

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

Alison McQueen

book review of

L'Empereur et les arts: La liste civile de Napoléon III by Catherine Granger

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 8, no. 2 (Autumn 2009)

Citation: Alison McQueen, book review of *L'Empereur et les arts: La liste civile de Napoléon III* by Catherine Granger, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 2009), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn09/lempereur-et-les-arts-la-liste-civile-de-napoleon>.

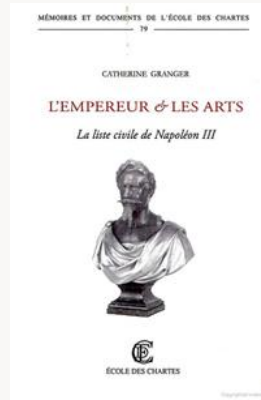
Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

Notes:

This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License Creative Commons License](#).



Catherine Granger *L'Empereur et les arts: La liste civile de Napoléon III* Paris: Ecoles des Chartres, 2005. 866 pages. 56 b/w illustrations; 21 color illustrations; catalogue of works; chronology; bibliography; indexes of names and places. €60 ISBN 2-900791-71-5

Catherine Granger's *L'Empereur et les arts* is the product of extensive primary research and offers readers a detailed study of the French state, its institutions, and patronage of the arts during the Second Empire (1852-1870). The work of avant-garde painters Manet and Courbet and controversies such as the *Salon des refusés* and the reforms of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1863 have received considerable attention, arguably to the detriment of a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of artistic production in the period. What Granger's work offers is a broader context from which we can assess the contributions of emperor Napoléon III and government officials, particularly Comte Nieuwerkerke, Director of Fine Arts. The study is rich in its analysis of the history of French museums during the Second Empire, particularly the growth of the Louvre, including the *musée des Souverains*, and the creation of the Museum of National Antiquities at Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Granger adds much to our understanding of Napoléon III's patronage of institutional collections, and her work reframes our understanding of the important contributions to the history of French art that were fostered in the Second Empire period. She successfully overturns the previous misguided view that Napoléon III had neither taste nor interest in the arts.

Granger makes it possible for the reader to understand the complex legal and financial position from which Napoléon III ruled through her in-depth discussion of the civil list, the budget granted to the French sovereign since the reign of Louis XVI that was designed to enable the ruler to fulfill his functions with magnificence. The French system of the civil list was based on an English model that existed since the Restoration in 1660, and was adopted by constitutional monarchies in Belgium and Spain. During the Second Empire, imperial rulers in Russia and Greece also had a civil list. Napoléon III was first assigned the civil list in December 1852, and from 1853 to 1870 he was granted 25 million francs a year to support his expenses and maintain his endowment.

The reader quickly comes to understand that while the sovereign and his family enjoyed the use of the palaces that were part of the Ministry of the House of the Emperor, including the

Tuileries, Elysées, Saint-Cloud, Fontainebleau, Compiègne, Pau, and Strasbourg, as well as their parks and gardens, the civil list was also used for the maintenance of these historic buildings and the salaries of their personnel. The imperial manufacturers of porcelain and tapestries, Sèvres, Gobelins, and Beauvais, as well as the imperial museums also fell under the financial umbrella of the civil list. Any new building projects, such as the museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, came from the same resources, as did the model farms the emperor initiated, and considerable work on churches that were restored and reconstructed across the country throughout the Second Empire.

The endowment produced additional revenues from the sale of farm products, wood, rentals of land, sales of books, plasters and prints from the imperial museums and porcelain from Sèvres (Beauvais and Gobelins did not sell to the public), as well as tickets sales from the Salon until 1859 and the Opéra from 1854 to 1865. These revenues amounted to between five and seven million francs per year that were added to the civil list and set off the expenses that Granger calculates averaged 34,282,811 francs per year between 1853 and 1868 (60). Grand officers responsible for individual areas, however, often exceeded their budget and the Minister of the Emperor's Household had little recourse. As with institutions today, a major expense of the civil list was personnel; for example, in 1870 there were nearly 900 people employed at different palaces. Granger makes clear that Napoléon III and his household followed a well-established budgetary precedent and readers are immediately sensitized to the responsibilities of his office. It would be impossible to review the financial realities of the imperial household as Granger lays them out and maintain the stereotypical view of the period as one of self-indulgent excess. The deficit for the entire period was under seven hundred thousand francs (63).

Granger's work focuses on the two chapters of the budget that were dedicated to the arts; these included purchasing and commissioning paintings, sculpture, prints and *objets d'art*, as well as the imperial museums, and any subventions and pensions for artists. She states it is impossible to determine the total amount dedicated to art from the civil list as it was often supplemented from the budget for "extraordinary expenses" as well as the "cassette de l'empereur," Napoléon III's private purse (67, 447). The works that were acquired fulfilled both public and private needs, and went to churches, the museums at Versailles and the Luxembourg, and for a while the provincial museums, as well as Napoléon III and his wife Eugénie's private collections.

Independent of the civil list, the *Direction des beaux-arts*, which fell under the rubric of the Ministry of State, acquired additional works for museums and churches. During the Second Empire, the Ministry of State was also responsible for the Academy of France in Rome, the *École des Beaux-Arts*, the *dépôt des marbres* (storage of works of art and blocks of marble for sculptors), works of art that decorated public buildings, and museums that were not part of the civil list. Certain institutions, such as the Salon, moved between areas. It was the responsibility of the Ministry of State after 1860, although it had been assigned to the civil list in 1850s. Granger acknowledges the impossibility of examining every building, museum or art institution of the period and seeks to fill lacunae in previous scholarship. She also focuses on purchases of contemporary painting and sculpture, which are better documented in extant archival materials.

The contribution of the book is particularly strong on Napoléon III's initiatives regarding the imperial museums (Louvre, Versailles, Luxembourg, and Saint-Germain-en-Laye), which were the responsibility of Comte Alfred Nieuwerkerke.^[1] Although there has been much scholarship on the Louvre, Granger adds significantly to our understanding of how the museum and its staff functioned during the Second Empire which is considered a particularly favorable period in the museum's history. It was during these years that the Louvre acquired the first painting by Vermeer for a French museum (*The Lacemaker* in 1870) and important donations such as that of Dr. La Caze (installed 1870), which was the subject of an exhibition in 2007.^[2] Granger relies on the journals of the Goncourt brothers, and curators Comte Horace Viel-Castel and Philippe de Chennevières for insights on the curators' personalities; Nieuwerkerke's dictatorial tendencies, for example, are revealed through the amusing detail that he did not organize a single curatorial meeting in the decade between February 1857 and January 1868 (270)! Granger's work on the departments and curators will be an important resource for anyone interested in the details of the Louvre's administrative history.

While Napoléon III was expected to maintain the Louvre collection and its personnel, funds were also available annually for acquisitions, despite the efforts of Achille Fould, Minister of State until 1860, who consistently tried to economize on the proposed increases to the acquisitions budget. There were instances such as in 1865 when Antonello da Messina's *Condotierre/Portrait of a Man* was so expensive (119,175 francs) it had to be purchased over a two-year period (266). Twice during the Second Empire the Louvre received exceptional credits from the state to make significant purchases at auction: the Sout Spanish collection (300,000 francs) and the Campana purchase (4,800,000 francs). The collection of the marquis de Campana, the insolvent former director of Mont-de-piété in Rome, was the Louvre's most famous acquisition of the period, and there is evidence that the writer Prosper Mérimée, inspector of historic monuments and close friend of the empress, lobbied hard to bring this collection to the Louvre in 1861 (286). Nieuwerkerke focused primarily on paintings, with an emphasis on acquisitions of Flemish 15-16th century art. Little sculpture was acquired, although greater attention was paid to antiquities.

Nieuwerkerke expanded the number of works on view at the Louvre considerably. He opened up 132 new rooms, and assigned five rooms on the first floor to be redesigned as the new *musée des Souverains*, created in 1852, opened in 1853, and suppressed in 1872. This museum was dedicated to all French sovereigns from the Merovingians to the July Monarchy, and placed particular emphasis on Napoléon I and the king of Rome. The collection of the *musée des Souverains* focused on objects that were used personally by sovereigns and came to the Louvre from state museums and libraries, forty-four private donations (including one from painter Jean-Baptiste Isabey), and a few special acquisitions. It is not surprising that there was a strong Napoleonic and imperial bias in the presentation with an entire room dedicated to Napoléon I and only one room dedicated to all the kings from Childeric to Louis-Philippe. Granger concludes it is difficult to know what the French public thought of the *musée des Souverains* because of press censorship early in the Second Empire, but that the emphasis on objects from daily life and material culture (arms, jewelry, manuscripts, furniture and clothing) was new for the Louvre and appealed to Napoléon III's taste for history and interest in relics (334-335).

The emperor's interest in national history was most apparent in his support for the gallo-roman museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye (later Museum of National Antiquities). The

collection focused on the history of the Gaul territory from the earliest time through Charlemagne and included pottery and arms transferred from the Louvre collection as well as pieces from recent excavations, casts and models. Napoléon III had a strong interest in archaeology: he funded excavations, bought objects from digs with his private purse, and published his *Histoire de Jules César* in 1865. When the museum opened in 1867 there were approximately 8,300 objects and within two years these were spread over a sizeable display in fifteen rooms (364). Napoléon III's patronage of the museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye was among his most significant contributions to visual culture in the Second Empire and his support of the museum's acquisitions should be considered the strongest evidence of his greatest passion as a collector.

Granger does not push any boundaries in her definition of collecting, however, and concludes that Napoléon III was not a collector, except of the arms and armor he acquired for Pierrefonds, the château near Compiègne that he hired Viollet-le-Duc to restore. This seems like a surprising conclusion given that Granger devotes a significant portion of her book to discussing the paintings and sculpture Napoléon III acquired through the civil list and includes extensive appendices to catalogue these works. After stating that Napoléon III formed a collection of more than 700 modern paintings by 400 artists and 157 modern sculptures by 85 artists, Granger concludes that Napoléon III had a collection, but was not "a great amateur of art" (219). His patronage of the archaeological digs and pieces purchased for Saint-Germain-en-Laye should, however, be regarded as an expression of the very passion that Granger says Napoléon III lacks. The emperor's collection was an extension of both his public position and his personal interests. Between 1854 and 1866 he purchased more than fifty sculptures by Emmanuel Frémiet; these were types from the French army that Napoléon III placed at the Tuileries as well as portraits of the emperor and the Prince Imperial (130, 204). The collecting of Frémiet's army figure sculptures can be read as an expression of the emperor's leadership role with the French military that moved between public and private spaces through his physical interaction with the sculptures at the Tuileries. This reading is supported by Granger's research on paintings that demonstrates Napoléon III preferred genre scenes, military subjects and landscapes (210). Between his patronage of Frémiet, collecting of arms and armor for Pierrefonds, and funding of archaeological excavations and objects for the museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a quite coherent collecting persona emerges of a political figure who expressed his leadership through his personal taste for a range of objects that relate to the history of France and the significance of its military. The collections of Prince Napoléon, Princess Mathilde and the duc de Morny may have been centered around the historical painters and contemporary artists who receive more recognition today, but that should not negate the significance of Napoléon III's collection both for his own enjoyment and as an expression of his perception of himself as France's leading public figure.

Woven into Granger's study of Napoléon III's art collection are sections on the Salon and the Luxembourg Museum during the Second Empire, both of which offer important resources to scholars of nineteenth-century France. During the Second Empire, Philippe de Chennevières was the curator responsible for the Salon, each of which took three months to organize (165). Until 1848, the Salon had been held at the Louvre but had become too disruptive, as the museum did not have rooms designated for temporary exhibitions. During the Second Republic (1848-52), the Salon moved to the Tuileries in 1849, and the Palais-Royal in 1850 and 1852. During the years of the Second Empire, it moved to the Menus-Plaisirs in 1853 and the Palais de l'Industrie from 1857; it returned to the Louvre in 1864 only for the prize ceremony.

Beginning in 1853, Nieuwerkerke proposed reforms for the Salons that would have meant various types of exhibitions open to different people. While emerging artists required many occasions to get their works known, Nieuwerkerke thought the exhibitions exhausted mature artists and did not allow sufficient time for works to evolve. The results of his efforts were that the Salon was held every two years until 1863 when petitions circulated by artists were successful in reestablishing the annual Salon. The main issue for the Salon during the Second Empire, as it had been during the July Monarchy, was the severity of the jury. The composition of the jury passed through many changes and went from an equal number of amateurs nominated by Nieuwerkerke to those elected by exhibitors (1852) only to return to the former jury system with members from the Academy (1857). Decorated artists and those who had received a first class medal at a Salon were exempt from the jury, and in 1859 those artists who received a second-class medal in 1855 were also admitted without examination. The well-known *salon des refusés* of 1863 was the result of criticisms from artists, who petitioned again in 1867 for a similar exhibition but were unsuccessful.

Arguably the greatest innovation of the Second Empire Salons occurred in 1861 when, following Chennevières initiative, the works were organized alphabetically. Although this was highly controversial and the practice was not retained, it demonstrates Chennevières' efforts to take a more democratic approach to exhibiting works of art, an innovation that is often mistakenly attributed to the much later Impressionist exhibitions. Further, Chennevières' vision of a society of artists who organized the salon was supported by Napoléon III in 1863, but rejected by Alexandre Walewski, then Minister of State, who thought it was a British idea (172). Chennevières was not successful with this initiative until the Third Republic when his ideas were the inspiration for the *Société des artistes français*. What is interesting, however, is that it was not the emperor, but rather other politicians who prevented significant change to the institution of the Salon. Another little-known aspect of Second Empire Salons is the lottery held in 1859 and, with less success, in 1861. Following an initiative of the duc de Morny, a commission of collectors and others (no members of the Institut) selected works from the Salon and assigned prices; these works were then acquired by the civil list with money made from the sale of booklets (1 franc each). Artists selected by the lottery commission had their work exhibited in a special room and a list was published in the official newspaper *Le Moniteur universel*, all of which was intended to support the careers of a broad array of artists.

In her documentation of the palaces and museums to which the imperial couple assigned the works they acquired at the Salons and elsewhere, Granger offers an important history of the Luxembourg museum during the Second Empire. This museum opened to the public for the first time between 1750 and 1780 with an exhibition of paintings from the king's collection. In 1802 it opened again as a museum of historical paintings that focused on three series: Rubens' *Marie de Medici* cycle, the *Life of Saint Bruno* by Lesueur and the ports of France by Claude-Joseph Vernet and Jean-François Hue. In 1815 these works transferred to the Louvre, and in 1818, the Luxembourg opened as a museum for artists of the modern French school. It opened with seventy-two works, growing to 149 paintings in 1849, and 240 in 1875, plus a seemingly unknown number of sculptures (337). The Luxembourg was considered an anteroom to the Louvre where works were supposed to be exhibited only until ten years after an artist's death, although space restrictions meant they were often moved earlier, and in some cases, while artists were still alive.

In theory, the most important works purchased by the civil list during the Second Empire went to the Luxembourg. These were not acquired by the imperial museums, but rather were donated by Napoléon III and bought by the director of fine arts from the Salon. Granger believes that the majority of artworks were really acquired by Nieuwerkerke (338). Certainly some were chosen by the imperial couple but were not given to the museum for several years, for example Breton's *Recall of the Gleaners* (1859). The Luxembourg collection also grew from donations such as Ingres' gift of his three portraits of the Rivière family. Although Chennevières was in charge of both the Luxembourg and the Salons from 1861, he was never responsible for acquisitions for the museum, which remained Nieuwerkerke's domain. Granger argues that the politics of Nieuwerkerke's acquisitions were such that he did not want works by artists who were already famous, and that this led to further gaps in the collection, which then transferred to the Louvre. Most notably, as Granger points out, during the Second Empire the Luxembourg had only one work by Corot, *A Morning*, purchased in 1851 (347). It was, however, a good place to study works by Delacroix as four were on display: *Dante and Virgil*, *Massacre at Scios*, *Algerian Women*, and *Jewish Wedding in Morocco*. While the Luxembourg museum enjoyed a prestigious location, space was tight particularly because the museum shared space with the Senate who were the majority tenants; thus there was no office space, nowhere to store easels for copyists, and no storage space for works not on display. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that after the Second Empire, the contents of the Luxembourg museum were transferred to the Orangerie in 1886.

Granger devotes the last section of her text to the settlement of the civil list that began two days after the fall of the Second Empire September 4, 1870. She gives a thorough account of the legal details of the commission and the extensive efforts to secure the museums and former imperial collections during the Siege of Paris and the Commune. Courbet was appointed president of the committee to care for museum collections, and Louvre employees went to great lengths to protect the works in different palaces. Despite these efforts, losses were significant. They began with a fire at the château at Saint-Cloud in October 1870 and continued with arson at the Tuileries Palace in May 1871. As early as 1871, some personal objects were sent to the imperial family in England, where Napoléon III joined them following his imprisonment at Wilhemshöhe. However, the family's representatives wrote to the liquidators in October 1872 asking for the sequestration to be lifted and the paintings from the *domain privé* and arms from Pierrefonds to be restituted immediately (386). Nonetheless, even the nomination of a new commission did not move things along more quickly.

Arguably Napoléon III and his family did not fare as well as Louis-Philippe had in the settlement of his civil list following the Revolution of 1848. One of the main principles of the civil list was that works of art that were placed in royal or imperial residences became the property of the state. But just a few months after Louis-Philippe inaugurated his famous *Galerie espagnole* at the Louvre in 1838, he passed a special *procès-verbal* that certified the collection as private property even though the over one million franc cost of the gallery had come from the civil list (27). Such arrangements meant the settlement of Louis-Philippe's *domain privé* took place quickly in a period of eight months in 1848, and that there was minimal conflict over the restitution of art such as the Spanish gallery and Standish collection even though they had been exhibited at the Louvre. When Granger examines the much more complex and protracted liquidation of Napoléon III's civil list, the reader can only conclude

that the very different and comparatively less self-serving practices employed by Napoléon III regarding art purchases disadvantaged his beneficiaries.

The Louvre was the principal repository for art from the *domaine privé* removed from palaces, which resulted in considerable confusion within the museum's collection. There was an inventory of works acquired through the civil list that included neither works bought for the Louvre, nor those acquired directly by Napoléon III and Eugénie or given to them as gifts. There was no designated administrator for the *domaine privé* during the Second Empire, and since the inventory was not signed, it was deemed inauthentic. Nonetheless, Napoléon III perceived the museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and several farms, as belonging to him and does not seem to have distinguished well between his property and the property of which he enjoyed use. Granger concludes that the rulers were not "prudent", that Napoléon III did not spend a lot of time on his personal fortune as Louis-Philippe had, and that he did not foresee the problems of a revolution (396). The commission determined whole collections, like the arms at Pierrefonds and the *musée Chinois* at Fontainebleau, to be historical monuments and by their placement in a château, as given to the state. Even the ownership of memorabilia was contested and all works of art found in palaces on September 4, 1870 were considered owned by the state and simply placed in the palaces as ornamentation. Paintings of family followed the imperial couple and were not attached to any palace, but Louvre curators were brought in to determine which works were of "historical or artistic interest;" thus, nine works were kept, including Prudhon's *Portrait of Josephine* and Gros' *Portrait of Bonaparte at Arcole* (401). Other modern paintings that the curators noted as of particular artistic interest were also kept by the state, including Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* and Daubigny's *La Grande vallée d'Optevoz*.

After Napoléon III's death in January 1873, Eugénie continued to challenge the government's decisions through her representative Eugène Rouher. Although the accord between the state and the imperial family failed, a parliamentary commission raised the sequestration in March 1874, allowing furniture from the *domaine privé* to be restituted by August of that year. Eugénie continued to request the restitution of the collections at Pierrefonds and Fontainebleau and works of art acquired by the couple during their reign that did not belong to the state. This process was finally settled in February 1879 with the actual restitution of objects in January 1881. The collections at Pierrefonds and Fontainebleau were retained by the state, as were the works of "historical or artistic interest" as noted above. Granger makes clear that the Louvre curators, Barbet de Jouy and Both de Tausia, who were charged with the restitution of paintings and sculpture, did not carry through on the tribunal's directives and instead followed their own criteria based on the fame of the artist, the fame of the work, the theme and format (426). The government was not interested in portraits of a fallen imperial family so works by artists like Winterhalter were restituted. Granger states that works by artists who had already been deemed out of fashion were also restituted with the choices being made to the advantage of the state. Eugénie's representative Firmin Rainbeaux was critical, but did not challenge the decisions. When Eugénie received the works in England, she had only one residence and the selection of works was neither what she had chosen, nor did it represent her memories. Ultimately, she kept works that were meaningful to her and sold the rest at auction. Eugénie and Rainbeaux also continued to work for the restitution of specific objects that had been overlooked. For example, in 1899 she was still arguing for the return of a pastel portrait of Louis XVII that had been attributed to Vigée-Lebrun during the Second Empire and that

Eugénie had loaned to exhibitions in Paris and Versailles in 1866 and 1867 (438). As late as 1907 a tribunal declared this work and others should be returned, but nothing was sent to her.

In addition to debates around the restitution of furniture and works of art, the ownership of the Palais de Pharo in Marseilles forms a particularly interesting case. This château was part of the *domaine privé*, but the land had been given to Napoléon III by the city and so it was argued it belonged to the nation. The palace was given to representatives of the imperial family in 1875, but the mayor of Marseilles took the case before a tribunal where it dragged on until 1882 when the tribunal voted again in Eugénie's favor. After this was challenged and reinforced by the *cour d'appel* in Aix-en-Provence, in 1884 Eugénie then donated the Palais de Pharo to the city of Marseille (414-415). Although Granger does not analyze the symbolic nature of the debate over this château, which the imperial family had never inhabited, it is clear that the battles over ownership were as much about principle as they were about the potential financial benefit of restitution.

In her conclusion, Granger argues that with the budget Napoléon III received, on average 34,000,000 francs per year, which was 2% of the state budget, the civil list had money to spend comparable to a small ministry and had a wide variety of responsibilities. She offers a good sense of the emperor's financial position by comparing this budget to those of the ministry of agriculture, commerce and public works that were 4.5% of the state budget in 1869 (445). Napoléon III pursued aspects of his political and social ideas with his budget: he sought to develop agriculture in certain regions of France, supported digs on Mount Palatine in Rome, and pursued architectural projects not just for the maintenance of palaces, but also for the construction of schools and churches. Granger concludes it is not completely clear how much money Napoléon III dedicated to art because the contents of different chapters of the budget were not always well defined, and the chapter for "unforeseen expenses" is the least known. Further, art purchases were also made from the emperor's cassette, which was 18% of the total civil list budget (*i.e.*, 6,231,970 francs). Napoléon III developed two museums, the *musée des Souverains* at the Louvre and the museum at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and while he was emperor the Louvre grew significantly. Granger states that Napoléon III was more interested in new art than Nieuwerkerke, acquiring works by Courbet, Corot and Rousseau while Nieuwerkerke failed to do the same for state collections. While Nieuwerkerke was a prestigious director for the Louvre, Granger argues he was also responsible for the weaknesses of the Luxembourg. This study offers a significant contribution to our understanding of the institutions and principle figures involved in the arts during the Second Empire. Granger's meticulous archival work and thorough analysis of an impressive array of legal and financial documents situates her study, along with the *Dictionnaire du Second Empire* and the catalogue for the exhibition *L'art en France sous le Second Empire*, as among the most important resources for the visual arts in the Second Empire period.[3]

Alison McQueen
Associate Professor of Art History, McMaster University
ajmcq[at]mcmaster.ca

Notes

[1] Françoise Maison et al, *Le comte de Nieuwerkerke: art et pouvoir sous Napoléon III*. (Paris: RMN, 2000).

[2] Guillaume Faroult et al., *La Collection La Caze: Chefs-d'œuvre des peintures des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, (Paris: Louvre & Hazan, 2007). For my review of this catalogue, see *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* vol. 6, is.2, Autumn 2007,

http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn_07/reviews/mcqu.shtml

[3] Jean Tulard ed., *Dictionnaire du Second Empire*, (Paris: Fayard, 1995). Victor Beyer et al., *L'art en France sous le Second Empire*, (Paris: RMN, 1979).