

Sarah Bernhardt

And the woman created the star

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

Information
petitpalais.paris.fr



Sarah Bernhardt
Photograph from W&D Downey Photographers
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Sarah Bernhardt, (1844-1923), was an emblematic figure who spanned the 19th and 20th centuries. The “Divine Sarah”, who was an artist as well as an actress, takes centre stage at the Petit Palais in an exceptional exhibition to mark the centenary of her death. The museum holds important collections of works linked to the actress, including the spectacular portrait of her that was painted in 1876 by her friend Georges Clairin and donated by her son Maurice

With near four hundred works, the exhibition traces the life and theatrical career of this “sacred monster”, as Jean Cocteau dubbed her. A legendary performer of the greatest roles from Racine, Shakespeare, Edmond Rostand and Alexandre Dumas fils, among others, Sarah Bernhardt went from triumph to triumph in theatres all over the world.

The exhibition evokes her greatest roles through the **costumes** she wore on stage, **photographs**, **paintings**, **posters** and other

memorabilia. Her “golden voice” and her tall, slender figure – unusual in those days – held the public in thrall, as well as the artistic and literary world, who simply venerated her. She was the friend of painters such as **Gustave Doré**, **Georges Clairin**, **Louise Abbéma**, and **Alphonse Mucha**, but also of writers like **Victor Hugo**, **Edmond Rostand**, **Victorien Sardou** and **Sacha Guitry**, as well as musicians and composers like **Reynaldo Hahn**. She was an artist herself, and an entire section of the exhibition focuses on this lesser-known aspect of her life.

Photographs, paintings and even a film reveal the private side of her art, but also the publicity she sought for her work as an artist. A number of objects that belonged to her also illustrate Sarah Bernhardt's personal life and her taste for eccentricity: her various homes, her lavish, eclectic interiors and her wardrobe. Sarah Bernhardt can be regarded as a genuine star before her time, constantly on the look-out for new trends and using her image for her own publicity. The frenzy of popular emotion that greeted her death in 1923, at the age of 79, anticipated the cult following of the great film stars of the 20th century.

Head curator: Annick Lemoine, director of the Petit Palais

Curators: Cécilie Champy, Director of the Musée Zadkine, Stéphanie Cantarutti, curator for 19th century paintings at the Petit Palais

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MUSÉE **HISTOIRE**
DE PARIS CARNAVALET



Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt by Georges Clairin
Oil on canvas, 1876
© Paris Musées / Petit Palais

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