

# 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MURALS

REMARKABLE ELEMENTS

## TRADITIONAL FRENCH PUPPETS ROOM



### At that time...

#### Impoverishment and degradation in the 19<sup>th</sup>c.

During the period in which the decoration of this room was created, the building had been divided into several parts. The area had long been deserted by its merchant families and for a century had been one of the poorest districts of the city. It was dark, dilapidated, fearfully smelly in places, having lost all of the splendour of

the great merchant fairs and the colours that the modern restorations of the 17th and 18th centuries had bestowed upon it. The building had completely changed status. It had become an income property\*, in which up to sixty families of tenants lived side-by-side.

Workers and craftsmen lived in dilapidated apartments. The larger rooms were divided into small housing units with lofts, which required the creation of



*Inner courtyard of Gadagne House, postcard, from a photograph taken as part of the photographic inventory undertaken by the archaeological commission of Vieux-Lyon, late 19<sup>th</sup>c., Inv. 1379.2*

new corridors, doors and mezzanines. It was for this reason that to ensure the autonomy of this room, a door was knocked through the south wall towards the montée du Garillan (it is no longer visible, cf. 2002 photo overleaf): at the time, a wooden staircase adjacent to the wall gave access to the room and made up the difference in level. The flats each had sinks, heating systems and sewage removal pipes.

These 19<sup>th</sup>c. transformations had little effect on the architectural structure of the building and, for the most part, were removed when the museum was first developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup>c.

### Gadagne, historic monument

It was following the development of the large cities during the Second Empire that the notion of preserving urban heritage began to come to the fore. In Lyon, the destruction of part of the Saint-Paul districts for the construction of the railway station of the same name led to the creation of the archaeological commission for Vieux-Lyon, in 1898. The commission was made up of architects and specialists in Lyon's history, and set about creating an inventory of remarkable buildings - sometimes shortly before they were demolished - and collecting the most important architectural elements of the buildings to be destroyed. Clearly, the Gadagne building formed part of this inventory and was classified as an element to be safeguarded. The commission undertook a photographic inventory of the facades, which comes down to us as precious testimony of what they looked like at the turn of the century. The archaeological commission became a municipal commission in 1901 and the City of Lyon began to purchase the building, bit by bit, between 1902 and 1946. In 1920, it was classified as a historic monument and one year later, the museum of history opened for the first time in the north-eastern section, on the rue Gadagne.



*Aldermen's Hall, first configuration of the Historical Museum of Lyon, photograph by Jean-Baptiste (aka Joannes) Drevet, 1922*

## The 19<sup>th</sup> c. murals

### Mounted trumpeters and paintings in light

The murals which cover this trapezoidal room, known as the mounted trumpeters, date back to 1880. At the time, the room was rented out to a hunting society for its music rehearsals. These oil paintings have been set on several layers of plaster and then covered with a thick layer of varnish. They depict **scenes of hunting** with deer, dogs, tigers, lions and wild boars...

Some of them, with their backdrop of pyramids and palm trees, provide a somewhat exotic and phantasmagorical vision. Although they are not the work of a highly proficient artist, they testify to the fascination for a faraway Orient that was so characteristic of late 19<sup>th</sup> c. thought.

### Echoes of the mounted trumpeters' room

During the period of Boysette House and then of Pierrevive House, this room had not yet been built. In 1618, when he acquired the southern plot, Guillaume de Balmes, king's councillor and notary, transformed it into a stable surmounted with a hayloft\*. Doctor and alderman Falconet subsequently modified it in 1655, turning it into a cellar with the groined arches\* set on the central pillar. It was reused for housing in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and in 1880 was rented by a hunting society for their music rehearsals, probably because of the characteristic acoustics provided by the arches!

## Choice of restoration

### Strappo\* of a mural

When the museum restructuring work began, the room was very dilapidated and the murals were in a terrible condition. The decision was taken to restore them because, although they had no connection with the illustrious builders of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, they stood as testimony to the way the building had been modified over the ages.

This task was made all the more delicate when it became apparent that **a door** needed to be created within the décor in order to enable visitors to reach the puppets of the world museum, devoted to "Guignol in Paris". The corresponding part of the décor was therefore very delicately removed and then reinstated in the doorway that was created, and which can be admired today.

In the course of the restoration work, which was carried out in two phases (2004 and 2008), part of the décor had to be abandoned, however: the details on the arches. Originally, the golden arches would have been enhanced with bright red edges, a colour also used to design the arabesques above the pillars.



Painted décor of the ceiling in the mounted trumpeters' room, oil and varnish on plaster, 1880, state 2002 (before restorations of 2004 and 2008)

### glossary

**income property:** building housing several housing units rented by the same owner, designed by the owner as an investment.

**strappo:** technique for removing the top layer of a fresco painting. The opposite of the stacco technique, which involves also removing the immediately underlying layers of plaster.

**groin arch:** type of arch used especially in the Middle Ages, characterised by the overlap of two barrel arches - or semicircular arches - which intersect at right angles, forming 4 sharp edges.