



Staging Empire: Napoleon, Ingres, And David

By Todd Porterfield, Susan Siegfried

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Napoleon Bonaparte conquered France and Europe in the name of liberte, egalite, et fraternite, but he suppressed freedom to achieve his aims. This was the birth of modern empire, and France's greatest artists were enlisted for the cause. *Staging Empire* focuses on two landmark paintings that celebrated Napoleon's coronation: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Napoleon I on His Imperial Throne* (1806) and Jacques-Louis David's *Le Sacre* (1805-7). In an unprecedented collaboration, two scholars investigate these masterpieces in their broad cultural context. This book is a sumptuously illustrated, extensively documented, analytical tour de force. Coronation pictures may seem to be all about the past, but they were produced to guarantee a future of empire whose military, media, and geopolitical practices are still with us today. *Staging Empire* surveys the period's essential problem of representing authority in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Ingres's portrait of the new emperor is steeped in archaic symbolism, bolstered by the cult of recently minted relics. The picture's strangeness, the press's withering critiques, and the government's anxious sponsorship are explored. The discussion lays bare the precariousness of modern art and politics and the dangers of cultural independence in the public sphere. Traditionally accepted as a document of the coronation of Napoleon and Josephine, *Le Sacre* is instead shown to be the most important barometer of the Empire's propagandistic strategies. The authors present it in light of Josephine's central role and of its critical reception in newspapers and the hitherto untapped archives of Napoleon's secret police. *Le Sacre* heralded an age of phony governmental transparency. Modern cultural practices, including consumerism, repressive theories of race and gender, and art history itself, were marshalled by the emperor's official painter.

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Review

Some of the best art history I've read in a long time. --Hollis Clayson, Northwestern University

Both authors are wonderful writers, offering clear, forceful prose that will be as accessible to undergraduates as it is informative and inspiring to specialists in the field. *Staging Empire* is, in short, a marvelously illuminating and captivating study, one that represents the discipline of art history and cultural criticism in general at their highest levels of sophistication. --Andrew Carrington Shelton, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*

As a whole, this is a comprehensive and thought-provoking new approach to two well-known images of Napoleon that calls attention to the challenges that the modern ruler's representation poses. --Mechthild Fend, *Art Bulletin*

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About the Author

Todd Porterfield is Canada Research Chair and Associate Professor of Art History at the Universite de Montreal. He is the author of *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism* (1998). Susan L. Siegfried is Professor of Art History and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. Her publications include *Fingering Ingres* (2001), with Adrian Rifkin; *The Art of Louis-Leopold Boilly* (1995); and, with Marjorie Cohn, *Works by J. A. D. Ingres in the Collection of the Fogg Art Museum* (1980).

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