

Gallery

19

The Astor Mansion Salon and Library

The two 19th century historic interiors installed in Galleries 19 and 20 are from the Astor mansion originally situated at 840 Fifth Avenue at 61st St. in New York City. The home was built between 1893 and 1895 by the Gilded Age architect Richard Morris Hunt for Mrs. William Backhouse Astor and her son, Col. John Jacob Astor IV, following the death of her husband in 1892. John Ringling purchased these rooms at the 1926 sale of the residence prior to its demolition. While he was no doubt impressed with their fine décor, he was also aware of the prestige associated with the previous owners. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor (1830-1908), known as “The Mrs. Astor,” was one of the most powerful society women America ever produced, and was responsible for the “Four Hundred,” a list of families and individuals whose lineage could be traced back at least three generations. Hunt designed the exterior of the mansion in the French Renaissance style, but its interiors were decorated in a wide variety of historical vocabularies, mostly by Jules Allard et Fils of Paris. The Cream Salon was considered the epitome of feminine taste and was decorated in the French Rococo Louis XV style. The library is in the Regency style, and was originally a dining room before John Jacob Astor IV converted it into a library.

Unfolding Beauty: Fans in the Ringling Museum of Art

The Ringling Museum of Art features an outstanding collection of over 275 hand-held fans dating from the late 17th to the late 20th centuries. The first donation came to the Museum in 1974 with the gift of 100 fans from Mr. and Mrs. Irving Snyder, in memory of Helen Campbell Kerr. The collection expanded in 1988 with the donation of over 150 outstanding examples of folding fans and rigid hand-screens from Elsa James Zelle, in memory of her mother, Elsa Konig Nietzsche. In 1993, Mrs. Zelle gave another donation, comprising her rare book collection on fans, costume, and lace, all of which are currently housed in the Ringling Museum's library.

The word fan is derived from the Latin word *vannus*, meaning a Roman tool used for winnowing grain. Fans allowed ladies to create a cool breeze while dressed in heavy formal attire, while simultaneously offering a miniature work of art that she could sit and enjoy during a theatrical interlude. Usually painted in watercolor on a leaf made of vellum, paper, or silk, fans depict a variety of scenes including mythology, landscapes, light-hearted genre, along with commemorative and personalized imagery. Many were created for special occasions such as weddings, parties, operas, balls, and funerals.

The Ringling's collection includes a number of 18th-century folding fans from France, Holland, Spain, and China, mid-19th-century fans fabricated with mirrors attached to the guard stick (so that women seated in their opera boxes were able to spy undetected on gentlemen), and 20th-century examples decorated with large bird feathers – Ostrich, Egret, Peacock – which were popular at the time. This impressive collection offers the viewer an intimate glimpse of this all important accessory, from the extravagant to the very plain.



The fans of the early eighteenth century were created with delicately carved ivory sticks and mounted with a vellum or paper leaf. The decoration was always on the front side with a very limited decoration to the back to the fans leaf.

French

Untitled, c. 1750

Pierced and carved ivory sticks, watercolor on paper leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.66

Dutch

Untitled, c. 1750

Pierced ivory sticks, watercolor on paper leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.21

Dutch

Untitled, c. 1740

Pierced ivory sticks, watercolor on vellum leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.14

French

Untitled, c. 1750

Ivory sticks, silk appliqué' on silk leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.11

French

Untitled, c. 1710

Carved and pierced ivory sticks, watercolor on vellum leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14. 53

Dutch

Chinoiserie with Vignettes, c. 1700

Painted ivory sticks with tortoiseshell guard, silk ribbon

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.35



Folding fans from the orient were created with exotic materials such as Ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of pearl, and lacquer. The term “Frozen Lace” refers to the two examples carved in ivory and tortoiseshell to replicate the delicate handwork of lace.

Chinese

Cabriolet Fan, c. 1830

Shaped and gilded lacquered sticks,
watercolor on paper leaf original
lacquered box

Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1988
MF 88.14.32

Chinese

Frozen Lace, c. 1800

Carved and pierced tortoiseshell
Gift of Mary Rhodes, 1994
MF 94.7.1

Chinese

Frozen Lace, c. 1800

Carved and pierced ivory
Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1993
MF 93.9.2

Chinese

Court Scene, c. 1835

Gilded lacquered sticks
Gift of Elsa James Zellely, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1988
MF 88.14.61



An artist would prepare and paint a fan leaf in vellum or paper. The leaf was then taken to a fan maker to fold the leaf, and mount to the custom made sticks to create a completed folding fan.

Italian

Night with Sleep and Death Near Her, c.

1780

Unmounted leaf, watercolor on vellum

Gift of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.13

Spanish

Untitled, c. 1815

Gilded and painted mother-of-pearl sticks,
watercolor on paper leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.30

French

Untitled, c. 1770

Ivory sticks with foil decoration, watercolor
on paper leaf

Gift of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.21

French

Untitled, c. 1815

Mother-of-pearl and ivory sticks, watercolor
on paper leaf, original box

Gift of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of
Elsa Konig Nitzsche

1988

MF 88.14.4



In the mid-19th century, fans became larger and highly decorative. Many guard sticks, (the outer stick that protects the fan in a closed position) were decorated with previous jewels, carved cameos, or a mirror to watch an admirer at the opera or a musical.

Italian

Antonia, c. 1850

Carved mother-of-pearl sticks, hand colored engraving on paper leaf

French

Musical Interlude, c. 1890

Pierced and carved mother-of-pearl sticks, watercolor and gilding, on paper leaf

Spanish

Untitled, c. 1851

Lacquered papier-mache sticks, hand colored engraving on paper leaf

French

Untitled, c. 1860

Painted ivory sticks, hand colored engraving on paper leaf

Spanish

Untitled, c. 1850

Painted mother-of-pearl stick, hand colored engraving on paper leaf

Gifts of Elsa James Zelle, in memory of her mother Elsa Konig Nietzsche, 1988
MF 88.14.144, MF 88.14.24, MF 88.14.22, MF 88.14.49, MF 88.14.45



Weber Piano Company
American, 19th century

Concert Grand Piano, 1876
Rosewood and brass

Gift of Dr. William E.
Wallace, 1981, MF80.10.a-b

This concert grand piano was made in 1876 by the Weber Company, which was founded by the German piano maker Albert Weber in New York in 1852. The Weber piano won immediate praise due to its

tone quality and powerful voice. It was awarded highest honors at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876, at the American Exhibition in London in 1887 and at the Paris Exhibition in 1889. During the middle decades of the 19th century, Weber was a top competitor with Steinway in the production of concert-quality pianos. The Ringling piano's cabriole legs that cascade into scroll feet are indicative of Victorian craftsmanship.