



Summer 2004



*The Flowering of the  
French Renaissance*



Ian Wardropper

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art**

## Director's Note

Outside of France collections devoted to that country's Renaissance are rare. The Museum is thus fortunate to have many of these objects assembled in its European Sculpture and Decorative Arts galleries. At the Metropolitan, Renaissance objects are also scattered throughout various other departmental galleries: the superb armor made for Henry II in Arms and Armor; panel paintings by Jean and François Clouet in European Paintings; engravings and sketches in the Drawings and Prints Study Room; and paintings and decorative arts in the Lehman Wing. Thanks to this issue of the *Bulletin* we are able to bring together into one forum French Renaissance works from these disparate collections.

Beginning with the imaginative patronage of Francis I and extending through the last of the Valois dynasty, the time frame of this publication spans most of the sixteenth century. Approaching the period thematically permits author Ian Wardropper, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Curator in Charge of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, to emphasize certain artistic and intellectual trends and to juxtapose various art forms in contexts vital to understanding the spirit of the age.

The majority of the objects reproduced in this publication were acquired in the first half of the

twentieth century. Major holdings of French, as well as Italian, Renaissance works of art, ranging in scale from portable to architectural, were amassed by such legendary collectors as J. Pierpont Morgan, George Blumenthal, Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, and Judge Irwin Untermyer and later given to the Museum. The façades of Manhattan mansions like Gertrude Rhinelanders Waldo's at 867 Madison Avenue (designed by Kimball and Thompson, 1895–98 and now a Ralph Lauren store) recall the architectural French Renaissance Revival that accompanied this collecting trend. Fewer French Renaissance objects have entered the Museum in recent years; those that have—the silver-gilt *Chalice* (p. 9) and the marble relief *The Reign of Jupiter* (p. 32), for example—are prized for their quality and rarity and were acquired by purchase. Recent scholarly attention to the period has reinvigorated study of this fascinating field, and the commentary in this publication relies on this expanded literature. I trust that the objects illustrated here will intrigue readers for their role in Renaissance culture and encourage further visits to the galleries, where the works can be appreciated firsthand for their intrinsic beauty.

Philippe de Montebello

#### FRONT COVER:

Detail of *Ewer* (p. 41)

#### INSIDE FRONT COVER:

Detail of *The Drowning of Britomartis* (p. 25)

#### INSIDE BACK COVER:

Detail of *Shield of Henry II of France* (p. 29)

#### BACK COVER:

*Helenus and Andromache Give Presents to Aeneas*, from the Aeneas series (see p. 14). French, Limoges, ca. 1530–35. Enamel, painted and partly gilded, on copper; 8¾ × 7¾ in. (22.2 × 19.7 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1925 (25.40.1)

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## Introduction

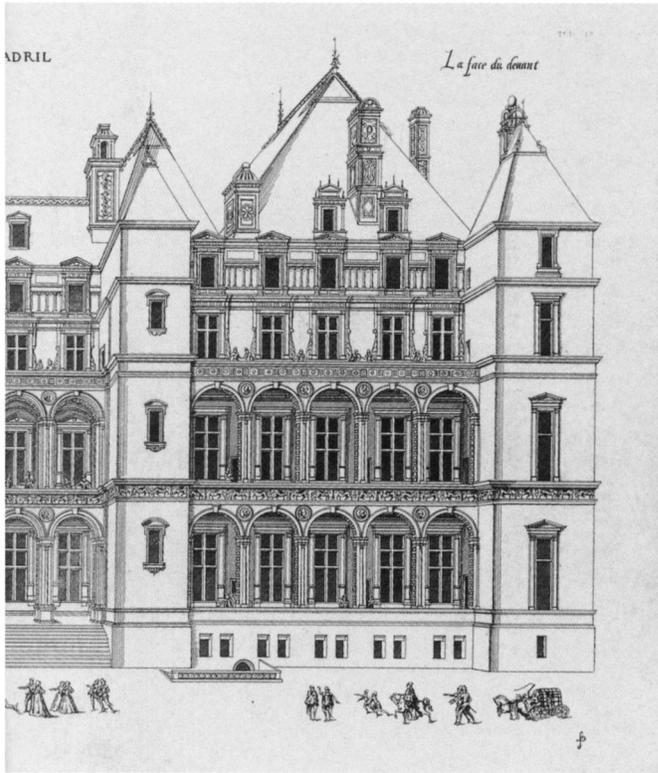
Of towering height and powerful will, Francis of Angoulême dominated court and country after his accession to the throne in 1515. King Francis I's ambitions for foreign conquest were dashed when he was captured at the Battle of Pavia in February 1525 and imprisoned in Madrid. Returning to France after this humiliating episode, he threw his enormous energy into domestic affairs. Thwarted in expansionist designs, the king determined to modernize his native land and to introduce the new culture of the Renaissance to France. Grafted to its own vibrant traditions of the medieval period, the Renaissance in France flowered in astonishing and unique forms. The regularly spaced, broad arcades of the new wing of the king's château at Blois (begun about 1515),

for instance, were inspired by Donato Bramante's innovative loggias (begun 1509) at the Vatican. Another royal residence built in the decade 1520–30, the now-destroyed Château de Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne, near Paris, incorporated Italian artist Girolamo della Robbia's glazed polychrome roundels of ancient rulers into its façade. Recognizably French features such as the building's pronounced height, pitched roof, and turrets were combined with Italian Renaissance elements like the loggia and roundels to create a singular architecture (p. 4).

The Château de Madrid's radiant colors and classical allusions impressed Francis's courtiers. When Louis Prévost de Sansac built his manor in 1529, this nobleman, titled Grand Falconer of



Possibly by Girolamo della Robbia (Italian, 1488–1566). *Francis I (1494–1547), King of France*, 1529. From Château de Sansac, Loches, Indre-et-Loire. Glazed terracotta, h. 17½ in. (44.5 cm). Gift of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.100.245)



detail

Jacques Androuet Ducerceau (French, 1520–1586). “Le Château de Boulogne dit ‘Madrid’ ” in *Les Plus Excellents Bastiments de France*, 1576/1579. Engraving. Reproduced in facsimile by Faure Dujarric, ed. H. Destailleur (Paris, 1868). Thomas J. Watson Library (121.691/D851Q1)

France, proclaimed his allegiance by affixing a roundel of Francis I to his entry gate (p.3). Dating from Girolamo della Robbia’s second stint in France (1527–48), the roundel pays homage to the king’s sense of style by referencing the decorations of the Château de Madrid. Its three-quarter bust format and slice of drapery over the shoulder recall the images of emperors seen on Roman coins and reliefs. Embroidered with the figure-eight, double-knot emblem associated with his mother, Louise of Savoy, his doublet identifies the king, though few of his subjects would have failed to recognize Francis’s long, broad face and prominent nose.

## Architectural Decorations

Francis I’s architectural projects accelerated the assimilation of Italian Renaissance style that began in the first decade of the sixteenth century. One of the great early patrons of French Renaissance art, Georges, cardinal of Amboise, figured as papal legate in the Italian diplomacy of King Louis XII (r. 1498–1515). When it came to transforming the archbishop’s palace in Rouen into his residence, he was one of the first Frenchmen to bring Italian artists to work for him, including the Milanese painter Andrea Solario. The cardinal’s example proved to be of great importance for the arts in France. He commissioned French artists who absorbed Italian models; among them were the sculptor Michel Colombe and the architect Colin Biart. Traditional French specialties such as wood carving, a notable art form in Rouen, also responded to Italian Renaissance designs. The delicate hand of Colin Castille de Rouen may have gouged the intricate patterns of the door panels centered on antique figures at Georges d’Amboise’s Château de Gaillon. In the example at right the emperor Hadrian appears on a medalion set within a trophy of arms and armor drawn from the decoration of ancient Roman buildings.



Colin Castille (?) de Rouen, (French, early 16th century). *Door Panel from the Château de Gaillon*, ca. 1505–10. Oak, 23 × 9 ¾ in. (58.4 × 23.5 cm). Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.494a)

Northeast France. *Pediment*, ca. 1525–30. Oak, w. 40 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (102.6 cm). Rogers Fund, 1923 (23.168.1)



Long a specialty of northern France, wood carving exemplified the uneven pace of transition from medieval tradition to Renaissance innovation. The triangular pediment above, which has a mate (acc. no. 23.168.2), might have been the crest of a frame over a door or part of a screen in a paneled room. The man portrayed has the stern gaze and forked beard of a Greek or a Roman philosopher, and his laurel crown reinforces the impression that he belongs to the ancient world. Yet his costume with its pleated sleeves is contemporary, consistent with the fashions of 1525–30. Other features, such as the curving ribbon filling the background of the triangle and the fantastic creatures on the gable slants are fanciful holdovers from Flamboyant Gothic architecture of the fifteenth century. Likely to be an indoor decoration, the pediment takes its cue from exterior building elements, such as the tops of portals or roof gables. Although the pediment's origin is not documented, its material, oak prevalent in northeast France, suggests that it is a splendid example of the exuberant carving from that region.

The dissemination of Renaissance architectural design throughout France is seen in stone carving as well as in wood and in ceramic ornaments. The stone relief of an emperor (overleaf) comes from the château at Assier in the Lot, a region in south-central France. The château belonged to another member of the circle of Francis I, Jacques Galiot de Genouillac, Grand Master of Artillery to the king and Grand Horse Master of France. When he returned to his ancestral home after being captured with the king at the Battle of Pavia, de Genouillac began rebuilding the family manor house, modeling it on the royal residences at Blois and Paris. His building was studded with ceramic roundels of Roman emperors by Girolamo della Robbia, similar to the one of Francis I made for Sansac. Joining these were stone reliefs such as this bust of an emperor wearing a toga; his hair is tied back with a fillet, the ribbons of which dangle behind his head. While ceramic roundels are an isolated example of Italianism penetrating deep into southern France, stone roundels responded to local traditions. Classical prototypes were

French. *Roundel: Bust of an Emperor*, ca. 1525–30? From Château d'Assier, Lot. Limestone, diam. 29 in. (73.7 cm). Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.480)

transformed by a sculptor trained in the rugged, exaggerated style associated with Nicolas Bachelier, active in Toulouse from the 1530s to 1560s. Bachelier's carved stone decorations for the Hôtel de Bagis and the Hôtel du Vieux-Raisin, both in that city, are close in spirit to those in nearby Assier.



## Painted and Drawn Portraits

The primary images of the men and women who lived in the châteaux were fixed not by French or Italian artists but by Netherlandish painters and their descendants. The principal portraitists of the sixteenth century in France, Jean Clouet, his son François Clouet, and Corneille de la Haye, also called Corneille de Lyon, were of Netherlandish origin. Clouet came from a Franco-Flemish family; Corneille de la Haye was born in Holland, established himself in Lyon, and later became court painter to King Henry II and subsequently to Charles IX. What characterizes their work is a concentration on the face, in preference to that on dress or on setting, and a lack of pretension. Typically, the background is neutral, in gray or green. The sitter is in three-quarter pose, neither too direct in a head-on appearance, nor too decorative in profile. Costumes are subdued, often of the dark velvet or cloth fashionable in the period but carefully restrained so as not to distract from the face. Similarly, drawings by the Clouet father and son and by Corneille de la Haye tend to reduce clothing to sketched lines, while the face is rendered in minute detail. The portraitist's acute observation is reserved for the face, every detail of which is laid out with care.

Jean Clouet's portrait of the royal librarian Guillaume Budé of about 1536 (opposite) illustrates these stylistic aspects. This scholar founded the court library at Fontainebleau as well as the Collège de France in Paris. His activities extended beyond bookshelves and classrooms to law courts, where he served as chief magistrate of Paris. His most lasting contribution, however, was the promotion of interest in Greek writers, which hastened France's renewed attention to classical literature. It is Budé who said that a man without letters (by which he meant without knowledge of the classics) could hardly be considered a real man. From his steely eyes down to his pen and book this seriousness of purpose is manifest. Despite the painting's stern simplicity, the expressive eyes and the inclusion of the hands reveal more of the sitter's personality than many French portraits of the period. The painting is especially important because it is documented in Budé's manuscript notes. Before photography, painted portraits were prized and replicated to the point that it is often difficult to sift out original versions from copies.

Fortunately, court portraits are often accompanied by penciled or painted annotations. A

Jean Clouet (French, act. by 1516–d. 1541). *Guillaume Budé*  
(1467–1540), ca. 1536. Tempera and oil on wood, 15 5/8 × 13 1/2 in.  
(39.7 × 34.3 cm). Maria DeWitt Jesup Fund, 1946 (46.68)





Studio of François Clouet (French, 1527–1572). *Portrait of “La Val de Pramence.”* Black and red chalk on paper, 12 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (32.6 × 21.5 cm). Bequest of Walter C. Baker, 1971 (1972.118.201)

chalk drawing of a man (above) inscribed *La Val de Pramence* (or possibly, and more logically, *Province*) captures his prominent features with a few lines, adding variety with touches of red chalk. The inscription likely refers to the Montfort-Laval family, whose main lineage descended from the Montmorency-Laval. There are several candidates for this portrait, including Guy XVII, fourth count of Laval, who died at twenty-six in 1547, or Louis de Saint-Maure, who became Guy XVIII. If the inscription leaves the identity of the sitter open, the handwriting is clearly the same that identified a series of portrait drawings

belonging to Catherine de' Medici, queen of Henry II, second son of Francis I. The inventory at her death in 1589 of the contents of her Parisian hôtel indicates that she owned 341 painted and drawn portraits. Her desire to amass a virtual album of notable men and women of Europe inspired her avid collecting of these images. Skilled in diplomacy and in arranging marriages for her children, Catherine was eager to identify noble men and women throughout Europe. This penchant for collections of portraits helps to explain the similarity of format that governs most examples of the period.

## Religious Art

As the century progressed, religion increasingly divided France. In 1516 Francis signed a concordat with Pope Leo X. The king had the right to nominate a candidate to a vacant see or priory, while the pope alone conferred investiture. In practice, the crown gained more control over the church in France. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants were held in check by the king's ambiguous attitude toward religious differences. Members of Francis's circle, particularly those humanists surrounding his sister Marguerite de Valois, were especially open to exchange with Protestants. By the second half of the century adherents of Protestantism strengthened their hold on many towns and regions throughout the country. Henry II, who succeeded Francis I in 1547, and Catholic adherents such as the Guise family forced confrontation, leading to a series of full-scale wars in the last third of the century. In such a climate art in service of religion became an article of faith, and widespread iconoclasm resulted from the Wars of Religion (1562–98).

Most religious art from the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, maintained traditional roles as luxurious commissions exalting an individual's faith or as powerful images conveying holy truths. This richly decorated silver-gilt chalice is a prime example of the sumptuous objects that wealthy devotees of the church supported through their patronage. Fleurs-de-lys worked on the outside of the cup are not necessarily a sign of

royal ownership, although their presence does reaffirm the authority the concordat gave the crown over the church. By 1532–33, when this chalice was hallmarked, Francis I had established his role within the church and set his personal sense of style in the arts, which was widely noted by his followers.

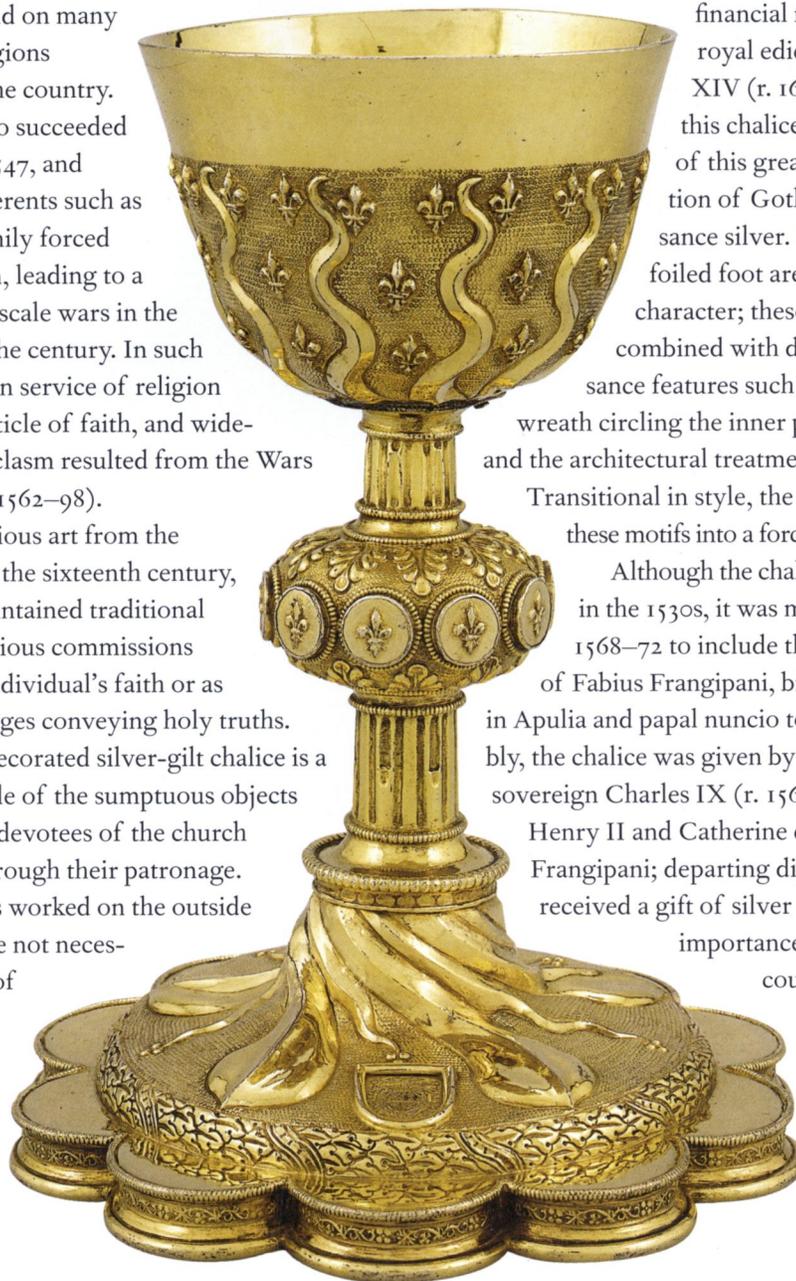
The most famous goldsmith employed by Francis I was the Florentine Benvenuto Cellini, who accepted the king's invitation to work in Paris from 1540 to 1545. Long before Cellini's arrival, France, particularly Paris, was renowned for goldsmithing; the frequent melting down of silver

objects into bullion in times of financial need and by royal edict under Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715), makes this chalice a rare survivor of this great artistic tradition of Gothic and Renaissance silver. Its profile and foiled foot are still Gothic in character; these elements are combined with distinctly Renaissance features such as the laurel wreath circling the inner part of the foot and the architectural treatment of the stem.

Transitional in style, the chalice joins these motifs into a forceful design.

Although the chalice was wrought in the 1530s, it was modified between 1568–72 to include the coat of arms of Fabius Frangipani, bishop of Cajazzo in Apulia and papal nuncio to France. Possibly, the chalice was given by the reigning sovereign Charles IX (r. 1560–74), son of Henry II and Catherine de' Medici, to Frangipani; departing diplomats often received a gift of silver to mark the importance of their country's mission.

French, Paris. *Chalice*, 1532–33. Silver gilt, h. 8 ¼ in. (21 cm). Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. John H. Gutfreund Gift, 1996 (1996.287)



However he came by it, the chalice was in the bishop's possession at the time of maximum religious unrest. Before he left for Italy, a few months prior to the infamously bloody killing of Protestants in Paris on Saint Bartholomew's Eve in September 1572, this unbending prelate added fuel to the fire of intolerance by stating that "no peace could be holy which was made with them who were out of the Church."

Another luxurious liturgical object is the embroidered orphrey, the narrow band that decorated an ecclesiastical vestment such as a cope. As the derivation of the name from the Latin *aurum* (gold) implies, these objects were often richly woven, and indeed this one combines metallic with silk threads. Like the chalice, it maintains a traditional medieval format updated with Renaissance composition and motif. Medieval orphreys often displayed a sequence of images of saints in Gothic architectural surrounds. Here the saints pose in the graceful and monumental style of the High Renaissance, seated before landscapes within oval strapwork cartouches popularized by decorations at the court at Fontainebleau. Paul (holding a sword) and Bartholomew (bottom) were important saints revered in all Catholic countries; James the Greater (holding a walking staff and wearing cockleshells) was particularly popular along pilgrimage routes from France to Spain.

The new artistic vision of the Renaissance reshaped traditional forms designed to proclaim religious dogma from church walls and niches. A stained-glass window from a cycle of seven in the choir of Saint-Firmin in Flavigny-sur-Moselle, near the major city of Nancy in Lorraine, exemplifies this stylistic change (opposite). Between 1531 and 1533 the designer Valentin Bousch rendered the story of *The Deluge* using Mannerist principles: the artist inverted the importance of events by pushing Noah's ark—his hand jutting through the roof releasing the dove that signaled the flood's end—to the back, with an engulfed group praying in the middle ground and a naked



man and soldier scrambling for safety in the foreground. This stained-glass specialist, based in Metz, was inspired by the prints of German Renaissance artists like Albrecht Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien for compositional sense and graphic intensity. Yet he capitalized on the strengths of his medium by the use of lead caning to strengthen the outlines of figures and the harmony of browns and reds to create an appropriately somber palette.

Just as style from Germany influenced this northern region of France, so, too, new religious ideas may have informed this commission. The cycle of seven windows stressed the fate of fallen mankind: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, the punishment by the Flood, the saving of man by God's law, brought down by Moses, along with other scenes. It has been suggested that this program was influenced by the doctrine of predestination at a time and in a place where such Protestant ideas were widely debated and circulated. Wary de Lucy, the commendatory prior at Saint-Firmin from 1510 to 1557, was a humanist nobleman with the means to decorate his church and a speculative mind to consider the new doctrines. His motto *Fraus inimica luci* (Deceit is inimical to light) beneath *The Deluge* signals his openmindedness and celebrates the source that causes this artwork to be visible.

The marble sculpture *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist* (p. 12) reveals the mix of influences that promoted the French Renaissance. Italian, Flemish, and French sculptors collaborating on courtly projects learned aspects of each other's art. So, too, this work's style combines various national traits. The subject was less common in France than in Italy, where famous paintings by Raphael and Leonardo often essayed this theme. King Francis I himself owned two such paintings that resonate in the composition of the marble group. Raphael's *Virgin and Child with Saint John* (*La Belle Jardinière*), in the Louvre, is a model for the compact pyramidal composition of the three figures. Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist* (*Virgin of the Rocks*),



French. *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist*, 2nd quarter of the 16th century. Marble, h. 27¼ in. (69.2 cm). Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1959 (59.12)



also in the Louvre, may have influenced the gestures of the praying Baptist and the blessing Christ child. The fastidious rendering of the Virgin's knot of hair and tightly fitting headdress and the lumpy anatomy of the children, however, mark a Flemish interest in verisimilitude. The harmonious flow of the Virgin's drapery and gracefulness of her gestures are more French characteristics.

This work has been associated with the town of

Tours, along the Loire, although its precise point of origin remains unknown. The relative wealth of regional centers of France from Tours to Rouen to Troyes led to the refurbishment of many churches. This sculpture is an exceptionally refined example of the works commissioned to decorate churches in the prosperous years of the first half of the sixteenth century.

## Images of Antiquity in Limoges Enamels

Since the Middle Ages the city of Limoges in central France thrived on the artistic production of enamel on metal. Similar in composition to glass, enamel consists of silica and a fluxing agent colored by metallic oxide or carbonate and fused to a metal surface by heat. From the twelfth through the fifteenth century Limoges enamel painters gouged into the surface of the metal (*basse taille*) or raised thin dams between areas of color (*cloisonné*) to establish the design and to prevent pigments from mixing. By the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century materials and techniques developed that permitted painters to apply enamels more freely to copper surfaces, without obvious demarcations between areas of color, in a manner that approached the painting of oil on panel or canvas. Unlike oil painting, enameled metal retains its hue without fading, or *tel que l'ambre une fleur* (like a flower in amber), as the poet Théophile Gautier wrote in a sonnet to the nineteenth-century enamel painter Claudius Popelin.

This technical development paralleled the growing cult of antiquity in France and the widespread circulation of printed images. While religious themes had dominated Limoges enamels in the Middle Ages and continued to cover the surfaces of Limoges plaques particularly in the first third of the sixteenth century, images of Greek and Roman subjects, readily available to painters through engravings and woodcuts, predominated from the 1530s.

The earliest series of Limoges plaques based on classical rather than religious subjects drew from the *Aeneid* (p.14). It is also the largest: eighty-two plaques are known, of which fifteen are in the Metropolitan Museum. The production

of this series about 1530 is hardly surprising, since ancient texts in the original and in translation had a wide readership in the literate society of France at this time. Courtly and allegorizing so-called Troy romances still circulated, but scholars like Guillaume Budé encouraged a new appreciation of more accurate versions of the epics. Homeric themes were much favored as artistic subjects at court: scenes from the *Iliad* decorated the king's chamber in the 1530s and those from the *Odyssey*, the Gallery of Ulysses, both at Fontainebleau, in the 1540s. Virgil's *Aeneid* and Statius's *Thebaid* also inspired artistic representations. A series of more than eighty enamel plaques offered the scope to recount the many episodes of an epic, and originally they may have fit into the panels of a small room. Such an enamels cabinet, though exclusively of portraits, was found in Catherine de' Medici's Hôtel de la Reine in Paris, as the 1589 inventory of her effects records.

In the case of the Museum's enamels, the Master of the *Aeneid* based his series on woodcuts from the historiated *Aeneid* printed by Johann Grüninger in Strasbourg in 1502. The painter varied his work from the printed model, changing the format, often reducing the number of figures to emphasize the principal action, and rendering black and white into color.

The dependence of enamel painters on print sources is entirely natural in the case of artisans unschooled in Latin or Greek. The enameler Couly II Nouaillher transformed a parade of the Nine Worthies from a series of engravings attributed to Cornelisz. van Oostanen into individual enameled medallions (p.15). While the *Aeneid* series exists only in single representations of each composition, this set, more typically



Master of the Aeneid (French, Limoges, act. ca. 1530–40). *Aeneas Erects a Tomb to His Nurse Caieta and Flees the Country of Circe*, ca. 1530–35. Enamel, painted and partly gilded, on copper; 8½ × 7¼ in. (21.6 × 19.7 cm). Gift of Coudert Brothers, 1888 (88.3.85)



Couly II Nouaillher (French, Limoges, act. 1539–67). *Julius Caesar*, ca. 1541. Enamel, painted and partly gilded, on copper; diam. 7¼ in. (24.1 cm). Gift of V. Everit Macy, 1928 (28.217.2)



Master IC (French, Limoges, act. ca. 1550–75). *Pair of Candlesticks*, ca. 1560–70. Enamel, painted on copper; h. 6 in. (15.2 cm). Gift of Ann Payne Blumenthal, 1939 (39.66.1,2)



for Limoges production, is known in multiple examples. The Nine Worthies—three from antiquity, Hector, Alexander, and Julius Caesar; three from the Old Testament, Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabeus; and three from the Middle Ages, King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godefroy de Bouillon—indicate another attraction of classical myth and literature. Important personages from ancient and more recent times served as exemplars for contemporary men and women. For example, Francis I was compared to figures from all three categories: Louise of Savoy referred to her son as *glorieux et triomphant second César*; Claude d’Espence, in his *Institution d’un Prince Chrétien* (1548) called him *un second David*; and Raphael portrayed him as Charlemagne in the fresco in the Vatican’s Stanza d’Incendio. Myth and history were read for moral application to present concerns; thus contemporary leaders sought to be associated with models from the past. Depicting Julius Caesar astride a horse and wearing a plumed helmet reinforced this Roman emperor’s relevance to the present.

Toward the end of the century mythological subjects crowded the surfaces of decorative objects such as this pair of candlesticks by Master IC.

The Twelve Labors of Hercules fill the oval repoussé medallions of one, while the principal gods—each identified by an attribute, Jupiter with an eagle, Neptune with a trident, for instance—fill the ovals of the other. Cupids cavort around the pans, called *bobèches*, that catch the wax from the candles, while terms and swags circle the stems. Once again, the enameler relied on engraved sources: Heinrich Aldegrever’s prints of the Labors of Hercules and the Master of the Die’s *amorini* after Raphael’s designs.

In these three instances, the Aeneid series, the Nine Worthies, and the candlesticks, antiquity was used for episodic illustrations, as emblematic medallions, and finally in decorative motifs. This shift reflects growing familiarity with antique sources in France by midcentury, as well as the increased collecting of Limoges by such patrons as the constable Anne de Montmorency, the powerful commander of the armies.

## The Creation of Fontainebleau

Passionate about hunting, Francis I prolonged visits to his lodge in the forests of Fontainebleau. His appetite for foreign affairs curbed by the disastrous Madrid Captivity, he channeled his ambition and flair into transforming this modest dwelling into one of the most inventively decorated palaces of Europe. The king invited artists of the highest caliber—Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto—to work for him and collected paintings and sculpture by those artists—Michelangelo and Raphael—whom he could not entice to France. Craving antique sculptures such as those displayed in the Belvedere courtyard in the Vatican, Francis had to settle for bronze copies of these famous examples. To facilitate these and other projects, the king established workshops in or near the palace for bronze casting, tapestry weaving, and printmaking.

Central to his efforts was the creation of two long galleries, novel for Europe, combining fresco painting and stucco decoration. The Gallery of Francis I and the Gallery of Ulysses, designed by two Italian painters, Rosso Fiorentino and Francesco Primaticcio, set the tone for the

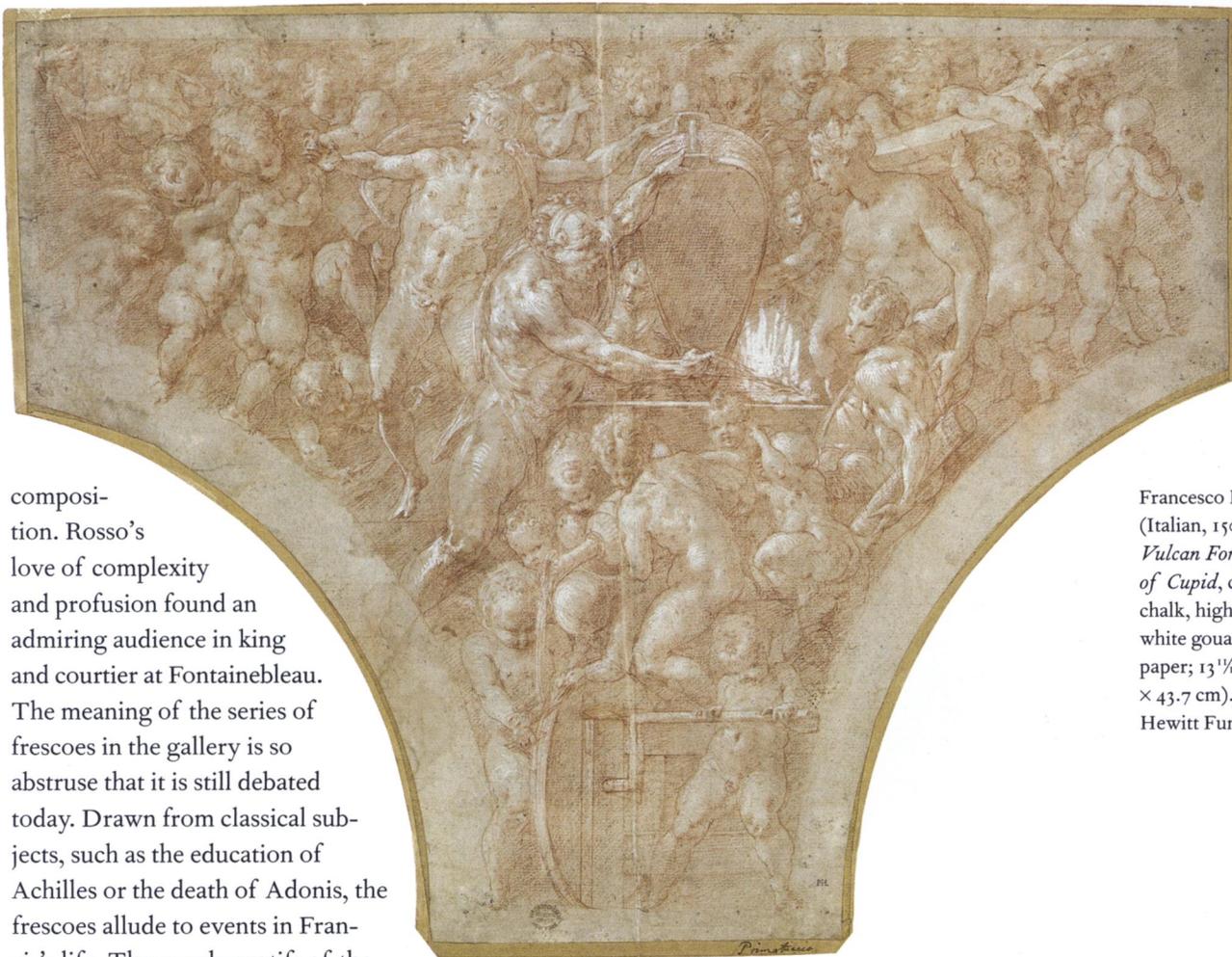
Fontainebleau style. Isolated by a day's journey from Paris, artists from France, Italy, and northern Europe worked in a creative hotbed devising decorations unlikely to have flourished in other circumstances.

*The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, based on a central cartouche of the Gallery of Francis I, echoes these brilliant decorations and reflects the dissemination through painted and printed copies of the palace's designs. The painting is after a print by Pierre Milan, which is, in turn, after one of Rosso's fresco-and-stucco cartouches. The languorous nude reclines against a water jug, alluding to the *fontaine* of the site as well as to the sensuous pleasures of the country retreat. Hunting dogs remind the viewer of the palace's original purpose.

Nearly overwhelming the central image, however, is a tumult of attendant figures and architectural motifs in the cartouche. Three-figured terms, children reading books and playing musical instruments, symbols of the monarch like the crowned F and salamander, swags of fruit, and reliefs of obscure classical subjects crowd the

Unknown French Artist.  
*The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, 1550–1600. Oil on wood, 26 × 47¾ in. (66 × 121.3 cm). Gift of Mrs. Hayward Cutting, 1942 (42.150.12)





composition. Rosso's love of complexity and profusion found an admiring audience in king and courtier at Fontainebleau. The meaning of the series of frescoes in the gallery is so abstruse that it is still debated today. Drawn from classical subjects, such as the education of Achilles or the death of Adonis, the frescoes allude to events in Francis's life. The unruly motifs of the frames, spilling around the painted images like overflowing cups, sometimes comment on the subjects they contain but serve mainly as a visual treat. Inventive designs, including curling leather strapwork, garlands, and roundels in relief inspired artists to adapt them to other media, such as silver and ceramics.

Rosso's complex, crystalline manner ruled Fontainebleau decor until his suicide in 1540. Beginning in the late 1530s, the more relaxed, flowing style of the Bolognese painter Primaticcio offered an antidote to the Florentine's intensity in court decorations such as the Cheminée de la Chambre de la Reine and the Chambre de Madame d'Estampes. After 1540 his style prevailed; as the superintendent of building, Primaticcio came to oversee most court projects, and his designs wielded wide influence. A red-chalk preparatory study for a spandrel painting in the Salle de Bal of 1552–56, *Vulcan Forging the Darts of Cupid*, displays his soft forms, easily overlapping and flowing into one another, gracefully adapted to the shape of the wall. This and

Francesco Primaticcio (Italian, 1504/05–1570). *Vulcan Forging the Darts of Cupid*, ca. 1552. Red chalk, highlighted with white gouache on brownish paper; 13<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (34.1 × 43.7 cm). Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, 1917 (19.76.7)

other compositions for the gallery depicting the Olympian gods and Apollo at Parnassus were painted by Niccolò dell'Abate following Primaticcio's drawings. Talented at design and administration, Primaticcio had a hand in shaping court art for three decades.

A celebrated aspect of Fontainebleau art is the female nude, often long-limbed and small-breasted, sensuously represented at her bath or revealed in another intimate setting. A perfect example of this ideal type is seen in the painting by the Master of Flora, an artist who fully absorbed Primaticcio's flowing line and elegant poses. As the Graces float about in diaphanous gowns and choreographed poses, Venus reclines on a gilded bed strewn with flowers. This image celebrates grace and beauty even if its ostensible subject is the birth of Cupid. The courtly refinement of gesture and sensuous flow of form enhance the type of nude that found favor at Fontainebleau and came to represent the ideal of feminine beauty throughout the French Renaissance.



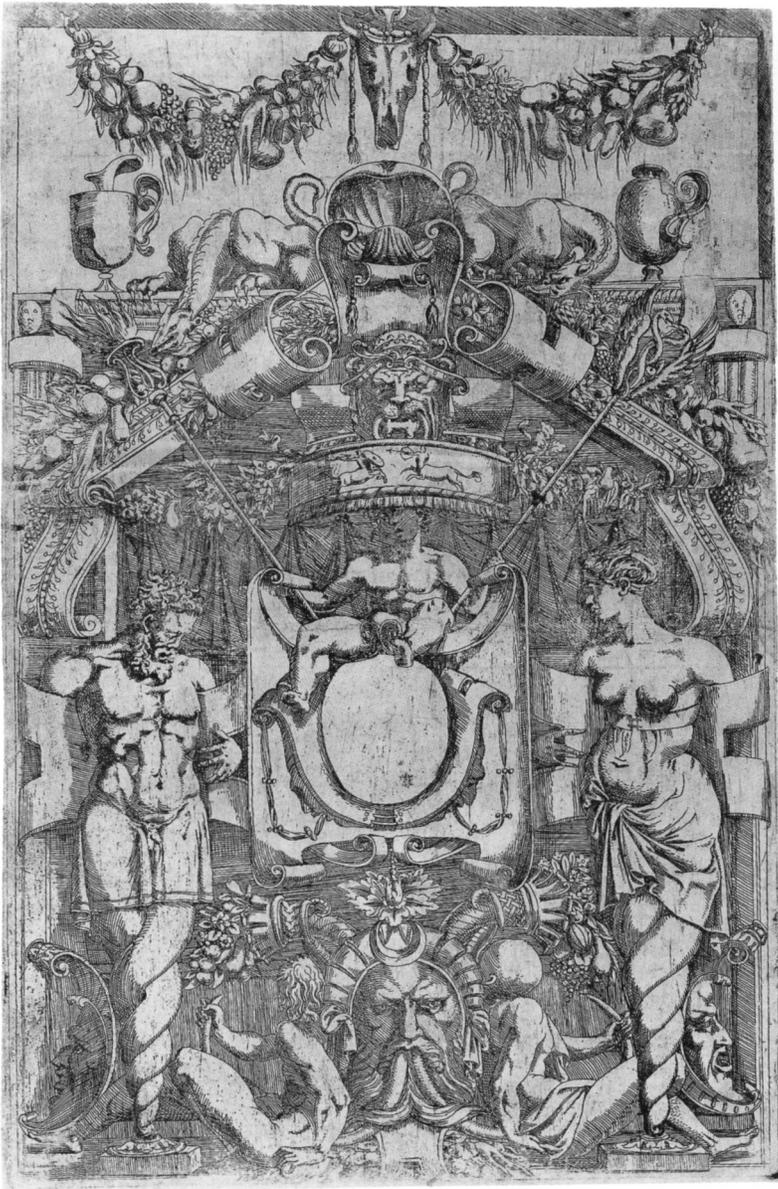
Master of Flora (Italian, act. Fontainebleau 2nd half of the 16th century). *The Birth of Cupid*, 1550–1600. Oil on wood, 42½ × 51⅞ in. (108 × 130.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1941 (41.48)

## Designing for the Decorative Arts

The sheer profusion of motifs, piling one on the other, and the interweaving of these often disparate forms into a plausible whole were much-admired characteristics of French Renaissance design. Rosso's cartouches for the Gallery of Francis I inspired artists to devise ever more complex assemblages. Antonio Fantuzzi's etched *Ornament*, for instance, takes elements of the gallery, like terms with spiral legs, a mask with cornucopia growing out of the mouth, strap-work, swags of fruit, and the king's emblematic salamanders and compresses them into a claustrophobia-inducing wall panel.

The license to combine disparate elements spread from wall design through print sources to

furniture. The horror vacui principle, leaving no inch of this walnut high chest uncarved, responds to prints such as Fantuzzi's and like the etching assembles individual motifs in unlikely ways. The bizarre terms, seen in sheets such as Fantuzzi's, become the principal elements of the upper register, while elaborate masks, such as that at the bottom of Fantuzzi's etching, are the centers of the two doors. The cabinetmaker may well have consulted more specialized furniture books, such as the forty-odd plates that designer and printmaker Jacques Androuet Ducerceau produced at mid-century, for ideas of overall form. But for individual motifs, he probably plundered numerous prints that circulated throughout France.

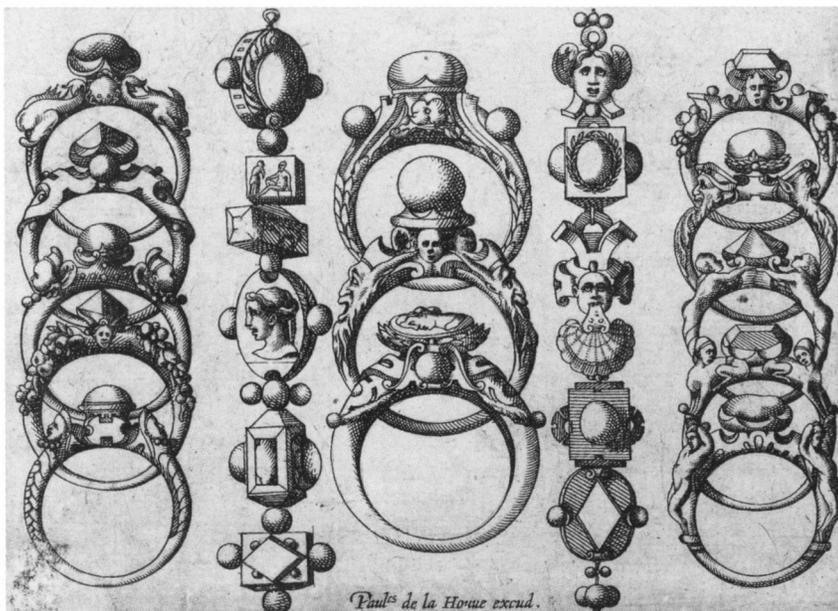


*High Chest* (detail)

Antonio Fantuzzi (Italian, act. Fontainebleau 1537–45). *Ornament*. Etching, 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (34.5 × 21.5 cm). Purchase, The Sylmaris Collection, Gift of George Coe Graves, by exchange, 1966 (66.658.6)

French. *High Chest*, ca. 1560–80. Walnut, h. 57 in. (144.8 cm).  
Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.2034)





René Boyvin (French, ca. 1525–ca. 1600). *Designs for Rings*. Engraving, 6 × 9½ in. (15 × 23.2 cm). Published by Paul de la Houve, Paris, ca. 1600. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1930 (30.67.4 [18])

French. *Ring with Cameo of Alexander the Great*, mid-16th century. Gold, enamel, and glass, h. ⅙ in. (1.35 cm). Rogers Fund, 1910 (10.110.2)



Several books were devoted exclusively to designs of rings. In Lyon in 1561 Pierre Woeriot, who etched subjects ranging from Egyptian burial practices to the decorative arts, published such a volume. Years later René Boyvin's engravings of rings were published posthumously by Paul

de la Houve. These repertoires of ideas were available to the jeweler who mounted the turquoise glass cameo of Alexander the Great wearing a gold lion skin. Brilliant enamel colors clarify the strapwork and mask motifs of the ring on which the cameo is mounted.

### The Patronage of Noble Families

Francis I's taste was critical for the arts in France in the first half of the sixteenth century, and many of the nobility shared the king's enthusiasm for commissioning important works from craftsmen and painters. The Dintevilles, for example, held prominent positions in Champagne as well as ambassadorial posts abroad, Jean as bailiff of Troyes and the king's ambassador to England, François II as bishop of Auxerre and emissary to the pope. The Dintevilles hired no less an artist than Primaticcio to direct the decorations of their château at Polisy in the 1540s and commissioned paintings from Hans Holbein the Younger and Jean de Gourmont, among others. A brilliant and curious painting of *Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh* of about 1538, features portraits of Jean and François II de Dinteville, clearly identified by name, title, and age, as Moses and Aaron. This painting of the Israelites confronting the despotic pharaoh has long been viewed as an allegory of the Dintevilles' situation around 1537. A scandal involving a third brother, Gaucher, tainted the family and

forced other members into exile in Italy. The painting showing Moses and Aaron pleading to release their people from captivity appears to refer to the Dintevilles' crisis and their effort to return to the monarch's good graces. As in the case of the Nine Worthies Limoges enamels, the painting reveals the period penchant for identification with Old Testament or classical figures. The identity of its painter has been more difficult to establish than its subject (the artist known as the Pseudo Félix Chrétien was once thought to be responsible), but whoever created this tempera on panel produced one of the masterpieces of French Renaissance painting.

Another sophisticated patron of the arts in eastern France was Claude de Longwy, cardinal of Givry. In addition to painting, architecture, and sculpture, he commissioned an important series of tapestries on the child martyr from Asia Minor, Saint Mammias, for his bishopric at Langres Cathedral dedicated to that saint. On July 14, 1543, the cardinal ordered from the designer Jean Cousin the Elder cartoons (full-size drawings) to

be followed by the Parisian weavers Pierre II Blasse and Jacques Langlois. A recently discovered preliminary drawing by Cousin documents one of the missing textiles, in all likelihood the first in the series (p. 24). Of the eight tapestries for the choir of the cathedral three survive at Langres and in the Louvre. In the drawing the noblewoman Amya petitions the governor Faustus to adopt the child Mammias, whom she holds, and to have permission to bury his parents, whose bodies are carried from prison. The background scene of the baptism of Mammias is only faintly suggested in wash; the final cartoon would have rendered such details and their colors precisely. The existing works are square with elaborate borders, suggesting that considerable changes in format took place from first sketch to final product.

One of the most fascinating figures and influential patrons of her time was Diane de Poitiers, who mesmerized Henry of Angoulême

when he was dauphin and continued to be his mistress after he became king. She employed the brilliant architect Philibert de l'Orme to build her château at Anet and enlisted other talented artists to create decorations for it. Perhaps the most famous sculpture of the French Renaissance, *Diana and the Stag*, crowned a fountain in its courtyard, while Benvenuto Cellini's *Nymph of Fontainebleau*, a bronze relief, was diverted from its intended location at Fontainebleau to preside over Diane de Poitiers's entry portal at Anet. It appears, too, that she engaged Cousin to create a series of tapestries for her that was even more important than those devoted to Saint Mammias.

Most of the tapestries illustrate well-known episodes of the myth of Diana, such as the death of Orion, the death of Meleager, and the Lycian peasants changed into frogs. One of the most successful compositions, however, is also among the most obscure episodes: the death of Britomartis

Unknown French Artist.  
*Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh: An Allegory of the Dinteville Family*, ca. 1538. Tempera and oil on wood, 69½ × 75⅞ in. (176.5 × 192.7 cm). Wentworth Fund, 1950 (50.70)





Jean Cousin the Elder  
(French, ca. 1500–ca. 1560).  
*Amya Petitioning Faustus  
for the Custody of Saint  
Mammias*, ca. 1543. Pen and  
brown ink, brush and gray  
wash, with white gouache,  
over black chalk;  $9\frac{1}{4} \times$   
 $12\frac{5}{8}$  in. (23.5 × 32 cm).  
Rogers Fund, 2001  
(2001.106)

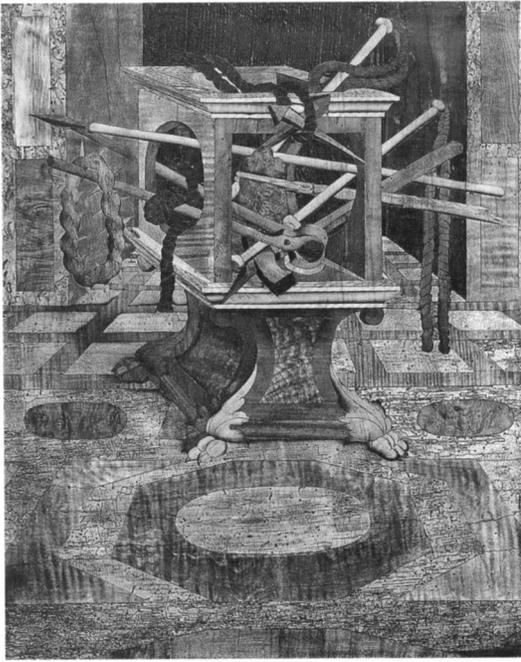
(opposite). Identified by a hunting bow and a crescent moon, Diana retrieves the body of Britomartis from the sea by inventing the net to haul him out of the water. She then buries him in a temple, seen above in the background. Inscriptions and ancillary scenes fill the borders. Diane de Poitiers's principal emblem, the arrow that always finds its mark (her prime target, as everyone knew, was the king) shoots along the side borders to her coat of arms at top. Tapestries were among the most costly and labor-intensive of all the arts; Diane de Poitiers's ability to command such a sumptuous set testifies to her wealth and taste.

One final example of patronage reminds us of the resources of the nobility in commissioning works of art from foreign artists. The d'Urfé family long dominated the region of Forez in the heart of France. Claude d'Urfé, like Louis Prévost de Sansac (p. 3), was one of the generation that distinguished itself accompanying the king in Italian wars and returning to rebuild their homes with artistic programs learned abroad. Subsequently, Claude was appointed ambassador to the Council of Trent in 1546; during his six

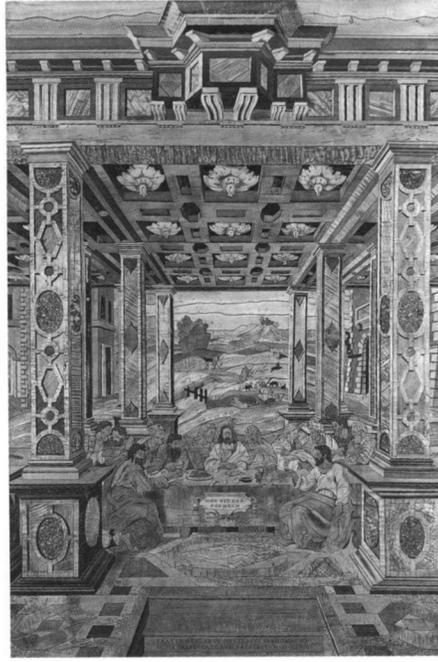
years in Italy, he conceived the idea of commissioning the marquetry specialist Fra Damiano da Bergamo to create a complete set of wall panels for the chapel of his château, La Bastie, not far from Lyon, now reconstructed in the Metropolitan Museum (p. 26). The lower register consists of painted-and-carved scrollwork patterns featuring flaming altars, cherubim, and emblems that recall the carved panels (*lambris*) by Scribe de Carpi in the Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau. The upper register is filled with marquetry scenes of landscapes and still lifes of geometrical devices. The Italian Sicciolante da Sermoneta supplied paintings to fill the walls above the marquetry; the Rouen ceramicist Masséot Abaquesne tiled the floors; and unknown masters pebbled and laid mosaic over the grotto through which one entered the chapel. Overt religious subjects and symbolic philosophical emblems joined in a program that was sophisticated in its unity and ambitious in scope. Nowhere in France was there as extensive and as accomplished a set of marquetry as this one, which marked the heights at which noble artistic patronage aimed.

Probably designed by Jean Cousin the Elder (ca. 1500–ca. 1560); probably woven by Pierre II Blasse and Jacques Langlois (both French, act. 1540–60). *The Drowning of Britomartis*, 1547–59. Wool and silk tapestry, 183 × 114 in. (464.8 × 289.6 cm). Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, in accordance with the wishes of their mother, 1942 (42.57.1)





detail



detail

Fra Damiano da Bergamo  
(Italian, d. 1549). *Panels*  
from the Chapel of *Château*  
de La Bastie, Saint-Étienne.  
Various woods, each panel  
average height 20 $\frac{1}{8}$  in.  
(53 cm). Gift of the chil-  
dren of Mrs. Harry Payne  
Whitney, in accordance  
with the wishes of their  
mother, 1942 (42.57.4.1-108)



## Henry II and His Armor

Henry II ruled France during a period of considerable prosperity and, at least in the beginning of his reign, political stability. If the new king was not as charismatic or adventurous as his father, the arts still continued to flourish. At Fontainebleau he completed the Gallery of Ulysses and commissioned the decorations of the Salle de Bal. Turning his attention to the Louvre palace in Paris, he commanded the architect Pierre Lescot and the sculptor Jean Goujon to add dignified and noble façades. With the king's support, his mistress Diane de Poitiers was able to promote many artistic projects at châteaux at Anet and Chenonceau.

The Langres goldsmith and printmaker Jean Duvet etched a revealing image of this king. He

is shown in the guise of Saint Michael trampling the devil and flanked by personifications of France—holding a shield of fleurs-de-lys—and of Fame. Henry rededicated the medieval order of Saint Michel in 1548; a space has been left blank at lower right to receive an inscription apparently to commemorate that event. Duvet's idiosyncratic style, with its dense composition and scratchy line, lends this print a feverish intensity. Henry's imperial aspirations and love of pomp are unmistakable.

Jean Duvet's style may not have appealed to this king, perhaps explaining the omission of a commemorative inscription. What King Henry certainly valued were the arms and armor needed for military campaigns, the embellishment of his favorite pursuit, the joust, and the elaborate parade armor worn in festivals. The museum owns some of Henry II's most significant parade armor (pp. 28–29). On the pauldron, within a motif of vines and mascarons, a scene of Apollo and Daphne unfolds; on the back Apollo and the Python continue the story of the god; serpents and snakes crawl throughout foliage. The design has been embossed and blued with damascened details set against gilding. A drawing for a pauldron in the Museum's collection and other sheets elsewhere prove that the goldsmith and draftsman Étienne Delaune was responsible for the design of this suit of armor. The complexity of detail can only be appreciated through close scrutiny as the concept of a goldsmith like Delaune. Its armorers were likely to have worked in France, although specialists from Brussels, like Elias Libertus, and from Milan added their expertise to the sophisticated and international production of armor in Paris.

On the breastplate the decoration centers on a Roman warrior; below, women offer him swords, while to the sides bound captives cower. These motifs can be found across the façade of the stone decorations of the Louvre, expressing Henry II's imperial ambitions keyed to his motto *Donec totum impleat orbem* (Until it fills up the entire world). Roman motifs govern the armor's entire decoration, which is based on grotesques adapted from wall paintings found in villas, such as Nero's, unearthed during the late fifteenth century in Rome.

Jean Duvet (French, 1485–ca. 1561). *Henry II between France and Fame*, ca. 1548. Etching, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 8 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (29.5 × 21 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1925 (25.2. 93)





Other armors for Henry II focus on narrative scenes. Within a pointed oval field of a shield, trophies of armor and swags of fruit are joined by a curling, damascened strap framing a battle scene. This central image features a relatively obscure story from Roman history, fully comprehensible only in relation to a series of shields for the king now distributed among collections in New York, Paris, Turin, Windsor, and London. The subjects include Rome's war against the nomadic Jugurtha, the careers of Julius Caesar and Pompey, as well as the war with Carthage and a contemporary battle of the siege of Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1545. The subject of the shields in New York and Paris is the Carthaginian general Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Cannae in 216 B.C. The trio of mounted and dismounted warriors at center represents an episode from the combat of the Roman consul Gnaeus

Lentulus attempting to save the consul Lucius Aemilius Paulus. These ancient military engagements alluded to Henry II's struggles against the Holy Roman Empire, just as the noble attempt to save a fallen hero echoes in anecdotes of contemporary war reporting.



*opposite*

Designed by Étienne Delaune (Italian, act. in France, 1518/19–1583). *Detail of Parade Armor of Henry II of France*, ca. 1555. Steel, embossed and gilded, damascened with gold and silver; brass, leather, and red velvet; h. (overall) 5 ft. 9 in. (1.75 m). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.121)

*right*

Probably designed by Étienne Delaune (Italian, act. in France, 1518/19–1583). *Shield of Henry II of France*, ca. 1555. Steel, gold, and silver, h. 25 in. (63.5 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1934 (34.85)

## Sculptural Reliefs at Midcentury

Freestanding sculpture was rare in Renaissance France. More often, marble statues were incorporated into fountains—as was the famous *Diana and the Stag* originally from Anet—or were a structural part of architecture, such as Jean Goujon's marble caryatids, which support a musicians' gallery in the Salle de Bal of the Louvre. In churches statues were set in niches or supported on consoles. By nature, reliefs were generally part of the fabric of a building or of a monument. Three examples of relief carving in the Museum testify to the vitality of this tradition in France, as well as to the variety of styles practiced at midcentury.

The city of Troyes in Champagne, southeast of Paris, nurtured a vibrant school of sculptors during the sixteenth century. Prosperous from industry and accessible by trade routes to the Netherlands and Germany, the city could afford to decorate its many churches and welcomed artisans from the north, as well as Italians drawn

to royal ateliers at nearby Fontainebleau. The six brothers of the Juliot family of sculptors thrived in Troyes. The Juliots practiced a style with strong traces of the Gothic, surviving in their swirling drapery, combined with a Flemish taste for detail. The *Dormition of the Virgin* is clearly their work. The apostles convene at the bed of the sleeping Virgin, each individualized by distinct features or flowing beards, and garbed in voluminous robes. The setting is pure Renaissance: Corinthian pilasters separate the arches and foliate designs decorate the bed frame and its spindle columns.

Troyes sculpture tended to be painted, and traces of pigment indicate that this composition was clarified by color. The suggestion published recently that the alabaster carving was once part of a retable at the monastery at Larivour of 1540 is problematic, although the relief was likely part of a set decorating a church altar.

Jacques Juliot and workshop (French, Troyes, act. 1540–52). *The Dormition of the Virgin*, ca. 1545–50. Alabaster with remains of pigment, 20 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 43 in. (51.1 × 110.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1921 (21.66)





Also for a church, or perhaps for a private chapel, the *Descent from the Cross* is stylistically distinct from the school of Troyes carving. The *Dormition's* crowded composition of overlapping figures yields here to a spare scene of carefully separated protagonists. Each body is clearly articulated by thin drapery revealing rather than disguising human form. Its sculptor is a follower of Jean Goujon, the great master of such works as the *Mourning over the Dead Christ* of 1544 on the rood screen of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. Perhaps a decade later, *Descent from the Cross* was executed for a member of the Saint-André family, identified by the arms on the lower corners, based principally in Paris. The composition adheres closely to a print by the Italian Marcantonio Raimondi and is thus not original but is beautifully rendered in the style of Goujon.

Follower of Jean Goujon (French, ca. 1510–1568). *Descent from the Cross*, ca. 1555. Marble with traces of gilding, 43¼ × 24½ in. (109.9 × 62.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1929 (29.56)



The third relief represents yet another stylistic stream. Distinctly blocked out, the six sections of the composition—Jupiter above a fountain at center, Mercury over intertwined children at left, a temple amid a ruined city above the centaur Chiron at right—reflect the compositional sense of a painter. The sculptor rendered these motifs with the exquisite refinement of a court decorator. His style is closer to the masterly court artist

French. *The Reign of Jupiter*, ca. 1555–60. Marble, 15 × 19 in. (38.1 × 48.3 cm). Purchase, The Annenberg Foundation Gift, 1997 (1997.23)



Germain Pilon than to Goujon, but it is perhaps closest of all to the decorous line of the sculptor or sculptors who worked at Anet during the 1540s and 1550s.

Interpreting the relief's subject is as difficult as it is for many recondite artworks made for the court. Its rebuslike scenes may have an astrological significance for an important person: the twins represent Gemini and the centaur Sagittarius, with Mercury (left) rising in the house of Jupiter. The presiding god may be an allusion to the king; that

Mercury also symbolizes eloquence has been interpreted as an homage to Charles, cardinal of Lorraine, who likened his speechmaking to Mercury's and portrayed himself as devoted servant to Henry II. A recent reading of the relief interprets it as praising a deceased member of the royal family, possibly Charles IX, on a funerary monument. Clearly, this sculpture was part of a decorative ensemble and represents French artists' skill at carving surfaces, seen earlier in the century on the architectural panels from Gaillon (p. 4).

## Gardens

Nature tamed by art, the garden expressed the Renaissance search for order. French medieval examples were often enclosed in cloisters or within the walls of fortifications. In the sixteenth century they became more open and elaborate. The one that stretches behind the allegorical figure of Pomona, goddess of gardens, her back to the château on an oval dish fired about 1600, is still contained by fence and wall. In the manner of the ceramist Bernard Palissy, the dish is based on a composition by the Flemish painter Marten de Vos engraved by Philippe Galle about 1600 and survives in a number of versions in different color combinations. The parterres centered on a fountain—a plan typical of northern Europe in the late sixteenth century—are more formal than their medieval predecessors. Water features, often based on Italian models, prevailed as the

century progressed. As early as 1508, for instance, the cardinal of Amboise commissioned a fountain from Genoa for the Château de Gaillon.

As the use of gardens became more ritualized, structures were created for specific purposes. Cavellike rooms called grottoes were built at Fontainebleau in 1542–44 and in the 1550s at the château, La Bastie, owned by the d'Urfé family. Pergolas were erected by Renée de France, daughter of Louis XII, at Montargis in 1560–75 and by Catherine de' Medici in the Jardin de la Reine at Fontainebleau in 1560–62. Gardens played many roles in French society—and thus found increasing representations in art—as places for relaxation, for music and dance, for poetry and learning, for horticulture, as symbolic spaces for myth and allegory, and finally as decorative motifs.

Manner of Bernard Palissy (French, 1510–1589). *Dish with Pomona*, ca. 1600. Lead-glazed earthenware, w. 13 3/8 in. (34 cm). Gift of Julia A. Berwind, 1953 (53.225.60)



French. *The Garden of False Learning*, ca. 1550–80. Hanging, wool and silk on canvas; 110½ × 153¼ in. (280.7 × 388.9 cm). Gift of Constance McCann Betts, Mrs. Winston F. C. Guest, and Frasier W. McCann, 1942 (42.193.2)



Some of these activities are suggested in the wool and silk embroidery known as *The Garden of False Learning*. It is part of a cycle called the Table of Cebes, purportedly written by a Greek from ancient Thebes, that became popular in France through Latin and Vulgate translations in the sixteenth century. It recounts a parable of the pilgrimage of life from the pure soul of a child from the beginning of his journey to the temptations and false learning he encounters and finally to true learning and happiness. Three embroideries of the subject are known. Here False

Learning, the attractive woman at the gate, welcomes the youthful wayfarer into a garden, where fashionably dressed men and women engage in various intellectual and artistic pursuits. The Museum also owns the last in the sequence, *Wayfarer Crowned by Happiness* (acc. no. 69.298). Both embroideries appear to have been made by or for the Limousin family Fenis de Prade, a provenance indicated by coats of arms, and after 1547, the date of the woodcut by Strasbourg artist David Kandel that served as model for some of the figures.

French, Moulins. *Set of Pruning Tools*, 1575–1600. Steel,  
partly gilded, and mother-of-pearl; l. (of saw) 11 1/8 in. (35.8 cm).  
Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1470–.1476)



The embroidery documents some of the more cerebral activities that took place in gardens: music, reading, and conversation, as well as such studies as astronomy and geometry, that could be practiced in its quiet precincts. The ceramic relief of Pomona, on the other hand, who keeps spade, rake, and watering jar ready, reminds the viewer of the earthy side of this terrestrial paradise and the labor required to maintain it. Gardening became a suitable activity for noble women and men, as the luxurious pruning tools reveal. Forged and decorated in Moulins, this partly gilded steel set, enhanced by mother-of-pearl, is engraved with motifs of fruit and foliage, the products of their use. The set includes billhooks for removing branches and clippers that could be mounted on a pole. A pruning knife, saw, and combination hammer and auger to cleave tree bark for bud grafts are evidence of the care taken

in trimming and directing tree branches. In his treatise *L'Architecture* (1567) Philibert de l'Orme describes a bower with tree trunks pruned into columns with tools such as these to form capitals, a reference to the presumed origins of architecture, primitive wood structures that led to sophisticated stone buildings.

Allegories of the cycles of nature and floral motifs increased in popularity as decorative themes. At either end of this draw-top table of about 1550–70 personifications of spring and summer recline in landscapes carved into rectangular panels. These are flanked by dense, sculptural scrolls of tendrils, supported by balusters inscribed with leaf patterns that rest, in turn, on bases ornamented by classical motifs of rosettes and palmettes. Such massive, richly carved wood typifies furniture of the French Renaissance.

French. *Draw-Top Table*, ca. 1550–70. Walnut, w. 58 in. (147.3 cm). The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.329)



## Bernard Palissy and His School



Workshop of Bernard Palissy (French, 1510–90). *Platter*, ca. 1565–75. Lead-glazed earthenware, w. 20½ in. (52.1 cm). Gift of Julia A. Berwind, 1953 (53.225.52)

The serious study of nature crops up in the work of the ceramist Bernard Palissy, as well as in that of other artists and architects like Philibert de l'Orme. Toward the end of his career Palissy established a “little academy” in Sedan, in northeast France, and gave lectures on natural sciences there and in Paris that were published as the *Discours admirables* in 1580. Untutored in Latin and Greek, Palissy’s knowledge was practical and based on direct observation. He kept a cabinet of curiosities, and this spirit of taxonomy transferred delightfully to the surface of what he called *rustiques figulines* [sic]. Palissy developed a method of molding from fauna and flora and applying the casts as decoration to large basins. Having closely observed the locomotion of animals, he transformed the slithering or coiling of snakes into motifs that invigorated his clay compositions. Textures of ferns and leaves contrast with the shiny spiral of the nautilus or sharp rim

of the scallop, as he created works that mimic the habitat of a riverbank yet resolve into artistic order. His compositions read sometimes as parables: the cunning serpent preys on innocent creatures, or, in the tradition of tomb symbolism, snakes and frogs may represent the corruptibility of human flesh, while shells stand for eternal life. These tales in clay come brilliantly to life through stunning colors. Having begun his career as a stained-glass artist in Saintes, Palissy experimented with many enamel hues to achieve a rich palette of glazes.

His work was appreciated at the highest levels of society. Anne de Montmorency, one of the most astute art patrons, collected Palissy’s rustic plates in the late 1550s. To oversee her collection of glazed earthenware Catherine de’ Medici employed a *garde-vaisselle*, a ceramist-curator named Jean Charpentier, who mounted pieces on sideboards during festivals. As queen mother she facilitated the advancement of Palissy’s work by



Probably modeled by Guillaume Dupré (French, ca. 1574–1642); probably made in the pottery of Claude Bertélemy (French, ca. 1555–1626). Model, ca. 1600–10. “Gondola” Cup with Figure Personifying a Spring, ca. 1620–25. Lead-glazed earthenware, w. 8 in. (20.3 cm). Gift of Julia A. Berwind, 1953 (53.225.54)

commissioning from him an entire room of clay creatures as a grotto for her Tuileries palace, then under construction after de l’Orme’s designs during the late 1550s and the 1560s. Although it was not finished, many individual parts for the grotto survive, and the kilns Palissy used for the job were recently unearthed in excavations at the Louvre. Despite the prestige of his supporters, the Protestant Palissy was imprisoned for heresy and died in the Bastille in 1589–90.

His art was profound and revolutionized the field of ceramics. The potter’s popularity led to a school of followers that over time increasingly emphasized the decorative aspect of his work. A whole class of objects developed in Palissy’s wake that adapted his inventive shapes and colored

glazes to human figures and decorative motifs. The “gondola” cup—a contemporary term for this ceramic type of a woman in the bath—for instance, employs Palissy’s saturated colors, textured waves, and shell designs, but they are now tinged with the erotic sensibility of court art.

A number of potters at Avon, the village next to Fontainebleau, produced works such as this partly submerged nude woman personifying a spring, a prevalent theme at this court that was, by tradition, named after a local water source. Probably modeled by Guillaume Dupré, this “gondola” cup maintains Palissy’s sculptural attitude: it is clearly not a vessel but rather a non-functional, decorative, and wryly amusing work.

## French Ceramics in the Provinces and at Court

The town of Saintes, where Bernard Palissy was born, has long been associated with the production of pottery. The economy of form of a water jar with spout (*vase à bec*) made in that city in the second half of the sixteenth century testifies to the strength of the city's tradition in this craft, in paring a work to an essential shape in response to its function. The bold, swelling body echoes in the hoop strap over the neck, and three more straps join neck to waist to facilitate pouring. Its thick lead glaze in bright green finishes and protects its surface.

The pilgrim flask (p. 40), utterly unlike the Saintes water jar, was fired in the same period farther south in Nîmes in 1581. Although its

ceramic form derives from a common type, the flask was painted with a sophisticated blend of technique and ornament. Its tin-glaze painting follows the example of contemporary maiolica produced in such Italian towns as Urbino and Faenza. The grotesques of fantastic creatures entwined with strapwork and birds are adapted from designs by the court artist Jacques Ducerceau. In this case we know the name of both artist and patron: the flask is one of the finest surviving works by the potter and painter Antoine Sigalon and was made, as the coat of arms indicates, for Count Casimir of Bavaria, most likely to commemorate the convocation of Protestant churches in Nîmes in February 1581.

This range of French pottery from rustic to refined comes together in the most intriguing ware of all, called Saint-Porchaire (p. 41). It, too, has a connection to the provinces in the southwest, in the towns of Saint-Porchaire, in Deux-Sèvres, and nearby Parthenay and Bressuire; as at Saintes, this region is the site of deposits of kaolin-rich white clay, prized for its fine texture and capacity to render precise detail. Yet the ware's sources are so sophisticated and disparate and its technical construction so complex that it appears to have close links to the court.

The answer to how artisans apparently working in provincial circumstances acquired access to highly sophisticated design models appears to lie partly in the peripatetic nature of artists at the time and partly with the Montmorency-Laval family branch that patronized the small factory. Through dynastic ties to Anne de Montmorency, the potters must have known collections of prints, bookbindings, metalwork, carved rock crystal, and other works of art that inspired these astonishingly eclectic clay creations. Some scholars, however, believe that such wares could only have been made in Paris.

Although no two pieces are alike, they share certain common motifs and techniques. The most prevalent is the interlace, a pattern popularized by printed books like Francisque Pellegrin's *La Fleur de la science de Pourtraiture* [sic], published at Fontainebleau in 1530, and often seen on the handsome bookbindings produced in the era of Jean Grolier de Servières, bibliophile and

French, Saintes. *Water Jar with Spout (Vase à bec)*, 1550–1600. Lead-glazed earthenware, h. 15 in. (40 cm). The Charles E. Sampson Memorial Fund, 1993 (1993.25)





Antoine Sigalon (French, 1524–1590). *Pilgrim Flask with Stopper*, 1581. Tin-glazed earthenware, h. 15 in. (38.1 cm). Samuel D. Lee Fund, 1941 (41.49.9a,b)

treasurer general of France in 1547. The interlace designs are inlaid by matrices, either directly into the clay body in its leather-hard state before firing, or on sheets of clay that are then applied to it. Contrasting colored clay is then inserted into these depressions, and the final glaze further smoothes the division between the clays. Such an approach is highly unusual in ceramic making and closer in spirit to metalworking techniques such as niello—blackened sulfur fused into gouged designs—as seen on contemporary arms and armor decorations.

The patterned surfaces of Saint-Porchaire

wares are often overlaid by other clay additions, such as this example's handle—part tree trunk, part winged dragon, part ram. A statuette in relief of the Virgin and child forms part of the base of its spout, while a miniature building with tiny figures in Gothic arches constitutes the neck. A number of the sixty-odd known examples of Saint-Porchaire ware (seven are in the Museum) are based on humble forms such as *biberons*, or nursing jugs, with simple hoop handles like the water jar from Saintes. The adroit mixture of court art and peasant form mark this perfect expression of the French Renaissance.

French, Saint-Porchaire. *Ewer*, ca. 1550. Lead-glazed white pottery, h. 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (26.2 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1740)



## The Taste of Catherine de' Medici

Catherine de' Medici's life was extraordinary even for her chaotic era. She was born in Florence in 1519 to Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, a descendant of the French Bourbon family. Her mother died in childbirth, and her father, Lorenzo de' Medici, a nephew of Pope Leo X, expired a few days later. The orphan was raised in convents until at fourteen she was married to Henry, duke of Orléans, second son of Francis I. Her first decade in France was shadowed by her inability to have children and by the ascendancy of the king's mistress Diane de Poitiers. But beginning in 1544 she bore eleven children, seven of whom survived birth, three becoming kings of France: Francis II, Henry III, and Charles IX. After her husband's death in a joust in 1559, Catherine wielded enormous power, first as regent and then as queen mother.

Although her reputation was forever blackened by her role in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Protestants in 1572, it is clear that she was an adroit politician. She was also an ambitious and adventurous patron of the arts. *Foemina superbi luxus* or "woman of superb luxury," the sixteenth-century historian Christophe de Thou called her. She advanced the state of French architecture with the Tuileries Palace and of sculpture with the unfinished Valois Chapel memorial to her husband. Besides the previously noted examples of her collecting of portraits and ceramics, her taste had a profound effect on two other areas of the decorative arts: textiles and jewelry.

In her Hôtel de la Reine in Paris, a series of twelve tapestries of the life of Hannibal hung in the entryway. Another series known as the Valois Tapestries, the most famous commission of the



French. *Panel with Grotesque Decoration*, ca. 1560–70. Embroidered silk on silk, 78 × 14¾ in. (198.1 × 37.5 cm). Rogers Fund, 1956 (1956 56.27)

detail





day, was ordered by or for her and taken by her granddaughter Christine de Lorraine to Florence. Even more than tapestries she adored embroideries and linens; staggering quantities of bed valences and table covers filled the pages of the inventory of her possessions at her death in 1589. The Venetian embroiderer Frederic de Vinciolo apparently came to France to work for her, and he dedicated to the queen mother his *Les singuliers et nouveaux pourtrits* [sic]... *de toutes sortes de lingeries* in 1587. An example of the kind of work she appreciated is the Museum's panel of yellow satin embroidered with silk threads. One of a set of three (the others are in the Musée Historique des Tissus, Lyon), it hung as a valence around the top of a four-poster bed. Various print sources were culled for the airy design of grotesques, while its five vignettes derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—based on the myths of Europa, Actaeon, Semele, Pyramus, and Salmacis—are adapted from woodcut illustrations published by Bernard Salomon in Lyon in 1557. Its brilliant colors, exquisite design, and sumptuous material would have suited the queen's taste perfectly.

Catherine's other great passion was jewelry. An impressive number of pieces accompanied her as part of her dowry. We know from her letters to artisans François Dujardin and Olivier Condoré how closely she supervised their designs. One particular type that she seems to have imported from Italy and made fashionable in France was the *commesso*, a combination of hardstone carving and enameled gold. The idea of combining these materials may have come from the restoration of ancient cameos in the

Renaissance, when gold supplied missing or broken elements of hardstone. One of the most frequent subjects of the French *commessi* is Prudence, the virtue with which Catherine was most associated. In this pendant Prudence's face and hands are carved from white chalcedony, while her hair and gown are gold. She holds her attribute, the mirror, a table-cut diamond, in her right hand, and in her left, the enameled snake referring to the "wisdom of serpents" mentioned in the Bible. Rubies, emeralds, and pearls complete this precious and colorful ornament.

French. *Pendant with figure of Prudence*, ca. 1550–60. Gold, enamel, jewels, and chalcedony; h. 3½ in. (8.9 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.907)



## The Country Life

A class of objects made at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth reflected a yearning for a simpler existence. Genre subjects drawn from everyday life have a long tradition in the arts. Toward the end of the sixteenth century such themes could be seen throughout Europe, from Florence, where statues of peasants were placed beside those of mythological gods in the Boboli Gardens, to Antwerp, where Pieter Bruegel the Elder painted and drew scenes of peasant life that were collected by the highest members of society.

In France peasants were often the subjects of ceramic and bronze statuettes. This trend found parallels in literature, as poetic narratives of idyllic shepherd life came into vogue. Translations of ancient pastoral tales, such as Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*, echoed in plays and poems by French authors that contrasted the innocence of rural life to the corruption of the city. These highly stylized dramas were widely read and performed; their popularity promoted their use as a theme in the decorative arts.

The potters of Avon who created such courtly extravaganzas as the bathing woman in a "gondola" cup (p. 38), also issued a large number of works of rural types: hurdy-gurdy players, milkmaids, and shepherds. Such objects were not made for the people represented—who could hardly have afforded them—but for the noble classes. The journal of Jean Héroard, the dauphin's doctor, records a pottery figure of a nurse given to the daughter of Madame de Montpensier by the dauphin Louis de Bourbon (son of Henry IV and future King Louis XIII) on April 24, 1608. The Museum has two versions of a wet nurse holding a swaddled child, which is the composition probably referred to by Héroard. The dauphin himself owned a large collection of these figures purchased from the nearby pottery.

Many of the models for these clay statuettes are attributed to Guillaume Dupré, named first sculptor to Henry IV in 1597. Contemporary sculptor Barthélemy Prieur is also believed to have modeled a number of genre subjects drawn from rural life, but his works were produced in the more costly medium of bronze. These bronzes follow the example of a group of similar

subjects by the Flemish artist Giambologna, modeled and cast in Italy during the late sixteenth century. Unlike the taut gestures and angular poses for which that sculptor was known, Prieur's figures are relaxed and limber. Some of these bronzes attributed to Prieur reference the antique; for instance, the statuette of a woman pulling a thorn out of her foot (acc. no. 25.142.5) recalls the second-century Roman statue



of the *Spinario* (*Thorn Puller*), a boy in the same pose, a copy of which had been made for Francis I in 1544. Prieur's seated woman calmly braiding her hair, however, has no ancient prototype. Although nude, the figure does not seem intended to be erotic; to the contrary, it is an image of innocence.

The noble shepherd, emblem of the simple life, captured the imaginations of many readers toward the end of the sixteenth century. Rémy Belleau's pastoral poem *La Bergerie* of 1565, set

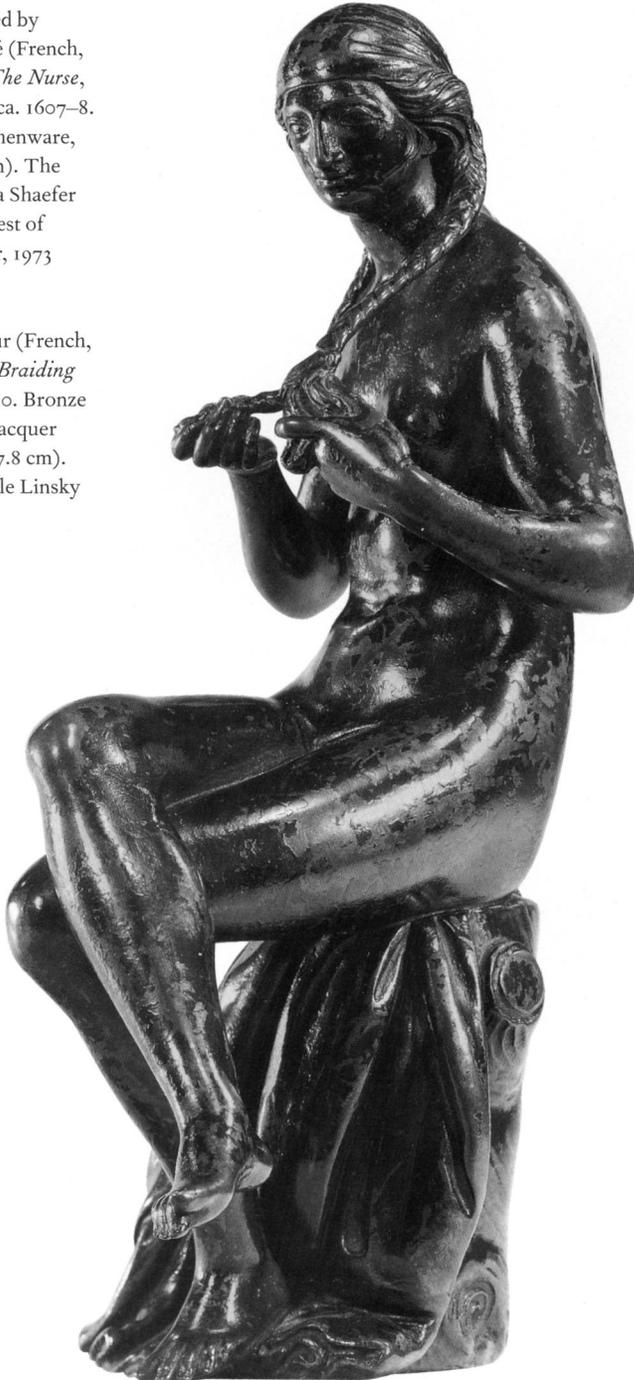
in Joinville, family seat of the Guises, intermixes descriptions of their wealthy accoutrements with the narrative of a rural drama. The Guises owned many tapestries, some of shepherd subjects, and Belleau intentionally blurred the line between his descriptions of real people and of fictional images on the château walls.

Pastoral images were also found in French embroidered tablecloths (pp. 46–47). This one represents the traditional tale of the shepherds Gombaut and Macée around the border of a panel of flowers and fruit. The girl, Gombaut, washes her feet in a stream; with Macée she raids a bird's nest; the croquetlike game ticquet is played; a bagpiper accompanies dancers. These idyllic scenes are followed by the couple's betrothal and marriage, bowdlerizing the sad tale of wolves and death that concludes the story. Extolling the ideal pleasures of arcadian life is the point of the pastoral, which is above all an escape from reality. In a country exhausted by internal strife and seeking a brighter future this was an understandable response.

The dauphin, who collected and gave away the pottery figure of a nurse and other ceramic statues, was commemorated in 1605 (p. 48) as successor to the throne (which he would assume in 1610 after his father's assassination). The ceramic modeler and medalist Dupré shows him astride a dolphin, a traditional symbol of the dauphin; he holds a helmet as a sign of his future military role as commander of the armies, while an eagle swoops from the sky to bestow a crown. His father, Henry IV, and mother, Marie de' Medici, clasp hands above his head. While the motto *Propago imperii* (I will continue the empire) promises the continuation of France's might, it was within a new dynasty. The Valois line ended with Henry III; with the accession of Henry IV in 1589 and continued in the dauphin, the future Louis XIII, the Bourbons ruled the country. As the Valois exited France's political stage, so the Renaissance gradually faded, replaced in time by a new set of artistic values emphasizing grandeur, power, and ostentatious use of materials. The new era of the Baroque found its greatest proponent in the king who would accede to the throne as Louis XIV.

Probably designed by Guillaume Dupré (French, ca. 1574–1642). *The Nurse*, from a model of ca. 1607–8. Lead-glazed earthenware, h. 9¾ in. (24.8 cm). The Lesley and Emma Shaefer Collection, Bequest of Emma A. Shaefer, 1973 (1974.356.303)

Barthélemy Prieur (French, 1536–1611). *Girl Braiding Her Hair*, 1600–10. Bronze with red-brown lacquer patina, h. 7 in. (17.8 cm). The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982 (1982.60.126)







French. *Table Cover with Story of Gombaut and Macée*, ca. 1600. Wool and silk on canvas, 108 × 64½ in. (274.3 × 163.8 cm). Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1954 (54.7.1)





Guillaume Dupré  
(French, ca. 1574–1642).  
*Medallion of Henri IV,  
Marie de' Medici, and  
the Dauphin*, 1605.  
Bronze, diam. 7½ in.  
(19.1 cm). Purchase,  
Gift of J. Pierpont  
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