



THE CHARLES HOSMER
MORSE MUSEUM
of American Art

September 17, 2018
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Morse Museum Opens Major American Art Pottery Exhibition October 16 *New Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau Installations Provide Context*

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WINTER PARK, FL—In a major new exhibition, the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art explores the origins of a U.S. art industry that won international recognition at the turn of the 20th century.

Earth into Art—The Flowering of American Art Pottery examines the roots of the industry in Ohio, the innovations in decoration and glazes, and the vital contributions of women.

“American Art Pottery is one of the country’s great artistic successes,” said Laurence J. Ruggiero, director of the Morse. “Beginning in the late 19th century, potters in the United States began to produce ceramics that rivaled those of the highly creative European firms that had dominated the field for centuries.”

In its exhibition, the Morse turns a spotlight on America’s art pottery pioneers in Cincinnati, many of whom were women, and presents more than 100 objects that reflect the technical and decorative imagination that led to this American achievement. *Earth into Art* is drawn from the Museum’s extensive collection of pottery. Selections for the installation, which include several new acquisitions, show some of the shapes, glazes, themes, techniques, and finishing methods that were second to none in the world.

American Art Pottery was in peak demand from roughly 1876 to 1915. Sharing many of the values of the international Arts and Crafts movement—which was a response to industrialization and mass production—these ceramic artists sought a return to work by hand, dignity of labor, and unity of design.

Their work, merging the fine and decorative arts, incorporated the avant-garde brush strokes of French Impressionism, the exoticism of Asian motifs like bamboo, realistic

representations of plants and flowers, and, paying homage to a proud heritage, portraits of Native American leaders.

To provide important art historical context for the exhibition, the Morse is reinstalling two adjacent galleries with new selections of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau objects from its collection.

The ascent of art pottery in the United States began with the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia, which with its displays of fine French and Asian ceramics helped to ignite a virtual craze among American women for china painting—the decoration of blank porcelain. The leaders for the nascent industry came from this seedbed of passionate hobbyists.

China painting, at this pivotal post-war juncture in American history, was viewed as an acceptable vocation for women, and no two women were more important to the flowering of art pottery in America than the artists Mary Louise McLaughlin (1847–1939) and Maria Longworth Nichols (1849–1932).

McLaughlin, also an author, discovered through relentless experimentation a way to recreate the French underglaze technique that had so impressed her at the Centennial Exhibition. Her development of this technique, along with her books, were foundational for the American industry. Nichols (later Storer), who was from a wealthy Cincinnati family, founded Rookwood Pottery (1880–1967), one of the largest and arguably the most famous of America’s art potteries.

McLaughlin and Nichols had maintained workshops in the same commercial pottery until Nichols opened Rookwood. Professional decorators and designers at Rookwood incorporated and refined McLaughlin’s techniques to create a range of innovative and beautiful art pottery celebrated at world’s fairs and sought after by consumers.

Able rivals, McLaughlin and Storer established Cincinnati as the center of the nation’s art pottery industry through their talent, business acumen, and vision.

The Morse Museum is open 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday. From November through April, the galleries are open until 8 p.m. on Fridays. Admission is \$6 for adults, \$5 for seniors, \$1 for students, free for children under 12, and from November through April, free for all visitors after 4 p.m. on Fridays. For more information about the Morse, please visit www.morsemuseum.org.