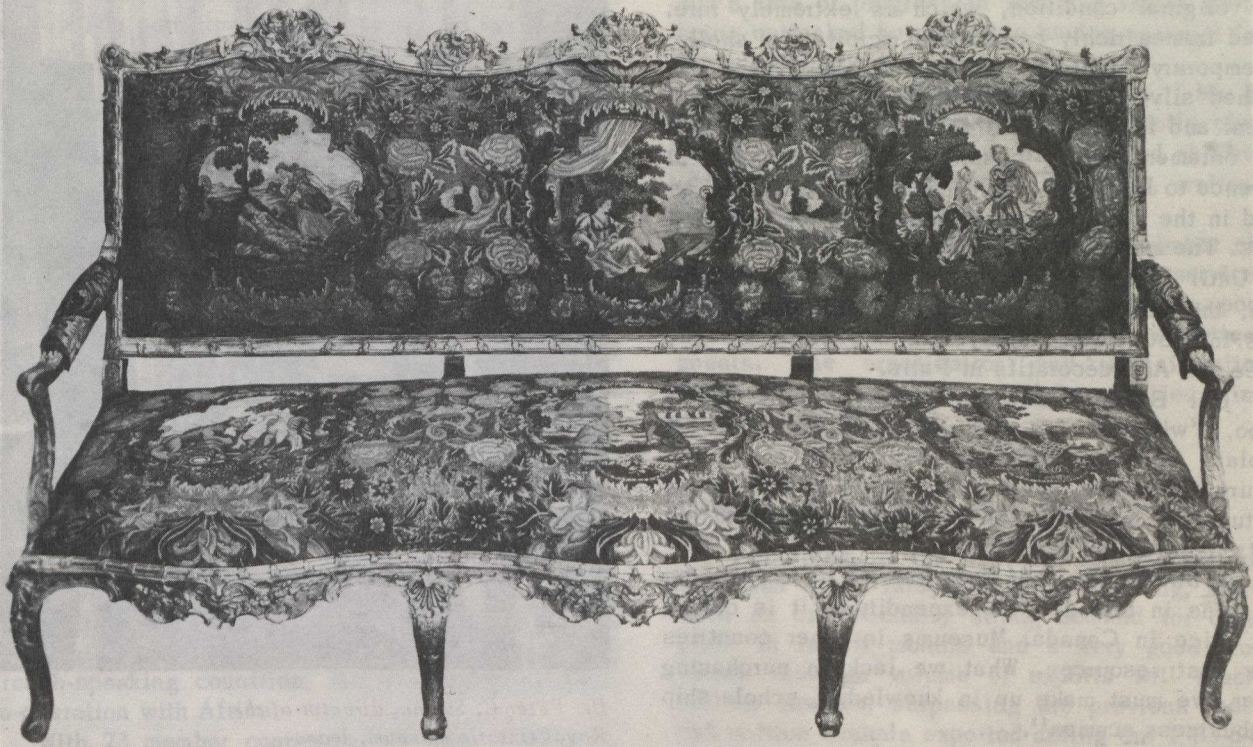


## FRENCH FURNITURE TREASURES TO ROM



*The settee from the court of Versailles.*

Three magnificent examples of the furniture art of the Baroque period, from the court of Louis XIV at Versailles, will be on display at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto from November 23 thanks to the discernment and negotiating skill of the curator of the Museum's European Department, Mr. Heribert Hickl-Szabo. The pieces — a settee and two armchairs dating from c. 1710, which are among the finest surviving examples of French Baroque furniture — were purchased for \$50,000, the largest single expenditure in the ROM's 58 years of existence. In the opinion of Mr. Hickl-Szabo, the rarity and beauty of the purchase renders it one of the supreme bargains in the history of antique-collecting.

The mastermind of the coup, whose special delight it is to seek out for the ROM the treasures of the past from many sources and to bargain for the best prices, is a third-generation antiquary, both his parents and his grandparents having been antique dealers in Graz, Austria.

#### FUND-RAISING BALL

In the background of the prolonged negotiations, which started over a year ago, was a group of female supporters of the ROM who in May 1969 held a ball that became the top social event of the season in Toronto to raise money for the new Baroque and Rococo Gallery. The proceeds reached nearly \$40,000,

the incentive required to send Mr. Hickl-Szabo flying to Paris to see Mr. François-Gérard Seligmann, a dealer whom he knew to have been for 15 years resisting every offer for an 11-piece set of furniture from Versailles. The pieces Mr. Hickl-Szabo first bid for were from another set; on these he obtained first refusal. Later, when the dealer sold them to another bidder, he redeemed his promise by giving Mr. Hickl-Szabo his choice of three pieces from the 11-piece set already referred to. Mr. Seligmann at first offered the ROM "three capital pieces" for \$75,000. Negotiations continued and Mr. Hickl-Szabo closed the deal at \$50,000.

Weeks of indecision followed. The French Government, which regarded the furniture as a national treasure, was opposed to its leaving the country. The ROM having, in effect, paid for the set, and made provisions for its display in its new gallery, now faced the prospect of rejection as a purchaser.

The director of the Museum, Dr. Peter Swann, appealed by letter to Canadian Government officials and to the French authorities and, eventually, the French Government relented; Mr. Seligmann was able to wire the exciting words, "Very glad export permission granted." The ROM could take its place among the select few world museums with such examples of the finest workmanship of the Louis XIV period.