

English

Exhibition
17 October 2018
–21 January 2019

Gustave Moreau
Towards reverie
and the abstract
Vers le songe et l'abstrait



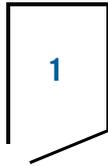
Musée national
Gustave Moreau

1

Le Triomphe d'Alexandre. Creating the work

**'Before starting a canvas,
establish the value and
colour modes in advance'.**

Gustave Moreau



Gallery,
1st floor

Gustave Moreau's technique is original and very unusual compared to his contemporaries. In order to escape realism, he invented a way of painting that questions the relationship between line and form, colours and values. In the *Le Triomphe d'Alexandre*, the use of colour builds and gives structure to the overall composition without defining either shapes or volumes. Colour is distributed as abstract touches over which the figurative outline is superimposed. As a whole, this series of works shows the disassociation made by Gustave Moreau when developing his work; using colour to construct the composition and drawing to define motifs. The final composition stems from the overlaying of the two.



Alexandre le Grand

Oil on canvas; 35 × 35 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau,
Cat. 650

Preliminary composition
for *Le Triomphe d'Alexandre*.
Only the large coloured
masses are pinpointed.



Le Triomphe d'Alexandre le Grand

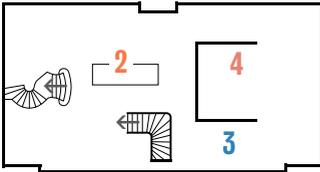
Oil on canvas; 155 × 155 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Cat. 70

Starting in November 1873, Moreau worked on the iconographic elements required to execute his painting, entitled *Porus* at the time. He worked on the piece between 1874 and 1890. Moreau developed his work by establishing coloured masses overlaid by drawings, almost like tattoos.

2

The stain that tells a story

One of the museum's quirks is to keep a large number of watercolour and gouache 'colour tests' that Gustave Moreau used to test his colours and clean his brushes. We also find similar artefacts among his contemporaries and friends, Delacroix and Chassériau, but less so. Their inscriptions and the drawings that appear in them, like for *Cédipe voyageur* or *Jupiter et Sémélé*, sometimes makes it possible to connect them to finished works. These artefacts on paper are sometimes palettes where the artist mixed his colours, and sometimes collections of stains. Some 'reworked' sheets have become works in their own right deemed worthy of being exhibited in the museum. The exhibition features a selection of around 15 actual colour tests, and some figurative watercolours derived from them: *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, *Dante et Virgile*, *Page*, *Composition non identifiée*.



Workshop,
2nd floor



Essai de couleur

Watercolour, gouache and graphite pencil drawing on vellum paper; 28.7 × 23 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Inv. 16010-348

On the back of this sheet is written: 'Did you throw away any paper lying around on which I am testing out my colours'. These sheets were considered till now as 'watercolour palettes'; this inscription granted those artefacts the name of 'colour tests'.



Tentation de saint Antoine

Watercolour and gouache on vellum paper; 135 × 24 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Cat. 525

In this watercolour, St Anthony the Hermit is in the grip of fantastic visions represented by a whirlwind of colours. This work perfectly illustrates the concept of 'the stain that tells a story' that he shares with, for example, Victor Hugo.

3

Blue as a medium



Ébauche. *Plantes marines pour « Galatée » ?*

Oil on canvas; 45 × 54.8 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau,
Inv. 13211

Gustave Moreau bequeathed the contents of his studio; the museum now owns the artist's materials as well as completed or preparatory works. Among them, a collection of paintings on a blue background that has never been exhibited before. Its uniqueness lies in being executed on blue cardboard found in a warehouse, onto which colours were generously applied.

No motif can be found among the works for this set, except on this sketch, a possible study for marine plants for *Galatée* (1880, Paris, Musée d'Orsay). This sketch would therefore be closer to works from the last part of his career.

4

Falling short of the figurative

Since the museum opened in 1903, some critics have considered the non-figurative works of Gustave Moreau to be, in fact, the premises of a finished work.

This has been said many times of *Jupiter et Sémélé* (Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau), an example of his work as a history painter. To execute this work, with a very complex iconography, exhibited on the third floor, Moreau began by setting up surprisingly simplified compositions, in a narrow colour range. In many of the studies on display, the characters appear to be reduced to mere colour stains, mainly red, overlaid onto the coloured background. For other works, the link is less precise, and many of them still retaining some of their mystery.



Ébauche. *Étude pour « Jupiter et Sémélé »*

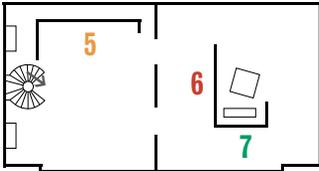
Oil on canvas; 40.7 × 32.8 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau
Cat. 1140

'Look at the paintings upside down to fully appreciate the values since subject-matter, objects represented and appearance always tend to divert your attention'.

Gustave Moreau

5

Landscape: value science



Workshop, 3rd floor



Ébauche. «Thomyris et Cyrus»

Oil on wood; 21 × 25 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Cat. 617

The landscape is omnipresent in Gustave Moreau's history painting; very early on, he studied the landscapes of his predecessors, from Leonardo da Vinci to Claude Gellée, named *le Lorrain* after his birthplace. However, it is very difficult to link many of his sketches to a style or identifiable iconography, except for one of them, the preliminary work for *Tomyris et Cyrus* (Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau). What characterises these rapid set-ups is choosing in advance a dynamic that may be vertical or horizontal and whose elements block the perspective or overlap in an attempt to storm the composition – a formula often found in the exhibition's more dramatic works. It seems to obey Moreau's principle 'to reduce all harmonies in paintings to monochrome graduations'.

Many of Gustave Moreau's exhibition paintings feature a backdrop dominated by rocks. This background is found in many sketches in order to stall the composition. Moreau adds the characters in the final work.

6

Colour field painting

In the margins of the landscapes, a small number of works seem to be the backdrop for interior scenes. Geometric shapes lead to an opening located more or less high up in the composition but almost always in the centre, and painted white.

Only rarely can they be connected to specific works. Do they refer to 'the extreme simplicity of coloured fields,' which he said he admired in the Flemish masters?

We find this vast, wide-open space in Moreau's history painting, particularly in *David* exhibited in 1878 (Los Angeles, Hammer Museum) and *Pétrarque* housed on the 3rd floor of the museum. All the details are eliminated, and only remain the essential chromatic fields, a technique that would go on to influence the works of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.



Ébauche. Intérieur

Oil on canvas; 45 × 38 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Cat. 857

'The magical effects of pure plastic art'

Linked to the generation of Romantic artists, Gustave Moreau is inhabited by that love of colour that he transmitted to his students, the founders of Fauvism. It is, as he himself said, pure 'plastic singing'. In these works, the third dimension has totally disappeared. Since the 1960s some critics have also wanted to see him as the father of Abstraction. We do not know the intent of these works. There is nothing to indicate that Moreau deliberately wanted to produce an abstract work in the contemporary sense of the term.

In fact, Moreau is above all, a practitioner, worker, experimenter and not a theorist whose work is to put theory into practice. His paintings retain their mystery. They spring from this constant search for colour, material and emotional resonance that springs from either cold or warm colours.

'Not having to adhere to representing reality exclusively, he wanted to embrace the beyond, translating the fleeting pageantry of the imagination into lasting colours. Instead of an impression of visible things, Moreau has rendered, as far as possible, the radiance of things we do not see [...]'

Arsène Alexandre, *The Event*, 1888



Ébauche

Oil on canvas; 27 × 22 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau, Cat. 1151

This work is one of twenty-two sketches kept in the 'abstract cupboard' on the ground floor of the museum. Its range of colours is close to that used for *Galatée* (1880, Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

Gustave Moreau

Towards reverie and the abstract

Vers le songe et l'abstrait



Ébauche

Oil on board; 55.5 x 45.1 cm
Paris, Musée Gustave Moreau,
Inv. 13212

By bequeathing the contents of his studio and his house to the French state to make it into a museum, Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) wanted to leave a record of his lifelong work as an artist.

In the heart of this sumptuous collection of over 25,000 works, the Musée Gustave Moreau speculated for years about the status of many non-figurative works kept there. Originally designated as 'sketches', these works went on to be described as 'abstract' during the twentieth century.

The scientific team that worked on the exhibition examined both paintings and watercolours, and raised a number of questions.

Are these works preparatory sketches for figurative paintings? Are they pure abstractions? What is their relationship with the artist's writings on art? Is Gustave Moreau a pioneer of abstraction? Were these works carefully thought through or executed randomly? What came after them? What information can we derive regarding the artist's creative process?

Gustave Moreau, this champion of introspective painting, wants above all, as he himself wrote, to take us 'towards reverie and the abstract'.

The exhibition, located in the gallery on the first floor and in the workshops on the second and third floors, will take the visitors to seven sections gathering nearly one hundred paintings and watercolours, some of them exhibited for the first time.

Around the exhibition

Imaginary Tours – Towards reverie and the abstract

Hosted by actors Pauline Caupenne
and Grégor Daronian

Thursday 15 November,
13 and 20 December 2018
and 17 January 2019 | 19:00

Exclusive evening visits to explore
the exhibition after-hours.

Duration: 1h
One price: 8€

Guided tours: Moreau Thursdays

Gustave Moreau. Towards reverie and the abstract

Thursday 8 November 2018 | 19:00

By Emmanuelle Macé.
Guided tour of the exhibition. The museum
possesses many non-figurative works. Over
time the viewer's gaze on these enigmatic
works has evolved. The exhibition enables us
to raise questions about the status of these
works, works that also inform us about the
artist's creative process.

Moreau, lyrical or geometric?

Thursday 6 December 2018

– 1st part | 19:00

Thursday 10 January 2019

– 2nd part | 19:00

Par Dominique Lobstein.
Guided tour of the exhibition. Although
Moreau is not the only benchmark for the
Masters of abstraction, this visit will explain
how his experience with the plastic arts may
have influenced this multiform movement.

Duration: 1h
Full price: 8€ | Reduced price: 6€
Free for students with a student ID

Drawing classes for adults

Held by Sophie Graverand

Dreams and the exhilaration of colour

Saturday 20 October
and 8 December 2018 | 10:00

Exploring the chromatic palette, from colour
stain to staged elaboration.

Creating the work

Thursday 25 October 2018 | 18:00

Exploring the place of colour, chiaroscuro
and graphism in staged elaboration.

Chiaroscuro and abstraction

Saturday 17 November 2018
and 19 January 2019 | 10:00

Exploring balances between
chiaroscuro, textures and materials,
and staged elaboration.

Duration: 2h30
One price: 15€ per course + booking fee
Register on billettereduc.com

Chamber music concerts

Concert by members of the Orchestre de Paris

Tuesday 20 November 2018 | 20:00

Théodore Gouvy, André Caplet,
Claude Debussy, Reynaldo Hahn

Ensemble Ouranos Concert

Tuesday 4 December 2018 | 20:00

Astor Piazzolla, György Ligeti, Karol Beffa,
Antonín Dvořák

Duration: 1h
One price: 15€ + booking fee
Tickets sold on billettereduc.com



Exhibition catalogue

Musée Gustave Moreau/Somogy éditions d'art
co-publication
192 pages, 140 illustrations

29€

ISBN: 978-2-7572-1391-9

The exhibition catalogue brings together the essays of Marie-Cécile Forest, Cécile Debray, Dario Gamboni, Rémi Labrusse, Emmanuelle Macé, Véronique Sorano Stedman.

Combined ticket

with the Musée National
Jean-Jacques Henner

Full price: 9€ | Reduced price: 7€

Partnerships

During the eight days following your visit to the Musée Gustave Moreau, you are entitled to a reduced price ticket to our partner museums: Musée national des Arts asiatiques-Guimet, Musée de la Vie romantique, Musée d'Orsay, Palais Garnier.

Useful Information



Musée national Gustave Moreau
14, rue de La Rochefoucauld
75009 Paris

Open every day except Tuesday
from 10:00 to 17:15.

Metro: Line 12, Trinité or Saint-Georges
Bus: 26 | 32 | 43 | 67 | 68 | 74

Tel: 01 48 74 38 50
info@musee-moreau.fr

Full price: 7€ | Reduced price: 5€

Free every first Sunday of the month, for young people under 18, EU nationals under 26 and for Paris Museum Pass holders.

   #museegustavemoreau

www.musee-moreau.fr

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