

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hi-res images available upon request

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Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean

On view June 8, 2024 through January 5, 2025

Explore the wonders of the sea, from its role as inspiration to the need for its preservation

Washington, D.C.—Dive into spectacular works inspired by and made from materials originating in the oceans in the special exhibition [*Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean*](#), on view at [Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens](#), from June 8, 2024 through January 5, 2025.

Covering over 70% of the planet, the oceans have remained an object of fascination, both treasured and feared, throughout history. Humanity has benefited from the rich and diverse fauna, flora, and resources the oceans provide, continually taking from these bodies of water for our gain. *Fragile Beauty* will explore the art of the oceans through exquisite pieces in Hillwood's collection, including representations of the ocean and objects created with its precious materials. These historic works will be on view alongside art by contemporary artists, whose work calls attention to the critical state of the oceans. This special exhibition will demonstrate the beauty of and admiration for these magnificent waters while raising awareness of their current state of peril and the need for their preservation.

"There are many environmental pressures facing our oceans, and yet everyone is dependent on them for survival," said Kate Markert, Hillwood's executive director. "This was the perfect opportunity for Hillwood to examine its array of oceanic art, highlighting not only the long history and continuing interest in the seas but also the need for action in protecting these resources."



Oceanic Art at Hillwood

Fragile Beauty will be a celebration of the oceans, showcasing Hillwood's wide variety of marine-related art for the first time. The exhibition was inspired originally by a rediscovered artwork titled *Treasures of the Sea*, a 1900 copy after the renowned 1870 masterpiece by Austrian painter Hans Makart (1840-1884). The piece, one of the largest paintings at Hillwood and once owned by Marjorie Post's father, C.W. Post, depicts several allegorical figures against the rich background of the sea. Alongside this painting and additional seascapes will be objects made of rare and precious materials, including coral, pearl, tortoiseshell, and walrus ivory, highlighting the beauty of these resources, many of which have been overexploited by humans. Lastly, *Fragile Beauty* will survey the

use of sea-inspired creatures, shapes, and forms, such as mermaids and seashells, both in usable objects and in art.

Contemporary Displays

A selection of contemporary pieces, by artists including Morel Doucet, Courtney Mattison, and Théo Mercier, and designer Christian Louboutin, will be interspersed with Hillwood's historic pieces, demonstrating how the sea continues to serve as a source of inspiration and the dire need for sustainability for its survival. Mattison, an artist and ocean advocate, creates sculptural works that "visualize climate change through the fragile beauty of marine life." Similarly, this exhibition will present the splendor of the sea at a time when the ocean is in danger, highlighting how sustainability is more important than ever.

Exhibition Organization and Highlights

Fragile Beauty will showcase an impressive array of art and utilitarian objects. Nearly 150 items, ranging from the 1600s to today, will explore the reaches to which the ocean has served as muse.

Organized into four sections, the exhibition will open with an introduction featuring Hillwood founder Marjorie Post's connections to the oceans and representations of the sea by Armenian artist Ivan Aivazovsky.

Next, it will explore the use of sea-inspired creatures, shapes, and forms in the arts. Sea creatures and gods, particularly those from literature and myths such as Venus and Neptune, will be well-represented, as will mermaids and dolphins. The seashell shape is strongly connected to the development of the rococo style in 1700s Western society and has remained a key influence. Extravagant pieces from this period and the 1800s will speak to the continued fascination artisans and artists had for the sea.

The section focused on humanity's impact on the oceans, including harbor activities, exploiting precious materials, and trade, will raise questions about how to preserve the oceans for future generations to enjoy. Pieces with decorative inlaid work, fashion accessories, and jewelry, some of which have rarely been on view, will highlight the beauty and special properties of rare ocean materials, such as mother of pearl, shell, coral, tortoiseshell, walrus ivory, and pearl. Human actions, from fishing to trade, have taken advantage of the benefits of the ocean, demonstrated in scenes of these activities on everyday decorative objects.

The exhibition will close with seascapes which will immerse visitors in the beauty of the waves and a few large-scale contemporary works, highlighting the continued interest in these bodies of water and providing a commentary on the need for sustainability now and into the future.



Curator

Dr. Wilfried Zeisler is Hillwood's deputy director and chief curator. He is a graduate of Sorbonne University and the Ecole du Louvre, Paris. Wilfried has written extensively on French and Russian decorative arts, including several articles and contributions to books. Wilfried's dissertation, *L'Objet d'art et de luxe française en Russie (1881-1917)* [French Objets d'art and Luxury Goods in Russia], was published in Paris in 2014. Since 2009, he has participated in and curated exhibitions in Paris, Monaco, and Washington, D.C. At Hillwood, his most recent exhibitions were *Fabergé Rediscovered* (2018), *Bouquet de Vries: War and Pieces* (2019), *Natural Beauties: Exquisite Works of Minerals and Gems* (2020), *The Porcelain Flowers of Vladimir Kanevsky* (2021), *Determined Women: Collectors, Artists, and Designers at Hillwood* (2023), and *Glass: Art. Beauty. Design.* (2023). Wilfried co-authored *Konstantin Makovsky: The Tsar's Painter in America and Paris* (2015) and *The Houses and Collections of Marjorie Merriweather Post: The Joy of It* (2022). He is the author of *Fabergé Rediscovered* and *Vivre la Belle Époque à Paris—Paul de Russie et Olga Paley*, both published in 2018, and *Les Youssouppoff – Un Siècle de Collections Françaises* (2023).

Events and Programs

Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean will inspire an array of programs and events throughout the presentation of the exhibition.

A benefit celebration, *Jewels of the Ocean*, will be held on Tuesday, June 4, 2024. Inspired by Marjorie Post's grand affairs at Hillwood, the evening will include cocktails and a glamorous dinner on the Lunar Lawn in honor of Post's singular style and in support of Hillwood's mission to share her cultural treasure with future generations.

In October, a four-part lecture series will feature a rich lineup of speakers and delve deeper into oceans.

Press Preview

A press breakfast and preview is planned for Tuesday, June 4, 2024. Invitation to follow.

Exhibition Sponsors

Fragile Beauty: Art of the Ocean is supported by The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Martha R. Johnston and Robert T. Coonrod, Dr. Catherine M. Chura, Kyra Cheremeteff and Thomas W. Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. Henry A. Dudley, Ms. Nedenia Rumbough and Mr. Jan Roosenburg, Janice H. Brambilla, and Simon Sidamon-Eristoff. All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs Program. This project was supported by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

About Hillwood

When art collector, business executive, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of Russian imperial art outside of Russia, an exquisite 18th-century French decorative art collection, and 25 acres of serene landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include a Japanese-style garden, rose garden, French parterre, and an orchid-filled greenhouse.

General Information

Location:	4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. Metro: Van Ness/UDC, Red Line (20-minute walk)
Information/Tickets:	(202) 686-5807 for information or www.HillwoodMuseum.org Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum
Hours:	Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Mondays, most holidays, and for several weeks in January.
Café:	Merriweather Café is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Merriweather To Go, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages, is available Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Suggested Donation:	\$18, \$15 seniors, \$10 college students, \$5 for visitors age 6 to 8. No donation is suggested for children under 6. Adults and seniors receive \$3 off the suggested donation for weekday visits and \$1 off for weekend visits when reservations are made online. Members receive free admission to visit the estate during regular operating hours. To join, visit https://hillwoodmuseum.org/membership . For more information, visit https://hillwoodmuseum.org/visit/opening-hours-tickets .

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