MARC MAISON

120, rue des rosiers
93400 Saint Ouen
(France)
tel: +33.(0)6.60.62.61.90
contact@marcmaison.com



Robert LEFEVRE (1756-1830), Pauline Bonaparte, Princess Borghese, Duchess of Guastalla (1780-1825), 1806, Versailles Museum. She stands close to a bust of her brother Napoléon Ier, made by Lorenzo Bartolini (1777-1850), after Antoine Denis Chaudet (1763-1810).



Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix after Canova (1757 - 1822) (Reference #03334)



Jacques-Louis David (1748 - 1825), Portrait of Madame Récamier, 1800, Louvre Museum, Paris



"Guirlandes en Coques", Ladies & Fashion Journal, Parisien costume, 22 august 1799.

It was in Ajaccio on October 20, 1780 that **Napoleon Bonaparte's little sister** was born. At birth she was given the name Paolina, but is better known by her French name of Pauline.
Throughout her whole life, she was cherished by her older brother. Despite the disputes she had with Josephine, the future Empress, the relationship between brother and sister remained strong. She had a competitive relationship with her sisters-in-law, Eugenie, whom she called "the old woman" and then Marie-Louise, whose youth, on the other hand, stirred up her jealousy. Even after the Glory, she continued to visit him on the island of Elba.

Pauline Bonaparte, a tumultuous love life:

Her first love was **Louis-Marie Stanislas Fréron (1754-1802)**, when she was only 13 and he 39. He was sent on a mission in the south of France where he had a passionate love life with the young woman. This deputy to the National Convention wanted to marry Pauline, but was already engaged to another. Learning of this, Napoleon separated the lovers.

General Duphot Leonardo (1768-1797) also fell in love with the young woman. However he died in 1797 and the same year Napoleon offered the hand of his sister to **Charles Victoire Emmanuel Leclerc (1772-1802)**, another brilliant general of his generation. From this love was born ten months later a son, **Dermide Louis Napoléon**, who died in 1806. For this marriage, Napoleon changed the name of his sister from Paolina to Pauline.

She was to find again her first love, Fréron, while accompanying her husband on a mission to **Santo Domingo**. Unfortunately, two months after her arrival, he died of yellow fever. In turn, her husband died from this same disease in 1802. Pauline was inconsolable and as a sign of repentance, the unfaithful wife deposited her hair in the coffin of her deceived husband.
The young woman consoled herself through ever more frequent liaisons with high-ranking members of the military. The future emperor was very protective and broke the careers of those who frequented his favourite little sister. This was notably the case for Jean Joseph Amable Humbert (1767-1823), general and leader of the expedition to Santo Domingo.

Pauline Borghese, an Italian princess:

In 1803, she married **Camillo Borghèse (1775-1832)**, so becoming part of the Italian nobility. However this was not a happy marriage and the couple never really lived together.
In 1806, Napoleon became King of Italy, while Pauline became **Duchess of Guastalla**. This prosperous period was marked by creation of the statue of *Venus Borghese* in her image and her move to the *Petit Trianon* in Versailles Palace . She took her place among the ranks of those women known for their beauty, such as the Marquise de Pompadour and Queen Marie-Antoinette . After the fall of Napoleon, she remained in Italy. She died, childless, in Florence, four years after the death of her brother from liver cancer. Her remains were laid in the Borghesiana chapel of the Basilica Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.

Pauline Borghese, a beauty of the "Marvellous Women" period :

In 1797, the fashion of the *"Merveilleuses"* ("marvellous women", roughly equivalent to "fabulous divas") was booming. It was the time of **Madame Récamier (1777-1849)**, also known for her charm. Pauline was 17 years old and her beauty was much appreciated at this time of the glorification of womanhood. It was the period of the French Directory, after the end of the Terror, when young people yearned for a sweeter, carefree world. Women dressed in antique style, with wide transparent dresses and tunics known as "woven air ". These skimpily dressed women sowed disorder in the capital, to such an extent that a vote being passed to ban them.
Pauline represented this **exacerbated femininity** and the *Venus Borghese* is a perfect example of this. Napoleon's sister is represented here in the antique style, in the *"Semisdraiata"* attitude, that is, semi-recumbent and resting on one of her elbows. Although this pose is highly academic and exudes great nobility, it nonetheless caused a scandal. It was not the semi-naked representation that shocked opinion, but rather the rumour surrounding the work's creation. Indeed, it was said that the princess posed nude for the artist **Antonio Canova (1757-1822)**, something unthinkable at that time for a person of her rank.

See also

The Directoire — Empire style — Neoclassicism — The Grand Tour — Hôtel de Beauharnais — Marie-Antoinette

See our 19th-century objets d'art



Jacques-Louis David (1748 - 1825), Madame Raymond de Verninac, 1798-99



John Watts, Napoleon and Pauline. She sold her jewlery to give his brother a better life on St Helene Island.



Directoire-period cotton gauze dress, c.1800, Neoclassical aesthetic inspired from the Antiquity.



Robert Lefèvre (1755-1830), Portrait of Pauline Bonaparte, Princess Borghese, Duchess of Guastalla (1780-1825), 1806, Oil on canvas, Versailles Museum.