

HARVARD'S FOGG ART MUSEUM PRESENTS EXHIBITION OF ARTWORKS AND ARTIFACTS WITH BOTH AESTHETIC AND HISTORIC CONSIDERATIONS

“A Public Patriotic Museum” Features Objects from the General Artemas Ward House and Chronicles the Role of Family’s Women in the Preservation of the Objects and the Ward Legacy



Raphaelle Peale (1774–1825), Artemas Ward (1727–1800), 1795. Oil on canvas, 72.4 x 61.8 x 4.5. Photo: Courtesy of the General Artemas Ward House, Shrewsbury, MA.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (August 18, 2006)—The Harvard University Art Museums present “*A Public Patriotic Museum*”: *Artworks and Artifacts from the General Artemas Ward House* from **October 14, 2006 through February 11, 2007** at the Fogg Art Museum. The exhibition is drawn from the holdings of the General Artemas Ward House, a Harvard-owned museum in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. Artemas Ward commanded the Patriot militia beseiging British-held Boston from April 1775 until the appointment of George Washington in July. Subsequently he served in the Provincial and Continental Congresses, the second and third U.S.

Congresses, and as chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas of Worcester County. On display will be a variety of extraordinary late 18th- to early 20th-century artworks and artifacts from the Ward homestead, including paintings, furniture, textiles, ceramics, glassware, and domestic and agricultural tools. By presenting artworks and domestic artifacts for aesthetic attention, the exhibition also questions the common assumption that the aesthetic qualities of artworks and artifacts are irrelevant to the writing of history.

The exhibition is organized by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 300th Anniversary University Professor and James Duncan Phillips Professor of Early American History at Harvard, and Ivan Gaskell, Margaret S. Winthrop Curator in the Department of European Painting, Sculpture and Decorative

Arts and senior lecturer on history at Harvard. The organizers seek to establish that art museums can and should encompass a range of disciplinary viewpoints, including philosophy and history, which border the aesthetic. In turn, they propose that historians can address aspects of artifacts other than the purely instrumental.

“We acknowledge that aesthetics played a role not only in the uses to which the Wards put their possessions, but also in our choice of objects for this exhibition,” said Ulrich. “Although the objects we have chosen for the exhibition have served many purposes over time, they function as artworks on this occasion.” Gaskell adds, “The objects we have chosen are varied. They include paintings that none would refute as artworks, as well as furniture, ceramics, and quilts that could enjoy a place within any art museum’s decorative arts collection. In contrast, some of the objects in the exhibition would once have been relegated to the realm of craft or that of amateur work. Intrinsic value as well as cultural equity now prompts art museums to accept as artworks objects such as these that might previously have been overlooked or left to anthropologists.”

“*A Public Patriotic Museum*” focuses on a small selection of objects associated with General Ward himself, kept and displayed as signifiers of his public eminence. These are presented in counterpoint with objects owned or made by his female descendants. Unlike the general’s, their lives remained entirely private, yet it was through their efforts that his memory was in large part preserved. Successive generations of women had preserved the general’s personal items—including his cloak, tricorne hat, snowshoes, razor and strop, an inkwell, and books—and had accorded them the status of relics. The maintenance of the house and the general’s possessions assured that his posthumous reputation remained intact, and also served to preserve the standing of the family. Following his death, the women fostered a domestic culture in which no artifact could be dispensed with, passing down their own possessions along with the general’s to future generations. The exhibition reveals an aspect of women’s roles in the creation of family, local, and national mythology.

Derived from a conference course taught jointly by Gaskell and Ulrich, the exhibition involved considerable original research by students on artifacts from the house. It also embodies conceptual and philosophical work by the organizers on the place of aesthetics in the production

of history from artifacts. “This exhibition presents a unique collaboration between two leading historians that challenges assumptions about the relation of the aesthetic to history,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “It pushes the limits of what might be expected to be shown in an art museum, and is an example of our continued efforts to find new ways to integrate those students and faculty that are outside of the discipline of Art History into the museums.”

Funding has been provided by a grant from the Office of the Provost, Harvard University.

Featured Works

Two oil paintings, *Artemas Ward (1727–1800) (1795)* by Raphaele Peale and *Elizabeth Denny Ward (1760–1846) (c. 1820)* by Ethan Allen Greenwood, depict the general and his daughter-in-law. Among the general’s personal effects are *General Ward’s tri-corner hat with lacquered paper cockade* (late 18th century), *General Ward’s cloak* (late 18th century), *General Ward’s Windsor writing chair* (late 18th century), and *General Ward’s snowshoes* (late 18th century). Items from the homestead and successive generations include *Grain riddle* (late 18th century), *Hair bouquet (family register) (c. 1850–70)*, *Willow pattern covered tureen and ladle (c. 1825–35)*, and the book *Old Times in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts: Gleanings from History and Tradition* (New York, 1892) by Elizabeth Ward. The most spectacular of the domestic artifacts is an early 19th-century feathered vine pattern indigo quilt, *Quilt: feathered vine pattern (c. 1810–40)*.

Brochure

The exhibition is accompanied by a brochure with six illustrations, an essay by curators Gaskell and Ulrich, and an exhibition checklist.

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world’s leading arts institutions, with the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, in Turkey.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation’s premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.; closed on national holidays.

Paid admission includes entrance to all three art museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks. General admission is \$7.50; \$6 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. (**EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1, 2006—NEW RATES: \$9.00 general; \$7 senior citizens.**) Admission is free for Harvard students and affiliates, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library Cardholders, and children under 18. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

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