SPRINGFIELD, ILL. — Wendy Greenhouse, the Chicago-area historian of American art who organized the first retrospective on the Jazz Age artist Archibald J. Motley Jr, in 1991, was on her way to Japan for five months when the call came.

"Come have lunch at the Chicago Club," an assistant to John H. Bryan Jr said enticingly. Bryan, who died at 81 on October 1, was the former chief executive officer of the Sara Lee Corporation, a past chairman of the Art Institute of Chicago, an admired collector of American and English decorative arts, and a philanthropist and fundraiser of near legendary prowess.

"I'd never met Mr Bryan but I knew this was a very big deal," says Greenhouse, who soon found herself, travel schedule notwithstanding, agreeing to work with co-curator Sharon S. Darling on "Art of Illinois," the inaugural exhibition of the newly restored Illinois Governor's Mansion.

Bryan also rallied to his side attorney Joseph P. Gromacki, a prominent collector who chairs the boards of trustees of the Terra Foundation for American Art and Historic Deerfield, among his other civic engagements.

"John was my best friend and had great influence on me personally. We shared many overlapping interests and activities," Gromacki says of Bryan, a fellow member of the Walpole Society. At the direction of First Lady Diana Rauner, with whom they worked closely, Bryan, Gromacki and Chicago auctioneer Leslie S. Hindman conceived of the "Art of Illinois" project — exhibition and catalog — as a way of honoring the creativity of their state.

The exhibition would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. When Governor and Mrs Rauner arrived in Springfield in 2015, they found the "people's house," as the First Lady calls it, in desperate need of repair. Perhaps best known as the architect of Chicago's Palmer House Hotel, John Mills Van Osdel (1811–1891) designed the 1855 brick mansion, the third oldest continuously occupied state executive residence in the United States.

"To me, this project was a metaphor for the state of Illinois and an opportunity to demonstrate that positive change is possible when we envision a future and work hard towards it," the First Lady told Antiques and The Arts Weekly.

"Once I announced that we would do this, I was pleasantly surprised at the outpouring of interest and support. I really think people were dying to see this restoration happen for years, and there was so much enthusiasm."

Chaired by Mrs Rauner, the not-for-profit Illinois Governor's Mansion Association raised nearly $15 million in pri-

(continued on page 30)
Private funds to complete the restoration, install the exhibition and produce the *Art of Illinois* catalog, the latter underwritten by Hindman. The group received funding from the Terra Foundation — a co-organizer of the year-long Art Design Chicago initiative — as well as from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, private individuals, corporations and foundations.

Begun in February 2015 and overseen by Vinci Hamp Architects, the renovation encompassed a new landscape design, structural repairs and the reconfiguration of the 45,120-square-foot residence’s public spaces. Now open daily to visitors, the newly accessible and ADA-compliant building features dedicated spaces for orienting visitors and exhibiting art.

Justin A. Blandford, who, at the First Lady’s invitation came on board as the mansion’s curator in July, notes, “The approach to restoring the exterior of this significant public property was that of a responsible homeowner. In the interior, Vinci Hamp Architects created a plan that makes sense. I am very excited to lead an educational experience that has been reimagined. We’ve refocused our work here on civic responsibility. It’s a very new and exciting opportunity.”

Working with collections manager Terri Sinnott, Darling and Greenhouse assembled 27 paintings, seven sculptures and 59 works of functional and decorative arts for the exhibition they say is the first of its kind. They borrowed three out of every four pieces from public institutions and private collectors. Remaining items belong to the State of Illinois.

Fine art displays are confined to the mansion’s first floor, with each of the four parlors respectively devoted to portraits, genre paintings, landscapes and cityscapes and abstract art. The state dining room is more eclectic, combining traditional furniture, contemporary art, state china and a massive silver tea service ordered by the Illinois Council of Defense in October 1943 for the USS *Illinois*. When Japan surrendered, the ship was scrapped, and in 1949, the silver was presented to Governor Adlai Stevenson for use in the mansion.

“Art of Illinois” An exhibition at the newly refurbished Illinois Governor’s Mansion salutes the state’s historic contributions to American art and design.

Well-wishers greeted General Ulysses Grant in the West Parlor in 1865. He was the guest of Governor Richard J. Oglesby, who served as brigade commander under Grant. The large mirror was donated by the family of Richard Yates, a Civil War-era Illinois governor.


Custom woodwork by an Illinois craftsman enhances the Civics Library.

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“It was a great opportunity to give visitors a sampling of the state’s rich artistic heritage in a broad overview. I was looking at diversity of every kind: upstate and downstate, Chicago and Springfield, different communities and identities,” Greenhouse recalls, citing writer Dave Eggers’ observation that Illinois “ranks first in contradictions, in self-delusions, in strange dichotomies.”

Three self-portraits provide graphic evidence of the state’s artistic development. The earliest is an academic portrait circa 1867 by the Boston-born George P.A. Healy (1813–1894), who, though largely unknown today, was internationally prominent in his time. Unlike Healy, Chicagoan Ivan Albright (1897–1983) has never fallen from favor. Created for the Depression-era Illinois Art Project, his 1934 self-portrait embraces the vanguard of Social Realism. Born in Mexico in 1948, Marcos Raya had not yet completed “Psychedelia” when Greenhouse first saw his 2016 acrylic on canvas painting. Though not explicitly labeled a portrait, the artist’s distinctive pork-pie hat and dark glasses are decisive clues to the sitter’s identity.
Whiskey/temperance snake jug designed by William Wallace Kirkpatrick (1828–1896), Anna Pottery, Ill., circa 1880–90. Stoneware, height 12 by width 10 inches. Collection of Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois on behalf of its Krannert Art Museum.

One of Greenhouse’s favorite sculptures is “Jitterbug Dancers,” a circa 1950 wood carving by Arthur Sieving (1902–1974). The identity of the maker was initially unknown to the curator, who happened upon the work in storage at the Illinois State Museum, a major lender to the show. Carving dummies was an outgrowth of Sieving’s early career as a professional magician and ventriloquist. By the 1940s, he was a drollama and model maker for the Illinois State Museum.

“Art of Illinois” would have seemed incomplete without at least one reference to favorite son Abraham Lincoln. “Lost America,” a 1989 oil-painting by Roger Brown (1941–1997), has special resonance for Greenhouse. She acquired the portrait, whose frame the Alabama-born painter decorated with the stars and stripes of the American flag, when she was on staff at the Chicago History Museum.

“If Illinois’ artists felt at a disadvantageous remove from New York, the same cannot be said of the state’s craftsmen and designers, who by the second half of the Nineteenth Century were prominent in the manufacture of furniture, ceramics and metalwork. Illinois’ industrial dowsit was, in fact, the implicit message of the World’s Columbian Exposition when it opened in Chicago in 1893. For Darling, the go-to authority on Chicago decorative arts, familiarizing herself with art beyond the Second City was both a challenge and a reward. “I worked very hard to show representative examples from throughout the state. I wanted to borrow from local museums and historical societies. What I learned broadened my perspective,” she says.

Limited by space, Darling arranged much of the decorative art in “Art of Illinois” upstairs in the central stair hall of the mansion. Bedroom and former bedrooms of Atgeld’s chambers and was exhibited at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Governor James R. Thompson reacquired the pieces on behalf of the state at auction in 1890. “Art of Illinois” captures the long span of the state’s ceramics tradition, moving from millennium-old pottery excavated in Fulton County to dinnerware decorated by Eva Zeisel for Western Stoneware in 1953. Darling sheds new light on the little-known Norse Pottery Company, which between 1903 and 1912 created glazed earthenware forms inspired by ancient bronze relics excavated in Scandinavia. Danish potters Thorvald P.A. Samson and Louis Ipsen founded Norse in Rockford, a Scandinavian American community also known for its furniture, in 1904 with underwriting from merchant Arthur W. Wheelock. The curator was in her element when it came to Arts and Crafts movement design, a particularly rich subject in Illinois. Art wares by Gates Pottery, which manufactured Teco wares, and Haeger Pottery join silver by the Kalo Shop, co-founded by Clara Bark Welles (1868–1965) and five female graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1900. The coiled and plaited surface of an Anasazi basket inspired the most striking piece of silver on view, a punchbowl made by Scottish-born Robert Riddle Jarvie (1865–1941) in 1910 for members of the Cliff Dwellers Club to use in their dining room, called the Kiva.

Darling closes with an observation on the cyclical nature of design history, noting the return, in the form of the studio craft, of unique and handmade objects following the decline of industrial-scale manufacturing in the state. On July 14, in this year commemorating the 200th anniversary of Illinois statehood, Governor and Mrs. Rauner welcomed visitors to the newly refurbished mansion for the first of regular tours exploring the history of the state through the lens of leadership, art, artifacts and architecture.

“After two years of construction, programming additions and partnering with local vendors and contractors to complete this work, it is very fulfilling for us to know that the people of Illinois can share this space. Remodeled as a place where visitors can experience Illinois history and art, the mansion can now fulfill its promise in the historic community of our state capital,” the First Lady said at the time. She told Antiques and The Arts Weekly that completing the new education center was for her the most satisfying part of the project, noting “Education is my and Governor Rauner’s passion. My highest priority was to ensure that the restored mansion would be meaningful and inspiring to visitors, especially schoolchildren.”

“Art of Illinois” is on view through May 2019. Tours are offered daily. The Art of Illinois catalog is $25 plus $4 handling.

The Illinois Governor’s Mansion is at 410 East Jackson Street. For information or to purchase the catalog, 217-782-6450, mansionassociation@gmail.com or www.illinois-mansion.org.


The State Dining Room has been the center of much official entertainment. On either side of breakfront bookcase is, left, “Psychedelia” by Marcos Raya (b 1948) and, right, “Flatscape #106” by Harold Gregor (b 1929).