

Press release

Splendeurs de la cour de Saxe, Dresde à Versailles (The Splendour of the Court of Saxony: Dresden at Versailles)

Exhibition from 24 January to 23 April 2006

The Palace of Versailles presents the exhibition *Splendeurs de la cour de Saxe, Dresde à Versailles* (Splendour of the Court of Saxony: Dresden at Versailles). With this exhibition, which has brought together 300 items of exceptional quality, the public will discover the culture and opulence of the Court of Dresden in the time of Frederick Augustus I (1670-1733), of which Voltaire wrote that it was “the most brilliant in Europe after that of Louis XIV.”

Paintings, jewels, silverware, bronzes, ivories and crystal: as they explore the exhibition with its highly original design by Marc Jeanclos and Antoine Fontaine, visitors will be able to appreciate the extent of artistic exchanges between the two royal courts. One key item is the *Obeliscus Augustalis*, a masterpiece of baroque exuberance by goldsmith Dinglinger, on show for the first time outside Dresden. Sets of jewellery resplendent with precious stones (only in Dresden have they been kept complete), costumes and masks inspired by those of Louis XIV, astonishing designs and accessories, all convey a notion of the dazzling festivities hosted by Auguste le Fort. Pieces of silver furniture indicate his fascination for Versailles while items from the great Meissen bestiary will also be on display, along with some of the famous "dragon vases".

These outstanding exhibits have been loaned to Versailles during the renovation work at the Grünes Gewölbe (“Green Vault”) in Dresden. For the city of Dresden – a name that instantly calls to mind the bombings of February 1945 – is enjoying a facelift. After an unprecedented reconstruction project, much of the historic city centre has been rebuilt and the castle has once more become a showcase for collections once hidden or confiscated but now returned. This year, 2006, the city celebrated the 800th anniversary of its founding and in addition, Unesco recently classed the surrounding Elbe valley as a world heritage site. Auguste le Fort, of the Wettin dynasty of patron princes, was a great collector and always maintained close links with France. His son, Marshall of Saxony, was responsible for Louis XV’s victory at Fontenoy, while his granddaughter Maria-Josepha married the Dauphin, Louis XV’s son, and gave France three kings: Louis XVI, Louis XVIII and Charles X.

Organisation: Établissement Public du Musée et du Domaine National de Versailles, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Museums of Dresden, with assistance from the Réunion des Musées Nationaux and support from EADS, Metrobus and the channel Histoire.

Commissioners: Béatrix Saule, chief curator and director of the Château de Versailles research centre, assisted by Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin, and Dirk Syndram, director of the Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden Museums, assisted by Antje Scherner and Christine Kitzlinger.

Exhibition design: Marc Jeanclos & Antoine Fontaine.

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