



Musée d'Orsay and the Pont Royal Crossing the Seine

# The Artistic Delicacies of Paris

Vivien Zielin

image info

I have spent many a quiet moment gazing at Rodin's [The Kiss](#) at the Tate Gallery on the banks of the River Thames in London. My eyes are always captivated by the cool sensuous lines of the white marble, the swirling intertwining bodies carved so artistically with such loving, beautiful balance and tenderness.

Now here I was, close to the banks of the River Seine in Paris, almost eyeball to eyeball with Rodin's pensive [The Thinker](#) as he pondered about life, the world, and the enormity of its challenges, and gazed with unfathomable sight across the gardens of the Musée Rodin surrounded by a huddle of [The Burghers of Calais](#). I was about to enter the main museum building, L'Hôtel Biron, to see the original of Rodin's three life-sized statues titled *The Kiss*. I couldn't wait.



Musée Rodin

It was 1996 and I was in Paris on my third trip to this fascinating city. I was taking a weekend break from my giftware store, the China Ware House Company, on London's Carnaby Street, leaving it in the capable hands of my partner Robert.

I was traveling with my friend Maddy. We had plotted and planned this trip for many weeks, deciding to focus on a menu of the artistic delights of Paris and basing ourselves in a small hotel located in the tangle of streets close to Notre Dame. Earlier that morning we had taken a leisurely stroll from our hotel to the Musée Rodin and were now ready to move on to our next visual delight—the Musée d'Orsay. On a previous visit to Paris in 1994, I had spotted the impressive Beaux-Arts exterior of this former railway station from the river, and I was eager to see its famed Impressionist collection containing works by some of my favorite artists.

Entering the high-domed ceiling of the forecourt of the former station, I was immediately struck by the way the traditional and modern blended with light and color

to seamlessly entice the visitor to take a deep breath and draw the energy to face the overwhelming richness of the art on display. I went from gallery to gallery dazzled by the colors, shapes, imagination, and works—many familiar to me, but some not—of my favorite artists: Renoir, Cezanne, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, van Gogh, Monet, Manet, Sisley, Degas, and Pissarro. It was a rich visual delight that I gorged on for hours, only emerging with my head spinning to meet Maddy in the foyer when the museum shut for the night.

One would have thought that with such a rich visual diet, we would go for something quieter in the evening, but we were stoked up and ready for more. We spent the evening enjoying the delights of Montmartre, wandering its winding streets and art galleries, listening to jazz, and sampling the menus and wines of some of its bistros.

The next morning our first priority was a leisurely breakfast. We sat outside on comfortable cane furniture at a small cafe near Notre Dame, watching the city come alive and



delighting in the hot strong coffee and fluffy pastry of freshly baked buttery croissants. Fortified and full, we then made our way to the Marais district to the Hotel Sale, which housed the Musée National Picasso. Picasso had for a long time held a special place in my heart.

Many years earlier, as a child in London, I had been summoned, together with some friends, to the principal's office to be reprimanded for some long forgotten

childish prank. As we stood silently in front of her desk, I was captivated by a painting on the wall behind her. It was so calm, and my eye delighted in its simplicity and the lovely blue and green colors. It was Picasso's *Child With A Dove*. From that day on, I became a firm Picasso fan, a somewhat surprising and unexpected legacy gained as the result of misbehaving in class. Many years later, as my appreciation increased, I traveled to Madrid to see a very different style of his art: his stunningly brilliant painting *Guernica*, which so convincingly conveyed the stark horror of war.

Aware of the enormously eclectic range of paintings, engravings, and sculptures that were part of this French National Picasso collection that would require weeks of study, I decided to focus on one aspect of Picasso's later art—his work with ceramics. At the China Ware House Company, we had recently begun to stock the Artis Orbis Homage Collection to Picasso, which had been authorized

for production by the Picasso estate, and I was eager to see some of the originals these works were based on. I was not disappointed. The range of colors, shapes, the sheer imagination displayed was mind-boggling. It was a carnival of colorful delight, a ceramic whirligig.

Time flew by and it was soon time for some re-energizing lunch. The museum was located in the Marais district, the traditional Jewish Quarter of Paris, and offered us the



Claude Monet's Water Lilies at Musée de l'Orangerie

perfect dish, a tasty falafel sandwich, making for the quick lunch we needed if we were to have time for our final artistic delicacy of this visit—Musée de l'Orangerie.

Though the Orangerie was offering a wide medley of our most admired artists' works, there was one location that pulled us toward it like a powerful magnet—the two oval rooms where we could float among the wonders of Monet's water lilies. These two rooms, each containing four curving canvasses, were constructed to receive shifting beams of light from the roof. They were fashioned like warm embraces to encircle you in a powerful, captivating hug

that allowed you to be imbued with the sheer beauty and colors of those wonderful water lilies. I have always thought that the goldfish is the most unfortunate of fish, sentenced to swim endlessly in circles, a passive observer of outside life. But to be a goldfish in these wonderful rooms, to luxuriate in the cooling circles of such timeless light-shifting waters could be a rather pleasant prospect.

As I stood there absorbed and immersed in the infinite beauty and light of those marvelous paintings, my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a familiar questioning voice.

"Hello, Vivien, what are you doing here? Is Robert with you?"

These oval rooms were really small and only allowed a small number of visitors at a time. I was just here in Paris for a long weekend with my friend , and didn't know anyone else in the city, so I looked around in some amazement. Standing just behind me were Kathy and Bob from California. They were regular customers to my China Ware House store, usually visiting London once a year and shipping English dinnerware home to Los Angeles. I had just spoken to them a few days ago in the shop, and they had said they were traveling on to France and Italy, but who would have imagined that I would bump into them in such a small and unique space?

With a smile I replied quietly so not to disturb the other art lovers, "Robert's back in London minding the store while I take a well-deserved short vacation. What a co-incidence to see you here. What a small world it is. How are you enjoying your travels in Paris?"

"It's wonderful," Kathy whispered back, "I've never seen so much wonderful art gathered in so many museums in one city, and these Monet Water Lily rooms must be among the *crème de la crème*."

"You are so right," I agreed, thinking to myself—what a lovely way to sum up our enjoyable short trip savoring the artistic delicacies of Paris. ❄️