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Wolf Burchard (The Royal Collection, London)

The Grande Galerie at the Louvre: Shifting Values in Seventeenth-Century French Royal Patronage: Henri IV to Louis XIV

The Grande Galerie, built by Henri IV in the first decade of the seventeenth century to link the Louvre with the Tuileries, created an architectural challenge which Henri and his successors struggled to complete. Its vast interior seemed to demand a decorative scheme on a huge scale. Several projects to decorate it would however be abandoned along the way. The original plan had been to line its walls with maps like those in the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican or the Galerie des Cerfs at Fontainebleau. None of this was implemented. When Louis XIII returned to the problem, he instead planned topographical views of the major French cities. Each city was to fund its own depiction. But the main focus of Louis's interest was the ceiling. The design devised for him proposed to combine casts from Trajan's Column, paintings by Poussin and stucco reliefs. Although he painted part of the ceiling, the thought of completing the whole work was so daunting that it helped persuade Poussin to return to Italy. Later Louis XIV commissioned Le Brun to create a new ceiling from scratch. Le Brun however persuaded Louis to allow him to retain the existing Poussin paintings and he completed the rest of the ceiling to a design that was intended to complement the work of his predecessor. Le Brun also designed 93 carpets, each of them different, for the floor. The exact arrangement of those carpets remains unclear and it is not certain whether they were ever all installed together. Burchard suggested that the increasing ambition of the schemes for the Galerie, and the greater progress made with each, shows that the Bourbons were becoming increasingly confident during the course of the seventeenth century. **AB**