

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM PRESENTS
FIRST EXHIBITION OF ITS EXTRAORDINARY
BABAR COLLECTION

Original Illustrations and Manuscript Material from
First Books by Jean and Laurent de Brunhoff
Illuminate Authors' Creative Process and Document
the Birth of an Iconic Character in Children's Literature

Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors
September 19, 2008, through January 4, 2009

★★ Press Preview: Thursday, September 18, 2008, 10 a.m. until noon ★★



Jean de Brunhoff (1899–1937), "The elephants carried Babar, Arthur, and Celeste in triumph," study for *Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* (The Story of Babar), 1931, watercolor. The Morgan Library & Museum; MA 6304.9.4 Gift of Laurent, Mathieu, and Thierry de Brunhoff, and purchased with the assistance of The Florence Gould Foundation and the Acquisitions Fund, Fellows Endowment Fund, Gordon N. Ray Fund, and Heineman Fund, 2004

New York, NY, August 25, 2008—The creation of Babar, the protagonist of a family bedtime story that began one of the most successful children's series of all time, is the focus of a new exhibition on view only at The Morgan Library & Museum from September 19, 2008, through January 4, 2009. *Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors* includes more than 170 works, with manuscript drafts, sketches, and watercolors for the first book by each of Babar's two authors, father and son Jean and Laurent de Brunhoff. The exhibition explores the working methods of these two men, who, fifteen years and a generation apart, created an iconic fictional character, French in style but universal in spirit, whose green suit and yellow crown have become recognizable to children and adults throughout the world.

Drawing Babar features an extraordinary series of drawings and manuscript material acquired by the Morgan in 2004, including nearly all surviving working drafts for *Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* (The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant, 1931), the first book by Jean de Brunhoff (1899–1937), and for *Babar et ce coquin d'Arthur* (Babar's Cousin: That Rascal Arthur, 1946), the first book written and illustrated by Laurent de

Brunhoff (b. 1925), Jean's son. The development of such memorable episodes as the marriage of Babar and Celeste and the purchase of his signature green suit is traced from preliminary pencil sketches to splendid finished watercolors.

A highlight of the exhibition is Jean de Brunhoff's maquette for *Histoire de Babar*, a small illustrated booklet that he made at the midpoint of his composition process. Due to its format, however, only a portion of the work can be displayed. All pages of the maquette are shown in an accompanying digital facsimile, providing the public with full access for the first time. A comparison of the maquette with the published version of *Histoire de Babar* reveals changes, both subtle and substantive, that Jean de Brunhoff made to the text and images as he refined his work.

"The universality of Babar is such that we forget the character rose from a blank sheet of paper as an artistic and literary creation," said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. "To see the process of inventing Babar at its earliest stages is truly marvelous, and all who tour this exhibition will forever view this familiar figure in a new light."

"*The Story of Babar* has found its final home in a city far from Celesteville and far from Paris but where we think Babar will feel very comfortable," said Laurent de Brunhoff, speaking of the gift to the Morgan that he and his brothers, Mathieu and Thierry, made of a portion of Jean de Brunhoff's work. "Since I came to live in America in 1985 and got to know its cultural institutions, The Morgan Library & Museum, with its extraordinary collection of manuscripts and materials focused on the history of the book, has seemed the right place for *The Story of Babar*. The gift is an expression of my love for and an act of homage to my father."

Supplementing the Morgan's important collection of de Brunhoff manuscripts and drawings are first editions that make clear the broad reach of a family story that began in the nursery as a tale told by Cécile de Brunhoff and continues to this day in the work of her son Laurent, whose latest book in the series, *Babar's USA*, will be published just before the Morgan's exhibition opens.

"It is unusual to be able to present to the public as complete a record of the creation of a major work of art as we are able to do with Jean de Brunhoff's *Histoire de Babar*," said Christine Nelson, the exhibition's curator. "It is still more unusual to be able to witness the re-creation of a fictional world in the hands of a second, equally talented artist—Laurent de Brunhoff. It is a privilege to present this exhibition for those who remember Babar from childhood, for young visitors who will see him for the first time at the Morgan, and for those interested in the way an illustrated book comes into being."

THE ORIGINS OF BABAR

The Babar series is the story of an orphaned baby elephant who has adventures in civilization and returns to the great forest to become king of the elephants. Whether he is in the big city, at home in Celesteville, or on a journey to a far-off land, Babar's story is anchored in family connections. The creation of the Babar series, too, is a family story.

One evening in 1930 Cécile de Brunhoff invented a story about an unnamed little elephant for her sons Laurent and Mathieu. Her husband, Jean de Brunhoff, an accomplished painter who had never before written or illustrated a children's book, expanded, illustrated, and published the tale in 1931 as *Histoire de Babar*. Publication was facilitated by Jean's brother-in-law Lucien Vogel, director of the French fashion magazine *Le jardin des modes*, and Jean's brother Michel, the editor of the Paris edition of *Vogue*.

Jean de Brunhoff's elegant story, told in simple prose and clear, lush images, was embraced by French readers and was soon translated into English in 1933. In six sequels written before his untimely death at the age of thirty-seven, he continued the story of the good-hearted elephant who lives well, rules benevolently, and does his best to be a good father. The exhibition includes first editions of all seven of Jean's books as well as manuscript drafts and watercolors.

LAURENT DE BRUNHOFF

Jean's eldest son, Laurent, an abstract painter, took up the story just after World War II, publishing *Babar et ce coquin d'Arthur* at the age of twenty-one. Laurent's final illustrations looked much like those of his father, but the exhibition reveals a very different creative process. Jean developed text and pictures concurrently at every phase of the composition, sketching in pencil and adding color only in the final stages. Laurent, by contrast, produced explosive swaths of color over the barest hint of graphite, incorporating text only after he had resolved his illustrations. Since *Babar et ce coquin d'Arthur*, Laurent de Brunhoff has produced thirty-six additional books about Babar and his family and friends.

THE MORGAN'S BABAR COLLECTION

The Morgan acquired its Babar collection in 2004. Drafts and drawings for the first Babar book, Jean de Brunhoff's *Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant*, were acquired as a partial gift from the sons of Jean de Brunhoff—Laurent, Mathieu, and Thierry—and a purchase made with the assistance of The Florence Gould Foundation and the Acquisitions Fund, Fellows Endowment Fund, Gordon N. Ray Fund, and Heineman Fund. Drawings for the first Babar book by Laurent de Brunhoff, *Babar et ce coquin d'Arthur*, were a gift of the author.

EXHIBITION READING AREAS

The installation includes several reading areas with original custom-painted carpets. The carpets are based on illustrations of rugs from *The History of Babar* and *Babar's Cousin: That Rascal Arthur*. These colorful textiles were conceived by exhibition designers Imrey Culbert, designed in collaboration with Laurent de Brunhoff, and painted by Emanuele Simonelli specifically for the Morgan's presentation. Reading copies of selected Babar books are available in the galleries.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AT THE MORGAN

The Babar collection is the most recent addition to the Morgan's strong holdings in children's literature, which include the illustrated manuscripts of Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma mere l'oye* (Tales of Mother Goose, 1695) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring*, illustrated letters of Beatrix Potter, and the manuscript and drawings for Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *Petit prince* (Little Prince). The Morgan's holdings in printed children's literature are especially rich in American, English and French books from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

SPONSORSHIP

Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors is made possible by The Florence Gould Foundation.

Chilton Investment Company, Inc. is the corporate sponsor.

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We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of the Consulate General of France in New York and the Cultural Services of the Embassy of France in New York.



This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Exhibition design is by Imrey Culbert LP (principals: Tim Culbert and Celia Imrey).

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue by Christine Nelson, the Morgan's Drue Heinz Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, with an essay by *New Yorker* author Adam Gopnik and foreword by William M. Griswold, the Morgan's director.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Over the course of the exhibition the Morgan will present a full range of engaging and informative events for both children and adults, including gallery tours, family and school programs, lectures by Adam Gopnik of *The New Yorker* and curator Christine Nelson, and a chamber music concert on October 26 featuring Francis Poulenc's 1940 narrated adaptation of *Histoire de Babar* (Babar the Elephant), op. 129.

For more information and other related exhibition programs, please contact the Education Department at (212) 590-0333 or visit www.themorgan.org.

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. Nearly a century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
www.themorgan.org

HOURS

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Monday, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

ADMISSION

\$12 for adults; \$8 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children, 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.

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