

Co-Directors' Foreword

Irreplaceable You: Personhood and Dignity in Art, 1980s to Now arrives at an opportune moment, testifying to the important role that art and other forms of creative expression can and should play in contributing to public discourse about the critical issues shaping our world today. Historic elections around the world have exposed deep political divisions within numerous nations. Ongoing military conflicts ravage Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East while brutal campaigns of violence and oppression play out against immigrants and other marginalized communities. All these atrocities, each of which threatens to desensitize us to the very value of human life, serve as the backdrop for this important and timely exhibition. Art cannot solve any of these global problems by itself, but it can foster and model nuanced critical dialogue welcoming a meaningful exchange of viewpoints that is often lacking in other forums.

Irreplaceable You was organized by Dr. Sean Kramer. As the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA), Kramer has played a leading role in fostering curricular engagement with academic departments across campus. During his three years at the BCMA, the number of class visits to the museum has reached unprecedented heights. We are deeply appreciative of his commitment to working with faculty and students, and we are mindful of the way in which these experiences have shaped his approach to this exhibition. We also want to acknowledge the entire team at the BCMA who work collaboratively to develop and realize the exhibitions and special educational offerings that happen here. Special thanks to Cassandra Mesick Braun, Theresa Choi, James Higginbotham, Jo Hluska, Emily Jacobs '23, Julia Smart '25, Laura Latman, Danyelle Morgado, Amy Morin, Steve Perkins, Jose Ribas '76, Rachel Rodrigues, Amanda Skinner, and Laura Sprague.

In creating this exhibition, Kramer selected many artworks from the BCMA's own collection. He also identified and helped to secure several new acquisitions. We are grateful to

the generous individuals who have donated artworks or who have provided financial resources to support the museum's growing collection. Significant loans have added to the richness of this exhibition. For the opportunity to borrow these works, we extend our gratitude to Joshua Rashaad McFadden, Bradley Secker, Garth Greenan Gallery, and private lenders. Also, in helping to realize this exhibition, we appreciate the financial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

At moments during the past century, some have questioned art's role as a vehicle for political expression, even suggesting that sensitivity to questions of human justice cannot coexist with art's philosophical, even spiritual aspirations. Yet, we might counter that it is precisely through its authentic engagement with the urgent demands and existential challenges of its own time, which often evade easy resolution, that art as a mode of expression is able to transcend its singular historical moment. Indeed, as demonstrated by this exhibition, artists today continue to create remarkable artworks that enable us to query, to contemplate, and perhaps even to come closer to making sense of the unsettling experiences that characterize our own era. In so doing, they offer structures through which we might see one another more clearly and through which might perceive more acutely our shared humanity.

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