

GOLD SILVER BRONZE

A HISTORY OF THE
OLYMPIC MEDAL

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One hundred years after the last games were held in France, the capital is hosting the 2024 Summer Olympic Games. This is an opportunity for Monnaie de Paris to showcase the history of Olympic medals and its extensive experience over the years minting (manufacturing) them. The exhibition “D’or, d’argent, de bronze. Une histoire de la médaille olympique” (Gold, silver and bronze. A history of the Olympic medal) tells the story of Victory and Reward from Antiquity to today, through a collection of medals, objects, images and archives. This ultimate moment symbolised by a medal has evolved throughout the history of the Olympic Games. By looking at medals, we can see how the Games, the arts and our world have evolved over time.

Sport itself is rarely depicted on the Olympic medal. Instead, they feature timeless allegories and symbols. The exhibition is complemented within the museum’s permanent collections by a selection of sports medals with which artists have been free to express their own vision of sporting endeavours and practices.

THE EXHIBITION IN 11 QUESTIONS

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE DISCUS THROWER WAS FOR A LONG TIME CONSIDERED THE IDEAL ATHLETE OF OLYMPIC GREECE?

The *Discobolus* statue of the discus thrower was created by Myron, a sculptor from Athens from the 5th century B.C. (450 B.C.). This figure embodies everyone's idea of an Olympic Greece that was the model for the Games of the modern era: perfection of effort, surpassing oneself. In the 19th century, one of the golden ages for medals, countless artists created their own representations of this figure.



Poster *Pour encourager le sport français*, 1940
Collections historiques de la Monnaie de Paris

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE VERY FIRST OLYMPIC MEDAL IN HISTORY WAS CREATED BY MONNAIE DE PARIS?

Athletes were not awarded medals at the Ancient Olympic Games. It wasn't until the revival of the Games that a silver medal and a bronze medal were awarded to those who finished first and second. The first Olympic medal in history was created by French medallist Jules Clément Chaplain (1839-1909), and this medal was minted by Monnaie de Paris for the 1896 Athens Olympic Games!

WHICH ATHLETE WON FIVE GOLD MEDALS IN A SINGLE OLYMPIAD?

Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi (1897-1973) won five successive Olympic titles (three individual and two team events) at the Paris Games in 1924. The sporting press at the time gave him the nicknames "the flying Finn", "the running machine" and "the man with the stopwatch". He is still a real hero in Finland. A century after Nurmi was

awarded his medals, which were created by engraver André Rivaud (1892-1951), they are for the first time back in the French capital where they were originally minted by the Monnaie de Paris.



Gold medal at the Games of the VIII Olympiad, Paris (1924), André Rivaud.
Paavo Nurmi Turku and Nurmi Family (Finlande)

IN WHICH COUNTRY WERE THE VERY FIRST WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES HELD?

In keeping with the Games of the VIII Olympiad, France also hosted the first Winter Olympics in Chamonix from 25 January to 5 February 1924, six months before the Summer Olympics in Paris. This event initially known as the "Winter Sports Week" was only renamed later in 1925 as the first Winter Olympic Games. The medals, once again minted by Monnaie de Paris, were designed by Raoul Bénard (1881-1961).

DID YOU KNOW THAT IT IS ONLY SINCE 1928 THAT MEDALS ARE GIVEN TO THE WINNERS AT THE END OF EACH EVENT?

From 1896, all medals had been awarded at a special ceremony at the end of the Games. But from the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam onwards, medals were awarded to winning athletes after each event and at each specific location. Another major change: between the IX and the XIX Olympiad (Mexico, 1968), the medals were all identical from one Olympiad to the next. This "standardised" medal design was created by Italian sculptor Giuseppe Cassioli (1865-1842) and named "Trionfo", meaning Triumph.

SINCE WHEN HAVE MEDALS BEEN AWARDED BY PLACING THEM AROUND ATHLETES NECKS?

At the Saint-Louis Olympic Games (1904), the Olympic medal was introduced as a decorative object attached to a short ribbon and pinned onto the athlete's shirt, but these medals were still systematically kept in cases up until the 1956 Games in Melbourne. In 1960 in Rome, a medal was placed around the athlete's neck for the very first time, with an impressive chain made of metal leaves.

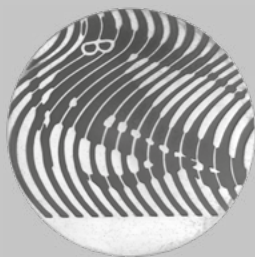
Following on from that, the chain was replaced by a ribbon and each organising committee had complete freedom to design the ribbon.

AND WHEN DID THE FIRST PODIUM APPEAR?

The podium first appeared at the 1932 Winter and Summer Games (Lake Placid and Los Angeles), with the winner taking the highest step in the centre, the runner-up to his right and the third-place finisher to his left. Since then, the podium has been a key part of the Olympic ritual.

DID YOU KNOW THAT A GRAPHIC DESIGNER CREATED THE MEDAL DESIGN FOR THE GRENOBLE WINTER OLYMPICS IN 1968?

French graphic designer and artist Roger Excoffon (1910-1983) was behind the graphic charter for the 1968 Grenoble Winter Games, and his design was also featured on all the victory medals. By playing with grids and striving for purity, the artist conveys movement and speed. The contemporary quality of his work was very much in line with the trends of the Op Art movement, which was in vogue at the time, pushing the limits of our vision through illusions and optical games. Monnaie de Paris was entrusted with minting the medals, and critics were unanimous in their praise for the transposition of Roger Excoffon's work into metal.



Bronze medal (slalom) at the X Olympic Winter Games (Grenoble, 1968), Roger Excoffon
Collections historiques de la Monnaie de Paris

DID YOU KNOW THAT MEDALS ARE NOT ONLY MADE FROM METAL?

The Games' Organising Committee approached Maison Lalique, founded by René Lalique (1860-1945), to manufacture the medals for the Albertville Winter Games (1992). For the first time in the history of the Games, the winner's medal was not solely made from metal, but included a crystal insert set with a metallic crown indicating the colour – gold, silver or bronze – of the award. Designed by

Marie-Claude Lalique (1935-2003), granddaughter of the Maison's founder, the medals for the Albertville Games were made in the Lalique workshops in Wingen-sur-Moder, Alsace. They evoke the snow and ice that form the backdrop to the Winter Games. The Winter Paralympic Games in Tignes-Albertville a month later provided an opportunity for Monnaie de Paris to mint medals designed by Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon (1934-2005). Each discipline would have its own reverse side, with a design that blind people could easily recognise and a text written in Braille.

UNTIL WHEN WAS THE "TRIONFO" MEDAL DESIGN OF 1928 USED?

Thanks to the awarding of the Games of the XXVII Olympiad to Athens in 1997, Greece was able to remind the world that it was the birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games. This country, which had also hosted the first Games of the modern era in 1896, demanded that its twin paternity be reflected on the winners' medals. This was done with the medal for the Athens Games of 2004. The Greek Goddess of Victory, Nike, was transposed onto metal by Greek artist Elena Votsi (born in 1964). This design has been around ever since and will feature on the obverse of the 2024 Paris Games medal.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE REAL STAR OF THE 2024 MEDALS IS NEITHER GOLD NOR SILVER, BUT IRON?

Since the Games of the II Olympiad in Paris in 1900, gold, silver and bronze have been used to reward athletes finishing in the first three positions of their event. This will evidently be the case for the Games of the XXXIII Olympiad in Paris in 2024. However, another metal will feature on the Olympic and Paralympic medals for the Paris Games: iron! Original pieces of iron from the Eiffel Tower, built in 1889, have been preserved over the years as it has undergone programmes of renovation. These hexagonal inserts are set on the reverse side of the medals, so that each victorious Olympic or Paralympic athlete can take a piece of French heritage home with them.

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

- Guided tour of the exhibition by Dominique Antérion and Béatrice Coullaré, curators (in French): Wednesday, April 17th, at 7 pm
- Guided tours of the museum and the exhibition (in French): Saturday and Sunday at 11am (see cultural agenda online)

FAMILIES

Guided tours and workshops on Wednesday and Saturday, 3 pm, and every day during school holidays (In French, see cultural agenda online)

- "Design your Olympic medal", tour and workshop, from age 5
- "Shape your own mascot", tour and workshop, from age 7
- "Chocolate Olympics", tour and workshop, from age 7
- "Olympic kids", tour for children, from 5 to 7 years old

Activity booklet in English by Paris Mômes available for free in the ticket office (from age 6)

Paris MÔMES

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VISIT THE MUSEUM

Demonstrations of the art of engraving: Saturday and Sunday, (except in July and August), from 3 pm to 5 pm (free with the admission ticket).



Agenda, tickets, and more information online on monnaiedeparis.fr

For tours in English, booking is required: +33 (0)1 40 46 57 57 billetterie@monnaiedeparis.fr

AFTER YOUR VISIT

Monnaie de Paris Shop: tuesday to Sunday from 11 am to 7 pm.

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