



LOUIS XV

PASSIONS OF A KING


CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

Exhibition 18 October 2022 – 19 February 2023





Louis XV at the age of ten, Rosalba Carriera, 1720-1721, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister © BPK, Berlin, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / image SKD

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Press release

In October 2022, the Palace of Versailles is for the first time devoting a major exhibition to king Louis XV to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the return of the Court to Versailles. Nearly 400 works contributed by collections from all around the world, many of which have never been seen in public or put in display in France before, cast a new light on the person and give the public a glimpse of the complex individual behind the monarch: his childhood, his entourage, his family and his many passions. The exhibition also reveals his great interest in the arts and involvement in the emergence of the Rococo in the 18th century.

Born in 1710 in Versailles, Louis XV was the son of the Duke of Burgundy and Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy, and Louis XIV's great-grandson. He became heir to the throne or "Dauphin" on the death of his father in 1712 and king at the age of five in 1715 on the death of the Louis XIV. In 1722, shortly after the government and Court returned to Versailles, the young king was crowned in Reims. This ceremony marked the beginning of a long reign that would stretch over fifty years, a chapter in which France's cultural and artistic model gained traction across Europe and the philosophy of the Enlightenment emerged.

This landmark exhibition seeks to reveal more about Louis XV whose reign and personality remain somewhat of a mystery: who was Louis XV and what was he like? What were his passions? What were the arts like in his day, what were his personal tastes and what did his day-to-day life look like?

Part one, *the man in private*, looks at the King's childhood, his upbringing, entourage and family. It provides a greater understanding of how the character of the monarch known as the "Bien-Aimé" or beloved was first forged. Timid and melancholic by nature, Louis XV preferred the intimate atmosphere of his private apartments to public life and surrounded himself with a close circle of trusted men and women. A devout believer, he paradoxically maintained relationships throughout his life with a series of mistresses, some of whom – madame de Pompadour especially –, had a significant influence on the King.

Part two, dedicated to the *passions of the king*, focuses on his personal passions, first and foremost among which were the sciences, books, botany, hunting and also his taste for architecture. He funded epic maritime expeditions, turned the Trianon into a garden for botanical experiments, commissioned cutting-edge scientific devices and ordered geographers and astronomers to draw up maps of France.

The final part, entitled *Louis XV and the arts of his time*, highlights the style so closely linked to his reign by showing what the world he lived in actually looked like. Visitors are invited to discover genuine masterpieces of Rocaille art and to gain an understanding of the foundations of this multi-faceted style which, released from all restrictions of symmetry and formal rules, revolutionised the artistic creation of the 18th century. The exhibition also reveals the key works which surrounded the King and those closest to him in their daily lives.

RE-OPENING OF THE APARTMENT OF MADAME DU BARRY

To mark the opening of this exhibition, the apartments of madame Du Barry, precious testimony to the intimate Versailles of Louis XV, have been re-opened to public after restoration work lasting eighteen months.

Visitors can also discover the traces of Louis XV throughout a wide range of areas within the Palace.

EXHIBITION CURATORS

Yves Carlier, Chief Heritage Curator at the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.
Hélène Delalex, Heritage Curator at the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

DESIGN

Martin Michel

WITH THE PATRONAGE OF:

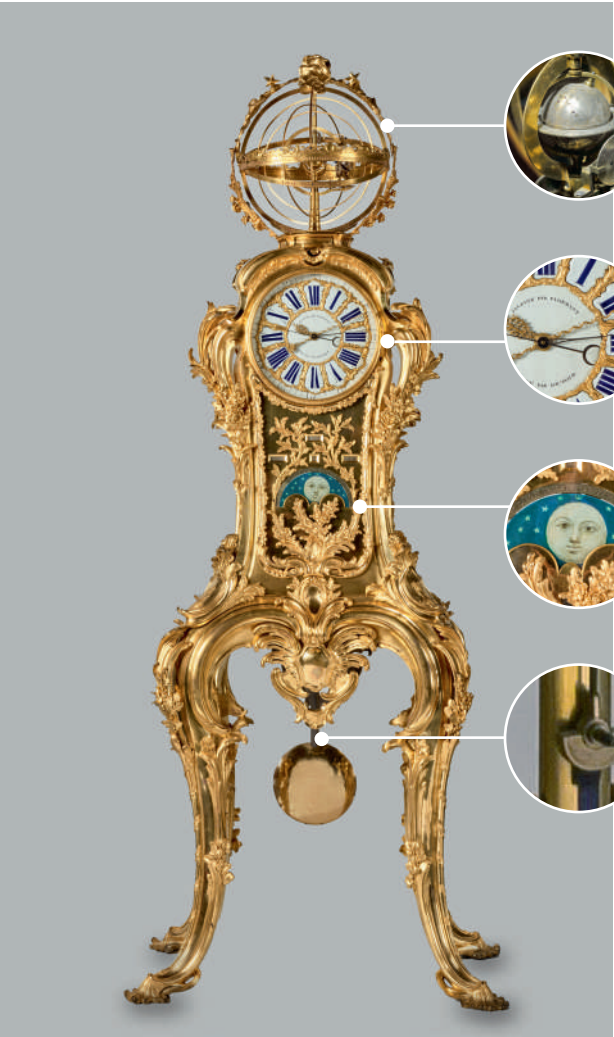




PART ONE | LAYOUT OF THE
EXHIBITION

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition opens with a spectacular piece: the famous Passemant astronomical clock, an icon of the reign as well as of the personal passions of Louis XV. A masterpiece of Rocaille art produced to a design chosen by the king and a scientific monument characteristic of the French spirit of the 18th century, the clock is now on view to visitors following thorough restoration work sponsored by Rolex France. The drawings, historical documents and archives relating to this piece are projected in the room. Still in its place at the very heart of the king's private apartments in the cabinet which bears its name, the clock, together with panelling by Jacques Verbeckt, the king's desk and the medallion commode by Antoine Robert Gaudreaus, form the most wonderful collection of French decorative art from the reign of Louis XV.



The moving sphere shows the Copernican system of the universe. We see the orbits of the moon and the planets – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – around the Sun, as well as the movement and rotation of the Moon around the Earth. The clock indicates the two equinoxes, the two solstices as well as solar and lunar eclipses

The clock dial composed of sixty-one enamelled cartouches indicates the hour, the true (solar) minute, the average minute and the second, with the pendulum marking the time.

The calendar slots indicate the days of the week, the date, the month and the year up to 9999, taking leap years into account. The revolving disk indicates the phases of the Moon.

The pendulum with heat compensation, made of steel and copper, marks the seconds. The different expansion rates of the metals acts as a natural thermometer.

The Louis XV astronomical clock

Louis XV astronomical clock, Claude-Siméon Passemant (1702-1769), engineer; Louis Dauthiau (1713-after 1769), clockmaker to the king since 1751; Jacques (1678-1755) and Philippe (1714-1774) Caffieri, sculptors, metal casters and engravers, Paris, 1749-1753, engraved and gilt bronze, enamel, steel, brass, copper, glass and paint, H. 226 cm; L. 83.2 cm; D 53 cm, Versailles, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin



Detailed view of the moving sphere © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin

1 THE MAN IN PRIVATE

THE CHILD KING

The first section of the exhibition reveals a series of works presenting the direct ancestors of the king and the crushing weight of the heritage of Louis XIV. It also evokes this “graveyard childhood” during which the entire family of the future Louis XV vanished: a terrifying series of losses which, in the space of less than two years, decimated three generations of presumed heirs to Louis XIV and left him haunted by death his entire life.

Stricken with illness at only age two, he was saved from death by Madame de Ventadour, Governess to the Royal Family. She banished the doctors who had just inflicted a fatal blood-letting on his older brother, prohibiting them from coming near him. Throughout his life, Louis XV’s love for the woman he now called “Maman Ventadour” was as deep as it was unchanging.

His upbringing

For the first years of his life, Louis XV grew up “in the hands of the women”, under the protection of Madame de Ventadour and the supervision of Madame de Maintenon. The latter’s principles in terms of upbringing meant that the child was never reprimanded or told not to do something, so as to avoid him getting in to the habit of obeying. The young Louis XV therefore enjoyed considerable freedom until the age of 7 when, according to tradition, he was then “handed over to the men”. His training in the “profession of king” then began. His education, overseen by his governor, the Maréchal de Villeroy, and his preceptor, Cardinal de Fleury, nurtured his interest in the sciences, botany, astronomy, geography and history. He also received political, practical and scientific instruction from the then Regent, the Duke of Orléans. From the age of ten, he took part in meetings of the cabinet.



Madame de Ventadour with king Louis XIV and his heirs

Attributed to Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746) and his studio, circa 1715, oil on canvas, London, with kind permission from the Trustees of the Wallace Collection © château de Versailles / Christophe Fouin

This impressively large painting shows Louis XIV surrounded by his heirs: Louis, the Grand Dauphin dressed in blue and the Duke of Burgundy in red, who died in 1711 and 1712 respectively. The king, seated, is gesturing towards his great-grandson, the Duke of Anjou and future Louis XV. The bust of Henri IV dominates the left of the scene which is completed by that of Louis XIII on the right. The heir apparent, aged two, is retained by a golden cord held by the person most probably responsible for commissioning this painting: the Duchess of Ventadour, Governess to the Royal Family.

TWO EXCEPTIONAL LOANS FROM THE WALLACE COLLECTION

The Wallace Collection now allows certain works to travel under quite exceptional circumstances. FOR this landmark exhibition, the high-profile museum has loaned two iconic works: the painting by Largillière representing Louis XIV and his heirs, which has been thoroughly restored, and the commode delivered by Gaudreaus for Louis XV’s new bedchamber. This key piece of furniture is now back at the Palace of Versailles for the first time since 1774.



Mechanical painting: The Education of Louis XV (The Dance Lesson)

Attributed to Father Sébastien (né Jean) Truchet (1657-1729), Paris, circa 1720, Private collection © DR

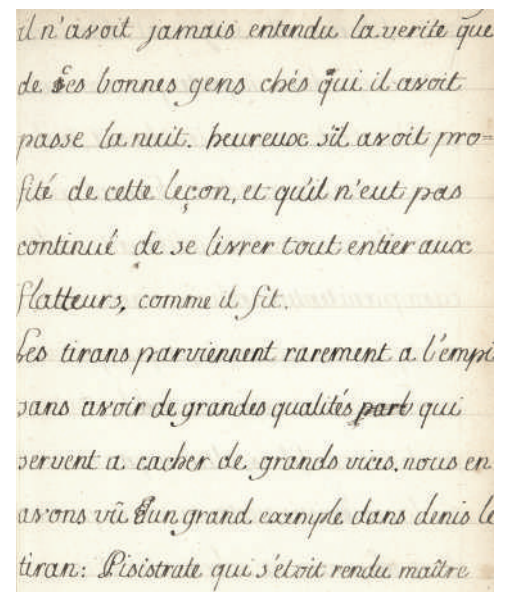
The recent discovery of this mechanical painting is fascinating in more than one way. Not only does it reveal a previously unknown image of the young Louis XV but it casts light on the existence of this anonymous work, kept in the Musée Carnavalet since 1897, representing the young Louis XV being given a science lesson. This mysterious little painting, oil on copper, is in fact the third scene of this painting, one scene of which is in fact missing.

The work is all the more significant given that moving images dating from this period are extraordinarily rare. This work consists of four paintings, oil on copper, showing the various activities comprising the education of Louis XV in the Tuileries Palace, a previously unknown image. Like a miniature theatre, the paintings take turns to appear in four successive acts thanks to a clockwork mechanism: *The Dancing Lesson*, *The Fencing Lesson*, *The Science Lesson* and *The Hunting Lesson*. From one image to the next, the spectator therefore watches the young sovereign grow up and flourish.



Louis XV as a child aged five

Antoine Coysevox (1640-1720), 1716, New York, The Frick Collection © The Frick Collection



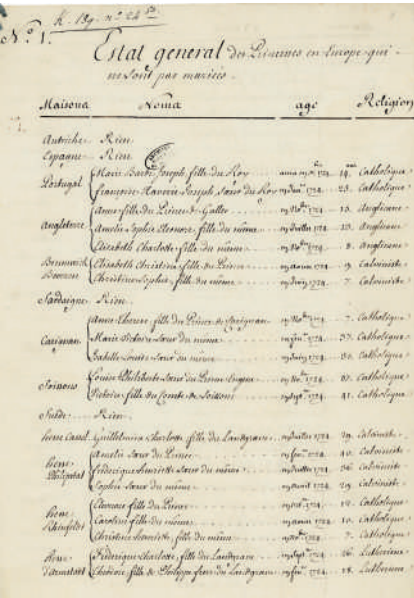
Handwriting exercises of the King Louis XV, written in his hand

Louis XV (1710-1774) and André-Hercule de Fleury (1653-1743), 1717-1723, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Manuscripts department, French 2324 © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Marriage

To guarantee the future of the Bourbon dynasty, the young king had to be married as quickly as possible. France and Spain agreed on a double marriage which would seal their alliance: the daughter of the king of Spain would marry Louis XV while the heir to the Spanish throne would marry the daughter of the Regent. Aged just 4 years old, the Infanta of Spain arrived in Versailles in the spring of 1722. Lively and vivacious, she quickly claimed to be very fond of her particularly handsome king. However Louis XV was repulsed by the idea of getting married so young and hardly said a word to her. The Infanta was in the end considered to be too young to have children and was abruptly sent back to Spain just three years later.

Further to this episode, the Foreign Affairs department worked hard to find the perfect wife. In March 1725, “lists of unmarried European princesses” were drawn up in a methodical manner. The most well-documented of these include details concerning the health, supposed fertility, religious beliefs, diplomatic alliances and even family social status of the princesses.



List of European princesses who are not married

circa 1723, Paris, National Archives, © Archives nationales

Marie Leszczyńska, Princess of Poland, who did not even feature on this *shortlist*, was finally selected for her discretion and her piety and she went on to marry the King in 1725. In the space of ten years, the couple had ten children but only their six daughters and one son, the Dauphin, would live to adulthood.



Portrait of Marie-Anne-Victoire of Spain
Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746), 1724, oil on canvas, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado © Akg-images

In 1724, Nicolas de Largillière painted this official portrait for the king of Spain. The Infanta, then aged six, is shown standing alone against the backdrop of a palace which appears to be cold and out of proportion. Despite the solemnity of the décor, the painter managed to produce a poetic image showing the pert majesty of the child. She is wearing sumptuous jewels, including perhaps those gifted to her by her father and her future husband. Despite her young age, the Infanta displays the dignity and aplomb required by her rank and her future high position. This work was presented at the La Granja palace during the reign of Felipe V.

THE CORONATION CEREMONY

The coronation marked the end of the king’s childhood, opening the way to personal authority. On 25 October 1722, aged 11, Louis XV was crowned in Reims cathedral.



Crown of Louis XV
Augustin Duflos (circa 1700-1771) and Claude-Laurent Rondé (?-1723), 1722, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Objets d’Art Department © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Martine Beck-Coppola

The king of France was crowned with what was known as the crown of Charlemagne, which was kept in Saint-Denis and had vanished during the Revolution. Louis XV was first of all crowned with the crown of Charlemagne, then, the Archbishop of Reims placed on his head another crown which he kept on for the celebrations. This crown was one of the most lavish ever made. After the coronation, it was garnished with facsimile stones as a souvenir. It is this version which is on display in the exhibition.

MASTERPIECES OF THE MUSÉE DU LOUVRE

The Louvre has most generously loaned several masterpieces from its collections for the exhibition. These are taken from the Objets d’art, Sculptures, Graphic Arts and Paintings departments.

FAMILY

The King suffered from growing up without parents or siblings, so his own family formed a refuge and a constant source of reassurance. His relationship with his queen Marie Leszczyńska was perfect for many years however the couple grew apart following her numerous pregnancies. Louis XV nevertheless remained very attached to her and became more attentive further to advice from madame de Pompadour.

The sovereign’s relations with his children changed over time. As they grew up, the King made sure they spent time together, in particular, by dining alone with them in his rooms. While his son, the Dauphin, maintained a respectful distance, his daughters (to whom he gave nicknames) were closer to him and in the habit of visiting him almost every day. In his final years, a great deal of his paternal affection was focused on his grandchildren.



Marie-Adélaïde de France, known as Madame Adélaïde, daughter of Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska
Jean-Marc Nattier (1685-1766), circa 1750, Versailles, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. © RMN-GP (Château de Versailles) © Gérard Blot

THE ENTOURAGE

From his childhood onwards, the king sought out the company of women, in particular, that of his governess, Madame de Ventadour, or his nanny, and of other women with whom he would remain close for his entire life, such as the Countess of Toulouse who had known his mother. Upon reaching adulthood, Louis XV, reputed as being the most handsome man in the kingdom, also had several mistresses and favourites: the Nesle sisters, madame de Pompadour who went on to become his friend and advisor, and madame Du Barry.



Madame de Pompadour as Friendship,

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714-1785), 1753, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Sculpture department © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Adrien Didierjean

By representing madame de Pompadour allegorically as Friendship, Pigalle produced a strong political image aimed at making her new status at the side of Louis XV official. The Marquise was to have the sculpture installed at the heart of her Bellevue estate, in the grove named Friendship.



Cameo: “Louis XV”

Jacques Guay (1711-1793), mid-18th century Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coins, Medals and Antiques Department © Bibliothèque nationale de France



Cameo: “Portrait of Louis XV”

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson (1721-1764), marquise de Pompadour, circa 1750, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coins, Medals and Antiques Department, Cameo © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Under the influence of madame de Pompadour, the art of engraving on precious stones experienced a golden age in France in the mid-18th century. From 1745 to 1764, the Marquise was the patron and muse of the engraver Jacques Guay. There are two known intaglios and three cameos signed by Pompadour, evidence that the Marquise devoted herself to this difficult art which requires time, patience and attention to detail. These personal objects all come from the collections of madame de Pompadour. They show portraits of the king engraved by the Marquise herself or set in a ring which she wore on her hand, as well as allegories of Friendship and seals decorated with their interwoven initials.

THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, A MAJOR LENDER TO THE EXHIBITION

Some fifty pieces – cameos, intaglios, medals, stamps, objects as well as manuscripts – are on display in the exhibition thanks to the exceptional participation of Bibliothèque nationale de France. These rare works are precious witnesses to the life of Louis XV.

The king in his private chambers: intimate suppers

Out of the many noble ladies and gentlemen of the Court who surrounded Louis XV throughout his life, only a small number belonged to what might be called his “inner circle”. Reserved by nature, the Duke of Croÿ described Louis XV as “a creature of habit, being fond of his old friends, finding it hard to part with them, and not liking new faces”. Preferring the company of his closest friends, several times a week, the monarch would invite some fifteen guests to take supper in his private chambers. Louis XV would appear relaxed and the sumptuous nature of the food was matched only by the art of conversation.



Berkeley Service

Jacques Roëttiers (1707-1784), circa 1737, private collection © Private collection / DR

The Berkeley Service, the last 18th century Paris silverware service in private hands, is the work of Jacques Roëttiers, appointed goldsmith to the King in 1737. This sumptuous dinner service, all 141 pieces of which are on display, gives a glimpse of the services used in the king's private chambers. This exceptional set of pieces is all the more valuable given the small scale of Roëttiers' production.

LOUIS XV AND RELIGION

This section describes the “Most Christian” king's ambiguous relationship with religion. Louis XV was a man of his times and a devout Christian – a fact all too often forgotten. Religion was seen as one of the pillars of unity within the kingdom, His liaisons with his favourites sat uneasily with his conscience and he preferred not to take communion for over thirty years rather than to do so contrary to his own convictions.



Chalice

Robert-Joseph Auguste (1723-1805) and Pierre Langlois (?-?), 1755-1760, Radmirje, Last Cerkve © Narodna galerija, Ljubljana

Despite being without a doubt one of the major works by Robert-Joseph Auguste still in existence, the chalice gifted by the Dauphine Marie-Josèphe de Saxe to the sanctuary dedicated to Saint François-Xavier de Radmirje in Slovenia remains largely unknown. Its almost incongruous presence in this place is not a coincidence. In around 1715, the link made between Saint François-Xavier and the end of the plague epidemic in the region led to a sudden rise in the adoration of this saint. The devotion touched the greatest Catholic families in the German world and across central Europe, including the imperial family. The Dauphine Marie-Josèphe made numerous offerings to the church in Radmirje which are still kept there.



© Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Hervé Lewandowski

THE "LITTLE HOUSE OF THE KING"

Around 1753, shortly after the decision by the marquise de Pompadour to end her physical relationship with the king, Louis XV became involved in a series of fleeting love affairs as a new remedy for his melancholia. These "minor mistresses" (not presented at Court) were housed in discrete residences located near to the Palace, in the Parc aux Cerfs area, which helped bolster the fantastic rumours and dark reputation surrounding the king. Once their time was over, the young women were thanked with substantial sums of money, as demonstrated by several archive materials on display in the exhibition.

THE FAVOURITES: LOVE IN THREE MASTERPIECES

In the spring of 1768, the Duke of Richelieu introduced Jeanne Bécu (the future madame Du Barry) to Louis XV who became deeply enamoured of her. As she began to return his affections, the king naturally abandoned his earlier excesses. The sculptures on display in this room come from the collections belonging to madame de Pompadour and madame Du Barry. They represent Amour (or Love), a major theme in the 18th century.

Amour trying one of his arrows

Jacques Saly (1717-1776), 1753, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Sculpture department

Commissioned by the marquise de Pompadour most probably in 1752, this sculpture was presented to Louis XV in 1753, just a few days before being put on display in the Salon. Destined initially as a decoration for the Château de Crécy, it was quickly moved to the Château de Bellevue.

Saly's execution of the statue is astounding in its virtuosity, both in the ornamental details on the trunk and in the plump flesh of the little Eros and the wavy locks of his hair. The pedestal, created by Jacques Verberckt, celebrated for his admirable wood carvings which decorate the most prestigious châteaux (Versailles, Fontainebleau, Rambouillet...), is of equally exceptional quality with its finely worked garlands of flowers.

THE DAMIENS ATTACK

In the evening of the fifth of January 1757, as he was about to get into a carriage, Louis XV was rushed by an individual who stabbed his right side with a knife. The king did not immediately notice that he had been injured but nevertheless had the presence of mind to point out his attacker to his guards. On touching the place where he had been struck, he pulled away his hand to find it covered in blood. He was taken to his apartments, given treatment and declared out of danger just a few days later. The would-be assassin, Robert-François Damiens, was arrested and imprisoned in Versailles. Damiens was found guilty on 26 March 1757 and executed on 28 March at the Place de Grève in Paris. The weapon used in the crime and the hand which had held it were burned, and Damiens was then dismembered. As well as a great deal of literature, Damiens' attack lives on for us in the substantial court files and damning evidence, on display here for the very first time.



The Damiens affair: evidence shown in court

Rosary, Leather glove, Two collars or neck ties, Evidence case, Letter addressed to the king by Damiens, 1757, Paris, Archives nationales
© Archives nationales

2 THE PASSIONS OF THE KING

A TASTE FOR BOOKS

Louis XV was one of the best educated princes of his time. He loved books, would himself read in French, Italian and Latin, and, it appears, had little call for those whose job was to read to him. He demonstrated a vast range of knowledge which surprised those who did not know him. Throughout his reign, he had many libraries installed in all of his residences.

Shown here as paintings, the exhibition presents some twenty works taken from the royal libraries, luxurious editions produced by the very best bookbinders.



La istoria universale provata con monumenti, e figurata con simboli degli Antichi

Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729), Rome, Antonio de' Rossi, 1747, Roman binding in calfskin with the bearing the crest of Louis XV, Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles, Res in-4 I 284 a © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin



Royal almanac for the year 1752

Paris, André-François Le Breton, 1752, binding by Dubuisson Junior in white Morocco leather, bearing the crests of France and Navarre, the initials LBA and royal symbols (sceptre and hand of justice), Versailles, Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon. © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin

THE KING & SCIENCES

Louis XV was passionate about the sciences not just as sovereign, protecting and encouraging scientific discovery, but also by personal inclination. Astronomy, mechanics, optics, clock making, botany, the King was deeply interested in many subjects. Right throughout his reign, he sought out the company of experts: the astronomers Cassini, the Lemonnier brothers - one an astronomer and the other a physician and botanist, the famous Buffon and Jussieu, the surgeon La Peyronie and, among his courtiers, the Duke of Croÿ and the Duke of Chaulnes, inventor of precision instruments. The royal collections were filled with prodigious scientific instruments, designed by the leading experts and built by the greatest artists: astronomical clocks, moving globes, microscopes and also telescopes, several of which were to be found in the king's private chambers in Versailles. He also had tower rooms where he would practice this exercise combining dexterity and the mathematical sciences.

In the Trianon, he created the largest botanical garden in Europe, bringing together over 4,000 varieties of plants from every continent. In the park surrounding the Château de La Muette, an optics and physics laboratory held the largest telescope in existence. IN Versailles, experimental science, known as "entertaining science", was given a welcome, such as, for example, in 1746, the spectacular experiment using electricity carried out in the Hall of Mirrors by the Abbé Nollet.

The exhibition presents many of the high precision scientific instruments created for Louis XV.



Edward Nairne's electrostatic machine

Edward Nairne (1726-1806), Paris, Musée des Arts et Métiers – Conservatoire national des arts et métiers © Musée des Arts et Métiers – Cnam, Paris / photo Michèle Favareille



Aloe vera, Claude Aubriet (1665-1742), 1707-1742



Aloe vera, Madeleine Basseporte (1701-1780) 1742-1780



Hibiscus, Claude Aubriet (1665-1742) 1707-1742

© MNHN, photo credit: Tony Querrec (RMN)

The collection of the King's vellums

Gouaches on vellum, Paris, Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, collection of vellums

During the reign of Louis XV, the exotic plants brought back by explorer naturalists contributed to the glory of the king by growing vigorously in the royal gardens and greenhouses. Their representations in the precious collection of the King's vellums bear witness to the grandeur of the sovereign.

While this collection of natural history paintings done on the skin of newborn calves, a material whose fine grain and transparency allow an image that is as sumptuous as it is accurate, grew during the reign of Louis XV, it had by that time been in existence for a century already. Two exceptionally long-lived artists in turn helped grow the collection of vellums: Claude Aubriet, the king's painter for miniatures from 1707 to 1742, and Madeleine Basseporte, holder of the same post from 1742 to 1780.

Trained by his predecessor Jean Joubert, the former initiated the latter then worked with her from 1735 onward, while she in turn passed on the baton to Gérard Van Spaendonck. This transfer of knowledge from painter to painter contributed to the preservation of the principles of style established by the first in the series, Nicolas Robert: specimens are represented in isolation, painted as in nature, and shown in a gold-leaf frame.

The requirement for the representations to be accurate, the beauty of the drawings and the unity of style between the works, maintained over centuries, make this collection of vellums a reference work to this day in terms of scientific illustration.

A REMARKABLE LOAN FROM THE MUSÉUM NATIONAL D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE

France's Muséum national d'histoire naturelle has exceptionally agreed to loan twenty admirable pieces taken from the collection of the King's vellums.



Terrestrial and celestial moving globes from the King's Physics and Optics rooms in the Château de la Muette

Claude-Siméon Passemant (1702-1769), engineer; Joseph-Léonard Roque (master in 1770), clockmaker; Philippe Caffieri (1714-1774), bronzemaker; Guillaume de La Haye (?-?), engraver, and Gobin (?-?), designer, 1759, Paris, library of the Paris Observatory © Bibliothèque de l'Observatoire de Paris

Listed as historical monuments in 1971, these two moving globes - one terrestrial and the other celestial - come from the Château de La Muette where, in around 1750, Louis XV had ordered the creation of a Pavilion for the study of optics and physics.

These globes, the result of the work of a group of scientists and artists, were created by Passemant, Roque, De La Haye, Gobin and Caffieri. Starting in 1758, on the orders of the Marquis of Marigny, Passemant worked on their design which exceptionally involves the use of clockwork. Their degree of sophistication, both aesthetic and technical, make them both luxury objects to be admired and functional instruments used for the teaching of astronomy.

The clockwork mechanisms concealed within cause the globes to rotate on an axis, in accordance with the rotation of the Earth (24 hours) and, for the celestial globe, in accordance with that of the fixed stars (23 hours, 56 minutes and 4 seconds). They need winding up every eight days.

These masterpieces are some of the most precious scientific instruments ever created and, alongside the Passemant Astronomical Clock, stand as symbols of the personal tastes of Louis XV and of an 18th century marked by the triumph of the arts and the sciences.

Tripod microscope

Claude-Siméon Passemant, engineer; attributed to Jacques and Philippe Caffieri, sculptors and bronze workers; created under the supervision of Michel-Ferdinand d'Albert d'Ailly, Duke of Chaulnes, Paris, circa 1750

The famous tripod microscope created on the instructions of Louis XV by Claude-Siméon Passemant is an extremely rare instrument, one example of which was in the possession of Louis XV. These instruments which are so rare today were also rare in the 18th century. Combining with a remarkable degree of success the most sophisticated technologies and artistic elegance, they were from their creation considered as prestigious objects destined exclusively for the king and for a narrow scientific elite.

Along with other personal scientific instruments, the tripod microscope from the La Muette rooms was most probably at the end of the reign kept in one of the cabinets in the King's personal chambers or his clothes cabinet in the Palace of Versailles, evidencing his interest.

In Versailles, the fashionable enthusiasm for science led to meetings in the private chambers during which the king and the others in attendance devoted themselves to observing: the specimens examined included hairs, seeds, flies' wings, fleas and insects of all kinds, squid gullets and lizard tongues.

This exceptional piece was acquired in 2021 by the Palace of Versailles, thanks to the support of L'Oréal.



THE KING & HUNTING

Just like all the Bourbons, Louis XV was passionate about hunting. He didn't just consider hunting as entertainment but also appreciated its technical aspects. Introduced from the age of six to the various forms of hunting, he showed a marked preference for hunting with hounds and shooting. Hunting was both a pleasure and a necessity as it constituted his primary source of physical activity. Other than when he was ill or off on military campaigns, Louis XV went hunting three times a week on average and was only prevented from doing so by bad weather.

For his courtiers, hunting with the king offered special access to his personal company and a chance of courting his favour as Louis XV often invited those who had been hunting with him to dine in his private rooms.



An African lion being fought by mastiffs

Jean-Jacques Bachelier (1724-1806), 1757, Amiens, musée de Picardie
© RMN-Grand Palais / Tony Querrec



A Polish bear brought down by large dogs

Jean-Jacques Bachelier (1724-1806), 1757, Amiens, musée de Picardie
© RMN-Grand Palais / Tony Querrec

This activity also formed part of the monarch's daily life through the numerous décors ordered for his apartments: hunting scenes, portraits of his favourite dogs from the pack and maps of estates and forests adorned the gilt room and the Petite Galerie known as the "exotic hunts" hall (presented in its entirety in the exhibition) as well as the dining rooms of Fontainebleau, Compiègne and Choisy.

Ordered by the king's Direction of Buildings for the Château de Choisy, these two spectacular works provide an excellent illustration of the king's tastes. The paintings were hung in the main dining room of the Petit Château which Louis XV had built in 1754.

ON EXCEPTIONAL LOAN FROM THE MUSÉE DE PICARDIE

The Louis XV Exotic Hunts series in its entirety (1735-1739)



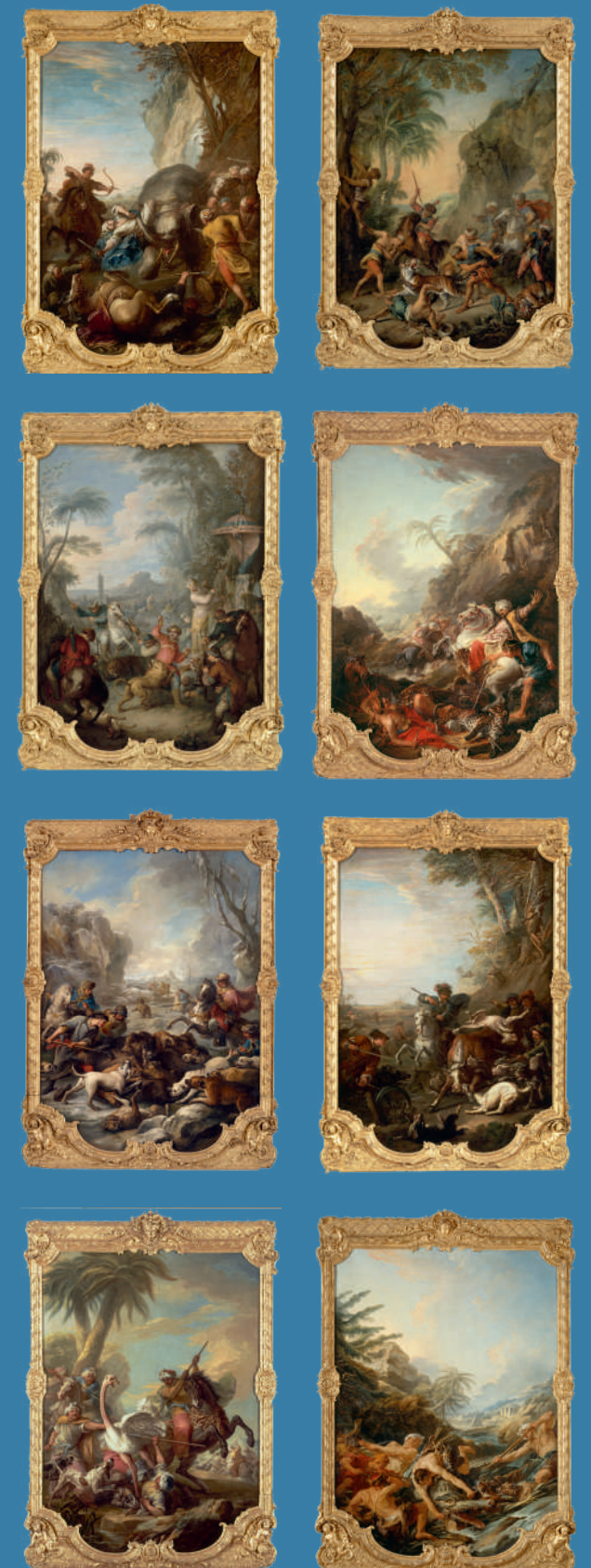
Kept today in the Musée de Picardie in Amiens, Louis XV's *Exotic Hunts* cycle is one of the most beautiful décors painted for the Palace of Versailles in the first half of the 18th century. These nine paintings illustrate the king's personal tastes. They are accompanied by two other canvases, also on exceptional loan,

the two monumental animal scenes painted by Jean-Jacques Bachelier for the Château de Choisy which can today be seen at the Musée de Picardie.

The work on the King's personal apartments began in 1722. *Hunts in foreign lands* were created for the Petite Galerie, located in the attic of the Palace (the current apartments of madame Du Barry). These paintings offer a spectacular and vivid illustration of the king's predilection for hunting-themed paintings and his interest in rare animals.

Painted by the most famous artists of the time, the paintings form the main ornament of the gallery. There are six paintings in total and they all depict the hunting of an exotic animal: in April 1736, delivery was made of *the Lion Hunt* by Jean-François de Troy, *the Elephant Hunt* by Charles Parrocel, *the Tiger Hunt* by Nicolas Lancret, *the Leopard Hunt* by François Boucher, *the Bear Hunt* by Carle Van Loo and *the Chinese Hunt* by Jean-Baptiste Pater. The extension of the gallery in 1738 led to two additional paintings being commissioned: *an Ostrich Hunt* by Van Loo and *a Wild Bull hunt* by Parrocel. In 1739, one final modification was made to the décor: the *Chinese Hunt* by Pater was removed and replaced by the *Crocodile Hunt* painted by Boucher.

These nine paintings are now back at the Palace of Versailles for the first time since 1767. On this occasion, they are presented as they were historically hung, in a reconstitution of the Petite galerie of *Exotic hunts* built to its original dimensions.





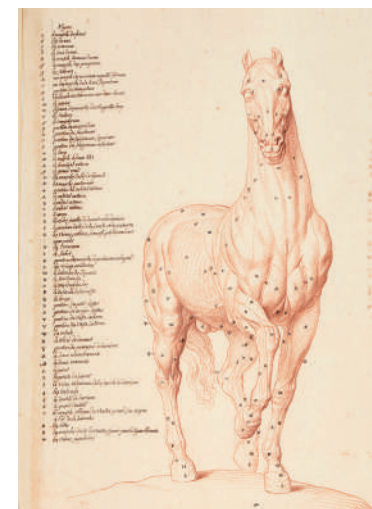
Right hand of the equestrian statue of Louis XV, Edme Bouchardon (1698-1762), 1758, Paris, musée Carnavalet – History of Paris, collection of the musée du Louvre © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / image RMN-GP

LOUIS XV BUILDER

Architecture and interior design were most decidedly artistic areas for which Louis XV had a veritable passion, going as far as to work alone on certain projects with his chief architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel. A passion evidenced by the incessant conversions or reconstructions of the royal palaces, as well as by the creation of royal squares both in Paris and the provinces. From the very start of his reign, the first “major projects” made their appearance, transforming the royal residences such as Compiègne and Fontainebleau. In the middle of his reign, Louis XV also ordered the transformation or extension of the Grand Trianon, the châteaux of Choisy, Bellevue and La Muette, and new constructions such as Saint-Hubert or the Petit Trianon.

His reign was also marked by the redevelopment of several royal palaces which made a considerable contribution to the urban renewal of the kingdom, as well as the construction of key monuments including the École Militaire and the church of Sainte-Geneviève (the future Panthéon) in Paris, the Hôtel Dieu in Lyon, and the Saltworks in Arc-et-Senans. Keen to perfect the art of construction, in 1747, the King founded the École royale des Ponts et Chaussées, destined to train future engineers.

The exhibition brings together for the very first time a full set of scaled-down versions of the statues erected on the royal squares created by Louis XV – Versailles, Rennes, Bordeaux, Rouen and Nancy – and still in existence. It also presents key works by Bouchardon: the right hand of the equestrian statue of the King created for the Place Louis XV (today, Place de la Concorde) in Paris, destroyed in 1792, as well as several preparatory drawings in red ochre.



Copy after the Villa Mattei anatomical study: horse standing, head seen from the front

Edme Bouchardon
(1698-1762), Paris, 1748-1752, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Graphical Arts department © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Laurent Chastel



Louis XV on horseback

Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne (1704-1778), 1769, Bordeaux, musée des Arts décoratifs et du Design © Mairie de Bordeaux – photo: Lysiane Gauthier

The notion of a decorative square with a statue of the sovereign in the centre was in the 18th century one of the key points of the programme for the improvement of French cities. Among all those erected outside of Paris, the example from Bordeaux is one of the masterworks of the construction work from the reign of Louis XV.

In 1729, the architect Jacques Gabriel drew up the plans for a royal square which was only completed in 1755 by his son, Ange-Jacques. In 1731, the carving of the statue was entrusted to Jean-Louis Lemoyne and his son Jean-Baptiste who then went on to create a brilliant series of standing effigies of the King. Despite their fame, all were however taken down and turned into cannon in 1792.

In order to spread the word about the monument, several medallions, an engraving and four reductions in bronze had been ordered. In 1766, Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne received the order for an initial example intended for the King who collected miniature versions of the statues erected to his glory in the different towns of the kingdom. A second reduction was created and put on show at the Salon in 1773: it is most probably this one which is on display here in the exhibition. Created by the artist himself, this reduction in bronze is a *unicum*.

3 LOUIS XV AND THE ARTS OF HIS TIME

SPECTACULAR ROCAILLE

Rococo art, inextricably linked to the reign of Louis XV, developed in France in the early 1720s. The period saw a complete renewal of form due to the unbridled imagination of the master ornamentalists who took inventiveness to limits so audacious that these objects, lacking good equilibrium, were sometimes impossible for craftsmen to create.

The style is characterised by the predominance of the curved line, by light polychromy associated with gilding and by a taste for ornamentation inspired by nature: serpentine lines, spirals, arabesques, decorations inspired by the curves of shells and rocks, geological, plant and floral elements, as well as dragons and exotic motifs. Levity, gaiety, light, transparency: more than a style, Rococo became a way of life for those taking part in the spread of the influence of France.

The exhibition presents some of the most beautiful Rococo masterpieces, of breathtaking virtuosity.



Decoration of vases representing the Four Elements

Meissen manufacture, Johann Joachim Kändler (1706-1775) and Johann Friedrich Eberlein (1695-1749), 1742, Dresden, © Porzellansammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, photo Adrian Sauer

This monumental porcelain work, glorifying the reign of Louis XV, is a masterful example by a pioneer of Europe's leading porcelain manufacture: Johann Joachim Kändler, Court sculptor and Meissen master modeller. In an unprecedented tour de force of porcelain modelling, Kändler stretched the plastic qualities of this material to the limit of what is possible, dissolving the surfaces of the bodies of vases in relief and blending silhouettes into projecting figurative applications.

Ordered in 1741 the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland Augustus III as a gift to Louis XV whom he wished to win over as an ally in the context of the Austrian War of Succession, these vases in the "white gold" of Saxony remained in the end in Dresden: once completed six months later, the political map had already changed.



Chandelier with nine arms, bearing the crest of madame de Pompadour

Jacques Caffieri (1678-1755) and/or Philippe Caffieri (1714-1774), Paris, circa 1750-1755, Paris, bibliothèque Mazarine
© Château de Versailles, dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Christophe Fouin

The exhibition presents one of the two chandeliers created by Caffieri father and son for madame de Pompadour. These chandeliers, absolute icons of the Rococo style, are a veritable symphony of bronze, combining with virtuosity the curves and counter-curves of the acanthus leaf. The ostensible presence of three towers, each supported by a *putto*, is an unambiguous reference to the marquise de Pompadour as the intended recipient or even commissioner of these two identical chandeliers.

The fantastic energy of these chandeliers and their remarkable execution argue strongly in favour of an attribution to Caffieri father and son, even if the name of the name of the bronze worker Edme-Jean Gallien has also been put forward. One must suppose a work created jointly by Jacques Caffieri, metal caster and engraver who worked for the king's Building department and the "Menus-Plaisirs", and his son Philippe who worked in partnership with him before going on to become his successor in 1755.

AN EXCEPTIONAL LOAN FROM THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE MAZARINE

For the first time since their installation in the Institute in 1795, the Bibliothèque Mazarine has loaned one of the two chandeliers bearing the crest of madame de Pompadour. Usually hanging from the ceiling of the Library, this chandelier will for the first time be visible at eye-level to the general public.



Louis XV golden girandoles

Étienne Fessard (1714-1777), 1751-1752, Paris, musée des Arts décoratifs, library, PF Germain engravings archive
© Les Arts décoratifs / Christophe Dellièvre

The two golden girandoles ordered by Louis XV in 1740 and delivered in 1747 were probably the most important pieces ever to come from the workshop of a Paris goldsmith in the 18th century. They were above all the most famous ones, being mentioned in guides to the Palace of Versailles and cited in several works published in the 18th century on the subject fine metal work or their creator. The greatest possible tribute, the *Mercure de France* of September 1748 wrote that "the composition, the finition & the detail are above even the harshest of critics".

Intended initially to be associated with the gold dinner service used during the Grand Couvert dinners, the Germain girandoles were in the end considered as works of art in their own right and placed on display on the commode in the King's bedchamber in Versailles, protected by glass and gilt copper covers.

LOUIS XV & THE ARTS

Which objects surrounded the King and his inner circle in their daily lives? What was the fashion at Court in terms of the arts? What were the King's personal tastes? Passionate about architecture, interior design and the decorative arts, Louis XV regularly went to discover the latest works produced by the Gobelins, Savonnerie and Sèvres workshops and remained loyal to the style of decorative arts from the years 1720 to 1760.

He commissioned the creation of some of the main masterpieces of Rococo art, such as the *Passemant* clock, the medallion commode by Antoine-Robert Gaudreaus, still today placed in the King's Private Chambers in the Palace, or the large commode by the same cabinetmaker, placed in the king's new bedchamber in 1739. **This exceptional piece of furniture left the Palace in June 1774 and is now returning for the first time to Versailles.**



Commode from the bedchamber of Louis XV in Versailles

Antoine-Robert Gaudreaus (circa 1682-1746) and Jacques Caffieri (1678-1755), 1739, with the kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London

An icon of the reign, this exceptional commode was a part of Louis XV's daily life for over thirty-five years. The piece is the result of close cooperation between three artists (and their respective workshops). Antoine-Robert Gaudreaus was tasked with creating the piece and adding the decorative wood veneer. Jacques Caffieri provided the gilt-bronze mounts. Their work was based on a design in colour attributed to the Court sculptor Sébastien-Antoine Slodtz.

This commode is considered as one of the most significant pieces of 18th century French furniture and, above all, as the masterpiece of Rococo art in terms of furniture. Installed in the bedchamber of Louis XV in Versailles, it is of a quite particular type as it features small side cupboards, most probably used by the king's barbers to store their equipment.

The superb bronzes are evidence of the imagination of Caffieri and his mastery of the Rococo style. He makes intelligent use of a combination of almost abstract curves and scrolls for the drawer handles, with details inspired by nature – flowers, branches, crowns composed of shapes reminiscent of seashells and of the wings of birds and bats – together with touches recalling an architectural background.

A restoration programme has been completed in the context of this exhibition. The gilt bronzes were first of all taken apart, then cleaned, waxed and polished, a process which, in those areas where visible abrasions to the metal had occurred, required the addition of pigments and mica powder. Then, concerning the marquetry, the wood veneer was carefully cleaned, reinforced in certain places then protected by the application of wax. The piece was therefore able to recover its full glory.

© Wallace Collection, London, UK / Bridgeman Images



The bringing together of the two most beautiful portraits of the favourites of Louis XV, portraits of the same size produced by the same painter, François-Hubert Drouais, enables their rôle and influence in the area of the arts to be understood. These canvases are accompanied by the most beautiful pieces of furniture owned by them, the quality of which is of itself testimony to their status at Court.



Madame de Pompadour at her Tambour frame

François-Hubert Drouais (1727-1775), 1763-1764, London, The National Gallery © The National Gallery, London

Painted by François-Hubert Drouais, this portrait is one of the last and certainly the most grandiose ever painted of her. Above all, it gives us the most accurate and honest image. At the time, the former favourite had become the “necessary friend” of the king almost twelve years earlier. She is shown here at the age of forty-one, at a time when she is feeling the pain of irremediably worsening health. Begun one year prior to her death and completed posthumously, the painting was delivered to her brother, the Marquis of Marigny. Seated on a settee, the Marquise wears a superb French-style gown and sits surrounded by her books, musical instruments and collections recalling her role as a protectress of the arts.

Decorative commode with porcelain panels

Sèvres Royal Porcelain Manufacture, Martin Carlin (circa 1730-1785) and Charles-Nicolas Dodin (1734-1803), 1765 - 1772, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Objets d'Art department © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Daniel Arnaudet

The Countess Du Barry's taste for furniture with porcelain panels is well known. This commode, delivered in August 1772 to furnish the bedchamber of her apartment in Versailles, is probably the most spectacular example of the practice of including porcelain plaques in works of cabinetmakers under Louis XV.



Portrait of madame Du Barry

François-Hubert Drouais (1727-1775), 1774, Versailles, Yvelines Chamber of Commerce and Industry © CCI PIDF / Côme Sittler

This painting shows Madame Du Barry depicted as the Muse of the arts, seated on a daybed covered in pink draperies. With her powdered hair falling in ringlets down her neck and a faint smile, she wears a low-cut tunic of white silk, decorated at the waist by a blue sash with a golden fringe. In the foreground there is a palette, the bust of a child, a book by the greatest French authors and a plan of the Pavillon de Louveciennes built in 1770. The painting appears to have been intended to hang in the dining room of this property, as evidenced by the inventory of the countess' property drawn up in 1793.



CONCLUSION

The death of the King

After coming down with fever in late April 1774, Louis XV left Trianon for Versailles on the recommendations of his chief surgeon. He was diagnosed with smallpox: a deadly scourge in the West from the earliest times, the disease experienced a new peak in the 18th century and spared no-one. At 3.15 p.m. on the tenth of May, the king died amid general indifference. He was the last sovereign to die in Versailles and the only one not to receive honours after his death.



To close the exhibition, a series of medallions created during the reign of Louis XV is presented, showing details of the events commemorated. While births and marriages within the royal family are always represented, it is no longer the warrior king who was being exalted as in the time of Louis XIV, but rather the builder king. The portrait of the monarch also became less austere and more intimate. In order to keep the history of his reign recorded in metal to hand, Louis XV had Gaudreaux make a special display unit for the corner cabinet, which stands there to this day. Sent to Paris in 1780, the collection was stolen in 1831 and most of the medallions struck in gold vanished.

Fortunately, a few were found: the medallions kept by the Bibliothèque nationale de France are therefore a quite exceptional and miraculous collection.

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Coins, Medals and Antiques Department © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Après nous, le déluge

The exhibition ends with a spectacular contemporary art commission. *Après nous, le déluge* is an installation produced by the Lignereux collective, the contemporary heir to Martin-Eloy Lignereux (1751-1809), the famous eighteenth century merchant. This piece, created specifically for the exhibition, echoes the luxury and excellence of French decorative arts during the reign of Louis XV.

Lignereux is a collective dedicated to the creation of *objets rares*. Active from 1781 onwards, the ‘marchand mercier’, or merchant of decorative art objects, Martin-Eloy Lignereux owned boutiques in Paris and London, creating sumptuous pieces of furniture and decorative objects for the most demanding art connoisseurs of his time, including King George IV of England or Tsar Paul Ist of Russia. After lying dormant for two centuries, the creator of *objets rares* Gonzague Mézin brought Lignereux back to life in 2016 as a collective of artists and craftsmen and women.

In this installation, twenty sculpted fountains are each reflected twice in a bed of mirrors inspired by the Bassin de Neptune fountain: once against the wall and a second time, on the ground. The work, composed of gilt bronze, porcelain and mirrors, symbolises the intellectual and creative effervescence of the eighteenth century and represents a fixed version of the Château de Versailles' water show, *Les Grandes Eaux*. With this piece, Lignereux also revisits the mounted vases that became fashionable under Louis XV and that the original *marchand-mercier* continued to sell until the start of the 19th century.

IN FIGURES

- For the **1st** time, the Palace of Versailles has commissioned the creation of a contemporary work within a historical exhibition.
- This commission represents over **10,000** hours of creation and production work.
- **17** studios and artisan workshops were involved in this creation.
- Nearly **10** different types of expert craftsmen and women were brought into the making of this artwork including goldsmiths, ceramicists, carpenters, casters of art pieces, bronzemakers, gilders, assemblers and *objets rares* creators.



© Lignereux



PART TWO

THE RESTORATION OF THE PASSEMANT CLOCK

AN EXCEPTIONAL RESTORATION PROJECT

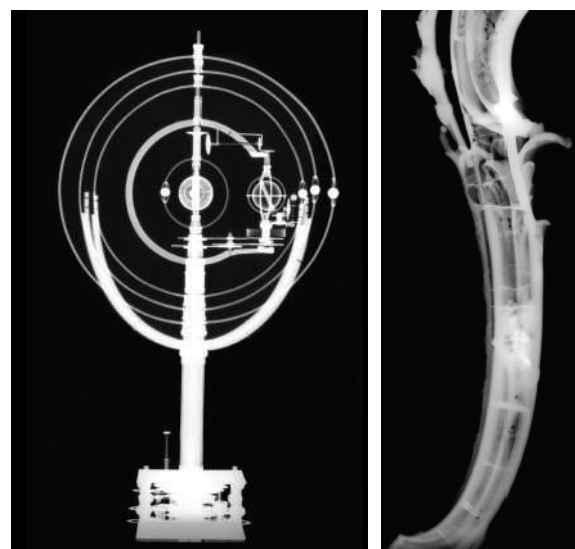
On the occasion of the exhibition, the Passemant astronomical clock is the subject of a scientific study and the complete restoration of its bronzes in the workshops of the Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France (C2RMF), scheduled to continue into 2023 with the restoration of the astronomical and timepiece mechanisms. This operation, which constitutes a world first for a clock of this importance, has been made possible thanks to sponsorship from Rolex France.

The restoration process is being carried out under the direction of a multi-disciplinary scientific panel, bringing together the top experts from each specialist area. The schedule is broken down into two main phases:

2021-2022: Examinations, analyses, documentation, establishment of a protocol and completion of the restoration of the gilt bronze casing

After a study prior to the dismantling of the structure and the transportation of the clock, multiple analyses were carried out at the C2RMF laboratory (X-ray, radiography, endoscopy, XRF fluorescence spectrometry, USB microscope, use-wear analysis, identification of materials and metal and coloured finitions, search for and identification of earlier repair work) enabling a considerable increase in the level of knowledge of this complex and composite piece, so as to draw up a general protocol on the cleaning of the bronzes and the restoration of the mechanisms.

Taking apart the structure has made it possible to identify the points of structural weakness and to discover many inscriptions enabling the material history of the work to be detailed. The parts of the mechanism have been inventoried (USB microscope, cogs counted and measurements taken) and cleaned. The surface of the bronze gilds was generally encrusted in grime, making the piece difficult to read. Their restoration has enabled the intentional interplay of patinas to be restored, a good reading of the matte and polished areas, and the reappearance of the exceptional satin effects specific to this piece.



X-rays of the planetary system and of one leg of the clock by Claude-Siméon Passemant, April 2022, Paris, Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France © C2RMF / Elsa Lambert

2023: Examinations, analyses, documentation and conservation and restoration of the astronomical and timekeeping movements

Once the exhibition has closed, the clock will undergo a complete restoration of its mechanisms in accordance with the protocol established. The clockwork pieces, covered in dust and oil residue causing harmful abrasions, some of which are damaged, are not working well (slips, shocks in the workings of the clock, planetary mechanism not operational, globe not sealed, inversion of the balance wheel, insufficient stability); the Passemant clock is moreover the only clock in the Palace which does not chime.



Taking apart the Passemant clock at the Palace of Versailles for transportation to C2RMF for restoration - December 2021
© château de Versailles / T. Garnier

ROLEX, SPONSOR OF THE RESTORATION OF THE PASSEMANT CLOCK

Rolex France, sponsor of the restoration of the King's Corner Room in 2018-2020, is renewing its support for the Palace of Versailles by assisting with the restoration of the Passemant astronomical clock.

PERPETUATING CULTURE

Rolex, reputed around the world for its know-how and the quality of its watches, has for over fifty years now encouraged the search for perpetual excellence in the arts.

The Swiss watchmaker supports some of the most talented artists and leading cultural institutions in order to perpetuate artistic heritage, creating bridges between the past, the present and the future. This long-term engagement with culture around the world applies to areas including music, architecture and cinema, notably via the Rolex artistic mentoring programme which covers many forms of art. In all these initiatives, Rolex encourages the passing-on of knowledge from one generation to the next, making a lasting contribution to culture throughout the world.

IN COLLABORATION WITH:



C2RMF

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PART 3 | LOUIS XV'S
VERSAILLES

RE-OPENING OF THE APARTMENT OF MADAME DU BARRY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE LOUIS XV EXHIBITION

THE APARTMENT

In 1770, the widowed Louis XV decided to install his favourite, madame Du Barry, in the heart of the Palace, right above his own private apartments. Furnished by Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the apartment covers over 350 m². Located on the second floor of the royal residence, the reception rooms (corner salon, grand cabinet, bedchamber) overlook the marble courtyard and the more private rooms (dining room, buffets room, bathroom, service areas) overlook the interior courtyards. The apartment has multiple access routes, allowing the King to join his mistress via several private staircases.

At the request of madame Du Barry, the main rooms are decorated in white and gold, a privilege reserved for princes. The other half of the apartment boasted a dazzling collection of multi-coloured décor, rare and invaluable witnesses to 18th-century tastes, few of which still remain today. Far from the public areas of the Court, the favourite demonstrated considerable refinement in this place which she had decorated with fashionable furniture and objets d'art.

Madame Du Barry was to spend only four years in this apartment, from 1770 to 1774, before being banished from the Court on the death of Louis XV. After her departure, the apartment was divided up and only a few minor changes were made. The permanent occupancy of these rooms then meant that the apartment was able to escape the burning of royal insignia by revolutionaries in October 1793 and therefore to preserve right up to the present some of the original fleurs de lys and double "L" insignia on the fireplaces and woodwork, precious and rare testimony in the décor of the Palace. The apartment was also spared the in-depth changes to the Palace brought about in the 19th century under Louis-Philippe.

THE RESTORATION

Madame Du Barry's apartment had been overlooked by restoration campaigns for over seventy years. The last restoration (1943-1947) had enabled the layout of the apartment as madame Du Barry would have known it to be re-established. Other than the ageing and deterioration of the paintings, the décor and ceilings had suffered from damp and significant climate-related changes were accelerating the deterioration of the rooms.

Substantial restoration work was therefore required to protect one of the palace's most authentic apartments. The work, carried out between February 2021 and September 2022, began with the partial removal of certain parts of the panelling and parquet, structural consolidation and the concealment of all lighting and security cabling. Insulation work was also carried out. After some repairs to the sculptures on the panelling, the former giltwork was cleaned, restored and completed in the main rooms of the apartment. The "blanc de Roi" resin-based paint was refreshed according to traditional techniques. Finally, important work was carried out on the rooms with the multi-coloured décor, rare witnesses to 18th century taste. The stucco cornices were restored and filled in and research was carried out to determine the shades to be used for the motifs, based on surveys of the panelling.

This restoration work, carried out thanks to sponsorship by AXA, makes it possible today to once again discover the charm and harmony of the apartment, home to madame Du Barry.

GUIDED TOURS AVAILABLE



LOUIS XV IN VERSAILLES

What places bear witness to the époque of Louis XV in the Palace of Versailles? What are the rooms which house pieces of Louis XV furniture? To continue the exhibition, visitors can visit not only the apartment of madame Du Barry but also the large number of rooms in the Palace which still bear the imprint of the sovereign: the King's private apartments, the Dauphin's apartment, the apartment of Mesdames, the Salon of Hercules, the Royal Opera, the apartment of madame de Pompadour and also the Petit Trianon.

THE KING'S PRIVATE APARTMENTS

Following on from his official apartment, Louis XIV had furnished for his personal use a suite of rooms overlooking the Marble Courtyard and the royal courtyard. Other than his family, the king received only a very favoured few in these rooms, mainly lovers of art like himself: it was indeed here that he kept the most beautiful paintings from his collection.

In 1735, Louis XV, concerned with comfort and privacy, undertook to convert this mini-museum into a genuine home and, after a great many modifications, gave it the appearance that it has practically kept up to the present.

Jacques Verberckt, using the designs by Gabriel, completed most of the woodwork which forms the most beautiful ensemble of this type to be found in France; the best furniture makers of the time provided the furniture, completed by silk from Lyon, porcelain from Sèvres, rugs from the Savonnerie manufacture and flowers which were constantly refreshed.

GUIDED TOURS AVAILABLE



Restored King's Private Chamber © château de Versailles / T. Garnier

COMPOSITION OF THE APARTMENT

- The dogs' antechamber
- The post-hunt dining room
- Louis XV's new bedroom
- The clothes cabinet
- The clock room
- The King's private chambers
- The dispatches room
- The water closet
- The golden service room
- The royal ledger room
- The library
- The porcelains salon
- The porcelains room
- The Cards room



Ceiling of the golden service room © château de Versailles / T. Garnier



The clock room © château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Jean-Marc Manai

THE DAUPHIN’S APARTMENT

Since April 2022, the Dauphin’s apartment located at the heart of the royal residence, has been accessible to visitors following restoration work lasting several months.

Giving out onto the gardens on the ground floor of the palace’s main building, the Dauphin’s apartment is one of the former royal residence’s most prestigious, designed in a succession of rooms, each more opulent than the last. Now restored to its former glory, the apartment is an invitation to delve deep into the beating heart of the royal family’s private life. The Dauphin’s apartment consists of three main rooms, all concerned by the project: the bedchamber, the large cabinet restored thanks to sponsorship by the company Baron Philippe de Rothschild S.A., and the library, restored thanks to the sponsorship of the Société des Amis de Versailles, with support of France’s Heritage Foundation.

They are located under the Hall of Mirrors, the Salon de la Paix and the Queen’s bedchamber and offer a unique view on to the gardens.

Yet between the 17th and 20th centuries, these spaces were used and tweaked in such a way as to gradually compromise the cohesiveness of the rooms and their décor. The restoration work has made it possible to get closer to the situation as it was in the 1740s when the princely apartment was re-developed for the Louis XV’s oldest son, the Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand.

UNACCOMPANIED VISITS



The Dauphin’s Grand Cabinet after restoration © château de Versailles / T. Garnier

THE APARTMENT OF MESDAMES, DAUGHTERS OF LOUIS XV

Located opposite the Dauphin’s apartment, this succession of nine rooms was home to Madame Adélaïde and Madame Victoire for twenty years, from 1769 up until the Revolution. Alternating between reception rooms and private chambers, these royal apartments are an invaluable, highly evocative testimony to the royal family’s life in Versailles as the sun set on the Ancien Régime.

The history of this series of rooms is complex as the uses and layouts have changed over the years. For example, Louis XIV ordered the installation of the splendid baths in the section of the suite today occupied by the apartment of Madame Victoire. Louis-Philippe had then in turn completely transformed these rooms in the 19th century into museum rooms.

Their restoration, completed in 2013, enabled these luxurious apartments to be returned to their state under the Ancien Régime.

They continue today to bear witness to the tastes of Louis XV’s daughters for the arts, in particular, for reading and music. The two harpsichords from Madame Victoire’s main room also recall the talent of this princess who played like a professional and to whom the young Mozart dedicated his first six harpsichord sonatas in 1764.

UNACCOMPANIED VISITS



Madame Adélaïde’s bedchamber © château de Versailles / T. Garnier

THE SALON D’HERCULE

The Salon d’Hercule is the final room created in the Palace at the end of Louis XIV’s reign. This area had in fact, since 1682, held the Palace’s chapel which was used until 1710 when it was replaced by the current Chapel Royal. Flooring was then put in to create a new salon, the decoration of which was completed under Louis XV.

In 1730, the monarch had brought out from storage at the Gobelins tapestry workshop an immense painting by Veronese, *The Feast in the House of Simon*, presented by the Republic of Venice to Louis XIV in 1664. Work in the Salon d’Hercule continued up until 1736 when François Lemoyne completed painting the ceiling representing *The Apotheosis of Hercules*.

This vast allegorical composition with no fewer than one hundred and forty-two figures sought to rival by its effect the masterworks of the Italian fresco painters, but it was painted on canvases which were then glued to the support. Despite being appointed to the position of First Painter to the King by Louis XV as a reward for his work, Lemoyne, exhausted by this gigantic project which took him four years, committed suicide one year later in 1737.

The décor of the room continues to bear precious witness to the end of the reign of Louis XIV and the shift toward the new Louis XV style.

UNACCOMPANIED VISITS



Salon d'Hercule © chateau de Versailles / T. Garnier

THE ROYAL OPERA

Inaugurated in 1770 during the reign of Louis XV, the Royal Opera is a major work by the architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel. The largest theatre in Europe, it represents an incredible achievement in terms of decorative refinement and technique. The theatre reflecting the life first of the monarchy and then of the republic, it has throughout its history hosted festivities, spectacles and parliamentary debates.

Louis XIV, wishing to give the Palace a venue for performances, contemplated creating one at the far end of the North wing but, in the end, chose the construction of the Royal Chapel (1710). Initially somewhat uninterested, Louis XV in the end ordered the construction of the Royal Opera, considering the prospect of the future weddings of his three grandsons. Gabriel then delivered a theatre which featured the most significant advances of his time: footprint resembling a truncated ellipse, gradually staggered tiers, French-style boxes (without partitions).

The sculptured decorations were entrusted to Augustin Pajou and the paintings were commissioned from Louis-Jacques Durameau. Blaise-Henri Arnoult, the King’s machinist, was entrusted with creating the stage machinery and created a genuine masterpiece. The intention was for this to be used both as a theatre and also as a ballroom or place for festivities. Via a complex system of mobile flooring worked by winches, Arnoult managed to create a long-lasting multi-functional space. While it took almost two days’ work to convert the space, there was no longer any need to constantly redecorate: everything could be re-used as required.

Inaugurated for the celebrations marking the marriage of the future Louis XVI to the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette, this theatre of the extraordinary was used only some forty times before the Revolution.

GUIDED TOURS AVAILABLE



Royal Opera © chateau de Versailles / T. Garnier

THE APARTMENT OF MADAME DE POMPADOUR

The apartment of madame de Pompadour, which enjoys magnificent views over the North gardens and the forest of Marly, is located on the third floor, above the salons of Mars, Mercury and Apollo. It was first of all used between 1743-1744 by the Duchess of Châteauroux and her sister, the Duchess of Lauraguais. Louis XV then gave it to madame de Pompadour, who lived there from September 1745 until May 1751. The King was able to make discreet visits via his private chambers.

The apartment set out as a series of rooms today has four. Access is via a vast corridor which opens on to an antechamber. This communicates with the bedchamber on one side and with the large cabinet and boudoir on the other.

This ensemble has the particularity of having of having preserved pretty much intact the rooms for use by servants located behind the main rooms: call room, water closets, clothes cabinet for storing clothes and, in the entresol, a bedchamber traditionally known as that of Madame du Hausset, the chambermaid to the Marquise.

In 1750, the relationship between Louis XV and the Marquise changed: she was no longer his mistress but she continued however to be his friend and confidante. It was then that she left this apartment for the ground floor of the palace where the king's younger daughters shortly became her new neighbours.

GUIDED TOURS AVAILABLE



The Grand Cabinet of madame de Pompadour © chateau de Versailles / T. Garnier

THE PETIT TRIANON

In 1758, Louis XV contemplated the construction of a new small château in among the gardens he had developed and embellished for some ten years. He ordered his chief architect, Ange-Jacques Gabriel, to design a pavilion of sufficient size for him to live in with part of his suite. Gabriel here signed a veritable manifesto of neo-classical architecture, a perfect example of the Greek-inspired style that was then spreading throughout Europe.

Completed in 1768, the new château is named the "Petit Trianon" to distinguish it from the marble Trianon which, for its part, became the "Grand Trianon". It was in Trianon, in 1774, that Louis XV felt the first symptoms of the smallpox that was to carry him off a few days later.

The architecture of the Petit Trianon adopts an extremely simple cub form, while varying the treatment reserved for the façades of the château.

The one looking on to the Cour d'Honneur is sombre and adorned with four pilasters emphasising the slight projection of the three central spans. The opposite façade repeats this pattern but with one less floor due to the difference in the level of the garden.

The façade which overlooks the English-style garden is more sober. In contrast, the façade overlooking the French-style garden was the most decorated and is skilfully showcased by four majestic Corinthian columns and by the subtle interaction of the staircases and terraces which lead down to the garden. The proportions as a whole make this a masterpiece of harmony and elegance, contributing to the revival of French architecture.

UNACCOMPANIED VISITS AND GUIDED TOURS



The Petit Trianon (façade overlooking the French-style garden) © chateau de Versailles / T. Garnier



PART SEVEN | EXHIBITION
PATRONS



True to its values of protecting and transmitting cultural heritage, AXA has for many years been committed to the conservation of symbolic French cultural landmarks that have an international reach. AXA has notably supported the Palace of Versailles, the Louvre, the Centre des Monuments Nationaux and the fondation Notre-Dame in recent years.

AXA's commitment to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage is the natural extension of our business as an insurer, which consists of protecting individuals over the long term, but also developing their heritage. Thus, our cultural philanthropic actions are closely linked to our approach to social responsibility, and to our purpose "Acting for human progress by protecting what matters".

In February 2021, a large-scale project was launched at the heart of the Palace of Versailles. Thanks to the support of the AXA Group, madame Du Barry's apartment, one of the most refined in the former royal residence and a testimony to the private Versailles of Louis XV, will be restored to its former harmony and charm. Thanks to the know-how of about fifty craftspeople: carpenters, gilders, ironworkers, locksmiths, painters, marble workers or stucco workers, this apartment will be able to regain all its beauty and coherence.

The restoration – lasting a total of seventeen months – will allow the resumption of visits to this place as part of an exhibition devoted to the return of Louis XV to Versailles in 1722. In addition, thanks to the patronage of AXA and the Société des Amis de Versailles, the “broken desk” of Louis XIV, classified as a “National Treasure”, returns to the Palace of Versailles after more than two hundred and seventy years of absence. It gives AXA great satisfaction to return this extraordinary work, a perfect illustration of late 17th century production, to the setting for which it was intended.

The history of AXA and the Palace of Versailles goes back a long way. Indeed, AXA is proud to support the Palace of Versailles since 2013, and thus contribute to its influence and the enrichment of its collections with in particular; the donation of a carpet from the Manufacture de la Savonnerie, support to the exhibition *La Chine à Versailles*, the contribution to financing the acquisition of King Louis XIV's desk or even funding the restoration of the Salle du Sacre.

About AXA

The AXA Group is a worldwide leader in insurance and asset management, with 149,000 employees and agents serving 95 million clients in 50 countries. In 2021, IFRS revenues amounted to Euro 99.9 billion and underlying earnings to Euro 6.8 billion. AXA had Euro 1,051 billion in assets under management as of December 31, 2021.

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Inventor of the world's first triple-play box, Groupe iliad, founded in the early 1990s, is today a major stakeholder in the European telecommunications which distinguishes itself from its competitors thanks to its innovative, simple and attractive offers.

The parent company of Free in France, of iliad in Italy and of Play in Poland, the Group has over 16,500 employees serving 45 million active subscribers and generated turnover of 7.6 billion Euros in 2021.

In France, the Group is an integrated Fixed and Superfast Broadband Mobile operator with nearly 21 million private subscribers.

In Italy, where it launched under the iliad brand in 2018, the Group is now the 4th largest mobile operator in the country and has over 9 million subscribers.

With the acquisition in 2020 of the Polish mobile operator Play, followed in 2022 by that of the fixed operator UPC Polska, the iliad Group is now a convergent operator in Poland with a total of 14 million subscribers.

A long-term partner of the Palace of Versailles, Free – Groupe iliad is today delighted to support the exhibition *Louis XV, passions of a king*.

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