Last Seen
Three deaths, three absences

"... His heart was open like a book."
(Surgeon's report.)

On May 5, 1992, in the bullring at Seville, the torero Manolo Montoliu was killed by a bull: a horn blow straight to the heart. H. sent me a message of condolence which ended thus: "I hope you were not in Seville and that you did not see anything." I was far away from Seville, I saw nothing. I was not at his funeral.

For several weeks, it had seemed, Hervé Guibert was close to death. I had to travel to America and was constantly putting it off. Out of superstition, I preferred to go. He would still be alive when I got back. I even told myself that my journey was an expression of my hope. He passed away on December 27, 1991, when I was on the plane. I was not at his funeral.

I spent last summer rereading interviews in which strangers told me about their suffering. The project title: Exquisite Pain. Five kilometers from there, in the village, love had broken my friend Jean-Marie's heart. He hanged himself on the afternoon of Thursday September 16, 1999. I used to see him regularly, I didn't see a thing. This time I was there, and I didn't see a thing.

May 2000

To Manolo, Hervé, Jean-Marie.
On March 18, 1990, five drawings by Degas, a vase, a Napoleonic eagle, and six paintings by Rembrandt, Flinck, Manet, and Vermeer were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Isabella Stewart Gardner expressly stipulated in her will that nothing in the display should be changed after her death. After the theft, I photographed the empty spaces that the paintings and objects had occupied and I asked the curators, guards, and other staff members to describe their recollection of the missing works.
From the will and codicil of
Isabella Stewart Gardner

1. ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER, WIDOW OF JOHN
LOWELL GARDNER, OF BOSTON IN THE COMMON-
WEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS, DO MAKE AND PUBLISH
THIS MY LAST WILL, HEREBY REVOKING ALL WILLS
BY ME HERETOFORE MADE.

... I ALSO BEQUEATH TO THE SAID COOLIDGE, CUSH-
ING, ENIDCOTT, HIGGINSON, JCHSON, POPE AND
SLEEPER, AND THE SURVIVORS AND SURVIVOR OF
THEM, AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SURVI-
VOR, ALL MY INTEREST IN THE PICTURES, STATUARY,
WORKS OF ART, BRIC-A-BRAC, FURNITURE, BOOKS
AND PAPERS, CONTAINED AT MY DEATH IN ALL THE
STORIES OF THE MAIN BUILDING OF SAID FENWAY
COURT OTHER THAN THE FOURTH STORY AND THE
ATTIC.... INCLUDING ALL THE PROPERTY WHICH
I OWN ... ALL THE AFORESAID REAL AND PERSONAL
PROPERTY TO BE HELD BY THE SAID COOLIDGE, CUSH-
ING, ENIDCOTT, HIGGINSON, JOHNSON, POPE AND
SLEEPER, IN TRUST AS A MUSEUM FOR THE EDUCA-
TION AND ENJOYMENT OF THE PUBLIC FOREVER,
BUT NO WORKS OF ART SHALL BE PLACED THEREIN
FOR EXHIBITION OTHER THAN SUCH AS I, OR THE

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM IN THE FEN.
WAYS OWN OR HAVE CONTRACTED FOR AT MY
DEATH....

... IF AT ANY TIME THE TRUSTEES ABOVE MENTIONED
SHALL PLACE FOR EXHIBITION IN THE MUSEUM
ESTABLISHED UNDER THIS WILL ANY PICTURES OR
WORKS OF ART OTHER THAN SUCH AS I OR THE SAID
ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM ... OWN OR
HAVE CONTRACTED FOR AT MY DEATH, OR IF THEY
SHALL AT ANY TIME CHANGE THE GENERAL DISPOSI-
TION OR ARRANGEMENT OF ANY ARTICLES WHICH
SHALL HAVE BEEN PLACED IN THE FIRST, SECOND
AND THIRD STORIES OF SAID MUSEUM AT MY DEATH,
THEN I GIVE THE SAID LAND, MUSEUM, PICTURES,
STATUARY, WORKS OF ART AND BRIC-A-BRAC, FURNI-
TURE, BOOKS AND PAPERS, AND THE SAID SHARPS
AND THE SAID TRUST FUND, TO THE PRESIDENT AND
FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE, IN TRUST TO SELL
THE SAID LAND, MUSEUM, PICTURES, STATUARY,
WORKS OF ART AND BRIC-A-BRAC, FURNITURE,
BOOKS AND PAPERS, AND TO PROCEIVE THE DISSOL-
UTION OF THE SAID ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM....

Witness my hand and seal this ninth day of May in
the year one thousand nine hundred and twenty-one.

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER (Seal)
There was food, wine, a big thing and all kinds of people on the ship. I remember some of them.

The ship looked like something out of a movie, but I was not interested in that. I looked around, thinking about what was going on.

There was music, people dancing, and the atmosphere was lively. I saw a group of people standing by the window, laughing and chatting.

I remembered a feeling of excitement, of being part of something bigger than myself. The ship was an escape, a world of its own.

I sat down by the window, watching the world pass by. The view was breathtaking, and I felt a sense of freedom.

As I looked out, I thought about the journey ahead. I wondered what would happen next, what new experiences I would encounter.

The ship was a place of wonder, a place where anything could happen. I was ready to embrace whatever came my way.
Storm on the Sea of Galilee, 1633
Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn

There was a bad storm, a big ship, and all kinds of people on the ship. I remember some of them were sick, they were kind of throwing up or something. I don't remember the colors. That's all I can say. There is a big storm at sea and the ship is tossing and turning, and it looks like it's the end. I visualize Jesus as being there too, and he's going to save them. There's no danger, just hold on and pray, everything's going to be all right, there's no problem. It was a biblical piece. It told the tale of the apostles with Jesus. But, I was very upset because there were fourteen in the boat and not thirteen, as in the Bible, since Rembrandt had put himself in the picture. Why was he there? What was he doing? It was so arrogant of him. I find it very appealing that he included himself in this moment of revelation, looking scared to death. I thought it was a rather humble thing to do. It was my favorite because he put himself in the boat. I swear that's where Hitchcock got the idea to put himself in his movies. But, of course, Rembrandt was the best looking one when all the others looked old and sick. We used to call him Robert Redford. This painting faced an earlier Rembrandt self-portrait, so the two Rembrandts looked at each other across the centuries. Some of the apostles are looking panicky, some are trying to wake up Christ, and Rembrandt himself is holding on to his little cap against the wind and looking out at his audience. Rembrandt's looking at you. That was a very aggressive painting. Very dark. A lot of movement and a lot of terror. A look of terror on people's faces. Everybody was frenzied, hanging on for dear life, except Christ and Rembrandt. Everyone else was just a wreck. It was busy, very busy. The flow, the sense of movement is mostly what I remember. Torn sails and water everywhere. Sailors who looked at it disliked it because they said that Rembrandt knew nothing about a ship. They always claimed that the boat would have never sailed because the mast was too thick and its proportions wouldn't allow for flotation. So, I remember being distracted by those details not being
correct. The ship was below the center, turning up towards the left-hand corner of the painting, triangular shaped with the mast jutting diagonally across the canvas. One of the ropes had snapped and was going wild in the air. Half of the painting was in darkness because of those who didn't believe in Christ. Jesus was at the back of the ship very calmly looking towards the light, suggesting that the turbulence might be about to end. What strikes me is how comfortable He was in the midst all that danger. Everyone is working to save his neck and He's the only one that isn't working all. That's how you know He's God. I don't remember Jesus at all in the painting, I don't remember seeing Christ ... It was Rembrandt's only seascape, a very luscious painting that always enlivened me. It just felt like your adrenaline picked up when you looked at the picture. The tumultuousness and the chaos were very contagious. I don't remember this painting as color. Action, not color. It's a very green picture, but it's also very gold. I can't remember why in the middle this big storm, it's so gold. The painting is just sort of suffused with this golden light. The light on the people was amazing. It lifted them out of the darkness of the storm. There was this blinding concentration of light towards the point of danger with yellows, greens and blues in the center of the agitation. The frame was gigantic, late 19th century oiled gilded frame, very thick, very carved. The colors were actually quite bright on the ship, purples, reds, whites. They kind of stood out from the black background. The waves might have had white tips to induce the stormy feeling. I loved the delicacy of the foam which was whitish and yellow and how he approached that with small strokes. When I was a youngster, one Christmas, a dear family friend gave me a five-pound box of candy in a tin box. And on the lid was Storm on the Sea of Galilee. It was the first time I'd ever seen it. It was my prized possession. I loved it, absolutely loved it.
It's the first day of the school year, and the playground is empty. The sun is shining, and the sky is blue. The children are all lined up, waiting for the bell to ring. Suddenly, the bell rings, and they all scatter, running towards their classes.

In the classroom, the teacher is standing at the front of the room, holding a book. She asks the children to take their seats and open their books. The children sit down and begin to read.

After a few minutes, the teacher asks the children to raise their hands if they have any questions. One of the children raises his hand, and the teacher calls on him. He asks, "What is a sentence?"

The teacher explains that a sentence is a group of words that make sense together and ends with a period, question mark, or exclamation point. She then asks the children to write a sentence about their favorite hobby.

The children begin to write, and the teacher circulates around the room, helping them as needed. She encourages them to use complete sentences and to check their work for errors.

After a few minutes, the bell rings again, and the teacher asks the children to put their books away and get ready for recess. The children pack up their belongings and head out to the playground.

The playground is filled with children playing and running around. The sun is still shining, and the day is perfect for playing.

As the day comes to an end, the children gather around their classes, ready to go home. The teacher thanks them for a great day and reminds them to use their manners and to be kind to each other.

The children say goodbye to their teacher and head home, ready for another day at school.
A Lady and Gentleman in Black, 1633
Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn

In the foreground, on the right-hand side of the painting, there was a woman sitting, gazing towards the left. Behind her, in the center, was a man. Her husband, I guess. He was wearing a black cape and a hat. He had a pair of gloves, wearing one and holding the other. She was also in black except for this fluffy thing around her neck, this white ruffle. It seemed very impersonal, very static. He gazed out towards the viewer. She gazed at no one. There were stairs nearby and a reference to travel with a map hanging on a wall in the background. The composition felt a little funny. There’s a man and a woman and no connection between them. They’re in different worlds. It has a very solitary feeling even though there are two people. This
gives the painting a mysterious quality because you can't quite figure out this lack of contact. What are they looking at? It just never made sense. It looked wrong. There's a woman sitting, looking out into space and a man standing up with gloves on, as if he's ready to go out. When they X-rayed the painting, they found that there had been a child in the picture, between the two figures, holding onto his mother's hand and clutching something that looked like a whip.

There was a theory that a little boy had been sitting in the chair with a rattle in his hand and somehow the missing spirit of the child lit the painting with melancholy. When you knew that there was a child who had been playing between them, it felt like a ghost was present. The painting became much deeper, it has a new dimension. One can speculate why he was painted out ...

The story was that the child had died so they removed him, and instead Rembrandt painted a chair. I had just had a child when I heard the story so, I used to come over here when there was no one in the room. It was just like sitting with them. They were friends of mine. Good, solid friends who had experienced a loss. It was a traditional pose, her sitting and him standing. I assume they were husband and wife but they didn't seem in love. I think there was a third interest in the painting. It might have been a dog. They were like porcelain dolls. They didn't seem very realistic. The woman had a far away look in her eyes but she was not looking out, she was probably looking at the child. They removed the child after the portrait had been painted so there's not a look of sadness or grief on their faces because the child was there initially. The woman had a very maternal impact. Everyone's dream of what you want your mother to be like, proper, solid and well fed. Someone who contributes to your future and with whom you could live your entire life. I loved her face, she had ruddy sort of cheeks but she didn't look common. She looked more alive than the man who was self-assured and a little pompous. But it was the detail in the clothing that spoke to me. I remember the flowers embroidered on her hair and those gorgeous white collars. I don't remember the woman's feet. It was another dark painting except for the very white lace. The black and white clothes stood out sharply against the neutral background. The black was very deep and the crisp white lace against it really brought the painting out. It was a little smaller than The Storm, maybe it was 3 feet x 4 feet, something like that. They were a very impressive couple. They dominated the room.
Self-Portrait, 1629
Rembrandt Harmensz Van Rijn

The little self-portrait, the little one? It was hanging to the left of the door as soon as you walked in. And, it was an etching. Beautiful, very much like Rembrandt. Very scribbly, very loose, but very effective. Just his head ... almost like floating ... looking directly at you. He had a really confident look ... almost noble in a way. It was, gosh, maybe 4 inches by 4 inches and behind glass • Oh, the little portrait, I liked that one. Well, he's kind of a peaceful, country kind of a guy, I guess, walking around, with his shirt on and his hat, a famous hat on. Looks like he's happy and contented there, maybe in a village in Italy somewhere ... looks Italian • The little self-portrait, I didn't think there was anything beautiful about it but he looked just like a hippie did you notice? I always called it the original hippie • Very small, small place. Most people didn't even notice it when they came in. It was just a portrait of his face, no background, no detail of clothing, just lots of hair, nice crisscross shading and a hat with a feather • Oh, that I remember, because of Rembrandt's look. His eyes were kind of startled. I think his eyes were wide open as if he had maybe raised his eyebrows. That's something that I used to spend a lot of time with. And I just loved to peer at it because it seemed like he was peering back. It was etched over and over again. There were little moustaches, I think, and I loved where it was on the edge of the cupboard • It wasn't really something that I looked at very much. Maybe because it was just here on the side ... little and modest ... in a small wooden frame. I just liked it because of the size • It had been stolen previously in the late 60s and had been retrieved by an art dealer in New Rochelle, New York and returned. I felt sort of ultra-protective of that one. I used to go by and just give it a smile or a glance or something, just to make sure it was still there. It seems like a barbarous act to me to disturb him in this little frame • I don't really remember anything about it except that it was small and it was a Rembrandt self-portrait • I think it was a sketch of, I'd say, the artist.
It was a young man, probably early thirties, facing the viewer holding a glass of champagne, probably just writing out something, wearing a dark top hat and a dark jacket. On the left-hand upper corner, there was a view to the outsice of the restaurant but little could be seen. I don't remember it at all. Except, I remember there was a guy with a top hat and maybe a moustache. He was a local writer that dined in the café Tortoni everyday and always left his hat on. Manet used to eat there frequently and one day, he said: “Do you mind if I paint you?” It's kind of small and it's like a man, all dressed-up with a top hat, holding a pencil and drinking absinthe. I don't remember the background much because I used to just look at his eyes. It was vibrant and the gentleman sitting there in the café looked at you with eyes of enjoyment and pleasure. He had on inquisitive, questioning look in his eyes. This was not a man who was carrying major responsibility or authority. He was enjoying life but he was not just a pleasure seeker. There was also a mind at work there. It seemed like he was looking far away. Looking out but not at you, as if in a dream. It hung right underneath the powerful portrait of Manet’s mother, but it was much more appealing and accessible. The mother, I hated her, she looked so domineering. This dapper gentleman was so small in relation to Madame. I was more drawn to the solidity of the woman. I remember commenting to people about Madame Manet and then saying: “Oh! By the way, don't forget to glance at this gentleman.” Except for his very white skin, the colors were mostly rustic: dark browns, dark blues and a lot of black. I remember a predominant russet tone apart from the pale rose colored face and hands. It’s a very moving work. It reminds me of something from a hundred years later, a poster called Café, on the walls of my dormitory at college by an artist who used the same kind of style. It was signed Manet, at the foot, on the left.
Landscape with an Obelisk, 1638
Govaert Flinck

It was a beautiful landscape with an obelisk in the distance, a huge tree in the middle ground and a road, along which walked two men and donkey ... and it looked as if there was a storm brewing. Clouds were swirling up around the tree, but the figures in the landscape seemed as if they weren't noticing, they were just meandering along as if nothing was going on up in the sky. All the colors blended into each other, black and brown and green and gold. It was just color, a diffused color, there was light all through it. I remember a chrome green with a lemon yellow and also a yellow ochre that diffused almost a glaze on top of those brighter tones. I think there was a tiny bit of red somewhere and a white blue in the sky, clouds. There
was mostly color and you'd have to see through it to get the picture. It is a landscape very rich, very festive, mellow tones and lots of swirling lines, but it's not turbulent, it has a solitude about it because there's an obelisk that stands out on a ridge, I think, as a sort of lonely presence. Then everything else is nature, an overwhelming presence of nature. I always got a feeling of abandonment from it. I remember looking at the obelisk and thinking that it was just an odd object. It was kind of out in the middle of nowhere, glowing. I just remember the painting as being very dark and just having that one point of light. I don't recall if there were people but it didn't seem to matter. Only the obelisk in the middle. Highly enigmatic. It could be just another colorful landscape without it. But with it, there's that element of enigma, this anomaly. In the center foreground a countryman converses with a horseman accompanied by his dog. The sun is breaking through after the storm and what most stands out is the overall golden color of it. I remember an obelisk that was kind of muddied, certainly muddied hue, with just the hint of white. To be honest, I don't remember that piece but I think here were a lot of greens in the distance and stuff. The Flinck, I never liked it. It never had enough life to it. It was dull, busy but dull. It didn't look nice enough for Rembrandt's work.

I like the fact that it had, at one point, been attributed to Rembrandt. When it was determined that the actual painter was Flinck, no one seemed disappointed, the public responded thinking: Oh! It was almost Rembrandt.

The picture was rectangular and not so big. There was a landscape, there was a sheep, dog... Yes, there was a dog there. Like they were out hunting or something. That's all I remember although I've been here for 25 years. When you're not interested in art, you know... I didn't spend much time with this painting. I was always looking at the Vermeer on the other side.
The Concert, circa 1660
Jan Vermeer

I'll always remember this painting because I couldn't see it. It was displayed at waist height, behind a chair, covered with glass but next to the window so that the glare caught the glass.

I remember there was a painting there but I couldn't describe what was in it. I remember it had a gold frame, very thick, carved, ornate.

In the foreground, there was a dark shape, I believe it was a piano, with a large textile, an oriental rug, covering it and an instrument, like a cello, partly tucked under the rug. In the middle ground were the three figures. One was a girl playing the harpsichord and she wore this yellow bodice with puffed sleeves and a white skirt. Then, there was a man playing the lute, with his back to you, sitting in a chair, wearing a red coat, I think. On the
right, the woman singing was in blue. She looked pregnant and held her hand just above her swollen belly. There were two paintings hanging in the background. One of them was a wild, dark, savage picture of a forest. The other, just above the head of the singer, was *The Procuress* by Van Baburen. It's a picture of an older woman, who is sort of a pimp, selling this young woman with a lot of cleavage to a distinguished businessman who is looking very salaciously at her, and it's such a rude counterpoint to this very pristine, demure scene of the concert. You had this dark shadowy corner that was somewhat ominous, then this lovely afternoon concert, and then this very lusty, bawdy picture within this very sedate and sensitive one. It's a peaceful thing. I used to look at it every morning before work. I used to come here at night, late at night and just to go up there and stand. There was a woman sitting at the harpsichord. She is so lost in her world of ideas that she's not even present. The other one, who is holding this ethereal scarp of paper, is exquisitely homely. And turning his back to us, sits the mysterious individual, this long-haired gentleman whom we will never know. He plays a guitar-like object and it's almost sort of phallic, especially since this pregnant woman is standing there. It seemed like a very innocent painting although the scholars would say that it had a lot of sexual energy in it. But, I just heard the piano and the woman's voice. The colors that were the most dramatic were the black and the white in the tiled floor but the brightest point was this yellow in the girl's dress. Just sheer yellow paint. The black and white of the floor just jumped at you, but it's the red back of the chair that would catch my attention. This rectangle of red light, in the center of the picture, like a bull's eye. And, of course, there's the lighting. It was just about as good as you can get. The light that came from left to right was just stunning. I thought it was very flat. The colors were muted. You couldn't see the faces of the characters and I was unsure of what was really going on. I don't know if it's because Vermeer was a bad painter or because he intended it to be that way. There was a tremendous sense of intelligence and order in that work. Like a scientific grid. I saw it more as a series of planes. You could almost slice it. The forms were very rounded and yet, the organization was very flat. I can remember its depth. It's Vermeer. You know, Vermeer is Vermeer and it was a Vermeer. The beautiful thing about this Vermeer is that you have silence in a concert. You are looking at such stillness and yet, you know that they're making music. I could hear them singing but it seemed very private, quiet and pure. You felt like an intruder and you wouldn't want them to know you were watching. I didn't like it much, not my style.
La Sortie du pesage, circa 1862–1866
Cortège aux environs de Florence, circa 1861
Three Mounted Jockeys, 1860
Two Programs for an Artistic Soirée, 1884

Degas

I looked at them once in a while but that didn't turn me on at all. Actually, I don't remember them. I know that I have seen them but I can't recall. I never really even saw them before they were taken. I just didn't like this stuff. Oh! those ... I think there was a program for a concert, something like that, but nothing striking. I think the colors were somewhat primary. I remember blues and reds but I don't know if they were men or women. I remember a violin bow ... they were sort of inconsequential. I was not drawn to that flat area but I think there was a musical instrument somewhere. There were some ballet dancers on point, simultaneously doing a move with tutus, and then the ends of the cello necks and also,
a horse race that was a little more developed. Neat things ♦ Well, the Degas gouaches and drawings were all together on one door. Because of the way they were hung, it's hard to separate them out. I think there were five all together, maybe it was four. But, they were all one; they were bunched very closely together, so it was hard to look at them separately ♦ The two that were the most striking to me were one of the environs of Florence that was a marvelous drawing and the other one of a man on a horse riding into a Renaissance city. You saw his back and yet, it wasn't a back turned on you because it was really just a back in motion ♦ Two of them were sketches for an artistic soirée, I believe, framed together. It had a little ballerina and a fiddle. It might even have had a little bit of music on it, some notes, a little piece of score ... ♦ The cortege and the mounted jockeys were framed together and I think the idea of paring them up was the way she had bought them. The frames as I remember were very modern, gold thin frames ♦ My favorite was the jockey going into the race. It was roughly 4 x 6 inches, very detailed, with a lot of buildings around and every brick was individually painted. Very right for a Degas, sharp lines, not fuzzy like his others ♦ They didn't have much, they just seemed like quick sketches that he almost dashed off on a napkin while he was having a glass of absinthe. They didn't look like they were on good paper. They probably dug them out of a box in his studio, so I think it's odd they were stolen. Maybe, I guess, because they're easy to get rid of.
Beaker
Shung Dynasty, China, circa 1200-1100 BC

We used to call it the Koo. It was the oldest object in the museum, maybe 1200 BC, and it just shimmered. It was used for ceremonial purposes and I remember always thinking that the mouth was so wide that when you would drink it you would have had wine dribbling down your chin. It was fluted and quite tall, about 14 inches and it just had the most elegant shape with this fabulous mouth. It was like a beaker, bigger bottom and a very delicate neck. Pretty thin material, copper, I think. Very dulled in terms of tonality. It was just an ancient thing that was made very a long time ago. A vase over 2,000 years old. I think it was blue...blue and gold...looked very nice, like something you would see in your mother’s cupboard or something in the country, because my mother had antiques at home it kind of made me think of one of her vases. It seemed very heavy and you couldn’t tell that it was so old just by looking at it because it looked in perfect condition. I just thought it was a beautiful out of place object that was somehow put under this kind of kooky looking Spanish guy. So ancient and almost primitive looking under this very severe man. It was really old. Worn and handmade. First of all, I didn’t like the placement of the Chinese beaker. I thought those plastic flowers next to the vase were just hideous. They were so dominant, if you want to consider color. So, I really didn’t look as hard at the Koo as I perhaps could have. I didn’t like glancing over there. I would have gone right by it...my obtuse masculine consciousness would have just been honing it on the furniture. I would have probably missed it, had it not been for the lady in my life pointing it out. I guess I loved mostly the little swirling designs, cloud like forms that were incised in the piece. It was so simple and lyrical...about 12 inches high, bronze and dark...so dark but shiny inside. It never intrigued me, it was just different, but never intrigued me.
Flag of the first regiment of the imperial guard of Napoleon Bonaparte, spread-eagle finial

It's not an object that I really looked at. I always looked at the flag and loved the bumblebees in the field of the flag so, I didn't pay attention to the finial. And, of course, now that it's not there, I see it more because its absence is so big. There was a Napoleonic flag and an eagle that was sitting right on the same pole with the flag. Very gold. It was just a thing on top of the flag. I wasn't too oppressed with that. I liked the color though the gold color was pretty. The finial was just brass. It was brass, I assume. I remember it being there, that it was a part of the piece and now I think it looks hideous without it. The whole thing looks ugly with that little piece of wretched wood. So, I miss it. I thought it was of no value was just a topping, such a little thing. No one would guard that if we can find that eagle, we can find out who took the paintings. I used to look at the regimental flag because I love Napoleon. Mrs. Gardner also liked Napoleon. I guess she just had this thing for strong, short men, who knows? ... but, that finial on the top eagle that may have been killed ... may have been bronzed? I probably knew that it was there and had seen it as a glimmer but I was looking at that. I looked more at the bees. I think this finial was taken as a personal trophy for what this person had accomplished in these rooms. Well, I think it was a gold eagle kind of thing.
On the night between August 24 and 25, 1980, the painting by Charles Gleyre, *Major Davel*, was partly destroyed by fire that ensued from an act of vandalism. All that remained of the canvas was the crying soldier in the bottom right-hand corner. I asked the curators, guards, and other staff members at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne to describe what they remembered of the missing part of the painting.