

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Great Bustard

Johann Gottlieb Kirchner (German, 1706–1768)

Date 1732

Medium Hard-paste porcelain

Dimensions 33 × 17 × 11 1/4 in. (83.8 × 43.2 × 28.6 cm)

Credit Line Gift of Henry H. Arnhold, 2013

Accession Number 2013.9.01

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 17, Garden Court

Commentary One of the most ambitious projects undertaken at the Meissen Porcelain Manufactory was a porcelain menagerie of life-size animals and birds conceived as interior decoration for the Japanese Palace, a small pleasure palace near Dresden acquired by August II, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, to display his vast collection of porcelain. Several hundred animals and birds were requested, but fewer than three hundred were successfully fired before the project was abandoned. The Great Bustard was designed by Johann Gottlieb Kirchner, the director of the modeling studio at Meissen in the early 1730s. With its head gracefully bent back over its wing, the bird is supported by a tree trunk covered with oak branches, leaves, and acorns. To mold and fire a figure of this size was a technical tour de force, and most of the sculptures have a number of firing cracks produced in the kiln, as does this one. The animals and birds were originally decorated with oil paints. These were later removed from most of the sculptures, including the Great Bustard. Source: Vignon, Charlotte. *The Frick Collection Decorative Arts Handbook*. New York: The Frick Collection/Scala, 2015., This rare flower-covered Meissen vase with scenes after the painter Jean-Antoine Watteau and French gilded mounts exemplifies the cosmopolitanism of eighteenth-century decorative arts. Based on Chinese designs, the floral-covered style of the piece was introduced in 1739 by the Meissen model master Johann Joachim Käendler. The signature overlaying bed of flowers was made by individually attaching pieces to a mold and painting enamel over the paste. The blue petals and yellow-ochre centers may be forget-me-nots. On either side of the vase, the flowers surround reserves painted with *fête champêtre* scenes after a group of Watteau engravings purchased by the Meissen manufactory in 1741. Porcelain with Watteau scenes quickly became so popular, particularly in France, that by 1744 the factory employed eleven “Watteau-painters.” The French predilection for Meissen, often described as porcelain de Saxe by contemporaries, began in the 1720s and was largely facilitated by the *marchands merciers*, dealers of luxury objects. For foreign or precious objects — such as Meissen and Chinese porcelain, Oriental lacquer, papier-mâché, or petrified wood — *marchands merciers* often commissioned bronze makers to fit pieces with mounts. Here, gilt-bronze c-scrolls, roses, and foliage wrap around the rim, extend into looped arms, and encase the central vase, transforming the piece into an object of display for a console table, mantelpiece, or commode. A pair of closely related, smaller vases is at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California.