
Title of Object

Grand Salon from the Hôtel de la Bouëxière

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: French

Date of Object: 1733-1737

Country: France

Accession Number: 83.147

File Created: 10/27/2016

Material/Medium: Wood, paint, plaster, gilt, marble, iron

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Tour Topics

Fashion, Style, and Trends, Group 1, Highlights 1600-1850, Trendsetting, architecture, Rococo, entertainment/music, celebration, imagination, monkeys, animals/birds, women

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

What would this room feel like to entertain in?

What type of person would use this room?

What types of activities would be conducted in this space?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

The decorative carvings of the room reflect the owner's refined interests. The luxurious gold, crystal, and mirrors reflect not only his wealth but also the candles in the room, amplifying the light so that his

parties could carry on late into the night or until the candles burned down to indicate that the party was over!

Gilded carvings of various gods and goddesses reflect the 18th-century interest in classical antiquity. The female heads are portrayed in profile, personifying the four continents. Each is identified by her headdress: Africa wears the head of an elephant; America, a crown of feathers; Europe, the helmet of Minerva (Roman goddess of wisdom); and Asia, a camel's head.

Europeans were fascinated by products imported from the Far East. People surrounded themselves with chinoiserie prints, textiles, porcelain, furniture, textiles and architectural elements influenced by Eastern designs. The central plaque of the fireback (in the fireplace), pictures a man sitting cross-legged, wearing an exaggerated Asian costume complete with a lotus-leaf hat, and attended by a monkey. He holds a table with a teapot and bowl, a reference to the Eastern ritual of tea drinking that inspired a similar custom in Europe

Two of the room's panels are decorated with trophies, one representing the arts and the other the hunt.

Singerie (in French) were monkeys that were often comically portrayed in human roles during the 18th century.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

It was a transitional time in terms of patronage: luxury objects were no longer solely commissioned by the church and monarchs, but were sought by the newly-endowed merchant and industrialist class. And the design elements invariably look backward – to the Classical, Gothic, and Renaissance eras – the techniques of manufacturing often representing breakthrough technologies.

This Grand Salon originally was the formal reception space in a Paris "hotel" or mansion of Jean Gaillard de la Bouexière, a wealthy former general who collected salt and wine taxes for the crown (Emperor Louis XV). The salon was primarily used for enjoying music and literature, card playing and conversation. It was constructed in 1731.

"PARIS - considered the center of the universe in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, was the home of the salon. Well recognized all over the world, the Parisian salon served as a meeting ground for group discussion on issues of political, social, and cultural discourse. Foreigners visiting this vibrant and progressive city often made it a priority to visit a Parisian salon during their stay. It can be said that with the beginning of the late 18th century, the Parisian salon was no longer a place of idle leisure but rather a unique social and intellectual setting, providing the opportunity for both men and women to share similar tastes and interests." (France in the Age of Les Miserables)

The fluid, naturalistic style of the rococo design seen in the Grand Salon compliment the arabesque fanciful foliage, both evident in the abundant wall decoration. Gilded medallions of the female heads placed throughout the room symbolically imply the four regions or continents of Asia, Africa, Americas and Europe.

Draperies were woven with gilded thread and trimmed with silk cords. However, it is likely the draperies were nonfunctional.

With the death of Jean Gaillard in 1759 the hotel ownership changed hands many times, eventually purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art only one week before the stock market crash in 1929. The Met never uncrating the room, sold it to a New York antique dealer in the 1950s, where it remained until the Groves Foundation purchased it and generously gifted the salon the Mia in 1983. Excessive water, bug, and fire damage necessitated an incredible amount of restoration which was also paid for from the Groves Foundation and Franklin and Carolyn Groves, connoisseurs of French art. It was shipped and opened at Mia in 1985. (Timeline and Muse)

The panels of the room were so damaged that it required restoration in France, in 2002. The cornice, where the walls meet the ceiling, was in such bad shape that it could not be shipped, so the French restorers actually came and worked at Mia for many months, reviving the decoration. The cornice is completely regilded. The fireplace received bricks from an 18th century French chateau, to rebuild it as it was originally constructed. The mirrors are new, but then weathered. The chandelier, sconces, and parquet floor are reproductions. Installation of the room took a full year! (Timeline)

The Grand Salon from the Hotel Gaillard de la Bouëxière, which was the 15th period room in the Mia, provides a tremendous opportunity to transport visitors back to 18th century Paris!

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Click here to enter text.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Docent Muse Newsletter, Fall 2005

The timeline of the Grand Salon: <https://new.artsmia.org/living-rooms/grand-salon-timeline/>

France in the Age of Les Miserables (Mount Holyoke course notes):

https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255-s01/paris_homework/welcome_to_salons.html