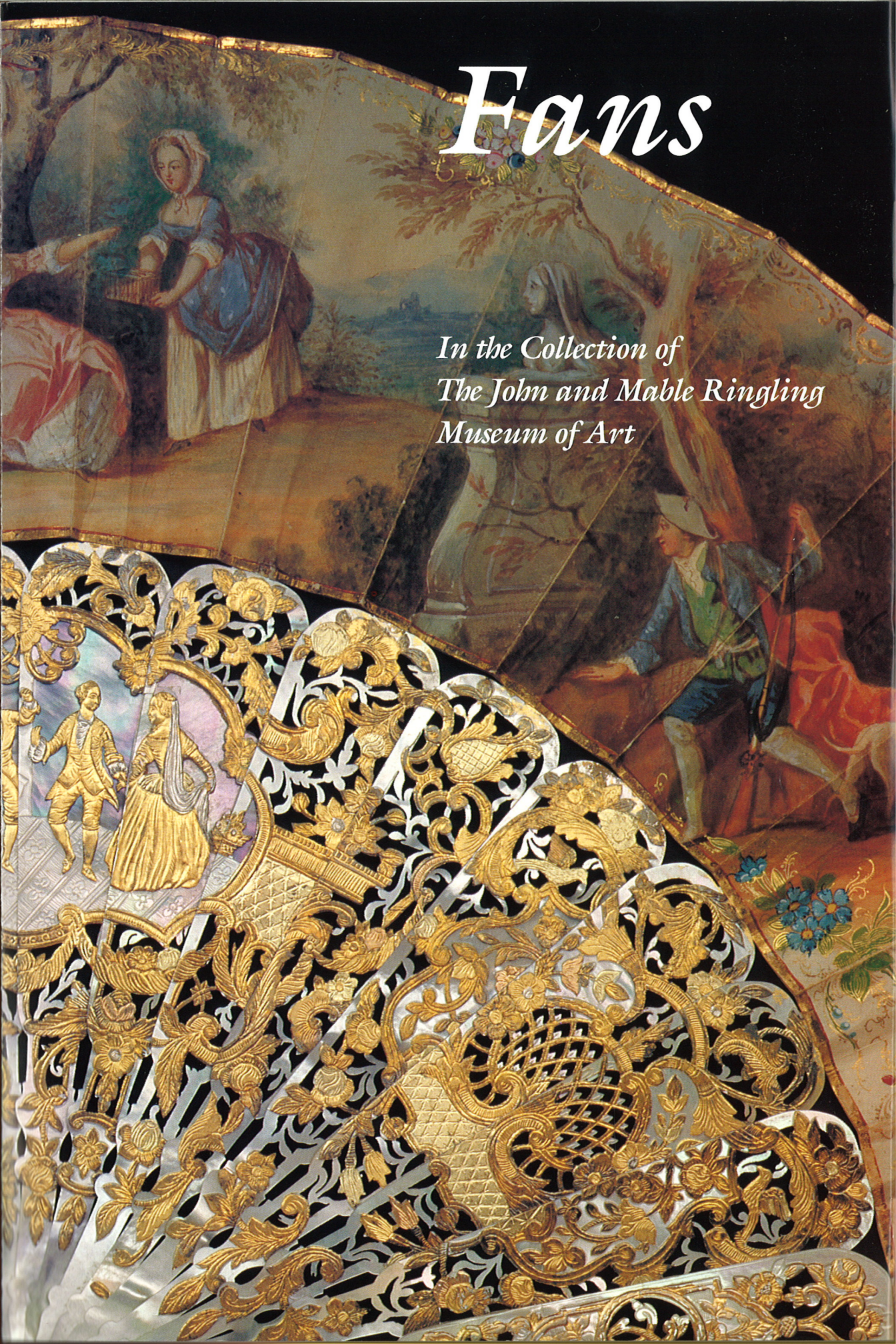
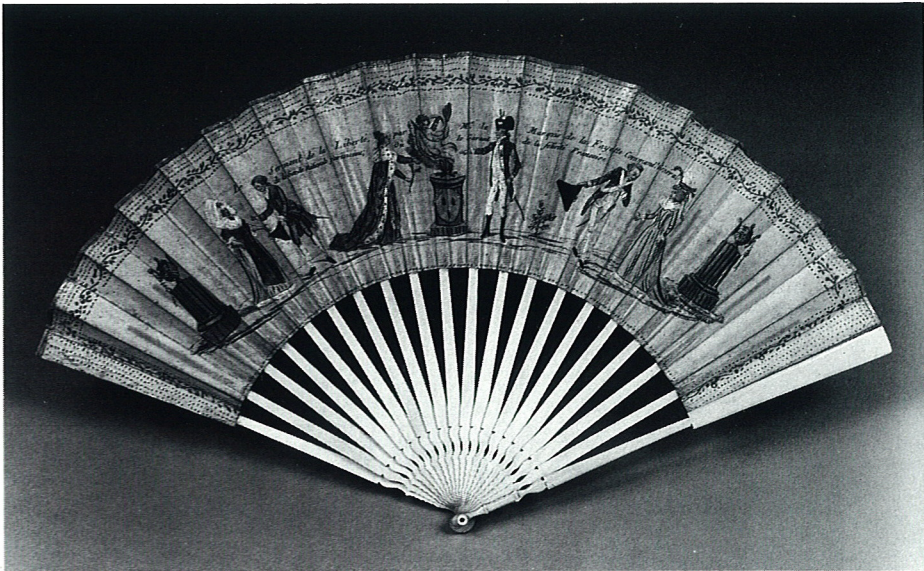


# *Fans*

*In the Collection of  
The John and Mable Ringling  
Museum of Art*





*Fig. 1. French, Lafayette's Promise of Liberty, about 1790, pierced ivory sticks, watercolor etching and engraving on paper leaf. Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche, 1988, MF 88.14.1.*

## *Introduction*

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is proud to be the first museum in the United States to have a permanent rotating exhibition displaying works from major fan-producing centers around the world. The Museum houses over 250 fine examples of hand-held fans dating from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. A Fan Center was established at the Museum in 1988 to assist scholars and serious collectors with information to help identify types of fans, lace and costume. The Fan Center features such rare volumes illustrating the history of fans as *Fan and Fan-Leaves* by Lady Charlotte Schreiber, *Catalogue of The Cabinet of Old Fans: The Property of Mrs. Robert Walker of Uffington, Berkshire*, and *History of The Fan* by G.W. Rhead.

The first donation to the collection was of 100 fans given by Mr. and Mrs. Irving Snyder, donated in the name of Helen Campbell Kerr, in 1974. The most important acquisition came in 1988 when Elsa James Zellely, in memory of her mother Elsa Konig Nitzsche, gave 150 fans of exceptional quality along with an outstanding library and related research materials. The Zellely fan collection was assembled over a fifty-year period and encompasses one of the finest collections in the country. The Fan Association of North America (FANA) has given important support to the Fan Center through grants and donations. FANA held its tenth Annual Conference at the Ringling Museum, bringing scholars from all around the world to the opening of the new fan display in one of the historic Astor Galleries.

In 1926, John Ringling purchased two rooms built for the John Jacob Astor family, originally installed in the Astor New York City mansion on Fifth Avenue. These rooms, one a reception room and the other a library, were designed by the American architect Richard Morris Hunt, with the assistance of the Parisian decorator Jules Allard. Hunt studied in Paris and was responsible for the Beaux Arts classicism that shaped American taste during the 1880s and 1890s. ■

## History

The word "fan" is derived from the Latin word *vannus*, a Roman tool used for winnowing grain. Egypt claims the earliest known fan dating to 3200 B.C. It has a very long-handled standard for servants to fan their God-Kings. Another magnificent example was included in the treasures of Tutankhamen of around 1355 B.C. The fan is of gold *repoussé* depicting the Pharaoh riding a royal chariot hunting an ostrich, and once held ostrich plumes in brown and white. Similar standards, with fan-shaped panels were later used in China, Japan, Assyria, Greece, and Italy as symbols of status.

Fans are well documented. Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589) is known to have had fans in her dowry at the time of her marriage to King Henry II of France. Fans of this period frequently contained masterpieces in miniature, and their handles were carved of ivory, gold or silver inset with jewels. They hung from the girdle by a chain. Queen Elizabeth I of England had 27 rigid fans listed among her belongings at the time of her death in 1603. These rigid fans of the time are shaped like a flag or banner, and can be very elaborate with heavy gold embroidery, brightly painted silk, decorated with exotic feathers or plain white vellum edged in Venetian lace.

Folding fans are smaller and easier to handle than rigid fans, and may have been invented by the Japanese in the seventh century A.D. The earliest Japanese folding fans were called *Komori*, which is also the word for bat, and were designed to imitate the action of a wing folding open and closed. In the Renaissance, fans were commissioned from the rarest materials available and were often garnished with precious metals. Although few fans still exist from the 16th and 17th centuries, many examples are depicted in the paintings of such artists as Bronzino, Titian and Rubens. The Ringling's *Portrait of Fürstin Johanna Elisabeth von Anhalt-Zerbt*, by the 18th century French painter Antoine Pesne, shows a magnificent example in use, and can be enjoyed in conjunction with the fan display. ■

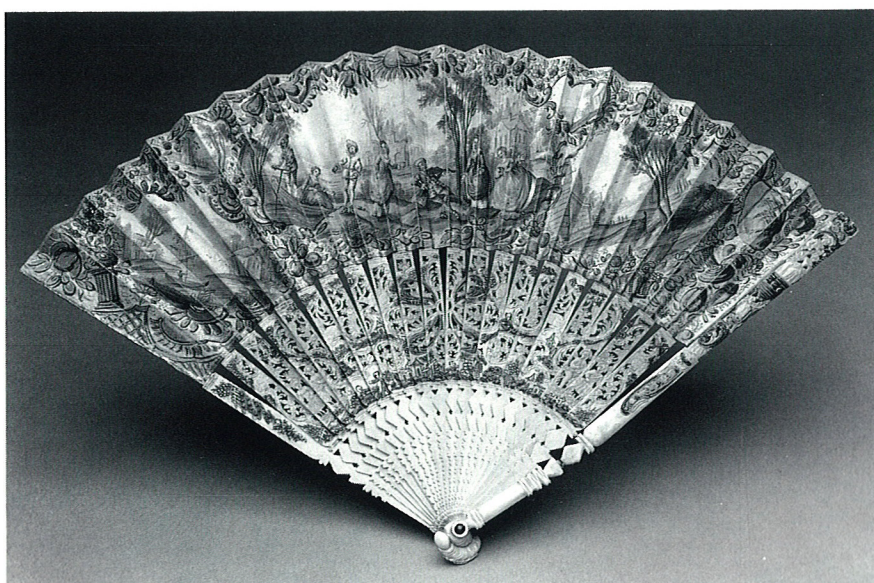


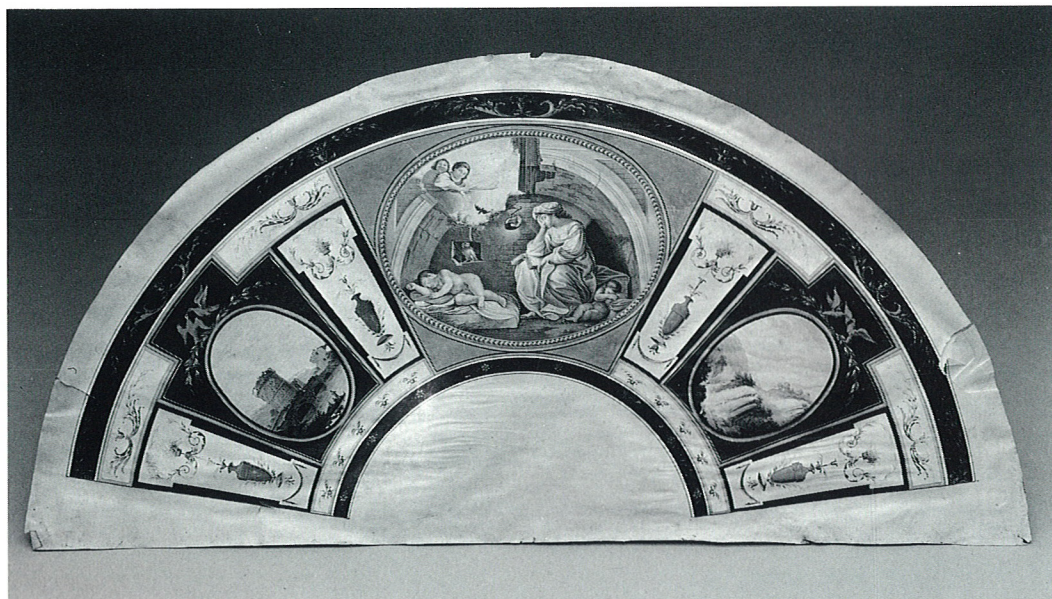
Fig. 2. *Netherlandish, Three Vignettes*, about 1750, pierced, carved and painted ivory sticks, gouache and gilt paper leaf. Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa König Nitzsche, 1988, MF 88.14.14.

## *Eighteenth Century*

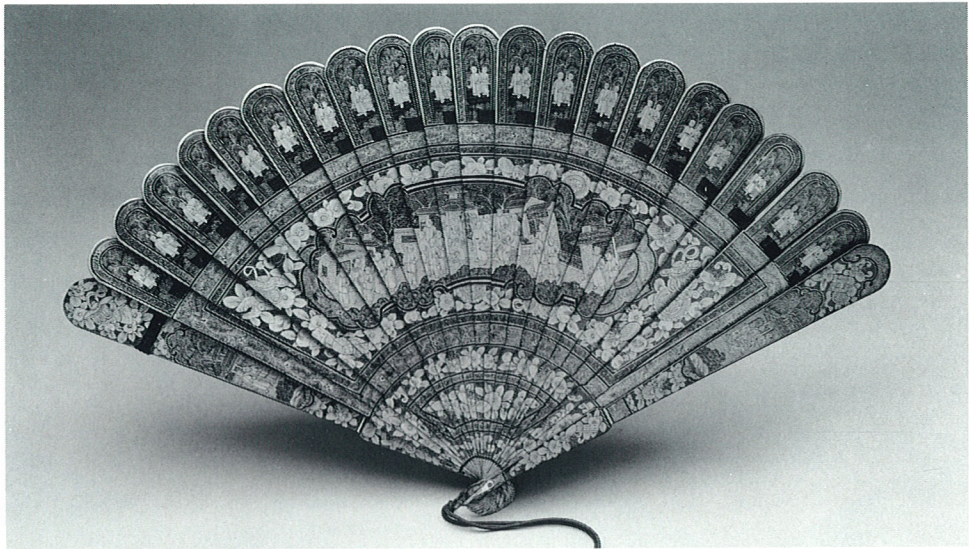
The 18th century was the Golden Age of fan making. The many subtle differences that determine a fan's age can be appreciated in the finely painted fan leaves along with delicately carved fan sticks and guards. Exquisite examples have survived. Some were painted on kid-skin leather, referred to as "chicken skin." Others contained painted medallions on woven silk detailed with gold and silver sequins. The miniature paintings included portraits, idealized romantic and domestic scenes, or mythological and classical subjects such as the Triumph of Divine Love, copied after works by such artists as Watteau and Fragonard. *Night with Sleep and Death Near Her* on the 18th-century Italian fan illustrated below (Fig. 3) was copied after a ceiling painting in Rome by Guercino. The verso or back of these fans was decorated more simply with brightly colored roses, tulips and carnations done by an assistant. The fan depicting *Lafayette's Promise of Liberty* (Fig. 1) is a fine example of a commemorative fan, complete with descriptive text and dated about 1790.

Wafer-thin ivory, tortoise shell and wood sticks often are carved and pierced with images of elegantly dressed ladies, animals, fruit or flowers. Rococo fan sticks have a central cartouche carved with scrolling decorations painted or covered with silver and gold leaf. They are delightful works of art in themselves. Guard sticks protect the delicate fan leaf and can be encrusted with gold, diamonds, emeralds and pearls.

*Découpé* fans were made of vellum or paper with intricately cut designs imitating the appearance of hand-made lace. These often contained painted scenes within a cartouche. We have a number of these rare fans in the Ringling collection, such as the Netherlandish fan with *Three Vignettes* (Fig. 2) beautifully rendered in watercolor. One very unusual aspect of this fan is that the carved ivory sticks were designed as well to imitate starched lace. ■



*Fig. 3. Italian after ceiling painting by Guercino, Night with Sleep and Death Near Her, about 1780, gouache on unmounted skin leaf. Gift of Elsa James Zellej, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche, 1988, MF 88.14.13.*



*Fig. 4. Chinese, Court Scene, about 1835, lacquer and gilded wood sticks, silk tassel. Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1988, MF 88.14.61.*

## *Nineteenth Century*

Fans were still precious items in the early 19th century and commissioned as works of art. *Brisé* fans were very fashionable and consisted of solid sticks made of ivory or wood, with either pierced decoration, such as on many Chinese examples, or magnificent gold and lacquer chinoiserie scenes, such as on the *Court Scene* on the Chinese fan in Fig. 4. *Brisé* fans have no leaf, with all the decoration applied directly onto the sticks, assembled with a rivet at the base, and connected together with a silk ribbon at the top. The Ringling collection has a pair of such fans in its original box, one in ivory and another in wood for day and evening use.

Fans were mass-produced by the second quarter of the nineteenth century and became much more affordable to the general public. Fans grew much larger in size. The fan sticks were wider, often made of mother-of-pearl and became heavy and less graceful. The most important fan factory in the United States was developed by Edmund Soper Hunt in 1866. Hunt perfected a machine by which the fan sticks and the leaf could be assembled, folding the leaf and gluing it to the sticks all in one process.

The elegant effect of 18th century fans was still popular, and they were imitated on the 19th century fans with painted vignettes and gold and silver leaf detailing to the fan sticks. The beautifully painted fan on the cover, *The Bird Catcher*, about 1865, demonstrates this imitation and shows the high degree of craftsmanship that was still required. Fan makers incorporated various types of prints, such as etchings, stippled engravings, aquatints, woodcuts and lithographs. These were hand-watercolored and has the effect of a much more expensive commissioned piece. Many fans were printed as memory aides and served as souvenirs from vacations or special events such as the dedication of the Eiffel Tower in 1889, and graduations, weddings and deaths. Impressionist artists Edgar Degas, Camille Pissarro and Berte Morisot offered a fresh approach using brilliant colors and bold images on fan leaves, exhibiting them in the group exhibitions of the 1870s and 1880s. ■



Fig. 5. A. Thomasse, French, *The Cat's Meow*, about 1908, (a pair) carved mother-of-pearl and horn sticks with brass piqué, gouache on silk leaf. Gift of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche, 1993, MF 93.9.5 and MF 93.9.4.

## *Twentieth Century*

In the early 20th century, many spectacular fans were created for the high fashion of the day, using very large ostrich plumes with mother-of-pearl sticks. Fine lace continued to be extremely desirable and was attached to a gauze backing. Fans were personalized by a monogram on the lace leaf or gold initials on the guard stick. Figure 5 displays a pair of fans, both painted by A. Thomasse for the Duvelleroy Company, a famous French fan company. Fans painted by Thomasse are especially treasured by collectors today. Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and other styles in painting and the decorative arts are reflected on fans of the period. Venus standing within a shell on the late nineteenth century fan in Fig. 6 is identical to her many representations in contemporary French Salon painting. The delicate leaf on this fan is most unusual, having iridescent sliced mother-of-pearl window inserts attached to a painted kid-skin leaf.

Advertising fans became popular from the 1920s on as businesses used them to advertise their wares. These rigid cardboard fans were given away by funeral homes, theaters, churches, perfume houses, and restaurants. The Ringling Museum is fortunate to have a commemorative fan representing the marriage of Charles, Prince of Wales, and the Lady Diana Spencer. In 1981, a limited edition of 25 fans was created, each with three white ostrich plumes fixed on a sterling handle with gold insignia and inscription. Only three are in American collections. ■



Fig. 6. Azneubl, French, **Venus**, about 1890, pierced, carved and gilded mother-of-pearl sticks, watercolor and gilt on skin leaf. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Irving Snyder, in the name of Helen Campbell Kerr, 1974, SN 1951.4.

### Glossary

- BODY COLOR:** watercolor mixed with chalk
- BRISÉ:** fan made up of sticks only
- CABRIOLET FAN:** fan with two leaves, one above the other, similar to the section of the wheel of a cabriolet, a carriage in the 1780s
- CELLULOID:** an early thermo-plastic
- CHICKEN SKIN:** very fine kid-skin
- CHINOISERIE:** European imitation of the Chinese style
- COCKADE:** fan that opens to 360°, usually with guard sticks that extend to form handles
- DÉCOUPÉ:** paper or vellum with cut work resembling lace
- FONTANGE:** fan higher in the center than at the guard sticks
- GUARD STICK:** outer sticks of a fan, protecting the interior leaf and sticks
- HAND-SCREEN:** rigid fan, mounted on a stick
- LEAF:** mounted fabric, skin or paper of a folding fan
- MANDARIN FAN:** Cantonese export fan decorated with figures having ivory faces and silk clothes applied to the fan's paper leaf
- PIQUÉ:** dots of gold, silver or brass set in tortoise shell or ivory
- PIVOT:** the metal rod that holds the sticks together
- RIVET:** screw that holds the pivot together, often jewelled
- VELLUM:** stiff parchment, animal skin
- VERNIS MARTIN:** a varnish invented by the Martin family for furniture and carriages; a name used for varnished brisé fans
- VIGNETTE:** small painted scene

### Acknowledgments

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photographs by Terry Schank.

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Front and back cover: Detail, French, **The Bird Catcher**, about 1865, pierced and gilded mother-of-pearl stick, watercolor and gilt on paper leaf. Gift of Elsa James Zellej, in memory of Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1988, MF 88.14.17.