

Exhibition *Art nouveau - Art déco. Marseille au cœur des styles*

Marseille, Château Borély – Musée des Arts décoratifs, de la Faïence et de la Mode

8th MAY 2026 – 25th APRIL 2027

Room 11 – FIRST-FLOOR LANDING

Introductory wall text

Between 1889 and 1937, a period punctuated by the Universal Exhibitions of 1900 and 1925, the history of the decorative arts underwent a profound transformation : the sinuous curves of Art Nouveau gradually gave way to the geometric lines and modernist spirit of Art Deco.

The exhibition *Art Nouveau – Art Deco : Marseille at the Heart of the Styles* invites visitors to explore this pivotal era by highlighting the correspondences, ruptures and reinventions that shaped these two major movements of modernity.

Bringing together nearly 300 works—furniture, ceramics, glassware, fashion creations, paintings, drawings and travel objects—it offers a dual perspective : on the one hand, the stylistic evolution from the Belle Époque to the 1930s ; on the other, the echoes and reinterpretations of these movements in Marseille and Provence.

The itinerary, adapted to the layout of the Château Borély, adopts a thematic approach that emphasises both continuities and contrasts. Certain rooms explore the profusion of Art Nouveau—nature, the marine world and the female figure—while others evoke the urban modernity, dynamism and stylisation characteristic of Art Deco. Regional creations from the Marseille ceramic workshops of Saint-Jean-du-Désert and Aubagne are presented alongside works by artists associated with the city, such as David Dellepiane and Félix Nadar. Fashion occupies a significant place within the exhibition, revealing both the evolution of taste and the role of women, from the fluid forms of the turn of the century to the modernist silhouettes heralding the 1940s.

By restoring the diversity of these decorative languages, the exhibition offers a renewed perspective on the richness of Marseille's collections and on the artistic exchanges between Paris and the Mediterranean. A crossroads of modernities, Marseille emerges in filigree through its artists, its manufactories and its role in the dissemination of French taste, facilitated by the Paris–Lyon–Méditerranée railway line and by the great maritime routes of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique and of the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes.

Expanded object labels

William Malherbe (1884–1951)

Mademoiselle Gaby Deslys, oil on canvas, 1912

Marseille, Museum of Fine Arts

Gaby Deslys, whose real name was Marie Gabrielle Caire (1881–1920), was a celebrated French music-hall dancer, singer and actress. Born in Marseille, she achieved immense success in the early twentieth century, both in France and abroad, foreshadowing the modern phenomenon of the international star.

An icon of the Belle Époque, she captivated audiences with her audacious style, extravagant costumes and commanding stage presence. Her widely publicised relationship with Manuel II of Portugal further enhanced her notoriety. She died prematurely at the age of thirty-eight, leaving behind the image of a flamboyant and avant-garde performer.

She bequeathed part of her fortune to the city of Marseille, including the Villa Maud on the Corniche—today known as Villa Gaby—so that it might be converted into a hospital.

In 1912, the year in which the Neo-Impressionist painter William Malherbe presented this portrait at the Salon, Gaby Deslys was triumphing with *La Danse de l'Ours*. In this music-hall number, she gradually removed her garments until appearing almost nude—though in fact she wore a flesh-coloured bodysuit—performing on stage what is considered one of the earliest striptease acts

Antonio de La Gandara (1861–1917)

Portrait of Madame Rémy Salvador, 1901, oil on canvas

Marseille, Museum of Fine Arts

Jeanne Salvator, the wife of the art critic Rémy Salvador, who wrote for the literary and artistic review *La Plume*, is portrayed here by Antonio de La Gandara, one of the most fashionable portraitists of Parisian high society during the Belle Époque. The commission for this monumental portrait illustrates the close interaction between the network of critics and artistic creation around 1900. Exhibited at the 1902 Salon of the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, it was frequently reproduced in the artistic press, attesting to the circulation of forms and fashions within the visual culture of the time.

The painter constructs the figure through line : the elongation of the silhouette and the continuity of curves echo the decorative rhythm of Art Nouveau, visible in posters, illustration and the decorative arts. The garment - attributed to the couturier Jacques Doucet - becomes a structuring principle, organising the composition through an interplay of lines and contrasts. This emphasis reveals the importance the painter attached to fashion, to such an extent that he founded the Association des peintres costumiers de la femme in order to denounce what he perceived as the declining quality of Parisian couture.