Take off on a world tour of about 2 hours, with stopovers in Oceania, Asia, Africa and the Americas... Explore each of these continents and discover the diversity of the museum’s collection. Bon voyage!
When you reach the museum’s collection, a figure with a man’s head and a woman’s torso will usher you into the heart of the museum. Dating back to the 10th and 11th century, this wooden sculpture known as Djennenke comes from Mali. From Oceania to Asia, and then from Africa to America, the geographical itinerary of the collections showcases around 3,500 works. Each change of continent is indicated by a change in the colour of the floor. The sand coloured ground represents passage areas. No rooms, no walls, only display cabinets spread out like a forest in subdued light, an effect conceived by the architect Jean Nouvel.

Once you have gone through ticket control in the reception hall, take the ramp which leads up to the collections. While climbing up the ramp, discover the Reserve of musical instruments, it houses close to 9,000 instruments. Do you feel that the ground is somewhat uneven? It was meant to be this way. It feels like a natural path. A contemporary artist has been commissioned to create a visual animation which accompanies visitors as they move around the museum. You will then walk through a dark and narrow passage, like a birth passage. Take a look at the guardrails, they are shaped like tree branches. Everything was designed to take you to an entirely different world, away to other continents.
The Oceania collection is composed of objects from four principal areas of the continent: Melanesia, Polynesia, Australia and Insulinde (the island regions of South-East Asia).

Follow the red path to spot the first work. On your way you will find the orientation table which identifies the main works on a map of the continent and on a map of the museum. You will find one of these at the border between each geographic zone.

Money roll
Santa Cruz Islands
(An archipelago of the Salomon Islands)

Feathers of Myzomela cardinalis, tortoise shell, tree bark, plant fibres, shells...

© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries

Such cumbersome coins! In Oceania, a coin is an object that is exchanged on important occasions. It could seal an alliance between groups, be exchanged in return for a valuable object such as a dugout canoe or be used in a wedding transaction.

Wherein lies its worth? In its length (around 10 m) and in its colour. Around 400 to 600 birds were required to make it. In this region, red is the symbol of life and power. In Oceania, each and everything is a source of creation: shells, scales and even bat’s teeth.

Follow the outer wall and walk through the area allocated for Vanuatu with its big upright wooden drums, and then on to New Caledonia. Enter into Polynesia and do have a look at the globe which, amongst other things, retraces the great voyages of discovery of Oceania.

Dugout canoe
Maori population from New Zealand

Early 19th century – Wood, shell.

© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries, Bruno Descouigs

Maori art can be identified by its spiral designs. Right at the top of the stern we find a fantastic being – half man half bird. At the foot of the stern, a figure, with a grimace discernable on its mouth, is sticking out its tongue: a gesture from the haka, the traditional dance form, it protected the boat. The spirals that cover its body are reminiscent of tattoos, an art which is omnipresent in the Māori culture.

Canoes are particularly important to the Māori. Their ancestors arrived in New Zealand after long canoe journeys from south east Asia through the Polynesian islands. The canoe was the only means of travelling between the islands to go fishing or for punitive expeditions.

Hook
Papua New Guinea

© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries, Bruno Descouigs

This is the primordial ancestor. She is covered by spirals which evoke the water world where the ancestors lived. In Papua New Guinea (to the North of Australia), these patterns refer to the custom of scarification (ritual scaring) and body painting.

A hook? Yes, under the fibre skirt. Household objects or food are hung on the hook which is fitted to a beam of the house to keep them out of the reach of rodents.

Installed in the men’s house. When the hook is particularly elaborate, as it is here, secret objects are hung on it and in such a case would be meant for the “men’s house”, a meeting place for men belonging to the same clan where important decisions are taken for hunts and ritual events.

Carry on with the visit by walking straight ahead, continue through Melanesia (an island arc to the North-East of Australia stretching from Papua New Guinea to New Caledonia).

Follow the outer wall and walk through the area allocated for Vanuatu with its big upright wooden drums, and then on to New Caledonia. Enter into Polynesia and do have a look at the globe which, amongst other things, retraces the great voyages of discovery of Oceania.

Go towards the left through the tapas (beaten bark fabric) of Polynesia. Go around the Tower of musical instruments before entering into the alcove known as “The Chamber of Barks” which showcases a wall replete with aboriginal paintings.
“Horned rainbow snake”
by John Mawurndjul
(born around 1952) – An aboriginal artist from the Land of Arnhem in Australia
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries, Valérie Torre

Once you notice the head, the snake becomes clear. For the Aboriginals (the first native inhabitants of Australia), the rainbow snake which appears during the rainy season is the manifestation of a mythical being, the creator of the world. It has the horns of a buffalo, a feared animal owing to its power and its violent demeanour.

Who is John Mawurndjul? An aboriginal artist. Here, he has represented a design which belongs to his family, because designs are handed over from one generation to another in a hereditary manner. In 2005, he made a painting on the ceiling of the museum’s bookstore-shop. These paintings on tree bark invoke the “Time of Dreams”, the time when mythical beings created the universe. These beings appeared in the dreams of the first Aboriginals and narrated stories to them, which recounted the power of the great serpent-ancestor. Other designs (red circles and white centers...) evoke sacred sites (pathways and water holes...). The painting becomes a landscape that only the Aboriginals know how to read.

After the contemporary aboriginal paintings, allow yourself to be guided by the sound of music up to the “Musical box”. The boxes are overhanging small thematic pieces mounted on the façade. Step into Asia starting with the orientation table and stop to admire the huge bronze drum from Java.

The Asian collection presents objects from popular culture, on an East-West axis, from Siberia to Central Asia, going through South-East Asia and India.

The long beige leather wall that traverses this area is named “the Serpent”, a passing glance at this animal that is at once feared and worshipped all over the world. This serves as a medium for a multisensory exhibition meant for everyone as well as for spaces designed for resting. The following work is also a snake ready to jump out at you!

Scarecrow
Vietnam
Kon Tum province, Gié population - 1955-1956
Bamboo wickerwork, ochre, red and black background.
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries

Raise your eyes to the ceiling! 7.30 metres in length, this Snake-shaped scarecrow was hung on trees and floated above fields for scaring birds away. The staple food of Asia, rice, was the main subject of various protective measures. In the centre of its body, the star-shaped design has traversed centuries as is testified, just behind you, by its representation in the centre of the Java drum (4th-1st B.C.) as well as to one side in the display cabinet, on the chest of the human shaped scarecrow. This design is supposed to represent “a vital central point”, which gives power to the object.

Braided bamboo? Yes, this material is commonly used in Vietnam for making day-to-day objects, such as baskets (to the right of the snake). Moreover, we often speak of “plant-based civilizations” to define the cultures of South-East Asia.

Stroll past the cabinets displaying costumes until you reach the India section. Right beside it, a small display cabinet houses a lamp from Nepal.
Ritual lamp
Nepal
First half of the 20th century – Iron
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries

A ritual lamp reminiscent of the shape of Nepalese homes. There is a stable on the ground floor, with animals. On the first floor, in the dwelling room, family members surround the shaman.

A shamanic session. The shaman is one of the two ritual specialists to be found in Nepalese villages. He intervenes when the balance has been disturbed, at the time of major fateful events or illnesses, in order to restore order and pacify the spirits.

Once it has been lit, the lamp enables the shamanic session. It channels the energy of the shaman with the energy of the fire and other protective objects: tridents, bells and oil bowls.

Bridal headdress
Palestinian territories, Hebron
Mid 19th century – Hemp fabric, silver coins, coral beads, glass
© musée du quai Branly

A headdress for a unique day. This bridal headdress was worn only on the day of the wedding. If the family did not have a headdress, they could rent it or borrow it and were supposed to subsequently return it to its owner along with sweets.

An identity marker. The costumes and veils are a means for women to display their social status and their belonging to a tribe. The coins and stones made up the dowry given by their husbands and reflected the wealth and power of the family to which they belonged. The blue glass beads are characteristic of the glass blower workshops of Hebron, a city located to the south of Jerusalem.

Coins, glass and coral beads sewn on to a hemp hat. Corals are much liked in the Near East, like the blue beads, they are used as amulets, their red colour is suggestive of blood which is the symbol of life.

Move on to the yellow coloured path to enter into the Africa area. The musée du quai Branly houses one of the largest collections of African art in the world.

The geographical itinerary invites you to move from the North to the South of Africa, from the Maghreb to Madagascar.

Dolls of reprisals
Morocco
Early 20th century – cedar wood, cotton, henna
© musée du quai Branly, photo Thémy Olivier, Michel Untado

A highly powerful doll. Generally speaking, dolls are mediums for superstitions in Morocco. The dolls of reprisals were not children’s toys. They represented a particular human being.

A Berber woman. We can recognize her from her veil and her white cotton draped outfit. Her forehead, her chin and her arms are tattooed with symbolic designs marking her belonging to the community.

A public act of witchcraft. When a person had committed a serious mistake, a statuette was sculpted in his or her image. It was subsequently taken on a procession through the streets of the village, and the souks, so that everyone knew about it, accompanied by cries of “Shame on you, traitor”. A week after the parading of the figurine of justice, the defaulter could once again move around freely and was reintegrated into society.

Now move towards the case housing Dogon masks.
Maternity sculpted by Kwayep
Bamiléké population
Bangangté chiefdom in Cameroon
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries, Bruno Descoings

A work crafted by a great artist. Kwayep is a famous artist attached to the court of a chief; he is also answerable to the orders originating from neighbouring kingdoms, such as the one from Bangangté where this work is from. This portrait of a queen is in all probability an order placed by the king N’Jiké for celebrating the birth of his first child. Maternity expresses the importance of fertility. Here, it also conjures up the tenderness which binds a mother to her child, which is brought out by the gestures and the expression. Like the other commemorative royal statues, it was kept in a room called the treasure and exhibited during important occasions.

Its body is covered with sawdust mixed with palm oil. Male and female notables dyed their bodies on the occasion of ritual ceremonies, such as the enthronement of a king or for new harvests...

Look at the box that contains the magical objects.

Move towards Central Africa and walk along the Serpent until you reach the sculpture of Maternity from Cameroon.

Mask known as Sirige
Dogon population in Mali
Early 20th century – Bombax wood, pigments.
© musée du quai Branly

“The entire world makes up the society of masks. And when it moves to the public space, it dances to the march of the world.” (Ogotemmélì, Dogon informer, to Marcel Griaule, French ethnologist, Dieu d’eau, 1948).

All these objects are masks, including the one that is 5.20 m tall. Its name translates as “the house with floors”. Each level corresponds to a stage of knowledge acquired in the course of initiation, a rite which makes it possible to attain adult status. The initiated men folk wear these masks during funeral ceremonies. The dancer fixes the lower part on his face and touches the ground with the end of the mask which gets animated and comes to life owing to the costume, the dance and the music.

Painting which gives life to the masks. Disappearing during the course of time, the designs with secretive symbols are repainted prior to ceremonies. Red is often to be found, invoking blood, it covers a few masks and colours almost all the fibres of the dresses.

Move towards Central Africa and walk along the Serpent until you reach the sculpture of Maternity from Cameroon.

Protective nkisi nkondi statuette
Kongo population from Congo
Before 1892 – Wood, glass, feathers, pigments including ochre and China clay, plant fibres.
© musée du quai Branly, photo Thierry Ollivier, Michel Urtado

This statue is not evil. It houses the nkisi spirits which will act on the orders of the nganga (a kind of priest). Its big eyes speak volumes of its ability to see beyond mere appearances. The feathers would seem to associate it with spirits. The statue can be used to resolve conflicts, identify thieves and sorcerers, cure or cause an illness or even ward off attacks by wild animals...

In black and white. Its red and black face evokes the colours of danger and death. As for the white on its body, it evokes the invisible world inhabited by the spirits of the dead.

A prominent belly enclosed by a piece of glass. Perhaps it still contains the magical inputs made up of symbolic ingredients and consecrated by the nganga: white clay, earth, leaves, hair...

Painting which gives life to the masks. Disappearing during the course of time, the designs with secretive symbols are repainted prior to ceremonies. Red is often to be found, invoking blood, it covers a few masks and colours almost all the fibres of the dresses.

Move towards Central Africa and walk along the Serpent until you reach the sculpture of Maternity from Cameroon.
Africa continues in the works of descendants of the black slaves deported to America. The exhibition then takes you from north to south, from Inuit masks through the painted skins of the Plains Indians, Bolivian festive costumes and Amazonian personal ornaments to Mapuche sculptures from Chile.

Mask of “the Spirit of the moon”
Yup’ik population (Inuit group)
Alaska, United States – Early 20th century – Painted wood, feathers
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries

“The Yupisits considered that all the animals which had been hunted went to the moon. You had to treat animals with respect so that in return, at the time of their reincarnation, they come back to you because you had treated them well. You could then hunt them again and again.” (John McIntyre, Yup’ik sculptor, early 21st century).

At the centre, a half-man half-seal face. This mask illustrates the Yup’ik belief in interference between the animal world and the world of humans; men take on an animal appearance when they go out in their clothes made of animal skin, thus revealing a common nature.

An art of assembly: the feathers evoke birds; the wooden hoop symbolizes passage to the supernatural world of the shaman (interceder between the world of men and that inhabited by spirits, animals and the deceased); the hands with chopped off thumbs reveal the impossibility for the spirits to retain you; the head of the carnivore (a wolf undoubtedly) is associated with the spirit of the moon; the wooden slices stand for water bubbles rising to the surface of water, indicating the presence of a seal to hunters.

Acquired thanks to the patronage of

Necklace made of claws of grizzly bears
North America – Grizzly bear claws, skin, beads
© musée du quai Branly

Grizzly bears were hunted by the Indians who used their meat, fat, fur and even claws to make necklaces.
Costumes and ornaments express the dignity and status of those wearing them. These necklaces are a symbol of the achievements of hunters and warriors, lots of Indians painted by 19th century Westerners sport them, just as on the two paintings behind you. The victorious warriors also possess golden eagle feathers, which are signs of strength and courage.

These paintings were executed by George Catlin, an American fascinated by the Indians. He travelled for 6 years in the Great Plains meeting them. In 1845, king Louis-Philippe ordered paintings from him to thank him for the dance show put on by his group of Iowa Indians, comprising among others Small Wolf and White Cloud who are both represented here.

“Butterfly” vase,
Teotihuacan culture, Mexico
150 - 650 – terra-cotta.
© musée du quai Branly, photo Jean-Yves et Nicolas Dubois

Teotihuacan, a great city of ancient Mexico, flourished from a century before our era to the 6th century. It dominated the centre of Mexico and probably the trade routes of the whole of Meso-America.

More than 400 workshops! Teotihuacan has left behind a number of examples of handicraft objects produced there: wall paintings, ceramic, work involving precious stones, obsidian and stone. Whether sculpted or painted, all the images had a meaning.

A vase buried in the tomb of a warrior. Three motifs adorn this vase: the butterfly, geometric patterns and a nose ornament. The butterfly is the soul of the warriors who died while fighting or those who were sacrificed. It is often associated with fire which can be seen here in the shape of lines and lozenges. The nose ornament (a “U” with three hooks) is the one worn by the water and storm god, the ancestor of the Aztec god Tlaloc. This divinity has several attributes: it is equally associated with earth and fertility as it is associated with territory and war, as is the case here.
Nasca funeral mask
Southern coast of Peru
200 B.C.-700 A.D. – Gold leaf
© musée du quai Branly, photo Patrick Gries, Valérie Torre

Only 547 grams for this fine gold leaf cut and hammered into the shape of a human face crowned with sixteen snakes. The two snakes on the top of the head are extended by two birds which recall the importance of feathers on the entire American continent.

Eldorado (“the gilded one”): the Spanish conquistadores located this imaginary country in South America. Considered as an emanation of the sun in the Pre-Columbian societies of the Andes, gold derived its sacred character from its indestructible nature.

This mask from the Nasca culture, in Southern Peru, was placed inside tombs, on the mummy called fardo. The funeral rites of this region required the use of valuable objects and adornments (ornaments, masks, tunics...) which imparted an eternal character to the deceased.

You want to know more? Here are a few ideas:

- Visit the mezzanines to discover our temporary exhibitions and themed displays.
- Take a break in the Jacques Kerchache reading room, in the reception hall, and browse the exhibition catalogues; there are stories and comic albums for children.
- Expand your knowledge and discuss ideas with the specialists leading the guided tours or workshops.
- Discover the museum’s collections as a family with the “My little exploration guide”, which is available free of charge from reception.
- Return to explore the museum with the multimedia guide, and listen to curators, storytellers or explorers describing the collections in images!
- You haven’t seen the emblem of the museum yet: The Chupicurao. This is one of the musée du quai Branly’s 120 masterpieces, exhibited in the greatest museum in the world: the musée du Louvre!
The official iphone and ipad applications of the musée du quai Branly.

Let you know the complete schedule of activities, a video presentation about the museum, tailor-made walks to discover the museum collection as well as practical information and the interactive map of the museum...

Finally, send a virtual postcard of the museum and share your impressions thanks to a selection of pictures!

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