

Salvaging the Past:  
Georges Hoentschel and  
French Decorative Arts from  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

On View April 4–August 11, 2013

Furniture mount  
(Gorgon or Medusa  
mask). French,  
1785–90. Gilt bronze.  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, Gift  
of J. Pierpont Morgan,  
1906 (07.225.510.255).



Bard  
Graduate  
Center: Decorative  
Arts, Design  
History, Material  
Culture

On view

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From April 4 to August 11, 2013, the Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture presents *Salvaging the Past: Georges Hoentschel and French Decorative Arts from The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Focusing on a remarkable but little-known collection that entered the Metropolitan Museum as a gift of J. Pierpont Morgan in the early twentieth century—indeed, it precipitated the building of a new wing—the exhibition features medieval art and French eighteenth-century paneling, furniture, metalwork, textiles, paintings, and sculpture, as well as late nineteenth-century art pottery, most of which have rarely been viewed since the 1950s. The fourth in a series of collaborations between The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Bard Graduate Center (BGC), the exhibition provides the first comprehensive examination of Georges Hoentschel, a significant figure in the history of collecting, and illuminates an understudied and critical chapter of the Metropolitan’s history. Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide, curator of European decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum; Deborah L. Krohn, BGC associate professor; and Ulrich Leben, BGC special exhibitions curator and visiting professor, are the organizers.



Medallion. Italian, 16th century. Silk and metal thread. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1916 (16.32.338).



Trumpeter. South Netherlandish, ca. 1500. Oak with traces of paint and gilding. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1916 (16.32.205).

## Background

In June 1907, the monthly *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* featured what amounted to a news article as its cover story. It announced the arrival of a vast and important collection of medieval art and French eighteenth-century woodwork, furniture, decorative paintings, and gilt-bronze mounts that was to form a “Department of Decorative Arts.” The collection had recently arrived in 364 packing cases, shipped from the gallery of Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915), described as “an architect of distinction in Paris,” and was the gift of J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), one of the great patrons and collectors of the age and president of the museum at the time. Morgan was so impressed with the Hoentschel collection that he had purchased it, *en bloc*, in the spring of 1906. He gave the eighteenth-century material outright to the museum and loaned the medieval works indefinitely.

It was no surprise that the Hoentschel collection was thought significant enough to call for the establishment of a new museum department. It provided the Metropolitan with an important collection of French decorative arts—unique in the United States at the time. More than a department was needed, however.

Jean Barbet. Angel.  
French (Lyon), 1475.  
Copper alloy. The  
Frick Collection,  
New York, Purchase,  
1943 (1943.2.82).



To display more than 3,000 objects, including a dazzling array of wooden paneling, gilt-bronze mounts, console tables, chairs, tapestries, sculptures, and paintings, the museum commissioned the leading architectural firm of the day, McKim, Mead & White, to design a completely new wing. The Wing of Decorative Arts opened in 1910 with the Hoentschel collection displayed in a systematic and integrated manner aimed at the education of students, artisans, designers, as well as the general public. That wing is now home to the Metropolitan's Arms and Armor collection, and some Hoentschel masterpieces may be seen today in galleries scattered throughout the museum. But the lion's share of the paneling, fragments of woodwork, and gilt-bronze mounts have not been on public view since the 1950s, when the fashion for presenting decorative arts in period room settings overtook the initial encyclopedic displays that were prominent in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Attributed to Nicolas-  
Quinibert Foliot (1706–1776),  
possibly after a design  
by Pierre Contant d'Ivry  
(1698–1777). Armchair for  
Louise-Élisabeth of Parma.  
French (Paris) and Italian  
(Parma), ca. 1749. Carved and  
gilded oak; original silk-velvet  
upholstery and gold trim. The  
Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan,  
1906 (07.225.57).



## The Exhibition

Featuring over 200 objects drawn primarily from the Metropolitan Museum's holdings, with loans from other public and private collections in the United States and France, the exhibition tells the story of this unique collection in four sections. The first introduces Georges Hoentschel, who was an enterprising and successful decorator during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when France witnessed a great scientific, industrial, and social transformation and the newly moneyed bourgeoisie adopted a lifestyle based on an aristocratic model. As director of the Parisian decorating firm Maison Leys, Hoentschel catered to these affluent clients, creating for them interiors in historic French styles. In this section of the exhibition, ephemera, family papers, photographs, personal possessions, and a film presentation will outline his story within the context of Belle Époque Paris.

The second and largest section presents selections from the eighteenth-century holdings of the collection in installations inspired by historic photographs of Hoentschel's densely arranged showroom-museum in Paris, where the objects served as models for his interior decorating business. Delicately carved woodwork, decorative paintings, and exquisitely chased gilt-bronze mounts are featured here. Highlights include a chair made for Louise-Élisabeth of Parma, daughter of Louis XV; an armchair made for Louis XVI; and a panel from shutters originally installed in a room outside the chapel at Versailles.

Section of the interior of 58 Boulevard Flandrin, Paris to be recreated in the Bard Graduate Center exhibition. Photographed circa 1906. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Thomas J. Watson Library, Presented by J. Pierpont Morgan.



The third section displays medieval artworks, including sculpture, enamels, ivories, and metalwork, and includes one of the finest surviving examples of French Limoges enamelwork—a twelfth-century reliquary container, or *chasse*. Also shown here is Jean Barbet's *Ange du Lude*, on loan from the Frick Collection, a rare bronze angel dated 1475, which was one of the most famous works in Hoentschel's collection.

The final section presents examples of Hoentschel's stoneware and those of his friend the sculptor and potter Jean-Joseph Carriès (1855–1894). Some of these ceramics were originally exhibited in the Union Centrale des Arts Décoratifs' pavilion at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, for which Hoentschel created interiors in art nouveau style, unique in his oeuvre. A chair from this pavilion, loaned by the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, is displayed, along with a selection of furnishing textiles used by Hoentschel in interior design commissions.

and artistic circles of the time and his career as a successful businessman, ceramist, and designer who was instrumental in exporting French taste abroad. New research documents many of Hoentschel's clients and commissions and, by scouring newspapers, biographies, and correspondence, the authors have placed him and his collection in a larger social and historical context. The effect his collection had in the United States after it arrived in New York and its publication in a lavish catalogue, mandated by Morgan as part of its purchase, are also explored. Extensive research and discoveries made during conservation treatments for this exhibition are outlined in entries about the individual objects. Published with Yale University Press (April 2013, cloth, 270 color and 42 b/w illustrations, 320 pages), it will be available for \$85 in the BGC gallery and through the website ([bgc.bard.edu](http://bgc.bard.edu)).

## The Book

Georges Hoentschel (1855–1915). Bottle. French, ca. 1900. Glazed stoneware. Collection of Dr. Martin Eidelberg, New York.



*Salvaging the Past: Georges Hoentschel and French Decorative Arts from The Metropolitan Museum of Art* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue edited by Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide, Deborah L. Krohn, and Ulrich Leben. Through scholarly essays, early documentary photographs, and images of newly conserved works, the book considers various aspects of Hoentschel's life in Parisian social

## Symposium

*Hoentschel in Context*, a symposium for the academic community and museum professionals, will be held on April 18 and 19, 2013. For further information about the keynote lecture, visit [www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/-626.html](http://www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/-626.html). To see the full schedule of lectures, visit [www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/-850.html](http://www.bgc.bard.edu/news/events/-850.html).

Panel from the top of a mirror frame with a mask of Flora. French, ca. 1725. Carved oak. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1906 (07.225.20).



## Gallery Programs

Lectures, study days, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition.

For more information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail [programs@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:programs@bgc.bard.edu).

## Exhibition Tours

Group exhibition tours for adult and school groups are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and Thursday until 7 p.m. Reservations are required for all groups. To schedule a tour, please call 212-501-3013 or e-mail [tours@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:tours@bgc.bard.edu).

The Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The admission fee is \$7 general, \$5 senior and students (valid ID); admission is free Thursday evenings after 5 p.m. For information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit [bgc.bard.edu](http://bgc.bard.edu).



Chasse with the Crucifixion and Christ in Majesty. French (Limoges), ca. 1180–90. Champlevé enamel on gilded copper, wood and paint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.514).

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For press information and images, please e-mail [press@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:press@bgc.bard.edu) or call 212-501-3074.

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