

# Bulletin

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ROCK-CRYSTAL EWER  
ITALIAN, SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
*Gift of Mrs. Thomas H. Simpson, 1940*

## AN ITALIAN ROCK-CRYSTAL EWER

THE great generosity of Mrs. Thomas H. Simpson has enabled the Detroit Institute of Arts to add to the Renaissance collection at Alger House an exceedingly rare and fascinating sixteenth century Italian rock-crystal ewer<sup>1</sup>, formerly a part of the famous Cook Collection at Richmond, England.

The vessel, which is of extraordinary grace and elegance, is cut from a solid piece of rock-crystal<sup>2</sup>, the body formed as a tapering cylinder, slightly flattened and indented at the sides so as to facilitate a firm grasp for purposes of pouring. The lower half is carved with vertical flutings, a motif borrowed from contemporary Italian architecture, and the upper section contains at the front a finely proportioned figure of a mermaid, chiseled in relief with superb skill and refinement, apparently inspired by an antique model. The mermaid is represented in the pose of a caryatid in full face, her arms upraised to support two liquid jets emanating above from a spout in the shape of a bat's head with opened mouth. The flattened sides of the ewer are delicately engraved with a characteristic arabesque design of naturalistic scrolls, while the mask and wings of a second grotesque bat constitute a shell pattern which emerges across the back, spreading along the upper border and terminating below in a fan of seven elongated acanthus leaves of classical derivation. A removable fluted rock-crystal dome, topped by a small gold rosette, covers the opening of the ewer, and the whole rests on a circular gold mount, designed with a band lightly enameled in black.

A perfect example of the most refined Renaissance taste, which in its enthusiasm seized upon many such types of material as rock-crystal for complete expression, this magnificent ewer may be described as a masterpiece of the highest artistry among smaller objects of the period and of a kind ordered by noble patrons not only for the beauty of their craftsmanship but as articles of daily usefulness. Its tremendous rarity, not to mention the precious values embodied in the limpidity of design and the medium itself, is emphasized by the fact that only a few rock-crystals, because of their fragile nature, have survived destruction. Among American collections only the barest number may be found, a consideration which places the example at Alger House in a special category, particularly since the piece exists in pristine condition in spite of one or two small and inconspicuous fractures.

It is difficult to assign the rock-crystal at Alger House to a specific hand, for little is known about crystal cutters during the age of the Italian Renaissance. The spirit of the design, however, agrees with other sixteenth century styles of production in Italy and bears a remarkably close resemblance to several additional specimens of rock-crystal carving in European collections<sup>3</sup>.

The Museum is indeed fortunate to possess such a distinguished object, which in character fits so ideally into the atmosphere of Alger House and brings to the collection a new and unusual type of artistic achievement in the field of minor arts belonging to the Italian Renaissance.

JOHN S. NEWBERRY

<sup>1</sup>Accession number: 40.140. Height: 8 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Gift of Mrs. Thomas H. Simpson, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Rock-crystal is a colorless and transparent variety of quartz, which is characteristically cold to the touch and occurs in rocks among Alpine glaciers and in Italy among the quarries at Carrara and near Bologna. It has been employed as an artistic medium from the Mycenaean Period until modern times, to be superseded today only by the more general use of glass.

<sup>3</sup>See Ernst Kris, *Renaissance-Klein Kunst in Italien*, p. 107, figs. 442 and 443.

## TWO WORKS BY PAUL CEZANNE

WITHIN the past year two important works by Paul Cézanne, greatest of the French Impressionist painters of the nineteenth century, have been added to the collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts: an oil painting, *Three Skulls*<sup>1</sup>, generously lent by an anonymous Detroit collector, and a color-lithograph of *Bathers*<sup>2</sup>, acquired through the William C. Yawkey and Julius H. Haass Funds.

Not less than fourteen times<sup>3</sup> did Cézanne employ the skull as subject matter for his art—in pencil and water color studies, in sketches and finished paintings in oils. In two early still lifes, executed about 1865-67, *Skull and Pitcher* (Venturi No. 68) and *Skull and Candlestick* (Venturi No. 61), the thick impasto technique contributes to the severity of the theme and helps to create the impression that the choice of subject was genuinely the result of a melancholy strain in the struggling young artist rather than the mere accident that a skull was among the still life properties in his studio. It is of interest to note that several skulls are still preserved in the artist's last studio on the Chemin des Lauves (now the Avenue Paul Cézanne) at Aix-en-Provence, where he was born in 1839 and died in 1906.

The fact that twelve of the known instances of the skull in Cézanne's work are in studies or compositions of the end of the artist's life, executed between 1890 and 1904, possibly within the decade 1894-1904, suggests that the choice of subject and the artist's mood were indeed closely linked as old age and the end of the struggle to "make of Impressionism something solid and enduring, like the art of the museums" came upon him.

Cézanne's lifelong concern with the representation of plastic form and the discrimination of the planes that compose forms by means of color is the basis for the opinion of a recent biographer<sup>4</sup> of Cézanne that "the skull always attracted Cézanne as a subject, not so much for its gruesome associations as for the problems of light and shade and volume presented by its rounded form." But others<sup>5</sup> have not failed to note that in at least one picture, *The Boy with a Skull* (Venturi No. 679), painted in the 1890's, Cézanne clearly suggests a more metaphysical intention. "The calm indifference of the pose of the figure contrasts with the colors which suggest death and despair." And it is further significant that the other subjects with a skull appear in this period—now a drawing, now a water color study,



## THE THREE SKULLS

BY PAUL CEZANNE, FRENCH, 1839-1906

*Lent anonymously to the Detroit Institute of Arts*

and finally the three oil paintings, apparently executed about 1900 to 1904: the *Pyramid of Skulls*, formerly in the Volland Collection (Venturi No. 753), the *Three Skulls*, now on view in Detroit (Venturi No. 1567), and the *Three Skulls on an Oriental Rug*, in the Dübi-Müller Collection, Soleure, Switzerland (Venturi No. 759), for which the water color in the Volland Collection, Paris (Venturi No. 1131) is probably a preliminary or contemporary study. This last composition, seen on Cézanne's easel at Aix in 1904 by Emile Bernard who called it the artist's last testament, has evoked from one critic<sup>6</sup> the opinion that "in the tragic expression which varies from one skull to the other, and the contrast with the richness of the rug . . . Cézanne has placed . . . a romantic allusion to the vanity of human affairs."

In the painting of *Three Skulls*, now in Detroit, the artist presents his theme without embellishment. That the artist did not destroy this canvas is evidence that he felt, as the present-day spectator must agree, that he had "realized" his subject and had created of this veritable *nature morte* a living work of art. The painting is a superb example of Cézanne's mature synthetic style which he attained in the second half of his career, say after 1880, and employed, although not without growth and change, to the end. Here the forms of the three skulls are differently realized by the skilled handling of brush and pigment. Against a warm background of varied neutral tones laced with colors, on a table top of buff tones also touched with bright color, stand three skulls, the one on the left an opalescent buff, the central one more ochreous, the one to the right a lighter hue, yet all built up of thinly applied touches of many-hued pigment, and strengthened by deep shadows, of heavy black around the contours suggesting the extension of the forms into space, of multiple colors in the shaded portions. Every inch of the canvas is alive with controlled color; the whole is a product of the creative mind in the presence of reality. The color of the Impressionists has been welded to the basic forms of

nature which Cézanne sought always to discover and to re-create in the work of art. While the motive of the skull was undoubtedly to Cézanne an interesting formal problem, it would seem that the artist has further created in this painting a vivid expression of the cry of the Preacher: "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever."

Although constantly engaged in sketching in pencil and water color, Cézanne did only three etchings and three lithographs, all toward the end of his career. Two of his lithographs represented *Bathers*, after compositions he had painted some twenty years before. Of these two, the larger and better is the *Bathers* recently acquired in a superb impression by the Detroit Institute of Arts, the composition of which is based directly upon the large canvas in the Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania (Venturi No. 276), painted about 1875-76. The lithograph was first executed in black and white and Cézanne then painted one of the trial proofs in water color to serve as a guide for the lithographer, A. Clot, who prepared the several stones for the application of the colors. Four colors were used, black, blue, yellow, and red-brown or orange, in delicate tones and shadings suggestive of water color, the green areas being achieved by the blending of the yellow and blue. The Detroit print is a trial proof in colors, since it is signed only once, whereas an additional signature and proof number were added to each print in the regular edition of one hundred examples published about 1899 by Vollard in Paris.

Since the drawing of the print has characteristics of the artist's late style, it has been suggested<sup>7</sup> that Cézanne himself drew upon the stone for the black and white state, naturally employing his style of that period, whereas the lithographer would probably have clung more closely to the style of the earlier painting. This highly original work is then a combination and a summary of Cézanne's preoccupation with problems of figure drawing and composition, and the presentation of forms as they appear to the artist expressed in terms of light and color.

On the basis of these two works alone, Paul Cézanne might safely be placed among the ranks of the immortals, for by his persistent efforts he brought to a useful conclusion the experiments of the Impressionists and established the foundations for the further study of form and color, underlying later developments in twentieth century art.

FRANCIS W. ROBINSON

<sup>1</sup>Loan number: 10.40. Oil on canvas. Height: 13 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches; Width: 23 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches. Painted about 1900 (L. Venturi, *Cézanne, son Art, son Oeuvre*, Paris, 1936, No. 1567). Collections: Ambroise Vollard, Paris; Bignou, New York; Private Collector, Detroit.

<sup>2</sup>Accession number: 39.667. Lithograph. Height: 16 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches; Width: 20 inches. Signed lower right: *P. Cézanne*. Executed about 1890-1900 (Venturi, *op. cit.*, No. 1157), about 1898-99 (G. Rivière, *Le Maître Paul Cézanne*, Paris, 1923, p. 223).

<sup>3</sup>The skull appears in the following works by Cézanne, here indicated by their numbers and dates as given in Venturi's catalogue: 68 (1865-66), 61 (1865-67), 679 (1894-96), 1366 (c. 1894), 758 (1895-1900), No no. (c. 1895; Vol. I, p. 312: Sketch Book IV, p. X), 1130 (1895-1900), 1568 (1895-1900), 751 (c. 1900), 1129 (1900-04), 753 (c. 1900), 1567 (c. 1900), 1131 (1900-04), 759 (1904).

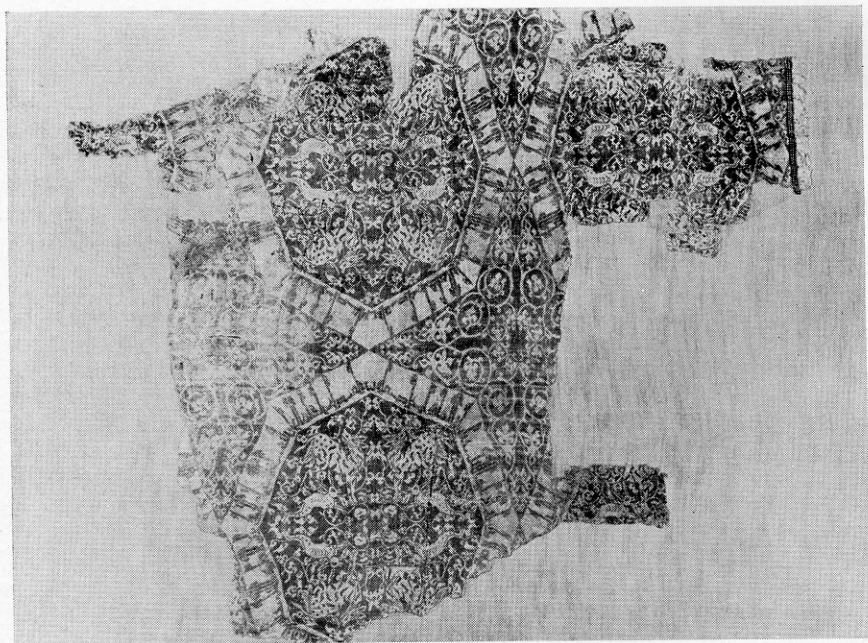
<sup>4</sup>G. Mack, *Paul Cézanne*, New York, 1935, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup>C. Sterling in *Catalogue, Exposition Cézanne*, Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 1936, second edition, pp. 124-125, No. 110; L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 210, No. 679.

<sup>6</sup>C. Sterling, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>J. Klein in *The Lillie P. Bliss Collection*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1934, pp. 71-72, No. 67.





SILK BROCADE  
 PERSIAN, TWELFTH CENTURY  
*Acquired through the Octavia W. Bates Fund, 1940*

## A PERSIAN SATIN OF THE SELJUK PERIOD

THROUGH the generosity of the Founders Society (Octavia W. Bates Fund) the Textile Department has acquired a fragment of Seljuk silk of outstanding importance.<sup>1</sup>

As in the case of many other Seljuk fabrics that have appeared on the art market within the last ten years, it was found in a grave near Rayy (Rhages). The piece is all the more welcome because it falls in with the other specimens of this period in our collection.<sup>2</sup>

At a first glance the design looks like a combination of the two main systems of Islamic ornament, the geometric and the biomorphic. Closer examination reduces the floral ornament of the field to a pure abstraction, while the geometric sturdiness of the octagons is abrogated by their flexibility, caused by the fact that the border, with its as yet undeciphered inscription in sparsely foliated cufic, is hardly differentiated from the background. Within this frame, against a thicket of leafy scrolls, are four pairs of animals, confronted and feet to feet. A leaping hare screams in terror, a big spotted deer looks back startled at some unseen danger, a wild beast lurking or a hunter approaching.

Neither photograph nor description can do justice to the delicate beauty of the colors, wefts of rose-golden tan and palest blue and warps which change from pure white to ivory. In technical interest the fabric equals the aesthetic pleasure. The wefts are brocaded; the ground and inscription, linen-bound, the pattern and background of the inscription, satin-woven. It appears to be an experiment in a novel technique: the elaborate design was woven sideways so that the satin warp threads appear horizontally rather than vertically, probably in order to obtain additional softness. A fragment of the end of run is preserved, two white lines on blue ground and a band of white satin with vestiges of a warp fringe. Finishing lines are seldom found in European textiles; in the Orient they are used when the fabric is woven for a special purpose, as in this case for a tomb cover.

Almost with a shock we remember that this delightful fabric was created in the shadow of the impending horrors of Genghiz Khan's invasion. Its very butterfly-wing quality brings to mind the sweetness of life lost forever.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

<sup>1</sup>Accession number: 40.139. Height: about 19 inches; Width: about 22 inches, irregular. Height of the octagon: 10¾ inches; Width of the octagon: 9 inches.

<sup>2</sup>Described in *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, vol. XV, 1935, p. 41, and vol. XVI, 1936, p. 28.

## Museum Notes

SEVERAL IMPORTANT WORKS of art from the museum collection have recently been on loan in various exhibitions throughout the country. The life-size bronze *Assunta* by Georg Kolbe was included in a November exhibition at the Cincinnati Modern Arts Society, while Joseph Badger's *Portrait of John Adams* was borrowed from October through December for the Carnegie Institute's annual show at Pittsburgh. Van Gogh's *Self-portrait* was also lent during November to an exhibition organized for British Relief at the Art Gallery of Toronto, and just returned from the Baltimore Museum of Art is the twelfth century South French stone figure of an *Apostle*. Breughel's *Wedding Dance* is once again back at the Museum after having been exhibited throughout the summer at the San Francisco Fair and later at the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego.

WITH THE DISRUPTION of European life, the Institute's publication, *THE ART QUARTERLY*, becomes increasingly important, for it is now one of very few magazines left in the world devoted to the serious study of the arts. Since its beginning in 1938, the *QUARTERLY* has had as its editorial policy the publishing of readable, scholarly articles on all phases of art history, but it has given most attention to the study of works of art in this country, both those brought here from elsewhere and those of American origin.

Outstanding among its contributions to the sound study of American art are the biographical articles and catalogues of the work of American artists, in which, we feel, the magazine has been able to do an important pioneering work. Among these catalogues are those of John Wesley Jarvis, William Page, Charles Willson Peale, John Hesselius, Edward Greene Malbone, Joseph Wood, and Henry Inman. But *THE ART QUARTERLY* will, however, be forced to discontinue publishing these catalogues in the future unless an increased subscription list enables it to meet the extra expense of printing them. Consequently the Institute urges its friends and members who have not subscribed to do so, beginning with the appearance of Volume IV, Number 1, after Christmas, and it suggests to subscribers that a subscription given to someone who does not now see the magazine is an excellent way to help forward a serious interest in the fine arts in this country. The price is \$4.00 per year.

# Calendar of Events For January

## EXHIBITIONS

January 3 through February 2: *Modern Paintings from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

December 31 through January 31: *Designs for the Ballet, from the Museum of Modern Art, New York.* (Alger House.)

## TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the Museum Staff in cooperation with the Archaeological Society of Detroit and the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall of the Art Institute. Admission free.

January 7: *Fantastic Art*, by Francis W. Robinson, Curator of European Art.

January 14: *Masterpieces of Italian Art in the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, by Dr. Alfred M. Frankfurter, Editor of "Art News."

January 21: *Cézanne and His Influence*, by John S. Newberry, Curator of Alger House.

January 28: Archaeological Society.

## THURSDAY EVENING COURSE

Given by Joyce Black Gnau on *Homes, Past and Present* at 8:30. Admission free.

January 9: *Homes, Ancient and Modern.*

January 16: *A Mediaeval Castle and a Renaissance Palace.*

January 23: *Palace and Cottage in the 17th Century.*

January 30: *18th Century French Furnishings.*

## FRIDAY AFTERNOON COURSE

Given by Adele Coulin Weibel on *Islamic Art* at 3:30.

January 10: *The Historic Background of Islamic Art—the Mosque.*

January 17: *The Caliphate—Arab Book-Painting.*

January 24: *The Age of the Crusades—Seljuk Pottery and Textiles.*

January 31: *The Mongol Invasions—Shah-Name, the National Epic.*

## FRIDAY EVENING COURSE

Given by Marion Leland Heath on *Art Travels in Mexico and Peru* at 8:30. Admission free.

January 10: *Rivera's Painting in Mexico and Detroit.*

January 17: *Pyramids of Old Mexico.*

January 24: *Mayan Cities in Guatemala.*

January 31: *The Mayans in Yucatan.*

## SATURDAY EVENING RADIO TALKS

Given by John D. Morse on *The Human Side of Art* each Saturday evening over Station WJW at 7:45 throughout January.

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON TALKS

Given at 2:30 in the galleries, where chairs are provided.

January 5: *Mediaeval Sculpture.*

January 12: *Modern Art.*

January 19: *Raphael.*

January 26: *The French Impressionists.*

## HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue at Kirby, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 1 to 5 and 7 to 10; Wednesday, 1 to 5; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Alger House Museum, 32 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe Farms, a branch museum for Italian Renaissance Art and temporary exhibitions, is open free daily except Mondays from 1 to 5. Telephones: Detroit Institute of Arts, COLUMBIA 0360; Alger House Museum, TUXEDO 2-3888; Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society, COLUMBIA 4274.