

French Paperweights, April 18, 2007-April 21, 2007

France's paperweight production is one of the most delightful episodes in 19th-century glassmaking. Beloved by enthusiastic collectors, these finely-executed colorful glass spheres are dubbed "paperweights" in a bit of a misnomer. They are rarely used for the utilitarian purpose of holding down papers, but are instead celebrated as magnificent examples of the glass artisan's fine workmanship.

Around 1845, the paperweight appeared in Europe as an attractive and compact means to showcase master glasswork techniques. Prince Albert's Great Exposition of 1851 in London's Crystal Palace exhibition hall played a significant role in introducing paperweights to the world, and they soon became popular gift items, appealing as they did to the Victorian love of ornament. The production of paperweights at the Saint-Louis, Clichy, and Baccarat glasshouses effectively revived the French luxury-glass industry.

Nineteenth-century French paperweights were made in innumerable varieties, as evidenced by the butterfly, floral, fruit, and intricate millefiori examples in this small display. Glass artisans revived the ancient millefiori ("thousand flowers") technique by bundling variously colored glass canes into patterns and heating, twisting, stretching, cooling, and then cutting them into small, flowerlike disks. Paperweights encased decorative elements in a magnifying clear glass "gather," making them appear even more precious.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Clichy Glassworks, French, 1838-1885

Paperweight, 1845-1875

Glass

Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.10



RISD MUSEUM

Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Clematis Paperweight, 1845-60
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.11



Baccarat Glasshouse, French, 1764-
Butterfly Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.12



Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Millefiori Paperweight, 1848
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.13



Baccarat Glasshouse, French, 1764-
Paperweight, 1848
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.14



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Clichy Glassworks, French, 1838-1885
Millefiori Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.15



Clichy Glassworks, French, 1838-1885
Newel Post Finial, 1845-1860
Glass with brass mount
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.16



Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.6



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Baccarat Glasshouse, French, 1764-
Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.7



Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Millefiori Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.8



Clichy Glassworks, French, 1838-1885
Paperweight, 1845-1860
Glass
Gift of Alan E. Symonds 69.200.9



Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Doorknob, 1845-1860
Glass, pewter
Museum Collection 84.051.5



RISD MUSEUM

Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Doorknob, 1845-1860
Glass with pewter mount
Museum Collection 84.051.7



Compagnie des Cristalleries de Saint-Louis, French, 1586-
Doorknob, 1845-1860
Colorless glass encasing colored glass canes; brass mount
Museum Collection 84.052

