

ART

A fuller picture

Paul Revere was much more than a man on a horse, as seen in a jointly mounted exhibition

BY MARK FEENEY | GLOBE STAFF

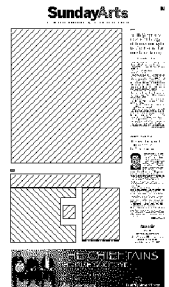
John Singleton Copley's 1768 portrait of Paul Revere is so familiar it's hard to notice how unusual it is. That makes sense, though, since the same is true of Revere himself. Famous names, like famous images, can obscure as well as identify.

The great virtue of the capacious exhibition "Beyond Midnight: Paul Revere" is how it emphasizes the many-sidedness of this notably many-sided man. Yes, on the night of April 18-19, 1775, Revere saddled up and "spread the alarm/Through every Middlesex village and farm" (well, not exactly "every" — which is far from the only detail Henry Wadsworth Longfellow gets wrong in his poem). Yet Revere's accomplishments over a full and highly varied life (1735-1818) extended so much further than that brief Revolutionary mission, momentous as it proved to be.

"Beyond Midnight" has the museum equivalent of split seating. It's presented at two venues, the Worcester Art Museum and the Concord Museum. The Worcester portion is slightly larger, with some 100 items. There's a bit of thematic overlap between the two halves, but in Worcester the main focus is on Revere the artisan and Revere within a social context. Wall text uses the rather gruesomely anachronistic "networking," as well as "price points," and "power couple." Who needs an art exhibition when you can have a PowerPoint presentation?

The Concord half, with more than 70 items, focuses on Revere as a figure in the Revolutionary movement and his posthumous reputation. Perhaps the single most startling object in the show is there: a Revere-related Pabst beer sign from 1975. That Bicentennial sure was a blast. A distant second is also beverage related: a phial containing tea retrieved from Boston Harbor after the Boston Tea Party. The show, which has

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been organized by the American Antiquarian Society, runs through June 7 at both sites. The AAS's Nan Wolverton and Lauren Hewes curated, with participation on the Concord end from the museum's David Wood.

The first thing a visitor sees at WAM is the Copley portrait. The man shown there is very different from the wealthy merchants and their wives Copley so often painted. We see Revere in shirt sleeves, collar open, wearing neither wig nor powder. No grandee he, Revere is a craftsman. He works with his hands. Several tools of his silversmithing trade can be seen on the table he leans against. He holds in one hand a teapot. It's at once handsome, functional, and, yes, a bit luxurious (being silver, not pewter). Speaking of luxury, that table is polished to a high gloss and the buttons on his vest are gold. Nor is Revere's squarish face that of a man accustomed to missing many meals.

Most important, there's his shrewd, forthright gaze. Tellingly, it's directed at Copley — and, by extension, us. Less than a decade later, the Declaration of Independence will speak of submitting "facts to a candid world." This is the face of someone making just such a submission: calm, composed, casually implacable. Dismiss such a man at your peril, as the British Empire would soon learn.

Alternatively, one can see that character expressed in the firm, clear, getting-things-done handwriting to be found in the several account ledgers included in the show. Revere may not have been a grandee. That didn't keep him from dying a wealthy man.

The son of a French Huguenot immigrant, Apollos Rivoire, Revere was atypical of his fellow colonists, who were overwhelmingly of British descent. Instead, he would prove more representative of the nation to come: not just in being an immigrant's son but also in his practicality, entrepreneurship, know-how, and general sense of can-do. In his 1994 book, "Paul Revere's Ride," the Pulitzer Prize-winning Brandeis historian David Hackett Fischer writes of his subject's "gift for being at the center of events." That centrality includes Revere's being in certain key respects emblematic of a nascent national culture.

Starting out as a silversmith, like his father, Revere extended his metalworking to gold, bronze, iron, and copper. He would use the last to sheathe the bottom of US Navy vessels. He cast bells and cannon. He made a lot of money literally, as well as figuratively, designing and engraving currency. He practiced dentistry. Jack of many trades, Revere was master of each.

Revere was artist as well as artisan. The same

firm, clear hand he used to record his accounts — and engrave currency plates and silverware — he used on prints. The occasion for "Beyond Midnight," as well as for the Massachusetts Historical Society's "Fire! Voices From the Boston Massacre" (it runs through June 30) is the 250th anniversary of the massacre.

In the massacre, British troops shot and killed five Bostonians. As familiar as the Copley portrait is Revere's "The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th, 1770." It's on display at Worcester, Concord, and the MHS. Revere printed 200 copies of the engraving. Seventy have survived. There are more famous works of art by an American (or, rather, future American). There are more famous works of propaganda by one, too. Perhaps none that's both is more famous.

There were four renderings of the massacre made in 1770. All are in the MHS show. One preceded Revere's, two followed. Henry Pelham executed the former. Not to put too fine a point on it, but Revere blatantly plagiarized Pelham. What may be the most notable difference, as a "Fire!" wall text notes, is Revere's adding a sign to a building facade on the right. It bears the words "Butcher's Hall." In reality, no such sign was there. The political commentary is both pointed and unmistakable.

Businessman that he was, Revere would likely appreciate a tiny detail of "Beyond Midnight." Museumgoers with a taste for reading fine print know that it's long been common for exhibitions to have sponsors and corporate partnerships of various sorts. "Beyond Midnight" offers the novel twist of having an official hostelry. Oddly enough, it's not handy to either of the museums. But in this case allowances can be made, since it's Revere Hotel Boston Common. Even if you're not a guest, stop in to check out the silverware.

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ART REVIEW

BEYOND MIDNIGHT:

Paul Revere

At Worcester Art Museum,

55 Salisbury St.,
Worcester, through
June 7. 508-799-4406,
www.worcesterart.org;
and Concord Museum,
53 Cambridge Turnpike,
Concord, through

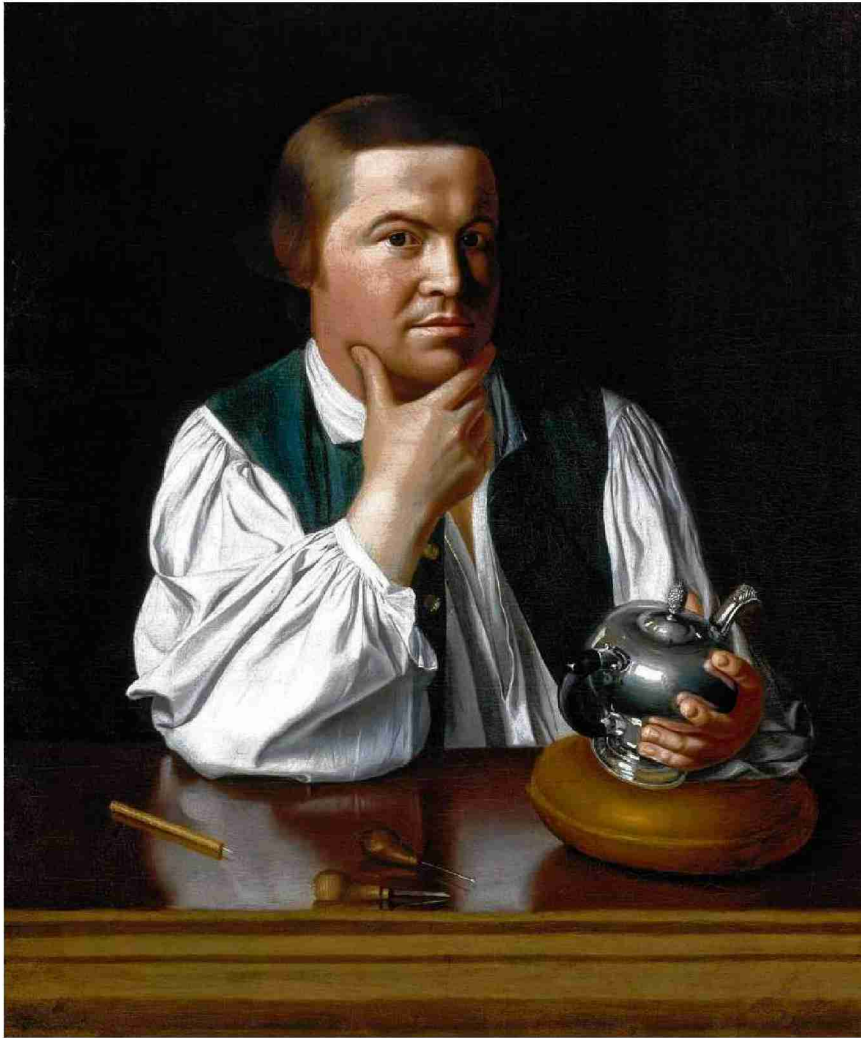
June 7. 978-369-9763,
concordmuseum.org

**FIRE! Voices From the
Boston Massacre**
At Massachusetts
Historical Society,
1154 Boylston St.,
through June 30.
617-536-1608,
www.masshist.org



Clockwise from left: Paul Revere's "The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston on March 5th 1770"; tea from the Boston Tea Party; Paul Revere, book plate, engraving c. 1760; a Revere tea service from 1792.





COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

Paul Revere depicted by John Singleton Copley in 1768 (top) and by N.C. Wyeth in 1922 (right).

