

# Oscar Wilde

## INSOLENCE INCARNATE

28 September 2016 - 15 January 2017



Petit Palais  
Musée des Beaux-Arts  
de la Ville de Paris

Tuesday-Sunday  
10am – 6pm  
Late opening - Friday until 9 pm

### INFORMATION

[www.petitpalais.paris.fr](http://www.petitpalais.paris.fr)

PRESS KIT  
September 2016



Napoleon Sarony, *Portrait of Oscar Wilde*, 1882.  
© Library of Congress, Washington.

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With the exceptional contribution of the Musée d'Orsay



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## PRESS RELEASE

The Petit Palais is delighted to be presenting **the first major exhibition in France devoted to the famous writer Oscar Wilde** (Dublin 1854 – Paris 1900). Although Wilde died in the French capital, the centenary of his death was not celebrated here; London, on the contrary, honoured him with two large-scale exhibitions in 2000, one – mainly literary and biographical – at the British Library, and the other at the Barbican Centre, focusing on his connections with the artists of his time.

For this landmark event the Petit Palais will retrace the life and work of this ardent francophile and speaker of perfect French through **more than 200 remarkable exhibits, some never shown before: manuscripts, photographs, drawings, caricatures and personal effects; as well as paintings borrowed not only from Ireland and England, but also from the United States, Canada and Italy, from French institutions including the Musée d'Orsay and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and from various private collections.**

It was only natural that Paris should ultimately host an exhibition like this one, given **Wilde's creative links with a host of leading figures on the artistic and intellectual scenes in late 19th-century Paris**. He made frequent stays in the city between 1883 and 1894 and counted among his writer friends **André Gide, Pierre Louÿs, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine** and even met **Victor Hugo**. He wrote his play *Salomé* originally in French, with **Sarah Bernhardt** in mind for the title role. Wilde would die, wretchedly poor, in Paris in 1900, after his conviction for homosexuality in London five years before; his tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery is topped with a sculpture by **Jacob Epstein**. The biographical element of the exhibition will be **uniquely innovative in bringing together a number of painted portraits for the first time, in particular the one by Harper Pennington** (William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, Los Angeles). **A further world premiere will be the first-ever group showing of 13 of the original oversize photo-portraits taken by Napoleon Sarony during Wilde's tour of America in 1882.**

These portraits will be complemented by others, both famous and unexpected: Wilde in back view, for example, in the left foreground of **Toulouse-Lautrec's *La Danse mauresque*** (Musée d'Orsay), painted as part of the set at the Baraque de la Goulue cabaret.



Napoleon Sarony, *Portrait of Oscar Wilde*, 1882.  
© Library of Congress, Washington.

### CURATORS:

**Dominique Morel** : chief curator, Petit Palais

**Merlin Holland** : academic adviser

**Portraits of Wilde's family and friends**, among them his wife Constance and Lord Alfred Douglas, will offer an insight into his personal life, together with various memorabilia and drawings, watercolours, landscapes and portraits by Wilde himself.

Needless to say the exhibition will also include **his most significant manuscripts**, copies of books inscribed to French writers and samples of his correspondence. Special attention will be given to *Salomé*, **published in French in 1893**, with its celebrated illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley and we are privileged to be showing two of the original artworks.

In addition to showcases displaying the books and manuscripts, the exhibition will be visually enhanced by a selection of Pre-Raphaelite pictures – by **Watts, Millais, Hunt, Crane, Tissot, Stanhope** and others – shown at the **Grosvenor Gallery in London in 1877 and 1879** and extensively written about by Wilde in his role as art critic. At different points visitors will also be offered excerpts from historic films, from interviews with Wilde's grandson **Merlin Holland** and **Robert Badinter**, author of the play *C. 3. 3.* – an account of Wilde's trial and imprisonment – and from recordings of Wilde's works read by English actor **Rupert Everett**.

A further feature will be **a mobile phone application serving as a guide and digital catalogue**. The application will divide the exhibition itinerary into 25 segments, with audio commentary by the two curators and high-definition images. The digital catalogue will help the visitor to discover the writer and his influence from different angles: via a timeline, a map of the world and an Oscar Wilde primer. It will also include the filmed interviews.

**CATALOGUE:** preface by Charles Dantzig, 256 pages, 39,90 euros.



John Roddam Spencer Stanhope (1829-1908), *Love and the Maiden*, 1877.

© Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Museum purchase, European Art Trust Fund, Grover A. Magnin Bequest Fund and Dorothy Spreckels Munn Bequest Fund



## GUIDE TO THE EXHIBITION



Guido Reni, *Saint Sebastien*, v. 1616.  
Musei di Strada Nuova  
Palazzo Rosso, Gênes. © Musei di Strada

### The formative years (1854–1878): Dublin, Oxford, London

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin on 16 October 1854. His father was a noted surgeon, specialising in diseases of the eye and ear, and had also written a number of books on the folklore and history of Ireland. His mother, Jane Francesca Elgee, had published a number of political poems in the nationalist press under the pen name 'Speranza'. Between 1871 and 1874 Oscar showed himself to be a brilliant student at Trinity College, Dublin. In 1874 he won a five-year scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, where he studied classics, but was also particularly influenced by two famous teachers of art history, Walter Pater and John Ruskin. In the spring of 1877 he made a study trip to Greece and Italy. His university course completed, Wilde, still with no profession, moved to London. In May 1879 he took an apartment in the centre of the city, decorating it with lilies and blue-and-white china, symbols of the new Aesthetic Movement, whose standard-bearer he proclaimed himself to be. In 1880 he moved to Tite Street in Chelsea and soon acquired a reputation as a poet and aesthete.



Sir William Blake Richmond, *Electre sur la tombe d'Agamemnon*, 1874.  
© 2016 Art Gallery of Ontario

### Wilde's beginnings as an art critic: the Grosvenor Gallery

In 1877, Wilde published a review of the opening exhibition at the new Grosvenor Gallery in London, founded to promote the artists of the Aesthetic Movement and their opposition to the conservatism of the Royal Academy. In his review he singled out George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), the holders, as he saw it, of 'the three golden keys to the gate of the House Beautiful'. He focused primarily on paintings with ancient history or mythology as their subjects, among them William Blake Richmond's *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon*. He paid little attention to portrait painters, with the exception of John Everett Millais, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite group, and expressed mixed feelings about James Tissot, whose rustic picnic he found too 'photographic'. On the other hand he was impressed by Ferdinand Heilbuth's pictures of cardinals in Rome. Like Ruskin, Wilde was harshly critical of Whistler's *Nocturnes* and their portrayals of fireworks; they were, he said, 'worth looking at for about as long as one looks at a real rocket, that is, for somewhat less than a quarter of a minute'.



Napoleon Sarony, *Portrait d'Oscar Wilde* #26, 1882. © Bibliothèque du Congrès, Washington.

### The conquest of America (1882)

Driven as much by a taste for adventure as by financial necessity, Wilde landed in New York on January 2, 1882, determined to make the most of his new-found fame as an aesthete. He had agreed to undertake a year-long lecture tour that involved travelling from the East to the West Coast and from the Mexican border to Canada. Choosing to speak of 'Beauty' in general and the decorative arts in particular, he took considerable inspiration from the ideas of John Ruskin, Walter Pater and William Morris. Having to win audiences ranging from the Mormons of Salt Lake City to the Indians of Sioux City and the miners of Leadville, Colorado, he played up the image of the aesthete: silk stockings, knee-breeches, velvet jacket and fur coat. On his arrival in New York he posed for the highly regarded photographer Napoleon Sarony (1821–1896), who produced more than twenty portraits, all showing his subject to his best advantage: standing or seated, bare-headed or wearing a hat, and holding a book, gloves or ivory-handled cane. Such was Wilde's success as a lecturer that some of these portraits were copied, without his knowledge, and used for advertising purposes.

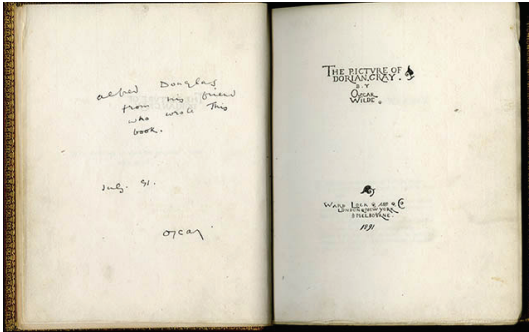
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Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *La Danse mauresque*, 1895. Panneau pour la baraque de la Goulue, à la Foire du Trône à Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski

### Paris–London (1883–1889)

His lecture tour of America having provided the necessary funds, in early 1883 Wilde decided to spend some time in Paris. During the three months he was there, he had himself invited to Victor Hugo's home, made the acquaintance of the poet Maurice Rollinat, became friends with Paul Bourget and met Paul Verlaine. In May he returned to London and, with his mother's encouragement, asked for the hand of Constance Lloyd, a young Englishwoman half-Irish on her mother's side, whom he had met in 1881. The marriage took place on 29 May 1884, and the couple spent their honeymoon in Paris. Children came quickly: Cyril was born in June 1885 and Vyvyan in November 1886. In August 1883 Wilde had gone to the United States for the premiere of his play *Vera*, or the *Nihilists*, and in the same year he finished the romantic drama *The Duchess of Padua*. Back in London Wilde began giving lectures again and in 1887 he became editor of *The Lady's World*, though he insisted on renaming it *The Woman's World* in deference to the increasing independence of women. He continued with his own writing, making a reputation for himself in very different genres. In 1888 he published a collection of stories, *The Happy Prince*, and in 1889 a philosophical essay, *The Decay of Lying*. As a successful journalist, brilliant lecturer and famous writer, Wilde was now a leading light on the London society scene.



Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (edition de luxe dédiée à Alfred Douglas), 1891.  
© The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library - University of California, Los Angeles

**The creative years (1890-1895): from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to *The Importance of Being Earnest*.**

In 1891, shortly before meeting Lord Alfred Douglas, with whom he would have a passionate and stormy homosexual affair, Wilde published his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Young and strikingly handsome, Dorian Gray wishes that his beautiful painted portrait could age in his place. His wish is granted and he abandons himself to a life of pleasure, urged on by his evil mentor, the dandy and aesthete Lord Henry Wotton. At the novel's close Dorian stabs the picture, which by now has become a hideous reflection of his dissolute life. He immediately falls to the floor, 'withered and wrinkled,' with a knife in his heart, while the figure in the picture has regained all the vividness and beauty of his youth.

Coming in the wake of *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895), *The Importance of Being Earnest* is one of the highlights of Wilde's dramatic oeuvre. It premiered at the St. James's Theatre in London on 14 February 1895. This satire on the manners of Victorian high society revolves around Jack and Algernon, two dandies in love with Gwendolen and Cecily, each of whom in turn is determined to marry an elusive man named Ernest. The plot is further complicated by the false identities assumed by the male characters.



Aubrey Beardsley, *J'ai baisé ta bouche Jokanaan*, *The Studio*, n°1, avril 1893.  
Collection Merlin Holland

**Salomé, a fin-de-siècle femme fatale**

Salomé was the Jewish princess, daughter of Herodias, whose charms forced her stepfather, the tetrarch Herod Antipas, to give her the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter. Steeped in the works of Gustave Flaubert and J.-K. Huysmans, Wilde wrote his play in French in Paris between November and December 1891. It was published in 1893, with a dedication to Pierre Louÿs, who had corrected the proofs. Wilde hoped to see Sarah Bernhardt play the leading role in London, but the play was banned and was never performed in England during its author's lifetime. *Salomé* finally premiered in Paris on 11 February 1896, directed by Lugné-Poe. It was translated into English and published by John Lane, who commissioned the artist Aubrey Beardsley, then barely twenty-one, to do the illustrations. Beardsley worked on them from May to November 1893, and the very linear black and white images are now considered to be one of the high points of his art. Some of his drawings were rejected by the publisher on the grounds of indecency. A portfolio of 17 plates by Beardsley loosely based on the highlights in Wilde's play was published in 1907.





Tombeau d'Oscar Wilde au cimetière du père Lachaise par Jacob Epstein.  
Collection Merlin Holland. © The Estate of Sir Jacob Epstein

### **Trial, prison, exile (1895–1900)**

On 18 February 1895, the Marquess of Queensberry, Lord Alfred Douglas's father, left an insulting message on his visiting card at Wilde's London club. Wilde decided to take legal action, but then withdrew his prosecution when the trial was already under way, resulting in Queensberry's acquittal. Queensberry, however, had accumulated evidence incriminating Wilde, which he passed to the public prosecutor who decided to put Wilde on trial, citing as additional evidence immorality in his literary work. On 25 May 1895, Wilde was found guilty of acts of 'gross indecency' and sentenced to two years' hard labour. He served most of his time in Reading Gaol, 80 kilometres from London. Between January and March 1897 he wrote a long letter to Alfred Douglas which was later published as *De Profundis*. Released on 19 May, he left England for France, and in July began writing *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, a long poem describing his intense emotion at the execution of a fellow prisoner. On 30 November 1900, Oscar Wilde died in Paris and was buried at Bagneux. In 1909 his remains were moved to Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris. A sculpture in the form of a sphinx by Jacob Epstein was later erected over the grave in his memory.





*Oscar Wilde, insolence incarnate - 28 September 2016 - 15 January 2017*

## SCENOGRAPHY OF THE EXHIBITION

Philippe Pumain's scenography for the exhibition has been carefully orchestrated to provide all kinds of surprises. The exhibition's seven sections are clearly identifiable, with each addressed as a space in its own right.

At the entrance the visitor is welcomed by Wilde himself, in the form of a photographic blow-up accompanied by one of his famous quotations. Other aphorisms are dotted throughout the exhibition. The first room, devoted to the writer's formative years, has deep blue walls, one of them decorated with an enlarged blue and white china motif of a lily – much prized by Wilde and emblematic of the decorative art of Victorian England.

The second section is devoted to the Pre-Raphaelite paintings shown at the Grosvenor Gallery, whose décor is the direct inspiration for this spectacular room. Visitors can linger over Wilde's tour of the United States, as well as a life-size reproduction of a portrait by American photographer Napoleon Sarony. Then come Paris and London, in an evocation revolving round the big painting by Toulouse-Lautrec.

Next, the room dedicated to the «creative years» offers alcoves for listening to works by Wilde read by Rupert Everett and for watching excerpts from the film *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The visitor discovers the following section, devoted to *Salomé*, in a breathtaking twelve-sided space with purple walls. An anteroom then leads to the final segment, dealing with the dark years of the trial, imprisonment and exile, and Wilde's death in Paris; The atmosphere is heightened by a recording of *De Profundis*, while further along is the screening of the interview with Robert Badinter. The exhibition closes with Wilde's posterity and a filmed interview with his grandson Merlin Holland. On leaving, the public can sign the visitors' book, presented on a desk reminiscent of Wilde's.



## THE OSCAR WILDE MOBILE PHONE APPLICATION

**The exhibition is accompanied by a combined digital guide and catalogue**

The itinerary is divided into 25 points of interest, each provided with audio commentaries, high definition images and extra images not included in the exhibition itself. The two curators also offer additional input on the main themes.

**The digital catalogue will help the visitor discover Wilde and his influence** via a timeline, a map of the world and an Oscar Wilde alphabetical primer. These different points of view and media approaches make this catalogue the perfect tool for anyone wanting further insight into the writer and his time.

**The catalogue will also include exclusive video interviews with Wilde's grandson Merlin Holland and Robert Badinter, whose play *C.3.3.* is an account of the writer's trial and imprisonment.**

A further feature will be access to all the necessary information about the exhibition and its related events.

# EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

## Oscar Wilde, insolence incarnate



Aesthete, dandy and a master of wit and provocation, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) was also a towering man of letters: at once art critic, playwright, novelist and poet. The catalogue retraces the fascinating, tormented life of a writer and brilliant conversationalist whose myth has lost nothing of its impact today. Here his many portraits (photographs, caricatures, paintings, etc.), together with the Pre-Raphaelite pictures he wrote about so copiously at the beginning of his career, manuscripts and rare editions, letters and excerpts from such great works as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, are accompanied by contributions from French, English and American specialists that cast fresh light on this multifaceted Irishman.

The darling of fashionable London in 1894, Wilde was imprisoned for homosexual offences the following year.

Although he died in Paris, France had never paid a real tribute to this ardent Francophile and speaker of perfect French. That omission has now been rectified with this splendid volume, published to accompany the Oscar Wilde exhibition at the Petit Palais.

Edited by Dominique Morel, curator at the Petit Palais, and Wilde's grandson Merlin Holland, the catalogue contains articles by, among others, Robert Badinter and Charles Dantzig.

22 x 28 cm

Clothbound

256 pages (2 papers)/250 illustrations

39.90 euros

**Paris Musées** issues some thirty art publications every year: handsome exhibition catalogues, guides to collections and brochures that are eloquent testimony to the artistic wealth of the City of Paris's museums and the variety of their temporary exhibitions.

[www.parismusees.paris.fr](http://www.parismusees.paris.fr)



*Oscar Wilde, insolence incarnate - 28 September 2016 - 15 January 2017*

## PARIS MUSÉES A NETWORK OF PARIS MUSEUM

Under the aegis of the Établissement public Paris Musées, the fourteen museums of the city of Paris contain collections of exceptional diversity and quality: fine arts, modern art, decorative arts, Asian arts, history, literature, archaeology, fashion – they cover a huge number of fields and reflect the cultural diversity of the capital of France and its rich history.

In an important gesture of outreach and an urge to share this fabulous heritage, admission to the permanent collections was made free of charge in 2001\*. This has been completed by new policies for welcoming visitors, and more suitable admission charges for temporary exhibitions; particular attention is also now being paid to a public deprived of cultural amenities. The permanent collections and temporary exhibitions therefore include a varied programme of cultural activities.

In addition to this, developments in the frequentation of the museums are being accompanied by a policy of seeking a more diverse public. Paris Musées, in partnership with people working in the social sectors of the greater Paris area, is consolidating and developing activities for a public unfamiliar with museums. In 2014, more than 8000 people took advantage of these activities in the museums of the city of Paris.

Our outreach extends to the Internet, with a website giving access to the complete programme of museum activities and to online details of the collections, so that people can prepare their visit.

[www.parismusees.paris.fr](http://www.parismusees.paris.fr)

### **This breakdown of visitor numbers confirms the success of the museums:**

**Visits:** 3 379 384 visitors in 2014 (i.e. +11 % compared with 2013)

**Temporary exhibitions:** 1 858 747 visitors, including nearly 1 million at the Musée des Beaux arts de la Ville de Paris (+90 % compared with 2013)

**Permanent collections:** 1 520 637 visitors

\*Except for establishments charging an admission fee for temporary exhibitions as part of the visit to their permanent collections (the archaeological Crypt under the forecourt of l'île de la Cité and the Catacombs). The Palais Galliera collections are only shown during temporary exhibitions.

## PARIS MUSÉES CARD FOR EXHIBITIONS AT YOUR OWN PACE!

A card can be bought from Paris Musées, which gives unlimited access, ahead of the queue, to the temporary exhibitions in all 14 of the museums of Paris\*, as well as special tariffs for activities. It entitles the holder to reductions in the bookshop-boutiques and the cafe-restaurants, and to receive prior information about events in the museums. In 2014, the card was bought by 9000 people.

Information is available at the Museum ticket offices or via the site:

[www.parismusees.paris.fr](http://www.parismusees.paris.fr)

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



## THE PETIT PALAIS



© L’Affiche-Dominique Milherou



© L’Affiche-Dominique Milherou

The Petit Palais was built for the **Exposition universelle in 1900** by the architect Charles Girault. In 1902 it became the Musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris. It has a very fine collection of paintings, sculptures, furniture and objets d’art dating from the **Classical era to 1914**.

There is an exceptionally fine collection of Greek vases and a large number of Flemish and Dutch paintings from the 17th century, focused around **Rembrandt’s** Self-portrait with a Dog. The magnificent collection of French paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries includes major works by **Fragonard, Greuze, David, Géricault, Delacroix, Courbet, Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Cézanne and Vuillard**. The museum has a fine collection of sculpture, including works by **Carpeaux, Carriès and Dalou**. The decorative arts collection is particularly rich in works from the Renaissance and works from the 1900s. There is glassware by **Gallé**, jewellery by **Fouquet** and **Lalique**, and also the dining room designed by **Guimard** for his private town house. The museum also has a fine collection of prints and drawings, which includes complete series of engravings by **Dürer, Rembrandt, and Callot**, and a rare collection of North European drawings.

The programme of temporary exhibitions has been reconceived to concentrate more on the periods covered by the museum’s extensive collections. In addition to the two principal temporary exhibition spaces on the ground floor and on the first floor, special shows and spotlight exhibitions extend the trail into the permanent galleries.

A **café-restaurant** opening onto the courtyard garden and a bookshop-boutique are available to add to the pleasure of a visit.

Remember to consult the programme for the **auditorium** (concerts, screenings, literary events, and lectures) on the museum website.

The museum is open to the public every day from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm except Mondays.

Late opening on Fridays until 9:00 pm for temporary exhibitions.

Entry to the permanent collections and the museum garden is free.  
petitpalais.paris.fr



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Oscar Wilde Insolence incarnate

**28 september 2016 - 15 january 2017**

#### OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Late opening Friday until 9:00 pm.

Closed on Mondays, 1 May. and 14 July.

#### ADMISSION CHARGES

Free entry to the permanent collections

Charges for temporary exhibitions:

**Full price:** 10 euros

**Combined ticket :** 17 euros. The combined ticket gives you access to two exhibitions of your choice.

**Reduced price:** 7 euros

**Free up to and including age 17**

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Accessible to handicapped persons.

#### Transport

Metro station Champs-Élysées Clemenceau



Station Invalides



Bus : 28, 42, 72, 73, 83, 93

#### Activities

It is necessary to reserve for all activities (children, families, or adults) apart from lecture-visits, at least 72 hours in advance. This can only be done by e-mail to [petitpalais.reservation@paris.fr](mailto:petitpalais.reservation@paris.fr)

**Programmes are available at the reception desk.**

Charges for activities are in addition to the exhibition admission charge

#### Auditorium

Information about the programme is available at the reception desk

[www.petitpalais.paris.fr](http://www.petitpalais.paris.fr)

#### Café Restaurant 'le Jardin du Petit Palais'

Open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

#### Bookshop-Boutique

Open from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm