

## THE QUEEN'S GUARD ROOM

The Queen's Guard Room is the counterpart of the Diana Room in the King's State Apartments. It served as a landing on the Queen's staircase before becoming the new Queen's Guard Room in 1680. The racks for storing weapons were arranged around the room, as were screens, behind which were placed camp beds for the officers charged with keeping watch over the sovereign day and night.

The décor of the room dates entirely from the reign of Louis XIV. The central octagon and paintings in the arches, by Noël Coypel, were originally designed to adorn the ceiling of the old Jupiter Room, which became the War Room in 1678. *Jupiter Accompanied by Justice and Mercy* is in the centre, while the four paintings in the arches extol royal benevolence through examples from classical antiquity: *Ptolemy Philadelphus Sets the Jews of Egypt Free*, *Severus Alexander Distributes Wheat to the People of Rome*, *Trajan Metes out Justice* and *Solon Explains the Law to the Athenians*. In the spandrels, the allegorical figures in shades of gold are accompanied by charming characters dressed in the fashion of the time. The two paintings facing each other on the walls are also by Noël Coypel. They portray *Jupiter's Sacrifice*, above the fireplace, and *Jupiter's Childhood*.

It was through this room on 6 October 1789 that the rioters broke into the apartment, killing one of the bodyguards who raised the alarm to save the Queen.

### A LARGE-SCALE HERITAGE RESTORATION UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN 2015 AND 2018

The Queen's Guard Room was the only room in the Queen's State Apartments never to have undergone an essential restoration of its painted and architectural décor. Overall, the room was in a dilapidated and worn-out state, making restoration a necessity. The work subsequently undertaken restored the vitality of the magnificent polychrome marble panels, which are among the most significant sets of ceremonial décors from the Louis XIV period that can still be seen at Versailles. This project also restored the harmony and clarity of the painted décors. Work on the stucco, lead and gilded-wood décors completed the restoration. One of the biggest challenges overall was upgrading the room's six sculpted and gilded doors.



Central ceiling décor in the Queen's Guard Room, post-restoration  
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The Queen's Guard Room, post-restoration  
© Palace of Versailles, Didier Saulnier

**Restoration of the painted and sculpted ceiling décors was possible thanks to the sponsorship of the American Friends of Versailles. Meanwhile, the Société des Amis de Versailles supported the restoration of the marble, woodwork, the two Noël Coypel paintings, *Jupiter's Childhood* and *Jupiter's Sacrifice*, and the gilded lead.**



## RESTORING THE PAINTINGS

The story of the ceiling in the Queen's Guard Room is certainly the Versailles tale with the most twists and turns. Originally, the central octagon and the canvases in the arches, commissioned from Noël Coypel (1628-1707), were destined for the ceiling in the Jupiter Room, which was destroyed during construction of the Hall of Mirrors. The paintings were therefore "repurposed" for the ceiling of this room. Designed in the studio, the canvases have been extended on all sides, which proves they were adapted from an original format. Put in place around 1679-1680, the whole was completed with the addition of four oil paintings on plaster in the spandrels. Various works were carried out on the room during the 18th and 19th centuries, but the most significant occurrence was the collapse of the central part of the ceiling in 1942 due to severe vibrations during the bombardments of the Second World War.

At the start of the essential restoration work, the state of conservation of the ceiling was concerning and chaotic. The canvases were warped and full of blisters, wrinkles, cracks, dents and flaking, while the plaster in the spandrels had cracks. Heavy repainting, wear and tear, myriad small cracks and oxidised varnishes disturbed the overall impression. The central, most damaged part was 80% repainted; whole sections of the composition, such as the faces, were completely redone and the flattened parts underwent successive treatments.



Detail from the ceiling in the Queen's Guard room, before and after restoration  
© Palace of Versailles, Christian Milet

The cleaning process revealed more gaps and wear. A thin layer of covering liquid – yellow/orange in colour – was applied to the surface, which concealed much of the repaint embedded in the varnish layers. All of this substantially altered the colour palette of the work, even to the point of changing the original scheme. This work restored the brightness of the colours and really brought out the parts that were entirely produced by the hand of Noël Coypel.

The rehabilitation of the pictorial layer emphasised the remaining elements of the original canvases and made the composition as a whole more harmonious. The conservators' aim was to preserve a certain level of wear while, at the same time, recreating the missing contours so as to prevent the blurred areas from spoiling the spirit of the painting.

Now, the decorative paintings are more harmonious visually, which is highlighted by the restored gilded stucco.

Incidentally, the two Noël Coypel paintings on the walls did not require any essential restoration, but they were, nevertheless, thoroughly cleaned and some distracting repaints were treated. As for the two canvas supports, some tensioning issues were dealt with.



## RESTORING THE ARCHITECTURAL DÉCOR

When the Queen's Guard Room was built it was decorated with magnificent polychrome marbles: red Languedoc (Incarnat) and Rance, green Campan, antique black and white Carrara. Originally, the floor was paved with alternating slabs of black and white Carrara marble forming geometric shapes, but this was replaced at the end of Louis XIV's reign with Versailles-style parquet blocks. The room shares many similarities with its exact counterpart in the King's part of the Palace – the Diana Room – particularly in terms of the distribution and vertical arrangement of the marble panels. The black marble doorframes run right from the floor up to the cornicing, framing and emphasising the doors and overdoor panels, as well as the great mantelpieces on each side of the room. The main mantelpieces above the fireplaces on opposite sides of the room are each topped with paintings on canvas, bordered by frames of moulded marble and accentuated with garlands of gilded-lead flowers. The stucco decorations and overdoors were made by the sculptors Le Gros, Benoît and Massou, who had already worked on other rooms in the apartment.

Like the other rooms in the State Apartments, this room underwent a general overhaul between 1814 and 1815, prior to the installation of Louis XVIII at Versailles. Later, during the transformation of the Palace into a museum dedicated "to all the glories of France", only slight alterations were made to the room.

The restoration conducted from 2015 to 2019 focused on the room's architectural décor as a whole. The marble panels were in a bad way – dull, dirty, full of cracks and gaps – so they were dusted and cleaned. The joints were cleaned out and the gaps filled in.

The gilded stucco decorations on the ceiling (borders and cornicing) were completely restored, the royal cyphers and emblems, which were re-established after the Revolution at the request of Louis XVIII, were preserved in situ – at the frieze level of the cornicing – and now stand out in gold on a pale grey background, whereas, originally, the whole cornice was gilded. Particular care and attention were also devoted to the room's extremely high-quality works in gilded lead (overdoor trophies, large hanging garlands, etc.). The old gilding was consolidated, while the mismatched bronzing and gilding were removed and remedied.

The monumental red-marble fireplace from the Louis XIV era was completely restored. The hearth was redone, like the floor, in terracotta tiles. The cast-iron fireback, featuring the Royal Coat of Arms of France and Navarre, was cleaned and retinted.

Gilded-bronze locks paraphernalia, such as lockboxes, lock rods and bolts, were taken down for cleaning and, where necessary, gilding retouches.

The herringbone parquet in the Ancien Régime style that had remained in place until the transformation into a historical museum under Louis-Philippe was replaced with Versailles-style parquet blocks.

A considerable amount of work had to be done on the doors, which had been severely damaged through use. Their sculpted and gilded décor, fortified in 1814 with carton-pierre in the upper and lower sections, was cleaned and filled in, as there were several gaps. The gilding and painted pale-grey backgrounds were also redone; owing to their fragility, they will be protected under glass, like other decorative elements in the State Apartment. Finally, in line with the 1814 reference condition, the windows were repainted in yellow ochre rather than gilded.



View of the polychrome marble décor and sculpted doors  
© Palace of Versailles, Didier Saulnier

### PROJECT MANAGER

Paintings: Museum conservation department  
Décor: Frédéric Didier, architect-in-chief for historic monuments

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Heritage and Gardens Directorate of the Palace of Versailles