

BOILLY (1761-1845)

PARISIAN CHRONICLES

16 FEBRUARY – 26 JUNE 2022



MUSÉE
COGNACQ-JAY

INFORMATION

museecognacjay.paris.fr

A virtuosic and prolific artist in a class of his own, Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845) was the enthusiastic chronicler of Parisian life for sixty years, spanning a period from one revolution to the dawn of the next (1789 and 1848). In addition to being a portraitist for the Parisians and a painter of city scenes, Boilly was also the inventor of stunning *trompe-l'œil* and the author of witty caricatures.

This monographic exhibition explores Boilly's productive career through a selection of 130 works, giving us a glimpse into the artist's uniqueness, brilliance, humour and inventiveness. It presents several previously unseen masterpieces, some of which have never been shown in France.

Born in the North of France, Boilly set out to win over the capital at the age of 24, in 1785. He would live there his whole life. Taking little interest in the grand history of Paris, he instead became fascinated by the city's modernity, its hustle and bustle, and its many spectacles. As a true chronicler of everyday life, Boilly painted an intimate portrait of his generation.

The artist developed a fondness for scrutinising the views and faces he came across in the city. He distinguished himself in the art of portraiture by capturing the faces of Parisians on the small formats that would become his trademark. The portraitist was also a keen caricaturist who looked at his fellow citizens with an amused, and perhaps even scathing, eye. His taste for provocation and technical proficiency can also be found in his stunningly illusionistic *trompe-l'œil*.

The exhibition also showcases the subtle tricks the artist employed to depict himself in his works. In addition to painting derisive self-portraits and using a variety of signatures, he also slid his likeness amongst the protagonists of his crowd scenes, just as Alfred Hitchcock did in his films. These stratagems establish a knowing relationship between the artist and viewer. Throughout the exhibition, visitors are taken along on a fun treasure hunt to find Boilly's face or clues of his presence.

Organised as a follow-up to the publication of Etienne Bréton and Pascal Zuber's catalogue raisonné of the artist's work (Arthena publishing house, 2019), the exhibition will be an opportunity to discover several masterpieces never before shown in France and loaned by prestigious private collections, including one of the largest, currently held by the Ramsbury Manor Foundation (United Kingdom).

The exhibition takes on a greater dimension from being shown in eight of the museum's rooms, as in the previous show, *The Empire of the Senses, from Boucher to Greuze*.

CONTACT

Pierre Laporte Communication Alice Delacharley : alice@pierre-laporte.com - 01 78 94 57 91
Musée Cognac-Jay Anne-Claire Parize : anne-claire.parize@paris.fr - 01 84 82 11 63



Louis-Léopold Boilly, Self-portrait as *Laughing John*, circa 1808-1810. Private collection.

Boilly in the limelight

Boilly found great enjoyment in depicting himself, and did so in fifteen or so self-portraits or “self-caricatures”. He liked to hide himself in the crowds he painted in his larger compositions. As a chronicler and true witness of the evolution of Paris, he chose to place himself among his contemporaries. One work after another, visitors are invited to look for Boilly’s face, the presence of which acts as the artist’s signature.

Chronicles of Parisian life

Boilly devoted a large portion of his work to painting the unusual aspects of Paris. He focused on bustling scenes of everyday life and on the behaviours of his fellow citizens: crossing a street in the rain, the incessant toing and froing of hackney cabs, travellers saying farewell in the Cour des Messageries, or the colourful parade of Parisian society during carnival festivities. He frequented cafes and billiard rooms, and also took the time to depict a prison yard. Boilly became witness to a new society and to the ways in which it found entertainment: he revealed the fierce reactions that the theatre inspired and the hustle and bustle of the Grands Boulevards, always focusing his attention on the reactions of the public. In this section of the exhibit, the Louvre’s masterpiece, *The Arrival of the Stagecoach*, will be the subject of a study of its own, which will highlight the artist’s unique work method.



Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Entrance to a free show at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique*, 1819. Paris, Louvre Museum.

CONTACT

Pierre Laporte Communication Alice Delacharley : alice@pierre-laporte.com - 01 78 94 57 91
Musée Cognacq-Jay Anne-Claire Parize : anne-claire.parize@paris.fr - 01 84 82 11 63

The many faces of Paris

By 1800, Boilly had made a name for himself as one of the most sought-after portraitists of the capital. He painted portraits of all and any Parisians, whether famous or unknown, as well as various personalities passing through. He developed a “lightning-fast” method of production that would garner him considerable success, painting small-format portraits (21 x 16 cm) in barely two hours, which he consistently presented in a gilded frame. 5,000 faces were thus immortalised by Boilly’s paintbrush; 800 of these are accounted for today, 40 of which will be presented in the exhibition. Boilly also produced series of caricatures aimed at describing the personalities of his contemporaries in the manner of a human comedy.



Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Trompe l'œil*, circa 1800. Private collection.



Louis-Léopold Boilly, *Two Young Women Kissing*, circa 1789-1793. London, The Ramsbury Manor Foundation.

The Paris of artists

As a member of a vast network of artists, Boilly gives us a glimpse into the studios of his colleagues, including the sculptor Houdon and painter Isabey. In doing so, he implicitly offers a reflection on the mutation of the art world, the emergence of its public and the development of the art market. Boilly caused a stir when he presented his *Trompe-l'œil* at the Salon in 1800. He would make the technique one of his specialties and use it as proof of his virtuosity. The ever-curious man, Boilly was also fascinated by the technical innovations of his time, and collected optical instruments that he used to perfect the illusionism in some of his compositions. A selection of these devices will be presented for the first time alongside the artist’s works.

From boulevards to boudoirs

The final section of the exhibition will be devoted to Parisian interiors and libertine scenes, and will be shown amid the museum’s permanent collections and alongside the three works owned by the Cognacq-Jay collection. This selection provides a glimpse into the intimacy of Parisian boudoirs and their risqué activities in the style of the 18th century.

CONTACT

Pierre Laporte Communication Alice Delacharley : alice@pierre-laporte.com - 01 78 94 57 91
Musée Cognacq-Jay Anne-Claire Parize : anne-claire.parize@paris.fr - 01 84 82 11 63

GENERAL CURATORSHIP

Annick Lemoine, director of the musée Cognacq-Jay

Sixtine de Saint-Léger, assistant curator for the musée Cognacq-Jay

SCIENTIFIC BOARD

Étienne Bréton, art historian and director of a consultancy and art appraisal firm

Pascal Zuber, art historian and director of a consultancy and art appraisal firm

Étienne Bréton and Pascal Zuber are the authors of the catalogue raisonné *Boilly, Le peintre de la société parisienne de Louis XVI à Louis-Philippe* (Paris, Arthena publishing house, 2019).

The **exhibition catalogue**, which will be published by Paris Musées, will feature thematic essays about Boilly written by French and international experts, along with a comprehensive selection of images that highlight the most singular and intriguing details of his compositions.

MUSÉE COGNACQ-JAY: A TASTE FOR THE 18TH CENTURY

Inaugurated in 1929, the Musée Cognacq-Jay brings together the collection that Ernest Cognacq and Marie-Louise Jaÿ, founders of the La Samaritaine department stores, bequeathed to the City of Paris. Devoted to 18th-century arts, the museum presents a large collection of paintings, sculptures, Saxon porcelain, goldsmithery, and stamped furniture evocative of the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment. A historic hotel particulier in the Marais quarter provides the perfect setting for the greatest artists of their time, such as Tiepolo, Chardin, Oeben, Clodion, Gouthière, as well as Greuze, Fragonard and Boucher. The museum owns three paintings by Louis-Léopold Boilly: *The Sweet Awakening*, *Peeping Tom*, and *Down the Staircase*, the first two of which have been specially restored for the exhibition.

The museum's website has recently been updated with new graphics and a more user-friendly design. It is now smartphone-compatible, with a clearer and simpler aesthetic that showcases the artwork and pictures in a more appealing way. The generalisation of online ticket sales will make it easier for users to book visits. The site is now also available in English.

8 rue Elzévir – 75003 Paris

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 to 18:00

Combined ticket for temporary and permanent exhibitions:

full price: 8 € / reduced price: 6 €



Louis-Léopold Boilly, *The Sweet Awakening*, circa 1789-1793. Paris, Musée Cognacq-Jay.

CONTACT

Pierre Laporte Communication Alice Delacharley : alice@pierre-laporte.com - 01 78 94 57 91

Musée Cognacq-Jay Anne-Claire Parize : anne-claire.parize@paris.fr - 01 84 82 11 63