

## Musicians and poets

### SCULPTURE WALK THROUGH MONCEAU PARK

Monceau Park, the former folly park of the Duke of Chartres, was transformed under the Second Empire following its acquisition in 1860 by the City of Paris. More than half the land was sold to the banker Pereire, who had buildings constructed on it. The rest of the park was entirely redesigned by Adolphe Alphand, chief engineer in the promenades and plantations department of the City of Paris and Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps, a gardener/landscape designer.

The Second Empire garden was inspired by the fashionable English parks and squares and satisfied a concern regarding public health. The transformation of Monceau Park into public gardens was part of Baron Haussmann's great project to make Paris a modern city. Whereas Alphand did not want there to be statues in the parks, under the Third Republic the green spaces in Paris became filled with monuments, usually assembled around a common theme. Monceau Park, a place for rest and relaxation in a privileged district, was associated with reading and music. It quickly acquired sculptures, becoming a garden dedicated to writers, poets and composers.

The public's reaction to the unprecedented increase in the number of statues invading the public space was one of rejection and this reached its peak in 1905. This exasperation led to the park being closed to all new concessions the following year. Although they were denigrated for a long time and mocked by Soupault, who called the statues in Monceau Park "jokes", these monuments evoke key figures in the Paris artistic scene in the 19th century.

**enlarge and download the plan in pdf format (128,1 Ko)**



### Guy de Maupassant (1850 – 1893)

A subscription for the monument to Maupassant was opened at the initiative of the Société des Gens de Lettres (Society of French Authors) in 1893, the year of the author's death.

The following year, the sculptor Raoul Verlet was chosen to create it. There was indecision as to whether to place the work in Monceau Park or on the writer's tomb at Père Lachaise cemetery. It was finally installed in the Park in 1897, thus inaugurating the series of monuments devoted to writers and musicians.

The elegant figure resting on her elbows at the foot of the monument embodies both the heroine of the novel *Fort comme la mort* (Strong as Death), published in 1889, and an anonymous reader, pensive as she reflects on the wasted lives and ruined destinies described in the author's works.

“Look for page—page 336, where you will find a poem entitled 'Les Pauvres Gens' (The Poor People). Absorb it, as one drinks the best wines, slowly, word by word, and let it intoxicate you and move you. Listen to your heart. Then close the book, raise your eyes, think and dream...”

[Extract from *Fort comme la Mort* by Guy de Maupassant]



### **Edouard Pailleron** Writer (1834 – 1899)

Edouard Pailleron began his career as a writer in 1860. The author of comedies of manners which spiritedly present the bourgeoisie of the time, he was appointed to the Académie française in 1881 with his play *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* (The Art of Being Bored), which depicted the vacuity of a conformist society.

The monument by L.-B. Bernstamm, inaugurated in 1907, was also dedicated to the actress Jeanne Samary. She is represented as she appeared in *L'Étincelle* (The Spark), another major success performed in 1879. Jeanne Samary came from a family of comedians. A member of the Comédie française, she usually played the role of servants. She died suddenly in 1890 at the age of 33. Highly popular and renowned for her jollity, she was pained by Renoir, Carolus-Durand and Louise Abbéma. The actress paid tribute to the writer by decorating the monument with a garland of roses, while at her feet were two masks symbolising Tragedy and Comedy. The actress's dancing pose, the garlands of flowers and the contours of the sculpture made this monument characteristic of the Belle Époque.



### **Ambroise Thomas** Musician (1811 – 1896)

This monument originated at the initiative of the Directors of the Opera, Mr Bertrand and Mr Gailhard, who in 1896 organised a gala evening to collect the funds to honour the memory of the composer Ambroise Thomas. Thomas found fame thanks to two operas: *Mignon*, inspired by Goethe, in 1866, then *Hamlet*, inspired by Shakespeare, in 1868. Once again it is the image of the composer deep in thought which is represented. Here he is isolated from the world, seated on top of a rock, contemplating Ophelia sinking into madness below.

This is one of the last creations of Alexandre Falguière, who had found glory under the Second Empire with works such as *Le Vainqueur de combat de coq* (Victor of the Cockfight), *Tarcisus martyr chrétien* (Tarcisus the Christian Boy-Martyr) in the Musée d'Orsay, and *Diane*, in the Augustins Museum, Toulouse. In Paris, he created a monument to Honoré de Balzac in the Square Georges Guillaumin and the monument to Louis Pasteur at Place de Breteuil.

The monument to Ambroise Thomas was inaugurated in 1900, the year of the sculptor's death.



### **Monument to Charles Gounod** Musician (1818 – 1893)

The monument to Charles Gounod was erected in 1902, thanks to a subscription committee whose president was the composer Ambroise Thomas, who also had a monument built in the park. The choice of Monceau Park can be explained by the proximity of Gounod's home at 20 Place du Général Catroux (previously Place Malesherbes).

The creation of the monument was entrusted to Antonin Mercié. The composer's bust is surrounded by three

female figures placed on a cloud. They evoke the composer's three most famous operas: Marguerite (Faust), Juliet (Romeo and Juliet) and Sapho, singing the praises of their creator. One of the various musical instruments which adorn the pedestal is an organ; the small angel playing it disappeared as a result of an act of vandalism.

Antonin Mercié (1845 – 1916) was well thought of due to the careful workmanship of his sculptures. The sculptor became famous at the beginning of the Third Republic thanks to the success of his *Gloria Victis*, currently at the Petit Palais Museum.



### Alfred de Musset Poet (1810 – 1857)

This monument was financed by the banker Daniel Osiris, who entrusted the project to Alexandre Falguière and Antonin Mercié in 1889. Falguière was entrusted with creating the figure of the Muse and Mercié that of the poet. This collaboration was not without problems, which slowed the completion of the project. It was finally Mercié who created the entire sculpture on Falguière's death in 1900. The monument was inspired by the poem *La Nuit de Mai* (A Night in May), published in 1835. Musset's *Nights* relate a dialogue between Poetry, personified by the figure of the Muse and the poet, an author overwhelmed by his suffering.

The monument, which was inaugurated on 23 February 1906, was erected on the corner of the Comédie Française. The poet's sister, Mme Lardin de Musset, had managed to obtain this location, which led to a number of criticisms. The work was removed in 1964 and finally installed in Monceau Park in 1981.

A second monument dedicated to Alfred de Musset, *Le Rêve du Poète* (The Poet's Dream), the work of the sculptor Alphonse de Moncel, can be found on the Place du Canada, near the Grand Palais.



### Frédéric Chopin Musician (1810 – 1849)

The monument to Frédéric Chopin remained at the project stage for a long time. The two subscriptions in 1895 and 1899 had difficulty in collecting the funds required for its creation. In view of this, the sculptor Georges Dubois proposed a less expensive rival project, part of which can still be found in the Luxembourg Gardens. This second project divided the members of the subscription committee and delayed still further the creation of the monument by Froment-Meurice. Due to the lack of money, the inauguration took place in the sculptor's garden and the monument was not installed in the park until 1906.

The sculpture by Jacques Froment-Meurice represents Chopin at the piano, composing a funeral march. The figure of Grief is crying at the musician's feet, while at the back, an angel is scattering flowers as she rises up. Jacques Froment-Meurice (1864 – 1948) came from a family of famous goldsmiths. A sculptor and medallion engraver, he worked with his father to create gold plate items.

The original cast of the monument in Monceau Park is conserved in Paris, in the winter garden of the Museum of Romantic Life.

Frédéric Chopin



Edouard Pailleron



Ambroise Thomas



Throughout the capital, the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Paris maintains some six hundred commemorative monuments and statues which form part of the municipal heritage. These works, most of which date from the beginning of the Third Republic, are the result of an active policy of artistic commissions intended to decorate the squares and streets, in accordance with the wishes of the elected officials of Paris. They include some of the masterpieces of French sculpture: The Fountain of the Four Continents by Carpeaux and The Triumph of the Republic by Dalou.

The 20th century was for a long time more cautious in this respect, but over the last twenty years or so, the City of Paris has revived the tradition of commissioning public art. In 2004, it set up the Art Committee in the City, a consultative committee of elected officials and experts to provide an opinion on policy in this area. Together with this Committee, the City of Paris commissioned 35 permanent or temporary public works between 2004 and 2008.

From Exercise Tower by Wang Du (Paris 17th) to the Dance of the Emerging Fountain by Chen Zhen (Paris 13th) and the Forest of Candelabras by the Berlin collective Inges Idee (Paris 19th), all these works can be discovered throughout Paris.