

The Cincinnati Wing

The Cincinnati Art Museum Revisits And Revises Its Signature Galleries



By Hollie Davis

CINCINNATI, OHIO — Growth spurts often occur as the teenage years approach. That has certainly been the case at the Cincinnati Art Museum, whose Cincinnati Wing recently reopened after being closed for extensive renovations and restructuring.

Amy Dehan, curator of decorative arts and design, and Julie Aronson, curator of American paintings, sculpture and drawings, oversaw the project. Part of a larger institutional plan, the latest phase, Dehan says, “allowed us to turn space that was previously used for back-of-house operations into new galleries and gave us the opportunity to reorient the wing’s

Page Above: Tea and coffee service, Beggs and Smith (1848–1861), retailer, Cincinnati, circa 1850, silver.



Marble bust of a woman, possibly Egeria, by Nathan Flint Baker (1820–1891), circa 1845.

earliest galleries so that they lead chronologically into the 13 other galleries for the first time since the Cincinnati Wing opened in 2003.”

As return visitors will observe, the wing’s entrance has been relocated and walls adorned with new color palettes inspired by Eighteenth Century wallpapers. The changes are meant to tell Cincinnati’s tale of growth and evolution in a way, Dehan says, “that is more intuitive and seamless for the visitor.” The curators moved works to create a more linear story and to make way for acquisitions such as a significant selection of silver previously included in the 2014 exhibition “Cincinnati Silver: 1788–1940.” The changes will continue, with more galleries opening on a rolling basis over the next year.

Sideboard by Mitchell and Rammelsberg Furniture Co. (1847–1881), Cincinnati, circa 1865, white oak, marble, horn and mirrored glass.



Linear structure aside, Dehan is quick to point out, “There are many narrative themes that feed into this story, that run contiguously throughout the wing, such as the story of Cincinnati’s location on the shifting frontier, the rise of industry and art patronage, the role of art education and the diverse racial, ethnic, religious and gender identities of the people of Cincinnati.”

The story of silver in the Queen City is certainly another of these themes. The earliest object on display is a 1795 spoon by silversmith Isaac Van Nuys, made the year he is believed to have arrived in Cincinnati. A typical frontier silversmith, Van Nuys also engraved printing plates and struck bills for the Northwest Territory. Van Nuys’ spoon illustrates the demand

Jug decorated with the image of a balloon ascent, American, circa 1835–1850, salt-glazed stoneware with slip decoration.



for fine goods on the frontier as well as the scarcity of both materials and means. It is French plate, the result of a plating technique that involves laboriously layering sheets of silver leaf onto a base, in this case copper, a few sheets at a time, then burnishing it to a convincing finish.

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Tall case clock by Samuel Best (1776–1859), clockmaker, Cincinnati, 1810–1815, mahogany, cherry, inlays of burlled maple and flame grained mahogany, poplar, white pine, glass, brass, paint and gilt.

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