



PARIS HERITAGE: SIGHTS AND INSIGHTS

07 THE KNIGHTS AND HORSES STROLL

The Paris heritage strolls



FROM NOTRE-DAME TO THE GRAND PALAIS

>>> Horses are legendary symbols of power and grace. If you counted the statues of dashing chargers and noble steeds decorating Paris's monuments, façades and fountains, you'd find at least one hundred of them. Equine figures enliven the Colonne Vendôme, the Opéra and the Cirque d'Hiver.

>>> This stroll across the city from east to west visits a series of palaces, grandiose buildings and posh avenues. It starts at City Hall, moves to the Louvre, crosses the Tuileries, and finishes on the Champs-Élysées. The Right Bank of the Seine has been prime royal real estate for a millennium now, offering prestigious settings for stunning equestrian statues.

>>> Traditionally sculpted to honour monarchs and military heroes, the equestrian statue is always an exercise in virtuosity. Capturing a horse's energy in stone is difficult, and casting a lifelike bronze requires outstanding technique. A spirited, majestic creature, a noble in the kingdom of animals, the horse is the throne Nature offers the human ruler (or so he would have his subjects think). Mastered by its rider, the horse clearly establishes the symbol of power.

>>> Groups of galloping or prancing horses are another theme. The composition may be allegorical or realistic: the often vividly depicted anatomy communicates movement, tension, freedom and willpower. The catalogue of models from antiquity offers artists inexhaustible resources: from the ancient Greek "Triumphant Quadriga" Napoleon admired in Venice, to rearing horses, animal fights, the triumph of man over animal, of order over chaos, and onward until symbolism meets decorative effect, spawning the essence of the baroque.



>>> (4th) >>> Notre-Dame esplanade

1 Charlemagne and his Men of Arms

Louis and Charles Rochet set out in 1853 to create a *Charlemagne* after executing two previous equestrian statues, *Don Pedro I*, in Rio de Janeiro, and *William the Conqueror* in the city of Falaise. The plaster version of the piece was displayed at the 1867 Universal Exposition. The bronze version was featured at the 1878 Universal Exposition: the piece's career, a pure product of Bonapartism and the exaltation of the emperor, outlived the Napoléon III regime. The composition is an absolute gem.

In 1879, the city council allowed the sculpture to be displayed on the esplanade of Notre-Dame; however, it wasn't actually installed until 1882, and even then, it stood on a canvas-draped wooden chassis instead of a proper pedestal for 26 years. The city finally acquired the piece in 1895, paying the foundry the market value of the metal alone.

By adding two full-scale squires, Roland and Olivier, the Rochet brothers enhanced the traditional form of the equestrian group, by multiplying the axes and the points of view in the composition. The interest in this equestrian piece resides in its quest for historic veracity with faithful reconstruction of supposed original models like *Durandal* (Roland's sword) in the Museum of Madrid or the *Nuremberg Crown* in Vienna.



>>> (4th) >>> Hôtel de Ville garden

2 Étienne Marcel

For Parisians, Étienne Marcel is a 14th-century hero who piloted Paris wisely and well. As the city's commerce secretary, he gained some independence for the tradesmen of Paris, despite royal opposition. In 1882, a competition opened for a commemorative statue. Elected city officials wanted a tribute to the defender of municipal rights as a reminder of the capital's contributions to the birth of new institutions.

The statue was meant to symbolize both Paris and the Republic. But plans for the statue stirred heated debate. Some city officials wanted a standing figure, a powerful orator, rather than an equestrian composition given the royal or military undertones that such a choice might convey. Others argued that city hall's south garden offered a more handsome position for displaying an equestrian composition of Provost Marcel than the main façade.

The commission had been awarded to the Toulouse-born sculptor Idrac. When he died at 35, Marqueste finished it. The piece has balanced proportions and the mixture of expressive power and natural truth associated with great Italian Renaissance models. As you take a moment to study it, you may sense the artists' drive for rigorous archaeological reconstitution, bowing to the dictates of taste.



>>> (1st) >>> Louvre, façade over the colonnade

3 Glory Handing Out Crowns

In 1807, architects Percier and Fontaine commissioned sculptor Pierre Cartellier to decorate the wall over the central arcade of the colonnade beneath the pediment carved by Lemot. In the centre of the composition, Glory stands on her chariot, wings spread symmetrically. Two small geniuses hold the reins of two rearing horses trampling war trophies. The barely realistic bas-relief (the horses gallop backwards) is inspired by a theme from antiquity, often reproduced on medals, cameos, and bronze work. Delicately carved in shallow relief, it is perfectly suited to its purpose as a decorative medallion.



>>> (1st) >>> Louvre, Cour Napoléon

4 Louis XIV

In 1667, Colbert asked Gianlorenzo Bernini, the most famous sculptor and architect of the day, to carve a marble statue for the main courtyard at the chateau in Versailles. But the exaggerations of baroque style didn't appeal to King Louis XIV. François Girardon reworked the composition to represent Martius Curtius, a hero of Roman antiquity, by adding a helmet and flames beneath the horse's belly. The piece was finally relegated to the gardens, behind the Pièce d'Eau des Suisses.

Despite Girardon's modifications, the heroic thrust and fervour of Bernini's original design is undiminished.

What we see here is a replica placed in the Cour Napoléon in 1988 as a graphic demonstration of Bernini's plans for the Louvre's façades.



>>> (1st) >>> Carrousel du Louvre

5 Genius of the Arts

The career of another 19th-century Toulouse native, Antonin Mercié, got a boost when he was hired to carve this allegorical figure to replace an equestrian statue glorifying Napoleon III removed after France's disgrace at the Battle of Sedan in 1870.

You must admit the monument is a dynamic piece of neo-baroque. Preceded by Fame turning toward him, the *Genius of the Arts* dismounts a rearing Pegasus pawing the sky. The animal's burst of energy is a haunting echo of *the Chevaux de Marly*, galloping and bucking in the air with a racing exuberance, peppering up cityscapes from the Opera Garnier to the Pont Alexandre III and the Grand Palais.



>>> (1st) >>> Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel

6 Peace Riding in a Triumphal Chariot

The Arc du Carrousel is a lesser arch of triumph commemorating Napoleon's "Grande Armée".

From 1806 to 1809, it graced the entrance to the Tuileries Palace, then the emperor's official residence. Designed by architects Percier and Fontaine, inspired by Rome's Septimius Severus triumphal arch, this one was abundantly ornamented with bas-reliefs by Vivant Denon depicting Bonaparte's campaigns.

The Carrousel was crowned by the Ancient Greek bronze *Horses of Saint Mark*, which were shipped from Byzantium (later to be known as Constantinople, and later still as Istanbul) to St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, in the 13th century. There, they caught Bonaparte's fancy in 1804. They were returned to Venice after Waterloo (1815). Bosio was commissioned to carve a new triumphant chariot driven by Peace flanked by winged Victories. He carried it out with classical rigor, faithful in every way to the ancient model. The statue *Louis XIV* on Place des Victoires depicting the king in imperial Roman attire, astride a rearing horse is also Bosio's work.



>>> (1st) >>> Place des Pyramides

7 Jeanne d'Arc

In 1872, Frémiet received a commission to create a life-sized equestrian Joan of Arc to stand on Place des Pyramides, near the very site where the young heroine was wounded in 1429.

The statue was sharply criticized immediately upon its unveiling in 1874. The public was disconcerted by the artist's realism: a frail damsel dressed in men's armour rides off to war on a frumpy farm horse. Words like

«clumsy» and «gauche» were flung. Frémiet, who had been trained in exact portraiture of both human and animal anatomy, sought to obey historical truth, contrary as it was to artistic conventions.



>>> (8th) >>> Place de la Concorde

8 The Chevaux de Marly

In 1719, the equestrian compositions of Mercury and of Fame, symbols of war and peace carved by Coysevox in 1702 for the drinking trough in Marly, were transferred to the Tuileries Gardens. By 1746, Guillaume Coustou was awarded the commission for two large-scale groups to grace the fountain in their stead. These equines were moved to Paris as ornaments for the entrance to the Champs-Élysées by the Revolutionary Government of 1794.

Taking the ancient example of the rearing horse, Coustou eschewed any mythological or allegorical connotation, favouring instead the ordinary human act of grooms restraining their horses. The tension, thrust and energy in the figures and the epic spirit conjured up by the composition are testaments to the appeal of the baroque in the Paris of the mid-1700s.

The original groups, now on display in the Louvre, were replaced by copies in 1984.



>>> (8th) >>> Cours la Reine

9 Albert I

Portraits of contemporary warriors on horseback paradoxically reappeared in the 1930s, just when horses had become obsolete on the battlefields of Europe. Two 1934 statues to foreign kings (this one of Albert Ist of Belgium and the double tribute to Alexander Ist of Yugoslavia and Peter Ist of Serbia on Place de Colombie in Paris) were inspired by World War I recollections. The king of Belgium joined the allied troops when he refused to allow the German army to march through his country. When he died in an accident in 1934, the French were greatly saddened and wished to honour him. A subscription for an equestrian portrait was launched and the commission was given to sculptor Armand Martial.



>>> (8th) >>> Cours la Reine

10 Simón Bolívar

This memorial to Simón Bolívar was a gift to the city of Paris from the sister republics of Latin America for the 1930 centennial memorial to the *Libertador*. In fact, it is the fourth cast of Emmanuel Frémiet's equestrian statue, ordered in 1900 for the city of Bogota, Colombia. Copies of it also stand in Baranquilla,

Colombia and the other in La Paz, Bolivia. Astride their steeds, statesmen, conquerors and defenders of freedom dot Cours la Reine, with Albert Ist on the eastern side and General La Fayette on the western one.



>>> (8th) >>> Grand Palais, corner of Cours la Reine

11 Harmony Triumphant over Discord

>>> (8th) >>> Grand Palais, corner of Champs-Élysées

Immortality Outrunning Time

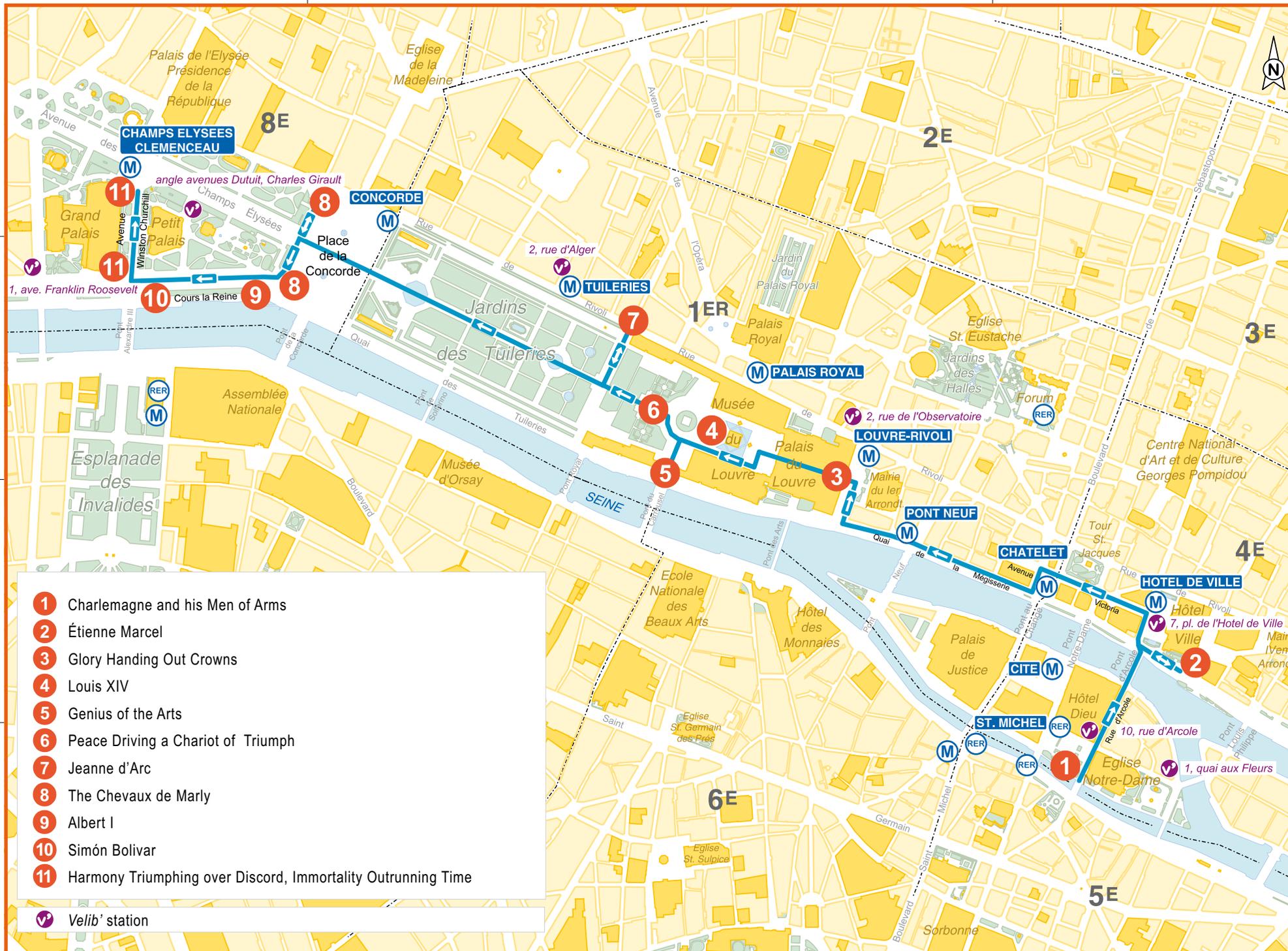
Created in the excitement and festivities for the 1900 Universal Exposition, the Grand Palais quadrigae, by sculptor Georges Récipon, represent the high tide of the neo-baroque wave that swept French sculpture. The horses are so lively, they seem to be about to leap off the façade.

The audacity in these compositions contrasts sharply with the broad, flat façade below. These snorting, stamping chargers suggest the ideal of triumphant progress, the theme of the Exposition. Technical and artistic feats of their time, the quadrigae are in repoussé copper, mounted on a metal armature anchored in the masonry, and decorated with ceramic pieces (the spokes of the chariot wheels and the winged lions to the rear).

ALL THE STROLLS ARE AVAILABLE ON THE SITE:

www.culture.paris.fr

The Direction des Affaires Culturelles de la Ville de Paris supervises the maintenance of over 600 statues and commemorative monuments. Most of these works of art date from the late 19th century, the early years of the Third Republic of France. They are the product of an active municipal policy to decorate the capital's squares and streets. Some are masterpieces of French sculpture, like Carpeaux's *La Fontaine des quatre parties du monde* and Dalou's *Le Triomphe de la République*. The 20th century has been less productive in this domain. But over the past twenty years, the City of Paris has revived the policy of ordering sculpture for public spaces. In 2004, the Comité de l'Art dans la Ville was set up. This committee is composed of art experts and elected officials who, between the years 2004 and 2008, coordinated 35 orders commissioned by the city for permanent and temporary works for public display. Here are a few examples you may wish to scout out in Paris: Wang Du's *Tour d'exercice* displayed in the 17th arrondissement, Chen Zhen's *Danse de la fontaine émergente* in the 13th, and the Berlin artist group Inges Idee's *Forêt de candélabres* in the 19th.



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