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Fleshing Out the Museum: Fernand Cormon's Painting Cycle for the New Galleries of Comparative Anatomy, Paleontology, and Anthropology

by Maria P. Gindhart

The New Galleries of Comparative Anatomy, Paleontology, and Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris, which were designed by Charles-Louis-Ferdinand Dutert and inaugurated on July 21, 1898, became part of an institution renowned for its contributions to science. Art had long played an important role at the Museum,¹ and the painter Fernand Cormon received the commission for the "pictorial decoration of the Classroom of the new galleries of the Museum of Natural History" on April 18, 1893.² In addition to an allegorical ceiling composition, he created ten wall paintings depicting prehistoric animals, the beginnings of human industries, and the development of humanity from the Paleolithic to the Iron Age.³ This painting cycle was distinctly designed to engage viewers and offer lessons in keeping with the lectures that were to be given in the amphitheater by the Museum's professors. Moreover, the subjects of the canvases were carefully chosen to create an overall narrative about progress. The novelty of Cormon's paintings, however, lies not so much in what they depict, either individually or as a group, but in how they were positioned in the room to create a series of interesting parallels and contrasts. Directly influenced by the Museum's collections and the comparative and evolutive manner in which they were displayed, Cormon's program, in addition to being decorative, was didactic due to both the iconography and the arrangement of the paintings.

Dutert had specifically asked the Fine Arts Administration to select Cormon for the classroom project.⁴ This decision was viewed as "an act of great intelligence," and several critics noted that the choice of Cormon was assuredly due to the reputation the artist had earned as a result of *Cain* (1880, Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and *Return from a Bear Hunt; Age of Polished Stone* (1884, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale), two earlier paintings with Stone Age themes.⁵ In addition, Cormon was an established academic painter, who had studied with Alexandre Cabanel at the School of Fine Arts in the 1860s and had won both the 1875 Salon Prize and the Grand Prize at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition. Elected to the Salon jury in 1884, he would become a member of the Academy of Fine Arts on December 17, 1898.⁶ Although Cormon's *oeuvre* encompassed a wide variety of genres, his representations of the distant past have predominantly defined his reputation. In many ways, the New Galleries commission seemed tailor-made for the artist, leading his biographer Jules de Saint-Mesmin to write:

The painter of the prehistoric ages thus found there, as it were, the opportunity to summarize all his science, all his philosophy, and to devote himself to a subject that seems ... to be his mission in life.⁷

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While he would go on to create related works, including *The Age of Iron* (1914, Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris) and *Funeral of a Chieftain, Heroic Gaul* (1917, location unknown), Cormon's painting cycle for the New Galleries was clearly his most elaborate statement on the subject.

The commissioning of these ten wall paintings also underscores the fact that the end of the nineteenth century was something of a heyday of such artistic representations in France. In addition to Cormon's decorative program, the sculptors Emmanuel Fremiet and Paul Richer created bronze images of, respectively, a prehistoric bear hunter and a Paleolithic artist for the Museum in the 1890s.⁸ The painters Léon-Maxime Faivre and Paul Jamin were also active at this time and created multiple canvases with Stone Age themes, many of which were shown in the annual Salons. While artists had, over the course of the century, produced images whose subjects were increasingly distant in both time and place, prehistory offered fresh and exciting territory for painters and sculptors interested in portraying the past.⁹ This new and unprecedented subject matter, which was of growing interest to the public, also helped reinvigorate history painting and historical sculpture.¹⁰ But Cormon was given a unique opportunity to create a unified series of paintings depicting prehistoric animals, humans, and industries. Moreover, Cormon's visualizations of contemporary knowledge about the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages were perfectly situated to join the artifacts and fossils on display nearby as conveyors of information about these distant eras.

For nearly five years, Cormon worked almost exclusively on the extensive New Galleries project. Along with the ceiling decoration, the ten wall paintings—*Beginnings of the Quaternary Period: Megatherium, Machairodus, and Glyptodon; Ice Age: Mammoth and Cave Bears; Pottery: Age of Polished Stone and Dolmens; Bronze and Iron: Gallic Workshop; Primitive Man; Flint: Man Has the Idea for a Tool and He Makes That Tool; Hunters: Ice Age; Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone; Bronze Age: Farmers; and Iron Age: Gauls*—were more or less completed by December 1897, when they were shown at the Circle of the Artistic Union at 5 rue Boissy d'Anglas in Paris along with numerous studies for them.¹¹ The paintings and related preparatory works were then displayed in their own room at the 1898 Salon of the Society of French Artists before being installed in the amphitheater of the New Galleries at the Museum.¹² Cormon was paid a total of 60,000 francs for his work on this project, which he estimated had cost him 20,000 francs.¹³

In developing his paintings for the New Galleries, Cormon considered the design of the architectural space and collaborated closely with Dutert to make sure his works augmented the amphitheater aesthetically as well as intellectually and iconographically.¹⁴ The classroom is a small, almost intimate, space with an instructor's desk at the front that is surrounded on three sides by three rows of wooden benches. In order to increase visibility, the third row of benches is higher than the second, which, in turn, is higher than the first. While those attending lectures would necessarily have had their backs turned to certain of the paintings lining the walls, other paintings would have been visible, and the overall percentage of wall space given to these decorations would have made them impossible to overlook. Set in wooden borders that match the room's paneling, wainscoting, doors, and trim, as well as the sills of the windows with which they are interspersed, Cormon's paintings further

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blend with their surroundings due to their predominant earth tones. Because the artist had respected the reflective atmosphere of the classroom and had not created works whose presence is overwhelming, Emile Michel, who was a painter, critic, and member of the Academy of Fine Arts, declared Cormon's program to be a success.¹⁵ Cormon also met the standards set by Léonce Bénédite, the curator of the Luxembourg Museum, criteria that were very similar to those of Michel. Bénédite believed that public wall decorations should respect the architecture surrounding them and generally serve the goals of commemoration, consecration, or higher education.¹⁶ In the end, the success of Cormon's painting cycle was due to the aesthetic and instructive unity of the works.

The amphitheater was intended for courses in anthropology, comparative anatomy, paleontology, and zoology, instruction covering both past and present fauna as well as fossil flora.¹⁷ The dedication of a separate space for instruction within the New Galleries was in keeping with the fact that teaching had, along with scientific research and the conservation, development, and display of its collections, been one of the primary missions of the Museum since its creation by a decree of the National Convention on June 10, 1793. In particular, the Museum was noted for offering free classes to the public on a variety of subjects relating to natural history.¹⁸ As a teacher himself, and one who took his instruction very seriously, Cormon was acutely aware of the purpose of the classroom and was concerned with the accuracy of his images and the way in which they worked as an ensemble.¹⁹ As Fine Arts inspector Henry Havard wrote in his report to the minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts after examining Cormon's sketches for the amphitheater in April 1894:

These diverse paintings, which have for their subject the First ages of the world, appeared to me to be happily composed and to present a link, a sequence, a series that gives them the value of a history lesson.²⁰

Due to Cormon's efforts, the very walls of the classroom would offer, in the opinion of Michel, "the most eloquent commentary on the sciences to be taught there."²¹ Other contemporaries also saw Cormon's paintings for the amphitheater as working together to present a didactic message, and their perceived educational merit is reflected in the fact that several of these images were subsequently reproduced in French schoolbooks.²²

Although he already possessed some knowledge of prehistory from his work on *Cain* and *Return from a Bear Hunt*, Cormon's research for the Museum program was quite extensive. According to Michel, Cormon read works by Charles Darwin, Albert Gaudry, Ernest-Théodore Hamy, Albert-Auguste de Lapparent, John Lubbock, and Gabriel de Mortillet. Moreover, believing, as did many of these celebrated scientists, that people akin to those who had lived in prehistoric times still existed in remote parts of the world, Cormon interviewed explorers and naval officers about their travels and about the customs and habits of the peoples they had encountered. In addition, he studied and drew potters, blacksmiths, and a variety of other workers whose crafts were similar to what they had been when first invented in the distant past. He also observed fishermen, bargemen, peasants, and others who labored in direct contact with nature.²³ In other words, since he was obviously unable to sketch people who had

actually lived in the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages, and as he preferred to work with live models, Cormon made do with those whose lifestyles and activities most resembled those in these bygone eras.

Cormon additionally studied relevant scientific collections, both public and private.²⁴ Most fittingly, given the destination of his paintings, Cormon immersed himself in the objects found at the Museum. As Antonin Proust, who was both a politician and an art critic, stated:

He so set in his mind the dead vestiges contained by its galleries, while adding the desire to give them life by the scrupulous contemplation of the model, that he succeeded in giving us with these elements a striking reconstitution of that which he desired to put before our eyes.²⁵

As it were, Cormon brought the collections of the Museum to life on canvas by putting flesh on the bones of the fossil animals and humans, and creating vivid scenarios of their lives in the distant past.²⁶ Moreover, those who saw his paintings in the amphitheater may well have been inspired to extrapolate, in a similar manner, from other fossils and artifacts that they saw in lectures and in the galleries. Such a process was directly related to what nineteenth-century archeologist and ethnologist Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers referred to as “the orthodox scientific principle of reasoning from the known to the unknown.”²⁷



Fig. 1. Fernand Cormon, *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period: Megatherium, Machairodus, and Glyptodon*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

The way in which the various animal skeletons had been installed in the temporary gallery of paleontology in 1885 and were being situated in the New Galleries was clearly a source of inspiration for two of Cormon's paintings. In *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period: Megatherium, Machairodus, and Glyptodon* (fig. 1), the megatherium is shown standing on its hind legs and reaching toward a tree with its front paws. This is similar to the positioning of the megatherium skeleton in the paleontology section of the New Galleries, which was shown with its two front paws leaning on a tree broken by lightning. Moreover, glyptodon bones are located near the megatherium in Cormon's painting, just as two glyptodon skeletons were placed beside the skeleton of the megatherium in the paleontology gallery.²⁸ While the megatherium and glyptodon skeletons, which had been found by François Seguin in the pampas of the Argentine Confederation, influenced *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period*, the Museum also owned fossils related to Cormon's *Ice Age: Mammoth and Cave Bears* (fig. 2).²⁹ Although the Museum did not possess the skeleton of a woolly mammoth, it did have the skeletal remains of the so-called “Elephant of Durfort,” an ancestral mammoth, *Mammuthus meridionalis*, which had been excavated between 1869 and 1873 in the Gard region of central France.³⁰ And an entire cave bear skeleton, which had been discovered in the country's Ariège department, had been given to the Parisian institution by Henri Filhol, the director of the Natural History Museum in Toulouse.³¹ Cormon, by echoing the scientific displays in the nearby galleries, reinforced the pedagogical nature of his paintings, which, like the exhibited objects themselves, complemented many of the courses taught in the amphitheater.³²



Cormon may have additionally studied the bears, elephants, and other inhabitants of the zoo located in the Museum's gardens, as

Fig. 2. Fernand Cormon, *Ice Age: Mammoth and Cave Bears*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

Proust noted that the carriage of the animals in both *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* and *Ice Age* recalled that of the “living animals of the Museum.” Proust drew particular attention to the fact that the cave bears in *Ice Age* “saunter with that gait full of bonhomie” characteristic of the ursine family.³³ In addition to underscoring the close relationship of paleontology and zoology, Cormon’s interest in modern-day animals is comparable to his concern with contemporary “savages” and laborers, with the present being used to interpret the past in both cases.

While Cormon drew on the Museum’s paleontology collections and on the animals in the menagerie in creating *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* and *Ice Age*, the Museum’s anthropology collections were extremely pertinent to his other eight wall paintings. In an 1898 article on the New Galleries in a popular science magazine, it was noted that “anthropological studies take man at the moment of his appearance on the earth, and they follow him up to the present day in his physical evolution and in the diverse manifestations of his activity.”³⁴ Charting this development was the guiding principal of anthropological collecting at the Museum, which housed, among other things, a wide variety of fossils and artifacts referenced by Cormon in creating his paintings. The objects in the collection were generally organized according to the three main subdivisions of prehistory—the Stone Age, further split into the Paleolithic and Neolithic, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age—and Cormon chose the subject matter of his paintings according to these chronological divisions. As the artist himself recounted, he generally placed two or three figures in the foreground participating in some sort of activity characteristic of the time period depicted and tried, in the background, to express the nature of the environment in which they lived.³⁵ Two of the paintings portray the invention of human industries: pottery and metallurgy, which are affiliated with the Neolithic and with the Bronze and Iron Ages, respectively. The six other paintings represent the development of humankind by showing increasingly “civilized” endeavors as the various prehistoric ages advance chronologically. Cormon’s fairly uniform compositional strategy was thus applied to carefully selected scenes that recount an overall narrative of progress.

Progress was similarly underscored in the evolutive manner in which the Museum’s comparative anatomy, paleontology, and anthropology collections were arranged at the New Galleries. Auguste Pettit, a scientist affiliated with the comparative anatomy chair at the Museum at the end of the nineteenth century, noted that the Gallery of Comparative Anatomy as a whole was primarily meant to offer “in a way the vision of the evolution of the organic world.”³⁶ In the Gallery of Paleontology, which already at the time of its opening was barely large enough to house what was arguably the best assemblage of fossil mammals in the world, animals were exhibited in the order in which they had appeared on the earth. The oldest beings were situated near the entrance to the gallery, while the most recent, including humans, were to be found at the far end. With this installation, paleontology chair Gaudry hoped to show that the earliest life forms were “puny, not very differentiated,” while those to be seen as the visitor advanced through the gallery were “more and more advanced.”³⁷ In terms of the Gallery of Anthropology, anthropology assistant René Verneau remarked, “Before classifying the actual races it was necessary to consider those that had lived in the past; the fossil races, the prehistoric races had to come before those inhabiting the globe at present.”³⁸ Embedded in that chronological

approach was the distinct perspective that there had been progress over time. As historian Steven Conn has more generally discussed in regard to both museums and their displays in this period:

A trip through the galleries followed a trajectory from simple to complex, from savage to civilized, from ancient to modern. The form that museums developed in the last half of the nineteenth century made this lesson inescapable to anyone who strolled their galleries. Museums functioned as the most widely accessible public fora to underscore a positivist, progressive and hierarchical view of the world, and they gave that view material form and scientific legitimacy.³⁹

The New Galleries were thus yet one more example of the way in which evolutive displays had come to dominate museology by the late nineteenth century.⁴⁰

In his amphitheater paintings, Cormon particularly focused on the cultural, social, and technological advancements that had been made over the course of prehistory, with the degree of human progress being judged by the development of both industries and complex societies. For example, Cormon was clearly reflecting contemporary societal ideals when he depicted increasingly organized social groupings—first the couple, then the nuclear family, and finally the tribe—contributing to more productive hunting, agriculture, and the like. Meanwhile, constant improvements in tools and technologies differentiated humans from other animals to an ever greater degree.

As represented by Cormon, the development of tools, weapons, crafts, and industries, as well as modes of communal living, allowed humans to combat the harshness of the natural world successfully. Overall, Cormon paid great attention to the relationship between his figures and their surroundings, with the humans defined both by their environment and by their ability not to be completely beholden to it.⁴¹ The idea that history, as well as prehistory in the case of the paintings for the Museum's amphitheater, was the story of the emancipation of humans from nature was central to the thinking of many great modern minds, including Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Jules Michelet.⁴² As Michelet wrote in his *Introduction to Universal History* (1831):

With the world began the war that must finish with the world, and not before; that of man against nature, of the spirit against matter, of liberty against fate. History is nothing other than the story of this interminable struggle.⁴³

While Michelet saw the battle of humans against nature as both a reality and as a metaphor for more metaphysical combats, Louis Figuier, at the end of his popular science book *Primitive Man* (1870) had commented on the very literal efforts of prehistoric humans:

Thanks to the progresses of a continual labor, thanks to the development of intelligence, which was the consequence, the empire of man over nature grew still bigger, and his moral improvement followed the same progression.⁴⁴

In fact, even today, the crucial moment in the history of humanity is often considered to be the moment when hominids first went from being “of nature, not in nature” to “in nature, not of nature.”⁴⁵

Cormon was a product of his era and was not immune to standard beliefs then circulating concerning the human conquest of nature over time and the continual advancement of humankind, but he did contrive a rather unique arrangement for the Museum paintings. Perhaps most importantly, the works do not simply proceed chronologically from one side of the room to the other, although they do recount an overall narrative of progress. By utilizing the familiar trope of progress but rejecting a strictly linear chronological presentation, Cormon created a program that truly engages viewers. The painter did this by creating scenes that he believed would “mutually highlight one another by the analogies and contrasts that they would create between them” and by carefully positioning the paintings within the amphitheater to make sure that this was even more true.⁴⁶ Comparing and contrasting was, of course, one of the basic tools of comparative anatomy, paleontology (which has been called “the comparative anatomy of extinct life”⁴⁷), and anthropology, so Museum students would have been able to apply scientific methodology to the interpretation of the amphitheater paintings as well as to the study of natural history. Cormon thus chose, in these paintings created for a classroom setting, to invite those looking at them to be active participants in both the viewing and the learning process. In his own teaching, Cormon respected the individual temperaments of his students and tried to help them develop their own styles rather than mechanically copy his own, and his amphitheater paintings were likewise designed to encourage the Museum students to think for themselves.⁴⁸

When facing the front of the classroom, *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period: Megatherium, Machairodus, and Glyptodon* and *Ice Age: Mammoth and Cave Bears* are, respectively, placed to the left and to the right of the teaching desk and its flanking doors. As one “reads” from left to right, from *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* to *Ice Age*, one progresses chronologically through time from the very start of the Quaternary to the Ice Age, or most recent glacial period.⁴⁹ One also moves from flora and fauna primarily associated with South America to plants and animals generally identified with Europe. *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* and *Ice Age* form a pair not only because they are of the same format, are located on the same wall, and represent a chronological progression, as well as a contrast between South America and Europe, but also because of their subject matter and related compositions. They are the only two canvases in the amphitheater that concentrate on animals, and these animals are shown as being very much a part of their environments. Moreover, the megatherium and the mammoth, which are positioned in roughly the same place in their respective paintings, help create a dialogue between the two works. The megatherium faces toward *Ice Age*, and the mammoth is shown moving in the general direction of *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period*.



Fig. 3. Fernand Cormon, *Flint: Man Has the Idea for a Tool and He Makes That Tool*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

Directly across the room from *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period*, on the back wall of the amphitheater, is a painting of the same dimensions entitled *Flint: Man Has the Idea for a Tool and He Makes That Tool* (fig. 3). In this work a standing, bare-breasted woman supporting a small child on her back watches while a seated man, with a look of extreme concentration on his face, is about to strike the flint that he holds in his left hand with the smaller stone that he grasps in his right fist. This scene is a celebration of human intelligence, made visible, in this instance, by the fabrication of tools. In the late nineteenth century, according to anthropologist Joan Gero:

Spearheads and axes, weapons and implements fashioned out of stone, were identified as the essence of man's rude beginnings, savage, indeed, as beginnings must be, but also full of the clever promise that makes them appropriate hallmarks of human ability.⁵⁰

In addition, the rather long title of the painting emphasizes the passage from idea to act and underscores the making of tools as a cultural achievement.

Flint is part of the sequence of six paintings tracing the development of humanity, but, just as *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* depicted a South American setting, the green and lush background of this painting also suggests a "voyage out" as well as a "voyage back." In the nineteenth century, contemporary "primitives" were widely held to be important sources of information about the prehistoric past because they resembled the "savage" ancestors of contemporary Europeans, and the English archeologist Lubbock, whose writings Cormon is known to have consulted in developing his painted program for the amphitheater, was one of the most active proponents of this "comparativism."⁵¹ Moreover, in this painting, there is the clear suggestion that people at this stage of development still existed in various parts of the world. After all, the tropical setting of *Flint* recalls exotic contemporary locales as much as, and maybe more than, it does prehistory.

Beginnings of the Quaternary Period and *Flint* can be viewed as pendants, as both works have tropical settings, with palm fronds and other equatorial vegetation, which create a visual connection between them. However, while the megatherium, the machairodus, and the glyptodon bones in *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period* are surrounded by plants, suggesting their status as part of nature, the three figures in *Flint* dominate the foreground of the painting and are set against the landscape in the background, implying that they are somewhat apart from nature and have learned to dominate it to a certain degree. This pairing additionally underscores the fact that humans are different from other animals because of their intellectual capacity to create tools.



Fig. 4. Fernand Cormon, Study for *Primitive Man*, 1897. Oil on canvas. Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

Also on the back wall of the amphitheater, in this case across from *Ice Age*, is *Primitive Man* (fig. 4). These two paintings, of exactly the same size, form a pair in that both are set on desolate, curving, wintery coastlines. In addition, both show prehistoric pachyderms, as Cormon depicted a mammoth in *Ice Age* and included a herd of mastodons in the background of *Primitive Man*. These pendants equate humans and animals to a large degree, as both forms of mammals are forced to forage for food under harsh conditions.

Primitive Man shows a prehistoric man and woman on a barren beach. The bestiality of the man, who is standing in the left foreground, is particularly emphasized. His stomach is somewhat distended, suggesting that he is near starvation, and his hair is long and wild. His face is partially obscured by his hands and by the live crab that he is in the process of devouring. Meanwhile, the woman crouches on a rather large rock at the man's feet, her face largely hidden by her hair, as she searches for food under the boulder.⁵²

Primitive Man has frequently been examined in order to help determine Cormon's beliefs regarding transformism, with several art historians viewing this work as proof that he was an evolutionist. For example, Maud Charasson sees the figure of the man as depicting:

what the evolutionists and transformists named "fossil man." An inferior man, different, who disappeared, overcome by superior races, victim of constant evolution.⁵³

Meanwhile, Chang Ming Peng concentrates on the simian characteristics of the male figure, which she views as a direct reflection of Darwinian ideas.⁵⁴ This opinion is echoed by Martha Lucy, who writes, "Cormon would eventually present prehistoric man with explicitly ape-like features in his 1898 cycle for the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle depicting the evolution of man" and goes on to mention the growing acceptance of Darwinism in France by this time.⁵⁵ At the Museum, however, anthropology chair Hamy, like his predecessor Armand de Quatrefages, was skeptical about the descent of humans from apes and about Darwinian evolution more generally.⁵⁶

In my mind, and to my eye, *Primitive Man* does not make a clear statement in support of evolutionary or transformist theories. First of all, there is certainly nothing "primitive" about the body of the woman, which resembles that of an idealized Salon nude. The man's physique, in turn, while undoubtedly based on that of a model whom Cormon found to be wild and "primitive," is still modern.⁵⁷ Rather than intimating an archaic anatomy, his swollen stomach serves as a sign of hunger, while his flat-footed stance conveys a lack of grace. In addition, while both figures have long, flowing locks of hair on their heads, neither has pronounced body hair as in the vast majority of other images of truly simian fossil humans.⁵⁸ The man does, however, appear to have heavy brow ridges, intimating a Neanderthal physiognomy. But, because his face is largely obscured by his wind-blown hair and the crab that he is eating, his features cannot be definitively interpreted. Consequently, while Cormon created figures whose behavior is clearly bestial, their physical appearance is not so dissimilar from that of contemporary Parisians.⁵⁹ The equivocal nature of this image in terms of human evolution is perhaps due to conflicted

feelings about this topic on the part of the artist.⁶⁰ Or he may have chosen a guarded stance as did Gaudry, who, while practicing, teaching, and displaying evolutionary paleontology at the Museum, felt it was best for his career to skirt or avoid the subject of human evolution.⁶¹ In the end, however, Cormon was allowing viewers to make up their own minds by producing a work that did not make a definitive statement on the subject, yet offered elements to satisfy both proponents and opponents of transformism.

Primitive Man and *Flint* form a pair, which again “reads” temporally from *Primitive Man* on the left to *Flint* on the right, with these two paintings marking the first steps in the development of humanity. According to Cormon, primitive man was a “simple animal, still similar to the other animals.” He had no means of defense, and eating was his only real need. He ate what he found on the beach, namely shellfish and mollusks. In *Flint*, on the other hand, “man is no longer a simple beast.”⁶² He has the intelligence to devise and fabricate tools and weapons, an ability that differentiates him from the rest of the animal kingdom.

These two paintings are also similar in terms of their compositions. The humans—one standing and one crouching—loom large in the foreground of both images, and there is a group of mastodons in the right background of *Primitive Man* and a herd of deer in the right background of *Flint*. Such formal similarities would have encouraged viewers to draw comparisons between them, as was the case with objects in the typologically arranged vitrines in the neighboring galleries.⁶³ Furthermore, there is a sense of a bond between the humans within each painting. The two figures in *Primitive Man* can be interpreted as a couple, while the man making the flint tool, the woman who stands behind him watching, and the child on her back seem to represent a nuclear family. Writing in 1870, anthropologist Clémence Royer asserted that a man and a woman would form a union for the sake of their child, with the mother caring for the child while the father provided food, shelter, and protection.⁶⁴ And for numerous past and present theorists, society is simply “an aggregate of basic families, each formed by a man, a woman and their children.” As anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss further notes, for many social scientists:

It is a fact of nature that the two sexes are attracted to each other, that an instinct drives them to reproduce, that another instinct urges the mother to feed and raise her children, etc. From this point of view, the basic family, founded as it is on natural requirements, forms the hard core around which any social organization revolves.⁶⁵

Considered in this light, *Primitive Man* and *Flint* represent the first two steps in the development of increasingly complex societies, such as those shown in other paintings in the amphitheater.

Between *Primitive Man* and *Flint* are two slightly wider paintings, *Pottery: Age of Polished Stone and Dolmens* and *Bronze and Iron: Gallic Workshop*.⁶⁶ Thus, on the back wall of the classroom, the “beginnings of the two oldest human industries”⁶⁷ are flanked by *Primitive Man*, which shows an early human couple without tools, weapons, clothing, or shelter, and by *Flint*, whose subtitle indicates that the development of culture, and specifically the ability to make tools, was due to the powers of the human

intellect. While all four of these works show people in the foreground, *Pottery* and *Bronze and Iron* also include people in the background and invoke the importance of community and cooperation. Consequently, in viewing these four paintings together, one gets the overall sense that human progress was due to the ability of men and women to overcome nature by working together and by creating tools and other elements of culture.



Fig. 5. Fernand Cormon, *Pottery: Age of Polished Stone and Dolmens*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

In *Pottery: Age of Polished Stone and Dolmens* (fig. 5), Cormon depicted a small potter's workshop in the foreground and a funeral ceremony in the background. A kneeling woman holding a red clay vase is located in the center foreground, but the viewer can only see the back of her head, as she turns to watch the funeral proceedings. Meanwhile, a warrior stands to the left and examines the small vase that he holds in his left hand while resting his right hand on his upright shield. The combination of a standing male figure and a crouching female figure whose face cannot be seen is similar to the composition of the nearby *Primitive Man*.⁶⁸ In the right middle ground of the painting, inside a hut, an elderly, bearded potter sits, holding one of his wares in his lap. This potter seems oblivious to the funeral, which is for a leader whose body is being carried to a dolmen for burial. The participation in this ceremony of much of the tribe indicates a hierarchical society in which the chieftain was particularly venerated.

Cormon spoke of the people in *Pottery* as being members of a *race asiatique*, or Asiatic race—that is, a race from the East.⁶⁹ When considered in relation to the anthropological beliefs of the day, this appellation was obviously synonymous with *race aryenne*, or Aryan race. According to anthropologist Bert Theunissen, most nineteenth-century European anthropologists believed that Europe had been invaded by Aryans from Asia at the end of the Paleolithic or beginning of the Neolithic, the very “age of polished stones and dolmens” represented in *Pottery*. While the inferior European indigenes were considered to have primarily been hunters, the superior Asiatic invaders were believed to have domesticated animals and grown their own food.⁷⁰



Fig. 6. Fernand Cormon, *Study for Bronze and Iron: Gallic Workshop*, 1897. Oil on canvas. Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

Bronze and Iron: Gallic Workshop (fig. 6) further supports the idea of an invasion of Europe from the East. In the foreground, this painting depicts a nomadic Hindu blacksmith in the process of pouring molten metal into a mold as a woman, whom Cormon identified as his wife, helps. Groups of Gauls are clustered around two forges and two furnaces in the middle ground. There is what appears to be another forge and furnace in the background, and, even further back, there is a group of tent-like structures representing a small village. The many figures laboring around the forges and furnaces help provide a sense of common purpose, of a community working together. In regard to this painting, Cormon stated, “I admitted the hypothesis that was suggested to me by a scholar that it must have been nomadic Hindus who had propagated the art of metals.”⁷¹ Bénédite added that these blacksmiths were “sorts of half-sacred sorcerers for the superstitious populations of the West whom they initiated into the secrets of the casting of metals.”⁷² According to Lubbock, writing in 1865, “it appears most probably that the knowledge of metal is one of those great discoveries which Europe owes to the East.”⁷³

Pottery and *Bronze and Iron* can be viewed as pendants because

they both illustrate the supposed Aryan influence on western culture. In addition, they are of the same format, and both show the beginnings of important human industries. The works, however, do not “read” chronologically from left to right, as the Bronze and Iron Ages, shown in the painting on the left, came after the Neolithic, depicted in the canvas on the right.⁷⁴ Moreover, a visual disjunction is created between these two works because the blacksmith and his wife in *Bronze and Iron* turn their backs to the man and woman holding earthenware vessels in *Pottery*—and vice versa. In addition, the direction in which the blacksmith is facing draws attention to the nearest side wall, the one displaying *Hunters: Ice Age* and *Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone*. Together, these three paintings depict the ages of both stone and metal. Similarly, the placement of the figures in *Pottery* seems to direct attention to the other side wall where *Bronze Age: Farmers* and *Iron Age: Gauls* both hang. Thus, once again, these three paintings represent both the Stone Age, albeit only the Neolithic, and the Bronze and Iron Ages.

The two inner images on the back wall of the amphitheater are in dialogue with the paintings on the side walls in other ways as well, just as the two outer images on the back wall create parallels with the paintings on the front wall. In particular, just as *Primitive Man* and *Flint* can be paired with *Ice Age* and *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period*, respectively, *Pottery* creates analogies with *Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone* while *Bronze and Iron* can be constructively compared with both *Bronze Age: Farmers* and *Iron Age: Gauls*. This is because both *Pottery* and *Fishermen* depict the Neolithic and show Eastern or Aryan people. Cormon even noted that the people in *Fishermen* were contemporaries of the dolmens, such as the one seen in the background of *Pottery*.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, *Bronze and Iron* and *Bronze Age* show that the Asiatic invasion brought agriculture as well as metallurgy to the West, while *Bronze and Iron* and *Iron Age* both depict Gauls.

On the right side of the classroom, when facing the front of the room, are *Hunters: Ice Age* and *Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone*. *Hunters* is located next to the front wall's painting of Ice Age animals, creating a chronological continuum between the two works. *Fishermen*, meanwhile, is situated beside the back wall's *Primitive Man*, demonstrating how humans developed the means to catch fish rather than having to depend on what could be scavenged on the shore. Moreover, this side wall shows a temporal progression from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic as one “reads” from left to right, and both images depict humans who had advanced further than those shown in *Primitive Man* and *Flint*.



Fig. 7. Fernand Cormon, *Hunters: Ice Age*, 1898. Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle.

According to Cormon, the people of Ice Age Europe, as represented in *Hunters: Ice Age* (fig. 7), belonged to a powerful, intelligent, and fearless race. They lived in caves and knew how to defend themselves against ferocious animals. They had perfected the making of stone and bone tools and weapons, and hunted ruminants and birds. They also had a sense of ornamentation and luxury, and some of them were artists.⁷⁶ Furthermore, by placing a fur-clad couple in the foreground—he holds a bow that he is fitting with an arrow, and she carries a dead deer and string of fowl while making an odd, angular gesture with her left arm—as well as showing several clusters of figures in the background, Cormon suggests a certain level of social organization.

The figures in *Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone* (fig. 8) are shown



Fig. 8. Fernand Cormon, Study for *Fishermen: Age of Polished Stone*, 1897. Oil on canvas. Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.

beside a lake in Switzerland. Near the center of the composition, a bearded man with long brown hair and an earring in his left ear wears a fur garment. He and the red-headed younger man to his right, who wears only a loincloth, pull together on a rope attached to an underwater net. Behind them to the left stands a woman wearing sandals, a skirt made of woven cloth, a necklace, and an elaborate halter-top, which is tied behind her back rather than around her neck and accentuates rather than covers her breasts. In her left hand she holds a distaff, while, in her right hand, she grips a wooden spindle on which is wound the thread she is spinning. By her right side, a child with disheveled blond hair sits cross-legged on the ground and sticks his left thumb into the mouth of the small fish that he holds in his right hand. Behind the woman and child, two additional men pull on a rope attached to the other end of the invisible net. In the right middle ground, a man approaches the shore in a pirogue, which he steers with a pole. Behind him in the distance is a lake-dwelling village on pilots with mountains beyond.

Lake-dwelling villages and their inhabitants had been the object of much speculation—and the subject of numerous French and Swiss paintings and drawings—since the remains of such communities had been unveiled in the winter of 1853-54 after a dramatic drop in the water level of several alpine lakes.⁷⁷ Many of the objects in Cormon's painting were based on artifacts that had been retrieved from these sites. The mud and peat at the bottom of these lakes had preserved not only durable objects made of stone and bone, but also pieces of fabric, rope, and nets. In addition, pirogues such as the one depicted by Cormon had been raised from some of the lake bottoms.⁷⁸

Bronze Age: Farmers and *Iron Age: Gauls* hang on the side wall opposite *Hunters* and *Fishermen*. Again “reading” from left to right, these paintings similarly show a progression in time. In fact, taken together, these four canvases, the largest in the amphitheater, show the four ages of prehistory: the Paleolithic, the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age. At the same time, *Bronze Age* and *Iron Age* also relate to the paintings on the front and rear walls of the amphitheater. *Bronze Age* is situated next to the back wall's *Flint*, drawing a distinction between a single nuclear family and a community. However, there are certain continuities between the two paintings. While the woman in *Flint* supports a child on her back, a woman in the center foreground of *Bronze Age* holds a baby on her right hip. Moreover, just as it is the man in *Flint* who is making a tool, it is predominantly the men in *Bronze Age* who are shown with tools.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, *Iron Age: Gauls* is next to the front wall's *Beginnings of the Quaternary Period*, so the wild South American mammals are juxtaposed with the domesticated dog, horse, and oxen in Cormon's image of the Iron Age.



Fig. 9. Fernand Cormon,

Bronze Age: Farmers (fig. 9) shows a community of men, women, and children. In the foreground next to a cowshed, women distribute the bread they have cooked to workers who have returned from the wheat fields, which can be seen in the background along with herds of cattle. At right, a forlorn matriarch, seated with her back against the shed, tends a fire. A woman in the center foreground wears a blue dress and carries a red-headed baby. To her right stands a man, his back to the viewer, wearing only a loincloth and a necklace and carrying some sort of tool in his right hand. A younger woman, wearing a shorter dress,

Bronze Age: Farmers, 1898.
Oil on canvas. Paris, Muséum
National d'Histoire Naturelle.



Fig. 10. Fernand Cormon,
Study for Iron Age: Gauls,
1897. Oil on canvas. Paris,
Petit Palais, Musée des
Beaux-Arts de la Ville de
Paris.

also of blue material, is standing at the left edge of the group and appears to be giving an older man, who has a tool hanging at his waist, something to drink.

Cormon explained *Iron Age: Gauls* (fig. 10) as representing the emigration of a horde of Gauls whom he refers to as “our fathers.”⁸⁰ With this last painting, as Michel notes, “we border on history proper” as opposed to prehistory.⁸¹ In the left foreground, a helmeted Gaul sits astride a horse, which faces directly out at the viewer and has an elaborately decorated breastplate.⁸² Beside the horse in the center foreground is a dog that has evidently been domesticated. The man looks over his left shoulder at a cart being pulled by six oxen. A woman sits atop the cart holding reins in her hands while a man walks alongside and helps guide the first pair of oxen. A convoy of other wagons can be seen winding through the background of this marshy landscape. In addition to serving as the chronological endpoint of his painting cycle, *Iron Age* also contributed to the growing iconography of Gauls in nineteenth-century France, a time when Gallic themes became increasingly popular due to recent archeological findings and the writings of influential historians Henri Martin and Amédée Thierry.⁸³

The overall message of the ten wall paintings in the amphitheater, as in the evolutive displays in the neighboring galleries, is one of progress. As critic Louis Enault noted in regard to Cormon’s efforts:

We follow with confidence the path of this guide, always on the right track, and we witness the progress of primitive man, fabricating weapons and tools, then sensing awakening in him ideas of luxury and the need for decoration and ornamentation; those are the first stages and the first glimmers of civilization at its dawn.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, Cormon’s program in the New Galleries does not represent an absolutely strict progression from *Primitive Man* to *Iron Age: Gauls*. While he clearly believed in some degree of linear development, Cormon, perhaps due to his awareness of contemporary “primitives,” recognized that various peoples attain different stages of culture at diverse times. Thus, while France at the end of the nineteenth century was becoming increasingly industrialized, there were people in other parts of the world who were still living in the Stone Age, as suggested by *Flint* in particular. Implicit in this recognition was the belief that the French had inherited the legacy of progress charted on the walls of the amphitheater and could now help “civilize” present-day “natives” and “savages.” This was a clear justification for French colonialism, and the Museum was purposefully involving itself in colonial activities in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Thus, as preoccupied as Cormon’s program was with the past, his paintings also reflected the time in which they were created and offered great promise for the future of France.

Just as prehistoric humans and modern-day “savages” could be productively compared, Cormon paired his paintings in a number of different ways through his use of composition and iconography. Again, this was similar to the way in which objects were displayed in the New Galleries, and in other anthropological and ethnographic museums of the time according to anthropologist

Nélia Dias, in order for visitors to uncover similarities and differences through close and repeated viewing.⁸⁶ At the same time, because Cormon's paintings fleshed out the artifacts and fossils on display, they gave viewers a more holistic sense of life in the prehistoric past.⁸⁷

Due to the themes of his works and the research that went into them, Cormon to some degree acquired "the status of men of science."⁸⁸ For example, according to minister of Public Instruction Léon Bourgeois's inaugural address at the New Galleries, Cormon had masterfully recreated the lost ages in his paintings for the amphitheater. As the government minister explained:

One would say that he had lived then, so much has he truly understood not only the exterior aspect of clothing, costume, and things, but the interior sense of the intellectual life, I was going to say the moral life of these epochs.⁸⁹

The understanding of the distant past conveyed by Cormon's canvases would have been augmented for viewers who considered them in relationship to various objects in the galleries. For instance, "an artifact may be viewed as a record of the process of its manufacture, as an indexical sign,"⁹⁰ and Cormon's representations of early tool-making, pottery, and metallurgy illustrated how ancient stone, clay, and metal objects on display elsewhere in the building had been made. Cormon thus provided a context for known artifacts in some of his canvases while similarly showing fauna in its natural surroundings in others.

Critics actively debated the merits of Cormon's program for the New Galleries. Despite the fact that the paintings were destined for an instructional venue, some critics were disparaging of what they saw as the strictly scientific aspects of the work. For example, Henry Bidou remarked, "These are the figures of an anthropology treatise. It is the schema and not the vision of an age."⁹¹ Maurice Hamel, on the other hand, felt differently and stated that Cormon had rediscovered "the spirit which sees the poetry of distant ages in front of bizarre skeletons and obscurely deciphers the ages of the world in the hieroglyphs of nature."⁹² Meanwhile, Louis de Fourcaud believed that Cormon had achieved a certain balance between his intellect and aesthetic sensibility, writing, "If the brain of the artist played a role, the work of the painter is far from having suffered."⁹³ And Justin Lucas similarly touched on the combination of science and artistry in this painted program when he referred to it as an "anthropological poem."⁹⁴ Perhaps the best summary of Cormon's work at the Museum, however, was one commentator's remark that it was "neither scientifically exact, nor frankly unreal."⁹⁵

There is much less evidence of what those who actually used the amphitheater—the Museum's professors and their students—thought of these ten wall paintings. But, at the inauguration ceremony for the New Galleries, which took place in the classroom, Alphonse Milne-Edwards, then the Museum's director, noted that "one can admire the so remarkable paintings of Cormon, who, through artistic intuition, brought the prehistoric times back to life in the handsome paintings that surround us."⁹⁶ Although Milne-Edwards stressed Cormon's "artistic intuition," the painter clearly applied many of the same scientific principles that were utilized in

the galleries to his decorative program. In the end, it was not just prehistory, but the National Museum of Natural History's collections and display techniques that Cormon brought to life in his painting cycle for the amphitheater of the New Galleries of Comparative Anatomy, Paleontology, and Anthropology.

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1. See Léon Bultingaire, "L'Art au Jardin des plantes," in *Archives du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*, vol. 12 (Paris: Masson, 1935), 667-78; and Luc Vezin, *Les artistes au Jardin des plantes* (Paris: Herscher, 1990).
2. Order dated April 18, 1893: "décoration picturale de la Salle des Cours des nouvelles galeries du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle," F/21/2128, folder labeled "M. F. Cormon Commande Décoration picturale de la Salle des Cours des nouvelles galeries du Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle," Archives Nationales, Paris.
3. On the ceiling painting, see Maria P. Gindhart, "Allegorizing Aryanism: Fernand Cormon's *The Human Races*," *Aurora* 9 (forthcoming).
4. Dutert had corresponded with Cormon about this project even prior to the painter's receipt of the commission. In a letter to Cormon dated April 6, 1893, Dutert wrote, "J'ai fait un croquis des emplacements que je vous destine. Si vous vouliez venir à mon agence lundi ou mercredi prochains de 2 à 4 heures, je vous montrerais bien volontiers les tracés. Mais nous ne pouvons rien commencer sans l'arrêté ministériel que la Direction des Beaux-arts doit vous adresser." (I made a sketch of the locations that I intend you to have. If you would like to come to my office next Monday or Wednesday between 2 and 4 o'clock, I would gladly show you the plans. But we cannot start anything without the ministerial order that the Direction of Fine Arts must send you.) Cormon then forwarded this letter to Henri Roujon, the director of the Fine Arts Administration, in the hope of expediting the commission. F/21/2128, Archives Nationales.
5. Antonin Proust, "La décoration du Muséum et les peintures de M. Cormon," *Figaro illustré*, October 1897, 190: "un acte d'une haute intelligence"; and Emile Michel, "Les peintures décoratives de M. Cormon au Muséum," *La revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, January 1898, 1. Michel also congratulated the Fine Arts Administration for having given Cormon the totality of the decoration rather than dividing up the commission. *Ibid.*, 12.

On *Cain*, see Martha Lucy, "Cormon's *Cain* and the Problem of the Prehistoric Body," *Oxford Art Journal* 25, no. 2 (2002): 107-26; and Chang-Ming Peng, "Fernand Cormon's *Cain*: Epic Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century History Painting," trans. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, in *Twenty-First-Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Laurinda S. Dixon (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 238-46. On *Return from a Bear Hunt*, see Maria P. Gindhart, "A *pinacothèque préhistorique* for the Musée des Antiquités Nationales in Saint-Germain-en-Laye," *Journal of the History of Collections* 19, no. 1 (May 2007): 57-60.

6. For biographical information on Cormon, see *L'Académie du Japon moderne et les peintres français*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Tokyo Shimbun, 1983), 222-24; and Jules de Saint-Mesmin, "Fernand Cormon," *La revue des beaux-arts et des lettres*, September 15, 1899, 427-33.

7. Saint-Mesmin, "Fernand Cormon," 431:

Le peintre des âges préhistoriques a donc trouvé là, en quelque sorte, l'occasion de résumer toute sa science, toute sa philosophie, et de se consacrer à un sujet qui semble . . . être la mission de sa vie.

8. On Emmanuel Fremiet's bronze relief *Bear Hunter* (1897), which adorns the Rue Buffon façade of the New Galleries, see Maria P. Gindhart, "Primitive Decoration: Belle Epoque Sculpture Programs for Parisian Scientific Institutions," in *Modernity and Early Cultures: Reconsidering Non-Western References for Modern Architecture in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Bernd Nicolai and Anna Minta (Berlin: Akademieverlag, forthcoming).

9. As Robert Rosenblum has written in regard to Cormon's first prehistoric canvas, "Even within the encyclopedically expanding range of nineteenth-century history painting, which could reconstruct life in Egypt, Greece, Moorish Spain, Renaissance France, or the Napoleonic battlefield, *Cain* must have opened a thrilling new vista, that of prehistoric mankind." *Paintings in the Musée d'Orsay* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1989), 388.

10. See Peng, "Fernand Cormon's *Cain*," 238.

11. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 11. A pamphlet for this exhibition, *Exposition particulière de M. F. Cormon: Décoration d'une salle du Muséum, Catalogue*, is part of the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, AA3 CORMON. Nine of the studies were labeled "Esquisse (Sketch)," eight were labeled "Carton (Cartoon)," and forty-six were labeled "Dessin (Drawing)."

12. Armand Dayot, "A la Galerie des machines: Le Salon des artistes français," *La nouvelle revue*, May 15, 1898, 312; and Justin Lucas, "Le Salon des Salons (1898) art et critique," *Revue encyclopédique*, July 2, 1898, 586. Antonin Proust wrote, "The Society of French Artists has very judiciously collected in one room the whole of the decorative work for the museum of Natural History by M. Cormon (paintings and cartoons) . . . Cormon's room is a favorite resort." *Goupil's Paris Salon of 1898*, trans. Henry Bacon (Paris and New York: Goupil, 1898), 4.

13. The original order, dated April 18, 1893, was for 40,000 francs. Cormon was then accorded an increase of 20,000 francs in an order dated April 24, 1895. In a letter dated August 14, 1897, he states that the commission had cost him 20,000 francs. F/21/2128, Archives Nationales.

14. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 8-9.

15. *Ibid.*, 8.

16. Léonce Bénédite, "La peinture décorative aux Salons," *Art et décoration*, May 1898, 137.

17. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 8; and Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 190.

18. Alexis Lemaistre writes, "Le Muséum est avant tout un lieu d'études. Un grand nombre de cours ayant trait à l'histoire naturelle ont lieu . . ." (The Museum is above all a place of study. A large number of courses related to natural history take place . . .) *L'Institut de France et nos grands établissements scientifiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), 152.

19. In the 1880s and 1890s, Cormon ran a private teaching studio at various locations in Montmartre. See John Milner, *The Studios of Paris: The Capital of Art in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 23, 137, and 158. He also taught at the School of Fine Arts, where he was named a professor of evening classes in May 1897 and the head of a painting studio in October 1899. Cormon encouraged his students, who included Louis Anquetin, Emile Bernard, Francis Picabia, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Vincent van Gogh, to be avid observers and to draw everything around them. At the time of his death, according to Jacques Baschet, Cormon's past and present

students, who represented nearly two generations of artists, mourned the loss of a father figure who was known for strongly supporting and defending his pupils. "La mort de Fernand Cormon," *L'Illustration*, March 29, 1924, 285.

20. Letter dated April 17, 1894, F/21/2128, Archives Nationales: Ces diverses peintures qui ont pour sujet les Premiers âges du monde, m'ont paru heureusement composées et présenter un lien, une suite, un enchaînement qui leur donnent la valeur d'une leçon d'histoire.

21. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 8: "le commentaire le plus éloquent des sciences qui y seront professées."

22. *L'Académie du Japon moderne*, 223-24.

23. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 3-4.

24. *Ibid.*, 4.

25. Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 193: Il s'est tellement pénétré de ce que ses galeries renferment de vestiges morts, en y ajoutant la volonté de leur rendre la vie par la contemplation scrupuleuse du modèle, qu'il est parvenu à nous donner avec ces éléments une reconstitution saisissante de ce qu'il désirait mettre sous nos yeux.

26. Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins write that "reconstructions bring the subject to life, in some cases almost literally putting the flesh on the bones." *Archaeological Illustration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 131. Stephanie Moser similarly notes, "Reconstruction drawings of the appearance of certain ancestors have been enormously influential in conferring human or non-human status upon the fossil specimens in question. This is precisely why archaeologists and other evolutionary specialists have enlisted scientific illustrators to flesh out the bones that they have found in ancient deposits." "Visual Representation in Archaeology: Depicting the Missing-Link in Human Origins," in *Picturing Knowledge: Historical and Philosophical Problems Concerning the Use of Art in Science*, ed. Brian S. Baigrie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 185.

27. Quoted in Nélia Dias, "Looking at Objects: Memory, Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Ethnographic Displays," in *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. George Robertson et al. (London: Routledge, 1994), 169.

28. Ph[ilippe] Glangeaud, "Les nouvelles galeries du Muséum," *L'Illustration*, April 23, 1898, 288. Albert Gaudry notes that the first skeleton the visitors would see upon entering the temporary paleontology gallery was the megatherium and that a glyptodon skeleton was placed on each side of the megatherium, one with its shell, the other without. *Nouvelle galerie de paléontologie* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1885), 3-4. Georges Cuvier, who had become the first chair of comparative anatomy at the Museum on October 16, 1802, had pioneered the reconstruction in lifelike poses of fossil skeletons. See Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 30-36.

29. Gaudry, *Nouvelle galerie*, 4.

30. Claudine Cohen, *Le destin du mammoth* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 203-6.

31. Gaudry, *Nouvelle galerie*, 7.

32. As was noted about the layout of the New Galleries, "Cette disposition, qui consiste à placer les locaux d'enseignement dans l'édifice même qui contient les salles d'exposition, permettra aux professeurs d'avoir à leur disposition tous les spécimens qui peuvent leur être utiles sans exposer ces objets aux risques d'un long transport et même les sujets volumineux et encombrants pourront être examinés sur place presque sans interrompre les cours." (This arrangement, which consists of placing the teaching premises in the very building that contains the exhibition rooms, will permit the professors to have at their disposition all the specimens that might be useful to them without exposing these objects to the risks of a long transport, and even the voluminous and unwieldy subjects may be examined in place almost without interrupting

the classes.) M. Seurat, "Les nouvelles galeries du Muséum d'histoire naturelle, à Paris," *Le génie civil*, May 21, 1898, 38.

33. Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 193: "animaux vivants du Muséum"; "déambulent de ce pas plein de bonhomie." Among the Cormon drawings belonging to the Taylor Foundation in Paris, there are studies of bears that seem to have been done from life.

34. G. Xert, "Les nouvelles galeries du Muséum," *La nature*, April 9, 1898, 297: "Les études anthropologiques prennent l'homme au moment de son apparition sur la terre et elles le suivent jusqu'à nos jours dans son évolution physique et dans les diverses manifestations de son activité."

35. Quoted in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191. In this regard, Cormon seems to have taken a cue from the life groups that were part of the Retrospective Exhibition of Work at the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition. See Maria P. Gindhart, "The Art and Science of Late Nineteenth-Century Images of Human Prehistory at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 206-8.

36. Auguste Pettit, "La galerie d'anatomie comparée," *L'Anthropologie* 9 (1898): 325: "en quelque sorte la vision de l'évolution du monde organique."

37. On the Gallery of Paleontology, see Albert Gaudry, "La galerie de paléontologie," *L'Anthropologie* 9 (1898): 320-24; and Ph[ilippe] Glangeaud, "Les nouvelles galeries du Muséum II," *La nature*, April 16, 1898, 307-10. The quotes are from Gaudry: "chétifs, peu différenciés"; "de plus en plus perfectionnés" (322). Gaudry had made a call for a befitting paleontology gallery with an evolutionary presentation of the collections in 1893 in a publication celebrating the centennial of the Museum: "Aujourd'hui la Paléontologie a pris des proportions immenses; elle est devenue l'histoire des développements de la nature organique. Pour bien embrasser cette histoire, il faudra construire une longue galerie où nous suivrons la marche de la vie, à partir du jour où nous surprenons ses premières manifestations sur le globe jusqu'à celui où rayonne l'intelligence humaine; ce sera comme la synthèse du Muséum d'histoire naturelle." (Today Paleontology has reached immense proportions; it has become the history of the developments of organic nature. In order to encompass this history, it will be necessary to construct a long gallery where we will follow the march of life, from the day where we discover its first manifestations on the globe up to the one where human intelligence shines; it will be like the synthesis of the Museum of Natural History.) "L'Eléphant de Durfort," in *Centenaire de la fondation du Muséum d'histoire naturelle, 10 juin 1793-10 juin 1893: Volume commémoratif publié par les professeurs du Muséum* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1893), 327.

38. R[ené] Verneau, "La galerie d'anthropologie," *L'Anthropologie* 9 (1898): 328: "Avant de classer les races actuelles il a fallu songer à celles qui ont vécu autrefois: les races fossiles, les races préhistoriques devaient venir avant celles qui peuplent actuellement le globe."

39. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5. Sharon Macdonald similarly writes that "visitors could embody the progressive narratives as they moved through the orderly museum space." "Exhibitions of Power and Powers of Exhibition: An Introduction to the Politics of Display," in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (London: Routledge, 1998), 12.

40. This progressivist view, however, has increasingly been attacked. For example, Ruth Tringham writes of the need for an "alternative to the very powerful progressive model of culture change in the archaeology of Europe . . . which involves 'civilisation' as the highest cultural development to be attained by human society." "The Concept of 'Civilization' in European Archaeology," in *The Rise and Fall of Civilizations: Modern Archaeological Approaches to Ancient Cultures*, ed. C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky and Jeremy A. Sabloff (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings, 1974), 484.

41. Michel writes, "Ces pauvres êtres, farouches et sauvages, confinant à

la bestialité, exposés à tous les dangers . . . nous les voyons peu à peu suppléer par leur intelligence à toutes leurs infirmités et finir par . . . dominer les énergies de la nature." (These poor beings, wild and savage, confined to bestiality, exposed to all the dangers . . . we see them little by little compensate for all their weaknesses with their intelligence and finish by . . . dominating the energies of nature.) "Les peintures décoratives," 10.

42. Claude Liauzu, *Race et civilisation: L'Autre dans la culture occidentale; Anthologie historique* (Paris: Syros/Alternatives, 1992), 174.

43. Quoted *ibid.*, 173:

Avec le monde a commencé une guerre qui doit finir avec le monde, et pas avant; celle de l'homme contre la nature, de l'esprit contre la matière, de la liberté contre la fatalité. L'histoire n'est pas autre chose que le récit de cette interminable lutte.

44. Louis Figuier, *L'Homme primitif* (Paris: Hachette, 1870), 428: Grâce aux progrès d'un labeur continu, grâce au développement de l'intelligence, qui en a été la conséquence, l'empire de l'homme sur la nature s'agrandit encore, et son perfectionnement moral suit la même progression.

It should be mentioned that the illustrations in Figuier's book, as well as those in Henri du Cleuziou's *La création de l'homme et les premiers âges de l'humanité* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1887), were an obvious iconographic source for Cormon's painting cycle. On Figuier and Cleuziou, see Stephanie Moser, *Ancestral Images: The Iconography of Human Origins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 121-33. On the influence of Figuier's book on Cormon, see Chang Ming Peng, "Fernand Cormon et le Muséum national d'histoire naturelle," in *Vénus et Cain: Figures de la préhistoire, 1830-1930* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux; Bordeaux: Musée d'Aquitaine, 2003), 96.

45. Melanie G. Wiber, *Erect Men, Undulating Women: The Visual Imagery of Gender, "Race" and Progress in Reconstructive Illustrations of Human Evolution* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 167.

46. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 4: "se feraient valoir mutuellement par les analogies et les contrastes qu'ils devraient offrir entre eux."

47. Paula Young Lee, "The Logic of the Bones: Architecture and the Anatomical Sciences at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, 1793-1889" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 8.

48. Saint-Mesmin, "Fernand Cormon," 432.

49. Similarly, in ethnographic and natural history displays, "[t]he arrangement of objects in panoplies and cases allowed the spectator's eye to follow a particular itinerary, moving from left to right, in a process somewhat analogous to that of reading." Dias, "Looking at Objects," 169.

50. Joan M. Gero, "Genderlithics: Women's Roles in Stone Tool Production," in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 164.

51. See John Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times, as Illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 336-37.

52. Maud Charasson notes that "Cormon a sans doute voulu faire référence à l'une des grandes découvertes qui a apporté l'une des preuves de l'existence d'un homme primitif. Elle est due à l'archéologue Worssae qui en 1848 découvre sur la côte de Jutland des amas de coquilles d'huîtres en association avec des silex et des os. Ces restes sont identifiés comme des 'rejets de cuisine' (*kjokkenmodinger*) datant de l'âge de la pierre." (Cormon no doubt wanted to make reference to one of the great discoveries that had brought one of the proofs of the existence of a primitive man. It was due to the archeologist Worssae who in 1848 discovered on the coast of Jutland piles of oyster shells in association with flints and bones. These remains were identified as "cooking waste" [*kjokkenmodinger*] dating to the Stone Age.) "Les peintres des antiquités nationales au XIXe siècle" (master's thesis, Université de Paris 1 [Panthéon-Sorbonne], 1994-95), 108. Lubbock

devoted to a whole chapter, "The Danish Kjökkenmöddings or Shell-mounds," to this subject in *Pre-historic Times* and noted that these Danish remains contained rudimentary flint tools and stones bearing fire marks, and suggested that people had lived together in villages (173). Cormon's *Primitive Man* suggests none of these things.

53. Charasson, "Les peintres des antiquités nationales," 110: ce que les évolutionnistes et les transformistes nommaient "l'homme fossile". Un homme inférieur, différent qui disparut vaincu par des races supérieures, victime de l'évolution constante.

54. Peng, "Fernand Cormon et le Muséum," 96.

55. Lucy, "Cormon's *Cain*," 126.

56. Erik Trinkaus and Pat Shipman, *The Neandertals: Of Skeletons, Scientists, and Scandal* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 110.

57. As André de Fouquières wrote in his history of turn-of-the-century Paris, Cormon "faisait grande consommation de modèles barbus et de fortes filles qu'il vêtait de peaux de bêtes et qu'il contraignait à hanter (sur ses toiles) des cavernes et des palafittes." (used numerous bearded models and stout girls whom he dressed in animal skins and whom he forced to haunt [in his canvases] caves and palafittes) *Mon Paris et ses Parisiens: Pigalle 1900* (Paris: P. Horay, 1955), 19.

58. Moser discusses hairiness as one of the "familiar icons" in "the story of the past." *Ancestral Images*, 170.

59. Instructive in this regard is a 1939 reconstruction of a Neanderthal by American anthropologist Carleton Coon. In this drawing, the Neanderthal has short hair, is clean shaven, and wears a hat, coat, and tie. As Christopher Stringer and Clive Gamble write, Coon's "aim was to show that impressions of the Neanderthals depend largely on such superficial criteria as hair styles and clothing." *In Search of the Neanderthals: Solving the Puzzle of Human Origins* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 28.

60. A certain equivocation had already marked Cormon's two earlier paintings with prehistoric themes. Writing about *Return from a Bear Hunt*, Lucy comments, "In what seems to be a retraction of the Darwinian statements made in *Cain*, the scientifically-informed bodies of his earlier picture are exchanged with figures bearing elegant classical profiles and physiques." "Cormon's *Cain*," 125-26.

61. Trinkaus and Shipman, *Neandertals*, 183. It should also be pointed out that while Gaudry instituted evolutive paleontology, his brand of transformism owed less to Darwin, whose work he nevertheless admired and supported, and more to a rather spiritual conception of "un progrès nécessaire qui culmine en l'homme (a necessary progress culminating in man)." Cohen, *Le destin du mammouth*, 204.

62. Cormon quoted in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191: "simple bête, encore semblable aux autres bêtes"; "L'homme n'est plus une simple bête."

63. According to Dias, "In a certain way, the typological arrangement functioned as an *aide-mémoire*, allowing for the recall of information that has already been stored. The ability to recollect was made possible by the juxtaposition of objects having formal analogies." "Looking at Objects," 169.

64. Clémence Royer, *Origine de l'homme et des sociétés* (1870; Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1990), 367.

65. Claude Lévi-Strauss, introduction to *A History of the Family*, vol. 1, *Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*, ed. André Burguière et al., trans. Sarah Hanbury Tenison, Rosemary Morris, and Andrew Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 1.

66. Although *Pottery* is on the right, next to *Flint*, while *Bronze and Iron* is on the left, next to *Primitive Man*, the two paintings were reproduced side by side with *Pottery* on the left and *Bronze and Iron* on the right in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191.

67. Cormon quoted *ibid.*: "début des deux plus anciennes industries

humaines.”

68. I consider the gender implications of the relative placement of the figures in Cormon's amphitheater paintings in my article manuscript "Coquettes of the Caverns: Cormon's Vision of Gender in Prehistory."

69. Cormon in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191.

70. Bert Theunissen, *Eugène Dubois and the Ape-Man from Java: The History of the First "Missing Link" and Its Discoverer*, trans. Enid Perlin-West (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 17.

71. Quoted in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191: "J'ai admis l'hypothèse qui m'a été soumise par un savant que ce devait être des nomades hindous qui avaient propagé l'art des métaux."

72. Bénédite, "La peinture décorative," 136: "sortes de sorciers à demi sacrés pour les populations superstitieuses de l'Occident qu'ils initient aux secrets de la fonte des métaux."

73. Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times*, 34.

74. Charasson, who initially "reads" the amphitheater paintings clockwise around the room beginning with *Ice Age: Mammoth and Cave Bears*, writes the following about the relative positioning of these two canvases: "La peinture suivante présente le *Bronze et le Fer*, les deux âges sont symbolisés ici par la présence de fours et de forgerons. Cormon opère ensuite une sorte de retour en arrière du point de vue chronologique en présentant la poterie qui symbolise la période néolithique." (The following painting presents *Bronze and Iron*, the two ages are symbolized here by the presence of furnaces and blacksmiths. Cormon then operates a sort of retreat from a chronological point of view in presenting pottery, which symbolizes the Neolithic period.) Although she does not discuss his reasoning, Charasson later notes that "Cormon n'a pas développé une vision strictement linéaire, chronologique de cette histoire des débuts de l'humanité." (Cormon did not develop a strictly linear, chronological vision of this history of the beginning of humanity.) "Les peintres des antiquités nationales," 107.

75. Cormon remarked that the race of people depicted in *Fishermen* was Asiatic, in the sense of Aryan, and was quoted as saying, "Ces pêcheurs sont contemporains des dolmens." (These fishermen are contemporaries of the dolmens.) In Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 191.

76. Ibid.

77. Some of these images are reproduced in Hans-Georg Bandi and Karl Zimmermann, *Pfahlbauromantik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, exh. cat. (Zurich: Historisch-Archäologischer Verlag, 1980); Catherine Louboutin, *Au Néolithique: Les premiers paysans du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); and Adolf Max Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism*, trans. Radka Donnell (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

78. O[tto] Schrader, *Prehistoric Antiquities of the Aryan Peoples: A Manual of Comparative Philology and the Earliest Culture*, trans. Frank Byron Jevons (London: Charles Griffin, 1890), 367.

79. The woman in the center foreground may, however, have tools poking out of her bag.

80. Cormon quoted in Proust, "La décoration du Muséum," 192: "[n]os pères."

81. Michel, "Les peintures décoratives," 6: "nous confinons à l'histoire proprement dite."

82. In regard to a print of this painting, Linda Nochlin writes, "In its primitive form, the horse, like the wolfish dog, could serve as an authenticating accompaniment to 'scientific' or would-be scientific representations of French prehistory . . . the Gaul in question is depicted astride an ancestor of the modern horse. Cormon's representation draws from new information about the most enduring of primitive horses, a type called Przewalski's horse." "Introduction: The Darwin Effect," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 2, no. 2 (2003), http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring_03/articles/noch.shtml.

83. Françoise Le Goff-Vandromme, "Autour du 'Baptême gaulois' de Pierre-Marie Ogé: La thématique gauloise dans la sculpture du XIXe siècle," in *La sculpture dans l'Ouest de l'âge du fer à nos jours*, ed. Denise Delouche (Rennes: Presses Universitaires Rennes, 1993), 29-30.
84. Louis Enault, "Le nouveau Muséum du Jardin des plantes," *Revue des arts décoratifs*, June 1898, 156:
 Nous suivons avec confiance les traces de ce guide, toujours sur la bonne voie, et nous assistons aux progrès de l'homme primitif, fabriquant des armes et des outils, puis sentant s'éveiller en lui les idées du luxe et le besoin du décor et de l'ornementation; ce sont là les premières étapes et les premières lueurs de la civilisation à son aurore.
85. On the Museum's colonial activities, see Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 56-59; Christophe Bonneuil, "Le Muséum national d'histoire naturelle et l'expansion coloniale de la Troisième République (1870-1914)," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 86, no. 322-23 (1999): 143-69; and Yves Laissus, *Le Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 25-27. On the colonial implications of Cormon's ceiling painting for the New Galleries amphitheater, see Gindhart, "Allegorizing Aryanism."
86. Nélia Dias, "Modes de voir et modes de présentation: Anthropologie et musées au XIXe siècle," *Antropologia portuguesa* 14 (1997): 9 and 11.
87. For a similar consideration of the role of artistic depictions of prehistory at the French Museum of National Antiquities (now the Museum of National Archeology), see Gindhart, "A pinacothèque préhistorique," 51-74.
88. Nélia Dias, "Cultural Objects/Natural Objects: On the Margins of Categories and the Ways of Display," *Visual Resources* 13, no. 1 (1997): 35.
89. Quoted in "Inauguration des nouvelles galeries d'anatomie comparée, d'anthropologie et de paléontologie," *Bulletin des nouvelles archives du Muséum d'histoire naturelle*, 3rd ser., 10, no. 2 (1898): xi:
 On dirait qu'il y a vécu, tant il a véritablement compris non pas seulement l'aspect extérieur du vêtement, du costume et des choses, mais le sens intérieur de la vie intellectuelle, j'allais dire de la vie morale de ces époques.
90. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 64.
91. Henry Bidou, "Le Salon: I. - La Société des artistes français," *L'Ermitage*, January-June 1898, 477: "Ce sont les figures d'un traité d'anthropologie. C'est le schéma et non la vision d'une époque."
92. Quoted in Lucas, "Le Salon des Salons," 586: "l'âme qui devine la poésie des époques lointaines devant les squelettes bizarres et déchiffre obscurément les âges du monde dans les hiéroglyphes de la nature."
93. L[ouis] de Fourcaud, "Les deux Salons de 1898," *Le Gaulois*, April 30, 1898, supplement, 1: "Si le cerveau de l'artiste est entré en travail, l'oeuvre du peintre est loin d'en avoir souffert."
94. Lucas, "Le Salon des Salons," 586: "poème anthropologique."
95. Quoted from *Le Voltaire* in Lucas, "Le Salon des Salons," 587: "ni scientifiquement exacte, ni franchement irréaliste."
96. Quoted in "Inauguration des nouvelles galeries," vii: "on peut admirer les peintures si remarquables de Cormon, qui, par intuition d'artiste, a fait revivre les temps préhistoriques dans les beaux tableaux qui nous entourent."