

LOUVRE

Lens



FANTASTIC
ANIMALS

EXHIBITION

FROM 27 SEPTEMBER 2023
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PRESS KIT

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PRESS RELEASE



Jean Gargot, *Grand Goule*, 1677, DRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine / CRMH-site de Poitiers, on loan to the Musée Sainte-Croix, Poitiers © Musée de Poitiers / Christian Vignaud

Dragons, griffins, sphinxes, unicorns, phoenixes: present as early as Antiquity, fantastic animals inhabit the tiniest recesses of our contemporary world, from films and cartoons to everyday objects. By turns images of terror or admiration, expressions of our hidden unconscious and our anxieties, these often hybrid creatures contain within them a fundamental ambiguity. Who are they? Where do they come from? What do they mean?

They share with real fauna the power to fascinate people. We confer on them a closeness to nature, a wildness mingled with wisdom. Yet these are no ordinary animals. They differ in their appearance. Gigantic, excessive and deformed, their bodies adopt the characteristics of several animals, such as a horse's body with the wings of a bird or an eagle with a lion's head.

This extraordinary physiognomy is a reflection of their supernatural powers. Fantastic animals embody the elementary forces of nature: stormy waters and choleric gusts of wind, as well as tranquil streams and the nourishing earth. They represent their immensity, their violence, their beauty and above all their excesses. Some of them have a face and hands and legs, which link them to the world of humans while evoking distance and danger.

Featuring more than 250 works – sculptures, paintings and objets d'art, as well as films and music – ranging from Antiquity to the present day, the exhibition offers a journey through time and space, retracing the history of the most famous of these animals through their legends, their powers and their habitats. It explores our passionate relationships with these creatures whose unreal presence seems more than ever necessary.

The exhibition offers a thematic exploration of the various facets of our relationship to fantastic creatures. It starts by going back to the origins of these imaginary animals, which emerged in prehistory and embody the sacred terrors of humans in the face of the impressiveness of nature. In Antiquity, they were central to the **founding combats** that represented, in different forms, the battle between opposing forces, notably those of good and evil. In addition to their strange, often hybrid appearance, fantastic animals were often above all **magical**: they protected people and rulers, and they watched over the frontier between the world of the living and that of the dead. The **dragon** occupied a unique place in this ecosystem: its appearance fluctuated according to the century and civilization, before being gradually codified in European art and later in the visual arts of popular culture. Living on the **fringes of reality**, fantastic animals also helped to embody other possible forms of society. More present than ever in pop culture and *fantasy*, these monsters from the dawn of time question our fears and our aspirations, and fulfil a need to **bring back enchantment to the world**.

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Gustave Doré, *L'Énigme*, 1871, Oil on canvas, Paris, musée d'Orsay
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Jean Schormans

EXHIBITION LAYOUT

1 SACRED TERRORS

Images of imaginary animals were already present in the decorated caves of the Upper Palaeolithic (between 45000 and 12000 BC), as evoked by the curious skeleton of a chimera, a contemporary work from the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, that greets visitors.

However, it was not until the end of the Neolithic period that the ones that are familiar to us appeared: **dragons and griffins**. They proliferated in the 4th millennium BC, the period when the first city-states were created, appearing on prestigious objects such as the make-up palettes and cylinder seals found in Iran, in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. Those displayed in the exhibition bears witness to the role played by the lion in Mesopotamian society and iconography, where it was often combined with other animals – with the eagle and the snake for example – to create hybrid beings, as protective as they were menacing. **Some animals, like the griffin, reappeared in numerous civilizations, while others gradually slid into oblivion, like the eagle with a lion's head.**

What did they represent? In the absence of mythological texts, it is difficult to know with certainty. Later, from the 3rd millenium BC, texts linked them to great cosmic cataclysms in the for of earthquakes, storms and floods. **They embodied the sacred terror that humans felt in the face of nature's immensity and excesses**, and the respect that these inspired.



Cast of the Two Dog Palette from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, cast after an original from Hierakonpolis (Egypt) dating from 3300-3100 BC - Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités égyptiennes
© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski

2 FOUNDING COMBATS

In Antiquity, numerous popular legends and traditions recounted the exploits of gods or young heroes, whose combats with fantastic animals explained the organisation of the world. These tales formed an imaginary world around these creatures, which evolved over the centuries.

First myths

The first mythological texts were written down in the **3rd millennium BC, in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq)**. These stories inspired the inhabitants of the neighbouring regions. The Canaanites, who lived in the Levantine region – present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine – adopted certain monsters that are found in the Bible. The Greeks also borrowed from Eastern mythology. **They then influenced Latin authors, and later Western artists.**

During Antiquity, stories developed in the ancient Near East that were soon written down on clay tablets. **These myths recounted the battle of divine heroes:** Ninurta, Ningirsu and later Marduk with creatures like Asag, a demon that copulates with the mountain, and Tiamat, goddess of primordial saltwater, who gave birth to monstrous snakes and man-animal hybrids. To the West of Mesopotamia there was a story of the duel between the storm gods Baal and Teshup and sea serpents, as **evoked in the decoration of the monumental doorway of the palace of Arslantepe in Turkey**, in the 8th century BC, a cast of which is displayed in the exhibition. These tales persisted in the Bible in the form of the combat between God and Leviathan.



Cast of a relief featuring a mythological scene, modern cast after an original from Arslantepe (Turkey), dating from c. 1200–1000 BC and conserved at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, Plaster - Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités orientales © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Raphaël Chipault

Classical heroes

Greek myths incorporated some of the stories inherited from the Mesopotamian and Anatolian world (present-day Turkey). They were written down in around the 8th and 7th centuries BC. The Greek poet Hesiod recounts the battle between **Zeus and Typhon**, a hybrid creature with the heads of ‘terrible dragons’ (*deinos drakontos*). Other heroes, like **Herakles** (Hercules for the Romans) and **Jason**, were also faced with dragons. The Lernaean hydra is reminiscent, with its many heads, of a Mesopotamian monster called Mus-sag-imin, ‘serpent with seven heads’. The Greeks gave the Chimera the appearance of fantastic animals, also of Levantine origin, and no doubt inspired by the Egyptian sphinx.

Other myths were rediscovered in the modern period, like that of **Thor**¹, the Scandinavian god of thunder, who attempts to fish Jörmungand, the ‘world serpent’; an episode illustrated by Johann Heinrich Füssli.

¹image below

Dragon-slaying saints

The development of Christianity redefined the meaning of these combats into the struggle between **the forces of Good against those of Evil**.

During Antiquity, **the fantastic animal was often an animal attribute**: it represented **the deity's powers**. When mythological stories turned them into adversaries, it was about making them appear as cosmic or natural forces destined to be dominated by anthropomorphic gods. Through their victory, gods and heroes ushered in a new era marked by the mastery of nature.

Christianity changed the perspective. With the Book of Revelation, the angels' battle with the Dragon and the Beast became a **battle of good with evil**. The Dragon, wrote Saint John, was none other than the original serpent that led man to his fall. A number of Christian tales turned some saints into **dragon-slayers**. They were the object of local cults, like the **Grand Goule**², a popular dragon from Poitou, in the Middle Ages. A wooden effigy of it, which had a bat's wings, a reptile's body, eagle's talons, a scorpion tail and a viper's tongue, and whose mouth could move, was paraded during processions in order to combat the forces of evil.



Johann Heinrich Füssli, *Thor Fighting the Midgard Serpent*, 1790, Oil on canvas, Royal Academy of Arts, London
© akg-images

3 MAGIC CREATURES

Forming a counterpoint to the warlike dimension, magic was central to the attributes linked to fantastic animals. With variations according to period and civilization, they were linked to healing, protection, divination and occultism – sacred powers that held a mystery of their own.

Warding off disease and death

They could thwart the normal course of nature and cause supernatural events through willpower, anger or when induced to do so by rituals. Thus people associated them early on with **ritual and medical practices** to ward off disease and death. Hybrid creatures appear on magic amulets, statuettes, masks, stones and ivories. Their effigies were activated to prevent certain diseases, or to ensure a good birth or a successful harvest. Their supernatural powers are called 'apotropaic': **they averted evil curses**. Rituals were passed on orally or via scholarly libraries. One thing is for sure, their magic affected everyone, from the humblest farmer to the wealthiest ruler.

² See p. 3



Figurine of the demon Pazuzu, Mesopotamia, Assyria, 911 604 B.C., Bronze - Paris, musée du Louvre, y département des Antiquités orientales © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Thierry Ollivier

A famous figure in the Mesopotamian imagination, **Pazuzu** became very popular in the 1st millennium BC. Representations of him were often worn around the neck by the most vulnerable people, like pregnant women and babies, for their protection. Covered in scales and endowed with four wings, a bird of prey's talons and a scorpion tail, it was one of the demons linked with the bad winds reputed to bring plagues. His demonic power could be beneficial when he turned against the demons of his family whom he was best placed to master or chase away.

Close protection

Certain fantastic animals were specialised in the **protection of rulers**. Sphinxes and griffins guarded thrones in near Eastern and Western Antiquity, while in the Far East dragons and phoenixes protected emperors and empresses.

Worn close to the body, on clothes, jewellery and everyday objects, or adorning furniture, beneficent creatures protected the leader and thereby the entire community.

Guardians of the universe

In addition to protecting the ruler, his throne and his person, **fantastic animals guarded temples and, by extension, all of creation and the cosmic order**. Placed at the entrances to sacred places, they kept away the forces of chaos. In necropolises and tombs, **they watched over the frontier between the world of the living and that of the dead**.

In the exhibition, an applique in the form of **fenghuang** – the Chinese phoenix – evokes this function. Dating from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 BC), it probably comes from a tomb in south-western China. A combination of *feng* (male bird) and *huang* (female bird), his name is a symbol of the harmony between *yin* and *yang*. It heralded order and peace for virtuous men and sometimes played the role of celestial messenger.



Applique in the form of fenghuang 凤凰, China, Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220, Copper alloy, traces of gilding - Musée départemental des arts asiatiques à Nice © Musée départemental des arts asiatiques (Nice) / photographie Laurent Sully Jaulmes



Recipient with a fish-goat, Assur (western Asia), 1400-1200 B.C., Alabaster © BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Olaf M. Tessmer

Occult powers

Creatures also embodied **the secrets of universal wisdom**. This was the case of the fish-goat (or Capricorn) who dwelled in Apsu, the primordial Mesopotamian waters. In the 1st millennium century BC, his image was reflected in the skies accompanied by other **signs of the zodiac**.

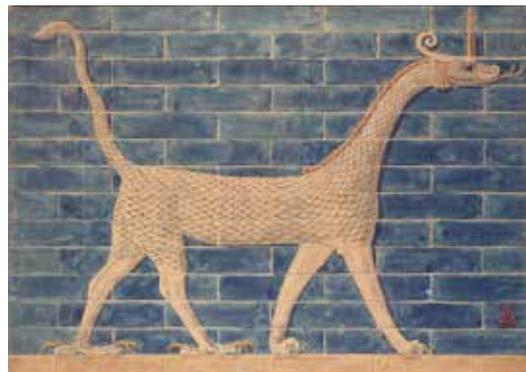
Other creatures like the dragon and the griffin were also found in books of symbols and philosophical-magical treatises intended for experts. They lent their complicated forms to phenomena that were intended to explain the mysteries of life. They could be seen as **signs that only a sage, magician or poet could interpret**.

4 DRAGONS

Within this teeming ecosystem, there is a figure that crossed multiple eras and continents, in different forms and under different names, becoming absorbed into the sciences, the arts, religions and popular culture. Ever since prehistoric civilizations appeared, the collective imagination has turned the dragon into the quintessential fantastic animal.

Cartography of dragons

The word 'dragon' comes from the Greek term *drakôn*, meaning 'one who stares', a characteristic of the serpent. Giant serpents and reptilian monsters were numerous. **They appeared in legends all over the world.** Angry or calm, kind or malicious, they embodied the power of the aquatic element, still water, the serpentine river, storms and fertilising waters, as well as rainwater. As serpents, they were also closely linked to the subterranean world.



Walter Andrae, *Dragon-serpent on Ishtar Gate*, 1902, Watercolour on card Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum © BPK, Berlin, Dist. RMN Grand Palais / Andres Kilger

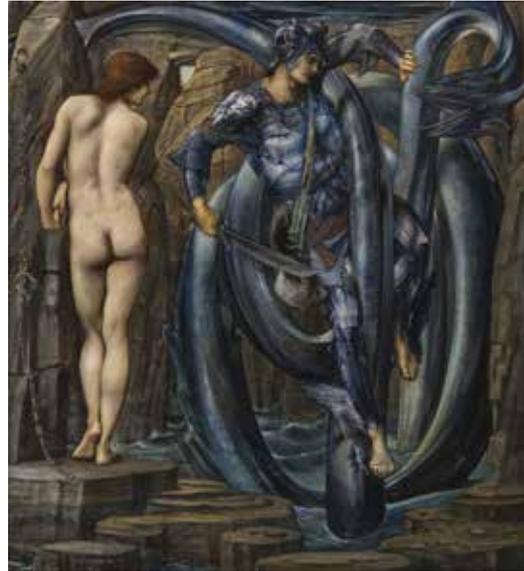
From China to Latin America and the Near East, **all the regions of the world were inhabited by monstrous serpents**, with various names. The exhibition features a non-exhaustive selection of these astonishing creatures, from the Mesopotamian **Mushkhushshu** (pronounced "mushrushu") to the rainbow serpent from West Africa and the Mesoamerican Quetzalcóatl.

Represented with visible tongue and raised head and tail, the Mushkhushshu on the Ishtar Gate at the entrance to Babylon represents Marduk, the largest Babylonian god, and was supposed to protect the city.

From bestiaries to fantasy

The dragon's appearance gradually became **codified first in European art and then in the visual arts of popular culture**. The replacing of the bird's wings with bat's wings and the use of the colour green, for example, were innovations of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 20th century, they gradually merged with the creatures that were studied by science, those 'terribly large reptiles' that disappeared 65 million years ago: **dinosaurs**.

Today, the dragon is **one of the fabulous animals that is most prevalent in fantasy**, an artistic and literary genre characterised by the presence of the supernatural and magic.



Sir Edward Coley Burne Jones, *The Doom Fulfilled*, 1884–1885, Mixed media on paper - Southampton City Art Gallery © Southampton City Art Gallery

5 ON THE FRINGES OF REALITY

Visions of wonderful worlds, alternative norms and the edges of the psyche also provided ways of appropriating fantastic animals. Thanks to their unique position at the frontier between reality and the imaginary, they lent their image to the embodiment of inner torments, spreading to public and political spheres, as symbols of struggle.



Thomas Grünfeld, *Misfit (flamingo/pig)*, 2005, Taxidermy - Courtesy de l'artiste et de la galerie Jousse Entreprise © Galerie Jousse / Lothar Schnepf © ADAGP, Paris, 2023

The edges of the world

During Antiquity, the inhabitants of the Near East and Egypt represented frightening creatures in uninhabited areas, **on the edges of civilizations**. These inhospitable regions, mountains and deserts, were on the fringes between this world and the beyond. This beyond can be understood as the world of the dead or that of gods, even both together.

As a result of trade and diplomatic exchanges, travellers described Indian unicorns, Ethiopian griffins, basilisks, and, of course, dragons of all kinds. **The curiosity cabinets** of the 16th and 17th centuries displayed their bones, teeth and even entire bodies. Cartographers attested to their presence on the surface of the globe and in the seas up until the mid 19th century.

The exhibition displays the geographies of these fantastic animals, from 16th-century maps of the world to the *Terra Incognita* of the contemporary artist Claire Fanjul. It evokes the routes populated by fantastic creatures, which include artist Thomas Grünfeld's ***Misfits*** – hybrid creatures made from combinations of stuffed animals.

Fantasies and nightmares

With the modern era, the great voyages of exploration and the globalisation of knowledge led to the disappearance of unicorns, dragons and griffins from maps. **Yet these animals continue to populate people's dreams, to embody their fears and desires.** And they still continue to nestle in the corners of our subconscious, as if reminding us of our own animal nature. Some symbolised those **violent passions** that the Greeks called *hubris*: our guilty desires, our pride and all the savagery of our humanity. Female sphinxes, dragons and demons were all **representations of the femme fatale**: a female temptress intent on man's downfall. The *Sphinx's Kiss* by Franz von Stüeck evokes the fatal embrace of the femme fatale; **Oedipus the Traveller**, painted by Gustave Moreau, arrives 'bent under the weight of life' to tackle this final challenge, victorious or fatal; and Damien Hirst's *Severed Head of Medusa*, frozen in an eternal expression of fury, hark back to these themes linked by myth – horror, sex, death and female subjugation. Before the invention of psychoanalysis at the beginning of the 20th century, these ancient tales served as models that **symbolised inner conflicts and fear of the other.**



Gustave Moreau, *The Traveller or Oedipus the Traveller*, 1888, Oil on canvas - Musée de la Cour d'Or Eurométropole de Metz © RMN Grand Palais / René Gabriel Ojeda



Will Cotton, *Roping*, 2019-2020, Oil on linen, Courtesy de l'artiste et Templon, Paris Bruxelles New York © Will Cotton © ADAGP, Paris 2023

Alternative norms

By nature ambiguous – simultaneously strange and familiar, dangerous and seductive, charming and fierce – fantastic animals have **happily lent their appearance to subversive representations in which humour is never far from political questioning.** Thanks to their faculty for going beyond the ordinary and conceiving of the extraordinary, they have been invested with ideals, as a way of calling into question the established order. Unicorns, dragons and minotaurs are today symbols of alternative currents, mobilised to give impetus to other possible forms of society.

6 RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD

Fantastic animals are a key element in today's pop culture, from children's literature to performance, cinema and video games. This important role reveals the narrative, symbolic and timeless power of these fictional beings, whose origins hark back to those of the world and of our civilizations.

Literary incarnations

The existence of fantastic animals was called into question by the great voyages of exploration on land and sea in the modern era. In the 16th century, Renaissance scholars began to highlight the inconsistencies in ancient accounts and in the more recent reports of travellers who claimed to have seen unicorns and dragons. In the 18th century, in reaction to the rationalist current of the Enlightenment, the Romantic movement in art, which celebrated human feelings in the face of inexplicable mysteries, drew on these legends and superstitions.

Art and literature have revived ancient myths and fabulous creatures. Restored to fiction and poetry, they now serve a nostalgia for a world of lost or forgotten magic.



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Roger Freeing Angelica*, 1819, Oil on canvas - Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Peintures © RMN Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux

Spectacle of the strange

At the end of the 18th century, a current called Dark Romanticism, linked to the Gothic literature that emerged in Great Britain, explored the strange and the fantastic lurking in the darkest recesses. The marvellous could also take on a horrifying guise. **The public delighted in awful creatures, which were fought or celebrated depending on the circumstances.**

It was the **performance arts that saw the most spectacular representations of fantastic animals.** They were brought to life in flamboyant or subtle fashion in famous plays, ballets and operas, like *Mozart's Magic Flute*, performed in 1954 at the Palais Garnier, and the *Dame à la licorne*, for which Roger Chapelain-Midy and Jean Cocteau designed the costumes. The decoration of old palaces, monster costumes and colourful creations for the opera heralded those of the new popular media of the 20th century, such as cinema and animation.



Costume for *The Magic Flute : the Dragon*, Roger Chapelain - Atelier karinska, Opéra de Paris, 1954, Apple green wool jersey, baize, apple green, dark green and brown velvet, herringbone pattern of green wool and grey baize © CNCS / Patrick Lorette © ADAGP 2023

Nostalgia for the marvellous

What do these fantastic animals, which we know to be unreal, represent for we humans? As in Antiquity, we see in them the inalterable and also the inexpressible: that which remains for ever but cannot be expressed or explained. It is not surprising that poets and artists celebrated the **unicorn**. They turned it into a **symbol of their reaction to the progress of science, which explained the world by depriving it of its magic**. Its myth was revisited by the French artist Nicolas Buffe, who, with *Peau de licorne*, showcases the animal's hide. Borrowing from the art of the past and contemporary popular culture, he has decorated it with motifs drawn from comics, images from Mayan culture and references to the Italian Renaissance. With a touch of humour, he 'kills it in order to regenerate it'.

Fantasy, a literary genre that grew out of disillusionment with industrial modernity, **today continues to question the misdeeds of a society regarded as being overly materialistic**. It generates new legends and spells. It plunges us into a past that is both collective and personal: that of a time imbued with wonder, be it ancient or medieval, and of the world of childhood.

The video installation *Unicorn* by the French artist Maïder Fortuné seems to draw us back to reality. The artifices of framing and lighting reveal the unicorn's deceptive appearance. The legendary animal gradually disappears in favour of a grotesque beast – instilling a feeling of disillusion in the face of a world that no longer exists or never existed.

But the **ubiquity of these fantastic creatures**, which even today continue to abound in fictional works and imaginations, **signals a need for their presence**. Evolving with our societies, they personify this extra element without which we are disorientated: the need for enchantment.



Tissage Atelier Tapisserie Guillot Aubusson, Nicolas Buffe, Centre de Recherche des Arts du feu et de la terre (CRAFT), Unicorn hide, 2011, Cotton, wool, silk and porcelain - Cité internationale de la tapisserie, Aubusson © Nicolas Buffe © Cité internationale de la tapisserie, Aubusson

SELECTED WORKS IN FOCUS

Introduction

Skeleton of a chimera

2006

Bones

H. 70 ; W. 63 ; l. 58 cm

Paris, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle

© MNHN / J.-C. Domenech



This skeleton of a young dragon welcoming visitors to the exhibition reflects the timeless fascination for fantastic animals throughout the thousands of years of human existence.

Made using anatomical elements from various species – a pig's body, the horns of a crustacean, a red mullet's fins for wings – it is like the "chimeras" that collectors used to buy in the 17th century for their cabinets of curiosities.

This unusual skeleton has a mechanical system that brings the creature to life with simple movements. They form an ensemble that arouses the viewer's curiosity.

This work was created by the theatre company Cendres la Rouge in conjunction with an exhibition organised at the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in 2006, "Dragons: entre science et fiction". The latter explored the way in which dragons have been perceived and represented in different cultures over time up until the emergence of critical scientific thinking. Supernatural accounts were increasingly contested and material proof was required to sustain the myth.

A vestige of an imaginary creature that was one of a number of hybrid creatures that were part of the 'gangling ossuary' invented by the company, this *skeleton of a chimera* evokes the subtle alliance between the passion for these fantastic creatures and the evolution in their status, from one era and one society to the next.

Sacred Terrors

Cylinder seal featuring lions and a lion-headed eagle

3300–3000 BC

Stone

Mesopotamia (Iraq)

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités orientales

© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Franck Raux



This seal in the form of a cylinder is a Mesopotamian invention from the so-called proto-urban era in the 4th millennium BC. This era was fundamental for the civilizations of the ancient Near East, which saw the appearance of the first cities, writing, gods – and also fantastic animals.

An administrative tool, the cylinder seal was used to create an impression on a tablet or piece of wet clay, identifying its owner. As a result, it was an invaluable vehicle for iconography. Above and beyond their aesthetic dimension, it is very likely that seal cylinders also had a magical value, which explains why they sometimes feature images of fantastic animals.

Two of the oldest specimens are represented on this example: serpopards, ancestors of dragons, with feline bodies and exaggeratedly long necks that interlaced like two serpents; and the lion-headed eagle.

The lion was important for Mesopotamians. Inhabiting the steppe, they were a threat to flocks and their power was associated with that of gods. The relationship between the lion and the king could have multiple meanings. The lion is frequently represented in a realistic or symbolic vein, combined with other animals to create hybrid beings that were both protective and terrifying.

Founding Combats

The Tarasque and the tarascaires

Claude-Michel Celse (1798 ou 1799–1865)

Between 1861 and 1865 ?

Oil on canvas

H. 75 ; l. 95 cm

Don de la Commune libre de Jarnègues

Marseille, Mucem

© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Michel Urtado



In the 15th century, the duke René d'Anjou (1409–1480) launched the first Tarasque games, referring to the legendary monster that lived in the Rhône and terrorised the local population during the 1st century. They took place on 28 July, in homage to Saint Martha who succeeded in taming it. An effigy of the beast was paraded through the streets of Tarascon. Another festival emerged, “the running of the Tarasque”, in which the creature, borne from inside by men, caused chaos and hit people.

The first of the two ceremonies was held annually in the 19th century, but the second was only celebrated sporadically. It may have been in the aftermath of the festivities of 1861 that Claude-Michel Celse executed his painting. It shows the beast, spindles in its nostrils, operated by six Tarascaires. The feet of those who guide it can be made out. The figure on the right doubtless evokes all the armed men that killed it.

The artist certainly introduced his personal interpretation, together with observations of the festival as it was at the time. During the running of the Tarasque, in the absence of Saint Martha, the monster became an ambivalent figure: The embodiment of both good and evil, its brutality released a positive energy. Since 2008, the festivities have been listed as part of the Immaterial Cultural Heritage.

Magic Creatures

Orthostat decorated with a bearded sphinx

Guzana, Western Asia (current Tell Halaf)

Beginning of the first millennium BC

Basalt

H. 155 ; l. 170

Cologne, fondation Max Freiherr von Oppenheim

© BPK, Vorderasiatisches Museum, SMB - Olaf M.Tessmer



The plaque in relief shows a sphinx with human head, side curls, lion's body, feathered chest and a long bird's wing. In the Near East, this creature provided protection against evil because it bought together the powers of different entities.

These figures adorned the palace at Guzana (today Tell Halaf in northern Syria). They were carved in relief on orthostats (stone slabs) that supported the building's walls and protected them from erosion and degradation. This plaque is one of a set of 187 orthostats in red-hued limestone and grey-black basalt, revealed during the excavations at Tell Halaf in 1911–13. All of the palace's entrances were protected by mythical animals: two men-bird-scorpions watched over the rising steps, two sphinxes were positioned at the first entrance, while two griffins flanked the second passage. These representations make it possible to deduce the religious functions of the palace.

The exhibition also features the orthostat of a winged sphinx – a lion's body with a human head and bird's wings – often considered to be the incarnation of original nature, of life in the wild, linked to the god of time; as well as the orthostat of a griffin – endowed with a lion's body and an eagle's head – associated with the functions of protection and fertility.

Dragons

Saint George fighting the dragon

Paolo di Dono dit Paolo Uccello (1397–1475)

Around 1465 (?)

Oil on wood

H. 62 ; l. 102 cm

Paris, musée Jacquemart-André

© RMN-Grand Palais



Paolo Uccello painted Saint George fighting the dragon, which was made popular in the 13th century thanks to Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The story adopts the ancient tale of Perseus and Andromeda. George of Lydda, a Christian officer in the Roman army, comes to the aid of the princess of the town of Silene, in Libya, chosen as a sacrifice to the monster in order to save her people. She symbolised the liberation of the oppressed Church, celebrated in the painting by a small cherub, now difficult to make out, blowing a trumpet in the sky. Here Uccello mixes representation that is still very medieval with methods – notably multiple vanishing points – that are derived from the speculations of the Renaissance.

The depiction of the cave, the princess's profile, the rich mosaic of bright colours, as well as the dragon's attributes – corkscrew tail, half-butterfly half-bat wings – straight out of a fantasy bestiary, are combined with meticulous work on perspective, both in the figure of the knight and the bird's-eye view of the vast landscape.

The work probably decorated a piece of furniture, such as a bed, or would have been a decorative element like a *spalliera* (an ornamental panel frequently found in houses of members of the elite during the Italian Renaissance), placed at shoulder height, in an ensemble of wood panelling.

On the Fringes of Reality

La tentation de saint Antoine

Salvador Dalí (Figueras, 1904–1989)

1946

Oil on canvas

H. 89.5 cm ; l. 119.5 cm

Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles

© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí / Adagp

© Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles / Joan Geleyns



The painting shows Saint Anthony kneeling in the desert and holding up a cross in order to repel the temptations appearing before him. The latter are perched on animals with exaggeratedly long feet. The horse with worn hooves represents voluptuousness and triumph, while lust is evoked by a voluptuous woman's body; the golden obelisk symbolises wealth, and pride is embodied by the woman imprisoned in a golden cage topped by the trumpets of renown.

Spanish artist Salvador Dalí, who was fascinated by psychoanalysis, created a phantasmagorical painting that reflects his obsession with sexual and morbid scenes, at the frontier between the real world and the imagination, on the verge of madness.

This work was executed in 1946 for a competition organised by the producer Albert Lewin, for the film adaptation of the novel *Bel-Ami* (1885) by Guy de Maupassant. Lewin wanted a painting representing the hermit prey to temptation. Although Dalí's proposal was not retained, it was nevertheless immediately popular with the public.

Re-enchanting the World

Conversation with Smaug

Based on an original watercolor by J. R. R. Tolkien made for *The Hobbit*, 1937

© The Tolkien Trust 1977

Carton Delphine Mangeret et Anne Boisseau

Tissage Atelier A2, Aubusson

2022

Cotton, wool and metallic threads

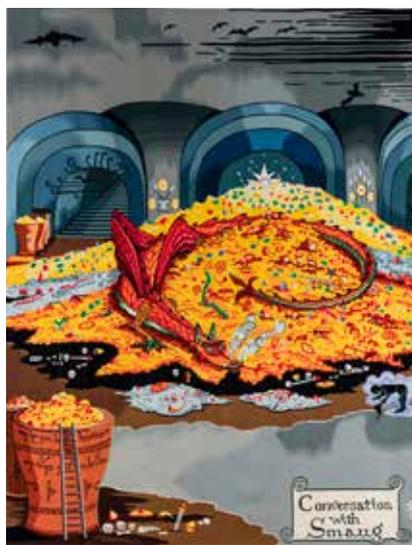
H. 322,5 ; l. 249 cm

Aubusson, Cité internationale de la tapisserie

Work produced with the support of the Fondation d'Entreprise AG2R LA MONDIALE pour la Vitalité Artistique, sponsor of the tapestry "Aubusson tisse Tolkien", the Fondation des Pays de France du Crédit Agricole, the Tolkien Trust with the aid of the Fonds Européen de Développement Régional (FEDER)

© The Tolkien Trust 1977 © Tissage Atelier A2 / Aubusson 2022

© Collection Cité internationale de la tapisserie / Photo Studio Nicolas Roger



This tapestry is the thirteenth in the "Aubusson weaves Tolkien" campaign initiated in 2017 following an agreement between the Cité Internationale de la Tapisserie and the Tolkien Estate. Once completed, it will consist of sixteen weavings, all adapted from original drawings by J. R. R. Tolkien illustrating *The Hobbit* (1937). *Conversation with Smaug* conforms to all of the major principles chosen for

the entire tapestry set: work is carried out using nothing but wool and in "pure colours", that is to say without mixing during weaving. The only exceptions are the gold and silver metallic threads, which were introduced to highlight the richness of the treasure.

The illustration shows Bilbo facing the dragon Smaug, reclining on the mountain of gold coins taken from the dwarves, when he seized their kingdom of Erebor. Bilbo was tasked by the dwarf and his company with stealing back the dragon's hoard and returning it to its legitimate owners. Smaug sensed the *Hobbit's* presence, but never actually saw him. The character is suggested here by a dark silhouette in a bluish cloud, symbolising the invisibility conferred by the Ring.

J. R. R. Tolkien is an iconic figure in fantasy literature. This genre, which emerged at the end of the 19th century, lies at the intersection of the fantastic and the magical and sought to rediscover the prestige of the earliest stories, tales and legends, in reaction to industrial modernity. In *The Hobbit* (1937), the author borrowed the treasure-guarding dragon with bad intentions from Nordic and Germanic legends; but the impressive creature would undergo a series of metamorphoses throughout the history of the genre.

LENDERS

Austria

Budapest, Szépművészeti Múzeum / Museum of Fine Arts

Belgium

Bruxelles, musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique

England

Londres, Royal Academy of Arts

Londres, Tate

Southampton, City Art Gallery

France

Angoulême, bibliothèque patrimoniale de la Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image

Arles, Museon Arlaten – musée de Provence

Aubusson, Cité internationale de la tapisserie

Bayonne, musée Bonnat-Helleu – musée des Beaux-Arts de Bayonne

Beauvais, MUDO – musée de l'Oise

Bidache, collection Christian Lehmann

Boulogne-sur-Mer, château-musée

Douai, musée de la Chartreuse

Écouen, musée national de la Renaissance – château d'Écouen

Fédération Française de jeu de rôle

Gravelines, musée du Dessin et de l'Estampes originale

Le Mans, musée de Tessé

Marseille, collection Claire Fanjul

Marseille, MuCEM

Metz, musée de la Cour d'or – Eurométropole de Metz

Mons, musée du Doudou

Montreuil, Hélène Barrier / Iconoklastes

Mougins, Musée d'art classique de Mougins (MACM)

Moulins, Centre national du costume de scène (CNCS),

Opéra national de Paris

Nice, musée départemental des Arts asiatiques

Nice, musée des Beaux-Arts Jules Chéret

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de la Musique

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département de la Musique, bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Arts du spectacle

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Cartes et Plans

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et de la Photographie

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Manuscrits

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Philosophie, Histoire, Sciences de l'homme

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Sciences et Techniques

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, réserves des Livres rares

Paris, Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine – Musée des monuments français

Paris, collection Jean-Baptiste Barbier

Paris, Collège de France

Paris, Courtesy Galerie Artima

Paris, galerie Mitterrand

Paris, Courtesy galerie Templon, Paris – New York – Bruxelles

Paris, Maïder Fortuné

Paris, musée d'Orsay

Paris, musée de la Chasse et de la Nature

Paris, musée des Arts décoratifs

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités égyptiennes

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités grecques, étrusques et romaines

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Antiquités orientales

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Arts de l'Islam

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Arts graphiques

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Objets d'art

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Peintures

Paris, musée du Louvre, département des Sculptures

Paris, musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac

Paris, musée Gustave-Moreau

Paris, Institut de France – musée Jacquemart-André

Paris, musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet

Paris, musée national du Moyen Âge – musée de Cluny

Paris, musée national Picasso-Paris

Paris, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle

Paris, Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris

Paris, Société Historique et Littéraire Polonaise –

Bibliothèque polonaise de Paris

Poitiers, DRAC Nouvelle Aquitaine / CRMH – site de Poitiers

Saint-Germain-en-Laye, musée d'Archéologie nationale –

domaine national de Saint-Germain-en-Laye

Strasbourg, Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire

Strasbourg, musée Tomi-Ungerer – Centre national de l'Illustration

Germany

Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum

Cologne, Max Freiherr von Oppenheim-Stiftung

Ireland

Dublin, Irish Museum of Modern Art

The Netherlands

Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen

Private collections

LISTENING STATIONS AND A METAL JUKEBOX



MUSICAL VOYAGE FROM ONE LISTENING STATION TO THE NEXT

The Louvre-Lens entrusted the music selection for the exhibition to Djubaka, musical programmer and chronicler of France Inter. Dotted throughout the exhibition, four listening stations enable visitors to follow his explorations, discovering how fantastic animals appear in music history. From a cantata inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses to Pazuzu* by Ennio Morricone and The Cramps' werewolf, have a listen and allow yourself to be surprised.

Djubaka © Zoé Forget

ALSO: A METAL JUKEBOX

Leviathan, Gorgon or sphinx: numerous hybrid beings populate the world of heavy metal. Mesopotamian and Persian creatures, freely reinterpreted, are hidden away in certain visuals, names of groups and lyrics, helping to evoke a mythical Orient.

Thanks to a digital jukebox in the exhibition, visitors are invited to find them.

Selection proposed by Florent Varupenne with the assistance and advice of Véréne Chalendar and Aurélien Caron



Portal of Pazuzu

LISTENING STATIONS

Selection proposed by Djubaka

Founding Combats

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
Peer Gynt, suite no 1 op. 46 :
Dans l'ancre du roi de la montagne
Album : *Bamberg Symphony*
The first 70 years (2016, DEUTSCHE
GRAMMOPHON)

Louis Nicolas Clérambault (1676-1749)
Pirame et Tisbé : Venez, monstres affreux
(1713)
Album : Gerard Lesne,
Dans un bois Solitaire
(1999, Virgin)

Les Tambours du Bronx
« Locomotive » (1992)
sur *Monostress 225L*

Artie Shaw (1910-2004)
Nightmare (1938)
78 tours-Bluebird Records

Magic Creatures

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
Le Sacre du Printemps : 2^e partie :
Le Sacrifice / Introduction (1913)
Album : *Boulez dirige Stravinsky* (1994,
SONY)

Ennio Morricone
(1928-2020)
L'Exorciste II - L'Hérétique
Album : *Pazuzu* (1977, Warner Bros
Records)

Natacha Atlas (née en 1964)
I put a spell on you (2001)
Album : *Ayestheni* (Mantra Recording)

YAT-KHA et Albert Kuvezin
(né en 1965)
Play with Fire, 2005
Album : *Re-Covers* (Plane)

On the Fringes of Reality

Clara Rockmore (1911-1998)
Pièce en forme de habanera
de Ravel (1977)
Album : *The Art*
of the Theremin (Delos International
Records)

Yma Sumac (1922-2008)
Birds (1951)
78 tours : Capitol Records

The Cramps
I was a teenage werewolf (1980)
Album : *Songs the lord though us* (IRS
Records)

Claude Chalhoub
(né en 1974)
Gnossienne (2001)
Album : *Claude Chalhoub* (Teldec)

Re-Enchanting the World

Camille Saint-Saëns
(1835-1921)
Le Carnaval des animaux : Aquarium
Version d'Artuan de Lierree
Album : *Aquarium* (2015, 1001 notes)

Christine Ott (née en 1963)
Chimere (2020)
Album : *Chimeres* (pour ondes
Martenot) NAHAL008

Björk (née en 1965)
Gate (2017)
Album : *Utopia* (One Little Indian
Records)

Sarah McCoy (née en 1985)
Boogiemán (2019)
Album : *Blood Siren*
(Blue Note)

METAL JUKEBOX

Selection proposed by Florent Varupenne with the assistance and advice of Véréne Chalendar and Aurélien Caron

Absu
A Song for Ea ; first movement (2011)
Album *Abzu*

Arsames
Persepolis (2020)
Album *Immortal Identity*

Black Funeral
Scourge of Lamashtu (2020)
Album *Scourge of Lamashtu*

Cradle of Filth
Intro - The Ceremony Opens (2010)
Album *Live Bait for the Dead*

Diğir Gidim
I (2022)
Album *The Celestial Macrocosmic Scale*
and the Shimmering Path of the Supreme
Regulator

Downcast Twilight
Wrath of the Anunnaki (2018)
Album *Wrath of the Anunnaki*

Eridu
Lugalbanda (2019)
Album *Lugalbanda*

Khanus
Womb of the Larger Self (2016)
Album *Rites of Fire*

Meleshech
Secrets Of Sumerian Sphynxology (2003)
Album *Sphynx*

Portal of Pazuzu
Invoke our Majesty - The Hideous One
(2021)
Album *Portal of Pazuzu*

Serpents Gift
Ziusudra - The last sumerian king (2014)
Album *Shadows Out of Uruk*

Stones of Babylon
The Gate of Ishtar (2022)
Album *Ishtar Gate*

Titaan
Itima (2020)
Album *Itima*

Total Denial
Revival of Asag (2019)
Album *Revival of Asag*

Wyatt E
Mušḫuššu (2021)
Album *Āl-Bēlūti-Dāru*

FILM SPACES AND LIBRARY: PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS



© Louvre-Lens / F. Iovino

Three classes from La Courneuve (2 *grande section* classes from the École Paul Langevin and a CE1 class from the École Charlie Chaplin) and **four classes from Lens** (3 *grande section* classes and a CE2 class from the École Curie), assisted by museum educators, helped design the **exhibition's film spaces and children's library**.

They studied several books about dragons and unicorns in order to select the ones to be made available to visitors. Each book is accompanied by a short text explaining their choices. Dragons, unicorns and phoenixes rub shoulders in the children's screening space, echoing the works presented in the exhibition. Art workshops were also held in parallel with the screenings. This artistic and cultural educational programme involved a hundred pupils from Lens and La Courneuve.

An “art-house” selection rounds off this ensemble, offering a glimpse of the richness of the “marvellous bestiary” found in fantasy cinema. It was devised by **Pascal Pronnier**, head of art programming at Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains, and the historian **Antoine de Baecque**.

“FAIRE ENSEMBLE”, TRADEMARK OF THE LOUVRE-LENS

Co-conception and “make do” are central to the approach of the Louvre-Lens: they help to make the museum a place that is rooted in everyday life and open to every voice, ensuring that it can adapt to each individual person and play an active role in society.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES: VISITOR TOOLS



© Louvre-Lens / F. Iovino

The Louvre-Lens is a museum laboratory committed to providing access for everyone. To this end, it has several tools for accompanying visits, enabling it to adapt to all of its visitors and offering a new kind of museum experience. It offers a variety of educational resources.

VISITOR BOOKLET AND AUDIO-GUIDE FOR ALL

From one page to the next, the booklet accompanies visitors as they explore the exhibition, taking them behind the scenes in its preparation. Games and colouring pictures make it possible to prolong the experience on the way back.

Accessible via local wi-fi without the need to download, the audio-guide offers a selection of works with commentaries by the exhibition's curators as well as a fun trail for kids.

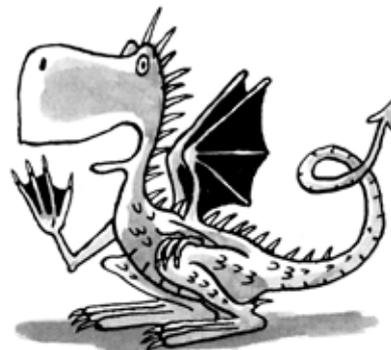
Free booklet, available from visitor welcome staff or as a download at louvrelens.fr

Free audio-guide, available on a smartphone (available for hire on the spot)

KID'S BOOKLET AND TRAIL

Children can explore the exhibition in a fun way. A booklet with little games and observational tasks gives them a better understanding of the works and tells them all about these strange creatures. A trail of 16 illustrated entries guides them in their adventures.

Free, available from the visitor reception staff or as a free download at louvrelens.fr



© Le Poisson

TOUR IN SIMPLE FRENCH

The “Facile à lire” commentaries, which have been published for every exhibition since 2022, offer visitors the essential keys to understanding a selection of works. With a drawing of the object in the centre of the text, arrows, diagrams and maps, they provide clear information about the subject, the context in which it was created and the technique used by the artist. For this edition, the museum has collaborated with a class of **CM2 pupils from the École Curie in Lens**. Six classroom sessions led by a museum educator introduced them to the works, enabling them to identify the essential information to share with visitors. The pupils played the role of prescribers and testers, becoming protagonists in the preparation of the exhibition before it opened to the public.



INFORMATION POINT

Every day, between two **Discovery tours**, members of the museum's team are on hand to welcome visitors at the information point, where they will find a selection of books and fun tools for learning more about the fantastic creatures that populate the exhibition.

For everyone

AT THE LOUVRE-LENS: TEST GROUPS AND TEXTS CO-WRITTEN WITH EDUCATION OFFICERS

The museum produces educational tools to help the visitor get their bearings and learn more, facilitating understanding and arousing curiosity. At the Louvre-Lens, the educational department collaborates with the curators on the writing of the wall labels for the exhibition. These are intended to make the subject easily comprehensible for everyone, whatever their sex, age, situation or disability. Before each exhibition, the museum organises test groups; visitors – including children – are invited to “test” the wall labels, poster, multimedia tools, etc., and to give their opinion. Their remarks are taken into account by the teams when the texts are reworked.

A FANTASTIC CULTURAL PROGRAMME LINKED TO THE EXHIBITION

A special programme of performances – a Louvre Lens speciality – with talks, events, guided tours and new activities for visitors, explores and extends the exhibition's themes between September 2023 and January 2024. Details at www.louvreens.fr

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Fantastic Animals exhibition from 27 september 2023 to 15 january 2024

Open daily from 10am to 6pm, except Tuesday
Free for under 18 / 18-25 : 6€ / full price : 11€

Louvre-Lens

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62300 Lens
T: +33 (0)3 21 18 62 62 / www.louvreens.fr

Check out #LouvreLens on social media    

Captain American, Marvel Comics Group, 1980 (volume 1, n°248) Angoulême,
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