



Upholsterer Rémy Brazet with a chair from the Swan suite.

BOSTON'S LATEST SWAN

When Boston's Museum of Fine Arts inaugurates its newly installed gallery of 18th-century French art on October 9, all eyes will be focused on the lavishly restored ten-piece Swan suite, the only complete set of royal French furniture in an American museum. James Swan, a colorful Revolutionary War colonel, Boston entrepreneur and possibly the very first American aficionado of fine French furniture, acquired the suite and other treasures from the French revolutionary government in 1794 in trade for tobacco and firearms. He sent it all home, and more than a hundred years later, his descendants began donating key pieces to the museum (though they've never been displayed together).

Made by celebrated cabinetmaker Jean-Baptiste-Claude Sené in 1787 for the bedroom of Marc-Antoine Thierry de Ville d'Avray (an *intime* of Louis XVI), the suite was covered in an exquisite silk lampas woven for the king's gaming room at the Château de Fontainebleau. The four-year project, sponsored by Ellen Jaffe, a member of the MFA's board of overseers, involved flying the furniture to the Getty for a state-of-the-art gilding restoration; then it was on to the renowned Paris upholstery atelier of Rémy Brazet. The Lyonnais

fabric house Tassinari & Chatel wove some 218 yards of silk lampas identical to the original; Declercq Passementiers provided six kinds of hand-assembled, handwoven gimps, tassels and fringes.

Back in the MFA's gallery, Gilbert Stuart's portraits of Colonel Swan and his heiress wife, Hepzibah Clarke, will watch over the suite and other French royal pieces from the Swan collection, as well as boiseries by Ledoux and paintings by Boucher and Greuze. MFA, 617-267-9300; www.mfa.org. **JEAN BOND RAFFERTY**

Degas's Dancers

Edgar Degas is renowned for his portraits of the dancers of the Paris Opéra ballet, captured in motion both onstage and off. Yet though there have been countless Degas exhibitions, none has focused on the artist's obsession with ballet—until, that is, “Degas and the Dance,” which includes 144 paintings, works on paper and sculptures drawn from collections throughout the world, some of which have not been exhibited publicly since his death, in 1917. The show opens at the Detroit Institute of Arts (October 20 through January 12, 2003) before traveling to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (February 12 through May 11, 2003).

The exhibit also examines the dancers' reputations, their training and their risqué social lives. (The Opéra was patronized by rich, powerful men who talked shop in the boxes and struck deals of a more personal nature backstage.) You'll encounter familiar works (*Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*), fresh discoveries (four drawings that haven't left Belgrade in decades) and brilliantly colored late works, some of which Degas painted with his fingers, such as *Three Dancers in Yellow Skirts* (right), from 1899. Detroit: 313-833-7900; dia.org. Philadelphia: 215-763-8100; philamuseum.org. **CAROL KINO**

