



PALAIS DE LA PORTE DORÉE

PRESS RELEASE

Paris, March 2024

EXHIBITION

OLYMPISM: A HISTORY OF THE WORLD

From the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 to the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games 2024

April 26 – September 8, 2024

An exhibition forming part of the 'Cultural Olympiad' in celebration of the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games 2024. Under the patronage of Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic.



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In 2024 Paris will host the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the first time in a century that the city has hosted the Summer Games. To coincide with this unmissable event, the Palais de la Porte Dorée is hosting a brand-new exhibition dedicated to the epic story of the Olympic movement, offering a unique perspective on the crises, struggles, feats and combats which have shaped the world we live in.

Opening on 26 April, the exhibition 'Olympism: A History of the World' looks back over 130 years of geopolitical, social, political and cultural changes, starting with the birth of the modern Olympics and celebrating the achievement of some of the great Olympic champions.

The exhibition is laid out chronologically, taking visitors on a journey through the 33 modern Olympiads, from Athens 1896 to Paris 2024, including the games that never took place (1916, 1940, 1944). Including almost 600 artworks, documents, archive films, objects,

press articles and photographs, the exhibition juxtaposes historic events with sporting exploits and the illustrious figures who embodied them.

This is a truly global history, complete with major international conflicts and era-defining combats: struggles for equality, the battle against racism and discrimination in all its forms, and the progressive opening up of the Games to all of the world's nations and peoples, in a spirit of inclusion which has seen the Olympics become a platform for gender parity and women's rights, civil rights and the fight to end apartheid, and now for environmental causes.

This exhibition and its accompanying catalogue reaffirm the commitment of the Palais de la Porte Dorée to all of these values, which inform and inspire our scientific and cultural ambitions, our actions and our events.

PALAIS DE LA PORTE DORÉE
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➤ **A JOURNEY FROM THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN OLYMPIC MOVEMENT TO THIS YEAR'S GAMES**

The exhibition is laid out chronologically, divided into six sections spanning the period from 1896 to the present day. Each section offers an insight into a specific period and its challenges: the birth of the modern Olympics (1895-1916), the age of competing nationalisms (1916-1944), the onset of the Cold War and decolonisation (1944-1968), the advent of a multipolar world (1968-1988), and the dawn of a new Olympic century (1988-2008). The final section (2008-2024) looks at how the Olympics fit into the modern world, and considers the future of the Games: the inclusion of new sports, new attitudes towards gender, the mental health of athletes, environmental responsibility, the cost of the Games and their political and democratic ramifications.

➤ **THE GAMES AS GEOPOLITICAL ARENA**

Each new Olympiad comes with its own geopolitical context, conflicts and moments of fraternity. As the world's most high-profile international sporting event, the Olympics have often been used to promote political agendas on the global stage, by democracies and dictatorships alike. This part of the exhibition looks at some of the defining moments – some bleak, others inspiring – which marked the history of the Olympics in the 20th century. Examples include Nazi Germany's attempts to make the Berlin Olympics of 1936 a showcase for their totalitarian regime and its racist, anti-Semitic ideology; the boycott of the Montreal Olympics in 1976 by African nations protesting against apartheid in South Africa; and the striking display of China's economic might at the Beijing Olympics of 2008.

➤ **THE OLYMPIC VILLAGE, A MICROCOSM OF CHANGING SOCIAL MORES**

Each Olympics comes with its own societal sub-plots. Above and beyond the evident geopolitical frictions, this section of the exhibition focuses on the Games as an arena of social struggle which holds up a mirror to broader societal changes. Visitors are immersed in the history of the struggles for fundamental freedoms: democracy, and end to racial discrimination, gender equality, inclusion and environmental responsibility are all accounted for. The exhibition also offers an alternative history of immigration and attitudes towards "minorities," from the involvement of athletes from colonised countries to the championing of immigrant athletes as emblematic success stories in many countries.

➤ **A PLATFORM FOR ALL KINDS OF STRUGGLES**

Olympism: a History of the World explores the Olympics' history as an arena in which athletes compete as equals, even in eras scarred by racial segregation and discrimination. In such times, sport was a rare and highly visible space in which victims of discrimination could express themselves and make their voices heard. The old motto "May the best win" established the Olympics as a uniquely egalitarian space and an international stage open to people usually kept down by discrimination. This includes athletes with disabilities: although in 2024 the Olympic and Paralympic Games are firmly under the same banner, it was not until Rome in 1960 that disabled athletes were first able to compete in the Paralympic Games, after more than sixty years of exclusion. The Olympic movement has since become a powerful symbol of social affirmation for athletes with disabilities. The exhibition also looks back at the changing status of women at the Games: from Pierre de Coubertin's initial hostility to the total parity which will define Paris 2024, via the great feminist struggles of the 1920s, as well as efforts to make sport more diverse and inclusive in the 1950s-70s.

► ATHLETES WHO MADE HISTORY

Each Olympiad has its defining figures. *Olympism: A History of the World* is packed with memorable moments, exceptional archive images and portraits of athletes with incredible stories. Not least among them is Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics of 1936, making a mockery of the Nazis' ideas of racial superiority. And of course Tommie Smith, John Carlos and Peter Norman, who chose to make a stand against segregation in the USA when receiving their medals for the 200m sprint in Mexico City in 1968, donning black gloves and raising their fists. And who could forget the triumph of Nadia Comăneci in 1976, a symbol of the sporting prowess of the Eastern bloc? Or the image of Cathy Freeman at the Sydney Games in 2000, draping the Australian and aboriginal flags over her shoulders in recognition of the rights of Indigenous Australians and the spirit of fraternity between two peoples after centuries of colonial history? Or Derartu Tulu and Elana Meyer doing laps of the stadium together in Barcelona in 1992, an enduring symbol of fraternity? As for France, one of the country's greatest sporting legends is Ahmed Boughéra El Ouafi, who won the marathon for the French team in Amsterdam in 1928, thus becoming the first "emigrant" from North Africa to win a gold medal. These individual sporting feats are all part of the great collective history, written by the 200,000+ athletes who have competed in the Olympic and Paralympic Games since 1896.

► WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR THE GAMES?

Last but by no means least, *Olympism: A History of the World* looks beyond this year's Games. How can we make the Olympics more democratic in the future? More open? More respectful of the environment? It was the London Olympics of 2012 that first put environmental responsibility on the agenda, reminding us of our obligation to face up to the great ecological challenges of the day. The exhibition and its catalogue also explore instances when the Games have become synonymous with waste and excess, including the Athens Summer Games of 2004 at a time of financial instability, and the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. They also address the long history of politicisation of the Olympic Games by non-democratic regimes, from Mexico City in 1968 to Beijing in 2008. Exploring and celebrating the Olympic Games and their history serves to remind us that the stadium is not just a sporting arena; it is also a platform in which competing visions of the future of our societies are played out, for all the world to see. With this exhibition, and of course its programme of associated events and workshops, visitors are invited to imagine the future of the Games: new sports, new definitions of the categories in which athletes compete, new and more environmentally-friendly infrastructure etc. From April through to September the museum will host a diverse programme of events relating to the exhibitions: performances, shows, discussions, conferences and a high-profile international colloquium on Tuesday 11 June 2024. For full details of the programme, visit palais-portedoree.fr

Exhibition curators

Nicolas Bancel, historian (Lausanne); **Pascal Blanchard**, historian (Paris); **Yvan Gastaut**, historian (Nice); **Sébastien Gökalp**, senior curator (Grenoble); **Elisabeth Jolys-Shimells**, senior curator, head of collections at the National Museum of the History of Immigration (Paris); **Sandrine Lemaire**, historian (Reims); **Stéphane Mourlane**, historian (Aix-en-Provence).

Exhibition organised in partnership with the **ACHAC research group** (as part of the 'History, Sport & Citizenship' programme).

This exhibition is supported by the **Banque Populaire's Casden fund**.

The exhibition catalogue is published by Éditions de La Martinière, 576 pages, 1100 images, RRP €65. For young readers aged 10 and over: 'Olympisme, une histoire en 30 dates', Éditions Quelle histoire, 96 pages, €13.95.





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The Palais de la Porte Dorée is a publicly-owned, multidisciplinary cultural institution housed within a historic monument, and containing both the National Museum of the History of Immigration and the Tropical Aquarium.

A resolutely open and inclusive institution, the Palais de la Porte Dorée is many things: an exhibition space, a place for sharing knowledge, a forum for self-expression and social interaction, a venue hosting performances and festivals, and a vital space for preserving endangered species and educating people about their plight.

Useful information

Getting here

293, avenue Daumesnil - 75012 Paris

Métro **8** - Tramway **3a** - Bus **46** - Porte Dorée

Wheelchair access via No. 293 Avenue Daumesnil
(administrative entrance).

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