



PARIS HERITAGE SIGHTS AND INSIGHTS

38 GESTURES AND IMAGES OF MAN AT WORK

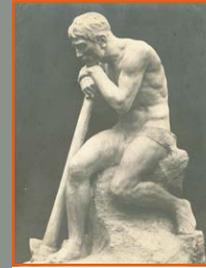


The Paris heritage strolls

FROM RUE J.-P. TIMBAUD (11TH) TO RUE DE LA CONVENTION (15TH)

>>> In addition to the traditional religious representations (work in the fields associated with the seasons), the choice to show working activities in Paris during the 19th and 20th centuries reveals society's definition of itself and of its values. Work occupies an important place within the repertory of the Third Republic. In order to take root within provincial France, the Republic appropriated Christian values (marriage, family, respect for parents and employers, charity) and made them its "secular gospel", particularly in the town halls which took over from churches in the allocation of public expenses in around 1880. Work thus came to be on an equal footing with defending the fatherland and responsibility for the family and there is a noticeable coincidence between the assertion of the Third Republic, reflections on the living conditions of workers (Waldeck Rousseau laws on trade unions in 1884 and on the labour of women and children in 1900) and the appearance of works of art dedicated to Work.

>>> This theme made it possible to illustrate a major stylistic direction which established the move from an ideal representation to a more realistic depiction of society. The debate around the representation of the contemporary world opposed the Paris municipality, which used scenes borrowed from local industry handled in a modern way, with government administration, which was more academic and focused on the ancient world. Pragmatically speaking, it was also a debate on "dress": must the worker be represented naked or semi-naked (ancient style) or in contemporary dress?



>>> (11th) >>> 94 rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud

1 Jules Pendariès, *Le répit du travailleur* (The Worker's Respite), 1907

Jules Pendariès (1862-1933) often depicted the working class and peasants in scenes tinged with a feeling of melancholy. In doing so, he was part of a trend which, particularly in Italy and Belgium (Constantin Meunier) in the late 19th century, insisted on the human cost of work. The body, taken in its heroic nudity following the example of traditional historic sculptures, was powerful and energetic, its contours simplified and fluid and with no trivial detail in the scene, showing that work is a tiring battle against nature. The work was admitted to the Salon in 1907, moved to the town hall of the 18th district and then placed in this location in 1926. It recalls the presence of a number of traditional professions in the 11th district (ceramics, furniture, metalwork), the Folie-Méricourt district which housed bronze smiths and foundry workers. The work was opposite the Maison des Métallos, a former musical instruments factory which was founded in 1881 and closed in 1936.



>>> (11th) >>> Square Maurice-Gardette

2 Jacques Perrin, *Le Botteleur* (The Bale Contractor), 1888

The City of Paris bought a first plaster version of this work from the sculptor Jacques Perrin (1847-1915) in 1886 and installed the bronze copy in 1888. Prior to 1900, Work-themed sculptures mostly depicted the peasant world (44% of the French population was rural in 1911). The painters Jean-François Millet and Jules Breton had spread a certain moralising realism based on working the fields, which was both poetic and concerned with the truth. Likewise, Perrin chose descriptions which were both highly realistic and highly respectful of peasant work, by studying the gestures which defined man at work. The representation of man at work, captured in the immediacy of the gesture, was a new iconographical feature for the time; the bronze casting, usually reserved for masterpieces, pagan divinities or great men, was used here for a simple activity, made noble by nudity and the simplicity of the posture.



>>> (12th) >>> Place de la Nation

3 Jules Dalou, *Le triomphe de la République* (The Triumph of the Republic), 1899

Jules Dalou (1838-1902) is known as a committed sculptor who was in favour of a democratic and social republic and who had stood up for the Commune in 1871. His Paris works (*Monument to Jean-Charles Alphand*, Avenue Foch, 16th district; *Monument to Jean Leclaire*, Square des Epinettes, 17th district) often refer to the world of work and to an ideal of fraternity, combining both realistic inspiration and the use of allegories. The monument was inaugurated on 21 September 1899, the anniversary of the founding of the Republic in 1792. The Republic is balancing on a celestial globe above the chariot of Nation, with the figures of Work and Justice at its sides, Freedom showing the way and Peace closing the procession. Work is thus one of the main ideals of the fraternal, law-dispensing and protective Revolution.

It is remarkable that Dalou chose to depict work as a half-naked forger, with strong, heroic muscles, symbolic of a positivist civilisation which believes in progress through machines. It is based on this work that Dalou began to think about a large monument to workers, putting together sketches and drawings. A number of terracotta studies have been preserved at the Petit-Palais Museum, including *The Peasant*.



>>> (12th) >>> Rue Cannebière

4 Sculpted decor of Saint-Esprit

Between 1935 and 1938, Saint-Esprit church, built by Paul Tournon, was decorated with vast fresco paintings relating the whole of Christian history since its origins. The contemporary world also found a place in the commissioning, between 1932 and 1941, of the sculptures for the outside pinnacles evoking the century's new professions (cameraman, chemist, astronomer, electrician, aviator, etc.). In 1941, however, artists used traditional rural iconography, the months and tasks of the year, used since medieval painters, for the twelve concrete bas-reliefs on the Rue Cannebière façade. Lucien Gilbert (born in 1904), a pupil of Aristide Maillol, created the months of March (the sculptural sower of seeds surrounded by ploughing with the cattle and the pruning of the vine), April (the goddess Cybele surrounded by sheep and the Easter bells) and May (month of the Virgin, time of the first blossoms). Fernand Guignier (1903-1980), a pupil of Henri Bouchard, created the months of June (a labourer leading the cattle), July (a pair of harvesters) and August (a woman carrying a horn of plenty).

Noël Feurstein depicted the months of September (the Nativity of the Virgin with the harvest of fruits), October (the Virgin of the Rosary surrounded by the grape harvest) and November (two angels raising the dead).



>>> (12th) >>> City hall of the 12th district, staircase of honour

5 Eugène Thirion, *Les industries du XII^e arrondissement* (The industries of the 12th district), 1881

A competition was organised in 1879 for the decor of the staircase of honour in this city hall, constructed between 1874 and 1877, and was won by Eugène Thirion. The competition was to "reproduce the facts relating to the history of the district or scenes taken from the different industries specific to each area". Here, the painter offers a depiction which brings together around the City of Paris, seated on an elevated throne, pupils from the secular school and the sick from Paris Hospitals (in the centre) and the wine warehouses in Bercy (bottom). The 12th district was famous for its warehouses and its wine market, which developed thanks to the river and rail communication networks. The warehouses were not constructed until the early 19th century, on land belonging to the City of Paris, and occupy some 42 hectares. Until 1950, "the joyful Bercy of wines", with its open-air cafes and its shops, was the largest wine market in the world, before it disappeared completely without leaving a single monument.

Eugène Thirion (1839-1910), a pupil of the academic painters Alexandre Cabanel and François Picot, differs from the masters, who were interested in ancient references, by using the iconography of the contemporary world.



>>> (5th) >>> Square Scipion

6 Alexandre Charpentier, *Les boulangers* (The Bakers), 1897

According to his contemporaries, when Alexandre Charpentier (1856-1909) created his plaster project entitled *Bread*, exhibited at the Salon in 1889, he was imagining the hierarchical posture of the Archers of the Palace of Darius, a frieze of polychrome varnished brick installed in the Louvre in 1888. Following on from artists heroising reality, his idea was to represent vital work, work which provides man with food – with bread being the basic foodstuff. He chose simplified volumes and lines, solemn attitudes and body movements and drapes which recall the religious offices. The work includes a real moral dimension, and critics talked of a "secular Trinity", depicting authentic baker boys whose work Charpentier had observed.

It was the Emile Muller company, a specialist in ceramic products for constructions, industries and artistic productions and often associated with Art Nouveau workplaces, which transposed it to enamelled sandstone brick in 1897.



>>> (14th) >>> 36 rue Guilleminot

7 Félix Villé, choir of Notre-Dame-du-Travail church

In the 19th century, the Plaisance district experienced considerable demographic growth, increasing from 2,000 inhabitants in 1850 to 35,000 in 1896.

To meet the needs of a poor working-class population and bring workers and religion together, Father Soulange-Bodin, curate since 1896 and an ardent defender of social Catholicism, wanted to finance a new church dedicated to Notre-Dame-du-Travail. In 1898, Joseph Lefèvre (1836-1911), a parish sculptor, created a statue representing Notre-Dame-du-Travail in white limestone, which can still be seen in the Chapel of the Virgin. This statue is at the heart of a decor painted in oil on a mounted canvas by Felix Villé (1819-1907), a painter belonging to the Dominican order. Created in 1904, *Notre-Dame-du-Travail-caring for the afflicted* shows workers on the left and the unemployed on the right, welcomed by two angels who introduce them to the statue.

The wide nave is flanked by ten chapels decorated with fitted canvases which represent several patron saints of the workers and the oppressed: Saint Joseph, patron saint of joiners and carpenters, Saint Eloi, patron saint of metallurgists and Saint Luke, patron saint of artists and artworkers.



>>> (15th) >>> 28 rue de la Convention

8 Jacques Gruber, stained glass window in the entrance to Saint-Christophe-de-Javel church

Since the late 18th century, the 15th district has experienced intense industrial activity (chemistry, operation of quarries). After the construction of Montparnasse station between 1848 and 1852 came the growth of metallurgy: production of locomotives, mechanical constructions, forges and foundries and the automobile industry (Citroën set up here in 1915). During the construction of Saint-Christophe church by the architect Charles-Henri Besnard between 1926 and 1930, the clergy almost logically chose as their patron saint the protector of automobile makers and aviators.

The painted decoration of the apse, by Henri-Marcel Magne, shows a procession towards Saint Christophe and Christ, consisting of the faithful presenting modern means of transport (locomotive, aerostat, aeroplane), allusions to neighbouring industries. This desire to portray the Christian faith in the contemporary world can also be found in the stained glass window in the entrance to the presbytery, created by Jacques Gruber, which depicts Christ on the cross in front of three workers.

On the outside, half-way up the entrance porch, a frieze painted on concrete by Magne evokes Saint Christopher aiding navigators, aviators and locomotive drivers.

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Further information...

- **4, Rue de la Pierre-Levée, 11th district:** façade of the former Loebnitz factory. Created in ceramic by Jules Loebnitz, the decor was designed for the 1878 Universal Exposition and represents arts and professions.
- **161 Rue Saint-Maur, 11th district:** façade of Saint-Joseph-des-Nations church: the sculptor Eugène Delaplanche (1836-1891) recalls the original dedication of the church (Saint Joseph the artisan) in memory of the profession of carpenter of the father of Christ. The choice to represent the patron saint of artisans is connected to the high number of traditional or even semi-industrial professions in the district.
- **Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, 11th district:** the traditional life of the suburb, focused around furniture, remains only in a few still-visible signs and in the chimneys of cabinet-makers (26, Rue de la Charonne, Passage Lhomme).
- **2, Place de la Bourse, 2nd district:** visible from the street in the evenings with back-lighting, the stained glass window of the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry is entitled "Work through Industry and Trade enriches Humanity". The main scene stands out against a background of a landscape of chimneys, a forger (Work) contemplates two young women holding an account book (Trade) and leaning on a cogwheel (Industry). The window was designed in the Art Nouveau style by Eugène Grasset and created by Félix Gaudin in 1900.



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- 2 The Bale Contractor, Jacques Perrin
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