

Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg Presents Focused Exhibition: *Creative Freedom | Women as Decorative Arts Entrepreneurs and Connoisseurs, c. 1900–1940*



Artist: Clara Driscoll, American, 1861-1944, Manufacturer: Tiffany Studios, American, active 1902-1932, *Daffodil Lamp Shade with Iris Base*, c. 1900, Leaded glass and bronze; modern wiring, Gift of Mary Alice McClendon in honor of the Museum's 50th Anniversary

ST. PETERSBURG, FL (August 27, 2025) – The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, is proud to present *Creative Freedom: Women as Decorative Arts Entrepreneurs and Connoisseurs, c. 1900–1940*, opening July 26, 2025. This exhibition reveals how women of the early 20th century transformed the landscape of decorative arts—claiming their place as designers, business leaders, and tastemakers during an era of profound social change.

At a time when the call for women’s suffrage echoed across the United States, another revolution was underway. Empowered by new social and economic freedoms, women stepped into studios, workshops, and boardrooms to shape an emerging modern American aesthetic. *Creative Freedom* tells its stories through extraordinary objects that reflect the ingenuity, artistry, and entrepreneurial spirit of this transformative period.

The exhibition features a remarkable array of works—from Tiffany Studios lamps designed under the direction of Clara Driscoll, to the fantastical Art Nouveau ceramics of Daisy Makeig-Jones, to the luminous pottery of Maria Martinez and Maria Longworth Nichols Storer. These masterpieces are joined by treasures from Rookwood Pottery, Newcomb College Pottery, Wedgwood, Zsolnay Manufactory, and more, representing both celebrated icons and overlooked innovators.

Visitors will discover the women who defied convention to merge artistry with commerce, and who helped define American design between 1900 and 1940. Highlights include:

- **Clara Driscoll** (1861–1944), the creative force behind many of Tiffany Studios’ most iconic and beloved designs.

- **Maria Martinez** (1888–1987), whose black-on-black pottery brought international recognition to San Ildefonso Pueblo traditions.
- **Maria Longworth Nichols Storer** (1849–1932), founder of Rookwood Pottery, who elevated American ceramics to world-class status.

The exhibition also honors **Margaret Acheson Stuart** (1898–1980), the Museum’s visionary founder, whose own passion for art and independence echoes the pioneering spirit of the women featured in *Creative Freedom*.

“This exhibition is about more than decorative arts—it’s about determination, innovation, and the courage to create on one’s own terms,” said **Chief Curator Dr. Stanton Thomas**. “These women didn’t just participate in the cultural and economic life of their time—they shaped it. In many ways, they reflect the same vision and independence embodied by our founder, Margaret Acheson Stuart, whose legacy continues to inspire the museum today.”

Creative Freedom will be on view in the MFA’s special exhibition galleries from July 26, 2025 through February 1, 2026.

About the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in thousands of objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O’Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas, and Native American art. The museum’s photographic collection is one of the largest and most well-respected in the Southeast. The museum’s rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum’s extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County School System.

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