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## MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON ART OF THE AMERICAS WING

### OVERVIEW

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The focal point of the MFA’s expansion is a new wing for the Museum’s Art of the Americas collections. Featuring works from the founding of 17<sup>th</sup>-century colonies in North America through the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the collections also include masterpieces of ancient Central and South America, as well as Native North America, from prehistoric times to the present day. The wing enables the Museum to showcase more than 5,000 works from the Americas, more than doubling the number previously on view.

Designed by Foster + Partners (London), the 121,307-square-foot wing for the Art of the Americas is located on the east side of the Museum. The elegant structure comprises a central glass building flanked to the north and south by pavilions made of glass and the same Deer Isle granite used in the MFA’s original Beaux Arts building. It features 53 galleries, which include nine period rooms and four Behind the Scenes galleries; the Barbara and Theodore Alford Auditorium; two studio arts classrooms; and a seminar room for educational programs. The wing for the Art of the Americas will serve as an international resource for the study of art, history, and culture of North, Central, and South America.

The Museum’s new wing was designed specifically for the MFA’s Art of the Americas collections. Gallery installations create visual dialogues that enhance the appreciation of the collections’ depth and breadth, as well as the stylistic development of art from the Americas. Works in all media—paintings, sculpture, furniture, decorative arts, works on paper, musical instruments, textiles and costumes—are integrated throughout the wing. In addition, accommodations have been made for monumental paintings, most of which have not been on view in the context of the American collection—in some cases for decades—owing to the previous lack of large-scale exhibition space. This sets the stage for the “rebirth” of numerous MFA masterpieces of artistic and historical significance, among them, *King Lear* (1788) by Benjamin West, *George IV When Prince of Wales* (1809) by John Singleton Copley, *The Passage of the Delaware* (1819) by Thomas Sully, the newly acquired wall painting, *Boston Harbor* (about 1824) by Rufus Porter, and *The British Fleet Forming a Line off Algiers* (1829) by Robert Salmon.

The wing’s galleries are organized on four levels according to culture, period, region, style, theme, artist, and maker, reflecting a broad range of art from all of the Americas. Each level features large core galleries in the center, flanked by additional galleries on either side and beyond in the pavilions. All of these galleries invite visitors to journey through time, from the first millennium BC—the date of the earliest Olmec art in the collection and the prehistoric era of Native American art on Level LG (Lower Ground)—to the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on Level 3. Nine period rooms, dating from the late 17<sup>th</sup> through the mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, are located on Levels LG, 1, and 2; four Behind the Scenes galleries are on Levels 1 and 2. Three galleries incorporate collections of light-sensitive prints, drawings, photographs, textiles, and costumes that will be rotated on a regular basis. Additionally, select galleries feature interactive touch screens.

**Level LG (Lower Ground)—Ancient American, Native American, 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and Maritime Art**

Visitors entering this level are greeted by the magnificent, decorated burial urns (650-850 AD) made by the ancestors of the K'iché Maya of Guatemala. Core galleries showcase art of the ancient Americas and Native North America from about 900 BC to the present. Rich assemblages of art and artifacts—including exceptional examples of goldwork from regions now part of Panama and Colombia, Andean textiles, the foremost collection of classic Maya ceramics outside of Guatemala, and a range of Native American works—allow visitors to experience the variety, individuality, and creativity of the indigenous people living in North, Central, and South America. Also on this level, the beginnings of colonial life in the New England region are illustrated by the Museum's unparalleled collection of 17<sup>th</sup>- and early 18<sup>th</sup>-century portraits, furniture, silver, domestic textiles, colonial embroidery, and samplers. Complementing these spaces is a gallery devoted to ship models and the maritime world, which was central to the patterns of colonization and commercial development of the Americas. Level LG also features the Brown-Pearl Hall (about 1704) and Manning House (1692-93) frame. Both structures illustrate the heavy mortise-and-tenon construction favored by Anglo-American builders, and the Brown-Pearl Hall displays a massive open-hearth fireplace, a rare early bed, and other furnishings—all of which demonstrate the multi-purpose nature of a hall of this period.

**Level G (Ground)**

This level features the 150-seat Barbara and Theodore Alford Auditorium for lectures, films, and concerts, as well as two studio art classrooms and a seminar room used for educational programs. This mezzanine level can be accessed by an elevator and stairs.

**Level 1—18<sup>th</sup>-Century Art of the Colonial Americas and Early 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Art**

The focus on this level is 18<sup>th</sup>-century art of the colonial Americas, produced primarily in New England and the Northeast, but also highlighting works of the period from the Spanish colonies of Central and South America. Prominently displayed is John Singleton Copley's iconic portrait of Paul Revere, the revolutionary and silversmith, whose famous work, the *Sons of Liberty Bowl* (1768), is on view adjacent to the painting. Galleries feature Colonial Boston and the art of the United States created just before and in the wake of the American Revolution. The new nation is reflected in paintings, furniture, textiles, and silver, including portraits of Revolutionary War figures, such as John Hancock, by John Singleton Copley; distinctive Boston, Philadelphia, and New York furniture; and iconic paintings of George and Martha Washington (1796) by Gilbert Stuart; as well as Thomas Sully's monumental *Passage of the Delaware* (1819), a commanding depiction of Washington and his troops. This level exhibits a range of cosmopolitan styles, as well as their interpretations in rural regions. Copley's works appear in several galleries, and his dramatic image of *Watson and the Shark* (1778) is displayed in a space dedicated to his paintings, drawings, and miniatures. Another gallery presents an overview of Copley's experiences, and those of his fellow artists, working abroad.

Three period rooms on Level 1—the dining room, parlor, and bedchamber—from the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century mansion known as Oak Hill (1800–1801), originally located in present-day Peabody, MA, were designed by Salem's famous architect and carver Samuel McIntire. They provide an intimate look at the neoclassical interiors and lifestyle of one of the wealthiest families in the United States. An adjacent gallery is devoted to the high-style furniture of John and Thomas Seymour, the neoclassical silver of Paul Revere, portraits by Gilbert Stuart, and other paintings of the neoclassical period by Henry Sargent and Washington Allston. This level also features a gallery that displays the arts of New Spain—showing how Spain influenced the culture of Central and South America—particularly silver, textiles, and portraiture from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two Behind the Scenes galleries that focus on collecting and conservation are also located on this level.

### **Level 2—19<sup>th</sup>-Century and Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Art**

Works of art featured on Level 2 evoke many of the ways in which 19<sup>th</sup>-century American art and culture were shaped by the nation's expanded role in the international context. Centrally located on this floor is a large gallery devoted to more than 25 paintings, watercolors, and drawings by expatriate artist John Singer Sargent. His iconic portrait, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882), serves as the centerpiece and is flanked by the two monumental Japanese-style vases that appear in the painting. Also on display are masterful works in all media from various stages of his career, including the elegant painting, *Mrs. Fiske Warren (Gretchen Osgood) and Her Daughter Rachel* (1903), and the monumental 1904 portrait, *Lord Londonderry* (1904). The adjacent core gallery focuses on American artists touring Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and showcases paintings hung floor to ceiling in salon style, complemented by sculpture of the period. Paintings by Winslow Homer (*The Fog Warning*, 1885) and Thomas Eakins (*Starting Out After Rail*, 1874) are on view in a nearby gallery, while another features American Impressionists, such as Childe Hassam (*Boston Common at Twilight*, 1885–86), and Mary Cassatt (*In the Loge*, 1878).

Also on view are works representing Folk Art, including the evocative *Pictorial quilt* (1895–98) by former slave Harriet Powers, and a wall of whimsical weather vanes. Another gallery features the Aesthetic Movement, displaying a Louis Comfort Tiffany stained glass window, *Parakeets and Gold Fish Bowl* (1893), and Charles Caryl Coleman's painting, *Still Life with Azaleas and Apple Blossoms* (1878). Galleries devoted to the American Renaissance, Arts and Crafts, and the Boston School are on this level, as well as two mid 19<sup>th</sup>-century rooms from the Roswell Gleason House in Dorchester, MA. Acquired in 1977 and now installed within the Museum for the first time, these rooms offer new settings for a range of mid 19<sup>th</sup>-century decorative arts and paintings, while galleries nearby explore related themes of dining, innovation, and entertainment in the same period. In addition, two Behind the Scenes galleries offer an exploration of how curators and conservators classify and make choices about works of art in the Museum.

### **Level 3—20<sup>th</sup>-Century Art through the mid 1980s**

Galleries on this level explore 20<sup>th</sup>-century art through the mid 1980s. Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism are featured in the central gallery, where ceiling louvers filter the natural light. There, works by Jackson Pollock (*Troubled Queen*, 1945), Arshile Gorky (*Good Hope Road*, 1945), and Chilean-born Matta (Roberto Sebastian Matta Echaurren) (*Cercle de Blé*, 1953) are on view, along with paintings by Franz Kline (*Probst I*, 1960), Norman Lewis (*Untitled*, 1964) and Philip Guston (*The Deluge*, 1969). Also featured are mobiles, stabiles, sculpture, and jewelry by Alexander Calder; sculpture by David Smith (*Cubi XVIII*, 1964); and a monumental ceramic piece (*Camelback Mountain*, 1959) by Peter Voulkos. Color field paintings, such as Morris Louis's *Breaking Hue* (1954), are juxtaposed with hard-edge Abstractionist works by César Paternosto, Al Loving, and Frank Stella.

Level 3 also showcases The Lane Collection of early modernist paintings and works on paper by Charles Sheeler (*Ore into Iron*, 1953), Georgia O'Keeffe (*Deer's Skull with Pedernal*, 1936), Arthur Dove (*That Red One*, 1944), and Stuart Davis (*Hot Still Scape*, 1940). In addition, galleries on this level present a range of artists working in the realist vein, including John Sloan, George Bellows, Edward Hopper, Walker Hancock, Alan Rohan Crite, Eldzier Cortor, Andrew Wyeth, Claudio Bravo, and Norman Rockwell (*New Kids in the Neighborhood*, 1967), and a rotating gallery highlights photographs by Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange, and Ansel Adams.

Two galleries incorporate a rich mixture of decorative arts, paintings, and works on paper. One reflects the glamour and urban aesthetic during the Jazz Age of the 1920s and '30s with works by artists such as Joseph Stella (*Old Brooklyn Bridge*, about 1941), Paul Frankl (*Skyscraper desk and bookcase*, about 1928), and

Victor Schreckengost (*Jazz Bowl*, 1931). Another gallery explores various forms of geometric and biomorphic abstraction in a range of media produced by artists working in the United States and Latin America during the 1940s and '50s. This gallery features paintings and works on paper by members of the American Abstract Artists Group, such as Ilya Bolotowsky (*Spiral Movement*, 1951) and Esphyr Slobodkina (*Tamara Abstraction*, 1945), as well as Josef Albers, Ralph Colburn, and Joaquín Torres-García. Other highlights include ceramics by Russel Wright as well as Jackson Pollock, who painted a ceramic bowl while he was undergoing Jungian analysis; decorative arts by Charles and Ray Eames; jewelry by a variety of artists, including Art Smith, Sam Kramer, and Margaret de Patta; and metalwork by Claire Falkenstein.

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