

# Portraits: More than Paint



## 6. L'état, c'est moi!

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LOUIS XIV AND NAPOLEON BONAPARTE were men of genius whose genius included the knowledge of how to create and maintain a public image. Louis was born to high position, but enhanced it immeasurably by the works commissioned from the great artists he assembled around him. Napoleon came from a more ordinary family, on an island that was not even a part of France when he was born. His rise to power was largely due to his success as a military commander, but he too ensured that there were artists around to commemorate those successes as he achieved them. Later in their lives, both lived through rituals that called upon past traditions to promise a glorious future.

Painting the portrait of a man whose life is already a curated self-portrait is a difficult proposition. While it is easy enough to transmit the intended persona, it takes a different kind of genius not to lose sight of the individual man behind it. We shall look at a variety of attempts, some magnificent, some frankly mediocre, and see if any truly succeeded. *rb.*

### A. Heads of State

Both men commissioned monumental portrait sculptures from the leading Italian artists of the day. What does each reveal about them?

**Bernini:** *Louis XIV* (1665, Versailles)

**Canova:** *Napoleon*, studio copy of head (c.1810)

**Canova:** *Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker* (1806, Apsley House)

### B. Louis XIV Timeline

An illustrated overview of the longest reign in recorded history.

♪ **Montage:** the life and reign of Louis XIV

## C. Louis as Man, Monarch, and God

Throughout his life, portraits that show much of Louis as a man are eclipsed by those that portray him as a monarch—or even as a god.

**Le Brun:** *Louis XIV* (pastel, 1660)

**Rigaud:** *Louis XIV* (Prado and Louvre, both 1701)

♪ **Video:** *What did Louis XIV really look like?* (Becca Segovia)

**Charles Poerson:** *Louis XIV as Jupiter* (1653)

**Le Brun:** *Apotheosis of Louis XIV* (1677, Budapest)

**Nocret:** *Louis XIV and his Family* (1670)

## D. Louis as Patron

Louis XIV was one of the greatest patrons of the arts of all time, shown not only in the palace and park of his masterpiece, Versailles, but also in his own example as a performing dancer.

♪ **Video:** *The King Who Invented Ballet* (David Bintley)

♪ **Corbiau:** *Le Roi danse*, the young king as Apollo

♪ **Rickman:** *A Little Chaos*, opening

## E. Napoleon Timeline

The life of Napoleon, in a video montage and a popular song.

♪ **Montage:** Napoleon timeline

♪ **Folk Song:** *Boney was a Warrior* (Paul Clayton)

## F. A Meteoric Military Career

Napoleon carved out a meteoric career through bold military action, and he made sure he had artists around to immortalize that action.

**David** (1812) / **Delaroche** (1845): *Napoleon at Fontainebleau*

**Gros:** *Napoleon at Arcole* (1796)

**David** (1801) / **Delaroche** (1850): *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*

**Gros:** *Napoleon Visits the Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804, Louvre)

## G. The Five-Year Empire

In 1804, Napoleon crowned himself Emperor. He intended a dynasty to endure for centuries, but in fact it lasted less than five years.

**David:** *The Coronation of Napoleon* (1805, Louvre)

♪ **Richard Grégoire:** *Napoléon*, coronation scene

**Girodet:** *Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes* (1805)

**David:** *Distribution of the Eagles* (1810, Versailles)

**Charles Minard:** *Losses in Men in the Russian Campaign* (1869)

**Pushkin:** *On the Death of Napoleon* (1821)

## H. The Emperor on Screen

Napoleon is the most-often-portrayed historical figure in movies (194 and counting). We look at four spanning almost a century of film.

♪ **Abel Gance:** *Napoléon* (1927), ending

♪ **Serge Bondarchuk:** *Waterloo* (1970), Napoleon's return

♪ **Richard Grégoire:** *Napoléon* (2002), Napoleon's return

♪ **Ridley Scott:** *Napoleon* (2023), coronation scene

Gianlorenzo **Bernini** (1598–1680, *Italian sculptor*), Antonio **Canova** (1757–1822, *Italian sculptor*), Jacques-Louis **David** (1748–1825, *French painter*), Paul **Delaroche** (1797–1856, *French painter*), Abel **Gance** (1889–1981, *French filmmaker*), Anne-Louis **Girodet-Trioson** (1767–1824, *French painter*), Benjamin Robert **Haydon** (1786–1846, *English painter*), Charles **Le Brun** (1619–90, *French painter*), André **Le Nôtre** (1613–1700, *French landscape architect*), Jean-François **Le Sueur** (1760–1837, *French composer*), Louis **Le Vau** (1612–70, *French architect*), Jean-Baptiste **Lully** (1632–87, *French composer*), Jean **Nocret** (1615–72, *French painter*), Sir William **Orchardson** (1832–1910, *Scottish painter*), Alexander **Pushkin** (1799–1837, *Russian poet*), Hyacinthe **Rigaud** (1659–1743, *French painter*)

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I will always answer mail to [rogerbrunyate@gmail.com](mailto:rogerbrunyate@gmail.com)