

# Fantastic Animals

27 September 2023 - 15 January 2024

**Dragons, griffins, sphinxes, unicorns, phoenixes: present as early as Antiquity, fantastic animals inhabit the tiniest recesses of our contemporary world, from films and cartoons to everyday objects.**

**By turns images of terror or admiration, expressions of our hidden unconscious and our anxieties, these often hybrid creatures contain within them a fundamental ambiguity. Who are they? Where do they come from? What do they mean?**

They share with real fauna the power to fascinate people. We confer on them a closeness to nature, a wildness mingled with wisdom. Yet these are no ordinary animals.

They differ in their appearance. Gigantic, excessive and deformed, their bodies adopt the characteristics of several animals, such as a horse's body with the wings of a bird or an eagle with a lion's head.

This extraordinary physiognomy is a reflection of their supernatural powers.

Fantastic animals embody the elementary forces of nature: stormy waters and choleric gusts of wind, as well as tranquil streams and the nourishing earth. They represent their immensity, their violence, their beauty and above all their excesses. Some of them have a face and hands and legs, which link them to the world of humans while evoking distance and danger.

**Featuring more than 250 works – sculptures, paintings and objets d'art, as well as films and music – ranging from Antiquity to the present day, the exhibition offers a journey through time and space, retracing the history of the most famous of these animals through their legends, their powers and their habitats. It explores our passionate relationships with these creatures whose unreal presence seems more than ever necessary.**

## **Curator:**

Hélène Bouillon, chief heritage curator, director of conservation, exhibitions and publications at the Louvre-Lens

## **Assistant curators:**

Jeanne-Thérèse Bontinck, project manager, Heritage, City of Art and History, Périgueux

Caroline Tureck, head of research and documentation, Louvre-Lens

## **Assisted by:**

Yaël Pignol, educator Heritage & Gardens – Scientific advisor, Cité des Electriciens, Bruay-la-Buissière

**Exhibition design:** Mathis Boucher, architect and exhibition designer, Louvre-Lens



Perseus slaying the dragon (1888) by Edward Burne-Jones © Southampton City Art Gallery / Paul Carter / Bridgeman Images

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