







**FRENCH SCHOOL (XVIIth century) perhaps HENRI GASCAR (French: 1634/35-1701)**

Pair of fan designs depicting the courtyard and garden façades of the  
Château de Versailles

*The Front Façade of the Château, with the Cour Royale, its Two Pavilions and the Cour  
de Marbre*

*The Rear Façade of the Château Seen from the Terrace of the Bassin de Latone*

Gouache and gold on vellum laid on oak panel: 8 7/8 x 16 7/8 inches (each)  
22.4 x 42.8 cm.

A pair of interlaced C's inscribed on the reverse of each mounting panel  
Executed c. 1675-80

The history of functional, ceremonial and decorative hand-held fans is ancient, and it is known that they were used on various continents in one form or another even in prehistoric times. Egyptians, Greeks, Etruscans and Romans had fans made of plant fronds, long feathers or stiff, banner-shaped cloth, papyrus or parchment mounted on more or less ornate handles. They served as liturgical or secular objects with a practical application, i.e. cooling the skin in times of great heat and driving away insects. The prototypes of the folding fan seem to have originated in Japan and were imported into Europe during the Age of Exploration and the rise of the great trading companies, either directly or via China. By the sixteenth century, these exotic curios were being used as fashion accessories by both women and men and, because of their considerable cost, had become luxury items reserved almost exclusively for royalty and the aristocracy. An industry was born when European artisans began producing them.

The complexity of fan construction and the artistry used to embellish them required that they be made of rare materials. Two sheets of limed animal skin, paper or finely woven fabrics such as silk and taffeta, cut into a crescent of semi-circular shape and then decoratively painted, were divided geometrically into slots so that slender, tapered sticks or blades of wood, mica, ivory, bone, mother of pearl or tortoise shell could be inserted into them, with the outermost sticks serving as guards. They were glued together over the sticks and carefully sewn at the separation lines, after which the guards were put into place. When collapsed, folding fans were usually of a 'V' shape and, below their pleated, painted and sometimes gilded surfaces, the ends of their mounting sticks and the outer face of their guards could be decorated by means of carving, piercing or insertions into them of precious or semi-precious stones or various types of inlays. The sticks were joined at the bottom with a pin or rivet that allowed the fans to be pivoted open to reach their full span. (For a detailed discussion of the intricate art of the fan making in Europe and especially in ancien régime France, see the entry on the subject in Charles Joseph Panckoucke's *Encyclopédie méthodique ou par ordre de matières: par une société de gens de lettres, de savans et d'artistes*, Paris, Liège and Madrid, 1783, vol. II, pp. 497-502.)

At the courts of Renaissance France, folding fans were especially popular after the arrival of two Tuscan princesses who used them not only for practical purposes but also as fashion accessories, Catherine de Médicis (wife and mother of the last kings of

the Valois dynasty) and later her niece Marie de Médicis (consort of the founder of the Bourbon line, Henri IV, and mother of Louis XIII). It was, however, under the latter's son, Louis XIV (1638-1715), the so-called Sun King, that they became a permanent item of a wealthy and elegant woman's wardrobe. In Paris, where most of these objects were produced, they were for a long time sold by purveyors of perfumes and toiletry items, dressmakers and haberdashers, ivory turners (*tabletiers*) and painters. Each of the *corps de métiers* to which these tradesmen, craftsmen and artists belonged competed for a monopoly on their commercialization. Between 1676 and 1678, Louis XIV and his finance minister Jean Baptiste Colbert put an end to their disputes when they decreed into existence by letters patent the corporation or Jurande of the *maîtres éventaillistes*.

Traditionally, the narrative scenes painted on both sides of most folding fans created at this time illustrated episodes from Greek and Roman history or mythology. The present depictions in gouache on calfskin or vellum of the east and west frontages of the Château de Versailles were executed by a master painter who may or may not have belonged to the new guild. There can be no doubt that their architectural subjects were dictated by the individual or the administrative agency that commissioned them. They can be dated with some accuracy to the end of the second and the beginning of the third stages of the construction and sculptural embellishment of the palace, which is to say around 1675-1680. Most of the primary architectural work carried out at Versailles had been planned and supervised by Louis Le Vau and François II d'Orbay. They were then succeeded by Jules Hardouin Mansart, among whose contributions were the Galerie des Glaces or Grande Galerie, which effectively unified Le Vau's structure on the park side.

In the front view of the palace, which is articulated around the brick and stone hunting pavilion erected in the mid-1630s for Louis XIII, the artist has shown the original disposition of the Cour Royale and its two pavilions, which are partially closed off by gilded bars interspersed with square columns and pedestals on which stand carved urns and monumental statuary. The inner court, or Cour de Marbre, was raised, and at its center was a circular fountain. (This pool had to be covered in July of 1674 when, in celebration of the reconquest of Franche-Comté, Jean Baptiste Lully's *Alceste* was performed; it was ultimately drained, filled in and replaced by a marble pavement or *dallage*.)

In the view of the garden side of the château, which is shown as it looked prior to the construction of the Galerie des Glaces, is the Bassin de Latone as it was originally conceived. The central group of marble statues are representations of the goddess Latona and her young children Apollo and Diana standing on a mound of rocks in the middle of a circular pool. They were surrounded by the gilded lead figures of the Lycian peasants being transformed into frogs as well as a multitude of small frogs spouting water placed around the circumference of the water basin. All were the work of the brothers Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy (1670). They were oriented towards the rear of the palace, the staircase leading to it and a set of gilded bronze or lead statues of Neptune and two other male water deities. (The Latona sculpture was ultimately placed on a three-tiered structure, and the main figures were turned around so that they looked out onto the Tapis Vert and the Grand Canal stretching westwards nearly to the horizon.) The small building on the north side of the palace is the so-called Grotte de Thétys, which housed the great sculptural group of *Apollo Served by Water Nymphs* by François Girardon and his assistant Thomas Regnaudin and the two

groups of *Horses of the Sun God Groomed by Tritons* by Gilles Guérin and the brothers Marsy that flanked them. Originally constructed in 1666, probably by Le Vau, this beautiful *château d'eau* was destroyed around 1684 to make way for the north wing of the palace. (Those sculptures were eventually placed in the rocky grottoes of the Bosquet des Bains d'Apollon.) The central scene was originally intended to be framed with an ornate ellipse reminiscent of Jacques Callot's famous fan design showing a mock naval battle on the river Arno between the boats of King Weaver and King Dyer in 1619, but the artist left it somewhat unfinished because the fan was never actually mounted.

The courtyards, terraces and staircases in the pair of gouaches are animated with well-dressed courtiers of both sexes, members of the clergy, military officers, liveried servants, sedan chairs and horse-drawn carriages, as well as with prancing steeds and frisky dogs. Only recently come to light, these tributes to the nearly forty-year-old Louis XIV, then well into his personal reign, are two of the most exquisite representations of the nearly completed royal residence, an honor they share with Pierre Patel's earlier bird's-eye view of Louis XIV and his retinue arriving at the palace from the Avenue de Paris, a large oil painting that the artist signed and dated 1668 (Musée national des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, inv. no. MV 765).

Below the depiction in gouache of the palace's front façade, set into the center of the botanical framing device that almost encircles the lively scene, is an effigy in profile of the nearly forty-year-old king, the very personification of autocratic, divine-right monarchy. It is presented in the form of a gold medal reminiscent of one that is generally presumed to have been cast for the royal Cabinet des Médailles in the studio of the Franco-Flemish sculptor Jean Warin (1607-1672), an object today preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (inv. no. 646a).

The two gouaches were described by the historian Alexandre Gady, who was the first to publish them in his remarkable history of the Château de Versailles that was published in 2011 (see Reference below):

*La mode d'orner les éventails de scènes peintes était très vive au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Sur ce document inédit, l'artiste a représenté le château après les travaux de l'Enveloppe [1678]. La vue côté cour offre au centre un portrait en médaillon de Louis XIV. Au premier plan, reliées par une grille droite dont la porte est encadrée de deux groupes fantaisistes, on voit les deux ailes de communs transformées par Le Vau: si elles ont bien leur colonnades en façade, celles-ci sont surmontées de pots-à-feu dorés, alors que des statues de pierre y prenaient place. Autre différence, les grands toits brisés, pourtant supprimés par l'architecte. Dans la cour de Marbre, on reconnaît les deux volières dorées des angles, ainsi que le bassin circulaire. A gauche, l'artiste représente la grille dorée du parterre de l'Amour, qu'il reproduit pour la symétrie à droite, où elle n'a jamais existé.*

*La vue côté jardins, pour laquelle l'artiste s'est probablement inspiré de la gravure de [Israël] Silvestre de 1674, montre le château depuis l'entrée du Tapis vert, devant le bassin de Latone dans son premier état. L'effet de la façade est bien rendu, ainsi que le volume de la grotte de Thétys, qu'on aperçoit à gauche, très détachée. Les détails sont rendus avec une merveilleuse précision: on voit les grilles dorées de la grotte, comme celles du centre de la façade de l'Enveloppe, qui*

*laissaient la transparence vers le vestibule bas et la cour de Marbre. Enfin, la couleur ocre jaune des croisées de menuiseries de l'Enveloppe, couleur qui se maintiendra jusque sous Louis XVI (restituée en 2002).*

The mythological and allegorical references contained in the lower parts of the elaborate borders of both gouaches—the soaring figures of two nymphs of Flora holding up swags of acanthus leaves and winged putti nestled in a profusion of beribboned garlands of blossoms, fruit and other plant life, as well as the arms and armor of the warrior demi-god Hercules—are reflections of a cultural movement known as *Préciosité*, which developed in the literary *salons* of Paris in the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century. This was also a time when, in the wake of the Renaissance, French and Flemish tapestry makers designed hangings with a similar kind of floral and mythological ornamentation in their surrounds. Moreover, the figural and vegetal motifs may also have been inspired by pictorial, literary or even musical sources.

One such inspiration could have been *Atys*, a tragic opera based on Ovid's *Fasti*, the score and libretto of which were composed in 1675 by Jean Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault. The plot involves the infatuation of the great earth-goddess Cybele, the “Magna Mater” of Roman polytheistic mythology, with the handsome, ill-fated Phrygian mortal, Attis, whom she wished to take as her consort. (Attis was ultimately revered in Antiquity as a vegetation deity, whose dreadful death and joyous resurrection in the form of a tree symbolized the fruits of the earth that die in winter and are renewed in the spring.) *Atys* was first performed before the nearly forty-year-old French king and his entourage on January 10, 1676 at the old Château of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, and it became one of the sovereign's favorite musical entertainments. Following a lush and stately overture, the prologue was an unabashed paean to the Sun King, the creator of Versailles, whose armies were preparing to launch a spring invasion of Flanders as part of the Franco-Dutch war (1672-1678). The scene takes place in the palace of the allegorical figure of Time. Cybele summons to her presence Flora, the goddess of spring and flowers, so that she and her nymphs can perform dances before Attis departs for war.

Quinault based the characters of Attis and Cybele on Louis XIV and his official mistress, the Marquise de Montespan, née Françoise Athénaïs de Rochechouart de Mortemart (1640-1707), who had already given birth to several of the eight children she was to have by him. But as she put on weight and her fits of jealousy increased, his passion for her dwindled. (Madame de Montespan was ultimately banished from court, and her promiscuous royal lover replaced her first with the seventeen-year-old Angélique de Fontanges and afterwards permanently by the governess the Marquise herself had selected to care for her illegitimate offspring, the deeply religious widow Scarron, for whom Louis created the marquiseate of Maintenon and whom he secretly married after the death of his Spanish Habsburg wife, Queen Marie Thérèse.)

The most striking likeness of the high-born Madame de Montespan is a signed portrait by the Parisian-born Henri Gascar (alternately spelled Gascars and Gascard), a painter whose works betray the influence of Pierre Mignard and Peter Lely and who was employed at the courts of both France and Restoration England. Last exhibited publicly at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (*Louis XIV: faste et décors*, 1960, no. 521), this rather large picture descended in the family of Montespan's older sister, the Marquise de Thianges. In it, Gascar represented the glamorous royal courtesan when



she was most appealing, lightly clad and provocatively reclining on a daybed at the entrance of the main gallery of the Château de Clagny, the opulent private residence built for her near Versailles between 1674 and 1680 by Jules Hardouin Mansart. Winged putti lift the heavily embroidered hangings falling from the overhead canopy, to which are attached garlands of roses, which according to Roman mythology were sacred to both Venus, the fertile goddess of love, and Flora. The head of the bed is topped by the gilded figure of Cupid, and at the subject's feet are more garlands of flowers and the Marquise's cast-off slippers.

The elaborate surrounds of our two gouaches are very similar in character, and this leads to the speculation that they may have been painted by the same artist, i.e. Henri Gascar, as a special commission for Madame de Montespan. (Gascar is not mainly known as a painter in gouache or bodycolor, but he was no doubt the author of two small works with religious subjects in that medium, *The Virgin Annunciate* and *The Angel Annunciate*, which were sold together as lot 101 at Sotheby's in New York on January 12, 1994.) Born in Paris, Henri Gascar traveled to Rome in 1659 and worked there for some seven years. He then lived for a time in Amsterdam, where it is supposed that he painted a likeness of the diarist Nicolas Delafond (The State Hermitage, St. Petersburg). The reception piece that he presented in 1672 to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, a portrait of Louis XIV's son and heir, the Grand Dauphin, was rejected. The artist then left for London where he enjoyed the patronage of Louise Renée de Penancoët de Kérouaille (1649-1734), the French paramour of Charles II and a member of the household of the latter's Roman Catholic wife, Catherine of Braganza. The mission that Louis XIV had given her prior to her departure was to seduce his Stuart cousin who had been restored to the throne of England in 1660 and serve as a spy. She succeeded by replacing the then favorite, Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland, and was made Duchess of Portsmouth. Gascar may also have been involved in espionage on behalf of France.

During the Restoration, Charles II, his family and his household resided mainly in the palaces of Whitehall, Windsor and Hampton Court. It is presumably there that Gascar painted portraits of the king's aforementioned mistresses and their successor Nell Gwynn, as well as members of Britain's landed aristocracy, especially those of the Roman Catholic persuasion who were at the time enjoying considerable favor. These paintings, some of which were popularized in mezzotint engravings, reflect the influence of his famous countryman Pierre Mignard and, to a smaller extent, that of the courtier-artist Peter Lely. (See exh. cat., London, National Portrait Gallery and New Haven, Ct., Yale Center for British Art, *Painted Ladies: Women in the Court of Charles II*, ed. by C. MacLeod and J. Marciari Alexander, 2001.) By far Gascar's most singular achievement while he was in England was his flamboyant, full-length portrait of Charles II's younger brother, James Stuart, Duke of York, as Lord High Admiral and fancifully dressed in Roman military costume (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich Hospital Collection, inv. no. BHC 2797), which was painted around 1672. In 1678 the French artist was in the Low Countries, where he painted *The Signing of the Peace Treaty of Nijmegen* (Commanderie van Sint Jan, Nijmegen), a pact that temporarily put an end to the state of belligerency between France and Spain. He returned to Paris in 1679, and shortly thereafter he was inducted into the Académie Royale upon presentation of his portraits of the painters Louis Ferdinand Elle the Elder and Pierre de Sève (both in the Château national des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon). If indeed Gascar is the author of the present gouaches, it was at this juncture of his career that he painted them. In 1681 he returned to Italy, traveling to Modena and

Venice. By 1691, he was working in Poland, but he eventually settled permanently in Rome, where he died in 1701.

The present gouaches were originally meant to be used as the two sides of a folding fan, but the artist's technique was so exquisite that they were never actually mounted as such, which is evidenced by the fact that the paintings are merely scored and not cut in their upper and lower corners, leaving their original rectangular shape whole. These views of the crowning architectural glory of the reign of Louis XIV, the Château de Versailles, which in the refinement of their execution have an aesthetic kinship with earlier illuminated sheets, remained as they were and were eventually framed and glazed to be treasured as paintings in their own right. They have miraculously survived to this day in wonderful condition.

The early provenance of the two gouaches cannot be established. However, it is known that they were for a considerable time the property of the heirs and/or descendants of a Parisian notary and writer, Jean Frédéric Gabiou, the husband of the portrait painter Marie Élisabeth Lemoine (1755-1812). The latter belonged to a family of female artists that included her two sisters—Marie Victoire Lemoine (1754-1820) and Marie Denise Lemoine (1774-1821), the wife of the architect Michel Jean Maximilien Villers—and a first cousin, Jeanne Élisabeth Gabiou (1767-1832), wife in succession of the sculptor Antoine Denis Chaudet (1763-1810) and an archivist and financial administrator from Arras, Pierre Arsène Denis Husson (1767-1843). In 2010, heirs in the Gabiou line entrusted the two works to I.E.P. Conseil, the firm of Jacques Bacot and his partner Hughes de Lencquesaing (furniture, objets d'arts and sculpture specialists or *experts*), who placed them in auction at their behest.

## PROVENANCE

Early history unknown

Collection of the descendants and/or heirs of the Gabiou family; sold by them in an auction organized in 2010 by Maître Marc Ferri,

Paris, Hôtel Drouot, April 16, 2010, lot 39, illus. in cat. (color; and color detail of one of the nymphs of Flora decorating the lower border of the view of the rear of the Château); acquired by

Private collection

## REFERENCE

A. Gady, *Versailles: la fabrique d'un chef-d'œuvre*, Paris, Éditions Le Passage / Château de Versailles, 2011, p. 50 (author dates the gouaches to c. 1675). Illustrated in color p. 51