

The Michael L. Rosenberg

Lecture Series at the
Dallas Museum of Art

French Art of the Eighteenth Century

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Detail of figure 102, p. 144

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Frontispiece: François Boucher, *Landscape with Distant Buildings and a Herdsman*, c. 1731.
Detail of figure 76, p. 104

Page 4: Hubert Robert, *Hermit in the Colosseum*, 1790. Detail of figure 8, p. 20



Fired by Passion Michael L. Rosenberg's Sèvres Tableau and the French Royal Prerogatives of Ceramics and Stag Hunting

Deborah Gage

Michael L. Rosenberg's abiding interest in eighteenth-century French art was broad, encompassing both paintings and the decorative arts. One object that links these two aspects is a remarkable painted Sèvres tableau of a boar hunt (facing page and FIG. 85, p. 121). The Rosenberg tableau is known not only for having been in the collection of Mayer Amschel de Rothschild but also for being one of the highlights of the ceramics section of the May 1977 Sotheby's Mentmore sale. The tableau is enhanced by its splendid nineteenth-century ormolu frame. Both hunting and ceramics, brought together in this tableau, were significant, long-standing royal traditions in France, reaching their apogee during the reigns of Louis XV and Louis XVI.

When Louis XIV assumed control of the French government in 1661, he was determined to prevent a recurrence of the nobles' rebellions of his youth and shrewdly invited them to attend him at court in Versailles, where he could keep them under close observation. Away from Paris, Louis XIV could more easily assert his absolute power over the nobility and provide distraction by creating an elaborate court life full of ceremony, competition, and reward. Sparing no expense, the king constructed his celebrated palace at Versailles, where Louis XIII's small hunting château had stood. Construction began around 1679, with building works continuing for most of his reign. The Palace of Versailles would become a symbol of the ancien régime's belief in the Divine Right of kings and of Louis XIV's absolutist regime, summed up by his famous statement: "L'état c'est moi."

Even before Louis XIV's reign and the creation of his extravagant court at Versailles, hunting was an integral part of the rituals of court life. From a charter relating to Louis VII, it appears that the first stag draw occurred sometime before 1137 in the heart of the Forest of Fontainebleau close to a fountain, the Fontaine Billaud. Fontainebleau's importance as a royal palace emerged under François I,

77 Sèvres Manufacture, painted by Charles-Antoine Didier, after a design by Alexandre-François Desportes, tableau of *A Boar Hunt*, 1793. Detail of figure 85

who decreed stag hunting a rite reserved exclusively for the monarch and princes of royal blood.¹ Henri IV established his Galerie des Cerfs (Hall of Stags) there, decorated around 1600 by Louis Poisson with views of mounted courtiers hunting in the forest.²

The layout of the rides at Fontainebleau, which was perfect for *la chasse à courre* (the ritualized form of hunting on horseback with hounds), thrilled Louis XIV. His great-grandson Louis XV, who came to the Château de Fontainebleau every autumn to stag hunt, later had the Salle des Chasses (Hall of Hunting) there decorated with hunting scenes. Louis XV and his court hunted three times a week, and sometimes every day when the court was at Fontainebleau or Compiègne.³ He so enjoyed hunting that he stopped after his coronation to pursue deer in the Forest of Villers-Cotterêts, and it is recorded that he hunted for a full 276 days in 1726.⁴ Following the tradition of his predecessors, Louis XVI also centered his life around the ritual of hunting. An infamous diary entry for July 14, 1789, records “rien,” referring to the fact that “nothing” had occurred on the hunt that day and not, as popular opinion suggests, that he was ignorant of the storming of the Bastille.

The ceremonies of the hunt, and Louis XV's obsession with them, had significant implications for the patronage of the members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, in particular Jean-Baptiste Oudry.⁵ For two decades, Oudry was the favored artist of Louis XV and Queen Marie Leszczyńska. His career blossomed under their patronage in the 1720s, and he became the foremost French painter of hunts, *têtes bizarres* (hunting still lifes), and monumental landscapes. Oudry's introduction to the royal stables was made through Henri-Camille, marquis de Beringhen, who was close to the young monarch and whose father was in charge of the king's personal stables (see FIG. 53, p. 73). Thus Oudry was able to access the Venerie Royale (Royal Kennels).⁶

In 1725, the artist painted *Misse and Turlu*, two greyhounds belonging to Louis XV (see FIG. 47, p. 68), the first of eleven overdoors for the Château de Compiègne portraying hounds from the royal pack of whom Louis XV was extraordinarily fond. Among Louis's favorites was the pointer Polydore, who can be seen in the overdoor painted in 1728, with the brand of the Venerie Royale on his flank (Château de Fontainebleau). Oudry painted some of these affectionate canine portraits in the presence of the king, which further endeared him to the monarch.⁷ With this commission, Louis XV was emulating his great-grandfather, who had ordered Alexandre-François Desportes to paint portraits of his own favorite hounds for the Château de Marly in 1702.

In 1726, Oudry was appointed painter to the Beauvais tapestry works, providing designs for a series known as *Les Chasses nouvelles*, which represented five principal animal hunts and were based on an older series of tapestries designed in 1690. Four of these tapestries are now in the collection of the Musée de la

Chasse et de la Nature, Paris. Oudry's next commission came in 1728, when he was ordered to ride out with the royal hunt in order to document it. The result was the epic panoramic canvas, the first of its scale in France, *Louis XV Hunting the Stag in the Forest of Saint-Germain* (*Louis XV chassant le cerf dans la forêt de Saint-Germain*) (see FIG. 48, p. 68) for the king's private apartment at the Château de Marly. Well aware of the prestige of such a commission, Oudry inserted his own self-portrait, dressed in hunting costume and holding his sketching supplies, into this dramatic court hunting scene.

This painting was so successful that three years later Oudry was commissioned to create three large-scale cartoons known as the *Royal Hunts of Louis XV* (*Chasses royales de Louis XV*) for Gobelins, the royal tapestry and furniture manufactory, to be turned into tapestries to decorate the royal bedchamber, the royal antechamber, and the council room at the Château de Compiègne. The initial commission was extended to nine cartoons in all, which Oudry completed in 1746.⁸ Unlike the Beauvais tapestry designs, which Oudry reworked from an existing series, the cartoons he produced for Gobelins were his own design, and he was extremely proud of them.

These ambitious compositions, mostly set around Compiègne, convey the grandeur, spectacle, and ritual of the royal hunts. The scenes include portraits of many courtiers, as well as detailed documentation of the full hunting party, which could comprise as many as eighty *sonneurs de cor* (trumpeters), nine hundred hounds, and one thousand horses. Two sets of the tapestries were woven at Gobelins—the first expressly for Louis XV between 1736 and 1750 for the Château de Compiègne, where they are today. The second group, produced from 1742 to 1753, was purchased by Louis XV's son-in-law, Infante Don Philippe, Duke of Parma, and is now in the Palazzo Pitti, Florence.⁹

The process involved in creating these celebrated tapestries had four stages. The first was the *esquisses*, or preliminary drawings, in which Oudry laid out the compositions (see FIG. 78, p. 112). Next came the *modelli*, or small oil sketches, which were worked up in finer detail and full color. The *modelli* are now in Paris at the Musée Nissim de Camondo. These were then translated into large-scale *esquisses peintes*, or cartoons, for Gobelins (see FIG. 79, p. 113). The cartoons were designed to be exactly the same size as the finished tapestries so that the weavers could precisely translate Oudry's design from paint to wool. All nine of Oudry's cartoons remained at Gobelins until the nineteenth century, when they were dispersed: in 1828, seven were inset into the paneling of Charles X's new hunting apartments at the Château de Fontainebleau, and two were sent to the Louvre, though one was returned to Fontainebleau in 1845.¹⁰

Oudry's designs provide an intriguing narrative of the royal ritual of the hunt. Ceremony was an indispensable attribute to Divine Right, one that, in the instance

of stag hunting, was performed outdoors. The designs do not show a single hunt from beginning to end but rather present the most striking moments from several different hunts, thus providing the viewer with a broader appreciation of the sport.

Beginning with the first scene Oudry presented to Louis XV in 1735, the drawing, *modello*, cartoon, and final tapestry of *Preparation at the Crossroads of the Puits du Roi, Compiègne* (*Carrefour du Puits du Roi, Compiègne*) show an intersection laid out by François I to provide the best hunting vistas: the traditional departure point for the royal hunt.¹¹ In the various stages, Louis-Alexandre de Bourbon, who was the comte de Toulouse and the legitimized son of Louis XIV, is mounted on the horse before Louis XV as the *grand veneur de France*, the equivalent of master of the horse in England. He is present in many of the scenes depicting the royal hunt, always in profile. There are also two figures on either side of the king, who are dressing him in his riding boots: in the royal hunt, these men are known as the *botté du roy*. On the left is the marquis de Beringhen, and to the right is the grand squire, Prince Charles de Lorraine.

Oudry continued with *The Death of the Stag at the Ponds of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois* (*La Mort du cerf aux étangs de Saint-Jean-aux-Bois*) (fg. 78). At the moment of the hunting horn sounding the *hallali*, the king is on a pied horse and the stag is being driven into a pond in the forest, with a vista of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois beyond. The courtiers, seated on the other side of the water, act as a reminder of the theatrical and ceremonial aspects of the hunt. The *valets des chiens* (dog handlers), in livery with dark-velvet trim, hold the hounds. The hunting coats worn by the entire entourage were designed by the king: he is shown in

a blue riding coat (its color was known as *bleu du roi*, the same term applied to the famous blue Sèvres glaze) with gold and silver braid, over a white waistcoat and gold belt. Every other hunt participant is wearing a red waistcoat, reminiscent of the livery for Louis XV's *gardes du corps* (bodyguards) and the French Guards.

The courtiers in the cartoons and tapestries from this series are distinguished from the mounted servants only by the former group's blue ribbons of the Order of the Saint Esprit.¹² The effect was intentionally orchestrated, like a military parade, to reflect the ceremony of the hunt and ultimately the king's power. The crossed *Ls* in the corner of the tapestry

78 Jean-Baptiste Oudry, preparatory sketch for *The Death of the Stag at the Ponds of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois* (*La Mort du cerf aux étangs de Saint-Jean-aux-Bois*), 1736. Charcoal and white chalk highlights on blue paper, 11½ × 13¾ in. (28.2 × 34.8 cm). École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, EBA 1376





correspond with the marks found in underglaze blue on Sèvres porcelain, both indicative of royal patronage.

A chase along the River Oise is shown in Oudry's subsequent cartoon for *Stag Hunt in the Oise in Sight of Compiègne, near Royallieu* (*Chasse au cerf dans l'Oise à la vue de Compiègne du côté de Royallieu*) (FIG. 79). The king is mounted on his horse, and the court follows the spectacle by boat on the river, while, in the foreground, the whip encourages the hounds into the water. The setting is identifiable: the banks of the River Oise, with the Royallieu Abbey in Compiègne in the distance. The drama of the event is palpable through Oudry's careful observations of the *valet de chiens* whipping the dogs forward; the ferry drawn across the river by a rope, carrying the king to the other side; and the dozens of onlookers.

The next in Oudry's series of nine views is entitled *The Cornered Stag on the Rochers de Franchard, Fontainebleau* (*Le Cerf aux abois dans les rochers de Franchard en forêt de Fontainebleau*, 1738). This scene, discussed in further detail later in this essay, shows a stag at bay, cornered atop a rocky outcrop in the Forest of Fontainebleau (see FIG. 84, p. 120).

The King Holding the Bloodhound at the Crossroads of Puits Solitaire, Compiègne (*Le Roy tenant le limier au Carrefour du Puits Solitaire, Compiègne*, 1739) returns to the beginning of the hunt, in which a young and elegant Louis XV holds the pointer hound straining to pick up the scent. The king wears *culottes françaises* (day breeches), indicating he has not yet dressed for riding.

In *Releasing the Old Pack at the Crossroads of Petite Patte d'Oie, Compiègne* (*On découple la vieille meute au Carrefour de la Petite Patte d'Oie, forêt de Compiègne*, 1741), the king, always depicted with an outstretched hand, is shown in the

79 Jean-Baptiste Oudry, cartoon for *Stag Hunt in the Oise in Sight of Compiègne, near Royallieu* (*Chasse au cerf dans l'Oise à la vue de Compiègne du côté de Royallieu*), 1737. Oil on canvas, 11 ft. 9 in. × 32 ft. 6 in. (3.57 m × 9.91 m). Musée National du Château de Fontainebleau, INV 7010, MR 2267

background with the youngest and fastest hounds. The more experienced, older hounds were kept in reserve, in pairs, by the whip who gave orders to the *valet de chiens*. The whip, wearing silver braid on his coat, is on horseback, while the *valet de chiens* has velvet trimming on his coat and is on the ground.

The next image in the series, *A Pack of Running Hounds, Going to the Meeting at the Crossroads of the Embrassade, Compiègne* (*Meute de chiens courant qui vont au rendez-vous, au Carrefour de l'Embrassade, Compiègne, 1743*) shows the royal huntsmen awaiting the king's arrival at an appointed place. The mounted huntsmen are carrying their horns over their shoulders, and the *valets des chiens*, shown on their feet in the foreground, wait with the hounds. The king arrives in his coach beyond.

The death of the stag is shown in *The Scramble for the Spoils of the Stag in the Forest of Saint-Germain in View of the Poissy Abbey* (*La Curée du cerf dans la forêt de Saint-Germain à la vue de l'abbaye de Poissy, 1744*). The final scene depicts *The Fourhu, Giving the Quarry to the Young Hounds* (*Le Fourhu ou la petite curée des jeunes chiens*) (FIG. 80). At the end of the hunt, the valet on foot blows his horn to the tune of *fourhu* to gather the hounds. The warm entrails of the stag are ceremoniously held aloft and then given to the hounds, realistically depicted jumping up for the carcass.

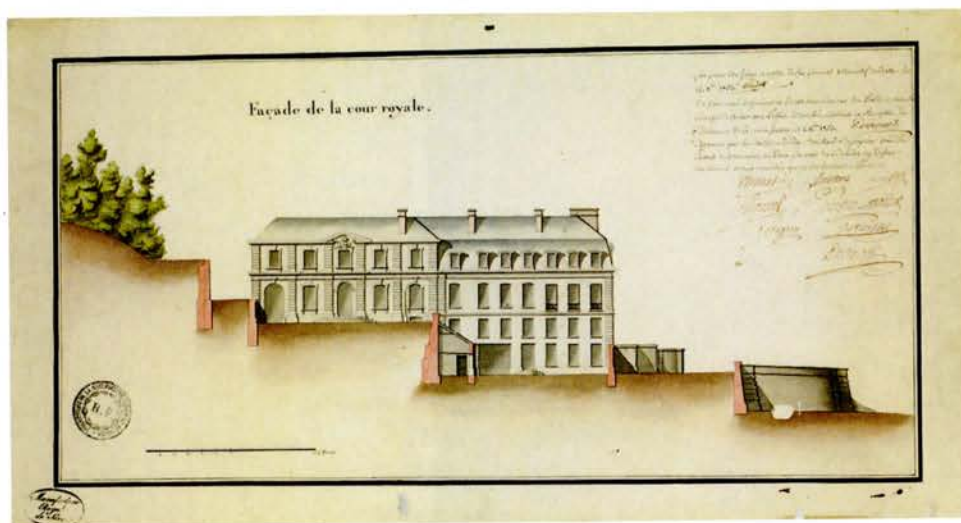
Interestingly, this set of tapestries commissioned for the Château de Compiègne was not the last iteration of Oudry's royal hunt designs. They inspired part of the *Surtout de chasse*, a group of three-dimensional Sèvres biscuit hunting figures made to decorate a dining table in a spectacular fashion and purchased by Louis XVI in 1776.¹³ A few years later, from 1779 to 1781, they were reproduced as a unique set of Sèvres porcelain tableaux commissioned by Louis XVI. While the tableaux present views almost identical to Oudry's tapestry designs, the new king exercised the prerogative of royal patronage in replacing the likeness of Louis XV with his own in every scene. Both Louis XV and Louis XVI had a great love of porcelain, which they indulged in almost as fervently as they did in hunting. Both were prolific and essential patrons of the manufacture of porcelain in eighteenth-century France.

When porcelain first arrived from the East during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it was valued as highly as precious metals and stones, and pieces were given as diplomatic gifts. However, the first true, or hard-paste, porcelain in Europe was created in Dresden in 1710 under the patronage of Augustus the Strong, the Elector of Saxony. Soon every monarch and nobleman sought to follow his example in collecting, commissioning, and exchanging works of fine porcelain. Charles III of Bourbon, King of Naples and Spain and the founder of the Capodimonte porcelain manufactory, stated that porcelain, next to hunting, was his favorite pastime.



The Vincennes porcelain factory was started at the Château de Vincennes under the direction of Jean-Louis Orry de Fulvy, intendant of finance and director of the French East India Company, who obtained a loan of 10,000 livres from Louis XV. Both Louis XV and his mistress Madame de Pompadour (whom the king had met by coincidence on a royal hunt) quickly developed a passion for ceramics. She encouraged him to subscribe to a quarter of the factory's capital stock by 1752, and, in 1753, the factory was granted the title Manufacture Royale de Porcelaine de France. In 1756, again at Madame de Pompadour's initiative, the factory was moved by the king to new premises in the village of Sèvres, on the road to Versailles and in close proximity to Madame de Pompadour's Château de Bellevue, thereby enticing the king to spend more time with her and availing him of a nearby project that would become an obsession. After a reorganization, the

80 Gobelins Manufacture, after a design by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, tapestry of *The Fourhu, Giving the Quarry to the Young Hounds (Le Fourhu ou la petite curée des jeunes chiens)*, 1746. High-warp tapestry, 14 ft. 1 in. × 11 ft. 4 in. (4.3 m × 3.45 m). Musées et Domaine Nationaux de Compiègne, c968c



81 Plan of the new Sèvres factory by Laurent Lindet and Jean-Rodolphe Perronet, signed by Perronet and the shareholders of the Eloy Brichard company, 1753. Watercolor on paper, 13 × 24 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (33 × 62 cm). Cité de la Céramique, Sèvres

king acquired the entire capital stock in 1759. The factory moved to its present premises on the banks of the Seine in 1876.¹⁴

The important but unusual commission for the factory's new home was given to the architects Jean-Rodolphe Perronet and Laurent Lindet. The building was 130 meters long and four stories high. Propriety dictated that, as a monarch, Louis XV should not participate in a commercial enterprise, so the premises at Sèvres were intentionally designed for a twofold purpose, as indicated in a contemporary elevation (FIG. 81). The front approach provided the appearance of a royal residence, with its own entrance and a complete suite of state apartments, including a chapel and a guardroom protected by Swiss Guards, where visitors could wait for the king.¹⁵

Beyond lay one of the first purpose-built factories prior to the Industrial Revolution. The ground floor was used to store the stocks of clay, logs, and raw materials. The floor above housed the plastering, sculpting, and engraving workshops. A long corridor enabled workers to circulate between the various departments and the kilns, which were located along the courtyard to the south. The sculptors, turners, repairers, and decorators worked on the third (European second) floor. Above them, just under the roofs, were the painters and gilders, where they were afforded the greatest amount of natural light.¹⁶

The dual purpose of this building was exemplified by the provision of two sets of staircases: one for general use and for customers, and a second, accessible only from Louis XV's drawing room, for the private use of the monarch, allowing him access to the workshops. This also gave the king direct access to Jean Hellot, the distinguished chemist and technical director of the factory, who was responsible for many of the ground colors that established Sèvres's fame. There was also a

room in which recent creations were set aside for the monarch. Key to the function of the new premises was the exhibition and salesroom, crowned with garlands framing Louis XV's medallion and the coat of arms of France.¹⁷

In 1758, a year before Louis XV became sole proprietor, the king established a permanent sales outlet in the same room at Sèvres, where the ceramics were displayed in showcases. Furthermore, for two weeks each year, over Christmas and into the new year, Louis XV dedicated part of his private apartments at Versailles to the sale of Sèvres wares, a tradition carried on by Louis XVI.¹⁸ The acquisition of the company by Louis XV was a turning point in the factory's history: it guaranteed financial stability, enhanced the standing of the factory, and, of course, boosted sales.

Sèvres plaques, like the series commissioned by Louis XVI after Oudry's designs for the *Royal Hunts* tapestries, were a natural evolution from those created to replace marquetry scenes on furniture. The earliest plaques (called *pièces* or *morceaux*) were recorded at Vincennes in 1752, and the term *plaque* appeared in 1754.¹⁹ Their heyday came in 1758, when the *marchand mercier* (luxury merchant) Simon-Philippe Poirier championed the trend of decorating with plaques and became one of the largest purveyors of Sèvres mounted and decorated inkstands, snuffboxes, clocks, billiard scorers, coffers, and furniture. Up to ninety plaques could be mounted on a single piece of furniture, and often entire sets of furniture were created with matching decoration.²⁰

In time, these plaques would be framed and hung on the wall as works of art in their own right, similar to paintings. The larger ones reproducing well-known paintings were called *tableaux*. The first is recorded in the Sèvres inventories in 1760: one showing *La Halte de chasseurs* (*The Hunters' Rest*) after Carel van Falens, with the date letter *H* for 1760 and the inscription *Dodin 1761* by the celebrated decorator and porcelain painter Charles Nicolas Dodin (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art).²¹ Another early example is a grisaille portrait, dated 1761, of Louis XV surrounded by a colorful floral wreath (Saint Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum).²² By 1766, scenes after Jean-Baptiste Pater and Carle Van Loo were advertised in the publication *L'Avant-coureur*, and, in 1768, Poirier advertised in his shop "Porcelain tableaux of admirable brightness and indelible color with which one can decorate furniture."²³

The French royal family purchased many tableaux directly from Sèvres to give as diplomatic gifts. Louis XV gave a pair of tableaux to the king of Denmark in 1768, and Louis XVI presented tableaux to the comtesse du Nord, the future tsarina of Russia, Maria Feodorovna; Archduke Ferdinand; and the king of Sweden.²⁴ A total of twenty-two Sèvres tableaux are known to have been at Versailles by the reign of Louis XVI, one of the most curious of which is the portrait of Qianlong, emperor of the Qing dynasty (FIG. 82), painted by Charles-Eloi Asselin after an



82 Sèvres Manufacture, painted by Charles-Eloi Asselin, after Giuseppe Panzi, tableau of *Portrait of the Chinese Emperor Qianlong*, 1776. Hard-paste porcelain, $9\frac{3}{8} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$ in. (23.7 × 17.4 cm). Deposit of the Musée du Louvre at the Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, INV 35760

engraving. This porcelain hung in the king's private dining room. A second plaque was sent to the emperor himself in China, both as a fine diplomatic gift and as a gesture on the part of Louis XVI to demonstrate that his factory could produce ceramics equal to those of China.

Plaques varied greatly in price, from 2 to 1,400 livres, depending on their size, color, and design.²⁵ Tableaux were more expensive, and often the subject and name of the painter were recorded in sales records. Subjects after Carle Van Loo, including *The Grand Turk Giving a Concert to His Mistress* (*Le Concert du grand sultan*)—painted by Dodin and mounted by Poirier for Madame du Barry on a table by Martin Carlin (Paris, Musée du Louvre)—were 3,000 livres each, whereas the nine commissioned by Louis XVI after Oudry's *Royal Hunts* (known as the *Chasses du roi*) were 24,000 livres together.²⁶ Undoubtedly, the tableaux after Oudry's designs were the most ambitious commission the factory undertook in this genre.

That grand commission of the *Chasses du roi* tableaux by Louis XVI was a continuation of the redecoration scheme of the king's private apartments in Versailles, begun by Louis XV in the 1720s. For political reasons, as well as the fact that Louis XIV had

died of smallpox, a highly contagious and feared disease, the court had withdrawn from Versailles during the Regency, returning in 1722. During this period, the young Louis XV created new private rooms situated on the second (European first) floor of the main body of the palace—far from the tumult of Louis XIV's Grand Apartments—all of which he decorated with hunting motifs.²⁷ The new Stag Court became the inner courtyard of the king's private apartments, hung with some of the best hunting trophies, while the timepiece in the courtyard was there to show the time of departure for the hunt. Louis XV's private dining room, the *Salle à Manger des Retours de Chasse* (After the Hunt Dining Room), where the king and his fellow huntsmen dined upon returning from the hunt, was decorated with gilded plasterwork of hunting scenes with dogs, deer, and horn-blowing cupids. Even the ormolu wall sconces were formed in the shape of hunting horns. In the *Antichambre des Chiens* (Antechamber of the Hounds), where the king's favorite hunting dogs were kenneled, the cornice was suitably decorated with hounds' heads and hunting scenes. Beyond that room lay the staircase, hung with Oudry's *têtes bizarres*, leading to the staterooms.

The Porcelain Dining Room, or *Salle à Manger Nouvelle*, where Louis XV took his larger unofficial suppers, to which forty or so people would be invited, was created in 1769. It was here that Louis XV, and later Louis XVI, held the annual Sèvres porcelain sales, discussed previously, presenting the latest productions



from the factory to the courtiers. It was also in this room that Louis XVI displayed the *Chasses du roi* Sèvres tableaux, adding to his predecessor's hunting-themed decorative scheme. This magnificent set of nine large tableaux (see FIGS. 83 and 84, for example) was commissioned in 1779 by Louis XVI specifically for this dining room, where they hang today. They were produced in two different sizes by the five best-known Sèvres painters of the time: Asselin, Philippe Castel, Dodin, and the two Pithou brothers. With incredible skill and dexterity, these artists, undoubtedly working directly from the Gobelins cartoons, translated Oudry's intricate designs into an entirely different medium without compromising their grandeur or detail.

Indeed, in many cases they updated the compositions to reflect the new monarch, his court, and his tastes. For example, in the tapestry *Preparation at the Crossroads of Puits du Roi, Compiègne*, Louis XV is shown as slim and elegant, while in the tableau, he has been replaced by the heavier-set Louis XVI. In the Sèvres tableau, the carriage has also become heavy, a solid enclosed coach, replacing his grandfather's lighter Tilbury carriage. The tableau *Releasing the Old Pack* by Dodin has more autumnal tones than the original verdant cartoon. In *Stag Hunt near Royallieu*, Nicolas-Pierre Pithou the Younger shows Louis XVI mounted, while Marie Antoinette, dressed in white, has been added to the onlookers on the

83 Sèvres Manufacture, painted by Charles-Eloi Asselin, after a design by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, tableau of *The Death of the Stag at the Ponds of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois in the Forest of Compiègne* (*La Mort du cerf aux étangs de Saint-Jean-aux-Bois en forêt de Compiègne*), 1779–81. Soft-paste porcelain, 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (39.8 × 49 cm). Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, MV7630



84 Sèvres Manufacture, painted by Nicolas-Pierre Pithou the Younger, after a design by Jean-Baptiste Oudry, tableau of *The Cornered Stag on the Rochers de Franchard, Fontainebleau* (*Le Cerf aux abois dans les rochers de Franchard en forêt de Fontainebleau*), 1780. Soft-paste porcelain, 15¼ × 18½ in. (40 × 47 cm). Musée National des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, MV5411

boat. The Sèvres tableau by Asselin of *The Death of the Stag at the Ponds of Saint-Jean-aux-Bois* (FIG. 83) also shows a corpulent Louis XVI (rather than the slender Louis XV) and, again, fall foliage.

However, the tableau *The Cornered Stag on the Rochers de Franchard, Fontainebleau* (FIG. 84) is the most pertinent to this discussion as it alludes to the origin of stag hunting as a royal prerogative. The tableau, like the cartoon and the tapestry, shows the stag at bay at the Rochers de Franchard in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Observed by the king and courtiers below, the hounds move in for the kill. The placement of the stag above the king in the composition is iconographically significant. According to legend, during the first century CE, a Roman general called Placidus was hunting deer with his troops, and he followed one in particular. Cornered, the stag turned to face the general when a vision of the Crucifixion appeared between its horns. The stag then spoke to Placidus, telling him to renounce his violent instincts and convert to Christianity. Placidus acquiesced and was baptized Eustace, meaning *faithful*. When Eustace refused to make a sacrifice to the Roman gods, he was condemned to death by the Emperor Hadrian, becoming a martyr and the patron saint of hunters. The stag thus became a sacred animal and the symbol of Saint Eustace. Thus, by divine (and royal) law, only

the king could hunt the stag. Images of a stag with the Crucifixion between its horns became an important icon of Saint Eustace, one that was widely reproduced across Europe.²⁸ The buck was painted above the king in the Sèvres tableau by Nicolas-Pierre Pithou as a Christ-like symbol.²⁹

It is from this background of royal patronage, passion, and prerogative that the tableau in the Michael L. Rosenberg Collection, *A Boar Hunt* (FIG. 85), was created. This large porcelain tableau shows the violent end of a wild boar hunt and draws clear inspiration from the *Chasses du roi* series, painted around fifteen years prior. There are no records for the production of the Rosenberg tableau in the inventories at Sèvres, which is hardly surprising since they were not properly maintained during the Revolutionary period. The fact that Charles-Antoine Didier signed his name prominently on the front with the date 1793 suggests that Didier may have painted this tableau privately, rather than on commission, and sold it for income.³⁰ The factory suffered financially during the Revolution and artisans were not paid regularly, though they would have continued to have access to the factory's facilities.³¹

It is rare to locate a direct source for tableaux of this late period, and thus thrilling to have found one for the Rosenberg Sèvres tableau. A collection of over seven hundred oil sketches and drawings and twenty-five oil paintings by Alexandre-François Desportes was purchased in 1784 by Louis XVI from the artist's nephew, Nicolas, when he inherited his uncle's workshop. The collection was intended for Gobelins, like Oudry's cartoons. However, the comte d'Angiviller, director of the *Bâtiments du roi* (responsible for the arts and building works for all the king's residences) under Louis XVI, realized their potential as source material for Sèvres, and they were delivered to the factory in 1785. Jean-Jacques Bachelier and Jean-Jacques Lagrenée the Younger restored the paintings, and the factory's carpenter made gilded frames for many. Most of the collection is now divided between the archives at Sèvres and the Château de Gien.³²

The drawings by Desportes for the Rosenberg tableau, including one for the jumping, snarling hound on the right-hand side of the composition (FIG. 86), are on long-term loan from the Sèvres archives to various French institutions. There are also two oil sketches after Desportes—one of the boar hunt represented on the Rosenberg tableau (FIG. 87), the other of a deer hunt—that were clearly intended



85 Sèvres Manufacture, painted by Charles-Antoine Didier, after a design by Alexandre-François Desportes, tableau of *A Boar Hunt*, 1793. Hard-paste porcelain, 15¼ × 10½ in. (38.7 × 26.7 cm). Dallas Museum of Art, lent by the Michael L. Rosenberg Foundation, 29.2004.15



86 Alexandre-François Desportes, *Howling Dog (Chien dressé)*, 1725. Oil on brown paper laid down on board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (37.7 × 31.2 cm). Deposit of the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres at the Musée de la Vénérerie de Senlis, 1967, D.V.2006.O.14.10; p1.26



87 After Alexandre-François Desportes, *A Boar Hunt*, mid- to late eighteenth century. Oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (130 × 97 cm). Deposit of the Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres at the Château-Musée de Gien, *Histoire, et Nature en Val de Loire*, D 52.31.38, s. 193

as a pair, both canvases measuring the same size. The sketch of the stag hunt, showing a desperate, writhing animal in sinuous detail as it fights off hounds, also belongs to Sèvres.³³ Similarly, the terror of the cornered boar in the oil sketch for the Rosenberg tableau is evident in his eyes; the scene is vivid and horrifying.

The ancien régime ended suddenly when Louis XVI was beheaded on January 21, 1793, sending a frisson of horror around the world. The concept of Divine Right came to an end in France at the same time. According to Madame Élisabeth, Louis XVI's sister, the king still hunted while awaiting trial after he was caught fleeing Paris. Paintings by artists such as Desportes and Oudry, or depictions thereafter in other media, like tapestry, silver, and ceramics, remained a vivid record of the myth attached to the vanished status of royal ceremony in France. The iconography of hunting continued even after royal patronage ended, as evidenced by the fact that Didier painted the Rosenberg tableau the very year of Louis XVI's death. It is perhaps ironic, given that stag hunting was so closely linked to Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI as a royal prerogative through the symbolism of Saint Eustace, that in the instance of Louis XVI, it was he who was executed.

- 1 I am grateful to Raphaël Abrille, curator at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris, for discussing with me the significance of stag hunting as a royal prerogative when I was first researching this essay, June 2009.
- 2 Morel 1967, 28.
- 3 Droguet et al. 2003, 15.
- 4 Bailey 2007, 10.
- 5 The Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture was the professional institution for artists working for the French court. With a hierarchy of members and a strict system of education, it held immense power over artistic production in eighteenth-century France.
- 6 *Art for the Nation* 2000, 41.
- 7 Bailey 2007, 6; Droguet et al. 2003, 19.
- 8 Bailey 2007, 10.
- 9 Opperman 1970, 218.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Bailey 2007, 10.
- 12 Mansel 2005, 55–57.
- 13 In 1776, Louis XVI purchased three biscuit centerpieces after Jean-Baptiste Oudry's hunting paintings, whose current locations are unknown. Another set, commissioned by the duc d'Aumale in 1847, is in the Musée Condé, Chantilly.
- 14 For a detailed chronology of the early history of the Vincennes/Sèvres manufacture, see Gwilt 2014, 12–17.
- 15 Much of the detail regarding the architecture and functioning of the Sèvres factory comes from a French Porcelain Society tour of the building led by Pierre Ennes in December 2006 and my subsequent conversations with him.
- 16 Whitehead 2010a, 96.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 102.
- 19 Savill 1988, 837.
- 20 Whitehead 2010a, 103.
- 21 Rochebrune 2012, 164.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 168.
- 23 “. . . des Tableaux de Porcelaine d'un éclat admirable, & d'un coloris inalterable dont on peut orner des Cabinets.” Translated by the author from Savill 1988, 839.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Rochebrune 2012, 184.
- 27 These rooms are not usually open to the public, so I am grateful to Bertrand Rondot who gave me a tour of these *petits appartements* in 2009. The information about the decoration is from that tour and from subsequent correspondence with Rondot and John Whitehead.
- 28 For an example, see the 1741 Meissen porcelain figure *Legende des Heiligen Hubertus* by Johann Joachim Kaendler in the collection of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, PE 3756.
- 29 Williamson 2010, 157.
- 30 Tamara Préaud first suggested this to me in a conversation in 2009.
- 31 Whitehead 2010b, 102.
- 32 *L'atelier de Desportes* 1982, 18.
- 33 Unlike the Rosenberg tableau, there is no indication whether a comparable Sèvres tableau after the Desportes oil sketch of the stag exists.