

WINTERTHUR



Winterthur Press Release

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Truths of the Trade: Slavery and the Winterthur Collection Exhibit
On View at Winterthur Starting May 5, 2018

Winterthur, DE April 30, 2018—The experiences of enslaved peoples in the Atlantic world are embedded in every coin that changed pockets, every spoonful of sugar mixed into a cake, and every cotton shirt worn. These commodities shaped the material culture of early America and, consequently, the objects collected at Winterthur. *Truths of the Trade: Slavery and the Winterthur Collection*, a new, student-curated exhibit, investigates objects at the epicenter of these narratives of Atlantic Trade, encouraging visitors to look beyond style and craftsmanship to place objects in different contexts and consider the multiple meanings and complex histories of each museum and library object.

The core questions for this exhibit were inspired by a recently acquired double cabinet that, at first glance, appeared unassuming in its construction and design. Once opened, the cabinet's intricate interior space revealed its more complex history—its role in the Atlantic Trade networks of Africa, North America, the Caribbean, and Europe.

In *Truths of the Trade*, visitors will encounter historic objects and explore how the current generation of emerging scholars work with museum professionals to design exhibitions. As home to graduate programs since 1952, Winterthur has long encouraged collaboration between students and staff to bring fresh insights to its collection. The objects selected for this exhibit were hand-picked by University of Delaware graduate students in the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture and from the Department of Art History and reflect contemporary scholarship on museum work, material culture in America, and the history of enslaved life. The exhibit

includes videos and interactive elements in addition to nearly 20 objects from the Winterthur collection.

In addition to the cabinet, highlights include:

Slave Tax Badge (South Carolina)

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, enslaved laborers could be hired out by their owners or permitted self-employment. Charleston, South Carolina, mandated that tax badges, like this one, be worn by enslaved individuals when hired out and away from their owner's direct supervision. The badges indicated that the owners had paid a tax to the city, relegating human beings to the status of an object and number and thereby controlling enslaved labor.

Martha Washington Cake Plate (Virginia)

Considering that the American consumption of both porcelain and sugar relied on the transatlantic slave trade, this plate and its intended use for serving cake, which requires sugar, complicate our image of early American hospitality and femininity. By owning and using this Chinese export porcelain cake plate, Martha Washington's role as an active participant in the worldwide network of trade that capitalized on the dehumanization and exploitation of enslaved labor is revealed.

Shirt (England or North America)

During the 18th and 19th centuries, a white shirt was a typical piece of men's clothing, yet not all shirts were of equal quality. The shirt on display in *Truth of the Trade* is a "fine shirt" made of linen, indicating that it was most likely used by a more well-to-do individual. An interactive display about the various materials that garments were made from during this period will help visitors understand how social status was evident through clothing and how putting coarse linen in a European style on black bodies was a way of controlling the personal choice of enslaved individuals.

Truths of the Trade: Slavery and the Winterthur Collection is included with all admission tickets. 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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