

TRINITY FINE ART



Antoine Jean Gros
Henri, Crown Prince of France



ANTOINE JEAN GROS

(Paris 1771 – 1835)

Henri, Crown Prince of France, in Court Costume

Full scale sketch of the left side of the painting *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540* or *Francis the I and Charles V visiting the tombs of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540*, now in the Musée du Louvre.

Oil on original canvas, 114 x 62,5 cm, (44⁷/₈ x 24⁵/₈ in)

Of David's three great students, Gérard, Gros and Girodet, Gros is the one whose work most vividly introduces the radical romanticism of Géricault and Delacroix. His sketches in particular show a freedom and an energy in the touch. His striking contrast of colours bring to mind Rubens' manner, which is rather unexpected in French neoclassicism. One might forget that the focus of the Davidian School, as probably of any school, is a simplification of history and that Gros from the very beginning of his career had difficulty fitting into the neoclassical mould. The son of a miniaturist, Gros entered David's workshop at the early age of 14 and soon became passionate about Rubens. Because of his moderate political opinions, he left Revolutionary Paris for Italy in 1793. Having failed the Grand Prix de Rome competition, he

¹ *Portrait of Madame Pasteur* (1795-1796, Musée du Louvre), *Portrait of Christine Boyer* (1800, Musée du Louvre), *The Battle of Aboukir* (1806, Musée du Château de Versailles), *Napoleon on the battlefield of Eylau*, (1808, Musée du Louvre), *Portrait of Lieutenant Charles Legrand* (1810, Los Angeles County Museum of Art), (1812, *Charles V received by François I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540*, Louvre Museum), *Portrait of Jean Antoine Chaptal* (1824, Cleveland Museum of Art).

had not been exposed in the same way as his contemporaries to the Academy, against which Girodet rebelled. Staying in Genoa, Florence and Milan, his albums of sketches show, next to Masaccio, Andrea Del Sarto, Rubens and Pontormo, subjects from vases after Tischbein and Flaxman. In 1796 Josephine Bonaparte, who was also staying in Italy, asked the painter to accompany her to Milan, where he painted the famous *Bonaparte at the Pont d'Arcole* (Versailles, sketch in the Musée du Louvre). Gros is a rare artist, portrait painter and history painter. His paintings are now found in the most important museums, mainly in the Louvre and in Versailles ¹. These works place Gros at the top of the French School of his time.

1. Sketch of the Crown Prince

Our painting, a preparatory work for the painting of the 1812 Salon: *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540*, is a sketch of the figure of the Crown Prince Henri of Valois (1519-1559), painted at the same scale as the final painting ². The figure, which in the final painting occupies the entire left side of the composition, is painted here on a very fine canvas, lightly brushed on a clear preparation that shines around the figure. The background is rapidly painted in a manner also found in paintings by David and his pupils.

Henri of Valois was twenty-one years old in 1540 during Charles



Fig. 1 (opposite): *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540*, Musée du Louvre



V's visit to France. The young prince, the future Henri II, married Catherine of Medici in 1533. The younger son of Francis I and Claude of France, he became heir to the throne at the death of his older brother Francis in 1536.

The sketch of the portrait of Henri of Valois is an unpublished work which illustrates, in addition to the virtuosity of the great colourist Gros, the diversity of his talent. It combines his interest and familiarity with the Italian Renaissance, particularly Pontormo and Bronzino, with a Rubens-like pictorial touch.

The vivid and contrasting colours, the blue and red spots on the face, around the eyes, in the earlobe and around the mouth, the chromatic freedom of the hands, the thick brushwork of the embroidered trimmings and the feathers of the hat, the shine of the fabrics, all relate to the incomparable manner of Gros. This particular manner can be found especially in his sketch of *Bonaparte at the Pont d'Arcole*, or the virtuoso treatment of the costumes and the snow of the *Battle of Eylau*.

Two additional head sketches of the Louvre painting also survive. Like in our sketch they are of the same scale as the final painting. The first one represents the head of Charles, Duke of Orleans, placed in the painting to the left of his father Francis I. It was shown in New York in 1980 at the Shepherd Gallery³. The second is the head of Charles V, a picture of which was sent by his owner on 15 December 1995 to the Louvre Museum's

³ *Christian Imagery in French Nineteenth Century Art*, New York, Shepherd Gallery, Spring 1980, pp. 102-103. "Gros, Antoine-Jean, baron, *Duc d'Orléans* (Study for the painting: *François I and Emperor Charles V visiting the Abbey Saint Denis*), oil on canvas, 22 x 16.7 cm).

curatorial department, with the precise dimensions of the head:
27 x 19 cm

The measurements of these two paintings show that the heads are of the exact dimensions as in the final painting and most probably constitute, like our sketch, the final studies for the Louvre painting.

In regard to Henri's figure the most striking differences between our sketch and the Louvre painting are as follows: a thinner general aspect of the silhouette, the different positioning of the head as placed in the collar of the short cloak that covers the figure up to the thighs. The colour of the sleeves is quite orange, contrasting with the gold braids of the cloak. In the Louvre painting the swelling of the silky gigot sleeves, gold and not orange as in the sketch, is amplified and the gilded point of the sword is blurred. The adjustment of the figure in the final composition required the widening of the short cloak to the left against the edge of the painting suggesting a different position of the arm under the cloak. Also, the porcelain softening of the flesh and the silk of the clothes as it appears in the final painting is characteristic of the transposition from the sketch to the definitive work.



⁴Laura Angelucci, *Musée du Louvre, Inventaire général des dessins, École française, Antoine Jean Gros (1771-1835)*, Paris, Musée du Louvre/Mare et Martin, 2019, pp. 235-238.

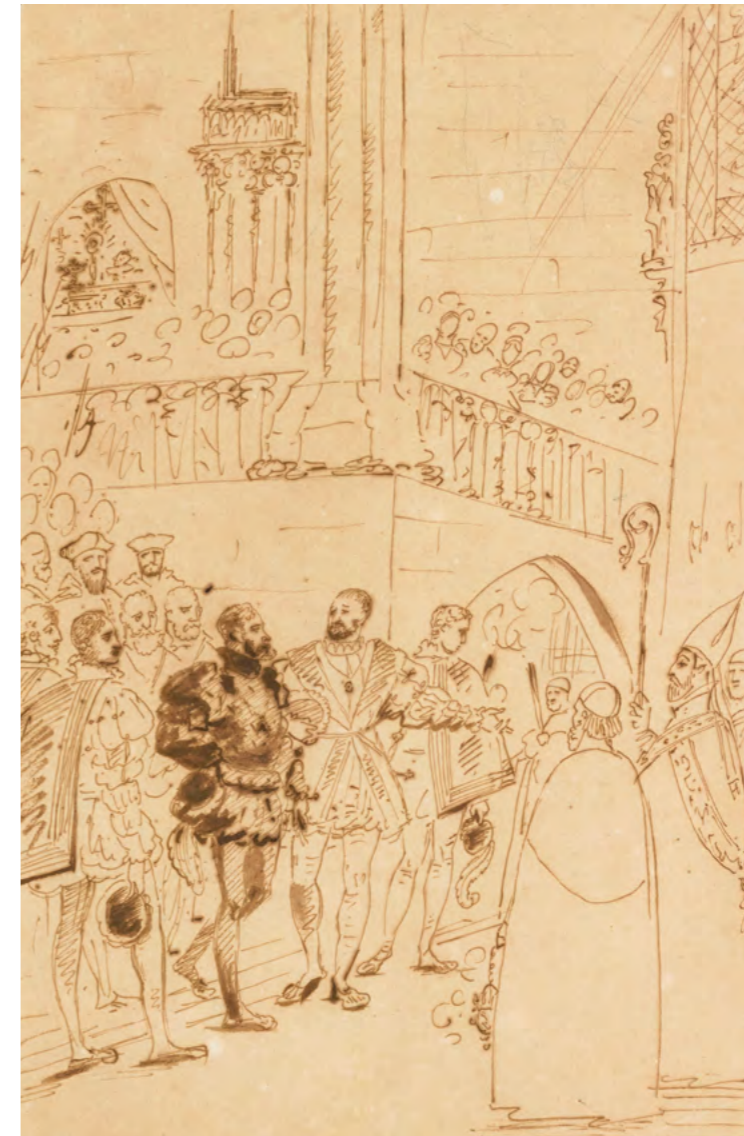
Gros made at least two preparatory drawings for his painting, both now at the Louvre. ⁴ A first version, not retained by the painter, shows *Francis I and Charles V arriving on horseback in front of Saint-Denis*. The second puts in place the entire final



Fig. 2: *François I and Charles V on horseback in front of the Abbey of Saint-Denis*, drawing, Musée du Louvre.

composition of *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis*. The drawing shows the foreground unchanged, but the background was largely transformed in the final painting. The royal group was slightly pushed to the right, placing the head

of Charles d'Orléans in the gothic arch. This change left more space on the left, allowed the enlargement of the upper part of Henri's cloak and made space for the replacement of the figure in profile behind the head of Henri. Our sketch corresponds



⁵J.-B. Delestre, *Gros, sa vie et ses ouvrages*, deuxième édition revue et augmentée avec 55 gravures, Paris, V° Jules Renouard, 1867; Laura Angelucci, op. cit.

rather precisely to the preparatory drawing with a shorter development of the cap. Jean-Baptiste Delestre published the two preparatory drawings in the second edition of his work *Gros, sa vie et ses ouvrages*, originally published in 1845 ⁵.

Fig. 3: *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis*, drawing, Musée du Louvre

2. A famous painting then and now

⁶J.- B. Delestre, *Gros, sa vie et ses ouvrages*, op. cit., p. 179.

⁷19 "This painting was certainly the most curious, the most remarkable of the 1812 Exposition, and it was admired, says M. Quatremère de Quincy, as one of the best paintings of the French school." Tripiet Le Franc, op. cit. p. 309. Debay probably made another copy, perhaps a reduction, which remained in Gros' studio and is cited in the inventory after his death in 1835, Valérie Bajou, "Testaments et inventaires après décès d'Antoine Jean Gros (1771-1835)" in Valérie Bajou and Sidonie Lemeux-Fraitot, *Inventaires après décès de Gros et de Girodet. Documents inédits*, Paris, chez les auteurs, 2002, p. 106.

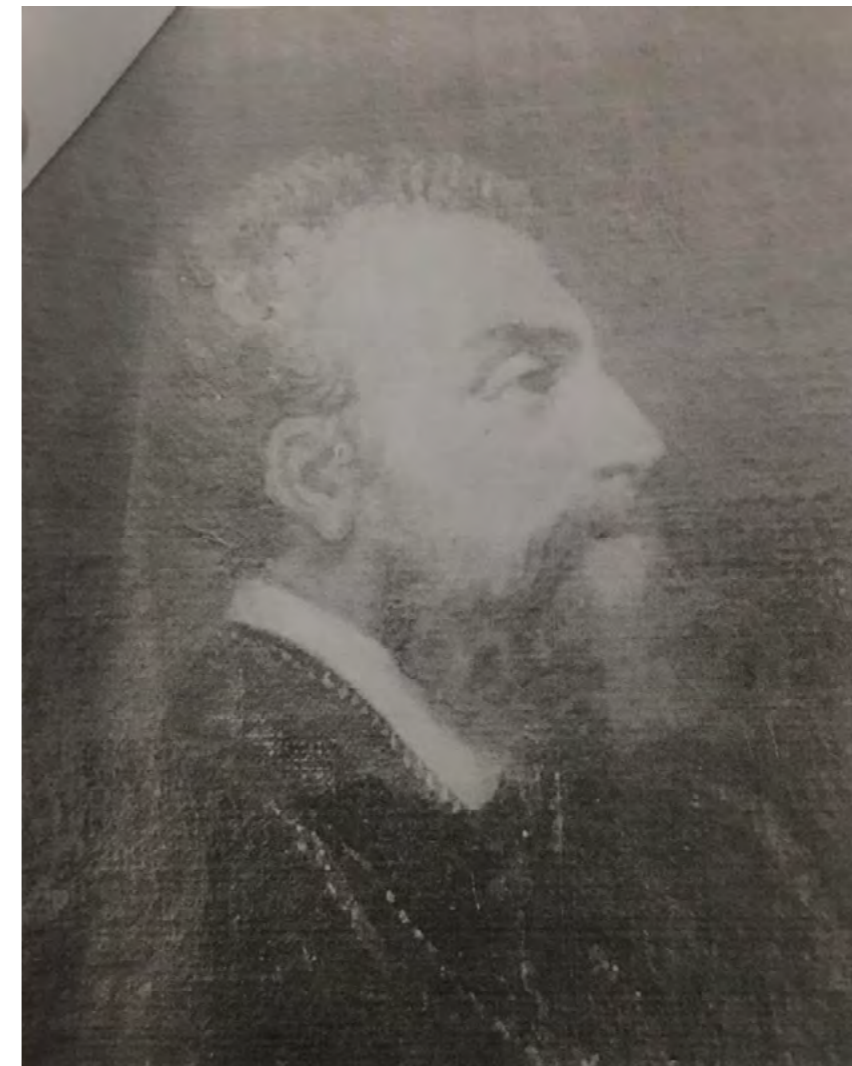
In a moment of naïve emotion Gros described *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540* with the words, "This is my bouquet."⁶ As well as being considered by the



Fig. 4: Head of Charles, Duke of Orleans, Oil on canvas, Shepherd Gallery, New York (in 1984)

artist as one of his most accomplished works, the painting was also well received by the critics including connoisseurs such as Quatremère de Quincy ⁷ and fellow artists like Delacroix⁸. Gros exhibited his painting at the Salon of 1812 and again in 1814.

The same year, the painting by Gros was chosen as the model for the tapestry by the Director of the Gobelins Manufacture, which was intended to be offered to the Francesco I, King of Naples, father of the Duchess of Berry, who was visiting Paris at that time.⁹ It was also copied on porcelain by Georget



⁸ "This painting by Gros, *François 1er and Charles-Quint visiting the church of Saint-Denis* is thus judged and appreciated by Eugène Delacroix. "This painting still presents, in a different genre for the subject and for the dimension, a remarkable effort of talent. One finds in it a finesse of intention and execution that one did not expect to find in the painter of *Eylau* and *Jaffa*. Above all, the Charles V is perfect; it is impossible to better characterize a historical figure, which everyone has been able to portray, from his actions, and the image that the painter shows us forbids the mind to ask for anything else." Tripiet Le Franc, op. cit. p. 309.

⁹ Chantal Gastinel-Coural, *La manufacture des Gobelins au XIX^e siècle, tapisseries, cartons, maquettes*, Beauvais, Galerie nationale de la tapisserie, 1996, catalogue de l'exposition, p. 34-36.

for the Duchess of Berry and presented at the Salon of 1822. By 1820 the painting, which had been kept in the sacristy of Saint Denis, was sent to the Musée du Luxembourg. In 1829 it was placed in the apartments of the Duc d'Orléans and

Fig. 5: Head of Charles V, Oil on canvas (documentation Department of paintings) Musée du Louvre

¹⁰ Gros, *ses amis, ses élèves*, Germaine Barnaud et Yves Sjöberg ed. Paris, Petit Palais, imprimerie Frazier-Soye, 1936, no. 63, pp. 85-87. (The two preparatory drawings of the Louvre appear under numbers 426 and 427.)

“The two sovereigns arrive at the foot of the stairs leading to the entrance to the cellars, where the royal tombs are located, in the abbey church of Saint-Denis. Francis I stands in the centre, dressed in sleeveless blue velvet, edged with fur, and white stockings, with the Golden Fleece around his neck. He shows Charles V the tomb of Louis XII, surmounted by two Venetian flags, taken at the Battle of Agnadel. The Emperor is entirely dressed in black, with the Golden Fleece. Henri, the crown prince of France, is on his right, wearing a gold embroidered habit with cut and puffed sleeves, with a black coat lined with white satin and bordered with gold braids, on the shoulders, and a black toque with white feathers in the right hand. His brother Charles of Orleans is to the left of Francis I, dressed in a blue and silver habit, with a similar coat on his shoulders. On the right, in the foreground, the Cardinal of Bourbon, abbot of Saint-Denis, with a mitre on his head and a crosier in his hand, under a heavy golden cap, assisted by two priests, faces the sovereigns. At the entrance to the cellars a chaplain, carrying two lit torches, is ready to enlighten the visitors. On the steps of the staircase leading to the choir, the Conetable of Montmorency carries the sword between Henri d’Albret and the Duke de Guise, Antoine de Bourbon, behind them the legate, the cardinals

three years later in 1832 in that of King Louis Philippe. The subject is described in detail in the catalogue of the 1936 Gros exhibition¹⁰. The picture is today exhibited in the Grand



Gallery of the Louvre amongst other masterpieces of the French Neoclassical School: *The Coronation of Napoleon* by David, *The Flood*, *The Burial of Atala* and *The Sleep of Endimion* by Girodet, Gérard’s *Corinne at Cape Misena* and *Portrait of*

Madame Recamier, *The Battle of Eylau* by Gros, and Prudhon’s, *Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime*.



3. A political painting

Anxious to bring the Empire into the historical continuity of France which had been divided after the Revolution between

de Bellay, Lorraine and Astorgia. Behind the balustrades of the choir, decorated with red draperies, a portion of the treasure of Saint-Denis can be seen at the bottom of the left arch. At the front stand Catherine de Médicis, Madame d’Uzès, Madame de Brissac, Diane de Poitiers, the beautiful Ferronnière, Amyot, Jean Goujon. The right arch is occupied by Madame d’Anelot, the Countess de la Rochefoucauld, Madame d’Elbœuf, Madame Gros, with the young Montaigne on her left. Primaticc leans against the pilaster, Pierre Lescot looks over the heads of the women in the front row, Jean Bullan also steps forward to get a better view, and Clément Marot and Rabelais talk together.»

Fig. 6: *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis*, Musée du Louvre (detail)

Monarchists, Republicans, Bonapartists and supporters of the Empire, Napoleon I, crowned Emperor of the French in 1804, decreed on February 20, 1806 that the basilica of Saint-Denis, burial place of the kings of France from the 10th century until 1789, would be restored and would host the tombs of



the emperors, thus establishing a dynastic continuity between the Bonapartes and the French royal dynasty. The Count of Montalivet, Minister of the Interior of the Empire, delegated the project of decorating the sacristy of the Basilica to Dominique Vivant Denon, director of the Napoleon Museum,

who responded by proposing a list of ten paintings illustrating the history of the Basilica since Saint Louis.

The subjects were divided among the following painters: 1. Ménageot, 2. Garnier, 3. Meynier, 4. Le Barbier, 5. Monsiau, 6. Landon, 7. Guérin, 8. Gros, 9. Gérard, 10. Girodet. At the



beginning of 1812, Gros, Landon, Le Barbier l'aîné, Ménageot, Meynier and Monsiau submitted their sketches to the Minister. At the Salon of 1812, Garnier, Gros, Meynier and Monsiau exhibited four of the ten paintings. Gérard and Girodet, overloaded with commissions of imperial portraits, withdrew and were replaced

Fig. 6: Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540, Musée du Louvre (detail)

¹¹ op. cit.

¹² Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting, Antoine Jean Gros's La Bataille d'Eylau*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

¹³ David O'Brien, *Antoine-Jean Gros, painter of Napoleon*, The Pennsylvania State University, 2006

by Monsiau and Menjaud.

In the years since the publications of Delestre and Tripier Le Franc¹¹ and the catalogue of the 1936 monographic exhibition at the Petit Palais, studies devoted to Gros are rare and generally focus on a single aspect of his work. Subsequent academic studies of Gros include those by Christopher Prendergast¹², David O'Brien¹³, or more recently Sébastien Allard and Marie-Claude Chaudonneret¹⁴.



Fig. 6: Antoine Jean Gros, *The Battle of Eylau* (detail), Musée du Louvre

Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis, presented at the Salon of 1812, then at the Salon of 1814¹⁵, is not limited to the troubadour taste that was fashionable at the time. It corresponds in all respects to the programme of imperial art, in the same way as the famous battles of Gros or other painters of the Empire. The sumptuous costumes, particularly those of Henri and Francis I, are not only typical of the luxury of the

¹⁴ Sébastien Allard and Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *Le suicide de Gros. Les peintres de l'Empire et la génération romantique*, Paris, Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2010.

¹⁵ Salon de 1812, n° 445 and Salon de 1814, n° 476.

Renaissance courts but are also characteristic of the increasing splendour that Napoleon brought to his court¹⁶.

For David O'Brien, "this unexpected subject is in fact a transparent allusion to Napoleon's famous encounter with Francis II of Austria, another Habsburg, and the analogy with the founder of a French dynasty serves obvious propaganda



purposes."¹⁷ The critical fortune of *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540* reveals both how the work illustrates at its highest level the contemporary change of taste and also the contemporaneous maintenance of the cultural policy of the Empire progressing towards its decline.

¹⁶ "It is no coincidence that in the enormous François I and Charles V Visiting Saint-Denis, commissioned from Baron Gros for the rededication of the royal necropole at Saint-Denis, the figures of King and Emperor and their attendants are garbed in robes not dissimilar to those worn at the Imperial Court. "in Guy Stair Sainty, "Introduction", *Romance & Chivalry. History and Literature reflected in early nineteenth century French Painting*, London and New York, 1996, pp. 36-37.

¹⁷ David O'Brien, op. cit. pp. 185-186, ill. no. 113.

The large, very finished and masterfully painted sketch of the figure of Henri de Valois in court costume constitutes a fundamental contribution to the evaluation of Gros' art, showing even in its unfinished state his artistic sources, skill with pictorial power and colourist virtuosity that are



Fig. 7: Antoine Jean Gros, *Bonaparte at the Pont d'Arcole*, sketch, Musée du Louvre

manifested in his great historical paintings.

We are grateful to Dr. Sylvain Bellenger for the information provided in this entry.

Photos credits

Jean-Antoine Gros, *Henri, Crown Prince of France, in Court Costume*, sketch for the painting *Charles V received by Francis I at the Abbey of Saint-Denis on January 13, 1540*, private collection, Photo Juan Cruz;

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