Vase to Commemorate the Industries of Sweden

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An important new addition to the Nationalmuseum collection is a monumental showpiece with an elaborate frieze decor commemorating the industries of Sweden (Fig. 1). Gustavsbergs Porslinsfabrik created the vase for the first General Industrial Exposition in Sweden, which was held in the park Kungsträdgården in central Stockholm in 1866. The magnificent model in Renaissance Revival style was produced with various motifs over the years. However, none of them can compare to this commemorative vase. Its frieze decor, which is rich in content and details that all contribute to the narrative, demands a top-ranking porcelain painter.

The Neoclassical frieze’s motif was created by the artist Johan Fredrik Höckert (1826–1866) and depicts Swedish industry. The story starts with Mother Svea rewarding Swedish industry with laurel wreaths (Fig. 2). The Swedish-Norwegian Union coat of arms is shown above her throne. On her right side, under the Stockholm coat of arms, a showpiece vase represents Gustavsbergs Porslinsfabrik. Other industries in Stockholm that are depicted are silk weaving, foundries, gold and silver work and mechanical workshops (Fig. 3).

The presentation continues with Södermanland Province, south of Stockholm, represented by hops, beer production and metalwork. A woman in traditional costume from Vingåker holds a roll of fabric and represents the area’s textile industry. Bergslagen’s mining and metal
industry is depicted under the provincial shields of Dalsland, Värmland, Närke, Västmanland and Uppland. Other key industries are hunting, timber sawing and charcoal burning. The adjacent province of Dalarna is represented by the copper mine Falu koppargruva, crafts, works made of horse hair and human hair, Ålvdalen porphyry, and Stiernsund clocks, made to Christopher Polem’s early 18th-century design. The northern Swedish provinces – Lapland, Västerbotten, Gästrikland, Medelpad, Ångermanland, Härjedalen, Hälsingland and Jämtland – offer Sami crafts, forestry, hunting and linen. A woman in traditional costume from Delsbo spins flax and represents Hälsingland’s important linen industry. Some of these images of the north are based on costume studies made by the artist on a trip to Lappland.

To the left of Mother Svea, under the coat of arms of the west-coast port city of Gothenburg, a sailor with a chinstrap beard holds the Swedish-Norwegian Union flag. Trade and shipping, sail making and the city’s mechanical workshops and factories are depicted as the city’s important industries (Fig. 4). The eastern province of Östergötland offers engineering, mechanics and important businesses such as the mechanical workshop Motala mekaniska verkstad, the foundry Finspång’s foundry and the copperworks Åtvidabergs kopparverk. A man wearing a tricorn hat is holding a cannon and represents the area’s cannon foundry. In contrast to these modern industrial trades, a Birgittine nun holds a cushion used for making the famous Vadstena bobbin lace. Further south, Småland has Jönköping’s match factory, founded in 1845, and Huskvarna’s arms and glass industries. A woman in folk costume from Värend represents Småland’s milk and cheese production. She carries a cask, maybe full of milk, on her head and a cheese under her arm, probably a Swedish prästost cheese.

Västergötland, to the west, is represented by Sjuhäradsbygden’s textile industry and

Fig. 2 JohanFredrik Höckert (1826–1866), Vase to Commemorate the Industries of Sweden, 1866 (detail, Mother Svea). Produced by Gustavsb ergs Porslinsfabrik, 1878. Earthenware, glazed, 123 x 59 x 50 cm (h x l x w). Gift of the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. Nationalmuseum, NMK 133/2019.
a local travelling salesman with a measuring stick and a bolt of fabric over his shoulder. Bohuslän and Halland on the west coast offer fish and shellfish.

Back to the east again, a woman in medieval dress, holding a model of a medieval church, celebrates sites of archaeological and historical interest and architecture on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. Sweden’s two southernmost Baltic Sea provinces Skåne and Blekinge offer grain and distilled goods, and a woman holding roses may be a reference to Blekinge being known as the garden of Sweden.

The vase was one of the main attractions in the Gustavsberg exhibit at the General Industrial Exposition. The spectacular 122-cm-high showpiece and other elaborate objects served as advertisements and examples of Gustavberg’s technical and artistic expertise. Few people were able to buy the exclusive studio wares, but these wares helped promote the plainer but excellent, mass-produced and inexpensive goods for which the factory won a silver medal.
The popular illustrated newspaper *Ny Illustrerad Tidning* highlighted the show-piece vase and stated that it was admired at the exposition. However, the painted frieze was described as substandard, and it was reported that the factory was therefore already in the process of creating a new one. It was promised that the decoration of the new vase would more accurately correspond to the drawing of the master, Höckert.³

The following year, 1867, Gustavsbergs Porslinsfabrik exhibits at the World’s Fair in Paris. Photographs and illustrations of the factory’s exhibition stand show two copies of the vase. According to unconfirmed sources, both vases were sold to a private owner.⁴ The magnificent vase with its narrative function continued to be deemed important and relevant, and a new copy was showcased a decade later at the World’s Fair in Paris in 1878. It is unclear how many of the vases Gustavsberg has made. The one acquired by the Nationalmuseum bears the date 1878, and the complex frieze was the work of Gustavsberg’s master painter Franz Meder. The acquisition was made possible thanks to a generous gift from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum in conjunction with the Nationalmuseum re-opening Gustavsbergs Porslinsmuseum following extensive renovation. The important vase has now been returned to its origins and occupies a position of honour in Gustavsbergs Porslinsmuseum’s new 19th-century gallery.

**Notes:**