

Sèvres Extraordinaire!

Sculpture
from 1740
until Today



Bard
Graduate
Center
Gallery



SÈVRES
MUSÉE NATIONAL
DE CÉRAMIQUE

On View

September 10, 2025–November 16, 2025

Organized by

Sèvres et Limoges, Manufacture et Musées nationaux, and
Bard Graduate Center

Curated by

Tamara Préaud, former archivist of the Sèvres Manufactory
Soazig Guilmin, Sèvres, Manufacture et Musée nationaux,
head of the registrar's department (Service de Récolement et
du Mouvement des Oeuvres)

Charlotte Vignon, former director of the department of
patrimony and collections (Département de Patrimoine et des
Collections), Sèvres, Manufacture et Musée nationaux

Susan Weber, founder and director, Bard Graduate Center

Louis Simon Boizot (director), *L'Amour Timbalier* (Cupid Drumming)
salt cellar, 1773/74–80. Enameled hard-paste porcelain and silver.
Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 2012.3.1.



Exhibition Description

Sèvres Extraordinaire! Sculpture from 1740 until Today presents the history of the Sèvres Manufactory and its production of extraordinary sculptural objects in various ceramic pastes. Organized by Sèvres, Manufacture et Musée nationaux and Bard Graduate Center (BGC), the exhibition is the first outside of France to highlight the production of sculpture made at the famed porcelain manufactory.

From extravagant Rococo to restrained Neoclassical, from romantic, neo-Gothic inventions to the elegant curves of the Art Nouveau or the geometries of the Art Deco, and in partnership with artists associated with Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop art, Sèvres has continually pushed the boundaries of ceramic production, creating objects that are neither functional nor decorative but rather art that it simply calls “sculpture.”

One of the main characteristics of the manufactory, from its origins in the disused premises of the Château de Vincennes until the present day, is the unsurpassed variety of its production. The exhibition considers the term “sculpture” in its broadest sense and features three-dimensional vases, centerpieces for a dining table, clocks, inkstands, and rare cups and saucers alongside more expected objects such as busts, figures, and medallions. This approach presents the history of the Sèvres Manufactory through a lesser-known part of its production while highlighting the significant roles of artists, designers, and architects, whose designs represent a microcosm of larger developments in art and culture.

The exhibition reveals the roles of chemical and technological advances as well as artistic innovations in the manufactory’s success, and it presents approximately two hundred works from the collection of Sèvres, Manufacture et Musée nationaux, in ceramic, soft- and hard-paste porcelain, faïence, and stoneware. Other objects highlight the long process of making a sculpture at Sèvres, from initial design to its final painted decoration. These items—sketched, drawn, or engraved sources as well as terra-cotta models and plaster molds—represent the institution’s rich, diverse, and mostly unknown archives.

Situating sculpture produced at the Sèvres Manufactory in the larger context of French history from 1740 through the twenty-first century, the exhibition tells the story of Sèvres’s relationship to French political power. As a royal, imperial, and then a national manufactory, Sèvres was regularly called upon to produce elaborate porcelain dinner, tea, and coffee services, as well as vases and other objects to be used as diplomatic gifts or to adorn the residences of the French elite.

The exhibition is organized chronologically and occupies all four floors of the Bard Graduate Center Gallery. It reflects the manufactory’s history of collaborations with innovative artists and architects to create new forms and designs aligned with the fashions of their time. Featured works from eighteenth-century artists and designers include those of Jean-Claude Duplessis and Louis-Simon Boizot, among others. Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, and Auguste Rodin represent important collaborations of the nineteenth century. Jean Arp, Louise Bourgeois, and Ettore Sottsass are among the artists whose work demonstrates the manufactory’s artistic output in the twentieth century; and creations by Yayoi Kusama, Johan Creten, Jim Dine, Kristin McKirdy, and Betty Woodman reflect Sèvres’s ongoing commitment to working with the most important living artists of the day.

Ground Floor: Eighteenth Century

The first floor of the exhibition displays works from the early years of the manufactory, when soft-paste porcelain was used as a substitute for Chinese and Saxon porcelain. The objects on this floor showcase the distinctive style pioneered by Sèvres in 1752, when it became the only manufacturer in the world to forgo the application of glaze to its figures. The resulting white, matte objects in biscuit looked as if they were sculpted from marble. This period also saw Sèvres's first great success with flowers made from porcelain. Sculptural objects were fashioned into large bouquets to adorn tables, mounted in vases and clocks, and integrated into other decorative objects.

Objects on display from the late 1700s showcase the introduction of new pastes and designs at the manufactory including hard-paste porcelain, used exclusively to create figures and busts; bas-reliefs made in white biscuit on colored paste; and a paste imitating bronze. The exhibition presents different kinds of objects from this period, from cups to saucers to teapots and vases enriched with elements carved in bas-relief in the round.

Highlights from the eighteenth century include:

- *L'Amitié/Madame de Pompadour en déesse de l'Amitié (Friendship/Madame de Pompadour as the goddess of Friendship)*. A sculpture in biscuit designed by Etienne-Maurice Falconet in 1755 and commissioned by Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's official mistress, as an allegory of her continuing friendship with the king.
- *L'amour timbalier (Cupid Drumming)*. In 1773 the manufactory presented three saltcellars in enameled and gilded hard-paste porcelain with a silver mounting to Louis XV. These *salières* reflected preoccupations with military life and were intended as traditional gifts to courtiers. Produced at the manufactory under the direction of the sculptor Louis-Simon Boizot, *Cupid Drumming* can be dated by its silver frame bearing the hallmarks of the city of Paris between 1774 and 1780. The same models were later used to make terra-cotta editions for the Second Empire at the request of Empress Eugénie.
- *Surtout du service de Catherine II de Russie: L'Apothéose de Catherine II (Centerpiece of the table service made for Catherine II: Apotheosis of Catherine II)*. This bust in biscuit personified the Russian empress as Minerva, the Roman goddess of war and wisdom. The bust topped the monumental *Parnassus of Russia* created by Louis-Simon Boizot. It was the centerpiece for an 800-piece table service completed in 1779 that required three years of work by more than forty artisans.



Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *L'Amour menaçant (Threatening Love)*, 1758/61. Manufacture de Sèvres. Soft-paste porcelain biscuit. Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 27724.1.

Second Floor: Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century, the manufactory developed several technical innovations that profoundly influenced its production, resulting in an incredibly rich and varied output that reflected the styles of the time. Most notable among these technical advances—illustrated by the sculpture on display on the gallery’s second floor—was the introduction of colored porcelain in celadon or enameled, painted, and gilded pieces. Other innovations included “paste on paste,” a method of production that created light reliefs on the surface of porcelain; pieces produced in glazed earthenware and faïence; and the development of new porcelain pastes, *pâte nouvelle* and *grosse porcelaine*, both adopted for sculpture.

The century also marked a shift in business strategy for the manufactory as Sèvres began to produce works by celebrated contemporary sculptors in order to profit from their fame. These collaborations, which became a hallmark of the institution’s practice moving forward, also significantly impacted its increasingly diverse output. The exhibition features works by well-known nineteenth-century artists including Auguste Rodin, Claude-Aimé Chenavard, Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard, and Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse.

Finally, the second floor explores the theme of “Sèvres and Power,” highlighting the manufactory’s relationship with the French state, beginning with the royal patronage of King Louis XV and continuing today under national State ownership, as well as its production for foreign seats of power. The gallery includes several portraits and busts that illustrate how Sèvres produced sculpture for French royalty, the court, and international diplomats.

Highlights from the nineteenth century include:

- *Vase de la Renaissance*. In 1835 Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard was inspired to create this boldly modeled vase by stucco ornaments fabricated in the early sixteenth century for the gallery in the Château de Fontainebleau. The reliefs, made by Hyacinthe Régnier, are covered with gold or left in biscuit, without enamel or polychrome. Children, masks, winged sphinxes, serpents, garlands of fruit and flowers, and sculpted motifs decorate the surface of the vase. The iconography celebrates one of the specialties of Sèvres, the creation of vases.
- *Buire de Blois*. This 1885–87 vase represents the combined work of Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse, who was responsible for the basic shape, known as Buire de Blois, and Auguste Rodin, who executed the figures and ornamental reliefs. Carrier-Belleuse was artistic director at Sèvres since 1875. Rodin officially joined Sèvres in 1879



Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse (designer), Auguste Rodin and Thomas Jules Roger (sculptors), Suzanne Estelle Apoil (painter), *Buire de Blois* (Blois ewer), 1884/87. Glazed and decorated *pâte Lauth-Vogt* porcelain. Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 9151.



Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard (designer),
Hyacinthe Regnier (sculptor), *Vase de
la Renaissance* (*Renaissance Vase*),
1834–35. Hard-paste porcelain biscuit,
partially glazed and gilt. Manufacture et
Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 24963.

at the invitation of Carrier-Belleuse. The first example was shown at the celebrated exhibition that took place at the Union Centrale des Arts décoratifs in 1884. At this show, the manufactory exhibited many pieces of completely new shapes created by Carrier-Belleuse or under his direction.

- *Vase Saigon*. This hard-paste porcelain vase was designed by Auguste Rodin and Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse and produced in 1882–84. Rodin worked with the Sèvres Manufactory at the invitation of Carrier-Belleuse from 1879 through 1882. Rodin's Vase Saigon form is still in production today.
- *Ecrivoire égyptienne* (*Egyptian inkstand*). An Egyptian inkstand created in 1802 from soft-paste porcelain under the direction of Alexandre Brongniart.

Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

The third and fourth floor galleries present a selection of Sèvres porcelain produced in the past two centuries through to the present day. Beginning in the twentieth century, the manufactory began to collaborate with a new generation of creators for the shapes of vases and other pieces in modern styles ranging from Art Nouveau to avant-garde to more abstract works. The development of new materials, such as ceramic stoneware in the early 1900s and a “semi-matte” couverte—a phosphatic soft paste that allowed for a wide range of bright colors—popularized in the 1970s, introduced new types of production. Today, Sèvres continues its history of embracing contemporary art movements by seeking collaborations with celebrated sculptors, artists, and designers.

Agathon Léonard, *Le Jeu de l'écharpe* (*The Scarf Dance*) surtout, 1ère gr., 1900. Pâte nouvelle porcelain biscuit, stands with gilding. Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 17266 (stand: Paris, Mobilier national, inv. GML 6122.1); n°3 inv. MNC 17258 bis; n°6 MNC 16215; n°7 MNC 17262 bis; n°11 MNC 17266 bis; n°12 MNC 17282; n°13 MNC 16224.



Also on the gallery's fourth floor, visitors can view a video that explains the process of making porcelain sculpture at Sèvres. The film offers insight into the long process of making sculpture and the hundreds of artisans needed to create a single Sèvres masterpiece.

Highlights from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include:

- *Le Jeu de l'écharpe (The Scarf Dance)*. Sèvres launched itself into the twentieth century with this set, produced mainly in biscuit, which comprises fifteen graceful and sinuous statuettes that brilliantly reflect the spirit of Art Nouveau. The development of a new hard-paste porcelain allowed sculptor Agathon Léonard and the artisans of Sèvres to animate the classic neo-Greek aesthetic with the innovative rhythm and choreography of Loïe Fuller's famous serpentine dance. *The Scarf Dance* was hailed by critics and awarded a gold medal in 1900 in Paris at the Exposition Universelle.
- *Surtout Ruines d'Égypte (Ruins of Egypt Centerpiece)*. A table centerpiece designed by Anne and Patrick Poirier and realized in 2000 in biscuit and gold with a blue surface. This large-scale work was inspired by the Egyptian centerpiece of 1808, one of which is in the collection of the Musée national de céramique de Sèvres.
- *Nature Study*. A porcelain sculpture in versions produced in gold or biscuit, designed by Louise Bourgeois in 1998–99.
- *Golden Spirit*, designed in biscuit and gold by Yayoi Kusama in 2006.
- *Diane*. A colorful vase created by the prominent Italian designer Ettore Sottsass during the first of his two residences at the Sèvres Manufactory in 1994–96. Sottsass created fourteen vases, giving each of them the name of a woman: Esmeralda, Cleopatra, Diane, etc. All of them were exhibited in 1995 at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In 2005–06, Sottsass returned to the Manufactory to create five new pieces, all co-editions with the Mourmans Gallery in Maastricht which represents Sottsass), and the Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et les Arts Plastiques (CIRVA, International Center of Glass and Plastic Arts) in Marseille.



Ettore Sottsass, *Vase Diane*, 1994/96. Glazed and decorated pâte nouvelle porcelain. Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, 2011.D.3316.

Louise Bourgeois, *Nature Study*, 1998.
Glazed and gilt porcelain. Manufacture
et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, 2008.0.21.
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Exhibition Catalogue

Sèvres Extraordinaire! Sculpture from 1740 until Today is the first large-scale, English-language publication to explore the production of sculpture created by the famed French manufactory from its eighteenth-century origins to the present. Published by Bard Graduate Center and distributed by Yale University Press, this richly illustrated volume is primarily written by Tamara Préaud, who held the position of archivist at the Sèvres Manufactory for more than forty years and today is considered one of the most important historians of the manufactory. Additional texts were written by Guilhem Scherf, curator of sculpture at the Louvre Museum; Soazig Guilmin, head of the registrar's department and art historian at the Sèvres Museum; Judith Cernogora, curator of contemporary art at the Sèvres Museum; and Florence Rionnet, curator at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Quimper, Brittany. The volume is edited by Susan Weber and Charlotte Vignon.

Introduction

- “French Sculpture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Historical Context and Stylistic References”
by Guilhem Scherf
- “Sculpture in France from the Belle Époque to Pop Art”
by Florence Rionnet

Part I: General Considerations

- Chapter 1: “Materials and Production”
by Tamara Préaud and Soazig Guilmin
- Chapter 2: “Salaries and Prices”
by Tamara Préaud
- Chapter 3: “Imitations, Copies, Overmoldings, and Marks”
by Tamara Préaud

Part II: History

- Chapter 4: “The Eighteenth Century”
by Tamara Préaud
- Chapter 5: “The Directorship of Alexandre Brongniart”
by Tamara Préaud
- Chapter 6: “The Second Half of the Nineteenth Century, 1848–91”
by Tamara Préaud
- Chapter 7: “The Twentieth Century”
by Tamara Préaud
- Chapter 8: “Two Decades of Contemporary Art at Sèvres, 2000–20”
by Judith Cernogora
- Chapter 9: “Sales and Deliveries after 1941”
by Soazig Guilmin

Exhibition Location, Hours, and Admission

The Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Wednesday, 11 am–8 pm, and Thursday through Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. Free for BGC members and people with disabilities and their caregivers. \$6 for students with valid ID; \$12 for seniors 65 and older; \$15 all others. Advance ticket purchase recommended; visit **bgc.bard.edu**.

Events

Bard Graduate Center will offer two public events associated with the exhibition. The first is a conversation with American sculptor Arlene Shechet and exhibition cocurator, Charlotte Vignon, on September 10. The second is a presentation by ceramic artist Kristin McKirdy who will tell the story of her four-year artist residency at the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres, on October 8.. For tickets and more information please visit **bgc.bard.edu/events**.

Online Resources

Bard Graduate Center's Digital Humanities / Digital Exhibitions program created an online companion to the exhibition with object photography and a brief history of the Manufacture nationale de Sèvres. It can be found at **<https://exhibitions.bgc.bard.edu/sevres/>**. In fall 2024, Bard Graduate Center hosted leading scholars and curators who presented “Three Centuries of Innovation at Sèvres: A Research Symposia” which is available to watch at **[youtube.com/@bardgradcenter](https://www.youtube.com/@bardgradcenter)**.

About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center and its gallery have pioneered the study of objects as a means to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions. Since its founding in 1993, it has established a network of more than 500 alumni who work in leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture. **bgc.bard.edu**

About Sèvres, Manufacture et Musée nationaux

Founded in 1824 by Alexandre Brongniart and nestled on the outskirts of Paris, the Sèvres National Ceramics Museum houses an unparalleled collection of over 55,000 works, gathering together masterpieces from all periods and corners of the world, as well as contemporary creations and works produced on site at the Sèvres Manufactory.

Representing a new museum genre, focusing on technology, science, and education, this establishment was initially meant to present the most varied examples of ceramic creation and thereby serve as inspiration to the manufactory's artisans and artists, as well as researchers, manufacturers, and scientists.

Located just behind the museum, the manufactory constitutes a unique living laboratory, as well as an influential player in the art world, most notably in design and the decorative arts. It benefits from the excellence and expertise of its 120 ceramists, who are masters of some thirty specialized trades, as well as from the excellence of its materials produced in situ according to ancestral techniques, which today serve as exceptional tools for contemporary artistic expression.

Over time, the institution was progressively transformed into a museum of decorative arts, with works selected according to more historical and aesthetic criteria. Cradle of the nascent scientific discipline of "ceramology," the original collection for study and inspiration would be enriched by donations from numerous private collections, as art collectors and enthusiasts became involved in the museum's ongoing evolution.

Today, this one-of-a-kind public institution beautifully balances tradition and modernity. The museum and manufactory jointly provide an immersive and unique journey into the world of porcelain and ceramics, illustrating its development and artistic transformations.

In January 2025, the Sevres Manufactory, the National Ceramics Museum, the Adrien Dubouché Museum in Limoges, and the Mobilier National and its factories and workshops, merged to form a new public center established to promote craftsmanship and the decorative arts.


Exhibition Credits

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 **Front** detail from page 7: Agathon Léonard, *Le Jeu de l'écharpe*
(*The Scarf Dance*) surtout, 1ère gr., 1900. Pâte nouvelle porcelain
biscuit. Manufacture et Musée nationaux, Sèvres, MNC 17266