Trade between America and China:  
The Difference in Art Styles

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Nathaniel Hawthorne's portrait

Porcelain figures of the Five immortals

Porcelain plate

Mahogany tea table
Timeline of the Artworks

1600-1720: Blue and white porcelains of the Five Immortals

1690-1720: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s portrait

1750: Mahogany tea table

1750: Start of the First Industrial Revolution

1690-1720: Blue and white porcelains of the Five Immortals

Mid 1700s: Start of the First Industrial Revolution

1770: Mahogany tea table

Late 1600s: Vibrant porcelain plate

Mid 1800s: Start of the Second Industrial Revolution

1840: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s portrait

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Our exhibit explores the differences in artistic styles between China and America during the 18th and 19th century. The exhibition includes four artworks curated from the Peabody Essex Museum. Each piece highlights the unique styles in both cultures and the trade between the two countries encouraged more artistic exchanges.

Our goal is to compare and contrast works from these two different countries not only in terms of artistic style, but also in terms of the impact that the specific artists from China and America were trying to leave on their audiences. It is interesting to observe the difference between the goals of the artists, as well as the differences in approach they took to achieve their goals.
These porcelain statues were made by multiple artists around 1690 to 1720 in Jingdezhen, China. The art pieces originally belonged to Pamela Cunningham Copeland and Pierre Durand, two distinguished porcelain collectors who donated them to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1997. Jingdezhen was a city known for producing beautiful pottery and exporting Chinese porcelain to the West during the 18th century. Blue and white porcelain were popular in European and American markets because of its unique decorative design that were not found in western artworks. European factories also began to recreate this distinctive art style in pottery. These five porcelain figures wore white robes that were covered in blue-glazed flowers and leaves, representing the Five Immortals. The decorations became a way to make the figures more ornamental. In contrast, most American artists would not paint abstract details and preferred capturing the natural beauty in portraits or figures.
This oil portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne was made in 1840 in Salem, Massachusetts by Charles Osgood. Osgood was an exceptional painter in Salem who specialized in oil paintings and focused mostly on portraits. Although the artist uses very plain shades and colors, Osgood is still successful in making an argument about Hawthorne’s class as a writer. The lack of color is also successfully used in order to create a more realist, professional painting. Much of the American art at the time took the same type of simplistic approach, whereas Asian art at the time was normally more visually vibrant and colorful. Our exhibit was made in part to highlight powerful art that does not need much vibrancy to make a statement.

Photo by Peabody Essex Museum, Painting by Charles Osgood
This picture showcases a vibrant porcelain plate, made in the late 1600s. It was made in Jingdezhen, China, by artists that are not currently identified. In the 17th century, much of the porcelain art was painted blue and white, but this plate displays even more colors such as yellow, red, and green. The plate’s design consists of many colorful flowers along the side, and a man wearing a blue robe with a bird flying over him in the middle. The many details of the plate juxtaposes the simplistic designs that many Americans were using in Salem in their art. Most of the porcelain pieces in the Northeast around the time period were painted for utility, not a decorative design like these artists in Jingdezhen, China used. Trading with China introduced this new style to Americans, which in turn, increased the demand for ornate porcelain.
The picture showcased here is that of a mahogany table. It was built around the year 1770 in the Essex County/Salem area. The creator of the piece is unknown. In 1770, the United States were still colonies, and Salem was still under British rule, but right after the French and Indian War and right before the Revolutionary War, this was a tumultuous time in Massachusetts. Despite being in early Revolutionary America, Salem was still a major trade hub in Massachusetts. This specific table was meant to be used as a tea-table, tea that came directly from the east and Asia. As seen here, the influence of trade from China has led to entire pieces of furniture being built to accommodate to the new goods they were receiving from there. It is safe to assume that a tea-top table would not have existed had trade with China not blossomed during this time.

Photo by Peabody Essex Museum.


Artist in Salem or Essex County, Massachusetts. Tilt-top tea table. *Peabody Essex Museum*,