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Le Carnet de France Exhibits and more on Notre Dame de Paris

By Martine P. Dulles and Frederick H. Dulles

If the eagle is the emblem of the United States, the rooster is the one for France. When you hear a French person say “Cocorico,” be assured, he or she is proud of an accomplishment. Well, lots of “Cocorico” were heard on December 7 and 8 during the reopening ceremonies of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. We reported on the cathedral last month, but you should know more. When the firemen and many of the 2000 people who worked on the renovation entered the cathedral, they were greeted with a standing ovation that lasted more than 15 minutes with non-stop applause from the multitude filling the cathedral. It was extremely moving.

This magnificent work would not have been possible without the generosity of 340,000 donors who gave nearly €850 million Euros. On the French media, it was always mentioned that after the French donors, the second most generous country was the United States, with 65,000 persons and institutions donating \$62 million. The French Heritage Society, which received many contributions, remarked that there were donors from all over the U.S. and from various religions. We are extremely thankful for all of these contributions. Travelers who wish to visit Notre-Dame in the future are strongly encouraged to book a slot way in advance — the entrance to the cathedral is free but the number of visitors allowed inside at a time is limited.

During the next few months, the Parisian museums offer a plethora of various interesting exhibits. Here is a selection in a chronological order starting with the earliest ending date:

Musée Marmottan Monet: Le Trompe l'œil from 1520 to today. (closing on March 2, 2025). (www.marmottan.fr) 90 works of art, paintings on canvas or wood and ceramics from international artists are on display.

Among the paintings is one by Nicolas de Largillierre (1656-1746) depicting two bunches of grapes hanging on a wall that look so real that it is said that birds tried to peck at them. American artists are also featured including John Frederick Peto (Philadelphia 1854-1907), William Michael Harnett (1848-1892) and John Haberle (1856-1933) with paintings of objects such as pipes, candles, letters or money bills displayed on tables. In the ceramics area there are plates filled with olives or with mussels and oysters and a terrine in the shape of a lettuce.

On the lower floor of the Musée Marmottan Monet is a small exhibit by Carole Benzaken (French b.1960), who after many years painting tulips is now exploring the world of “trompe l'œil” with bookshelves. It is a great honor for Benzaken's work to be displayed in such a prominent institution (her show ends on February



PHOTO ©MPD

Manufacture Hannong, Strasbourg, *Terrine en forme de laitue* (lettuce), circa 1750.

16). After this, visitors may proceed to the rooms filled with some of Claude Monet's most beautiful paintings.

Cité de l'architecture: The History of Department Stores from 1850 to today. (until April 6, 2025) (www.citedelarchitecture.fr)

The emphasis is on the architecture of the department stores and their evolution during the industrial revolution, the transportation changes of the 19th century and the new challenges of the 20th and 21st centuries. There are 500 original artworks on display, mostly lent by the Parisian department stores. The Cité's permanent exhibits are also very interesting and allow visitors to admire many casts and models of iconic French monuments.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs: CHRISTOFLE À TABLE! Une brillante histoire (ends on April 20, 2025) (www.madparis.fr)

The Musée des Arts Décoratifs has organized the largest exhibit ever of the silversmith firm Christofle, founded by Charles Christofle and Henri Bouilhet in 1830. The company still exists and produces a multitude of silver items from little spoons and plates to centerpieces, vases, candlesticks and much more. Some of these were specially designed by famous artists according to their various styles (i.e. Japonism, art deco, art nouveau) for private customers, diplomats and hotels as well as the Orient Express train and many transatlantic ocean liners.

To continue with beauty and elegance, do not to miss the following two exhibits:

The first is Flowers of Yves Saint Laurent exhibit at the Fondation YSL, which runs until May 4, 2025 (www.museeyslparis.com). Yves Saint Laurent loved flowers, and this exhibit shows dresses made from a variety of magnificent flowery fabrics he designed (mentioned this

show in the September edition of the *Mercury*).

The second is found at School of Jewelry Arts in the private mansion, the Hôtel de Mercy-Argenteau, inaugurated last June by the jeweler Van Cleef & Arpels. The exhibition is called Paris, City of Pearls until this June 1, visitors may admire 100 exquisite pieces while learning more about the history of the pearls since the 1900s. The facility is a school in addition to a library, a bookstore and a museum. The entrance is free, but reservations are required; book a slot in advance at www.lecolevancliefarpels.com.

There are two more interesting and unusual exhibits for “les petits et les grands” (i.e. for young and old): Have you ever thought of seeing 400 Teddy bears in a museum and learning why it is the very favorite for many children? Well, the Musée des Arts Décoratifs allows visitors to experience this in its show *Mon ours en peluche* (My Teddy bear) running until June 22 (reservation@madparis.fr). If the first toys were created during antiquity, the Teddy bear only dates from the beginning of the 20th century. Americans named it after President Theodore Roosevelt, who saved a bear cub from being killed during a hunt (French children call the stuffed animal “mon nounours”).

Near Le Bon Marché department store in the 7th Arrondissement at 128 rue du Bac is a very simple carriage door that thousands of people walk past every day with no idea that behind it is the largest private garden in Paris stretching 2.5 acres. Since the 17th century it has belonged to the Missions Étrangères de Paris (“MEP” — Paris Foreign Missions), where young Catholic men have been studying before going to evangelize in Asian countries. In addition to the garden, there is a chapel and two beautiful 19th century buildings where 150 student priests reside.

A small museum is open to the public and hosts a temporary exhibit called Destination Asia, on display until this July 5. The exhibition takes visitors to 12 Asian countries with models of different religious sites constructed using a total of 300,000 Lego bricks that took four months to assemble. The models reflect the religion of each country: For example, Islam is prominent in Indonesia, so the model is of a mosque, Cambodia features a Buddha and India is represented by a scene of the very crowded steps in Varanasi (Benares) that lead down to the Ganges River.

Nous vous présentons tous nos meilleurs vœux pour 2025! (We wish you the very best in 2025!)

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