become part of the marvellous legend.

The objects themselves did not indeed provide any explicit narrative of events, but were lent evocative powers that supposedly enabled them to bring back personal histories to the minds of visitors and give them a more intimate sense of past events. Towards the end of the century the *musée Carnavalet* as the historical museum of the city of Paris also created a display of the Emperor's possessions, promoting historical pathos by presenting Napoleon's *nécessaire de campagne*, and other pieces that had come into possession of the museum mainly through the donations of private collectors, as objects of grave curiosity (Bodenstein, 2011, 17).

The *musée des Souverains* closed in 1871, after the exile of Napoleon III, but many of the objects related to Napoleon's person made their way into what would become the future collection of the *musée de l'Armée* officially founded under its current title as the reunion of already existing collections in the *Invalides* in 1905 (Hussadis, Robbe 2010, 70). Throughout the twentieth century it continued to be devoted to a presentation of Napoleon that was clearly commemorative and dedicated to monumentalizing the figure of Napoleon rather than to inserting his life into a narrative of military history. The history of the collections – very much the sum product of private donations – to a certain extent explains the development of what for a military museum appears as an unusually personal museography. In 1949, the *Invalides* hosted an exhibition entitled *Napoléon Bonaparte. Souvenirs personnels présentés pour la première fois à Paris*, the exhibit was then also

presented in Brussels augmented with objects from the reserves of the *Musée du Cinquenaire* and the *Musée d'armes de la porte du Hal* (Anonymous, 1950: 6). It was organized with the help of the *Société des Amis du Musée de l'Armée* in conjunction with important loans from the descendants of Napoleon himself. Contemporary press articles give us an idea of how the objects were perceived, especially in relation to the display devoted to Napoleon's death, including those objects that had surrounded him during his last moments (Castelot, 1949, translation by the author):

The last moments of his life are rendered extraordinarily present. The thermometer refers to the heavy moist heat that must have dominated the room; the oval teapot decorated with the Imperial arms can be seen on the bedside table, the crucifix that was placed in his hands and the objects that participated of the ceremony of last rites. The bed from Austerlitz is still covered in the same sheets that he lay on in death.

In the 1960s, an American researcher J.-L. Westrate travelled across Europe to study military museums for the Smithsonian Institute and pointed out the disproportionate attention given to the figure of Napoleon in Paris, describing the hall dedicated to his “family and personal items ranging from dishes and clothing to the bed in which Napoleon died. Such objects normally are not found in a military museum” (Westrate, 1961: 83). The museum to a certain extent became the direct extension of the shrine-like display tradition established around Napoleon's tomb itself.

For over 150 years, France's national museums have developed the same “narrative fetishism” defined by Eric Santner as: “the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place. [...] it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere” (Santner, 1992: 144). So it was that the loss of the Empire, the dramatic consequences and impact of the wars were generally overstepped and blotted out by a glorified, biographical representation of Napoleon himself.

### **At home with Napoleon**

The cult of the personal object that provides the essential material of the metonymical biographical displays described above is equally if not even more preponderant in the roughly ten museums exclusively dedicated to Napoleon and to his family. These house museums (cf. table), whose sites are related to the private and public life of Napoleon, which had in some cases been maintained throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century as family shrines were progressively nationalized during the twentieth century. All of them contain collections whose public status is generally the result of initiatives due to members of the imperial family, beginning in 1906 with the donation of the castle of Arenenberg to Swiss canton of Thurgau by the former Empress Eugénie, who played a very important role in the musealization of the family's history.

Taken together, these museums present Napoleon as the patriarch of a European house that he himself established, a new dynasty that allowed him to effectively extend his rule across the Empire. Today the Island museums of Corsica, Elba, the Island of Aix and Saint Helena each tell the story of an essential biographical event: birth, exiles and death – their narrative role is clear and unambiguous.

The situation is somewhat more complex in the case of those house museums that were never direct sites of Napoleon's life and history. Although he himself never lived in the house in which



the count Primoli established his *Museo Napoleonico*, its owner conceived of it as a way of illustrating the genealogical relationship that tied Napoleon to the city of Rome, through the *aiglon*, the king of Rome, and through the history of a large part of his family who sought exile in the eternal city after 1815 (Huguenaud, 2011, translation by the author):

The histories of the First and Second Empire appear through the intimate evocation of their main protagonists. Beyond the official iconography dedicated to important historical events, the Bonaparte's personal and daily destiny is revealed through an extremely rich variety of objects.

It stands as a monument to the memorial work undertaken by its owner, and has hardly changed since its establishment; the recently renovated rooms have sought as much as possible to remain faithful to their original state.

In a very different way, Apsley house in London attests to the long history of Britain's fascination with Napoleon described by Olausson (2010: 19) in the introduction to the 2010 exhibition catalogue *Staging Power* as: "an almost fetishistic love-hate relationship." The Swedish historian continued by observing:

One of its most exclusive forms is the collecting of objects once belonging to the emperor. These could in a sense be described as trophies, which were commonly taken on the battlefield. Such items, though would scarcely have attracted as much interest had it not been for an almost perverse fascination with 'the little general Bonaparte.

Interestingly, it was not only in France that Napoleon's popularity changed over the course of the first half of the Nineteenth century to reach cult status, but also in Britain, as analysed by Stuart Semmel (2004) where his character attracted ever more admiration – a fact that needs to be taken into account if we want to understand the Duke of Wellington's personal demonstration of respect for his defeated adversary in his home which has since become "a national shrine to the victor of Waterloo, the liberator of Europe from Napoleon" (Bryant, 2009, 3).

Apsley house is today described as a family house museum, dedicated to military history and the important collection of art of Arthur Wellesley, the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington. It was purchased by Wellington in 1817, with the help of the money that he received as reward from the grateful British state and it remained in his family until the Seventh Duke of Wellington donated it to the state in 1947 to mark the centenary of the first Duke's death. "The house as it appears today is largely a product of the first Duke's refurbishments." (Bryant, 2009, 5). The museum in no way retraces a clear story of the battle of Waterloo, the events of the Napoleonic wars or its political background – yet these are consistently referred to through the display of the Duke's "trophies".

However, in the case of Apsley house the notion of the trophy needs to be employed with care. Indeed, the ambiguity of the relationship between the victorious general and owner of the house and his adversary immediately strikes the visitor upon entering the area of the stairwell from the vestibule. Here, he comes face to face with the monumental nude statue of Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker by Antoino Canova (1802-06).



Figure 6: Antonio Canova, *Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker* (1802-1806), Apsley House Photo F. Bodenstein.

Napoleon had himself rejected the statue as too unrealistic in its rendering of his physical body and had kept it covered up in the Louvre in a corner of the *Salle des Hommes Illustres* (Bryant, 2005, 38). After 1816 however, it was bought by the British government and presented to Wellington as a gift. The significance of Napoleon's place here has been interpreted in very contrasting ways. As pointed out by Julius Bryant "The location of the sculpture prompted published criticism from France and Italy in Wellington's lifetime and it is still seen today as evidence that the victor of Waterloo sought to humble his adversary by giving a war trophy an unworthy domestic setting." (Bryant, 2005, p. 38). Yet, as Bryant points out, given the immense fame of the artist - Canova who at the time was perhaps the most famous of living artists - "This was no white elephant to be acquired for political amusement" (Bryant, 2005, 40). Its position and lighting convey a particularly dramatic effect upon the statue creating what would be an inordinately monumental effect if the aim of the display were indeed to ridicule. Today, a bust of Wellington himself is positioned in the corner and appears as though calmly contemplating the figure of Napoleon – a presentation that due to the contrast of scale is not without comic effect.

The audio-guide at this point in the visit reminds us of the respect that Wellington expressed for Napoleon during his lifetime, on news of his death, he is quoted as having stated: "Now I think I may safely say that I am the most famous general left alive". The display also includes a large painting by John Prescott Knight (1803-81) showing the heroes of Waterloo united in the dining room of Apsley house, in presence of Wellington himself. The house holds an important selection of other portraits of Napoleon confirming a narrative that places the English general on a level footing with his adversary – still in the stairwell after passing this first monument – the visitor is confronted with two full length portraits of Wellington and Napoleon side by side



Figure 7: Portraits in the stairwell of Apsley house. Thomas Lawrence, 1814, *Arthur Wellesly*, Apsley house collection and Robert Lefèvre, 1812, *Napoleon Bonaparte*, Apsley house collection. Photo F. Bodenstein.

This magnificent collection of European art, mainly united as trophies of the Napoleonic wars and through the artistic interests of the Duke of Wellington himself, establishes an early example of an ambiguous memory of the wars outside of France.

### Current Museographies of the *Grand Homme*

The permanence of such displays over decades and thus of the narratives that they vehicle is perhaps what best characterizes the existence of such house museums as the *Museo Napoleonico* and *Apsley House* which are as much to be considered as public collections as they are monuments to their owners and expressions of personal memorial relationships to the figure of Napoleon.



**Figure 8: Presentation in Apsley of personal objects related to the cult of the figures of Napoleon and Wellington. Photo F. Bodenstein.**

Such a memorial function implies that it is difficult to establish new critical and reflexive narratives as these displays are treated as fixed elements, in themselves objects to be conserved. However, in the case of both of the museums considered, curators have in the last decade augmented the traditional presentation with a separate display that tells of the cult of these personalities, that allows the visitor to better apprehend the museum itself and its historical foundations. The *Mythe and Satire* room of the *Museo Napoleonico* is the only new addition to the original display, established during the museum's recent renovation. It considers how the myth of Napoleon was constructed and provides a counter-image of the "great man" by exhibiting a selection of caricatures that portray a different Napoleon. At Apsley house a new display area has been recently developed in the basement of the museum where we find again the cult of the person of Wellington, reflexively placed in opposition to that of Napoleon. By setting out relic objects related to both men in the context of a variety of souvenir objects and caricatures they



show the different reactions that both men provoked throughout history. Though the Napoleon Museum of Arenenberg has not made any additions or major changes to its museography it did publish in 1997 one of the most comprehensive catalogues of caricatures of Napoleon.

These attempts attest in a modest way to changes in what has been termed here as the heroic regime of display that founds the museographical tradition of the display of Napoleon himself. One might add that it can also be observed in the context of displays related to other national heroes from this period – in comparative terms an interesting example is the fetishisation of Nelson's uniform in the *National Maritime Museum* in Greenwich. In terms of current displays one can attempt a comparison between the presentations of the *Musée de l'Armée* in Paris that reopened in 2009, the display in the National Army Museum in London and that of the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* that can both be dated to 2006.

The recent so-called Athéna project (1996-2010) of renovation that entirely reorganised the *Musée de l'Armée's* displays (Delage Irène, interview with E. Robbe, 2010) has very much toned down the shrine like aspect of its museography discussed above. The space and symbolic place occupied by Napoleon had come to be considered by the museum's current curators as too overbearing (Humbert, 2005) and in the context of the museum's renovation, the predominance of his place which eclipsed even the personality of the buildings founder, Louis XIV, was questioned. A good example of how this change is expressed museographically is the place given to the famous sword carried by the Emperor at Austerlitz. As a relic it had for over a century been either placed directly on the tomb of Napoleon itself or in the aforementioned gilded display case. Today it has been relegated to an almost insignificant position, discreetly displayed in a sunken display case on the windowsill of the room dedicated to Napoleon in battle, easily overseen and absolutely understated.



Figure 9: Napoleon's sword from the battle of Austerlitz. The current display in the *Musée de l'Armée*, Paris (2009). Photo F. Bodenstein.

It is placed in the same room as the formerly existing display of his tent and military equipment, conserved with the renovation. Here Napoleon's lifestyle on the battlefield is the focal point. Despite a certain attempt to balance out its narrative, the figure of Napoleon still retains a strongly individualized presence in the rooms related to the Revolution and the Empire.

Of course the importance of Napoleon for the *Deutsches historisches museum* in Berlin, cannot be compared to the *Musée de l'armée*, but one might consider room 17 dedicated to *Napoleon and Europe* (<http://www.dhm.de/ausstellungen/bildzeug/17.html>, site consulted on the 3 May 2011). Here, the hat, sword and stirrups used by Napoleon at Waterloo are carefully isolated in a separate

display case that quite simply sets them apart from a more global narrative and they are clearly presented as the focal point in the centre of the room.

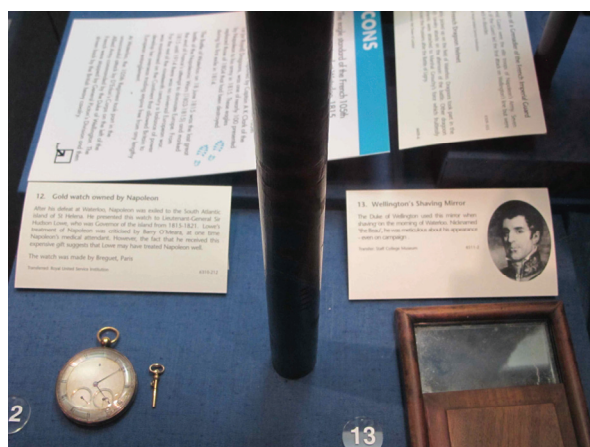


Figure 10: Napoleon's sword from Waterloo, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. Photo Sebastian Niedlich (<http://flic.kr/p/98dNNM>).

This museography continues to underline the reverence for personal objects described above – perpetuating the kind of sanctified relationship to great man that such objects represent. Of course Napoleon's Prussian adversary at Waterloo, Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, also benefits from a biographically exclusive display area to establish his historical existence and his importance. Yet, the particular pride of place given to Napoleon's hat and sword from Waterloo is different; evidently has not the same meaning here as the memorabilia from Austerlitz would have in the Invalides. Yet the presentation enhances the role of Napoleon as central, the positioning of the display case allows his figure to preside over the narrative describing his role in European history. Here in quite a traditional manner, the "Great Man" is not so much a story as a presence in the museum.

One might argue that it seems simply quite natural and intuitive to underline in this way important historical actors, yet if we compare this display with what we find in the *National Army Museum* in London, we can observe a very neat opposition to the narrative of the great military hero as embodied by such objects. The Napoleonic era is illustrated in a section entitled 'The Road to Waterloo, 1793-1815' as part of the *Changing the World 1784-1904* permanent exhibit. In the displays dedicated to the Battle of Waterloo one of course also finds objects related to

Napoleon and to Wellington. Indeed, two small objects – Wellington’s watch and Napoleon’s shaving mirror are displayed side by side though appear as relatively insignificant at the bottom right of this large *vitrine* of miscellaneous military memorabilia related to Waterloo.



**Figure 11: Vitrine of historical memorabilia from Napoleon and Wellington. National Army Museum. Photo F. Bodenstein**

In London, the display illustrates an obvious desire to tell the story of Waterloo without paying too much attention to the “great men” of the battle. Of course there is a small print of Wellington, providing us with some basic biographical information, yet of all the actors of the battle one learns most about a certain Captain William Tyrwhitt-Drake through the presentation of his personal effects in a vitrine labelled “A Household Cavalry officer at Waterloo”.



**Figure 12: “A Household Cavalry officer at Waterloo” National Army Museum, Photo F. Bodenstein.**

This display is clearly a transfer of the museographical modes usually reserved for the presentation of the personal objects of famous and important men. In general, it should be added that the displays of the National Army Museum seek to present the history of British military intervention from the point of view of the average soldier and great pains are taken to ensure the

representation of ordinary soldiers and minorities – even women and children and their role in the army is brought to our attention.

In the London displays, personal objects when available, have been carefully woven into a factual narrative to create an idea of a general war situation – but they are never placed in exergue in such a way as might lead the visitor to consider them as having an intrinsic value of their own, outside of the story being told – not even objects owned by Napoleon or Wellington himself.

The tendency we would like to draw attention to culminates in the 2010-2011 exhibition presented in Bonn, *Napoleon und Europa, Traum und Trauma* that neatly announced the dual ambition of the narrative it intended to offer the visitor in the title of the display itself and in a sense set out its principal argument using the museographical tradition of the great man as a foil. The exhibition was curated by French/German art historian Benedicte Savoy and was organised in collaboration with the *Musée de l'armée* in Paris.

Spatially, the hall occupied by the exhibit was split down the centre from the entrance into two halves introduced by a central dome shaped area that formed the exhibit's introduction. In order to introduce this dual conception the rotunda presents Napoleon in the heroic regime – with his signature coat and hat and a neo-classical bust of Napoleon as Augustus, whilst to the left of this central space the heroic figure was clearly placed in opposition to the general situation of violence incurred by the war itself, identifying Napoleon as the principal orchestrator of Europe's first "Total war" (Bell, 2007) by presenting the violently damaged breast-plate of the carabineer François-Antoine Faveau. (For images of the exhibition: <http://www.franceculture.fr/2011-03-10-napoleon-le-reve-et-la-blessure.html>).

This confrontation introduced the notion of "Fascination" for Napoleon and "Abscheu" or repulsion that structured the themes of the exhibition. After being lead down the right side of the exhibit through the story of the Napoleonic wars all the way to the back end of the exhibition space which is occupied by the story of Napoleon's family and his implementation of blood relations to create a new Napoleonic dynasty ruling across Europe, the visitor then turns back toward the entrance and comes through another series of spaces presenting the other dimensions of the Napoleonic story – evolutions in state rule and leadership, but also presents the question of art robbery, symbolic imagery related to Napoleon, and the nationalist reactions that his actions provoked. Towards the front of the exhibition hall, and the exit (which was also the entrance) - the Napoleonic legend is illustrated by two spaces, back to back, dedicated to his birth and another dedicated to the mythology surrounding his death which forms the end of the exhibit on the other side. The circuit subtly manages to express at once the polarised narrative, introduced by the rotunda and spatially expressed by a division of the exhibition straight down a median line with the war to the right and the other themes running down the left side. At the same time it orders the narrative of Napoleon's life and impact on European thought and history according to clear thematic propositions that nevertheless follow an order that is logical in terms of the timeline of events, establishing it firmly as a dualistic European story.



## Napoleon – Man of War and Military Adversary

### General historiography and the museum

We posited in our introduction that the image of Napoleon conveyed by national museums, be it in France or abroad has until recently proved less contentious and conflicting than what the strongly contrasting currents to be found in general historiography might allow us to expect. In 1940, the dual nature of Napoleonic historiography was established as a kind of constant in a seminal essay written by the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, *Napoleon: for and against* clearly defining the problem of considering his place for posterity. Using Napoleon as a historiographical textbook case he showed that throughout the nineteenth century ‘French historians had depicted Napoleon either as a son of France and the Revolution who brought liberty and stability to Europe or as a foreigner whose thirst for power and glory dragged France into disaster’. In so doing, Geyl demonstrated that ‘historical accounts are coloured by the ideological and political concerns of historians’ (Hughes-Warrington, 2008: 126).

As we have tried to show in the first part of our study, a largely positive narrative can be observed in the history of displays related to his figure, as many of them were related to private and public cults of Napoleon. It is implicitly perpetuated through a particular form of reverence for personal relics, and the long life of display traditions that go back to the mid-nineteenth century and are often reinforced by the private origins of collections and by the propagandistic nature of their construction.

The conservative historian Renée Casin recognised the narrative power of Napoleon’s personal possessions as a positive historic expression of the man in her 1956 study (reedited in 2008) dedicated to the representation of Napoleon in France’s *lycée* or high school history books. Her book appeared as a reaction to an explicitly negative vision of the history of Napoleon that appeared during the Second World War, resulting from the more or less direct comparison with Hitler. The perceived affiliation of the two men had indeed been epitomized by the famous visit of the *Führer* to Napoleon’s tomb during the ceremony that accompanied the transfer of the body of the *Roi de Rome*, Napoleon’s son from Vienna to the *Invalides* in Paris in 1940 (Savoy, 2010, 15).

Casin very interestingly remarks on the contrast that she observed between the negative representations of Napoleon in France’s schoolbooks, the more nuanced historiography in the academic field and the more clearly positive vision provided by the museum. She expressed her strong feeling of injustice at the absence of recognition of what she considered as Napoleon’s more positive contributions to French society or indeed to Europe as a whole and accused school history of exclusively underlining his role as the sole responsible for the bloodshed of the Napoleonic wars (2008: 13-17). As a counterpoint, she remarks on the contrasting situation to be found in the museum, quoting as an example the 1951 exhibition *Napoleon and his family*, held at the *Musée de l’Armée* in Paris. She presents it as an excellent source for a better understanding of what she considers to have been the fruitful role of the Emperor and praises the moving, lively impression produced by the clothing, arms, handwritten documents and even the furniture that accompanied him throughout his lifetime (Casin, 2008: 24). Her remarks illustrate the stability of the image of Napoleon produced by France’s museum in contrast to the narrative of schoolbook history and academic work.

It is noteworthy that several recent exhibition catalogues point to the relative absence of French Museums in the commemoration of the bi-centenary of the great battles of the Napoleonic wars, a situation that has been analysed by Peter Hicks (2007). The fact is all the more striking, as it is the exact opposite to the situation described by Jean Bourguignon in 1949, at the time chief curator of the Napoleonic museums in France. In his preface to the catalogue of the 1949 exhibition of Napoleonic memorabilia in the *Musée de l'armée*, he observed the great number of brilliant temporary exhibitions dedicated to the souvenir of Napoleon Bonaparte in France since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the last major monograph exhibition dedicated to Napoleon in France, held at the *Grand Palais* in 1969 for the bicentenary of his birth gave rise to a remarkably controversial reception as outlined by Bénédicte Savoy (2010, 15). The hagiographic presentation of the “prodigious destiny” of Napoleon, the great statesman, prompted certain journalists in France, but also in Germany, to criticise what they considered to be a grossly one-sided presentation.

In the following we will try to see whether we can trace a narrative current in the museum that explicitly questions the status of Napoleon as a hero and great statesman by addressing some of the more contentious aspects of his person and his role as an historical figure.

### **Napoleon and the representation of violence**

Though we have shown that French museums have essentially established Napoleon as the great hero of the Empire, they are also home to some impressive images of the suffering and the violence of Napoleonic wars that can be found in some of the paintings of the Napoleonic era by artists such as Antoine-Jean Gros, who experienced the battlefield first hand. The horrors of the death and the suffering of injured and starving soldiers rendered in the foreground of Gros' monumental *Napoléon sur le champ de bataille d'Eylau, 9 février 1807* (1808) is generally recognized as one of the most realistic contemporary depictions of the violence of the Napoleonic wars (O'Brien, 2006). In 1837, the painting was exhibited to the French public as part of the *Musée d'histoire de France* in the château of Versailles.

Alexandre de Laborde's guide to the museum described the painting as a most horrific spectacle, and the battle as an event of great violence during which “three hundred mouths of fire had vomited death for twelve hours” (1839: 348). He underlines to what an extent the outcome of the battle had affected the emperor, due to the huge loss of life on both sides as observed in his letters to Josephine. Alexandre de Laborde's text, in conjunction with paintings such as these, established a narrative of the Napoleonic wars as depicted in the Versailles galleries that does indeed render its horrors but clearly places them in the context of Napoleon's compassion for his soldiers (1839: 340). Recent art historical perspectives have recognised the ambiguous nature of Gros' glorification of Napoleon in this image that of course went unremarked in Laborde's explanation of the painting (Prendergast, 1997, 35):

The formal composition of the picture can be said to reproduce the tri-partite schema of Renaissance and Baroque religious painting: in the foreground the tormented souls of the dead, in the centreground the Redeemer (or his delegate), in the background the heavens radiating the aura of divinity. But as Gros' picture reproduces this schema, it also wrecks it, the brute carnage of its foreground and the apocalyptic atmosphere of its background inevitably putting questions to the assurance of its centreground. This brings us to the verge of a very complicated relation indeed, which concerns not just the painting of politics but also the politics of painting.

Gros' realism was nevertheless already recognised as exceptional in the nineteenth century and was precisely one of the reasons that led the painting to be elevated to the status of masterpiece of the French school, and to be moved from Versailles, where it documented the history of Napoleonic campaigns, to the Louvre in 1848 (Allard, Chaudonneret, 2011: 141-142). Today it hangs with some of the most famous images of French nineteenth century painting, prominently displayed in the *Grande Galerie des Peintures françaises* of the Louvre where it occupies an essential place in a presentation of the monumental history of French art.

However, generally speaking depictions of Napoleon in battle or with his soldiers, by artists of his time or as painted later in the nineteenth century to be displayed in Versailles, were part of a tightly controlled state funded artistic production and are rarely ambiguous in their propaganda oriented message. Defeated and hurt soldiers were more often than not painted in a more idealized style, perhaps best represented by Charles Meynier's *Retour de Napoléon dans l'île de Lobau après la bataille d'Essling*, (1812), thus more easily supporting the narrative of the compassionate general developed by Laborde. The difficulty of providing a contemporary critical reading of these images has contributed to the fact that a large part of the thirteen rooms dedicated to the Napoleonic wars in Versailles remain today closed to the public.

In light of the above, one might venture the supposition that until recently the role of Napoleon and the violence of the Napoleonic wars was not a prominent theme of museum displays related to his person and that a history of museographical narratives of such a theme might first and foremost be the history of their non-existence. Napoleon was certainly represented as a man of war through extensive displays of *militaria*, and battle scenes yet these do not seek to tell of the brutal reality of war, as we might understand it today, but act more as edifying elements in a narrative of military glory that is unrelated to the everyday condition of ordinary soldiers or to the suffering caused by war, and which is a recent narrative in museographical terms. The example provided above to illustrate the absence in France's national museums of a critical narrative relating to the nature and political causes of this violence are echoed by situations abroad. In such military museums as the Heeresgeschichtliches Museum in Vienna, whose museography dates further back than the current displays in Paris, London or Berlin that we will consider in more detail below, the most common narrative of Napoleon as an enemy in war is structured as a confrontation between two mighty and more or less equal adversaries and national heroes in what one might call the *face-off* narrative. Unfortunately, however it is not always easy to find visual information on overhauled museographies and in certain cases a more exhaustive archival study would need to be undertaken to ascertain exactly how past museographies in European national museums have dealt with the issue of violence during the Napoleonic wars.

However, one may consider here the effort that has over the last decade attempted to explicitly deal with issues of war and violence – by looking at the recent museographies of the *National Army Museum* in London, the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin and the *Musée de l'Armée* in Paris, as elements of a development of this narrative that was however taken to a level never seen before in the 2010-2011 exhibition, *Napoleon und Europa. Traum und Trauma*. This development can be directly considered as the result of a corresponding academic historiographical current, related to the revaluation of the Napoleonic wars, notably through the rise of war studies (i.e. Guimard, 2004; Bell, 2007; Talty, 2009) but also to a more general cultural

change in terms of the perception of war as a necessarily traumatic experience for all of its actors/victims, the historical evolution of which has been pointed out by Fassin and Rechtman (2009).

Let us then begin by first considering this most explicit example of a new narrative current as displayed in the Bonn exhibition. Upon entering *Traum and Trauma* the visitor was greeted by the open end of an impressive canon that at once drew him to the right side of the rotunda – to the area where the repulsion and fascination for the figure of Napoleon confront each other. The circuit then leads us through a series of themes related to the wars, providing some extremely vivid visual representations of the horrors of the multiple campaigns as part of the section entitled “Dream of an Empire” devoted to the military expansion of Napoleon across Europe. The narrative that it constructed gave a clear overview of the damage to human life caused by the 60 battles (of which 44 victorious) led by Napoleon’s army.

One of the most impressive of these displays was related to the infamous campaign of Russia. In 1812, 35 000 soldiers died from hunger and hypothermia outside of the city walls of Vilnius as one of the final episodes in what had been a disastrous campaign for Napoleon. To illustrate this the exhibition used an enlarged photography embedded into a grave like floor presentation of the archaeological excavation undertaken in 2002 by a Franco-Lithaunian research team of the mass grave of soldiers who froze to death outside the city of Vilnius in 1812 (Talty, 2009).

The visual impact of this presentation appeared as all the more remarkable when compared with the evocation of the campaign of Russia in the *Musée de l’armée* in Paris in the new permanent exhibit (2009). Here the recent excavation of Vilnius is also referred to - however the reference is infinitely more discreet, indeed one might easily overlook it. In a room dedicated to the campaign of Russia, it is illustrated by fragments of clothing, in and of themselves relatively non-descript from the excavation, explicated through a short text and placed in a corner display case set into a window-sill. It is a resolutely understated presentation when considered alongside the scale and nature of the visuals used in Bonn. Yet it is a direct reference to a situation of suffering and violence – representing what has been established as a new thread in the narrative presented by France’s military museum, albeit a still relatively minor one.



Figure 13: Vitrine dedicated to fragments of clothing discovered in the mass graves of Vilnius in 2002. Musée de l’Armée, Paris.  
Photo F. Bodenstein.

The exhibit in Paris illustrating the battle of Waterloo also presents the steel breastplate of the carabineer François-Antoine Faveau that was literally torn open by the impact of a bullet, a piece that was also lent for the Bonn exhibition where it was used with much greater rhetoric impact as a symbol of the wars' violence. It was placed in the introductory rotunda of the exhibition as an opening piece to the theme of the Napoleonic wars, a stark example of the physical damage incurred by war. This approach was further developed in the exhibition notably through the presentation of gelatine moulds used by forensic experts to show the penetrating force of the large bullets that made these head-on combats so deadly, as they literally blew off entire limbs. However, one of the most gruesome pieces related to the question of war mutilations was borrowed from the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin. It is a set of false so called 'Waterloo' teeth, made from the real teeth of dead soldiers, torn from their mouths on the battlefield to make sets for those who had lost or hurt their own in battle. In Berlin, this telling object was placed directly behind the vitrine showing Napoleon's hat and sword from Waterloo as discussed above in a section dedicated to the question of war injuries.

The Bonn exhibition reaches a high point in its presentation of violence with a series of contemporary sketches by the Scottish surgeon, Charles Bell, who documented the injuries incurred by the soldiers who fought at Waterloo, where 55 000 men were injured or died – doubtlessly these sketches, which represent a very different genre from the generally omnipresent battlefield paintings, are some of the most explicit renderings of these mutilations that exist.

As already touched upon in the first part of our study, in the National Army Museum in London, the different ills suffered by soldiers – cold, injuries and the imminent danger of the battlefield have clearly become a structuring narrative, a characteristic that appears as especially explicit when considered in opposition the Paris installations, where they are evoked more as an aside to the general narrative. The soldier's life – more than that of the great generals – gains a strong visual presence from the life size figures whose realism can easily have quite a startling effect as they punctuate the visitor's circuit, accompanied by fictional biographies that illustrate the fates of the lowest hierarchies in the army.

It is in such a context, beside the figure of an ordinary British soldier and the massive model of Waterloo built in 1838, that we find the only representation of Napoleon in the London exhibit. It is made up of a massively enlarged print of Napoleon on horseback, placed behind the skeleton of the actual horse that he rode into the battle of Waterloo.



Figure 14: “Napoleon’s horse”, vitrine showing the skeleton of Marengo. National Army Museum, London. Photo F. Bodenstein.

The horse, Marengo had lead a long career of “display” as a trophy of British victory after being captured by the British Army (Hamilton, 2001). Here, the superposition of the print and the skeleton creates quite a uniquely disturbing effect. It is impossible to know whether it is a voluntary quotation of a well-known French caricature of Napoleon entitled “Depart pour l’Armée” (Mathis Hans Peter (dir.) 1998, p. 486) - the resemblance remains striking. In the caricature, Napoleon appears as a crazed Jupiter, galloping past a dead tree upon a skeletal horse on his way to war. The print was filed for publication the day that Napoleon left with his army for the Southern Netherlands just a few days before the battle of Waterloo. Placing Napoleon behind a skeletal horse to establish a morbid equestrian portrait is in any case a significant museographical choice. Indeed, the equestrian portrait is *par excellence* that of the political and military leader – its long history makes it a particularly important subject for the construction of Napoleon’s image best illustrated by David’s portrait – the most iconic representation of Napoleon already mentioned in our introduction. The comparison between the London Army Museum and the far more neutral presentation of Napoleon’s stuffed horse Vizir in Paris highlights the dark nature of this very unusual display which constitutes the final exhibit of the section entitled the “The road to Waterloo”. It is a rare example of a museography that presents a truly negative representation of the figure of Napoleon – and which as such can be considered comparable thematically to the voluminous production of caricatures that depicted Napoleon as a Néron, a warlord, or man eating general who sent hundreds of thousands of men into bloody battles to satisfy a hunger and thirst for power, violent images which up until quite recently made only scarce appearances in the museum.

### **The faceoff: confrontations and adversaries**

In the last two decade the bi-centennial commemorations have confronted museums with the problem of revisiting the major victories and defeats of the Napoleonic wars. In order to deal with this theme numerous recent exhibitions have placed Napoleon in the position of the adversary in a biographic confrontation that could allow for the representation of the most

important military confrontations of the Napoleonic wars with the British and with Russia (2002 – Alexander and Napoleon; 2005- Nelson and Napoleon; 2010- Staging Power : Napoleon, Charles John, Alexander – see table of exhibitions).

The exhibition held in 2002 at the Roemer und Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim confronting the figures of the Russian emperor Alexander I and Napoleon Bonaparte was actually the final result of a project for a national museum in Moscow that was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century and presented a collection that was initially brought together nearly a century ago to create the “Museum of the Year 1812” as an attempt to portray the phenomenon that was “Napoleon” (*Napoleon Bonaparte und Alexander I. Epoche Zweier Kaiser*, 2002: 6). The project had been at the outset designed as two separate rooms, one dedicated to each personality, but it was never actually carried out; however, the collections are part of Moscow’s state history museum and were presented as a major exhibition in 2000 in Russia and in 2002 in Germany. The introduction by the director of Russia’s State History Museum, Alexander Schkurko, illustrates how the confrontation of two personalities allows him to underline contradictory and ambiguous aspects of their lives, summarizing that Bonaparte began his career as the defender of the Revolution only to become the tyrant of Europe and was finally challenged by one of the most absolutist ruler who became the liberator of Europe (*Napoleon Bonaparte und Alexander I. Epoche Zweier Kaiser*, 2002: 6). Schkurko justifies the use of the biographical approach by underlining the fact that the Napoleonic era can above all be characterized by the personality cults that the subjects of the exhibition induced.

Similar reasoning led the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich to dedicate its bicentenary commemorative exhibition of the battle of Trafalgar to a confrontation between the figures of Nelson and Napoleon. The exhibition’s curators were aware that a major temporary exhibit would perhaps allow them to renew and reshape the vision that the public had of the ever present Nelson memorabilia (Nelsonia) on permanent display in Greenwich since the museum’s creation – such as the uniform that Nelson was wearing when he died at Trafalgar (Lincoln, Margarette ; Dauntton, Martin, 2007, 106). The decision to pair up the famous admiral with Napoleon on this occasion was not as obvious as one might think and was made with very specific intentions. Again as above in the case of Alexander I, there was the sense that it would allow for a more balanced presentation of otherwise controversial figures. At the outset was the question of commemoration – should one and could one still commemorate the admiral, was he still an iconic figure for a vast majority of the British population and how could one deal with aspects such as his defence of slavery. “How could the picture of Nelson as a great popular hero, the name of a thousand public houses, be reconciled with his participation in a British state seen by many radicals at the time (and since) as repressive and a threat to civil liberties? And how could the events of Trafalgar be presented without incurring the dangers of nationalistic celebrations of defeat of the French?” (Lincoln, Margarette ; Dauntton, Martin, 2007, 104). The answer was found by comparing him to his greatest adversary – this would have the advantage of expelling the problem of a nationalist perspective and set Nelson into a European context. “The dual focus also offered a way of dealing with the wider strategic issues of the war between Britain and France, and the internal dynamics of the two societies, through an accessible biographical approach. And the two men allowed an exploration of how highly significant and iconic lives

were memorialized and contested after their deaths” (Lincoln, Margarete ; Daunton, Martin, 2007, 105).

In terms of the exhibition’s reception, the curators noticed that what fascinated most again were however the relics “it was all here: no medieval saint could have asked for more” (Adam Nicolson, *Sunday Telegraph* quoted by Lincoln, Margarete ; Daunton, Martin, 2007, 110) and the personal items. *The Times* reviewer Rachel Campbell-Johnston wrote that it was at those points where the exhibition “focuses on the personal that it touches the spectator to the quick” (quoted by Lincoln, Margarete ; Daunton, Martin, 2007, 110). However, it was also praised for emphasizing the violence of combat, making it an all the more personal experience as it “placed the implications and brutal reality of war alongside the intimacy of certain objects” (quoted by Lincoln, Margarete ; Daunton, Martin, 2007, 108). Indeed again as in *Traum and Trauma*, surgical equipment was presented as a means of narrating this aspect of the war. The curators also reviewed French press reports on the exhibition which were characterised as relatively unremarkable, noting however that Napoleon appeared as a more controversial figure in France than Nelson did in Britain – a situation that possibly explains why “despite initial plans, there was in the end no major Austerlitz exhibition at the Paris *Musée de l’Armée*” (Hicks, 2007, 121) for the bi-centennial anniversary of the most important French victory of the Napoleonic wars.

## **Napoleon through the Lens of Art History**

When considering the representation of Napoleon in the museum it is impossible to dissociate between art and history. This indeed is due to the character of artistic production of the Napoleonic era as was recently defined in the 2010 exhibition *Staging Power* that took place in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. As stated in the introduction to this exhibit that compared Napoleon with Sweden’s Charles John and Russia’s Alexander I :

Art and power are like magnetic fields. They can attract each other, to form an inseparable whole, but they can also repel one another. At certain junctures in history, they have fused together with such force that entire societies have been remoulded. The rulers of the Napoleonic era made architecture and town planning, the fine and decorative arts interior design and fashion, coats of arms and emblems, coins and medals, even simple utilitarian objects, into bearers of the symbols and messages of power. (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 2010 : 5).

Organized in cooperation with the St. Petersburg’s State Ermitage museum, the preface states that these “Two countries that for many years regarded each other as enemies have freed themselves from their firmly rooted stereotypes by seeking their shared history” (Director of the Ermitage, Mikhail Piotrovsky, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 2010 : 6), and goes on to underline that: “Our starting point is the role of art in these dramatic historical events, which finds concrete expression in the objects on display”, thus “the history narrated in this exhibition is fascinating, dramatic and beautiful.”

More generally speaking the narratives concerning Napoleon in the museum nearly always employ objects that are first and foremost recognized as having artistic or aesthetic value, this is even true to some extent in military museums: in Paris at the *Musée de l’Armée* famous art works and collections of splendid arms and army costumes are set into a very purist and highly aesthetic type of presentation.





Figure 15: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1806, *Napoleon I on the Imperial throne*, Musée de l'Armée, Paris.  
Photo F. Bodenstein.

In this third part of our study we will try to consider how this has conditioned the museographical representation of Napoleon. Predominantly aesthetically oriented presentations can be a means of edifying or of relating historical actors to artistic concerns (as often implicitly opposed to political or military issues). In recent exhibitions we will see that such displays are often related to a discourse that refers to notions of common heritage. However, art works can of course also be presented critically to outline the system of cultural propaganda and art theft that also characterises the history of Napoleonic rule over France and Europe. Furthermore by widening the range of visual culture used in recent exhibitions, a new imagery of Napoleon has in the last decades allowed art historians to provide a darker counterpart to the idealized portraits of his time, contributing to a more balanced or dualistic portrait of the 'great man'.

### **Napoleon, patron of the arts – promoter of a European artistic style**

Throughout the twentieth century the *arts* became one of the preponderant means that the network of national museums from Malmaison (1906) to Fontainebleau (opened in 1986) have established to consider the role of Napoleon. The chief curator of the Napoleonic museums in France, Jean Bourguignon expressed in 1949 what one might call the master narrative of these museums, taken as a group (Bourguignon, 1949, 13, translation by the author):

We know that the First Empire was in terms of artistic production one of the most flourishing periods in our history. As Napoleon stated himself 'It is my aim to see France's artists erase the glories of Athens and Italy'. Doubtlessly, he no more created those artists than the popes of the Renaissance created theirs. But he knew how to orient them and by encouraging them to take as their subjects the *Grande Épopée*, (the Empire), he lead them to take on the full challenge of contemporary life.

The simple fact that art works are the museum's privileged media in representing Napoleon, is hardly surprising indeed as museums are where art goes. It follows that in the house museums dedicated to Napoleon and his family in France and abroad, the figure of Napoleon is very much represented through the lens of an art historical narrative that runs parallel to the historical one, dedicated to the development of the fine and especially the decorative arts during the Empire. In

her guide to ‘Napoleonic’ collecting, Karine Huguenaud promotes the advantage of collecting in the field of the decorative arts as one of the richest areas in terms of the availability of objects, advising the amateur to train his eye by visiting the castle museums of the circuit of *Musées napoléoniens*, whose displays “bear witness to the creativity of a style that has left a lasting mark on the history of the decorative arts, contradicting the general clichés that unjustly depreciate it” (Huguenaud, 2007: 79). She especially praises the power of the period rooms of Malmaison, Fontainebleau, Compiègne and Versailles’ Grand Trianon as essential experiences to the understanding of the creative importance of the Napoleonic era and their ability to valorise a style that was for a long time denigrated.

The effect that the sumptuously decorated period room presentations of the collections in these eponymous museums must have on a visitor needs to be carefully observed. The displays of France’s national Napoleon museums: Malmaison, Fontainebleau etc. or those of the castle of Arenenberg in Switzerland or in Rome at the *Museo Napoleonico*, are all considered as important art collections based for a very large part on the direct heritage of the collections owned by members of Napoleon’s family. Fontainebleau is the most recent museum dedicated to Napoleon. The decision to establish a special museum in one of the wings of the castle was made in 1979 following the donation to the state by the prince and princess Napoleon and princess Marie-Clotilde of the family collection of napoleonic souvenirs.

These site museums are principally structured as series of rooms to be visited as formerly inhabited spaces. Additionally, Arenenberg and Malmaison are more exclusively representative of Napoleon’s women developing strong narratives of family life. As shown in the first part of this study, they are constructed museographically as “memorials” to the man himself or to his dynasty, thus they *de facto* represent Napoleon. Yet they do so nearly exclusively in the context of displays dedicated to the decorative arts, collections of objects, furniture and decor of the period of the Empire. In a similar way we might say that Apsley house presents Wellington as an art collector rather than as the leader of an army. These house museums, through the very nature of their collections, emphasize a very specific dimension of an era. Their role as museums of the decorative arts does not contradict their memorial role – but rather underlines it and one might dare say even tends to sublimate it.

Napoleon himself actually occupies a relatively marginal place in some of these museums, for example in the *Museo Napoleonico*, his presence is described by Ferdinand Boyer as less important than that of the other *Napoléonides*. However, he states that Napoleon is nevertheless represented by the great carpet decorated with an eagle and bees and bronze chandeliers from the apartment that had been prepared for him in the palace of the Quirinal, some books from Saint Helena, some personal objects such as a tobacco box, some letters and a large official portrait painted by Joseph Chabod in 1810 (Boyer, 1955, p. 96). So indeed, he is represented mainly through memorabilia and works of decorative art produced during his time. All in all, the ‘Napoleonic museum of Rome offers more than a simple illustration of Napoleon and his time, it is also an evocation of the shared past of France and Italy’ (Boyer, 1955: 97, translation by the author).

On the point of Napoleon’s relationship to the arts, historiography presents a very nuanced situation through the important debates that have been waged in French art history in order to ascertain to what degree one might consider Napoleon himself a “man of taste” who veritably influenced the forms and ideals of the aesthetic vision of his time, or whether this was actually

rather the work of others, such as Dominique-Vivant Denon, who was the *Directeur général du Muséum central des arts* later the *Musée Napoléon*. A certain consensus has been established positing that Napoleon though not himself directly what one would call a man of taste showing exceptional sensibility for artistic matters, did however very much “direct” cultural affairs and seek to control them an idea that can be weighted both positively and negatively according to the context. However, debates concerning the nature of his patronage in terms of the arts do not necessarily impact upon the general impression produced by the constant reference to and visual prominence of Napoleon in these house museums that are equally dedicated to his life, to that of his family and to the history of the decorative arts during the Empire. Their very nature quite logically and directly brings the artistic dimension to the forefront, whilst the history of Napoleon the politician and the general – take a step back.

In contrast to the implicit equation established between Napoleon and the arts in the permanent displays of Napoleonic museums, recent temporary exhibitions have in some cases also produced narratives of culture and art that explicitly seek to establish Napoleon in a narrative of the Emperor as a great administrator of the arts. In 2004, the Louvre published a book on Napoleon’s role in the establishment of France’s most famous museum and in its preface, the museum’s director, Henri Loyrette expressed the hope that it would allow the reader to consider the Napoleonic era through a different perspective from that of the military epic, which tended to overshadow the history of that time (Loyrette, 2004: 5). Whilst in his introduction to the same book, Sylvain Lavissière, curator of the Louvre’s paintings department defended a historiography of the neo-classical style and the *style Empire* that established these as more than mere creations or reflections of the authoritarian and militaristic reign of Napoleon stating that the notion of a “dictatorship” of the arts needed to be carefully challenged (Lavissière, 2004: 6). The book gave its title to a major exhibition organized by the Louvre and presented in China in 2008 (in the Forbidden city) and in Moscow in 2010 – but which was not shown in France. The history of the Louvre had already been very much a part of the exhibition held in 1999 dedicated to the man who had been its general director, Dominique-Vivant Denon and ‘Napoleon’s eye’, to paraphrase its title (*L’Oeil de Napoléon*, musée du Louvre, 1999). Of course the role of a personality such as Denon, though important for France was too marginal to be exported, whilst Napoleon could very well serve as the ambassador of the Louvre abroad. The tonality of the book published in 2004 indicated however that an explicit narrative relating Napoleon to the development of France’s greatest national museum was not necessarily a welcome one in France – lending itself to a book, but not perhaps to a major exhibition as it was clearly one that needed to be defended and justified to a wider public. Indeed, Lavissière (2004: 7) remarks that Napoleon’s artistic patronage:

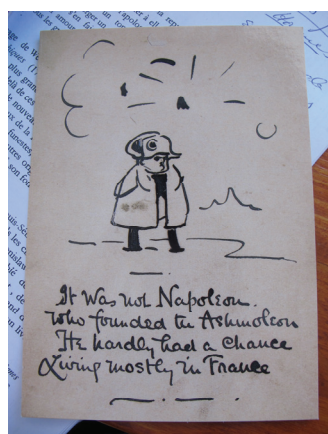
Is on an even greater scale, the modern counterpart of the glorious works of art commissioned by Louis XIV from Le Brun and the Academies and that if one were to be fair, it is quite simply a constant of absolute powers, though they do not always apply themselves with similar determination. But, does one want to be fair with Napoleon?

In 2005, the privately owned Fuji museum in Tokyo brought together objects from the most important national collections in Europe and America to create a major temporary exhibition entitled: *Napoleon : Europe and Culture, the other Conquest*. The catalogue was authored by curators from major national museums in France, Germany and Italy. Its central narrative was to consider

Napoleon as the incarnation of a whole era, visually identifiable through the *style Empire* as a European phenomenon and thus Europe as a culturally unified space during this period. In a note to the visiting public, the founder of Tokyo's musée Fuji wrote : "Napoleon re-established order in the face of the chaos that reigned after the French Revolution and was already dreaming of the possibility of European unification" (Ikeda, 2005: 13). His text was followed by prefaces and opening words from Arnaud d'Hauterives, the perpetual secretary of France's *Académie des beaux-arts* and Jean Tulard, France's foremost specialist of Napoleonic history, both echoing this edifying discourse. Hans Ottomeyer, the director of the *Deutsches historisches Museum* contributed an article retracing the history of the furniture related to the couple Napoleon and Josephine and its place at the castle of Malmaison and the Italian Giulia Gorgone presents the meaning and the museography of the *Museo Napoleonico* as a family art collection. What is interesting here is that this narrative of the Napoleon as a great administrator of the arts has originated in European national museums – but is essentially told outside of Europe.

### Napoleon as Conqueror and Dictator of the arts

A postcard on sale at the Ashmolean museum's gift shop (2006) illustrates one of Clerihew Bentley's biographical verses: "It was not Napoleon who founded the Ashmolean. He hardly had a chance living mostly in France" with a drawing of Napoleon by G. K. Chesterton. The short humorous phrase captures the international importance of Napoleon's contribution to the development of the public museum. However, whilst Napoleon can be represented as the orchestrator of a European cultural and artistic Empire in Japan or appear as a kind of founding figure of the Louvre in Russia and China, inside of Europe itself such narratives appear as far more contentious.



**Figure 16:** Postcard "It was not Napoleon who founded the Ashmolean. He hardly had a chance living mostly in France".  
Photo F. Bodenstein.

The paradoxical relationship between Napoleon and history of the Louvre may in a sense be illustrated by the reflections of Pierre Rosenberg in an intentionally provocative introductory text of the catalogue accompanying the *Napoleon und Europa. Traum und Trauma* exhibition, entitled

“Why I do not like Napoleon” . As a former president of the Louvre, Rosenberg (2010: 18, translation by the author) writes:

How could I, who have given 40 years of my life to the Louvre, forgive Napoleon for the catastrophic consequences of his return to France? For indeed would not the Louvre otherwise have been allowed to remain that *musée imaginaire* of all the masterpieces that Malraux had dreamed off.

He was of course referring to the emptying of the Louvre after Napoleon’s final defeat at Waterloo. For indeed, throughout the Napoleonic era and up until the restitutions that followed Waterloo of 1815-1816, the *Musée Napoléon* had displayed as a result of confiscations during the revolutionary but also the Napoleonic wars some of the greatest treasures from what were to become Italian, German, Austrian, Belgian and Dutch national collections. But it is not without irony of course that Rosenberg accuses Napoleon not of theft – but of having overestimated his powers, of coming back thus allowing Wellington to become the triumphant general who organized the gutting of what had for a short time been the largest and most magnificent collection of art in all of Europe.

Only a few of the many European museums affected by this episode present this aspect of the history of their collections explicitly. Interestingly, there is one example of display related to this question, in Britain (a country that of course never lost any of its collections to France). In Apsley house, the provenance of the collections coincides so directly with the story of war and art conquest that it has entirely conditioned the display as arranged by the Duke of Wellington himself and is carefully explained and commented in all the guidebooks of the museum.

The manner in which the collections of Apsley house came to be there is indeed the main narrative of the museum itself as ‘the display of his (Wellington’s) collections at Apsley House could be seen as a way of consolidating his victory’ (Bryant, 2009, p. 33). To illustrate this one might consider the heart of the house, the so-called Waterloo gallery, designed by the Duke as a space to be used for the annual commemorative dinner of the victorious battle. (For more images see: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/apsley-house/>) Despite what one might expect, not a single battle scene hangs on its walls. These are in fact entirely covered with the splendid collection of Spanish paintings that Wellington recovered from Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon’s brother after the battle of Vitoria. As the King of Spain himself had refused to take them back, declaring them to be an offering of his gratitude, these canvases of singular artistic value, including two extremely famous paintings by Velazquez, appear here most obviously as trophies of war. The following room, the yellow drawing room, prominently presents a marble bust offered to Wellington by the artist Antonio Canova, a present given to Wellington by the sculptor in 1817 as a sign of his recognition for his contribution in the return of Italian collections from the Louvre.

More critically, the subject of Napoleon’s great “art theft” has in the last two decades received considerable scholarly with the increasing development of collecting and museum history establishing a narrative that recognizes Napoleon as an essential figure of the history of the national museum firstly in France (Gallo, 2001; Laveissière, 2004) but also in Europe (Savoy, 2003; Bergvelt, Ellinoor and al., 2009, Potin, 2010). He has been considered as the founder of significant institutions, but, he of course also appears as the “thief”. In *Napoleon's Legacy: The Rise of National Museums in Europe 1794-1830* several essays consider how museums and national

collections were founded or developed as a result of the heightened awareness of heritage caused by the sense of loss provoked by multiple confiscations. The narrative of art theft was for the first time explicitly displayed in relation to Napoleon as a European experience in Bénédicte Savoy's presentation in Bonn (2010-2011) where a section was entitled "Objects of Desire: Napoleon and European Art and Memory Theft". The display highlighted the extensive nature of his project. Though not initially a Napoleonic project, but an operation began by the armies of the revolution, its aim to centralize Europe's artistic heritage but also the paper archives of the dominated territories in the city of Paris, was largely developed under Napoleon's rule, firmly establishing cultural heritage as a central strategy of conquest.

Napoleon was himself fully aware of the power of display and very much at home in the Louvre palace, consistently using its galleries as spaces to magnify his own greatness. The only sovereign to ever have lent his name to the museum: the *Musée Napoléon* indeed opened its doors in 1803. It was there in the *salle des Antiques* that Napoleon received the chiefs of his army after his coronation on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1804 (Laveissière, 2004: 9). It was in the *Grand Galerie* that the emperor celebrated his wedding to the Austrian Princess, Marie-Louise. Lastly it was in the bi-annual salon held in the Louvre that the French public discovered the hundreds of paintings that he commissioned from the most important artists of his day to glorify his own image, establishing a vast *ensemble* of monumental propaganda paintings that definitively made contemporary events worthy of the attention of history painters. Accordingly commissions sought representations of contemporary history as illustrations of the nation's glory, designed to elevate the new Empire to the rank of the past Empires of Alexander, Cesar, Augustus and Charlemagne (Foucart, 2001: 14). Two decades later, these paintings founded the core of the collection established to illustrate the period from 1789-1815 in the huge history museum that Louis-Philippe created in Versailles (1837).

Indeed of the 400 paintings that were used to represent the Revolution and the Napoleonic era, 150 of them had been painted during this period and for the second part were largely direct commissions by the Emperor (Constans, 2001: 28), providing a series of explicit examples of the instrumentalisation of art for political ends.

The plethoric character of the production of these images of war and government for the French artistic salons held in the Louvre during Napoleon's lifetime clearly outweighs the artistic production in Europe related to the so-called *Befreiungskriege*, or representation of the battles of the Sixth and Seventh Coalition that put an end to the Napoleonic wars. Indeed for Michael Thiman an art of *Befreiungskriege* does not exist: "In contrast to the affirmative political iconography of Napoleon and his official state art, no consistent visual world was developed on the side of his opponents" (Thiman, 2010: 119).

So it is mainly through these battle and political propaganda images, as seen through the eyes of France's artists that the Napoleonic epic has been visually perceived. Furthermore one must remember that these paintings have continued to occupy an extremely important place on the walls of two of the most visited museums in the world: the Louvre and Versailles.



**Figure 17: The Great Gallery of French Painting in the Louvre (2012). We see Gros's *Battle of Eylau* close to Gericault's famous *Radeau de la Méduse*. The display showcases the masterpieces of French nineteenth century painting.  
Photo F. Bodenstein**

However, in the last two decades, art history has paid increasing attention to the caricatures of Napoleon that were produced in France and across Europe, providing a visual *anti-Napoleon*. This was indeed the title of an exhibition held in 1996 in the *Musée national de Malmaison*. Bernard Chevallier, head curator of the museum pointed out that this subject was deliberately chosen as an original and in a sense provocative kick in the series of exhibitions that would be dedicated to Napoleon across Europe in light of the commemorations of the bi-centenaries of the Napoleonic wars. In his rhetorical interrogations on how the museum could still seek to praise the *Grand homme*, he posited that by presenting his black legend he had tried to conceive of a different, original form of celebration (Chevallier, 1996).

Two years later, the Napoleon museum of Arenenberg published in German the most extensive existing catalogue of Napoleon caricatures (Mathis (dir.) 1998). In 2003, the *Deutsches Museum für Karikatur und Kritische Grafik* acquired a collection of 700 caricatures that gave rise to an important exhibition shown twice in Germany: in 2006 *Napoleon! Kunst und Karikatur um 1800* was presented in Berlin to mark the bi-centenary of Napoleon's entry into the city and again in 2009 under the title *Napoleon: Genie und Despot*, confronting the ideal and official image of himself that Napoleon had carefully established with the caricatures that had flourished across Europe, producing perhaps for "the first time – a European discourse" (Hoppenstedt, 2007: 6) to quote the preface of the exhibition, or at the very least the visual expression of a European wide political cause – the destruction of a common enemy.





Figure 18: Lewis Marks, *A Happy Dance for Europe*, 1814, Public Domain.

## Conclusion

In recent years much attention has been paid to the memorialisation of the wars of the twentieth century – the development of the multi-disciplinary field of war studies and that of museums studies have very fruitfully worked together to establish a critical approach (Louvier, P., Mary, J. and al. 2012) and create innovative museographical presentations. Even in France where an otherwise suspicious attitude reigns in relation to the historical museum, the need to commemorate the world wars has given rise to the creation of the Historial of Peronne, the Memorial of Caen or to the most recent addition to the *Musée de l'Armée* in Paris, the Historial Charles de Gaulle. This last case is a rare example of a purely biographical approach in dealing museographically with the history of the world wars. However, the circular structure and narrative organisation of this monument let it appear as the twenty-first century's version of Napoleon's tomb. Here Charles Simart's low-reliefs, telling of Napoleon's exploits, are, as it were, replaced by the high-tech projections and touch-screen installations that narrate Charles de Gaulle's heroic military and political career, whilst the immersive cinematographic experience occupying the central rotunda, is designed to promote strong emotive reactions – the low-lighting and underground placement of the *Historial* all contribute to its near sepulchral character. These spaces taken side by side, illustrate how one memorial experience can engender another.

This is also true of monuments and museums displays on a transnational scale. As I have tried to show the evolution of a museography of Napoleon and the Napoleonic wars over a long time period allows us to better gauge the significance of recent changes – but also the weight of display traditions. Our vision of Napoleon has been significantly changing in museums both in France and in other European countries; be it in the permanent exhibits of major national museums, but more particularly through a series of international temporary exhibitions, whose production has been more than prolific in the context of bi-centennial commemorations. This change is however often difficult and tentative due to a tradition of representation related to the events of these wars as historically conditioned by the types of objects available to illustrate them



and to the very different social and political perception of war that they express. The change in contemporary attitudes to war have also changed the way in which the history of the Napoleonic wars is written today according as illustrated by recent historiographical and even archaeological contributions – these contributions are however echoed by the museum in differing degrees, according to different national and museological contexts.

This essay has attempted to examine the reverse side of an already well-studied aspect of Napoleon's contribution to the development of the cultural institutions – his role in the establishment of national museums – by looking at how he has himself been represented by these institutions over a period of nearly two centuries. This long chronological perspective shows that even in the context of changing narratives, certain types of objects – certain characteristics of the history of collections related to historical figures such as Napoleon impose a kind of permanence in a tradition of glorification by the museum that is currently being challenged by the need to establish a more balanced representation of Napoleonic history. However the new narratives, appearing mainly in temporary exhibitions are conditioned by such contemporary notions as the collective trauma of the Napoleonic wars in a history of suffering, an anthropological and social approach that according to Henry Rousso (2004: 4) characterizes the “europeanisation” of history and that appears as a foil against which the image of the *Great man* can be reflexively balanced. This happens through an exchange of perspectives, in which national histories are dealt with as the history of ourselves and of the other, an aspect that is artistically captured by the work of the Benin artist, Georges Adéagbo presented at the 2012 *Triennale* fair of contemporary art in Paris, dedicated to the notion of *Intense proximity*. Inside of his vast multimedia installation that is private narrative devoted to the notion of the relationships that unite politics, religion, art and display in a global world, one particular vitrine is dedicated to Franco-German relations, showing in the centre an article published in *Le Monde* on the exhibition in Bonn, *Napoleon, Traum und Trauma*, entitled “Bonn looks at the multiple faces of Napoleon”. The article begins with a quote from the director of the *Musée de l'armée* in Paris, stating that no French museum could have organised this exhibition by itself. Sandwiched between a photo of Angela Merkel and the *Mémoires de guerre* de Charles de Gaulle it expresses the contemporary importance of this narrative, and seems to offer the challenge of intercultural understanding in light of the ever-present and often conflictual past.



Figure 19 and 20 : Georges Adéagbo, 2012, *La Porte: derrière la porte...! Qu'est-ce qu'il y a derrière la porte?*, Photos F. Bodenstein

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**Table 1: Recent temporary exhibitions in European national museums**

<b>Name of the Exhibition</b>	<b>Localisation</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>General description</b>
Napoleon und Europa. Traum und Trauma	Bonn, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Paris, Musée de l'Armée, Germany	2010/2011, 2012	Aims to present a differentiated portrait of the man and of his time in its influence on European history as a whole through all kinds of visual and documentary media.
Staging Power : Napoleon, Charles John, Alexander	Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, Sweden, organised with the Ermitage, Saint-Petersburg. The exhibition was also shown at the Château de Compiègne, France in 2011.	2010 ; 2011 (France)	With an emphasis on art history, exhibition presents a comparative approach of the representation of power in the field of the arts during the Napoleonic era.
Napoleon. Feldherr, Kaiser und Genie	Schattenburg Kulturbetriebsgesellschaft, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.	2009	Historical exhibition commemorating the 200 years anniversary of the battle of Wagram and Aspern
Napoleon and the Louvre	Biejing, Forbidden city(2008) Moscow, National history museum, Russia (2010)	2008, 2010	The life and cultural policy of the Emperor Napoleon as considered in relation to the a history of the Louvre. (In France there was a book with the same title edited by the Louvre in 2004 but no exhibition accompanied it. )
Napoleon Trikolore und Kaiseradler über Rhein und Weser	Preussen-Museum, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany.	2007	Exhibition considers the historical role of Napoleon in the modernisation of the region and of Germany as a consequence.
Napoleon: Genie und Despot	Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin (2006) and in 2009, Museum Haus Ludwig, Saarlouis (birth town of the general Michel Ney), Germany.	2006, 2009	Organized with the Brandenburger Tor foundation to commemorate Napoleon's 1806 entry into Berlin through the Brandenburg gate. An iconographic confrontation of Napoleon as heros, genius, emperor and as ogre, caricatured and hated despot.
Nelson & Napoleon	The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Britain.	2005	Commemoration of the bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar that opposes the figure of the two major players of the battle (chosen over a monographical presentation of Nelson)
Napoléon, l'Europe et la culture: une autre conquête (Napoleon, Europe and Culture, the other Conquest)	Musée Fuji de Tokyo, Japan.	2005	Napoleon's taste and cultural politics as a cultural aspect that forged a European chapter of art history
Napoleone e la repubblica italiana, 1802-1805	Milan, Museo del Risorgimento, Italy.	2002/2003	
Napoleon Bonaparte – Zar Alexander I. Epoche zweier Kaiser	State history museum Moscow and Museum Hildesheim in Germany.	2000, 2002	Two biographies to illustrate the Napoleonic era – focused on the historical attention and given to these major figures of European history.
1796-1797 Da Montenotte a Campoformio: la rapida marcia di Napoleone Bonaparte	Museo Napoleonico, Rome, Italy.	1997	Exhibition that deals with the historical details of the campaign, with the imagery of Napoleon in Italy, his influence on the formation of the future Republic.
Anti-Napoléon	Musée national de Malmaison	1996	Exhibition that presents Napoleon's black legend through a presentation of European caricatures.



**Table 2: Museums dedicated to Napoleon and important permanent exhibits in national museums**

<b>Nomination</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date(s) of creation/ inauguration</b>	<b>Major actors/management</b>	<b>Main display themes</b>	<b>Short collection history</b>
<u>House/Family Museums</u>	-	-	-	-	-
Napoleon museum of Saint Helena	Island of Saint Helena, British but the domains related to Napoleon are owned by the French state.	1857	The negotiations for French ownership of Longwood were instigated by Napoleon III. Longwood was bought by France in 1855 thanks to Queen Victoria, the Briars by Mrs Brooks to France in 1960. The museum situated on British territory, is financed by the Napoleon Foundation and is run by the French ministry of Foreign affairs and is not part of the RMN network of napoleonic museums.	The house has been maintained and restored as the last home of Napoleon Bonaparte since 1857 due to the direct attention of Napoleon III.	There are original elements of the furnishings in the house during Napoleon's exile and an important collection of souvenirs
Musée national du château de Malmaison and château de Bois-Préau	Île de France, France	1906	The house, bought by Joséphine in 1799 remained hers until her death in 1814, exchanged hands twice but came back into the imperial family in 1861 when it was bought by Napoleon III, the state sold it in 1877 but it was offered to the state again in 1904, becoming a national museum in 1906.	The museum is more specifically dedicated to the period of the <i>Consulat</i> and to Joséphine and her children. Whilst Bois-Préau houses souvenirs of Saint-Helena and displays related to the Napoleonic legend (1815 to the present day).	The house though emptied by 1861 has been restored to show the rooms of Josephine's residence and to present the aspect again of a former home, important collection of art and decorative arts of the style Empire, that were part of the so called <i>Mobilier national</i> collection and the rest is due to donations

Musée national de la maison Bonaparte	Ajaccio, Corsica, France	1923, declared historical monument and a museum was established - took on the status of national in 1967.	The remained in the Bonaparte family from generation to generation, passing notable to Napoleon III and his wife Eugenie in 1923 the prince Victor who offered it to the state in 1923 (today it is RMN and administratively dependant of the museum at Malmaison)	History of Corsica. Family home, family members and their history. Period rooms evoking the home where Napoleon was born and grew up: the <i>chambre natale</i> is the central attraction of the museum.	The house could be visited by a very select public and was already a site of napoleonic cult in the 19th c. Much of the furniture and collections are original, having been preserved over the generations.
Musée Napoléon de l'île d'Aix	Island of Aix, off the Atlantic coast, France	Inaugurated in 1928, it was nationalized in 1959	The house in bought from the French army in 1926 by the baron Napoleon Gourgaud (great grandson of general Gaspard Gourgaud (1783-1852) - who had followed Napoleon to Saint Helena. Today, RMN, (administratively dependant of the museum at Malmaison)	It has been preserved as the house were Napoleon gave himself up to the British after the defeat of Waterloo	10 rooms each developing a specific theme related to the life of the Emperor, especially preserved is Napoleon's bedroom from his three day stay before his surrender. The collections of souvenirs however were bought by Gourgaud himself and given to the museum.
Musée national du château de Fontainebleau, Musée Napoléon Ier	Fontainebleau, France	1979, inaugurated in 1986.	Part of the RMN network, the decision to establish a special "museum" in the castle was made following a donation.	Presented as Napoleon's favorite residence "Voilà la vraie demeure des rois, la maison des siècles".	The decision to establish a special museum in one of the wings of the castle was made following an important donation made by the prince and the princess Napoléon of souvenirs belonging to the imperial family.
<u>Outside of France:</u>					
Napoleonmuseum, Thurgau, Castle Arenenberg,	Switzerland	1906	donated to the canton of Thurgau in 1906 by Eugénie de Montijo, widow of Napoleon III, who had inherited it from his mother. Eugénie's wish was that it be transformed in a museum dedicated to Napoleon. Today it is cantonal museum	It is only German speaking museum dedicated to the history of Napoleon. Former residence of the exiled Hortense de Beauharnais, bought in 1817 (wife Louis Bonaparte, Arenenberg was the childhood home of Louis-Napoleon, later Napoleon III)	Essentially made up of period rooms that illustrate the decorative and fine arts of the first and second Empire. The room in which Hortense died has been kept in its original state.

Residenze Napoleoniche: Musei Nazionale; Palazzina dei Mulini; Villa San Martino and the Demidoff Gallery	Elba island, Italy	19th c.	Anatolif Demidov brought together a collection of Napoleonic souvenirs from all over the island for the gallery and the Villa San Martino in order to form a museum, but most was dispersed in 1880 after his death.	The Palazzina dei Mulini had been Napoleon's official residence on the island, whilst the Villa Sal Martino, was his more intimate retreat. Both contained souvenirs of the Emperor but were relatively badly kept and have only been renovated in recent decades as quite sparse period room style displays.	In the 19th c. the Count Anatolif Demidov who had bought the Villa Sal Martino, which had been the more intimate residence of Napoleon, built a gallery in the front as a kind of mausoleum in memory of the Emperor.
Museo Napoleonico	Rome, Italy	1927	Guiseppe Primoli (1851-1927), son of Count Pietro Primoli and Princess Carlotta Bonaparte (grand-daughter of Napoleon's brother, Lucien). Primoli gave his collection to the city of Rome in 1927 as a legacy - it is today run as a municipal museum (we might add that the municipal museums of Rome have an obviously national status - including such institutions as the Capitoline museums).	The displays offer a family cult to the figure of the Emperor and illustrate the relationship between Rome and the Bonapartes, as the once future imperial city to be ruled over by Napoleon's only son the "roi de Rome" and the city of exile for a large part of imperial family after 1815 (Napoleon's mother, Letizia and his brothers Louis and Jérôme).	The collection itself was mainly established by the Count Giuseppe Primoli (1851-1927). They are mainly made of furniture, paintings, sculptures etc of portraits of the Emperor and other members of the royal family, organized as period rooms that have remained faithful to the presentations created by the count Primoli himself.

Apsley House	London, England	Donated in 1947; opened to the public in 1952 to mark the centenary of the Dukes death.	The house was offered to the First Duke of Wellington as recompense for his military achievements, it is still in the family but the current public display areas were donated by the 7th duke of Wellington to the State, and are today the collections are managed by the Victoria and Albert museum and building is labelled as "English Heritage".	Residence bought by the Arthur first Duke of Wellington in 1817, annual banquets in commemoration of Wellington were held there during the lifetime of the first Duke. Today the displays are of the Dukes collection and public reception rooms, relating the Dukes victory at Waterloo and the subsequent celebrations of that victory, especially in the Waterloo gallery and dining hall.	Period rooms, as decorated by Wellington, presentation of his collection of art works, portraits of his time, of Napoleon and his family. Painting collection confiscated from Joseph Napoleon's that had been part of the Spanish royal collection, notably hung as in the time of Wellington in the Waterloo gallery. The entry hall is decorated by famous nude statue of Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker, sculpted by Canova, in 1806 and rejected by the Emperor himself, it was purchased by the British government and presented as a gift to Wellington.
Museum of Napoleon Souvenirs, Prince's Palace of Monaco	Monaco	Opened to the public after 1949	Prince Louis II of Monaco (1870-1949), Rainier III	A collection of over 1000 souvenir objects related to Napoleon I from garments of the <i>roi de Rome</i> to religious souvenirs from Saint Helena	Collection composed by Prince Louis II of Monaco (1870-1949)
<u>National History Museums</u>					
Musée national du château de Versailles	Versailles, France	1837	Former royal residence, nationalised and opened to the public in 1798, as a history museum in 1837 (under the patronage of king Louis-Philippe), today run by the RMN, ministry for Culture however the main attraction today are the former Royal living quarters refurbished at the end of the nineteenth century.	A series of rooms dedicated to the history of the Revolution and the Empire, notable - the Marengo room and the room of the Sacre with a copie of David's monumental painting of Napoleons coronation as Emperor.	The history of France is told through the display of monumental history paintings - many were painted during the period of the Revolution and the Empire itself, and some were commissioned specifically for the museum by Louis-Philippe - it very much presents the history of Napoleon from the perspective of national historical propaganda far from current historiographical readings.

Rijksmuseum	Amsterdam, Netherlands	1800 (first opening) 1808 move to Amsterdam, 1815, the Rijksmuseum, 1885 (current building).	State owned building and collections but administered and run as a private foundation since 1996.	Before the renovation that began in 2003 three rooms were dedicated to the Napoleonic era, of course mainly representing the figure of Louis Napoleon, but also important display to devoted to the victory of Waterloo.	The largest canvas of the Rijksmuseum is indeed Jan Willem Pieneman's <i>Battle of Waterloo</i> , 1824, (576x836 cm), Napoleon is not represented.
Deutsches Historisches Museum	Berlin, Allemagne	Political project since 1983, first exhibitions from 1991 onwards, permanent exhibit since 2006.	German Bundestag.	History of Germany from its origins to the present day in a monumental chronological presentation. Room 17: Napoleon und Europe. Presents a variety of documents that comment in part on the social contributions of the period for Germany but also on the extreme violence of the napoleonic wars.	The collections include two "trophy" of the victory of Waterloo, Napoleon's hat and sword (as such a kind of pendant to the skeleton of Napoleon's horse, in the National Army Museum in London). Also objects rarely shown elsewhere such as the "Waterloo Zähne" dentures made from death gathered from soldiers dead during the battle of Waterloo (also shown at the <i>Traum und Trauma</i> exhibition).
Museo del Risorgimento	Milan, Italy	1893	Municipality of Milan	Italian history from 1796 to 1870	The regalia worn by Napoleon when he was crown king in Milan in 1805
<u>Military Museums</u>					
Musée de l'Armée: Hôtel National des Invalides	Paris, France	1905	Ministry of Defense, Société des Amis du Musée de l'Armée. Museum goes back to the Arsenal museum created in 1797 and which was housed in the <i>Hôtel des Invalides</i> from 1873 onwards. The development of a museum of military history was encouraged in parallel after a retrospective military exhibition that took place during the Universal Exhibition of 1889. They were united to form the <i>Musée de l'armée</i> in 1905.	There is a long history of display related to the figure of Napoleon, conditioned at first by the presence of his tomb in the <i>Église du Dôme</i> . Reliquary type displays of symbolical souvenirs are the mains characteristic of these displays. This aspect has been somewhat neutralized by the new display that opened in 2009. There is	The vast majority of the objects directly related to the figure of the Emperor came into possession of the state in the second half of the 19th c. Before the opening of an actual museum in the Invalides in 1905 they were partly regrouped as a reliquary display close to the tomb itself. (i.e. the Sword of Austerlitz). They included the so-called souvenirs of the "Return of the ashes".



				relative continuity though with a similar installation of Napoleon's military camp room.	
Heeresgeschichtliches Museum	Vienna, Austria	project: 1848, inauguration and development 1856/1891	Imperial creation by Kaiser Franz Joseph I, State run by the ministry of Defence	Chronological display of military history of Austria - dedicated rooms to the napoleonic wars.	Room dedicated to the Archduke Charles, chief of the Austrian army against Napoleon. Display opposing the two military heroes. With specific souvenirs such as the coat of the General Koller worn by Napoleon on his voyage to Elba.
National Army Museum	London, England	end of 1950s, 1960 royal charter; 1971 inauguration in current building	Inheriting collections from the Royal United Service Institution Museum in Whitehall. It was founded by Field Marschal Sir Gerald Walter Robert Templer, established by Royal Charter, public but not dependent of any one ministry.	The museum is made of 4 chronological sections of which the second is "Changing the World" - the first part of which is "The first Great War, 1793-1815" or the "Road to Waterloo" - it is mainly dedicated to an equal representation of all the actors of the Army - from the simple soldier to the general. The current display dates from 2006.	An important display area is dedicated to Waterloo, with the monumental 19th c. Sibourne model of the battle in a darkened room - and animated by multi-media. The main display related to the figure of Napoleon is the famous skeleton of his horse Marengo, that he rode into the battle of Waterloo