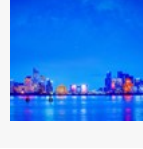


Exhibition dazzles with collection of ancient Western silver vessels



By Wu Huixin

© 14:27 UTC+8, 2023-03-17



Hangzhou City



A German gold-gilded silver saltcellar made in 1900, copying the "Saliera" from Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571)

An extraordinary exhibition showcasing 80 sets of Western silver vessels from the 18th to the 20th centuries is currently underway at the Hangzhou Museum, running until July 16.

The dazzling collection offers an elegant glimpse into a bygone era and a well-rounded picture of luxury life in Europe. These vessels are on loan from Hong Kong-based Liang Yi Museum, one of the largest private museums collecting Chinese furniture, Western bejeweled crafts and metal antiques.

This is the first time such Western silver crafts have been introduced in Hangzhou. Previously, citizens could only learn about the ornate vessels used by aristocratic families from Western television series. Now, they can have a closer look at these real antiques.

The exhibition is categorized into five sections, showcasing the heritage, design and craftsmanship of silver, exploring the changing aesthetics of crafts, and tracing how they function as a symbol of aristocrats.

Silver has long been used in both East and West, both as a type of currency and as a medium for extraordinary workmanship. This precious material has been praised for its flexible and durable properties, as well as its intrinsic value. Aristocrats have long had a tradition of commissioning silver to mark important occasions such as weddings, births and deaths.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is a silver fruit basket made in 1827. The basket features smooth lines and ornate designs with grape and vine patterns. The piece is a wedding gift from William Beauclerk, the ninth Duke of St Albans, given to his wife Harriet Mellon. It still gleams in the light, having been preserved for centuries. The silversmith even engraved a bacon pattern at the bottom, which means the couple genuinely had true, deep love.

Centuries ago, aristocrats even used exquisite metal vessels to keep condiments, which can be evidenced from a German gold-gilded silver salt cellar made in 1900, copying the "Saliera" from Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571). This exhibited intricate sculpture depicts a male figure representing the sea and a female figure that represents the earth with their legs entwined. A small vessel meant to hold salt is placed next to the male figure, and a temple-shaped box for pepper is placed next to the female figure.



French enameled crane-shaped twin candelabra

Cellini made "Saliera" for Francis I of France in Vienna. "Saliera" is the only remaining work of precious metal that can be reliably attributed to Cellini. The original work is housed at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna. The copy in Hangzhou shows the sculptor's long-lasting influence on art.

In China, silver has long been in use. The booming trade along the Maritime Silk Road built a bridge for cultural exchanges in ancient times. Centuries ago, the chinoiserie style was popularized in Europe thanks to a rise in trade with China. Decorative arts, garden designs and daily utensils, which were thought to be distinctively Chinese, were characterized by exuberant, asymmetrical ornaments and patterns with distinctive Chinese elements.

Catering to European customers, Chinese craftspeople produced a large number of products that integrated Chinese elements with Western designs, including the metal handicrafts showcased in this exhibition. A pair of French enameled crane-shaped twin candelabra was believed made by Chinese craftspeople in the 18th century and then exported to Europe. The candelabra features a distinctive chinoiserie style that blends Chinese traditional auspicious crane designs with Western aesthetics. During that time, handicrafts from China were a luxury, only affordable to the upper class.

Before the 15th century, long distances and the scarcity of Chinese commodities made Europeans fantasize about China. Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant and traveler, left behind a detailed chronicle of his experiences in China's Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). His description of China as a prosperous country reportedly deepened Westerners' yearning for the East. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a large quantity of Chinese products was transported to the West along the Maritime Silk Road, which, in return, gave a boost to the chinoiserie trend in Europe.



The basket features smooth lines and ornate design with grape and vine patterns.

Exhibition info:

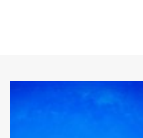
Date: Through July 16, closed on Mondays

Admission: Free

Address: 18 Liangdaoshan

粮道山18号

Source: SHINE Editor: Su Yanxian



Hangzhou City