A Chair Fit for a Prince

Anders Bengtsson
Curator, Applied Art and Design

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum
Stockholm

Volume 20
Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, is published with generous support from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum.

The Nationalmuseum collaborates with Svenska Dagbladet, Fältman & Malmén and Grand Hôtel Stockholm.

Items in the Acquisitions section are listed alphabetically by artists’ names, except in the case of applied arts items, which are listed in order of their inventory numbers. Measurements are in centimetres – Height H, Breadth B, Depth D, Length L, Width W, and Diameter Diam. – except for those of drawings and prints, which are given in millimetres.

Cover Illustration
Alexander Roslin (1718–1793), The Artist and his Wife Marie Suzanne Giroust Portraying Henrik Wilhelm Peil, 1767. Oil on canvas, 131 x 98.5 cm. Donated by the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, Sophia Giesecke Fund, Axel Hirsch Fund and Mr Stefan Persson and Mrs Denise Persson. Nationalmuseum, NM 7141.

Publisher
Magdalena Gram

Editor
Janna Herder

Editorial Committee
Mikael Ahlund, Magdalena Gram, Janna Herder, Helena Kåberg and Magnus Olausson.

Photographs
Nationalmuseum Photographic Studio/Linn Ahlgren, Erik Cornelius, Anna Danielsson, Cecilia Heisser, Bodil Karlsson, Per-Ake Persson, Sofia Persson and Hans Thorwid.

Picture Editor
Rikard Nordström

Photo Credits
© Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig (p. 14)
© The Gothenburg Museum of Art/Hossein Schalou (p. 18)
© Malmö Art Museum/Andreas Rasmusson (p. 22)
© Wildenstein & Co., Inc., New York (p. 29)
© RMN Grand Palais/Musée du Louvre, Paris/Hervé Lewandowski (p. 30)
© The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Fig. 4, p. 31)
© RMN Grand Palais/Musée du Louvre, Paris/René-Gabriel Ojéda (Fig. 5, p. 31)
© Guilhem Scherf (p. 32)
© Bridgeman/Institute of Arts, Detroit (p. 33)
© Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris/Jean Tholance (p. 34)
© RMN Grand Palais/Musée du Louvre, Paris (p. 35)
© Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Rome/Mauro Coen (Figs. 6, 10 and 12, pp. 114–116)
© Mikael Traung (Fig. 7, p. 114)
© Stockholm City Museum (p. 123)
© http://www.stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=319
© Stockholm City Museum/Lennart af Petersens (p. 124)
© http://www.genealogi.se/component/mtree/sodermanland/eskilstuna/a_zetherstroem_/22850?Itemid=604 (p. 125)

Every effort has been made by the publisher to credit organizations and individuals with regard to the supply of photographs. Please notify the publisher regarding corrections.

Graphic Design
BIGG

Layout
Agneta Bervokk

Translation and Language Editing
Gabriella Berggren and Martin Naylor.

Publications
Ingrid Lindell (Publications Manager), Janna Herder (Editor).

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum is published annually and contains articles on the history and theory of art relating to the collections of the Nationalmuseum.

Nationalmuseum
Box 16176
SE–103 24 Stockholm, Sweden
www.nationalmuseum.se
© Nationalmuseum and the authors

ISSN 2001-9238

NATIONALMUSEUM @
A NEW PIECE, of royal provenance, has been added to the Nationalmuseum’s collection of furniture. The chair was made when the royal family moved into the Royal Palace in Stockholm in 1754, an occasion when great efforts were made to create a modern interior for official occasions. The Palace was decorated mainly with Swedish furniture made by Stockholm’s best craftsmen.

The chair that has now been acquired, a “rygglänstol” (a chair with a backrest but no armrests), is believed to have been created for the royal dining room, the so-called Pillar Hall. It was intended for one of the children of the royal couple, the future kings Gustav III or Karl XIII, or their younger brother Prince Fredrik Adolf. In the strict hierarchy of the royal court, the design of a chair was not left to chance. King Adolf Fredrik and Queen Lovisa Ulrika sat on gilt armchairs with exquisite carvings, their offspring had gilt chairs with similar carvings, and guests who were permitted to sit down were given one of the 24 yellow-painted chairs with simpler carvings.

A Chair Fit for a Prince

Anders Bengtsson
Curator, Applied Art and Design

A Chair, attributed to Carl Hårleman (1700–1753).
Probably produced by Lorentz Nordin (1708–1786), Stockholm c. 1754.
Gilt wood, fabric, H 101, L 56, W 70 cm.
Purchase: Barbro Osher Fund.
Nationalmuseum, NMK 104/2013.
that made up the rest of the suite. One feature that demonstrated the rank of the chairs used by the royal children was that the backs were also adorned with carvings. Such niceties were usually considered unnecessary, since 18th-century chairs stood with their backs against the wall according to the interior fashion.

To comprehend the difference in rank between the royal children’s chairs and those of the other guests, we can compare the respective prices for production and gilding. The carved frame for a princely chair cost 46 Silver Thaler, while the chair frames for guests cost less than a quarter, 9 Silver Thaler. In addition, gilding cost 40 Silver Thaler per chair. All chairs in the royal dining room were upholstered in silk damask woven in Sweden and supplied by Barthelemy Peyron. The silk had a crown pattern.

According to the preserved accounts, the chair frames were probably made by Lorentz Nordin, and the decor carved by one of the French or Swedish ornamental wood-carvers employed in the Palace workshops. The “designer” of the chair is unknown, but it is characteristic of the palace architect Carl Hårleman’s stylistic ideals. Hårleman died in 1753, the year before the chair was made, but his taste continued to influence the commissions carried out after his death.

The subsequent provenance of the chair (according to word of mouth, it stood in the Gustavian Opera House until this was demolished in 1892) indicates that its ceremonial role was eventually forgotten. A further indication of this is that arm rests were added some time in the 19th century, to increase its status; the chair still has marks from this adjustment.

The Nationalmuseum’s purchase of this fine piece of furniture of royal provenance was made possible by a generous contribution from the Barbro Osher Fund.

Notes:
2. Bukowskis catalogue 574, spring 2013, lot no. 490.