

Made In The Americas: The New World Discovers Asia



By Kate Eagen Johnson

BOSTON, MASS. — As Americans debate the merits of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and a much-trumpeted commercial pivot toward the Pacific Rim, they might be surprised to learn that Asia and Latin America have traded directly with each other since the Sixteenth Century. The artistic

Previous Page, Left Image: Desk and bookcase, Puebla de los Ángeles, Mexico, mid-Eighteenth Century. Inlaid woods and incised and painted bone, maque, gold and polychrome paint, metal hardware; 87 by 41 by 26 ½ inches when closed. Ann and Gordon Getty collection. The geometric exterior looks back toward Europe with its wood and bone Mudéjar designs, a Spanish Islamic style popular in viceregal Mexico. Opening the doors reveals chinoiserie-style painting in gold on a vermillion background.

Previous Page, Right Image: Desk on stand decorated by José Manuel de la Cerda, Mexico, about 1760. Linden wood with Mexican lacquer and polychrome decoration, Spanish cedar; 61 by 40 ¾ by 24 inches. Hispanic Society of America. This desk is signed by de la Cerda. He incorporated both Asian and European motifs into his work.

consequence of these deep-rooted ties is one of the topics addressed in the stunning “Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia,” on view at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFAB), until February 15. Our preconceived notions about what “Colonial American” actually means and how inhabitants of the Western hemisphere received and translated



“The Wedding at Cana” by Nicolás Correa (born 1670/75), Mexico City, 1693. Mixed media with encrusted mother of pearl on panel; 22 7/8 by 29 3/4 inches. Hispanic Society of America. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. In her essay, Donna Pierce explains how this enconchado painting of a New Testament story evokes the display of sumptuous Asian imports in wealthy Mexican homes during the Seventeenth Century.

stylistic influences from Asia are both challenged and expanded by this project.

“Made in the Americas” is the first major exhibition to explore the effect China, Japan, the Philippines and other Asian entities had upon decorative arts across the Americas during the Colonial period. It coincides with the 450th anniversary of the establishment of the Manila-Acapulco Galleon trade between the Philippines and Mexico, both part of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, in 1565.

Basin with landscape in Chinese style, workshop of Diego Salvador Carreto, late Seventeenth Century. Tin-glazed earthenware. Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1908.



Dennis Carr, the MFAB's Carolyn and Peter Lynch curator of American decorative arts and sculpture, is the exhibition's curator and lead author of the accompanying volume of essays. The exhibition is an outgrowth of the opening of the museum's Arts of the Americas wing in 2010. With the departmental mandate to integrate the arts of North, Central and South America, Carr observed, "Our goal is to redefine American art." He went on, "I would like visitors to appreciate the power of decorative arts to tell a broader, more global story."



Cover, Peru, late Seventeenth to early Eighteenth Century. Wool, silk, cotton and linen interlocked and dovetailed tapestry; 93 ⁷/₈ by 8 ¹⁵/₈ inches. Denman Waldo Ross Collection. Chinese and indigenous Peruvian styles, motifs and even fibers are interlaced here. European devices include collared dogs and crowned lions.

As one would expect, Carr analyzes the kinds of Asian imports and expressions of chinoiserie found in the 13 colonies on the Eastern Seaboard, largely the result of mercantile and artistic connections with London and other

European capitals. But he and his fellow essayists go on to demonstrate that, in regard to Asian trade and cross-cultural fertilization in the decorative arts...

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