In the 18th and 19th centuries, Westerners often sent merchant ships out to the East in hopes to trade and they would discover many items that were uncommon to them. Fascinated by the complexity of Chinese art, Westerners wanted to assimilate Eastern culture into their own. They would travel to places like Canton, China and Sumatra and the exports brought back would be placed in federal mansions as a symbol of wealth and a show of cultural appropriation.

In this exhibit, two western and two Chinese pieces of art were chosen. Arranged in opposite order (Chinese, Western, Chinese, etc.) to demonstrate contrast between the two cultures’ styles. The focus of this exhibit is to show the difference in colors and detail between western and eastern art. Western art tended to be more simplistic in its style and used duller colors. Oppositely, Chinese Art was vibrant, and focus was put on incredible detail especially in its incorporation of Chinese culture.
This portrait of Empress Xiaoxian Chun was created in the 18th century that was a gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Sturgis Hinds. This 275 x 131 cm painting is a perfect representation of Chinese precision and detail. The multiple colors included on a silk canvas and the intricate designs on the Empress's dress truly show the difference between the bland colorless western-style art.

Qing dynasty, second half of 18th century with later repainting, hanging scroll; ink and color on silk, 1956.

Peabody Essex Museum
This teapot, crafted in 1766 by the Cockpit Hill factory, shows the simplistic designs of western art during the 18th century. Designed with only two different shades of brown, this artefact can most definitely be considered “dull.” It was a gift of Professor Richard C. Manning in 1933.

Teapot, "Stamp Act Repeal'd," Earthenware Derby, England
5 1/8 inches (13.018 cm)
Chinese Porcelain

Created in Jingdezhen, China between 1662-1722, this sculpture is loaded with vibrant colors and incredible detail. A mere 3.8 x 3.1 x 7 inches, this sculpture is a prime example of the level of intricate and detail prevalent in Chinese porcelain during this time period. Considering its small size, the delicate shaping of the clay and painting with such colors vastly contrasts to the dull, not as detail-orientated western-style art.

Women in a landscape, Porcelain, Gift of the estate of Pamela Cunningham Copeland, 2001, Peabody Essex Museum
Western Furniture

Created around 1810 by architect, Thomas Seymour (1771-1848) in Boston, Massachusetts, this 73 ½ x 45 x 25-inch Dressing chest is constructed out of mahogany, bird’s-eye maple, satinwood veneer, brass, and glass.

It was gifted to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1935 by Mirian and Francis Shaw Jr. The Dressing chest shows the simplicity in Western design while remaining its sense of wealth with the gold accents of the brass material.
Comparison

Placed side-by-side, the difference is even clearer. The ornate Chinese porcelain statue contrasted with the dull, western teapot is incredibly profound. The durable, beautiful porcelain from China was incomparable with the western equivalent.
Western art relied heavily on shades of brown. Although these artworks are intricate and detailed, it is no match for the Chinese’s color.
Chinese art exhibits a multitude of colors to represent wealth and prosperity which is why portraits of royalty were full of color. The greens in the porcelain is a symbol of luck as green is the color of most jades, a stone of luck. Additionally, Chinese art contains a lot of cultural aspects like the dragons of the empress’ dress and the chess table of the porcelain.