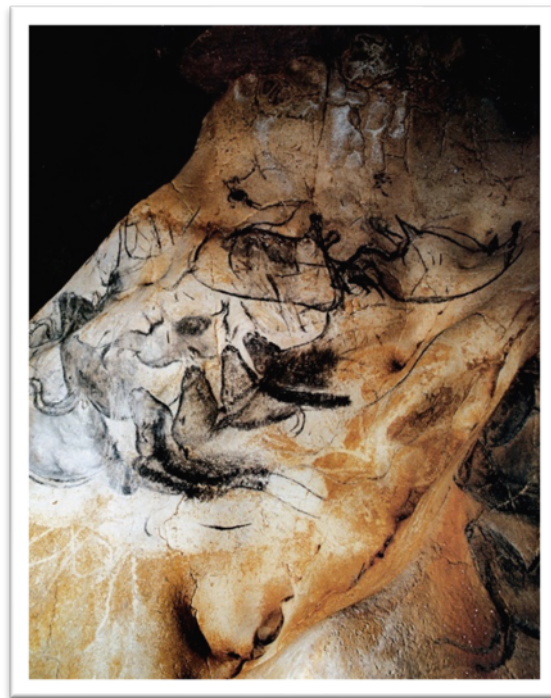


The Art of France: A Region by Region Sampler

Having just returned from a wonderful trip to France, I thought about writing a piece related to French art. Ultimately, I challenged myself to find at least one remarkable work of art that represents each of the 13 administrative regions of the country. It wasn't as easy as you might think.

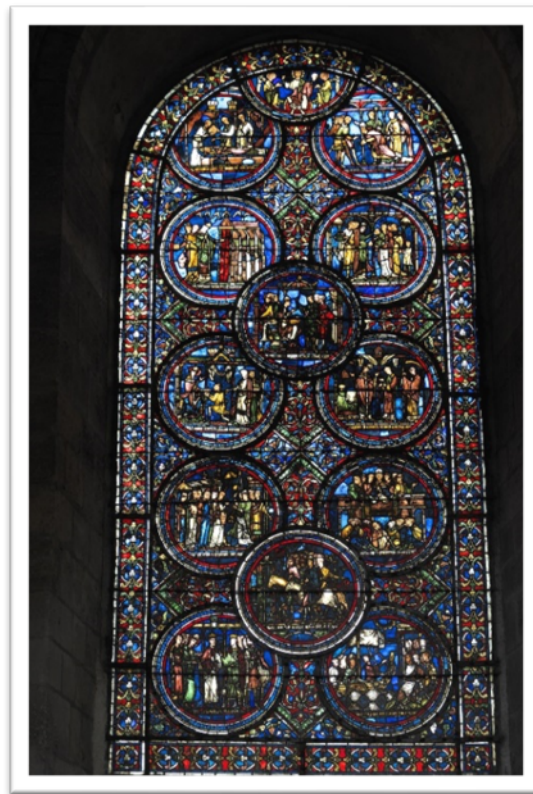
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes

Located in the southeastern part of France, Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes is home to the Gastronomic Capital of the World, Lyon. It is also home to the Chauvet Cave in the Ardèche, considered one of the most significant prehistoric art sites. The cave art, dated 30,000-33,000 years ago, is of high aesthetic quality and is extremely well preserved. Only scientists are permitted to enter the cave, but a replica located nearby allows visitors to experience the art contained within. The photo below, which depicts horse heads and fighting rhinos, is just a small sample of the art found in the cave.



Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

Located in Eastern France, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté is perhaps best known for its Burgundy wines. The largest city in the region is Dijon, the capital, the center of which is a UNESCO heritage site because of its well-preserved palaces and “hôtels particuliers”, or private mansions. Also found in the region is the Sens Cathedral, dedicated to St. Stephen, the first cathedral to be built in the Gothic style. Among the features of the church is its stained glass, which dates from the Early Gothic to the Renaissance. The best-known of the windows is the 13th century Thomas Becket window, celebrating the saint’s life and martyrdom. The window is pictured below.



Brittany

Brittany is the most northwestern of the 13 regions of France, known for its Celtic routes, Quimper ware, rocky coast, dairy products, and menhirs (like Stonehenge only less organized). The region's capital is Rennes. The post-impressionist French painter, Paul Gauguin, drew inspiration from the remote and unspoiled terrain of Brittany and from its pagan Celtic past. He was particularly taken by the small Breton town of Pont-Aven. The two paintings below are scenes of daily life in late 19th century Pont-Aven.



Paul Gauguin, *Breton Girls Dancing*, Pont-Aven, 1888



Paul Gauguin, *Winter at Pont-Aven*, 1888

Centre Val de Loire

Centre Val de Loire occupies the center of Northern France, split in half by the Loire Valley. Its capital is Orléans. It is a primary wine producing region, known for its white wines, primarily Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. A key attraction for tourists is the magnificent châteaux. One of the most famous residents of the Loire Valley was Leonardo da Vinci, who was invited to live in France by the king François I in 1516. The King hired him to be "The King's First Painter, Engineer and Architect" and to help him design the ideal city, Romorantin. Da Vinci lived in Amboise for the three remaining years of his life as a guest of the king in the Château Clos-Lucé, close to the royal palace of Château d'Amboise. It is said that he brought three of his paintings with him, including the *Mona Lisa*. Although Romorantin was never built, some of the king's plans for enormous palaces came to fruition, including the 426 room Château de Chambord, pictured below. Although Da Vinci died some months before the chateau's foundations were laid, his notebooks from his time in Amboise contain drawings that suggest he had input into the palace's design, including its double helix staircase (see below).



The English artist, JMW Turner, travelled extensively for inspiration, spending days in the Loire Valley, filling notebooks with sketches. The photo below is one of Turner's renditions (c. 1830) of the Château d'Amboise.



Corsica

Corsica, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, is the smallest of the French regions by population. Its regional capital is Ajaccio. Ruled by the Republic of Genoa until annexed by France in 1769, Corsica maintains many Italian cultural elements. Napoleon Bonaparte was a native of the island. Mountainous in the interior, the coast is known for its sandy beaches and turquoise waters. U Museu di a Corsica has a collection of paintings by natives and visitors to the island whose central theme is their view of Corsica. One of those painters was Léon-Charles Canticcioni (1879-1957) , whose large compositions depict daily rural life.



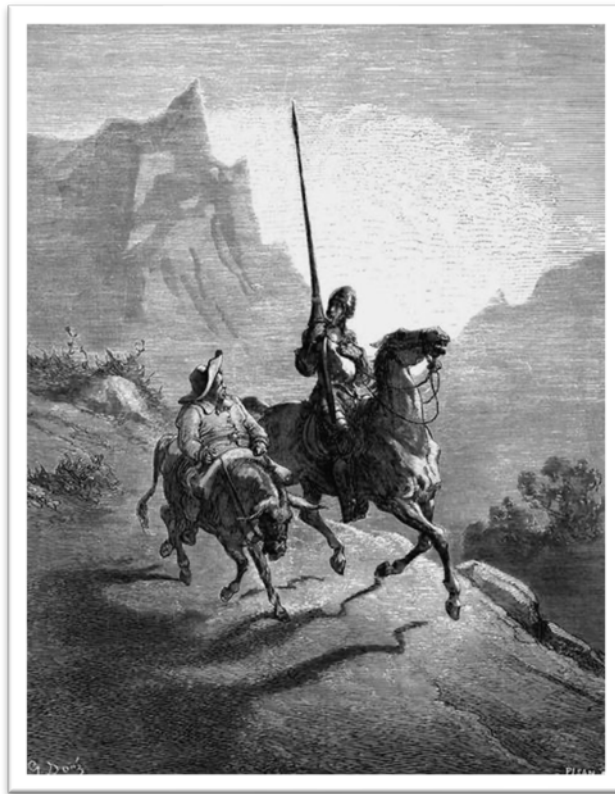
Leon-Charles Canticcioni, *Market Scene Corsica*, date unknown



Leon-Charles Canticcioni, *Harvest in Corsica*, c. 1930

Grand Est

The Grand Est region of France includes Alsace, Lorraine and Champagne. Situated in the northeastern portion of France, its regional capital is Strasbourg, a designated UNESCO Heritage Site and home of the *Marseillaise*. Given its tempestuous history, the region has the largest number of feudal castles in Europe. Its cultural influences reflect the shared borders, particularly with Germany and Switzerland. It is known for its wines, including Champagne (Dom Perignon, for example), Riesling and Gewürztraminer. A significant artist to come out of the Grand Est region was Gustave Doré (1832-1883). Born in Strasbourg, Doré was one the most prolific and successful book illustrators of his time. His illustrated books included the *Bible*, *Dante's Inferno*, Balzac's stories and the works of Rabelais. His illustrations for *Don Quixote* were so influential they determined the look of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in many subsequent illustrated versions, stage and film productions, and readers' imaginations. Pictured below is one of Dore's illustrations of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.



Hauts de France

Hauts de France is the northernmost region of France, comprised of the area of Calais and Picardie. Its largest city and regional capital is Lille. Its third largest city is Calais, from which ferries depart for Dover, UK, and where the Eurotunnel arrives in France. Picardie is the region in which WWI's battle of the Somme was fought. The French landscape and portrait artist, Camille Corot (1796-1896) captured Picardie in his 1867 painting *A Pond in Picardie*.



Perhaps the most notable work of art associated with Calais is Auguste Rodin's (1840-1917) sculpture, *The Burghers of Calais*. The sculpture refers to the siege of Calais by the British during the Hundred Years War. Six leading citizens of Calais, the Burghers, offered to die if the English King Edward III spared the rest of the town's people. Their lives were spared by the intervention of England's queen, Philippa of Hainault, who persuaded her husband to exercise mercy by claiming that their deaths would be a bad omen for her unborn child.



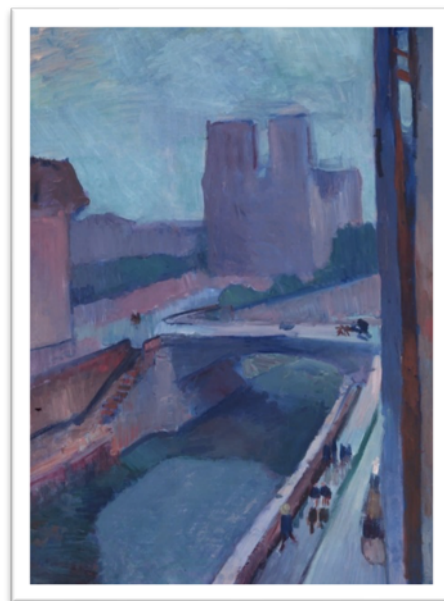
Ile de France (or Paris Region)

This was actually harder than some of the other regions because there are so many works of art that say Paris. Ultimately, I chose paintings of two of the city's icons. Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower. First Notre Dame. Many artists have been inspired by the cathedral. So, how to choose?

Ultimately, by what captures your imagination. American impressionist painter, Childe Hassam (1859-1935) is one. Pictured below is his 1888 *Notre Dame Cathedrale, Paris*.



A different take on the same subject by the French artist, Henri Matisse (1869-1954). This is Matisse's 1902 painting.



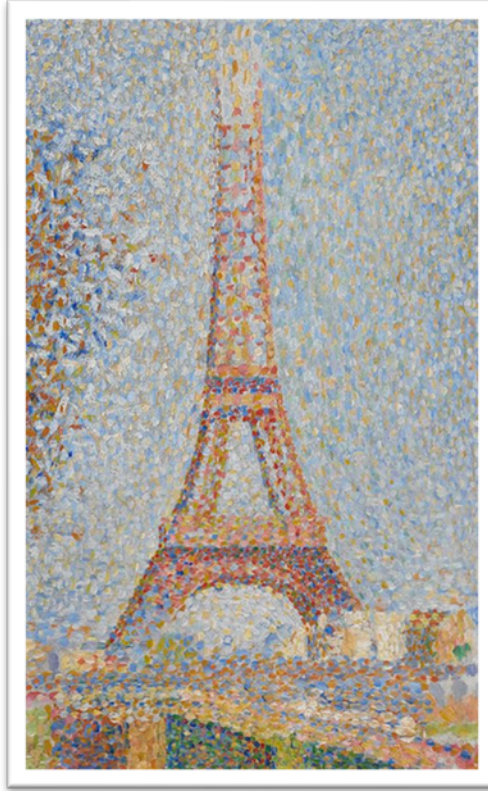
Another American artist, Edward Hopper (1882-1967), was also inspired by the magnificent cathedral. In 1907, he painted this masterpiece.



And last, but definitely not least, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), gave us his interpretation (1954) of the Gothic marvel.

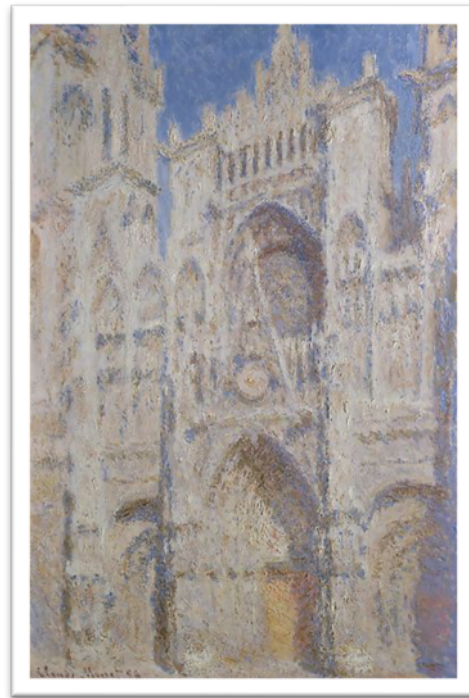


Probably as well known internationally as Notre Dame is the Eiffel Tower. It was in 1889 rendered in pointillist style by Georges Seurat (1859-1891).



Normandy

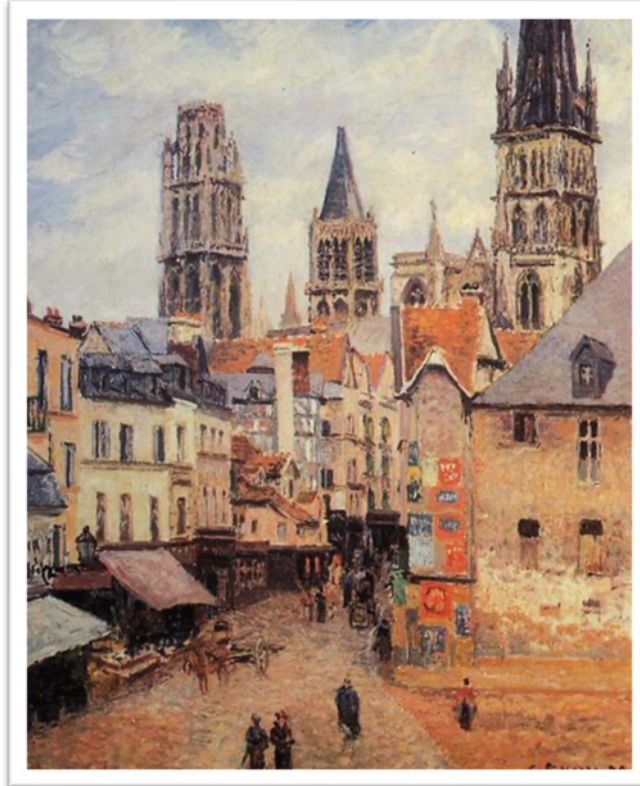
Normandy in the north of France is renowned for its white chalk cliffs, its World War II beachheads (e.g., Omaha Beach, site of the D Day landing), Mont Saint Michel and Calvados. Its capital is Rouen, whose cathedral the impressionist artist, Claude Monet (1840-1926), painted more than 30 times. The painting below, *Rouen Cathedral: The Portal (Sunlight)* (1894) is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.



Monet was not the only artist who found inspiration in Normandy. Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) painted *Landscape in Normandy* in 1895.



Another French impressionist painter, Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) spent several months painting in Rouen, producing, among other works of art, *Rue de l'Épicerie at Rouen, on a Grey Morning* (1898), pictured below.



Nouvelle-Aquitaine

Nouvelle-Aquitaine, which is located in the western and southwestern part of France, is the largest region in the country. It is known for wine (e.g., Chateau Lafite-Rothschild) and brandy (Armagnac and Cognac), resort areas (Biarritz), ceramics (Limoges) and a treasure trove of châteaux. The capital is Bordeaux, whose harbor the modernist artist Édouard Manet (1832-1883) painted in 1871. Manet's *Port of Bordeaux* is shown below.



Occitanie

Excluding Corsica, Occitanie is the southernmost region of France, bordering Spain and Andorra. Its capital is Toulouse; the second largest city is Montpellier. It is known for its Roman ruins (the amphitheater in Nîmes and the Pont du Gard), Roquefort cheese, cassoulet, wine (e.g., Picpoul, Côtes de Roussillon, Languedoc), and pink flamingos in the Camargue.

Jean-Frédéric Bazille (1841-1870), who hailed from Montpellier, is considered to be one of innovators of impressionism, although his style remained largely realist. He was a pioneer in situating human figures in outdoor settings and integrating them with the atmospheric effects of a given locale. Unfortunately, Bazille's artistic career was cut short when he died on the battlefield during the Franco-Prussian War. The photo below is of Bazille's 1868 *View of the Village*, depicting a young woman sitting on a stone ledge overlooking the village of Castelnau-le-Lez on the outskirts of Montpellier.



Pays de la Loire

The Pays de la Loire is found in western France, south of Normandy, with a coastline on the Bay of Biscay. Its principal cities are Nantes, the capital, Angers and Le Mans. The Pays de La Loire encompasses a portion of the Loire River (the longest river in France) and is home to a number of the Châteaux of the Loire.

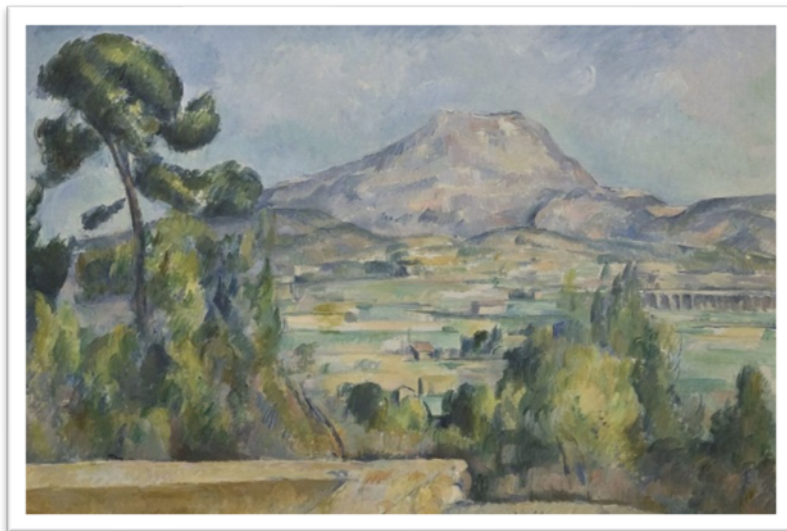
Turner painted and sketched various scenes of Nantes. The photo below is of his c. 1830 *Nantes from the île Feydeau*.



Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur

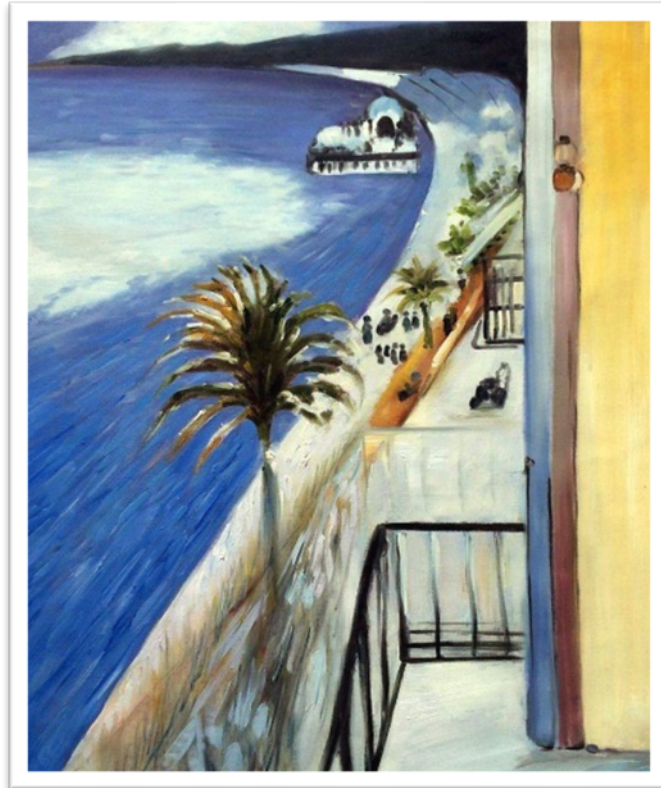
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, which lies in the southeastern corner of France, is a region of diverse landscapes, from mountains to sandy shoreline to fields of poppies and lavender fields to vineyards. The capital city is Marseille, the second largest city in France, atop which the Basilica Notre-Dame de la Garde affords magnificent views of the city below. Outside of the Paris region, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur probably has inspired more artists than any other region. Aix-en-Provence, a quintessential Provence town, was the birthplace of Paul Cézanne and the town in which he lived most of his life. Henri Matisse lived more than 40 years in Nice; many of his paintings reflect the colorful beauty of the city and its coastline. An old Roman capital, the city of Arles was an inspiration for many of Van Gogh's paintings. Auguste Renoir had his home in the town of Cagnes-sur-Mer. Claude Monet spent four months in Antibes where he painting some 40 landscapes.

Cézanne was obsessed with Montagne Sainte-Victoire, a major landmark in the Aix region. He painted it dozens of times.



Paul Cézanne, *Montagne Sainte-Victoire*, 1904-1906.

Matisse was first taken with Nice when he went there from Paris in 1916 to recuperate from bronchitis. He ended up relocating permanently to the south of France. His 1918 painting below is of the Bay of Nice from the vantage point of a hotel window.



Van Gogh spent about 16 months in Arles. He had decamped from Paris, in search of warmer weather and an escape from the hectic life in the city. The artist had one of the most prolific periods of his life while in Arles, producing some 300 paintings and drawings. The places in the city where he set up his easel are marked with panels representing the paintings. Van Gogh's side trip by stagecoach to Saintes-Maries resulted in a series of paintings, including *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries*, June 1888, shown below.



Suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, Auguste Renoir moved to warmer climates, to the farm in Cagnes-sur-Mer, Les Collettes, near Nice that he had purchased the prior year. He lived there until his death in 1917. The photo below is Renoir's painting of Les Collettes (c.1908-1914).



Finally, while in Antibes in 1888, Claude Monet painted, in the impressionist style, Gardener's House at Antibes.

