

# The Fabre Apartments

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The director's apartments were installed in the heart of the museum as a condition of the Fabre donation and he set aside the first floor wing of the hotel Massilian, which opens onto the garden, for this purpose. This is the only part of the museum that retains the original floor plan reorganised by Jean de Massilian in 1775.

In 1828, visitors would reach the first floor by the monumental staircase (the Beroud staircase) ; the entrance to the museum was on the right, and on the left a small door opened onto the director's apartments (Rooms 13 to 16). This succession of a series of rooms is original ; the commission for their decorative scheme and painting was given to Thomas Baroffi from 1827 who had painted the Griffin frieze in Room 11. All these rooms are equipped with fireplaces and the floor is covered in flagstones called "bars" (fig.1).

One enters the first salon which is bordered to the south by a small room where drawings were displayed, an arrangement that indicates the bond between the director and the museum. In this salon for formal receptions (Room 16) the furnishings include chairs, armchairs and tables as well as the large bookcase that was also bequeathed to the museum. This ceremonial room has a ceiling bordered with plant scrolls adorned with blue, yellow, pink, lilac and orange flowers.

Continuing towards the north the second salon is smaller and received a more restrained decorative theme. The ceiling is divided into three coffers and ornamented with a blue interlace motif. The next room in the succession is the director's office, which was used for all official museum business. The decoration is adapted to the function of the room with a light blue frieze punctuated by Pompeian red medallions depicting scenes from classical mythology such as the procession of the gods and fauns. The end rooms were Fabre's bedchamber followed by his private office, which opens onto the balcony. Unfortunately this last room was demolished during the renovations of 1979-81. From the balcony a staircase led to the garden (today the Cour Vien), which had a water basin and a rocaille fountain (fig.2).

The service areas, kitchens and storage rooms were also found to the north. Of these, only Room 12 remains. The servants' quarters and Fabre's studio were on the second floor, though towards the end of his life he was less and less active due to gout.

After his death in 1837, the museum integrated the Fabre apartments in order to enlarge its exhibition space. Fabre had named the Marquis de Nattes as his successor, and Rooms 13 and 14 were reserved for administration and the museum's new director's office. The two other rooms received works from the collection of Antoine Valedau, an exceptional group of Flemish and Dutch works bequeathed to the museum in 1836.

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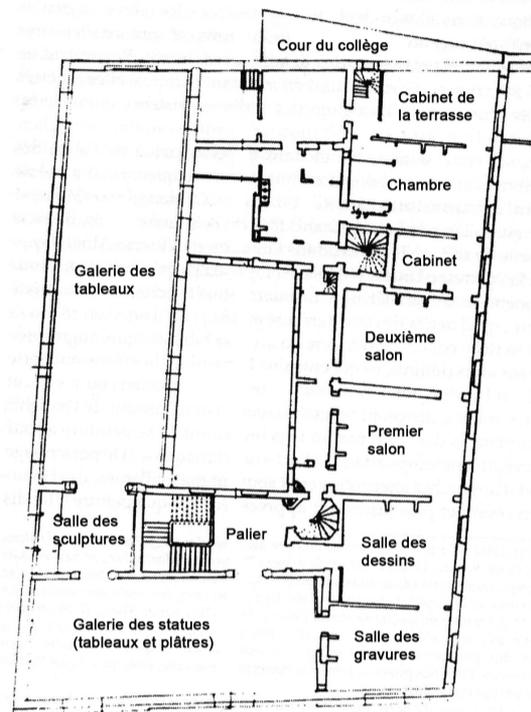


fig.1- Plan of the first floor of the Musée Fabre in 1828 after a document preserved in the Municipal Archives of Montpellier

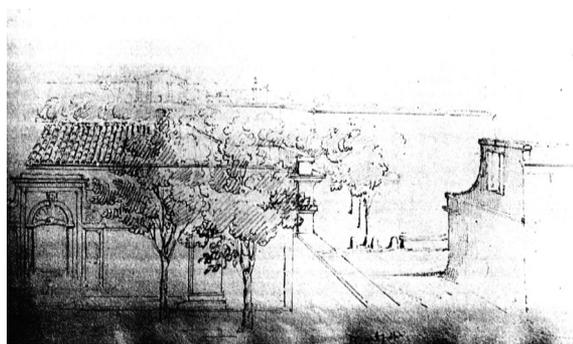


fig.2- Bonaventure Laurens (Carpentras, 1801- Montpellier, 1890) *The Garden of the Hotel Massilian* © Inguimbertaine Library, Carpentras