The Morgan Brings Jean-Jacques Lequeu Drawings from the Bibliothèque nationale de France

Jean-Jacques Lequeu: Visionary Architect. Drawings from the Bibliothèque nationale de France
January 31 through May 10, 2020

*Exhibition extended through September 13, 2020

New York (January 30, 2020) – Six months before he died in poverty and obscurity, architect and draftsman Jean-Jacques Lequeu (1757–1826) donated one of the most singular and fascinating graphic oeuvres of his time to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). The Morgan Library & Museum is proud to be the first institution in New York City to present a selection of these works. Some sixty of Lequeu’s several hundred drawings are now on view in Jean-Jacques Lequeu: Visionary Architect, the first museum retrospective to bring significant public and scholarly attention to one of the most imaginative architects of the Enlightenment.

Lequeu’s meticulous drawings in pen and wash include highly detailed renderings of buildings and imaginary monuments populating invented landscapes. His mission was to see and describe everything systematically—from the animal to the organic, from erotic fantasy to his own visage. Solitary and obsessive, he created the fantastic worlds shown in his...
drawings without ever leaving his studio, and enriched them with characters and stories
drawn from his library.

Lequeu dreamed of becoming an architect and began his career working on building sites,
but ultimately he spent the majority of his life as a bureaucratic draftsman shifting between
government offices before being retired on a meagre ministry pension. Working stealthily on
his own, Lequeu produced animated self-portraits, erotic drawings, plans for revolutionary
monuments, and over one hundred designs for imagined projects. His drawings
demonstrate a remarkable degree of skill and creativity, as well as an inventiveness
inspired by antiquity and the Enlightenment.

Born during the reign of Louis XV (r. 1715-
1774), Lequeu was a witness to the death
throes of the ancien régime, the upheavals
brought about by the Revolution, and the
new order established under Napoleon’s
Empire. His work, created in solitude and
fueled by self-study, reflects the opportunities
and vicissitudes of his troubled times and a
vision of architecture that defied academic
boundaries.

This exhibition is curated by the Morgan’s Eugene and Clare Thaw Curator of Drawings and
Prints Jennifer Tonkovich, who says “Jean-Jacques Lequeu was a builder of fantasies, an
architect that we know through his drawings, not his buildings. Since many of his drawings were
not proposals for actual buildings, we see his imagination unleashed. The more closely visitors
look, the more details will emerge. 200 years after they were made, they convey to us the
possibilities of architecture and the built environment.”

The exhibition is accompanied by a 192-page hardcover volume in French. The publication
provides unique insight, both vivid and deviant, into an extraordinary time, and allows the reader
to follow Lequeu on his obsessive and solitary course.
Drawings from the Bibliothèque nationale de France
January 31 through May 10, 2020
The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street
New York, NY 10016

For more information about the exhibition, hours, and admission, please visit www.themorgan.org.

For assistance with media inquiries in French:
Fiona Greep
fiona.greep@bnf.fr
press@bnf.fr
01 53 79 41 14 / 06 59 13 41 96

Marie Payet
chef du service de presse et des partenariats médias
marie.payet@bnf.fr
01 53 79 41 18 / 06 63 01 10 74

Related Programming

LECTURE AND DISCUSSION

Lequeu, exceptional draftsman?
Basile C. Baudez | If it were not for his drawings at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Jean-Jacques Lequeu would be a simple footnote in the history of late eighteenth-century French architecture. Lequeu’s drawings reflect the way architects of his generation tended to rely more heavily on graphic communication than on textual or theoretical means of expressing their ideas. Lequeu established a specific and original dialogue between text and image that allowed him to question and distort the graphic language set by his colleagues. Join Basile C. Baudez, Assistant Professor at Princeton University, for a presentation contextualizing Lequeu’s production in the history of architectural draftsmanship and to uncover the reasons why he remains one of the most fascinating artists of his time.
Friday, January 31, 2020, 6:30 PM
Tickets: $20; free for Morgan Members and students with a valid ID.

Where in the World is Jean-Jacques Lequeu?
Meredith Martin | Lequeu’s donation of more than 800 architectural drawings, letters, manuscripts and physiognomic studies to the Royal Library in Paris created a paper legacy that has confounded scholars ever since. Historians and curators have attempted to link his enigmatic oeuvre to the work of such Enlightenment visionaries as Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux; to the writings of rebellious libertines like the Marquis de Sade. In one infamous account, Lequeu was even outed as the semi-
fictional brainchild of the twentieth-century artist Marcel Duchamp. In this lecture Meredith Martin, Associate Professor at New York University, will explore various ways that Lequeu's corpus has proven to be fruitful for scholars as well as architects over the past two centuries.

**Wednesday, April 29, 2020, 6:30 PM**
**Tickets:** $20; $15 for Morgan Members; free for students with a valid ID.

**EVENT**

**A Surrealist Soiree**
Join us for an evening exploring the unconventional, imaginary worlds of Parisians Jean-Jacques Lequeu and Alfred Jarry. Curators will delve into a selection of fantastic and humorous works in Jean-Jacques Lequeu: Visionary Architect and Alfred Jarry: The Carnival of Being during a series of brief gallery talks. In the Gilbert Court, you can participate in the surrealist drawing game Exquisite Corpse, relax with a prix fixe French wine and cheese tasting. Enjoy French inspired music by the Brooklyn based band The Bailsmen playing Gypsy Jazz and Vintage Swing.

**Friday, February 7, 2020, 6 – 8:30 PM**
**Tickets:** Free. Food and drink available for purchase.

**GALLERY TALK**

**Curator Guided Tour**
Jean-Jacques Lequeu: Visionary Architect. Drawings from the Bibliothèque nationale de France tour with Jennifer Tonkovich, Eugene and Clare Thaw Curator of Drawings and Prints
**Friday, February 7, 2020, 6:30 PM, 7:30PM**
**Friday, April 3, 2020, 1 PM**

**Organization and Sponsorship**

*Jean-Jacques Lequeu: Visionary Architect* is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum and the Bibliothèque nationale de France with the cooperation of Paris Musées.

The exhibition was presented at the Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, from December 11, 2018 to March 31, 2019. Exhibition curators were Corinne Le Bitouzé and Christophe Leribault and scientific collaborators were Laurent Baridon, Jean-Philippe Garric, and Martial Guédron. The curator of the exhibition at the Morgan is Jennifer Tonkovich, Eugene and Clare Thaw Curator of Drawings and Prints.

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About the Morgan Library & Museum
A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor Pierpont Morgan. The Morgan offers visitors close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music, drawings, and works of art comprises a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

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