

An all too brief review of Art in the Louvre

The first and most important thing to say is that I greatly enjoyed the Louvre. The queue wasn't actually the hour long slog I expected; it was a mere 10-15 minutes, and once I was inside the building, the tickets were even quicker to buy, with automated machines diluting the tourists into lines which were seconds long. But things only got better from there. For me, the art collection was my priority, even though my interests do also lie in the material culture of the ancient world, including that of the ancient Egyptians. However, canvas and paint are primarily the subject of my affections so the stonework and hieroglyphs had to wait. The art in the Louvre speaks for itself, and it speaks in deafening volumes. Even a brief look at the list of artworks in the galleries would astound even the most clueless tourist. For many, the main highlight of the collection is "*The Mona Lisa*", or, "*La Joconde*" as it is called in French. Viewing the painting may sometimes feel like an uphill struggle, with there being an ever present crowd around it, however it is always worth a viewing. For me, however, the collection of Italian Late Medieval altarpieces is one of the best in the world, and one of the most important aspects of the Louvre's collections. With works by *Giotto*, *Cimabue*, *Uccello* and *Fra Angelico* a true fan of early Italian panel painting can really lose themselves in the collection. To list every brilliant aspect of the Louvre's art collection would be impossible, but in my opinion, it wouldn't be ridiculous to say that the Louvre has the best art collection in the world, even ousting the National Gallery in London and the *Kunsthistorische* gallery in Vienna, mainly due to both its quantity and quality of artworks.

Still, the Louvre is not just an endless labyrinth of paintings, far from it. As well as its collections of ancient and medieval objects it also contains an extensive sculpture collection. Ranging from modest busts of Antinous to the overwhelming "*Winged Victory of Samothrace*" and "*Venus de Milo*", the Louvre truly does own the timeless masterpieces in stonework to match those on the canvas. So, if you are tempted to pay the Louvre a visit then my advice would be to decide and plan what you want to see before going, otherwise you will end up running out of time, as you become wound up in a web of incredible distractions you never knew were there (much like myself in Napoleon's apartment).

And finally, as my mum reminded me to, I must mention the gift shop. If literature is what you require from a book shop then the Louvre will fill your every need with a huge collection of books on every subject the museum and gallery itself do, and ever will cover. From Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, all the way through the Renaissance, then onwards, deep into the crevices of Modern art the bookshop covers everything you could ever want, and in significant volumes too. However, and rather surprisingly, the same cannot be said about the souvenir shop, which lacked originality, practicality and reasonable pricing. If you want to buy an expensive *Mona Lisa* mug, or overpriced postcard then it's ideal, but if you want an amiable *Giotto* notebook, a *Caravaggio* pen or a miniature *Venus de Milo* then you will be left displeased.

Jack Snape