

What is a museum?

The Musée d'Orsay

• Presentation

1. A Museum?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a museum is "a building or portion of a building used as a repository for the preservation and exhibition of objects illustrative of antiquities, natural history, fine and industrial art, or some particular branch of any of these subjects."

Whether the museum is national, regional, municipal or other, the works in its collection are part of a shared national heritage.

Collections are not static since new works are continually being added. They are acquired by various means: purchased from private individuals, dealers or public auctions, funded partly by the proceeds from ticket sales; through payment in kind for death duties; through works on loan from other museums or organisations; through gifts from a collector or artist's family; through bequests, when a work stated in a will comes to the museum on the death of its owner; through corporate sponsorship; or through gifts from the Friends of the Musée d'Orsay.

In May 1990 a statutory definition declared that curators: "should have both scientific and technical responsibility for the study, classification, conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the national heritage, and a duty to encourage appreciation and knowledge of this heritage. They may achieve this through education programmes and publications". Their responsibilities include presenting the permanent collections, organising temporary exhibitions and preparing catalogues, etc.

Restorers, under the authority of the curators, clean and restore works within their area of competence; some specialise in paintings, others in sculpture, etc. Since the opening of the Musée d'Orsay one of the main restoration projects has focused on the plaster sculpture of *La Danse* by Carpeaux (ill. 2). Security staff are required to protect the works from any damage that might result from the crowds of visitors: and thus very strict rules are applied: it is forbidden to touch the works, use flash photography, or take in rucksacks or umbrellas, which could be knocked into the works. In addition to their physical presence in the galleries, security staff are also assisted by a system of security cameras.

Other potentially harmful elements are strong lighting or excessive humidity and extremes of temperature. A control system (ill. 3) has been installed to ensure the best conditions for conservation are maintained, and a team of museum staff appointed to maintain this equipment. The fragility of a work of art varies depending on the medium involved, for example gallery lighting for pastels is maintained at a much lower level than for other works, and they are protected by glass. Old photographs are particularly fragile, which is why photographs are never on permanent display and are shown in temporary exhibitions only, as is also the case for drawings and all other works on paper.

Responsibility for the preservation of the collection extends beyond the museum itself. When works are lent for exhibitions to other French or foreign museums, the curators have to give their agreement, and those works considered too fragile are not sent. If a work is lent out, it is insured and accompanied by a curator to the exhibition site.

2. The History of the Musée d'Orsay Buildings

The Palace

- 1810-1838: the Palais d'Orsay* was built on the site of the present museum. It was intended for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but in the end housed the National Audit Office.
- May 1871: in a tragic epilogue to the Commune, many Parisian buildings were destroyed, including the Hôtel de Ville, the Tuileries, the Palais d'Orsay and the Salm Hall (now the Musée de la Légion d'Honneur). The Palais d'Orsay was not re-built, and it remained in a state of ruin for nearly thirty years.



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* Between 1700 and 1708 Charles Boucher d'Orsay, the Merchant Provost for Paris, began work on an embankment to be constructed with dressed stone, and planted with trees. The embankment bore his name, and as a result, came to be given to the palace, the station and ultimately to the museum.

1. The Musée d'Orsay: Bellechasse façade
2. Carpeaux's *La Danse* during restoration work
3. Caissons in the ceiling of the main hall
Air-conditioning outlets and resonance absorbers are concealed behind them

The Station

- 1898-1900: The Gare d'Orsay was built when the Paris-Orleans railway company decided to move its terminus nearer the centre of Paris from the Gare d'Austerlitz, considered to be too far out. They purchased the site of the former National Audit Office, and the design presented by architect Victor Laloux was chosen. The station had to fit perfectly into its prestigious surroundings, opposite the Louvre and the Tuileries Gardens. So Victor Laloux hid the station's metal structure in an envelope of dressed stone. He surrounded the station on two sides with a luxury hotel, offering 400 rooms, a restaurant and a ballroom. The station was decorated by artists and sculptors selected by the architect himself. It was inaugurated for the Universal Exhibition of 1900. Between 1900 and 1939 the station, used exclusively for passenger trains pulled by electric locomotives (ill. 4), was always bustling with activity. Its hotel attracted not only travellers passing through, but also Parisians, who dined in its restaurant and held sumptuous receptions in its ballroom.

The station in disuse

- 1939: The main lines were closed, as the platforms had become too short for the trains then in use. Orsay only served the suburbs, and its huge facilities became redundant.
- 1939-1980: the building was used for a number of different purposes. During the war it was a distribution centre for parcels sent to prisoners, then, in 1945, became a reception centre for survivors returning from the camps. It was in the Orsay ballroom that General de Gaulle announced that he was returning to power in a press conference on the 19th of May 1958. Then, on the 1st of January 1973, the hotel finally closed. The abandoned buildings were also used as a film location, notably for Orson Welles' 1962 film *The Trial*, based on the novel by Kafka. For a while, the Renaud-Barrault theatre company used one end of the hall for performances (ill. 5), and the auctioneers from the Salle Drouot took refuge here while work was carried out on their building.

The building is saved

In 1961, when the French National Railways Company (the SNCF) decided to put the building up for sale and demolition, various projects were put forward, including the architect Le Corbusier's plan for a hotel. A different hotel project was finally selected, and, in 1971, the destruction of the building seemed inevitable. However, the outcry following the demolition of Baltard's famous market *Les Halles*, had revived interest in nineteenth century industrial architecture, and the Minister for Culture at the time, Jacques Duhamel, decided to cancel the project.

In 1973 the building's façades and decoration were added to the list of Historic Monuments, and the whole station was listed in 1978. *Historiques et l'ensemble de la gare classée en mars 1978.*

The Museum

Meanwhile, in 1977, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing again took up the idea of creating a museum of the nineteenth century to house the national collections which were either dispersed or cramped in the Museum of the Jeu de Paume.

This museum would bridge the gap between the Beaubourg Centre, then under construction, and the Louvre. Shortly after his election, in 1981, François Mitterrand authorised the Musée d'Orsay project.

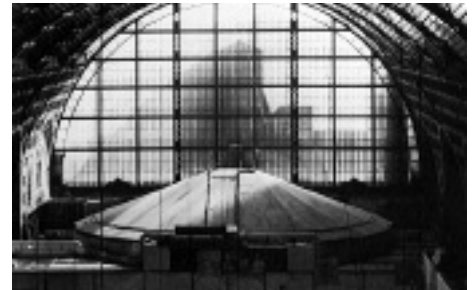
- 1983-1986: transforming the building. The winning ACT architecture team faced a challenge - to preserve a major creation of the early 20th century and to adapt it to its new function. They planned a complete reorientation of the former station building. Originally, people entered the station through seven huge doorways opening on to the Seine embankment, and the exit was through the place de Bellechasse. The Seine façade was closed off and the wrought iron canopy on the square became the entrance.

The main walkway now ran the length of the building, showing the architecture of the building at its best, highlighting the 138 metre main hall, the vaulted glass and iron roof, and the two tympana that form the east and west walls. The ground floor of the hotel and the arrivals area were transformed into the public foyer. Three principal exhibition levels were planned. From the foyer a large staircase goes down to the level of the old rails, and leads to a central walkway running the length of the main hall. On each side of this walkway there are several raised platforms, divided into small galleries. This whole area forms the ground floor (ill. 6). At the eastern end there are escalators for access to the upper level, built under the roof of the station, and including the top floor of the hotel on the Bellechasse side. Terraces on the middle level form exhibition spaces overlooking both sides of the central walkway. Floors were laid inside six of the seven cupolas on the Seine side. The hotel ballroom was preserved and is open to the public, and its dining room was made into a public restaurant (ill. 7). Provision was also made for a bookshop, a café, offices, storage, technical facilities, an auditorium, activity spaces for children, and a series of rooms to accommodate temporary exhibitions.

The interior design was entrusted to Gae Aulenti, including partitions, surfaces, lighting, furniture, etc. Traces of the old station were deliberately left exposed; its metal structure was painted green, whereas new elements were painted brown, the clocks were retained, and the central cupola was preserved in its original proportions (Courbet Gallery).



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- 4. Orsay station, the railway lines on the lower level
- 5. Renaud-Barrault theatre company's big top, erected at the far end of the great hall (1974-80)
- 6. The museum, view from the main hall
- 7. The former station hotel dining room, now open to the public

The museum was opened to the public in December 1986. On the 1st January 2004 its status changed, and instead of being administered by the Department of French Museums (DMF), it became a Public Administrative Establishment (EPA), with increased autonomy.

3. The Musée d'Orsay Collections

Period

The museum houses works from the period 1848-1914 placing it between the Louvre, with national collections up to 1850, and the Beaubourg National Museum of Modern Art, responsible for works after 1905-1910. The choice of dates was a subject of much discussion, especially about the choice of starting date. It was originally decided to begin with the works of the Romantic period (1820-1830). However, paintings from this period are often very large, and the museum itself was not sufficiently spacious. Another date suggested was 1863, but this date is only significant in terms of the history of painting (Salon des Refusés). Finally 1848 was chosen, as much for its historical, political and social importance (the 1848 Revolution, the Restoration of the 2nd Republic), as for its significance in the history of art (the emergence of Realism). In theory this period ends in 1914. However, in the case of painting, the last works date from the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century. This was when Cubism arrived with Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907, a style of painting not represented in the Musée d'Orsay collections. On the other hand, the cinema collection goes well beyond the date of 1914, as the programme of films includes talking pictures which started around 1929.

Nature

The museum has an interdisciplinary policy, taking into account all forms of artistic creation of the period (ill. 8 to 15). Thus, at the Musée d'Orsay one can find collections of paintings, sculpture, architecture (with the museum building itself as the principal exhibit!), graphic arts (drawing, prints), decorative arts (objects and furniture), and photography, invented at the end of the 1830s. As well as the historical context, literature, the press, illustrated books, cinema and music of the period 1848-1914 are presented through temporary exhibitions, concerts, displays and screenings. When the museum first opened, they were presented as part of the permanent collections, through displays, posters, with objects and documents of the period. Subsequently, it was decided to focus the permanent collections exclusively on fine art.

Origins

The Musée d'Orsay collections are state collections, (the museum itself is one of 34 French national museums) which were previously held either by the Louvre, the National Museum of Modern Art, the Jeu de Paume, or were on loan to other museums, or in the reserve collection. Since 1986 works have been bought, and donations received, to complete the collections.

4. Presenting the Works

Museography is the discipline relating to the display of works of art. It involves choosing the works, hanging them, designing the layout of the exhibition, and producing information in various forms for the public.

Exhibiting the Permanent Collection

- **selecting the works:**

Excluding photographs, the Musée d'Orsay owns around 6,000 works, of which 3,000 are on display. The others are kept in the reserve collections from where they are retrieved, from time to time, for temporary exhibitions at the museum or for loan. Thus, out of 2,600 paintings, 1,500 are in reserves; of 1,250 sculptures, 500 are in reserves... It is the curators who select the works for permanent display.

- **designing the layout:**

The challenge was to use the constraints of the site in a positive way when presenting the works of art. The first choice was to present them in chronological order. Works from the Second Empire are hung on the ground floor. Impressionists after 1870, and Post-Impressionists, are located on the upper level. Finally, works from the period of the Third Republic and the Art Nouveau collection are sited on the middle level. The fact that visitors have to go directly to the upper level after visiting the ground floor, then come down through the middle level, is justified by the imperative to use the space to its greatest advantage.

The designers believed that Impressionist paintings after 1870, open air paintings, required the overhead daylight which only the *Galérie des Hauteurs* provides, whereas the official art from the turn of the century found its natural place in the galleries within the decorated cupolas of the middle level. Certain areas invited certain exhibits, for example, the *Pavillon Amont*, with its exposed, metal girders, was ideal for the architecture section.

Having made the choice of chronological presentation, other problems presented themselves, notably, that of mixing different genres and techniques. Should one, for example, be rigid and put together two contemporary works from 1863, such as *La Naissance de Vénus*, by the academic painter Alexandre Cabanel, and *Le Déjeuner sur*



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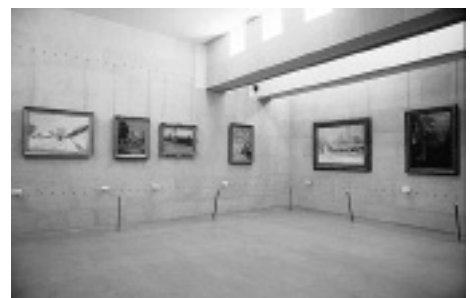
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8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867): *La Source*, 1856

9. Edouard Manet (1832-1883): *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863

10. Auguste Rodin (1840-1917): *Honoré de Balzac*, plaster, 1897

11. Calligram in the shape of the Eiffel Tower, 1889

12. Georges Seurat (1859-1891): *Cirque*, 1891

13. Edgar Degas (1834-1917): *Petite danseuse de 14 ans*, bronze, tulle tutu, satin ribbon, 1879-81

14. Emile Gallé (1846-1904): *Vitrine aux libellules*

(Glass case with dragonflies), 1904

15. Félix Nadar (1820-1910): *Portrait of d'une Antillaise*, 1856

16. The Ingres and Ingresites gallery

17. The Monet pre-1870 gallery

l'Herbe by the innovative painter Edouard Manet? This approach was rejected in favour of a more stylistic presentation, or grouping the works of just one painter (ill. 16-17), except in the case of collections kept together on the wishes of the benefactor. Another question was whether works of different techniques, but related in style, should be exhibited together, resulting in reconstructions like "period rooms" in British and American museums. This idea was rejected, but with two important exceptions: the ballroom of the former station hotel, whose sumptuous decor demanded certain pieces of the period (ill. 18), and the Charpentier Dining Room, which is in itself a comprehensive example of Art Nouveau.

On occasions it was deemed necessary to display, alongside the original works, some items giving an understanding of the period. These might be models (ill. 19) or modern photographs, but in each case the visitor is informed, to avoid confusion. Since the initial design, there have been changes in the hanging of the exhibits, which have significantly altered the original policies. The main modification consisted of bringing the Moreau-Nélaton collection together, which until then had been dispersed in several galleries. This was at the request of the heirs. Among the works moved were Honoré Daumier's *La République*, originally in the gallery dedicated to him, and Edouard Manet's, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, originally exhibited with *Olympia* and his other pre-1870 paintings.

A more important place has been given to foreign schools of painting, such as Scandinavian Art.

Temporary Exhibitions

As well as the permanent collections, the public can visit temporary exhibitions. Each year, in addition to the major exhibitions put on in the Grand Palais, the Musée d'Orsay curators put on temporary exhibitions in rooms reserved for this purpose. In keeping with the museum's multidisciplinary approach, these exhibitions cover a wide range of subjects.

Apart from paintings, sculptures, furniture, objets d'art and architectural pieces, the Musée d'Orsay possesses an outstanding collection of more than 50,000 photographs, and nearly 70,000 drawings. A photography gallery and a graphic arts gallery have been created to display these works, too fragile to be on permanent display.

A living museum, the Musée d'Orsay invites contemporary artists to enter into a dialogue by presenting a work of their own – often created for this event – alongside a work they have chosen from the permanent collection. A "correspondance" is thus made between a work from the collection and a new work of today, enabling the former to be seen in a new light.

Explanation

Information has a discreet presence in the exhibition space: no large explanation panels, instead there are cards placed near the works, with identifying information but without commentary. However, for visitors wanting further details, or for whom the planned layout is not always obvious, more information is available.

Staff at the information desk are available to answer queries, and can provide guidebooks and audio-guides for unaccompanied visitors.

Window displays and information areas (display of sculptural techniques (ill. 20), for example) around the exhibition, give visitors more details.

Information sheets on styles or on certain major works are available at various points around the exhibition.

Guided tours are also provided for members of the public. These are given by lecturers working for the French national museums.

Each season, there is a programme of shows, concerts and screenings (ill. 22) in the auditorium.

The museum's cultural service organises courses in cultural history, lectures and symposia, encouraging an appreciation of the museum, its works and the artistic and cultural context of the period from 1848 to 1914.

Finally, the education service organises activities specifically for schools, ranging from primary level to sixth form. It produces materials (ill. 23) to help teachers prepare visits, and to provide background information.

N. B. Two other museum services must be mentioned: catering – the museum restaurant and the *Café des Hauteurs*, and sales – sale of posters, books specialising in the period, video cassettes, CD ROMs, DVDs, CDs, a gift shop for reproductions, decorative objects and clothing accessories, etc.



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What is a museum?

The Musée d'Orsay

- Objectives
- Preparing the visit
- Suggested Visit
- Bibliography

Objectives

- To introduce school children to the range of activities found in a museum, insisting, at each stage, on the characteristics common to all museums, and the individual characteristics of the Musée d'Orsay. These include:
 - the nature of the space
 - the diversity of the collections
 - the various ways of acquiring works of art
 - the different types of objects
- to raise awareness among pupils of a shared heritage, and the rights and responsibilities that the general public has for this heritage
- to help young people discover the Musée d'Orsay, its architecture, its choice of layout, and some of the major works in its collections
- to encourage young people to reflect on the rôle of a museum in society, and the nature of the collections

Preparing the Visit

The teacher should choose one or more of the options listed below, which can be combined according to the pupils' age and level.

Primary Schools

I. Look at the definition of the word "museum" given in the Oxford English Dictionary: "a building or a portion of a building used as a repository for the preservation and exhibition of objects illustrative of antiquities, natural history, fine and industrial art, or some particular branch of these subjects", and summarise the main ideas contained in the words "repository", "preservation", "exhibition".

II. Provide vocabulary relating to museums and to the different jobs involved.

III. Ask pupils to draw up a list of all the different types of buildings that can accommodate a museum: castle, church, former workshop, converted apartment, disused factory, buildings designed for the purpose, etc.

IV. Ask pupils to name different types of objects that might constitute a private collection, and then, those that might be displayed in a museum: paintings, sculptures, architecture, everyday objects from the past, objects linked to jobs or skills; collections relating to history, science, films, cartoons, etc.

V. Collect reproductions of works of art to create a classroom museum. Select and classify the works according to various criteria (chronology, theme, style, etc.). Display these works in a space, real or in miniature, and justify these choices. Draw up information sheets for the different works.

VI. Give pupils a brief introduction to the history of the Musée d'Orsay and the originality of its collections (using the information contained in the attached sheet).

Secondary Schools

I. Follow Primary Schools point I, adapted for secondary level.

II. Explain the origin of the word "museum" to pupils. It comes from the Greek word "mouseion" meaning the "Temple of the Muses". Each of the nine Muses presided over one creative activity (Calliope was the Muse of epic poetry, Clio, of history, Euterpe, of lyric poetry, Polyhymnia, of hymns, Erato, of love poetry, Thalia, of comedy, Melpomene, of tragedy, Urania, of astronomy, and Terpsichore, of dance). There is no Muse for visual arts, because, until the

17th century, painting and sculpture were regarded as crafts rather than fine art. The word "museum" first meant the Temple of the Muses, then a school where poetry and art were practised, then a sort of Academy in Alexandria in Ptolemaic times (4th century BC, considered to be the ancestor of present day museums), and finally it acquired the meaning it has today.

III. Where necessary, provide vocabulary relevant to museums and to the different related professions

IV. To whom do the museum's collections belong? (the State, a private foundation, a private individual who gives the public access to them, etc.). Discuss the different types of museums (national, regional, municipal, foundations, etc).

V. Discuss the different ways in which a work comes to a museum (gift, inheritance, purchase, etc).

VI. Clarify the difference between displaying the permanent collections, where changes are rarely made, and the temporary exhibitions.

VII. Draw up a list of the different sources of information that can accompany a work to help visitors understand it (labels, information panels, sheets, floor plans, guidebooks, catalogues, films, etc.). Look at the different role of each document.

VIII. As well as purpose-built museums, other buildings can become museums. Ask pupils to draw up a list. The Musée d'Orsay itself is built from a former railway station. Draw the pupils' attention to the contradictory implications of the words "station" and "museum": the station is a place of transit, of departure, where people are in a hurry, where they seldom stay for long, an open space; the museum is a place where one stops, where one takes one's time; it is an enclosed space...

IX. Give some information about the Musée d'Orsay, the history of its building and the special features of its collections (see the presentation sheet attached).

X. Study the Musée d'Orsay mini-guide with your pupils.

Senior Schools (16+)

- Adapt secondary school suggestions
- Study the following texts, which are representative of the debates surrounding the role of museums.

In 1815, in his Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art, Quatremère de Quincy raised the question of uprooting works created for a particular site, building or monument, for exhibition in a museum environment at odds with that for which they were created:

"Do not tell us that works of art are preserved in these repositories. Yes, you have transported the substance, but how can you transport all the tender, profound, melancholic, sublime, sweet sensations that surrounded them? Can you house in your storerooms all those ideas and references which used to invest these paintings and sculptures with such passion? All these objects lost their effect when they left their context behind. Most of them derived their worth from the beliefs which gave them life, from the ideas they represented, from the surroundings which gave them meaning, and of the thinking which unified them. How will our spirit understand the meaning of these statues whose gaze is unfocused, whose expressions are no more than grimaces, and whose surroundings are now an enigma? How can our soul be moved now that the magic has gone from this marble, this woman pretending to cry over an empty vessel, this figure which no longer converses with her grief? How can these effigies, which have nothing left but their substance, possibly speak to us? What can they tell us, these mausoleums without tombs, these cenotaphs, emptied for a second time, these vaults which even death can no longer inspire?"

- A century later, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Marcel Proust offers a totally opposite point of view, arguing for the exhibition of works of art for their own sake, with no context at all:

"But whatever the art form, it is the fashion nowadays to display works in the context of their time, and thus to remove the essential element, the creative act which sets art apart.

A painting is 'presented', surrounded by furniture, trinkets, hangings of its time. It then becomes an insipid décor, which the most ignorant mistress of the house excels in creating in her mansion, having spent days in archives and libraries. But the masterpiece we look at as we dine, fails to give us the same intoxicating joy we might really expect only in an art gallery, which, stripped of all other embellishments, symbolises far better the inner world into which the artist withdraws to create."

- Finally, the following extract from Alexandre Vialatte's *Chroniques*, published in 1952, offers a starting point for a different view:

"We have had museums for everything: medals, sculpture, mankind, hats made of wrought iron, pictures made of trouser buttons, museums of our forefathers, of toads, snakes, cows' bones, of generals made from postage stamps. It only needed a museum of objects which are not museum pieces, the Museum of the Nondescript. The Comte sisters from Marsac have filled this gap.

It was a Great Idea. They achieved this by leaving in their will all their furniture in glass cases, in one room of the first floor of their house. It makes for a charming museum of "The Next Door Neighbour's Furniture," or of "a Gun-Smith's Daughter's Life in Auvergne in the Twentieth Century". Everyone can go and see it. It only costs 10F. You go in through the kitchen, up the black

staircase: then you look around you and you find yourself lost in thought.

I guarantee that you will have plenty to think about. When you leave the Marsac Museum you are troubled by its philosophy. You ask yourself – as any philosopher would – what did I see? What sort of museum was it? Finally you realise that it was a Museum Museum. The Museum of the museum itself. The Museum of the 'Concept of Museums'. And that really was a great idea. Because it is not even the Museum of the Commonplace, the anti-museum, with objects which, unlike in other museums, are all equally unremarkable (in fact it happens to contain some things which are quite unusual). It is much better than that. The anti-museum is a museum like any other, the only difference being in the objects it displays: it is a museum of anti-museum objects, assuming a choice like a true museum. But here, it is the complete reverse: choice does not exist – perhaps the limit would be the universe under glass, so that, by not looking to make choices the Marsac Museum succeeds in being the ultimate non-museum museum, and thus, the Museum of Museums since it only exhibits what is common to every museum: that is, the transformation to museum object by the display case. It is the museum of the special perspective of the glass case, and this is why it moves into the realm of philosophy."

Suggested Visit

1. Ground Floor

1.1. Walk down the central walkway, stopping from time to time to look into the galleries:

- review the architectural distinctions made earlier and judge whether the pupils have fully understood them.
 - point out the different materials which make up the station and the museum respectively. (ill. 1) Show how they enable the two buildings to coexist without conflict, drawing attention to the colours for example (the metallic structure of the station is painted green, while the museum structure is brown).
- Look at the way the works of art are displayed.:
- the way the lateral spaces contrast with the huge proportions of the main hall
 - the difference between the overhead natural light and the artificial light, always used indirectly so that the paintings are not over-lit.
 - the separation of artistic disciplines; generally the different art forms are not mixed: sculpture, an exterior art, is located in the central walkway (ill. 2) and painting, an interior art, is shown in the side galleries)
 - the separation of different schools and styles. Academic painting is on the right, while the more innovative work is on the left. As a result, Cabanel's *Naissance de Vénus* (ill. 3), which is contemporary with Manet's *Olympia* (1863, ill. 3) and which has the same subject of the reclining female nude, is



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1. Station and museum – how their structures enhance each other
2. Sculpture in the central hall
3. Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1889) : *Naissance de Vénus*, 1869
4. Édouard Manet (1832-1883) : *Olympia*, 1865
5. Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) : *Un enterrement à Ornans*, 1849-50
6. Thomas Couture (1815-1879) : *Rome pendant la décadence*, 1847

nevertheless exhibited in a different gallery (galleries **3** and **14** respectively).

- discuss what distinguishes a painting – a two-dimensional work which can only be seen from one point of view – from a sculpture, which is three dimensional, visible from several viewpoints.

1.2. In gallery **7**, devoted to Courbet, review all these points and mention the following:

- the juxtaposition of the works: to understand what makes *L'enterrement à Ornans* (1849-1850, ill. 5) so revolutionary, one has to look at Couture's *Les Romains de la décadence* (1847, ill. 6). Courbet borrows Couture's monumental format and, by departing from the rules of academic painting, he turns a scene of daily life in his native village into a grand theme in contemporary history.
- the comparisons in architectural style: gallery **7** is the only cupola from the station's departure hall where the full height was retained. Discuss the relationship between the architecture of the station and that of the museum. Is there a clash, a blend or a mutual benefit?

1.3. In the gallery dedicated to the Opera, at the end of the central walkway between the two towers:

- study the two models of the area around the Opera and the cross-section of Charles Garnier's Opera. After a brief historical introduction, analyse the different viewpoints of the two models: an aerial view below our feet and a longitudinal cross section presented at eye level (ill. 7). These models amaze visitors, and excite their interest. Then emphasise the difference in status between the original buildings they have encountered up to now and the models, small-scale reproductions. Point out the difficulties of looking at the architecture.
- Point out the three spectacular painted ceilings, which echo the opera theme presented here. Establish the difference between this and the more objective museography in other parts of the museum.

2. Upper Level

2.1. Go to the top of one of the towers and look out across the central hall (ill. 8). It looks much less solemn from here than from the entrance hall. Look closely at the vaulted roof of the station and at its riveted structures, its caissons and its windows.

2.2. As you go past the postcard stand, point out the museum sales areas.

2.3. In the Degas pastels galleries (**37** and **38**), point out the glass cases (ill. 10) and the low-level lighting, which protect the more fragile works.

2.4. Once in the *Galerie Bellechasse* examine the use of space, light and colour in the building. Emphasise the importance of the two rows of pillars which encourage the visitor to look more closely at the works.

3. Middle Level

3.1. In the Ballroom (**51**), an authentic room from the original station hotel, restored rather than reconstructed:

- point out the visitor's surprise at the abrupt change in décor: this room evokes the lives of the nobility and the splendour of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.
- look at a few works typical of the official art of the Third Republic, and see how they fit with the décor.

3.2. In gallery **55**, "Naturalism", you will find a collection of the sort of paintings admired by our great grandparents.

- point out how these works have fallen out of favour since the triumph of Impressionism in the 1920s. Conclude by underlining how taste is relative, and how it can change. Will there be further significant changes in artistic taste?

3.3. Galleries **61** to **65** are reserved for Art Nouveau exhibits:

- comment on the expression "Art Nouveau"
- study in particular the way the objects are displayed; are they exhibited for their functional use or for their aesthetic value? (ill. 13)

3.4. In the area between the two towers devoted to Rodin:

- explain the importance of not touching the sculptures in order to protect them from fingerprints, impact, etc.
- enjoy a historical anecdote : Rodin was commissioned to make this door (ill. 14) for a museum of decorative arts to be constructed on the site of the ruined Palais d'Orsay, well before anyone dreamed of building a station.
- study the works in plaster, an essential medium in nineteenth century sculpture. Compare the low esteem in which plaster is held today. Talk about the nineteenth century sculptor as essentially a modeller in clay or plaster. Sculpting in marble, as with casting in bronze, starts with models made in plaster.



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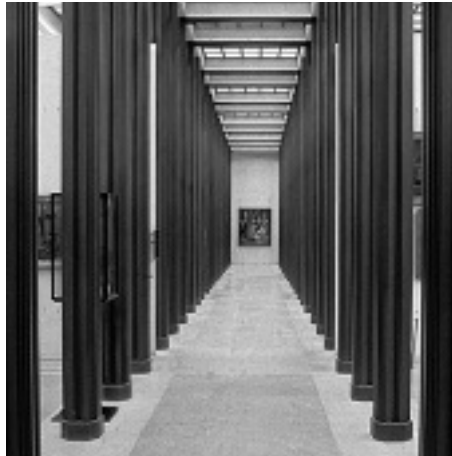
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- 7. Model of the Garnier Opera against a background of a starry sky (created by Richard Peduzzi)
- 8. The main hall viewed from the top of one of the towers
- 9. Gallery dedicated to the Moreau-Nélaton collection
- 10. Glass cases protecting the Degas pastels

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