

ART SHOWCASE

Louvre des Antiquaires

PARIS LANDMARK | The other Louvre

A source of treasures that can travel

The Musée du Louvre houses some of the world's greatest artistic treasures, but visitors may feel frustrated that they cannot take the "Mona Lisa" or an Antique Greek vase home with them. Are they aware that just across the street is another treasure house filled with antiques and works of art, many of museum quality, that they can take back home?

The Louvre des Antiquaires, home to 100 dealers selling fine art and antiques, has no equal anywhere else in the world, according to Vincent L'Herrou, president of the Association du Louvre des Antiquaires, who also cites its location in the heart of Paris, near most of the big hotels.

Representing 30 specialties, the dealers sell everything from antiquities to 20th-century design and are governed by strict rules concerning the age and quality of objects on sale to ensure authenticity.

The Louvre des Antiquaires is housed in a 19th-century building with a history as fascinating as that of many of the antiques on sale there. Like so many aspects of present-day France, the story begins with Napoleon, who envisioned turning the Louvre into the "Grand Louvre," but never had a chance to complete the project. In the run-up to the Exposition Universelle of 1855, his nephew, Napoleon III, decided to take up where his uncle had left off. The decrepit quarter along today's Rue de Rivoli, vividly described by Balzac in his novel "Cousine Bette," was demolished, and the street's elegant arcades extended. At the emperor's request, a grand hotel was built on the Place du Palais-Royal to house visitors to the upcoming World's Fair.

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The original plans for the neo-Classical Grand Hôtel du Louvre had been drawn up by the architects Charles Percier and Pierre-François Léonard Fontaine (who designed parts of the Louvre) during the reign of Napoleon I. It was built by the developers Emile and Isaac Péreire, brothers who also worked on industrial and railroad projects. The 700-room hotel immediately attracted well-heeled and even royal clients, among them the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII. Later, the hotel's ground-floor boutiques

were incorporated into the building's next incarnation: the Grands Magasins du Louvre, one of the world's first department stores, with 52 departments selling everything from silk fabric and exotic shawls to toys, books and clothing. The store eventually took up the whole building, and the hotel was moved into another building on the opposite side of the square in 1880.

The department store's business started dropping off during World War II, and the building metamorphosed into a center for antique galleries after it was purchased in 1975 by the British Post Office Staff Superannuation Fund, whose president at the time was Ralph Quartano (it is now owned by the Société Foncière Lyonnaise).

After a complete renovation and restructuring that reopened the courtyards to natural light and redistributed interior spaces and traffic patterns, the building began its new life as the Louvre des Antiquaires on Oct. 26, 1978, with office space on the upper floors and antiques galleries below. The "new" building became a home for the best of the past. ■



"Les Sables d'Olonne" (left) by Albert Marquet, from the Galerie des Modernes; Japanese armor from the Edo period (below), from Galerie Japon Antique; and a detail of the Royal Dockyard model "Charlotte" (bottom), from Galerie Delalande.



HIGHLIGHTS | Exceptional antiques

Gallery choices of striking pieces

The Ali Baba's cave that is the Louvre des Antiquaires contains so many fascinating antique pieces that it is difficult to focus on just one. Here, a few dealers pick out an unusual item among their wares that is especially worthy of attention.

● **Galerie Michel-Guy Chadelaud:** "Extravagant" is perhaps the best word to describe the magnificent ormolu-mounted grand piano (c. 1878) of brass- and marquetry-inlaid amboyna and mahogany with a body made by the famed 19th-century French cabinet-maker Henry Dasson, movement by Erard and paintings by Juan Antonio Gonzalez, being shown by Galerie Michel-Guy Chadelaud (www.chadelaud.com). The large painting that covers most of the lid depicts a social gathering on the terrace of a chateau. An inventory label provides evidence that this one-of-a-kind piece belonged to Queen Amélie of Portugal, and it is thought to have been the property before that of Maria Pia of Savoy, queen of Portugal and the Algarves.

● **Galerie Les Enluminures:** An extremely rare find discovered by the Galerie Les Enluminures (www.lesenluminures.com) is the Hours of Francis I, an illuminated manuscript on parchment made in France and dated

1539-40, near the end of the reign of François I, the great patron of the arts for whom this devotional book was made. Containing 18 large miniatures by the Master of François de Rohan, it is "unusual in that it shows an informal contemporary portrait of the king kneeling — a position he was rarely seen in — before Saint Marcouf," says Ariane Bergeron-Foote, researcher and archivist at the gallery. Only two books of hours belonging to François I are known to exist. This one comes from a private collection; the other is in the British Library.

● **Japon Antique:** To modern eyes, the armor worn by Japanese warriors during the Edo period (1603-1868) looks frightening enough to scare off an opponent without even using a weapon. Galerie Japon Antique, specialists in Japanese arms and armor, has a suit of Japanese armor that offers a good illustration of the fine craftsmanship that went into these protective suits, which were often passed down from generation to generation. "These are sculptures that are also of military and historical interest," says the owner, Christian Magnier. The warriors did not carry shields, so each suit of armor has a shoulder shield that would be presen-



ennobles the table," he says, "even if you are just eating boiled potatoes, because it is something special. It is intrinsically elegant, a sign of distinction, and lights up the home with its reflections." He points out that France has an especially rich tradition of silver-making, with solid pieces often bearing extravagant decoration.

As the most unusual piece in the shop, he chose a massive oval chased solid-silver centerpiece made c. 1880 in the Baroque Louis XV style by the house of Aucoc in Paris. "Look at the play of light on it," says Prêaux, pointing to the varying polished and matte surfaces. The oval-shaped frame has a swirling pattern of volutes and waves, and would have held a carafe of wine, perhaps, or a bouquet of flowers on its mirrored surface.

● **Galerie des Modernes:** Galerie des Modernes (www.galeriedesmodernes.com), specialists in master paintings and sculpture, offers a wide variety of works by leading artists representing most of the 20th century's major movements up to the 1970s. The gallery, founded in 1998 by Philip Bismuth and Vincent Amiaux, has just opened a new space in the Louvre des Antiquaires. It has chosen to spotlight "Les Sables d'Olonne: La Sortie du Port" (1921), painted in the port by Albert Marquet, whose sea views were recently the subject of a major exhibition at Paris's Musée de la Marine. "Marquet was fascinated by water," says



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