Chronological landmarks

1. Construction of the Opéra
1869: competition for the new opera house
1870: 173 candidates begin plans, Garnier is chosen unanimously
1872: drawing of the underground water and laying of the first stone.
1873: commission of the sculpted group The Dancer from Carpeaux
1876: completion of the facade of the opera house for the opening of the World Fair
1880: unveiling of The Dance, the ink stain scan.
1879: declaration of war, building work halted
1875: fire in the rue Le Peletier opera house necessitating completion of new building
1875: completion of the building and inauguration by Mac-Mahon, in the presence of the Lord Mayor of London.

2. Changes undergone by the building
1862: a new ceiling for the Opera was commissioned from Chagall in which provisions were made to keep the masking of Lepaute's earlier ceiling from being irretrievable.
1890: Paul Emile Lorrain's copies of The Dance were installed on the building's facade whilst the original sculpted group is transferred,力求 to the Garnier and then in 1936 to the Musée d'Orsay.
3. Theatres staging operas in Paris
1852–58: Salles Louvois, rue de Buci
1857–1867: rue Le Peletier opera house
1870–1880: Opéra-Garnier (specialising in dance performances since 1880, exclusively since 1900, subject to exception)
Since 1989: Opéra Bastille

The visit: list of artworks

Sculptures: Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux

Major pieces:
- Les danseurs (The Dancer), stone, 1880–1889; half-size plaster cast, 1868; sketches, 1865–1868
- Other works:
  - sculptured portraits, numerous busts of contemporaries including Charles Garnier, Eugène Ficher (a famous Opéra dancer)...
  - half-size plaster casts of two high reliefs designed to decorate the facade of the Louvre: Flore, La France impérieuse prétendant l'intrépendance et la science (Imperial France Pretending Agriculture and Sciences)
  - numerous plaster, clay and terracotta sketches (in glass cases)

Architecture: the Opera and Haussmann's Paris

Models:
- longitudinal section of the Opera
- bird's-eye view of the Opera's surroundings
- structure of the stage and machinery of the Opera
- sculptures of decorative elements in the building
- posters, drawings, watercolours
- three-dimensional models of opera set-designs
- models of Haussmannian buildings

Paintings:
- The Louvre: L'Exécuteur de l’Opéra (The surgeon at the Opéra), 1866; Vue générale de Paris, peint de l’observatoire, in ballons (General View of Paris, from a balloon over the Observatory), 1853

Paintings, pastels and sculptures:

The dancers by Edgar Degas

Paintings:
- L'Exécuteur de l'Opéra (The Opera Surgeon), 1867
- L'Étoile (The Star), 1876–1877
- Dancers above bougasse (Dancer with a Bouquet, Bouquet), 1877
- Dancers (Dancers), 1884–1885
- Étude danseuses au repos (Two Dancers Reposing), circa 1890

Sculptures:
- Danseuse, grande arabesque (Dancer, Great Arabesque)
- Danseuse, position de quatre-vingt quatre devant la jambe gauche (Dancer, Fourth Position Left Leg Laying)
- Danseuse mettant son bas (Dancer Putting on her Stocking)
- Danseuse regardant la plante de son pied droit (Dancer Looking at the Sole of her Right Foot)
- Petite danseuse de quatorze ans (Little Dancer)
- Étude de la pour la petite danseuse de quatorze ans (Nude Study for the Little Dancer)

Paintings: the audience

- Éva Gouzoula: Une ligne aux bâtiments (1 · Out at the Bâtiments), 1873
- Pierre Bonnard: La Loge (The Box), 1906

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1. Eclatisme and architectural rigour

Charles Garnier, at just thirty-five, was young and as yet unknown when he was chosen to design the new opera house at the Opéra. His winning project was a competition in 1861. His achievement was even more remarkable considering that there were 171 candidates. Among them the already renowned Viollet-le-Duc, whose project was favoured by the Empress. The building proposed by Garnier drew inspiration from several historical styles that he had reinterpreted and fused together. This mixing of genres, selections coupled with ambitious ornamentation are typical of the art of the second Empire. The exuberance of this new style, despite having been minutely thought out by Garnier, could be confusing and prompted a verbal scandal in 1869 as much for its vivid composition as for its daring subject – a ring of nude women, bacchantes, drunken with pleasure, whirling around the spirit of dance – remains to this day the most eye-catching and best known.

2. Architecture and urbanism

One of the main problems facing Charles Garnier was how to insert the new public edifice into the midst of metropolitan-shaped Haussmannian blocks. Urban structural uniformity has its origins in the rules established by the Baron Haussmann who controlled the height and alignment of buildings, the proportions of façades, the number of stories, the segmentation and dimension of windows, balconies, etc. Garnier’s solution was to use the building’s imposing volume and the exuberance of its overcharged décor to vividly contrast with its surroundings, highlighting the Opera’s prestigious singularity. The construction of the new Opera house was not only an architectural creation but was also part of the general urbanisation plan of Paris as defined by Napoleon III and implemented by Haussmann. The latter intended to carve a new niche in the capital, fostering the development of a business area in the centre of the city and to the railway stations. To this end, he decided to cut an avenue connecting the Opera with the Luxembourg (the Avenue de l’Opéra), which was to be a cornerstone of his plan that required extensive demolition. This project was included in the campaign to carve many new arteries that were to consist of Paris’ north-south axis formed by the boulevards Sébastopol and Saint-Michel, the east-west axis of the rue de Rivoli, and the numerous avenues starting from the Arc de Tréville. Place de l’Étoile was created.

Besides this, Napoleon III was still recovering from the shock of revolution and the attempted coup d’etat on him which had taken place as he was on his way to the old Opéra House, on the rue Le Peletier, in 1858. It was the first bomb attack in France and it had very nearly been successful, aided in particular by the network of narrow streets which surrounded the building. This ever more striking since the rue Le Peletier Opera was already a replacement for the fire-bombed building on the rue de la Loge, which had been closed in 1820 having hosted the successful assassination of the Duc de Berry. The Avenue de l’Opéra was designed to give majestically direct access to the Opéra from the new railway connection at the Palais des Tuileries; it was to be vast enough to eliminate the risk of traffic jams which might facilitate new

The Opéra by Charles Garnier

- Presentation
- Objectives
- Circuit
- Before and after the visit
- Chronological landmarks
- The visit: list of artworks
- Bibliography
assassination attempts. Besides this, a secured entrance was devised whereby a double access was led the Emperor’s coach directly to the entrance of the regalia which opened on to his box at the front of the house. But as work on the Avenue de l’Opéra only began after the construction of the Opéra House and was not completed until 1879, the Emperor was never to use it.

The construction of the Opéra lasted fifteen years, from 1862 to 1875, the setbacks encountered by this, the symbol of the pomp of the Second Empire, were closely related to the political events of the time. Although the façade was inaugurated during the World Fair in 1867 and Capeaux’s group, The Dance, was unveiled in 1869, the building was still unfinished in 1870 when the Empire collapsed. The costly construction, testament to a disintegrated era, was brought to a halt and it was even considered worth abandoning. The Opéra was to suffer long from its association with the imperial regime and its eventual completion, in 1875, was only in direct consequence of the fire that had ruined the theatre on the rue Le Peletier two years previously, making the inauguration of the new building urgent and necessary.

4. The dancers by Degas

Edgar Degas’ work is especially good at evoking the poetry of ballet and the aesthetic work of the dancers. A great lover of music and dance, Degas regularly attended the Opéra, in particular the one on the rue Le Peletier which is to be seen in many paintings and pastels. He liked going backstage and attending rehearsals either on stage or in the “Foyer de la danse” (large semi-public rehearsal studio), subjects he found more interesting than actual performances. He was greatly interested in the “saying” of the body and tirelessly studied the dancers’ often exhausting, preparatory exercises as well as their different postures and attitudes when resting. The Opéra was to provide a source of inspiration for numerous artists; dancers on the stage and in the wings, the orchestra pit and even the auditorium itself were to serve as a vehicle for staging innovative compositions or new ways of expressing light.

3. The Opéra: its life and workings

This result, based on the theme of the Opera, links up three major artistic disciplines: architecture, sculpture and painting, whilst examining the work of three major artists of the second half of the 19th century: Garnier, Carpeaux and Degas.

1. The Opéra: the architecture and its incorporation into its surroundings

• to observe an architectural plan
• to study Charles Garnier’s architectural principles
• to name the different parts of the building
• to explain the architectural terms designating the elements of a façade and its decor
• to understand the incorporation of the Opéra House into its surroundings, with reference to Baron Haussmann
• to describe the transformation of Paris under the Second Empire

2. The Opéra: its painted and sculpted decor

• to explain the notion of sculptural architecture
• to define the terms sculpture in the round, high relief, bas-relief
• to comprehend the dynamism of the sculpted group The Dance by Carpeaux
• to compare the sophistication of the movement in Carpeaux’s work with the static quality of academic sculpture
• to make a rough catalogue of the mythological, allegorical, historic or contemporary sources which inspired the sculpted and painted works
• to identify different sculptural materials and understand the corresponding techniques
• to promote popular awareness of the problems posed by the transportation and conservation of artworks, and the destructive effects of pollution

4. The Circuit

Because of the disposition of artworks in the museum, it is best to start the circuit on the ground floor with the sculpture The Dance by Carpeaux, a monumental decor made for the façade of the Opéra, before moving on to look at the two models of the building: the first being its longitudinal section, from the entrance to the administrative offices, and the second, the Opéra in its surroundings (a model under glass flooring), in which the avenue leading to the Opéra and the constructions surrounding it, buildings, department stores, etc, are clearly visible. Then, continue to the upper level, where the world of ballet is evoked in the painting, sculpture and pastels of Edgar Degas, before concluding on the middle level with Pierre Bonnard’s painting Le Jour (The Day).

Besides this, one might consider the option of studying “the Opera in literature” or “the relationships between literature and the other modes of expression in the 19th century” in 8th form French.

5. The Objectives

• to observe an architectural plan
• to study Charles Garnier’s architectural principles
• to name the different parts of the building
• to explain the architectural terms designating the elements of a façade and its decor
• to understand the incorporation of the Opéra House into its surroundings, with reference to Baron Haussmann
• to describe the transformation of Paris under the Second Empire

2. The architecture and set-designs for operas

Studying this building introduces one to the wide variety of disciplines covered by the Museum; collections in which architecture has its own specific place. This complex art form is not easy to exhibit, the architect’s work having to be presented through plans, projects and drawings. To make the discipline easier to understand, Richard Pouzat has been commissioned to construct models of the Opéra and its surroundings. There, he has staged as a permanent feature the background of a starry night, which evokes a dream world whilst at the same time, pay homage to opera stage sets. One can also see three-dimensional models of set-designs, displayed behind specially designed glass windows. These are the original models, created by the 19th century Opera set-designers, models after which the painted canvases of the sets were made: at the time, this was the sole method employed in the design and building of sets. In this part of the Museum devoted to the theme of opera, changing exhibits of drawings, posters, projects for costumes or set designs, as well as small exhibitions, complete and diversify the display.

3. Painting

A visit on the theme of dance provides a good opportunity to study Degas’ work, whose passion for the subject shines through his paintings, pastels, and sculptures. In parallel to Degas’ representations of rehearsals, bar exercises, dancers at rest, etc., it is interesting to see how other painters drew inspiration rather from the attitudes of the Opéra’s public. Two paintings by different artists show members of the audience in their boxes, one painted by Eva Gonzales in 1874, and the other by Pierre Bonnard, painted in 1889.

Before and after the visit

1. Outside visits

• Theatre buildings
  • the Opéra Garnier
  • the Théâtre du Châtelet
  • the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées
  • the Salle Favart
  • the Opéra Bastille

• Sculptures by Carpeaux in Paris
  • high-reliefs on the Laroche’s Pavilion of France
  • the Fountains of the Observatoire

The Musée de la Musique:
• models of theatres and opera houses, in particular that of the rue Le Peletier

2. Literature and Opera

Honoré de Balzac:
• La Prise de Chalons (The Bold Inn’s Nán, 1851)
• Le Pere Goriot (Father Goriot, 1835)
• Illusions perdues (Lost Illusions, 1852, 1849, 1948)
• Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary (1857)
• Guy de Maupassant: Förs kött så döde (The Strong, Le Dom, 1890)
• Gustave Leroux: Le Fantôme de l’Opéra (The Phantom of the Opera, 1910)
• Marcel Proust: Le Coeur de Guermantes (The Guermantes Way, 1920-1925)
• Paul Valéry: Monstre Testé (1929)
assassination attempts. Besides this, a secured entrance was devised whereby a double access was led the Emperor’s church directly to the entrance of the ruins which opened on to his box at the front of the house. But as work on the Avenue du Châtelet only began after the construction of the Opera House and was not completed until 1879, the Emperor was never to use it.

The construction of the Opéra lasted fifteen years, from 1860 to 1875; the setbacks encountered by this, the symbol of the pomp of the Second Empire, from 1860 to 1875; the setbacks encountered by this, the symbol of the pomp of the Second Empire, were closely related to the political events of the time. Although the façade was inaugurated during the World Fair in 1867 and Carpeaux’s group, The Dance, was unveiled in 1868, the building was still unfinished in 1870 when the Empire collapsed.

1. The Opéra: the architecture and its incorporation into its surroundings
   - to observe an architectural plan
   - to study Charles Garnier’s architectural principles
   - to name the different parts of the building
   - to explain the architectural terms designating the elements of a façade and its décor
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2. The Opéra: its sculpted and painted décor
   - to explain the notion of sculpture subordinate to architecture
   - to define the terms sculpture in the round, high relief, bas-relief
   - to comprehend the dynamism of the sculpted group The Dance by Carpeaux
   - to compare the sophistication of the movements in Carpeaux’s work with the static quality of academic sculpture
   - to make a rough catalogue of the mythological, allegorical, historical or contemporary sources which inspired the sculpted and painted works
   - to identify different sculptural materials and understand the corresponding rendering
   - to promote public awareness of the problems posed by the transportation and conservation of artworks, and the destructive effects of pollution

3. The Opéra: its life and workings
   - to describe all the kinds of performances given at the Opéra House
   - to define the make up of the high-society Opera audiences
   - to round up the social ritual preceding the entrance and seating of the public in the Opéra: stalls, boxes, lower circle, gallery (the gods)
   - to relate the functions of different parts of the building and the professions to be found there

These objectives may easily be related to the history programmes in French curricula for 5th and 3rd year students. ‘Discovery of an aspect of social, cultural and artistic life (in particular of the bourgeoisie) under the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic’.

Besides this, one might consider the option of studying ‘the Opera in literature’ or ‘the relationships between literature and the other modes of expression in the 19th century’ in 6th form French.

4. The dancers by Degas

Edgar Degas’ work is especially good at evoking the poetry of ballet and the autoshow work of the dancers. A great lover of music and dance, Degas regularly attended the Opéra, in particular the one on the rue Le Peletier which is to be seen in many paintings and pastels. He liked going backstage and attending rehearsals either on stage or in the ‘Foyer de la danse’ (large semi-public rehearsal studio), subjects he found more interesting than actual performances. He was greatly interested in the ‘taming’ of the body and tirelessly studied the dancers’ often exhausting, preparatory exercises as well as their different postures and attitudes when resting.

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5. The Circuit

Because of the disposition of artworks in the museum, it is best to start the circuit on the ground floor with the sculptor The Dance by Carpeaux, a monumental décor made for the façade of the Opéra, before moving on to look at the two models of the building: the first being its longitudinal section, from the entrance to the administrative offices, and the second, the Opéra in its surroundings (a model under glass flooring), in which the avenue leading to the Opéra and the constructions surrounding it, buildings, department stores, etc. are clearly visible. Then, continue to the upper level, where the world of ballet is evoked in the painting, sculpture and pastels of Edgar Degas, before concluding on the middle level with Pierre Bonnard’s painting Le Bateau (The Boat).

1. Sculpture

During this visit, sculpture may be reconsidered both as an art in its own right, and also as an art form, ‘subservient to architecture’; dependent on the building from which it cannot be dissociated. Architectural sculpture, takes the form of monumental high relief; standing against, yet clearly distinct from, the façade: see The Dance by Carpeaux. Sculptural décor, takes the form of bas-relief – such as the small-sized medallions representing musicians – or the compositions inscribed in semi-circular pediments, the third identifiable category are sculptures in the round; autonomous sculptures one can walk around, some of which can be seen topping different parts of the building.

2. The architecture and set-designs for operas

Studying this building introduces one to the wide variety of disciplines covered by the Museum collections in which architecture has its own specific place. This complex art form is not easy to exhibit, the architect’s work having to be presented through plans, projects and drawings. To make the discipline easier to understand, Richard Poulin has been commissioned to construct models of the Opéra and its surroundings. These, he has staged as a permanent feature choosing the background of a starry night, which evokes a dream world whilst at the same time, paying homage to opera stage sets. One can also see three-dimensional models of set-designs, displayed behind specially designed glass windows. These are the original models, created by the 19th century Opera set-designers, models after which the painted canvases of the sets were made: at the time, this was the sole method employed in the design and building of sets. In this part of the Museum devoted to the theme of opera, changing exhibits of drawings, posters, projects for costumes or set designs, as well as small exhibitions, complete and diversify the display.

3. Painting

A visit on the theme of dance provides a good opportunity to study Degas’ work, whose passion for the subject is shown through his paintings, pastels, and other sculptures. In parallel to Degas’ representations of rehearsals, bar exercises, dancers at rest, etc., it is interesting to see how other painters drew inspiration rather from the attitudes of the Opéra’s public. Two paintings by different artists show members of the audience in their boxes, one painted by Eva Gonzalez in 1874, and the other by Pierre Bonnard, painted in 1889.

Before and after the visit

1. Outside visits

- The Opéra Garnier
- The Théâtre du Châtelet
- The Théâtre des Champs-Élysées
- The Salle Favart
- The Opéra Bastille

2. Literature and Opera

- The Théâtre du Châtelet
- The Opéra Garnier
- The Théâtre des Champs-Élysées
- The Salle Favart
- The Opéra Bastille
The Opéra by Charles Garnier

1. Eclecticism and architectural rigour

Charles Garnier, at just thirty-five, was young and as yet unknown when he was chosen to design the new opera building. The competition for the new opera house in 1861 was a great opportunity for the young architect. His achievement was even more remarkable considering that there were 171 candidates, among them the already renowned Viollet-le-Duc, whose project was favoured by the Empress. The building proposed by Garnier drew inspiration from several historical styles that he had reinterpreted and fused together. This mixing of genres, selected with a modern sensibility, was typical of the art of the Second Empire. The excellence of this new style, despite having been minutely thought out by Garnier, could be confusing and prompted a verbal controversy. The Empress, displeased by her protegé Viollet-le-Duc, had not been chosen, said of the plan: “What style is that?... That’s not a style!... That’s neither Greek, nor Louis XVI, nor even Louis XV...” Charles Garnier answered: “No, these styles have passed out... This is Napoleon III’s and you are complaining!” Garnier’s architectural scheme is based on a symmetrical plan, developed either side of a longitudinal axis. He wanted the succession of spaces, each corresponding to a precise function, to be clear to the passer-by. He achieved this through the articulation of mass, the outside volumes of which reflect the interior spaces. This correspondence is particularly visible at roof level where the dormers vary according to whether they cover the theatre, the stage, or the rosaries of the Emperor or the season ticket holders, etc. Charles Garnier had not designed the architecture, but also supervised the entire iconographic programme for the interior and exterior decoration: painting, sculpture, mosaics, frescoes... – and in so doing revised the tradition that considered architecture to be the mother of all arts. He favoured subject matter drawn from mythology – for instance the group on the top of the building, Idols crowning “Dance” and “Music”, or from contemporary sources such as the people in his entourage or the artisans working on the building... The iconography on the façade pays homage to great musicians – Berlioz, Massenet, Ravel, Boulez, Meyerbeer – and to two librettists – Scribe and Guiraud. Garnier commissioned many works from former student artists from the Beaux-Arts and from a friend from the “Petite École” named Carpeaux... Garnier was no mere replacement for the former building on the rue de l’Opéra. It was already a replacement for the former building on the rue de l’Opéra. He was to be vast enough to eliminate the risk of traffic jams which might facilitate new residential developments. This project was included in the campaign to carve many new arteries that were to run through Paris: the north-south axes formed by the boulevards Saint-Éloi and Saint-Michel, the east-west axis of the rue de Rivoli, the numerous avenues starting from the Arc de Triomphe, Place of the Étoile de l’Équateur and the Étoile.
The Opéra by Charles Garnier

• The visit: the artworks

The Dance by Carpeaux and the façade of the Opéra

The contrast between the three versions discussed below – the original stone sculpture, the plaster cast and the miniature reproduction which is visible on the model of the Opéra, enables one to follow the different stages of the sculptor's work, in comparing their dimensions, the materials used and their respective functions. One should keep in mind the difficulties implied in working onsite on an artwork of this dimension; Carpeaux had a hut built for him against the façade of the Opéra.

1. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: La danse (The Dance), 1863-1869, Edition state
Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery, on the right
This smaller sculpted group is similar to the former but in a different material. After making numerous drawings, sketches and models in which he sometimes included many more figures before restricting himself to nine, Carpeaux designed his final work in this plaster cast. The monumental group is of monumental dimensions suited to the proportions of the building; the plaster cast, closer to human scale is more touching, both by its size, half that of the stone group, and by the brittle material in which the hand of the sculptor may be felt. Among the numerous techniques used to make a sculpture, Carpeaux seems to have employed clay, gradually building up the form on a wire armature that served as the sculpture's skeleton. Once finished, the half-size model was cast in plaster.

The next stage, the stone group, was executed by assistants who used a painting system on the model to calculate the final dimensions which, cutting under Carpeaux's supervision, they would then translate directly on to the stone. This group is a high relief, a sculpture of volume with a flat back which is meant to be set against the façade. It is worth noting the way the composition has been used to connect the characters as well as being the vehicle used to render movement and express joy, and also the way the dancers vary one from another in the expression of their faces, their smiles, inclination of the heads, and the bodies, the all balance between on tip toe, the movement of the bust, etc.

Also on view: Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: La danse (The Dance), plaster sketches
Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery, glass case on the right

5. La danse (The Dance) on the model of the longitudinal section of the Paris Opéra

Carpeaux's sculpted group can be recognised on the half-size scale of the stone model. The changes of scale as one studies the compositions of the sculpture, the half-size plaster cast and this miniature copy affect one's perception. The original sculpture was covered and animates the façade of the Opéra. This is no longer a monumental sculpture that dominates and overwhelming the viewer, but a small element integrated into a whole.

The various sculptural groups that are "subordinate to architecture" Garnier envisaged: Carpeaux's Opéra architectural sculpture which plays a role in the edition such as the four figures that stand out from the façade and the high reliefs situated on both sides of the arcades; and sculptural decor that covers and animates the façade of the Opéra.
surface of the building in the form of medallions, semi-circular pediments, etc. It is worth looking at the sequence of figures in the semi-circular pediments and how they have been fit into the half moon shape; for example: women sitting with their legs stretched out. Other figures top the roof, these being sculpted in the round; autonomous structures one can walk around. This profusion of decor confuses one's senses and accentuates the orthogonal structures of the building.

The Correspondence between the exterior volumes and the interior spaces

4. Longitudinal section of the Paris Opera, model
5. Bird's eye view of the opera quarter: model under glass flooring
6. Victor Navlet: L'escalier de l'Opéra (The Staircase of the Opera), 1880, oil on canvas Location: ground floor, Opera gallery
7. Eva Gonzalès: Une loge aux Italiens (4 Box at the Italians), circa 1874, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 51
8. Edgar Degas: L'architecte de l'Opéra (The Architect of the Opera), 1889, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 50
9. Edgar Degas: Le foyer de la danse à l'opéra de la rue La Pétrière (The Foyer of the dance in the Opera rue La Pétrière), 1872, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 51
10. Edgar Degas: La classe de danse (The Dancing Class), 1871, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 50

The administrative offices are discreetly accommodated at the back of the building. The architecture there is simpler, even severe. The two, the attribute of Apollo and the symbol of music and poetry, can be found all over the edifice.

5. Bird's eye view of the opera quarter: model under glass flooring Location: ground floor, Opera gallery

This model demonstrates how the Opéra, whose architecture favours curves and sculpted ornaments, stands out from the straight lines of its surroundings. It portrays the area in 1914 at the scale of 1:200. It helps the visitor to understand the difficulties Garnier faced in integrating this building into rows of modern buildings with identical façades, in an area which included banks and department stores. The whole street runs out of the avenue de l'Opéra leading to the Louvre can easily be made out.

By comparing the longitudinal section with this bird's eye view of the building, one can see how each space within the opera has a distinct roofing. The configuration of spaces is visible from the outside as Garnier wished it to be: terrace roofing for the entrance vestibules and the foyer, large dome above the auditorium, gabled roof covering the stage, and low roofs for the administrative offices. All the architectural elements are organised symmetrically around a longitudinal axis. On both sides of the central dome are two smaller domes covering the rotundas: the Emperor's rotunda, preceded by a double slope designed for a home-drawn coach and thus reserved for season ticket holders, giving access to the foyer de danse. On top of the building, one can see the main dome which is in both half-moon shape.

6. Victor Navlet: L'escalier de l'Opéra (The Staircase of the Opera), 1880, oil on canvas Location: ground floor, Opera gallery

Painted in a realistic and academic manner, this cool-toned oil painting is a faithful rendering of the grand staircase with its rhythm of balconies and portrays the movement of the ascending audience. The architecture of the interior is described with accuracy but emphasized: the spaces of vast proportions and the overcharged decor which become a shrine for music-lovers as soon as they set foot in it. This is how Garnier imagined it would be: “At each level, members of the audience, leaning on the marble balustrades will watch the walls making them alive, so to speak, while others moving up and down the stairs will still more live.” Victor Navlet (1848-1886) is best known as a painter of panoramas, such as the View of Paris, from a balloon over the Observatory, 1855.

A Box at the dancing class. A few dancers are looking at the top right hand corner of the painting. The arabesques carved in the lintels under the cornices, walls and floors are a masterpiece of the sculptor. The painting was made in 1872 and is signed with the artist's monogram. Besides the magnificent salon, the dancers' rooms are decorated with paintings and pastels, and were to continue to be so until the end of his life. He was more interested in their poses during classes and rehearsals than in stage performances. The line is here solemnised by the imposing decor of the study in the rue La Pétrière with its large mirror set in a niche framed with marble pillars. The ballerina seen in profile is attractive to the posture of the ballet master. Louis Merante, but it is difficult to know whether she is about to start her exercise or whether she has just finished it. Her silhouette stands out against the wall in front of a partly open door, leading the scene a sensation of depth. This effect is accentuated by the daylight filtering through the window, glimmering through the open door. On the left, three dancers are the others are at the bar, whilst the right, a small group is gathered tightly around the ballet master. The sitting dancer is in repose, her body relaxing. Times of colour and gold dominate the painting, punctuated by white and grey patches and enhanced by a few touches of vermilion: the fan on the chair in the foreground, the white ribbon in the back of the right hand dancer, the line of the bar along the wall and the painter's signature in the bottom left.

7. Eva Gonzalès: La classe de danse (The Dancing Class), 1872, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 51

This is the first painting of its size which Degas devoted to the subject of the ballet and was to become a group portrait of part of the orchestra. However, the actual places of the musicians have been rearranged, which has the effect of emphasizing Degas. This is one of the first examples of Degas' interest in the world of the opera. The contrast between light and shadow, as well as the musicians faces, who are all depicted as a group, in their postures during classes and rehearsals, are so until the end of his life. He was more interested in their poses during classes and rehearsals than in stage performances. The line is here solemnised by the imposing decor of the study in the rue La Pétrière with its large mirror set in a niche framed with marble pillars. The ballerina seen in profile is attractive to the posture of the ballet master. Louis Merante, but it is difficult to know whether she is about to start her exercise or whether she has just finished it. Her silhouette stands out against the wall in front of a partly open door, leading the scene a sensation of depth. This effect is accentuated by the daylight filtering through the window, glimmering through the open door. On the left, three dancers are the others are at the bar, whilst the right, a small group is gathered tightly around the ballet master. The sitting dancer is in repose, her body relaxing. Times of colour and gold dominate the painting, punctuated by white and grey patches and enhanced by a few touches of vermilion: the fan on the chair in the foreground, the white ribbon in the back of the right hand dancer, the line of the bar along the wall and the painter's signature in the bottom left.

8. Edgar Degas: L'architecte de l'Opéra (The Architect of the Opera), 1889, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 50

The ballet at the Opéra

The auditorium, a sumptuous nest of red and gold, is the setting for the gents out of high society, frequently frequented by the impresarios who were interested in subjects relevant to their times. A paper by Edmond Muret, Eva Gonzalès (1846-1885) used the same contrasting effects, violently opposing dark and light, as can be seen in the famous Olympia, a detail from which is to be found repeated here: the stunning bouquet on the left, on the raling of the box, against the piece of soft furnishing restraining the curtain. The couple stands out clearly against the dark background of the box. The young lady, seen from the front, occupies the central ground. She is wearing an elegant costume, a ruse similar to that on her dress highlights her hair. In her left hand, resting on the red velvet railing of the box, one can see a pair of opera glasses. On the right, seen from three quarters and wearing evening dress is her companion. His face, in profile, is turned towards her but does not seem to see her. Both seem to be absent, indifferent to one another and even to the performance which they are nevertheless attending together.

9. Edgar Degas: Le foyer de la danse à l'opéra de la rue La Pétrière (The Foyer of the dance in the Opera rue La Pétrière), 1872, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 51

Dancing at the Opéra, Degas is already nicknamed ‘the painter of dancers’ and he so has remained for posterity. As early as the 1870’s, dancers were the inspiration for him drawings, paintings and pastels, and were to continue to be so until the end of his life. He was more interested in their poses during classes and rehearsals than in stage performances. The line is here solemnised by the imposing decor of the study in the rue La Pétrière with its large mirror set in a niche framed with marble pillars. The ballerina seen in profile is attractive to the posture of the ballet master. Louis Merante, but it is difficult to know whether she is about to start her exercise or whether she has just finished it. Her silhouette stands out against the wall in front of a partly open door, leading the scene a sensation of depth. This effect is accentuated by the daylight filtering through the window, glimmering through the open door. On the left, three dancers are the others are at the bar, whilst the right, a small group is gathered tightly around the ballet master. The sitting dancer is in repose, her body relaxing. Times of colour and gold dominate the painting, punctuated by white and grey patches and enhanced by a few touches of vermilion: the fan on the chair in the foreground, the white ribbon in the back of the right hand dancer, the line of the bar along the wall and the painter's signature in the bottom left.
The Correspondence between the exterior volumes and the interior spaces

4 and 4bis. Longitudinal section of the Paris Opéra, model

Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery

Garnier imagined the construction of the building as a musician writes an opera, with particular care for the design of the auditorium, a sumptuous nest of red and gold, as well as the boxes and the grand foyer. The architecture there is simpler, even severe. The configuration of spaces is visible from the outside as Garnier wished it to be: terrace facing for the entrance vestibules and the foyer, large dome above the auditorium, gilded roof covering the stage, and low roofs for the administrative offices. All the architectural elements are organised symmetrically around a longitudinal axis. On both sides of the central dome are two smaller domes covering the rotundas: the Emperor’s rotunda, preceded by a double slope designed for a home-run catch and thus reserved for season ticket holders, giving access to the foyer de danse. On top of the building, one can see the roof of the building itself in two halves.

5. Bird’s eye view of the opera quarter: model under glass flooring

Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery

This model demonstrates how the Opéra, whose architecture favours curves and sculpted ornaments, stands out from the straight lines of its surroundings. It portrays the area in 1914 at the scale of 1:100. It helps the visitor to understand the difficulties Garnier faced in integrating this building into rows of austere buildings with identical façades, in an area which included banks and department stores. The wide street out of the avenue de l’Opéra leading to the Louvre can easily be made out.

By comparing the longitudinal section with this bird’s eye view of the building, one can see how each space within the opera has a distinct ceiling. The configuration of spaces is visible from the outside as Garnier wished it to be: terrace facing for the entrance vestibules and the foyer, large dome above the auditorium, gilded roof covering the stage, and low roofs for the administrative offices. All the architectural elements are organised symmetrically around a longitudinal axis. On both sides of the central dome are two smaller domes covering the rotundas: the Emperor’s rotunda, preceded by a double slope designed for a home-run catch and thus reserved for season ticket holders, giving access to the foyer de danse. On top of the building, one can see the roof of the building itself in two halves.

7. Eva Gonzalès: Une loge aux Italiens (4 Rue au Baltius), circa 1874,oil on canvas

Location: upper level, gallery 51

During his lifetime, Degas is already nicknamed “the painter of dancers” and he has remained so posthumously. As early as in the 1870s, dancers were their inspiration for immobile drawings, paintings and pastels, and were to continue to be so until the end of his life. He was more interested in their postures and movements than in stage performances. The lesson is here solemnised by the imposing decor of the study in the rue Lépine with its large mirror set in a niche framed with marble pillars. The ballerina seen in profile is attentive to the posture of the ballet master, Louis Méruet, but it is difficult to know whether she is about to start her exercise or whether she has just finished it. Her silhouette stands out against the wall in front of a partly open door, leading the scene in a movement of depth. This effect is accentuated by the daylight filtering through the window glimpsed through the open door. On the left, three dancers are seen exercising at the bar, while on the right, a small group is gathered tightly around the ballet master. The sitting dancer is in repose, her body relaxing. Times of usher and gold dominate the painting, punctuated by white and grey patches and enhanced by a few touches of vermilion: the fan on the chair in the foreground, the wide ribbon in the back of the right-hand dancer, the line of the hair along the wall and the painter’s signature in the bottom left.

9. Edgar Degas: Le foyer du ballet à l’Opéra de la rue Lépine (Le Foyer de la danse en l’Opéra), circa 1880, oil on canvas

Location: upper level, gallery 51

The subject of the painting is the foyer of the Opéra, which opens onto a double-colonnaded loggia, another space of vast proportions and the overcharged surfaces of the building in the form of medallions, for example: women sitting with their legs stretched out. Other figures top the roof, those being sculpted in the round; autonomous structures one can walk around. This profusion of decor conceals one’s senses and accentuates the orthogonal structures of the building.

The correspondence between the exterior volumes and the interior spaces

4 and 4bis. Longitudinal section of the Paris Opéra, model

Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery

Garnier imagined the construction of the building as a musician writes an opera, with particular care for the opening. From the very moment one enters the building, one passes through spaces designed to put one in the right mood for a performance. This orchestration of space also prepares the audience for their entrance into the auditorium as if they too were about to perform. On the outside, the glittering of gold and coloured marble reveals the taste of the time for colourisation. Inside, one finds the abundance and diversity of a lustrous decor.

The different parts of the building correspond to precise functions: the arrival of the public, the performance, areas reserved for staff, etc. The entrance hall, with its relatively low ceiling leading onto the grand staircase which, by contrast, seems all the more high and vast. Decorated on several levels with balconies, this staircase really is Garnier’s pièce de résistance. Situated right above the foyer of the opera, it opens onto a double-colonnaded loggia, another space of vast proportions and the overcharged surfaces of the building in the form of medallions, for example: women sitting with their legs stretched out. Other figures top the roof, those being sculpted in the round; autonomous structures one can walk around. This profusion of decor conceals one’s senses and accentuates the orthogonal structures of the building.
11. Edgar Degas: Danseuses bleues (Blue Dancers), circa 1885, oil on canvas Location: upper level, gallery 31, glass case.

12. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: La Loge (The Box), 1870, oil on canvas Location: middle level, gallery 72.

13. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: Danseuses bleues (Blue Dancers), 1881, bronze Location: upper level, gallery 31, glass case.

The Dance by Carpeaux and the façade of the Opéra

The contrast between the three versions discussed below is the original sculpture, the plaster cast and the miniature reproduction which is visible on the façade of the Opéra, enables one to follow the different stages of the sculptor’s work, in comparing their dimensions, the materials used and their respective functions. One should keep in mind the difficulties implied in working onsite on an artwork of this dimension; Carpeaux had a hut built for him against the façade of the Opéra.

1. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: Danseuses bleues (Blue Dancers), 1881-1889, Echallion stone Location: ground floor, central aisle, to the left.

2. Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: La danse (The Dance), 1863-1869, limestone Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery, on the right.

This smaller sculpture group is similar to the former but in a different material. After making numerous drawings, sketches and models in which he sometimes included many more figures before restricting himself to nine, Carpeaux designed his final work in this plaster cast. The monumental group is of monumental dimensions suited to the proportions of the building; the plaster cast, lower in human scale is more touching, both by its size, half of that of the stone group, and by the brittle material in which the hand of the sculptor may be felt. Among the numerous techniques used to make a sculpture, Carpeaux designed his final work in plaster, cast, gradually building up the form on a wire armature that served as the sculpture’s skeleton. Once finished, the half-size model was cast in plaster. The next stage, the stone group, was executed by assistants who used a painting system on the model to calculate the final dimensions which, carving under Carpeaux’s supervision, they would then translate directly on to the stone. This group is a high relief, a sculpture of volume with a flat back which is meant to be set against the façade. It is worth noting the way the composition has been used to connect the characters as well as being the vehicle used to render movement and express joy, and also the way the dancers vary one from another in the expression of the faces, eyes, smiles, inclination of the heads, and the bodies: the all balance postures on tips, the movement of the bust, etc.

Also on view:

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux: La danse (The Dance), plaster sketches Location: ground floor, Opéra gallery, glass case on the right.

5. La danse (The Dance) on the model of the longitudinal section of the Paris Opéra

Carpeaux’s sculptural group can be recognized on the right-hand half of the building model on the table. The changes of scale as one studies the evolution of the sculpture as the plaster cast and this miniature copy affect one in the same way as the progression of a group of sculptors dominated and overwhelming the viewer, but a small element integrated into a whole. The smaller sculptures that are “subordinate to architecture” Gardner envisaged to work under Carpeaux’s influence for his Opéra architectural sculpture which plays a role in the overall building. Carpeaux’s architectural sculpture which plays a role in the overall building.