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## “La Rose Impériale”

**The floral legacy of the Empress Joséphine is celebrated  
in an exhibition of rare rose books opening Feb. 9 at The Huntington**

SAN MARINO, Calif. – When the wife of France’s Napoléon Bonaparte died in 1814, she left behind a floral legacy that lives on in gardens around the world: A passion for roses that greatly influenced the way we know the flower today. The role played by Empress Joséphine in the development of modern roses is at the heart of a new exhibition opening Feb. 9 and continuing through April 28, 2008, at The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.

“La Rose Impériale: The Development of Modern Roses” will showcase 110 rare illustrated herbals and rose books, including a first edition of Pierre-Joseph Redouté’s glorious multivolume work, *Les Roses* (1817-24).

The exhibition is the anchor of a yearlong celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rose Garden at The Huntington, which was established by the institution’s founders Henry and Arabella Huntington in 1908. A lecture series and other related programs are planned. Clair G. Martin III, the Ruth B. and E. L. Shannon Curator of the Rose Garden, is the exhibition curator.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very important era in the history of horticulture: the birth of the modern rose was under way. “In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, repeat-blooming, or remontant, roses from southern China and central Asia had just been introduced into Europe,” says Martin. “Up until that time, few European rose species flowered more than once in a blooming season.”

Empress Joséphine helped drive the demand for these new arrivals from Asia. Her passion for the flowers gave them an imperial allure that did much to heighten their popularity. The title of the exhibition pays tribute to her with a play on her name. Born Marie Joséphe Rose Tascher de la Pagerie in 1763, she was known as Rose before marrying Napoléon in 1796 and

adopting the name Joséphine, which her husband preferred. They were crowned emperor and empress in 1804.

While Napoléon waged war against Britain, Joséphine was spending vast sums collecting new varieties of roses for the gardens of her estate, Château Malmaison, outside of Paris. She even enlisted her husband's aid in the pursuit of her horticultural hobby, says Martin. "At the height of the war in the early 1800s, Napoléon was sending money to England to pay his wife's plant nursery bills, and the British Admiralty was allowing ships to pass through its naval blockades to deliver new types of roses to Malmaison." Joséphine's influence was felt across the channel, as well, as many British aristocrats joined the frenzied competition for the newest blooms.

Joséphine further elevated the stature of the rose by having her flowers immortalized. She commissioned Pierre-Joseph Redouté, former court painter of Marie Antoinette, to paint a series of flower portraits. These were later published, after Joséphine's death, in *Les Roses*, which the artist dedicated to his patroness' memory. The collection of 170 stipple-engraved, hand-colored plates, many of them retouched by Redouté himself, is universally acknowledged as one of the most beautiful and important rose books ever produced. The popularity of Redouté's breathtaking images endures to this day.

Spurred by the intense demand for new roses that Joséphine and Redouté had helped create, 19<sup>th</sup>-century hybridizers began crossing repeat-blooming Asian species with the hardier, more fragrant European natives. "There was a lot of trial and error," Martin notes, "but in a period of just 60 years, between 1840 and 1900, more than 4,000 hybrid remontant roses were introduced."

Although Joséphine died decades before any of these successful hybrids were produced, the continued popularity of roses, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, can be seen as the natural legacy of her passion for these glorious flowers. "She set the standard that everyone else followed," Martin says.

In addition to displaying selected images from *Les Roses*, the exhibition will include more than 100 rare botanical books tracing the history of roses from the once-blooming European natives through key developments in hybridization, such as the introduction of the first hardy, repeat-blooming roses (including 'Duchess of Sutherland,' 1839), the debut of the first true yellow rose ('Soleil d'Or,' 1900), and the rise of the United States as a dominant player in rose hybridization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

References to ancient European roses date back to the pre-Christian era and the writings of Theophrastus, Virgil, and Pliny the Elder, represented in the exhibition with early printed editions. In his poem *Georgics* (finished in 29 B.C), Virgil refers to the “twice-blooming rose of Paestum” in southern Italy; it was the only repeat-blooming rose known in Europe until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today it is known by the name ‘Autumn Damask.’

A rare German herbal, *Gart der Gesundheit* (1488), by Johann Schönsperger, is the oldest volume on display, featuring a hand-colored image of a native European dog rose (*Rosa canina*). The oversized format of Basil Besler’s great botanical folio, *Hortus Eystettensis* (1640, second edition), lends itself to exquisitely detailed hand-colored engravings.

One of the most important roses to arrive from China was the first true red-flowered rose, ‘Slater’s Crimson China,’ an image of which appeared in *Curtis’ Botanical Magazine* in 1774. This early remontant rose is the parent of all modern red roses.

Blooms from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are vividly captured in *The Temple of Flora* (1798-1807) by Robert John Thornton and in Mary Lawrance’s *A Collection of Roses from Nature* (1796-99). The latter volume, with 90 hand-colored images, is the first monograph devoted exclusively to the rose and is one of the rarest of all rose books.

Some of the works on display document how Asian roses were collected—often with considerable derring-do. One such work is Robert Fortune’s *Three Years’ Wandering in the Northern Provinces of China* (1847). “Fortune was something of an industrial spy,” says Martin of the British horticulturist. “He was sent to China to collect roses, but he was also smuggling tea plants out of China for the British East India Company.” Fortune and other plant collectors were aided by the invention of the Wardian case, the forerunner of the modern terrarium, which revolutionized the transportation of live plants during long sea voyages. A replica of a Wardian case will be on view.

Later works displayed will focus on the development of repeat-blooming hybrids, with highlights that include *The Beauties of the Rose* (1850-53) by Henry Curtis and *The Genus Rosa* (1910-14) by Ellen Willmott. Salesmen’s illustrated catalogs from the Victorian era and manuals for the amateur gardener provide a fascinating window into the business, and considerable pleasure, of growing roses.

The final section of the exhibition will speak to the rediscovery of Europe’s historic rose heritage in the mid- to late-20th century, when gardeners were re-awakened to the appeal of Old Garden Roses being grown by influential writers like Graham Stuart Thomas, author of *The Old Shrub Roses* (1966) and Nancy Steen, who wrote *The Charm of Old Roses* (1966).

And since no exhibition about roses would be complete without fragrance, an interactive display will allow visitors to sample rare rose oils from Bulgaria, Morocco, and Turkey. These will be accompanied by an early work on the development of perfumes, Simon Barbe's *Parfumeur français* (1696). A video presentation on how new roses are produced by contemporary plant breeders will round out the exhibition.

The Huntington is a collections-based research and educational institution serving scholars and the general public. For more information, visit online at [www.huntington.org](http://www.huntington.org)

**VISITOR INFO** (effective as of Jan. 1, 2008)

**Hours:** Open to the public Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday from noon to 4:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **Closed Tuesdays** and major holidays.

**Admission on weekdays:** \$15 adults, \$12 seniors (65+), \$10 students (ages 12 – 18 or with full-time student I.D.), \$6 youth (ages 5 – 11), free for children under 5. Group rate \$11 per person for groups of 15 or more. Members are admitted free.

**Admission on weekends and Monday holidays:** \$20 adults, \$15 seniors, \$10 students, \$6 youth, free for children under 5. Group rate \$14 per person for groups of 15 or more.

Members are admitted free. Admission is free to all visitors on the first Thursday of each month with advanced tickets. Information: (626) 405-2100 or [www.huntington.org](http://www.huntington.org)

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