



A GARNITURE OF FIVE VASES PROBABLY PAINTED BY ADAM FRIEDRICH VON LÖWENFINCK (BIALA 1714–1754 HAGUENAU)

Circa: 1735

Meissen, c. 1735

“AR” monograms in underglaze blue

H. 42 cm (16½ in.); 35.5 cm (14 in.); 51.5 cm (20¼ in.); 36 cm (14⅛ in.); 42.5 cm (16¾ in.)

Placed in an alternating order of sizes to create a rising and falling outline, these three covered and two bottle-shaped vases form a symmetrical ensemble known as an “Aufsatz” (lit.: “top set”) or garniture which was usually placed on a mantelpiece or a commode, the lintel of a door or the cornice of a cabinet. Prototypes of these garnitures had been commissioned from Chinese and Japanese porcelain-makers by merchants of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC). Numerous examples found their way into the royal collection of Augustus the Strong (Dresden 1670–1733 Warsaw) and were displayed in the Japanese Palace at Dresden. They served as models for the Meissen porcelain manufactory when it began to produce garnitures with coloured grounds in the seventeen-twenties.

Quatrefoil reserves were excepted on both display sides of the vases for the depiction of landscape or figural décors. During the early years of the manufactory these mostly contained “Chinese” scenes designed by Johann Gregorius Höroldt (Jena 1696–1775 Meissen) while a little later, they would also include Kauffahrtei scenes and, eventually, gallant couples in parkland settings. These subjects were mostly based on copperplate engravings of works by French Rococo painters.

The five vases with a purple ground represent both the consummate craftsmanship and the superb artistic quality of porcelain painting at the Meissen manufactory during the seventeen-thirties. The Augustus Rex monograms mark them as being intended for the personal use and property of the Elector of Saxony and King of Poland August III (Dresden 1696–1763 Dresden). While the ground is decorated with colourful butterflies and large indianische Blumen on flowering tendrils, the white reserves contain, in varying degrees, landscape décors with bizarre rock formations, trees whipped by the wind or with broken-off branches, harbour scenes with large sailing vessels, or park landscapes with monuments, against which staffage figures including soldiers, amorous couples, riders on horseback, and wayfarers disport themselves. The style of the floral motifs and pictorial décors corresponds both in detail and overall design to the faience décors created by the painter Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck at the faience manufactories in Bayreuth, Fulda, and Höchst, subsequent to the six years the painter spent working at Meissen.

Von Löwenfinck had already attracted attention at the Saxon manufactory for his idiosyncratic style, in which he deviated markedly from the models established by Höroldt, the head of the painting workshop, in both chinoiserie motifs as well as in other figural depictions. The sky is always enlivened with a few grey cirrus clouds in his miniature images, and the use of strong shading renders a strikingly three-dimensional character to other pictorial elements. His figures, occupying the middle ground of the image, can be recognized by their stocky, muscular build with the foreground immersed in dark brown. Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck is regarded as one of the most gifted porcelain and faience painters of the first half of the eighteenth century, an artist who had an enduring and enriching influence on ceramic painting as a whole in the German-speaking countries.

There was hardly any other European royal court at which the representative use of porcelain acquired such dimensions as at the residences of the Kings of Poland and Electors of Saxony in Warsaw and Dresden. Not just the royal porcelain collection, which comprised more than 35 000 pieces, but also the opulent decoration of various castles and palaces in Saxony and Poland with Meissen porcelain provide eloquent witness to the enthusiasm for porcelain of Augustus II in particular.

Here sets of vases played a special role, the more extensive they were the greater their prestige and value, as the monarch always strove to own the most valuable and magnificent art works. For example: for a secondary Saxon residence, the Hubertusburg, Europe's largest hunting lodge, Augustus III had a set of vases made in the Meissen manufactory that comprised nine pieces, decorated with sculptural figures of hunters and painted with hunt scenes, an ensemble that was never matched by any other porcelain manufactory. It was extremely rare for such sets to remain together over the centuries and frequently they were divided up when sold

It can therefore be seen as something of a sensation that it recently proved possible to reunite the present set of vases. Whereas at the exhibition entitled *Phantastische Welten* in the Dresden Zwinger in 2014, which was devoted to the work of the Meissen porcelain painter Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck, only the large lidded vase and the "bottle" vases were to be seen, in summer 2015 the five vases were reunited to recreate the original, axially symmetric arrangement with its emphatic centrality, comprising a magnificent ensemble that would enrich any interior.

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Literature:

Ulrich Pietsch, *Phantastische Welten. Malerei auf Meissener Porzellan und deutschen Fayencen von Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck 1714-1754*, Stuttgart 2014, p. 216-217, cat. no. 131-133. (large covered vase and two “bottle” vases)

