

Strasbourg, 19/08/2026

MUSÉES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG

Exhibition « At the Twilight of the Ancien Régime: Cardinal de Rohan and the Affair of the Diamond Necklace »

Galerie Heitz, Palais Rohan

From 20 November, 2026, to 15 March, 2027

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg and the National Archives Museum in Paris have joined forces to produce the first exhibition devoted to the Diamond Necklace Affair – a scandal that made headlines during the reign of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette and even continuing under the Revolution.

When it flared up on 15th August, 1785, the "Queen's Necklace" affair contained all the ingredients of the perfect scandal: the sensational arrest of Cardinal de Rohan at the court of Versailles, the involvement of Queen Marie-Antoinette's name in a sinister fraud, the loss of a masterpiece of exorbitantly expensive jewellery and a sensational list of schemers involved. Here for the first time is an exhibition devoted to this affair, tracing it back to its origins – a legal case with repercussions unfolding over the decade from 1783 to 1793. Moving beyond the superficial aspects of an episode that was as extravagant as it was scandalous, this Exhibition proposes an analysis of the scandal and the ways in which it was perceived, viewing it as a manifestation of the political and social upheavals at work in Louis XVI's France on the eve of the Revolution.

The *Affair of the Diamond Necklace* remains a fixture of mainstream popular culture today, thanks to a vast literary and cinematic legacy that has popularized the story through fiction, going from Alexandre Dumas to Edgar P. Jacobs, and from Marcel L'Herbier to Canal+. Drawing on archives of the investigation and the trial, as well as numerous contemporary accounts and personal collections of the protagonists, the exhibition sheds light on a case with complex ramifications. Lampoons and pamphlets, songs and artefacts, all reveal how the affair reverberated through the public sphere and shaped opinion. Through their portraits – including works by renowned artists - and the art objects that surrounded them, the exhibition also presents a colourful gallery of suspects, all representing the period and centred around the figure of Cardinal Louis René de Rohan.

Thus assembled, the elements of the affair help to clarify its context (the debt crisis, public agitation, parliamentary opposition, Queen Marie-Antoinette's alleged lifestyle, elections of the Estates General, non-revolutionary emigration) and to perceive signs of growing dissent (particularly regarding privileges, royal spending, and the subordination of justice to authority...) all of which crystallized in 1789.

To accompany the exhibition, and lasting until June 21, 2027, a special trail devoted to Cardinal de Rohan's life and career has been set up in the State Apartments of the Palais Rohan. It displays his prestigious collections in settings where the Prince-Bishop actually lived and illustrating the roles, lifestyle, and opulence of the High Clergy at the end of the Ancien Régime. Drawing extensively on the Strasbourg collections (ceramics, textiles, jewellery, books, and prints), supplemented by exceptional loans, it shows the decorative arts in the service of a

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political career and functioning as evidence of social prestige. Inviting us on a journey back in time to meet the famous prelate, this new approach offers a more subtle view of the Cardinal, opposed to the censorious portrait of a gullible dupe, an image that, in the eyes of posterity, has remained inextricably linked to the Affair of the Diamond Necklace.

An exhibition produced by the Strasbourg Decorative Arts Museum in co-production with the French National Archives; a subsequent phase will be presented in Paris from 7th April to 12th July, 2027, thereby circulating the collections of the Strasbourg City Museums, together with the image of the Palais Rohan and the figure of the Cardinal.

This exhibition has been organized with the special participation of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.



Curatorship:

François Bouquet, Curator of the Museum Collections and those of the Princely Residences of the French National Archives;

Sabine Meuleau, documentary research assistant at the French National Archives Museum;

Louis-Napoléon Panel, Curator of the Strasbourg Décorative Arts Museum