

D'Angiviller's Louvre Project

a sharp retreat from political intervention. The one statue that was properly commissioned but never executed was that of the famous seventeenth-century magistrate Guillaume de Lamoignon for the Salon of 1789. Commissioned from the sculptor Pajou in 1787, it was probably abandoned in the following year as opposition mounted to the Parliamentary reforms of his direct descendant Chrétien-François de Lamoignon. Under fire, Lamoignon resigned as keeper of the seals in September 1788; days later an angry mob tried to attack his Paris hôtel.¹⁶⁵ Rather than risk a riot at the next Salon, the proposed statue of his ancestor was dropped. In August 1789, d'Angiviller wrote to the painter Vien with reference to the next round of paintings and statues to be commissioned by the king: "We must exercise the greatest caution in the choice of subjects."¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, the Great Men chosen – the artists Lebrun and Puget, the writer Boileau, and the admiral Duguay-Trouin – offered little scope for hostile interpretation.¹⁶⁷ The Great Men – at least those with clear political significance – signal an important departure in state intervention in the arts. Arguably the arts had long been a weapon in the ideological arsenal of the French monarchy, but beginning with Gois's *l'Hôpital* we find royal commissions being used not simply to glorify the king but to influence public opinion on issues of immediate concern to the government. Pajou's unexecuted *Lamoignon* and d'Angiviller's anxiety over the choice of subjects in 1789 represent the invasion of that policy. Far from trying to dictate public opinion, in 1789 the director general feared a hostile reaction to any attempt or any gesture that could be read as an attempt to assert royal authority through the arts. It was, of course, at the moment of the *Grands Hommes*' retreat from significant political involvement that David came of age as a history painter. Whether or not his great canvases of the 1780s were painted with politically subversive intent (the debate continues), d'Angiviller's use of the Great Men in the service of the Crown would at least have heightened an awareness of David and his contemporaries of the political possibilities and tensions in the Salon, and makes it all the easier to understand why David's painting could have taken on a radical identity on the eve of the Revolution.¹⁶⁸

Those possibilities and tensions would have been transferred to the museum with the works of art intended for it. Even though completion of the museum eluded d'Angiviller and the Old Regime, his deliberate exclusion into contemporary politics and historical representation through patronage had nevertheless made of the Grand Gallery a deeply ideological space. The politicization of the Louvre would be carried steps further by Revolution, but in a direction unimaginable to d'Angiviller before 1789.

THE REVOLUTIONARY LOUVRE



*The museum is not supposed to be
a vain assemblage of frivolous luxury objects
that serve only to satisfy idle curiosity.
What it must be is an imposing school.*

Jacques-Louis David, *Second rapport sur...
la commission du musée*, 1794

The Revolutionary chapter in the history of the Louvre museum begins on the day the Bourbon monarchy finally collapsed – August 10, 1792, when the Tuileries Palace was overrun and King Louis XVI taken prisoner. Until then the Louvre had remained a royal palace and the museum a project supervised by the king's architects. As late as April of that year, the *bon du roi* had still to be acquired before the architect Mique could begin the long overdue structural repairs to the sloping stable walls that supported the Grand Gallery from below (Fig. 25). The repairs were paid for from the king's civil list.¹ However, with the fall of the monarchy, the royal collection was declared national property, and the National Assembly quickly announced its interest in accelerating the completion of the museum. On August 19, just days after the attack on the Tuileries, the following decree was issued:

The National Assembly, recognizing the importance of bringing together at the museum the paintings and other works of art that are at present to be found dispersed in many locations, declares there is urgency.²

That the museum was made the subject of an official decree so soon after August 10, and declared a matter of urgency no less, is remarkable. Yet, as a letter dated October 1792 from the minister of the interior, Jean-Marie Roland, to whom the museum had been entrusted, to Jacques-Louis David makes clear, the museum already had an important role to play in the Republican scheme of things.

This museum must demonstrate the nation's great riches. . . . France must extend its glory through the ages and to all peoples: the national museum will embrace knowledge in all its manifold beauty and will be the admiration of the universe. By

Assembly of May 26, 1791, envisaged the Louvre as a national palace of arts and sciences, uniting under one roof "all the riches possessed by the nation."⁶ Later that year the idea was taken up by Armand Kersaint in his *Discours sur les monuments publics*. But for Kersaint, the museum was to be more than a union of rare and useful objects. Located in an expanded (and finished) Louvre-Tuileries Palace complex, the museum would be a national monument, affirming at one and the same time the "will of the nation" and "the superiority of the new regime over the regime of old." Completing the Louvre, he stated, would demonstrate that the new regime had accomplished "in several years what ten kings and fifty prodigal ministers had failed to do in several centuries."⁷ What is striking about Kersaint's project is his identification of artistic achievements with the creation of a new political order ("Show the world what a sovereign people can do!") and the use of those achievements to confirm the triumph of Liberty in the public eye. More remarkable still in retrospect was his prophecy that the completed Louvre would make Paris the "capital of the arts" and the Athens of the modern world, a theme to which we will return later.⁸

Just as Kersaint preached the symbolic value of completing the Louvre after centuries of neglect, so Roland and his successors grasped the potential of opening the museum after years of frustrating delays during the final years of the Old Regime. Speed was of the essence. Roland assumed responsibility for the Louvre and all national property in September 1792 and duly appointed a panel of six men — five artists (J.-B. Regnault, E.-A. Vincent, N.-J.-R. Jollain, J. Cossard, and Pierre Pasquier) and one mathematician (C. Bossut) — known as the Museum Commission, to oversee the museum project.⁹ To these six men fell the task of preparing the Grand Gallery for the display and deciding which objects should be chosen for exhibition from the huge collection now belonging to the nation. The encyclopedic schemes of Barère and Kersaint remained paper projects, last gasps of an Enlightenment dream, and attention focused, as it had prior to 1789, on the Grand Gallery and the fine arts. There was equally no question now of giving the museum the "perfection" d'Angiviller had sought. Even though a new experiment in the gallery as recently as 1791 had determined once more that the existing supply of light was inadequate and the space too narrow, the museum would have to open as it was.¹⁰

As the Museum Commission worked on the gallery through the winter and spring of 1792–3 it was inevitable that the museum's identity and political role would be shaped by developments in the world beyond its walls. A succession of events in 1793 — the execution of Louis XVI, royalist rebellions in the provinces, military setbacks on the eastern front, and the assassinations of Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau and Jean-Paul Marat — pushed the Revolution to the left and influenced the government's attitude toward the Louvre. Fear of royalist conspiracy and of failure during this uncertain

embodying these grand ideas, worthy of a free people . . . the museum . . . will become among the most powerful illustrations of the French Republic.³

Long before the first picture had been hung Republicans recognized in the Louvre a symbol of Revolutionary achievement and the cultural benefits of Liberty.

As Edouard Pommier has argued, this apparently spontaneous investiture of the museum with the power of a Revolutionary sign had its origins in the creation of a national patrimony following the state's appropriation of Church property in November 1789.⁴ Overnight an immense artistic and historic heritage ceased to function meaningfully in a religious context and entered the public domain as *biens nationaux*, "at the disposition of the Nation." The property of émigrés, the royal academies and the Crown soon followed. In response to this unprecedented situation, commissions composed of artists and scholars were established in Paris — first the Commission des monuments (1790) and then the Commission temporaire des arts (1793) — to determine what should be preserved and what could be sold, reused, or destroyed. Guidelines were drawn up for distribution in the provinces, including the pamphlet *Instructions sur la manière d'inventorier et de conserver, dans toute l'étendue de la République, tous les objets qui peuvent servir aux arts, aux sciences et à l'enseignement* (1794), a landmark document in the history of conservation. More will be said about the work of these commissions in Chapter 5; what is important for present purposes is that from the start the destination of those objects deemed worthy of conservation was a museum. What better use could be made of the nation's new-found artistic and cultural wealth than to display it for the benefit of public instruction and pleasure? And what better use for abandoned churches than to house such collections? These were the early conclusions of the Commission des monuments, embodied in a clear-sighted report of December 1790:

1. All monuments so designated belong to the nation. It is necessary therefore to make them accessible to the general public, and nothing could better serve that purpose than bringing them together in repositories established in each of the eighty-three departments which now make up France, taking care that each repository is as complete as possible.
2. Each departmental repository will be located in a large town, preferably one where there is already an educational establishment, for it is clear how much public instruction will benefit from these *museums*, the name that will be given to the repositories.
3. The site will be easy to find in each of the chosen towns. The museum will be housed in one of the churches that are due to be closed and which would otherwise be without useful purpose.⁵

In the capital, the sight of overflowing storage depots rekindled earlier visions of transforming the Louvre into a physical encyclopedia of knowledge. The politician Bertrand de Barère, in an address to the National

period fueled a campaign of "public instruction," the purpose of which was to effect the complete regeneration of society along Republican lines. As a prominent state institution, the museum had its part to play in the process. In April 1793, Dominique Garat, the *philosophe* and man of letters who replaced Roland as minister of the interior in January, wrote to the Museum Commission urging it to press on with the gallery, "the interest in which grows daily due to present circumstances." He continued:

The achievement of this victory [i.e., the completion of the museum] at the present moment in time, over our domestic troubles as well as our external enemies, is by no means the least important of those to which the national effort should be directed; in particular, it would have an invaluable effect on public opinion, which is so often the sovereign mistress of empires.¹¹

In addition to assuaging "the fury of our passions and the calamities of the war" by demonstrating that in spite of troubles at home and abroad calm and order reigned in the capital, the museum would also show that the "political storms" of the Revolution had in no way extinguished the cultivation of the arts in France.¹²

A crucial step was taken in May when the Convention directed its Committee of Public Instruction (CPI) to draw up plans for a public festival commemorating the first anniversary of the birth of the Republic, to take place in Paris on August 10, 1793. Garat wrote to the president of the Convention a little over a month later to suggest that the museum and the Salon exhibition contribute to the celebration by opening on the same day. His idea was to associate the museum with the direction of the Revolution and to prove, in his words, "to both the enemies as well as the friends of our young Republic that the liberty we seek, founded on philosophic principles and a belief in progress, is not that of savages and barbarians." Furthermore, Garat reiterated Kersaint's observation that the inauguration of the museum on August 10 would underline the superiority of republican government over "the administrators of despotism."¹³

It was at this moment that the Louvre museum formally entered Revolutionary political discourse as a sign of both triumph over despotism and culture born of liberty. Garat's sensitivity to the latter symbolic value in particular may well have been due to his understanding of how the course of events in France was perceived abroad. In April 1792 he was attached to the embassy in London where he witnessed how "the principles and events of our revolution were disfigured in a most atrocious manner."¹⁴ As anti-Revolutionary propaganda abroad intensified in step with the Revolution itself, Garat would have become increasingly aware of the need to redirect attention away from recent atrocities (such as the September Massacres) and toward the ultimate, and in his view, positive goals of the Revolu-

tion.¹⁵ Through the museum Garat hoped to forge a link in the public eye, both at home and abroad, between the conservation and display of universally esteemed works of art and the perception of responsible Republican government. In order to counter anti-Revolutionary propaganda, publicity of Republican achievements had at least to equal the spectacle of the guillotine and dramatic acts of iconoclasm. And what better source of positive publicity than the founding of a museum Europe had been anticipating for twenty years? Garat's proposal to assimilate the opening of the Louvre into the Festival of National Unity, as it came to be known, was greeted with great enthusiasm, and from that moment the Museum Commission had a deadline to meet.

The Commission now had two months to put the museum in order. It complained that only half the Grand Gallery was available (repairs to the stables were still in progress) and that no one was satisfied with the quality of light, but to no avail.¹⁶ It also ran into difficulties with members of the Commission des monuments, who, resenting the sudden appointment of an upstart commission to do work that they felt was rightfully theirs, obstructed access to storage depots.¹⁷ Garat finally intervened but with no time to spare; pictures were still arriving at the Louvre less than two weeks before it was due to open.¹⁸ Remarkably, the *Muséum Français*, as it was called, opened as planned on August 10, 1793. On display were a total of 537 paintings, plus 124 assorted marble and bronze sculptures, precious marbles, pieces of porcelain, clocks, and "other objects."¹⁹

The opening of the Louvre and the Festival of National Unity stand out as two signal Republican achievements of 1793, and it was highly appropriate that they occurred on the same day. To grasp the significance of this connection, we must consider briefly the purpose of the Revolutionary festival and the meaning of the Louvre in 1793.

In a tract addressed to the Convention in year II of the Republic (1793-4) entitled *Essai sur les fêtes nationales*, the deputy François de Boissy d'Anglas introduced his discourse on the crucial role of the festival in the emerging body politic by first stating the ultimate goal of the Revolution:

It is to bring together and to effect the permanent regeneration of mankind . . . it is to return man to his natural state of purity and simplicity through an understanding and the exercise of his rights. . . . It is finally to destroy once and for all the chains that oppress and enslave him.²⁰

Revolutionaries realized that such grand ambitions could be fulfilled only through education. Authority alone was not enough to direct a revolution: the citizenry had to be molded through direct and willing participation.²¹ The consent and participation of the people would be secured through a

comprehensive system of public instruction. "It is by educating a man," wrote Boissy d'Anglas, "that you will regenerate him in a manner complete and absolute."²² Man had to learn to be free; he had to be taught to reject his old values and to place his faith in the future of the Republic. The public festival was designed to serve this end on two levels. On one, the program of festivals, which was gradually expanded as the Revolution progressed, gave legitimacy to the new order by filling the gap left by the discontinuance of royal celebrations and religious worship and lent the experience of the Revolution a sense of what Lynn Hunt has termed "psycho-political continuity."²³ On the other, the public festival generated a sense of community, an image of an ideal republican society based on the belief in transparency between individual citizens and between citizens and the state. In short, the festival was central to the concept of "public instruction," and didacticism was at the heart of Revolutionary politics.

The festival of August 10 combined and made manifest two themes that recur throughout Revolutionary literature and figure prominently in Jacobin discourse: national unity and the regeneration of the people. These concerns were conspicuous in the focal point of the festival – the procession and its attending imagery designed by David – but they were also implicitly present in the organized spectacle at the Louvre.

On the morning of August 10 the crowds assembled at the Place de la Bastille, where the people drank from a fountain of regeneration in the form of a neo-Egyptian statue of Nature squeezing water from her breasts, which at once cleansed them of any association with the past and "baptized" them citizens of the Republic (Fig. 40). The ordered masses (estimated at 200,000), decked with liberty caps, tricolored ribbons, fasces, garlands, and olive branches, then set out along a processional route punctuated by five stations established at the scenes of significant Revolutionary events from the Bastille to the Champs de Mars. The festival thus endorsed the reidentification of familiar Parisian landmarks as sites of Republican memory. The crowd envisaged by David in his proposal to the Convention was the very picture of a new society in which distinctions of class and race were dissolved. "All individuals useful to society," he wrote, "will be joined together as one; you will see the president of the executive committee in step with the blacksmith; the mayor with his sash beside the butcher or mason; the black African, who differs only in color, next to the white European."²⁴ From the second station at a triumphal arch on the Boulevard Poissonnière, the procession moved on to the Place de la Révolution (now the Place de la Concorde), where Louis XVI had been guillotined months earlier. The people watched as representatives from the eighty-six regional departments set light to a symbolic pyre made up of the "debris of feudalism" placed before a statue of Liberty, which stood on a pedestal

VUE DES SIX DIFFÉRENTES STATIONS DE LA PÊTE DE L'UNITÉ ET DE L'INDIVISIBILITÉ DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE¹⁻⁴

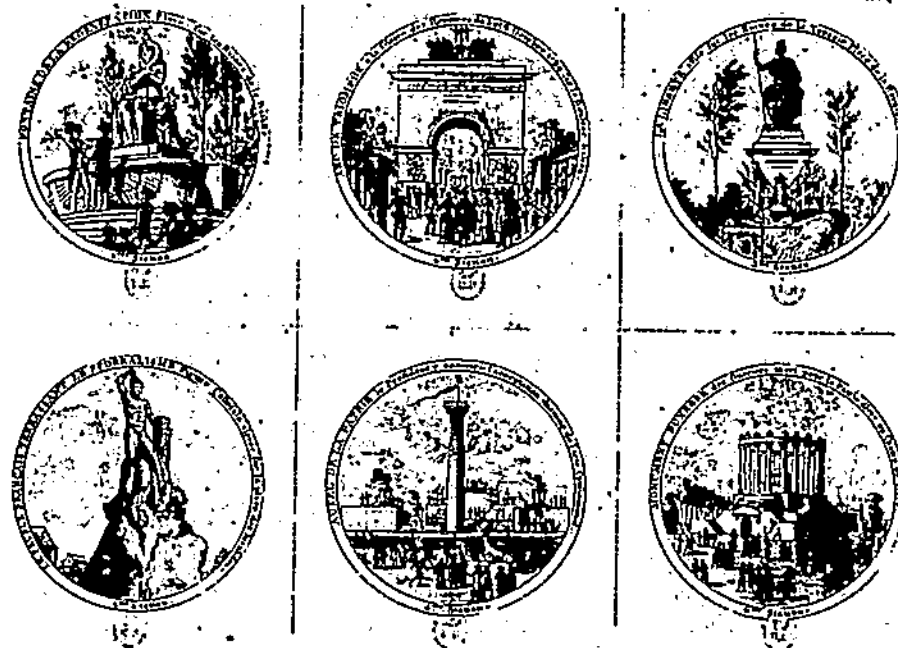


Figure 40. Anonymous, *Festival of 10 August 1793*. Engraving, 1793, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

that once supported Bouchardon's equestrian statue of Louis XV. Thousands of birds were then set free. At the fourth station, the Place des Invalides, the march halted in the shadow of a colossal statue of Hercules representing the French people smashing federalism, the antithesis of national unity, in the form of a hydra. Finally, at the Champ de Mars, the procession gathered before the altar of the Fatherland where the president of the Convention read the Constitution and led a pledge of allegiance. Music and dancing followed into the night.

It was a brilliant allegorical drama, sanctifying the new symbols of the Republic while doing away with those of the monarchy, and with the nation joined as one reliving the progress of the Revolution from the fall of the Bastille. In the words of Mona Ozouf, the festival was conceived as a *mise en scène* of the birth of the Republic and its citizens.²⁵ It was David's masterpiece of Revolutionary pageantry and was commemorated by an official medal and a five-act theatrical production by Gabriel Bouquier and P.-L. Moline.²⁶ The opening of the museum was no doubt overshadowed by the day-long festival, yet those who did visit the Louvre would have come away

with a similar sense of collective Revolutionary triumph over despotism. In important respects the museum may be viewed as an extension of the festival outdoors.

On that day above all others, the rich historical associations of the Louvre would have seemed particularly significant. The Revolutionaries' intent to regenerate society was put into effect on two levels. First, new symbols for public worship were substituted for those of old: the fasces replaced the fleur-de-lis, the female image of Liberty replaced the Virgin, and so on.²⁷ And, second, the past in all its manifestations was either destroyed or appropriated and revolutionized. David's festival skillfully blended the two possibilities: all the trappings of the new *culte révolutionnaire* were paraded through the streets and squares, which now belonged to the people.

The occupation of spaces that had previously been tightly controlled was an inevitable response to the collapse of the Old Regime. As Ozouf has remarked, "The appropriation of a certain space, that must be opened and forced, is the first climactic pleasure afforded by revolutions."²⁸ This applied to internal spaces no less than to space outdoors, and of all royal buildings in Paris none (after the Tuileries, overrun in August 1792) was more conspicuous, and therefore more attractive to Revolutionaries, than the Louvre. Entry to much of the palace, and particularly the Grand Gallery, had been carefully regulated during the *ancien régime*. As we have seen, until 1776 the Grand Gallery was home to the strategic scale-relief models and, for obvious reasons, was kept under strict lock and key (Fig. 23). Permission to visit the Galerie des plans was customarily reserved for high-ranking courtiers, foreign ambassadors, and visiting heads of state. Even after the models were removed, the gallery was not generally accessible except to those involved with or interested in the museum project.²⁹ In the summer of 1793 the government would have been alive to the significance of "liberating" this formerly privileged space.

Inside the museum, the feeling of Revolutionary conquest was unequivocal. The works of art on display had been prized from their pre-Revolutionary settings and returned to their "rightful" owners: the people. According to the Abbé Grégoire, those treasures "which were previously visible to only a privileged few . . . will henceforth afford pleasure to all: statues, paintings, and books are charged with the sweat of the people: the property of the people will be returned to them."³⁰ Belonging to no one individual or institution, the gallery's contents were presented as "the property of all." Seizing works of art in private hands and reidentifying them as communal property brought together at the national museum paralleled the Revolutionary progression from liberty to unity dramatized by the festival of August 10; free

admission and circulation at the museum echoed participation in the street celebration. The perception of collective ownership helped fashion what Grégoire termed the "republican mold" and to confer on the citizen "a national character and the demeanor of a free man."³¹

In the weeks leading up to August 10, the Louvre was stocked with all manner of art objects in order to reveal the full extent of the nation's newfound artistic wealth. Paintings and sculptures, tables and vases of precious marbles and porphyry, bronzes and porcelain were brought from the various depots to dazzle and overwhelm the beholder. In July, Garat wrote to the Museum Commission:

It would be appropriate to bring together for the opening everything that will enhance our precious collection of treasures to impress upon those who are coming to Paris for the festival that our present political problems have in no way diminished the cultivation of the arts among us.³²

At one and the same time, the museum symbolized the stability of the state and the triumph of the people. Furthermore, for a period of two weeks, beginning on August 3, the public was admitted to the central storage depot of the Petits-Augustins to view the vast hoard of property, most of it confiscated from Paris churches, arranged according to provenance. The event proved such a success that the depot's keeper, Alexandre Lenoir, was allowed to keep the exhibition open until the end of September.³³ As mentioned in the introduction, some time later at the Louvre the names of émigrés were attached to works of art that had come from their collections.³⁴

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The Louvre was not simply a royal space that had to be liberated: it was also home to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Discontent with the Academy's monopoly of the Paris art world had grown steadily from midcentury, to the point where on the eve of the Revolution many people were eager to dismantle a system that had promoted the interests of a privileged few at their expense. Even within the Academy there was dissatisfaction with the hierarchy and customary distribution of honors.³⁵ After 1789 the academies were among the first institutions of the Old Regime to come under attack. The argument against the Academy of Painting rested on two beliefs. The first was that its hierarchical structure and the privileges its members enjoyed were incompatible with the political reforms that were transforming society. As the engraver S.-C. Miger stated in an important pamphlet of November 1789: "If everything else in society is undergoing reform, the constitution of the Academy must also change."³⁶

The second argument was that the Academy's traditional teaching methods were ill suited to the proper development of artists. The museum entered the dispute because in the Republican plan for the regeneration of the arts it was to replace the Academy as the source of instruction for present and future artists.

This intent was made clear in an early statement of policy by the Commune des arts, the 300-strong group of dissident academicians, students, and previously disenfranchised artists that came together under David's leadership in September 1790. In an address delivered to the National Assembly in 1791, the Commune insisted that "In place of these public professors and their deceptive instruction . . . the huge collections of antiquities and works by the great masters, as well as many other artistic treasures currently hidden away" must be displayed "in a vast and suitable space" for the benefit of both students and the general public.³⁷ The Commune returned to the museum later in its address, after further criticizing traditional academic practice:

It is obvious how ill-suited this education is . . . to the formation of artists. Let us provide one that is more in keeping with liberty . . . one that doesn't raise students into servitude and commit them to a narrow path. Their goal as artists should be demonstrated in a more striking manner: let us evoke the memory of the great masters in a such a way that their wise and immortal masterpieces will inspire the artist enflamed with a love of his art to use them as his guide. It will be clear that we are calling for the creation of the national museum.³⁸

According to the Commune, the main problem with academic instruction was the enforced dependence of a pupil on the teaching and protection of one master. The argument went as follows: an aspiring student was placed at an impressionable age in the studio of an established master. To get ahead and to benefit from his master's influence with patrons and in the Academy, the student had little choice but to imitate the master's manner. The faults of the master (no artist was perfect) would be transferred to the pupil, who in turn would pass them on to the next generation, and so on. Though the dangers of following one example too closely had long been a commonplace of art theory, after 1789 the contrasting notions of indentured servitude to a corrupting master, on the one hand, and freedom to choose one's own teachers from the field of great masters, on the other, became a central and irresistible figure in antiacademy rhetoric.³⁹ In the words of Alexandre Lenoir, before the Revolution "Paris had neither museums nor public collections; arrogant masters hid the works of the great men from their pupils and offered only themselves as models; students became slaves forced to wear their masters' livery."⁴⁰ The master-pupil argument was used by the

Jacobin deputy Gilbert Romme in a 1792 speech calling for the suppression of the directorship of the French Academy in Rome:

Surrounded by the works of Raphael and Michelangelo students full of youth and vigor are unlikely to receive fruitful instruction from a man inferior to those great masters and well past his prime. . . . Close supervision is inappropriate for students called by the nature of their art to exercise their genius freely.⁴¹

The closure of the Academy in Rome in the following year made the opening of the museum in Paris all the more urgent.

Rhetoric aside, there was a real commitment to giving artists access – indeed privileged access – to the Louvre collection for purposes of copying during the Revolutionary era. Lenoir exaggerated when he said that artists before the Revolution could not see Old Master paintings: apart from the Luxembourg, there was the Palais Royal (where Lenoir himself studied) and numerous other private collections open to well-connected academicians. But it is true that *copying* works of art in Paris was a problem. Despite initial intentions, copying was not permitted at the Luxembourg; nor was it allowed in the royal picture depots under Terray and d'Angiviller.⁴² By contrast the Museum Commission in 1793 devoted five days of every *décade* (the ten-day week in the new Revolutionary calendar) to artists' study.⁴³ This was increased to seven days in ten in the mid-1790s.⁴⁴ As Dominique Poulot has noted, the activity of copying in the Grand Gallery testified to the useful purpose of the museum: more than a repository of past art, it was instrumental in *producing* art in the present (Fig. 6).⁴⁵ By the middle of the decade just about anyone was allowed to set up an easel in the Grand Gallery, but so popular did copying become (by year III over 500 people had been given permits)⁴⁶ that before long restrictions had to be introduced. Ironically, during the Directory, permission to copy was granted only upon presentation of a letter from one's master!⁴⁷ Even though the atelier system was never, in fact, abolished and survived the temporary closure of the Academy (1793–5), copying did become a vital part of artistic training in Paris. If the museum did not in the end replace the master-pupil relationship, it nevertheless more than justified the pedagogic claims made on its behalf during the Revolution. Whereas the full impact of copying on contemporary artistic practice would be very difficult to gauge, surviving copies by early-nineteenth-century artists – Delacroix, Gericault, and so on – point to the great importance of the Louvre as a supplement to their formal training.

The turning point in the battle between the dissidents and the Academy was David's election to the National Convention as deputy from the "Museum" section of Paris, followed by his nomination to the influential Committee of Public Instruction (CPI) and Committee Public Safety (CPS).⁴⁸ David participated actively in the work of these committees, as he

did in the Jacobin Club, of which he served a term as president. His addresses to the Convention mostly concerned the arts, but when he spoke his opinions carried weight, especially during the Terror (1793-4), the era of Jacobin rule.

David's political campaign against the Academy began in November 1792 with his dramatic resignation from it during a speech on the floor of the Convention. In the months that followed, as Jacobin influence grew, David gradually won over his colleagues in the house. By July he had persuaded the Convention to order the CPI to report on the suppression of the Paris academies. Meanwhile the Commune gained official recognition on July 18 when it was instructed by the Convention to assist the Commission des monuments in the ideologically significant work of effacing remaining royal emblems from public buildings in Paris. When the Commune met to discuss this job, emboldened by the Convention's support, it decided to appropriate the Academy's rooms in the Louvre and hold its assembly there.⁴⁹ Finally, on August 8 – two days before the museum opened – following rousing speeches by David and the Abbé Grégoire, the Convention voted to dissolve the academies.⁵⁰ The CPI assumed responsibility for the arts, which in effect meant that power passed to the Commune.

In assuming control of the arts, the Commune was faced with the problem of taking over the Academy's functions while eschewing its methods and hierarchical structure. This it was evidently unable to do – at least to the satisfaction of the Convention. The Commune itself was suppressed in the autumn of 1793 and its place taken by a radical offshoot, the Société populaire et républicaine des arts (SPRA). As the name suggests, the SPRA was run along the lines of a popular society or club whose business it was to convert the people to the Republican cause. Artists were examined to ensure that only true Republicans were admitted; politics became a criterion of membership.⁵¹ In keeping with its egalitarian charter, ranks within the Society were proscribed, and its meetings in the Louvre were open to anyone who wished to attend. So much for the abolition of privilege. But the SPRA, now that the traditional academic system was no longer available, was also obliged to address the question of how to provide artistic instruction to aspiring artists, and, more important, how to tailor that education to meet the political demands now placed on the fine arts. The history of the Academy's dissolution would be little more than a sideshow of the Revolution if it were not for the great store placed by Republicans on the regenerative powers of the visual arts and the efficacy of visual signs.⁵²

It was through the arts that the people would become familiar with the history, symbols, and martyrs of the Revolution. The arts, in other words, would play a leading role in legitimizing the Revolution and, moreover, would record the heroic achievement for posterity. The experience of revo-

lution was so different from what had gone before, the break with the past so radical, that a new artistic style was called for to characterize in visual terms the magnitude and nature of the upheaval. The art of the Old Regime came to be viewed as effeminate and debased after 1789 (building on earlier efforts by La Font and others to characterize the rococo in those terms) and unfit for either public scrutiny or emulation by young Republican artists. In a remarkable June 1794 address to the Convention, which sought to bring painting in line with the masculine republic of virtue promoted by the Jacobins, the painter turned politician Gabriel Bouquier had this to say about the art of the Old Regime and that which must replace it:

It is time to do away with the traditional French system, that monarchical routine which, in subjugating art to the whims of false taste, corruption and fashion, has narrowed its genius, mannered its methods, and perverted its goals. . . . It is time to replace the dishonorable productions [of the Old Regime] with paintings worthy of a republican people who cherish morality and who honor and reward virtue. . . . Effeminate works by the likes [of Boucher, Vanloo, and Pierre] are incapable of inspiring the virile and energetic style that must represent the revolutionary exploits of the defenders of equality. In order to capture the energy of a people who, in breaking the chains that bound them, has voted for the liberty of mankind, we need dignified colors, an energetic style, a bold brush, a volcanic genius.⁵³

Republicans advocated that it was in the museum that these qualities would be acquired.

It was the question of how the museum, or rather what kind of museum, could best serve the needs of Republican artists that led David into his next confrontation – this time with the Museum Commission. As we have seen, the Commune had insisted from the start that hand in hand with the abolition of the Academy must go the creation of the national museum, and it is clear from its polemical pamphlets that its campaign to replace the Academy was at the same time a declaration of its interest in taking control of the museum.⁵⁴

David's move on the Museum Commission coincided with an effort to do away with the Commission des monuments. The CPI was behind both initiatives, and both were motivated by a desire to bring all aspects of arts administration under centralized control. This meant doing away with agencies that were created by and owed allegiance to now defunct or discredited authorities – the Municipality of Paris in the case of the Commission and the Girondin minister Roland in that of the Museum Commission. Not surprisingly, the charges leveled against the two commissions were the same as those that had destroyed the Academy: incompetence and inconsistency with the ideals of the Revolution. All three were held guilty by association with past regimes.

The Commission des monuments was the first to go. Waiting in the wings

to take its place was the Commission temporaire des arts (CTA), created in August 1793 and attached to the CPI.⁵⁵ On December 18 the deputy from Oise and CTA president, Jean-Baptiste-Charles Mathieu, delivered a speech in the Convention on behalf of the CPI demanding the abolition of the Commission des monuments. In retrospect, his charges of ineptitude and lack of dedication are difficult to justify; the CTA cannot be said to have done a better job, and even they were the first to admit – after Thermidor – that they had merely continued the work begun by their predecessors.⁵⁶ But at that moment any defense of the Commission's performance would have been overwhelmed by Mathieu's further accusation that its members were lacking in patriotism. His words are a vivid reminder that "terror" was now the order of the day:

Your committee has decided that talent and expertise are insufficient unless accompanied by a pronounced patriotism. Given the direction of current events, the civic spirit of several members of this committee seems to have stood still, and indeed in some cases to have regressed. Today it is essential that everything march forward together . . . and those who are called upon to serve on such commissions must possess an unwavering republicanism . . . a firm and rapid step in harmony with public opinion.⁵⁷

David followed Mathieu's speech to the Convention with one of his own denouncing the Museum Commission and calling for its replacement by a Conservatoire of ten men (the painters J.-H. Fragonard, J. Bonvoisin, P.-E. Le Sueur, J.-M. Picault, and J.-B. Wicar; the sculptors R.-G. Dardel and A.-L. Dupasquier; the architects F.-J. Lannoy and David Le Roy; and Casimir Varon) accountable to the CPI, whose professional standing was sound and whose patriotism beyond reproach.⁵⁸ The Museum Commission, David claimed, was made up of men who were either unqualified for the job, such as Cossard and Bossut, or who, though possessed of talent, like Vincent and Renard, were at best lukewarm Republicans. David failed to persuade the Convention on this occasion, perhaps in part because the Commission had tangible proof of its accomplishments in the form of the museum itself. In a second report on the subject, delivered on January 16, 1794, David challenged that achievement and argued that in different hands the display could be much improved.⁵⁹ He focused on two issues that had become controversial almost as soon as the Commission began preparing the museum late in 1792: picture restoration and the choice and arrangement of works of art in the gallery. Because of incompetence in those two areas, David explained, the Louvre, that "temple of liberty," was a source not of glory to the Republic but of shame.

Not for the first time the issue of conservation proved an effective weapon against those in whose trust the nation's heritage had been placed. The equation between a well-ordered museum and responsible government

once again came into play, only this time there was even more at stake because the Republic was relying on the museum to counteract outward signs of civil and political chaos. Failure to maintain the art it had inherited jeopardized the Revolution's self-image as the engine of progress and Enlightenment ideals. As the Abbé Grégoire remarked in his report on vandalism, "barbarians" detest and destroy works of art, but "free men" love and preserve them.⁶⁰ Appealing to such sentiments, David's report gave details of botched restoration work under the Museum Commission: a Raphael disfigured by clumsy repaints, a Claude landscape stripped of its magical light and color, a famous Guido Reni scrubbed to the bone, and so on.⁶¹ By implication, Commission members were vandals in their own right. David emphasized that his criticisms of restoration practices were backed by "the best-qualified experts in Europe." He was referring to Jean-Michel Picault, son of Robert, the "inventor" of the transferral technique, and Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, both of whom had recently published pamphlets attacking the Museum Commission. Frustrated in their own attempts to win a place on the Commission, they joined forces with David to help in the destruction of the Commission.

As early as October 1792 Lebrun applied unsuccessfully for a position at the museum as a restorer.⁶² A month later he tried again, this time presenting himself to Roland, then minister of the interior, as a connoisseur. David went along to the interview to lend his support, but to no avail.⁶³ Apparently the Revolution had done nothing to erase Lebrun's questionable reputation. Having failed to persuade the authorities, Lebrun appealed to the public. In January 1793 he published his *Réflexions sur le muséum national*, condemning the Commission's restoration policy and reiterating the familiar point that only connoisseurs were qualified to run the museum, because they alone had the ability to make attributions and to distinguish original pictures from copies and good pictures from bad. Roland countered with a letter to the press exposing Lebrun's intrigue and suggesting that David had been seduced by it.⁶⁴

Picault, meanwhile, was making a simultaneous bid to secure the position of chief restorer at the museum. Like Lebrun, Picault had been rebuffed by d'Angiviller and no doubt counted on the Revolution to improve his fortunes. In October 1792 he was asked by the Museum Commission to take part in an open competition to determine the best-qualified restorers. Like his father before him, he refused to divulge the family's "secret" technique and proposed a different restoration competition of his own design. When this was in turn rejected Picault angrily withdrew and joined forces with Lebrun and David.⁶⁵ In March 1793 Picault published a letter in the *Chronique de Paris* calling on the Commune to petition the Convention to look into what he claimed were the Commission's abuses at the Louvre.⁶⁶

Restoration was halted briefly but was allowed to resume again later in the month. Despite the subsequent publication of Picault's *Observations . . . sur les tableaux de la République*, repeating his accusations, and further letters of protest from Lebrun, the Commission was left to get on with its business.⁶⁷ Not until David's campaign in December do we hear from Picault and Lebrun again.

David's charges of incompetent restoration, supported by the "expert" testimony of his fellow conspirators, were effective because they were difficult to disprove. As the recent debate over the cleaning of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling shows, restoration remains a contentious subject, notwithstanding the considerable technological advances of the past two centuries. But in the case of David and the Museum Commission it seems clear that restoration was used simply as a strategy. Surviving documents show that great care was taken under the Commission; the main restorers used – Roeser, La Porte, Michau, and Hacquin and his pupil Fouque – were well respected and continued to be employed at the Louvre through the Directory and Empire.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Picault and Lebrun both found themselves in positions of power when the museum passed into the hands of the Conservatoire.

The other point of contention between the Museum Commission and its critics was the choice of objects for the museum and their arrangement in the Grand Gallery. As we have seen, the Commission deliberately set out to dazzle the beholder, to create a spectacle revealing the full extent of the nation's artistic wealth, and it did so evidently with the approval of Garat. In August 1793 the government was not concerned to put too fine a point on the distinction between a museum and a depot of *biens nationaux*. The Commission understood its mission to be the creation of an all-encompassing museum, displaying under one roof "all the riches of the Republic in all branches of art and science."⁶⁹ But to David and his Jacobin colleagues this eclectic display was at once all too reminiscent of the aristocratic cabinets of the Old Regime and too heterogeneous to function as a school for artists. As he declared in his speech of January 16: "The Museum is not supposed to be a vain assemblage of frivolous luxury objects that serve only to satisfy idle curiosity. What it must be is an imposing school."⁷⁰

In addition to the decorative arts and scientific instruments, the gallery had also to be cleared of paintings that, in David's words, "could only encourage bad taste and error" – paintings, in other words, that were seen to embody the decadent, effeminate taste of the Regency and the reign of Pompadour. For it was precisely this taste that the museum was supposed to eradicate from French art: "By offering young students only the most beautiful of models, we will soon see the end of that mannered and artificial taste which has characterized up till now the work of every master of the French

school."⁷¹ Finally the critics insisted that if the museum was to contribute properly to public instruction and the formation of Republican artists, the collection must be divided into schools and arranged chronologically.⁷²

The question of how to arrange the Louvre collection had been the subject of much debate in 1793. Even before the museum had opened the Museum Commission felt obliged to justify its preference for a mixed-school arrangement. In response to the criticisms of Lebrun, Picault, and others, the Commission presented its argument in a polished memoir dated June 17:

The arrangement we have adopted is like that of an abundant flowerbed that has been planted with great care. If, by choosing a different arrangement, we had demonstrated the spirit of art in its infancy, during its rise and in its most recent period; or if we had separated the collection into schools, we might well have satisfied a handful of scholars, but we feared being criticized for having ordered something which, in addition to serving no useful general purpose, would actually hinder the study of young artists, who, thanks to our system, will be able to compare the styles of the Old Masters, their perfections as well as their faults, which only become apparent upon close and immediate comparison.⁷³

Aware of the "scholarly" alternative to their installation, the Commission decided against its implementation. In its view, a strict arrangement by school and period would do nothing for the man in the street and would impede the young artist's development. Roland himself had recommended an eclectic display as one that would please "everyone."⁷⁴ As artists (five of the six men on the Commission were artists, it will be recalled) they reverted naturally to a Luxembourg-type arrangement (Fig. 20) when it came to the pedagogic needs of young students. Their report said as much in its insistence on the benefits of stylistic comparison. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Veronese's *Supper at Emmaus* and Lebrun's *Tent of Darius* were still paired at the Muséum Français when it opened, as they had been at Versailles for more than a century.

The Louvre's role in the education of Republican artists became the focal point of the argument between the Museum Commission and its opponents. Both parties advocated the superiority of their respective systems in a bid to claim higher pedagogic ground, but in the final analysis one system was not demonstrably better for young painters than the other.⁷⁵

In essence the dispute about hanging the Grand Gallery represented a clash of alternative modes of pictorial display: the one, favored by artists, was ahistorical and derived from critical categories established by de Piles; the other, preferred by connoisseurs, was historical and characterized by a scientific taxonomy. The former aimed to concentrate the beholder's attention first and foremost on pictorial qualities within the frame, whereas the latter encouraged appreciation of a given painting in terms of its place in a

diachronic, national sequence.

As with virtually everything else in France during the Revolution, the debate over rival strategies of display was inflected by broader ideological concerns. For the Museum Commission's critics, the issue of pedagogic efficacy and student needs masked a straightforward ideological discontent with an approach to pictorial display that signified a return to the bygone Luxembourg era. The mixed-school arrangement of pictures together with the exhibition of assorted luxury objects recalled too closely both discredited academic practices and, in the words of Bouquier, "the luxurious apartments of satraps and the great, the voluptuous boudoirs of courtesans, the cabinets of self-styled amateurs."⁷⁶ Even the Commission's likening of the museum to a cultivated flowerbed smacked of what had come to be seen as the leisured dilettantism of the Old Regime.⁷⁷ The system of school and chronology was by now well established in important northern European galleries, as we have seen, but it had yet to make an appearance in a significant public collection in France (thanks to the failure of d'Angiviller's museum project), and thus its implementation at the Revolutionary Louvre could be hailed as a break with the past and a forward-looking Republican innovation.

* * *

When the Conservatoire came to power in January 1794, composed of David's men, its agenda was already determined by the issues over which the Museum Commission and its critics had fought: restoration and the gallery installation.⁷⁸

In June the Conservatoire scheduled the restoration competition demanded by Picault and Lebrun.⁷⁹ In the event it proved a failure. A week after it was announced in Paris only a few people had come forward.⁸⁰ A second date was planned for the summer of the following year, and it was hoped that better publicity would yield a larger field of candidates. In September 3,000 notices were distributed to provincial towns throughout the land.⁸¹ As it happened, the Conservatoire was not to get a second chance, for by September 1794 paintings seized as war booty in Belgium had begun to arrive in Paris, the majority in need of restoration.⁸² The political pressure to put them on display immediately exceeded the desire to see justice done to a handful of would-be restorers. Besides, even without the Belgian intervention, there were doubts about the effectiveness of such a competition owing to the impossibility of determining "in a matter of days how successful a restoration would prove several years later," as J.-F.-L. Mérimée put it.⁸³ Ironically, though inevitably, the practice of restoration at the Louvre from 1794 was conducted much as it had been at the Bâtiments during the final years of the Old Regime.

The pamphlets of Picault and Lebrun, together with the guidelines for the

failed competition, reveal the extent to which attitudes toward restoration had changed in fifty years. The crucial aspect of restoration was no longer the ability to perform transferrals, though this was still of the utmost importance in certain cases. What made a good restorer was the ability to discern the techniques and materials of the various Old Masters and the skill to proceed with the restoration on the basis of that knowledge. As defined by one contemporary restorer, the main purpose of restoration was to return a given work of art to its "original state."⁸⁴ There was no greater threat to a picture than the ignorant restorer who in cleaning the surface mistook layers of glazes for coats of varnish or who in repainting a damaged area substituted his own hand for the style of the master.

The removal from the gallery of works of art that were deemed unsuitable began in February. The Conservatoire's word for this was "purification."⁸⁵ During a period of some months the gallery was closed to all but artists and foreigners (a special open day for the general public was held on July 14, 1794, the fifth anniversary of the Bastille).⁸⁶ The special concession to *étrangers* remained in place throughout the 1790s and is a clear indication of the propagandistic function of the museum.

What is particularly interesting about the process of "purification" is the difficulty the Conservatoire had in deciding what to do with certain types of art. Disdain for *objets de luxe*, porcelain, and so on, was outright, but the criterion for what pictures should be banished from view was not so clear-cut.⁸⁷ The confusion was not so much over style as content. For example, the few paintings in the original exhibition embodying "the French routine" (their presence had been exaggerated by the Conservatoire) were removed because of their potential corrupting influence. Problems arose, however, in cases in which indisputable masterpieces by canonical artists portrayed what since the Revolution had become sensitive subjects. The desire to create the perfect museum conflicted with the Revolutionary ambition to eradicate the memory of former customs and loyalties.

A good case in point was Rubens's Medici cycle (Fig. 9), whose original purpose was, of course, the glorification of the monarchy. (We should bear in mind that by the summer of 1794 the streets of the capital had been cleared of all royal monuments and insignia.⁸⁸) The fate of those paintings was discussed by the Conservatoire in August. On the one hand, there was concern that the sight of the "tyrant Henri IV and his wife" (Marie de Medici) might reawaken royalist sentiments. But, on the other, it was understood that this famous series had long been regarded by artists and connoisseurs as one of the supreme monuments of the history of art.⁸⁹ In the end a compromise was reached whereby two of the less overtly royalist episodes from the series — *The Treaty of Angoulême* and *The Conclusion of the Peace* (Figs. 41 and 42) — were chosen. Removed from their narrative



Figure 41. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Treaty of Angoulême*. Oil on canvas, 1621-5, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 42. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Conclusion of the Peace*. Oil on canvas, 1621-5, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

sequence, the dense allegory of the scenes rendered them illegible except as figurative paintings and examples of Rubens's brush; the nude foreground figures became all the more prominent as signifiers of the Ideal. All the same, as an added precaution all "feudal signs" in the paintings were painted over.⁹⁰

A second difficult class of paintings was Northern genre scenes. Though genre painting had proven highly popular with the Parisian public, appealing equally to aristocratic collectors and visitors to the Salon, the lowly subject matter of much Dutch and Flemish art was deemed inconsistent with the didactic, moralizing aims of the museum during the Terror. In strict Republican eyes the activities of farmyard and tavern would not mold and inspire the young artist or citizen along desired lines. In the spring of 1794 genre painting was denounced more than once in meetings of the SPRA. On one occasion the sculptor J.-J. Espercieux exclaimed that he would not give eighty *sous* for any Flemish picture.⁹¹ It was proposed that a separate room be created at the Louvre for selected genre pictures judged useful to artists from a purely technical point of view but inappropriate for general viewing. J.-B.-P. Lebrun, author of a recent book on the Northern schools of painting, came forward to defend the Flemish school and "the virtues of the cottage," yet he need not have worried.⁹² In practice, the exclusion of genre painting was never systematically applied. Indeed many Northern artists – David Teniers, Albert Cuyp, Adriaen van de Velde, Adriaen van der Werff, Bartolomeus Breenbergh, and Gérard de Lairesse – figured on the list of works requisitioned by the Conservatoire from Paris depots at the height of the Terror.⁹³ Misgivings about exposing the public to less than edifying subjects were outweighed by the demands of completeness at the museum.

Another potential problem was religious art. The public exhibition of miracles, saintly ecstasies, and martyrdoms ostensibly clashed with the government's policy to suppress "fanaticism" and to replace the worship of Catholicism with the Cult of Reason. But, of course, if religious paintings were to be excluded, the museum would be deprived of countless masterpieces of all schools and periods.⁹⁴ The dilemma intensified in September 1794 with the arrival of confiscated Belgian pictures. The first consignment contained numerous religious works, including Rubens's magnificent *Descent from the Cross* from Antwerp Cathedral (Fig. 43). An article in the *Décade philosophique* questioned the wisdom of importing such pictures to France and imposing their "catholic mythology . . . on a people delivered from the superstitions of catholicism."⁹⁵

Whatever doubts people may have had along these lines, public criticism was rare (it is significant that the above comment figured in a review of a travel book and not a discussion of the museum). The potential corrupting influence of religious art, or any other type of painting, though a serious



Figure 43. Peter Paul Rubens, *Descent from the Cross*. Oil on panel, 1611-12, Antwerp Cathedral.

concern, especially during the Terror, was finally not great enough to impede the momentum of the museum or to detract from its ultimate perfection. On the one hand, the ideal of a comprehensive museum transcended mundane political concerns; on the other, precisely because it was an ideal shared by all enlightened Europeans of the late eighteenth century, it was something the Republic aspired to realize in order to demonstrate its political, cultural, and ultimately military superiority.⁹⁶ Besides, for the sake of consistency and appearances, a potent rationalization was at hand.

A solution to the apparent contradiction between Revolutionary ideology and the purpose of much past art lay in the secularizing power of the museum and the reidentification of iconic paintings as art objects occupying

a place in the history of art. A transformation from *imago agens* to work of art, a shift in emphasis from function to form, from signified to signifier, would, it was suggested, result from displacement to a museum and an arrangement of the collection by school and chronology.⁹⁷ This was implicit in the October 1793 law outlawing vandalism of significant art objects bearing feudal signs: the alternative to destruction was removal to the "nearest museum."⁹⁸ The power of the museum to elide original meanings and to substitute for them new aesthetic and art historical significances is well understood today, but it is an attribute of museums first recognized and exploited during the Revolution.

As promised by David in his reports to the Convention, the Conservatoire set out to replace what it viewed as a disorderly jumble of pictures with what its spokesman Casimir Varon described as "a continuous and uninterrupted sequence revealing the progress of the arts and the degrees of perfection attained by various nations that have cultivated them."⁹⁹ If the program was not in itself radically new, what is remarkable is that its implementation in the Grand Gallery was recommended at this time on grounds of political expediency. In Varon's fascinating report to the CPI of May 1794 explaining the changes that the Conservatoire had so far effected, he proposed that the new installation would neutralize the regrettable content of many of the paintings:

An involuntary sense of regret interferes with the pleasure of spreading before you our riches; art has diverged far from its true path and celestial origins . . . a multitude of dangerous and frivolous experiments, the results of long centuries of slavery and shame, have debased its nature: wherever one turns one sees that its productions bear the marks of superstition, flattery, and debauchery. Such art does not recount the noble lessons that a regenerated people adores: it does nothing for liberty. One would be tempted to destroy all these playthings of folly and vanity if they were not so self-evidently unworthy of emulation. But nevertheless there is some point in trying to veil these vaults, to obliterate these false precepts. This is our task and we shall strive to achieve it. *It is through the overall effect of the collection that this can best be done.* It is by virtue of an air of grandeur and simplicity that the national gallery will win respect. It is through a rigorous selection that it must command the public's attention.¹⁰⁰

Simplicity, method, and rigorous selection were key at the Louvre during the Terror. In his report on the Commission des monuments, Mathieu envisaged a national museum in which "everything will be ordered and arranged with method, explained and embellished by method itself."¹⁰¹ Just as Varon contrasted the "flattery" and "debauchery" of the Old Regime with the "simplicity" and "rigor" of the new, so he compared the laxness and disorganization of the Museum Commission with the efficiency of the Conservatoire, whose conduct he described in like masculine, militaristic terms: "Our

administration in contrast exudes order, precision, and the strictest exactitude."¹⁰²

The methodical reordering of the collection promised by the Conservatoire proved easier said than done, however. Pressure to keep the museum open to artists and the public made changes hard to institute. Still only half of the Grand Gallery was available (the other half was still under repair), and money to expand exhibition space elsewhere in the Louvre, to accommodate the separate rooms for antique and modern sculpture, medals, cameos and gems, drawings, and engravings called for by Varon in his report, was not forthcoming. Frequent requests for funds through the winter of 1794-5 fell on deaf ears.¹⁰³ Most troublesome of all was the steady arrival of new works of art and the constant need to revise the existing installation. Despite close monitoring of the various Paris depots, keeping track of what was available proved difficult, to say the least. By September 1794, the Louvre depot alone had swelled to between six and seven hundred pictures – no one was sure of the exact number.¹⁰⁴ Any additions or substitutions in the permanent collection had both to comply with the demands of school and history and the dictates of visual symmetry.

The problems of choice and hanging were, of course, greatly compounded by the arrival from September onward of art seized in conquered lands. The Revolutionary Louvre would not be complete, or more than provisional, until the fruits of foreign conquest had been successfully assimilated. An account of the process of assimilation and permanent installation must wait until the next chapter. In the meantime we must turn our attention abroad, to the plundering of northern Europe and the systematic despoliation of Italy by Napoleon Bonaparte.

* * *

Official confiscation of art, as opposed to random looting by troops, was authorized by a report made by the CPI to the CPS on June 27, 1794, the day after the French victory at the battle of Fleurus, which marked the turning point in the two-year-old war with Austria. The CPI recommended that a handful of artists and men of letters be sent to Belgium in the wake of the Republican army in order to confiscate selected "monuments of interest to the arts and sciences."¹⁰⁵ On July 8 the CTA appointed a committee of four men – J.-B.-P. Lebrun, the Abbé Grégoire, A.-C. Besson (an early advocate of confiscation),¹⁰⁶ and Varon from the Louvre – to draw up instructions for generals in the field in the event they happened upon objects worth taking. The CTA was the obvious body to supervise such business since the elaboration of guidelines for selection and confiscation complemented the work that had gone into their earlier manual on cataloguing and conserving valuable objects throughout the land.¹⁰⁷ Belgium, after all, was now another

French province whose monuments might enrich Parisian institutions: the Louvre, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Jardin des Plantes. In due course a number of experts were chosen in various fields to direct the operation, including the painter J.-B. Wicar (who was forced to resign following the fall of Robespierre), the architect de Wailly, the botanist André Thouin, and the antiquarian and former secretary of the Commission des monuments, G.-M. Leblond. At about the same time, however, apparently at the behest of the CPS, the distinguished chemist L.-B. Guyton de Morveau, then serving with the French army at Brussels, authorized two men to do precisely what the CTA's experts were being sent to do. Morveau's delegates were the painter and former pupil of David, Luc Barbier, then an officer in the Hussars, and one Léger. In the event, they sent the first spoils of war back to France.

Regarding the choice of paintings and other objects, much if not all direction was provided by the CTA in Paris. In the realm of art, Lebrun's knowledge of the Low Countries, accumulated in his years as a dealer and in the preparation of his three-volume *Galerie des peintres flamands, hollandais et allemands* (1792-6), proved invaluable.¹⁰⁸ Whatever reservations contemporaries may have had about his character and professional conduct, Lebrun was a formidable connoisseur, perhaps the greatest of his age, and his experience was essential to the formation of the Louvre during the 1790s. Cecil Gould was probably right to suspect his influence in Barbier's choice of pictures and to note that the first three sent back from Belgium, Rubens's *Descent from the Cross* (Fig. 43), the *Erection of the Cross*, and the *Crucifixion*, had been singled out for special praise in his recent book.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, they were obvious choices and topped the register of Flemish pictures that had, in the words of one Convention delegate, "long attracted travelers from all over Europe as well as the admiration of painters."¹¹⁰ More significant, no doubt, was Lebrun's influence in the selection of representative works by dozens of lesser Flemish and Dutch masters. The list, featuring two works by twenty-one artists and single pictures by more than sixty others, is at once too varied and too specific to have been the product of chance. It is as if Lebrun's *Galerie* provided the model, and perhaps it did.¹¹¹

The first of the 150 paintings to be confiscated in Belgium arrived in Paris in September. Political pressure to display these treasures was such that they went on view at the Salon just five days after their arrival, ousting pictures by contemporary French artists submitted for the annual *concours*.¹¹² This special exhibition in the Salon set a precedent for all future convoys of war booty arriving at the Louvre. A day after their arrival in Paris, Luc Barbier, who had escorted the convoy in person, appeared before the Convention and made a speech important for its rhetorical justification of foreign conquest:

The fruits of genius are the patrimony of liberty. . . . For too long these masterpieces have been soiled by the gaze of servitude. It is in the bosom of a free people that the legacy of great men must come to rest. . . . The immortal works of Rubens, Van Dyck and the other founders of the Flemish school are no longer on alien soil . . . they are today delivered to the home of the arts and of genius, the land of liberty and equality, the French Republic.¹¹³

Pre-empting obvious criticism that these paintings had been removed from native soil and their proper purpose, Barbier claimed that they had found their rightful home in the bosom of liberty, the true home of creativity and genius. Just as the Revolution had freed Frenchmen and would soon liberate all of Europe, so confiscation had freed these paintings, too long subjected to the "gaze of servitude." Furthermore, once deposited at the Louvre the museum would become a universal source of inspiration, drawing artists from around the world. Finally, recent conquests served "to make known to the Republic the order and discipline of its armies."

In one speech Barbier managed simultaneously to defend French confiscation on ideological, pedagogic, and military grounds. His address became the basis for all subsequent public justifications of French conquest, and there were many. Yet it is worth noting that the Louvre was already the focus of imperialist dreams before the battle of Fleurus. Kersaint, for example, writing in 1791 on the Louvre and other monuments, envisaged a new Paris, "peopled by a race of men regenerated by liberty," succeeding Rome as the "capital of the arts."¹¹⁴ A similar vision preoccupied Boissy d'Anglas early in 1794:

Imagine Paris . . . as the capital of the arts: imagine the inestimable advantages of it becoming the home of all the treasures of the mind . . . it must be the school of the universe, the hub of human science, and command the respect of the whole world through knowledge and instruction.¹¹⁵

Most familiar is the Abbé Grégoire's call to enrich France with cultural treasures at the expense of its vanquished enemies, culminating in the acquisition of the greatest prize of all: the *Apollo Belvedere* and the other ancient marbles of Rome.¹¹⁶ It was fitting that Paris, capital of what Revolutionaries perceived as a new political world in the making, should naturally become the capital of art and knowledge as well. With this premise in place, confiscation became a matter of taking from the ignorant and giving to the enlightened for the ultimate benefit of all. In the new cultural order, the Louvre would become museum to the entire world.

In 1796 the policy of confiscation was taken south to Italy by General Napoleon Bonaparte where it was raised to new levels of sophistication.¹¹⁷ Though Bonaparte manifested little personal interest in art, he well understood its value in the realm of politics and war. After a quick victory over

the Piedmontese in April, he turned inland toward Parma. Before entering the city he sought information from the French minister at Genoa about collections of art to be found not only in Parma but also in Milan, Modena, Piacenza, and Bologna.¹¹⁸ Breaking with the informal looting of collections in the Low Countries, Bonaparte stipulated the surrender of works of art as part of the armistice he signed with the Duke of Parma on May 9, setting a precedent for future campaigns (Fig. 44). Though confiscation was on occasion ordered in retaliation for local resistance, as in Verona following the revolt of April 1797, or in Rome a year later to avenge the assassination of General M.-L. Duphot, in the main it was legitimized (and tied directly to battles won) through treaty agreements.

In advance of the armistice with the Duke of Parma and in anticipation of great victories to come, Bonaparte wrote to Paris on May 6 asking that "three or four known artists" be sent to Italy to assist in the choice and transport of his booty.¹¹⁹ But already in Paris, in the wake of the fall of Piedmont and apparently in ignorance of Bonaparte's innovative armistice of May 9, the Directory had decided to authorize the continuation of the looting that had proved so successful north of the Alps. In due course five commissioners were chosen: the chemist C.-L. Berthollet, the mathematician Gaspard Monge, the botanists Thouin and J.-J. de La Billardière, and the painter J.-S. Barthélemy (who was later assisted by Wicar and Gros).¹²⁰ Though our concern is with the paintings and sculptures taken for the Lou-

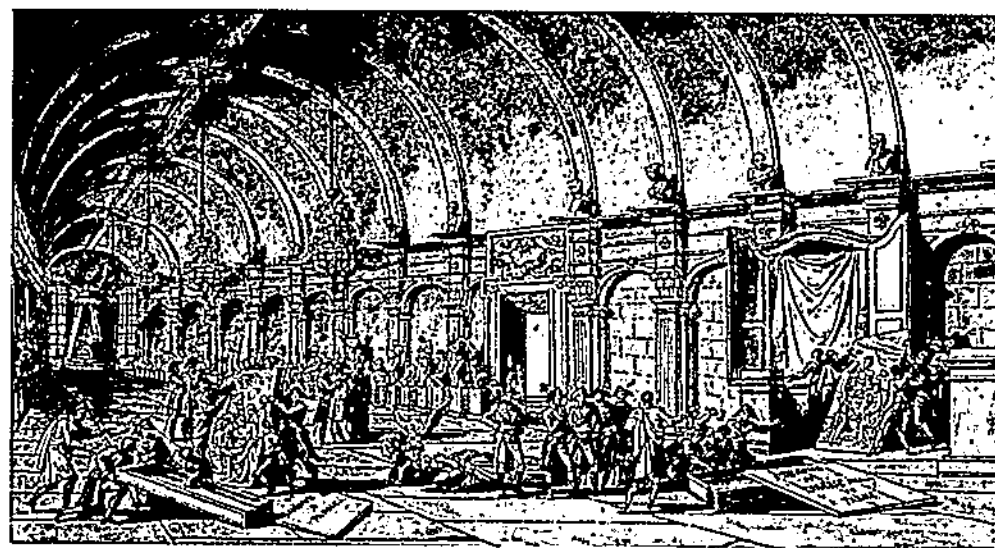


Figure 44. Charles Meynier, *Confiscation of Paintings at Parma by French Troops*. Drawing, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

vre, the composition of the commission reminds us that art was by no means all that was confiscated in Italy.

Following their arrival in Milan in early June (conquered a fortnight earlier), the commissioners were kept busy as Bonaparte marched victorious toward Rome. In rapid succession Parma, Piacenza, Milan, Cremona, Modena, Bologna, and Cento fell to the French and were surveyed by members of the commission. In each case works of art were ceded by treaty; in some cases the number was specified, in other cases not. In Bologna on June 23 an armistice was signed with papal delegates whereby 100 paintings and statues from Rome, chosen by the commissioners, were to be given over to France.¹²¹ Between then and the spring of 1797 further works of art were ceded by Modena, Verona, Mantua, Perugia, and Venice. According to General F.-R.-J. de Pommereul's list, published in year VI (1797-8), in all just under 200 paintings and 100 sculptures were chosen during this first phase of French conquest. For all that was taken, certain important cities, notably Florence, Naples, Turin, and Brescia, remained untouched, as did most private collections not belonging to heads of state. Some of these cities would later be at least partially stripped, while Bonaparte eventually found ways of acquiring desired treasures in noble collections.¹²²

The question of who selected the works of art and according to what principles arises again. As in Belgium, the commissioners' choice met with almost complete approval at home, suggesting that they were given clear guidelines if not detailed lists of objects. The one exception to the rule supports such a conclusion. After the first French victories in northern Italy, Bonaparte, impatient for the arrival of the commissioners from Paris, appointed the artist J.-P. Tinet, who happened to be on hand, to begin the process of confiscation.¹²³ By the time the experts from Paris arrived, Tinet had already been to Milan, Cremona, and Modena and partially filled the stipulated quota of works of art. On May 17 Tinet dispatched seven cases of assorted antiquities and works of art, which proved a dismal anticlimax when they were unpacked at the Louvre six months later. The *Décade philosophique* was forced to admit to an expectant public that "with the exception of five etruscan vases . . . there is nothing worthy [in the convoy] to be offered to the French Republic."¹²⁴ Acting on his own and in haste, Tinet had put together a less than satisfactory collection of objects.

The official commissioners were altogether more professional. They went about their business with an assurance that suggests a guiding hand. At least with respect to art, it is more than likely that they knew in advance what to look for. Between common knowledge of what constituted the major artistic monuments of Italy and detailed guidebooks providing information about less obvious works of art, a list of desiderata could easily have been compiled in Paris. A guidebook had been used to scout works of

art in Germany and (at least) one was most probably used for Italy as well.¹²⁵ Thouin, in his otherwise discreet account of his stay in Italy, tells us that he traveled with J.-J. Le Français de Lalande's popular *Voyage d'un Français en Italie* (1769), and this may well have been the common source.¹²⁶ If at first the use of guidebooks to direct the confiscation of foreign art seems ironic in the sense that a central museum in Paris undermined the purpose of the Grand Tour, we should recall that the point of building the Revolutionary Louvre was precisely to alter the priorities of European tourists and artists and to make Paris the artistic capital of the modern world. Where relevant, other sources of information must have been used. A list of antiquities from Verona, for example, refers throughout to Scipione Maffei (1675-1755), the erudite friend and correspondent of the Comte de Caylus, who had published several antiquarian studies of that city.¹²⁷ In their choice of 500 manuscripts from the Vatican, the commissioners closely followed the requests of the Institut and Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and referred constantly to the "printed catalogue" issued by the latter.¹²⁸ For paintings, Luigi Lanzi's two-volume *Storia pittorica della Italia* might also have been consulted. Published at Bassano in 1795-6, it was the most up-to-date and authoritative account of Italian painting. Certainly Lanzi's book was used in about 1800 when the Louvre drew up a list of Florentine artists (mainly "Primitives") not yet represented in the museum.¹²⁹

Works of art were chosen according to one of two criteria: first, celebrity; second, rarity. In the first category were those canonical paintings and sculptures esteemed the world over. The final list of objects taken from Rome begins with famous antiques from the Vatican and Capitoline Museum – the *Apollo Belvedere*, *Laocoon*, *Belvedere Torso*, and so on. Eighty-three of the 100 works of art ceded by the pope were antique marbles. Though many of those chosen are unfamiliar today, at that time they were universally admired by amateurs. In the words of Haskell and Penny, the selection "implied a tribute to consecrated taste."¹³⁰ The same could be said of paintings from Rome. That list opens with two of the three paintings thought by the French (following Poussin) to be the greatest in Rome: Raphael's *Transfiguration* (Fig. 52) and Domenichino's *Last Communion of Saint Jerome* (the third, Daniele da Volterra's fresco of the *Descent from the Cross* at S. Trinita dei Monti, was immovable).¹³¹ It continues with other scarcely less famous altarpieces: Guercino's *Saint Petronilla*, Caravaggio's *Deposition* from the Chiesa Nuova, Andrea Sacchi's *Vision of Saint Romuald*, and Reni's *Martyrdom of Saint Peter*. These paintings, long admired by amateurs, had also been faithfully studied and copied by generations of students at the French Academy in Rome; their capacity to inspire future students in Paris was an important consideration.

If little guidance would have been needed to select these obvious master-

pieces, the same was not true of the large number of paintings chosen for their rarity. The commissioners' second task was to bring back pictures that would fill gaps in the museum's Italian holdings. This complementary ambition, stemming from the desire to provide instruction in the *history* of art, accounts for the inclusion in the booty of works by the likes of Giorgione, Simone Cantarini, Dosso Dossi, Elisabetta Sirani, and Carlo Bononi – artists who would not have been recommended to students for copying. Where art historical rather than artistic instruction was concerned only a representative sample of a given artist's work was required.¹³² Who to include in the survey of each school was surely a matter decided by the museum authorities. Directions from Paris must also explain the commission's excursions to Perugia and Cento in search of works by Perugino, Guercino, and his pupil Ercole Gennari. A total of seventeen Peruginos, twenty-eight Guercinos, and three Gennaris were brought to Paris. Such disproportionate numbers (compared with, say, fifteen Raphaels, nine Renis, and three Domenichinos) were less an aberration on the part of the commissioners than the product of the museum's didactic program, to which I will return in the following chapter.

The removal of art from Italy, culminating in the mighty third convoy from Rome and Venice, was presented to the public at home as an exotic pageant, in which Bonaparte's Grand Army, the commissioners, and invaluable masterpieces of art played leading roles. Through press reports the public followed the progress of the most eagerly awaited convoy through successive stages of its tortuous journey to Paris, each step on the way reported like installments in a serialized adventure. Descriptions of the bumpy road and curious bystanders between Rome and the port of Livorno (Leghorn), and the threat of English frigates on the open seas, lent the reports local color and a touch of suspense. A pair of letters published in the *Décade* give us, in one, a fascinating account of how the paintings were rolled in waxed cylinders and the statues encased in plaster and straw and then transported overland on specially constructed carts to the coast, whence they traveled by ship to Marseilles.¹³³ The other letter gives an improbable, though no less interesting, account of the arrival of the third convoy at Livorno, pulled by 120 buffalo and 60 large-horned oxen:

The whole town came out to greet the convoy; everyone was amazed by the power of a nation which, four hundred leagues from native soil . . . had managed to transport such a large and precious cargo across the Apennines from Rome in order to decorate the capital of its empire. What a nation, this France, they said. So impressed were they that they called her THE NATION, as if she were the only one on earth deserving of the title.¹³⁴

It was indeed a miraculous achievement, especially as, by all reports, so lit-

tle damage was suffered by those fragile works of art. The whole operation was a large-scale propaganda exercise managed with the precision of a military campaign, which in an important sense it was, since the prime beneficiary was General Bonaparte. To the people at home these trophies of conquest spoke more loudly and enduringly of his success in war than reports of victorious battles ever could.

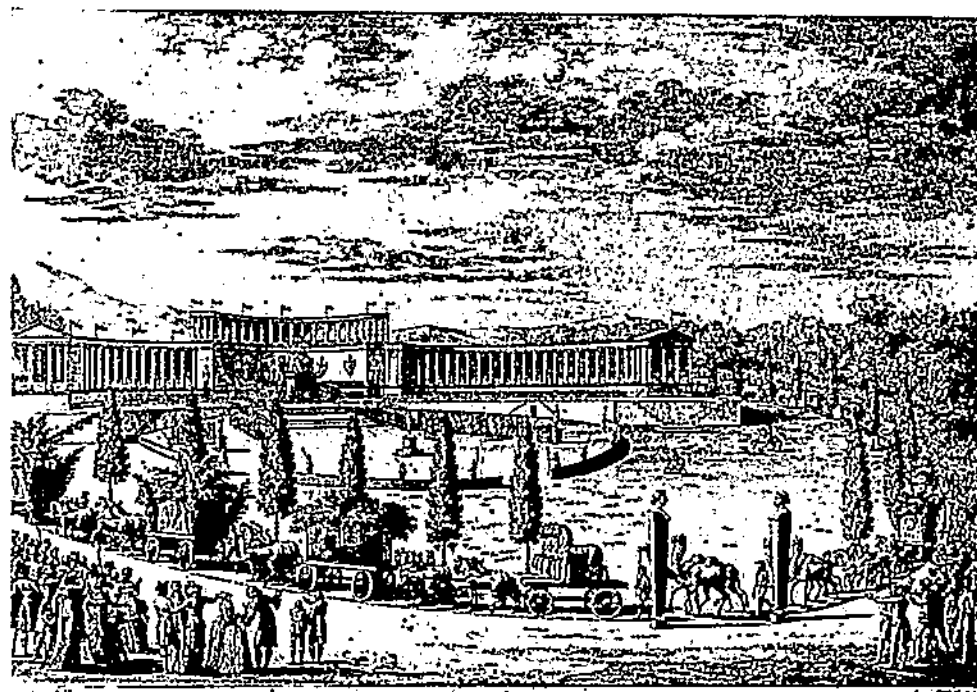
As a result of Bonaparte's Italian campaign the Louvre took on an increasingly military air. The symbolism of war and military might replaced that of popular triumph over despotism. Artists and the public now had the army to thank for the museum as much as the Revolution. Witness the tribute offered by the artist Baltard: "The National Museum and its precious contents are recompense for the lives and blood of our fellow citizens spilled on the field of honor. French artists are worthy of this prize; they fully recognize its importance."¹³⁵

The press, eager to fan the flames of patriotism, predisposed the public to view the art from Italy as the bounty of war. In May 1797, for example, the *Décade* announced the arrival of a small consignment from Mantua, augmenting "the number of trophies that will celebrate until the end of time the memorable exploits of our armies."¹³⁶ By 1798, according to an account of the new exhibition of booty from Lombardy, the new national flag, the *tricolore*, displayed in the gallery four years earlier, had been displaced by an ornamental arrangement of captured enemy arms and battle standards:

A trophy of arms and flags taken from the enemy decorate the door of the Salon. In the middle an inscription reads: "To the Army of Italy." The sight of this trophy warmed my blood, the words brought tears to my eyes. . . . One day we will raise monuments of marble and bronze to our warriors. Unnecessary efforts! The true and lasting monuments to their glory will be in our museums.¹³⁷

Bonaparte's personal identification with the museum was secured in December 1797 at a dinner held in his honor in the section of the Grand Gallery destined to house the Italian schools.¹³⁸

Of all events connected with the removal of art from Italy none was more dramatic than the festival organized in 1798 to mark the arrival in Paris of the third convoy containing the long-awaited marbles and paintings from Rome, central Italy, and Venice (Fig. 45). After lengthy delays caused by a combination of political problems in Rome (resolved by the Treaty of Tolentino, signed in February 1797), a shortage of funds for transportation, and bad weather en route, the convoy finally arrived at Paris in July 1798.¹³⁹ Though previous convoys had arrived at the Louvre with little fanfare, the contents of the third and last convoy called for a celebration. It was commissioner Thouin who it seems pushed for a spectacular entry into Paris. In his letter to the Directory of August 1797, written once the convoy



107. France, 1827. *ENTRÉE TRIOMPHALE DES MONUMENTS DES SCIENCES ET ARTS EN FRANCE; FÊTE À CE SUEZ.*
Les 9 et 10 Thermidor, An 6^e de la République.

Figure 45. Pierre-Gabriel Berthault, *Triumphal Entry of the Monuments of the Arts and Science, 9 and 10 Thermidor Year VI*. Engraving, 1798.

was under way, he calculated the enormous political benefit of a "triumphal procession" traversing the length of the French Republic.¹⁴⁰ By September, as he prepared to escort his precious cargo up the Rhone from Marseilles, he had conceived in considerable detail an elaborate parade through the capital.¹⁴¹ His plans were followed to the letter when the barges eventually reached the banks of the Seine.

Originally the festival was planned for Bastille Day, but last-minute delays caused the ceremony to be rescheduled to coincide with the annual Festival of Liberty marking the anniversary of the fall of Robespierre and the end of the Terror.¹⁴² On the morning of 9 thermidor (July 27), forty-five cases were loaded onto the carts that had borne them overland in Italy. The procession, divided into three groups – natural history, books and manuscripts, and fine arts – made its way from the Museum of Natural History on the Left Bank to the Champs de Mars, where it arrived late in the afternoon. In addition to carts decked with oak garlands and tricolors, the

parade consisted of cavalry and marching troops, musical bands, and representatives of the three divisions. Since for safety's sake all of the artistic treasures were kept in their packing cases (with the lone exception of the bronze Horses of San Marco), visual interest was confined to the exotic plants and animals, dromedaries, lions, and so on, that led the way. Banners and inscriptions described what could not be seen. Introducing the sculptures at the front of the arts division was a banner that read: "Monuments of Antique Sculpture. Greece gave them up; Rome lost them; Their fate has twice changed; / It will not change again."¹⁴³ Inscriptions on individual cases repeated the full array of metaphors and apologies for the museum that had been introduced since 1793. That on the Horses of San Marco, for example, read: "Horses transported from Corinth to Rome, and from Rome to Constantinople to Venice, and from Venice to France. They are finally on free soil." That on the cart bearing the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Clio*: "Both will reiterate our battles, our victories." The banner preceding the paintings exclaimed: "Artists hurry! Your masters have arrived." Meanwhile a song composed for the occasion resounded with talk of prize trophies, vanquished tyrants, and the Republic's eternal right to its plunder.

Upon the arrival of the procession at the Champs de Mars, Thouin gave a speech loaded with more of the same fuzzy rhetoric. What better way of commemorating the end of the Terror, he insisted, than a festival that will wash away memories of tyranny and replace them with thoughts of nature, the arts, and liberty! Though Thouin described the triumphal ceremony as uniquely suited to that anniversary, others (and no doubt Thouin himself) had earlier prepared to emphasize the appropriateness of the convoy's arrival on the anniversary of the Bastille. Certainly the *Décade* had committed itself by declaring July 14 a day well chosen, for it was after all the fall of the Bastille that had triggered "this great revolution which has given us so much precious plunder."¹⁴⁴ Had the convoy been delayed further, the anniversary of August 10 would have done just as well. Cutting through the rhetoric, what mattered most was the acquisition of the world's most highly prized works of art. A refrain in the song said it all: "Rome is no more in Rome; / Every Hero, every Great Man / Has changed country: / Rome is no more in Rome, / It is all in Paris."¹⁴⁵