

PRESS RELEASE

Minneapolis Institute of Art Unveils New Phase of “Living Rooms,” an Initiative To Reinterpret the Museum’s Period Rooms and Decorative Arts

Reimagined Charleston Rooms, 18th-century English Rooms, and Providence Parlor Now on View



Charleston Drawing Room, 1772, United States. Cypress, paint. Gift of James F. and Louise H. Bell in memory of James S. and Sallie M. Bell.

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Minneapolis, June 8, 2017— Four new temporary exhibitions in four different suites of historic interiors from the United States and Europe are on view at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) through April 15, 2018. The installations are part of “Living Rooms,” an ambitious and unprecedented multi-year initiative to reinvigorate the museum’s period rooms. These new experiential installations tell the story of Mia’s decorative arts collection by placing the past in dialogue with the present, and fostering a broader conversation that includes the histories of marginalized peoples, the senses, and even time.

“Period rooms have long been a staple of the encyclopedic art museum, but their purpose, interpretation, and relevance has come into question in the few decades,” said Alex Bortolot, PhD, curatorial content strategist at Mia. “With ‘Living Rooms,’ Mia is leading the field in rethinking the possibilities of and opportunities with period rooms. We see each of these projects as an experiment—what we’ll learn will help us and, we hope, enable other museums to create new strategies for engaging visitors and connecting them to the histories embedded in these spaces.”

Mia first launched the “Living Rooms” project in 2014, in collaboration with the Milwaukee-based Chipstone Foundation, dedicated to supporting scholarship on American decorative arts, by organizing a series of conversations around the concept of the period room, as well as through site visits in Boston and Los Angeles. Artists, journalists, creative professionals, and academics participated in these dialogues to develop approaches for reimagining the period rooms at Mia, including narrative and experiential programming, interventions by practicing artists, and onsite lighting and sound strategies.

“At Mia, we are always experimenting with our spaces and presenting our collections in innovative ways to better engage our visitors,” said Kaywin Feldman, Mia’s Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President. “Period rooms can be incredible windows into the past, and can also help us understand contemporary society. With the ‘Living Rooms’ project, we are using new forms of interpretation—and the power of the senses—to bring these treasures to life so that our visitors can not only engage with the objects on view, but also the lives of the people who used these rooms and made them their home.”

Mia

Supported by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and donors of the 2014 Mia Gala, this new phase of "Living Rooms" includes the following four new exhibitions, with additional installations planned for 2018 or 2019.



Charleston Dining Room, 1772, United States. Cypress, paint. Gift of James F. and Louise H. Bell in memory of James S. and Sallie M. Bell.

"The Many Voices of Colonial America"

This exhibition reinterprets the dining and drawing room of the 1772 Charleston house of Col. John Stuart, an owner of enslaved Africans who served as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Britain's southern colonies. Colonial-era and contemporary Cherokee art will respond to this moment in history by revealing stories of diplomatic relations and travel between the Cherokee Nation and the British Crown. West African and African American objects will tell important stories of Charleston's dependence on enslaved West Africans' indigenous knowledge of rice cultivation, which was exploited for commercial gain, and the West African cultural connections that persist in South Carolina today. Object highlights include an embroidered deerskin coat (1854) that blends European styling with Cherokee imagery, a powder horn (1768) depicting scenes from the first Indian Congress at Fort Picolata, a Cherokee gambling basket (2013) by artist Shan Goshorn, and a Cherokee artist's bandolier bag (1825-50).



Georgian Drawing Room, 1740, England. Pine. Gift of Mrs. Eugene J. Carpenter and Mrs. Folwell Coan in memory of Eugene J. Carpenter.

"Science and Sociability in 1700s England"

This installation presents Mia's 18th-century English rooms as places for the pursuit of science. Genteel men and women studied and conversed about natural history in their private homes. Before the professionalization of science, women often engaged with scientific discoveries and cultivated observational skills through embroidery and drawing. The Queen Anne Room (c. 1730) will feature works on paper and textiles made by women; the adjoining Georgian Drawing Room (c. 1740) will be arranged for a "scientific party" where curious men and women socialized amidst telescopes, microscopes, an electrostatic generator, and tea.



Grand Salon from the Hôtel de la Bouëxière, 1735, France. Wood, paint, plaster, gilt, marble, iron. Gift of the Groves Foundation.

“Up All Night in the 18th Century”

Showcasing popular night life and nocturnal soirées, which were often private affairs hosted in elite homes, Mia’s Grand Salon from the Hôtel de la Bouëxière will evoke one of these exclusive parties. It will display games table for card-playing, candlesticks, and the required stimulants—coffee and chocolate—along with new lighting. Simulated flickering flames will reveal the warm glow of gilded paneling and metalwork in a “nighttime” setting, and the increased importance of artificial lighting with candles and fire as the well-to-do stayed up ever later to party.



Providence Parlor, 1760–70, United States. Pine. The William Hood Dunwoody Fund.

“Just Imported: Global Trade in 1700s New England”

This exhibition restores the Providence Parlor to its former glory as prime real estate on an 18th-century wharf in Providence, Rhode Island. The parlor’s owners, brothers Joseph and William Russell, operated a prosperous import and export business, and their store—The Sign of the Golden Eagle— offered a resplendent selection of imported fabrics, exotic spices, fine housewares, and hogsheads of rum, among other goods. With their wealth, they built the first three-story home in Providence. Originally installed at Mia in 1923, the parlor, along with its original inhabitants and harbor-side location, is brought back to life through a naturalistic soundscape, multisensory discovery cabinet of mercantile curios, and animated shadow puppets.

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About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 89,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday 10am–5pm

Thursday, Friday 10am–9pm

Sunday 11am–5pm

Monday Closed

For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org

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