

THE STRANGE TALES OF NIELS HANSEN JACOBSEN

A DANE IN PARIS (1892-1902)

**MUSÉE
BOURDELLE**

**EXHIBITION
FROM JANUARY 29
TO MAY 31, 2020**

INFORMATION
www.bourdelle.paris.fr

PRESS OPENING: JANUARY 28, 2020 FROM 10 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

This exhibition, the first to be dedicated to Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941) in France, invites visitors to an oneiric journey into the world of this Danish sculptor and ceramist, a contemporary of Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929).

His work was strongly marked by a taste for the bizarre, the ambiguous, even the macabre—the “uncanny”, to quote an expression coined by Sigmund Freud a few years later. His sculptures revived Nordic mythology and Scandinavian legends, the orality of folklore and the fantastic aspects of Andersen’s tales.

From 1892 to 1902, Hansen Jacobsen settled in Paris. His studio at 65, Boulevard Arago became the meeting place for a group of francophile Danes, in a “cité d’artistes” where, among others, the ceramist Jean Carriès and the illustrator Eugène Grasset lived.

This community of artists was associated with symbolist circles; from 1880 to 1900, this literary and artistic movement sought to transcribe the inexpressible by a play of poetical and plastic correspondences.

The parallel though individually different careers of Hansen Jacobsen and Bourdelle both contributed to the radiant influence of the symbolist spirit, in the wake of Gustave Moreau and Paul Gauguin. They were also part of the modernity of Art Nouveau, an international movement born at the very end of the 19th century, which used nature as a new ornamental repertoire.

In doing so, the exhibition acknowledges the essential position that Niels Hansen Jacobsen deserves in the laboratory of formal inventions in the Paris of the 1890s, when each work seemed to speak “secretly to the soul its sweet mother-tongue” (Charles Baudelaire, “Invitation to the Voyage”, *The Flowers of Evil*, 1857).

The exhibition is organised in collaboration with the Vejen Art Museum. It benefits from the exceptional participation of the Petit Palais, Paris museum of Fine Arts.

PRESS CONTACTS

Pierre Laporte Communication

Alice DELACHARLERY :

alice@pierre-laporte.com - +33 (0)1 78 94 57 91

Marie LASCAUX :

marie.lascaux@pierre-laporte.com - +33 (0)1 78 94 57 90



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941)
Masque de l'Automne, vers 1896-1903. Grès émaillé,
26 x 33,5 x 10 cm. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum

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GENERAL CURATORS

Teresa Nielsen, director of Vejen Kunstmuseum

Amélie Simier, director of musée Bourdelle

SCIENTIFIC CURATOR

Jérôme Godeau, art historian, musée Bourdelle

65, BOULEVARD ARAGO, A DANISH SYMBOLIST CIRCLE IN PARIS

Niels Hansen Jacobsen, the son of a farmer, was born in Vejen, a small Danish industrial town in the Jutland, and trained at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of Copenhagen in the tradition of the famous sculptor Berthel Thorvaldsen, imbued with the models of antique statuary. A travel scholarship rewarded his talent and led him to Italy, Germany and Paris, then considered the “capital of the Arts”; he settled there in 1892 for ten years.

From Montmartre to Montparnasse, “cités d’artistes” (studios and living quarters for artists) appeared, such as the current Bourdelle museum. At 65, Boulevard Arago, a wise contractor placed around a garden various pavilions, remnants of the 1878 World Fair. It was in this “kind of artistic monastery” (to use the words of the art critic Arsène Alexandre, who frequented it)—a place preserved today under the name “Cité fleurie”—that Hansen Jacobsen and his wife, the painter Anna Gabriele Rohde, settled. They joined the communities of Nordic and North American sculptors. Soon, they encouraged their Danish friends to join them: the painters Axel Hou, Jens Lund, Henriette Hahn, Johannes Holbeck, and the sculptor Rudolph Tegner. Emulation was all the greater as they rubbed shoulders with the major figures of symbolism: the sculptor and potter Jean Carriès, the illustrator Eugene Grasset, and the ceramist Paul Jeanneney, who collected Japanese pottery.

Hansen Jacobsen’s eminently original work stemmed from his estrangement from Denmark and this melting pot of artists, an alchemy of Nordic identity, symbolist obsessions, Art Nouveau aesthetics and radical technical experiments.



↑ Anna Gabriele Rohde dans le jardin du 65, boulevard Arago, entre 1892 et 1902. Photographie anonyme. Archives de Visavuori, Valkeakoski. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum



↑ Henriette Hahn-Brinckmann (1862-1934), *Crépuscule : portrait du sculpteur Niels Hansen Jacobsen*, vers 1900-1904. Gravure sur bois à six couleurs. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum

THE LITTLE MERMAID (1901)

When he completed *The Little Mermaid* (1837), Hans Christian Andersen confessed: “It is the only one of my works that moved me while I was writing it”. The Danish writer’s daughter of the sea belonged to the important trend of nymph figures, of young women associated with nature, who kept on resurfacing—from romantic reveries to the mysteries of symbolism and the volutes of Art Nouveau.

The in-the-round transposition by Niels Hansen Jacobsen of *The Little Mermaid* in 1901 placed the serpentine body of the water sprite within a spinning movement. The ornamental prowess of the compositions of Jens Lund—a compatriot of Hansen Jacobsen in the Cité fleurie—were also based on the logic of the arabesque. The ambivalence of this plastic rhythm led to images of desire and death that emerged in the elusive waters of Gustave Moreau’s watercolours, in the oceanic dreams of the Dane Henry Brokman or in the obscure flux of Odilon Redon’s lithographs.

The organic ceramics of Jean Carriès and Hansen Jacobsen, the foamy hues and vitreous texture of François Décorchemont, and Georges Despret’s pâte de verre works invite one to meditate on the imagination of texture, to a reverie on “feminine water”, according to Gaston Bachelard’s expression (*Water and Dreams*, 1941), and its mysteries. The iridescent opalescence of the work of the American stain-glass artist Louis-Comfort Tiffany irresistibly evokes the “living parasol” of the medusa and “its fine hairs, which are its organs to breathe, absorb and even love”. (Jules Michelet, *The Sea*, 1875).



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941)
La Petite Sirène, 1901. Plâtre
Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum



↑ Jens Lund (1871-1924), *La Gloire du Seigneur*,
1899-1900. Huile sur toile partiellement recouverte
de feuille d’or. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum

THE ALCHEMY OF CERAMICS

Clay is the raw material of the sculptor, but the completion of his work requires the intervention of foundry workers for the bronze or that of specialists for marble. On the contrary, glazed stoneware makes it possible to reclaim the totality of the creative gesture, the modelling, the glazing, then the firing, the whims of the fire making each object unique.

The discovery of Japanese stoneware pots at the 1878 World Fair was an artistic revolution. Vegetable forms, asymmetric construction, irregular clays, dull or shiny enamels, drippings and multi-layered surfaces—these Japanese stoneware pieces were eagerly sought after by collectors and by sculptors turned potters.

At the 1892 Salon of the National Society of Fine Arts, all of the great names of the avant-garde ceramics were present: Chaplet, Dalpayrat, Dammouse, Deck, Delaherche, Gauguin, Lachenal, then Bigot, Jeanneney... and, Carriès, the neighbour of 65, Boulevard Arago, one of the most daring.

Jacobsen started working with stoneware in 1894—maybe under the influence of Carriès. His pieces, exhibited in Paris between 1898 and 1903, stood out for their more unpolished and more experimental aspect: pots with convoluted shapes, glaze flowing like bodily humours, aggregates of raw materials, jigsawed metal partitions... When he went back to Denmark, the artist would pursue his alchemic research until his death, ensuring that his enamelling techniques would disappear with him.



↑ Odilon Redon (1840-1916), *Naissance de Vénus*, vers 1912. Pastel sur papier collé sur carton. Paris, Petit Palais - musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, donation Jacques-Michel Zoubaloff, 1916



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941), *Ensemble de coupes, vases, pots, chandelier et presse-papier*, vers 1896-1903. Grés émaillé, certains rehaussés d'éléments métalliques (alliages d'étain et de plomb). Vejlen, Vejlen Kunstmuseum

GLAZED STONEWARE

Once baked, the clay becomes ceramic. There are two kinds of ceramic: porous pastes, made waterproof by a glaze—glazed clay, earthenware; pastes vitrified within the body—porcelain, stoneware.

If stoneware was discovered in China in the 15th century B.C., its high temperature firing process (from 1150° to 1350°) was really mastered ten centuries later. In France, stoneware clay quarries were exploited from the Middle Ages to produce waterproof and functional objects, which did not crack from the effects of frost.

Alongside the industrial productions, the artistic use of stoneware developed in the late 19th century: the subtle range of its natural colours was revealed by wood, then gas firing, and more or less oxygen; applied glazes, melting and vitrifying during the firing, provided other effects of colour and textures.

All of these possible combinations were left to the estimation of the potter turned alchemist: it fell to him to anticipate the result of such and such mixture of clay, such and such superimposition of glazes, depending on the arrangement of the pieces in the kiln, the firing temperature, the methods, etc.

While Hansen Jacobsen mastered the process and revelled in the margins of chance it offered, Bourdelle preferred to entrust the colouring of his sculptures to Alexandre Bigot, a ceramist and experienced scientist. The two artists would exhibit their ceramics in the Salons and World Fairs.



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941), *Palette d'émaux*, après 1902. Grès émaillé. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum

A TROLL SMELLING CHRISTIAN FLESH (1896). SAVAGERY OF THE PSYCHIC FOREST

Created by Niels Hansen Jacobsen during a stay in Denmark in 1896, *A Troll smelling Christian flesh* was inspired by an age-old figure of Scandinavian folklore. A tail, horns, talons in the shape of three-fingered pincers—as if a diabolical denial of the Christian Trinity? On the lookout in the primeval forest, the bestial creature evokes primal and devouring urges. The formal logic of the Troll was born of a rich soil of vernacular and plastic references.

The dynamic process of hybridization was directly inspired by Paul Gauguin, the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic pots of the ceramist playing with fire to celebrate the *ensavagement* of the artist. Like those of Gauguin, the glazed stoneware of Carriès and Hansen Jacobsen draw out from the “inner furnace” (Paul Gauguin) the monsters of primitive voraciousness, so as to summon and ward them off at the same time.

Nothing is more pertinent than to couple together symbolism, *sun-bolos*—the sign of what unites the spirit to the world— and its opposite, diabolism, *dia-bolos*—the sign of what divides, separates, opposes. The desperate hunger for primordial unity is coupled with the fear of dislocation, with the anguish of being devoured in one’s turn. An anguish which finds its own symbolic and plastic expression in the figures of witches and she-wolves which resurface in Eugène Grasset’s watercolour *Three Women and Three Wolves* (circa 1900), and in the incandescent oil painting of Paul Ranson, *The Witch with the Black Cat* (1893).



↑ Eugène Grasset (1845-1917), *Trois femmes et trois loups*, vers 1892. Crayon, aquarelle, encre de chine et rehauts d’or sur papier. Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941), *Troll qui flaire la chair de chrétiens*, 1896. Bronze. 157 x 198 x 85 cm. Dans l’exposition : Jesuskirken, Valby, Danemark. Exemple photographié ici : Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhague. Photo : Pernille Klemp

MASKS AND MEDUSA. CONFRONTING THE GORGON

Because it reduces the being to its simplest face, because it is its most striking epitome, the mask was a form tremendously successful among artists of the late 19th century, in search of synthetic expressions and powerful symbols. As such, Japan and the Noh theatre with its masks—one of which Bourdelle owned—, were a major source of inspiration, abounding in a thousand and one variations.

While some of his ceramics belong to the genre of naturalistic portrait, Hansen Jacobsen exhibited at the 1900 World Fair a nightmarish allegory with his *Autumn Mask*.

The mask, which freezes the living to the point of petrification, is less a “seducing ornament” than the apparition of the “real head and sincere face” (Charles Baudelaire, “The Mask”, *The Flowers of Evil*, 1861). With its folds and viscosities, with its enucleated eyes or its tongue caressing a serpent, the mask stares at death in action and reveals the most archaic sexuality.

The mask, the decapitated head of John the Baptist gazed at by *Salome in the Garden* (1871), a drawing by Gustave Moreau, inexorably evokes Medusa, the deadly Gorgon whose evil head was chopped off by Perseus. In this respect, Antoine Bourdelle, Pierre-Amédée Marcel-Berroneau, and above all Arnold Böcklin, with his frightened *Medusa* (1897), created images all the more petrifying because they brought together, on the same face, Eros and Thanatos, love and death.



↑ Jean Carriès (1855-1894), *Masque aux lèvres serrées* dit aussi *Masque de Carriès faisant la moue*, vers 1887. Grès émaillé. Paris, Petit Palais – musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, donation Georges Hoentschel, 1904



↑ Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), *Bouclier avec le visage de Méduse*, 1897. Relief en papier mâché peint et doré. Paris, musée d'Orsay, achat, 2007



↑ Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929), *Marteau de porte, Tête de Méduse*, 1925. Plâtre. Paris, musée Bourdelle, legs Rhodia Dufet-Bourdelle, 2002

THE PART OF SHADOW

Elusive by nature, the shadow is a figure of impermanence, of uncertainty, of death even. It is also, in the words of Clément Rosset (2004), a “signature of the real”, because only a tangible body can project a shadow. The symbolists got an added meaning out of this ambiguous darkness: the shadow acts as something that reveals the irrational, the uncontrollable but necessary part of oneself. Its realm is that of hybrid and nocturnal animals that haunt the ceramics of Hansen Jacobsen, the etchings of František Kupka, the photographs of Brassai, and *The Night* (1894) of Victor Prouvé. But this symbolist masterpiece also conjures up works on the exploration of dreams, research on sleep and hypnosis of the Nancy School works contemporary of those of Hansen Jacobsen.

The nightmarish apparitions of Boleslas Biegas’ *Chopin* and the ghostly visions of Bourdelle’s glass plates arise from the dark realms of the psyche. The gloomy arabesques of Jens Lund allow the emergence of unspeakable desires that assail, like so many menacing doubles, the masculine figure of Bourdelle’s marble, or the closed-eyed mask of Grasset’s brooch. “I is another” according to Arthur Rimbaud’s formula...

The Shadow (1897) by Hansen Jacobsen— a plastic transcription of the eponymous tale by Hans Christian Andersen (1847) in which the scholar who has lost his shadow becomes its victim—refers to some sinister obvious fact: this long piece of rag folds, unfolds and expands like the drapery of a wave which could engulf the body it used to project.



↑ Antoine Bourdelle (1861-1929),
Le Jour et la Nuit, 1904. Marbre.
Paris, musée Bourdelle, legs Rhodia Dufet
Bourdelle, 2002



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941), *L'Ombre*, 1897. Bronze. Vejlen, Vejlen Kunstmuseum

**DEATH AND THE MOTHER (1893).
THE ARABESQUE OF THE FEMININE**



↑ Niels Hansen Jacobsen (1861-1941), *La Mort et la Mère*, 1892. Bronze. Vejen, Vejen Kunstmuseum

Even darker than *The Little Mermaid* (1837), *The Story of a Mother* (1847) evokes the impossibility to decide between “the flower of misfortune” from “the blessed one”, as Hans Christian Andersen put it. The ending of the text inspired Niels Hansen Jacobsen the plastic transposition of *The Death and the Mother*, exhibited at the 1893 Salon of the National Society of Fine Arts. Whorling, volutes, spiralling... from the gyratory movement of Death from the fluidity of the dress and the floating hair, the feminine opens an undulatory space into which one can sink.

The serpentine eroticism of the arabesque takes on a mortiferous power with Eugène Grasset’s *The Acid Thrower* (1894) and *The Woman in the Black Hat* (circa 1898-1900) by Georges de Feure. Whatever possessed the floral graces of Art Nouveau to turn so easily into figures of castration—Medusa, mermaid, strix or vampire—? The ghoulish capturing net leaves the mark of all its darkness to the lithographs of Edvard Munch or Eugène Carrière.

Flowers of Evil (1890) by Odilon Redon, *Whore Flower and Night Flower* (1898) by Jens Lund, and the ornamental and fatal *Féminifloras (Feminiifloras)* by George de Feure... Between exorcism and fascination, Medusa’s mask continually resurfaces beneath the icon of the flower-woman—an enigmatic image, which Sigmund Freud interpreted as the horrifying representation of maternal sexual power.



↑ Edvard Munch (1863-1944), *Madonna*, 1895. Estampe, épreuve. Lithographie sur carte verte. Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d’art moderne/Centre de création industrielle, donation Utenriksministeren/Ministère des affaires étrangères de Norvège, 1964

THE MUSÉE BOURDELLE



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© Paris Musées / Photo Benoit Fougeirol

Situated in the heart of Montparnasse, the Musée Bourdelle is one of the last examples of the centres in which Parisian artists flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Bourdelle, the sculptor of *Hercules the Archer*, and the designer of the facades of the *Théâtre des Champs Elysées*, lived, created and taught in this place from 1885 until his death in 1929.

The series of spaces and gardens around his preserved studio contain studies, sketches, models and everything that went towards the creation of a work. The Grand Hall built in 1961 and its gardens display the monumental sculptures he created for the public space, while the extension designed by Christian de Portzamparc and constructed in 1992 is the setting for temporary exhibitions.

The exhibition in the former studios offers the chance for visitors to rediscover Bourdelle and his production from his early days until his maturity, from the initial sketches to the final works. It comprises a hundred or so sculptures, drawings, photographs and archive documents with the theme the “spirit of the studio”, echoing the architecture of the places and the creative processes seen at work.

In the former studio of the painter Eugène Carrière, next to Bourdelle’s in the heart of the museum and its permanent collections, a room offers an educational, visual, tactile and sonic presentation of sculpture techniques.

As a counterpoint to the poetic geography of the studio-museum, the renovation of the painting studio – as similar as possible to its state in the photographs left by the artist – has been inspired by the Musée Bourdelle’s thoughts on the life and practice of an artist’s studio, emphasising its nature as a centre of deep-rooted existence, and a place of transmission and “permanent” creation.

THE STRANGE TALES OF NIELS HANSEN JACOBSEN

Practical Information

MUSÉE BOURDELLE
18, rue Antoine Bourdelle
75015 Paris
Tel.: +33 (0)1 49 54 73 73
www.bourdelle.paris.fr
Metro: Lines 4, 6, 12, 13 :
Montparnasse - Bienvenüe
(exit 2 - Place Bienvenüe)

Opening times

10am–6pm,
Tuesday to Sunday, closed
Mondays and on certain
Bank Holidays.
(closed on May 1st)

Ticket prices

Full: 9 €,
Reduced: 7 €
Free for under-18s

Cultural activities

Activities for all audiences, all ages
Information, reservation:
EPPM-bourdelle.reservations@paris.fr
Tel.: +33 (0)1 84 82 14 55

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Communication

Fasia Ouaguenouni
fasia.ouaguenouni@paris.fr
Tel.: +33 (0)1 71 28 15 11

Press contacts

Pierre Laporte Communication
Alice DELACHARLERY :
alice@pierre-laporte.com
Tel.: +33 (0)1 78 94 57 91
Marie LASCAUX :
marie.lascaux@pierre-laporte.com
Tel.: +33 (0)1 78 94 57 90

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The Board of Directors is chaired by Christophe Girard, Vice-Mayor of Paris for Culture, and the Vice Chairman is Afaf Gabelotaud, Vice-Mayor of Paris for Employment Policies.

Delphine Lévy is General Manager of Paris Musées.

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