



Fig. 1



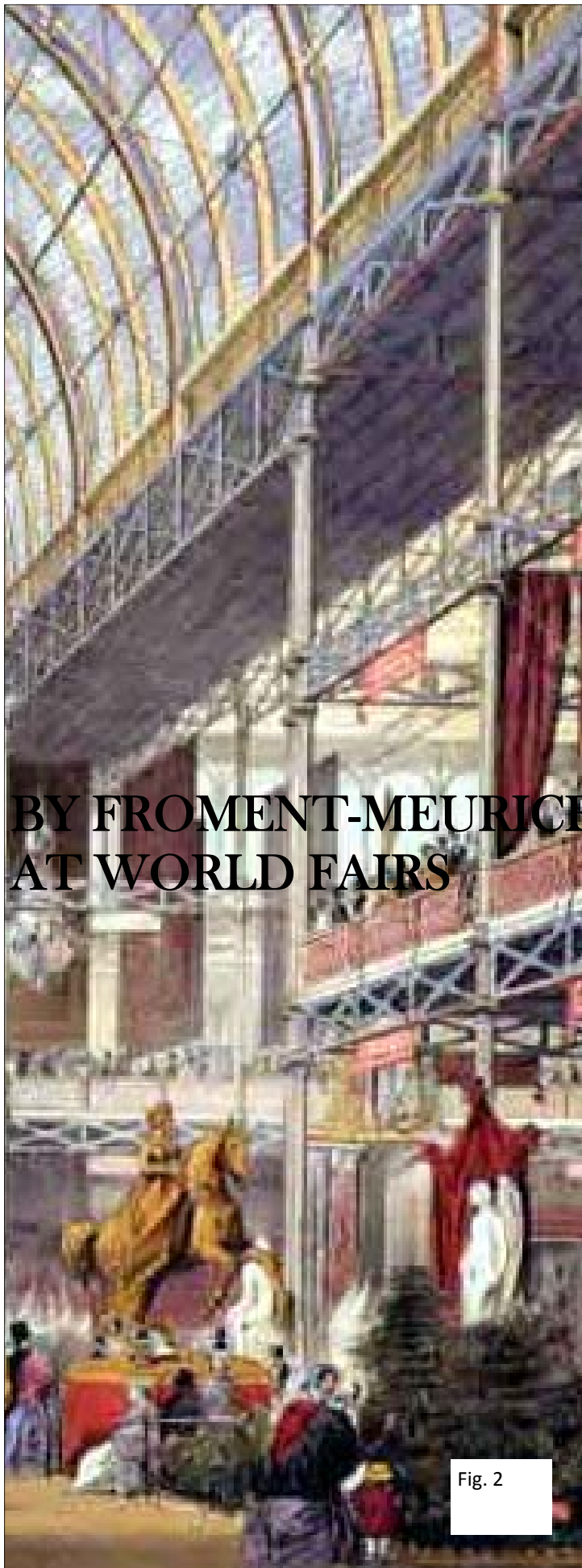
Fig. 3



Fig. 4



A CENTERPIECE LUXURY OBJECTS



BY FROMENT-MEURICE AT WORLD FAIRS

Fig. 2

In 2010, the Royal Ontario Museum acquired an imposing French centerpiece made of mottled green marble with a sculptural bronze base. (Figure 1) Its design copies one made for Emperor Napoleon III, which was featured at the Paris Exposition of 1867. Between 1851 and 1939, international expositions played an important role in promoting the latest technology and artistic and stylistic developments. To fully appreciate this centerpiece, one needs to explore its historic and artistic context.

Public exhibitions displaying and promoting the latest developments in art, manufactures and technology began in France as early as 1798 with a sporadic series of small national exhibitions. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, England, was the first major international exposition. (Figure 2) It featured products

By Peter Kaellgren

Figure 1, Centerpiece, carved and polished mottled green marble bowl set in a patinated figural bronze stand. French, Paris, Froment-Meurice Workshop, c. 1866-67. Height 44 cm (17 ¼ inches) Length 55 cm (21 7/8 inches) long. Purchased by the Royal Ontario Museum with the assistance of a Moveable Cultural Property grant accorded by the Minister of Canadian Heritage under the terms of the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. ROM funding made possible by gifts from the Louise Hawley Stone Charitable Trust and the generous support of the Count Walter Bieniewski fund. Accession no.2010.23.1 Photograph by Christine Puza.

Figure 2 Contemporary View of the interior of the Crystal Palace Exhibition, London, 1851.

Figure 3 Gothic Revival Jug, engraving, from *The Crystal Palace Exhibition: Illustrated Catalogue*, London, 1851 London: The Art Journal, 1851, page 240. Reproduced from the 1970 reprinted edition courtesy Dover Publications, New York.

Figure 4 The "Minster Jug," slip-cast moulded stoneware. English, Charles Meigh & Son of Hanley, Staffordshire. Design registered on November 16, 1846: probably produced c. 1846-1860. H. (at handle) 24.5 cm. (9 5/8 in.) Gardiner Museum Collection, gift of Rosemary Knox, Accession no. G12.4.1. Gardiner photograph reproduced with permission. The Gothic Revival design with tracery has two reliefs of the Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist.



Fig. 5

Figure 5. Pistol in the historical revival style, engraving, from *The Crystal Palace Exhibition: Illustrated Catalogue*, London, 1851 London: The Art Journal, 1851, page 220. Reproduced from the 1970 reprinted edition courtesy Dover Publications, New York.



Fig. 6

and art from around the world with a heavy emphasis on Britain and its Empire. Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg was instrumental in organizing the exhibition. Over six million people visited making it a major event of the century. Here we see a view of the interior of the cast iron and glass Crystal Palace created by Joseph Paxton, head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. You can gauge the interior space from the cut glass fountain made by Osler of Birmingham. It was 28 feet high. Suddenly Crystal Palaces and international exhibitions were springing up everywhere on both sides of the Atlantic.

The prestigious Art Journal of London published an illustrated catalogue of the Exhibition. The com-



Fig. 7

mentary on a couple of items reproduced in the catalogue differentiates the British and the French approaches to applied arts. The historical revival style which involved borrowings of form, technology and decorative motifs from past centuries was popular on both sides of the English Channel. However, the British were more concerned with promoting consumer products and publicizing the size and output of their factories. (Figure 3)

On pages 240 and 241 of the catalogue, six examples from the "manufactory of Messrs. CHARLES MEIGH & SON, of Hanley", Staffordshire are illustrated as line engravings. Theirs is described as "one of the largest and oldest in the pottery districts, . . . [with more than] seven hundred hands. . .

Figure 6. Cast and chased bronze mounts for the pistol by M. Gavain of Paris, 1851. Length of the trigger and guard 12.1 cm (4 ¼ in.) Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Gift of Mr. E. R. Rolph, Accession no. 949.19.1-3. Formerly nos. 31-33 in the Daley Collection.

Figure 7. Cast and chased bronze mount for the butt of the pistol shown in Figure 5. H. 5.1 cm (2 in.) Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Gift of Mr. E. R. Rolph, Accession no. 949.19.3

Figure 8. Empress Eugenie and Her Ladies in Waiting, at Compiègne. Oil on canvas. Painted by François Xavier Winterhalter, 1855. Collection of the Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 8

employed . . . ; . . . [M]ore than two hundred and fifty tons of coals are consumed every week; . . . [when] eighty tons of clay are made up into their various articles . . . of earthenware, Parian [China] and stoneware. [A]bout two-thirds are for exportation.” (Figure 4) The “Minster Jug” in the Gothic Revival style with reliefs showing the Madonna and Child and St. John the Baptist was illustrated in the *Catalogue*. It proved to be a best-seller and is still valued by collectors today.

In contrast, the French exhibits discussed in the *Illustrated Catalogue* emphasized art and luxury. (Figure 5) The comments about a pistol shown on page 220 make it quite clear that historical objects in museums and private collections exerted a crucial influence on contemporary design:

“The luxurious decoration of fire-arms may be said to have commenced when the practice of war declined as an exhibition of mere force, and became a science . . . studied in military schools. Spain and Italy first adorned their weapons with artistic decoration, and many costly and elaborate works of the kind grace our museums. The PISTOL by M. Gauvain, of Paris, here engraved, rivals in beauty of execution many of these old works, and is a good specimen of modern art applied to such purposes.”

Fortunately in 1949, Mr. E. R. Rolph of Toronto gave the Royal Ontario Museum a set of the bronze mounts that M. Gauvain had made for this model of pistol. (Figure 6) The naturalistic style of sculpture complies well with mid-Victorian naturalism and the French taste for bronze sculpture of animals. The

mount for the butt of the pistol is an especially intriguing combination of a snake crushing a frog in a tangle of vine leaves. (Figure 7)

This particular approach in French decorative arts reached a high point between 1852 and 1870 during the Second Empire when France was ruled by Napoléon Bonaparte’s nephew, Emperor Napoleon III and his beautiful wife. (Figure 8) The Empress Eugenie in particular exemplified this ideal of style and refinement. Francois Xavier Winterhalter, the leading portrait painter of the age, depicted her with her ladies in waiting in this huge tableau of 1855. It was shown along with retrospectives of Ingres and Delacroix at the 1855 Universal Exposition in Paris which was the French attempt to rival the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London.

Important exhibition pieces could be extremely large. The Imperial Factory of Sèvres, noted for its porcelain from the 18th century onwards, produced monumental pieces for the 1855 Paris Exposition. Queen Victoria purchased a commemorative Sèvres vase, approximately four feet tall, for the Royal Collection during her official visit. The ROM is fortunate to own an equally impressive vase from the 1855 Exposition. It is currently displayed in a niche in the Rotunda of the original wing.

Sir Robert Mond donated this monumental vase in 1926. (Figure 9) Mond wrote to Dr. Currelly that it possessed the “right dimensions for a big museum.” It is 105 centimetres or 41 ½ inches high. The late Jean Bacso, a Curator in the European Department, published her research on this vase in *Rotunda*,



Figure 9 Monumental Vase, hard paste porcelain with painted in underglaze cobalt blue. Bronze and silvered bronze mounts. Porcelain, France, Sèvres Factory, c. 1855. Mounts, Christoffle Workshops, Paris, c. 1855. H. 105 cm. (41 ½ inches) Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, Gift of Sir Robert Mond. Accession no. 926.53.1

Figure 10 another view of the vase in Figure 11



Figure 11 Detail of the bronze and silvered bronze mounts on the handle of the vase in Figure 11. Mounts by Christofle, a prominent firm in Paris that produced flatware, silver plate and silver as well as mounted articles.

Figure 12 Centerpiece by Froment-Meurice, engraving from a contemporary catalogue of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1867. Reproduced from José Alvarez, *Trésors d'Argent: Les Froment-Meurice, orfèvres romantiques parisiens* Paris: Musées, 2003

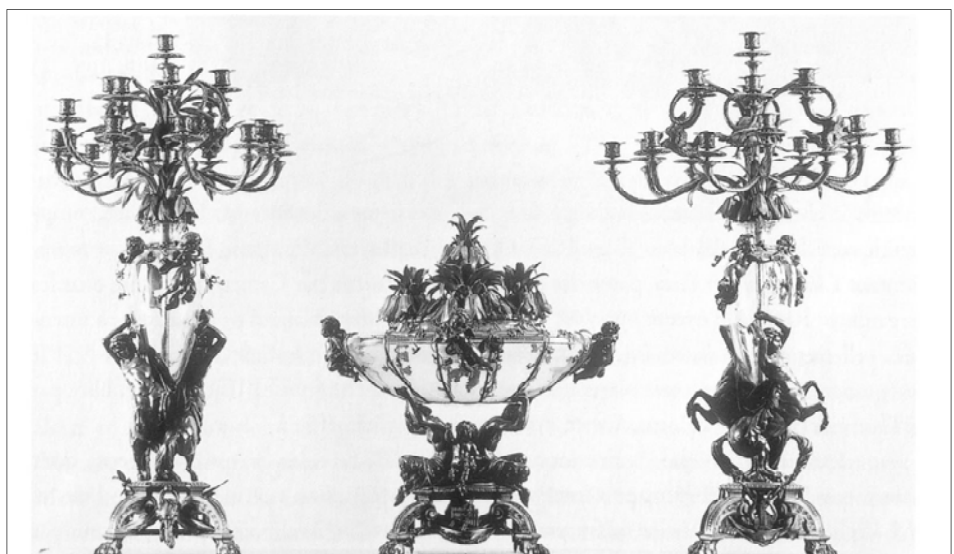
spring, 1977. Made of hard paste porcelain in five sections, the model known as “Mansard” was designed by Jules Deterle, the Art Director at Sèvres. The factory artist Joseph-Ferdinand Regnier painted the vase during the year 1854. Christofle of Paris, a major manufacturer of silver and electroplate, produced the mounts.

In typical Victorian fashion, this vase combines scholarly historicism with the latest technical know-how. The decoration is an allegorical tribute to the City of Paris. The ship crest on the side supported by nereids or water nymphs is an heraldic reference to Paris. (Figure 9) The oval medallion on the other side reproduces a relief of Diana, classical goddess of the hunt with her stag. At the time, this was believed to have been carved by Jean Goujon, a much-admired French Renaissance sculptor whose works beautified Paris.

As handles, Christofle produced figures of Victory in cast bronze, partially silver-plated, holding in place large classical ram’s horns. (Figure 11) This was the more elaborate of the two specially decorated vases in the Mansard model displayed at the 1855 Exposition. Archival evidence documents its value as 14,000 francs. This was 2,000 more francs than one of Eugenie’s regular ladies in waiting received in a year and indicates the cost of a major exhibition piece.

Both Mansard vases were owned by Napoleon III in 1856 at the time of the birth and baptism of his son and heir the Prince Imperial. The Emperor then presented this one to Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Prefect of the Seine, whom he had appointed to modernize Paris in June, 1852. The stunning boulevard plan of Paris, the parks and uniform building style were created by Baron Haussman at a cost of 2.5 billion francs between 1853 and 1870.

Figure 13, Centerpiece and matching Candelabra, silver and silver gilt with carved and polished rock crystal as documented in a contemporary tinted photograph. French, Froment-Meurice Workshops, Paris, 1867. Reproduced from José Alvarez, *Trésors d'Argent* (2003)



The last great international exhibition under the Second Empire was held in Paris in 1867. France was striving to maintain pre-eminence in art and luxury goods as well as in technology through projects like the Suez Canal. Parisian ateliers like Froment-Meurice worked to support this Imperial vision.

François-Désiré Froment (1802-1855) founded the firm of Froment-Meurice in Paris about 1830. It occupied a position similar to Tiffany's with some pretensions to being crown jewelers and creators of important diplomatic and presentation gifts. By 1859, when Pierre-Louis-Émile Froment-Meurice (1837-1913) took charge, the firm was gaining a reputation for important commissions that were stars in international expositions. The history of the firm is documented in the 2003 exhibition catalogue published by the Musée de la Vie Romantique, Paris. The Froment-Meurice ateliers remained important producers of luxury objects and jewelry until around 1900.

Up to the 1970s, historians, art historians and museums often ignored firms like Froment-Meurice. Victorian style was out of fashion. The defeat of the Second Empire in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and subsequent political upheaval also meant that they were forever associated with a disgraced regime. (Figure 12) Contemporary visual documentation is often uninspiring, usually consisting of sketchy line engravings like this one showing a carved rock crystal "coupe" or centerpiece in silver and gilded mounts that Froment-Meurice created for Napoleon III.

An open cover of "Crown Imperial" lilies or *fritillaria Imperialis* rests on the top. This tall spring flower refers to the imperial status of Napoleon III. Discrete bands of violets, a symbol adopted by Napoleon Bonaparte, the first Emperor, trail down the bowl and onto the supporting figures. Candelabra of similar design complimented the bowl and created a "surtout de table." (Figure 13)

With a display of these and other imperial commissions, Froment-Meurice earned a gold medal for artistic achievement at the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle. A fire in the Tuilleries destroyed Napoleon's rock crystal version in 1871. Fortunately, the Froment-Meurice workshop preserved the gilded and silver-plated bronze version which the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris acquired in 1907. An

image of the bowl remained in my mind because the design was so unusual.

Imagine my surprise when I suddenly saw a photo of another version in spring, 2009. (Figure 14) As a curator in the European Section of the Department of World Cultures, I served as an Expert Examiner for Export Permits which Revenue Canada directed to me. Under federal regulations, any non-Canadian artifact, art, document or natural history specimen, that is important, often financially valuable, and has been in Canada for 35 years or more, requires an approved Export Permit to leave the country.

I immediately made an appointment to study it at Sotheby's Canada with help from ROM metals conservator Susan Stock and Assistant Curator Brian Musselwhite. Experienced conservators help to evaluate proposed acquisitions and determine their authenticity and condition. I denied the Export Permit and was able to negotiate the purchase. Federal regulations allow for the ROM or any Canadian institution to apply for a grant of up to half of the purchase price, providing the institution can raise the first half of the money. The first half came from the Bieniewski Fund and the Stone Endowment.

Vincent Vertolli of the ROM Mineralogy Department identified the green marble for the bowl as being from a particular region of Italy. Luxury firms like Froment-Meurice sometimes produced more than one variation of an important model. The less expensive green marble and absence of the cover with crown imperial lilies suggest that this version may have been made for someone outside of the Imperial Family.

Marks often help to confirm the origins of an important piece like this. "FROMENT MEURICE" is engraved in block upper case letters on the plain flat moulding at the right side of the overlapping leaves on the scrolled support of the foot located between the adult male and the boy satyr. Engraved markings in a similar style are sometimes found on superior quality bronze mounts or on important pieces of silver of good weight made by the top workshops in cities like London and Paris. The style of the lettering is suggestive of ancient Roman imperial inscriptions and may be intended to re-enforce the high quality of the piece.

Émile Froment-Meurice conceived the overall composition. Émile Carlier (1827-1879), a popular con-

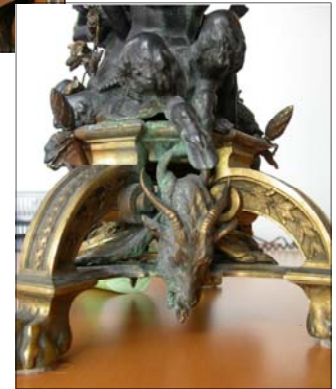


Figure 14 Original photograph of the centerpiece in Figure 1 as photographed by Susan Stock, ROM Conservator, on the premises of Sotheby's, Toronto, 2009

Figure 15 Detail of the centerpiece as originally found. Susan Stock photo, 2009

Figure 16 Detail of the centerpiece in original condition. Susan Stock photo, 2009.

temporary sculptor, created the figures of a youthful satyr family with two children. The cast and chased bronze mounts combine sections in dark patination and others of golden finish. (Figure 15) The little girl satyr is draped with Napoleonic violets. The half goat/ half human satyrs of classical mythology, the classical musical instruments, and the goat's head are symbols of the wine god Bacchus. Bacchic imagery often appeared on pieces destined for the dining room. (Figure 16) Looking at the corroded surface of the goat's head, you can get some idea of the conservation challenges.

Meticulous hand-cleaning by Christine Puza under the supervision of Susan Stock resulted in a magical transformation. The bronze legs regained their original golden finish. During 2012, the restored centerpiece was featured in "The Art of Collecting" exhibition in the Samuel European Galleries, third floor. (Figure 1)

The ROM's centerpiece seems to be only the third version known. Research is ongoing and will undoubtedly yield new discoveries. Outstanding questions include documenting its provenance and investigating whether the marble was perhaps quarried from the site of one of the battles for the unification of Italy where the armies of the Second Empire participated. So far as I can determine, this is the only object from the Froment-Meurice atelier in a Canadian public collection. Examples are rare in museum collections. The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns only one or two examples.

The salon of the Empress Eugène preserved at the Louvre provides some idea of the Second Empire interiors for which such a piece was destined and of the incredible luxury of the period. (Figure 17)

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Dr. Peter Kaellgren is a retired curator of the European Department at the Royal Ontario Museum, where he has worked since 1972. He has lectured and written widely and coordinated the annual Decorative Arts Symposia at the ROM from 1991 to 2008.



Figure 17: The author photographed in the Second Empire apartments of the Ministère de l'Etat at the Louvre in September 2007. These apartment retain their authentic furnishings from the period and give some idea of the riches of Paris.

Original photograph by John Alexander. The Imperial apartments were preserved and served as a residence for the President of the Republic in the years following the revolution of 1870. You can still tour them today.

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