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WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART RECEIVES BEQUEST FROM STEPHEN GRAY COLLECTION OF AMERICAN ARTS AND CRAFTS

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art—America’s oldest public art museum—has received a substantial bequest from celebrated Arts and Crafts collector Stephen Gray (1936–2013). The museum has acquired 50 objects from the collection of Gray, which includes early Gustav Stickley furniture and an array of Arts and Crafts metalwork, prints and pottery. Gray began collecting Arts and Crafts for his country home in upstate New York in the 1970s, making strategic purchases and trades for coveted Stickley furniture and Arts and Crafts objects.

The Arts and Crafts Movement is one of the most important periods of design reform that elevated hand-craftsmanship in tandem with modern design. Gray’s bequest captures his advanced knowledge of the field and enables the museum to interpret new areas of the American Arts and Crafts Movement in its galleries.

“Stephen Gray’s generosity is of enormous benefit to the Wadsworth,” said Susan L. Talbott, Director and C.E.O. “Stephen’s astute vision and ambition in collecting will benefit visitors and researchers at the Wadsworth for years to come.”

The museum developed a relationship with Gray during the later years of his life—a bond which culminated in the 2008 exhibition and catalogue, “At Home with Gustav Stickley: Arts and Crafts from the Stephen Gray Collection.” During the organization of the exhibition and the years following, Gray expressed his intent to donate works from his collection to the Wadsworth. Working in collaboration with Gray, Richard Koopman Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts Alyce Englund carefully selected objects that would meaningfully fill gaps within the museum’s collection of American decorative arts and exponentially expand the Wadsworth’s holdings, particularly with regard to furniture and metalwork.

“Truly, the Stephen Gray Collection has transformed the fabric of American Decorative Arts Collection at the Wadsworth Atheneum,” said Englund. “This gift is among the most historic advents in the institution’s collecting history.”

The profile of the Stephen Gray Collection of American Arts and Crafts distinguishes the Wadsworth as a place for the study of American Arts and Crafts. The wealth of works bestowed by Gray opens opportunities for collaboration or exhibition with complementary collections of Arts and Crafts at other major institutions.

About the Collection

In 2009, the Wadsworth received 18 pieces of iconic Stickley furniture from Gray, most notably a Harvey Ellis arm chair with metallic inlay and an inviting Eastwood chair and footstool, which remain on view in the Avery building. The final gift of 32 objects acquired this year boasts signature designs including the abstracted “‘Poppy’ Table, Model No. 26,” c. 1901 and a “Joiner’s compass” desk lamp, that echoes Stickley’s stamped trademark often seen with the motto “Als ik kan” (“If I can” or “To the best of my abilities”). Also of interest are ceramic vessels and art tiles from Newcomb College, Gates-Teco, Grueby, Marblehead and Rookwood potteries; a jonquils vase by Marie de Hoa LeBlanc of Newcomb College; and a goose bowl by Albina Mangini of the Saturday Evening Girls-Paul Revere Pottery.

While the strengths of the Gray gift remain in ceramics and furniture, the donation of rare lighting fixtures, metalwork, works on paper, as well as the regional diversity of artists deserve special attention. Gray bequeathed important works by West Coast artists including the landscape printmaker Gustav Baumann (1881–1971) and metalworkers Dirk Van Erp (1908–1977) and Elizabeth D’Arcy Gaw (1868–1944). In addition, the Gray gift presents the Wadsworth’s first work by architect Marion Mahony Griffin (1871–1961), an associate of Frank Lloyd Wright, and sconces she designed for the David Amberg house in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest public art museum in the United States. The museum’s nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The museum’s five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Connecticut. Hours: Wed – Fri: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sat & Sun: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; First Thursdays: 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 10; discounts for members, students and seniors. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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