



Gallery Reinstallation Project Enters Exciting New Phase with 'Empire of Things'

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LAWRENCE, KS, December 19, 2012—In 2010, the Spencer Museum of Art envisioned a bold reinstallation of its permanent collection. Called “**Project Redefine**,” the transformation represents a dramatic shift from traditionally conceived galleries organized by time period and continent to an innovative new organizational principle based on themes, drawing works from disparate regions and eras into the same physical space and, by extension, into conversation with one another.

The first of these thematic exhibitions – *Corpus*, a collection of works of art exploring the trajectory of the human life – opened to the public in spring 2012. The Spencer is now putting the final touches on the second of these striking new exhibitions: ***Empire of Things***. The exhibition will be unveiled slowly, with a “soft opening” throughout the early months of 2013. The public has the rare opportunity to watch as the final stages of this installation are completed; progress can be observed from open areas within the Museum’s galleries.

Empire of Things explores the relationships between objects, the people who make them, and the people who collect and display them. The objects assembled for this exhibition showcase the geographic diversity of the Spencer’s impressive collection while revealing patterns of acquisition underlying the history of the modern museum.

This exhibition deals with a wide range of subject matter, including the history of colonial expansion, encounters with “the other,” the complexity of international commerce, and the dialogue between art and science during the modern era, from the 15th through 19th centuries. Objects included range from architectural fragments to blue-and-white ceramics, from paintings depicting coveted objects to the coveted objects themselves: Persian rugs, for example, and Spanish tiles, as well as items made of ivory, coral, and gold.

The opulent beauty of *Empire of Things* belies the institutional critique at the heart of this exhibition, self-consciously encouraging and inviting meta-museum and meta-collecting commentary. In

one section of the installation, curators Kris Ercums and Kate Meyer have arranged objects to evoke the feeling of a domestic space. European furniture sits alongside a Chinese folding screen, which has been placed near an African chair. However, this installation does not constitute a period room. Instead, it represents the aspirations of the collector, expressed through the careful yet idiosyncratic accumulation of treasured objects.

The lives of objects take on particular relevance in *Empire of Things*. It is an exhibition that asks where things come from, why they look the way they do, what they have meant to their collectors and inheritors, and what, finally, earned them their places within the walls of a museum, the ultimate *Empire of Things*.

***Empire of Things*, the second new installation in the Spencer Museum of Art's ongoing "Project Redefine," opens gradually through February, 2013 and offers glimpses behind the scenes.**

Information and captions for attached images; Additional information and label copy available upon request.

Object 1

Joseph Highmore, 1692-1780

born London, England; died Canterbury, England

***Mrs. Thomas Pelham (Annetta, daughter of Thomas Bridges, wife of Thomas Pelham)*, 1720s**

oil on canvas

photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art

Object 2

China

vase, Qianlong period (1736-1795)

porcelain, underglazing

photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art

Object 3

Benjamin Martin (1704-1782)

England, United Kingdom

octant, mid 1700s

mahogany, brass fitts, ivory scale, original ivory mounted pencil, wooden box

photograph courtesy of the Spencer Museum of Art

The Spencer Museum of Art houses an internationally known collection that is deep and diverse, currently numbering approximately 38,000 artworks and artifacts in all media. The collection spans the history of European and American art from ancient to contemporary, and includes broad and significant holdings of East Asian art. Areas of special strength include medieval panel painting and religious sculpture; the Kress Study Collection of early modern Italian painting; 19th-century American art and material culture; old master prints; photography; European, East Asian, and Indian textiles; American Indian pottery, beadwork, and jewelry; African sculpture; Japanese Edo-period prints; and 20th-century Chinese painting.

Spencer Museum of Art

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Gallery Hours

Tues. 10 AM – 4 PM
Wed. & Thurs. 10AM – 8PM
Fri., & Sat. 10 AM – 4PM
Sun. Noon – 4PM
Closed Monday