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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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FIRST EXHIBITION ON THE WORK OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COURT GOLDSMITH NOW TOURING EUROPE AND U.S.

Gold, Jasper, and Carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court

May 30 through August 19, 2012



Johann Christian Neuber, box decorated with landscapes, gold and semiprecious stones (view of top and side), marked: « Neuber à Dresde », Dresden, c. 1770–75, L: 3 1/3 inches, H: 1 1/2 inches; private collection; photo: © Hugues Dubois

Johann Christian Neuber (1736–1808) was one of Dresden’s most famous goldsmiths. Sometime before 1775 he was named court jeweler to Friedrich Augustus III, elector of Saxony, and in 1785 he was appointed curator of the Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault), the magnificent royal collection of Augustus the Strong, the founder of the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory. A travel book published in 1782 that listed Dresden’s notable sights praised Neuber’s “extraordinary dexterity,” noting that “his pieces worked in mosaic are especially admired by all connoisseurs.” For more than thirty years, Neuber created small



Johann Christian Neuber (1736–1808), *Breteuil Table*, 1779–80, wood, gilded bronze, semiprecious stones, faux-pearls, and Meissen porcelain plaques, W: 28 inches, D: 25 1/2 inches, H: 32 inches, Collection of the Marquis de Breteuil, Château de Breteuil; photo: © Georges Fessy

gold boxes, chatelaines, and watchcases decorated with local semiprecious stones such as agate, jasper, and carnelian. He fashioned enchanting landscapes, elaborate floral designs, and complex geometric patterns using cut stones, often incorporating Meissen porcelain plaques, cameos, and miniatures into his pieces. These one-of-a-kind objects, which reflect the Saxon court’s interest in both luxury items and the natural sciences, remain prized treasures today, but have never before been shown together in a monographic exhibition. *Gold, Jasper, and Carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court* will offer visitors to the Frick the first comprehensive introduction to this master craftsman’s oeuvre by highlighting approximately thirty-five boxes and other objects from the Grünes Gewölbe of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, The Metropolitan Museum of

Art, the Walters Art Museum, and private collections in Europe and the United States. Included in the exhibition will be several quartz specimens from the American Museum of Natural History to illustrate the raw materials used by Neuber in his work. The exhibition is on view this spring and summer in the Frick's Oval Room, and will be accompanied by a publication and related public programs.

Comments Frick Director Ian Wardropper, "These unique and inventive objects were treasured in the eighteenth century, but, remarkably, have never before been shown together. European and American audiences have had much more exposure to exhibitions relating to commissions by the contemporary French court. We are delighted to introduce our visitors the oeuvre of this ingenious artisan through the upcoming exhibition, which together with our current Portico Gallery show, *White Gold: Highlights from the Arnhold Collection of Meissen Porcelain*, will offer them a sense of the important contributions made by those at work for the Saxon court at Dresden. And, I am pleased to announce that the Meissen porcelain exhibition will now be extended through January 6, 2013.

Gold, Jasper, and Carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court is co-organized by Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, The Frick Collection, and Galerie J. Kugel, Paris. The exhibition's presentation at The Frick Collection is coordinated by Director Ian Wardropper and Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts. Support for the New York presentation has been generously provided by Walter and Vera Eberstadt, Aso O. Tavitian, Margot and Jerry Bogert, and an anonymous donor.

MASTER GOLDSMITH AND COURT JEWELER

Johann Christian Neuber was born in 1736 in the town of Neuwerndorf in Saxony and at the age of sixteen registered as an apprentice in the Dresden workshop of goldsmith Johann Friedrich Tectaon, where he remained for six years. In 1762 he became a master of the Dresden guild of goldsmiths and, around 1775, the official jeweler of the Saxon court. Illustrated on page one is a small oval box decorated on all sides with landscapes, an excellent early example of Neuber's extraordinary skill. Using tiny pieces of cut stones, he crafted a complex mosaic depicting elaborate scenes of pastoral life: on the lid, a couple accompanied by their dog sit under a tree with individual leaves made of green jasper. An antique ruin and a village with a castle on top of a hill can be seen in the distance, while the decorations on the box's sides include a shepherdess tending her sheep. Such virtuosity is extremely rare, even for a master such as Neuber. More characteristic, but equally exquisite, are Neuber's boxes decorated with colorful flowers. In the example at right, Neuber used yellow, orange, and red jasper for the tulips; lapis lazuli for the forget-me-nots; amethyst for the irises; white agate for the gardenias; carnelian for the primroses; and various shades of green jasper for the leaves. This mosaic is inlaid into a background of burnished gold, which gives the box a particularly luxurious appearance.



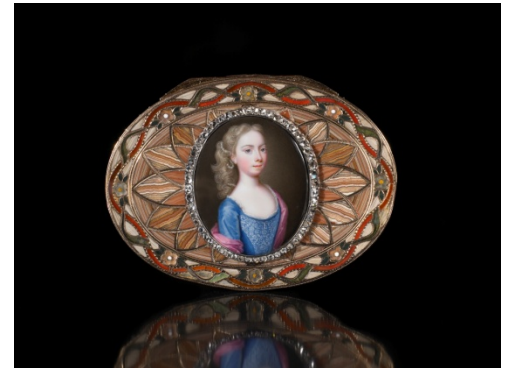
Johann Christian Neuber (1736–1808), box inlaid with semiprecious stones, Dresden, 1765–70. L : 2 ½ inches, H : 1 ¼ inches, private collection, photo: © Éditions Monelle Hayot /photo Thomas Hennocque



Johann Christian Neuber, box decorated with a geometric pattern and a bouquet of flowers, gold and semiprecious stones, marked : « NEU/BER » and « DRE/SDE », Dresden, c. 1775–80, L: 3 1/2 inches, H: 1 1/4 inches, private collection; photo: © Éditions Monelle Hayot /photo Thomas Hennoque

During the 1770s and 1780s, Neuber’s naturalistic designs evolved into a more classical style, as illustrated by the box at left, which is decorated with a diamond pattern. A bouquet of flowers composed of a variety of hard stones appears against a background of burnished gold. By pushing a concealed button, the central medallion on the lid opens, originally revealing a hidden miniature (now lost). Such miniatures, usually a portrait of a loved one, occasionally appear on the lids of Neuber’s boxes, as seen at

right in the example decorated with a geometric pattern of cut-agate stones. These boxes show that Neuber, who rarely repeated a design, experimented with a variety of techniques to create an astonishing range of objects.



Johann Christian Neuber, box decorated with a geometric pattern and an enamel miniature of an unknown woman by Christian Friedrich Zinke, gold and semiprecious stones, Dresden, c. 1775–80, L: 3 3/4 inches, H: 1 2/3 inches, private collection; photo : © Éditions Monelle Hayot /photo Thomas Hennoque

LUXURY, TASTE, AND SCIENCE BROUGHT TOGETHER

In 1786 Neuber advertised in the *Journal des Luxus und der Mode* of Leipzig, an influential monthly magazine that reported trends of German cultural life: “M. Neuber, jeweler to the court of the Elector of Dresden, has invented a very nice way to make buttons that are likely to be imitated in Paris. As incredible as it seems, in fashion, Germany could offer a model for this great capital.” The advertisement continued: “An older invention of this clever artist, still largely unknown, is a kind of snuffbox made of gold and all kinds of precious stones from Saxony, known as *Steinkabinettabatiere* [literally ‘stone cabinet snuffbox’]. The stones are numbered and none appears twice, while a small booklet that accompanies the box provides their scientific names. Thus, luxury, taste, and science are brought together in this fashionable object of jewelry, which makes them desirable for every wealthy amateur.”



Johann Christian Neuber, *Steinkabinettabatiere* (or gold box forming a stone cabinet), Dresden, c. 1765–70, L: 2 2/3 inches, H: 1 1/3 inches, private collection; photo: © Éditions Monelle Hayot /photo Thomas Hennoque

The exhibition presents twelve *steinkabinetts*, several of which will be displayed with their original booklets. Certainly the most characteristic works by Neuber, the *steinkabinetts* earned him a great deal of recognition, and one is shown at left. For many years, they were considered to perfectly reflect the wealth and refinement of Saxony, simultaneously representing both the beauty of nature and the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment. The boxes’ success led Neuber to seek his own source for the stones and, in 1775, Friedrich Augustus III awarded him the concession of a mine near Schlottwitz, south of Dresden, a region famous for the diversity and superior quality of its rocks.

ON VIEW FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE UNITED STATES: THE BRETEUIL TABLE

In addition to the *steinkabinetts*, the exhibition features Neuber's masterpiece, the *Breteuil Table*, shown below in detail and in full on page 1. This small table is regarded as one of the most extraordinary pieces of eighteenth-century furniture ever made, distinguished not only by the materials used in its construction and for the remarkable skill of its creator, but also for its prestigious history. It was presented in 1781 by Friedrich Augustus III to Baron de Breteuil, a French diplomat, as recognition for the role he played in the negotiation of the Treaty of Teschen. This agreement officially ended the war of Bavarian Succession fought between the Habsburg monarchy and a Saxon-Prussian alliance to prevent the Habsburg acquisition of the Duchy of Bavaria. The table has a mosaic top



Johann Christian Neuber (1736–1808), *Breteuil Table* (detail of top), 1779–80, wood, gilded bronze, semiprecious stones, faux-pearls, and Meissen porcelain plaques, W: 28 inches, D: 25 ½ inches, H: 32 inches, Collection of the Marquis de Breteuil, Château de Breteuil; photo: © Georges Fessy

inlaid with 128 semiprecious stones and decorated with five Meissen porcelain plaques depicting scenes that celebrate peace and the glory of the Baron de Breteuil. Still owned by the family who received it nearly 250 years ago, this stunning object has almost never been exhibited outside the Château de Breteuil (some twenty-five miles west of Paris) and has never before crossed the Atlantic. For the table's design, Neuber employed his concept for his *steinkabinetts*, but enlarged the size of the stones nearly ten times. As he did with the boxes, he compiled a manuscript to document the name of each stone he used and the

location where it was quarried. Since its creation, the table has been widely admired and has contributed to Neuber's international recognition. In Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the table served as the inspiration for "the famous mosaic table" owned by the princess of Iéna.

The Frick exhibition also includes two bases designed and crafted by Neuber for the display of Meissen porcelain groups. One base, at right, is now in the collection of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, while the other, shown below, is from a private collection in Paris. These bases were part of a much larger diplomatic gift from Friedrich Augustus III to Nicolai Wasilijewitsch Repnin, the Russian emissary involved in the negotiation of the Treaty of Teschen. The gift originally included a Meissen porcelain service of several hundred pieces and an enormous centerpiece composed of seven bases of varying heights, each supporting an allegorical group made of Meissen porcelain. Of the seven bases, only these



Johann Christian Neuber, gilded-bronze base inlaid with amethyst, agate, jasper, petrified wood, carnelian, glass, and marble, 1780, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

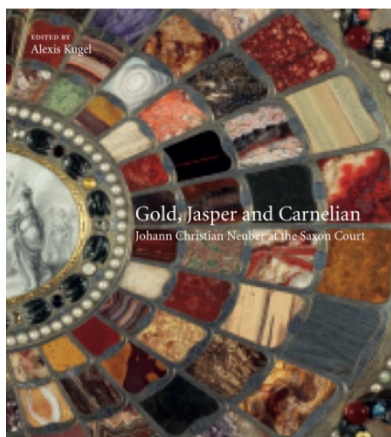
two have been definitively identified. Preparatory drawings for the bases recently uncovered in the archives of the Royal Meissen Porcelain Manufactory made possible their attribution to Neuber and clarified their original function and provenance. Subsequent research has identified the corresponding Meissen groups created for them, both of which are now part of the Porcelain Collection of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.



Johann Christian Neuber, stand or base for a figural porcelain group from the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, Dresden, 1780, gilded bronze, agate, carnelian, glass, and marble, L: 16 inches, D: 13 1/3 inches, H: 5 3/4 inches, private collection; photo: © Hugues Dubois

The bases and their groups will be reunited for the Frick's exhibition, the first time in nearly a hundred years that they will be displayed together.

PUBLICATION



The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated publication in English by Paul Holberton publishing, London, and in French by Editions d'Art Monelle Hayot, under the direction of Alexis Kugel. The authors include Dr. Jutta Kappel, Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the Grünes Gewölbe, Dresden; Sophie Mouquin, art historian and specialist in eighteenth-century decorative arts; Philippe Poindront, art historian and specialist in eighteenth-century Central and Northern European art; Alexis Kugel, antique collector and dealer; and Henri-François Le Tonnelier, Marquis de Breteuil, owner and keeper of Breteuil Castle. The English edition (ISBN: 978 1 907372 36 0, hardback, 400 pages,

568 color illustrations) is available for \$150, member price, \$135, in the Museum Shop, on the Frick's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone at (212) 547-6848.

RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Lecture

This evening lecture is free and does not require reservations. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Date Wednesday, June 27, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Wolfram Koeppel, Marina Kellen French Curator, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Title *Natural Wonders Set in Gold: The Art of Johann Christian Neuber*

Saxony was traditionally known for its mining industry, the source of the region's wealth and princely art patronage. During the eighteenth century—considered to be the great age of exploration of the area's unusually diversified mineral deposits—countless “precious and wondrous stones” were discovered. The goldsmith and mineralogist Johann Christian Neuber used these magnificent stones to create a legacy of small gold boxes and other objects to honor his royal patrons. This lecture will introduce his oeuvre, focusing on the artist's inspirations and the materials he used to create some of his best works.

Seminars

Seminars provide unparalleled access to works of art, often when galleries are closed to the public, and encourage thought-provoking discussion with Frick specialists. Sessions are limited to twenty participants, and advance registration is required. Register online or by calling 212.547.0704. \$100 (\$90 for Members).

Date Thursday, June 21, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Speakers Ian Wardropper, Director, and Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection, with George E. Harlow, Curator, Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, American Museum of Natural History
Title *Art and Nature: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court*

The Saxon goldsmith Johann Christian Neuber specialized in creating small gold boxes and watchcases decorated with semiprecious stones, works of art that perfectly reflect the eighteenth-century European interest in both luxury

items and the natural sciences. This seminar will focus on several of the nearly forty objects assembled at the Frick for the first comprehensive exhibition dedicated to the oeuvre of this celebrated jeweler.

Date Tuesday, July 17, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Speaker Joseph Godla, Conservator, and Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts,
The Frick Collection
Title *Johann Christian Neuber's Masterpiece: The Table of Baron de Breteuil*

Inlaid with semiprecious stones quarried in Saxony and decorated with gilded bronze and Meissen porcelain plaques, the *Breteuil Table* is considered to be Johann Christian Neuber's masterpiece as well as one of the world's most extraordinary pieces of eighteenth-century furniture, appreciated not only for the materials used in its construction, but also for its prestigious history. This seminar will explore the multiple and complex aspects of this one-of-a-kind table.

Extended Hours Event: *Summer Night*

Date: Friday, June 8, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a free after-hours viewing of the Frick's summer exhibitions *Antico: The Golden Age of Renaissance Bronzes* and *Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court*. Meet curators, hear lectures and gallery talks, sketch in the Garden Court, and listen to live music. *No reservations are accepted; space is limited and visitors will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, please e-mail education@frick.org.*

EXHIBITION TOUR INFORMATION

Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden
The Frick Collection, New York
Galerie J. Kugel, Paris

March 3 through May 2, 2012
May 30 through August 19, 2012
September 13 through November 10, 2012

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$18; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212. 288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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