

WADDES DON MANOR × BUCKINGHAM FILES



A collaborative project between MA students of the
University of Buckingham and Waddesdon Manor
funded by The Rothschild Foundation

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Edited by Adriano Aymonino and Lindsay Macnaughton

2025–2026





ROTHSCHILD
FOUNDATION



WADDESDON



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WHAT WE DO

The Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files is a five-year collaborative project developed from the University of Buckingham's MA programme in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors, and MA programme in Art Market, Provenance and History of Collecting (supported by a 5-year grant by the Rothschild Foundation).

These programmes combines rigorous academic training with a strong emphasis on vocational and professional skills, preparing students for careers in museums, galleries, auction houses, and the wider heritage sector.

In partnership with Waddesdon Manor (The Rothschild Collection), the Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files gives MA students the chance to work with real objects and collections while still studying. Through a shared, assessed module, students work closely with academic tutors and Waddesdon's collections staff to create public-facing outputs, including catalogue entries, thematic essays, blogs, podcasts, and professionally designed digital publications.

Each year, students work in groups to explore themes and objects from the Rothschild collections at Waddesdon Manor, often focusing on under-researched material or offering fresh perspectives on well-known works. Their research is published on an open-access platform and, as in this case, as professionally produced printed volumes with ISBNs. Students

graduate with published work and concrete experience to support their next career step.

The Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files addresses a well-recognised gap in the sector: the need for meaningful, accessible practical experience alongside advanced scholarly training. While internships are increasingly rare and often unpaid, this project embeds vocational skills directly within the MA curriculum. Students develop expertise in object interpretation, provenance research, collaborative working, professional writing, and public engagement – skills that can only be fully learned through practice.



WHO WE ARE

TUTORS



Adriano Aymonino

Dr Adriano Aymonino is an art historian specialising in early modern art, the reception of the classical tradition, and the history of collecting. He is Programme Director of the MA Art Market, Provenance and the History of Collecting at the University of Buckingham. Adriano's research focuses particularly on eighteenth-century art and provenance. His publications include *Drawn from the Antique* (Sir John Soane's Museum, 2015); *Enlightened Eclecticism* (Yale University Press, 2021), winner of the 2022 William M.B. Berger Prize for British Art History; and a revised and updated edition of Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny's *Taste and the Antique* (Brepols, 2024, with Eloisa Doderò). He is currently working on a critical edition of Robert and James Adam's Grand Tour correspondence (Sir John Soane's Museum, forthcoming) and a monograph on Pier Leone Ghezzi's Studio di Molte Pietre (Burlington Magazine Press 2026). He is a member of the advisory councils of the Museo del Bargello in Florence and the Attingham Trust. Through the Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files, Adriano brings his expertise in provenance research and the history of collecting into direct engagement with students, enabling them to work closely with historic collections in practice.



Lindsay Macnaughton

Dr Lindsay Macnaughton is a cultural historian of France specialising in 18th- and 19-century decorative arts and historic interiors, and the history of collecting in Britain and France. Her work is published in *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* and *Museum History Journal*. She is the Programme Director for the MA in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors at the University of Buckingham, where she has been a lecturer since 2020. Waddesdon Manor has been central to Lindsay's career, beginning with an internship ten years ago, when she contributed to the Riesener Project and the publication *Jean-Henri Riesener: Cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (2020).

Lindsay's research interests have been influenced by the city of Paris, where she was born, and by her Scottish-American upbringing there, and include cross-cultural exchanges, the material culture of urban upheaval, as well as 18th- and 19th-century French furniture and interiors. Lindsay is a Trustee and Secretary of the Society for the History of Collecting. She brings a wealth of experience to share with students from her internships at Waddesdon Manor (2015-2016), the Wallace Collection (2016) and the Musée du Louvre (2020). She is delighted that the Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files mean that her students can work with the collection and learn from the people that helped shape her academic interests to date.



WHO WE ARE

STUDENTS



Albertina Ciani

Albertina Ciani is a doctoral candidate at the University of Buckingham. Her research focuses on the sculptor Raffaele Monti (1818–1881), specifically examining how Monti’s contributions shaped and were influenced by the Italian and British artistic contexts of the mid-nineteenth century. Her project also analyses his engagement with official patronage and the incorporation of industrial innovations into sculpture. She has authored a brief letter titled *Moore not Monti*, published in the *Burlington Magazine* (2023), as well as an article on Baron Carlo Marochetti’s involvement in the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, available on the *Victorian Web*. Additionally, she has participated in numerous international conferences related to the field of sculpture. Furthermore, she served as one of the organisers of the conference entitled *Academy, Market, Industry: Sculpture, Models, Themes, and Genres between Britain and Italy, c. 1728-1854*, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in May 2025.



Karlyn Culmer

Karlyn is a mid-career professional and recent graduate of the MA in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors program at the University of Buckingham. With over ten years of experience in project management across architecture, interior design and construction, she has contributed to several historically inspired projects, including a “Versailles Wing” in a residence in Malibu, California, crafted by Féau Boiseries of Paris. Most recently, she oversaw the renovation of a 1929

Spanish Revival residence in Los Angeles and an 1899 brownstone in New York City. These experiences honed her already innate appreciation for historical design and materials, which she sought to explore academically through the MA at Buckingham. A hobbyist woodworker, Karlyn also approaches historic furniture and ornament with a practical understanding. Since graduating, she has begun working on the renovation of an 1897 shingled beach cottage in The Hamptons, while considering further academic training to advance her career. She is a member of the Decorative Arts Trust, the Society of Architectural Historians, and the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art.



Jessamy Harvey

Jessamy Harvey has just completed her Masters in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors at the University of Buckingham and completed a collaborative BIFMO-FHS digital internship with Raby Castle in 2025. She works as a researcher and associate archivist and records manager in the culture and heritage sector, and taking this degree was an opportunity to engage with the interdisciplinary and hands-on study of European applied arts in museums, galleries, historic buildings and country houses. She now volunteers as an Explainer at Kenwood House, London, as well as learning how to professionally restore furniture in her spare time whilst continuing to pursue her career. It was a privilege to focus on Waddesdon Manor’s French lean-to secretaire because it speaks volumes about Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild’s interest in French eighteenth century furniture as well as allowing us to glimpse the transnational character of decorative arts in France due to the incorporation of Japanese lacquer panels.





Christine Kyle

Christine Kyle spent her working life as director of a contemporary art gallery in Mayfair. She now assists on an archaeological excavation unearthing Mesolithic remains in Suffolk and when not playing tennis, enjoys walking long-distance paths in the U.K. She is currently completing a master’s degree in The Art market, Provenance and the History of Collecting at the University of Buckingham.



Phoebe Sowten

I recently completed my Masters in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors with the University of Buckingham, having received the Leche Trust Scholarship for 2024/2025, which I undertook to follow my enthusiasm for History of Art and to strengthen my knowledge of the heritage sector. Academically, I’m interested in combining gender history with the decorative arts, specifically focussing on the role of elite women in eighteenth-century Europe, which I explored in depth throughout my time on the course. Whilst completing my Masters, I worked as a secondary school Literacy Assistant, Librarian and Lead of EAL Learning, a position I continue to hold. Although I take much pride in my role and have enjoyed working in education, I am eager to begin my career in the arts and have considered the possibility of continuing my academic journey in the field.

**WADDESDON MANOR
STAFF**



Pippa Shirley, FSA

Director of Waddesdon (National Trust/Rothschild Foundation)

Pippa has History BA and an MA in Art History from the Courtauld Institute, London. She worked in publishing before joining the British Museum as a curator in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities. In 1992 she moved to the V&A as a Curator in the Metalwork, Silver and Jewellery Department, specialising in decorative ironwork and English and continental silver, working on three major gallery projects. In 2000 she was appointed Head of Collections at Waddesdon Manor leading the curatorial team responsible for the collections and archives of one of the most significant properties open to the public. In 2015 the Gardens and the Aviary (an accredited zoo) and Education and Learning were added. In 2022 she became Director of Waddesdon, responsible for operations, visitor services and experience and strategic planning. Pippa has published and lectured widely and oversees a varied programme of events for a range of audiences, exhibitions, schools and community learning programmes and external academic and other partnerships. Since 2018 she has been a member and is now Deputy Chair of the Reviewing Committee for the Export of Works of Art, an advisory body to DCMS. Pippa was previously on the Scholarship Committee of the Attingham Trust (2010-2015), and a member of the Comité Scientifique for the Centre des Monuments Nationaux, Paris (2015-2018).

The Manor is owned by the National Trust and managed by a charitable trust, The Rothschild Foundation chaired by Dame Hannah Rothschild CBE. Pippa works closely with the Foundation grant-giving team and represents Waddesdon across different media for press and marketing.



WHO WE ARE



Catherine Taylor

Catherine Taylor has been Head of Archives and Records at Waddesdon Manor since 2020 and previously Head Archivist since 2012. A qualified archivist with 25 years' experience Catherine has worked across the archive sector managing archive collections that spanned railway and hospital records to local authority files and deeds. She has been a member of the Archive Service Accreditation Committee for the last six years, helping to assess archive services against the accreditation standard. She is currently Chair of the Historic Houses Archivists Group.



Michael Shrive

Michael Shrive is Assistant Curator at Waddesdon Manor and an alumnus of The University of Buckingham, where he studied an MA in Decorative Arts and Historic Interiors. A former Curatorial Intern of Decorative Arts at Royal Collection Trust, he previously worked on the National Trust's Furniture Research and Cataloguing Project. He contributed to the publication *Jean-Henri Riesener: Cabinetmaker to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (2020) and has published in *Furniture History*. He currently sits on the Furniture History Society Events Committee.



Mia Jackson

Dr Mia Jackson is Senior Curator of Decorative Arts at Waddesdon Manor, where she has worked since 2017. She studied French and Philosophy at the University of Oxford then completed an MA in eighteenth-century French decorative arts at the Courtauld Institute of Art. Her doctoral thesis entitled "André-Charles Boulle (1642–1732) and Paper: Prints and Drawings in the Workshop of an Ébéniste du Roi" was completed at Queen Mary, University of London in 2016. She previously worked in the Prints and Drawings Department at the British Museum, the Wallace Collection, and English Heritage. Eighteenth-century France is her area of expertise, in particular the links between works on paper and the decorative arts.



HOW WE DO IT

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Archival research forms the foundation of each study. Students work closely with a wide range of primary sources, including inventories, catalogues, correspondence, sales catalogues, photographs and institutional records preserved in the Waddesdon Manor Archive and other repositories. These sources provide essential evidence for understanding how objects were identified, valued, displayed and interpreted.

Particular attention was paid this year to the catalogues compiled by Alice de Rothschild (1847–1922) after she inherited the collection at Waddesdon Manor from her brother, Baron Ferdinand.

By reading these documents critically, students learn to assess what archives record, what they omit, and how knowledge about objects was shared in the past.

Archival research requires students to navigate uncertainty such as gaps in documentation, conflicting attributions or evolving terminology. These challenges are treated not as obstacles, but as opportunities to reflect on the processes through which collections are formed and histories written.

VISUAL AND MATERIAL ANALYSIS

Alongside archival work, students undertake visual analysis, closely examining an object's materials, techniques, style and condition. Attention to scale, surface, craftsmanship and iconography allows students to situate objects within artistic traditions and to assess how form contributes to meaning.

This analysis is informed by comparative study, drawing on similar objects in museum collections, historic photographs and published scholarship. In many cases, students consider how materials – such as terracotta, lacquer, porphyry, or gilt bronze – carried specific cultural associations and how these informed collecting choices.

Formal analysis provides a necessary counterbalance to documentary evidence, ensuring that interpretation remains rooted in the physical attributes of the object itself.

PROVENANCE RESEARCH

Provenance research brings together archival and formal approaches by tracing an object's history of ownership, movement and display over time. Students investigate how objects circulated through collections, dealers' networks, auctions and family inheritances before finding their place at Waddesdon Manor.



HOW WE DO IT

Rather than treating provenance as a simple list of owners, the project approaches it as a critical tool for reconstructing dynamics of taste, value and cultural exchange. Provenance research reveals how objects were understood in different contexts, how their meanings shifted, and how they participated in broader cultural phenomena such as antiquarianism, historicism or the revival of interest in specific materials, styles, people and places.

By situating objects within these networks, students gain insight into the intellectual ambitions and aesthetic priorities of collectors such as Ferdinand and Alice de Rothschild. They also develop an understanding of the specific challenges posed by provenance research in the decorative arts, where the lack of secure authorship or clearly identifiable individual characteristics can make reconstruction of an object's history considerably more complex than in the study of paintings and sculpture.

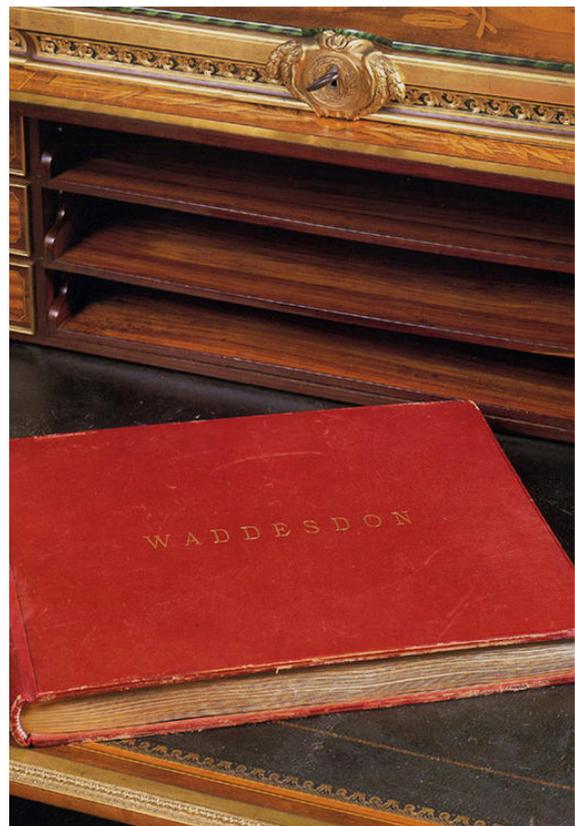
FROM RESEARCH TO INTERPRETATION

The final stage of the methodology involves translating research into clear, accurate and engaging interpretation. Students are trained to present their findings in professional catalogue-style object entries, learning how to structure tombstones – the concise technical descriptions that define an object – alongside analytical entries, to use appropriate scholarly language, to integrate primary and secondary sources, and to balance description with critical analysis.

Alongside these catalogue entries, blogs allow students to experiment with narrative voice, thematic connections and broader cultural contexts in order to communicate research to wider audiences. This

dual approach equips students with practical skills relevant to careers in the museum, heritage and academic world.

Together, these methods demonstrate how rigorous academic research can be transformed into public-facing interpretation. By combining archival evidence, close formal analysis and provenance research, the Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files offer a model of object-based study that foregrounds both scholarly precision and professional practice.



OBJECT STORIES

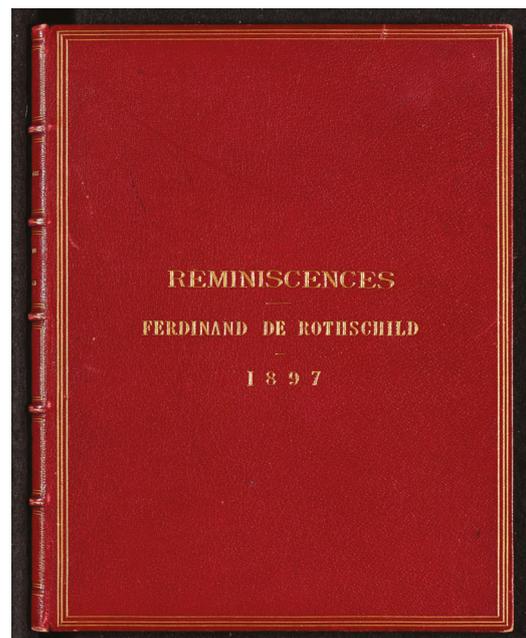
This year's theme for the Waddesdon Manor × Buckingham Files explores collecting and taste through the lens of provenance research, developed as part of a collaboration between Waddesdon Manor and the University of Buckingham.

The theme develops from recent renewed attention to Alice de Rothschild (1847–1922) and her decisive role in shaping Waddesdon Manor's collections, most notably expressed through the exhibition *Alice de Rothschild: Collector* organised at Waddesdon Manor in 2022-2023. This focus has prompted fresh questions about Alice's curatorial vision, her intellectual engagement with objects collected by herself and by her brother Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) and the significance of the lists and catalogues she compiled.

Objects selected for student study are largely drawn from those listed in Alice de Rothschild's catalogues, placing her individual approach to the family's collection at the centre of the project. When known, she records information about how and when the object came into the collection at Waddesdon Manor, at times presumably recounting information given to her by her brother. This year, the objects selected for student study all feature in the 1906 catalogue, where they are each associated with a British collector or property. The majority of objects were made in France in the eighteenth century. The students' focus this year was therefore to find out more about the objects' history of collecting

after the time they were made and before they arrived at Waddesdon Manor. By tracing ownership histories, modes of acquisition, and archival references, provenance research allows students to move beyond attribution and chronology, revealing the networks, market conditions and cultural values that informed collectors' activities.

Used in this way, provenance is not simply a record of ownership but a critical tool for reconstructing dynamics of taste and broader cultural phenomena – from the transmission of artistic fashions to the meanings attached to materials, styles, and historical prestige. Together, the student object entries and blogs demonstrate how provenance research can deepen understanding of Waddesdon Manor, its collections, and the cultural forces that shaped them.



**SCULPTURAL GROUPS
BY CAFFIÉRI AND
LECOMTE**

Karlyn Culmer



Jean-Jacques Caffiéri (1725-92)

Geometry and Architecture

1776

Inscribed on left of base: I ° I °

CAFFIERI invenit et Sculpsit 1776

Marble

H 97.2 cm, L 84.4 cm, W 49.5 cm

Waddesdon Manor (no. 2214)

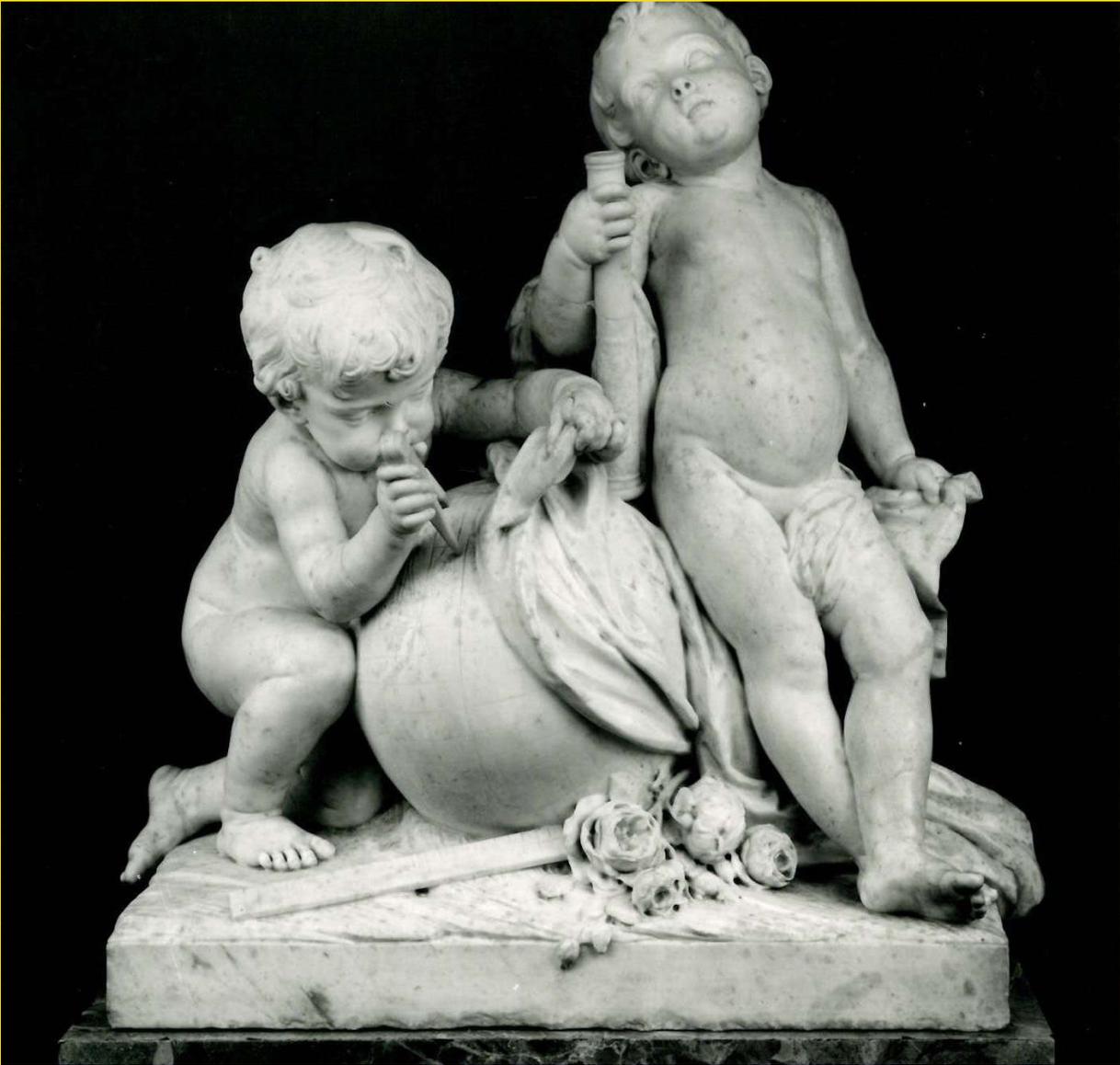
PROVENANCE

Sculpture completed for Abbé Joseph-Marie Terray (1715-1778) in 1776, France; removed from the posthumous sale of Abbé Terray's collection (20 January 1779) and installed by his nephew and heir, Antoine-Jean Terray, Vicomte de Rozières (1750-1794) at Château de La Motte-Tilly; inherited by his son (Abbé Terray's great-nephew), Claude-Hippolyte Terray (1774-1849), and described in the 1818 inventory of Château de La Motte-Tilly; described in Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898)'s 1898 probate inventory as purchased from Lord William Osborne (1835-1888); inherited by Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922); inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957); bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.

ESSENTIAL LITERATURE

Jules Guiffrey, *Les Caffiéri: Sculpteurs et Fondateurs-Ciseleurs, étude sur la statuaire et sur l'art du bronze en France au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Damascène Morgand et Charles Fatout, 1877), p. 221; Stanislas Lami, *Dictionnaire de sculpteurs de l'école française au dix-huitième siècle* (Honoré Champion, 1910), pp. 157-221; Dennis Sutton, 'La Sculpture', in Francis John Bagott Watson (ed.), *Waddesdon Manor and Its Collections* (Éditions de la Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1959), pp. 75-86 (pp. 82-4); Terence Hodgkinson, 'French Art at Waddesdon Manor', *The Burlington Magazine*, 101.676/677 (1959), pp. 256-7; Terence Hodgkinson, *The James A. De Rothschild Collection At Waddesdon Manor: Sculpture* (Office du Livre, 1970), pp. 16-9; Wend Graf Kalnein and Michael Levey, *Art and Architecture of the Eighteenth Century in France* (Penguin, 1972), p. 100; Ulrich Middeldorf, *Sculptures from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools XIV-XIX Century* (Phaidon, 1976) p. 106; Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700-1798* (Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 151-2; Colin B. Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray - An Enlightened Patron', *The Burlington Magazine*, 135.1079 (1993), pp. 121-32; Colin B. Bailey, *Patriotic Taste: Collecting Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Paris* (Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 82-3.





Félix Lecomte (1737-1817)
Geography and Astronomy

1778

Inscribed on left of base: LECOMTE

1778.

Marble

H 94.9 cm, L 80.3 cm, W 48.3 cm

Waddesdon Manor (no. 3158)

PROVENANCE

Sculpture completed for Abbé Joseph-Marie Terray (1715-1778) in 1778, France; removed from the posthumous sale of Abbé Terray's collection (20 January 1779) and installed by his nephew and heir, Antoine-Jean Terray, Vicomte de Rozières (1750-1794) at Château de La Motte-Tilly; inherited by his son (Abbé Terray's great-nephew), Claude-Hippolyte Terray (1774-1849), and described in the 1818 inventory of Château de La Motte-Tilly; described in Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898)'s 1898 probate inventory as purchased from Lord William Osborne (1835-1888); inherited by Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922); inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957); bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.

ESSENTIAL LITERATURE

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AN EXPANDED PROVENANCE OF THE SCULPTURAL GROUPS BY CAFFIÉRI AND LECOMTE

- 1776-1778 – Caffiéri’s sculpture (accession number 2214) completed; in 1778, Lecomte’s sculpture (accession number 3158) completed, per their respective maker signatures with these dates on the bases. These two are part of a set of four sculptures – the others being by Clodion (1738-1814) and Jean-Pierre-Antoine Tassaert (1727-1788), now both at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. – commissioned for Abbé Joseph-Marie Terray (1715-1778), France, per correspondence by Clodion in his negotiations for the marble.¹
- 1778 – Described in the posthumous sale catalogue of Abbé Terray, which took place at the Hôtel d’Aumont, the Parisian residence of Terray’s nephew and heir, Antoine-Jean Terray, Vicomte de Rozières (1750-1794). The printed date on the catalogue is December 1778, but a handwritten note on a copy of the sale catalogue preserved in the Bibliothèque de l’Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art, Paris, indicates the sale occurred on 20 January 1779.² Further handwritten notes on the abovementioned copy of the sale catalogue state that lot 25 (Caffiéri’s sculpture) and lot 26 (Lecomte’s sculpture) were withdrawn, together with the other pair today at the National Gallery of Art,³ and installed by Antoine-Jean Terray at his country house, Château de La Motte-Tilly.⁴
- 1818 – Described in an inventory drawn up for Claude-Hippolyte Terray, Vicomte de Rozières (1774-1849) the Abbé Terray’s great-nephew, of the La Motte-Tilly estate, indicating these two sculptures were still there.⁵
- 1898 – Described in Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898)’s probate inventory, indicating it must have entered his collection by this date, Waddesdon, UK.⁶ According to Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922)’s manuscript catalogue entry for the two sculptures, they had been purchased from Lord William Osborne (1835-1888).⁷ Lord William Godolphin Osborne married the second daughter of Admiral Viscount Keith, Giorgiana (d. 1892) and lived at her home, Tulliallan House, near Kincardine, Fife. There are two unsigned marble copies of the sculptures at Wemyss Castle, Fife, which were bought by Captain Michael Wemyss (1888-1982) from Tulliallan. It is thought these copies were fabricated to replace the originals when the originals were acquired by Ferdinand de Rothschild.⁸
- 1898 – Inherited by Alice de Rothschild.
- 1922 – Inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957).
- 1957 – Bequest of James de Rothschild to National Trust, Waddesdon, UK.⁹



CATALOGUE ENTRY

Among the more than two hundred pieces of sculpture in the Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor are a pair of marble statues of *putti*, standing in the East Gallery. Made by sculptors Jean-Jacques Caffiéri (1725-92) and Félix Lecomte (1737-1817) respectively, the pair once formed a group with two other statues sculpted by Clodion¹⁰ (1738-1814) and Jean-Pierre-Antoine Tassaert¹¹ (1727-88), both now at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., all highly esteemed sculptors of their time.

Each *putto* within the pair represents a different field of the arts. Caffiéri's pair represent *Geometry and Architecture*, and the sculpture is signed and dated 1776, while Lecomte's pair represents *Geometry and Astronomy*, signed and dated 1778. The other two pairs, by Tassaert and Clodion, represent *Poetry and Music* (NGA, no. 1952.5.98), and *Painting and Sculpture* (NGA, no. 1952.5.110), respectively. Correspondence shows that Clodion led negotiations in acquiring the stone for all four pairs in 1774, requesting from his vendor in Italy only the finest quality marble for the prestigious client, Abbé Joseph-Marie Terray (1715-78), Louis XV's *Contrôleur Général des Finances*.¹² The sculptures' iconography was suitable for the patron, since Terray also served as *Directeur Général des Bâtiments du Roi*, a role associated with promoting the arts. In Caffiéri's *Geometry and Architecture*, the *putto* representing Geometry is writing out Pythagoras' theorem on parchment and the shape of a dodecahedron sits at his feet. The second *putto*, *Architecture*, rests a hand on a floor plan, with a Doric capital and a set square at his feet. In Lecomte's *Geography and Astronomy*, the figure of Geography leans on a globe

and is holding a compass. The *putto* of *Astronomy* gazes upward, a telescope in one hand, the other leaning on a scroll marked with concentric circles and the words 'Système de Copernic'. A cluster of roses on the ground symbolizes the flourishing of the arts and sciences. In Clodion's sculpture, *Poetry* is represented by a *putto* sitting atop books with a scroll of paper across his lap and a stylus in his hand. *Music* stands beside him holding a stringed instrument called a cithern and a wind instrument at his feet. Tassaert's *Painting* is a draped female *putto* standing next to a canvas and holding a palette and brushes in her hand. She looks down at *Sculpture*, who holds a chisel and hammer while leaning upon the sculpted head of a man. The head may represent the patron, since it clearly resembles a bust presumed to be of the Abbé Terray by Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne (1704-78).¹³

The sculptures never made it to their intended destination in the Abbé Terray's *hôtel* in Paris, since he died in 1778. Instead, they were installed at the Hôtel d'Aumont, the Parisian residence of Terray's nephew and heir, Antoine-Jean Terray (1750-94), to be displayed as part of the Abbé's estate sale. However, all four lots were withdrawn¹⁴ from the sale, apparently because the Waddesdon sculptures did not reach their reserve prices, and the National Gallery of Art sculptures received no bids.¹⁵ They were taken by Antoine-Jean Terray to his country house, Château de La Motte-Tilly. In 1794 Antoine-Jean Terray and his wife were executed as enemies of the Republic, and his estate was eventually inherited by the Abbé's great nephew, Claude-Hippolyte Terray (1774-1849), who had fled Revolutionary France. In an 1818 inventory of the estate, the sculptures are described as *mutilé*, and it is noted that the damage occurred eighteen years prior



around the turn of the century.¹⁶ Ferdinand de Rothschild was evidently interested in the detail of this ‘mutilation’. In Alice de Rothschild’s 1906 catalogue, she records that his impression was that ‘these groups stood in some royal or palatial garden at the end of the eighteenth century, where they witnessed some revolutionary scenes, as they bear the marks of bullets’.¹⁷ A series of arguably bullet-sized chips can be identified on the marble bellies of both *Architecture* and *Astronomy*. This detail made a significant enough impression on Alice to include it in the catalogue entry, whereas most other objects are succinctly described by her without anecdotal associations. We can also infer that such details appealed to Ferdinand by his remarks in *Reminiscences* (1897):

Old works of art are not, however, desirable only for their rarity or beauty, but for their associations, for the memories they evoke, the trains of thought to which they lead, and the many ways they stimulate the imagination [...].¹⁸

Ferdinand’s enthusiasm for the French decorative arts, its patrons and associated legends, was a fascination not atypical among nineteenth-century collectors.¹⁹ With the post-Revolutionary sales of royal and noble assets, and scavenged paraphernalia from the ruins of Revolutionary sites, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed largescale emigration of eighteenth-century French objects to Britain. By the second half, the trade was well-established, and the appetite of the burgeoning wealthy market was voracious. High prices were paid for objects with illustrious provenances and well-known makers, but also for objects considered to have survived the trauma of historical events. With the museums of the Louvre

and Versailles being generally focused on earlier periods of French history, the nineteenth-century British urban and country houses became the destination for concentrated collections of some of the finest French eighteenth-century decorative arts. This strongly shaped the collecting culture that developed through the nineteenth century, which Ferdinand put no small value on, as he summarized in his 1885 article ‘The Expansion of Art’:

Newly-formed collections are generally more accessible in their new homes than in their former secluded retreats. They contribute, not a little, to dignify their new residence; they attract the more enlightened and intelligent portions of society, who, in their turn, attract the fashionable throng. Thus brilliant gatherings are formed which have a beneficent influence on the tone and the conditions of society at large, and may lead to the social and political development of a future age.²⁰

Ferdinand de Rothschild’s appreciation and preservation of these objects provided a material perspective for nineteenth-century historicism. As a collector, his skill lay not only in acquiring these remarkable individual artefacts, but in arranging and displaying them in rich ensembles that were often as dense in historical anecdote as they were in beauty. In the East Gallery at Waddesdon where the two marble sculptures stand, Ferdinand also displays a musical automaton in the shape of an elephant – a mechanical marvel and typical *Wunderkammer* object. Nestling vestiges of the *ancien régime* amidst nineteenth-century eclecticism, Ferdinand’s collection at Waddesdon presents both a highly personal and historic tableau.



NOTES

- 1 National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., respectively nos 1952.5.98; 1952.5.110. See Colin B. Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray – An Enlightened Patron', *The Burlington Magazine*, 135.1079 (1993), pp. 121–32 (p. 125).
- 2 Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, no. CV01279_17790120: F. C. Joullain fils, *Catalogue D'une Très-Belle Collection De Tableaux, de Sculptures en marbre, bronze, plomb doré, terre cuite, & c. de porcelain ancienne & de Séve, & de meubles précieux par Boule. Provenans de la succession de feu M. l'Abbé Terray, Ministre d'Etat, & Secrétaire, Commandeur des Ordres de Sa Majesté* (1778).
- 3 Ibid., pp. 17–18, lots 25–26, pp. 18–19, lots 27–28.
- 4 Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray – An Enlightened Patron', p. 130.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 157.1997.3: *Inventory of Waddesdon Manor, Bucks, 1898, vol. III, Reception Rooms, East Gallery*, p. 115.
- 7 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor, 1906*, 1906, p. 46.
- 8 Terence Hodgkinson, *The James A. De Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Sculpture*, 1970, pp. 16–8.
- 9 Michael Hall, 'Waddesdon Manor: Buckinghamshire', *Country Life*, 192.23 (1998), p. 65.
- 10 Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700–1798* (Yale University Press, 1993), p. 151; Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray - An Enlightened Patron', pp. 121–32; Anne L. Poulet and Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Clodion: 1738–1814* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1992), p. 307, fig. 153; Norman Herz, Katherine A. Holbrow and Shelley G. Sturman, 'Marble Sculpture in the National Gallery of Art: A Provenance Study', *Archéomatériaux: marbres et autres roches: ASMOSIA IV, Bordeaux, France 9–13 octobre 1995: actes de la IVème Conférence internationale de l'Association pour l'étude des marbres et autres roches utilisées dans le passé* (Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1999), pp. 101–10; Robert Price and C.D. Dickerson III, 'Restoring Sculpture in Paris After and Before the French Revolution, Facture: Conservation, Science', *Art History*, 6 (2023), pp. 120–51.
- 11 Ulrich Middeldorf, *Sculptures from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools XIV–XIX Century* (Phaidon, 1976) p. 105; Guilhem Scherf, 'Un Buste de l'Abbé Raynal à l'Académie de Lyon', *Bulletin des Musées et Monuments Lyonnais*, 1 (1988), pp. 10–9 (p. 17, fig. 9); Poulet and Scherf, *Clodion: 1738–1814*, p. 307, fig. 154; Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France*, pp. 240–3; Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray - An Enlightened Patron', pp. 121–32; Herz, Holbrow and Sturman, 'Marble Sculpture', pp. 101–10; Price and Dickerson III, 'Restoring Sculpture in Paris', p. 120.
- 12 Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray – An Enlightened Patron', p. 125.
- 13 Ibid., p. 127. It is worth noting that Lemoyne was Caffiéri's master during his training at the Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris.
- 14 Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, no. CV01279_17790120: F. C. Joullain fils, *Catalogue D'une Très-Belle Collection De Tableaux, de Sculptures en marbre, bronze, plomb doré, terre cuite, & c. de porcelain ancienne & de Séve, & de meubles précieux par Boule. Provenans de la succession de feu M. l'Abbé Terray, Ministre d'Etat, & Secrétaire, Commandeur des Ordres de Sa Majesté* (1778), pp. 17–9, lots 25–28.
- 15 Middeldorf, *Sculptures*, p. 106.
- 16 Bailey, 'The Abbé Terray – An Enlightened Patron', p. 130.
- 17 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor, 1906*, 1906, p. 46.
- 18 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 177.1997: Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897, p. 65.
- 19 See Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c.1790–1890* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- 20 Ferdinand de Rothschild, 'The Expansion of Art', *The Fortnightly Review*, 37 (1885), p. 57.



SCULPTURES THAT SPEAK

Karlyn Culmer

The majority of sculpture in the Waddesdon Manor collection is of fine eighteenth-century French provenance. Of these, two large sculptures of *putti* sit in the East Gallery, some of the larger statuary featured indoors. Visitors to Waddesdon today no doubt appreciate the beauty of their cool marble. Their refined carving exhibits fleshy mobility in the figures with charming expressions. The twenty-first-century viewer might spend a moment absorbing a few of these aesthetic details and move on. In the eighteenth century, the beholder would have likely engaged with them in a different way, since nestled within all these decorative elements is also a bounty of meaning and allegorical details that may be lost on us today.

Allegory in art dates back to Antiquity, symbology expressed through objects, gestures, and figures.¹ Certainly many of us may enjoy recognizing the occasional familiar motif in the paintings and statues we see at galleries and museums. But to both the eighteenth-century patron and the nineteenth-century collector, reading these allegories wasn't cursory; people were fluent in this language, and this visual

fluency was crucial to participate in intellectual circles.

While the medieval arts had purveyed much religious allegory, in the Renaissance, European artists began to revive ancient Greek and Roman iconographies and themes, marrying them to their Humanist ideals. The Enlightenment period that followed continued this practice in the arts and began to incorporate its own principles, often expressing allegories that were ultimately related to the cult of reason and scientific progression.²

Following a curriculum that had been established since the Renaissance, the educated and enlightened elites of the eighteenth century were schooled in the Classics, typically learning Latin, Greek, philosophy and the liberal arts. Art was seen as a tool of instruction as much as ornament, and the educated viewer would read the iconography of painting and sculpture for its mythical, historical, philosophical or literary references and their moral implications. Displaying one's knowledge of this language was as much a part of the ritual as reading it, and so many patrons would collect and commission appropriately



allegorical works of art. Let us adopt the lens of such an eighteenth-century patron, and through it look again at these two sculptures at Waddesdon Manor.

Of the pair, Jean-Jacques Cafféri's (1725-1792) sculpture is titled *Geometry & Architecture* (see catalogue entry above), two fields of the sciences that were commonly represented together. Cafféri was an expert in his trade, having come from an extensive family of sculptors. He trained at the French Academy in Rome in 1749 and undertook many commissions for the French state after returning to Paris. The patron for whom this sculpture was made was indeed a senior minister of the French court, the Abbé Joseph Marie Terray (1715-1778), Louis XV's *Contrôleur Général des Finances* and briefly the *Directeur Général des Bâtiments du Roi*. This latter position was associated with being responsible for the state of the nation's arts. Terray therefore needed to display his artistic knowledge and appreciation, exemplified by his commissioning of these sculptures.

Cafféri's statue features two *putti*, each representing a scientific discipline. The figure on the left personifies *Geometry*, made evident by the parchment he leans on which is inscribed with Pythagoras' theorem. Pythagoras was admired not just as a mathematician but also as a foundational philosopher of ancient Greece.³ His theorem here alludes to harmony and cosmic order, concepts aligned with the Enlightenment's own philosophical principles.

At the figure's feet are two geometric shapes, most notably a dodecahedron (figure 1). This twelve-sided object was associated with the highest realms of the cosmos. In Plato's *Timaeus*, he declares it the ultimate shape which 'found a use in embroidering the universe with constellations'.⁴ Plato's theory of Forms posited that the physical world was an imperfect

imitation of a higher realm of perfection, composed of Ideal Forms. His Platonic Solids, a series of five polyhedrons – tetrahedron, cube, octahedron, dodecahedron, and icosahedron – represented the elements of nature, and he used them to theorize about metaphysical truths.⁵ The tetrahedron, for example, with its sharp points suited the element of Fire, while a cube's regularity matched the solidity of Earth. The dodecahedron was the most complex solid and was thus elevated above the natural elements to the order of the divine. Plato posited that the geometric stability of these solids was evidence of a rational, intelligible universe, from which deeper truths about existence could be understood through mathematics and reason.

Platonic theory would have been familiar to many in eighteenth-century intellectual circles.⁶ The dodecahedron would be a recognizable shape with all the complex symbolism it represented. The presence of an obelisk behind the dodecahedron further reinforces these themes. A shape with a long and ancient history that was appropriated by the Romans from Egypt, it symbolized a connection between heaven and Earth.⁷ The second *putto* standing next to *Geometry* represents *Architecture*. His hand holds a ruler and rests upon a floor plan. On the ground lies a set square, next to which is the capital of a Doric column (figure 2). This apparently simple reference to a building component in fact alludes to the classical orders of architecture. Defined by the Greeks and Romans, the orders were not merely decorative styles in architecture but whole systems of rational proportions and geometric relationships.⁸ These orders were codified in Greece from the sixth century B.C. onwards and detailed in Vitruvius' *De Architectura* in the first century B.C., the only complete treatise on architecture surviving from Classical



Antiquity. Today, we are surrounded by architecture founded upon these orders of Antiquity, yet many have lost the key to identifying them. To the eighteenth-century viewer, however, this simple artefact broadcasts a much deeper symbolic statement of classical knowledge.

The companion sculpture to Caffiéri's in the collection at Waddesdon Manor, by Félix Lecomte (1761-1768), represents two more scientific disciplines: *Geography and Astronomy* (see catalogue entry above). Lecomte had also attended the Academy in Rome in 1761 and achieved similar status as a highly skilled sculptor. The *putto* representing *Geography* kneels over a globe, holding dividers, and peels back a piece of drapery to reveal a mapped region (figure 3). Closer inspection reveals that he is unveiling Indonesia, while the divider points to Australia. This was an area of active European exploration in the late eighteenth century.⁹ After the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) had ended, Europe was experiencing a brief period of relative peace. The ships previously occupied with warfare could turn to expeditions, and both colonial expansion and scientific exploration became intensely competitive between France and Britain. This part of the Pacific Ocean was at the time largely uncharted, and so began major endeavors by each imperial nation to dominate the region. While Britain was the naval superior, France was undaunted and no less intrepid in its efforts. Recent French expeditions included that by Louis Antoine de Bougainville (1729-1811), the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the globe from 1766-69, and Jean-François de Surville (1717-1770), who in 1769 crossed paths with Britain's own Captain Cook (1728-1779) while exploring New Zealand's coasts.¹⁰ These voyages were heralded as triumphs of global discovery, scientific investigation and rational

inquiry. The globe is a typical symbol of geography, but here the sculptor alludes to much more by referencing and celebrating these recent specific expeditions.

Standing up next to *Geography* is *Astronomy*, personified by a *putto* gazing up toward the heavens, holding a telescope. On a scroll in his other hand is the inscription '*Système de Copernic*', with a diagram of concentric circles indicative of Copernicus' heliocentric theory of 1543.¹¹ Copernicus placed the Sun, rather than the Earth at the center of the cosmos, which challenged prevailing religious dogma. Eventually this concept would reshape scientific ideas that would be fundamental to the Enlightenment. To eighteenth-century intellectuals, this reference would have symbolized the victory of reason and inquiry over established authority. The blooming flowers lying on the ground at the *putto*'s feet further this message, signifying the flourishing of knowledge.

The pair of sculptures at Waddesdon were in fact part of a larger group of four. The other two, by Clodion (1738-1814) and Jean-Pierre-Antoine Taessart (1727-88), symbolize *Poetry and Music* (figure 4), and *Painting and Sculpture* (figure 5) respectively (both now at the National Gallery of Art in Washington). Tassaert's allegorical *Painting* is represented by a draped female *putto* standing beside a canvas, holding brushes and a paint palette in her hand. Next to her, *Sculpture* holds a hammer and chisel, the tools of stone carving. He leans on the head of a man he has evidently been sculpting. Of interest, the face of the sculpted head bears a resemblance to a bust sculpted by Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne (1704-78) thought to be of the Abbé Terray, the patron of these sculptures. In Clodion's sculpture, the *putto* of *Poetry* sits on a stack of books, holding a stylus with an unrolled scroll across his lap. He looks for inspiration from the figure of



Music, standing beside him with a cithern (a type of stringed instrument) in his hand and a wind instrument at his feet. This pair of sculptures represent the Arts to complement Caffiéri and Lecomte's Sciences, the group as a whole declaring their patron's intellect and taste.

Behind the figure of *Painting*, on the floor of the implied artist's workshop, lies the carved face of a *putto*. Hidden from initial frontal viewing, this self-referential allusion is a nod to the genre of *putti* themselves. The contemporary viewer is well exposed to these cherubic characters across the arts, but why? The baby-like figures developed from ancient traditions of Greek and Roman iconography. They appeared on antique Roman sarcophagi that Renaissance artists would draw from, and their application developed into embodying the essence of something, or the spirit of a place, the *genius loci*.¹² In Baroque sculpture, it was customary for sculptors to make their debut by creating *putti*, a genre that could be considered minor yet often became a point of comparison between major artists.¹³ One of those major artists, Flemish sculptor François Duquesnoy (1587-1643) profoundly shaped the modern visual language of the *putto* in sculpture.¹⁴ His fleshy and naturalistic infantile bodies departed from the more affected representations of earlier Renaissance art. Duquesnoy infused his *putti* with a youthful tenderness, anatomically accurate but with a charming emotional presence. His influence on contemporary sculpture was not without criticism. The art critic Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), while acknowledging that Duquesnoy executed this style of cherub better than anyone else, criticized the sculptor for rendering them too tender – ‘sembrando essi più tosto di latte che di macigno’¹⁵ – making them seem more like milk than sandstone. Regardless, Duquesnoy's style persisted in the genre

of *putti*, and is reflected in the forms of Caffiéri's and Lecomte's *putti* we see today.

So, what did these allegorical sculptures mean to Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898)'s own nineteenth-century taste? Ferdinand was not a passive collector of beautiful objects for beauty's sake, as he notes in his *Reminiscences*:

Old works of art are not, however, desirable only for their rarity or beauty, but for their associations, for the memories they evoke, the trains of thought to which they lead, and the many ways they stimulate the imagination [...].¹⁶

These sculptures' iconography which we have deconstructed here was essential in their appeal to their eighteenth-century patron, and therefore an important association for Ferdinand. Historical provenance was a major part of his collecting pattern, as can be seen in the illustrious provenance associated with many of his objects. That these sculptures were commissioned by a renowned figure in the court of Louis XV (r. 1715-1774), and both carved by celebrated sculptors of the eighteenth century, was not incidental but integral to Ferdinand's appreciation of them. Furthermore, they bear the wounds of history with their Revolutionary bullet marks (apocryphal or not). Ferdinand also believed his collecting to have a greater moral imperative, as such objects would attract ‘brilliant gatherings’ of ‘the more enlightened and intelligent portions of society [...] which have a beneficent influence on the tone and the conditions of society at large’.¹⁷ Like much of Ferdinand's collection, these sculptures formed a bridge from the cultural heights of eighteenth-century society that he so admired, to the contemporary moralistic aims of his own nineteenth-century collecting.





Figure 1. Jean-Jacques Cafféri, *Geometry and Architecture*, detail showing the geometric solids.



Figure 2. Jean-Jacques Cafféri, *Geometry and Architecture*, detail showing the Doric capital.



Figure 3. Félix Lecomte, *Geography and Astronomy*, detail showing the terrestrial globe.



Figure 4. Clodion, *Poetry and Music*, about 1774-1778, marble, 117.6 × 89.1 × 56 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (no. 1952.5.98) (Samuel H. Kress Collection)



Figure 5. Jean-Pierre-Antoine Tassaert, *Painting and Sculpture*, about 1774-1778, marble, 98.3 × 87.2 × 63.8 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (no. 1952.5.110) (Samuel H. Kress Collection)

NOTES

- 1 James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (Taylor & Francis, 2008); Matilde Battistini, *Symbols and Allegories in Art* (Getty Publications, 2005), pp. 6-7.
- 2 See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 3 Carl Huffman, 'Pythagoras', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/pythagoras/>> [accessed 04-02-2026].
- 4 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Robert Gregg Bury (Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 55.
- 5 Michele Emmer, 'Art and Mathematics: The Platonic Solids', *Leonardo*, 15.4 (1982), pp. 277-82 (pp. 277-8).
- 6 See David Lay Williams, *Rosseau's Platonic Enlightenment* (Penn State University Press, 2007).
- 7 Erik Iversen, 'Obelisk', *Grove Art Online* (2003), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T063129>> [accessed 04-02-2026].
- 8 John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (Thames and Hudson, 1980), pp. 9-10.
- 9 Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders: A Global History of Exploration* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 289-328.
- 10 John Gascoigne, *Discovery and Empire: the French in the South Seas* (University of Adelaide Press, 2013), pp. 24-35.
- 11 Nicolaus Copernicus, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (Iohannes Petreius, 1543).
- 12 Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Benj. Motte, 1709), p. 34.
- 13 Stefano Pierguidi, 'Bellori e i putti nella scultura del Seicento: Bernini, Duquesnoy, Algardi', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 39 (2012), pp. 155-80 (p. 156).
- 14 Estelle Lingo, *François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal* (Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 43-4.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 16 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, acc. no. 177.1997: Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897, p. 65.
- 17 Ferdinand de Rothschild, 'The Expansion of Art', *The Fortnightly Review*, 37 (1885), pp. 56-69 (p. 57).



**FRENCH LEAN-
TO SECRETAIRE BY
JACQUES DUBOIS**

Jessamy Harvey



Jacques Dubois, maître-ébéniste
(1742-63)
French lean-to secretaire
About 1750
Stamped (right-hand rail): DUBOIS,
JME (fig. 1)
Oak, pine, tulipwood, kingwood,
purplewood, mahogany, Japanese lac-
quer, gilt bronze, white metal, green
Morocco leather
88.5 × 52.4 × 40 cm
Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire
(no. 2435)

PROVENANCE

Probably purchased by Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay (1779-1845), for his collection at Highcliffe Castle, which was constructed between 1830 and 1834; inherited by his wife Lady Elizabeth Stuart de Rothesay (1789-1867); inherited by their daughter Lady Louisa Waterford (1818-1891); acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) for Waddesdon Manor possibly in 1890; inherited by Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922); inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957); bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.

ESSENTIAL LITERATURE

Geoffrey de Bellaigue, 'French Lean-to Secrétaire', *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes*, 2 vols (Office du Livre, 1974), I, pp. 282-5, no. 62; Arlen Higinbotham et al., 'Secrétaire', in Gillian Wilson and Arlen Heginbotham (eds), *French Rococo Ébenisterie in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2021), pp. 178-88, no. 13.

AN EXPANDED PROVENANCE OF THE FRENCH LEAN-TO SECRETAIRE:

- 1750 – The secretaire was made by Jacques Dubois (1694-1763), *maître-ébéniste* (cabinetmaker), in about 1750. There are a number of other secretaires stamped in the same way and decorated with Asian lacquer panels made during this period by Dubois.¹
- 1828-1831(?) – The secretaire was acquired by Charles, Lord Stuart de Rothesay (1779-1845), a diplomat and avid collector of his time, probably when he was in post as ambassador in Paris during his second placement between 1828 and 1831.² On his return to England, he and his family lived at number 4 Carlton House Terrace, London, whilst Highcliffe Castle – his country residence in Dorset built in Gothic Revival style – was under construction.³ Sarah Medlam's research suggests that Charles Stuart transferred his furnishings and other possessions to England using an agent called George Gunn (fl.1830-31).⁴ Gunn was also an antiques dealer and supplied architectural salvage for Highcliffe Castle; this



makes it very probable that Gunn supplied Charles Stuart with the secretaire.⁵ It is not known if the secretaire was temporarily at the London address or if it was brought directly to Highcliffe Castle.

- **1845-1867** – The secretaire was part of the Highcliffe Castle collection. On the underside of the secretaire there is a label which states ‘Stuart Collection, Highcliffe’ (fig. 2). Highcliffe Castle was completed in 1834.⁶ Although it is not known which room the secretaire was placed in, Highcliffe Castle contained ‘two Chinese Rooms and a Chinese Dressing-Room’, making it likely that the secretaire was displayed in one of these spaces.⁷ After Charles Stuart’s death in 1845, the house and its contents remained in the family, inherited by his wife Elizabeth, Lady Stuart de Rothesay (1789-1867) and subsequently at her death by their surviving youngest daughter Louisa, Lady Waterford (1818-91).⁸
- **1890 (?)** – Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) drew up a list of the collections at Waddesdon Manor in 1906: *Catalogue of The Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor, 1906*, where she notes the provenance of the pieces when known. In this case: ‘Louis XV small Lacque Bureau. From the possession of Louisa, Lady Waterford’.⁹ Geoffrey de Bellaigue proposes that the secretaire was purchased by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) from Lady Waterford in 1890.¹⁰ Ellis Waterhouse notes that in 1890 Baron Ferdinand bought *The Honourable Lady Stuart* (1780) by George Romney (1734-1802) from her, and it is very likely that the Savonnerie Folding Screen, catalogued here by Phoebe Sowten, was also acquired in the same year.¹¹ In a personal

communication, Highcliffe Castle and their archive team has conjectured that they believe that Lady Waterford ‘sold a number of items from the castle during her residency to fund essential repairs’, adding ‘sadly, the records from this period are quite limited, so it is difficult to confirm specific details’.¹² Medlam makes the point that Lady Waterford spent the last year of her life focusing on sorting out her affairs at Highcliffe Castle, in order to identify a suitable heir.¹³ It is possible that as part of this process she made sales of this kind.

- **1898** – The secretaire is listed in the inventory of Waddesdon Manor made after the death of Baron Ferdinand in 1898 when it was located in the small library, and it is still in this room to the present day.¹⁴ Alice de Rothschild inherited Waddesdon Manor after her brother Baron Ferdinand’s death.
- **1922** – James de Rothschild (1878-1957) was Alice de Rothschild’s great-nephew and he inherited Waddesdon Manor in 1922.
- **1957** – Bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.¹⁵



CATALOGUE ENTRY

The lean-to secretaire can be attributed to a specific mid eighteenth-century Parisian workshop because it has two stamps added to its body: one identifies Jacques Dubois as the *maître-ébéniste* (cabinetmaker) and the other, JME, stands for *jurande des menuisiers-ébénistes* (jury of cabinetmakers and carpenters) indicating that this committee had approved the quality of his workshop's output (fig. 1).¹⁶ This type of furniture is a slant-front desk generally intended for a woman's use.¹⁷ It is a product of the French guild system, which organised craftsmen, minimised competition within the system, oversaw production standards and maintained France's reputation as a global leader in luxury goods.¹⁸

Whilst Dubois is the named maker, the secretaire was made by more than one pair of hands. Dubois, possibly in conjunction with the unidentified client, will have developed the design. Once the design was approved, it is likely that a *menuisier* (carpenter) would make the body of the piece and a *bronzier* (bronze maker) would cast the bronzes.¹⁹ In addition, the use of imported Asian lacquer panels brings in another set of social actors into the elaboration of this piece, the entrepreneurs known as *marchands merciers* (merchants of luxury objects), one of whom will have supplied Dubois with the lacquer panels.²⁰ It is crucial to note that the artisans who worked on the original Japanese lacquer panels are unknown to us, their contribution to this secretaire and other pieces by Dubois that incorporate their work can but be acknowledged. So we need to look beyond Dubois and understand that the completed secretaire is a collective achievement that represents more than just how a piece was made, but also how taste and style were being expressed during the reign of Louis XV (r. 1715-1774).

Dubois had developed an eye for surface design linked to the contemporary fashion for Asian lacquer. This fashion persisted for a long period. Oliver Impey notes that lacquer became popular in Europe in the first decade of the seventeenth century.²¹ It is not unusual for older pieces of furniture to have been dismantled later in the eighteenth century and the lacquer panels re-used to create newer and more up-to-date shapes and forms.²² European makers adapted lacquer panels from existing East Asian furniture, such as screens, cabinets and boxes into fashionable European shapes; they also reused lacquer panels on updated shapes to suit European fashions. The reclaiming of lacquer panels is not the only material in the eighteenth century to be recycled. *Marchands merciers* also reused hardstone panels and Boulle marquetry from older pieces: furniture 'that they could not pass on intact they dismantled to harvest their costly materials for reuse'.²³ The panels used in this secretaire conform to what is called 'pictorial style' and were in vogue from 1630 onwards.²⁴ They represent idealised scenes by lakeside or mountain settings.

There are a number of well documented pieces of writing furniture incorporating Asian lacquer stamped by Dubois still in existence, for example, the secretaire that belonged to Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764) and was sold by Christie's on behalf of Baroness Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza (1943-) in 2019.²⁵

It is not known who commissioned the secretaire in the first place, which is not uncommon for items involving *marchands merciers*, many of whom owned shops. However, the first known owner is Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay. He had a long diplomatic career and served as ambassador in France for two terms, 1816-24 and 1828-31.²⁶ He was also well known as a collector



in his lifetime, and was an early participant in the enthusiasm for French furniture and decorative arts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that lead Britain, in the nineteenth century, to become the richest repository of *ancien régime* objects and furniture, much of it concentrated in the hands of a small and influential circle of collectors.²⁷ Charles Stuart aimed to furnish two properties in England, one in London, 4 Carlton House Terrace, and the other at the Highcliffe Estate in Dorset.²⁸ According to Medlam, it is the latter project that held his interest and where this secretaire would come to reside.²⁹ It can be argued that Highcliffe engaged with the eclectic spirit of revivals of the time, embracing the Renaissance and the Gothic as well as being decorated in the heady mix of ‘Old French’ pre-Revolutionary styles.³⁰ Adriana Turpin notes that during the long nineteenth century in Britain ‘the taste for the furnishing and decoration of the houses of aristocrats and *nouveaux riches* was resolutely French’ and this was known as ‘Old French style’.³¹ It is not known in which room the secretaire resided whilst in the possession of the Stuart family, but it is noted that Lady Louisa Waterford, who inherited Highcliffe Castle, made discreet sales to Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild in about 1890.³² Another item sold at the same time to Baron Ferdinand is the portrait of Lady Louisa’s grandmother, *The Honourable Lady Stuart* (1780) by George Romney (1734-1802).³³

To understand Baron Ferdinand as a collector, one who placed himself in a continuum of collectors within the Rothschild family and the practice of collecting in the nineteenth century, it is vital to consult his private memoir, *Reminiscences* (1897), in particular chapter III: ‘Bric-a-Brac’.³⁴ He notes that ‘old works of art are not, however, desirable only for their rarity or

beauty, but for their associations, for the memories they evoke, the trains of thought to which they lead’.³⁵ He values the aura of the originals and rejects the copy: ‘a copy, at its best, is but an excellent imitation or a clever forgery’.³⁶ It becomes clear how the extended Rothschild family was, in his view, a trailblazer in reviving the eighteenth century in its so-called ‘purity’ through the salvage of interiors and the curation of furniture and decorative arts, all whilst adapting the revival to ‘modern requirements’.³⁷ He places the Rothschilds in the context of other collectors, who also admire ‘the graceful compositions of the French eighteenth century’, such as Lord Hertford (1800-1870), Sir Richard Wallace (1818-1890) and Henri, Duc d’Aumale (1822-1897).³⁸ Why would this secretaire in particular interest Ferdinand de Rothschild? To purchase, contemplate or to use this secretaire is to own, admire and touch the past shattered by the French Revolution.³⁹ It had a captivating provenance as it had the stamped marks of a known workshop and the committee which oversaw quality and it had been acquired by a known Francophile collector. It is also known today to be comparable to the one once owned by Madame de Pompadour, whose collection Ferdinand de Rothschild ranked second to the one built up by Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661).⁴⁰

He placed the secretaire in the small library to the right of the marble fireplace. The library is sumptuous, a small-scale room meant for his working library to prepare for lectures that he gave locally.⁴¹ It is not the only eighteenth-century piece of furniture in the room made for the art of writing, and it found its home within this private sanctum among similarly evocative pieces.⁴²





Fig. 1: Jacques Dubois, *maître-ébéniste* (1742-63), French lean-to secretaire, about 1750, Waddesdon Manor (no. 2435): Stamped (right-hand rail): DUBOIS, JME



Fig. 2: Jacques Dubois, *maître-ébéniste* (1742-63), French lean-to secretaire, about 1750, Waddesdon Manor (no. 2435). There are two labels beneath, one is the original Highcliffe label, and the other is the additional Waddesdon label which indicates where it is placed: 'small library, right of fireplace' (photograph by the author).

NOTES

- 1 Geoffrey de Bellaigue, 'French Lean-to Secrétaire', *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes*, 2 vols (Office du Livre, 1974), I, pp. 282-5, no. 62.
- 2 Sarah Medlam, *The Bettine, Lady Abingdon Collection. The Bequest of Mrs T. R. P. Hole. A Handbook* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), pp. 26-8.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 4 For more information on Gunn see 'Nixon, James (1816-1839)', on the *British and Irish Furniture Makers Online Database of The Furniture History Society*, <<https://bifmo.furniturehistorysociety.org/entry/nixon-james-1816-39>> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 5 Medlam, *The Bettine*, pp. 30-4.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 9 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926, Alice de Rothschild, *The Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor, 1906*, 1906, p. 35.
- 10 Bellaigue, *The James A. de Rothschild*, p. 285. There is no evidence in the catalogue to support this purchase date.
- 11 Ellis Waterhouse, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Paintings* (Office du Livre, 1967), p. 102. There is no evidence in the catalogue to support this purchase date.
- 12 Email communication shared by Phoebe Sowten on 18 April 2025. Further email communication by Sowten on 14 May 2025 states that 'unfortunately, we don't have any specific sources confirming that Lady Waterford sold items from the castle to fund repairs'.
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- 14 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 157.1997.3, *Inventory of Waddesdon Manor, Bucks, vol. III, Reception Rooms*, p. 67.
- 15 Michael Hall, 'Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire. A property of The National Trust', *Country life*, 192.23 (1998), pp. 63-7.
- 16 Daniëlle O. Kisluk-Grosheide, 'Side-Table (commode en console)', in Daniëlle O. Kisluk-Grosheide, Wolfram Koepppe, William Rieder (eds), *European Furniture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: Highlights of the Collection* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008) p. 142, no. 56; Alexandre Pradère, *French Furniture Makers: The Art of the Ébeniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution* (J. Paul Getty Museum, 1989), pp. 168-75; François de Salverte, *Les Ébénistes du XVIIIème siècle, leurs oeuvres et leurs marques* (Gérard van Oest et Cie, 1923), pp. 95-6.
- 17 'Bureaux en pente', *Art & Architecture Thesaurus Online*, J. Paul Getty Trust, <<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/aat/300077310>> [accessed 05-02-2026].
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- 19 Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (University of California Press, 1996), pp. 75-89.
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- 22 Oliver Impey, Christiaan Jörg and Cynthia Viallé (eds), *Japanese Export Lacquer 1580-1850* (Hotei, 2005), p. 11.
- 23 Wolfram Koepppe and Florian Knothe, 'An Enduring Seductiveness: The Reclaiming of Pietre Dure in the Eighteenth Century', in Wolfram Knoeppe, Anna Maria Giusti, and Cristina Acidini Luchinat (eds), *Art of the Royal Court: Treasures from Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), p. 88.
- 24 Impey, Jörg and Viallé, *Japanese Export Lacquer*, p. 84.
- 25 Christie's London, *The Collector: European and English Furniture, Ceramics, Portrait Miniatures & Works of Art*, 13 November 2019, lot 110 <<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6235072>> [accessed 05-02-2026].
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- 28 Medlam, *The Bettine*, p. 28.
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30 Ibid., pp. 36, 40.
31 Adriana Turpin, 'Appropriation as a Form of Nationalism? Collecting French Furniture in the Nineteenth Century', in Jan Dirk Baetens and Dries Lyna (eds), *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750-1914* (Brill, 2019), pp. 220-55 (pp. 220-1).
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33 Waterhouse, *The James A. de Rothschild*, p. 102.
34 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897.
35 Ibid., p. 65.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 67.
38 Ibid., pp. 102-111, and p. 115.
39 See Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past*.
40 Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, p. 86: 'Madame de Pompadour's collection came next in importance'.
41 See <<https://waddesdon.or.uk/the-collection/virtual-tours/>> [accessed 05-02-2026].
42 See Waddesdon Manor, nos 2434, 2442, 2460.



LACQUER LUXE: EAST- WEST SURFACE

Jessamy Harvey

Lacquer luxe, as a composite word, combines the reference to material goods, lacquerware, and a decorative craft method, lacquering, with a term related to luxury. I have adopted this term from the contemporary beauty industry which often combines both these words to refer to products that provide intense colour, glossy finish and are aimed at the high end of the market.¹ The term is apt in relation to antique lacquerware which can range in scale from small decorative pieces, such as bowls, to larger pieces of furniture, such as folding screens.

Japan House in Los Angeles held an exhibition between July 2023 to January 2024: 'Pokémon X Kogei. Playful Encounters of Pokémon and Japanese Craft'. The exhibition brought together two aspects of Japanese culture: one admired for centuries, *Kogei* (traditional arts and crafts) – in lacquer, ceramics, textiles, and other media – and their more recent successful export, the globally popular Pokémon brand in the form of video games and apps, trading cards, animated television shows, and other merchandise.² One of the items that encapsulated the theme of the exhibition was a lacquer tea caddy, *Call Spring*, by

contemporary lacquer master Yoshiaki Taguchi, featuring Moltres, the legendary bird Pokémon which controls fire and heralds Spring (fig. 1). In my twenties I was captivated by Pokémon trading cards. Collecting them filled me with wonder, particularly those illustrated with fantastic creatures that bore a vague resemblance to the natural world of plants, animals and minerals. In due course, I stopped collecting but passed on my collector folders to my nephew and, whilst I can still identify the early Pokémon species, such as my favourite Pikachu, I rely on him for updates on the current franchise. We have both, in our own ways, been entranced by an expression of Japanese aesthetics and, in this way, we join a long line of Japanophiles.

To understand the influence of Asia on Western decorative arts, two terms are often used: *Chinoiserie*, a style which emerged in the late seventeenth century but, it could be argued, had its zenith in the eighteenth century and has been long-lived, and *Japonaiserie*, a term coined by the brothers Jules de Goncourt (1830-1879) and Edmond de Goncourt (1822-1896)



to describe a similar phenomenon in the nineteenth century.³ The first style did not distinguish between the Asian nations and combined motifs from India, China and Japan to create an exotic fantasy realm that was far away, whereas the second emerged when Japan reopened in 1853 for trade with the West after centuries of seclusion. A third term used is *Japonisme* which describes European borrowings from Japanese aesthetics.⁴

From the seventeenth century, Europeans started to respond to the importation of Asian luxuries, such as porcelain, lacquerware and textiles, by learning from these decorative objects and imitating them to stimulate local production. Asia was ahead in the technologies involved in making these luxury products, but the Europeans could not bring back this knowledge so the desire to make substitute Asian luxuries in Europe can be seen as generating the discovery of new materials locally, developing manufacturing skills and growing the consumer market for luxury goods.⁵

Asian lacquer is known as *urushi*. It is a natural plastic, like turtle shell, that is extracted from the sap of the *Rhus vernicifera*, or Lacquer tree, in Japan. Various surface techniques are used in the manufacture of *urushi* ware, either singly or combined: carved, incised, inlaid, sprinkled, painted, dry, moulded and gilt.⁶ Layers of *urushi* are applied, and they polymerise in reaction to the environment, hardening and becoming water proof. In between applications, the upper layer is polished to create an even and reflective surface. Towards the final stages, outlines of designs are transferred and these are filled with metallic powders, gold and silver, and sometimes mother-of-pearl in the sprinkled or *Makie* type.⁷ This particular type is a millennia-old decorative lacquer art that is still made in contemporary Japan.⁸ It was the importation of

Makie objects, with their opulent beauty of shiny black and gold, that dominated the French court taste. The reception at Versailles of the ambassadors of Siam in 1686 during the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) can be argued to mark the beginning of the French court's interest in the Far East. One of the hundreds of Siamese diplomatic gifts was a Japanese *Makie* lacquer cabinet that the monarch gifted to the Grand Dauphin. As Elizabeth Benjamin notes, 'these gifts were only occasionally products of Siam, but instead reflected the kingdom's well-established trade networks with India, Persia, Japan, and China'.⁹ This desire for *Makie* lacquer continued though the eighteenth century; Queen Marie Antoinette (1755–1793) inherited the collection of Japanese lacquer from her mother, the Hapsburg Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780). Marie Antoinette had one of her private rooms in the Palace of Versailles, the *cabinet doré* (gilt room), redecorated in 1784 to showcase this precious collection.¹⁰

Europeans who sought to replicate the surface aesthetics of Asian lacquer experimented with a wide range of plant resins and oils. In England this imitative approach was known as 'japanning'. This term does not only mean the art of varnishing as a technique, it also carries an association with exoticism typical of *chinoiserie* which, we will see, provides a fantasy of the East, be it India, China or Japan, packaged for consumption in the West.¹¹ In this quest to produce European imitation lacquer, many different formulations were developed, but one of the most superior oil-resin varnishes was created by the Martin brothers, Parisian *vernisseurs* (varnishers) for two generations (1730–1770).¹² Due to their success in creating a high-quality lacquer finish, the term *vernis Martin* (Martin varnish) is used in France to describe the



technique whether the brothers' workshop was involved or not in crafting the piece of furniture.¹³ Whereas the dominant aesthetic in *Makie* lacquer is a reflective black surface predominantly decorated with gold, *vernis Martin* objects play with a much broader colour palette (figs. 2-3). Two notable examples are displayed in Parisian museums: the panels that once decorated the Chinese cabinet in the Paris townhouse of Louis-François-Armand du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu (1696-1788) – a rare survival of green japanning – at the Musée Carnavalet (fig. 3), and the chest of drawers delivered by Mathieu Criaerd (1689-1776) to Madame de Mailly (1717-1744), inspired by the blue and white of imported Asian porcelain, now at the Musée du Louvre (fig. 4).

Both Japanese and European lacquer help us to understand the appeal of two lean-to secretaires, or writing desks, that are in the Small Library at Waddesdon Manor. They were both made in the mid-eighteenth century. Ferdinand de Rothschild acquired the one made in the workshop of Jacques Dubois (1694-1763) in the late nineteenth century when the fascination for Asian aesthetic still held visual appeal (see the catalogue entry). It incorporates seventeenth-century Japanese lacquer panels.¹⁴ James de Rothschild (1878-1957), who inherited Waddesdon Manor in 1922, received the one attributed to Adrien Faizelot-Delorme (1722-1791) from the estate of Edmond James de Rothschild (1845-1934), his father (fig. 2). It is a fine example of European lacquer imitating the sumptuous surface of Asian lacquer but expressing classical themes from the Western canon.¹⁵

They are similar in shape, both having cabriole legs, both decorated with bronze mounts, and in each the lean-to panel opens to provide a writing surface and reveal multiple drawers to hold writing materials,

paper and correspondence. Whilst they both come from named and known workshops, both are the product of more than one pair of hands. Many craftsmen with their guild-regulated specialties such as cabinet-makers and bronze makers, in addition to the original Japanese lacquer artisans, contributed to make these pieces of furniture. However, these details aside, what does each piece of furniture tell us about lacquer luxe and the surfaces that are produced out of encounters between East and West?

The secretaire from the workshop of Dubois incorporates older Japanese lacquer panels with scenes representing nature: geese amid bamboo, water plants and rocks in a lake; domestic dwellings at the foot of mountains, and more houses on the margins of a lake. These panels would initially have formed part of a different piece of furniture, possibly a screen or a box, procured by the French *marchand mercier*, dismantled at some stage and recycled into a piece that was more in keeping with eighteenth-century French taste and use. Contemporary Western admirers of this secretaire would have enjoyed the luxuriousness of the gold decoration, with motifs such as the geese and the dwellings built up in moulded relief upon the black background to create an exotic rural landscape. However, they likely would have missed the original references to Japanese literary traditions. Barbara Brennan Ford observes that lacquer pieces of the period had links to 'the poetic imagery of the *Konshisū*', the earliest Imperial anthology of poetry, reflecting 'a literary tradition in which intimately observed seasonal manifestations of nature are used as metaphors for human emotion'.¹⁶ In Europe, Japanese culture remained an enigma at that time, and the depth of Japanese upper-class learning would have been lost on European admirers of the surface decoration.



Although the secretaire from the workshop of Faizelot-Delorme owes a debt to the importation of Asian lacquerware due to its imitation of the sumptuous polished surface, the subjects depicted belong to the European tradition (fig. 2). Upon the gold ground, there are polychrome coloured scenes: framed with garlands, four show children playing; one is an allegorical group that may have links to the writings of Plutarch (about AD 40–120s); and one presents a bouquet of poppies.¹⁷ The polychromatic range of colours – red, blue, green, yellow, pink, purple – although commonly used in *vernis Martin* are absent from the imported Asian pieces.¹⁸ It has been speculated that the children at play derive from engravings by Claudine Bouzonnet Stella (1636–1697).¹⁹ Contemporary European viewers of the piece, well-versed in classical mythology, would have understood the symbolism of the female figure pressing a ring to the mouth of the winged putto holding an open letter as asking him to keep the secrets held in this writing desk. Unlike the Dubois secretaire, this one was fully legible to those who, given their European classical education, could appreciate the playful visual references.

To conclude, both these secretaires located in the Small Library at Waddesdon Manor are the result of a passion for lacquer luxe which emerged in the seventeenth century from the encounters between East and West. The storm of the French Revolution dispersed a myriad of objects, including many examples of Asian and European lacquer, and these secretaires came to be placed in the Small Library at Waddesdon Manor after passing through other collectors' homes: the Dubois secretaire left France at some point in the early nineteenth century to join the collection at Highcliffe Castle until its arrival at Waddesdon Manor in about 1890.²⁰ The

provenance of the *vernis Martin* secretaire is less clear-cut, although we do know that before it joined James de Rothschild's collection at Waddesdon, it was in the Salon des Boucher in his parents' chateau in Boulogne. Whilst there are many pieces at Waddesdon Manor that can be understood to be linked to the Western obsession for Asian-inspired goods and the wide-spread fashion for *Chinoiserie* – in the porcelain collections for example – Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild acquired the lacquer luxe secretaire by Dubois as part of the revival of the taste for French eighteenth-century decorative arts and their associations with the vanished courtly society of Versailles.²¹





Figure 1. Yoshiaki Taguchi (1958-), *Call Spring* (Tea Caddy), 2022, Urushi lacquer, Makie, 8.1 cm × 7.2 cm, Private Collection.



Figure 2. Adrien Faizelot-Delorme (1691-1768) (attr.), French Lean-to Secretaire, about 1750, oak, walnut, pine, kingwood, purplewood, vernis Martin, gilt bronze, brass, 87.8 × 58.8 × 43 cm, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2434).



Figure 3. One of the panels that once decorated the Chinese cabinet in the Paris townhouse of Louis-François-Armand du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu (1696-1788) – a rare survival of green japaning, Musée Carnavalet, Paris (no. BO102/5).



Figure 4. Mathieu Criaerd (1689-1776), Commode en vernis Martin, 1742, oak, fruit tree wood, bronze (silvered), marble, vernis Martin, 85 × 132 × 63.8 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris (no. 11292).

NOTES

- 1 See for example Tom Ford Beauty's product Lip Lacquer Luxe and Sassy Cow Co's Luxe Lacquer nail gel polish.
- 2 *Pokémon X Kogei. Playful Encounters of Pokémon and Japanese Craft* (exhibition held at Japan House, Los Angeles, 25 July 2023 – 7 January 2024).
- 3 Ayako Ono, *Japonisme in Britain: Whistler, Menpes, Henry, Hornel, and nineteenth-century Japan* (Routledge, Curzon, 2003), p. 2; Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire*, vol. 2 (Editions Robert Laffont, 1989), pp. 178-9 (October 29, 1868).
- 4 See 'Chinoiserie – an introduction', V&A Museum website: <<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/chinoiserie-an-introduction>> [Accessed 05-02-2026]; 'Japonisme', *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: <<https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/japonisme>>> [Accessed 05-02-2026]; Richard Hayman, *Chinoiserie* (Bloomsbury, 2021); Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester University Press, 2014); Elizabeth Emery, *Reframing Japonisme: Women and the Asian Art Market in Nineteenth-Century France, 1853-1914* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).
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- 6 Frank Minney, L. A. O'Neil, Oliver Impey and Nicholas Umney, 'Lacquer', in *Grove Art Online*, 2009.
- 7 Christine M. E. Guth, 'Layering: Materiality, Time and Touch in Japanese Lacquer', in Glenn Adamson and Victoria Kelley (eds), *Surface Tensions: Surface, Finish and the Meaning of Objects* (Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 33-44 (p. 36).
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- 10 A *Queen's Treasure from Versailles: Marie-Antoinette's Japanese Lacquer* (exhibition held at The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 23 January 2018 – 5 January 2019).
- 11 Chi-Ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (John Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 109-111.
- 12 Anne Foray-Carliet and Monica Koplin (eds), *Les secrets de la laque française: Le vernis Martin* (Les Arts Décoratifs, 2014).
- 13 Jessica Chasen, Arlen Heginbotham and Michael Schilling, 'The Analysis of East Asian and European Lacquer Surfaces on Rococo Furniture', in Gillian Wilson and Arlen Heginbotham (eds), *French Rococo Ébénisterie in the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Getty Publications, 2021), pp. 9-16.
- 14 Geoffrey de Bellaigue, 'French Lean-to Secrétaire', *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Furniture, Clocks and Gilt Bronzes*, 2 vols (Office du Livre, 1974), I, pp. 282-5, no. 62.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 'French Lean-to Secrétaire', pp. 278-81, no. 61.
- 16 Barbara Brennan Ford, 'Japanese lacquer: Makie and Negoro', in James C. Y. Watt and Barbara Brennan Ford (eds), *East Asian Lacquer: The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), pp. 153-61 (p. 156).
- 17 De Bellaigue, *The James A. de Rothschild*, p. 280.
- 18 Anne-Solenn Le Hô, and others, 'French Lacquers of the 18th Century and Vernis Martin', ICOM-CC Conference, September 2014, Melbourne, Australia. Hal-01279161 <<https://hal.science/hal-01279161>> [Accessed 05-02-2026].
- 19 De Bellaigue, *The James A. de Rothschild*, p. 280.
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SAVONNERIE FOLDING SCREEN

Phoebe Sowten



Savonnerie folding screen with panels representing animals after Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1743)

The carpet panels: probably Bertrand Dupont (active 1687-1720) or Jacques Noinville (active 1720-1742) of the Savonnerie Manufactory, Chaillot

About 1719-1739

The frame: maker unknown

Made or altered about 1781-1866

The carpet panels: wool; the frame: wood and gilt bronze

Each panel: 186 cm × 63.5 cm

Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2318)

PROVENANCE

Probably purchased by Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay (1779-1845), for his collection at Highcliffe Castle, which was constructed between 1830 and 1834; inherited by his wife, Lady Elizabeth Stuart de Rothesay (1789-1867); inherited by their daughter Lady Louisa Waterford (1818-1898); acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) for Waddesdon Manor, possibly in 1890; inherited by Miss Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922); inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957); bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.

ESSENTIAL LITERATURE

Pierre Verlet, *The Savonnerie: Its History – The Waddesdon Collection* (National Trust, 1982), pp. 330-40.

AN EXPANDED PROVENANCE OF THE SAVONNERIE FOLDING SCREEN

- 1719-1739 – This six-leaf screen was woven at the Savonnerie manufactory on the outskirts of Paris, France, but the exact date of creation is currently unknown. However, Pierre Verlet states that it was almost certainly woven after 1719 but before 1739, due to its ‘superb quality’.¹ He claims that the best weaving at the Savonnerie manufactory was often seen in the earlier years of the eighteenth century when new cartoons were being produced, suggesting that it was woven during this time.
- 1828-1831 (?) – The Savonnerie screen was acquired by Charles, Lord Stuart de Rothesay (1779-1845), a diplomat and avid collector of his time, probably during his second placement as ambassador to King Charles X in Paris between 1828 and 1831.² On his return to England, he and his family lived in Carlton House Terrace, London, whilst Highcliffe Castle – his country residence in Dorset built in Gothic Revival style – was under construction. Sarah Medlam’s research suggests that Charles Stuart transferred his furnishings and other possessions to England using an agent called George Gunn (fl.1830-31),³ who had access to the Parisian market and was his main agent when it came to collecting.⁴ Gunn was also an antiques dealer and supplied architectural salvage for Highcliffe Castle, making it very probable that Gunn supplied Charles Stuart with the Savonnerie screen.⁵ It is not known if the screen was temporarily at the London address or if it was transferred directly to Highcliffe Castle. On one panel there is a label on the underside of the frame that reads ‘de Rothesay’, as well as the



arms of the Stuart de Rothesay family (a similar label can be seen in fig. 1).⁶ When discussing the transactions between Gunn and Charles Stuart, Sarah Medlam has noted a receipt from Gunn to the Duke of Sutherland stating that he purchased ‘6 pieces of Savory [sic.] for screens’.⁷ This most probably refers to a six-panelled Savonnerie screen owned by the 1st Duke of Sutherland (1758-1833) now in The Huntington Art Museum, Pasadena, which uses the same panel designs as this screen from Waddesdon, although in a different sequence (fig. 2), and with the Savonnerie panels inserted into a different shape of frame.⁸ This strongly reinforces the possibility that Gunn also supplied Charles Stuart with the Waddesdon screen, or elements of it, especially due to the similarities between the Huntington and Waddesdon screens.

- **1845** – The Savonnerie screen was part of the collection at Highcliffe Castle, built for Charles Stuart, and completed in 1834.⁹ After his death in 1845, the house and its collection remained in the family and were inherited by his wife Elizabeth, Lady Stuart de Rothesay (1789-1867).
- **1867** – After the death of Charles Stuart’s wife, Elizabeth, their surviving youngest daughter Louisa, Lady Waterford (1818-91) inherited the house and its collection.
- **1890 (?)** – As noted by Miss Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) in her *Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor* (1906), the screen was purchased by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) ‘from the possession of Louisa, Lady Waterford’, without a specified date.¹⁰ Ellis Waterhouse notes that in 1890 Baron Ferdinand bought *The Honourable Lady Stuart* (1780) by George Romney (1734-1802) from her,¹¹ and it is very likely that Jacques Dubois’s

French *secrétaire en pente*, catalogued here by Jessamy Harvey, was also acquired in the same year. The archives team at Highcliffe Castle have conjectured that Lady Waterford ‘sold a number of items from the castle during her residency to fund essential repairs’, adding that ‘sadly, the records from this period are quite limited, so it is difficult to confirm specific details’.¹² Medlam makes the point that Lady Waterford spent the last year of her life in 1890 sorting out her affairs at Highcliffe Castle in order to identify a suitable heir. It is possible that during this process, she made sales of this kind.¹³ Ferdinand’s memoir, *Reminiscences*, suggests that he began collecting around 1867.¹⁴ It is known that he continued collecting up until the time of his death in 1898; therefore he could have purchased this screen in this 30-year period, probably in 1890, as noted above.

- **1898** – Inherited by Ferdinand’s sister, Miss Alice de Rothschild.¹⁵ The catalogue of the collection that she compiled in 1906, notes that the screen was in the Grey Drawing Room.¹⁶
- **1922** – Inherited by Miss Alice’s nephew, James de Rothschild (1878-1957), at the same time as he inherited Waddesdon Manor.¹⁷
- **1957** – Bequeathed to the National Trust by James de Rothschild.¹⁸
- **1957-present** – The screen is currently displayed in the Grey Drawing Room at Waddesdon Manor, as it was in Ferdinand’s day.



CATALOGUE ENTRY

Despite the high production of carpets and other woven items at the Savonnerie manufactory during the eighteenth century, panels and mounted screens of this kind were few and far between, with a total of 750 individual leaves being woven between 1707 and 1791.¹⁹ Similarly, new cartoons for these screens were rarely produced, with only six to eight designs being created throughout the century by the manufactory's leading artists. The reason for such little production of screens in comparison to carpets was due to the established tradition that screens were reserved for the French royal family, usually to be used in their dining or anterooms to protect one from draughts and to create a sense of privacy, or to be given as diplomatic gifts, meaning that private purchases of these screens were incredibly rare and only took place under special circumstances.²⁰ Very few panels for screens were actually mounted during the eighteenth century: most of the individual panels were assembled or stored in the royal *Garde Meuble*, eventually mounted at a later date, or left to be discovered after the Revolution when interest in eighteenth-century French decorative art was revived.

This particular screen which formed part of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898)'s collection at Waddesdon Manor, later inherited and catalogued by his sister, Miss Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922), has six single-sided panels, each leaf woven after a design by the French artist, Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1743), who was successful for his realistic depictions of animals in painting. Each individual panel is florid with an array of animals, plants, flowers, fruits and a vibrant use of colours, and although each panel is busy with a variety of elements,

they all work together to create a cohesive, unified screen which exemplifies the eighteenth-century fashion for decorating interiors with natural elements and depictions of animals. It has been noted that the animals featured in the royal menagerie of Louis XV (r. 1715-1774) at Versailles, which included exotic animals such as parrots, peacocks and monkeys, making the screen's connection to royalty all the more apparent.²¹

Despite the small number of Savonnerie screens that were produced, there are several surviving examples alongside this one. A six-leaf screen owned by the 1st Duke of Sutherland (1758-1833), another notable collector of his time, is now located at The Huntington Art Museum in Pasadena and utilises this exact set of designs by Desportes, as well as being similarly mounted in a nineteenth-century carved and gilded frame (fig. 2). The sequence of the carpet leaves is different, but it evidently shows how the small number of cartoons produced in this period were repeatedly used to create different screens. Some aspects of this design can be seen on other screens, such as the exotic birds on the three-leaf screen held at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (fig. 3). This design, also by Desportes, together with Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay (1653-1715), an artist known for his flower painting, features blooming bouquets in porcelain vases, floral garlands and festoons, as well as trophies featuring different objects, with the exotic birds woven in the centre. Despite the differences in these various panels, the skill of the artist and the weaver are perceptible; the richness of such designs makes clear why these screens were reserved only for royalty and explains their price which would have been high, especially for such high quality weaving.

Unlike most decorative objects and pieces



of furniture, Savonnerie screens remained fashionable throughout the entirety of the eighteenth century, despite changing fashions. They continued to interest collectors in the nineteenth century, especially those who sought out French decorative art from the *ancien régime*.

The Waddesdon screen has been mounted in a gilded frame which is curved at the top, therefore cutting off the top corners of several of the leaves, which differentiates it from other examples that have squared frames.²² Furthermore, this screen is on casters, one of which is marked with the name Louasse.²³ New research using online trade directories reveals that several cabinet-makers by the name of Louasse were active in Paris between about 1781 and 1866, which might help to narrow the window in which the leaves were assembled into a screen, or when the screen might have been altered.²⁴

As Ferdinand states in his *Reminiscences*, collectors were keen on reviving the style seen under the reign of the Louis', attempting to reproduce eighteenth-century interiors whilst adapting them to fit modern day requirements, which would make these screens particularly attractive.²⁵ Ferdinand's renowned collection of eighteenth-century French decorative art at Waddesdon Manor was assembled into a nineteenth-century interior, adhering to his personal tastes. Before him, Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay (1779-1845) had bought the Savonnerie screen to display it alongside some of the best eighteenth-century French furniture in his newly built home, Highcliffe Castle in Dorset, an impulse explored by many other Francophile collectors during this period.²⁶

Yet perhaps the continued popularity of such screens is a result of their exclusivity at the time they were made. Reserved for the French royal family, they were highly

desirable to nineteenth-century collectors. Although the exact provenance of this screen from the date of its creation until its acquisition by Charles Stuart is unknown, the possibility of it being sold in the French revolutionary sales from one of the royal palaces would have increased the appeal. In his *Reminiscences*, Ferdinand claims that the rarity of past works of art and their historical associations is what makes them so precious, hence his acquisition of a screen of such high quality, one which is likely to have a royal provenance.²⁷ In addition, the association of this screen with Charles Stuart would have increased Ferdinand's wish to purchase this object, knowing it had been in the hands of a notable diplomat and collector, one who had close ties with the French Bourbon Restoration court during his role as ambassador. The stamped arms of the Stuart de Rothesay family, as can be seen in figure 1, provided Ferdinand with a clear provenance and added to its biography.

In his own words, part of Ferdinand's fascination with eighteenth-century French works of art, objects and furniture, just like other collectors of his time, was the 'memories they evoke, the trains of thought to which they lead, and the ways which they stimulate the imagination'.²⁸ Ferdinand's collection turned Waddesdon Manor into a multi-layered time capsule of the history, stories and souvenirs from pre- and post-Revolutionary France, all seen through the lens of Rothschild collecting.



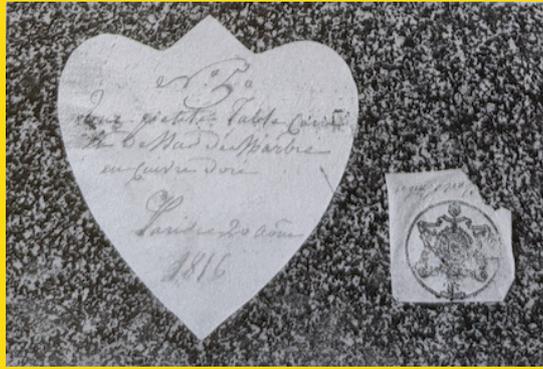


Fig. 1: Image of a label featuring the arms of the Stuart de Rothesay family taken from a granite slab in Lord Charles Stuart de Rothesay's collection, after 1828, featured in Sarah Medlam, *The Bettine, Lady Abingdon Collection: The Bequest of Mrs T.R.P. Hole* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), p. 48.



Fig. 2: Savonnerie Manufactory, *Six-fold Screen*, c. 1719-84, wool, linen, wood and gilt bronze, each panel, 176.5 × 61 cm, The Huntington Art Museum, Pasadena (no. 11.41).



Fig. 3: Savonnerie Manufactory, *Pair of Three-panel Screens*, 1714-1740, wool, linen and wood, overall: 273.6 × 194.2 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (no. 83.DD.260.2).

NOTES

- 1 Pierre Verlet, *The Savonnerie: Its History – The Waddesdon Collection* (National Trust, 1982), p. 337.
- 2 Sarah Medlam, *The Bettine, Lady Abingdon Collection: The Bequest of Mrs T.R.P. Hole* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), pp. 26-8.
- 3 For more information on Gunn see ‘Nixon, James (1816-1839)’, on the *British and Irish Furniture Makers Online Database of The Furniture History Society*, <<https://bifmo.furniturehistorysociety.org/entry/nixon-james-1816-39>> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 4 Medlam, *The Bettine*, p. 30.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 30-34.
- 6 This is not a photo of the exact label on the screen: it is a similar label featuring the arms of the Stuart de Rothesay family from a granite slab in Charles, Lord Stuart de Rothesay’s collection, reproducing numbers and information from an inventory made for his personal furniture in 1816. Medlam asserts that the existence of the coat of arms dates the labelling to after 1828, Medlam, *The Bettine*, p. 59.
- 7 Ibid., p. 32.
- 8 Robert R. Wark (ed.), *The Huntington Art Collection* (Huntington Library, 1970), p. 156.
- 9 Medlam, *The Bettine*, p. 36.
- 10 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *The Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor 1906*, 1906, p. 39.
- 11 Ellis Waterhouse, *The James A. de Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Paintings* (Office du Livre, 1967), p. 102. There is no evidence in the catalogue to support this purchase date.
- 12 Email communication on 18 April 2025. Further email communication on 14 May 2025 states that ‘Unfortunately, we don’t have any specific sources confirming that Lady Waterford sold items from the Castle to fund repairs’.
- 13 Medlam, *The Bettine*, p. 11.
- 14 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897, pp. 158-159.
- 15 Michael Hall, ‘Waddesdon Manor: Buckinghamshire: A Property of the National Trust’, *Country Life*, 192.23 (1998), p. 64.
- 16 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor 1906*, p. 39.
- 17 Hall, ‘Waddesdon Manor’, p. 65.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Verlet, *The Savonnerie*, p. 95.
- 20 Ibid., p. 304.
- 21 Ibid., p. 96.
- 22 Ibid., p. 337.
- 23 Verlet notes that Louasse was the name of a Parisian locksmith or upholsterer of the nineteenth century: Ibid., p. 467.
- 24 Nicolas Louasse became *maître ébéniste* in 1781, see François de Salverte, *Les ébénistes du XVIIIe siècle, leurs oeuvres et leurs marques: ouvrage contenant un millier de notices présentées dans l’ordre alphabétique, avec de nombreuses planches hors texte* (G. Van Oeste, 1923), p. 205. The *ébéniste* Louasse *jeune* is listed in *Bazar parisien, ou Choix Annuel des premiers manufacturiers, fabricans, artistes, mécaniciens et inventeurs de Paris, précédé d’une liste des banquiers, agens de change, courtiers de commerce et commissionnaires en marchandises* (1826), p. 128. A turner in copper named Louasse was active in Paris in 1842, see Sébastien Bottin, *Almanach-Bottin du Commerce de Paris* (Bureau de l’Almanach du commerce, 1842), p. CCLX. Finally, between 1858 and 1866, an *ébéniste* named Louasse was active at 6 rue St-Nicolas-St-Antoine: see Firmin Didot and Sébastien Bottin, *Annuaire-almanach du commerce, de l’industrie, de la magistrature et de l’administration* (Firmin-Didot frères, 1858), p. 314; A Cambon, *La Fabrique ou Almanach indicateur général d’adresses* (1860), p. 174; Didot and Bottin, *Annuaire-almanach* (1866), p. 424.
- 25 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 177.1997, Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, 1897, p. 137.
- 26 Adriana Turpin, ‘Appropriation as a Form of Nationalism? Collecting French Furniture in the Nineteenth Century’, in Jan Dirk Baetens and Dries Lyna (eds), *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750-1914* (Brill, 2019), pp. 220-55; Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris, c. 1790-1890* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- 27 Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Reminiscences*, pp. 132-3.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 132-3.



A MOMENT IN TIME: HOW THE SAVONNERIE SCREEN CAPTURED THE STORY OF THE ROYAL MENAGERIE

Phoebe Sowten

In the introduction to his book, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c.1790–1890*, Tom Stammers suggests that nineteenth-century collectors were not only interested in objects and furniture which adhered to the style of the old French regime, but they were also intrigued by how such items could evoke the past and reflect the lives of certain makers, places and elite figures.¹ Moreover, collectors acquired decorative objects from eighteenth-century France as a means of remembering a world lost to the Revolution – one that could be evoked only through words and material objects. The French Revolutionary sales during the late eighteenth century made the acquisition of such items possible to those across the Channel in Britain, subsequently influencing the craze for imitating French interiors

from the *ancien régime*, and allowing collectors to replicate or evoke spaces from this period with decorative objects that could evoke such a crucial part of French history.

Screens created at the Savonnerie Manufactory, originally located on the outskirts of Paris, are a prime example of decorative objects that were of great interest to nineteenth-century collectors, as they acted as mementos of the French past (Fig. 1). Very few panels and mounted screens were created over the course of the eighteenth century, and new cartoons were rarely produced, due to the fact that they were reserved for the French royal family. These practical screens were either used in the dining rooms and anterooms of royal residences to create a sense of privacy or to eliminate draughts. They were



on occasion given as diplomatic gifts. As a result, private purchases of these screens were incredibly rare and only took place under special circumstances. Unlike other decorative objects and pieces of furniture, Savonnerie screens remained fashionable throughout the eighteenth century, despite changing fashions seen across other elements of interiors. These screens continued to be considered suitable and fashionable from the 1730s all the way to the 1780s.

This enduring taste for screens during the eighteenth century is shown through Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764)'s collection whilst she was mistress to King Louis XV (r. 1715-1774), as it is known that she owned four Savonnerie screens displayed in her residences.² Notably, she had one screen in her Salon of Portraits at the Chateau de Saint-Ouen and others in the Great Room at the Hotel Pompadour in Paris, as well as many other textile pieces from the Savonnerie Manufactory, most likely featuring similar designs. The location of these screens in Pompadour's interiors in formal reception spaces rather than the more private rooms indicates that they were regarded as extremely high-status items intended to be seen by guests. Much later Louis XVI (r. 1774 -1793) gifted a screen to Gustavus III of Sweden (r. 1771-1792) in 1784.³ This enduring taste for Savonnerie screens provides them with a unique character in comparison to other furnishings of the period, as does their royal history, exclusivity and the way in which each panel captures a facet of French history.

Unlike other items woven at the Savonnerie Manufactory that derive from a variety of designs and feature a range of visual depictions, these screens have quite specific iconographical scope. From the six to eight designs that were originally created by the manufactory's leading

artists, the majority feature naturalistic elements such as fruits, plants and flowers, as well as animals, which are central to most of the surviving examples. Animals can be seen in the six-panelled screen at Waddesdon Manor, acquired by the notable collector Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898), which frames (quite literally) snapshots of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles during the reign of Louis XV when these leaves were woven (Fig. 1).⁴ Each leaf tells a tale of exoticism, luxury and splendour, as well as power, royalty and absolute monarchy, reflecting the 'royal authority and aristocratic civility' of the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715), the creator of the menagerie, and his successors.⁵ Narratives such as these are what make decorative objects like these so compelling; they become more than just artworks to be displayed in interiors; rather they turn them into an open book, one which seeks to be read and appreciated for the vivid story it elicits. When the Savonnerie screen is read like a picture book, it becomes possible to develop a deeper understanding of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles – a spectacular institution that displayed the very animals depicted on the screen – and to discern the ways in which the menagerie was politicised, structured around monarchical authority.

The act of collecting and displaying exotic animals seems to have been a 'universal human desire' for royalty that began as early as the fifteenth century B.C. when Queen Hatshepsut of Egypt used animals to enhance her image and reinstate her position as Queen.⁶ From this moment onwards, 'unusual and marvellous beasts' were obtained by various rulers across the world to help them to strengthen their royal status and political power, especially in the event of war or



international diplomacy. Because of the high cost of maintaining exotic animals, this practice was limited to rulers, and menageries thus became closely associated with royalty, serving as clear expressions of monarchical authority. Similarly to Queen Hatshepsut, in France the Royal Menagerie at Versailles was purposefully created by King Louis XIV, as a tool to build his monarchical power and to establish his position as the ultimate Sun King.

It was in 1662 that architect Louis Le Vau (1612-1670) began to construct the menagerie at Versailles to house the rare and exotic animals that the King owned (fig. 1). Louis XIV's ability to organise such a mammoth display of animals from all corners of the world proved his authority over nature, therefore establishing his position as an absolute monarch anointed by God.⁷ Kept in cages, the display of animals served as proof of the King's dominance over the natural world and, by extension, over France and the lands from which these animals originated, thereby showcasing the breadth of his power. Over time the caged animals became a metaphor of the King's omnipotent power, forever reminding visitors to the menagerie that they too could be captured, locked up and imprisoned if they were to prove disloyal to his regime. While the King's menagerie at the Chateau de Vincennes was devoted to combat and staged fights, the menagerie at Versailles took a more ornamental route, one which featured animals of a more peaceful nature such as parrots, peacocks and other birds. That is not to say that larger mammals were not present in the menagerie, and indeed many of these were the subjects of paintings, such as those by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) (fig. 2).

In turn, this shift in display shied away from the more traditional, ancient forms

of presentation and provided an indirect model for court culture and civilisation which continued throughout the reign of Louis XV and Louis XVI up until the French Revolution. Although the Royal Menagerie at Versailles is most closely associated with its founder, Louis XIV, the screen at Waddesdon Manor was produced during the reign of Louis XV, and many comparable screens were made or assembled later in the century under Louis XVI. Louis XIV's successors maintained the Royal Menagerie and continued to use its animals as expressions of royal authority. However, with the outbreak of the French Revolution and the collapse of the monarchy, the menagerie also fell into decline, symbolising the end of Bourbon rule and its spectacles of grandeur.

This heightened ornamental presentation of animals is reflected in the screen from Waddesdon, which follows a design by Alexandre-François Desportes (1661-1743), a notable artist of the time who specialised in animal paintings and hunting scenes. Rather than featuring animals in a more savage way (fig. 3), the Savonnerie animals are presented in a highly decorative manner, showcased as a spectacle. In the screen's panels the animals on the ground appear to be gazing up towards the birds at the top of the panel, acting as an allegory for the human social structure. Indeed, royal hierarchy is reflected in the depiction of exotic birds, which in the natural world were perceived as the highest order in the chain of being, therefore becoming representative of the position of the king.⁸ The importance of birds as a reflection of royal power is also a prominent aspect of other designs for these typology of screens, such as a three-leaf screen by Desportes and Jean-Baptiste de Fontenay (1653-1715) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which only features exotic birds (fig. 4). Clearly,



the Savonnerie Manufactory were conscious of the patriotic meaning of these designs, using the images of the animals as a metaphor for the politics of royalty.

Furthermore, as much as this screen tells the story of the menagerie's splendour and display of power, it also has connotations of confinement, brutality and capture. The barriers or cages that are illustrated on both ends of the panels, albeit rather discreetly, subtly nods to the immobilisation of the animals, reminding us that although at Versailles they were not used for staged fights, these animals were still forced to perform for human entertainment. When the performance of the menagerie came to a halt with the French Revolution, it became even more politically charged, as the animals were considered from opposite points of view as 'vicious agents' of the monarchy, or 'victims of the *ancien régime*'. As a result, some animals were left to perish in poor conditions, whilst others were taken to be used for scientific observations.⁹

At first glance, the political undertones of this screen can be difficult to discern, as the vivid colours and abundance of elements draw the viewer's attention. However, nineteenth-century collectors likely recognized these screens as symbols of the *ancien régime*, which contributed to their desirability. The political narratives woven into the fabric of these screens would have intrigued a learned collector such as Ferdinand de Rothschild who was passionate about history and fascinated by the historical weight carried by decorative objects, allowing for interesting conversations to be brought to the surface.

The power, authority and royalty conveyed in exclusive Savonnerie screens of this type ensured their enduring desirability across the eighteenth century. After the

Revolution, they continued to be extremely desirable for collectors such as Ferdinand de Rothschild, as vestiges of a lost era. They act as souvenirs of a distant past, one which cannot be physically met, but can be experienced through objects and furnishings.





Figure 1. Pierre Aveline, *View and Perspective of the Salon of the Versailles Menagerie*, 1689, engraving, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Figure 2. Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Leopardin*, c. 1741, oil on canvas, 131 × 160 cm, Staatliches Museum Schwerin, Schwerin (no. G 867).



Figure 3. Alexandre Francois Desportes, *Dog, Dead Game and Fruit*, c.1715, oil and canvas, 128.5 × 161.5 cm, The Wallace Collection, London (no. P594).



Figure 4. Jean-Baptiste de Fontenay and Alexandre-Francois Desportes, *Trophies and Birds*, c.1715-50, wool and linen, 274.3 × 66 cm (each panel), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (no. 58.75.128).

NOTES

- 1 Tom Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c.1790-1890* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 14: ‘Collectors privileged different “memories” in the existence of their objects: some were fascinated by their original makers, some were intrigued by their early owners, whilst others studied them as specimens of artistic styles’.
- 2 Rosalind Savill, *Everyday Rococo: Madame de Pompadour and Sevres Porcelain* (Unicorn Press, 2021), pp. 752-6.
- 3 Pierre Verlet, *The Savonnerie: It’s History – The Waddesdon Collection* (National Trust, 1982), p. 336.
- 4 Ibid. .
- 5 Pete Sahlins, ‘The Royal Menageries of Louis XIV and the Civilizing Process Revisited’, *French Historical Studies*, 35.2 (2012), pp. 237-67 (p. 239).
- 6 Marina Belozerskaya, ‘Menageries as Princely Necessities and Mirrors of Their Times, in Mary Morton (ed.), *Oudry’s Painted Menagerie: Portraits of Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), pp. 59-74 (p. 59).
- 7 Sahlins, ‘The Royal Menageries of Louis XIV’, p. 266.
- 8 Ibid., pp. 253-4.
- 9 John Simons, ‘How the King of Beasts Became a Republican’, *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 53.2 (2020), pp. 51-63 (p. 54).



PAIR OF EGYPTIAN PORPHYRY VASES

Albertina Ciani



Anonymous artist, probably Roman
 Pair of Egyptian Porphyry Vases
 About 1670-1700
 Egyptian red porphyry
 H. 68 cm
 Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire
 (nos 144.1995.1; 144.1995.2)

PROVENANCE

Probably acquired by Alexander Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton (1767-1852); William Hamilton, 11th Duke of Hamilton (1811-1864); inherited by William Hamilton, 12th Duke of Hamilton (1845-1895), and sold as part of the collection of Hamilton Palace in 1882; acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) in 1882; inherited by Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) in 1898; inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957) in 1922; bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.

AN EXTENDED PROVENANCE OF THE PORPHYRY VASES

- 1850 – Owned by William Hamilton, 11th Duke of Hamilton (1811-1863). The 1850s inventory of Hamilton Palace reports in the Marble Hall: ‘2 fine porphyry vases on the chimney; Beckford Collection – £4’ / ‘2 fine red and white marble vases on chimney from Beckford Collection – £4’ / ‘1 fine red porphyry marble vase on chimney from Beckford Collection – £4’ / ‘2 large antique porphyry vases with covers and serpentine marble bases – £10’.¹ Given their size and material, the Waddesdon vases can almost certainly be identified with the final entry (‘two large antique porphyry vases with covers and serpentine marble bases – £10’), while the smaller vases placed over the chimney, from the collection of William Beckford (1760-1844) – the father-in-law of Alexander Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton – must have been inherited or acquired as a set. It is likely that the Waddesdon vases were acquired by Alexander Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton, as this inventory from the 1850s was probably compiled at the time of, or shortly after, his death in 1852.
- 1876 – In the collection of William Hamilton, 12th Duke of Hamilton (1845-1895). The 1876 *Inventory of Furniture, Pictures and Articles of Hamilton Palace* reports that in the Marble Entrance Hall, there were ‘2 Egyptian Red Porphyry Vases & covers with serpent handles; on Green porphyry bases 30 in high’.² This entry confirms that the vases were originally set on green “serpentine/porphyry” bases, as recorded in the aforementioned 1850s inventory of Hamilton Palace. These bases must have been replaced at a later date.



- **1882** - The pair of Porphyry Vases was sold on Tuesday 4 July 1882, lot. 1008, on the ninth day of the first sale of the Hamilton Palace collection, organised by Christie's.³ They were acquired by Samson Wertheimer (1811-1892) for £1365 for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898). The auction catalogue reports: 'lot. 1008: A Pair of Vases, of Antique Egyptian Porphyry, with fluted bowls and covers, and twisted serpent handles – on antique serpentine plinths – 30 in high – on ebonised pedestals (purchased by S. Wertheimer £1365)'.⁴ It is well-known that Samson Wertheimer acted as an agent for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild at this auction, also acquiring other items and artworks for the collection at Waddesdon Manor.⁵ Wertheimer played a significant role in shaping the Waddesdon Manor collection. He was not only an art dealer for Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild and his cousins, Alfred (1842-1918) and Leopold (1845-1917) de Rothschild, but also a close friend of the baron, who was even named godfather to one of Wertheimer's children.⁶
- **1898** – Inherited by Miss Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) at her brother's death in 1898, and mentioned in Miss Alice's *Catalogue of the principal Pictures, Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor* of 1906 and 1910: 'Pair of Louis XIV Porphyry Vases. From the Hamilton Palace Collection'.⁷
- **1922** – Inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957), nephew of Miss Alice, in 1922.
- **1954** – Bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.⁸



CATALOGUE ENTRY

Porphyry is currently referred to as ‘ancient porphyry’ or ‘Egyptian porphyry’ due to its origin from Mount Gebel Dokhan, also known as ‘Mons Porphyrites’, located in the Egyptian eastern desert.⁹ This material is renowned for its exceptional durability and distinctive purple hue. Indeed, its unique colour led to its designation as *lapis porphyrites* in Roman times. Its extreme durability, conversely, resulted in its widespread use for architectural elements such as columns and pilasters. The striking purple colouration is attributed to the presence of minute hematite particles, a red iron oxide mineral, while its remarkable durability stems from its volcanic origins.¹⁰

Porphyry was certainly utilised during the Egyptian Pharaonic period, though without any particular symbolic association. It was not until the Greek Ptolemaic era in Egypt that its use became more frequent for architectural and artistic purposes, and it began to be linked with royalty. Tyrian purple dye – made from the secretions of sea snails –, introduced to Rome via Etruscan trade during the Tarquinian Monarchy (616-509 BCE), was exceptionally expensive and consequently reserved exclusively for patrician clothing, even forbidden to women. From the mid-first century CE onwards, its use was restricted to emperors, who employed the colour purple to legitimise their position and justify their rule, thereby transforming it into a potent symbol of political, civil, and religious authority. Consequently, from this period, porphyry itself, owing to its colour, became emblematic of imperial power. It was thus employed for architectural features in buildings, imperial busts, and decorative objects intended for the emperors. Particularly from the Constantine era (306-337 CE) onward, this

stone was also utilised for the sarcophagi of emperors and their family members. With Constantine’s recognition of Christianity, the colour of porphyry evolved to symbolise not only the Empire but also the Christian Church, as evidenced by its adoption in the vestments of the higher echelons of the Catholic Church.¹¹ Following the fall of the Roman Empire, the quarries on Mount Gebel Dokhan were lost to memory, only to be rediscovered in 1822 during an expedition led by James Burton (1786-1862) and John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875).¹²

From the medieval period until the mid-nineteenth century, porphyry from Roman architectural elements, such as columns and floors, was frequently repurposed for new decorative objects and busts in the classical style. During the Renaissance, this practice of reusing ancient porphyry was particularly evident in the creation of valuable objects and architectural features for the Medici family in Florence. In the seventeenth century, prominent figures such as Cardinal Scipione Borghese (1577-1633), the Barberini, and the Doria Pamphilj families began amassing collections of porphyry objects crafted by sculptors like Tommaso Fedele (known as ‘del porfido’) (1598-1658) or Silvio Calci from Velletri (active about 1600-1650). The vogue for Egyptian porphyry extended beyond Rome, reaching beyond the Alps due to the interest of Cardinal Armand-Jean Richelieu (1585-1642) and his successor, Cardinal Jules Mazarin (1602-1661). These two figures are recognised as among the greatest collectors of porphyry objects in the seventeenth century and were instrumental in transmitting this interest to the French Court. Among the Egyptian porphyry objects most frequently collected in subsequent centuries were busts of emperors or busts in the ancient style, but especially vases.¹³



The enduring association of porphyry with royalty, emperors, and the Catholic Church has ensured its status as a material of extreme prestige, even in more recent history. This is perfectly encapsulated by curator Henri Loyrette: ‘It thus becomes one of the means to manifest transcendence, political supremacy, technical mastery, and “grand goût”’.¹⁴ By 1898, the two-thousand-year-old symbolic association of Egyptian porphyry with royalty and status was widely acknowledged throughout Europe, with objects like the two Louis XIV-style Egyptian porphyry vases at Waddesdon Manor gracing the residences of Europe’s most eminent families (figs 1-3). The two Waddesdon Manor vases not only symbolise the prestige of the Rothschild family but also fit seamlessly into Baron Ferdinand’s collection, aligning with the predominant French aesthetic of the entire ensemble.¹⁵

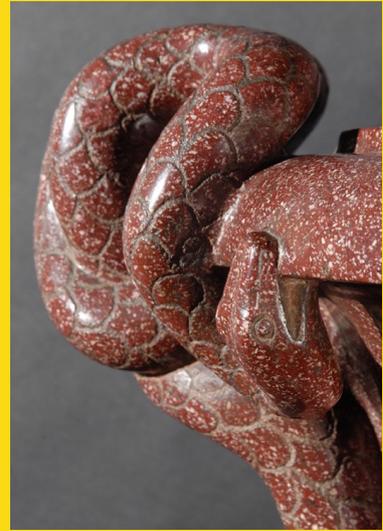
The two Egyptian porphyry vases are in a characteristic Baroque style, featuring an urn shape with a lid. They are distinguished by fluted bowls and covers, with serpents forming the handles and biting the rim. This composition is remarkably understated, with the vases featuring only vertical fluting (similar to gadroons) on the lower body and lid, and the serpentine handles. This simplicity underscores that the beauty of the vase primarily derives from the Egyptian porphyry itself, owing to its rarity and imperial association.

Although simplified, the composition of these two vases recalls the *Pair of Amphorae with Serpentine Handles*, crafted from Belgian black marble, known to have been designed by Alessandro Algardi (1598-1654) and executed by Silvio Calci (fig. 4) for Marcantonio Borghese Principe di Sulmona (1601-1658).¹⁶

The two Waddesdon vases cannot be attributed to a specific artist, and the period

and place of their creation cannot be determined with certainty. However, they are clearly inspired by the pair in Belgian black marble in the Borghese Collection and are very similar to another porphyry *Vase with serpentine handles* in the Louvre, which has been dated to the seventeenth century and is believed to have originated in Rome (fig. 5).¹⁷ Given the close similarity to the *Vase with serpentine handles*, it is possible to infer that the date and place of production of the Waddesdon pair of Egyptian porphyry vases may coincide with those of the Louvre’s vase, and that they were either produced in Rome, or by a French artist inspired by Roman vase typologies of the period.





Figures 1-3. Anonymous French or Roman artist, *Pair of Louis XIV Egyptian Porphyry Vases*, about 1670-1700, Egyptian red porphyry, H. 68 cm, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (nos 144.1995.1; 144.1995.2).



Figure 4. Alessandro Algardi and Silvio Calci, *Pair of amphorae with serpentine handles*, 1638, black Belgian marble, 90 × 52 cm, Rome, Galleria Borghese (no. CCXIX).

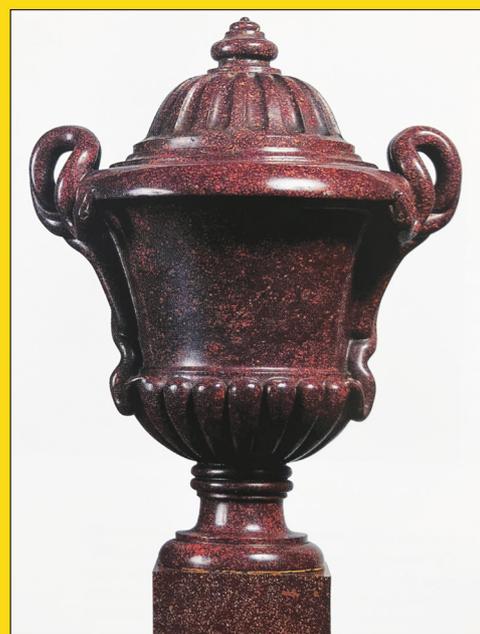


Figure 5. Anonymous Roman artist, *Vase with serpentine handles*, 1650-1690, Egyptian red porphyry, 72 × 54 × 40 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre (no. MR 2816).

NOTES

- 1 Hamilton Palace Archive, Acc. no. 1228-00106: Inventory of Hamilton Palace Collection, 1850s, fol. 106: <https://archive.vhpt.scot/imageview/1836> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 2 Hamilton Palace Archive, Acc. no. TD200000001-00016: Inventory of the Furniture, Pictures, Articles of Hamilton Palace, 1876, fol. 16: <https://archive.vhpt.scot/imageview/1984> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 3 Christie's London, *The Hamilton Palace Collection. Illustrated Price Catalogue*, 17 June - 20 July 1882, p. 134.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 For instance, a Writing Table in the collection of Waddesdon Manor (no. 2546), that had belonged to Marie Antoinette, was purchased by Samson Wertheimer for £6000 at the same sale, see Christie's, *The Hamilton Palace Collection*, p. 45, lot. 303
- 6 Nicola Pickering, 'The English Rothschild Family in the Vale of Aylesbury: Their Houses, Collections, and Collecting Activity 1830-1900' (King's College London: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 2013), pp. 239-40; Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: The Heritage of a Rothschild House* (Harry N. Abrams, 2002), p. 76.
- 7 The Waddesdon Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of Principal Pictures, Furniture, China and other works of art at Waddesdon Manor 1906*, 1906, p. 47; Acc. no. 927: 1910 edition, p. 43.
- 8 Michael Hall, 'Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire. A property of The National Trust', *Country life*, 192.23 (1998), pp. 63-7.
- 9 On the caves of Mount Gebel Dokhan see Dario del Bufalo, *Porphyry: Red Imperial Porphyry. Power and Religion* (Umberto Allemandi, 2018), p. 55.
- 10 Philippe Malgouyres, Clément Blanc-Riehl (eds), *Porphyre. La Pierre Pourpre des Ptolémées aux Bonapart* (Musée du Louvre, 2003), p. 9.
- 11 Del Bufalo, *Porphyry*, pp. 13-34.
- 12 Malgouyres and Blanc-Riehl, *Porphyre*, pp. 14-5.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 90-6, 109-12.
- 14 Ibid., p. 9: 'Il devient donc l'un des moyens de manifester la transcendance, la suprématie politique, la maîtrise technique, le «grand Goût»' (translation by the author).
- 15 For more on Waddesdon Manor see Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: The Heritage of a Rothschild House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002); Nicola Pickering, 'The English Rothschild Family in the Vale of Aylesbury: Their Houses, Collections, and Collecting Activity 1830-1900' (King's College London: Unpublished PhD dissertation, 2013), pp. 16-26, 414-25.
- 16 Sonia Felici, *Pair of Amphorae with Serpentine Handles*, Algardi Alessandro / Calci Silvio, inv. CCXIX, 2024, Rome: Galleria Borghese. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12732865> [accessed 05-02-2026]; Italo Faldi, *Galleria Borghese. Le sculture dal sec. XVI al XIX* (Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1954), pp. 10-11, cat. no. 3; Jennifer Montagu, *Alessandro Algardi*, 2 vols (Yale University Press, 1985), vol. II, p. 461.
- 17 Malgouyres and Blanc-Riehl, *Porphyre*, p. 114, no. 28.



**RUNNING SATYR AND
RUNNING BACCHANTE
BY CLODION**

**Albertina Ciani and
Christine Kyle**



Claude Michel, known as Clodion
(1738-1814)
Running Satyr (1), and Running
Bacchante (2)
c. 1775-1800
Terracotta
H. 39.1 cm (1), and H. 38.45 cm (2)
Signed CLODION (N reversed) (1)
Signed CLODION (2)
Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire
(no. 2456.1; 2456.2)

PROVENANCE

Acquired or inherited by George Stanhope, 7th Earl of Chesterfield (1831-1871); inherited by Anne Elizabeth Stanhope (née Forester), Countess of Chesterfield (1803-1885); inherited by George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon (1866-1923); acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898); inherited by Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) in 1898; inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957) in 1922; 1957, bequest of James de Rothschild to the National Trust.

ESSENTIAL LITERATURE

Anne L. Poulet and Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Clodion: 1738-1814* (Musée du Louvre, 1992), p. 333, figs 175-6; Anne L. Poulet, 'On the Run: Clodion's Bacchanalian Figures', in Heather MacDonald (ed.), *French Art of the Eighteenth Century: The Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture Series at the Dallas Museum of Art* (Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 176-7.

AN EXTENDED PROVENANCE OF CLODION'S STATUETTES

- 1868 – Acquired or inherited by George Stanhope, 7th Earl of Chesterfield (1831-1871). The statuettes were displayed at the Leeds National Exhibition of 1868 in the 'Museum of Ornamental Art' section, which showcased 'foreign' works from antiquity up to the nineteenth century. The statuettes were listed in the exhibition catalogue under 'Museum of Ornamental Art, Section E, Sculpture: Marble and Terracotta, n. 608, Terra Cotta, Figure of Bacchante by Clodion; n. 609, Terra Cotta, Figure of a Young Bacchus, by Clodion', and reported as 'Contributed by the Earl of Chesterfield'.¹ Undoubtedly, the statuettes in question were the *Running Bacchante* and the *Running Satyr*, now at Waddesdon Manor, as a contemporary issue of the *Illustrated London News* (figs. 1-2) identified the two Clodion terracottas as the property of Lord Chesterfield and published an illustration of the statuettes.²
- 1871 – George Stanhope, 7th Earl of Chesterfield, died in 1871 without a wife nor children.³ Bretby Hall, his primary residence,⁴ and its collection, including the two statuettes by Clodion, were inherited by his widowed mother, Anne Elizabeth Stanhope (née Forester), Countess of Chesterfield (1803-1885).⁵
- 1885 – Outliving both her children, when Anne Elizabeth Stanhope, Countess of Chesterfield died in 1885, both Bretby Hall and the collection were inherited by her grandson George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon (1866-1923). He was the oldest son of the Countess's daughter, Lady Evelyn Stanhope (1834-1875), and her husband, Henry Herbert, 4th Earl



of Carnarvon (1831-1890) of Highclere Castle.⁶

- 1897 – The statuettes were acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839-1898) pre-1897, as a photograph of the two Clodion sculptures is present in the *Red Book* (1897) (fig. 5),⁷ and listed in Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild's *Probate Inventory* (1898).⁸ The two statuettes were probably acquired by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild from George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon, who had inherited Bretby Hall in 1885 from his grandmother.⁹
- 1898 – The statuettes were inherited by Miss Alice de Rothschild (1847-1922) at her brother's death in 1898, and mentioned in her *Catalogue of the principal Pictures, Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor* of 1906 and of 1910.¹⁰
- 1922 – Inherited by James de Rothschild (1878-1957), nephew of Miss Alice, in 1922.
- 1954 – Bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust in 1957.¹¹



CATALOGUE ENTRY

Claude Michel, known as Clodion (1738–1814), was a pivotal figure in eighteenth-century French sculpture, celebrated primarily for his extensive production of terracotta statuettes. This output coincided with a burgeoning appreciation for terracottas in France, which, from the 1730s, gained prominence at the Salons organised by the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture as preparatory models and as standalone artworks. This trend mirrored an earlier embrace of terracotta in Italy, where collectors acquired works by masters like Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) and Alessandro Algardi (1598–1654), and paralleled its rise in Britain. Initially, the appeal of terracottas was confined to academic and artistic circles, but expanded to the aristocracy and upper bourgeoisie by the mid-eighteenth century. Clodion’s independent terracotta statuettes seamlessly fit into this evolving aesthetic.¹²

Clodion’s terracotta pieces are notable for their exceptional quality. Many are believed to have been cast, and are unpainted and unglazed. The remarkable technical skill demonstrated in the modelling and high-temperature firing processes, which were carried out without any cracks or flaws, means they can be compared in refinement with the finest porcelains from Meissen, Sèvres and Ginori.¹³

Precisely because of their fineness, these works graced prestigious collections, including those of Baron Louis Charles Thibon (1866–1940), Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–1796), and prominent English figures. The enduring popularity of Clodion’s terracottas is evident in their continued acquisition by collectors well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as numerous auction records attest.¹⁴

Clodion began producing these

autonomous terracotta statuettes during his nine-year residency in Rome, starting in 1762 as a *pensionnaire* of the Académie de France in Rome. His works exhibit a profound antiquarian influence, derived from rigorous study of Greco-Roman sculptures and extensive knowledge of ancient literature, cultivated through his uncle, the sculptor Lambert-Sigisbert Adam (1700–1759)’s library and his studies at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.¹⁵ Clodion drew heavily from classical mythology for his subjects, and in particular from Virgil’s *Bucolics*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and Homer.¹⁶ The eighteenth century saw a widespread European fascination with classical themes, viewed as both scholarly and emotionally resonant. This classical revival was a reaction against the religious focus of the Baroque, fuelled by antiquarian circles in Rome, the archaeological discoveries at Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748) and, later, by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768)’s writings. While Clodion’s works embody this antiquarian trend, they also integrate elements of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s Roman Baroque, an artist whose terracottas Clodion reportedly owned. Furthermore, the influences of his uncles, Lambert-Sigisbert and Nicolas-Sébastien Adam (1705–1778), and his teacher, Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714–1785) – who had all been trained in the late Baroque tradition – were crucial, teaching him the importance of studying nature alongside classical sculpture.¹⁷

Waddesdon Manor, commissioned by Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild (1839–1898) and designed by Hippolyte Destailleur (1822–1893), meticulously recreates the Renaissance châteaux of the Loire Valley, influencing its architecture, decoration, and furnishings.¹⁸ This strong French cultural preference is reflected in



its extensive sculpture collection, predominantly featuring eighteenth-century French artists, including numerous works by and after Clodion. Among these are three candelabra (nos 2248.1; 2248.2; 2248.3), two vases (no. 2216.1; 2216.2), a relief (no. 677), and a series of terracotta statuettes besides the *Running Satyr* (no. 2456.1), and *Running Bacchante* catalogued in this entry: *Two Satyrs and a Nymph* (no. 2512.1) (fig. 4), *Two Nymphs and a Satyr* (no. 2512.2) (fig. 5), *Running Satyr, Bacchante, and Infant Satyr* (no. 2586.1) (fig. 6), *Votaries of Bacchus* (no. 2457) (fig. 7). The late eighteenth-century statuettes of a *Running Satyr* and a *Running Bacchante* are prime examples of Clodion's artistry. The *Running Satyr* depicts a nude figure, dynamically poised with a raised right leg and thrusting torso, adorned with a vine wreath and carrying thyrsi from which dead ducks hang. A suspended syrinx reinforces his mythological identity. The *Running Bacchante*, designed as his counterpart, joyfully rushes towards him, holding a thyrsus and bells, with a tambourine at her feet filled with grapes. Her flowing drapery and backwards-extended left leg enhance the sense of movement. Clodion intended these figures to portray a dynamic and joyous reunion. Their effectiveness stems from the complex composition, which conveys vigorous movement through the projection of body parts and heavy draperies. These running figures fuse classical themes with Baroque compositional principles. Anne L. Poulet notes that Clodion drew inspiration from Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* (fig. 8) for the complex, multi-viewpoint composition, and from Guillaume (1677-1746) and Nicolas (1658-1733) Coustou's *Apollo and Daphne* (fig. 9) for their stance and dynamism.¹⁹

Clodion produced numerous terracotta figures of bacchantes and satyrs, often in groups, but also as individual statuettes intended for pairing. The artist never made exact copies but created variants, used as a means of experimentation, reflecting the development of his style over time. Progressively, the drapery of the robes becomes more intricate, the attributes more voluminous, and accessories gain greater significance. Variants from the 1790s display increased monumentality and a more detailed depiction of nudes. For example, two statuettes in a private collection (fig. 10) depict a satyr very similar to one in the Waddesdon Collection, with the main difference being that lambs, not ducks, hang from his thyrsi. The bacchante in this variant shows notable differences: she holds two thyrsi on her shoulders with dangling grape tendrils, also near her right foot. Unlike the Waddesdon *Bacchante*, this one bears her weight on her right foot, which is advanced, while her left leg is raised and extends outward. Also, the Waddesdon *Bacchante* is draped in animal skin, whereas the one in the private collection is dressed in fabric. A standalone version of the running satyr is held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (fig. 11). This differs by the absence of animals hanging from the thyrsi (only vine tendrils), the absence of additional elements like the flute hanging from the tree trunk, and a reversed composition, with the weight resting on the left leg and the right raised. Several versions of running Bacchantes also exist. Another *Bacchante* at the Musée Cognacq-Jay (fig. 12) is very similar to the one at Waddesdon, although the raised right arm is damaged and the object it once held is unknown. Further variants are known, demonstrating that Clodion favoured variation rather than exact replicas.²⁰



In addition to the numerous terracotta variants – attesting to their popularity and to Clodion’s prolific production – there also exist bronze versions, as well as black basalt reproductions of the *Running Satyr* and *Running Bacchante* from Waddesdon Manor, produced by Wedgwood from 1860 onwards (fig. 13).²¹ The mould for the basalt reproductions must have been made around 1860, while the statuettes were at Bretby Hall, still in the possession of Lord Chesterfield.

Wedgwood’s reproduction of Clodion’s terracotta statuettes from 1860 onwards, and their subsequent display at the Leeds National Exhibition in 1868, demonstrate the popularity of this artistic style in the second half of the nineteenth century. Clodion’s statuettes and groups were highly sought after when first produced, as they combined themes from antiquity with the popular Rococo aesthetic. In the late eighteenth century, these terracotta statuettes were particularly appreciated for their light, playful character and were considered ideal for the cabinets of amateurs. Around a century later, Clodion’s works were rediscovered and re-evaluated.²² This occurred at the height of a widespread Rococo revival and coincided with the praise expressed by the renowned French brothers Edmond (1822–1896) and Jules de Goncourt (1830–1870) for Clodion’s charming works and, more broadly, for eighteenth-century terracotta in *La Maison d’un artiste*.²³ The presence of Clodion’s works in major collections, such as those of Baron Thibon and the Florentine Demidoff family, which were frequently auctioned and therefore widely publicised, contributed significantly to his renewed visibility.²⁴ This prominence was further reinforced by Goncourt’s writings and by Henry Thirion’s 1885 publication of a monograph devoted

exclusively to Clodion and his uncles, the Adams.²⁵

Against the backdrop of the Rococo revival, Clodion’s delicate and charming terracotta sculptures were acquired by discerning collectors who regarded French taste as a marker of sophistication and elegance. One such collector was Ferdinand de Rothschild, who was clearly caught up in the “Clodion mania” that swept European taste in the late nineteenth century.





Figure 1-2. Illustration of Clodion's *Running Satyr* and *Running Bacchant* from the Leeds National Exhibition of 1868, in *Illustrated London News*, 53 (1868), pp. 273, 304.



Figure 3. The Clodion statuettes at Waddesdon Manor, as photographed in Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, November 1897 (The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 54, p. 59).



Figure 4. Clodion, *Two Satyrs and a Nymph*, terracotta, H. 54 cm, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2512.1).



Figure 5. Clodion, *Two Nymphs and a Satyr*, terracotta, H. 69 cm, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2512.2).



Figure 6. Clodion, *Running Satyr, Bacchante, and Infant Satyr*, 1775-1800, terracotta, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2586.1).



Figure 7. Clodion, *Votaries of Bacchus*, 1780-85, terracotta, H. 50.8 cm, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (no. 2457.1).



Figure 8. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1622-25, marble, H. 243 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome (no. CV).



Figure 9. Guillaume and Nicolas Coustou, *Apollo and Daphne*, 1713-15, marble, 132 × 135 × 65 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris (no. MR 1807).



Figure 10. Clodion, *Running Bacchus and Bacchante*, date unknown, terracotta, dimensions unknown, private collection (in Anne L. Poulet, and Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Clodion: 1738-1814*, Musée du Louvre, 1992, p. 393).



Figure 11. Clodion, *Running Faun*, 1775-1800, terracotta, H. 43.18 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (no. 2627-1856).



Figure 12. Clodion, *Running Bacchante*, 1803-4, terracotta, 35 × 15 × 18.5 cm, Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris (no. J203).



Figure 13. Josiah Wedgwood and Sons, *Running Satyr and Running Bacchante*, 1860-1910, black basalt, 38.7 × 36 cm, York Art Gallery, Yorkshire (no. YORAG 1952.635).

NOTES

- 1 *National Exhibition of Works of Art, at Leeds 1868: Official Catalogue* (Edward Baines & Sons, 1868), p. 196.
- 2 ‘Leeds National Exhibition’, *Illustrated London News*, 53 (1868), pp. 273, 304, 308.
- 3 ‘Death of the Earl of Chesterfield’, *Derbyshire Times*, 1090 (1871), p. 8.
- 4 Since 1585, Bretby Hall had served as the principal residence of the Earls of Chesterfield. For the history of the estate, see: <https://bretbyparish-council.org.uk/history/> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 5 ‘Highclere’, *Hampshire Chronicle*, 113 (1885), p. 5; Derbyshire Record Office, Acc. no. D765: Bretby Hall Estate – 1883-1900: <https://calm-view.derbyshire.gov.uk/calmview/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=D765&pos=1> [accessed 05-02-26]. This is contrary to the information given in Terence Hodgkinson, *The James A. De Rothschild Collection at Waddesdon Manor: Sculpture* (London: The National Trust, 1970), pp. 98-9: at her brother’s death Bretby Hall was not inherited by Lady Evelyn Stanhope (1834-1875), by then the first wife of 4th Earl Carnarvon (1831-1890), but by her mother, Lady Anne. On Anne Elizabeth Stanhope see: Jane Ridley, ‘Stanhope [née Forester], Anne Elizabeth, countess of Chesterfield (1802–1885)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, 2004.
- 6 Derbyshire Record Office, Acc. no. D765: Bretby Hall Estate – 1883-1900: <https://calm-view.derbyshire.gov.uk/calmview/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=D765&pos=1> [accessed 05-02-26]. On George Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon, see: Brian Fagan, ‘Herbert, George Edward Stanhope Molyneux, fifth earl of Carnarvon (1866–1923)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition, 2011.
- 7 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 54: Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, 1897, p. 59.
- 8 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 157.1997.1-4, *Inventory of Waddesdon Manor*, 4 volumes, 1898, Vol. III, Principal bedrooms, p. 3.
- 9 Hodgkinson, *Sculpture*, pp. 98-9, wrongly assumes that they had been bought from Henry Herbert, 4th Earl of Carnarvon. The 5th Earl of Carnarvon was closely connected to the Rothschilds: in 1895 he married Almina Wombwell, alleged daughter of Alfred de Rothschild (1842-1918), Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild’s cousin, see Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: The Heritage of a Rothschild House* (Harry N. Abrams, 2002), p. 35.
- 10 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 926: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of the Principal Pictures, Old Furniture, China and Other Works of Art at Waddesdon Manor, 1906*, 1906, p. 4; Acc. no. 927: Alice de Rothschild, *Catalogue of Principal Pictures, Furniture, China and other works of art at Waddesdon Manor 1910*, 1910, p. 4, ‘From the collection of the late Earl of Carnarvon at Bretby’.
- 11 Michael Hall, ‘Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire. A property of The National Trust’, *Country life*, 192.23 (1998), pp. 63-7.
- 12 James David Daper and Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Playing with Fire. European Terracotta Models, 1740-1840* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), pp. 3-6.
- 13 Marjorie Trusted, *The Making of Sculpture: The Materials and Techniques of European Sculpture* (V&A Publishing, 2007), p. 45.
- 14 See entries on ‘Clodion’ in the Brill Art Sales Catalogues Online Database.
- 15 Clodion moved from Nancy (his hometown) to Paris in 1755, where he lived with his uncle Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, until the latter’s death in 1759. Lambert-Sigisbert Adam possessed a profound knowledge of Greco-Roman antiquities. He assisted the great collector and patron Cardinal Melchior de Polignac (1661-1742) in forming his collection of antiquities in Rome, restored many of these sculptures, and published the volume *Recueil de sculptures antiques grecques et romaines* (Daumont, 1754).
- 16 Anne L. Poulet and Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Clodion: 1738-1814* (Musée du Louvre, 1992), p. 36.
- 17 Poulet and Scherf, pp. 37-8.
- 18 Michael Hall, *Waddesdon Manor: The Heritage of a Rothschild House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).
- 19 Anne L. Poulet, ‘On the Run: Clodion’s Bacchanalian Figures’, in Heather MacDonald (ed.), *French Art of the Eighteenth Century: The Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture Series at the Dallas Museum of Art* (Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 176-7.
- 20 Poulet and Scherf, *Clodion*, pp. 330-3, 393. See p. 330 for two other variants of the *Running Bacchante*. The first is a *Running Bacchante*



belonging to private collectors in London, distinguished by the raised hands of the figure holding a tambourine. The second is a *Running Bacchante*, also in private collection, which differs significantly from the others in the physiognomy of the figure.

- 21 See Christie's New York, *500 Years: Decorative art Europe, Including Oriental Carpets*, 15 April 2011, lot. 132.
- 22 'Clodion (1738-1814) and "Clodion Mania" in Nineteenth-Century France': <https://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/ma/2019/exhibition> [accessed 06-02-2026].
- 23 Edmond de Goncourt, Jules de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste* (G. Charpentier), 1881, p. 182.
- 24 Poulet and Scherf, *Clodion*, pp. 455-6.
- 25 Henri Thirion, *Les Adam et Clodion* (A. Quantin, 1885).



COLLECTING CLODION

Albertina Ciani

In 2019, postgraduate students from Columbia University's MA in Art History curated a small exhibition entitled *Clodion (1738–1814) and “Clodion Mania” in Nineteenth-Century France*.¹ The exhibition examined the authorship of two terracotta groups in the university's collection, *Satyr and Two Nymphs* and *Nymph and Two Satyrs* (figs. 14–15). Although both works bear Clodion's signature and the date “1779” on their bases, inconsistencies in chronology and the substandard execution of certain details – most notably the fruit clusters – have cast significant doubt on their authenticity. The researchers ultimately concluded that both sculptures are forgeries. While Clodion may not enjoy the household-name status of Michelangelo, this case nonetheless illuminates a compelling chapter in the history of Western taste: a period in the late nineteenth century when Clodion's popularity was so pronounced that he became one of the most frequently forged artists in Europe.

The nineteenth-century appetite for Clodion was voracious. A 1882 report in the *Pall Mall Gazette* recounts the plight of Madame Bernage, a Parisian dealer who unwittingly purchased a fake from

the curator of the Rouen Museum of Antiquities. The object was ultimately traced back to a forger named Lebroc. Lebroc's technique was as devious as it was effective: he would deliberately fracture the limbs of his new creations and then ‘mend’ them, artificially soiling the clay to mimic the patina of an eighteenth-century antique.² This case, alongside the Columbia University figurines, exemplifies the late nineteenth-century phenomenon defined by Guilhem Scherf as “Clodion mania”.³ Driven by the Rococo Revival, Clodion's playful terracotta groups became highly sought-after by collectors and amateurs. This surge in demand precipitated an extraordinary wave of falsifications and reproductions: alongside deliberate forgeries, the market was saturated with an unprecedented volume of terracotta groups produced ‘after Clodion’.

In Britain, this “Clodion mania” manifested in high-end commerce rather than just the black market. By the 1860s, the prestigious manufacturer Wedgwood was capitalising on the trend. They began producing black basaltware replicas of Clodion's *Running Satyr* and *Running Bacchante* (fig. 13), the original now held



at Waddesdon Manor (see the catalogue entry above).⁴ Black basalt – a fine, stoneware refined by Josiah Wedgwood I in 1768 – was an ideal medium for these replicas.⁵ While Wedgwood often drew from Greek and Roman antiquity, the firm also selected modern masters like Bernini and Roubiliac. That Clodion was included in this “hall of fame” is a testament to his immense commercial prestige.

During the Enlightenment, terracotta shifted from a mere preparatory material for “sketches” to a celebrated medium for finished works. To own a Clodion terracotta was a mark of erudition. Unlike marble, which can feel cold and distant, or bronze, which is unpredictable in the cast, terracotta offered a malleability that allowed Clodion to achieve breathtaking detail. His works, neither painted nor glazed, relied on pure technical mastery.⁶

The celebrity of the *Running Satyr* and *Running Bacchante* was solidified in 1868 at the Leeds National Exhibition. Displayed in the ‘Museum of Ornamental Art’ and subsequently featured in the *Illustrated London News* (figs 1-2), the figures became iconic.⁷ It was likely this public exposure that caught the eye of Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild. When building Waddesdon Manor in 1874, the Baron sought to recreate the splendour of the *ancien régime*. Clodion’s work, with its ‘Transalpine’ elegance, was the perfect fit for his French-inspired *boiseries* and interiors.⁸

Clodion’s genius lay in his ability to blend three distinct influences: the antique, drawing from Virgil and Ovid to depict joyful, pagan themes; the baroque, taking cues from Bernini’s *Apollo and Daphne* to create compositions that demand to be seen from every angle; and the natural, a meticulous attention to the anatomy of movement.⁹ The *Running Satyr* and *Bacchante* are not

static figures; they are caught in a joyous, dynamic sprint toward one another. This effectiveness, the ability to freeze a moment of Dionysian ecstasy in humble clay, is exactly why collectors (and forgers) couldn’t get enough of him.





Figure 14. Style of Clodion, *Satyr and Two Nymphs*, likely 1800-1899, terracotta with wash, 65.1 × 43.3 × 33.6 cm, New York, Columbia University (no. 1976.12.005).

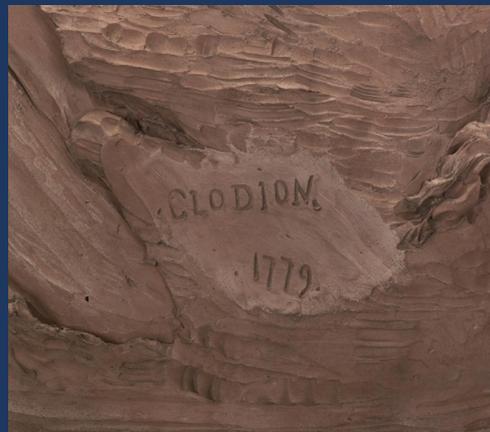


Figure 15. Style of Clodion, *Nymph and Two Satyrs*, likely 1800-1899, terracotta with wash, 72.4 × 43.2 × 37.2 cm, New York, Columbia University (no. 1976.12.006).

NOTES

- 1 <https://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/ma/node/242> [accessed 03-02-26].
- 2 ‘Art Frauds in France’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 35 (1882), p. 10.
- 3 Guilhem Scherf, ‘Fortune critique’, in Anne L. Poulet, Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Clodion: 1738-1814* (Musée du Louvre, 1992), pp. 456-60.
- 4 Christie’s New York, *500 Years: Decorative art Europe, Including Oriental Carpets*, 15 April 2011, lot. 132.
- 5 *Classic Black: The Basalt Sculpture of Wedgwood and His Contemporaries*, Mint Museum Randolph: <https://www.mintmuseum.org/exhibition/classic-black/> [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 6 James David Daper, Guilhem Scherf (eds), *Playing with Fire. European Terracotta Models, 1740-1840* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), p. 3; Marjories Trusted, *The Making of Sculpture: The Materials and Techniques of European Sculpture* (V&A Publishing, 2007), p. 45.
- 7 ‘Leeds National Exhibition’, *Illustrated London News*, 53 (1868), pp. 273, 304.
- 8 The Waddesdon Manor Archive at Windmill Hill, Acc. no. 54: Ferdinand de Rothschild, *Red Book*, 1897, pp. 2-10: https://waddesdon.org.uk/the-collection/item/?id=5804&srsId=AfmBO00qUwMnqON6QD-1Ikww4zW84zd4p7nTCWbgNwXmGxhQ00___sz3 [accessed 05-02-2026].
- 9 Poulet and Scherf, *Clodion*, p. 36; Anne L. Poulet, ‘On the Run: Clodion’s Bacchanalian Figures’, in Heather MacDonald (ed.), *French Art of the Eighteenth Century: The Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture Series at the Dallas Museum of Art* (Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 176-7.



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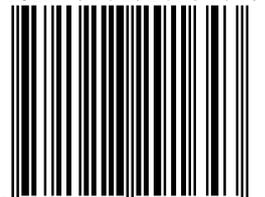


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