

FRAGONARD AT THE MET | DÉSIÉ FEUERLE'S IMPERIAL CHAIR | NORDIC DESIGN RISES

BLOUINART+AUCTION

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THE CHAMPIONS OF
PETER BEARD

NARA ROESLER'S
BRAZILIAN EYE

PHYLLIDA BARLOW
MEDITATES ON
JOEL SHAPIRO



Désiré Feuerle on an Early Qing Dynasty Imperial Chinese Carved Chair

THE PRIZED POSSESSION IS JUST ONE OF
THE MASTERPIECES IN THE INAUGURAL SHOW AT
THE FEUERLE COLLECTION IN BERLIN

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NEARLY 20 YEARS AGO, the name “Armory Show” was not yet associated with the contemporary art fair. Rather, it was the insider name for the International Fine Art & Antique Dealers Show, which has been held in the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue each October since 1989. As I walked the aisles in those faraway days, I spotted a chair, about 30 inches tall, which immediately caught my attention. As I came closer I realized it was not the right moment to proceed into the booth, because two bodyguards were tending the entrance. Inside, a couple was being advised by two consultants and the entire gallery staff. As the two had everybody’s attention, I decided not to enter and started walking in circles around the booth, hoping they would leave soon. After what seemed like a very long time, they did.

At this point, I was very worried that my chair—I already considered it to be *my* chair—had been bought by them. But I was very lucky. They had bought most of the things around it, but not my chair! I reserved it straightaway. The gallery owner pointed out that I had to make a very quick decision, however, as that day was the fair preview and a reserve wouldn’t be honored for too long. What fascinated me about that particular chair was that I could feel it was something really extraordinary. I thought this must have been an uncommon example of its time. So, finally, I made a quick decision and bought it.

Just half a year later, the owners of the gallery asked me if I would like to sell the chair.

“No way! I love this piece. Why should I sell it?” I asked.

“You haven’t heard the offer yet,” the dealer replied. The gallery offered me a lot of money, even asking how much I would want for it. At that point I realized I really was still in love with the chair. Eventually the gallery owners gave up trying to persuade me to sell.

In the meanwhile, I asked Beijing’s Palace Museum to do some research on the Qing Dynasty piece, constructed of red and black lacquered wood with gold painting, featuring lingzhi motifs. Curators said they thought it might be the finest example in lacquer of a chair ever made for an emperor. They told me the chair must have been one of a pair, probably made especially for the Yongzheng Emperor’s birthday. It was standing in his bedroom and likely took artisans about three years to complete. The museum presented me with a 19th-century book about masterpieces from the Imperial Palace, in which this chair had been mentioned. This made me extremely happy, allowing me to realize what an incredibly significant acquisition this had been. It has stimulated me to explore my interests further and delve deeper into Chinese furniture. In 2006 I curated the chair into “The Art of Imperial Chinese Furniture,” an exhibition held at Barcelona’s Fundación Francisco Godia, and since the end of April it has been in residence at the Feuerle Collection in Berlin, presented with other imperial Chinese furniture. It’s also the piece that made me realize that by following and trusting my own instincts and senses, it is possible to find a treasure. 田

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