



## THE FURNITURE HISTORY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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### A 'MEDAL CABINET' LOANED TO OSTERLEY AND AN UNEXPECTED SIGNATURE DISCOVERED AT GRIPSHOLM: NEW LIGHT ON THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF GEORG HAUPT

By chance, two pieces of furniture essential for the interpretation of the early career of Georg Haupt (1741–84) have emerged simultaneously: at the royal castle of Gripsholm, Sweden, and at Osterley Park, Middlesex (NT). At Osterley, the generous long-term loan from a private collection has enabled the National Trust to display the famous 'medal cabinet', created (1768–69) in the Linnell workshop in Berkeley Square, London, alongside the related library furniture, comprising a magnificent desk, a pair of writing tables and a set of chairs, all inlaid with marquetry and mounted in gilt bronze, in *goût grec* style. In their monograph on the Linnells (1980), Helena Hayward and Pat Kirkham published the so-called 'medal cabinet' as a crucial argument for Georg Haupt's presence in Linnell's workshop. Born and trained in Stockholm, Haupt and his long-time travel companion Christopher Fürloh (soon anglicized as 'Fuhrlöh') were then both fresh from Paris, and brought French influences to the Linnell *atelier*. There are many questions swirling in the wake of Hayward and Kirkham's monograph which make this opportunity to re-examine the cabinet most welcome, especially as it is now located in the Osterley Library, an ideal setting for an appreciation of its stylistic context.

This cabinet is properly a *secrétaire-on-stand* (*secrétaire en cabinet*), in other words a writing cabinet whose secondary purpose is indicated by its inset white medallions after the Antique. The fall-front drops to provide a writing surface, revealing two sets of drawers flanking a central door. Behind this door is a set of cedar letter trays. The drawer fronts and the door are inlaid with superb marquetry, the door with a neo-classical urn. Only the drawers either side of the door would have been suitable for medals or coins. Supports in their corners indicate that they originally held double trays, which are now lost, thereby reducing the effective depth by half. The construction of the upper section of the Osterley *secrétaire* is typical of Haupt. The fittings were made as a separate section, and slotted into



*Photographer: Robin Briault*

the carcass from behind. The back was then sealed by a panel housed in grooves on three sides and secured by the top. Essentially, it is an application of the novel French drawer bottom construction which allows the wood to contract and expand in response to changing air humidity. Haupt consistently used this form of back for his commodes. Thus the Osterley secretaire/medal cabinet is a link between French sources and Haupt's later activity in Sweden. The same is true of the model as such: Haupt introduced several types of furniture previously not made in Stockholm, among them the *secrétaire en cabinet*, of which there are at least nine versions signed by him.

Christopher Fürloh's signature inside a break-front commode supplied by Linnell to Castle Howard, Yorkshire, indicates that he enabled Linnell to broaden the scope of his firm's production in the form of modern marquetry furniture. Evidence for Hayward and Kirkham's claim that Haupt played an equally important part in this process is found at the short sides of the Osterley secretaire, where an oval marquetry cartouche draped in heart-shaped laurel swags hangs from an illusory ring. This motif was later repeated in the *cartonnier* of Queen Lovisa Ulrika's desk (Haupt's 'masterpiece' on his return to Sweden in 1769) and less precisely in several subsequent pieces by Haupt. The link is obvious, but it can now be supplemented by a French source. The motif had been introduced and perhaps invented by Jean-François Neufforge, but the innocuous ring shows the Haupt/Linnell version to be based on a print in Jean-Charles Delafosse's *Nouvelle iconologie historique*, which was advertised in the Paris journal *L'Avancoureur* in July 1767. Haupt's luggage, brought across the Channel when he joined Fürloh in London, later that year or in January 1768, would seem the most logical means for Delafosse's utopian *goût grec* engravings to have reached Linnell's workshop so rapidly.

The Linnell firm's early marquetry furniture (including Fürloh's commode at Castle Howard and the library furniture at Osterley) is notable for what can be described as a deficiency of shading. Light and dark veneers are often juxtaposed without any attempt to create a three-dimensional illusion, neither by arranging the veneer so that the natural grain simulates shading, nor by any extensive use of scorching or engraving. The result resembles a stencilled pattern. Haupt's later Swedish furniture, on the other hand, relies heavily on lavish engraved shading, creating three-dimensional effects. Interestingly enough, both manners are found in the Osterley secretaire-cabinet. In its present location, the parallels between the secretaire's stand and the library furniture are striking, as is the contrast between the lower and the upper sections. In the upper section (the secretaire proper) there is a more minute style of marquetry, and even the drawing technique of the engravings match Haupt's manner. As the stand is a separate part, mounted to the secretaire by iron screws, a reasonable explanation could





*The Gripsholm secretaire.*  
Photograph by Alexis Daflos/  
The Swedish Royal Collections

be that the execution was assigned to different hands. If so, the clearly alien lace pattern engraved at the acanthus scroll may very well be an addition intended to bridge the gap in character.

Lucy Wood has suggested that Fürloh and Haupt's contribution to the Linnell workshop probably consisted more in their experience of high quality marquetry (a craft Linnell himself — trained in wood carving and as a draughtsman — did not master), than in the stylistic reorientation ascribed to the Swedes in Hayward and Kirkham's book. In other words, is it possible to discern individual contributions, or did Linnell manage the sizable staff as a production team under his own firm leadership? This type of question is notoriously difficult to answer. In my opinion, it is clear that the upper section of the secretaire-medal cabinet must have been made by Haupt. But did he also design it? He must have done. Even though Haupt (and Fürloh) were not Linnell's sole link with current trends in France, it seems very likely that Haupt, recently arrived from Paris, would have produced a *secrétaire en cabinet*, itself a French novelty. Given that the marquetry is partly based on a print issued in Paris just before Haupt's departure for England, he surely must have had a hand in its design. But the differences between the secretaire and its stand indicate that Haupt's contribution was in a studio context. A cooperation, in which Linnell had the final say, is perhaps the most reasonable scenario. Linnell would have wanted to put to use the foreign experiences of a gifted employee, but in a manner that would have satisfied his British patrons.

The result is a masterpiece whose loan to Osterley greatly enhances the collection of Linnell furniture in the Library. Even though it is at home there, apparently *en suite* with the library set, the Haupt secretaire was not listed with the other Linnell furniture in the Osterley inventory of 1782. Indeed, its first appearance in a family inventory was in 1868 in the Front Drawing Room of the Child family's London house, 38 Berkeley Square, a few steps from Linnell's workshop. It must originally have been made either for Osterley or for

the London house: probably the latter given that it was not at Osterley in 1782. The secretaire was certainly moved to Osterley when the London house was given up, and has now returned thanks to the generosity of its lender.

Towards the end of 1769, Haupt returned home to Stockholm, having received his patent letter as Swedish Court Cabinet Maker. The first commission back home was a large desk for Queen Lovisa Ulrika, which made a forceful statement of modernity, heralding a breach with Swedish rococo. The Queen's desk combines the tectonic principles of classicism with a display of ornamental marquetry, which enhances the decorative rhythm. Its style had to be neo-classical given that it was destined for the Marble Cabinet at Drottningholm Palace, a more advanced *goût grec* interior than any other so far realized in Sweden (to designs by Jean Eric Rehn).

King Adolph Frederic was clearly pleased with his consort's desk, especially as the royal couple were French-orientated and better informed than most about cultural developments abroad. Royal patronage was indeed paramount for Haupt's reputation, but setting up business in 1771, he could not rely on court commissions alone and only the small radical elite in Stockholm would yet have been prepared to pay the premium asked for his uncompromisingly luxurious furniture. As a result, there are not many Haupt pieces with a recorded or probable date earlier than 1774–75, when the market obviously boomed.

The discovery of Haupt's engraved signature on a completely atypical secretaire at Gripsholm Castle, Sweden, is therefore highly interesting. Haupt's characteristic classicising trellis and acanthus rosettes are applied to a carcass with rococo contours, making it the only known piece by Haupt in which the rococo prevails. This attempt to strike a compromise with Swedish rococo taste suggests that it must be one of his very first works after the queen's desk. The secretaire was brought to Gripsholm Castle in 1849 by King Oscar I and recorded as his private property, but without any provenance. It is therefore futile to speculate on the circumstances of its commission. The result is not entirely successful. This may partly be because Haupt experimented with a number of ornamental motifs unique to this piece (the large rosettes of the trellis, the central oval and the agave pots). Only the bronzes are typical of his otherwise consistent style. This was a personal synthesis based on French and English transitional style merged with Jean Eric Rehn's interpretation of *goût grec*, as encountered in the Marble Cabinet and elsewhere. It is furniture with a strong air of architecture turned into veneer. The Gripsholm secretaire reveals that a more decorative approach was probed but not pursued, suggesting that Haupt must have arrived at his mature style shortly after his return to Sweden.

Despite its exceptional elements, the newly discovered secretaire confirms a pattern of previous connections. Haupt had almost certainly worked for Simon Oeben while in France, and the furniture produced after his return to Stockholm shows influences from the Oeben circle. Simon's more creative elder brother, Jean-François, died in January 1763 before Haupt and Fürloh reached Paris, so the Oeben tradition would have been transmitted by Jean-François's former journeymen, Riesener and Leleu, Simon Oeben, and Roger Vandercruse-Lacroix, a subcontractor as well as a relation. Thus Haupt's agave pots belong to a category of marquetry décors invented by Vandercruse, who during the 1760s started to depict jars, flower pots and various household items in a slightly distorted perspective, inspired by Chinese lacquer screens. The agave pots of the Gripsholm secretaire are in fact the first substantial indications that this kind of marquetry motif existed before 1767–68, when Haupt left Paris. Vandercruse's concept was later to be exhaustively copied by Charles Topino, but by the time Topino gained his *maîtrise* in 1773, the Gripsholm secretaire almost certainly had left Haupt's workshop in Stockholm.

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## WAKEFIELD WINE CRUTCHES

Robin Butler's impressive new publication *Great British Wine Accessories 1550–1900* (published by Brown & Brown Books, [www.wineaccessoriesbook.co.uk](http://www.wineaccessoriesbook.co.uk)) contains sizeable, well-illustrated sections to interest furniture historians and collectors on such things as wine coolers, coasters, drinking tables and other miscellanea. In the latter section there is one particular intriguing item on which members of this Society might just be able to throw some light. I refer to the pair of mahogany crutches illustrated (fig. 12/5), good quality pieces of around 1815–30. They have heavy, lead-weighted bases which are hemi-spherical in form, so as to return to an upright position if knocked over. They are the height of a chair arm and were supposedly used to assist a seated person from sliding underneath a drinking table when imbibing heavily: seemingly a very English pursuit of the time!



At least three similar pairs are known, which seem to be connected with a gentleman's club in or near Wakefield in Yorkshire, but any further information has so far eluded research. Their existence first came to light in correspondence in *Country Life* in the mid 1950's.

I would be most grateful if anyone with any further information or suggestions about the crutches or the Wakefield connection would like to contact me at [c.claxtonstevens@normanadams.com](mailto:c.claxtonstevens@normanadams.com)

Christopher Claxton Stevens

## ACTIVITIES SECRETARY

After fulfilling this role with great efficiency and enthusiasm for over nine years Clarissa Ward has signalled her intention to retire towards the end of 2010. The Society has been seeking a replacement. The task, which comprises planning all activities, is flexible and part-time, but requires reliability, commitment and administrative skills. It commands a modest honorarium (fee) and expenses. Expressions of interest should be directed to James Yorke FSA, Secretary, The Furniture History Society, c/o Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Department, Victoria & Albert Museum, London SW7 2RL ([j.yorke@vam.ac.uk](mailto:j.yorke@vam.ac.uk)) by 18 May, 2010.

## ADVANCE NOTICE: A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ALL MEMBERS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Why a questionnaire? The Society's website ([www.furniturehistorysociety.org](http://www.furniturehistorysociety.org)) needs to be more agile and informative. In planning changes your Council decided on a questionnaire as the simplest way of eliciting facts, guidance and ideas from members. But as this is the Society's first exercise of this kind — and is unlikely to be repeated in the near future — Council felt that it should be more broadly framed. We would be grateful for factual

information, but we also want to use this opportunity to learn as much as possible of what you think about your Society, its record, publications, activities, future directions and potential. Inevitably this questionnaire is better adjusted to personal members than it is to institutions. But we hope that institutional members will respond, adapting their answers as necessary. We also hope that in suggesting any new activities or extensions of present ones members will bear in mind that we are a charity, run by volunteers, and that doing more always brings with it a need for extra resources, be they organisational or financial (and often both!).

For your convenience and to assist the Society this questionnaire can also be completed online via the surveymonkey website. Full details of how to do this will be given in the next *Newsletter*.

Simon Swynfen Jervis  
Chairman

## FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

### BOOKINGS

For places on all visits, please apply to the Activities Secretary, Clarissa Ward, 25 Wardo Avenue, London, SW6 6RA, tel./fax 020 7384 4458, enclosing a separate cheque and separate stamped addressed envelope for each event *using the enclosed booking form*. Applications should only be made by members who intend to take part in the whole programme. No one can apply for more than one place unless they hold a joint membership, and each applicant should be identified by name. If you wish to be placed on the waiting list please enclose a telephone number where you can be reached. Please note that a closing date for applications for all visits is printed in the *Newsletter*. Applications made after the closing date will be accepted only if space is still available.

### CANCELLATIONS

Please note that no refunds will be given for cancellations for occasional visits costing £10.00 or less. In all other cases, cancellations will be accepted up to seven days before the date of a visit, but refunds will be subject to a £5.00 deduction for administrative costs. Separate arrangements are made for study weekends and foreign tours and terms are clearly stated on the printed details in each case.

N.B. PLEASE REMEMBER TO SEND SUFFICIENT STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPES FOR ALL APPLICATIONS, INCLUDING REQUESTS FOR DETAILS OF FOREIGN TOURS AND STUDY WEEKENDS.

### ANNUAL LECTURE — ADVANCE NOTICE

Monday 8 November 2010

This year's FHS Annual Lecture is titled *Nicodemus Tessin (1654–1728): The First Historian of Interior Decoration and his Collections* and will be delivered by Dr Martin Olin, Research Curator, The National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm. Booking details will appear in the August *Newsletter*.





## OTHER EVENTS

Please note that these events are not organised by the FHS. Information/booking instructions can be found under individual items.

### WEST DEAN COLLEGE — WOODWORKING AND FURNITURE MAKING COURSES

West Dean College has a long-established reputation for courses in fine furniture making, woodworking processes, decorative finishes and musical instrument making.

22–26 August 2010 — *Exquisite details for fine furniture*

This course explores the use of inlays of exotic wood, shell and silver, making patterned bandings and how to integrate these. Also learn how to sharpen, tune and work with hand tools.

Further details about the furniture courses can be found on [www.westdean.org.uk](http://www.westdean.org.uk)

### V&A GALLERY TALK — FURNITURE AND DIPLOMACY: THE LEISTLER BOOKCASE

Thursday 3 June

Discover the history of the monumental Leistler Bookcase, a masterpiece of nineteenth-century cabinet-making in the gothic revival style. Crafted by the Austrian firm, Carl Leistler & Son, for display at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, it was later gifted to Queen Victoria by the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef. Talk given by Louisa Collins, Assistant Curator, Furniture, Textiles & Fashion Department.

Further information on the V&A website – [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

All talks are free and subject to change at short notice.

## V&A EVENING TALK: MODERN FURNITURE BY MATTHEW HILTON

Friday 4 June

Lecture Theatre, V&A — 19.00–20.00

Mathew Hilton is one of the UK's most successful furniture designers and many of his pieces are already considered modern classics. He often updates and reinvents long-established furniture forms prioritising proportion, scale and functionality. He talks about his career and recent work.

£8, £6 concessions. Book online on [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk) or call 0207 942 2211

## OTHER ITEMS

### JOHN MAKEPEACE ARCHIVE — Assistance Required

Last Autumn there was a disastrous fire at the John Makepeace studio with major losses including client files and photographic archive, in particular for the period of 1959–1975. If there is a FHS member who might be interested in offering assistance with valuing the archive please contact John Makepeace, tel. 01038 862204, email [info@johnmakepeacefurniture.com](mailto:info@johnmakepeacefurniture.com)

### 'MUSEUM MANAGEMENT AND CURATORSHIP' BEST PAPER AWARDS 2009

Each year *Museum Management and Curatorship* (MMC) recognizes the best paper that addresses curatorial matters. The Jury's criteria include the scope of the paper, its relevance, originality and applicability to a variety of institutions, and the readability of the work. Congratulations go to Julius Bryant for winning the curatorial award in 2009, for his article 'Museum Period Rooms for the Twenty-First Century: Salvaging Ambition' (Vol. 24. Number 1, pp. 73–84) a solid contribution to evolving curatorial approaches that have widespread implications for decorative arts and the social history interpretations of period room installations.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Suggestions for future reviews and publishers' review copies should be sent to Dr Reinier Baarsen, Reviews Editor, Rijksmuseum, PO Box 74888, 1070 DN Amsterdam, The Netherlands, tel. 00-31-20-6747220. E-mail: [r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl](mailto:r.baarsen@rijksmuseum.nl).

The catalogue of the Boule exhibition held at Frankfurt includes two specialized chapters on technical matters, and the findings presented therein have informed some of the art-historical texts as well. However admirable, this combination of disciplines is a difficult feat to be pulled off successfully. In the two reviews presented here, the separate approaches are individually considered, in an attempt to achieve an all-round assessment of this new contribution to Boule studies.

Jean Nérée Ronfort (ed.), *André Charles Boulle 1642–1732, Un nouveau style pour l'Europe* (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art, and Frankfurt: Museum für Angewandte Kunst, 2009), 472 pp., 302 col., 39 b. & w. illus., 6 diagrams, ISBN 978-2-7572-0314-9, €55 (German edition: *André Charles Boulle (1642–1732), Ein neuer Stil für Europa*, ISBN 978-2-7572-0315-6).

This is the catalogue of the exhibition held at the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt from 30 October 2009 until 31 January 2010 and reviewed by the present writer in *Apollo*, January 2010, pp. 76–77. It was visited by the Society on 18 January 2010 (see report, p. 22–23).

The principal contributors to the catalogue are Jean Nérée Ronfort and Jean-Dominique Augarde, who are preparing a *catalogue raisonné* of Boulle's large œuvre. They contribute seven out of the thirteen introductory chapters, and Ronfort has written the bulk of the catalogue entries. In the essays Boulle is set in his original context, his workshop practice is examined, a stylistic chronology is proposed for his work, and his international influence is charted, as is the collecting of his furniture. The English love of Boulle (or 'Buhl') came to the fore after the French Revolution, a process described by Peter Hughes in a chapter on British collections, while Boulle furniture has never ceased to be prized in France and the rest of Europe.

Boulle was appointed *ébéniste, ciseleur, doreur et sculpteur du roi* in 1672, and was thereby freed from guild restrictions. In his enormous workshops in the Louvre he was able to produce all the different elements of his furniture: the carcass, the veneers and marquetry, and — above all — the finely chased gilt bronze mounts, which were the most expensive components of his output, narrowing the gap between furniture and sculpture. Boulle's beautifully made, and innovative confections were the product of considerable artistic inspiration and technical expertise.

Boulle bankrupted himself by avidly collecting paintings, drawings and medals. As the exhibition made clear, he was a fine draughtsman, though not on the level of Gilles-Marie Oppenord (1672–1742), several of whose designs for furniture by Boulle figured in the exhibition. A sheet (no. 73) was first published in 1992 by Peter Fuhring who attributed the — rather dry — chalk drawings on the *recto* to Boulle and the more exciting pen and wash designs on the *verso* to Oppenord. However, the *verso* is neither reproduced in the catalogue, nor is Fuhring's attribution to Oppenord mentioned, and so the interest of this sheet is not fully elucidated.

Boulle's famous set of engraved designs, the *Nouveaux Deisseries* published by Mariette, is here dated unusually late, c. 1725–30 (no. 87). Two finished red chalk drawings, showing its title page and plate 3 in reverse (nos 50a–b), are interpreted as the final models for the engraver. It is plausibly proposed that two unique prints of similar character but without lettering were intended as additions to the *Nouveaux Deisseries* which never materialized (nos 88 a–b). Together, these engravings represent the principal source for Boulle's furniture, while archival evidence is provided by the inventories of his effects made up in 1715, after a devastating workshop fire in 1720, and after his death in 1732. Remarkably, there are only two fully documented pieces of Boulle furniture: the pair of sarcophagus shaped commodes supplied to Louis XIV for the Grand Trianon in 1708 (Château de Versailles), which were not in the exhibition. He neither signed nor stamped any of his furniture.

Much therefore remains tentative, especially as Boulle's large output spans over fifty years when the workshop was running at full stretch. Successful models, even the famous pair of royal commodes, were reproduced in his workshop. The problem of attribution is further complicated by the later alteration and bedizenment of his furniture, and by the

often equally high-quality production of Boulle revival furniture (surveyed in Augarde's interesting chapter).

I must now express certain reservations. The cataloguers display unprecedented confidence in identifying Boulle's works so that both furniture and drawings are simply described as 'by André Charles Boulle' (the usual hyphen between the Christian names has been omitted throughout, as in the title page of the *Nouveaux Dessins*) and occasionally by both him and his sons. One of only two 'attributed to's' curiously appears in the photographic caption to the ex-Hamilton Palace version of the 1708 Grand Trianon commodes, now at Petworth, although this is more plausibly described in Peter Hughes's text as an 'original' replica (pp. 146–47 and 150, fig. 7).

Pieces with no documentation or provenance are given to Boulle *tout seul*. President Sarkozy's accolade of Boulle as the 'most celebrated cabinetmaker of all time' is fitting in a preface, but not in the catalogue entry of a pair of small undocumented stands (no. 28). By contrast, Hughes's Wallace Collection furniture catalogue (1996) exhibits a scholarly hesitation about Boulle attributions, ranging from 'may be securely attributed to' to 'almost certainly not by André-Charles Boulle'. Similarly, the Boulle furniture in Gillian Wilson's catalogue of the Baroque and Régence furniture at the J. Paul Getty Museum (2008) is at best 'attributed to André-Charles Boulle', including the Getty's pendant to the medal cabinet from the Hermitage (no. 22). Surely, even in the case of such superb and unique pieces of furniture, a tentative approach to attribution is the only realistic one, and the designation 'by' Boulle may be considered inaccurate anyway, given the complex teamwork involved in the making of his furniture. And to state that heavily altered pieces are by Boulle is simply confusing. The pair of 'Cheremetiev' cabinets from the Hermitage (nos 9 a, b) is a case in point: the catalogue entry proposes that one dates in its entirety from the 1770s, whereas the other has been substantially altered during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. So why the heading 'André Charles Boulle'? The eighteenth-century provenance of these pieces, presented as secure, can be no more than tentative.

As with these puzzling cabinets, gilt bronze mounts were often replaced, re-cast, moved about, or added when Boulle's furniture was altered, aggrandised or copied. The catalogue establishes Boulle as a brilliant innovatory designer of gilt bronze, whose workshop produced some of the most satisfyingly conceived and expertly finished mounts ever made. The fascinating juxtaposition in the exhibition of the *première-* and *contre-partie* writing tables (nos 20 and 21) underlined the virtues of an undisturbed provenance. The gilding of the corner mounts — variations on the sphinx mounts of the 'Grand Trianon' commodes — is in largely untouched condition on the former (which was confiscated at Chantilly during the Revolution and has been in the French national collection ever since) and much less so on the latter (which has been through the trade to America and back). This difference is not mentioned in the catalogue entries. When the design is unsatisfactory or the quality is low, questions should be asked. The pair of cabinets on stands (no. 6) with prominent gilt bronze mounts of Louis XIV on horseback and the King's cipher of interlaced L's, has a supposed provenance from the collection of Charles-Marie-Michel, 3rd duc de Feltre (1844–1930), which does nothing to explain the remarkable presence of these royal emblems. The possibility that these unique mounts, of uncharacteristically poor quality and crude design, may not be original is not raised in the catalogue, which dates the cabinets c. 1695–1700, describing them as wholly by Boulle. The similarity between the exhibited pair and a smaller pair in the Louvre (stamped by Levasseur, as repairer, and altered again for Louis-Philippe) with mounts depicting a standing Louis XIV needs further investigation, as is noted. Where the mounts of these two pairs are comparable, the quality is lower on the two exhibited pieces. A Boulle drawing (no. 54) depicts one half of a cabinet of similar design,

with arabesque Boulle marquetry on the front door panel instead of the gilt bronze figurative mounts.

Never have so many drawings relevant to Boulle's *atelier* been discussed together. Again, most have previously only been attributed to Boulle, and there has been no definitive study of this material. The coloured wash drawings (such as no. 67) seem closer to the style of Oppenord, though given that they worked together this is not surprising. Boulle's debt to the Italian tradition via Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), Louis XIV's artistic impresario, is not investigated, nor is the influence of other branches of the royal workshops. Boulle's superb pictorial wood marquetry ('painting in wood') — evident here in such masterpieces as the great wardrobe from the Hermitage (no. 1) — bears a distinct stylistic similarity to the *pietre dure* panels produced at the Gobelins. This would be explained by common drawings and paintings used as models.

Not enough is made of Domenico Cucci's expertise in melding ebony, gilt bronze and *pietre dure* panels to create precocious masterpieces like the 'Northumberland' cabinets (1679–83; Alnwick Castle) which indicate that Boulle did not create from scratch 'a new style for Europe'. He was innovative, but none the less the product of the Parisian/Gobelins/Louvre tradition of Cucci, Gole and the rest, who were already practised in the manipulation of gilt bronze and *ébénisterie*. The mounts on the Northumberland cabinets are grandly conceived and finely executed. These are the sole survivors of a whole series of magnificent royal cabinets, which — had they survived — would have set Boulle more securely within the context of his peers. Incidentally, the leonine base of the giltwood sidetable (no. 41) is reminiscent of the wooden ox-legged supports of Cucci's 'Northumberland' cabinets. The attribution of no. 41 to Philippe Caffieri seems too precise, but the alternative 'to the Gobelins workshop' may be correct. But why is this piece, which is nothing to do with Boulle, presented in this context?

As for Boulle's chronology, Ronfort argues convincingly that the Hermitage medal cabinet (no. 22) is later than the c.1710–15 date recently published in the Getty catalogue, and is very probably c.1723, given its ownership by the family of the flamboyant royal architect, Jules-Robert de Cotte. Indeed, this piece seems appropriately advanced in style for the later date, despite the inclusion of earlier elements. Its idiosyncratic design mixes *bombé* side panels with superb corner mounts (a more thoroughly Egyptian 'take' on the sphinx mounts of the Trianon commodes). As a mixture of curious forms (which include Mercury's wings and *caduceus*, entwined with a beautifully rendered snake, in the centre of the front), it seems indicative of further innovation by Boulle.

In conclusion, this elegant and fully illustrated catalogue is an essential addition to Boulle studies. The gathering of furniture in the exhibition (and the magnificent works of gilt bronze, such as the four chandeliers, nos 30–33) was nothing less than breathtaking. The organisers are to be congratulated on this considerable achievement. However, in the forthcoming *catalogue raisonné*, it is to be hoped that the authors will display more rigour and clarity in their catalogue entries.

Christopher Rowell

Jean Nérée Ronfort, 'L'apport de la science à la connaissance de l'œuvre d'André Charles Boulle', and Jacques Fretey, 'L'écaillé utilisé par André Charles Boulle', in: Jean Nérée Ronfort (ed.), *André Charles Boulle 1642–1732, Un nouveau style pour l'Europe* (see above), pp. 102–119.

The inclusion of these scientific and technical chapters in the Boulle catalogue follows the lead of major institutions and recent publications such as the J. Paul Getty Museum catalogue of Baroque and Régence furniture (2008). Technological advances in material

analysis, combined with increased knowledge of the history of materials and techniques, have turned this branch of the study of furniture into an essential analytical tool and it is fitting that Ronfort's study encompasses the most up-to-date techniques. Indeed, science forms the major basis of attribution and dating for some of the objects in the exhibition, particularly those that lack documented provenance.

However, where the Getty catalogue uses scientific analysis primarily to distinguish and explain potential restorations, additions and alterations to objects, Ronfort's objective is very different. Brief sections about the materials found on Boulle furniture are written in a didactic manner with the apparent intention of creating a definitive listing of materials and techniques that are authentic and that could ultimately be used to ascertain a secure date and even attribution. In itself this is a commendable, though extremely ambitious project; however, considering the numerous restorations to which Boulle furniture has been subjected over the past three centuries and the difficulties of finding un-altered objects to study, not to mention the enormous technical developments that Boulle's workshop must have experienced during its sixty years' activity, one would have liked to see a more cautious interpretation of the data given. Ronfort's specialist training well equips him to contribute the scientific chapter; however, while note is made of some fascinating discoveries rarely published before, the result would carry more authority if separate contributions by the scientists involved had been included, or at the very least more references and results provided in footnotes or appendices. This is particularly true of the section devoted to dendrochronology. Dendrochronology, or tree-ring dating, is a method for dating wooden artefacts. Dr Peter Klein, a recognised world expert in this field from the University of Hamburg, is listed as one of the scientists involved but was regrettably not given the chance to interpret his results, as Ronfort is clearly of the opinion that the '*interprétation et synthèse des résultats*' is the work of the art historian. Dr Klein's characteristic caution is missing: as an example of his own approach, in his report on the dating of panel paintings in the Rijksmuseum he does not hesitate to state that, in view of the removal of the perishable sapwood, 'the determination of the exact felling year (is) impossible'. Sapwood is often removed during the course of making furniture; the estimate of the amount of missing sapwood, which with western oak may vary from seven to fifty sapwood rings according to more recent publications by Dr Klein than the 1996 one referred to in Ronfort's contribution, is therefore an important consideration. This, together with factors such as missing heartwood rings, the duration of the seasoning of wood, and the possibility of a workshop re-using older timber, should have encouraged Ronfort to offer his conclusions with more caution. The use of dendrochronology is undoubtedly extremely useful and can offer potential differentiation between original Boulle furniture and later copies, but the application of this technique to distinguish very precisely the works by Boulle from those of his sons and his eighteenth-century followers seems questionable.

Curiously, the scientific chapter omits any mention of major Boulle studies carried out by the Getty, the Institut National du Patrimoine in Paris, the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich, the Walpole Library, Connecticut, as well as much other individual or institutional research. Any compilation of these studies would certainly demonstrate that generalisation in the field of Boulle's materials and techniques is, to date, almost impossible. For example, it is difficult to accept at face value and without any references Ronfort's assertion that only one (*le seul*) black pigment was used by Boulle during his entire working life. Similarly, the degree of attention given to the pigmentation of the turtle shell with a metal called *or d'Allemagne* is peculiar. The illustration of a sample of turtle shell with *or d'Allemagne* backing (p. 111, fig. 6) has no identifying caption but is clearly taken from the side of one of the so-called 'Duc de Feltré' cabinets (no. 6). In all the numerous analyses carried out over the past ten years, this unusual pigmentation has been encountered only once: in small, central

areas on a pair of cabinets at the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum which are not by Boulle but by his German contemporary Johann Puchwiser (1680–1744). Considering the oddity of the mounts and the lack of documented history of the Feltre cabinets, using these pieces as a technical benchmark is curious, particularly in view of their recent restoration which appears to have been extensive, if not excessive. As the Trianon commodes at Versailles are the only fully documented pieces by Boulle, surely only they can be used as benchmarks in any attempt to build up reliable data about this maker. Despite their recent history of restoration, there is still a good chance that these commodes, as well as many objects in old British collections which have escaped the overzealous attentions of restorers, will offer reliable information.

The chapter on turtle shell is the longest chapter on the subject ever published in a book on furniture. Its author, Jacques Fretey, is an internationally renowned sea turtle researcher and expert from the French Committee of IUCN, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, with an impressive knowledge of sea turtles. His brief introduction on the use of turtle shell in the manufacture of furniture through the centuries demonstrates a good acquaintance with furniture history. Regrettably, the usefulness of this chapter ends here, as Fretey lists only two species of turtle, the green turtle and the hawksbill, omitting the most common species used by French cabinet makers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the loggerhead turtle. According to Jacques-André Roubo in 1774, *ce sont ces écailles dont les ébénistes se servent le plus communément*. More recent publications, including the books by Pierre Ramond on marquetry, include the loggerhead species of turtle shell and it is perplexing that no mention is made of it here.

In conclusion, while one looks forward to the forthcoming *catalogue raisonné*, it is to be hoped that the authors will display more scientific scepticism in their approach to analysis and will offer complete references for their scientific conclusions as well as integration with other studies of Boulle carried out by independent bodies. A book that brings together the many varied studies of Boulle, while an enormous undertaking, would be a great achievement which would stand as a monument to this greatest of cabinet-makers.

Yannick Chastang

Adam Bowett, *Early Georgian Furniture 1715–1740* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 2009), 328 pp., 750 col. illus., ISBN 1-85149-584-3, £50.

This book sets right the indiscretions of the past and is the first account to be published for many years detailing the development of English furniture of the early years of the eighteenth century. It begins with a look at the London furniture trade, followed by studies of case and seat furniture, tables, stands and looking-glasses. It has valuable appendices on cabinet mechanisms (locks, handles and the like) and, as befits the author who is a timber expert, on the furniture woods mentioned in the text. Together with the essay by John Griffiths on the history of the British screw, published in Lucy Wood's recent catalogue of the upholstered furniture in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, these provide us at last with a reliable basis for the assessment of pieces of furniture from the period in question.

The early Georgian period was one of technical progress, but Bowett has attempted to define further the 'Age of Walnut' in terms of new discoveries and modern research methods. This is not an essay on names of important patrons or makers ('Lyttelton' and 'Hallett' should be used in future), although those appear in plenty in the first chapter and in the informative captions to the wide range of illustrations. These include many trade cards, signatures and initials on important pieces of furniture in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, Temple Newsam House, Leeds, various National Trust and privately owned houses, as well as items sold at auction or through the trade. The famous

Antrobus desk and bookcase of 1730 is treated to six illustrations (2.41–2.47), showing the piece itself, its signature and date, the interior of the desk, a drawer and its front, and the ‘deeply rebated drawer bottom and unusually thick sides’. It is the first piece of English furniture, securely dated, with cockbeaded drawers.

Many other illustrations offer similar fascinating insights. Figure 3.14 for example — a walnut and deal chest-of-drawers in a private collection — retains features which allow the author to date the piece to 1730–40. Illustrations 4.68 and 4.69 show how the back post and splat of a chair in the collection at Temple Newsam have been thickened to create the shaping of the back, and how the seat-rail is jointed to the leg.

Careful examination causes the author to re-evaluate the pair of tables made for the Gallery at Lord Burlington’s Chiswick villa, traditionally credited to the Italian sculptor Giovanni Battista Guelfi and the English joiner John Boson (p. 223). The authorship of the frames is poor allowing the author to speculate that they are inferior to one of Boson’s ability. He died in 1743 and is one of the many heroes of the Kent style. Another of Bowett’s theories concerns the Burlington tables now at Chatsworth (p. 124). While Treve Rosoman attributed these to Boson, Bowett asserts that this craftsman only executed the carving applied to the tables, stating that the money paid, £20, was too small an amount to account for their final cost. The tables may have been made by Benjamin Goodison. It is observations such as this which repay a careful read of the book. There is a useful account of work by Goodison, Boson and others for the Kent circle.

The book has a full bibliography (which sets out the research of many FHS members), and an index. There are attractive endpapers of tea parties of about 1725 and 1740. The preceding book by the author, *English Furniture from Charles II to Queen Anne, 1660–1714*, was published in 2002. I warmly commend both the former and the present volumes. They are a joy to behold — a triumph for the author and the publisher.

Geoffrey Beard

## SHORTER NOTICES

Jörg Meiner, *Wohnen mit Geschichte, Die Appartements Friedrich Wilhelms IV. von Preussen in historischen Residenzen der Hohenzollern* (Berlin and Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009), 244 pp., 40 col., 81 b. & w. illus., ISBN 978-3-422-06856-8, €68.

This book follows on to the author’s catalogue of the furniture from the reigns of the two successive kings of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861, reigned from 1840) and Wilhelm I (reigned 1866–1888), in the collection of the Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten, reviewed by Achim Stiegel in the *Newsletter* of August 2008 (No. 171). It expands the analysis of Friedrich Wilhelm’s apartments in his various residences. Thanks to extensive documentation through plans and proposals, designs, bills and, most distinctively, a host of detailed watercolours of the furnished interiors, the history of each room can be fully traced. Friedrich Wilhelm took a great interest in the architecture and decoration of his residences, and many sketch designs by his hand survive. In line with his attitude towards his kingship which was deeply rooted in the past, he was keen to emphasize the achievements of his predecessors, Frederick the Great foremost among them. He elected to reside in the historical residences of the Prussian kings, and to occupy, whenever practically feasible, the very rooms in which these had lived before him. Shortly after his marriage to Elisabeth of Bavaria in 1824, he commissioned Karl Friedrich Schinkel to remodel a number of state rooms in the Stadtschloss in Berlin in the fashionable late-classical style, but after he ascended the throne in 1840, all interventions in his palaces were

characterized by a profound respect for the existing architecture. The traditional striving for stylistic unity was abandoned in favour of furnishings in revival styles, mixed with historical objects connected with the dynasty: a uniquely eclectic design by Schinkel, probably executed shortly after 1840, shows this architect actually incorporating a Parisian rococo Boulle bracket clock in a proposal for a window pier in the Berlin Stadtschloss (fig. 14). The book provides a fascinating overview of a wide-ranging royal building and furnishing campaign of the early historicist era, admirably and consistently presented and interpreted by the author.

Daniela di Castro, *Filippo Passarini mobiliere, decoratore, incisore* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Documenti e Riproduzioni* 9, 2009), 152 pp., 103 col. illus., ISBN 987-88-210-0861-0, €100.

Filippo Passarini (born 1651) is well known for his *Nuovi Inventioni d'ornamenti d'architettura* published in Rome in 1698, comprising 32 plates of designs for altars, church fittings, coaches and furniture in a vigorous baroque style: the copy in the Vatican Library is fully illustrated in the book under review, with commentaries by Barbara Jatta who also provides a useful introduction to the collection of ornament prints in that institution. Now for the first time, some of Passarini's executed work has been identified. In 1682–1683 he and another sculptor, Giovanni de' Sebastiani, between them delivered ten gilded console tables for the Palazzo Ruspoli. Seven of these are at present known: one was recently stolen, whereas the other six have been acquired for the Palazzo Altieri in Rome. The tables, impressive examples of the foliate baroque style characteristic of the 1670s and 1680s, are documented in a series of bills which indicate that their elaborate carving was paid more highly than the gilding, and that the price of the stands was on a par with that of the marble tops. In the late eighteenth century newly fashionable stands were provided for these tops, whereas the existing baroque stands were given leather-covered ones before being relegated to a country residence — three of those later tops survive. The six splendid tables at the Palazzo Altieri are extensively illustrated in this beautifully produced book, and their attribution and significance are set out. The Ruspoli archives have yielded much additional information about Passarini, who among other things supplied in 1682 eight low chairs *alla francese a tortiglione* [i.e. twisted]. In recent years much research has been carried out on Roman baroque furniture — those who attended the FHS symposium in 2009 will recall the many fascinating discoveries presented all too fleetingly by Alvar González-Palacios — and the Ruspoli tables are now firmly positioned as key pieces in its history.







## VISIT TO BOULLE EXHIBITION, FRANKFURT, Monday 18 January 2010

We were warmly welcomed on our arrival by Professor Ulrich Schneider, director of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, and Drs Jean-Nérée Ronfort and Jean Dominique Augarde, curators of the exhibition were our guides. We were told to leave the twenty-first century behind us as we entered through the life-size photographic copies of the doors of the *armoire* on loan from the Hermitage (cat. no.1).

Dr Ronfort began with a brief explanation of the Louvre workshops where André-Charles Boulle worked before showing us two pieces of silver by Claude II Ballin ordered by Elector Maximilian II Emanuel of Bavaria. These objects are among the very few pieces of silver made in France and dating from this period known today.

Apart from the heroic effort of obtaining permission to loan much of the furniture, an extraordinary feat was the grouping of the great majority of the known drawings for Boulle furniture, including two full size off-prints for the table tops (one with *singeries*), several of which survive and one pair, now in the Weimar Residenzschloss was exhibited. Also shown were engravings by his son, Jean-Philippe, (another, not shown records the design of the four-legged Buccleuch table, now at Bowhill and supplied in 1701), additional proof of the exceptional talents of the family.

Examining several display cases showing different objects attributed to Boulle or his contemporaries, we entered into the first gallery which contained the magnificent *armoire* from St Petersburg, a 'matching' pair of *bureaux plat* (one being *première partie* and the other, *contre-partie*) and the Medal Cabinet of the Bavarian Elector which unusually includes mother-of-pearl inlay. Dr Ronfort took this opportunity to tell us that Boulle did not use pewter as so often claimed but that Louis XIV was buying in vast quantities of Cornish tin at this period (some 10% of the annual production). We then broke briefly for lunch before returning to continue our visit.

This started with a unique find — a giltwood and gesso table identified as made for the Galerie des Glaces (c. 1670–75) which had been identified in the Banque de France. We then looked at a collection including a pair of pedestals, a pair of Cabinets of the Four Seasons

and a richly ornamented clock made for Charles Perrault with a case attributed to Cucci. Studying a cartel, we then passed onto see the four magnificent gilt-bronze chandeliers of slightly different designs. Of particular interest for those on the Naples visit was a pedestal clock by Boulle and Gilles-Marie Oppenord similar to that made for Cardinal Ottoboni showing Atlas and Hercules holding up the world, similarly with a movement by Thuret. Dominating the same gallery were the impressive pair of cabinets from Russia; one of which the top section is considered basically period (although with possible alterations) on a later base and its 'pair', which is generally thought to have been made in the late eighteenth century and at the same time as the base for the original. The study of this pair once again shows the immense complexity attached to the study of Boulle furniture, of that influenced by Boulle, of later copies and indeed of all pieces in the style of Boulle.

Moving on we saw the pair of consoles from Weimar which were compared with a console in kingwood by Doirat and another from the V&A to show the influence of Boulle on his contemporaries and on later ébénistes.

After examining a pair of cabinets we entered the penultimate room where we admired the famous tapestry of Louis XIV's 1667 visit to Gobelins, another weaving of the one exhibited at the Louis XIV exhibition at Versailles, before studying the celebrated barometer and thermometer made for the Comte de Toulouse and saw the designs for his regulator which is today at the Louvre. Now running late, we discussed the Four Continents Clock designed by Oppenord and Boulle, one of four known; briefly noted the large bronzes coming from Pavlovsk; and then quickly visited the last gallery to see pieces attributed to Bernard I van Risenburgh, Nicolas Sageot and Alexandre-Jean Oppenordt.

A quick thank you and sadly no time to discuss further, we returned to the 21st Century with aplomb! This unique opportunity to examine all these pieces, not only for the entire day but without any other visitors in the museum was a great honour for which we must thank once again Professor Ulrich Schneider and all his team who so very kindly opened on their day off and Drs Ronfort and Augarde for the time they took to share their thoughts and expertise. We are also extremely grateful to Christopher Rowell for instigating the visit. Of course, this exhibition, like all exhibitions, could not include everything; nonetheless gave us an extraordinary insight into furniture by, influenced by or after André-Charles Boulle and his workshops.

Charles Garnett

## FURNITURE IN THE 20TH CENTURY — NEW PERSPECTIVES

The 34th Annual Symposium of the FHS in association the Victoria and Albert Museum,  
Saturday 6 March 2010

*Same or Different? Studying 20th Century Furniture*

Christopher Wilk (Victoria and Albert Museum)

This conference was the first in the FHS's history devoted to the 20th century. The introductory talk considered the extent to which the study of 20th century furniture raises questions similar to, or different from, those that arise in historical furniture studies. Connoisseurship and archival research were described as the bedrocks of traditional furniture studies, supplemented by both an approach based on the biography of individuals and firms, and study based on methods and materials of making. Such approaches remain

important for the study of 20th century furniture although the discipline of design history gradually and fundamentally altered furniture history from the 1980s. This change was reflected in many ways but, summarily, it attempted to situate objects within wider social, cultural, economic and political contexts. New factors which have also hugely affected the way in which we write furniture history have been the blurring of boundaries between the mass and elite markets as well as, in more recent decades, the ways in which furniture has become a subject or object for artists while, at the same time, the standards and values of the art world have created new categories and meanings for furniture.

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*Between Arts and Crafts and Aestheticism: Theo Nieuwenhuis 1898–1920*

Dr Marjan Groot (Leiden University)

Theo Nieuwenhuis (1866–1951) belonged to a group of Dutch designers who were educated around 1885 at the newly founded Public School for Industrial Arts and Drawing in Amsterdam. Nieuwenhuis became one of the leading designers of the *Nieuwe Kunst* (literally Art Nouveau), a Dutch Arts and Crafts reform movement that broke through around 1895. He designed book covers and graphic illustrations, furniture and interiors as well as furniture textiles, and — having first trained as a smith — lamps. In his designs he appropriated Arts and Crafts ideals. His furniture was of good craftsmanship with traditional construction techniques and his ornamental designs were based on nature. While his work remained restrained in form — unlike curvilinear French Art Nouveau — it had an oriental character due to fine-worked and decorated materials such as rosewood, marble chimney plaquettes, open-worked copper lamps, and parchment with batik-dyed decoration. This gives it an aestheticism which is unlike straightforward Arts and Crafts. The Amsterdam art dealers Van Wisselingh established workshops to produce the furniture which they then presented in their premises. His textiles were produced by factories and small, artistic workshops.

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*In and Out of the Canon — Hungarian Modern 1900–1939*

Juliet Kinchin (Museum of Modern Art, NY)

By 1900 Hungary was a significant player within European politics, culture and the arts. As a partner within the Hapsburg Empire, the country had undergone an intense period of industrialisation and developed a sophisticated furniture industry. Many designers and manufacturers went on to participate in the major modern tendencies of early to mid twentieth-century design in Europe and America — from the Arts and Crafts Movement, Secession style and National Romanticism, to Art Deco, International Modernism and the neo-Baroque — but their position within a canon of twentieth-century design remains ambiguous. Various Hungarian émigrés have been seamlessly absorbed into histories of the more dominant cultures with which they became associated, and in broad stylistic surveys, individuals like Pál Horti, József Vágó, Marcel Breuer or Ernő Goldfinger become exemplars of a free-flowing internationalism. In the process, however, aspects of their design practices that are firmly rooted in Hungarian traditions tend to be omitted or downplayed. This lecture also addressed a second category of Hungarian furniture designers, including major figures such as Károly Kós, Lajos Kozma, Géza Maróti and Ferenc Molnar, whose work was equally prominent in international exhibitions and magazines at the time, but has largely disappeared from the same dominant narratives of European or American

design and craft. In choosing to remain based within Hungary in the 1930s, and in some cases into the post-war communist era, their careers became embroiled in the specific political and economic conditions of Hungary and Central Europe. It was also suggested that the persistent western bias in canon-formation fails to represent the full diversity of Central European design movements in the early twentieth-century, marginalizing the importance of folk-modern and neo-Baroque tendencies which, seen from a Hungarian, Czechoslovakian or Austrian perspective, were perceived as equally valid and modern forms of progressive design.

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*Turkish Furniture Design in the 1930s: Responses to Art Deco in the Early Republican Era*

Dr Gulname Turan, PhD (F), (Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Industrial Design)

This study discussed the reception of Art Deco by Turkish furniture designers with different design approaches in the 1930s, a decade of change when western modernism was supported by the Turkish Republican ideology. The introductory section of the paper briefly discussed the Republican attitude of creating 'rupture with the past', of associating the modernization of Turkey with 'the new', as imported from the West, and opposing it to 'the old' inward looking traditions of the Ottoman Empire. Within this new, westernizing approach, the work of Seyfi Arkan exemplified the purer introduction of European modernism and Art Deco, and contrasted with that of Sedad Hakki Eldem, who attempted to blend Art Deco with recognizably national motifs and modes of living, within the context of Turkism. Both architects had worked for Hans Poelzig in Berlin.

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*Free Radicals: The Unstable Politics of Bauhaus Furniture, 1927–1960*

Dr Greg Castillo (College of Environmental Design, University of California at Berkeley)

The tubular steel furniture developed at the Bauhaus by Marcel Breuer in 1925–26 received an international debut at the 1927 Werkbund exhibition 'Die Wohnung' and its Weissenhof housing district. Along with parallel experiments in tubular steel by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Mart Stam on display at Weissenhof, Breuer's innovative design defined the Typenmöbel (standardized furniture) synonymous with *Das neue Bauen* and *Das neue Wohnen*: avant-garde heralds of a pending transformation of life and society. Admirers and opponents of a subsequent generation of Bauhaus furniture frequently associated its formal vocabulary with a political agenda, perceiving the 'neo-Kantian search for absolutes in everyday objects' as an implicit prescription for a new unitary social order. However, Bauhaus *Typenmöbel* manifested a radical political ambiguity at Weissenhof: a housing district purportedly planned 'with an eye to the city of Stuttgart's most urgent housing needs, which is to say for families of low and middle income,' but in which single family villas came equipped with cell-like maid's quarters. This presentation traced the fluctuating political discourses associated with Bauhaus furnishings from interwar exhibitions like Weissenhof to Cold War legacies of modernist transatlanticism and Soviet bloc assessments of Bauhaus design: condemned in the 1950s as symptomatic of capitalist cultural

degeneracy, but hailed as a precursor of 'real and existing' socialist material culture a decade later.

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### *Gio Ponti's Superleggera Chair: Design and Craft in Post-War Italy*

Catharine Rossi (V&A/RCA)

The Superleggera is easily the Milanese architect Gio Ponti's most celebrated and well-known contribution to Italian design. Produced by Cassina from 1957 and still manufactured today, the chair is included in collections worldwide and yet its familiarity conceals a largely untold story about the relationship between design and craft in post-war Italy. This paper took a new look at the Superleggera to examine this wider relationship in the context of Italy's post-war reconstruction and burgeoning international design success in the 1950s. The continuing artisanal character of production in the Milanese hinterland, the centre of Italy's furniture industry, was viewed as both advantageous and problematic by Italy's architects. By focusing on the story of one 'iconic' example of Italian post-war furniture, this paper attempted to untangle design and craft's knotty relationship and reconstitute modern craft in the history of post-war Italy.

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### *Substance Abuse: Crafting Postmodern Furniture*

Glenn Adamson (Head of Graduate Studies, V&A)

When one thinks of postmodernist furniture of the 1970s and '80s, the phrase 'surface over substance' leaps to mind. Often made from cheap materials such as fibreboard and plastic laminate, or cobbled together from found objects, the radical chairs, bookcases and cabinets of this period were above all an exercise in stylization. In this talk, craft historian Glenn Adamson drew from his current research for an exhibition entitled 'Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970 to 1990', which will be held at the V&A in Autumn 2011. He discussed the image-driven strategies of postmodern furniture design, contextualizing them within the design press and exhibition culture of the period. He also discussed the relationship between furniture and architecture during the period, showing how the metaphor of the facade came to determine production strategies in both fields.

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## THE OLIVER FORD TRUST AND TOM INGRAM MEMORIAL FUND

In line with one of its roles — the promotion of interest in interior design — the Oliver Ford Trust has generously expressed the desire to sponsor a place on each FHS study weekend or foreign tour. Applicants should either be a student with a particular interest in interiors, or a junior museum professional. Applications from non-members will be considered. Grants will be awarded via the Tom Ingram Fund, to which candidates should apply.

The Tom Ingram Memorial Fund makes grants towards travel and other incidental expenses for the purpose of study or research into the history of furniture (a) whether or not the applicant is a member of the Society; (b) only when the study or research is likely to be of importance in furthering the objectives of the Society; and (c) only when travel could not be undertaken without a grant from the Society. Applications towards the cost of FHS foreign and domestic trips and study weekends are particularly welcome from scholars. Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the assistance of the Fund in

any resulting publications and must report back to the Panel on completion of the travel or project. All applications should be addressed to Adriana Turpin, Secretary to the Fund at 39 Talbot Road, London W2 5JH, Turpinadriana@hotmail.com, who will also supply application forms for the Oliver Ford Trust grants on request. Please remember to send a s.a.e. with any request.

The committee requests that applications for study trips be made well in advance of the final deadline for acceptance — preferably at least one month before.

## COPY DEADLINE

The deadline for receiving material to be published in the next *Newsletter* is **15 June**. Copy should be sent, preferably by email, to M.Winterbottom@bath.ac.uk or posted to Matthew Winterbottom, The Holbourne Museum of Art, Bath, BA2 4DB, tel. 01225 820813.

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