A NATION REFLECTED: STORIES IN AMERICAN GLASS

The Yale University Art Gallery presents the first major survey of its extraordinary collection of American glass
March 29–September 29, 2019

March 22, 2019, New Haven, Conn.—The Yale University Art Gallery is pleased to announce a student-curated exhibition of American glass from Yale University’s collections, including a remarkable array of objects from the Gallery’s esteemed Mabel Brady Garvan Collection placed alongside select loans from the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History. The exhibition draws on the research of John Stuart Gordon, the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts and author of the 2018 publication American Glass: The Collections at Yale. During the fall 2018 semester, Gordon oversaw six Yale students who came together to organize an exhibition for the public, studying objects firsthand and selecting more than 140 works to present in thematic displays. While each object tells a story of its own, A Nation Reflected: Stories in American Glass also presents broader narratives of American history, innovation, and creativity.

For generations, glass—in its natural as well as manmade form—has been fashioned into objects of both beauty and utility. The development of glassmaking in America, beginning with the short-lived glasshouses in early 17th-century Jamestown, Virginia, has mirrored the expansion of colonial settlements into a thriving nation, and thus the medium offers captivating insights about many aspects of American history. Flasks and bottles emblazoned with portraits of politicians and celebrities such as George Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Jenny Lind signal the personal beliefs of those who used them; light bulbs, laboratory glass, and patented innovations bring technological sophistication into the home; and contemporary artists and craftsmen continue to reinterpret the medium’s rich past.

The Gallery’s Garvan Collection has particular strengths in 18th-century mold-blown vessels and 19th-century pressed glass, and features objects crafted by the major glassmakers in the country from the colonial era through the nineteenth century. Makers represented in the exhibition include Boston and Sandwich Glass Works, Pittsburgh Flint Glass Works of Bakewell, Page & Bakewell, Corning Glass Works, East Hartford Glass...
Works, New England Glass Company, John Frederick Amelung’s New Bremen Glass Manufactory, and many others.

Works on view range from the whimsical—such as a 19th-century turtle-shaped sailor’s flask and a blue salt in the shape of a top hat—to the stylishly pragmatic Chemex coffeemaker and a glass rolling pin. Scientific instruments on display include one of the oldest complex microscopes in the United States, an early Edison light bulb, and a Wimshurst electrostatic generator. Names of famous designers and architects make an appearance with Louis Comfort Tiffany lamps, a stained-glass window by Frank Lloyd Wright, goblets by Frank Gehry, and glassware by Calvin Klein. Contemporary sculptures by Lynda Benglis, Alyson Shotz, Toots Zynsky, and others demonstrate the incredible versatility of the medium as well as its enduring appeal to the artist’s imagination.

One section of the exhibition explains the glassmaking process and illustrates various techniques, while several beautifully decorated free-blown glass objects from the Gallery’s ancient art collection remind visitors that American makers continue and elaborate on a millennia-old tradition. Pieces of obsidian and opal from the Yale Peabody collections further expand our perspective by bringing natural and manmade glass into proximity for close consideration.

As Gordon explains, “While researching the Gallery’s American glass collection, I soon realized that glass is everywhere in the museum’s collections, and indeed everywhere on Yale’s campus. It constitutes the sugar bowls and flasks that often come to mind when we think about early American glass, but it also appears in furniture, scientific equipment, architecture. We live in a world of glass. And the various ways it is decorated and the various functions it takes on reflect our ever-evolving interests as users of glass, as well as scholars of glass. Teasing out the stories from these objects became the driving theme of our seminar and inspired how the students conceived of the exhibition.”

Jocelyn Wickersham, ES ’19, one of the six student curators, continues, “We each brought unique research interests and individual curiosity to this project and were therefore captivated by different objects in Yale’s collections. The resulting exhibition aims to provide visitors with a similar variety of points of entry to the works on view and to encourage newfound appreciation for glass as an art form, historical artifact, and expression of American material culture.”

On View
March 29–September 29, 2019

Exhibition Credits
Exhibition made possible by the Friends of American Arts at Yale Exhibition Fund, the Jane and Gerald Katcher Fund for Education, the John F. Wieland, Jr., B.A. 1988, Fund for Student
Exhibitions, and the Nolen-Bradley Family Fund for Education. Organized by Yale University students Julia Carabatsos, MC ’20, Nolan Crawford, GH ’19, Lily Dodd, SM ’21, Adelaide Goodyear, B.A. 2018, Mariana Melin-Corcoran, GH ’20, and Jocelyn Wickersham, ES ’19, under the mentorship of John Stuart Gordon, the Benjamin Attmore Hewitt Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts, with the assistance of Alexandra Ward, the Marcia Brady Tucker Fellow, Department of American Decorative Arts.

Related Publication

American Glass: The Collections at Yale
John Stuart Gordon

Glass can be decorative or utilitarian and its forms often reflect technological innovations and social change. Drawing on an insightful selection from the Yale University Art Gallery and other collections at Yale, American Glass illuminates the vital and often intimate roles that glass has played in the nation's art and culture. Spectacularly illustrated, the publication showcases 18th-century mold-blown vessels, 19th-century pressed glass, innovative studio work, and luminous stained-glass windows by John La Farge and Louis Comfort Tiffany, the latter reproduced as a lush gatefold. These are considered alongside beguiling objects that broaden our expectations of glass and speak to the centrality of the medium in American life, including one of the oldest complex microscopes in the United States, an early Edison light bulb, glass-plate photography, jewelry, and more. With an essay on the history of collecting American glass and discussions of each object that present new scholarship, this engaging book tells the long and rich history of glass in America—from prehistoric minerals to contemporary sculptures.

320 pages / 9 × 10¼ inches / 190 color illustrations, including 1 gatefold / Copublished with Yale University Press / 2018 / Hardcover / ISBN 978-0-300-22669-0 / Price $65; Members $52

Related Programs

Keynote Lecture
Thursday, March 28, 5:30 pm
“What Is the Future for American Glass?”
Kelly Conway

Symposium
“Stories in American Glass: New Scholarship, New Perspectives”
Friday, March 29, 9:00 am-4:00 pm
Onine registration required. To register, visit artgallery.yale.edu/symposium-registration-form-roque

Performance
Thursday, April 25, 5:30 pm
“Gallery+Glass Is Everywhere”
Gallery Talks
Wednesday, April 17, 12:30 pm
“Stories in American Glass”
John Stuart Gordon

Wednesday, May 1, 12:30 pm
“Stories in American Glass”
Nolan Crawford and Jocelyn Wickersham

Wednesday, July 10, 12:30 pm
“The Craft of Color”
Alexandra Ward

Wednesday, September 11, 12:30 pm
“Science, Sparks, and Sight”
Alexi Baker

Walking Tour
Wednesday, June 19, 12:30 pm
“Walls of Light: Stained Glass in New Haven”
John Stuart Gordon
Weather permitting

Please visit artgallery.yale.edu/calendar for details and additional related programming.

Yale University Art Gallery
The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 250,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

General Information
The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at artgallery.yale.edu.

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