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Vanities ART OF THE DRESSING TABLE



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JANE ADLIN

With contributions from LORI ZABAR



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

Director's NOTE

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Front cover: Armand-Albert Rateau (French, 1882–1938), *Dressing table*, ca. 1925 (see fig. 54, p. 41)
Back cover: detail of *Cosmetics stand*, Japanese, 19th century (see fig. 46, p. 36)
Inside front cover: detail of George Barbier (French, 1882–1932), *Le Bonheur du jour; ou, Les Graces à la mode*, 1924 (see fig. 56, p. 43)

Contributors: Jane Adlin (JA), associate curator; Jared Goss (JG), associate curator; and Lori Zabar (LZ), research assistant, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art

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THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM'S vast collections include a seemingly infinite variety of objects, some more familiar than others. Among these is the dressing table, or vanity, to which this issue of the *Bulletin* is dedicated. This volume and the exhibition it accompanies, "Vanities: Art of the Dressing Table," provide an overview of the origins and development of the dressing table from antiquity to the present day. What emerges is a refreshing and surprising cross section of works from the Museum's curatorial departments, including an Egyptian storage box, a nineteenth-century Japanese cosmetics stand, and a streamlined Jazz Age vanity by noted American designer Norman Bel Geddes, to name just a few.

Fine furnishings and other accoutrements designed specifically for men and women to use while preparing to dress have been created throughout the centuries, from utilitarian pieces to serve our most basic domestic needs to matchless luxury objects that are also powerful statements about social class and status. Among the standouts in the Museum's collections is a combination table by Martin Carlin, a German-born cabinetmaker active in Paris in the late eighteenth century, just as the dressing table reached the apogee of its evolution as a marker of social ascendance. The Carlin table is one of many splendid gifts to the Museum from Jayne Wrightsman that demonstrate her profound knowledge of and devotion to the decorative arts of eighteenth-century France. Armand-Albert Rateau's dressing table, a triumph of French Art Deco elegance, is another superb example of the variety of this furniture form. To those important pieces we can now add a dressing table that allows us to update the story of the vanity for the present day: a starkly beautiful stone, steel, and marble ensemble, by Korean artist Byung Hoon Choi, whose echoes of ancient Korean tomb architecture underscore some of the complex themes traditionally associated with the vanity and elucidated in both the exhibition and the *Bulletin*.

"Vanities: Art of the Dressing Table" brings to fruition the longtime vision of Jane Adlin, associate curator in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art. She was aided by a number of curators, conservators, and outside scholars who contributed significant findings about the furniture as well as the many equally elaborate accessories. We are also grateful to Lori Zabar, research assistant in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, who provided critical assistance at many stages of the project.

Thomas P. Campbell
DIRECTOR, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Vanities ART OF THE DRESSING TABLE

FEW TYPES OF FURNITURE reveal more about our leisure pursuits, popular taste, and changing social customs than the dressing table, or vanity. More than a work of exquisite craftsmanship and design, the dressing table is capable of making broad statements about class and culture, and as a symbol it is often wrapped up with notions of beauty, love, and vanity itself. The age-old impulse to be attractive or fashionable informs and animates much of the dressing table's lengthy design history, as it does many of the objects associated with the toilette, the ritual in which the dressing table reached new heights of elegance and sophistication.

The history of the vanity begins, arguably, not with a table but a box. From ancient times and across many cultures, ornate boxes have been crafted to hold a variety of beautifying paraphernalia, including jars for cosmetics, flasks for rare perfumes and exotic oils, implements for applying makeup, and mirrors. Egyptian storage boxes, for example, were made from an array of materials—wood, alabaster, ivory, bone, bronze, faience, or pottery—and were embellished with inlaid woods and gold or

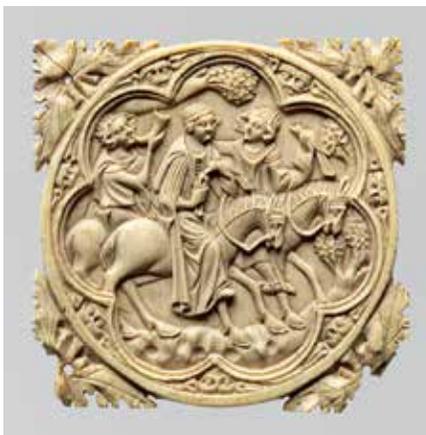
1

Cosmetic box of the Cupbearer Kameni.
Egyptian, Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 12, reign of Amenemhat IV, ca. 1814–1805 B.C. Cedar, with ebony and ivory veneer and silver mounting; 8 x 7 x 11 ¼ in. (20.3 x 17.7 x 28.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1926 (26.7.1438)



2

Mirror with a support in the form of a draped woman. Greek, Classical, mid-5th century B.C. Bronze; H. 16 in. (40.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Walter C. Baker, 1971 (1972.118.78)



3

Mirror case with a falconing party. French, 1330–60. Ivory; overall, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4} \times \frac{3}{8}$ in. (9.5 x 9.5 x 1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.248)



4

Box with floral decoration. Korean, Joseon dynasty (1392–1910), 18th century. Lacquer with mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell inlay; $12\frac{3}{8} \times 8 \times 7\frac{3}{4}$ in. (32.1 x 20.3 x 19.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Promised Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving (L.1996.47.132)

painted with sophisticated geometric patterns; they were intended both for display and as signifiers of rank. A cedar box (fig. 1) excavated from the tomb of Reniseneb by Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon in 1910 was a storage container for ointments, face paints, perfumes, and other potions; a mirror and four stone ointment jars were found nearby and are presumed to have belonged in it. The incised decoration on the front shows the Cupbearer Kementi (who served drinks at the royal table, a position of high rank) presenting ointment to the pharaoh, Amenemhat IV. In ancient Greece and Rome, too, portable containers and hand mirrors were the prevalent accessories relied on for the task of self-adornment. Atop this superb bronze mirror from Greece (fig. 2) sits a siren, the feared temptress of ancient mythology and literature, underscoring a theme associated throughout history with some of the objects and rituals related to personal adornment, particularly with regard to women.

The use of cosmetics seems to have diminished in western Europe with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and was not reintroduced until the twelfth century, possibly by returning Crusaders who had learned of them in Byzantium, where old Roman customs persisted. Given this renewed enthusiasm for making oneself up and the lack of any specifically designated furniture or interior space for such activity, accessories became the focus of medieval “vanity,” from ivory combs and intricately carved mirror cases, such as this luxury example with

Unknown artist (Dutch, 17th century). *Lady at Her Toilet*, ca. 1650–60. Oil on canvas; 53 ¼ x 69 ½ in. (135.3 x 176.5 cm). Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Putnam Dana McMillan Fund (71.1)

a falconing party (fig. 3), to caskets, some of which were used to store toiletries or jewelry; those decorated with scenes of courtly love were probably given as courtship gifts. The box form also figured prominently in some Asian customs. During the more than five-hundred-year-long reign of the Joseon dynasty in Korea, for example, highly decorated cosmetic boxes took pride of place and would have adorned the private quarters of an aristocratic woman along with other accessories such as mirrors, decorative screens, and metal-fitted wood boxes (fig. 4).

The shift from boxes or portable cases to the tabletop and, eventually, to a broadly idiomatic form of furniture occurred in tandem with the evolution of the toilette, referring to the process of dressing and making up and the concomitant rituals of personal grooming. The origins of the term “toilette” (or toilet) can be traced to the Middle Ages, when men and women began spreading on a table a *toile* (French for cloth), or *toilettes*, as they became known, when the table was to be used for serving meals, correspondence, and game playing as well as applying cosmetics. For purposes of dressing, the table would typically be draped with a simple cloth that reached to the floor, and a second, more refined cloth (probably of linen) or even a piece of leather was then placed on top, as seen in this seventeenth-century Dutch scene in which a *toilette* has been placed over the floor-length table carpet (fig. 5).

Self-adornment truly came into vogue among the European aristocracy during the Renaissance, and with it the desire for specifically designed accoutrements. At court, ladies-in-waiting to the queen or barbers to the king carried such makeup accessories in small ornamental containers known as *étuis*, whereas the bourgeoisie kept their accessories in small cloth *toilettes*. The portable accessory eventually moved to the tabletop, and the dressing table was, in effect, born. The *toilette*, formerly an



Unknown artist, *Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton*, ca. 1600. Oil on panel; 64 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (164 x 110.5 cm). By kind permission of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, KBE



object, became an activity, one that eventually encompassed not only the act of preparing oneself but also the cosmetics, accessories, clothes, and jewelry that contributed to the appearance of a fashionable man or woman.

This rare example of an Elizabethan portrait of a courtly lady at her ritual toilette (fig. 6) shows Elizabeth Vernon (1572–1655), lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth I, who fell into sharp disfavor after secretly marrying Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, without securing the queen's permission. No doubt the countess's often remarked-upon natural beauty contributed to Elizabeth's ire. Despite the vicissitudes of her position, the countess remained an important member of the ruling elite, and she is shown here surrounded by representations of her enduring social standing, from the ermine-lined crimson robe laid across the dressing stool to the fashionable ruff of silk. The portrait clearly conveys the importance of certain objects and accessories among the upper classes, such as the ivory comb, the jewel box, and not least the jewelry itself, which includes a triple strand of pearls, two necklaces, probably of gold and garnets, and three pendants.

Although the form of the dressing table as we know it today developed throughout Europe beginning in the late seventeenth century, it was in the eighteenth century that the dressing table reached the apex of its role as both a marker of social standing and an object of fine design and craftsmanship. In France, two women in particular

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François Boucher (French, 1703–1770).
*Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de
Pompadour*, 1750. Oil on canvas; 32 x 25 5/8 in.
(81.2 x 64.9 cm). Harvard Art Museums/
Fogg Museum; Bequest of Charles E. Dunlap
(1966.47)



helped shape the narrative of the dressing table: Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764), the highly influential mistress of King Louis XV, and Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), wife of Louis XVI. Both were arbiters of taste, and each in her own day held sway in matters of fashion, art, and design.

Madame de Pompadour popularized the once-private morning ritual of the toilette by sitting at her grand dressing table and receiving guests during the long and engaging process. François Boucher, among the most celebrated artists of the day and a favorite of the marquise, paid homage to his longtime patron's legendary beauty in this portrait (fig. 7), which presents her as a woman in full possession of her youth. Madame de Pompadour's leading position in society is expressed not only by the finery of her low-cut negligee, her customary dress for the toilette, but also by the table bedecked with a number of grand accoutrements. She holds a makeup brush and compact, doubtless for her rouge, and wears a large bracelet with a cameo likeness of Louis XV shown intentionally facing the viewer to signify her status as chief mistress to the king.¹

Louis XV commissioned the building of the small château known as the Petit Trianon for Madame de Pompadour, who died a few years before its completion. The château was later occupied by another famed mistress of the king's, Madame du Barry (1743–1793), and then by Marie Antoinette, who retreated to its private apartments as

8

Georges Jacob (French, 1739–1814), Pierre-Claude Triquet (French, master 1762), and Jean-Baptiste Simon Rode (French, 1735–1799). *Chair*, 1787. Carved beech, caning, and modern upholstery; 33 ½ x 22 ¾ x 21 ½ in. (85.1 x 57.8 x 54.6 cm). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (72.DA.51)



9

Nicolas Henri Jacob (French, 1782?–1871). *Vanity and chair*, ca. 1819. Crystal, verre églomisé, and gilded bronze; 30 ¾ x 48 x 25 ¼ in. (78 x 122 x 64 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (11229OA, OA11230)



an escape from the rigors of court life. This chair, or *fauteuil de toilette* (fig. 8), was part of a larger set of furniture delivered to Versailles in 1787 and intended for the Petit Trianon. Function dictated the chair's design; it includes a swivel mechanism (wood wheels set into the seat frame) and a low back to accommodate servants working on the queen's elaborate makeup and hair, a royal antecedent of today's beauty-parlor or barbershop chairs.

The French dressing table reached new heights of ostentation in this sumptuous vanity set (fig. 9) most likely made for Caroline, the duchesse de Berry (1798–1870) and daughter-in-law of Charles X, for her château at Rosny-sur-Seine. Constructed almost exclusively of cut crystal and gilded bronze, both the chair and the table

William Hogarth (British, 1697–1764). *The Toilette*, from *Marriage A-la-Mode*, ca. 1743. Oil on canvas; 27¾ x 35¾ in. (70.5 x 90.8 cm). The National Gallery, London; Bought, 1824 (NG116)



reflect light from every angle. The carved chair back takes the form of a lyre; the rotating mirror is supported by a pair of crystal and gold candelabra anchored by Zephyr, the west wind, and Flora, Roman goddess of springtime, whose courtship had recently been popularized in *Flore et Zéphire*, a ballet by Charles Louis Didelot (1767–1837). The duchess, a supporter of the arts, was also an important client of L'Escalier de Cristal, a highly regarded maker of crystal and bronze furnishings and porcelain that was located, along with other decorative arts ateliers, in the Palais Royal, Paris. The shop was founded in 1802 by Madame Désarnaud (née Marie Jeanne Rosalie Charpentier, 1775–1842), who became an influential tastemaker in French society. On behalf of L'Escalier de Cristal, Mme Désarnaud received a gold medal from Louis XVIII at the Exposition des Produits de l'Industrie Française of 1819.

Even as European aristocrats transformed the toilette into a semipublic spectacle, some observers waxed critical or satirized the lavish excesses of these beauty rituals. The admired memoirist and educator Stéphanie Félicité du Crest, comtesse de Genlis (1746–1830), offered this pointed critique in her *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour*, a treatise on etiquette: “One has to admit that there used to exist customs [in] very bad taste that today seem completely ridiculous. For example, the custom among women of dressing in front of men and [doing] one’s makeup.”² A similar whiff of censure enlivens this canvas by William Hogarth (fig. 10), the fourth in a series of six paintings in which the artist skewered upper-class society in eighteenth-century Britain. Privilege and privacy are turned inside out in Countess Squanderfield’s toilette in her bedroom, where she is seated at an elaborate vanity table. Silvertongue, the aptly named lawyer, lounges on the sofa next to her with his shoes off and his feet up, clearly indicating his familiarity with the chamber. An equally mordant engraving by Matthew Darly (fig. 11) lampoons British historian and political activist Catharine Macaulay (1731–1791), who is shown as an old woman adding rouge to her face, oblivious to the approach of Death. In

Matthew Darly (British, ca. 1720–?1778). *A Speedy & Effectual Preparation for the Next World*, 1777. Hand-colored engraving; 9 5/8 x 13 3/4 in. (24.5 x 35 cm). The British Museum, London (J,5.109)



eighteenth-century Britain older women were often criticized for continuing to wear “face paint,” a pursuit regarded as better suited to the young. The caricaturist emphasizes the futility of the elderly woman’s ritual by placing a horse-drawn funeral cortege racing down her otherwise stylish coiffure. The horses are adorned with brightly colored feathers, a reference to the fashion in the 1770s for wearing such elaborate plumage in the hair.

Throughout Europe about this time another form of vanity was being devised to address the latest personal grooming trend among men: shaving. Because men stood for their morning ritual, unlike women, who sat, this new type of construction came in an upright form, with multiple drawers for housing accessories. This “dressing box” was on tall legs with a hinged lid, which opened to an interior fitted to hold grooming supplies such as razors, soaps, pomade bottles, and powder boxes. The mirror was also modified: where it had been stationary or affixed to the dressing table it was now adjustable and often regarded as a separate accessory. As such, it could be either mounted on a stand or placed on the console (see fig. 39).

Home furnishings were among the vast quantities of goods exported from Europe to America in the mid-eighteenth century. Americans of means aspiring to decorate their homes in the latest European fashion sought out the finest examples of mahogany furniture, silk and damask coverings, and silver and glass tableware. Although there was already a substantial history of successful cabinetmakers in America, this new interest in European styles led to the increased popularity of case furniture such as high chests and dressing tables, the ultimate in fashion for the colonial bedroom. This modest standing mirror (fig. 12) was meant to be placed on top of a dressing table and would have been useful in the application of makeup. It incorporates a bombé (or kettle-shaped) base, a form popular among a very select, stylish Boston clientele. In the nineteenth century the American vanity was characterized by a range of elaborate styles, from the widely popular English Chippendale, which incorporates elements of Gothic, Rococo, and chinoiserie (fig. 13), to a succession of revivalist modes, including Elizabethan, Renaissance, and Colonial.

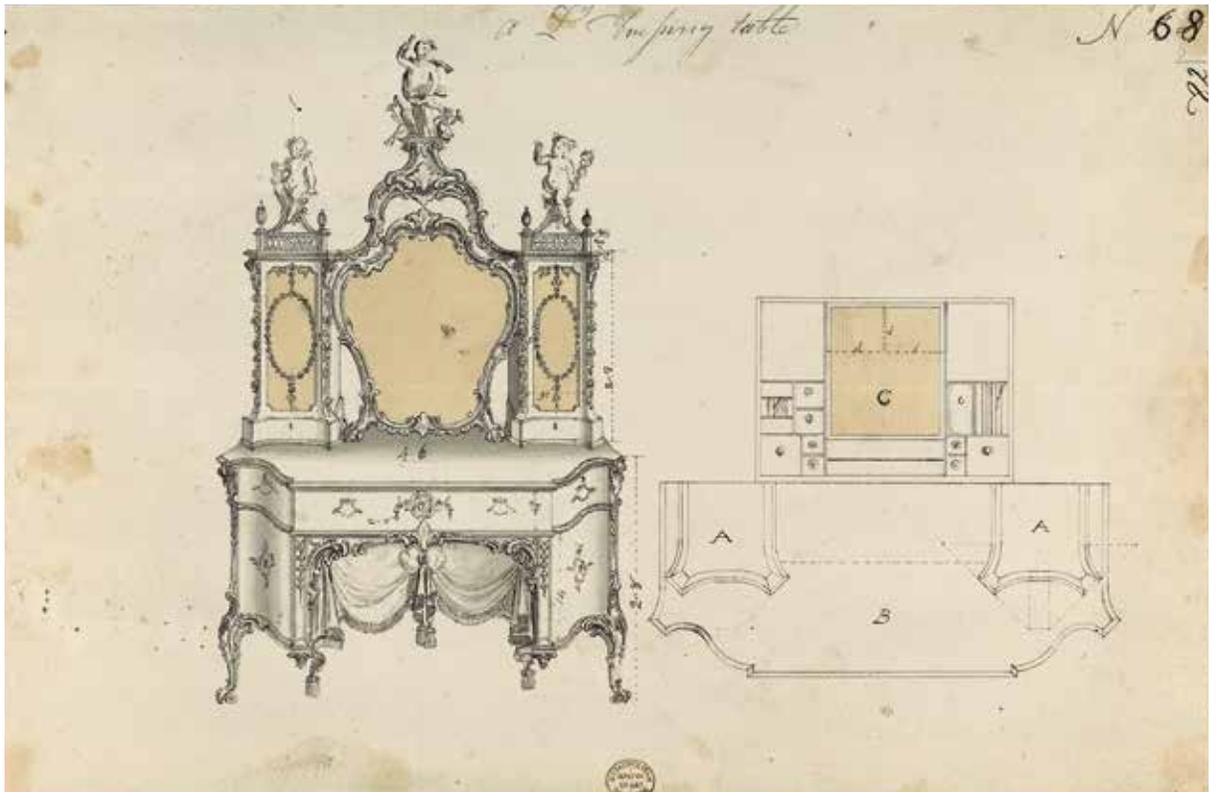
12

Dressing glass. American (Boston), 1760–90. Walnut, walnut veneer, and white pine; 33 x 22 ¼ x 10 in. (83.8 x 56.5 x 25.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Cecile L. Mayer, 1962 (62.171.14)



13

Thomas Chippendale (British, 1718–1779). *A Lady's Dressing Table*, from *Chippendale Drawings*, vol. 2, ca. 1761–62. Black ink, gray wash, and pale orange wash; 8 ¼ x 12 ½ in. (20.8 x 31.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund, 1920 (20.40.2[65])



14

Attributed to Charles-Honoré Lannuier (American, born France, 1779–1819). *Worktable*, ca. 1815–19. Mahogany, mahogany veneer, and gilded brass; secondary woods: mahogany, white pine, and yellow poplar; 32 1/4 x 23 3/4 x 17 3/8 in. (81.9 x 60.3 x 44.8 cm). Private collection



Charles-Honoré Lannuier, a Paris-trained *ébéniste* who immigrated to the United States in 1803, was one of the acknowledged leaders of the New York furniture trade during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Lannuier established a distinctive style of cabinetmaking that incorporated contemporary European design, especially the Napoleonic style, as well as a range of ornaments, including ancient Greek and Roman motifs (lyres, caryatids, dolphins, laurel wreaths, winged figures), architectural elements (columns, brackets, pediments, pilasters), and traditional American themes (eagles, five- or six-pointed stars). The Parisian's "New York" style appealed widely to Americans, who considered it the pinnacle of taste and sophistication. Lannuier's design for this multipurpose table (fig. 14) recalls its predecessors of the eighteenth century, which could often be used as either a dressing or a writing table: a looking-glass plate is mounted under the lift lid, and an adjustable writing surface is located inside.

The ascendance in the late nineteenth century of Art Nouveau, with its whiplash curves and nature-inspired forms, was in part a reaction to the historicism of these revivalist modes. Although the Art Nouveau era was short-lived (ca. 1890–1910), its outsize influence released future designers from the yoke of historical precedent.

15

Antoni Gaudí (Spanish [Catalan], 1852–1926).
Dressing table, ca. 1886–89. Carved wood, iron
hardware, and glass; 47 ¼ x 51 ⅞ x 25 ⅞ in. (120 x
130 x 65 cm). Güell Family Collection, Barcelona



Hector Guimard (1867–1942) and Louis Majorelle (1859–1926) of France and Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926) of Spain, among the style's leading practitioners in Europe, each made works that in varying ways propelled the continuing evolution of the dressing-table form. This dressing table by Gaudí (fig. 15), asymmetrical in the extreme, is from early in his career and was part of the commission for the Palau Güell (1886–89), the ornate Barcelona mansion of Catalan industrialist Count Eusebi Güell (1846–1918). The table's mirror is precipitously slanted above drawers at varying levels; curves mix with twisted metal and extravagantly carved wood, all of it in keeping with the Art Nouveau style but with a sensuous, dizzying effect unique to Gaudí. Majorelle, a prominent French *ébéniste*, was part of the École de Nancy in northeast France, a major center of Art Nouveau design. The description of Majorelle as an “eccentric” who “went beyond the surface application of floral ornament to a fundamental reinterpretation of structure on organic lines” is nowhere more apparent than in this fantastical *coiffeuse* (fig. 16), with its taut curvilinear profile and dynamic reenvisioning of natural forms.³ The table was part of a bedroom ensemble exhibited

Louis Majorelle (French, 1859–1926). *Dressing table*, ca. 1900. Marquetry and ormolu. Whereabouts unknown



at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, the world's fair visited by millions in which Art Nouveau was the ubiquitous aesthetic impulse.

The tension between historicism and modernism that characterizes much of Art Nouveau is evident in William C. Codman's martelé (or hand-hammered) dressing table and stool (fig. 17), which were likewise exhibited at the Exposition Universelle. With its pronounced cabriole legs and ball-and-claw feet, the table remains rooted in the late nineteenth-century Rococo Revival style, yet its curvilinear patterns evocative of nature show it squarely as a product of its day. A masterpiece of American handcraftsmanship, the table and stool were part of a limited production of hand-hammered, fine silver objects, reportedly requiring more than 2,300 hours of labor and 1,250 ounces of silver.

The forward-looking optimism and freedom of Art Nouveau were casualties of World War I, which temporarily stymied creative design and invention in virtually all of Europe. Among a number of groups and movements that eventually rose to prominence following Art Nouveau's demise was the Wiener Werkstätte, a cooperative of artists, designers, and craftspeople organized in Vienna in 1903 under the leadership of architect Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) and artist Koloman Moser (1868–1918). Based in part on the Guild and School of Handicraft set up by Charles Robert Ashbee (1863–1942), a leading figure in the English Arts and Crafts movement, the Wiener Werkstätte sought to unify the fine and decorative arts, believing that elements large and small—architecture, furniture, paintings, decorative objects, even clothing and jewelry—played an equally important role in creating a total work of art, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Dagobert Peche (1887–1923) was a codirector of the workshop when he created this dressing table (fig. 18) for Margaret Stonborough, a wealthy Viennese arts patron and sister of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. The table's legs curve gracefully, as if on tiptoe, exemplifying the designer's refined

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William C. Codman (American, 1839–1921). *Martelé dressing table and stool*, 1899. Gorham Manufacturing Company, Providence, Rhode Island (founded 1831). Silver, glass, fabric, and ivory; overall, 60 x 54 x 33 in. (152.4 x 137.2 x 83.8 cm). Dallas Museum of Art; The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., in honor of Dr. Charles L. Venable (2000.356.A-B McD)



18

Dagobert Peche (Austrian, 1887–1923). *Dressing table*, 1920. Lacquered wood and mirrored glass; 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (73.5 x 79.5 x 50 cm). Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe

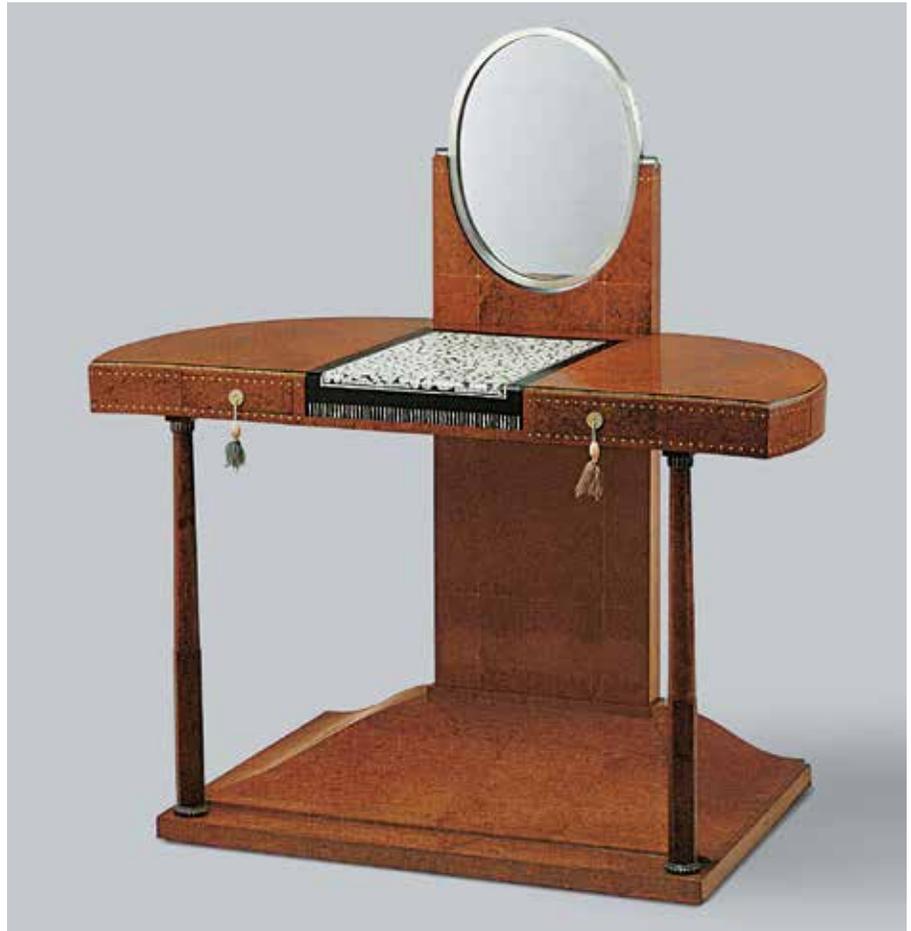


yet expressive approach (see also fig. 52). A floral theme, typical of Peche's work, is expressed throughout. The ebonized top is decorated with a pair of stylized flower arrangements, which hint at Rococo and Baroque influences. The sides of the case display delicate blooms, and tropical leaves edge up each corner. The table remains demure in scale and decoration when closed, but when opened it is full of surprise and delight. The harlequin-patterned mossy green vines that grace the table's legs also cover the interior surface in a dazzling blend of geometry, nature, and decoration.

In the face of increasing competition from other European nations and abroad, the French, seeking to restore some of the luster to their flagging domestic design industry, proposed another world's fair to be held in Paris in 1914. Delayed by the war, the landmark Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) finally opened in 1925 and further solidified what we now refer to as the French Art Deco style, which forever changed twentieth-century art and design. At the center of the movement was French designer Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (1879–1933), whose command of proportion and fine construction helped define Art Deco and, at the same

19

Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (French, 1879–1933).
Colonette dressing table, 1919–20. Amboyna burl
veneer over oak, ivory and ebony marquetry
panel, ivory, and silvered-bronze mirror; 47 ½ x
43 ¼ x 23 ⅝ in. (120.7 x 109.9 x 59.9 cm).
Private collection



time, recalled France's rich history in the decorative arts. The vanity was an essential piece in the repertoire of the Art Deco designer, and Ruhlmann's *Colonette* dressing table (fig. 19) is an exemplar of the form, showcasing his close attention to detail and use of sumptuous, exotic materials, from ivory and silvered bronze to rare burls found on the Southeast Asian padauk tree. At the center of the tabletop is an extraordinary trompe l'oeil cloth complete with overhanging fringe, a playful homage to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century custom of placing fine fabrics on dressing tables. Here the vestigial *toile* is made from ivory and ebony marquetry.

In Germany the exuberant experimentation that marked the first decades of the twentieth century was spearheaded by the *Deutscher Werkbund*, an association of artists, architects, and designers founded in 1907 at the instigation of architect and theorist Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927). An outspoken proponent in Germany of the English Arts and Crafts movement, Muthesius was also an integral influence on the developing aesthetic of the Bauhaus, which opened in Weimar in 1919 under the leadership of architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Gropius's intention for the Bauhaus was to unite all the arts, under the aegis of architecture, with nineteenth-century traditions of craftsmanship. Almost from its inception, however, the school was opposed by the conservative right, and in 1933, amid intolerable harassment from the Nazis, the school was closed. Many Bauhaus students and faculty, notably Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), fled Germany and resettled elsewhere, including the United States, disseminating their ideas and producing seminal works well into

Eckart Muthesius (German, 1904–1989).
Interior of bedroom at Manik Bagh, Indore,
ca. 1933



Paul T. Frankl (American, born Austria, 1886–
1958). *Vanity, Penner House, Holmby Hills,*
California, 1938



the mid-twentieth century. The clean, often starkly simple dressing tables, stools, chairs, and sofas of the Bauhaus modernists are part of a broad arc of influence that encompasses such notable designers as Paul T. Frankl, Norman Bel Geddes, and Raymond Loewy, among many others (see figs. 21, 59, 60).

In 1930 Eckart Muthesius (1904–1989), Hermann's son and a noted architect in his own right, was commissioned by the Maharajah of Indore, a Western-educated enthusiast of modern design, to decorate his palace of Manik Bagh. The palace's architecture and interiors expressed comfort through function by focusing on industrial materials, machine aesthetics, and the latest in technology. In this photograph of a bedroom at Manik Bagh (fig. 20), we glimpse a rare example of a modernist dressing table and mirror; the latter, called *Psyche*, was the work of French designers Louis Sognot (1892–1969) and Charlotte Aix (1897–1987). The rotating side tables allude to aviation, specifically the propeller, a popular motif of the period, and are fabricated in chrome-plated metal, a new industrial material for the time. The spare, unadorned table surfaces offer no drawers or storage, forcing the owner to make a careful selection of accoutrements. The dressing table stood at Manik Bagh among furnishings of

Room for a Lady, designed by Eliel Saarinen (Finnish, 1873–1950) for the exhibition “Contemporary American Industrial Art” at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1934–35



Muthesius’s own design and those of his fellow modernists, including Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887–1965), Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999), and Marcel Breuer (1902–1981).

In the United States, Paul T. Frankl (1886–1958), who was born in Vienna but immigrated to New York in 1914, sought to popularize modern design for a consumer culture. An early advocate of modernism, Frankl first found success in the 1920s with his Skyscraper furniture series, inspired by the soaring skyline of Manhattan. While most of Frankl’s Skyscraper designs were for bookcases, he also created a number of dressing tables, which initially were rectilinear in form, with tall, narrow mirrors and tables stepped in the signature Skyscraper manner. Frankl later adopted a more curvilinear approach that featured large round or semicircular mirrors and low tables. A vanity designed by Frankl after he moved to Los Angeles, where he rose to prominence during Hollywood’s Golden Age, comprises just two oversize elements: a circular mirror and an elongated curved base (fig. 21). The table’s reductive nature reflects a modernism distinctive to California, as defined by Frankl and other European émigrés, that merged clean lines with comfort and emphasized a transparency between indoors and out.

Frankl was not the only American modernist designing vanities during the 1930s. In 1934 the Metropolitan Museum mounted an exhibition on the industrial arts (the thirteenth in a series of such exhibitions) that included two rooms designed specifically for women. The boudoir by Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) features a vanity typical of the era in that it was built into a wall of cabinets sufficiently capacious to hold a growing number of creams, perfumes, and other beauty aids (fig. 22). A little more than a decade later, George Nelson (1908–1986) designed a modernist vanity for Herman Miller dubbed the #4609 Illuminated Way (fig. 23). At first the table appears to be an ordinary cabinet, but the doors enclose deep interior shelves for the necessities of the toilette, and the table is illuminated by means of indirect lighting, here reflected on the glass tabletop.



23
 George Nelson (American, 1908–1986). #4609
Illuminated Way vanity, 1948. Manufactured by
 Herman Miller Furniture Company, Zeeland,
 Michigan (founded 1905). Walnut, leather, glass,
 and metal; 57 1/2 x 34 x 18 in. (146.1 x 86.4 x
 45.7 cm). Courtesy Herman Miller, Inc.

After the end of World War II many designers, but especially those in the newly minted field of industrial design, adapted to peacetime use some of the materials and production methods devised during the war. The Good Design movement (whose name derived from a pivotal 1950 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, “What Is Good Design?”) promoted products that were intended to be relatively inexpensive but also highly efficient, stylish, and economical. The dressing table was among the furnishings rehabilitated by Good Design for use in the middle-class home. One of the highlights of the MoMA exhibition was a full-scale house erected in the museum’s sculpture garden by Gregory Ain (1908–1988) and associates (a California architect, Ain had previously worked with the well-regarded modernist architects Richard Neutra and Harwell Hamilton Harris). In its press release the museum described the dressing room as having “two closets and a dressing table with soft lighting around the mirror of a type used in theatrical dressing rooms.” Also in 1950 MoMA sponsored a Good Design exhibit at the Chicago Merchandise Mart, a wholesale market in interior-design goods housed in a massive Art Deco building on the banks of the Chicago River. In a poll conducted by the Mart, one of the items most favored by consumers and buyers was a combination desk and dressing table by Danish designer Børge Mogensen (1914–1972). Like Nelson’s vanity, Mogensen’s dressing table was not what it appeared to be, namely, a simple chest of drawers; the top drawer concealed a mirror and small drawers and shelves, and when the drawer was pulled out and unlatched, it provided a surface for writing or cosmetic application.

Nelson’s and Mogensen’s vanities illustrate a key characteristic of modern design as it progressed in America, where it was a reflection of but also a response to European antecedents such as the International Style and Bauhaus movements. The American strain of what we now refer to as midcentury modernism was slightly

Ettore Sottsass (Italian, born Austria, 1917–2007).
Console and mirror, 1965. Manufactured by
 Poltronova, Italy. Walnut, lacquered wood, mirror,
 glass, brass-plated steel, and brass; 67 ½ x 24 x
 11¾ in. (171.5 x 61 x 29.8 cm). Private collection



but notably more organic than its rigid, rectilinear European counterparts. In addition to Nelson, American designers such as Ray (1912–1988) and Charles (1907–1978) Eames, the Finnish-born Eero Saarinen (1910–1961), and Danes such as Arne Jacobsen (1902–1971) and Finn Juhl (1912–1989) rounded the corners of their chairs and tables and even cushioned some of their seats. Nelson’s Illuminated Way vanity, for instance, hews generally to the early modernist dictum “form follows function” but tempers it with a biomorphism that reflects the intent of many postwar designers to incorporate a more human aspect conducive to modern lifestyles.

By the 1960s and 1970s newly invented plastics and other breakthrough materials and methods, such as injection molding, were being used to make strikingly beautiful domestic furnishings that excelled in simplicity and adaptability. Raymond Loewy (1893–1986), an industrial designer born in France whose projects ranged from the Greyhound bus to the packaging of Lucky Strike cigarettes, profoundly influenced the course of American consumer culture and in many ways helped define his profession (see fig. 60). The iPod, to name but one of Apple’s blockbuster designs, can be seen to echo the core belief Loewy applied to his range of home furnishings: “more than function itself, simplicity is the deciding factor in the aesthetic equation . . . beauty through function *and* simplification.”⁴

One of the most influential, prolific, and paradoxical of designers in the second half of the twentieth century, Ettore Sottsass (1917–2007) contributed to nearly every field of the profession—from architecture to furniture, glassware, porcelain, metalwork, and jewelry—during a nearly seventy-year-long career. Sottsass infused this graphic white-against-walnut, all-in-one men’s console with his characteristic subtle sense of humor (fig. 24). Designed in 1965, at the height of the Pop art movement, the wall-mounted piece—whose basic form derives from antique barometers—is really a study in the circle, echoing associations from popular culture such as a popsicle on a stick or a head topped with a comically small hat. Despite its playful aspect, the console prescribed a simple, functional regime for men’s grooming in the 1960s: a mirror, a shelf for accessories, and a compartment to hide away grooming essentials; there is also a single hook, presumably to hang one’s hat on, and an actual barometer. Poltronova, the Italian furniture company that produced the piece, was founded in 1957 with the idea of combining traditional methods of production with modern ideas in materials and forms. Associated with Sottsass almost from the beginning of his career until his death, Poltronova went on to work with other important Italian designers of the era and is still in business today.

The 1980s were marked in part by the return of revivalist styles, but this time combined with wit and irony, political ideology, and social commentary. The practitioners of postmodernism, as it came to be known, including Sottsass and the architect and designer Michael Graves (born 1934), two of the movement’s most prolific and responsive advocates, did not necessarily create new forms; rather, they updated, repurposed, or otherwise referenced elements from previous eras in sometimes whimsical furniture and accessories. Graves, best known for his major building commissions as well as a range of housewares, imbued each with his indelible style of whimsy and art. He created the Plaza dressing table and stool (fig. 25) in 1981 as a contribution to the nonconformist international design collective Memphis (1980–88), formed by Sottsass in Milan, which played a significant role in shaping



25

Michael Graves (American, born 1934). *Plaza dressing table and stool*, 1981. Bird's-eye maple, mirrors, lightbulbs, electrical work, and upholstery; overall, 89 x 55 x 18 1/2 in. (226.1 x 139.7 x 47 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Gift of Martina Navratilova and purchased with funds provided by the Decorative Arts Council and Lois and Bob Boardman (AC1997.5.1.1-3)

26

Nipa Doshi (Indian, born 1971) and Jonathan Levien (British, born 1972). *Chandlo dressing table*, 2012. Ash, steel, glass, lacquer, and leather; 65 x 57 1/2 x 25 5/8 in. (165 x 146 x 65 cm). Courtesy of the artists



the postmodern movement. A virtual road map of twentieth-century design, Graves's dressing table is replete with cultural references both high and low: short columns of mirrored tiles playfully echo the disco ball; a pair of globe lights and small sparkling bulbs scattered throughout are nods to old Hollywood glamour; and the stepped motifs and stylized streamlining recall Art Deco. Not unlike the opulent furniture destined for French royalty, who could expect only the most au courant offerings, Graves's Plaza was intended for the elite. And yet the table offers an ironic juxtaposition of lavish woods with inexpensive plastic, part of the conceptual underpinnings of the piece that help define its true sense of extravagance.

Today the dressing table remains a uniquely telling and classic furniture form, one capable of satisfying simultaneously our expedient quotidian needs as well as our most profound emotional and psychological desires. The Chandlo dressing table (fig. 26) was a prototype designed for the 2012 exhibition "Das Haus" in Cologne, which explored the vision of the perfect home. Placed at the center of a "dressing space," the table was intended to be experienced from multiple angles; its abstract forms and the planes of the mirrors, cabinet, and surface are grounded in the daily ritual of dressing and grooming.

The Chandlo dressing table notwithstanding, furniture designed specifically for the toilette, once an important cultural signifier, is rarely produced today, and the time-honored and prestige-laden act of making up one's face is an activity most often shortened to a few fleeting moments before the bathroom mirror. Nonetheless, the

Yayoi Kusama (Japanese, born 1929). *The Artist with Macaroni Girl and Infinity Net Painting, Studio, New York, ca. 1964*

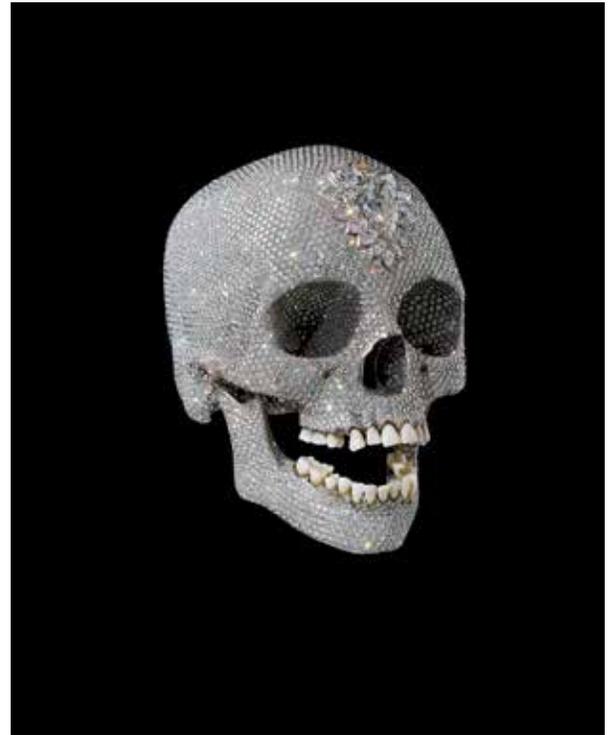


Bebe Daniels in *The Affairs of Anatol* (Paramount Pictures, 1921), directed by Cecil B. DeMille



vanity as such clearly lives on in the popular consciousness. For Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, the vanity is a recurring theme that touches upon the intersection of feminism, rituals, and meaning in her life. Kusama's multifaceted, often obsessively decorated works perpetuate basic human concerns of self-image, beauty, and narcissism. In this photograph of an installation from the 1960s (fig. 27), the artist stands before a fantastical dressing table, brush in hand, but is seemingly frozen by her own image in the mirror. By way of contrast, one could point to Cecil B. DeMille's 1921 film *The Affairs of Anatol*, which presents a more classic vision of the complex themes associated with the dressing table. The boudoir of Satan Synne (Bebe Daniels) becomes a lair of romantic entrapment, with a dressing table of cinematic proportions at its center (fig. 28). Stylized bat wings flank the mirror, and the high-backed dressing chair's silhouette echoes a spider's web. (Even an early advertisement from the period shows the actors against a scrim of webs.) The theme of entanglement is further expressed through snake-wrapped torchères and Daniels's octopus-inspired costume. The table is laden with perfumes, potions, and charms, all piled dangerously high, as well as an ominous skull, a reference to the *vanitas* tradition in still-life painting, in which a skull or other memento mori serves as a reminder of the ephemeral nature of life.

One of the most visually succinct connections between the vanity and *vanitas* was made by Charles Allan Gilbert, who was only eighteen when he created this famous illustration for *Life* magazine (fig. 29). Gilbert's artful optical illusion—the conflation of an oversize human skull with the pretty young woman seated at her



29
 Charles Allan Gilbert (American, 1873–1929). *All Is Vanity*, 1892. Reproduced in *Life* magazine, November 27, 1902

30
 Damien Hirst (British, born 1965). *For the Love of God*, 2007. Platinum, diamonds, and human teeth; 6¾ x 5 x 7½ in. (17.1 x 12.7 x 19.1 cm). © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2013

dressing table—is also a cleverly contrived juxtaposition of vanity and mortality: at once a *vanitas* and a *memento mori*. Imagery associated with the *memento mori* is widespread in the history of art. In painting, a timepiece or petals falling from a flower have been used to convey the concept; the Victorian era was known for its *memento mori* jewelry, typically a brooch or ring made with a daintily arranged lock of hair from a deceased loved one. In Damien Hirst’s modern-day *memento mori*, *For the Love of God* (fig. 30), a platinum cast from an eighteenth-century human skull was encrusted with 8,601 flawless diamonds and set with an extraordinary pear-shaped pink diamond on the forehead. With its macabre beauty and audacity the glistening death’s-head seems to claim at least some metaphorical triumph in the face of mortality; a radically expensive *objet*, it is fit for an eighteenth-century queen and unassailable in its physical form. Known for courting controversy as well as publicity, Hirst may also be equating death’s relentless pursuit with our own vanity-fed quest for money and perpetual youth. In the end, the powerful metaphorical associations between beauty and death, the tension between attraction and seduction, are what give potency to the vanity as a multivalent and still-relevant symbol of human desires, ambitions, and even futility.

Selections FROM THE COLLECTION



31

Jean François Oeben (French, 1721–1763) and Roger Vandercruise, called Lacroix (French, 1728–1799). *Mechanical table*, ca. 1761–63. Oak veneered with mahogany, kingwood, and tulipwood, with marquetry of mahogany, rosewood, holly, and various other woods; gilt-bronze mounts; imitation Japanese lacquer; replaced silk; 27 ½ x 32 ¼ x 18 ¾ in. (69.8 x 81.9 x 46.7 cm). The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982 (1982.60.61)

32

François Boucher (French, 1703–1770). *The Toilette of Venus*, 1751. Oil on canvas; 42 ¾ x 33 ½ in. (108.3 x 85.1 cm). Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 1920 (20.155.9)

Regarded as one of Oeben's masterpieces, this impressive dressing table (fig. 31) was most likely intended for Bellevue, Madame de Pompadour's château overlooking the Seine. The table's design telegraphs the marquise's place in society by way of various symbols: a tower (the main emblem of her coat of arms) is depicted at the top of the gilt-bronze mounts at each corner, and the marquetry top includes references to her many interests in the arts, among them gardening, painting, music, and architecture. The table was artfully engineered so that the top slides back as the front moves forward to reveal the vanity mirror and additional compartments.

Boucher's *Toilette of Venus* (fig. 32) was commissioned for the dressing room at Bellevue. Although not a portrait of Madame de Pompadour per se, the artist may have intended to flatter his patron



and sitter, who was known for cultivating allusions to the goddess of love. This mythological toilette perfectly captures the sensual and playful spirit of Rococo art. JA

William Fowle (British, 1658–1684) and Thomas Jenkins (British, active 1668–1708). *Toilet service*, 1683–84. Silver gilt and glass; H. of mirror, 22 ½ in. (57 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1963 (63.70.1–21)

This luxurious toilet service, possibly a gift for an aristocratic bride, is skillfully chased with fashionable scenes of chinoiserie. On the lid of the box at center

a bow, approaching a winged dragon. The set would have been displayed in either a young lady's bedroom or a smaller, inner connecting room decorated in a manner equally evocative of exotic locales. JA



34

Nécessaire. British, mid-18th century. Watchmaker: Joseph Martineau Sr. (active 1744–70). Gold and agate with white enamel dial and implements of various materials; 3 1/4 x 4 1/4 x 3 1/8 in. (8.3 x 10.8 x 7.9 cm). Gift of Admiral F. R. Harris, in memory of his wife, Dena Sperry Harris, 1946 (46.147.2a–p)

35

Nécessaire. French, third quarter of the 18th century. Shagreen on wood, with fittings of gold, porcelain, glass, and steel; 3 x 2 in. (7.6 x 5.1 cm). Bequest of Kate Read Blacque, in memory of her husband, Valentine Alexander Blacque, 1937 (38.50.21a–h)

By the early eighteenth century there was a heightened desire among the European elite for luxury goods that could proclaim one's social status and be displayed on the dressing table. One such item was the *nécessaire*, a small box made of precious materials (gold and gemstones as well as tortoiseshell or mother-of-pearl) that was designed to hold miniature implements like sewing needles or writing tools. This exquisite example (fig. 34) has space for a watch in the center compartment, while a portable version (fig. 35) holds numerous personal grooming items, from tweezers and an ear spoon to scent bottles. Probably made more for show than any utilitarian purpose, most of these ornate boxes were intended to sit among other precious belongings on the elaborate dressing tables of the period. JA



Dressing table mirror. French, ca. 1700. Tortoiseshell, engraved brass, kingwood, amaranth, satinwood, ebony, and mirror glass; 27 ½ x 26 ½ x 3 in. (69.8 x 67.3 x 7.6 cm). Purchase, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, by exchange, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, 1985 (1985.177)

Jean Marc Nattier (French, 1685–1766). *Madame Marsollier and Her Daughter*, 1749. Oil on canvas; 57 ½ x 45 in. (146.1 x 114.3 cm). Bequest of Florence S. Schuette, 1945 (45.172)

Madame Marsollier, daughter of a minor functionary at court, was married to a Parisian textile merchant considered beneath her station. To conceal her displeasure at being regarded as “middle class,” Madame Marsollier cajoled her wealthy husband into purchasing a title, making her the comtesse de Neubourg. Avowedly ambitious, the couple also commissioned this portrait from Nattier (fig. 37), the preeminent painter of the French court. The luxe silks around Madame Marsollier and her young daughter suggest the source of their wealth. (The French court, less tolerant of Madame Marsollier’s brazen social climbing, mocked her with the nickname “Duchess of Velvet.”) Other signs of status include the lace-covered table, crystal ewer, and several ormolu-mounted tortoiseshell boxes.

The mirror in Nattier’s portrait is similar to this example (fig. 36) made in the style of André Charles Boulle (1642–1732), royal cabinetmaker to Louis XIV, whose richly embellished furnishings befitted the extravagant tastes of the Sun King. Although Boulle was neither the first Frenchman to practice the art of marquetry nor the inventor of brass and tortoiseshell inlay, for which he became known, he was widely regarded as the most skillful furniture designer of his day. JA

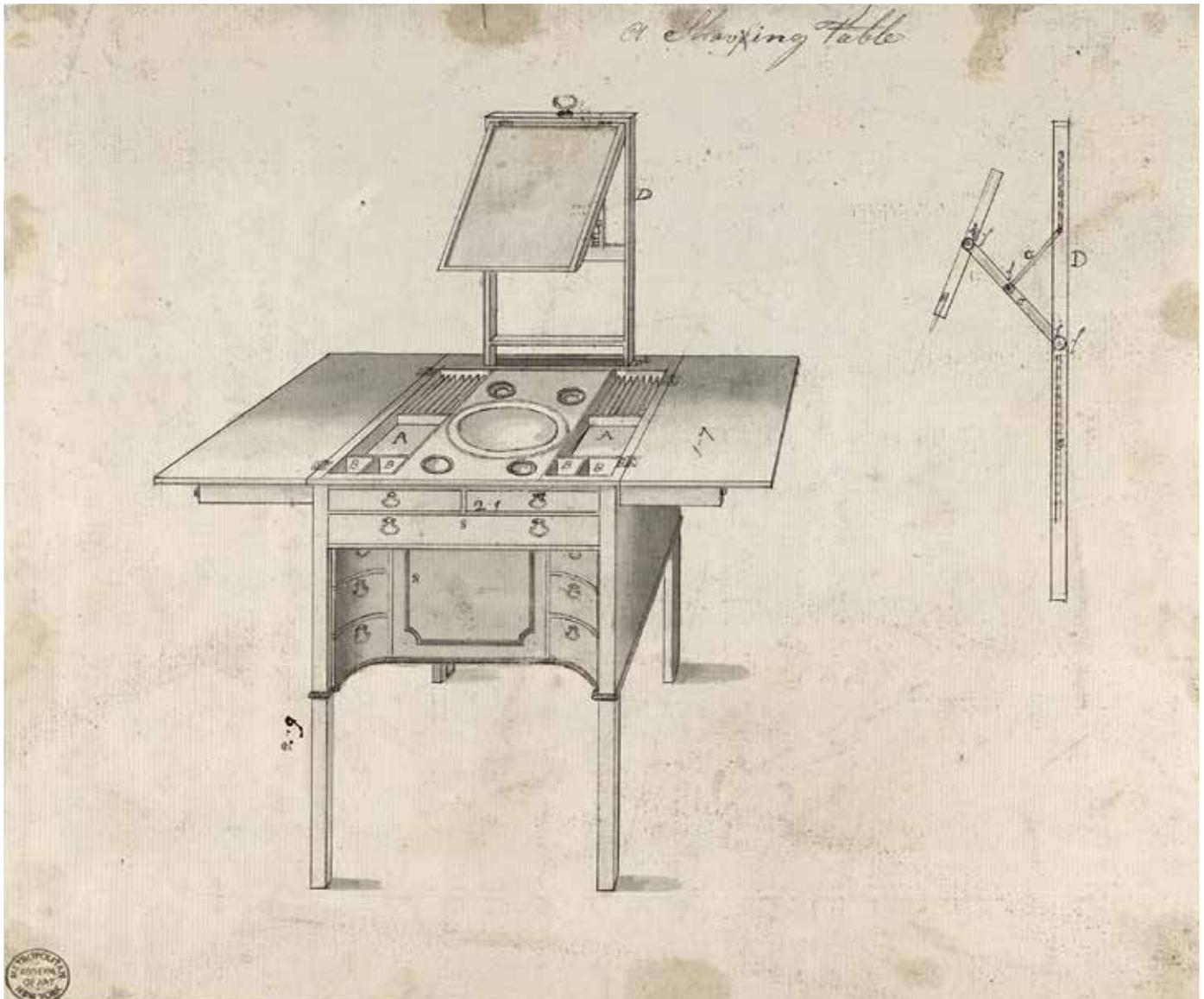




38
 Martin Carlin (French, born Germany, ca. 1730–1785). *Combination table*, ca. 1775. Oak and pine veneered with tulipwood, sycamore, holly, boxwood, and ebony; Carrara marble; gilt-bronze mounts; and accessories of Sèvres porcelain, rock crystal, silver gilt, and lacquer; overall (table), 29 x 27³/₄ x 16³/₈ in. (73.7 x 70.5 x 41.6 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1976 (1976.155.99a, b)

Designed specifically to accommodate the needs of an aristocratic woman who might receive visitors while seated at her dressing table, this superb example features a removable upper section that could serve as a bed table, an adjustable mirror that could be reversed to form a bookrest, and lidded compartments in the shallow front drawer for storing toilet articles. The lower

section is a full-size table, complete with shelves that pull out in front and back and drawers on both ends holding equipment for dressing, breakfasting, and writing. The designer, Martin Carlin, a German-born cabinetmaker, was active in Paris and specialized in luxury pieces. JA



39
 Thomas Chippendale (British, 1718–1779).
Shaving Table, from *Chippendale Drawings*, vol. 2,
 ca. 1761–62. Black ink and gray wash; 6 x 8 3/8 in.
 (15.2 x 21.1 cm). Rogers Fund, 1920 (20.40.2[63])

The original drawings for the greatly enlarged and influential third edition of Chippendale's famous British pattern book *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1762) include a design for a shaving stand. Essentially a dressing box (a box or case containing toilet utensils and cosmetics) on legs, the table has a hinged folding top that opens to reveal a basin and compartments and spaces for

soap, razors, bottles, and other grooming implements and supplies, as well as a looking glass on a spring catch that allows the gentleman to raise and bring forward the mirror when shaving.

This new, specialized form of dressing table was developed in response to changes in men's grooming habits. In the late seventeenth century, at the beginning of the Enlightenment, a fashion for clean-shaven faces arose when facial hair began to be seen as uncouth. During the first half of the eighteenth century men were shaved by barbers—then considered members of the medical field—but in 1745 barbers in London formed their own

society and established shaving as a non-medical, personal function. By the time of Chippendale's design, men (or their men-servants) were beginning to take the razor into their own hands in the home. Some were aided by books such as *Pogonotomie* (*The Art of Shaving Oneself*) by Jean Jacques Perret (1730–1784), a Parisian cutter, published in France in 1769, which was quickly followed by similar instructional manuals in English. Once shaving became a domestic activity, men needed a place to store shaving accoutrements as well as a basin for water and a mirror, leading directly to variants of the traditional dressing table such as the example seen here. LZ

Pietro Antonio Martini (Italian, 1738–1797) after Jean Michel Moreau the Younger (French, 1741–1814). *La Petite Toilette* (The Morning Toilet), from *Le Monument du Costume*, 1745–97. Etching and engraving: plate, 16 1/8 x 12 5/8 in. (40.9 x 31.9 cm); sheet, 18 1/8 x 14 in. (46 x 35.5 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1933 (33.6.28)

The dressing table of a gentleman in eighteenth-century France was in some ways as decorated and integral to the ritual of the toilette as that of a fashionable woman. The table shown in this illustration, part of a portfolio of costumes, is covered in luxurious drapery. The young man's dressing gown protects his clothes from the powder that will soon be applied to his hair; the floor mat beneath his

feet is temporary, intended to catch any loose powder or hairpins that may fall. The entire scene is one of mock-serious bedlam and indulgence. While one servant styles the young man's hair, a second warms a pair of curling tongs; a tailor and his assistant present a new embroidered silk coat; and a footman stands at the ready to run errands. JA





41

Dressing table, ca. 1740–50. American (Newport, Rhode Island). Mahogany; 30 ³/₈ x 34 ¹/₄ x 22 ¹/₂ in. (77.2 x 87 x 57.2 cm). Gift of Yvette and Thomas Cole, in memory of Louis W. Cole, 1994 (1994.449)

In about 1730 colonial American cabinet-makers introduced a new style, named for Great Britain's Queen Anne (r. 1702–14), characterized by undulating forms and cabriole legs. The Queen Anne style appeared first in high chests of drawers and matching dressing tables. In Newport, Rhode Island, a group of Quaker families led by the Goddards and Townsends developed and produced some of the most refined and original furniture in the Queen Anne style beginning in the 1740s. In particular, they are known for adding superbly carved shells to the block fronts (alternately projecting and receding surfaces) of their exquisitely crafted pieces. On this dressing table the graceful cabriole legs ending in slipper feet and the finely carved shell ornament make for an exceptional example of the Newport Queen Anne style. In contrast to elaborately decorated French dressing tables of this period in the Louis XV style (for example, fig. 31), American pieces derived their elegance from understated yet beautifully proportioned and crafted simple forms. LZ



42

Attributed to Duncan Phyfe (American, 1770–1854). *Worktable*, 1805–15. Satinwood veneer, satinwood, kingwood, mahogany, and yellow poplar; 29 ³/₈ x 25 ¹/₄ in. (74.6 x 64.1 cm). Gift in loving memory of Gardner D. Stout, from his wife and children, 1986 (1986.84.2)

The sides of this table follow the form of an astragal molding: a convex semicircle with a flat fillet or break at each end. In the early years of the nineteenth century such Grecian-style worktables, which were intended for ladies, were especially popular in New York. This exquisitely

constructed example, made of expensive satinwood, satinwood veneer, and inlaid dark kingwood stringing, served as a sewing table, a writing desk, and a dressing table. The hinged top opens to reveal an adjustable writing panel covered in baize, located behind the false drawer front, and two removable half-round compartmented trays at each astragal end. By lifting a small leather tab behind the writing panel, one can pull up a framed looking glass, thereby converting the piece into a dressing table. Within the reeded tambour case of the table, made of narrow strips of wood glued to a linen canvas backing, a sliding door provides access to two mahogany drawers for storage.

The carved pillar-and-claw base is typical of the Grecian style and the work of Duncan Phyfe. Attribution of this table to Phyfe, one of the leading American cabinetmakers of his era, is based upon the similarity in quality of materials, construction, design, and craftsmanship to one made by Phyfe for Victorine du Pont upon her marriage to Ferdinand Bauduy (1813, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware). LZ

43
Seddon, Sons and Shackleton (London, 1793–1800). *Dressing table*, ca. 1790–95. Mahogany, glass, and ivory; 58 x 32 3/4 x 16 in. (147.3 x 83.2 x 40.6 cm). Rogers Fund, 1919 (19.66)

During the second half of the eighteenth century dressing tables became more varied to include a number of specialized forms for men, such as the shaving stand (an early design for this type by Thomas Chippendale can be seen in fig. 39). This example by Seddon, Sons and Shackleton, the foremost furniture makers of their time, is in the British Sheraton style, popular in the 1790s and early 1800s. Based on the French Louis XVI style, Sheraton furniture is generally characterized by



graceful, rectilinear forms ornamented with refined Neoclassical motifs in contrasting veneer wood inlays, especially satinwood, as well as dainty painted flowers and other themes. The stand contains four fitted wood boxes for the storage of shaving supplies and other implements. Within a semicircular glazed compartment the maker's proud name has been inlaid in veneered woods. LZ



44
 George A. Schastey (American, born Prussia, 1839–1894). *Dressing table and dressing glass from the Arabella Worsham / John D. Rockefeller Home, ca. 1883.* Satinwood, purpleheart and mother-of-pearl marquetry, and silvered hardware; table, 30 ½ x 30 ⅝ x 22 ½ in. (77.5 x 77.8 x 57.2 cm); mirror, 23 ¼ x 15 ¾ x 10 ½ in. (59.1 x 40 x 26.7 cm). Gift of The Museum of the City of New York, 2008 (2009.226.1, .2)

In 1881 Arabella Yarrington Worsham embarked on a remodeling project at 4 West Fifty-fourth Street, New York. She hired George A. Schastey and Company (1873–late 1890s) to decorate a number of the rooms, including the bedroom and dressing room. Schastey and Company—on par with firms such as Herter Brothers and

Pottier and Stymus—created sumptuous, custom-designed rooms and furnishings for a wealthy American clientele. At the time, Arabella Worsham was the mistress of the much older (and married) Collis P. Huntington, the renowned railroad tycoon who formed the Central Pacific Railroad Company. She likely chose Schastey because he had executed work

for Huntington's other homes in New York and for other railroad magnates of the day, such as Charles Crocker in California.

Huntington had met Arabella in her native Richmond, Virginia, and in 1869 moved Arabella and her family to New York City. Supported by Huntington, Arabella and her mother invested in residential

properties, including 4 West Fifty-fourth Street, purchased as their home. Nine months after Huntington's wife died, in October 1883, he married Arabella, at which time she sold her house, fully furnished, to John D. Rockefeller.

The dressing room and its en suite furnishings, most of which are built-ins,

are made from satinwood, described in 1907 as "the daintiest of all woods, and therefore the ideal one for the furniture of drawing rooms, boudoirs and bedrooms."⁵ The architectural woodwork features ornamental motifs associated with a lady's toilette, such as hand mirrors, combs, necklaces, earrings, and scissors. Among the room's few freestanding works are the delicate dressing table, with its undulating legs, and the diminutive dressing glass that sits on top of it. The table's stretchers are surmounted by a small pad that retains its original teal silk velvet, upon which Arabella would have rested her feet while seated. Both the materials and the decoration are reminiscent of those used in the Sheraton-style shaving stand by Seddon, Sons and Shackleton (fig. 43) a century before. LZ

45

Dressing table. American, ca. 1880. Bamboo, oak, sycamore, and poplar; 64 x 36 x 20 1/2 in. (162.6 x 91.4 x 52.1 cm). Purchase, Sansbury-Mills Fund, 1982 (1982.193)

Goods related to the rituals of daily life, including attending to oneself and to one's home, were especially important to women in Victorian America. As the United States evolved from an agricultural nation to a manufacturing powerhouse, a middle class emerged and, along with it, new social rules. For many, furniture that had once served utilitarian purposes was now a potent way to communicate their values, status, and place in society. This bamboo dressing table is a good illustration of such emerging ambitions. Despite its domestic origins, the table serves as a display of its owner's worldliness and sophistication, combining a Western form with Japanese-inspired decoration. In all likelihood it was part of a larger bedroom suite that included a head- and footboard, chiffonier, washstand, towel rack, and other accoutrements. JA





46
Cosmetic stand with design of pine, bamboo, and cherry blossoms. Japanese, Edo period (1615–1868), 19th century. Sprinkled gold on lacquer (*maki-e*); 10 3/8 x 12 1/2 x 10 1/8 in. (27 x 31.8 x 25.7 cm). Frederick C. Hewitt Fund, 1910 (10.7.8)

While Japanese women did not traditionally have dressing tables, they did kneel before cosmetic stands to apply their makeup or style their hair. This cosmetic stand constituted one item in the thirty-one-piece wedding trousseau of a *daimyō*, or provincial lord. Made of the highest-quality late Edo period *maki-e* lacquer, it was most likely ordered to celebrate a

wedding between the Shimazu and Matsudaira families in the early nineteenth century. The set consists of containers for different purposes, and the cosmetic stand is among the items decorated with pine, bamboo, cherry blossoms, and crests of the two families.

The trousseau symbolized the social rank of the families and the political alliances formed by the marriage. Its main function, however, was to decorate the dressing room at the time of the wedding; otherwise, the trousseau was stored and perhaps brought out for special occasions.⁶ LZ



47

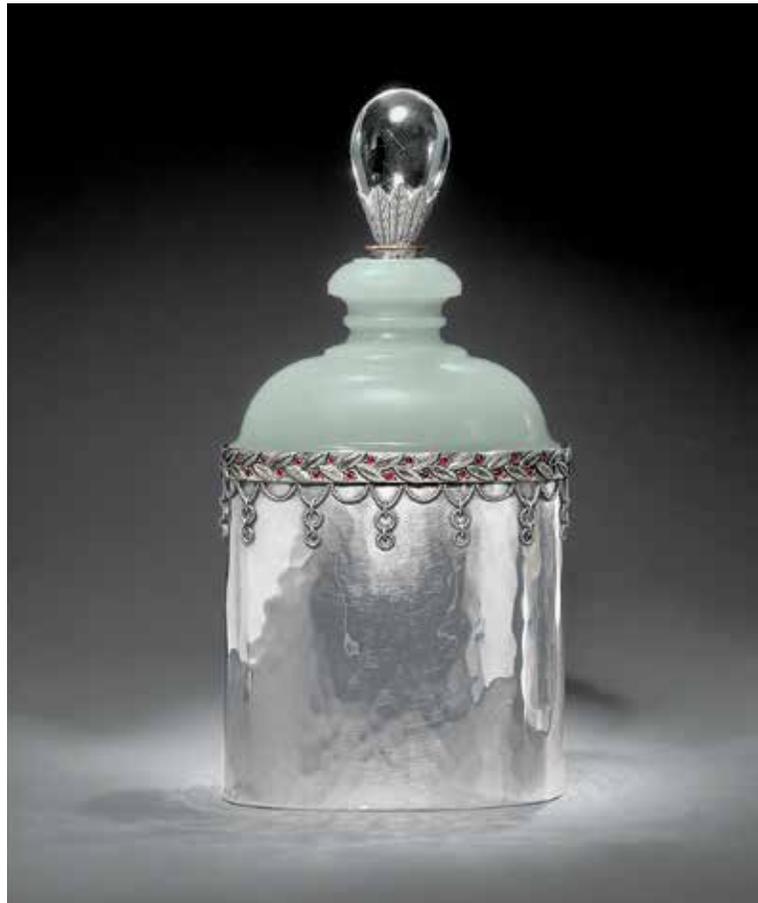
Pyxis (cosmetic box). Greek (Macedonian), Hellenistic, 3rd–2nd century B.C. Terracotta; H. with lid, 5 1/4 in. (13.4 cm), D. 6 in. (15.1 cm). Gift of Madame Politis in memory of her husband, Athanase G. Politis, Ambassador of Greece to the United States, 1979 (1979.76a, b)

48

Marie Zimmermann (American, 1879–1972). *Covered jar*, 1905–15. Silver, gold, jade, crystal, and rubies; overall, 6 1/2 x 3 3/8 x 2 3/8 in. (16.5 x 8.4 x 6 cm). Purchase, Edward C. Moore Jr. Gift, 1922 (22.186a, b)



The term “pyxis” refers to a vessel, often a cylindrical box with a separate lid, used to hold cosmetics, oils, and other unguents. This terracotta example from Greece (fig. 47) is notable for its feet in the shape of lions’ paws. Marie Zimmermann, a metalworker and jewelry artist associated with the American Arts and Crafts movement, delicately blended historical styles into a pyxis intended for the modern world (fig. 48). Zimmermann, in fact, deliberately sought materials for their historical references: gold and rock crystal, prized in many ancient civilizations; jade, precious in Asia; and hammered silver, long a symbol of American luxury (see fig. 17). JA



49

Lentoid aryballos (perfume bottle). Greek, Late Classical or Hellenistic, 4th–3rd century B.C. Glass, core-formed; H. 2 in. (4.9 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.194.309)



50

Sprinkler. Iranian, 19th century. Glass, dip-molded and blown, with applied solid foot and decoration; H. 12 7/8 in. (32.7 cm). Edward C. Moore Collection, Bequest of Edward C. Moore, 1891 (91.1.1600)



51

William Carlson (American, born 1950). *Kinesthesia bottle*, 1981. Glass with silver gilt; 5 3/4 x 7 1/2 in. (14.6 x 19.1 cm). Gift of Douglas and Michael Heller, in memory of Eleanor Heller, 1981 (1981.234)

At once functional and luxurious, scent bottles, flasks, and sprinklers were traditional mainstays of the dressing table and remain highly collectible statements of design, consumerism, and popular culture. The use of bottles for perfumes and other aromatic substances is ancient in origin and well attested throughout history and across cultures, from this Greek *aryballos* (fig. 49), which may have been worn around the neck as a pendant, to this nineteenth-century sprinkler from Iran (fig. 50), whose elegant silhouette echoes earlier Persian forms. Contemporary designers continue to explore the sculptural possibilities of the perfume bottle. William Carlson's *Kinesthesia* bottle (fig. 51), for example, whose title refers to how the body is perceived through the senses, offers an unlikely combination of physical solidity and translucency. JA





52

Dagobert Peche (Austrian, 1887–1923). *Jewel box*, 1920. Gilded silver; 15 ¼ x 7 ¾ x 5 in. (38.7 x 19.7 x 12.7 cm). Purchase, Anonymous Gift, 1978 (1978.8a–c)

Produced while Peche was a codirector at the Wiener Werkstätte, toward the end of his short but expansive career, this magnificent jewel box represents a significant departure from the austere linearity that defined the firm's early years under the direction of founders Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser. In a gilded forest, an elegantly attenuated deer, speckled with flowers, stands surrounded by grasses and grapevines, helping itself to the hanging fruit. The undulating pattern of the central container serves as the earth beneath its feet. Compelled by the possibilities of ornament and decoration, Peche took them to their sculptural extreme, banishing sharp angles and straight lines. Yet within the natural scene, which draws on Baroque and Rococo inspirations, the decoration also serves a function; the deer is the handle with which to open the box, and each elaborate ball foot opens to reveal additional storage space. There are only two examples known of this design, and this is the only gilded version. JA

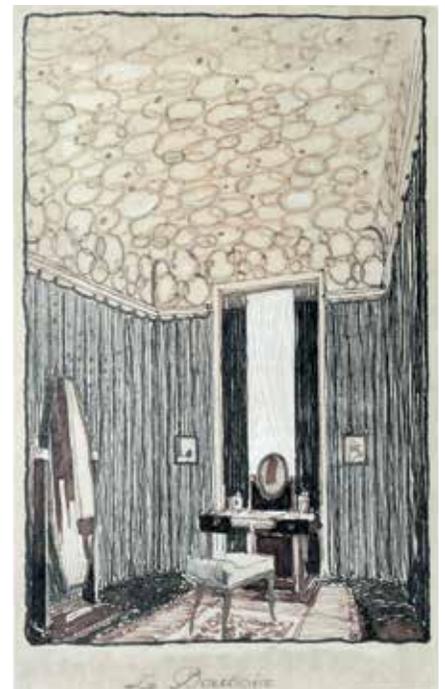


53
 Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann (French, 1879–1933).
Retombante stool, ca. 1916–18. Lacquered beech,
 silvered bronze, and modern upholstery; 22 ¼ ×
 25 ½ × 18 ¾ in. (56.5 × 64.8 × 47.5 cm). Gift of
 Mr. and Mrs. Michael Chow, 1986 (1986.399.4)

Ruhlmann wore many hats, from designer and *ensemblier*, overseeing every detail of his interiors, to businessman (he managed a sizable shop and atelier in Paris). He was also a skilled draftsman, as demonstrated in the gouache *Le Boudoir*, at right, which features a rendering of the Museum's *Retombante stool* (fig. 53). The interior space of the boudoir, or dressing room, is generously sized and elegantly styled, with careful symmetry throughout. The vertically grained wood walls elongate the

height of the room; pattern is reflected on the ceiling and the lush carpet below. The scale of the stool is in keeping with its probable placement before one of Ruhlmann's singularly luxurious dressing tables (see fig. 19). Using only a few simple curves, the designer created a piece of considerable fluidity, in this case from the overall organic contour of both the stool seat and back. JA

Ruhlmann, *Le Boudoir*, ca. 1920. India ink and gouache with gold highlights. Collection of Florence Camard, Paris





54

Armand-Albert Rateau (French, 1882–1938).

Dressing table, ca. 1925. Bronze, basalt, and mirror glass; 55 ½ x 31 ½ x 15 ⅝ in. (141 x 80 x 39.7 cm). Purchase, Edward C. Moore Jr. Gift, 1925 (25.169)

The works exhibited at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris were intended to reflect the vanguard of modern style, but many French Art Deco designers nonetheless looked to historical precedent as well as to more immediate exotic influences: the arrival in Paris of Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* in 1909, for example, with its orientalist costumes and stage sets. More than a decade later, in 1922, the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt ignited a similar vogue for all things Egyptian. The subsequent Egyptian Revival style was especially pronounced in architecture, jewelry, the decorative arts, and furniture.

For this Rateau dressing table antiquity was again the inspiration, in this case Pompeii, although the bird motif (visible at center, below the mirror) may derive from Persian miniature painting. Rateau made more than one version of the table. The first, from 1921, was intended for the Palacio de Liria, the Duchess of Alba's home in Madrid. The designer exhibited yet another model in the aptly named Pavillon de l'Élégance at the 1925 exposition. JA



55
 Bruno Paul (German, 1874–1968). *Dressing table*, ca. 1924. Manufactured by Hermann Gerson Möbelhaus, Berlin. Tulipwood veneer, ivory, and mirror glass; 53 ½ x 48 ⅝ x 21 ¼ in. (135.9 x 123.5 x 54 cm). Gift of Ralph and Lester Weindling, in memory of Daly Weindling, 1976 (1976.288.1a, b, 2)

Paul’s dressing table and matching stool, made during the Weimar Republic (1919–33), express modern luxury through a distinctly German lens. Although likely custom-made for a woman’s space, the set’s rounded banding and overall proportions hint at a masculine, nineteenth-

century German classicism. Fine tulipwood veneer covers the streamlined design, and carved ivory hinges highlight the large, almost heart-shaped mirror.

Paul played a key role in popularizing modernism for the German public. He began his long career as an avant-garde illustrator who helped to define Jugendstil (“youth style”) at the turn of the twentieth century. Later he became a successful architect and was a founding member of the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen), a group of designers and producers who sought to

link design more closely with industry. Paul was also a progressive teacher to many of the next generation of German designers, who along with other European émigrés helped spread modernism at the onset of World War II. In contrast to his more theoretical counterparts at the highly influential Bauhaus, however, Paul approached modernism with an eye to practical design solutions, and he often incorporated historical styles. This led to commercial success within Germany but also, until recently, the underappreciation of his important legacy. JA

56

George Barbier (French, 1882–1932). *Le Bonheur du jour; ou, Les Graces à la mode*, 1924. Pochoir; 12 3/8 x 17 3/4 in. (32 x 45 cm). Purchase, The Paul D. Schurgot Foundation Inc. Gift, 2002 (2002.10a–t)

57

Richard Hudnut (American, 1855–1928). *Vanity case*, 1920s. Leather and brass; overall, 2 3/4 x 6 1/4 x 11 1/4 in. (7 x 15.9 x 28.6 cm). Gift of Lois Small Zabriskie, 1995 (1995.238a–z)



Barbier's image of a woman in the midst of her toilette (fig. 56) is from an album depicting Paris couture and the city's fashionable elite at the beginning of the 1920s. Beautifully dressed and conspicuously made-up, she sits before a dressing table in the French Art Deco style, possibly of a design by Louis Süe (1875–1968) and André Mare (1887–1932). Her gown, with its massing of roses, is a conscious reference to noted French fashion designer Paul Poiret (1879–1944), who took the flower as his signature emblem in a nod to his beloved daughter Rosine. The reference is carried further by the drawer pulls and the single rose in the vase. The widespread influence of Japonisme in late nineteenth-century art can be seen in the umbrella-like shades of the candelabra lighting, the large carved-coral hair comb in the young woman's chignon, and the sash in the shape of a chrysanthemum, the imperial seal of Japan.

The travel vanity set by Richard Hudnut (fig. 57), a pioneer of the American cosmetics industry, comes in a leather case with a brass lock. Lined with pink silk, the set contains an array of implements, cosmetics, and perfumes from



Hudnut's popular DuBarry line, named after Madame du Barry, a renowned beauty who was the last of Louis XV's official mistresses and whose predecessor in the king's favors, Madame de Pompadour, was one of the key figures in the evolution of the ritual toilette. JA

58

Attributed to Alfred Langlois (French, died 1958) for Van Cleef & Arpels, Paris. *Vanity case*, ca. 1928. Gold, enamel, jade, and diamonds; $3\frac{3}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (8.6 x 5.4 x 1.3 cm). Gift of Walter L. Richard, 1957 (57.160a-c)

Small jeweled boxes for cigarettes and cosmetics became fashionable after World War I, when it became acceptable for women to smoke and apply makeup in public. Jewelers promoted such boxes as an important part of a complete evening parure, or jewelry set. Although modeled

on gem-encrusted dressing-table boxes from the eighteenth century, modern vanity cases were feats of ingenuity that often included a wide range of features depending on a client's needs, such as specialized compartments to hold cosmetics, combs, cigarettes, matches, lighters, and even clocks. Here, a push button opens the case, revealing a polished gold interior with a mirror set into the underside of the cover. There are compartments for powder and rouge, and a hinged lipstick springs up from the bottom of the case when it is opened.

The unapologetically flashy and exotic case presents a somewhat indiscriminate mix, typical for its time, of Asian and Near Eastern influences. The rich green-jade panel set into the cover suggests both traditional Chinese hardstone carvings and Mughal emeralds. The cover's composition recalls that of a Persian carpet; its central field and corners are articulated with stepped pyramids set with diamonds and gray jade cabochons. The edges and underside of the box are decorated with inlaid goldwork in a vaguely Chinese fretwork pattern. JG





59
Norman Bel Geddes (American, 1893–1958).
Dressing table, ca. 1932. Manufactured by
Simmons Furniture Company, Chicago. Enameled
and chrome-plated steel; 29 ⁵/₈ x 44 x 19 in.
(75.2 x 111.8 x 48.3 cm). Gift of Paul F. Walter,
1984 (1984.263)

The streamline aesthetic was an identifiably American style in the second quarter of the twentieth century, and Norman Bel Geddes was one of its most notable proponents. The American populace was captivated with the idea of speed, from trains and automobiles to airplanes. Designers reflected this national phenomenon by producing teardrop- or bullet-shaped aerodynamic products. Even

stationary objects were given rounded corners and sleek proportions, as in Bel Geddes's dressing table and mirror. Not only did it have a streamlined shape, it was made of black enameled steel and polished chrome, modern materials ideally suited for the sophisticated decor of a penthouse apartment, a pointed symbol of wealth and success during the Great Depression years in America. JA



60
 Raymond Loewy (American, born France, 1893–1986). *Valet 2000/50 dressing cabinet* (DF2000 series), 1969. Manufactured by Doubinski Frères, Montreuil, France. Plastic, painted wood, mirror, and metal; 41 7/8 x 20 1/8 x 20 in. (105.7 x 51.1 x 50.8 cm). Cynthia Hazen Polsky Fund, 1993 (1993.460)

This futuristic and savvy piece of men’s furniture, from late in Loewy’s career, was

inspired by space-age aesthetics and technology and celebrates the material properties of plastic. Using single drawer-fronts of brightly colored, injection-molded plastic, Loewy created bands of drawers with integrated, sinuous handles, avoiding altogether the need for hardware. In terms of function, the valet’s design is cleverly deceptive. From the outside, it appears to be a simple eight-drawer chest. The top, however, lifts up to reveal a mirror on

the underside and a compartment with a small tray for men’s accessories. Sleight of hand also occurs in the outer “drawers,” which essentially are facades for drawers paired to create deeper and larger storage spaces. Ball-shaped casters (a nod to aerodynamics and the age of travel) allow the cabinet to be moved as needed, a flexibility warranted given the open-plan layouts of contemporary domestic spaces in the 1960s and 1970s. JA

61

Byung Hoon Choi (Korean, born 1952). *Beyond the Image 013-01*, 2013. Stainless steel, natural stone, and marble; vanity, 70 1/2 x 28 x 19 5/8 in. (179 x 71 x 49.8 cm). Gift of the artist, Friedman Benda, and Mr. Yangsoo Kim, 2013

Contemporary Korean artist Byung Hoon Choi designs functional objects that seamlessly fuse Eastern and Western ideologies and practices as well as his- torical influences. His dressing table is formed of two parts and two contrasting materials: the swordlike top is oblong and vertical, shaped from polished stainless steel, and stands on a similarly polished steel disk. Its simple, soaring construc- tion takes inspiration from the polished bronze mirrors of antiquity. By contrast, the base of the dressing table is formed from a round natural stone, chosen for its color, organic imperfections, and weath- ered surfaces. Choi's use of stone recalls Korean dolmens: large monoliths, found in greater concentrations in Korea than anywhere else in the world, that were moved into tablelike structures, capstone formations, and standing megaliths, often marking tombs from antiquity. The jux- taposition of the old and new, rough and smooth, found and fabricated is typical of Choi's work. According to the designer, aside from its functionality and pure image reflection, the ensemble (especially the mirror) is intended to invite the user's introspection. JA



NOTES

1. See Melissa Hyde, "The 'Makeup' of the Marquise: Boucher's Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette," *The Art Bulletin* 82 (September 2000), pp. 453–75.
2. [Stéphanie Félicité du Crest], *Dictionnaire critique et raisonné des étiquettes de la cour* (Paris, 1918), pp. 344–45.
3. Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, "[The Decorative Arts of the Twentieth Century . . .]," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (Winter 1979–80), p. 9.
4. Raymond Loewy, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone*, 2nd ed. (1951; Baltimore and London, 2002), pp. 210–11.
5. Olive Milne Rae, "Satinwood Furniture at the South Kensington Museum," *The Connoisseur* 18 (August 1907), p. 212.
6. See Monika Bincsik, "Plum Flowers and Cherry Blossoms: Auspicious Symbols of a Political Alliance—A Maki-e Daimyo Wedding Set," *Orientalia* 40 (September 2009), pp. 73–79.

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