

Press kit



PETIT PALAIS
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VILLE DE PARIS

**JEAN-BAPTISTE
GREUZE**
L'ENFANCE EN LUMIÈRE

PARIS MUSÉES

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LE FIGARO
RADIO CLASSIQUE

Œuvre de Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1791), Musée de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Photo: M. L. / M. L. / M. L.

September 2025

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Press release

Jean-Baptiste Greuze *Childhood in the spotlight*

16 September 2025 - 25 January 2026



Jean Baptiste Greuze, *Jeune berger tenant un pissenlit* dit *Jeune berger qui tente le sort pour savoir s'il est aimé de sa bergère*, entre 1760 et 1761. Huile sur toile, 72,5 x 59,5 cm. Paris, Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris. CC0 Paris Musées / Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

The Petit Palais pays tribute to Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725 - 1805) on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of his birth. A painter of the soul, famous for his portraits and genre scenes, Greuze was one of the most important and daring figures of the 18th century. Although little known today, in his time, he was acclaimed by the public, courted by collectors, and adored by critics, Diderot in particular. The painter however, was also an utterly unique artist. A rebellious spirit, he never ceased to reaffirm his creative freedom and the possibility of rethinking painting outside of conventions.

This exhibition allows visitors to rediscover his work through the prism of the theme of childhood, through some one hundred paintings, on loan from some of the most important French and international collections, including the Musée du Louvre (Paris), Musée Fabre (Montpellier), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), Kimbell Museum of Art (Fort Worth), National Galleries of Scotland (Edinburgh), the Royal Collection (Britain), as well as numerous private collections.

Rarely has a painter depicted children as much as Greuze, in the form of portraits, expressive faces, or in genre scenes: at turns candid or naughty, mischievous or sulking, in love or cruel, focused or pensive, adrift in the world of adults, loved, ignored, punished, embraced, or abandoned. Like a recurring motif, they are everywhere, at times asleep in a mother's arms, at times lost in a melancholic reverie, or occasionally seized by the fear of an event beyond their control. This exhibition highlights them in seven different sections, from early childhood to the beginnings of adulthood.

The centrality of the theme of childhood in Greuze's painting can be said to reflect the key issues of the 18th century. The new status of childhood—now considered an age in its own right—the debates over breastfeeding versus the use of wet nurses, the child's place within the family, the importance of education in forging their personality, and the responsibility of the parents in their development were the concerns of educators and philosophers like Rousseau, Condorcet, and Diderot. These questions were on everyone's lips. Influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment, Greuze, through his brush and pencil, became their witness, interpreter, and even ardent defender.

Throughout his career, the artist explored the intimacy of the family, with empathy, sometimes with humour, often with a critical dimension. He enjoyed depicting the symbolic moments or rituals that punctuate family life, such as *The Giving of the Dowry* (Petit Palais), *The Kings' Cake* (Musée Fabre, Montpellier), and *The Bible Reading* (Musée du Louvre, Paris). But the domestic space was not always just a haven of peace. It was also, and often for Greuze, the scene of family disorder, the place of physical and psychological violence. Like life itself, beginning with that of the painter, which proved to be a succession of domestic misfortunes, complexity reigns in the families depicted by Greuze: the miserly father and the much maligned son, the loving father and the ungrateful son, the strict mother and the beloved child, the protective brother and the jealous sister...

Greuze, radically, dared to show the tragedy of death, which children also experienced. He questioned the transition into adulthood, the loss of innocence, the awakening to love, without disguising the appetites that the beauty of the flesh could arouse in lustful old men or young predators. Faced with this adult world, often cruel, petty, and mean, we see in Greuze's production a desire to return to the bosom of childhood, a time of purity and candour that is fragile, mysterious, and ephemeral, like the dandelion flower on which the *Young Shepherd* from the Petit Palais' Collection blows in order to know if his beloved feels the same way about him.

To guide visitors through the works by the master, the "Sharp eyes" symbol allows the public to linger over details, deciphering hidden meanings and allegories.

By drawing on the threads of childhood, but in light of the great debates that animated 18th-century Paris, with its political aspirations and dreams of transformation, the exhibition reveals a work of an unexpected originality and audacity.

CURATORS

Annick Lemoine, Chief Heritage Curator and Director of the Petit Palais

Yuriko Jackall, Department Head of European Art and the Elizabeth and Allan Sheldon Curator of European Painting, Detroit Institute of Arts

Mickaël Szanto, Associate Professor, Sorbonne Université

The exhibition

Section 1: Introduction



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Autoportrait*, vers 1760.
Huile sur bois, 65 x 51,5 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre.
© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Thierry Le Mage.

The Petit Palais pays tribute to Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of his birth. The painter, although little-known and frequently misunderstood today, was one of the most important and daring figures of the eighteenth century. In his lifetime, he was acclaimed by the public, adored by critics, and courted by the most important collectors.

At every Salon, Greuze was a triumph: his portraits and the genre scenes which became his speciality, were much admired. In his works, the figures of children are prevalent. Like a recurring motif, they are everywhere, at times asleep in a mother's arms, at times lost in a melancholic reverie, occasionally overcome by the fear of an event beyond their control. Examining the centrality of childhood in Greuze's work permits a better understanding of the scope of his oeuvre. Better than anyone else, the painter knew how to convey the psychological depth of children, as well as their universal value. Through his work, he expresses the crucial nature of education and the fundamental role of family in a child's development.

According to Greuze, a man of the Enlightenment open to the thinking of contemporary philosophers like Rousseau and Diderot, children played a key role in the advent of a new society based on knowledge, education, and culture. However, in Greuze's realistic paintings, the family was not only a haven of love and learning about the world. It could also be the scene of disorder, in which the intimate fused with the tragic. By highlighting the theme of childhood, and in view of the great debates that animated eighteenth-century Paris, this exhibition reveals an artistic production of unexpected originality and modernity.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait d'Anne-Gabrielle Babuty*, vers 1760.
Huile sur toile, 40,6 x 37,8 cm.
Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum.
Courtesy of the RISD Museum, Providence, RI.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Madame Greuze sur une chaise longue avec son chien*, vers 1759-1760.
Crayon graphite, pierre noire, plume, encre grise et noire, 34,3 x 46,8 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
© Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam;

SHARP EYES COURSE

Greuze is known for adding significant details to his works that shed light on their meaning. To learn more and to sharpen your observational skills, look for the “Focus” (eye) symbols throughout the exhibition.

GREUZE INTIME. THE GREUZE FAMILY. A HAPPY THEATRE. ACT I



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait d'Anne-Geneviève (dite Caroline) Greuze*, 1766. Huile sur toile, 41 x 33 cm. Collection particulière. © Collection particulière.

To an unprecedented degree, Greuze inflected his work with elements drawn directly from his personal life. At the Salon exhibitions of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, a key event in the contemporary Parisian art scene, the painter presented portraits of his close friends, as well as paintings of his wife, Anne-Gabrielle Babuty, whom he married in 1759, his father-in-law, François-Joachim Babuty, a wealthy bookseller on the rue Saint-Jacques, and his daughters Anne-Geneviève (known as Caroline) and Louise-Gabrielle. He even portrayed the beloved family pet, a small spaniel—one of the most fashionable breeds of the period—in the arms of his daughter.

To his marriage contract, dated 31 January 1759, the painter appended his elegant, imperious signature, in cursive lines, alongside that of his wife. Renowned for her beauty, Madame Greuze became his muse and model. The endearing faces of his daughters, rendered with a delicate touch, translate a father's tenderness for his children. Greuze was an accomplished artist both publicly and privately, but he was also notoriously strong-willed and extremely slow to compromise. If we are to believe the testimony of his contemporaries, his wife had a character as strong, if not stronger, than his own.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait de Louise Gabrielle Greuze*, 1766. Huile sur toile. New York, Collection particulière. © Collection particulière

Section 2: Childhood, painted from life



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait de Charles-Etienne de Bourgevin de Vialart, comte de Saint-Morys*, vers 1782-1784. Huile sur bois, 65 x 54 cm. Nantes, musée d'Arts de Nantes. © GrandPalaisRmn (musée d'Arts de Nantes) / Photo Gérard Blot.

From the very start of his career in Paris, Greuze was praised for his skill at capturing the human psyche, particularly through the figure of the child which was one of his specialities. Not only did he paint his own children, as well as those of close friends and patrons, but he also portrayed children who were apparently unknown to him. An attentive observer, he knew how to translate a dizzying range emotions, from gentle reverie to mischievousness, from melancholy to deep sadness.

Greuze always managed to capture the personalities of models, like the seriousness and gravity Charles Étienne de Bourgevin Vialart de Saint-Morys. Following in the footsteps of Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau, Greuze provided a new perspective on childhood. In his hands, this stage of life was no longer seen as an uninteresting or trivial, but a moment worthy of consideration in its own right.

Section 3: Loving, nurturing, educating



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Un enfant qui s'est endormi sur son livre, dit Le Petit paresseux*, 1755. Huile sur toile, 65 x 54,5 cm. Montpellier, musée Fabre. © Musée Fabre de Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole / Photo Frédéric Jaulmes

Figures of mothers, fathers, and wet nurses abound in Greuze's work. We see one woman breastfeeding her child, another returning the child she has nursed to his parents, and yet another gently scolding her little boy. These various subjects are not simple genre scenes. They reflect the artist's personal musings on the place of children in society and the crucial importance of their education.

In this, Greuze echoed the concerns that preoccupied educators and philosophers — Diderot, Rousseau, or Condorcet — at the time. That true laboratory of Enlightenment ideas, *the Encyclopaedia* of Diderot and d'Alembert (1751-1772), advocated for the ideal of parental love and its educational role. Although the practice of wetnursing was widespread in the eighteenth century, Greuze, like those philosophers opposed this practice, advocating instead for breastfeeding by mothers as the first stage of education. To refuse would be to break the bond of love that "forms the natural union of children and fathers and mothers". Paradoxically, Greuze resigned himself to sending his own daughters to wet nurses outside of Paris even as his work revealed the inner wounds of that separation.

Section 4: Family stories, intimate theatres

As a painter of childhood, Greuze explored intimate family ties with empathy, sometimes with humour, often with critical wit. The stories he tells, in the form of domestic comedies or dramas, are akin to theatres of emotion.

It is within the family that the destiny of humankind, its happiness and troubles, was played out. It is also there, according to Enlightenment thinkers and Greuze with them, that the renewal of society, as well as its ruin, was written. For these philosophers, the family represented the fundamental unit of the nation wherein collective values were learned. It contributed to the formation of the modern citizen, freed from prejudice and enlightened by knowledge.

The painter enjoyed depicting the symbolic moments or rituals that punctuate family life: the giving of the dowry to the fiancé, the kings' cake, or the reading of the Bible. However, the family space was not always a peaceful haven. It was also, and often for Greuze, the scene of disorder, the site of physical violence and psychological cruelty whose victims were children rather than adults.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Le Gâteau des rois*, 1774. Huile sur toile, 73 x 92 cm. Montpellier, musée Fabre.
© Musée Fabre de Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole / Photo Frédéric Jaumes

GREUZE INTIME. A FREE-SPIRITED PAINTER AND A TURBULENT COUPLE. ACT II



Jean Baptiste Greuze, *La Femme en colère*, vers 1785. Pinceau, lavis noir et gris, réhaussée de blanc, sur des traces de graphite, 52,1 x 64 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. © GrandPalaisRmn (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) / Image of the MMA

Crowned with professional success, Greuze was an audacious, free-spirited figure. He even dared make the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture wait thirteen long years before submitting his reception piece, a unique delay in the institution's history! In 1761, Greuze refused to paint a portrait of the Dauphine, the daughter-in-law of the king, on the pretext that he was not in the habit of painting "plastered faces" to cite the artist! His insulting words caused a scandal at court. The Dauphin's reaction, addressed to one of Greuze's chief supporters is famous: "You had given me to understand that this painter was a peculiar man, but you did not tell me he was mad."

Greuze, who gained strength from his fame and confidence from his talent, refused to submit to orders. His wife, Anne-Gabrielle Babuty, appeared to have had a character at least as strong as his own, and according to Diderot, the couple often argued: "I enjoy listening to him talking to his wife. It's like a parade where Punch dodges the blows with an art that makes the accomplice seem even more wicked."

Section 5: Greuze's engraved works: a tribute to childhood



Thérèse Éléonore Lingée, *Tête de jeune garçon*, 1777. D'après Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Manière de crayon, 51,3 x 40,2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan museum of Arts. © GrandPalaisRmn (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) / Photo Thierry Ollivier

Rarely was a painter reproduced in engravings during his lifetime as much as Greuze. The widespread distribution of his work, wherein the figure of the child was omnipresent, stems from a publishing strategy put in place by the painter and his wife, Anne-Gabrielle Babuty, in the 1760s, perhaps on the advice of their friend, the painter and engraver Jean Georges Wille. As the daughter of a bookseller familiar with the trade, Madame Greuze played a key role in Greuze's reproductive activity. The best engravers in Paris were sought out, as well as promising young talents.

Greuze typically provided his drawing to the engraver who covered the cost of producing the plate. Both, along with their respective wives, then shared equally the proceeds from the sale of the engravings. This activity seems to have been particularly lucrative: according to Greuze, it earned him some 300,000 pounds.

Section 6: The lessons of history. Fathers and sons

The figure of the father, as a counterpoint to that of the child, was also central to Greuze's work. It is precisely around the paternal image that the painter created his most ambitious compositions, whether theatrical or tragic. The father, although he was the figure of authority in the eighteenth century, was most often depicted in Greuze's work as weakened, sick, bedridden, even deceased. Representing this period of decline interested Greuze because it allowed him to use all the tropes of pathos to translate the sublime into painting, in other words, the highest form of expression in the order of Beauty.

However, in these moving scenes, in which horror combines with terror, the painter invites viewers to reflect on the role of the father in maintaining the harmony of the family. Greuze also holds the father accountable for familial imbalances, even its destruction. If the father, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, is depicted as virtuous in works such as *Filial Piety* (Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum), he is shown as the opposite in paintings such as *Septimius Severus and Caracalla* (Musée du Louvre). Here we see a malignant father who, through his neglect, has produced a monstrous son. In the counterpart to *The Ungrateful Son* and *The Punished Son* (Paris, Louvre museum), the father appears to be the victim of the son's contempt, but the fury expressed on his face at his son's unacceptable departure invites one to wonder if he himself does not bear some responsibility for his son's shortcomings.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, La Malédiction paternelle. *Le Fils ingrat*, 1777. Huile sur toile, 130 x 162 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre.
© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado

GREUZE INTIME. THE SCANDAL OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS AND CARACALLA. ACT III



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Septime Sévère reprochant à son fils Caracalla d'avoir voulu l'assassiner*, 1767-1769. Huile sur toile, 124 × 160 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre. © GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado

The presentation of Jean-Baptiste Greuze's reception piece at the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture on 23 August 1769, thirteen years late, corresponds to one of the most painful episodes in the painter's life. Against all expectations, the artist's chosen subject was not one of the domestic genre scenes that had contributed to his fame, but a story inspired by Roman antiquity: the Emperor Septimius Severus reproaching his son Caracalla for having attempted to assassinate him during the English campaigns. The painter depicts the moment when the emperor summons his son to confront him with the atrocity of his act: "If you wish to kill me, kill me here," he said, pointing to the sword lying on the table. Far from depicting the courage of a father indifferent to death, Greuze shows the emperor's flaws. For by refusing to condemn his criminal son, the emperor was responsible for the decadence of the Roman Empire.

Greuze's attempt to gain recognition as a history painter resulted in failure. The Académie agreed to receive him in its ranks, but only in his area of specialty, as a genre painter; Septimius Severus was considered to be "of the greatest mediocrity". With this judgement, the institution refused to acknowledge the painting's pioneering aesthetic: the carefully composed, austere canvas foreshadowed the neoclassical art of Jacques-Louis David, while its moralizing subject could be understood as a criticism against princes who put their personal interests over those of the nation. Humiliated, Greuze left the Académie for good; from then on, exhibited his paintings only in his own studio. Reading this, I realize that this is not true — he exhibited in the Salon de la Correspondance and elsewhere. Either we could end the sentence after 'for good' — and cut the corresponding phrase in the French text — or say: 'exhibited his paintings largely in his own studio'

Section 7: Lost innocence and broken destinies



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Jeune Fille à la colombe*, vers 1780. Huile sur bois, 64,4 × 53,3 cm. Douai, musée de la Chartreuse. © Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai, France / Photo Daniel Lefevre

Greuze's depictions of girls in the bloom of adolescence are undoubtedly his most technically skilful creations. This may be seen in the refined interplay of textures—satin, gauze, porcelain skin—and colours—white, cream, pale pink—in *Girl with a Dove* or *The Broken Pitcher*. But while the radiant girl with the white dove appears serene —she is an allegory of innocence and purity — , *The Broken Pitcher* hides a dramatic reality.

Throughout his career, the painter explored the transition to adulthood, that time of innocence marked by the first stirrings of love. Equally, he explored the threats to that innocence posed by predators, whether youthful seducers or lustful old men. The young girl with the broken pitcher, who has just been abused, appears frozen, her hands clenched as she attempts in vain to hold on to the flowers that she has already metaphorically lost. Her beauty reflects the purity of her soul, but her gaze, disturbing in its fixity, is definitively elsewhere, like her broken jug forever emptied of its pure water. In eighteenth-century Paris, at least in the spheres of the moneyed classes, the art world, and great lords, Greuze invited his public to see what was generally more convenient to ignore.



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Étude pour La Cruche cassée*, vers 1771-1772. Pierre noire et rehauts de blanc sur papier, 40,3 × 31,2 cm. Bâle, collection particulière. © Collection particulière / Photo Max Ehregruber



Jean Baptiste Greuze, *Esquisse préparatoire pour La Cruche cassée*, 1771. Huile sur toile, 43 × 37 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre. © GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Franck Raux



Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Cruche cassée*, 1771-1772. Huile sur toile, 109 × 87 cm. Paris, musée du Louvre. © GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Angèle Dequier

GREUZE INTIME. THE PAINTER'S WOES. ACT IV

At the turn of the 1780s, when the painter was over fifty years of age, and his professional reputation was on the decline, his relationship with his wife, Anne-Gabrielle Babuty, became strained. The painter accused her of having embezzled considerable sums from the proceeds of his engraving activity. He was unable to verify the accounts, as the records had been destroyed: "But Madam, why did you tear up the records?" he is said to have asked her. "Because it pleased me and I have no accounts to give you," she is said to have replied.

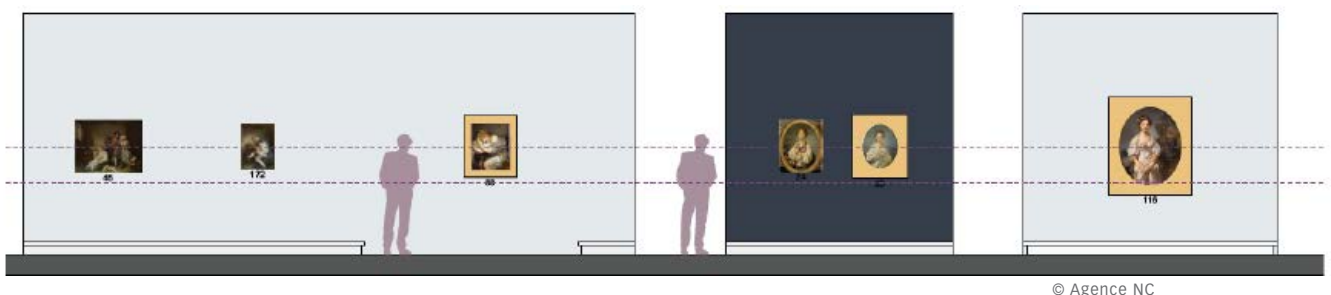
But above all, he accused her of having cheated on him with multiple lovers and of having neglected their daughters' education. Unfortunately, we do not know what criticisms she may have had of him. The couple separated in 1785 and divorced in 1793, almost as soon as the law allowed them to do so. The artist's two daughters, both trained in painting, remained with their father.

Financially ruined by the end of his life, Greuze's art fell out of fashion and commissions became scarce. "I have lost everything, except talent and courage," he wrote in 1801. Greuze died poor and forgotten, but surrounded by his two daughters in his studio on 21 March 1805.

Scenography

Realised by Matteo Soyer of the NC agency, the scenography for this exhibition has been designed to evoke eighteenth-century decors.

Visitors can discover the painter's private life through a glimpse at his interior, adorned with mouldings and covered in wallpaper. The exhibition route unfolds through a series of small rooms with the key works displayed and visible from one room to the next. In the middle of the exhibition, a space dedicated to engravings adds a new dimension. Each room boasts a unique ambiance, sometimes light and bright, other times dark and dramatic, in resonance with the subject matter explored in the artist's paintings. Farrow & Ball's subtle palette contributes to the representation of a specific epoch, taking visitors on a journey through the history of classical painting.



Press visuals



1. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Autoportrait*, vers 1760.
Huile sur bois, 65 × 51,5 cm.
Paris, musée du Louvre.
© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Thierry Le Mage

Greuze has rendered his own features with loose, broadly-brushed strokes of paint in a bold hand that bespeaks assurance in his technical abilities. In the years around the making of this self-portrait, he had every reason to be confident. Since his return from Rome in 1757, his professional trajectory had been nothing short of spectacular. His warmly humorous scenes of family life were sought after by art collectors and embraced by critics such as the philosopher Denis Diderot.



2. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait d'Anne-Gabrielle Babuty*, vers 1760.
Huile sur toile, 40,6 × 37,8 cm.
Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum.
Courtesy of the RISD Museum, Providence, RI

This young woman with sparkling eyes and a fresh complexion is Anne-Gabrielle Babuty, whom Greuze married in 1759. The daughter of a prosperous bookseller, Anne-Gabrielle was widely known for her beauty, and her husband was clearly under her spell. Greuze depicted her in numerous works throughout the 1760s, even in highly intimate moments, including the impressive drawing of her sleeping from the Rijksmuseum.



3. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Madame Greuze sur une chaise longue avec son chien*, vers 1759-1760.
Crayon graphite, pierre noire, plume, encre grise et noire, 34,3 x 46,8 cm.
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
© Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Sharp eyes : viewers can appreciate the tranquillity of this scene. Madame Greuze is shown resting on a chaise-brisée (or chaise longue ?) with the small family dog resting comfortably on her lap. The painter invites us into the privacy of his family life. Notice the pillow against which Madame Greuze leans, one hand resting tenderly on her canine companion. Small dogs like this one were part of the family, unlike the much larger hunting dogs. The dog visible here belongs to a breed of spaniels known in French as “pyrame”. You will see him again in another work in this room.



4. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Une enfant qui joue avec un chien (portrait de Louise-Gabrielle Greuze)*, 1767. Huile sur toile, 62,9 × 52,7 cm. Angleterre, Collection particulière. © Collection particulière.

The famous chronicler of Parisian life Gabriel de Saint-Aubin Gabriel identified this painting as representing Louis-Gabrielle, Greuze's youngest daughter. She is shown at the age of three years old in a nightdress and sleeping cap. The little dog who wriggles vigorously in her arms may be the same as the one who cuddles with Madame Greuze in the large drawing from the Rijksmuseum nearby. When it was shown at the Salon of 1769, this painting met with astonishing success; one contemporary described it as "the most universally applauded" painting in the exhibition.

Sharp eyes : Did you recognize the Greuze family dog? His portrait, alongside the painter's daughter, was praised by the artist's contemporaries. Notice the spontaneity of the image: viewers have the impression that they're interrupting the fun. The little bonnet, called a *béguin* in French, and the oversize shirt worn by the little girl show that she is not yet dressed. In the 18th century, people slept in night shirts like these, which were replaced by pyjamas in the late 19th century.



5. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait d'Anne-Geneviève (dite Caroline) Greuze*, 1766. Huile sur toile, 41 × 33 cm. Collection particulière. © Collection particulière



6. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait de Louise-Gabrielle Greuze*, 1766. Huile sur toile, 41 × 33 cm. Collection particulière. © Collection particulière

These naturalistic portraits, with their tight framing, represent Greuze's daughters, Anne-Geneviève, better known as Caroline, and Louise-Gabrielle, aged four and two respectively. Greuze seems to invite the viewer into the intimacy of his domestic space: Caroline is positioned behind a simple table on which an enamelled earthenware egg cup and pewter bowl are placed. These utensils likely came from the painter's own kitchen.



7. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Un enfant qui s'est endormi sur son livre, dit Le Petit paresseux*, 1755.

Huile sur toile, 65 × 54,5 cm.

Montpellier, musée Fabre.

© Musée Fabre de Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole / Photo Frédéric Jaulmes

Greuze won widespread acclaim when this dramatically-lighted depiction of a little boy sound asleep on his lesson-book was shown at the Salon of 1755, Greuze's inaugural appearance in this biannual event. Critics praised its sober, realistic subject matter and vigorous execution with its bold, loose brushstrokes that are clearly inspired by Rembrandt. At the 1755 exhibition, this little masterpiece appeared alongside *The Bible reading*. Like that painting, this work belonged to Greuze's early champion, the art collector Ange-Laurent de La Live de Jully.



8. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Un écolier qui étudie sa leçon, dit Le Petit écolier*, vers 1755-1757.

Huile sur toile, 62,5 × 49 cm.

Édimbourg, National Galleries of Scotland.

Photo : John McKenzie

Greuze's painting of a concentrated young student committing a text to memory as he covers his lesson-book with one hand was amongst his exhibits at the Paris Salon of 1757, which took place soon after his return from Rome. With his choice of contemplative subject, rendered in a restrained colour palette, Greuze looked back to seventeenth-century Dutch painters, as well as to the works of his slightly older contemporary in France, Jean-Siméon Chardin.



9. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Petit garçon au gilet rouge*, vers 1775.

Huile sur toile, 40 × 32 cm.

Paris, musée Cognacq-Jay.

CCØ Paris Musées / musée Cognacq-Jay



10. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Portrait de Charles-Etienne de Bourgevin de Vialart, comte de Saint-Morys*, vers 1782-1784.

Huile sur bois, 65 × 54 cm.

Nantes, musée d'Arts de Nantes.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée d'Arts de Nantes) /

Photo Gérard Blot.

Here, Greuze depicts the son of his patron Jean-Baptiste de Bourgevin, Count of Saint-Morys, who was an avid collector of drawings. Charles-Étienne strikes a pose, his elbow resting on an open book, the epitome of a studious child.



11. Thérèse Éléonore Lingée, *Tête de jeune garçon*, 1777.

D'après Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Manière de crayon, 51,3 × 40,2 cm.

New York, The Metropolitan museum of Arts.

© GrandPalaisRmn (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) / Photo Thierry Ollivier



12. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Tête de jeune fille*, vers 1773.

Sanguine, 31 × 25,5 cm.

Londres, Collection particulière.

© Collection particulière.

Made of clay mixed with iron oxide, sanguine also known as red chalk, ranges in hue from orange to a kind of purple. An artist may modulate its intensity by changing the pressure of his hand or by moistening the chalk to reveal a range of luminous shades—pink, light red, brown. In his heads drawn in red chalk, like this head of a young girl, Greuze plays with the sanguine, revealing the white of the paper to suggest the presence of blood beneath the skin. According to Denis Diderot, a great admirer of the artist, Greuze's facility with red chalk, enabled him to convey all the nuances of the complexion.



13. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Mère qui traye son lait*, dit aussi *L'Heureuse Mère*, vers 1766.
Pinceau, lavis d'encre grise et d'encre noire sur un léger tracé au graphite sur papier crème doublé, 29,9 × 23,5 cm
Collection Milgrom
© Photo Courtesy Collection Milgrom



14. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Tête d'enfant*, dit *La Petite Nanette*, 1770-1780.
Huile sur bois, 40,5 × 32 cm.
Montpellier, musée Fabre.
© Musée Fabre de Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole / Photo Frédéric Jaulmes



15. Pierre Guillaume Alexandre Beljambe, *La Petite Nanette*, 1780.
D'après Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Eau-forte et burin, 25,6 × 19,7 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
© photo : BNF

Little Nanette, probably produced in the 1770s, is one of the many portraits of children that contributed, through its print reproduction, to Greuze's reputation as a painter of childhood. The canvas was engraved by Pierre Beljambe (1759-1838) in 1780 under the title *Little Nanette*. The engraving was published in many newspapers, including the *Journal de Paris*: "this vigorous print has the head engraved with flats [a technique for accentuating shadows], which indicates on behalf of the engraver a talent for forms."



16. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Le Gâteau des rois*, 1774.
Huile sur toile, 73 × 92 cm.
Montpellier, musée Fabre.
© Musée Fabre de Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole /
Photo Frédéric Jaulmes

In a simple setting, a peasant family participates in the celebration of Epiphany, held each year on the 6th of January to mark the visit of the Three Kings to the infant Jesus, with a "gâteau des rois". The French tart holding a hidden bean has been divided up, and the finder will become king for the day. The youngest child takes his slice from a cloth held by his father. Greuze's composition celebrates the pleasures of family life, and describes one by one the reactions of the children at all ages.



17. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Présentation de l'enfant naturel* vers 1770.
Plume et encre brune, pinceau et lavis gris et brun, sur craie
noire, 33 × 50,8 cm
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
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18. Jean Baptiste Greuze, *La Femme en colère*, vers 1785.
Pinceau, lavis noir et gris, réhaussée de blanc, sur des traces
de graphite, 52,1 × 64 cm.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
© GrandPalaisRmn (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) / Image
of the MMA



19. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Septime Sévère reprochant à son fils Caracalla d'avoir voulu l'assassiner*, 1767-1769.

Huile sur toile, 124 × 160 cm.

Paris, musée du Louvre.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado

The episode depicted by the painter is taken from a passage in Roman history. The painting contains all the elements reported by historians: the palace bedroom, the son — a “miserable young man” — who has attempted to assassinate his father, the emperor “in bed, broken with age”, his followers Castor and Papinian, the sword lying on the table, pointing as if to say: “if you wish to kill me, kill me here”. The scene is remarkably austere, worthy of the compositions of Nicolas Poussin.

Sharp eyes : can you see the small golden statuette to the left of the composition? This is the Roman goddess Fortuna, the goddess of Fortune, recognizable by the horn of plenty she holds in one hand. Why did Greuze take the trouble to depict this detail? It was a good omen for emperors to have a golden representation of the goddess, the personification of fortune, in their bedrooms. With this scholarly reference, the painter demonstrates his attention to detail in terms of historical accuracy.



21. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Tête de jeune garçon, étude pour Le Fils ingrat*, vers 1777.

Sanguine sur papier vergé crème, 39,4 × 32,4 cm

Collection particulière.

Image ©The Frick Collection



20. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Malédiction paternelle. Le Fils ingrat*, 1777.

Huile sur toile, 130 × 162 cm.

Paris, musée du Louvre.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado

Conceived as early as 1765, the ambitious pendants *The Ungrateful Son* and *The Punished Son* were completed over twelve years later, around 1777-1778. They illustrate in two episodes the strong tensions that tear a family apart. The first canvas depicts the eldest son, a modern image of the prodigal son, who abandons his family to enlist in the army. His father curses him, while the entire family expresses distress at his tragic departure. The power of the scene, akin to a play, is particularly striking.



22. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Malédiction paternelle. Le fils puni*, 1778.

Huile sur toile, 131 × 163 cm.

Paris, musée du Louvre.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado

The second painting represents the return, a few years later, of the young adventurer who now seems to be injured (he has just dropped his crutch) and prematurely aged by his ordeal. He is greeted by his tearful and grieving mother who points to the entire family gathered around his deceased father's bed. With his hand on his face in despair, the son seems to repent of his ingratitude. The expression of terror on the face of the young child in the background — distraught in the presence of death — is impossible to miss.



23. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Jeune berger tenant un pissenlit*, dit *Jeune berger qui tente le sort pour savoir s'il est aimé de sa bergère*, 1761.

Huile sur toile, 72,5 × 59,5 cm

Paris, Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.
CCØ Paris Musées / Petit Palais

A young boy holds a dandelion, ready to make a wish. His innocent thoughts are with his shepherdess, who he hopes may reciprocate his affections. Greuze's poetic ode to the fragile beauty of young love once hung in the Versailles apartment of Madame de Pompadour, alongside its pendant, *Simplicity*. Conserved at the occasion of this exhibition, the Petit Palais's *Jeune berger* has regained its freshness and brilliance. At the peak of his technical prowess, Greuze shines here, with his breathtakingly free brushwork and sophisticated colour palette.

Sharp eyes : can you identify the flower that the little shepherd boy holds in his hand? It is a dandelion. The boy seems hesitant: should he blow on it? He appears pensive as the risk is great. If all the seeds blow away, it will mean that the young girl whom he loves, loves him in return. Many people believed that blowing on a dandelion seed head brought about the realization of a wish. Here, the flower, associated with the world of innocence and children's games, echoes the subject of the painting.



24. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Jeune bergère effeuillant une marguerite*, dit *La Simplicité*, 1759.

Huile sur toile, 71,1 × 59,7 cm.

Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum.

© Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

"He loves me, he loves me not..." A young girl pulls petals from a flower in an innocent ritual to determine where she stands with the object of her affections. Greuze has couched this exquisite depiction of dawning romantic sentiment in the artistic language of the pastoral, made famous by one of Greuze's most celebrated contemporaries, the artist François Boucher. This painting belonged to Madame de Pompadour, official mistress to Louis XV, who was closely linked to Boucher.



25. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Jeune Fille à la colombe*, vers 1780.

Huile sur bois, 64,4 × 53,3 cm.

Douai, musée de la Chartreuse.

© Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai, France / Photo Daniel Lefevre

That the radiant young girl clad in white has a bright future is confirmed by the living white dove that she embraces. Like seventeenth-century Dutch painters before him, Greuze constructed close visual associations between femininity and birds in his art. A dead bird might suggest the loss of virginity. Here, however, the bird embraced in the girl's arms is living. The presence of this white dove confirms that the painting evokes the purity of innocence.



26. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *La Cruche cassée*, 1771-1772.

Huile sur toile, 109 × 87 cm.

Paris, musée du Louvre.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Angèle Dequier

The girl standing at the center of this composition holds in her right arm the broken jug that gives this famous painting its name. As with dead birds or broken eggs, broken jugs symbolized the loss of virginity in the eighteenth century. The composition provides other hints as to what has transpired. On the girl's left, on the fountain from which she had gone to draw water is a lion's head with masculine features, while the fountain itself may be a phallic symbol. As for the girl, she clutches her dress uncertainly and her expression seems hesitant, even stunned. Breaking with tradition, Greuze was the first painter to associate the loss of virginity with the notion of trauma.



26 B. Jean Baptiste Greuze, Esquisse préparatoire pour *La Cruche cassée*, 1771.

Huile sur toile, 43 × 37 cm.

Paris, musée du Louvre.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Franck Raux

A young girl stares at the viewer, her dress in disarray, its ribbon untied. A cracked jug hangs from her arm. The girl's partial nudity, her blank stare, and her disheveled attire suggest a brutal scene, likely the result of a rape. The cold grey hues echo the suggested tragedy. This rapid sketch, like the related drawing, conveys the underlying drama even more palpably than the final composition.



26. C Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Étude pour *La Cruche cassée*, vers 1771-1772.

Pierre noire et rehauts de blanc sur papier, 40,3 × 31,2 cm

Bâle, collection particulière.

© Collection particulière / Photo Max Ehregruber



27. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Les Œufs cassés*, 1756.
Huile sur toile, 73 × 94 cm.
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
© GrandPalaisRmn (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) / Photo Malcom Varon

A young man is berated by a woman (a mother or grandmother?) for destroying a basket of eggs while a small innocent child stands at the right who attempts vainly to reconstitute a cracked shell. This is one of the first instances in which Greuze relied upon the figure of a child to comment upon the actions of the scene: thanks to this small figure the viewer understands that an incident more grave than spilled eggs has taken place. As in the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings that Greuze took for inspiration, broken eggs were synonymous with lost virginity. Significantly, the male model appears to be the same as that in *L'Oiseleur*.



28. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *L'Oiseleur accordant sa guitare*, 1757.
Huile sur toile, 62 × 48 cm.
Varsovie, National Museum
© Varsovie National Museum / photo Krzysztof Wilczyński;

A young man sits tuning his guitar. His surroundings indicate that he is a "oiseleur" — a hunter of birds — but it is quickly apparent that other interpretations are possible. Greuze repeatedly drew associations between women and birds, and the notion of entrapment through seduction is graphically present throughout his art. The painting is rife with telling details: the bird-catcher's gesture with the index finger of his left hand toward the round soundhole of his guitar or the limp body of a bird that dangles, headfirst, toward the floor. Greuze has rendered here a portrait of a predator. This painting was exhibited in the Salon of 1757 alongside *Broken eggs*.



29. Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *L'Oiseau mort*, 1800.
Huile sur toile, 68 × 55 cm.
Paris, musée du Louvre.
© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre) / Photo Jean-Gilles Berizzi

Shown at the Salon of 1800, this is Greuze's final interpretation of a theme that he held dear. A young girl, whose emotion the artist has eloquently rendered, has just discovered the corpse of her little bird, which she touches hesitantly with one hand, while raising the other in a gesture of dismay. By the time Greuze exhibited this work in 1800, the French art world had radically changed. Even has he revived what was for him a familiar theme, the artist has clearly attempted to update his style to accommodate the prevailing taste for neoclassicism.

Catalogue of the exhibition



Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Childhood in the spotlight.

Under the direction of Annick Lemoine, Yuriko Jackall, and Mickaël Szanto
Texts by Emma Barker, Marine Carcanague, Guillaume Faroult, Yuriko Jackall, Mark Ledbury, Annick Lemoine, Christian Michel, Nicolas Milovanovic, Anne Morvan, Joëlle Raineau-Lehuédé, Céline Spector, Perrin Stein, and Mickaël Szanto

Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) was one of the eighteenth century's most important and audacious artists. At every Salon, his work was a success. He stood out for his portraits and the genre scenes that became his speciality. More importantly, figures of children were seen to populate his work.

Greuze knew better than anyone how to convey the psychological depth of children and their universal value. Through his painting, he expressed the significance of education and the fundamental role of the family in a child's development. In his productions, the family was not only a place of love and learning about the world; it could also be a theatre of disorder or chaos, where the intimate merged with the tragic.

By exploring the recurring theme of childhood in Greuze's work and in light of the great debates that animated eighteenth-century Paris, the catalogue, whose essays are accompanied by rich illustrations, reveals an oeuvre of an unexpected originality and modernity.

**24 x 30 cm, hard cover,
392 pages, 250 illustrations
A publication by Paris Musées
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The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the generous support of:

- **Hubert and Mireille Goldschmidt;**
- **Ariane and Lionel Sauvage.**

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Founded in 2015 in Geneva, the **Etrillard Foundation** is a Swiss family foundation that highlights the enduring relevance of Europe's cultural heritage in the contemporary world. It contributes to the preservation of exceptional sites, fosters the transmission of knowledge, and supports cultural rediscovery, thereby encouraging creativity and intellectual curiosity.

As part of its philanthropic activities, the Etrillard Foundation supports the rediscovery of works, artistic movements, and musical repertoires that remain little known to the public. It promotes the transmission of sometimes overlooked knowledge, ranging from art history to music. This rediscovery also involves reinterpreting works from a new perspective, drawing on contemporary cultural and artistic media.

The Etrillard Foundation is delighted to partner for the first time with the Petit Palais for the exhibition "Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Childhood in the Spotlight." The exhibition explores the work of a major eighteenth-century painter who has since fallen into relative obscurity. His bold depictions of childhood – and, by extension, of the intimate and domestic sphere – reflect the concerns of his century and will undoubtedly serve as a source of inspiration for today's artists and scholars.

This sponsorship coincides with the Etrillard Foundation's anniversary year, as it celebrates in 2025 a decade of commitment to safeguarding Europe's cultural heritage.

- **The Tavolozza Foundation**



TAVOLOZZA
FOUNDATION

Founded in 2001 by Katrin Bellinger, the **Tavolozza Foundation** is a non-profit, charitable organisation based near Munich, Germany.

Named Tavolozza, the Italian word for palette, the flat surface on which a painter arranges and mixes paints, the Foundation offers a range of support to museums, galleries and other cultural and educational institutions. This includes providing funding for exhibitions, acquisitions, scholarly publications as well as special projects such as conferences and study days.

The Foundation is particularly interested in furthering research into the theme of the artist at work and promoting it internationally through educational initiatives. It especially supports the visual arts making works on paper more accessible to the public by helping to fund exhibitions, publications and digitisation.

The publication of the catalogue was made possible thanks to the support of

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The Petit Palais

The City of Paris Museum of Fine Arts



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Built for the Exposition Universelle of 1900, the Petit Palais building is a masterpiece by architect Charles Girault. In 1902, it became the City of Paris Museum of Fine Arts and presents a very beautiful collection of paintings, sculptures, furnishings and art objects dating from Antiquity to 1914.

Among the museum treasures are an exceptional collection of Greek vases and a very large group of Flemish and Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century, displayed around the famous Self-Portrait with Dog by Rembrandt. A magnificent collection of French paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries includes major works by Fragonard, Greuze, David, Géricault, Delacroix, Courbet, Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, Cézanne and Vuillard. The museum is also very proud of a very beautiful collection of sculptures by Carpeaux, Carriès and Dalou. The collection of decorative art is especially noted for objects from the Renaissance and the 1900s, including glasswork by Gallé, jewellery by Fouquet and Lalique and a dining room designed by Guimard for his private mansion. Finally, the museum has an outstanding graphic arts room featuring complete series of engravings by Dürer, Rembrandt and Callot and a rare collection of Nordic drawings.

The programme of temporary exhibitions at the Petit Palais alternates ambitious major themes such as *Paris Romantique*, *Paris 1900*, *Les Bas-fonds du Baroque*, *Modern Paris* with monographs that allow us to rediscover forgotten painters such as Albert Edelfelt, Giovanni Boldini, Theodore Rousseau, Jusepe de Ribera. Each autumn, contemporary artists such as Thomas Lerooy (2015), Kehinde Wiley (2016), Andres Serrano (2017), Valérie Jouve (2018), Yan Pei-Ming (2019), Laurence Aëgerter (2020), Jean-Michel Othoniel (2021), Ugo Rondinone (2022) and Loris Gréaud (2023), as well as the Street Art in 2024 have been invited to exhibit in the Petit Palais' permanent collections to create a dialogue with these paintings and reveal the links between their works and those of the museum.

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*Except the archaeological Crypt under the forecourt of l'île de la Cité and the Catacombs.

General information

Jean Baptiste Greuze *Childhood in the spotlight*

Petit Palais

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