

The Versailles of Maria Leszczyńska Court Art in 18th-Century France

*The Versailles of Maria Leszczyńska
Court Art in 18th-Century France*

Royal Castle In Warsaw
Gallery of Temporary Exhibitions 2nd fl.
21 September 2013 – 5 January 2014

Opening: **20 September 2013**

Exhibition organised by the **Royal Castle in Warsaw**
jointly with the **Palace of Versailles**

Maria Leszczyńska on the throne of France: it's almost like a fairy tale. Who would expect the daughter of exiled King Stanisław - Poland's elected ruler, deprived of his throne - to be chosen from among ninety nine princesses of the blood royal, candidates to the hand of Louis XV who represented Europe's most desired crown – the Kingdom of France? Great grandson of Louis XIV and sole male descendant of the main line of the Bourbons, the young Louis XV did not enjoy good health at the age of fifteen. There were serious fears that the dynasty's future was compromised, therefore, a wife aged properly to bear children was urgently needed for Louis XV, to secure the throne of France for the Bourbons. Maria – seven years his senior – was selected. They married in Fontainebleau, on 5 September 1725. Over the first twelve years of marriage, Maria bore to Louis and France eight daughters (including a pair of twins), and two sons. The dynasty's future was safe. Louis XV, initially in love and close to his wife, distanced himself from her with time, engaging in numerous extramarital affairs with lovers, among whom Marquise de Pompadour was the most prominent. Maria Leszczyńska voluntarily renounced from the life of a celebrity, restricting her social contacts to the closest friends and dedicating much of her time to religion and two passions that she inherited from her father; namely, music and painting.

The exhibition, staged in co-operation with the Palace of Versailles, is meant not only to show the extraordinary fortunes of the Polish Queen, grandmother of three Kings of France, but also the sophisticated court arts of the era of Louis XV. The exposition opens the view to several issues, such as Maria Leszczyńska's marriage and maternity, lovers of King Louis XV, the most intimate friends of Queen Maria, her passion for music and painting, the decorations and fittings of her apartments, as well as everyday life, royal court festivities and pleasures.

The multi-faceted display is composed of carefully selected portraits, original elements of decorations of the Queen's apartment that include the painting series titled Five Senses by Jean-Baptiste Oudry. Other works of art follow the Queen's concept; some of those painted with her

participation, as is the case of the Chinese Room; and finally, sophisticated craft, such as the splendid cabinet by the renowned ébéniste Robert-Antoine Gaudreaus, ordered for one of her sitting rooms.

The exhibition will feature more than a hundred items almost entirely from French collections, both public and private. The Palace of Versailles will present sixty extraordinary works of art from its permanent expositions; among them, eight outstanding paintings by Jean-Marc Nattier, depicting the King's daughters. One of those works is the splendid Portrait of Madame Henriette, represented as Flora. Other artists include Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Jean-Baptiste Vanloo, Hyacinthe Rigaud, Alexander Roslin, Pierre Gobert, Alexis-Simon Belle, François-Hubert Drouais, or Joseph-Marie Vien.

Among other institutions that provided their items to the exhibition, one should mention the Paintings Department and Graphics Department of the Louvre, the Château Fontainebleau, Musée l'Ile-de-France in Sceaux, State Museum of Ceramics in Sèvres, State Museum of Porcelain Adrien Dubouché in Limoges, Cognacq-Jay Museum, National Library of France, State Archives, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Versailles Municipal Library, and private owners. Polish institutions are represented by the PAN (Polish Academy of Sciences) Library in Kórnik, the Czartoryski Princes Foundation in Kraków, the Ciechanowiecki Foundation at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, and the Royal Castle in Warsaw itself.

The exhibition The Versailles of Maria Leszczyńska presents to the public the full image of this charming and very popular Pole that became Queen of France, as well as the refined French art of the times of Louis XV. We hope that the top-class artistic value of exhibited works will promote the exhibition as a cultural event of primary importance.

Exhibition managers:

Juliette Trey – State Museum of Palaces at Versailles and Trianon

Anita Chiron-Mrozowska – Royal Castle in Warsaw, tel. **22 35 55 119**

From 1 October, the **exhibition open on:**

Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays at **10.00 – 16.00** hrs.;

Wednesdays at **10.00 – 20.00** hrs.;

Sundays at **11.00 – 16.00** hrs.

Ticket prices:

regular PLN **15**,

concessionary PLN **8**,

family PLN **10**.

Entrance payable also on Sundays.

