

On October 22, North Carolina's first fine art museum will celebrate its rich legacy, promising future and The Mint Museums' 70th anniversary.

The Old Charlotte Mint

The Piedmont region of North Carolina emerged as the first major gold producing area in the United States following the discovery in 1790 of a rich deposit of gold



nuggets near Concord, N.C. At one time there were between 75 and 100 gold mines within a 20-mile radius of Charlotte. Gold from these Carolina mines could be sold to local banks, sent to the Bechtler family's private mint in Rutherfordton or shipped to the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia. As an alternative, the U.S. Congress funded the first branch of the Philadelphia Mint which began operation in Charlotte in 1836.

The building, designed in the Federal style by William A. Strickland, a noted architect of the era, originally stood on West Trade Street between Mint and Graham Streets in downtown Charlotte. At the start of the Civil War the building was pressed into service as a Confederate headquarters and hospital. After the Civil War it was used as an assay office and later for meetings of local organizations. Finally, in 1936 it became the first art museum in the state and is known today as the Mint Museum of Art.



The Early Years

Thanks to Mary Myers Dwelle, piece by piece the former Charlotte Federal Mint was moved far from the end of the nearest trolley line or paved road to four acres of land donated by E.C. Griffith in Eastover known as "Watkin's Bottoms" in the early 1930s. Dwelle, who led the cause to save the Mint along with a group of 16 other Charlotteans, raised \$950 the

week before the building was to be demolished to make room for the expansion of the neighboring post office on the same site. Soon after the purchase was made, Dwelle set to work, persuading Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Van

Landingham to spearhead a committee of 200 to raise restoration funds. Speakers went out to civic and social clubs to enlist

their aid. Even the school-

children of the day contributed their pennies to visit the museum. But it wasn't until an art critic for the *Washington Star* and former curator at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Leila Mechlin, spoke at the Charlotte Woman's Club that support for the Mint was ignited. She wrote Dwelle advising of a new federal relief program to put men back to work building roads, bridges and public works. She thought perhaps building an art museum might qualify. Dwelle's persuasive abilities were enhanced by the foresight of architect Martin E. Boyer, who made detailed

architectural sketches of the original Mint, marking each beam and stone in turn.

Unlike any other American art museum, the Mint opened its doors on October 22, 1936 without a collection or a bequest to build one. *The Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte News* provided enthusiastic coverage of the event. Over the next six months, slightly over

26,000 visitors crossed the threshold to see an exhibition of 16 American paintings from the National Gallery of Art in



Washington, D.C., as well as Francesco Granacci's *Madonna and Child* donated by dime store magnate Samuel H. Kress. Few could have ever imagined that works by Rembrandt, Corot, Inness, Gainsborough, Reynolds and El Greco would grace the then century-old building that now bridged Charlotte's past and future.

The first four notable gifts to the museum came from Dwelle's cousin, Richard Springs, who donated William Hart's *The Golden Hour* in memory of Eli Baxter Springs, former mayor of Charlotte. Others included Elliott Daingerfield's *Autumn* from Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Cannon, Sr., and Allan Ramsay's *Coronation Portrait of Queen Charlotte* from Mrs. S. Westray Battle.

Above Left: MMA in the early years.

Left: Mary Myers Dwelle

Above: Queen Charlotte reigns over the Main Gallery in 1936.

Below: Charles W. Tillett, Jr., Franklin Graham, Mary Myers Dwelle, Leila Mechlin and Philip N. Youtz at the inauguration of the Mint Museum of Art on October 22, 1936.



1936 • 2006 *70 Years* Celebrating the Past / Envisioning the Future

1936

Mint Museum of Art opened as the first art museum in North Carolina. The opening exhibit featured 16 American paintings from The National Gallery of Art.

1953

First Tour of Charlotte Homes to benefit the Mint Museum of Art.

1954

Charlotte Garden Club organized.

Mint Museum Theatre Guild established by Dorothy Masterson as Artistic Director.



Dorothy Masterson

1956

Woman's Auxiliary organized by Mrs. Harold T. Crosby.

1958

Woman's Auxiliary opened the Mint Museum Shop.

1960-61

Renovation of "attic space" of the Mint Museum of Art for collection storage, exhibit preparation, library, staff offices, and *Browse, Buy, Borrow Gallery* for the rental/sales of work by regional artists.

1969

Dr. and Mrs. Francis Robicsek made their first gift of Precolumbian art to the Mint Museum of Art. The Precolumbian Art collection has grown over the years to become one of the finest such collections in the Southeast. The Robicseks have long been recognized as the force and vision behind this outstanding holding at the Mint Museum of Art.

1970

Collector's Circle organized.

Precolumbian Art of the Americas opened. It is the first installation and catalogue of the Mint Museum's Precolumbian collection.

1972

The Mint Museum is one of a handful of museums across the country to successfully achieve accreditation from the American Association of Museums in their 2nd year of national certification. The Mint is reaccredited in 1986 and 1996 and today is one of just 771 accredited museums in the United States.

1975

The Delhom Service League was organized.
The Performing Arts Department was founded.

1980

Romare Bearden 1970-1980, the first major retrospective exhibition of Bearden's work, is organized by and opens at the Mint Museum and tours nationally to three venues. Sponsored by Philip Morris Inc. and the National Endowment for the Arts, the presentation of the Charlotte-born artist with an international reputation has an immediate impact with significant increase in regional press coverage and attendance.



Romare Bearden with M. Mellanay Delhom

1982

Charlotte voters overwhelmingly approved \$3.5 million in bonds for the construction of the new \$7.5 million expansion of the Mint Museum. The new Dalton Wing is named for Harry and Mary Dalton, who offered their American and European art collection to the city if the Mint Museum would expand to house it. The city's support is matched with \$4 million in private contributions.



Construction of the Dalton Wing at The Mint Museum of Art

1992

After nearly 20 years as a department of the City of Charlotte, the Mint Museum of Art becomes a private, non-profit corporation.

1994

The Mint is selected by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund as one of 19 American museums to receive a multi-year grant for collections accessibility and community outreach. The Mint's grant, in the amount of \$1.25 million, prompts a major reinstallation of the permanent collection; hiring of the first Curator of Precolumbian Art, the first Director of Community Relations; and the first Educational Outreach Coordinator.

1995

D.I.G.S., Deciphering and Investigating Great Societies, a Mint-organized program, pilots an interactive tour for 5th graders, teacher workshops and computer interactive lessons integrating art and social studies with support from the Institute of Museum Services. Almost 10,000 5th graders from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools participate every year.

1995

Charlotte's Latin American Festival finds a new home on the grounds of the Mint Museum of Art in partnership with the Latin American Coalition and Latin American Women's Association.



Latin American Festival

of contemporary design. Of note are three architectural commissions: a glass chandelier by Seattle artist Dale Chihuly, an architectural glass wall by Massachusetts artist Tom Patti and the last American commission for Czechoslovakian glass artists Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová.



Chihuly Chandelier at The Mint Museum of Craft + Design

1999-2000

Dale Chihuly: Installations exhibition draws over 58,000 visitors to the Mint Museum of Craft + Design.

2000

The Fleur and Charles Bresler Collection of 36 historically significant American quilts is acquired.
Awarded Ford Foundation New Directions/New Donors for the Arts Challenge Grant (one of 28 national grants, \$1.75 million towards Endowment and membership growth).

1935	1940	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
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Mrs. Charles Crutchfield started the Queen's Mintkins Puppet Theatre.



Queen's Mintkins Puppet Theatre

1965

Friends of the Mint founded.

1967

First Antique Show held at the Merchandise Mart, sponsored by the Woman's Auxiliary.

1968

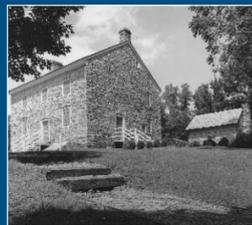
Delhom Wing opened showcasing the acquisition of the historic pottery and porcelain collection of Miss M. Mellanay Delhom, and a theatre-in-the-round for public programs. Delhom's decision to bring her 2,000 piece collection, research library and herself as a consulting curator instantly put the Mint Museum on the art world map.

Miss Delhom and the Delhom Gallery



1976

The Mint Museum of Art is designated a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Site by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission. The Mint Museum becomes a Department of the City of Charlotte and also operates the Hezekiah Alexander Homesite.



Hezekiah Alexander Homesite

1978

Il Grande Disco is donated by Independence Square Associates to the City of Charlotte and the Mint Museum. The six-ton, 15-foot bronze disk is the largest single gift donated to the Mint Museum to date. The big disk-shaped sculpture is located in front of the old headquarters of NationsBank on the corner of Trade and Tryon Streets.



Il Grande Disco at Trade and Tryon

Ramesses the Great



1983

Purchase of the Dorothy C. and Walter S. Auman Collection of North Carolina pottery was funded by Daisy Wade Bridges and the Mint Museum Auxiliary, making the Mint one of the largest repositories of North Carolina pottery in the U.S. Bridges' contributions over the years would form the nucleus of the Mint's American ceramics collections.

1985

The Dalton Wing opened with a public ceremony highlighted by remarks from Governor Jim Martin and Mayor Harvey Gantt. The expansion tripled the size of the museum and reoriented its main entrance to Randolph Road, but maintained the original façade on the back side of the building facing Eastover.



Harry Dalton breaks ground on the Dalton Wing

1988-1989

Ramesses the Great: The Pharaoh and His Times exhibition attracted over 600,000 visitors and is the impetus for a city-wide celebration and collaborative events. The voice of Charlton Heston led visitors from every city and town in the Carolinas and well beyond on taped tours through the transformed Mint building and grounds.

1990

Young Affiliates of the Mint organized.

1996

The Dwelle Society (planned giving) established.

1997

Allan Chasanoff ceramic collection is acquired. This magnificent international collection later provides the critical mass that enabled the Mint Museum of Art to realize the vision of the Mint Museum of Craft + Design.



Einstein, 1988, by Judy Fox

1998

Founders' Circle organized.

1999

Mint Museum of Craft + Design opens in the renovated Montaldo's Department Store through the generous support of Hugh McColl and NationsBank (now Bank of America), Rodgers Builders, the Founders' Circle and other generous supporters. Today, the Mint Museum of Craft + Design



The Mint Museum of Craft + Design on North Tryon Street

serves as a national and international design and craft resource through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programs. Collections and exhibitions focus on both traditional and contemporary crafts in the five media of ceramics, glass, wood, metal and fiber, and design including architecture, industrial design, furniture design, graphic design, and other areas

2001

The Mint Museum of Craft + Design introduces its third and most significant installation: *Relations*, a colossal glass wall by internationally known Czech artists Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová. Greeting visitors at the entrance of the permanent collection galleries, *Relations* stands almost 13 feet high and weighs more than 6,000 pounds.

2002

Jane and Arthur Mason Collection of more than 100 pieces of turned wood art is acquired. This collection, along with the ceramics collection of Allan Chasanoff, formed the basis of the new craft museum site.

2003

The Mint Museum of Art is one of two museums selected to display *Raphael to Monet: European Masterpieces from the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore*, attracting more than 52,000 visitors.

Ford Foundation challenge campaign is completed with a total of \$4.7 million raised to match Ford's \$1.75 million gift.

2005

Apprentice Circle organized.

The 15th Annual Latin American Festival attracts 16,000 people.

Latin American Festival



The Mint Today

The Mint opened 70 years ago without much of a collection. Over the years, through many generous donations and acquisitions, the Mint's collection has



grown to include over 28,000 pieces. As the collection grew so too did the Mint: through several expansions including a renovation in 1960, the addition of the Delhom Wing and a theatre-in-the-round in 1968, the construction of the Dalton Wing in 1985, and Bank of America's conversion of the former Montaldo's Department Store into the Mint Museum of Craft + Design in 1999.

Charlotte is now one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States. As the community grows, usage of facilities



such as The Mint Museums expands as well. According to the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, Mecklenburg County's 2006 population is estimated at 850,178, an increase of 18% from just six years ago. Over the past 70 years, The Mint Museums have expanded in response to the needs of the community and the demands of a burgeoning collection. Today, the need to expand The Mint Museums is once again at hand. It is one of the top priorities laid out in a master Cultural Facilities Plan which was developed by the Arts & Science Council. Expansion will entail moving the craft and design collections currently housed

at the Mint Museum of Craft + Design along with part of the art collections to a new, larger facility on South Tryon Street in center-city Charlotte. The approximately 145,000-square-foot facility is proposed to open in 2009. The rest of the Mint's art collections will remain at the original U.S. Mint building on Randolph Road. The Mint Museums' six artistic focus areas will be divided evenly between the two facilities: the ceramics, historic costume, and Precolumbian art collections will be housed on Randolph Road; the contemporary craft, American art, and contemporary art collections will move to the new building on South Tryon Street.



The new Mint Museums facility will be part of a cultural campus being developed by Wachovia Bank. In addition to the Mint, the development is to include a 1,200-seat performing arts theater, the Bechtler Art Museum, the Afro-American Cultural Center, Wake Forest University Graduate School, an office tower, and residential and retail features. Together, these components will create a vibrant new urban gateway at the southern end of uptown and will benefit the entire Charlotte community.

Calling all (Mint-Related) History!

Do you have artifacts (old newsletters, photographs, exhibition invitations/catalogs, etc.) relating to the Mint or The Mint Museums? Of special interest are artifacts/archival items prior to 1955. If so, contact Martha Mayberry, Registrar/Associate Curator of Prints and Drawings, at either mmayberry@mintmuseum.org or (704) 337-2005. Thank you.



Mint Museum Directors

[1936-2006]

1936-1939

Leila Mechlin
Consulting Director

1939-1944

Sada Burwell
Director

1944-1946

Sarah Everett Toy
Acting Director

1946

Philip Moose
Acting Director

1946-1949

Mrs. Thomas Burton
Acting Director

1949-1951

Joseph S. Hutchinson
Director

1951-1955

Bruce St. John
Director

1955-1958

Katheryn Korthauer
Acting Director

1958-1965

Robert W. Schlageter
Director

1965-1967

Russell Hicken
Director

1968-1969

Herbert Cohen
Acting Director

1969-1976

Cleve Scarbrough
Director

1976

Elizabeth Crouch
Acting Director

1976-1990

Milton J. Bloch
Director

1991-2000

Bruce H. Evans
Director

2000-2001

Mary Lou Babb
Acting Director

2002-Present

Phil Kline
Executive Director