



In the Lock, Miraflores, by Alson Skinner Clark

The Panama Canal: Inspiring artists for 100 years

Written by Katie Toussaint | Photos by The Mint Museum

Strips of blue tape slant across the walls of Dr. Jon Stuhlman's office at Mint Museum Uptown. Post-It notes and palm-sized printouts of paintings for the upcoming exhibition *Connecting the World: The Panama Canal at 100*, dot the spaces within the lines. The design represents the gallery that, come November 1, will open to the public with the exhibition to celebrate the centennial of the canal's completion. The exhibition will be on view until February 1, 2015.

Stuhlman, the Mint's Senior Curator of American, Modern and Contemporary Art, is in shuffle mode. As he plans the layout of the exhibition and the project evolves, he shifts pieces of paper around. "It's organized around a painting that I've known about for years," Stuhlman said.

Preceding his eight years at the Mint, Stuhlman worked at Norton

Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Fla. There, he met a collector with a five-foot-wide painting—*In the Lock, Miraflores*. He was amazed: "It's this very pretty, American impressionist style picture, but it's depicting this massive, laborious, industrial, dirty, dangerous undertaking."

The American artist, Alson Skinner Clark, painted the piece at the site of the canal's construction in 1913. The original frame makes the painting appear to be wrapped in layers of gilded ribbon—a garnish to a gritty subject.

The collector later loaned the piece to the Mint when Stuhlman was working on a reinstallation of the American Art collection in 2010. Stuhlman's vision for an exhibition evolved from a small-scale show to coincide with the 2014 centennial of the canal.

The timing of the exhibition aligns with the progress on the Intermodal Transfer Facility at Charlotte/Douglas International Airport as well. The facility, expected to be completed this year, will link air, rail and truck transportation to East Coast seaports. Over the next 20 years, it is expected to generate \$7.6 billion in economic development. Meanwhile, in 2015, the Panama Canal is expected to conclude an expansion project that is expected to double the volume of freight that can pass through its locks.

Constructing historic context

"If you think more broadly about the canal 100 years ago," Stuhlman said, "what it really did was connect the world—shrink the world in a way."

The exhibition will connect Clark's piece to the past: the more than 50 prints and paintings will include art from two other important American artists who worked onsite at the canal—printmaker Joseph Pennell and painter Jonas Lie—as well as early 20th century artists such as Julien Alden Weir, Ernest Lawson and George Bellows, whose painted scenes explored factories and urban development in the American landscape.

The exhibition will also feature an illustrated catalogue that includes an essay by Stuhlman, and ephemera—photographs, books, newspapers and more—to set the time period for viewers.