

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Nicolas de Largillierre, *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, ca. 1715

Artist	Nicolas de Largillierre, French, 1656–1746
Title	<i>Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland</i>
Object Date	ca. 1715
Medium	Oil on canvas
Dimensions (Unframed)	57 1/2 x 45 1/2 in. (146.1 x 115.6 cm)
Inscription	Inscribed under the 1954 relining in an eighteenth-century hand: Peint par N. de Largillière
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 54-35

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Catalogue Entry

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The iconography associated with Augustus the Strong—born Friedrich August von Wettin (1670–1733), later Elector-Duke of Saxony, King of Poland, and Grand Duke of Lithuania—is more abundant and varied than that of most European rulers of his generation. That said, there exists no likeness of him that, in terms of the artist's powers of characterization and sheer technical brilliance, can equal the painted portrait that has been in the Nelson-Atkins Museum since 1954.¹ The work of the French painter Nicolas de Largillierre (Fig. 1),² one of the foremost portraitists during the reigns of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) and Louis XV (r. 1715–1774), it was executed in circumstances that may never be satisfactorily elucidated.

The subject was a member of the junior, Albertine branch of the Wettin dynasty, which since the early fifteenth century had ruled Saxony, one of four secular electorates of the Holy Roman Empire, ruled by the Habsburg monarchs. Born in Dresden on May 12, 1670, Friedrich August was the second of the two sons of the Lutheran Elector Johann Georg III (1647–1691) and his consort Anna Sophia von Oldenburg of Denmark and Norway (1647–1717). His humanist and military

education was typical of Germanic princes of the time. Much of his passion for the fine and decorative arts, architecture, music, dance, and literature, as well as his taste for opulent display and ornamentation, derived from his Grand Tour of Europe. Traveling under the name "Graf von Leisnig,"³ he made two sojourns in France during the summer months of 1687 and 1688, where he was dazzled by the Baroque pomp and splendor of the court of Louis XIV. Official presentations to the French monarch and the royal family were made by German princesses to whom he was related, both of whom were married to Bourbon princes.⁴ In 1693, Friedrich August wed the Protestant Christiane Eberhardine von Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1671–1717), by whom he had only one child, his son and namesake Friedrich August (1696–1763). Upon the death of the sitter's elder brother, Johann Georg IV (1668–1694), he became Elector Duke of Saxony.



Fig. 1. Nicolas de Largillierre, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas, 36 1/2 x 28 3/4 in. (92.7 x 73 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Patrons' Permanent Fund, 2006.26.1

Friedrich August's physical prowess earned him the epithets "the Strong" (*der Starke*), "the Iron Hand," and "the Saxon Hercules." He fought alongside the imperial troops of Austria against the Ottoman Turks in Hungary.

On the death of Jan III Sobieski in 1696, he positioned himself as one of the leading candidates for election to the throne of Poland.⁵ By means of bribery and converting to Roman Catholicism, he secured the prize in September of the following year with the support of Emperor Leopold I. His incursion into the Slavic country with a massive army consolidated his victory. Continuing to combat the Turks on the side of the Habsburgs, at the beginning of the Great Northern War he joined an anti-Swedish coalition that included the forces of his cousin Frederick IV of Denmark-Norway and those of Czar Peter the Great of Russia. Friedrich August employed his armies to invade the province of Livonia, but in 1702 they were soundly defeated by his implacable foe, Charles XII (1682–1718) of Sweden, an ally of the Turks, who put Stanisław Leszczyński on the throne of Poland in his place. After fighting with Austria in the Dutch Republic in the War of the Spanish Succession and further conflict with Sweden, Friedrich August regained the Polish crown in 1719 and remained head of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth for the rest of his life.

Voltaire extolled Augustus the Strong in his biography of the life of Charles XII: "His court was the most brilliant in Europe after that of Louis XIV. Never was a prince more lavish or munificent, and bestowed his favors with as much elegance."⁶ He engaged the Huguenot architect Raymond Le Plat (ca. 1664–1742) as his principal art advisor. The ruler's impact on the cultural history of Saxony and above all its capital city, Dresden, fueled by Saxon industry and profits from Polish agrarian taxes, cannot be overemphasized. In 1710, he founded the Meissen porcelain factory, and between 1711 and 1728 he had the Zwinger Palace designed and built under the direction of Matthaues Pöppelmann and Balthasar Permoser. Augustus the Strong's Japanese Palace was erected in 1715 to house his porcelain collections, and the Green Vault in the Residenzschloss was created as a repository for his unrivalled collection of *objets d'art* and jewels. He added to the electorate's collection of antiquities and purchased important paintings for Dresden's Picture Gallery, to which his successors added numerous masterpieces, among them Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (1512–1513).

Friedrich August died in Warsaw on February 18, 1733, and was entombed in the royal crypt of Wawel Cathedral in Cracow. He was succeeded by his son, Friedrich August II of Saxony and August III of Poland. Of the numerous offspring the latter had by his consort, Archduchess Maria Josepha of Austria, whom he wed in Vienna in 1719, the ninth child was Maria Josepha of

Saxony (1731–1767). She was betrothed to Louis XV's heir, the Dauphin Louis Ferdinand (1729–1765), and was the mother of the last three monarchs of the ill-fated Bourbon dynasty who, prior to and after the French Revolution, reigned in France as Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, and Charles X.

The Nelson-Atkins portrait shows the elector-king around the age of fifty. Represented as a warrior prince, he is outfitted resplendently in partly damascened steel armor decorated with heads of fantastical beasts in relief. The area of the groin is protected by a flap of chain mail, and the subject's skin is cushioned from the heavy metal by strips of burgundy-red velvet edged with gold cording. Friedrich August's taste for precious and semiprecious gems is reflected in some of the accoutrements complementing his attire. His neck is swathed in a white cambric stock edged with frilly lace, onto which is attached a ruby, and cuffs of more finely reticulated lace encircle his wrists. Around his torso and trailing down his back is a mantle of lynx fur lined with plush red velvet held in place by a cabochon brooch. Hanging at his left hip is an ornate parade sword, the gold grip of which is topped by a pommel in the shape of a dragon's head with fangs bared; it is studded with brilliants and a large ruby. Augustus wears the insignia of the fifteenth-century Danish royal and chivalric Order of the Elephant, an honor he and his brother received in 1686 as a diplomatic gift from the hands of their maternal uncle, King Christian V, at Gottorp Castle in Schleswig. It consists of a broad sash of blue moiré silk, to which is attached at the level of the subject's right hip the elephant pendentive ornament of white-enameled gold inset with a huge diamond.⁷

Above the subject's blue eyes, heavy jet-black eyebrows suggest the natural color of the graying or powdered locks of his long hair. The expression on his lips and the fleshiness of his face and hands bespeak the sensuous nature of a voluptuary. Indeed, even in his adolescence, Friedrich August was known to have an insatiable sexual appetite, and he fathered a prodigious number of children with women of different nationalities and social stations.⁸ Finally, his outstretched left hand, in a rhetorical gesture, points to a burning building from which issue masses of orange-red smoke dramatically obscuring the sky, in an allusion to his military exploits. The painter's handling of creamy pigments and transparent-colored glazes is spectacularly assured.

At one time, Largillierre's portrait of Augustus the Strong was erroneously believed to have been painted in 1697, the year the subject was first elected King of Poland,

when he was twenty-seven years old. However, the French artist clearly depicted a man between the ages of forty-five and fifty, and this fact alone rules out such a dating. It could not possibly have been done from life and must have been based on a portrait by another artist, either a painter or a printmaker (as explained below).



Fig. 2. Nicolas de Largillierre, *Crown Prince Frederick Augustus of Saxony*, ca. 1714–1715, oil on canvas, 55 7/16 x 42 1/8 in. (140.8 x 107 cm), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1968, 1819-5

The work was executed around 1715,⁹ during or slightly after Augustus's son and heir visited France as part of his Grand Tour (1711–19).¹⁰ Traveling incognito, like his father had before him, the younger Friedrich August was called the Graf von Lausitz (in French, the Comte de Lusace), and he was accompanied by his tutor and spiritual mentor Graf Józef Kos (1680–1717), Palatine of Polish Livonia, his governor Freiherr Heinrich Reinhard von Hagen (1658–1729), and the aforementioned Raymond Le Plat.¹¹ One of the three may have commissioned Largillierre to produce a pendant pair of portraits of Friedrich August and his son, including this one, but only the son's portrait could have been painted from life when the group was in Paris. The finest version

of the younger Friedrich August's portrait (Fig. 2)¹² was sold to the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, by the Heim Gallery in London during the firm's winter exhibition in early 1968.¹³ According to the dealer's catalogue, the painting had previously belonged to a "Princess von Hohenlohe" in Paris¹⁴ and to the Belgian attorney, politician, and collector Baron Albert d'Huart (1867–1937).¹⁵



Fig. 3. Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Elector Frederick Augustus of Saxony*, 1715, oil on canvas, 98 13/16 x 68 1/4 in. (251 x 173.4 cm), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemälde Galerie Alte Meister, Zwinger, Dresden, 760. © Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

In Largillierre's portrait of the heir apparent, which was painted from life in Paris in 1715, he too wears body armor and the insignia of the Order of the Elephant. The stylistic similarity of the two portraits, especially the rich handling of the armor, drapery, and accessories, suggests they were painted at virtually the same time. At the younger subject's side is a ceremonial sword, the hilt of which is set with diamonds, an item that could well be the sword that Louis XIV gave him after their visit at the Château de Marly on May 15, 1715.¹⁶ While in France, the

nineteen-year-old prince had commissioned from Largillierre's rival Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743) a sumptuous full-length portrait of himself standing in a landscape (Fig. 3). In it, he wears full body armor and the robes and the insignia of the Order of the Elephant.¹⁷ The large painting cost the prodigious sum of 4,000 *livres*.



Fig. 4. Guillaume Coustou I, *Bust of Augustus the Strong*, ca. 1705–1715, white marble, 25 3/16 x 16 1/8 x 10 13/16 in. (64 x 41 x 27.5 cm), Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Skulpturensammlung, Albertinum, Dresden, H4 001 / 005. © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden / Art Resource, NY

Another notable portrait of Augustus the Strong is the bust-length marble (Fig. 4) by the French sculptor Guillaume Coustou I (1677–1746), the artist of the *Chevaux de Marly* (1745; Cour Marly, Musée du Louvre, Paris).¹⁸ The dating of the bust has also caused scholars to speculate on its creation, including Paul Vitry and François Souchal,¹⁹ both of whom have assigned it to the year 1704, speculating that the elector-king made a second visit to Paris in that year, although there is no documentary proof of such a trip. Coustou may have based the sculpture on another portrait, such as a rather

crude engraving (Fig. 5) published around 1710 in the *Theatrum Europaeum* (a history of Europe's German-speaking lands). Coustou is not known to have ever gone to Saxony or Poland, so it is likely that he carved the bust in Paris at the same time that the Kansas City and Melbourne portraits were commissioned from and executed by Largillierre. Around 1718, the German sculptor Paul Heermann (1673–1732) carved from life another splendid bust of the elder Friedrich August wearing armor (Fig. 6). In that work, the sitter's head bears a striking resemblance to that of the elector-king as he was depicted by Largillierre in the work under discussion.



Fig. 5. German School, *Portrait of Friedrich August I, Elector Duke of Saxony and King of Poland*, ca. 1710, engraving on paper with stippling, 5 11/16 x 3 7/16 in. (14.5 x 8.7 cm) (cropped), published in *Theatrum Europaeum*, 1710, British Museum, London, Bb,14.755



Fig. 6. Paul Heermann, *Bust of Augustus the Strong*, before 1718, white marble on a dark gray marble socle, 29 1/8 x 26 3/16 x 13 3/16 in. (74 x 66.5 x 33.5 cm), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Skulpturensammlung, Albertinum, Dresden, H4 002 / 006. © Skulpturensammlung, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

An early owner of the Kansas City portrait was the Hungarian Count Sámuel Festetics de Tolna (1806–1862), whose wife, Wanda Izabella Klara Raczyńska (1819–1845), was the daughter of the Polish diplomat, politician, and art historian Count Atanazy Raczyński (1788–1874) and his wife, Princess Anna Elżbieta Radziwiłł (1785–1879). The Raczyńskis and the Radziwiłłs had many ties to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which the subject of the Nelson-Atkins portrait by Largillierre ruled until his death. The painting was purchased from Festetics by Anselm Salomon von Rothschild (1803–1874) of the family's Vienna branch and passed through the family.²⁰



Fig. 7. Nicolas de Largillierre, *Assemblage of Hands Copied from Various Finished Portraits*, ca. 1714, oil on canvas, 25 9/16 x 20 7/16 in. (65 x 52 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris (on deposit from the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Algiers), DL 1970.11. Photo: Mathieu Rabeau. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY



Fig. 8. Louis de Silvestre, *Portrait of Friedrich August von Wettin, called August I, Elector of Saxony and August II, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania on a Battlefield*, after 1715, oil on canvas, 57 1/8 x 43 11/16 in. (145 x 111 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, NMGh 1380. © CC BY-SA 4.0

There are at least three full or partial copies of the Nelson-Atkins painting: one at the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland;²¹ another that sold through Galerie Fischer in Lucerne, Switzerland, June 14, 1970, lot 274 (formerly attributed to Hyacinthe Rigaud); and a bust-length version formerly in the collection of Count Jakub Ksawery Aleksander Potocki (1863–1934), whose current location is unknown.²² Largillierre also copied Friedrich August’s right hand in *Assemblage of Hands* (Fig. 7), a painting he may have executed in order to instruct studio assistants and outside collaborators.²³ Finally, Louis de Silvestre (1675–1760) based, almost point for point, one of his portraits of Augustus the Strong (Fig. 8) on Largillierre’s masterpiece in Kansas City.²⁴

Joseph Baillio
November 2021

Notes

1. According to documents in the Nelson-Atkins curatorial files, the original back of the canvas bore the inscription “Peint par N. de Largillière,” which would not be the artist’s signature found on the back of so many of his works, because his patronym is misspelled. He invariably signed his name as “Largillierre” (with two Rs) on his works and in archival documents. For example, Largillierre’s portrait of *François Armand de Gontaut, Duc de Biron* (1714; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) is inscribed “Peint par N. de Largillierre / 1714” on the verso. See Myra Nan Rosenfeld, *Largillierre and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, exh. cat. (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 256–57. Unfortunately, no photographs of the inscription were apparently taken before the Nelson-Atkins canvas was lined in 1954. It is also possible that someone mis-transcribed the artist’s name.
2. The most informative early biography of Nicolas de Largillierre is to be found in Antoine Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville, *Supplément à l’Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, pt. 3 (Paris: chez de Bure l’ainé, 1752), 246–53.

3. Augustus the Strong may have used a pseudonym so that he could avoid diplomatic duties while on his Grand Tour. See Tony Sharp, *Pleasure and Ambition: The Life, Loves and Wars of Augustus the Strong* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 9, 11.
4. See Béatrix Saule's informative discussions of Friedrich August's two sojourns in France in 1687 and 1688: "Trois princes de Saxe à la cour de Louis XIV," in Dirk Syndram and Béatrix Saule, eds., *Splendeurs de la cour de Saxe: Dresde à Versailles*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006), 51–52; and "Trois princes de Saxe à la cour de Versailles," in the Acts of the Colloquium organised by the Académie des Sciences Morales, des Lettres, et des Arts de Versailles et d'Île-de-France, ed. Bruno Chauffert-Yvart, *Lumières européennes: Versailles et la Saxe XVIIe-XXe siècles* (Versailles: Académie des sciences morales, des lettres, et des arts de Versailles et d'Île-de-France, 2007), 44–47.
5. The other contenders were Sobieski's son Jakub Ludwik Henryk (1667–1737); the French candidate, François Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Conti (1664–1709), who was backed by Louis XIV; the Bavarian claimant, Maximilian Emanuel von Wittelsbach of Bavaria (1662–1726); and the Papal pretender, Livio Odeschalchi, Duca di Bracciano (1652–1713).
6. "Frédéric Auguste, Électeur de Saxe . . . étoit un prince moins connu encore, par sa force de corps incroyable que par sa bravoure & la galanterie de son esprit. Sa cour étoit la plus brillante de l'Europe, après celle de Louis XIV. [J]amais prince ne fut plus généreux, ne donna plus, & n'accompagna ses dons de tant de grâce." (Frederick Augustus, Elector of Saxony . . . was a prince even less known for his incredible physical strength than for his bravery and the gallantry of his spirit.) Voltaire, *L'Histoire de Charles XIII, Roi de Suède* (Basel: Chez Christophe Revis, 1731), 34.
7. The chivalric order was reinstated and modified by Christian V in 1693, who based the ceremonials on those of the French royal Order of the Holy Spirit (Ordre du Saint-Esprit).
8. Numbering as many as several hundred (a number both implausible and impossible to prove), the best known of them was the son of his official Swedish and German mistress, Countess Aurora von Königsmark (1662–1728). In adulthood, the Maréchal Comte Maurice de Saxe (1696–1750), a mercenary in the employ of Louis XV, bore a striking resemblance to his father. Among the descendants of the Maréchal Comte Maurice de Saxe is the celebrated French novelist, Aurore Dupin de Francueil, known by her pseudonym George Sand (1804–1876).
9. This dating was confirmed by the Largillierre specialist Dominique Brême, Director of the Musée du Domaine de Sceaux, who is in the process of completing the catalogue raisonné of the artist's works begun by the late Georges de Lastic.
10. He secretly converted to Roman Catholicism in Bologna in 1712 so that he could inherit the crown of Poland.
11. On January 7, 1715, Le Plat engaged the services of Louis de Silvestre (1675–1760), a student of Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) and Bon Boullogne (1649–1717), as First Painter to Augustus the Strong. De Silvestre did not depart Paris for Dresden before the late spring of 1716. He remained there for over thirty years and only returned to Paris in 1748. See Georges Servières, "Artistes Français à la Cour de Saxe au XIIIeme Siecle," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1911): 333–34, 340.
12. Another autograph example in a private New York collection is reproduced by Dominique Brême in "Largillierre: Un géant retrouvé," *Dossier de l'Art*, no. 50, (September 1998): 55, fig. 57. In that work, the hilt of the sword is not studded with diamonds.
13. In 1966–67, it was lent from a private collection to an exhibition held at the Schloss Charlottenburg in Berlin, *Höfische Bildnisse des Spätbarock*, and was catalogued as no. 50. See Helmut Börsch-Supan, *Höfische Bildnisse Des Spätbarock*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Verwaltung der Staatlichen Schlösser und Gärten, 1966).
14. See *French Paintings and Sculptures of the 18th Century: Winter Exhibition*, exh. cat. (London: Heim Gallery, 1968), 3. One cannot state categorically that the "Princess von Hohenlohe" mentioned in the Heim Gallery publication was the notorious, double-dealing spy for the Nazi regime, the Jewish-born Prinzessin von (or zu) Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingsfürst, née Stephany Richter (1891–1972), but that is a distinct possibility. At

various times before, during, and after World War II this adventuress—the former lover of both an Austrian Archduke and Grand Duke of Tuscany (by whom she had a son) and of the British newspaper magnate Lord Rothermere—was kept under surveillance by the Allies and had to be deported from France, Great Britain, and the United States. If she directly or indirectly sold Largillier's portrait of the Crown Prince of Saxony to the Baron d'Huart, the transaction probably occurred when she was living on the avenue George V in Paris in the 1920s.

15. *M. le Baron d'H . . .* (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, December 7, 1938), lot 38, as *Portrait d'homme*.
16. According to the memoirist Saint-Simon, just prior to their departure from France, the Saxon prince, Kos, and von Hagen were sent sumptuous presents by Louis XIV, who was to die only three months later: "Le comte de Lusace, c'est-à-dire le prince électeur de Saxe, maintenant électeur et roi de Pologne, après son père, vint prendre congé du roi dans son cabinet à Marly, qui lui fit beaucoup d'honnêtetés, et au palatin de Livonie, qui était le surintendant de sa conduite et de son voyage, et qui s'était acquis par la sienne ici et partout, beaucoup de réputation. Le roi envoya au comte de Lusace une épée de diamants de 40 000 écus, au palatin de Livonie son portrait enrichi de fort beaux diamants, et le même présent, mais moindre en valeur, au baron Haagen, gouverneur du prince" (The Comte de Lusace, which is to say the Electoral Prince of Saxony, now Elector and King of Poland, following his father, came to take leave of the king in the study of the Château de Marly; he extended many courtesies to him and to the Palatine of Livonia, who was supervising the prince's activities during the voyage and who distinguished himself while he was here and everywhere else and had acquired by his own conduct a great reputation. The king sent to the Comte de Lusace a sword set with diamonds worth 40,000 écus, to the Palatine of Livonia a portrait of himself embellished with very beautiful diamonds, and the same present of a lesser value to Baron von Hagen, the prince's governor). Louis de Rouvroy, Duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, ed. Pierre-Adolphe Chéruel (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1878), 7:322.
17. In Balechou's engraving of Rigaud's portrait of the electoral prince, the decorations of the Order of

the Elephant were replaced by those of the Polish Order of the White Eagle, founded by Augustus the Strong in 1705.

18. See the catalogue entry by Astrid Nielsen in Syndram and Saule, *Splendeurs de la cour de Saxe*, 157, no. 15. Antoine Coysevox's pupil François Coudray (1678–1727) produced medallion portraits in marble and stucco of Augustus the Strong (Staatsbibliothek, Leipzig, and Schloss Moritzburg); like his compatriot Guillaume Hulot, Guillaume Coustou's brother-in-law, Coudray, also traveled to Germany, in his case Berlin. In 1714 or 1715, before his departure from Paris, Coudray sculpted in marble a handsome bust of Friedrich August's son and heir wearing armor (Staatlichen Kunstsammlung, Dresden, inv. no. H4 002/007); see Syndram and Saule, *Splendeurs de la cour de Saxe*, 157, no. 16.
19. According to Souchal: "*Auguste II était un homme d'une vigoureuse laideur que l'artiste [Coustou] n'a certes pas esquivée mais qu'il a su dépasser en prêtant à ce visage ingrat une arrogance et un dédain qui ne manquent pas de grandeur. Les grosses lèvres qui trahissent la sensualité du personnage font une moue plus méprisante que gourmande. Coustou n'a pas davantage oublié le strabisme dont était affligé son royal modèle, mais en dirigeant le regard vers le haut, il l'atténue tout en accentuant par cet artifice l'air d'arrogance et de dureté implacable*" (August II was a tremendously ugly man, a fact which the artist certainly did not evade but which he managed to alleviate by conferring on an unattractive face an arrogance and disdain that are not without grandeur. The thick lips betraying the individual's sensuality suggest an ill temper that is more contemptuous than rapacious. Nor did Coustou overlook the strabismus [wandering eye] afflicting his royal subject's eyes by deceptively directing his gaze upwards, thus distracting from it while accentuating an air of haughtiness and an unyielding brutishness). François Souchal, *Les Frères Coustou, Nicolas (1658–1733)—Guillaume (1677–1746), et l'évolution de la sculpture française du Dôme des Invalides aux Chevaux de Marly* (Paris: E. de Boccard 1980), 179.
20. I am grateful to MacKenzie Mallon, Specialist, Provenance, at the Nelson-Atkins for sharing this insight. In 1938, the painting was confiscated from the Rothschilds by Nazi forces, but it was

restituted to Clarice Adelaide von Rothschild, New York, on September 24, 1947. See provenance below.

21. Rosenfeld suggests that this may be the small copy listed in the posthumous inventory of Largillier's possessions drawn up in 1746: "Item un autre tableau représentant l'électeur de Saxe Roy de Pologne estimé cinquante livres cy" (In addition, another painting representing the elector of Saxony, King of Poland estimated fifty livres). See Rosenfeld, *Largillier and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait*, 396, no. 24. She also cites Hal N. Opperman as attributing the painting to Largillier's disciple, Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755). Today, the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts has no longer attributed the painting to Oudry but given it to the artist.
22. Bequeathed by him to the Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw, inv. no. 62644; stolen by the Nazi occupation forces during World War II and never recovered. See note 2 within the accompanying provenance entry.
23. See *Exposition N. de Largillier*, exh. cat. (Paris: Palais des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Petit Palais, 1928), no. 65; Jean de Cayeux, "Rigaud et Largillier, peintres de mains," *Etudes d'Art* (Musée National des Beaux-Arts d'Alger) 6 (1951): 49; "Eighteenth Century Acquisitions Recently added to the Nelson Gallery Collection," *Bulletin* (Nelson Gallery and Atkins Museum) 1, no. 1 (January 1956): 83; and Dominique Brême and Nicolas Sainte Fare Garnot, *Nicolas de Largillière, 1656–1746*, exh. cat. (Paris: Phileas Fogg, 2003), 70, no. 4.
24. See note 10.

Artist's Biography

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MLA:

Baillio, Joseph. "Nicolas de Largillier, *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, ca. 1715," artist's biography. *French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, edited by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023. doi: 10.37764/78973.5.320.6679.

When Nicolas de Largillier was three years old, his father Antoine de Largillier, a hatmaker and haberdasher, left the Pont Notre-Dame in Paris with his family and household and settled in the economically, culturally, and artistically thriving Flemish city of Antwerp, an outpost of the Austrian Empire. In 1665, once the boy had shown promise as a draftsman and painter, he was sent to London. By 1668, he had returned to Antwerp and was enrolled in the Guild of St. Luke as a pupil of Antoni Goubau (Flemish, 1616–1698), a painter of landscapes and low-life genre pictures known as *bambocciate*. In 1675, having completed an apprenticeship, he made a second trip to London where he was employed in the studios of Peter Lely (1618–1680) and Antonio Verrio (Italian, ca. 1639–1707), painters to the restored Stuart king, Charles II.

Settling in Paris in 1679, Largillier specialized in portraiture in the "grand manner" style exemplified in the works of Anthony Van Dyck (Flemish, 1599–1641), Lely, and their followers and imitators. He soon became acquainted with Charles Le Brun (French, 1619–1690), then First Painter to Louis XIV and Director of the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture (founded in 1648). Largillier was elected to full membership in the Académie in 1686 upon presentation of his magnificent diploma picture: a full-length portrait of Le Brun seated in his studio before an easel (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Largillier's earlier works reveal the influence of the Anglo-Flemish manner, in which he had been trained, but he quickly developed an even lusher, more sophisticated style described by Hal Opperman as "at once decorative and lordly."¹ He made yet another visit to London, and in 1685, he painted a superb double portrait, *A Young Man with His Tutor* (Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), and several spectacular still lifes. In 1699 and 1704, he exhibited at the Salon of the Académie more than forty individual and group portraits, and pictures with religious subjects.

Largillier's clientele consisted of international royalty and aristocracy, the prelature, high-ranking military officers, members of the wealthiest segment of the

middle class, foreign dignitaries, literary personalities, artists, and artisans. The exact identity of the woman who posed for *La Belle Strasbourgeoise* (1703),² perhaps his most celebrated work, is unknown. His large, *Ex-voto* group portrait of the members of Paris's governing body in the presence of St. Geneviève (1696; Église de Saint Étienne du Mont, Paris), with its high drama, celestial light, and vivid coloring, is an impressive tour de force of Baroque painting. Among his innumerable masterpieces, which are being catalogued by Dominique Brême, are his portrayals of the sculptor *Nicolas Coustou* (ca. 1713; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin); the hauntingly beautiful British nun living in Paris, *Elizabeth Throckmorton, Canoness of the Order of the Dames Augustines Anglaises* (1729; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC); and the goldsmith *Thomas Germain and his Wife* (Anne-Denise Gauchelet) (1736; Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon).

Largillierre, whose paintings helped consolidate the transition from the Baroque to the Rococo, ultimately became a patriarchal figure in the Académie, where he served as Professor, Chancellor, Rector, and Director of the institution. His large output also includes landscapes, sacred and profane history pictures, and still lifes, works in which he maintained an exceptionally high standard of execution. With his Flemish cultural background, he championed the theories of Roger de Piles (1636–1713), which promoted color over design, and the study of nature over abstract idealization. This approach, which he shared with his wife's uncle, the history painter Charles de La Fosse (1636–1716), is reflected in his mature portraiture. His handling of impasto became richer and denser, the brushwork more tactile, the color contrasts more daring, and the drapery rhythms ever more elaborate and profuse. This was precisely the technique the artist employed when the time came to paint the Nelson-Atkins likeness of *Friedrich August of Saxony*.

Joseph Baillio
November 2021

Notes

1. Hal N. Opperman, "Nicolas de Largillierre," in *The Dictionary of Art* (London, 1996), 13:788.
2. Autograph versions are known: one in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg, and another in the collection of the late Paul-Louis Weiller.

Technical Entry

Technical entry forthcoming.

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:

MacKenzie Mallon, with Glynnis Stevenson, "Nicolas de Largillierre, *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, ca. 1715," documentation in *French Paintings, 1600–1945: The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.320.4033>.

MLA:

Mallon, MacKenzie, with Glynnis Stevenson. "Nicolas de Largillierre, *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, ca. 1715," documentation. *French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, edited by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2023. doi: 10.37764/78973.5.320.4033.

Provenance

Possibly commissioned from the artist by the sitter's son, Crown Prince Frederick Augustus of Saxony (1696–1763), Paris, ca. 1715 [1];

Count Sámuel Festetics de Tolna (1806–1862), Vienna, by 1859;

Purchased from Festetics by Anselm Salomon von Rothschild (1803–1874), Theresianumgasse, Vienna, as *Portrait August des Starken, Königs von Polen*, before March 6, 1859–1874 [2];

By descent to his son, Nathaniel Mayer von Rothschild (1836–1905), Theresianumgasse, Vienna, July 27, 1874–1905 [3];

By descent to Nathaniel's nephew, Alphonse Mayer von Rothschild (1878–1942), and his wife, Clarice Adelaide von Rothschild (née Sebag-Montefiore, 1894–1967), Theresianumgasse, Vienna, June 16, 1905–1938;

Confiscated from the Rothschilds by German National Socialist (Nazi) forces, 1938–May 1945 [4];

Recovered by Allied forces, May 1945–May 16, 1946 [5];

Returned by Allied forces to Austria, May 16, 1946–September 24, 1947;

Restituted by Austria to Clarice Adelaide von Rothschild, New York, September 24, 1947–February 9, 1954 [6];

Purchased from Rothschild by Rosenberg and Stibel, New York, no. 2656, February 9–June 15, 1954 [7];

Purchased from Rosenberg and Stibel by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1954.

Notes

[1] It is possible this portrait was commissioned during Crown Prince Friedrich August's sojourn in Paris in 1714, either by the Crown Prince himself or a member of his party, as was a portrait of the Crown Prince by the artist Hyacinthe Rigaud, which is today in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. The Rigaud painting was sent directly to the Dresden court by the artist after its completion. However, since neither the Nelson-Atkins portrait, nor its two possible pendant portraits by Largillierre of the Crown Prince, were ever part of the Saxon royal collection, it may have been the intent for them to remain in France. See correspondence between Carina Merseburger, Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin (Daphne-Projekt), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, and MacKenzie Mallon, Specialist, Provenance, May 3, 2022, NAMA curatorial files.

[2] In Nathaniel von Rothschild, *Notizen über Einige Meiner Kunstgegenstände* (n.p.: 1903), p. 30, no. 51, this painting is described as having been acquired at the "Versteigerung Festetics" [sic] (Festetics auction). It had been planned for offer at *Der auserlesenen Gemälde-Sammlung alter Meister der italienischen, niederländischen und altdeutschen Schule, nebst einer grossen Sammlung von Original-handzeichnungen der berühmtesten Meister, Kupferstiche, (besonders Portraite) und Lithgraphien des Herrn Samuel Grafen von Festetics* [sic], Artaria und Altmann, Vienna, March 7 and April 11, 1859, lot 59, as *Porträt August des Starken, Königs von Polen*. The March 7 date was postponed at the last minute, and the catalogue was reprinted with new sale dates—April 11 and May 2, 1859—and with seven fewer lots. Lot 59 was one of these missing lots in the second catalogue printing because it had already been purchased privately by Rothschild. According to Johann Barkoczy (Sámuel von Festetics de Tolna's brother-in-law and husband of his sister Antonia) in a letter to Atanazy Raczyński (Sámuel von Festetics' father-in-law), March 6, 1859, "Das Bild von Rigaud (Portrait des Gr. Zinsendorf) ist

bereits vor längerer Zeit von Rothschild erstanden worden, samt einem großen Teniers (Atelier) und Nr 59 Largilliere" (The painting by Rigaud [Portrait of Gr. Zinsendorf] was already acquired a long time ago by Rothschild, along with a large Teniers [Studio] and Nr. 59 Largillierre). This correspondence is transcribed in Kamila Kłudkiewicz, ed., *Libri Veritatis Atanazego Raczyńskiego/von Athanasius Raczyński. Supplement* (Poznań: Uniwersytet Im. Adama Mickiewicza W Poznaniu, 2019), 495–96.

The April 11 and May 2 Festetics sales were both eventually cancelled (as announced in "Licitations-Widerruf," *Wiener Zeitung* (April 10, 1859): 1623), when the majority of the remaining lots were purchased ahead of time by dealer Georg Plach, who in turn sold a large number of the paintings to Viennese collector F. J. Gsell. Theodor von Frimmel, in "Mittheilungen über die Gemäldesammlungen von Alt-Wien," *Berichte und Mittheilungen des Alterthums-Vereines zu Wien* 27 (1891): 9, and *Lexicon der Wiener Gemäldesammlungen* (Munich: George Müller Verlag, 1913), 1:368, describes annotations that supposedly appeared in two separate copies of the Festetics sale catalogue, one belonging to Plach, the other to collector Albert Figdor: "Plach schreibt dazu 'fehlt.' Im zweiten Exemplar bei Dr. Figdor steht 'Rothschild,' was, wie die meisten Eintragungen jenes Exemplars, unrichtig ist. Denn das hier gemeinte Bild kam an den Grafen Edmund Zichy, nach dessen Tode die Erben es nach Ungarn gebracht haben" (Plach writes that it is missing. In the second copy Dr. Figdor writes 'Rothschild,' which like most of the entries in that copy, is incorrect. Because the picture mentioned here came to Count Edmund Zichy, after whose death his heirs brought it to Hungary).

Although von Frimmel writes that Figdor's annotation was incorrect, it was von Frimmel himself who was in error, having confused the Nelson-Atkins painting with a similar portrait in the Edmund Zichy collection, which is today in the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Both paintings were attributed to Largillierre and depict the same sitter, but they differ in size and composition. The Nelson-Atkins portrait was in the Festetics collection, but there is no evidence it was ever owned by Plach or Gsell. Contrastingly, the Budapest portrait was not in the Festetics collection but was offered for sale by Plach two years later (*Tableaux anciens composant la belle collection de M. P., de Vienne*, Hotel des Commissaires-Priseurs, Paris, April 20, 1861, lot 51) and appeared in Gsell's posthumous sale in 1872, which was conducted by Plach (*Versteigerung der Grossen Gallerie und der übrigen Kunst-Sammlungen des am 20. September 1871*

verstorbenen Herrn F. J. Gsell, Georg Plach, Sälen des Künstlerhauses, Vienna, March 14, 1872, no. 63). See correspondence between MacKenzie Mallon, Specialist, Provenance, and Julia Tatrai, Head of Department of Old Master Paintings, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, September–December 2020, NAMA curatorial files.

Plach's purchase of a large number of paintings from the Festetics sales has occasionally led to the assumption that he bought all of the Festetics paintings, but this is not the case. For example, Fritz Lugt wrote it was probable Plach acquired the entire collection; see Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins et d'Estampes* (Amsterdam: Vereenigde Drukkerijen, 1921), p. 163, no. L.926. If Plach was involved in the purchase of the Nelson-Atkins portrait from the Festetics collection, it could have been as an agent on behalf of the Rothschild family, rather than as an outright purchaser. Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections*, 208, no. L.1188, describes Plach as instrumental to the enrichment of the three Rothschild brothers' collections. However, Plach's annotation in his copy of the 1859 Festetics sale catalogue (as described by von Frimmel in 1891, the location of which is today unknown) that this painting is "missing" tends to suggest Plach was not involved in its purchase. With thanks to Dr. Orsolya Bubryák, Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest, for her help sorting out the different versions of the Festetics sale catalogue, and to M. Piotr Michałowski, Curator, Galeria Sztuki Europejskiej, Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, for informing us of the Barkoczy-Raczyński correspondence.

[3] The painting is definitively identified in the following Rothschild inventories: Nathaniel von Rothschild, *Notizen*, 30, as *Porträt August des Starken*; "Inventar über die in den Nathaniel Freiherr von Rothschild'schen Nachlaß gehörigen, in dem in Wien, IV. Bezirk, Theresianumgasse Nr. 14 befindlichen Kunstgegenstände und Einrichtungsstücke," 1906, Rothschild Archive, London, 000/793, no. 50, as *Portrait des Königs August des Starken*; and "Palais Inventar," 1934, Rothschild Archive, London, 000/793, no. 313/50, as *Portrait des Königs August des Starken*.

[4] The collections of Alphonse and Clarice von Rothschild were confiscated by the Gestapo soon after the German annexation of Austria in March 1938. This painting was taken to the Nazi depot for confiscated art objects at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Neue Burg, Vienna, in 1939, where it was inventoried as number AR 863, "König Friedrich IV v. Dänemark." See *Katalog beschlagnahmter Sammlungen, insbesondere der*

Rothschild-Sammlungen in Wien, Verlags-Nr. 4938, Staatsdruckerei Wien, 1939, Privataarchiv, reproduced in Sophie Lille, *Was einmal war: Handbuch der enteigneten Kunstsammlungen Wiens* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2003), 1031. It was intended for Hitler's planned Führermuseum in Linz and included in inventories of Linz objects dated October 20, 1939, and July 31, 1940 (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 260, Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points: Munich, Restitution Research Records, Linz Museum: Consolidated Interrogation Report No. 4, Catalog ID 3725274). The painting was transferred to the Nazi repository at the Kremsmünster Abbey, where it was assigned inventory number K976. From there it was moved to the Führerbau in Munich on December 16, 1943, and assigned inventory number 3219 (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 260, Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points: Munich, Restitution Research Records, Reger, Hans: Transport Correspondence and Lists, Catalog ID 3725274). It was subsequently transferred from the Führerbau to the Nazi repository in a salt mine at Alt Aussee, Austria, on August 24, 1944 (Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany, B323/6). Copies of Allied and German documents describing the painting's wartime movements are in the NAMA curatorial files. With thanks to Mag. Leonhard Weidinger, Provenance Researcher, Commission for Provenance Research of the Federal Chancellery, Vienna, for his assistance.

[5] Following the discovery of the art objects in the Alt Aussee salt mine in May 1945, the officers of the U.S. Army's Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section (the "Monuments Men") worked to catalog every looted object and return it to its rightful owner. This painting was sent to the Munich Central Collecting Point on July 17, 1945, where it was assigned numbers Aussee 3237 and Mun. 4588 (Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Germany, B323/656, MCCP Restitution Card File). Upon its transfer to the US Allied Commission of Austria on May 16, 1946, it returned to Kremsmünster from where it was restituted to the Rothschild family (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 260, Records of the Reparations and Restitutions Branch of the USACA Section, General Administrative Records, Stift Kremsmünster, R&R 41, Catalog ID 1561451).

[6] Bundesdenkmalamt Archives, Vienna, Restitution Materials, Sammlung Alphonse Rothschild, Kartons 53/1 and 53/3. With thanks to Anneliese Schallmeiner, Commission for Provenance Research at the Bundesdenkmalamt, for providing copies of the restitution documents to the Nelson-Atkins; see NAMA

curatorial files. Also Rothschild Archive, London, 000/2135/12.

[7] MS.065, Rosenberg and Stiebel archive, Frick Art Reference Library, New York, Photographs—Card Files and Sales and Inventory Records—Purchases and Sales, 1952–1955, copies in NAMA curatorial files. Rosenberg and Stiebel paid a small commission to Eric de Goldschmidt-Rothschild at the time of the painting's sale to the Nelson-Atkins. His role in the transaction is currently unclear; research is ongoing.

Related Works

Nicolas de Largillierre, *Crown Prince Frederick Augustus of Saxony*, 1714 or 1715, oil on canvas, 55 7/16 x 42 1/8 in. (140.8 x 107.0 cm), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, no. 1819-5.

Nicolas de Largillierre, *Portrait of Frederick Augustus II of Saxony, Later Augustus III, King of Poland*, 1714 or 1715, oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 38 1/2 in. (130 x 98 cm), private collection; sold at *Important Old Master Pictures*, Christie, Manson, and Woods, London, April 10, 1987, lot 53.

Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), *Prince Elector Friedrich August of Saxony*, 1714, oil on canvas, 98 13/16 x 68 1/4 in. (251 x 173.4 cm), Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, no. 760.

Known Copies

Nicolas de Largillierre, *Study of Hands*, ca. 1715, oil on canvas, 25 9/16 x 20 1/2 in. (65 x 52 cm), on deposit at the musée de Louvre, Paris, from the Musée national des beaux-arts, Algiers, People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), after Nicolas de Largillierre, *Portrait of Augustus II, King of Poland*, ca. 1714–1715, oil on canvas, 31 5/8 x 25 in. (80.3 x 63.5 cm), Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, no. 725.

Louis de Silvestre (1675–1760), after Nicolas de Largillierre, *August II the Strong, 1670–1733, elector of Saxony, king of Poland*, 1718, oil on canvas, 57 1/16 x 43 11/16 in. (145 x 111 cm), Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, no. NMGrh 1280.

Largillierre workshop copy, formerly attributed to Hyacinthe Rigaud, after Nicolas de Largillierre, *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*, n.d., 55 1/8 x 44/12 in. (140 x 113 cm), location unknown,

illustrated in advertisement, *Connaissance des Arts* (June 1970): 28.

Louis de Silvestre (1675–1760), after Nicolas de Largillierre, *Portrait of August II of Poland*, n.d., oil on canvas, 27 3/4 x 28 9/16 in. (70.5 x 72.5 cm), looted from the Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw, Poland, by the Nazis and not recovered. Location unknown.

Exhibitions

The Century of Mozart, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, January 15–March 4, 1956, no. 64, as *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, King of Poland*.

Homage to Mozart: A Loan Exhibition of European Painting, 1750–1800, Honoring the 200th Anniversary of Mozart's Birth, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, March 22–April 29, 1956, no. 30, as *Portrait of Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, King of Poland*.

Largillière and the Eighteenth-Century Portrait, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, September 19–November 15, 1981, no. 61, as *Portrait of Elector Frederick Augustus I of Saxony (1670–1733)*, and as *Augustus II, King of Poland (1697–1704, 1709–1733)*.

The Arnhold Collection of Meissen Porcelain (1710–50), The Frick Collection, New York, March 25–June 29, 2008, hors cat.

Discriminating Thieves: Nazi-Looted Art and Restitution, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, January 26, 2019–January 2, 2020, no cat.

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Nathaniel Rothschild, *Notizen über Einige Meiner Kunstgegenstände* (n.p.: 1903), 30, as *Portrait August des Starken*.

Theodor von Frimmel, *Lexicon der Wiener Gemäldesammlungen* (Munich: George Müller Verlag, 1913), 1:368, as *Portrait August des Starken, Königs von Polen*.

Victor von Fritsche, *Bilder aus dem österreichischen hof- und Gesellschaftsleben* (Vienna: Gerlach und Wiedling, 1914), 236, as *August des Starken, Königs von Polen*.

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"New Acquisition," *Gallery News* (The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts) 22, no. 6 (March 1955), unpaginated, (repro.), as *August the Strong*.

"This Week in Kansas City," *Kansas City Times* 118, no. 56 (March 7, 1955), 5, as *August the Strong*.

"This Week in Kansas City," *Kansas City Times* 118, no. 62 (March 14, 1955), 4, as *August the Strong*.

Winifred Shields, "Among the New Acquisitions of the Nelson Gallery of Art," *Kansas City Star* 75, no. 226 (May 1, 1955), F1, (repro.), as *Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland*.

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