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Emmanuel Frémiet, "Joan of Arc on Horseback," plaster reduction of the initial model, 1872–1874 (Musée d'Orsay).

Emmanuel Frémiet, born in Paris on 6 December 1824 and died in Paris on 10 September 1910, is one of the great animal sculptors of the 19th century. Nephew and pupil of **François Rude**, he made his name both through his **animal bronzes**, observed with almost scientific precision, and through famous **equestrian monuments**, including the *Joan of Arc* in the Place des Pyramides in Paris.

Training outside the École des Beaux-Arts

Frémiet did not follow the teaching of the École des Beaux-Arts. He trained at the Petite École, the special drawing school, then in the studio of his uncle Rude, alongside his aunt, the sculptor Sophie Frémiet. Before turning to sculpture he worked as a moulder at the École de Médecine, an experience that fed his taste for anatomy. He exhibited at the **Salon** from 1843 and remained present there until 1908.

Early work: animals from life



Emmanuel Frémiet, "Retiarius and Gorilla," c. 1859 (Musée d'Orsay).

His *Marabout Holding a Caiman in its Claws* (1850), a model commissioned in 1849 and shown at the Salon of 1850, was his first commission: four bronze groups were to support a porphyry table in the Egyptian museum of the Louvre. A specialist in the domestic animal, observed in daily life, he attracted the attention of critics, Baudelaire among them, and was recognised for his studies of **horses**. The museums of Dijon and the Musée d'Orsay hold several of these early models.

Gorillas, horses and monuments

Frémiet renewed the animal repertoire by opening it to big cats and apes: his *Retiarius and Gorilla* (about 1859), at the Musée d'Orsay, foreshadows the famous **gorilla carrying off a woman**, which earned him a medal of honour at the Salon of 1887. He went on to create major monuments: the equestrian statues of *Napoleon I* and *Louis d'Orléans* (Château de Pierrefonds), the gilded **Joan of Arc** in the Place des Pyramides (model of 1874, with replicas abroad), an equestrian *Velázquez* for the Jardin de l'Infante at the Louvre, and the *St Michael* crowning the church of the same name. The Musée d'Orsay holds a plaster reduction of his first model for *Joan of Arc*, dated between 1872 and 1874.

An official career



Emmanuel Frémiet, "Marabou Stork Holding a Caiman in Its Feet," 1850 (Dijon Museum of Fine Arts)

Frémiet succeeded Barye as professor at the Muséum d'histoire naturelle. He was made an Officer of the Legion of Honour in 1878 and elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1892. The Royal Academy in London elected him an honorary member in 1904. He was also the father-in-law of the composer Gabriel Fauré.

Frémiet and the edition bronze

His models, notably animals and riders, were reduced and cast in bronze by the Parisian founders of his day, among them Barbedienne. These editions, signed "Frémiet", spread his work far beyond public monuments.

See also: Antoine-Louis Barye — Christophe Fratin — Ferdinand Barbedienne — Gilt bronze

See our 19th-century sculptures



Portrait of Emmanuel Frémiet by Nadar, circa 1860-1865.



"Frémiet" signature on a cast bronze.