

## **IN THE COUNTRY OF WHITE GOLD A PRIVATE COLLECTION OF MEISSEN PORCELAIN**

**Musée Ariana, Geneva**

from 29 April to 27 September 1999

**On 23 January 1710, Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, announced proudly in a decree addressed to the chancelleries of Europe that his Meissen manufactory would be able to produce henceforth porcelain comparable, or even superior, to that of China. After more than a century and a half of trial and error and experimentation, the West had unravelled at last the secret of white gold. Served by highly skilled artists, the Meissen factory was to make a decisive contribution to shaping the aesthetic universe of European porcelain in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.**

**The invention of porcelain** in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe constituted an economic and artistic phenomenon whose importance can nowadays no longer be fully appreciated. The new material was to have a revolutionary effect both on tableware and on small-scale sculpture, creating a veritable furore within the ranks of the European aristocracy.

In the 1720s Johann Gregor Höroldt developed at the **Meissen** factory a range of enamels and a pictorial style which served to emphasize the novel aspect of the precious material. Porcelain wares enabled ceremonial tables to be enriched with vivid colours. In 1731 the sculptor Johann Joachim Kändler was appointed to the factory as master modeller. His training enabled him to utilise the plastic qualities of the new material to create original forms which were not limited to a servile imitation of oriental ceramics or baroque silverware. Kändler's most significant contribution is manifest in the gaily coloured world of the celebrated Meissen figurines.

At Meissen, more than elsewhere, porcelain soon became established as one of the indispensable attributes of wealth and power. And, more significantly, in aristocratic circles it participated in the invention of a **new art of living**. In the latter half of the century, despite drastic measures undertaken by the Saxon authorities, the secret of porcelain manufacture spread to the other German states and across the rest of Europe. Most of the new factories at first sought to imitate the products of Meissen but later introduced their own inventions and styles.

**The Ariana exhibition** features in particular an important group of Meissen porcelain, including tableware and figurines, created between 1725 and 1750. The inclusion in the exhibition of examples from other factories (Höchst, Ludwigsburg, Vienna, Frankenthal, Berlin), allows a further appreciation of the extraordinary development of this new ceramic art in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**The subjects developed** by porcelain artists, whether in painted decoration or in small-scale figures, constitute a lively depiction of the customs and fantasies of the aristocracy of that period. Chinoiserie and Turkish models, the jarring humour of the commedia dell'arte, courtship scenes and genre scenes, all the various facets of a vivid imaginary world are represented in this superb display.

The high quality items on view in this exhibition belong to a private Genevese collection. Thanks to the generous collaboration of the owners, who wish to remain anonymous, these treasures are being displayed in public for the first time.

### **Public visits**

Musical performance during the opening by Nicole Hostettler (harpsichord) and Claude Majeur (flute).

Works by C.P.E. Bach, J.G. Mützel, J. Haydn et J.C.F. Bach.

Public guided visits in French, Sundays 9 and 30 May, 4 July and 12 September at 11 a.m.

Family discovery-visits, upon payment and by inscription, Sundays 9 et 30 May, 4 July and 12 September, from 2 to 4 p.m.

### **Useful Information**

Director of the Musées d'art et d'histoire : Cäsar Menz

Exhibition curator

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Enquiries

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Open every day from 10 a.m to 5 p.m. Closed on Tuesdays.