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Introduction

Abstract

An Audran ceiling preserved in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs introduces the reader to the artist Claude III Audran. A brief description of his artform, the arabesque, follows. This is the first study to analyze Audran's accomplishments and the longevity of his successful career. Audran acted as a vital connection between the Maîtrise and the Académie royale while earning renown for his painted arabesques. The chapters follow the arc of Audran's career and consider the contextual variables that influenced and shaped his work. Audran's achievements bridge an important period with the eclipse of the Maîtrise artist and the rise of the Académie royale. A review of previous scholarship contributes to our understanding of Audran's oeuvre.

Keywords: Ornamentalist; Hôtel particulier; Commission; Cronstedt

In a small oval gallery at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, the beautifully lit vitrines draw the immediate attention of many of its visitors. As a consequence, they might fail to notice the gallery's ornate painted ceiling, which was designed in 1725 by Claude III Audran (1658–1734) and preserved from an eighteenth-century Paris mansion, the Hôtel de Verrue (Plate 1). A gilded frieze of *singerie*, playful monkey figures dressed and imitating human behavior, set against a blue background borders an interior field of arabesque designs. The ease with which the identification of this ceiling can be overlooked typifies the underappreciation of Audran's oeuvre despite a career spanning nearly forty years, from the 1690s until his death.

During this period, Claude III Audran played a critical, yet largely overlooked, role in the development of Rococo design to suit the elite tastes of the period. He created a new kind of ornamentation that updated the grotesque, a form of ancient Roman painted ornament featuring fantastic animals and decorative elements that was rediscovered in the Italian Renaissance. His designs tapped into topical motifs instead of the propagandistic themes of absolutism conveyed in design from Louis XIV's early decades. French decorative style changed from the severity of the Baroque to the light, whimsical aesthetic of the Rococo, and Audran's work in its entirety reflects this evolution of elite taste. Audran achieved artistic and

enduring professional success due to his creation of arabesque ornament, which blended venerable motifs with those drawn from popular culture into a sort of generic hybridization. That blending, which infused a sense of play into the design, delighted noble patrons.

Claude III Audran, Arbiter of the French Arabesque presents the first extensive study of this late seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century French artist's achievements. This investigation includes the historical factors that impacted his work and his patrons. Audran's drive to satisfy some of the most discriminating patrons, including Louis XIV, led to the creation of ephemeral interiors, which were frequently changed to reflect the sophisticated, evolving tastes of their occupants. The fleeting nature of design and Audran's continued popularity prove his abilities, but few examples of his work survive to attest to his accomplishments. Previous scholars have only investigated a handful of individual commissions, and Audran's achievements have received fragmentary assessment in previous art history scholarship. By referencing surviving projects and reconstructing fragments of others, and through contemporaneous documentary evidence with respect to projects that are completely lost, this study reconstructs Audran's career in an effort to understand his oeuvre and his role as an ornamentalist. And, among other pertinent issues, I explain how Audran responded to the ebb and flow of state patronage, how he attracted a cadre of elite patrons, why he subcontracted artists, what contributed to his longevity, and what historical factors impacted his career.

Existing scholarship mentions Audran's work but marginalizes his achievements for two reasons.¹ The first includes his affiliation with the artists' trade guild known as the Communauté des maîtres peintres et sculpteurs de Paris, referred to as the Maîtrise.² The second may be due to Audran's particular art form, the Rococo arabesque. In 1692, Audran became part of the guild as a "maître peintre, sculpteur, graveur et enjoliveur à Paris," meaning a master painter, sculptor, engraver, and one who embellishes or adds ornaments.³ At the time, the French Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture had not yet achieved its dominance in the art world.⁴ In my opinion, this transitional period has received little scholarly attention and requires discussion in order to understand Audran's position in the marketplace.

1 Examples of this scholarship include Fiske Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1943; repr., New York: Dover, 1980) and Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), among others.

2 The Community of Master Painters and Sculptors of Paris, an organized trade group incorporated by the crown.

3 Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 106.

4 The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture founded in 1648 by royal decree created a separate entity from the guild of master painters: C. Michel, *The Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture: The Birth of the French School, 1648–1793*, trans. C. Miller (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2018), 5.



Audran's job title as an ornamentalist, as defined by Jennifer Milam, "refers to nonstructural forms of surface decoration used to embellish objects and interiors."⁵ Misapprehension of the arabesque arises from the non-narrative character of the combined decorative motifs as opposed to other genre, such as history painting. Audran pushed the boundaries of this ornamentation by adding elements from popular culture, which gave each commission a new topical significance, a subject that will be discussed further in this study. Unlike the grotesque, the arabesque does not have hybrid animal and plant forms. A brief summary of the arabesque's development in France is covered in Chapter Two.

In 1699, Louis XIV refurbished a small chateau on the grounds of the Ménagerie at Versailles as a gift to his granddaughter-in-law, Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy (1685–1712). Audran received the commission to paint the interior of that small chateau, which is more fully reviewed in Chapter Three. This project presented an art historical conundrum because it proved to be a significant project for Audran but was destroyed during the French Revolution. The little documentation that remains provides only scant details. Recent research, however, has revealed valuable information regarding Audran's contribution to the project. The Ménagerie interiors present the first example of Audran's depiction of whimsical elements drawn from popular culture in his arabesque designs that became the hallmark of Rococo style. From that influential project, in my opinion, Audran earned the designation "arbiter of the French arabesque," as well as the approval of Louis XIV.

Afterwards, Audran created hundreds of ornamental works in commissions for other royal residences, such as Versailles, Meudon, and Marly, as well as chateaus and Parisian mansions known as *hôtels particuliers*. He became a mentor of and collaborator with notable artists, among them Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) and Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743). Audran also held the position of *concierger* of the Luxembourg Palace and was *peintre ordinaire du roi*, a guild painter for the King.⁶ As *concierger*, Audran served as the custodian or curator of the monarchy's art collection housed at the Luxembourg palace, including the Marie de Medici cycle of twenty-four allegorical paintings, c. 1622–1625, by Peter Paul Rubens. As *peintre ordinaire du roi*, Audran received a stipend from the crown as a painter to the king.

Let us consider the fact that during his early years of apprenticeship, membership in the Académie royale did not promise greater opportunities, even for trained academicians of the time. The crown's finances, deeply in debt because of Louis XIV's expensive wars, severely limited the number of commissions available for painters and craftsmen. In addition, conflicts erupted between the masters of the

5 Jennifer D. Milam, *Historical Dictionary of Rococo Art* (Lanham, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 191.

6 Gérard Mabilie, "La Ménagerie de Versailles," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 83 (1974a): 36, ft. note 68.

guild and the painters of the Académie royale as the members of each vied for state commissions and artisanal status. Audran would have known about these issues as a *maître* designer, a guild master, directing the work of other artists to complete his decorative commissions. Over the course of his career, Audran acted as a connection between the masters of the guild and the Académie because he subcontracted work to many artists. The rationale for adopting this practice is explained in Chapter One. Those artists mentored by Audran further developed the arabesque style, but aesthetic changes, in part due to the Enlightenment, soon ended its use for interiors.

In reviewing eighteenth-century French art-historical and decorative-art references, I found that scholars generally mentioned Claude III Audran in conjunction with Jean Berain the Elder (1640–1711), *dessinateur de la chambre et du cabinet du roi* in the Département de l'argenterie et des menus-plaisirs et affaires de la chambre du Roi, whose decorative use of the grotesque motif served as a precedent for Audran's endeavors.⁷ The two worked in separate departments and catered to different needs of the crown. Audran worked with some of the most notable architects and sculptors of the Bâtiments du Roi, the king's building department, and he earned renown for his collaborative creation of interiors.⁸ Berain's output covered a wide range of decorative media, including costume design, while Audran worked primarily for the Bâtiments, which was responsible for constructing and maintaining royal buildings. Audran's work was, then, in the architectural sphere, in collaboration with members of the Académie royale d'architecture, architects of the Royal Academy of Architecture.

Previous scholarship contributes to our understanding of Audran's oeuvre. Primary sources, such as Audran's will, list some of his most notable commissions—at Versailles, the Ménagerie, Meudon, Sceaux, the Château d'Anet, the Hôtel de Bouillon, the Hôtel d'Antin, and the Hôtel de Verrue.⁹ Contemporaneous guidebooks of Paris by authors such as Antoine-Nicolas Dézaillier d'Argenville, Jean-Aimer Piganiol de la Force, and Germain Brice noted some of Audran's works.¹⁰

7 Jean Berain's title was Draftsman of the King's Chamber and Cabinet in the Department of Silverware and Menus-Pleasures and Affairs of the King's Chamber.

8 Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 40.

9 See Audran obituary in Guillaume Chavelier, Veuve de Noël Pissot, and Jean-Jacques de Nully, *Mercur de France, dédié au Roy, Juillet, 1735* (Paris: Chez Guillaume Chavelier, 1735). In addition, the term *hôtel* refers to an urban Parisian mansion.

10 Antoine-Nicolas Dézaillier d'Argenville, *Voyage pittoresque des environs de Paris, ou description des maisons royales, châteaux et autres lieux de plaisance situés à quinze lieues aux environs de cette ville* (Paris: Chez Debure, 1769); Jean-Aimer Piganiol de La Force, *Description historique de la ville de Paris et de ses environs* (Paris: Chez les libraires associés, 1765); Germain Brice, *Nouvelle description de la ville de Paris, et de tout ce qu'elle contient de plus remarquable*, 8th ed., 4 vols. (Paris: Chez Julien-Michel Gandouin, François Fournier, 1725). books.google.fr.



Each of these references, however, generally provides the reader with only a brief synopsis of the commissions.

My review of secondary sources includes the previous perspectives that have contributed invaluable information to this present study. In 1876, Leon Charvet wrote “Les Audran,” an article outlining the Lyonnais family’s genealogy, including a list of works for each member. Beginning with Adam Audran and his brother Louis from the sixteenth century, Charvet proceeded to trace the generations of descendants based on baptismal, marriage, and death records. Louis worked in the household of Henri IV as a wolf hunter. He had two sons, Charles and Claude I, who worked as engravers. Claude I, who was born in Paris in 1592 and died in Lyon in 1677, married Hélié Fratelat and fathered a daughter and three sons, among them Germain, the father of Claude III.¹¹ In his entry regarding Claude III, Charvet included remarks from earlier Parisian guidebooks. For instance, he mentioned the author Germaine Brice, who wrote that Audran is considered to be one of the best designers of arabesques, whose compositions are both light and pleasantly distributed with ornament.¹²

In 1892, Georges Duplessis published *Les artistes célèbres: Les Audran*, a book that briefly described each member of the Audran family through several generations. He confirmed Claude III’s commissions at Meudon, Anet, the Ménagerie, and the Château de La Muette. He also included comments by two eighteenth-century writers. The first, Edme-François Gersaint (1694–1750), considered the experience of Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), who worked for Audran. Gersaint, a Watteau devotee, recounted an episode between the *maître* Audran and Watteau. The young Watteau showed Audran a painting, requesting a critique of the work. Gersaint stated that Audran had cause for concern because of the quality of Watteau’s work. Instead of praising the painting, Audran advised the young Watteau not to spend his time on such endeavors because it would ruin his taste for work provided by the *maître*.¹³ Audran may have been trying to rein in Watteau’s ambitions, but Gersaint considered this episode as the reason for Watteau’s leaving Audran’s employ. The second writer’s comments mentioned by Duplessis were those of Pierre-Jean Mariette, who believed that Audran was an artist of real value, perfectly capable of garnering fame on his own.¹⁴

These nineteenth-century assessments of Audran’s talent, combined with his choice to abstain from membership in the Académie royale, have left Audran’s artistic status ambiguous for later generations. In the twentieth century, for instance, Fiske Kimball wrote *The Creation of the Rococo* and credited Audran with taking over

11 Leon Charvet, “Les Audran,” *Revue du Lyonnais* 1, no. 4 (1876): 449, 451.

12 Charvet, “Les Audran,” 465.

13 Georges Duplessis, *Les artistes célèbres: Les Audran* (Paris: L. Allison & Cie., 1892), 36.

14 Duplessis, *Les artistes célèbres*, 38.



Jean Berain's role as the designer of arabesques when they both completed interior work at the Château de Meudon.¹⁵ Louis XIV inspected the progress at Meudon and supposedly preferred Audran's arabesques because, according to the marquis de Dangeau's *Journal*, Berain did not receive further arabesque projects.¹⁶ After Meudon, Audran earned important projects, including the first tapestry commission when the Gobelins Manufactory reopened in 1699.¹⁷ Kimball also mentions the works listed in Audran's obituary. He dates Audran's work at the Hôtel de Peyrenc de Moras from 1730, speculating incorrectly that none of the decoration survived. While he notes a possible link between the designs at the Hôtel de Peyrenc de Moras and another townhouse on rue d'Assas, Kimball opines that Audran's work there did not differ from earlier works and shows no development in style or technique. Such judgments, without the benefit of later scholarship examining Audran's work at the Hôtel de Peyrenc de Moras, compounds the ambiguity of Audran's accomplishments. While Kimball did contribute to our overall understanding of the Rococo style, he did not review Audran's commissions, such as those listed in Audran's obituary, to assess Audran's artistic skill or the longevity, impact, and significance of his career.

Soon after Kimball's work, Carl David Moselius wrote about the Audran drawings preserved in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, in an article published in 1945. He describes the education and travels of the Swede Carl Johan Cronstedt (1709–1779), who studied architecture with Carl Hårleman (1700–1753) and became acquainted with Audran when he visited Paris.¹⁸ The two Swedes hoped to attract French artists and craftsmen to work in the construction of Stockholm's royal palace. They consulted with Audran, who suggested two of his students.¹⁹ During his more than three years in Paris, Cronstedt became friendly with Audran and familiar with his collection of sketches and design drawings. After Audran's death, he negotiated successfully with the executor of Audran's estate to purchase the artist's collection of drawings along with the working sketches he had executed for royal and private commissions.²⁰

The Cronstedt collection of Audran's drawings moved from private hands to Stockholm's Nationalmuseum in 1938.²¹ Moselius's article about this collection

15 Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 62.

16 Philippe de Courcillon, Marquis de Dangeau, *Journal du Marquis de Dangeau*, vol. 7, 1699–1700 (Paris: Firmin, Didot Freres, 1856), 174, 176.

17 Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, 106–107.

18 Carl David Moselius, "The Carl Johan Cronstedt Collection of Drawings by Claude Audran," *The Gazette des beaux-arts* 28 (October 1945): 237.

19 Moselius, "The Carl Johan Cronstedt Collection," 241.

20 Moselius, "The Carl Johan Cronstedt Collection," 240, 244.

21 Carl David Moselius, "La Collection Cronstedt," in *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm, collections Tessin and Cronstedt: Claude III Audran (1658–1734): Dessins d'architecture et d'ornements*, ed. Carl David Moselius, J. Vallery-Radot, and Roger-Armand Weigert (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1950), XI.

provides a wealth of visual examples of Audran's oeuvre. Typically, in developing a décor, Audran began with sketches and then proceeded to produce large finished presentation drawings detailing motifs and colors with precision. Such drawings frequently show the design halved or quartered so that two or even four variations of the overarching design can be seen on a single sheet. Because Audran dated only one of these drawings and few were labeled, scholars must rely on written descriptions of Audran's completed projects to connect preparatory drawings to specific commissions.

Moselius's review of these drawings probably inspired his collaboration with J. Vallery-Radot and Roger-Armand Weigert to organize the only exhibition that has thus far been mounted devoted to Audran's work. The Bibliothèque nationale de France presented the exhibition in 1950.²² The exhibition's slender catalogue includes a valuable chronology written by Weigert delineating the dated Audran works. These identifications were based on payments made to Audran by the Bâtiments du Roi, whose records are preserved at the Archives Nationales, Paris.²³ The chronology lists the sites for Audran's commissions, a short description of each work, and the amount paid to the ornamentalist. In addition, Weigert includes the references made by contemporary guidebooks in connection with the individual projects. Furthermore, Weigert's essay discusses Audran and his milieu, describing how the ornamentalist "must be considered as a foreman, a supervisor, the director of a disciplined team," a team which Weigert describes as "coherent, constituted wisely where each member has a role to fill."²⁴ This invaluable documentation listed Audran's various works at Versailles over some thirty years as well as works for other crown properties, such as Fontainebleau, Marly, Meudon, the Tuileries, and the Louvre.

In each entry, Audran received the total payment for completed work. When he painted the Ménagerie interiors, assisted by Alexandre-François Desportes (1661–1743), Audran received the full amount for the project and then paid Desportes, his subcontractor, for his contribution. The same procedure continued when Audran subcontracted work to other assistants in subsequent projects. Although Weigert documents valuable information on the commissions, he analyzes Audran's work

22 Moselius, Vallery-Radot, and Weigert, *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm*.

23 The payment records were documented by *Les comptes des Bâtiments du Roi*. Roger-Armand Weigert, "Liste chronologique des travaux datés de Claude III Audran," in Moselius, Vallery-Radot, and Weigert, *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm*, 59–68.

24 "Claude III Audran doit être considéré le plus souvent comme un chef d'atelier, un maître d'œuvre, le directeur d'une équipe disciplinée, cohérente, constituée avec discernement et dont chaque membre avait un rôle à remplir." Roger-Armand Weigert, "Claude III Audran et son milieu," in Moselius, Vallery-Radot, and Weigert, *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm*, XXVIII–XXIX.

only in broad terms without consideration or artistic appraisal of individual projects, which varied widely.²⁵

The Bibliothèque nationale de France exhibition catalogue does not mention the possibility that the Cronstedt collection may contain work by other artists whose drawings were owned by Audran. In my review of that collection of drawings for the present study, I found that there appear to be works by other artists' hands, or copies of other artists' works by Audran, as evidenced either in technique or style, especially when compared to the attributed drawings in the 1950 exhibition catalogue. For this reason, subsequent scholarship has carefully assigned attribution to Audran drawings, working backward from known commission descriptions or based on a rare drawing notation. For instance, the chronology noted Audran's completion of the Coronelli Globes documented by the Bâtiments du Roi payment dated from 1707.²⁶ (My analysis of this little-known commission is discussed in Chapter One.) Documentation of Audran's contribution to the finished illustrations on the globes invited comparison to the Cronstedt collection's drawings, which led to my attribution of a noncredited preliminary drawing for that project. This project and others indicated in the chronology exemplify how commissions reveal information about Audran: his techniques, his development of style, and the factors impacting his work.

Roger-Armand Weigert continued to examine Audran's work in subsequent published articles describing the patrons or circumstances of certain commissions and the international relations between France and Sweden in the eighteenth century. Other scholars followed, including Pierre Verlet, who described Audran's designs for Savonnerie tapestry panels.²⁷ (These tapestry designs are discussed in Chapter Three.)

Marianne Roland Michel made reference to Audran and provides contextual information when discussing Watteau and other painters who illustrated characters from the Italian theater or from La Fontaine's *Fables*. She cites the influence of the Rubenistes, not only for the use of color but also for the consideration of subjects from everyday life.²⁸ In the early eighteenth century, the availability of increasing numbers of publications illustrated with quotidian scenes provided artists inspirational fodder for their work. Michel notes that Gaspard Duchange (1662–1757), an engraver who directed others in the completion of illustration work, occupied workspace

25 Weigert, "Claude III Audran et son Milieu," XXX.

26 Weigert, "Liste chronologique des travaux datés de Claude III Audran," 61.

27 Pierre Verlet, "Les paravents de Savonnerie pendant la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle," *L'Information d'histoire de l'art* 12 (May–June 1967): 106–18. The Savonnerie manufactory operated independently between 1650 and 1685 and was combined with the Gobelins manufactory in 1712.

28 Marianne Roland Michel, "Watteau and His Generation," *Burlington Magazine* 110, no. 780 (March 1968): ii.



in the Luxembourg palace.²⁹ The crown had also provided Audran with housing and workspace in the Luxembourg as part of his position there as *concierge* of the king's paintings. While no evidence substantiates Audran's exposure to Duchange's output, he lived in the same royal property and possessed a substantial collection of some 450 books, as documented in his posthumous inventory.³⁰ Michel comments that the Rococo style appeared obvious when considering work by artists such as Antoine Lepautre (1621–1679), Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1672–1742), Nicolas Pineau (1684–1754), and Jacques Lajoue (1686–1761). But she found it hard to differentiate whether other artists, including Audran, Gillot, and Oudry, had been influenced by the movement or, conversely, if they had exerted an influence on its development.³¹

The difficulty in differentiating between Audran's achievements and those of other artists continued, especially with regard to the artists who worked for him. A number of recent scholars reference Audran's work when writing about Watteau because Audran acted as a mentor to the young painter.³² Thomas E. Crow provides valuable scholarship regarding the tensions between the guild masters, known as the *Maîtrise*, and the artists of the *Académie royale* in his 1985 publication, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. In particular, Crow traces Watteau's progression from a provincial artist arriving in Paris to the development of his talent and his induction into the *Académie royale*. Watteau first worked in a guild master's shop copying devotional images.³³ Along with other outlets, retail sales of such images occurred at the Parisian fairs. Visitors to the fairs were also presented a variety of entertainments available to be enjoyed at four or five theaters.³⁴ One of the popular theaters featured the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, whose characters inspired both Watteau and Audran. Images of such characters appeared at the *Hôtel de Nointel*, an Audran commission dating from 1708.³⁵ Crow comments that this mix of motifs became popular with elite patrons. The blending of motifs from popular theater together with those of the grotesque tradition offered patrons a large choice

29 Michel, "Watteau and His Generation," iii.

30 A.N., M.C. XLIX/553, also cited by Katie Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 133.

31 Michel, "Watteau and his Generation," iv. Antoine Lepautre (1621–1679), Gilles Marie Oppenord (1762–1742), Nicolas Pineau (1684–1754), Jacques Lajoue (1686–1761), Claude Gillot (1673–1722), Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755).

32 Martin Eidelberg and Sekh A. Gopin, "Watteau's Chinoiseries at La Muette," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 130, nos. 1542–1543 (July–August 1997): 25; Margaret Morgan Grasselli and Pierre Rosenberg, *Watteau, 1684–1721* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1984), 32; Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 58.

33 Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 45.

34 Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 48.

35 Jean Cailleaux, "Decorations by Antoine Watteau for the *Hôtel de Nointel*," *Burlington Magazine* 103, no. 696 (March 1961): i.



of subjects to be used in the design of ceilings and wall panels. Crow includes two drawings from the Cronstedt drawing collection, but neither is an Audran-attributed work. Both suggest an essentially elemental level of sophistication in the use of “the lower, bodily-oriented segment of the classical repertoire: heads of Bacchus, sileni, dolphins as messengers of love.”³⁶ Crow’s overall argument advances the superiority of academic artists over the Maîtrise. However, this study does not consider the reasons why Watteau sought to work under Audran instead of an academic mentor. Audran and his academic uncle, Gérard Audran, did provide Watteau entry into a pool of noble patrons, and Audran’s work exposed the young Watteau to the use of popular culture in arabesques that would augment the latter’s *fêtes galantes*.

In 1995, Katie Scott took the analysis of Audran’s work further in her seminal work, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris*. In this publication, Scott describes Audran’s practices of subcontracting work and mentoring younger artists.³⁷ Audran prospered as a result of his work at Meudon and later commissions. Scott confirms his work with his drawings, extant ceilings, and tapestry designs. She investigates how unified Rococo interiors resulted from the coordinated efforts of craftsmen and the noble patrons who sponsored the commissions. In the process, Scott discusses the upper-class salon culture that sought distinction from state-sponsored interior projects through commissioned arabesque interior schemes. However, that distinction became muddled over time when many of the newly rich emulated this noble style in their interiors.³⁸ In her analysis, Scott views the role of architectural features and ornamentation as fixed decorative details and as reflections of the elite society’s social and political structures.³⁹

In comparison, my investigation of Audran’s projects determines that the motifs chosen by patrons appeared individually suited for each project. Even when La Fontaine’s *Fables* inspired the motifs for two Audran commissions, the differences between each project and its patron appeared as unique interpretations of the theme. (These interpretations are discussed in Chapter Three.) Scott suggests that Watteau’s role with Audran might have been “confining and supportive,” and that Watteau’s patrons proved to be different from Audran’s “Who’s Who” list of the nobility.⁴⁰ Scott opines that the younger painter’s unsuccessful attempt to break into that elite list may have been the impetus for Watteau’s return to easel painting.⁴¹

36 Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 59.

37 Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 24.

38 Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 8.

39 Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 7.

40 Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 153.

41 Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, 153.



Martin Eidelberg completed an exhaustive study on Watteau's drawings. In his discussion of Watteau's development as an artist, Eidelberg credits Watteau for working with Audran, "the leading decorator of the moment."⁴² An Eidelberg article describes Audran's la Muette commission and dates the project between 1709 and 1712 when Watteau worked for Audran. The commission is known through engravings of the figural characters contained within the arabesques, but the overall arabesque design remains unknown. (This project is discussed in Chapter Three.)

In her 2003 work entitled "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de la Muette," Katie Scott discusses the same Audran commission at la Muette and acknowledges the commission's completion during the years 1708–1712 when Audran employed Watteau.⁴³ She believes that the lack of correspondence between an Audran drawing and the engraved Watteau figures reflects Audran's practice of leaving areas of his designs open for subcontractors to complete. This assumption harkens back to a statement made by Anne-Claude de Pestels, comte de Caylus (1692–1765), in *La vie d'Antoine Watteau: peintre de figures et de paysages sujets gallants et modernes*.⁴⁴ According to the comte de Caylus, Audran allowed other artists to contribute by "the reservation of blank spaces, for the reception of figure[s] or other subjects in accordance with the wishes of the various patrons [in] whom he had inspired a desire to have their walls and ceilings decorated in this manner, it was thus that artists in differing genres found employment in his studio."⁴⁵ This description has been interpreted by Scott and others as Audran's method of giving assistants, such as Watteau, the independence to fill the blank areas.⁴⁶ However, patrons contracted ornamental work with the Maître Audran, who designed the overall arabesque design program and with whom they discussed the project details and the cost of its completion. As we will see, Audran's drawings all appear as complete arabesques with no blank areas.

42 Eidelberg and Gopin, "Watteau's Chinoiseries at La Muette," 27.

43 Katie Scott, "Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau's Chinese Cabinet at the Château de la Muette," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003): 189–248.

44 *The Life of Antoine Watteau: Painting of Figures and Landscapes Gallant and Modern Subjects*.

45 "Elles étoient susceptibles, par les places qu'il y réservoir, de recevoir déférens sujets de figures et autres, à la volonté des particuliers qu'il avoit sçu mettre dans le gout d'en faire décorer leurs plafonds et leurs lambris, en sort que plusieurs artistes de divers genres y trouvoient de l'emploi." Anne-Claude de Tubières-Grimoard de Pestels de Levis, comte de Caylus, "La vie d'Antoine Wateau [sic]: peintre de figures et de paysages sujets galants et modernes," in *Notes critiques sur les vies anciennes d'Antoine Watteau*, ed. Pierre Champion (Paris: Librairie spéciale pour l'histoire de France, 1921), 82–83. Translation cited from Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus, "The Life of Antoine Watteau" (1748), trans. R. Ironside, in *French XVIII Century Painters*, ed. E. and J. de Goncourt (London: Phaidon, 1948; repr. Cornell University Press, 1981), 15.

46 Other authors include Posner, *Antoine Watteau*, 58; Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 60; Bruno Pons, "Arabesques, or New Grotesques," in *The History of Decorative Arts: Classicism and the Baroque in Europe*, ed. Alain Gruber, trans. John Goodman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 172.



Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the subcontracted artists contributed to the overall design with their painted figures or motifs—but Audran held the reins of the creative endeavor. The conclusion that Watteau or any of the subcontracted artists had free license in these projects takes the statements of the comte de Caylus further than what appears plausible.

Besides the differentiation between Audran's work and that of others, Alain Gruber's exhaustive 1994 study, entitled *The History of Decorative Arts: Classicism and the Baroque in Europe*, includes essays by authors who studied various forms of ornament, noting the formal appearance and its execution over a period of 130 years (1630–1760). The ornament types under analysis include such forms as the acanthus, the arabesque, and chinoiserie, among others. This perspective explains the historical use of the forms and their execution by various craftsmen. Gruber admits that the meaning of ornament can be confusing; he relies on each author to define the significance of each ornamental motif during the period.

In the book's chapter on arabesques, Bruno Pons focuses on the evolution of motifs, from the grotesque to what he describes as the "new arabesque."⁴⁷ He briefly reviews the ornament's ancient roots, then concentrates on the craftsmen using the arabesque, such as Jean Berain and Claude III Audran in France. Their application of the ornamental form transformed its appearance through the addition of new motifs within the compositions. This overview provides insight to the ornament, but considers the form in isolation, extracted from the interior, metalwork, or decorative art and without the constraints of its immediate cultural context or the patron's taste. Audran became part of the lineage of other craftsmen using the ornament, and the study was never meant to analyze his or any craftsman's particular oeuvre.

The analysis of individual projects by Audran brings another perspective to the understanding of his work. In 1974, Gérard Mabile focused on the Ménagerie, the zoo, at Versailles, a commission dating from 1699. Mabile documents a chronology of the construction and later renovation of the small chateau on the zoo's grounds.⁴⁸ Using available evidence, he describes the few known interior details and the renovation of the interiors for Marie-Adélaïde, duchesse de Bourgogne. In a later, 2003 study, Jennifer Spinks analyzed what was known about the Ménagerie interiors, speculating from an Audran drawing with singerie (now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France) and two known paintings said to hang in one of the rooms.⁴⁹ She links the singerie monkeys in Audran's drawing to La Fontaine's *Fables* and believes that the animal narratives reflected the pedagogical approach of Abbé

47 Pons, "Arabesques, or New Grotesques," 159.

48 Mabile, "La Ménagerie de Versailles."

49 Jennifer Spinks, "Education and Entertainment: The Redecoration of Marie-Adélaïde of Savoy's Ménagerie at Versailles," *Melbourne Art Journal* 6 (2003): 25–34.

Fénélon, who promoted the use of fables to teach with pleasure or wit.⁵⁰ Spinks references the use of fables for the Labyrinth Garden, Versailles, concluding that the interior decoration served a light-hearted educational purpose for the benefit of the young Marie-Adélaïde.⁵¹

Then, in 2010, Gérard Mabilie and Joan Pieragnoli published new research regarding the *Ménagerie* using a previously unknown 1764 interior inventory preserved at the Archives nationales de France.⁵² That inventory describes Audran's arabesques along with the illustrated characters for each room. One room presided over by the personification of satire, Momus, features eighty vignettes from La Fontaine's *Fables*. My analysis of the 1764 inventory in Chapter Three contributes to the discussion of the *Ménagerie* commission (1699) followed by Audran's later use of the *Fables* at the Château de Réveillon. The dominance of Audran's designs in that installation at the *Ménagerie* established a design precedent that influenced interiors during the early decades of the eighteenth century, when painted arabesque interiors became a hallmark of the Régence and the early years of Louis XV's reign.

Audran used the theme of La Fontaine's *Fables* for a later commission, c. 1733, at the Château de Réveillon. John Whitehead's *The French Interior in the Eighteenth Century* (1992) includes a Réveillon painted panel by Audran. (The Réveillon commission is discussed in Chapter Three.) Whitehead uses that panel as an example to illustrate how colorful painted panels became the principal decorative scheme for reception rooms of the early eighteenth century.⁵³ He also cites Audran's examples at the Hôtel de Peyrenc de Moras (c. 1724) but does not elaborate further on Audran's work.

Rochelle Ziskin's study (1999) of the Place Vendôme examines the buildings of this public square from the early aspirations of Louis XIV, when progress foundered, to the Régence, when the urban environment became part of the Parisian building boom.⁵⁴ Ziskin chronicles the development of this urban hub near the Palais Royal, which housed the Regent Philippe II, duc d'Orléans (1674–1723), and his government. Many of the status-seeking rich or nouveaux riches built urban mansions referred to as *hôtels particuliers* at the Place Vendôme and sought Audran's expertise to demonstrate their taste and status. (This phenomenon is discussed further in Chapter Three.)

50 Spinks, "Education and Entertainment," 29.

51 Spinks, "Education and Entertainment," 31–32.

52 Gérard Mabilie and Joan Pieragnoli, *La Ménagerie de Versailles* (Arles, France: Éditions Honoré Clair, 2010), 4–96. The unpaginated inventory, "Peintures de la Ménagerie," dated to about 1764, is in the collection of the Archives nationales de France (O¹ 2080).

53 John Whitehead, *The French Interior in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Dutton Studio Books, 1992), 95.

54 Rochelle Ziskin, *The Place Vendôme: Architecture and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).



Chapter Overview

My first chapter relates the known biographical facts about Claude III Audran. From his early years of training, Audran experienced the competition for state commissions between the guild artists, the *Maîtrise*, and the painters of the *Académie royale*.⁵⁵ He chose to advance his career as a member of the guild, and subcontracted work to younger artists, who would later become part of the *Académie royale*. This practice allowed Audran to cater to the whims of noble patrons driven to display their positions following the concept of *bienséance* (discussed in Chapter Three). Audran's patrons included elite members of society from the reign of Louis XIV, through the *Régence*, and into the reign of Louis XV. The chronology of Audran's commissions is based on payments made by the *Bâtiments du Roi* during the reign of Louis XIV. Subsequent Audran documentation comes from primary and secondary sources. A number of projects, the *Château de Petit-Bourg*, for example, represent venues in which Audran completed work. But the chateau was demolished, and the interior paneling sold without documentation that might have enabled one to trace its whereabouts. The commissions discussed in this study represent Audran's work through the forty years of his career and are supported by varying amounts of documentation.

The ceiling described briefly at the beginning of this Introduction characterizes Audran's arabesque designs, an art-historical analysis of which is difficult to generate. Unlike history painting, the arabesque is non-narrative, and its symbolic meaning must be discerned in conjunction with a consideration of both the individual patron and the work's historical context. (The ceiling is discussed in detail in Chapter Three).

The development of the French arabesque, so essential for an understanding of Audran's oeuvre, is briefly summarized in Chapter Two. The grotesque motif was originally brought to France by Italian immigrant artists when they received a commission from François I (1494–1547) for Fontainebleau.⁵⁶ As a consequence, the motif conveyed a sense of noble status when subsequently used. The *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture & gravure* (c. 1792) specifies that the arabesque can be found in painted panels and in the interior décor of rooms. It mentions as well that the arabesque was composed of plant, branches, flower motifs, and architectural

55 The founding of the *Académie royale* in 1648 sought to raise the status of artists by distinguishing them from the artists' trade guild, the *Communauté des maîtres peintres et sculpteurs de Paris*. *Académie royale* artists received certain privileges and the *Maîtrise* experienced restrictions on their work. The *Académie de Saint-Luc*, a community of master painters, provided the training for Audran and others in preparation to be received themselves as a *maître* or master in the guild.

56 The two Italian artists were Giovanni Battista di Jacopo, known as Rosso, (1495–1540) and Francesco Primaticcio (1504/5–1570).



framing devices that “can offer arrangements which please or inspire numerous ideas.”⁵⁷ The description further notes that arabesques present agreeable objects, but the union and arrangement of various motifs are chimeric or fabulous.⁵⁸ Described as moving away from simple ideas, arabesques are said to be viewed and understood as illustrating the “dreams of painting.”⁵⁹ The definition adds that “reason and taste dictate that they are not the dreams of a sick person but, rather, the musings comparable to those experienced by an eastern voluptuary under the influence of a skillfully measured dose of opium.”⁶⁰ The nature of the arabesque allows the viewer to observe the motifs and freely associate meaning as if in a dream.⁶¹ The picturesque dreams resemble those formed by young children, in happy, playful moments, and include all that was present in nature’s flora and fauna. According to the definition, “the capable artist, whose imagination is as fertile as it is worldly, assembles and arranges various rich or light fabrics that he hangs, that he suspends gracefully as noted in the decoration of tents, pavilions. ...”⁶² Finally, “when arabesques have a comic nature, they are similar to a joke in a literary work, or in a conversation, and everyone knows that the joke in whatever form it appears, ought to be always light, gay, in good taste and witty and never over-emphasized.”⁶³ This contemporaneous definition appears to parallel the social behavior of the *honnête gens*, the elite court nobles, whose manners are discussed in Chapter Three.

Audran’s chosen mode of expression, the arabesque, continued to have an association to the chimeric or fabulous that can be attributed originally to the hybridic elements of the grotesque, as when a scrolling acanthus leaf becomes the body for a

57 “...peuvent offrir des assemblages qui plaisent, ou faire naître des idées riantes.” Charles Henri Watelet and Pierre Charles Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, vol. 1 (Paris: L. F. Prault, 1792), 90.

58 “Les arabesques présentent donc le plus souvent des objets agréables & partialement vrais; mais dont le réunion & l’agencement sont chimérique.” Watelet and Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, 90.

59 Watelet and Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, 91.

60 “La raison & le goût exigent qu’ils ne soient pas des songes de malades, mais de rêveries semblables à celles que l’opium, artistement dosé, procurèrent aux Orientaux voluptueux, qui les préfèrent quelquefois à des erreurs moins chimériques.” Watelet and Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, 91. Cited by Pons, “Arabesques, or New Grotesques,” 173–174.

61 Pons, “Arabesques, or New Grotesques,” 174.

62 “L’artiste instruit, dont l’imagination ne doit pas être moins féconde qu’aimable, assemble & dispose des étoffes riches ou légères qu’il suspend, qu’il rattache avec grace, comme on le fait en décorant des tentes, des pavilions...” Watelet and Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, 91–92.

63 “Lorsque les arabesques sont du genre comique, ils sont dans la peinture ce que la plaisanterie est dans les ouvrages littéraires, ou dans la conversation, & tout le monde sait que la plaisanterie, sous quelque forme qu’elle se montre, doit être de bon gout, légère, gaie, spirituelle, qu’il ne fait pas y insister trop.” Watelet and Levesque, *Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*, 96.

monster's head. This notion of the fabulous continued conceptually in arabesques with transitory elements, such as the progress of time in zodiac signs, as seen in Audran's tapestry design for the months of the year entitled *Les douze mois grotesques*.

This study follows the arc of Audran's career through a discussion of chronological commissions dating from the later decades of the reign of Louis XIV to the early 1730s. Unfortunately, Audran left no letters or diaries, but information gleaned from previous scholarship and primary sources begins to tell the narrative of this artist's life. What we find in one of Audran's initial commissions is an artist who portrayed a time-worn hunting theme for a country estate that served its patron for the same sport – hunting. Then, in 1699, Audran was tapped by the king's architect to work on the renovation of the Ménagerie at Versailles. Louis XIV demanded something different for its interior design and this impetus pushed Audran to devise ornamental schemes combining the venerable motifs with contemporary elements, resulting in a generic hybridization. This successful formula garnered the king's satisfaction and augmented the artist's career. Subsequently, Audran developed many variations on this formula for his noble patrons. This study will let Audran's commissions, and his use of contemporary elements, speak to us about his life, his patrons' investment in his work, and how he devised designs reflecting the currents of taste in subsequent years.

Each of the case studies that I discuss in Chapters Two, Three, and Four includes extant written accounts of the projects in question, as well as information about the building and/or room for which the design was devised, the patron who commissioned it, and any other pertinent details situating Audran's work in economic and social contexts. The first of my case studies, covered in Chapter Two, sets the scene for Audran's earliest commission and considers the noble courtiers' need to escape the rigors of court life to venues providing ready access for the pursuit of the hunt or the enjoyment of music. At the Château d'Anet (1689), Audran designed ornamentation complementing the country house in which Louis-Joseph de Bourbon, duc de Vendôme (1654–1712), sought escape by hunting on the grounds of his ancestral home. From this commission, Audran gained the attention of other members of the nobility.

Other escape venues, as discussed in Chapter Two, included the Château Neuf (new chateau) at Meudon and the chateau at Sceaux. The chateau at Meudon brought Audran within the orbit of the Dauphin and his circle. At Sceaux, Anne-Louise-Bénédictine de Bourbon, duchesse du Maine (1676–1753), played the quintessential hostess to a glittering court of cultivated nobles and provided any number of musical entertainments. Audran's commissions at the chateaus are discussed, as well as a painted harpsichord, now preserved at Versailles, which is attributed to Audran and is similar in description to those owned by the duchesse du Maine. In this instance, we find that Audran applied his aesthetic to the harpsichord case



of an earlier Flemish instrument. My analysis of Audran's harpsichord ornament explains the contextual background leading to the need for new ornamentation, a factor that has received little scholarly attention.

The second case study, introduced in Chapter Three, chronicles Audran's seminal work at the Ménagerie chateau, a building set in the zoological garden at Versailles. In 1698, Jules-Hardouin Mansart (1646–1708) sought to refurbish the Ménagerie at the behest of Louis XIV. The king wanted to refresh the spaces of the small chateau as a gift to Marie-Adélaïde, the duchesse de Bourgogne, after her marriage (at age twelve) to the king's grandson. Mansart asked Audran to assist because Louis XIV wanted the new interiors to reflect the youthfulness of the occupant. So, Audran devised playful and engaging didactic décors adding popular motifs, such as the *Fables* of Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695).

The *Fables*, which drew upon those of Aesop, the ancient legendary figure who lived in Greece between 620 and 560 BCE, had been recently published in Paris (1668–1694). La Fontaine's *Fables*, short stories in which animals take on human roles and behaviors to illustrate moral precepts, have been characterized as “teaching through delight.”⁶⁴ Accompanied by illustrations, La Fontaine's lessons relied on the reader's ability to tease out the meaning of the picture by musing upon the text.⁶⁵

The theme of Aesop's *Fables* had inspired the designs of Charles Perrault (1628–1703) for thirty-nine sculptural fountains for the Labyrinth Garden at Versailles, dedicated to the Grand Dauphin. This installation and La Fontaine's *Fables* collection dedicated to the same Dauphin elevated the fable theme, previously considered by the Académie française as a low form of genre. Louis XIV sought to acknowledge the status of Marie-Adélaïde when he gave her the Ménagerie. My analysis shows how the renovation accomplished the king's objective by adhering to the dictates of *convenance* and *bienséance*, which I discuss through the use of the *Fables* theme, and other decorative motifs, and the elite caliber of decorative arts specifically made for the Ménagerie interiors.

My third case study, presented in Chapter Four, focuses on subsequent commissions demonstrating Audran's continued use of generic hybridization, but for lesser nobility. Audran worked for three financiers: Louis Béchameil, marquis de Nointel (1649–1718); Joseph-Jean-Baptiste Fleuriau d'Armenonville (1661–1728); and the marquis Abraham Peyrenc de Moras (1686–1732), all of whom rose to prominence in the early decades of the eighteenth century. Audran's patron Louis Béchameil, marquis de Nointel, *conseilleur d'État*, and *intendant de la province de Bretagne*,

64 Marc Fumaroli, *The Poet and the King: Jean de La Fontaine and His Century*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 94; Margaret M. McGowan, “Moral Intention in the Fables of La Fontaine,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 266.

65 McGowan, “Moral Intention in the Fables of La Fontaine,” 270.

followed in the footsteps of his father (former *conseiller du roi* and *surintendant des finances et des bâtiments du duc d'Orléans*), who had amassed a fortune that allowed him to buy his title in 1697.⁶⁶ A relative parvenu, Béchameil sought to display his rise in status through the purchase of a luxurious *hôtel* in the fashionable Place Vendôme district, an area that became home to many of the financial elite who were either recently ennobled or had aspirations to that status.⁶⁷ As I discuss in Chapter Three, Fleuriat d'Armenonville and Peyrenc de Moras followed their own paths to wealth and noble status. These nouveaux riches emulated the established nobility in their patterns of conspicuous consumption, which included luxurious clothing, jewelry, fine wines, silverware, and lavish interior decoration.⁶⁸ Several turned to Audran, whose work had become synonymous with elite décors, to ornament their homes with his trademark arabesques. Rather than seek private escape (as the duc de Vendôme did at Anet), Béchameil and his peers sought to broadcast their newfound wealth and status via high-end décors imitating those favored by nobles and royalty alike. Their pretention of noble status on a par with the elite would provoke an eventual rejection of the arabesque as a distinct form of upper-class interior decoration by the more established representatives of the nobility.

The last chapter, Chapter Five, discusses both Audran's influence on competitors, who took inspiration from his arabesques, and his impact on his protégés and their careers. Audran's work did not go unnoticed by contemporaries, and some—such as Pierre Cailleteau, known as Lassurance (1655–1724), and Giles-Marie Oppenord—created interiors on a par with Audran's work. Over the course of some forty years, Audran's assistants included Alexandre-François Desportes, Jean-Antoine Watteau, Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743), Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), and Christophe Huet (1700–1759), among others. Each artist brought his specialty to the fore when working with the master, who designed and directed each commission. All of these assistants benefitted from their collaboration with Audran, not least by learning how effectively to satisfy their elite clientele.

Claude III Audran had a long and successful career, but the very trendiness of his designs doomed most of the rooms brought to completion under his supervision to eventual renovation and replacement when styles changed. During his career, Audran existed between the guild and the Académie royale, one of which would disappear in the course of the next decades. The work of this ornamentalist, who directed the decorative ensembles that characterized private dwellings and chateaus, would become obsolete, and the Academy would soon come to define all artistic careers.

66 Martin Eidelberg, "Watteau and Audran at the Hôtel de Nointel," *Apollo* 155, no. 479 (January 2002): 10.

67 Cailleaux, "Decorations by Antoine Watteau for the Hôtel de Nointel," i.

68 Daniel Brewer, "(Re)Constructing an Eighteenth-Century Interior: The Value of Interiority on Display," in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, eds. Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 224.