

David Patrick Columbia's

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**A passing storm**

Storm clouds over Manhattan. 8:30 PM. Photo: JH.

*Wednesday, May 30, 2012.* Sunny yesterday with temperatures in the high 80s, and Real Feel 100 degrees midday with thunderstorm rolling in from the West mid-evening cooling things a bit.

*Last night the Frick Collection hosted a preview reception* for an exhibition which opens today and runs through August 19th: *Gold, Jasper, and Carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court.*

The Frick, one of the most precious jewels of the city, is lavishly glorious in its understatement of its treasures. As museums go in this faster-and-faster culture of ours, the Frick confidently retains its steady and substantial place as a Collection, rather than a museum *per se* – although it is every bit that too. This new exhibition of the works of **Johann Christian Neuber**, includes some extraordinary porcelain from Meissen, and is a perfect example of the Collection's charter which began with the Founder/Creator and his daughter **Helen Clay Frick**.

It is a very small exhibition, unabashedly un-New York in that way, occupying the Oval Room – which connects the large South and North Galleries of the former mansion. The wood-paneled room's paintings have been removed for this elegantly presented show of the works of one of Dresden's most famous goldsmiths.



Helen Frick and her father Henry Clay Frick by Edmund Charles Tarbell, c. 1910. Mr. Frick died in 1919. His daughter Helen died 65 years later in 1984, having

I appreciate beauty and artisanship, although I tend to be drawn to the history of objects which enhances the item for me. Most of the pieces on display are the snuffboxes made of gold and jeweled items for his wealthy clients in the second half of the 18th century. Faberge followed Neuber's lead a century later. In 1775, Neuber was named court jeweler to **Friedrich Augustus III, elector of Saxony** and King of Poland. Ten years later he was appointed Curator of the royal collection of **Augustus the Strong**, the founder of the Meissen Porcelain factory.

delivered her father's dream, the Frick Collection.

The artist, considered the greatest goldsmith artist of his age, created perfect gifts for a princess, a duchess, a marquis or baronne. Not to mention a monarch or an ambassador.



Boxes of gold, jasper and carnelian: Johann Christian Neuber at the Saxon Court. there are 35 of these boxes, one-of-a-kind objects for his clientele.



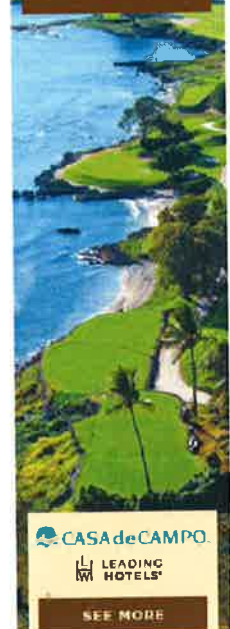


Neuber's work was rich with personal references to the recipient. He used local semi-precious stones – agate, jasper, carnelian. He created landscapes, floral designs and patterns geometrically laid out with tiny cut stones and often incorporating Meissen porcelain plaques, cameos and minatures. One-of-a-kind luxury items. The fashion changes but the objective remains the same. Today they are treasures. At the time they were expressions of sentiment, commitment, devotion and honor. Today Johann Neuber would be a brand like Gucci, Cartier, Tiffany, Verdura (among others).

The center of this intriguing exhibition is the *Breteuil Table*. This is the artist's masterpiece. It is regarded as one of the most extraordinary pieces of 18th century ormolu furniture *ever* made – distinguished not only by the materials used and the remarkable skill of its creator, but also for its prestigious history.

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The Breteuil Table in the center. Made in Dresden between 1779-80 when the artist was in his early 40s. The piece is wood, gilded bonze, semiprecious stones, faux-pearls and Meissen porcelain plaques.



Henri-Francois de Breteuil, the 10th Marquis de Breteuil and Alexis Kugel of Galerie J. Kugel, behind the famous table, last night at the Frick.

It was created especially from the **Baron de Breteuil** in 1781, presented as a gift by Friedrich Augustus III as recognition for the role the baron played in the negotiating the end of a war (of Bavarian Succession) fought between the Hapsburg monarchy (Austria) and the Saxon-Prussia alliance. All of which means nothing to us today, but back then it was about Austria grabbing Prussia (now part of Germany) for itself.

The baron's name is familiar to Francophiles and historians as he was Prime Minister to **Louis XVI** on July 14, 1789 and the fall of the Bastille, Louis demanded his resignation immediately thereafter, and it was delivered immediately. Three days later the baron departed for Switzerland, escaping the guillotine that would soon mark the fate of the King and Queen as well as many members of aristocracy, the clergy and the court.

[storm](#)

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A closeup of the table top. Each piece (numbered) represents a stone from Saxony's environs.



The centerpiece of the table, a Meissen porcelain plaque with a scene of the armor on the floor around the pedestal, denoting the war being over.

Because the baron's heir was a child at the time, destruction of the chateau eluded the Revolution. The table remained untouched for the next 250 years in the Chateau of Breteuil (in the Michelin Green Guide, about 25 miles southwest of Paris) where it has been on display for the public. This is the first time it has traveled the Atlantic for the Frick exhibition.

Also in the exhibition are two Meissen porcelain groups which were part of a larger gift of seven which was a diplomatic gift – like the *Breteuil Table* – from Friedrich Augustus II to **Nicolai Repnin**, the Russian emissary who worked along with the Baron de Breteuil to secure the treaty that ended that particular war. Both the porcelain and the bases amaze the eye of even the most unsophisticated viewer.

The Neuber bases were thought to be lost forever until Alexis Kugel of Galerie J. Kugel in Paris (see [NYSB 6.13.07](#)) discovered them – not knowing at first which Meissen porcelains they were made for. One of them was found in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and the other belonging to a private collection in Paris.



One of the two Meissen porcelain groups with the Neuber base. The porcelain was one of a group of 7 made for the Russian emissary who helped in negotiating the same treaty as Breteuil. After the War, the Russian Soldiers removed them from the safe storage outside of Dresden and took them to Moscow and St. Petersburg.



A close-up of the other Meissen group of the same size, also on a Neuber base, with the detailed treasures flowing from the cornucopia.



The Frick Collection last night. 8 PM.



Looking across Central Park to the southwest with the storm moving in. 8:15 PM.



Henri-Francois, the Marquis de Breteuil, who brought the table to New York, with Susan Gutfreund, who with her husband John, gave a small dinner for the marquis last night.



The Baron de Breteuil to whom the table was given by the elector of Saxony. At the end of the 18th century the baron was very close to King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. He was present with them in 1785 when the Cardinal de Rohan was asked to explain to them the purchase of a diamond necklace in the name of the Queen. The "Affair of the Necklace" in which Marie

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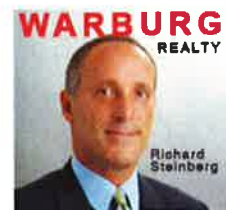
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Restaurant  
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Antoinette was innocent, became a mark against her nevertheless, on the eve of the French Revolution.



The Chateau de Breteuil. An earlier marquis was a friend of Edward VII of England, and was a character in Proust ("Marquis de Breaute") who was a guest at the chateau in 1900. The chateau is open to the public daily, year-round. visit the web site <http://www.breteuil.fr>.



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A sign on a lamp post on Fifth Avenue and 67th Street last night. What a difference a leash would have made in the poor dog's life. Some think it's cool to walk a dog in the city without a leash, never considering how easily the animal can be spooked by the sudden sounds and sirens and horns, ruining its life without the security of a leash.

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