

LOUVRE MUSEUM PAINTINGS



Nicolae Sfetcu

Louvre Museum - Paintings

Nicolae Sfetcu

Published by: Nicolae Sfetcu

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BOOK PREVIEW

NICOLAE SFETCU: LOUVRE MUSEUM - PAINTINGS

Published by MultiMedia Publishing, <https://www.telework.ro/en/publishing/>
ISBN: 978-606-9016-16-9, DOI: 10.58679/TW15606

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Source: "Louvre Museum" (Pierre Laffite, 1913), Vol. 1 and 2, by Armand Dayot (1851-1934), translated by Nicolae Sfetcu

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Back cover: View of the Grand Salon Carré in the Louvre (detail), by Giuseppe Castiglione (1829–1908)

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Louvre Museum

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City: Paris

Address: 99, rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris

Coordinates: 48°51'40" north, 2°20'09" east

Date of opening: August 10, 1793

Collections: Oriental Antiquities, Egyptian Antiquities, Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities of the Louvre, Islamic Art, Sculptures, Objets d'art, Paintings, Graphic Arts

Number of works: 38,000 in exhibition, 554,498 in total (including 225,000 graphic works)

Area: 210,000 m² including 60,600 m² of galleries

Website: www.louvre.fr

The Louvre Museum is a museum of art and antiquities located in the center of Paris in the Louvre. It is the largest of the world's art museums by its exhibition surface of 72,735 m². Its collections include nearly 460,000 works. These represent the Western art of the Middle Ages in 1848, those of the ancient civilizations that preceded and influenced it (Oriental, Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan and Roman), and the arts of early Christians and Islam. The museum has 2,100 employees (civil servants, contractors and temporary staff), including 1,200 security guards, a guard for each of the 403 showrooms, which are complemented by the staff assigned to the 900 cameras in the remote monitoring system.

Located in the 1st arrondissement of Paris, between the right bank of the Seine and the Rue de Rivoli, the museum is marked by the glass pyramid of its reception hall, erected in 1989 in the cour Napoleon and which has become emblematic; while the equestrian statue of Louis XIV is the starting point of the historical axis of Paris. With approximately nine million annual visitors (since 2011), the Louvre is the most visited museum in the world, and the most visited paying cultural site in France. Among his most famous pieces are the *Mona Lisa*, the *Venus of Milo*, *The Crouching Scribe*, *The Victory of Samothrace* and the *Code of Hammurabi*.

The Louvre has a long history of artistic and historical conservation, from the Ancien Régime to the present day. Following the departure of Louis XIV for the Château de Versailles at the end of the 17th century, a part of the royal collections of paintings and antique sculptures was stored there. After having lodged several academies during a century, including that of painting and sculpture, as well as various artists housed by the king, the former royal palace was truly transformed during the Revolution into a "Central Museum of the Arts of the Republic". It opens in 1793 by exhibiting about 660 works, mainly from royal collections or confiscated from emigrated nobles or churches. Subsequently, the collections continued to be enriched by war-taking, acquisitions, patronage, legacies, donations, and archaeological discoveries.

Variety of exhibited works

A universalist museum, the Louvre covers a wide chronology and geographical area, from antiquity to 1848 and from western Europe to Iran via Greece, Egypt and the Middle East. It consists of eight departments which, including the depots in other museums, include 554,498 works on October 4, 2014, of which 38,000 are exhibited on 60,600 m²: Egyptian Antiquities (66,300), Oriental Antiquities (137,628), Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities (68,362), Islamic Arts (15,311), Paintings (12,660), Sculptures (6,115), Art objects (23,405) and Graphic Arts (122,212) from the Rothschild collection (86,858) and chalcography (14,647). Almost all exhibited works, including some of the new acquisitions, are available online on the Atlas base and from 2016 all collections are integrated into the new MuseumPlus base.

The works of the museum are varied in nature: paintings, sculptures, drawings, ceramics, archeological objects, art objects of various materials among others. Among the most famous pieces of the museum are the *Hammurabi Code*, the *Venus de Milo*, the *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Liberty Guiding the People* by Eugene Delacroix or the *Victory of Samothrace* restored in 2014.

In Paris, several national museums are complementary to the collections of the Louvre.

The Royal Palace

At the origin of the Louvre existed a castle, built by King Philip Augustus in 1190, and occupying the southwest quarter of the current Cour Carrée. The plan of the fortress consisted of a quadrilateral about 70 to 80 meters long, surrounded by ditches, flanked by towers and with two entrances, in the middle of which was a mighty keep, the large tower of the Louvre, on which depended all fiefs of France. One of its main missions was the surveillance of the downstream part of the Seine, one of the traditional routes used during the invasions and raids since the time of the Vikings. With the transfer of the goods of the Order of the Temple to the order of the Hospital, the royal treasure previously preserved at the House of the Temple of Paris is transported in 1317 to the Louvre. Charles V made the castle a royal residence.

The Grand Tower became obsolete and was destroyed by Francis I in 1528. In 1546, the king began the transformation of the fortress into a luxurious residence by having the western part of the medieval walls removed and replaced by a Renaissance wing erected by Pierre Lescot. These works continued under the reign of Henry II and Charles IX. The southern part of the "old Louvre" was demolished to leave room for a Renaissance wing.

In 1594, Henri IV decided to unite the palace of the Louvre with the palace of the Tuileries built by Catherine de Medicis: it is the "Grand Dessein", the first stage of which is the Grande galerie which joins the pavilion of Lesdiguières (in honor of Francois de Bonne, Baron de Champsaur, last constable of France and first duke of Lesdiguières) in the pavilion of La Trémoille (in honor of Henri de La Trémoille (1598-1674), Mestre de camp of the light cavalry of France).

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The Cour Carrée was built by the architects Lemercier and then Le Vau, under the reign of Louis XIII and Louis XIV, quadrupling the size of the old Renaissance court (thus requiring the demolition of the rest of the medieval enclosure). The decoration and layout of the palace were then directed by painters like Poussin, Romanelli and Le Brun. But all this was abruptly interrupted when Louis XIV chose Versailles as the center of power and royal residence in 1678. The Louvre remained for a long time as it was. It was only in the 18th century that new projects, led by Gabriel and Soufflot, continued and completed the "Grand Design". One of these new projects is to transform the Louvre into a museum. It was born under Louis XV but would only really come to fruition with the Revolution.



(Public domain (Pixabay))

Louvre Museum includes various rich collections of works of art from different civilizations, cultures and eras. It includes about 460,000 pieces, without the deposits in other museums that remain on its inventories, and 554,498 with deposits, including about 225,000 graphic works (237,559 worksheets for albums, as of January 1, 2016) and 38,000 exhibited works. For reasons of conservation, it is impossible to show the drawings for more than three consecutive months. The rest of the collections are made up of secondary works or archaeological series.

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Painting

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(French Romantic art, Liberty Leading the People, Delacroix, 1830)

Painting is a branch of plastic arts that represents a possible reality in two-dimensional artistic images created with the colors applied on a surface (cloth, paper, wood, glass, etc.). The goal is to get a composition with shapes, colors, textures and drawings that give birth to a work of art in accordance with aesthetic principles.

Much of the painting of Western and Oriental art is dominated by religious motives; examples of this type of painting are biblical scenes taken from the walls of the catacombs and the inner ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and in Oriental art there are the scenes from Buddha's life or the paintings of the Egyptian pharaohs' tombs representing the shift to immortality.

André Félibien, an architect and theorist of classicism, showed a hierarchy of genres of classical painting, these being "history, portrait, landscape, seas, flowers and fruits."

Painting is one of the oldest human artistic expressions. As for the aesthetics or the theory of modern art of painting, it is considered a universal category that includes all artistic creations made on surfaces.

Definitions

As has been said above, painting is a branch of plastic arts that interprets reality in two-dimensional images. The word "painting" may also mean:

- an artistic work performed by a painter; the ensemble of plastic works that define the personality of a painter; the ensemble of works, styles and procedures specific to painters from a country, from an epoch, from a school, etc.;
- in the literature, a suggestive description of the physical and figure character, of scenes of real life and nature.

Painting genres

The landscape

Since the end of the sixteenth century, when artists began to experience it as a self-contained genre, the landscape quickly evolved into their preferences, becoming their favorite expression in a short time.

This option was made possible by the openness that such an image offers to the artist and to the receiver, not only on the epic or pictorial level, but also the emotional one. That's why, for almost half a millennium, it has been - and the subject is still far from exhausted - one of the most fascinating and complex adventures of the universal artistic phenomenon.

In the last decades, due to the new attempts of visual expressions (media, performance, happening, etc.) there is an attempt to marginalize all "classical" art forms, implicitly of the landscape, especially by the young creators who believe them desquamate, and in contradiction with what they consider performance. It is an excessive vision which, although natural to age, and especially to the moment of crisis that art has been going through for a long time, finds no support in reality at the level of artists, and even less so by the art consumer.



(Titian, La Vierge au Lapin à la Loupe (The Virgin of the Rabbit), 1530, Louvre, Paris. Idealized Italianate landscape background)

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Paintings

Translated by Nicolae Sfetcu from the book "Louvre Museum" (Pierre Laffite, 1913), Vol. 1 and 2, by Armand Dayot (1851-1934)

FRANCOIS BOUCHER

Vulcan presenting arms to Venus for Aeneas

Sully - 2nd floor - Painters of Louis XV (King of France from 1715 to 1774) - Room 38



BOUCHER, affirms *Nécrologe* of 1771, "possessed to a greater degree all the great parts of the art of painting, and could have tried and distinguished himself in all genres; but, born sensitive, lovable, and voluptuous, he was almost always carried away to the Graces, of which he was generally appealed the painter." Sensible, amiable, and voluptuous: in these three terms is summed up the physiognomy of the eighteenth century, with its spiritual elegance and his refined slavery; in these three words also encloses all the art of Boucher, painter of gallant festivals and graceful mythologies. His personal conceptions adapted marvelously to the taste of the time. He was to succeed in a brilliant and libertine court, of which Madame de Pompadour was the queen; he soon became the official painter. As a good courtier as well as a skilful artist, he employed the best of his talent in celebrating Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, a delicate homage to the royal favorite, her protector, supreme sovereign in the sumptuous Olympus of Versailles. By natural taste, he likes to play light on the pink and pearly flesh of women; his entire work is a permanent hymn to youth, beauty and love.

Among these allegorical paintings, the one we give here is one of the most beautiful. To the right of the picture, Vulcan, seated on a tiger's skin, tends to the goddess the weapons he has just forged. Carried on a cloud and leaning on one of her nymphs, half-naked Venus examines them negligently. His nonchalantly stretched body is a marvel of easy grace and indolent beauty. In the foreground, one sees the chariot of the divinity, harnessed with doves. On the front of the canvas, a Love braids garlands of roses. In the sky bathed in a diaphanous light, other Loves continue playing.

If he obtained the unanimous votes of his contemporaries, Boucher's art experienced the rigors of posterity. From the exaggerated enthusiasm to absolute contempt, without transition. He was reproached with the softness of his drawing, the incorrectness of his anatomies, the conventional of his painting. In spite of the truth contained in these criticisms, we must admit that we are very wrong placed today to judge Boucher, who was especially, and above all, a decorator. To establish a fair judgment, one should see his works in the frame for which they had been painted, carved panels with garlands, worked and precious trills, gilded tympan and festooned with arabesques; all their aesthetic significance and all their harmony are at once found. Stripped of this necessary support, the paintings of Boucher resembled diamonds that would have been loosened from their alveolus of goldsmithery.

"His work is prodigious in its lightness, prodigious by the fecundity of the effort it represents, and prodigious also by the ease of expression which is discovered there, and, it must be said, Who persist in penetrating the mystery of nature only in those whose faculty of observation stops at the surface of things. And such was the incredible facility, which formed the basis of the talent of Boucher, who treated with the same assurance, if not with the same happiness, all the subjects, from the subjects of sanctity to the most undressed grivoiseries, caressing with equal ease of brush the sails of the Virgin in his paintings of Nativity, and the pearly splendours of Miss Murphy voluptuously lying amid the draped draperies of the alcove." (Armand Dayot.)

What we can not dispute to Boucher without injustice is the harmonious beauty of his composition, the incomparable fluidity of his color, the clarity of his atmospheres, and above

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all his perfect elegance, a little mannered but exquisite, where the spirit and taste of the Regency and of the reign of Louis XV are materialized, somehow, in our eyes.

David knew it well, he who had worked more than any other to react against this art. One day when he heard some of his pupils mocking the painter of the Bergeries and the Boudoirs, he went up to them, very angry, and shouted to them: "Boucher is not willing!"

We may believe David; he was a good judge. Boucher remained inimitable in a genre he created and of which no painter after him could find the secret. His pupils endeavored to continue it, and did not succeed. Under their pencil the skill of the master became a process, his grace an affection, his gallant turn of insipidity.

We have now recovered from the injustice which Boucher's art has long suffered. Without classifying him to the rank of the great masters, he is acknowledged as a delicate and charming painter, sometimes incorrect but never banal, whose works are always looked at with pleasure and interest, because they are elegant, spiritual, brilliant as the society of which they reflect tastes, qualities and defects.

Vulcan presenting arms to Venus for Aeneas was exposed at the Salon of 1757. He obtained a great success. It was acquired by King Louis XV to be reproduced in tapestry by the royal manufacture of the Gobelins. Later, he moved from the Garde-Meuble to the Musée du Louvre, which he never left. It can now be seen in the 18th century hall.

Height: 3.20. — Width: 3.20. — *Natural size figure.*

RAPHAEL

Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione

Denon wing - 1st floor - Grande Galerie - Room 8



Only a few months ago, this magnificent portrait of Raphael was still, in the Salon Carré, near the famous Mona Lisa of Vinci, recently been carried away from the admiration of the world by a criminal hand. Side by side, the two paintings radiated an incomparable splendor in this illustrious room, in this Saint of the Saints of Art, which nevertheless contains only masterpieces. At the place vacated by Mona Lisa - and that she will no longer be able to take

it back - Balthazar Castiglione throne today, and her delicate smile as a diplomat succeeds to the troubling enigma of the eyes and lips of the Mona Lisa.

To contemplate the impeccable perfection of this portrait, we can guess that Raphael put all his soul into executing it. Castiglione was, in fact, his most dear friend and most reliable adviser. It was to him that the great artist wrote: "I will tell you that to paint a feminine beauty I need to have you with me to choose the most beautiful."

Castiglione deserved this honor. Nature had adorned him with the most brilliant gifts. His exterior was seductive, his face pleasant, his manners affable and courteous. He loved the arts with passion, understood and encouraged them. Of remarkable knowledge and intelligence, at once a soldier and a scholar, he wielded the sword like a Sforza and the pen like Machiavelli. Just as the latter wrote the Prince's Book, Castiglione left to the world this immortal monument of the spirit of the Renaissance: the Book of the Courtier. From the courtier he was himself the accomplished type, without baseness as without effort, by the suppleness of his mind and the sincerity of his attachment to his princes. He first waged war in the army of the Duke of Urbino and then served him as a diplomat. Then he went successively to the service of Pope Clement VII and of the Emperor Charles V. Leo X. made him a cardinal. Charles V gave him the title of Bishop of Avila. Soldier, literary, diplomat, bishop, cardinal, Castiglione, with his multiple qualities, realizes the most complete and brilliant personification of the great cultivated lord of the Italian Renaissance.

He was always very attached to Raphael, whom he had known very young, and whose genius he had guessed. Very much in favor with the princes and the papal court, he helped to facilitate his beginnings. It was due to his influence that the young painter received his first orders. Raphael was not ungrateful. Becoming rich and reaching the height of glory, he never ceases to see a benefactor in this patrician who poses only as a friend. He knows, moreover, what science, what a sure taste, what height of mind is concealed under the elegant exterior of the great lord. When he is embarrassed at any point of history or if he hesitates in the composition of a group or ensemble, he appeals to the judgment of Balthazar Castiglione. When Julius II entrusted Raphael with the decoration of his apartments in the Vatican, the rude pontiff decreed the destruction of the previously painted frescoes, some of which were signed by the great names of Perugino and Sodoma. Desolated from this profanation, Raphael opened himself to Castiglione, who encouraged him to resist to the designs of the pope. With this support, the painter presented himself before Julius II, wiped his anger, but succeeded in saving the threatened works. Raphael, in charge of painting allegorical figures in the Chamber of Signature, was little cultivated in spite of his powers of assimilation. He found a guide always ready, a council always authorized by Balthazar Castiglione, and orderly harmony, the unity of conception in the infinite variety of motifs, indicate the important documentary contribution that Castiglione provided to the painter.

Such is portrayed in history, as we see in the portrait of the Louvre. The sharp and penetrating eyes speak of intelligence, the thin lips of finesse; Raphael, whose friendship led the brush, was able to embellish the character of an aristocratic distinction. The whole picture is in a gray, attenuated tone, unusual for painters of that period, and which will be

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found only a century later in another artist of genius, Velazquez. Everything harmonizes admirably in this painting, the garment, the face, the bottom itself, as if the whole bathed in a uniform light, very soft and sifted by a screen.

This manner, of which Raphael himself used very rarely, demonstrates the prodigious flexibility of his art, which was adapted to all genres and was transformed completely according to the subject to be treated, in turn amiable or grandiose, full of sweetness or power, and always equal by genius.

This work is one of the last of Raphael. He painted it in 1517, three years before his death.

After the death of Castiglione, the picture passed to the Duke of Mantua, from which Charles I of England bought it. It is later found in the collection of a Dutch amateur, Van Asselin, from where Rembrandt and Rubens copied it. At the time when Mazarin acquired it, this portrait was estimated at 3,000 francs. At the death of the cardinal-minister, he entered, thanks to Louis XIV, into the national domain. Originally painted on wood, it was transported on canvas.

Height: 0.67 - Width: 0.62 - *Half-length figure, natural size.*

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The Department of Paintings currently has about 7,500 paintings (of which 3,400 are exposed), covering a period that goes from the Middle Ages to 1848 (date of the beginning of the Second Republic). By including the deposits, the collection is, with 12,660 works, the largest collection of ancient paintings in the world. With rare exceptions, the works after 1848 were transferred to the Musée d'Orsay when it was created in 1986.

MultiMedia Publishing: <https://www.telework.ro/en/e-books/louvre-museum-paintings/>
- e-Book: EPUB (ISBN 978-606-9016-14-5), Kindle (ISBN 978-606-9016-16-9), PDF (ISBN 978-606-9016-15-2)

DOI: 10.58679/TW15606

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