

## Art Reviews

In helping you appreciate this wonderful work of art, the reviews from the 1860's may give you guidance:

*Boston Transcript*, November 17, 1864:

“The statue is marvelous in its lifelike reality. The emperor is absorbed in thought. The expression of the features indicates the ability to form vast designs, and the expression of the fingers, the determination to carry out those designs. The whole statue is instinct with life — beautifully harmonious, wonderfully individual — a real creation, a triumph in art. New Yorkers ought to secure a copy for Central Park.”

*Daily Evening Bulletin*, (Philadelphia),  
December 13, 1864:

“Among the works of art now in progress, one of the finest and most attractive is a statue of Napoleon by the sculptor Launt Thompson. It represents the emperor's standing there bare-headed and lost in thought. The figure stands in a graceful and easy position. The head is extremely beautiful and it may be said with truth that the whole composition is extremely grand and shows in every detail the greatest study and greatest truth.”

## *Napoleon and the American Dream*

We might ask ourselves, as we contemplate this work of art: What should we think of Napoleon today? Is there some inspiration we can gain? Or does he represent just another chapter in the world's long history of war and turmoil? Was he a brutal despot, an enlightened monarch, or an advocate of democracy?

He was probably all three simultaneously. Napoleon was a colossal figure, with giant contradictions. Napoleon plundered Europe and acted in ways that are antithetical to the values of American democracy.

But he also made lasting contributions to progress in the world:

- Napoleon created the foundation of the modern French state.
- To impose his will, he professionalized the system of provincial governors.
- To gain control over what was being taught in the schools, he promoted a new national educational system.
- To help break the political power of the Catholic Church, he promoted freedom of religion for Protestants and Jews.
- Although he himself often ignored his own Civil Code (the “Napoleonic Code”), it provided equality before the law and opened careers to talented individuals of all classes.
- To raise money for his armies, he simplified the tax system and formed the Bank of France.
- To create a vested interest in supporting his regime, he endorsed the sale of church lands to peasants and the middle class.
- While he was a dictator and devoted much effort to silencing opposition, he was by all accounts an incredibly energetic and talented administrator.

It is worthy to note that many of the positive aspects of these actions have survived, while the negative ones have not.

*We acknowledge the Smithsonian Art Museum for the loan of the Napoleon I statue and thank the many volunteers who conducted the research and helped bring Napoleon I “home.”*

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# NAPOLEON



*Napoleon I*  
by Launt Thompson  
1866



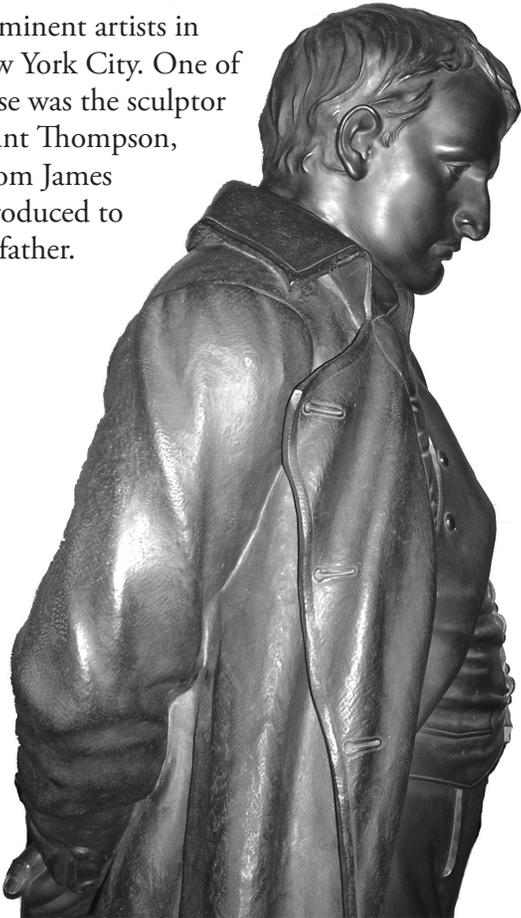
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## *The Pinchots and Napoleon*

Cyrille Constantine Desire Pinchot, (born in Breteuil, France, 1796 – 1873) and his parents were ardent supporters of Napoleon Bonaparte. Cyrille was about 19 at the time of Waterloo and may have participated in the battle. In 1816, Cyrille and his parents fled to America, fearful of the retribution of the aristocrats who returned to France after Napoleon's fall.

Cyrille moved to Milford in 1819 and established a profitable family business. He resided in the large white house at the center of Milford that now serves as the Milford Community House. Cyrille's son James (1831 – 1908) built Grey Towers as his home in 1886, but not before he befriended numerous prominent artists in New York City. One of those was the sculptor Launt Thompson, whom James introduced to his father.



## *About the Statue*

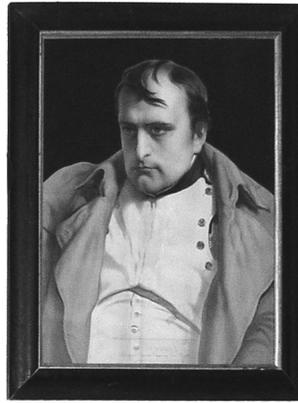
Cyrille, driven by a strong sense of loyalty to his French heritage, hired Thompson to sculpt a bronze statue of Napoleon in the early 1860's. He intended to have the statue placed in downtown Milford.

Unconfirmed reports note that the residents of Milford were not keen on paying tribute to Napoleon, who at the time was considered a tyrant.

Instead, *Napoleon I*, a highly acclaimed work by one of the preeminent American sculptors of the 19th century, was exhibited at the Paris Art Exposition of 1867 and displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York for one-half century. The Pinchot family loaned it to the Smithsonian Institute in 1912, and Gifford Bryce Pinchot donated it to their permanent collection in 1961. In 2001 it was loaned to Grey Towers and relocated to Milford — its intended original home.

## *About the Sculptor*

Launt Thompson (1833 – 1894) was born in Ireland and immigrated to Albany, NY, in 1847 during the potato famine. He moved to New York City at age 25 and became a roommate of James Pinchot, which ultimately led to a friendship with the Pinchot family and the commission to sculpt the *Napoleon I*. For a period of time, including when he was working on this statue, he resided in Milford during the summer months.



Thompson's other well-known sculptures include these:

- *General Winfield Scott*, Washington, DC
- *General Ambrose Burnside*, Providence, RI
- *General John Sedgewick*, West Point, NY
- *Admiral Francis DuPont*, Wilmington, DE (originally in Washington DC)
- *Abraham Pierson* (founder of Yale University), New Haven, CT
- *William Cullen Bryant*, Grey Towers
- *Edwin Booth as Hamlet*, Grey Towers
- *The Color Bearer*, Pittsfield, MA

## *What to Look for in This Statue*

There are a number of things to consider when appreciating this statue. First, note **the humble pose**. The sculptor could have shown the Emperor on a rearing horse with sword in air. Or he could have depicted him with the stereotypical hand-in-vest gesture and a bicorne general's hat. Instead, Napoleon is non-heroic — hatless, calm, and reflective.

The sculptor intended to convey some message by choosing this pose. What do you think it is?

Next, note the **fluid lines and forms**, achieved in the hard medium of bronze. This movement conveys emotion and a sense of his personality. Look closely at the **expression on Napoleon's face**. He clearly is lost in thought, not posing stiffly or passively. Look at his **hands**; they are tensed. It makes the statue more like one of us, more human and lifelike.

You might ask yourself: What is he thinking? Is he planning his next battle? Brooding over his failures? Or maybe he is reflecting on his impact on the course of history, trying to decide if ultimately he would be a positive force or a negative one. Maybe he is perplexed by the realization that he would be both.