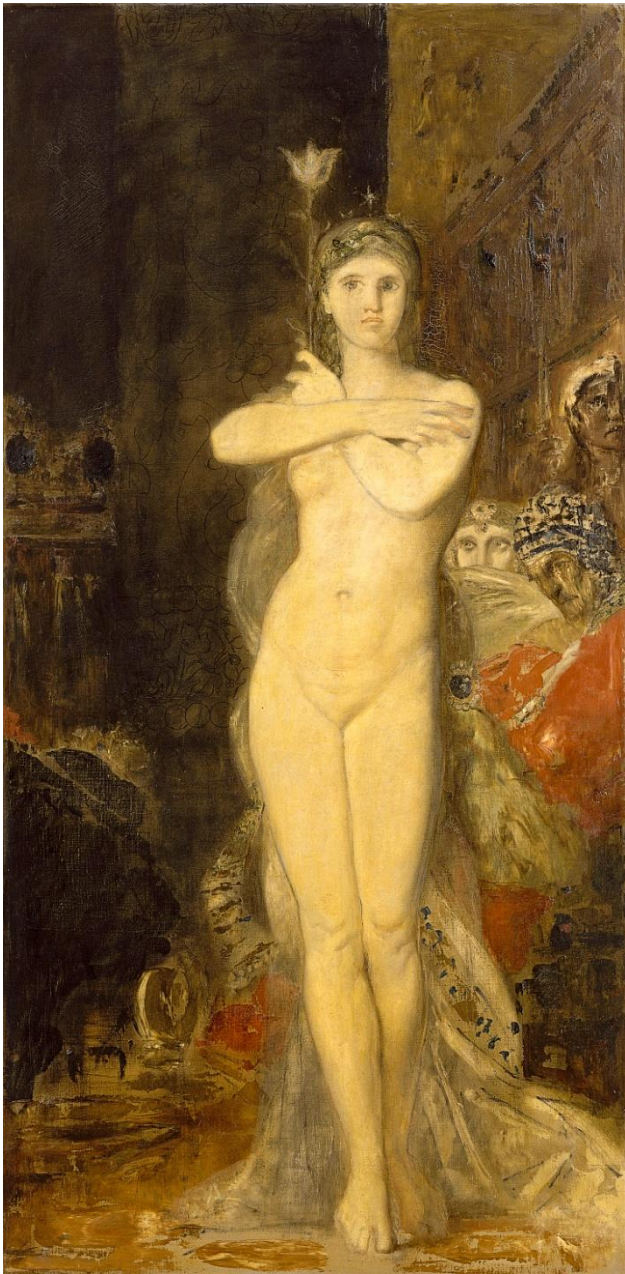


GUSTAVE & MOREAU the Eternal Feminine



Be seduced by *femmes fatales*, goddesses and temptresses of history and legend at the NGV this summer in *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine*, the first significant exhibition of Gustave Moreau (1826–1898) to be seen in Australia.

From tomorrow, the superb craftsmanship of Gustave Moreau will be celebrated with over 100 paintings, watercolours and drawings from the unique and acclaimed *Musée Gustave Moreau* in Paris.

Gerard Vaughan, Director, NGV said this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Australians to see these captivating works by Moreau.

“Visitors will embrace Moreau’s portrayals of familiar historical and mythical characters. From famed *femmes fatales* including Salomé, Helen of Troy and Lady Macbeth to the rugged depictions of Hercules and the Cyclops, this spectacular exhibition will reveal the many faces of Gustave Moreau.

“Moreau’s pictures are amongst the most haunting and mysterious of the entire 19th century, and ironically are incredibly modern. This is a must see exhibition!” said Dr Vaughan.

Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine will explore the artist’s obsession with the female form, taking visitors on a voyage from classical antiquity and the ancient Far East, to Christianity’s more lurid escapades and epic narratives of the Middle Ages.

Ted Gott, Senior Curator, International Art, NGV said: “Throughout his life Moreau was both entranced by female beauty and captivated by the allure of powerful,

even dangerous women from the pages of history and legend, making him a cult figure for today’s younger generation who are spellbound by gothic tales and imagery.

“Moreau’s fascination with heroines and queens, goddesses and temptresses were screens through which he could filter his explorations of the key themes of the Eternal Feminine: obsession, dream, luxury, magic, the *femme fatale*, exoticism and the ideal,” said Dr Gott.

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A highlight of the exhibition will be a section devoted to Moreau's most celebrated and intriguing obsession – the story of Salomé and the beheading of John the Baptist. Salomé is often depicted as an icon of dangerous female seductiveness and in this famous tale, her stepfather Herod requests Salomé to dance for him on his birthday in exchange for anything she desires. Salomé dances and then orders the beheading of John the Baptist who was in prison at the time for criticising the marriage of her mother, Herodias and stepfather Herod.

During his youth, Moreau was obsessed with Italian art of the 14th and 15th centuries, and with narratives drawn from the classical past. This exhibition will feature the tales and tribulations of well known characters from history – both real and mythological – including Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Messalina, Lady Macbeth, Samson and Delilah, Galatea, Sappho and Salomé.

Whilst many of Moreau's works are filled with mythical female characters, in life he was surrounded by two key female figures: his mother and his girlfriend, Alexandrine Dureux. Moreau lived with his mother until her passing in 1884, while Dureux lived nearby. After Dureux's death in 1890, Moreau transformed his family home into a museum, creating massive ateliers for the display of more than 5,000 of his own works of art, as well as dedicating rooms to his father, his mother and Alexandrine Dureux. Left to the French nation in Moreau's will in 1898 and officially opened to the public in 1903, the *Musée Gustave Moreau* remains one of the world's most unique and extraordinary single-artist museums.

Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine is on display at NGV International, St Kilda Road from 10 December 2010 to 10 April 2011. NGV International is open 10am–5pm, closed Tuesdays. Admission fees apply: Adult \$15 / Concession \$12 / Child \$7.50 / Family \$42.

Exhibition organised with Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris.

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JUPITER AND EUROPA

Europa was the daughter of King Agenor, ruler of Tyre in Lebanon. Captivated by her beauty, Jupiter stole down from the heavens and disguised himself as a dazzling white bull, mingling with the other cattle tended by Europa. Attracted to this snowy-white newcomer to her herd, Europa was persuaded to sit on the creature's back. She was then taken to the seashore and carried across the ocean. After placing Europa on the sands of Crete, Jupiter changed back into human form, taking her as his bride and making her first queen of the island.

This was the subject Gustave Moreau took for his painting, *Jupiter and Europa* (left), shown at the Paris Salon of 1869. He was faced with a barrage of negative and even hostile criticism, at this time, however, his work falling victim to the increasing new popularity for painting realistic observations of nature.

HERCULES AND DEIANIRA

In this epic tale from Greek mythology, Hercules accepted an offer made by the centaur Nessus to transport Deianira safely over the raging waters, while Hercules swam across the river solo. Betraying his word, Nessus attempted to abduct Deianira for himself. Alerted by Deianira's cries, Hercules shot Nessus with an arrow dipped in poisonous blood. As the centaur was dying, he sought revenge on Hercules by giving Deianira his cloak, soaked with his blood and the poison, telling her it possessed the powers of a love potion. Years later, consumed by jealousy over rumours of Hercules' affair with another woman, Deianira sought to use Nessus' gift to win back the affections of her husband. Donning the cloak given to him by his suspicious wife, Hercules then suffered an agonising death. After killing the man she loved, Deianira, in despair, took her own life.

Gustave Moreau was captivated by this story of love, jealousy and betrayal, and examined the tale in more than 150 drawings and paintings created between 1860 and 1890.



ULYSSES AND THE SIRENS

In Homer's *The Odyssey* the sirens inhabit a dangerously rocky stretch of coastline, enticing unwary sailors towards their destruction with their seductively melodious singing. Homer tells of how Ulysses, wishing to hear their song and live, ordered his ship's crew to lash him to the mast of their boat while they blocked their own ears with honey and melted wax. Ulysses' pleas to untie him subsequently fell on deaf ears, and his ship successfully sailed passed the sirens.

In Moreau's treatments of this ancient Greek myth it is the sirens that are the primary focus, rather than the heroic figure of Ulysses himself. This treatment of a classical tale was fundamental to Moreau's attempts to rejuvenate historical painting.



SALOMÉ

In 1876 Moreau returned triumphantly to the Paris Salon with two treatments of the Christian story of Salomé, the oil painting *Salomé Dancing before Herod* and the watercolour *The Apparition*. An oil version of *The Apparition* (left) is on show at the NGV. Salomé was Christianity's ultimate *femme fatale*, the epitome of dangerous sexuality and predatory desire, and throughout the latter half of the 19th century, she fascinated poets, artists, novelists and playwrights.

The dramatic New Testament tale of Salomé's seduction of Herod and the beheading of John the Baptist gave Moreau full scope for re-evaluating both his art and his iconography, following the failure of *Jupiter and Europa* at the Salon of 1869. This exotic new style was softer but more detailed in its portrayal.

Moreau now received some of the most glowing reviews of his career, as the critics reacted with astonishment to the complete reinvention of his art.

HELEN OF TROY

According to mythology Helen, the daughter of Leda and Zeus, was born in Sparta in Greece during the heroic age. Following Helen's seduction, or abduction, by Paris the Prince of Troy, the Greek forces united to destroy the Trojan capital. There is no evidence that Helen willingly played a central role in the fall of Troy but her immortal beauty and adulterous love for Paris contributed nonetheless to the destruction of two great armies.

In more than fifty renderings of this subject, Moreau depicted Helen after the downfall of Troy. In most of Moreau's works containing Helen, the queen is seemingly oblivious to the carnage before her.

FEMMES FATALES

The term *femme fatale* (fatal woman) emerged in the middle of the 19th century, when attitudes to women began to shift as a direct outcome of the growth of the middle class. The *femme fatale* was characterised as worldly, alluring and independent, with a predatory nature that was ultimately destructive to any man who fell victim to her seductive powers. Unlike the Romantic heroine who existed in a realm of erotic haziness, she propelled a negative energy of wickedness and sadomasochism.

For Moreau, the theme of strong women and their destructive force was one he returned to time and again in dream-like works that had a compelling exoticism and otherworldliness. Legendary women from history, literature and mythology fuelled his vision of the irresistible but deadly *femme fatale*.



THE POETESS

The ancient Greek poet Sappho was supposedly so grief-stricken after being abandoned by her lover, the ferryman Phaon, that she lost her poet's gift of eloquence. Sappho plunged to her death from the White Rock of Leukas, in despair over her unrequited love for Phaon. As the poet falls she arouses love and invokes the breeze to carry her slight body to the water below.

For Moreau, Sappho embodied the eternal feminine as seen in the creative inspiration brought by love. Moreau's works featuring Sappho, focus on her tragic relationship with Phaon and subsequent suicide.



THE LADY AND THE UNICORN

In medieval times the unicorn was associated with notions of chastity, pure love and the taming of animal passions. The legendary unicorn was reputed to be so wild that it could only be tamed by the priest of virgins, to whom it would come voluntarily for protection and comfort.

Moreau was influenced by the famous 15th century *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries (Musée de Cluny, Paris) when he painted *The Unicorns* (left). In this painting the unicorn represents the medieval period and the spiritualism of late 19th century French culture.

OEDIPUS AND THE SPHINX

The tragic story of Oedipus, the orphan who was doomed to marry his mother and kill his father, was told by many Greek writers including Sophocles and Euripides.

Moreau's modern reworking of this tale, in his painting *Oedipus and the Sphinx* exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1864, was an unprecedented critical and popular triumph, and marked him as an artist to watch. The painting's erotically charged

narrative, with its confrontation of youthful manly energy and aggressive female sexuality (the first appearance of the *femme fatale* in Moreau's works) captivated viewers and breathed new life into the classical legend upon which it was based.

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IMAGE CAPTIONS:

Gustave Moreau, French 1826-1898

1. *Salomé* oil on canvas 180.0 x 90.0 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Cat. 79) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
2. *Jupiter and Europa* 1868 oil on canvas 175.0 x 130.0 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Cat. 191) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
3. *The abduction of Deianira*. *Composition study* black chalk, pencil 24.2 x 19.7 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Des. 704) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
4. *The sirens* oil on canvas 89.0 x 118.0 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Inv. 13957) © Photo RMN – Christian Jean
5. *The apparition* oil on canvas 142.0 x 103.0 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Cat. 222) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
6. *Helen on the walls of Troy* watercolour 33.0 x 24.5 Musée Gustave Moreau (Cat. 483) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
7. *Sappho* pencil 25.0 x 18.5 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Des. 2762) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda
8. *The unicorns* oil on canvas 115.0 x 90.0 cm Musée Gustave Moreau (Cat. 213) © Photo RMN – René-Gabriel Ojéda



SPONSOR'S MESSAGE

Mercer is proud to support the National Gallery of Victoria in bringing the first significant exhibition of French Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau to the Southern Hemisphere.

The exhibition of more than one hundred paintings, watercolours and drawings from the Musée Gustave Moreau in Paris will provide a fascinating insight into the artist's life and obsessions.

Mercer values the opportunity to support this exhibition as part of our partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria in bringing art and people together, reinforcing our commitment to the community and making a positive contribution to the arts.

Please enjoy this captivating exhibition.

Peter Promnitz
Regional Head, Asia Pacific
MERCER