The Influence of Maritime Trade on Western Christian Spheres of Influence in Asia and America
Let’s Dive In

A glimpse through the looking glass into an unforgettable history at sea...
Our exhibition aims to unite diverse views on the integration of cultural influence through the maritime trade of 1550-1809 between America and Asia.

Reflecting art through mediums of portraits, fine art, cooking items, and furniture, we hope to show the historic series of events that occurred during this time period and their effects on society.

Through the influence of art and its functionality, culture, religion, and history have the capacity to reflect the rich roots in which they are tethered.
A 2-YEAR EXHIBITION

Salem, MA

India

China

Sri Lanka
The Embarking of an Unforgettable Artistic Expedition

The pieces found within this exhibit all reflect the major theme of Christian influence on the established Buddhist and Hindu cultures of Asia via maritime trade between both America and Asia.

Through the artistic design and mystique, the stories behind each piece emulate true interconnectivity as nations crossover and influence one another through travel.

The exploration and trade among Asian and American nations stimulated the spread of Christianity via Western missionaries. The works of art reflected in this exhibit demonstrate the effect that Christianity has had on cultures and specifically people in Asia and ultimately New England. The apparent influence found in New England is expressed through the many extensive and prized collections ranging from oriental works of art to daily used household items.

And with this came both artistic Asian influence in America and American Christian influence in Asia...
ALL THE PIECES IN THIS EXHIBITION

Photo Credits: Peabody Essex Museum, 2019

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Photo Credits: Peabody Essex Museum, 2019
Christ Child

1550-1650

Artists in Goa, India, or Sri Lanka

Composition: Rock Crystal Figurine with Gold, Rubies, and Sapphires

This intricate and small figurine depicts the central figure of Christianity, Jesus Christ, integrated with clear Asian influence. The figure exhibits distinguishing facial features of people of Asian descent including elongated facial features (SCMP). Furthermore, the stance and left hand gesture of the Christ Child closely resembles that of the Buddha, the central figure of the very prominent religion of the region Buddhism. This fusion places further emphasis on the profound impact and influence of Christianity throughout maritime trade in Asia. The Buddha-inspired figure is also holding an embellished Christian cross in this holy stance while elevated on a bejeweled podium, which acts as an alter, to symbolize the strength of religion seen throughout both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

Photo Credits: Zoe Varkaris

Photo Credits: Peabody Essex Museum, 2019
This chalice was a symbol of status during the 1600s. Porcelain was still quite expensive and scarce and the addition of the gold and silver by Peter Weber made the piece all the more valuable (Peabody-Essex Museum). The chalice hints at a possible fusion of Asian and Christian culture with the Asian inspired design on the chalice combined with the intricate metal work showing almost gothic inspired designs. It is also theorized that this cup was used as a communion chalice, further showing an influence of Christian practices.
Guan Zuolin also known as Spoilum, was a Chinese artist who is known for being the first oil painter in the Canton region. His paintings were characterized by portraying merchants both western and eastern of the Canton trade port. The man depicted in this portrait is Eshing, a silk and tea merchant (MIT). This portrait resembles the influence of maritime trade on western christian spheres of influence in Asia in that the painting was made with oil and this was made possible because of its introduction by Christian westerners. Additionally its creation was not for Eshing himself but rather as a gift for Captain Richard Wheatland, a custom of westerners to bring gifts in their voyages.
This chair was designed to reflect various diversities of design and culture through an array of artists. Portraying Indian art, the serpents surrounding a beast known as the *makara* is reflected on the crest rail as shown in the picture presented. Being a mythological, Hindu sea creature, this figure represents the Maritime trade effects on even ordinary pieces of furniture.

Using ivory, cane, and sandalwood, artists from this part of India were known for their expertise in the area of engravement. Reflecting a message of culture while also incorporating religion, trading of this chair and ones like it expressed a message of interconnectivity and Asian influence within America. All of this is done through the initial inspiration of both English and Indian design and rhetoric.
Uncovered Scrolls of Knowledge

- Peabody-Essex Museum, Asian Export Art Collection
- https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/rise_fall_canton_01/merchants.html
Thank You & Come Explore Again!