

WINTERTHUR



Winterthur Press Release

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Dining by Design: Nature Displayed on the Dinner Table
Exhibition on View at Winterthur Starting April 1

A dazzling display of dining design inspired by the natural world

Winterthur, DE March 9, 2018—A visual feast of flora and fauna awaits visitors to *Dining by Design: Nature Displayed on the Dinner Table*, on view at Winterthur from April 1, 2018, to January 6, 2019. This major new exhibition takes a fresh look at the history of dining and dinnerware from the 1600s onward and celebrates how hosts and hostesses have brought the natural world into their dining rooms. Everything from painted butterflies and hand-modeled flowers to tureens in the shapes of the foods served in them will be on view, set among a fascinating range of ceramic and silver tableware.

“While many things have changed in our world, the love of nature-inspired motifs as part of the dining experience continues from the past to today,” said Leslie Grigsby, senior curator of ceramics and glass and curator of the exhibition. “Foods were drawn from the bounty of nature, and dishes were created in the shapes of animals, birds, fruit and flowers or bore designs after such inspirations. In addition to their beauty, some patterns had special meaning and many provide clues to the original owner’s background or social status.”

Viewers will be introduced to some of the ways in which consumers purchased their dinnerware. For centuries, the famous Dutch and British East India Companies controlled much of the world’s trade, including household goods such as dinnerware in exotic new materials and forms. As time passed and a broader range of affordable choices became

available, some consumers special-ordered wares for the table or made design choices using factory pattern books. A dramatic tureen-pyramid in this section will hint at the range of decorative patterns that were available.

Nearby, a stunning display of dishes will help viewers consider some of the many ways to acquire food. A tureen in the form of a boar's head (complete with arrows!) and another shaped like a cooked goose will help illustrate the theme of hunting. In the fishing section, a silver sea turtle tureen will swim serenely near a dish in the form of a bucket of codfish. A hen-and-chicks shape vessel will help illustrate the availability of meats from domestic animals, and dishes in the forms of melons and cauliflower will remind visitors to "eat their fruit and veggies."

The next portion of the show will discuss the fact that, after tableware and food were acquired, there still were many decisions to be made before one's dinner guests arrived. Cookbooks offered both advice on the preparation of different dishes for the meal and instructions, sometimes in the form of illustrations, on how to set the table. A dramatic display in flowered Chinese export porcelain will reproduce a banquet plan from a mid-1700s cookbook. Nearby, a room-vignette will portray a table set with seashell-pattern dinnerware once owned by an elegant Boston family. And why should naturalistic table ornament be restricted to plates and dishes? Another display will show that, from as early as the 1500s, napkins were elaborately folded in shapes inspired by nature, whether it be a ruffled leaf, a nesting pigeon or a swimming fish.

Visitors will find that some dinnerware designs depicted natural wonders such as Niagara Falls or portrayed imaginative scenes from the travels of explorers including Christopher Columbus. Other plates and dishes bore sophisticated imagery copied from important natural history books or prints. Some designs for the whole family celebrated famous displays at zoos, while animals on alphabet plates encouraged children to learn to read.

Next, visitors will see a gallery filled with nature designs created in Western (primarily European) styles. Ancient patterns portrayed Bacchus, the god of wine, and grapevines,

symbolic of fertility and autumn. Also from antiquity are Aesop's Fable patterns, such as The Tortoise and the Hare. Adam and Eve will appear in the earliest garden of all, Eden! Not far away, a pyramid of centerpieces formed of dozens of seashell-shaped dishes will entice the viewer's eye. Beyond this, a pastoral scene filled with animal-shaped vessels, from geese and a swan to a turtle, rooster, and rabbits will show how nature truly had a place on past dinner tables. Dishes portraying roses, lilies, and many other flowers will also delight.

Leaving the Western section, guests will enter the world of nature designs in Asian styles, especially from China and Japan. The huge water buffalo-head tureen that will greet visitors once held delicious hot soups or stews, the savory steam having billowed outward from the beast's nostrils. Not far away, within a Chinese pavilion, plates and dishes will display richly robed "mandarins" in flower- and pavilion-filled gardens. Displays of fish- or deer-patterned wares will invite consideration of the fact that some motifs had different meaning in Asia than in the Western world. Plates and dishes in the "hundred butterflies" design will flutter in a case nearby, and the somewhat flattened patterns of Asian peonies, carnations, and lotuses will invite comparison with the Western-style floral ornament viewed in the previous gallery. The final portion of this section will feature rarely seen Chinese porcelain produced for the Persian and Indian markets.

The conclusion of the exhibition will remind visitors how the love of nature designs on tableware continues today. "We proudly display and use floral or bird-pattern dishes passed down to us from our parents, and we purchase our own nature-pattern wares for family use and to entertain our guests," said Grigsby.

Winterthur—known worldwide for its preeminent collection of American decorative arts, naturalistic gardens, and research library for the study of American art and material culture—offers a variety of tours, exhibitions, programs, and activities throughout the year. General admission includes a tour of some of the most notable spaces in the 175-room house as well as access to the Winterthur Garden and Galleries, special exhibitions, a narrated tram tour (weather permitting), the Campbell Collection of Soup Tureens, and the Enchanted Woods children's garden. Admission costs \$20 for adults; \$18 for students and

seniors; and \$6 for ages 2–11. Group rates available. For details, visit winterthur.org or call 800.448.3883.

Winterthur is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m., Tuesday–Sunday, and is located on Route 52, six miles northwest of Wilmington, Delaware, and five miles south of U.S. Route 1. Closed on Mondays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Nestled in the heart of Delaware’s beautiful Brandywine Valley, midway between New York City and Washington, D.C., Winterthur is located minutes from Longwood Gardens and other Brandywine Valley attractions—including world-class museums, gardens, and historic sites—as well as wineries, hotels, and restaurants.

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