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“India in America”

A Curatorial Conversation on the Work and Practice of Lockwood de Forest and The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company

Nina Blomfield and Katie Loney

Conversation

A curatorial conversation between Nina Blomfield and Katie Loney on the work and practice of Lockwood de Forest and The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company. This conversation is based on a public conversation held on October 3, 2019 at the University of Pittsburgh.

About the Authors

Nina Blomfield is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Art at Bryn Mawr College. She holds a B.A. in history from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand and an M.A. from Bryn Mawr College. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century architecture and design history, the material culture of the home, and networks of consumption in the decorative arts. She is working on a dissertation that explores the intimacy of cultural encounter in late-nineteenth-century interior decorating and the role of the domestic interior in engendering, embodying, and preserving complex social and artistic relationships.

Katie Loney is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research examines nineteenth-century American art and design, with a focus on processes of making, international art markets, collecting histories, and Orientalism. She currently holds an Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh, where she is writing her dissertation “Lockwood de Forest, The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, and the Global Circulation of Luxury Goods.” Her work has been supported by the World History Center, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and CASVA.

“India in America”

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What happens when we contextualize late-nineteenth-century “artistic” interiors within global material and social networks? Two exhibitions curated by the authors in 2019 and 2020 explored this question through the work of the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company (AWCC), a joint venture started in 1882 by New York-based artist-designer Lockwood de Forest and Gujrati merchant and philanthropist Muggunbhai Hutheesing. *“All-Over Design”*: *Lockwood de Forest between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr*, curated by Nina Blomfield, was the first comprehensive exhibition of the decorative arts

program designed by de Forest at Bryn Mawr College (Fig. 1). The exhibition explored de Forest’s idea of “all-over design” as a complex expression of his globalist enterprise—from establishing a carving workshop in Ahmedabad, India, to the interiors he decorated for the newly-founded American women’s college. *“India in America:” East Indian Furnishings between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr*, curated by Katie Loney, was a digital exhibition that focused on a set of furnishings produced by the AWCC now held by Bryn Mawr College (Fig. 2). The exhibition tracked these furnishings from production to consumption, visualizing the now non-existent spaces through which these objects moved. Virtual galleries registered the position of the company’s work as objects of skilled craftsmanship, commodities, and exotic luxury furnishings, as well as how turn-of-the-century Indians and Americans used objects to navigate their identities and social relationships in an increasingly interconnected world. Both exhibitions examined the movement of these objects from Ahmedabad to New York, Baltimore, and Bryn Mawr, accounting not only for the creative agency of de Forest but also for the often-overlooked work of Hutheesing, the company’s craftsmen, and de Forest’s elite female patrons: Baltimore railroad heiress Mary Garrett and Bryn Mawr College president M. Carey Thomas.

The following conversation revisits an event held publicly on October 3, 2019, in the Indian Nationality Room at the University of Pittsburgh (Fig. 3). A project that began in the early twentieth century and continues today, the Nationality Rooms in the Cathedral of Learning are monuments created by Pittsburgh’s immigrant communities. The Indian Nationality Room was created by the Indian Room committee and dedicated in the year 2000. Architect Deepack Wadhvani designed an immersive interior modeled after Nalanda University (Bihar, India), collapsing space and time between Pittsburgh and the Buddhist monastic university that operated from the fifth to twelfth centuries. Blomfield and Loney chose this venue for its affinity with Aesthetic movement interiors, which also sought to imagine distant times, places, environments. Over the course of curating their exhibitions, Blomfield and Loney have collaborated informally through research and conversation and by co-presenting ideas about material culture and global exchange. Their scholarly work shares a focus on interiors as complete compositions and interrogates the transportive effect of such spaces. By locating their conversation in the Indian Nationality Room, they aimed to highlight the totalizing and transformative atmospheres shared by the Nationality Rooms and late-nineteenth-century Orientalist interiors.

The community-built Indian Nationality Room is, however, fundamentally different from the de Forest-designed interiors at Bryn Mawr College. Built by Pittsburgh’s Indian community, the Indian Nationality Room reproduces Nalanda University’s architectural features, creating a direct connection between the Indian diaspora and the Buddhist monastic university, which educated students from across Asia. de Forest, on the other hand, filled his interiors with an assortment of carved wood and metalwork from India, inlaid pearl chests and fritware tiles from Damascus, carpets from Egypt, and Japanese ceramics. The layering of color, pattern,



Figure 1

Installation shot of "All-Over Design": Lockwood de Forest between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr. (Photograph by Zachary Hartzell, courtesy Bryn Mawr College Special Collections.)

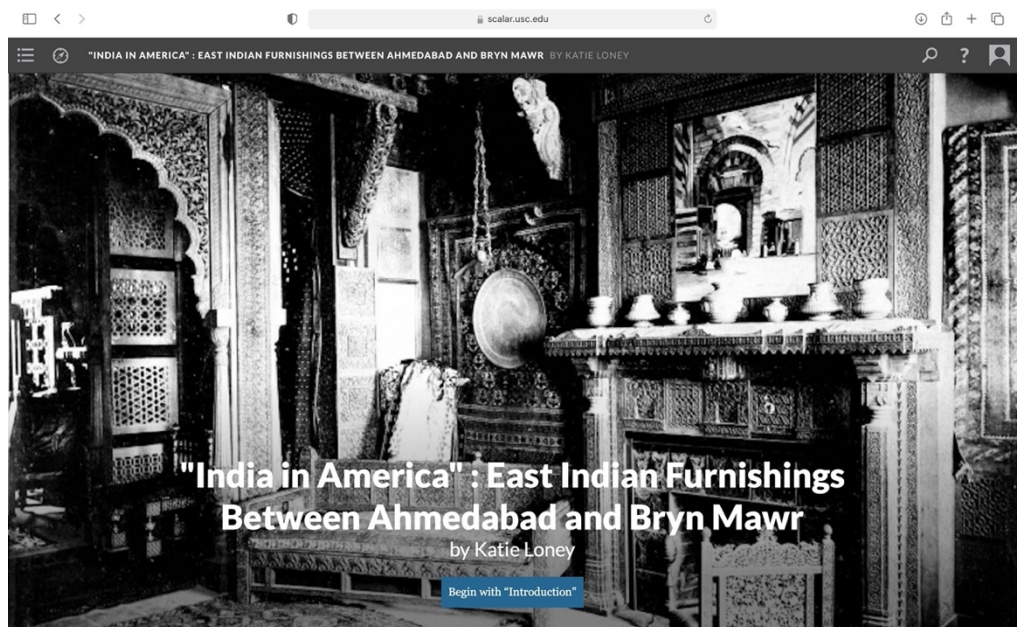


Figure 2

Frontpage of "India in America": East Indian Furnishings between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr by Katie Loney

and texture in these densely furnished interiors disconnected objects from time or place and created totalizing artistic environments. "*All-Over Design*" and "*India in America*" dismantle the work of the late-nineteenth-century Orientalist interior, revealing the global networks and uneven relationships that both enabled and were sustained by the American market for decorative arts and interior decoration. In their work, Blomfield and Loney challenge how institutions have valued these interiors for their decorative effects and the imperial visions of Western artist-designers, an interpretation that risks perpetuating the colonial systems on which the rooms relied. This conversation records Blomfield and Loney's efforts to recover the creative agency of the Hutheesing family and the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company's craftsmen, female patrons, and their surviving objects.¹



Figure 3

Photograph from "*India in America:*" A Curatorial Conversation on the Work and Practice of Lockwood de Forest and Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, October 3, 2019. (Photo: Alex J. Taylor).

¹ The authors' work is indebted to the Bryn Mawr College Facilities and Collections staff charged with the care and preservation of this furniture for over a century, as well as Roberta A. Mayer and Abigail McGowan for their meticulous research on Lockwood de Forest. They would also like to thank everyone who attended their conversation at the University of Pittsburgh for their thoughtful comments and provocative questions. Katie Loney is especially grateful to Ruth Mostern and Molly Warsh at the University of Pittsburgh's World History Center and Alex J. Taylor, Department of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh, for supporting "*India in America*" and her work in public history. Nina Blomfield would like to acknowledge the dedication and support of Carrie Robbins, Curator/Academic Liaison for Art and Artifacts, Bryn Mawr College, and Sylvia Houghteling, Assistant Professor of History of Art, Bryn Mawr College. "*All-Over Design:*" *Lockwood de Forest between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr* was made possible through the generous assistance of the Friends of the Bryn Mawr College Libraries.

Katie Loney: Over the last decade or so, we have seen rising interest in de Forest's work amongst museums and curators in the US. Major museums have purchased furnishings by de Forest and the AWCC for their collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. As part of their 2011-2014 renovation, the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum restored Andrew Carnegie's private family library, designed by de Forest using the AWCC's wood carvings throughout the space. Additionally, both the Cooper Hewitt (2015) and the Olana Partnership (2014) hosted exhibitions about de Forest's decorative work and his relationship with Frederic Church. Why do you think there is such an interest in this material now? And, what prompted you to curate an exhibition of de Forest's work at Bryn Mawr College at this particular time?

Nina Blomfield: Over the past few years, Bryn Mawr's community, like many others, has been engaged in a rethinking of the impact of individuals on public spaces. The conversation has frequently centered on the second Bryn Mawr College President M. Carey Thomas, an ardent supporter of women's suffrage but a figure whose ideology of reform was grounded in an abhorrent set of anti-Semitic and white supremacist beliefs. Through the continued work of anti-racist organizers and students of color, efforts to dismantle Thomas's legacy came to a head in the fall of 2020 when students organized a sixteen-day strike against systemic racism in institutional and community structures. One of the demands issued by the Core Strike Collective was the removal of Thomas's name and image from campus spaces. When we developed the exhibition in late 2018, my colleagues in Bryn Mawr's Special Collections felt a pressing need to include this group of furnishings, which belonged to Thomas but have this unexpected association with de Forest and with India, in the discussion. But they have never been the focus of their own exhibition, and they're currently in storage and inaccessible to the public. By exhibiting these furnishings, I hoped to lend a material dimension to the conversation and allow an opportunity to read objects against the grain and uncover new and unexpected stories.

KL: Thomas is such a towering figure on Bryn Mawr's campus, and the removal of her name and image certainly seems like an important anti-racist action. If we want to center anti-racist and decolonial approaches as part of our growing curatorial practices, it is also essential to highlight the local and global networks, indeed the colonial systems, of which someone like Thomas was a part. Here, her Orientalist tastes weren't necessarily about an appreciation for Indian things, but rather an investment in imperial expansion and, thus, white supremacy. When I saw your exhibition, I was struck by how you decentered Thomas and, instead, highlighted how the AWCC's furnishings connected Thomas, de Forest, the Hutheesing family, and the company's craftsmen. How did you approach the task of recontextualizing these objects?

NB: Starting out, I was continually surprised by how much Lockwood de Forest was involved in designing Bryn Mawr's campus. The collection held at Bryn Mawr is an unusually complete group of furnishings from de Forest's oeuvre. We are lucky to have objects and interiors that have survived alongside an archive of letters and historical photographs of the spaces. That said, the public space that de Forest was most deeply connected to, the Deanery, was demolished in the late 1960s. The Deanery was conceived and constructed as an "all-over" interior design, and de Forest was involved in decisions on everything from the selection of paintings to the color of cushion covers. The careful coordination of every aspect of the interiors was essential to achieving a harmonious visual effect regardless of the cultural origin, time period, or style of individual objects.

In exhibiting this material, it was important to me that viewers could experience this aesthetic density for themselves in the form of a sort of period-room style vignette. Seeing everything together, en masse, gives an important sense of how the objects were used and experienced. When the lion armchair, for example, is displayed alone, you have the space to take in all its intricate detail, but it can be difficult to imagine its context and function (Figs. 4-5). The interiors that de Forest designed for Garrett and Thomas overflowed with pattern and color. But the density of the aesthetic interior obscures the stories of these objects. The

**Figures 4-5**

The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, Armchair, ca. 1881–1886, Wood, upholstery. Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, Deanery.360. Bequest of M. Carey Thomas, President of Bryn Mawr College, 1894–1922. (Photograph by Zachary Hartzell, courtesy Bryn Mawr College Special Collections.)

**Figure 6**

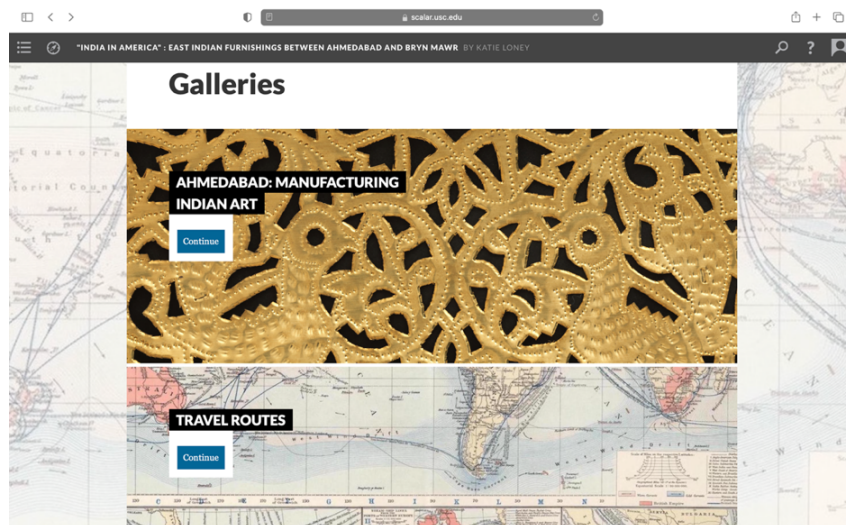
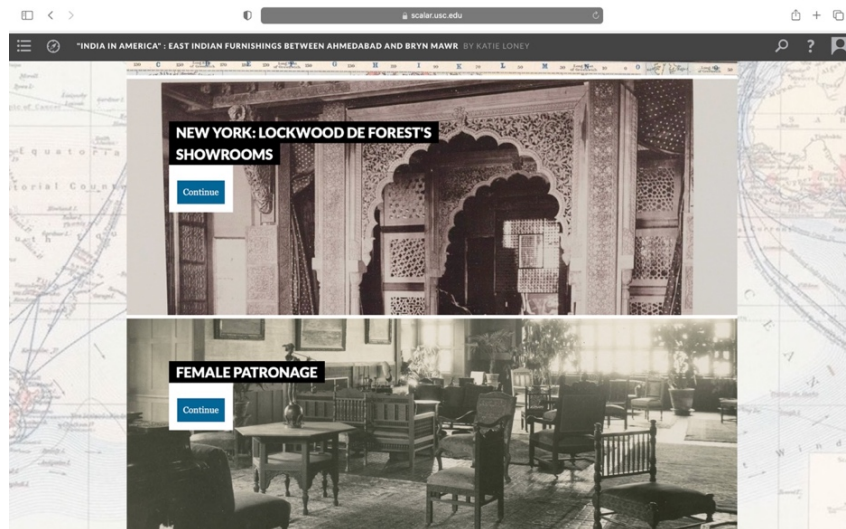
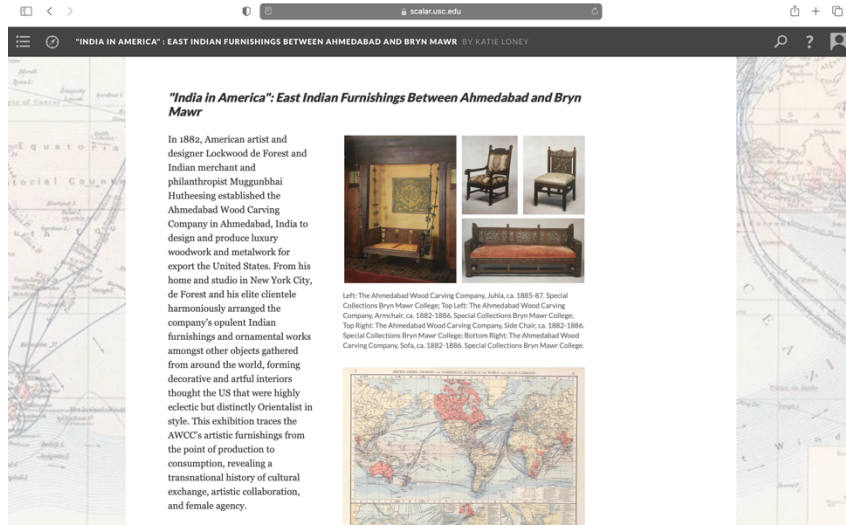
Installation shot, "All-Over Design": Lockwood de Forest between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr. (Photograph by Zachary Hartzell, courtesy Bryn Mawr College Special Collections.)

problematic issues surrounding their production, appropriation, and the Orientalist thinking that guided the use of this furniture in American interiors get lost amongst a focus on decorative effects. Attempting to recreate an interior "as it was," without interrogating how it came to be, is to risk transporting viewers into the time and mindset of the space's primary occupants. Considering the exhibition space was built over the site of the demolished Deanery, I did not want to provide a replication that could be regarded as a monument to M. Carey Thomas or an endorsement of her views. As I developed the format of the exhibition with Curator of Art and Artifacts Carrie Robbins, we kept returning to the idea of offering viewers the opportunity to experience the interiors as a whole while concurrently dismantling them into a more familiar museological presentation, with individual pieces displayed on plinths (Fig. 6). When we, as viewers, pull these interiors apart, both physically and conceptually, we can apply twenty-first-century critical lenses to these objects and learn from the part as well as the whole. We can accept them for the beautifully formed, aesthetically satisfying objects that they are, objects that stimulate the eyes and hands and provide comfort for the body. But we can also acknowledge their agency and involvement in harmful systems of colonial oppression.

Your work also raises questions of agency and interrogates how authorship has been assigned in the historiography of this material. How did that concern shape the process of curating your exhibition?

KL: Questions of agency were my primary concern, and recovering the collaborative and uneven modes by which the AWCC's objects were made was the driving goal of the exhibition. Before I proposed this digital project to the World History Center, I conducted an informal survey of museum collections in the US, tracking how they accounted for artistic agency in catalog entries and object labels. I found that most art museums house or display the AWCC's work in collections, or the context, of American art.² Here, creative and intellectual labor tends to be attributed to de Forest in his position as designer. In contrast, manufacture is attributed to the AWCC through the category of maker (at least in instances where provenance records are secure). While such attributions conform to standard practices for collecting and organizing metadata, it's an insufficient account of the company's work. It reduces a collaborative, if uneven, mode of production to a false binary that diminishes Indian agency, thus perpetuating an erasure of Indian agency that was so prevalent in the nineteenth century. Attribution is a powerful tool. Crediting de Forest as the primary creative agent of an object made of Indian patterns, techniques, materials, and by Indian hands doesn't accurately represent how the object was made or its history. I tried to recoup the agency of the AWCC's craftsmen in "*India in America*" by making the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company and its objects the focus, rather than de Forest. Tracing the AWCC's work from production to consumption, I aimed to identify the global networks and colonial systems that have supported—and continue to support—their erasure. In this historical narrative, de Forest is certainly an important actor, but he is not the lone or even central actor.

² My survey was not exhaustive, but it did include a range of prominent art and design museums in the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in addition to Special Collections at Bryn Mawr College. For example, at the Met, two Lockwood de Forest designed chairs manufactured, or likely manufactured, by the AWCC are housed in the American Wing. On the other hand, brass-cutouts designed by de Forest and attributed to Ahmedabad are housed in the museum's Islamic Art Department. The descriptions of these objects in the museum's online collections database highlight their role in the Aesthetic movement. See: [Lockwood de Forest, Cutout, The Met](#). A de Forest designed and AWCC manufactured server at the Art Institute of Chicago is on display in the Art of the America's galleries. The Brooklyn Museum identifies cut-outs in their decorative arts collections as designed by Lockwood de Forest and made by "The Ahmedabad Workshops for Lockwood de Forest." An exception to these examples is two chairs designed by de Forest and manufactured by the AWCC at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. They are currently housed in the museum's South Asian Art collection and on view in their South Asian Galleries.



Figures 7-9

Screenshots of the Introduction and Galleries of *"India in America": East Indian Furnishings between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr* by Katie Loney

It's worth saying a bit about the nature of the manufacture of these elite goods. The AWCC was a joint venture between de Forest and Muggunbhai Hutheesing. The company relied upon a patronage system, where Hutheesing was able to hire men and boys from the *mistri* caste (skilled artisans trained in wood and metalwork). De Forest relied on Hutheesing for access to these artisans and their work, with the hope of establishing a secure supply chain over which he had some control in terms of design, quality, and exclusivity. These were specific problems that de Forest encountered in other parts of India, where he would have to rely on tenuous relationships with dealers and other intermediaries. For Hutheesing, on the other hand, de Forest provided access to an elite clientele that was not a part of the British colonial system. The American artist/designer/dealer was at most an interlocutor in the Indian art schools and exhibitionary complex established by colonial art administrators in the Government of British India.³ That's not to say that de Forest and his clients did not use and benefit from these systems; they did. Colonial structures supported their business and collecting activities, which, in turn, served US imperialism through Orientalist aesthetics as well as the global movement of goods and capital as the US started to become a global commercial power.

De Forest and Hutheesing were both part of a cultural elite, and they relied upon the creative agency and skilled knowledge of the company's artisans. Importantly, these artisans *knowingly* adapted their craft to foreign markets. In curating an exhibition of the AWCC's woodcarving and metalwork, it was important for me to account for these artisans' creative agency. The archive, unsurprisingly, reveals little about their identities or experiences—we know that men and boys worked for the company, and we know a few of their names. But we also have the objects they made, and we can read de Forest's papers against the grain. This provides a sense of the company's collaborative and uneven operations as well as how creative agency was negotiated amongst the company's various stakeholders.

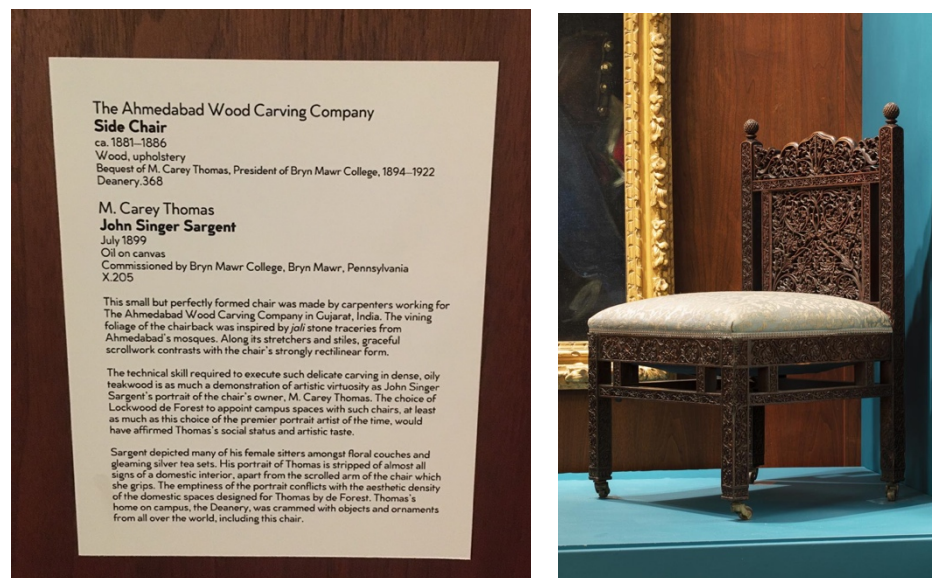
NB: Yes, I think you are so right to draw attention to how museums and collecting institutions have categorized these objects, and how considering them solely as American decorative arts misses so much of their story. Navigating issues of agency will always be a curatorial challenge when we're working with networks that are this expansive. It's an especially slippery task when the objects are so closely associated with their end-user, as with this furniture and M. Carey Thomas. How did you find a way to rebalance the narrative?

KL: My strategy was really to focus on the objects, to make them the central actors of the story, and to track their movements through different aesthetic worlds. "*India in America*" traced the suite of furnishings made by the AWCC at Bryn Mawr College from production to consumption, examining how creative agency was negotiated at various stages in these objects' long history (Fig. 7). Moving through digital galleries, visitors examined Mary Garrett and Thomas's furnishings in the workshop, de Forest's showrooms, one of Garrett's Baltimore mansions, and the Deanery (Figs. 8-9). The digital format allowed for furnishings to reappear throughout these different environments, arranged with period photographs and archival materials. For example, I arranged Garrett's suite of furnishings and their potential prototype,

³³ Roberta Mayer has written extensively on of Lockwood de Forest and his career, including his travels throughout India and relationships with various officials and arts administrators of the Government of British India. Any study of Lockwood de Forest and his work is indebted to her scholarship. The authors are especially grateful to Mayer for giving the keynote address, "Lockwood de Forest at Bryn Mawr College: Exoticism and Eclecticism," at the opening for "*All-Over Design*." Mayer and Karen Mauch also generously allowed for the photographs of the AWCC's furnishings (photographed by Mauch) in Mayer's book *Lockwood de Forest: Furnishing the Gilded Age with a Passion for India* to be used in "*India in America*." See: Roberta A. Mayer, *Lockwood de Forest: Furnishing the Gilded Age with a Passion for India*. (Associated University Presse, 2008). Roberta A. Mayer, "The Aesthetics of Lockwood de Forest: India, Craft, and Preservation," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 1 (1996): 1-22. Roberta A. Mayer, "Lockwood and Meta de Forest in India, Kashmir, and Nepal," *Archives of American Art Journal* 52, no. 1/2 (2013): 44-57.

a rough drawing made by de Forest, side by side.⁴ Juxtaposing these furnishings with this sketch and writings by de Forest exposed the extent to which de Forest relied on the craftsmen's expertise, including their knowledge of woodcarving, metalworking, and local aesthetics. As the exhibition touches on, and as *"All-Over Design"* shows so well, these collaborative and uneven modes of making were also essential in designing decorative interiors. Once the company's objects arrived in the US, they became compositional elements in other artworks—so-called "artistic" interiors that relied upon Orientalist taste. Here, Garrett and Thomas also became creative agents, which doesn't make them heroines, of course, but important actors in this network.

NB: Digital exhibitions are especially suited to this complex and sometimes unwieldy subject. They have the flexibility to move in and out of these categories and to draw together materials from unexpected places. For *"All-Over Design,"* the question of agency came through most strongly in the process of attribution. We spent a long time thinking about the labels and how to condense these complicated discussions of agency and authorship into what appears to be the simplest piece of text in the exhibition. We decided to attribute most of the furniture not to de Forest, as it had all been previously labeled, but to The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company (Figs. 10-11). This decision was based on exhibition records for the Calcutta International Exhibition of 1883 and the Edinburgh International Forestry Exhibition of 1884 that describe the senior *mistri* in the AWCC workshop as responsible for drawing up the designs for carving. De Forest's writings often focus on the "compositional" skill of the carvers and their ability to produce highly-detailed carving without plans. The choice to fully attribute the furniture to AWCC helped us decenter the narrative of de Forest as sole designer and think about his role in other ways, as an importer, consultant, and educator.



Figures 10-11

Left: Label for Side Chair by The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company in *"All-Over Design"*: *Lockwood de Forest between Ahmedabad and Bryn Mawr*. (Photo: Katie Loney)

Right: The Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, Side Chair, ca. 1881–1886, wood, upholstery. Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, Deanery.368. Bequest of M. Carey Thomas, President of Bryn Mawr College, 1894–1922. (Photograph by Zachary Hartzell, courtesy Bryn Mawr College Special Collections.)

⁴ De Forest's papers are held at the Archives of American Art. Lockwood de Forest Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

In previous scholarship on this material, de Forest is always the center point of the network; the connections are made through him. This status as a sort of cultural broker was clearly an important part of de Forest's identity as an artist, something that set him apart from his family and his peers. But de Forest wasn't the only one concerned with self-fashioning. This network is composed of diverse individuals, institutions, and commercial enterprises, many of which were separated by vast distances and opposing agendas. Hutheesing was a prominent public figure and saw something to be gained through a partnership with de Forest. The AWCC, under the management of the Hutheesing family, continued to produce and exhibit carved furniture long after de Forest sold his stake in the company to Tiffany Studios in 1908. M. Carey Thomas and Mary Garrett were also important figures living public lives. For a time, Garrett was the wealthiest unmarried woman in the United States and the inheritance of her father's fortune, her philanthropic endeavors in medicine and education, and her move to Bryn Mawr College were all reported in the newspapers. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz has written about the shared aesthetic experiences that grounded Thomas and Garrett's lifelong relationship, and how this aestheticism was closely tied to their self-perception as modern women.

The Deanery was a carefully crafted monument to the women's shared aesthetic identity, but it was also strangely liminal, in-between space. Originally a small cottage, the Deanery expanded into a sprawling shingle-style mansion with several renovations financed by Garrett's Baltimore & Ohio Railroad fortune. This financing occurred under the condition that the Deanery was legally owned by Thomas and not the College. The result of this was that a domestic space, a woman's home, occupies the heart of a campus that consciously opposed domesticity. The Collegiate Gothic architecture of the campus represented a departure from the cottage-style layouts of other women's colleges. And yet, despite Bryn Mawr's antipathy, Thomas was happy to deploy domestic tropes when it suited her. She called her Wednesday afternoon meetings with students "At Homes," using the space as a way of playing with or controlling access to her circles.

KL: Garrett's Baltimore home at 101 West Monument Street seems, to me, to further build on what you are describing about the role of these spaces in cultivating social relationships and identities. As you mention, the Deanery was a liminal space, both domestic and administrative, private and semi-public. It was also quite different from Garrett's Baltimore mansion, where the AWCC's furnishings formed an Indian-themed sitting room. In "*India in America*," I wanted to examine what it would have meant for Garrett to have an Orientalist interior, what it would have offered her. Unlike the Dorothy Vernon room, the formal sitting room that was central to both the Deanery and the College's campus, Garrett's Indian-themed sitting room was a self-contained and private space (Fig. 12). What makes this room such an interesting feature of Garrett's home is that domestic Orientalist interiors on this scale were usually reserved for men, who sometimes created smoking rooms or dens in Orientalist styles. As design historian David Brett has theorized, these rooms operated as playrooms, where elite men, and occasionally women, could experiment with their behavior and play with their identities. As Brett explains, men could wear turbans and so-called Turkish pants and women, when permitted, could smoke and wear trousers.⁵

When considering Garrett's Indian theme room, I wanted to know what it meant for her—a suffragette, philanthropist, and queer woman—to have such a space. What did its transgressive potential offer her? In my research thus far, the archive has been frustratingly silent about the activities that took place within this room. But I found it useful, in the exhibition, to consider this Orientalist sitting room in relation to Garrett's public persona and to consider what playing the "Other" in this private environment would have meant for her. Garrett was an adamant supporter of women's suffrage and education, working to make space for white women in public and professional life. Thus, it is likely that playing the other would

⁵ David Brett, *Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

not just have been about experiencing the exotic or foreign but would have involved redefining traditional gender roles—redefinitions that Garrett helped actualize. In this context, Garrett's sitting room can also be considered a queer space, where playing the "Other" becomes a mode of playing the self.



Figure 12

Ida Pritchett, Dorothy Vernon Room, Deanery, c.1934, black and white photograph. Bryn Mawr College Photo Archives, PAB_Deanery_227. (Courtesy Bryn Mawr College Special Collections)

NB: What it meant to inhabit these spaces and play these roles must have shifted significantly over the long relationship that Garrett and Thomas had with de Forest—they worked together on and off for over forty years. Our conversations have often turned to the role of temporality in the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company furniture, and every time we talk, I feel like we're peeling back a new layer of time. Both Lockwood de Forest and M. Carey Thomas carefully cultivated a sense of historicism in their decorating. In de Forest's writings, there is a constant emphasis on the carver's work as an "old" and "ancient" craft. This Orientalist viewpoint continually positions India as the past and America as the present. The gesture towards historicism was an important part of de Forest's marketing of himself as an expert connoisseur with access to antique goods and knowledge of their production. Bryn Mawr's Collegiate Gothic architecture cultivates a similar mystique. The ivy-laden cloisters and carved gargoyles were intended to evoke the traditions of scholarship represented by Oxford and Cambridge and lend a historic atmosphere to what was, at the turn of the twentieth century, a very new institution. Many of the architectural details were adapted by architects Cope & Stewardson from Oxbridge models that Thomas and Garrett recorded on in a fact-finding mission to England. These romanticized versions of ancient India and ancient England converge in the Deanery. Still, the colonial resonance of Jacobean scrolled armchairs embellished with brass openwork adapted from *jali* screens seems to have gone unremarked by contemporary observers.

Historicism might be an obvious first place for an art historian to go when thinking about temporality, but there are many other forms of temporality at play here. It is important to remember that as much as they are beautiful expressions of artistry, the objects in the exhibition are also functional pieces of furniture, and as such, we need to consider how they operated as part of the mundane. After the Deanery was demolished, a small collection of furniture was kept together in a recreation of the Dorothy Vernon Room. The rest was dispersed across campus and placed in offices and private spaces. Most of the furniture was in daily use for over a century. It became embedded in the fabric of the College. For some of the alumnae who visited the exhibition, it was a shock to see, for example, the Damascus chest put up on a plinth. They told me, "Oh, this was in my office," or, "I remember drinking a beer on the swing!" The exhibition aimed to acknowledge how this furniture became a locus of memory for alumnae while defamiliarizing it by providing greater context for its cultural origin and production. This helps us see the products of the AWCC not as hand-me-down Victorian oddities, as they have previously been treated at the College, but as a tangible connection to these various pasts, both real and imagined.

KL: Temporality is such a compelling aspect of these interiors, and I appreciate your point about historicism at Bryn Mawr College and how the AWCC's furnishings went from exotic and ancient, to mundane, and then to nostalgic—at least for Bryn Mawr students and alumnae. These objects and their production also say something interesting about modernism. At the same time de Forest argued to period audiences that the work of the AWCC was traditional and preservationist, the company was also industrial in its operations.

Much of what we know about the AWCC's operations and the people who worked there, we know through de Forest's writings. While de Forest was an ardent supporter of Indian arts and crafts and enthusiastic about the artistic skill and ingenuity of Indian craftsmen; he was also an Orientalist. As you mentioned, de Forest saw the carvers engaging in an "old" and "ancient" tradition. To him, the artistic skill of the AWCC's artisans was innate rather than learned, inherited from an ancient past. In his writings on art and design, he discusses the craftsmen's mastery over materials and praises their design skills, emphasizing that they didn't have to draw their designs. At the same time, he uses the language of modern industry, referring to the AWCC's craftsmen as "human machines." Such ideas echo other nineteenth-century Orientalists, such as Owen Jones and John Lockwood Kipling, English men who valued and appreciated "Oriental" art, but who also saw Indian applied arts as separate from, or even fodder for, the progressive drive of modernity. De Forest, like English art administrators, feared Indian art was in a state of crisis, facing extinction due to encroaching modernity. De Forest's British peers attempted to "save" Indian art through education, while de Forest argued that Indian art could be "saved" through western patronage. In both schemes, the perceived survival of Indian art relied on western imperialism—British arts education in colonial India and US patronage or employment.⁶

At the same time, the operations of the AWCC were almost surprisingly industrial. It was a business that relied upon a division of labor and transnational modes of production and consumption. Interestingly, the objects themselves index this through a numerical stamp. Some of these numbers reference designs in two identical pattern books. De Forest had one, and Hutheesing had the other. These portable books facilitated a practical system where de Forest could commission a specific design while he was traveling throughout India or at his studio in New York. Then, Hutheesing could ensure it was made in Ahmedabad. In some cases,

⁶ De Forest describes the work of the AWCC's craftsmen in his unpublished book manuscript "Indian Domestic Architecture." See: Lockwood De Forest, "Indian Domestic Architecture," (unpublished manuscript, 1919), Lockwood de Forest Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. For a discussion of how de Forest's views about the state of Indian craft differed from that of English arts administrators see: Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

these numbers stamped on objects referred to how something should be assembled. As we were able to show participants of an object study session at Bryn Mawr College, each decorative panel of two beds owned by Garrett indicated a specific location on the beds' footboards and headboards. The objects register these transnational and transoceanic exchanges while showing one of the ways the AWCC's craftsmen anticipated the object's future movements.

NB: When we look closely, we can find this push-pull between history and modernity all over campus. The architectural forms of campus buildings refer to an imagined "ancient" past. At the same time, their historicism is closely tied to the turn of the century ideology and M. Carey Thomas's efforts to establish a lasting legacy. We spoke earlier about cultivating identity - Thomas was keenly aware of the role of architecture and design in conveying meaning and the campus design reflected her ambitions for the College: a space that would welcome white, wealthy, aesthetically minded women, and exclude all others. She might have slept in a bed made in Ahmedabad and appreciated the skill and craftsmanship of its makers, but she also gave public speeches that vilified Indian culture and religion in the most derogatory terms imaginable. She used recollections of her travels in South Asia as a warning against what "white civilization" would "revert" to, should Americans fail to educate their daughters. These aspects of Thomas's character, her racism and her appreciation of art, are at once inextricable and irreconcilable. We have to understand both to fully grasp the meaning of these objects in time.

But it's not enough to just consider what these objects meant at the moment of their production and first use. We also have to think about the span of their lives and how their persistence into the present continues to affect the Bryn Mawr community. While the alumnae feel varying levels of nostalgia for the campus "as it was," Thomas's presence is a very real and immediate source of pain for current students, especially students of color who live and work in spaces inscribed with the name of a woman who held these racist beliefs. For decades, student organizers have worked to increase awareness of the histories of racism at Bryn Mawr, and the recent teach-ins and conversations hosted by the Strike Collective have energized these conversations. There are now actions to remove images of Thomas from campus spaces, and proposals have been submitted to the Board of Trustees to remove her name from the facade of the Great Hall.

KL: These calls to remove Thomas's name and image from campus buildings are part of larger anti-racist practices and movements to decolonize our public spaces and national landscape. In many ways, both our exhibitions intended to contribute to this work by interrogating institutional and canonical histories—yours from the position of Bryn Mawr College and mine from American art history. As I continue to examine the work and practice of the Ahmedabad Wood Carving Company, I wonder to what extent we can actually recoup the agency of Indian actors in North American interiors. At the very least, I hope both our exhibitions and continued work on this material can continue to challenge historical narratives and identify the very systems of global production and circulation that Orientalist interiors erase. This is just the start of acknowledging the multiplicity of agents and uneven relationships that had stakes in these spaces.

NB: Yes, and there is still so much work to be done.



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