

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this tour is to focus on Mia's collection of unique and rare silver objects. Silver as an artistic media is different from art created from paint, stone, bronze and iron, fabric, clay or other common materials. Because silver has an innate value independent of the added creative value provided by the artist who works with it, the preservation and collection of antique silver has had several challenges. It was not uncommon for wealthy families who owned heirloom silver to melt old pieces down in order to have something more "fashionable" created. Silver, and gold, were confiscated by governments in search of sources of revenue to finance wars and other projects. This was particularly true in 16th and 17th century France and is the reason why French silver art objects from these years are especially rare.

However, this tour is also about two key collectors and benefactors who through their generous gifts helped build this rare collection. James and Louise Bell in Mia's early years were responsible for donating objects and a creating a fund that formed the foundation of the Mia silver collection. In the current silver gallery, well over twenty objects are gifts from the Ford family. We will focus on three particularly important objects: one of a famous set of twelve Renaissance *tazza* (cups) based on the *Lives of the Caesars*, a masterpiece wine cistern by Paul de Lamerie, the greatest silversmith working in England in the 18th century, and a complete silver tea service fashioned by colonial patriot and silversmith Paul Revere.

Mary Agnes and Al McQuinn are more recent donors who have made many significant gifts that have expanded the depth and breadth of Mia's silver collection. In recognition of their generosity, the silver gallery has been named the "Mary Agnes and Al McQuinn Gallery. Thanks to their gifts we will be able to see an 18th century nautilus cup fashioned for an early "chamber of art and wonder", a racing trophy cup by the great English architect Robert Adam that set a standard for trophy design still used today, a Regency silver charger that gives us insights into the process of silver creative design, a "masterpiece" covered cup created by an aspiring silversmith to earn entrance into the Strasbourg guild, and a wonderful example of silver sculpture by a Neapolitan master of the decorative arts.

Curators, artists, and benefactors have come together to provide us the opportunity to see the creativity and progress of centuries of silversmithing all in a single gallery. Let's go have a look.

1. Unknown Artist, *Tazza*, 1575-99. Acc: 75.54
2. Paul de Lamerie, *Wine Cistern*, 1719-20. Acc: 61:56
3. Paul Revere, *Tea Service*, 1792. Acc:60.22.1
4. Robert Adam, *Richmond Race Cup*, 1767. Acc: 2005.116 a,b
5. William Pitts, *Feast of the Gods Charger*, 1808. Acc: 2008.71

6. Unknown Artist, *Nautilus Cup*, 1660-80. Acc: 2011.28
7. Johann Friedrich Baer, *Masterpiece Cup and Cover*, 1746. Acc: 2010.1 a-c
8. Giuseppe Sanmartino, *The Archangels Saint Raphael and Saint Michael*, c.1780
Acc:2015.24.1,2

CONCLUSION

I hope you have enjoyed our tour. The quality of the work and the breath of the collection make Mia's silver collection one of the highlights of its Decorative Arts collection. I suspect you have been impressed with the talents of the artists and the beauty of their work. But I hope that I have also been successful in giving visibility to role that benefactors play in building a world class collection in a museum. We need to be thankful for the creative contributions of the artists, the vision and knowledge of the curatorial staff, but also the collaboration and generosity of Mia's many donors. Together their combined efforts make our museum special and great.

Before I close, I would like to direct you—if you are interested—to one other great silver object in the Mia collection that you might enjoy but is not in this gallery. In Gallery 303 is an extraordinary silver presentation tray that was created in 1884 by the Tiffany Company as a gift to James J. Hill from the business community to recognize his contributions to building Minneapolis into a great city. It is one of the many special gifts to Mia by the Hill family. You may want to see it on your way out.

Thanks for touring with me today.