

Corinne Thépaut-Cabasset: The *Mouche*, beauty patch. Innovation, name and reputation.

The Object in focus:

Meissen porcelain figure group of children imitating adults.

Victoria and Albert Museum: museum n° C.984-1919

Image reference 2010EC4954

This figure group of hard-paste porcelain (H. 15 cm), painted in enamels and gilt, was made in Meissen (Germany) in about 1760-65. This group was probably modeled ca. 1758 by Johann Joachim Kändler (1706-1775) for the porcelain factory after the print by François-Bernard Lépicié (1698-1755). The three figures are taken from Lépicié after Coypel's larger picture where other children are playing at dressing up and making up as adults.

A boy dressed as a gallant is wearing a waistcoat in puce-coloured (red) fabric with a lozenge pattern. He is approaching a girl at her toilette. The nude girl is seated on a rococo chair, is holding a mirror while putting a patch or rouge on her face. Behind her a girl dressed as a maid standing on a stool places a wreath of flowers on her head. On a rococo flowered base, sits a box containing various bottles and boxes for body care and make up. An opened patch box is lying next to the chair.

This scene is clearly a satire about fashion and fashionable accessories such as beauty patches.

Bibliographic references:

Berling, K., Meissner Porzellan und seine Geschichte, Leipzig, 1900, p. 197.

1765 Price List: "Groupe von 3 Kinders mit Galenterie-Kästel. 18 Thlr. 18 Gr."

Related objects:

Jeu d'enfants. Print made by François-Bernard Lépicié (1698-1755), after a painting by Charles-Antoine Coypel (1694-1752).

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des estampes et de la photographie, AA-4 (COYPEL, CHARLES-ANTOINE).

Image reference: NQ-C-040756

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The print is announced by the *Mercure de France* in november 1731:

"On vient de mettre en vente une très belle estampe en large, qui est extrêmement recherchée et qui mérite de l'être ; elle est gravée par M. Lépicié, d'après un tableau du cabinet de M. Fagon, conseiller d'Etat, peint par M. Coypel. Cette ingénieuse composition représente un nombre d'enfants, qui devant et autour d'une toilette dressée, se parent des hardes, des nippes et des ajustements de leurs parents qu'ils ont pu attraper, en imitant avec beaucoup de grâce, de naïveté, les avis et les manières des grandes personnes. Ce joli badinage, dans lequel les Modes du temps sont exactement observées, ont donné lieu à ces quatre vers qu'on lit au bas de l'estampe:

"De la Mode et de ses boutades,
Ce jeu d'enfant rend les excès,
Ces atours, malgré leur succès,
Sont bien souvent des Mascarades."

Le Matin. La dame à sa toilette. Print made by Gilles-Edmé Petit (1694-1760) after a painting by François Boucher (1703-1770).

London, The British Museum, Prints and Drawings, n° 1873,0712.272

Image reference: AN362479001

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Patch Box. Charles's Gouyn porcelain factory, London, ca. 1749-1754.

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, n° 414:277-1885

Image reference: 2010EC4369

L'art de la coiffure des dames françaises, avec des estampes..., 1768-1770, by Legros de Rumigny (18th century).

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.126a-e

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Marquise Dangeau à sa toilette. Print made by Antoine Trouvain (1656-1708).

Versailles, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, invgravures 2189

Image reference: 75-001117

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The patch: fashion and creativity in the service of beauty.

One of the many innovations of modern times to enhance personal beauty and decorate the body is the patch. A patch was a small bit of silk taffeta or black velvet that women, and men, put on their faces in the 17th and 18th centuries in order to hide some imperfection or to simply embellish their skin and to make their complexion appear whiter.¹

Tradeswomen, who were called patch makers (*faiseuses de mouches*), were responsible for creating these devices of beauty and seduction. Patches were available at various prices for all types of people. There were several different sorts with different purposes: those that softened the eyes, those that beautified the face or those that were to be placed on the forehead or on the breast. In the work entitled *La faiseuse de mouches*, of 1661, the author wrote that the patch "is never in vain, provided that an adept hand knows just how to put it to good use."

Patches became true emblems of coquetry. The Church attacked the use of patches, which, to them, were the very essence of vanity. In his dictionary of 1690, Antoine Furetière warns that the "sanctimonious cry out loudly against patches as a sign of great coquettishness".²

The name and the reputation.

¹ Diderot & d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire des arts et métiers*, 1751, T. X.

² Furetière, Antoine, *Dictionnaire universel de tous les mots français, tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts...*, La Haye, A. et R. Leers, 1690.

It is thanks to the afore-mentioned long prose poem of 1661 that the patch makers became a literary entity. In this work, the patch is compared to a bee and a woman's face to the flower upon which it alights. This work claimed that a patch could make a woman irresistible, and if the object of her desire "is not under her spell today, he will be tomorrow. Even if he is not interested or feigns indifference, in the end he will be stung by the patch".

Patches were made in different sizes and designs and thus had various names. Furetière, author of the great dictionary, tells us that "those that are cut lengthwise are called *assassins*".

The great rage of the era in a country governed by the laws of gallantry, the patch tempted the onlooker and gave the face a unique expression. Placed close to the eye, is "the passionate one"; at the corner of the mouth, "the strumpet"; upon the lip, "the coquette"; on the nose "the shameless"; on the forehead, "the majestic"; in the middle of the cheek, "the gallant" and those placed in the crease of the cheek when one laughed were "the light-hearted." Yet others were called "the discreet" and "the virtuous".

The size of the patch varied according to the desired effect. Long patches were used when going to a ball. These were called "ball patches" or "court patches" and, because of their large size, they could be seen from afar and thus made a stronger impression in the candlelight. The ones called "petites" or "marvellous coquettes" were worn during the day, for celebrations and collations. *La faiseuse de mouches* calls these "mouches de ruelle" and recommended that, in order to seduce the object of one's desire, a woman should wear all of these patches at the same time.

In the middle of the 18th century a treatise on cosmetics and body care appeared, the *Traité des odeurs*, by a certain Dejean who was a distiller in Paris.³ He mentions the patch as "the finishing touch of one's toilette". As such, patches were either used to further enhance a pretty complexion or to hide unsightly blemishes. Small, medium or large ... round, oval or crescent-shaped, knowing the art of just how to place them is what shows them off to their best advantage.⁴

The patch was an artifice that depended on skill in the art of making and in the use of the proper tools because a good cut depended on these two factors. The best patch maker was the one who had the best made dies that cut cleanly. The hand had to be firm and deft and have as many dies as necessary to make a wide variety of styles and sizes. The good preparation was another guarantee of high quality patches and that only new, very black taffeta that had been well gummed should be used. This prevented the loose threads from separating from the patch after it was cut and avoided lines when ironed or put under the calender press. Nevertheless, Dejean states that "these procedures are easy and every

³ M. Dejean, *Traité des odeurs, Suite du traité de la distillation*, Paris, Les libraires associés, 1777, Chap. XLV, p. 414-415.

⁴ Print in Legros de Rumigny, *L'art de la coiffure des dames françaises, avec des estampes, où sont représentées les têtes coiffées, gravées sur les dessins originaux de mes accommodages, avec le traité en abrégé d'entretenir & conserver les cheveux naturels*, Paris, Antoine Boudet, 1768-1770. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004.126a-e.

woman who is willing to devote a few minutes' time can succeed. There are, however, those who have a reputation for making better patches than others and this fame contributes to their success; the others who make less high quality goods do so because of the poorer quality of their tools rather than because of their workmanship".

The patch maker became widely known by the general public and was a great publicity tool for the sale of patches. In 1692, the *Livre commode des adresses de Paris* indicated the best maker of patches in the rue Saint-Denis « *A la perle des mouches* ». ⁵

Indispensable accessory for beauty, the famous patch was mentioned by Charles Perrault in the fairytale in which Cinderella prepares her sisters for the ball given by the king. She sends someone to bring the "good hairdresser" and "to buy patches from the good maker of patches". ⁶

The patch box: objet d'art, objet de vertu, and object of the goldsmith's art.

Patches were "ornaments" that could be carefully stored and saved in patch boxes that became veritable works of art created by leading goldsmiths of the day ⁷ and, as such, they were often quite costly. ⁸ These expensive objects were often given as gifts to women and were also used in high society as a wedding present for the future bride. ⁹ They might also be diplomatic gifts. In 1714, Louis XIV gave three gold patch boxes to the Queen of Spain who was passing through France on route to the Iberian Peninsula. ¹⁰

Flat boxes, round, oval or rectangular, patch boxes were made in gold, ¹¹ silver, ¹² turtleshell, ¹³ inlaid horn, ¹⁴ ivory, porcelain. ¹⁵ Some boxes were also invented to hold both patches and rouge. Some others were of smaller size to fit in one's pocket, and/or bag. ¹⁶ The interior of the box contained a small mirror, ¹⁷ and two lidded compartments, one for the rouge and the other for the patch. ¹⁸ These boxes were sold by goldsmiths, jewellers and mercers,

⁵ Blégny, Nicolas de, *Livre commode des adresses de Paris pour 1692 par Abraham du Pradel*, Edouard Fournier éd., Paris, Paul Daffis, 1878, T.II.

⁶ Perrault, Charles, « Cendrillon », *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*, Paris, 1697.

⁷ See *Jean Ducrollay Album*, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Prints and Drawings, n° E.897:21-1988.

⁸ Havard, Henry, *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement et de la décoration depuis le XIII^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris, Maison Quantin, 1887-1890 ; Nocq, Henri, et Dreyfus, Carle, *Tabatières, boîtes et étuis. Orfèvrerie de Paris XVIII^e siècle et début du XIX^e siècle des collections du musée du Louvre*, Paris, 1930 ; Snowman, Kenneth A., *Eighteenth century gold boxes of Europe*, London, Faber and Faber, 1966.

⁹ *Etat de la corbeille de mariage de Madame la dauphine en 1745 ; Etat de la corbeille de mariage de Marie-Josèphe de Saxe*, 9 février 1747, Paris, Archives nationales, O/1/3252.

¹⁰ *Recueil des présents du roi*, Paris, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, MD France 2037.

¹¹ See Patch box, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° LOAN:GILBERT.954:1, 2-2008.

¹² See *Calverley Toilet Service*, London, 1683-1684, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° 240F&O-1879.

¹³ See Patch box, England, 1775-1800, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° M.116:1, 2-1960.

¹⁴ See Patch box, France, first half 18th century, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° 807:1-1864.

¹⁵ See Patch box, Charles Gouyn's Factory London, ca. 1749-1754, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° 414:277-1885.

¹⁶ See Patch box, Meissen, mid 18th century, London, Victoria and Albert Museum n° 939-1882.

¹⁷ Maze-Sencier, Alphonse, *Le Livre des collectionneurs*, Paris, Librairie Renouard, 1885, p. 770

¹⁸ See Patch box, A-N. Cousinet, 1773-1774, Paris, musée du Louvre, n° inv. OA8010.

marchands merciers, such as Lazare Duvaux, at whose shop Madame de Pompadour made numerous purchases, among them patch boxes.¹⁹

Images of the patch box are found in engravings, fashion plates, and in portraits of Europe's elite in the 17th and 18th centuries.²⁰ The patch box was part of men's and women's adornment and had place of honour on the dressing table, and the morning toilette,²¹ among paste and powder boxes, *fards*, rouge, makeup, combs, brushes and mirrors, all elements that were essential to fashion, beauty and social and cultural standing.²²

¹⁹ Courajod, Louis, *Livre-Journal de Lazare Duvaux marchand bijoutier ordinaire du roi, 1748-1758*, 2 vol., Paris, De Nobele, 1965.

²⁰ Antoine Trouvain, *Madame la marquise Dangeau à sa toilette*, Versailles, musée des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, invgratures 2189.

²¹ Gilles-Edmé Petit, after François Boucher, *Le Matin, La dame à sa toilette*, 1745-1760, London, The British Museum, Prints and Drawings 1873, 0712.272.

²² Exhibition event: *Boîtes en or et objets de vertu au XVIIIe siècle*, musée Cognacq-Jay, 8 rue Elzévir 75003 Paris, from Tuesday to Sunday until 6 May 2012. (Exhibition Catalogue).

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