

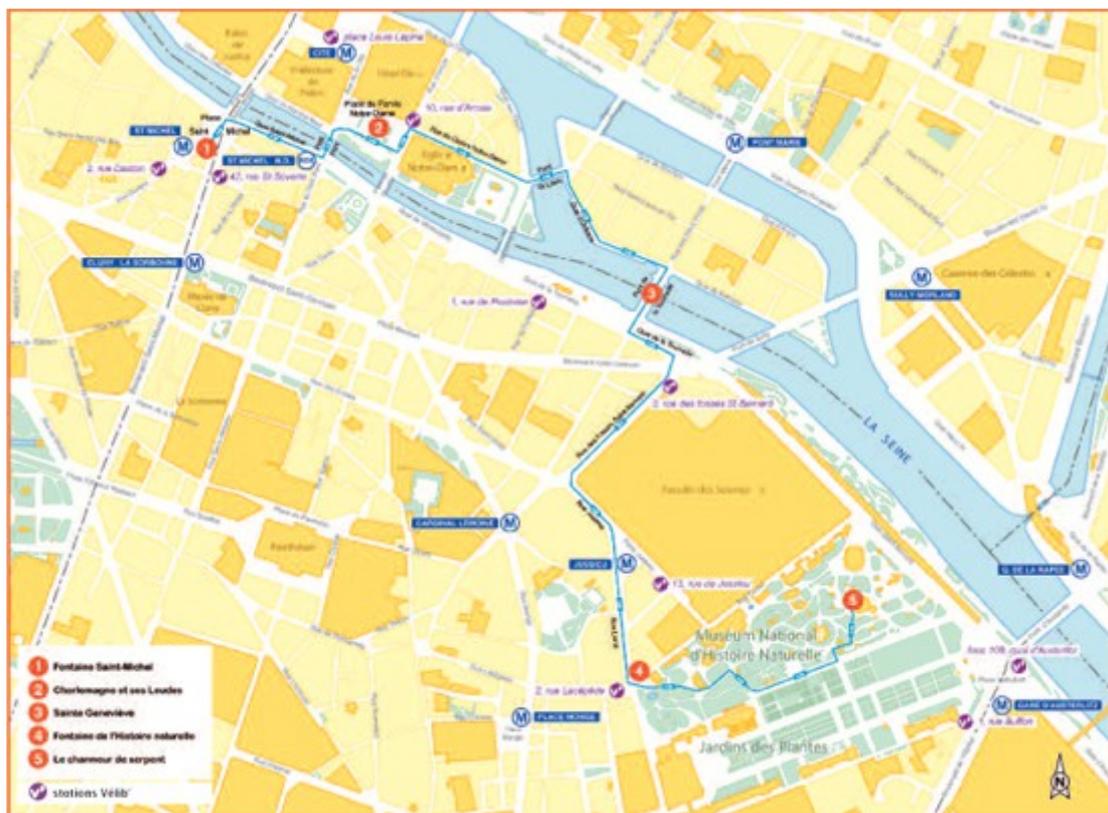
Myths and realities

FROM SAINT MICHEL'S FOUNTAIN (5TH) TO THE BOTANIC GARDEN (5TH)

Of all the visual arts, sculpture has a particular virtue: unlike painting and all the graphic arts, it is created directly in space and transmits a three dimensional image which is visible in all directions and from all angles. It thus provides a direct depiction of the subject it represents, without the need for representation codes such as perspective, making it instantly accessible to everyone. Even better, it produces objects which can be touched, around which one can move and which change depending on the light and the weather. Sculpture can give form both to models taken from reality and to supernatural beings such as demons, which become real and almost carnal under the artist's chisel. Medieval art adored these scenes and imaginary characters cut out of stone.

In the 19th century, the sculptors' skills were such that these phantasmagorias took form in a spectacular fashion and winged dragons and monsters became part of a real bestiary: just be patient and you will see those in the Place Saint-Michel fly away. Armed with this evocative power which allowed it to say anything, sculpture became a way of letting young and old discover the founding myths of Religion and the Fatherland – the great preoccupations of the time – or of arousing their curiosity for Science, by telling them wonderful stories and firing up their imaginations.

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1

(6th) Junction of Boulevard Saint-Michel and Place Saint-André-des-Arts

Architect G. Davioud (1824 – 1881)

Saint Michel's Fountain

The great urban layout of the Place brought about by Haussmann was completed in 1860 with the construction of a great fountain, the highest in Paris, designed by Davioud. It is dedicated to the Archangel Michael and

seems like the background decor of an imaginary theatre. The central recess houses the subject himself, sculpted by Francisque Duret (1804 – 1865): the Archangel, head of the celestial armies, brandishing his vengeful sword and trampling underfoot the defeated body of the demon of the Apocalypse. It was Michael, the Patron Saint of warriors, who appeared to Daniel, who chased Satan from Paradise and who stayed the hand of Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac. It was Michael again who helped David to overcome Goliath appeared at Jericho to guide Joshua and who. And it was also Michael who appeared to Joan of Arc to free the country from the yoke of the English. He can be seen, again as a liberator, staying the forces of Evil represented here by two enormous winged dragons which have come, unsuccessfully, to assist the Demon. Alfred Jacquemart (1824 – 1896), who designed them, actually specialised in sculpting animals and fantastical creatures (two Lions on City Hall, the Fountain of Lions on the Place Félix Eboué, the Sphinx of the Fountain of the Palm Trees on Place du Châtelet, Rhinoceros at the Orsay Museum). It is possible to see in these dragons a body and head inspired by a lion, the tail of a crocodile, the wings of an eagle, etc. These two monsters, keeping guard around the basin of the fountain, have been copied many times in everyday objects such as bookends and paperweights.



(4th) Parvis of Notre-Dame de Paris

Sculptors Louis Rochet (1813 – 1878), Charles Rochet (1819 – 1900)

Charlemagne and his Squires

A remarkable work created by the Rochet brothers in 1878 (it was not installed until 1882) and an amazing feat of casting by the foundry worker Thiébaud, Charlemagne and his Squires seem to appear directly from the mists of time. The sculptors tried to respect the archaeological knowledge available to them at the time, giving Roland a copy of the famous Durandal sword lent by the Museum of Madrid and giving Charlemagne the so-called Nuremburg crown, kept in Vienna. A horn is hanging at Roland's side and his cousin Olivier is carefully guiding the convoy: the entire legend is contained within this group of characters, giving substance to this medievalchanson de geste and presenting the heroes before the drama in Roncevaux which concludes the song. The young warriors advance fiercely to meet their fate and the old Emperor, represented on horseback in all his majesty, is being led, protected by his nephews, towards his own glory which will be won at the price of their imminent sacrifice. Behind the displayed bravura it is possible to sense the threat lying in wait for them all. It is certainly a remarkable work, which offers a valuable and heroic vision of this empire and this emperor which led to the birth of France.



(5th) Pont de la Tournelle

Sculptor P. Landowski (1875 – 1961)

Sainte Geneviève

At the top of a high stone pinnacle topping one of the supports of the Pont de la Tournelle, which was rebuilt in 1928, the statue of Sainte Geneviève, facing east, seems to be simply the last element in a movement coming up from the river and leading up to the sky. However, Paul Landowski, its creator, had doubts about it his entire life. There was a great deal of prevarication about its installation and the sculptor remained dissatisfied with the work: "the beauty of this chevet of Notre Dame! [...] And how sorry I am when I turn round and see this awful pillar of my poor Sainte Geneviève". The saint, beseeching but confident in her faith, seems to be watching Attila's hordes advancing on Paris. Her long plaits are caressing a little girl who is clasping in her arms the vessel representing her city. Geneviève is placing a protective hand on the child's shoulder, which she is covering with her cloak: "The folds of the cloak follow the angles of the post and in my work there is no gesture, no movement to interrupt this beautiful movement towards the sky".

In 451, Attila's hordes, having crossed the Rhine, rushed to conquer the Gauls and rapidly progressed towards the west. They were soon marching towards Lutetia. The terrified Parisians were ready to leave their city when Genevieve persuaded them to stay. In Saint Etienne's basilisk, where Notre Dame would later be built, she brought together the women who were begging the gods to spare Paris. The legend shows Sainte Geneviève

facing the Huns, who turned back.

A few years later, when the Franks laid siege to the city, Geneviève again saved the inhabitants from famine. When she died in 512, she was buried in the church at the top of the hill, both of which bear her name, and became the protector of Paris.



(5th) 20, Rue Cuvier

Sculptors J.J. Feuchère (1807 – 1852), P. Pomateau

Histoire Naturelle Fountain

On the corner of Rue Cuvier and Rue Linné, the fountain is a tribute to these two famous naturalists. At the back of a recess framed by an abundantly decorated Ionic portico, in the centre of large shell, the muse embodying natural history and holding a conch and a tablet is sitting enthroned between the lion and the owl of Minerva on an amazing bed of marine and aquatic animals. Tangled together pell-mell are a fish resembling a piranha, a walrus, a lobster, a crocodile (in a pose which would be impossible in real life) and its baby and various marine molluscs. This aquatic theme took over the entire decor, with the walls adorned with octopuses, starfish and nautiluses and even the canopies in the shape of scallop shells, overrun with algae. An eagle taking up a lamb in its claws, attached to the keystone of the portico, crowns the scene. A frieze of animal and human masks runs along the plinth. In the lower part, water springs up from strange bronze grotesque masks in the shape of serpents – or could they be moray eels? – and shells and cascades into a basin, also of bronze. Jean-Jacques Feuchère created the main figure and Pierre Pomateau created the innocent, fanciful fauna around the fountain between 1840 and 1846.



(5th) Jardin des Plantes (Botanic Gardens)

Sculptor Charles Arthur Bourgeois (1838 – 1886)

The Snake Charmer

To reach our last stop, you have to enter the menagerie in the Botanic Gardens. The menagerie was created in 1793 and originally housed animals presented in fairs or which were once part of the collections of aristocrats. This is the oldest menagerie in France and due to its small surface area, it was soon devoted to small animals. Parisian children discovered an exotic world which could already be found in their picture books. The reptile section, and particularly the snake pit, quickly became one of the star attractions of the Gardens, arousing repulsion, disgust, fear and curiosity in equal measure. The Snake Charmer (1864), a bronze by Baron Charles Arthur Bourgeois, represents a colourful scene which at the time was used to illustrate all Oriental adventures: a tame horned viper, undulating to the sound of his master's flute; the master is dancing in a "Hindu" costume, as it was thought to be at the time. In the other walkways, it is possible to see Crocodile Hunter (1883), also by Bourgeois, Brown Bear by Georges Guyot, all works which bring animals out of their cages and place them in amongst the visitors, and Stone Age Man by Frémiet, which reminded the Gallery of recent evolution and placed humans at the centre of living creatures.

Histoire Naturelle Fountain



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.