SPECIAL LOAN

"Beauty-in-Design"

Objects from the Horace Wood Brock Collection

Horace Wood Brock is one of America's most remarkable collectors. Over the last three decades, he has assembled an enviable collection of French and English decorative arts dating from 1675 to 1820, as well as paintings and Old Master drawings. Dr. Brock has also been a generous lender of works of art, loaning objects to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and now to the Frick. Five French clocks from his collection are featured in the special exhibition *Precision and Splendor: Clocks and Watches at The Frick Collection,* which opened in the Portico Gallery in January and will remain on view until February 2014. In addition to Dr. Brock's clocks, four important pieces of French eighteenth-century decorative arts from his private collection are now on view in the galleries, where they can be enjoyed by museum visitors for the next several years.

Dr. Brock trained as a classical pianist and holds advanced degrees in mathematics, mathematical economics, and political philosophy. His serious involvement with music, along with a commitment to the study of Greek and Latin and to European history and languages, led to his deep appreciation of and love for European art of all kinds. What makes his collection unique is that it was formed in accordance with a highly original and personal theory that he developed about the concept of "beauty-in-design." He describes this theory in the catalogue published in conjunction with the 2009 exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection.*

In terms of design, Dr. Brock believes that a beautiful object "is composed, like a Bach fugue," with themes and transformations. A theme constitutes the basic motif of the work (for example, a simple S-curve visible in the line of the arm of a chair) while the transformations are the echoes of this theme (such as a reversed, rotated S-curve found in the back of the same chair). A simple theme combined with simple transformations brings maximum symmetry and harmony to an object. Conversely, disorder and/or incoherence often correspond to a complex theme and a complex set of transformations (as seen in Victorian furniture and twentieth-century atonal music). According to Dr. Brock, "the highest degree of satisfaction typically results when the right balance is achieved between order and disorder." He further states that an object with "a very simple theme but sufficiently complex transformations can be as beautiful and as pleasing as an object with a complex theme but a simple set of transformations."

RIGHT
Mounted Vase, c. 1786–88, Royal Manufactory of Sèvres, hard-paste porcelain with gilt-bronze mounts attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751–1843); Horace Wood Brock Collection

OPPOSITE PAGE
Potpourri Vase and Cover, c. 1763–70, Royal Manufactory of Sèvres, painted and gilded soft-paste porcelain with gilt-bronze mounts, c. 1785; Horace Wood Brock Collection

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ABOVE
Secrétaire à abbatant, c. 1785, by Jean-Henri Riesener (1734–1806), oak veneered with mahogany, gilt-bronze mounts, marble, leather writing surface; Horace Wood Brock Collection

OPPOSITE PAGE
Longcase Regulator Clock, c. 1750–55, by Balthazar Lieutaud (d. 1780), oak veneered with tulipwood and amaranth, gilt bronze, enameled metal, and glass; Horace Wood Brock Collection

The presentation of works of art also plays an important part in Dr. Brock's theory. In his homes, the objects from his collection are not grouped according to their materials, function, or date or place of manufacture. Instead, they are displayed next to each other or on top of each other with the goal of enhancing the beauty of each piece and creating a perfect symmetry, coherence, and harmony.

The mantel clock featured on the magazine's cover is one of the five timepieces included in the *Precision and Splendor* exhibition. It was made sometime between 1785 and 1790 and represents Study and Philosophy after a sculpture by Simon-Louis Boizot. Here, classical symmetry is achieved by placing within an imaginary equilateral triangle the figure of Study on the left, Philosophy on the right, and, in the center, a column topped by a globe. The composition is completed by the harmonious contrast between the dark patinated bronze figures, the clock's white marble column and dial, and its elaborate gilt-bronze ornamentation.

The impressive longcase regulator clock (opposite page) displayed in the East Vestibule near the museum's Entrance Hall was made in Paris around 1750–55, when the fashion for rococo design was at its peak. A perfect example of this highly decorative style, the clock's shape avoids straight lines in favor of a fanciful play of curves and countercurves, adorned by heavy gilt-bronze mounts that call to mind the branches of a tree. Although the mounts take their inspiration from nature, they are not representational but rather a pure fantasy of the rococo style. The clock is topped by the winged figure of Time, made by an unknown craftsman. The figure holds a scythe in one hand and an hourglass in the other as reminders of man's mortality. The case was made by Balthazar Lieutaud, who became a master cabinetmaker in 1749, only a few years before creating this piece. About a decade later, in 1767, he executed a longcase clock that was


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