

PORCELAIN FROM VERSAILLES: VASES FOR A KING & QUEEN



THE QUEEN'S VASES

Three Lidded Vases, 1775-76. Sèvres porcelain manufactory. Hard-paste porcelain with gilt bronze mounts. National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon. Image: © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY / Christophe Fouin

Originally owned by the French queen Marie-Antoinette, this set of vases is elaborately decorated with scenes depicting children and adults in fanciful outdoor settings. The images are based on designs by the French artists François Boucher and Jean Pillement, notably the latter's *Collection of Many Chinese Children's Games*, a suite of illustrations showing people playing with various toys.

Inspired by Asia: These vases reflect the profound impact of Asia on the arts of Europe during the 1700s. An intense interest in Asian art and culture was fueled by imported luxury items such as porcelain, lacquer, and silk. European ceramic artists were inspired by the technical achievements of Asian potters. They sought to produce the same type of material and finish, with its clear white surface and sophisticated enameled and gilded decoration.

Elaborate Decoration: The decoration on these vases was executed by several highly specialized craftspeople. The ornamentation on the porcelain represents one of the most intricate decorative schemes produced by the painter and gilder Louis François Lécot at the Sèvres manufactory in France. He created the scenes in colored enamels and gold using a refined technique that achieved remarkable shimmering effects reminiscent of Chinese silks.

The finely detailed handles, collars and finials on each vase are made of gilt bronze, including elements that look like tasseled ropes. These are attributed to the Parisian metalworker Jean Claude Thomas Chambellan Duplessis, who was a prominent maker of gilt bronze for Sèvres.

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February 14, 2023 – March 3, 2024

The J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center



THE KING'S VASES

Five Lidded Vases, 1781, Sèvres porcelain manufactory. Soft-paste porcelain. Three central vases: J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Two end vases: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Originally owned by the French king Louis XVI, this set of vases is elaborately decorated with mythological scenes on the front and floral bouquets on the back. The scenes copy illustrations from one of the king's favorite books, *The Adventures of Telemachus*. This famous French novel was written for his great-grandfather. It tells how Telemachus, son of the Greek hero Ulysses, was educated by the Roman gods to be a wise leader.

Inspired by a Book: The vases are decorated with images copied from a 1773 edition of the French novel *The Adventures of Telemachus* by François Fénelon. Left to right: The old tutor Mentor persuades Telemachus, son of the hero Ulysses, to join a battle; Telemachus listens to a priest of the god Apollo; The goddess Minerva protects Telemachus from Venus and Cupid, gods of love; Venus brings Cupid to the sea nymph Calypso; Telemachus wins a chariot race.

Elaborate Decoration: The decoration on these vases was executed by several highly specialized craftspeople. Among them was Philippe Parpette, who perfected the complex technique of jeweled enameling seen here. It was the most extravagant type of ornamentation produced at the Sèvres porcelain manufactory during the 1700s. The process involved applying small drops of colored enamel to pieces of gold leaf that had been stamped with different patterns.

The pair of heads on the sides of each vase were expertly gilded by Étienne Henri Le Guay, and the detailed figural scenes on the fronts are by Antoine Caton, one of the leading porcelain painters at the manufactory.



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PILLEMENT PRINTS

Jean Pillement was a prominent French painter active in the second half of the 1700s. His designs were published in widely circulated prints that influenced a variety of designers in many countries. Pillement was famous for his inventive decorative patterns that evoke Asian settings. These images accentuated European views of East Asia – a distant region with which most people in Europe had little direct experience – as a world of fantasy and frivolity.

Pillement's designs were one source of inspiration for the artists at the Sèvres porcelain manufactory when conceiving the ornamentation seen on the queen's set of three vases.



Chinese Figure, 1758, Jean Pillement. Etching. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

The woman playing a lute was copied on the lid of the central vase in the queen's set of three vases.



Chinese Children's Games, 1759, Jean Pillement. Etching. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

The children blowing bubbles may have been the inspiration for a similar scene on one of the side vases in the queen's set of three vases.



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