

# ABEGG-STIFTUNG

Media Release, April 2013

## SPECIAL EXHIBITION 2013

### THE PLEASURES OF COLLECTING

### WORKS OF ART AND TEXTILES FROM HISTORIC PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

**28 APRIL TO 10 NOVEMBER 2013**

**OPEN DAILY FROM 2 PM TO 5.30 PM**

*The collection of the Abegg-Stiftung contains numerous textiles and works of applied art that originally belonged to famous private collections of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This exhibition spotlights a selection of these works and names their illustrious previous owners. Collectors of renown such as Albert Figdor, Marczell von Nemes, Alfred Pringsheim and Edmond de Rothschild are presented in both words and pictures so that visitors can relive the passion that drove them and learn more about the mixed fortunes of their collections.*

The works of art exhibited are grouped according to origin. Each of the ten sections is devoted to a different historic private collection and so reflects each collector's sometimes highly eclectic interests. These range from exquisite gold- and silverware and extravagant collectibles from the Renaissance and Baroque eras, objects made of rock crystal and Strasbourg faience painted with flowers and chinoiseries to Late Antique tapestries from Egypt as well as European and Ottoman weavings and embroideries dating from the fifteenth to eighteenth century. The exhibition relates the history of the works themselves and attempts to reconstruct how and why they changed hands over the decades. The history of a single object in many cases is closely tied to the biography and fate of its collector.

#### **MOVING STORIES**

Numerous private collections belonging to major European art collectors were dispersed and sold in the course of the twentieth century. When the collections belonging to Albert Figdor (1843–1927) in Vienna and Marczell von Nemes (1866–1930) in Munich came under the hammer following their respective deaths, the auctions were major events on the art market. Werner Abegg (1903–1984) managed to purchase some of the bronze vessels and textiles that had once belonged to these collections from two different art dealers in 1930 and 1931. Also among the former owners, however, were German and Austrian Jews expropriated by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. In several cases, their heirs were able to have at least some of the treasures restored to them after the Second World War. Some families then decided to sell parts of the collection on the art market. While in many cases they were motivated by financial necessity, in others it was the descendants' lack of interest that led to the collections' dispersal. By no means the least of the reasons why the American art market flourished in the 1950s was the fact that so many major European dealers had fled there. Their sales of these

works gave a younger generation of art collectors a chance to build up collections of their own. Werner Abegg had been living in New York since 1940. Starting around 1950, he and his wife Margaret (1901–1999) repeatedly acquired works of a very high quality from European collections.

#### **GOLD- AND SILVERWARE FROM THE PRINGSHEIM COLLECTION**

The objects from the Pringsheim Collection form the centrepiece of the exhibition. What makes these silver gilt vessels from the sixteenth and seventeenth century so remarkable is the artfulness of their engraved and chased decoration. A mathematics professor and patron of the arts with Jewish roots and father-in-law of Thomas Mann, Alfred Pringsheim (1850–1941) was a highly regarded member of Munich society until the Nazis seized power. The ninety-six exquisite examples of goldsmithing in his possession were seized by the Gestapo in 1938 and restored to his heirs only several years after the end of the Second World War. In 1953 the family exported them to the United States where they were sold on the art market. Werner and Margaret Abegg purchased the vessels shown here in New York in 1956 and 1960. These five objects constitute the largest group of gold- and silverware from the Pringsheim Collection to have been preserved in a public or private collection anywhere. In recognition of the importance of this group of works, a book is being published to coincide with the exhibition in which readers can learn more about how the Pringsheim Collection of gold- and silverware came into being, its eventful history and eventual dispersal.

#### **OTTOMAN TEXTILES**

Alongside the Late Antique tapestry weavings and fifteenth-century Italian velvets, visitors can also admire some magnificent silks from the Ottoman Empire. With their gorgeous colours and exotic patterns, they continue to fascinate even today. Many of them came from the collections of Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934) and Louis Besselièvre (1862–1914), a collector scarcely known today who ran a textile printing factory in France. Part of the Rothschild Collection of textiles was sold through a London gallery in 1980. The silks that the Abegg-Stiftung purchased on that occasion now count among the highlights of the collection. The textiles from the Besselièvre Collection, by contrast, were purchased individually on the art market over a period of several years after they had passed through other private collections.

#### **ARTFUL «NEEDLE-PAINTING»**

The exhibition also features an especially finely worked embroidery with a wealth of imaginative detail on which to feast the eyes. This fine linen cloth – possibly a tablecloth – is embellished with a broad border frieze made up of little hunting scenes from all corners of the world playfully linked together by meandering tendrils. This embroidery dating from the seventeenth century once belonged to the Swiss textile manufacturer Leopold Iklé (1838–1922), most of whose collection can now be admired at the Textile Museum in St. Gallen. Later generations of the Iklé family also collected textiles and it is thanks to them that parts of Leopold Iklé's collection found their way onto the art market at the close of the twentieth century.

#### **STRASBOURG FAIENCE**

Another important mainstay of the exhibition is that formed by the collection of eighteenth-century Strasbourg faience that once belonged to the Bernese art dealer and collector Jürg Stuker (1914–1988), who on his death bequeathed it to Werner and Margaret Abegg. The items on show include tableware and three-dimensional showpieces from the Hannong Manufactory made in the period from 1745 to the 1770s, among them a number of platters and plates decorated with painted flowers and chinoiserie. The ensemble comprising sixty-five items was recently conserved, analysed and researched and the results of that work summarized in a publication.

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