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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Taft Museum of Art Creates Bicentennial Exhibitions, Laying Groundwork for Infrastructure Project

In a New Light opens July 3, 2021 at the Taft followed by *Borrowed Gems*, July 23, 2021 at Cincinnati Museum Center

CINCINNATI—May 19, 2021—The Taft Museum of Art opened to the public in 1932 comprised of the personal art collection of Anna Sinton Taft and Charles Phelps Taft. Ever since, the collection has been displayed throughout the Tafts' former home. For only the second time since the museum's creation nearly 90 years ago, the Taft's prized artworks will be temporarily removed from the beloved 1820 landmark to prepare for the [much-anticipated Bicentennial Infrastructure Project](#), set to begin this August. Supported by the [Love This House](#) capital campaign, the project will ensure the future stability of the 200-year-old historic house.

To prepare for rehabilitation work, the Taft will begin deinstalling the permanent collection from the historic house this May. Two exhibitions drawn from the permanent collection will be created: [In a New Light | Treasures from the Taft](#) and [Borrowed Gems from the Taft Museum of Art](#). Each show will offer audiences the opportunity to continue to enjoy the museum's storied artworks, but also offer up new insights as the works get reinterpreted for a 21st-century audience.

"The *Bicentennial infrastructure Project* has been long-awaited for the Taft Museum of Art. We are humbled and filled with joy that after the ordeals of the last year, our community continues to see the value in this project and how it will not only support the integrity of the house but enable us to continue our meaningful work in the Cincinnati community and beyond," says Louise Taft Semple President/CEO, Deborah Emont Scott.

The Taft will first move more than 80 works of art from the historic house to the museum's Fifth Third Gallery to create [In a New Light | Treasures from the Taft](#), on view July 3, 2021–May 1, 2022. The selections in this exhibition will highlight Anna and Charles Taft's vision as art collectors and their legacy to the people of Cincinnati. The show explores a broad range of eras, cultures, and art forms through their historical context, subject matter, materials, and makers. The exhibition will literally show the Taft's collection "in a new light," featuring artworks such as the most important Gothic ivory outside of Europe to one of the last works painted by Joseph Mallord William Turner. Through select works and a thematic approach, the exhibition will also reveal centuries-old social concerns such as the distribution of wealth, environmental destruction, and gender and racial inequality by continuing the museum's *More to the Story*

interpretative texts, which provide audiences a more diverse understanding of history. A recently published book, [*Highlights from the Taft Collection*](#), showcases many of the same works and is available in the Museum Shop on-site and online for purchase.

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“Some may ask, ‘does an art collection assembled nearly 100 years ago still hold relevance today?’ We invite audiences to embrace this conversation and dialogue with us as we continue to learn more about our historic house and the legacy of the artwork it contains,” says associate curator, Tamera Lenz Munte.

Deinstallation of the Taft historic house’s permanent art collection is anticipated to begin in late May 2021 with select galleries becoming publicly inaccessible on a rolling basis. By early June, the full footprint of the historic house will become publicly inaccessible for the duration of the rehabilitation project (through Spring 2022). The deinstallation phase also includes caring for objects such as the custom window treatments found throughout the home, protecting the 150- year-old Duncanson murals, and monitoring the home’s environment.

During the deinstallation phase and infrastructure project, the Taft Museum of Art will continue to remain open to the public, offering complimentary admission; guests are encouraged to apply the suggested donated admission (\$10) to the *Love This House* campaign. Guests will have access to the special exhibition *In a New Light* and access to all museum amenities (following the museum’s health and safety protocols), including the Lindner Family Café, Museum Shop, and special programs and events.

Approximately 40 other works from the collection will be loaned to the Cincinnati Museum Center from July 23, 2021 to February 21, 2022 for a free, public exhibition: [*Borrowed Gems from the Taft Museum of Art*](#). The exhibition will feature portraits and landscape paintings from masters such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Charles François Daubigny, and Thomas Gainsborough and decorative arts featuring Qing dynasty ceramics and 18th-century golden watches. *Additional details to be announced.*

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

Like other wealthy collectors of their time, including Isabella Stewart Gardner, J.P. Morgan, and Henry Clay Frick, Anna and Charles Taft sought examples of timeless beauty and exquisite craftsmanship, believing these qualities could inspire and educate all people. A century later, *In a New Light* revisits the Taft’s collected works, addressing the evolving needs and interests of today’s audiences through reinterpretation and the show’s themes: *Power & Wealth, Gender, Race, & Class, and Nature & The Environment*. This exhibition is part of the Taft Museum of Art’s ongoing dedication to this challenge, embracing the legacy of Anna and Charles Taft to offer new insights for today’s generation.

The exhibition opens with the Taft's artworks reinterpreted through the lens of *Power & Wealth*. It explores how skilled artisans made paintings and decorative objects for elite groups such as aristocrats and royalty. A highlight of this section includes the Taft's iconic Rembrandt painting, *Portrait of a Man Rising from His Chair*. Admired for Rembrandt's masterful depiction of satin, lace, and the man's lively demeanor, the portrait incorporated an innovative pose for its time.

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The subject dons austere black-and-white clothing, which at first glance indicates modesty, but the details and materials signal wealth as nations vied to control the luxury commodity of black dye, made from trees harvested by disenfranchised people. Other works within *In a New Light* continue the exploration, highlighting expert artisans who crafted objects using enamels, precious stones, and gold to communicate great wealth such as the House of Fabergé *Notebook* and the 17th-century *Watch with Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*.

In a New Light continues providing insights into the untold stories of women, people of color, and other underrepresented groups of people in the subsequent section focused on *Gender, Race, & Class*. For example, throughout history, women have often been excluded from gaining the skills and professional connections necessary to pursue artistic careers. In fact, a small enamel plaque made during the Renaissance by Suzanne de Court is the only work by a female artist in the collection. De Court was one of the few professionally trained women in her field at the time, and she is the only known woman to have led an enamel workshop in Limoges, France. This makes her enamel of *Saint Luke*, the patron saint of artists, a unique object in the Taft's collection and within this exhibition. Likewise, the collection includes work by only one Black artist: Robert S. Duncanson, who overcame racial prejudice and other challenges to succeed as a painter in 19th-century America. Works such as Duncanson's *The Temple of the Sybil, Tivoli, Italy*, on loan from the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, highlight the splendor of Duncanson's talent in creating imagined landscapes. Using these works of art as gateways to these stories, *In a New Light* offers new ways to experience and understand the context of history and art together.

The exhibition's final section, *Nature & The Environment*, explores how artists have drawn upon nature for inspiration. Featured works showcase how they used iconic motifs, such as flowers and birds, to symbolize prosperity, happiness, and longevity such as seen with the exhibition's Chinese *Vase with Kingfisher and Lotus*. Other works, such as Balthasar van der Ast's *Still Life with Tilted Basket of Fruit, Vase of Flowers, and Shells*, immortalize exotic natural specimens gathered around the globe, and explore the backstories that made it possible for nations to collect such objects for study. Notably, this section features furniture found throughout the Taft historic house which have never been showcased in an exhibition. For the first time, each piece is also accompanied by interpretative texts that shed light on the objects' masterful combination of function and fine craftsmanship. Unlike many works found within *In a New Light*, most of the furniture would not have been owned by the Tafts as the

majority was purchased by Walter Siple, the museum's first director. These objects included early-19th-century American tables, chairs, and sofas to "provide a dignified backdrop to the Taft's collections" and to echo the 1820 architecture of the historic house. Works such as the mahogany *Card Table* (attributed to Duncan Phyfe) is a striking example with a base featuring crossed lyres, details including a carved pineapple, and brass-capped feet modeled in the form of paws.

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PUBLICATION

Highlights from the Taft Collection published by D Giles Limited, is available in the [Museum Shop online and in-store](#). The volume presents highlights from the Taft Museum of Art's exceptional [collection](#), which spans over 750 years of creative endeavor. Donated to the city of Cincinnati in 1927, Charles and Anna Taft's collection features porcelain from the Ming and Qing dynasties, paintings by masters including Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Gainsborough, Goya, Ingres, Corot, Whistler, and Sargent, and decorative works of art, including enamels, ceramics, and metalwork. The 80 pieces featured in this volume, chosen from the 740-piece collection, are presented in four sections, coinciding with the museum's major areas of specialization: European painting, European decorative arts, American art, and Chinese art.

Each piece is accompanied by an entry detailing its history and that of its artist or maker, written by Taft curatorial staff. Former Taft chief curator Lynne D. Ambrosini's essay explores the collecting practice of Charles and Anna Taft, including the inspiration they derived for their own collecting from visits to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Museum director Deborah Emont Scott's foreword provides a history of the Taft bequest and its lasting significance to the city of Cincinnati and its present-day inhabitants.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

In a New Light is made possible by exhibition sponsor Fifth Third Bank with support from the H.B., E.W. and F.R. Luther Charitable Foundation, Fifth Third Bank and Narley L. Haley, Co-Trustees; the John Hauck Foundation, Fifth Third Bank, John W. Hauck, and Narley L. Haley, Co-Trustees; The Frank J. Kloenne and Jacqueline Dawson Kloenne Foundation, Fifth Third Bank and Narley L. Haley, Co-Trustees. Additional exhibition support is generously provided by Cincinnati Magazine and the Cincinnati Business Courier.

Operating support is provided by the museum's season funders ArtsWave, The Carol Ann and Ralph V. Haile, Jr./U.S. Bank Foundation, and the Ohio Arts Council; the Western & Southern Financial Fund enables the museum to offer free admission every Sunday. Additional exhibition support is generously provided by the Ellen and George Rieveschl Endowment, the Warrington Exhibition Endowment, the Chellgren Family Endowment, and the Sallie Robinson Wadsworth Endowment for Exhibitions.

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ABOUT THE TAFT MUSEUM OF ART

The Taft Museum of Art is a living landmark tucked away in downtown Cincinnati, where art and history lives on the walls—and *in* the walls. Built around 1820 as a private home for several of Cincinnati's most prominent citizens, the Taft Museum of Art is now one of the finest small art museums in America and holds National Historic Landmark status for its historic house and Duncanson murals.

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Throughout our grounds, guests can enjoy special exhibitions, the historic outdoor garden, our Museum Shop and Lindner Family Café, events and programming for all ages, and complimentary on-site parking. It is all under one roof, culminating in a one-of-a-kind, multi-sensory experience that puts you at the center of art and history.