This installation brings together a diverse group of objects in the Davis Museum collections related to eighteenth-century European interiors. Architecture and interior decoration, like fashion and the print trade, allowed elite consumers in this period to explore and exhibit their knowledge, taste, and sense of self-identity. Rococo and exotic ornament prints were used as models for wall paneling, textiles, and porcelain; pastoral paintings, portraits, and neoclassical furnishings enlivened domestic spaces. Other works on display represent new sorts of environments—auction houses, art galleries, and bath complexes—that were intended to both entertain and instruct the public.

This installation has been organized in conjunction with the Art Department's spring 2011 seminar, ARTH 325: Rococo and Neoclassical Interiors. Over the semester, students researched and gave gallery talks on an object in the collection, and they wrote short texts that make up the present publication. I would like to thank the seminar students for their unflagging hard work and enthusiasm; together they have created a polished and brilliantly insightful catalogue that expands our knowledge of the museum's rich holdings of eighteenth-century art.

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Catalogue
The style of this particular gilt **surtout** (table centerpiece) is associated with the reign of Louis XV. The organic, serpentine lines of the base and the recurring shell motifs recall the partial origin of the term “Rococo” from **coquillage**, the French word for shell. Two nympha, lightly drapped with sheets, hold afloat a golden shell supported by palm trees. The upturned shells were most likely containers, the two smaller ones for spices and the larger one on top for fruits or meats. As early as the seventeenth century, **surtouts** played prominent roles in the French dining repertory. These earlier centerpieces reunited the decorative with the functional, combining candleholders with spice jars, oil bottles, salt, sugar and pepper shakers. With the rise of the Rococo under Louis XV’s reign, the functional aspect of the **surtout** became subsumed within exuberant and sensuous Rococo ornamentation, a trend echoed in this **surtout** by the relatively small sizes of its containers.\(^1\)

The Davis Museum’s gilt **surtout** is composed of heavily gilded bronze, a medium that often substituted for precious metals in the eighteenth century as a glamorous and economical alternative. Bronze was also practical, since multiples could be easily cast from a single mould, and was often used to create porcelain mounts and cabinet accents. **Surtouts** such as this would have been accompanied by equally dazzling bronze ware on either side, with the entire arrangement placed on a large mirror to amplify and reflect light. Starting as early as the sixteenth century, tabletop designers drew upon the aesthetic vocabulary of landscape architects, porcelain modelers, and interior decorators to construct miniature landscapes on tabletops.\(^2\) Thus, it is most likely that small sugar figurines, later replaced by porcelain and silver figurines, would have accompanied this **surtout**.

While the Louis XV-style gilt **surtout** is of unknown provenance, it was most likely made for a wealthy or even a royal client. An 1865 engraving by Jules Gaillard shows two pieces that bear resemblance to the museum’s **surtout** (fig. 1). This engraving shows part of the 4,938 pieces of table service inspired by Louis XV that Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico commissioned for the Castle of Chapultepec in the late nineteenth century. In fact, a twin to the Davis’ gilt **surtout** exists in a private collection,\(^3\) which suggests that this piece may have flanked a more elaborate centerpiece along with its twin, rather than functioning as a centerpiece. This supposition could account for the **surtout**’s symmetrical nature compared to the usual irregular ostentation of Rococo decorative arts.

Cabelle Ahn

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\(^1\) This entry draws upon information from Pierre Ennès, *Histoire de la table: les arts de la table des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).  
\(^3\) This information is contained in the Davis Museum’s object file for the gilt **surtout**.
Giovanni Battista Piranesi was born in 1720 near Venice and trained as an architect. In 1740, he travelled to Rome, where he encountered a shortage of building commissions. As a result, he began producing souvenir views of Rome that were then used to illustrate travel and guide books to the city. Piranesi’s collective works consist mainly of etchings and engravings. His only built structure, in fact, was the church of S. Maria del Priorato in Rome, whereas he produced nearly one thousand prints. These prints typically incorporate views of antiquity as seen in *The Tomb of Nero*.

Piranesi’s series acquires its name from the French term “grotesque,” which is derived from the Italian “grottesco.” The term represents a type of ornament typically composed of classical architectural elements, scrollwork, fanciful figures, and imaginary creatures that are then arranged vertically around a central axis. All of the etchings in the series were inspired by excavations conducted at the end of the fifteenth century of the interiors of Nero’s Domus Aurea in Rome, and by later archaeological discoveries of tombs, palaces, and villas in Rome and Naples. *The Tomb of Nero* is, in fact, based on an actual Roman ruin, even though Piranesi has taken obvious liberties in representing this structure so as to create an alluring fantasy view.

Piranesi produced the *Grotteschi* series early in his career. According to scholars, the series as a whole suggests ideas of destruction and death through their inclusion of classical ruins, skulls, and human bones. *The Tomb of Nero* also includes slithering snakes and an abandoned painter’s palate in the bottom right corner. In order to enhance the dramatic and almost sinister sentiments of these prints, Piranesi used deep etched lines that create saturated blacks which he then contrasted with thinner, more delicate strokes. In addition to the use of strong light and dark contrasts, Piranesi reworked each plate various times to generate curvilinear lines. Together, these elements of *The Tomb of Nero* and the *Grotteschi* series create disturbing images of decay and death in a classical setting.

Emma Curtis

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6 This entry draws upon information contained in the Davis Museum’s object file for *The Tomb of Nero*, in particular, the former wall text.
Bacchanales is a recent acquisition for the Davis Museum and an important addition to the museum’s collection. It offers valuable information about Fragonard’s artistic process and about stylistic transitions in eighteenth-century France. The series depicts what came to be known as the Bacchic Mysteries, ancient Greek and Roman rituals in which individuals danced, made music, and experimented with intoxicants in order to remove artificial or societal constraints and return to a more natural state. Completed two years after Fragonard returned from Italy, where he made original black chalk drawings that served as models for the series, the etchings’ classical subject matter reflects both the artist’s study of Roman antiquities and French society’s transition to the Neoclassical style.7

This interest in Neoclassicism prompted artists to adapt archaeologically correct details when representing the classical past. Such details are evident in Fragonard’s series. The first etching, Nymph Supported by Two Satyrs, is based on an identifiable marble bas-relief from the Villa Mattei. Additionally, the meticulous inclusion of the sistrum (held by the nymph) and the Bacchic situla and thyrsus (lower left) in the last etching, The Satyr’s Dance, suggests Fragonard’s use of a classical model or a Bacchic sarcophagus, although no exact source is known. However, while the subject matter is characteristically Neoclassical, the draftsman’s, style, and design are Rococo. Natural and pastoral elements are emphasized by the landscape’s prominence within the composition; the mobile effervescence of the scene is depicted by the artist’s hand; erotic suggestions are conveyed by the interactions between the figures; and the delineation of light and shadow is assisted by the etching’s distinction between dark and light lines. The 1763 Bacchanales, thus, proposes that the Rococo and the Neoclassical are not as antithetical as has traditionally been presumed.

At the time of the etchings’ completion, Jean-Honoré Fragonard was thirty-one and not the prolific, quintessentially Rococo artist that we consider him today. Although he is now most often recognized as a painter of voluptuous love scenes, Fragonard’s initial interest in historical or mythological scenes and his commanding abilities as an etcher are demonstrated in Bacchanales. For this reason, the Davis Museum’s series is a significant indicator of Fragonard’s artistic capabilities and his progression towards a distinct personal style. The high-spirited movement, animated light, and exuberant landscape present in this plate are components that reoccur throughout his oeuvre. In the same way that the series’ bacchantes are liberated and uninhibited, Fragonard’s Bacchanales rejects social and artistic constraints by uniting mediums (black chalk drawing and prints), craftsmanship (painter and etcher), nations (France and Italy), Neoclassical subject matter, and Rococo design. These exquisite prints may be seen, therefore, as an interpretation of Italian antiquity created and marketed for French consumption.

Hannah Keck

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7 Fragonard toured Italy from 1760-1761 with the abbé de Saint-Non and fellow artist Hubert Robert. The black chalk drawings on which the Bacchanales is based are now in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard.
Since Neolithic times, terracotta, a clay-based ceramic material, has been used in the production of decorative sculpture as well as vessels, votive objects, and architectural ornamentation. Though the Middle Ages saw a substantial decrease in the use of terracotta, the fifteenth century in Italy and the seventeenth century in France marked large-scale resurgences in the artistic use of the medium.

Artists throughout the ages have been drawn to terracotta for its easy to use, inexpensive nature. Not only is terracotta much cheaper and more readily accessible than the “noble” sculptural materials of marble and bronze, but it also allows for a quicker molding process with more detailed results. While the clay material is still moist, it is soft enough to be shaped by the artist’s hand (as well as any assortment of small tools), allowing for a level of dexterity and precision that is much more difficult to obtain with marble or bronze. When the clay is then fired at temperatures of 600 degrees Celsius or higher, the strength of the material increases to the point where it will not soften back to its original state when exposed to water.8

Terracotta’s revival in seventeenth-century France was associated with its ability simultaneously to exude solidity and permanence and to record, on its pliant surface, minute impressions of the artist’s touch and thought process. Terracotta models at this time also began to play a key role in the artistic commissioning process, serving as samples for clients to approve. The material also gained popularity in the creation of portrait busts and was highly regarded for its importance in building a sculptor’s skill set. By the second half of the seventeenth century, terracotta sculpture had garnered enough respect and prominence to be considered an art form in its own right, and by the eighteenth century the material’s natural, earthen appearance was considered more desirable than painted terracottas that were popular in earlier eras.

This particular sculpture, likely created in France between 1730 and 1740, depicts an “Allegory of Minerva Freeing Mankind.” Minerva, the figure at the top, is the Roman goddess of poetry, wisdom, crafts, magic, and the inventor of music, symbols of which can be found surrounding the base of the sculpture. The central, chained female figure, representing Mankind, is shown held down by the suggested lack of the wisdom and beauty that Minerva embodies. Given the object’s proposed date and the cultural context of the French Enlightenment, one could perhaps read the image of Minerva as an allegory of France herself, superior in her intelligence and magnificence, graciously trying to free the rest of the world from an inferior state.

A closer look might also suggest a romantic intimacy between the scantily clad woman representing Mankind and Minerva herself. While this does not seem to perpetuate the allegorical meaning of the work, it may imply a certain respect for sensuality and moral liberalism among those who would have both displayed and admired it.

Casi Schwisow

Catalogue no. 5
Nicolas-Guy Brenet (1728-1792)
_Bacchus and Ariadne_, 1764
Oil on canvas
On loan from Mr. William Postar   EL. 1992.1

History paintings, often executed in a grand pictorial style, typically depict historical, mythological, or biblical subjects. In the eighteenth century, the French government promoted history painting, which was at the top of the Academy’s so-called “hierarchy of genres.” Thus, the French state commissioned artists to create history paintings, encouraged their price discrimination, and sponsored competitions for history painters.

Nicolas-Guy Brenet was a leader of the revival of history painting in France. Supported by the crown, he studied in Rome for three years during the 1750s, after which he began to take a more serious approach to history painting and to exhibit at the biannual salons at the Louvre. His style moved away from the playful Rococo typical of François Boucher, with whom he had trained, and toward the monumentality of Nicolas Poussin—the great academic classical painter of the seventeenth century—and the Bolognese school.

This particular painting, from Brenet’s early years at the Salon (in 1764), shows the artist still under the stylistic sway of Boucher and working in the palette of the high Rococo: faded pastels dominated by blue-green. The theatricality of the figures’ gestures and postures, along with the monumental arrangement of the figures and their nearness to the picture plane, are hallmarks of Brenet’s approach.

This painting depicts the story of Bacchus and Ariadne. Bacchus (or Dionysus in Greek mythology) is the god of wine. Ariadne is the daughter of King Minos of Crete and the bride of Bacchus. Bacchus discovered Ariadne on the island of Naxos, where she had been abandoned by Theseus after aiding in his escape from the Labyrinth. Venus had hoped to relieve Ariadne’s suffering by sending her an immortal lover in the form of Bacchus. Bacchus’ marriage gift to Ariadne was a golden crown set with jewels, which he threw into the sky upon her death, forming the constellation of the Corona Borealis.

Typically, this myth is depicted in paintings with the scene of the discovery of Ariadne on rocky and desolate Naxos. Unusually, Brenet chose to show the sentimental moment of Bacchus’ profession of love as he kneels before Ariadne, while a putto places a crown of stars on her head. Bacchus’ thyrsus staff tipped with a pinecone and a bunch of grapes lie on the ground before him, signifying his role as the god of the grape harvest and winemaking. His characteristic chariot and entourage are shown to the left. Bacchus is wearing a leopard skin and an ivy and grape leaf crown. At the right is Theseus’ departing fleet, with the sea water’s dark, churning appearance suggesting the island’s inhospitableness.

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Whereas the painting is Rococo in its color scheme and swirling lines, Brenet’s choice of a mythological theme, along with his decision to depict Bacchus vowing his love to Ariadne (which would have appealed to the emotions of eighteenth-century art patrons), indicates Brenet’s transition to the Neoclassical style.

Wendy Dickieson
Catalogue no. 6
Georges Jacob (1739-1814)
Pair of Louis XVI-style Porte-torchères, 1770-1790
Mahogany
Gift of Eleanor Pearson DeLorme (CE Class of 1978) in memory of Eleanor Horton Pearson
1991.140.1-.2

This particular style of candle stand (porte-torchère) became popular in France in the last third of the eighteenth century and is sometimes associated with the reign of Louis XVI. Similar examples were created for such elite clients as Louis XV’s mistress, Madame du Barry, who wanted to show off their taste for the new aesthetic of Neoclassicism. The tripod shape recalls an athénienne, a type of furniture stand invented around 1774 that was inspired by an ancient bronze tripod excavated at Pompeii. One of the most celebrated objects to be unearthed at this archeological site, the ancient tripod was reproduced several times in the eighteenth century, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi among others. In 1762 it appeared in a painting by the French artist Joseph-Marie Vien that was engraved under the title “The Virtuous Athenian Woman” (La Vertueuse Athénienne).

The Davis Museum’s porte-torchères are made of mahogany, a wood often used in eighteenth-century French furniture design, especially for objects associated with the Neoclassical or Louis XVI styles. Mahogany was prized for its exotic pedigree—in this era it was imported from Saint-Domingue, France’s colony in the Caribbean—and for its rich, dark color, which could be polished or stained to imitate bronze. The use of mahogany coincided with a shift toward a more naturalistic approach in French furniture design that rejected ornamental gilding or complicated marquetry techniques. This ostensibly pared-down look, however, could be deceptive, since mahogany furniture was just as expensive, if not more expensive, than its gilded Rococo counterpart.

Georges Jacob was a prolific and highly sought-after menuisier (cabinetmaker) who, in 1784, was appointed Furnisher to Louis XVI. Shortly thereafter he designed a suite of Neoclassical mahogany furniture for Marie-Antoinette’s dairy at Rambouillet. The suite featured palmettes, ram’s heads, and other antique-inspired decorative motifs that were deemed appropriate for this “rustic” venue. The museum’s porte-torchères, with their pinecone finials, sheep heads, and cloven hoof feet, may have also been intended for a garden pavilion or other kind of elegant country retreat. In an eighteenth-century interior they would likely have been placed at opposite corners of a room or arranged symmetrically around a mantelpiece or other item of furniture, and they would have supported candelabra or possibly a vase filled with flowers or a plant to augment the back-to-nature theme.

Meredith Martin

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12 This entry draws upon information contained in the Davis Museum object file for the porte-torchères, most notably a text written by their former owner, Eleanor DeLorme.
Although Watteau’s reputation is primarily based on his *fête galante* paintings, he was also a designer of arabesques. This particular sketch for an arabesque design, later transformed into a print also shown here entitled *La Voltigeuse*, is more finished than many of his other sketches. It remains unclear what Watteau’s intentions for this sketch were, although it may have been intended for a friend. The print made after this sketch was not created by Watteau’s chief printmaker, Jean de Julienne, but by renowned engraver and collector Gabriel Huquier.

The sketch exudes a soft, tranquil ambience that is consistent with Watteau’s style. There are three vignettes that possibly depict various types of relationships valued by eighteenth-century French society. Whereas the trio in the foreground seems to be enjoying a casual, flirtatious and perhaps even taboo liaison, the central figures seem more committed to each other. The indistinct figures in the background may be friends or perhaps family members. The arabesque designs framing these vignettes and the rustic, erotic themes are all characteristic of the Rococo era. The arabesques in particular were often used by other artists in paintings, ornament designs, or interior décor. Huquier is largely credited for the spread of Rococo ornamental arabesque designs.

Huquier etched and engraved at least fifty-five sketches by or after Watteau. He was an important collector and dealer of Italian, Dutch and French art and likely acquired Watteau’s sketches through his professional dealings. He frequently made *pentimenti*, or alterations, to Watteau’s original sketches, and scholars debate how to interpret these changes. Huquier’s print is sharper and more detailed compared to the sketch. All three vignettes are shown very clearly. Though it would have been possible at the time to use an etching technique that more closely replicated the softness of the sketch, Huquier seems to have wanted to flaunt his expertise as an etcher and to inject his own personal style into the prints. The changes he made included boldly inserting new figures into the image. In the foreground, there is a dragon that was absent in the original sketch. The addition of a dragon may have enhanced the marketability of the print, since *chinoiserie* themes were increasingly popular at the time.

The overall style of the print is more suggestive of ornamental designs by Gilles-Marie Oppenord than of Watteau’s drawings. Since Huquier was Oppenord’s chief engraver, he might have been influenced by the latter’s designs. Also, because Watteau did not intend for many of his sketches to be seen by others, he often left out details that Huquier was obliged to fill in. Huquier’s engraving after Watteau’s *The Temple of Diana* is more representative of how his prints were not intended to exactly replicate Watteau’s sketches, but rather to experiment with arabesque ornamental design. Therefore, Huquier’s prints should be used not so much to study Watteau as to explore Huquier’s own engraving techniques as well as French Rococo ornament.

Francis Cho

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Louis Marin Bonnet started training as an engraver in 1756 under Jean Charles François, who discovered the crayon-manner technique of engraving a year later. Bonnet opened his own shop in 1760, where he tried to perfect the crayon-manner method by producing prints using multiple plates. His techniques and innovations included using blue or buff paper; experimenting with aquatint-like techniques; discovering a stable white ink that was resistant to discoloring; printing with gold ink; and, most importantly, developing the technique of pastel-manner etching. 

*Tête de Flore* is considered to be the finest example of Bonnet’s pastel-manner technique.14

Prints became even more popular in the eighteenth century following the discovery of the crayon-manner method. This technique enabled printmakers to replicate accurately the subtleties of drawings that previous prints were unable to duplicate. Due to their reproductive capabilities and increased circulation, prints became a valuable resource for art students who copied works by other artists in order to learn from them. A combination of high quality, low cost, and availability also secured the popularity of prints as interior decorations. This particular print is a reproduction of François Boucher’s pastel *Tête de Flore*. Boucher was a popular artist during the Rococo period who specialized in idyllic imagery. The initial prints were priced at 10-15 *livres* for a matted print and 6 *livres* for a regular print. The portrait is commonly thought to depict Madame de Pompadour, but it actually represents Boucher’s younger daughter, Marie Emilie. Louis Marin Bonnet’s print was made using a combination of engraving and etching. While the engraving method of printmaking involves carving marks directly into a metal plate, an etching consists of using a tool to make marks onto a wax ground that covers the plate. The plate is then put into acid that wears away the metal left exposed by the tool to leave marks behind.

Bonnet called the prints he made using more than three plates “pastel manner.” The image was printed using red, green-yellow, blue-green, light blue, black, tan, brown, white, and pink inks. The initial printing involved eight plates, and plates 1, 2, and 4 were printed *à la poupée*, a method whereby a plate is inked in multiple colors in different areas. While printing, Bonnet took into account the effects that multiple printings would have on earlier layers and adjusted the design accordingly. The second printing was done in a monochromatic color scheme, using three plates in black and white. Later reprints used anywhere from three to eight plates. Due to the effort and time Bonnet took in creating the print, he changed the number of plates and colors so he could reprint the same image multiple times.

Annie Zhang

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Catalogue no. 9
Unknown (French)
*Fashionable Hairstyles*, ca. 1775-1780
Hand-colored etching
Gift of Mrs. William B. Heller (Anne Cohen, Class of 1941) in the Name of the Class of 1941
1983.47.2

*Fashionable Hairstyles* depicts four variations of the popular pouf hairstyle of eighteenth-century France. Though the origins of this particular etching are unknown, prints such as this one were often featured in the *Galerie des Modes* and other fashion periodicals that circulated during the time. The hairstyles featured in this plate are typical of the most popular hairstyles of the day. Most aristocratic women wore wigs similar to these daily. They were often as high as three feet and were made from a combination of the wearer’s real hair, horsetail, wire, cloth, gauze, and fake hair, all built on scaffolding. Though this style was popular, it was incredibly cumbersome to wear. Sleeping was next to impossible. The wigs were not removed often, and at night they had to be so carefully wrapped that women were obliged to sleep sitting upright with several pillows underneath their heads. Additionally, the wigs were not washable, which made them susceptible to a multitude of small insects. Eighteenth-century women used elaborate head scratchers made of gold, silver, and sometimes diamonds to alleviate themselves of the itching caused by lice.

The infamous French queen Marie Antoinette was one of the pouf’s most enthusiastic proponents. She debuted the style at her husband Louis XVI’s coronation in 1774. For the celebration, Marie Antoinette commissioned an elaborate pouf that angered many bystanders, who claimed that their view of the king was hindered due to the queen’s obscenely high hair.

As time passed, the pouf became much more elaborate. Precious stones were used to decorate poufs, along with very tall and expensive ostrich feathers. Two different types of poufs were developed: the pouf à sentiment, which was created to express a certain feeling, and the pouf à la circonstance, which commemorated an event. Marie Antoinette had hundreds of both kinds of poufs, including one that she commissioned to mourn the death of Louis XV. Another of the queen’s headpieces, which celebrated Louis XVI’s successful inoculation from smallpox, was ornamented with syringes.

After their high-profile debut, poufs remained in fashion for several decades. However, due to their association with Marie Antoinette, they soon fell out of favor (it did not help that the queen, along with other members of the aristocracy, powdered their wigs with flour during France’s bread shortage of the 1780s). The pouf was the ultimate hairstyle of the mid to late seventeenth century, but it quickly fell out of favor during the French Revolution.

Alexa Rice

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Jean-Baptiste Pillement, master of the eighteenth-century Rococo, was one of the most well traveled artists of the period and among the most prolific and successful designers. Born into an artist family, Pillement was given the opportunity to train at an early age, and his talent was quickly discovered. During his career, he traveled extensively—from Paris to Spain, Portugal, Poland, and England—where he carried out projects for elite and royal clients. Pillement worked primarily in the realms of painting, printmaking, and design. The artist’s decorative motifs were popularized through prints and objets d’art.

The French term chinoiserie, which relates to the imagery in Pillement’s cabier, connotes a European fantasy vision of the Far East. In the eighteenth century imaginary images of China were used to adorn European decorative objects, such as porcelain and pottery, and interior design. Pillement was one of the most distinguished artists to experiment actively with and create chinoiserie schemes. “A New Book of Chinese Ornaments,” his first cabier (series) of engraved chinoiserie designs, was published in 1755 in London. Thereafter, over a period of 44 years, he created more than 1,300 designs to be used by draughtsman and painters. Pillement’s illustrations often included fantastic birds, human figures, flora and fauna, as seen in this cabier’s five etchings. Normally, a cabier would consist of an ornamental title page and four etchings, as is the case here.

The Nouvelle Suite de Cabiers Chinois à l’usage des dessinateurs et des peintres was etched by Anne Allen, Pillement’s second wife, after his designs. In the late 1770s, during one of his many trips to London, Pillement met Allen, an English miniaturist, printer, and engraver. He offered to employ her as his primary printmaker because he was impressed by her exceptional finesse of execution. In the eighteenth century, printmakers often experimented with new techniques to improve the range and quality of color and tone. Anne Allen employed a rare and sophisticated technique of color printmaking known as à la poupée. Unlike the previous technique of color printing—in which each color was inked onto a separate copperplate—à la poupée entailed applying each color onto the appropriate part on a single plate. Allen, who printed a total of nine cabiers of Pillement’s designs, used two copperplates, which were printed on paper one after the other. Pillement was pleased with her ability to impeccably execute his imaginary and fantastic flowers, and began referring to them as fleurs idéales.

Though these prints qualify as chinoiserie, their subject matter and form resonate to some extent with Chinese art, suggesting that Pillement may have seen prints and art objects arriving from China in the eighteenth century. Chinese art often captures a moment in time, emphasizing the vastness and power of nature against the smallness of individual beings, a motif that recurs throughout the cabier. In addition to Pillement’s fantastic chinoiserie motifs of flowers, rocky cascades, and fishermen, Allen’s proficiency of inking vibrant colors furthers the connection to Chinese prints.

Anna Kim

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16 This entry draws upon information contained in the Davis Museum’s object file for the cabier, most notably a text written by curatorial assistant Rachel Spaulding.
Catalogue no. 11
Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki (1726-1801)
_Cabinet d’un Peintre_ (A Painter’s Cabinet), 1771
Etching
Gift of Mrs. William F. Stearns  1989.31

_Cabinet d’un Peintre_ is one of over two thousand etchings that Chodowiecki produced throughout his career. It is not only an excellent example of German printmaking in the Zopfstil period (the period between Rococo and Neoclassicism); it also represents a growing interest in the German middle class and the persona of the artist in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chodowiecki was born in Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) in 1726. His father was a grain merchant with a knack for painting, and he passed on his interest in art to Chodowiecki and his brother, Gottfried. In 1743, Chodowiecki moved to Berlin to train as a salesman, but he continued to study art as a hobby. Painter Johann Lorenz Haid instructed him in enamel painting, and he practiced drawing in much of his free time. His most successful works were miniatures—he painted snuffboxes and small oil paintings. These were popular enough that he could give up his salesman training and work full time as an artist. Chodowiecki became a member of the Berlin Bunstakademie in 1764. In 1756 he began to use the printmaking technique of etching, and the medium really played to his strengths as it allowed him to create highly detailed miniature works. Since he participated actively in the German Enlightenment, many of his prints were illustrations for books, calendars, almanacs, and pedagogical texts.

While Chodowiecki experimented with a variety of genres, he gained the most acclaim for works based on firsthand observation. Therefore, his prints of domestic scenes of Prussian and Berlin society were considered his most successful. In the eighteenth century Chodowiecki’s images were thought to represent truthful and unbiased depictions of middle class life. He was often referred to as the German Hogarth because of this “truthfulness,” a claim that he himself disputed because he felt that his works lacked the biting wit of Hogarth’s prints.

In _Cabinet d’un Peintre_, Chodowiecki presents us with a domestic scene that he would have been infinitely familiar with: a depiction of his own family in his painting studio. The print was created in response to a request by Chodowiecki’s mother for a picture of her grandchildren, but it also met a larger societal request in this period for insight into the life of an artist. Family time was precious in middle-class Germany, as evidenced by the Chodowiecki family’s close contact in the print. Chodowiecki was constantly working, so the fact that his family was spending time with him in his studio emphasizes a commitment to family values balanced with a strong work ethic. This work ethic is evidently being passed on to his children, and in fact his son, Wilhelm, who is shown drawing in the print, became an artist, while his older daughter, who is represented studying a book of prints, also demonstrated artistic talent. The paintings on the wall in the studio served as inspiration for Chodowiecki, who, in accordance with Enlightenment ideals, was continually learning through studying the work of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Eliza Tibbits
This print is one in a series commissioned by London publisher Rudolf Ackermann, and it represents a collaboration between Ackermann, the architect Augustus Pugin, and the caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson. Scholars attribute the architectural space to Pugin and the satirical figures to Rowlandson. The juxtaposition of the attenuated Neoclassical lines of the institutional setting and the flowing Rococo exaggerations of the human figures is the first in a series of contrasts that invite the viewer to interpret the print humorously.

Thomas Rowlandson rose to prominence as an artist at the height of the English caricature movement, 1770-1820. While the humor exhibited in Rowlandson’s work is occasionally cruel, it does not take on the moralizing tone of William Hogarth’s prints of the previous generation. Also unlike the stylings of the political satirist James Gillray, Rowlandson’s pen was chiefly concerned with exposing the humor of everyday scenes and people. In particular, he was fascinated by the comedy of contrasts between fat and thin, ugly and pretty, old and young, rich and poor. While his style erred on the side of observation rather than judgment, these exaggerated contrasts demand that the viewer acknowledge the absurdities of reality and possibly make value judgments of his or her own.

This invitation to social commentary is strongly present in Christie’s Auction Room. The scene represents an auction in Christie’s Auction House, which was founded in 1766 by James Christie. In its early years, auctions at Christie’s included such banal objects as chamber pots, but by 1808 it had become a respected venue for the sale of important art. While it is difficult to discern precise sources for the paintings on auction in this scene, they represent a wide variety of genres, from religious and historical pictures to scenes of debauchery. Importantly, the painting that is shown being auctioned (spotlighted by a beam of light from the lantern above) is of a female nude, drawing attention to the question of commodity and connoisseurship inherent in the appreciation of art.

The audience, too, represents a diverse range of social status, age and interest. The serious connoisseur is placed next to the lecherous old man, who in turn stands next to an oblivious couple engaged in flirtation. There is a sense that the figures are as aware of being examined by other characters as they are of examining the art. Despite the vignettes created by the relationships between figures in the print, the composition draws the viewer’s attention to the auctioned painting and the auctioneer at the back of the room, and there is an undertone of courtroom drama. The auctioneer assumes the role of a judge of taste, and the easel on which the auctioned painting is placed is disturbingly like a guillotine, appropriate given the relatively fresh ravages of the French Revolution. Finally, Rowlandson asks the viewer to consider what it means to depict fine art through the medium of caricature. Ultimately, does he bring “high” and “low” art to the same level of importance by demonstrating caricature’s ability express inherent truths?

Nancy Welsh
CHRISTIE'S AUCTION ROOM.
Following in the tradition of celebrated British social satirists, Thomas Rowlandson frequently depicted the quotidian comedy of the English middle class. Rowlandson’s quick, often imprecise line was well suited to his preference for depicting “types” rather than individuals; however, in this particular series, his more orderly line may be attributed to the growing popularity of his book illustrations. The series was later used to illustrate the 1858 edition of the New Bath Guide, written by British poet Christopher Anstey.

“The Comforts of Bath” is a series of twelve satirical drawings that are loosely inspired by Humphry Clinker (1771), a novel by Scottish poet and author Tobias Smollet. The scenes depict the use of mineral water therapy in Bath, England, which became fashionable for both medical and social purposes during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Bath’s increasing popularity was due in part to the rise of Neoclassicism—specifically, the ancient Roman practice of outdoor bathing. Frequently patients with gout (a broad term used for many types of arthritis and rheumatism) and other medical conditions were sent to the baths for treatment. At the time these drawings were made, however, Bath’s medical practitioners were generally regarded as quacks.

Each of the twelve aquatints features a rotund gentleman who probably has some form of gout. Because gout was associated with the habits of the gluttonous elite, it was frequently used as a satirical theme throughout the work of comedic draftsmen. One of the first social satirists, William Hogarth, represented the subject in The Marriage Settlement from his series “Marriage à la mode” in 1743. In The Doctor’s Visit, Rowlandson pokes fun not only at the large, ridiculous-looking patient, but also the quack doctors on either side of him. The doctor on the right holds a magnifying glass that is absurdly far from his patient and placed not over, but to one the side of his eye. The doctor on the left, meanwhile, appears to have early signs of the same symptoms of bodily swelling. The curtains in the upper left of the scene add an element of theatricality to the comedy, highlighting the dubiousness of the doctor’s performance.

The Pump Room is filled with several corpulent visitors including the pathetic looking protagonist from the Doctor’s Visit, who enters the Neoclassically designed room from the left. First built in 1706, the pump room supplied Bath’s mineral water from a covered pump, allowing people to drink indoors and creating a new central arena for socializing. To heighten the satire, Rowlandson includes a statue of another large man in the upper right corner. Perhaps through the artificiality of Rowlandson’s representation of three-dimensional sculpture—emphasized here by his flat drawing style—the artist is cleverly drawing the viewer’s attention to the artificiality and ineffectiveness of the mineral water treatment. Rowlandson’s last joke seems to be on the viewer, who is inevitably absorbed by the entertaining spectacle of social life in Bath.

Jenny Harris
A Harlot’s Progress is a series of six prints engraved, etched, and printed by William Hogarth in 1732. The series tells the cautionary story of country girl Moll Hackabout, whose name is inspired by Daniel Defoe’s innocent-turned-corrupt heroine in the novel Moll Flanders (1722) and by the famous, real-life prostitute Kate Hackabout. In Hogarth’s series Moll arrives in London determined to create an honorable, urban life for herself, but she quickly ends up falling for the fraudulent world of the city and becoming a prostitute.

Plate two portrays Moll as the mistress of a wealthy Jewish merchant, whose identity is evoked by the Old Testament paintings on the back wall. She creates a diversion by exposing her breast and knocking over a tea table, an act that permits her second lover to escape. The stage-like composition, combined with the figure’s dramatic postures and surroundings, creates an overall impression of performance, a hallmark of the Rococo’s social sensibilities. The jars of cosmetics, the mask, the monkey, and the young black servant all allude to Moll’s sexual promiscuity and moral instability as well as her pretensions to wealth and society. Hogarth was a xenophobe, and most of his prints reflect his negative view of foreigners and otherness, like the Jewish merchant who contributes to her downfall.

In eighteenth-century England, many country people had to relocate to the city because of the rising merchant class and a growing industrialization that obviated the role of agricultural laborers and depopulated rural communities. Hogarth’s series reveals anxiety about this development, while it also portrays foreign commodities and luxuries that add to this scene’s commotion. The Chinese tea service that Moll upsets, the stunned African houseboy with an Arabian turban, and the crazed monkey, along with the Jewish merchant, all figure as an assessment of London’s commercial and morally corrupting influence on good, wholesome country girls like Moll herself.18

William Hogarth was born in London at the turn of the eighteenth century to a poor Latin schoolteacher and textbook writer. At a young age he was apprenticed to the engraver Ellis Gamble and learned to engrave trade cards and similar small items. He took an interest in London street life and was gifted at capturing various aspects of urban living. A Harlot’s Progress was Hogarth’s first attempt at creating a series of prints, based on his own popular series of paintings, to sell to the public. The “limited edition” series of 1240 sets of six prints each were priced at one guinea, and they gave him financial and artistic freedom since he didn’t have to rely on a patron. A Harlot’s Progress began Hogarth’s successful emblematic and satirical treatment of current events that characterized his career. Piracies of the series were instantaneously produced, causing him to campaign for an Act of Parliament that granted copyright privileges to engravers. In many ways, Hogarth initiated the tradition of tabloid journalism with A Harlot’s Progress, which embodied his witty, detailed, realistic take on British metropolitan culture.

Sarah Fiori

This Louis XVI style roll-top desk is an object that, in the eighteenth century, would have required knowledge to use and a high level of bodily interaction with the piece of furniture. The desk has several locks, which made it accessible to only one person or to whomever its owner would have allowed access. Privacy was a major concern for eighteenth-century furniture makers, who produced objects with nested drawers, secret compartments, and mechanical side-wings on desks that would open up when a hidden button was pressed. Knowing how to use this type of furniture, typically found in cabinets and salons, required either a manual supplied by the furniture maker or a certain level of hands-on experience gained from being part of the aristocratic circle. If one did understand how to manipulate this particular object, the body then took on a key role in the interaction since the roll-top desk had to be physically maneuvered in order to make it a functional writing desk. The roll-top desk was, therefore, part of a larger performance played out between aristocratic bodies and the specialized, individualized objects that surrounded them.

This roll-top desk is made out of mahogany with brass mountings. The use of brass, in place of its more expensive counterpart, bronze, indicates that this desk was not created for a member of the royalty; however, due to the high cost of mahogany imported from the West Indies, this desk was most likely found in the apartment of a member of the upper class. The marble on the top of the desk would have most likely matched the marble of the mantle in the room. Furniture, by 1750, was often conceptualized as part of an overall interior design program that included a color scheme to integrate the object with its architectural surroundings. This desk would have either been placed against a wall or somewhere in the middle of the room, since it is finished on all four sides.

Similar to other forms of desks being produced at the time, the roll-top desk is made out of solid wood with few embellishments. The desk was made by a menuisier, instead of an ébéniste who veneered furniture; therefore, the pattern of the natural grain of the wood and the curve of the roll-top provide the only curvilinear lines that were previously ubiquitous under Louis XV. The rest of the object is defined by its strict linearity and geometry. Designed in the “Etruscan” style, this desk is part of the Neoclassical aesthetic that dominated furniture creation under Louis XVI. In this period some Rococo objects were still being produced—and ébénistes continued to create veneered writing tables and toilettes for women—but many of the royal commissions were given to designers such as Jean-Henri Riesener, the principal furniture maker under Louis XVI, who created solid wood pieces of furniture that emphasized linearity over excess decoration and curvilinear forms.

Sara Putterman
Fans became a necessary part of court life in France during the sixteenth century, when King Henri III began importing these accessories from Italy due to the influence of his mother, Catherine de’ Medici. The most enticing aspect of the fan was its ability to open and close at the flick of a wrist, adding a tangible element of surprise and intrigue to court life. Folding fans spread like wildfire within the aristocracy, in part for their compact convenience, but mostly because they offered yet another chance to ornament the body. Fans always kept up with current fashions, often changing shape to complement various dress silhouettes, and reached the pinnacle of their popularity during the mid-eighteenth century when Rococo sensibilities favored ornament and luxury.

A fan went through many processes of production before reaching its aristocratic owner. Each part of the fan was manufactured by a different guild: one guild would create the fan’s leaf, another would make the sticks (the support, or skeleton, of the fan), and another would assemble the fan. Since these materials came from all corners of the world - with ivory, mother of pearl, and horn for the sticks imported from Asia, and paper or parchment leaves typically painted in France or Italy - the finished product was a conglomeration of elements that made the fan an international commodity.

With all of the pomp that went into courtly life, the fan became a potent signifier of identity. How a woman held her fan was a clue to her mental state, and certain gestures were known for their ability to display etiquette, chastity, coquetry or boredom. Skillful manipulation of one’s fan could foster or inhibit social relationships, and the chosen design often highlighted a desirable personality trait, much the same as one’s choice of pouf hairdo. While there were certain types of fans for key events, such as marriage or mourning, everyday fans could portray almost any theme, with the more popular being pastoral imagery, Oriental motifs, and depictions of important historical events. Also popular were fans that changed color or subject matter depending on how they were held - the perfect means to secretly view erotica or other illicit material. The risqué behavior connoted by these so-called puzzle fans was a major component of fan culture, with some fans even going so far as to have eye holes through which to flirtatiously feign discretion.

After the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1738 and 1748, respectively, fans were sold as souvenirs that Grand Tourists could use to call attention to their worldly knowledge. Many of these Pompeian fans were decorated with copies of newly discovered frescos, which were frequently divided into symmetric partitions featuring grotesques, vases and armor, as can be seen on the fan designs at the Davis. These motifs were primary features of Neoclassicism, and were circulated in pattern books that were used for all kinds of decorative objects, including Josiah Wedgwood’s jasperware and Sèvres porcelain. The grotesques on the Davis’ fans also recall those that Raphael painted in the Vatican Loggia and show the influence of the ancient frescos they commemorate. More than simply replicating the frescos found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, however, the

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20 Bennett, pp. 18-22.
Neoclassical style seen in these fans recast antiquity into a more modern framework, mixing Rococo color palettes with Classical scenes of mythology and virtuous allegories (depicted in each fan’s center cartouche). Placing such noble scenes on a decorative object used for flirtation may indicate that Neoclassicism’s aesthetic moralization was not necessarily echoed in societal reformation, as many critics at the time had hoped.

Rachel Spaulding

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22 The central scenes are understood as allegories based on the description of a remarkably similar fan as an allegory of charity. This fan, recently auctioned at Sotheby’s, was painted by Tomasso Bigatti and is almost identical to one of those owned by the Davis, but the proliferation of designs through pattern books makes it very difficult to discern whether or not Bigatti made the Davis’ fan.