

RISD MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 1, 2024

RISD Museum to Open Significant Exhibition of Exceptionally Rare French Wallpapers,
Capturing an Important Chapter in Design History

Featuring More than 100 Works Drawn from the Huard Collection,
Remarkable for Its Preservation of These Fragile 18th and 19th Century Paper Works

PROVIDENCE, RI, October 1, 2024—On November 16, the RISD Museum will open an expansive exhibition exploring the intricacy and innovative quality of French wallpapers from across the 18th and 19th centuries. Titled ***The Art of French Wallpaper Design***, the exhibition features more than 100 rare samples of preserved wallpapers, borders, fragments, and preparatory drawings, capturing an extraordinary diversity of designs and technical skills. To bring the exhibition further to life for audiences, RISD Museum has partnered with Adelphi Paper Hangings in Sharon Springs, NY, to recreate one of the wallpapers through the same process of woodblock printing used by the original Paris-based manufacturer, Bon. In addition to experiencing this wallpaper in the exhibition, fans of the design will be able to order it from Adelphi for use in their own projects.

The works in the exhibition are drawn from the exceptional Huard Collection—named for the collectors who assembled it: French artist Charles Huard (1874-1965) and American writer Frances Wilson Huard (1885-1969)—includes more than 500 examples of wallpapers from this period in France. The Collection is particularly unique given that—as is often true today—historical wallpapers were frequently removed or covered with the changing tastes of the time and interests of owners. The existence of the Huard Collection today is a testament to the vision of the collectors, who gathered many of the papers directly from French homes, and to the stewardship of the RISD Museum, which purchased the Collection in 1934. Given the fragile nature of the papers, the collection has had limited public showing and the forthcoming exhibition marks the most in-depth examination of the works to-date.

The Art of French Wallpaper Design will remain on view at RISD Museum through May 11, 2025. It is curated by Emily Banas, RISD Museum's Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design. The exhibition is accompanied by a digital catalogue with essays exploring the history of the collection, wallpaper's relationship to print history, and the role of conservation in caring for works on paper. Additionally, video content detailing the process of production as well as an extensive visual catalogue of the collection will be available for scholars and the public on the RISD Museum website.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to re-introduce this extraordinary collection, which has not been presented in depth for many years, to a broad audience," said Banas. "I am certain the material will excite our visitors and challenge notions of what "historic" design looks like. From its foundations in drawing and printing, to its dynamic forms and creative uses that enlivened and personalized spaces, there is so much more to wallpaper than meets the eye. I look forward to sharing the many discoveries this exhibition holds."

The exhibition reflects an essential, and under-studied, chapter in design history and captures the remarkable impact of woodblock printing on design innovation. In the 1700s, decorative papers or ***papier dominoté*** printed in France became popular for covering books, lining drawers, and adorning walls. This early interest grew into a bustling industry that by the end of the century saw French artists and designers creating wallpapers with increasingly complex compositions that engaged with vibrant color and texture. Many of these intricate designs were made possible by the use of carved blocks, even as mechanized roller printers began to shift processes in the mid 19th century. The Art of French Wallpaper Design features an incredible range of these design breakthroughs, by both renowned French manufacturers such as Zuber, Joseph Dufour, and Jean-Baptiste Réveillon and by little-known or forgotten makers and shops.

As visitors walk the exhibition, they will experience the richness and depth of these designs, including wallpapers and drawings that reflect popular motifs and styles. The works in the exhibition engage with a range of subjects, from florals to classical imagery and from abstract compositions to imitations of paintings or architectural elements. The exhibition also explores some of the ways that different papers were collaged and transformed for specific effect by owners and the repairs that occurred during the paper's life in real homes.

Highlight works in ***The Art of French Wallpaper Design***:

- **Wallpaper Bandeaux and Pilasters (1790)**: This monumental panel is one of a pair produced by the manufacturer Arthur et Robert. At approximately seven feet high, the works would have made quite an impression when they were installed in a room. The design was likely meant to imitate the more costly treatment of decorative plasterwork. The image in the central medallion was done in grisaille, a popular method of painting in shades of gray. Through recent conservation efforts, this marvelous panel has been brought back to its original splendor and will be on view for the first time ever.
- ***Les Cinq Sens (The Five Senses)*** (ca. 1780): These spectacular wallpapers were created by Italian designer Pierre Cietti and produced by renowned French manufacturer Jean-Baptiste Réveillon as part of a set representing each of the five senses. The motifs reflect the burgeoning influence of classical antiquity during the late 18th century, and demonstrate the creativity and ingenuity of producing a complex design in a restrained color palette.
- **Flocked Wallpaper Border (ca. 1800)**: Known as a ***soubassement***, or dado, this large wallpaper

border was intended to be placed at the base of the wall. It would have been made available with a coordinating wallpaper design featuring the same alternating bands of green seen on the background of this paper. Heightening the visual contrast of the composition is black flocking made from chopped wool fibers adhered to the surface. Flocking was often used to replicate the plush look of textiles, however it quickly expanded to create a dynamic surface treatment on a variety of wallpapers.

- Domino Paper (*Papier Dominoté*) (1810-1812): This elegant design featuring a composition of flowers and foliage is perhaps the best-known *papier dominaté* produced by the Atelier Boulard. Known as domino papers, these small format, block-printed sheets were produced for a variety of uses, including covering books, lining drawers, and covering walls.

- Design for a Wallpaper Border (1830): This rare design for a wallpaper border provides a look into the iterations of the artist's process. The central floral imagery appears to have been pasted over an initial drawing for the composition. The simple graphite drawings at the top and bottom were brought to life with the addition of vibrant pinks and greens painted in gouache. Although it is not known whether this design was brought to fruition, one can imagine its effect in a room would have been extremely cheerful.

- View of Venice Wallpaper (ca. 1840): This rare wallpaper design featuring a city and seascape within a framework of theatrical drapery is in remarkably pristine condition. The vibrant background of blue, pink, and green was produced using a technique called *irisé*, which allowed for multiple paint colors to be brushed on at once and then blended, creating a seamless background of landscape and sky. This particular form of wallpaper is known as a *dessus de porte*, or overdoor panel.

- Wallpaper with Birds and Flowers (1700s): This stunning wallpaper is one of three Chinese papers in the Huard Collection. Chinese wallpapers were exclusively produced for export to Europe and America, and these hand-painted papers would have been exponentially more costly than their French block-printed counterparts to produce. This made them all the more desirable to maintain and repair when they were damaged, as was skillfully done with this example by the previous owner.

"The Huard Collection is just one example of the extraordinary depth of RISD Museum's collection, which emphasizes both important design history and a depth of contemporary innovation. *The Art of French Wallpaper Design* represents our museum's commitment to leveraging our collection to engage our community with compelling objects and interesting histories," said Tsugumi Maki, RISD Museum's Director. "Wallpaper is an everyday item with which many people are familiar but is likely rarely the subject of broad discussion or consideration. We are excited to change that dynamic, to bring our audiences into this compelling world, and to illuminate the beauty and diversity of these papers. Perhaps we will also inspire some new home projects!"

About the RISD Museum

Established in 1877 as part of a vibrant creative community, the RISD Museum stewards works of art representing diverse cultures from ancient times to the present. We interpret our collection with the focus on the maker and we deeply engage with art and artists, presenting ideas and perspectives that can be inspiring and complex. We aspire to create an accessible and inclusive environment that builds meaningful relationships across all communities. For more information: 401-454-6500 or risdmuseum.org.

Press Contacts:

Alina Sumajin
Principal, PAVE Communications & Consulting
alina@paveconsult.com
646 369 2050

Julia Temple
Marketing & PR Manager
jtemple@risd.edu
401 709 8524

Kara Nandin
Marketing & PR Associate
knandin@risd.edu
401 709 8513