

THE GALLERY OF THE HISTORY OF THE PALACE



400  ANS
CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES
1623 • 2023

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OPENING OF THE NEW GALLERY OF HISTORY OF THE PALACE

Versailles, 14 september 2023
Press release

The Palace of Versailles is opening a new Gallery of the history of the Palace in honour of its 400th anniversary. This Gallery aims to provide visitors with insight into the creation, transformation and upheavals that have marked the history of the Palace, from its beginnings as a modest hunting lodge built by Louis XIII in 1623 up to the current day. The itinerary will feature more than 120 works of art from the Versailles collections – some of which have never before been displayed – complemented by a digital and educational programme.

THE GALLERY OF HISTORY, REDESIGNED

During their exploration of Versailles, visitors pass without interruption from King Louis XIV's State Apartment to Marie-Antoinette's Private Chambers to the historical galleries dating from Louis Philippe, thus moving through eras, fashions and styles. The Gallery of the History of the Palace was created to help visitors understand the history of Versailles and its successive layout and decoration.

Once the apartments of key personalities of the Court, since 2011 this succession of 11 rooms on the ground floor of the North Wing has been conceived as an introduction to one's visit to the Palace.

Organised chrono-thematically, this new arrangement features over a hundred artworks from the Versailles collection. Portraits of kings, queens and artists reveal the faces of those who shaped Versailles over the centuries. Paintings depicting the Palace and Gardens of Versailles illustrate the architectural transformations of the estate, while the vestiges of the Versailles of yesteryear rekindle memories of mythical places lost to history, such as the Ambassadors' Staircase, Louis XIV's Bath Chamber and Marie Leszczyńska's Chinese Chamber.

The gallery also shows what became of Versailles after the French Revolution, from the fall of the *Ancien Régime* to its transformation into a museum of French history by Louis Philippe in the 19th century, not to mention its political role as a venue for extravagant festivities and contemporary artistic creation.

To bring to light these different eras and the multiple facets of the Palace, a wealth of digital and educational content is available throughout the tour – 3D replicas, aerial views of the estate from drone-mounted cameras, archival videos and tactile displays – to transport visitors through four centuries of the history of the Palace of Versailles and France itself.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Sneak preview opening for European Heritage Days: evening visits on 15 September and daytime access on 16 and 17 September 2023. Free admission.

As of 21 September 2023, the Palace of Versailles History Gallery will be accessible to all visitors with a Passport or Palace ticket.

More information at chateauversailles.fr

CHIEF CURATOR

Laurent Salomé, Director of the National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon

SCENOGRAPHY

Véronique Dollfus

“Four centuries of uninterrupted history...”

Like a childhood dream... Today, we can scarcely believe that Louis XIII built Versailles on the cherished spot where he experienced his first hunt, at the tender age of six, in 1607. He returned again and again to these game-filled grounds, finally ordering the construction of a hunting lodge “on the mound with the windmill near Versailles”. Such was born a palace of which so little remains. Really, so little? A few traces of the original residence commissioned by Louis XIII have survived, but we have Louis XIV to thank for the Palace of Versailles that we admire today, as it was he who bequeathed it to France and the world, he himself having such happy childhood memories of his father’s hunting lodge. The construction of that modest abode set the stage for four centuries of uninterrupted history.

The Gallery of the history of the Palace revisited by Laurent Salomé and the museum’s curators thanks to recent digital replicas, offers visitors a fabulous journey through time, drawing them into the Palace and Gardens along an 11-room itinerary. Masterpieces – some restored, others on display for the first time – are indeed worth a thousand words to evoke the passions for life and power that blazed within these walls, like an unconscious ephemeris of the past that continues to shape the present. Once again, we see how, from its beginnings and up to the current day, the Palace of Versailles has influenced French action in every field, overcoming tragedies and periods of neglect that could have proved fatal. It is hard to imagine that after the death of Louis XIII in 1644, the deserted royal residence lay dormant for almost two decades, finally revived by the sudden and “immoderate passion” of Louis XIV.

Our choice to inaugurate this Gallery of the history during European Heritage Days is not coincidental. By celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Palace of Versailles with a focus on heritage, we are paying tribute to its builders, its protectors, and all those thanks to whom Versailles continues to embody timelessness in an ever-changing world. And to nurture the dreams of today’s children...

Catherine Pégard
President of the Public Establishment of
the Palace, Museum and National
Estate of Versailles



“Making history truly tangible”

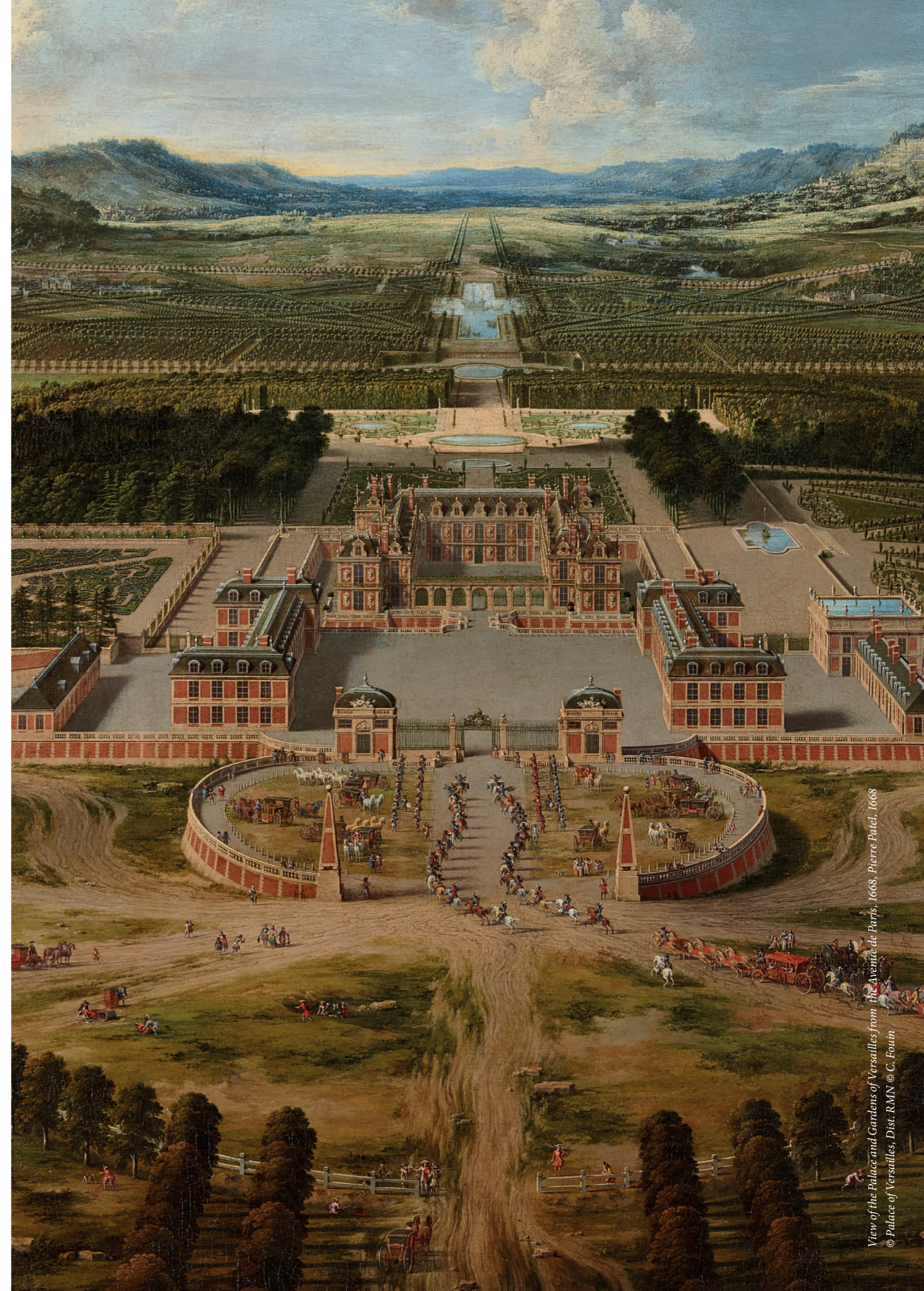
A museum must of course ensure that visitors do not touch the artwork contained within, but the new Gallery of the history of the Palace nonetheless aspires to make history truly tangible. Telling the story of the origins and constant transformations of the Palace of Versailles, explaining its functions and decorations, could be a dreadfully academic exercise; the subject is so vast that if it were to be explored only in words, even the most basic components would take up an entire book. Visitors who have just entered the Palace, often after a long journey and years of dreaming about the experience, obviously have no desire to suffer through pedantic lectures, and that is indeed not our aim. We simply seek to offer them a few clues that will inspire a keener sense of the historical depth of the different spaces they will be passing through. We also endeavour to immerse them in the realm of the sublime from the very beginning: when it comes to telling the story of Versailles, the most telling documents are masterpieces. Some are famous, like the great panoramic views of the Palace or the paintings by Hubert Robert illustrating the reforestation campaign in the park under Louis XVI. Others are on display for the first time after ages in the storerooms, like the marvellous bookcases in Madame Sophie’s stucco library, topped by large potpourri vases made of stucco fashioned like alabaster, their perforated lids arousing a quasi-olfactory perception of the aromas the princess liked to spread through her apartments, since lost to time. We believe in the suggestive power of these artistic gems to spark curiosity and offer us a glimpse into a world that is no more, opening up the immensity of time, human activity and the genius of art, shedding light on untold efforts to understand and choreograph the harmony of the world. These principles, embodied at Versailles more than anywhere else, are what attract people from all over the globe in search not of a simple demonstration of French greatness, but of timeless constancy. Sometimes delving into the past takes on an even more archaeological aspect: just recently, a pedestal made of grey Brech marble, among the rarest and most sought-after types of stone, was identified in one of the Palace’s many storerooms. The piece is a remnant of the octagonal Salon in Louis XIV’s bath chamber. The perfect elegance of this piece of marble, on display in the new gallery, serves as a lesson in grandeur, demonstrating the fascination with Antiquity that characterised the *Grand Siècle*.

Myriad recent acquisitions enliven this new itinerary, from modest and yet enormously compelling pieces such as the diminutive painting of Louis XVIII visiting the construction site that would become the Hall of Mirrors, to the major rediscovery of the monumental marble group *Zephyr and Flora*, donated to the Palace by the Republic of Angola in 2022. Another exceptional event was the entry into the collections of *The Royal Family Hearing Mass in Les Tuileries*, a painting by Hubert Robert classified as a National Treasure: yet another cardinal work that, although not depicting Versailles, gives viewers an up-close view of a world at its twilight hour. The great “Versailles Revival” at the dawn of the 20th century is explored in a room designed thanks to research carried out for the recent exhibition of the same name.

These are but a few examples of the vast array of memories, marvels and new insights that are sure to make visitors’ first steps in the Palace of Versailles a source of pleasure and a true learning experience, adding to the intensity and enjoyment of the rest of their tour. In this Palace, history literally comes to life as soon as you reach the first room, which opens with a series of majestic portraits of all the “kings of Versailles”. There are five such monarchs, from Louis XIII to Louis Philippe, brought together for the very first time from such a perspective. But Louis Philippe not only gave the Palace its definitive status: in his own way, he reigned within its walls. Comparing Winterhalter’s grand portrait of the last “King of the French” in the Galerie des Batailles with Duplessis’s painting of Louis XVI in coronation regalia sets the stage for a copious contemplation to be pursued while exploring the Palace in all its glory.

Laurent Salomé

Director of the National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles Trianon



View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles from the Avenue de Paris, 1668, Pierre Patel, 1668
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin



PART I | **EXPLORING
THE GALLERY**

1 | 400 years of History

The first room of the Gallery will bring together a vivid highlight of the five grand portraits of the kings of France who lived at the Palace (Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Louis XV, Louis XVI and Louis Philippe), along with a projection of a 3D video on the architectural transformations of the Palace.

If Louis XIII laid the first stone of the Palace, it was King Louis XIV who was the great builder of Versailles and its gardens. During his reign, additions and embellishments followed one after another at an unbridled tempo to arrive at the “total work of art” that we know today.

Louis XV did little to change the architecture of the Palace but worked tirelessly to transform the interior, providing it with some of its most sublime décor, some elements of which survive today.

Finally, though Louis XVI reigned for only 15 years, the Palace as we see it today is the one that he knew, frozen in time by the Revolution. After 1789 and the fall of the Ancien Régime, the Palace was entirely emptied and abandoned. Under the Empire, Napoleon attempted to turn Versailles into an imperial palace, without quite succeeding. After the restoration of absolute monarchy between 1815 and 1830, the July Revolution instituted a constitutional monarchy that lent Versailles its lasting identity. Louis Philippe substantially transformed the Palace by creating a historical museum dedicated to “All the glories of France.”



Louis XIII, King of France (1601-1643)
Justus Van Egmont,
1621-1700
© Palace of Versailles, Dist.
RMN © C. Fouin



Louis XIV on Horseback Crowned with Victory before the Siege of Namur,
Pierre Mignard, ca. 1694
© RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles) DR



Equestrian portrait of Louis XV, King of France
Charles Parrocel, 1723
© Palace of Versailles, Dist.
RMN © C. Fouin



Louis XVI, King of France (1754-1793),
Louis-Joseph-Siffred Duplessis, after 1777
© Palace of Versailles, Dist.
RMN © JM



Louis Philippe I, King of the French (1773-1850),
Franz-Xaver Winterhalter, 1841
© Palace of Versailles, Dist.
RMN © C. Fouin

2 | The Ideal Palace for a Young King

This room will present exceptional works from the first Versailles, imagined by Louis XIV, who decided in 1661 to expand his father Louis XIII's hunting lodge. His First Architect, Louis Le Vau, maintained the central brick-and-stone court (the modern-day Marble Courtyard) while adding antique busts and a gilded-ironwork balcony. In front of the Palace, he constructed two wings and six pavilions. The painting by Pierre Patel, which will be presented here, sheds light on these first changes.



View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles as seen from the Avenue de Paris, 1668,
Pierre Patel
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

This room will also display views of the Palace and its gardens, as well as portraits of the most brilliant artists and scholars of the era who were brought into the service of the royal project. Visitors will also discover busts from the Marble Courtyard and décor from the bygone Bath Chambers, with its sumptuous octagonal Salon adorned with statues of the months and paintings by René-Antoine Houasse including *Landscape with a Portico* commissioned by Louis XIV himself in 1675 to embellish the window frames.



Louis XIV, King of France (1638-1715),
Anonymous, France, 17th century
© RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles) © G. Blot



Landscape with a Portico,
René-Antoine Houasse
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

3 | The Quest for Grandeur: Versailles, the Palace of Power

Originally a site of parties and pleasure, in 1682 Versailles became the Palace of government. This room will present a view of the Palace at the beginning of the 18th century created by Pierre-Denis Martin, as well as several paintings of now lost décors and preliminary works for larger pieces of décor.

One can see the single surviving painting of the legendary, now defunct Ambassadors' Staircase : *Surrender of the Cambrai Citadel* by Charles Le Brun. As with other iconic sites of Versailles that no longer exist, this one will be brought back to life through digital reconstructions.

Several preliminary painting studies for the Mercury Room such as *Alexander the Great Offering Animals to his Teacher, Aristotle* by Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne offer a glimpse into the arrangement of the official apartments of the king and queen. In fact, in the king's apartment, every room was dedicated to one of the planets of the solar system, the décor melding mythology with classical history.



Alexander the Great Offering Animals to his Teacher, Aristotle,
Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin



Surrender of the Cambrai Citadel, 18 April 1677,
Charles Le Brun
© RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles) © G. Blot

4 | The Glory of God and the King: Monumental Versailles

Following the death of Louis Le Vau in 1670, Jules Hardouin-Mansart rose to the status of the king's favourite architect. He is known for designing the Hall of Mirrors, 73 metres long and adorned with 357 mirrors. On the ceiling, spanning more than 1,000 m², painter Charles Le Brun suggested depicting the story of Hercules, but Louis XIV preferred his own exploits to mythological feats: as such, the painting portrays the Sun King himself, a political giant in the company of the gods and goddesses.

In this room, visitors can examine many of the sketches drawn by Charles Le Brun for his décors, including *The King Governs by Himself*, painted for the central composition of the vault in the Hall of Mirrors.



The King Governs by Himself,
Charles Le Brun
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © JM Manai

As a Catholic monarch, Louis XIV had several chapels built successively in his palace: the four lost to history and the last chapel, the one we know today, inaugurated in 1710, five years before the king's death. Designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart, the Royal Chapel is the last major transformation of the residence ordered and carried out by the Sun King. Its lavish décor comprises both painting and sculpture: no fewer than 110 sculptors worked on the sanctuary, while three painters, Charles de La Fosse, Antoine Coypel and Jean Jouvenet, shared the task of decorating the vaulted ceiling. A selection of preparatory paintings for the ceiling of the Royal Chapel will be exhibited in the Gallery, including Jouvenet's *Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles*.



La descente du Saint-Esprit sur les apôtres,
Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet le Grand, 1709
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © JM Manai

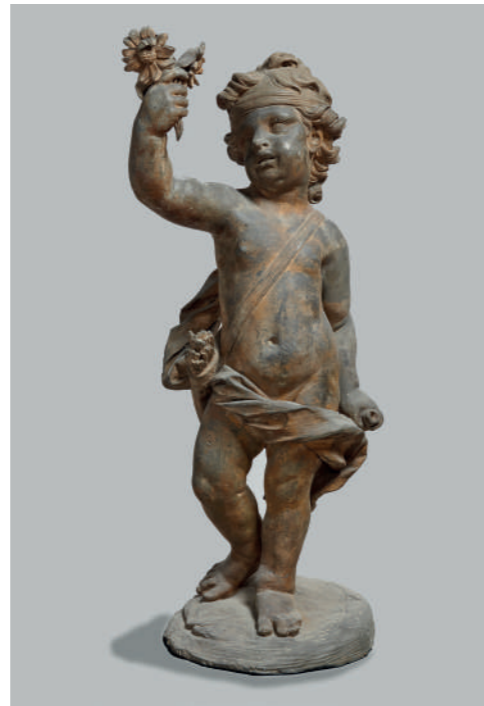
5 | The Gardens

For Louis XIV, the gardens were an integral part of the Palace. Their design was no less sophisticated than that of the Palace interiors, and their architect André Le Nôtre was as prominent as Le Vau and Mansart. Building on the grid layout of Louis XIII's Palace gardens, Le Nôtre multiplied the perspectives, played with levels and curated visual surprises. Alleys bordered the leafy salons of the groves. In the basins, stunning fountain shows surprised the stroller or accented the iconography of the sculptures.



The Grand Dauphin, Louis XIV and Maria Theresa on a Promenade in the Gardens of Versailles, Anonymous, France, 17th century
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © JM Manai

This room will present several works that allow the public to imagine the gardens as they were at the time: vistas of parterres, the Orangerie, the Grotto of Tethys, and even traces of transformed or vanished groves. The Gallery will also feature a number of lead and stone sculptures celebrating love, a common theme during the reign of Louis XIV, such as Marsy's statue of *Cupid Holding a Sunflower Bouquet*, which crowned the canopy housing the marble group *Apollo Served by the Nymphs* in the Apollo's Baths Grove.



Cupid Holding a Sunflower Bouquet,
Gaspard Marsy
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

6 | The Great Royal Estate

The Royal Estate of Versailles stretches well beyond the Palace Garden and encompasses the Swiss Pond, the Grand Canal, the Menagerie and the Trianon Estate. This room calls special attention to the Grand Trianon, whose architecture, interior décor, and gardens pay homage to nature, seen through the mythological prism of the love affairs of the gods. The monumental sculpture of *Zephyr and Flora* is exhibited here to evoke the gardens of the Grand Trianon, where the king enjoyed walking. Commissioned by Louis XIV, this sculptural masterpiece was incorporated into the collections of the Palace of Versailles in 2022 following extensive research making it possible to trace back its extraordinary journey over the centuries.



Zephyr and Flora,
Philippe Bertrand, René Frémin, Jacques Bousseau
© Palace of Versailles / C. Fouin

The public will also be able to enjoy works showing the Marly Estate and its extravagant castle, where Louis XIV only invited his closest friends, and of which nothing survives today. *La végétation y était sculptée comme le marbre et le complexe réunissait un pavillon royal et douze pavillons d'invités*. Louis XIV y fit son premier séjour en 1686 et voulait y être en paix, entouré de ses intimes.

Finally, an aerial drone image will be projected on a digital screen so that visitors can appreciate the immensity of the modern-day Estate of Versailles.



General View of the Palace and Gardens of Marly, circa 1724,
Pierre-Denis Martin
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © JM Manai

7 | Louis XV: An Interior Transformation

King Louis XV's architect, Ange-Jacques Gabriel, had no trouble measuring up to his predecessors. Though we have him to thank for certain iconic buildings, like the Petit Trianon and the Royal Opera, he generally respected the craft of his predecessors, working not to transform the Palace's architecture but rather demonstrating his talents through interior design and décor. Inside the Palace, Gabriel managed a top-to-bottom overhaul of the apartments at Louis XV's behest, designing perfectly proportioned spaces for the royal family—and his rococo panelling designs (often sculpted by another genius, Jacques Verberckt) remain epitomes of the genre.

The search for intimate spaces often led sovereigns to hide out in private, interior apartments, creating a universe of fantasy therein. Queen Marie Leszczyńska went so far as to take up the brush herself (with the help of the painters of the King's Private Chambers) to paint the panels of her Chinese Chamber recently returned to Versailles' collections and presented in the gallery.



Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France,
Jean-Marc Nattier
© RMN-GP (Palace of Versailles) © G. Blot

The collection portrays a picturesque image of China, inspired by the tales of travellers to the land of Cathay, and manifests the queen's taste for all things Chinese. Indeed, Marie Leszczyńska was particularly interested in missions to the Far East. Displayed in the gallery alongside Gabriel's preparatory sketches, these paintings offer an indirect glimpse into the Chinese Chamber, typical of the Louis XV style, which was demolished in the late 18th century.



Merchants Making Bundles, a Jesuit and a Mandarin in Conversation,
Marie Leszczyńska
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

8 | The End of the Ancien Régime

The reign of Louis XVI was much shorter than those of his two predecessors: only fifteen years stood between his coronation from the Revolution in 1789. But this period holds a special importance for the Palace since it was the one in which its style was cemented for posterity. The Palace of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, invaded 6 October 1789, was emptied out and pillaged. Most of the furniture was sold off, while the strongest symbols of the monarchy (such as beds, thrones, and coaches) were destroyed.

This room bears witness to the neoclassical sophistication of the princely décor of Louis XVI's era, coming from apartments that do not survive today, such as the "winged lion" piece of wood panelling from the apartment of the Count of Provence, the future Louis XVIII and brother to Louis XVI. For their part, the paintings of Hubert Robert and Claude-Louis Châtelet remind us of the importance of gardens in this pre-romantic era.



Marie-Antoinette as a Vestal, attributed to Charles Le Clercq
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin



The Grove of the Baths of Apollo,
Hubert Robert
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

9 | The Historical Galleries of Versailles “To All the Glories of France”

Rising to the throne with the favour of the revolutionary spirit of July 1830, King Louis Philippe was granted the residencies of the Crown, notably Versailles, which had not been occupied by a sovereign since 1789. Not wanting to seat himself there, he decided to transform the Palace into a museum covering 14 centuries of French history, from the reign of Clovis up to his own accession. Dedicated to “All the glories of France”, The Historical Galleries of Versailles called for national reconciliation after forty years of political turmoil and changing regimes.

The work took more than 15 years, with much of the Palace transformed to present collections of paintings and sculptures, bringing together some 6,000 pieces. Several works from this period will be displayed in this room: paintings showing Louis Philippe in the new museum, the portrait of his architect Frédéric Nepveu, several pieces of furniture and Horace Vernet’s vast painting showing Louis Philippe and his sons leaving the Palace of Versailles through the Honor Gate.



Frère Philippe Copying the Portrait of Chancellor Etienne Pasquier in the Constantine Room of the Palace of Versailles
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © JM Manai



Louis Philippe Visiting the Gallery of Great Battles, 1837,
François-Joseph Heim
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

10 | Versailles Revival

This room will be devoted to the spectacular popularity, nostalgia, curiosity, and passion that developed around Versailles and the Ancien Régime at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. In this era, the Palace of Versailles became an ambiguous place, at once a symbol of political power, a witness to lost grandeur, and the site of nostalgic revelry.

This room will display works illustrating the political role of Versailles in this era, such as the painting of the 1889 Centenary Celebration of the Estates General by Alfred Roll and the famous desk where the 1919 Treaty of Versailles was signed in the Hall of Mirrors.

This room also calls attention to the efforts to reconstitute the Palace of the Kings of France that began at the urging of the curator Pierre de Nolhac in 1890. The prestige of the Palace only grew, attracting a worldly and artistic society. Writers and painters converged at Versailles to explore its mysteries, representing it as at once lively, lavish, and melancholy, as shown in the immense painting *Fête de nuit* (Night Party) by Gaston La Touche.



Pierre de Nolhac (1859-1936),
Henri Girault de Nolhac
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN
© C. Fouin



Night Party,
Gaston La Touche
© Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN © C. Fouin

11 | A Never-Ending Celebration

Versailles has always been, both before and after the revolution, a symbol of power, a site of the grandest parties but also a place of creation. Plays, operas, concerts and fireworks are inextricable from this Palace, which has once again become a major artistic scene, today raising the curtain on over 100 performances a year. The extravagant festivities of Louis XIV first set

this pace, starting with his famous “Delights of the Enchanted Island” parties in 1664. The Fountain Shows and the Night Parties thrived during the 19th and 20th centuries, alternating with or complementing diplomatic events. In this inherently audio-visual room will be projected three videos on the themes: *Versailles, the Artistic Hub*; *Versailles and the Never-Ending Party*; and *Versailles, the Political Scene*.



The King of England, George VI (1895-1952), arriving at the Palace of Versailles in 1939
© LAPI / Roger-Viollet



Richard Cœur de Lion à l'Opéra royal du château de Versailles
© CVS / Agathe Poupeney



PART II | **PRACTICAL
INFORMATION**

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

DIRECTIONS FROM PARIS

RER line C, Versailles Château - Rive Gauche station.

SNCF trains from Gare Montparnasse to Versailles - Chantiers station.

SNCF trains from Gare Saint-Lazare to Versailles - Rive Droite station.

Bus line 171 from Pont de Sèvres to Versailles - Place d'Armes.

Highway A13 (towards Rouen), exit Versailles - Château.

Parking available at Place d'Armes. Parking fees apply (visitors with disabilities exempt); free parking as of 7:30 pm when evening performances are scheduled.

HOURS OF OPERATION

The Palace of Versailles is open every day except Mondays, 25 December and 1 January.

– Summer hours (until 31 October): 9.00 am - 6.30 pm, last entry at 6.00 pm (ticket counters close at 5.45 pm)
– Winter hours (as of 1 November): 9.00 am - 5.30 pm, last entry at 5.00 pm (ticket counters close at 4.50 pm)

PRICES

Gallery accessible with Passport or Palace tickets, "1 Year in Versailles" annual pass, and for visitors eligible for free entry (under 18, EU residents under 26, disabled visitors, job-seekers residing in France, etc.)

Palace ticket, valid for temporary exhibitions: €19.50, reduced rate €14.50.

One-day passport valid for the Palace and Gardens, the Trianon, the estate of Marie-Antoinette and temporary exhibitions: €21.50.

VERSAILLES FOR EVERYONE

Free entry to the Palace (guided tours not applicable):

– Visitors with disabilities and care partners upon presentation of a disability card.

– Recipients of minimum social benefits upon presentation of proof of status dating from less than 6 months.

Information and reservations: + 33 (0)1 30 83 75 05 and versaillespourtous@chateauversailles.fr

AUDIO GUIDES

Palace tour: audio guides in 11 languages, plus a version in French Sign Language.

PALACE OF VERSAILLES APP

Download the exhibition itinerary on the app available from the App Store and Google Play.

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