

ENGLISH

Exhibition
15 November 2023 – 12 February 2024

GUSTAVE MOREAU THE MIDDLE AGES REDISCOVERED



Musée national
Gustave Moreau

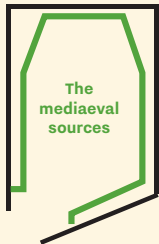
GUSTAVE MOREAU

THE MIDDLE AGES REDISCOVERED



The curators and the exhibition designer propose a choice of two routes for the exhibition, either starting from the “Gallery” on the 1st floor, or from the studios on the 2nd and 3rd floors.

Visitors are thus invited not only to discover the richness of Moreau's mediaeval sources of inspiration, but also to immerse themselves in the unique creative process of this “worker and assembler of dreams”.



First floor

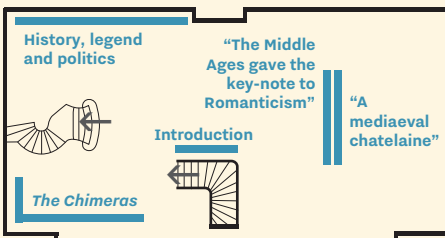
The Middle Ages permeate many of the works of Gustave Moreau, a history painter usually thought of as only interested in mythological or religious scenes. But he was a man of his time, and not immune to the taste for the mediaeval period running through the 19th century and finding its expression in museums, literature, architecture, the restoration of monuments, the study of history and collecting. The most obvious example of this taste is the fascination with Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris, as seen in Victor Hugo's famous novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and the restoration of the monument by Jean-Baptiste Lassus and Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

Ever curious, Moreau drew inspiration from a wide number of sources, largely in museums, libraries and his own archives, but also from his voyage to Italy (1857-1859) and his stay in Belgium and the Netherlands (1888).

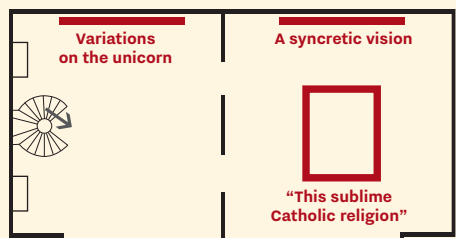
After the “Romantic pastiches” of the 1850s, inspired by Eugène Delacroix, Moreau developed a profoundly original art of his own.

With the exception of the emblematic *Chimeras* and *Unicorns*, his artistic production is situated at a crossroads between different periods and sources of inspiration. In his works, at once secular and sacred in character, he deploys a composite art combining the Middle Ages with the Renaissance, East with West.

Gustave Moreau, *Saint Cecilia* (detail)
Watercolour on wove paper,
Gustave Moreau Museum, Inv. 13992 bis



Second floor



Third floor

Museums and Libraries of Paris

Moreau made frequent visits to the museums and libraries of Paris. In two of his notebooks, he drew up a list of manuscripts held by the Imperial Library thus demonstrating his interest in illuminated manuscripts. In addition he went to the Library's Print Room and to the Louvre where he studied not only the Italian primitives but also metalwork and mediaeval enamels such as the *Arm Reliquary of Charlemagne* and a *Limoges Reliquary* dating from the 13th century, of which he made a watercolour.



Gustave Moreau
Study from a Reliquary
 (Musée du Louvre, MR 2647)
 Graphite, watercolour on fine-grained
 wove drawing paper, mounted in an album,
 Gustave Moreau Museum, Des. 12746-19



Amédée Pérée
*"Civilian Costumes of the late 14th century,
 Extracts from two pairs of Manuscript
 Hours in the Royal Library"*
 Nicolas Xavier Willemin, *Les Monuments
 Français inédits*, 1839
 Printed copy enhanced with colours,
 Gustave Moreau Museum, Inv. 14592-2

In the painter's studio

Moreau's own library was a vital aid to his work. Grammars, illustrated encyclopaedias of ornament and even popularising magazines, of which he possessed a great number — *Le Magasin Pittoresque* for example — nourished his imagination. His rich archive of thousands of prints and photographs was a veritable "iconographic reservoir" into which he dipped repeatedly.



Séraphin Médéric Mieuement
*Gargoyle from the chevet, south side, restored by Eugène
 Viollet-le-Duc, Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris, before 1886*
 Albumen print,
 Gustave Moreau Museum, Inv. 11932-9

“The Middle Ages gave the key-note to Romanticism”

This quote by Gustave Moreau demonstrates how important Romanticism was to the rediscovery of the Middle Ages. From the 1850s he saluted Eugène Delacroix, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Théodore Chassériau as his precursors.

Following on from these artists, he illustrated the tragic history of Paolo and Francesca, inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy* and developed an interest in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Shakespeare in turn inspired *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Lady Macbeth*. Nor was he indifferent to the myth of Faust, reworked by Goethe and highly popular in the 19th century.



Gustave Moreau
Hamlet, 1850
Oil on canvas,
Gustave Moreau
Museum, Cat. 862



Robert Jefferson Bingham,
after Gustave Moreau
Orpheus
Albumen print,
Gustave Moreau Museum,
Inv. 18401

“A mediaeval chatelaine”: art criticism at the Salon

During the 1860s, Moreau sent an increasing number of works to the Salon. In 1864, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) was praised by the critics including Théophile Gautier who wrote of it: “[...] There is, moreover, a well of learning hidden beneath this Gothic Hellenism.”

The following year, Gautier compared the Medea of *Jason* (Paris, Musée d’Orsay) and then the Thracian maiden of *Orpheus* (Paris, Musée d’Orsay), exhibited in 1866, to “mediaeval chatelaine[s]”, drawing attention to the mediaeval ornaments on the young girl’s dress.

In 1900, when seven works by Moreau were shown at the Universal Exhibition, art critic Gustave Geffroy echoed Gautier’s remarks when he recalled the “slightly Gothic Antiquity” of the works of the 1860s, underlining again the syncretic vision of the artist.

The Chimeras: ode to the Middle Ages

“this Island of fantastic dreams
contains all the forms of passion, fantasy
and caprice to be found in woman”

The chimera is, in Greek mythology, a creature of evil intent which in the Middle Ages becomes identified with the monsters and demons of Christian hell.

Moreau's interest in this figure dates back to 1856, and almost thirty years later he reinvented it *ad infinitum* in *The Chimeras*. Subtitled *Satanic Decameron*, this allegorical work portrays the Vices as linked to the fantasies of female figures, each accompanied by her chimera. The leafy setting with its subdued tones and shallow perspective recalls the millefleurs style of late mediaeval tapestry.

“Long meditated”, the painting was preceded by more than five hundred preparatory studies in which Moreau assembled real animals and fantastic creatures. It is signed and dated 1884, the year in which Moreau's mother died, but was never completed and remained in his studio until the end of his life.



Gustave Moreau
The Chimeras
Oil and graphic
elements on canvas,
1884,
Gustave Moreau
Museum, Cat. 39

Gustave Moreau
*Squared study of a woman
riding a winged bull,
for The Chimeras*
Brown pencil, charcoal,
pastel on mounted
tracing paper,
Gustave Moreau Museum,
Des. 11975

The war of 1870

Moreau was profoundly affected by the Franco-Prussian War and the events of the Commune. For the 1872 Salon, he had imagined making a polyptych entitled *France Vanquished* to illustrate France's defeat in symbolic terms. A note describes the project: "triptych/reliquary/shrine/funerary monument/Byzantine style Basilica/Orvieto-OrsanMichele/of Florence. Basilicas/Italian of 1400." This work never saw the light of day. After the conflict of 1870, mediaeval "warrior" figures begin to appear in his work in the form of the Crusader, a Christian knight departing for the Holy Land, and Joan of Arc.

Gustave Moreau
Two heralds

Watercolour and gouache on paper
Gustave Moreau Museum, Cat. 576



A world of chivalry

The painter was absorbed by such subjects as heralds, the hunter with a falcon and courtly love. Although they evoke the mediaeval period, their pictorial transcription is characterised by a blending of the art of East and West, Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.



Gustave Moreau
Travelling Angel
Oil on canvas,
Gustave Moreau Museum,
Cat. 627

“This sublime Catholic religion”

Emblematic saints

Moreau's iconographic repertoire is peopled with figures of saints whose plastic treatment frequently suggests a mediaeval inspiration. One example is the watercolour *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* (Private Collection) which he painted for Charles Hayem in 1879, the composition of which is reminiscent of an illuminated manuscript.

A dreamed cathedral

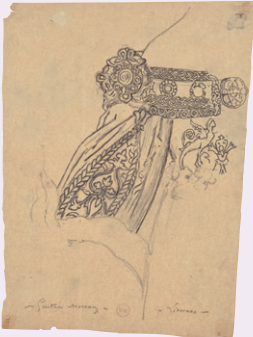
While “troubadour” artists often depicted Gothic interiors, the religious architecture of the Middle Ages is little present in Moreau's work. Only the series of *Travelling Angels*, dating from around 1890, uses the cathedral motif which was so emblematic of nostalgia for the mediaeval period.

“Mystic pagan”

Ambiguous in his relation with religion, Moreau was described as a “mystic pagan” by Jean Lorrain. The cherubs' heads on the Church's robe in *The Church Triumphant* reappear on the tunic of one of the women in *The Chimeras*. This reuse of a motif in works of contrasting iconography is characteristic of the artist's creative process.

Variations on the unicorn

An important creature in the mediaeval bestiary, the unicorn abounds in the miniatures, ivories and tapestries of the late 15th century. The rediscovery and presentation of *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries at the Universal Exhibition in 1878 and subsequent display at the Musée des Thermes et Hôtel de Cluny in 1883 certainly contributed to this mythical beast becoming topical once more.



Gustave Moreau
*Sheet of studies: decorative motifs
for The Unicorns*

Graphite, pen, brown ink on tracing paper,
Gustave Moreau Museum, Des. 9531



Gustave Moreau
The Unicorns

Oil on canvas,
Gustave Moreau Museum, Cat. 213

The Unicorns, despite being originally destined for Edmond de Rothschild, never actually left Moreau's studio. The picture was doubtless not to the collector's taste and he chose to buy another work instead (Private Collection).

With its mediaeval and Renaissance influences, the painting is of astonishing decorative richness. Moreau utilised in particular motifs from an 8th century ivory diptych acquired by Alexandre Du Sommerard and shown at the Musée des Thermes et Hôtel de Cluny from 1844 onwards. It was certainly by visiting this museum that he was able to study the famous *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries and acquire an interest in the technique of tapestry.

Many variations of the woman with a unicorn exist in the Museum or in private collections. They bear witness to the artist's fascination with this fantastic creature and what it symbolises.

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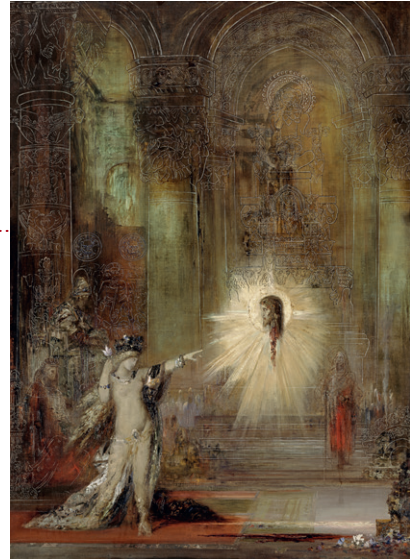
A syncretic vision

3rd floor

From the 1860s, a syncretic approach starts to appear in Moreau's work as he deliberately combines motifs from different periods, cultures or religions the better to render a timeless universe. The Middle Ages is thus often defined by its juxtaposition with Classical Antiquity or the Renaissance.

Such assemblages were remarked on by art critics of the time as a particularity of the artist. Moreau pursued and developed this ornamental eclecticism during the last twenty years of his life as he completed canvases begun earlier in his career.

So, at the end of his life, he resumed work on *The Apparition* in particular by transferring mediaeval motifs on to the surface of the canvas in white.



Gustave Moreau
The Apparition
Oil on canvas,
Gustave Moreau Museum,
Cat. 222

Photographs and plates taken from the *Album du Musée de Sculpture comparée* by Paul Frantz Marcou, which Moreau acquired a year before his death, permitted him to depict in greater detail the interior in which Salome performs her dance.



Paul Robert
Cast of the capital of an attached column in the aisle of the nave of St Martin's Church at Brives (Corrèze), 12th century
Paul Frantz Marcou, *Album du Musée de Sculpture comparée* [...]. *First series: Gallo-Roman period - XII century, [1897] pl. 34, prototype (detail), Gustave Moreau Museum, Inv. 10388*



Gustave Moreau
Study of a Romanesque capital decorated with two eagles facing each other
After the cast of the capital of an attached column in the aisle of the nave of St Martin's Church at Brives (Corrèze), 12th century, Paul Frantz Marcou, *Album du Musée de Sculpture comparée* [...].
Graphite, pen, brown ink on tracing paper, Gustave Moreau Museum, Des. 9296



Around the exhibition

◆ Guided visits of the exhibition

Duration: 1h

Full rate: 10 € / Reduced rate: 8 €

Booking required



Wednesday
Saturday
Sunday

In 2023

November 15, 19, 22, 26 and 29

December 2, 6, 13, 20, and 27

at 3 pm

In 2024

January 3, 6, 10, 14, 17, 24 and 31

February 3, 7 and 11

at 3 pm

◆ Family story-telling visits

Children aged 5 and over

Over two weekends, storytellers take adults and children on a fabulous journey to discover the world of chivalry, the marvellous bestiary and the medieval legends that inspired Gustave Moreau.

Duration: 1h

Full rate: 10 € / Children and reduced rate: 8 €

Booking required



Weekend

In 2023

December 9 and 10

at 11 am and 4 pm

In 2024

January 20 and 21

at 11 am and 4 pm

◆ Carte blanche to students

Over two weekends, students from the Law, Art history and archaeology double degree of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University will explore the exhibition and offer visitors short, participatory mediation sessions in front of artworks of their choice.

Free of charge, included in your exhibition ticket

No booking required



Weekend

In 2023

December 16 and 17

from 10:30 am to 1:30 pm

and 2 pm to 5 pm

In 2024

January 27 and 28

from 10:30 am to 1:30 pm

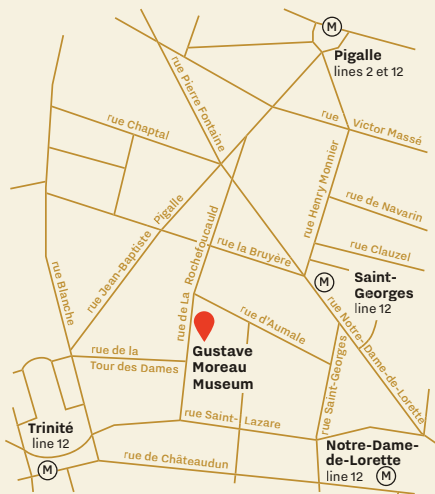
and from 2 pm to 5 pm

Further information

Additional works related to the exhibition can be discovered in the museum using information cards available on each floor.

Further information and bookings at www.musee-moreau.fr

PRATICAL INFORMATION



Gustave Moreau National Museum

14, rue de La Rochefoucauld

75009 Paris


T : 01 83 62 78 72


Open every day except Tuesday
from 10.00 to 18.00

Metro: line 12, Trinité or Saint-Georges

Bus: 26 | 32 | 43 | 67 | 68 | 74

Full rate: 7 € | Reduced rate: 5 €




 Booking strongly recommended

 Free access on the first Sunday of each month
(booking required).

Free for visitors under 18, visitors under 26 from
an EU country and holders of the ParisMuseumPass.

Joint ticket to Jean-Jacques Henner
National Museum

Adults: 9 € | Concessions: 7 €

   #museegustavemoreau

www.musee-moreau.fr

Cover: Gustave Moreau, *Travelling Angel*, graphite,
watercolour, gouache on wove grain paper, Gustave
Moreau Museum, Cat. 441. Back cover: Gustave
Moreau, *Study of a crowned figure* (detail), pen and
brown ink (recto), graphite, traces of transfer (styllet
or graphite) (verso) on tracing paper, Gustave Moreau
Museum, Des. 5825

