

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chrysler Museum of Art Presents a Fresh Look at its Porcelain Gallery
—The newly installed space highlights various historical and educational themes—



Teapot and Cover, “Cannonball” Pattern, ca. 1770,
L2005.10.13, On loan from the City of Norfolk, Gift of
Elise & Henry Clay Hofheimer, II

NORFOLK, Va. (March 6, 2019) —The Chrysler Museum of Art transports visitors to 18th-century England with the reinstatement of its porcelain gallery. Nearly 200 pieces of First Period Worcester porcelain, made in England between 1751 and 1783, are on view, including marvelous examples of tea services, tableware and decorative objects in a variety of colors and designs. The pieces are from the Hofheimer Collection. “We are excited to offer a fresh perspective on these beautiful objects. The reinstatement allows us to bring each piece to life in new and interesting ways and encourages our visitors to engage with the collection. We explore themes related to the history, design and use of the pieces,” said Carolyn Swan Needell, Ph.D., the Chrysler Museum’s Carolyn and Richard Barry Curator of Glass.

The new display is organized thematically and includes in-depth information about the form and function of the objects, the distinct blue and white color and the eastern and western design influence. Visitors will also learn about the art of tea, the people and places depicted in the designs and the painting and printing of the objects. This spring, the Chrysler will install a video showing Richmond-based ceramic artist A. Blair Clemo recreate a blue and white teapot from the collection.

One of the display cases highlights how an object’s shape is closely linked to how it was used. “Porcelain is a material that is both familiar and foreign to many people today,” said Swan Needell. “We might recognize something because we use similar objects, but how many people still use a sweet-meat dish or asparagus server? This begs the social and cultural question of why not? Encouraging our visitors to engage with the objects in this way is a major goal of the new display.”

A nearby display case invites viewers to compare the visual effects of the two major methods of decorating porcelain, painting by hand or printing with a transfer design. Because many of the designs depicting people are unfamiliar to a modern American viewer, a third display case points out the famous people and favorite motifs of the 18th-century English consumer. Another area underscores the close connection of the production of porcelain in England with an upswing in the cultural practice of drinking tea. The final two display cases explore the decoration that made Worcester porcelain so famous and appealing, namely the company's innovative adaptation of Chinese, Japanese, French and German patterns and designs.

"By organizing the objects thematically, the Chrysler's porcelain gallery offers a glimpse of the lives of people who lived in 18th-century England. We give visitors the chance to look to the past while also considering how some of these pieces can be used by their families today," said Swan Needell.

Another goal of the Chrysler's reinstallation is to examine reasons for the particular success of the Worcester Porcelain Manufactory, founded some 130 miles northwest of London in 1751. During a time of high competition among English porcelain manufacturers, Worcester stood out and flourished thanks to the high quality and inventiveness of its wares. The company used steatite to create a soft-paste porcelain that was stronger and more durable than other English products, and used a harder and thinner glaze that was less prone to crazing, the appearance of fine lines on the surface. Worcester's designs borrowed concepts or imagery from East Asia and Continental Europe, but gave them an English twist to create entirely new products that could not be found elsewhere. In addition to its quality and variety of design, Worcester porcelain was readily available at a low cost, making it appealing to a wide range of English consumers.

Worcester porcelain is still produced today, making it one of the oldest English porcelain brands. The manufactory has changed ownership numerous times over the more than two-and-a-half centuries of its existence. Today, it is known as Royal Worcester, a division of Portmeirion Pottery. The most widely collected of the 18th-century English porcelain factories, Worcester has a large base of enthusiasts who collect by pattern, type of decoration or date. First Period (1751–1783) Worcester is of particular interest among collecting enthusiasts.

The objects on view at the Chrysler Museum of Art are from a collection of approximately 900 pieces of porcelain that were gifted to the City of Norfolk by Elise Nusbaum Hofheimer and Henry Clay Hofheimer, II. "This gift demonstrates the generosity and lifelong commitment of the Hofheimer family to the Hampton Roads community," said Swan Needell, who notes that the City of Norfolk entrusted the collection to the care of the Chrysler Museum of Art as a long-term loan in 2005. The porcelain gallery was renovated along with the rest of the Museum in 2014 and was closed in August 2018 for the current reinstallation.

ABOUT THE CHRYSLER MUSEUM OF ART

The Chrysler Museum of Art is one of America's most distinguished mid-sized art museums, with a nationally recognized collection of more than 30,000 objects, including one of the great glass collections in America. The core of the Chrysler's collection comes from Walter P. Chrysler, Jr., an avid art collector who donated thousands of objects from his private collection to the Museum. The Museum has growing collections in many areas and mounts an ambitious schedule of visiting exhibitions and educational programs each season. The Chrysler has also been recognized nationally for its unique commitment to hospitality with its innovative gallery host program.

The Perry Glass Studio is a state-of-the-art facility on the Museum's campus. The studio offers programming for aspiring and master artists alike in a variety of processes including glassblowing, fusing, frameworking, coldworking and neon. The studio has also cultivated a reputation for its cutting-edge performance evenings, and was the host venue of the 2017 Glass Arts Society Conference.

In addition, the Chrysler Museum of Art administers two historic houses in downtown Norfolk: the Moses Myers House and the Willoughby-Baylor House, as well as the Jean Outland Chrysler Library on the campus of Old Dominion University. General admission is free at all venues. For more information on the Chrysler Museum of Art, visit chrysler.org.

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