TOUR
MAP

Domaine de la Garenne Lemot

A DEPARTMENT HERITAGE SITE
Welcome to the domaine de la Garenne Lemot!
Along the banks of the Sèvre Nantaise, discover an Italianate architecture in an exceptional park.

The Department of Loire-Atlantique manages its heritage sites with the aim of making them as accessible to as many as possible. However, the nature of the Garenne Lemot Park and its configuration does not allow us to ensure optimum accessibility.
Ever since he discovered the beauty of the landscape along the banks of the Sèvre Nantaise river in 1805, the sculptor François-Frédéric Lemot had only one dream: to compose a garden on the former hunting preserve of the Lords of Clisson. Alongside the official career he led in Paris in Napoleon’s service, he conceived this estate with Joseph Gautret, steward of the Clisson estate. Fascinated by Italy, he set to work to find motifs akin to those landscapes that had so impressed him during his time in Rome, and to recreate them to offer scenic outlooks to landscape designers and painters. Thus were born the ornamental follies (statues, grotto, column, tomb) that harmonise with the plant decoration of over thirteen hectares and which dot the pathways. Work was begun in 1817 to create a neoclassical villa which Lemot would design with the help of two successive architects. After his death in 1827, the project was taken over by his son, who paid tribute to him in the Gallery of the Illustrious (on the first floor). Faithful to its creator’s wishes to welcome many artists, the villa now hosts art exhibitions.

François-Frédéric Lemot
(1771-1827)

If his name is little known today, it is nevertheless found among his official commissions: the decoration of the tribune of the National Assembly, the statue of Henri IV on the Pont Neuf in Paris or that of Louis XIV at the Place Bellecour in Lyon.
This building was the first to be built on the estate. Lemot stayed there himself during his visits to La Garenne. Its architecture is largely inspired by rural building styles found in the northern Italian provinces of Rome, Umbria, Tuscany and Lazio. The dovecote tower, the elongated brick decorations, the arched windows and the flat roofs covered with red tile give it a picturesque Mediterranean appearance. After the War in the Vendée, the City of Clisson was largely rebuilt according to the same Italian design.

Based on the model of an Italian summerhouse, the villa was built by the architect Pierre-Louis Van Cleemputte beginning in 1824. It consists of a main building to which two perpendicular wings are added. Two shaded terraces located on either side provide a breathtaking panorama of the town of Clisson, the castle and the Sèvre River. Unfinished at the time of Lemot’s death, the works were continued by his son Barthélémy, who was responsible for the construction of the loggia and semi-circular colonnade.

These rocks contribute to the picturesque character sought by Lemot for La Garenne. It was inspired by other parks with follies he knew, which were very fashionable at the time, such as the park of Ermenonville in the Oise. Many inscriptions in the rock invite you to meditation. For the Rousseau Rock near the pergola, Lemot was inspired by an inscription by the English poet William Shenstone (1714-1763) carved in a grotto in the park of Ermenonville.

Lemot adapted the poem by replacing “fountain” in the original version with “river”, thus referring to the Sèvre, flowing below. The Delille Rock meanwhile bears a quote taken from the book of verse, Les Jardins de l’abbé Delille (The Gardens of Abbot Delille) (1738-1813) referring to the strength of the rock: “Its indestructible mass has exhausted time itself.”

O limpid river, O beloved river,
May foolish vanity
never scorn your humble flowered banks,
and may your simple path be nowhere touched
by any torments of life,
as ambition, envy,
greed and duplicity.
A grove so fresh, a setting so serene,
must only to tender feelings lend asylum.
Only to the Muses and the gods of love,
should these loving branches, intertwined,
offer their thick veil.
And this crystal of purest water,
may it never reflect aught
but the graces of Nature
and the pictures of pleasure.
4 GROTTO OF HÉLOÏSE

This grotto is named after a 12th century heroine, the young Héloïse, who fell in love with her private tutor, Abélard, a native of Pallet. In her grief, she took refuge under these rocks to cry in secret, as alluded to in an inscription on the grotto wall. In reality, this was a piece of stage setting by Lemot, who, with this quote, transformed the grotto into a mythical place inviting us to dream. The grotto entrance bears an inscription carved into the rock in 1813, the text for which was borrowed from a friend of Lemot’s, Antoine Peccot.

Heloise perhaps wandered this very shore,
When, from jealous eyes she hid her stay,
Within the walls of Pallet she did deliver
A son — a dear but unhappy proof
Of her furtive pleasures and her tender love.
Perhaps in this wild hollow,
Often and alone she came to sigh,
And freely yield to tears’ sweet comfort;
Perhaps seated upon this rock
She dreamed and dwelt upon her sorrow.
Here too I wish to dream; here too I wish to fill my heart
With the sweet memory of Héloïse.

5 THE NICHED AEDICULE

This aedicule refers to a typical small construction from Roman antiquity in which a statue was housed, typically a protective deity. Although Lemot’s original plan is unknown, old postcards suggest it was the location for the statue of Ceres, goddess of fertility, which is now positioned opposite the entrance to the villa. It consists of a brick and stone monument built in the style of structures from Antiquity, covered with a double-pitched roof and containing a semi-circular niche on its façade.

6 THE ANTIQUE-STYLE TOMB

This folly, completed in 1818, is located near the Baths of Diana. It was created after drawings attributed to Lemot himself. The rock contained an inscription in Latin, now disappeared, “Et in Arcadia Ego”, which means: « I [Death] am also in Arcadia », directly links the park with the ancient Arcadia, the central region of Peloponnese considered as an idyllic, pastoral place. This poetic reference is meant to incite the visitor to remember the transience of life and to enjoy every moment.
THE BATHS OF DIANA

This space was created by Lemot beginning in 1815. Hornbeams were planted along its banks, creating abundant shade and an ideal spot for daydreaming. With both water and stone, it symbolises the place where Diana, goddess of the hunt, came to rest.

THE MADRID COLUMN

According to the account of historian Edouard Richer (1792-1834), this column came from the castle called “Castle Madrid”, built by King Francis I in the heart of the Bois de Boulogne near Paris. Like the ancient statues, this column would then be re-used for an original work in the Park of the Garenne. Lemot mentions its existence in his notes on the maintenance of the park by asking his steward to “fill the area around the column of Francis I with dry thorns”. As part of the local heritage conservation policy, the Département de Loire-Atlantique recently funded the restoration of this column.
THE TEMPLE OF VESTA

Completed in 1823, the Temple of Vesta was made in the form of a round temple surrounded by 18 Tuscan columns*. It sits atop a knoll of picturesque rocks evoking the location of the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, Italy. One of its earliest designs is attributed to the architect Mathurin Crucy (1749-1826). Like the temple of Vesta in Tivoli, Lemot was planning to use the water from the Route de Poitiers’ culverts to feed a little waterfall in the rocks. This project, however, would never be realised. The temple has just been completely restored.

*Tuscan columns are characterised by the presence of a capital with a strongly curved profile and a very simple base.

THE MILESTONE AND THE ANTIQUE-STYLE MOUNTING BLOCK

The milestone was erected in the Park of the Garenne in 1813 after a drawing by Lemot. Made by a local stonemason, it suggests the existence of a Roman road dating back to the reign of Emperor Augustus and running along the Sèvre. This folly is actually a fanciful invention by Lemot that references the greatness of the Roman Empire. Not far from the column, stands the antique-style mounting block, which allowed horsemen to mount their horses with greater ease. This mounting block suggests a traveller’s departure.
In 1807, having fallen in love with the medieval castle on the other side of the Sèvre, François-Frédéric Lemot bought the ruins of this ancient residence of the Lords of Clisson. He then committed heart and soul to preserving the monument and incorporated it into the composition of his landscaped garden. The old fortress therefore became a new folly.

** Doric columns are characterised by their smooth echinus capital (bare without decorations), and by their shaft adorned with 20 flutes and the absence of a base.
ANCIENT STATUES

Between 1824 and 1825, Lemot installed four Roman marble statues on the estate, further evidence of his fascination with classical antiquities: Ceres, goddess of fertility 15, Faustina, Roman Empress 14, Asclepius, god of medicine 15, and an unnamed Roman senator 16. The granite bases were created on site by surveyor Joseph Gautret, dotted throughout the gardens to create new perspectives for artists.

THE DAN GRAHAM PERGOLA

Created in 1989 by American artist Dan Graham, as part of the FRAC international workshop series, this contemporary, pyramidal structure 18 incorporates a trellis overgrown with greenery, a double mirror reflecting the surrounding trees and buildings and an aquatic space at its centre which feels like a visual extension of the River Sèvre. This work serves as the culmination of the promenade which begins at the entrance to the gardens with the first pergola, designed by Lemot himself 17. Both structures simultaneously reflect the natural and artificial elements of this harmonious, constructed landscape. For contemporary visitors, the gardens offer a coherent visual experience which emanates and expands from the historical reveries dreamed up by Lemot more than two hundred years ago.
THE ARTIST’S APARTMENT
BY PASCAL CONVERT

During his residency in Rome in 1990, artist Pascal Convert was given rooms in the Villa Médicis. During his artistic explorations in Italy, he decided to cover the walls of his apartment in glass panels and trace the underlying features onto the surface of the glass. Convert thus mapped every detail of the walls, creating a “printed image” of the space. Later that year, the work was disassembled and installed at the Domaine de la Garenne Lemot, near the villa. The result is a compelling dialogue between the neoclassical architecture of the villa and the symmetry and regularity captured in this new structure. The use of glass, and the absoluteness of the black and white colour scheme, establish a crisp contrast between this installation and its verdant surroundings, an interplay enhanced by the reflective surfaces.

THE GRANDE OBLIQUE HAUTE D’IVRY BY JEAN CLAREBOUJDT

Initially designed to serve as a study for a monumental installation to be created in Ivry, this sculpture was transferred to the Domaine de la Garenne Lemot in 2010. The tripod structure plays on the equilibrium and balance of forces between its constituent parts, appearing to propel the great mass of granite up into the treetops. Suspended in the air and yet rooted in the soil, this work evokes a strange sense of proximity between heaven and earth. The desire to create a feeling of movement with a monumental, static installation inspired Jean Clareboudt to use a distinctive combination of natural elements (raw stone, wood) and industrial materials (steel plates, girders).
Owner of the Château de Châteaubriant since 1853, the Château de Clisson (1962), the Domaine de la Garenne Lemot (1968) and the Eglise du Vieux-bourg in Saint-Sulpice-des-Landes (1979), the Loire-Atlantique Département recently acquired the gardens of Les Folies Siffait (2007) and the Abbaye de Blanche Couronne (2020), and continues to pursue an ambitious policy of heritage conservation.

**OPENING HOURS - GARDENS**

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The gardens may be closed in the event of an orange or red-level weather warning.

**OPENING HOURS - VISITOR CENTRE AND SHOP**

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Closed: 1st and 11th November, 24th, 25th and 31st December

For more information: [domaine-garenne-lemot.fr](http://domaine-garenne-lemot.fr)