HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

This holiday season, more than any other, has given many of us time to slow down and to reflect on what is important to us. While time with family and friends will surely top the list, we are all missing the other things that enrich us—like the DIA.

Although VCESDA’s upcoming programming will be virtual, the DIA has remained open since July 10, 2020, and has two nationally-recognized exhibitions currently running: Detroit Style: Car Design in the Motor City and Russ Marshall: Detroit Photographs, 1958–2008.

Recently, during a virtual event, someone made a comment about the museum “probably being one of the safest places to be right now,” due to the safety practices in place and crowd limits. That is reassuring and should give us comfort when thinking about visiting the museum.

We appreciate your generous dedication to the museum, continued VCESDA membership and friendship. We wish you and your family a safe and enjoyable holiday season, and we look forward to seeing you in the new year.

Alan P. Darr
Charles L. Dunlap
Celeste has been with the DIA for two years. She began as an intern in Strategic Initiatives working to support the DIA Plaza Project (now known as the Cultural Center Planning Initiative), an international design competition to re-imagine Detroit’s cultural district. She joined the European Art Department as the administrative assistant in August of 2019 and has been working with the Visiting Committee for European Sculpture and Decorative Arts and the European Paintings Council ever since. Celeste graduated from the University of Michigan in 2017 with a degree in Social Theory & Practice and a minor in French Language & Literature.

Alongside Mika Kennedy of the Detroit Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens’ League, she is currently working on Exiled to Motown, an exhibition exploring how Japanese Americans created community in Detroit in the wake of the incarceration during WWII. The project, which existed in its first iteration as a traveling exhibit, is set to debut in its expanded form at the Detroit Historical Museum in the summer of 2021. She aspires to build community with the scholars, artists, and activists doing work in Asian American history and culture, women of color, feminism, and abolitionism. In her spare time, she loves discovering and playing contemporary minimalist piano music and cooking with friends.

WHAT CELESTE IS READING

Helen Oyeyemi.
Boy, Snow, Bird.

Jenny Odell.
How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy
During the last quarter of the sixteenth century, delicately modeled wax reliefs captivated erudite collectors such as the Dukes of Bavaria and the Archdukes of Tirol. Originally imported into the German-speaking lands by north Italian artists, the technique demonstrated its practitioners' skill and vibrantly evoked the material world. Refined wax vividly mimics skin, lending a bodily presence to David's triumphant figure and the head of the vanquished Goliath in this relief. The wax also enlivens the details of the Old Testament hero's costume and surroundings. His brass helmet is studded with jewels and adorned with plumes, his red cape billows behind him, and a lace cuff slides toward the shoulder of his upraised sword arm. A shepherd's bag hanging from the tree that leans over the left side of the composition alludes to David's origins, while his staff rests against the trunk. Meanwhile, a squirrel nibbles a piece of fruit in the branches overhead. These details not only added drama and depth to the narrative but delighted the courtly audiences who would have viewed this work in the context of a Kunst- or Wunderkammer.

This relief sculpture—whose dynamism and monumentality are surprising for its small scale—represents the victory of the future King David over the giant Philistine general, Goliath. An inscription in red early modern German text across the architectural panel at the bottom of the work—interprets the scene. It declares in rhyming verse, "Here behold a wondrous thing. A shepherd strikes the Giant/His sling has done what no spear has proven/ The sword now yields to the staff: the bearded head of the braggart now lies on the ground/For it had to be subjected to his own sword." Though this wax figure of David may appear delicate and courtly, this inscription presents the young shepherd as a biblical warrior.

One of two superb wax reliefs that the department has recently acquired, this intimately sized yet mighty image of David and Goliath will debut in the DIA's third-floor galleries in early 2021. There, in the European Decorative Arts Court, it will reside next to a case that evokes the splendor and variety of the early modern Kunst- or Wunderkammer. These cabinets of art and curiosities—comprising both natural wonders and exceptional examples of human creativity and skill—were among the ancestors of the modern museum, and this installation allows us to pay homage to these collections and the astute collectors who assembled them.
On October 22, 2020, VCESDA joined EPC for a Virtual Trivia Night with questions from Judith Dolkart, Alan Darr and Chassica Kirchhoff. A fun and educational time was had by all. For those of you who couldn't join us, we've chosen a few of the questions to share with you. Answers (and fun facts) are listed on the last page of this newsletter.

The DIA has two impressive paintings on canvas of this courageous, sword-wielding Old Testament heroine. In addition to these paintings, the museum is also home to an important bronze figure of the same triumphant woman, created by an Italian Renaissance sculptor who also distinguished himself as an early pioneer of printmaking as well as painting.

1. Who is this woman, and who sculpted the DIA's bronze image of her?

Plate Depicting Hercules and Omphale, 1528-35, maiolica, tin-glazed earthenware, paint, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Brodie, DIA No. 2015.94

Name That Artist!

A central-Italian pioneer of the narrative istoriato style of ceramics decoration, I am often known as the “Raphael of Maiolica Painting.” In 2015, members of the VCESDA generously donated a maiolica plate whose entire surface I filled with a mythical scene of Hercules and Omphale.

2. Who am I?

Plate Depicting Hercules and Omphale, 1528-35, maiolica, tin-glazed earthenware, paint, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Brodie, DIA No. 2015.94

Oh, the Places We’ve Been

The multitalented architect, artist, and designer, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, made this chair in his iconic style for Mrs. Cranston's Argyle Street Tea Rooms around 1897.

3. In what city could patrons sip tea while seated on this innovative form?
Saturday, February 6th, 2021

WINTER PROGRAM

“Styled in Detroit: Cars and their Designers, 1950–2020"
Saturday, February 6th, 2021 at 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
(Microsoft Teams Virtual Event – instructions to follow)

Featuring Ben Colman, Associate Curator of American Art

This lecture will explore the Detroit cars that changed the world in the decades following World War II. The presentation will consider some of the key designers who shaped the practice of car styling and design, and consider their work in conversation with changes in American culture, politics, and technology.

Wednesday, April 7, 2021

VIRTUAL GALLERY TOUR

“Artistic Intersections: Early Modern Encounters between the Islamic World and Europe"
Wednesday, April 7th, 2021 6:00 p.m.
(Microsoft Teams Virtual Event – instructions to follow)

Featuring Dr. Chassica Kirchhoff and Dr. Katherine Kasdorf

This virtual gallery tour will bring together members of the European Paintings Council, VCESDA, and the Friends of Asian Art and Cultures, as Dr. Chassica Kirchhoff and Dr. Katherine Kasdorf spotlight objects that demonstrate the rich artistic exchanges that connected Europe and the Islamic World during the 16th and 17th centuries. This intermedial and intercultural tour will include textiles, paintings, miniatures, prints, and metalworks, and will share exciting works that have recently debuted in the DIA galleries.
Saturday, May 22, 2021

SPRING PROGRAM

Dr. Coleman Mopper Memorial Lecture and VCESDA Spring Program

(Based on evolving circumstances, this may take place either virtually, in the Lecture Hall, or even as a hybrid in-person and online event. Please stay tuned for updates as the DIA’s response to the pandemic develops in early 2021!)

Seminar: 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (FJC A & B)
“The Creative Process: European design drawings 1500–1900 at the Rijksmuseum"

Featuring Dr. Reinier Baarsen, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in collaboration with the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 2013, private benefactors established the Decorative Art Fund at the Rijksmuseum, with the express purpose of assembling a small but significant collection of drawings for objects. These had been largely missing from the Rijksmuseum’s holdings, as neither the Print Room, which concentrates on prints and drawings by major artists from the past, nor the Department of Sculpture and Decorative Arts (now amalgamated into the Art Department), was ever able to make a point of acquiring them. As the initiative matured, an increasing number of patrons have joined it, and the result is already far beyond our initial expectations. A major exhibition of highlights from the collection is being prepared for 2022, and it is constantly being expanded. Reinier Baarsen will explain why such a collection was felt to be desirable for the Rijksmuseum, and he will discuss its nature and purpose. These drawings tell us a great deal about the process of producing works of the decorative arts – from initial sketches, made as a first idea by an artist, to working drawings and even drawings made of existing works of art, for marketing purposes. He will also tell the exciting story of the formation of the collection and illustrate how it is functioning within the Rijksmuseum.

Lecture: 2:00 p.m.–3:30 p.m. (Lecture Hall)
“Paris in Amsterdam: French Luxury Decorative Arts in Holland, 1650–1900"

From the middle of the 17th century until the end of the 19th, Paris was the undisputed leader of fashion and taste in Europe. This extraordinary phenomenon is all the more remarkable, as it was largely the result of an avowed, deliberate policy – normally, attempts to direct the arts for state purposes are doomed to fail. No country could escape the hegemony of Paris – not even the Dutch Republic, whose ruler, Prince William III of Orange, was the arch-enemy of King Louis XIV of France. Parisian decorative arts form a central part of the collections at the Rijksmuseum, and in 2013, upon the re-opening of the main museum building after a great rebuilding campaign, a major catalogue was published: Paris 1650–1900: Decorative Arts at the Rijksmuseum. Reinier Baarsen, who wrote the catalogue, will show highlights from the wonderful collections at the museum, ranging from richly mounted furniture, splendid gold boxes, Sèvres porcelain, and treasures of silver and gold. He will discuss the history of the collection and explain how this has determined its character. Although some pieces come from the collections of the Dutch stadholders and kings, the principal part was assembled by Fritz Mannheimer, a German banker who lived in Amsterdam between World Wars I and II. His collecting activities can be compared to those of the greatest American collectors at the time, and there are many parallels with collections in American museums – not least in Detroit.
or anyone who missed Dr. Chassica Kirchhoff’s engaging and informative presentation on Armor at the DIA during the VCESDA Annual Meeting—or those who are interested in learning more about this complex facet of the collection—the museum’s YouTube features a short talk about two 16th-century armors from the glittering Saxon Court. Click here to watch.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1985 as part of DIA’s 100th anniversary, Alan Darr contacted and proposed to the US Postmaster General in Washington D.C., that our DIA’s Luca della Robbia Genoa Madonna, (acc. no. 29.355) be featured as America’s 1985 Christmas Stamp. It was approved, making it the first and only time a DIA artwork to ever be accepted as the USA Christmas stamp! The Postmaster General visited the DIA to announce and present the First Day of Issue stamp on October 30, 1985. All day long, lines of philatelist collectors and the public stretched outside the DIA building to obtain a canceled stamp. It was an exciting and rare event for the DIA or any museum to experience! The DIA’s elegant, beautiful Madonna is called the Genoa Madonna because one other (the one now in Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum) of the four know versions of this composition stood for many years in a courtyard in Genoa. However, the DIA’s relief is the finest and best preserved of the four surviving casts. This season, please come visit and enjoy it and other Italian Renaissance masterpieces in our Tuscan Renaissance Gallery just off the Great Hall in the Cret Building!

TRIVIA NIGHT ANSWERS

1. Judith by Pollaiuolo
FUN FACT: The DIA has two paintings of this courageous, sword-wielding Old Testament heroine. The museum is also home to an important bronze of the same triumphant woman, created by a Florentine Renaissance sculptor who is also distinguished as an early pioneer of printmaking and painting. The DIA’s sculpture by Pollaiuolo features in the catalog for the ongoing Louvre exhibition, Body and Soul: Italian Renaissance Sculpture from Donatello to Michelangelo.

2. Nicola di Gabriele Sbraghe, also known as Nicola da Urbino
FUN FACT: 2020 marks the 500th anniversary of Raphael’s death. Though many of the exhibitions celebrating the artist’s life and work have been interrupted this year, many symposia and lectures have moved online. Some particularly great YouTube conversations on Raphael are available through the National Gallery of Art and the Rafaello 500 lecture series hosted by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, such as this talk on Raphael’s influence on Veronese, whose work is also well-represented in the DIA.

3. Glasgow, Scotland
FUN FACT: Visitors to the artist’s native Glasgow can still experience his immersive style of design—inflected by Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as Symbolism—at the Glasgow School of Art and the Willow Tea Rooms.