

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

The Wolfsonian was founded in 1986 to exhibit, document and preserve the Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection, an assemblage of 100,000 objects including furniture and other decorative arts, paintings, books, prints and ephemera. The focus of interpretation is the critically important role of design at the height of the industrial age in the context of social, political and technological issues. From 1986 through 1993 staff members were committed primarily to unpacking, registering, cataloging, conserving and researching the collection, then growing at the staggering rate of some 300 items per month. Objects were stored in a 1927 Mediterranean Revival building, which in 1992 was renovated and enlarged for the new museum—a seven-story, 56,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility. Located at 1001 Washington Avenue, the facility now houses The Wolfsonian's auditorium and shop, administrative offices, library, storage of small objects and paintings and three exhibition galleries. The Wolfsonian's remaining object collections are housed in a 28,000-square-foot, historic warehouse in Miami Beach known as the Annex.

The Wolfsonian's first exhibition was held at Miami-Dade College between 1988 and 1990, where it captured public interest and was viewed by 40,000 visitors. *Stile Floreale: The Cult of Nature in Italian Design* was guest-curated by Dr. Gabriel Weisberg. The accompanying catalog was published by the University of Washington Press. In January 1993 The Wolfsonian opened a 1,000-square-foot preview exhibition, *Design 1880-1945: The Modern Idiom*, in its Miami Beach facility. Showcasing 100 objects from The Wolfsonian collection, the exhibition was seen by 12,000 visitors before it closed in June 1995 in preparation for the inaugural exhibition. The Wolfsonian's research component was also established in 1993; it administers a competitive fellowship program, facilitates collections access and plays a leading role in the Association of Research Institutes in Art History.

The Wolfsonian's full-scale public dimension was officially inaugurated on November 11, 1995, with the opening of the major touring exhibition *The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945*, which demonstrated, for the first time, the depth and breadth of the Wolfsonian collection and its concomitant themes. Presenting 256 objects from the permanent collection, this exhibition traveled to the leading art museums of Los Angeles, Seattle, Pittsburgh and Indianapolis. Its catalog garnered international recognition and won awards for its excellence.

In May 1996, The Wolfsonian launched its calendar of regularly scheduled temporary exhibitions, with summer exhibitions focusing on the city of Miami's centennial, objects surrounding the consumption of food and modern Dutch graphic design. In November 1996, The Wolfsonian opened *Art and Design in the Modern Age*, featuring some 300 objects from the permanent collection. Permanent galleries provide insight into the role of design as an agent and reflection of change, interpreting both the advent of modernity and the persistence of tradition. Temporary exhibitions have continued with *Pioneers of Modern Graphic Design* (1997); *Public Works and Drawing the Future: Designs for the 1939 New York World's Fair* (1998); *Leading "The Simple Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, 1880-1910* (1999); *Print, Power and Persuasion: Graphic Design in Germany, 1890-1945* and *Dreams and Disillusion: Karel Teige and the Czech Avant-Garde* (2001); *From Emperors to Hoi Polloi: Portraits of an Era, 1851-1945* (2002); *Weapons of Mass Dissemination: The Propaganda of War* and *Tokyo: The Imperial Capital* (2003); *Streets and Faces: Jazz Age Paris, London, Berlin and New York; Evolution/Revolution: A Century of Modern Seating* (2004); *X: A Decade of Collecting* (2005); *In Pursuit of Pleasure: Schultze & Weaver and the American Hotel* (2005); *Revolutionary Tides: The Art of the Political Poster, 1914-1989* (2006); and *Modernism in American Silver: 20th-Century Design* (2006).

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In 1997 The Wolfsonian became a department of Florida International University, following Mitchell Wolfson Jr.'s landmark donation of his collection, and its historic building, to the state. Given this fiscal and administrative stability, and the vital support from local, state and national resources, programming continues to grow and diversify as additional events for residents and visitors to South Florida are realized. Staff-directed collections management, conservation and documentation continue with vigor and care. The Wolfsonian has become one of the world's preeminent exhibitors of material culture, offering educational and research opportunities to a diverse community of cultural seekers and academics. In 2003 The Wolfsonian's director, Cathy Leff, was invited to become a member of the American Association of Museum Directors. And in 2005 the museum signed an agreement with the American Academy in Rome for joint appointments for Wolfsonian fellows.

The Wolfsonian has developed an extensive array of academic and public programs, reaching an audience as broad and varied as its collection. The museum has produced exhibitions and activities to give the public opportunities to identify and consider the historical significance of collection themes and their relevance to the world today. Ongoing public programming is extensive, including school activities, community events, lectures, films, symposia and collaborative performing arts events. The Wolfsonian also collaborates with the Miami-Dade County Public Schools Museum Education Program to develop additional school tours and curriculum materials. Programmatic objectives focus on building audiences within the public schools and the FIU communities, while advancing The Wolfsonian's international scholarly reputation.