

The Carnival in Paris

15 November 2012 - 17 February 2013

Free exhibition alongside the permanent collections

“That’s the carnival! – a time of pleasure, life, movement, tiredness, drunkenness, intrigues, liaisons, break-ups, marital disasters, triumphs in love, vows, betrayals, coquetry, deception, knavery and the police station! Ahoy, Badouillards, Chicards, Flambards, Braillards, Balochards! [Parisian carnival society members] – ahoy! ahoy!” *Physiologie Carnaval, du Cancan et de la Cachucha (Physiology of the Carnival, the Cancan and the Cachucha)* by Un Vilain Masque

This period of disorder, at once poetic, grotesque, exuberant and passionate, is presented by the Maison de Balzac, with **over sixty exceptional works** incisively depicted by Benjamin, Daumier, Gavarni and Maurisset. And to comment on these caustic yet graceful pictures, **the Maison de Balzac has brought together the greatest writers of the era**: writings by Balzac, Théodore de Banville, Théophile Gautier, the Goncourt brothers and Charles Philippon accompany the trail.

The “walk of the fattened bull” was the sign to begin rejoicing. Most Parisians came together on the boulevards and quays to take part in the procession led by the biggest bull of Normandy. **The elegant pencil of Gavarni** has immortalised, in fresh colours, the masks that have inspired so many stories: who is hiding behind a wolf mask? A charming heiress, a grandmother who has kept a good figure, or your own aunt? Pierrot, Harlequin and Pulcinella rub shoulders with mermen, bears, chiefs, Turks, troubadours, duchesses, milk maids and Danube boatwomen!

The artists depict the **supper, the carnival institution** which replaced lunch and dinner. People gathered in the villages surrounding Paris, where the wine was cheaper, to get drunk. The atmosphere was more refined at Le Véfour or Chez Véry, restaurants famous for their excellent cuisine, high prices and private rooms, the subjects of many fantasies.

The public dances made their mark, and the conductor Napoléon Musard, “supreme master of frenzied music” achieved true glory. He surpassed himself in the galop, a dance that rounded off the ball, and even used a cannon to build up enthusiasm and good humour. Comparable to a cavalry charge, the galop was one of the “frantic” new dances like the polka, cancan, cachucha or “chahut-chat” which showcased the flexibility and physical skills of the dancers.

The exhibition invites visitors to **relive a highlight of Parisian life in the time of Balzac**, who wrote, “Everyone knows that since 1830, the carnival in Paris has grown prodigiously, making it European and burlesque in a very different way from the late Venice carnival”.

Publication: *Le carnaval à Paris (The Carnival in Paris)* by Yves Gagneux, Éditions Paris musées, Petites Capitales collection, 2011, €12

Commissioning

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Titi by Gavarni, 1842 © Maison de Balzac / Roger Viollet