The Wonder of World’s Fairs

...this is a World’s Fair and all the world is here, to exhibit and to see.

—from The World’s Fair, 1891

In the passage above, H.G. Rutler describes what to expect at the World’s Columbian Exposition, also known as the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, where even a month would not be enough time to see all the exhibits, sample all the foods, and enjoy all the entertainment. From the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London in 1851 to the most recent Expo 2012 in Yeosu, South Korea, world expositions have always been places where citizens of the world gathered to see exhibitions of culture and industry. One could view “native” peoples, houses, and ceremonies, and see the latest inventions promoted by industrialized nations.

The Penn Museum is fortunate to have in our collection over 5,000 objects that were originally exhibited at world’s fairs. These objects vary from the Tomb Chapel of Kaipure, purchased for the Museum by John Wanamaker in 1904, to clothing made from fish skin, part of the Russian exhibit at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris, to a small beaded bag carried by a young Filipino girl at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair.

In early 2013, American Section Keeper Bill Wierzbowski came to me with the idea for a special issue of Expedition focused on our collection of world’s fair objects. Bill, along with other keepers and curators, wanted to write about the objects in their sections and about the fairs where these objects were first exhibited. Bill, Louise Krasniewicz, KC Boas, and I developed an editorial framework for this issue. The magazine took over two years to complete and would not have been possible without the help of many people, including Bill, Louise, KC, Xiuqin Zhou, Alessandro Pezzati, Dwayne Latimer, Adria Katz, David Silverman, Ann Brownlee, Lynn Makowsky, and Lynne Farrington. We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Associate Editor and Classics major Katherine (KC) Boas is leaving Expedition this May when she graduates from Penn and begins her career in marketing in New York City. KC started as Assistant to the Editor in 2012. Over the course of three years, she has worked with me on every issue of the magazine as well as on special projects such as the organization, writing, and editing of Culinary Expeditions. KC has been a terrific colleague and she will be missed. We wish her the best!

Jane Hickman, Ph.D.
Editor