Leslie P. and George H. Hume American Furniture Study Center Opens at Yale West Campus

The Yale University Art Gallery’s working library of more than 1,300 examples of American furniture, clocks, wood-turned sculpture, and more celebrates its 60th anniversary with a new state-of-the-art facility that opens this September.

August 7, 2019, New Haven, Conn.—On September 10, 2019, the Yale University Art Gallery opens the Leslie P. and George H. Hume American Furniture Study Center and the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Sack Family Archive in the Collection Studies Center at Yale West Campus, West Haven, Connecticut. Created in 1959 by former curator Meyric R. Rogers, the Furniture Study is a three-dimensional textbook of American furniture dating from 1650 to the present.

Roughly half of the objects in the Hume Furniture Study are part of the Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, which includes outstanding examples, such as a 17th-century court cupboard made in the New Haven Colony and an 18th-century roccoco-style dressing table made in Philadelphia that is attributed to the so-called Garvan Carver. From the quotidian to the exceptional, the Hume Furniture Study collection illustrates the breadth of American craftsmanship and serves as a primer on the tenets of connoisseurship. The Hume Furniture Study also houses examples of historic tools and joinery models that illuminate craft processes, as well as a collection of about 200 contemporary turned-wood and other wood sculptures. The expanded Hume Furniture Study and adjacent Bass Sack Family Archive were established with significant gifts from Leslie P. and George H. Hume, b.a. 1969, and Anne T. and Robert M. Bass, b.a. 1971, in addition to important anonymous gifts.

The relocation of the Furniture Study to West Campus from its original home at 149 York Street, in downtown New Haven, accomplishes a number of important goals. It provides a safer environment for the long-term preservation of the collection and facilitates better access, with additional space for objects that were not previously accessible to the public, such as the 30 examples of architectural woodwork that have never before been exhibited and are now on elegant display in the two-story study center. Because objects in the new space are more easily movable—with many larger pieces now on mobile platforms—and interpretive displays that highlight various aspects of craft practice have been integrated throughout the facility, the move to West Campus also allows for enhanced teaching opportunities. In addition, the proximity of the new space to other departments and resources, such as the Margaret and Angus Wurtele Study Center and the Conservation Laboratory, encourages collaboration in the advancement of scholarship on American furniture.

The adjacency of the Bass Sack Family Archive—an extraordinary collection of comparative material for the study of American furniture from the business records of Israel Sack, Inc.—to the
The new Hume Furniture Study will also foster scholarship on furniture types and makers in America. Lithuanian immigrant Israel Sack started a furniture-repair business in Boston in 1903, relocated to New York City in the early 1930s, and was later joined in the operation by his three sons, Harold, Albert, and Robert. Until the business closed its doors in 2002, it was the premier vendor for early American furniture, due in large part to the knowledge and experience of the Sack family. Through the generosity of Anne T. and Robert M. Bass, the Gallery acquired the Albert Sack Legacy Archives in 2011. These resources have been amplified by the gift of more than 17,000 color slides assembled by the firm and given by Lee Sack in memory of her husband, Robert Sack. Some of the firm’s 10,000 black-and-white photographs can be searched online through Yale University Library’s Digital Collections.

Patricia E. Kane, the Friends of American Arts Curator of American Decorative Arts, states, “The relocation of this treasured furniture collection and the incorporation of the Sack archives represents a real transformation for the Gallery as a leading destination and resource for the study of American furniture. What was for decades a ‘hidden gem’ in a basement space one block from the museum is now a spacious, state-of-the-art facility and a truly dynamic center for appreciation, teaching, and learning.”

Stephanie Wiles, the Henry J. Heinz II Director at the Gallery, says, “The opening of the new Hume Furniture Study and the Bass Sack Family Archive at Yale West Campus is a tour de force, presenting outstanding achievements in American art and design on an awe-inspiring scale.” She continues, “The visitor experience combines close looking with a deep dive into stylistic considerations and an enjoyable lesson on how these objects were made. We are deeply grateful to the generous Gallery benefactors who share Yale’s vision for making collections widely accessible to visiting scholars, students and faculty, and lifelong learners of all ages.”

A number of public programs are planned to celebrate the opening of these new facilities. On Sunday, September 8, at 3:00 pm, Stephen P. Latta, Professor of Cabinetmaking and Wood Technology, Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, will present the Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque Memorial Lecture in the Robert L. McNeil, Jr., Lecture Hall at the Gallery. Latta’s presentation, titled “‘Shells for inlaying . . . for Sale on very moderate Terms’: Furniture Inlay in Federal America,” will demystify the making of inlay while providing insights into its rich and diverse history in early America.

Weekly public tours of the Hume Furniture Study resume on Friday, September 13, at 12:20 pm, with express shuttle service to West Campus that leaves the Gallery at 12:00 pm and return service that departs West Campus at 1:30 pm. For details on weekly tours, as well as special thematic tours of the Hume Furniture Study offered throughout the fall semester, visit artgallery.yale.edu/calendar. The Hume Furniture Study also welcomes individual visitors and groups of up to 18 people by appointment. Email yuag.furniturestudy@yale.edu or call 203.432.0632 to make an appointment.
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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