LILLE, FRANCE

Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille: Masterpieces

Twenty paintings from one of the major museums of northern France



The Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille holds a large collection of European paintings, drawings and sculpture. It is especially strong in art from France and the Low Countries, which is hardly surprising in a city so close to the Belgian border, and its galleries cover large religious subjects as well as portraits and scenes of ordinary life.

None of the twenty paintings chosen here is religious. Several take their subjects from ancient legend and myth, but the story matters much more in some than in others. You can follow David's Belisarius with little help from the legend. Delacroix's Medea reads quite differently once you know the myth. The name Erigone does surprisingly little to unlock Moreau's dense panel. Other pictures need no background at all, among them Jordaens's cows and Oudry's pug. Boilly appears twice, with two public men, Robespierre and Marat, and he treats them in strikingly different ways.

Artline chose these works from the museum's documented holdings. The selection is independent of the museum, and dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the source records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/palais-beaux-arts-lille

The selection · 20

1. Belisarius Begging for Alms
   Jacques-Louis David · 1781
2. Five Studies of Cows
   Jacob Jordaens · 1624
3. The Triumph of Marat
   Louis-Léopold Boilly · c. 1794
4. Medea
   Eugène Delacroix · 1838
5. Robespierre
   Louis-Léopold Boilly · c. 1791
6. Study for the Race of the Barbary Horses
   Théodore Géricault · 1817
7. After the Thaw: The Seine at the Pont de Suresnes
   Alfred Sisley · 1880
8. Apelles Painting Campaspe in the Presence of Alexander
   Jacques-Louis David · c. 1814
9. Travellers in a Rocky Landscape
   David Teniers the Younger · Second half of the 17th century
10. Bouquet of Flowers
    Roelant Savery · c. 1620
11. Brie-sur-Marne
    Stanislas Lépine · c. 1873
12. A Shepherd from the Landes
    Rosa Bonheur · Second half of the 19th century
13. Pug with a Red Ribbon
    Jean-Baptiste Oudry · 1730
14. Wheat Field
    Jacob van Ruisdael · c. 1660
15. Confidence
    Jules Breton · 1864
16. Pear Pickers
    Émile Bernard · 1888
17. The Old Women, or Time
    Francisco Goya · c. 1810
18. In the Woods
    Albert Anker · 1865
19. Erigone
    Gustave Moreau · c. 1865
20. Winter: Snow Effect
    Alfred Sisley · 1876

01 / 20

Belisarius Begging for Alms

Jacques-Louis David

1781 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Belisarius Begging for Alms. WikiArt; Jacques-Louis David. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Belisarius, the fallen general of legend, has been reduced to begging. David hangs the whole reversal on one object: the helmet that once signalled military authority is now used to collect alms. The onlookers do the rest. Their gestures of surprise, recognition and pity each show the old man's fall from a different side.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

Five Studies of Cows

Jacob Jordaens

1624 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Jacob Jordaens. Five studies of cows. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/jacob-jordaens/five-studies-of-cows-1624 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Five studies, but no herd. Jordaens put the cows on one canvas without joining them into a scene. Some stand and some lie down, and each pose brought its own problems of weight, overlap and the turn of a head. The repetition is what gives the canvas away as a working study rather than a composed picture.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

The Triumph of Marat

Louis-Léopold Boilly

c. 1794 · Oil on white paper mounted on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Louis-Léopold Boilly. Le triomphe de Marat. Image credit: Louis-Léopold Boilly; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PBA_boilly_triomphe_de_marat.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Marat is lifted up and carried, yet he hardly owns the picture. Boilly gives much of it to the bearers, whose raised arms and clustered heads make his importance look like something they hand up to him. If this is a triumph, the crowd is the one staging it. It is also the only painting on paper in this selection: oil on white paper, mounted on canvas.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 395

04 / 20

Medea

Eugène Delacroix

1838 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Medea. WikiArt; Eugène Delacroix. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Medea holds two children in a rocky shelter. At a glance the close grouping might pass for protection, but her turned head and tense grip say otherwise. Delacroix puts the danger in the embrace itself. For anyone who knows how her story goes, the children's dependence on her is hard to look at.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

Robespierre

Louis-Léopold Boilly

c. 1791 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Louis-Léopold Boilly. Portrait de Maximilien Robespierre. Image credit: Louis-Léopold Boilly; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PBA_Boilly_robespierre.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Papers, a desk, orderly clothing: these are the restrained props of a particular kind of formal portrait, and Boilly uses them to present Robespierre as a composed civilian sitter. In the same painter's Triumph of Marat the crowd hands a public man his importance. Here Robespierre's standing seems to rest on furniture and paperwork.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 396

06 / 20

Study for the Race of the Barbary Horses

Théodore Géricault

1817 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Study for the Race of the Barbarian Horses. WikiArt; Théodore Géricault. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Nobody is racing yet. Géricault paints the moment before the start, when the horse has to be held back, and he makes the holding look like hard labour. Human limbs and the animal's neck pull in different directions, and the bodies are packed so tightly that no single action stands out from the struggle. Like Jordaens's cows, this is a study, but of another kind. There are no separate poses set side by side here; people and horse are already tied into a single knot.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

After the Thaw: The Seine at the Pont de Suresnes

Alfred Sisley

1880 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Alfred Sisley. APRES LA DEBACLE LA SEINE AU PONT DE SURESNES. Image credit: Alfred Sisley; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_sisley_apres_la_debacle.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

The thaw of the title is already over, and Sisley paints what it has left behind. The swollen Seine has spread into an unusually broad, pale expanse beside the wet bank, and water lies where there might otherwise be firm ground. The weather has changed the proportions of the place.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 1894

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Apelles Painting Campaspe in the Presence of Alexander

Jacques-Louis David

c. 1814 · Oil on wood · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Jacques-Louis David. Apelle peignant Campaspe en présence d'Alexandre. Image credit: Sailko; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacques-louis_david,_apelle_ritrae_camaspe_alla_presenza_di_alessandro,_1813-23_ca.jpg. CC BY 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · CC BY 3.0

The ancient story turns on three figures: Apelles the painter, Campaspe his model, and Alexander, the ruler who watches the work. David separates them with the easel and keeps its canvas in view between them, so the picture being made stays visible inside the one we see. Campaspe is the one being looked at. Of those doing the looking, Alexander is the most powerful.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 444

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Travellers in a Rocky Landscape

David Teniers the Younger

Second half of the 17th century · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



David Teniers the Younger. BOHEMIENS. Image credit: David Teniers the Younger; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_tenier_jeune_bohemiens.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Beside the small travellers the rocks look formidable, and at first they seem to block the way. The route gets through all the same, and beyond the enclosed passage the view opens out onto distant country.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 107

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Bouquet of Flowers

Roelant Savery

c. 1620 · Oil on wood · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Roelant Savery. BOUQUET DE FLEURS. Image credit: Roelant Savery; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_savery_bouquet_de_fleurs.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

The centre of the bouquet is crowded, yet no flower is lost in it. Savery sets each stem and delicate edge against the dark background with enough contrast to keep it clear, and a few fallen blossoms carry the arrangement beyond the vase.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 1036

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Brie-sur-Marne

Stanislas Lépine

c. 1873 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Stanislas Lépine. BRIE-SUR-MARNE. Image credit: Stanislas Lépine; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_lepine_brie_sur_marne.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

River, houses and sky lie in broad horizontal bands, and then the water loosens that order. Reflections blur the boundaries between the bands and give the inhabited bank a second, less solid presence. Little else happens, so the reflections repay a closer look: no building in the water quite matches the shape of its counterpart on the bank.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 1943

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A Shepherd from the Landes

Rosa Bonheur

Second half of the 19th century · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Rosa Bonheur. Berger Landais. Image credit: Rosa Bonheur; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_Pdba_bonheur_berger_landais.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Bonheur brings the shepherd so close that his rough outer garment counts for as much as his face, and his dark cap against the blue sky makes the turn of his head easy to read. The tight cropping leaves out any wider view of rural work. Instead he gets the close attention of a portrait, and his occupation has to be read from his clothing and bearing.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 604

13 / 20

Pug with a Red Ribbon

Jean-Baptiste Oudry

1730 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Jean-Baptiste Oudry. CARLIN PARE D'UN RUBAN ROUGE. Image credit: Jean-Baptiste Oudry; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_oudry_carlin.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

The red ribbon gives the picture its title and a bright accent at the neck, but the dog's stance is what holds it together. Compact and pale against darker surroundings, the pug registers at once: open mouth, alert pose.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 348

14 / 20

Wheat Field

Jacob van Ruisdael

c. 1660 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Jacob van Ruisdael. CHAMP DE BLE. Image credit: Jacob van Ruisdael; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_Van_Ruisdael_champ_de_ble.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Ruisdael runs a curving path through the farmland and puts a few small figures on it, so the fields look continuous and easy to cross. The sky works on another scale entirely. Its great banks of cloud stop the land from looking fully under human control.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 224

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Confidence

Jules Breton

1864 · Oil on canvas mounted on wood · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Jules Breton. Trust. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/jules-breton/trust-1864 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

A confidence is meant for one listener, and Breton does not let the viewer become a second. One young woman leans towards the other so that both bodies turn the same way. Their relationship is plain, though what they are saying is not, and together they make a private enclosure within the wider setting.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 513

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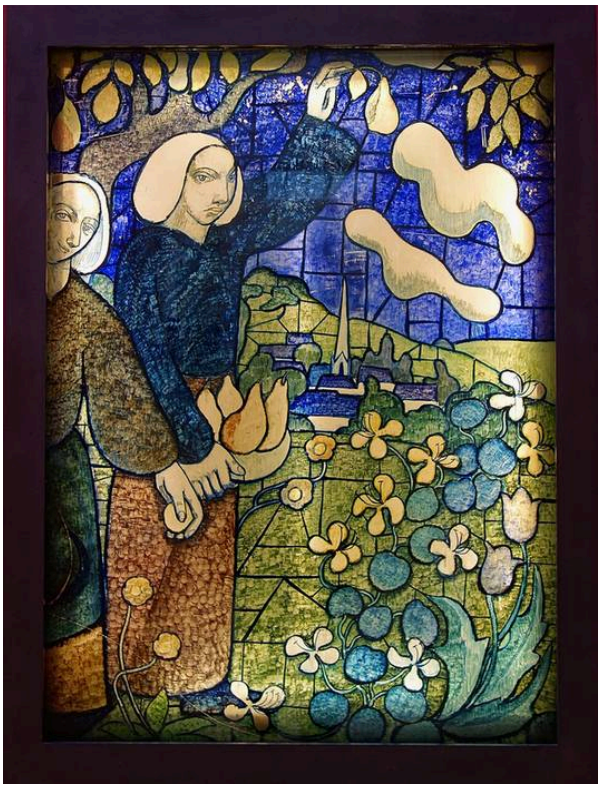
Pear Pickers

Émile Bernard

1888 · Oil on glass · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Émile Bernard. CUEILLEUSES DE POIRES. Image credit: Émile Bernard; Self-photographed. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_PdBA_emile_bernard_cueilleuses_de_poires.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

Bernard painted this on glass, not canvas. He built the scene from areas of colour edged with dark outlines rather than modelling it with naturalistic shadow. The pickers and trees are still recognisable, but the depth is compressed, so each patch of colour does two jobs at once: it describes part of the scene and takes its place in a flat pattern.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 1822

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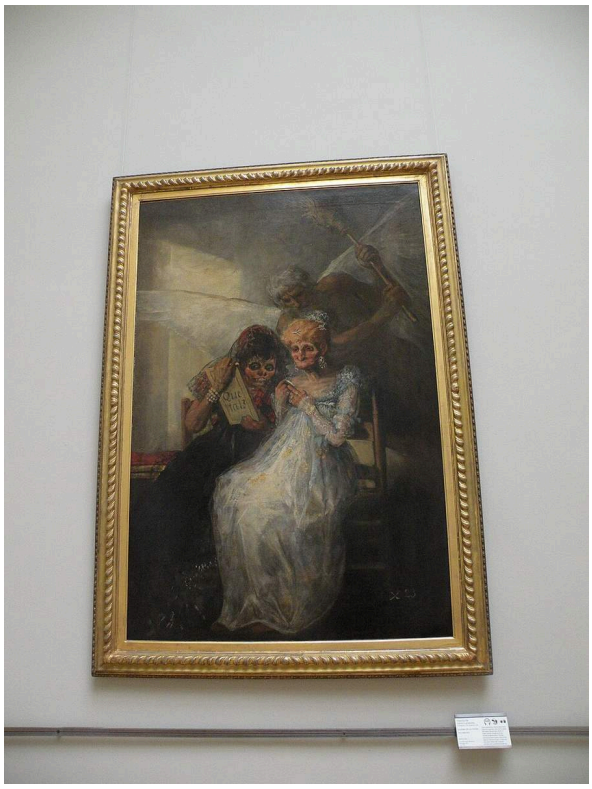
The Old Women, or Time

Francisco Goya

c. 1810 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Francisco Goya. Les vieilles ou Le temps. Image credit: Francisco Goya; Own work , Chatsam , 2015-07-05 11:41:15. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goya_le_temps_pdba_lille.JPG. CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · CC BY-SA 3.0

The old women are elegantly dressed and study themselves in a small mirror, but nothing in the picture flatters them. Behind them, a winged figure and a raised broom bring in a larger threat, presumably the Time of the alternative title. Against that, their business with the mirror, trying to control how they look, seems very small.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 50

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In the Woods

Albert Anker

1865 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Albert Anker. DANS LES BOIS. Image credit: Albert Anker; Joconde database : entry 000PE019295. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Albert_Anker_-_Im_Wald.jpg. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

A girl has fallen asleep in the woods. Her head rests on her hand, and the wooded ground closes round her body. Cut branches show that she is near some kind of work, but what Anker paints is an unposed break from it. As with Bonheur's shepherd, the work itself stays outside the picture and only its signs remain.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 623

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Erigone

Gustave Moreau

c. 1865 · Oil on wood · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Gustave Moreau. ERIGONE. Image credit: Gustave Moreau; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lille_Pdba_moreau_erigone.JPG. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · Public domain

A pale body emerges from a setting that will not sort itself into distinct parts. Moreau picks out the skin with small areas of light against the dense growth and shadow around it. Beyond that, the panel gives little away.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 609

20 / 20

Winter: Snow Effect

Alfred Sisley

1876 · Oil on canvas · Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Alfred Sisley. En hiver effet de neige. Image credit: Patrice78500; Own work. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:En_hiver,_effet_de_neige,_Alfred_Sisley.jpg. CC BY-SA 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/). Full-frame proportional resize and JPEG compression; applicable ShareAlike terms retained. · CC BY-SA 4.0

Snow mutes the colour, and grey and violet shadows break up the white, but the road keeps its structure. Its converging edges lead carriages and walkers between the houses and trees. In Sisley's view of the Seine after the thaw, water spills over what should be firm ground. Here the snow softens almost everything, but not the line of the road.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: P 1895

Bystanders and travellers

The secondary figures in this selection do very different jobs. In the figure paintings they tell you how to read the central figure: Belisarius's fall and Marat's elevation both reach us largely through the people around them. In the landscapes, people shrink to something closer to a measuring device. The walkers beside Sisley's swollen Seine show how wide the river has become without taking over the scene. Ruisdael's figures and Teniers's travellers mark out a route, easy going across the fields in one picture and harder won among the rocks in the other. None of these landscape figures is the subject. That role belongs to cloud, rock and water, and the people mostly tell us how big those are.

Further reading

Seven Discourses on Art

Joshua Reynolds · Read free · English

Reynolds sets out an influential eighteenth-century argument about what painting should aim to do. These pictures are not among his subjects, but his argument gives you a yardstick from the period for judging the ambitions of the large figure compositions by David and Delacroix.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12