

# Trifecta Of The Exotic: Lockwood de Forest

**N**EW YORK — Renewed interest in Lockwood de Forest has seen not one, but three compelling exhibitions now on view mere miles of each other, which seems fitting since de Forest, the prominent designer and interior decorator of the Aesthetic Movement, was born in 1850 in New York. But why now?



**This custom carved teak balustrade in the corridor of the house at Olana, provided by Lockwood de Forest was made by the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, India, circa 1887. Photo by Melanie Hasbrook.**

**L**ast summer’s exhibition at the Olana State Historic Site in Hudson, N.Y., “All the Raj — Frederic Church and Lockwood de Forest...” played no small part, but collectors know good stuff

when they see it, ensuring de Forest’s continuing appeal. A 2013 auction at Bonhams proved that when the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts paid a record \$242,500 for a pair of de Forest chairs. With

the recently reopened Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum featuring “Passion for the Exotic: Lockwood de Forest and Frederic Church” among inaugural exhibitions, Olana and two New York City galleries (Debra Force Fine Art and Gerald Peters Gallery) mounted complementary de Forest shows now on view. Olana is important to any discussion of de Forest; he was one of the few artists Church chose to encourage and mentor — their relationship grew into a collaboration. For Church’s interiors, de Forest provided material that Church integrated throughout his entire home; or Church provided the design de Forest then had executed in India. In later years de Forest said, “This close association with Mr Church, I think now was the most important factor in my own development.” Museums have recognized de Forest’s place in a comprehensive survey of American decorative arts by acquiring pieces, as the Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute, Utica, N.Y., did in 2013 when it added a circa 1895 de Forest carved chair to its already strong collection of decorative arts. Olana is at 5720 State Route 9G; [www.olana.org](http://www.olana.org) or 518-828-0135.

**O**n view at the Cooper Hewitt: Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City, “Passion for the Exotic: Lockwood de Forest, Frederick Church” is a small but powerful exhibit showcasing the Teak Room (formerly the Carnegie family library). The room displays de Forest’s decorative arts objects, designed and collected, as they reflect the Aesthetic Movement’s passion for the “exotic,” and defines his role in creating an

Indian style of interior decoration in late Nineteenth Century America. During his yearlong

Also on view is this tile from the Ottoman Empire (present day Syria), late Sixteenth–early Seventeenth Century, tin-glazed earthenware, underglaze decoration, 109/16 by 103/16 inches.



Drawing, "Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives," by Frederic Edwin Church, 1868, brush and oil paint, graphite on cardboard, 1113/16 by 18½ inches), gift of Louis P. Church.



honeymoon to India in 1881, de Forest established a studio guided by Muggunbhai Hutheesing in the city of Ahmedabad, where he employed master craftsmen to create decorative teak wood and

brass panels he imported to the United States. The Indian influence is evident in the library's patterned wall stenciling; lacquered in yellow, it creates a golden light reminiscent of Indian latticed screens. Although the walls and ceilings were painted on canvas onsite, the carved teak came from de Forest's studio in India, using primarily native designs that he adapted. The room represents the most complete existing de Forest architectural

interior in America still situated in its original site. Cooper Hewitt is at 2 East 91st Street at Fifth Avenue; 212-849-8400 or [www.cooperhewitt.org](http://www.cooperhewitt.org).

**Made by Sperry Douglas Brower and Son, formerly Sperry and Henson, Albany, N.Y., 1870s, cut, engraved and stamped silver. 107/8 by 15/8 inches), museum purchase from General Acquisitions, Endowment Fund.**

**Birbal's Lockwood de Forest, "Birbal's Palace, Fattipur Sikri (Fatehpur Sikri), India," March 19, 1881, brush and oil paint on thin paperboard, 105/16 by 12½ inches; gifted by a private Santa Barbara collector, courtesy of Sullivan Goss — An American Art Gallery.**





**This circa 1885–1895 bench has its panels supplied by Lockwood de Forest (1850–1932) and carved by Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, Ahmedabad, India, probably fabricated in New York, 42 by 62 by 22 inches.**

**D**ebra Force Fine Art presents “An Exotic Journey: Furniture and Paintings by Lockwood de Forest” through March 13. Focusing upon the artist’s travels to the Middle East and North Africa, the paintings on view reflect his romance with the exotic. Highlights include three rare major paintings of Egypt and the Nile, vignettes of Greece, Kashmir and Syria and among furniture pieces are a highly carved wine cabinet, chairs, a bench and an unusual iron fire backboard. The gallery is at 13 East 69th Street, #4F; 212-734-3636 or [www.DebraForce.com](http://www.DebraForce.com).

Gerald Peters Gallery's "Lockwood De Forest" through February 13, features landscapes and seascapes from the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. De Forest painted constantly throughout his life and his preference was for the small, intimate oil sketches that he completed in one sitting, en plein air, to document his impressions of the sights and the mood they evoked within him. Gerald Peters Gallery is at 24 East 78th Street; [gspanierman@gpgalleryny.com](mailto:gspanierman@gpgalleryny.com) or 212-628-9760.



**Lockwood de Forest (1850–1932),  
"Winter Twilight," 1900, oil on board,  
21½ by 29¾ inches, is on view at Gavin  
Peters Gallery.**