

► **Just one year before its 2024 edition, the festival *Normandie Impressionniste* can already promise an exceptional programme to celebrate the Impressionist movement's 150th anniversary, and it is now unveiling two vital events: Whistler and Wilson.**

The next edition of the *Normandie Impressionniste* festival, which will take place from 22nd March to 22nd September 2024 across the entire territory of Normandy, is setting out to be at once remarkable and striking. It aims to federate the initiatives of both public and private players around a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first Impressionist exhibition, and it desires above all to reflect the spirit of invention that is inherent to this revolutionary artistic movement which, since its inception, has successfully crossed over both borders and generations.

A year before its public opening, and buoyed up by ever stronger ambitions, the festival is today revealing two of the many key moments that will mark its six-month-long programme. They are an exhibition/event devoted to James Abbott McNeill Whistler at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rouen and an exclusive sound and light show on Rouen Cathedral, especially created for the event by the famous artist and stage director Robert Wilson. Standing 150 years apart, these two internationally renowned figures in the artistic creation of their respective fields, both born in the USA, indisputably embody the notions of freedom, innovation and renewal which Impressionism exuded and which it continues to inspire, worldwide.

These two projects also illustrate the special bond between Impressionism, the territory of Normandy and the United States of America, while 2024 will at the same witness the 80th anniversary commemorations of the Normandy landings.

From 22nd March to 22nd September 2024, the festival will offer a deep dive into the spirit of invention inherent to the Impressionist movement, across the entire territory of Normandy. This exceptional edition will pay homage to the 150th anniversary of the first Impressionist exhibition. It will present a programme which will be as rich as it is multiple, bringing together heritage and modernity, while giving pride of place to young creativity by inviting nationally and internationally renowned artists. This special edition will run across not only all of Normandy's cultural sites, but also public spaces, bringing in the region's rich historic and industrial heritage, as well as its exceptional natural settings.... As the land that saw so many impressionist artists emerge or call their home, during this festival, Normandy will become the site of a grand collective narrative, providing keys to the understanding of a major artistic movement and its influence, which has become more vital than ever in the 21st century.

For this ambitious event, the festival is running with the momentum given by the 2020 edition and by *Nuits Normandie Impressionniste* in 2022, and is setting out to celebrate the impressionist gaze, while remaining rooted in today's issues: the highlighting of communities, taking on our responsibility towards nature, questioning our relationship with new depictions of reality, while understanding social, environmental and technological upheavals, through the crossed views of artists. These questions were already emerging at the end of the 19th century. Have we answered them in the 21st?

► Robert Wilson and Rouen Cathedral

Every summer, the "Cathedral of Light" event enchants the City of Rouen's inhabitants and visitors, with each year an audience of over 100,000 attending this sound and light show for families, on the façade of Rouen's legendary cathedral.

At the Normandie Impressionniste 2024 Festival, this show will for the first time be entrusted to one of our era's greatest multidisciplinary and avant-garde artists, the American Robert Wilson, or Bob Wilson. As a stage director and visual artist, Bob Wilson is a poet of light. At the end of the 1960s, Bob Wilson became known as one of the leading figures in New York's contemporary theatre scene. Today, he can be found on the entire world's operatic and theatrical stages. He has worked with such varied artists as Philip Glass, Isabelle Huppert, Marina Abramović, Michel Piccoli, or Willem Dafoe...

His inimitable and instantly recognisable style will surely mark the history of video-projections on historical buildings and be a key moment in the Normandie Impressionniste Festival. This historic collaboration promises a new, unexpected experience, as "universally accessible" as it will be sophisticated.



Bob Wilson's photograph: © Lucie Jansch

► James Abbott McNeill Whistler, the Butterfly Effect

The painting of the American artist Whistler (1834-1903), who was a contemporary of the nebula of impressionist painters, provides a stylistic counterpoint while also sharing with them a deep feeling of rupture, opening the way to a painting which was independent, liberated and self-reflexive. For the Normandie Impressionniste 2024 Festival, the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rouen has decided to broaden its focus and sidestep, by presenting the figure of Whistler and the deep, lasting fascination he exercised from 1874 to 1914 in France and, more generally, across Europe.

The aura of Whistler's painting comes from its singular style, its grace and mystery, as well as the range of sensations that it inspires, in particular when associated with literature and music. But it also comes from this dandy painter's outlandish personality, which sparked off uproars and scandals, and was the source of an attraction shown by so many artists, which broadened even further his renown, as well as by art critics and by such writers as Huysmans and Proust.

In the exhibition James Abbott McNeill Whistler, the Butterfly Effect, the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rouen's ambition is to bring together a large number of this American artist's works, as well as major pieces by painters who were infused by the master's spirit, in areas that will be dealt with room by room: the sensitive confrontation generated by human-scale portraiture, nocturnal landscapes, the imperceptible and the evanescent, Japonism, the revelation of Velasquez's painting, etc.



Whistler James Abbott McNeill Arrangement in Grey and Black n°1 or Portrait of the Artist's Mother (1804-1881) 1871, Paris, musée d'Orsay. Photograph © RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Jean Schormans

NORMANDIE IMPRESSIONNISTE, THE FESTIVAL OF AN ENTIRE REGION, OPEN TO THE WORLD

Since its inception in 2009, the Normandie Impressionniste festival (more than 1 million attendees at each edition which makes the festival the biggest event dedicated to impressionism in France...) has created a unique dynamic in France: it brings together public and private players from an entire region around an artistic journey that explores the special bond between a territory and a cultural movement, which was born in France, in Normandy, shook up the history of art, conquered the whole world and has never failed to come in for a huge popular success.

"Narrating the birth of the world's most popular artistic movement invites us to bring a breath of fresh air to the entirety of Normandy. But celebrating the rise of an artistic revolution also means reminding ourselves of the importance of being open to the world. With Bob Wilson, we have long wished to find the right project for us to work together. So we are especially proud that he has accepted our invitation to produce a piece which is unprecedented both in his oeuvre and in the history of the festival: making Rouen Cathedral shimmer with Wilsonian light", states Philippe Platel, the Director of the Normandie Impressionniste Festival.

"As soon as it appeared, Impressionism shook up all the academic canons and came in for a certain success among those foreign artists who felt close to it. For example, the American artist Whistler struck up a relationship with the movement – and with Monet in particular – as they shared the same spirit of invention", affirms Philippe Piguët, the festival's Chief Curator.

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