



MUSÉE DE CLUNY

PRESS RELEASE

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MAGICAL UNICORNS

14 July 2018 - 25 February 2019

The mysterious, ambivalent unicorn has throughout history engendered myriad myths and fantasies. In the 1500's as well as in the contemporary period, it has been the subject of a veritable infatuation. From 14 July 2018 to 25 February 2019, the "Magical Unicorns" exhibition at the Musée de Cluny - National Museum of the Middle Ages illustrates the manner in which artists have represented this legendary creature via illuminated manuscripts and engraved works, sculptures and tapestries, as well as photographs and videos.

The museum's most famous masterpiece, the set of six tapestries entitled *The Lady and the Unicorn*, constitutes the exhibition's point of departure. Woven around 1500, during the transitional period between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, these works testify to the importance of the unicorn during the medieval period. A "magical" animal with a horn that could detect poisons and purify liquids, it also symbolized chastity and innocence. Indeed, several illuminated manuscripts evoke the traditional belief that unicorns could only be approached by virgin maidens. Yet other works represent the unicorn as powerful, aggressive or even malevolent, influenced notably by tales of travellers who claimed to have glimpsed it in the Orient. In the late Middle Ages, towns, powerful lords and printers placed the unicorn within their coats of arms, emblems or brands, undoubtedly to testify to their magnificence.

In 1882, when the Musée de Cluny acquired *The Lady and the Unicorn*, this tapestry became an inexhaustible source of inspiration. The work's beautiful feminine figures, the mystery surrounding its creation and the persistent presence of vegetation and familiar, wild or fantastical animals all captured its admirers' attention. Diverse artists, such as Gustave Moreau and Le Corbusier, borrowed from this medieval hanging that also inspired a ballet by Jean Cocteau, whose costumes are here displayed. In the most contemporary works, unicorn references are occasionally humorous - notably in the poster design by Tomi Ungerer - or melancholic, as in the video by Maider Fortuné. The exhibition is capped off by a final tribute to *The Lady and the Unicorn* in the form of five tapestries by Claude Rutault.

The "Magical Unicorns" exhibition is curated by Béatrice de Chancel-Bardelot, General Curator at the Musée de Cluny. Further complementing *The Lady and the Unicorn*, which has returned to its Parisian home after being loaned to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the exhibition presents other medieval and contemporary works shared by such prestigious institutions as the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Cité Internationale de la Tapisserie - Aubusson, the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain and the Mobilier national.

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#MagiquesLicornes

To discover at the Musée de Cluny - National Museum of the Middle Ages, from 14 July 2018 to 25 February 2019.

Complementing the exhibition :

- A game booklet for children will be available at the museum and on our website.
- Various activities will be held starting in September, including family tours, storytelling visits and workshops. As regularly scheduled, on Wednesdays at 2: 30 PM and during the school holidays. More information on our website.
- Republication of “Les secrets de la licorne” by Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye and Michel Pastoureau, French paperback + English version. €14,50. Published by RMN-GP.
- A new album : “La dame à la licorne”, with texts by Elisabeth Taburet-Delahaye and Béatrice de Chancel Bardelot, 114 pages. €19.90. Published by RMN-GP.

Other news for the Musée de Cluny – National Museum of the Middle Ages

Opening of the new reception building

Starting 14 July 2018, the Musée de Cluny welcomes visitors within its new building conveniently located next to Boulevard Saint-Michel. Designed by Bernard Desmoulin, it lends greater visibility to the institution, while also making it easily accessible to disabled visitors. This inauguration represents a high point of the museum’s vast renovation project, to be completed in 2020 with the renewal of the collection tours.

Exhibition: “Birth of Gothic sculpture – Saint-Denis, Paris & Chartres, 1135-1150” 10 October – 31 December 2018

While a new art of building was supplanting Romanesque architecture, its associated sculptural style was spreading throughout the Île-de-France region, between around 1135 and 1150. This early Gothic sculpture was not limited to the emblematic portals adorned with column-statues, as new models circulated and new forms of expression were explored. An unprecedented virtuosity in the cutting and carving of stone allowed for infinite variations on ornamental themes shared with illuminations and stained-glass windows, wonderfully illustrating refined detail work, a sense for narration and a marked taste for the monumental. This represented a clear break from the earlier Romanesque traditions of the Paris region. Thanks to this exceptional assembly of column-statues from the Chartres Royal Portal and vestiges of those from the western portals of the Suger Abbey in Saint-Denis, as well as other sculptural testimonials of this period’s abundant experimentation and inspiration (the Sainte-Anne Portal of Notre-Dame de Paris, the Saint-Denis Cloister, etc.), visitors will be able to observe – some nine centuries later – the birth of a whole new artform.

Curators: Damien Berné, Heritage Curator at the Musée de Cluny, and Philippe Plagnieux, Professor of Medieval Art History (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne & École Nationale des Chartes). In partnership with RMN-GP.

Press contact

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Practical information

Museum entrance

28 Rue Du Sommerard
75005 Paris

Opening hours, starting 14 July 2018 :

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

€5, reduced-rate: €4
€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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