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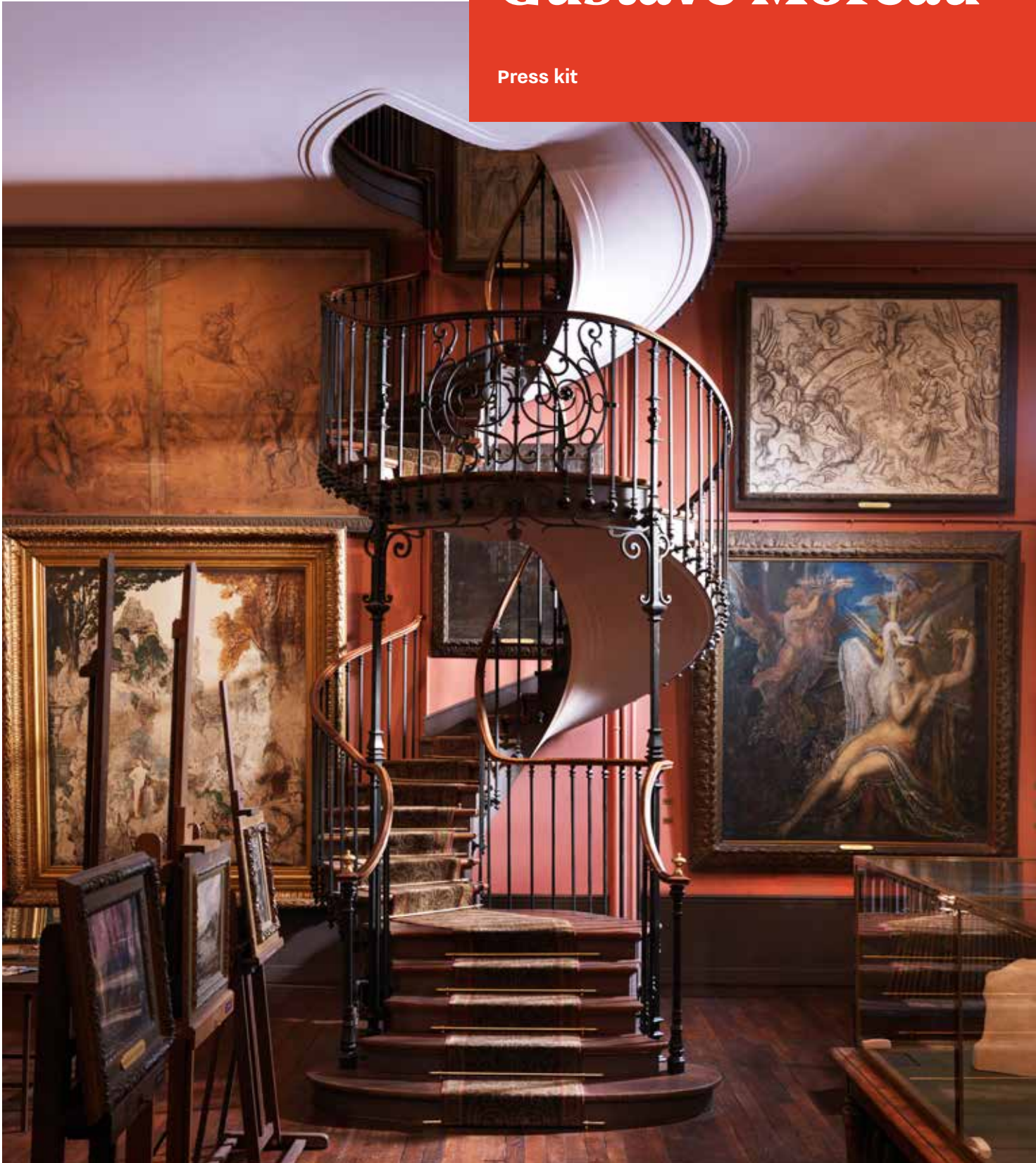
*Liberté
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Musée national
Gustave Moreau

Musée national Gustave Moreau

Press kit



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'I bequeath my house, located at 14, rue de La Rochefoucauld, with all it contains: paintings, drawings, sketches, etc., the work of fifty years, and likewise, what is contained in the said house and the old apartments formerly occupied by my father and my mother, to the state ... with the express condition that this collection be conserved forever, that would be my dearest wish, or at least as long as possible, maintaining its integral character that allows the sum of the work and the efforts of the artist during his life to be recorded in perpetuity.'

Extract from Gustave Moreau's Will, dated 10 September 1897



Eliza de Romilly, *Portrait of Gustave Moreau*, 1874

Inv. 16048

© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Musée Gustave Moreau: From family home to house-museum

It seems that from very early on, Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) pondered the fate of his work. In 1862, while still an unknown artist, he noted at the bottom of a sketch: *'This evening 24 December 1862. I am thinking of my death and the fate of my poor little works and of all these paintings that I take the trouble to collect. Separated, they perish; taken together, they give a bit of an idea of who I was as an artist and of the environment in which I liked to dream.'* (Inscription noted on the drawing *Samson and Delilah* [Des. 3637]).

*'Now that the man is dead,
all that remains is that which
was able to emerge from the
divine within him. By an abrupt
metamorphosis, the house
has become a museum, even
before it is transformed into one.'*

Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*,
Paris, Gallimard, 1978, p. 667-674



Musée Gustave Moreau: the facade
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Creation of the museum

14, rue de La Rochefoucauld

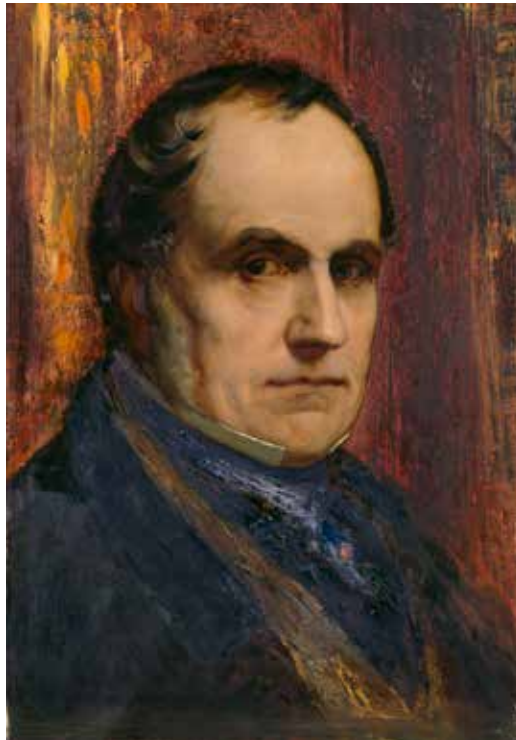
In July 1852, the architect Louis Moreau (1790-1862) bought a house located at 14, rue de La Rochefoucauld in the New Athens district of Paris, in the name of his son, Gustave. Built in 1829, it consisted of three floors, plus an attic with a small living space, and an extension covered with a terrace roof to the south. The Moreau family moved there in July 1853, and Louis Moreau quickly decided to make alterations to the building. The attic was transformed into a fourth floor where a workshop was installed for Gustave. A private staircase was created

to reach it. Little is known about this first studio. The roof of the house was raised to make it two metres higher than the accommodation floors, it must have measured 25 to 30 m², and it included what Moreau called a 'cabinet de débarras', that is a storage room for paintings. The ground floor was occupied by a tenant, while the artist's parents, Pauline and Louis, lived on the first and second floors.

Art historian, Paul Leprieux's 1889 book about Moreau included some invaluable information about the house and studio: *'In this new quarter... it stands out with its modest, rather old-fashioned appearance and unsociable air, as if fearful of passers-by... The studio is his laboratory, and here, far from the noise of the street, he devotes himself to his work like an alchemist, always restless, passionately trying to achieve perfection.'*

The New Athens district

Situated in the heart of Paris' 9th arrondissement, the New Athens district was created between 1819-1820 by the Receiver General of Finance, Augustin Lapeyrière, and the architect, Auguste Constantin. It owes its name to the poet and historian Adolphe Dureau de La Malle, who used the term to describe the new district's neo-classical architecture. The area's town houses were owned by a group of elite painters, musicians, and writers. These mansions can be found on roads like rue de la Tour-des-Dames, rue Saint-Lazare, rue Blanche, and rue de La Rochefoucauld, where we find the town house acquired by Louis Moreau. The neighbourhood was also home to the nascent Romantic movement.



Gustave Moreau,
Portrait de Louis Moreau
Oil on canvas, Inv. 15138
© RMN-GP



Gustave Moreau,
Portrait de Pauline Moreau
Oil on canvas, Inv. 15140
© RMN-GP

Transformation from a house to a museum

After the death of his father in 1862, his mother in 1884, and his friend Alexandrine Dureux in 1890, Gustave Moreau found himself alone. He decided to expand his house-studio so that he could leave his work to posterity. In April 1895, he commissioned the young architect Albert Lafon, to transform the family home into a museum.

The work was carried out from May 1895 to September 1896. Given the small size of the plot of land, the architect decided to build the reception and service areas, necessary for the operation of the future museum, on the site of the garden facing the street. He raised the height of the house and designed a brick and stone facade on a metal structure (which earned him the Medal for Private Architecture in June 1897).

Two new rooms were created on the street side of the first floor, one to be used as a 'gallery' and the other as an office. On the same floor, the living space was preserved and reorganised by Moreau himself into a 'sentimental museum' where he gathered family memorabilia, art work, and souvenirs from his childhood. The second and third floors were replaced by spacious studios with large windows facing north, designed to provide as much room as possible for the artist's work. An elegant metal spiral staircase connects the two studios.

From 1896 onwards, Moreau prepared his museum: he classified and selected drawings and paintings, gave them a final touch, enlarged some and began others. The museum was designed as a final 'great work' in which all the themes he had explored during his life had to be present.

In his Will, dated 10 September 1897, Gustave Moreau bequeathed his house and everything it contained to the state and gave his sole legatee and good friend, Henri Rupp (1837-1918), the financial means to complete the project.



Musée Gustave Moreau:
second floor studio and the staircase
© Hartl-Meyer



Musée Gustave Moreau:
third floor studio, second gallery
© colombeclier



Portrait d'Henri Rupp
Inv. 19363
© Musée Gustave Moreau

From his death to the opening of the museum

When Gustave Moreau died on 18 April 1898, he left his studios in a cluttered state. According to his pupil, George Desvallières (1861-1950), the large rooms contained nearly 100 easels with works in progress.

Once the inventory was completed, Henri Rupp set to work hanging the paintings using all the available space and by having a large number of panels and pivoting frames installed on the different floors, in accordance with the artist's wishes.

The bequest was accepted by the state in 1902, and the Musée national Gustave Moreau was officially inaugurated in January 1903. Georges Rouault (1871-1958), one of Moreau's pupils at the École des Beaux-Arts, was the first curator and remained in the post until 1929. Rupp became its administrator. The second curator of the museum was the painter, George Desvallières.

The inauguration of the museum to today

From its opening in 1903 to the 1960s, there was not much public interest in the museum, despite the efforts of its curators. But even though visitors were rare, those that did go were enthusiastic about it. Some were even famous people, such as the surrealists André Breton and Salvador Dalí. For the latter, it was a symbolic 'Dalinian' place that would inspire him to create his own museum at Figueres in Spain. The rediscovery of Moreau by a wider public began in 1961 with a monographic exhibition organised at the Louvre museum.

In 1991, the artist's rooms on the first floor, which until then had remained private, were opened to visitors.

It was not until 2003, on the occasion of the museum's centenary, that the painter's office or reception room, also located on the first floor, was opened to the public. It was in this room that the artist received visitors during the last two years of his life. It was like a curiosity cabinet, bringing together rare books and precious or unusual objects, inherited from his parents or collected by the artist himself throughout his life. It also included copies made by Moreau of works he had seen in Italy, and was intended as a tribute to his visit to that country from 1857 to 1859.

Between 2011-2014, major work was carried out at the museum, within the framework of the Ministry of Culture and Communication's 'Plan Musées', to rehabilitate and restore the ground floor to its original state. Thanks to information

found in the archives and a survey of the walls, the current restoration is as close as possible to the original harmony of colours in these rooms.

A graphic arts office was also created in the basement for the use of researchers. Since 2017, the Musée Gustave Moreau, along with the Musée Jean-Jacques Henner, has been a public establishment under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture.



Musée Gustave Moreau: reception room
© colombeclier

Museum tour

Situated in the heart of the New Athens district of Paris, the Musée Gustave Moreau was designed by the painter himself as a coherent whole, setting out his works in the building that houses them. His organisation of the museum, which is both spectacular and intimate, has remained unchanged since its opening in 1903.

Nearly 25,000 works of art are kept on the four levels of the house-museum, revealing the many facets of the symbolist master.

Ground floor

On this level, works are presented from different periods of Moreau's career. It was set out by Henri Rupp according to instructions by the artist, who may in fact have started the process himself. Six rooms (A to F) house more than 400 paintings, hundreds of drawings, and a unique collection of watercolours.

In Room C, which was once a dining room with a fireplace, two cupboards house 677 drawings, most of them copies Moreau made in Italy of works by the Masters. Large format watercolours set in gold frames are also presented. The paintings one can see here are *Narcisse* (Cat. 575), *Ulysse et les Sirènes* (Cat. 584), and *Polyphème* (Cat. 587).

Rooms D to F house collected works by Moreau from all periods, ranging from Shakespearian-inspired paintings such as *Lady Macbeth* (Cat. 634) to more innovative works like the little *Bethsabée* (Cat. 725). Hidden cupboards installed inside the thick walls (Rooms E and F) contain pivoting frames which enclose drawings and painting, some of them more than two metres high.



Ulysse et les Sirènes
Watercolour, Cat. 584
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



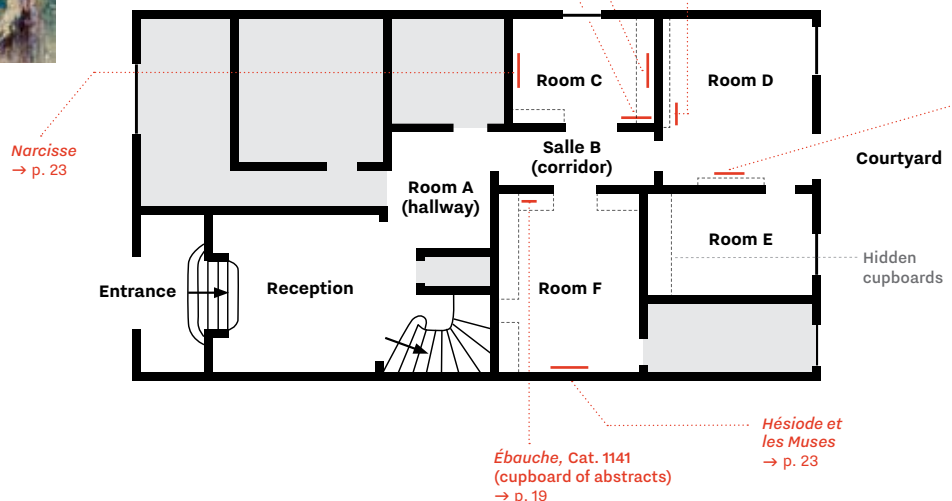
Polyphème
Watercolour, Cat. 587
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Lady Macbeth
Oil on canvas, Cat. 634
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



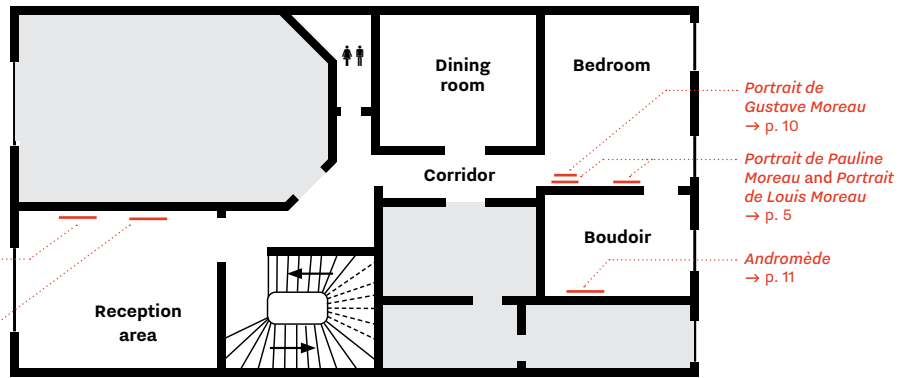
Bethsabée
Oil on canvas, Cat. 725
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



First floor



Putto (copy of a fresco by Raphael at the National Academy of San Luca in Rome)
Watercolour, Inv. 13610
© RMN-GP / Christian Jean



Reception area

On the right as you enter, a display cabinet houses a collection of antiques that belonged to Louis Moreau, the artist's father. Noteworthy among the ceramics, most of which originate from Italy and date from around the 5th and 6th centuries BC, are two craters (or large vases used for mixing wine) of imposing dimensions, which were found in the tomb of an Apulian princess. There are also a number of small plaster or bronze replicas of famous sculptures and reproductions of intaglios, which the painter often used in his compositions.

The bookshelves hold 16th and 17th century editions of the most famous architectural treatises (Vitruvius, Sebastiano Serlio, Philibert Delorme, Vignola, etc.), acquired by Moreau's father, who was a pupil of French neoclassical architect, Charles Percier. There are also large illustrated folio volumes and a beautiful 1836 edition of the work of British sculptor, John Flaxman, which was an important source of inspiration for the artist.

In this room, Gustave Moreau wanted to bring together his most beautiful studies based on the old Masters, made at the Louvre and during his trip to Italy (1857-1859). Here one can admire the famous copy of Italian painter Raphael's

Putto (Inv. 13610), which Moreau produced when visiting the National Academy of San Luca in Rome. There is also a magnificent replica, executed in Florence, of the angel that Leonardo de Vinci painted in his teacher, Andrea del Verrocchio's *Le Baptême du Christ* (Inv. 13611). From Moreau's visit to Venice, there are studies of a few episodes from Vittore Carpaccio's *L'Histoire de sainte Ursule* and the *Légende de saint Georges* (Inv. 13612, Inv. 13623 and Inv. 13633).

Studies in oil and watercolour, based on paintings of Pompei that are kept in a museum in Naples, testify to the painter's interest in antiquity, while views of Rome and its surroundings unexpectedly reveal his remarkable qualities as a landscape artist and watercolourist.

Thus the visitor finds themselves in an ambiance described by French art collector, Count Robert de Montesquiou, as *'... His friends, his visitors, the privileged few, remember the decor of his reception room in which, proudly and modestly, his glorious name could be read only under beautiful and charming replicas. M. Degas, who had seen them made in Italy in the time of their youth and friendship, spoke to me of them with admiration.'* (Serene Highnesses, 1907)



Le Congédiement des ambassadeurs du cycle de la Légende de sainte Ursule (after Carpaccio)
Oil on canvas, Inv. 13612
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

The apartment: a 'sentimental museum'

Even before he decided to transform his house into a museum, Moreau had planned to keep the rooms on the first floor, where he had lived happily with his parents, as a 'little museum'. During the work undertaken in 1895 to build the large studios on the second and third floors, the front part of the house was demolished, and with it, his mother's former bedroom.

The furniture and memorabilia were then arranged in the remaining rooms, the dining room and sitting room, which had been turned into a bedroom as Moreau still lived mainly in the studio. His old bedroom was now a boudoir holding items that had belonged to Alexandrine Dureux, a friend who had died prematurely and whose furniture he had purchased. The apartment bore no resemblance to the one Moreau's parents had lived in. It was now a truly symbolic arrangement orchestrated by the artist around memories of his own and of his friends and family.



Musée Gustave Moreau :
corridor in the apartment
© Hartl-Meyer

The entrance to Gustave Moreau's apartment is reached via a corridor decorated with photographs, engravings, drawings, and watercolours. These works are mostly by artists who were his friends or who he admired, like Théodore Chassériau, Eugène Fromentin, and Narcisse Berchère. There are also photographs of *Jours de la Création* by Edward Burne-Jones.

The dining room is decorated with photographic reproductions of works by Moreau that had been sold some time before, as well as engravings by other artists.

The bedroom, which had been his mother's living room, groups together family heirlooms. On the right as you enter, there is a *Portrait* of the artist by Edgar Degas (Cat. 69 ter), painted around 1860 shortly after Moreau's return from Italy. There is also a *Portrait* of his mother, Pauline Moreau, by Jules Élie Delaunay (Inv. 15146).

You can also see a showcase in which, in the last days of his life, Moreau placed objects that were precious to him, including miniatures and photographs that were like a family tree of those closest to him: his sister Camille, his good friend Henri Rupp, as well as Alexandrine Dureux.



Musée Gustave Moreau: the bedroom
© Hartl-Meyer



Edgar Degas, *Portrait de Gustave Moreau*
Oil on canvas, Cat. 69 ter
© RMN-GP

The final room in the apartment, **the boudoir**, preserves the memory and furniture of his 'very dear and only friend' Alexandrine Dureux, who he met in 1859 following his trip to Italy. The two remained very close for the rest of her life, as evidenced by the many works hung on the wall that the painter had given her, such as *Cavalier Renaissance* (Inv. 15498) or *Andromède* (Inv. 15499).



Musée Gustave Moreau: the boudoir
© Hartl-Meyer



Andromède
Oil on wood, Inv. 15499
© RMN-GP / Franck Raux

Second and third floors: the studios

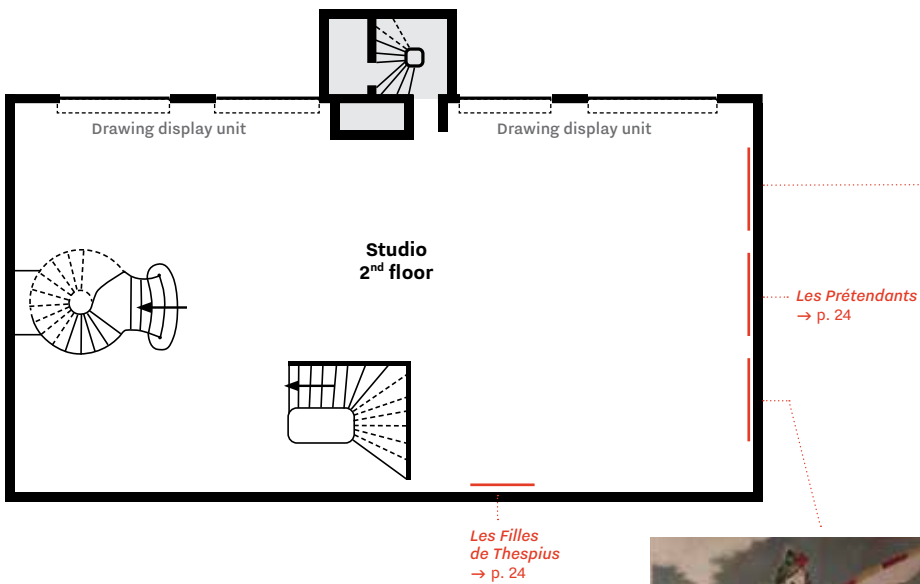
The paintings

The studio on the second floor was specially designed by the architect Albert Lafon at the request of Gustave Moreau. The design and organisation of the museum has remained unchanged since it opened in 1903. The numerous canvases, many of which are unfinished, are hung side by side without any attention to chronological order or thematic coherence.

Tyrtée chantant pendant le combat (Cat. 18) and *Les Prétendants* (Cat. 19), paintings that the artist started working on very early in his career, were enlarged at the end of 1882 at a time when Moreau was considering organising a large, and possibly posthumous, exhibition of his work.

Retour des Argonautes (Cat. 20), originally painted around 1891, was made bigger after the construction of the studios and he resumed work on it in 1897. The museum has numerous preparatory drawings for this painting and a wax model of the boat that features in it, filled with 'all the dreams of youth'.

Facing the painting *Les Filles de Thespius* (Cat. 25), a glorification of youth by the ageing artist, you can find Théodore Chassériau's *Tepidarium* (Paris, musée d'Orsay).



Tyrtée chantant pendant le combat, 1860
Oil on canvas, Cat. 18
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Retour des Argonautes, 1897
Oil on canvas, Cat. 20
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Jupiter et Sémélé, 1895
Oil on canvas, Cat. 91
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

The first room in the large studio on the third floor is dominated by *Jupiter et Sémélé*, painted in 1895 for the German banker Leopold Goldschmidt, who donated it to the museum in 1903.

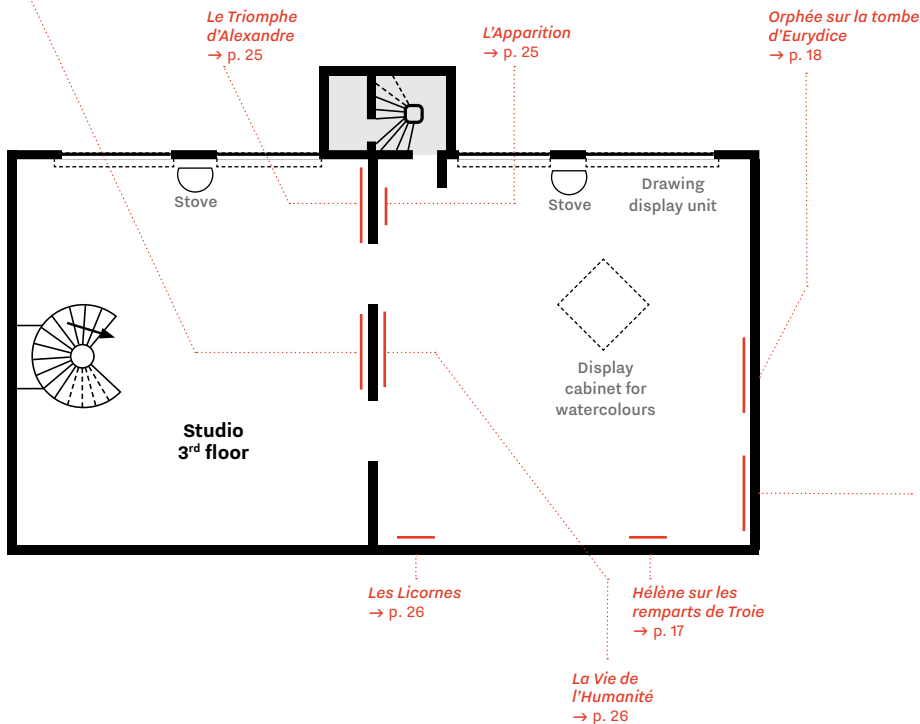
The work, with its dazzling colours, is reminiscent of the ceramics of Bernard Palissy, and gives insight into the multiple influences that shaped Moreau.

Notable works in the second room are *L'Enlèvement d'Europe* (Cat. 191), *Prométhée* (Cat. 196), exhibited at the 1869 Paris Salon, and the famous work, *Les Licornes* (Cat. 213), painted around 1888, which testifies to the artist's fascination with the Middle Ages.

Orphée sur la tombe d'Eurydice (Cat. 194), painted around 1891 after the death of Alexandrine Dureux, clearly has an autobiographical overtone.

Two compositions on the theme of Salome are among the museum's most famous works, *Salomé dansant*, also known as *Salomé tatouée* (Cat. 211) because of the decorative graphics printed on the biblical heroine's body, and *L'Apparition* (Cat. 222), an oil version of the famous watercolour exhibited at the 1876 Salon, which was a huge success both with art lovers and several art critics, including Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907).

Enhanced by a monumental frame, as are the individual panels, the polyptych *La Vie de l'Humanité* (Cat. 216), dated 1886, has Orpheus as its central figure. The theme of the poet and civilizing hero can be found often in Moreau's work.



Prométhée, 1869
Oil on canvas, Cat. 196
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

The graphic art collection

Gustave Moreau's wish was to have the best of his graphic art permanently on display. Some 4,830 drawings are exhibited in glass units with pivoting shutters that can be leafed through like a book, and which can be consulted by visitors at all times.

The amount of graphic art testifies to the artist's passion for drawing and the essential role that this played in the development of a painting, from the first draft to the finishing touches, often through the use of tracing paper and a technique called squaring. Moreau used graphite, black pencil, charcoal and, especially before 1860, red chalk. He also made pen and ink drawings. The artist remained faithful to the teaching of François-Édouard Picot, his professor at the École des Beaux-Arts, who emphasised the importance of drawing in the creation of a painting. The art critic, Ernest Chesneau, was to say of Moreau: *'You write your thoughts through the nervous precision of drawing.'*



*Feuille d'études : quatre femmes
les bras levés, main gauche*
Chalk, lead pencil, and red chalk
on tracing paper, Des. 3272
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



*Feuille d'études : tête d'homme, modèle masculin
nu à mi-corps, groupe de trois guerriers*
Lead pencil on tracing paper, Des. 2701
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Saint Sébastien et l'Ange
Chalk, lead pencil, black
and red chalk, Des. 827
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

The watercolours

Gustave Moreau's watercolours are displayed to best advantage. Some 250 of them can be viewed in the second room on the third floor in a four-sided revolving cabinet that was designed especially for them when the museum opened. So, like the drawings, they can be leafed through almost like a book.

Their presentation in gilded wooden frames is similar to that of the paintings. The themes are varied, ranging from early Italian landscapes to sketches for La Fontaine's Fables, and include studies of marine plants for *Galatée* (Paris, musée d'Orsay).

There are also colourful variations, audacious private experiments that the artist did not dare show to the public. Moreau was aware that, although it was considered a less important technique, he sometimes obtained results with watercolours that he failed to achieve in more elaborate paintings, *'It's curious, this little watercolour today showed me in a wonderful way that I do well only when I work at things without being too diligent,'* he would say.



Third floor studio, 2nd room: watercolour display cabinet
© RMN-GP / Adrien Didierjean



Ange voyageur
Watercolour, Cat. 441
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



*Phébus et Borée. Esquisse
pour les Fables de La Fontaine*
Watercolour, Cat. 492
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

‘Gustave Moreau did not paint man; he painted human thought and imagination. History had no grace for him; ingenuous Nature did not satisfy him; one and the other seemed to him to be too limited or too positive in their concrete, fixed lines. The fable was the spiritual realm in which he found pleasure. He is the chosen painter of myths, legends, symbolic feelings.’

Ary Renan, *Gustave Moreau* : 1826-1898, Paris, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1900.

Gustave Moreau: an admired, controversial, and unclassifiable painter

The art of Gustave Moreau

*'It is the language of God!
A day will come when we will
understand the eloquence of this
silent art; it is this eloquence
whose character and power over
the mind cannot be defined,
to which I gave all my attention,
all my commitment: the evoking
of thoughts through the use
of lines, arabesques and pictorial
means, that is my goal.'*

Gustave Moreau

Academic, romantic, Italianist: Gustave Moreau could have been just another eclectic artist, like so many of his successful colleagues. However, more often than not, the numerous references he made, together with his great precision and forms inspired by numerous models borrowed from engravings, combined together to result in original creations.

Moreau himself described his painting as resulting from 'inner flashes', revealing the introspective dimension of his artistic expression.

He did not attempt to recreate nature's show on canvas, but rather aimed to address the human spirit. Moreau aspired to create work in which the soul could find, in his own words, *'all the aspirations of dreams, of tenderness, of love, of enthusiasm, and of religious elevation to a higher realm, everything that is high, powerful, moral, beneficial, all that is the joy of imagining caprices and distant flights to sacred, unknown, mysterious lands'*. His painting aimed to transport the viewer to another world, to make people dream rather than think.

Symbolism and Gustave Moreau

Symbolism, in the strictest sense of the word, revolved around a close-knit literary circle whose manifesto was published by the Greek-born poet, Jean Moréas, in *Le Figaro* newspaper in 1886. The Symbolists' desire to free themselves from the rational thinking demanded by science was shared by many 19th-century artists. Rejecting realism and naturalism, this cultural movement spread throughout Europe at the end of the 19th century.

Moreau, like the entire Symbolist generation, demanded the mystery of art. Rather than explanations, he preferred the communion that was established between the spectator and the work, and favoured the pure pleasure of contemplation, as his pupil Henri Matisse would later invite us to do: *'In each era, a work of art brings to man a pleasure that comes from the communion between it and the one who contemplates it.'*

In 1897, the year before he died, Moreau said that throughout his life he had been accused unjustly of being too literary for a painter. He remained convinced that 'divination, the intuition of things, belongs to the artist or poet alone'.

A self-proclaimed 'assembler of dreams', he strived to translate his 'inner flashes' and affirm, like the French poet Charles Baudelaire, the leading role played by the imagination.



Hélène sur les remparts de Troie
Oil on canvas, Cat. 205
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

The father of Fauvism

On his deathbed, the painter Jules-Élie Delaunay (1828-1891) asked Gustave Moreau to succeed him as professor at the École des Beaux-Arts. Appointed to the position in January 1892, Moreau taught there until 1897.

His students included René Piot, Edgar Maxence, Charles Milcendeau, and Henri Evenepœl, but also Henri Matisse, Albert Marquet, Charles Camoin, and Henri Manguin, the main representatives of Fauvism. In addition to his art school students, the French painter George Desvallières was also one of Moreau's pupils. Desvallières co-founded the Salon d'Automne art exhibition in 1903 and was to become the second curator of the museum.

Moreau's talents as a teacher and the freedom he gave his students – his only imperative was that each one should develop their own personality – made him very popular. There are many accounts of his pupils' enthusiastic praise of their master. Georges Rouault paid tribute to Moreau's insistence on respecting the individuality of each artist. Matisse also acknowledged his debt to Moreau: *'One of my friends persuaded me that there was nothing to be learned from the École de Rome, so I set to work following my own inclinations. I was greatly assisted in this by getting to know Gustave Moreau when I joined his studio.'*

Moreau was a bridge between the generations, as he himself said to his students. Rouault reported his words as follows: *'I am the bridge. You will pass or you will not pass.'* Far from restraining them, he encouraged them to let their imagination run wild, 'to have respect for their inner vision'. He encouraged them to think about colour for itself and to free it from the shackles of the drawing. According to Matisse, he put his students *'not on a road, but off all roads'*.



Orphée sur la tombe d'Eurydice

Oil on canvas, Cat. 194

© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Gustave Moreau 'grandfather of abstract art'?

The museum's collection contains many non-figurative works. Originally described as 'rough sketches', some of them were reclassified as 'abstract art' in the 1950s.

A cupboard, known as the 'cupboard of abstracts' (located in Room F, on the ground floor of the museum) containing 22 paintings, remains an enigma. It is not known when it was installed, but it attracts a lot of attention because of the artwork it contains: a very homogenous collection of partially or completely non-figurative sketches.

Writing in the journal, *Art News*, in December 1961, the American painter Paul Jenkins wondered about the status of these works, going so far as to headline his article, 'Gustave Moreau: controversial grandfather of abstraction'.

In a period marked by Abstract Expressionism and Informalism, this discovery contributed significantly to a reinterpretation of Moreau's art.

There is nothing to suggest that Moreau intended making abstract art in the contemporary sense of the term. He was above all, not a theorist but a practitioner, a worker, someone who experimented. His paintings were part of his constant research into colours, materials, emotional overtones that could be triggered by cold or warm colours.

The exhibition that took place at the Musée Gustave Moreau in 2018, '*Gustave Moreau. Towards reverie and the abstract*' allowed us to take stock of this aspect of his work.



Ébauche
Oil on canvas, Cat. 268
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Ébauche (Salomé?)
Oil on canvas, Cat. 1141
© RMN-GP / Christian Jean

Gustave Moreau, a great paint technician

Gustave Moreau's technique was particularly original compared to his contemporaries. He invented a way of painting that questioned the relationship between line and form, colours and values, in order to escape realism.

A great painting technician, a 'labourer' to use his own term, he left little information on this subject in his writings. Unlike the artist Eugène Delacroix, whose diary makes it possible to follow closely his research on colour and materials, Gustave Moreau cultivated a kind of mystery, no doubt to avoid a simplistic reading of his work. However, he often mentioned the 'tool' and to take advantage of it, like the hard work of which each painting is the culmination.

His technique, which in the beginning could be considered more 'classical' because he was influenced by people whose work he admired (Delacroix was to say of Moreau: *'He believes he is imitating me when in fact he is doing Chassériau.'* [Théodore Chassériau]), became increasingly experimental from the 1870s onwards. A special vocabulary is even needed to describe the unique techniques he used, including the unusual dissonance between the line and coloured spaces.

In the 19th century, there was a series of innovations in the field of binders, varnishes, and pigments. Gustave Moreau used these new materials to express himself rather than to appear like a virtuoso, sometimes even using them for things they were not intended for. He nevertheless remained concerned about the preservation of his work:

'One would give everything to discover, only in terms of technique, the composition of the field - canvas or panel - on which the ancients painted and worked, their methods, their individual processes, not to copy their style or their work, but to be certain of something that is invaluable: that the conservation of the work is guaranteed in terms of its physical preservation.'

Unusually, the museum retains numerous objects from the artist's studio including paintbrushes, palette knives, palettes, boxes, and tubes of watercolours.



Gustave Moreau's palette
Inv. 16257-51-1
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



Materials Gustave Moreau used for painting watercolours
© RMN-GP / Mathieu Rabeau

Biography

6 April 1826

Gustave Moreau is born in Paris. His father, Louis Moreau, an architect, instils in him a sound knowledge of classical culture. His mother, Pauline, lavishes attention on him because of his delicate health.

1836-1840

Secondary schooling at the Collège Rollin. His sister, Camille, dies at the age of 13. Moreau is taken out of school because of his ill health. His father helps him study for the *baccalauréat (final)* school exam. From the age of eight, he draws constantly.

1841

First visit to northern Italy. He returns with an album of drawings.

1844-1846

Makes frequent visits to the private studio of the neoclassical painter François-Édouard Picot, decorator of public monuments and churches in Paris, where he prepares for the competitive entrance exam for the École Royale des Beaux-Arts.

1846

Admitted to the École Royale des Beaux-Arts.

1849

Leaves the École after twice failing to win the Prix de Rome.

1849-1850

Makes copies at the Musée du Louvre and receives several government commissions from the Beaux-Arts.

1851

Becomes friends with Théodore Chassériau, a former pupil of neoclassical painter, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and rents a studio next to his on Avenue Frochot, near the Place Pigalle. Chassériau's influence on Moreau is crucial.

1852

Moreau's work is accepted at the official Salon for the first time. He frequently attends the theatre and opera. His parents buy a house at 14, rue de La Rochefoucauld in his name. The painter sets up his studio on the third floor.

1856

Death of Théodore Chassériau.

1857-1859

Second visit to Italy from October 1857 to 1859, where he makes copies of the Masters (Michelangelo, Veronese, Raphael, Correggio, etc.). After Rome he goes to Florence, Milan, and then to Venice, where he discovers the Italian painter, Vittore Carpaccio. He becomes friends with the young French artist, Edgar Degas. After a visit to Naples with his parents, who have by then joined him, he returns to Paris in September 1859. Shortly after this he meets Alexandrine Dureux who he introduces to drawing. Right up until her death in 1890, she remains his 'best and only friend'.

1862

Death of his father in February.

1864

A return to the Salon with *Oedipe et le Sphinx*, which is purchased by Prince Napoleon.

1865

Invited to Compiègne by Emperor Napoleon III in November.

1869

Exhibits *Prométhée** and *L'Enlèvement d'Europe** at the Salon. He wins a medal but receives bad reviews from the critics. He does not exhibit again until 1876.

1870-1871

Moreau enlists in the National Guard at the start of the Franco-Prussian War but is discharged due to rheumatic fever.

1875

Appointed chevalier de la Légion d'honneur.

1876

Exhibits *Salomé dansant*, *Hercule et l'Hydre de Lerne*, *Saint Sébastien*, and a watercolour, *L'Apparition*, at the Salon.

1878

Presents six paintings at the Universal Exhibition in Paris.

1879

Begins an exceptional series of 64 watercolours to illustrate La Fontaine's *Fables* (private collection). The sketches belong to the Musée Gustave Moreau.

1880

Takes part in the Salon for the last time with *Hélène* and *Galatée*.

1881

Exhibition (8 May-13 June) at the salon used by the Société d'Aquarellistes français (Society of French Watercolourists) at the gallery of Paul Durand-Ruel, of 25 watercolours commissioned by art collector, Antony Roux, for the *Fables* of La Fontaine, alongside 155 watercolours by 55 other artists.

1882

Puts himself forward for the Académie des Beaux- Arts but is not elected.

1883

Officer of the Légion d'honneur.



Autoportrait
Watercolour, Inv. 14457
© RMN-GP / Franck Raux

1884

The death of his mother plunges him into the deepest despair.

1886

Completes the polyptych *La Vie de l'Humanité**. His first and only solo exhibition is held at the Galerie Goupil.

1888

Election to the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

1890

Death of his friend Alexandrine Dureux. Deeply affected, he paints *Orphée sur la tombe d'Eurydice** in memory of her.

1892-1898

Succeeds Élie Delaunay as professor at the École des Beaux-Arts. His pupils include Georges Rouault, Henri Matisse, Albert Marquet, Henri Charles Manguin, and Edgar Maxence. Receives his pupils at his house on Sundays and also invites young artists such as Ary Renan, his first biographer, and George Desvallières.

1894

The Manufacture des Gobelins commissions a sketch from him for a tapestry, *Le Poète et la Sirène* (Paris, Mobilier national).

1895

Produces the masterpiece of his late career, *Jupiter et Sémélé** and has the family house at 14, rue de La Rochefoucauld remodelled so that it can be used as a museum after his death.

1898

Dies on 18 April. Funeral is held at the Église de la Trinité in Paris. He is buried in the Montmartre Cemetery.

*Works with an asterisk are owned by the Musée Gustave Moreau.

Gustave Moreau

Some works

Ground floor



Narcisse (Room C)
Watercolour, Cat. 575
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Narcisse

The myth of Narcissus is told by the Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphoses* (Book III, 407-510). This young man, courted because of his great beauty, turned down all advances, even rejecting the nymph, Echo. To punish him for his indifference, the goddess Rhamnusia (also called Nemesis) granted the wish of one of his victims: 'If he should love, deny him what he loves.' While drinking from a spring, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, and this passion proved fatal to him. Even when he descended into Hell, he continued to search for his own reflection in the waters of the Styx.

Among the many works that the myth inspired in Moreau, this large watercolour on 'torchon paper' is undoubtedly the most accomplished. In a pantheistic vision, he composed a hymn to nature, in which humans and plants communicate and are in symbiosis. In August 1897 he wrote a short text, a sort of ekphrasis or description of a work of art, which resonates with this watercolour: *'Already the glowing foliage, already the interweaving flower, already the grasping vegetation takes hold of this adored body, of this lover losing himself in himself in the idolatrous contemplation of being. Soon he will return to the heart, the essence of this nature which adores itself, which contemplates itself, which will die with him to relive more beautiful than before, more resplendent still and ever more solitary in its dream, ever more whole. And in the evening this beautiful body and this mysterious nature will merge in a supreme and ineffable blaze.'*

Hésiode et les Muses

Painted shortly after Gustave Moreau's trip to Italy, *Hésiode et les Muses* is rich in reminiscences of the art of Antiquity and the Renaissance. Preparatory drawings are dated 1860 (Des. 2968, Des. 2970 and Des. 2989), suggesting that the canvas was already in progress at that time.

The 8th century Greek poet, Hesiod, was well-known to the artist, especially through the engravings that 18th century British sculptor, John Flaxman, had made for his famous book, *The Theogony*, which Moreau had been able to consult in his father's library since his childhood. The moment represented in the painting relates to Hesiod's vocation as a poet, as described in the prelude to *The Theogony*. The nine Muses reveal the divine mysteries to the shepherd poet and offer him an olive branch. Wearing a hood and holding the pastoral staff, Hesiod appears to be receiving a gift from a Muse kneeling before him, while another is crowning him, all in the presence of Apollo's sacred swan.

In a commentary on *Hésiode et les Muses* written at the end of his life, the painter explained: *'Surrounded by the virgin sisters, dancing lightly around him, murmuring mysterious words, revealing the sacred mysteries of nature to him, the young shepherd [the child shepherd] amazed, delighted, smiles with wonderment, opening up to life in its entirety. / A sacred neophyte, he listens to these lessons from above mixed with tenderness and delight. While nature, in its springtime, awakens too and smiles upon its future exalter. / The swans frolic lovingly, the flowers open and burst forth, everything seems to come alive, everything awakens to divine love, to this contact of youthfulness, joy and love.'*



Hésiode et les Muses (Room F)
Oil on canvas, Cat. 872
© RMN-GP / Christian Jean

Second floor



Les Prétendants
Oil on canvas, Cat. 19
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Les Prétendants

This canvas was inspired by the famous scene in Book XXII of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus, on his return to Ithaca, massacres the suitors installed in his palace. It is the largest that the painter executed, and was reworked several times.

In the hall of the palace, Athena, appearing in a dazzling halo, dominates the scene of Odysseus' revenge, the massacre of the princes who courted his wife Penelope during his absence. The armed hero can be seen in the doorframe at the back of the hall on the right. Moreau notes: *'And the lyre and song seemed to echo still in the middle of this storm of cries, rage and pain. And the sound of the bow's piercing string also echoed rhythmically, when the swallow Minerva had raised the bloody aegis to the ceiling'*.

As he worked on it, Moreau gradually populated the canvas with new characters, adding figures to *'this scene of total butchery'* that appear to have no part in the drama, to introduce physical beauty to the viewer. From the notion of *'epic carnage'*, the author evolves towards a tribute to masculine physical beauty, highlighted by the entanglement of bodies in the foreground.

Les Filles de Thespius

Gustave Moreau probably began this painting around 1853. Enlarged in 1882, it remained a work 'in progress'. The central part of the painting is testimony to the strong influence of Théodore Chassériau and his painting *Le Tepidarium* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), exhibited at the Salon of 1853 and again at the Universal Exhibition in 1855. In this painting, Moreau presents a very personal vision of a myth that was rarely represented because it was considered scandalous. Hercules, the 18-year-old son of Jupiter and Theban princess Alcmena, had killed the lion of Cithaeron which had ravaged the herds of Amphitryon, who was said to be his father, and those of King Thespius. The latter, concerned about his lineage and to show his gratitude to the hero who was staying with him, arranged for him to have relations with each of his 50 daughters. It is the moment just preceding 'this great act of procreation' that the painter chose to represent. Hercules is seated in the centre in a meditative pose reminiscent of Michelangelo, with *'two pedestals [...] bearing the sun and the moon, both symbolized by bulls and sphinxes: the two poles of life, of creation, emblem of the constant duality of the two sexes'*. Moreau managed to successfully vary the faces and poses of the king's daughters. In this *'cyclopean gynaeceum'*, some wander around, others are dozing. As for the demi-god, Moreau said he *'feels the immense sadness of one who is going to create, who is going to give life at the same time as this great exaltation of soul comes to assail him, he who is dedicated to sacrifice, to every act of his fatal destiny. All the religious gravity of primitive races is in him. A god animates and supports him'*.



Les Filles de Thespius
Oil on canvas, Cat. 25
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Third floor



Le Triomphe d'Alexandre le Grand, between 1875 and 1890
Oil on canvas, Cat. 70
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

Le Triomphe d'Alexandre le Grand

'The young Greek king, conqueror, dominates all these captive people, defeated and crawling, at his feet, subdued by fear and admiration. The small Indian valley where the immense and superb throne stands contains the whole of India, the temples with fantastic peaks, the terrible idols, the sacred lakes, the underground filled with mysteries and terrors, all this unknown and disturbing civilisation. And the soul of Greece triumphs, radiant and superb, far away in these unexplored regions of dream and mystery'. This is how Gustave Moreau spoke of his painting, *Le Triomphe d'Alexandre le Grand*, which tells the story of the defeat of Porus, king of northern India's army by that of Alexander the Great in 326 BC.

Gustave Moreau does not see the painting as a historical reconstruction, but as a symbolic work in which he hoped to give – by representing monuments from all periods and religions without respecting chronological order - an idea of India, a land of dreams. The artist celebrated a tiny character in a huge painting, and, through Alexander, a magnanimous and victorious Greece, the prestige and triumph of civilization over humanity.

L'Apparition

This painting picks up on the iconography of the famous watercolour of the same title, *L'Apparition* (Louvre Museum, Department of Graphic Arts, Musée d'Orsay collection), which inspired a few wonderful pages in the novel, *À rebours* (*Against the Grain*), by French novelist and art critic, J.K. Huysmans.

It illustrates an episode in Chapter XIV of the Gospel According to Matthew. For having condemned the unlawful union between Herodias and King Herod, John the Baptist is imprisoned. To get rid of this intruder, the queen, at the end of her daughter Salome's dance before the king, urges her to ask for the head of John the Baptist as a reward. The story gave rise to numerous works focusing on the figure of Salome, who was not the instigator of the crime. The Jewish princess fired the imagination of painters, becoming the archetype of the femme fatale.

Gustave Moreau was therefore part of a well-established tradition, but he was to subvert it by introducing a grotesque apparition into his composition, the head of the John the Baptist, wreathed in light and dripping with blood in front of the horrified Salome. On the left of the painting, we can see Herod sitting on his throne, priestly, near his wife. On the right stands the impassive executioner, sword in hand. On the dark background, a network of lines creates a disturbing structure featuring pagan deities and medieval decorative motifs.

Characteristic of the painter's art, the rich ornamental decor borrowed from centuries past and distant civilizations makes this scene difficult to situate in time and space and adds to its enigmatic character. Gustave Moreau transform this biblical episode into a fable, a painted poem whose purpose is to be edifying, but at the same time to be a pretext to dream.



L'Apparition
Oil on canvas, Cat. 222
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda



La Vie de l'Humanité

The polyptych *La Vie de l'Humanité* is composed of nine panels in three superimposed rows, surmounted by a semi-circular arch featuring a depiction of the bloodied Christ. The order of the panels illustrates what Moreau thought of as human destiny. He wanted to express the connection between the different ages in life, the seasons, and the hours of the day.

The upper row is dedicated to the golden age, personified by Adam and symbolizing childhood: morning prayer, midday rapture, evening sleep. The middle row represents the silver age or youth embodied by Orpheus: Hesiod, in the morning, inspiration; Orpheus, at noon, singing; Hesiod, in the evening, the tears. Lastly, the iron age is embodied by Cain, symbolizing maturity: in the morning work, at noon rest, in the evening death.

Moreau explained the painting as follows: *'These three phases of all humanity also correspond to the three phases of human life: the purity of childhood: Adam. The poetic and painful ambitions of youth: Orpheus. The terrible suffering and death for adulthood: Cain – with redemption through Christ'*.

La Vie de l'Humanité
Oil on wood, Cat. 216
© RMN-GP / Christian Jean

Les Licornes

'I saw one of the most beautiful things that I have ever seen!' This is what the collector Émile Straus wrote on 14 July 1887 on leaving Gustave Moreau's studio where he had just discovered *Les Licornes*. The painter refused to part with this work which Edmond de Rothschild had commissioned from him. Instead, he gave him a watercolour, *David dansant devant l'Arche* (location unknown). He had probably been offended by remarks made by Edmond de Rothschild who wanted to see him develop the painting further, which Moreau refused to do. It might have been the banker who was the target of this angry note: *'Enough of all these critical reflections, this disapproval, this theoretical harshness, in all these imbeciles whose comprehension of art, as with everything else, does not exceed that of a caretaker or a butcher. Whatever they think of themselves and whatever they do, they are just fools'*.

The painting was inspired by the famous series of six tapestries from the Middle Ages known as *La Dame à la licorne*, which was acquired by the Musée de Cluny in 1882. To achieve the *'necessary sumptuousness'*, which was central to Moreau's aesthetic, he mixed ornamental motifs of medieval origin with others inspired by the Renaissance, while drawing on ideas found in an illustrated magazine like *Le Magasin pittoresque*. He spoke of the painting as *'an enchanted island with a gathering of women, only women giving the most precious image to all the visual arts motifs'*. In the distance, we can see the nave that led the princesses to this strange place. Two of them are embracing the unicorns, who remain impassive. These legendary animals, were said to be shy and would only allow themselves to be approached by virgins. All the women are elaborately dressed, one holds a symbol of purity, the fleur-de-lys, in her hand and a long slender sword. The clothes of one of the other ladies features legendary animals and epic battles, including that of Saint George and the dragon. The chalice on the right corner of the work, which may be the Holy Grail, adds to the painting's mysterious atmosphere. This is one of the most attractive and undoubtedly the most enigmatic of creations left to us by the artist.



Les Licornes
Oil on wood, Cat. 213
© RMN-GP / René-Gabriel Ojéda

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Cultural activities

Cultural activities and events are subject to change. Please consult the museum's website for the latest information, on: <https://musee-moreau.fr>

The Musée Gustave Moreau offers various ways to discover the painter and his house-studio through an extensive cultural programme aimed at different audiences that take place throughout the year. The two spacious studios on the 2nd and 3rd floors are an ideal place to welcome, inspire, and bring together both experienced and young artists, and informed and curious admirers of all ages around a painting that leaves room for the imagination and creativity.

Courses and drawing classes

These courses offer an insight into Gustave Moreau's creative approach while at the same time exploring both the basics and countless possibilities of drawing. Several courses are on offer, as well as one-day classes and the option of arranging customized lessons for both beginners and people with some drawing experience.

Workshops for schoolchildren

These workshops specially designed for school audiences aim to improve their knowledge and understanding of the collections and the history of art, through a cultural, educational, and playful approach. Greek and Roman mythology is explained through the works of Gustave Moreau. This is complemented by drawing to help the children understand the techniques used in the creation of the works. Under supervision of the teachers, each class is welcomed to the museum by a speaker. Activities take place in the two large studios at times when they are open to the public. In order to ensure that there is enough space for all the children, reservations for the workshops should be made in advance. The museum will make the studios available to the school and will provide the children and speakers with all the necessary equipment (pencils, paper, brochures, photocopier, computer if necessary, etc.) free of charge.



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Theatre – theatrical readings – concerts

Because of their decor and size, the studios on the 2nd and 3rd floors are perfect settings for theatrical performances and concerts. The public and artists get to meet and mingle in what was Gustave Moreau's studio and home.

Theatrical visits: 'Imaginary tours of Gustave Moreau's home'

Through texts written by some of the greatest authors, the public is invited to a visit-lecture that gradually transforms into a poetic dialogue between the actors, the public, and the artwork. The tour mixes commentary on the works and acting of scenes, becoming a kind of imaginary visit. The physical presence of the actors enhances a sensory approach to the creation, generating a subtle echo between the two clashing aesthetic methods: the representation and the presentation of the works.



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Guest speakers

Guest speakers: 'Rendez-vous avec...'

Lectures take place around a specific theme related to the work of Gustave Moreau and his time. They are intended to deepen one's knowledge of the artist, or simply discover his work, his contemporaries, his painting and technique, and the period in which he lived.

No booking required

Duration: 1 hour – Open to all ages

Guided tours of the museum

The visitor is invited by a guide-lecturer to discover the artist and his work but also the fascinating history of his house-studio. Through some key works, the visitor will explore Gustave Moreau's sources of inspiration, his techniques, and his connection with his contemporaries. A family visit to immerse yourself in the art of the master of Symbolism.

No booking required.

Duration: 1 hour – Open to all ages.

Association of the Friends of the Musée Gustave Moreau

Founded in 1990, the association 'Friends of the Musée Gustave Moreau' aims to contribute to the restoration and enhancement of the museum, to the conservation and development of its collections, and to increase the impact of his work.

The association's office bearers are:

Serge Legat – President

Odile Porthault, Eva Constans, Marion de Flers – Vice-Presidents

Caroline du Martray – Secretary General

Sylvie de Fayet – Treasurer.

Contacting the association:

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LES AMIS DU MUSÉE
Gustave Moreau

For subscription rates and to download the membership form, visit the 'Les Amis du musée' section of the museum's website.

Maisons des Illustres

The Musée Gustave Moreau has been awarded the prestigious 'Maisons des Illustres' or 'Landmark Houses' classification. Established by the Ministry of Culture and Communication in 2011, the label aims to promote places that preserve and transmit the memory of women and men who have distinguished themselves in the political, cultural, social, and scientific history of France.

Such illustrious places have to be open to the public for at least 40 days a year, must offer original presentations, high quality cultural programming, regular events, and guided visits that are accessible to all.

For more information, visit : <https://illustres.fr>



Practical information

All information can be found on the museum's website:
<https://musee-moreau.fr>

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Social media

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Getting there

Metro: Trinité or Saint Georges
Bus: 21, 26, 43, 68, 40, 74

Opening times

Every day except Tuesday from 10h-18h.
Please note: galleries cleared 15 minutes
before closing time.
Museum closed on: 1 January, 1 May, 25 December

Tickets

Full price: 7 €
Reduced price: 5 €
Free every first Sunday of the month.

Keep your entry ticket

For the eight days following your visit, on presentation of your Musée Gustave Moreau entrance ticket, visitors are entitled to a reduced tariff at our partner museums:

- musée national des arts asiatiques-Guimet
- musée national Jean-Jacques Henner
- musée d'Orsay
- and for the self-guided tour of the Palais Garnier opera house.

All the same conditions apply for entrance to the Musée Gustave Moreau, should you visit one of our partner museums or take the self-guided tour at the Palais Garnier first.

Groups

Limit of 30 people per group.
By prior reservation only at:
Telephone: +33 (0)1 83 62 78 72
Email: resa@musee-moreau.fr
To book a speaker, contact the Réunion des musées nationaux's 'visites-conférences' department at: contact.dpc@rmngp.fr

Private visits

Up to 120 people (including supervisory and service staff) on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the museum only (172 m2 each).
Contact: carine.carrey@musee-moreau.fr

Bookshop

The bookshop specializes in works related to the artist, Symbolism, and artist's houses. It offers a selection of books, exhibition catalogues, postcards, DVDs, posters, and related objects.

Reproduction of photographs

To request permission to reproduce photographs, contact the photographic agency of the Réunion des musées nationaux-Grand Palais (www.photo.rmn.fr)
254-256 rue de Bercy
75577 Paris Cedex 12
Tél. +33 (0)1 40 13 49 00

Documentation centre and graphic arts office

The documentation centre and the graphic arts office are accessible to researchers and museum professionals by appointment only.

Inaugurated in 2015, the Musée Gustave Moreau's graphic arts office is intended for the consultation of the graphic arts collection (drawings, photographs, engravings) and part of the artist's library.

A request should be sent by email to the director of the museum, Charles Villeneuve de Janti, à l'adresse charles.villeneuvedejanti@musee-moreau.fr

Museum management

Charles Villeneuve de Janti
Conservateur général du patrimoine de la Ville de Paris, directeur de l'Établissement public du musée national Jean-Jacques Henner et du musée national Gustave Moreau
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