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Musée Jules BASTIEN-LEPAGE



MONTMEDY





Jules Bastien-Lepage Museum

The Jules Bastien-Lepage Museum in Montmédy explores the different facets of the work of one of the Meuse department's key artists of the XIXth.

The first reference to a museum dedicated to the artist dates back to 1907. At the time it occupied a room in the Montmédy town hall. The collections consisted primarily in paintings and sketches donated by Berthe Mailier, whom Emile Bastien-Lepage, brother of Jules and a widower with no direct descendants, had appointed his sole legatee.

In 1984, following an exhibition dedicated to Jules Bastien-Lepage, the Museum was transferred into the former school of the upper citadel.



Salle des peintures

An important acquisition campaign was then conducted to enrich the museum's collections. The current collection includes over sixty sketches and engravings, twenty-three paintings, statuettes, photographs, several dozen written documents and a dozen personal objects that belonged to the artist.

A second large exhibition dedicated to Jules Bastien-Lepage was organised in 2007 and presented at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, then in the Centre mondial de la Paix in Verdun. It marked the national and international recognition for the artist's work.

The Jules Bastien-Lepage Museum was renovated in the same year and now presents emblematic works by the artist and objects which belonged to him. It is organised into three sections. The first section is dedicated to the artist's life, the second is a cabinet of graphic artwork and the third exhibits paintings. It provides an insight into the different facets of the work of one of the Meuse department's key artists of the 19th century.

The neutral tones of the picture rails provide the perfect background for the works on display. The low lighting in the graphic arts cabinet is essential for preserving the drawings, providing an intimate setting in which visitors can examine the works closely.

First Room: the Artist and his work

On the wall to the left of the entrance, a chronological frieze traces back over the major stages of Jules Bastien-Lepage's life.

Opposite this, three panels introduce his family and closest friends, who were the subject of many of his portraits.

Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884)

Born in Damvillers in 1848, Jules Bastien-Lepage was a boarder at Verdun school and obtained his high school diploma in 1867. The same year, he passed an exam to work for the postal service and was summoned to work in Paris. A year later, he left this job and trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, working under Alexandre Cabanel.

He exhibited his work for the first time at the 1870 Salon. His works were exhibited regularly until his death in 1884. His first works were classical and academic compositions, influenced by his visits to the Louvre.

His successive failure to obtain the Prix de Rome in 1875 and 1876 incited him to veer away from mythological or historical subject matter, linked to his training at the Beaux-Arts.

Light slowly took on an increasingly important role in his work, influenced by the impressionists. Equally marked by realists such as Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet, he worked with an original set of aesthetics illustrated by his "rural" paintings, shown at the Salon and painted on very large-format canvasses with small chromatic ranges.

His choice of centring conveys his interest in photography: the protagonists in his compositions are most often portrayed from below and positioned in the foreground of deep landscapes.



Autoportrait,
7 juin 1880, huile sur bois,
Musée de Montmédy



*Saison d'octobre, récolte des
pommes de terre, 1879,*
huile sur toile, Melbourne,
National Gallery of Victoria

Suivez le guide



Les Foins, 1877, huile sur toile,
Paris, Musée d'Orsay

In 1878, his painting *Les Foins* was shown at the Salon, then the following year his *Saison d'Octobre, récolte des pommes de terre* was a great success, making him a well-known artist.

After 1880, Jules Bastien-Lepage continued to combine different genres, such as portrait and genre painting, however in smaller-sized paintings, which were much appreciated by collectors.

Jules Bastien-Lepage fell ill and died in 1884. From 1885, a large retrospective exhibition was dedicated to him in Paris and the French State acquired *Les Foins*.

In 1889 a commemorative monument was inaugurated in Damvillers, created by Auguste Rodin.

Second Room: *Graphic Arts cabinet*



Esquisse pour les Foins
Musée de Montmédy

This room presents works on paper, which require the use of very low lighting. Sketching is first and foremost used by artists as a quick way of setting down ideas and thoughts on paper. This stage is generally preparatory to the creation of a painted or sculpted work but can also be a work in its own right.

A wide variety of works are shown in this room – ink and pencil drawings, pastels, engravings, watercolours, sketches on tracing paper, etc.

Some of these are preparatory studies for major works, kept in different museums across the world, such as *La Communiante*, *Les Foins* and *La Récolte des pommes de terre*. Others are drawings sketched on the fly by Jules Bastien-Lepage in his sketchbooks. Lastly, some of the drawings are works in their own right, such as *Le Héron*, pastel on paper, hung on one of the room's walls.

Throughout his life, Jules Bastien-Lepage kept up a correspondence with his family. Letters, kept by the Montmédy museum, shed light on the creative process behind certain works.

La Communiant

The Montmédy Museum holds two preparatory drawings for *La Communiant*, an oil on canvas shown at the 1875 Salon. One of these is particularly similar to the final drawing. It is a full-face seated portrait of Lucie Bastien, Jules Bastien-Lepage's cousin, in communicant dress, motionless and with impassive features.

Jules Bastien-Lepage was not aiming to portray a significant moment of religious life with this painting, he was more concerned with the creation of a portrait. In the final painting, the young lady's face contrasts with the whiteness of the solemn communion dress that she is wearing.

Jules Bastien-Lepage was a learned artist and frequented the Louvre Museum. The influence of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres can be seen in the absent eyes of the model as well as in the importance given to the subject's clothing.



La Communiant, 1875, huile sur toile, Tournai, Musée des Beaux-Arts

Le Héron

This pastel on paper stands apart from the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage, both due to the subject matter and technique, generally used for preparatory work. This work was doubtless destined to figure in a new edition of Lafontaine's *Fables*, commissioned by collector Antony Roux. This pastel probably belonged to the series of illustrations, collected between 1879 and 1881 and produced by different artists. It seems that the Jules Bastien-Lepage pastel was not used since the order went to Gustave Moreau, for whom he produced sixty-three watercolours.



Le Héron, 1881, pastel sur papier, Musée de Montmédy

Marchande de fleurs à Londres

This watercolour on paper is a preparatory study for a painting produced in 1882 by Jules Bastien-Lepage during his stay in London. It portrays a young girl, positioned at the centre of the composition, who looks as if she is about to walk out towards the viewer. In the final version of the painting, the artist added characters in the background, notably a man who seemed to be staring at the young lady. This watercolour belongs to a series of works with street children as subject matter, illustrating social reality and street jobs associated to the development of towns. These works are both portraits and genre paintings. They are not devoid of ambiguity and are influenced by the work of Degas and Manet.



Marchande de fleurs à Londres, 1882, aquarelle sur papier, Musée de Montmédy

Third Room: the paintings

This room presents thirteen paintings and two sculptures produced by Jules Bastien-Lepage, illustrating recurrent themes in the artist's work: portraits, "rural" paintings and landscapes.

Portrait of J.G Lemarchand



Portrait de J.G Lemarchand,
1870, huile sur toile,
Musée de Montmédy

This painting was the first work presented by Jules Bastien-Lepage at the Salon.

It portrays Gustave Lemarchand, a fellow-student at the Beaux-Arts and future architect. When he started painting, Jules Bastien-Lepage didn't have the means to pay his models, often calling upon friends or members of his family to model for him. This portrait appears to be relatively traditional, applying the rules and principles learnt by the artist at the Beaux-Arts. The presence of the architect's work instruments in the foreground allows the viewer to identify the subject's profession.

The painting is produced essentially in different tones of green. The character nevertheless stands out from the drape in the background adorned with plant motifs.

Le Mendiant

This sketch is probably one of Jules Bastien-Lepage's final preparatory studies for *Le Mendiant*, the painting shown at the 1881 Salon. It differs from the definitive version by the presence of a cat in the lower right hand corner and the absence of a female figure in the background.

For this painting, Jules Bastien-Lepage had doubtless drawn inspiration from a painting by Jean-François Millet, painted in 1858-1859. However the composition is entirely different. Jules Bastien-Lepage uses a vertical format, placing the eponymous character of his painting in the foreground, with the little girl just behind him.



Esquisse pour le mendiant,
1881, dessin préparatoire,
Musée de Montmédy



Esquisse pour *Le Mendiant*, 1881,
huile sur toile
Musée de Montmédy

The old man is depicted arriving at the threshold of the door, sliding the fruit of his quest into his satchel and ready to take to the streets again. The use of different perspectives accentuates the monumental character of the beggar, who is set apart from the door frame.

Le Mendiant bears witness to an evolution in the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage: it is the first example of a rural painting that is no longer set in a vast landscape (as is the case for *Les Foins* or *Saison d'Octobre*) but in a tighter structure.

This painting met with great success and influenced numerous artists.

La Baie d'Anne Port, Ile de Jersey



La Baie d'Anne Port, Ile de Jersey, 1880-1884,
Musée de Montmédy

This painting was probably produced during one of the trips that Jules Bastien-Lepage made during the 1880s. The landscapes that he saw during his travels became one of his preferred subjects.

The landscapes created by Jules Bastien-Lepage form a set of works that are still little-known. Indeed, it appears that the artist only signed a small portion of his canvasses, shedding light on the personal and intimate nature of these works which were not destined for sale.

His studies for his landscape works allowed him to explore composition and colour and to thus possess a repertoire of motifs that he could use for larger-sized compositions.



Orphée,
vers 1876-1877,
terre cuite,
Musée de Montmédy

Orphée

This clay sculpture was modelled in the context of a project for a painting destined to be shown at the Salon, but which was never painted. Only one sketch remains which is kept in a private collection, portraying the precise moment in time when Orphée, playing the lyre returning from Hell, is about to turn around to try and see Eurydice.

The clay statuette is in the same position as in the sketch, only the shape of the lyre is different.

By modelling the subject of his painting in clay first, the painter has a better grasp of it and can examine it from all angles. This valuable work tool was produced quickly - traces of the tools used to model it are visible.



Sarah Bernard,
1879,
dessin Jules Bastien-Lepage

The statuette of Orphée was depicted in a different manner in a painting shown at the 1879 Salon, where it is held in Sarah Bernhardt's hand.

• Bibliographie :

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