

A Children's Guide to

Splendour

By
Isaac du Toit

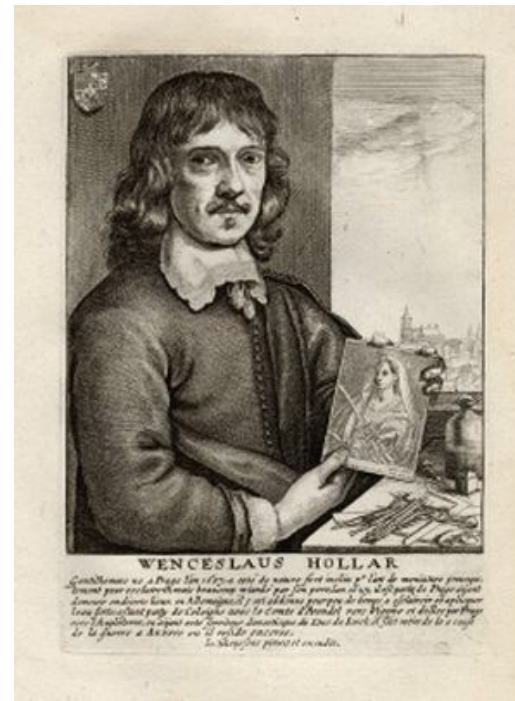
Pirakorako Ūropi
European Splendour

∞ 1500–1800 ∞



At the beginning of the period that the **Splendour** exhibition covers (1500-1800) a church was probably the only place less wealthy people would see an 'artwork' displayed. Art was privately owned and collections of it could be found in churches, palaces, castles, and large country houses. These could sometimes be viewed by appointment but there was no such thing as a public art gallery like Te Papa.

Today, you can view the collections of many art galleries and museums from around the world, including Te Papa, on the internet.



Wenceslaus Hollar, **Self-portrait**, 1649. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This portrait is not on display in Splendour.

One of the most talented and prolific artists of his time was Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677). Hollar did at least 300 drawings and 3000 etchings - six of which are on show in **Splendour**.



Maker unknown, **Orphrey cross**, Italy, 1400-1500, silver, silver gilt, copper, silk, linen. Bequest of Mrs Alec Tweedie, 1946. Te Papa (PC000795)



Wenceslaus Hollar, **A chalice**, 1640 etching. Gift of Sir John Ilott, 1961. Te Papa (1961-0006-12)

Hollar's very detailed etchings, used for making prints, are a rich source of information about the 17th century - what people were wearing, hairstyles, landscapes, architectural drawings, natural history specimens and maps. Hollar is particularly famous for his drawings of London before and after the Great Fire of London in 1666 (350 years ago).

Today people use mobile phones to take selfies or other photographs on a daily basis. However, in 1770, when John Greenwood wrote to John Copley asking him to paint a portrait of his mother, Mrs Humphrey Devereux, paintings or drawings were the only way you had of remembering or recording what people looked like.

It will be almost seventy years after this portrait was painted that the first photographic portrait is taken, in 1839.



Photography will not be available to the masses until the introduction of Eastman Kodak's Brownie in the 1900s



John Copley, **Mrs Humphrey Devereux**, 1771, oil on canvas. Gift of the Greenwood family, 1965. Te Papa (1965-0013-1)

It's hard to imagine now, but in earlier centuries it was considered an act of vanity to have your image on display like Mrs Devereux. In any case, only the very wealthy could afford to get their portraits painted.

However, throughout this period waves of change, the increasing wealth of the middle classes, global trade and exploration gave increasing numbers of people access to art and fine furniture, 'exotic' and expensive objects and materials previously beyond their reach.

By the early 1700s, exciting new items were arriving in Europe through trade with China, Japan, and India. Porcelain, lacquer, silks, and Eastern styles were new to European eyes – and local manufacturers in England were quick to copy them.



Royal Worcester, Teapot, 1770-1775. England, soft paste porcelain. Te Papa (CG000864)

In this exhibition you will see lots of examples of what type of clothing very wealthy people wore over 200 years ago.

Only rich people could afford a silk dress like this one which might have cost about £50 at the time - a ridiculous amount of money by today's standards. On the other hand the people weaving the silk were often very poor.



Artist unknown, **Robe à l'Anglaise**
1775-1789, England, Spitalfields silk,
lace, Gift of Mrs B Vye, 1951. Te Papa
(PC000072)

Can you imagine being arrested and fined for wearing your favourite colour clothing? 'Sumptuary laws' were used to restrict the wearing of things like lace, silk, fur, purple or gold cloth to the aristocracy or upper class. By law, a poor person was not allowed to look like a rich person!



Bo Derek, By Lloyd Klein CC BY 2.0 via
Wikipedia Commons

My fancy lace collar shows the world how important I am!



Unknown artist, **Elizabeth I of England**. From William Camden, "The historie of the most renowned and victorious Princesse Elizabeth, late queene of England" 1630. Te Papa (RB001301/001a)

In Elizabethan times only royalty were allowed to wear the colour purple. Materials used to produce this colour were very scarce.

Unlike today, during this period buttons were generally found only on men's clothing. Buttons could also reflect the wealth and status of the wearer. The 18th century has been called the golden age of buttons and some buttons were tiny works of art and were a profitable sideline for many of the artists of the day.



A follower of Philippe Mercier **The sense of hearing** about 1750, oil on canvas. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (1992-0035-1794a)



Artist unknown, **Court waistcoat** about 1780, France, silk voided velvet, floss silk and twisted silk threads, silk damask. Bequest of Mrs Alec Tweedie, 1946. Te Papa (PC000042)



Women's clothing, on the other hand, often had many layers and tied (or laced) together. Zips weren't invented yet and weren't used on clothing until the 1920s.

Artist unknown, **Waistcoat** 1760-70, England, silk. Gift of the Estate of Mrs Margaret S Jack, 1961. Te Papa (PC000454)

Did you know?

Men's clothing have buttons that face right and women's have buttons that face left. Don't believe it? Check out the photo of present-day girl's and boy's pyjamas below. This convention dates from the 18th century when men usually put their own clothing on but a wealthy woman had a ladies maid to help her dress and buttons were on the other side to suit the maid!



Girl's pyjamas

Boy's pyjamas

Pockets were a separate item of clothing. Have a look at the ones on display in **Splendour** (as pictured below). From the 17th century to the late 19th century most women had at least one pair of pockets, which served a similar purpose as a handbag today. They were tied around the waist and usually worn underneath their petticoats. Of course there were no mobile phones or money cards to keep in your pockets back then.



Artist unknown, **Pockets**, about 1760, England, silk, silver and copper thread. Gift of the Wellington Embroiderer's Guild Inc, 2002. Te Papa (GH007784)

'Pickpockets' would sometimes steal pockets by cutting the strings that held them.

In the late 18th century women's fashions changed. Dresses had a high waistline and skirts fell close to the body and legs as in the painting below of Princess Charlotte. Pockets could no longer be hidden under clothing. Women began to use decorative bags carried over the arm instead.



George Dawe, **Portrait of Princess Charlotte of Wales**, about 1817, oil on panel. Gift of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1936. Te Papa (1936-0012-92)

While originally used by both men and women to cool the face or to keep insects away, fans became more of a fashion accessory for women during this period. Folding fans were introduced to Europe from Japan.

France was the centre for fan design and production. French fans were so popular they were smuggled into England in the 18th century.



Artist unknown, **Folding fan** about 1750, France, paper, water colour, gilt, mother of pearl, brass. Gift of Mr and Mrs Ernest Makower, 1938. Te Papa (1938-0003-3)

Fan Language

As fans grew in popularity and use, fan "sign language" was developed. A fan maker from Paris published a version of "fan language" which included the following:

Twirling the fan in the left hand: we are watched

Carrying the fan in the right hand in front of her face: follow me

Drawing the fan through the hand: I hate you

Drawing the fan across the cheek: I love you

Touching the tip of the fan with the finger: I wish to speak to you

Letting the fan rest on the right cheek: Yes

Letting the fan rest on the left cheek: No

Opening and shutting the fan: You are cruel

Dropping the fan: we will be friends

Fanning slowly: I am married

Fanning rapidly: I am engaged

Touching the handle of the fan to the lips: kiss me

The **Splendour** exhibition covers a period of time called "the age of discovery", when many lands previously unknown to Europeans were "discovered" or explored including America, Australia and New Zealand.

People were very interested in the world around them and would collect and display exotic objects and curiosities in a cabinet like this one on display.

Excellent craftsmanship, rare materials, and dark Japanese lacquer give this cabinet an exotic and eye-catching presence. A collector would display it like this, with the doors open.

Artist Unknown, **Cabinet on stand** about 1690, England, wood, lacquer, abalone, sharkskin, brass. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (PF000039)



John Webber **Portrait of Captain James Cook**, about 1780, England, oil on canvas. Te Papa (1960-0013-1)

Portrait is not on show in Splendour.

Cabinets of Curiosities

The term cabinet originally described a whole room of collections rather than a single piece of furniture. They were limited to the very rich who could afford to create and maintain them. Many monarchs developed large collections. They showed the interests of their owners but were also a bit of a status symbol and showing your collection was a form of entertainment.

The cabinets of curiosities would often show off quite different objects - a bit like going into Te Papa's "Golden Days" on level 4.

Cabinets of Curiosities were like the first museums. In fact, the British Museum is founded on the Cabinet of Curiosities of a man called Hans Sloane (1660-1753) who bequeathed his collection of over 71,000 books, antiquities and natural specimens to the British nation in 1753 (he had acquired the collections of lots of other collectors). Many of the objects and paintings on show in **Splendour** were also gifted (to Te Papa).





Armchair about 1690, England, oak, wool. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (PF000047)

In the late 17th century furniture for the wealthy became more comfortable and more finely decorated. Earlier in the century furniture was plain and heavy and was usually made of oak.

Chairs like these were luxury items.

This is a "longcase" clock **not** a "grandfather" clock.

The term grandfather clock probably dates from the 1876 song "My Grandfather's Clock" so when this clock was made there was no such thing. Longcase clocks date from 1670.



Thomas Windmills, **Longcase clock** about 1720, England, walnut, oak, steel, glass. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (PF000059)



Artist unknown, **Chest** about 1700, England, walnut veneer. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (PF000038)

This chest of drawers is made of walnut and dates from about 1700. It is an item of furniture that you find in most New Zealand homes today but it was a relatively new type of furniture in 1700!

In 1733, Sir Robert Walpole abolished all taxes on imported timber, an act which heralded in the age of mahogany - an exotic new material.



Artist unknown, **Card Table** about 1770, England, mahogany. Bequest of Mrs E G Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (PF000073)

Imports of mahogany in 1720 totalled £42 but by 1753 the figure had risen to £6,430. England had become obsessed by mahogany!

Now, thanks to the internet and social media we have news and anyone's views at the touch of a button. This was not the case in the 16th, 17th or 18th centuries.

William Hogarth was a skilled painter but he is as well-known for his engravings which were sold in large numbers to people who previously would not have been able to afford to own any art. Technological changes to the printing press meant prints were becoming more affordable to people from the middle and lower classes.



William Hogarth, **A Rake's Progress**. Plate 2, 1735. Gift of Sir John Illott, 1965. Te Papa (1965-0001-1/2-8)

Artists like Hogarth could use their art to comment on and satirise (make fun of) the way the wealthy lived and what he considered the decline in public morals and behaviour.



Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd, **Medallion**, about 1787. England, white jasper with black basalt relief, mounted in gilt silver. Gift of Majorie K. Mestayer, 1965. Te Papa (GH002423)

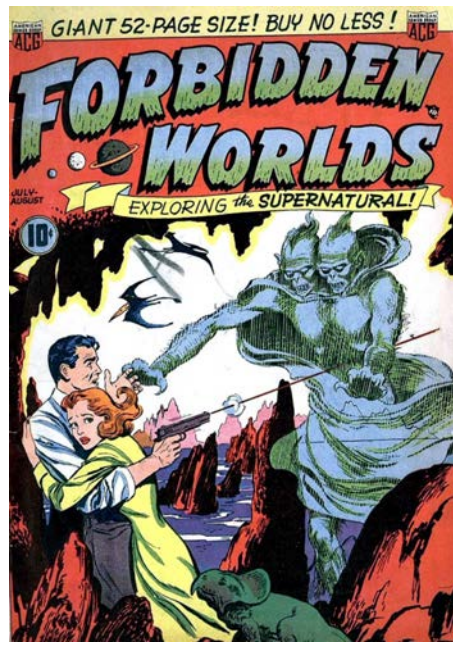
In 1787 Josiah Wedgwood became a leading member of the "Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" and wanted to focus people's attention on this issue. He produced these medallions at his own expense and freely distributed them.

This medallion is an early example of a fashion item worn to support the wearer's cause. Today we might wear a T-shirt with a political message in the same way.

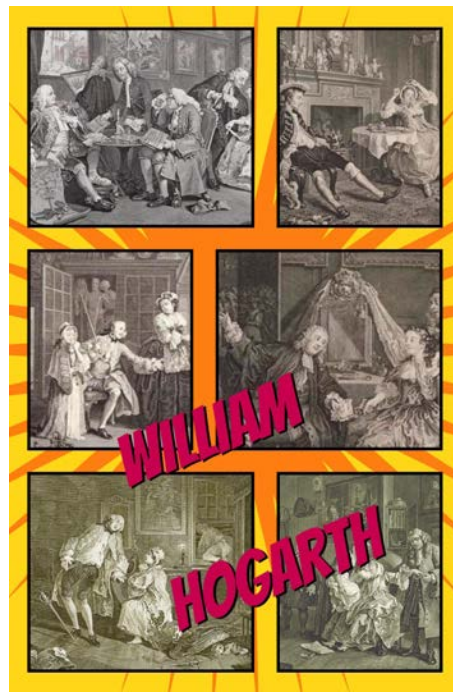
The second half of the period of **Splendour** coincides with creation and development of newspapers and magazines. Prior to this people would rely on word of mouth or distribute pamphlets on particular topics.

Newspapers and magazines were illustrated with engravings but the very nature of the engraving process did not allow for instantaneous publication of images.

You may be wondering why a comic book image has been used to illustrate this page. William Hogarth is considered by many to be the pioneer of sequential art (telling a story through a series of pictures). His paintings and engravings like **Marriage à-la-mode** (6 pictures) and **A Rake's Progress** (8 pictures) are considered by many to be the origin of the comic book. Engravings from both of these series of artworks are on display in **Splendour**.



By Ken Bald - Comic Book Plus, Public Domain. Not in Splendour.



Hogarth as a comic, by Isaac du Toit using **Marriage à-la-mode** series by W. Hogarth 1743-1745.

Front cover illustrations:



John Copley, **Mrs Humphrey Devereux**, 1771, oil on canvas. Gift of the Greenwood family, 1965. Te Papa (1965-0013-1)



A follower of Philippe Mercier, **The sense of taste** about 1750, oil on canvas. Bequest of Mrs E. G. Elgar, 1945. Te Papa (1992-0035-1795a)



George Dawe, **Portrait of Princess Charlotte of Wales**, about 1817, oil on panel. Gift of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, 1936. Te Papa (1936-0012-92)

This book is by Isaac du Toit with Megan du Toit and was inspired by visiting **European Splendour 1500-1800** at Te Papa.

Edited by Paddy Rockell.



Isaac du Toit

Paddy Rockell