Recent Accessions

This Mourning Virgin, once part of a Crucifixion group, is an unusually beautiful and well preserved example of south German late baroque sculpture. Carved in the round out of lindenwood, it combines a remarkably delicate and harmonious polychrome surface—pale blue, muted browns, and gilded details—with the expressive forms, charged with passionate yet controlled emotion, of the best Bavarian works of the second half of the seventeenth century. Height 37\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1971.15

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, a handful of cities on the American seaboard were centers for cabinetmakers working in the current English neoclassical mode. One of these was Salem, Massachusetts, where men like Nehemiah Adams, Mark Pitman, and Edmund Johnson helped to create a distinctive regional style in cabinet forms. Seen here is a masterful example of the most sophisticated of those forms, a breakfront secretory-bookcase based upon plates in Hepplewhite’s Guide of 1787, Sheraton’s Drawing Book of 1793, and the London Cabinetmaker’s Book of Prices of 1793.

One of only a dozen or so of these Salem breakfront bookcases now known, this “Gentleman’s Secretary” has an unusually rhythmic, well unified design. An echoing pattern of ovals not only decorates the veneered surface of the doors, drawers, and center pediment, but also forms the mullions of the glazing.

As part of a constant effort to upgrade the American Wing collections, it was acquired by exchange to replace a Salem breakfront bookcase of less distinction. Mahogany with inlay, height 8 feet. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, Bequest of Ethel Yocum, Bequest of Charlotte E. Hoadley, and Rogers Fund, by exchange, 1971.9

M.J.

Photograph: Israel Sack, Inc.
Most of the art of the Cameroon Grasslands is connected with the chiefs and their court, and its strong, stylized forms are expressive of their power and importance.

Three snakes crown the head of this helmet mask. Very generally in African art the snake, guardian of the waters, is a symbol of fecundity in the universe. Among the Bamileke it is also an emblem of royalty, appropriate here since this mask was used in a dance associated with the enthronement of a new chief. Africa, Cameroon: Bagam Chiefdom of the Bamileke group. Wood, height 28 inches. Louis V. Bell Fund, 1971.13

Rothko’s dark pictures, of which this is a fine example, are increasingly considered his major statement. His ability to project luminosity with purples, deep reds, and dark browns shows him to be a master in the elegiac mood. This painting—Reds, No. 16 (1960)—was the focal point in the Rothko room in last year’s exhibition New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970. We have long felt that if Mark Rothko were to be represented at the Metropolitan Museum by one painting, this should be it. Oil on canvas, 102 x 119½ inches. Arthur H. Hearn, Hugo Kastor, and George A. Hearn Funds, 1971.14