



Press release
Exhibition

June 14 - September 18,
2006

Musée du Louvre
Salle de la Chapelle
and Salon Carré

Exhibition co-organized by the Louvre and the Terra Foundation for American Art with the support of the Florence Gould Foundation

as media partners



Exhibition curators

Olivier Meslay, Curator, Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre, and Elizabeth Kennedy, Curator of Collection, Terra Foundation for American Art



Samuel F. B. Morse (1791–1872)
Gallery of the Louvre, 1831–1833
Terra Foundation for American Art,
Daniel J. Terra Collection

American Artists and the Louvre

The first exhibition at the Louvre devoted to American artists, “American Artists and the Louvre” presents a selection of thirty masterworks of American painting. Jointly organized by the Louvre and the Terra Foundation for American Art (Chicago), this exhibition explores the development of artistic exchanges between France and the United States, showing how the Louvre has been a source of inspiration for generations of American artists, from Benjamin West to Edward Hopper.

For centuries, artists from around the world have flocked to the Louvre, whose vast collections have had a pervasive influence on their work. For American artists, this attraction is as old as the Museum itself. Although we are well aware of its significance in the work of James McNeill Whistler or Edward Hopper, it is easy to forget that the Louvre has been an academy for American artists from its very inception. The annual salon exhibitions established at the Louvre in the 18th century presented their first American paintings beginning in the 1800s. During the reign of Louis-Philippe, the American artist George Catlin was even offered exhibition space at the Louvre to present his works. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, American artists pursued their studies at the Louvre and their works bear witness to the profound impact of the Museum and its collections. This exhibition presents a broad selection of paintings from the end of the 18th century to the 1940s. It also provides an opportunity to observe that artistic inspiration did not only flow in one direction and that French artists also benefited from the presence of American artists and their works.

The personality of Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872), and his painting representing the Salon Carré and the Grande Galerie in perspective (collection of the Terra Foundation), are emblematic of this artistic relationship. Morse came to France to begin painting this panoramic work in 1831, and returned for what was to be a two-year sojourn in 1866, when the first successful transatlantic cable link was established, also serving as a member of the jury for the Exposition Universelle of 1867. The presentation of Morse’s celebrated portrayal of the Salon Carré provides the public with the opportunity to contrast a contemporary vision of this gallery with that painted 175 years before.

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Robert Henri (1865–1929)

Salomé, 1909

Collection of the John and
Mable Ringling Museum of
Art, Sarasota, Florida

Visitor information:

Exhibition open daily except Tuesdays
from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and until 10 p.m.
on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Place: Sully Wing, 1st floor, Salle de la
Chapelle and Denon Wing, 1st floor,
Salon Carré

Admission fees: Free admission with
the purchase of an entrance to the
Museum; €8.50 and €6 after 6 p.m. on
Wednesdays and Fridays; free
admission at all times for youths under
18, and holders of the “Louvre Jeunes”
or “Amis du Louvre” cards, and for
youths under 26 after 6 p.m. on Fridays.

Further information: www.louvre.fr
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Auditorium du Louvre

Further information: +33 (0)1 40 20 55 55
Monday to Friday, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Reservations: +33 (0)1 40 20 55 00, every
day except Tuesday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

American artists and France: Laying the foundations for a long-lasting relationship, 1760–1860

This part of the exhibition explores the first generation of American artists, including Benjamin West, John Vanderlyn, and George Catlin, who traveled to Paris to study and present their work at the Salon. To take only the example of Benjamin West (1738–1820), one of the most innovative artists of the years 1760–1770, it is astonishing to realize the extent of his interest in France. He visited France three times and was elected a member of the Académie des Beaux Arts. A number of his paintings were in the Louvre’s collections for about twenty years, in particular his *Death of Hyacinth*, which inspired several works by French artists. West had a decisive influence on French artists, from David to Delacroix.

Another revealing symbol of the productivity of Franco-American artistic exchanges was the warm reception given to George Catlin (1796–1872) in France. In April 1845, he arrived in Paris from London, accompanied by twelve Native Americans, also transporting no less than eight tons of wigwams, tepees, North American Indian artifacts, and 540 paintings, most of which were executed between 1832 and 1840, a period of extensive travels to study and document tribes throughout the Missouri territories. Catlin and his “Indian Gallery” were to remain in Paris for nearly three years. Indicative of Louis-Philippe’s particular fondness for the American artist, Catlin was invited to present his exhibition in the Salle des Séances at the Louvre.

Inspired by the Louvre: The unofficial academy of American art, 1860–1940

This second section illustrates the extraordinary potency of the experiences of American artists who came to the Louvre to draw inspiration from its collections, which would help to define their future creations, as was the case for James McNeill Whistler, Thomas Eakins, Thomas Hart Benton, and Edward Hopper, among others.

James McNeill Whistler (1843–1903) famously held that “what is not worthy of the Louvre is not art”. This controversial modernist recognized that his prolonged study of the old masters had honed his powerful imagination: *At the Piano* is greatly indebted to his abiding interest in 17th century Dutch painting and in the interpretations by 18th century French artists of bourgeois familial harmony. Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) reveled in the splendor of the Louvre’s collection of sculptures of antiquity, a fertile wellspring apparent in his representation of male nudes (*Swimming*). Robert Henri (1865–1929), a major personality in the history of American art, was inspired by the sensual power of the female form as portrayed by Rubens in his *Maria de’ Medicis* cycle, for his depiction of the biblical temptress *Salomé*. Later, Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), the most celebrated American artist of the 1930s, also acknowledged his debt to this cycle by Rubens, which had inspired him to become the greatest of American mural painters. Finally, the work of Edward Hopper (1882–1967) is suffused with his Parisian impressions, still evident in his late works, such as *Dawn in Pennsylvania*.

Although the avant-garde was to assert its independence after 1945, with New York taking its place as the capital of modern art, the passion of Americans for Paris has survived intact into the present. The Louvre, a monument of stability amidst the artistic upheavals of the last two centuries, remains to this day the first stop for American artists making the pilgrimage to Europe.