

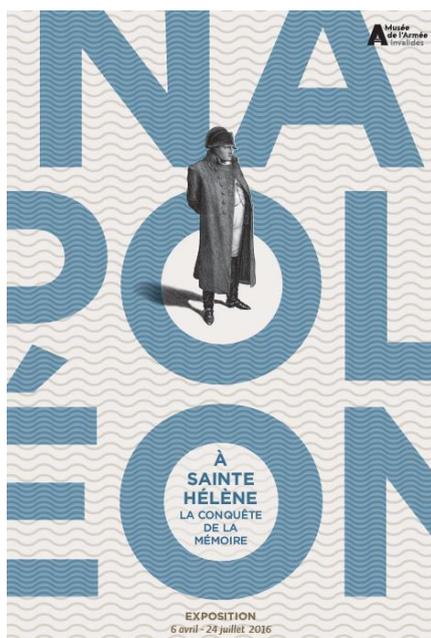
## **NAPOLEON IN SAINT HELENA** **HIS FIGHT FOR HIS STORY**

An exhibition from 6 April to 24 July 2016, organised in conjunction with the operation to restore the furniture from Longwood House, Napoleon's residence on the island of Saint Helena.

This is a unique opportunity for the public to see the furniture that surrounded the Emperor at the moment of his death, which has been restored thanks to the joint efforts of the Fondation Napoléon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, the Domaines Nationaux de Sainte-Hélène, the Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois-Préau, the Government of Saint Helena and private subscribers.

On 18 June 1815, the Battle of Waterloo sounded the death knell of the French Empire. The defeated Napoleon was exiled. England decided on the Emperor's last residence: Saint Helena, a small island bristling with jagged contours in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Napoleon disembarked on the island with his most faithful companions and settled at Longwood House, a modest residence to say the least, where he would end his days in 1821.

A genuine journey through history, this exhibition lays bare the mechanics of memory and its relationship with the present, inviting the public to decode how the memory of Napoleon and the Napoleonic legend were constructed. The exhibition attempts to restore full historical and legendary meaning to the furniture and artefacts. The remnants from his exile and their reinterpretation by subsequent generations will therefore be closely linked, to compose the image of Napoleon's last victory, a victory over time and history, the theme on which the exhibition itinerary ends.



*Charles Steuben, The Emperor in Saint Helena dictating his memoirs to General Gourgaud © Rueil-Malmaison, Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau*

## **Saint Helena, Napoleon's last conquest**

On the rock of Saint Helena, the fallen Emperor launched his final battle, that of posterity, making his last residence a place for writing and creating the legend. Isolated in the midst of the Atlantic, everything conspired to make Longwood a tragic hell on earth. However, Napoleon refused to submit to this and decided to write, thus turning his exile into one last test before his apotheosis. Forced into introspection, he looked back on his political career, making a lie of the adage that history is only written by the conquerors.

Before his death, on 5 May 1821, his actions and gestures had already been published, disseminated and amplified, and false stories and genuine rumours had all begun to create the legend. The most insignificant object associated with the place of his exile and death took on a memorial dimension, and its proximity to the Emperor raised it to the status of a relic.

## **Exhibition itinerary**

The exhibition itinerary is in three different stages, with the following themes:

### **1. Saint Helena. An Emperor in exile**

The first part traces Napoleon's journey from Waterloo and his abdication, up to his exile and arrival on the island of Saint Helena.

The fallen Emperor found his last place of residence there, at Longwood House, and so the space around him shrank, from Europe to an island, and finally to a house. On this remote island in the middle of the Atlantic, Napoleon once more became "General Bonaparte" to the English, and the negation of his Imperial status resonates with the representations given of him: the fallen Emperor in his hunting clothes, gardening to stave off boredom, the writer drafting his memoirs for posterity.

Visitors are then invited to discover the Emperor's house at Longwood through the various rooms, starting with the dining room and bedroom which retain traces of the Imperial etiquette.

Even when exiled from power, Napoleon continued to consider himself a sovereign, and was served by officers and servants, as in his former residences.

### **2. In the heart of Saint Helena. The final battle**

The second part presents Napoleon's life on Saint Helena, which he organised like a campaign. Faced with difficult living conditions and captivity, plus the petty squabbles of his entourage, history became his final battlefield. The library evokes the view the ex-Emperor had of the world, while the study lets us observe the memoir writing process. The bathtub, in which Napoleon soothed his pains, illustrates the theme of sickness and the suffering body. Finally, agony and death, the final part of this section, are shown in the lounge area.

### **3. Beyond Saint Helena. From the shadows to the light**

The final section of the exhibition explores the development of the legend, which the Emperor had begun to construct on Saint Helena, well before his death. A significant part of the itinerary is dedicated to written testimonials, with writings from his "companions", but above all the famous *Memorial of Saint Helena*, one of the bestsellers of the 19th century. Finally, the exhibition ends with a display of the imagery of Saint Helena, showing Napoleon on his rock, fallen but victorious in his battle with posterity.

## **An outstanding set of artefacts**

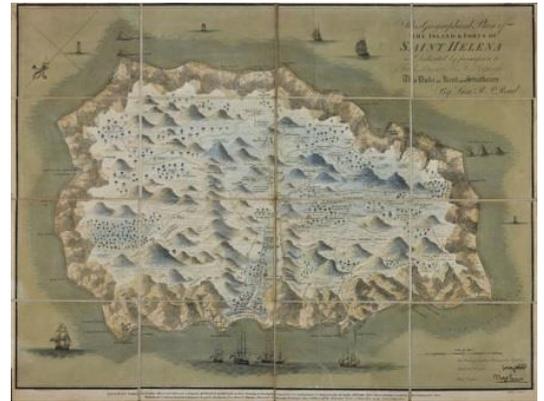
Nearly 240 artefacts, objects and documents are exhibited including, for the first time in France, pieces of furniture from Longwood House, recently restored under the direction of the Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau, the property & logistics department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development. This work was supported by the Fondation Napoléon.

Prestigious loans have also been made, from the collections of the Musée du Louvre, the French National Library (BNF) and the collections of the Queen of England. Visitors will discover historic items such as Napoleon's death bed, or intimate objects such as his clothes, the English lessons that were given to him by the Count of Las Cases from January 1816, and also unexpected artefacts such as his death mask, famously reproduced by the artist Magritte.

A symbolic item on show is the billiards table, which arrived in early July 1816 and on which Napoleon would spread the maps he needed to dictate his account of his campaigns to his companions in misfortune.



*Camp bed used by Napoleon on Saint Helena, known as the "Tayer bed" © Paris, Musée de l'Armée*



*Map of the island of Saint Helena © Paris, Musée de l'Armée*

### **Specific aids for young visitors**

As at every Musée de l'Armée exhibition, multimedia devices and special panels will punctuate the exhibition spaces, giving young visitors and families the keys to understanding and decoding the artefacts, objects and documents presented.

A games booklet and guided tours will also be offered.

### **Multimedia**

A varied multimedia system offers an immersive experience, with a 3D reconstruction of Longwood House with all its furniture in place, so that visitors can imagine themselves in the space occupied by Napoleon at Longwood. Each piece of furniture displayed in the exhibition is linked to an animated multimedia terminal projecting a 3D reconstruction of the object. Finally, a film explains the restoration work carried out on Longwood House and its furniture.

## Partners

This exhibition is produced by the Musée de l'Armée and has been organised with the support of the Fondation Napoléon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, the Domaines Nationaux de Sainte Hélène, the Musée National des Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois-Préau, the Government of Saint Helena and the CIC, the Musée de l'Armée's major partner.

## Curators

Emilie Robbe, Curator of the Modern Department, Musée de l'Armée  
Michel Dancoisne-Martineau, Curator of the Domaines Nationaux de Sainte-Hélène  
Assisted by Léa Charliquant, assistant in the Modern Department, Musée de l'Armée

## Publication

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## Practical Information

Musée de l'Armée, Hôtel des Invalides, 129 rue de Grenelle, 75007 Paris

Open every day except 1 May

10am to 6pm (1 April to 31 October)

Admission: €8.50 to visit the exhibition, €12 to visit the exhibition and the permanent collections

Free for children under 18

Guided tours, activities for young people, film cycle, concerts, conferences, etc.

[musee-armee.fr](http://musee-armee.fr) - 0 810 11 33 99



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**The Musée de l'Armée** has one of the richest collections of military history in the world with nearly 500,000 items, from the Bronze Age to the 21st century. Founded in 1905, it is situated in the heart of the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris, and offers a cultural programme open to all, with exhibitions, concerts, film showings, conferences, events and shows. In 2015, it received over 1.4 million visitors, making it the 5th most visited museum in France.