

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Renovated Galleries  
for British Decorative Arts and Design  
Opened on March 2, 2020**

(New York) A highlight of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 150th anniversary in 2020 was the opening, on March 2, of the Museum's newly installed Annie Laurie Aitken and Josephine Mercy Heathcote Galleries—11,000 square feet devoted to British decorative arts, design, and sculpture created between 1500 and 1900. The reimagined suite of 10 galleries (including three remarkable eighteenth-century interiors) provides a fresh perspective on the period, focusing on its bold, entrepreneurial spirit and complex history. The new narrative offers a chronological exploration of the intense commercial drive among artists, manufacturers, and retailers that shaped British design over the course of four hundred years. During this period, global trade and the growth of the British Empire fueled innovation, industry, and exploitation. Works on view illuminate the emergence of a new middle class—ready consumers for luxury goods—which inspired an age of exceptional creativity and invention during a time of harsh colonialism.

The British Galleries reopen with almost 700 works of art on view, including a large number of new acquisitions, particularly works from the nineteenth century that were purchased with this project in mind. This is the first complete renovation of the galleries since they were established (Josephine Mercy Heathcote Gallery in 1987, Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries in 1995). A prominent new entrance provides direct access from the galleries for medieval European art, creating a seamless transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. A seventeenth-century staircase with exquisite naturalistic carvings—brought to The Met in 1932 from Cassiobury Park, Herfordshire, a now-lost Tudor manor—has been meticulously conserved and re-erected in the new galleries. The dining room from Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire, with exquisite plaster decoration (ca. 1748), and two interiors after designs by Robert Adam, the Tapestry Room from Croome Court (1763-71) with its set of Gobelins tapestries on the walls and furniture, and the dining room/gallery from Lansdowne House (1766-69), have been transformed by new lighting and painstaking restoration and remain at the heart of the galleries.

Silver objects are installed throughout the renovated galleries, highlighting portions of the significant donations by collectors including Irwin Untermyer (Fig. 1) and manufacturers such as Paul de Lamerie (1688-1751, active 1712-51) whose tea kettle and spirit lamp with stand and bowl of 1744-45 once owned by David Franks and his wife Margaret Evans of Philadelphia is installed in the corner of the “Tea, Trade, and Empire” gallery (#510). Passing into the eighteenth century gallery (#512) one encounters an example of silver furniture, a teakettle, lamp, and table marked by London silversmith Simon Pantin I (ca. 1672-1728), 1724-25. A tall multi-shelved vitrine simulating a royal buffet houses other examples marked by de Lamerie, his predecessors including a wine cistern marked by Lewis Mettayer (active 1700-died 1740), London, 1709-10, and his contemporaries. A hand list identifying the various items on the shelves is available in a pocket mounted on an adjacent wall. Another vitrine houses silver miniatures from the Joseph M. and Aimee Loeb May Collection, marked by London silversmiths David Clayton, John Le Sage, and others. The gallery devoted to the nineteenth century highlights the designs of Christopher Dresser in many media, including a silver plate toast rack manufactured for the Birmingham firm of Hukin & Heath, 1881. Also included is a recent acquisition, a pair of silver and silver gilt tankards marked by Edward Farrell (1779-1850) with finials made by Charles Frederick Hancock (born 1807) which was likely retailed by Kensington Lewis (1790-1854), London, 1824-25, that display the eclectic historicism associated with Farrell. Prince Frederick Augustus, Duke of York (and King of Saxony), a Lewis client, owned the pair at his death in 1827 (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 *Flagons (pair)*, 1597-98. British, London. Silver gilt. 12  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 6  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. Weight 35 oz. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1968 (68.141.142)



Fig. 2 Edward Farrell (British, 1779-1850). Finials made by Charles Frederick Hancock (British, born 1807). Probably retailed by Kensington Lewis (British, 1790-1854). *Tankards (pair)*, 1824-1825. Silver and gilt silver, 18  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13 x 10  $\frac{7}{16}$  in. Weight 4882.5g. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Paul and Elissa Cahn, 2017 (2017.177.2)