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CURRENTS OF CHANGE ART AND LIFE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, 1850-1861

**THE LSU MUSEUM OF ART
JUNE 16 - SEPTEMBER 18, 2005**



Baton Rouge –The LSU Museum of Art in the Shaw Center for the Arts is presenting *Currents of Change: Art and Life Along the Mississippi River, 1850-1861*. The exhibition opens at LSU MOA on June 16, 2005, and is organized and toured by The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA). *Currents of Change* showcases arts along the Mississippi River through approximately 40 objects, including paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, furniture, silver, ceramics, textiles and sculpture.

Through fine and decorative arts, *Currents of Change* explores life and culture along the Mississippi River during the 1850s, a dramatic time in the development of America. The nation was undergoing extraordinary and massive changes: from the steamboat era to the advent of the railroad, from a mostly agrarian economy to the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, from a nation of youthful optimism to one that would soon erupt into civil war. The economy of the Mississippi Valley—lumber and flour milling, lead production, and sugar and cotton processing—gave rise to the great cities along the river that we know today and financed the demand for sophisticated furnishings and a refined life. The Mississippi, which had long been a channel for trade, was becoming an important conduit for ideas about art, culture and design.

Currents of Change includes seldom-seen objects from numerous museums, historical societies and private collections in the southern Mississippi River valley. Included is Marie Adrien Persac's 1858 watercolor, *Norman's Chart of the Lower Mississippi River*, from a private collection and Persac's 1861 gouache and collage, *Interior of Main Cabin of the Steamboat Princess/Imperial*, from the LSU Museum of Art collection. The latter is the only known, pre-Civil War painting of a Mississippi River steamboat interior, and it depicts in minute detail the elegance and luxury of the steamboat's Gothic Revival-style interior. Hippolyte Sebron's 1853 oil painting, *Giant Steamboats of New Orleans*, from the Tulane University collection, also captures the pre-Civil War prosperity of the south. Crewman load and unload cargo from a string of steamboats at the wharf while other steamboats depart up river.

Additional *Currents of Change* highlights include a rare collection of sheet music from the John Hay Library, Brown University, and a Grecian-style, mahogany and walnut bed manufactured by Charles Lee of Manchester, Massachusetts in 1860, on loan from the Natchez National Historical Park, Melrose. Lee foresaw the approaching demand for Grecian-style bedroom furniture in cities located along the Mississippi River and began shipping his highly regarded furniture aboard the cargo ships that transported cotton from the south to Boston and New York. Nearly every plantation in the Natchez region contained a bed similar to the one featured in this exhibition.

One of the many special items featured in the exhibition is a cotton quilt made by Susan Robb of Arkansas in 1861 from the Museum of Texas Tech University collection. The quilt is covered with appliqué patterns of Confederate soldiers and flags, and a pelican, which was the symbol of Louisiana and the Confederate South.

Works in the exhibition are on loan from the LSU Museum of Art (Baton Rouge), Tulane University (New Orleans), The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans Notarial Archives, Louisiana State Museum (New Orleans), Mississippi River Museum (Memphis), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, New Orleans Museum of Art, Natchez National Historic Park (Melrose), Museum of Texas Tech University (Lubbock), and Stanton Hall, Pilgrimage Garden Club (Natchez).

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated, color catalogue that includes three thematic essays, on sale in the LSU MOA Museum Store. MIA curator Christopher Monkhouse examines the forging of America's identity through Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*

(1855) and *Evangeline* (1847), both of which are set in the Mississippi River valley. MIA assistant curator Jason Busch, who has lectured and published on the decorative arts and culture of the lower Mississippi, uses furnishings and portraits by artists such as Thomas Sully and Alexander Roux to compare domestic spaces and to trace patterns of patronage and decoration along the river. Janet Whitmore, a freelance art historian, addresses the Mississippi River landscape, people, and architecture in paintings by artists such as George Caleb Bingham and Henry Lewis.

CURRENTS OF CHANGE

Events and Programs

Opening Public Reception: Thursday, June 16, 2005, 7:30 p.m.

Exhibition tour:

**Jason T. Busch, Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), Co-Curator, *Currents of Change*
Sunday, June 19, 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Free with museum admission.**

Location: LSU MOA, Paula Garvey Manship Floor (5th), Shaw Center for the Arts
Jason T. Busch, Assistant Curator of Architecture, Design, Decorative Arts, Craft and Sculpture, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, will offer visitors an intimate glimpse of the exhibition's theme and its contents. Busch, the co-curator of *Currents of Change*, has lectured and published on the decorative arts and culture of the lower Mississippi since the 1990s, and holds a Master of Arts in early American culture from the Winterthur Program, University of Delaware.

Guest speaker:

Jim Fraiser, best-selling author of *Mississippi River Country Tales* (2001) and *Shadow Seed* (1997)

Sunday, July 17, 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Free with museum admission.

Location: LSU MOA, Paula Garvey Manship Floor (5th), Shaw Center for the Arts
In conjunction with the *Currents of Change* exhibition, writer Jim Fraiser will read from his writings about the Mississippi River and the Deep South. Fraiser's recent book, *The Majesty of the Mississippi Delta*, charts the fascinating architectural history of the 200-mile-long and 52-mile-wide plain known as the Mississippi Delta region. He begins with Port Gibson, a cotton town on the Mississippi River bluffs, and moves north towards Memphis with vivid tails of Vicksburg, Rolling Fork, Greenville, Cleveland, Clarksdale, Greenwood, Yazoo City, and Holly Springs.

His first novel, *Shadow Seed*, sold out in hardcover after only two months on store shelves. Set in present-day Jackson, Mississippi, and the Mississippi Delta region at the turn-of-the-century, it's a hair-raising psychological thriller, and a provocative study of the moral ambiguity of the modern-day legal system and the society it seeks to protect. Fraiser, former Assistant Attorney General, Mississippi Civil Litigation Division, is a lawyer, actor, teacher and editor who resides in Jackson, Mississippi.

About the LSU Museum of Art, Shaw Center for the Arts

The new LSU Museum of Art (LSU MOA) in the Shaw Center for the Arts is Baton Rouge's premiere art museum. Located in downtown Baton Rouge overlooking the Mississippi River, it presents rotating, historical and contemporary exhibitions. Selections from the permanent collection are always on display. The 3500-work collection includes seventeenth–twentieth-century American and British portraiture, landscape painting, prints and decorative arts, pre-Civil War New Orleans silver, historical art from India, Japan and South America, and contemporary Inuit sculpture.

General Admission: Adults - \$8; Seniors (65+), students and LSU faculty/staff (with I.D.) - \$6; Children 5 to 17 - \$4. Children under 5 are admitted free.

Museum and Museum Store Hours: Sunday: 1 p.m.–5 p.m.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Thursday: 10 a.m.–8 p.m.; Closed Monday.

For additional information, call (225) 389-7200 or visit www.lsu.edu/lsumoa.org.

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