

SÉRAPHINE LOUIS FROM SENLIS, WITHOUT RIVAL

FROM 31.10.26 TO 12.04.27
GALLERY 2

 **Centre
Pompidou-Metz**

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OPENING HOURS
Every day except Tuesday and May 1st

01.11 > 31.03
MON. | WED. | THU. | FRI. | SAT. | SUN. | 10:00 – 18:00

01.04 > 31.10
MON. | WED. | THU. | 10:00 – 18:00 / FRI. | SAT. | SUN. | 10:00 – 19:00



SÉRAPHINE LOUIS. FROM SENLIS, WITHOUT RIVAL

31 October 2026 – 12 April 2027 – Gallery 2

Curated by: Elia Biezunski, Research Associate / Curator, Centre Pompidou-Metz

This autumn, the Centre Pompidou-Metz is presenting a major monographic exhibition dedicated to Séraphine Louis (1864–1942), known as Séraphine de Senlis. The exhibition, entitled Séraphine Louis. From Senlis, Without Rival, brings together over eighty paintings from some one hundred inventoried works. It offers a reinterpretation of the artist's work in light of an unprecedented biographical and scholarly study. The exhibition explores every facet of Séraphine Louis, moving beyond the classifications that have long kept her at a distance from the narratives of artistic modernity. The assembled body of work opens new perspectives on the sources of her imagination and allows for a reassessment of the artist's place in art history.

From her early beginnings to her international recognition shortly before her death in an asylum, Séraphine Louis. From Senlis, Without Rival revisits her connections with German collector and critic Wilhelm Uhde and with the avant-gardes, as well as the singular materiality of her painting, and her spirituality. Above all, the exhibition reveals the journey of an artist who once escaped social determinism and now defies the determinism of art history.

Séraphine Louis (known as "Séraphine de Senlis"), *Les Fruits*, circa 1928
Oil on canvas, 195 × 130 cm
Paris, Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art
Gift of Anne-Marie Uhde, 1948 AM 2817 P

An artist at the heart of modernity

Sometimes presented among the Peintres du Sacré Cœur (Painters of the Sacred Heart), sometimes among the Modern Primitives—two groups championed by Wilhelm Uhde—then associated with so-called Naïve Art, or even cited by André Breton among the artists opposing official European art, Séraphine Louis has long been perceived through classifications that highlighted her exceptional nature while keeping her in a form of otherness, on the margins of modernity rather than at its core.

The exhibition seeks to show how all these interpretations coexist, intersect, and even contradict one another. It reveals the full extent of Séraphine Louis's contribution to art history: her convergences with historical avant-gardes, her way of developing a painting on the border between ornament, symbolism, and post-impressionism, in a form of idiosyncratic inner expressionism. As Chiara Parisi, Director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz, notes: "Nowadays, museums have a responsibility to broaden narratives. The public strongly feels the need for a less hierarchical, more porous, and more open art history—one that includes artists who have worked from places of fragility, isolation, or freedom."

The exhibition Séraphine Louis. From Senlis, Without Rival thus continues a reflection initiated by the Centre Pompidou-Metz through exhibitions dedicated to **Eva Aeppli, Suzanne Valadon, and Louise Nevelson.**

The exhibition journey: from radical interiority to monumentality

From the very entrance, visitors are confronted with the six "giant canvases" created between 1928 and 1930, at the height of the artist's career. **Drawn from the collections of the Centre Pompidou, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie de Senlis, and the Fondation Dina Vierny – Musée Maillol, they spread out a monumental vegetal universe where leaves, fruits, and flowers seem imbued with an intense inner life.** Everything proliferates, transforms, hybridises, and unsettles the senses.

The journey then unfolds through several thematic rooms exploring the artist's spirituality, her colour palette, and the influence of botany on her work. Her relationship with the German collector and critic Wilhelm Uhde also occupies a central place, repositioning Séraphine Louis within a much broader dialogue with the visual culture of her time. A decisive figure in the European avant-garde, Uhde did provide her with economic stability, enabling her to develop ambitious formats. The exhibition thus moves beyond the romantic myth of the cursed artist—marked by poverty and her psychiatric internment in 1932—to focus on the beauty of her work, *modus operandi*, and incredible determination.

The catalogue, published by Éditions du Centre Pompidou-Metz, extends the main themes of the retrospective and testifies, through the diversity of viewpoints expressed, to Séraphine Louis's resonance in the research of contemporary visual artists and fashion designers. Introduced by an essay by curator Elia Biezunski, it brings together scholarly contributions from Manja Wilkens, Gilles Barabant, Anne-Marie Dubois, and Marion Alluchon, as well as open-ended contributions from artists Mimosa Echard, Annette Messenger, and Madeleine Roger-Lacan, and fashion designer Simon Porte Jacquemus. The catalogue concludes with an illustrated biographical timeline based on the departmental archives of Oise, including the artist's life story, collected in 1933.

A materiality imbued with life

The materiality of Séraphine Louis's painting lies at the heart of the exhibition and refutes the idea of a purely instinctive creation. Her use of Ripolin, an industrial paint typically reserved for functional purposes, anchors her work in a striking material modernity. It should be noted that she painted her canvases both on the floor and upright. Though these methods began as practical solutions, they evolved into a conscious artistic choice—a means of forging her own creative freedom. **Her pigments, the organic density of her surfaces, and the cracks she reworked reveal an extremely physical relationship with pictorial matter: a touch that is at once microscopic and sweeping, a depth that continually returns to the living.**

Her monumental compositions strike with their simultaneously fantastical and highly constructed character. Painting becomes an art of variation—repetition, vegetal proliferation, the growth of forms—while preserving the profound singularity of each canvas. The richness of her chromatic palette and the saturation of her surfaces produce an extraordinary visual sophistication. **For Séraphine, the canvas is no longer a window hung on the wall but a space to inhabit: painting as an expanding space.**

Woman, mystic, unrivaled: a figure of emancipation

From the modest beginnings of a cleaning lady in Senlis to international recognition, Séraphine Louis's journey embodies a radical break with social determinism. Painting on large formats, for a female artist at the beginning of the twentieth century, was in itself a bold act: large formats traditionally belonged to history painting, the most noble genre in the academic hierarchy. Yet Séraphine Louis embraced this monumentality to paint leaves, fruit, and flowers, shifting the categories of painting as much as those of society.

She, who signed her works "sans rivale" (unrivaled), had a strong and assertive temperament, far removed from the image in which she has long been confined. In her work, her spirituality, observation of the living, and fascination with organic growth converge in a painting that emanates something beyond the visible. **Her work anticipates contemporary reflections on ecofeminism: the ability to create a vast inner world, the praise of the living as an act of resistance.**

A work that resonates with a wide audience

Through her expressive interpretation of a universal motif—the plant world—whose seemingly naïve appearance offers an accessible entry point for all, Séraphine Louis reaches diverse audiences. Her ornamental dimension, vibrant palette, and the apparent simplicity of her subjects resonate with young and adult audiences alike, as well as lovers of aesthetics, botany, and decoration, not to mention those well-versed in art history. Fashion designer Simon Porte Jacquemus, who is lending a painting to the Centre Pompidou-Metz for this exhibition, shares his fascination: “This very direct, almost ‘primitive’ way of painting life gave rise to something profoundly beautiful and powerful.”

Yet Séraphine Louis’s work also speaks to those who are moved by the psychological and mystical dimensions of creation, the power of a radical interiority translated into painting, or the feminist stakes of a journey that defies all assignments. **This is doubtless what makes her work so contemporary: it speaks of life, interiority, and the mystery of the world, as well as our need to reconnect with more sensitive and profound forms of perception.**

PRESS IMAGES AVAILABLE



Séraphine Louis (known as "Séraphine de Senlis"), *L'Arbre du paradis*, circa 1929 - 1930
Oil on canvas, 195 x 130 cm
Paris, Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art
Gift of Anne-Marie Uhde, 1948 AM 2817 P



Séraphine Louis (known as "Séraphine de Senlis"), *Marguerites*, circa 1929
Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm
Cologne, Zander Collection



Séraphine Louis (known as "Séraphine de Senlis"), *Grappes et feuilles roses*, circa 1929
Oil and Ripolin paint on canvas, 115.5 x 89 cm
Senlis, Museum of Art and Archaeology



Séraphine Louis (known as "Séraphine de Senlis"), *Fruits (Les Pommes)*, [circa 1929 - 1930]
Ripolin on canvas, 194.3 x 129.5 cm
New York, The Museum of Modern Art
Bequest of Richard S. Zeisler, 2007