ALMINE RECH

Artists' faces
From Gustave Courbet to Annette Message

Mar 18 — Jul 19, 2026 | Petit Palais, Paris, France

The Petit Palais is currently presenting a unique exhibition devoted to artists' portraits and self-portraits, a theme central to its collections and a major focus of its acquisitions policy since its creation in the early twentieth century.

The exhibition brings together some one hundred works—paintings, sculptures, graphic arts, decorative arts, and photographs—combining key pieces from the collections, such as Gustave Courbet's *Self-Portrait with a Black Dog*, with lesser-known works brought out of storage especially for the occasion. These include the impressive busts of Impressionist painters sculpted by Paul Paulin.

As part of the exhibition and dotted amongst the museum's permanent historical collections, visitors can admire works by Giulia Andreani, Sophie Calle, Nina Childress, Hélène Delprat, Nan Goldin, Camille Henrot, Nathanaëlle Herbelin, Annette Messager, Françoise Pétrovitch, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Cindy Sherman, Apolonia Sokol, and Claire Tabouret. Their works bring a contemporary perspective, that of the female artist's portrait. They question the legacy of the artist's portrait, its codes and uses, while offering a reinterpretation of its importance. Through this juxtaposition, a resolutely masculine past is put into dialogue with today's world, where the female artist now has her rightful place.

The exhibition adopts a narrative perspective that starts with the individual and moves towards the collective, offering a thematic journey across four sections, following the subject of self-portraiture to the realm of fraternities and tributes from peers. It also explores the inventions, singularities, and evolutions of portraiture through several key themes, punctuated by explanations on the historical context and insights into the history of the Petit Palais' collections.

The exhibition opens with a section focusing on self-portraiture, the quintessential artist's portrait, which is particularly well represented in the collections of the Petit Palais. A remarkable gallery of faces welcomes visitors in the introductory rotunda. In works that haven't been commissioned by patrons, the artwork becomes a space for freedom and experimentation, affording the artists greater self-introspection. In direct contact with the viewer, the artist asserts their style and reveals their personality, sometimes by means of metaphorical or metonymic portraits. This section includes self-portraits by Gustave Courbet, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Léon Bonnat, Jacques-Émile Blanche, amongst others, as well as the striking sandstone masks of Jean-Joseph Carriès. The painting titled *Self-Portrait Clown / Flower* by Nina Childress and the hyper-realistic sculpture of Hélène Delprat introduce an element of surprise while simultaneously questioning the genre's traditions transposed to today's world.

The second section explores group portraits, professional and personal connections, and the development of artists' societies. Here, visitors can see Henri Gervex's large-format work, *Panorama of the Century* (1889) and Paul Paulin's gallery of busts representing Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Camille Pissarro. Portraits of artists and family portraits illustrate close personal bonds. In contrast, the works of Annette Messager and Nathanaëlle Herbelin offer a fresh perspective on the genre by drawing on their own personal experiences.

The next section looks at the studio space, which oscillates between a place of creation and a social hub. The artist is photographed or painted there amidst their works and personal surroundings. A wall of photographs illustrates this fascination with the studio space. As a contemporary counterpoint to the subject, the works of Giulia Andreani and

Sophie Calle explore the interplay between family history and an itinerant or mobile studio.

The final section of the exhibition examines the dialogue between artists and historical masters like Rembrandt, Leonardo da Vinci, and Van Dyck, through homages and parodies. It also considers caricature and humour in portraiture. Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, and Claire Tabouret forge a dialogue with these tutelary figures through disguise, caricature, and mythological reinterpretation.

Visitors are invited to prolong their visit by exploring the museum's permanent collections. The impressive *Janus* sculpture by Anne and Patrick Poirier is on display at the entrance to the sculpture gallery, while works by Apolonia Sokol and Françoise Pétrovitch, created specifically for the exhibition, resonate with the museum's historical pieces. The exhibit concludes with the (re)discovery of Maurice Denis's dome (1925), which offers an extraordinary panorama of the entire history of French art from the Middle Ages to the early twentieth century, and features numerous portraits of artists, from Nicolas Poussin to Maurice Denis himself.

A programme of lectures and talks with the exhibiting artists offers further opportunities to explore the theme in greater depth.