

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Pair of Candelabra

Pierre Gouthière (French, 1732–1813)

Date 1782

Medium Gilt-bronze mounts and hard-paste porcelain; one vase, Meissen Manufactory, ca. 1720; the other, a later replacement

Dimensions Each: 17 1/8 × 6 7/8 × 6 7/8 in. (43.5 × 17.5 × 17.5 cm)

Credit Line Gift of Sidney R. Knafel, 2016

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Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 28, Boucher Room

Commentary These candelabra, among Gouthière's last commissions for the Duke of Aumont, are a true tour de force. The extremely detailed chasing lends a naturalistic appearance to the swirling ivy and grapevines decorating the vases' shoulders, as well as to the individual pomegranates, pears, and other fruits that spill from the cornucopias that form each candleholder. At the same time, the rough texture of the goats' ridged horns contrasts with the silky appearance of their wool. Gouthière's superb chasing was embellished by his unique gilding techniques, which included *dore au mat*, or matte gilding, that can be seen here on the goat's heads and on the many leaves on the candleholders. What distinguishes these candelabra is the contrast of the bronzes made by Gouthière—whose craftsmanship is comparable to that of a goldsmith—with the simplicity of the white vases. These were considered in the Aumont sale catalogue to be of Meissen porcelain, although they appear in the section titled "old white Japanese porcelain." Regardless of what Aumont knew about the porcelain, he valued these vases highly enough to have commissioned such exquisite mounts for them. These works were included in the exhibition *Pierre Gouthière: Virtuoso Gilder at the French Court.* The candelabra were made in 1782 by Pierre Gouthière, the "celebrated Gouthière," as he was called in his lifetime. Gouthière became a master chaser-gilder in 1758 and by 1765 was gilding pieces in both bronze and silver for the famous silversmith François-Thomas Germain. In 1767, Gouthière was appointed gilder to the king, working for the *Menus-Plaisirs du Roi*, the arm of the royal household that managed the king's personal effects and organized his entertainment, creating decors for theatrical productions and for occasions such as marriages and funerals. Thus began Gouthière's long career in the service of the French court. In addition to Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, Gouthière's clientele included the Count of Artois, the Countess Du Barry, the Duke of Duras, the Duchess of Mazarin, Princess Kinsky, the Marquis of Marigny, the king of Poland, and the Duke of Aumont. The candelabra were commissioned by the Duke of Aumont — among the most important art collectors in eighteenth-century France — shortly before he died on April 15, 1782. The duke's cabinet of curiosities was renowned for its antique marble, mounted porphyry, and oriental porcelain, and the gilt bronzes he commissioned from Gouthière were familiar to connoisseurs of the time. When the Duke of Aumont died, this pair of candelabra (not quite finished) was at the workshop of Gouthière, who completed them just in time for the memorable sale of the duke's estate, which started on December 12, 1782. Each piece in the sale, including these candelabra, was described in the sale catalogue, which was written by the merchant of luxury goods Philippe-François Julliot (1727–1794) and the painter Alexandre-Joseph Paillet (1743–1814). The catalogue specifies that "all the works [by Gouthière] are indicated at the ends of the entries by the initial letter G." This pair (lot 148) is attributed to Gouthière and described as being of "pleasing shape." Julliot and Paillet added that the gilt-bronze mounts were of "distinctive refined taste." This refers to the characteristic style of the celebrated architect François-Joseph Bélanger (1744–1818), who was responsible for their design.

