

Launch of a project
to reproduce the

PIETA AND THE BURIAL OF CHRIST

A partnership between the
Château de Biron and the
Metropolitan Museum of Art
in New York...



THE STORY OF AN ABSENCE

At the edge of the Périgord, Quercy and Agenais regions, the earliest major castle on the site of the Château de Biron dates from the 12th century. The castle's architecture has continually developed down the centuries and is today one of the most remarkable monuments in France and one of the biggest castles in south-west France.

Its prestigious history marked the Renaissance, especially due to the gigantic chapel on two levels erected on the eastern ramparts. Inside the chapel, a master sculptor (whose identity is unknown) created two exceptional sculptural groups! **A Pietà and a Burial of Christ.**

The world's top museums always underlined the value of these works. And they finally found their home at the **Metropolitan Museum in New York** in 1908, after they were sold by the last Marquis de Biron.

Curators have made repeated requests to make casts of the statues, but this would be impossible without damaging them.

Today, however, the **Ateliers des Fac-similés du Périgord** have made it possible to produce copies by using the latest technological developments, as can be seen in the company's incredible reproduction of "Lascaux IV" created right here in Périgord!



Armand-Louis was promoted to the rank of general officer, before becoming notorious as "Citizen Biron", a general serving under the National Convention, in 1792. He was accused of treason after his resignation (he refused to take part in the massacres in Vendée) and was guillotined in 1793. Today, his name is engraved on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

2023, a memorable anniversary of French-American friendship!

In 1781, during the War of Independence, the Battle of Yorktown saw the American rebels and their French allies come up against the English led by Lord Cornwallis... Cornwallis surrendered after a battle lasting 21 days, along with a quarter of the British forces taking part in the war! The battle was a decisive defeat for Great Britain!

Leading the foreign legion at Yorktown was Armand-Louis de Gontaut-Biron, Duke of Lauzun and of Biron. He was given the task of informing King Louis XVI of the victory.

On 3 September 1783 the Treaty of Paris was signed. Its 140th anniversary will be celebrated this year... A fine symbol of French-American friendship.

THE SCULPTURES AND THEIR LOCATION IN THE CHÂTEAU DE BIRON CHAPEL

THE PIETA was in the choir on the chapel's high altar. The work is shown on a medallion on the recumbent Pons statue in the centre of the chapel.



In this 19th century lithograph by Fd. Perrot and L. Froger, we can make out the Pietà at the back, below the large window in the choir.



The Pietà in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



Its original location in the Château de Biron chapel.



The Burial of Christ.



Its location in the chapel of the Château de Biron.



The Burial of Christ was in the right-hand transept, known as the "chapel of the Holy Sepulchre". The alcove where the statue was located still exists. In the alcove are the remains of the hooks used to support the Angels, as well as a few traces of painted decoration.



The location of the Burial of Christ/ Château de Biron chapel.



KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE PROJECT



FROM THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART IN NEW YORK TO THE CHÂTEAU DE BIRON IN DORDOGNE...

Or how the AFSP will restore the Château chapel to all its glory with reproductions of the Pietà and the Burial of Christ!

The Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord (AFSP) is a company based in Dordogne, a subsidiary of SEMITOUR. It is specialised in making faithful reproductions of art works in order to preserve them and bring them to a wider audience.

It was awarded the "Living Heritage Company" label in 2016, particularly for its contribution to sharing a major work of human heritage with the whole world: LASCAUX.

The focus of the Atelier's work was for a long time on the prehistoric period, particularly due to its geographic location in Dordogne, just a few hundred yards away from the Lascaux cave, in the Vallée de la Vézère, "the valley of Mankind".

After publicity arising from the Lascaux reproduction project – the site now welcomes over 400,000 visitors a year – the AFSP began to broaden its scope, bringing to the fore its skills in reproducing works from other historic periods, such as the Middle Ages.

The projects to reproduce wall paintings in Chaise Dieu Abbey or to make exact copies of parchments have opened up other avenues.

Its work has also diversified to include the creation of linked products for cultural and tourism sites, helping to maintain the AFSP's activity and the skills of the team, with the prospect of new projects in the future.

The COVID period had a major impact on the AFSP's work, limiting production to tie-in products and a few reproduction projects, such as manuscripts and cave walls. This period was also used to test out new protocols, to make progress in certain techniques and to anticipate new requests...

A new, original adventure: SEMITOUR PÉRIGORD (the body in charge of major cultural sites in Dordogne, including the Château de Biron) is developing a project to restore part of its heritage within the Château walls. The Château de Biron is a major site in Aquitaine and listed as a historic monument. It is exceptional both for its majestic architecture and its history!

It once hosted masterpieces from the dawn of the Renaissance in France in the form of two monumental sculptures in the chapel: "The Pietà" and "The Burial of Christ". They were sold in the 1920s. Today, the sculptures are among the key works in the medieval gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

SEMITOUR wanted to launch a project of creating exact copies of the sculptures and returning them to their original home. After the initial contacts and an enthusiastic response from the Metropolitan Museum, the first phase of the project (photogrammetry) is currently being completed.

The AFSP is in the process of creating its first copies of monumental sculptures from the Middle Ages, with lifesize figures, and making use of modern, 3D techniques and the reproduction skills of the workshop's artists. The aim was to recreate the sculptures in their current state, including any impairments and polychrome elements.

The project represents a real international development, with a French-American partnership and a demonstration of our skills to a New York institution that was very impressed with the copies. It also opens the way to new projects, since sculptures had never been produced in the workshop before, thus increasing the range of our skills.

This is a new challenge and a wonderful human adventure that will make its mark on an iconic site in south-west France.



THE UNRIVALLED SKILL OF THE ATELIER DES FAC-SIMILÉS DU PÉRIGORD

Unrivalled skills

The Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord (AFSP) is a subsidiary of Semitour Périgord, the company tasked with operating the major cultural and tourism sites in Dordogne, including Lascaux IV. The Périgord-based company is deeply rooted in its region. It specialises in making exact copies of artistic objects and any other works requiring faithful reproduction to preserve them or to share them worldwide.

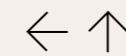
Whatever the art work to be reproduced, the AFSP's aim is to recreate all the emotion that a work of art can convey, in a totally objective way and in all its perfection. In their workshop in the town of Montignac, the artists work with concentration for days at a time, identically reproducing works that, with their help, can continue to be shown to future generations, without risk of damaging or destroying the original.

Chaise Dieu

The AFSP made an exact copy of the Danse Macabre. The goal was to create a high-quality reproduction of an unfinished 15th century wall painting located in Chaise-Dieu Abbey in the Haute Loire region. It consists of three panels measuring 5 by 1.20 metres. The panels were to be kept in the abbey buildings but would also be transported for exhibitions, so they had to be adapted to both purposes, using sophisticated honeycomb protective packaging.



La Chaise-Dieu in Haute Loire



Lascaux IV

Never before has a prehistoric cave been copied exactly on a 1 to 1 scale, including all the parietal art and stone elements. The challenge became a reality thanks to the skills of the multiskilled team from the Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord (AFSP) in Montignac. For three years, 43 people – painters, sculptors, casters and 3D experts – faithfully reproduced the structures and decoration of the 53 painted walls covering a total surface area of 900 square metres. The gigantic puzzle, made in the hidden world of the workshop, was transported and set up in the CIAP heritage building in Montignac, designed by the architects at Snøhetta. The site has attracted an endless stream of visitors since first opening on 15 December 2016, with up to 3,200 visitors a day in summer. They emerge moved and deeply touched by their journey back in time.

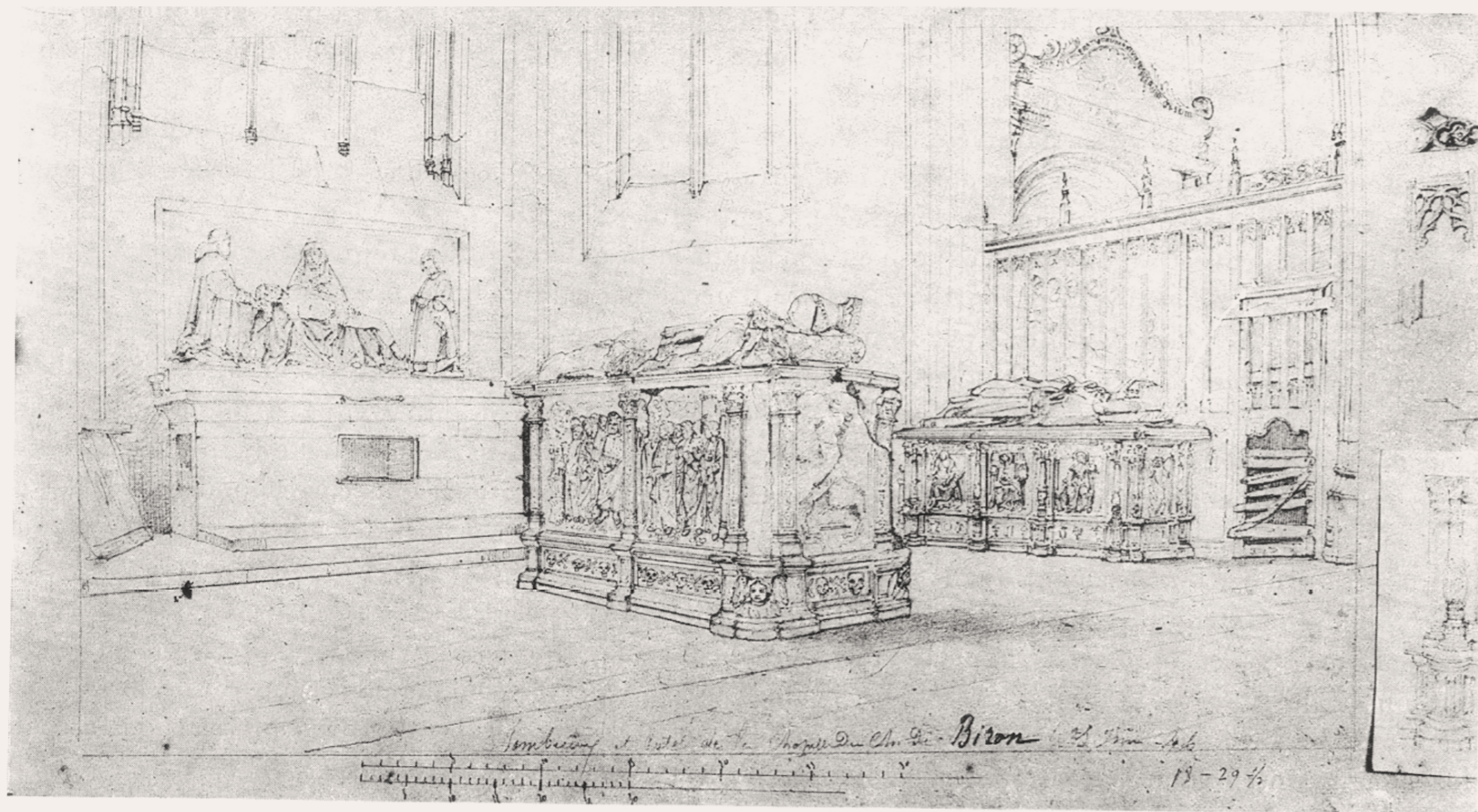


Items for museum shops and other cultural sites

Using varied reproduction techniques, 3D scans, photogrammetry and direct casting, the AFSP can make exact copies, on a 1 to 1 scale or other scales, of any object from a wide range of fields, including sculptures, architectural elements, objects from archaeological excavations, etc.

APPENDIX

↓ Photo by N. Ajoulat of the drawing by Léo Drouyn in 1846. We can see the Pietà and part of the Burial of Christ in the right-hand transept.



AN ARCHITECTURAL TREASURE UNITED ONCE MORE...

After research carried out by Antoinette and Jacques Sangouard, it seemed that Biron had conserved (without being aware of it) part of the Burial of Christ monument. A Bonnet Lithography dating from 1839 provided the initial clue...!

Assembly of the Virtues altar (of the Burial of Christ) with the recumbent statue of Bishop Armand de Gontaut-Biron.



The study conducted by Antoinette and Jacques Sangouard first showed that the bishop's tomb was not in fact a tomb! It was an altar set against a wall! Another anomaly was that the stone slab in the recumbent statue of Armand was not the right size for the tomb... And yet the dimensions are exactly the same as the Burial of Christ monument! So the lithograph brought together elements that had been scattered by the hazards of time and history... ↓



OUR PATRONS

Jack LANG
Former Minister of Culture and Education

Christine E. BRENNAN
Senior Researcher and Collections Manager at the
Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters at the
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Germinal PEIRO
President of the Department of Dordogne

André BARBÉ
Managing Director of Semitour Périgord

Photos: Dan Courtice, Julieu Riou, Déclic & Décolle

