

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

Press Release

CONTACT

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IMAGES AVAILABLE
Kendra Gramlich, 314.655.5493
publicrelations@slam.org

Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800–1815 Opens June 17 at the Saint Louis Art Museum

More Than 140 Extraordinary Works on View through September 16

March 26, 2007—The Saint Louis Art Museum announces the June 17 opening of *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800–1815*, an exhibition featuring more than 140 extraordinary works of decorative art, including furniture, silver, bronze, porcelain, jewelry, clothing, textiles and wallpaper in addition to drawings, paintings and sculpture. The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts, New York, and Les Arts Décoratifs, Paris. The national tour is made possible, in part, by the Joseph and Sylvia Slifka Foundation, Inc. and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. The exhibition is also supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Opening in St. Louis before traveling to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800–1815* is a definitive survey of the decorative arts of the Empire style created during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte in early 19th-century France. The exhibition draws extensively from French collections and brings to St. Louis many works that have never been exhibited outside of France, including several objects from royal and imperial residences at Fontainebleau, Versailles and Malmaison.

While serving as emperor of France, Napoleon and his designers, Percier and Fontaine, developed objects decorated with a wealth of antique motifs, projecting an aura of imperial majesty. Napoleon adopted emblems of power from ancient cultures such as Egypt, Greece and Rome, visually and conceptually linking his empire with great civilizations of the past.

Among the exquisite works in the exhibition is a chased and gilded steel cuirass, or breastplate, modeled after armor worn by Roman emperors. Created in homage to Napoleon in 1805, the breastplate's decoration depicts Napoleon as a victorious Mars, the god of War, from whom he is symbolically descended.

In contrast, motifs associated with the empress Josephine were developed to convey a world of seduction and sensuality. The ancient myths of Apollo and Psyche were translated into the decorative arts using flower, butterfly and swan motifs, reflecting a more intimate, feminine side of the Empire style.

Admission to the exhibition is \$10 for adults, \$8 for students and seniors, \$6 for children six to twelve, free for children younger than six, free to Museum Members every day and free to all on Fridays. An audio tour accompanies the exhibition. Tickets are available at all MetroTix locations. Charge by phone 314.534.1111 or online at metrotix.com.

Curated at the Saint Louis Art Museum by David Conradsen, assistant curator of decorative arts and design, *Symbols of Power: Napoleon and the Art of the Empire Style, 1800–1815* will be on view in the Main Exhibition Galleries through September 16, 2007.

The Saint Louis Art Museum is one of the nation's leading comprehensive art museums with collections that include works of art of exceptional quality from virtually every culture and time period. Areas of notable depth include Oceanic art, pre-Columbian art, ancient Chinese bronzes and European and American art of the late 19th and 20th centuries, with particular strengths in 20th-century German art. The Museum offers a full range of exhibitions and educational programming generated independently and in collaboration with local, national and international partners.

Admission to the Saint Louis Art Museum is free to all every day. For more information about the Saint Louis Art Museum, call 314.721.0072 or visit www.slam.org.

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