

Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen
Dresden

FAIT À PARIS

THE FURNITURE OF THE
PARISIAN CABINETMAKER
JEAN-PIERRE LATZ (1691–1754)
AT THE DRESDEN COURT



A special exhibition project of the
Museum of Decorative Arts,
State Art Collections Dresden



Detail of pedestal / Signed and dated: Jean-Pierre Latz, Paris, 1739; Inv.No. 37616-2

FOREWORD

The history of collections and their individual objects in museums are often full of surprises, ambivalence and fascination. Some of their stories cannot be tracked down despite intensive research, whereas in other cases the history is seemingly as readable as an open book in front of you; nevertheless the artworks slumbering in depots for decades, owing to their critical condition, are thus invisible to the museum public and science. The latter also applies to the Dresden furniture collection by Jean-Pierre Latz (ca. 1691–1754). Now finally we are bringing this treasure into the light again, a collection no other museum can boast in this range and condition.

The remarkably comprehensive medley of furniture is not only one of the superlative achievements in the art of French eighteenth-century furniture; it is at the same time inextricably connected to the history of the State of Saxony: it manifests the great requirement for prestige that drove Augustus III (1696–1763) and his prime minister Heinrich von Brühl (1700–1763), who had furniture creations delivered to them directly from Paris. Even in the nineteenth century this furniture still adorned the state rooms of the king of Saxony. Certain pieces were particularly in focus and therefore, repeatedly restored so as worthily perform their function in official representation. This process of restoration opened up the window to a fascinating new history: copies began to circulate.

The Latz Collection gives us a potent illustration of the upheavals of twentieth-century history: the end of the monarchy and the collection's transfer into the ownership of the Free State of Saxony, the dramatic events of the Second World War, during which the furniture not only suffered through wartime storage, but several items were severely damaged in the Dresden bombing in February 1945. Then came the difficult period after the war, when, because of the furniture's critical condition and also the lack of resources needed to rectify this, the furniture had to be put into storage and thus lapsed into oblivion.

Thanks to the committed support of the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, the Schoof'sche Stiftung and the Rudolf-August Oetker-Stiftung, parts of the Latz Collection have been examined and restored using state-of-the-art technological and art-historical methods. Now it's time to present the fascinating results of this research and, of course, the impressive pieces themselves in a special exhibition. We are still in need of support in order to realise this internationally oriented and acclaimed exhibition project. We would be delighted if we could gain your support as sponsor of this unique and momentous project.

Marion Ackermann

General Director of the State Art Collections Dresden

Pendulum clock on pedestal / Jean-Pierre Latz (attributed), Paris, ca. 1739; Inv.No. 37679-1





THE MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS DRESDEN

COLLECTION FOR DESIGN PRACTICE AND ART-HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The Museum of Decorative Arts, housed today in Schloss Pillnitz, holds a collection of more than 60,000 objects in the fields of textiles, glass, ceramics, metalware and furniture, ranging from the Gothic period through to contemporary design. The museum was founded affiliated to the School of Arts and Crafts in 1876, intended as a didactic collection with the aim of sensitising and creating an awareness for design and quality.

In the early twentieth century the function of a practically implemented model and study collection increasingly receded. The museum was separated completely from the School of Arts and Crafts and in 1947 integrated into the network of the State Art Collections Dresden. At the same time – within the context of confiscation and evacuation of cultural assets – a great quantity of decorative artefacts from the Court was assigned to the collection, including the furniture of the Saxon Court from the Dresden Residenzschloss (Royal Palace) and Schloss Moritzburg. Cut off from its original function and upgraded by the high standard of the new acquisitions, the museum now focused its activities on art history research.

Based on this legacy it is our mission that both traditions are cultivated and coin the museum's current profile. In reflection of its origins in design education and practice, we have been developing a Design Campus since 2020. As a platform of research and development focusing on issues of social change and ecology, the Museum of Decorative Arts aims to be a place of discourse and knowledge-sharing on crucial topics of our time and challenging the role of design.

By establishing a new environment and formats of display the Museum of Decorative Arts will once more reclaim the character of a living study collection, in which the public, producers and designer equally interact. Meanwhile, scientific analysis of the holdings will be intensified as well, since this forms the foundation for any work on the collection. The research and special exhibition project "Jean-Pierre Latz" is one of our foremost initiatives in this direction.

Thomas A. Geisler

Director of the Museum of Decorative Arts

Watercolour depicting cartonnier and pedestal in the living room of the Queen in the Prince-Georg-Palace situated in the Anton garden, Dresden / Wagner, Otto; SPSC, GK II (5) 3480

Cartonnier and pedestal / Jean-Pierre Latz (attributed), Paris, ca. 1750; Inv.No. 37655





SUMPTUOUS – UNIQUE – AUTHENTIC

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DRESDEN COLLECTION OF LATZ FURNITURE

The Museum of Decorative Arts of the State Art Collections Dresden holds the largest collection of furniture worldwide with approximately twenty object ensembles consisting of thirty individual items attributed to the Paris *ébéniste* Jean-Pierre Latz (ca. 1691–1754) – one of the most fascinating and important cabinet-makers of the 1730s to 1750s.

Latz's furniture creations are among the most prestigious products of Parisian cabinetmaking during the reign of Louis XV and are today highlights of many top-ranking international museum collections, including the Getty Museum, Waddesdon Manor, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum and the Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation (SPSG). Latz's works are striking for a very distinct individual artistic signature and boast opulent, sculpturally conceived corpus forms, technically superb craftsmanship and great sculptural skill in the fashioning of bronze mounts, as well as consummate marquetry work.

A feature of the Dresden collection that makes it so unique is seen in the large clocks on their corresponding high pedestals. Up to two and a half metres tall, with their precious tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl and brass marquetry (Bouille Marquetry) and opulent ornamented bronze mounts, they were an effective medium for manifesting Saxon-Polish prestige and magnificence.

They are also unique because in their time they were purchased as series of up to four similarly constructed examples, thus enabling us today to make a comparison that grants us unrivalled insights into Latz's work methods.

But further exceptional significance for furniture research exists as well in their provenance history as objects, which has been seamlessly handed down since the 18th century: since 1768 and up until today the precious pieces have remained documented in the inventories of the Dresden Residenz Schloss (Royal Palace), the Moritzburg hunting lodge and the Taschenbergpalais. Some can even be traced all the way back to the collection of the famous Saxon prime minister Count Heinrich von Brühl.

When examining the internal structure of the furniture, three pieces revealed rare signatures of Jean-Pierre Latz in his own hand. Therefore, the Dresden collection offers a unique opportunity for furniture research to peruse at first hand its creator, quasi, at work. The collection is accordingly incomparable in its importance for research on Latz and furthermore on French furniture in general at the time of Louis XV.

Paper label with handwritten signature by Jean-Pierre Latz / Attached to inner surface of pedestal; Inv.No. 37616-2

Detail of pendulum clock on pedestal / Jean-Pierre Latz (attributed), clockwork: Antoine Pelletier, Paris, ca. 1740;

Inv.No. 37628-1 + 37779-2



SPECIAL EXHIBITION

“FAIT À PARIS – THE FURNITURE OF THE PARIS CABINETMAKER JEAN-PIERRE LATZ AT THE DRESDEN COURT”

A world premiere is coming up for the Dresden Latz furniture in the 2024/25 autumn-winter season. For the very first time they will be placed in the international spotlight as focus of a special exhibition and shown grouped together as an impressive collection of its own. Thus the major part of the Dresden Latz collection is making its comeback on the museum stage for the very first time since their war-time storage eighty years ago. This is in many ways a very significant event: not only because several masterpieces were long thought lost in the war, but also because the pieces are superlative in their aesthetic quality and design – now manifest again after comprehensive restoration work – thus a rediscovery of a very special kind.

Prominent key works from other collections at home and abroad are adding to the tableau of works by Latz, thus embedding the Dresden holdings within a larger landscape. This will enable us to present an unprecedented and probably one-time concerted show of outstanding masterpieces by Jean-Pierre Latz.

For this special exhibition – which is moreover extremely important for the history of art and of official representation at the Saxon Court – the State Art Collections Dresden are providing a special and very prominent exhibition space: as the first and probably only special exhibition “Fait à Paris” will take the stage in the recently restored state rooms in the Dresden Residenzschloss, the Royal Palace.

The exhibition promises to be a truly fascinating and innovative way of revealing to the public the phenomenon of Latz furniture at the Dresden Court. In doing so it deals with diverse key topics: First of all, in order to make these artworks accessible through in-depth explanation and communication, the exhibition spans not only the historical context of the contemporary taste of the time, dominated by France, but also in the diplomatic, dynastic and economic connections between Saxony and France.

Another of the exhibition’s facets throws light on the official representation and demonstration of power at the Saxon Court through the vehicle of French luxury products. The comparison with other rival courts like Munich and Berlin opens up a new and as yet scarcely treated perspective.

One of the exhibition’s central aspects is of course the artist himself. Despite his pre-eminent significance, the ébéniste Jean-Pierre Latz has received hardly any academic attention. The essay published in 1970 “Jean-Pierre Latz. Cabinetmaker” by the American art historian Henry Hawley (1934–2019) remains to this day the sole foundational work. The essential requirement of performing well-grounded and interdisciplinary research on his works must be paramount, also on his biography and his international reputation – and will be addressed through this exhibition.



View of the reconstructed audience chamber and state bedchamber at the Royal Palace in Dresden



An aspect that seems modern and highly topical pertains to “entrepreneurial organisation” and “networks”. Latz as a person merits individual attention not only as a craftsman but as a Parisian entrepreneur with a German background. His deliveries to the Saxon-Polish Court in Dresden, the Brandenburg-Prussian Court in Berlin, also the Court of Parma, testify to an international network that was highly unusual for the time.

Something that still caused ripples of admiration throughout the international scene was the *pendule aux biches*, shown in 1862 at the London International Exhibition; it was from the workshop of the Dresden cabinetmaker to the Court, Johann August Türpe (1810–1883). Türpe copied the Dresden clock more than a hundred years after Latz’s death and proved that Latz’s creations continued to be effective as prestigious showpieces even several generations later and still do so today. Meanwhile, these coveted copies from the nineteenth century cause us to look at a problem of reception: copy or art forgery?

Old craftsmanship always brings up fascinating issues for today’s museum public: which materials did the artist use and how did he fashion them: wood – veneering, inlaying, polishing; metal – casting, punching, gilding; horn, mother-of-pearl or tortoiseshell layering – how many different materials and techniques come together as a unity in Latz’s creations? The exhibition uses the preceding technological analyses to thematise in digital and also analogue form the processing of materials and construction of the furniture. For instance, the furniture as work of art can be – digitally – disassembled directly before the visitor’s very eyes, so that all its secrets can be penetrated and understood.

On the other hand, the show also addresses current burning social issues about the use of exotic materials in furniture in the eighteenth century.

A catalogue on the exhibition will be published in German and English. It contains a text section presenting the results of the preceding research project in short, problem-oriented essays as well as a catalogue section illustrating for the first time the complete Latz-collection.

Detail of Cartonnier / Jean-Pierre Latz (attributed), Paris, ca. 1750; Inv.No. 37655

SPONSORS OF THE SPECIAL EXHIBITION

*The **Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation** was involved right from the start: as part of the programme "Kunst auf Lager" (Art in Store), we have been supporting the research and restoration project since 2017 because this project corresponded exactly to the aims of this initiative – important works of art which have for a long time been stored in depots are now at last being scientifically investigated, restored and exhibited again.*

The holdings of the Dresden Latz furniture are unique in their quality, their composition and their history. This is why the exhibition as follow-up to the research and restoration of this long forgotten treasure is extremely important for putting it back on the map. The sponsoring of the special exhibition is therefore a logical step for us. The accompanying catalogue will publicize all information that was compiled in recent years, thus ensuring that the project will be successfully finalised and will lay claim to sustained achievements for science.

Dr Martin Hoernes

General Secretary of the der Ernst von Siemens Art Foundation



*The **Schoof'sche Stiftung** has been supporting the research and restoration project since 2020. The project was chosen because besides research on this impressive collection, the focus is on its conservation and restoration and therefore its permanent preservation and safeguarding. Extremely impressive and fascinating for us in addition are the results generated by the analyses and investigations, also their further processing, for instance in computer graphics and visualisations of the constructions and the material structure. They demonstrate the eminent significance of such a project off the "beaten track". So it is only logical for us that we should sponsor this special, follow-up exhibition which is an important concern for the Schoof'sche Stiftung. After all, it adds the final, perfecting touch to the restoration in that this superlative collection can be put on show again at last.*

Matthias Hägele

CEO of the Schoof'sche Stiftung

Schoof'sche Stiftung

Detail of pedestal / Jean-Pierre Latz (attributed), Paris, ca. 1740; Inv.No. 37680-2



RESEARCH PROJECT

The special exhibition is based on the preceding research and conservation project in which an interdisciplinary team of experts has since 2017 been investigating the collection of Latz furniture. Due to its excellent documentation, its state – minimally modified by earlier restorations – in addition to the unique composition formed of small series, the Dresden Latz furniture holdings offer a launching pad that is unique worldwide for research on Jean-Pierre Latz and the characteristics of his workshop. The pieces signed by his own hand are reference objects for research and offer singular insights into his oeuvre and that of his workshop.

In order to gain as much information as possible from the pieces – which are extremely complex in their attributes – a team of scientists, noted for their broad-based expertise, is working on the project. Art historians investigate the different aspects of the objects' history. This embraces their stylistic categorisation, the road to Dresden and the actors involved in this, as well as their function and installation at the Saxon Court. Conservators investigate the structure and materials used in their construction, the combination of marquetry materials and the casting process in addition to the surface treatment of the mounts. They are supported in this by scientists who use highly sensitive analysis methods to determine the applied materials and the material compositions – for instance the alloys used for the mounts, or the composition of binding agents and paint layers. The generated data and analysis results are collectively evaluated, discussed and compiled. Knowledge-sharing with a widely ramified network of fellow experts in the international museum scene also comprises an important part of the work.

Following the examination, the objects undergo conservation treatment so that after more than eighty years' storage they are at last ready for exhibition and the fascinated eyes of museum visitors. The special exhibition is thus the grand finale of the research and restoration project.

In order to evaluate the project outcomes intensively and sustainedly, in autumn 2024, parallel to the special exhibition in Dresden, a scientific conference will be held oriented on the international specialist scene. Thus the exhibition will reverberate well beyond Dresden.

The research project was sponsored by:



Schoof'sche Stiftung



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IMPRINT

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