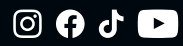


CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES

THE KING'S ANIMALS

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Exhibition at the Palace of Versailles
12 October 2021 – 13 February 2022



PALACE OF VERSAILLES PRESS OFFICE

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THE KING'S ANIMALS

EXHIBITION FROM 12 OCTOBER 2021 TO 13 FEBRUARY 2022

Press release

From 12 October 2021 to 13 February 2022, the Palace of Versailles is hosting the exhibition *The King's Animals*. Some 300 works will breathe new life into a spectacular artistic menagerie encompassing the thousands of animals that lived in and around the Palace during the Ancien Régime. The exhibition will also shed light on the opposition, among certain great minds of the French Court, to the Cartesian vision of animals as mere machines bereft of intelligence and sensibility.

Looking at the Palace and Gardens of Versailles today, we can hardly imagine them awash in animal life. And yet the Palace was once home to dozens of companion animals, with **dogs, monkeys, cats, birds** and more occupying the apartments and antechambers. The now bygone Royal Menagerie featured the rarest species, **from the coati to the quagga, and from beavers to black crowned cranes**. Game was plentiful in the park, the royal stables accommodated 2,000 **horses** and the kennels held 300 **hunting dogs**. Animals are omnipresent as well in the decor of the Palace and Gardens, depicted for their mythological or political symbolism.

Since its creation, the Palace of Versailles contributed to establishing a new rapport with the animal world. Fierce resistance to the Cartesian theory of “animal machines” even emerged at court: in the Palace of the Kings of France, there was never any doubt that animals were endowed with a soul.

This legendary fauna is returning to Versailles for the exhibition *The King's Animals*. Indeed, the King's finest painters — Bernaerts, Boel, Le Brun, Desportes, Oudry — raised animals to noble standing through portraiture, alongside their paintings of Court worthies. Monarchs' favourite dogs were also eligible for immortalisation on canvas, with their names gleaming in golden letters: **visitors will thus make the acquaintance of Misse, Turlu, Tane, Blonde, Diane and other four-legged friends, not to mention Louis XV's cat, Le Général, painted by Oudry.**

Animals were also portrayed in tapestries woven at the Manufacture des Gobelins, and some were dissected and stuffed by taxidermists for the Academy of Science and the King's Garden.

EXHIBITION CURATORS

Alexandre Maral, General Curator at the Palace of Versailles in charge of sculptures and Director of the Palace of Versailles Research Centre.

Nicolas Milovanovic, Chief Curator at the Louvre Museum, in charge of 17th century French paintings.

DECOR

Guicciardini&Magni Architetti



Three Hounds Facing an Antelope
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, oil on canvas, Ireland, Russborough House,
© Alfred Beit Foundation.

The public will also discover Louis XV's stuffed elephant, as well as the skeleton of the first elephant to inhabit Versailles (a female given to Louis XIV by the King of Portugal).

Finally, the exhibition will look back on the Labyrinth Grove, adorned with a fantastic bestiary illustrating Aesop's *Fables*. **Never since the destruction of this mythical alcove of the Gardens of Versailles in 1774 have so many of the sculptures that once embellished it been presented to the public.**

Paintings, sculptures, mounted animals, tapestries, sleds, vellums, porcelain, goldwork and more: **some 300 works will be brought together for the exhibition, exemplifying the ubiquity of animals at Versailles.** They are taken from some 50 collections in France and abroad (Louvre Museum, National Museum of Natural History, Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, Sèvres Museum of Ceramics, Natural History Museum of the University of Pavia, etc.).

The exhibition is organised with special support from the Louvre Museum

LOUVRE

"SEEING ANIMALS AS THEY ARE – 'SENSITIVE BEINGS' – AND NOT SIMPLY LIVING MACHINES..."

The partnership between the two curators of the exhibition *The King's Animals*, Alexandre Maral, Chief Curator at the Palace of Versailles, and Nicolas Milovanovic, Chief Curator at the Louvre Museum, intended to shed compelling light on the complementary nature of the two institutions' collections, would in itself have provided ample motivation for this singular discovery of animal painting, a familiar and yet little-known artistic field. But this event goes much further, reviving "another way of life" in Versailles, parallel and intimately linked to court life as such, that reveals, often with novel panache, the spirit and habits of sovereigns and courtiers.

Animals were everywhere at Versailles. They filled the days of royal residents. Cats and dogs mingled in the antechambers alongside monkeys and macaws, immortalised both by renowned painters and by celebrated chroniclers who have passed down their games and mischief. And lest we forget the hunting dogs who shared daily in the Kings' greatest passion, as well as farm animals in the Queen's Hamlet, who led Marie-Antoinette to theorise on the benefits of country living away from the pressures of the Court.

Nonetheless, just like the curiosities that abound in the Inner Apartments or the Admirable Trees that lend the Gardens their uniqueness, rare animal species brought to Versailles from far off lands testify to the prestige of French kings, as well as their interest in science. For the first time, this exhibition recreates the mythical Menagerie — definitively destroyed in the early 20th century — in which exotic animals were not only admired but also studied. Some, such as Louis XV's stuffed elephant, remain to this day. The event also looks back on the fabulous Labyrinth Grove with its fascinating lead bestiary.

Thanks to exceptional contributions from some 50 French and international collections, 300 different works of art demonstrate a passion for animals portrayed in myriad ways — in painting, sculpture, porcelain, sketches, goldwork, in palace decor, as ornamentation on sleds and more.

As we commemorate the 400th anniversary of the birth of La Fontaine, whose spirit lives on through his fables, inspired by those of Aesop that once punctuated the Labyrinth Grove, it would be tempting to focus on the symbolic and political nature of these animal allegories with their lessons for mankind. However, Alexandre Maral and Nicolas Milovanovic follow in the footsteps of the kings, inviting us to consider animals as they are — "sensitive beings" — and not simply living machines, as seen by contemporary Cartesians.

As scientists delve into animals' souls, determining whether octopi dream, measuring the average intelligence of bears or exploring links between emotions and colour changes in chameleons, Alexandre Maral and Nicolas Milovanovic imbue the exhibition with a contemporary spirit, a hallmark of Versailles.

This event is the fruit of a dual passion for *The King's Animals* and for Versailles itself, a passion that gives the exhibition its full force and originality.

Catherine Pégard

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

Passage taken from the exhibition
The King's Animals,

published jointly by the Palace of Versailles and Liénart

"IN THE GRANDIOSE CHOREOGRAPHY OF COURT, UNEXPECTED PERFORMERS PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE..."

Fathom the universe while at the same time forging the world order, contemplate the harmony of nature while contributing to its perfection: such is the quest of classical civilisations. This idea was especially prominent at Versailles where, day after day, the world performed for an audience of one: an absolute monarch.

In the grandiose choreography of court, unexpected performers played a central role, a role brought into clear relief by this particularly innovative exhibition. Indeed, the issue of animals is quite familiar to us today and has been the subject of myriad scientific and philosophical questions over the past few centuries. However, it has rarely been addressed from a historical and political perspective. As such, many of the factual components making up this exhibition strike us as veritable discoveries.

Undoubtedly, the vigorous dedication of the curators — an uncustomary posture to be sure in the scientific activity of our museums — helped identify these key moments of reflection and thoughtfulness with regard to animals, moments embodied by central figures in the royal court: monarchs, princes and courtiers of every stripe. In addition to their fascination with animals, Nicolas Milovanovic and Alexandre Maral share another passion of equal intensity: a passion for Versailles. One could challenge their exuberant portrait of an enlightened, even heroic court, a bastion of resistance in a sea of Cartesian 'machinism'. Nonetheless, their case is powerful and amply documented, a thought-provoking and often deeply moving argument. The issue is unimaginably far-reaching: there may be no more profound question than that of the (putative) borderline separating us from animals. For we clearly cannot recognise their intelligence and sensibilities without seeing ourselves reflected in them, and vice versa.

This kinship may be unsettling as the imagination calls up its hybrids and metamorphoses... Classical thinkers systematically draw from the animal world to forge values or study character traits, artists use them to express sentiments, and even highly abstract notions, in their allegories.

At Versailles, the two dimensions exist side by side: animals in art (veritable masterpieces!) and in life, housed in the Menagerie and the apartments, in the woods and fountains, providing material for countless anecdotes. Louis XIV's tender devotion to the carps that he would feed from his own hand is but one of the love stories narrated by the exhibition. Emotions pervade an exploration that also addresses subjects such as scientific curiosity, social life and economics.

Visitors should be advised that thanks to a multitude of exceptional pieces on loan, they will see in this exhibition not only a new take on history; they will also come across unforgettable sights, gazes that will follow you forever, and that will guide you.

Laurent Salomé

Director of the National Museum
of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon

Passage taken from the exhibition catalogue

The King's Animals,

published jointly by the Palace of Versailles and Liénart



White Angora Cat Stalking a Butterfly
Jean-Jacques Bachelier (1724-1806), ca. 1761, oil on canvas,
Versailles, musée Lambinet © Art Shooting / Gwenola de Crémières



THE EXHIBITION

KINGS AND COURTIERS SURROUNDED BY ANIMALS

Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI lived at Versailles surrounded by animals, according to their own taste or in deference to court interests and practices. During the *Ancien Régime*, animals were ubiquitous in the royal residence.

HORSES

More than 2,000 horses inhabited Versailles, with hunting and war horses housed in the Great Stables, and saddle and workhorses in the Small Stables. An indispensable subject of royal passion, they were regularly depicted by the greatest artists, particularly the painter Adam François Van der Meulen. In addition to their utilitarian functions, they shone at the centre of lavish royal ceremonies such as carousels and garden parties.



Alexander and Thalestris, or The Pompous Carousel of Gallant Amazons from the Four Parts of the World

Attributed to Jean-Baptiste Martin the Elder (1659-1735), after 1686, gouache, Palace of Versailles

The Carrousel of Galant Amazons was organised on 28 and 29 May 1686 in the Main Courtyard of the Great Stables. Inspired by the story of Alexander, the scene represents the encounter between Alexander — the Grand Dauphin, pictured on the right upon a rearing horse — and the Queen of the Amazons. Ladies — the Duchess of Bourbon and Mademoiselle de Bourbon, followed by a cortege of Amazons — follow behind the horsemen. The decorations adorning the horses vie in resplendence with the sumptuous costumes of the competitors, bedecked with gemstones, feathers, pearls, and silver and gold embroidery. As for the Versailles stables, they are visible but appear larger than in reality due to a trompe-l'œil perspective. This gouache rendering testifies to the skill of fanmakers, who enjoyed the privilege of creating these objects, imported from Asia in the 16th century and essential to the worlds of fashion and luxury in the age of Louis XIV. They drew inspiration from etchings and current events, including performing arts, as well as from major political events such as battles and treaties, as well as births and weddings in the royal family.

PETS AND COMPANION ANIMALS

Dogs were the closest animal companions of sovereigns and princes. Louis XIV set an example by creating kennels for his dogs in the first antechamber of his private apartments. François Desportes would accompany the Sun King on hunting trips to sketch his favourite dogs in natural poses. Jean-Baptiste Oudry continued in the same vein, painting Louis XV's dogs. Folle, Mite, Blonde, Blanche, Tane were thus immortalised, with their names gleaming in golden letters.

Cats only came to the fore with Louis XV. Indeed, the monarch was a cat lover, with a particular fondness for angoras. The red velvet mat belonging to his white angora cat Brillant was placed above the fireplace in the Council Room, where the King's feline friend could listen in as he debated policy with his Ministers. Jean-Baptiste Oudry also painted an official portrait of Louis XV's black cat: Le Général.

Versailles featured several aviaries, and **birds** of every stripe are regularly pictured on royal portraits. Parrots, and particularly macaws, were especially popular due to the beauty of their plumage and their ability to imitate human speech. They could be found not only in the Menagerie, but also in the apartments, as companions to the royal children.

Paintings attest as well to a multitude of **small monkeys** at Versailles. Often confined to the apartments, they were largely absent from the public sphere. Monkeys were generally seen as toys and offered as gifts to ladies and children. No portrait of the royal families or members of Court featuring monkeys has been unearthed.

Green monkey specimens, imported from South America, were also held in the Menagerie as of the 1670s.



Zette and Nonette,

François Desportes (1661-1743), 1714, oil on paper bonded to cardboard, dépôt de Sèvres, Manufacture et Musées nationaux, Paris, musée de la Chasse et de la Nature

Delighted with Desportes's initial portraits of his favourite dogs in 1702, Louis XIV commissioned the painter in 1714

to create four more, intended to hang in the Château de Marly. Three preliminary studies are included in the exhibition to represent this order. The artist paid careful attention to the dogs' posture, carrying out many preliminary studies, hastily sketched in the royal kennels in black stone or sometimes red chalk, as well as oil on paper.

In this preparatory study for *Zette and Nonette*, we see the bitch portrayed in diverse postures. The artist submitted these small-sized studies to the King, who chose the postures to be depicted in the final work. Finally, following royal assent, an oil study was painted, representing the animal in the pose to be preserved for posterity.

Louis XIV was a passionate hunter, but even more passionate about his dogs, for whom he spared no expense. The King's canine companions lived in the lap of luxury, both in an antechamber of the royal apartments.

After dinner, it was not uncommon for the King to visit the Dogs' Room, located in the first antechamber to his private apartments, to treat his favourite animals to biscuits specially prepared and delivered daily by the royal pastry chef. Louis XIV's fierce love for his animals led to the emergence in France of an artistic genre that already existed in the Netherlands: dog portraits, successfully executed by Jean-Baptiste Oudry and those who came after him.



Portrait of “Le Général”, Louis XV’s cat

Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), 1728, signed and dated: “JB. Oudry 1728”, oil on canvas, Elaine and Alexandre de Bothuri Collection

This painting is part of a series by Oudry for Louis XV. The King commissioned ten paintings between 1725 and 1732 to adorn the walls of his apartment in the Château de Compiègne.

The portrait of his cat, Le Général, is unique in that for the first time it portrays not a dog but a royal cat, whose name is printed in golden letters in the lower right-hand corner.

Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska are known to have gradually established love of cats as an aspect of court life. In 1728, this portrait officially confirmed the new status cats enjoyed at Versailles.

Le Général was a majestic animal, and his jet-black coat inspired particular admiration, as chronicled by Paradis de Moncrif: “Black Cats are those whose nature has always been most parsimonious; it seems to shine forth from time to time simply to show us that it can. To all appearances, the she-cats who take the most pride in their beauty are black in hue, or at least try to come across as such.” This 18th century poet, playwright and scholar is the author of *Les Chats*, published in 1727. His light-hearted writing style belies a deep examination of the human-animal relationship, as well as the issue of anthropomorphism, a central aspect of religious rites during Antiquity.



Louise-Marie de France (1728-1733), known as Madame Troisième

Pierre Gobert (1662-1744), ca. 1730-1732, oil on canvas, Palace of Versailles.

On 9 November 1729, the Treaty of Seville marked the end of the Anglo-Spanish War

(1727-1729). Louise-Marie de France, known as Madame Troisième (1728-1752) was born shortly before the signature of this treaty.



This portrait and its counterpart depicting Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska's twin elder daughters, were commissioned from Pierre Gobert and hung in the Queen's Inner Apartments in 1732. They serve to link portraits of the three First Children of France with the peace treaty.

Madame Troisième, dressed in a gown trimmed in fine lace

and wearing a bonnet festooned in flowers, stands before a column, while a façade of the Palace looking out on the Gardens serves as a backdrop. Two turtle-doves are seen emerging from a cage held open by the young princess. Harbingers of good omens, these messengers of hope and joy appear ready to announce the good news of peace in Europe.

FARM ANIMALS

Reflecting a new appreciation of fauna, farm animals became welcome at Versailles, living alongside monarchs. In addition to Louis XIV's Menagerie, which included domestic fowl and rabbits, the most significant illustrations of this proximity were the new Menagerie established by Louis XV, which included a farm, and then the farm at the Queen's Hamlet at the Trianon.

These institutions brought with them concern for animal welfare, as Claude-Henri Watelet wrote in his 1774 treatise *Essay on Gardens*: "Everything that assures me these useful animals are content contributes to my pleasure far more than would gilded fences, trellises overladen with ornaments, marble basins that dry up at the slightest heat, or other features that are better suited to a kind of misplaced petty grandeur than to real usefulness."

Louis XV's son the Dauphin also chose the farm as the subject of a painting commissioned from Oudry, and later copied by his mother, Queen Marie Leszczyńska.



Charles Philippe de France, Count of Artois (1757-1836), and his sister Marie Adélaïde Clotilde Xavière of France, known as Madame Clotilde (1759-1802)

François-Hubert Drouais (1727-1775), 1763, oil on canvas, Palace of Versailles

François-Hubert Drouais came to

specialise in portraits of children, often accompanied by pets.

Although he succeeded in capturing the essence of his young models, this portrait nonetheless exhibits an artificial character: in a landscape-like setting reminiscent of a theatre backdrop, Count d'Artois supports his younger sister, sitting upon a ribbon-swathed goat.

This allusion to court entertainment is a reference to Amalthea, Zeus's caprine wet nurse, one of whose horns, torn off by the infant god, became the *cornucopia*. The fruit bowl under the princess's left arm echoes the theme of abundance.

This painting was extremely popular with the royal family.



The Farm, based on a work by Jean-Baptiste Oudry

Marie Leszczyńska (1703-1768), 1753, oil on canvas, Palace of Versailles

The Queen, Marie Leszczyńska, took up the brush herself for this painting. Her model, a work by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, was commissioned and designed by the Dauphin, Louis Ferdinand of France, who also oversaw its execution.

The painting depicts an idealised vision of nature celebrating the blessings of agriculture, Mother Earth and healthy work, all ideas defending by the Dauphin's high-minded social circle. Prefiguring physiocratic theories, in the 18th century the work was known as *Agriculture or France*: cows, horses, fowl and other farm animals came to symbolise the kingdom's wealth. No mere idyllic vista, it was a celebration of the nation through its agricultural landscapes.

The Queen borrowed the canvas from her son to execute her own painting, probably with the help of her "colour master", painter Étienne Jeaurat, along with Oudry himself. Marie Leszczyńska's prominent signature testifies to her pride in this work. In 1753, she presented the painting as a gift to Louis XV, who hung it in the small study adjoining his private chamber. The Duke of Luynes described the occasion in these words: [...] "The King and Queen are accustomed to exchanging gifts each year [...]. This year, the Queen offered His Majesty the work of her own hands [...]. She undertook last year to copy a painting by Oudry portraying a very pleasant landscape. The idea originated with His Royal Highness the Dauphin. The Queen [...] commissioned a frame notable for its admirable carved motifs and gilding. This is the painting she presented to the King, who appeared to receive it with pleasure."

In this exhibition, Oudry's model and Marie Leszczyńska's copy are presented side by side for the first time.

ANIMALS IN THE DECORATIVES ARTS

In the 18th century, animals were a common theme in French decorative stylings. These figures served an ornamental function that provided inspiration for artists, without eclipsing their symbolic value. Monarchs' private apartments, furnished in accordance with contemporary tastes, thus held numerous objects adorned with animal likenesses, from the most familiar pets to the most exotic creatures.



American Independence Candelabra

Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751-1843), 1785, chiselled and gilded bronze, Sèvres biscuit porcelain and green porphyry, Palace of Versailles

This superbly opulent candelabra commemorates the French and American victory at Yorktown. It was delivered to Versailles in August 1785 and placed in the King's Corner Room. Three leopards (symbols of pride and emblems of England) support a

circular base from which rise three plates in classical biscuit representing: *The outbreak of hostilities*, *Peace conquering War* and *The Conclusion of Peace with America*.

Three roosters (the emblem of France) stand over the English felines, which are depicted in chains to illustrate the British defeat. An American Indian figure — removed and replaced with a bobèche in 1815 — served to proclaim the birth of a new nation: the United States of America.

With this stunningly fashioned candelabra, Thomire created a masterpiece of bronzework. The leopards, magnificently rendered with their long, muscular bodies, display a coat animated by spots in the form of slight indentations on the bronze surface. The roosters sing the French victory while looking defiantly down on the chained cats.

As a political monument, this candelabra sends a strong symbolic message, signalling revenge for the defeat and humiliation suffered in the Seven Years' War.



Box in the form of a small dog lying on a table

Box made up of two components, lacquer, Japan, late 17th or early 18th century, Palace of Versailles

Queen Marie-Antoinette had a genuine affinity for Japanese lacquer, which adorned the Gilded Room of her private apartments. The arrangement of these objects is known thanks to the inventory of her collection, carried out on 10 October 1789. They were exhibited on four tables topped with petrified wood, as well as in a showcase.

These lacquer works, most of which came from workshops in Nagasaki and Kyoto, were created in the late 17th century and the first three decades of the 18th century. The boxes present a wide variety of shapes. One of the tables located to the left of the fireplace held two of the rarest and most poignant boxes in her collection: one depicts a small dog, while the other is shaped like a rooster. These wonderfully poetic works exemplify the refinement of Japanese lacquer art. The dog-shaped box is made of black lacquer covered in gold powder with black islets, the two colours suggesting the animal's spotted coat. Glass eyes embellished with lacquer pupils lend the miniature dog a warm-hearted gaze as it lies tenderly curled up. This pure, rounded figure was likely created in a workshop in Kyoto. We know that during the Edo period, small sets of matching lacquer dog statues were believed, based on an ancient superstition, to protect children from evil spirits: as such, these decorative objects became popular in the homes of wealthy Japanese families.



“Leopard” sled

France, ca. 1730-1740, sculpted, painted and gilded wood, glass, silk velvet, leather, steel, Palace of Versailles



During harsh winter months, Louis XV would race through the snow-covered pathways of the royal park perched on a lavishly decorated sled. The Duke of Luynes recalls in his memoirs that the King was a skilled driver, known for thrusting his vehicle forward at full speed. Competitions would include 17 or 18 sleds distributed into three relay teams, and the games would continue throughout the afternoon and until sunset. Driven by courtiers seated behind the dash as ladies rode on the seat, sleds were pulled by horses shod with crampons, covered in rich caparisons of silver-embroidered fabric or wild animal skins, and garlanded with silver bells, their joyful jangle breaking the muted stillness of the snow. Sleds displayed a strange and fantastic bestiary of rare or legendary beasts.

The leopard is particularly striking, with its mouth wide open, its bulging eyes, its body arched as if ready to strike, as well as its graphically rendered coat. The sculpture was in all likelihood based on a real-life model, as the royal Menagerie housed a leopard from 1730 to 1741.

Although falling under the purview of the Palace’s *Menus-Plaisirs* Department, these fanciful vehicles nonetheless featured highly elaborate gilding techniques including several coats of coloured glaze applied atop gold and silver leaf: their consummate execution attests to their royal origin.

MYTHICAL PLACES OF THE PAST

Thanks to scenic decors, visitors can discover two centres of animal life at Versailles.

LABYRINTH GROVE

This grove, a reflection of the garden commissioned by Louis XIV and demolished under the reign of Louis XVI, once stood out among the most fascinating spaces in the royal estate. Designed by Le Nôtre starting in 1665 and completed in 1673, the Labyrinth featured 39 fountains illustrating Aesop's *Fables* through some 330 multicolour lead animal statues. The water gushing from their mouths and beaks represented the Aesopian tradition of animals gifted with the capacity of speech.

Wise teachers of mankind since Antiquity, the animals of Aesop's fables also inspired those of Jean de La Fontaine. Twenty-three of the fables published in 1668, in the first printings of *Selected Fables Set in Verse* were encapsulated in the fountains throughout the Labyrinth of Versailles. The fabulist, known for having breathed new life into the age-old genre of fables, does not appear to have participated in the design of the grove. Nonetheless, his influence, albeit indirect, is clearly visible.

Some 19 sculptors — including renowned artists such as Jacques Houzeau, Pierre Legros, Benoît Massou, Pierre Mazeline and Jean-Baptiste Tuby — were called upon to create this man-made menagerie. The identity of the project manager is unknown. Charles Le Brun, who served as First Painter to the King and studied animals as part of his research into physiognomy and expression of passions, may have participated in designing the works, but none of his sketches can be conclusively linked to the Labyrinth.

For the first time since the grove was dismantled in 1774, 21 animals (of the 35 that have been preserved) will be on display for the exhibition. Thanks to a compelling decor and an abundant collection of paintings and engravings representing the grove, viewers will appreciate the sensation of wonderment contemporary visitors must have felt.



Labyrinth of Versailles

Engravings by Sébastien Leclerc, painted in gouache by Jacques Bailly, calligraphy in golden ink by Nicolas Jarry, hand printed on vellum, red morocco binding featuring the coat of arms and monogram of Louis XIV, Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris

Most likely illuminated and calligraphed for the King, this sumptuous volume is mentioned by accounting agents in August 1674. The magnificent painted engravings by Leclerc and Bailly offer precious insights into the colour coating used on the lead animal statues. Jacques Bailly (1629-1679), a student of Nicolas Robert, ranked among the foremost French miniaturists of the 17th century. In 1678, he was designated to maintain the colour coating on the Labyrinth sculptures. During the following century, this task fell to François Desportes and Jean Bailly.





Monkey riding a billy goat and looking to the left

Fountain 12 (*Animal Combat*), Pierre Legros and Benoit Massou, 1673-1674, colour-coated lead, Palace of Versailles

Fountain 12, *Animal Combat*, was the most significant work in the grove in terms both of its size and the theme it illustrates, betrayal and consequences: "Upon a desperate and doubtful battle betwixt the birds and the beasts, / the bat stood neuter, 'till she found that the beasts had the better on't, / finally condemn'd never to see daylight again".

Assembled upon a mound of rocks, several four-legged beasts, together with a bat, pitched stones at a flock of birds perched at the top of a latticework pavilion. The streams of water gushing from some 50 animals formed a liquid dome within the trellis.

This work was associated with the two groups *Monkey Riding a Billy Goat*, located on either side of the pathway leading to the fountain.

THE MENAGERIE

Built between 1662 and 1664, the Menagerie housed rare animals intended to amaze visitors and assert the King's prestige. Unlike those of Vincennes, created by Mazarin, where combats were organised between wild beasts, most of the animals in the Menagerie of Versailles — including a wide variety of birds — were peaceful creatures. These animals served as models for a number of artists, whose work led to the emergence of a French school of animal painting in the 18th century.



View and perspective of the Menagerie of Versailles as seen from the Royal Gate
Adam Perelle, water-colour etching, 1668-1695, Palace of Versailles

On the first floor of the building, architect Louis Le Vau designed an octagonal room offering a panoramic view on each of the seven courtyards and enclosures where the animals resided. The walls of this chamber were decorated with several animal representations painted by Flanders-born artist Nicasius Bernaerts. These works composed a repertoire of Versailles fauna and served as a source of inspiration for major 18th century animal painters such as François Desportes and Jean-Baptiste Oudry. **For the first time since it was dismantled during the French Revolution, this collection will be partially reunited in its original layout.**

The exhibition will also serve as a window into the scientific activity carried out in the Menagerie. For example, upon the death of animals, dissections performed in particular by Claude Perrault and Joseph Guichard Du Verney were subsequently published as engravings, entitled *Memoirs for a natural history of animals...*



Ostrich

Nicasius Bernaerts (1620-1678), 1664-1668, oil on canvas, musées de la Ville de Montbéliard

This painting was carried out for the Octogon Room of the Versailles Menagerie. It is one of the precious fragments of that bygone decor, originally made up of 49 works of art, of which only 22 survive today. This series was hung as a frieze atop the room's vast French windows. The portraits in this cycle, rectangular or oval, all exhibit comparable compositions inspired by the first volumes of zoological studies: the animal is positioned in the foreground and usually looking towards the viewer. The artist attempts to portray the unique temperament of each model: the placid nature of the turtle, the ravenous appetite of the beaver or, in this case, the self-assurance of the ostrich. To avoid monotonous repetition, different angles are used (frontal, profile, three-quarter view, etc.), along with varied backgrounds: discreet brushwood for the barnacle goose and the ruff, a seaside landscape with fishermen for the turtle, etc. The best-preserved paintings in the series demonstrate the great descriptive quality of the painter's brush strokes, accurately and efficiently rendering the hue of coats and plumage and thereby accentuating their grace and beauty.



Frontal view of an elephant from the Congo

Pieter Boel (1622-1674), ca. 1668-1674, black stone with pastel highlights, Louvre Museum

The elephant represented here was given to Louis XIV by the Regent of Portugal, the future Peter II, in 1668. For 13 years, this animal was the star of the Versailles Menagerie. The first elephant to set foot in France since the reign of Henry IV, he was of an easy-going, somewhat timid nature.

He was also a skilled escape artist, breaking free from immobilising straps and bursting through the door to his enclosure to amble throughout the

Menagerie, often terrifying neighbouring birds. During spring and summer months, he was led on walks through the park. In winter, his enclosure was carefully insulated and heated so he would not suffer from the cold.

The elephant was not always hospitable to visitors. He could spot taunting behaviour and did not hesitate to exact revenge. One day, he used his trunk to knock over a young man who teased him by pretending to throw food. An artist who did likewise in an attempt to paint the animal with its mouth open found himself — and his painting — the target of a blast of water.

The elephant died in 1681. The dissection, which took place at Versailles, was a major event with the King himself in attendance. The practitioners thus discovered that the animal was a female. There exist several sketches of this elephant by Pieter Boel, which stand out among his strongest and most poignant work. The artist observed the animal's natural attitudes upon raising its trunk or trumpeting, while also paying attention to the anatomical structure of its feet and eyes.

In this sketch, highlighted with white chalk, the artist focused on the elephant's depth of expression as seen in its gaze and attitude. He studied the wrinkles on the trunk and sides, the bumps in its forehead and the curvature of the tusks on each side of the trunk. Boel's portrait depicts an individual endowed with a unique personality, a person in animal form.



Wall hangings depicting birds in the Versailles Menagerie

A vulture and pink flamingo surrounded by greenery, Royal Manufacture of Beauvais, based on a cartoon (or model?) by Pierre Charles Firens (?), ca. 1684-1711, tapestry, wool and silk, ville de Lausanne, Benoist collection

Woven between 1684 and 1711 at the Royal Manufacture of Beauvais, this series of tapestries primarily depicts fowl. The greenery appears to be a collage based on a variety of visual sources.

Most of the animals adorning these tapestries were inspired by studies by Pieter Boel and Nicassius Bernaerts. These Flemish painters, specialised in animal portraiture, had brilliant careers in France. Their models included specimens housed in the Versailles Menagerie, and their work was disseminated far and wide, in particular through copies embellishing tapestries, as well as engravings.

The tapestries on display in the exhibition, part of a series that is remarkable for the number of species portrayed, stand out for their blend of aesthetics celebrating the great diversity of the natural world. The artists who designed the model certainly sought to enchant the eye with the rich medley of animals woven into the work. The lavish border of floral flourishes, typical of the style adopted by the Manufacture in the late 17th century, further enhances this phenomenon. This highly successful series, woven over several decades, is an iconic example of the Manufacture's heritage. In 1681, Louis XIV offered a copy to the high representative of the Russian czar. The King also owned a version delivered in 1696 to adorn the Château de Marly.



Chameleon

Anatomical description of a chameleon, beaver, dromedary, bear and gazelle, Paris, 1669, Abraham Bosse (ca. 1604-1676), based on the work of Sébastien Leclerc (1637-1714), Paris, library of the musée national d'Histoire naturelle.

This plate is taken from a work featuring explanations and illustrations of several animal dissections performed at the Academy of Science under the direction of Claude Perrault. The chameleon dissected at the Academy was a gift to Louis XIV in 1668.

This animal has fascinated naturalists since Aristotle. By observing and dissecting it, the researchers sought to verify and supplement the philosopher's reflections. Through scrutiny of the animal's organs, particularly its digestive system, Perrault's study disproved the millennia-old belief that chameleons take their sole sustenance from air. The anatomist also focused on the animal's symbolic importance: its ability to constantly change colour was seen as a metaphor for courtiers' pliant nature. Aristotle wrote that the chameleon could take on any colour except white. Perrault seeks to refute this hypothesis through experimentation, concluding that colour changes were linked to temperature, sun exposure, and especially the animal's emotional state.

| THE ANIMAL AS SYMBOL

IN THE DÉCOR OF THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES

At Versailles, the seat of power, animals are laden with political associations. In the décor of the Palace and the gardens, animals symbolise above all else the majesty and power of the King. In particular, horses (real and represented) embody royal magnificence.

Animals also embody the genius of nations and the supremacy of France. In a bas-relief in Fame's Grove, the French rooster stands atop Europe; in the art of the Hall of Mirrors and the War Salon, the eagle serves as the heraldic animal of the Holy Roman Empire, the lion for Spain and the Spanish Netherlands — all foes of France — while the peacock represents English vanity. In the Ambassador's Staircase, the dragon pierced by Apollo's arrows represented the victory of Louis XIV, the Sun King, in the Fronde civil wars.



Spain Defeated

Charles Le Brun (1619-1690), ca. 1684-1685, oil on canvas, Palace of Versailles

Starting in 1678, Jules Hardouin-Mansart began construction of the Hall of Mirrors and the War and Peace Rooms. The décor was entrusted to Le Brun, who was inspired by the Franco-Dutch War (1672-1678). In one massive work, a vast European coalition — including the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and Spain — assemble around the Dutch. Each nation is symbolised by an animal: an eagle for Germany and lions for the Netherlands and Spain. This work is a sketch for one of the voussoirs. The lion, which has carried a strong symbolic value since Antiquity, illustrates courage, strength and nobility. Here, Spain lowers her sword and leans on the animal, standing on its back legs, its mouth open and its mane in the wind. Looking skyward, they both understand that their defeat is imminent. This work can be dated to the beginning of the project, circa 1684-1685. It is without a doubt a *modello* destined for the King and Colbert. The brightness of the colour, the lightness of the hand, and the speed of the strokes characterise Le Brun's sketches. The work has some slight differences from the ceiling's final composition, a more accomplished piece that highlights the warrior.



The Horses of the Sun

Gaspard (1624-1681) and Balthasar Marsy (1628-1674), 1667-1672, marble, Palace of Versailles

In December 1667, three large-scale group sculptures were commissioned at the same time: *Apollo Tended by the Nymphs* by François Girardon and Thomas Regnaudin; and the two-group *Horses of the Sun* by Gilles Guérin and Gaspard Marsy. These sculptures were made for Thetis' Grotto, then under construction in the lower part of a reservoir where the lower vestibule of the chapel currently stands.

These three groups are undoubtedly the masterworks of 17th-century French sculpture.

On either side of the central sculpture, *Apollo Tended by the Nymphs*, Guérin and the Marsy brothers created the horses of the celestial chariot, newly untethered and tasting freedom for the first time. These group sculptures were designed under a common schema, which allows the viewer standing in front of them to see the heads of all four horses at once. Their raised eyebrows, bulging eyes, pointing ears, wild manes, and rippling muscles lend them a distinctive expressiveness. In stark relief to the self-possession of the central statue, the remarkable stylistic breadth of these groups paints a portrait of unleashed instinct: Guérin's horses evince

a thirst demanding to be quenched, while the daring diagonals of Marsy's group admirably translate the irrepressible urge for freedom.

When Thetis' Grotto was demolished in 1684, the three group sculptures were installed in the Palace gardens. In 1781, the painter Hubert Robert placed the groups on the artificial rock in the new Apollo's Bath Grove he was designing.

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Thanks to the patronage of The Versailles Foundation, Inc., the three groups were taken down, sheltered, restored, and finally replaced by replicas in the garden. The patronage also allowed the two *Horses of the Sun* groups to be prepared for presentation at the exposition. **A highlight of the exposition, these two group sculptures have been temporarily placed near the lower vestibule of the Royal Chapel, returning, for the first time since 1684, to their original locale.**



HUNTING

A daily activity for French kings, hunting was a highly symbolic activity. A peacetime occupation for kings of war, it was understood as a form of training and a show of force. Naturally, it became a key part of royal iconography.

Hunting was everywhere at Versailles, as present in the King's schedule as it was in royal décor, as shown in the gallery of exotic hunting expeditions in Louis XV's private apartments. The King was also a lover of hunting trophies, whose unique shapes piqued his attention.

The exposition will present a part of the *Tapestry of Louis XV's Hunting Expeditions*, designed by Jean-Baptiste Oudry for the King and woven at the Gobelins factory between 1736 and 1750.



Deer Guarded by Hounds

François Desportes (1661-1743), ca. 1702-1703, oil on canvas, Palace of Versailles

This painting was one of five large-format works commissioned in 1702 for the Château de Meudon. The hunting motifs hew to the tastes of the

commissioner: Louis, Dauphin of France, also known as the "Grand Dauphin." A hunting aficionado like his father, Louis XIV, the Grand Dauphin kept a pack of hunting hounds, to which the dogs in the painting probably belonged.

There's no doubt that Desportes made some preparatory sketches for his composition during his visit to the kennel.

On the canvas, the artist seizes the moment of rest after a successful hunt. One dog drinks, another stands guard over the dead animal, another lies down, yet another is still barking; animated and alert, they embody the tension of the hunt. In opposition to this lies the blank-eyed cadaver of a deer, blood trickling from its snout.



The Crocodile Hunt

François Boucher (1703-1770), 1739, oil on canvas, Amiens, musée de Picardie

Much favoured by the royal family, François Boucher marked the final work of his "Exotic Hunts" cycle of commissions in 1739 with

this work. His focus on the vigorous figures of the hunters invites one to wonder whether, under Boucher's brush, the subject of the hunt is just a pretext. While the animal is undoubtedly the central motif of this composition, it doesn't hold a candle to the picturesque scene of the hunters and their dogs. In particular, one sees the man seated on the back of the crocodile, using all his strength to stay balanced while keeping the animal's powerful jaws open with a long piece of wood. Nature, too, is embellished by fantasy: though this scene is set on the banks of the Nile in Egypt, the artist defies logic by playing with the icons of Antiquity, placing side by side rotunda and pyramid, palm trees and pines.



Three Hounds Facing an Antelope

Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), signed "JB.Oudry/1745"
1745, oil on canvas, Russborough House, Alfred Beit Foundation

This painting caused a sensation when it was presented at the winter 1968 exhibition of the Royal Academy of Arts.

It's an imaginary meeting of two universes of Versailles: the three dogs (left) and the fowl (suspended above) represent the world of the hunt, while the antelope represents the world of the Royal Menagerie. The unreal quality of image fascinates the viewer. This feeling stems from the improbability of this meeting, but also the nonchalance of the antelope in the face of the dogs, whose strained leashes emphasise their struggle to reach it. This is without a doubt one of the most powerful images painted by Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

IA NEW SENSIVITY

The Cartesian theory of animal machines reduces them to cogs in nature's machine, denying them any form of language, intelligence, or even feeling. The Court of Versailles resisted this theory, providing a new vision of the animal world. This philosophy was represented by a diverse range of personalities over the course of centuries.

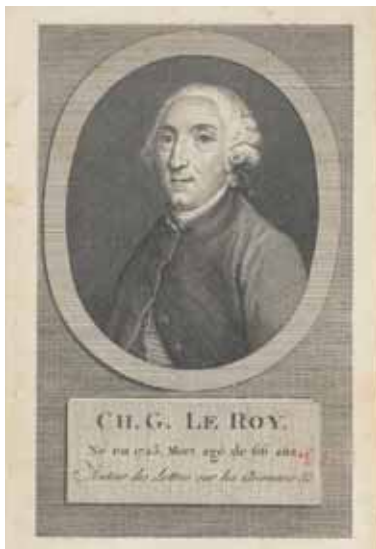
Through his work for Louis XIV, the staunch anti-Cartesian Claude Perrault contributed to the science of compared anatomy.

Princess Palatine, sister-in-law of Louis XIV, was just as fervent an anti-Cartesian.

Claude-Adrien Helvétius, the Queen's *maître d'hôtel*, authored a treatise, *On the Mind*, in which he defends the idea of an animal intelligence.

Paradis de Moncrif, the Queen's reader, wrote *The History of Cats and the novel Rival Souls*, in which he investigates the question of the souls of animals and their possible transmigration.

Finally, Charles Georges Leroy, the Versailles gamekeeper, authored of *Letters on Animals*, where this forefather of ethology defends animal intelligence by studying them in their natural habitat.



Philosophical Letters on the Intelligence and Perfectibility of Animals

Charles-Georges Leroy (1723-1789), Paris, Valade printing company, Year X (1802), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France

A figure in Louis XV and Louis XVI's Versailles, Charles-Georges Leroy became gamekeeper in

Versailles and Marly parks upon the death of his father in 1753, then became inspector and, finally, in 1760, chief lieutenant of the hunt.

Aside from enjoying access to the King, Leroy was also connected to the brilliant world of wits, which he encountered in Paris and at the court.

Through organizing high-society dinners, he frequented philosophical circles that gathered at Versailles: that of Élisabeth-Josèphe de Laborde, a friend of Madame de Pompadour, or even François Quesnay, leader of the physiocrats and doctor of Madame de Pompadour and, later, the King.

It was there that he got to know Helvétius, whose treatise *On Mind* he admired, or even Diderot, at whose request he edited over 20 articles for the *Encyclopédie* between 1755 and 1765.

He was close with Buffon, who he helped write his *Natural History of Birds*, printed by the royal press starting in 1770.

As part of his job, Leroy observed the animals of the royal grounds and reflected on their behaviour. One of his theories was that of an animal intelligence that develops as the animal surmounts obstacles.

Starting in 1762, in the *Foreign Journal* (and later in the *European Literary Gazette*), Leroy published the first six *Letters on Animals Written by a 'Physician from Nuremburg'*.

From his first letter, Leroy de-centred the theological question of whether animals have souls. As a Sensualist, he founded his approach on the senses, which are universal, in order to demonstrate that animals are capable of knowledge and judgment. In this regard he distinguished himself from Buffon, for whom "the animal is a purely physical being, neither thinking nor reflecting, who nevertheless acts and appears to make decisions".

Not only did Leroy detect the animal's capacity to reflect, but he was the first to define their language abilities: "It is absurd to doubt that animals share a language, through which they convey ideas whose communication is necessary. But since words are invented based on need, it follows that language would be very simple among beings that are always in a state of action, fear, or sleep".

For Leroy, that which distinguishes animals from humans is the absence of a society that, with its 'artificial passions', forces the human mind to evolve.

In his rebuttal of Descartes' animal-machine theory Leroy's Letter VI is without a doubt the most important. Thus, concerning the dog: "This animal is so well known that its example alone should serve to refute any idea about the 'automatism' of animals. How could we explain the many movements of this intelligent animal if it possessed no form of reflection? [An animal] that man can train to do a great number of useful things and who even as a subject maintains a certain liberty, inspiring tender movements of personal care and friendship from his master through his willed docility." Leroy adds: "The education of animals, unreflected by them, is as incomprehensible as the education of a man deprived of liberty". Leroy observes the capacity of birds to reflect: "One cannot observe [...] the nests of birds without noticing that those of the young are, by and large, poorly constructed and poorly placed [...]. The problems in these early works are rectified in later ones, after the animal has been instructed by the discomfort it felt. If animals always act without intelligence or reflection, they would always behave the same way". In his Letter VII, Leroy defines animal instinct as the ability to sense, remember, and reflect.

A complete edition of *Letter on Animals* was published in 1768, followed by a new edition in 1781 including seven new letters. Expanded with two posthumous letters and published under a new title, the present edition is that of 1802, which shows that Leroy's theories survive in the social and institutional settings in which they were developed. Today, Leroy is considered a pioneer of ethology and animal psychology.

"HOW COULD WE EXPLAIN THE MANY MOVEMENTS OF THIS INTELLIGENT ANIMAL IF IT POSSESSED NO FORM OF REFLECTION? [AN ANIMAL] THAT MAN CAN TRAIN TO DO A GREAT NUMBER OF USEFUL THINGS AND WHO EVEN AS A SUBJECT MAINTAINS A CERTAIN LIBERTY, INSPIRING TENDER MOVEMENTS OF PERSONAL CARE AND FRIENDSHIP FROM HIS MASTER THROUGH HIS WILLED DOCILITY."

Letters on Animals Written by a 'Physician from Nuremberg', Letter VI). Charles-Georges Leroy (1723-1789)



Portrait of Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans, Madame Palatine (1652-1722), petting a Dwarf Spaniel

Johann Baptist Ruel (1634-1685), ca. 1667-1668, oil on canvas, Eichenzell, Kulturstiftung des Hauses Hessen, Museum Schloss

This portrait of Elizabeth Charlotte, Madame Palatine shows the princess around fifteen years

old, three or four years before she married Philippe I, Duke of Orléans, Louis XIV's brother, in 1671. She pets a dwarf spaniel, demonstrating her love of small dogs while at the Court of Versailles, especially spaniels. Her look is full of kindness.

Her brio and her letter-writing talent made her one of the greatest activists for the cause of animals in Versailles. Her letters burst with details about the role of pets in the Court.

Her letters include the names a succession of many dwarf



spaniels that all had her affection: Mione, Titi, Tatine, Follette, Myrtil, Millette and Reine Inconnue, about whom she wrote in 1720: "She's the only queen we have in France

right now."

In another passage of a letter written just after the death of the Dauphin in 1712, she wrote: "Yesterday, the little dog of Monsieur le Dauphin made me cry. The poor beast went to the gallery of the chapel, searching for her master in the place she last saw him pray; she looked at everyone with a sad look as if to ask what happened to her master. It really broke my heart to see."

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