

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Upward With the Arts | The Louvre's Cy Twombly Ceiling

Culture

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Last week, the Musée du Louvre introduced its newest acquisition, a 3,750-square-foot ceiling painting created by Cy Twombly to hang in the Salle de Bronzes.

To get to it, you work your way through the crowds to the Sully wing, climb two flights of royal stairs and hang your first right, where you will find a room that doesn't look like anything else in the museum: the ceiling is a monumental wash of a blue the color of the Aegean, so vivid it seems as if it's lit by the Mediterranean sun. You can almost hear the sea.

A warning for purists: It doesn't look much like a Twombly. There are no inscribed loops, no scribbles. Instead of drawing your attention to the center, overlapping circles push your eye out to the border. There are words, but the letters don't lean into one other so that you can actually read them — that is, if you have a basic understanding of Greek. Twombly lists the greatest Hellenic sculptors, from Phidias to Praxiteles, and maybe out of a sense of dignity for his fellow artists, the names are written with strong and straight brush strokes.



It's a site-specific tribute. Built in the 1550s, the Salle de Bronzes displays more than 1,000 works of art made from bronze and other precious metal – signet rings, helmets, crowns of laurel rendered in gold. The ceiling might be the most spectacular thing in the room, but it doesn't scream for your attention so much as take its role as a part of the architecture. It turns out Twombly is a classicist, too.

The work is courtesy of Janet Wolfson de Botton and the Gagosian Gallery. At the unveiling, Frédéric Mitterand, the Minister of Culture, named the 81-year-old Twombly a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur in a small ceremony.

It's not the first piece of contemporary art commissioned by the museum. In 2007, Anselm Kiefer created works for a monumental staircase in the Egyptian wing. And a Georges Braque ceiling triptych, installed in 1953, is next to the Salle de Bronzes. The museum will also point out that Charles Le Brun (1619-90), Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) all contributed original art when living – “contemporary” is a relative term at the Louvre.