

Paray-le-Monial,

A magnificent heritage site waiting to be discovered



Paray-le-Monial is undoubtedly one of the major heritage sites in Burgundy.

Notre-Dame Basilica (11th-12th century) is a veritable jewel of Romanesque architecture. Together with its 18th-century cloister, it offers a first-rate example of a Cluniac monastic ensemble. (Indeed, a plaster cast model of the Basilica is exhibited at the *Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine* in Paris).

Even more astonishing is Paray-le-Monial town hall (known as the *Maison Jayet* from the name of its former owner) built between 1525 and 1528. The façade of this imposing mansion was built onto older existing structures and, like the Châteaux of the Loire Valley, is in the style of the early French Renaissance.

Along with the former parish church of St Nicolas (16th-17th century)—today an exhibition centre—it constitutes the town's historic core.

The Musée du Hiéron—one of the few buildings in Burgundy, and indeed in France, to be designed from the very outset (in 1890) as a museum—adds a more contemporary note to the town's architecture. Since undergoing renovation in 2005, its metallic roof structure, inspired by Gustave Eiffel, is now visible over the central hall.

Following the renovation of these three magnificent edifices, which are listed respectively as Historic Monuments and "Musée de France", the municipal authorities have undertaken to redesign the layout of the entire historic centre. The unity of the ensemble will be recreated by the provision of larger pedestrian spaces, and an architectural, heritage and historical visitor route highlighting each of the sites and the urban links between them.

The arrival of the railway in Paray-le-Monial in 1867, near the canal and the town centre, heralded the growth of industrial activity. Ten years later, in 1877, ceramicist Paul Charnoz set up a ceramic tiles factory. Charnoz launched a range of stoneware tiles featuring decorative inlays and the company swiftly gained a reputation for the aesthetic and technical quality of its products.

The canal and the railway offered two ideal communication links; from 1873, this led to the organization of pilgrimages to celebrate the numerous apparitions of Christ to the Visitandine nun Marguerite-Marie Alacoque in the late 17th century. Henceforth, the town of Paray-le-Monial was to be dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

Today, Paray-le-Monial continues its innovative development, drawing on the twin pillars of a living spiritual heritage and a rich industrial past.



The musée du Hiéron

Sacred art is imbued with mystery and has many layers of meaning. It offers a reflection on the foundations of our history, and is at the very root of the development of art and civilization. Works of sacred art bring together the entire wealth of artistic and technical prowess through which artists and craftsmen in every community, and at every period of history, have sought to give tangible expression to their faith.

The Hiéron Eucharistic Museum was designed by Parisian architect Noël Bion, and was completely renovated by Catherine Frenak and Béatrice Jullien in 2005. Built between 1890 and 1893, it features a metallic architecture inspired by Gustave Eiffel, and is one of the rare museums in France to be designed as such from the very outset.

The Museum's name derives from the Ancient Greek term *hiéros*—sacred or holy—and also refers the Ancient Greek *hiéron*—a consecrated public space that served both political and religious purposes. Embracing contemporary art forms, the Museum offers an imaginatively new cultural approach to religious feeling in Western Christianity.

Since undergoing renovation, the Museum/Monument, with its 700-m²-exhibition space, offers visitors a thematic historical panorama of Christianity over two millennia.

The Museum has received 3 awards:

Included among the list of nominees for the Heritage Award given by The European Museum Forum.

The Heritage Ribbons, presented by the Fédération Française du Bâtiment in partnership with the Association of Mayors of France, Dexia Credit Local and the Heritage Foundation.

The Heritage Award (Special Prize) given by the Conseil Général de Saône et Loire.

The specifically designed edifice houses a unique ensemble of artworks. On permanent exhibition are some one hundred paintings from the 15th century down to the present day, one hundred sculptures and objets d'art, including the remarkably preserved 12th-century Romanesque carving from the main door of the church in nearby Anzy-le-Duc, itself a listed historic monument, and the sublime *Via Vitae* (The Way of Life), executed between 1894 and 1904 by the Parisian goldsmith and jeweller, Joseph Chaumet.

Every year, the Museum holds a new exhibition of contemporary art, yet another of the institution's strong points as it continues to enrich and diversify its collections.



An outstanding national treasure

On the occasion its re-opening, and thanks to the participation of the Fonds du Patrimoine, the Fonds Régional d'Acquisition des Musées, and to a campaign of cultural sponsorship, the Museum acquired a fabulous National Treasure: the *Via Vitae*, or *Way of Life* (1894-1904) by the Parisian goldsmith and jeweller Joseph Chaumet (1852-1928).

Up until 1993, the *Via Vitae* had been on exhibit in the premises of the Chaumet jewellery store in the Place Vendôme in Paris and could only be admired by a privileged few. In 2000, it was listed as a National Treasure; the ministerial decree has enabled this magnificent artwork to remain in the public domain as an object of major interest for the national heritage.

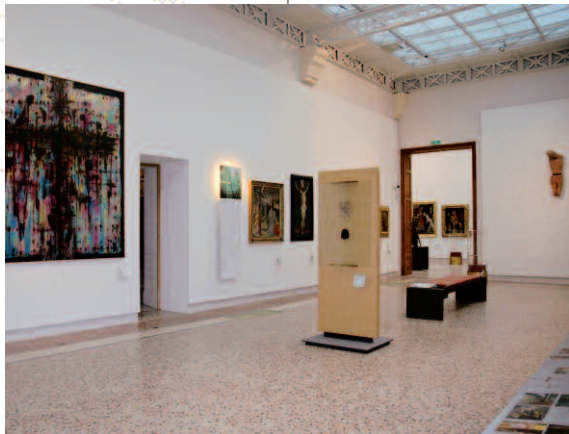
The monumental work, executed in precious materials, stands ten feet high, is ten feet in width, and weighs some three tons. It is a gigantic piece of gold and silversmith work. One hundred and thirty-eight gold and ivory figures represent scenes from the life of Christ; the Trinity in glory is depicted in patinated silver gilt and rock crystal; the Eucharist appears in diamonds and rubies; different coloured marbles, alabaster, jasper and gilt bronze form the plinth and the background decors in each of the scenes. It evokes the principal episodes in the life of Christ: the *Nativity*, *Jesus among the Doctors*, *The Sermon on the Mount*, *The Wedding at Cana*, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, *The Last Supper*, *The Garden of Olives*, *The Flagellation of Christ*, *Calvary*, *The Resurrection*, culminating with the Eucharist borne aloft by two allegorical figures. The nine groups of figures stand on the slopes of a mountainside which is made up of eighteen blocks of blue-grey marble, some of which weigh almost 700 pounds, and had to be assembled together to create the work. These blocks of Pyrenean marble are surrounded by alabaster, representing clouds.

Mystically inspired, and in reaction to the ambient anti-clericalism that characterised much of late 19th-century France, Chaumet sought "an attempt to artistically represent, using precious metals and stones, mankind's notions of God and the nature of God, of Man himself and human nature, of human being's mutual relationships, and their own relationship with their Creator".

This magnificent work by Joseph Chaumet, the creation of which coincided historically with that of the Musée Hiéron itself, adds a harmonious balance to the museum collections, in a blend of astonishing perspective and intense moments of contemplation.

Ancient art and contemporary art

A dialogue between the collections



The layout of the collections addresses the artistic representation of the Divine from the very beginnings of Christianity up to the most recent times.

In the first gallery, organized around the theme: "Under the Sign of the Cross", the vibrant *Passion selon saint Jean* by Alfred Manessier (1988) engages in a dialogue with a large series of crosses—including processional and benediction crosses, along with others used in personal meditation, etc—to illustrate the evolution of the representation of Christ from the 12th to the 20th century.

The issue of the representation of Christ dates right back to the very beginnings of Christianity. "Six centuries were to pass before we find a representation of Christ's visual features. This form of representation corresponds to the Christian belief in God who became Man".

Also on exhibit in the first gallery, another remarkable illustration of this same question—two extremely rare coins, dating from the reign of Justinian II (late 7th/early 8th century AD) for the first time feature an effigy of Christ. These are probably the earliest known representations of Christ's face.

In the second gallery, centred on the theme: "The divine and human model", the works on exhibit evoke the relationships between man and God, through the theology of incarnation. This theme is particularly well illustrated in the painting *Jéhovah devient notre Père*, by Jean-Georges Cornélius (1880-1963), a French painter influenced by Expressionism. The Museum received a major donation from the artist's estate in 2007.

The Sacred Heart and the Eucharist are at the centre of the two following exhibition spaces, in which the works on display offer an exploration of Christian spirituality through an infinite variety of images.

At the end of the third gallery, the visitor's eye is drawn to a work of almost unimaginable proportions. This monumental work—a listed National Treasure—is the *Via Vitae* or *The Way of Life* (1894-1904) by Parisian goldsmith and jeweller Joseph Chaumet. Acquired in 2005 when the museum reopened after renovation, it is a harmonious addition to the collections.

The last gallery, laid out around the theme of the "Divine Host", presents a large, homogenous series of paintings associated with the Catholic Reformation, and includes works by such masters as the Roman artist Antonio Cavallucci (1752-1795) or the Dutch painter Henry Van Steinwick (1580-1649). The Museum's most recent acquisition, *L'Adoration de l'Agneau Mystique* by Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717), has added an outstanding French touch to the original collection.

In a more contemporary vein, the charcoal drawing by Alexandre Hollan on exhibit is a modern attempt to capture the divine features of Christ, while the series of crucified bodies by Cécile Marie evoke the representation of Christ's suffering on the Cross. The contemporary exhibits also include *Dévotion*, a work in deposit by the designer Sylvain Dubuisson (commissioned for the "Epiphany" exhibition held in 2000 at Evry cathedral).

These recent acquisitions of contemporary works of art are presented as elements of a new exhibition layout that continually aspires to look to the future.

Facilities for young visitors

Family visits to the Museum



Special reception facilities are provided for young people. On arrival, they are offered a coloured booklet/game that enables them to discover the museum collections in a playful ambiance. And a little surprise awaits them at the end! Children can round off their museum visit by dropping in on one of the several "pedagogical workshops" — a series of spaces that can be accessed at all times and where they can participate in a range of fun (and instructive) activities including jigsaw puzzles of paintings, a tactile model of the Museum, art books available for consultation, etc.

Schoolchildren at the Museum

The Museum visitor reception staff, in collaboration with schoolteachers, arranges "à la carte" visits centred on specific teaching projects.

For Secondary Schools:

The museum collections allow secondary-school children to discover artworks from all the periods studied in their curriculum (the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the 19th and 20th centuries, and Contemporary Art). The visit, together with slide-show presentations in the multimedia room, offers children a novel and enjoyable way to appreciate the works on exhibit.



From Kindergartens up to Secondary School level:

The playful, interactive "visite-animation" consists of a 30-minute introduction to the museum by a special presenter, followed by half an hour of pedagogical games based on the museum collections and chosen by the teacher. Some examples of games for younger children: "Spot the 5 errors", "Fill me In", jigsaw puzzles of paintings, distorted images, the "Artist's Workshop" etc.

Workshops specifically catering for children from Kindergarten up to 11-year-old level:



One hour and a half sessions, including hands-on modelling by the children themselves, centre on a particular theme or work. The workshop creative session is preceded by a visit to the galleries. Activities include:

- Terrazzo workshop
- Imaginary—and ephemeral—museum
- Paray-le-Monial down the centuries
- Figures in the paintings escape from the Musée Hiéron!
- Around a picture frame
- Egyptian-themed workshops based around the specimen

of an Egyptian mummy in the museum collections: hieroglyphics, Egyptian jewellery, the Pyramid etc. etc.

Practical information

Reservations for young visitors and school groups:

Marie-Agnès Descourvières : 03 85 81 24 65

Museum Curator:

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Opening times:

Du mardi au dimanche, de 10h à 12h et de 14h à 18h

En juillet et août, tous les jours, de 11h à 18h

To get to the Museum:

13, rue de la Paix

71600 Paray le Monial, Bourgogne du Sud.

By train from Paris: 2h15 by TGV to Le Creusot Montchanin, then take the shuttle service from Le Creusot Monchanin to Paray Le Monial railway station (ticket to be purchased along with your TGV ticket).

By road from Paris: take the RN 7, direction Nevers, then follow Mâcon.

By train from Lyon: 1h15 by TER.

By road from Lyon: take the A6/E15 motorway. Exit at Mâcon-Sud, then follow Charolles.

Nearby car-parking facilities

The Museum is fully equipped for disabled visitors access

Others services available:

- Guided visits in four languages; French, English, German, Italian.
- Special visits for children available at all times
 - Young visitors workshops
 - Multimedia Room
- Museum Shop and Bookstore: 03 85 81 79 72

Museum website: www.musee-hieron.fr

