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***SPLENDOR AND ELEGANCE: EUROPEAN DECORATIVE ARTS AND DRAWINGS
FROM THE HORACE WOOD BROCK COLLECTION
SHOWCASES SPECTACULAR WORKS FROM THE 16TH–19TH CENTURIES***

**Exhibition at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Features
Aristocratic Furniture, Decorative Arts, and Master Drawings
by Rubens, Fragonard, Tintoretto, Guercino, and Tiepolo**



*Vase (one of a pair),
about 1760–65*

BOSTON, MA (January 14, 2009)—Deep insight and a highly personal approach to beauty and harmony of design are the hallmarks of the sumptuous Brock collection of aristocratic furniture, decorative objects, drawings, and paintings showcased in an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), from January 22 through May 17, 2009. *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection*, on view in the Museum’s Torf Gallery, features approximately 185 works assembled in the last 30 years by collector Dr. Horace Wood (“Woody”) Brock, who has sought to return objects of beauty and elegance to positions of prominence in the art world.

Heavily concentrated in the French and English 18th century, the furniture and decorative arts range from 17th-century Flemish to the Regency period (George IV) of early 19th-century England. Art cabinets, console tables, vases in rare materials splendidly mounted in gilt bronze, sturdy blue and white Delft ware, fine porcelain from Chelsea, Meissen and Sèvres, French clocks and andirons in imaginative forms all testify to the beauty and fantasy of design characteristic of the Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-Classical eras. The some 75 choice drawings

—more—

reveal Dr. Brock's passion for drawing materials that have a subtle but rich coloristic impact—examples include drawings with glowing ink washes from gold to brown, red chalk, and blue paper. The drawings are primarily Italian and French in origin and range in date from the mid-16th to the early 19th centuries. These include outstanding works by such masters as Peter Paul Rubens, Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, Jean Honoré Fragonard, and Guercino, as well as many equally expressive drawings by less celebrated artists.

“The Brock collection is an important assemblage of European artistry ranging from the majestic splendor of the Louis XIV style to the refined elegance of the Regency period,” said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. “Woody Brock's passion for beauty and discerning eye for fantastic objects and eloquent drawings reflect his unique vision. We are so pleased to offer our visitors a window into the world of this dedicated collector and connoisseur.”

The works assembled in the exhibition are an eclectic mix of furniture, decorative objects, drawings, and paintings that showcase breathtaking craftsmanship, abundant fantasy, and perfect harmony of proportion, whether it be a rare long-case clock made by André-Charles Boulle for Louis XIV, a fantastic English Chinoiserie tea table from the age of George II, or a François Boucher oil sketch—a preliminary study for a tapestry on mythological themes.

“If there is anything distinctive about this collection, it is that it was formed in accordance with a mathematical theory I developed about what makes objects beautiful,” said Dr. Brock. “My quest has been to enjoy beauty in the refuge of my own home, and I have acquired objects solely because I find their harmonious design life-enhancing. In this regard, the forthcoming MFA exhibition is intended to spread the word that in the world of art, after 50 years of neglect, beauty is back.”

The drawings and paintings are extremely diverse in subject matter, including Biblical and mythological narratives, literary illustrations, architectural fantasies and ruins, landscapes,

studies of the human figure, and design drawings for the decorative arts. Many of the narrative drawings involve the sculpturally rendered human figure in action, but the key figure drawing in the collection is the pen anatomical study by the young Rubens. The outstanding landscape in the collection is a painting, *Mountain Landscape with Travelers* (1623), a large-scale work, part of a set of six paintings created by Joos de Momper in the 1620s for the Spanish ambassador to the Netherlands. The greatest Biblical illustration on paper is Domenico Tiepolo's *Resurrection of Christ*, one of the finest pen and wash drawings from the series of over 300 large format finished New Testament drawings Tiepolo made after 1785. Among the liveliest literary illustrations are those on blue paper by J.B. Oudry for the fables of La Fontaine, such as *The Rat and the Elephant* (1732).

The exhibition involves a complex dialogue between harmonious stylistic groupings of furniture and objects (Louis XIV, English Neo-Palladian, German Rococo, Empire, etc.), arranged in a roughly chronological sequence, alternating with thematic clusters of drawings that provide a counterpoint to, as well as a cultural backdrop for, the objects. *Splendor and Elegance* was initiated by the late Tracey Albainy (Russell B. and Andrée Beauchamp Stearns Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture) and is curated by George Shackelford (Chair of the Art of Europe and Arthur K. Solomon Curator of Modern Art at the MFA) and Clifford S. Ackley (Chair of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs and Ruth and Carl J. Shapiro Curator of Prints and Drawings at the MFA).

In the exhibition, beauty is celebrated in a rich variety of objects from England, France, Germany, Holland, and Italy, shown in period groupings. Several spectacular pieces from the 17th century include the *Cabinet-on-Stand* (Flemish, about 1650), ornately detailed and made of pine veneered with tortoiseshell, ebony, palissander, and bone. Also of note is Boulle's *Long-case clock* (about 1685), a rare French clock commissioned for Louis XIV's palace at Versailles, crafted from oak, enamel, and glass, with tortoiseshell, brass, and pewter marquetry, and accented by gilt-bronze mounts. It is one of Boulle's rare early long-case clocks—only seven other examples have survived. The classically inspired *Vase with lion handles* (Delft, about 1680–85), from the Het Moriaenshooft factory, is one of the collection's important examples of early Delft wares.



A Sheet of Anatomical Studies, 1600-1605,
Peter Paul Rubens

Dramatic pen and brown ink drawings from the 17th century include such masterworks as *A Sheet of Anatomical Studies* (1600–1605) by the young Flemish painter Rubens, which details the sinuous musculature of a man’s powerful arms, and *A Young Man with an Owl on a Stick* by the Italian painter Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri). Another important drawing, *The Head of Medusa* (Flemish, 1680) by Godfried Maes, is a startling pen portrait of the serpent-haired mythological figure.

Eighteenth-century works in *Splendor and Elegance* range from the early and mid (Rococo) to late (Neoclassical) periods. Exquisite French decorative objects in gilt bronze attributed to Boulle—a Louis XIV *Pair of candelabra* (about 1700) and *Pair of sphinx andirons* (about 1710)—are featured in the exhibition. Complementing the decorative arts are drawings, such as *Head of a Young Man Looking Down to the Left* by the Venetian painter Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, and eight illustrations on blue paper by the 18th-century French painter Jean-Baptiste Oudry based upon the 17th-century fables of Jean La Fontaine and a tale by the 16th-century author Machiavelli.

Focusing on the mid-18th century’s Rococo style, the exhibition features elegant furniture of the period, such as the ornately carved gilded wood *Console table* (French, about 1735), and the black japanned-wood *Chinoiserie table* (English, about 1760) inlaid with panels of Chinese lacquer and gilt. Other decorative arts objects are whimsical, as can be seen with *Mounted porcelain group: Blind Man’s Bluff* (French, about 1750), incorporating in its design a Meissen porcelain vase and figures of playful children, with Vincennes porcelain flowers, accented by colored enamel and gilt bronze. A fine example of painting of the period is *The Story of Cupid and Psyche: An old Philosopher leads the wandering Psyche to his rustic Home* (French, 1737–1740), a preliminary design by François Boucher for a Beauvais tapestry. The exhibition also features the red chalk drawing “*The Temple of Jupiter Serapis*” at Pozzuoli (French, about 1760), a work of archaeological fantasy by Hubert Robert.



Louis XVI clock with vestals carrying the sacred fire (Vestales portant le feu sacré), about 1789

The neoclassical design that followed in the late 18th century evokes Greek and Roman antiquity. Many examples are featured in the exhibition, including the tall, elegant *Clock and pedestal* (English, about 1790), created by a consortium of artists, including clockmaker Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy. Crafted from painted satinwood, biscuit porcelain, marble, gilt bronze, and glass, it features a temple in the round atop a veneered satinwood pedestal, decorated with a painting of Apollo driving his horse-drawn chariot encircled by signs of the Zodiac. Another magnificent clock of the period is the gilt and patinated bronze, marble, enameled metal and glass *Louis XVI clock with vestals carrying the sacred fire (Vestales portant le feu sacré)* (French, about 1789) made for Louis XVI's court attributed to metalworker Pierre-Philippe Thomire, featuring two vestal virgins carrying the altar bearing the sacred flame.

Porcelains from Asia, mounted in gilt-bronze, include the *Garniture of a Clock and Two Vases* (about 1770). Neoclassical furniture is represented by *Fall-Front Desk* (French, about 1785), a secretary made by Jean-Henri Riesener—cabinetmaker to Louis XVI—in oak veneered with mahogany. A spectacular drawing of the period from the collection is *Resurrection of Christ* (Italian, after 1785) by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, executed in pen and brown ink and wash over black chalk. It is one from a series of more than 300 large-format “New Testament” drawings by Tiepolo. In contrast, a darker view of the world is offered in Giovanni David's *Nightmare* (Italian), a late 18th-century work drawn in pen and brown ink, with washes that hauntingly illuminate a frightened young woman threatened by death and damnation. Charles de Wailly's *Interior of a Celestial Palace* (French, 1771), a design for a court “spectacle,” imaginatively constructs God's throne room from light and shadow. Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *Ruggiero Seeking Angelica* (French, 1780s) is an illustration for the epic poem *Orlando furioso* by the 16th-century Italian poet Lodovico Ariosto. Luigi Valadier's *An Oval Soup Tureen and Cover for the Borghese Service* (Italian, before 1784) is a pen and black ink illustration with gray washes depicting the design for a splendid 18th-century silver table setting.

The Empire and Regency period of the early 19th century figures prominently in the Brock collection. A striking example of furniture from the classically-inspired Regency style is the *Cabinet-on-stand* (English, about 1805), attributed to James Newton and given recently to the Museum by Dr. Brock. Veneered with satinwood, rosewood, tulipwood, ebony, and boxwood, the cabinet features a variety of Egyptian and Roman motifs, such as sphinx heads and lions' paw feet. Comparisons between the French Empire and English Regency styles can be made when considering two similar decorative objects of the period, Thomire's patinated and bronze *Pair of Empire candelabra* (French, about 1810), and Vulliamy's patinated *Pair of "Atlas" candelabra* (English, about 1815), a promised gift to the MFA from Dr. Brock. Another important Regency object in the exhibition is a *Circular 'buhl' inkstand* (English, about 1810–15), another recent gift from Dr. Brock to the Museum. This "buhl" inkstand by George Bullock features marquetry inlay of tortoiseshell and brass. A drawing in the collection representative of the period is Theodore Gericault's *Groom Leading Two Horses* (French, 1814–1815).

The unifying theme in *Splendor and Elegance* is the collector's personal commitment to the aesthetics of beauty and design. By integrating furnishings and pictures from the 16th–19th centuries, the exhibition recreates the splendor and elegance of times past for new audiences to enjoy. In addition to being a collector, Dr. Brock is a Distinguished Benefactor and Overseer of the MFA who, since 2004, has generously given to the Museum 20 objects from his collection. He also has promised additional works of art for a future gallery at the Museum dedicated to the English Regency period. Dr. Brock is a mathematical economist and the founder and President of Strategic Economic Decisions, Inc. (SED, Inc.). He is a specialist in applications of the modern Economics of Uncertainty to forecasting and risk assessment in the international economy. Dr. Brock earned five degrees: an AB, MBA, and an MA (Mathematics) at Harvard University and a MA and Ph.D. at Princeton University.

PUBLICATION

A 160-page catalogue, *Splendor and Elegance: European Decorative Arts and Drawings from the Horace Wood Brock Collection*, accompanies the exhibition. It features essays by Dr. Horace Wood Brock, English decorative arts specialist Martin P. Levy, and Clifford S. Ackley.

The hardcover catalogue, produced by MFA Publications, is available for \$55 at the MFA Bookstore and Shop or by visiting mfa.org.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/IMAGES

Support for *Splendor and Elegance* comes in part from the Cordover Exhibition Fund and a gift from Melvin Seiden. For additional information about the exhibition, or for digital images, please contact Kelly Gifford at 617.369.3540 or kgifford@mfa.org.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), is recognized for the quality and scope of its encyclopedic collection, which includes an estimated 450,000 objects. The Museum's collection is made up of: Art of the Americas; Art of Europe; Contemporary Art; Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa; Art of the Ancient World; Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Textile and Fashion Arts; and Musical Instruments.

Open seven days a week, the MFA's hours are Saturday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 4:45 p.m.; Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 9:45 p.m. General admission (which includes two visits in a 10-day period) is \$17 for adults and \$15 for seniors and students age 18 and older. Admission for students who are University Members is free, as is admission for children 17 years of age and younger during non-school hours. No general admission fee is required (after 4 p.m.) during Wednesday Nights at the MFA, underwritten by the Citizens Bank Foundation, although voluntary donations are welcome. Gund Gallery exhibitions are ticketed events that require an additional fee. The Museum is closed on New Year's Day, Patriots' Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For general visitor information, visit the MFA website at mfa.org or call 617.267.9300.

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