

## About the exhibition

### ALBUM

The booklet of the exhibition *Chic and practical, The art of the purse* is for sale exclusively at the Monnaie de Paris shop and online.

### VISITS AND ACTIVITIES

All visits are in French.  
For visits in English, booking is required.  
Please call +33 (0)1 40 46 57 57

**Wednesday, May 22th and October 9th, at 7 p.m.**

Noctambule – guided tour of the exhibition by the curator, Claudette Joannis

**Thursday, July 5th, at 1 p.m.**

Focused visit : “The coins in the purse”, by Dominique Antérion

**Saturday, May 25th, Wednesday, June 19th and Wednesday, September 25th, at 2:30 p.m.**

Family activity : “Make your own purse” with Le Tanneur

### OUR PARTNERS

CAMILLE  
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### 11 CONTI MUSEUM

Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Nocturnal visit on Wednesday until 9 p.m.

### Discover the museum

Open to all (children from the age of 12),  
90 mn, Saturday to Sunday, 11 a.m.

### Family Museum Visits

Adults and children (from the age of 5),  
60 mn, Sunday, 3 p.m.

### Demonstrations of the art of engraving :

Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from  
3 to 5 p.m. (free with the admission ticket).

You can find all the details online  
at [monnaieparis.fr](http://monnaieparis.fr)

Practical information, prices and booking  
at [billetterie@monnaieparis.fr](mailto:billetterie@monnaieparis.fr)  
or on-site at the ticket office.

### AFTER YOUR VISIT

Monnaie de Paris shop :  
Open Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.,  
and Wednesday 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Café Frappé by Bloom :

Open Tuesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.,  
Wednesday until 9 p.m.  
Brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

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#ExpoPorteMonnaie  
#11Conti

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# CHIC AND PRACTICAL, THE ART OF THE PURSE

17th of May —  
5th of November, 2019



Purchased out of pure curiosity at a junk fair in 1963, a small, gold inlaid tortoiseshell purse became the first item in a collection built up over the years by Henri Joannis Deberne (1928-2009). His discovery of purses, often precious and of great diversity, led him to reflect on the role played by the bourgeoisie in 19th century society. As well as the purses, countless other small objects collected – dance cards, fans, implements, snuffboxes, tableware and correspondence – reflect this bourgeois lifestyle, the thirst for novelty and the importance of appearances. A shrewd collector, Henri Joannis Deberne did not wish to simply increase the size of his collection, nor was he searching for a particular missing piece, he was simply fascinated by anything that might illustrate domestic and social life. Throughout his lifetime, he never stopped documenting his acquisitions with inventory notes, photographs and research.

This is the first exhibition to be devoted to this small yet useful and precious accessory. Its aim is to provide an historical overview leading the visitor to the heart of the subject: purses of the period 1830-1930, with the never previously exhibited collection lent by Claudette Joannis, alongside numerous loans from both public and private collections. Purses for every occasion are presented from the simplest to the most luxurious, with a section of the exhibition dedicated to remarkable pieces from the great French luxury houses. These purses are the fruit of long traditions of knowhow and craftsmanship and the work of many interrelated trades: tablet-makers, leather craftsmen, jewellers and goldsmiths.

## **I. THE FORBEARS OF THE PURSE**

Since the earliest Antiquity, man has been aware of the need to carry money on his person. The term purse stems from the Latin word for leather: *bursa*, a word derived from ancient Greek, which gives a clear indication of its age. Originally purses were small bags made of animal skin, closed by a drawstring. Leather (as well as fabric) purses have been made for centuries and lent their name to the profession of purse-maker, the craftsmen who made them. Over time, they have changed in appearance, materials used and even name (almoner, harmondoy...).

The manner in which people wore their clothes changed with the times and prevalent fashions and ways of carrying money also evolved. During the centuries after the earliest purses, more ample clothes allowed their wearers to carry small canvas bags under their clothing, attached at the waist by a belt. Slits in the sides of the skirt allowed the wearer access

## **IV. ECCENTRIC STYLES OF PURSE**

Certain purses are not exactly what we might expect. We can describe them as eccentric as they bring together humour, creativity and something secretive.

As well as their everyday usage, purses may also have other functions. Some contained kits for moustache care, sewing kits or even rosary holders. On opening a purse, one might also discover smoker's accessories, implements for writing, counting and storage. On the other hand, numerous different objects were produced in the shape of purses but having quite different uses.

## **V. FROM PURSE TO HANDBAG**

It was in the middle of the 19th century that purses began to resemble the form we know today: for everyday use, leather made, with accordion pleats, sometimes equipped with a flap and clasp. They were also employed to carry

to these purses. As purses became more ornate and their clasps more technically effective, they were worn more ostentatiously on the outside of clothing. Whether or not they were an integral part of the garment, these accessories were representative of the society that used them and contributed to a person's elegance through their preciousness, their decoration and the perfection of the workmanship involved in their making.

## **II. THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE PURSE UNDER THE RESTORATION AND THE SECOND EMPIRE**

Historical texts and manufacturing patents lead us to the conclusion that purses, as we know them today, made their appearance between 1820 and 1830. They generally consisted of two trimmed plates (covered with semi-precious materials), a clasp and internal compartments.

visiting cards and banknotes, whose use was on the increase.

In many photographs taken around 1900, women carry purses made from silver or silver-plated chainmail, suspended on chains, around their necks. These purses gradually became larger and were consequently carried by hand. Small evening bags began to appear in the early 1920s. They were equipped with interior compartments for a mirror, a compact and a lipstick, as well as small spring-loaded coin holders.

Jewellers and goldsmiths began to produce purses that were true examples of the jeweller's art, decorated with precious stones and metals. For daytime use, clothes designers and leather craftsmen began to create handbags with matching purses. In the 1930s however, the fashion for small hand-held bags left little room for the purse.

These costly purses were initially reserved for a fairly wealthy public. They were made to be seen and were also used principally as presents for loved ones and family members, marking important events such as communion and marriage. They gradually became more widely available thanks to new manufacturing techniques and inventions. As they became more affordable, purses enjoyed a boom under the Second Empire (1852-1870). They reflected society's imagination and accompanied the development of tourism. During the second half of the 19th century, the number of purses bought as holiday souvenirs or purchased at the Universal Exhibitions held in Paris between 1867-1900, increased dramatically.

## **III. THE PURSE AND ITS SECRETS**

The increasing demand from the bourgeoisie for purses, led to a period of intense activity for purse-makers during the 1850s. The large number of patents filed,

gives us an idea of the astonishing developments in technical invention: manufacturers used all their ingenuity to come up with more practical and secure clasps as well as the use of more affordable and more easily workable materials.

The study of these purses bears witness to the enormous number of different shapes and materials used. Natural substances such as bone, ivory, mother-of-pearl, tortoise-shell and wood were worked by tablet-makers, of whom there were many in France, particularly in the Paris region. Other materials such as textiles, beads, painted or sculpted wood, porcelain, enamel or metal were also used, as well as newly invented synthetic materials such as celluloid or galalith.

Each object could be made of several separate pieces, in different materials, the fruit of the work of various craftsmen and thus required delicate assembly to produce the finished piece.

## **VI. PURSES OF TODAY**

The purses of the 20th and 21st centuries are multi-faceted. They exist in every imaginable size, shape and material. They are often made of leather or rare materials associated with the world of luxury. More modest versions can also be found, made of synthetic or fantasy materials, or in the form of souvenirs and tourist items. For the major luxury brands, the purse is seen as a fashion accessory and as such contributes to their reputation and nowadays fashion houses design collections of small leather goods each season. Even within a highly competitive market, French leather goods manufacturers know how to renew themselves by adapting to the trends of the moment, while revisiting their pasts and reinterpreting their classics.

The purse has found itself in every pocket, on all kinds of occasion, in each of our lives. It is a witness in miniature to the intimate and social history of every individual and the society in which they have lived.

Like coins, the purse has followed the evolution of society, its mores and also its technical advances. Today, the wallet and purse have become a single accessory used for coins, notes and payment cards. The ability to make contactless payments using credit cards or mobile phones is changing habits and disrupting certain practices.

In the future, what shape and utility will the purse take on, when we can pay without cash? The epilogue of this exhibition attempts to confront questions related to the dematerialization of money. In terms of its usage, will the purse have as many successors as it has had ancestors?

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