

## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 11, 2023  
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Slides available on request

## **Beauty, Utility, Commodity**

### **Decorative Arts of Early America**

Opening August 21 and remaining on view through October 24, 1999 will be *Makers and Users: American Decorative Arts, 1630-1820, from the Chipstone Collection*. This exhibition of furniture, ceramics and prints from early America tells stories of beauty and function, of makers and consumers. It also reveals aspects of our national heritage, of a country becoming American.

Long appreciated for visual and material sumptuousness, decorative arts also address design and aesthetics, business and technology, fashion and social practices. The term "decorative arts" distinguishes these art objects from painting, sculpture and architecture, media often referred to as the "high" arts. Then as now, decorative arts are what we use to furnish and decorate our homes, set our tables and commemorate special occasions. They are also items we collect, display and invest with personal meaning.

The decorative arts in early American homes were made locally or imported from England. Early American craftsmen brought from the Old World woodworking skills and business savvy. Drawing on their experience to create new furniture-making industries in the colonies, these makers emulated European styles, following the taste of the time, but at the same time developed forms that were distinctly American.

Shifts in fashion and technology as well as in consumer taste and social behavior transformed the production of decorative arts. Such changes are expressed in increasingly refined and specialized forms, the availability of a greater number and variety of items and the use of new objects to reflect social status. The consumer's role is also seen in the growing practice of collecting pottery and prints for display and in the rise of such specialized forms as sewing tables for women, wooden chests for spices and easy chairs for the infirm.

These interlocking themes of changing makers and users are explored through close examination of nearly ninety objects from the Chipstone collection. The Philadelphia chest on chest is an extraordinary example of its type, while the

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Elderkin chair is the only known American example of its form. Important artisans represented include John and Christopher Townsend, Paul Revere, Charles Willson Peale, William Hogarth, Thomas Rowlandson. Also significant are items that were once common but rarely survive the hazards of everyday use, such as a Staffordshire slipware chamber pot. Other popular forms include a German bellarmine jug with bearded face decoration. Combining beauty and utility, this selection of works makes an exciting contribution to our understanding of the crafting of American culture.

Polly and Stanley Stone of Milwaukee began their collection of American decorative arts in 1946 with the purchase of a Salem lady's secretary and bookcase; the collection matured into one of the nation's finest private collections devoted to American decorative arts of the nation's Colonial period. The collection, broadened to include American historical prints and early English ceramics, now numbers some 500 objects. In 1965 the Stones established the Chipstone Foundation to preserve their works of art and stimulate research and education in the decorative arts. Stanley Stone died in July 1987 and Polly Stone in May 1995. Loans from the collection have been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. "The collection of American furniture at Chipstone is among the finest anywhere," wrote Morrison H. Heckscher, a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "It far surpasses that of most urban museums."

Guest curator for *Makers and Users* is Chipstone Professor of American Decorative Arts Ann Smart Martin of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Art History; students in her spring class on material culture have been active in selecting and writing on objects for the show.

As part of the University of Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial Celebration, this exhibition demonstrates the Chipstone Foundation's mission to promote advanced scholarship and education and its new affiliation with the University of Wisconsin-Madison through endowed faculty and educational programs.. The museum is grateful to the Hilldale Trust and the Evjue Foundation, Inc./ The Capital Times providing funding for the exhibition and catalogue, generous support without which the event could not have taken place. The fully illustrated catalogue will be on sale (19.95) in the Museum Shop in late August. To order call 608 263-2240.

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The Elvehjem Museum of Art is open Tuesdays-Fridays 9-5 pm; Saturdays and Sundays 11-5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the Murray Street (north) entrance. Parking is available at the city of Madison's Lake Street and Frances Street ramps, university lot 46 on Lake Street between Johnson and University Avenue, university lot 47 on Johnson Street between Park and Lake streets. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Elvehjem Museum of Art will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, 608 263-4421 (voice).  
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**Decorative Arts of Early America**

**Reception for the Exhibition**

Friday, August 27: 6:00 pm “Crafting an Exhibition: American Makers and Users,”  
slide-lecture by guest curator Ann Smart Martin, Chipstone Professor of American  
Decorative Arts followed by a reception from 6:30 to 8:00 pm in Paige Court

**Educational Programming**

**All programs are free and open to the public**

Luke Beckerdite, editor of *American Furniture*

of a Private Collection”

L140

Lecture: “American Furniture: The Evolution

Thursday, September 16, 5:30 pm, Room

Michelle Erickson, master potter

Old-fashioned Way—An Overview of Eighteenth-century Pottery Technology”

Whyte Gallery

Robert Hunter, ceramic historian, and

Demonstration and lecture: “Making Pots the

Saturday, September 25, 9:00 a.m.-12 noon,

Call 608-263-4421 for more information

Jonathan Prown, executive director, The Chipstone Foundation

Furniture”

Lecture: “New Directions in American

Sunday, October 17, 2:30 pm, Room L140

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