

# Victoria & Albert Art & Love

## The patronage and collections of Louis-Philippe and Napoléon III during the era of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

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Essays from a study day held at the National Gallery,  
London on 5 and 6 June 2010  
Edited by Susanna Avery-Quash  
Design by Tom Keates at Mick Keates Design

Published by Royal Collection Trust /  
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Royal Collection Enterprises Limited  
St James's Palace, London SW1A 1JR

ISBN 978 1905686 75 9  
First published online 23/04/2012

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## The patronage and collections of Louis-Philippe and Napoléon III during the era of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

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**Fig. 1**  
Workshop of Franz Winterhalter;  
*Portrait of Louis-Philippe (1773–1850)*, 1840  
Oil on canvas, 233 x 167cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais



**Fig. 2**  
After Franz Winterhalter;  
*Portrait of Napoleon III (1808–1873)*, 1860  
Tapestry from the Gobelin manufactory,  
241 x 159cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais

The reputation of certain monarchs is so distorted by caricaturists as to undermine their real achievements. Such was the case with Louis-Philippe (1773–1850; **fig. 1**), son of Philippe Egalité, who had voted for the execution of his cousin Louis XVI, and with his successor, Napoléon III (1808–73; **fig. 2**), son of Hortense de Beauharnais and Louis, one of Napoleon Bonaparte's brothers. Furthermore, these two rulers have been discredited by history for the manner in which their reigns ended: the first fleeing a revolution, the second leading his country to a bloody defeat by Prussia. For all that, both of them enriched their country, notably in the cultural sphere. They also share the distinction of having been admired by Queen Victoria, and they both found refuge in England – Louis-Philippe in 1848 and Napoleon III in 1870, after his abdication.

In this paper I shall not deal with the relationship between artistic life and political power but will concentrate instead on the patronage and collections of Louis-Philippe and Napoléon III. This study is limited to the period 1837–61, from the

accession of Queen Victoria to the end of the happy life she shared with Prince Albert. This is a narrower span than the combined reigns of Louis-Philippe (1830–48) and Napoléon III (1852–70), but this constraint enables us to focus on comparisons between all three sovereigns. Furthermore, in order to keep the study within reasonable limits, the investigation concentrates on two significant parts of the collections of French rulers: painting and porcelain.

The cultural patronage of Louis-Philippe and Napoléon III was important, but the destinies of their collections were different, notably because Louis-Philippe refused to allow his private collection to become part of the national heritage. Napoléon, on the other hand, was content for what remained in his personal possession to enter the state collections. Louis-Philippe had the means of spending his own income on acquisitions, whereas Napoléon was obliged to use whatever funds he was allowed by the state for his Civil List. His numerous purchases of works of art were not solely for his own enjoyment: churches and museums were also beneficiaries.

## Artistic life

In the field of official art – known increasingly as ‘academic’ art – the Salon grew in importance in nineteenth-century France. The role of the sovereign was important: they could both lend works they had commissioned and make purchases from the exhibitions. Thematically the royal loans were restricted to historical scenes (at the Salon of 1842, for example, Siméon Fort exhibited four canvases of battles and sieges ordered by the King for the ‘musée historique de Versailles’) and several portraits.

The evidence for Napoléon III’s interest in painting is rather contradictory. On the one hand Maxime du Camp (1822–94) wrote of the Emperor’s visit to the Salon of 1853 that he ‘passed through the galleries at a gallop’. On the other hand, the inventory of paintings in the Emperor’s private possession<sup>1</sup> shows that he began making annual purchases at the Salon from 1855, acquisitions that ultimately amounted to more than eighty contemporary works. But 1855 was also the year of the first French Exposition Universelle, inspired by the Great Exhibition which had taken place in London in 1851 thanks to the vision and energy of Prince Albert. These universal exhibitions brought London and Paris closer together: Queen Victoria came to Paris to visit the French version. For the Emperor it was chiefly a means of displaying the economic and artistic dynamism of France to the rest of Europe. One of the exhibits was Winterhalter’s portrait of Empress Eugénie surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting (**fig. 3**),<sup>2</sup> completed in 1855; it occupied a place of honour in the Grand Salon of the Fine Arts Pavilion. From the exhibition the Emperor bought a mother-of-pearl fan for Queen Victoria and a painting, *The Brawl* (1855) by Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, as a birthday present for Prince Albert.<sup>3</sup> For himself he bought a beautiful picture that had caught his eye, Corot’s *Memory of Marcoussis* (1855; Paris, Musée d’Orsay). At the time of the Paris exhibition of



**Fig. 3**  
Franz Winterhalter; *Empress Eugénie  
surrounded by her ladies in waiting*, 1855  
Oil on canvas, 300 x 420cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais

1855 Napoléon III also presented Prince Albert with a French tribute to his great achievement of the Great Exhibition of 1851: J.P.M. Dieterle's commemorative vase of the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>4</sup>

The sovereign could take a stance on matters of organisation that could significantly affect the display of artists' work – and hence the reputation of the artists' themselves. Thus in 1855, at the time of the Universal Exhibition, Gustave Courbet (1819–77), with the support of his friend the collector Alfred Bruyas (1821–76), obtained permission to exhibit around forty of his works – including his celebrated *The Artist's Studio* (1855) – at a separate venue they had rented together. Their pavilion was emblazoned 'DU REALISME' ('ABOUT REALISM'). The opening on the 28 June, a little more than a month after the Exposition Universelle, was not the success for which the painter had hoped. This turn of events anticipated the Emperor's own response to the Salon of 1863. In that year there was a kind of 'Secession' of artists, including Courbet, Manet, Pissaro and Whistler, who obtained the Emperor's support to mount a separate exhibition, which they called the 'Salon des Refusés' ('Exhibition of Rejected Art'). This episode demonstrates that in 1863, as in 1855, imperial 'support' for the arts was not confined to 'official' art.

## Projects: residences

The museum at Versailles, dedicated 'to the glories of France', was above all, a political and educational project to reconcile the French nation with its past. It was opened on 10 June 1837. Louis-Philippe ordered that appropriate works be sought from the royal residences and from the stores of institutions such as the Louvre



and the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, and he also issued a number of important commissions for paintings and sculptures on military themes. The iconographic programme spanned the period from 1300 to Louis-Philippe's own reign. He also commissioned paintings of the royal residence, such as that of Compiègne by Siméon Fort of 1843 (**fig. 4**).

Louis-Philippe made use of the palaces of the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud, Eu, Fontainebleau and Compiègne. It was at Compiègne, for instance, that the wedding took place in 1832 of his daughter Louise to Prince Leopold, first king of the Belgians (the uncle of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert). As part of the wedding preparations Louis-Philippe decided to create a theatre, to place orders with the Sèvres porcelain manufactory and to send paintings to Compiègne<sup>5</sup> – indeed, he continued to send new works to the palace after the wedding had taken place. He also bought watercolours by artists such as James Roberts (c.1800–1867) and William Callow (1812–1908); the latter's *View of the Port of Le Havre* (**fig. 5**),<sup>6</sup> purchased in 1841, was sent to Compiègne the same year. Callow was also employed for a time as a drawing teacher to Louis-Philippe's children. Additionally, the King sent to Compiègne a series of large eighteenth-century tapestry cartoons by Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700–1777) on the theme of *The History of Don Quixote* (**fig. 6**), demonstrating his growing interest in the art of the eighteenth century that would develop particularly during the second Empire. Napoléon III made use of Natoire's tapestry cartoons to decorate a gallery, which served as a dining room and an approach to the new theatre.

**Fig. 4** (above left)  
Simeon Fort (1793–1861),  
*View of the Palace of Compiègne*, 1843  
Oil on canvas, 326 x 171 cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais

**Fig. 5** (above)  
William Callow (1812–1908),  
*View of the Port of Le Havre*, 1840  
Watercolour, 58.1 x 89.7 cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais





**Fig. 6**  
Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700–1777),  
*The History of Don Quixote: The Meal of  
Sancho on the Island of Barataria*, 1734–5  
Oil on canvas, 325 x 538cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais



**Fig. 7**  
Charles-François Daubigny (1817–78),  
*The Valley of Optevoz (Isère)*, 1857  
Oil on canvas, 97 x 194cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais

Among the other artists patronised by the Emperor was Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805–73), who had served both Louis-Philippe and Queen Victoria (he had painted the picture of the Queen presenting her children to Louis-Philippe at Windsor in 1844),<sup>7</sup> and who became official portraitist to the Empress. Napoléon III's private purchases of contemporary works from the salons between 1853 and 1869 were intended for hanging in his palaces and châteaux: for example, *The Valley of Optevoz (Isère)* (**fig. 7**) by Charles-François Daubigny (1817–78) was sent to Compiègne. A number of watercolours by Fortuné de Fournier (1798–1864) of the imperial apartments at Saint Cloud, which were occupied by Queen Victoria at the time of the 1855 visit, also survive in Compiègne as well as in the Royal Collection at Windsor; these show contemporary paintings by Cabat, Dubufe and Fromentin decorating the walls.

## Commissions from the Sèvres factory

In 1843, on the occasion of her stay at the Château d'Eu between 2 and 7 September, the Queen received a gift from Louis-Philippe: a jewel casket with scenes painted by Jean-Charles Develly (1783–1862) for the Sèvres factory.<sup>8</sup> It is comparable to a casket that formerly belonged to Queen Marie-Amélie and has been recently acquired by the Louvre.<sup>9</sup> For the palaces at Compiègne and Saint-Cloud Louis-Philippe ordered in 1832, in connection with marriage of Louise and Leopold, a set of tableware known as the 'blue agate service' with a frieze of palmettes in raised gilding (fig. 8). The residences were also enriched with vases, purchased between 1832 (with an order for fifty white-ground vases) and 1838. In all there were three separate consignments, comprising some 83 vases in total. One of these was an Egyptian Vase B known as 'Egyptian Champollion' (fig. 9), its shape, decoration and colouring derived from drawings by Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) of ornaments at Thebes.

During the Second Empire, commissions from the Sèvres firm became even more numerous. For the imperial table at Compiègne and Fontainebleau the same type of service was provided from 1856, in white with a gilded edge and cipher. Mention should also be made of the numerous other Sèvres ornaments, such as the *garnitures de cheminée* (mantle clock with flanking ornaments) in each bedchamber. A pair of Chinese Ly vases in Celadon ground (fig. 10) was delivered to Compiègne in 1853, where they adorned the Empress's bedchamber. Their decoration seems strikingly modern, the border of gilded foliage anticipating Art Nouveau – perhaps even Art Deco. In 1855 Napoléon III commissioned from the Sèvres manufactory a *garniture de toilette* with the cipher of Queen Victoria (fig. 11), as a gift for the English monarch.

## Royal collections

By the time he came to the throne, Louis-Philippe already possessed a notable art collection. Alongside the Versailles project there was the 'Galerie espagnole' (Spanish Gallery), for which Baron Taylor (1789–1879) and the painter Adrien Dauzats (1804–68), in association with another painter, Pharamond Blanchard (1805–73), were charged by the King with the task of assembling the collection in 18 months. In 1838 the collection went on view in Paris, on the first floor of the colonnade of the Louvre: it comprised eight paintings by El Greco, 39 by Murillo, 26 attributed at the time to Ribera, 24 attributed to Zurbaran, and 11 by Goya.



**Fig. 8**  
Sèvres manufactory, sauceboat, 1830–35  
Porcelain, height 19cm, length 24.5cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais



**Fig. 9**  
Sèvres manufactory, Egyptian Vase B called  
'Egyptian Champollion', 1832  
Porcelain, height 62cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais



This focus on Spanish art begs the question of whether Louis-Philippe had a more personal collection of French art; scrutiny of the sale of his collection in Paris on 28 April 1851 suggests that this was indeed the case. This evidence reveals that he owned numerous historical portraits, along with French landscapes and some foreign pictures, including a painting by the British artist Newton Fielding (1799–1856). Some major French names are also present, such as Girodet and Géricault, the latter represented in particular by two paintings today in the Louvre, *A Cavalryman of the Imperial Guard* (Salon 1812) and *Wounded Cuirassier taking Cover* (1814).

As for Napoléon III's collecting instincts, his passion for antiquity and archaeology was well known. Some people believed him to be indifferent to painting, but a recent scholar, Catherine Granger, has produced evidence to the contrary, pointing to important acquisitions made through the Civil List. First, the Emperor showed an interest in the German landscape artist Oswald Achenbach (1827–1905). His German, Swiss and English connections also explain the interest he showed for Waldmüller and Calame at the Universal Exhibition in 1855. More surprising, perhaps, was his interest in Jules Breton (1827–1906) at the 1855 exhibition, which was followed up by the Empress when she bought Breton's *Calling in the Gleaners* (Musée d'Orsay) in 1859. This painting was hung first at Saint-Cloud, before being sent in 1862 to the Luxembourg Palace. In 1861 the Emperor bought Cabanel's *Nymph abducted by a Faun* (1860) and at the Salon of 1863 he paid 15,000 francs for the artist's most celebrated work, *The Birth of Venus* (1863).

Among purchases made after 1861 it is worth noting Courbet's *The Covered Brook* (1865), bought at the Salon of 1865 on the advice of the Count of Nieuwerke, Napoléon's Superintendent of Fine Arts, and hung at the palace of Saint-Cloud. The Emperor also bought entire collections, such as that of his cousin, the Princess

**Fig. 10**  
Sèvres manufactory,  
pair of Chinese Ly vases, 1851  
Porcelain, height 32cm  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais

**Fig. 11**  
Sèvres manufactory, *garniture  
de toilette* with the cipher  
of Queen Victoria, 1855  
Porcelain  
Compiègne, Musée national du palais



Baciocchi, in 1854, and in 1861 the outstanding collection of the Marquis Campana, which had been formed at Rome, and which comprised 11,835 items, including 646 paintings. Although the catalogue of his collection, published in 1862, was entitled *Catalogue of the paintings, Renaissance sculptures and maiolica of the Musée Napoléon III*, this was in no sense a private purchase – the Emperor purchased the Campana collection for the French nation.

The constraints of time and space have meant that the present survey has only been able to consider paintings and porcelain; a more complete picture would include sculpture and other works of art, although in those areas too, the story would have been much the same.

The big difference between the collections of these two French sovereigns and that of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert is that in the case of the former they do not, in general, survive intact. Both rulers – but especially Louis-Philippe – were interested in history. In his creation of the Galerie espagnole it is clear that Louis-Philippe envisaged that it would one day form part of the national collection. Napoléon III shared his predecessor's interest in history and landscape, but unlike him, did not form a great collection. His interest in the Old Masters seems to have been limited, although he took a greater interest in contemporary art and his patronage of various manufactories was significant. He was concerned with maintaining the standards and savoir-faire of the imperial factories, and his desire to support French artistic endeavours was genuine. While Frédéric Reiset was buying German Renaissance drawings for the Louvre in 1852 – including works by Dürer and Holbein – the Emperor was purchasing the work of contemporary German romantics such as Achenbach (whose work also featured in the collection of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert), Waldmüller and French artists including Corot and the little-known Penguilly l'Haridon, whose work was, however, praised by Baudelaire. The Emperor was more a sponsor than a collector, although his tastes and artistic interests, as we have seen, were close to those of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

## Notes

1. *Table alphabétique des peintres dont les ouvrages sont inscrits dans l'inventaire des commandes et acquisitions du domaine privé de l'Empereur Napoleon III*, Archives des musées nationaux, 2 DD 20.
2. Granger 2005, p. 702; see also Compiègne 2008–9, no. 217.
3. Granger 2005, p. 582; see also Compiègne 2008–9, no. 211 and Marsden 2010, no. 70.
4. Marsden 2010, no. 208.
5. See Compiègne, 2007–8, *passim*.
6. Compiègne, 2008–9, no. 10.
7. Versailles, Musée national du château, MV6876.
8. Marsden 2010, no. 205.
9. Casket of the Queen Marie-Amélie, 1841 (Louvre, OA 12236); see Paris 1991, no. 227.

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