

The Musée Gustave Moreau

Collecting life and work as proof of a genius's contribution to art

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When the Parisian painter Gustave Moreau died in 1898, he bequeathed his house and its consciously arranged collections to the French state on condition that the collection's integral character be maintained. Opened in 1904 as the Musée Gustave Moreau, the house made public the life and oeuvre of a painter whose seclusion had become legendary during his lifetime. Tied to Moreau's habit of collecting and reworking his own work, the format of a personal monographic museum emerged only in the last resort as a modification of an earlier planned retrospective exhibition. It is argued that Moreau's enterprise should be interpreted in connection with the art-historiographic paradigm of life and work rather than with any museographic format. Moreau's strategic bequest envisioned the presentation of his work as a lifetime achievement, the posthumous evaluation of which would ultimately prove him a genius and recognize his contribution to the history of art.

THE Musée Gustave Moreau which opened to the public in 1904 was incomparable to any other known 'monographic' museum only because of the sheer quantity of its works and the fact that it consisted of a painter's house, which had apparently been 'left untouched' after the artist's death. Artists as well as art collectors engage in similar immortalization strategies to this day, but often with quite divergent ambitions. In this paper, I will present a detailed description and interpretation of the overall enterprise embarked on by Gustave Moreau (1826–98), of establishing his own museum and the specific way he chose to undertake this exercise. I will argue that the painter was not merely preoccupied with achieving expanded visibility for his works through the format of the museum, nor with ensuring perfect conditions for the presentation of his works – two recurring motivations for artists founding personal museums in recent decades.¹ Rather, Moreau's museum project was geared towards presenting his work as a lifetime achievement which the museum had to preserve, for Moreau believed that the evaluation of this achievement would ultimately prove him to be of *genius* and would recognize his rightful place in the history of art. It will become clear that as a museum format, the Musée Gustave Moreau constituted a novelty in some ways, but that the discourse resonating in it was already firmly established.

The last history painter

On entering the hallway of the museum in Paris's 9th district today, the first paintings one encounters are mainly copies made by Moreau during his sojourn in Italy between 1857 and 1859.² Copies of antique frescos hang next to a copy of Correggio's *Danae* and one of Poussin's *La mort de Germanicus*. Since we are in the artist's house museum we are further able to visit a sequence of fully furnished living quarters on the first floor. The studio rooms on the second and third floors function as museum galleries, their walls completely covered with Moreau's larger paintings, many still unfinished. Further adding to the experience of densely installed artworks in these studio rooms are three cabinets in which thousands of Moreau's drawings, oil sketches and watercolours can be examined. In total, the museum holds more than 1,000 paintings, cartoons and watercolours, and about 13,000 drawings.

The above-mentioned copies in the entrance hall constitute a meaningful start for the museum's trajectory, which aims to deploy Moreau's artistic practice. Their prominent presence corresponds to the importance accorded by Moreau to the study of the classical tradition in the arts. He considered it crucial for a painter to copy the masters of the past, which he did, not only in Italy but also throughout his career in the galleries of the Louvre and during a late study-visit to the Low Countries. This theme of the necessity of

learning from the past in order to advance art is a recurrent one in Moreau's writings, and his museum amply proves that he lived up to his own creed.

The Old Masters such as Poussin practised the grand tradition of the *peinture d'histoire* which Moreau used to call 'le grand art'. By the mid-nineteenth century, this grand tradition of history painting had fallen into crisis.³ It was being challenged from without by the rise of aesthetic currents such as naturalism and realism that contested history painting's theoretical foundations and supreme status, and from within it was 'threatened' by the ever-freer application of the old genre by academic painters themselves, who introduced the anecdotal subjects familiar to those art categories that the academic tradition had considered inferior: the 'genre historique' or the 'genre'. Moreau by contrast set out to defend and at the same time to renew history painting by returning to the immutable laws he believed he had found in Italian Renaissance art.⁴

Moreau entered the public scene at the *Salon* of 1864 with a work that drew broad attention.⁵ With its mythological subject, its seriousness and its provocatively archaic style, *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (Fig. 1) was strikingly different from what had been on view in the *Salons* of the preceding years. According to one critic, it was '[a] thunderclap in the middle of the Palais de l'Industrie'.⁶ The enormous critical attention attracted by the painting was divided between sharp detractors and supporters, some of whom saw in Moreau a history painter who could counter the tide and save *le grand art*. The painting exemplified not only Moreau's current aesthetic ideals but also his ambitions. Peter Cooke interprets Moreau's *Oedipus* as a challenge to the then most prestigious living embodiment of high art, Jean-Dominique Auguste Ingres (1780–1867). He remarks that it cannot be a coincidence that the choice of subject for the painting invited comparison with one of Ingres's best known compositions. It was probably even a tacit reproach to the aged Ingres who had forged for himself an image as the high priest of tradition but in reality had long since abandoned history painting in favour of more lucrative genres. Moreau in fact wanted to reinvent history painting by trying to reconcile the narrativity of this genre with an immobile, anti-theatrical beauty, epitomized by Ingres's *La Source* (1856).

In the paintings he submitted to the *Salons* of 1865, 1866 and 1869, Moreau further experimented with combinations of narrative content and immobi-



Fig. 1. G. Moreau, *Oedipe et le Sphinx* (1864). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William H. Herriman, 1920 (21.134.1). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

lized beauty. His intricate art most often puzzled its audiences and the critics with its excessive detail, which at times served a merely decorative function but at others a symbolic one. Nevertheless, in 1866 the French state bought *Orpheus* to be hung in the Musée du Luxembourg, which exhibited contemporary French art. In 1869 Moreau received his third *Salon* medal, the maximum obtainable. After a period of relative absence, Moreau reappeared at the *Salon*

of 1876 and 1880 with a series of paintings that not only provoked critical outrage but also attracted new collectors. After 1880 Moreau again withdrew to some extent from participation in public life. For reasons that are unclear, he ceased to participate in public exhibitions. However, the Moreau myth initiated by Joris-Karl Huysmans, who called Moreau ‘a mystic secluded in the centre of Paris’, certainly exaggerates Moreau’s isolation.⁷ During these years, Moreau’s income increased significantly as he was able to command very good prices, especially for his large paintings, while at the same time consolidating his reputation among collectors as a great watercolourist.⁸ In the 1890s, the realization of his own museum gradually became Moreau’s primary focus and the works he subsequently produced were mainly intended to complete the collection of his own works. He nevertheless continued to sell works to collectors, albeit sparsely and at much higher prices. At the same time, from 1892 on, Moreau was also the director of a studio at the École des Beaux-Arts, where Matisse, Rouault and Evenepoel were amongst his students.

With his mission to renew history painting, Moreau occupied a somewhat isolated position within the French art scene of the second half of the nineteenth century, a position closer to Manet than to Courbet. The painter of the Orpheuses and Salomes did not oppose the ‘undemocratic’ art institutions such as the Academy by contesting their norms with scandalous art or by organizing his own exhibitions in opposition to the official *Salons*. On the contrary, Moreau was eager to prove himself and his art true to the historic tradition which others had rejected but which he wanted to take further. Although he never achieved broad public success and never pursued it, Moreau appears to have been sensitive about his critical reception.⁹ He found support from a small group of appreciative critics, connoisseurs, collectors and writers.¹⁰ In addition, he did not disdain the institutional recognition he obtained at the end of his career, with his late election as a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1888 and his appointment as *professeur chef d’atelier* at the École nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1892.¹¹ However, with respect to his manoeuvres towards recognition, it is Moreau’s bequest that we should consider. His singular aesthetic position cannot account for his museum project alone, but neither is it completely unrelated to it.

Towards a personal museum

The Moreau museum’s realization was well considered, although the available documentation indicates that the museum concept did not evolve in a straightforward manner. However sketchy, the various earlier plans point in divergent directions, but nevertheless reveal some of the intentions underlying Moreau’s museum project. They also show how circumstantial factors and pragmatic considerations were at play in the conception of the museum.¹²

The project first took the shape of a future retrospective exhibition. In 1885, the critic Paul Leprieur lamented that Moreau exhibited his works so infrequently, despite dozens accumulating in his studio, but he also suggested that ‘[i]t is possible that M. Gustave Moreau will decide finally to step out of his shadow and to offer us in a private exhibition a vast *ensemble* of works that will explain him more clearly’.¹³ The first traces of the retrospective project date back to 1878.¹⁴ The mounting of private exhibitions had become a regular phenomenon since the 1870s, and there are indications that Moreau was indeed preparing such an exhibition during the period 1880–85.¹⁵ Moreau’s archives in the museum contain, for example a note titled ‘Exposition générale à faire’, which must have been composed during these years.¹⁶ In 1882, Moreau had a number of early canvases enlarged, as if to turn them into the necessary exhibition pieces.¹⁷ He also started a new series of large-format paintings.¹⁸ However, it was his most important collector Antony Roux who in 1886 organized Moreau’s first and only one-man show in the private gallery Goupil, exhibiting the watercolours he had commissioned to illustrate La Fontaine’s *Fables*. In 1892, still no Moreau exhibition had taken place, and the artist received a New Year’s card in which the sender expressed the wish that an exhibition would take place in the following year, but to no avail.¹⁹ The most probable explanation had already been given years earlier in 1885 when Péladan, in his account of a visit to the artist, quoted Moreau as saying ‘[f]rom year to year, I add augmenting details – as the idea comes to mind – to my two hundred posthumous works, because I want my art to appear suddenly, all at once, one moment after my death’.²⁰ Péladan’s account makes clear that Moreau might not yet have decided on a location for his exhibition, but that its timing had already been determined. Just like the common

honorary retrospectives, the exhibition Moreau was planning would take place after the artist's death, but unlike the former, Moreau's retrospective would present works that for the most part had never before been shown in public.

The idea of some sort of museum, or at least of a permanent exhibition, first appears in several drafts of Moreau's will, written around 1893, five years before he died.²¹ Geneviève Lacambre suspects that the successive deaths of Moreau's dearest love Alexandrine Durieux in 1890 and his friend and fellow painter Elie Delaunay in 1891 were events that contributed to Moreau's decision to take measures concerning his accumulating *oeuvre*.²² In any case, the above-mentioned drafts of his will mention the erection of a simple building on the periphery of the city which would contain his works. Moreau's formulations concerning the presentation are quite straightforward: to construct a large warehouse in which to place his works as neatly as possible.²³

The drafts also contain stipulations that reveal a certain ambivalence with which Moreau still approached the personal museum project at the time. If the State were to accept the greater part of the large works, then the new building project could be cancelled and the rest of his works sold. If it was recognition that Moreau was after, he seemed to think that this was something the national museums could offer him and for which his large canvases were decisive. During his life, Moreau had only one work hanging in a national museum: his *Orpheus*, which had been shown at the *Salon* of 1866, was hung in the Musée du Luxembourg, as mentioned above. Large canvases were an aspect of history painting that Moreau acknowledged. However, as a criterion contained in the concept of the museum picture, it was already losing its sense, along with the notion of a museum picture itself.²⁴ Furthermore, it was very improbable that a large number of his paintings would ever enter the collections of the Luxembourg or the Louvre given their acquisition policies. Before an artwork could enter the Louvre, the artist had to have been dead for at least ten years, while the Musée du Luxembourg collected a maximum of four works by each artist. A selection by the state from Moreau's bequest would thus have meant that in the best case scenario some of his works would go to the Luxembourg, but there was just as much chance that they would be distributed throughout the provincial museums.²⁵ In the final

version of his will, Moreau no longer provided the option of the national museums choosing from his bequest.

The preliminary wills from around 1893, which refer to a new structure to contain the artworks, also mention the preservation of Moreau's house as a 'petit musée'. The appearance of the house-museum project is most interesting. Conceived of as distinct from the building that would contain his works of art, it makes clear that Moreau's aims went beyond the mere optimal presentation of his works. This *petit musée* would probably have been similar to the apartment one finds today in the Musée Moreau, where the artist's private belongings are presented symbolically.

This idea of preserving the apartment where his parents had lived might to some extent have evolved out of the particular relationship that Moreau had developed with the place. For most of his life he had shared the house with his mother, and after she died her apartment on the first floor had become a private *lieu de mémoire* which the artist preserved intact and approached with piety.²⁶ However, an artist turning his own house into a museum was a most unusual enterprise at the time and without precedent, although the monumentalization of the houses of historic artists was occurring throughout Europe.²⁷

It is probable that Moreau was inspired by Ingres's bequest to the local museum of Montauban in 1867. In addition to some paintings by its native son and 1,000 of his drawings, the city also received the painter's tools; his violin; some paintings by his father; a collection of antique vases; the painter's desk; portraits of Raphael, Mozart, Haydn, Glück, Beethoven and Grétry and editions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Moreover, the artist's will stipulated the unmistakably symbolic way that all of these 'personalia' were to be installed in the museum.

What made Moreau decide to give up the idea of the two locations in favour of the construction of a single museum at the place where he lived? This option may have occurred to Moreau when discussing his building intentions with his friend, the architect Dainville.²⁸ It must have become clear that it was possible to provide the necessary exhibition space on the property while also keeping those spaces that constituted Moreau's 'petit musée sentimental' intact. In a letter to Dainville of April 1895, Moreau details the design commission, starting with the immediate reason for the building project. Moreau says that the lack

of space to decently preserve the works he owns had forced him to take action, adding that it was not a matter of vanity.²⁹ He then mentions the conditions for the design: firstly, he wants to develop the full potential of his property by extending the building as much as possible; secondly, he finds that it is essential to preserve the apartment previously occupied by his parents; thirdly, he claims that his financial means are modest; and finally he states that the project should be limited to the strictly necessary, ‘that is, a larger place for my works. Every pursuit of luxury, of comfort even, must be discarded.’³⁰

Dainville entrusted his assistant Albert Lafon with the design of the project and Duclos with the execution. The plans for the alterations were drawn up within a month and a long year later Moreau returned to 14 Rue de La Rochefoucauld (Fig. 2). Essentially, Lafon’s design made two alterations to the existing building. The first replaced the façade of the old house, extending it towards the street by taking in the former front yard. In this way, two new spaces were



Fig. 2. Façade of the Moreau Museum, by architect A. Lafon; published in *SADG Recueil publié à l'occasion de la millième adhésion à la Société des Architectes diplômés par le Gouvernement* (Paris, 1911).

added to the first floor, a gallery and a small office, but most importantly, the floor area for the upstairs galleries was substantially increased. The second alteration required the renovation of the entire second and third floors which contained Moreau’s private quarters, as well as the attic studio where he had worked for forty years. The new studio spaces were given a cast iron framework which facilitated their characteristic openness and maximized the window area to the north.³¹ This structure is partially visible on the inside and, deliberately or not, brings to mind Moreau’s earlier warehouse concept. The new eclectic façade in brick and stonework used a vocabulary that Dainville’s office applied more than once to town houses.³² It is not clear whether the Italianate touch is just a lucky coincidence for ‘the new Mantegna’.

During the final two years that he spent in his remodelled house, Moreau was occupied with the preparation of his bequest and wrote several lists of tasks for himself, which are preserved in the museum’s archives.³³ The process of preparation largely comprised trying to ‘finish’ his *oeuvre*, deciding on the destination for his private belongings and providing lists of instructions for his assistant, Henri Rupp, to execute after his death.

During these years Moreau became ill and hired several young assistants to help him finish the old canvases that he had enlarged some years earlier as well as the new large paintings he had started more recently. He began to select, touch up and sign the 8,000 drawings he had kept, half of which would be shown in his museum. The interiors of the rooms of the museum’s first floor were reorganized and, finally, Moreau wrote a series of notes concerning the meaning of his works and his own position as an artist. Since many of them were at first written as drafts and then edited and rewritten, it is most probable that Moreau consciously developed them as an integral part of his bequest.³⁴

The final version of Moreau’s will was dated 10 September 1897.³⁵ It appointed Rupp as his executor and in addition to a list of financial donations contained three stipulations concerning his posthumous fame. Moreau donated 100,000 francs to the École des Beaux-Arts to establish an annual prize, thus ensuring the survival of his name. Secondly, he stipulated that no official honours were to be paid at his funeral. However, the most important passage is that concerning the destiny of his house:

I bequeath my house, situated 14 rue de La Rochefoucauld, with all it contains, paintings, drawings, cartoons, etc., etc., work of fifty years, and likewise what is enclosed in the said house by the ancient apartment formerly occupied by my father and my mother, to the state or in default of the former to the city of Paris or in default of the former to the École des Beaux-Arts or alternatively to the Institut de France (Académie des Beaux-Arts) on the explicit condition of the preservation forever – that would be my dearest wish – or at least as long as possible, of this collection, maintaining the integral character that allows the sum of the work and the efforts of the artist during his life to be recorded [*constater*] forever.³⁶

When Moreau died in 1898 the script he had developed started to be played out. In addition to the execution of his will, this also included a donation by Charles Hayem of four Moreaus to the Musée du Luxembourg in the month after his death, and a second donation the following year. After Antony Roux, Hayem was the most important collector of Moreau's work and the donations were the result of a promise he had made to the artist. The acceptance of Moreau's legacy by the state became a more complicated affair and was successfully concluded only in 1902. It then took three more years before the museum opened to the public. The biggest obstacle to the state accepting the bequest was the unfinished nature of many of the works. This was also the main reason for the lukewarm response of the public when the museum was finally opened.³⁷ Moreau's condition, 'to preserve ... this collection, maintaining its integral character', thus proved crucial to having the unfinished works accepted together with those that were finished. For Moreau, they were equally important in realizing his artistic project. As if looking back from the future, he wrote: 'everything will be accomplished, all will have come to light in a sufficient realization, not the realization of the complete achievement, but that realization which, from the start, expresses all that is necessary and desired for the soul'.³⁸ It is the irony of history that precisely among the works which did not meet the *critères d'achèvement* are those that are responsible for the later myth of Moreau as a precursor of abstract painting.³⁹ However, the condition in his will to respect the alleged unity of the collection is probably just as important in that it guarantees that the museum not only presents Moreau's work but his life as well. While Moreau's instruction to Rupp to limit access to the bequeathed apartment interiors has been interpreted as Moreau wanting to disappear

behind his *oeuvre* – especially when taken together with his instruction that no portrait of him should ever be shown – his scrupulous organization of his private belongings belies this interpretation.⁴⁰ It is more likely that these instructions reveal Moreau's obsession with maintaining control of his posthumous image: his artistic effort had to be highlighted while his personal life was to be meticulously presented but of secondary importance.

Maison-musée Gustave Moreau

The Moreau museum is often simply classified as a preserved artist's house, but what it exhibits is harder to grasp than this classification suggests. The building, the works collected and presented in the studio galleries, and the private apartment spaces on view on the first floor all share a particular ambiguity when we realize that what we see is not some 'frozen' historical condition, but a careful presentation designed only for posterity. From the street the building appears to be a commonplace bourgeois house of the period, despite its façade being erected when the building was altered with a view to its future museum function.

The status of the rooms on the two upper floors is equally odd. In spaces that were conceived of as museum galleries from the start, the suggestion to the visitor is of entering the artist's studio (Fig. 3), with the space conforming to the studio typology of high ceilings with windows to the north. At the same time the space occupies two full floors and is too extensive to be convincing as a workplace of the artist. No reference is made to the real studio where Moreau had worked for forty years and which had disappeared with the demolition of the second and third floors in 1895.⁴¹ The scenography in these new spaces keeps at a distance any romantic image of the artist's studio, with carelessly lingering works both finished and unfinished.⁴² Similarly, as a collection, the works on view are more than an accidental *fonds d'atelier*, for they were conceived of by the painter as a collection that had to represent his *oeuvre*. For example, Moreau produced some new versions of works that he had sold, as if to complete his collection, and had enlarged and reworked early works that did not meet his requirements.

An artist's studio may be characterized as a waiting room in which works remain unfinished or unready,



Fig. 3. Musée Gustave Moreau: studio gallery on the second floor. Collection of the author.

awaiting the moment when the artist considers them mature enough to be presented ‘outside’.⁴³ This certainly applies to Moreau, who was in the habit of working on many paintings at the same time, while also from time to time reworking paintings he had considered finished many years earlier. Towards the end of his life he sold very few of his works, and it seems that this radicalized the role of the studio as a temporal mediator. The public exhibition of the works in his studio was no longer temporarily suspended, but this suspension became a general condition. For as long as he lived, the accumulating works were no longer meant to leave the orbit of the artist. They would finally be made public, not by leaving the studio but by making the studio public.

Finally, the first floor of the museum contains the only spaces that originally formed part of Moreau’s house, and it is here that Moreau’s posthumous pose reaches its climax.⁴⁴ The *cabinet de réception*, the dining room, the drawing room and the boudoir present a complete Second Empire apartment interior, which was never really inhabited by Moreau but by his parents. Moreover, the interior arrangement is not merely functional, for each room appears to be dedicated to some theme from Moreau’s life.

In the *cabinet de réception*, for example the theme might be Moreau’s learning of the classical tradition. A glazed cupboard contains antiquities and antiquar-

ian editions of architectural treatises that Moreau inherited from his father Louis Moreau, an architect, who also arranged Moreau’s private education. The walls of the room are covered with a marvellous selection of copies made by Moreau during his stay in Italy and during his many visits to the Louvre. A series of small, varied artworks decorates the modest hallway. Small paintings by Moreau hang next to works by or portraits of friends such as Fromentin or Berchère and drawings or reproductions of artists that he admired, figures as diverse as Rembrandt, Poussin, Chassériau and Burne-Jones. A series of photographs and engravings of Moreau’s best known works hangs in the dining room – those which had established his name in the *Salons* of the 1860s. This series in some sense complements the *oeuvre* presented on the upper floors.

The next room is often called the bedroom because it contains a bed, but it was actually the living room used by Moreau’s parents (Fig. 4). It is full of portraits and reminders of family and friends, mostly of Moreau’s parents, but also his sister, who died as a child, his grandparents and Henri Rupp. There is not only a series of townscapes of Italian cities by Victor-Jean Nicolle, probably belonging to the original living room interior as did most of the furniture, but also small pictures of the estate of Moreau’s grandfather. There is a portrait of Moreau painted by



Fig. 4. Musée Gustave Moreau: 'bedroom' on the first floor. Collection of the author.

Degas in Rome in 1859, which by 1897 had already become a souvenir of a friendship that had cooled. The organization of the souvenirs culminates with a glazed frame containing miniature objects, photographs, medals of honour, jewellery and toys in an arrangement in the shape of a family tree. The *boudoir* preserves the memory of Moreau's 'unique et meilleure amie' Alexandrine in its furniture and a selection of Moreau's artworks, which had once belonged to Alexandrine and which he had purchased from her heirs shortly after her death.

The last judgement

Moreau wrote in his will that the preservation of his bequest had to permit *forever* the assessment of 'the sum of the work and the efforts of the artist during his life'. It seems as though it was self-evident to him that this effort would have to be judged in the future. However, it is now clear that Moreau's bequest not only reflects the effort that he made in his quest for what he believed art should be but also testifies to the energy he invested in the presentation of this labour. Commenting on the many notes that Moreau wrote on his own work and that of others, Peter Cooke interprets them as Moreau affirming for himself the rightness of his often-contested mission to renew history painting.⁴⁵

However, legitimization was a problem that affected not only Moreau; it was an essential aspect of the regime of the 'exhibition artist'.⁴⁶ Moreau renounced the idea of art in the service of politics and adhered instead to the ideal of art for art's sake.⁴⁷ Under such conditions, an artist could be legitimated only by claiming to be a genius or through the testimony of a life dedicated to art. In his writings, Moreau links the concept of genius with a life dedicated to art, stating that, among two equally gifted artists, genius will be apparent in all its splendour in the artist who has lived the most.⁴⁸ I argue that the whole of Moreau's museum enterprise, its structure and its reasoning, needs to be interpreted in connection with this art-historiographic discourse rather than in relation to any museum format.

During the nineteenth century, posthumous evaluations of artists had their proper place in the artist's monograph, the so-called 'Life and Work', which was the predominant form of art-historical writing.⁴⁹ The common format of the monograph integrated the artist's biography with an overview of his *oeuvre*. The 'Life' combined the literary tropes and topoi of the genre – much the same since Vasari's *Vite* – with the empirical methods of contemporary historiography. However, the biography was also written as if in a dialectic relationship with the characteristics and the internal development of the *oeuvre*. Ultimately, the



Fig. 5. Musée Gustave Moreau: cabinet with drawings that can be leafed through, on the second floor. Collection of the author.

person, the life and the work of the artist were presented as one indivisible whole.

Moreau's museum anticipates the evaluating narrative still to come by initiating it in itself. Its arrangements aim to make this evaluation a mere confirmation of his work and effort. To that purpose, every study of the nude, every copy and every study trip made are as important as the potential masterpieces of the artist himself (Fig. 5). In contrast to many monographic discourses, the Moreau museum does not weave life and work together as two parallel unfolding temporalities in a dialectical relationship, but it ties life and work together through the notion of Moreau's effort. A conscious collection – including and excluding evidence and works of art – has been made. The collection comes to bear meaning through its articulation in an exhibition scenography.⁵⁰ The house provides the master structure of the unifying narrative; it represents his person and his life through its interior arrangement, and his works, assembled into an *oeuvre*, are the fruit of this life. The architecture not only separates life and work but also holds them together in the same place. The architecture of the house thus contributes to the 'natural unity' of the collection – the *oeuvre* is 'at its place' in the studio spaces, in the same way that an interior full of personal souvenirs completes the living quarters of the first floor.

In 1895 Moreau wrote a letter to the director of the Uffizi rejecting the idea of sending a self-portrait to the famous Vasari gallery, which contains the self-portraits of the greatest artists of the past. He argued that it would have been a 'ridiculous presumption' on his part.⁵¹ This humility might seem misplaced, but it is at least a pose that Moreau assumed consistently. To send his portrait would have meant seeking immediate glory, beating his own drum.⁵² Moreau thought it more appropriate to present his life and work to posterity, which would have to judge and decide on whether to grant him fame. In an elaborate note on his own future reception, Moreau writes '[b]ut we will only be able to do this once this artist ... has disappeared, leaving behind but these so noble testimonies of his passage on this earth. Then there will be a judgement ... about what has been added to the beautiful heritage of the masters'.⁵³ Ultimately, Moreau's attitude invokes the concept of genius, misunderstood in his own time and whose 'marche en avant' was only recognized after his death.⁵⁴

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Notes and references

- 1 For example, achieving greater visibility lay behind the foundation of the Roger Raveel Museum by the painter in Machelen, Belgium. Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, was created by the artist to guarantee a permanent, perfect place for his works and their continued accessibility.
- 2 For a brief description of the museum, see Pierre-Louis Mathieu, Geneviève Lacambre *et al.*, *Le Musée Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 2005). As Moreau had not won the Prix de Rome in 1849, he organized his sojourn in Italy himself.
- 3 See especially Peter Cooke, 'Gustave Moreau and the reinvention of history painting', *Art Bulletin* 3 (2008), pp. 394–416. Poussin's *La mort de Germanicus* is a good illustration of history painting as a narrative genre traditionally involving the dramatic, theatrical staging of figures engaged in significant acts.
- 4 In art-history reference books, however, Gustave Moreau has generally been associated with *fin-de-siècle* Symbolism or Decadence, but this categorization is subject to reconsideration. Art historians have recently started to recognize the essential fact that Moreau was foremost a history painter. That is how the author of *Oedipus and the Sphinx* and *Salome* understood himself, as did his contemporaries. See, for example Peter Cooke, *Gustave Moreau and les arts jumeaux. Peinture et littérature au dix-neuvième siècle* (Oxford and New York, 2003).
- 5 Earlier, through recommendations, Moreau had been able to exhibit at the *Salons* of 1852, 1853 and at the Exposition Universelle of 1855, without receiving critical attention. For a discussion of the critical reception of *Oedipe* and its programmatic significance with respect to the status of history painting, see Peter Cooke, 'Gustave Moreau's "Oedipus and the Sphinx": archaism, temptation and the nude at the Salon of 1864', *Burlington Magazine* 146 (2004), pp. 609–15.
- 6 '[U]n coup de tonnerre en plein palais de l'industrie'. Drion, *Journal du Loiret* (8 June 1864), quoted in Cooke, op. cit. (note 3), p. 609.
- 7 'Monsieur Gustave Moreau est un artiste extraordinaire, unique. C'est un mystique enfermé, en plein Paris, dans une cellule où ne pénètre même plus le bruit de la vie contemporaine qui bat furieusement pourtant les portes du cloître.' Joris-Karl Huysmans, *L'art Moderne* (Paris, 1883), p. 152, quoted in Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau. Monographie et nouveau catalogue de l'oeuvre achevé* (Courbevoie, Paris, 1998), p. 94.
- 8 See Geneviève Lacambre, Larry J. Feinberg *et al.*, *Gustave Moreau. Between Epic and Dream* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 133–4.
- 9 As the folders of press-cuttings that he kept testify. Peter Cooke (ed.), *Écrits sur l'art par Gustave Moreau* (Fontfroide, 2002), p. 211.
- 10 See Pierre Pinchon, 'Le sauvage et les mondains 1856–1906: les amateurs fin de siècle de Gustave Moreau', *Les Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Art* 2 (2004), pp. 48–60.
- 11 See, for example the inaugural speech given by Moreau on 22 November 1890. Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), pp. 337–8.
- 12 I rely largely on Geneviève Lacambre's article which documents the development of the museum concept and the alteration of Moreau's house, Geneviève Lacambre, *Maison d'artiste, maison-musée. L'exemple de Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1987).
- 13 'Il se peut qu'un jour M. Gustave Moreau se décide enfin à sortir de son ombre et nous offre en une exposition privée un vaste ensemble d'oeuvres qui l'expliqueront plus clairement.' Paul Leprieur, 'Gustave Moreau et son oeuvre', *L'Artiste* (March-May-June 1885), quoted in Mathieu, op. cit. (note 7), p. 102.
- 14 In a letter of 1878 in which Pierre Puvis de Chavannes encouraged Moreau, who was worried about the reception of his work, the painter advised Moreau to organize a private exhibition every now and then. In doing so, Puvis de Chavannes suggested that Moreau could arrange the installation of his selected works and the interior himself, choosing the right carpets and flowers 'to have the effect desired'. See Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 10–11. In pointing to 1878, I allude to the much quoted reflection by Moreau noted as early as 1862, which might appear more significant in hindsight than at the moment that Moreau wrote it down as a singular thought: 'Ce soir 24 décembre 1862. Je pense à ma mort et au sort de mes pauvres petits travaux et de toutes mes compositions que je prends la peine de réunir. Séparées, elles périssent; prises ensemble, elles donnent un peu l'idée de ce que j'étais comme artiste et du milieu dans lequel je me plaisais à rêver. Gustave Moreau – 1862'; Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), p. 159.
- 15 Martha Ward, 'Impressionist installations and private exhibitions', *Art Bulletin* 73 (1991), pp. 559–622.
- 16 The list is a copy by Henri Rupp and mentions nineteen cartoons, twenty-one watercolours and drawings, forty-one 'peintures grandes' and twenty-three small canvases as an outline for the potential exhibition. See Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 51.
- 17 Mathieu, op. cit. (note 7), p. 96.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 19 Désiré Laugée, 30 December 1892: 'Parmi ceux que je forme pour toi, il en est un surtout dont je désire ardemment la réalisation en l'an 1893 – c'est l'Exposition de tes oeuvres. Nous en avons déjà parlé ensemble', quoted in Lacambre *et al.*, op. cit. (note 7), p. 295.
- 20 'D'année en année, j'ajoute des détails augmentatifs, suivant que l'idée vient, à mes deux cents oeuvres posthumes, car, je veux que mon art apparaisse tout à coup, et tout entier, un moment après ma mort.' J. Péladan, 'Gustave Moreau', *L'Ermitage* (January 1885), p. 30 as quoted in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 16.
- 21 Published in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 11), pp. 45–6.
- 22 Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 17–18.
- 23 'Construire aux abords de Paris (Neuilly?) un grand hangar et y mettre le plus proprement possible mes peintures, mes dessins' and 'Bien cadrer dignement et sans trop y regarder bien qu'avec mesure toutes mes toiles, tous mes dessins sous verre (cadre bois) mes aquarelles etc. etc. etc. disposer tout cela bien en ordre dans un local approprié très simple mais suffisamment propre et décent.' Published in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 45–6.
- 24 On the erosion of the notion of the museum picture at the end of the nineteenth century, see Daniel J. Sherman, *Worthy Monuments. Art Museums and the Politics of Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 197–8.
- 25 On the *envoie* system providing provincial museums with works obtained by the central administration, see Sherman, op. cit. (note 21), pp. 16–54.
- 26 Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 17.
- 27 The older cases include Canova, Thorvaldsen, Vela and Wiertz who all created museums in new buildings. Wiertz's studio

- was turned into a museum. Canova initiated the erection of his Tempio in his birthplace Possagno. The house where he was born was posthumously opened as a museum on the initiative of his step-brother and heir Sartori who also had the *gipsotheca* erected behind the house. Eduard Hüttinger, *Künstlerhäuser von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart* (Zürich, 1985).
- 28 Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 19.
- 29 'Mon travail accumulé pendant quarante ans, m'encombraît à tel point que je ne savais plus où me mettre pour travailler, tout cela s'abîmait, et bien que je n'aie pas la niaiserie d'attacher une trop grande importance à tous ces ouvrages, je les aime assez, par la peine qu'ils m'ont donnée, pour désirer les laisser intacts après moi, et dans le meilleur état possible.' Letter published in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 47.
- 30 '[C]'est-à-dire d'une place plus grande pour mes ouvrages, toute recherche de luxe, de confortable même, doit être écartée.' Cited in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 47.
- 31 The building plans further show that nine thin metal posts were integrated into the solid walls of the first and second floors.
- 32 According to Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), p. 27.
- 33 Some of them published in *ibid.*, pp. 45–50.
- 34 See Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), p. 22.
- 35 Published in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 47–8.
- 36 'Je lègue ma maison sise 14 rue de La Rochefoucauld avec tout ce qu'elle contient, peintures, dessins, cartons, etc, etc, travail de cinquante années, comme aussi ce que renferment, dans ladite maison, les anciens appartements occupés jadis par mon père et ma mère: à l'Etat ou à son défaut à la Ville de Paris ou à son défaut à l'École des Beaux-Arts ou à son défaut à l'Institut de France (Académie des Beaux-Arts) à cette condition expresse de garder toujours, ce serait mon vœu le plus cher, ou au moins aussi longtemps que possible, cette collection, en lui conservant ce caractère d'ensemble qui permette toujours de constater la somme de travail et d'efforts de l'artiste pendant sa vie', and 'Je recommande que pour l'enterrement, il ne soit fait aucune convocation officielle en dehors de l'Institut, qu'aucun discours ne soit prononcé sur ma tombe, et que les honneurs militaires, auxquels j'ai droit comme officier de la Légion d'Honneur, ne me soient pas rendus.' Published in Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 47–8.
- 37 See E. Gray Buck, 'Museum bodies: the performance of the Musée Gustave Moreau', *Museum Anthropology* 2 (1997), pp. 15–24.
- 38 '[H]eureusement rien ne sera à regretter, car tout aura pris son vol, tout sera arrivé à la lumière par une réalisation suffisante, non celle de l'achèvement complet, mais celle qui, dès le début, exprime tout ce qui est le nécessaire et le désiré pour l'âme.' Published in Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), p. 169.
- 39 For instance in the recent exhibition 'Turner, Hugo, Moreau: Entdeckung der Abstraktion', Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 2007.
- 40 Jean Paladilhe and José Pierre wrote, for example that 'In his last wishes he was faithful to his basic principle that the personality of an artist should be lost in his work'. Jean Paladilhe and José Pierre, *Gustave Moreau* (New York, 1972), p. 61. Moreau's first biographer Ary Renan first mentioned this belief of Moreau's in A. Renan, *Gustave Moreau* (Paris, 1900), p. 129.
- Recent museum curators have ignored these instructions: in 1991 and in 2003 several rooms of the apartment on the first floor were added to the visitor's tour of the museum.
- 41 This studio, to which Moreau admitted almost no one with the exception of his assistant Rupp – not even his students from the École who often visited him on Sundays – is almost undocumented.
- 42 It is not clear to what extent this scenography in the upper two floors arranged by Rupp is according to Moreau's intentions. Some documents indicate that when Moreau died, some eighty easels were located there, while others mention Moreau's intention to have his paintings fixed to the easels. See Lacambre, op. cit. (note 12), pp. 29, 49.
- 43 Brian O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube. On the Relationship between where Art is Made and where Art is Displayed* (New York, 2007), p. 18.
- 44 All of these rooms formed part of the original house except the *cabinet de réception*. The first floor contains one further room that is not open to the public.
- 45 Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), p. 211.
- 46 Oskar Bätschmann, *The Artist in the Modern World. The Conflict between Market and Self-expression* (Cologne, 1997), pp. 64–71.
- 47 However, this needs to be nuanced; see Cooke, op. cit. (note 4).
- 48 'Si Dieu a beaucoup donné, certes, l'artiste sera supérieur à l'artiste qui aura beaucoup acquis ... mais, à don égal, le génie sera dans toute sa splendeur chez l'artiste qui aura le plus vécu'. Moreau, in Cooke, op. cit. (note 9), p. 173.
- 49 For a discussion of the development of the monograph as a format with its own discourse, see Gabriele Guercio, *Art as Existence. The Artist's Monograph and Its Project* (Cambridge and London, 2006). Greg Thomas has argued that the biographical paradigm was particularly prevalent in French art history and criticism. Greg M. Thomas, 'Instituting genius: the formation of biographical art history in France', in Elizabeth Mansfield (ed.), *Art History and its Institutions. Foundations of a Discipline* (London, 2002), pp. 260–70.
- 50 This selection also applies to the archives bequeathed by Moreau, consisting of his notes and correspondence. They thus also form some sort of collection. For example, something Moreau and Rupp apparently tried to keep out of the museum's archives were the photos of models that had been used in the preparation of some compositions.
- 51 Mathieu, op. cit. (note 7), p. 108.
- 52 For a discussion of the concepts of glory and fame, see Mark Jarzombek, 'The (trans)formations of fame', in Anthony Vidler (ed.), *Architecture between Spectacle and Use* (Williamstown and New Haven, 2008), pp. 77–88.
- 53 'Mais nous ne le pourront que lorsque cet artiste tant méconnu d'abord, malgré quelques caresses apparentes, aura disparu, ne laissant après lui que ces témoignages si nobles de son passage sur cette terre. Alors on jugera, alors on jaugera, alors on comprendra et on verra, comme ce fut de tous temps, et ce que l'on a perdu et ce qu'on possédait, ce qui aura été ajouté à ce bel héritage des maîtres.' In Cooke, op. cit., (note 9), p. 170.
- 54 Moreau, in *ibid.*, p. 167.