

***Les Roses* remains a cornerstone in the historical study of this favorite flower, as well as the unequaled peak of its artistic depiction.**

Pierre-Joseph Redouté, *Les Roses*. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1817–1824. 18 inches x 12 inches (458 x 305 mm), 3 volumes: 410 pages, 170 hand-colored engravings.

Pierre-Joseph Redouté is perhaps the most popular botanical painter of all, thanks largely to the 170 plates collected in the three volumes of *Les Roses* (1817–24). Redouté (1759–1840) came from a family of many generations of painters and studied under the botanist Charles-Louis L’Héritier de Brutelle, who persuaded him that the best botanical illustrations were the result of an expert knowledge of living things. For the last fifty years of his life Redouté served as drawing master to the queens and princesses of France, from Marie-Antoinette to Marie-Amelie. His drawings adorned a series of lavishly illustrated books by leading French botanists that covered a wide range of subjects from garden plants to forest trees and succulents.

Roses, however, are the most familiar subject of his works, owing to the outstanding quality of his artistry and the devotion of so many gardeners to this group of shrubs. Among these enthusiasts was the Empress Josephine, whose garden at Malmaison contained over 200 varieties of roses, many of which Redouté painted for his book. Still grown today is a rose with fragrant, pinkish-white flowers called “Souvenir de la Malmaison,” which commemorates both Josephine’s garden and the West Indian island of Martinique where she was born. Not all the roses depicted in *Les Roses* came from Malmaison, however; Redouté and the author of the descriptive text, Claude-Antoine Thory selected varieties from the national gardens at Paris, Sèvres, and Versailles and from the gardens of nurserymen and knowledgeable amateurs.

Redouté created the most memorable survey of the rose through his skill in representing the rose’s infinite variety and his talent for capturing the subtleties of both flowers and leaves — and often an impression of the way the whole bush grows. *Les Roses* remains a cornerstone in the study of the historical development of this favorite flower, as well as the unequaled peak

of its artistic depiction. No flower painter has so linked his name and immortality with a single genus as has Redouté with the rose.

This is the first of only five special copies issued in large folio format with the plates in a double sequence: uncolored (on tan paper) and colored (on white paper), from The Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection at the Library of Congress. It was bound by a Parisian, Joseph Thouvenin *l'aîné* (active 1813–33), in quarter purple straight-grain morocco, purple and white washed mottled paper boards, richly decorated in gilt. The title panel reads LES ROSES | PAR | P. J. REDOUTÉ, the volume panel TOME | I [II, III], volume 1 with binder's name tooled at the foot of the spine as customary for Thouvenin. This copy was believed, not implausibly, to have been a gift to Marie Louise, duchess of Parma, the second and last wife of the Emperor Napoleon. And who better to receive the first copy? The gardens at Malmaison of her predecessor Josephine had supplied specimens for many of Redouté's plates.

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