



PRESS RELEASE

September 2018

BIRTH OF GOTHIC SCULPTURE. SAINT-DENIS, PARIS, CHARTRES. 1135-1150

10 October 2018 - 21 January 2019

No longer truly Romanesque, without yet being fully Gothic, the style that developed in Île-de-France and beyond between 1135 and 1150 is something of a puzzle. Grasping the imperceptible wind of change and following the tracks of the notebooks of designs that circulated between one construction site and another: this was the challenge of presenting “Birth of Gothic Sculpture. Saint-Denis, Paris, Chartres. 1135-1150”, an exhibition at Musée de Cluny - National Museum of the Middle Ages, from 10 October to 21 January 2019.

Although Romanesque art continued to dominate in this period throughout most of Europe, in Île-de-France its supremacy was threatened during the 1140s. The construction sites at Saint-Denis, Paris and Chartres formed the cradle of a growing art that combined innovations as technical as they were stylistic and iconographic. Through emulation between builders, sculptors and sponsors, the first expression of Gothic sculpture was born, developed in the wake of a changing architectural style.

Although we owe the invention of portals with column statues to sculptors working on the abbey church of Saint-Denis, it was at Chartres cathedral that this model really flourished, before adopting its most enduring expression, again at Saint-Denis, in the Valois portal. In the rivalry between these seats of power, the formation and propagation of new aesthetics played out in a complex intertwining of borrowings and departures. This new art found its origins in a quest for expressiveness which was achieved by the assertion of a style inspired by classical antiquity and marked by the art of the Meuse Valley around 1150. Bodies come to life, become flesh, start to move and become recognisable through the staging of the subjects

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Fonds National From the engraved columns of the façade at Saint-Denis to the great bible, perhaps commissioned by Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis from the Chartrian illuminators, the relationship is obvious and points us in the direction of long-lost notebooks of designs. By bringing together sculptures, illuminations and stained glass panels, the exhibition shows their common sources of inspiration. More than just a simple juxtaposition of various items, visitors will witness the birth of a hybrid and fascinating art.

Enriched by the scientific contributions of the extensive restoration works conducted over recent years, starting with the Western façade of Saint-Denis, the exhibition sheds new light on the earliest days of Gothic art and the explosion of its intricate carving. We are also lucky enough to have on exclusive loan a set of column statues of monumental size removed from the Royal portal of Chartres Cathedral, provided by DRAC Centre-Val de Loire.

The exhibition organizers, Damien Berné and Philippe Plagnieux, have succeeded in assembling 130 works of art. As well as the reference collections of the Musée de Cluny and the Louvre, brought together for the occasion, numerous sculptures have been gathered from museums across France and overseas, including from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, as well as from archaeological archives including the Saint-Denis Archaeological Unit and from various cathedrals.

Press contact

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Practical information

Museum entrance

28 Rue Du Sommerard
75005 Paris

Opening hours:

Every day except Tuesday,
from 9:15 am to 5:45 pm.
Final admissions at 5:15 pm.
Closed 1st January, 1st May
and 25th December.

Bookshop/Shop

9:15 am to 6 pm, free access
T. + 33 (0) 1 53 73 78 22

Getting to the museum:

Métro Cluny-La-Sorbonne /Saint-
Michel / Odéon
Bus n° 21 - 27 - 38 - 63 - 85 - 86 - 87
RER B and C line, stop at Saint-Michel
- Notre-Dame station

Rates

€9, reduced rate: €7 (RMN
exhibitions)
Free for visitors under 26 years of age
(EU nationals and holders of a long-
stay visa) and for everyone the first
Sunday of each month.

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