

The New British Galleries

The image features a rich, detailed tapestry as the background. The central focus is a still life scene. On the left, a colorful parrot with red, blue, and white feathers stands on a branch. To its right, a large, overflowing basket of flowers, including yellow and white blooms, sits on a wooden surface. Above this, a small, ornate vase with a floral design is placed on a white mantelpiece. The background is a vibrant red wallpaper with a repeating floral pattern. The overall style is characteristic of 18th-century British decorative arts.

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The New British Galleries

Wolf Burchard, Max Bryant, and Elizabeth St. George



THE MET THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK



Director's Note

In the weeks since the opening of the new British Galleries, the world as we know it has been turned upside down. On March 13, The Met made the difficult but necessary decision to close to the public as part of the global effort to stem the spread of COVID-19. In many ways, these unprecedented times underscore one of the main themes of this *Bulletin*: that for much of modern history, art, like the world community, has developed and evolved not in isolation but as part of an interconnected and interdependent society. These galleries help bring to life a small part of that world, in particular the artists, tradespeople, and merchants from Europe and beyond who contributed to the hybrid development of what we now think of as British decorative arts. The stories told by these remarkable works — accounts of outstanding artistry and craftsmanship but also resiliency, determination, failure, and hope — are all the more poignant given the tumultuous circumstances we all now face together as part of our shared humanity.

The reopening of the new British Galleries helped launch The Met's celebrations of its 150th anniversary. Following years of renovation and rethinking, these majestic spaces, which cover more than four hundred years of British decorative arts, sit at the very heart of the Museum — between the Medieval Hall and the American Wing — and house an astounding array of objects and historical rooms designed to delight and surprise. Constituting some eleven thousand square feet of space, the British Galleries accommodate more than seven hundred works of art, including a substantial number of exceptional new acquisitions, particularly from the nineteenth century, that fill previous gaps in our holdings. Together they represent an extraordinary range of styles and materials and reveal the full panoply of Britain's artistic and economic aspirations. We see imposing masterpieces commissioned and collected by powerful rulers such as Elizabeth I and George III alongside smaller luxury goods imported from abroad — such as small boxes, scent bottles, and miniature vanity cases — that fed a growing appetite for toys and trinkets and demonstrate the fanciful tastes of Britain's rising middle classes.

The new British Galleries were developed by The Met in collaboration with the New York-based design firm Roman and Williams, who helped set the stage for a fresh curatorial narrative devised to encourage close looking and big thinking. As


the new installation examines the intersection of creativity and entrepreneurialism, it also illuminates the intense commercial drive that arose among British artists, manufacturers, and retailers over the course of four hundred years. This narrative was shaped by two former Met curators — Ellenor Alcorn, Chair of European Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Luke Syson, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. We are indebted to them and to their successors — Sarah Lawrence, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Curator in Charge, and Wolf Burchard, Associate Curator, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts — who oversaw the completion of this project. We are equally grateful to the authors of this *Bulletin* — including Max Bryant, Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, and Elizabeth St. George, now Assistant Curator at the Brooklyn Museum of Art — for their enlightening overviews of the new galleries, the history of British decorative arts at The Met, and the competition that brought about final design.

To bring an undertaking of this scale to fruition required an incredible effort across every department at The Met, and I congratulate all involved. Indeed, the many years it took to envision, build, install, and present these new galleries represents a truly enormous team effort. Contributors at all levels made this renovation possible, including leadership commitments from Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Chilton, Jr., Howard and Nancy Marks, the Estate of Marion K. Morgan, the Annie Laurie Aitken Charitable Trust, Irene Roosevelt Aitken, Mercedes T. Bass, Candace K. and Frederick W. Beinecke and the Krugman Family, Drue Heinz, Alexia and David Leuschen, Annette de la Renta, Kimba Wood and Frank Richardson, Denise and Andrew Saul, and Dr. Susan Weber. Major gifts were provided by Pamela and David B. Ford, Lady Gibbons, Carol B. Grossman, Sarah and David Kowitz, and Beatrice Stern, with additional support from the Lillian Goldsmith Charitable Trust, Earle M. Hardy Foundation, Clare McKeon, the Prince Foundation, Carolyn and Malcolm Wiener, Anna and Kenneth Zankel. We also acknowledge the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*, for its support of The Met's quarterly *Bulletin* program.

MAX HOLLEIN

Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art





Nation of Shopkeepers: A *Very* Brief History of British Decorative Arts

WOLF BURCHARD

The opening of The Met’s new British Galleries marks the beginning of the Museum’s 150th anniversary celebrations. What visitors will feast their eyes on is the result of five intense years during which the galleries were completely rebuilt, a new curatorial narrative developed, favorite works of art given new attention through conservation, and many star pieces added to The Met’s already outstanding holdings, which constitute the most comprehensive collection of British decorative arts in the United States.¹

Some may argue that there is something artificial about galleries dedicated solely to British art. Just as Britain is in the process of reassessing its relationship with the rest of Europe and other parts of the world, we are reminded that the history of British art and design is far from an isolated one. For centuries, London’s thriving economy encouraged trade in foreign luxury goods and attracted countless artists and artisans from abroad, many of whom are represented in the newly installed galleries, from renowned masters such as Pietro Torrigiano, Francis Cleyn, and Paul de Lamerie to numerous others whose names history does not relate.

The Metropolitan Museum has had small gallery spaces dedicated to British decorative arts since 1910, which saw considerable expansion in 1925 and 1954 (for a history of how British decorative arts were collected and displayed at The Met, see Max Bryant’s essay in this *Bulletin*). The new installation combines the footprint of the Josephine Mercy Heathcote Gallery, established in 1987, and the Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries, opened in 1995 under the curatorial leadership of the late William Rieder (1940–2011).² Rieder’s polite, elegant rooms lined with wooden paneling and green cotton damask were the pride and joy of many Anglophile New Yorkers, but less frequented by the general public in recent years. Dubbed “Noah’s Ark” by Met curator emeritus Clare Vincent because of the symmetrically arranged furniture — always in pairs — the galleries recorded New York’s taste for British decorative arts at a time when so-called brown furniture was immensely fashionable and fetched very high prices at auction. They were a repository for the generous contributions made by the likes of John L. Cadwalader, Mrs. Russell Sage, and, crucially, Judge Irwin Untermyer, who

bequeathed his exceptional collection to The Met in 1964.³

Entirely reconfigured, the British Galleries now offer a more immersive, chronological experience. Entering from The Met’s Medieval Hall, visitors proceed logically through time and space, beginning with the Tudors and ending with the Victorian era before exiting into the American Wing. To create a stimulating new stage for our works of art to perform to the best of their abilities, The Met teamed up with the design firm of Roman and Williams, whose remarkable spaces encourage a personal engagement with the collection (for an overview of the gallery design commission, see Elizabeth St. George’s essay in this *Bulletin*).

Creativity and entrepreneurship are the core themes of the new galleries, as selected and developed by two former Met curators: Ellenor Alcorn, now Chair of European Decorative Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Luke Syson, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Their joint aim was to demonstrate how The Met’s wide-ranging collection of British decorative arts and design from 1500 to 1900 captures the country’s bold, entrepreneurial spirit and multifaceted social and political history. The once derogatory phrase “a nation of shopkeepers” (apocryphally attributed to Napoleon) — intended to characterize Britain’s supposed lack of ambition other than in mercantile matters — has come instead to describe its commercial and creative triumphs. The new galleries focus on those shopkeepers: the people who made, marketed, and sold ceramics, textiles, metalwork, and furniture, and whose individual stories range from enormous success to dramatic failure.

Foreign expertise, influences, and materials have shaped British art as we know it. Almost every object on display underscores the permeability of Britain’s borders and those of its former empire, in particular the coming and going of artists and craftsmen motivated either by economic incentives or

by religious and political persecution. The empire’s story is one of the movement of people and of goods, and, in the case of the slave trade, of people as goods. Indeed, the new galleries do not shy away from addressing the direct correlation between the cruelty of the empire and the economic benefits derived from it, which allowed for the production of so many of the objects on display. Featuring multiple narratives that sit side by side, the new British Galleries represent diverse stories of migration and illustrate how different accounts of the same events can often produce dramatically different perspectives. Finally, through the occasional unconventional or unexpected juxtaposition of objects, we hope to convey something of the importance of humor for British culture. Far too often do we forget that the decorative arts, in addition to being practical or beautiful, can also be fun, quirky, and a little eccentric.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: RELIGIOUS UPHEAVAL AND THE BEGINNINGS OF EMPIRE

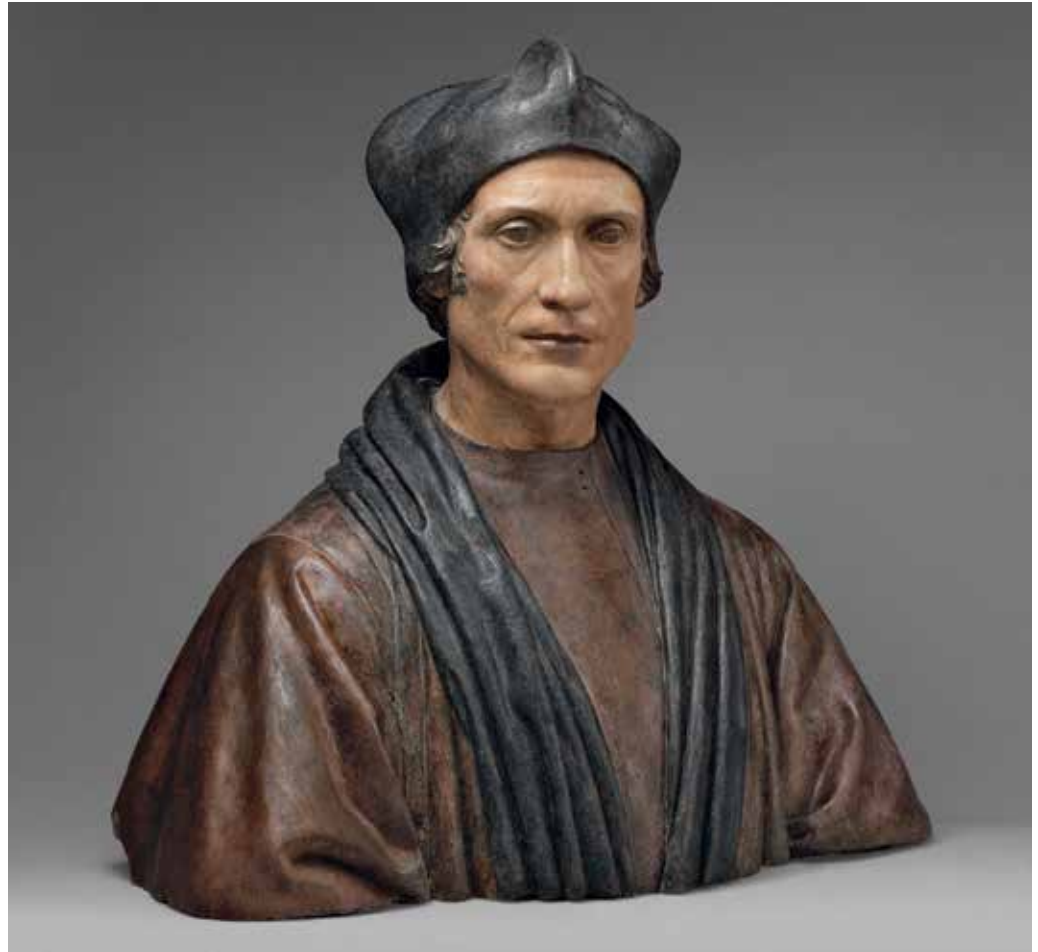
Our story of creativity and making begins with an episode about destruction. The reign of Henry VIII conjures up images of extravagant feasts and thrilling tournaments staged by an early Tudor court lavishing extraordinary funds on the visual arts. Yet, Henry’s clash with the Vatican after the pope refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon eventually resulted in the English Reformation and subsequently, under the king’s son, Edward VI, in a period of ruthless iconoclasm.

In 1535, John Fisher, bishop of Rochester — a former champion of Henry’s, whose quietly dignified terracotta likeness is the first work of art to greet visitors to the new British Galleries — was decapitated on the king’s orders (fig. 2). Not only had the clergyman preached against Henry’s divorce, he had secretly plotted with Catherine’s nephew, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, encouraging him to invade England and overthrow the Tudor monarch.

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1 | *Dining room from Lansdowne House*. Designed by Robert Adam (British, 1728–1792). Plaster ceiling by Joseph Rose (British, 1745–1799). Woodwork by John Gilbert Marble. Mantelpiece supplied by John Devall & Co. (British, 1766–69). Wood, plaster, and stone, 566 x 294 x 215 in. (1437.6 x 746.8 x 546.1 cm). Rogers Fund, 1931 (32.12)

2 | *Bishop John Fisher (1469–1535)*. Pietro Torrigiano (Italian, 1472–1528). English, 1510–15. Polychrome terracotta, H. 24 ¼ in. (61.6 cm). Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1936 (36.69)



Pietro Torrigiano, the Florentine virtuoso who translated Fisher's spiritual demeanor into clay, was one of the first exponents of the Italian Renaissance in England. Henry VII and Henry VIII both sought talent in mainland Europe by using London's network of Italian bankers to attract artists and artisans from abroad, giving rise to a huge mercantile influx that strengthened London's economy. Torrigiano was first summoned to England in 1510 to create the monumental effigies of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York for Westminster Abbey.⁴ In 1519, the sculptor traveled to Florence, where he was on the lookout for capable artists willing to join him in England. Benvenuto Cellini famously turned down Torrigiano's offer on the grounds that the latter was said to have broken Michelangelo's nose.

There is a rather ghostly quality to the bust of Bishop Fisher, a man who lost his head

because he stood by his theological convictions. It once formed part of a trio installed on the Holbein Gate at Whitehall Palace, including one of an unidentified sitter — also in The Met collection (44.92) and sometimes thought to be of Henry VIII — as well as a portrait of Henry VII now welcoming visitors to the British Galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.⁵ This portrait group stands at the very outset of Britain's complex relationship, politically and artistically, with Renaissance Europe. The particular combination of artist and sitter in The Met's terracotta embodies the tension between a Tudor court seeking artistic talent from papal Italy to help visually underpin the grandeur of its rule and the legacy of a king whose zeal to part with the Church of Rome led one of his most loyal advocates to turn against him. The recognition that Renaissance Italy continued to influence Britain in spite of the



3 | *Hunters in a Landscape*. With elements after a design by Jost Amman (Swiss, before 1539–died 1591). British (probably Southwark), ca. 1575–95. Wool and silk, 70 ⁷/₈ x 181 ⁷/₈ in. (180 x 462 cm). Purchase, Walter and Leonore Annenberg Acquisitions Endowment Fund, Rosetta Larsen Trust Gift, and Friends of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Gifts, 2009 (2009.280)

4–5 | *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife and Lot Seduced by His Daughters*. Probably English, ca. 1567. Silver, partly gilded, Diam. of each 7 ³/₄ in. (19.7 cm). Gift of C. Ruxton Love Jr., 1965 (65.260.10, 65.260.3)

nation's break with Catholic Europe is essential to our understanding of sixteenth-century British art.

Throughout his reign, Henry VIII promoted the immigration of foreign artisans, no matter their religious beliefs, to boost the production of luxury goods. Restrictions associated with the medieval guild system, however, were a pressing concern for foreigners working in London, as the arrival of Continental talent ruffled feathers among the established corporations. A decade ago, The Met acquired a particularly well-preserved wainscot tapestry depicting gentlemen engaged in outdoor activities such as riding, fishing, and shooting (fig. 3). The tapestry, which was woven by émigré workers from Flanders who were based in Southwark—outside the jurisdiction of the London corporations but close enough

to supply the Tudor court and its courtiers—exemplifies the legal constraints imposed on foreigners.⁶ A new mezzanine added to the British Galleries allows visitors to engage with such outstanding weavings at eye level, heightening their almost cinematographic effect and entertaining subplots.

The short reign of Henry VIII's son, the young Protestant Edward VI, brought about the systematic destruction of religious imagery and devotional objects throughout Britain; conversely, that of his successor, Mary I, a devout Catholic, saw the gruesome persecution of Protestant craftspeople. A set of twelve silver plates, thought to have been made by a Flemish artisan for Edward and Mary's sister, Elizabeth I, shows scenes from the Old Testament, including the disturbing seduction of Lot by his daughters as well as the



attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (figs. 4, 5).⁷ How, one may ask, could such religious images have been disseminated at a time when devotional objects were being systematically destroyed? Following the violent turmoil of Edward's and Mary's reigns, the Protestant Queen Elizabeth took a more pragmatic approach to matters of faith, seeking to calm a country damaged by religious unrest. Furthermore, scenes from the Bible, along with those from Greek and Roman mythology, remained popular in the visual canon, particularly the iconography of the Old Testament, which presented relatively little theological contention. It was the New Testament and its varying interpretations that had led to confrontations of the most brutal order.

Queen Elizabeth's subjects lived through a period of booming trade with Europe, as London was transformed into one of the Continent's major marketplaces and continued to attract artisans from the mainland. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English all established international sea routes at this time. As part of that trading system, enslaved peoples from West Africa were shipped to the





6 | *Table clock.* Movement by Bartholomew Newsam (English, active 1565–87). English (London), 1580–85. Case: engraved, chased, and gilded brass; dial: silver; movement: brass and steel; Diam. of dial, 1¾ in. (4.4 cm); Diam. of back plate, 3½ in. (8.9 cm). Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.1514a)

Caribbean, where they were sold in return for sugar, ginger, animal skins, and pearls. In 1600, just before the end of her reign, Elizabeth I bestowed a royal charter upon the East India Company, which by the early nineteenth century would rise to administer half of the world’s trading activities.⁸

Two watches and a table clock displayed at the threshold of the new British Galleries take us back to Queen Elizabeth’s long reign and capture the intellectual and technical sophistication of late sixteenth-century London (fig. 6). Made by Bartholomew Newsam, the earliest known native English maker of small domestic clocks, and Flemish émigré Nicholas Vallin, the timepieces have intricate exteriors that complement their equally complex internal mechanics, which require diligent maintenance. Was this degree of care lavished on timekeeping an indication that life was considered in a new way in Protestant England? Indeed, industriousness took on a moral imperative at the time, as the Catholic

belief that entry into heaven was gained through confession gave way to an ethos of a limited but productive existence on earth. Now, every hour counted.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

During the seventeenth century, both Britain and the Continent witnessed an unprecedented contrast between extraordinary creativity and brutal devastation. An age of enormous Baroque palaces and churches, exquisite wunderkammer objects, and groundbreaking scientific advancement, it was also an era of continuous conflict between Catholics and Protestants — the Thirty Years’ War, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the ensuing prosecution of the Huguenots — all of which came at the cost of millions of lives.

The English Civil War saw the ill-fated Charles I (fig. 7) removed from the throne and beheaded. His son, Charles II, restored the monarchy in 1660, but his early reign was marred by two traumatic events: the plague of 1665, and the Great Fire of London in 1666, which almost completely obliterated the capital. “It made me weep to see it,” wrote the diarist Samuel Pepys of the fire’s destruction. “The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once; and a horrid noise the flames made.”⁹ Yet London quickly reemerged, phoenixlike, from the ashes of the conflagration. Sir Christopher Wren, architect of St. Paul’s Cathedral and mastermind behind the city’s rebuilding, emphasized the political importance of architecture: “It establishes a nation, draws people and commerce; [it] makes the people love their native country.”¹⁰ By the late 1670s, international commerce was indeed on the rise again, with European settlements established in many parts of the world. Britain’s thriving economy continued to attract foreign craftsmen, while the ports of London, Bristol, and Liverpool received more goods from abroad than ever.



7 | *Charles I, King of England and Scotland (1600–1649)*. Daniël Mijtens (Dutch, ca. 1590–1647/48). English, 1629. Oil on canvas, 78 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 55 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (200.3 x 140.7 cm). Gift of George A. Hearn, 1906 (06.1289)

8 | *Ewer*. Probably by Peter Bettesworth (English, active ca. mid-17th century). English (London), 1635. Silver, H. 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (28.9 cm). Purchase, Friends of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts Gifts and Larry and Ann Burns Gift, in honor of Austin B. Chinn, 2015 (2015.502)

9 | *Tankard engraved with scenes of the Great Plague and Great Fire of London*. English (London), 1675/76. Silver, H. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (19.1 cm). Gift of Mrs. Henry S. Morgan, 1986 (1987.54)

Charles I, one of the most important patrons of the arts ever to have sat on the English throne, was an especially keen supporter of the new classical language in architecture, introduced to Britain by Inigo Jones.¹¹ A prolific patron of the Mortlake Tapestry Works, he famously acquired Raphael's cartoons for the *Acts of the Apostles*, first woven in Brussels for the Sistine Chapel.¹² Charles's unrivaled art collections were sold and dispersed during the Civil War, an uncertain period during which silver was particularly susceptible to being melted down, making pre-Restoration pieces exceedingly rare. This political reality could be reflected in the relative sobriety of an elegant pre-revolutionary ewer excavated in July 2013 by a treasure-hunting amateur using a metal detector in a field adjacent to Kingston



Russell, in Dorset (fig. 8). The polished yet plain silver could have been turned into ready cash, making a silversmith's embellishments undesired, since they would be lost forever and thus the expense wasted. A rather later pair of richly engraved tankards, in turn, shows more confidence in England's political stability, even if the scenes commemorate the tragedies of the plague and the Great Fire of London (fig. 9).

Charles II shared his father's passion for art and architecture. Inspired by the glittering courts of France and the Netherlands, where he found refuge during the Interregnum, the new sovereign sought to embellish his residences to reinforce the power of the restored monarchy. It appears unlikely that the king would have thought much of the slipware dishes produced by Thomas Toft, a Staffordshire potter





10 | *Staircase from Cassiobury Park, Hertfordshire*. Attributed to Edward Pearce (English, ca. 1630–1695). English, ca. 1677–80. Oak, elm, and pine, H. 15 ft. 6 in. (472.4 cm). Rogers Fund, 1932 (32.152)

11 | *State bed from Hampton Court Castle, Hertfordshire*. English, ca. 1698. Wood covered in silk damask, H. 12 ft. (365.8 cm). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William Randolph Hearst Jr., 1968 (68.217.1a–t)

possibly of Scandinavian origin, who repeatedly depicted the popular scene of Charles II hiding in an oak tree after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651 (see p. 1). The Met's example shows the king's head tucked away between oak leaves, the tree trunk flanked by the royal supporters, the lion and unicorn, and the king's cipher, CR, for "Carolus Rex." Abstract and witty, this rendition suggests that the episode quickly became a recognizable anecdote of public memory.

The awe-inspiring staircase from Cassiobury Park, acquired by The Met in 1932, remains the pièce de résistance in the seventeenth-century galleries (fig. 10). Following a painstaking conservation process that required its complete disassembly,

the staircase was rebuilt in a new location according to its original 1670 configuration. Visitors can now ascend the stairs, previously sealed off, in order to access the mezzanine and immerse themselves in this breathtaking masterpiece of English woodcarving. The highly animated acanthus scrolls— ascribed to Edward Pearce, who, like Grinling Gibbons, collaborated with the architects Sir Christopher Wren and Hugh May— combine Baroque grandeur with humorous details. Close inspection reveals, for example, that the tiny birds resting on the vegetation were each given two heads so that they peek out from both sides of the balustrade.¹³

The influx of Huguenot refugees from France after the Revocation of the Edict of

12 | *Figure of a European merchant*. Amoy Chinqua (Chinese, active ca. 18th century). Chinese (Canton), 1719. Polychrome unfired clay and wood, H. 13 in. (32.9 cm). Purchase, Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest and several members of The Chairman's Council Gifts, 2014 (2014.569)

13 | *Hanging depicting a European conflict in South India*. Indian (Coromandel Coast, for the British market), before 1763. Cotton, plain weave, 116 3/4 x 103 in. (296.5 x 261.6 cm). Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Louis V. Bell Fund; Larry and Ann Burns and Brett and Sara Burns Gifts, in honor of Austin B. Chinn; and Austin B. Chinn and Joseph Conforti and Douglas Jakubowski Gifts, 2014 (2014.88)

Nantes in 1685, which decreed Protestantism illegal, particularly benefited the production of sophisticated silver and upholstery in London. In 1688, just as England was beginning to challenge Dutch supremacy in the seafaring trade, the Glorious Revolution replaced the Catholic James II with his Protestant daughter and her first cousin-husband, the stadtholder of the Netherlands. Although it lasted only just over a decade, the joint reign of William III and Mary II had an undeniable impact on the visual arts, as French, Dutch, and Italian fashions were translated into a new idiom best described today as late English Baroque. Their arrival on the throne required the refurnishing of their residences, administered by the royal household department known as the Great Wardrobe, then the most significant consumer of expensive furnishing textiles in Britain.¹⁴

The Met's magnificent blue four-post bed, towering more than twelve feet high and discovered in 1911 by Avray Tipping, longtime editor of *Country Life* magazine, is comparable to those that would have been supplied to the king and queen and was, in fact, made for one of their courtiers, Thomas, 1st Earl of Coningsby (fig. 11). It was presented to the Museum by William Randolph Hearst Jr. in 1968 together with a crimson state bed with a flying tester (or canopy) commissioned by Coningsby for a potential visit from his sovereign. Both beds, in all likelihood, come from a workshop of the likes of Francis Lapiere or Jean Poictevin, the two most celebrated French émigré upholsterers of the day, while their overall design owes much to the engravings of French Protestant architect Daniel Marot.¹⁵ Beds of this scale were the paramount piece of furniture in a courtier's house. Geoffrey Beard's seminal study on early modern British upholstery emphasizes the significance of foreign craftsmen, especially those from the Low Countries and France, whose "principal achievements" were state beds and matching seat furniture "of surpassing brilliance and quality."¹⁶

TEA, TRADE, AND EMPIRE

Textiles came to the British Isles from all corners of the world. Facing the blue state bed across the galleries rises an imposing cotton hanging probably made on India's Coromandel Coast and likely commissioned by a member of the East India Company about 1760 (fig. 13). An extremely rare figurative chintz, it depicts a European conflict during the Seven Years' War (also known as the French and Indian War) — possibly the siege and capture of French Pondicherry by British forces — from a South Indian perspective, although the arrangement of the troops is clearly reminiscent of contemporary Western engravings.¹⁷ Acquired by The Met in 2014, the hanging provides a spectacular backdrop for a thematic gallery called "Tea, Trade, and Empire," which sits at the junction between the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century galleries.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

14 | *Teapot in the form of a camel.* British (Staffordshire), ca. 1745. Salt-glazed stoneware, L. 7 ¾ in. (19.7 cm). The Helen and Carleton Macy Collection, Gift of Carleton Macy, 1934 (34.165.183a, b)



15 | *Teapot in the form of a house.* British (Staffordshire), ca. 1755. Salt-glazed stoneware with enamel decoration, H. 5 in. (12.7 cm). The Helen and Carleton Macy Collection, Gift of Carleton Macy, 1934 (34.165.123a, b)



16 | *Teapot (part of a service).* Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory (ca. 1744–84). British (Chelsea), ca. 1758–69. Soft-paste porcelain with enamel decoration and gilding, H. 5 ½ in. (14 cm). Gift of Mrs. Francis P. Garvan, in memory of Francis P. Garvan, 1954 (54.163.7a, b)



17 | *Teapot with fossil decoration.* British (Staffordshire), ca. 1760–65. Salt-glazed stoneware with enamel decoration, H. 4 ¼ in. (10.8 cm). The Helen and Carleton Macy Collection, Gift of Carleton Macy, in memory of his wife, Helen Lefferts Macy, 1937 (37.22.6a, b)

The cases along the walls of this gallery display elaborate works that are made of exotic turtle shell and ivory and reflect the expansion of the British Empire. A clay statuette by the Cantonese artist Amoy Chinqua of an unidentified merchant (although probably portrayed from life) conveys the pride and ambition of European merchants in South East Asia (fig. 12). Tea, sugar, coffee, and cocoa were all commodities that drove both mercantile endeavors abroad and artistic innovation at home. More than 120 teapots, housed in two twelve-foot-high semicircular cases at the center of the gallery, demonstrate the astonishing breadth of the mid-eighteenth-century pottery market. The rise of the East India Company led to a British monopoly on tea distribution, and, while tea remained a heavily taxed luxury, even in the most modest households the teapot enjoyed a unique status as a focus of domestic entertainment and social interaction. Numerous potters and retailers sought to capitalize on the growing consumption of tea, producing

pots that pushed the boundaries of design and imagination (figs. 14–17).

Britain's success as a nation during this period of rapid growth was corrupted, to varying degrees, by violence and oppression, as much of the nation's wealth was built on the labor of enslaved Africans and on the appropriated resources of other countries. A dazzling sugar box by Paul de Lamerie, which illustrates the harvesting of sugarcane, evokes the chilling contrast between the whimsical humor of eighteenth-century British decorative arts and the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade (fig. 18). De Lamerie, yet another French Huguenot who followed William III to Britain — and by far one of the most accomplished of the London silversmiths — got into repeated trouble for bypassing the city's regulations and “for making and selling Great quantities of Large Plate which he doth not bring to Goldsmiths' Hall to be mark't according to Law.”¹⁸ Yet this box, which probably formed part of a set that also included containers for green and black



18 | *Sugar box*. Paul de Lamerie (British, 1688–1751). British (London), 1744/45. Silver, H. 5 5/8 in. (14.3 cm). Bequest of Alfred Duane Pell, 1924 (25.15.55)



19 | *Antislavery medallion*. Modeled by William Hackwood (British, ca. 1753–1836). Manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood (British, 1730–1795). British (Etruria, Staffordshire), ca. 1787. Jasperware, H. 1 1/4 in. (3 cm). Gift of Frederick Rathbone, 1908 (08.242)

tea, is, in fact, marked with a date (1744–45). It thus predates by almost fifty years the abolitionist movement of the 1790s, during which William Fox circulated pamphlets aimed at mobilizing the British public to boycott any kind of sugar consumption. The antislavery medallion by Henry Webber, William Hackwood, and Josiah Wedgwood dates to about the same time (fig. 19). It represents a kneeling man in chains surrounded by the words “Am I not a man and a brother,” a petition against the inhumane treatment of peoples shipped from Africa to the West Indies against their will. “The slaves lie in two rows, one above the other, on each side of the ship, close to each other, like books upon a shelf,” wrote John Newton, a slave-ship master turned clergyman, describing the appalling conditions of the vessel he captained.¹⁹ Newton later became a staunch abolitionist and reflected with profound regret on his earlier life in the hymn “Amazing Grace,” which he composed, writing “I once was lost, but now am found.”²⁰

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND THE SEDUCTION OF RETAIL

“How I love the English boldness, how I love men who say what they think!”²¹ In 1726, the philosopher Voltaire, who had suffered persecution in his native France owing to his outspoken advocacy for individual rights, was exiled to Britain, which he declared a “land of liberty.” Marveling at the political and philosophical freedoms enjoyed by the British, Voltaire was equally amazed by the small nation’s extraordinary economic success: “Posterity will very possibly be surprized to hear that an island, whose only produce is a little lead, tin, fuller’s earth, and coarse wool, should become so powerful.”²²

The year 1707 had seen the union of England, Wales, and Scotland to create the Kingdom of Great Britain, followed in 1800 by the creation of the United Kingdom, which would include Ireland, although all those territories had effectively been under the same rule since 1603. Georgian Britain, named after the

four Hanoverian monarchs who ruled it, grew extremely prosperous as business expanded, and London, whose population rose to half a million, became one of Europe's foremost marketplaces for textiles and other commodities. Newspapers exploded in number and in circulation from about one to fourteen million annually. Coffeehouses, dubbed "penny universities," stirred debate by providing access to these publications and thus to informed discussion. At the same time, freedom of the press prompted a surge in visual satires, spearheaded by the likes of William Hogarth, Thomas Rowlandson, and James Gillray.

The Georgians were obsessed with classical architecture. In 1715, Colen Campbell published the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, which he dedicated to the newly arrived George I: a shy, reluctant king of German origins whose true interests lay in music and the theater. Both he and his son, George II, proved restrained architectural patrons, while George III, a keen amateur architect, received personal tutelage from William Chambers. Indeed, George III and Queen Charlotte, whose beautifully intimate portrait by Thomas Gainsborough (49.7.55) is paired with her husband's exquisite medal cabinet (64.79) for the first time in the new galleries, were avid patrons of the arts. Unfortunately for them, financial constraints meant that they could never collect or commission on the scale of their Continental counterparts, especially Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette.

Rather than the royal family, it was the British aristocracy who built large houses and collections that could compete with those of European princes. The Met's three historical interiors—the dining rooms from Kirtlington Park (1742–48) and Lansdowne House (1766–69) and the Croome Court tapestry room (1763–71)—bear witness not only to the Georgians' profound understanding of classical design and proportion but also to craftsmanship of the highest caliber.²³ The Lansdowne dining room (fig. 1) reveals the significance of the Grand Tour and the Roman

Republic as models for British patronage and parliamentarianism. Remains of The Met's once extensive holdings of male Roman plaster casts populate the niches of the room and are now joined by two arresting masterpieces by Antonio Canova, the *Venus Italica* (2003.21.1) and the *Reclining Naiad* (1970.1). Both are similar to works originally owned by the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne, whose father, the 1st Marquess, was an advocate of free trade, free speech, and autonomous American colonies and who had turned his London house into a center of a liberal-minded high society.

Kirtlington Park (fig. 20) was likewise the home of an active politician. Sir James Dashwood, who supported the Jacobite cause—that is, the restoration of the Stuart monarchy—built Kirtlington upon his return from the Grand Tour in the early 1740s. Designed by John Sanderson, an architect about whom relatively little is known, the double-cube room beautifully combines Neo-Palladian proportions with bountiful late Baroque plaster decoration. Executed by Thomas Roberts, a stucco specialist who employed a technique introduced by Italian *stuccadori*, the plaster decor of fruits and flowers, female masks, and two imposing Roman eagles imbue the space with an opulence of the kind Dashwood would have encountered in Italy.

Finally, the Croome Court tapestry room is the product of a close collaboration between an architect, Robert Adam, and his patron, the 6th Earl of Coventry (fig. 36). This remarkable space represents a clear-cut example of the strong French influence on eighteenth-century British interiors, even if the antiquarian Horace Walpole maintained that France's Anglophilia far outdid Britain's Francophilia: "Our passion for everything French is nothing to theirs for everything English."²⁴ The Seven Years' War, which had brought European travel almost to a complete halt, had ended with the 1763 Treaty of Paris, meaning the British and French were once



20 | *Dining room from Kirtlington Park*. Designed by John Sanderson (active from ca. 1730, died 1774). Mantelpiece attributed to Sir Henry Cheere (British, 1703–1781) or John Cheere (British, 1709–1787). Plasterwork attributed to Thomas Roberts (British, 1711–1771). British (Oxfordshire), 1748. Wood, plaster, and marble, overall 36 ft. × 23 ft. 11 in. × 20 ft. 3 in. (1097.3 × 729 × 617.2 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1931 (32.53.1)

again free to shop in each other’s capitals. Coventry, among the first to do so, rushed to the Paris-based Gobelins manufactory, where the mesmerizing Croome Court tapestries were woven to Adam’s exact measurements. The trompe l’oeil weavings convey an illusion of crimson damask hung with paintings by François Boucher in gutsy Rococo frames, surrounded by trophies of flowers colonized by a rich array of exotic birds. The Gobelins further supplied upholstery covers, but not the actual chairs and sofas, as it was much more sensible to have seat furniture made in

Britain rather than shipped from France. The firm of William Ince and John Mayhew made the Croome Court suite, while the Boucher tapestry rooms at Newby Hall and Osterley Park were supplied with furniture by Thomas Chippendale and John Linnell, respectively.²⁵

The importance of the country house for Britain’s history of the visual arts cannot be overstated. Such was the verdict of Sir David Cannadine in his discussion of the noted 1985 exhibition *Treasure Houses of Britain* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.: “The message was as simple as the display



21 | *Table*. Attributed to Matthias Lock (British, ca. 1710–ca. 1765), after a design by Henry Flitcroft (British, 1697–1769). British, ca. 1740–45. Pine and marble, H. 35 in. (90.8 cm), W. 68 in. (173.4 cm), D. 34 in. (87.6 cm). Rogers Fund, 1926 (26.45)

22 | *Mirror and console table from Croome Court, Worcestershire*. Designed by Robert Adam (British, 1728–1792). Made by Sefferin Alken (Danish, active 1744–died ca. 1783). British, 1765. Mirror: carved and painted pine, glass, 11 ft. 8 in. × 75 in. (355.6 × 190.5 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1960 (60.31.2a–c). Table: carved and painted pine, marble sheets veneered on a cement core, with newly carved swags, H. 35 7/8 in. (91.1 cm), W. 84 in. (213.4 cm), D. 34 1/8 in. (86.5 cm). Fletcher Fund, 1965 (65.127a, b)

23 | *Open armchair with the Barrington coat of arms*. After a design by Thomas Chippendale (British, 1718–1779). British, ca. 1755. Mahogany and needlework, H. 51 in. (129.5 cm). Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.980)

was glittering: the country houses of Britain were ‘vessels of civilization,’ inhabited across the generations by grandees and gentry of exceptional culture and refinement . . . These rural mansions, with their in situ collections (and, preferably, with their in situ owners), represented Britain’s greatest single contribution to global culture, and the purpose of the exhibition was to provide overpowering visual evidence to that effect.”²⁶ As complete architectural vestiges transported from British country houses to the heart of New York City, The Met’s interiors allow for an enveloping experience that isolated treasures in an exhibition cannot provide. They give visitors a flavor of the idealized world the Georgians sought to build for themselves. In order to highlight the three rooms as artistic masterpieces in their own right, they are now displayed with a limited selection of furniture and sculpture.

The significance of classical architecture for Georgian furniture design is revealed by many of the individual works exhibited (on a rotating basis) in the eighteenth-century galleries. The architects William Kent and Robert Adam are known to have ensured that their furniture was in keeping with the architectural idiom of the spaces they designed.²⁷ The pier table attributed to Matthias Lock (fig. 21) at one

end of the gallery and the Croome Court table and mirror (fig. 22) at the other are indicative of Georgian Britain’s wide spectrum of Neoclassicism, from the Kentian masculinity of the 1740s to the Adamesque refinement of the 1770s. Their contemporary Thomas Chippendale capitalized on the diversification of the furniture market like no other. Acknowledging that a thorough understanding of classical architecture was “the very soul and basis” of the art of cabinetmaking, Chippendale’s magisterial volume *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director* (1754) provided an unprecedented array of styles and options in furniture.²⁸

The enormous Barrington armchair, associated with Chippendale’s so-called French designs, which he specified “must be covered with Tapestry, or other sort of Needlework,” takes pride of place at the entrance to the eighteenth-century galleries (fig. 23).²⁹ The density of the mahogany—Britain’s “national wood,” which actually came





24 | *Miniature secretary incorporating a watch*. James Cox (British, ca. 1723–1800). British (London), ca. 1766–72. Case: gold, agate, gilded brass, pearls, paste jewels, and silver; dial: white enamel; movement: wheel balance and cock set with paste jewels, H. 12 1/8 in. (30.8 cm). Gift of Admiral F. R. Harris, in memory of his wife, Dena Sperry Harris, 1946 (46.184a–c)





25 | *Pair of perfume burners.* Matthew Boulton (British, 1728–1809) and James Fothergill (died 1782). British (Soho, near Birmingham), probably ca. 1770. Derbyshire spar, tortoiseshell, and wood; Carrara marble base, gilded-bronze mounts, and gilded-copper liner, H. of each 13 in. (33 cm). Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1633)

26 | *“Sacred to Bacchus” wine ewer.* Designed by John Flaxman (British, 1755–1826). Josiah Wedgwood and Sons (founded 1759). British (Etruria, Staffordshire), ca. 1785–90. Jasperware (unglazed stoneware), H. 15 ¼ in. (38.7 cm). Gift of the Starr and Wolfe Families, 2018 (2018.889.2)

from the colonized West Indies — enables the chair’s bold contours. This prominent position pays tribute not only to Chippendale’s central role in shaping Georgian aesthetics, but also to the outstanding generosity and discriminating taste of Judge Irwin Untermyer, who bequeathed the chair to The Met in 1964.

The cacophony of styles and influences evident in eighteenth-century British design heralds the eclecticism of the nineteenth century. Writing in 1760, Scottish novelist Tobias Smollett observed that the prodigious growth of British commerce and manufacturing had led to “an irresistible tide of luxury and excess.”³⁰ That lavishness is reflected in a display of more than one hundred “toys,” which were not children’s playthings but rather small accessories — from enameled *nécessaires* and tiny silver coffeepots to bejeweled miniature secretaires made by James Cox — that had no use other than to delight their owners (fig. 24).



Any history of British decorative arts would be incomplete without two entrepreneurs who, on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, transformed the rural Midlands into booming centers of production: Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood. Based in his native Birmingham, Boulton, whom Wedgwood described as “the most complete manufacturer in England in metal,”³¹ fashioned outstanding gilt-bronze ornaments that he mounted on Neoclassical urns and candelabra made of so-called Blue John, or Derbyshire spar (fig. 25). Wedgwood also stayed loyal to his local roots and was an enthusiastic experimenter, undertaking trials for new glazes, clay bodies, and designs. The clean, crisp, and expressive Neoclassicism of blue and white jasperware, his signature product, had a lasting impact on Britain’s perception of Greek and Roman antiquity and continues to be produced even today to great acclaim (fig. 26).

27 | Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, (1769–1852). Sir Francis Chantrey (British, 1781–1841). British, 1823. Marble, H. 47 ¾ in. (121.3 cm). Wrightsman Fund, 1994 (1994.295a, b)



THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Francis Chantrey's commanding portrait of the Duke of Wellington (fig. 27), a central figure in the reorganization of Europe in the aftermath of Napoleon's downfall, ushers visitors from the eighteenth- into the new nineteenth-century galleries. The bust of the Iron Duke, who witnessed firsthand the transition from the Age of Enlightenment into the Industrial Revolution, presides over a sampling of furnishings from the Regency period, as the glamorous era and rather loud last gasp of Georgian taste is known.³² Thomas Hope's "Egyptian" bench is a particularly good example, as the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome, which continued to be sources of inspiration during the first third of the nineteenth century, were joined by Egyptian influences following Napoleon's military campaign there from 1798 to 1801 (fig. 28). Hope, a member of a powerful banking family and a highly sophisticated patron of the arts, set out to influence and improve contemporary taste through the publication of his own collection in *Household Furniture and*

Interior Decoration (1807). The Met's bench can be matched to one of Hope's detailed line drawings, but the designer never specified the fabrics he used. The coral wool covers, contrasting with the burnished surfaces of the gilded wood, are based on fiber fragments found on this bench and remains on a Hope sofa now at the Cleveland Museum of Art. These may at first surprise, but Regency design reveled in flashy juxtapositions of color and texture.

Compared to their last iteration at The Met, the nineteenth-century galleries have grown considerably in terms of both size and content. Victorian design has been a major focus of acquisitions over the last couple of years as the Museum sought to bridge gaps in the collection. Under the age's name-sake, Queen Victoria, the British Empire approached its apex, stretching from Canada to New Zealand and covering almost a fifth of the planet's land surface. India, of which Victoria became empress in 1877, was one of Britain's most significant and lucrative colonies. A recently acquired and weirdly naive Staffordshire figure helps illustrate different perceptions of the fraught relationship between Britain and India. It depicts the death of British Army officer Hector (Hugo) Sutherland Munro, killed by a tiger during a hunting excursion in 1792 (fig. 29). The event is said to have inspired the creation of an almost lifesize automaton known as "Tipu's Tiger," a reference to Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore in South India, who had vehemently resisted attacks by the British East India Company. Since the strength of the tiger was inextricably linked to the power of the sovereign, the symbolism of the automaton is easy to decipher: a ferocious feline mauling a British soldier stood for an ancient kingdom defending its territory. In 1799, British troops laid siege to the nearby fortress at Seringapatam, and, after taking Mysore, killed Tipu Sultan, looted the city, and brought the wooden tiger to London, where it remains today in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



28 | *Bench*. Thomas Hope (British, 1769–1831). British, before 1807. Gilded mahogany, modern wool cover and silk trims, W. at feet 45 3/4 in. (116.2 cm). Purchase, The James Parker Charitable Foundation Gift, 2014 (2014.136)



29 | *The Death of Munrow*. British (Staffordshire), ca. 1820–30. Lead-glazed earthenware with enamel decoration, L. 14 3/8 in. (36.5 cm). Purchase, Funds from various donors, The Charles E. Sampson Memorial Fund, and The Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation Gift, in memory of George Munroe, 2016 (2016.129)



30 | *Cylindrical vase with ring handles.* Designed by Christopher Dresser (British, 1834–1904). Josiah Wedgwood and Sons (founded 1759). British (Etruria, Staffordshire), 1867. Unglazed earthenware with transfer-printed decoration. On loan from Paul Jeromack, 2019 (L.2019.32.1)

Stripped of its anti-imperialistic meaning, the automaton became so popular that its composition was turned into a somewhat harmless ornament representing the death of a British soldier.

The Victorian era was an age of reform and urbanization, as many people left the countryside to find work in the cities and emerging factories. Consumers were everywhere, eager to bring culture into their homes, and eclecticism ruled as makers looked to Asia and the Islamic world but also embraced the visual vocabularies of the past, happily mixing and matching Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque. The 1851 Great Exhibition, organized in part by Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, sought to showcase the best of British design alongside its foreign competition. “The history of the world . . . records no event comparable in its promotion of human industry,” wrote Henry Cole, who co-organized the exhibition with the Prince Consort. “A great

people invited all civilized nations to a festival, to bring into comparison the works of human skill.”³³ Yet reactions to the designs on display were mixed. Christopher Dresser, design pioneer of the Aesthetic Movement for whom beauty trumped meaning or functionality, later recalled the displays with horror: “Scissors formed as birds . . . candle-sticks formed as human beings . . . and other absurdities equally offensive to good taste.”³⁴ While Western design at the fair provoked the aesthete’s censure, that of the wider world, particularly India, sparked his interest.³⁵ The extremely versatile Dresser, who held a doctorate in botany from the university in Jena, Germany, had the advantage of understanding the properties of the materials for which he created his designs. Dresser’s caneware vase for Wedgwood, decorated with abstracted insect limbs, fins, and wing bones, is but one example of the designer’s unceasing spirit of invention as he pioneered new ornamental vocabularies (fig. 30). In addition to Wedgwood, Dresser collaborated with numerous manufacturers, producing ceramics, glass, and silver for Minton, Ault Pottery, Elkington, James Dixon and Sons, and James Couper and Sons, among others.

Like Dresser, William Morris—figurehead of the anti-industrial Arts and Crafts movement, which was founded on traditional craftsmanship and a visual vocabulary borrowed from the Middle Ages—advocated that creators and practitioners understand their materials and utilize them according to their unique strengths: “Never forget the material you are working with, and always try to use it for doing what it can do best.”³⁶ For Morris, who founded the Merton Abbey Tapestry Works in 1881, weavings encapsulated what he saw as the honesty of medieval craftsmanship. Perhaps contrary to his principles, however, the tapestry *Angels Praising* (fig. 31) was based on a design by Edward Burne-Jones originally intended for stained-glass windows at Salisbury Cathedral. A startlingly romanticized representation of two angels in

31 | *Angels Praising (Angeli Laudantes)*. Designed by John Henry Dearle (British, 1860–1932), 1894, after a prototype by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (British, 1833–1898). Woven by John Martin, Robert Ellis, and Merritt Morris and Company (1875–1940), Merton Abbey Tapestry Works (1881–1940). British (Merton Abbey), 1898. Dyed wool and silk on undyed cotton warp, 92½ x 80 in. (235 x 203.2 cm). Rogers Fund, 2008 (2008.8a–c)

32 | *Dining room chair from the Speaker's House, Palace of Westminster*. After a design by Augustus Welby Northmore (A. W. N.) Pugin (British, 1812–1852). Holland and Sons (1803–1942). British (London), 1859. Carved oak, upholstered in modern stamped and gilded red leather, H. 39½ in. (100.3 cm). Purchase, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, by exchange, 2015 (2015.638)



a wildflower meadow, it serves as a reminder that, while Burne-Jones and Morris were not people of faith themselves, nineteenth-century medievalism was the product of a deeply religious culture.

The ecclesiastic nature of the furniture designed by A. W. N. Pugin, a Catholic religious zealot working at the heart of the Protestant British establishment, equally testifies to this connection. Pugin assisted Charles Barry in the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster, home of the British parliament, after its destruction by fire in 1834. For a chair that once furnished the Speaker's House, Pugin followed medieval precedents in emphasizing its structure, heavily elaborating the three beams under the seat that support it horizontally (fig. 32). Pugin's creation conveys his romantic notion



33 | *Sideboard (Pericles DRESSOIR).*

Designed by Bruce J. Talbert (British, 1838–1881). Holland and Sons (1803–1942). British (London), 1866. Oak, molded, turned, carved, painted, gilded, inlaid with ebony, walnut, boxwood, amaranth, rosewood, and tulipwood marquetry panels; lime wood, brass mounts, H. 10 ft. 8 in. (325.1 cm). Purchase, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, by exchange; Romano I. Peluso, Ada Peluso, William Lie Zeckendorf, Lila Acheson Wallace, Malcolm Hewitt Wiener Foundation, Carol Grossman, Patricia Wengraf Ltd., Anonymous, Henry Arnhold, Marilyn and Lawrence Friedland, Irene Roosevelt Aitken, Andrew Butterfield and Claire Schiffman, Jason Jacques, Anne Rorimer, and Ian Wardropper and Sarah McNear Gifts, in honor of James David Draper, 2015 (2015.281a, b)



of pre-Reformation England in a manner not dissimilar to the enormous *Pericles Dressoir*, acquired by the Museum in 2015 (fig. 33). Brain child of the architect Bruce Talbert, this mammoth sideboard — the centerpiece of Holland and Sons’ booth at the 1867 Paris International Exhibition — boasts Victorian national pride, combining native English oak with depictions from Shakespeare’s works, including *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (ca. 1607–8).

Concluding our story of creative entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, and the international migration of artists and artisans is a reference to another literary monument, the groundbreaking Gothic fiction *Frankenstein*, whose author, the Romantic novelist Mary Shelley,

is the subject of a remarkable portrait bust (fig. 34). Camillo Pistrucci, son of the better-known gem engraver Benedetto, captured Shelley’s likeness in 1843, during the year of her Italian sojourn, twenty-five years after she had written her famous book. Born in Rome but raised in London, Camillo was sent back to his native city, where he carried out several prestigious commissions for Englishmen on the Grand Tour.³⁷ Together with Torrigiano’s portrait of Bishop Fisher, his marble likeness of Mary Shelley functions as a fitting bookend to The Met’s new British Galleries. Quintessentially British portraits but made by Italian artists, they tangibly illustrate that British art cannot be seen in isolation.

34 | *Mary Shelley (1797–1851)*. Camillo Pistrucci (Italian, 1811–1854). Italian, 1843. Marble, H. 25 3/8 in. (64.5 cm). Purchase, Wrightsman Fellows Gifts, 2019 (2019.341)

35 | *Jar in the form of a bird*. Modeled by Robert Wallace Martin (British, 1843–1923). R. W. Martin and Brothers (1873–1915). British (Southall), 1888. Glazed stoneware with wood mount, H. 12 1/4 in. (31 cm). Robert A. Ellison Jr. Collection, Gift of Robert A. Ellison Jr., 2013 (2013.239.5a, b)



A MATTER OF TASTE

One of the reasons The Met can justify having galleries dedicated solely to British decorative arts and design is that they tell a truly international story. The Museum’s ambition was to create a new experience that reinvigorates the dialogue between our visitors and our outstanding holdings of objects made either in Britain or for the British market. Just as every generation has its own take on Shakespeare’s plays, so do our visitors deserve new light shone on the collection, which includes old stars, such as Torrigiano’s John Fisher, as well as promising new cast members, like Hope’s Egyptian bench.

Only time will tell how long the performance will resonate. The installation leaves room for the possibility, perhaps even anticipates, that some may come to the new galleries with reservations. This may equally be true of reactions to some of the objects on display, as people tend to be more vocal about their likes and dislikes when it comes to decorative arts than they are regarding the

established canon of old masters. Perhaps that is as it should be, because tastes, likes, and dislikes are key to the narrative of these new galleries, which are centered around craftsmen and shopkeepers who were trying to find their niche or segment in a diverse marketplace. The story of retail has always been one of success and failure, to which a nation of shopkeepers should be accustomed.

Leading visitors out of the galleries is an 1888 jar by Martin Brothers in the form of a bird (fig. 35). Its cheeky smile suggests that for all the complex and, at times, traumatic political, economic, and religious subjects that infuse and inform the works exhibited in these galleries, decorative arts are frequently designed simply to delight and entertain. Writing for *Country Life* in 1995, John Cornforth praised the installation of the British Galleries, which had just been unveiled: “What is good about the arrangement is that it has a sense of the objects giving pleasure.”³⁸ Although the new galleries for 2020 are markedly different from their predecessors in both appearance and arrangement, one would hope that Cornforth’s judgment would remain the same.





A History of the British Galleries

MAX BRYANT

Walk under the portico, pass through the Medieval Hall, and turn right. For more than half a century, visitors to the Metropolitan Museum have known where to find British art in New York City. Nineteen museums around the world define themselves as “universal” or encyclopedic, but The Met is the only one that has an entry on the history of British design.¹ This is the story of how these galleries came to be established and of the collection that has sustained them through decades of change.

The galleries of “English Decorative Arts” first opened in May 1954 as part of the vision of The Met’s most iconoclastic director, Francis Henry Taylor (1903–1957), who described the Museum as nothing less than “the great free public institution to which the humblest citizen may turn for spiritual regeneration.”² While study galleries on the ground floor presented much of the decorative arts collection organized for artists and students, the main galleries on the first floor presented “works addressed by their irresistible beauty to the general public.”³ At the time, most displays of decorative arts massed contemporaneous objects together in semi-illusionistic period

settings. By contrast, these galleries affirmed that they were works of art worthy of space and symmetry, a strikingly emphatic assertion at midcentury that remains a guiding principle of the new installation.

One of the first works that a visitor from 1954 would have encountered was a Georgian doorframe (fig. 37). Stepping through, one could admire the carving in pine of Corinthian pilasters, decorative brackets, and acanthus rinceaux. Virtuoso but idiosyncratic, the doorframe was neither an authored masterpiece nor a representative specimen of a particular style. Instead, it showed the imaginative uses of the classical decorative vocabulary around 1730. Rather than masterpieces or surveys, Taylor wrote, he was more interested in giving visitors “a visual reference collection of cultural history.”⁴

The doorframe also demonstrates the aesthetic approach of the galleries’ curator, Preston Remington (1897–1958). Framing the settee and tapestry beyond, it created one of his many formally ordered yet evocative compositions of paintings, textiles, furniture, and ceramics, in contrast to the more didactic study galleries below, where objects







37 | Gallery 18 (looking into gallery 17) in 1971, showing door-frame (41.92, deaccessioned), settee (24.136.1), and tapestry (53.165.2)

38 | Gallery 22 in 1954, showing tapestry (41.190.135), high chest (10.125.57, deaccessioned), walnut armchairs (18.110.39, deaccessioned, and 10.125.210), punch bowl (53.25), and portrait of Elizabeth Trentham (22.45.34, deaccessioned)

39 | Gallery 518 in 2011, showing the Cassiobury staircase (see fig. 10), with portraits of the Earl of Rochester (loan from private collection) and Sir Henry Capel (39.65.6)

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36 | *Tapestry room from Croome Court, Worcestershire*. Designed by Robert Adam (British, 1728–1792). Paneling by Sefferin Alken (Danish, active 1744–died ca. 1783). Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1958 (58.75.1a). Photographed in 2011, with carpet from Harewood House (1970.141), chandelier (63.208.2), and candelabra (29.112.2–.3)

were grouped by material. Having graduated from Harvard shortly before the university’s commencement of its influential course on curating, Remington was an old-fashioned aesthete, but his aestheticism aligned perfectly with Taylor’s desire for “irresistible beauty.” Another example of Remington’s approach was the grouping in front of a sixteenth-century Netherlandish tapestry (fig. 38). Many of the pieces on display had analogues in the hanging. The figure of the princess pursued by Mercury, for example, repeated the pose of Elizabeth Trentham in an adjacent portrait by Peter Lely. The bed in the tapestry was likewise reflected by a bed from Rushbrooke Hall (ca. 1700) placed opposite, and even the silhouette of the high chest below mirrored the stool on which the princess’s foot was perched.

The Georgian doorframe also carried a significance that would not have been obvious at the time. It was the first personal gift to The Met from Irwin Untermyer (1886–1973), who would go on to become the Museum’s most important supporter of British decorative arts. Irwin was the son of corporate lawyer Samuel Untermyer, a nemesis of bankers and a prominent Zionist. After Samuel’s sprawling, undisciplined collection of mostly French art had been rejected by the city—to

the embarrassment and inconvenience of his family—his son was determined not to make the same mistake. Starting with the Georgian doorframe in 1941, Irwin began to donate objects that would support a future installation at The Met. He also developed his own collection to be bequeathed to the Museum, taking as his model the one amassed by the father of British decorative arts collecting, Percival D. Griffiths (1862–1937), a London accountant who furnished his house outside St. Albans, Hertfordshire, with scrupulously authentic antiques that formed the basis of a survey of English furniture published in 1929.⁵ In this way, the galleries of 1954 did not represent a conclusion as much as they anticipated future developments that would sustain The Met’s collection of British decorative arts into the twenty-first century.

In addition to establishing the Untermyer connection, Taylor and Remington had been in contact with the collector and philanthropist Samuel Kress about his acquisition of a tapestry room from Croome Court, a country house in Worcestershire, to be donated to the Museum after his death (fig. 36). Remington directed its removal and planned ahead to accommodate the room in the new galleries. The long foresight of Taylor and Remington was crucial, since neither the tapestry room



40 | Gallery 513 in 2016, showing teakettle with stand (68.141.81), china table (64.101.1099), and pair of chandeliers (1970.148.1-.2)

nor the majority of the Untermyer collection would come to the Museum until after both director and curator had retired and died.

When the Untermyer collection finally arrived, its scale was so great as to necessitate a dedicated exhibition (1977–78); this was followed by a refurbishment of the galleries to integrate the new objects with the rest of the Museum’s holdings.⁶ As part of that renovation, the decorative arts study rooms were closed, and highlights were moved into the main galleries. The new installation, which opened in 1995 as the Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries of English Decorative Arts (figs. 36, 39, 40), was organized by curator William Rieder.

Major new purchases of British decorative arts had declined after 1954, however, and did not play a significant role in this

installation, which was a consolidation rather than a reconception. Indeed, until recently, the last landmark purchases of British decorative arts were made in 1965, while Untermyer was still a trustee: a full wood-paneled interior and a massive Rococo balustrade. These decades also witnessed a major loss: the demolition in 2003 of two staircases by British designer Jacob Wrey Mould conceived in 1874 and part of the original Museum building that opened in 1880.⁷ In 2015, following a careful deaccessioning of some British works that were “not what they purport to be” or lacked “the quality that makes [them] worthy of display,” funds were raised for new acquisitions.⁸ Major purchases of British decorative arts then resumed at The Met, including most of the nineteenth-century furniture in the new installation.

1870–1954

The resilience of The Met's British Galleries over the decades is thanks in large part to the conceptual strength and vision of Taylor, Remington, and Untermyer, although in 1954 they, too, were building on an already substantial legacy. British art and design had been collected by The Met from its founding, in 1870. For the first decades, works were chosen as examples of material craftsmanship, for the study of technique, rather than as part of a historical display. The Museum's second president, Henry Marquand (1819–1902), donated a range of British works himself, from enamelware (1890) and ceramics (1894) to electrotype copies of famous silver pieces (1883), including one of a wine cooler now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg (fig. 41). This feat of nineteenth-century technology was made to re-create a prodigy of the eighteenth century. A masterpiece twice over, the electrotype cistern represents two very different eras of British art and so has never been installed in any chronologically linear display.

The first installation of decorative arts at The Met to be organized by period opened in Charles McKim's Wing F (later known as the Morgan Wing) in March 1910.⁹ The curator was Wilhelm Valentiner (1880–1958), whose background was in *Kulturgeschichte*, or cultural studies, the scholarship underpinning Wilhelm von Bode's Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin. According to this approach, surveys of design structured around materials were to be replaced with ones organized by chronology.¹⁰

In the Morgan Wing, most of the galleries were devoted to French design, which by the turn of the century had become known to Americans through publications like those of the French historian Henry Havard (1838–1921). The first two galleries of British design were intended not as representations of any school per se, but as an introduction to the rooms of American decorative arts. The objects displayed in the British rooms, purchased in 1908 and 1909 from Tiffany Studios and the collector H. Eugene Bolles (1853–1910), had been selected by a specialist in colonial American furniture, not by



41 | Electrotype reproduction of the Jerningham Wine Cooler, after an original by George Vertue (1684–1756), Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770), and Charles Kandler (active 1727–50), 1884. Manufactured by Elkington & Co. (British, 1829–1963). Silver on base metal (copper and brass), W. 65 in. (165.1 cm), 320 lb. (145.2 kg). Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1883 (83.18.290)



Valentiner. These were supplemented in 1918 with a purchase from Bolles's cousin George S. Palmer (1855–1934) that also combined American and British furniture. Although the British objects were modest in number, they were of substantial material value, such as a single eighteenth-century chair that cost \$5,000 in 1918 and was deaccessioned in 2015 for \$437,000.¹¹

Scrupulous about chronology, Valentiner was less interested in what he considered provincial schools or evolutionary transitions, preferring instead the “great art epochs . . . the Periclean age, the High Renaissance in Italy, the epoch of Dürer, and that of the great Baroque painters in Holland.”¹² The French collections qualified under his rubric, but colonial design was by definition provincial. The American rooms were thus installed on the upper floor of the Morgan Wing along with the two small rooms of British eighteenth-century furniture. Nothing in these short-lived galleries suggested a prominent future for British design at The Met.

About the same time, however, huge amounts of British art and design were flooding into New York, the culmination of decades of change on the other side of the Atlantic. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the idea of British aristocratic collections surviving in perpetuity had come to an end: a series of laws passed in 1882 allowed life tenants of land for the first time to sell their property with a court order. In addition, new taxes in the budget of 1894, intended to combat an agricultural depression, encouraged the sale of family heirlooms. American collectors still had to pay heavy duties to import antiquities more than a hundred years old, but these were removed in 1909. The situation came to a climax two years later, when the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne sold Rembrandt's *The Mill* to an American, prompting a national outcry.

The impact on the dealers who specialized in antique furniture was immediate. In 1910, Francis Lenygon (1877–1943), the



42 | Cadwalader Room in 1915, showing settee (14.58.145, deaccessioned), corner cabinet (14.58.33, deaccessioned), tripod table (14.58.146, deaccessioned), chair (14.58.6, deaccessioned), and Chelsea porcelain candelabra (14.58.91, .92) and vases (14.58.56–.58)

43 | Room 13, Wing J, in 1924, showing Rushbrooke bed (24.99, deaccessioned), carved overmantel from Holme Lacy (16.88a, b), Cupid and Psyche tapestries (not accessioned), display table (10.226), and tapestry of St. Paul (15.121.5)

44 | “The Decorative Arts in the Nineteenth Century” in 1926, alcove 5 (“Medievalism”), showing cabinet known as *The Backgammon Players* (26.54), plate (23.163.1), vase (23.163.2), the tapestry *Greenery* (23.200), and framed detail from the tapestry *The Passing of Venus* (23.163.3)



dealer most associated with British art and design in New York, moved to the city, where he would work until his death. Untermyer’s collection was soon underway, starting with a pair of Queen Anne chairs, a wedding gift in 1912. Two years later, with the publication of two books on British furniture written under Lenygon’s name by art historian Margaret Jourdain, Untermyer and other American collectors had a road map for the British material beginning to appear in the antique shops.

The first bequest to The Met following the changes to British law came from John L. Cadwalader (1836–1914), a philanthropist closely associated with the New York Public Library who focused on British design for its own sake rather than as a prelude to American art. First exhibited in May 1914, his collection of Georgian furniture was given its own room the next year, adjacent to the two by Valentiner (fig. 42). Although the works on display in the room have all been deaccessioned (with the exception of some of the porcelain visible on the mantelpiece), these objects nonetheless

represented a watershed moment: a collection of British decorative arts that was not presented simply as context for American design.

This turning point at The Met was underscored in 1917 by the appointment of Joseph Breck (1885–1933) as assistant director and head of the Department of Decorative Arts. Breck, an American, was Valentiner’s protégé at the Museum and had learned his methodology, but he did not share the German scholar’s narrow focus. After Valentiner left The Met in 1914 and the Wing of Decorative Arts closed in 1917, Breck initiated a more substantial presence for British art in McKim’s new building. Three large rooms opened in January 1925, requiring major purchases, including the tester bed from Rushbrooke Hall (fig. 43). More important, however, was their location: as far from the new American Wing as possible.

The following year, Breck made an even more striking statement with The Met’s first historical galleries dedicated to nineteenth-century decorative arts (fig. 44). Applying

45 | Josephine Mercy Heathcote Gallery in 1987, showing door from Basildon Park (64.101.1214) and a painted roundel from Adelphi Terrace (1982.315)



the principles of *Kulturgeschichte* to European design only a few decades old was an idea that no European-born curator could have contemplated. Moreover, Breck made purchases for the new galleries intended explicitly as historical examples, not ones for contemporary designers to emulate.¹³ Few of those acquisitions appreciated more in value and import than a cabinet known as *The Backgammon Players* (26.54), acquired at a nadir in the taste for Victorian design. Collecting nineteenth-century decorative arts began again in earnest at The Met in the late 1980s, and in 1987 the chronology of the display was extended up to 1840 through the addition of the Josephine Mercy Heathcote Gallery, overseen by curator Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide (fig. 45). Nevertheless, as a landmark in establishing the artistic and commercial success of William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Philip Webb, *The Backgammon Players* remains by far the most important nineteenth-century British object in The Met collection.

The historical interiors from Lansdowne House and Kirtlington Park (see figs. 1, 20, 46), Breck's largest British acquisitions, were purchased as part of an unfinished project. Following the critical and popular success

of the opening of the American Wing in 1924, director Edward Robinson (1858–1931) and president Robert de Forest (1848–1931) initiated plans for a new European decorative arts wing on the north side of the Museum, with a design approved in January 1931. This would include space for a long series of historical interiors like those subsequently installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Later that year Breck traveled to England, where he acquired the two rooms and, shortly after his return, a carved staircase from Cassiobury Park, a house in Hertfordshire (see figs. 10, 39). At The Cloisters, Breck had pushed for the architecture to be installed as examples of “perfected styles,” each embodying a specific monastic function.¹⁴ The same logic applied to the historical rooms in the proposed decorative arts wing, with Lansdowne House and Kirtlington Park representing, to Breck, ideal specimens of British Neoclassicism and Rococo, respectively.

Joseph Breck died in 1933 at the age of forty-eight. In the wake of the deaths of Robinson and de Forest, the stock market crash of 1929, and the appointment of Herbert E. Winlock (1884–1950), an Egyptologist, as director of The Met, the new wing was



46 | Dining room from Kirtlington Park (see fig. 20) in 1971, showing library table (24.103.3) and portrait of Sir James Dashwood (56.190)

abandoned and the historical rooms were put into long-term storage. In the years leading up to the galleries' eventual opening in 1954, major purchases were made, but they were additions to what was mostly Breck's collection. For the installation, however, the approach of Taylor and Remington was the antithesis of what would have been done for the aborted decorative arts wing. The goal was not simply to assemble a comprehensive survey of design history, but to engage

the public, through either the "irresistible beauty" of the main galleries or the material-based focus of the study galleries.

Taylor's innovations made direct reference to a subcommittee report of the Museum's organizing committee from January 4, 1870. That document defined The Met's mission as affording "to our whole people free and ample means for innocent and refined enjoyment, and also supplying the best facilities for practical instruction and for the cultivation of pure taste in all matters connected with the arts."¹⁵ Taylor elaborated: "Quaint as these words may sound to our jaded ears, the fundamental philosophy of American art museums has never been better expressed." Ironically, they had been drafted by someone born and trained in Britain: Calvert Vaux (1824–1895), architect of Central Park.¹⁶

Taylor's appeal to the Museum's founding principles became a regular feature in later reorientations of The Met. Henry Watson Kent referenced them in the 1920s while developing the institution's first educational program; Thomas Hoving quoted them in his preface to the controversial 1969 exhibition *Harlem on My Mind*.¹⁷ Although American luminaries such as William Cullen Bryant had initially called for the Museum to become a "repository . . . of works left by the world's greatest artists," Vaux's draft embodied his own values and those of American followers of John Ruskin, for whom design was a matter of supreme importance to every individual.¹⁸ With the new installation of 2020, the chronology of the British Galleries extends to the end of the nineteenth century and thus, for the first time, includes the era of Ruskin, an appropriate conclusion of their story and a fitting commemoration of the Museum's 150th anniversary.



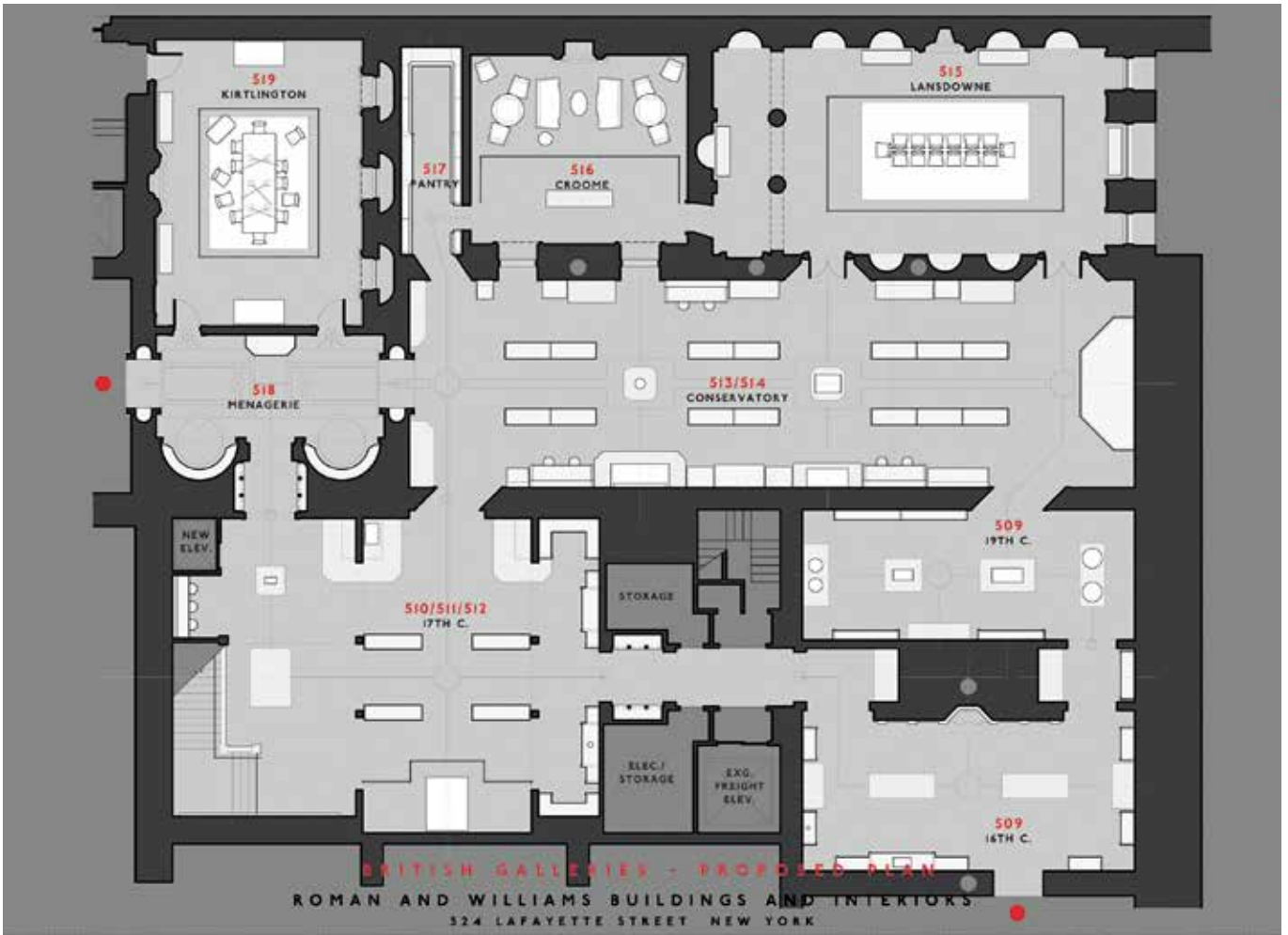
Reimagined Interiors

ELIZABETH ST. GEORGE

The new British Galleries create an environment unlike any other at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A collaboration between The Met and the New York–based firm Roman and Williams,¹ the design of the galleries is unmistakably contemporary in spirit and reflects shifting tastes in the Museum’s presentation of British sculpture and decorative arts. As Max Bryant notes in his essay in this *Bulletin*, previous iterations of the galleries were guided by a collecting philosophy that privileged aristocratic taste. Visitors to the 1995 renovation of the British Galleries were transported to a grand country house in which the eighteenth-century galleries, for example, were hung in luscious green damask and staged with symmetrical vignettes of furniture (see fig. 40). The new galleries represent not an attempt to revise the vision of former Met curators but, rather, a decision to present the Museum’s exquisite holdings in a way that feels compelling to contemporary audiences. As such, they also form the backdrop for new narratives about creativity, entrepreneurship, and the role of the British Empire as a global power.

Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch, principals of Roman and Williams, embody

many of the themes the galleries aim to convey. Former production designers in the film industry, they are better known for their restaurant, retail, and hotel interiors and had no previous experience working with a museum. Yet Standefer and Alesch were awarded the commission through a competitive process that involved several leading architectural firms. Although their bold initial proposal evolved over the course of the project, many of its most appealing features are inherent in the final design. Most important, their original vision prioritized giving visitors intimate architectural spaces in which to experience the works on display. Playing with concepts of density and the massing of objects, the end result is unusual for most contemporary museums in eschewing a white-box aesthetic in favor of a rich ensemble of colors, materials, and architectural details. Their initial presentation also evoked nineteenth-century models of displaying art, such as utilizing long rows of wood-framed casework (figs. 47, 48). While this more literal interpretation was not implemented in the final installation, the firm’s sensitivity to historical context and its responsiveness to learning





48 | Stephen Alesch for Roman and Williams, proposal for the Menagerie

49 | Roman and Williams's original floorplan

50 | Detail of Gothic-style arches in the nineteenth-century galleries

PAGE 40:

47 | Stephen Alesch for Roman and Williams, proposal for the Conservatory

about and framing the story of each object served as a philosophical cornerstone for much of their subsequent revisions.

One of the first key decisions made by the design team was to reorganize the overall plan of the British Galleries. One shortcoming of Roman and Williams's original scheme was that it condensed the display of sixteenth- and nineteenth-century objects into a single gallery, leaving little space to build either collection (fig. 49). Almost providentially, during the renovation process a previously unknown, sealed-off doorway was discovered leading from the Medieval Hall into the southeast corner of the British Galleries' existing footprint.² This new entryway resolved the tight squeeze of the original plan and, at the same time, created

an exciting and logical temporal connection between the works in the Medieval Hall and the sixteenth-century British sculpture and decorative arts collections.

With the problem of the entrance solved, the new galleries now offer, with one exception, a chronological journey. Rather than alluding to nineteenth-century modes of display in the final concept, the design team, in consultation with Met curators, settled on other cues to contextualize the objects in their respective time periods. Each gallery has plaster arches, for example, that employ an architectural vocabulary from the corresponding epoch: Tudor for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Neo-Palladian for the eighteenth century, and Gothic Revival for the nineteenth century (fig. 50). Implementing



51 | Display of teapots in the
“Tea, Trade, and Empire” gallery

52 | “Retail Toys and Trinkets”
gallery



some of Roman and Williams’s initial principles, the four galleries formed by the arrangement of Tudor arches and the Cassio-bury stair (see fig. 10) create small spaces for sustained, intimate viewing of silver, embroideries, ceramics, glass, and other works. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century galleries, inserted between the arches are tall cases with thematic groupings that allow visitors to experience the breadth of The Met’s collection in specific areas such as Neoclassicism, Aestheticism, and, in the output of design pioneer Christopher Dresser (1834–1904), protomodernism. These ensembles also help to emphasize aspects of the galleries’ narrative. In the Aestheticism case, for example, visitors can see how the multitude and quality of similar ceramic forms evolved as industrial methods of production were refined over the course of the nineteenth century.

The “Tea, Trade, and Empire” gallery—the one deviation from the chronological format—examines the impact of global commerce,

including the Atlantic slave trade, on the growth of the British Empire. The room is painted a deep blue ombré as a reference to the sea, the primary source of Britain’s wealth during this formative period (fig. 51). Elsewhere in the galleries, deep tones of brown, aubergine, and pale lilac on the walls are juxtaposed with bronze-colored metal for the architectural trim and platforms, the palette lending the space a sleek, modern feel. Steel patinated to resemble bronze is also used for the casework, manufactured by the Milan-based firm Goppion S.p.a. Featuring thin bases and plinths, the minimalistic casework allows the works of art to seemingly hover in air. This technique is used to whimsical effect in a case dedicated to eighteenth-century retail and toy shops, where items such as snuff boxes and scent bottles, floating on mounts, are grouped from most to least expensive (fig. 52).

The Met’s three renowned historical rooms—Kirtlington, Croome, and Lansdowne—have been equally reconfigured by the



53 | James Boyd's maquette for the Kirtlington exterior landscape, 2019

new gallery design. Visitors can now enter Croome for a more immersive experience of the pink Gobelins tapestries in the round, while Kirtlington and Lansdowne are staged not as period rooms but as pristine architectural spaces. For the latter two rooms, Roman and Williams designed modern benches with integrated label holders so that visitors can read about the architecture while appreciating the intricate plasterwork that decorates them. To create the illusion that visitors have been transported to these grand spaces, The Met team collaborated with painter James Boyd to re-create views outside the windows of Kirtlington and Lansdowne. Boyd's interpretation, based on extensive research by Max Bryant, renders the landscapes in historical styles and techniques such as those of painters John Wootton and Claude Lorrain, which were popular among eighteenth-century British collectors, to offer a sense of the period eye (fig. 53). Views like these were an important feature of the rooms, since the vistas from the windows of British country homes were considered part of the

interior architecture of the space, emphasizing—particularly in the case of a house like Kirtlington Park—the owner's prosperity. Each of the three rooms was also reconceived with atmospheric lighting designs by L'Observatoire International: Croome evokes an evening setting, Kirtlington is lit to resemble a summer's afternoon, and Lansdowne appears as it would on a winter's evening.

As Wolf Burchard observes in his essay, the narrative themes of the new British Galleries speak to issues of globalization, makers and making, systems of value, and Britain's role on the world stage. The complex, interwoven nature of these themes required a refined, clear design concept in order to convey the nuanced history of the objects on view and their relevance to the modern world. Through a chronological plan, subtle architectural details, and a sophisticated palette of color and materials, the design of the new British Galleries presents a spirited platform for storytelling and signals the rich possibilities for contemporary design in the display of historical material.

Nation of Shopkeepers

- This brief essay owes much to the research and ideas of others, including Max Bryant, Elizabeth Cleland, Elizabeth St. George, Daniëlle Kisluk-Grosheide, Iris Moon, Elyse Nelson, and especially Ellenor Alcorn and Luke Syson, from whom Sarah Lawrence and I inherited the British Galleries renovation project following their departure from The Met.
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Reimagined Interiors

- The British Galleries design team included Mitchell Giurgola Architects (executive architect), Silman (structural engineer), and Loring (mechanical engineer). Additional support was provided by Met staff, including Brian Butterfield, Patrick Herron, Michael Langley, Frank Mondragon, and Ria Roberts.
- Mechthild Baumeister, Conservator, Objects Conservation, and I discovered the doorway while investigating the 1995 installation of the Norfolk paneling. It was likely a former entrance to the service court in the Wing C complex. For a comprehensive overview of the architectural history of The Met, see Morrison H. Heckscher, "The Metropolitan Museum of Art: An Architectural History," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., 53, no. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 1, 4–80.

A History of the British Galleries

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—WOLF BURCHARD

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Page 1: *Display dish with Charles II (1630–1685) in a tree*. Thomas Toft (English, active before 1663, died 1689). English (Staffordshire), ca. 1680. Slip-decorated earthenware, Diam. 19 3/4 in. (50.2 cm). Rogers Fund, 1924 (24.241.2). Page 2: view of the dining room from Kirtlington Park during installation.

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