

Here begins a regular feature on clocks in fine art. Based on an expanding collection of more than 300 digital images, these artworks combine my love of art and horology. They range from the early fifteenth century up to the present day and include dozens of artists from Durer to Degas to, of course, Dali. My illustrated "Clocks in Art" lecture was presented at the 2011 NAWCC National Convention.

One of the first works of art to excite my interest was this 1812 oil on canvas, "The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries," by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), often called the foremost painter of his era. Approximately 80" x 50", this famous portrait is on view at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. It was originally commissioned by a Scottish nobleman who, like the artist, greatly admired the emperor.

Most of these artworks tell a story and contain symbolic references. In this example, the clock's hour of 4:13 reveals that Napoleon had been at work throughout the night. His formal costume is somewhat disheveled, the candles are nearly burnt down, and pen and papers are scattered around the desk. He was drafting the Napoleonic Code (a visible paper shows the word "code"). His sword, a sign of his military successes, lies ready for a review of his troops. We see other symbols: medals, bees, furniture, uniform, etc. A copy of *Plutarch's Lives* sits under the table, connecting the emperor's achievements with great men of the past.

The clock's dial shows no signature, but the high style and five-rod gridiron pendulum demonstrate quality. Possibly, the maker was the eminent Antide Janvier (1751-1835), who was clockmaker to King Louis XVI, survived revolutionary prison, and by 1800 was again in official positions including advising the government on decimal time.

Most likely, this view is imaginary and was contrived to idolize Napoleon. I am grateful that David, along with all my artists, chose a timepiece as vital to the scene.

About the Author

Bob Frishman has restored and sold vintage clocks since 1980 and is a past-president of New England Chapter 8. He is a frequent contributor of articles and newsworthy items to the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*. Bob can be reached at www.bell-time.com.

Horology *in* Art

by Bob Frishman (MA)



NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, 1961.9.15