



# FUTURE RETRIEVAL CLOSE PARALLEL



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## INTRODUCTION

by Cameron Kitchin

*Future Retrieval: Close Parallel* is an exhibition and research project formed by artists and educators Katie Parker and Guy Michael Davis in close collaboration with the Cincinnati Art Museum. While the work in the exhibition is contemporary and fresh, the thesis of the project depends on the synergy and power of present linked with past. In this way, we are able to elucidate new insights into historical work and artists at the Cincinnati Art Museum through a modern lens and today's context.

My deepest gratitude goes first to Katie Parker and Guy Michael Davis for their joyful and pensive exploration of the interrelated nature of art making with what precedes and what will follow in time. I hope that this project serves as a capstone for their years of influence and teaching at DAAP at the University of Cincinnati. I also would like to extend my thanks to Amy Dehan, Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Through her interpretation, scholarship and guiding hand, we find how works from the museum's collections change and evolve in meaning through time. By extension of projects such as *Close Parallel*, the museum and history itself is brought to life by artistic creators and adroit curators.

The inspiration for *Future Retrieval: Close Parallel* is the intersection of Cincinnati and the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA). While the times have required us to be nimble in how we think about

place and presence in 2021, the themes of the NCECA conference are more pertinent than ever. The importance of art makers and those who think differently about the role of education in societal transformation is front and center today. I am grateful to NCECA and to CincinnatiUSA for shining a light on how art makers have always made Cincinnati a special place to live and to work.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the entire Cincinnati Art Museum team of art handlers, designers, conservators, registrars, educators, scholars, researchers and all who have stepped forward during this unprecedented period and kept the museum front and center in the life and recovery of our city. Our lead sponsor HORAN joins us in this cause and believes as we do that the city is made vital and vibrant by our creative workforce. Thank you to each and to all.

The Cincinnati Art Museum proudly celebrates the artists—past, present and future—of our region. Through the work and intuition of *Future Retrieval*, and throughout the galleries of the museum, I hope you will find inspiration to excellence in every pursuit.

#### Cameron Kitchin

Louis and Louise Dieterle Nippert Director  
Cincinnati Art Museum



# FUTURE RETRIEVAL: CLOSE PARALLEL

by Amy M. Dehan, Curator of Decorative Arts & Design

“Close parallel” implies two things that are strongly related, but not the same; a pair of lines, forms, or ideas that travel side by side but arrive at distinctly different destinations. Katie Parker (b. 1980) and Guy Michael Davis (b. 1978), who collaborate as Future Retrieval (est. 2008), specialize in using historical artworks as a springboard to conceptualize and create fresh, original works that reference or are close parallels to past artistic achievements while simultaneously vaulting them into a modern-day context. Through Future Retrieval’s work, both object- and installation-based, historical designs gain a contemporary relevance and accessibility that entices viewers to dive into forgotten sources and forward-thinking explorations.

In 2018, the Cincinnati Art Museum invited Future Retrieval to mine its decorative arts and design collection and identify objects from the storage vaults to serve as catalysts for the anachronistic exploration at the heart of the artists’ practice. Parker and Davis were assigned two galleries to use as project spaces where they would show their work in combination with the museum’s objects that inspired and, in many cases, completed new pieces. The resulting mashup has injected fresh interest and meaning into objects that have, in the past, undeservedly been overlooked.

This was not Future Retrieval’s first time working with an institutional, corporate, or private collection. Since formalizing their collaboration in 2008, the artists have

been granted insider access to collections that include the Dresdner Porzellan factory (Dresden, Germany); the Pottery Workshop (Jingdezhen, China); the Taft Museum of Art (Cincinnati); the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (Washington, DC); the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum (New York, NY); Rookwood Pottery (Cincinnati); and the Lloyd Library and Museum (Cincinnati). Parker and Davis are as interested in a work’s historical context and significance as much as they are in its potential contribution to a new work. Museums and archives are their playground, where their practice of discovery and reinvention finds inspiration and, ultimately, carries it forward. The artists regard these collection-holding sites as nexuses where both old and new objects live together, interact, and generate new ideas. Thinking of museums in this way drives their interest in how objects are presented in these contexts and how a shakeup of these constructs furthers their intent to reframe and reinvent. For example, in this exhibition, both *High Rise Farrago* (plate 11) and *Negotiating Space* (plate 1) were inspired by displays within the museum’s permanent collection galleries, the former relating to a niche displaying an eighteenth-century French commode by Jean-Pierre Latz (1976.435) framed by period appliques or wall lights (1976.20) and a painting by François Boucher (1989.24), and the latter by an installation of early-twentieth-century ceramic and metalware vessels on a pair of Paul Frankl’s *Sky Scraper Bookcases* (1969.417, 1967.418).

**Fig 1.** *Tureen with Lid*, 1745–47, Meissen Porcelain Manufactory (est. 1710), Gottlob Birckner (circa 1712–1771), decorator, Germany (Dresden), porcelain, Cincinnati Art Museum; Centennial Gift of the Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Joseph, 1981.80

**Fig 2.** *Tureen*, 1728–29, Charles Kandler (circa 1727–1750), England (London), silver, Cincinnati Art Museum; Bequest of Paul E. Geier, 1982.187

It may seem that Future Retrieval arbitrarily chooses objects for reinterpretation, but that is not so. As we explored the museum’s holdings in preparation for this exhibition, several works immediately resonated with Parker and Davis’s existing inclinations for particular forms, subject matter, modes of surface decoration, finish, and production technique. The resulting selection is, as anticipated, ripely eclectic, spanning at least two hundred years of artistic creativity from across the western world expressed in a variety of media. Because Future Retrieval explores the value and validity of replicating works of art, it was especially discerning that two of the objects the artists chose to focus on were themselves copies of historical subjects. The museum’s Meissen *Tureen with Lid* replicates in porcelain earlier versions of this ovoid, lobed form with crown-shaped finial that were made in silver (figs. 1 and 2). Note how the feel of the form shifted when translated from one medium to another, a phenomenon that also plays out as Future Retrieval shifts media and scale as the artists remake forms. The gilt electroformed copper *Tripod* (plate 25) by Elkington & Co. is a late-nineteenth-century copy of a late-eighteenth-century French copy by Pierre Antoine Bellangé of an antique Roman bronze tripod discovered in the Temple of Isis at Pompeii. Thus, Elkington’s version is a copy of a copy, twice removed from the original object. The English firm of Elkington specialized in creating electrotype copies of significant works found in royal and museum collections. Our *Tripod* was part of a large group of Elkington ware purchased by the art museum in 1883



and displayed alongside plaster cast reproductions of well-known Classical and Renaissance sculptures (fig. 3). Providing visitors with the opportunity to experience these renowned works through reproductions was common practice among many American museums established in the late nineteenth century.



**Fig. 3** Entrance hall of the Cincinnati Art Museum, early 1900s. Cincinnati Art Museum, Mary R. Schiff Library and Archives

Future Retrieval is as devoted to craftsmanship as the artists are to ideas. Parker and Davis both earned BFA degrees from the Kansas City Art Institute and MFAs from The Ohio State University, specializing in ceramics. After twelve years leading the ceramics program at the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning, they have recently assumed teaching posts at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. Early in their career, the artists' work focused on impeccably crafted hand-built, cast, and wheel-thrown pieces in the fickle medium of porcelain. While their devotion to porcelain holds steady, the pair has, over time, introduced other media into their repertoire, including hand-cut paper, fiber, neon, aluminum, and wood, as well as a variety of creative techniques including

3D scanning, rapid prototyping, laser cutting, wood carving, and weaving. This adept mix of media and accumulation of skill has diversified their work and allowed them to create more dynamic, large-scale pieces and installations. But, perhaps more importantly, it has broadened the scope of their audience and the critical consideration of their work as they freely navigate through and are accepted in the disciplines of craft, fine art, and design.

Often it is Future Retrieval's exploration of a historical work or subject matter that pushes the artists toward transferring to, experimenting with, and mastering yet another material or process. Likewise, it is frequently this trial-and-error process of learning how materials and techniques can work together that leads them to the most successful and final form for their work. For instance, before finding himself in front of Paul Frankl's Egyptian-inspired Art Deco *Mirror* (plate 43), the haloed rhesus monkey in the installation piece *Us* (plate 41) was a form that Davis scanned and digitally captured while working with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History's taxidermy collection. Initially, Future Retrieval intended to use the scan to create a multipart mold to cast the monkey's form in porcelain. When the limitations of porcelain prevented the artists from efficiently replicating the monkey at the desired scale, they decided to use computer numerical control (CNC) milling to create the form in wood. However, deficiencies and irregularities in the data captured in the digital file produced a form that required an incredible amount of refining and hand-finishing. The wooden version of the monkey stood in the artists' workshop for months, until their visit to the art museum's conservation studio to view the aluminum-leafed wooden Frankl mirror. Seeing the mirror unlocked the idea of covering the monkey with sheets of aluminum leaf, thereby masking some of the imperfections of his surface. This solved a practical problem, and also tightened the parallel between the monkey and the mirror in the existential composition *Us*.

Just as a museum collects and reinterprets its collection over time, Future Retrieval acquires experiences, techniques, and a lexicon of subjects, forms, and patterns culled from design history that they retrieve, re-examine, and reframe in their work. By scanning historical objects and adding them to their database, they are acquiring a collection of forms, and by fashioning these forms in new materials, or at a different scale, combining them with other forms, and interpreting them through their creative processes they begin to own these new works, internalizing and investing them with alternative meaning. Their aim is not to make a direct copy, but rather to pay homage to the works they find intriguing and worthy of re-examination. This is eloquently articulated in their version of the museum's Meissen *Tureen with Lid* (plate 14), whose form they initially captured on the fly using photogrammetry and a hand-held camera during a visit to the museum's storage area. The inherent imperfections of the low-tech scan were embraced and incorporated into the three-dimensional model that was used to form the multipart mold required to cast the work in porcelain. The model was purposely scaled larger than the Meissen tureen and altered to have goat-skull handles, a nod to the ox skulls punctuating the frieze of Elkington & Co.'s nineteenth-century *Tripod* (plate 25) also appearing in the exhibition. Ironically, when Future Retrieval re-

created the tureen using the same methods utilized by Meissen roughly 275 years earlier, their tureen developed the same inherent firing crack evident in the eighteenth-century tureen. Owing to the inability of porcelain to withstand the extreme curvature of the vessel's base, the original design was, and remains, flawed. Ultimately, the objects exist beside and apart from one another, informing our understanding of and interest in each. The contemporary *Tureen*, in turn, pairs beautifully with the eighteenth-century French *Console Table* (plate 15) in the ensemble work *High Rise Farrago* (plate 11), a mashup of crusty Rococo surfaces and high gloss, modern glam.

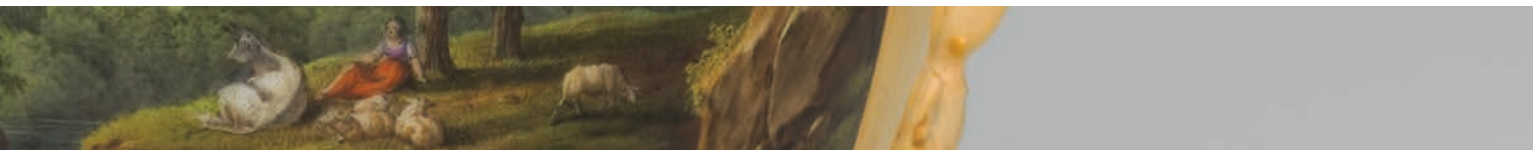
Much of the conceptualization of and artwork for this exhibition came to be during the early shelter-in-place days of the COVID-19 pandemic and the events that refocused us all on societal inequalities. This time of extraordinary stress and reckoning forced us to confront the dualities in our modern experience. Future Retrieval's exploration of the dual nature of matter, form, time, and place has always been playful. But, reading deeply, the works and combinations of works in *Close Parallel* take on a more serious tone—a tone that holds these concepts, strongly related but not the same, in balance, placing them, for our careful consideration, outside the constraints of time.

**“Museums and archives are their playground, where their practice of discovery and reinvention finds inspiration and, ultimately, carries it forward. The artists regard these collection-holding sites as nexuses where both old and new objects live together, interact, and generate new ideas.”**





# CATALOGUE



1. Conceptual rendering for *Negotiating Space*



2. *Navy Lily* from  
*Negotiating Space*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
21 x 14 x 4 1/2 in.  
(53.3 x 35.6 x 11.4 cm)



3. *Blue Mushroom* from  
*Negotiating Space*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
10 3/4 x 4 x 1 3/4 in.  
(27.3 x 10.2 x 4.4 cm)



4. *Green Globe Vase*  
from *Negotiating Space*  
2020  
porcelain  
14 x 8 x 8 in.  
(35.6 x 20.3 x 20.3 cm)





5. Vase  
 circa 1830  
 Marc Schoelcher  
 Manufactory (1794–1834)  
 France (Paris)  
 porcelain  
 17 x 9 1/4 x 7 1/2 in.  
 (43.2 x 23.5 x 19.1 cm)  
 Cincinnati Art Museum;  
 Bequest of Reuben R.  
 Springer  
 1884.428

opposite:  
 6. *Green Melon Vase*  
 from *Negotiating Space*  
 2020  
 porcelain  
 12 x 9 x 9 in.  
 (30.5 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm)



7. *Mint Bouquet* from  
*Negotiating Space*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
18 3/4 x 13 x 3 3/4 in.  
(47.6 x 33 x 9.5 cm)



8. *White Jade* from  
*Negotiating Space*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
18 x 11 x 2 in.  
(45.7 x 27.9 x 5.1 cm)



9. *Navy Poppy* from  
*Negotiating Space*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
20 1/2 x 13 x 3 1/2 in.  
(52.1 x 33 x 8.9 cm)







10. *Blue Melon Vase*  
from *Negotiating Space*  
2020  
porcelain  
12 x 9 x 9 in.  
(30.5 x 22.9 x 22.9 cm)  
(detail on right)







11. Conceptual rendering  
for *High Rise Farrago*



12. *Visible Storage Shag*  
2020  
wool  
120 x 60 in. (304.8 x 152.4 cm)  
Photography by Rob Deslongchamps



13. *Disk with Tureen* from *High Rise Farrago*  
2020  
aluminum and porcelain  
disk: 36 x 36 x 5 in. (91.4 x 91.4 x 12.7 cm);  
tureen: 15 x 15 1/2 x 10 1/2 in.  
(38.1 x 39.4 x 26.7 cm)



14. *Tureen with Lid*  
1745–1747  
Meissen Porcelain Manufactory (est. 1710)  
Gottlob Birckner (circa 1712–1771), decorator  
Germany (Dresden)  
porcelain  
10 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (26.7 x 26.7 x 19.1 cm)  
Cincinnati Art Museum; Centennial Gift of the  
Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts from the  
collection of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Joseph  
1981.80







15. *Console Table*  
 circa 1715–20  
 after designs by Bernard  
 Turreau (1672–1731)  
 France  
 gilt wood and griotte marble  
 30 1/2 x 58 5/8 x 26 9/16 in.  
 (77.5 x 148.9 x 67.5 cm)  
 Cincinnati Art Museum;  
 John J. Emery Fund  
 1976.24  
 (detail on right)







16. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)



17. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)



18. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)





19. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)



20. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)



21. *Plate*  
2019  
porcelain  
14 x 10 1/2 x 1/4 in.  
(26.7 x 35.6 x 0.6 cm)





22. *Reproduction Quality*  
2020  
hand cut paper  
60 x 72 in.  
(152.4 x 182.9 cm)

23. Conceptual rendering  
for *Elkington Crunch*



24. *Sculpture from Elkington Crunch*  
2020  
porcelain  
h. 19 1/2 in. (46.5 cm);  
max. diam. 15 1/2 in. (39.4 cm)



25. *Tripod*  
circa 1883  
Elkington & Co. (1829–1963)  
England (Birmingham)  
electroformed copper, gilt, marble  
35 1/4 x 17 1/4 x 16 in. (89.5 x 43.8 x 40.6 cm)  
Cincinnati Art Museum; Museum Purchase  
1883.801







26. *Image of Order*  
 2014  
 wood, Formica®, hand cut paper,  
 porcelain, LEDs, plexiglass  
 96 x 120 x 30 in.  
 (243.8 x 304.8 x 76.2 cm)  
 (detail on right)







27. Conceptual rendering  
for *Consolarium*

opposite:  
28. *Mushrooms*  
(detail) from  
*Consolarium*  
2020  
hand cut paper  
40 x 36 in.  
(101.6 x 91.4cm)







29. *Mushroom Dish*  
from *Consolarium*  
2020  
porcelain  
14 x 8 x 8 in.  
(35.6 x 20.3 x 20.3 cm)



30. *Yellow Mushroom Cake*  
from *Consolarium*  
2020  
porcelain  
15 x 8 x 8 in.  
(38.1 x 20.3 x 20.3 cm)



31. *Green Mushroom Cake*  
from *Consolarium*  
2020  
porcelain  
12 3/4 x 6 x 7 in.  
(32.4 x 15.2 x 17.8 cm)



32. *Small Mushroom Cake*  
from *Consolarium*  
2020  
porcelain  
9 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.  
(22.9 x 14 x 14 cm)





33. *Consolarium*  
(detail)  
2020  
porcelain and  
hand cut paper



34. *Console Table*  
circa 1740  
France  
gilded wood and griotte marble  
33 x 53 x 21 3/4 in. (83.8 x 134.6 x 55.2 cm)  
Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of Mrs. Gilbert  
McCurdy in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Paul E.  
Geier, and John J. Emery Endowment  
1981.406



35. Conceptual rendering  
for *Old World Convenience*



36. *Sculpture from Old  
World Convenience* (detail)  
2020  
porcelain  
h. 21 1/2 in. (54.6 cm) x  
max. diam. 10 in. (25.4 cm)







37. *Sculpture from Old World Convenience*  
2020  
porcelain  
h. 21 1/2 in. (54.6 cm) x  
max. diam. 10 in. (25.4 cm)



38. *Occasional Table*  
1927–30  
Paul Frankl (1886–1958)  
United States  
lacquered wood  
17 5/8 x 21 x 11 3/4 in.  
(44.8 x 53.3 x 29.8 cm)  
Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of the  
Estate of Mrs. James M. Hutton II  
1969.407





39. *Rhesus  
Monkey Shag*  
2019  
wool  
60 x 36 in.  
(152.4 x 91.4 cm)



40. *Finch's  
Parrot Shag*  
2019  
wool  
60 x 36 in.  
(152.4 x 91.4 cm)





41. Conceptual  
rendering for *Us*



42. *Rhesus Monkey from Us*  
2020  
maple and aluminum leaf  
34 x 26 x 34 in. (86.4 x 66 x 86.4 cm)



43. *Mirror*  
circa 1927  
Paul Frankl (1886–1958)  
United States  
wood, aluminum leaf and mirrored glass  
67 x 57 1/2 x 11 in. (170.2 x 146.1 x 27.9 cm)  
Cincinnati Art Museum; Gift of the Estate of  
Mrs. James M. Hutton II  
1969.411





44. *Oval* from  
*Garden Vignettes*  
2020  
hand cut paper  
45 3/4 x 22 x 1 1/2 in.  
(116.2 x 55.9 x 3.8 cm)

“ Just as a museum collects and reinterprets its collection over time, Future Retrieval acquires experiences, techniques, and a lexicon of subjects, forms, and patterns culled from design history that they retrieve, re-examine, and reframe in their work.



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