

# Augustin Rouart

## Painting as legacy

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

INFORMATION  
[petitpalais.paris.fr](http://petitpalais.paris.fr)  
Free entrance

The Petit Palais is thrilled to announce and showcase a generous donation from the French Academy's Jean-Marie Rouart of twelve works by Henri Rouart, Henry Lerolle, Maurice Denis and Augustin Rouart.

On this occasion, the museum will launch a free exhibition in its permanent collections in Spring 2021, in dialogue with works linked to Rouart family: pastels and paintings by Berthe Morisot, Edgar Degas and Auguste Renoir. The exhibition will include some 15 loans and the family archives of Jean-Marie Rouart.

In the footsteps of other institutions that have contributed to rediscovering the Rouarts and their circles over the past ten years and more, the Petit Palais is delighted to shine a light on this vital family of Parisian artists and collectors.

Presented in two large spaces, the exhibition will first focus on the "Rouart Constellation", with the great grandfathers of the donator, **Henri Rouart** and **Henry Lerolle**, at its centre. Both men painted and eagerly collected Impressionist works. A second room will be dedicated to the oeuvre of Augustin Rouart, the writer's father.

Henri Rouart (1833–1912) was a major figure in the art world of the late 19th century. A prominent industrialist and painter, but above all an enlightened collector, he helped many artists whose work now feature in the collections of the Petit Palais – especially the Impressionists – gain recognition. Works by **Berthe Morisot**, **Paule Gobillard** and **Edgar Degas** – who were very close to the Rouart and Lerolle families – recall the many ties forged with the great artists of their time. The painting by Henri Rouart of his salon/artist's studio on the Rue de Lisbonne in Paris gives a glimpse of this emblematic rallying point that his private townhouse was at the time.



Augustin Rouart, *Lagrimeras y Penas*, 1943  
Photo Philippe Fuzeau

The second artist represented in the donation, the painter Henry Lerolle (1848–1929), was best known for his mural decorations. However, his painting *Intérieur* ("Interior"), included in the donation, is an excellent example of his intimist vein. Steeped in the tradition of 17th-century Dutch painting, his silent atmospheres, clear tones and crisp light captivate the viewer. This painting is presented alongside a handsome pastel portrait of Christine Lerolle by **Maurice Denis**, also offered by Jean-Marie Rouart to the Petit Palais. It was a gift from the artist to the sitter when Henri Lerolle's daughter married one of Henri Rouart's sons. While the museum has a very large collection of works by the Nabi artist, it could not boast a pastel – a medium nevertheless much appreciated by Maurice Denis – until now.

The exhibition ends with an impressive ensemble of some 20 works by **Augustin Rouart** (1907–97), of which eight are included in the donation to the museum. Smitten with Renaissance masters, especially Dürer whose monogram he adopted, Augustin Rouart created his own style, combining respect for the real, fascination for nature, and a taste for the decorative in a deeply humanist synthesis. He was most productive in the 1930s and 40s, although his career went well beyond this time period.



Augustin Rouart, *Le Nageur*, 1943  
Photo Philippe Fuzeau

Among the most emblematic works, *Le Nageur* ("The Swimmer") and *Le Petit Pêcheur* ("The Little Fisherman") show how the artist was influenced by art deco and the world of Japanese prints. *Lagrimas y penas* ("Tears and Sorrows") depicts the painter's wife and stands out for its chromatic qualities, flat planes and astonishing foreshortening of the figure lying on her stomach. These characteristics are reminiscent of work by Paul Gauguin and Félix Vallotton. Augustin Rouart also made a name for himself in portraiture, affirming his affiliation with the hieratic style of the northern Renaissance, especially Holbein. Likewise, the stark minimalism of his still life compositions, lavish attention to detail in the meticulous representation of each species, and sensuous palette in the rendering of petals cannot help but strike the viewer. This fascinating dynasty of painters and art patrons is at the heart of a moving account published by Jean-Marie Rouart in 2000, *Une jeunesse à l'ombre de la lumière* ("A youth in the shadow of light").

Thanks to the generosity of the author, the Petit Palais, in addition to being the custodian of different works linked to this Parisian family, has now become the guardian of artistic memory.

### Curation

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