

# The CCI-USA News

## Chess Collectors International

Spring 2004

### CCI EVENTS AND CHESS AUCTION NEWS

Reminder: **MADRID MEETING**; CCI's eleventh biennial convention is scheduled for Madrid, **June 1 to 6, 2004**. Have you sent in your registration? Made your travel and hotel plans? New York Times reports that travel to Spain has not fallen off. More US people are going to Spain this year, than ever before. Don't delay. You may get left out. If you misplaced the convention material that was mailed to you about 6 weeks ago, or if you need another copy, contact Floyd Sarisohn, email [Lichess@aol.com](mailto:Lichess@aol.com) or call at 631 543 1330 (evenings and weekends) for an additional copy.

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**HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES FOR 2004? You cannot get further issues of CCI-USA, WITHOUT payment of your dues for 2004. Please send dues (\$50) to our treasurer, Bill Fordney at 9046 Hunting Arrow St., Las Vegas, NV 89123-7445**

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### CHESS SET AUCTION DATES:

**MAY 27, 2004** Christie's in London- Sets from collection of CCI member Kasper Stock

**JUNE 4, 2004** Duran - Subastas de Arte in Madrid, sets from various collectors sold at Auction during CCI Convention

**JUNE 16, 2004** Sotheby in New York, Sets from collection of CCI member Benno Bordiga See press release printed in this newsletter, for details.

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For an ongoing **Internet** chess set auction, members may visit the auction site maintained by CCI member Garrick Coleman at [www.antiquechess.co.uk](http://www.antiquechess.co.uk)

Another interesting website that members may wish to look at is [www.zelazny.com](http://www.zelazny.com), maintained by CCI member Gene Zelazny.

In the next issue of CCI USA, we would like to publish other web sites and chess set sales sites maintained by CCI members. If you have a chess set website that you would like to have members aware of, please email the information to Floyd Sarisohn at [Lichess@aol.com](mailto:Lichess@aol.com)

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# GIANNI TOSO

by Kathy Vaglio

Italian Master glass artist Gianni Toso utilizes his immense knowledge and skill to express his tremendous passion for history, religion and life. Descended from a long and distinguished line of Murano glass blowers, his branch of the Toso family has been making glass without interruption for 700 years and he himself has been making glass for more than 50 years.

In Addition to being a renowned expert in lampworked sculpture, he worked at the glass factories since he was ten years old, laboring twelve hours a day in the glass furnace of Venice. He worked at twelve different factories over fifteen years in order to learn the secrets from the best of all the masters. He went to school at night and earned a master degree in fine arts and painting (Maestro d'arte).

In 1967, at the age of 24, he left he glass factories and opened his own lampworking studio in the Jewish Ghetto of Venice. His workbench consisted of a washboard with two sawhorses and his original creation were twelve animal figurines that he sold to the glass souvenir shops in San Marco. In 1969, the same year he created his first chess set (Jews vs. Catholics"), Gianni Toso won First Prize in an exhibit of Master Glassblowers of Murano and was subsequently commissioned by Salvador Dali to make twelve glass panels of Dali's surrealistic flowers. Unfortunately after making three of twelve panels, there was a disagreement and the project was not completed.

The First International Glass Symposium was help in Zurich in 1972 and Gianni Toso was the only Italian artist selected to attend. Here he met Dale Chihuly and many of the emerging glass artists from the United States and around the world. This group of artists later became organized in order to exchange information, educate, and stimulate the understanding of

glasswork as fine art. This was the beginning of the contemporary studio glass movement. Gianni Toso revolutionized lampwork by introducing the use of Venetian art glass as opposed to the readily available borosilicate glass which is formulated to be used for kitchen measuring cups and test tubes.

In the late 1970's the Chairman of Glass at California College of Arts and Crafts, Professor Marvin Lipofsky, organized an artistic tour of glass departments at American colleges and universities giving Gianni Toso the opportunity to teach and give demonstration of Italian techniques throughout the United States. In 1981, while he was still living in Venice, the Corning Museum bought one of his limited edition "Jews vs. Catholics" chess sets for museum display. Two years later he closed his studio in Venice and moved to the United States.

In 1989, at a fundraising auction for glass artists, Gianni Toso's "Jews vs. Catholics" chess set sold for \$26,000.00. This work, depicting Catholics Franciscan Priests and Hasidic Jews, has influences from the Venetian commedia dell'arte, which portrayed caricatures of societal leadership. Toso saw the place of the Hasidim in Judaism as parallel to the place of the Franciscans in Catholicism in that both are motivated by high philosophical ideas. The conflict was not intended to be between

Catholics and Jews but rather between the philosophy of ideas and the mathematics of the chess game. Gianni declared that chess set to be the final set of that design.

Because of subsequent demand for more chess sets he then developed his "Pulcinella" set, a limited edition of ten. Although Toso's first



chess set showed influence of the commedia dell'arte the "Pulcinella" chess set represents actual characters from this Italian theatrical tradition. This colorful art form originated in the streets and marketplace of the early Italian Renaissance. Street performers, whose skillful mime, stereotyped stock characters and broad physical gestures were universally understood and were accessible to all social classes. Hand gestures are a distinctly Italian form of communication and Gianni Toso cleverly uses them to convey a full range of human emotions.

Very recently he created the "Maccabees vs. Hellenists" chess set, also a limited edition of ten, Symbolizing the eternal battle between monotheism (the recognition of one Creator) and the parade of polytheism through human history. The particular figures of this chess set derive from the Jewish revolt against the Syrian Greek Hellenists. The Greek gods are

creatively depicted in incredibly fine details considering that the artist's medium is glass!

Today Gianni Toso's work is on display in many museums and private collections in the United States, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Israel and Japan and throughout the world. His art portrays cultural and ethnic scenes that reflect his deep understanding of history and the humanity, his great sense of humor and his profound technical skills. Not only is this evident in his chess sets but also in his figural works (ie: Rabbi and Cardinal playing chess). Leo Kaplin Modern Gallery in New York, expressing true admiration for Gianni's work, was fortunate to become his representative in the United States. (Editors note – Sotheby's will auction one of Toso's Chess Sets on June 16, 2004. See related announcement.)<sup>1</sup>



**Gianni Toso – "Jews vs. Catholics"**



**Gianni Toso – “Puncinella”**



**Gianni Toso – “Maccabees”**

## THE IMAGERY OF CHESS REVISITED

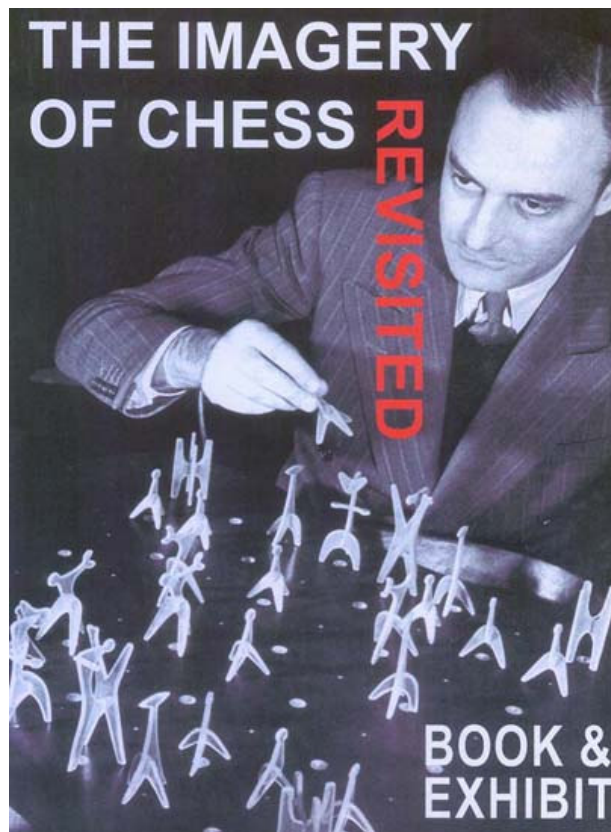
by Larry List, Guest Curator, Ismau Noguchi Museum

"It was the most important exhibition of its kind ever held," wrote F. Lanier Graham, former Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, in his (now classic) 1968 text *Chess Sets*. The exhibition he was referring to was *The Imagery of Chess* show held at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City, December 1944. It was the brainchild of gallery dealer Julien Levy and artist-chessmaster Marcel Duchamp.

A "who's who" of famous European expatriate artists and soon-to-be famous American Modernists were invited to redesign the standard chess set or explore chess imagery in bold new ways. Critics Andre Breton and Nicolas Calas, artists Duchamp, Max Ernest, Alexander Calder, Richard Filopowski, Carole Janeway, Man Ray, Isamu Noguchi, Yves Tanguy, gallerist Julien Levy, Collector Antonin Heythum and psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg all contributed playable chess sets. Musicians John Cage and Vittorio Rieti each created original musical scores. Master painters and sculptors Dorothea Tanning, Joseph Cornell, Arshile Gorky, Roberto Matta, Robert Motherwell, Kay Sage and others presented works in a variety of media that explored chess imagery and symbolism.

It was an exhibit that is touched upon in many art history texts covering the 1940s in New York and is cited in almost every serious history of chess and chess sets. It is the show that everybody mentions reverently but nobody can discuss in detail because it was not well documented. However, the Isamu Noguchi Museum in New York hopes to change that.

Inspired by their acquisition of a copy of the rare *Chess Table* Isamu Noguchi made for *The Imagery of Chess* show and the replication of Noguchi's lost *Chess Set*, the Noguchi Museum has decided to mount an exhibition entitled *The Imagery of Chess Revisited*. It is slated to open in the newly renovated Noguchi Museum



Art dealer Julien Levy playing with the Noguchi *Chess Set* and *Chess Table*. Photo by George Platt Lynes.

October 13th of 2005 and may travel to other venues in the United States, Europe and Japan.

The exhibition will feature all of the chess sets in the original show along with many of the original paintings and a number of influential "precursor" chess sets and sculptures. Viewers will be able to see the work in context and get a sense of that "life-during-wartime" moment in art history when the expatriate Europeans and young Americans confronted the alienation and madness surrounding them by playing and reinventing the centuries-old game of war, the game of chess. A book documenting all of the work will accompany the exhibit.

The museum would like to make the exhibit and book as complete as possible so please contact me, Larry List, at 303 Park Avenue South, N.Y., N.Y. 10010 about any objects, information or documents you might have regarding the original show. <sup>1</sup>

## C.C.I. Montreal Meeting - June 2003

by Billy Levene

The year was 1988. C.C.I. was four years old. Its members were assembled at the Ethnologic Museum (Staatliches Museum fur Volkerkunde) in Munich to review the collection of Halvor and Astrid Jaeger. The collection was sensational, recorded in a beautiful catalog.

Advance to June 29, 2003. The Jaegers have moved, first to New Jersey and then to Montreal where they have invited C.C.I. to visit their home and city.

Halvor and Astrid have built a spacious home on an island, a small bridge crossing from the city. Montreal is an attractive city. After registration at the Hotel Montagne we had a chance to look about and visit the Chess Center which houses a chess shop, playing quarters and the Chess-Math program which brings chess into 128 schools. In the evening there was an informal dinner at the hotel's restaurant. There was a jazz group downstairs and a roof bar with a view of the city.

Buses and private cars took us to the Jaegers on Saturday morning. The house is designed to display their collections. Large rooms are divided with partitions to increase wall space. The major collection is Haitian, both oil paintings and sculpture. The sculpture is flat, cut from oil drums and sometimes painted or lacquered. There is Mexican, also of the type which Halvor calls "naive art." There is an extensive collection of Polish art and a large room devoted to the chess sets. The art is everywhere. A dining room table seats eight but one place is permanently occupied by a wooded clothed figure.

The chess set collection comprises antique ivory from Europe, India and Asia as well as modern folkloric from the Americas. There is a magnificent 19th century Czech ivory figural set of the Discovery of America, a Max Esser silver, a small Italian porcelain copy of 16th century German wood, the one with a man mounted backward on a donkey. One of the most intriguing is a large flat Haitian set cut from metal, the pieces being from 18"-30" inches tall.

A tent had been set up on the lawn to serve a catered lunch to about fifty people. Before and during lunch Irene Helitzer showed pictures of the ceramic sets she had created with Jewish religious and secular themes. Allan Weitz brought a collection of Mah Jong sets in ivory bamboo and paper dating to the 1920's. Billy Levene spoke on types of chess book collecting and brought books and facsimiles dating to the early 17th century.

Saturday night we gathered at the DaVinci restaurant for an excellent dinner. It was in walking distance of the Hotel De La Montagne and on a street popular with the young people. We passed side by side restaurants and bars on the streets, all with outdoor tables and groups of people watching people.

The bus was ready to take us early Sunday morning to Fort Stewart. After we were seated in the large parade area, a French regiment in 18th century uniforms marched in and took places at a chessboard. They were followed by a Highland regiment in red. A Montreal master guided one side and a young woman expert the other. They then reenacted the famous Morphy vs. Count Isouard and the Duke of Brunswick game played in the Paris Opera House in 1858.

We were then driven to the Chess Center where there was a small exhibition of sets and the shop was open for sales. Upstairs a Chess Fair was held with a great variety of sets available. The featured sets were four carved from mammoth ivory. These had been brought from Russia by Nikolai K. He arranges the retrieval of the ivory from Siberia by helicopter and the carving by Russian artists in themes such as Jason and the Argonauts, King Richard and the Saracens, Wine and Love.

There being no end to the hospitality of the Jaegers, all the people who stayed till Monday were invited that evening to a barbeque that Halvor cooked. The threatening clouds were so impressed that they withheld their rain. As we departed we were given copies of "Kunst aus Haiti" and the Jaegar Chess Collection.<sup>1</sup>

## New Chess Megastore Checks Into Town

From THE TOQUE, at <http://www.thetoque.net/020129/chessmegastore.htm>

**ST. PAUL, MN--** Minnesota residents are thrilled about their new chess superstore, Rook's. The megachain one-stop chess outlet opened its doors in January giving people another source for their chess shopping needs.

Rook's opened its first store in New Jersey in 1996, and now has 17 locations across America. A further three locations plan to open in Canada this year, and seven more are scheduled for Europe in 2003.

"We are happy to now be able to give the people of Minnesota the best possible selection of chess materials and supplies" said Bert Knight, CEO of Rook's. "Our chess representatives are trained to know what you want, and will always be thinking two or three moves ahead of the customers--so that they can provide the best possible service."

With four aisles dedicated to traditional chess sets, a chess library, an on-duty chess clocksmith, a customized board manufacturing section, Rook's looks like it's ready to take on the competition.

"We also have a major coffee chain co-located inside our stores, complete with those cute little coffee tables with the chessboards built-in" added Knight. "And I must mention our fabulous outdoor chess centre, where one can purchase complete patio chess sets, and a full range of decorative chess furniture"

Other chess stores in the St. Paul/Minneapolis area, including The Pawn Shop, The Treasure Chess, and of course, the original Chess Warehouse, are worried that the new store will bully them out of business, or bring them to a stalemate.

Philip Patterson, owner of The Pawn Shop, is concerned. "These big-box retailers take all the character out of shopping. Sure, Rook's will have great deals, and always have everything in stock, but what about the customer? What about the community? I know everyone in the local chess clubs, but there's no way I can compete with someone who can buy 5,000 Chinese chess sets. If that's all people care about, I may as well tip my king over right now."

The chess giant plays down the suggestion that they are a corporate juggernaut only interested in profit.

"We're here to service the community for all their chess needs," said Knight. "I'm a chess player myself, so I know what the people want. We're not going to treat our customers like pawns. Each and every person who comes through our store will be treated like a king...or a queen."

So far, chess consumers are pleased with the new store.

"There's nothing wrong with a little healthy competition," said Martin Penderghast, an avid chess shopper. "I am looking forward to checking out the prices in their computer chess department. I've been wanting to upgrade my old Sargon II software for years."

Rook's store has almost 120,000 sq. ft. of retail space, and there are over 140 employees, including seven chesspiece carvers. At the opening in January, former Soviet chessmaster Yuri Smegarov made the ceremonial first move, E2-E4, to the delight of the hundreds who attended. <sup>1</sup>



The new chess megastore has opened.

## ROBIN HILL'S NEW ZEALAND CHESS SET

by Hope Levene

One of the loveliest of contemporary chess sets was made by Robin Hill of Papakura, New Zealand. The subject is a feudal European court represented by 7-8 inch cloth figures. These are stuffed with cotton and sewn so skillfully as to give hands and legs and arms appropriate positions. The faces have distinct expressions. Then the figures are clothed. Of the thirty two pieces there is but one repetition of the fabric. The wood chopper wears a hand-knitted sweater, the shepherd a wool lined jacket (Robin is, after all, a New Zealand Kiwi) The kings sport fur trimmed coats and the queens elegant gowns. The juggler keeps five balls

in the air and the chef holds a tray with a boar's head. The visage of the knight is as fierce as the nun's is beatific.

"I'm really not an artist," said Robin when we visited her recently in the village where she has spent her life. "Just a craftsman. Years ago at a show in Wellington I saw stocking heads stuffed with cotton wool. They used pipe cleaners and felt and sequins for eyes. I thought I could do better using a wire armature and embroidery for eyes and sewing for expressions. My figures were sold by a shop in Auckland and became quite popular. I even had some exhibitions. I don't know how I came to make the three chess sets. Perhaps my brother suggested it. I made a fourth set of green figures, sort of gnomes.

Recently Robin started making full sized stuffed figures. When I asked who bought them, she said there were art collectors but that the film companies were good clients. "Like if they want to have a body thrown off a cliff." For inventiveness and ingenuity they come to the right place. (Editors note - copies of these remarkable chess sets are in the collections of the Levene's and the Sarisohn's, in New York.)



Hope and Robine in their fanciest knitting

## "Street Smart"

In the story on Bishop Street (August 2003), our readers were asked if they knew of another chess decorated street like the one in the article.



C.C.I. member Mel Brass sent us the photo on the left with a note: In Denver, CO, on the 16<sup>th</sup> street mall, there are two chess pieces with attached chairs and boards. The boy in the photo is Zachary Brass (Mel's grandson.)

**Send us your stories and photos.**

## News of the Weird

### New sport, chess boxing, making rounds

Dutch artist Iepe created the sport of chess boxing, which began in earnest in Amsterdam in November with several matches of six four-minute chess rounds alternating with five two-minute boxing rounds, with victory coming by knockout, checkmate or, if the match goes the distance, judges' scoring of rounds.

Both the Dutch Chess Federation (KNSB) and the Dutch Boxing Federation (NBB) have endorsed the sport.



## The Chess Artist By: J.C. Hallman

*In September 2000, I traveled to the Republic of Kalmykia with one time National Master Glen Umstead. My friendship with Glenn is the framework for a book entitled **THE CHESS ARTIST: Genius, Obsession, and the World's Oldest Game**, now available from the USCF, amazon.com, and most major bookstores. The story culminates in a trip to FIDE President Kirsan Hyunzhinov's desolate nation and its oddly named village, Chess city. We stayed in one of Chess City's cottages for two weeks. When we eventually interviewed Hyunzhinov, he told us he hoped to turn chess into a religion-I went on to ask a number of Kalmyks what they thought of the plan. In addition to the trip to Kalmykia, **THE CHESS ARTIST** travels to the 2000 NY Open, a prison in Michigan for a simultaneous exhibition, and the New York City chess district.*

*There's a good deal of chess history in the book, for which my primary source was of course H.J.R. Murray's **A HISTORY OF CHESS**. At a certain point during our trip to Kalymkia, we were taken to the institute for Humanities Research and introduced to a number of Kalmyk scholars, including an aging chess expert and craftsman named Vaskin. I eventually arranged a meeting with Vaskin to test a theory...*

I wanted to talk to Vaskin because of something I'd read in Murray. In 1913, Murray had disagreed with other chess historians, who claimed that all the older forms of chess had vanished by then. Ninety years later, Vaskin was a still-lingering connection to that past, and even though the Kalmyk game showed distinct western influence, it was quite different.

Vaskin still wore his beret and a long tie. His home was filled with wood trimming and comfortable furnishings, and we sat on chairs covered with sheets. Bambusha had to scream into Vaskin's ear. His wife gave us water. Vaskin started talking.

150 years ago, a rich Kalmyk had brought an ivory chess set from Djangharia to Kalmykia. He donated the set to a Kalmyk temple

constructed in 1860, and it came into the possession of a monk who became Vaskin's woodworking teacher. The ivory set was the first chess set Vaskin ever saw. When the temple was destroyed by communists, the board and the pieces were lost. Sixty years later Vaskin reproduced the set in honor of both his teacher's 100th birthday and the 500th anniversary of the *Djanghare* epic. He brought out the board and pieces for Glenn and I to see. It was his most prized possession.

The board was a four-legged tray a couple of decimeters high. It was made of African rosewood, and the black and white squares were buffalo horn and elephant tusk, respectively. It had taken him a year-and-a-half to complete. The chessmen were chiseled from Swiss beech, and came in the squatty shapes of a number of animals.

"This is the idea here," Vaskin said. "They reflect the life of the nomads. The rook is a bull. The bishop is a camel. The pawn is a boy."

"You could sell this to a museum," Glenn said.

A delegation from Germany had offered him \$20,000 for the set, Vaskin said. He had refused. Glenn was astonished, and wanted to know why he hadn't simply pocketed the money and made another one.

Vaskin laughed. "I only make unique things, I never repeat."

"Would you like to play a game?" Glenn Said.

"Of course!"

Vaskin again went step by step through all the peculiarities of Kalmyk chess. He made the first move. Glenn twice had to lean in close to distinguish camels from horses. He won the game with a clever use of the Kalmyk rule of promotion, and when Vaskin realized he was lost, he cackled and said that Glenn had done very well in his first time playing Kalmyk chess.

"It was a pleasure to play you," Glenn said. "I never played that way before. This is a very nice set, but next time take the twenty thousand and make another one."

Vaskin laughed again. I reminded him that at the Institute he had mentioned his mother's chess prayer. He nodded and spoke the prayer in Kalmyk, a quick consecration like grace before a meal:

Oh, God, thousand Buddha,  
I worship and pray to chess.  
Sanctify my play, bless my Knight's move and  
Protect the Saint Khan.  
Bless my victory.  
Oh, God, thousand Buddha.

He nodded at the memory of it. I asked him the same question about chess and religion that I had asked of the monk in Lagan.

Vaskin was too old for political fear, and disagreed plainly. "Chess is an intellectual game," he said. "It cannot be a religion. It's a culture. A national chess game is a national chess culture. But it cannot become a religion. Chess was created by an Indian or an Arab, and they made this game for competition. They wanted it to be an intellectual game. I have

been Buddhist since I was three. And never have I seen chess in Buddhist books."

I wanted to argue with him. One of the chess's creation stories said that the game had been invented by monks as an alternative to violence, *buddhi* had once been a name of chess, and the spread of chess in fact closely followed the spread of Buddhism. And hadn't he just recited a Buddhist chess prayer? But Vaskin was on a lucid roll, and would not be interrupted.

"Chess is a competition of mind. I am sure that this idea of the president's will not end well. " He mimed a spit at the floor, and accented his words with raps of his cane. "It will just not work! Here's why I think this. Because a long time ago when Kalmyk people started playing chess, men and women were equal in the game. There wasn't a single family where the members didn't play. Everybody played-it was widespread among the Kalmyks. But chess is different from Buddhism. In chess, you play in order to capture the pieces of your enemy. You capture them, you surround them, you kill them. And religion does not foresee this. It is forbidden in any world. Religion. Chess has nothing to do with religion!" <sup>1</sup>

## The International Chess Set Collection at Maryhill Museum

The collection of unique and unusual chess sets at Maryhill Museum had its origins in an exhibition held at the museum in 1957. According to newspaper accounts at the time, it included over 1600 pieces from local, national and international collections. The success of the exhibition was astonishing. Attendance rose and the exhibition was extended twice because of the intense interest. Indeed, the decision to develop a permanent collection of chess sets at Maryhill was made as a direct result of the popularity of the exhibit. But this should not have been so surprising. Interest in chess pieces as works of art had been steadily growing throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning around 1910 and continuing through the second half of the century, an unexpected number of contemporary artists experimented with set design. These included Marcel Duchamp (who is said to have given up painting for chess), Man Ray, Alexander Calder, Yves Tanguy, and Max Ernst, to name just a few. Many were chess players themselves and were looking to create beautifully designed playing pieces. In 1944, Julien Levy organized a pivotal art exhibition on chess sets at his gallery in New York. *The Imagery of Chess* presented a range of recent interpretations by Ernst, Calder, Man Ray, Noguchi, and Tanguy, among others. The techniques employed included assemblage, painting and sculpture, and the sets were both humorous and serious in design. Within a decade, artist-designed sets began to attract a great deal of attention, and artists were creating one-of-a-kind or limited edition sets in diverse styles ranging from the abstract to the representational.

Coincidentally the art world's interest in the game came at a time when there was a rising popular interest in championship play that began in the thirties with the much publicized matches of the Soviet Grand Masters and culminated with the infamous match between the American Bobby Fisher and Boris Spassky at Reykjavik in 1972. Moreover, these decades witnessed a growing appreciation and study in the history of chess and chess pieces, sparking an interest in collecting historic and contemporary chess sets by private and public collectors everywhere.

Initially the development of the chess set collection at Maryhill fell to Clifford Dolph, the Museum's first director. Dolph was first attracted to chess as a player. He enjoyed a good game and was even willing to play by mail, one move at a time, if necessary. However, Dolph also developed a keen interest in the multiplicity of styles and materials to be found in chess sets. This interest led him to collectors, galleries and other institutions where sets could be found, and it was under his direction that the 1957 exhibit was organized. His goal was to interpret chess for its artistic beauty, originality and novelty.

Since then, the chess collection at Maryhill has flourished, and presently comprises over 300 sets dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present. They represent a wide range of styles, materials, and techniques from diverse cultures and historical periods. A growing number of sets in the collection are artist-designed sets. The museum also collects works of art whose subject matter is chess, including paintings, decorative arts and works on paper.

Today the permanent chess exhibition is still one of the most admired exhibits at the Museum, attracting the attention of visitors, researchers and collectors from all over the world. The collection has been featured in a wide variety of publications ranging from a Turkish art magazine, *Poyun ve Sanat*, to a children's magazine, *Muse: From the Publishers of Cricket and Smithsonian Magazine* and, of course, Maryhill's catalog, *Sculptures in Miniature: Chess Sets from the Maryhill Museum of Art*, and more recently in the book, *The Art of Chess*.

This spring we are celebrating nearly a half of a century of chess at Maryhill, opening the 2004 season with two special exhibitions and related programs featuring chess and chess related works of art from the last fifty years. We hope to see you at the programs or in the galleries this year.

It's your move. ♠

## Miniature Royalty

Collectors make strategic moves with chess sets.

By Brook S. Mason

Even today's high-tech games cannot knock chess from its 1,500-year reign. Chess sets, created with finely carved ivory and all varieties of wood and sterling silver, remain in strong demand, selling out in antiques shops as they arrive, creating a vibrant market for contemporary versions. First favored by kings, lords and the aristocracy, chess sets' royal association gives them a certain luster for their mostly male buyers. "Gaming tables complete with chess pieces are commonly requested for rooms filled with antiques from Sheraton to Regency," says Mindy Papp of the venerable Manhattan establishment Florian Papp, who reports fielding such requests monthly. The current pride of place at her gallery is given to an Anglo-Indian ivory

and ebony board with matching chess pieces and checkers that is priced at \$8,500. A bonus: This 19th-century game board folds neatly in half for traveling. "We're certain of authenticity with ivory and ebony chess pieces dating from the 18th century," Papp explains.

Gaming boards like this are in such demand today that Patrick Bavasi of the San Francisco antiques firm Dillingham & Company considers them signature pieces for completing 18th- and 19th-century interiors. British antiques enthusiasts have long desired such examples in satinwood and mahogany with yew veneers. "In London, there's been a consistent demand for more than a century," says Tarquin Bilgen of Mallett, the 132-year-old London enterprise, which just



*Carved and ebonized decoration accent this c. 1815 Regency ambonyna wood game table (above), which stands on a trestle base of round column legs with scrolled feet. This c. 1850 William IV rosewood game table (top) has an inset and removable Chinese lacquer gaming board with checkers/chess on one side and backgammon on the other. A "Boxwood Chess Set" by Max Ernst (below), 1944, which was made for "The Imagery of Chess" exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery.*





*"White Knight from Buenos Aires Chess Set" by Marcel Duchamp (above), 1919. "Himmel und Hölle" (Heaven and Hell) by Meissen chief sculptor Peter Strang (right), 1986, hard-paste porcelain.*

opened a Manhattan outpost on Madison Avenue.

Due to the extreme demand for and scarcity of tables and chess sets, prices have doubled and tripled. However, antique chess pieces are becoming a rarity, say a host of dealers. According to Bilgen, among the most prized examples are "John Company" sets richly carved in ivory; sculptural, non-figurative sets made in Kashmir also are highly valued. The intricacy and massive scale of the former, which are called "John Company" in reference to the East Indian Trading Company, make them extraordinary art objects. The kings sit on elephants 5 inches tall accompanied by uniformed English soldiers as pawns; on the opposite side sit Indian maharajahs with foot soldiers, known as *sepoys*. Such rarities can fetch \$45,000 and only appear about once every three years at Mallett. Four years ago, such a set would have sold for \$20,000 if in good condition, says Elizabeth Gann, a Delray Beach, Florida, dealer.

Antique boards are becoming as difficult to find as the sets. "Early game

boards are rarities," Bavasi says. Right now, his gallery has a prized 1710 German board crafted from boxwood and walnut with its original intricate lock. What makes this example so unusual is its date—most sets commonly found in antiques shops and auction houses are from the 19th century—and large size.

This past summer, chess sets received the museum world's seal of approval: "The Art of Chess," an exhibition at London's prestigious Gilbert Collection, showcased great sets such as Carl Fabergé's celebrated example, with its playing pieces of silver, jasper and



aventurine quartz and its board of silver, apricot serpentine and Siberian jade. Of note, too, were the porcelain sets turned out in the 1920s by the Russian Lomonosov State Porcelain Factory. Sets created by great 20th-century artists, such as Man Ray, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp and Alexander Calder also were represented. In Dadaist artist Duchamp's hand, the carved figures dating from 1919 bear a decidedly Art Deco touch, while Man Ray's figures are pure geometry. To round out the show, exhibition curator Mark Sanders approached seven contemporary artists from Damien Hirst to Paul McCarthy for sets to include. Even the steep prices like \$96,000 for

the McCarthy set in resin and plaster of kitchen items like a bar of soap didn't seem to faze collectors; Sanders reports there are ready buyers for the contemporary sets.

Such museum shows will whet the appetites of even more collectors, says Gann. "Now that the market for antique sets is drying up, contemporary luxury sets are in demand," she reports, noting in particular a set made by the Florentine firm Piero Benzonni: a 6-foot-wide onyx table accompanied by one-foot-tall figures priced at \$75,000. A sterling-silver chess set inlaid with pearls and jade and weighing a stunning 32 pounds costs \$26,500. Meissen porcelain sets are also available, with pieces relating to sea themes, such as charming sea horses and octopi. But handle these Meissen sets carefully—they cost \$35,000.

If you prefer a more routine set, check out Chess Forum in New York's Greenwich Village, where Vasari sets from Italy are highly popular. Crafted of solid bronze with gilt and silver highlights, these examples can reach \$7,000. Chess Forum's clientele runs the gamut, notes owner Imad Khachan, who says, "Today, people of all ages and walks of life enjoy owning a chess set." □

*From Art & Antiques,  
November 2003*

## SOTHEBY'S PRESS RELEASE

On June 16, 2004, Sotheby's New York will present for sale an important private collection of twenty-five chess sets. The offering will include examples of remarkable quality ranging in date from the late 18th Century to contemporary productions. Themes vary from commemorations of historical periods to the whimsical and fantastical, and the materials also cover a large spectrum, including fine German porcelain, Venetian glass, colorful ivory, various fruitwoods, metals, enamels, as well as the highly sought-after medium of amber. The collection, which illustrates the myriad styles and types of chess sets available to the collectors, and also represents the artistic styles of the regions, countries, artists, and eras that produced them, will be included in the June 16th and 17th Arcade sale and will be on public exhibition from June 10th-15th.

Highlights include an elaborately hand-blown, contemporary Venetian glass set by the artist Gianni Toso. The design is the fourth produced in an edition of twenty and is estimated to sell for \$20/30,000. The figures, with Mannerist elongated features and dressed in Renaissance attire, possess a jovial and delightful demeanor. Each piece is a character from the Venice Carnivale and in their hands are masks verifying their participation in this traditional annual event. Toso's sheer virtuosity is evident in the details of each character, from their facial expressions to the snakes that coil from the Queen's mask of Medusa.

An exquisite Indian Ivory Berhampore John Company set (est. \$20/30,000), dates to the early to mid 19th century. Taking its cue from the actual struggle over the control of India, this set is one of the more traditional in the collection. The monarchs, in howdahs mounted on the backs of elephants, survey an army of water buffaloes, lions, bishops astride camels, knights on horseback, and foot soldiers. The local Hindus, on black lotus bases, compete with East India Company merchants on a battlefield for authority over the land and the trade monopolies. Pawns hold spears while the British grasp muskets; Rooks are towers surmounted by flag-bearers. Its is a finely carved and delicate rendition of a highly sought after set.

Of great historical significance is a Russian porcelain set, made by the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory in 1926, which pits the Communists against the Capitalists (est \$10/15,000). This extremely rare set, which was produced only in the 1920s, offers a unique glimpse into the political commentary of the day: the archetypal figures of Russia's Revolution are glorified against the satirized leader of Capitalists, gruesomely represented by an ermine-cloaked personification of Death.

In addition, the sale boasts five figural porcelain sets produced from the Meissen factory, including a contemporary version of The Marine Life set designed by Max Esser in 1923, with an associated four-part porcelain chess board (est. \$10/15,000), The Turks and Moors (est \$8/12,000); a frog theme set; a buestenspiel set: and a saulenspiel set.

\* \* \* \*

Sotheby NY has indicated to us that they might be willing to send a FREE copy of their June 16th 2004 auction catalogue to any CCI member for whom we supply a name and address. Our CCI policy has been to NOT give our members names and address to anyone without their specific permission. However, if you would like to have a free auction catalogue mailed to you from Sotheby, for the June 16, 2004 chess set auction, please send your name, mailing address and email address, to FLOYD SARISOHN at 350 Veterans Highway, Commack, New York 11725 (or email same to [Lichess@aol.com](mailto:Lichess@aol.com)) no later than May 1, 2004, to be included on the list that will be submitted to Sotheby Auction House, for the mailing. NO NAME OR ADDRESS WILL BE SUBMITTED WITHOUT YOUR GIVING PERMISSION, BY SENDING SAME TO FLOYD (NO LATER THAN May 1, 2004). There is some possibility that we may be able to persuade Christies in London to also make such a free mailing to our members. In giving permission to have such mailing from Sotheby, indicate if you give permission for your name to go to Christies as well, if they are also willing to make a free mailing of their auction catalogue. <sup>1</sup>

### CHESS SET AUCTION DATES:

<b>MAY 27, 2004</b>	Christie's in London- Sets from collection of CCI member Kasper Stock
<b>JUNE 4, 2004</b>	Duran - Subastas de Arte in Madrid, sets from various collectors sold at Auction during CCI Convention
<b>JUNE 16, 2004</b>	Sotheby in New York, Sets from collection of CCI member Benno Bordiga

## Classified ads

Ads are free for CCI members and you are welcome to have an ad in more than one category. Ad rates: full page \$120.00, ½ page \$60.00; ¼ page \$30.00; business card \$15.00.

### Need your help for research

I'm researching chess ex libris 1) for a talk that I will give in Madrid, and 2) for a book that I'm writing (*CHESS Themed Ex Libris*) and will have published by the time of the Congress. I need your collective help as follows:

- 1) I need to borrow or purchase the following 3 items distributed at the respective CCI Congresses:
  - a) London Jerzy Gizycki gave out a booklet on the theme of chess ex libris,
  - b) New York/1990 Jerzy Gizycki again gave out a booklet with his chess ex libris on the cover,
  - c) Paris/1992 A booklet was distributed by Wladyslaw Koscielniak of 10 chess bookplates.
- 2) I understand that Gizycki put out some other literature on the subject; I would be pleased to buy or borrow same.
- 3) Karel Falley of Belgium issued two catalogues (circa late 1970s, I believe); I would be pleased to purchase or borrow either or both of these.
- 4) I will accept any gifts of original ex libris for my new collecting interest. Also, I would be very pleased to borrow any other items so that I can make quality prints of and return to you ASAP! I am interested in all chess ex libris, but particularly those made for you!
- 5) Finally, if you are in touch with another collector that has chess ex libris material kindly advise and I will write to them as well.

Thank you for whatever assistance you can muster!!!

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