

PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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FIRST EXHIBITION ON REMARKABLE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ARTIST *PIERRE GOUTHÈRE:* *VIRTUOSO GILDER AT THE FRENCH COURT*

November 16, 2016, through February 19, 2017



Pot-pourri vase (detail), gilt bronze by Pierre Gouthière, ca. 1770–75, Chinese porcelain, 18th century. Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Pierre Gouthière (1732–1813) was one of the greatest French artists of the eighteenth century. A master chaser-gilder, he created opulent *objets d'art* that were coveted by the wealthiest and most important figures of pre-revolutionary France, including Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Louis XV's mistress Madame Du Barry, and the Duke of Aumont. Like a sculptor, he made his own models and had them cast in metal. Using dozens of specialized tools, he then created patterns and textures on the surface of the metal objects before gilding them. So exceptional was his talent that his work commanded amounts equal to, and sometimes greater than, those asked by the era's most famous painters and sculptors. Furthermore, such was the popularity and prestige of this work that over the last two centuries, many French eighteenth-century gilt bronzes have been erroneously attributed to

him. This fall, New York's Frick Collection presents the first exhibition devoted to Gouthière, a project that brings together twenty-one of his finest masterpieces, drawn from public and private collections across Europe and the United States. Many of these remarkable objects—from firedogs, wall lights, and doorknobs to elaborate mounts for rare Chinese porcelain and precious hardstone vases—have never before been shown publicly in New York, and their assembly in an exhibition will provide the basis for a fresh understanding of his oeuvre. With new art historical and technical research by leading experts in the field, the exhibition and accompanying catalogue shed fresh light on the life, production, workshop, and clientele of this incomparable



Vase, gilt bronze by Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger, ca. 1775–80, green Greek porphyry and gilt bronze. Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

artist. Presentation of these works at the Frick is organized around the major patrons who commissioned them, bringing to life a sense of the extravagant world for which they were created. The exhibition is also accompanied by an educational video that illustrates how gilt bronze is made. It shows the recreation of one of Gouthière’s iconic pieces, taking viewers step by step through traditional techniques he would have used. **Following its presentation at the Frick, the exhibition will travel to Paris, where a version will be shown at the Musée des Arts décoratifs from March 15 through June 25, 2017.**

Pierre Gouthière: Virtuoso Gilder at the French Court was organized by Charlotte Vignon, Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection. This exhibition is supported by the Michel David-Weill Foundation; the Selz Foundation; and two anonymous donors, one in memory of Melvin R. Seiden; with additional contributions from Alfredo Reyes of Röbbig Munich and Edward Lee Cave.

Comments Vignon, “With this exhibition, some five years in the making, we hope the public will appreciate the creativity and craft behind the works created by Gouthière. The beauty and perfection he achieved is worthy of special focus, and we’ve sought to clarify what can be attributed with certainty to his oeuvre while illustrating for visitors the steps of his remarkable technique, now only preserved in the hands of a few craftsmen. Our joy in turning to this topic—which was inspired by a remarkable object in The Frick Collection—is that we hope to kindle further interest in the subject and in other artists who contributed to this remarkable artform.”

GOUTHIERE’S EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING



Pair of ewers, gilt bronze by Pierre Gouthière, ca. 1767–70, porphyry and gilt bronze, private collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Almost nothing is known of Gouthière’s early life, except that he was born in 1732 in the Champagne region of France, where his father was a master saddler. His training mostly took place in the Paris workshop of the chaser-gilder François Ceriset, who died in 1756. Two years later, after Gouthière had become a master, he took over his former patron’s workshop and also married his widow. At the beginning of his career, Gouthière carried out a considerable amount of work for François-Thomas Germain, the silversmith to the king, who certainly played a role in his early success. Gouthière famously made the gilt-bronze mounts for two incense burners and a vase, which were purchased in 1764 in the Parisian workshop of Germain by the Polish merchant Casimir Czempinski, on behalf of Stanislas-August Poniatowski, an art connoisseur and the future king of Poland. Gouthière claimed their authorship in an undated letter he and the silversmith Jean Rameau boldly wrote to the Polish sovereign to circumvent Germain:

[We take] the liberty of very humbly representing to Your Majesty that, for a long time, we have both been running the works of Germain, silversmith to the king of France; the former for gilding and chasing, being the only one to possess the color in which Your Majesty’s works are gilded, and the latter, for silversmithing; ... and [we] dare to assert that Germain, who appeared to be their author, was absolutely incapable of making them, or indeed of bringing them to perfection ...

Gouthière's collaboration with Germain certainly put him in contact with the silversmith's dazzling clientele, thereby giving him the opportunity to expand his business. Unfortunately, no other works by Gouthière from this period are known. Gouthière's output during the second half of the 1760s is more familiar to experts, largely because he signed and dated a handful of pieces in 1767, including two ewers included in the exhibition (shown above). Like most bronze-makers, Gouthière did not sign his work, except in 1767 to celebrate his appointment as gilder to the king, which he received on November 7 of that year "on the basis of testimony ... as to the intelligence, ability and integrity of Mr. Gouthière, merchant gilder in Paris."

CLIENTELE IN THE FRENCH COURT

During the next twenty years, Gouthière collaborated with several celebrated architects, who provided him with innovative neoclassical models that he masterfully interpreted into extravagantly rich and exuberant gilt-bronze objects. His clientele comprised the powerful and wealthy members of Louis XV's and Louis XVI's courts, including Louis XV's mistress, the Countess Du Barry. By 1772, Gouthière was known as the "very famous [gilder], the one who worked for Mme Du Barry" and was described as such in the directory of the best craftsmen working in Paris assembled by Colonel St. Paul of Ewart, secretary and later diplomatic envoy to the king of England.

Gouthière's commissions for Madame Du Barry include the knob for a French window that he made for the countess's pavilion of Louveciennes, one of France's most lavish eighteenth-century buildings, designed by the architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Although it can no longer be appreciated in its original setting (the interior decoration was removed and sold to various collectors after the French Revolution), rare elements like this knob made for the pavilion's Salon en Cul-de-Four, as well as Jean-Honoré Fragonard's four panels



The Fragonard Room, The Frick Collection New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb



Knob for a French window, Pierre Gouthière, after a design by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, ca. 1770, gilt bronze, Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris; photo: Les Arts décoratifs / Cyril Bernard

depicting *The Progress of Love*, painted for the same room and now in The Frick Collection, attest to the pavilion's former glory. Each myrtle leaf, a symbol of the goddess Venus, is rendered in exquisite detail, forming a sort of lacework that contrasts with the smooth surface of the interlinked *D* and *B*, the royal mistress's initials. The knob alone confirms the recollections of the painter Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, who, writing in the 1830s about her time spent in Du Barry's residence decades earlier, recalled that the "salon was ravishing ... the chimneypieces, the doors, everything was fashioned in the finest possible way; even the locks could be admired as masterpieces of the goldsmith's art."

When the fourteen-year-old Marie Antoinette arrived at Versailles, in 1770, she was surprised to learn of her grandfather-in-law's official mistress, who had apartments near those of Louis XV in each of the royal residences and owned such an extravagant private residence as well. The rivalry between the future queen and Madame Du

Barry is notorious, dividing the court of France between the pro-Marie Antoinette camp and those who preferred flattering Madame Du Barry. Gouthière managed to work for both. In 1777, he was asked to create several items for Marie Antoinette’s small Cabinet Turc at the Château de Fontainebleau. This prestigious commission included a pair of firedogs, a chimneypiece, a chandelier, a pair of wall lights, and a shovel and tongs with handles in the shape of “African heads.” Only the firedogs and chimneypiece (still *in situ* at the Château de Fontainebleau) have survived. A firedog is the decorative façade of an andiron, a metal support that holds burning wood in a fireplace. The design of these examples, in the shape of seated dromedaries, was in keeping with the oriental decorative theme of the Cabinet Turc, which was meant to transport the queen into a world of fantasy, sensuality, and refinement. The bases are adorned with an elegant arabesque frieze characteristic of the neoclassical style favored by the queen.



Pair of firedogs, Pierre Gouthière, 1777, gilt bronze and blued steel, Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

EXQUISITE COMMISSIONS FOR THE DUKE OF AUMONT

In addition to the king and his mistress, Gouthière’s clientele comprised other wealthy members of the royal court. He produced some of his masterpieces for Louis-Marie-Augustin, the Duke of Aumont, who directed the Menus-Plaisirs et Affaires de la Chambre du Roi, an administrative body of the king’s household that managed the monarch’s personal effects and organized his entertainment, creating sets for theatrical productions and significant occasions such as marriages and funerals. The artists employed by the Menus-Plaisirs were free to develop new ideas without constraint, and their workshops were the locus for the forging of new fashions. The Duke of Aumont employed several artists from the Menus-Plaisirs (including Gouthière) to create objects for his personal cabinet of curiosities, housed in his sumptuous residence on Place Louis XV in Paris, now the Hôtel Crillon, Place de la Concorde. The cabinet was renowned among connoisseurs for its exquisite antique marbles, mounted porphyry, Asian porcelain, and gilt-bronze objects.



Vase (detail), gilt bronze by Pierre Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger, ca. 1770–75, alabaster (probably 18th-century), green marble, and gilt bronze, private collection; photo: Joseph Godla

For about ten years beginning in 1770, Gouthière created for Aumont unique objects after designs by the duke’s favorite architect, François-Joseph Bélanger (also from the Menus-Plaisirs), including the mounts for a pair of alabaster vases, a detail of which is shown at left. So perfectly do they capture the density and variety of a laurel branch laden with berries that they seem to have been cast from nature. Gouthière also created for Aumont the stunningly beautiful mounts illustrated on the vase shown on the front of this release and on exhibition catalogue’s cover, which take the shape of seated female figures, looking in opposite directions. Though at first glance the figures seem identical, one represents a female satyr who wears a crown of ivy and holds a branch of the same; the second figure, a mermaid, bears a laurel crown and clutches a laurel branch. Gouthière’s masterful chasing techniques breathe life into their expressions and transform decorative elements into

sculptures in their own right. He accentuated his superb chasing with unique gilding techniques, including *dorure au*

mat, or matte gilding, which gives a soft hue to the skin and contrasts with the burnished (shiny) elements, such as the fabric draping each.

On a pair of Chinese vases (originally used as garden seats), Gouthière created for the Duke of Aumont mounts after a complex design by François-Joseph Bélanger, whose composition of arabesques, snakes, and harpies was considered the height of fashion in the 1780s. Gouthière's gilt-bronze interpretation of the architect's design shows his command of the medium. The snakes' backs are chased to create the illusion of small scales, while their bellies feature larger scales to imitate the skin of a live snake. Although bronze makers usually attached their mounts to porcelain by drilling holes in it, Gouthière again demonstrates his virtuosity by creating mounts that fit securely on the vases without piercing the fragile ceramics.



Vase, gilt bronze by Pierre Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger, 1782, 18th-century Chinese celadon porcelain, porphyry, and gilt bronze, Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: Joseph Godla

A MASTERPIECE BY GOUTHÈRE THAT INSPIRED THE EXHIBITION

Several of Gouthière's masterpieces were commissioned by Louise-Jeanne de Durfort, Duchess of Mazarin, a faithful client who was the daughter-in-law of the Duke of Aumont and heiress to the vast Mazarin fortune. Most of the objects made for her by Gouthière were intended for the gallery-salon of her residence on the Quai Malaquais in Paris (since razed and now the site of the École des Beaux-Arts).



Side table, marble supplied and carved by Jacques Adan, gilt bronze mounts by Pierre Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger and Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin, 1781, *bleu turquin* marble and gilt bronze, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

The Frick Collection's table—commissioned by the Duchess in 1781 and the inspiration for this exhibition—is certainly one of Gouthière's masterpieces. The mask at the center of its entablature is one of the most beautiful faces ever to have been created in gilt bronze. Its fine features follow the classical canon then in fashion, but instead of the rigidity or coldness of some models inspired by Greco-Roman examples, it is animated by eyes that look to the right under slightly lowered eyelids and a mouth that expresses a pensive self-confidence. Is it a young man or a beautiful woman?

Gouthière's 1781 invoice refers only to a "head." It is placed between two *thyrsi* (a staff topped with a pinecone and entwined with ivy, usually carried by Bacchus) and surrounded by ivy leaves (a living allegory of the Roman god's eternal youth), thus Bacchus springs to mind; the braids and pearls suggest a female. Either way, he or she is deep in thought. The hair—a tour de force in itself—is wavy, arranged into curls or



Side table (detail), marble supplied and carved by Jacques Adan, gilt bronze mounts by Pierre Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger and Jean-François-Thérèse Chalgrin, 1781, *bleu turquin* marble and gilt bronze, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

plaited into braids that intermingle with a strand of pearls and branches of ivy. Both the branches and the veins of the ivy leaves are irregular, presenting an appearance so natural they seem to be actual specimens dipped in gold. Adding further refinement to the leaves, Gouthière employed a technique called *dégraissage*, or “paring back,” in which he reduced the thickness of the metal on edges and sides to render it more delicate. The leaves are matte gilded, while the fruit is burnished to emphasize the contrast between matte and shiny surfaces. The daring design (with some leaves overlapping others) and the lightness achieved through *dégraissage* are admirable.



Pair of wall lights, Pierre Gouthière after a design by François-Joseph Bélanger, ca. 1780, gilt and patinated bronze, Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Art Resource, NY/ Martine-Beck Coppola

Gouthière also made a pair of large wall lights for the large gallery-salon of the Duchess of Mazarin. The extreme richness of the poppy branches with numerous varieties of flowers, almost every one unique, is particularly remarkable. Some of the flowers are only buds, while those that form the candleholders are in full bloom. Because the lights were intended to be hung relatively high, the undersides of the flowers were burnished so they would sparkle with reflected light. To appeal to a client eager for symbolic objects, a quiver of Cupid’s arrows completes their design.

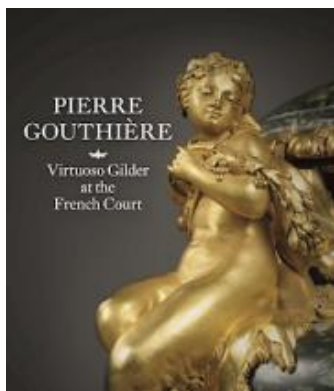
In the 1770s and 1780s, the elite of Paris were eager for Gouthière’s work. Jean-Baptiste-Charles-François, Marquis of Clermont d’Amboise, may have commissioned the pair of pot-pourri vases from Gouthière in the early 1770s before he left for the court of Naples, where he served as ambassador from 1775 to 1784. Achieved by employing a range of treatments of the bronze, the naturalism of the swans is particularly impressive. Their flashing eyes express fury: as if about to attack, they raise their wings on either side of the porcelain pots. Their aggressive posture (seen in the detail on the front of this release) is also indicated by their slightly open beaks, which are edged with burnished gold. The shape of their beaks identifies these birds as mute swans, a species common in Europe.



Two pot-pourri vases, gilt bronze by Pierre Gouthière, ca. 1770–75, Chinese porcelain, 18th century, Musée du Louvre, Paris; photo: RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Despite Gouthière’s success, a series of financial setbacks—including enormous sums owed to him by the Duchess of Mazarin and the Duke of Aumont, who died in 1781 and 1782, respectively, without paying their debts—forced him to declare bankruptcy in 1787. He worked very little after that and died in poverty on June 8, 1813. He has long been lauded by collectors, critics, and art dealers alike as one of the most important artists of the period, and, with this exhibition, the public finally will be introduced to this incomparable chaser-gilder.

PUBLICATION



The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, the first major study on the artist since 1912 and the only comprehensive volume on him produced in English. The inclusion of detailed entries and plates of forty works positively attributed to Gouthière, five essays by leading experts which examine his life, career, clientele, and techniques, as well as examples of his work from French, British, Polish, Portuguese, and American collections, ensure that this beautiful volume is an invaluable new resource. Principal authors are **Christian Baulez**, former chief curator at the Musée de Versailles, and **Charlotte Vignon**, Curator of Decorative Arts at The Frick Collection and the exhibition's organizer. Additional contributions were made by **Anne Forray-Carlier**, curator of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Decorative Arts at the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris; **Joseph Godla**, Chief Conservator at The Frick Collection; **Helen Jacobsen**, Chief Curator at the Wallace Collection, London; **Luisa Penalva**, Curator of Gold, Silver, and Jewelry Collections at the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon; **Anna Saratowicz-Dudyńska**, curator of Silver and Bronze at the Royal Castle, Warsaw; and independent scholar **Emmanuel Sarméo**. Published by Giles Press in association with The Frick Collection, the book is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered through the Frick's Web site (frick.org) or by phone at 212.547.6848. Hardcover (\$79.95, member price \$71.96, 9 ½ x 11 inches, 408 pages, 322 illustrations). The French edition is published by Mare et Martin.

INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Museum Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

First Fridays: museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January)

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing;
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