



A Chair Fit for a Prince

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Alexander Roslin (1718–1793), *The Artist and his Wife Marie Suzanne Giroust Portraying Henrik Wilhelm Peill*, 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.

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NATIONALMUSEUM @

A Chair Fit for a Prince

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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 "ryggänstol" (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



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.¹ 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 Barthélémy 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 1892²) 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:

1. Bo Vahlne, *Frihetstidens inredningar på Stockholms Slott: Om bekvämlighetens och skönhetens nivåer*, Skrifter från kungliga Husgerådskammaren no. 12, Stockholm 2012, pp. 143 ff.
2. *Bukowskis catalogue* 574, spring 2013, lot no. 490.