

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin

1724-1780

Press release

Exhibition

**February 21 –
May 26, 2008**

Musée du Louvre,
Sully Wing,
salle de la Chapelle

Exhibition organized with
The Frick Collection,
New York



Gabriel de Saint-Aubin
View of the Salon of 1765 (detail)
Black chalk, ink and watercolor
Paris, musée du Louvre, Department of Graphic
Arts, inv. 32749 © Erich Lessing

**This exhibition is made possible thanks
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In media partnership with **INOUS PARIS**
LE NOUVEAU MUSEE

A unique chronicler of bohemian Paris under the reign of Louis XV, Gabriel de Saint-Aubin was a marginal artist who roamed the streets of the capital his entire life, a sketchbook in his hands. Ever since this artist was rediscovered by the Goncourt brothers, admiration for his keen eye, liveliness of execution, sensuous use of materials and freedom of expression has never waned.

Nevertheless, this exhibition marks the first time in nearly a century that the public will be treated to a monographic exploration of the various aspects of the art of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Louvre and The Frick Collection in New York, this exhibition is able to bring together seven of the rare paintings by this artist, a selection of his remarkable etchings and some sixty of his best drawings.

An unclassifiable and undaunted artist

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin belonged to an eclectic family of artists—his father and a brother were embroiderers for the royal court, a sister and another brother were widely noted for their mastery of the draftsman's art—who proudly recognized his genius. However, we know very little about how he got his start as an artist, his training, or his private life.

Only his works can guide us. Saint-Aubin's drawings often include a veritable interweaving of scribbled images and personal notes. This delicate handwriting, almost undecipherable at first glance, is one of the trademarks of his personal approach, which was hardly lacking in humor or irony, extending occasionally to self-mockery. Once one has gotten past the shock of the inventive, and sometimes muddled, presentation of his sketches, these captivating works can allow us to trace the artist's sensitivity as a draftsman throughout his entire creative process.

The works of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin could be categorized into three main families. The first, and the one associated most with the artist's legitimate, professional status during his lifetime, consists of allegories, historical subjects and illustrations for manuscripts commissioned by publishers. The second includes sales catalogues, booklets for the Salons and guides to Paris meticulously enhanced with sketches. Lastly, the largest group, and the one with the greatest appeal for today's collectors, comprises his drawings from life (*Two Children with One Holding a Kite, A Knife Grinder, A Village Fiddler and many others*).

Exhibition curators

Pierre Rosenberg, Member of the Académie Française, Director Emeritus, Musée du Louvre.

Christophe Leribault, Chief Curator, Department of Graphic Arts, Musée du Louvre and Director, Eugène Delacroix Museum.

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Gabriel de Saint-Aubin
Encounter on the Boulevard, 1760
 Oil on canvas
 Perpignan, musée Hyacinthe Rigaud
 © Musée Hyacinthe-Rigaud



Gabriel de Saint-Aubin
Sale of Paintings, 1776
 In the Groult Notebook (fol. 23 verso)
 Paris, musée du Louvre, Department of
 Graphic Arts © RMN / Thierry Lepage

Visitor Information

Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and until 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Admission fees: Access to the exhibition is included in the purchase of an admission to the museum's permanent collections: €9; €6 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays. Free admission for youths under 18, the unemployed, and holders of the "Louvre Jeunes", "Louvre Professionnels", "Louvre Enseignants", "Louvre Etudiants Partenaires" or "Amis du Louvre" cards.

Further Information

+33 (0)1 40 20 53 17 / www.louvre.fr

Auditorium du Louvre

Information: +33 (0)1 40 20 55 55
 Réservations : +33 (0)1 40 20 55 00

Chronicler of Paris in the Age of Enlightenment

Today, Gabriel de Saint-Aubin is known most of all for his vivacious chronicles of life in Paris during the 18th century. These intriguing works take in intimate family settings as well as fashionable spectacles (*Armide, an Opera by Quinault and Lully*) and the great Parisian monuments (*Porte Saint-Denis, Southern Face Viewed from the Boulevard*). He also was an avid follower of public events, whether festivals or sermons, official ceremonies (*Louis XVI Laying the Foundation Stone for the Amphitheater of the School for Surgeons*), catastrophes (*Fire at the Hôtel-Dieu*) and numerous other events, for which his work often provides the only existing pictorial representation. His skill in depicting life on the boulevards of Paris has never been surpassed (*Parade on the Boulevard*). He ran the length and breadth of Paris, like a modern reporter, meticulously crafting each anecdote. All the same, there is neither a hint of bleakness nor any inkling of the Revolution in his joyous and seductive vision of Paris.

Keen follower of the arts and sciences

Saint-Aubin's frenzy of observation has made him a boon to art historians who relish his small sketches in the margins of the exhibition and auction catalogues that passed through his hands (Catalogue of the Vassal de Saint-Hubert sale and *Sophie Arnould at the Grands-Augustins*). Equally fascinated by the old masters and the newly discovered artists of the Salon (*View of the Salon of 1765*), he did not focus uniquely on painting but also recorded the shapes and curves of many decorative objects and sculptures (*Sketch of the Renommée de Coysevox*). He was also commissioned to provide decoration schemes for plates produced by the Sèvres manufacture as well as snuff-box lids. In addition, he was a regular attendee of scientific conferences and demonstrations, from mineralogy at the Hôtel de la Monnaie to chemistry at the Collège de Pharmacie.

A singular approach

Saint-Aubin used all the techniques available to him: black chalk worked over with pen and ink, sometimes red chalk, gray wash, watercolor, pastel, colored pencil (*Sheet of Studies with the Pfaff Venus*). He enjoyed combining different techniques and tools, which distinguishes him from the leading draftsmen of his age. Far from a devotee of the pure line, he was known for working and reworking his images, applying many strokes of the pencil and marks of the pen, daring to heighten using colors of unparalleled boldness for his period. Order and cleanliness, the bywords of the "petits maîtres" of the 18th century, contrasted with his pluralist taste for works overloaded with subjects and details. Thanks to this singular approach, he has left us with a body of work providing the most lively and evocative representation of his time, hardly the least significant of the paradoxes of this marginal artist, who was roundly shunned in these pursuits by the official artistic establishment of the Enlightenment.

Related events and publication

Exhibition catalogue

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, 1724-1780 by Colin B. Bailey, Kim de Beaumont, Christophe Leribault and Pierre Rosenberg, co-published by Musée du Louvre Éditions and Somogy, 320 p., €39.

The publication of this work was sponsored by ArjoWiggins.

In the Auditorium du Louvre

Art on Stage, Wednesday, February 13 at 12:30 p.m.

A Gabriel de Saint-Aubin Sketchbook by Christophe Leribault, Musée du Louvre.
Presentation of the exhibition, Friday, March 7 at 12:30 p.m. by Christophe Leribault, Musée du Louvre and Pierre Rosenberg of the Académie Française.