



News media contact

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Winston-Salem, NC and Williamsburg, VA (June 1, 2013) — The two leading decorative arts institutions in the South are embarking on a new level of collaboration between their organizations. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) at Old Salem Museums & Gardens have entered a five-year agreement between the museums for reciprocal extended loans.

The museums have already collaborated on the recently opened exhibition, “Painters and Paintings in the Early American South” at the Arts Museums of Colonial Williamsburg. With nine major paintings MESDA is the largest single lender to the exhibition, while select objects from the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are already on display at MESDA. In total, 40 objects from MESDA are on loan to the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg and, conversely, 30 objects from the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg to MESDA. These objects range from clocks and high chests to paintings and silver coffee pots. The collaboration is part of a five-year agreement between the museums for reciprocal extended loans. Many of the MESDA objects on loan to Colonial Williamsburg will be featured in a new, long-term exhibition opening at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, one of the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, in January 2014. “A Rich and Varied Culture: The Material World of the Early South” will feature furniture, silver, ceramics, textiles and costumes, tools, machines, architectural elements and other materials made in or imported to the South before 1840.

Ronald L. Hurst, Colonial Williamsburg’s vice president for collections, conservation, and museums and Carlisle H. Humelsine chief curator, said of MESDA “This is the age of partnerships. With partnerships everyone wins: the institutions, the public, the scholarly world...so why not do it? Both [the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg and MESDA] have some remarkable objects temporarily off view. Why not show them at a sister institution?” “Our collaboration allows each museum to tell a new story, a more complete story with these treasured objects,” said Robert Leath, vice president of collections and research and chief curator at Old Salem Museums & Gardens. “But most importantly when two great museums collaborate, the public wins—creating a more meaningful visitor experience.”

The two museums have already begun discussions on several ways in which they can broaden the collaboration. Ideas include not only reciprocal extended loans but also research exchanges (both documentary and scientific), conservation, joint exhibitions produced together and, potentially, joint publications. “The most exciting aspect of our new collaboration might be the opportunity to share research and bring together information,” said Leath. “MESDA’s Director of Research June Lucas, for example, was thrilled to help identify a dish dresser in the Colonial Williamsburg collection as the product of a particular Quaker cabinetmaking shop that worked in Alamance County, NC, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.”

Further evidence of the collaboration will be seen in Colonial Williamsburg’s 66th annual Antiques Forum, February 14-18, 2014. Tentatively titled “New Findings in the Arts of the Coastal South,” the program will feature multiple speakers from both institutions as well as a number of experts from museums and universities across the nation. Whether or not this partnership will be a catalyst for other museums in the country remains to be seen. “It’s what everybody should be doing, in my view,” says Hurst.

About MESDA

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is the preeminent center for researching, collecting, and exhibiting decorative arts made and used in the early American South. MESDA is one of the museums at Old Salem Museums & Gardens. The Web site address is MESDA.org.

About Old Salem

Old Salem Museums & Gardens is one of America’s most comprehensive history attractions. Its museums—the Historic Town of Salem, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), and the Gardens at Old Salem —engage visitors in an educational and memorable historical experience about those who lived and worked in the early South. Old Salem Museums & Gardens is located at 600 South Main Street in Winston-Salem. For more information call 336-721-7300 or visit oldsalem.org.