

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 20 – EXOTIC CABINET

Introductory wall text

Marseille, Gateway to the Mediterranean : Transport and Travel in the Age of Art deco

Marseille, Gateway to the Mediterranean : Ports and Maritime Horizons

Served by the railway network of the Compagnie des chemins de fer de Paris à Lyon et à la Méditerranée, Marseille emerged during the Art Deco period as a major gateway to the Mediterranean and an important stage on the route to the Côte d'Azur. Its intense port activity led numerous international shipping companies to establish offices there, operating regular routes not only across the Mediterranean basin but also to India, China and Japan.

Through its harbour, the Phocæan city became a true gateway to North Africa and the Orient, occupying a central place in the modern imagination of travel.

Ocean Liners and the Motor Car : Luxury, Speed and Modernity

At the initiative of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, the architect Gaston Castel designed the company's headquarters, while the French Line launched the ocean liners SS Île-de-France and SS Normandie for the transatlantic route between Le Havre and New York.

The Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, also established in Marseille, commissioned the Société provençale de constructions navales to construct several passenger liners. The luxurious SS Mariette Pacha and SS Champollion, linking Marseille with Egypt and Syria from 1925 onwards, were decorated in an Egyptianising Art Deco style designed by Georges Raymond. Their decoration echoed the widespread fascination with ancient Egypt following the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922.

At the same time, the automobile industry developed in Marseille with manufacturers such as Turcat-Méry and Léon Paulet. Numerous garages and dealerships—such as the Garage Devoulx—adopted a distinctly Art Deco architectural style. Ocean liners, motor cars, trains and aeroplanes thus came to embody luxury, speed and modernity, becoming emblematic motifs in Art Deco decoration.

Expanded object labels

Biscuit box with tray : “solo” and “duo” pouring vessels

Christofle for the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, 1930-1935, Silver-plated metal
Private collection

Founded in Marseille in 1871, the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes equipped its prestigious liners with refined objects intended for first-class passengers. During the interwar period, it commissioned the silversmithing firm Christofle, whose craftsmanship perfectly matched the company’s elegant and cosmopolitan image. These silver-plated pieces reflect the attention paid to comfort and luxury on board, in line with the works that Christofle also produced for emblematic ocean liners such as the Normandie.

Statuette Côte d’Azur Pullman Express

René Lalique (1860-1945), 1929, frosted moulded-pressed glass
Wingen-sur-Moder, Musée Lalique – deposit from Shai Bandmann and Ronald Ooi

Created by Lalique for the inaugural journey of the Côte d’Azur Pullman Express, this statuette was presented to guests on the first official trip on 9 December 1929. With her hair swept back by the wind, this nude female figure in motion symbolises movement and speed.

Radiator caps

Between 1925 and 1931, René Lalique designed around thirty radiator caps, transforming them into true glass sculptures. At a time of remarkable expansion in the automobile industry, these “mascots” adorned luxury cars and contributed to the emergence of a modern aesthetic in which ornament became a marker of distinction. Produced in moulded-pressed glass, sometimes satin-finished or tinted, the works presented here illustrate themes dear to Lalique: the animal kingdom, movement, and symbolism. Created in 1928 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of France’s victory in the First World War, Victoire embodies momentum, speed, and the optimism of the interwar years. Saint Christopher—the patron saint of travellers—imbues these objects with a protective dimension, while the Dragonfly and Epsom designs convey the lightness and dynamism of the modern world.

Digital display

Luxury in motion : a full-scale model of a first-class compartment on the Côte d'Azur Pullman Express

Inaugurated in 1929 by the Paris–Lyon–Méditerranée Railway Company (PLM), the Côte d'Azur Pullman Express epitomised the golden age of luxury rail travel between Paris and the Mediterranean. Following in the wake of the Orient-Express, this prestigious train offered affluent passengers a refined experience combining technical comfort with exceptional interior design, en route to the Riviera.

A symbol of the expansion of luxury transport during the interwar period, it connected Paris to Ventimiglia via Lyon, Marseille and Nice—reached in just fourteen hours and ten minutes—and Menton.

To assert its prestige, the PLM enlisted the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (CIWL) to equip the Côte d'Azur Pullman Express with luxurious carriages. The CIWL devised an exceptionally refined onboard service and entrusted the decoration of the carriages to leading designers.

René Prou (1887–1947), a major figure in furniture design in the 1920s, was commissioned to design the first-class carriages. He collaborated with René Lalique (1860–1945), a master glassmaker at the height of his career, who in turn involved his daughter, Suzanne Lalique-Haviland (1892–1989). Produced around 1929, this full-scale model demonstrates the remarkable coherence of their collaboration, at the intersection of decorative arts and technical innovation.

The wood panelling, made of plane tree, is punctuated by floral motifs in moulded-pressed glass with silver powder, designed by Suzanne Lalique-Haviland and inlaid into the wood. She also created the textiles: the fabric covering the wingback armchairs designed by Prou, as well as the beige carpet with brown motifs inspired by stylised railway tracks arranged in a staggered pattern.

This project highlights the essential role played by Suzanne Lalique-Haviland within the Lalique workshop. Without formal academic training, she developed a distinctive artistic voice at an early stage under her father's influence. Her work spans numerous fields, including textiles, glass, and tableware—initially for the Manufacture de Sèvres and later for Théodore Haviland's manufactory in Limoges.

For the Pullman Express, she also designed the table service, adorned with the company's gilt monogram, contributing to a refined and streamlined decorative language that combined the French tradition of luxury with the functional demands of railway design.

Introductory text

Exoticism in Faience : Aubagne and the 1930s

At the beginning of the 20th century, Marseille established itself as a major colonial metropolis : by 1920, nearly one third of French colonial trade passed through its port. Maritime links with the Mediterranean, as well as with India, China and Japan, encouraged the circulation of distant images and goods.

The colonial exhibitions organised in Marseille in 1906 and 1922, and later in Paris in 1931, greatly contributed to this fascination. The Exposition coloniale de Marseille de 1922, which welcomed three million visitors, left a lasting impression with its Indochina Palace inspired by Angkor Wat and its displays of art and craftsmanship.

This context stimulated the production of the ceramicists of Aubagne. From 1927 onwards, under the direction of Jacques Bourdillon, the Société des Faïenceries d'Aubagne—later the Faïencerie Nouvelle de Provence and subsequently Proceram—opened its workshops to regional artists and encouraged the creation of small series, particularly within the Section d'Art (1934–1937), led by Henry-Ann Guibert.

Among the notable collaborators was the sculptor Félix Guis, creator of advertising objects for the Thé Elephant teas and of bookends inspired by Hindu imagery, finished with either matt or glossy glazes. Simone Jouglas, better known for her santons, revealed her talent in a striking head of a young Asian woman beneath a “granulated honey” glaze. More enigmatic still, the artist J. Tomé signed vases decorated with luxuriant jungle scenes, a theme emblematic of the exoticism then in vogue.

Produced by slip-casting, these works demonstrate both the technical mastery and the quality of the glazes that established the European reputation of the Faïencerie Nouvelle de Provence / Proceram.

Expanded artist label

Jean Mayodon (1893–1967)

Trained at Sèvres, where he quickly established his own workshop and built a kiln, Jean Mayodon sought to master the secrets of firing and metallic oxides—iron, copper, lead, chromium, manganese—in order to achieve refined chromatic and luminous effects.

Influenced by André Metthey, he perfected the firing of gold, which became one of his distinctive features. His decorations, inspired by ancient myths and civilisations, celebrate dance and movement through figures such as nymphs, tritons, centaurs and goddesses.

Artistic adviser at the Sèvres manufactory from 1934 to 1939, then artistic director in 1941–1942, he designed more than eighty vase models there.

Introductory wall text

Fashion and the Decorative Arts

At the turn of the twentieth century, fashion and the decorative arts were part of the same creative impulse: to express, through form and material, the evolution of taste and social customs. In this gallery, garments and accessories enter into dialogue with furniture, glassware and ceramics, revealing the constant exchanges between the world of dress and that of the decorative arts.

From 1900 to 1937, the female silhouette underwent profound transformations, reflecting new attitudes towards the body and modernity. Fashion designers, like interior decorators, sought to reconcile elegance with comfort, in keeping with a society undergoing rapid change.

These developments formed part of a broader dialogue affecting all fields of artistic creation. Art Nouveau interiors, conceived as harmonious ensembles, celebrated the rhythms of nature, whether expressed through vegetal motifs or aquatic forms.

With the advent of Art Deco, this imaginative vocabulary gradually gave way to a more restrained language, dominated by straight or gently curved lines. Between the two world wars, the style reached its full flourishing in France, combining vivid colours, strong contrasts and forms inspired by Cubism—visible here in the reinterpretation of marine decorative motifs.

The diversity of Art Deco expression is also reflected in the extensive programme of modernisation undertaken by the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, which abandoned its exclusive attachment to porcelain in order to explore stoneware and faience. It is likewise evident in furniture design, whose rigorous simplicity foreshadowed the rise of functionalism in the mid-twentieth century.

Section wall texts

Woman and Her Image : Fashion and Style in the Age of Art Nouveau

With the prestigious Exposition Universelle de 1900, Paris became the world capital of fashion. At the time, around twenty renowned couture houses were active, among them Paul Poiret, Jeanne Paquin, Jacques Doucet and Mariano Fortuny, the favourite designer of Marcel Proust, who mentioned him seventeen times in *In Search of Lost Time*.

These designers produced fluid creations liberated from the corset, garments that followed the movement of the body and showcased new materials and techniques. Art Nouveau shared this pursuit: the supple, undulating line, inspired by nature, became a common language for couture, sculpture and the decorative arts.

The dancers sculpted by Agathon Léonard, as well as candelabra decorated with female figures and thistles, echo these forms and draperies inspired by dance, nature and a reimagined antiquity. Woman thus became both a decorative motif and a symbol of modernity.

Within the intimate sphere, beauty and toilette accessories testify to the everyday practices of the “flower-woman” celebrated by Art Nouveau. Such objects, like the garments themselves, reflect a vision of woman still largely conceived as a figure of elegance and seduction, whose social identity was expressed above all through her appearance.

The Scarf Game

With « Le Jeu de l'écharpe » (« The Scarf Game »), the sculptor Agathon Léonard conceived a series of fifteen statuettes of dancers in biscuit porcelain, designed as a monumental centrepiece for a table ensemble produced by the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres. First presented to the public in 1897, these models were subsequently produced in porcelain for the Exposition Universelle de 1900.

Four of these fifteen figures are displayed here. Captured in light and airy poses, they form a veritable sculptural ballet. Among them, the Danseuse à l'écharpe (« Dancer with a Scarf »), one of the most celebrated, embodies the artist's ambition: to fix within an immobile medium the dynamism and fluidity of movement.

This visual language resonates with the art of Loïe Fuller, whose choreographies of monumental veils, enhanced by coloured lighting effects, astonished audiences at the 1900 exhibition. In both Léonard's and Fuller's work, textiles become an extension of the body, tracing a sinuous, flowing line characteristic of Art Nouveau.

Yet the sculptor's inspiration was not limited to this source. Critics of the time compared his figures to the ancient Greek statuettes of Tanagra figurines, while the pleated garments recall the textile creations of Mariano Fortuny. Introduced in 1907, his Delphos gowns, with their fine pleats reminiscent of ancient chitons, reflect the same quest for garments that follow the freedom of gesture.

This search for harmony between body and textile also echoes the experiments of Isadora Duncan, another pioneer of modern dance who claimed a direct lineage from ancient Greece and whose liberated movements inspired painters, sculptors and fashion designers alike.

Woman and Her Image : Fashion and Style in the Age of Art Deco

The fashion of the 1920s and 1930s reflects the profound aesthetic and social transformations of the interwar period. By presenting two silhouettes renewed every three months, this section places in dialogue two pivotal moments in the history of Art Deco: 1920–1925 and 1930–1935.

Creations from the earlier period display a fluid and androgynous silhouette inherited from the "garçonne": straight dresses, dropped waists and liberated legs. Light, supple fabrics accompanied a more active social life in which sport, dancing and travel played an increasingly important role. In 1925, at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, fashion established itself as an art form in its own right, alongside architecture, furniture and theatre.

Ten years later, couture underwent a decisive shift. The waistline rose, the hips were redefined and the draped techniques championed by Madeleine Vionnet restored a sculptural femininity. This evolution reflects a new refinement and a desire to assert a rediscovered sensuality, already heralding post-war trends.

These garments converse with tapestries produced by the Manufacture de Beauvais in the early 1930s after designs by Charles Edelmann and Charles Martin. Aviation, boating and swimming celebrate the dynamism of an era captivated by speed, aquatic leisure and tourism.

Designed to accompany the modern woman travelling by train, ocean liner or aeroplane, handbags and travel accessories embody the spirit of Art Deco as applied to everyday objects.

Objects labels

> Glazed display case presenting mannequin figures

DISPLAY CASE # 1

From 08.05 to 06.09.2026

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (1871-1949), *Delphos* dress, c. 1920, pleated silk taffeta
Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Museo Fortuny

Painter, sculptor, photographer and designer, Mariano Fortuny was less a couturier than a visionary inventor. Steeped in medieval culture and Greek antiquity, and fascinated by technology and craftsmanship, he embodies the synthesis of aestheticism and modernity. Like Paul Poiret, he contributed to the emancipation of the female body and, from 1909, registered two patents: one for a “type of pleated, undulating fabric”, the other for the Delphos dress. Inspired by the Greek chiton, its straight cut and finely permanent pleating follow the body’s natural lines, freed from the corset, and allow unprecedented freedom of movement. From Isadora Duncan to the Marchesa Casati, the artistic elite clamoured for it. Unchanged in form, it continued to be produced until Fortuny’s death in 1949.

From 09.09.2026 to 10.01.2027

Paul Poiret, French Haute Couture House founded in 1903 by Paul Poiret (1879-1944)
Evening dress, Haute couture, c. 1911, Silk muslin, rhinestones, silk satin lined with organza,
passementerie belt with twisted metallic threads
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

After working for Jacques Doucet and Worth, Paul Poiret founded his house in 1903. A visionary couturier and entrepreneur, he revolutionised the Belle Époque silhouette from 1906 onwards: supple, streamlined dresses worn without corset or bustle, high waistlines, and fresh colours inspired by the Directoire. The torso straightens and the line is purified. His style, founded on clarity of line, draws on the Orientalism of the Ballets Russes: caftan coats, kimonos, harem skirts and zouave trousers in vivid fabrics. A great traveller, he drew inspiration from Japan, North Africa, Central Asia and European folk traditions. In 1911, he founded the Rosine cosmetics house, followed by the “Petite Usine” with Raoul Dufy, the Atelier Colin, and the Atelier Martine school for young women. His extravagant spending, the rise of the *garçonne* style championed by Chanel, and the 1929 economic crisis precipitated his decline and the closure of his house.

From 13.01 to 25.04.2027

Chanel, French Haute Couture House founded in 1909 by Gabrielle Chanel (1883–1971)
Blouse, Haute couture, Spring/Summer 1919, Silk crêpe embroidered with silk threads
CHANEL Heritage Collection, Paris

Gabrielle Chanel opened a millinery workshop in Paris in 1909. Promoting her own creations, she introduced, from 1912 onwards, garments with simplified lines—sweaters and Breton tops, jackets and

blouses worn with supple skirts—made from soft materials borrowed from menswear, giving women an androgynous elegance.

In the aftermath of the war, like certain couturiers such as Jean Patou and Elsa Schiaparelli, Chanel intuitively understood the expectations of clients seeking functional clothing suited to modern life. The four years of conflict had transformed society, accelerated women's emancipation, and profoundly altered habits of dress: a woman could now dress herself unaided, as garments were no longer "put on" but "slipped into" in a single movement, over the head or from the feet. As exemplified by this model, Chanel's formal and decorative simplicity in fashion parallels that achieved in the visual arts by Cubism.

DISPLAY CASE # 2

From 08.05 to 06.09.2026

Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (1871–1949)

Coat, c. 1910–1920, block-printed silk velvet

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

Between 1901 and 1934, Fortuny developed and patented several printing processes: natural pigments applied in successive layers; mechanical printing using screens or blocks; and techniques based on metallic oxides (copper, bronze, aluminium). Complex and masterfully controlled, these methods interact subtly with light and enhance each fabric, rendered unique through its texture and pattern. Initially printed by hand on silks imported from Japan, these pieces were reserved for luxury production. A 1910 patent, inspired by Japanese katagami stencils, enabled broader production in the 1920s on longer lengths of fabric for a wider clientele. The models, essentially unchanged, are difficult to date, and motifs were often reused.

Characteristic of his tunics and caftans, the decoration of this coat draws on Italian Renaissance motifs of the pomegranate and pineapple, disseminated in Venice and Constantinople during the sixteenth century.

From 09.09.2026 to 10.01.2027

Callot Sœurs, French Haute Couture house founded in 1895

Evening dress, model "Pour la gloire", Haute couture, Autumn/Winter 1918, Silk muslin, embroidery, lace, stones, black and white pearls

Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

In 1895, Marie, Marthe, Regina and Joséphine Callot opened a couture house in Paris, building on the success of an earlier shop specialising in lace and trimmings. In the early twentieth century, Callot Sœurs established itself among the leading Parisian houses alongside Worth, Jacques Doucet and Jeanne Lanvin. Renowned for the richness of its ornamentation—antique lace, beaded embroidery, Orientalist influences and luxurious textiles—the house attracted an affluent international clientele. While the First World War imposed simpler, more practical fashions suited to women's work and material restrictions, this dress instead testifies to the enduring luxury and refined aesthetic for which the house was celebrated.

From 13.01 to 25.04.2027

Gabrielle Chanel (1883–1971)

Dress, Silk muslin embroidered with iridescent glass beads
CHANEL Heritage Collection, Paris

For Gabrielle Chanel, formal, chromatic and ornamental restraint underpinned her pursuit of simplicity and naturalness—synonymous, for her, with elegance. Generally sparing in decoration, her preferred motifs remained flowers, particularly the camellia. With its immaculate whiteness, regular petals and rounded form, its minimal design—bordering on abstraction—accords as much with Chanel's ideal of pared-down luxury as with the Art Deco aesthetic.

An element of adornment, decoration and accessory alike, it appears across all media—printed, embroidered, applied or inset into lace—unceasingly revisited until it became the house's iconic signature, the expression of a timeless style. Although no definitive attribution can be established, this model, attributed to Chanel, is entirely consistent with her aesthetic vocabulary and creative principles.

DISPLAY CASE # 3

From 08.05 to 06.09.2026

Lucien Lelong, French Haute Couture house founded in 1921 by Lucien Lelong (1889–1958)

Evening dress, Haute couture, c. 1928, Silk organdie, glass beads, rhinestones
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

During the 1910s, the female silhouette evolved from flower to stem. From 1918 onwards, in the aftermath of the war, women embraced the *garçonne* style. An expression of emancipation and modernity, the tubular dress—shortened for the first time—flattened the body's curves. Simple by day, evening models displayed luxurious embroidery that sparkled under the lights of dance halls. In response to the popularity of the Charleston, couturiers designed dresses that moved with every gesture by adding floating scarves and panels. For Lelong, creator of the kinetic line in 1926, the superimposition of lightweight fabrics alone created volume and transparency. Draped over the shoulders, with only a slight blousing of the bodice, this type of dress dominated the years 1927–1928. Here, it is animated by a pattern of beads and rhinestones forming circles, a recurring Art Deco motif.

From 09.09.2026 to 10.01.2027

Lanvin, French Haute Couture house founded in 1885 by Jeanne Lanvin (1867–1946)

Day coat, model "La Fontaine", Haute couture, Autumn/Winter 1923, Pongé and faille silk
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

Jeanne Lanvin began as a milliner in 1885 and opened her first hat shop in 1889. With the creation in 1909 of a department for young girls and women, she joined the prestigious circle of Parisian haute couture. Her work is distinguished by meticulous attention to detail and a masterful command of decorative techniques; embroidery, appliqué, inlay and aligned stitching characterise her creations of the 1920s. Inspired by her travels and her textile collections, Lanvin adapted quilting techniques into refined fabrics whose geometric patterns harmonise with the Art Deco aesthetic.

This coat is a fine example : the oblique arrangement of ribs, symmetrically aligned at the waist, structures the silhouette and lends it an elegant rigour. In 1921, in collaboration with decorator Armand-Albert Rateau, she created a pavilion dedicated to the art of living; Rateau also designed her boutiques, her private residence and, in 1927, the celebrated bottle for the perfume “Arpège”.

From 13.01 to 25.04.2027

Lenief, French Haute Couture house founded in 1922 by Alfred Lenief (1890–?)
Afternoon dress, 1920s, Silk velvet, metallic sequins and gold lamé
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

Emerging from the simplified wardrobe of the war period, the dress of the 1920s is characterised by a flattened bodice, a dropped waist and a boldly shortened hemline. In a rapidly changing society, this modern style was enthusiastically adopted by the *garçonnes*. Under the influence of sport, which now dictated clothing design, couturiers prioritised comfort, freedom of movement and fluidity of silhouette. Simple by day, dresses were adorned in the evening with beads, rhinestones and sequins, echoed in accessories. Exoticism, a major source of inspiration for fashion and the decorative arts, enjoyed considerable popularity. Couture houses readily incorporated Orientalist motifs. In this model, the embroidery of the *plastron*, in gold and silver tones that catch the light, contrasts with the sobriety of the characteristic tubular line of the decade.

DISPLAY CASE # 4

From 08.05 to 06.09.2026

Jean Patou, French Haute Couture house founded in 1914 by Jean Patou (1887–1936)
Jumpsuit, c. 1930, Wool
Château Borély – Musée des Arts décoratifs, de la Faïence et de la Mode

From the 1920s onwards, the rise of leisure culture, sunbathing and sport demanded practical clothing. Patou created chic yet relaxed fashions for an affluent clientele, for both day and evening, favouring a slender silhouette and a sporty elegance. Soft, elastic knitwear liberated movement: sweaters, twin-sets, skirts and dresses with Cubist geometric patterns coexisted with the beach pyjama—popularised by Chanel from 1929—which made the wearing of trousers socially acceptable. Seen on the beach, aboard yachts, in town, or at dance halls and casinos, it appeared in coloured jersey or luxurious silks. This example, once belonging to Princess Nilüfer, Begum, is emblematic of Patou’s “Sport” line, dedicated to beachwear and garments for swimming, skiing, golf and tennis.

From 09.09.2026 to 10.01.2027

Delapierre, French ready-to-wear brand founded in 1929 by Madame Delapierre
Dress, c. 1935, Linen
Château Borély – Musée des Arts décoratifs, de la Faïence et de la Mode

New seaside practices and sport, hallmarks of modernity, accelerated the simplification of the wardrobe. The Côte d'Azur, frequented in winter by elites, became in the 1920s a summer destination. Cannes, Nice and Monte Carlo fostered a wardrobe combining comfort, functionality and elegance. The major houses—Lanvin, Patou, Chanel and Schiaparelli—were soon joined by smaller local enterprises, precursors of luxury ready-to-wear, offering lightweight fabrics and sunlit colours: the “Riviera look”. From 1929 onwards, Madame Delapierre proposed designs suited to the climate, promoting “modern hygiene”: suits, dresses and beachwear in silk, cotton or linen—a fabric then little used—which she had discovered in Paris at Gustave Sennelier.

From 13.01 to 25.04.2027

Madeleine Vionnet, French Haute Couture house founded in 1912 by Madeleine Vionnet (1876–1975)
Day dress, Haute couture, Spring/Summer 1926, Crêpe and pongé silk
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

In the 1920s, Madeleine Vionnet established herself as the queen of the bias cut. Visionary and largely indifferent to passing trends, she transformed the traditional conception of garments cut on the straight grain. Beaded and embroidered models gave way to a new aesthetic privileging line over ornament. Anticipating the fashions of the 1930s, dresses became more closely fitted, accentuating the curves of the body through the elastic properties of the bias, previously reserved for collars and cuffs. Fascinated by ancient Greece, Vionnet reinvented free drapery by reducing seams and fastenings, creating garments that could be slipped on like a glove through ingenious inlays, without recourse to corsetry. Of apparent simplicity, her dresses possess a highly complex internal structure, earning her the nickname “the Euclid of fashion”. Their fluidity also derives from the use of crêpe de Chine, crêpe Georgette or silk muslin, as seen here in both the dress and its underlayer.

Digital display - LARGE GLAZED SHOWCASE

Living and entertaining: an Art Nouveau interior

At the end of the nineteenth century, certain artists sought to move beyond the reinterpretation of historical styles and to conceive a modern, coherent art in which architecture, furniture and objects formed a unified whole.

Promoted from 1896 by the group L'Art dans Tout, this approach elevated the so-called "minor arts" as essential components of a living environment in harmony with modern life.

The 1900 Exposition Universelle marked the culmination of these ambitions. While admired for the poetic quality of its decoration, the movement proved a commercial failure: costly, fragile and difficult to industrialise, it struggled to gain wider acceptance. Only the École de Nancy, around Émile Gallé and Louis Majorelle, together with a few Parisian workshops, succeeded in establishing it as a true artistic language.

In this context, cabinetmakers of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine adopted the organic lines and vegetal motifs of Art Nouveau. The Pérol brothers, heirs to a long artisanal tradition, presented a dining room ensemble at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, now preserved at the Musée d'Orsay.

Executed in polished and varnished mahogany, gilt copper and stoneware, the furniture is distinguished by its water-lily motifs. The jury praised "the skilful scattering, against the dark ground, of small leaves executed in gilt copper", as well as the delicate leather of the seats, concluding: "This is modernism of a most commendable kind." Through this ensemble, the Pérol brothers combined technical virtuosity with a modern decorative language, creating an interior conceived both for living and entertaining, reflecting the ambitions and limitations of Art Nouveau in France.

The aquatic world in Art Nouveau

At the boundary between the visible world and the realm of dreams, the aquatic universe fascinated Art Nouveau artists as a source of forms, mysteries and symbolic associations.

Unlike the plant world, which is familiar and close at hand, the marine realm evokes a distant, fluid and sometimes unsettling domain. Water is not merely a natural element; it is a primordial environment, a matrix from which life emerges. It conjures images of seaweed, shells and iridescent fish, but also of fossils embedded in stone, of archaic and silent creatures. These real or imagined forms nourished a decorative language that was as rich as it was enigmatic.

Rather than depicting water or the sea as picturesque landscapes, Art Nouveau artists sought to interpret their structure and energy. The marine world became a reservoir of forms aligned with the intellectual concerns of the period: the origins of life, geological time and the persistence of living matter.

The use of underwater motifs in the decorative arts reflects a shift towards an aesthetic of form without narrative. Artists drew upon illustrated natural history publications and cabinets of curiosities to enrich their visual vocabulary. Across all areas of the decorative arts, particularly ceramics and furniture, one observes a proliferation of stylised aquatic forms, visual echoes of the movement of water and the depths of the sea.

Émile Gallé and the metamorphoses of water

Few artists embody the dialogue between aquatic nature and artistic creation as fully as Émile Gallé.

Although renowned for works inspired by the plant world, the theme of water and the marine depths also permeates much of his production, particularly around 1900. His project for the Paris Exposition Universelle illustrates this ambition. There, Gallé presented a spectacular vase, the Amphora of King Solomon, a true manifesto of his aquatic aesthetic. A technical tour de force, it demonstrates the glassmaker's ability to adapt and transpose the world of dreams into glass.

It also reflects the period's fascination with the marine environment. In 1870, Jules Verne published *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*; in describing the ocean depths, he employed metaphors that anticipate the material effects later explored by Gallé in glass.

Expanded objects labels - LARGE GLAZED SHOWCASE

1 – Paul Albert Besnard (1849–1934)

Portrait of Madame Mante and her Children, 1905, oil on canvas

Marseille, Museum of Fine Arts

While travelling to Rome, Albert Besnard paused in Marseille, where in 1905 he painted this portrait of Madame Mante and her children. Juliette Mante (1872–1956), daughter of Eugène Rostand, had married the wealthy Marseilles industrialist Louis Mante (1857–1939), an art enthusiast who assembled a remarkable collection. Alongside the expected Southern painters, it included works by leading figures of the previous century's French school, such as Delacroix, Corot and Gustave Moreau. Juliette Mante herself was an accomplished pianist, and her Parisian residence became a vibrant meeting place for musicians.

A fashionable society portraitist, Albert Besnard enjoyed an exceptionally distinguished official career. His success among affluent patrons owed much to his refined and measured assimilation of Impressionist ideas. He depicts Juliette Mante surrounded by her four children in the summer light of a park, most likely that of their Marseilles residence at Valmante. To their mother's right stand Gérard, who would later marry Suzy Proust, niece and sole heiress of Marcel Proust, and Régine, the future Countess Arnaud de Vallon. To the left are Andrée, an animal sculptor who would become the wife of Jean Rostand, and Odette, the youngest of the four.

From 08.05 to 08.11.2026

2– E. Brochier (dates unknown)

Evening dress ensemble, Marseille, c. 1910, silk, jet, galalith

Marseille, Musée d'Histoire

On the eve of the First World War, Marseille, an industrial capital, was rapidly embracing modernity. In the face of growing internationalisation, regional costume survived only as a marker of popular display. Elegant Marseillaises looked exclusively to Paris, which dictated fashion trends. New styles spread through specialised press, the theatre, the opera, and the salons of private mansions where the elite entertained lavishly.

To meet the demands of this clientele, furriers, bootmakers, tailors, lingerie houses, jewellers and perfumers—and soon ready-to-wear establishments such as Armand Thierry, followed by major department stores like La Belle Jardinière and the Nouvelles Galeries—offered a wide range of high-quality goods.

Executed in the style of Paul Poiret, this Directoire-inspired gown bears the label "Mme E. Brochier, 56 rue Saint-Ferréol, Marseille". Located at the heart of the luxury district, between the Canebière, rue de Rome and rue Paradis, the establishment likely belonged to those couturières en chambre who reproduced designs from Parisian fashion journals.

From 10.11.2026 to 25.04.2027

2– Anonymous

Skirt and bodice, Marseille, c. 1905, Silk and linen
Marseille, Musée d'Histoire

This outfit belonged to Rose Caihol, President of the Fishmongers' Guild. Worn to attend the Opera or receptions at the Prefecture, it attests to the official and social role of this prominent popular figure of Marseilles, whose income appears to have been considerable.

Composed entirely of tulle and lace, it rivals the latest Parisian fashions favoured by the city's elite, who, since the eighteenth century, had habitually turned to the capital as the sole arbiter of elegance.

Digital display - SMALL GLAZED SHOWCASE

Art Deco and the call of the sea

Like plant forms, aquatic worlds stirred the imagination of decorative artists. Fish, seaweed, crustaceans and shells thus formed part of the decorative vocabulary of both Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

These motifs, inspired by marine flora and fauna, were applied to Sèvres porcelain vases, stoneware vessels, furniture panels and tapestries. Jean Dunand (1877–1942), for example, explored the motif of the Japanese-inspired fish in a lacquered wooden fire screen.

This same motif of fish and underwater landscapes appears in a silk dress and coat designed by Dunand in collaboration with the renowned Parisian haute couture house Worth. The textile, created by Dunand in 1925, draws directly on the decoration of lacquer panels, illustrating the fruitful collaborations between decorative artists and fashion designers.

Expanded objects labels - SMALL GLAZED SHOWCASE

From 08.05 to 08.11.2026

1– Lanvin, French Haute Couture house founded in 1885 by Jeanne Lanvin (1867–1946)

Afternoon dress, "Bergère Légère" model, Haute couture, Spring/Summer 1926, silk organdie, organza
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

Jeanne Lanvin's art library contained numerous early fashion periodicals, which nourished her creative imagination, particularly for her celebrated robes de style. Derived from the "war crinolines" fashionable around 1915, these designs reached their fullest expression at Lanvin during the 1920s and remain emblematic of the house. Also referred to as "dancing dresses" or "garden-party dresses", they featured in every collection for women, young girls and children.

Inspired by the eighteenth century—fitted bodice, full skirt supported by petticoats or hoops, and evocative names such as Fêtes galantes, Versailles or Dubarry—they offered a silhouette in marked contrast to the straight lines then in vogue.

While "de style" in its skirt, this model presents a sleeveless bodice, cut straight like a chemise, recalling the tubular dresses associated with the garçonnette aesthetic. The large circular motifs reflect the Art Deco idiom, while the subtle gradations of colour attest to Jeanne Lanvin's passion for chromatic nuance, with soft, faded pink among her preferred shades.

From 10.11.2026 to 25.04.2027

1- **Worth**, French Haute Couture house founded in 1858 by Charles-Frederick Worth (1825-1895)
Evening Cape, Haute couture, 1926, silk satin, gold and silver lamé, velvet, silk taffeta
Paris, Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

Renowned for its unique designs and ostentatious luxury, the celebrated House of Worth—pioneer of French haute couture—continued to expand following the death of its founder in 1895. Over three generations, his heirs adapted to the evolving tastes of an exceptionally wealthy clientele.

In the 1920s, under the direction of his grandsons Jacques Worth, administrator, and above all Jean-Charles Worth, principal designer, the house fully embraced modernity through fruitful collaborations with leading figures of the contemporary art scene, notably Jean Dunand (1877–1942), a major exponent of Art Deco.

A decorator, sculptor, coppersmith, mosaicist and goldsmith, Dunand excelled in the art of lacquer, whose shimmering effects he translated into the many patterns he devised for Jean-Charles Worth, ever in search of vibrant colours and innovative textiles. Created around 1925, the fish motif adorning this cape also appears on several models produced by the house between 1926 and 1927, attesting to its popularity among clients.

Introductory wall text

The End of Art Deco, 1930–1937

The 1930s were marked by a succession of economic, political and social crises, bringing an end to the *Années folles*, the carefree decade that followed the First World War. The luxurious and ostentatious furniture and objets d'art of the 1920s, largely intended for a wealthy clientele, no longer corresponded to the spirit of the time.

Nevertheless, the Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne held in Paris sought to continue celebrating modern life and French luxury. Decorators such as André Arbus achieved consecration there, alongside artists, art-industry entrepreneurs and architects including René Lalique and Gaston Castel, who once again designed the pavilion devoted to Provence, as he had done in 1925.

The furniture ensembles displayed adopted a more sober and classical style, devoid of elaborate decoration or ornament. Chrome-plated metal increasingly appeared in furniture design, under the influence of the modernist movement championed by architects and designers such as Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand.

The Second World War ultimately sounded the death knell of Art Deco, a style now considered outdated and unsuited to the needs of French households in the post-war period. Reconstruction brought about a major expansion in the furniture industry. Modern, durable and affordable furniture was henceforth mass-produced, finally realising the social ambitions that the decorators and art-industry pioneers of Art Nouveau and Art Deco had only partially achieved.

Section wall text

Black and White : A Perfect Harmony

"But for whom are you in mourning, mademoiselle ?" would have asked Paul Poiret of Gabrielle Chanel. "For you, monsieur !"

Paris, 1909: Gabrielle Chanel opens a millinery workshop. Within a few years, she propels couture towards a modernity of use, transforming comfort into elegance. From 1912 onwards, she establishes her "sport" ensembles, elevating jersey—hitherto confined to hosiery—to create a rational silhouette designed for movement.

In pursuit of simplicity and naturalness, Chanel favours formal and chromatic restraint. An advocate of so-called "non-colours", she introduces in the early 1920s the celebrated "little black dress", a distillation of efficiency and discretion that becomes a staple of every wardrobe. In 1926, the magazine *Vogue US* dubs it "the Ford signed Chanel".

After the crisis of 1929, her stylised evening gowns follow newly rediscovered curves, articulated through drapery and asymmetrical panels. Lightweight fabrics are exploited to their fullest effect, without ostentation. Nicknamed the "Queen of Beige", she also privileges black, white and ivory—a palette echoed in the décor of her apartment on the rue Cambon. On the eve of the Second World War, she closes her house and withdraws to Switzerland. Fifteen years later, in 1954, she resumes activity with a collection that breaks with the ultra-feminine silhouette of Christian Dior.

If Art Deco is defined by the modernity of its forms, the refinement of its materials and a taste for innovation, Gabrielle Chanel undeniably shares its spirit. Like her, the decorators André Groult and André Arbus moved within the aristocratic circles of Parisian high society during the Roaring Twenties, sharing a common conception of modern luxury. From the interiors conceived by Groult to the liberated silhouette fashioned by Chanel, and through to the furniture of Arbus, there emerges an art of living founded on elegance, comfort and the excellence of craftsmanship. In contrast to the functionalist avant-gardes, these creators embody a distinctive path, rooted in the continuity of tradition and in a particular vision of French refinement.

Expanded objects labels

André Arbus (1903–1969)

Chaise longue, 1937, bronze, metal, modern satin

Manufactures nationales, Sèvres & Mobilier national, Paris

Chaise longue designed for the bathroom of the Manufacture de Sèvres pavilion at the 1937 International Exhibition, this chaise longue exemplifies André Arbus's modern and luxurious aesthetic. Acquired by the Mobilier national at the close of the exhibition, it formed part of a suite that also included a chair and a pedestal table. Dish

Émile Decoeur (1876–1953)

Émile Decoeur was one of the foremost French ceramists of the first half of the twentieth century. A pupil of Edmond Lachenal, his stoneware and porcelain works were influenced by the forms of Art Nouveau and Japanese craftsmanship. During the 1920s, his style evolved towards a more restrained and refined aesthetic, reflecting broader trends of the period shaped by a renewed interest in Chinese and Korean pottery of the tenth century.

André Groult (1884–1966)

Fall-front secrétaire, 1937, ebony, wood, leather, metal

Manufactures nationales, Sèvres & Mobilier national, Paris

This secrétaire, presented at the 1937 International Exhibition, was acquired on that occasion by the Mobilier national.

Raoul Lachenal (1885–1956)

Raoul Lachenal worked alongside his father, the ceramist Edmond Lachenal, in the family workshop until 1911, when he established a new studio in Boulogne-sur-Seine. In 1914, he exhibited at the Pavillon de Marsan, where his works—featuring scale-like decoration and symmetrical experiments—met with considerable success. He produced ceramics of simple, balanced forms inspired by Eastern models and employed slip-casting techniques.

Georges Serré (1889–1956)

Trained at the Manufacture de Sèvres, Georges Serré travelled to Saigon in 1916, where Far Eastern aesthetics left a lasting impression on his work. Upon his return in 1922, he opened a studio in Sèvres and produced thick stoneware fired in wood kilns, initially valued for their glazes and later enriched with incised decoration beneath the glaze. From 1940 to 1950, he directed the ceramics workshops at the École des arts appliqués in Paris.

Séraphin Soudbinine (1867–1944)

Following his period working with the sculptor Rodin, Séraphin Soudbinine drew inspiration from Chinese and Japanese stoneware traditions, adopting their restrained treatment of surface and material. In the 1930s, he combined these influences with the principal tenets of the Art Deco style.