



BECOME A PATRON

# RESTORATION OF THE PAINTED CEILING OF THE SALON DE DIANE

IN THE STATE APARTMENT OF  
KING LOUIS XIV



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

## THE SALON DE DIANE |

**In the heart of the King's State Apartment lies the *salon de Diane*, one of the finest chambers of the Palace of Versailles**

First decorated between 1671 and 1680 during the reign of Louis XIV, the King's State Apartment comprises an enfilade of seven distinguished state rooms.

The State Apartment's decoration follows a remarkably opulent **Italian model**, quite en vogue at the time, featuring marble wall panels and painted ceilings.

These seven rooms, dedicated to the **seven planets**, recall both the Planetary Rooms of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence and the **symbol of the sun** with which Louis XIV was associated from the very beginning of his reign.

The *salon de Diane* is thus intertwined with the solar myth theme, while its painted ceiling pays tribute to the goddess of the night and the hunt. Exquisitely embellished, this room boasts several masterpieces, including the bust of Louis XIV sculpted by Lorenzo Bernini in 1665, undoubtedly the most exquisite portrayal of the King in his youth.

**Positioned between the *salon de Vénus and Mars***, the *salon de Diane* was once accessible via the now-destroyed Ambassadors' Staircase.

Much like the *salon de Vénus*, the *salon de Diane* functioned as an antechamber to the State Apartment. **As the ultimate entertaining room**, it was used as a billiards parlour during Louis XIV's time. Three times a week, the King, along with the royal family and the entire court, would congregate to engage in games and revelry on "apartment days". Two tiers of seating were installed for spectators to witness the King's prowess in billiards, a game at which he excelled.



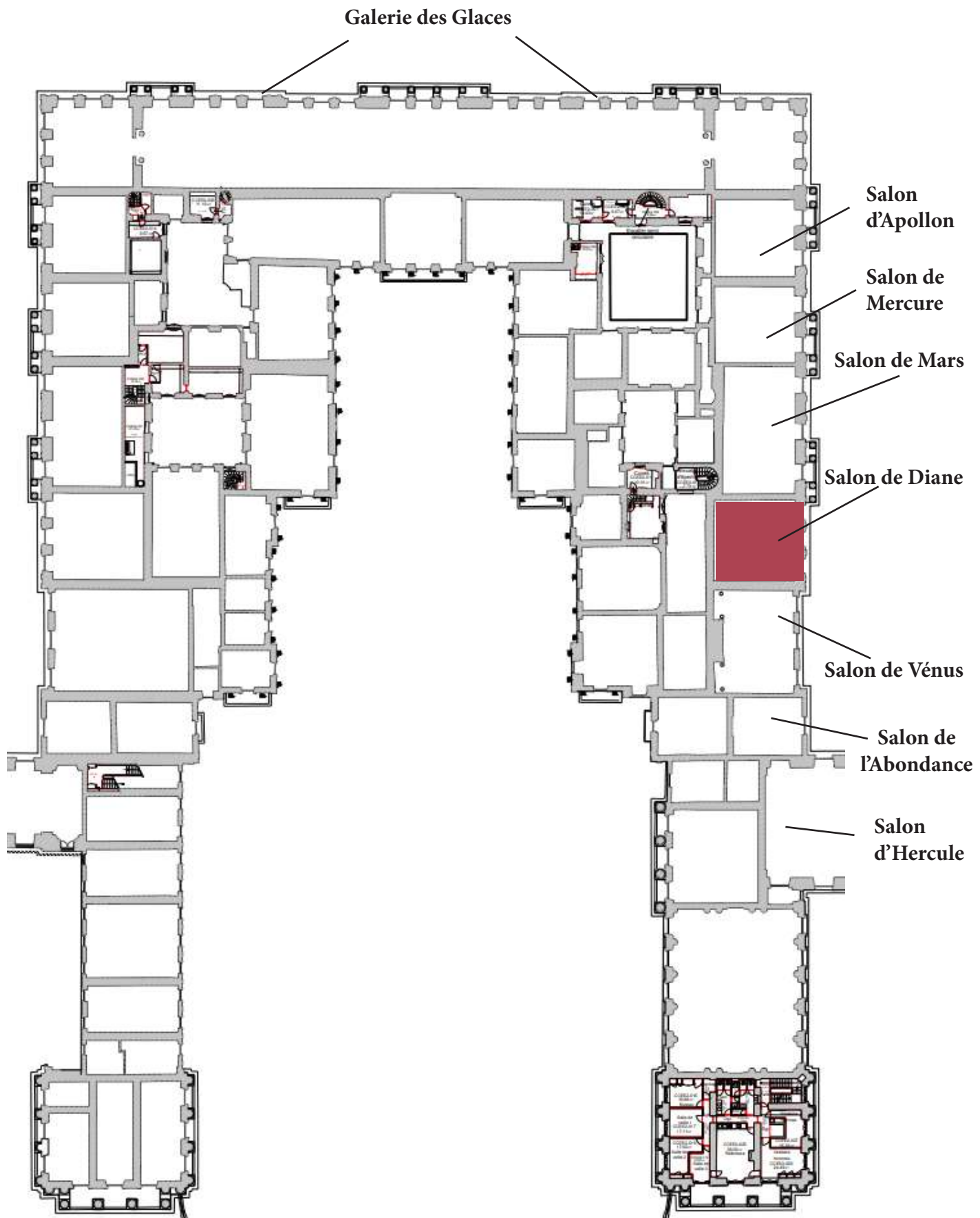








## Map of the first floor of the Palace of Versailles: the seven rooms comprising the enfilade of the King's State Apartment



## THE CEILING OF THE SALON DE DIANE A COMPLEX STRUCTURE WITH RICH ICONOGRAPHY

The ceilings of the Palace of Versailles display a complex structure, combining **archivolts, marouflaged canvases, plaster and stucco paintings**, rendering them exceedingly delicate and in regular need of restoration.

**The *salon de Diane*, for instance, is adorned with a central tondo, four canvas archivolts, and plat bands painted on plaster.**

Being dedicated to *Diane*, the room showcases iconography symbolising hunting, fishing, and trade.

At the behest of Louis XIV, **Charles Le Brun**, First Painter to the King, outlined the general design. For the painted decor, he enlisted the talents of prominent painters of the era: Louis Gabriel Blanchard (1630-1704) for the central piece, Charles de La Fosse (1636-1716) for the north and west archivolts, and Claude Audran the Younger (1639-1684) for the east and south archivolts.

With Charles Le Brun affording them artistic liberty in their treatment of the subjects, Gabriel Blanchard and Charles de La Fosse freely indulged in their colourist sensibilities, while Claude Audran the Younger harmonised with Le Brun's own painted decors at Versailles.















## AN ESSENTIAL RESTORATION |

**The *salon de Diane*, and its painted decor in particular, has undergone several restorations between the 19th century and the present day.**

The first substantial restoration dates back to **1814** and was overseen by the artist Blondel. This restoration of the central panel and the archivolts of the ceiling encompassed cleaning, reaffixing, gap filling, repressing certain areas, and some retouching.

In **1955**, further work was carried out on the central panel and the archivolts, involving reaffixing with gelatine, repressing, cleaning, mastic filling, paint layer reintegration, and varnishing.

**The restoration of the *salon de Diane* paintings follows recent major restorations of the State Apartment's painted decor**, including the ceiling of the *salon d'Hercule* initiated in 2002, the *salon de Mercure* in 2011, and the *salon de l'Abondance* in 2013.







## THE CURRENT CONDITION |

The ceiling comprises a central panel, four archivolt, platbands, and overdoors, the canvases of which are becoming detached in areas, resulting in numerous blisters and large gaps in the painted layer.

The central tondo and archivolt paintings are covered with several layers of oxidised varnish that has turned opaque. Furthermore, overpainting frequently obscures the compositions' clarity, especially on the archivolt.

**The restoration of the painted decor will therefore unveil the nuanced hues and chromatic harmony envisaged by the artists for the *salon de Diane*.**

Given the alarming nature of the damage and in preparation for restoration of the ceiling paintings and overdoors, a study was conducted by a team of five restorers from December 2019 to February 2020.





The west cove painting

© Marie Bégué



The central panel

© Marie Bégué



## THE RESTORATION IN DETAIL | THE CENTRAL PANEL

**The central composition** portrays « *Diane présidant à la navigation et à la chasse* » ou « *Le Char de Diane* ». As the twin sister of Apollo and goddess of the moon, *Diane* holds essential significance in royal iconography.

Diane, seated in her deer-drawn chariot, is surrounded by maidens representing the different Hours of day and night.

In the foreground are two allegories and their attributes: on the left, *Navigation* with an anchor, and on the right, *The Hunt* with a net and some children, one sounding a horn and another holding dogs on a leash, evoking the King's passion for this pursuit.







The central panel painting

This painting's surface has suffered numerous distortions due to the ceiling's own structure, the repressing of certain parts, and various reinforcement efforts.

In places, the edges have become detached, and the surface exhibits blisters, most of which have hardened or peeled away where the canvas remains supple.

These are predominantly located in the upper portion above the seam. Beneath the mastics and overpainted parts, old tears and a few cuts are discernible, likely related to the reinforcement work conducted on the central section in 1955.

Several blisters on the paint layer stem from stresses exerted by the support. The paint layer's adhesion is highly precarious due to age-induced cracks resulting from breaks or deformation of the canvas.

Dust and grime have accumulated atop the paint layer, and its notably uneven surface now bears a shiny, lackluster aspect in parts due both to the varnish's irregularity and the employment of dated materials (glue, synthetic adhesive, retouching materials, etc.).











## THE RESTORATION IN DETAILS

### THE ARCHIVOLTS

**The archivolts, painted by Charles de La Fosse and Claude Audran the Younger, depict ancient themes celebrating the glories of Alexander, Jason, Cyrus, and Caesar.**

The north and east archivolts evoke the Hunt through two principal themes: « *Alexander the Great Hunting Lions* » (La Fosse) and « *Cyrus Hunting Wild Boar* » (Audran). Meanwhile, the south and west archivolts allude to **trade**, featuring the following themes: « *Caesar Sending a Roman Colony to Carthage* » (Audran) and « *Jason Landing in Colchis* » (La Fosse)

The four paintings, marouflaged—or pasted—directly onto the archivolts are in a precarious state of preservation.

The canvas supports can be seen through several gaps in the paint layer, each support being made of multiple canvas strips.

Several instances of delamination have been observed. These deficiencies in the marouflage's adhesion have resulted in blistering and significant gaps in the paint layer.

The east and south archivolts painted by Audran are in an alarming condition, with substantial, deteriorating blisters in the paint layer, along with some sections entirely overpainted, several which have been applied directly onto the plaster.







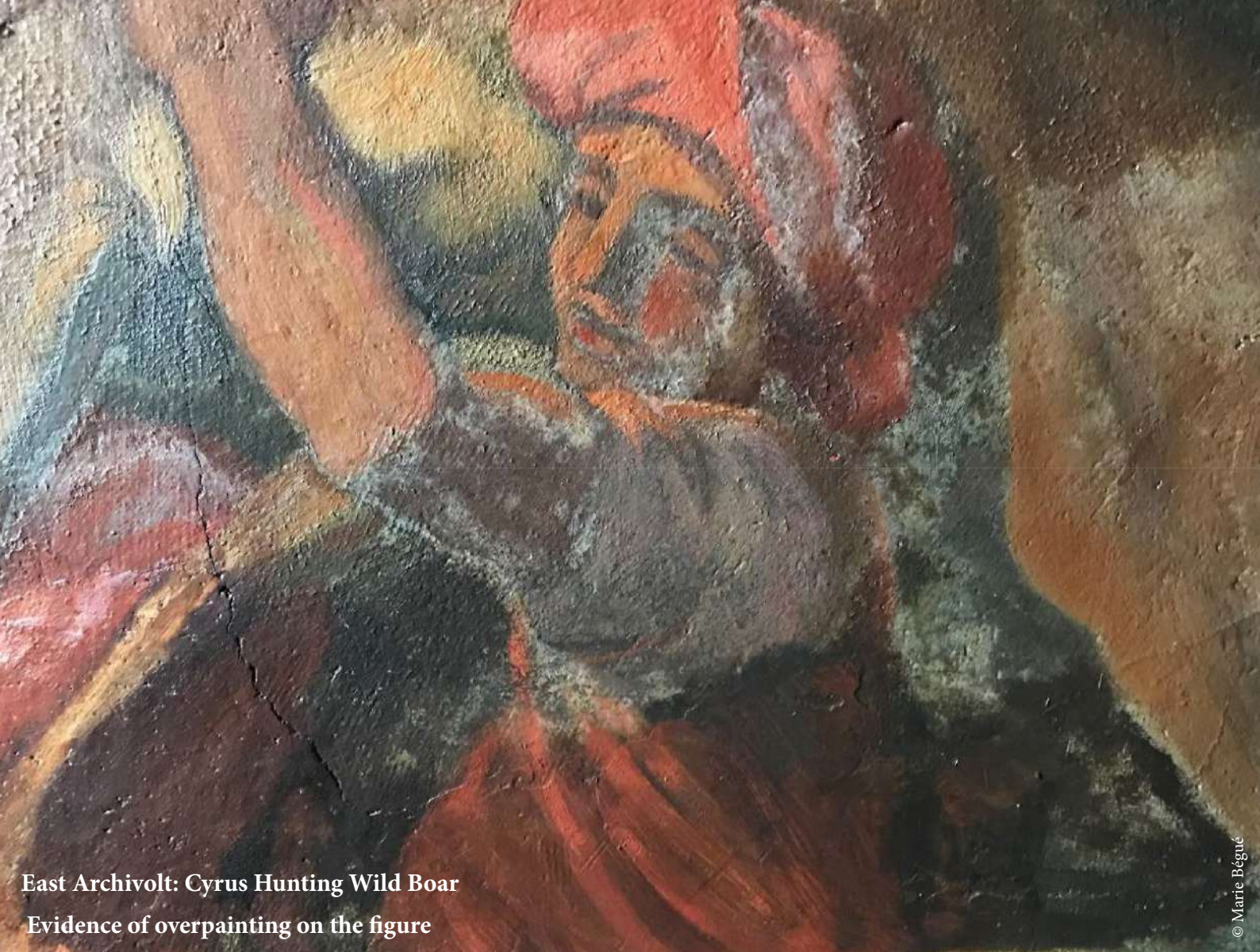


West Archivolt: Jason Landing in Colchis



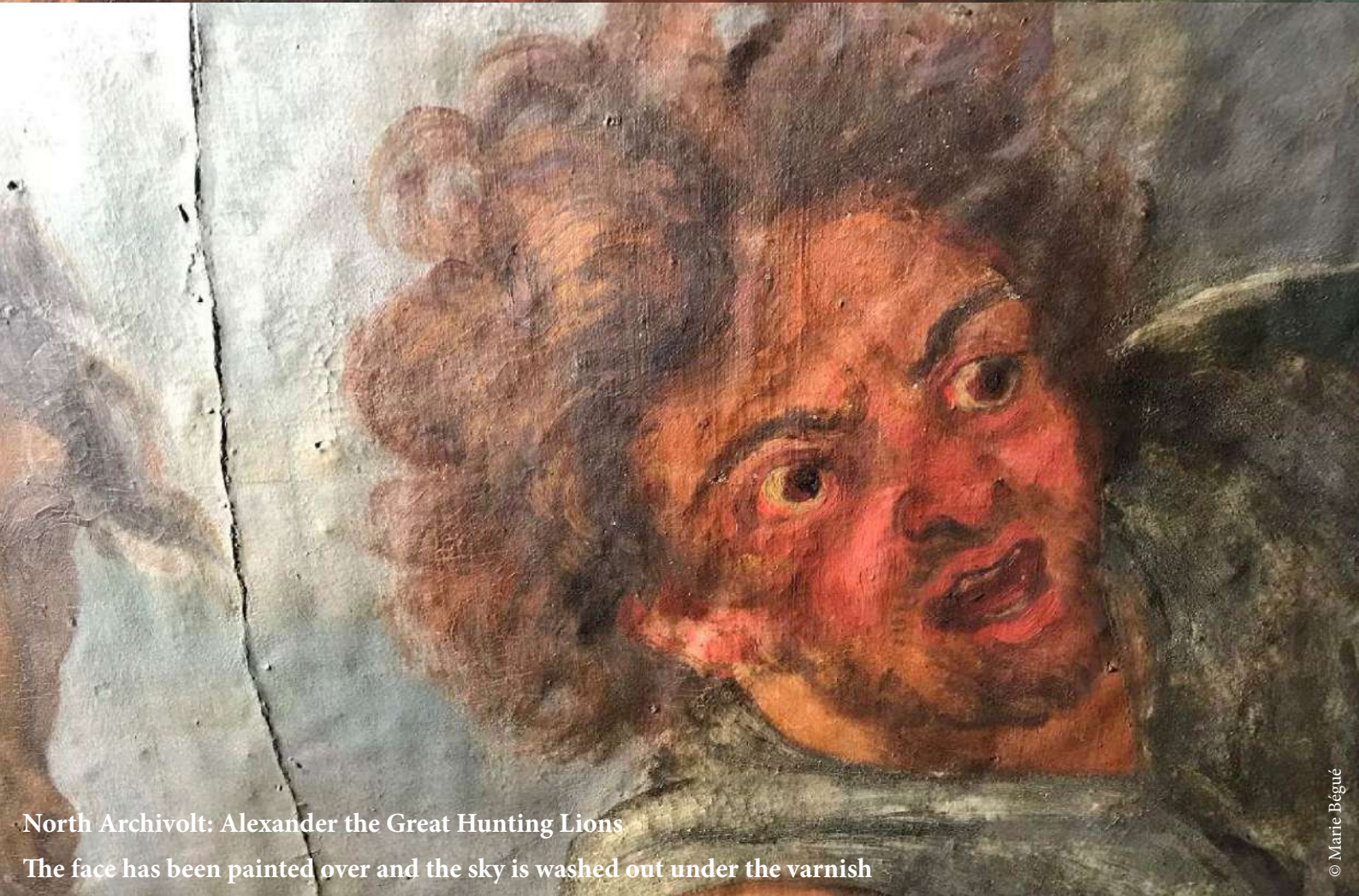
West Archivolt: Jason Landing in Colchis





East Archivolt: Cyrus Hunting Wild Boar  
Evidence of overpainting on the figure

© Marie Bégue



North Archivolt: Alexander the Great Hunting Lions  
The face has been painted over and the sky is washed out under the varnish

© Marie Bégue



## THE RESTORATION IN DETAIL

### THE PLATBANDS AND OVERDOORS

**The plaster platband decorations** were executed in accordance with the designs provided by Charles Le Brun.

The trompe l'oeil sections painted on plaster between the archivolts are encased in carved and gilded stucco frames and moulding.

These decorations show cracks and overpainting, along with some isolated blisters.



A section of the south-west platband.  
Re-opened crack and gaps in the mastic.  
© Marie Bégué

**The overdoors** consist of stretched canvases adorning the four doors leading to the Venus and Mars Rooms.

These four paintings seem to have undergone minimal restoration, with only a few sporadic overpainted areas noted.



An overdoor  
© Château de Versailles, Dist. RMN © Christophe Fouin











## PROPOSED ACTION |

Based on an initial study assessing the state of the painted decor, identifying any deterioration, and proposing a restoration protocol, **the restoration of the ceiling will require teams of restorers working on both the paint layer and the support.**

The east and south archivolts painted by Claude Audran the Younger represent the most extensively damaged sections. Hence, several options are being considered for their restoration.

A diverse range of **trades and expertise** will be showcased throughout the restoration of the Palace of Versailles' iconic *salon de Diane*.

Technical and scientific oversight will accompany the project.

This significant restoration aligns with the Palace's mission to safeguard and enhance the painted decor, which stands as an exceptional testament to Louis XIV's reign.













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