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**ART OF THE AMERICAS WING
LEVEL LG (LOWER GROUND) GALLERY DESCRIPTIONS**

ANCIENT AMERICAN, NATIVE AMERICAN, 17TH-CENTURY, AND MARITIME ARTS

Ancient Mesoamerica (LG32)



Mask, 900–500 BC, Olmec

The foundation for the Art of the Americas collections is located on Level LG with two galleries devoted to ancient American art and one large gallery for Native North American art. The first gallery features Mesoamerica (modern-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras). Upon entering the Art of the Americas Wing, across from the Ann and Graham Gund Gallery for special exhibitions, visitors are greeted by the enormous, highly decorated burial urns (650-850 AD) made by the ancestors of the K'iché Maya of Guatemala. A highlight of the gallery is the Museum's superb collection of Classic Maya ceramics, the foremost of its kind outside of Guatemala (an interactive touch screen explores various themes presented in these ceramics). Set against a background of evergreen, these include the artist Mo'n Buluk Laj's masterpiece depicting the birth of the Maize god (755-780 AD), considered among the finest Maya works created. Royal jewelry and body adornments—Olmec jades, especially a superb portrait mask, from Mexico, and a newly acquired Veracruz ballgame yoke (450-700 AD)—are also exhibited, along with a fine selection of art from other ancient cultures of Mexico.

Wall Text

Please see attached maps: *The Cultures of Mesoamerica and Maya Culture*

The word Mesoamerica is not ancient. It was invented in the middle of the 20th century and simply means “middle America”—in other words, between North and South. Scholars had long noted that the ancient cultures of today's Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador shared many features, and they wanted a term under which to gather the remarkable civilizations that flourished there. As early as 1200 BC, the region emerged as one of the world's great cradles of civilization. The area is filled with marvels of engineering—pyramids, palaces, irrigation systems—that attest to the dynamism of a sequence of cultures that stretched across more than 2500 years, until abruptly interrupted by the Spanish conquest in the 1520s.

The interrelationships between the cultures are complicated, and there is much we don't know. Writing emerged early in Mexico, culminating in the extraordinary hieroglyphs of the Maya, but it is only in the last few decades that scholars have learned to read those glyphs. The decipherment opened historical windows long assumed to be forever shut. Today, the study of Mesoamerica is an extraordinarily dynamic field; new information comes to light, and new historical connections are made every day.

Pre-Columbian Gold and Andean Civilizations (LG33)



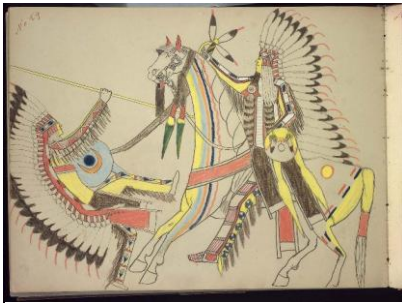
Shaman effigy pendant, AD 900–1600, Tairona

Examples of the Museum’s renowned collection of ancient Central and South American art are showcased in this gallery. Textiles from Peru will be seen on a rotating basis, providing an opportunity for visitors to compare Andean imagery in a variety of media, including gold, ceramics, and fiber arts. Goldwork from the various cultures that lived in ancient Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia is on display, set against an indigo background, including a striking cast gold “cacique” figural pectoral, enigmatic “tunjo” cache figures made by the Muisca people, and large-scale dynamic body adornments from southern Colombia. Ceramics from other ancient Andean cultures are also featured.

These range from vessels created by the Nasca people, boldly painted with abstract motifs and schematized renderings of the human form, to hand-modeled and mold-made sculptural pottery in the shape of fruits, animals, and historical figures made by the Moche and Chimú cultures of northern Peru. In addition, an array of musical instruments, including ocarinas, shell trumpets, rattles, and hand drums, address the role performance played among many ancient American cultures to convey social, political and religious principles.

Please see attached map: *The Cultures of Central America and the Andes*

Native North American Art (LG34)



Drawing No. 24 (from Ledger Book Containing 33 Drawings), 1885, Silver Horn

Works of art created by the diverse indigenous peoples of North America were among the earliest objects collected by the MFA after its opening in 1876. The collection now spans the continental United States and Canada from ancient times to modern day. A prominent feature of this gallery is the Museum’s extensive collection of pottery from the Puebloan peoples of Arizona and New Mexico, which includes outstanding ancient works from the period before contact with the Spanish (patterned ceramics by the ancient Mimbres and Anasazi). The MFA’s collection also includes objects from the time following the arrival of the Spanish, represented by 19th- and early 20th-century pottery from many pueblos, including those Zia and Zuni decorated with abstract birds. Also on view is pottery made by the ancient Mississippian Tradition “Mound Builders” of the mid-West and

Southeast; basketry of California and the plains peoples; Diné (Navajo) textiles and jewelry; an Apache headdress; moccasins by Eastern Woodlands people; spectacular objects from the Pacific Northwest, including a mid 19th-century Tsimshian chief’s chest, a Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwakiutl) potlach figure, and a recently acquired Chilkat dancing blanket; as well as masks and scrimshaw produced by Inuit (Eskimos). This gallery also features modern Native American artists in various media, including paintings, works on paper, ceramics, jewelry, glass, basketry, and textiles in both traditional and contemporary modes. Highlighted are works by artist Preston Singletary, who explores his connection with ancient customs, along with paintings and works on paper by such artists as Stan Natchez and Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, and ceramics by Nathan Begaye and Diego Romero.

Wall Text

Please see attached map: *The Native Cultures of North America*

The history of the native peoples of North America extends back thousands of years and takes in an entire continent. So this gallery can only hint at the grand sweep of the art of the “five hundred nations,” from ancient works of the Mississippi valley to contemporary art. The MFA collected Native American art early—we acquired the first works shown here in 1877—but for most of the 20th century the institution largely ignored Native traditions. It is only in the

last few decades that the collection has begun again to grow. Unlike most galleries at the MFA, this one mixes old and new. Many of today's Native artists feel close kinship with the past and often discuss their works' connections to traditional art. Much of this recent work addresses the question of identity and the challenge of finding a balance between continuity and change—of seeking freedom *within* tradition as well as freedom *from* tradition.

17th -Century New England; Brown-Pearl Room (LG35)



*Mrs. Richard Patteshall
(Martha Woody) and Child,*
1679, attributed to Thomas
Smith

Built in Boxford, Massachusetts, north of Boston, about 1704, the Brown-Pearl room illustrates New England domestic life in the first years of the 18th century. Based on descriptions of 17th-century inventories, the room has been furnished with chairs, tables, metalwork, and other objects found in an Essex County home of the period, illustrating the multi-purpose nature of a 17th-century hall. The room is dominated by a massive open-hearth fireplace and showcases a rare early bed. The timber frame of the room exemplifies the heavy mortise-and-tenon construction used by immigrant builders during the earliest years of the Anglo-American colonies. Outside of the room, 17th- and early 18th-century furniture is featured representing various New England shop traditions and illustrating various decorative techniques, such as carving and painting. The gallery also includes a rare double portrait of the period, *Mrs. Richard Patteshall (Martha Woody) and Child* (1679), attributed to Thomas Smith.

Wall Text

Many of the earliest English settlers of New England were devout, God-fearing people. Some had come to North America hoping to create a new community organized around religious principles. Theirs was an austere religion, centered on sermons and Bible study, with few rituals and little religious art. The extreme plainness of their form of Protestantism has led to a belief that the Puritans, as they called themselves, also enforced extreme plainness in clothing and decoration—that early New England was a world nearly devoid of color and ornament. The reality is more nuanced. Puritans *were* wary of the inappropriate display of wealth, and even passed laws to control excessive ostentation. But people violated those laws with great regularity. This gallery features works from the domestic world—furniture, portraits, even a whole room—that give a glimpse of the richness of color and pattern that surrounded the early colonists.

Wall Text

The Brown-Pearl House, West Boxford, Massachusetts, about 1704

Sometime around 1704, a farmer named Cornelius Brown and his wife, Susannah, built a house in the small town of West Boxford, north of Boston. This room was on the ground floor, with one room above and a small addition at the back. As in many early New England houses, this room—called simply the “hall”—was the central living space and served many functions, including cooking, eating, and sleeping. The furniture here is not original to the room, but it represents the kinds of furnishings often described in household inventories of the period. Much of the furniture here was made by local Essex County furniture makers of the period, and a relatively well-to-do family like the Browns might also have owned smaller, imported luxuries, like the German pottery we have included in the display. Around 1725, the Browns expanded their house. The rectangular cutouts in the beam above your head are for ceiling joists for an addition that extended in the direction you are standing. In 1738 the house passed to Richard Pearl and descended in his family for nearly two centuries. In 1925, when the house was being torn down, the museum acquired two rooms, including the heavy oak frame, pine wall paneling, fireplace bricks, and floor boards from this room, which are all original to the house.

17th -Century New England; Manning Room (LG36)



*Chest of drawers with doors,
1670–1700*

This gallery has been designed around the large, dramatic timber frame from the second floor of the late 17th-century Manning House from Ipswich, Massachusetts, now installed as an architectural setting for decorative arts and paintings. Examples of the MFA's unparalleled collection of 17th- and early 18th-century North American furniture, silver, and portrait paintings, primarily from New England, are featured. The case furniture and chairs on display represent many of the regional shop traditions of the period and are arranged in groupings comparing the early furniture of the Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, and Connecticut Colonies. Domestic and ecclesiastical silver by Boston silversmiths, including rare examples by John Hull and Robert Sanderson, Jeremiah Dummer, Edward Webb, and John Coney, are well represented, as are European ceramics.

Wall Text

The first European artisans to work in New England had been trained in old England. Since English furniture varied from place to place, those regional differences crossed the ocean as well. The artisans trained apprentices, establishing traditions that endured for decades. Seventeenth-century New England furniture is relatively rare today, so the examples here provide an unusual opportunity to test the eye and compare styles from Boston, Plymouth, and a number of other towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Furniture was made throughout the colonies, but silversmiths tended to congregate in large towns, especially Boston and New York. In Boston, silversmiths worked in the latest London styles, making pieces for churches and private customers; but New York had begun as a Dutch colony—New Amsterdam—and silversmiths there often made objects in forms that reflected the town's Dutch heritage. Portrait painters also worked in the larger towns, but other expensive items still needed to be imported from Europe. The glass and ceramics we've put in this gallery are similar to ones that have come to light—usually broken—in archaeological excavations of early sites throughout New England.

Wall Text

The “Manning” House, Ipswich, Massachusetts, about 1692

The wooden frame behind you was once part of a house in Ipswich, Massachusetts, north of Boston. The house was most likely built for a merchant named William Stewart, who acquired the property on March 5, 1692, for £65 in silver and £20 in pork. By August of 1693, the property was worth £300, suggesting that he had made a major improvement—probably this house. Over the years, the house changed hands several times. In 1818 it was acquired by Jacob Manning, Jr., and the Manning name has been associated with the house ever since.

Originally, this frame formed the second floor of the house. The posts behind you were at the front of the house; the ones nearer the gallery's long wall were toward the back. In the original house, the second floor was divided probably into two rooms separated by a stair hall and a chimney stack.

George Putnam Gallery / Ship Models and Maritime Arts (LG28)



100-gun ship of the line,
About 1715–1719

This gallery is devoted to the golden age of maritime ship models, paintings, and decorative arts, all of which are presented as though installed in a collector's ship room for maritime arts, with ship models displayed in cases by Goppion Museum Workshop—floating, seemingly, on a green glass ocean. For hundreds of years, craftsmen have celebrated and disseminated technological advances in sea faring by building streamlined hull models and minutely detailed ship models, such as the Dutch East-Indiaman, *Valkenisse* (1717), and other English, French, and American examples, including the *Constitution* (1928) and *Flying Cloud* (1915). Artists such as Robert Salmon (*The British Fleet Forming a Line Off Algiers*, 1829), Fitz Henry Lane (*New York Harbor*, about 1855), and William Bradford (*Icebound Whaling Ship*, about 1875), painted maritime views. Others recorded the topography of harbors, commemorated battles, and memorialized ships and their captains. Maritime arts were not always commissioned from professional artists—sailors and prisoners of war often occupied their time with model making and carving scrimshaw in many forms. The variety of works presented in this gallery allows visitors to explore a maritime world intricately tied to the colonization and commercial development of the Americas.

Wall Text

This gallery captures the great age of sail—the late 17th through the 19th centuries—when exploration, conquest, immigration, and trade shifted boundaries and shrank the world. Ships like the ones here are the very reason much of the art in this Museum came to be; they carried the objects, styles, and people—enslaved and free—that are key to the story of the arts of the Americas. Ship models were made for a host of reasons. Some were presentation pieces meant to help win a contract for an actual ship; some were used in shipyards to guide builders; some served to instruct sailors in handling ships. Others are the product of leisure time—either enforced leisure in the case of models made by prisoners of war, or more pleasant hours spent by retired sailors hoping to recapture the adventurous past. Whatever the purpose, making models requires mind-bending patience and attention to detail. The models here attest to the extraordinary skill and dedication of their makers, but they are also important documents of maritime history. For, despite their great fragility, models often prove more durable than actual ships. Of the dozens of vessels represented in the paintings and models here, only one survives today: the *USS Constitution*, docked in Boston.

Burton A. Cleaves Gallery / Trade and the Arts in the Atlantic World: 1700–1750 (LG27)



Sugar box, about 1680–1685,
John Coney

The gallery presents colonial North American objects of the baroque style, which is characterized by elaborate ornament, richly patterned surface treatments, and imported exotic materials. Veneered furniture, including high chests and dressing tables, carved high-backed cane chairs, and other highly decorated new furniture forms demonstrate colonial craftsmen's engagement with the period interest in light and space. Outstanding examples of silver candlesticks, sugar boxes, chocolate pots, and wine cups by John Coney, Edward Webb, John Noyes, Jeremiah Dummer, and others demonstrate the richness of American silver in this period, with its elaborate surfaces and use of symbolic ornament. Paintings by John Smibert, one of the first important British-born artists to work in the North American colonies, also are shown here, among them his iconic portrait of the *Oliver Brothers* (1732). Adjacent to the Ship Model and Maritime Arts Gallery, this gallery further explores topics of trade and exchange throughout the Atlantic Basin during the early 18th century.

Wall Text

Already by 1700, the English colonies in North America were active players in an intricate network of trade and exchange that stretched across the Atlantic from Europe to Africa and the Caribbean. The trade routes that bound this world together carried commodities and people—both free and enslaved—as well as ideas and artistic styles. The colonies produced raw materials, especially sugar, tobacco, furs, and timber. In return, England and Europe supplied manufactured goods and finished products. As English colonies grew wealthier, the rich did their best to keep up with the latest London had to offer.

The artworks in this gallery are all products of that cosmopolitan world. Most were made in the colonies, but we have included English works for comparison, and in many cases the “American” works were made by craftsmen who had trained in Europe. Taken together, the furniture, silver, and paintings help trace the American interpretations of the dramatic and exuberant style—called baroque today—that dominated European arts from about 1600 to 1760. The baroque style, as well as new craft techniques, and an increasingly refined lifestyle, came to America through imported goods, immigrant artists and craftsmen, and aristocrats who lived in the colonies on temporary government duty.

Edward and Nancy Roberts Family Gallery / Rotating Gallery for Textiles (LG26)—*Embroideries of Colonial Boston: Samplers*



Sampler, 1771, Sally Jackson

This gallery features special exhibitions on a rotating basis beginning with a selection of colonial embroidery created in Boston. The embroideries of Colonial Boston girls and women have long been treasured family possessions and are now much sought after by collectors. The charm and craftsmanship of Adam and Eve samplers, pastoral pictures with leaping stags and galloping hunters, as well as crewelwork bed hangings and delicately embroidered baby caps bring to mind a warm domesticity; however, they also reveal much about the lives of Boston women and their role within colonial society. Over the next year and a half, this gallery will present a series of exhibitions focusing on three types of needlework—samplers, schoolgirl pictures, and domestic embroideries—revealing the role of embroidery in the education of women, in their domestic lives, and as an important source of household income. A catalogue accompanies these installations.

Embroideries of Colonial Boston: Samplers: through March 13, 2011

Colonial Boston samplers played an important role in educating young women by teaching them embroidery and the ability to recognize letters and numbers. The use of samplers was common in Europe and when the first New England colonists arrived they brought their samplers with them to help educate their children. A pair of 17th-century samplers brought to Boston will be exhibited to show the Boston samplers' English roots, as well as examples of samplers from East Anglia, where many colonial Boston families originated. These share many similarities with some of the earliest known Boston work. During the 18th century, schools were established to teach embroidery, and distinctive sampler styles developed that have been associated with specific neighborhoods. The show will feature many of these styles including Boston's most famous samplers, which are identified by the depiction of Adam and Eve at the bottom. *Embroideries of Colonial Boston: Samplers is supported by the Coby Foundation, Ltd. and sponsored by Northern Trust. Additional support is provided by the MFA Associates/MFA Senior Associates Exhibition Endowment Fund.*