

National Gallery says farewell to Fontainebleau exhibition

Fontainebleau, an exhibition of 221 works, including paintings, engravings, drawings, sculptures, decorative arts and tapestries of art in France from 1528 to 1610, shown at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, from March 2 closed on April 15. Ottawa was the only place other than Paris where the exhibition was seen.

The art of Fontainebleau is the art of the court of France which had its centre at the château of Fontainebleau from the time Francis I, King of France, 1515-1547, returned from his disastrous campaign in Italy in 1528 until the death of Henry IV in 1610. It started then with the French king who supported Jacques Cartier's explorations of Canada, beginning in 1534, and ended with the king who backed Champlain's expeditions, including the founding of Quebec in 1608.

Much of the life of the court was reflected in the exhibition. There were, for example, several pieces of parade armour, which probably belonged to Francis I's successor and son, Henry II, King of France, 1547-1559, and one iron shield, inlaid with silver and gold, that certainly belonged to this king. Figures in relief of this shield, which was lent to the exhibition by the Louvre, fought the battles of ancient Rome but suggested the alliance of France and Turkey against the Holy Roman Empire.

The Museum of Rouen sent a large tapestry that Henry II commissioned

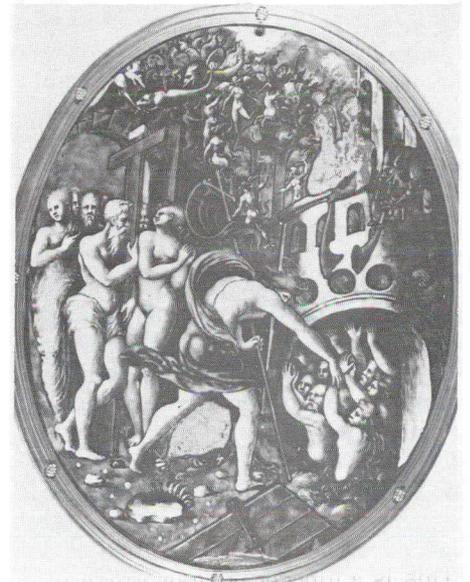
as part of a set for Anet, the château of his mistress Diane de Poitiers — a château that could be seen in a drawing lent by the British Museum. In this supposedly mythological tapestry the goddess Diana beseeches her father for the gift of chastity, but the staid figure of Diana in sixteenth-century dress is clearly Diane de Poitiers.

Catherine de Medici must have felt Fontainebleau not to be completely foreign when she arrived in France from Florence after her marriage in 1533. Her father-in-law had imported many artists from Italy, including the most famous of all Leonardi da Vinci who nevertheless did not directly influence the art of Fontainebleau. In the exhibition there was a small painting by Rosso (1494-1540) lent by the Louvre, that was painted in Italy before Rosso went to Fontainebleau (1530), where he created the combinations of paintings and stucco that distinguish the decorations of the château. His fellow-Italian, collaborator and successor, Primaticcio (1504-1570) was represented in the exhibition only by works produced in France, but there was a figure of Peace lent by a New York private collector drawn by Nicolo dell'Abate before he left Bologna for France in 1552.

The exhibition was arranged as the result of a cultural agreement between France and Canada. The showing in Paris at the Grand Palais, closed on January 15.



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1. *The History of Coriolanus: Preparations for Combat.*
Anonymous.
Before 1606.
Wool, silk and gold thread.

2. *The Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem and the Descent into Limbo.*
Leonard Limosin.
Circa 1505-1575/77.
Enamelled copper.

3. *The Legend of Diana for Anet: Diana Imploring Jupiter for the Gift of Chastity.*
Anonymous.
Wool and silk.