France, India to Reinvigorate Ties

French President Jacques Chirac and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed nine agreements outlining their countries’ future cooperation during Chirac’s visit to New Delhi on February 19 to 21. Most notable are plans to cooperate on the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, new economic partnerships and major agreements in the defense and aerospace sectors. Chirac emphasized that the document regarding nuclear energy is not a pact, but rather a declaration expressing objectives that can only be reached once certain conditions are met. In addition, France will make sure that any cooperation is placed firmly under IAEA safeguards.

India and France identified several key areas in which civilian nuclear cooperation would prove fruitful. The declaration foresees research in the fields of nuclear fuel, waste management and nuclear safety, as well as the exchange of information and expertise. According to a speech given by Chirac during his visit, France’s decision to help India pursue its goals in the civilian nuclear arena is based on two principles. First, Chirac identified “a moral principle” according to which India must be able to continue to develop economically by finding a solution to its energy problems. Secondly, he spoke of an “environmental principle,” referring to India’s need to meet its energy demands without emitting dangerous amounts of pollution.

Chirac, recognizing that India is now “one of the main engines of world growth,” vowed to engage India more in the economic sphere. Bilateral trade is currently worth $4.17 billion, and the two countries hope to double this figure over the next five years. France and India plan to achieve their goal by increasing the volume of investment in each other’s countries and by encouraging closer business partnerships in priority sectors.

In particular, the two countries took important steps toward cooperation in the defense and aerospace sectors. A contract between the state airline Indian Airlines and Airbus was given the go-ahead, and Kingfisher Airlines agreed to purchase 15 European aircraft. France also entered the global contest to win a contract with the Indian Air Force, which is seeking to purchase a large number of jets.

Mayor of Paris Visits Washington

Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë visited Washington, D.C., from February 8 to 10 to take part in a meeting of the Executive Bureau of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), of which he is a co-president. On February 10, Delanoë met with the French community in Washington, at the Embassy of France.

The UCLG meeting this February focused on strengthening local governments and convincing World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz to directly fund projects in poverty-stricken cities. Delanoë pointed out that 80 percent of the world’s population now lives in cities.

At the French Embassy, Delanoë also emphasized the strong ties between the French and American capitals. D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams visited Paris in 2003 and 2004. To deepen their bilateral understanding, Williams and Delanoë are engaged in a dialogue about youth, local democracy, and poverty.

Recent developments in Paris confirm this continuing French-American friendship. A statue of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin’s successor as U.S. Ambassador to France, will be erected near the Musée d’Orsay this summer (Mayor Williams has been invited to attend its unveiling on July 4). Also, on February 13, a new gymnasium in Paris’s 14th arrondissement was named Gymnase Rosa Parks.

Delanoë became the mayor of Paris in 2001. In May 2004 Delanoë was elected as co-president of the UCLG, an organization with members in over 100 countries worldwide.
FRANCE CALLS FOR RELEASE OF U.S. JOURNALIST

Last week, 30 balloons were released in front of the Eiffel Tower to mark the 30 days that American journalist Jill Carroll has spent in captivity in Iraq. A banner held up by the helium-filled balloons read “Free Jill Carroll.” Paris-based Reporters Without Borders organized the demonstration in support of the Christian Science Monitor’s correspondent, who was kidnapped by Iraqi insurgents on January 7. French actress Juliette Binoche and former French hostage Florence Aubenas attended the event, as did the Christian Science Monitor’s chief European correspondent, Peter Ford. Another demonstration was held at the Grand Mosque of Paris.

France Has Best Quality of Life

ACCORDING TO International Living Magazine, France has the best quality of life in the world. Switzerland and Australia follow in second and third place respectively, and Iraq brings up the rear. The United States, which had topped the list for the past 21 years, dropped down to seventh place. The criteria used by the world’s leading globe-trotting publication to establish its rankings include climate, environment, economic stability, healthcare, cost of life, leisure and culture, safety, infrastructure and freedom.

France received scores of 100 percent in safety, freedom and health, and a 99 percent score in infrastructure. In fact, according to the WHO’s latest study, France has the best health care system in the world. The French economy, ranking fourth in world exports and fifth in GDP, is home to many world-class companies and provides the foundation for the country’s high quality of life.

Massive Terrorist Attack Simulation Staged in Lyon

IT IS 8:45 PM on a Sunday night in the Gerland quarter of Lyon, and everything is quiet. All of a sudden a bomb explodes underneath a seat in the Lyon metro. The metro station is thrown into darkness and engulfed in smoke. Eight minutes later, a second explosion on the other side of the Rhône River, in the Perrache quarter, occurs when a suicide bomber detonates himself inside a car of the Lyon light rail. In the midst of the panic, a third explosion occurs at 9:30 in Terreaux Square, a busy pedestrian intersection in the center of town.

This was the scene in Lyon on February 13 when an exercise simulating a potential terrorist attack took place. Organized by the prefect of the Rhône-Alpes region, the simulation was staged in order to test the city’s civil service personnel and their readiness to handle a terrorist attack should one ever occur. Over 1,600 people, 200 of whom played the role of victims, assisted in staging the exercise, making it the largest civilian security exercise ever organized in France. Actors and volunteers were given roles and makeup, as if they were about to star in a Hollywood movie. They played corpses or victims with critical injuries, while team of doctors, firemen and police officers worked around them. The exercise ended after five hours, and organization officials seemed pleased during their initial debriefing. A similar exercise has already been planned for Paris this summer.
"Echos des USA" : "News From France" à l'Américaine

THE EMBASSY of the United States in France unveiled the first issue of its new newsletter, Echos des USA, this January. The eight-page newsletter, written in French, is in many ways a mirror image of News From France, with both publications hoping to foster better understanding between our two countries.

An opening statement by U.S. Ambassador Craig R. Stapleton introduces the newsletter and emphasizes that France and the United States are cooperating on a range of issues, from Afghanistan to Iran. The newsletter also includes sections on current events, economic news, and cultural events. Unlike News From France, Echos des USA contains sections on geography and on history. The former showcases different states and regions within the United States, with the state lucky enough to be portrayed first being Connecticut, the ambassador's state of residence. The latter takes a look at important figures and events in U.S. history, and begins with biographies of Martin Luther King Jr. and Benjamin Franklin, America's first ambassador to France, whose tercentenary is currently being celebrated (see NFF 06.01).

The entire News From France team congratulates Echos des USA on its first issue and wishes our U.S. counterparts the best of luck! Echos des USA will be published every two months, and can be received electronically by writing to Echos-USA@amb-usa.fr.

France Telecom, Intel Partnership Launched

FRANCE TELECOM customers are just beginning to enjoy the fruits of a partnership between the French firm and American microprocessor company Intel. Their partnership, forged in April of last year, is based on Intel's new Viiv technology, and introduces a variety of new and exciting services to subscribers of Wanadoo, France Telecom's internet provider. Viiv is a media platform and exciting services to subscribers of Wanadoo, France Telecom's cooperation with Intel allows Wanadoo customers to enjoy four exciting new options on Viiv-compliant computers. With "24/24 VIDEO," subscribers are able to rent recently released movies, television series, documentaries and cartoons for a 24-hour period. "Wanadoo Photos" allows users to access their online photo albums and view them on other devices, such as televisions. The partnership also created "Wanadoo Jukebox," a legal way to download songs. Customers may preview excerpts for free, and if they like what they hear, buy songs for one euro each. Nearly 1.1 million songs are currently available, and the service is expanding rapidly. Lastly, "Wanadoo Jeux" offers more than 120 video games that can be downloaded onto a computer or television.

For more information, visit www.franchise.com.fr.

U.S. AND FRANCE JOIN FORCES TO FIGHT BIRD FLU

A French-American agreement signed on February 6 will bring forces from both countries together to detect early outbreaks of bird flu in an effort to strengthen the world's capacity to respond to a possible human pandemic. The partnership, signed between the Institut Pasteur and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is one of many measures the two nations have taken to combat the threat posed by the avian flu in Asia, Turkey, and possibly Iraq. Immediate projects for the two countries include increased testing in at-risk areas and public-awareness campaigns. The virus, which mainly affects birds, has already claimed 85 human lives.

UMA THURMAN HONORED

France honored American actress Uma Thurman on February 7 by proclaiming her a knight in the Order of Arts and Letters. The special award was presented to the actress by the director of the Cannes Film Festival, Gilles Jacob, on behalf of the French Ministry of Culture. He cited her classic beauty and impressive film repertoire as the reasons for her considerable popularity in France. Thurman is also a spokesperson for haute couture designer Louis Vuitton of France.

NEW YORKER COLUMNIST WRITES CHILDREN'S BOOK SET IN FRANCE

Adam Gopnik, a well-known columnist for The New Yorker, has recently published his new children's book, The King in the Window. This is the first time Gopnik, who lived in Paris from 1995 to 2000 and is an avowed Francophile, has written something of this genre. The story follows Oliver, a 12-year-old American, who in addition to overcoming the daily challenges of being a foreigner in Paris, must deal with angry teachers and the anxieties of young love. His troubles are multiplied when, on the night of Epiphany, he is magically transported to a fairy-tale-like version of Paris. Accompanied by his beautiful neighbor Neige and his friend Charlie from New Jersey, Oliver must cross Paris while battling evil forces hiding in mirrors and windows. Gopnik highlights the cultural differences between the U.S. and France but concludes that the two nations have much to learn from one another if only they, like Oliver, can learn to combine the best of both worlds.

U.S. Encyclopedia of French Thought

FRENCH THOUGHT is alive and well in the United States according to Laurence Kritzman, editor of The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought. In this new encyclopedia, published in December, 175 leading French and American intellectuals wrote a total of almost 800 pages to "convince American readers of the importance and radiance of French intelligence."

Kritzman describes "French thought" as not existing in one form but rather as intercrossing and multidisciplinary. The encyclopedia includes essays on gastronomy, fashion, technology and sexuality, as well as philosophy, literature and the more traditional topics that one associates with "French thought."

The Dreyfus Affair and its image of the committed intellectual ("intellectuel engage") as well as the institutionalization of social sciences are two of the important French social movements that Kritzman mentions as having had a profound impact on American society throughout the 20th century. Characterizing American academia as being supra-specialized, he sees the more open French approach as a countervailing and enhancing force.

He also addresses the continued importance of French thought in America today, citing for instance France's lead in the U.S. foreign film industry. The steady emergence of French psychoanalysts in America also confirms an American tendency to draw upon the know-how of some of France's avant-garde intellectuals.

Organic Foods Winning Over the French

The French today are more conscious than ever about the foods they consume and produce. According to an Agence Bio study in 2004, 86 percent of the French have a positive view of organic products, or "produits bio" as they are known in France. Thirty-seven percent of respondents regularly buy organic products and 45 percent buy an organic product at least once a month. These numbers are all the more impressive because of the tendency for organic products to be more expensive than their non-organic equivalents.

Strictly defined, organic products are those whose ingredients are almost entirely derived from organic farming, which spurns the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Organically raised animals are fed only natural foods rather than processed feed that could include animal matter. Consumers of organic products—who buy mostly fruits, vegetables and eggs—believe that organic farming safeguards the environment. They also believe that this more natural method is healthier than "industrial" farming since it does not use chemicals. Distrust of genetically modified products as well as fears of disease, though often unwarranted, have helped make organic products extremely attractive in recent years.

Many new organic supermarkets have opened their doors recently to meet this growing demand. Bio Génération, for example, has already opened several supermarkets exclusively for the sale of organic products. In general, organic supermarkets are doing very well, with an average rise in sales of 17 percent in 2005. The French organic farming industry isn’t being left behind! It has already grown into a $2 billion industry. With 11,000 organic farms and 540,000 hectares of organically farmed land, the industry has taken on significant proportions, even though only 2 percent of France’s total farmland is currently being used for organic production (compared with 8 percent for Italy, for example). These percentages are projected to rise, however, with the increase in support and promotion of organic farming at the national and European levels.

At the national level, France created "Agence Bio" (www.agencebio.org) in 2001 to promote and facilitate the production and sale of organic foods. Today, the "AB" label is a very recognizable logo found on certified organic foods (pictured). In February 2005, France launched a 10-day national campaign to promote organic produce, which resulted in a 20-year plan for sustainable agricultural policies. Amongst other measures, this plan gives tax rebates to farmers who earn 40 percent or more of their income from organic farming.

European authorities are also mobilizing in favor of organic foods and farming. Europe accounts for 21 percent of the 31 million hectares of organically farmed land worldwide. It is the continent with the second highest production from organic farms, behind only Australia/Oceania. In January 2004, European agriculture commissioner Franz Fischer announced an Action Plan on Organic Farming, which includes 21 goals for the E.U. to help organic farming. Important goals include the harmonization of national standards on what is organic, the creation of an E.U. organic food label, and the better collection of statistics on the marketing and production of organic products.

The Era of Organic Wines

The next time you are driving through the wine regions of France, you may be surprised to see an entire vineyard that appears pale, sick and covered with yellow leaves. These vineyards are not actually sick; they simply have not been treated with herbicides. Indeed, a new phenomenon of grape cultivation is occurring in France. From Alsace to Aquitaine, French wineries are now opting to cultivate their grapes using organic methods—organic in the sense that these wine producers do not use the chemicals that would give their grapevines dark green leaves from the added nitrogen.

To combat insects, diseases and climate conditions, vineyards like those of Gaston Huet (Vouvray) administer doses of chamomile, fennel, dandelions or valerian as precautionary measures. Herbicides used on most vineyards also kill the good bacteria and microbacteria that are essential for the grapevine to feed itself. This makes the grapevine more prone to disease and insects, which is why pesticides are then needed. Many wineries now have to use organic methods not because organic wines are à la mode, but because after years of being treated with chemicals, the soil needs to recover its essential elements.

In 1996, a French trade association, Biodyvin, was created to promote and regulate the production of organic wines (www.biodyvin.com). Twenty-seven wineries have already become licensed members, all respecting the same culture, bio, and climate conditions as the Domaine Raoul Cruchon (Echichens) and the Domaine Louis Philippe Bovard (Cully) on their dinner wine menu.
Prehistoric Cave Drawings Found in Charente

THE DISCOVERY of ancient prehistoric cave drawings in the Charente region, in western France, was announced on February 4 by Henri de Marcellus, mayor of the town of Vilhonneur, near where the drawings were discovered. They are thought to be older than those in the famed caves of Lascaux. Indeed, a preliminary analysis of the cave paintings suggests that they were made 25,000 years ago, during the Cro-Magnon period, which would make them 8,000 years older than the Lascaux paintings, though further analysis is needed to be certain.

The cave drawings were first discovered in November by 63-year-old amateur spelunker Gérard Jourdy, but were kept secret until now to protect the site from damaging intrusions. The art work, which comprises six paintings, including a hand and possibly a face, is not nearly as sophisticated as that found in the Lascaux or Chauvet caves. However, the discovery is still very significant, especially if the human bones found in the cave are also dated to the Cro-Magnon period. If so, this would be one of only three prehistoric burial grounds ever discovered with paintings (the other two are in Cussac, Dordogne, and Del Romito, Italy).

The famous 17,000-year-old drawings of Lascaux Cave, discovered in 1940 in the Dordogne region (100 km to the southeast of Vilhonneur), have long been considered some of the best preserved and finest examples of cave paintings. The Chauvet cave, discovered in the mid-1990s in southeast France, features 300 examples of Paleolithic animal art estimated to be about 31,000 years old.

Research on Human Embryos Allowed

FRENCH LAW regarding bioethics was revised on February 7 through the publication of a decree authorizing limited research on human embryos, under very stringent conditions. Stem cells, the building blocks of our bodies, can be extracted from very young embryos before they have differentiated into specialized cells. France’s government believes the enormous life-saving potential of stem cell research justifies such research for a limited five-year period. Indeed stem cells can potentially produce every other type of cell and thereby be used to reconstitute damaged tissues such as the heart, muscle, nervous system, etc... Stem cell research could also lead to a better understanding of human biology, and to more accurate drug testing.

The new law on bioethics was first enacted in August 2004 (see NFF 04.08), but research on embryos was initially put on hold, to give law-makers and ethicists more time to consider the issue and work out a comprehensive regulatory framework. Scientists can now conduct research on stem cells derived from frozen supernumerary embryos, which are embryos that no longer have any parental or adoption potential. But many restrictions have been instated to prevent abuses. Research on embryos is authorized only when it is capable of enabling major therapeutic advances that could not be achieved by alternative means. In addition, parents must give their written consent after a three-month long waiting period before any research can be conducted on their embryos. The newly created Agency of Biomedicine (05.07), assisted by a panel of experts and ethicists, will have the final say on whether to authorize specific research proposals.

Hachette Acquires Time Warner Books

FRENCH COMPANY Lagardère bought the Time Warner Book Group, the United States’ fifth largest book publisher, from Time Warner for $537.5 million on February 6. Lagardère owns Hachette, publishers of Elle, Premiere and Car and Driver magazines. In 2004, it also bought Hodder Headline, one of the biggest publishing companies in Britain.

This new acquisition makes Hachette the third largest book publisher in the world, behind Pearson and Bertelsmann, the German company that owns Random House. It is part of the French company’s efforts to expand its presence in the U.S. Sixty percent of Lagardère’s sales already take place outside of France, including 45 percent in the Anglo-American world.

Robert Broadwater, the director of Veronis Suhler Stevenson, a media industry investment bank, commented that "Lagardère could make better use of the company because its global book business gives it better opportunities to exploit the purchasing of rights from authors." For instance, Hachette was able to buy the rights to Dan Brown’s first four books (Brown is the best-selling author of The Da Vinci Code). Richard Parsons, the chairman and chief executive of Time Warner, agrees, saying that the Warner book group “needs the scale and other advantages that come from being part of a larger, more global publisher.”

French publishing companies seem to be booming, as Lagardère and Editis, the second-largest publisher in France, both plan to announce a 10 percent increase in sales at a time when the publishing market is experiencing a global slump of 0.5 percent.

For more information, visit www.hachette.com.

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Diversity Viewed as Asset for French

According to a study published earlier this month by CSA, an independent French polling agency, 72 percent of the French believe that a diverse population is an asset for the country. Of the 1,001 people polled across France, 34 percent regarded immigration as entirely beneficial for French society, while 38 percent considered it to be in some ways disadvantageous but overall a benefit for the country. In fact, many of the respondents were direct beneficiaries of immigration themselves: according to French experts, one out of every four French citizens has at least one immigrant parent or grandparent.

France’s current diversity is the product of a long history of immigration. Indeed, France, at the crossroads of Europe, has always been a land of immigration and during the “Trente Glorieuses” (literally, the “Thirty Glorious Years,” 1945-1973), immigration was seen as an integral part of the building and rejuvenation of the French economy and culture after the devastation of World War II. This period also marked the beginning of a new trend, with ever increasing numbers of overseas immigrants making their way to France (whereas previous immigrants had mostly hailed from other European countries, such as Italy, Spain and Portugal).

In 2004, 133,454 immigrants entered France, 42.7 percent of whom were from North Africa, 17.9 percent from sub-Saharan Africa, 15.8 percent from Europe, 10.6 percent from Asia and the Middle East, and 8.9 percent from America. Their contributions and heritage will be celebrated in a new museum on the history of immigration in France, which is scheduled to open in the spring of 2007 (www.histoire-immigration.fr).

Growing Up… and Sideways!

In the past 35 years, the average height of French men has grown by over five centimeters (2 inches), and that of women has grown by two centimeters (0.8”). Furthermore, the average weight of French men has increased from 72 kilograms to 77.4 (170.6 lb), and that of women has increased from 60.6 kilograms to 62.4 (137.5 lb). These figures were gleaned from a survey of over 11,000 people between the ages of five and seventy, in which an x-ray unit was used to precisely determine their shape and size.

The results of this survey, commissioned by a fashion industry association, will help designers make sizes that are more comfortable and flattering for the average person. The industry’s last major measurement took place in 1970, making France’s current sizes very out of date! Statisticians cite a more diverse population due to immigration, better access to sports, and eating habits that include richer foods as reasons for this gradual growth in size of the French population. This phenomenon is taking place not only in France, but in other countries as well, including the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Belgium, where the average person has grown in height and girth.

Return of the Cult Comedy "Les Bronzés"

In the initial months of 2006, the most anticipated event in France was not the Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, or the Euro Championships of handball, but the release of Les Bronzés 3: Amis Pour la Vie, the third film in the Bronzés trilogy. A comedy à la française, Les Bronzés 3 is a film that can be enjoyed by adolescents and adults alike. It follows the tribulations of six acquaintances who spend their holidays together, desperate for some fun and relaxation, and become friends. Twenty-seven years have passed since the last Bronzé film, Les Bronzés 2: Le Bronzé Font du Ski, was released. Based on preliminary box office results, it is obvious that the French have eagerly waited for the Bronzés to make their comeback.

The night before the release of Les Bronzés 3, 12 million people tuned in to TF1 to watch a telecast of Les Bronzés 2. Within the first five days of the film’s release, 3.2 million people had attended a screening, a record in France! The producers of the film estimate that over 10 million people will see the film in theaters. Les Bronzés is not just any comedy; it is a cult film much like Austin Powers or the Lord of the Rings films in the United States. The six principal performers in the film are very highly regarded in France. Known as the Splendid troupe, they often star in the same movies with one another. The group includes actors Thierry Lhermitte (very popular as a result of his role in The Dinner Game) and Gérard Jugnot (best known as the music director in the acclaimed film, The Chorus).

For more information, visit www.lesbronzes3.com.
French Music and Film Exports Surging

French films and music are doing well not only in France but also worldwide. In 2005, French cinema attracted 73.6 million foreign spectators, an increase of nearly 50 percent since 2004. The past year also marked the first time that French movies were viewed by more foreign spectators than French ones! Similarly, French music continues to attract listeners of different tastes around the globe.

The boom of French cinema is due largely to the success and subsequent Oscar nominations of three films: Joyeux Noel (Best Foreign Language Film), March of the Penguins (Best Documentary Feature) and Darwin’s Nightmare (Best Documentary Feature). In 2005, March of the Penguins alone earned $92 million and had more than 16 million viewers, 12.8 million of whom were American. The film replaced Luc Besson’s The Fifth Element as the best-selling French film ever in the United States. French Culture Minister Renaud Donnedieu said that these nominations “are new proof of the vitality of French cinema and the dissemination of its talents abroad.”

French music, too, is increasingly successful around the world. Particularly well recognized by music lovers are the duos Air, known for its dreamy sound, and Daft Punk, creators of the “French touch” electronic sound. French hip hop also sells well to talented rappers such as MC Solaar. With artists such as Grammy-nominated Malian duo Amadou & Mariam and Paris native Camille, French music has broadened its international base by experimenting with different sounds. “There is a generation of French artists who include an export strategy in their vision of their careers,” Eric Morand, president of the French Music Export Office said. “They are more open to different things and listen to a wider range of music.”

To learn more about French music and music exports, visit www.unifrance.org and www.french-music.org.

Bonnard Exhibit at the Modern Art Museum of Paris

After having closed its doors to complete a much-needed two-year face lift, the Modern Art Museum of Paris in the Palace of Tokyo reopened to the public on February 1 (see NF 06.01). To commemorate this occasion, Suzanne Pagé, director of the museum, unveiled an exhibition of 90 works by Pierre Bonnard, a 20th-century French painter of modern art. The exhibition, which was designed to resituate Bonnard among the “classic” painters of the period, is the largest exhibition of Bonnard assembled since 1983. Bonnard was a contemporary of Picasso and Matisse and is recognized as being an heir of Manet and Degas. Fascinated with the nude feminine figure, Bonnard often used his wife Marthe as a model in his paintings. After the death of Marthe in 1942, Bonnard’s female figures took on a much more somber and melancholic persona.

Bonnard never played to conventional painting compositions, instead, he preferred to portray women in unflattering positions such as lying nude in a bathtub or sitting in a hunched-over position. The paintings themselves are undefined, limitless, and open to interpretation. Bonnard was always suggestive, never definitive. As he once said, “before painting I reflect and I dream.” Everything Bonnard painted was drawn from registered images in his memory. Bonnard, also recognized for the bright colors on his canvases and the influence of Japanese lithographs in his paintings, always questioned and challenged the meaning of subject in paintings. A perfectionist, he was known to return to museums to touch up his paintings while friends distracted the guards!

The Bonnard exhibition will be on display until May 7. For more information, please visit www.mam.paris.fr.

The Splendors of Saxony in Versailles

An exhibition entitled “Splendeurs de la Cour de Saxe” currently at the Palace of Versailles provides a glimpse of the splendors of the 18th-century Saxon Court. The exhibition is a collaborative project between the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and the Versailles palace museum, and is another important contribution to Franco-German cultural exchanges. French President Jacques Chirac and newly elected German Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasized the cultural links between their two countries by attending its opening together on January 23.

The Dresden Court in Saxony was said, in the words of Voltaire, to be “the most beautiful in Europe,” second only to that of Louis XIV’s. It was ruled by the King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, Frederick August I. As a young prince, he had visited the palace of Versailles and much of the décor of the Saxon Court was inspired by this experience. The collection at Versailles showcases more than 256 pieces on loan from six Dresden museums, including rare pieces of silver furniture, fine jewelry, firearms, and paintings illustrating extravagant court life. A highlight of the exhibition is the first showing outside Dresden of the Obeliscus Augustaliss, a Baroque monument including 240 gems and gold figures, which has been restored specifically for the exhibition.

The exhibition will run through April 24. For more information, please visit www.chateauversailles.fr.

FRENCH SCULPTOR IPOUTESTUGY REMEMBERED
French sculptor Ipoustéguy died at the age of 86 on February 8. The artist, painter, writer and poet from the Lorraine region “was most of all an inventor,” prised Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, the French minister of culture and communication, who went on to call Jean Robert, known as Ipoustéguy, “one of the most important sculptors of our time.” The work of this “surrealist fanatic” has been celebrated and recognized worldwide. One of his gilded statues, A la Lumière de Chacun (To Everyone’s Insight) is located at the Embassy of France in Washington, D.C. The work, completed in 1983, is one of three Ipoustégus exhibited in Washington; the other two (“David and Goliath” and “Man Entering Door”) are installed in the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden of the Smithsonian Institution.

FUTUROSCOPE GOES ROBOTIC
Futuroscope, the Poitiers theme park, announced that the theme of its 2006 season will be robots. It has invested 7 million euros in new attractions, including a robotic menagerie of six robo-animals, a virtual ride where passengers are moved upside down and side to side to match the choreography of a dance troupe of reconfigured robots from the automobile industry; and a performance featuring several Albus, the robotic dogs designed by Sony. Futuroscope, which will be celebrating its 20th birthday next year, has already attracted 30 million visitors since its opening and hopes to attract at least 1.5 million this season. Learn more at www.futuroscope.com.
A merica’s first major museum exhibition on the Dada movement is taking place at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., until May 14. Over 400 different works are on display, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, ready-mades, collages, and films.

The Dada movement was a brief but revolutionary movement that mainly took place in Western Europe after World War I. The Dadaists’ nihilistic views rejected the belief that traditional art is useful or meaningful, after having seen civilization descend so quickly into barbarism. Dada art is, ironically, anti-art.

French artist Marcel Duchamp, who has 14 of his pieces on display in the exhibition, was at the forefront of the Dada movement. His 1917 L.H.O.O.Q. is a reproduction of Leonardo Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa to which he added a moustache and goatee, reflecting the Dada disregard for traditional art. L.H.O.O.Q. is an example of the new “ready-made” genre, which was pioneered by Duchamp and completely redefined art. He believed that an object that involved no manual work at all could become art merely through an artist’s decision to call it art. These objects are interposed throughout the exhibit, and include a reproduction of Duchamp’s lost Fountain (1917), which was simply a urinal he purchased and signed.

“Thought is made in the mouth,” claimed Tristan Tzara, another French artist on display in the exhibition. In other words, there is no meaning in words, only sounds. This claim prefigures the surrealism of the 1920s that would grow out of Dadaism.

Having stolen meaning away from art, it seems only the defiant sounds of Dadaism now resonate through the National Gallery (www.nga.gov).