

Musée d'Orsay History

Paris Art Studies – Musée d'Orsay, a history of the building and museum

1615 – Sale of the old gardens of Marguerite de Valois, first wife of Henri IV, whose central axis was the current rue de Lille. Building of hotels particuliers along the river.

1708 – Building of the quai d'Orsay on the Left Bank west of the Pont Royal.

1782-88 – Building of the Hôtel de Salm (current museum of the Legion of Honor).

1810-1838 – Building of the massive Palais d'Orsay initially intended for the ministry of Foreign Affairs, then Cour des Comptes and later seat of the Council of State.

1871 – Palais d'Orsay burned down during the Commune. For the next 30 years the charred ruins remain standing.

1897 – Grounds are ceded by the state to the Orléans railway company for the building of a new train station to bring visitors to the edge of site of the 1900 World's Fair. The chosen architect was Victor Laloux.

1900 – Inauguration of new station and hotel.

1939 – Station closed.

The gradual electrification of trains and their lengthening make station impractical. In its last years it only serves the suburbs.

1939-1973 – Used to

group repatriated prisoners at the end of WWII, then as theater by the Louis Barrault company, film set (Orson Welles's Trial after Kafka, Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris) and as temporary auction house.

1973 – Threatened by

demolition it is saved by being registered on list of national monuments.

1978 – Definitely

classed as national monument. Decision is made by president Giscard d'Estaing to create a 19th century art museum in the building.

1986 – Inauguration of

the new museum by president Mitterand. 19th century art works from a variety of Paris museums (Jeu de Paume, Palais de Tokyo, Louvre) are at last brought together. The layout of the exhibition galleries and much of the added stone and tomb-like architecture was supervised by the fashionable 1980's architect Gae Aulenti.

2007-11 – Renovation

of most of the museum apart from ground floor central "nave"; initiated by new director, Guy Cogeval. The old pale walls were repainted in dark dramatic colors, the upper floor galleries were considerably enlarged and the removal of the Post Impressionist collections to the intermediate level on the north side allows for better distribution of visitors and greater flow in the museum. Many more academic and Symbolist works are now displayed giving the museum a much more 19th century atmosphere. The new Impressionist galleries on the last floor are by Jean Michel Wilmotte, and the Brazilian designers, the Campana brothers are responsible for the chic kitsch décor of the new Café des hauteurs.

The Seine side

galleries are also scheduled for renovation in 2012-15.

