THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES PRESENTS

EXHIBITION from 22 October 2013
TO 23 February 2014

ANDRÉ LE NÔTRE
IN PERSPECTIVES
1613- 2013

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SAINT-GOBAIN
ANDRÉ LE NÔTRE IN PERSPECTIVES
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To celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of André Le Nôtre, creator of the gardens of Versailles and greatest of "gardeners", the exhibition probes the mystery behind the genius of the artist.

Based on years of archival research and field study, the exhibition brings together, for the first time, the masterpieces having belonged to Le Nôtre, as well as the rare autographed documents and superb drawings of his team, gathered from all over the world.

For the first time also, with the help of the latest technologies, the exhibition demonstrates how Le Nôtre used his total mastery of optical processes as a tool to express his extraordinary creative force.

This leads to a different vision of the work of Le Nôtre. But let’s not forget that his work consists of the great sites which the exhibition invites you to visit or see again: Versailles of course, as well as Vaux-le-Vicomte, Fontainebleau, Chantilly, Saint-Cloud, and other less known sites.

Exhibition produced with the exceptional participation of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Institut de France, Louvre Museum and Nationalmuseum of Stockholm.

CURATORS

Béatrix Saule, Director of the National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon
Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin, Historian and Associate Researcher
Georges Farhat, Associate Professor, University of Toronto
assisted by Hélène Delalex
LE NÔTRE AS ART COLLECTOR

The quality of Le Nôtre’s collections conveys another image of the man, his interests and his social position. His art collection is so remarkable that the descriptions of Paris invite one to visit his offices and, in his absence, "the key is in a place known to all honest people" (Tallemant des Réaux).

In the 1650s, Le Nôtre started to acquire paintings, drawings, prints, marble sculptures, bronzes and medals, most of which were contemporary works from the French artists he frequented, but also from Italian, Dutch and Flemish masters. In his Tuileries home, he displayed them in a vestibule and three adjoining rooms, of which the last was the most beautiful, being of an octagonal shape, and covered with paintings from floor to ceiling. In 1693, as he had no direct heir, he gave Louis XIV the best works in his collection.

Christ and the Adulteress, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665), Louvre Museum, Paintings Department

Le Nôtre commissioned Christ and the Adulteress from Nicolas Poussin in 1653. The painting represents an episode on the theme of forgiveness, in which Jesus saves the kneeling woman from stoning. The gardener got to know Poussin when he was in Paris.
KEY DATES IN THE CAREER OF ANDRÉ LE NÔTRE

1610  Louis XIII, King of France
1613  Birth of André Le Nôtre on 12 March at the Tuileries, in Paris.
1629 – 1635  André Le Nôtre follows the teachings of Simon Vouet.
1635  He becomes Head Gardener to Gaston d’Orléans.
1637  He becomes gardener to the King on his father’s death.
1643  Death of Louis XIII. Louis XIV becomes King of France.
1643  André Le Nôtre becomes the King’s designer.
1650  Start of work at Vaux-le-Vicomte.
1657  Le Nôtre becomes Advisor to the King and General Controller of Buildings, Gardens, Arts and Factories.
1661  Le Nôtre initiates the work for Versailles.
From 1665  Le Nôtre is called upon for numerous projects in France and abroad.
1665  André Le Nôtre and Le Bernin meet on several occasions.
1675  André Le Nôtre is ennobled by Louis XIV.
1679  Trip to Italy (end of April to end of November)
1680  Le Nôtre is appointed Maître d’Hôtel de la Dauphine.
1681  He is decorated with the Order of Saint Lazarus and Mount Carmel.
1693  André Le Nôtre is decorated with the Order of Saint Michael.
1700  André Le Nôtre dies on 15 September at his Tuileries home in Paris.

André Le Nôtre (1613-1700)
Carlo Maratta, 1625-1713
Versailles, Palaces of Versailles and Trianon
Career and Honours

The career of André le Nôtre, who worked tirelessly for 65 years, started well before his work for Fouquet in the gardens of Vaux-le-Vicomte and didn’t end when he resigned from his duties in 1693. After a family apprenticeship and a period in the workshop of the painter Simon Vouet, he was appointed Head Gardener to Gaston d’Orléans, brother of Louis XIII, in 1635. Having inherited his father’s duties as King’s Officer, he became ordinary gardener to the King (in charge of the Tuileries). He then became the designer of the King’s plants and gardens and was appointed Advisor to the King and General Controller of Buildings, Arts and Factories, making him an administrator working in close collaboration with the Buildings Superintendent. His work for Louis XIV truly started in 1660. The King quickly honoured him with his friendship, because of his skills, his integrity and a shared passion for gardens and works of art.

Visit of Louis XIV to the Château of Juvisy, Pierre-Denis Martin, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Le Nôtre designed the park of the Château of Juvisy in the 1660s. As the Château was already built, Le Nôtre could not create a perspective which lined up with the building. He thus tailored his creation to the specificities of the site. He created two perspectives: the first, which is parallel to the river Orge, was transformed into a canal while the second, which is perpendicular to the first axis, stretches between the channelled river and another canal. Coming out of the Château down the flight of steps, one goes through the terrace, into the middle of the landscape where a large parterre is adorned with a fountain. As one walks along a tree-lined path, other perspectives suddenly come into view in a dazzling theatrical way.
WITH VOUET

In the 1630s and for about five years, the young André followed the teachings of Simon Vouet to master the art of drawing. Vouet returned from Italy in 1627 where he had earned a wide reputation. He was appointed First Painter to Louis XIII and was given a workshop under the large Gallery of the Louvre. With this talented young master, Le Nôtre acquired a new way of drawing forms from nature, the ability to combine various arts to compose a décor, and new techniques to deal with perspectives, in particular that of anamorphosis. In this large workshop where numerous students came to train, Le Nôtre met artists such as the sculptors Sarrazin and Lerambert, the painter Mignard and, most importantly, Le Brun, the future First Painter to Louis XIV with whom he was to work on numerous projects.

GREAT WORKS FOR GREAT PATRONS

While Louis XIV asked Le Nôtre to primarily focus his reflections and creations on the royal residences, they also extended to civil engineering work, such as the road leading out of Paris and the Champs-Élysées avenue, as well as roads leading to Versailles and Saint-Germain-en-Laye. In addition to the royal family, his special clients included the royal mistresses, ministers and their families. Le Nôtre was soon called upon by foreign monarchs who had seen his creations or learned about them from travellers, princes, ambassadors or architects who had admired them. Without travelling, he met their requests through the precise plans and data on which he worked and by sending assistants on site.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF LE NÔTRE

For the King:
- Versailles, Vincennes, Fontainebleau, Tuileries, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Trianon, Marly

For the royal family and the royal mistresses:
- Saint-Cloud for Philippe d’Orléans
- Chantilly for the Grand Condé
- Anet for the Duke of Vendôme
- Clagny for Madame de Montespan
- Maintenon and Saint-Cyr for Madame de Maintenon

For ministers and their families:
- Vaux-le-Vicomte for Fouquet
- Meudon for the Marquis de Louvois
- Sceaux for Jean-Baptiste Colbert

For foreign monarchs:
- Greenwich for Charles II of England, then for William IIIPrince of Orange, King of England and Stadtholder of Holland, as well as Windsor and Het Loo
- Racconigi and Venaria Reale (Italy) for Charles-Emmanuel II then Victor-Amédée II of Savoie
- Charlottenbourg, Potsdam, Herrenhausen and Kassel (Germany)
THE MAN

ROOM 1
Le Nôtre as art collector

ROOM 2
Training, career, honours and achievements

HIS ART

ROOM 3
A territory for the art of Le Nôtre

ROOM 4
Le Nôtre at work

ROOM 5
Axes and view points

ROOM 6
Open spaces

ROOM 7
Enclosed spaces

HIS INFLUENCE

ROOM 8
Heritage and modernity of Le Nôtre
ROOM 3

A TERRITORY FOR THE ART OF LE NÔTRE

Under the Ancien Régime, gardens and parks were part of the institutional and economic framework of manorial estates. A palace was linked to this territory which provided it with income, prestige and power. The garden and the park are distinct but complementary entities which are physically separate but visually linked. The dividing elements – terraces, transversal canals, railings or impassable walled ditches – do not break up the view. The garden thus opens onto the park where hunting paths are laid out in star shapes or crows’ feet. In some cases – such as Versailles – Le Nôtre made plans and had the work carried out even before all the pieces of land in the parks had been purchased. The complex surveying operations and estimates for the purchase of the land sometimes took up to thirty years. The extension of the estate was then based on the composition lines, not the reverse.

ROOM 4

LE NÔTRE AT WORK

Le Nôtre had all the knowledge and know-how of his profession, including land surveying and levelling. Through his apprenticeship with Vouet, his experience on numerous work sites and his duties as General Controller of Buildings, he gained other competencies, those of an architect and hydraulics engineer. He had ties with scholars from the Academy of Sciences as well as Minim monks who were knowledgeable in optical geometry. His close assistants were either relatives or allies. Some were tied to a royal house while others had specific skills, like the purchase of plants or alignments. Le Nôtre entrusted his assistants with the land surveying work and final drafting of the projects he designed. His ideas were laid down as quick sketches or comments on a plan.

ROOM 5

AXES AND VIEW POINTS

The landscapes designed in France in the 17th century feature vast perspectives along main axes of composition. They consist of a succession of terraces and parterres, paths and avenues, fountains and canals. To offer strollers a succession of different visual effects, Le Nôtre used his mastery of optical perspective by combining the use of two processes: collimations and anamorphosis. Collimations are visual alignments; to obtain them, distances and levels need to be coordinated. This defines the earthwork to be carried out. As for anamorphosis, it offsets the apparent reduction in the size of distant parts: the further the shapes, the more they need to be elongated and widened.
ROOM 6

OPEN SPACES

From the end of the 16th century, the open spaces, essentially made up of the parterres, were given special consideration concerning their size, shape and décor, the need for overlooking terraces, and the layout of the plants which composed them. While applying them, Le Nôtre changed both the conception and function of the parterres. On the one hand, he gave less importance to the plants than to the overall design they formed. On the other, in addition to an ornamental function, he gave the parterres a structural role to give rhythm to the perspectives, effect transitions or create specific atmospheres. Le Nôtre was the first to give so much prominence to raised components - sculptures and topiary - to decorate his plant beds. But most importantly, he gave his parterres exceptional magnitude, as seen at the Tuileries gardens and at Fontainebleau. At Versailles, he invented a new type of parterre: the water parterre.

Topiary models, stemming from the book "Décoration intérieure et jardins de Versailles et autres endroits", anonymous, France, 18th century

This plate shows a selection of shapes into which yews can be pruned in the gardens of Versailles. Topiary art consists in forming and pruning bushes to create a sort of plant sculptures.

ROOM 7

ENCLOSED SPACES

With few flower displays, the great gardens of the 17th century gave trees renewed importance. With Le Nôtre, the progression of their height and their density reinforced the scale effects. It is probably in the fifteen groves of Versailles, enhanced throughout the reign of Louis XIV, that Le Nôtre best expressed his genius focused on "grandeur and nature". More than anywhere else, he made full use of his imagination to create exceptional water, mineral and plant sculptures. These groves were designed as places of pleasure and astonishment and were the site of extraordinary festivities whose engraved representations made the gardens of Versailles famous throughout Europe.
After the death of Le Nôtre, his art continued to flourish through the works of numerous designers. His direct heirs were his former assistants and great-nephews. Numerous French architects and designers have made use of his work in a more or less direct way and transposed his principles by creating gardens in France and abroad. The work of Le Nôtre has also been disseminated through prints and treatises. With *La Théorie et la pratique du jardinage* (1709), Dezallier d'Argenville presented the most famous synopsis on the French formal garden and some of the principles of Le Nôtre. Throughout the 19th century, formal gardens continued to be created in France for "Grand Genre" enthusiasts. At the end of the century, the reference to Le Nôtre was tinted with nationalism, setting apart "French" gardens from "English" ones to the point of caricature.

### Modernity

Numerous designers and theoreticians from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day refer to Le Nôtre. This appropriation takes place on the scale of gardens and cities, involving a diversity of approaches and meanings. Le Nôtre also caught the interest of architects and urbanists such as Le Corbusier and Henri Prost who integrated his perspectives in France's first motorway network in the 1930s. In "*Space, Time and Architecture*", a book which quickly became a work of reference (1941), theoretician Giedion summarises the theory according to which the origin of modern urbanism would be in the gardens of Versailles. On the cover of his book, an American motorway is superimposed on the gardens.

Meanwhile, the models of Le Nôtre spread to the USA and the USSR. They inspired the reconstruction of the Washington Mall (1901-1902), the Burnham Plan of Chicago (1909), the roof gardens of the Rockefeller Center in New York (1929-1940) and several large-scale constructions in Moscow, in the spirit of Soviet gigantism. The inventive interpretation of the work of Le Nôtre intensified after the war: main avenue in Cergy-Pontoise, Esplanade of La Défense in Paris, terraced walkway in Riem-Munich, urban development strategy for city suburbs, and even the 9/11 Memorial whose creator, Peter Walker, says he is fascinated with "the work of Le Nôtre on emptiness".
At Versailles, the confrontation with the works of Le Nôtre proved stimulating for landscape designer Louis Benech and sculptor Jean-Michel Othoniel. Following an international competition, they have been commissioned to create a new Water Theatre Grove. To keep track of the major stages of the construction of the grove until its opening in 2014, visit [www.chateauversailles.fr](http://www.chateauversailles.fr).
VISITOR INFORMATION

Exhibition from 22 October 2013 to 23 February 2014

Every day except Mondays and on 25 December 2013 and 1 January 2014, from 9 am to 5:30 pm (last admission at 4:45 pm).

Exhibition ticket included in the Passport and Palace tickets.

Free for EU residents under the age of 26.

Guided Visits:
7 and 20 November, 14 December, 12, 16, 21, 22, 23, 28, 29 and 30 January at 10 am.

Advance booking required: +33 (0)1 30 83 78 00

BOOKLET-GAME

Free discovery quiz for children aged 8-12, produced in partnership with Paris Mômes.
Available at the information desks and on www.chateauversailles.fr

Workshops for ages 8-12
"In the footsteps of Le Nôtre": 25 and 31 October, 27 December and 3 January.
Information and booking: +33 (0)1 30 83 78 00 or activites.educatives@chateauversailles.fr

CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

André Le Nôtre in Perspectives, 1613-2013

P. Bouchenot-Déchin and G. Farhat (dir).
Co-publication of Hazan-Château de Versailles, €49.
Available in all museum shops and on www.boutique-chateauversailles.fr

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