

## Paris and its suburbs

### THE PARISIAN LANDSCAPE IN THE DECORATION OF THE CITY HALL (HOTEL DE VILLE)

“The realm of enchantment and fable is now less rich than reality”, declared the Revolution, thus revising a hierarchy of genres which, since the classical age, had relegated landscape painting to a minor form of expression.

An important development took place at the turn of the 19th century with the creation of a landscape class at the School of Fine Arts. This contributed towards the change in the gaze of the artist, who was now required to discover reality through nature. Leaving the enclosed world of the workshop, from 1830 onwards the Barbizon painters and their successors would become advocates of naturalistic pictures painted directly from life. Before the Impressionists, they made use of atmosphere and light phenomena and enriched painting with a new iconography. They were particularly interested in Paris and its suburbs. Under the Second Empire, Jongkind, whom Manet described as “the father of the landscape school”, painted views of the Capital that in many ways foreshadowed a number of panels commissioned for the decoration of the City Hall in 1890.

Indeed, it was not until the end of the century that landscape painting reached the walls of official buildings, which until then were devoid of allegorical painting. The Parisian councillors wanted a municipal palace that was also a museum of the French art of the day. The response is more modest but just as attractive, as it demonstrates the extreme vitality of landscape painting circa 1900, before the great rupture of modernism turned the world of painting upside down.

## THE SCIENCE ROOM

### 1 The Little Arm of the Seine at Pont-Neuf Stanislas Lépine (1835-1892)

A close associate of Boudin and Jongkind and a friend of Corot, with whom his style is often associated, Lépine specialised in views of Paris which he regularly exhibited at the Salon from the middle of the Second Empire onwards. Water, whose reflections and dazzling surface he excelled at capturing, is omnipresent in his painting. The panel at the City Hall, painted shortly before his death, shows the artist's ultimate fascination for the bridges and banks of the Seine, which formed the main theme of his work, along with the streets of the Butte Montmartre (Montmartre Hill).



### 2 The Island of La Grande-Jatte Emile Barau (1851-1930)

Made famous by Georges Seurat's painting, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (1886), this site and its open-air cafés were visited by many artists up to the 20th century. From Claude Monet to Albert Gleizes, the greatest artists came here to sit alongside families visiting from Paris on Sundays. Emile Barau delivered a synthetic representation of the island. Like the rest of his work it was inspired by the landscapes of Champagne (Reims, Saint-Denis Museum) which, along with his views of Holland, were the main subject of his paintings.



### 3 The Val de Grâce Luigi Loir (1845-1916)

Seen from Rue de la Santé, The Val de Grâce vibrates in the heat of the summer. The colour of July intensifies the tones and strengthens the contrasts. The artist, a great specialist in Parisian landscapes, owed his reputation to the decorative quality of his urban views, bustling with an anecdotal crowd. In this respect he was similar to another great painter of the Capital's streets, Jean Béraud, who is curiously absent from the walls of the City Hall (*A Corner of Bercy during the Flood*, Paris, Petit Palais Museum).



### 4 The Arsenal Basin Pierre Vauthier (1845-1916)

The artist's work generally shows a taste for scenes which are true to life, well-suited to the shift towards documentary realism in public decoration (*Le jour du couronnement de la Rosière - The Crowning of the May Queen*, Bagnolez Town Hall, 1893). Here Vauthier paints in a different vein, close to the Impressionist tradition. This view of the Arsenal Basin is observed in snowy weather, through the grey filter of the winter light. The landscape, captured in the blink of an eye, rejects the picturesqueness that often characterised landscape painting at the time.

## THE ARTS ROOM



### **The Seine at Bas-Meudon****Gustave Colin (1828-1910)**

This view was painted from the headland on Saint-Germain Island and provides a glimpse of the old Trocadéro Palace and the Eiffel Tower, beyond the viaduct over the Seine. Of all the landscape artists in the City Hall, Colin is one of the most similar to the Impressionists in terms of technique. With fine brushstrokes, it tames the light and thus captures the surface of the water and the transparency of the sun's reflections. The organisation of the group in the foreground is a direct reference to the Pilgrimage to Cythera by Watteau (Paris, Louvre Museum).



### **La Marne at Champigny Bridge****Jean-Joseph Bellel (1816-1891)**

Of all the landscape artists at the City Hall, Jean-Joseph Bellel was the only one who practised historical landscape art, which he studied at the School of Fine Arts in the workshop of the painter Caruelle d'Aligny (The Flight into Egypt, Paris, Saint-Pierre-du-Gros-Cailou Church). This early tuition gave him a lifelong taste for highly constructed compositions with an ideal quality. The painting reproduces a work previously executed by the same painter for the old City Hall.



### **St. Nicholas Port****Charles Lapostolet (1824-1890)**

St. Nicholas Port, which was one of the main harbours in Paris until 1942, was named after Saint-Nicolas-du-Louvre Church, which once stood nearby. While the painter sought to restore the liveliness of the port, he was also intent on reproducing the movements of the sky, capturing its reflection in the water's surface and on the embankment. His realistic yet sensitive art placed Lapostolet on the fringes of Impressionism, among artists who remained within the naturalist tradition but were above all interested in the role of light.



### **The Seine at Bougival****Louis Français (1814-1897)**

Français was one of the first landscape artists to visit Bougival. There, in the company of the painter Célestin Nanteuil, the artist painted many pictures that he then signed as Français, a student from Bougival. Castagnary said of his work that "everything is drawn there, from the blade of grass that grows in the ground to the leaf that trembles in the treetops." In this late depiction of the site, the artist has departed from his usual meticulousness in favour of a composition effect which contrasts a background bathed in light with the valley which is already covered in shadows.

## THE LITERATURE ROOM



### **The Quarries at Arcueil****Louis Henri Saintin (1846-1899)**

The entrance to the quarries and the aqueduct, which is visible in the distance and whose top level was built to bring the waters of the Vanne to Paris, were often represented by painters in the late 19th century to depict the site of Arcueil (Arcueil City Council, wedding hall, 1885). Here Louis Saintin gives us an autumnal version where the morning sun struggles to dissipate the mist. The painter, who was a student of Pils, very soon opted for landscape painting, which he practised in a clear, solid yet luminous style that we can see here (Erquy Bay, Rennes, Museum of Fine Arts).



### **Place de la Concorde****Emmanuel Lansyer (1835-1893)**

Before discovering landscape painting with Courbet and then Harpignies, at the start of his career Lansyer had practised architectural drawing in the studio of Viollet-le-Duc and took part in restoring Auxerre Cathedral with him. The sketches of the monuments remained a great source of inspiration throughout his life, as we can see from this view of Place de la Concorde, which is designed mainly to emphasise the site's architectural environment. The small figures that accompany the composition may have been painted by someone else.



### **The Medici Fountain****Jean-Baptiste Antoine Guillemet (1843-1918)**

Guillemet was a friend of Zola and remained faithful to the naturalistic approach embodied by his masters Corot and Daubigny. On several occasions he painted the banks of the Seine and the urban landscapes of the Paris area (Bercy in December, Paris, National Assembly). As with the Barbizon painters, the landscape shown here is inhabited by tiny figures in the background, far from the observer. Unlike the Impressionists, for the landscape artists nature was associated with the feeling of solitude.

**12****The Seine at Pont Saint-Michel Eugène Berthelon (1829-1914)**

In the accuracy of the depiction, this panel painted with a fine, light touch is close to the art of illustration. The density of the forms, barely covered by a delicate light, nonetheless gives this view of the Seine and Notre-Dame real power. After the war in 1870, the painter became famous for two views showing the ruins of the Court of Accounts, which was burnt down under the Commune, painted in the same documentary spirit (Compiègne, castle).

**THE TOURELLES GALLERY****13****The Jumièges Area Léon Germain Pelouse (1838-1891)**

The subject chosen by the painter – the Seine at Jumièges – is only rapport loosely related to the general theme of the landscapes at the City Hall, which are devoted more directly to views of Paris and the suburbs. The technique of the work is characteristic of the art of Pelouse, who liked using green and brown tones to paint landscapes where the tangle of nature is reflected in peaceful water bathed in the radiance of the sky. The painter had discovered the sites of the lower Seine Valley in the 1860's when the railway line from Paris was extended beyond Rouen to the sea.

**14****The Luxembourg Garden Henri Harpignies (1819-1916)**

Throughout his career, this painter stayed faithful to the teachings of Corot and the Barbizon painters. As he used to say, "Corot was the first to find the air." Like his master, Harpignies took care over his skies, which he painted clear and flowing, like in this picture, where the whole composition bathes in a soft grey paleness, barely awakened by the gleam of the autumn sun. In the foreground, the light divides the rough trunks of the trees, forming a motif that this artist often treated with great elegance.

**15****The Tuileries Garden Frédéric Montenard (1849-1926)**

Frédéric Montenard started out as a painter of Provence landscapes, which he captured in a light-coloured palette, and this gave him a taste for the light with which he flooded his large-scale decorations (Paris, Sorbonne and Gare de Lyon station; Montpellier, Prefecture). The panel at the City Hall, bathed in an azure sky that contrasts with the red colour of the chestnut trees, is part of a style of landscape painting that drew heavily on colour effects and was very fashionable after 1900.

The Val de Grâce  
Lugi Loir (1845-1916)



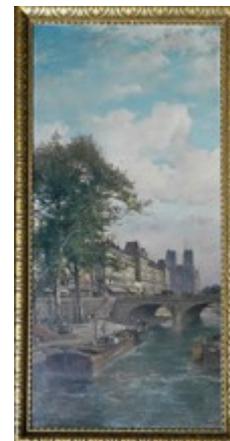
The Jumièges Area

Léon Germain Pelouse (1838-1891)



The Seine at Pont Saint-Michel

Eugène Berthelon (1829-1914)



The commission formed in 1887 to establish the principles of interior decoration at the City Hall had decided that the walls in the reception areas would be decorated with views of Paris or the suburbs, while leaving the artists free to choose their subjects.

Forty or so panels were ordered, frequently featuring the banks of the Seine and the poetry of the public parks, as if the artists wanted to use the City Hall to preserve a trace of nature, which was already threatened by urbanisation. In many paintings, the City is far off in the distance, almost invisible to the eye, beyond the water or a curtain of trees sheltering a withdrawn world.

In contrast to this vision, which was part of the landscape painting tradition in the 19th century and joined that of the Barbizon painters, a small number of panels paint a livelier, more colourful picture of the City. A few street scenes showcase the most famous monuments of the Capital. The palette becomes lighter and the style, made up of small brushstrokes that capture the light, is closer to that of the Impressionists.