2022: A TRIBUTE TO LOUIS XV AT THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

Versailles, 8 December 2021
Press release

In 2022, to mark the three-hundredth anniversary of the coronation of Louis XV and the return of the Court to Versailles, the Palace of Versailles will be paying tribute to the King known as the “Bien-Aimé” (the Beloved), whose life and history people are relatively unfamiliar with today. A special exhibition will enable the public to learn more about this King and his reign, as well as his personality, entourage and passions. For the occasion, the King’s private apartments are to be reopened and the famous Passemant astronomical clock restored.

LOUIS XV
EXHIBITION - 18 OCTOBER 2022 TO 19 FEBRUARY 2023

The main exhibition at the Palace of Versailles in 2022 will be devoted to Louis XV. Going beyond the King’s public image, it will seek to capture the complex personality of the man beneath the monarch.

Who was Louis XV? What kind of education did he receive? What was his personality like? What were his great passions? Who was in his entourage? What role did he personally play in the creative art movement of his time? Visitors will have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of this King, who was the great-grandson of Louis XIV and the grandfather of Louis XVI.

The exhibition will be organised according to three main themes. The first aspect will be devoted to the private side of the man. The second part of the exhibition focuses on the King’s tastes and passions: science, hunting, books and architecture. Finally, the third part will highlight the style associated with the name of Louis XV, reflecting the day-to-day world in which he lived. This event will bring together exceptional works of art from collections from around the world, many of which have never been exhibited in public before.

EXHIBITION CURATORS
Yves Carlier, General Curator at the Palace of Versailles
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THE PASSEMANT ASTRONOMICAL CLOCK
AN OUTSTANDING RESTORATION

As one of the iconic items of the Palace of Versailles’ collections, the grand astronomical clock (the largest one produced under the reign of Louis XV) designed by Claude-Siméon Passemant is a genuine artistic and scientific monument.

This remarkable object simultaneously displays planetary movements, represented at the top by a terrestrial globe in a sphere; hourly time thanks to an enamelled porcelain dial with four hands (real time, average time, minutes and seconds); the calendar date with a mechanism that automatically integrates monthly variations, while the succession of the twenty-nine astrological decans is represented below, against a starry-sky background. During an eclipse, a silver cover appears, indicating whether the eclipse is total or partial.

This technical feat took 36 years to make. Passemant spent twenty years making the astronomical tables and designing the clockwork mechanism, which took the watchmaker Dauthiau twelve years to produce. It took Jacques Caffieri another four years to complete the gilded bronze cabinet, a masterpiece of Rococo art. The clock was subsequently approved by the French Academy of Sciences.

On 15 January 1754, the clock was installed at Versailles, on a white marble base placed on the floor of the large Chamber of the King’s Small Apartment, next the Corner Room. From this time on, the room became known as the Clock Room.

In 2022, the Passemant clock will undergo exceptional, fundamental restoration work. Its bronzes and clockwork mechanism (a world first) will be restored at the Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France (C2RMF). This mechanism is the only one of its kind in the world. However, it is in such a poor state that many of the indications no longer function correctly, and its main drive movement often stops working. It was therefore crucial to restore this masterpiece in order to safeguard it for the future.

Passemant’s astronomical clock will be presented at the opening of the Louis XV exhibition at the Palace of Versailles.

The Passemant astronomical clock is being restored thanks to the patronage of ROLEX FRANCE
REOPENING OF THE DAUPHIN’S APARTMENT

In February 2022, the apartment of the Dauphin – Louis XV’s eldest son – will once again be open to the public following seventeen months of restoration work involving numerous craftsmen.

Situated on the garden level, in the central part of the Palace, the Dauphin’s apartment is one of the most prestigious in the former royal residence. It consists of three rooms – bedchamber, Great Chamber and library – with a unique view over the gardens. The rooms are situated below a small part of the Hall of Mirrors, the Peace Room and the Queen’s Chamber, respectively. As you progress through the apartment, each room seems more elaborate and majestic than the last, inviting visitors into the private, inner circle of the royal family.

However, due to the many different uses and refurbishments of the apartment between the 17th and 20th centuries, the overall harmony of the rooms and the décors was gradually altered.

The aim of the current project is to restore them to how they were in the 1750s. At that time, the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel was in charge of renovating the princely apartment set aside for Louis XV’s eldest son, the Dauphin Louis Ferdinand.

REOPENING OF MADAME DU BARRY’S APARTMENT

In October 2022, the Palace of Versailles will reopen Madame Du Barry’s apartment. This is one of the most elegant complexes in the former royal residence, which gives an insight into the private life of Louis XV at Versailles.

In 1770, Louis XV – who was a widower – decided to install his favourite, the Countess du Barry, in the heart of the Palace, just above his private apartment. Designed by Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the fourteen-room apartment covers over 350m². Situated on the second floor, the apartment’s reception rooms overlook the Marble Courtyard and the more private rooms look onto the inner courtyards. It also has several entrances, allowing the King to discreetly visit his mistress using his private staircases.

At the request of Madame du Barry, the main rooms retained a white and gold decoration, a privilege usually set aside for princes. The other half of the apartment had exceptional polychrome decorations during the Ancien Régime, but most of these had disappeared by the end of the 18th century. Today, the apartment remains a unique space in the Palace, filled with history and emotion.

This apartment will soon regain all its former beauty and harmony thanks to the work and timeless skills of some fifty craftsmen – carpenters, gilders, marble workers and stucco workers.

The Dauphin’s Great Chamber is being restored thanks to the patronage of BARON PHILIPPE DE ROTHSCHILD S.A.

The Dauphin’s Library is being restored thanks to the patronage of the SOCIÉTÉ DES AMIS DE VERSAILLES

Madame Du Barry’s apartment is being restored thanks to the patronage of AXA GROUP