



Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, dit Léonard de Vinci, Portrait de Monna Lisa, dite La Joconde
© RMN - Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado

THE LOUVRE'S MASTERPIECES



Introduction

Some artworks have survived over the centuries and made such a mark on history that we cannot imagine the world without them. Their influence has spread across borders and cultures, and to this day they continue to be distinguished by experts and admired by all.

Where better than the Louvre to get a sense of these great artworks? The palace is home to some of the world's most iconic pieces – paintings, sculptures, architectural elements and art objects by famous or anonymous artists of many different origins and eras.

And no two masterpieces are alike!



Enter through the Sully wing.

After the ticket check, go straight on.

When you arrive at a curved stone archway, take the staircase on your right-hand side up to level 0, following the blue arrows towards the Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities.

At the top of the stairs, go through the double wooden doors on your right.

You're in the Salle des Caryatides. Look behind you to see the musicians' gallery above the door.

Ancient masterpieces from the royal collections

1

Room 348
Sully wing
Level 0

Festivities and bloodshed: The Salle des Caryatides was used as both a ballroom and a court of justice. And it was here, in 1572, that Marguerite de Valois, the famous 'Queen Margot', married Henri de Navarre, the future King Henri IV. Only a few days later, on 24 August, Protestant nobles who had attended the wedding were assassinated in the Louvre in the notorious Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre.



Hermaphrodite endormi © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN - Grand Palais / Thierry Ollivier



Les Caryatides © Musée du Louvre / Nicolas Guiraud

The caryatids
Jean Goujon

Under Henri II, the Louvre completed its transition from a medieval fortress into a Renaissance palace. The Salle des Caryatides was originally a splendid ballroom, designed in classical style by the architect Pierre Lescot. It has a musicians' gallery, supported by four Roman-inspired 'caryatids'; these sculpted female figures serving as columns were the architect's way of elevating King Henri II to the status of the Roman emperor Augustus!

The room's purpose changed in 1692 when it was used to display classical sculptures, which French royalty began to collect in the Renaissance. One of the first masterpieces to enter the royal collections, the statue of Diana the Huntress was joined in 1807 by the Sleeping hermaphrodite, purchased by Napoleon I. To understand the nature of this fascinating figure, it has to be seen from all sides..



Cross the room.

Take the passage to the right of the monumental fireplace.

Go straight on between the red marble pillars until you reach the *Venus de Milo*.

A welcome newcomer to the Louvre

2

Room 346
Sully wing
Level 0

An apple or a shield?

The *Venus de Milo* was found in fragments and her original appearance is still something of a mystery. The first restorer wanted to give the statue arms – but how would they have been positioned? A hand holding an apple, found near the statue, may once have been hers... but the position of her left leg suggests she may have held a shield, as she does in many other depictions – a reminder that Venus was the lover of Mars, the god of war.

Aphrodite, known as the Venus de Milo

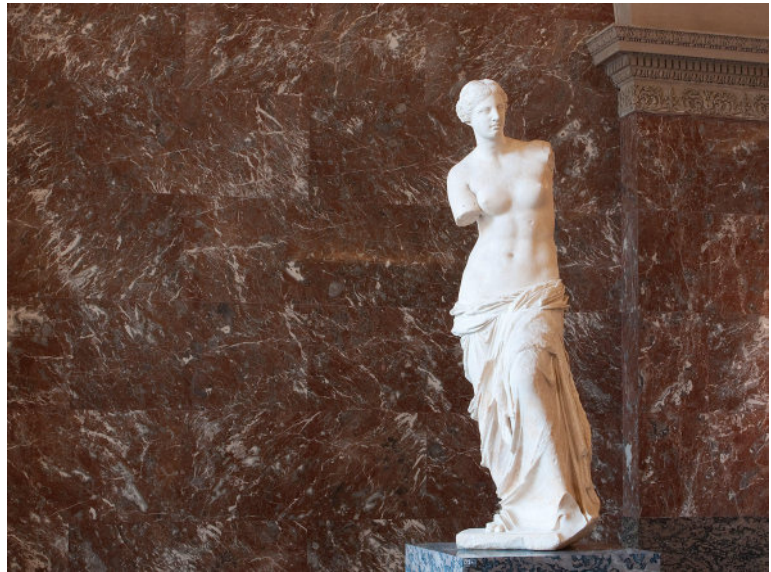
Perhaps the gentleness of her gaze and the slant of her hips would in any case have distinguished her from other sculpted goddesses... but this particular Venus carved out a reputation for herself as soon as she entered the Louvre. The statue was found on the Greek island of Melos (or Milos, as it is known today) and presented to King Louis XVIII, who gave it to the Louvre in 1821. Six years earlier, following Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the Treaty of Vienna had stipulated that some 5,000 artworks seized by Napoleon's troops should be returned to their owners. As a result, the Louvre lost many of the artworks (antiquities in particular) that had contributed to its status as the world's greatest museum under the First Empire (1804–1815). So the Venus de Milo was welcomed with open arms and hailed as a masterpiece. Her appeal is still as strong as ever and she continues to be widely copied and referenced in art and popular culture.



Retrace your steps and take the first left after the red marble pillars.

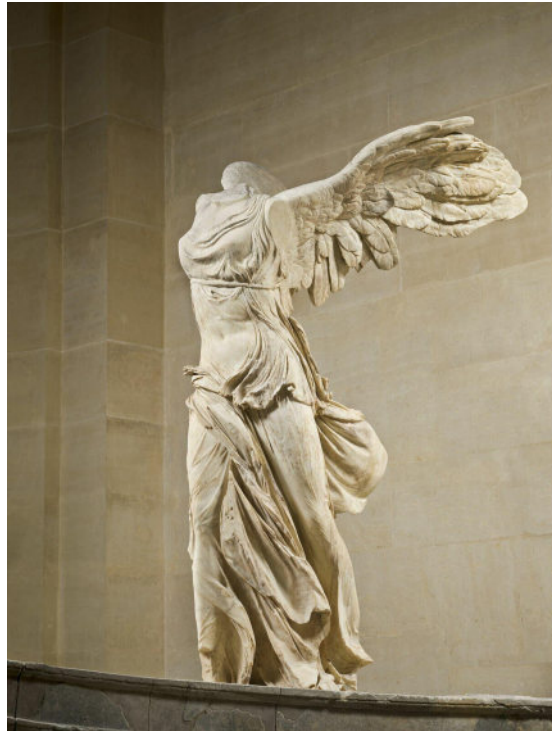
Go straight on. Cross through room 347, continue through the rotunda and head towards the stairs.

Go up the stairs as far as the large winged figure perched atop a ship.



Aphrodite, dite «Vénus de Milo» (vue de la salle de la Vénus de Milo)
© 2010 Musée du Louvre / Angèle Dequier

An uplifting sight



La Victoire de Samothrace © 2015 RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Touchard/Urtaado/Querrec

3

Room 703
Denon wing
Level 1

From discovery to fame:

In the 19th century, a French diplomat came upon some fragments of a statue. He identified them as elements of a Victory and had them shipped to the Louvre. The monument was painstakingly pieced together – without its wings – and exhibited to the public, who showed no great interest. Ten years later, archaeologists came to realise that the pieces of grey marble found near the statue had originally formed a ship. So the statue underwent a second restoration, from which it emerged with its monumental base and wings – and that changed everything! The «Winged Victory» became one of the Louvre's most popular exhibits.

The Winged Victory of Samothrace

Standing at the top of the Daru staircase, The Winged Victory of Samothrace is a timeless icon of Western art. The monument was found on the island of Samothrace, in the sanctuary of the 'Great Gods' to whom people prayed for protection from the dangers of the sea. The figure, spectacularly placed in a rock niche high above the sanctuary, was designed to be seen in three-quarter view from her left-hand side – a view which highlights the billowing cloak and clinging 'wet drapery'. The wings, the warship, the sanctuary... all point to the goddess Nike, the messenger of victory.

In 2014, following an eighteen-month conservation and cleaning project, the Victory and her warship reappeared in a new and even brighter light!



Opposite the Winged Victory of Samothrace, turn right and walk between the columns.

Take a look at the frescoes by Botticelli on the walls on your left.

Italian frescoes on the walls of the Louvre

4

Room 706
Denon wing
Level 1

Venus and the Three Graces Presenting Gifts to a Young Woman
Sandro Botticelli

These magnificent Renaissance frescoes by the painter Sandro Botticelli reached the Louvre in 1882 after being (re)discovered in Italy in 1873 during the renovation of a villa near Florence. They were found under the whitewash on the walls of the villa, home in the Renaissance to a wealthy family who had probably commissioned them from Botticelli, a renowned artist of the day. He reportedly used the daughter of the house as his model, placing her in the company of classical heroines and a Cupid, perhaps on the occasion of her engagement. The scene is allegorical in nature; Botticelli's emphasis is on the act of giving rather than the gift itself. A second, similarly allegorical fresco shows Prudence presenting a young man to Grammar, surrounded by the Liberal Arts. It would be nice to think that the young woman's fiancé was the model for the young man...



Go straight on and through the glass door.
You are now in the Salon Carré (room 708).



Sandro Botticelli, *Vénus et les Trois Grâces offrant des présents à une jeune fille*
© Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN - Grand Palais / Angèle Dequier

The making of reputations

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Room 708 Denon wing Level 1

A platform for masterpieces:

The Salon was moved out of the Louvre in 1848 to make more room for the museum, and it was decided to reserve the Salon Carré for outstanding paintings, such as the Mona Lisa, which was presented here for a while. In accordance with the fashion of the day, the works were placed frame to frame in tightly packed displays that covered the high walls.



Giuseppe Castiglione, Le Salon Carré en 1861
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchal



Le Salon carré © Musée du Louvre / Bertrand Lercy

The Salon Carré

In the 18th century, the Salon Carré ('Square Room') was used as an exhibition space for works by members of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. These annual displays, or 'Salons', forerunners of our contemporary art exhibitions, were very popular with the public.

The role, significance and impact of the Salons changed during their century of existence, but they were essentially places where living artists could exhibit, where the general public could view contemporary art and where art criticism originated. Artists' reputations were made or broken at the Salons, where critics enjoyed contrasting and comparing their works.



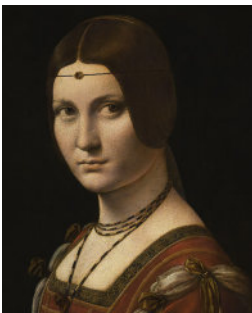
Leave the Salon Carré through the double wooden doors to the right of the windows.
In the Grande Galerie, go straight on as far as the white marble columns.
Look at the paintings on the wall on your left, just past the columns.

Treasures of the Italian Renaissance

6

Room 710 Denon wing Level 1

A gallery with an eventful history... :
The Grande Galerie has been the setting for all kinds of happenings! In 1606, it served as a rainy-day playroom for the future king Louis XIII, who was provided with a live fox for his entertainment. And hundreds of sick people came here for the 'royal touch' ceremony, when Henri IV laid his hands on sufferers, exclaiming, 'The king touches you; God heals you!!'



Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, Léonard de Vinci, Portrait d'une dame de la cour de Milan, dit La belle Ferronnière
© RMN - Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado



Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, dit Léonard de Vinci, La Vierge à l'Enfant avec sainte Anne
© RMN - Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / René-Gabriel Ojéda



La Grande Galerie © Musée du Louvre / Nicolas Guiraud

The Grande Galerie

The Louvre's extensive collection of Italian art includes five paintings and 22 drawings by one of the greatest Renaissance artists: Leonardo da Vinci.

Portrait of a Lady, known as La Belle Ferronnière **Leonardo da Vinci**

The compelling gaze of the woman in the outstanding portrait *La Belle Ferronnière* reflects Leonardo's interest in capturing a living moment. The title of the work derives from a mistake by the painter Ingres, who made a drawn copy of the portrait and gave it the name of another painting in the Louvre. The sitter's identity is uncertain, but she may have been Lucrezia Crivelli, a mistress of Ludovico Sforza, the duke of Milan, for whom Leonardo worked for several years.

Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary, and the Infant Jesus Playing with a Lamb, known as Saint Anne **Leonardo da Vinci**

In the large painting of Saint Anne, showing the Virgin and Child with Mary's mother Anne, the poses and arrangement of the figures are particularly striking. The fantasy landscape in the background creates a sense of timelessness, heightened by Leonardo's famous 'sfumato' technique which casts a misty veil over the whole scene, enveloping it in a mysterious softness.



Go straight on and take the first right into the Mona Lisa room.

A superstar... and a wedding crowd!

7

Room 711 Denon wing Level 1

In 1966, this famous and fragile masterpiece was moved to the Louvre's largest room – the Salle des États – where it is conserved in the best possible conditions, protected inside a temperature- and humidity-controlled glass case.



Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, dit Léonard de Vinci, Portrait de Monna Lisa, dite La Joconde
© RMN - Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado



Paolo Caliari, dit Veronèse, Les Noces de Cana
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado

The salle des États

Mona Lisa (Portrait of Lisa Gherardini) **Leonardo da Vinci**

Leonardo da Vinci must have particularly treasured the Mona Lisa, as he never parted with her. She was given star status as soon she arrived in the Louvre... The painting's special appeal lies in its technical excellence, the sitter's famous smile, the fantasy background landscape and the sfumato technique that envelops the figure in a misty haze. The Mona Lisa's special allure has brought her all sorts of unwelcome attention too, with incidents that have only added to her celebrity status. In 1911, for example, an Italian museum worker stole the painting 'to return it to its homeland', sparking a furore in the press!

The Wedding Feast at Cana **Paolo Caliari, know as Veronese**

While you're queuing to enjoy your personal glimpse of the Mona Lisa, make sure to admire the painting opposite: The Wedding Feast at Cana. You can't miss it: at almost 70 m², it's the biggest painting in the Louvre! Commissioned to decorate the refectory of a monastery in Venice, Veronese had the bold idea of transposing a biblical scene to a contemporary setting – a Venetian banquet. The painting was a great success and other commissions followed. In 1797, it was confiscated by Napoleon's troops, who rolled the huge canvas up and shipped it to Paris.



Go behind the Mona Lisa and into the next room.

Turn left into a long gallery with red walls.

Go straight on until The Raft of the Medusa, a bit further along on the left wall.

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**Room 700
Denon wing
Level 1**

The Raft of the Medusa was completed in 8 months. While working on the painting, the artist met with survivors, used scale models, visited morgues, and studied dying hospital patients. The result divided the critics: some were captivated, and others repulsed by the powerfully confrontational image. The painting was acquired by the Louvre in 1824, shortly after the artist's death.



la liberté guidant le peuple
© GrandPalaisRmn (musée du Louvre)/Adrien Didierjean/
Mathieu Rabeau



Théodore Géricault, Le Radeau de la Méduse
© Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN - Grand Palais / Angèle Dequier

The Salon Molien

The Raft of the Medusa, Théodore Géricault

When you leave the Salle des États, turn your attention to the large 19th-century French paintings in the Salle Mollien...

At the Salon of 1819, Théodore Géricault presented his huge painting *The Raft of the Medusa*, a dramatic scene illustrating the recent wreck of a French ship – an event that had shocked the public. One hundred and fifty people drifted for thirteen days on a makeshift raft, falling prey to thirst, starvation, disease and cannibalism. Only fifteen survived to tell the tale..

he pyramidal composition and precise draughtsmanship are classically inspired. However, Géricault's pallid, unforgiving lighting draws attention to the emaciated bodies of the dead and living heaped together atop the precarious vessel.

Liberty Leading the People, Eugène Delacroix

Eugène Delacroix is regarded as one of the great Romantic painters. Contrary to popular belief, *Liberty Leading the People* does not portray the French Revolution of 1789, but the three-day uprising of July 1830 when Parisians took to the streets to defend their freedoms – that of the press in particular – from the tyrannical rule of Charles X. In this work described by Delacroix as 'a modern subject, a barricade', the allegorical figure of Liberty has something of the beauty of a Greek goddess but is personified by a sensual and vibrant woman of the people. This painting, the most famous by Delacroix, has been referenced in all kinds of freedom fights.



Go straight on and leave the room.

Time for a break? Try the Café Mollien...

Toilets are also available in the Café Mollien.

Go down the large staircase.

Go up to the two large male statues in the middle of the room.

Imprisoned in stone

9

Room 403
Denon wing
Level 0

Taking an all-round view !: Sculptures need to be seen from every angle to be fully appreciated. In the case of the Dying Slave, the figure's charm and mystery are heightened by walking all around it... Look out for the monkey carved behind his left knee! Why a monkey? It all depends on the interpretation of the Slaves themselves: if these figures of resignation and rebellion represent the inability of humans to rise above their physical condition, then the monkey symbolises material life; but if they are seen as personifications of the Arts, mourning the death of the Pope, then the monkey is a symbol of Painting...



Michel-Ange, les « Captifs » © Musée du Louvre / Nicolas Guiraud

Slaves (the 'Rebellious Slave' and the 'Dying Slave')
Michelangelo Buonarroti, known as Michelangelo

These two striking muscular figures illustrate the mix of realism and idealism at which Michelangelo excelled. A closer look reveals the fine bonds, carved in relief, that restrain their movements and identify them as 'Slaves'. The figures are depicted in different poses: The Dying Slave is shown in a deep, perhaps eternal sleep; the Rebellious Slave seems to be straining against his bonds. The statues were commissioned from Michelangelo as part of a decorative project for a pope's funerary monument but the project was abandoned and the Slaves have remained imprisoned in the marble. Their state of incompleteness makes them more difficult to interpret... but a touch of mystery has never harmed a masterpiece!



Cross the room. Just before the exit, look at the sculpture on the right near the window.

Bringing marble to life

10

Room 403
Denon wing
Level 0

A different view of the duo !: At the Musée du Louvre-Lens, another version of *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* shows the lovers younger, at the start of their tumultuous love affair... In this work, Canova chose to depict them standing – the challenge being to achieve a sense of movement and life. If you walk around this sculpture to see it from the back, you'll see the young lovers make a very different – and far more modern – impression!

Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss
Antonio Canova

When you enter the Michelangelo gallery, the work of another Italian sculptor might be the first to catch your eye... Cupid can be hard to resist! Antonio Canova specialised in delicate marble depictions of mythological episodes; it's easy to see why he was so admired by the Romantic poets of the late 19th century! *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* instantly conveys a sense of the feeling of love. Rather than just copying a classical model, Canova took an almost choreographic approach to the composition of his sculpture, choosing the compelling moment when the goddess awakens – a moment captured in a masterpiece that has lost none of its power to move us.



Leave the room and go down the steps.
From the landing, you can see the Pyramid through the window on your left.



Antonio Canova, *Psyché ranimée par le baiser de l'Amour*
© RMN - Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / René-Gabriel Ojéda

A transparent controversy...

11

Room 404
Denon wing
Level 0

The Pyramid **Ieoh Ming Pei**

On your way through the Salle du Manège, look through the glass door to the famous Pyramid which sparked such controversy in the press and the National Assembly during its construction between 1985 and 1989. Some feared the venerable palace would be transfigured beyond repair... but in fact, the project followed in an 800 year-old tradition of architectural transformations, such as the demolition of a 30 metre-high keep that once stood at the heart of the medieval fortress. I.M. Pei's Pyramid – a mere 19 metres in height – was inspired in part by the geometry of the Tuileries Garden, and the Chinese-born American architect chose the clearest possible glass to ensure that the buildings of his predecessors would remain perfectly visible. .



To find your way out, turn around and go through the Salle du Manège (room 405) across from you.
Go down the spiral staircase on the left.
Go down the stairs on the right and continue straight on to the Pyramid, where you'll see signs for the exit.



Cour Napoléon et Pyramide © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN - Grand Palais / Olivier Ouadah © Ieoh Ming Pei