





DAVID D'ANGERS

MAKING THE MODERN MONUMENT

EMERSON BOWYER

with JACQUES DE CASO

THE FRICK COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *David d'Angers: Making the Modern Monument*, organized by Emerson Bowyer at The Frick Collection, New York, September 17–December 8, 2013.

Support for the exhibition is generously provided by Antonio Weiss and Susannah Hunnewell, Margot and Jerry Bogert, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Published by The Frick Collection, 1 East 70th Street, New York, NY 10021. [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

Michaelyn Mitchell, Editor in Chief

Hilary Becker, Assistant Editor

Designed by The Oliphant Press, New York

“David d'Angers and the Necessity of Writing” translated from the French by Jacques de Caso and Dorothy Johnson.

Untitled by David d'Angers translated from the French by Jack D. Johnson.

Front cover: David d'Angers, *The Abbé de Lamennais*, 1831 (cat. 9)

Back cover: Portrait of David d'Angers, ca. 1845. Photogravure after a daguerrotype. From David d'Angers, *Les tragiques grecs: 100 dessins par David d'Angers—text par Henry Jouin* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1903).

Frontispiece: David d'Angers, *Pierre-René Choudieu* (detail), 1832 (cat. 10)

Page 10: David d'Angers, *Head of a Woman in Profile*, ca. 1830s (cat. 3)

Page 12: David d'Angers, *La Douleur*, 1811 (cat. 13)

Page 68: David d'Angers, *The Massacres of Galicia*, 1846 (cat. 45)

Page 84: David d'Angers, *Christening Cup*, 1835 (cat. 11)

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Sans titre text by David d'Angers first published in *Démocrate de l'Ouest*, no. 34 (March 20, 1849).

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Bowyer, Emerson.

David d'Angers: making the modern monument/ Emerson Bowyer with Jacques de Caso.

p. cm.

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *David d'Angers: Making the Modern Monument*, organized by Emerson Bowyer at The Frick Collection, New York, September 17–December 8, 2013.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-912114-59-0

1. David d'Angers, Pierre-Jean, 1788-1856—Exhibitions. 2. Romanticism in art—France—Exhibitions.

3. France—Biography—Portraits—Exhibitions.

I. David d'Angers, Pierre-Jean, 1788-1856. II. De Caso, Jacques. III. Frick Collection. IV. Title.

NB553.D3B69 2013

730.92—dc23

2013024049

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## FOREWORD

Artist, intellectual, activist—Pierre-Jean David d’Angers was at the epicenter of early nineteenth-century French culture and politics. A prolific and innovative sculptor, he set himself the enormous task of representing all the illustrious figures of his time. It is almost impossible to imagine such luminaries as Chateaubriand, Goethe, and Paganini other than by David’s powerful likenesses. Today, the artist is not well known beyond the borders of his native country. Few realize that one of the great masterpieces of Romantic sculpture, his bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson, arrived in Washington in 1834 and currently stands in the Capitol Rotunda. Since then, an impressive number of works by David have made their way into North American public and private collections, many of which are included in this first major exhibition devoted to the sculptor outside of France.

Emerson Bowyer, former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow at The Frick Collection, curated the exhibition and wrote the major essay for the catalogue. His insightful contribution is joined by that of the long-acknowledged authority on David, Jacques de Caso, Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley.

*David d’Angers: Making the Modern Monument* extends the Frick’s series of monographic exhibitions on major sculptors who worked in bronze—Tetrode, Riccio, and, most recently, Antico. It also continues the institution’s important tradition of organizing annual exhibitions curated by emerging scholars, a program made possible by the ongoing assistance of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

We are deeply grateful to the exceptional group of private collectors who have so generously and enthusiastically shared their precious works and their knowledge: Allen Adler and Frances Beatty, Pierre Bergé, W. Mark Brady, Herbert and Carol Diamond, Louise Grunwald, Alexander B. V. Johnson

and Roberta J. M. Olson, Stephen K. and Janie Woo Scher, Michael and Lana Schlossberg, Wheelock Whitney III, and a number of anonymous lenders. We also extend our hearty thanks to the American Numismatic Society, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of the City of New York, and the New York Public Library for their loans.

Finally, the project could not have been brought to fruition without the generous support of Antonio Weiss and Susannah Hunnewell, Margot and Jerry Bogert, and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, as well as Allen Adler and Frances Beatty, Michael and Lana Schlossberg, and an anonymous donor, all of whom have our deepest thanks.

Ian Wardropper

*Director, The Frick Collection*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This catalogue and the exhibition it accompanies have developed from my dissertation research at Columbia University. I have been extremely fortunate to have received the unceasing support and generosity of The Frick Collection in bringing this research to life.

At the Frick, my gratitude goes to Ian Wardropper, Director; Colin B. Bailey, former Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator; Susan Galassi, Senior Curator; Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts; and especially Denise Allen, Curator. They have guided and enthusiastically supported this project from its inception. I wish to acknowledge the camaraderie and patience of my office mates and partners in crime in the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellows' office—Nat Silver and Jeongho Park. I also thank Michaelyn Mitchell for her tireless and exacting work on the production of this handsome catalogue, which was designed by Ron Gordon and Aaron Tilford of The Oliphant Press; and Michael Bodycomb, for his beautiful new photographs of many of the works. Thanks also go to Robert Goldsmith, Lynne Rutkin, Rosayn Anderson, Joseph Godla, Julia Day, Patrick King, Adrian Anderson, Rika Burnham, Olivia Powell, Adrienne Lei, Anna Finley, Heidi Roseneau, Alexis Light, Katie Steiner, Nick Wise, Hilary Becker, Serena Rattazzi, my extremely able intern, Kaylee Alexander, and Joanna Sheers, for her assistance obtaining image rights. Diane Farynyk and Allison Gallea handled the many loans with grace and the utmost professionalism. Stephen Saitis and Anita Jorgenson brought the exhibition to life with their stunning designs and lighting.

I am very grateful to our institutional lenders—the American Numismatic Society, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of the City of New York, and the New York Public Library—and particularly appreciative of the remarkable group of

collectors who have been so generous in their support: Allen Adler and Frances Beatty, Pierre Bergé, W. Mark Brady, Herbert and Carol Diamond, Louise Grunwald, Alexander B. V. Johnson and Roberta J. M. Olson, Stephen K. and Janie Woo Scher, Michael and Lana Schlossberg, Wheelock Whitney III, and a number of anonymous lenders.

A number of scholars, curators, and dealers outside the Frick have offered me their advice and assistance. I am especially grateful to David and Constance Yates, without whose expertise and support this exhibition would not have been so rich. I am also extremely lucky to have worked with the great David scholar Jacques de Caso on this catalogue, as well as Jack and Dorothy Johnson. In addition, I thank my advisors, Jonathan Crary and Anne Higonnet, as well as Roger Arvid Anderson, Brooks and Annette Beaulieu, Véronique Boidard, Barry Bergdoll, Aimée Brown Price, Eric Carlson, Elena Carrara, Patrick Crowley, Isabelle Degut, Anne-Lise Desmas, Jim Draper, Jacques Fischer, Adam Glick, Dana Gooley, Mark and Lynne Hammerschlag, Charles Janoray, Wassili Joseph, Jonathan Kagan and Ute Wartenberg, Thierry Laugée, Meredith Martin, Edgar Munhall, Stephanie O'Rourke, David Pullins, Joseph Reinis, Christine Ritok, Catherine Roach, Xavier Salomon, Drew Sawyer, Sheila Schwartz, Eugene Thaw, Melanie Vandenbrouck, Olivia Voisin, Susan Wager, and Alison West. In addition to the staff at the Frick Art Reference Library, I extend my warm thanks to the staff of the Bibliothèque municipale d'Angers, the Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Angers, and the Fondation Custodia in Paris.

Emerson Bowyer



David H. Angus  
1854

## CHRONOLOGY

Pierre-Jean David (d'Angers)

- 1788 Born March 12 in Angers.
- 1808 Enrolls in the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris as a student of Philippe-Laurent Roland (1746–1816).
- 1810 Awarded second place in the Prix de Rome competition. Takes classes with Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).
- 1811 Awarded first prize in the École's *tête d'expression* competition with *La Douleur*. Receives scholarship of 500 francs from the city of Angers. Takes the Prix de Rome for his bas-relief *The Death of Epaminondas*.
- 1826 Elected a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and named professor at the École des Beaux-Arts.
- 1828 Begins writing his *Carnets* and visits London.
- 1829 Visits Germany (and again in 1834).
- 1830 Marries Émilie Maillocheau. Secures the commission for the pediment of the Pantheon.
- 1839 Inauguration of Galerie David d'Angers in Angers.
- 1848 Rejects the position of director of the Musées nationaux. Elected mayor of the 11th arrondissement in Paris and becomes a member of the Constituent Assembly in Maine-et-Loire (Angers) but is not reelected the following year.
- 1851 Arrested and exiled following his opposition to Louis-Napoleon's coup d'état. Travels throughout Greece, the Ottoman Empire, and Italy.
- 1853 Returns to France.
- 1856 Dies January 5 in Paris and is interred in Père Lachaise Cemetery.



# DAVID D'ANGERS: MAKING THE MODERN MONUMENT

EMERSON BOWYER

*A sculptor is the recorder of posterity. He is the future.*

—David d'Angers, *Les Carnets de David d'Angers*

IN 1883, VICTOR HUGO REFUSED TO SIT FOR A PORTRAIT BUST BY Auguste Rodin. No artist, the writer asserted, could hope to equal the likenesses made of him decades earlier by another French sculptor, David d'Angers.<sup>1</sup> Though lauded by Hugo as the Michelangelo of Paris, today David is little known and understudied. Yet he produced many of the most iconic portraits and ambitious public monuments of the Romantic era. Celebrated and controversial in his lifetime, he was an ardent Republican, experimental writer, confidant to innumerable artists and intellectuals, and teacher to some of the greatest sculptors of the period. Taken in its entirety, David's career presents a profound investigation of the function and significance of memory and the representation of the past. In an epoch marked by both intense historicism and the ever-accelerating rhythms of modernity, David sought to redefine and reinvigorate the notion of a monument.

## CLASSICISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Like most sculptors of the early nineteenth century, Pierre-Jean David d'Angers's origins were working class. From an early age, he assisted in his father's ornamental woodcarving workshop and joined other apprentices for

basic drawing classes at the local *École Centrale*.<sup>2</sup> In 1808, he traveled to Paris and enrolled in the *École des Beaux-Arts* as a pupil of the sculptor Philippe-Laurent Roland (1746–1816).<sup>3</sup> By all accounts, David spent his first Parisian years in near abject poverty, assisting on large-scale public decorative projects in order to survive. Yet he rose rapidly through the ranks, in 1810 receiving second prize in the *Prix de Rome* competition for his *Othryades Mortally Wounded*. This work caught the attention of First Painter to Napoleon, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), who invited him to take classes in his studio without paying the usual fees. Louis David provided a charismatic, if problematic, model for the production of politically engaged art, fostering in his students both a preference for the observation of nature and a critical approach to classicism. Throughout his career, David would acknowledge the formative influence of that teacher.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1811 brought David greater success. In early February, he won the *École's* annual *tête d'expression* prize with *La Douleur* (p. 12 and fig. 1), an extraordinary bust representing pain.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, his professors requested financial aid from the city of Angers for the impoverished student.<sup>6</sup> A fellowship of five hundred francs was offered, providing David with the financial security necessary to devote all his effort to study. The following September, he took the *Prix de Rome* with his bas-relief *The Death of Epaminondas*, a work that demonstrates his complete assimilation of neoclassical style.<sup>7</sup> As an expression of gratitude to his native city, David sent his three prize-winning works to the *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Angers.<sup>8</sup> He would also adopt the city's name as his own. Angers continued to receive a regular flow of objects made by the sculptor—mostly bronze and plaster casts. In 1839, the *Galerie David d'Angers* officially opened as an appendage of the city's museum. It was the first institutional and museological space devoted to a living artist and, by the late 1850s, would house an almost complete collection of his sculpture.<sup>9</sup>

Of his three major student works, the *tête d'expression* bust offers the clearest indication of David's developing aesthetic philosophy and practice.<sup>10</sup> *La Douleur* is a *Laocoön* with side whiskers; a thrillingly tense conjunction of timeless classicism and the material immediacy of the real.<sup>11</sup> Here, David makes an important intervention in contemporary controversies concerning the relationship between the art of antiquity and the observation of nature.<sup>12</sup> Writing to Roland in 1812, David reiterates his teacher's position on this debate: "I know you have always told me that the antique serves to make visible the beauty that exists in nature."<sup>13</sup> This vague proposition, expressing all the internal contradictions of early nineteenth-century aesthetic theory, seems directly addressed by *La Douleur*. The work demonstrates David's deep familiarity with classical precedents—the *Laocoön*, the *Dying Alexander*—while retaining a strong sense of the live model from which he worked. Rather than relying on superficial and schematic facial movement for its effect, *La Douleur* evokes a unified bodily organism, one that seems to extend beyond the limits imposed by the bust format. Head, neck, and shoulders act in concert, each contributing meaningfully to the representation of pain.

David's anatomical precision reflects his investigation of dissected corpses with the young medical professor Pierre-Augustin Bécclard (1785–1825). Around this time, and probably in consultation with Bécclard, the sculptor executed a series of large and highly finished anatomical drawings.<sup>14</sup> One sheet vividly pictures what could almost be the meaty, subcutaneous machinery of *La Douleur*: a straining web of veins and muscles that, in the plaster, seems veiled only by the finest of membranes (fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> Here, David provides an innovative interpretation of Toussaint-Bernard Émeric-David's *Recherches sur l'art statuaire*, which offers the following advice: "Each time you study a dissected part of the human body, model or draw the corresponding part of a live model. During this work, keep the antique



Fig. 1. David d'Angers, *La Douleur*, 1811 (cat. 13). Fig. 2. David d'Angers, *Study of Neck Muscles from the Side*, ca. 1808. Sanguine and black crayon on paper, 58.2 x 42.5 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers (77.16.33)

constantly before you so it might serve to mediate between dissected and living nature.”<sup>16</sup> Unlike other contemporary attempts to harmonize antiquity and modern physiology—Jean-Galbert Salvage’s overly literal illustrations of the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 3), for example<sup>17</sup>—*La Douleur* is a hybrid figure that exploits the ambiguous space between classical idealism and the fleshy, pulsing reality of the living body. As such, it teeters on the brink of Romanticism.

In 1816, following his four-year sojourn in Italy as a *pensionnaire* at the Académie de France in Rome, David returned to Paris and almost immediately gained his first major state commission.<sup>18</sup> With the death of Roland, the young artist received his teacher’s unexecuted contract for a



Fig. 3. Jean-Galbert Salvage, *Head of the Apollo Belvedere*. From *Anatomie du gladiateur combattant applicable aux beaux arts, ou Traité des os, des muscles, du mécanisme de mouvemens, de proportions et des caractères du corps humain* (Paris: Salvage, 1812)

colossal sculpture of Louis de Bourbon, the seventeenth-century French general known as the Grand Condé. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1815, Louis XVIII had launched a monumental program celebrating the illustrious men of the Bourbon reign, and David's marble was one of twelve commissioned for the Pont Louis XVI (now the Pont de la Concorde). This was an exceptional show of faith in a little known and untested artist who was also by far the youngest contributor to the project. His half-size plaster model for the statue made its debut at the Salon of 1817 although the four-meter-high marble (now destroyed) would not be completed for another decade.<sup>19</sup>

*The Grand Condé* (fig. 5) breaks with the neoclassical style that had dominated sculptural production for almost half a century and whose major



Fig. 4. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Bonaparte on the Bridge of Arcole*, 1796. Oil on canvas, 73 x 59 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris

proponents were Antonio Canova (1757–1822) and Bertel Thorwaldsen (1770–1844). David rejects the cool repose of such sculpture in favor of dramatic action. In its conception and effect, the work owes more to innovations in painting—such as Antoine-Jean Gros’s *Bonaparte on the Bridge of Arcole* (fig. 4)—than in sculpture. A confluence of oppositional forces, the extravagantly costumed Condé rears back while preserving a forward momentum, and

all the while he whirls like a turbine. According to the Salon’s explanatory booklet, the statue depicts a crucial episode from the life of the Condé when the young officer hurled his general’s baton at the enemy before leading his troops forward to reclaim it.<sup>20</sup> David presents the instant immediately preceding the baton’s release, when the Condé coils like a spring. And yet, precisely with that bodily stance, he allows us to imagine an almost cinematic unfolding of the action on a wider temporal continuum—both before and after the moment pictured. This is animated history. Like the young general, David treads a fine line between boldness and recklessness.<sup>21</sup> It marks the brash entry of Romanticism in the history of sculpture.<sup>22</sup>



Fig. 5. David d'Angers, *The Grand Condé*, 1817 (cat. 19)