

Napoleon

Revolution to Empire

MEDIA RELEASE | 31 MAY 2012

On 2 June 2012 the National Gallery of Victoria will open this year's spectacular Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibition, *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire*.

Premier and Minister for the Arts Ted Baillieu said: "Now a well-established highlight of our major events calendar, the Melbourne Winter Masterpieces series has set the benchmark for blockbuster exhibitions in this country. I'm pleased to welcome the latest instalment - *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire*. Through hundreds of priceless treasures, never before seen in Australia, this exhibition brings to life the legend one of history's most extraordinary and complex figures. It's another great Melbourne exclusive, another tourism drawcard for Victoria and another stunning exhibition for the NGV."

This panoramic exhibition features nearly 300 works, examining French art, culture and life from the 1770s to the 1820s and includes objects of breathtaking opulence and luxury – from paintings, drawings, engravings, sculpture, furniture, militaria, textiles, porcelain, gold and silver, fashion and jewellery.

Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director NGV, said: "*Napoleon: Revolution to Empire* continues the tradition of spectacular NGV exhibitions which have become a winter highlight in Victoria's cultural calendar.

"This year visitors will be intrigued by the life of Napoleon, a man who held the world captive to his ambition. He had a vision of a united Europe, but a Europe controlled by France and united through conquest. Napoleon is well known as a master military strategist; this exhibition reveals that he was also a passionate lover and dedicated patron of the arts, sciences and literature."

Napoleon: Revolution to Empire explores, amongst other themes, the stormy period of social change forced upon France through the outbreak of the French Revolution, the execution of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, and the rise to power of the young Napoleon Bonaparte and his new wife Josephine, as the couple worked to cement their place as France's new political and social leaders.

Ted Gott, Senior Curator International Art, NGV said: "World leaders in the Age of Exploration, Napoleon and Josephine were a true power couple- famous and stylish.

"The stunning artworks and objects in this exhibition illustrate their belief that the advancement of knowledge was integral to social order; they welcomed scientists and artists to receptions and dinners where world affairs were reshaped under their rule."



"Imagination rules the world."

- Napoleon Bonaparte, 8 January 1816

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Personal items will give visitors a glimpse into an extravagant private world of the couple. Jewels owned by Josephine, Napoleon's personal weapons, lavish furniture from private residences and a lock of Napoleon's hair feature alongside spectacular decorative objects, bejewelled gifts given to dignitaries, military uniforms and a beautiful court dress- the only surviving garment worn at Napoleon's coronation ceremony in 1804.

Napoleon: Revolution to Empire also considers the enormous cultural and scientific contact between Australia and France from the 1770s to the 1820s. This is a story that is not often told.

Both Napoleon and Josephine were captivated by Australia, which had newly entered the world's imagination following the publication of Captain Cook's travels. The exhibition tells the story of how this fascination spurred Napoleon to fund a voyage in 1805 that collected information about the continent and produced the first map of the southern Australian coastline with the land we now know as Victoria, but which was at the time first named *Terre Napoléon* (Napoleon Land).

French voyages to Australia returned with collection's of Australian flora and fauna, much specifically earmarked for the hothouses and enclosures of Napoleon and Josephine's country residence Malmaison. Captivating works in the exhibition show kangaroos, black swans and a range of native Australian plants in the grounds of this quintessentially French estate.

Organised in partnership with the Fondation Napoléon in Paris, who are lending many of their greatest works, the exhibition also features incomparable treasures drawn from Europe's most important Revolutionary and Napoleonic collections, including the Château de Malmaison, Château de Versailles, Musée Carnavalet and Musée de l'Armée in France, the Napoleonmuseum Thurgau in Switzerland, and the Museo Napoleonico in Rome.

Exclusive to Melbourne, ***Napoleon: Revolution to Empire*** will only be shown at the National Gallery of Victoria this winter. Open daily from 10am–5pm from 2 June to 7 October 2012 and until 9pm every Wednesday.

Admission fees: Adult \$26, Concession \$22.50, Child (ages 5-15) \$10, Family (2 adults + 3 children) \$65. Tickets available from 20 March at www.ticketmaster.com.au or in person at NGV.

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Caption: **Jacques Louis David**, French 1748–1825 Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul, crossing the Alps at Great St. Bernard Pass, 20 May, 1800 1803 oil on canvas | 267.5 x 223.0 cm | Versailles, musée national du château