



Montpellier
Agglomération

Press File

Musée Fabre Montpellier



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Editorial

With the new Musée Fabre, Montpellier Agglomération confirms its place as a major European city of culture.

Rightly considered as one of the leading French public art collections in terms of both depth and quality, Musée Fabre has recently undergone complete restructuring and extension work.

Through initiatives including internationally renowned dance and music festivals, the development of a network of media libraries - recently consolidated by the opening of a seventh establishment - the modernisation of music venues such as the Victoire 2 concert hall, series of open air films in fourteen communes in its territory starting next August, Montpellier Agglomération offers a wealth of cultural initiatives throughout its administrative area and well beyond, confirming its status as a major European city of culture.

The museum was closed to the public in September 2002 and after transfer of the collections to a secure reserve, work commenced.

This is one of the largest museum works that France has ever seen and in terms of development projects it is the only museum in the southern half of France to have been the object of renovation on such a scale. The Bordeaux based architects Lajus, Pueyo, Brochet along with Nebout from Montpellier, creators of a talented project that answers the numerous technical difficulties that the project represents, were chosen to lead the renovation work.

The objective was to extend the museum's exhibition surface area to enable redeployment and enriching of its collections. This involved rethinking the layout of a complex set of buildings that are steeped in history and making the most of an exceptional architectural heritage in order to present the ensemble with optimal coherence while underlining the diversity of the collections and keeping the door open to modernity and the contemporary arts. We notably wanted the museum to be a living part of the city in order to attract new types of public, especially the younger generations.

The work carried out has brought the surface area accessible to the public up to 9,200m², nearly double the previous area. It will be completed by the end of 2006.

In the meantime you are warmly invited to an avant-premier view of the configuration of your future museum.

Georges Frêche

President of Montpellier Agglomération
President of the Languedoc-Roussillon Region

Musée Fabre

Modernity integrated into two centuries of history

Musée Fabre will be reopened in early 2007. The newly renovated and extended museum will be a fitting setting for showing its collections in all their splendour...

But the museum has gone much further than a mere renovation. The objective is to create a new type of museum, one which represents an active contribution to Montpellier Agglomération's cultural influence, open to as wide a public as possible, asserting itself as a living, enriching facility that is capable of evolving with time and embracing modernity.

A. Background

The Musée Fabre project is the latest chapter in a two century lifespan. In the 19th century founding donations from Fabre, Valedau and Bruyas set the wheels in motion for the construction of a site worthy of housing their works: renovation of the 'Hôtel de Massilian' for the inauguration in 1828 followed by construction of the Gallery of Columns from 1875 to 1878. Although it received a series of major donations and legacies in the early 20th century, the Musée Fabre had difficulty in adapting to the then modern times, even in spite of remarks made by its curators on the need to "consider the museum as a living entity, not a necropolis" (André Joubin).

Extension work was completed just before the Second World War in 1939 and further renovations were made in the 1980s, notably in the 'Salle des Griffons' and to a wing of the Jesuit College in order to house the Modern and Contemporary Art collections. Montpellier Agglomération's proactive cultural policy has today enabled the city to develop a modern museum that pays fitting tribute to the aspirations of its donors over the years. The collections will henceforth enjoy a form of presentation and communication in line with present levels of exchange, open to future developments.



Musée Fabre, a blend of epochs

Right from the beginning of the project the main challenge, for the architects and curators alike, was that the Musée Fabre is comprised of three different sections of buildings that do not present a real logic or linking theme. One section includes a 17th century Jesuit College, the original museum dates from the early 19th century and the extensions such as the Gallery of Columns, date from the end of the 19th century. The ensemble is therefore relatively mixed and the crux of the architectural challenge was to ensure optimal coherence and unity between the units.

In addition, the former premises had become too constrained to house and make the most of its collections and required total rethinking. The museum also needed to be made accessible to persons with reduced mobility and equipped with an auditorium, places for exchange and documentation areas for the public...

B. Museum design

The museum has been designed with great care taking into account, and creating advantages out of, the various architectural constraints. In order to adapt the museum layout to the building and transform the exhibition areas while respecting the initial architecture, the architects have used a subtle system of contrasts. Drawing inspiration from the alliance between tradition and modernity, they have also made the most of open/closed, vast/intimate, shade/light, black/white, wood/stone, thus applying their creativity to areas which, in museum design especially, are as delicate as volumes and lighting.

Examples:

- > The open, spacious volume of the atrium has been restored in opposition to the exhibition rooms which are, by definition, more enclosed;
- > Verticality of light in the entry hall followed by a reception hall with a studied horizontal effect;
- > The reception hall opens onto a room for temporary exhibitions, bathed in light but which can be totally blacked out;
- > Exterior courtyard coatings: black for Bazille, white for Bourdon;
- > Interior coatings: wooden for areas devoted to thinking and reflection such as the documentation centre and the interpretation rooms, mineral for the exhibition rooms...

The visits are structured, given relief, clarified, by this original rhythm which respects the historic rooms and gives them a new lease of life through the creation of original, new, specially designed or constructed spaces.



Visits in and around the museum's three levels

The future museum will offer 4 clearly indicated, logical and accessible chronological visits through collections that have been put together per period from the 16th century through to contemporary collections,

- > a classic tour, from the Renaissance to the 17th and 18th centuries and the neoclassic period,
- > a 19th century tour, from the Romantics, the Academism, Realism, Impressionists and early Modernity,
- > a modern tour, from post-War abstract painting to the present day.

A further tour option will be solely temporary exhibits by means of direct access via the Bourdon courtyard. This room offers nearly 1,000m² of fully modular exhibition space capable of hosting the widest classic and contemporary diversity of artistic techniques.

Clarity of collections

A further ambition for the Musée Fabre project was to make the collections easy to understand by ensuring logical and optimal display. The labyrinth-like approach in the former museum had its charms but made it very difficult to develop a coherent path through the collections. Now, architecture has been placed at the service of fluidity and liberty. From reception onwards, the museum has been designed to enable visitors to choose their itinerary freely and easily.

Special attention has been paid to visitor comfort with indicators enabling everyone to find their way easily both in spatial and chronological (artistic periods) terms:

- > In terms of identifying itineraries: visits have been divided onto three coherent and chronologically independent sub-sections.
- > Information: short scripts provide information on the key dates, points of interest or details.
- > Given the diversity of the buildings themselves and the length of the visit, no effort has been spared on making it easy to find one's bearings and way and to ensure full visitor comfort at all times, for example every room has an area indicating where the room is compared to the rest of the building.

Presentation clarity and simplicity

Special attention has been paid to the quality of presentation of the works, to ensure that the museum building itself only serves to present the works. To this end clarity and simplicity are the watchwords.

For example, in terms of lighting: natural or artificial daylight is present everywhere with glass rooftops in certain areas, such as the Courbet room, or the glass façade on the new pavilion that has been specially treated to ensure that it can be adapted for presenting works that are sensitive to light.

A very subtle treatment has been employed in the historic rooms, notably the 'Salle des Griffons', the 'Salle des Colonnes' and the Fabre apartments which will house a selection of the works by the painter-donor.

Cutting edge technology

> **Air conditioning:** the museum design had to take obligatory air conditioning standards into account. This was a particularly delicate consideration given the conflicting concerns of preserving the original architectural aspect.

The museum was not previously in a position to conserve works in line with the applicable standards but now has air conditioning. This is a real technical feat given the configuration of the existing buildings (very thick walls and floors, vaulted ceilings, openings to the exterior in the former Jesuit college, architectural works to be conserved such as the gallery of columns, the Fabre apartments...).

> **Security:** renovation of the museum also had to integrate the security installations that such a facility requires. The museum has thus been equipped with a highly sophisticated protection system that is reliable, robust and... invisible.



The Gallery of Columns before and after restoration.

> **Hanging the works:** the exhibition rooms are equipped with systems that mean works can be changed easily. For example, works can be brought from the reserves to replace works on loan to other museums. The capacity to change, adapt and provide a dynamic display policy is essential in ensuring an enriching life for the collections.

Interpretation rooms

Given the dimensions of the museum, both in terms of chronology and spatially, interpretation rooms with a comfortable and intimate ambience, in contrast to the exhibition rooms, have been set up throughout the museum to enable visitors to relax in a pleasant environment while still in contact with the collections by means of catalogues or free access multimedia terminals.

A range of information supports is available in the reception area, such as audio guides, or in the rooms themselves (documents per room). Visitors are always in a position to obtain more detailed information on the collections throughout their visit. ■



A tribute to the donators

Interpretation rooms have been dedicated to the three donators: Valedau and Bruyas each have a multimedia room offering a wide range of information on their work and biographies; two rooms are dedicated to Fabre.

Tributes to these three founding donators have also been included in the tours with exhibition rooms providing further background on these three characters.

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Musée Fabre

Livelier, more convivial and equipped with the latest technologies

The extension and renovation of the Musée Fabre has meant that nearly 800 works of art can be exhibited simultaneously, compared to just 300 previously. The collections are shown on some 9,200m² of exhibition space. The architects have taken care to create a transition from the external city to the interior of a museum right from the entry area: reception for the permanent and temporary exhibitions is on a single level via the Soulages courtyard from the Esplanade, thanks to the excavation and changed layout of the Bazille and Bourdon courtyards which have respectively become a reception hall and a temporary exhibition area.

All the routes through the museum have been redesigned and modified to ensure a logical and fluid transition. The architects, in response to this complex challenge, played on the alliance between tradition and modernity. For example, they restored the full volume to the interior courtyard of the 19th century Hôtel de Massian, now known as the Atrium. In creating a new pavilion the architects recreated the enclosure of the Bourdon courtyard and added a totally modern façade of textured glass. At night this glass façade is illuminated with 3,000 neon lamps - a work of art in its own right.



A. New collections presented

> Pierre Soulages, quite at home

Between Pierre Soulages and the Musée Fabre, between the painter and Montpellier, a close bond has been created over the years. It began in 1941 when Pierre Soulages joined Montpellier's school of Fine Arts. He was a frequent visitor to the Musée Fabre whenever he was in the region, as he shared his time between Paris and Sète.

In the year 2000, when the renovation work was initiated, Pierre Soulages was involved in the design of the new museum. In 2004 the decision was taken to dedicate two rooms to the artist (i.e. 600m² out of 5500m²). The painter also demonstrated his own devotion to the museum in the most eloquent of manners by donating nineteen of his works covering the period of 1952 to the present day. This ensemble is the most complete public collection of this major artist and has triggered an exceptional project in the French museum network making the Musée Fabre the central point where paintings by Soulages will be the most visible and best represented.

> Daniel Buren: project for the entry to the Musée Fabre

The project covers the transition between the exterior of the museum, from the street to the museum entrance. The concept is a sort of musical 'chariot' that literally sweeps the work and the visitor into the interior and accompanies both on their way out. Daniel Buren's work offers a transition between seven successive areas (street, halls, corridors, doors...) comprising a 40m long, 7m wide magical carpet. The work is a succession of geometric shapes that match the contours of the walls and the colours of the surrounding areas. The closer the visitor gets to the exhibition rooms the more the motif that started in the street disappears, progressively giving way to the works within the museum.

> **Graphic arts:** the museum's collections include a very rich choice from the graphic arts with some 3,500 drawings and 900 engravings that have never been exhibited due to their great fragility.

The new museum will include two special drawing display units enabling these works to be presented in rotation in the right conservation conditions along the visitor routes. Given the need to change these exhibits regularly due to their fragility, the museum will establish dialogues and correspondence between these exhibits.

The Musée Fabre reception hall.



An exhibition of drawings could also be held in the temporary exhibit room given the excellent modularity of this exhibition space capable of hosting the widest variety of artistic techniques, from drawings to multimedia.

> **Decorative arts:** Hôtel Sabatier d'Espeyran (rue Montpelliéret) will be the new centre for the decorative arts. It will be fully redesigned in terms of public interaction (longer opening hours, access for those with reduced mobility) and presentation of the collections (subtle restitution of ceremonial salons in the full atmosphere of the end of Second Empire, new presentation of precious 18th century furniture with the inclusion of the Rouayroux legacy and a totally new style of presentation for ceramics).

B. The public at the heart of the project

The former Musée Fabre did not offer services that convey a museum's modernity and functionality, such as a documentation centre, bookshop, catering or public services.

The new museum will provide all such services, carefully distributed around the entry area and one of the courtyards with a view to creating, here again, an area for exchange and communication. These services will also offer direct access to the city, providing access to all, even those not visiting the collections in the museum.

Subject to the programmes and the museum's ongoing projects the museum will be capable of simultaneously hosting:

- > workshops for traditional artistic practises (painting, sculpture, modelling...) plus a workshop dedicated to new technologies (digital imaging workshop, photo retouching...)
- > a polyvalent area which can host exceptional events such as an installation to explain a perspective, a restorer at work, an artist at work, live broadcast auctions...

Thanks to 300m² of leisure and mediation areas, the Musée Fabre aims to develop its attractiveness towards those who do not often visit museums such as adolescents and young adults.

An ambitious multimedia programme

The new museum is fully equipped for the deployment of the latest information and communications technologies in virtually every room in order to provide opportunities to seek further information on the works, keep up to date with museum information, artistic activities and educational activities, create a dialogue between the public and the museum... Within the framework of this programme a film about Frédéric Bazille was produced in 2004 and others are currently being prepared on Courbet, Fabre, Bruyas... ■

The establishment will be fully accessible to persons with reduced mobility by means of lifts and adapted access. Special sound based directions have been installed for the visually impaired.

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Chronology

January 2001

> nomination of the winners of the architectural competition: Brochet - Lajus - Pueyo (Bordeaux) associated with Emmanuel Nebout (Montpellier).

September 2002

> closure of the Musée Fabre.

March 2003

> beginning of the preparatory work, demolition and excavation.

2004

> Beginning of the building work, fitting out of the new pavil

June 2005 - April 2006

> Interior layout

May to July 2006

> Building opened – test phase

From September 2006

> Return of the collections to the museum, hanging.
> Installation of the facilities (documentation centre, bookshop-gift shop, auditorium, catering area...).

Opening: 1st quarter 2007

Budget & financing

Renovation and extension of the museum represents a budget of 61,200,000 €

FINANCING

Montpellier Agglomération 40,100,000 €

State 15,500,000 €

Languedoc-Roussillon Region: 2,800,000 €

SCHEDULED TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS AT THE MUSEE FABRE

This programme may be subject to modification.

Art of La Serenissima

Venetian drawing from the 17th and 18th centuries from French public collections

October 2006 - February 2007

Fabre museum Pavilion

Upon the initiative of the Louvre museum presentation of a series of never before seen exhibitions aimed at underlining the depth of French collections of Italian drawings from the 17th and 18th centuries. To be presented from October 2006 to January 2007 in seven major French museums.

Tribute to Jean Fournier

Opening – May 2007

Temporary exhibition room

Since 1954 Jean Fournier, through his successive galleries, has played a considerable role on the French painting scene having accompanied numerous periods of creative effervescence and renaissances.

Impressionism in the FRAMEwork

June - September 2007

Temporary exhibition room

Thanks to its partnership with FRAME (French Regional & American Museums Exchange), Musée Fabre will host a prestigious collection of impressionist masterpieces on loan from American FRAME museums.

François-Xavier Fabre Retrospective (1766-1837)

October 2007 - January 2008

Temporary exhibition room

Musée Fabre pays tribute to its founder, François-Xavier Fabre, brilliant student of David, whose works are today shown in all the major museums.

Jean Raoux Retrospective (1677-1734)

Autumn 2007

Temporary exhibition room

A tribute to the famous Montpellier-born Regency painter. Similar tributes will be paid to Frédéric Bazille and Sébastien Bourdon, with Cabanel, Fabre and Vien coming soon.

Gustave Courbet Restrospective

February - June 2008

Temporary exhibition room

(Autumn 2007, Musée d'Orsay – Summer 2008, The Metropolitan museum of Art, New York) This artist is essential for the comprehension of 19th century French art and has not been the object of a major exhibition since 1977. Courbet owes a great deal to an art collector named Alfred Bruyas who bought several of his masterpieces and later bequeathed them to the Musée Fabre.

Video, an art, a history

Summer 2008

Temporary exhibition room

Based on 1500 works from the Pompidou Centre in Paris the exhibition traces the history of this new media from its origins to the present day (this is the only French leg of an event which will be shown in Barcelona, Taipei, Sydney and Melbourne)

Gauguin / Van Gogh : a visit to the Musée Fabre

Summer 2008

Temporary exhibition room

120 years after. An exhibition that takes a look back on a visit to the Musée Fabre by two of the great figures of modern art attracted by the masterpieces in the Bruyas collection.

Musée Fabre

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