

MMFA

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE MMFA ANNOUNCES TWO EXHIBITIONS THAT EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF THE GULF SOUTH THROUGH DECORATIVE ARTS

Pieces of History: Decorative Arts of the Gulf South reflects the stories of the early migrants to Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana through the items they purchased, created, and used while they made their homes and lives.



Mallory and Welch Families, *Mount Ida Wedding Quilt*, 1851, cotton, Lent by the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama

Montgomery, AL, January 18, 2022 – In the early 1800s, the American South was the destination for the earliest migrants, largely of European descent, who ventured from the Atlantic seaboard to “the west” to find new land and opportunity. Some came by choice—to create new business opportunities or establish homes and families—while others were brought with them, without consent, as property. Still, each left their mark in the land and in the culture of the fast-developing Gulf South.

PIECES OF HISTORY

Pieces of History, on view January 21 through April 10, 2022, tells the story of these people and what they moved with them, purchased, made, and used while they built their homes and lives. What we today call “decorative arts” or “material culture” convey their legacies, in many ways speaking more eloquently than the rare written words which survive the centuries. Their domestic furnishings, whether elegant or humble, speak to the routines of daily life and bring places distant in time back into focus. Many objects are familiar and have counterparts in our own lives, while

others have lost their usefulness or significance in modern societies.

The exhibition will describe spaces that were found in homes of the 19th-century Gulf South with furnishings that would have been used there. In the homes of the wealthy, these furnishings were often shipped great distances, from Eastern seaboard cities such as Boston or Philadelphia, through the ports of Mobile or New Orleans, making their way by ship over sea and river to rooms in Alabama,

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Mississippi, or Louisiana. Others were crafted and designed locally to mimic the styles of these imported pieces. A section is also devoted to practical items that would have been used within the household by those who worked to support the day-to-day life of the house.

The exhibition was organized by the staff and fellows of the Decorative Arts of the Gulf South Project housed at The Historic New Orleans Collection, which researches and maintains records of decorative arts found in the early 19th-century Gulf South. The Montgomery installation is expanded to include loans of furnishings and materials from Alabama's Black Belt and the central Alabama region from the collections of the Landmarks Foundation of Montgomery, Inc.; the Alabama Department of Archives and History; and local private lenders.

WALK HUMBLY



Installation of Nell Gottlieb's (American, born 1945) work *Bearing Witness* in the Certificate of Achievement Exhibition at the Brad & Leslie Bucher Gallery, Glassell School, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas. Photograph by Nash Baker, courtesy the artist.

In 2018, artist Nell Gottlieb inherited her family's ancestral home, the Wallace House near Harpersville, Alabama. While investigating its long history, she learned that her ancestors built their wealth on the backs of enslaved persons, many of whose descendants still live in the area. These descendants, Black and white, came together to shift the narrative of the house and surrounding plantation lands, focusing on racial reconciliation through arts and culture, by forming Klein Arts and Culture which is centered there.

Walk Humbly has two parts: works that address the issues surrounding her family's cotton plantation legacy and new works created in response to the decorative objects in the adjacent exhibition, *Pieces of History*. Through her installation, Gottlieb hopes to provoke discussion about how these systems of exploitation persist in other forms to this day.

MMFA Director Angie Dodson says “Over the past decade, the Historic New Orleans Collections’ staff and fellows have done a remarkable job documenting the diverse stories of the structures, contents, and—most importantly—the inhabitants of Gulf South plantations. I also applaud our staff for deepening the resonance of these narratives for our Central Alabama audience through their thoughtful work with colleagues at Montgomery’s Landmarks Foundation and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, local collectors, and the artist Nell Gottlieb.”

MMFA Board President Cathy Martin adds “*Pieces of History* and *Walk Humbly* are the next stops on the path of MMFA exhibitions presented with the intention of telling more relevant and representative stories of our shared humanity through art. They will be followed by two other exhibitions later in the year that continue on this narrative course—we very much hope the community begin the year with a visit to *Pieces of History* and *Walk Humbly* and return later in the Spring for *Lava Thomas: Homecoming*, and then again in the late summer for *A Site of Struggle: American Art against Anti-Black Violence*.”

Support for *Pieces of History* and *Walk Humbly* was provided by lead sponsor Alabama Power Foundation. Additional support was provided by sponsors Mr. Will Hill Tankersley and Dr. Kristin Tankersley and co-sponsors AmeriFirst Bank; Balch & Bingham, LLP; and Valley Bank.

RELATED PROGRAMS

Art+Letters

Saturday, February 5; 10 AM

The colonial history of art in museums and monuments is a thorny issue that we are only just beginning to address. Alice Proctor, creator of Uncomfortable Art Tours, will join MMFA Director Angie Dodson in a conversation about this issue and Proctor’s book, *The Whole Picture: The Colonial Story of the Art in Our Museums...and Why We Need to Talk About It*.

Art After Five: Telling Your Story

Tuesday, March 8; 5:30–7:30 PM

Tell your story over drinks with a small work of art or another object that speaks to your history during a discussion moderated by Margaret Lynne Ausfeld (MMFA).

Second Tuesdays: Artmaking

Tuesday, March 8; 6 PM

Using paper and other mixed-media materials, design and build a room from your own imagination on a miniature scale.

RELATED EXHIBITION

Home

January 15 through February 27, 2022

ArtWorks Gallery, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

Taking inspiration from *Pieces of History*, River Region students explore the idea of home—from the physical to the abstract.

FOR YOUR SAFETY | COVID-19

We remain committed to serving our members and visitors in a safe and responsible manner, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To this end: all Museum visitors over the age of five **must wear a mask or face covering** while inside during their visit. **Social distancing is encouraged** and indicated by signage throughout the Garden and the Galleries. Following CDC and ADPH guidelines, we have increased the frequency that we **clean and disinfect high-touch areas**. Additionally, hand sanitizer is readily available for visitors. Please stay at home if you are feeling ill or have been exposed to COVID-19 in the fourteen (14) days prior to your visit.

MMFA BACKGROUND

The Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1930 by a group of local artists as a place for both exhibiting art and space for art education. The original intentions of our founders—to exhibit and teach—continue to inspire and inform every action and activity here at the Museum which, since 1988, has shared the 277-acre Blount Cultural Park with our partners across the lake at the celebrated Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Today's MMFA visitors stroll through art-studded grounds and permanent collection galleries. They see compelling changing exhibitions and learn about art by playing in our interactive gallery, ArtWorks, making art in its bustling studios, or by participating in other engaging events and programs. And, as of late September 2018, MMFA visitors can now relax and recharge in the serenity of our stunning new three-acre sculpture garden.

While the Museum's collection is still home to the art of many of the regional artists who first established it, over time it has become known for its strength in American art and Old Master Prints. Recent, important acquisitions of art made by African American and Asian artists and works inspired by images and themes related to the experiences of these groups represent the breadth and depth of the lives and concerns of those who now call Montgomery and the River Region home. Through the exhibition of this work as well as the programs and events that help connect our communities with it, the MMFA is recognized as a leading arts and cultural resource here in the state and Southeastern region.

The MMFA is a department of the City of Montgomery and is supported by funds from the City of Montgomery, with additional funds from the Montgomery County Commission and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association. Programs are made possible, in part, by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

GENERAL INFORMATION

WHAT: *Pieces of History: Decorative Arts of the Gulf South*
Walk Humbly

WHEN: January 21 through April 10, 2022

WHERE: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park
One Museum Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117

INFORMATION: mmfa.org
334.625.4333
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HOURS:
Galleries, Mondays, Closed
Sculpture Garden, Tuesdays–Sundays, 10 AM–5 PM
Terrace, and Shop: Last entry at 4:45 PM

ADMISSION: Free! With ample, free parking.

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MEDIA CONTACT

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