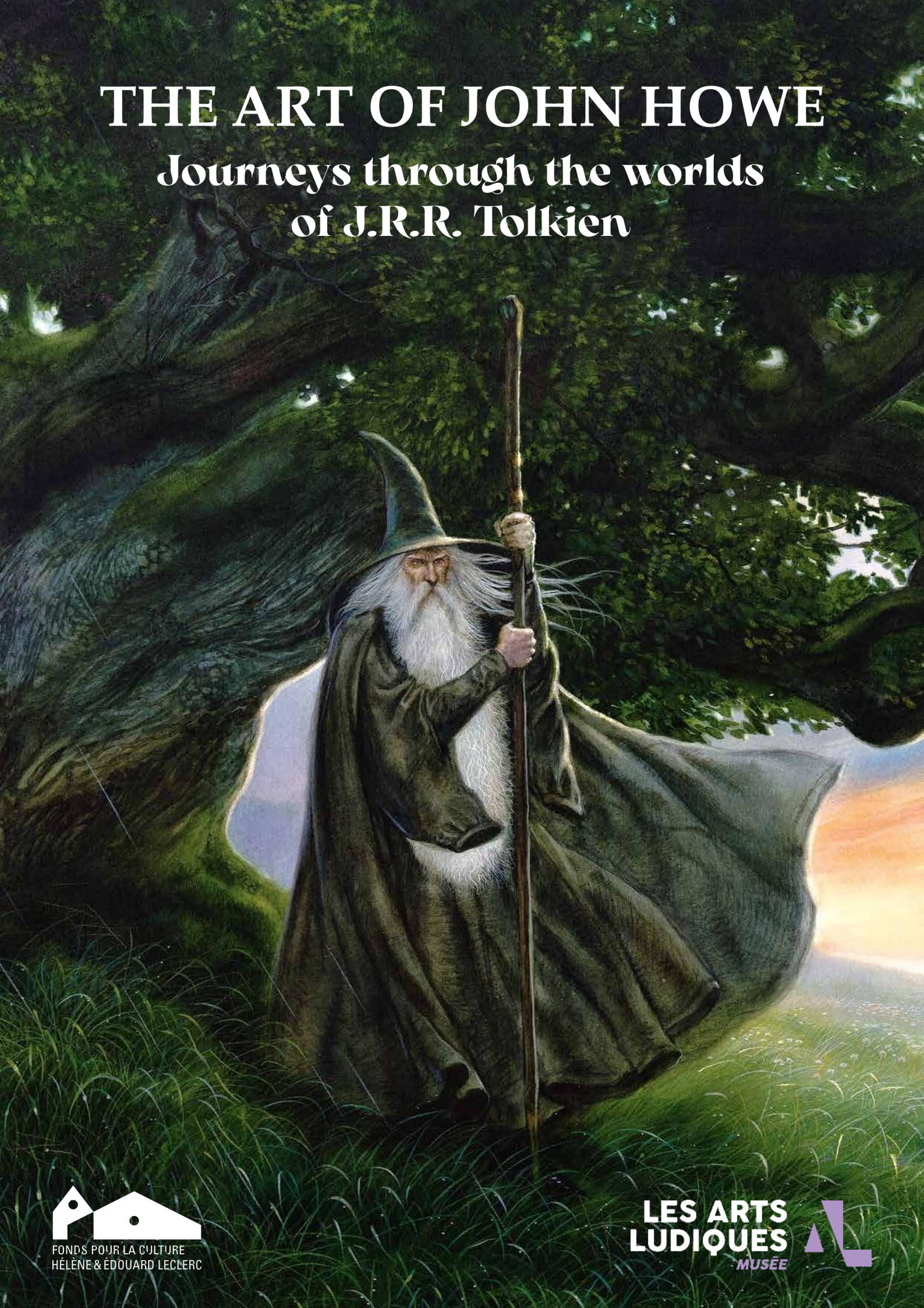


THE ART OF JOHN HOWE

Journeys through the worlds
of J.R.R. Tolkien





Conceived by Diane and Jean-Jacques Launier as a visual art exploration, with commentary, of Tolkien's oeuvre as well as of the origin of medieval legends, the exhibition presents more than 250 drawings and paintings by John Howe. An artist of international repute, John Howe first illustrated Tolkien's novels before taking part in the artistic direction of the two cinematographic trilogies *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* alongside filmmaker Peter Jackson. More recently, he has taken part in the artistic production of the series *The Rings of Power*. Referring to the old poetic and mythological influences shows us to what degree the richness of Tolkien's works of fiction and of the medieval imaginary take their sources from the echo of those distant times. The exhibition is supplemented with authentic objects from medieval times (armour, swords...) and punctuated with works of art contemporary to Tolkien.

**CURATORS DIANE AND JEAN-JACQUES LAUNIER,
FOUNDERS OF THE MUSÉE ART LUDIQUE**

LES ARTS LUDIQUES 
MUSÉE

*“Myths, magic and reality
are always present. It's down to us
to learn their language again”.*

JOHN HOWE

Elements of biographies

Diane and Jean-Jacques Launier, curators of the exhibition



© Diane and Jean-Jacques Launier

In 2003, Diane and Jean-Jacques Launier founded Galerie Arludik in Paris, the first gallery in the world to exhibit works from animation films, cinema, video games, comics and mangas. Their concept consisted in removing the partitions between various genres to establish a new narrative figurative art current they call Art Ludique. After having organised the exhibition *Miyazaki-Moebius* in 2004 at the Monnaie in Paris, they set up the Art Ludique museum in 2013. Their museum welcomed more than 400,000 visitors in its first year alone. There they designed, wrote and presented in world première many exhibitions, among them *L'Art des Super-Héros Marvel*, *L'Art des Studios Walt Disney - Le Mouvement par Nature*, *Aardman*, *l'Art qui prend forme*, *l'Art dans le jeu video: L'Inspiration Française*. Several of these exhibitions were listed on the 10 most visited events in France in that year and are still touring internationally to the most prestigious museums of the world, on all continents.

In 2020, Diane Launier co-directed in Africa the documentary short film *Les Chats du Pharaons*, which was nominated at various festivals, among them New York, San Francisco and Tokyo. In 2001, Jean-Jacques Launier wrote the novel *La Mémoire de l'âme*, in which each page is illustrated with a drawing by Moebius, and co-wrote the book *Art Ludique* in 2011. In 2016 he was awarded the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres. Since 2020, Diane and Jean-Jacques Launier have taught a course at the Institut national supérieur de l'éducation artistique et culturelle.

John Howe

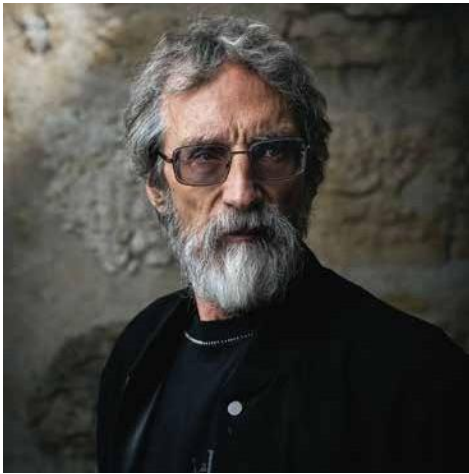


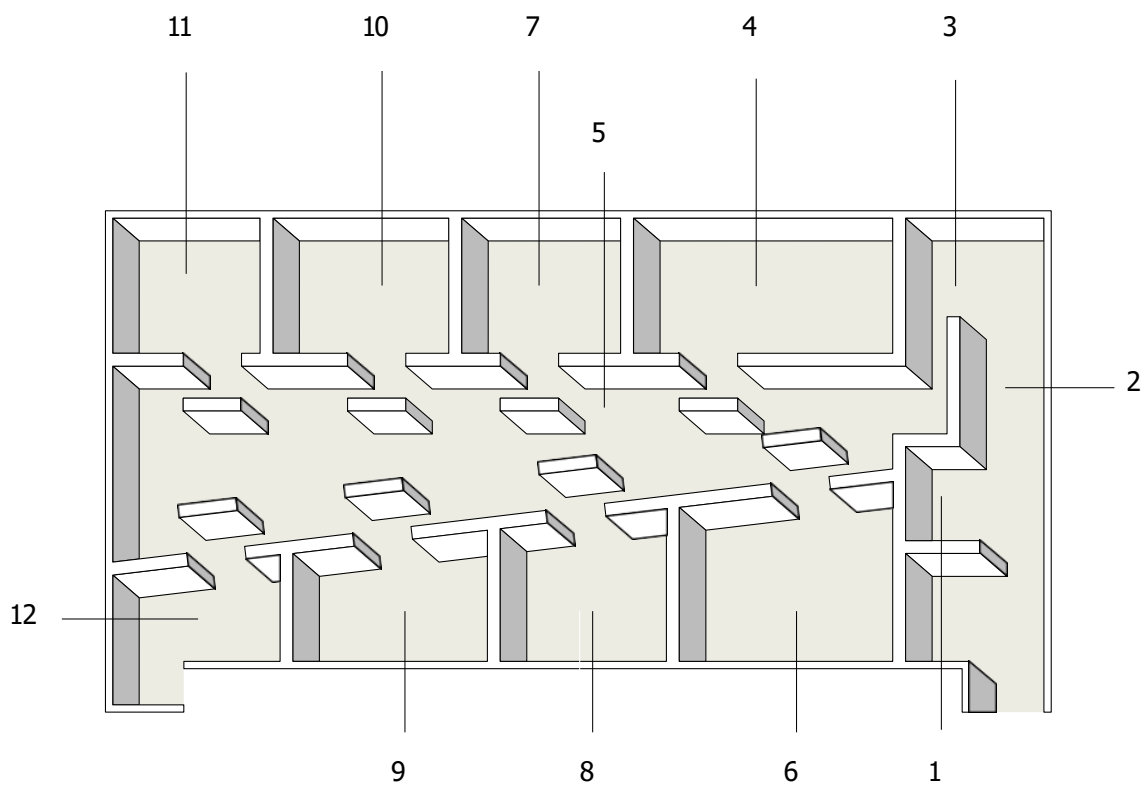
Photo Lucas Vuitel

Freelance artist since 1981, John Howe was born in western Canada in 1957 and attended art school in Strasbourg, France. He is the illustrator (and occasionally author) of many children's books, as well as pursuing a career in the film industry as concept artist, notably on Peter Jackson's film trilogies *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, as well as the series *The Rings of Power*. Monographies of his work include *Myth & Magic* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 2001), *John Howe Artbook* (Editions Nestiveqnen, 2004) and *A MiddleEarth Traveller* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 2018). John Howe is also the instigator of several drawing courses, that he prefers to call "applied exercises in the practical philosophy of visual communication" rather than methods offering formulas and visual short-cuts, and he continues his work of transmission by regularly giving masterclasses.

On top of that, he works in close collaboration with the Swiss watchmaker Jaquet Droz for the production of a series of automaton watches and is presently head of artistic direction for Châteaux et Légendes, a cross-border festival supported by Collectivité européenne of Alsace. He is working on the writing and illustration of several books yet to be published and paints in his free time. The exhibition at Landerneau is the first to present a broad set of paintings and drawings involving all aspects of his work, from his first pieces in art school to his most recent paintings and conceptual works.

Exhibition trail

Discover the exhibition trail in [video](#)



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THE MEDIEVAL IMAGINARY

Chivalry and knightly honour, companions of adventure, magic creatures, enchanters and dragons populate the narratives of the tales and legends that form "the medieval imaginary". Throughout times, this fantastical universe represented a source of inspiration for painters, writers and composers, and is present today on our small and big screens, in comics as much as in video games. Some of these legends, like the one of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, are so strongly embedded in our popular culture that many believe they are true. The roots of medieval imaginary are to be found in the poets and storytellers of the Middle Ages, but the origins of most of the old myths come from an oral tradition dating from time immemorial.



Gandalf
Lord of the Rings Boardgame by Reiner Knizia,
published by Sophisticated Games, 1999
Ink and watercolour on paper, 65.3 × 65.3 cm



I AM A HOBBIT!

"I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size)," Tolkien declared. "I like gardens, trees and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated) and I can't stand French cuisine; I like, and even dare to wear these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much."

J.R.R. Tolkien



Bilbo's Front Hall. There and back again: The Map of the Hobbit by Brian Sibley, published by HarperCollins Publishers, 1995
Ink and watercolour on paper, 35.9 × 45.8 cm

John Ronald Reuel was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa. His family, originally from England, had settled there because his father had been promoted to director of a bank. His mother Mabel couldn't cope with the climate and went back to England, but her husband became ill and passed away before he was able to rejoin his family back home. Tolkien was 4 years old. Mabel brought up and educated her two children by herself. She passed on to J.R.R. her taste for drawing and watercolour, but sadly she died prematurely too. At 12, Tolkien was placed in a foster home with his brother, under the supervision of Father Francis, who had a significant spiritual influence on him. There he met a young orphan, Edith Bratt, and the two teenagers quickly fell in love. Father Francis, fiercely opposed to that romance, only fuelled their passion, for a long time thwarted. That episode also heightened Tolkien's fantastical and romantic inclination, as he found in Edith both a muse and the love of his life. Undoubtedly, he was inspired by her when he wrote the perilous adventures of the human Beren to conquer the love of the elf princess Lúthien, evoked in *The Silmarillion*, the complete book of which was published in 2017 by Christopher Tolkien from his father's manuscript notes.



IT EXISTS IN REAL LIFE!



The Ravens
Cathédrale, Editions Bueb & Reumaux, Strasbourg, 1985
Watercolour on paper, 60 × 40 cm

As a child, drawing was his favourite hobby and at 19 John Howe applied to Strasbourg's School of decorative arts. His arrival in the Alsatian town was a revelation when he discovered the impressive architecture of the Cathedral of Strasbourg. "It exists in real life!", he exclaimed at the time. "I first discovered Gothic architecture in France," John Howe explained. "Canada was a young country, particularly the West, so my knowledge of the history of architecture, without being completely non-existent, remained theoretical and derived from books. Contemplating a cathedral in real life was a huge cultural shock for me. It undoubtedly opened my eyes and I've worked hard at keeping them open since."



THE ROOTS OF MEDIEVAL IMAGINARY

Though epics, magic, fabulous and evil creatures populate the medieval imaginary, they have always been part of stories told by humans, and are included in all the mythologies of the world. Among the fundamental texts of medieval imaginary, *Beowulf*, an epic poem of more than three thousand lines, figures as a major work in Anglo-Saxon literature. Composed around 750 AD, this heroic tale is inspired by an old Norse legend. Transmitted in manuscript form in the 10th century, the unique copy on parchment was partially damaged by the fire that devastated the library of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, its owner in the 17th century.

Beowulf exerted a remarkable influence on Tolkien's fantastical inspiration as much as on his university life. The professor began working on a translation, and gave conferences that peaked in 1936 with the delivery of his essay "Beowulf: monsters and critics" in front of the British Academy. Enthralled by the epic lyricism of Beowulf, Tolkien declared: "That poem is close to painting!"

The Doors of Heorot
Beowulf: A Tale of Blood, Heat, and Ashes
 by Nicky Raven, published by Templar Publishing, 2007 Ink
 and watercolour on paper, 61 × 97.5 cm





I FEEL LIKE A SURVIVOR

At 24, Tolkien was sent to the battlefields of the First World War. He ended up on the front in June 1916 when the long drawn and terrible battle of the Somme started, one of the most deadly in history, with nearly 20,000 victims among the English soldiers from day one. Rob Gilson, Tolkien's childhood friend, was among the fallen. In October he caught trench fever and had to be hospitalised in Birmingham. No longer in a state to come back to the front, he made use of his convalescence to immerse himself in writing, working in particular on the glossaries of his made-up languages, like the qenya and the goldorin. On his return to England, Tolkien was a "ghost", deeply shaken by the experience of the war. He lost his three closest friends in battle, and found refuge in his imagination, taking out his notes scribbled in the darkness of the trenches, populated with fabulous and legendary creatures.



The Barrow-downs
A Middle-Earth Traveller by John Howe,
published by HarperCollinsPublishers, 2019
Pencil on paper, 49 × 39 cm



NATURE

Throughout the epic battles of Middle-Earth, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy inspired an ecological awareness undoubtedly prompted by the discoveries of the scientists of the time, in the wake of the revolutionary book "*On the Origins of the Species*" by the naturalist Charles Darwin (1859). At Oxford University, Tolkien made the acquaintance of the professor of botany Sir Arthur George Tansley, who popularised the term "Ecology", by taking part in the foundation of the British Ecological Society in 1913, and the publication of the *Journal of Ecology* for several years.

A lover of nature from childhood, Tolkien attentively followed Tansley's works, among them the book *The British Islands and Their Vegetation* which became a source of inspiration for him. As a matter of fact, there are no less than 64 different species of wild plants in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Forest Realm
Concept art for *The Hobbit* film trilogy, directed by Peter Jackson
Digital painting





THE KEY TO MIDDLE-EARTH

The vastness of the worlds described by Tolkien seems to originate in one single word: Eärendil! In 1913, having recently begun studying at Exeter College, in Oxford, Tolkien discovered, among the texts taught that year, a poem dating from the 8th century, *Crist of Cynewulf*. Cynewulf is one of the rare poets from the Anglo-Saxon period whose name is known as being spelt in runes in his poems. The reading of those verses deeply moved Tolkien: "Hail Earendel, brightest of angels, sent over Middle-earth to men!"

Enthralled by those words that unleashed in him a boundless imagination, Tolkien wrote as an homage to Cynewulf, the poem *Of the Voyage of Eärendil and the War of Wrath*. With it he laid down the foundation of his Masterpiece. Eärendil became the first character imagined by Tolkien in the construction of his mythology.



A Wizard is Never Late
A *Middle-Earth Traveller* by John Howe, published by HarperCollinsPublishers, 2019 Ink and watercolour on paper, 41.5 × 63 cm



DRAWING CITIES AND CASTLES

“Tolkien wrote with images, he didn’t really write with words, and there are hardly any writers capable of conjuring up images with such force. It represents a challenge to reproduce on a canvas, because what the author didn’t write ends up being as important as what he mentioned. Tolkien’s sources have been broadly documented and analysed. I have a whole shelf of books, not by Tolkien, but on his work, and I find them particularly enlightening. I don’t have the training of an architect, but I’m very interested in that. I act like an imaginary architect in those fantasy universes in which each object and each building represent an added opportunity to build and consolidate the foundations of the fictitious world you create. I have an approach which I qualify as “pedestrian”: I like to start with a broad view at a reasonable distance to be able to get an impression, then I move slightly forward and I draw what I see. Then I walk closer and closer and end up inside the city where I can see all the details. Exactly in the same way I like to discover and visit a new city, and it seems to me a logical way to approach the work.”

JOHN HOWE



Watchful Peace
The Return of the King by J.R.R. Tolkien, Grafton Books, 1991
Ink and watercolour on paper, 55 × 40 cm



The Fall of Gondolin
The Silmarillion by J.R.R. Tolkien, Grafton Books, 1992
 Ink and watercolour on paper, 56,2 × 39,3 cm

DRAGONS AND CREATURES

Described as flying snakes by the Ancient Greeks and the Sumerians, represented on a Chinese grave in a neolithic site dating from several thousand years ago, dragons also decorate the Assyrian, Parthian, Scythian, Roman and Breton flags and, of course, the Viking longships, of which they are the emblems.

The dragon stands up, lethal opponent of the hero of the old epic poem *Beowulf*. It is one of the very first appearances of dragons in European literature. Omnipresent in the Middle Ages, the dragon is represented on coats of arms, shields, miniatures, sculptures, and symbolises the ultimate demon opposing the good and confronting the saints, as in the mythical fight of Saint George slaying the Dragon. In Arthurian legends, Uther, King Arthur's father, in order to intimidate his enemies, chose for himself the name Pendragon, a honorific title meaning "Head of the Dragon".



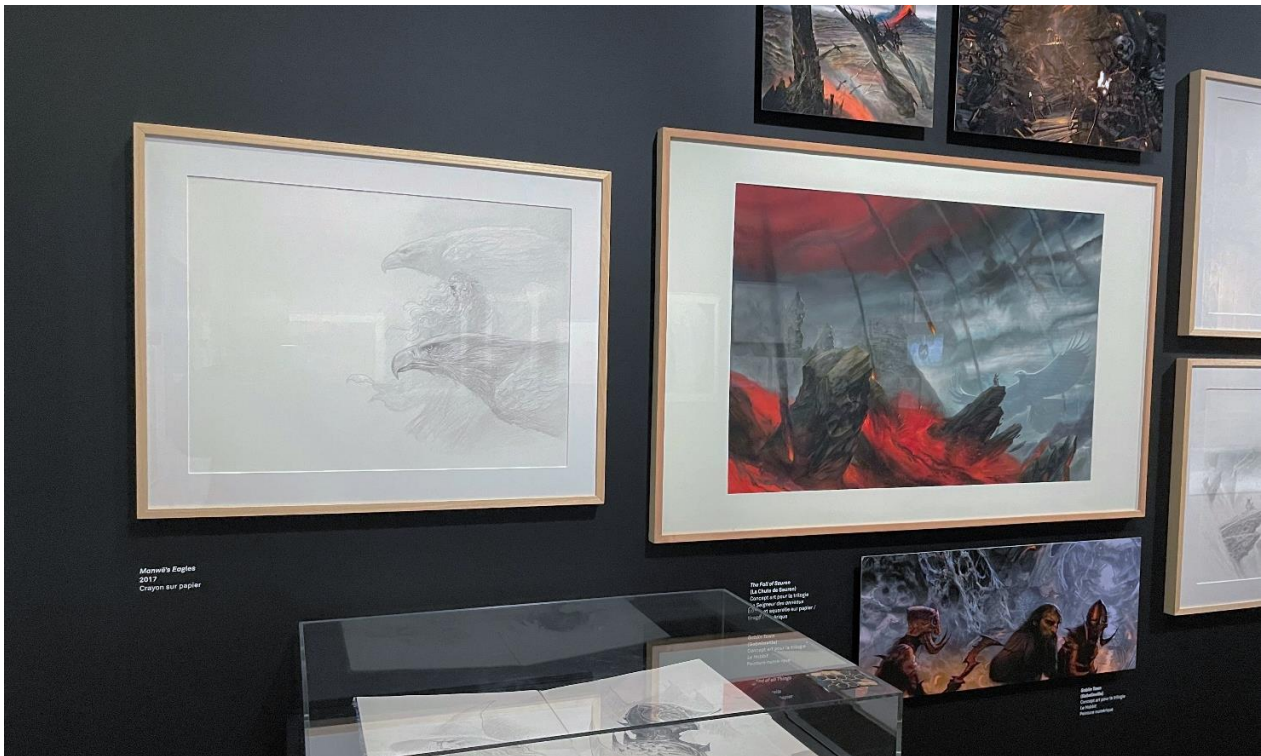
CREATING LEGENDS

When John Howe drew Andúril, Aragorn's sword, forged for the second time by the elves to confront the armies of Mordor, he gave it an appearance worthy of a king, without however overloading it with superfluous ornaments. He used his perfect knowledge of the handling of medieval weaponry to imagine a legendary royal sword that has the appearance of a weapon with clean lines, easy to handle and credible.



To learn how to handle a sword, how to dress and fight with an armour, John Howe regularly took part in rigorous reconstructions, sometimes spending whole weekends in a medieval campsite with other people interested in History. This personal involvement helped him to gain knowledge of the various parts and joints of an armour, to observe and feel its protective aspects, the constraints in the mobility and weight, all that in order to draw and paint knights with a meticulous sense of authenticity.

Royal Assassin
Royal Assassin, Book II of The Farseer Trilogy by Robin Hobb, Subterranean Press, 2016 Ink and watercolour on paper, 45 × 69.5 cm



ADAPTED FOR THE CINEMA

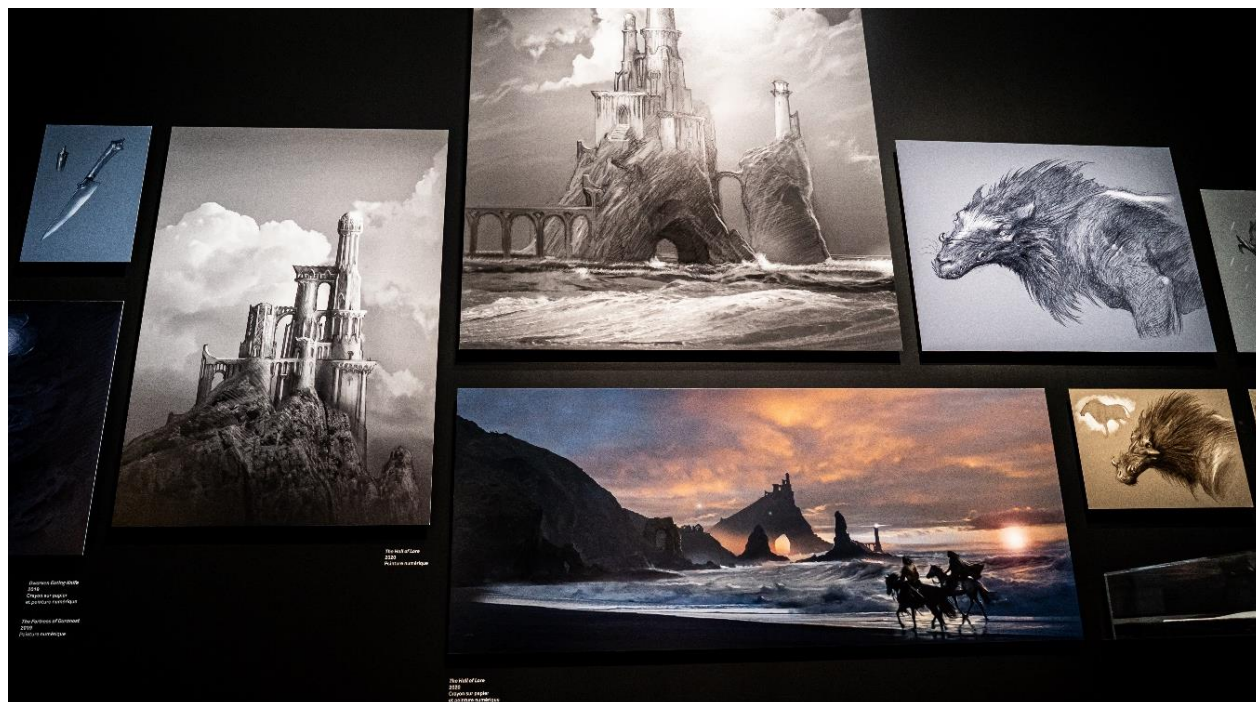
At the request of the film maker Peter Jackson, John Howe spent eight years in New-Zealand to take part in the production of the cinematographic trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, followed by *The Hobbit*. Though many preparatory drawings were made before shooting, the artist made several thousand sketches on location, intervening sometimes urgently to draw the missing part of a set or of an armour essential for the team, for its manufacturing and integration into a scene.

This cinematographic experience proved to be very exciting for John Howe who witnessed some of his drawings take shape before becoming alive.

The need to make a drawing very quickly, then to immediately modify the range of colours or degrees of lighting encouraged John Howe to use digital technology in addition to his traditional sketchbooks.



The Witch-King before Minas Morgul
Ink and watercolour on paper, 60 × 88 cm



THE RINGS OF POWER

John Howe made more than 1,500 drawings to contribute to establish the parameters of the artistic direction of the recent series, which adapts the heroic legends of the Second Age in the history of Middle-earth. This epic takes place thousands of years before the tales of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The rings of power already appeared in the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*. Gandalf mentioned them to the Hobbit Frodo Baggins in an old poem known by the elves of Middle-earth. The rings of power are also present in two of Tolkien's posthumous books published by his son Christopher in 1977 and 1980: *The Silmarillion* and *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*. In order to give the series a new breath, John Howe moved away from the style of his previous works made for books and cinema. While giving life to creatures at times briefly described in the literary work, he succeeded in giving the universe of the series an original style through his drawings, of which one selection is exhibited in Landerneau for the very first time.



Amazon Prime – *The Rings of Power*
 All concept art © Amazon Studios,
 reproduced courtesy Prime Video

Not to be missed



The Eye of Sauron, 2002 Highbridge Audio Collection:
The Lord of the Rings & The Hobbit
by J.R.R. Tolkien, 2003
Ink and watercolour on paper, 35.5 × 45 cm

- At the beginning of the 19th century, the writers belonging to the Romantic movement contributed to the rediscovery of the Middle Ages by the public and were at the origin of the concept of medievalism, a fantasised vision of the period which later became a fertile ground for J.R.R. Tolkien's writings.
- In the 1930s, Tolkien co-founded the writers' club of the Inklings at Oxford University, with, among others, his friend C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The members gathered regularly to read to each other their own writings (like *The Lord of the Rings*) and confront their points of view.
- Tolkien was close to Arthur George Tansley, who created the term "ecosystem" and contributed to popularizing ecology. The texts by the British author give an important place to nature by elevating it to the rank of a character, and questioning the galloping industrialization in 19th century Britain. At the end of the 1960s, the environmentalist movements took hold of Tolkien's oeuvre and made it a flagbearer for their fight in the United States as in Europe.
- A selection of drawings made by John Howe for the first season of *The Rings of Power* is presented as a world exclusive in the exhibition at Landerneau!
- John Howe has recently worked on an animated fantasy film that comes out in April 2024, *The Lord of the Rings: the War of the Rohirrim*. The action takes place two centuries before the period of the Tolkien's trilogies.



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