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An Eighteenth-Century French Snuffbox as an Object of Social Status*



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Columbus's voyages to the New World introduced snuff, or finely ground tobacco, to Europe. In 1493 Friar Ramón Pane first described the Taino Indians of Haiti inhaling tobacco powder, in an account published in 1511.¹ Europeans initially believed that the leaves had curative properties. By the mid 1550s Spanish and Portuguese sailors had introduced to Europe the practice of smoking the leaves in pipes, and smoking caught on among all classes. Many European countries controlled the importation and sale of tobacco as royal monopolies, which provided much needed revenue for royal treasuries. The inhalation of powdered tobacco among Europeans, however, is not described until the first half of the seventeenth century, the time of Louis XIII (r. 1610–1643).² The first of the absolute rulers, Louis XIII himself was attached to snuff taking. By the beginning of the eighteenth century and throughout the century, snuff constituted the most important part of the tobacco trade in Europe.³ This created a need for something to contain it—a snuffbox, or *tabatière* in French. A beautiful example of a French snuffbox resides in the collections of the Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri (Figs. 1–6 and front cover).⁴

The popularity of snuff went hand in hand with the popularity of snuffboxes and the performance of elite status in Europe. France became the epicenter of snuffbox production and use by the eighteenth century, and the finest boxes were made in Paris. In fact, snuffboxes played such a prominent part in the political and social life of France that the eighteenth century has been called *Le siècle de la tabatière* (The century of the snuffbox).⁵ A fashionable snuffbox was considered an indispensable accessory for a well-dressed gentleman or lady.⁶ A *tabatière* was not just a beautiful container for finely ground tobacco. The



Fig. 1. Snuffbox. French, ca. 1756–1762, gold box and mounts, and lacquer panels. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri. Gift of Sarah Catherine France, acc. no. 69.1044. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.



Fig. 2. Front of snuffbox. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.



Fig. 3. Top of snuffbox. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.



Fig. 4. Back of snuffbox. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.



Fig. 5. Bottom of snuffbox. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.



Fig. 6. Left and right ends of snuffbox. Photo: Jeffrey Wilcox.

ownership of such a luxury object as a snuffbox and its graceful manipulation in a social setting would have marked the owner as a member of the social elite.

The Museum of Art and Archaeology's *tabatière* is a good example of a luxury object and fashionable accessory for the well-dressed eighteenth-century gentleman or lady who wished to be a player in French elite circles. It is an elegantly constructed gold box made in mid-eighteenth century Paris. Its size, approximately one and a half by three inches, would allow it to be carried on the person, and its weight, just over five ounces, gives it a physical presence.⁷ Characteristic of French gold boxes made after 1735, a precise, well-integrated hinge across the back enables the box to close, in a phrase of the period, "*à miracle*."⁸ The hinge, located on the back of the box, is so well hidden that it is not visible when the box is closed (Fig. 4). The extraordinary mechanical perfection of the hinge allows for a very tight-fitting lid, important from a practical point of view since snuff needs to be contained and kept moist.⁹ An elaborately chased gold thumb piece on the front of the box provides a place to open the snug fitting lid (Figs. 1 and 2). The box itself is decorated with miniature paintings mounted on all sides with gold mounts that form an elegant wavy frame for the paintings. The paintings on the front and the top of the box depict courting scenes between a man and a woman set in the countryside (Figs. 1–3). The paintings on the back, bottom, and ends depict this pastoral setting further with rustic structures, a garden fountain, and a riverbank (Figs. 4–6).

The museum's *tabatière* was a luxury good because, first of all, it is a gold box. We know it is gold and made in mid-eighteenth century Paris because it bears the impressions of four *poinçons*, or marks, which every gold box manufactured in Paris had by law to bear. Impressions of three of the *poinçons* were required before assembly of the box, and they therefore appear on all parts. These marks were the maker's mark, the personal mark of the goldsmith; the warden's or hallmark, which guaranteed the purity of the gold alloy; and the *charge* mark, which was the preliminary tax mark, the first of two duty marks.¹⁰ These marks are often hard to decipher; when the box was being finished, the marks might be stretched, rubbed, and hammered into illegibility.¹¹ Examination of the museum's box under a microscope reveals that all three *poinçons* were impressed inside on the bottom, the lid, and the right flange. Only the *charge* marks inside the lid and on the right flange are legible, however, and both are a portcullis (Fig. 7). The fourth *poinçon*, the *décharge* mark (second duty mark), was most often impressed on the right flange, and that is where it is found on this box. It

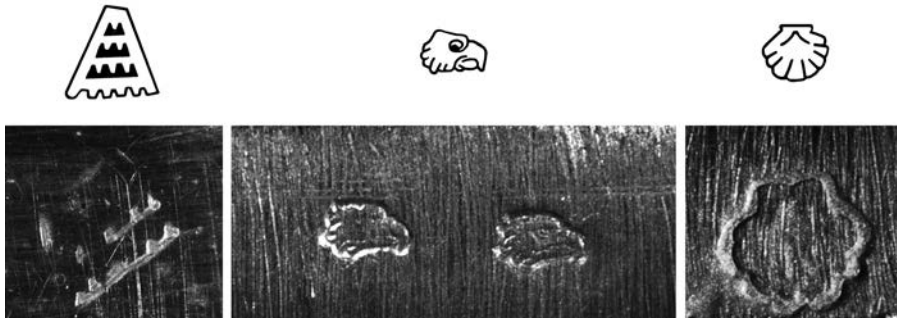


Fig. 7. Marks impressed on the snuffbox: portcullis, parrot heads, and shell. Microscope photography: Dr. Aleksandr Jurkevic, Molecular Cytology Core, Life Sciences, University of Missouri. Drawings adapted from Nocq and Dreyfus, *Tabatières du Musée du Louvre*, p. XIV.

is easily differentiated from the other three because it is noticeably smaller. This type of mark is often perfectly legible because it was impressed only after the box had been completed and the taxes paid; it signaled that it could be legally sold. The *décharge* mark on this box is a shell (Fig. 7). The portcullis and the shell were the *charge* and *décharge* marks used by the Parisian *fermier* (collector of taxes) Eloi Brichard, whose term of service was from 1756 to 1762.¹² The legible *poinçons* establish that the museum's box is gold and originated in Paris between 1756 and 1762.

Examination of the left flange of the museum's snuffbox reveals two more marks of the same size as the *décharge* marks. The marks are identical parrot heads (Fig. 7). This mark was in use only from 1786 to 1789.¹³ Why two more *décharge* marks? The records state that countermarks were impressed on pieces that came up for resale, and these marks were the same size and nature as *décharge* marks.¹⁴ In the eighteenth century, luxury goods like *tabatières* constituted one of the most important components of the Parisian economy.¹⁵ They were of course sold new but also had value in the resale or secondhand market. Secondhand luxury goods maintained their value because they were made from expensive materials with costly workmanship.¹⁶ Luxury goods also circulated as an alternative currency. The elite in eighteenth-century Paris, inescapably enmeshed in the social mechanism of Parisian society, had constantly to prove their position through extravagant display, which often consumed their whole incomes and more. By the end of the 1770s, therefore, cheap credit was needed, which enabled the creation of the Paris pawnshop.

Pawning was immediately successful, not only among the poor but also to a great extent among the wealthy.¹⁷ Two other *décharge*-like marks may mean this box was resold or perhaps pawned twice in Paris between 1786 and 1789. These were the years leading up to the French Revolution, so this information adds interesting history to this object, given the economic, political, and social turmoil of that time.

Another feature of this snuffbox that enhanced its value and status is the choice of medium for the panels that decorate all of its sides. The miniature paintings are lacquered.¹⁸ Lacquer products were first made in the Far East, and so few were imported to Europe in the sixteenth century that only royalty owned them.¹⁹ “Lacquer with its flawless surface, polished to a mirror gloss, impervious to scar and scratch, dazzled the Europeans. The undeniable perfection of craftsmanship, the tasteful and exotic decoration, the novelty and the scarcity of imported lacquer pieces reserved them for royalty. They were gifts as acceptable as jewels.”²⁰ Equating lacquer with jewels and the use of terms such as “brilliance,” “luster,” and “longevity” in describing it, reveal the value placed on the medium and on objects made with lacquer.²¹ By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many artisans throughout Europe were trying to imitate it, but the resin for Far Eastern lacquer, which came from the *Rhus verniciflua* tree (indigenous to China and later introduced in Japan) had no botanical equivalent outside the East and could not be shipped long distances.²² In 1730, Guillaume Martin obtained a patent in Paris on his lacquer process called *vernis Martin*. The lacquer varnish was composed of resin from the Brazil gum copal tree. Contemporaries considered it to have a particularly beautiful luster, and it “seems to have been substantially superior [to other European lacquer processes] in quality, shine, and durability.”²³

Over time, Martin and his three brothers (and eventually four of their sons) manufactured fewer and fewer Far East imitations and more and more decorative motifs in lacquer that reflected French Rococo taste. Lacquerware became immensely popular in France during the reign of Louis XV (1715–1775).²⁴ The Martins were known for small elegantly lacquered objects such as jewelry boxes and snuffboxes. Preferred subjects were “pastoral idylls, *scènes galantes*, and mythological allegories.”²⁵ The Martin brothers worked from engravings of contemporary paintings and worked closely with many artists and artisans who were in the business of decorating objects.²⁶ “The Martins were . . . responsible for creating a fashion among the nobility during the Rococo

period for exquisitely lacquered small objects.”²⁷ *Marchands merciers*, merchants of luxury goods, frequently commissioned work from the Martins for their noble customers. Accounts of one, Lazare Duvaux, show that he delivered small lacquered items such as snuffboxes to such clients as Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764), *maîtresse-en-titre* (titled mistress) of Louis XV.²⁸

It is difficult to know whether the Martin brothers decorated the panels for the museum’s box. Their work was so popular and sought after that many imitations were made in Paris at the time. They never signed their work.²⁹ In addition, there are no stylistic or technical characteristics—easily identifiable sets of designs, for example—that can help attribute lacquerwork to the Martin family, or to other *vernisseurs* (artisans who do lacquerwork) for that matter.³⁰ The term *vernis Martin*, therefore, has developed as a generic term to connote lacquerwork done particularly during the Rococo period (1710–1780).³¹

The lacquer panels on the museum’s box were constructed by building many polished layers of colored resin, paint, and clear resin upon a base or support. In Oriental practice, “Wood is the most common support for lacquer.”³² It was smoothed, and all cracks and joints filled. Then it was covered with paper or cloth to isolate the wood base and to act as a ground material.³³ Two areas of damage on the panels of the museum’s box, one a piece splintered in the lower left corner of the top and the other a crack on the back of the lid, allow one to peer down through the layers (Figs. 3 and 4). A black ground of perhaps tortoiseshell material appears to form a base for the panels. On the back panel, the base appears to be covered with cloth. The cross fibers of the cloth are visible at the edges of the damage in the back of the lid; they are not visible, however, on the top panel. Multiple layers of resin, some stained white, some blue green, were apparently laid down over the cloth. Each layer would have been polished repeatedly until completely smooth.³⁴ Then at least five layers of paint created the pastoral scenes. Clear resins were applied in many layers over the painted scenes, each layer always polished until completely smooth. Although we know that the resin used in *vernis Martin* was from the Brazil copal tree, there is no record of the formula.³⁵

It has been recorded that the Martins’ workshops could produce lacquerware so like that of China and Japan that it could fool even the most astute contemporary connoisseur.³⁶ European lacquer, *vernis Martin* included, was, however, prone to discoloration, and it is doubtful that it looks today like it did when it left the *vernisseur*’s workshop. “In time, all European lacquer shows

craquelure, and the varnish has a tendency to yellow.”³⁷ The lacquer surface of the museum’s *tabatière* is yellowed, and a whole network of cracks has occurred in the resin (craquelure). In addition, it appears as though there has been an attempt to fill the cracks by applying a coat (or coats) of varnish at some point later in the life of the box, which may have contributed to the yellowing of the surface. When looked at under a microscope, pooling of varnish is visible at the edges of the gold mounts.

What could the *vernis Martin* lacquer technique do for the decoration of this box? One of the contemporary terms used to describe lacquer, “brilliance,” speaks to its striking coloring that was very appealing to the eighteenth-century elite customer.³⁸ Placing layers of oil paint between different layers of varnish could make shapes and color pop out, a technique first used in Persian lacquerware.³⁹ In the scene on the top of the box, the roses on the woman’s shoes glimmer, drawing attention to how fashionable they are. The brushstrokes have created expressive faces for the women and have allowed the artist to create the atmospheric effects necessary to make the landscapes a background for figural scenes (Figs. 1–3). These effects could not have been created in enamel, porcelain, or gouache. The lacquer technique gives the whole box a glowing luster, making its appearance very pleasing. The lacquerwork, the gold, and the box’s elegant construction make it an object of beauty and status fit for royalty but more likely bought by the elite consumer.

By 1740, among the elite, the snuffbox had become a social necessity.⁴⁰ A fashionable snuffbox could become an important accessory to the rituals of etiquette associated with aristocratic life. The display of an up-to-date, fashionable snuffbox was a sign of the owner’s own elegant and cultured taste. Since notions of fashionability are intimately linked with change, new forms in snuffbox design became the rule rather than the exception. The museum’s snuffbox is representative of a new design innovation that appeared toward 1755—the *tabatière en cage*.⁴¹ “*En cage*” referred to *tabatières* constructed with a gold frame fitted with panels of one or more of a variety of materials: hard stones, lacquer, tortoiseshell, porcelain, *vernis Martin*, ivory, or enameled copper. In most cases, the gold mount cages fitted decorative panels to a gold box. This *en cage* construction could allow for the alteration or substitution of more up-to-date decoration, so that the elite could keep pace with fashion demands.⁴² The pastoral scenes on the museum’s box are miniature paintings done on panels held in place on all sides of the gold box by a nearly seamless

gold cage. No physical evidence suggests that the panels were altered or substituted. What is important to recognize is that the *en cage* construction represents a new design concept that addresses the social anxieties of the elite to keep up with fashion in Paris in the eighteenth century.

The invention of the *tabatière en cage* is attributed to the merchants of desire, the *marchands merciers* of Paris.⁴³ Their corporation dates back to the twelfth century, and they have always been associated with the importation of luxury goods.⁴⁴ In eighteenth-century Paris, they maintained shops and through these supplied objects of fine craftsmanship and fashionable design to the royal court, residents of Paris, and tourists. By statutes, however, *marchands merciers* were not allowed to manufacture goods. The sphere of retailing and marketing was theirs, not production, although they did alter objects to make them more marketable. Corporation statutes gave them the right to buy and sell items in any medium and the right to “facilitate production” of goods that crossed artisanal categories. The museum’s *tabatière en cage* is a good example since its manufacture would have involved goldsmiths, painters, and *vernisseurs*. A *marchand mercier* could have facilitated its production by supplying design ideas to an artisan workshop, or by supplying materials, or by commissioning this object from an artisan for a customer. Uniquely positioned between the artisan and the elite customer, *marchands merciers* could shape taste and incite demand through “facilitating production,” sumptuous displays of merchandise, and advertising. This also represented a shift in the cultural meaning of decoration, from manual and material (the work of the artisan) to conceptual and creative (the work of the *marchands merciers* and their customers). The conceptual and creative were perceived as more noble and appealed to the elite. French luxury commerce—which included the designing and buying of *tabatières en cage* like the museum’s box—was viewed as a social enterprise. The shops of *marchands merciers* were social spaces where negotiation with makers and extensive conversations with consumers took place.⁴⁵ Since the museum’s box is a *tabatière en cage* with the latest in fashionable decoration, it is reasonable to assume that a member of the elite would have bought it from a *marchand mercier*.

One feature in the construction of the panels of the Missouri *tabatière en cage* makes it unusual when comparing it to others of the type. For each of the front, back, and side panels, the pastoral scenes extend from the body of the box onto the lid (Figs. 2, 4, and 6). The design elements in each scene line up



Fig. 8. François Boucher (French, 1703–1770). *Le vieux moulin, environs de Beauvais* (The Old Mill, Environs of Beauvais), 1740, oil on canvas. Hermitage Museum. Image courtesy of the author.

perfectly as though each panel was painted and then cut and mounted. A search of *tabatières en cage* illustrated in six catalogues turned up none constructed like the museum's box.⁴⁶

The *en cage* construction is fashionable, and the placement of the panels on the body of the box in relation to the lid are specialized and unique elements of this snuffbox. The subject matter of the panels is, however, clearly part of a conventionalized pictorial and iconographic tradition—the pastoral scene. François Boucher's (1703–1770) painting *Le vieux moulin, environs de Beauvais* (1740) is one example (Fig. 8). This landscape of rural France includes a dovecote, a cottage, and a watermill, as well as men and women dressed in the same casual clothes as we see men and women wearing in the scenes on the museum's box.⁴⁷ In Boucher's painting the dovecote is pictured as a rustic

cottage for human habitation, not as it really was in the French countryside, shelter for a flock of pigeons. The pastoral scenes on the museum's box include these same architectural features. The back panel illustrates a riverbank scene (Fig. 4). Lined up from left to right, four structures appear to be sinking into the river. On the left stands a tumbled-down mill with a waterwheel. Next on the river edge, vines cling to a second, larger waterwheel. Further to the right, stone stairs descend to the river adjacent to a dovecote and ruined building. Trees and shrubbery surround all these structures, with woodlands behind. Represented on the bottom panel of the museum's *tabatière* is the suggestion of a garden, an aristocratic use of land (Fig. 5). In the right foreground rises a fountain with flowering vines tumbling down its sides. Trees and a fence form the backdrop, and to the left, in the distance, a cottage leans against a dovecote. One end panel shows a dovecote and cottage, and the other a second fountain and a rickety fence, both framed by trees (Fig. 6). These architectural features became the decorative vocabulary of French country estates.⁴⁸ The painted panels on the back, bottom, and two ends reveal an enchanted landscape of artifice that provides a space for the enactment of elite status.

The top of the box depicts a courting scene in this French country-estate setting (Fig. 3). To the left in the distance are thatch-roofed cottages. In the foreground to the right, woods provide a backdrop for the courting scene. A young man holding a flute and wearing breeches, a shirt with loose sleeves, and a vest has placed his arms around the shoulders of the woman seated next to him. She is dressed as informally as he, in a gown with loose sleeves and an over-apron; a basket of roses lies at her feet. Their casual clothing and his flute identify them as a shepherd and shepherdess—standard iconography for the eighteenth century. Their costumes, her basket of roses, and the flute declare their disposition for love. He holds the flute to her lips as if to instruct her in music making. This represents the rules of courting, the etiquette. Instead of following the rules, however, this suitor behaves aggressively, impetuously leaning in and kissing his mistress. The woman's eyes open in surprise, her right hand frozen in a startled gesture. She may be interested in romance, but she wants it conducted by the rules.⁴⁹

The front panel of the snuffbox describes another amorous scene between a man and a woman in a wooded setting (Figs. 1 and 2). To the right in the distance is a cottage and dovecote. To the left of the couple a birdcage sits abandoned with its cage door flung open. The snaring of doves and their



Fig. 9. François Boucher (French, 1703–1770). *The Enjoyable Lesson*, 1748, oil on canvas, 0.925 x 0.786 m. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Felton Bequest, 1982.

containment in cages represent virginity—also standard iconography for the eighteenth century. The man, dressed in casual clothing, grips his paramour tightly around her waist. Her left arm stretches out to the right, following the flight pattern of a white dove that has escaped, instead of being contained. In their boldness, the lovers may have skipped too many steps in the ritual of courting etiquette.

These pastoral scenes with amorous encounters between men and women are called *scènes galantes* and can be found in many different media. The scene on the top was inspired by the popular painting *The Enjoyable Lesson* (1748) by François Boucher (Fig. 9). Through engravings such as one created in 1758 by René Gaillard (1719–1790), this painting became a popular design motif for the decorative arts.⁵⁰ It inspired the soft paste porcelain sculptural group, *The Flute*



Fig. 10. *Figure Group: The Flute Lesson*, modeled under the direction of Etienne-Maurice Falconet after engraved designs of François Boucher. French, ca. 1757–1766, soft-paste biscuit porcelain, H. 0.223 m, L. 0.254 m, W. 0.152 m. Sèvres, France. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California.

Lesson, made by Vincennes (later Sèvres) Porcelain Works (Fig. 10).⁵¹ It appears on one of the porcelain vessels in a set of three (Figs. 11 and 12), and it was reproduced in enamel on a *tabatière*, now in the Louvre’s extensive collection.⁵²

The scene on the front of the museum’s box was inspired by eighteenth-century *scènes galantes* paintings involving the snaring and containment of doves, such as Boucher’s painting *La cage*,⁵³ and *The Bird Cage* by Nicolas Lancret, another successful painter of this time (1690–1745) (Fig. 13). This cage scene also appears on other snuffboxes.⁵⁴

The inspiration for the inclusion of an aggressive suitor in courting scenes comes from the art of yet another popular artist, Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). His painting *Assembly in a Park* (1716–17) is but one example (Fig. 14). A key Watteau theme was love’s evolution—love desired, love proposed, and love achieved in a poetic landscape.⁵⁵ The elite players comport themselves with a reserve that veils their feelings, but Watteau often contrasts this cultivated reserve with outbursts of passion from an “aggressive suitor.” The aggressive suitor loses his control, needing to be sharply rebuffed by his noble lady. Etiquette appears to be important for success in courting.

The *scène galante* was very fashionable in Paris in the mid-eighteenth century. Hence, the fashionability of these scenes only added to the luster of the museum’s snuffbox as a luxury item and to the status of its very *à la mode* owner. The elite eighteenth-century viewer would have seen in these scenes a parallel



Fig. 11. Vase and cover, one of a garniture of three, possibly designed by Etienne-Maurice Falconet. French, ca. 1779, Sèvres porcelain. © By kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.



Fig. 12. Detail. Vase and cover, possibly designed by Etienne-Maurice Falconet. French, ca. 1779, Sèvres porcelain. © By kind permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.



Fig. 13. Nicolas Lancret (French, 1690–1743). *The Bird Cage*, ca. 1735, oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. Image courtesy of the author.



Fig. 14. Antoine Watteau (French, 1684–1721). *Assembly in a Park*, 1716–1717, oil on wood, 0.325 x 0.465 m. Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, N.Y.

with the theatrical performances and masquerades that formed the venues for their display of elite behavior.⁵⁶ The *scène galante* was a conventionalized image that signified elite status, codifying behavior appropriate for conspicuous leisure and signifying an individual's membership in an exclusive circle.⁵⁷ The imagery of correct and incorrect behavior in love might also remind the user and viewers of the snuffbox of the importance of knowing the "rules of comportment" and the fine line between that which is *galante* and that which is *gauche*.⁵⁸

Elite society in general was organized hierarchically according to status, which depended on an individual's house and how ancient it was, but increasingly throughout the eighteenth century, title was not the only, nor the most important, criterion. By the time the museum's *tabatière* was made, during the reign of Louis XV, the royal court was no longer the center of elite society and culture. Paris had become the center, and simultaneously with that shift came the rise of the bourgeois class and a blurring of class lines. It was increasingly difficult to tell who was who. The elite, therefore, had to reinvent the locations and ways to display their elevated status. This reinvention involved the development of conspicuous forms of leisure and hyperrefined etiquette and social protocol in which one's status was also determined by appearance and by a display of refined taste, manners, and movements, including the use of objects such as *tabatières*.

The miniature paintings positioned within a gold cage on the museum's snuffbox visualize this venue of conspicuous leisure and the hyperrefined *politesse* reinvented by the elite in eighteenth-century France to display their status. The aristocratic landscape setting creates a fantasy stage for practicing the correct rituals of etiquette involved in seduction, but in the two scenes of amorous ritual, each man's own desire makes it impossible for him to pursue the correct ritual implied by the teaching of flute lessons or the capture and containment of a dove. He too hastily imposes his own desires, "a breach of all contemporary notions of civility and judgment."⁵⁹ He does not understand the complex, highly ritualized rules of seduction, which are grounded in the acknowledgment of the needs and desires of others.

The use of a snuffbox in eighteenth-century elite circles also involved following complex, highly ritualized rules. A pamphlet published in 1750 lists these rules for the use of a *tabatière* in the company of others. There are fourteen steps, most detailing how to manipulate the *tabatière*.⁶⁰ Only two steps involve the actual inhalation of the snuff—you are to do it with deliberation into both

nostrils at once and without grimacing. The rest involve what hand to hold the *tabatière* in, when to transfer it to the other hand, how to tap it to settle the snuff and how many times, how to open it, how to offer it to one's company, how to pinch it between which fingers, and so on. Knowing how to manipulate the box with ease—following all the steps, doing it effortlessly and, of course, without mishap—would demonstrate one's control. There was danger. For example, the lid of this box is quite snug and difficult to lift up. It could suddenly fly open sending the snuff all over and demonstrating the user's lack of control, or the user could end up with smears of snuff on his or her nose. For the person engaged with the object and for those observing there was a certain fascination in flirting with such danger.⁶¹ These complex rules were also grounded in the acknowledgment of the needs and desires of others. Step five prescribed that one should “offer the snuffbox to company.”

In summary, the museum's *tabatière* is an object of status. Its ownership represents distinction in society. The materials chosen, gold and lacquer, connote luxury. It is finely crafted and well constructed. The extension of the panel scenes from the body to the lid, so that the scenes line up perfectly when the lid is closed, is unusual in the world of snuffboxes. Its *en cage* construction, a design innovation that helped the elite to stay fashionable, intersects with the *marchands merciers*, arbiters of good taste who were important in the elite's quest to display and maintain their elevated status. The decoration of this box with fashionable yet conventionalized *scènes galantes* and with the inclusion of an “aggressive suitor” who does not play by the rules reveals a critical commentary on which behavior was appropriate for membership in elite society. Wealth and rank were not enough. One had to be in control of one's feelings and passions and exhibit “character and a discerning mind.”⁶² Not just the materiality of the museum's *tabatière* connoted status, however. Its correct use also marked the owner as a member of an exclusive circle.

As a status symbol, *tabatières* could easily be resold in the secondhand market or pawned in the eighteenth century. This was still true in the twentieth century. The museum's *tabatière* came into its collections from a collector, Charles B. France, who bought it from a pawnshop in Paris in the 1920s. Even today, its materiality and its connection with status within eighteenth-century society make it an object in high demand.

NOTES

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1. Clare LeCorbeiller, *European and American Snuff Boxes, 1730–1830* (London, 1966) p. 2.
2. Richard and Martin Norton, *A History of Gold Snuff Boxes* (London, 1938) p. 13.
3. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 6. Chewing and smoking tobacco were preferred in America. By the time of the French Revolution in France, snuff taking was on the decline. Cigarettes had been introduced, and smoking became fashionable.
4. “Acquisitions 1969,” *Muse* 4 (1970) pp. 8–9 (listed and top illustrated). Acc. no. 69.1044, gift of Sarah Catherine France in memory of her brother, Charles B. France. This box is just one from his collection, acquired in Paris in the 1920s.
5. Henry and Sidney Berry-Hill, *Antique Gold Boxes: Their Lore and Their Lure* (London, 1960) p. xxiii.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
7. The museum’s *tabatière* measures 4.1 cm in height, 8 cm in width, and 3.7 cm in depth.
8. A. Kenneth Snowman, *Eighteenth-Century Gold Boxes of Europe* (Boston, 1966) p. 54. Translated into English, the French term *à miracle* means “wonderfully well”
9. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 9.
10. From 1721 to 1789, the gold standard in Paris was 20.25 carats with a margin of error of 0.25 carats. The warden’s or hallmark guaranteed that the gold in the box met that standard.
11. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 56.
12. Henry Nocq and Carle Dreyfus, *Tabatières boîtes et étuis orfèvreries de Paris XVIII siècle et début du XIX de collections du Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 1930) p. XIV.
13. Nocq and Dreyfus, *Tabatières du Musée du Louvre*, p. XV.
14. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 57.
15. Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 212.
16. Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets: The Marchands Merciers of Eighteenth-Century Paris* (London, 1996) p. 144. Many disputes erupted between different corporations wanting exclusive rights to trade in luxury goods, testimony to the lucrativeness of this market.
17. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, eds., *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desire and Delectable Goods* (New York, 2003) p. 90.
18. More common materials for *tabatières* with pastoral scenes, as illustrated in the catalogues listed below, were enamel, gouache on vellum protected with polished crystal or glass, or porcelain. See Berry-Hill, *Antique Gold Boxes*; LeCorbeiller, *Snuff*

Boxes; Nocq and Dreyfus, *Tabatières du Musée du Louvre*; Norton, *History of Gold Snuff Boxes*; Snowman, *Gold Boxes of Europe*; and the Atlas Database for the Decorative Arts Collection (search *tabatières*) on the Louvre Museum site http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=crt_frm_rs&langue=en&initCritere=true (accessed July 2010). In all, 253 boxes from the most extensive collection in the world are in this database with photographs and brief descriptions.

19. Anna Czarnocka, "Vernis Martin: The Lacquerwork of the Martin Family in Eighteenth-Century France," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 2 (Fall, 1994) p. 56.
20. I. O'Neil, *The Art of the Painted Finish for Furniture and Decoration* (New York, 1971) p. 112.
21. Michael E. Yonan, "Veneers of Authority: Chinese Lacquers in Maria Theresa's Vienna," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37.4 (2004) p. 663.
22. Marianne Webb, *Lacquer: Technology and Conservation* (Oxford, 2000) p. 3.
23. Czarnocka, "Vernis Martin," p. 57.
24. Hans Huth, *Lacquer of the West: The History of a Craft and an Industry 1550–1950* (Chicago, 1971) p. 91.
25. Czarnocka, "Vernis Martin," p. 65.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
29. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 82.
30. Huth, *Lacquer of the West*, p. 96.
31. Czarnocka, "Vernis Martin," p. 57.
32. O'Neil, *Art of the Painted Finish*, p. 111.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Huth, *Lacquer of the West*, p. 96.
35. O'Neil, *Art of the Painted Finish*, p. 115.
36. Huth, *Lacquer of the West*, p. 97.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Yonan, "Veneers of Authority," p. 658.
39. Webb, *Lacquer: Technology*, p. 3.
40. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 20.
41. Stéphane Faniel, *French Art of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1957) p. 94.
42. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 22.
43. Carolyn Sargentson, *Merchants and Luxury Markets*, p. 1.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
45. Mimi Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (Summer 1999) p. 417.
46. See note 18 above.
47. Dovecotes were located on country estates in France. They were built in the style of ancient Roman cylindrical towers, the ruins of which dotted the countryside. This design remained popular through the end of the eighteenth century. Dovecotes housed flocks of pigeons, providing shelter and keeping them from foraging valuable winter crops. Pigeons were a source of fresh meat for farmers. Stephen D. Borys, *The Splendor of Ruins in French Landscape Painting, 1630–1800*, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College (Oberlin, 2005) p. 66.

48. Ibid., p. 131.
49. Mary Salzman, "Decoration and Enlightened Spectatorship," in Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past* (New York, 2007) p. 157.
50. Jo Hedley, *François Boucher: Seductive Visions* (London, 2004) p. 183. Boucher's images in particular influenced the decoration of objects such as porcelain, gold boxes, fans, and tapestries from the 1740s into the 1790s.
51. Adrian Sasoon, *Vincennes and Sèvres Porcelain*, The J. Paul Getty Museum (Malibu, 1991) p. 33.
52. Nocq and Dreyfus, *Tabatières du Musée du Louvre*, p. XIV, no. 22.
53. See www.artviewseum/boucher/ (accessed July 2010). See also Samuel Rocheblave, *French Painting in the XVIIIth Century* (London, 1937) pl. 33.
54. Nocq and Dreyfus, *Tabatières du Musée du Louvre*, p. XXXIV, no. 58.
55. Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau* (New York, 1984) p. 174.
56. Julie Anne Plax, *Watteau and the Cultural Politics of Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 111. In chapter 3, "The *Fête Galante* and the Cult of *Honnêteté*," Plax provides an insightful discussion of elite behavior in France in the eighteenth century when the royal court dissolved as the center of elite society and culture, and the center shifted to Paris.
57. The ability to control the "liberating forces of leisure" in such a way as to profit from that control distinguished the elite individual from those of lesser status. The elite individual did this by creating an "artificial second self" and then, through that filter, experienced the dangers of liberation indirectly. "That one understood the nuances of this complex and self-deceiving game, that one could practice the correct rituals of speech, comportment, manners, dress, and especially, seduction, and was able to display this knowledge without affectation or sign of effort, marked one as superior" (Plax, *Watteau*, p. 112). This elite individual sought to please others by knowing the rules of the game but also by accommodating others' needs and desires, as the means to his own pleasure and gain.
58. *Galante* means pleasing, elegant, correct, tasteful, courteous, and polite. *Gauche* means clumsy, awkward, uncouth, and bashful.
59. Salzman, "Decoration and Enlightened Spectatorship," p. 156.
60. LeCorbeiller, *Snuff Boxes*, p. 13.
61. Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability," p. 424.
62. Salzman, "Decoration and Enlightened Spectatorship," p. 158.

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