

PRESS RELEASE

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ODETTE DU PUIGAUDEAU

AN UNKNOWN LOVER OF DESERTS

**A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH FROM OCTOBER 3,
2026, THROUGH MARCH 7, 2027**

Her career includes work as a natural history illustrator, a fashion designer, a deckhand on Breton tuna boats and a journalist writing under a male pseudonym for the Paris Stock Exchange in the 1930s—a place then off-limits to women—before she developed into one of the keenest observers of the Sahara’s nomadic cultures, with no training other than on-the-ground experience. The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech (mYSLm) is dedicating its new exhibition to Odette du Puigauveau (b. 1894 in Saint-Nazaire, France; d. 1991 in Rabat, Morocco), an explorer who lived a remarkable life and made Morocco her adopted home. Through more than 200 works and documents—including photographs, drawings, manuscripts, objects, audio archives and documentary film excerpts—sourced from the collections of the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts, the Fondation Jardin Majorelle and private collections, this exhibition shines a spotlight on this free-spirited woman who has unjustly remained little known to the general public.

A LIFE LIVED AGAINST THE CURRENT

Born in 1894 in Saint-Nazaire, France, daughter of Ferdinand du Puigauveau, a painter of the Pont-Aven School, Odette grew up near the Atlantic coast at the Kervaudu manor, where she was captivated by the movement of ships along the Loire estuary. After moving to Paris in 1920, she led several professional lives simultaneously: as a scientific illustrator, as a stage costume designer and as a fashion designer for Jeanne Lanvin. Yet the sea called her back. In 1928, she obtained her professional seaman’s papers—a rarity for a woman at the time—and embarked on tuna fishing boats, which led to her first published reports. In 1932, she met the journalist and painter Marion Sénones (b. 1886 as Marcelle

Borne Kreutzberger in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France; d. 1977 in Rabat, Morocco), who would go on to share all her journeys. On November 28, 1933, the two women left Douarnenez aboard a lobster boat, the *Belle-Hirondelle*, bound for Mauritania. Traveling without an official mission, at their own expense and at their own risk, this first voyage set the course for the future: for over twenty-five years, until 1960, they would constantly return to their journeys and explorations. In 1961, Odette du Puigaudeau and Marion Sénones settled in Rabat; they would remain in Morocco for the rest of their lives. This exhibition is structured around **three chronological chapters: from Saint-Nazaire to Paris (1894–1934); the call of the deserts (1934–1961); and Rabat, final port of call (1961–1991).**

A GEOGRAPHY OF SAND AND SALT

The territory explored by Odette de Puigaudeau stretched from the Atlantic coast of Mauritania to the libraries of Chinguetti, and from the ocher alleyways of Oualata to Timbuktu. She was particularly fond of Southern Morocco: Tiznit, where she stayed starting in 1937, followed by the Tamanart Valley and Foum el Hassan, where she painstakingly documented rock carvings. She covered thousands of kilometers by dromedary: in the winter of 1937, she accompanied the *azalai*, a caravan of several thousand animals linking Timbuktu to the salt mines of Taoudenni twice a year, a twenty-day trek across expanses devoid of water and pasture. In total, Odette du Puigaudeau spent five years fully immersed in nomadic communities. She shared their daily lives and recorded everything: their black-and-brown wool tents (*khaymat*)—the wife’s domain—which visitors to the exhibition will see recreated, filled with saddles and chests, silver jewelry, clay dolls from Oualata and women’s hairstyles, which Puigaudeau hailed as the “masterpieces of Saharan women.” Her drawings, notebooks and photographs form a detailed archive regarding an ingenious culture perfectly adapted to the desert. Her accounts—*Pieds nus à travers la Mauritanie* (1936), *La Grande foire des dattes* (1937) and *Le Sel du désert* (1940)—revealed this world to the general public, while the quality of her work earned her recognition among the leading Saharan scholars of her time. She left behind eight books, countless articles and an ethnographic treatise dedicated to the Moorish people.

RABAT, LAST PORT OF CALL

In 1961, Odette du Puigauveau and Marion Sénones settled permanently in Rabat. No longer merely a field for exploration, Morocco became their home. For thirty years, Puigauveau—who had become an ethnologist—tirelessly pursued a range of activities: cultural programs on Moroccan radio, research and documentation work, and finally, from 1970 to 1977, directing the Prehistory Department at the Rabat Archeological Museum. In 1964, Moulay Ahmed Alaoui—Minister of Information, Tourism, Handicrafts and Fine Arts—called upon Puigauveau to organize the visit of André Malraux, the French Minister of Culture, to the Oued Tamanart valley. Puigauveau had been exploring this important site for rock art since 1937; she had cataloged 114 rock engravings and six previously unknown figures were added to the list on the eve of Malraux's visit. In Rabat, she finally completed her magnum opus, *Arts et coutumes des Maures* [Arts and Customs of the Moors]—a comprehensive record of thirty years of field work and observation that was first published in the Moroccan journal *Hespéris-Tamuda*. Marion Sénones passed away in Rabat in 1977, and Odette du Puigauveau in 1991. She admired the nomads for “that proud detachment from material possessions that makes men free”—a guiding principle she adopted in her own life.

THE EXHIBITION

In the Footsteps of Odette du Puigauveau is the first exhibition in Morocco dedicated to the explorer who chose to make Morocco her home and never left. It is part of a rediscovery movement already underway in the Kingdom: in 2018, the Center for Saharan Studies at Mohammed V University in Rabat and the National Human Rights Council paid tribute to Puigauveau at a symposium held at the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco, celebrating her deep attachment to the country and its nomadic cultures. The upcoming exhibition at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech is co-curated by Hayate Machache, head of collections at the mYSLm and at the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts, and Monique Vérité, the author of the only biography dedicated to Odette de Puigauveau. The exhibition design is by Jasmin Oezcebi, an architect and

scenographer at the Centre Pompidou, who also designed the exhibitions devoted to Bert Flint (b. 1931 in Winschoten, Netherlands; d. 2022 in Marrakech, Morocco) and Théophile-Jean Delaye (b. 1896 in Valence, France; d. 1970 in Saint-Donat, France) at the mYSLm. *In the Footsteps of Odette du Puigau* will exhibit more than 200 artifacts and documents spanning the 1930s to the present day that hail from the collections of the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts, the Fondation Jardin Majorelle and Monique Vérité's personal collection, including numerous drawings, watercolors and original plates created by Puigau and Sénones. Radio archives can be heard throughout the exhibition, along with documentary film excerpts—including a testimonial by naturalist Théodore Monod (b. 1902 in Rouen, France; d. 2000 in Versailles, France) and a West African griot song written for Puigau—which further enhance the exhibition's immersive experience. Following its previous exhibitions—*Bert Flint* and *Théophile-Jean Delaye's Morocco*—and now with *In the Footsteps of Odette de Puigau*, the mYSLm continues its exploration of key twentieth century figures who were fascinated by the history, geography and anthropology of Morocco.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

In the Footsteps of Odette de Puigau

From Saturday, October 3, 2026, through Sunday, March 7, 2027

Gallery for temporary exhibitions at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech

Rue Yves Saint Laurent, Marrakech

The museum is open every day of the week except Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (last entry at 5:30 p.m.)

THE MUSÉE YVES SAINT LAURENT MARRAKECH

The Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech, located a stone's throw from the renowned Jardin Majorelle, opened its doors in the autumn of 2017. The museum is far more than a showcase for the visionary couturier's work: it is a vibrant, dynamic cultural center. Featuring exhibition spaces, a research library, and the Pierre Bergé Auditorium, the mYSLm actively promotes culture through an eclectic, globally-oriented program that encompasses cinema, music, literature and international symposia.

ABOUT ODETTE DU PUIGAUDEAU

(b. 1984 in Saint-Nazaire, France; d. 1991 in Rabat, Morocco 1894)

An illustrator and journalist before becoming an ethnologist, Odette du Puigauveau dedicated her life to studying the nomadic cultures of the Sahara. From 1933 to 1960, she traveled thousands of kilometers across Mauritania, southern Morocco and Timbuktu, documenting—through drawings, photographs and her writings—a desert civilization undergoing profound change. The author of eight books and a seminal ethnological study, *Arts et coutumes des Maures* [Arts and Customs of the Moors], she settled in Rabat in 1961, where she lived the rest of her life.

ABOUT HAYATE MACHACHE

Hayate Machache is the Head of Collections at the Pierre Bergé Museum of Berber Arts and at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech. She joined the Fondation Jardin Majorelle in 2017 and has contributed to the mounting of numerous exhibitions in Morocco and abroad, such as *Amazighes: Cycles, Ornaments, Motifs* at the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (Mucem) in Marseille (2025) and *Yves Saint Laurent: Line and Expression* at the Orange County Museum of Art (OCMA) in Los Angeles (2024). In collaboration with her colleague, the conservator Juan Gerardo Ugalde Salinas, Hayate Machache designed and organized an intensive skills-transfer program in textile conservation and restoration for young Moroccan professionals, held in the autumn of 2025.

ABOUT MONIQUE VÉRITÉ

Monique Vérité, a former curator at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, is a passionate desert traveler. She gathered the work of Odette du Puigauveau (1894–1991), an explorer of the Sahara during the 1930s. In 2001, Vérité published her definitive biography, *Odette du Puigauveau, une Bretonne au désert*, and contributed to the republication of Puigauveau's works. She has also published two other books: *Le Sahara, guide littéraire* (1999) and *Henri Lhote: une aventure scientifique au Sahara* (2010).

ABOUT JASMIN OEZCEBI

Jasmin Oezcebi has been an architect and exhibition designer at the Centre Pompidou in Paris for over twenty years. She has designed the scenography for numerous exhibitions in France—most notably *Yves Saint Laurent at the Museums* in 2022, held simultaneously at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, the Musée du Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, the Musée National Picasso, the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and the Musée National d'Art Moderne—as well as for *Bert Flint* (2022) and *Théophile-Jean Delaye's Morocco* (2023) at the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech.

