EMBRACING ASIAN ART

“New globalism” really isn’t, not in the world of decorative arts. As early as the 16th Century, North, Central, and South America formed the hub of trade between Europe and Asia. As exotic lacquer ware, porcelains, and textiles passed through American ports, resident artisans embraced the designs and incorporated them into their own work.

For instance, when the craze for blue-and-white Chinese pottery swept through Europe, Mexican potters compensated for a lack of kaolin clay used in porcelain by molding buff-colored earthenware, painting it with a white tin glaze, and embellishing it with cobalt designs that mixed Chinese and Islamic motifs.

Similarly, a mid-1700s inlaid desk-and-bookcase made in Mexico melds elaborate geometric inlays in Moorish style on the exterior with an indigenous-style map of a hacienda with chinoiserie elements on the inside.

“We don’t realize that in the 17th Century Mexico City and the country were larger and wealthier than any settlement in North America,” said Linda Eaton, chief curator at Winterthur. Great wealth also rested in Brazil and Peru, she noted.

Winterthur Museum explores these cross-cultural influences on the arts in Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia, opening March 26 after its debut at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, which mounted the exhibition. More than 80 masterpieces—ceramics, inlaid furniture, paintings, silver work, and textiles—visually substantiate the importance of Asian influences on the early arts of the Americas.

The exhibition runs through January 8, 2017. For information call 302.888.4600 or visit www.winterthur.org

Well-embroidered shawls were among the commodities most often imported into the Americas. This rebozo, a type of shawl worn by all classes of Mexican society, incorporates European iconography into a form comprising Asian, American, and European prototypes. It was embroidered using gold, silver, and silk threads in the mid-1700s in an unidentified professional workshop in Mexico City.