

# Books

## The Louvre's publication of the *Inventaire Napoléon* continues with a volume on the Italian paintings

### Les Peintures italiennes du musée Napoléon (1810–1815): Edition illustrée et commentée du volume I de l'*Inventaire Napoléon*'

By Stéphane Loire. 760 pp. incl. 962 col. + 32 b. & w. ills. (*Musée du Louvre and Mare & Martin, Paris, 2025*), €149. ISBN 978-2-35031-783-0 and 978-2-36222-102-6.

by MARIE-ANNE DUPUY-VACHEY

For the Louvre, Paris, the First Empire (1804–15) was both a prosperous and a turbulent period. The *Muséum français* was opened in 1793 and renamed the *Musée Napoléon* ten years later, while its holdings continued to grow. The collections of the crown were augmented by revolutionary confiscations in France and abroad, followed by lootings during Napoleon's conquests across Europe. Despite the steady arrival of thousands of works, it was not until 1810 that an inventory, the *Inventaire Napoléon*, was begun. It consists of seventeen large, handwritten volumes, which are the sole record of this short-lived museum that left such a lasting impression. In preparation for the events organised at the *Musée du Louvre* in 1999–2000 to celebrate its first director, Dominique-Vivant Denon (1747–1825), Pierre Rosenberg launched a project to publish the *Inventaire*.<sup>1</sup> The section devoted to antique sculptures came out in 2004.<sup>2</sup> In 2017 Stéphane Loire, the chief curator and deputy director of the Louvre's department of paintings, undertook the monumental task of cataloguing the paintings, beginning with the Italian school, the subject of the volume reviewed here.

In his introduction Loire begins by summarising the three-way correspondence between Denon, the comte Pierre Daru (1767–1829), who was the chief steward of the emperor's household, and Henri Beyle, better known as Stendhal (1783–1842), then a young auditor at the *Conseil d'État*. In their letters, they discussed the best way to develop a model inventory. There follows a clear and succinct analysis of the complex history of the Louvre's Italian collections, from the museum's opening through to the Battle of Waterloo and the fall

of the Empire. This event interrupted work on the inventory and the first column, which was intended to contain sequential numbers for all the works, remained empty and was only filled in after the Bourbon Restoration. Loire shows that 1,140 Italian paintings were recorded. By comparison, there were barely one hundred of the Spanish school, consistent with the prevailing canon of the period.

The edition of the *Inventaire* occupies the most substantial part of the volume. It maintains the original alphabetical order of the entries by artist. The text has been carefully transcribed and is printed in a reddish-brown colour to distinguish it from Loire's additions. Each entry includes the following information: the artist's name and dates; the subject of the work, sometimes as a lengthy description, which can be useful for identifying the painting; dimensions; provenance; an estimation of its value and that of its frame (where applicable); and, finally, its location. Each entry is followed by a new catalogue entry by Loire, which includes, where relevant, the current attribution, a concise history and valuable bibliographical references.

For the first time, the booklets (*livrets*) that recorded successive installations of the museum's collections have been systematically studied. Due to a lack of space and time, only a quarter of the six thousand paintings that passed through the Louvre were ever on display. The *Salon Carré* never hosted more than 140, and 1,233 were in the *Grande Galerie* in 1810. On the basis of the booklets, it can be established exactly which works such artists as Théodore Géricault, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and the so-called troubadour painters were able to see, since the Louvre was open primarily to artists, with the public only admitted at weekends. In many of the entries Loire has included information about the subject-matter of the paintings and a selection of comments from the period. In addition to extracts from Denon's correspondence, there are quotations from Jean-Joseph Taillasson, Joseph Farington, Henry Milton, Friedrich Schlegel and several other foreign visitors. Most were enthusiastic, but Charles Paul

Landon, for example, thought, in relation to the *Funeral of the Virgin* by Ludovico Carracci (1608; Galleria Nazionale, Parma; cat. no.232), taken from Piacenza Cathedral in 1796, that 'to judge this immense painting properly, one would need to see it in the setting for which it was executed, and where it undoubtedly produced a great effect that did not reveal the imperfections one now notices in it' (p.168). The work was returned to Italy in 1815.

Consulting this imposing volume (which weighs 3.7 kilograms) is a pleasure, since almost all the identified works are reproduced in colour. Contemporary documents help to evoke those that have been lost. For example, an engraving based on a watercolour by Maria Cosway (1760–1838) provides an idea of a lost painting depicting the Virgin and Christ Child attributed to Leonardo da Vinci (no.910). It was stolen in 1815 from the *château de Saint-Cloud* during the occupation of the Prussian troops. Cleverly, the size of the reproductions is related to the estimated value of the works in the *Inventaire*, so that attention is drawn to the most important works. The highest-valued painting was Raphael's *Transfiguration* (c.1517–20; Vatican Museums; no.740), estimated at 1,500,000 francs, followed by Correggio's *Madonna of St Jerome* (c.1527–28; Galleria Nazionale; no.40) and Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* (1562–63; Louvre; no.164), both estimated at 1,000,000 francs. Unsurprisingly, the highest estimates were for Renaissance works, but Domenichino's *Last Communion of St Jerome* (1614; Vatican Museums; no.923) was valued at 500,000 francs, as high as Correggio, Raphael and Titian and far outstripping Caravaggio, who had not yet achieved the fame he enjoys today. His *Entombment* (c.1602–03; Vatican Museums; no.64) was estimated at 150,000 francs, the *Death of the Virgin* (c.1601–05; Louvre; no.65) at 40,000 francs and the *Fortune teller* (c.1595–98; Louvre; no.66) at just 3,000 francs. Valued at 90,000 francs each were the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci (c.1503–19; Louvre; no.901), which was acquired by François I in 1518, and the painting long believed to depict Jeanne d'Aragon and thought to be by Raphael, now given to Raphael and Jules Romain (c.1518; Louvre; no.727), which arrived in France in the same year.

As for the 'primitives' selected by Denon in Italy in 1811 to complete the museum with, in his words, 'that historical aspect of art that it lacked', they failed to arouse the interest of the three volunteer experts tasked with the valuations, Pierre Joseph Lafontaine, Féréol Bonnemaïson and Guillaume Jean Constantin.<sup>3</sup> Cimabue's *Maestà* (c.1280; Louvre; no.312) was



1. *Swordsman*, by Simon Vouet. Oil on canvas, 72 by 56 cm. (Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig).

valued at 10,000 francs and Giotto's *St Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata* (c.1295–1300; Louvre; no.407) at 6,000 francs. These figures reflect not only the history of taste, but also the knowledge of the time. The fact that Giuseppe Maria Crespi was only rediscovered in the twentieth century may explain the low estimate (60 francs each) for the two mysterious mythological scenes (c.1695–1707; no.327; and c.1695–97; no.328; both Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) looted from Vienna in 1809 and returned in 1815.

Loire's book concludes with a long section of indexes, including the much-anticipated index of the 522 paintings that were returned following Napoleon's abdication. Another index, recording the works by their current location, concludes with a list of 149 that the author was unable to locate. It presents a challenge to art historians and should be systematically consulted by those involved in the art market. This reviewer was intrigued by a portrait returned to Braunschweig in 1815 (no.543). Attributed to the Venetian Giambattista Piazzetta (1683–1754) in the *Inventaire*, its description allows it to be identified as the *Swordsman* (Fig.1), which has been in the Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel ducal collections since 1776. At that point it was considered to be a self-portrait by Caravaggio. In 1932 it was identified as a Simon Vouet from the Italian period.<sup>4</sup> Loire draws attention to an impressive *Battle of the Amazons* (or *Semiramis in battle*) by Luca Giordano (no.1001), which has only recently resurfaced in Madrid.<sup>5</sup> Its

sellars were unaware that it was recorded in the *Inventaire*. In fact, it was one of the 250 paintings from the collection of great Spanish families that were sent to Paris in 1813. These were not valued, no doubt because their stay at the Louvre was brief: they were returned in accordance with the royal decree of 8th May 1814, following Napoleon's first abdication on 6th April 1814. Among the few of these that were on display in the Louvre was Jusepe de Ribera's *Bearded woman* (1631; Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid; no.1015). As Loire points out, a copy of this was requested by the École de Médecine, Paris. Many of the paintings from Spain have not been discussed since their restitution, including seventeen others by Giordano, suggesting that there will be future rediscoveries.

In this digital age, the production of a print edition of the *Inventaire* is welcome, especially given its importance for the history of European heritage and, in particular, that of museums. It is hoped that the same will be the case for the following three volumes. These are being prepared by Loire, and will be devoted respectively to paintings from the German, Flemish and Dutch schools (2,022 entries), those from the French school (1,768 entries) and, finally, those sent to museums in the newly created departments (1,261 entries).

1 P. Rosenberg and M.-A. Dupuy, eds: exh. cat. *Dominique-Vivant Denon: L'œil de Napoléon*, Paris (Musée du Louvre) 1999–2000; reviewed by Jon Whiteley in this Magazine, 142 (2000), pp.324–26.

2 J.-L. Martinez: *Les Antiques du Musée Napoléon: édition illustrée et commentée des volumes V et VI de l'inventaire du Louvre de 1810*, Paris 2004.

3 Letter from Dominique-Vivant Denon to the comte de Montalivet, 6th January 1812, in M.A. Dupuy, I. Le Masne de Chermont and E. Williamson, eds: *Vivant Denon, Directeur des Musées sous le Consulat et l'Empire: Correspondance (1802–1815)*, Paris 1999, II, p.786.

4 See the entry in P. Rosenberg, ed.: exh. cat. *Poussin, Watteau, Chardin, David: peintures françaises dans les collections allemandes XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles*, Paris (Galeries nationales du Grand Palais), Munich (Haus der Kunst) and Bonn (Bundeskunsthalle) 2005–06, pp.451–52, no.176.

5 Sale, Abalarte Subastas, Madrid, December auction, 3rd and 4th December 2025, lot 171.

## Art and Artifice in Twelfth-Century Iberia

By Rose Walker. 306 pp. incl. 70 col. + b. & w. ills. (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2025), £95. ISBN 978-1-83765-285-3.

by FERNANDO GUTIÉRREZ BAÑOS

This book adopts an original and challenging approach to the art produced in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula from

about 1110 to 1170. Its author, Rose Walker, has already made substantial contributions to the study of Spanish medieval art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, including reference works on complexes such as San Isidoro, León, and Santa María la Real de las Huelgas, Burgos, as well as on the impact of the eleventh-century liturgical reform on the arts.<sup>1</sup> Her expertise and knowledge of the most recent scholarship, both Spanish and international, enables her to reassess the artistic landscape of Christian Iberia in the first half of the twelfth century.

At first glance, the book appears to be a continuation of the author's *Art in Spain and Portugal from the Romans to the Early Middle Ages: Routes and Myths* (2016), which covers the period until 1100. However, although this may be true in a strictly chronological sense, the scope and the purpose of this book are completely different.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the 2016 volume presented a survey, the present study does not aim to offer a comprehensive and systematic overview of the art of the period under analysis. Instead, the objective of each of the seven chapters is to examine specific issues. To achieve this, Walker makes a choice of works of art to be discussed, which includes the defining works of this period, but also ones that are not so well known; for example, manuscripts from Huesca Cathedral, from which the cover illustration has been selected. Walker pays attention to both large-scale works, such as the monumental complexes of Santiago de Compostela and San Isidoro, and those on a smaller scale, including the portable altar of Sancha Raimúndez (1144; Museo de San Isidoro, León) and the ivory plaques, generally thought to be of Leonese origin, which depict episodes from the Life of Christ after the Crucifixion (Fig.2), as well as to a variety of artistic techniques. Moreover, although she attaches special prominence to the kingdoms of León and Aragon, in accordance with their importance in the period, Walker considers works produced in different parts of Christian Iberia between Portugal and Catalonia, paying attention to stylistic connections to al-Andalus in the south and to France in the north.

More important than the choice of works included in the discussion is the premise under which they are scrutinised. The starting point is a quotation from the celebrated Spanish scholar Serafín Moralejo Álvarez, who considered the above-mentioned group of ivory plaques 'erratic, strange and isolated' (p.1). Walker perceives this character in much of the Iberian artistic production of the first half of the twelfth century and tries