

# Flight of Fancy

## THE GALLE CHANDELIER

Resembling a hot-air balloon, the chandelier at the center of this exhibition is a work of extreme novelty that includes a glass bowl intended to hold water and small goldfish. It was made in the early 1800s by Gérard Jean Galle, a French bronze caster and gilder. Galle adapted motifs from ancient art to a new form, creating an intriguing object that was thoroughly modern for its time. J. Paul Getty acquired the extraordinary piece in 1973, just before the opening of the Getty Villa in Malibu. On permanent display since its installation there and subsequent move to the galleries at the Getty Center, the chandelier is one of the most popular objects in the Museum's collection of decorative arts. This special installation encourages close viewing of the chandelier and explores the inspiration, sources, and themes of its imaginative design.



Non-flash photography and video for personal use are welcome in the exhibition.

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# The Artist

Gérard Jean Galle (French, 1788–1846) was a bronze caster and gilder who designed and made luxury items in gilt bronze such as clock cases, candelabra, chandeliers, and vases. After training in the workshop of his father, Galle joined the army and served with distinction under Emperor Napoleon I. With the fall of the empire in 1814 and the death of his father the following year, Galle quit the military and took over the family enterprise.

Galle exhibited a number of pieces at the Paris Exhibition of French Products of Industry in 1819. He then wrote to the government of King Louis XVIII, offering the works for sale and providing detailed descriptions of each. These included a chandelier of the same design as that displayed here:

Fish chandelier: In the middle of a blue enameled globe scattered with stars is a circle with the signs of the zodiac and six griffins carrying candles.... [Below is a glass bowl fitted with] a plug intended for the removal of the water, which one places in the bowl with small goldfish whose continuous movement will give agreeable recreation to the eye.

Galle was not successful in his appeal and struggled financially throughout his career. Nevertheless, he continued producing high-quality objects in gilt bronze and was awarded a gold medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1823.

# The Design

The graceful, symmetrical form of the Galle chandelier suggests the harmony of ancient Greek and Roman art. Each element radiates from the central globe and includes classical motifs such as griffins, eagles, and palmettes. These are incorporated into a modern piece that resembles a hot-air balloon, with a bowl to hold water and goldfish. By merging the old and the new, Gérard Jean Galle created a unique design that reflects the fashionable taste of his time.

The chandelier embodies a standard noted by designer Thomas Hope, whose influential book *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* is displayed nearby. Hope wrote that while a design's primary purposes should be function and comfort, it may also include attributes of elegance and beauty that “enable its shape and accessories to afford additional gratification, both to the eye and to the imagination.”

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