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Calendar of Events February 1941

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OUR MUSEUM OF ART AS A CERAMIC TREASURY

A FASCINATING FIELD of interest for the student of history who enjoys exploring the byways of man's progress in the amenities of civilization is the art of ceramics. I refer here not to the profound studies of ancient cultures which can be based on pottery relics, but to the delightful sidelines on the life of the not too distant past which old china reveals. A clear if minor note on the art and taste of our forefathers can be rung on its fragile surfaces. Pursuit of information on the ceramics can be a profound study, a passionate quest or an agreeable recreation.

One thing is clear when we study the pottery and porcelain of our ancestors, and that is the reiterated interest in the Orient. It is present in every age. This is not entirely surprising when we remember that it was in China that the ceramic art first attained its perfection, a fact to which our generic term, "china," eloquently testifies.

The caravans of the Middle Ages brought via the Near East stray specimens of Chinese porcelain to Europe. In New College, Oxford, is cherished the silver-mounted celadon bowl known as Bishop Warham's cup, which was bequeathed to the College by the Bishop in the early 16th century. However, it was not until some time after the opening up of the sea route to China, when the Dutch, French and English had followed the example of the Portuguese and established warehouses near Canton, that any considerable quantity of Chinese porcelain reached Europe. When eventually the East India Companies were carrying on a brisk trade with the Orient, it was another story, and in the 17th century Chinese porcelain became the rage, with princes and potentates vying with one another as collectors.

The enthusiasm for Oriental art persisted in Europe throughout the 18th century and its influence was manifest particularly in the decorative arts. In the cargoes of the vessels of the East India Companies were many things made by the Chinese especially to please the Occidental taste. This was true of great quantities of chine which is known on the Continent as India china, and in England and in the New World, through an odd misunderstanding, came to be called " Lowestoft" china.

Here in New England everyone interested in ceramics is familiar with this study porcelain ware which, though made and decorated in China, is known by the name of the little English town; for the number of table services bearing the interlaced initials of New Englanders, or the more impersonal decoration of floral sprigs and starred borders, which was carried in the holds of sailing vessels around the Horn during the latter part of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th century is incalculable. It is fitting that among the treasures of the Pendleton Collection at the Museum and in the pantries at Carrington House there is always on display a rather fine collection of this ware. Also on the upper floor of the Colonial House may be seen the tea set bearing the coat-of-arms of New York, a pattern so coveted by collectors, and on the lower floors of the Museum proper, other Lowestoft pieces bequeathed or given by various friends of the Museum.

DANCERS IN CHINOISERIE
Ludwigsburg Porcelain 1758-1793
From the Lucy T. Aldrich Collection

It was natural that the potters of Europe should seek to emulate the craftsmanship of the Orient and try to reproduce at home the prized Chinese porcelains. It was a secret not easily discovered. The Dutch potters tried it, and the result was Delftware, with its brittle tin-enamel glaze. The French tried it, and at Saint-Cloud in the 17th century succeeded in making a white vitreous ware that somewhat resembled the porcelains of China, but the resemblance was superficial. The vital ingredient, kaolin, was missing.

It was not until 1709 that the secret of true porcelain was discovered in Europe by an alchemist named Böttiger at Meissen, Saxony. Although the secret was jealously guarded, it leaked out as secrets will, and within a decade or so there were porcelain factories at Vienna, Höchst, Nymphenburg and other German towns, and factories in Italy, Spain and France were not long to follow.

Perhaps it is not generally realized that we have in Providence a unique opportunity to study early European porcelains in their most delightful aspects. In the Lucy T. Aldrich Collection of Porcelain Figures, housed in the 18th century paneled English room on the garden level of the Museum, we may find choice examples of the products of nearly every European factory of consequence. It was in the making of figures that the most skillful workmen were employed, the most lavish pains expended, the most ambitious hopes placed. Not only the sculptural talent necessarily required in the modelling, but also the technical difficulties presented by the firing, called for exacting skill, and a distinguished figure was an accomplishment in which to take pride. American ceramic enthusiasts have not as a rule concentrated their attention on figures, and Rhode Islanders would have to travel very far indeed to find a collection comparable to the Aldrich Collection.

The vogue for Chinese porcelains in 18th century Europe was directly responsible for the thin white salt-glaze ware manufactured in Staffordshire, England, between 1720 and 1780. The process of throwing salt into the kiln at the height of the firing, when it would form a thin layer of silicate of soda and alumina on the surface of the pots, was not new, but the application of this glaze to a thin-walled white body was, and the resultant ware rivaled porcelain in its delicacy and fragility. At first, this ware was pure white, with decoration in slight relief. About 1740, simple floral patterns were incised on the surface and brushed with cobalt oxide, this so-called "scratched blue." Later, the ware was decorated with enamel colors. No more highly prized English pottery exists today, for its great fragility, taken with the fact that it was a process which soon fell into disuse, makes the surviving pieces worth almost their weight in gold. A remarkable collection of this decorated salt-glaze was made by Mr. Charles Pendleton and may be seen on the shelves of the Philadelphia secretary and the wall case in the library of the Colonial House and in the small ceramics room on the second floor.

Mr. Pendleton was also a discriminating collector of the lead-glazed Whieldon wares. These included agate and tortoise shell wares and the moulded pottery with fine green glaze in imitation of cauliflowers and pine-apples. This green glazed ware is said to have been the invention of the famous Josiah Wedgwood who was Whieldon's partner. A great variety of patterns are included in the Pendleton Collection, some of great rarity.

While the well-to-do imported table services of Oriental Lowestoft and fine English potteries, there was a ware which in the early years of the last century was well within the reach of the most modest pocketbook. Quantities of it were manufactured especially for the American market. This was the transfer-printed Staffordshire pottery, usually in blue, and familiarly known as Old Blue China. The Museum of Art is rich in this ware, for it possesses the Lora E. Aldrich Collection given by her husband, Mr. Edward T. Aldrich, and this large collection of two hundred and fifty pieces is augmented, not duplicated, by groups given in memory of Miss Nelly F. Conant and Mr. L. Earl Rowe. American scenes are well represented, and there are included also many English views, as well as caricature pieces after Rowlandson, Smirke and Wiltke.

Nearly every variety of English pottery is represented in the Brownell Collection of Teapots, from the salt-glaze teapot in the shape of a kneeling camel to the lustrous black Jackfield pot, or the creamware teapot commemorating the marriage of the Prince of Orange, showing busts of the prince and his bride on either side of an orange tree. In proximity to the teapots there has been on view for a number of years Miss Brownell's loan of English lustre ware, comprising both copper and silver lustres. This, together with the Howland collection of copper lustre, makes a lavish display of this interesting pottery.

The Museum does not possess a large collection of American pottery. However, those interested in the native product may see examples of the early redware platters, the brownware of Bennington and the sgraffito and slip-decorated wares of Pennsylvania in the newly arranged ceramics room on the lower floor of the Museum.

The study of China may lure enthusiasts to distant lands and remote byways of travel, and by some good fortune may indulge in such excursions, but for the lover of ceramics who is not at the moment foot-loose, there is much to be seen in our own Museum of Art in Providence.

Miriam A. Banks
EXHIBITIONS OUTSIDE OF RHODE ISLAND

Andover, Mass., Addison Gallery, Phillips Academy
Feb. 1-Feb. 17—Drawings by Grant Wood.
Feb. 1-Feb. 17—Source material for discussion. "Watercolors from five regions of the United States.

Boston, Mass., Museum of Fine Arts
Feb. 19-Apr. 6—Portraits through Forty-Five Centuries. Special exhibition galleries.

Boston, Mass., Guild of Boston Artists
Feb. 3-Feb. 15—Paintings by Louis Kronberg.
Feb. 17-Mar. 1—Sculpture by Bashka Paepf.

Boston, Mass., Institute of Modern Art.
Jan. 21-Mar. 2—Exhibition of the Sculpture of Carl Milles.

Pittsfield, Mass., The Berkshire Museum
Feb. 1-Feb. 28—Cleveland Water Color Exhibition.

Northampton, Mass., Smith College Museum of Art

Springfield, Mass., Springfield Museum of Fine Arts
Jan. 20-Feb. 20— "Modern Plastics and their Use."

Wellesley, Mass., Farnsworth Museum, Wellesley College

Worcester, Mass., Worcester Art Museum
Jan. 15-Feb. 31—Loan Exhibition of Staffordshire Pottery ornamented with American Views.
Jan. 15-Feb. 9—Index of American Design.
Feb. 1-Feb. 16—Prints by Contemporary Mexican Artists.
Feb. 18-Mar. 16—Prints and Drawings (anonymous loan).
Feb. 22-Mar. 16—French Painting of the Third Republic.

New York, N. Y., The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Feb. 1—The Nineteenth Century: Paintings from French Museums. Galleries All, 12, 20, 22.
Feb. 1—Nineteenth Century French Costume Prints, Gallery E 15.

New York, N. Y., Museum of Modern Art
Jan. 22-Apr. 20—Exhibition of Indian Art of the United States.

EXHIBITIONS IN RHODE ISLAND

Providence Art Club, Thomas Street
Jan. 28-Feb. 9—Paintings by Frederick R. Sisson.
Feb. 18-Mar. 2—Watercolor Club Annual Exhibition.

Tilden Thurber Gallery
Feb. 1-Feb. 28—Annual Sale of Paintings, Prints and Watercolors.

Armour Gallery, The Arcade
Feb. 15-Feb. 28—Etchings by Modern Masters.

CALENDAR OF ART EVENTS

Sunday, February 2
* Concert by the Rhode Island W. P. A. Symphony Orchestra. Soloist, Rev. Leo F. Rowlands, O. S. F. C., pianist, Edouard Caffier, conductor. Gilbert Stuart Jr. High School, 8:15 P. M.

Monday, February 3
* Sock and Buskin presents "Shore Acres" by James A. Herne. Annual Alumni Production. Feaune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Tuesday, February 4
* The Parents' Club of St. Dunstan's School present Jussi Bjorling, tenor of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Metropolitan Theatre, 8:30 P. M.
* Sock and Buskin presents "Shore Acres" by James A. Herne. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Wednesday, February 5
* Community Art Project Wednesday Evening Talk, "Art as a Means of Social Expression" by Irving Cannon. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 8:15 P. M.
* Sock and Buskin presents "Shore Acres" by James A. Herne. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Friday, February 7
* The Puppet Theatre of John Ralph Geddis and Francois Martin presents "The Swans." Shepley Theatre, Benefit Street, 8:45 P. M.
* The Providence Junior League, Inc., presents Flora Robson in "Ladies in Retirement." Albee Theatre, 8:30 P. M.
* Sock and Buskin presents "Shore Acres" by James A. Herne. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Saturday, February 8
* The Puppet Theatre of John Ralph Geddis and Francois Martin presents "The Swans." Shepley Theatre, Benefit Street, 2:45 and 8:45 P. M.
* Sock and Buskin presents "Shore Acres" by James A. Herne. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Sunday, February 9
Gallery Talk, "4000 Years of Costuming" by Elizabeth T. Casey, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.
* Concert by the Rhode Island W. P. A. Symphony Orchestra. Donald Steele, pianist, soloist. Edouard Caffier, conductor. Gilbert Stuart Jr. High School, 8:30 P. M.

Monday, February 10
Basement Studio Group: Dramatic Reading of "The Ticket-Of-Leave Man" by Tom Taylor. Tea, 80 Benefit Street, 8:10 P. M.

Friday, February 14
Lecture of John B. Archer on the concert program of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.

Sunday, February 16
Gallery Talk, "Adventures of a Newspaper Photographer," Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 3:30 P. M.
* Concert by the Providence W. P. A. Symphony Orchestra. Madame Eva Tancrille Meullier, soprano, soloist, Edouard Caffier, conductor. Gilbert Stuart Jr. High School, 8:15 P. M.

Tuesday, February 18
* Concert by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Metropolitan Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Saturday, February 22
* Sock and Buskin presents three original one-act plays written by Brown and Pembroke undergraduates. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.

Sunday, February 23
* Sock and Buskin presents three original one-act plays written by Brown and Pembroke undergraduates. Faune Theatre, 8:30 P. M.
* Concert by the Providence W. P. A. Symphony Orchestra. Bedrich Valsa, cellist, soloist. Edouard Caffier, conductor. Gilbert Stuart Jr. High School, 8:15 P. M.

Tuesday, February 25
* The Providence Community Concert Association presents Jascha Hafetz, violinist. Metropolitan Theatre, 8:30 P. M.