We’re All Wound Up!

Making Time: The Art of the Kentucky Tall Case Clock, 1790 - 1850
February 2 – June 16, 2019

Louisville, KY (January 15, 2019) The Speed Art Museum’s 2019 exhibition season focuses on the art of Kentucky, launching on Saturday, February 2, with a first-of-its-kind exhibition devoted to early Kentucky tall case, “grandfather” clocks. The exhibition showcases twenty-seven clocks made across a wide swath of Kentucky from the 1790s through the 1840s. The majority of the clocks come from family and private collections and have rarely, if ever, been shared with the public. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated scholarly catalog that presents significant new research on early Kentucky cabinetmaking and the state’s watch and clock trade.

When shown side-by-side, the clocks reveal the expert hands of many Kentucky artisans; illustrate the hidden world of gears, bells, weights, and pendulums that kept the clocks running and chiming; and record the complex webs of craft, taste, trade, and technology needed to make these practical works of art. Throughout the exhibition, the clock cases illustrate the talents of early Kentucky cabinetmakers, both native-born and those who came to the state in search of success. These artisans transformed local woods like cherry and walnut into towering cases that frequently
incorporate flourishes like inlaid decoration, carved ornament, and richly figured veneers. The results range from urbane, Federal-style creations to more idiosyncratic, often boldly inlaid forms. Numerous Kentucky silversmiths are associated with the intricate movements housed within the various clocks.

Commenting on the exhibition, the Speed’s Curator of Decorative Arts and Design, Scott Erbes, notes, “Making Time represents several firsts: the first exhibition devoted to the subject, the first publication devoted to the subject, and the first scholarly publication on Kentucky decorative arts produced by the Speed. It is truly a rare opportunity to see so many exceptional examples of art and technology in one place, especially since so many will disappear from public view after the exhibition.”

Said Speed Director Stephen Reily, “Making Time represents the renovated Speed’s deep commitment to all the art of Kentucky and reminds us that Kentucky was on the cutting edge of what we now call ‘advanced manufacturing’ over two hundred years ago, bringing together emerging technologies, refined skills, and exotic materials to meet the needs of a growing market. These clocks illustrate Kentucky’s rapid progress from the wild Western frontier into a refined Commonwealth with a rising interest in art.”

Exhibition highlights include two clocks associated with the famed Lexington silversmith and merchant, Asa Blanchard (about 1770–1838). Along with their handsome, Lexington-made cases, the two clocks also illustrate Lexington’s trade connections with Philadelphia, which acted as a source for imported English luxury goods like painted clock dials. Lexington’s mix of skilled artisans and imported goods greatly contributed to the city’s status as the “Athens of the West” during the early nineteenth century.

Making Time also features clocks from Kentucky’s two Shaker communities, one clock each from Pleasant Hill in Mercer County and South Union in Logan County. The South Union clock combines a movement made in Watervliet, New York, by the well-known Shaker clockmaker, Benjamin Youngs Sr. (1736–1818), with a case made at South Union by the Shaker cabinetmaker William Knowles. The movement likely made the long journey from New York to Kentucky in the hands of the Shaker missionary Benjamin Seth Youngs (1774–1855).

The exhibition and accompanying catalog were organized by Scott Erbes at the Speed Art Museum in collaboration with independent researchers Clifton Anderson, Greg Black, Bob Burton, and Mack Cox. The exhibition catalog was sponsored by Jean Frazier. Support for the exhibition was provided by Mack and Sharon Cox, Holly and Joe Gathright, Woodford S. Van Meter, Richard H. C. and Elizabeth Clay, Bob and Norma Noe, and the Kentucky Bluegrass Chapter 35 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.

The exhibition is free for members and free with the cost of admission for non-members. In a move to make the Museum more accessible to the public, the Speed will begin offering extended hours every Friday until 8pm starting Friday, February 1 and will continue its ever-popular After Hours party every third Friday until 10pm.

For more information on Making Time: The Art of the Kentucky Tall Case Clock, 1790-1850, as well as current exhibitions on view at the Speed Art Museum, visit speedmuseum.org.
Support for the Speed Art Museum’s exhibition season is provided by:

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About the Speed Art Museum

The Speed Art Museum is Kentucky’s largest art museum. An independent and encyclopedic museum located on the campus of the University of Louisville, the Speed celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2017. Louisville philanthropist Hattie Bishop Speed founded the Speed Art Museum, which opened in 1927, with a belief in the power of art to change people’s lives.

The Speed reopened in 2016 following a three-year, $60 million renovation and expansion designed by Kulapat Yantrasast of wHY that doubled the museum’s overall square footage and nearly tripled its gallery space. Free Owsley Sundays, sponsored by the Brown-Forman Corporation, draw large and diverse crowds every week. For more information, visit www.speedmuseum.org.

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