

Statues, reliefs and décorations

The 30's

The art of the thirties was mainly characterised by the increasing distance between artists and realism. During the Cubist revolution, under the influence of Picasso and Braque, painters devised shapes that synthesized the subject while encompassing many different viewpoints within a single line.

Circa 1920, Picasso conveyed this synthesis using simplified images, adding weight to his shapes with a Neo-Classical appearance.

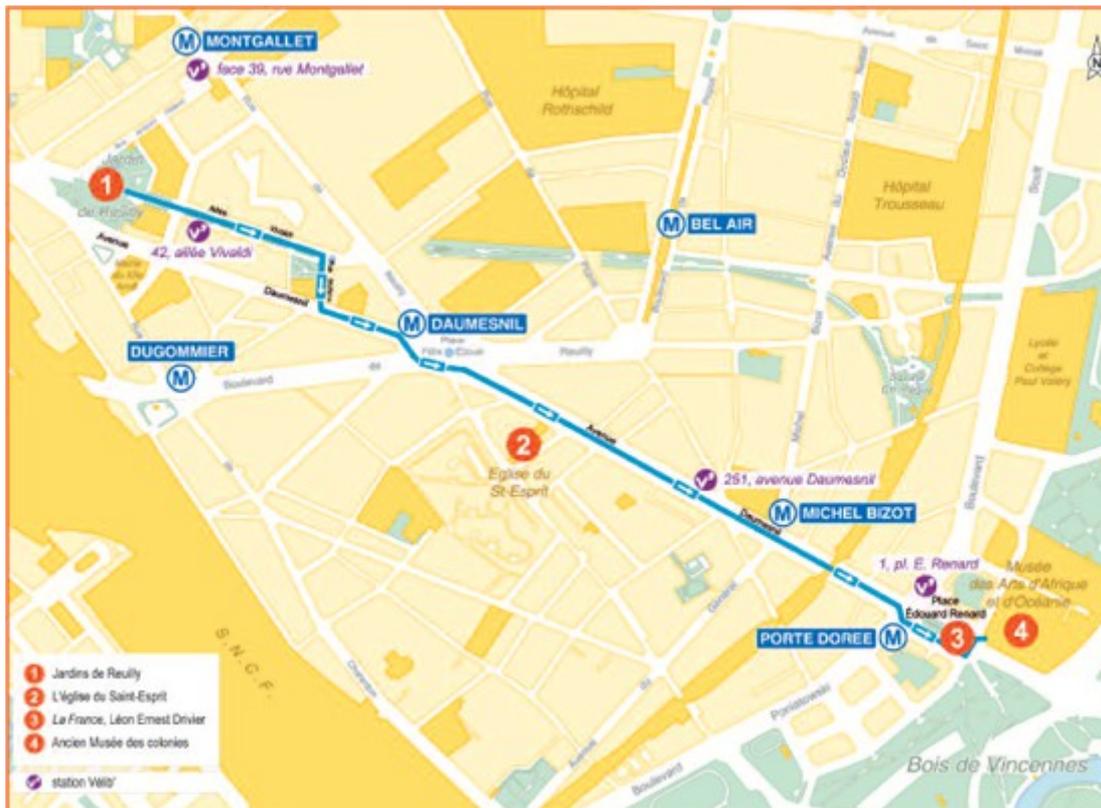
It is this more accessible stage that was embraced by many artists, who conformed to a more decorative aesthetic, rather than a profoundly speculative one.

At the same time, the artistic debate on modernity entered the Church. Tired of the Sulpician academism that seemed unshakeable, artists gathered together to move religious art forwards.

The Ateliers d'art sacré (Studios of Sacred Art), founded by Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières in 1919, attempted to make up for lost time, although were not entirely successful. It was not until 1937 that Father Couturier and Father Régamey reconciled Catholic art and contemporary art, encountering many difficulties on the way. Saint-Esprit Church was a major milestone in this evolution.

We can see how the sculptors of the thirties simplified details in favour of volumes, to meet the need for the monumental, and how architects still incorporated decorative sculpture into their edifices, to the point where the great decoration programmes developed by talented artists sometimes took the place of architecture, even in the composition of the façades.

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1 (12th) Avenue Daumesnil Reuilly Garden

Our walk starts here, in this garden designed by Pierre Colboc and the "landscapes" group in 1992. The City chose to group together several works of various origins here, which are all characterised by the expression of a common aesthetic. Effects of mass, elegant expressions of lines, stylised shapes: the artists have all these things in common. These female figures, in accordance with the wishes of the architect, are arranged along the circular avenue that dominates the central lawn. The Dance (Charles Malfray) and Amazon (Georges

Chauvel): these two works were part of an ensemble (now replaced by lead vases by Bizet Lindet and Lagriffoul) that ten artists were commissioned to produce to adorn the “water mirror” of the Tokyo Palace for the 1937 exhibition. In the tradition of Neo-Classicism inherited from Landowsky and Bouchard, we see the abundant use of the plane that characterises the technique of these sculptors.

Female Nude (Naoum Aranson): this is an element of a fountain which, after being exhibited at the Decorative Arts Exhibition in 1925, was set up in the Cours la Reine park. This fountain consisted of a stand with four pillars supporting a basin and topped by this statue. Already far removed from the 1900 style, it heralded the taste of the thirties.

Female Nude (Raymond Delamarre): this work from 1947, in the Bagatelle rose garden, replaced a statue that was melted down during the war in 1943. It demonstrates the persistence of a decorative style that was unaffected by the upheavals of contemporary art and would remain popular until the late fifties.



(12th) 1, rue Cannebière

Saint-Esprit Church

This marks an important stage in 20th-century religious art. Its construction, which was completed in 1935, was part of the “projects of the Cardinal”, a vast programme launched by Monsignor Verdier in 1932.

In 1926 the project was entrusted to Paul Tournon, the Head Architect of Civil Buildings and National Palaces. He had in particular distinguished himself at Sainte Thérèse d'Elisabethville in Aubergenville during the same period. For the first time, in under a year (1927-1928), he made a church with a slender spire out of reinforced concrete.

At Elisabethville he worked alongside the sculptor Carlo Sarrabezolles, who had been working under the direction of the architect Georges at the Saint-Louis Church in Ville-Momble, where he had experimented with a procedure to cut directly into setting concrete (sculpted cement). This procedure would be used once again in the highly original bell tower at Sainte-Thérèse.

At Saint-Esprit, Tournon once more chose to work with concrete, ostensibly embracing the Modern current and following the model of Raincy Church, built a few years earlier (1920-1924) by Auguste Perret.

However, during the thirties, a synthesising movement to which Tournon belonged attempted to embrace the expression of modernity without denying the legacy of the past: thus, while the building is made of concrete, the façade is clad with bricks and directly inspired by the church of Sainte Sophie in Constantinople. The concrete would also enable him to take up the challenge set by Sainte Sophie in a durable way, by resting a vast open-work cupola on four opposing semi-cupolas.

A simple and solid construction, with decoration incorporated into the architecture: Tournon wanted to be part of a tradition of rational and efficient builders who followed Viollet-le Duc in taking inspiration from the Middle Ages. He once more called upon Sarrabezolles to produce the extraordinary sculpted cement bell tower and the pinnacles.

He also turned towards the Studios of Sacred Art to put together a first-rate team of artist-decorators, who produced works including the Pentecost by Maurice Denis, the Council of Thirty by Jean Dupas, the stained glass windows by Louis Barillet, Jean Hébert-Stevens and Paul Louzier, and the altar and altarpiece by Jean Dunand. However, the Way of the Cross by Richard Desvallières, who also designed the font, is a particularly successful example of this expressionism, imbued with the religious fervour that can be found in the art of Georges Rouault.



(12th) Place Édouard Renard

France, by Léon Ernest Drivier

This statue is a decidedly quaint and ambiguous reminder of the International Colonial Exhibition of 1931. The work, which Antoine Bourdelle was first commissioned to produce, was originally meant to occupy the peristyle of the Museum of the Colonies. Finally the commission went to Léon Drivier, who had to deal with the league formed by Albert Laprade and Alfred Auguste Janniot, who thought the planned statue was too big.

Janniot especially did not like him - either due to jealousy or academic differences. He wrote to Laprade circa 1930: “Once more, we have failed to produce a statue representing France using anything other than Greek attributes (although the statue is armed in the Gallic style), which have nothing to do with France and make it look more like a policeman than anything else.” The statue, reduced in size by half, would be placed in front of the steps during the exhibition, finally finding the place it now occupies after the exhibition was closed.

Janniot's judgment was rather partial for a work which, while conventional, remains very representative of the

Neo-Classical style. Drivier, a former assistant of Rodin, belonged to “Schneegg’s gang” at the turn of the century. These young sculptors, who met at the Schneegg brothers’ house circa 1900, and all professed an attachment to modern figuration. There you would find, apart from the Schneegg brothers themselves, artists such as Bourdelle, Despiou, Wlérick, Pompon, Malfray, Dejean and Yvonne Serruys. While there is renewed interest in it today, for several years this movement was overshadowed by Cubist or abstract sculpture. However, the work it produced under the aegis of Rodin shows similarities to that of Maillol or Picasso’s Neo-Classical period: synthetic, weighty shapes, simplification of volumes, and a tendency toward the monumental. The artists of “Schneegg’s gang” made a great contribution to the sculpture in the Trocadéro gardens. There you can also find work by Drivier (The Joy of Living), who also has work on display at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris (Muse Lying Down).



(12th) Place Édouard Renard
Former Museum of the Colonies

The architects Albert Laprade and Léon Jaussely were selected in 1927 to erect the only building destined to remain after the International Colonial Exhibition of 1931. In effect, the State entrusted them with the project for a “Museum of the Colonies”, which a few years later would become the “Museum of Overseas France”. In line with the imperialist policy that most western countries were pursuing at the time, for France this was a way of promoting the cultures and arts of its possessions throughout the world. “Indigenous” art was regarded with a certain paternalist curiosity at the time: it would take the eye of painters and poets, who frequently went to the Porte Dorée with Braque and Picasso, to recognise their genius and expressive power. In 1962, André Malraux finally gave the name of “Museum of African and Oceanian Arts” to this leading venue of the thirties.

It seems that Albert Laprade soon had the idea for a huge relief that would extend over the building’s whole façade, to the point where architecture and sculpture would be totally inseparable. He initially approached Antoine Bourdelle, but he was most probably already thinking of his follower, Alfred Auguste Janniot. Thus, Janniot was entrusted with the project in 1929. And what a project! He had to produce the biggest relief in existence in Europe at the time (1130 m²) within two years. To do this he enlisted the help of two companions to sculpt the stone, Gabriel Forestier and Charles Barberis.

Fortunately this was not a first for Janniot. He had already taken on a monumental relief in 1924 (Monument to the Dead of Nice).

In 1925, for the Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, he also collaborated with Pierre Patout to produce a large group, Tribute to Jean Goujon, for the collector’s pavilion, which earned him the custom of Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann and a commission to decorate the tea room of the Ile-de-France liner, as well as the Vine for Charles Plumet’s “wine tower”. However, his talent is indisputably displayed to its fullest in the low relief of the Porte Dorée, representing the contributions of the colonies to the riches of France. This was proof that he was truly destined to produce great monumental works.

He would carry on creating reliefs in a similar vein in the United States (1934, Rockefeller Center) as well as in France: façade of Puteaux City Hall (1932-1934, architects: Niermans brothers), Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris (1937, architects: Dondel, Aubert, Dastugue and Viard), Mont Valérien memorial (1959) etc. In this work full of powerful modern Classicism, Janniot worked with relatively thin stone, so there is little difference between the planes. He had to emphasise the graphic character of the scenes and synthesized the shapes to retain their clarity. The plastic density is to a large extent due to the active importance given to the voids as well as the solid parts, in the style of the temple decorations at Angkor Wat for the panels describing Asia. For Africa, he produced a pattern of decorative plant and animal motifs reminiscent of tapestry, drawing on the art of ancient Egypt, whose representations he revisited by combining front and sideways views and abolishing the classic perspective to produce an image that is reminiscent of the Cubist studies. The result is a highly unified ensemble, which is nonetheless disrupted by the shadows of the colonnade and its roof.



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.