

A stylized, high-contrast illustration of Napoleon Bonaparte's face and head. He is wearing his iconic bicorne hat, which is black with a green band and a plumed cockade on the right side. The cockade features a blue circle in the center, surrounded by red and white stripes. The portrait uses a limited color palette of black, white, green, and blue on a tan background. The text 'Napoleon at the Movies' is overlaid in white, with the 'o' in 'Napoleon' containing the blue circle from the cockade.

# Napoleon at the Movies

FSU Museum of Fine Arts  
Fall 2021

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Cover image: *Waterloo*, designed by Klaus Vonderwerth, East Germany, 1972


## More films have been made about Napoleon Bonaparte than any other figure in history. What is it about this man that intrigued filmmakers, actors, and audiences throughout the 20th century?

Napoleon's story arc is epic in scope and dramatic opportunity. It is a narrative that spans his idealistic youth as a Corsican nationalist and revolutionary in the French army to the height of his power as an ambitious emperor to his eventual ego-fueled downfall. These plot points are punctuated by shifting love interests and awe-inducing battlefield set pieces.

***Napoleon at the Movies*** is a collection of posters that advertise these films to specific audiences around the world. Part of what has made Napoleon's character so enduring in performance is its changeability – in the archetypal story of rise and fall, each filmmaker can find a point of view that makes the story newly relevant. This same flexibility is present in the posters: the image that compelled moviegoers in East Germany to see 1970's *Waterloo* is quite different from the one that spoke to an audience in Cuba.

Through the lens of these films and the posters that typify them, much can be understood about the cultures, moments,

and histories that contributed to their making. Throughout the world, the 20th century was marred by wars, economic depressions, and the brutalities of authoritarian governments, each of which was accompanied by prolonged periods of social unrest. Napoleon's legacy is difficult to comprehend in 2021 as we revisit the limitations of his liberal ideals, the violence of colonialism, and his embrace of slavery. These posters tell us what 20th-century audiences might have seen in Napoleon and how national identities were projected and performed through him.

***Napoleon at the Movies*** features more than forty original posters created between 1908 and 1989 from sixteen countries, including Argentina, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Egypt, Italy, Japan, Poland, Romania, and Spain. The exhibition also includes displays of rare books and materials from FSU Libraries' French Revolution & Napoleon Collections to aid in exploring the history of self-fashioning and mythmaking that surrounds Napoleon. 




# *Retraite de Russie*

France, 1908

We know little about the movie for which this poster was created. The poster for *Retraite de Russie* ("Retreat from Russia") clearly depicts the Grande Armée's long and ill-fated march through the Russian winter in 1812, and the movie itself has perished as well. The celluloid chemistry used in the silent film era was highly corrosive. With few copies to begin with, much of this history has been lost.

Napoleon's exploits were among the earliest subjects explored by film directors. During Napoleon's own lifetime, experiments with "magic lantern" shows were

underway, but it was not until the late 19th century that the first motion pictures emerged.

Caran d'Ache's "black cat" shadow play *L'Épopée* ("The Epic") (1888) used zinc silhouettes to recreate famous battles, and Louis Lumière's *L'entrevue du Napoléon et du Pape* ("The Interview between Napoleon and the Pope") (1897) staged a volatile meeting between the emperor and Pius VII. There is much arm waving and foot stomping, and Napoleon knocks a vase from a table and breaks it. The entire movie was one minute long. 

Left: Designed by Louis Galice France, 1908

# NAPOLEONE BUONAPARTE



vvdly N. LEGRANT-HELDORN


AFFICHES-PARIS - 5 Rue de Valenciennes - PARIS

# Napoleon

France, 1909

*Société Pathé Frères* was founded in Paris in 1896, and it quickly became the largest film production company in the world. *The Moving Picture World* was an influential early trade journal for the industry. From 1907 to 1927, its pages chronicled the business of silent filmmaking, its stars, and the pictures that marked the first Golden Age of cinema. Its writers lavished praise on Pathé's *Napoleon*, a sweeping epic that clocked in at just under fifteen minutes. Here is their review:

"It would be an impossibility even in three reels to give the complete history of this man. In presenting this picture, we have selected only a few of the best-known scenes in his life. Commencing with a summer evening at Malmaison, we join in progress one of the most magnificent fetes of the kind that took place only in France, during the height of Bonaparte's power,

and at which are present Napoleon and Josephine. Following this is the well-known scene when Napoleon on his rounds discovers a sentry asleep behind a haystack. He takes up the latter's gun and continues his duties to the astonishment of the soldier when he awakes. We next come to the Battle of Austerlitz and the incident of the guard who was decorated by Napoleon for refusing to allow him to pass without the watchword. [...] Scenes show the little King of Rome; Napoleon endeavoring to compel the Pope to sign an agreement annulling the latter's temporal power; the abdication of Napoleon and his farewell to his guards. Then follows his imprisonment in St. Helena and finally his death in May 1821. [...] Where practicable the pictures were taken on the spot. For instance, Napoleon bids farewell his guards at Fontainebleau Castle, where the event actually happened." 

# NAPOLÉON



CINÉMA *Pathé*

LOCATION et VENTE de FILMS et APPAREILS - PATHÉ FRÈRES - 14 RUE FAVART - PARIS -




# *Le Mémorial de Sainte Hélène ou la captivité de Napoléon*

France, 1912

Though we know little about Nonguet and Carré's 1912 film, Napoleon's years of exile on St. Helena have been the subject of many treatments. Napoleon died at Longwood House at age fifty-one, under the watchful eye of the island's governor and custodian, Sir Hudson Lowe, depicted here in full military dress.

Over six years of exile, the emperor complained often of "colds, catarrhs [stuffy noses], damp floors, and poor provisions." The cause of his death has been alternately attributed to stomach

cancer, a bacterial infection, and poisoning from arsenic in the wallpaper. Accounts differ as to his last words. Napoleon's Grand Marshal, General Henri Bertrand, attended at his deathbed and recorded the following.

"From three o'clock until half-past four there were hiccups and stifled groans. Then afterwards he moaned and yawned. He appeared to be in great pain. He uttered several words which could not be distinguished and then said 'Who retreats' or definitely 'At the head of the army.'" 




# *Napoleon und die kleine Wäscherin*

Germany, 1920

# *I cento giorni di Napoleone*

Italy, 1914

*Napoleon und die kleine Wäscherin* ("Napoleon and the Little Washerwoman") was the first in a line of film adaptations of Victorien Sardou's 1893 comedy *Madame Sans-Gêne* ("Mrs. Without-Embarrassment"). This poster presents a very severe-looking Napoleon who has clearly been embellished with the stage makeup – whitened face, darkened eyes, rosebud lips, painted-on eyebrows – common to the silent-film era.

The "Hundred Days" marked the period between Napoleon's return from eleven months of exile on the island of Elba in March of 1815 and the second restoration of King Louis XVIII in July. Mauzan's lithographic portrait captures the intensity and desperation of a power-mad Napoleon in his final throes. He dominates the frame, but on the horizon are the smoke, flames, and battalion lines on the fields near Waterloo where defeat awaits. 

Top left: Unknown Designer, Austria, 1920

Bottom right: Designed by Achille Lucien Mauzan, Italy, 1914

# MADAME SANS-GÈNE

Direction Artistique  
**LÉONCE PERRET**



avec  
**GLORIA SWANSON**

et  
**ÉMILE DRAIN**  
de la Comédie Française

*C'est un film Paramount*



Imp. DEVAL et BÉGINNE de Félix Faure - PARIS


# *Madame Sans-Gêne*

France, 1925

Léonce Perret's *Madame Sans-Gêne* is a lost film. No surviving prints are known to exist. This gold-plated poster does, however, reflect its grandeur. It starred Gloria Swanson, one of the world's most famous actors, and Émile Drain, who was acclaimed for his portrayals of Napoleon. Here he strikes that most iconic pose in his grey overcoat and bicorne hat embellished with the tricolor cockade to show allegiance to the Revolution.

The hand-in-coat pose that we now associate almost exclusively with Napoleon was common in paintings of the rich and powerful long before he was born. In 1738, Francois Nivelon wrote in *A Book*

*of Genteel Behavior* that it signified "manly boldness tempered with modesty." It appeared so often in English and American pictures that artists were accused of not knowing how to paint hands. By Napoleon's time, it had fallen out of style.

In 1812, Jacques-Louis David received a commission to paint a fresh portrait of the emperor. This was before Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia, but his popularity was already in decline. David thought the power pose might revive Napoleon's fortunes, and it became his signature gesture. Napoleon told the artist after seeing the portrait, "You have understood me, my dear David." 



RENDEZŐ:  
ABEL GANCE



AZ ÉVAD LEGNAGYOBB FILMJE, A FRANCIA FILMGYÁRTÁS DIADALA.

# Napoleon

A CSÁSZÁR, A CSÁSZÁR!...

# *Napoleon*

France, 1927

Abel Gance's *Napoleon* is often listed among the greatest films of all time. It is the most celebrated cinematic treatment of Napoleon, despite the fact that it depicts his life and career only up to the age of 27. Albert Dieudonné's portrayal of the rawboned, brooding young general has come to signify the apex of the silent era and its expressive stars.

*Napoleon* was expensive. Although it ran for over four hours, it was only the first in a series of six increasingly ambitious films that Gance had planned. Its technical innovations included hand-held camera shots, fast cutting, extreme close-ups, multiple exposures, underwater shots, kaleidoscopic images, and tinting.

The finale was a "triptych" of three juxtaposed images, which needed three screens and three projectors. Only a few cinemas could meet such demands, and the film was subjected to so much cutting and reformatting that most audiences never saw it as intended.

This very rare Hungarian poster from 1927, with its bold colors and totalistic intensity, foreshadows a review in *The Guardian* by Peter Bradshaw from more than half a century later upon the film's restoration by historian and editor Kevin Brownlow: "It looks startlingly futuristic and experimental, as if we are being shown something from the 21st century's bleeding edge. It is as if it has evolved beyond spoken dialogue into some colossal mute hallucination." 

波乱の英雄ナポレオンに不変の愛を捧げる女!

MARIE WALEWSKA

グレタ・ガルボ  
シャルル・ボワイエ

監督 ジョージ・アブザン

# 征服

マリー・ワレウスカ

M-G-M映画




# *Maria Walewska*

United States, 1937

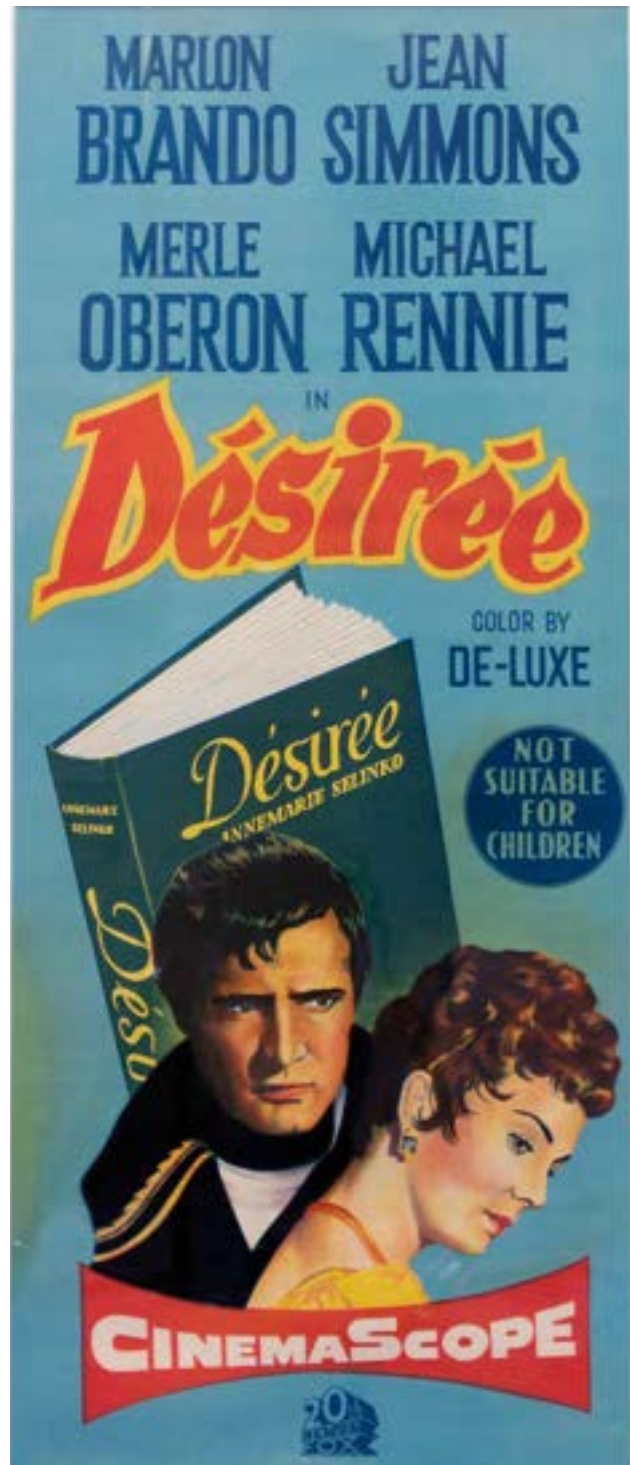
Napoleon's numerous affairs were always the subject of rumor and fascination. His life-long passion for Josephine de Beauharnais showed in hundreds of letters and poems penned at his desk in Paris and written from military campaigns, but it was an infidelitous world, and Josephine and Napoleon are each known to have had many lovers.

His relationship with the Polish noblewoman Marie Countess Walewska was perhaps the most scandalous of these liaisons. In 1806, Marie met with the newly crowned emperor to implore him to save Poland from Russian aggression. Marie saw an opportunity to leverage her power and submitted to Napoleon's affections, in exchange for a shift in his attitude towards Polish independence.

Marie's memoirs remained unpublished until the late 19th century, and much gossip surrounded their poorly concealed affair. In these pages, she reflected on the tragic cost of her acquiescence, maintaining that she forced herself to become involved with Napoleon for purely patriotic reasons.

Brown and Machatý's *Maria Walewska* was based not on these sobering memoirs, but on Waclaw Gąsiorowski's 1930 novel *Pani Walewska* ("Mrs. Walewska"). While celebrating Marie as a nationalist hero whose strategic "conquest" of Napoleon's heart saved Poland, it also sensationalized the affair in a manner much closer to a romance novel than the facts attest. 

Left: Unknown Designer, Japan, 1962



# *Désirée*

United States, 1954

The film *Désirée* tells the story of Napoleon's first fiancé, Désirée Clary, the daughter of a Marseilles silk merchant. As indicated in the Australian version of the film poster, it is based on a 1952 German novel by Annemarie Selinko. The film is pulpy, melodramatic, and filmed exclusively on Hollywood sound stages. Of these posters, the one designed for Japanese audiences most accurately captures its thesis: Napoleon is a brooding jerk and Désirée is a silly woman who cries so often even she remarks that it is a bit over the top.

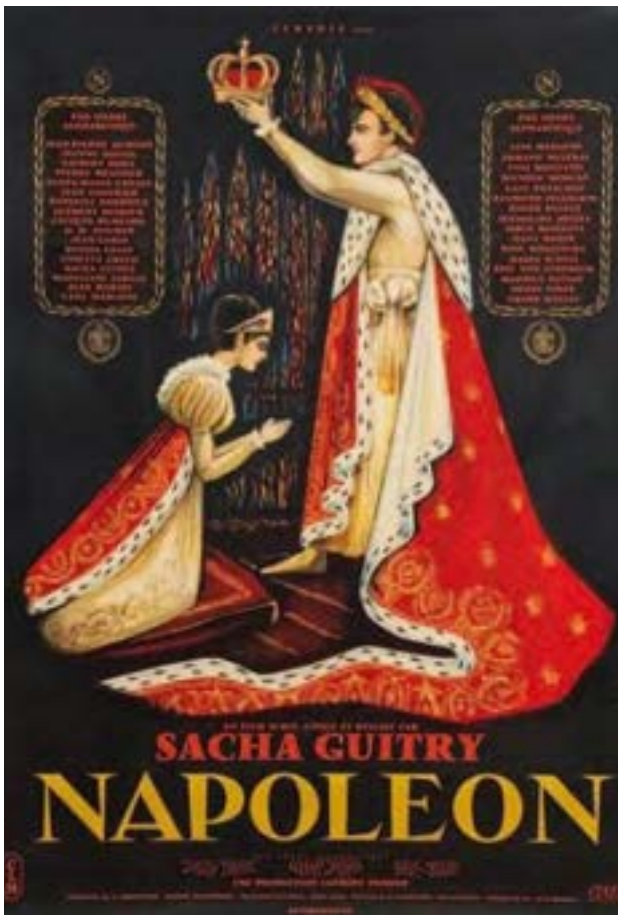
The Italian poster, designed when the film was re-released in the country in 1970 under the banner *Napoleone il Grande*, is the outlier of this group and seems to have been inspired by a different film entirely. There are no battle scenes in *Désirée*, few extras, and not a single horse.

The text across the top reads, "Twice humbled to the dust! Twice victorious in glory! Worthy emulator of Julius Caesar! Conquered Europe and made it tremble!" This tagline riffs on one of the best-known modern Italian poems, "The Fifth of May" from *The Napoleonic Ode* by Alessandro Manzoni. It also helps explain why Marlon Brando is blue and a patrician bump has been added to his nose. An Italian audience would immediately see the parallel to another emperor, now often represented in carved marble. Italy was going through a tumultuous period in 1970, as labor unrest, economic collapse, and politically charged domestic terrorism initiated a period known as the Years of Lead. This poster places the film within an Italian nationalist narrative and glosses over the recent inglorious past and chaotic present to harken a time when a Roman conquered Europe and made it tremble. 

Top left: Unknown Designer, Japan, 1955

Bottom left: Unknown Designer, Italy, 1970

Right: Unknown Designer, Australia, 1955



# Napoleon

Italy & France, 1955


Sacha Guitry's 1955 treatment of Napoleon's life was perhaps the most iconically French of all of the films. Scenes were shot on location at Malmaison, Fontainebleau, and Versailles. The story is told through a series of vignettes narrated by Sacha Guitry himself, cast in the role of the elder advisor Tallyrand.

These largest posters depict two of the most heralded moments from Napoleon's life, each in a style derived from a high point in French art history. Napoleon is emblematic of French greatness, banded with the victor's laurels and monograms. There is no complexity to the message. Here is the center around which a national identity has been shaped.

Jean Mascii's young general's storming of the bridge at Arcole is rendered as a grand manner portrait. This is the moment when Napoleon sealed his reputation as a fighter, charging ahead of his troops, waiving the tricolor flag. This image of fearlessness had been repeated countless times in paintings and reproductive prints,

but the story was apocryphal. Records show that Napoleon stood defiantly along the riverbanks, within range of Hapsburg marksmen, but he did not hurl himself into the line of fire. Guitry surely knew this. He had played the role of Napoleon in two previous films and dedicated years to the making of this one, but reinforcing the legend was the point.

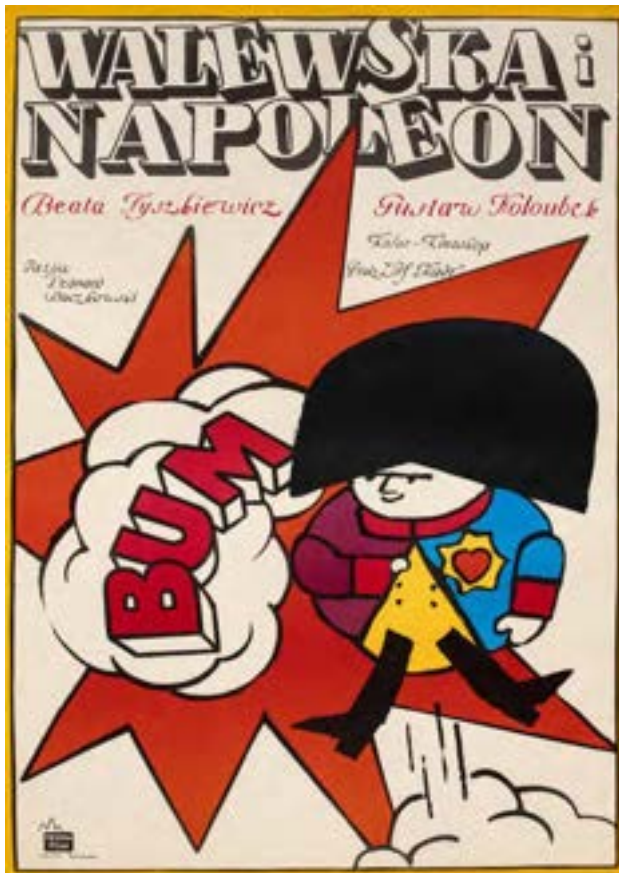
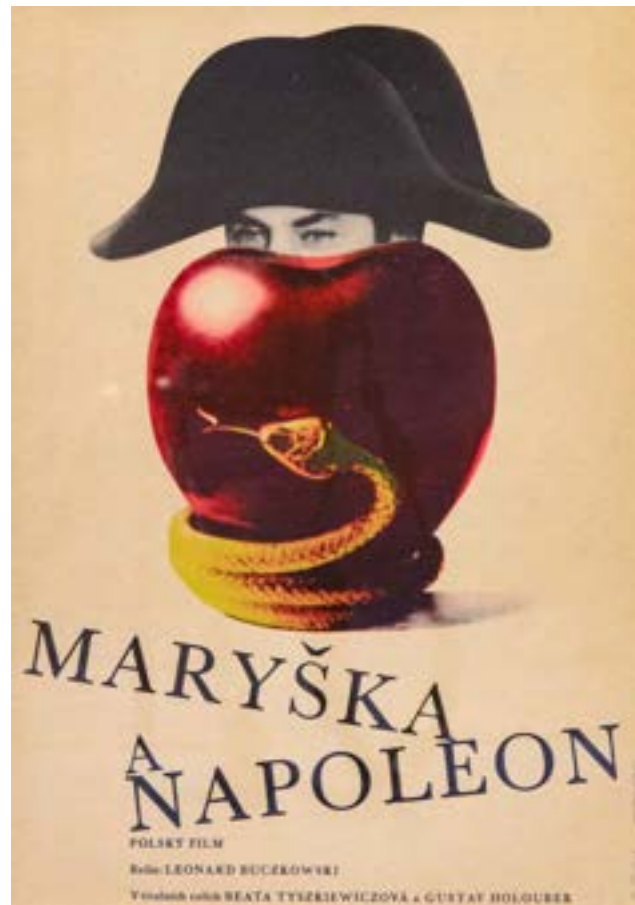
René Ferracci depicts the moment of Napoleon's coronation at Notre-Dame Cathedral in a neo-Gothic fashion, flattened and colored in the jewel tones of the stained glass backdrop. It was a carefully scripted affair, culminating in Napoleon holding a replica of Charlemagne's crown over his own head while also wearing a golden wreath to evoke the Roman Empire.

Perhaps most interestingly, the third poster for Napoleon also drew from art history to elicit associations with national greatness, but they were Japanese precedents. The vertical format and muted palette evoke traditional ink and brush landscape paintings, but Napoleon is the landscape. His hat towers over the composition like Mount Fuji. 

Top left: Designed by Jean Mascii, France, 1955

Bottom left: Designed by René Ferracci, France, 1955

Right: Unknown Designer, Japan, 1956



# *Marysia i Napoleon*

Poland, 1966

In *Marysia i Napoleon*, a French historian, named Napoleon, tells a Polish art history student, Marie, the story of Napoleon Bonaparte and Marie Walewska. The film traces both timelines and couples, and through their mirrored relationship conveys the political and social pressures that complicated the romance between 1806 Napoleon and Marie. Despite the slapstick humor of the Polish and Cuban posters, the film is not particularly comedic. It is invested instead in the gendered and nationalist dynamics that weighed on Marie as she used her closeness with the emperor to push for Polish independence.

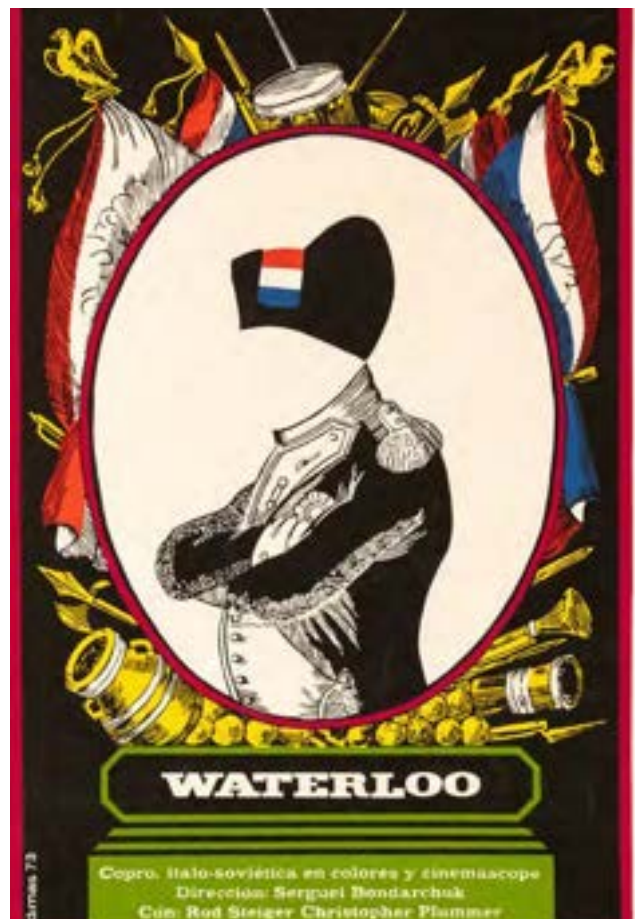
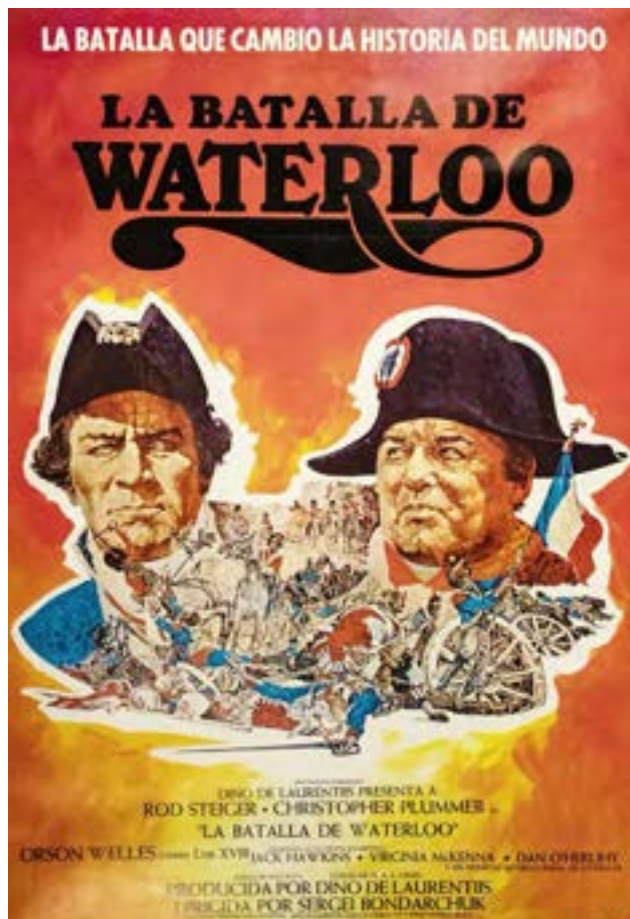
The Romanian poster illustrates Marie's difficult position, balancing personal and national desires. In the mod graphic, the repetition of the famous bicorn hat obscures Marie's face, replacing her identity with the metonymy for his. In the early 1960s, Romania began to exert some independence from the Soviet Union, relaxing many of the restrictive Stalinist policies instituted in the post war years and re-orienting towards the United States and Western Europe. In this poster, we see reflected the aesthetics of American feminism and pop art and an exploration of this short-lived Romanian national identity. 

Top left: Designed by Napoleon Zamfir, Romania, 1966

Bottom left: Designed by Waldemar Swierzy, Poland, 1966

Top right: Designed by Vladimír Bidlo, Czechoslovakia, 1967

Bottom right: Designed by Eduardo Muñoz Bachs, Cuba, 1968






# Waterloo

## Soviet Union & Italy, 1970

Waterloo is synonymous with defeat. Napoleon's breakdown and destruction had many causes – torrential storms and mud, futile infantry charges against a well-shielded enemy, the timely arrival of reinforcements – but foremost was his failure to recognize his own hubris and the accelerating inevitability of his fall. “An incomprehensible day,” Napoleon later said. “I did not understand the battle.”

In Sergei Bondarchuk's *Waterloo*, as the endless war scenes give way to a smoldering landscape strewn with tens of thousands of casualties, the finality of Napoleon's defeat is reflected in Rod Steiger's rain-drenched, fuming inertia. He collapses into a carriage as his vanquishers watch from their mounts and his officers distance themselves from his madness. “They will chain you like Prometheus to a rock,” says Marshall Ney. “And the memory of your greatness will gnaw you.”

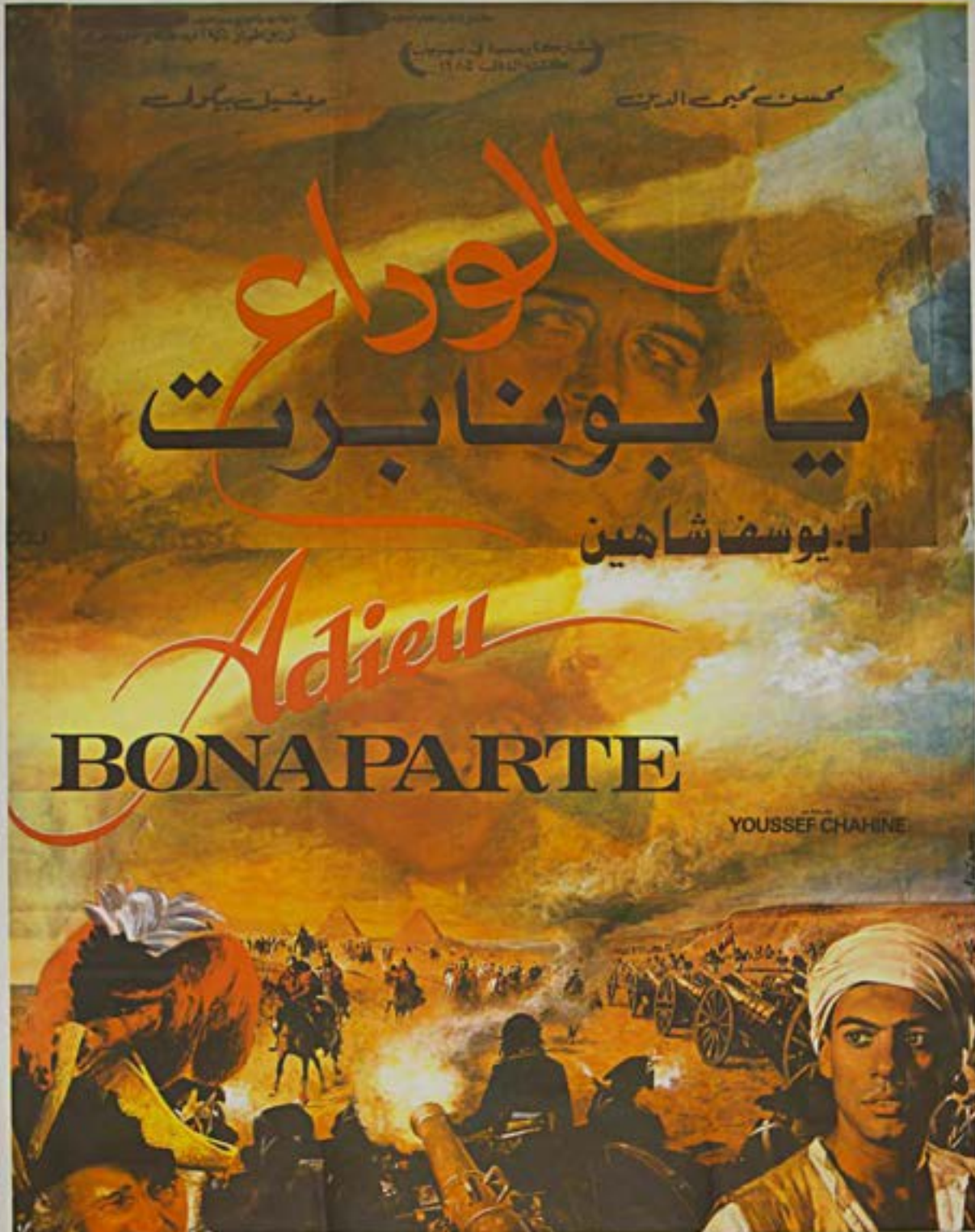
Perhaps more than any other chapter of Napoleon's life, *Waterloo* offered poster artists a rich opportunity for symbolism. It was 1970, the Cold War era, and the torpor of the “great powers” was on full view. Leaders may have been festooned with patriotic regalia, but the clock was running in Franco's Spain, Nixon's America, and the Soviet-occupied Eastern Bloc. *La Batalla de Waterloo* is a literal faceoff between two equally militaristic fronts. In the Hungarian iteration, we are trapped behind Napoleon, a uniformed silhouette with his hands clasped, while the agents of his defeat approach us. For East Germany, here is the once great general, bloated and confused. He cannot even rise from his chair. And perhaps most interesting is Dimas's image from Cuba, which invites a uniquely anticolonial reading. Napoleon has been erased, but the pompous trappings of the tyrant's office remain, waiting for the inevitable successor to fill them. 

Top left: Designed by Klaus Vonderwerth, East Germany, 1972

Bottom left: Unknown Designer, Spain, 1970

Top right: Designed by Helényi Tibor, Hungary, 1972

Bottom right: Designed by Dimas (Jorge Dimas Gonzalez Linares), Cuba, 1973



مکنتہ محمدیہ الدینت  
 میشل بیکرل  
 (شہنشاہی ریاستہ کی سرپرست)  
 مملکت المارک 1962

# الوداع

## یا بوناپرت

د. یوسف شاہین

# Adieu

## BONAPARTE

YOUSSEF CHAHINE

مکنتہ توفیق  
 دکتہ شہید  
 قعدت سلطان جمیل راتب  
 صلح ذوالفقار حسن حسین توفیق الدینت سید الدینت  
 باثریہ شہید  
 خیمہ کار بورکا  
 مملکت المارک 1962  
 مملکت المارک 1962  
 مملکت المارک 1962  
 مملکت المارک 1962  
 مملکت المارک 1962


# *Adieu Bonaparte*

## Egypt & France, 1985

Acclaimed Egyptian director Youssef Chahine's *Adieu Bonaparte* is one of the rare films that confronts the human and cultural costs of Napoleon's many colonial wars. The cinematic valorizing of Napoleon is in direct conflict with his undeniable record. He maintained dominance over French colonies through military and economic warfare and the enslavement of Black and Indigenous peoples, but in the vast filmography these narratives are less explored. More than 200 years later, Napoleon's systematic looting of masses of cultural treasure and their ongoing residence in European and American collections reiterates these crimes.

It was not until the late 20th century, with its fragmentation of imperial states and the emergence of post-colonial theory as a force for reclaiming identities, that Chahine could find any support for his project. The Egyptian women and men whose lives and

lands were invaded by Napoleon's expeditionary forces are not waiting to be enlightened. They were poets and clerics, merchants and civil servants, and mothers and fathers with nuanced understandings of the politics and territorial aims of the French, Ottoman, and Mamluk occupiers of Egypt. Their food stores were raided, their properties were burned, and they were shot indiscriminately by cannon as they mobilized to defend their homes and form a sense of nationhood.

There are vanishingly few depictions of these most consequential impacts of Napoleon's reign. The structural and financial barriers to challenging Eurocentric narratives limit the creation of such informed portrayals of Napoleon as a leader of bloody and repressive campaigns in the Caribbean, North Africa, and the Middle East. These Napoleon movies are still waiting to be made. 



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