GUIDE TO THE COLLECTIONS
Use this guide to discover the museum from a new angle!

Thanks to its behind-the-scenes access, you’ll learn all there is to know about the acquisitions, the storage reserve and how the items are cared for.

Follow our experts and discover works selected specially for you by the collections managers as you move through the Main Collections Level.
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ARE THE COLLECTIONS REALLY PERMANENT?

With over 300 exhibits moved every year for loans, rotation of the most fragile objects, display cabinets changed to house new acquisitions and frequent analyses carried out, the Main Collections Level is an area that’s constantly being updated.

71% come from the ethnological laboratory at the Musée de l’Homme

22% come from new acquisitions

7% come from the old Musée des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie

Explore the collections on the museum’s website quaibranly.fr
3,500 items are exhibited on the Main Collections Level.

But this only represents 1% of the museum’s collections.

So, where’s the hidden part of the iceberg? It’s in the reserve.

5000 m² of storage space in the museum

320,000 items stored

500 new acquisitions every year

1000 items loaned every year

800 m² of exterior storage

11 km of shelving for books and archives

20,000 items moved every year

Kanak mask, 19th century, 1m75 • New Caledonia.
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Cyril Zanettacci
THE ACQUISITION PROCESS

Whether it’s a purchase from a collector, gallery or auction house, a donation, a bequest or a gift*, an acquisition has to go through certain key stages before becoming part of the national collections.

1 The acquisitions pre-committee
first declares the item’s interest (origin, history, characteristics, rarity, etc.), and an initial examination of the object’s state reveals any restoration requirements.

If need be, the item is analysed to date and/or identify the materials used.

2 The acquisitions committee
The Loans, Deposits and Acquisitions Centre organises the arrival of the selected piece and places it in the museum’s inventory. The collection manager once again defends the case before the committee members, who then cast votes.

3 If the acquisition is accepted,
the object undergoes a detailed examination in the Conservation-Restauration Centre to assess its condition.

4 The Inventory & Computerised Management Centre
assigns an inventory number to the object. This is composed of a prefix (70), which is the establishment’s identifier, then the year the object was acquired, the number of the collection in which it will feature and lastly, the number of the object itself. This inventory number is the object’s personal ID.

A photo is then taken of the object, and a note is written, which will remain with it for the rest of its existence. This note (its record) is registered in the museum’s database.

* Donating gifts of artistic or historical value can offset some tax duties.
The Loans, Deposits and Acquisitions Centre transfers the object to the ‘Acquisitions’ repository while waiting for it to officially become part of the collection.

The object officially becomes part of the museum’s collections!

It is now an integral and unassailable part of the national collections, and, as such, can not be sold or given away. The legal department archives the signed agreement.

The Conservation-Restoration Centre examines the condition of the newly acquired item.

It describes the object in detail and determines any work needed to make it presentable. It is also in charge of marking the object’s inventory number.

Photo shoot

of the new acquisition in a photo studio, carried out by the Image centre.

Verifications:

The Inventory and Computerised Management Centre for the collections’ objects checks the conformity of the inventory number, photo, dimensions, markings and inscriptions, as well as the description of its conservation state.

The object is given an allocated place by the Collections Management team, either in the museum’s reserve or on the Main Collections Level. A ‘New Acquisition’ sticker is then affixed to the display cabinet!

View all the latest acquisitions on the museum’s website

quaibranly.fr
FROM THE REPOSITORY TO THE MAIN COLLECTIONS LEVEL

Five facts you maybe didn’t know...
1 A room of surprises

Feathers, skins, ivory, fish scales, flying-fox hairs, spiderwebs, wood, plant fibres: the museum’s collections include countless objects of organic matter that are particularly fragile.

The anoxia room:

New acquisitions made of organic matter are left here for two weeks. Once the door is closed, the oxygen is replaced with nitrogen to kill any insects and larvae through dehydration.

2 The magic of storage

As handling is the biggest risk in terms of damage, the museum has created special boxes so the objects can be viewed without being touched.

Sturdy plastic: These boxes are made of alveolar polypropylene. Inside them, nitrogen-blown polypropylene foams, thermo-welded wedges and nonwoven polypropylene fibre sheets protect each item. The main goal is to create a holder that will not damage the object in any way. Hence the choice of stable, inert, top-quality materials made to last.

3 Staying alert

An object deteriorates naturally when in contact with light, air, insects, vibration or handling. Preventive conservation uses the environment to predict and slow down any alterations. The best way to do this is through observation and measuring.

The study of measurements: Climatic factors (temperature and relative humidity) are constantly measured by digital hygro-thermometer recording devices and the data is transmitted in real time. It’s also uploaded from the devices during a reading every four months. The level of lighting is measured whenever a new object is placed in the permanent collection area. Vibrations are measured too, although less frequently. All this data is analysed and discussed with the museum’s technical installation managers.

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4 Secrets of restoration

Each object checked by a restorer is ranked from A (restoration work needed in the short term) to D (no restoration work required). With this ranking, restoration work can be scheduled throughout the year. If the restoration isn’t urgent, the restorers wait for a loan request or an exhibition before beginning the work.

Cubeo costume-mask from Brazil:
The restoration work on this dance costume was especially complex given the fragility of the materials. The skirt – made of plant fibres and beaten phloem (the inner part of the bark) – was restored using a vapour technique. Rips and gaps in the beaten phloem were repaired using rolled threads or micro-pieces of Japanese paper. Ripped seams were mended and one of the sleeves, which had been put inside out, was turned the right way round.

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5 Through the X-ray machine

Using medical imaging technology, it’s now possible to see inside materials with increasing clarity using X-ray scanners and viewing software. The images enable us to perform detailed analyses of materials and to gain access to parts that are usually concealed. This means we can produce virtual cross-sections and analyse the rings of wood without any physical probing or contact!

A well-fed ancestor:
Images from a scan of this sculpture revealed a strange discovery: a complex inner network running through the sculpture’s body and linking up all the body’s orifices (open mouth, ears, navel and so on).
An analysis of these unique images showed – in light of remains conserved in the different ducts – that this network was used to ‘feed’ the sculpture!

© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain

A mask in danger:
One morning, during a weekly inspection tour around the Main Collections Level, a detail caught the eye of the Conservation-Restoration Center’s manager. A ray of light was shining through a transformation mask from British Columbia (Canada). The object was put through a scanner where the images revealed a network of tunnels that insects had dug through the wood (the little dots in the photo).
The mask’s very structure was at risk and required complex, irreversible work. The restorers had to inject resin into each tunnel to stabilise the mask.

© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain
Moai sculpture, early 19th century

The term moai denotes a sculpted representation. The most famous moai are the colossal stone statues standing on platforms along the coastlines, their gaze turned inland. This moai tangata sculpture is wooden. It represents a young man in good health. These statuettes were handed down from generation to generation and were worn around the neck or brandished in ceremonies.

32cm high • Easter Island
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Oliveau/Michel Urtado

Australian boomerang, 19th century

Although the cultural richness of the Aboriginals mainly resides in their intangible culture, they did keep a small number of objects. Among them were boomerangs and throwing sticks used for hunting. With these, men would measure their skill and strength. They also served as percussion instruments.

85cm long (for the longest ones) • Australia
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Cyril Zinnettacci
Backrest of an Indonesian seat of honour, 20th century

Southern Sumatran societies operated in a system of merit-based festivals in which members of the nobility could rise through the social ranks. These festivals were chances to show off not just their wealth but their oratory skills too. On a seat of honour that placed him above the others, the chieftain would sit with his back against the tree of life which, in this example, produced a flower in bloom at the level of the neck, giving the man clear, fair and righteous discourse, the words of a leader flowing like the undulating lines that run across the backrest.

84.5cm high and 1.42m wide • Lampung province, Indonesia
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Olivier, Michel Untieds
**Mythical ancestral panel, first half of the 20th century**

In Paiwan society in southern Taiwan, the aristocrats’ mythical ancestors watched over social harmony and good millet harvests. In wealthy households, this type of panel was positioned in front of the pillar dedicated to the clan’s spirits. The mythical ancestor is surrounded by emblems of power: a deer-antler headdress, a betel box at the waist and hunting dogs. The figure is holding the triple bowl that notables would use to share drinks at ceremonies. His eyes are inlaid with shards of Chinese ceramic.

*2m high • Taiwan*
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Patrick Gries

**Head of Shiva, late 19th century**

The Hindu god Shiva can be recognised mainly by his plaits, his third eye and the crescent moon on his forehead. The wave-like ornaments behind his ears remind us that the Ganges river flowed from his hair, from heaven down to earth. This type of image of Shiva is called a ‘face linga.’ It represents the moment when Shiva revealed himself through his symbolic and phallic form, the linga.

*29cm high • Maharashtra, India*
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Olivier, Michel Urgaon
Mythical serpent (naga), late 19th century

The naga frightens with its fangs and its bulging eyes but its fierce appearance enhances its protective power. This powerful guardian of Buddha often decorates the stairs and roofs of temples. The aquatic ripples that characterise the shape of its body are also a reminder that the naga dominates the celestial and underground waters.

2m38 high • Thailand
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Patrick Gries, Valérie Torre
1 Bridal headdress, circa. 1840

This bridal headdress was only worn on the wedding day. If the family didn’t have a headdress, it could rent or borrow one, then return it to its owner filled with sweets. Like the outfit, the veil and jewellery were a way for women to show their social status and affiliation to a certain tribe. Coins and stones made up the dowry offered by their husband. Coral and blue glass pearls were used as amulets.

55cm long • Hebron, Palestine
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain

2 Ceramic tile, late 19th century

‘Khosrow looked around, as he usually did, and his gaze at once fell upon the beautiful woman. Having seen her naked for a fleeting moment, he was fearful of looking, but the more he was, the more speechless he became...’ These verses from a twelfth-century Persian poem inspired the potter Hussein (his name is on the chest on which the Princess Shirine is sitting). Perhaps this tile adorned a palace or a rich merchant’s house. Or maybe it was part of a Western traveller’s collection.

52cm wide • Tehran, Iran
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain
Earthenware jar,
late 19th – early 20th century

This earthenware jar was used to store melted butter, honey or milk, the basic ingredients of North African cuisine and confectionary. It’s adorned with a geometric and floral pattern in blue, yellow and green. Did you notice the red dots? At first, these were just used to conceal the parts where the enamel had come off, but they were so popular that they were painted over the entire jar!

Around 50cm high • Fez, Morocco
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Cyril Zannettacci

Ex-voto,
mid 20th century

They look like feet, eyes, hands or, as is the case here, a sick person. These ex-votos were offered to a saint, either to ask for a favour or to be cured, or to give thanks for a wish that came true! The practice can be found as much in the Greek Orthodox Church as it can in Islam and Christianity.

11.4cm high • Egypt
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Olivier, Michel Urtado
AFRICA

① Okuyi mask, early 20th century
With its white face, almond eyes and thin, red mouth, it looks like a Japanese theatre mask... but this African mask represents a young girl returning from the land of the dead. When there’s a death in the village, a man puts on the mask on and enters the village on long stilts so everyone can see him. He’s there to comfort the community and accompany the spirit of the deceased person to the land of the dead (and prevent them from bringing problems or diseases).

25cm high • Gabon
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Thierry Olivier, Michel Urtado

② Kota reliquary figure, 19th century
This ancestral figure has the particularity of being two-sided with a face on each side. It displays the key features of Kota statuary: an oval face capped with a crescent-shaped crest. However, renowned metalwork sculptors could add a personal touch, such as the shape of the eyes, for example, or the decor of the plates, with ribbing or engraved patterns. This figure, with eternally open eyes, stood on a reliquary basket. He was the guardian of the clan’s relics.

72.5cm high • To the north of Gabon, in today’s Republic of the Congo
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Patrick Gries, Valérie Torre
When someone is sick, they consult a magician-priest (debtera) who, after making many calculations and consulting astrology books, prescribes the sacrifice of a goat or sheep, whose skin is used to make the scroll (the same height as its owner!). In it, the debtera writes prayers and the sick person’s name, and paints images with incantatory power to drive away evil spirits.

Fragile work sensitive to light, subject to regular rotation

Protective scroll, 1770-1830

Around 2m long and 16cm wide • Ethiopia
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain
Juliet Alutiiq mask, late 19th century

In the winter of 1871, the linguist Alphonse Pinart explored the Kodiak Archipelago, south of mainland Alaska. He collected around seventy Alutiiq masks and mask models, and made enquiries about the local people to record the names, stories and songs associated with some of them. This mask bears the name ‘allayak’, which means ‘different, not like us’ or ‘the one who is close-fisted and greedy’.

44cm high • Alaska

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Lucifer costume, 1999

This mask was taken out for the Oruro Carnival’s Diablada, a parade featuring both Lucifer and the Archangel Saint-Michael. The carnival mixes aspects of Catholicism and ethnic beliefs. Our Lady of Socavón (protector of mining) is celebrated there as much as the spirits of nature. Lucifer embodies a positive force in touch with the Amerindian underworld deity Supay, who distributes good fortune.

90cm wide • Oruro, Bolivia

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Inca figurine, 1450-1532

The Spaniards called Inca nobles ‘the men with big ears’ as their earlobes were astonishingly stretched under the weight of ear ornaments worn as emblems of their rank. This figurine was undoubtedly placed as an offering in a sacred place or as part of a ritual. For the Incas, gold and silver had special symbolic value.

20cm high • Southern Highlands, Peru

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Did you notice the symbols on the dish’s outer rim? Thanks to this text, we know that this bowl accompanied the great storm god Yopaat in his tomb. It would have contained atole, a corn-based drink that’s still consumed in Mexico today. Inside the bowl, the figure of the god of corn emerges from the underworld, an aquatic world populated by animals and plants, and a source of renewal.

30cm diameter • Petén Basin, Mexico
© musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Patrick Gries, Valérie Torre
Want to know more?

Use the audio guide to create your own itinerary through the vast selection of objects presented by the museum’s curators.

An itinerary through the collection masterpieces is now available!

Souvenirs and mementos?

Before leaving, don’t forget to go to the museum’s gift and book shop. There you’ll discover a vast selection of catalogues, books and magazines about non-Western art and civilisations, as well as many ethical, fairtrade, crafted items, including jewellery, toys, textiles and decorative objects.

Fancy some delicacies?

THE DESIGNER STYLE CAFÉ JACQUES

offers refined cuisine in a splendid setting throughout the day. On sunny days, enjoy its terrace nestled in the garden designed by Gilles Clément. At night, the garden is lit up by L’Ô, an installation created by the artist Yann Kersalé.

Open on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and on Mondays when the museum is open, from 10.00am to 6.30pm. Open on Thursday from 10.00am to 9.30pm.

LES OMBRES, A PANORAMIC RESTAURANT

invites you to dine in a magic setting beneath the Eiffel Tower designed by Jean Nouvel. Perched on the museum’s roof terrace, enjoy its refined cuisine together with a unique view of the French capital.

Book at +33 (0) 1 47 53 68 00
www.lesombres-restaurant.com
Access: 27 Quai Branly or via the museum garden
Open every day: 12.00pm to 2.15pm; 7.00pm to 10.30pm.