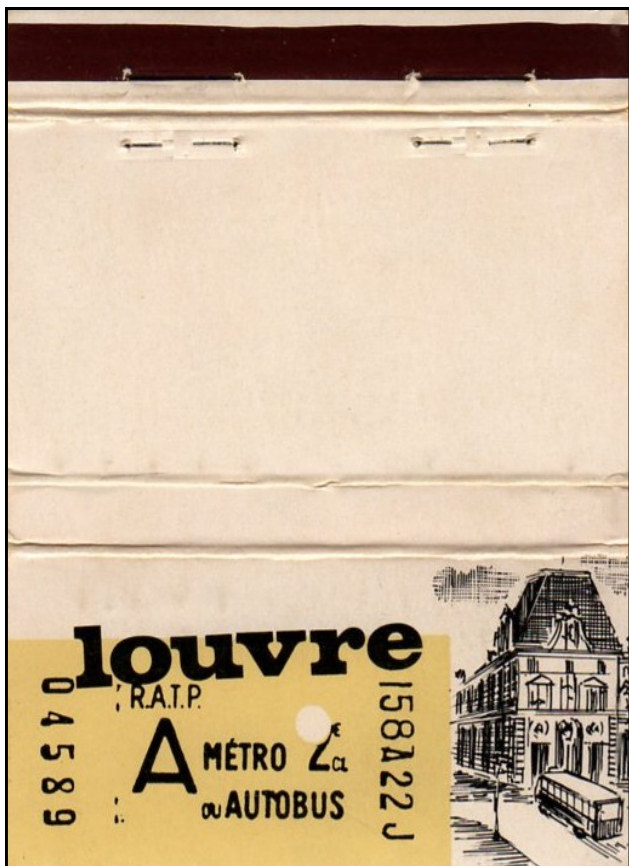

The Louvre

“The Louvre, in its successive architectural metamorphoses, has dominated central Paris since the late 12th century. Built on the city's western edge, the original structure was gradually engulfed as the city grew. The dark fortress of the early days was transformed into the modernized dwelling of François I and, later, the sumptuous palace of the Sun King, Louis XIV. Here we explore the history of this extraordinary edifice and of the museum that has occupied it since 1793.

During the forty-three-year reign of Philippe Auguste (1180–1223), the power and influence of the French monarchy grew considerably, both inside and outside the kingdom. In 1190, a rampart was built around Paris, which was Europe's biggest city at the time. To protect the capital from the Anglo-Norman threat, the king decided to reinforce its defenses with a fortress, which came to be known as the Louvre. It was built to the west of the city, on the banks of the Seine.

The reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV had a major impact on the Louvre and Tuileries palaces. The extension of the west wing of the Cour Carrée under Louis XIII marked the beginning of an ambitious program of work that would be completed by Louis XIV and added to by Louis XV, resulting in the Louvre that we see today. However, following the completion of Versailles, royal interest in the palace waned, plunging the Louvre into a new period of dormancy.

With the Revolution, the Louvre entered a phase of intensive transformation. For three years, Louis XVI lived in the Tuileries palace, alongside the Convention Nationale. In 1793 the Museum Central des Arts opened to the public in the Grande Galerie and the Salon Carré, from where the collections gradually spread to take over the building.



The demolition of the Tuileries in 1882 marked the birth of the modern Louvre. The palace ceased to be the seat of power and was devoted almost entirely to culture. Only the Finance Ministry, provisionally installed in the Richelieu wing after the Commune, remained. Slowly but surely, the museum began to take over the whole of the vast complex of buildings.

In 1926, France's director of national museums, Henri Verne, launched an ambitious plan to extend the exhibition space at the Louvre. Work began in 1930 and continued during and after World War II.

In 1996, the French president, Jacques Chirac, announced the creation of a national museum of tribal and aboriginal art. In addition, selected masterpieces from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas were to be shown at the Louvre. These were installed on the ground floor of the former Pavillon des Sessions, in galleries refurbished by the architect J. M. Wilmotte. Inaugurated in April 2000, these galleries are a satellite of the future Musée du Quai Branly, scheduled to open in 2006.” [<http://www.louvre.fr/llv/commun/home.jsp?bmLocale=en>]