

Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower: Two Iconic Landmarks Immortalized in Art

By Kathy McShane

Some artists are inspired by bucolic landscapes. Others are inspired by soaring cathedrals, imposing buildings, palaces or monuments, the expanse of a bridge, or the bustle of a city. The work of some of the most famous artists in history depict iconic landmarks throughout the world. Here are some examples of paintings featuring just two of those landmarks, Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower, both iconic symbols of Paris.

We start with Notre Dame, considered one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture. Started in the 13th century, it took over 300 years to build. It has suffered considerable damage over the years, most notably during the French Revolution, and recently, from the massive 2019 fire. It is hoped that restoration will be complete in time for the 2024 Summer Olympics. Among the artists who have been inspired by the cathedral are two Americans, Childe Hassam (*Notre Dame, Cathedral*, 1888) and Edward Hopper (*Notre Dame de Paris*, 1907).

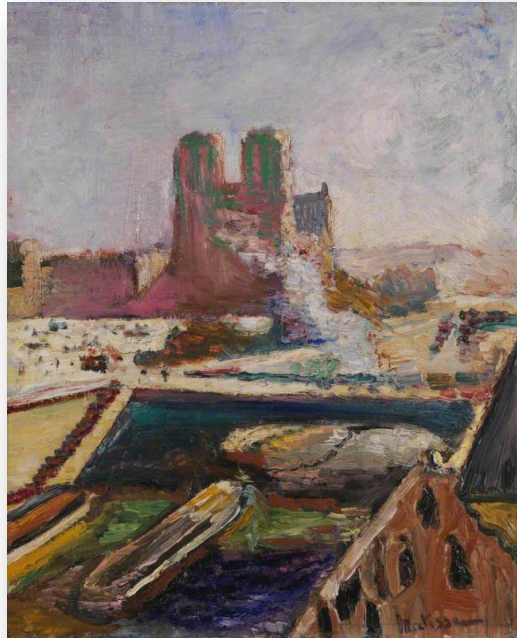




The French artist, Henri Matisse, painted various views of the cathedral which he could see from his Paris studio. The painting below, *Notre-Dame, une fin d'après-midi* (A Glimpse of Notre Dame in the Afternoon), 1902, was created during a particularly turbulent period of Matisse's personal life.



The version below, painted more than a decade later, in 1914, demonstrates his evolving style.



The painting below is by Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), considered one of India's most influential modernist painters, and, indeed one of the greatest avant-garde women artists of the early 20th century.

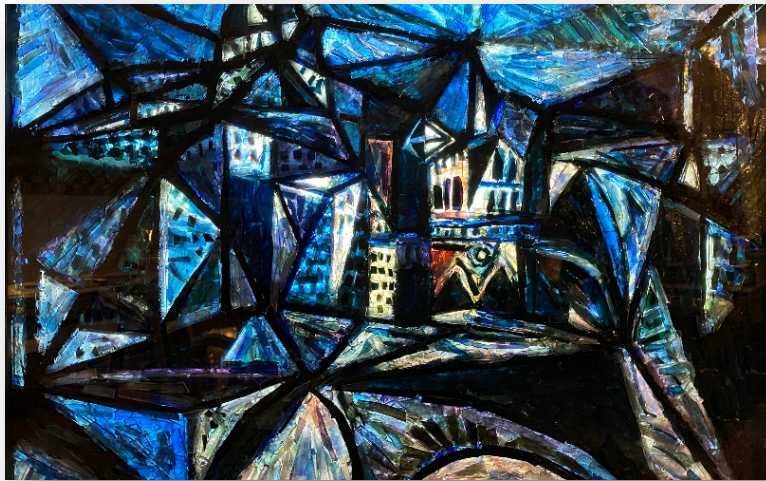
Called the "Indian Frida Kahlo", Sher-Gil was particularly known for her portrayals of the lives of Indian women. She studied in Paris, during which time she painted *Notre Dame* (1932). However, she longed for her native country to which she returned, finding inspiration there.



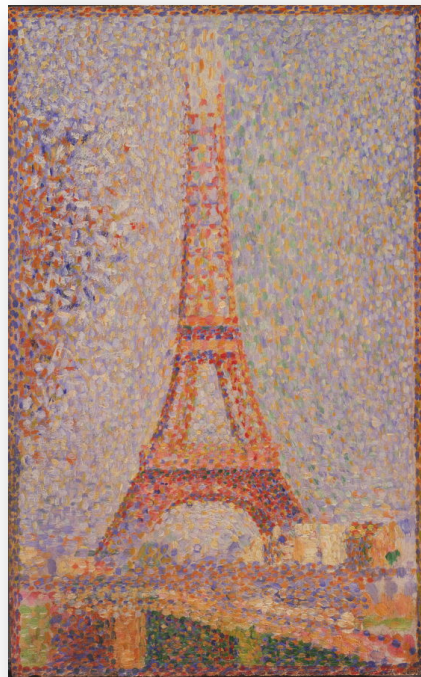
Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) painted Notre Dame in 1954. The painting, Notre-Dame de Paris, reflects his love of Paris, and his blossoming love for a woman who would become his wife, Jacqueline Roque. Picasso' Cubist tendencies can be seen in this work which embodies joy and positivity.



One of the more unique of the artistic renditions of Notre Dame is Picasso's Paris Notre Dame "gemmail". The term "gemmail" is the contraction of two words: "gemme," meaning precious stone and "émail," meaning enamel, the medium used to assemble pieces of glass. "Gemmail" are made of multicolored pieces of glass that are layered on, bound together with liquid enamel and hardened in an oven. Picasso's 1955 gemmail of Notre Dame Cathedral was sold at auction in 2022 after the 2019 fire (pre-sale estimate of \$1.0-\$1.5 million), with the hopes that the buyer would donate it to Notre Dame.



A second iconic landmark in Paris which has inspired artists is the Eiffel Tower. The tower, named for its engineer, Gustave Eiffel, was built on the Champs de Mar for the 1889 World's Fair. While widely criticized at the time, it is now one of the most iconic structures in the western world. Below are a couple of artistic views of one of the most visited monuments in the world, starting with the pointillist work of French artist, Georges Seurat. Seurat painted it before it was even finished. His tiny dot technique gives the monument a dreamy quality.



Paul Signac (1863-1935), who along with Seurat, helped develop the pointillist technique, painted the monument around the same time. His 1899 painting of the then recently built tower, titled *Seine Grenelle*, is depicted below.



Robert Delauney, also French, painted the same monument, but with completely different perspectives and techniques. Delaunay (1885-1941), along with his artist wife, Sonia, is credited with spearheading Orphism, an offshoot of Cubism, in which light and color are prioritized. Delaunay painted an entire series of Eiffel Tower works, spanning the period 1909 to 1928. The two presented below provide a sense of how the artist's technique evolved over time. The first, entitled *La Tour Eiffel Rouge*, was completed in 1911; the second, simply titled *La Tour Eiffel*, was painted more than a decade later in 1922.





Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) was a founding member of the post-impressionist group, Les Nabis. Les Nabis comes from the Hebrew word for prophet. These artists saw themselves as prophets of modern art, favoring bold, simplified forms. Bonnard's 1912 Pont de Grenelle and the Eiffel Tower exemplifies his bold use of color to depict a cityscape.



Maurice Utrillo (1883-1955), the son of the famous artists' model, Suzanne Valadon, was part of the School of Paris, so-called not for a particular style, but for the importance of Paris as an art center of the Western world at the time. Largely self-taught, Utrillo took up painting upon the encouragement of his mother, who thought of it as a way to combat his truancy and alcoholism. Utrillo painted *La Tour Eiffel* in 1913.



French artists weren't alone in being inspired by the Eiffel Tower. Mexican artist, Diego Rivera (1886-1957), painted the Eiffel Tower while living in Madrid. Rivera painted the monument in 1914, reflecting his support for France after the outbreak of World War I. (He tried several times to enlist in the French army, only to be rejected due to his weight and flat feet).



The Fauvist School's bright colors and lyrical style are reflected in Raoul Dufy's 1935 Eiffel Tower watercolor. It has been said that Dufy never painted a sad picture. The French painter (1877-1953) was also a textile designer; his designs were used by the most famous haute couture houses of his time.

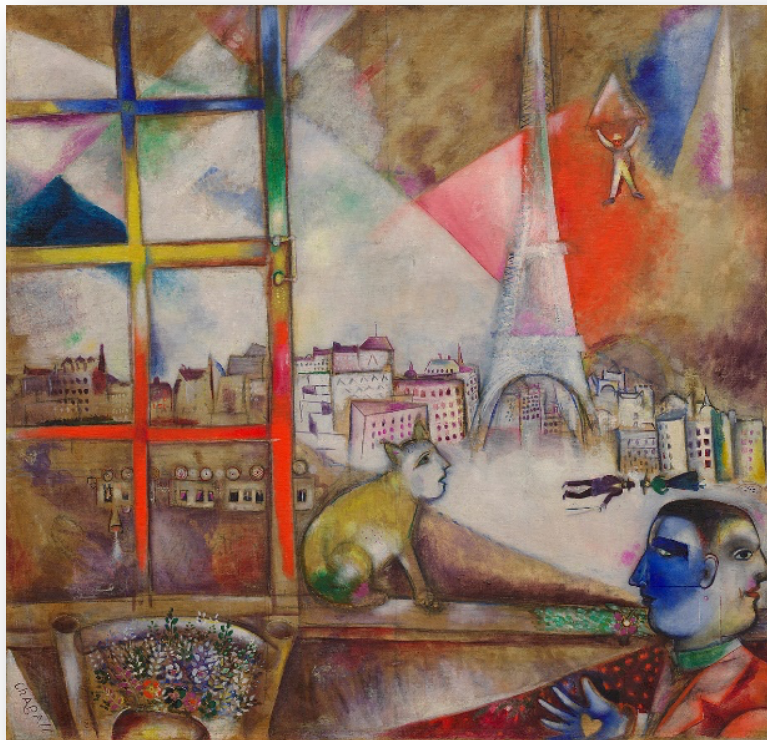


Robert Delaunay's friend and colleague, Fernand Léger (1881-1955), also was inspired by the Eiffel Tower (and the entirety of the modern city). Léger, like Delaunay, came from the Cubist School. He developed his own personal form of Cubism, called TUBISM. He is considered a forerunner of the Pop artists. His Eiffel Tower is one of a series of 29 lithographs from a portfolio entitled *La Ville* (The City). He died before he was able to finish the project; his wife and a colleague gathered all of the completed plates and published the portfolio in 1959, four years after his death.



Finally, the Eiffel Tower was a key element of several Marc Chagall (1887-1985) paintings. The French-Russian artist was very much a modernist; he is also known as a major Jewish artist. Some of his works were among those confiscated by the Nazis as degenerate. His works are replete with metaphors. It has been said that much of his work reflects one long dreamy reverie of life in his native village in what is now Belarus.

Chagall moved to Paris from Russia in 1910, where he successfully integrated himself into the artistic milieu. The painting below, *Paris Par La Fenêtre* (Paris Through the Window) (1913), uses the Eiffel Tower as a metaphor for Paris. Note also the parachutist in the upper right-hand corner; two years earlier the first successful jump from the Eiffel Tower had been completed with the newly invented knapsack parachute.



An example of the dream-like quality of Chagall's work can be seen in his fantastical 1939 *The Bridal Pair with the Eiffel Tower*. In addition to the apparently floating couple with the Eiffel Tower as backdrop, the work below includes references to various nursery stories.

