

International Exhibitions / The official showcase of the nations

As the official image of the Universal Exhibitions was related to aspects that were designed to legitimise the choices of the organisers (economic relations, educational missions and demonstrations of power), it is not surprising that the preferred locations to host these events were capital cities. From the first exhibition held in London in 1851, the extraordinary potential of these initiatives was immediately obvious from the number of visitors the event attracted. Celebrations of significant events were other factors that guided the choice as to which city would host the next exhibition: the opening of the Suez Canal in Cairo (1869), the centenary of the French Revolution in Paris (1889), the centenary of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia (1876) and the discovery of the Americas in Chicago (1893). As relations between Europe and the Arab World intensified during the 19th century, exchanges between the two cultures became ever more complex, not just materially in terms of the arts and architecture, but also in terms of relations between peoples.



Working Number: UK 168
Name: Guernsey and Jersey, Malta and Ceylon (from Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition)
Holding Museum: The British Library
Date: 1854 (publication of the book)
Materials: -
Curator Justification: This painting of the interior of Crystal Palace is by Owen Jones. It shows how the exhibition was on two levels, the upper floor hosting exhibitions about "all nations" separated by huge tapestries. Yellow, blue and red dominated the colour scheme that was used tastefully throughout in accordance with contemporary decorative taste.



Working Number: PD 052
Name: The Palace of Illusions, Universal Exposition 1900
Holding Museum: Brown University Library
Date: -
Materials: -
Curator Justification: While the interior of the Palace of Electricity is typical of an industrial structure, it nonetheless reveals its derivation from the Great Mosque of Córdoba. The main room, called the "Palace of Illusions", was furnished with a series of horseshoe arches, the mirror-covered surfaces of which reflected the light from the lamps, exalting the incredible possibilities of electrical power.



Working Number: FR 113
Name: Gustave Eiffel. The Eiffel Tower in 1889.
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1889
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Eiffel Tower, depicted on a poster for the exhibition held in Paris in 1878, is seen as a symbol of France's industrial innovation and vitality. The other images represent the Palace of Industries, where the "Dôme Central" was the first building to use electricity to large extent, and the "Machine Gallery", intended to promote modern industrial machines, but with some exhibits that looked well into the technological future.



Working Number: PD 045

Name: One Arab man and two Arab children in front of Kabyle house, Paris Exposition, 1889

Holding Museum: The Library of Congress

Date: 1889

Materials: -

Curator Justification: -

During the exhibition held in Paris in 1889, the "Histoire de l'habitation humaine" (History of Human Habitation) exhibit was criticised, even though it gained huge public favour, because it was considered far from accurate. The restitution of the autochthon architecture sometimes made use of "background actors", further underlining the racial stereotyping typical of the time.
