THE ESSENTIAL
OF THE COLLECTIONS

LA **BOVERIE**

SOMMAIRE

At the start of the 19th century, nobody could have imagined that the Parc de la Boverie would be, two centuries later, at the heart of Liège's transformation. At the time, this district was made up of meadows, islands and hops fields. It was transformed in 1853 with the works to divert the river Meuse. Quays were built there; the park and the green islands disappeared.

The Universal Exhibition of 1905 involved other infrastructural works which completed its new appearance. The correction of the course of the Ourthe, the construction of the Fragnée and Hennebique bridges and, above all, the building of the Palais des Beaux-Art are testimonies from this period that are still visible today.

Designed by the architects Jean-Laurent Hasse and Charles Soubre, the building of the Palais des Beaux-Arts ascribes to a neo-classical style, influenced by the architecture that was in vogue during the reign of Léopold II. Inspired by the Petit Trianon at Versailles, the building is organised around a central rotunda covered with a cupola. After the Universal Exhibition, the site was ceded to the City of Liège by the organising committee. From 1930 onwards, the palace housed the collection of the Musée de l'Art wallon and, from 1950, the collections of the Musée d'Art Moderne, until 2011.

Rudy Ricciotti in association with the Liégeois architects' office p.HD. These developments are a reflection of Ricciotti's creative power and construction knowledge. With a surface area of 1200m², 7m 50 high, the new wing that he has designed overhangs the river diversion and completes the renovated old building.

Ricciotti says of this measured intervention: "what I think about Liège is, La Boverie is a real territory, an extremely ro-mantic territory. The museum existed and I didn't want to martyr this building or take it hostage. I proceeded very modestly, as one respects an ancestor."
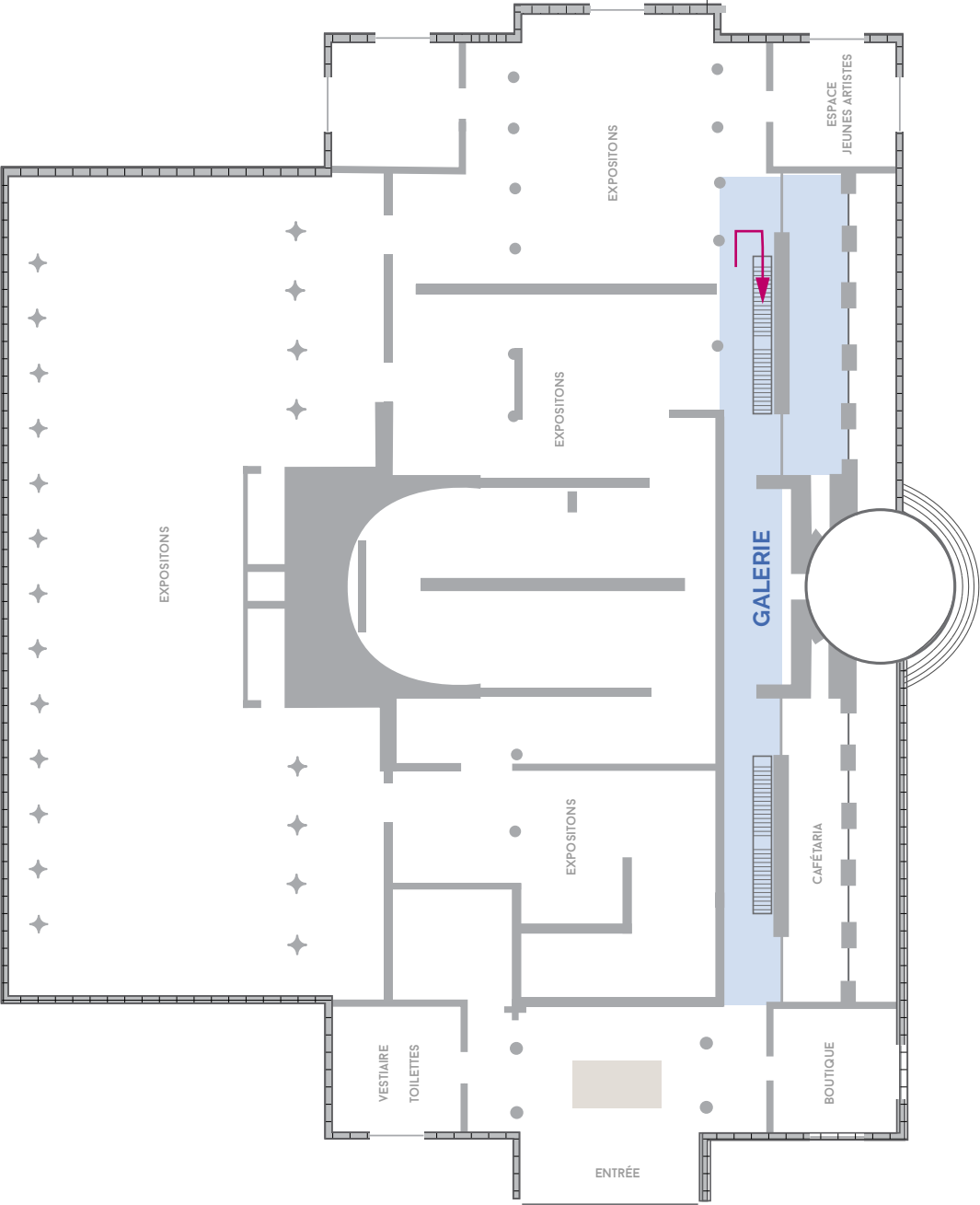

Charles SOUBRE and Jean-Laurent HASSE, Palais des Beaux-Arts – La Boverie, 1903-1905

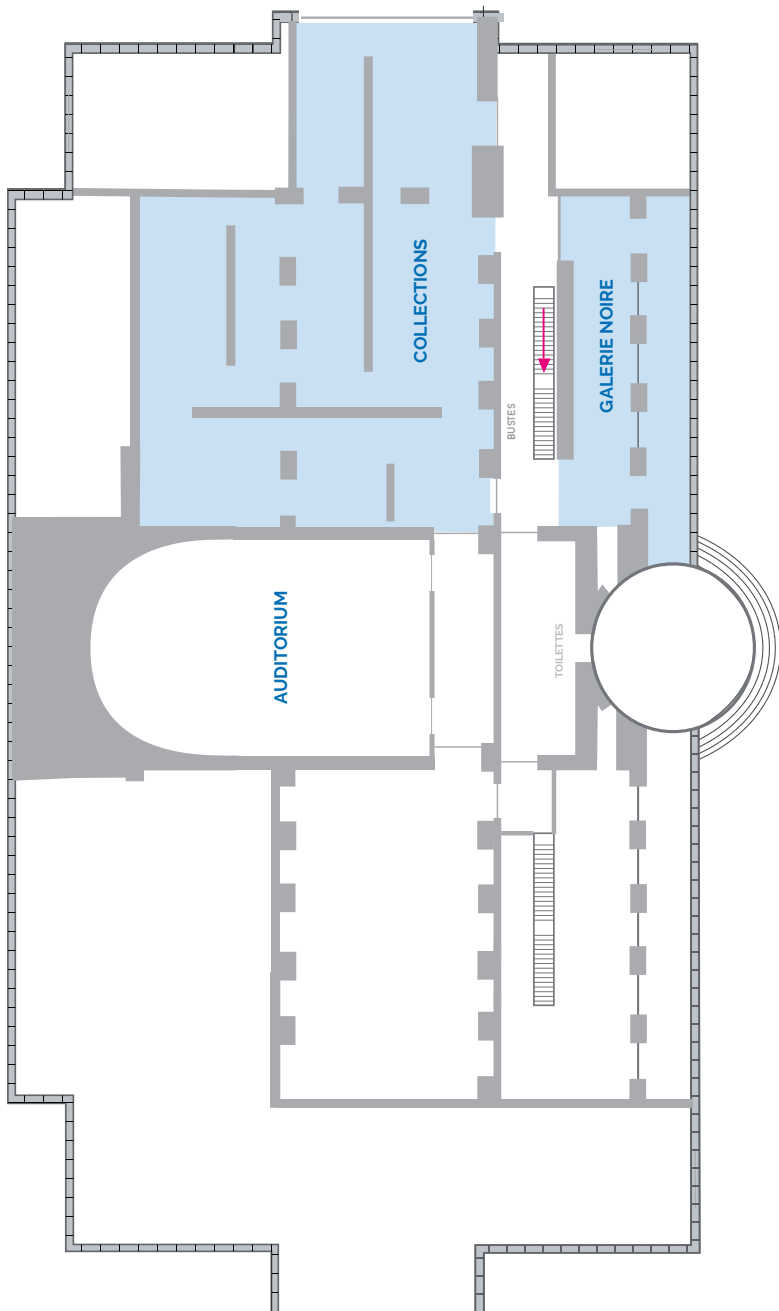Rudy RICCIOTTI, Contemporary extension, 2010-2015

FLOOR ABOVE

EXPOSITONS

ESPACE
JEUNES ARTISTES

EXPOSITONS

EXPOSITONS

EXPOSITONS

GALERIE

CAFÉTARIA

VESTIAIRE
TOILETTES

BOUTIQUE

ENTRÉE

FLOOR BELOW

COLLECTIONS

GALERIE NOIRE

BUSTES

AUDITORIUM

TOILETTES

THE 17TH CENTURY. THE GOLDEN AGE OF PAINTING IN LIÈGE

In Germany, in the middle of the 16th century, Luther laid the foundations for the Protestant Reformation. Denouncing the idea of idolatry, the Reformation was a revolt against the authority of the Catholic Church. This iconoclasm spread across Europe, destroying a portion of Christian imagery. In response to this movement, the Catholic Church restructured itself during the Council of Trent (1563) and reaffirmed the importance of religious imagery, which was a tool for promotion and education among its faithful followers. It was within the context of the Catholic Reformation that the Baroque style was born.

Often referred to as the Golden Age, the 17th century in Europe was characterised by the decline of Protestantism and "large empires". In Liège, more than a hundred artists formed a vital artistic centre in which, within the context of the Catholic Reformation, they produced scenes that were predominantly religious or mythological in nature, defined as "historical paintings" but also portraits. Many of them worked for the prince-bishops, who hoped to revitalise the Principality on a cultural and artistic level. These artists operated within an extremely strict corporative system, one that was subject to rigorous regulations and protectionism.

It was in the 17th century, however, that these artists made their first attempt to liberate themselves from their status as craftsmen, fighting to exempt themselves from the mandatory requirement to register with a group to carry out their work. They formed a "Liège school", with four generations of artists following, bringing together Italian and French influences in equal measure. This movement was started by the painter Gérard Douffet (1594–1660). Receiving his training in the workshop of Pierre-Paul Rubens, he completed his apprenticeship during a 10-year sojourn in Rome, which was, at that time, the artistic crossroads of Europe, an essential destination for many overseas artists.

BAROQUE

The term "Baroque" (barocco in Italian) originally referred to pearls that were irregular and imperfect. This style developed in Italy during the 17th century against the backdrop of the Catholic Reformation, first in the field of architecture and then later in painting and sculpting. Its grand, theatrical style, which favoured the illusion of movement, asymmetry and lack of balance, allowed Baroque art to disseminate the religious ideals behind the Catholic Reformation.

CLASSICISM

An artistic and cultural movement, Classicism was born in France sometime around 1660. Its aesthetic was defined by the search for perfection and balance, similar to the art of antiquity, by building on the principles of the Age of Reason. This feature places the movement in direct opposition with the Baroque art movement and the excesses of Mannerism. Raphaël, the Italian Renaissance artist, was the model to be followed for the ideal of beauty, through his noble works, which drew principally from Greco-Roman mythology.

GÉRARD DE LAIRESSE, *JUDITH*, 1687

On an international level, Gérard de Lairesse stands out as the greatest Walloon painter since the 15th century. Working in Liège between 1660 and 1664, he was compelled to leave Amsterdam permanently after a personal tragedy. His compositions became increasingly classical, favouring allegorical and mythological themes. Though few notable figures from Liège managed to avail themselves of his services after his exile, Léopold Bonhome, who would later become mayor of Liège, ordered this circle-shaped painting in 1687, shortly before the artist lost his sight. The work depicts "Judith beheading Holofernes", a passage taken from the Old Testament and a frequent subject of Western painting during the 17th century. An Assyrian general sent on a campaign by King Nebuchadnezzar II, Holofernes' mission was to punish those who refused to support the king in his campaign against Persia. As he lay siege to the Jewish city of Bethulia, water became scarce and the inhabitants found themselves on the verge of surrendering. Judith, a young girl of extraordinary beauty, decided to save her city. With her maid by her side, she entered into Holofernes' camp with jugs of wine. Charmed by the young woman, he organised a great banquet in her honour; at the end of this, his servants departed, leaving Judith and Holofernes alone. Once he was intoxicated and, as a result, unable to defend himself, Judith decapitated him, bringing his head back to Bethulia. When Holofernes' men discovered his body, they fled, panic-stricken. Roused by her actions, the Hebrews routed the remainder of Nebuchadnezzar's troops. As opposed to typical depictions, Lairesse's version does not focus on Holofernes' death but rather on Judith, crowned with laurels by an angel and holding a palm leaf, the symbol of victory, in her other hand. Holofernes' head, which the young woman holds at her waist, can barely be made out, while Judith's pearl-white complexion stands out against the darkness of the overall composition. This chiaroscuro effect and the deliberate expressiveness of the characters closely resemble the style of the famed Italian painter Caravaggio (1571–1610), whose technique, known as "Caravaggism", would serve as an influence for many paintings from the 17th century onwards.

Gérard de Lairesse, *Judith*, 1687 © Ville de Liège

THE 19TH CENTURY.
BETWEEN NEOCLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM

By the middle of the 18th century, many art critics were opposing the extravagance and frivolity of the Rococo style that was in vogue at the time. Dreamy, poetic depictions had no place in a society where the bourgeoisie and their economic power were flourishing socially. At the same time, a strong sense of patriotism was progressively being felt in France, England and Germany, giving rise to a need for easily understood images that served the cause for which they were created. In this way, ancient art and the idea of the "ideal of beauty", as defined by the German theorist Johann Joachim Winckelmann, became a point of reference for reproducing an ideal aesthetic, one which brought together the beauty of the body and spirit.

In order to be universally understood, Neoclassicism favoured depictions that were clear and free of artifice, displaying an economy of means by focusing on an attention to archaeological detail, a perfect knowledge of anatomy and the readability of the piece. Neoclassicism became the academic model during the first decades of the 19th century, serving as the chief reference to the "Great genre". In direct opposition to academic art, artists from across Europe were turning to Romanticism during the first half of the 19th century. Reacting to the academic canons of Neoclassicism, they sought to express their inner feelings. The imagination, the fantasy elements of popular literature, the melancholic moods and nostalgic feelings of times gone by, the anguish of man's fragility in the face of a threatening nature: these are the new subjects that artists dealt with, stemming from their imaginations and their need for expression.

Romantic artists adopted new sources for imagery, such as the great dramatic writers (Dante, Goethe or even Byron). They also depicted the important events of their lifetimes, such as the Napoleonic wars or the revolution of 1830, each choosing episodes that resonated with their own sensibilities.

Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Napoléon Bonaparte, premier Consul,* 1803 © Ville de Liège

JEAN-AUGUSTE DOMINIQUE INGRES,
NAPOLÉON PREMIER CONSUL (NAPOLEON, FIRST CONSUL), 1803 ⎯⎯⎯

A student of the Neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David, Ingres was awarded the Prix de Rome in 1801. It was not until 1806 that he travelled to Rome to finish his apprenticeship. He remained there until 1824. His work has long been considered as a symbol of the search for perfection, one that aligns with the academic principles of the time. Though he has often been viewed as a representation of the Neoclassicist dogma, he had also, since 1806, been criticised for his formal experimentation. His style was divided into two opposing motivations: inspired by his personal creative impulses, which included the elongation of the female body, and exotic themes that resembled the interests of the Romantics, he was, however, careful to respect the academic rules and constraints that were taught to him. In 1803, he was commissioned to make a portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte, the First Consul. This official portrait, which tool much of its inspiration from a portrait of the First Consul painted by Jean-Antoine Gros a year before, was made on his return from an initial visit to Liège, which was the capital of the department of Ourthe at the time. Each element of the imagery in this piece forms part of its political programme. Bonaparte no longer has the appearance of a ferocious war general, but appears as a Chief of State, carrying a ceremonial sword at his waist; this is adorned with the famous crown diamond of France, the Regent Diamond, which he purchased in 1801. His hand-on-vest pose, which has become closely associated with his character in the collection consciousness, in in fact taken from the oratory position of the Athenian philosopher Eschine in ancient sculpture. In the 19th century, this calm pose came to be associated with lawmakers, powerful men with a thoughtful, magnanimous temperament. Offered to the City of Liège in 1804, this portrait was also a vehicle for the future emperor to assert his presence and authority. If its initial goal was to immortalise the signing of a decree which ordered the reconstruction of the Amercœur district, this event is depicted in a discrete manner, through a document that has been relegated to the edge of the table and indicated with a point of Bonaparte's finger. Elsewhere, the viewer's gaze is drawn to the landscape that can be seen through the window. Though logic would dictate that Amercœur would be depicted, it is, in fact, the Cathedral of Saint-Lambert, which had been in ruins since the Liège Revolution, that is depicted. This anachronistic feature is a clear reference to the Concordat of 1801, which entrusted the upkeep of the Catholic Church to the French state.

JOHANN JOACHIM **WINCKELMANN**

An archaeologist and German art theorist, Winckelmann would play a pioneering role in the development of Neoclassicism in Europe. Rejecting the sensual nature of art, which served as a manifestation for the passions of the soul, he was a defender of Grecian art. In his opinion, this reached its peak in the 5th century BCE, when Greece was free and "democratic". In it, he saw the characteristics of "absolute beauty", an aesthetic based on the idealisation of beauty. Through his book, *Réflexion sur l'imitation des œuvres des Grecs en peinture et en sculpture (Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks)*, a true bestseller that was translated throughout Europe, he helped to spread his theory about the ideal of beauty.

Testimonials about the use of coal in Wallonia date back to the beginning of the 13th century, but it was at the beginning of the 19th century when Liège underwent an initial industrial development, not unlike the one experienced by England. The pre-industrialisation primarily revolved around metalworking and the steel industry, thanks to the richness of the soil in terms of iron ore, limestone and coal. These elements were essential for operating blast furnaces.

Under the guidance of John Cockerill, Liège experienced an incredible industrial development in the Seraing basin, where one of Europe's largest factories was established. The economic shifts brought about by this Industrial Revolution led to the growth of the working class. Men, women and children worked in desperate conditions. In this tense climate, series social crises unfolded, advocating for the improvement of working conditions, and workers movements took shape, including the Belgian Labour Party (Parti Ouvrier Belge, POB) in 1885.

Though the theme of work has been found in art since Antiquity, it is the turmoil of the Age of Enlightenment that provides a new outlook on work, one in which it is considered a fact of society. Representing this became a genre of its own, although the effort and hardship involved are rarely depicted.

This theme became more popular during the latter half of the 19th century, with certain artists adopting the world of industry and work as their theme of choice. Constantin Meunier, an active campaigner for the POB, transformed his art into a tool for social advocacy. He specialised in representing men involved in industrial work, decrying the appalling working conditions experienced by the working class, elevating him to the status of a contemporary hero.

JOHN **COCKERILL**

The son of an English mechanical who was exiled to Belgium and who made his fortune in spinning and carding machines, John inherited the family business at the age of 20. He swiftly discovered the economic advantage of mastering each step involved in the manufacturing of the steam engines he produced, from the raw materials to the finished product. In 1817, thanks to the low price offered by William of Orange, Cockerill bought the old summer residence of the prince-bishops of Seraing. There, he operated mines and built blast furnaces. Upon his death, the company became a public limited company, one that invested in shipbuilding, railways and military production. If the company enjoyed a strong international influence at the beginning of the 20th century, the second half was less auspicious, punctuated by mergers and economic hardships. The company was taken over by the Indian industrialist Lakshmi Mittal in 2003, becoming ArcelorMittal. The 2008 financial crisis led to the closure of the hot phase in Seraing. The visible marker of this closure was the demolition of the no.6 blast furnace in December of 2016.

CONSTANTIN MEUNIER, *LA COULÉE À SERAING (THE CASTING AT SERAING)*, VERS 1880

In 1878, Constantin Meunier visited the Cockerill factory in Seraing and observed steel casting. He was struck by the "tragic and savage beauty" of the factory, which he depicted in several preparatory sketches. One year later, the Belgian naturalist writer Camille Lemonnier asked him to illustrate his book, La Belgique (Belgium). Meunier took this opportunity to make use of his drawings. As a result, he painted La coulée à Seraing (The Casting at Seraing) in 1880. This piece testified to the technological advances happening in the steel-working field. The Cockerill factory adopted the "Bessemer" process for transforming cast iron into steel in 1863. This system allowed a large amount of steel to be produced at a low cost, by injecting air into the retort containing the molten metal. The steel obtained was cast in bullion-shaped moulds. It is this step that is depicted by La coulée à Seraing (The Casting at Seraing): two workers are releasing the valve on the retort, allowing the steel into the mould, while, on the right-hand side, another worker is cooling the mixture by watering it. The artist adopts a colour palette that captures the sweltering atmosphere of the factory. The large format and chiaroscuro contrasts of the light help to emphasise the tensed muscles of the workers' bodies and the ruggedness of the work. This piece reflects the artist's social engagement and sensitivity to the working condition, elevating the latter figure to a contemporary hero figure.

Constantin Meunier, *La coulée à Seraing*, vers 1880 © Ville de Liège

▞ MODERNITY

Neoclassicism and Romanticism dominated the European art scene at the beginning of the 19th century. Official salons and academic standards shaped the aesthetic trends. Social unrest, expanding demographics, the Industrial Revolution, scientific advantages and global conflicts led to new ideas and concerns in the world of art.

In this modern context, the emergence of photography in 1827 led to the questioning of pictorial art, shaking the conception of images made by artists. This mechanical instrument, which could reproduce real images, led to several artists redirecting their work towards experimentation with innovative plastic techniques in reaction. To distinguish themselves from photography, which was capable of capturing a clear and objective image of the world, they moved away from their former concerns in favour of depicting a movement, a moment, a mood, an atmosphere or a texture, before finally, in the early 1920s, abandoning depictions altogether and moving towards abstract painting.

1863.
THE SALON DES REFUSÉS

In 1863, the jury of the Salon (an annual event in Paris that was overseen by the Academy of Fine Arts) rejected more than 3000 of the 5000 pieces submitted. At this time, the Salon was one of the only means by which an artist could build their reputation and obtain public commissions and private clients. In the face of this crisis, the Salon was vigorously opposed by those who had been excluded. The emperor, Napoleon III, decided that an exhibition of the rejected artists should be organised. Opposed by the Academy, this exhibition was a failure and was not held again in subsequent years. In 1884, the Salon des artistes indépendants was created, allowing any artist to freely exhibit their work without the prior approval of a jury.

Henri Evenepoel, *La promenade du dimanche au Bois de Boulogne*, 1899. © Ville de Liège

HENRI EVENEPOEL, *LA PROMENADE DU DIMANCHE AU BOIS DE BOULOGNE (THE SUNDAY WALK IN BOIS DE BOULOGNE)*, 1899 ———

Born in Nice in 1872, the Belgian artist Henri Evenepoel uses his painting to depict the subject times that were popular during his lifetime, a reflection of the modern climate that ruled in turn-of-the-century Paris. Encouraged by Octave Maus, he created La promenade du dimanche au Bois de Boulogne (The Sunday Walk in Bois de Boulogne) in 1899. This large-scale piece depicts one of Paris' most popular spots for walking: the Bois de Boulogne. A new urban development from the Second French Empire, the Bois de Boulogne unfolds across 800 hectares in front of the Eiffel Tower. It formed part of the urban modernisation efforts carried out in the City of Lights under the supervision of Baron Haussmann between 1852 and 1870. During this period of rapid industrial growth, these developments aimed to facilitate the movement of people and goods and to give the city a new façade, one characterised by large, well-laid-out avenues and boulevards. This choice of subject, which was eminently modern, allowed the artist to study the attitudes and gestures of the crowd, attempting to render them in an immediate manner. To achieve this, he created dozens of preparatory studies. With the development of photography, artists renounced illusionism in favour of rendering images of movements and luminous atmospheres. Evenepoel replicates these impressions of movements using various synthetic techniques, such as blurry contours, pastel brushstroke areas, visual plays on the depth of field and "out-of-frame" elements, while still respecting the rule of thirds used in photographic compositions. By capturing this everyday moment, Henri Evenepoel brings the traditional genre scene up to date.

IMPRESSIONISM

Claude Monet exhibited alongside thirty other artists in the Parisian studio of the photographer Félix Tournanchon in 1874. Louis Le Roy, the critic from the Le Charivari newspaper, sarcastically joked about these artists, who had turned their backs on the academic method, titling his article L'exposition Les impressionnistes after the title of an 1872 painting by Claude Monet, Impression soleil levant (Impression, Sunrise).

This movement questioned the artistic principles of the 19th century, seeking to capture a fleeting moment in image form. The Impressionists, therefore, stand out thanks to their innovative technique, which consisted of painting natural scenes on the spot. Their efforts centred around depicting the changing light through a fragmented application of paint, without the need for preliminary drawings, thus making it possible to capture natural elements with all of their nuances. They attempted to replicate the fleeting nature of the sky's atmospheric effects, to capture the glimmering reflections of light on water or to render the heat of the late-afternoon summer sun on the outside of a building.

These experimental paintings, based on optic research, found great success between 1887 and 1910. Naturally, Impressionist artists favoured landscapes (urban vistas and seascapes), a subject matter that had, until that point, been at the lower end of the hierarchy for academic genres. Impressionists worked outdoors in order to capture variations in the natural light, helping them to paint the precise moment. Working outdoors was once again possible in the 19th century, thanks to the invention of the first tubes of oil paint.

LES XX

Created in 1884, this artist's circle initially comprised twenty founding members from the art scene in Brussels; these included, among others, Théo van Rysselberghe, Fernand Khnopff and James Ensor, as well as several influential journalists, writers and art critics. The Les XX group was formed after two or three painters were refused entry to the Brussels Salon in 1884. "They can exhibit in their own space," said one of the jury members. That's exactly what they did. The "Les XX" group organised its own exhibition, above all serving as proponents for equality amongst artists. There was no longer a jury for making selections and each participating artist could exhibit six canvases. From a stylistic point of view, this group reacted as one against academicism and was based around what could be seen, by focusing on nature and social situations in a non-idealised manner. The group broke up about ten years later, but its successor was established with the "Libre Esthétique" group in 1894.

Claude Monet, *Le bassin du commerce, Le Havre*, 1874
© Ville de Liège

EMILE CLAUS, *LE VIEUX JARDINIER (THE OLD GARDENER)*, CIRCA 1886

Born in a small village in Flanders on the banks of the Lys river in 1849, Emile Claus very quickly revealed a propensity for painting. After a trip to North Africa in the company of the painter Théo Van Rysselberghe, he made light the central theme of his work. He moved to Astene, a village near Laethem-Saint-Martin, in 1882, naming his villa Zonneschijn (meaning a "ray of sunlight"). This elderly gardener appears to be crossing the threshold of this very villa. The garden, which is adorned with flower beds and weeds, can be made out in the background; this serves as the frame for many of the artist's paintings. The imposing dimensions of this unconventional portrait highlight the gardener's size. His rugged hands and feet, as well as his face, seem weather by time and his work outdoors. Captured in the backlighting, the garden behind him is bathed in the light of the peaking sun. Awash with this vivid lighting, the reflections of the sun in his hair seems to drape a halo around him and play with the transparency of his apron. The artist employed a colour palette that is characteristic of his work, comprising cold blues, soft greens and glimmering whites. His method combined what had been passed down from the Realist tradition and the integration of Impressionism, a feature that set Luminism apart.

LUMINISM

Luminism was a Belgian pictorial trend influenced by French Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, the leading figure of which was Émile Claus (1849–1924). Its central hub was in Flanders, most notably the region around the Lys river, including the village of Laethem-Saint-Martin. Plays on contrast and a bright palette applied with small strokes recreate the clearest beams of light.

Emile Claus, *Le vieux jardinier*, vers 1886
© Ville de Liège

THE **LUCERNE AUCTIONS**

In the early 1930s, the Nazis launched a crusade against avant-garde art, which they deemed "degenerate art". Nazi leaders were entrusted with gathering modern art works that were deemed unacceptable from both public and private collections. More than 700 pieces were thus collected and displayed in a large exhibition of "degenerate art" in Munich in 1937.

This showcase was designed to support the Reich's propaganda and demonstrate the inferiority of these styles, which would, however, go on to revolutionise the 20th century. Between 1933 and 1937, between 16,000 and 20,000 pieces were confiscated. Many of these pieces were destroyed, but some were also sold. An auction of 125 pieces was organised at the Fischer Gallery in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1939. 87 were sold. Despite its own intentions, this renowned auction allowed masterpieces of Western painting to be preserved.

On the mandate of Auguste Buisseret, the municipal councilman for Public Instruction and Fine Arts for the City of Liège, Jules Bosmant arrived in Lucerne. There he encountered experts from other countries. Together, they reached a reached a mutual agreement to not bid too excessively, so as not to pay too much money into the Nazi's coffers. With the help of the State and private patrons, the City of Liège bought nine paintings by the most notable 20th century artists; today these are the crown jewels in the collections of the Museum of Fine Art.

THE **PARIS PURCHASES**

Following the purchases made at the Lucerne auction, the delegation from Liège went to Paris. As there was money left over from the Lucerne auction, the remaining sum was used to complete the collection of the Liège museum. The delegation visited galleries and workshops in Paris, searching for modern canvases. In this way, 9 further canvases came to enrich the collections. The choice of paintings formed part of the cultural policy carried out by the Liège communal authorities for many years, which, at that time, aimed to highlight modern art, from the Impressionists through the more recent masters, particularly those from the School of Paris.

EXPRESSIONISM

The Expressionist movement was born in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century. Expressionism impact many different fields, including painting, sculpture, literature, music and even theatre and cinema. This movement was born as a response to Impressionism, which still focused on representing physical and visual items in a realistic manner. It was also a reaction to academicism and the society of the time. Expressionist painting offered frightening images that distorted and stylised reality in order to provoke a strong emotional reaction in the viewer. Shapes and characters were distorted, their features stretched and arranged in schematic layouts to add a powerful force to their painting, which was also associated with a violent colour palette.

JAMES ENSOR, *LA MORT ET LES MASQUES (DEATH AND THE MASKS)*, 1897

James Ensor grew up surrounded by souvenirs and curios of every type, which were kept in the souvenir shop that his mother's family owned in Ostend. Marine souvenirs, seashells and miniature boats, along with masks and accessories related to the Ostend carnival, were imprinted on the young man's imagination. The carnival also marked the highlight of the beginning of the tourist season in this small seaside town, which became a leading destination for the bourgeoisie and aristocracy after King Leopold I established his summer residence there. Ensor began his apprenticeship with two painters from Ostend when he was thirteen years old, though he quickly came to view them as too traditional. At that time, he mainly occupied himself with marine landscapes. In 1877, he left the safety net of his family home to continue his training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels. If he considered that this education was essential, he did not exactly flourish here, with his work criticised by his teachers. At the same time, he met young avant-garde artists in the capital, as well as the intellectual and progressive elite of Brussels. He thus developed a singular, avant-garde style, one that served as a precursor to Expressionism. Set in a universe that was phantasmagorical, eccentric and sarcastic, Ensor's world is populated by masks and skeletons. A theme that captivated him since 1883, the mask motif gradually took on a charged meaning, one that criticised the bourgeoisie society of the time. It personifies the hypocrisy and excess of the bourgeoisie society from which it came. Following his father's death, the skeletons became a regular accompaniment to the masks in his paintings. When he painted La mort et les masques (Death and the Masks) in 1897, he experienced his most prolific artistic period. Enthusiastic about straightforward, undiluted colours, he depicted the subject using a heavy impasto technique. Death is draped in her white shroud, smiling caustically. She is holding a flickering candle, a symbol of how fragile life is. This skeleton is surrounded by masks – some of them grimacing, some of them grotesque – inspired by the Commedia dell'Arte. His technique and the expressive visual power of his innovative themes would later inspire many Expressionist artists.

James Ensor, *La mort et les masques*, 1897 © Ville de Liège

SURREALISM

In his "Manifeste du Surréalisme" (Surrealist Manifesto), published in 1924, André Breton, the founder of the group that became a focal point for many painters and poets, defined Surrealism as a "pure psychic automatism which allows one to express how their thoughts really work, without any reason-based control and without any concern for aesthetic or moral considerations". During the first half of the 20th century, Surrealism was the only artistic movement that did not affirm its position by renewing pictorial techniques. It aimed to offer images that were created outside of the constraints of reason, ones that associated opposing elements or which explored the idea of chance. Its endeavours were based on playing with languages and free association, free from logical articulation. The approach of Surrealists explored the unconscious mind, based on the concepts of Freud's psychoanalysis, and invited viewers to enter a world that was dreamlike, imagination-based and fantastical.

Born in Antheit near Huy in 1897, Paul Delvaux quickly found himself attracted by the world of art. Though his family intended for him to pursue a career as a solicitor, he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels in 1916. He dedicated himself to landscapes and urban and railway vistas for the early part of his career. Preferring to work with large-scale mediums, over time he started to introduce human figures.

The characteristic features of his method took shape from the 1930s onwards. Taking his influence from the Surrealists – a group that he would never belong to – and, more importantly, De Chirico, he depicted deserted locations and isolated figures, often nude women with no expression, blind to the men around them. The overall painting was treated in a mimetic manner, right down to the smallest details.

 A cold, dreamlike universe, Delvaux' world turns the established order on its head, deconstructing spatio-temporal reference points and creating unusual connections. He added the skeleton to his collection of recurring characters from 1943 on. Far removed from the one depicted by Ensor, Delvaux' does not carry any symbolic connotations. More closely resembling the living than the dead, it appears as a living flesh-and-blood being.

From 1949 onwards, the artist replicates these "living" skeletons in episodes from the Passion of the Christ. These scenes were not painted with the intention of offering undue reverence, but with the intention of instilling these skeletons with the maximum dramatic expression. La Mise au Tombeau (The Burial), a copy of which of which is today preserved at the Fine Arts museum in Mons, unfolds in a canopy made from geometric shapes. Seven skeletons, some of them veiled, stand on the corrugated steel floor, leaning over and mourning the motionless bodies. Delvaux made several preparatory studies, using both oils and watercolours, on both paper and canvas, which demonstrate the artist's thought process, particularly regarding the range of colours. While the final piece is dominated by blue hues, the studies showcase the use of brown and ochre tones.

THE **COBRA GROUP**

In November of 1948, Karel Appel, Christian Dotremont, Constant and Corneille visited Paris for an international conference about avant-garde art, organised by the Surrealists. Disagreeing with what they found, they left the assembly and gathered at the Notre Dame café, where the CoBrA group was founded. The group's name is an acronym for the three cities where the founder members lived: Brussels, Copenhagen, Amsterdam. An offshoot of Surrealism, the CoBrA group tried to move away from automatism and the exploration of unconscious elements. A reaction to the struggle between figurative and abstract art, which they deemed to have become "academic" in nature, there art was experimental, founded on the principles of collaboration and interdisciplinary engagement. Its members advocated freedom of expression and free, spontaneous creation. Most notably, they sought to move away from those forms deemed "contaminated" by Western standards at all costs, finding their inspiration in children's art, naive art, Oriental art, outsider art and even primitive art, while also reviving the interest of the early avant-garde artists in primitive works.

KAREL APPEL, *MEXICAIN (MEXICAN)*, 1953

Originally from Amsterdam, Karel Appel studied at the National Academy, where she became friends with Constant and Corneille. He moved to Paris in 1950, soon distancing himself from the political aspirations of the members of the CoBrA group, which broke apart in Liège in 1951. Appel then followed a more independent path, travelling to the United States, South America and Mexico, where he soaked up their cultural riches. His painting was filled with an expressive gesturality that was both abundant and spontaneous. Motivated by a creative drive, Appel created images that came to life through the intertwining of subjects and colours. Populated by human and animal characters, his painting was underlined with a plenitude of colours, one that reflected the violence of the world around him. He declared, in 1962, "I paint like a barbarian, living in an age of barbarians. I paint life as it unfolds around me. Hard, lively, beautiful, cruel, formidable."

◢ **ROBERT** AND **SONIA DELAUNAY**, THE COUPLE

Robert Delaunay met Sonia Stern in 1908. They were married in 1910. The work of both revolved around the rule of "Simultaneous Colour Contrasts", a theory proposed by the chemist Eugène Chevreul. Between 1912 and 1917, their paintings developed in a complementary manner. Forerunners of abstraction, the couple moved away from the cubist movement by making the use of colour central to their aesthetic, as part of their search for harmony and movement. To them, colour was a support for the painting and a primordial subject matter. Basing themselves around Chevreul's theory, they created a sense of rhythm and movement by juxtaposing complementary colours: green and red, blue and orange, yellow and purple. This colour, therefore, becomes a synthetic representation of light. This luminous and poetic language was called "Orphism" by Guillaume Apollinaire, a reference to his poem Orphée (Orpheus) (1908). Little by little, abstraction gained favour, bring geometric shapes and circular planes to the forefront. In this way, the disc became the essential model for capturing the simultaneous relationship enjoyed by light and movement for Robert Delaunay.

EUGÈNE CHEVREUL'S RULE OF **« SIMULTANEOUS COLOUR CONTRASTS »**

The chemist Michel-Eugène Chevreul wrote De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs et de l'assortiment des objets colorés (The principles of simultaneous colour contrast and harmony of coloured objects) in 1839, in which he explained various optical phenomena. Each object has a colour of its own: its local hue. According to Chevreul, this local hue does not exist independently but is based on the local hue of surrounding objects. In this way, for any given colour, our eye requires its complementary colour (at the same time) and the product of them, if this has not been given to it. Based on this theory, Chevreul demonstrated that a colour is modified optically by the coloured hues around it. He proved that a colour provides a complementary shade to its neighbouring colours. When placed side by side, complementary colours appear brighter, while non-complementary colours seem duller. For example, blue and green resonate weakly, while red and green offer a more striking contrast.

ABSTRACT ART

Born at the turn of the 20th century, abstract art started as a result of artists' innovative efforts to avoid creating pieces that merely reflected things as they appeared. Shortly prior to the First World War, certain avant-garde artists were no longer seeking to depict subjects or objects, but instead to create compositions that were untethered by references to the world as it really was. As a result, abstract art became an artform that was non-representative, non-figurative and highlighted by the fundamental use of lines and colours. At the beginning of the century, it opened a new path that responded to the call for change in the world of art. The true "father" of abstract art was Vassily Kandinsky. Connected to the world of German Expressionism, at the beginning of the century, this artist was evolving towards an expressive language that used colour and geometrical elements to express successive states of mind, similar to a musical composition. As time went by, abstract art moved away from the geometric trend (known as "cold") in various directions, towards a lyrical and gestural trend (known as "warm").

GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION/ **LYRICAL** ABSTRACTION

Geometric abstraction involves the use of geometric shapes that are associated with mathematical rigour and the simplification of shapes. The forerunners of this trend, such as the Russian Constructivist artists Bauhaus, Kasimir Malevitch and Piet Mondrian, produced their earliest abstract works between 1910 and 1920. These artists reject the concept of art as a means of representation and rejected the

illusion of a three-dimensional pictorial space. Similarly, they rejected curved lines, modelling, textures and detailing, instead favouring straight lines, geometric shapes and colours. This synthetic model aimed to underscore the social aims to which these Constructivist artists aspired. They dreamed of changing the world and fostering an ideal based on equality and community.

Lyrical abstraction developed in Paris after the Second World War, partially as a reaction to Geometric abstraction, but, more importantly, in the context of a country that was rebuilding itself and its identity in the aftermath of armed conflict. France, in particular Paris, hoped to take back its place as the capital of avant-garde art, a role the city had occupied prior to the war. This desire was in opposition with the new New York School, a rising star in creative circles. The term "Lyrical abstraction" was used for the first time in 1947 in Paris, during the "L'imaginaire" exhibition. This term refers to any kind of abstract art that does not employ geometric shapes or constructivist principles. The goal of Lyrical abstraction-style pieces is to make gestures perceptible, to stir feelings and to create ideas, which relates to the artist's state of mind, their career and their reaction to the social and political events of their lifetime. Gestures and subject matter were the real driving forces of artistic expression for artists engaged in Lyrical abstraction.

JEAN GORIN, *COMPOSITION 47*, 1981 ⸻

Jean Gorin met Piet Mondrian in 1927. The latter figure encouraged his reflections about shapes and colours and the Dutch De Stijl group. They thought of their paintings as a meticulous, disciplined and scientific task, based on the principle of repeating swathes of primary colours on a flat surface, with their layout established based on geometric principles. If Jean Gorin applied this model, it became obvious starting from 1930, when he created the "Reliefs", a hybrid genre that touched upon architecture, painting and sculpture; these were created by introducing volume to painted mediums. Following Mondrian's advice, Gorin came to consider these "Reliefs" as architectural pieces rather than paintings on easels. Thanks to the support of Fernand Graindorge, a famous collector from Liège, and the Association pour le Progrès Intellectuel et Artistique en Wallonie (APIAW), he enjoyed a monographic exhibition at the Wallonia Art Museum in 1960. Today, the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts preserve five pieces from this event, which were made between 1930 and 1960. These provide an account of the evolution of the artist's "Reliefs". If his creations were originally simple in nature, they became more complex with the passage of time, gradually introducing oblique lines or circles. However, he would remain faithful to his colour palette, which was restricted to primary colours, as well as white, grey and black.

FERNAND **GRAINDORGE**

A patron and collector, Fernand Graindorge managed to create a veritable contemporary art hub in Liège at the beginning of the 1950s. He supported a number of internationally renowned artists (Magnelli, Arp, Jacobsen, Degottex) on both a financial and strategic level, thus introducing the people of Liège to the forerunners of so-called "modern" art. The Fine Arts Museum in Liège benefited from the generosity of the collector, who donated several pieces to its collection.

THE **APIAW**

In 1943, the Walloon Movement prepared for the post-war period in complete secrecy. Several young scientists proposed the creation of a group that would bring scientists and artists together. Aimed at all Walloons, this association would be the cultural counterpart to the planned Conseil économique wallon. The day after the war ended, the prestigious Association pour le Progrès Intellectuel et Artistique de la Wallonie (known as the APIAW) set to work, publishing its manifesto in the magazine "Renaître". The APIAW used this publication to take a detailed look at the cultural and scientific situation in Wallonia. In solution, the APIAW suggested integrating Wallonia into the international trends that governed academia and artistic creation, such that Wallonia was able to occupy a place at the forefront of the modern world. The association's objective was to provide training to leading Walloons. Fernand Graindorge and Marcel Florkin were the core of the APIAW for almost twenty years. The association's activities diminished in the 1970s, the result of major financial issues.

CONTEMPORARY ART

Some critics date the rise of contemporary art to 1945, just after the Second World War drew to a close. As the conflict subsided, the city of Paris lost its status as the world capital of art in favour of New York and the artists from its school. Others attribute the birth of contemporary art to the 1960s. During this decade, the FLUXUS group played a fundamental role in flipping art on its head, rejecting institutions as a whole and, on a larger level, the notion of "works of art". Thus, the established limits of artistic practices were eliminated. For others, the progenitor of contemporary art is Marcel Duchamp, whose artistic endeavours radically revolutionised art in the 20th century. He invented the "ready-made" principle circa 1910, which consisted of viewing found objects as works of art. Thus, the door was opened to the most extreme artistic approaches. According to Duchamp, it was possible to elevate an object into a work of art, whatever it may be, without even having to alter it. The difficulty of defining contemporary art stems from the diversity of creative forms. Each artist was producing a singular work, which did not necessarily belong to a particular style or trend. Since the 1980s, the medium or lack thereof could comprise the subject of an artist's study. New technologies also made a significant appearance in the arts. First came video art, then computer art, digital art, bio art, etc.

Gilbert and George met in 1968 while attending the Saint Martin's School of Art (London) and declared themselves to be "living sculptures". Using their bodies as living materials for their artistic creations, Gilbert and George have made their day-to-day lives a work of art. Calling this "Art for All", Gilbert and George's creations testify to every element of the human condition, including morality, sex, religion and even politics. Aiming to incite the viewer to reflect, the pair of artists depict images that encourage us to question life itself. In their Bad Thoughts photographic montage, it is the suffering and perdition of Man that they call into question. Since 1973, Gilbert and George risked alcoholism and depression. They created what they called the Drinking sculptures, which serves as a reflection of their lives, opening new areas regarding dark or bad thoughts. In the nine photographs that comprise the piece, the duo appears dressed in their trademark strict outfits, alone in the corner of a room, with a glass and a cigarette in their hand. The photos are organised in a cross formation, resembling a stained-glass window. This cross motif, a clear reference to the Judeo-Christian culture and also to martyrs, is a new feature in Gilbert and George's output. The overall piece is bolstered by the red hue, another new element in the artists' repertoire. If this colour is clearly tied to violence in the collective consciousness, here, it is in direct opposite to the calmness of the imagery.

NEW **ACQUISITIONS**

The Fine Arts collection is expanding steadily through acquisitions and donations, the selection of which is governed with an eye for complementary works and legitimacy. These choices support the talents found through the awards organised by the various museums, such as the Triennale de la Gravure, the Prix Dacos, the Prix de la Création and the "Jeunes Artistes" award. The City of Liège also benefits from the assistance of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the King Baudouin Foundation, which provide the City's museums with major new acquisitions. Thanks to this support, masterpieces such as Ensor's La mort et les masques (Death and the Masks) and Delvaux' L'homme de la rue (The Man in the Street) have been restored. Last October, the City of Liège signed an agreement to deposit internationally renowned pieces from a private collection. As a result, masterpieces by Kasimir Malevitch, Pablo Picasso and Robert Delaunay, master works with astounding aesthetic features, will join the collections of the Museum of Fine Art for a period of ten years.

Marthe Wéry is a self-taught Belgian artist who entered the art scene by attending the Grande Chaumière workshop in Paris in 1952. She also discovered the work of Dutch abstract artists and Russian Constructivists. She continued to receive training in workshops in Brussels and Paris. Her approach involved a continuation of strict Geometric abstraction. In 1972, she entered a new stage in the development of her work, adopting a more minimalist kind of abstraction, opting for a principle that involved series, variations and repeated colours. The study of colours became a fundamental element of her work from the 1980s onwards. She superimposed layers in a serial perspective, one after another. Her work, no two pieces of which were ever identical, played on laying out multi-panel pieces, thus modifying the spatial perception of an exhibition space. In 1984, she presented a personal exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal. There, she presented "Installations/Compositions", a collection she titled "Montréal 84". The latter comprises seven paintings, presenting a series of variants on the colour blue. Narrow in width, each canvas is a different height. Wéry imagined an initial layout for the installation in which each of the seven elements could be moved around, depending on the architecture of the exhibition space. The variable element of this interlocking feature requires the intervention of an actor outside of the artist, demonstrating her desire to demystify her work, to let it "live".