

The Belle Époque numbers game

UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION

Paris. "There has never been a show on the subject of 'Paris 1900' in Paris before. Strangely enough there has also never been a general survey encompassing paintings, films, furniture and jewellery," says Christophe Leribault, the co-curator of the exhibition "Paris 1900" at the Petit Palais in Paris. Around 600 objects, many of them drawn from the permanent collection, reflect the heady atmosphere of Belle Époque Paris in the year when around 50 million tourists descended on the capital for the Paris Exposition Universelle.

The Petit Palais was built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition and became a museum in 1902. It houses works dating from antiquity to the First World War, by artists and sculptors such as Rodin, Cézanne, Rembrandt and

Rubens, but has been overshadowed by its sister building, the Grand Palais, and other Parisian municipal museums including the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

The show, with its populist themes and recognisable artists, is a concerted attempt to increase visitor numbers. Leribault, who was appointed director in November 2012, says: "Our original

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idea was to organise an exhibition related to the Petit Palais, focusing attention on the permanent collection and the building, but such a subject needed to be extended by many loans to create something more exceptional." These loans, from institutions including the National Gallery of Art in Wash-

ington, DC, and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Caen, were only requested around eight months ago.

The exhibition is divided into six sections or "pavilions", including an homage to Art Nouveau with works on show by Emile Gallé, René-Jules Lalique and Alfons Mucha whose sculpture *La Nature*, 1899-1900, portrays a nude woman with long golden hair. The darker side of turn-of-the-century Paris, with an underbelly of prostitution and drugs, is also depicted in paintings such as Santiago Rusiñol's *La Morphine*, 1894.

The art of Sarah Bernhardt

Another section sheds light on the capital's burgeoning painting scene; Paul Cézanne's painting *Ambroise Vollard*, 1899, and Claude Monet's *Nymphéas* (waterlilies), 1907, will be shown alongside less well-known works by artists such as Henri Gervex and William-Adolphe Bouguereau. "This section will be hung in the style of the Salon with pictures adjacent to each other. We will mix up the movements, from Realism to Impressionism, from Academicism to Symbolism," Leribault says.

The exhibition also charts the career of the French stage and film actress Sarah Bernhardt, elucidating her largely unknown vocation as an artist. She was taught by the sculptors Mathieu-Meusnier and Jules Franceschi in the 1870s.

From 1874, Bernhardt was regularly invited to participate in the French Salon, and like the leading proponents of the Art Nouveau style, also turned to the natural world for inspiration. Her bronze sculpture modeled on a maritime organism, *Une algue* (an alga), 1900, is included in the exhibition.

Gareth Harris

• Paris 1900: the City of Entertainment, Le Petit Palais, Paris, 2 April-17 August



The spirit of the age captured by Henri Gervex in *Une soirée au Pré-Catelan* (an evening at Pré-Catelan), 1909