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from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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First Special Presentation on Frick Porcelain in Fifteen Years

Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East

March 6 through June 10, 2007



Pair of Deep Blue Chinese Porcelain Jars with French Gilt-Bronze Mounts; porcelain, China, 1st half of the eighteenth century; gilt-bronze mounts, France, 1745–49; 17 7/8 x 18 5/8 x 10 11/16 in. (45.4 x 47.3 x 27.1 cm) and 18 7/16 x 18 5/8 x 10 5/8 in. (47 x 47.3 x 27 cm); The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

In 1915 Henry Clay Frick acquired a magnificent group of eighteenth-century objets d'art to complete the décor of his new home at 1 East 70th Street. Among these was a striking pair of large mounted porcelains, the subject of an upcoming decorative arts focus presentation on view in the Cabinet gallery, the museum's first ceramics exhibition in fifteen years. Visually splendid, delightfully inventive, and quintessentially French, the jars fuse eighteenth-century French

collectors' love of rare Asian porcelains with their enthusiasm for natural exotica.

Assembled in Paris shortly before 1750, the Frick jars are a hybrid of imported Chinese porcelain and French gilt-bronze mounts in the shape of bulrushes (curling along the handles) and shells, sea fans, corals, and pearls (on the lids). Displayed alongside these objects are French drawings and prints as well as actual seashells and corals, all from New York collections. Together, the objects illustrate the convergence of the natural and the humanly wrought in the production of such luxury wares and probe the fascination with the exotic that lies at the heart of rococo



Pierre-Quentin Chedel, French, 1705–1763, *Fountain of Pinaeus* from *Fantaisies Nouvelles*, 1738; etching, plate: 9 x 6 1/2 in. (22.9 x 16.5 cm), sheet: 13 1/4 x 10 in. (33.7 x 25.4 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1930

design. Organized by Kristel Smentek, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, *Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East* is on view at The Frick Collection from March 6 through June 10, 2007.

Comments Director Anne L. Poulet, “While Henry Clay Frick’s eye as a collector of paintings has been a major focus of scholarship and public attention for decades, his taste for the decorative arts—particularly Chinese ceramic objects—has received somewhat less attention. Not since the 1992 installation of blue-and-white porcelain from the estate of Childs Frick have we created an exhibition and publication devoted to the ceramic arts. With great pleasure, we anticipate that this spring’s portfolio project will inspire a fresh appreciation for this notable aspect of the Frick’s holdings, which include rare Sèvres pieces and porcelain-decorated furniture, Asian export porcelain, and terracotta sculpture.”

EXOTIC EASTERN PORCELAINS PRIZED IN EUROPE

The cobalt-blue porcelains were produced in China in the first half of the eighteenth century, when dense, homogeneous monochrome glazing was perfected. Because porcelains glazed with a single color were manufactured primarily for the domestic Chinese market, relatively few of them made their way to France in the eighteenth century. Those that did were particularly prized and especially costly. Originally, the Frick porcelains were probably tall vases or jars but, on their arrival in Paris, they were cut—at the neck and again at the shoulder—to form lidded jars. These modifications may have been undertaken to salvage a chipped or broken porcelain, although at this time in Paris it was common practice to saw apart Asian porcelains in order to create new forms that could then be fitted with finely chased gilt-bronze mounts. A tax stamp, in the form of a crowned C, indicates that the Frick mounts were cast between 1745 and 1749. (However, since the same stamp also was applied to items on the art market during those years, it is not impossible that the mounts were made earlier.) Embellished with gilt bronze to conform to eighteenth-century French taste, the jars most likely graced the home of a French nobleman or a wealthy financier before traveling, at some point, to London, where the dealer Joseph Duveen purchased them at auction in 1913 from the estate of Henry M. W. Oppenheim and subsequently sold them to Frick.



One of the pair of Frick jars (unassembled)



One of the pair of Frick jars (unassembled)

Although the mounts can be dated with some precision, their designer is

unknown. Their quality is, however, undeniable. Their dynamic form and contrasting smooth and textured surfaces break up rays of light; in combination with the jars' reflective properties—a characteristic for which monochromes were especially appreciated—the effect is one of sparkling exuberance. Arranged on Boulle pedestals, veneered or lacquered tables, or in front of mirrors, mounted porcelains were essential to the décor of French townhouses and châteaux. Adorned with a profusion of such objects, eighteenth-century French interiors seduced the eye (and sometimes, if contemporary novelists are to be believed, the heart), producing, as one observer wrote in 1749 of the financier Blondel de Gagny's Parisian home, “an effect so surprising that the viewer is captivated and will not leave this refuge of so much beauty without pain and without the desire to see it again and again.”

A VOGUE FOR ROCOCO DESIGN

In their reliance on natural forms, these objects are superb exemplars of rococo design, which emerged in Paris in the 1720s and remained in vogue until the 1750s. Eighteenth-century artists and collectors were fascinated by nature's wonders, especially shells, the most spectacular of which were believed to come from the East (like porcelains). This interest in shells was a significant factor in the development of the *rocaille*. (The



Claude-Augustin Duflos, le jeune, French, 1700–1786, after François Boucher, *Rocaille*, c. 1737, etching with engraving, 16 x 22 in. (40.6 x 55.9 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953

term *rocaille* originally referred to the shell- and rock-work decoration of garden grottoes, but, by the mid-1730s, it was used to describe the asymmetrical and irregular forms of the rococo that were inspired by shells and other natural forms.) Equally important was the contemporary appreciation of works in which the marvels of nature and human ingenuity were conjoined. Actual shells and corals were frequently set into gilt-bronze mounts, as were Asian porcelains in the shape of shells. Like these objects, the gilt-bronze imitations of marine life and freshwater bulrushes found on the Frick jars blur the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, dazzling the senses with their artful play between the beautiful creations of nature and the inspired invention of the artisan.



Shells, Sea Urchins, and Corals, American Museum of Natural History, New York; photo: Craig Chesek

PUBLICATION

Rococo Exotic: French Mounted Porcelains and the Allure of the East is accompanied by a fully illustrated publication that features an introduction by Chief Curator Colin B. Bailey as well as an essay

by Andrew W. Mellon Fellow Kristel Smentek, catalogue entries, and a bibliography. It is available in the Museum Shop of The Frick Collection, on the institution's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone (212) 288-0700.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

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

Hours: open six days a week: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11am to 5pm 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: \$15; senior citizens \$10; students \$5; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11am to 1pm

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection, and those under sixteen must be accompanied by an adult.

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 INFORM® Audio Tour of the permanent collection, provided by Acoustiguide. 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, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing, or Geetha Natarajan, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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