

# Modern Paris: 1905-1925

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

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



Robert Delaunay, *Paris –The Woman and the Tower*, 1925  
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Photo © BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image BPK

After Romantic Paris (1815-1858) and Paris 1900, City of Entertainment, the Petit Palais is devoting the last section of its trilogy to Modern Paris (1905-1925). From the Belle Époque to the Roaring Twenties, Paris continued, more than ever before, to attract artists from all around the world. This cosmopolitan city was both a capital where innovation thrived and a place of tremendous cultural influence. Paris would maintain this status despite the reorganization of the international scene following the First World War, a period during which women played a major role, which has too often been forgotten. Ambitious, unique, and exciting, this exhibition aims to demonstrate the dynamism of the period by highlighting the ruptures and brilliant advances that occurred, both artistic and technological. It brings together almost four hundred works by Robert Delaunay, Sonia Delaunay, Marcel Duchamp, Marie Laurencin, Fernand Léger, Tamara de Lempicka, Amedeo Modigliani, Chana Orloff, Pablo Picasso, Marie Vassilieff, and many others. It also features clothing designs by Paul Poiret and Jeanne

Lanvin, jewellery by Cartier, a plane from Le Bourget Musée de l'Air et de l'Espace, and even a car on loan from the Musée national de l'Automobile in Mulhouse. Through fashion, cinema, photography, painting, sculpture, and drawing, as well as dance, design, architecture, and industry, this exhibition showcases the rich creativity of the period 1905-1925.

The exhibition, organized both chronologically and thematically, draws its originality from the geographical perimeter on which it mainly focuses, i.e., the Champs Élysées, halfway between the districts of Montmartre and Montparnasse. Stretching from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe and the Esplanade des Invalides, it encompasses the Petit and Grand Palais, as well as the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and rue de la

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Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Olga in an Armchair*, spring 1918, Paris, Musée national Picasso  
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Boétie. This district was a veritable cradle and hub of Modernity. At the time, the Grand Palais hosted the latest in artistic creation at the Salon d'Automne and Salon des Indépendants every year, where the public could discover works by **Douanier Rousseau**, **Henri Matisse**, and **Kees van Dongen** amongst others.

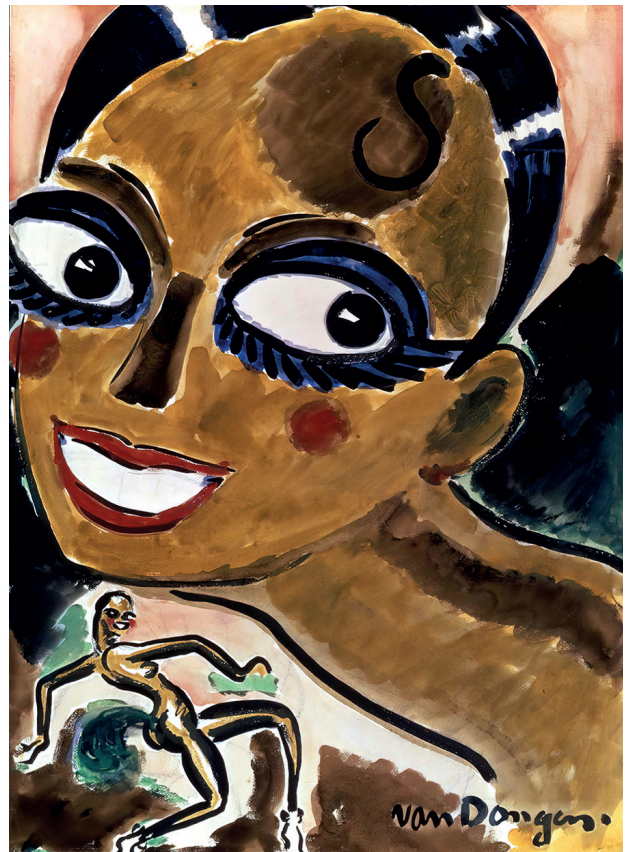
During the First World War, the Petit Palais played an important patriotic role, exhibiting works of art that had been damaged during the conflict, as well as Mimi Pinson cockade (tricolour rosette) competitions. In 1925, it hosted the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, displaying an exciting mix of traditional, Art Deco, and international avant-garde productions. A few steps away, on the current-day Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, at that time called the Avenue d'Antin, the great fashion designer **Paul Poiret** moved into a sumptuous private mansion in 1909. He soon earned a reputation for his lavish costume parties, such as "The Thousand and Second Night" held there in 1911, for which the designer created outfits and matching accessories. His mansion also housed the Galerie Barbazanges, where **Picasso's** *Young Ladies of Avignon* was exhibited for the first

time in 1916. The Spanish artist lived on the nearby rue de la Boétie with his wife Olga. The exhibition also offers an insight into the interiors of their home, allowing an unprecedented glimpse into the couple's private life. After the war, the Galerie Au Sans Pareil on the Avenue Kléber opened its doors to Dada and Surrealist art. On the Avenue Montaigne, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, which had opened in 1913, hosted ballet productions by the Russian, and later Swedish Ballet Companies up until 1924, with works like *Relâche* and *The Creation of the World*. In 1925, **Josephine Baker**, newly arrived in Paris, caused a sensation there with the Revue Nègre. She frequented cabarets like Le Boeuf sur le Toit which opened in 1922 on the rue Boissy d'Anglas and where **Jean Cocteau** attracted many of the capital's socialites.

This history of "Modern Paris" is not linear; it was instead marked by numerous "accidents" and dramatic events. The scandals that punctuated artistic life are touched upon here: from the "wild beasts' cage" (cage aux fauves) and the "Kubism" of **Braque** and **Picasso** to the highly erotic **Nijinsky** performing as a faun in *The Rite of Spring*, produced by the Ballets Russes in 1913, to the ballet Parade created by **Cocteau** during the war, with costumes designed by Picasso, of which some may be seen here. Modernity assimilated all these scandals with many of them becoming key stages in the consecration of certain artists.

Modernity also involved progress in the fields of technology and industry. Speed was of the essence with the development of bicycles, automobiles, and airplanes, to which trade fairs were dedicated at the Grand Palais. This exhibition, which features an airplane and a Peugeot car, shows how the popularity of such fairs with artists like **Marcel Duchamp** and **Robert Delaunay** had a lasting influence on their work. The war also saw photographs flood the press. The development of cinema, machinery, and speed transformed society and Paris into an urban spectacle, akin to the one presented at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in **Fernand Léger's** *Ballet Mécanique*, in 1924.

The role of women during this period is highlighted throughout the exhibition. From 1905 to 1925, French society experienced dramatic social upheavals. Women enjoyed a greater sense of freedom by doing away with the corset. Artists like **Marie Laurencin**, **Sonia Delaunay**, **Jacqueline Marval**, **Marie Vassilieff**, and **Tamara de Lempicka** held an important place in the avant-garde. A symbol of female emancipation, the figure of the flapper was immortalized in **Victor Margueritte's** novel in 1922. With her short stature and slim waist, **Josephine Baker** was the embodiment of this freedom. A biracial woman from St. Louis in the United States, she experienced terrible racial riots as a child, and upon her arrival in France, marvelled at the possibility of being served in a café on the Champs-Élysées like everyone else. Paris became her city, and France, her country of adoption. **Josephine Baker** was just one figure in a growing multicultural movement within French society. **Aïcha Goblet** for example, a renowned artists' model of West Indian origin, was immortalized in works by **Félix Vallotton**. The ballroom on the rue Blomet was a popular venue for Biguine (Martiniquan-style) music. From the underground arts scene to elite social circles, well-known figures like **Max Jacob** and **Gertrude Stein** strove to build bridges: poor artists rubbed shoulders with the rich in Montparnasse, and the luckiest amongst them attracted the attention of generous patrons such as **Chaïm Soutine** or American billionaire **Albert Barnes**. A beacon for artists and tourists from all over—Eastern Europe, Brazil, the United States, and Russia—Paris was truly the “international capital of the world”. The scenography designed by **Philippe Pumain** immerses visitors in this fascinating epoch, punctuated by a selection of films by **René Clair**, **Fernand Léger**, and **Charlie Chaplin**.



Kees Van Dongen, *Josephine Baker*, 1925, Private collection © AKG images © ADAGP, Paris 2023.

#### Curators:

**Annick Lemoine**, Director and Head Curator of the Petit Palais

**Juliette Singer**, Chief Heritage Curator, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Petit Palais

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