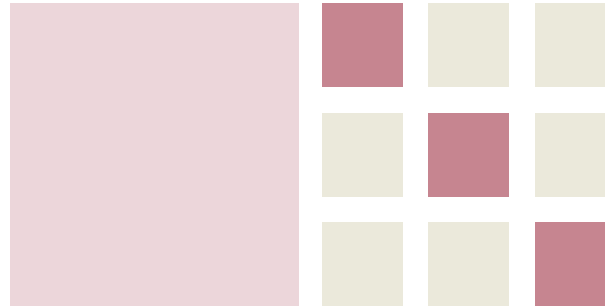


# LES BATELIERS

arts décoratifs



The Museum of Decorative Arts, which is currently undergoing restoration work, is of interest from two points of view. The first of these relates to its external and internal architecture, which spans the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the diversity of the collections it holds, bearing witness to styles and tastes from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The second area of interest, which is more essential, involves preserving and enhancing the value, year after year, of the atmosphere of an aristocratic residence from the Age of Enlightenment, thanks to the synergy between the works and the edifice.



## ARCHITECTURE

Built by the Belgian architect **Jean-Baptiste Chermant** (1704-1770) between 1751 and 1753 for Count **Alexandre-François de Groesbeek**, this building is structured around three wings forming an H, the central body of which incorporates part of the remains of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century refuge of Villers Abbey.

The 1751 reconstruction is remarkably in line with the three basic rules of architecture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: respect for privacy, the quest for a new functionality and interest in the outside world. In a nutshell: **the pleasure of living and the desire for pleasure**. In the south wing, the need for privacy is reflected in a succession of small apartments, boudoirs and other alcoves that are simple and comfortable, with corridors that avoid the need to pass through one room to enter another.

The ground floor, however, is just the opposite. J.-B. Chermant laid out the state rooms 'in a row' so that guests could admire **the richness of their hosts' interiors** as they moved around. The desire for privacy met with a response in the quest for functionality, i.e. everything that can make life easier, soothing and pleasant.

The creation of the dining room, which became a permanent feature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, meant that setting the table, in the literal meaning of the term, no longer had to be reserved for important occasions only, and made it easier to bring the family together. The appearance of toilet facilities and the increase in the number of cupboards and linen rooms were also among the innovations introduced by J.-B. Chermant. To this should be added **the admirable use of light**, thanks to a system of inner courtyards (wells of light) and the diffusion of light from zenithal lighting beneath the dome to the corridors through bay windows overlooking the hallway on the first storey and the stairwell.

Finally, the opening up to the outside world is clearly seen in the use of many large windows, but also in the plan of the building itself, with the wings extending towards the gardens. The hallway on the ground floor crosses right through the mansion, creating a channel of communication between the active world of the street and the enclosed universe of the gardens.



## INTERIOR DECORATION

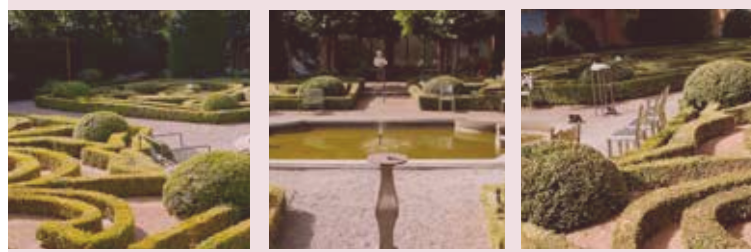
The Hôtel de Croix, which was acquired by the City of Namur in 1935, displays a whole range of different decorative techniques specific to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The surface of the wall is adorned with **moulded woodwork** bearing a simple and geometric design, sometimes enhanced by colours. This panelling surrounds **tapestries** depicting rural and wooded landscapes (hence their name: verdures or greenery), canvases painted with a romantic landscape (boudoir) or **floral and rockery motifs** and linen embroidered with flowers (bedroom) as well as embossed **gilded leather** panels, (antechamber of the grand drawing room and the room known as the leather room).



The walls above the doors and the overmantels are **adorned with paintings** depicting chivalrous scenes in the style of Jean-Antoine Watteau (dining room), mythological sketches or bouquets of flowers.

The marble fireplaces, most of which are the work of the sculptor **Vandenbase**, are decorated with patterns of shells and rockeries.

It is also worth mentioning a **Chinese cabinet** which again reflects the typical taste of this century for knowledge and a change of scenery, as well as a magnificent **period kitchen**. Finally, it would be impossible to ignore the **Rococo stuccowork** adorning the cymatia in the hallway and the dome, within which masks, flowers and rockeries are gracefully entwined, making this set one of the most complete and beautiful in Belgium.



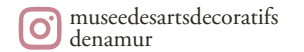
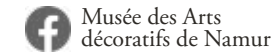
## GARDEN

Although Nature is omnipresent indoors, as the inspiration for art in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is at its most poetic in the garden. Four box beds surround a **water feature**, creating a symmetrical perspective further enhanced by the pavilion at the end of the park, thus recalling the French garden principles dear to Le Nôtre, the landscape architect who designed the gardens of the Palace of Versailles. Within this regularity, a hint of English-style Romanticism is provided by a **bicentennial tulip tree** that causes light to shimmer through its foliage, appearing to breathe life into the putti that adorn the low wall separating the garden from the courtyard.

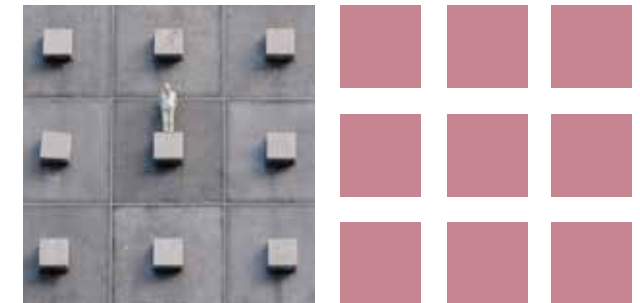
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The Museum of Decorative Arts is an institution managed by the City of Namur Culture Service.

BESIDES THE CITY'S COLLECTIONS, THE MUNICIPAL MUSEUMS ALSO EXHIBIT A CONSIDERABLE SHARE OF THE COLLECTIONS OF THE FOLLOWING ASSOCIATIONS:

SOCIÉTÉ ARCHÉOLOGIQUE DE NAMUR

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