

Discovering
the Secrets
of Soft-Paste
Porcelain
at the
Saint-Cloud
Manufactory,
ca. 1690–1766



July 15 –
October 24, 1999

The Bard
Graduate Center
for Studies in the
Decorative Arts

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Snuff boxes in the shape of Chinese figures, ca. 1740

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Organized by The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts in collaboration with the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, *Discovering the Secrets of Soft-Paste Porcelain at the Saint-Cloud Manufactory*, ca. 1690-1766 is the first comprehensive examination in the United States of the history and impact of the Saint-Cloud porcelain manufactory.

Founded by royal privilege in 1664 for the purpose of creating faïence, Saint-Cloud became a porcelain manufactory in the 1690s after the painter Pierre Chicanneau made the long awaited discovery of soft-paste porcelain. This landmark technical development sparked an intense period of formal innovation at Saint-Cloud that resulted in an unprecedented approach to the production of ceramics. Twenty years before Meissen and 50 years before Vincennes-Sèvres, the Saint-Cloud manufactory rivaled the porcelains of China and Japan by introducing an entirely new ceramic vocabulary. If 18th-century Europe can be called the Europe of porcelain, this is due primarily to the pioneering role played by Saint-Cloud.

The exhibition is unique in its scope and its focus on an underrecognized area of French decorative arts. Curated by Bertrand Rondot, an expert on Saint-Cloud and a curator at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, the exhibition is



Octagonal tray, ca. 1700-1730
Plate, Faïence of Sinceny, ca. 1740

Inkstand, sugar bowl, two toilet pots,
a cup and saucer, ca. 1700-1720
Inkstand: H. 8.3cm, Diam. 15.1cm:
Sugar Bowl: H. 12.8cm, Diam. 10cm;
Toilet Pots: H. 9cm, Diam. 14.9cm;
Cup and Saucer: H. 5.5cm, Diam. 13.4cm



Tureen, ca 1720-1730
H. 26.5cm, Diam. 30.8cm



composed of approximately 300 extraordinary loans from major museums in Europe and the United States.

Discovering the Secrets of Soft-Paste Porcelain at the Saint-Cloud Manufactory represents a significant departure from past exhibitions on the subject. The exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center expands on the scholarly initiative begun in the 1980s, when French museum scholars began to reexamine Saint-Cloud and

restore its place in the history of French porcelain. On a larger scale than the previous exhibitions organized in 1980 at the Musée Historique du Parc de Saint-Cloud and in 1997 at the Musée Municipal de Saint-Cloud, this exhibition follows the *parti pris* of the larger exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1997 in Paris, which examined the museum's incomparable collection. Both exhibitions place Saint-Cloud porcelains in the ceramic and artistic context of the time, displaying pieces in Chinese and Japanese porcelain as well as porcelain and faïence coming from the major contemporary manufacturers such as Meissen, Chantilly, and Vincennes-Sèvres (porcelain) or Rouen and Menecy (faïence).

The exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center builds on the permanent collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the primary lender to the exhibition, in an effort to show the finest examples of the factory's production and to elucidate its underrecognized yet highly influential and noteworthy history. In addition the exhibition includes loans from the Musée du Louvre; Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres; Musée National

Adrien Dubouché, Limoges; Château-Musée, Saumur; Musée de la Céramique, Rouen; The Cleveland Museum of Art; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The J. Paul Getty Museum; The Museo Nazionale della Ceramica Duca Di Martina, Naples; and the Porzellansammlung, Dresden.

One of the distinguishing aspects of Saint-Cloud porcelain is its rich and evocative decoration that affirms the factory's position in the forefront of French decorative arts at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. Porcelain painters at Saint-Cloud were encouraged to be daring and expressive in the creation of new decorative motifs. Their experimentation and inventiveness produced an unprecedented variety of ornamental designs. Eventually, three types of decoration became characteristic of Saint-Cloud porcelain: blue and white, white relief, and polychrome. In addition, Saint-Cloud developed ornamental motifs, called *grotesques*, drawn from earlier Renaissance designs by the French architect and engraver Jacques Androuet Ducerceau (1510/20–1585), who left a collection of more than 1,600 prints and among them two pattern books of grotesque ornaments, *Petits Grotesques* and *Grands Grotesques*. Saint-Cloud is unique in its reinterpretation of Renaissance ornament, and the factory built a lucrative market for this type of decoration. Saint-Cloud porcelain is one of the rare examples of the literal application of grotesque ornament for ceramic decoration, 150 years after its initial appearance. In addition, the decorative vocabulary at Saint-Cloud included new forms of lambrequin and embroidery patterns.

Another noteworthy theme of the exhibition is the use of porcelain in everyday life. While the earliest examples of Saint-Cloud porcelain were almost exclusively used for decoration or as commemorative pieces, the mastery of the production process enabled the factory to expand its repertoire of forms that



Two Pairs of Vases, ca. 1700
H. 21cm. Diam. 9.8cm



Wine cooler, ca. 1720
H. 18cm, Diam. 20.3cm



Tureen, ca. 1730

were purchased by patrons throughout Europe. The exhibition will examine the creation and marketing of forms for daily use, such as vases, potpourris, oil and vinegar cruets, basins and — with the introduction of tea, coffee, and chocolate in Europe — cups, goblets, and pots that were resistant to thermal shock. Porcelain was also used in place of silver for the service of spices and other condiments, often adopting its configuration from the work of gold-

smiths and silversmiths. The Saint-Cloud manufactory specialized in the production of cutlery handles, however, due to unresolved technical problems in firing soft paste, it did not produce flat pieces such as plates or platters. Because of this restriction, Saint-Cloud was often presented at the dining table with Far Eastern porcelain and faïence.

A selection of paintings, including works by François Boucher and Alexandre François Desportes, will provide visitors an opportunity to see how porcelain was used for both display purposes and in everyday rituals of dining and entertaining.

In 1766 Saint-Cloud closed due to its inability to respond to fierce competition from new porcelain manufactories in Europe, especially in France from the royal manufacture of Sèvres.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a scholarly catalogue that is fully illustrated in color and includes new photography of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs collection among others. It is edited by Bertrand Rondot, Curator, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris and will include interpretive entries that document all objects in the exhibition. The catalogue will be published jointly by the Bard Graduate Center and Yale University Press. Back matter will include a previously unpublished factory inventory.

The catalogue entries will be preceded by ten essays by ranking experts in the field. The topics and their authors are: “A General History of Saint-Cloud,” by Bertrand Rondot; “Saint-Cloud Porcelain and the Art of Table Decoration,” by Gérard Mabilie, chief curator, Musée du Louvre; “Methods of Producing Porcelain in France at the End of the Seventeenth and Beginning of the Eighteenth Century,” by Antoine d’Albis, Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres; “Saint-Cloud and the Goust de Raphael,” by Clare Le Corbeiller, curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art; “Saint-Cloud and Delft: Two Perspectives on the Chinese Model,” by Christine Lahaussais, Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres; “Soft-Paste Porcelain at Rouen, The Poterat Manufactory: Competition and Connections between the Two Earliest Porcelain Manufactories in Europe,” by Gilles Grandjean, curator, Musée de la Céramique, Rouen; “Soft-Paste Porcelain at Saint-Cloud and the Production of Soft-Paste Porcelain at Paris called Saint-Cloud ca. 1696–1766”, by Geneviève Le Duc, historian; “The Parisian Porcelain Studios That Copied the Production of Saint-Cloud in the Eighteenth Century,” by Régine de Plinval de Guillebon, historian; “The Sale of Saint-Cloud Porcelain in Paris in the Eighteenth Century: The Role of the Marchands-Merciers and Marchands-Faienciers,” by Carolyn Sargentson, curator, Victoria and Albert Museum, and Bertrand Rondot; and “Meissen and Saint-Cloud: Cross Influences,” by Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, curator, The Arnhold Collection.



Vase, ca. 1700 Decoration after an engraving by Jacques Androuet Ducerceau
H. 19.7cm, Diam. 12cm

This exhibition has been organized
in collaboration with the Musée des
Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

Funding for the exhibition has been
provided in part by The Florence
Gould Foundation and Mrs Charles
Wrightsmen. Partial support for
the exhibition catalogue has been
provided by the Samuel H. Kress
Foundation.

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*Cover: Figure of a European dancer,
one of a pair, ca.1730-1740
H. 28cm, L. 19cm*

Collection: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
Photographs: Bruce White