

**Press
release**



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**The AXA Group officially presents *La Vestale* by
Jean-Antoine Houdon to the Louvre.
Acquired as part of the Group's cultural
philanthropy program, the work is to be officially
presented to the museum on Tuesday, March 29,
2005**

On Tuesday, March 29, 2005, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, France's Culture and Communications Minister and Henri de Castries, Chairman of AXA's Management Board will officially present the Louvre Museum with Jean-Antoine Houdon's masterpiece *La Vestale*, a work acquired through the AXA Group's cultural philanthropy program.

This life-size marble sculpture dated 1787 is a dazzling exercise in virtuosity. It portrays a vestal virgin priestess, tender of the eternal flame dedicated to the goddess Vesta. This work by Houdon (1741-1828) is an original, modern rendition of classical model that makes an admirable complement to the Louvre's sculpture collection.

This national treasure had been purchased in 1901 by American banker John Pierpont Morgan and thus, in the early XXth century, began its long exile from France. The collector's son entrusted the sculpture to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1925 and the prestigious institution had it on display for two decades. It was subsequently purchased in 1943 by art dealer Georges Wildenstein.

The present acquisition was made possible by tax incentives granted under the terms of the French Philanthropy act of August 2003. These new regulations, which enhance and complete those provided for under the law of January 4, 2002 relative to France's museums, seek to encourage gifts to public collections through corporate philanthropy. The works selected are acknowledged by the board of national treasure consultants as part of the country's cultural heritage.

Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres wishes to hail and thank the AXA Group for its exemplary act of philanthropy in favor of France's national heritage and its contribution to the advancement of the arts. This gesture and this focus are a natural extension of AXA's core financial protection business – providing protection to individuals and companies and helping them develop and pass on their accumulated wealth.

AXA has already drawn on various tax incentives available in France to encourage the enrichment of public collections, donating two red chalk Russo drawings to the Louvre in October 2003: "*Saint Roch distributing his inheritance*", 1530, and "*The Visitation*", circa 1540, as well as the magnificent Dogon statue, it contributed last December to the Quai Branly Museum, a new facility dedicated to art from Africa, Asia and Oceania and the Americas.

