

# IMPERIAL SILKS FOR VERSAILLES

MOBILIER NATIONAL COLLECTION



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

EXHIBITION  
19 MARCH – 23 JUNE 2024  
GRAND TRIANON





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# IMPERIAL SILKS FOR VERSAILLES, MOBILIER NATIONAL COLLECTION

EXHIBITION FROM 19 MARCH TO 23 JUNE 2024 - GRAND TRIANON  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MOBILIER NATIONAL

Versailles, 18 March 2024  
Press Release

From 19 March to 23 June 2024, the Grand Trianon hosts an exhibition dedicated to the exceptional order placed by Napoleon with Lyon silk workers in 1811, comprising 80 km (50 miles) of silks intended to refurnish the Palace of Versailles. The exhibition revisits this order in its historical context, the manufacturing techniques involved, and the creation of these silks delivered by the Lyon factories. Never used under the Empire, this collection of textiles remains in an exceptional state of preservation today. It constitutes an eloquent testimony to the skills of the Lyon silk workers and to good taste under the First Empire.

## AN EXCEPTIONAL ORDER

In February 1810, having expressed the wish to redesign Versailles, Napoleon granted a special fund of six million francs for this purpose. At the same time, the Lyon silk factories were experiencing great difficulties. The Emperor sought to support them through this crisis with a substantial order, dedicating two million francs to it. Between 1811 and 1813, no less than 80 km (50 miles) of fabrics would be delivered by the Lyon silk craftsmen to the Imperial Garde-Meuble (Furniture Repository) for Versailles. This exhibition, proposed by the Palace of Versailles and the Mobilier National (National Furniture collection), revisits the history of this significant order.

## THE EXHIBITION

The first part of the exhibition evokes the historical and economic context of this order. Original samples and archival documents illustrate the involvement of various actors, from the Lyon silk workers to the meticulous imperial administration, which developed unprecedented verification techniques for the occasion. Advances in the field of textiles are also discussed, with the presentation of a model of the Jacquard loom as well as investigation techniques in the fields of chemistry and dyeing.

A second part is devoted to the architectural arrangements considered for Versailles by Napoleon, forming the context of the order placed with the Lyon silk workers. Debates among architects and the evolution of taste between the Ancien Régime and the early 19th century are discussed, notably through watercolours by Jacques Gondoin.

The exhibition then proposes to discover the decorative projects for Versailles by various Lyon silk workers and the fate of the silks from Napoleon's great order, especially under the July Monarchy and the Second Empire.

The 80 km (50 miles) of fabrics delivered in 1813, and for the most part never used under the First Empire, testify to the unexpected originality of the colours and patterns chosen. The Lyon silk workers, revitalised by this considerable order, all vied to be the most audacious and therefore please the Emperor and his wife. **The exhibition thus presents a unique collection of 120 silks.**

Exceptionally, **the tour of the Emperor's apartment in the Grand Trianon** has been included in the exhibition tour. Original Lyon silk samples are compared to textile restitutions made in the 1960s during the restoration of the Grand Trianon.

## CURATORSHIP

Muriel Barbier, Chief Curator of Heritage, Director of Heritage and Collections at the Château de Fontainebleau  
Noémie Wansart, Scientific Advisor, National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon

## SCENOGRAPHY

Véronique Dollfus



*Fragment of crowning from a hanging for the Throne Room, Camille Pernon, 1806, silk; damask, gold threads, Fond Tassinari & Chatel © Palace of Versailles / C. Fouin*



*Hanging for the resting chamber in the Empress's small apartment, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811 - 1813, silk; satin; embroidery © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*





**"Napoleon could not overlook the significance of these poetic lengths of fabric, nor did he wish to deprive himself of their comforting charms."**

Are the incredible treasures revealed in this exhibition not Napoleon's greatest achievement at Versailles? The palace resisted him obstinately, as if it did not want to belong to him, and the magnificent projects of which we know the designs and drawings did not replace the decor of the Ancien Régime. The Emperor eventually settled for a spring residence at Trianon. But from the grand Versailles project remains an astounding production, a magnificently orchestrated industrial and artistic boom, where the preservation of a centuries-old tradition was coupled with the most radical modernity. Yet, these luxurious weavings are largely unknown, and rightly so, as objects that have remained shielded from light, their mortal enemy. Had they been put in place, had the Emperor been able to realise his projects and transform the palace, little would remain today. The samples piously preserved at the Mobilier National can now, after two centuries, release their chromatic energy and reveal the subtlety and boldness of their perfectly preserved harmonies. It is customary at Versailles to celebrate the balance between solemnity, richness, and whimsy that characterises the "grand royal style." But this quality also applies to Imperial era creations, and one is instantly convinced by the compositions of Bissardon, Cousin, and Bony where geometric rigour, far from hindering floral profusion, adds intensity and vibration. The artists and craftsmen are often the same ones who worked for Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. It is the continuation of a grand historical narrative, chaining together stylistic and technical inventions at a frantic pace. Through the example of the great orders for Versailles, the exhibition shows how the period was fertile in new processes, mechanical or chemical, that were to ensure ever more precision, regularity, brilliance, but also productivity and durability in the art of weaving. The programmable Jacquard loom promised renewed prosperity to the prestigious Lyon silk industry, while novel colours regularly emerged from the test tubes of the Gobelins manufacture. The walls of the greatest palaces would thus be transformed, a new world could come to life. Since time immemorial, textile art has been the most emblematic and most costly form of art preferred by royal princes. Henry VIII of England spent more on it than on his army. Napoleon I could not ignore the stakes of these poetic lengths (or kilometres) of fabric, nor did he want to deprive himself of their comforting charms. As for the creators themselves, as if galvanised by the magic of their technique, they seemed driven by an ingenious spirit leading them to weave all the music of the world around them into their fabrics. And first among these spirits was one of a vigorous and infinitely diverse nature, where the bee and the fritillary peacefully signal the new imperial order.

This exhibition retraces a great adventure of humanity, exploring all its historical complexity without ever straying from the delight, the pure pleasure of rediscovering these wonders capable of making us cry our hearts out for the fall of the Empire.

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





## "The collection of silks once again emerges from its storeroom to reveal the modernity and freshness of the fabrics woven in Lyon."

For over four hundred years, the Mobilier National has supported French craftsmanship and contemporary creation. As the heir to the Garde-Meuble (Furniture Repository) and the Royal Manufactures - now national entities - the Mobilier National conserves and restores more than 100,000 pieces primarily intended for the furnishing of the Republic's official venues. These places are one of the showcases for the work of French art craftsmen and their excellent productions.

Museums and historic monuments are another. Therefore, it is with great joy that we present, at the heart of the Palace of Versailles, a selection of silks from our collections.

The Mobilier National's reserves house over 30,000 pieces of fabric, ordered over the centuries to serve the upholsterers charged with glorifying them in official decors. This collection, primarily composed of silks woven in the Lyon manufactories, is one of the richest preserved in France. It represents two hundred years of creation in the silk sector and has continually inspired creators and manufacturers.

Among these thousands of pieces, the eighty kilometres of silks ordered by Napoleon I from the Lyon silk workers starting in 1810 stand out for their modernity. All intended to refurnish the Palace of Versailles, which had become a Crown residence from 1804, they demonstrate the imperial wish for artistic freshness in the field of decorative arts. Indeed, unlike other kings and queens who lived at Versailles, Napoleon Bonaparte did not build or engage in major works at the palace; he instead decided to restore it, particularly its decors.

Through these large orders and subsidies, Napoleon would not only ensure the revival of the Lyon silk workers in the aftermath of the Revolution but also offer support for technical innovation. Two hundred years later, the Mobilier National continues the public commitment to the decorative arts, research, promotion of French excellence, and support for the ecosystem of decorative arts, craftsmanship, and design. Our "large orders" take the form of restoration plans, calls for artistic and design projects, or acquisitions of furniture pieces from young French creators.

The silks presented in this exhibition have, for the most part, never been used under the First Empire. Napoleon dreamed of a Versailles made of "very solid things, such that it would be an expenditure made to last a hundred years." The use of the silks in furnishings after his reign, by the Mobilier National, is a start in acknowledging this work. The exhibition Imperial Silks for Versailles, Mobilier National Collection ensures their legacy.

**Hervé Lemoine**

President of the Mobilier National

President of the Board of Directors of the Cité de la Céramique - Sèvres and Limoges





# THE EXHIBITION

# 1<sup>ST</sup> PART

# THE 1811 COMMISSION: THE BACKGROUND TO A SUCCESS



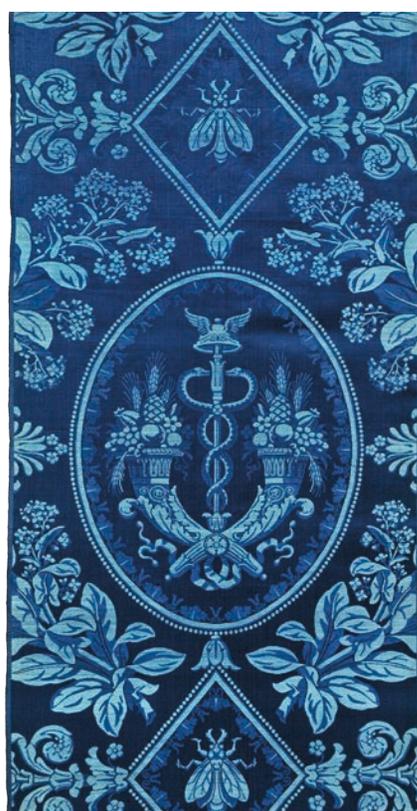
*Hanging element for the First Consul's library at the Palace of Saint-Cloud, Camille Pernon, 1805-1806, brocaded silk satin  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*

Since the 17th century, the history of Lyon's silk industry has been linked to economic and political ups and downs. For example, at the end of the French Revolution, silk industrialists and the entire ecosystem around them were deeply impacted.

Napoleon soon realised the devastating consequences of the siege of Lyon in 1793 and the end of luxury commissions. In 1802, he travelled to Lyon for the second time with Joséphine and visited the leading silk workshops, such as Dutilleu & Théoleyre and, above all, the workshop of Camille Pernon, who made him aware of the concerns of the silk industry. With the upturn in the economy at the beginning of his reign, not only did Napoleon become the saviour of the Lyon silk industry, but he also saved the entire French decorative arts sector in the early 19th century. Indeed, from 1807 until the end of the Empire, exceptional financial measures were taken to support Lyon and Parisian manufacturers. Underlying this seemingly philanthropic endeavour lay an economic necessity: to maintain France's position at the forefront of the decorative arts in Europe. It was against this backdrop that 80 kilometres (60 miles) of silk was commissioned for Versailles.



*Point-paper plan for a hanging border with indigo flowers for a room of the Emperor's State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811, gouache; paper Fonds Tassinari & Chatel, Maison Lelièvre © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Hanging loom width for a room of the Emperor's State Apartment, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, silk; damask  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



This economic boost and the support provided to the Lyon silk manufacturers were coupled with an incentive for innovation. In 1805, Napoleon studied the Jacquard mechanism in Lyon and allocated a grant to Joseph-Marie Jacquard. In 1811, Gabriel Dutilleul invented the regulator, a device that ensured the perfect repetition of the design from one loom width to the next and a join with no pattern gaps, which is essential for hanging joins.

The refinement and robustness of dyes were also the focus of innovation research. While the Imperial Garde-Meuble (Furniture Repository) developed a system for checking the quality of dyes, Napoleon encouraged the creation of a chemistry professorship in Lyon. He created a 25,000-franc prize for research into a dye to replace indigo, which was virtually impossible to import because of the international blockade. Jean-Michel Raymond, then director of the new professorship, won the competition by creating a Prussian blue using “iron prussiate”.

The choice of textiles was not random and was strictly governed by the *Règlement pour l'ameublement des palais impériaux* (Rules for furnishing imperial palaces), which determined the amount of meuble (in this case, fabric) required for each room according to its position in the general layout and provided guidelines for the choice of fabrics.

It also suggested a gradation in the richness of the décor: crimson velvet adorned with gold braids for the Throne Room, damask and brocade for the reception rooms in the Emperor and Empress' apartments, among others. In addition, the apartments of Madame Mère, Napoleon's mother, those of Princes Joseph and Louis and the other apartments were divided into eight different categories

The 1811 commission was not the first to be placed with the Lyon silk manufacturers, but it was the most important one. It also illustrates the efficiency of the imperial administration, both in allocating commissions among the silk manufacturers and in controlling the quality of the weaving and colours once the fabrics were delivered.



*Hanging and seating loom width for a first room of the Emperor, Fournel Père & Fils, 1811, silk; damask*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging loom width of three corner pieces for the First Consul's library at the Palace of Saint-Cloud, Camille Pernon, 1805-1806, brocaded silk satin* © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

## 2<sup>ND</sup> PART | VERSAILLES, L'IMPOSSIBLE INSTALLATION

Dès 1804, Napoléon I<sup>er</sup> ambitionne de réaménager le château de Versailles, devenu musée de la peinture française en 1797. Si des crédits conséquents sont accordés pour sa restauration, le chantier s'annonce rapidement colossal. De nombreux projets lui sont présentés, mobilisant de grands architectes comme Jacques Gondoin, auteur d'un album richement illustré d'aquarelles, ou encore Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, qui travaille plusieurs fois le plan du château et sa façade sur la ville. C'est l'une des rares fois où l'Empereur n'a su prendre une décision.

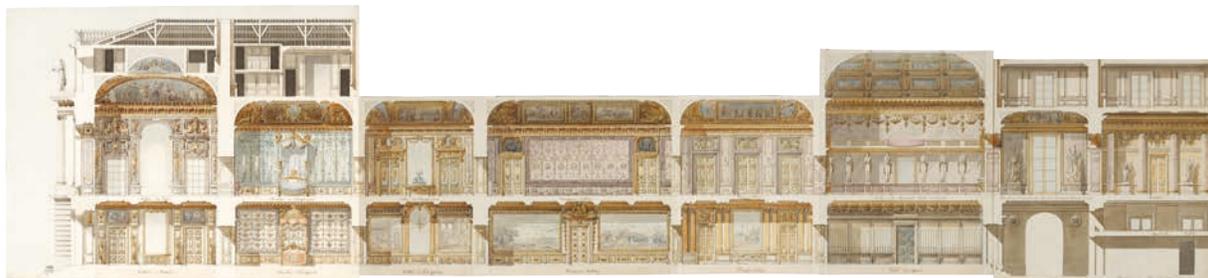
Suivant l'*Étiquette impériale*, règlement promulgué en 1806 et destiné à régir la vie de la cour, il était prévu que le palais de Versailles soit divisé pour l'Empereur, en un appartement d'honneur, un grand et un petit appartements et pour l'Impératrice, en un grand et un petit appartements. Il y avait également plusieurs appartements pour les princes, les ministres et certains officiers. Sans plan arrêté mais avec un budget exceptionnel de deux millions de francs, l'administrateur du Garde-Meuble, Alexandre Desmazis, suivit strictement ces recommandations pour solliciter les soyeux et conçu un ameublement idéal.



Design of a décor for the Emperor and Empress' apartments at the Palace of Versailles  
© RMN-GP (Château de Versailles), Franck Raux



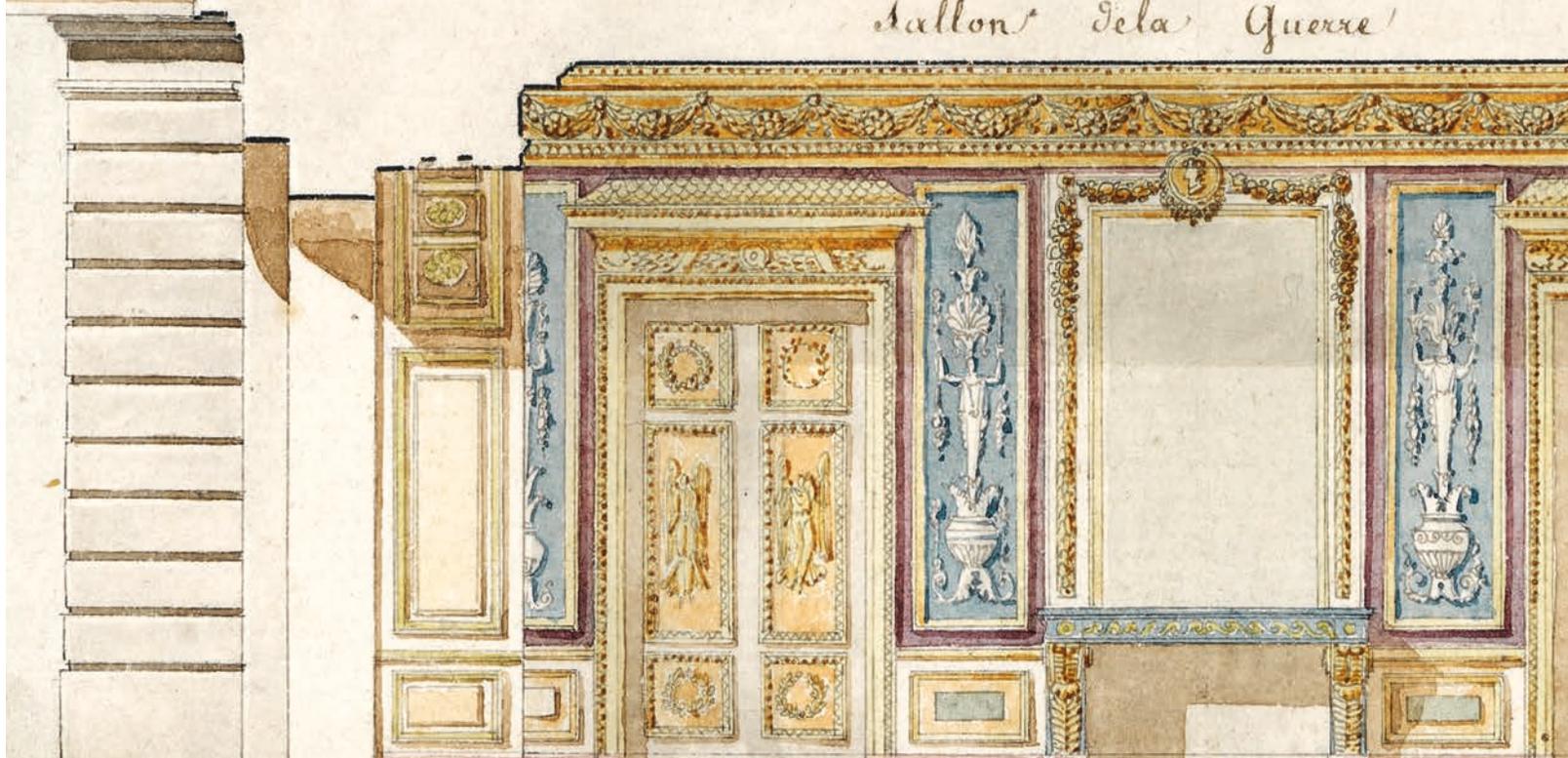
Facade of the Palace of Versailles, Entrance Side, project N°1, Alexandre Dufour, Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine, vers 1807 © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



Design of a décor for the Emperor and Empress' apartments at the Palace of Versailles, Jacques Gondoin (anciennement attribué à Charles Percier et Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine), vers 1807 © RMN-GP (Château de Versailles), Franck Raux



*Sallon de la Guerre*



### 3<sup>RD</sup> PART

# CAMILLE PERNON (1753-1808), THE « BEST IN LYON »

Camille Pernon began working in 1771 in the family business, which had been established in 1680. His reputation was cemented before the French Revolution with lavish weaving for Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI, as well as for the courts of Spain, Poland, Russia, Sweden, et alia.

He partnered with talented collaborators such as the draughtsman Grognard, the draughtsman and weaver Philippe de Lassale and the ingenious Joseph-Marie Jacquard, who tested his mechanism in his workshops. He also worked with the greatest interior designers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries: ornamentist such as Jean-Démosthène Dugource, Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart, Nanteuil and Bouvard, to name but a few.

In 1802, during Napoleon Bonaparte's visit to Lyon, Pernon raised his awareness of the tragic situation of the silk industry in the wake of the French Revolution. Considered to be Lyon's most skilled manufacturer at the time, he supplied the Garde-Meuble in 1805-1806 with nine silk ensembles for the Palace of Saint-Cloud.



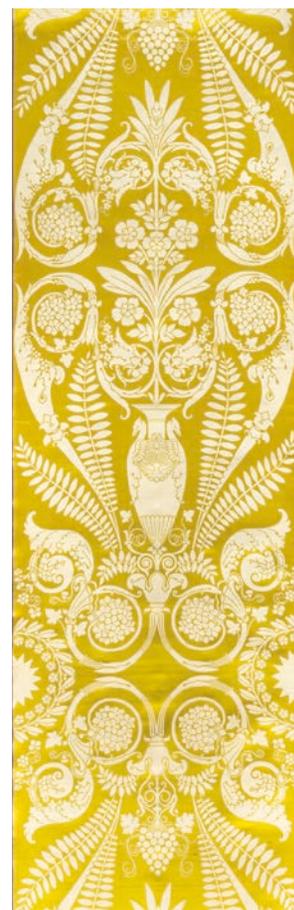
*Hanging loom width and its border for Versailles, Camille Pernon et Grand Frères, 1807-1808, satin ground damask, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre  
© Château de Versailles / C. Fouin*

In 1806, before the great 1811 commission, a new commission was to be allocated among Lyon's best manufacturers. Twelve of them were shortlisted, but the Treaties of Tilsit signed in July 1807 resulted in the project being scaled down and only six pieces were ordered, including that for the Throne Room in Versailles, which was entrusted to Pernon alone.

Camille Pernon was involved in a lawsuit regarding faulty dyeing and stepped down on 31 December 1807, after selling his manufacture to the Grand brothers (Grand Frères). He died on 3 December 1808, without knowing the outcome of the trial.

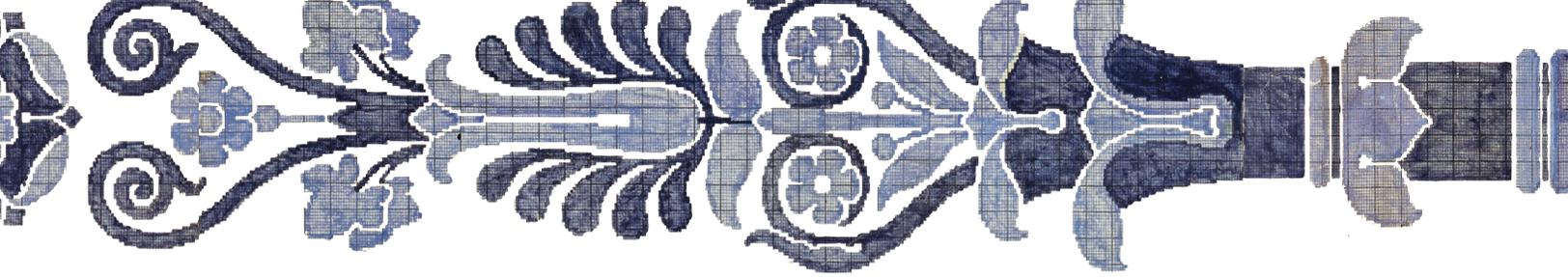


*Hanging loom border for Versailles [unknown destination], Camille Pernon, 1807-1808, satin and liseré ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Hanging loom width fragment for Versailles, Camille Pernon et Grand Frères, 1807-1808, satin ground damask, 1807-1808, satin ground damask  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*





## 4<sup>TH</sup> PART

# THE EMPIRE'S MOST OPULENT FABRIC, THE 1806 THRONE ROOM

From the very first project for Versailles, in 1806, the imperial administration intended to convert either the Mercury Room or the Apollo Room into a Throne Room in the State Apartments. One hundred and thirteen metres of brocade hangings was commissioned from Camille Pernon. The Empire's most opulent fabric featured the recently developed imperial emblems: the eagle with outstretched wings, the thunderbolt, the N cipher and the cross of the Order of the Legion of Honour (established in 1802), framed by wreaths of laurel and oak separated by stylised palm trees. The splendour of this meuble (fabric) illustrated the majesty of imperial power and won the Emperor's "full approval".



*Fragment of a hanging top loom width for the Throne Room, Camille Pernon, 1806, brocaded and embroidered satin ground lampas, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Palace of Versailles / C. Fouin*



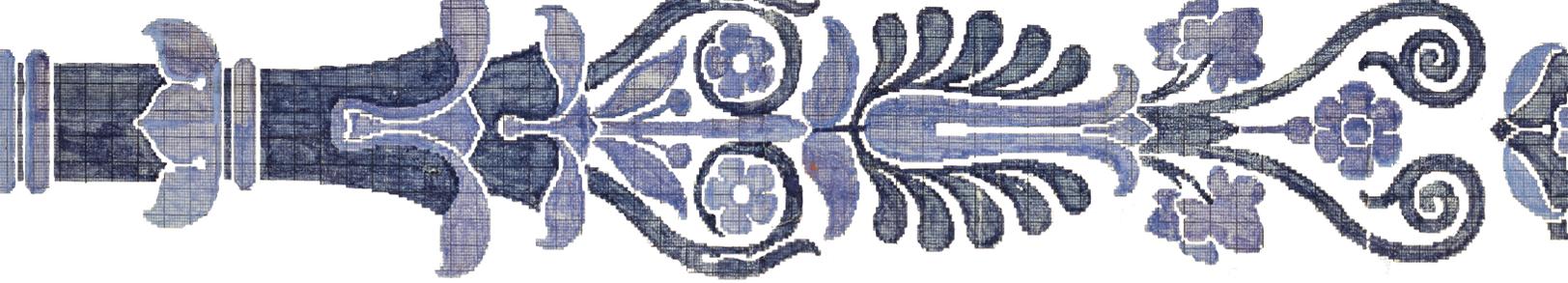
*Hanging, portiere and pelmet border for the Throne Room, Grand Frères, 1806, satin ground cisele velvet © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet border for the Throne Room, Camille Pernon, 1806-1808, brocaded and embroidered satin ground lampas, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Palace of Versailles / C. Fouin*



*Point-paper plan for the Throne Room folding screens and screen panels, Camille Pernon, 1806, graphite pencil and gouache on paper, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Palace of Versailles / C. Fouin*



In 1811, these fabrics were still stored at the Garde-Meuble. Alexandre Desmazis, in an exceptional move, included them in the new Versailles furnishing project, not for the Throne Room but for the fourth room of the reception apartment, devoted to the Council of Ministers, which became the most sumptuous room of the palace. This new destination reveals a striking redefinition of the hierarchy of spaces, just as had recently occurred at the Tuileries Palace.

Additional fabrics were bought from the maison Grand Frères, who had taken over the Pernon business. In the major 1811 commission, the Throne Room was to be upholstered in crimson velvet with gold-embroidered borders and probably decorated with tapestries from the Gobelins manufactory.



*Design of a brocade loom width for the Throne Room, Jean- François Bony, 1811, graphite pencil and gouache on paper*  
© Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto



*Portiere and pelmet loom width for the Throne Room, Camille Pernon and Grand Frères, 1806- 1808, brocaded and embroidered satin ground lampas*  
© Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto





## 5<sup>TH</sup> PART | GRAND FRÈRES

Jean-Étienne and Jean-François-Zacharie Grand officially took over the Pernon manufactory on 1 January 1808, and renamed it Manufacture Grand Frères (Grand Brothers Manufactory). The transition went smoothly, probably because the two brothers were already working for Pernon.

The Grand brothers enjoyed an excellent reputation and received in 1808 some prestigious official commissions for the Palace of Versailles, as well as for the Saint-Cloud, Fontainebleau, Meudon and Tuileries palaces. In 1811, they delivered about 500 metres (approx. 550 yards), all destined for Versailles. Their designs were among the most elaborate ever commissioned for Versailles, both for their patterns and their weaves. They oversaw the sets for the most prestigious rooms of the Emperor and Empress' apartments. They worked for the Mobilier Impérial until the end of the Empire.

Ironically, during the Bourbon Restoration, the manufactory was asked to supply patches to complement the Throne Room commission, to replace the imperial emblems with rosettes and double cornucopias.

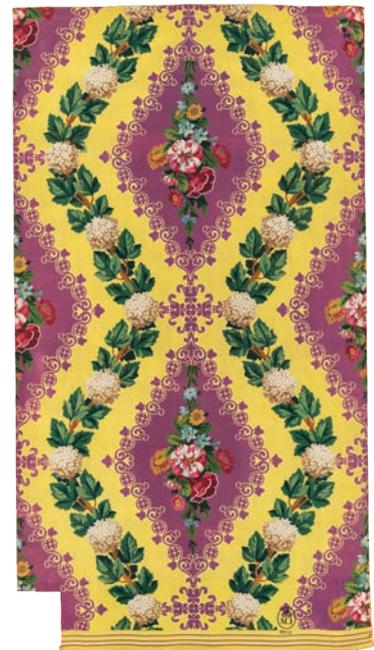
From 1830 onwards, the Grand brothers developed products for a new clientele that had emerged from the Industrial Revolution and wanted the very best for decorating their homes. The Grand manufactory maintained its reputation throughout the 19th century, eventually supplying the court of Napoleon III. In 1870, it was sold to the Tassinari & Chatel families, whose name still exists today.



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet border for the bedchamber of the Emperor's State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, brocaded silk satin*  
© Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto



*Element of a hanging for the third room of the Emperor's State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, mottled cut velvet*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet loom width for the fourth room of the Empress' State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, brocaded silk satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging top loom width for the resting chamber of the Emperor's private chambers, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, brocaded gros de Tours*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

*Point-paper plan for the top of the resting chamber of the Emperor's private chambers, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, graphite pencil, gouache and ink on paper, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Château de Versailles / C. Fouin*



*Hanging and curtain border for the resting chamber of the Emperor's private chambers, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, brocaded gros de Tours*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



# 6<sup>TH</sup> PART TWENTY-EIGHT FACTORIES WEAVING FOR VERSAILLES

Lyon has been the capital of silk since the Renaissance and during the Empire, the city was home to more than 200 silk manufacturers, employing up to 13,300 looms. These silk manufacturers, whether members of the same family or just business partners, worked with the same designers, occasionally merged under new company names over the course of their history, and some diversified their operations to other towns (Cartier Fils, a trader in Paris, owned looms in Tours but worked with Seguin & Cie in Lyon). The Imperial Garde-Meuble selected 28 of them to create the ideal furnishings for Versailles, distributing the orders between solid and ornate fabrics.

## LACOSTAT & C<sup>IE</sup>

The *maison* Lacostat & Trolhier company, run by Jean-Pierre Lacostat, is mentioned from 1808 in the deliveries for the Garde-Meuble, for which it produced a hanging and fabrics for the Meudon palace. For the 1811 commission, the maison wove several versions of crimson and green damask with palm leaf decorations, yellow and blue damask with daisy garlands and fruit bowls, and green damask with oak wreaths and ivy leaves for the Emperor's bathroom.



Hanging, bed and seat loom width for bedchambers of ministers or great officers' apartments, J.P. Lacostat & Cie, 1811-1813, three-colour satin and liseré ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



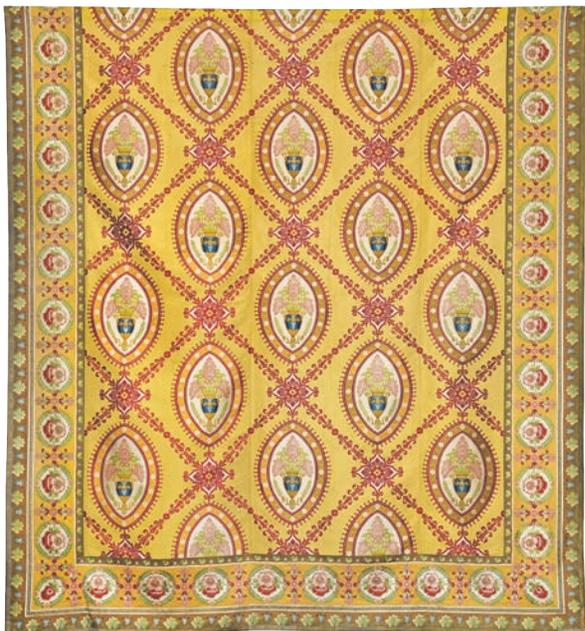
Hanging, bed and curtain border for bedchambers of ministers or great officers' apartments, J.P. Lacostat & Cie, 1811-1813, three-colour satin and liseré ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Alongside prestigious names such as Grand Frères, Bissardon, and Cousin & Bony, other silk manufacturers were less productive but equally renowned for their quality. Although some of their fabrics were intended for the imperial apartments, they mainly supplied so-called secondary apartments for princes, ministers and great officers. Their compositions were often simpler and showed a taste for geometric (Dutillieu & Théoleyre) and partitioned (Chuard & Cie) patterns. Here, the floral repertoire majestically blossomed with friezes, scrolls and separate bouquets, varying between natural refinement (J. M. Sériziat & Cie), stylisation that was sometimes surprisingly modern (Lacostat and Trollier & Cie) and intriguing complexity (Corderier & Lemire).

#### CARTIER FILS & SEGUIN & C<sup>IE</sup>

Run by André-Joseph Cartier, Cartier Fils was a trading company established in Paris in the early 1790s. It sold fabrics produced in Tours and Lyon by Antoine-Michel and Jacques-Philippe Seguin. Relying on his network to convince the imperial administration, Cartier facilitated the choice of luxurious fabrics from Seguin & Cie for the most important pieces of the Versailles commissions.



*Hanging element for the fourth room of the Emperor's State Apartments, Charles Percier (draughtsman), J.P. Seguin (silk manufacturer), 1811, brocaded gros de Tours © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Hanging and bed loom width for two bedchambers of princes or great dignitaries' apartments, J.P. Seguin, 1811, two-colour satin ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*

## CHUARD & C<sup>IE</sup>

The *maison* Chuard & Cie, a silk merchant and manufacturer in Lyon, was founded in 1810 by Jean-Marie Chuard, who had been working with other silk manufacturers since 1796. From 1811 onwards, the company was entrusted with commissions for the Versailles and Tuileries palaces, which testified to a high degree of *savoir-faire*. For Versailles, it supplied several damask meubles: one for the second room of the Empress' State Apartments with a light green ground and a double white and purple brocaded ground, and another blue damask for the second room of the Emperor's State Apartments. It also produced an astonishing yellow, lilac and white damask with meanders and hydrangeas for the Empress' first room, which later pleased Empress Eugénie. The company also supplied other fabrics, including a green damask that was eventually used in Napoleon's private study at the Grand Trianon.

The *maison* Chuard & Cie enjoyed great success during the Bourbon Restoration, supplying the finest quality of the now fashionable damask *taille-douce*. Jean-Marie Chuard retired in 1830, leaving the company to his son and nephew.



Vertical hanging and seat loom width for a room of the Empress' Apartments, Chuard & Cie, 1811-1813, four-colour liseré and lancé damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Armchair, François-Honoré-Georges Jacob also known as Jacob-Desmalter, 1813, carved and gilt wood; damask © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



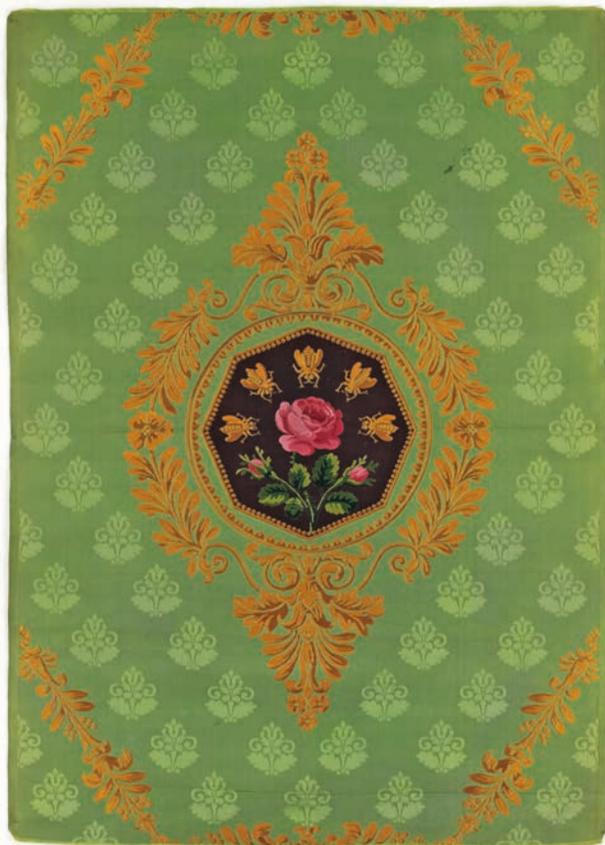
Vertical hanging loom width for the second room of the Empress' State Apartment, Chuard & Cie, 1811-1813, brocaded silk satin ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

## CORDERIER & LEMIRE

Heir to a family that had been involved in the silk industry since the late 18th century, the *maison* Corderier Frères, manufacturer of brocaded silk fabrics, teamed up with merchant and manufacturer Marie-Jacques- Alexandre Lemire under the name Corderier & Lemire to meet the 1811 commission. Three pieces were supplied for Versailles, including the green damask with anemones and torches for the bedchambers of the princes and high dignitaries' apartments, whose rounded patterns stands out in the imperial production. The maison Corderier & Lemire also produced a gold and green brocaded border with ornamental cartouches and shells for one of the Empress' chambers, a piece of which was taken to furnish Napoleon's private study at Trianon as quickly as possible.



*Hanging loom width for bedchambers of princes or great dignitaries' apartments, Charles Corderier, 1812, three-colour satin and liseré ground damask*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



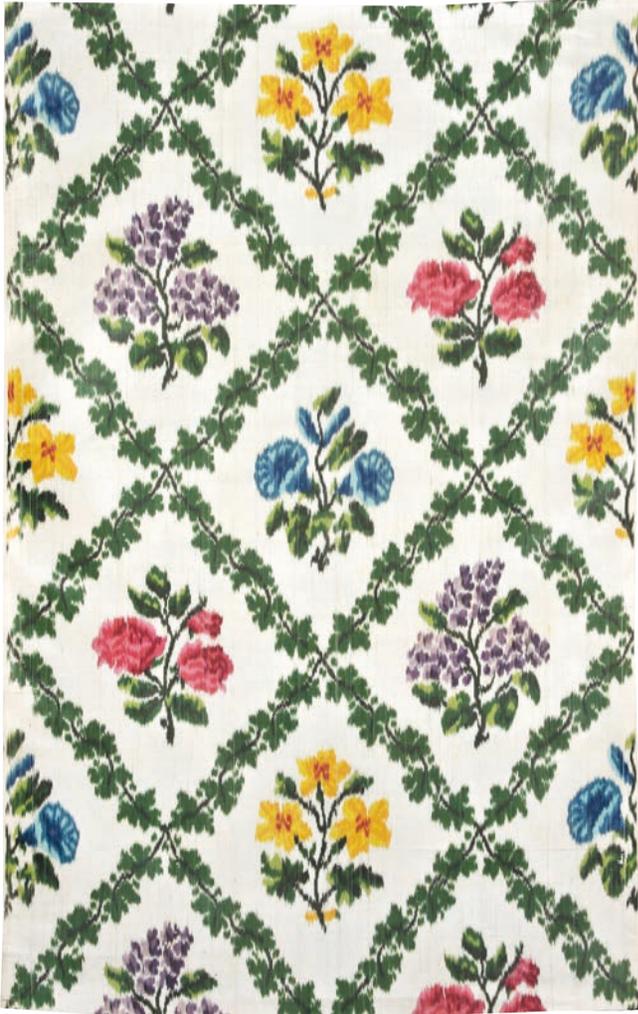
*Hanging and seat loom width for the resting chamber of the Emperor's State Apartment, J.M. Seriziat & Cie, 1811-1813, brocaded gros de Tours ground damask*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

## J.M. SÉRIZIAT & C<sup>IE</sup>

The son of a hatmaker and former musketeer of Louis XV, Jean-Marie Sériziat was brought up in Lyon's textile industry. Thanks to the vast network of his cousin, a famous Lyon military officer close to Jacques- Louis David, he married the daughter of a wealthy Spanish merchant. This marriage enabled him to develop his own business, under the guidance of his two brothers. Well established among Lyon's silk manufacturers, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony and Dutillieu & Théoleyre were his neighbours. Sériziat was among those chosen by the Imperial Garde-Meuble for the 1811 commission. Nevertheless, he only delivered three pieces, including a green gros de Tours with rose and bee motifs and a yellow and purple damask.

## DUTILLIEU & THÉOLEYRE

During the Empire, the maison Dutillieu & Théoleyre was a continuation of the firm founded in 1786 by Gabriel Dutillieu, who had partnered with François Debard and draughtsman Nicolas Théoleyre, among others. The maison was renowned under the Consulate and the Empire as one of the most important names in Lyon's silk industry. In 1808, François Debard retired from the business, leaving Gabriel Dutillieu at the head of the company under the name Dutillieu & Théoleyre, until 1814, followed by Dutillieu & Cie until 1823. Dutillieu was recognised for his research and experimentation and participated in the trend of innovation to improve manufacturing processes. He registered several patents.



Curtain and seat loom width for ten rooms in various apartments, Dutillieu & Théoleyre, 1812-1813, taffeta chiné à la branche © Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto



Bed hanging loom width for bedchambers of ministers or great officers' apartments, Antoine Sandrin (draughtsman), Dutillieu & Théoleyre (silk manufacturer), 1811, two-colour satin and liseré ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Design of a hanging and border for a damask intended for bedchambers of ministers or great officers' apartments, Antoine Sandrin (previously attributed to Jean-François Bony), 1811, graphite pencil and gouache on prepared paper © Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto





# 7<sup>TH</sup> PART BISSARDON, COUSIN & BONY

A prolific artist, Jean-François Bony worked in Lyon as a draughtsman and embroiderer for various manufacturers such as Desfarges and Camille Pernon. His portfolio of drawings, which he probably began under the Consulate and which is on display in the exhibition, includes a number of projects for the Palace of Saint-Cloud that he submitted to Pernon. He also designed rich fabrics, such as those for the Throne Room.

In 1808-1809, while working on a commission for the Meudon palace, Jean-François Bony partnered for the first time with André Bissardon under the name Bissardon et Cie Bony et Cie. At the time, Bony was also a teacher of floral painting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Lyon. The maison Bissardon et Cie Bony et Cie was also commissioned to make sumptuous clothing for the Empress Marie-Louise.



Stool cover for the second room of the reception apartment, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1813, satin ground lamé cisele velvet © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

To meet the 1811 commission, Jean-François Bony and André Bissardon teamed up again, forming a trio with Bissardon's cousin: Jean-Pierre Bissardon. Under the name Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, the company supplied nine pieces for the Versailles commission. The *maison* remained in operation until the end of 1815.

The creations of Bissardon, Cousin & Bony owed much to the artistry of Jean-François Bony and were probably the most imaginative and poetic of the 1811

commission. The three men joined forces to fulfil the imperial commissions promised by Napoleon I, but their partnership did not survive this project.



Bed border loom width for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1814, brocaded silk satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Hanging loom width for the resting chamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1813, cisele and embroidered velvet © Lyon, Musée des Tissus - Sylvain Pretto





**JEAN-FRANÇOIS BONY,  
"THE EMBROIDERY VIRTUOSO"**

Jean-François Bony was a prolific and exceptionally talented artist. Born in Givors in 1754, he moved to Lyon to attend the École Royale Gratuite de Dessin. He later worked in collaboration with several manufacturers to whom he supplied designs. Several of his gouaches, kept at the Palace of Versailles, feature designs for Marie-Antoinette's bedchamber summer meuble. Made by the maison Desfarges Frères & Cie, it was fitted in 1787 and was still there when the revolutionaries invaded the palace in October 1789. This piece, like the counterpane designed by the artist, is decorated with Bony's characteristic floral motifs.

After the revolutionary period, which was not conducive to prestigious commissions, he took part in several projects to decorate the former royal residences that Napoleon I had reoccupied, in particular the 1811 commission. He delivered what is perhaps his greatest masterpiece: a hanging, a screen "preciously embroidered with silk and gold threads" and seat covers for the resting chamber of Empress Marie-Louise's private chambers in Versailles.



*Design for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers, Jean-François Bony, 1811, graphite pencil and watercolour on paper*  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



*Le Printemps, Jean-François Bony, 1804, oil on canvas*  
Image © Lyon MBA - Photo Alain Basset



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet loom width for the third room of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1813, brocaded silk satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet loom width for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1814, brocaded silk satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



# 8<sup>TH</sup> PART FLOWERS AND BIRDS OF THE EMPRESS' CHAMBER



In 1811, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony were commissioned to make an ivory-coloured satin ensemble embroidered with flowers and birds for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers in the Palace of Versailles. Several preparatory drawings for this piece have been preserved and reveal the different compositions that were considered. Upon Desmazis' request, this was the only fully embroidered meuble from the 1811 commission, which was specially made for the Empress "who seems to appreciate this kind of work".

The fine dyeing was a complicated process to achieve, as the partners themselves confessed: "Never has a meuble given us so much difficulty, we had to dye the shades several times before we reached the desired result [...]".

It resulted in a marvellous embroidery on an ivory ground, combining Beauvais, cord and chain stitches. The embossed effect was achieved by a subtle combination of twisted silk yarns and furry chenille yarns.

The taste for flowers and shades of pink, mauve and purple recalls the floral patterns of the days of Marie-Antoinette, which had a lasting influence on textile design in Lyon, and particularly on the art of Jean-François Bony.



*Hanging for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812, embroidered satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Backrest loom width for the Empress' resting chamber,*  
Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812, embroidered satin  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Design for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers,* Jean-François Bony, 1811,  
graphite pencil and watercolour on paper  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



*Design for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers,* Jean-François Bony, 1811,  
graphite pencil and watercolour on paper  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



*Backrest loom width for the Empress' resting chamber,*  
Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812, embroidered satin  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Armchair seat loom width for the resting chamber of the Empress' private chambers,* Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812, embroidered satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging border for the Empress' resting chamber,*  
Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812,  
embroidered satin  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Unmounted hanging corner piece for the Empress' resting chamber,* Bissardon, Cousin & Bony, 1811-1812, embroidered satin  
© Paris, Mobilier national





## 9<sup>TH</sup> PART THE GRAND TRIANON, THE EMPEROR'S "ONLY SPRING HOUSE"

Unlike the Palace of Versailles, where he never lived, Napoleon quickly moved into the palaces of the Trianon, which he began refurbishing in 1805. He planned to install his sister Pauline Borghese in the Petit Trianon, keeping the left wing of the Grand Trianon for Madame Mère and the right wing for himself. The supplied furniture was simple, as were the fabrics. But the Emperor's mother refused to live at the Trianon, believing it to be inconvenient and unsuited to modern needs. A large part of its furniture was removed and transferred to Rambouillet.

It wasn't until 1808 that Napoleon resumed his project for the Grand Trianon, enriching it from 1810 onwards in anticipation of his second marriage to Marie-Louise. He then regarded the Trianon as his "only spring house". This new furnishing is the one we see today. During the major restoration of the Grand Trianon in the 1960s, the imperial silks were woven anew, thanks to the fragments kept at the Mobilier national and displayed in this exhibition, thus bringing back the opulence of these décors.

The entire textile decoration of the Trianon palaces was created by François-Louis Castelnau-Darrac, one of the most important upholsterers of the Empire. He began working on commission for the Crown in 1806, notably for the Compiègne and Strasbourg palaces, and became in 1809 one of the most sought-after upholsterers for the Imperial Garde-Meuble. In addition to furnishing the entire Trianon palaces in 1810 and 1811, Castelnau-Darrac also worked on the Hôtel Marbeuf, then the Paris residence of Joseph Bonaparte, and the Monte Cavallo palace in Rome.



The bedroom in the Emperor's private chambers at the Grand Trianon © Château de Versailles / T. Garnier



# 10<sup>TH</sup> PART

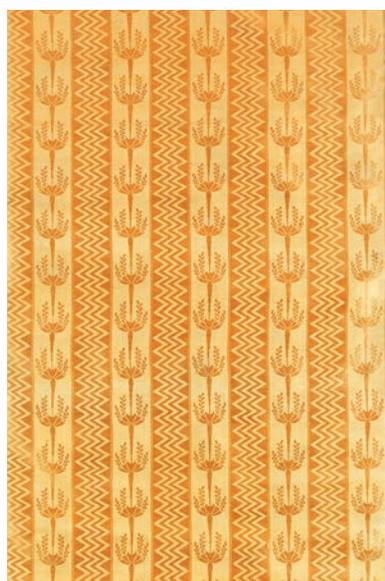
## THE PETIT TRIANON, FROM PAULINE BORGHÈSE TO JOSÉPHINE THEN MARIE-LOUISE

As ordered by the Emperor, the Petit Trianon was restored as early as spring 1805. Princess Borghese, Pauline Bonaparte, moved in in June and spent the summer there, finding it a delightful retreat. Following the renovation and maintenance of the building and gardens, the Petit Trianon returned to its former splendour, which had enchanted Queen Marie-Antoinette.

Its new furnishings were simple, in painted wood or mahogany, apart from the furniture in the grand salon executed by Jacob-Desmaller in gilt wood. The fabrics, supplied by traders Cartier and Vacher, featured elegant, fashionable ensembles. Orange gorgorans were provided for the drapery in the two drawing rooms, the most elaborate of which, with its zigzag and bouquet motifs, was provided by Cartier Fils and used for the curtains in the main drawing room.



*Hanging, bed and seat loom width for the bedchamber of Pauline Borghèse at the Petit Trianon, Cartier Fils (trader), 1805, two-colour satin and liseré ground damask*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging, bed and seat loom width for the bedchamber of Pauline Borghèse at the Petit Trianon, Cartier Fils (trader), 1805, figured gorgoran*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Hanging, bed and seat border for the bedchamber of Pauline Borghèse at the Petit Trianon, Cartier Fils (trader), 1805, silk; damask*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Fragment of an appliqué lace for the embroidered ceiling of Marie-Louise's bedchamber at the Petit Trianon, Cartier (trader), 1810, embroidered satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

When Napoleon expressed his wish to relocate to the two Trianons in 1808, Joséphine oversaw the project and was even involved in the choice of fabrics. An upholsterer's masterpiece, the Petit Trianon was entirely furnished by Castelnaux-Darrac in 1809. This décor has now been lost, but the archives attest to the elegance and lavishness of its textiles.

The Empress' bedchamber was the centrepiece of this new textile decoration: pleated wall hangings of light- blue satin with a gold brocaded white ground for the perimeter of the room and muslin draperies embroidered in gold for the bed. The furniture was upholstered in blue satin with a gold embroidery representing Josephine's cipher, which was quickly replaced by that of Marie-Louise. Finally, Castelnaux- Darrac supplied the white satin ceiling adorned with cabled yarn and embroidery in blue and semi-fine gold silk. Marie-Louise seems to have appreciated this décor, as her bedchamber in the Elysée Palace, commissioned in 1813, was similar.

A few fabrics from the original décor of Pauline Borghese's bedchamber have survived and give an idea of the elegance of the overall effect. The Marie-Louise décor, which was in poor condition, was removed during the reign of Louis-Philippe. Only the ceiling has been partly preserved.



*Central medallion of the embroidered ceiling of Marie- Louise's bedchamber at the Petit Trianon, Cartier Fils (trader), 1810, embroidered satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



*Fragments of appliqué lace for the embroidered ceiling of Marie-Louise's bedchamber at the Petit Trianon (cartouche and fleurette), Cartier (trader), 1810, embroidered satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

# 11<sup>TH</sup> PART

## THE HAMLET, A BLEND OF COUNTRY ELEGANCE AND INNOVATION

Although the state of the houses in the Hamlet quickly became a matter of concern to the imperial administration, it wasn't until 1810 that the first funds were allocated to the restoration of what was then known as the "village". Architect Guillaume Trepsat ordered the complete renovation of the houses and their surroundings, although three, that had fallen into disrepair, had to be demolished. Marie-Antoinette's pastoral setting became once again a place for strolling and pleasure for the new sovereigns. Jacob- Desmalter, Marcion and Castelnaux-Darrac delivered the precious furniture. The choice of fabrics demonstrates a quest for elegance in a setting aimed at simplicity.

The Empress' boudoir in the Billiard house was decorated with a white brocaded silk satin with a white-on- white bindweed pattern and a coquelicot and white border, while the seating of the state rooms in the House of the Lord was upholstered in a rosette fabric with a green and orange ground. These seats are among the only ones at the Palace of Versailles to have kept their original upholstery. The same applies to the modest footstool upholstered in yellow ground toile de Jouy with red separate bouquets for the Boudoir house.



*Seat*, Jacob-Desmalter / Darrac, 1811,  
beechwood, silk  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN,  
Christophe Fouin



*Footstool*, Jacob-Desmalter / Darrac, 1811, wood, fabric  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



## VAUCHELET'S WALL HANGINGS



A textile ensemble stands out in the Hamlet, which is the décor of the drawing room in the House of the Lord, formerly the Queen's house. In keeping with the technical innovations fostered under the Empire, Antoine Vauchet developed a new process for painting cotton and silk velvet, which he patented in October 1810.



To “vary the types of fabric” used in the imperial residences, the administration of the Garde-Meuble commissioned new wall hangings for the drawing room located on the first floor of the most important house of the Hamlet. At the end of 1810, Vauchet presented a project for a set of cotton velvet seats painted with bouquets on a straw colour background.

However, following the Continental System, which banned the use of cotton fabrics, Vauchet modified his design and submitted a silk velvet ensemble. Unfortunately,

it has now been lost. Sixteen panels painted on yellow ground silk taffeta were delivered to decorate the walls of the drawing room. After being vandalised in 1957 and since kept in the Palace of Versailles's storerooms, two of them have just been restored for the exhibition.

Vauchet favoured the antique motifs that were popular at the time, taking inspiration from compositions by Jean-Démosthène Dugourc and Jean-François Bony. The recently rediscovered original curtains have a bright yellow colour that is quite similar to the hangings. In an unprecedented pattern, their braid features the yellow and purple duotone that was highly fashionable at the time. It resulted in an elegant drawing room, in keeping with the latest trends, that blended perfectly with the rustic atmosphere of the Trianon gardens.



*Hanging wall panels for the drawing room of the House of the Lord, Antoine Vauchet, 1811, painted silk taffeta*  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



The Empress' lounge at the Hamlet  
© Château de Versailles / T. Garnier

# 12<sup>TH</sup> PART

## "AN EXPENSE MADE FOR A HUNDRED YEARS"



Of the yardage delivered in 1813, Napoleon agreed to a few samples being used for the Élysée Palace in Paris and the Monte Cavallo Palace in Rome. Since the ambitious project drawn up for Versailles was never completed, the 1811 commission was not used during the First Empire.

After the fall of the Empire, 68,403.86 metres (74,807 yards) of fabric from this commission was still stored in the warehouses of the Mobilier Impérial. They provided the Bourbon Restoration with an exceptional supply of upholstery silks that were used to renovate the décor of the former imperial palaces. They have been used, for instance, for the Duchess of Berry's apartments in the Tuileries Palace, for the Élysée Palace and for the Duke of Orléans' apartments in the Marsan Pavilion (Tuileries). Under the reign of Louis-Philippe, the wall hangings intended for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments were given to the chasuble maker Biais to produce liturgical garments. The Second Empire continued to use this stock to renew furnishings, most notably for the Palace of Fontainebleau. Examples of the successive re-use of the 1811-1813 fabrics right up to the Fifth Republic are legion. Napoleon I had expressed the wish, for his furnishings, to have "very solid things, so it would have to be an expense made for a hundred years". The 1811 commission granted his wishes beyond his expectations.



*Dalmatic made with silk fabric intended for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony (silk manufacturer) and Maison Biais Ainé (chasuble maker), 1811-1814 (fabric) & 1838-1842 (assembly), brocaded silk satin © Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin*



*Cope made with silk fabric intended for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony (silk manufacturer) and Maison Biais Ainé (chasuble maker), 1811- 1814 (fabric) & 1838-1842 (assembly), brocaded silk satin © Palace of Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin*



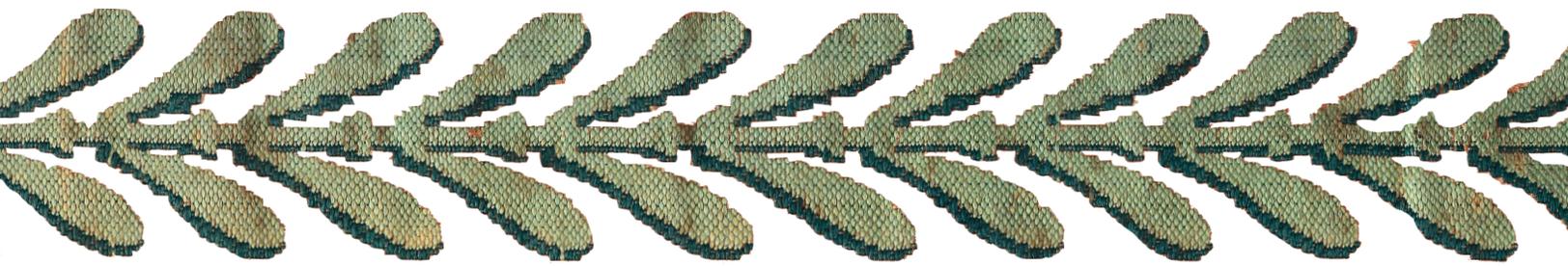
*Loom width of the fireplace screen for the Throne Room, Maison Biais l'Ainé, 1806-1808 (fabric) et 1817- 1819 (bees re-embroidered in an oakleaf pattern), brocaded and re-embroidered silk satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau*



*Easy armchair of Empress Eugénie in Fontainebleau, Parisian workshop (woodwork and upholstery), Chuard & Cie (silk manufacturer), 1860 (wood and upholstery), 1811-1813 (silk), wood and damask © RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Fontainebleau) / Adrien Didierjean*

Cope made with silk fabric intended for the bedchamber of the Empress' State Apartments, Bissardon, Cousin & Bony (soyeux) et Maison Biais Ainé (chasublier), 1811 & 1838 - 1842, satin broché © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin





# 13<sup>TH</sup> PART

## THE EMPEROR'S SMALL, THE ORIGINAL FABRICS AS COMPARED TO THE 1960s REWEAVED VERSIONS

From December 1809 onwards, Napoleon regularly stayed at the Grand Trianon. Part of Madame de Maintenon's former apartments and of Louis XV's private chambers, this five-room enfilade was hastily furnished to serve as private chambers for the Emperor. As was often the case, the Garde-Meuble relied on its stock of textiles, mainly fabrics supplied by Camille Pernon in 1807 and 1808. In 1813, when the Emperor wished to modify his private study, new furniture was supplied by the upholsterer Castelnoux-Darrac, with exceptional upholstery by Chuard & Cie from the major Versailles commission. In the Emperor's private quarters, the period's taste was reflected in the use of green and "Egyptian earth" coloured damasks and "lemonwood" moire.

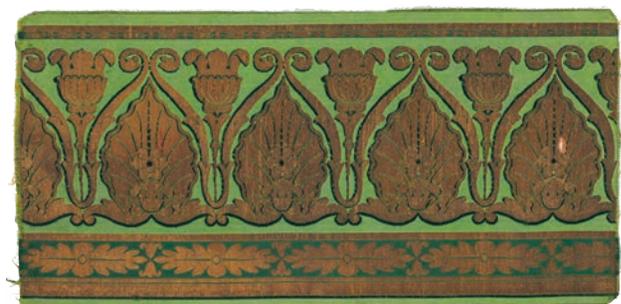
Today, the textiles in place are rewavings of these original silks, made by the maison Prelle and the maison Tassinari & Chatel as part of a major restoration campaign carried out at the Grand Trianon between 1963 and 1966. Based on the original unmounted fabrics kept at the Mobilier National or by the silk manufacturers' heirs, these pieces have been restored to their original vibrant colours, thanks to this faithful textile replacement. New milestones in the history of imperial silks, these rewavings also illustrate the transmission of the Lyonnais savoir-faire by craftsmen who are still strongly rooted in their heritage.



Private study of the Emperor's private chambers at the Grand Trianon  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



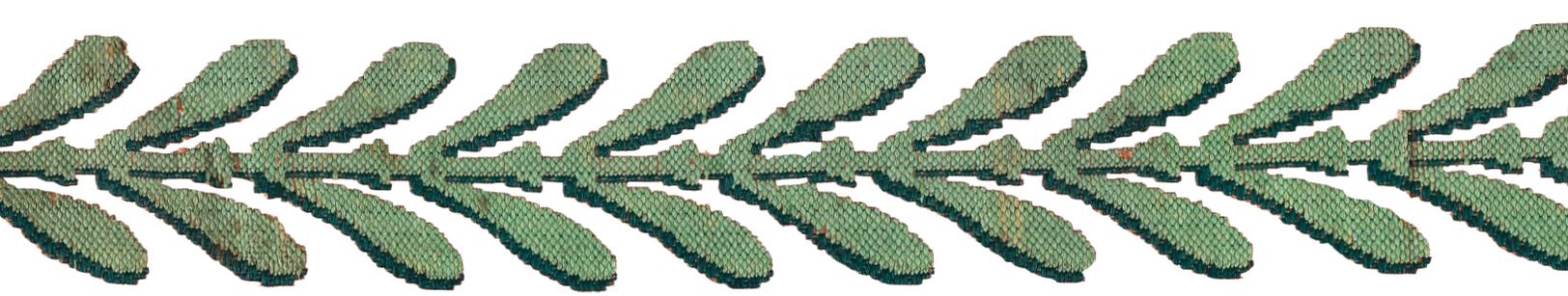
The secretary's office of the Emperor's private chambers at the Grand Trianon  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



Hanging border woven for a chamber of the Empress's State Apartments [placed in 1813 in the Emperor's chamber at the Grand Trianon], Corderier & Lemire, 1812, brocaded silk satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Hanging border woven for the Emperor's Topographic salon at the Palace of Saint-Cloud [placed in 1809 in the secretary's office of the Emperor at the Grand Trianon], Camille Pernon, 1802, three-coloured satin ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



Bedchamber of the Emperor's private chambers at the Grand Trianon  
© Château de Versailles / T. Garnier



Unmounted lemonwood moire hanging and its silver brocaded border for Joséphine's bathroom at the Palace of Saint-Cloud [placed in 1810 in the Emperor's bedchamber at the Grand Trianon], Camille Pernon, 1802-1806, gros de Tours moiré and embroidered satin ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



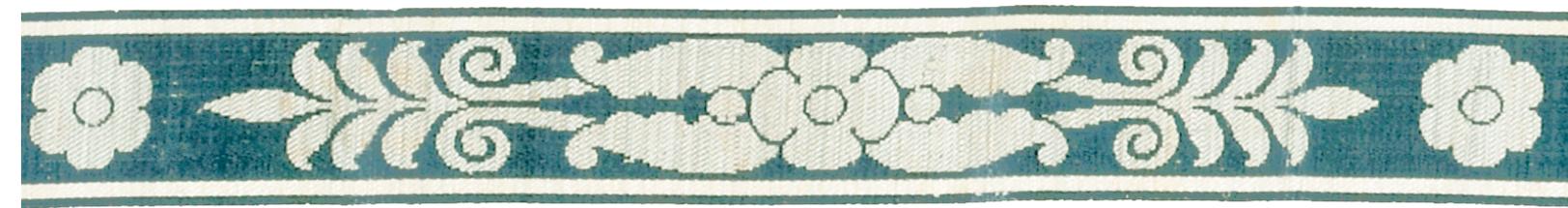
Hanging border for Joséphine's bathroom at the Palace of Saint-Cloud [placed in 1810 in the Emperor's bedchamber at the Grand Trianon], Camille Pernon, 1805, brocaded silk satin © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau



The breakfast room of the Emperor's private chambers at the Grand Trianon  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin



Hanging border for Versailles [placed in 1810 in the Emperor's breakfast room at the Grand Trianon], Camille Pernon, 1802, lampassette © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau





# GO FURTHER

*Hangings, bed and seat loom width, for bedchambers of ministers or great officers' apartments, J.P. Lacosat & Cie, 1811-1813, three-colour satin and liseré ground damask © Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bidau*



# FROM DRAWING TO WEAVING, THE ART OF LYONNAIS SILK

Until the middle of the 15th century, Italy was Europe's leading silk manufacturer. Louis XI began to develop the silk industry in Lyon and then in Tours in 1466, followed by François I, who invested substantial resources in the production of high-quality fabrics in Lyon, although the finest fabrics were still imported from Italy. As with many craft industries under the Ancien Régime, the silk manufacturing trades in Lyon were pooled in a group of manufacturers known as the Grande Fabrique and then the Fabrique lyonnaise.

Thanks to major innovations in weaving and design in the early 18th century, Lyon's silk manufacturers developed unique savoir-faire and increased refinements throughout the century, resulting in ever more elaborate designs.

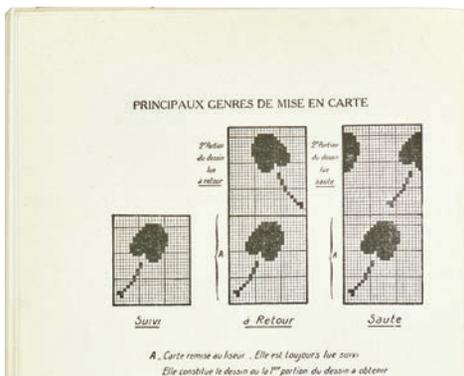
The process of creating a patterned fabric involved several stages and professionals before the weaving began. Every patterned fabric is based on a drawing. The draughtsmen who specialised in this field, many of whom are unknown today, were members of the Grande Fabrique. They trained at the École Gratuite de Dessin in Lyon (which later became the École Royale Académique de Dessin et de Géométrie in 1769) and often furthered their education at the Gobelins in Paris. The draughtsmen were both great creative minds and often outstanding technicians, as they would often be responsible for the point-paper plan stage. Unfortunately, few preparatory drawings have survived, since they were often destroyed after the point-paper was produced.

Point-paper plan is an essential stage in the production process of a patterned fabric. It is seen as the transposition of the drawing into fabric, and its success is decisive for the quality of the silk.

The point-paper plan process emerged in the 18th century when designs were becoming increasingly complex. To create a point-paper plan, the preparatory drawing was transferred to cartridge paper with horizontal lines indicating the weft and vertical lines representing the warp. There were different sizes of cartridge paper, depending on the complexity of the drawing to be transferred. The point-paper designer would use gouache to paint the boxes with the patterns.



*Gouache for the hanging, portiere and pelmet border for the fourth room of the Empress' State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811-1813, gouache and ink on paper, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Château de Versailles / Christophe Fouin*



Explanation of the join, in *Soieries de Lyon* by Georges Gilonne, Lyon, Éditions du Fleuve, 1948, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Château de Versailles / Christophe Fouin



*Point-paper plan of the hanging, portieres and pelmets for the fourth room of the Empress' State Apartments, Grand Frères 1811, graphite pencil, gouache and ink on paper, Tassinari & Chatel Collection, Maison Lelièvre © Château de Versailles / C. Fouin*



Once the point-paper plan was complete, it was passed on to the reader, who prepared the loom. The reader would read each line of the point-paper plan and replicate the design by separating the vertical cords with horizontal ones. When the small box was painted, the horizontal cord would pass under the vertical cord, and when it was empty, the horizontal cord would pass over the vertical cord.

The reader could work on two types of looms: a draw loom and a Jacquard loom. With the draw loom, the worker separated the warp threads according to the desired patterns and passed his shuttle, which was connected to the weft thread, through the middle of the warp threads. With the Jacquard mechanism, an ingenious system of punch cards controlled the raising or lowering of the warp threads to allow the passage of the weft.

The competition around mechanical developments (Jacquard mechanism, regulators, etc.), dyeing and design greatly contributed to the development of the silk industry in Lyon.



*Hanging, portiere and pelmet border for the fourth room of the Empress' State Apartments, Grand Frères, 1811-1812, silk; brocated silk satin*  
© Paris, Mobilier national / Isabelle Bideau

#### A FABRIC LIBRARY IN THE EXHIBITION

An additional room in the exhibition provides an educational approach to fabrics. A panel outlines a brief history of the silk industry, while a technical glossary is accompanied by a touch-sensitive pedagogical screen. Donated by the Maison Tassinari & Chatel, modern reweaving samples of imperial silks—taffeta, lampas, damasks and silk velvets—are on display for visitors to touch, lift and compare. There are also two films shot in the weaving workshops of Lyonnais fabric manufacturers, one showing Jacquard looms still in use and the other showing modern looms on which the Jacquard process is computer-controlled.



# RESTORING THE VAUCHELET WALL HANGINGS

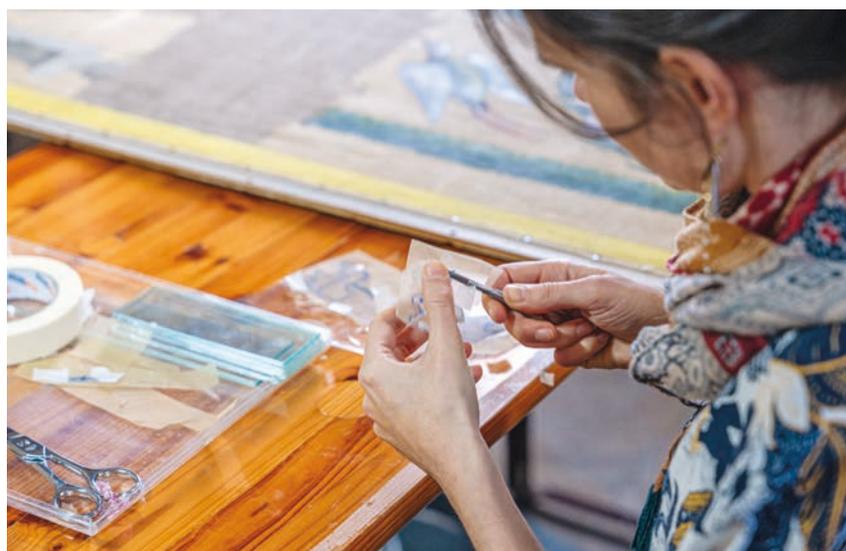


© Château de Versailles / S. Giles

Antoine Vauchelet (1762-1819) invented a process for oil painting and printing on silk or velvet. The oil contained in the paint usually releases exudates which can cause greasy rings on a porous material such as silk. The painting and printing process invented by Vauchelet prevents these stains. These wall hangings are therefore of the finest quality and very rare these days. Those delivered in 1811 for Marie-Louise's lounge at the Hamlet were unfortunately vandalised in 1957: large sections of painted silk were cut away and were never to be found.

This outstanding imperial textile decoration was restored for the exhibition.

The first stage of the restoration involved the removal of the plastic covers protecting the works, which had turned yellow due to light exposure. This plastic interfered with the visibility of the image and compromised the conservation of the works. Then, for aesthetic reasons, the varnished wooden brackets around the works that held the plastic covers were also removed. The fabrics were then dusted with brushes and a vacuum cleaner fitted with a variator and fine particle filter, before being cleaned with small, soft sponges. This is a delicate stage given the oxidation and ageing of the textile. Tape from a previous restoration, which held the edges of the plastics covers under the wooden brackets, has been removed.



© Château de Versailles / S. Giles



*Hanging wall panels for the drawing room of the House of the Lord, Antoine Vauchelet, 1811, silk*  
 © Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN, Christophe Fouin

Following the vandalism in 1957, the painted silk panels were fully mounted on linen to preserve them. This grey linen was visible where the silk was missing, so its presence had to be toned down to ensure that it did not interfere with the comprehension of the work. To match the textures of the thick, loosely woven linen and the fine, tightly woven silk, the restorers glued inlays of silk organza that were dyed to match as closely as possible the colour of the original silk. This very delicate organza was first coated with a thin layer of glue and then applied to the missing parts. The heat produced by the heated spatulas melted the glue that had been applied to the organza, allowing it to adhere on the surface.

The aim of the restoration was not to reconstruct the missing paintings, but to make the gaps less visible. This inherently fragile fabric was damaged and even cracked in some places. The original “straw colour” is only visible at the edges of the fabric, which have been protected from light by the hanging strips. The painted sections, however, have magnificently withstood the ravages of time, making it possible to discover Vauchelet’s work. An in-depth study of the painted elements, in the light of the patent and based on chemical analyses, would provide a better understanding of this fascinating technique.

**THE RESTORATION OF THE VAUCHELET WALL HANGINGS IS A PROJECT FUNDED BY THE “MÉCÉNAT DES JEUNES AMIS DE VERSAILLES” PROGRAMME**



© Château de Versailles / S. Giles



© Château de Versailles / S. Giles

# MOBILIER NATIONAL, CO-ORGANISER OF THE EXHIBITION

As a supporter of crafts and creation since the 17th century, Mobilier National's mission is to ensure the preservation and restoration of its unique collections, to perpetuate and pass down exceptional craftsmanship. As a major heritage site, the institution is also an important actor of contemporary creation and the promotion of French decorative arts.

Mobilier national owns a collection of tens of thousands of furniture pieces and objects meant to furnish and decorate the official buildings of the Republic in France and abroad. More than three hundred and forty women and men work daily to maintain, practice or promote the institution's excellent know-how, in Paris and throughout France. The Gobelins and Beauvais manufactories are dedicated to tapestry, the Savonnerie manufactory to rugs, and the Puy-en-Velay and Alençon workshops to lace. The Research and creation workshop (Atelier de Recherche et de Création - the ARC) promotes creation and contemporary design in France. Seven restoration workshops oversee various specialities of wood, metal and textile.

Forward-looking, Mobilier National is one of the founding members of the Campus d'Excellence des métiers d'arts et du design - Paris, Gobelins manufactory, launched in 2020. Through its role, it bears witness to the vitality of artistic creation and contemporary design.

The Mobilier national is a public administrative institution attached to the Ministry of Culture.

## PRESSE CONTACTS

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# | GLOSSARY

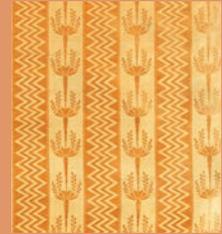
## BROCADE

Fabric with gold or silver silk threads.



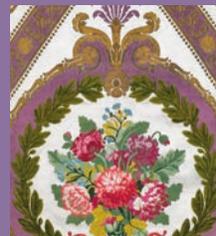
## GORGORAN

Under the Empire, a fabric striped by several methods of interweaving threads.



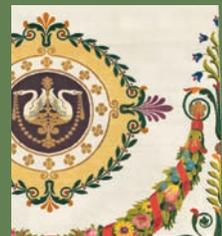
## PELMET

Fabric covering the top of a window.



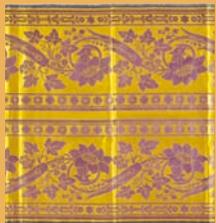
## GROS DE TOURS

Horizontal rib fabric.



## WARP

A set of threads stretched longitudinally along the loom and separated into two layers to allow the weft threads to pass through.



## LAMPAS

Fabric with patterns created by several types of threads interweaving.



## DAMASK

Same-colour fabric with a ground effect and a pattern.



## LANCÉ

A patterned effect formed by an additional weft passing through the entire width of the fabric. By extension, a fabric decorated with lancé wefts.



## LOOM WIDTH

Width of fabric between two selvages (narrow borders), approximately 55 cm.



## PORTIERE

Fabric covering a door.



## MEUBLE

Set of fabric supplied for a single room.



## SATIN

A plain fabric with a glossy finish obtained using warp floats with hidden binding points.



## POINT-PAPER PLAN

Technical drawing on cartridge paper depicting the design to be woven.



## WEFT

In a fabric, a thread arranged transversely to the warp threads using a shuttle.



## MOIRE

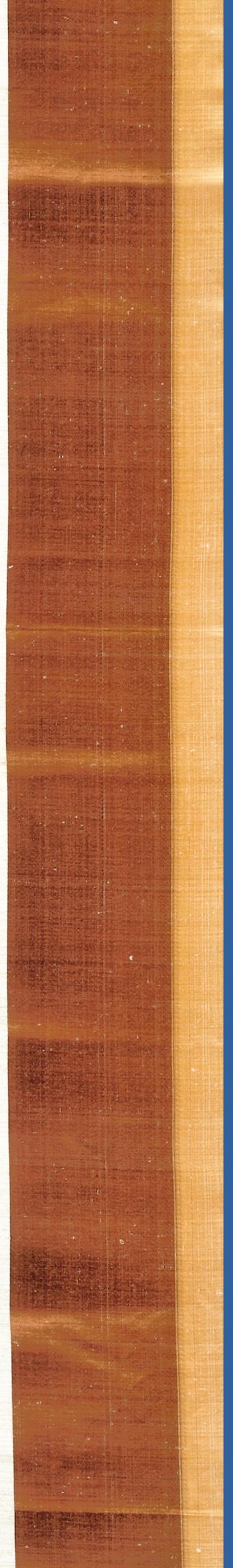
Fabric with ribs flattened after weaving to give a shiny effect.



## VELVET

A fabric whose surface is covered with loops or pile rising above a ground weave.





# AROUND THE EXHIBITION

# GUIDED TOUR AND AUDIO GUIDE

## GUIDED TOUR OF THE EXHIBITION

Discover the story of an exceptional order made by Napoleon in 1811 to support the Lyon silk manufactories then in great difficulty, for his project to re-decorate the palaces of Versailles and Trianon. A selection of a hundred pieces of sumptuous and varied fabrics bears witness to the innovations and research for improvement by the Lyon silk houses in the 19th century. The exhibition offers the opportunity to discover lesser-known works and world-renowned savoir-faire.

Duration: 1 hr 30

Price: 10 euros, in addition to an entry free (reduced rate of 7 euros)

## AUDIO GUIDE

A guided audio tour with twelve commentaries is available in French and English via an audio guide or the Château de Versailles app. This guide will accompany visitors in their discovery of the exhibition through the different spaces.





# PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### ACCESS FROM PARIS

RER line C, towards Versailles Château - Rive Gauche.

SNCF trains from Montparnasse station, towards Versailles - Chantiers.

SNCF trains from Saint-Lazare station, towards Versailles - Rive Droite.

RATP bus no. 171 from Pont de Sèvres towards Versailles - Place d'Armes.

A13 motorway (follow Rouen), exit Versailles - Château.

Parking at Place d'Armes. Parking is paid, except for people with disabilities and in the evenings from 7:30 pm.

### OPENING HOURS

The exhibition is open to the public every day except Monday at the Grand Trianon:

- From 19 to 31 March: from 12 pm to 5:30 pm
- From 1 April to 23 June: from 12 pm to 6 pm

### PRICES

Exhibition accessible with Passport or Château tickets, the "1 year at Versailles" subscription card, and to beneficiaries of free admission (<18 years old, <26 years old residents of the EU, people with disabilities, job seekers in France, etc.)

Passport (1 day) giving access to the Château, gardens, Grand Trianon and Estate of Trianon, and temporary exhibitions: 28.50 euros

Estate of Trianon ticket (from 12 pm): 12 euros

### VERSAILLES FOR ALL

Free admission for temporary exhibition visits:

- for people with disabilities and their companions upon presentation of proof.
- for recipients of social minimum benefits upon presentation of proof dated less than 6 months.

Information and reservation: + 33 (0)1 30 83 75 05 and [versaillespourtous@chateauversailles.fr](mailto:versaillespourtous@chateauversailles.fr)

### AUDIO GUIDES

Palace Tour: audio guides in 11 languages, as well as a version in French Sign Language

### THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES APP

The official app of the Château de Versailles offers audio tours, an interactive map to visit the entire estate, and full access to all the podcasts of the Palace of Versailles.







  
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