

# ROTTUNDA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

P.S.  
Ro  
440  
ROMF

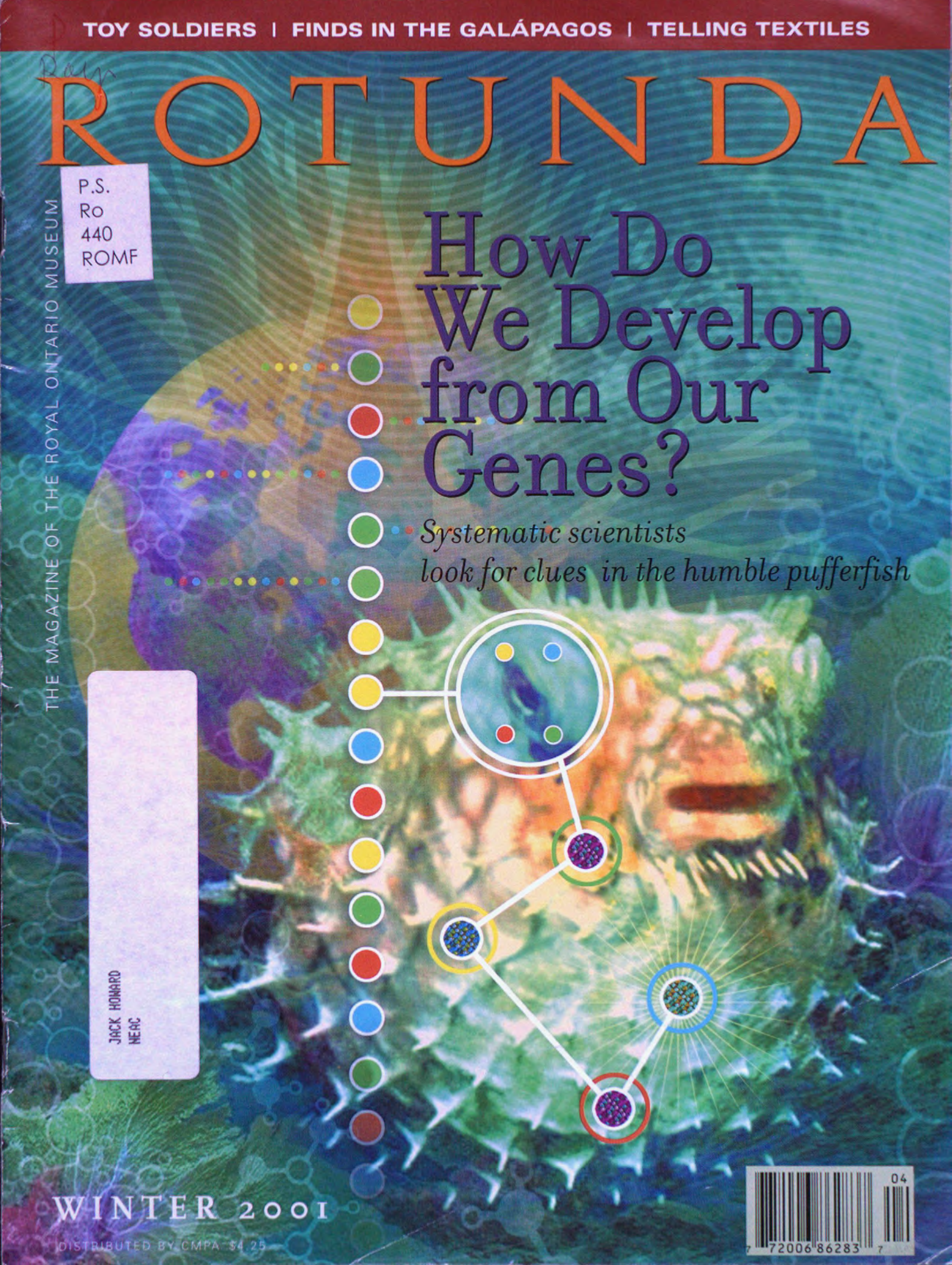
## How Do We Develop from Our Genes?

*Systematic scientists look for clues in the humble pufferfish*

JACK HOWARD  
NERC

WINTER 2001

DISTRIBUTED BY CMPA \$4.25







Harry Wearne, whose printed textile collection was donated to the ROM in 1934, was one of the first to make the connection between prints on paper and printed textiles. He identified John Hoppner's 18th-century mezzotint (left) as the inspiration for the textile design shown below.



BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 934.4.614

# tales in textiles

*Novels and ballets, encoded political messages,  
and even tabloid scandals were all grist for the mill  
200 years ago when artisans printed images on  
furnishing fabrics for fashionable homes*

**L**AST JANUARY, as I was researching the ROM's celebrated collection of some 3000 printed textiles, I came across a photograph pasted to the back of one of them. It showed a mezzotint—a print of a painting—by 18th-century artist John Hoppner. In the print, English society bride Lady Sophia Heathcote was dressed as Hebe the Cup Bearer—the ancient mythological Greek goddess of youth and spring. Clearly, the print had served as the textile designer's model: the fabric itself is covered with the repeating image of Lady Heathcote as Hebe.

Beside the photo, English collector Harry Wearne—whose widow donated in 1934 the majority of the ROM's narrative textiles—made an annotation that reveals his pride in identifying the engraved print as the source of the fabric's design: "This remarkable example of mezzotint engraving was produced about 1810–20 by Steinback, Koechlin & Co. of Mulhouse, Alsace, one of the foremost printers of the period, whose work equals that of Oberkampf, or any other printer. A rare document."

Unknowingly, Wearne had taken his first step into a field that only today, more than 60 years later, is finally taking root—the study of print sources for 18th-century European decorative arts. He would have been amazed to learn about the many print sources I am now identifying that were used as models to decorate the textiles in the Harry Wearne Collection of Ancient Textiles.

On these fabrics, everyone from George Washington and Ben Franklin to the royal court of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI as well as village children, shepherds, and their pets can be found. They mingle

charmingly in scenes from everyday life, current events, or historic battles. Once you know how to interpret them, the narrative images that decorate more than 350 early furnishing fabrics in the ROM's textile collection serve as mirrors into all facets of life two centuries ago. Popular novels and classical literature, plays, ballets, and operas, even tabloid scandals, visual puns, and encoded political messages are represented on these fabrics, waiting to be rediscovered and enjoyed as they once were when they covered the walls, slip-covered the chairs, and draped the beds and windows of fashionable 18th- and early 19th-century homes in Europe, Great Britain, and North America.

In 1995, when I was first invited to study early printed textiles at The Art Institute of Chicago, I could not recall any of my colleagues in the print world writing about this intriguing subject let alone discussing it. As a curator of prints and drawings and a former printmaker, I seem to be the first from my discipline to cross fields to work on textiles. When the invitation came, I was deep in the middle of solving a mystery at the British Museum—I had found an unrecorded album of drawings from the Italian Renaissance. Somehow, it had slipped between the cracks and no one knew it was there. At the time, it was the most exciting discovery I had ever made. Little did I know how much my career was about to change, and that soon discoveries would be the stuff of my everyday life.

At my first meeting in the Art Institute's Department of Textiles, as the curator showed me photographs of 18th- and 19th-century printed fabrics designed for home furnishings, I immediately started making associations. Without thinking I'd blurt out "Oh! I think I know an engraving

By Starr Siegele



on paper related to that textile design.”

Only in the last few years, as I have systematically explored connections between prints on paper and prints on cloth—and studied the ROM’s collection as a Veronika Gervers Fellow—have I realized the full extent to which designers of these yard goods were using engravings, etchings, and lithographs as their models. In virtually every case, images on the textiles can be explained if corresponding prints on paper can be found and their subjects identified.

The real challenge, of course, is making the match. Even then, the game is not always straightforward. Some textiles present a researcher with complex jigsaw puzzles: the most skilled designers might easily borrow ideas from many different prints to compose a single textile design. It sometimes takes years of patient hunting to gather all the pieces.

Some of the most complex designs were produced, not surprisingly, by the world’s most famous manufacturer of printed textiles, Christophe-Philippe

Oberkampf. A German Protestant who immigrated to France via Switzerland in 1758, 20-year-old Oberkampf already showed signs of becoming a brilliant entrepreneur. He set up shop conveniently close to the royal court at Versailles in the village of Jouy-en-Josas. Born into the textile business, Oberkampf had trained through the ranks. He was a fast study, both clever and practical. And luck was on his side. The year after Oberkampf moved to France, a 73-year French ban on printed cloth—imposed in response to a strong lobby by the manufacturers of

silk, wool, linen, and hemp who feared their customers’ infatuation with cheaper printed cottons would ruin their businesses—was finally lifted. Opportunity abounded for a young man with textile-printing know-how, which had been largely lacking in France since 1685, when the Edict of Nantes was revoked, resulting in an exodus of the Protestant population, including many skilled textile workers.

Astutely, Oberkampf, after many years of commissioning designs from various artists, hired one whose



COURTESY STAIR SAINTY MATTHIESEN INC.



COURTESY THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO



BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 934.4576A

## discovering the Wyngaerts

EVERY RESEARCH FELLOW privileged to conduct firsthand studies in the ROM’s collections and archives dreams of uncovering within their riches some new key that will elucidate previous work in the field and open exciting paths for future research. Just such a discovery came during my own fellowship when I found signatures on three of the ROM’s printed textiles—two of whose fabric designs I had never seen before. Although the signature on each piece was different, eventually I was able to associate all of them with a Flemish-born family of textile designers and manufacturers active in Bolbec, France, during the second quarter of the 19th century. Their name was Wyngaert (also spelled Winkaert). Most revealing, these ROM artifacts seemed to relate to a fourth textile at The Art Institute of Chicago that had been intriguing and perplexing me for several years. Although the design and manufacture of the Chicago piece appeared to be French, the interiors and costumes portrayed on it evoked Elizabethan England.

The first clue to the connection came when I noticed that one of the ROM’s signed works—a cotton fabric dated 1827 and printed with scenes from the life of Henry IV—appeared similar enough in style to be a possible companion to the Chicago textile. The design on the Toronto textile was based

on prints, themselves reproductions of the paintings *Henri IV et Sully chez Gabrielle* by Evariste Fradelle and *Henri IV chez Michaud* by Alexandre Menjaud.

It is frustrating but not unusual that furnishing fabrics decorated with narrative scenes have often been described rather vaguely. When I began to study Chicago’s printed textiles, I noted that the Elizabethan-looking one was designated as “scenes from Shakespeare.” Only after I had seen the ROM’s signed artifacts did Wyngaert’s signature become clear; the design was not even described in any of the literature on textiles. I still have not found an example of it in any other collection.

Over time, I was able to identify each of the four prints on paper used as models for the textile in Chicago. As it turns out, the images are all scenes from British literature depicted in paintings of the early 1820s by Henry Joseph Fradelle and reproduced as engravings in 1827 by Jean-Pierre-Marie Jazet: Othello telling his life story to Desdemona from *Othello* by William Shakespeare; Belinda at her dressing table from *The Rape of the Lock* by Alexander Pope; and two illustrations from novels by Sir Walter Scott—Mary Stuart and Chatelard from *The Abbot* and Leicester visiting Amy Robsart from *Kenilworth*.

Once a textile design’s sources and subject have been identified, my next step is to consider its context. In consid-

**Opposite page: Left:** This painting of Mary Stuart visiting Chatelard by Henry Joseph Fradelle was the inspiration for one of the scenes printed on a textile from The Art Institute of Chicago, shown beside it. **Above right:** The ROM’s textile depicting scenes from the life of Henry IV and signed by Wyngaert helped identify the Chicago textile, shown in full at left.

ering why British tales would be depicted on French toiles, I found that in France in the years following Napoleon’s defeat, a vogue for everything English swept the country. A fascination with historical novels and plays, particularly those set in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a preoccupation with sentimental anecdote, intimate format, details of historic costume and decor—all presented in a refined, miniaturist technique—were elements of the popular painting style typified on the Art Institute’s textile, a genre that later came to be known as “Troubadour.”

It also occurred to me in looking for context, that each of the female characters portrayed in the textile design had been betrayed by a man. Who can’t imagine the angry woman who might have commissioned such a fabric? Picture it covering her bedroom walls, draping the windows, upholstering the chairs, and, especially, swathing her great bed and its canopy like a tantrum! However, it is more likely that these tender but provocative scenes were purposely selected by the textile manufacturer to cater to clients fascinated with themes that idealized past heroines. Women writers and painters became significant proponents of the Troubadour style’s retrospective romanticizing. It is easy to understand why the genre had a natural appeal to feminine sentiment.

Given that so many early printed textiles illustrated contemporary theatrical themes, it was not surprising to discover that Chicago’s “Scenes from British Literature” and Toronto’s “Henry IV” both reflect performances presented in France during the 1820s. In 1823 de Plannard’s comic opera “Marie Stuart en Ecosse” opened at the Feydeau Theatre in Paris. Anglomania encouraged renewed interest in Shakespeare and a travelling English theatre troupe was received with enthusiasm in 1827 (the actual date inscribed on Jazet’s print series and on the ROM’s artifact). The following year, the famous French author Victor Hugo adapted Scott’s *Kenilworth* for a staging of *Amy Robsart*, with costumes designed by the equally renowned painter Eugène Delacroix. These facts connect neatly to provide a sound basis for dating the Art Institute’s textile with the ROM’s “Henri IV”—around 1827–1828.

What began during my Gervers Fellowship with a visual association and then with my identifying the Wyngaert name on four printed textiles in Toronto and Chicago has led to a remarkable expansion of our knowledge of that family’s contribution to the printed textile industry. With the collaboration of French and American colleagues, it has been possible to assemble from our respective collections an inventory of 27 printed textile designs signed by the Wyngaerts.





The design for the ROM's textile "American Liberty," seen in the background, was created by designer Jean-Baptiste Huët, who drew inspiration from the works of more than 15 artists from various countries and epochs. A few close-ups from the textile are shown beside the prints he used as models. **Left to right:** "Girl Milking Goats" by Johannes Visscher after Nicolaes Berchem; "Sheep and Goats," "The Little Shepherd," and "The Laundresses," all by Gilles Demarteau, after François Boucher.

skill and instinct for designing printed fabrics was unequalled in France or England—Jean-Baptiste Huët. Their highly successful partnership lasted from 1783 until the artist's death in 1811. So renowned were the printed cottons they created at Jouy-en-Josas that the term "toiles de Jouy" came to be used generically.

Huët was a painter, draughtsman, and tapestry designer with a gift for portraying animals. He was also a prolific printmaker. Huët had assembled a large collection of contemporary and Old Master prints that we now know he tapped regularly as models. I have no doubt that Huët's hands-on experience with printmaking

contributed significantly to Oberkampf's success.

The painstaking process of printing on fabric began with an original "cartoon" or design drawn by the artist, which would then be transferred by an engraver onto a copperplate and engraved. A note in Oberkampf's archives describes the technique: "An engraver must know at least the rudiments of drawing so that he can trace the design accurately on the sheet of oiled paper that is provided, and then transfer it onto the plate, using a stylus and a sheet of paper darkened with oil and lampblack." The tools and techniques for engraving were essentially the same as those used to print on pa-

per, and much of the technology of textile printing derived from the book trade. But whereas paper could be printed directly using the oil-based printers' inks familiar to the book trade, for cloth to be colourfast it had to undergo many more steps. The blank cotton fabric had to be specially prepared to make it receptive to the design; first it was printed with carefully thickened mordants (iron and aluminum salts); next it was dipped in a dye bath and then it was washed in water to clear any superfluous colour away from the design. Finally, the printed textile was laid out in the sun to be dried and bleached.

Huët understood exactly how to prepare a cartoon for the engraver: with precise graphic rendering and by minimizing the detail, he shortened the time needed to engrave the copperplate, and so reduced costs for the manufacturer. The larger, more complicated plates—up to a metre square—could take several months to en-

grave, and speed was essential, particularly if the subject matter concerned a breaking news event.

Oberkampf himself had an instinctive ability to sense a new trend almost before it happened, and with the help of Huët's skills was often the first to seize advantage on the market. His textile depicting scenes from *The Marriage of Figaro*, for example, may mark the first performance ever printed on a French furnishing fabric. It must have sparked a huge fad among decorators catering to the culture mongers of the day. As my sleuthing reveals the context of one picture after another on these printed fabrics, I continue to be amazed at how many of them commemorate performances of the day.

Banned in France when it was written around 1776 by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–1799), *The Marriage of Figaro* circulated in pirated editions in Europe for years. The multi-talented de Beaumarchais's audacious script carried a timely political mes-



sage so derisive of the old regime in France that it incurred the royal censor. Finally, during the spring of 1784, his stage play was allowed its public premiere in Paris (Mozart's famous comic opera adaptation debuted two years later in Vienna). Oberkampf moved quickly to base his fabric's design on some of the prints commissioned for the two earliest French editions of the play, both published in 1785. The books' principal illustrators were Parisian engraver and print dealer Thomas-Charles Naudet and the genre and landscape painter Jacques-Philippe Joseph de Saint-Quentin.

Sometimes attributed to Huët, the original drawing for the Figaro textile mostly exhibits a style quite different from Huët's—though its anonymous draughtsman did not lack a subtle sense of humour. Politically sensitive scenes are played under an elaborate stage curtain appropriated directly from a print done of a painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau, the earlier 18th-century Belgian-born painter who had most successfully romanticized the *ancien régime* in France. Only some of the broader, surer strokes—defining a couple of cherubs, a girl with a pet lamb, and her male companion piping a tune for his dog—might indicate Huët's correcting hand on the sheet. In fact, the same young musician—a figure inspired by a Boucher print—appears in two other designs Huët prepared for Oberkampf that year.

No other designer of printed textiles ever approached Huët's unique ability to transform however many disparate parts into such a charmingly cohesive, personal style. One early product of the Oberkampf-Huët collaboration—called "American Liberty" or "The Franklin Peace Medal"—introduces in dizzying array many of the themes the manufacturer and artist would explore over their 28-year collaboration. The ROM's example bears the mark of Oberkampf's famous factory—with its proud display of the King's stamp of approval—signalling the zenith of textile printing. What looks on the surface like an easy, breezy pastoral scene, is in fact an incredibly complex composition. Its seamless, graceful motifs are assimilated from the works of

more than 15 artists from various countries and epochs.

Much has already been written about the namesake medal conceived by Benjamin Franklin while he was in France negotiating a Franco-American alliance against Britain. But no one has much noticed how many other timely references abound on the textile. It pays due homage to the preceding generation of court artists such as François Boucher. Several of Boucher's laundresses appear here along with his young mother feeding her chickens. And, of course, we recognize the little musician and his dancing dog—this time joined by an expanded audience of farmyard livestock and exotic monkeys. Some of these gentle critters were gathered from prints etched either by Huët himself, or by his mentor, Gilles Demarteau, who gave Huët his first major job painting murals for Demarteau's Paris townhouse salon alongside the well-known artists Fragonard and Boucher.

Other images in "American Liberty" derive from engravings made by or after 17th-century Dutch and Flemish artists. Huët particularly admired Nicolaes Berchem (1620–1683) and Philips Wouwerman (1619–1668): hundreds of their works are listed in the inventory of his art collection. In addition to many of the sheep and goats, there are other motifs whose sources can be found in these prints: the milkmaid, a frisky dog pulling the little boy holding his leash, another pup enjoying his ride in the bow of a rowboat, and a dashing horseman in a fine feathered hat.

In drawing a visual connection between republican ideals of liberty and a simple lifestyle, close to nature, Huët was alluding to the popularly embraced philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), which equated rustic culture with virtue, equality, and freedom. Happy, lowland peasants from an earlier era were perceived as exemplars of a natural democracy. The public's rush to collect paintings by the earlier Dutch and Flemish masters of these themes quickly produced a demand on 18th-century printmakers to reproduce the bucolic images—which inevitably turned up on printed textiles. During the 1770s and

1780s, Rousseauian concepts of landscape architecture also took hold, and the "natural" park-garden became a familiar backdrop for many textile designs.

The dancing nymph playing a tambourine seen on "American Liberty" derives from a more classical tradition—and is based on a wall painting discovered during the archaeological excavations of Herculaneum in the 1740s. These excavations along with the discovery of Pompeii fired interest in ancient Greek and Rome. Unless Huët used an intermediate source, he undoubtedly copied the nymph from plate 21 in *Le pitture antiche d'Ercolano e contorni* (published in Naples, 1757), a popular catalogue that illustrated many of the findings at Herculaneum. Huët's own collection from which he drew inspiration included not just paintings, drawings, and engravings but also actual antiquities—vases, coins, and a considerable variety of ancient medals and plaques—along with contemporary recreations popularized by decorative artists such as Wedgwood.

Classical themes became more important with Napoleon's rise to power in the years following the French Revolution of 1789. Purposefully, Napoleon evoked ancient Rome, a style he affected for his empire, and it was no accident that antique subjects increasingly came to dominate art and decoration. Fortunately, several of Oberkampf's letters of instruction have survived, illuminating how current events and other market trends influenced the creative process. After the revolution, Oberkampf wrote Huët that he wanted to participate in this new trend for images reminiscent of ancient Greece and Rome—the growing taste for neo-classical design. Huët promptly changed course and obliged with compositions derived from catalogues that illustrated artifacts amassed by 18th-century collectors of antiquity. He also looked to the Italian Renaissance.

In Renaissance master Raphael's day, similar excitement had been spurred by the discovery of ceiling and wall paintings in the ancient Golden House of Nero, country palace of the infamous Roman emperor who died

in 68 AD. Raphael and the artists working in his studio incorporated many of the things they saw in Nero's palace in their own paintings, which were in turn reproduced many times over in prints on paper—and ultimately in the textile prints Huët designed for Oberkampf.

One such Huët design for a textile printed with "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" derived most of its motifs from a series of Renaissance engraved prints known as the "Fable of Psyche," made and published in Rome around 1532 by Augustino Veneziano and the anonymous Italian printmaker, Master of the Die. The engravings themselves were based on other drawings by Flemish painter and tapestry designer Michael Coxie, following Raphael's ideas.

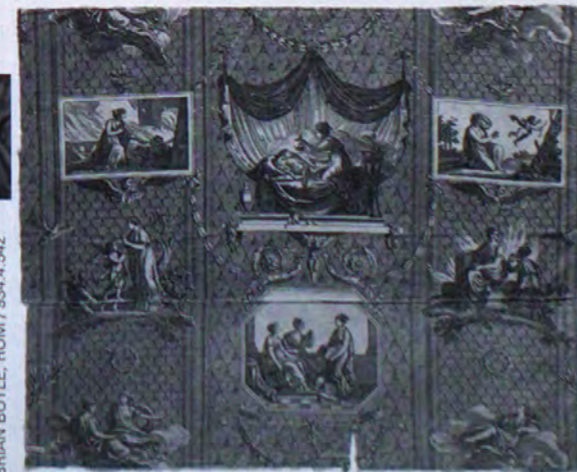
French printmakers copied the series during the 16th century and again in 1802 and 1809. Huët interpreted them for Oberkampf around 1810 when the reproductions were undoubtedly intended to capitalize on another event: the Paris exhibit of a stunning set of stained-glass windows created in 1543—and based on the Coxie/Raphael designs—for the Psyche Gallery at the Chateau d'Ecouen in the area of Val d'Oise. The windows remained on view in Paris until 1816 (today they can be seen at the Musée Condé in Chantilly).

Huët's ambitious textile composition for "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" was his final work for Oberkampf—he died later that year. By the time of Oberkampf's death four years later, the centre of the printed textile industry had already shifted to Normandy and Alsace. Perhaps, as British collector Harry Wearne attested, the Alsatian successors achieved excellence in the quality of their printing. But, although designs were commissioned from an array of respectable artists, no one ever again proved capable of producing the harmony and charm of the printed textiles created by Christophe-Philippe Oberkampf and Jean-Baptiste Huët at Jouy-en-Josas. •

*Starr Siegele's findings for this article have been greatly aided by The Oberkampf Archives at La Fondation Pour l'Histoire de la Haute Banque, Paris, and by Monsieur Xavier Peticol of Saint Pandelon and Paris.*



These prints of "The Fable of Psyche" by anonymous Italian engraver Master of the Die were obviously the models used to decorate the textile (opposite page, left) created by the renowned artist/manufacturer team of Huët and Oberkampf.



BRIAN BOYLE, ROM / 934.4.542

