

Théodore Rousseau

The Voice of the Forest

Press Kit
February 2024

5 March – 7 July 2024



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

Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 a.m.
to 6:00 p.m.
Late opening on Friday and Saturday
until 8:00p.m

Informations petitpalais.paris.en



Théodore Rousseau, *Tree in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1840-1849. Oil on paper on canvas, 40,4x54,2 Cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom. Photo © image Victoria and Albert Museum.

The exhibition has been possible thanks to



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Press release

The Petit Palais presents a unique exhibition devoted to Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867), a bohemian and modern artist, who made nature the principal motif of his work and world, as well as his refuge. Admired by the young Impressionists and the photographers who followed his footsteps through the forest, Rousseau single-handedly embodied the vitality of the landscape school, in the middle of a century marked by the industrial revolution and the rise of the life sciences. A true ecologist before his time, he turned his artist's gaze on Fontainebleau Forest and raised his voice in warning at the fragility of this ecosystem. The exhibition brings together almost one hundred works from major French museums like the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay, as well as European institutions such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Gallery in London, the Mesdag Collection in The Hague, the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, amongst others, and from private collections. These works show the extent to which the artist deserves a significant place in the history of art and landscape, but also reveal the influence his work has had on our contemporary relationship with nature.



Théodore Rousseau, *Inside the Forest, known as the Vieux Dormoir du Bas-Bréau (Forest of Fontainebleau)*, between 1836 and 1837. Oil on canvas. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Sylvie Chan-Liat.

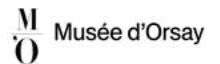
The exhibition follows the career of this singular artist who always positioned himself in opposition to his contemporaries. The first section explores his turning away from the academic path, notably through his refusal to undergo the traditional voyage to Italy as part of his artistic apprenticeship. **Rousseau**, in fact, wanted to paint nature for its own sake and not as a setting for mythological scenes. He preferred to travel the length and breadth of France as evidenced by his early works: *Landscape in the Auvergne*, 1830 (Musée du Louvre); *Village in Normandy*, 1833 (Custodia Foundation, Frits Lugt Collection); *Mont Blanc, seen from La Faucille. Storm Effect*, 1834 (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen). From his travels, he brought back numerous studies that bear witness to his attentive observation of the visible: studies of trunks, rocks, undergrowth, and marshes. The exhibition also demonstrates the unique dimension of Rousseau's work, of which painting closely from and in nature was an integral part of his creative process. The painter needed to immerse himself in nature. He renounced any geometric perspective and placed the viewer in a position where they were not overlooking the landscape but at the heart of this ecosystem. He often retouched his paintings in his studio, a process that could last several years. His very personal technique, contrasting with that of other artists of the day, contributed to the refusal of his work by the Salons for several consecutive years before a discouraged Rousseau chose not to submit anymore. Paradoxically, this rejection, which earned him the nickname "the great rejected one", allowed him to acquire a certain notoriety and real critical and commercial success both in France and abroad.



The exhibition then focuses on his works painted in the forest of Fontainebleau and his prominent role amongst the artists and photographers who visited the village of Barbizon, where he settled in 1847. Around him was a circle of painters that included **Narcisse Díaz de la Peña**, **Charles Jacques**, and **Jean-François Millet** who would become his closest friend, but also photographers like **Eugène Cuvelier**, **Charles Bodmer**, and **Gustave Le Gray**. They tirelessly scoured Fontainebleau Forest executing portraits of trees. This, in fact, would become Rousseau's signature. He carefully observed the trees' organic structure, the line of their branches, the form of their knots. He individualized them, citing the precise location for each of his paintings: *Chailly Path*, circa 1840 (Musée départemental des peintres de Barbizon), or *The Vieux Dormoir of Bas-Bréau*, 1836-1837 (on long-term loan from the Musée du Louvre to the Musée d'Orsay).

Around this time, a keen awareness of the threat posed to forests emerged amongst artists, critics, and writers in a context of increasing industrialization. Painters witnessed deforestation and showed this in their works. Rousseau sought to denounce these "crimes" through his paintings. For example, he borrowed a particularly striking or arresting title for one work—*Massacre of the Innocents*, 1847 (Mesdag Collection, Netherlands)—inspired by a biblical episode. The canvas presents trees being felled in the forest. In 1852, Rousseau became the voice of the forest on behalf of all the artists who painted it, and on this subject, he wrote to the Count of Morny, the then Minister of the Interior. His combat found its resolution in the creation, in 1853, of the world's very first nature reserve, under the name of "artistic reserve", made official in 1861. At the end of the exhibition, a timeline traces the history of Fontainebleau Forest and its preservation from the early 19th century up to the present day, highlighting Rousseau's decisive contribution, in the name of art, to the emergence of an ecological conscience.

The exhibition has been organized thanks to the exceptional participation of



Curators:

Annick Lemoine, Chief Heritage Curator, Director of the Petit Palais, Head Curator
Servane Dargnies-de Vitry, Curator of Paintings at the Musée d'Orsay,

The Exhibition

Introduction

A generation before the Impressionist painters, Théodore Rousseau (Paris, 1812-Barbizon, 1867) was one of the most controversial artists of his day. An archetype of the bohemian, rebellious, and modern artist, he was excluded from the Salon—a key event in artistic life—by a harsh academic jury, while at the same time, being hailed the “greatest landscape painter in Europe” by progressive critics. He alone demonstrated the vitality of the landscape school in the mid-19th century, sparking fierce debates, some of which became political, and even ecological, ahead of their time.



Théodore Rousseau, *Cattle at the Trough*, 1850-1860. Oil on wood. Legs Jean-Pierre Lundy, 1887. Musée des Beaux-arts de Reims. Photo © Corentin Le Goff.

In a century marked by scientific discoveries, the Industrial Revolution, and the rural exodus, humankind’s relationship with nature was undergoing profound change. Rousseau was the privileged, sensitive, and committed witness to this. In his canvases, he tirelessly sought to capture the sense of harmony he experienced in nature, while studying trees and forests, as well as the air and light that could be found there. Driven by this unconditional love for living things, the artist who once claimed that he could hear trees’ voices would be one of the first to raise his own voice in warning about the fragility of the forest ecosystem. It is for this reason that it is now timely to re-examine the life and work of this revolutionary and unique figure, thereby showing the extent to which he deserves a prominent place in the history of art and landscape painting, but also the extent to which his work may be said to influence our relationship with nature today.



Théodore Rousseau, *Malbuisson Lake*, circa 1831. Oil on paper mounted on cardboard, 19,5x28,4 cm.

Section 1 – Revolutionizing landscape painting

Théodore did his painting apprenticeship in the studio of Jean-Charles-Joseph Rémond, the master of the “historical landscape”. In 1829, when ready to enter the Prix de Rome competition, Rousseau rebelled and turned his back on the academic or classical path for good. He aspired to paint nature for itself, and not merely as a simple backdrop for mythological or biblical scenes. Inspired by the Dutch landscape painters of the 17th century and by the Englishman John Constable, he established the methodical study of reality and natural

phenomena as the principle of his art. He travelled to Auvergne and this solitary journey would be the starting point for numerous other journeys across France: Normandy, Jura, Vendée, Landes, Pyrenees, Berry, but never Italy, going against the grain of tradition. We can chart his voyages thanks to the works he brought back: oil studies, drawings, and watercolours. As his ambition was to explore the visible, everything became a subject for the painter: marshes, the undergrowth, rocks, old trees, and even branches of dead wood. A wide range of subjects populated his studies, as well as his more accomplished paintings.

Section 2 - “The Great Rejected One”: the unruly Rousseau

Théodore Rousseau first worked outdoors, practicing painting en plein-air, as close as possible to nature, and adding the finishing details over a lengthy period of time in his studio, a process that sometimes took several years. “Finishing” was the great bane of his life, because of the fundamental tension between his desire to capture reality and to imbue it with his soul. In the words of Charles

Baudelaire, Rousseau was “a naturalist constantly drawn towards the Ideal”. A free and undisciplined artist on all levels, including technical, Rousseau produced hybrid works, between drawing and painting, erasing the border between the sketch and the painting. He was criticized for this: from 1836 onwards, his works were systematically refused by the official Salon. Even his Allée des châtaigniers (Avenue of Chestnut Trees), which was to be acquired by the State, was refused by the jury. Discouraged, the artist refused to submit any more of his works to the Salon until the advent of the Republic in 1848 caused his career to take a new path. Supported by the new government, he received an official commission and exhibited once again at the Salon, after a hiatus of thirteen years. This myth of the “great rejected one”, as a result of his intransigence and unwavering support of certain critics, such as Théophile Thoré, paradoxically benefited him on a commercial level. His works gradually achieved growing success with collectors and a public in search of authenticity.

Section 3 - Barbizon, the village of artists

When Théodore Rousseau settled in Barbizon in 1847, the hamlet had only one street. Beyond the houses, fields stretched as far as the eye could see, punctuated by a few wooded groves. To the east, lay the spectacular forest of Fontainebleau. Since the beginning of the century, it had attracted dozens of painters, who stayed at the inn of a certain Père (Father) Ganne. The opening of the Paris-Melun railway line encouraged the growth of what would soon be called the “colony” of Barbizon painters, short of being a real school.

A veritable community formed around Rousseau: painters Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, Karl Bodmer, Jean-François Millet, and Charles Jacque, and photographer Eugène Cuvelier, were amongst his close friends. Others regularly visited, such as Constant Troyon, Honoré Daumier, and sculptor Antoine-Louis Barye, as well as critics, collectors, and art dealers.



Théodore Rousseau, An Avenue, Isle-Adam Forest, 1849. Oil on canvas. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.

There was a firm friendship between Millet and Rousseau, based on their shared tastes and sense of solidarity or community. Nevertheless, they did not paint together: Millet focused on the farmlands, while Rousseau turned to the forest, preferring the solitude of dense groves.



Théodore Rousseau, Edge of the Forest at Fontainebleau, Setting Sun, 1848-1850. Oil on canvas. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot.

Section 4 - Fontainebleau, the forest as refuge

Théodore Rousseau wandered the forest alone from dawn to dusk. His works were always precisely located there, and the viewer can follow him on his strolls throughout the seasons, from the Chailly path to the Gorge aux Loups, via the Bellecroix Plateau, the woods at Bas-Bréau, the drylands of Macherin and Apremont, the rocky landscape at Franchard, and even the pond known as the Mare aux Fées (Fairy Pond).

His great ambition was to paint “the manifestation of life”, and to do in such a way that “a tree [could] truly grow”. This led him to tirelessly study shapes, materials, colours, and above all, the light and air that gave form to chaos. His paintings are composed in such a way that they give the impression of not actually being composed. By renouncing any geometric perspective, Rousseau placed people inside this ecosystem, and not before it. In this way, Rousseau may be said to display an organic conception of nature and living things, typical of Romantic pantheism. By immersing the viewer in nature, he sought to show that it was a whole and that humans were one with this whole, in a rediscovered harmony.

Section 5 - The voice of the trees

The forest of Fontainebleau boasts many “remarkable trees”, grandiose and centuries-old oaks and beeches, identified and named in the guidebooks of Claude-François Denecourt. Each with their own name, “Le Charlemagne” was painted by Corot, “le Rageur” by Barye, “le Braconnier” by Diaz, and these portraits of trees became the obligatory exercise for the artist, painter, or photographer who visited the forest. The task however, was more difficult than it seemed: without story or allegory, the artist had to confront the materiality of the tree.

In a sense, portraits of trees are emblematic of Rousseau’s production. The artist carefully observed their organic structure and the intertwining of their branches, scrutinizing their musculature and knots. In his paintings, human figures are reduced to a minimum, and the trees are the main actors. Rousseau understands them not as species, but as individuals, whose “entire system of life” must be revealed. He listens to them, hears their voice, understands their language, while seeking to uncover the secret of their power and serene energy.



Théodore Rousseau, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, 1847. Oil on canvas, 95 cm x 146,5 cm. La Haye, Collection Mesdag. Photo © Collection Mesdag, La Haye.

Section 6 - Rousseau, an ecologist?

From the 1840's onwards, many artists, critics, and writers became increasingly concerned about the fate of the forest of Fontainebleau. On the one hand, it was devastated by the felling of trees on a massive scale for industry; and on the other, by the development of tourism—the trails implemented by Claude-François Denecourt had profoundly altered the landscape. Théodore Rousseau sought to arouse the viewer’s compassion for these innocent trees falling under the blows of foresters. If in most of his paintings he highlights the organic unity between humans and nature, he also sometimes painted trees being felled to raise awareness.

In 1852, Rousseau became the voice or spokesperson of the forest. He wrote to the Minister of the Interior, the Comte de Morny, on behalf of all the artists who painted the forest. He demanded that the places that served as their models and inspiration be preserved and protected from untimely felling. His passionate appeal had an impact. In 1853, the world’s very first nature reserve was born, under the name “artistic reserve”, and was made official in 1861. In the name of art, Rousseau had participated in the Western emergence of ecological awareness.



History of Fontainebleau Forest

- **1822:** Camille Corot visits Fontainebleau Forest and paints a dead tree, one of the preferred subjects for artists painting from nature.
- **1827:** Birth of the modern Forest Code, establishing rules for managing, developing, and protecting forests, while restricting farmers' rights.
- **1831:** The Forestry Administration Board initiates a renewal project by felling old trees. On the less fertile moors, it plants pine trees, arousing the indignation of the Barbizon artists who denounce such methods.
- **1837:** Théodore Rousseau leads a campaign against the planned felling of trees.
- **1842:** Claude-François Denecourt invents nature tourism by tracing the world's first marked hiking trails at Fontainebleau, called "blue trails". He also adds features like fountains, caves, and an observation tower.
- **1847:** Théodore Rousseau rents a house at Barbizon and sets up his studio there, the same year that Théophile Thoré publishes "Par monts et par bois" ("By hills and woods").
- **1849:** On 12 August, "leisure trains" make the forest accessible to Parisians and generate great excitement.
- **1852:** In the name of "all the artists who paint the forest", Théodore Rousseau and his friend Alfred Sensier ask the Forest Administration Board that these places "be put out of reach of the forest administration which mismanages them, and away from the absurdity of man who exploits them."
- **1853:** The imperial government creates an "Artistic Series", a reserve of six hundred and twenty-four hectares for artists and walkers.
- **1861:** On 13 August, an imperial decree formalizes the Artistic Series, and extends it by one thousand hectares. This is the world's first nature reserve, eleven years before the creation of Yellowstone National Park in the United States.
- **1873:** Creation of the Committee for the Artistic Protection of Fontainebleau Forest, chaired by the painter Jean-François Millet. The following year, the Committee launches a petition to expand the number of artistic series or reserves. Victor Hugo, George Sand, Jules Michelet, and Claude Monet are amongst the signatories.
- **1892:** By decree, the Artistic Series (Reserve) is expanded to almost one thousand five hundred hectares.
- **1927:** A first municipal museum opens in Barbizon in Théodore Rousseau's former studio. It closes in 1930 due to lack of funding.
- **1953:** The artistic reserve is reduced to one thousand and seventy hectares to make way for the creation of five hundred and fifty-two hectares of biological reserves closed to the public, including one hundred and forty-one hectares of "strict nature" reserves with zero human intervention.



- **1966:** Creation of the National Forestry Office (ONF).
- **1967:** End of the Artistic Series or Reserves. The biological reserves are maintained, but their surface area is subsequently reduced to four hundred and fifteen hectares in 1972. The 2009 planning review increases the surface area of "strict nature" reserves to one thousand and sixty-two hectares, and "managed" to one thousand three hundred and five hectares.
- **2002:** Decree of 19 April classifying Fontainebleau Forest as a "Protected Forest".
- **2013:** Fontainebleau Forest is the first such zone to receive the "Exceptional Forest" Label.
- **2020:** Application for the inclusion of Fontainebleau Forest as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, under the title "Domaine de Fontainebleau" as an extension of the castle, itself listed since 1981.
- **2023:** In 2023, the forest welcomes over fifteen million visitors, almost one hundred times more than in 1866.

Press visuals



1. Théodore Rousseau, *Cattle at the Trough*, 1850-1860.

Oil on wood, 41,7x63,7 cm. Legs Jean-Pierre Lundy, 1887. Musée des Beaux-arts de Reims. Photo © Corentin Le Goff.

The acidity of the colours of this painting recalls English landscape artist John Constable, whose Hay Wain Théodore Rousseau had probably seen. The work was sold in Paris in 1832. His admiration for Constable merged with the lessons of the Dutch landscapers of the seventeenth century, notably Jacob Van Ruisdael and Meindert Hobbema. Their sensitivity to atmospheric conditions, infinitely changing, depending on the seasons and the time of day, lastingly inspired Rousseau.



2. Théodore Rousseau, *Edge of a Cleared Wood, Forest of Compiègne or View of the Village of Pierrefonds*, 1833.

Oil on canvas, 51,8x73,7 cm. Kunshtalle, Hambourg, Allemagne. Photo © BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image BPK

This work, remarkable for its composition, narrowly admitted to the Salon of 1834 (eleven votes to ten), was purchased by the Duc d'Orléans. The artist represents the surroundings of Compiègne. Beyond the agricultural land, we can just make out the roofs of a village. In the background, a hill borders the edge of a wood. Under the blue and grey sky, we can almost feel the slight quiver of the air in the branches. Peasants and a country guard seated in the foreground add some animation to the scene.



3. Théodore Rousseau, *Mont-Blanc seen from La Faucille, storm effect*, started in 1834.

Oil on canvas, 146,5x242 cm. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

In 1834, Théodore Rousseau stayed at the Col de la Faucille, in the Jura, which offers a unique view of the Mont-Blanc massif. Keen to translate the immensity that surrounded him onto the canvas, he abandoned traditional perspective and topographical accuracy. His canvas represents an abyss rather than a panorama. The space towards the summit of Mont Blanc seems to deepen as we contemplate it. The painting, devoid of any human presence, brings to the fore the artist's sensations in the face of the unleashed elements.



4. Théodore Rousseau, *Malbuisson Lake*, circa 1831.

Oil on paper mounted on cardboard, 19,5×28,4 cm. Private collection.



5. Théodore Rousseau, *The Valley of Saint-Vincent*, 1830.

Oil on paper on cardboard, 18,2×32,4 cm. The National Gallery, London. Photo © The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom



6. Théodore Rousseau, *Avenue of Chestnut Trees*, 1825-1850, Oil on canvas, 79×144 cm.

Musée du Louvre, Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux

Théodore Rousseau began this painting from nature, in the grounds of the Château de Souliers in the Vendée, before retouching it in his workshop over a period of several years. On a composition sketched in charcoal and ink, he paints with dark glazes, in search of vibrant tones. The branches and foliage form a vault carried by the tree trunks, in the manner of cathedral columns. Lower down, in the lighter areas, the painter imitates the coarse surfaces of the chestnut trees by roughly applying his paint.



7. Théodore Rousseau, *An Avenue, Isle-Adam Forest*, 1849.
Oil on canvas, 101x81,8 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.

This painting was one of Théodore Rousseau's favourites. He spent two years completing it and chose it for his triumphant return to the Salon in 1849. Consisting of a profusion of leaves and branches where viewers can almost feel the air circulating, the work is also emblematic of the artist's ecological vision. Nature is represented as an organic whole in which rural populations are integrated. The shepherdesses grazing their cows blend harmoniously into the forest environment.



8. Étienne Carjat, *Portrait of Rousseau*, circa 1865.
Photograph (print on albumen paper from a glass negative, pasted on Canson paper), 10,5x6,5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.



9. Théodore Rousseau, *La Campagne au lever du jour*, 1859.
Oil on wood, 33x61 cm. Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, France.
Photo © Paris Musées / Petit Palais.



10. Théodore Rousseau, *Inside the Forest, known as the Vieux Dormoir du Bas-Bréau (Forest of Fontainebleau)*, between 1836 and 1837.

Oil on canvas, 65×103 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Sylvie Chan-Liat.

This early painting depicts an idyllic undergrowth scene in the woods at Bas-Bréau, one of the oldest in the Fontainebleau Forest. In the middle of a vegetal landscape with brown, green, and yellow tones which evoke early autumn, a herd of cows are seen drinking from a pond. Although the blue sky is visible through the foliage, the absence of a horizon line and the succession of vertical tree trunks close off this chaotic space, celebrating the uncontrollable profusion of nature.



11. Théodore Rousseau, *Clearing at Haute Futaie, Forest of Fontainebleau*, before 1866.

Oil on wood, 28×53 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.



12. Théodore Rousseau, *Apremont Gorge in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, after 1862.

Oil on canvas, 79×143 cm. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

In the early 1860s, the wild beauty of the drylands of Apremont, made up of rocks and heather, was threatened by a massive plantation of Scots pines. Outraged and inconsolable, Théodore Rousseau painted the site before its transformation, to preserve its memory. When critic Théophile Thoré described the Apremont Gorge in "By hills and woods", we can easily imagine the site. We enter it, he wrote, by a "tortuous path between the rocks, and soon we discover an immense arena, covered, in the middle, with moss the colour of bears' fur, and bordered by hills of silvery granite."



13. Théodore Rousseau *Chailly Path*, 1840-1850. Oil on canvas, 24,8x39,2 cm. Musée départemental des peintres de Barbizon, France. Acquired in 2007 with the support of the Fond régional d'Acquisition des Musées (État / Conseil régional Île-de-France). Photo © Département de Seine-et-Marne / Galica Valdet.



14. Théodore Rousseau, *La mare aux fées, forêt de Fontainebleau*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 59,1x114 cm. Private collection.

The dynamic oblique lines guide the viewer's eye into the heart of a gloomy landscape. The skeletal trees standing out against a pale twilight evoke the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. The damp and almost bare terrain is rendered with a great density of material, while the sky, crossed by rapid clouds, reveals the canvas. In the middle, the pond appears unreal, with its powerful greens contrasting harmoniously with the red sky. The mystery of nature here, is pushed to the point of fantasy. This painting was part of the collection of Théophile Thoré, who was the painter's most vocal supporter.



15. Théodore Rousseau, *The Oak Pond*, 1860-1865. Oil on wood, 42x62 cm. Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, Musée Thomas-Henry, long-term loan from the Musée d'Orsay.



16. Théodore Rousseau, *Edge of the Forest at Fontainebleau, Setting Sun*, 1848-1850. Oil on canvas, 142×198 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Gérard Blot.

At sunset, a herdsman gathers his herd drinking peacefully at the edge of an old oak grove. The theme of pasture chosen by Théodore Rousseau for his first state commission was an implicitly political one. Barbizon artists regularly used it to support and defend the right of farmers to graze their flocks in the forest. At the Exposition Universelle of 1855, Rousseau hung this painting next to another representing the same site at a different time of the day, foreshadowing the notion of series associated with Claude Monet.



18. Eugène Cuvelier, *Rocks and Pines in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, circa 1860. Photograph (salted paper print from a waxed paper negative), 25,4×33,5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.



17. Eugène Cuvelier, *Franchard Pond, forest of Fontainebleau*, circa 1863. Photograph (salted paper print from a paper negative, laminated on cardboard), 20×25,8 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.



19. Gustave Le Gray, *Oaks at Bas-Bréau* circa 1852. Photograph mounted in a collection (albumen paper, after negative on paper), 27.8×38 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France. ©Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Gustave Le Gray, who advocated for the artistic dimension of photography, regularly came to Fontainebleau. His views of the forest reflect his talent for composing images by playing with focus and exposure time. By capturing only part of the trees, he suggests that the image struggles to contain them, thus allowing viewers to imagine them larger than they really were. His expert manipulation of light and meticulous treatment of the negative, as well as the prints, give expressive force to the bark of the trunks and great softness to the foliage.



20. Théodore Rousseau, *The Rock Oak*, 1860.
Oil on wood, 88,9×116,8 cm. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.
Photo © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

Théodore Rousseau represented the crooked “rock oak” twice, in a painting and in a print, in the centre of an intertwining group of branches and foliage. The two works thus present fragments of an untamed nature, as if devoid of construction. Through his framing, Rousseau offers a dense and obscure vision of the forest, a counterpoint to Denecourt’s tidily marked trails, which he abhorred. No human figure, however small, can be seen in this landscape: a rarity in Rousseau’s work.



21. Théodore Rousseau, *Group of Oaks, Apremont, Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1850-1852.
Oil on canvas, 63,5×99,5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Angèle Dequier.

The painting is imbued with a palpable sense of nostalgia. Théodore Rousseau deliberately omitted the characteristic hills and rocks of Apremont to highlight the three large bicentennial oaks. Alfred Sensier, Rousseau’s biographer, maintains that this painting was specially created to preserve the ancient appearance of the site threatened by pine plantations. The presence of the herd of cows and the herdsman also highlights a traditional pastoral practice in full decline in the 1850s: grazing in the Fontainebleau Forest.



22. Théodore Rousseau, *Tree in the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 1840-1849.
Oil on paper on canvas, 40,4×54,2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom.
Photo © image Victoria and Albert Museum.

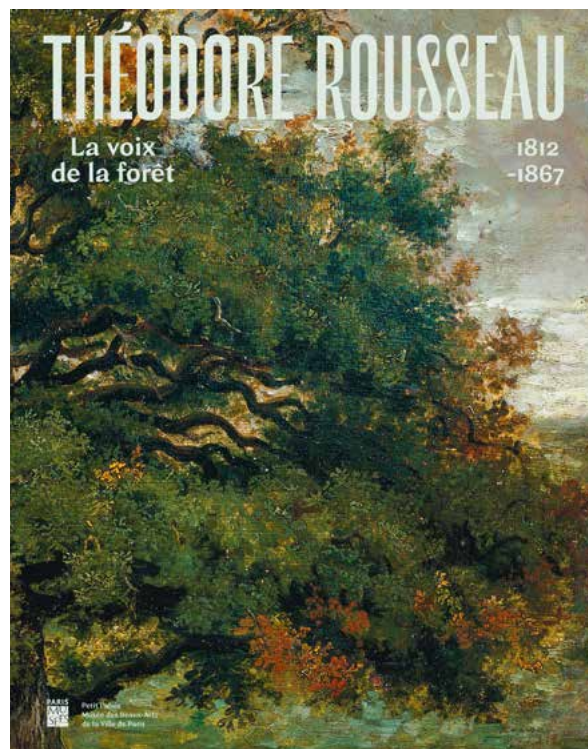


23. Théodore Rousseau, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, 1847.
Oil on canvas, 95 cm×146,5 cm. La Haye, Collection Mesdag. Photo © Collection Mesdag, The Hag.

It is rare that Théodore Rousseau depicts a specific scene involving figures. Even though the canvas remains in a rough form, we can see, almost in the centre of the composition, a man, high up, tying a rope onto the trunk of the main oak. Other loggers, far off to the left, pull on another rope to fell the furthest oak. In the foreground, a tree lies across the path. The title given by the artist, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, evokes the biblical story of the murder of all children under the age of two in the Bethlehem region, on the orders of King Herod. By comparing the oaks to these innocent people killed, Rousseau sought to raise awareness about the destruction of forest environments due to industrialization.

Catalogue

A generation before the Impressionist painters, Théodore Rousseau (Paris, 1812 – Barbizon, 1867) was the sensitive and committed witness to humankind's evolving relationship with nature, in a century marked by scientific discoveries, the Industrial Revolution, and the rural exodus. The artist found his inspiration outdoors and explored Normandy, the Vendée, Auvergne, Berry, the Alps, Landes, Pyrenees, and the Jura. However, his principal source of inspiration was very close to Paris: Fontainebleau Forest. The latter offered him a great variety of models—trees, undergrowth, rocks, clearings—which he observed, on his own, for hours at a time, producing sketches from nature before executing the definitive works in his studio. He tirelessly sought to recreate on the canvas the sensation of harmony he felt in nature, studying the trees and forest, the air and the light. Théodore Rousseau challenged the established codes of the landscape genre, by blurring the boundaries between painting and drawing, sketch and completed work. Moved by his unconditional love of living things, he who wanted to be the voice of the trees would be one of the first to raise his voice in warning about the fragility of the forest ecosystem.



Under the direction of Servane Dagnies-de Vitry, Painting Curator at the Musée d'Orsay, and Curator of the exhibition.

Prefaces:

Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris

Annick Lemoine, Director of the Petit Palais.

Texts by: Sandra Buratti-Hasan, Servane Dagnies-de Vitry, Dominique de Font-Réaulx, Chantal Georgel, Simon Kelly, Edouard Kopp, Asher Miller, Michel Schulman, Renske Suijver, Greg M. Thomas, Pierre Wat.

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Paris Musées A museums network

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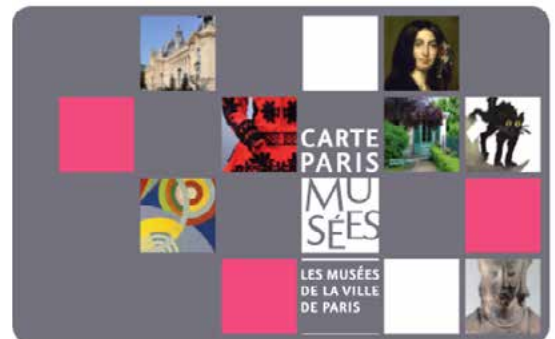
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Information is available at the Museum ticket offices or on parismusees.paris.en



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

The Petit Palais



© C. Fouin

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.



© B. Fougérol

Since 2015, the collection presentation has been extensively reworked. It has been enriched by two new galleries on the garden floor level, one of which is dedicated to the Romantic period. In one gallery, restored large-format paintings by Delaroche and Schnetz are surrounded by works of artists such as Ingres, Géricault and Delacroix. In the second gallery, decorative paintings by Maurice Denis are interspersed with works by Cézanne, Bonnard, Maillol and Vallotton. In the fall of 2017, the collection of icons and Eastern Orthodox arts, which is the largest one in France, will benefit from a new museographic presentation. An area will also be dedicated to sketches of the major nineteenth-century Parisian settings. Early in 2018, these new presentations will be complemented in the North Gallery by collections of monumental sculptures from the nineteenth century.



© B. Fougérol

The program of temporary exhibitions at the Petit Palais alternates ambitious major subjects like *Paris romantic*, *Paris 1900*, *Les Bas-fonds du Baroque (Baroque Slums)* and Oscar Wilde with monographs that allow rediscovering forgotten painters such as Anders Zorn, Albert Besnard or George Desvallières. Since 2015, contemporary artists (Thomas Lerooy in 2015, Kehinde Wiley in 2016, Andres Serrano in 2017, Valérie Jouve in 2018, Yan Pei-Ming in 2019, Laurence Aëgerter in 2020 and Jean-Michel Othoniel in 2021) have been invited to exhibit in the Petit Palais permanent collections in order to create a dialog with these paintings and reveal links between their works and those of the museum.

petitpalais.paris.en



Information

Théodore Rousseau *The Voice of the Forest*

5 Mars to 7 July 2024

Admission

Full rate : 12 euros

Reduces rate : 10 euros

Reservation of a recommended visit time on
petitpalais.paris.en

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Late opening on Friday and Saturday until
8:00p.m

Petit Palais

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petitpalais.paris.en
Accessible to people with disabilities

Access

Metro

Lines 1 and 13: Champs-Élysées
Clemenceau
Line 9: Franklin D. Roosevelt

RER

Line C: Invalides

Bus

Lines 28, 42, 72, 73, 83, 93.

Vélib'

Station 8001 (Petit Palais)

Auditorium

Information on petitpalais.paris.en

Café-restaurant *Le Jardin du Petit Palais*

The museum's café-restaurant will be closed
for renovation work until 26 April inclusive.

From 27 April, open from 10:00 a.m. to
5:15 p.m. (last order)

Terrace closes at 5.40pm.

Late-night opening times: see petitpalais.paris.en

Bookshop

Open from 10:00 a.m to 5:45 p.m,
Late closing at 8:00 p.m