

*Currents: Art Since 1875*  
Opened October 12, 2023 and ongoing  
Exhibition Labels

Currents create movement, ferrying people, ideas, knowledge, skills, and natural resources to new places. They can cause movement away from and apart, sometimes resulting in tension and division and other times providing space for creativity and innovation. A current can also connect, forging new circuits and associations. To be “current” means to be in the present, up to date, relevant.

*Currents: Art Since 1875* draws on these different associations through the Museum’s collection of modern and contemporary art. This installation is organized around three themes—“Labor / Bodies,” “Migration / Environment,” and “Inspiration / Appropriation”—with a particular focus on how these topics intersect with race, gender, class, and power. Global in scope, *Currents* reveals the breadth and depth of the Museum’s collection and reflects our increasingly interconnected world. Featuring regularly rotating works of art and integrating new research by Bowdoin College faculty and students, this exhibition invites us to craft inclusive narratives about the human experience and to ask challenging questions about our unique histories and shared futures.

Support for the exhibition is provided by the Shapell Family Art Fund, Bowdoin College.

LABOR / BODIES

Bodies at work and at rest frequently appear as the subjects of portraits, landscapes, and as documentary testaments to everyday life. Artworks in this section focus on how artists have engaged with changing notions of labor, leisure, and the human form. As you explore this section, consider:

How do artists ask us to confront the difficult histories of slavery and other forms of exploitative and coerced labor and the legacies of racism, genocide, and displacement such systems left behind?

How do artists represent the often invisible and overlooked dimensions of work, such as domestic labor and caretaking?

How are ideas about gender, race, and class made visible in these artworks?

ROBERT HENRI  
Born Cincinnati, Ohio, United States  
American, 1865–1929  
*Coal Breaker*, 1902  
oil on canvas  
Museum Purchase, Elizabeth B. G. Hamlin Fund  
1970.48

As a prominent member of the Ashcan School, Robert Henri was committed to portraying the realities of modern life in American cities. This painting depicts a coal processing plant in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, which the artist encountered while traveling through the state by train. He effectively captured the air pollution these massive plants produced, suggesting the unhealthy conditions in which the miners, or “breaker boys,” worked. Henri created this painting in response to the Coal Strike of 1902, when miners in eastern Pennsylvania protested for higher wages, shorter workdays, and union recognition. Although only partially successful, this strike marked the first time a United States president intervened in a labor dispute when Theodore Roosevelt stepped in as a mediator. Henri exhibited the canvas in Philadelphia and New York to raise awareness of the hardships faced by miners and other manual laborers.

### KÄTHER KOLLWITZ

Born Königsberg, Prussia, North German Confederation (present-day Kaliningrad, Russia)  
German, 1867–1945

*Sharpening the Scythe* (from *The Peasants' War*), 1905

etching on cream wove paper

Gift of Charles Pendexter

2009.16.493

Käthe Kollwitz was born to politically radical parents who nurtured her artistic interests from a young age. From the start of her career, Kollwitz focused on depicting the harsh conditions faced by the lower-class women, men, and children she encountered in her daily life. Working primarily in drawing and printmaking—media closely associated with social activism at the time—she was particularly interested in confronting dangerous and exploitative labor systems. This print is from Kollwitz's series *The Peasants' War*, which chronicles a violent sixteenth-century popular uprising in Germany. Given Kollwitz's activist agenda, *Sharpening the Scythe* raises a question about whether the subject is preparing to reap crops with her implement—or to battle the evils of class oppression.

### JAMES BAARE TURNBULL

Born Saint Louis, Missouri, United States

American, 1909–1976

*The Sower*, 1939

watercolor and gouache on paper

Gift of halley k Harrisburg, Class of 1990, and Michael Rosenfeld

2017.8.14

Painter, muralist, and sculptor James Baare Turnbull was a combat artist for the U.S. Army during World War Two, serving in the Caribbean, Philippines, and South Pacific. His depictions of the conflict, especially on non-European fronts, emphasized the global toll of battle. Prior to his military career, Turnbull served as director of the Works Progress Administration's art projects in Missouri, during which time he created *The Sower*. Although barefoot and shown performing manual labor, the Black farmer, perhaps a sharecropper, appears healthy and content as he plants seeds in a well-tended field. The significance of the dramatic sky is difficult to interpret. – Does it reflect the destructive history of chattel slavery, or the promising future of a man might sowing his seeds?

GEORGE HAWLEY HALLOWELL

Born Boston, Massachusetts, United States

American, 1872–1926

*Logging Crew*, ca. 1903

oil on canvas

Gift of the Family of Myron H. Avery, Class of 1920

2009.27

Many artists have been inspired by the striking landscapes of Maine. For much of the nineteenth century, painters depicted dramatic coastlines, idyllic forests, bustling harbors, and cozy villages, emphasizing the pristine beauty and bounty of nature over the grim realities of industry, environmental destruction, and settler colonialism. George Hawley Hallowell provided an alternative perspective in *Logging Crew*, which captures the rugged terrain of northern Maine and the workers who relied on the lumber industry for year-round income. During the spring logging drives, felled timber was floated downriver to markets along the coast. Not only was this work dangerous for laborers, but it also led to widespread pollution in Maine's rivers. Hallowell's dark and ominous scene takes place on the East Branch of the Penobscot River, which today runs through the heart of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, established in 2016.

ANDREW WYETH H '70

Born Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, United States

American, 1917–2009

*Night Hauling*, 1944

tempera on Masonite mounted on stretcher

Gift of Mrs. Ernestine K. Smith, in memory of her husband, Burwell B. Smith

1985.59

In *Night Hauling*, Andrew Wyeth depicts an arresting and shadowy scene set in Port Clyde, the harbor town on the central coast of Maine where the artist's family summered. Lit only by the warm glow of a lantern and the radiance of marine bioluminescence, a man hauls in a lobster trap under the cover of darkness. His mostly obscured face conveys an alert wariness. The artist revealed that he originally titled the work *The Poacher*, suggesting that the subject did not have a license and was stealing another lobsterman's catch—a serious and illegal act in Maine. That Wyeth painted *Night Hauling* at the height of World War Two suggests that the painting may also refer tacitly to the threat of German submarines rising in the night as well as the challenges of subsistence during a sustained global conflict.

DANIEL MINTER

Born Ellaville, Georgia, United States

American, born 1961

*A Distant Holla from the Mouth of the New Meadows River*, 2020

mixed media

Museum Purchase, Jane H. and Charles E. Parker Jr. Art Acquisition Fund

2022.18

In this assemblage, Daniel Minter illuminates the history of Malaga, a forty-two-acre island located off the coast of Phippsburg, Maine. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, Malaga was home to an

economically impoverished community of Black, mixed-race, and white individuals and families. In 1911, the State of Maine forcibly removed the residents of Malaga, destroying their homes and disinterring the remains of their deceased to ensure they were completely uprooted. Here, Minter pays homage to the men, women, and children who lived and worked on Malaga, incorporating buttons, bottles, fishing lines, and other items he collected on the island to evince the once-vibrant existence of its inhabitants. He explains that his use of blue is also significant: “It’s my go-to color. I use that to show the depth of color within our skin. And that beautiful blue that goes straight all the way to black.”

MARGUERITE THOMPSON ZORACH

Born Santa Rosa, California, United States

American, 1887–1968

*The Family Evening*, ca. 1924

oil on canvas

Gift of Dahlov Ipcar and Tessim Zorach

1979.77

*The Family Evening* includes a self-portrait of the artist Marguerite Thompson Zorach, sitting with her back to the viewer, and her family at their summer home in Georgetown, Maine. For Zorach, the lines between artmaking and caretaking often melded. After her children were born, Zorach moved away from painting to experiment with textile arts, a medium she felt would better allow her to balance the demands of motherhood with her artistic ambitions. Her embroidered panels and batik fabrics recalled her Fauvist paintings and proved to be a commercial success, at times financially sustaining the household. She and her husband William Zorach often collaborated on textiles, upending early twentieth-century gender norms that positioned fiber arts as women’s work. Through her chosen subject matter and experimentation with new materials and techniques, Zorach simultaneously sustained strong family relationships and advanced American modernism.

LOUIS MICHEL EILSHEMIUS

Born North Arlington, New Jersey, United States

American, 1864–1941

*Interior with Nude*, ca. 1917

oil on paperboard

Gift of halley k harrisburg, Class of 1990, and Michael Rosenfeld in Memory of Stefan Banz (1961–2021)

2020.53.2

After failing to achieve success as a landscape painter, Louis Michel Eilshemius began to imbue his work with elements of fantasy, such as incorporating nude female figures into woodland and urban scenes and painting on cardboard. This painting exemplifies Eilshemius’s approach, showing a nude woman posed as if mid-dance. The interior room is dim, illuminated only by the city lights glowing through large, floor-to-ceiling windows. The single bright color, a vibrant red, appears on the figure’s breasts and abdomen, calling attention to her nudity and femininity. The dramatic lighting and painted frame suggest a surreal performance, while the clearly urban setting with uncovered windows evoke a sense of uneasy voyeurism onto a private moment.

ANNE HARRIS

Born Cleveland, Ohio, United States

American, born 1961

*Second Portrait with Max*, ca. 1996–1997

oil on canvas

Anonymous Gift and Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund  
1998.1

Created during the last months of her pregnancy, Anne Harris's self-portrait provides an intimate and visceral glimpse into her journey towards motherhood. The protruding abdomen, visible veins, and pendulous breasts attest to her physical transformation. Other formal aspects hint at concurrent psychological changes underway. The skin of Harris's shoulders, arms, hands, and legs blur into the background, creating an optical effect of a body dissolving into the canvas, while the lifeless expression suggests repose, death, or resurrection. These ambiguities hint at the physical demands, loss of self, and transformation of identity required to carry a child, give birth, and become a parent.

ALISON SAAR

Born Los Angeles, California, United States

American, born 1956

*Skillet Study, "Eunice,"* 2001

iron skillet, paint

Archival Collection of Marion Boulton Stroud and Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, Maine. Gift from the Marion Boulton "Kippy" Stroud Foundation  
2018.10.287

Alison Saar incorporates found objects into her sculpture to explore gender, race, history, and heritage. In her *Skillet Study* series, Saar paints portraits onto the undersides of cast iron skillets, referencing the labor that many Black women performed in kitchens, first as slaves and later as the cooks, wetnurses, maids, nannies, and other domestic workers employed by upper-class primarily white families. By personalizing this common kitchen utensil, Saar reminds us of the ways that labor carried out by Black women in domestic spaces has been rendered invisible and undervalued through systems of racism, sexism, and classism. Her use of tools associated with the kitchen also serve as a form of reclamation, as Saar remembers her own childhood kitchen as a place of nourishment and warmth.

MARTHA RYTHER KANTOR

Born Boston, Massachusetts, United States

American, ca. 1896–1981

*Kantor Cooking*, ca. 1935

oil on glass

Bequest of Hilton and Esta Kramer  
2021.73.113

Martha Ryther Kantor started painting at an early age, studying under artists such as Maurice Prendergast, Hugo Robus, and William Zorach. By the late 1930s, she began experimenting with reverse glass painting and eventually became a modern master of the technique. Popular among many early American folk artists, glass painting requires the patient layering of pigment onto the back of a piece of

glass in reverse order as they would be on a canvas—that is to say, the foreground is placed first, the background and shading last. When done correctly, glass painting can create scenes of vibrant color like the domestic scene pictured here. In this painting, Kantor shows her husband and fellow artist Morris Kantor preparing a meal in their home. Kantor’s preferred subjects included nineteenth-century houses, still lifes, and interior domestic scenes.

JOHN SLOAN

Born Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, United States

American, 1871–1951

*Sunday Afternoon in Union Square*, 1912

oil on canvas

Bequest of George Otis Hamlin

1961.63

Along with Robert Henri, John Sloan helped establish a new form of social realism in painting. Much of his work focused on documenting the dizzying energy of everyday life in New York City during the early twentieth century. His subjects were diverse and drawn from all walks of life. In this painting, Sloan depicts typically busy city dwellers relaxing in Union Square, a park in downtown New York City. He centers two young women, possibly shop girls, promenading in their finery. Their coy demeanors and confident postures indicate that they are aware of the attention they garner from nearby park-goers and suggests the active—if somewhat ambiguous—subcurrents operative below the placid surface of conviviality and leisure.

BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

Born Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

American, 1945–2017

*Sister Lucas*, ca. 1975

oil on canvas

Lent by “Friends of the Museum”

This early painting by Barkley Hendricks exemplifies the large-scale portraits that propelled his successful career. Hendricks developed his practice during the 1960s, when many artists consciously sought to combat engrained stereotypes about the Black body as hypersexual, unattractive, even obscene. Hendricks painted several nude portraits of both Black men and women during this time, seeking to disrupt both racialized and gendered norms about what types of bodies appeared on canvases. In *Sister Lucas*, the sitter gazes directly at the viewer, her pose communicating a quiet confidence, even defiance. She wears her hair in an afro, partially covered by a vibrant silk scarf, perhaps in a nod to the “Black is Beautiful” and natural hair movements of the 1960s. Here, Hendricks attempts to strip away the legacies of colonization, enslavement, and structural inequity to create a picture of Black pride, joy, and unapologetic beauty.

MIGRATION / ENVIRONMENT

The movement of people, ideas, raw materials, and goods around the world have enriched cross-cultural knowledge, inspired new forms of artistic production, and led to revolutionary innovations. The same

dynamics have also resulted in environmental devastation, violent conflict, and structural inequities that persist to this day. As you experience these artworks, consider:

How do representations of the environment and landscape shift throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?

What do these artworks reveal about the impacts of colonization, slavery, and the commodification of natural resources over the past two centuries?

How do these artworks demonstrate new artistic traditions and reflect diasporic experiences?

TWINS SEVEN-SEVEN (OMOBA TAIWO OLANIYI OYEWALE-TOYEJE OYALALE OSUNTOKI)

Born Idaban, Nigeria

Nigerian, 1944–2011

*Shapes in the Sky During Rainy Season*, 1974

mixed media on denim

Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund

2017.44

Yorùbá artist Twins Seven-Seven is among the most celebrated and widely exhibited twentieth-century Nigerian painters. Born Omoba Taiwo Olaniyi Oyewale-Toyeje Oyalale Osuntoki, he adopted the name Twins Seven-Seven as the only surviving child of seven pairs of twins. He trained at the Mbari Mbayo workshop in Oshogbo, Nigeria, where he began creating works that visually reimaged Yorùbá mythology for contemporary audiences. He attended the Haystack Mountain School Mountain Crafts School in Deer Isle, Maine, in 1972 and 1974, when he created this work. The title and imagery of this multimedia work reflect a concern for fecundity, both human and agricultural. Rain falls to earth in the form of tears from a central figure, while other forms appear to grow inside womblike structures. His use of fabric as a support for the painting illustrates Seven-Seven's commitment to artistic experimentation.

CHEN YIFEI

Born Ningbo, China

Chinese, 1946–2005

*Going Home (Suzhou)*, 1986

oil on canvas

Gift of Irving Isaacson in memory of Judith Magyar Isaacson

2018.9

Educated at the Shanghai College of Art, Chen Yifei's early training was in Soviet Socialist Realism, the dominant mode of painting under Mao Zedong. Chen created this painting in the years following the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when he was able to explore artistic paradigms outside of Mao's mandate to produce art in service of the nation. This dreamy landscape depicts Suzhou, a city in southern China known for its canals, footbridges, and gardens. In Chen's rendering, the city's idyllic architecture, calm water, and soothing color palette are punctuated by pops of aqua, lavender, and pink

pigment. The lone figure, a motif that appears in other of the artist's work from the period, recalls a sense of melancholic nostalgia. This deliberately serene depiction of Suzhou—a major metropolis with millions of inhabitants—reveals the artist's fascination with creating art that is assertively picturesque rather than propagandistic.

SERGIO MIGUEL

Born Mexicali, Mexico

Mexican, born 1992

*Jacinta*, 2022

oil on linen

Gift of Rahul M. Sabhnani

2023.8

Mexicali artist Sergio Miguel portrays people who have been omitted or marginalized from art historical canons, combining explorations of queer personhood with a deep knowledge of colonial Latin American painting. In *Jacinta*, Miguel references a historical genre known as *ángel arcabucero* (arquebusier angel), which emerged from the Cusco School established in seventeenth-century Peru. Melding pre-Hispanic, Indigenous, Spanish, and Catholic elements, these paintings depict martial angels holding an arquebus (an early firearm) rather than the traditional sword. *Ángel arcabucero* paintings suppressed Indigenous traditions and were part of colonial practices aimed at solidifying Spanish rule throughout the Andes. Here, Miguel pushes back against colonizing themes by populating the paintings with his femme, queer Latinx friends and family—people whose identities are often threatened, denigrated, and misunderstood today, just as Indigenous people were subjugated in colonial Latin America centuries ago.

RENÉ MAGRITTE

Born Lessines, Belgium

Belgian, 1898–1967

*Le Banquet*, 1957

oil on canvas

Bequest of William H. Alexander, in memory of his friend, Howard Hoyt Shiras, M.D.

2003.11.49

A highly accomplished and influential surrealist painter, René Magritte explored human perception, the limits of representation, and conceptions of reality. In *Le Banquet*, one in a series of four eponymous oil paintings created in 1957 and 1958, a grove of trees is silhouetted against a crepuscular sky, the dark branches startlingly punctuated by a red circle representing the sun. By unsettling pictorial conventions—the sun should be behind the trees—Magritte questions the distinction between visibility and invisibility. Writing in 1964, he mused, “With regard to ‘the invisible,’ I understand that which is not visible, for example; heat, weight, pleasure, etc. There is the *visible that is seen*: the apple on the face in *The Great War*, and the *visible that is hidden*: the face hidden by the visible apple. In *The Banquet*, the sun hidden by the curtain of trees is, itself, visible.”



FRANK BOWLING

Born Bartica, Guyana

Guyanese, born 1936

*Skowhegan Green II*, 1984

acrylic on canvas

Gift of Julie McGee, Class of 1982, in Honor of David C. Driskell H'89

2010.60

Frank Bowling emigrated to London from British Guiana (present-day Guyana) in 1953, graduating from the Royal College of Art in 1962. Throughout his prolific career, Bowling has worked in different styles, shifting from figurative to abstract painting. His time as an artist-in-residence at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1984 proved to be an important moment of creative experimentation for the artist, who soon began integrating found materials such as foam and plastic into his dense, textural canvases. Bowling credits the lush summertime landscape of rural Maine as being a source of inspiration for *Skowhegan Green II*. After spending so much of his career in urban areas such as New York and London, Bowling explained, "I felt the green in the Skowhegan area was so powerful a look that I just couldn't ignore it."

JOHN MARIN

Born Rutherford, New Jersey

American, 1870–1953

*Weehawken Sequence*, 1910–1915

oil on canvas board

Museum Purchase

2012.2

John Marin grew up in Weehawken, New Jersey, and studied architecture at the Stevens Institute of Technology before turning his attention to painting. He traveled to Paris and other European cities in 1905, where he met many avant-garde artists of the period who were interested in defying established societal norms. This experience abroad informed his artistic approaches, and he was among the first American painters to experiment with abstraction. Marin created the *Weehawken Sequence* series shortly after returning to the United States, incorporating aspects of Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism he encountered in Europe to create abstracted landscapes of his hometown. This painting, a strong example of Marin's early work, explores the relationship between representational forms and abstraction, challenging conventions of landscape painting in the early twentieth century.

ROBERTO SEBASTIÁN MATTA

Born Santiago, Chile

Chilean, 1911–2002

*Untitled*, ca. 1951

oil on paper mounted on wood panel

Bequest of William H. Alexander, in memory of his mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. William Homer Alexander

2003.11.54

Chilean painter Roberto Matta established a network of friends among European modernist architects and Surrealist artists even before he arrived on the New York art scene in 1939. There, he played a pivotal role in the inception of Abstract Expressionism. This untitled painting dates to the next phase of Matta's career, when he lived an itinerant life in Europe and pursued work that clashed with the expectations of his European and American cohorts. Matta initiated works such as this one by making uncontrolled marks and smudges that freed his imagination. He then interpreted these notations with pencil and crayons. Chance and improvisation became the means to express the other unspeakable, even unthinkable side of existence. Like his friend and collaborator Marcel Duchamp, Matta made human desires and the workings of the mind a constant concern.

FELRATH HINES

Born Indianapolis, Indiana, United States

American, 1913–1993

*Untitled*, 1965–1968

oil on canvas on panel

Museum Purchase, Barbara Cooney Porter Fund

2022.25

This painting speaks to Felrath Hines's lifelong interest in abstraction, its gestural brushwork engaging with Abstract Expressionism. In 1963, Hines joined Spiral, a collective of prominent Black artists such as Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff who were engaged in the Civil Rights Movement. In addition to his work as a painter, Hines was a respected conservator, leading the art conservation department at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery and working for prominent artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, with whom he developed a close friendship. Hines had recently completed conserving one of Monet's *Water Lilies* at the time he created this work. Some of the French artist's pictorial strategies find analogues in Hines's painting, including the lack of a horizon line and the yellow brushwork layered on top of a field of blue and white, which evokes sunlight reflecting off water.

### INSPIRATION / APPROPRIATION

Artists are enmeshed in complex social and intellectual networks that are in turn shaped by their historic contexts. The artworks in this section illuminate some of the pathways through which twentieth- and twenty-first century artists have exchanged ideas, found inspiration, influenced others, and innovated anew. As you encounter these works, consider:

How have artists looked to the past and to cross-cultural artistic practices to create their work?

How do you distinguish inspiration, appreciation, and appropriation?

What power dynamics are at work as you explore both specific artistic networks and broad concepts like appropriation?

FRANCIS YELLOW (WANBLI KOYAKE, CARRIES THE EAGLE)

Born Pierre, South Dakota, United States

Lakota and American, born 1954

*untitled (8126)*, 2015

pigment and ink on found paper

Museum Purchase, Barbara Cooney Porter Fund

2017.20

DWAYNE WILCOX

Born Kadoka, South Dakota, United States

Oglala Lakota and American, born 1957

*Before Day Break*, 2017

crayon, colored pencil, and felt-tipped pen on ledger paper

Museum Purchase, Barbara Cooney Porter Fund

2017.19

In these drawings, contemporary Lakota artists Dwayne Wilcox and Francis Yellow (Wanbli Koyake, “Carries the Eagle” in Lakota) create colorful drawings on a sheet of found antique ledger paper, evoking a nineteenth-century pictorial tradition known today as ledger art. The origins of ledger art can be traced to the 1874 Red River War, during which United States soldiers had incarcerated more than seventy Native Americans at Fort Marion, Florida. As part of the sweeping forced assimilation tactics of the late nineteenth century, the jailors provided prisoners with pencils, ink, and paper from unused ledgers in an attempt to forcibly assimilate them to Western culture. A group of twenty-six Native American prisoners instead used these materials to continue the long Plains tradition of pictorial painting on hide, effectively inventing a new, hybrid art form that quickly spread beyond the prison walls. Although ledger art waned after the 1920s, contemporary artists like Wilcox and Yellow have revived it in recent decades.

CELIA VASQUEZ YUI

Born Pucallpa, Peru

Peruvian and Shipibo-Conibo, born 1960

*Paloma Negra*, 2019

pre-fire, slip-painted, coil-built clay and vegetal resins

Museum Purchase, The Philip Conway Beam Endowment Fund

2021.72.1

Celia Vasquez Yui is a Shipibo-Conibo activist, shaman, and master ceramicist based in the Peruvian Amazon. Her work combines intergenerational learning and Indigenous visual vocabularies with contemporary innovations and environmental advocacy. *Paloma Negra*, or black dove, is part of a series of coil-built ceramic sculptures that represent the critically endangered flora and fauna of the Amazonian rainforest and Ucayali River in Peru. Yui draws on many traditional aspects of Shipibo-Conibo art, including the use of *kené*, intricate geometric patterns in natural dyes of red, black, and white. Yet the scale and form of *Paloma Negra* are unique. While Shipibo-Conibo ceramics can be figural, they are typically shaped as vessels for use in the home and in ritual; true figurines tended to be far smaller than these examples. Through her artistic experimentation, Yui’s ceramics explore new possibilities for Shipibo-Conibo ceramics.

BEAUFORD DELANEY

Born Knoxville, Tennessee, United States

American, 1901–1979

*Untitled*, 1960

oil on canvas

Gift of halley k harrisburg, Class of 1990, and Michael Rosenfeld

2004.25

Beauford Delaney grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee, the son of a Methodist minister and formerly enslaved mother who taught him about the injustices of racism from an early age. In 1929, Delaney moved to New York City and first made his mark as a member of the Harlem Renaissance. For the next two decades, Delaney lived what biographer David Leeming refers to as a “compartmentalized” life as a gay Black man. In Greenwich Village, he escaped the homophobia he faced in Harlem; in Harlem, he was largely free from the racism he experienced in Greenwich Village. In 1953, Delaney permanently moved to Paris with the encouragement of his close friend, the writer James Baldwin. In Paris, his painting style shifted dramatically. Works such as this respond to American Abstract Expressionism while reveling in luminous colors and the beauty of light.

GEORGES BRAQUE

Born Argenteuil, France

French, 1882–1963

*Head of a Woman (Tête de Jeune Femme)*, ca. 1920–1922

crayon on paper

Bequest of William H. Alexander, in memory of his friend, Howard Hoyt Shiras, M.D.

2003.11.4

Georges Braque is recognized as one of the inventors of Cubism, an avant-garde movement that flourished in France during the 1910s and 1920s. As exemplified in this drawing, Cubists represented their subjects from multiple perspectives at once, reassembling the constituent parts into a fragmented form. Numerous artists of the European avant-garde drew heavily on the visual aesthetics they encountered in artworks from Africa and the Pacific, often celebrated as “primitive” because they were created outside of European artistic traditions that these artists rejected. African masks and other wood carvings were particularly admired, although European and American artists rarely acknowledged or understood their significance to the communities who made and used them. With European nations’ imperial expansion during the late nineteenth century, many such objects came to be collected widely by both public institutions and private individuals; Braque once owned the *nkisi* figure displayed nearby.

NANCY SPERO

American, 1926–2009

Born Cleveland, Ohio, United States

*El Salvador*, 1986

collage

Museum Purchase with Funds Donated Anonymously

2019.2

Feminist and anti-war activist Nancy Spero dedicated her artistic career to chronicling social issues, political concerns, and the experiences of women on a global scale, often in collaboration with her husband and fellow artist Leon Golub. In the 1970s and 1980s, Spero cast a critical lens on the violence unfolding in many Latin American countries, including El Salvador, which was embroiled in a civil war from 1979–1992. In this collage, Spero depicts a mother crouching protectively over her child. The triple-repeated image conveys a sense of motion, suggesting that they are fleeing or escaping danger. In the top left corner, a seated woman wails, perhaps lamenting the atrocities taking place. Spero’s focus on women and children emphasizes the human costs of war, powerfully serving to denounce violence and demand change.

NYEEMA MORGAN

Born Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States

American, born 1977

*Soft Power. Hard Margins. (1936)*, 2022

mixed media, cast resin, Plexiglas, composite gold

Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund

2022.29.1

In her series *Soft Power. Hard Margins.*, Nyeema Morgan appropriates works from the canon of Western art history to interrogate the power and politics of representation. Here, Morgan reframes Dorothea Lange’s iconic and widely reproduced photograph *Migrant Mother* (1936), which depicts Florence Owens Thompson, a woman of Native American descent, and her three children during the Great Depression. Although Lange’s work was fueled by a strong social commitment, the removal of Thompson’s biography when the image was published universalizes her suffering and erases Indigenous experiences. In this context, Morgan’s use of the image and her statement “permission to empathize” compels us to consider the individual behind the image. Yet, to empathize is to establish a human connection on the most fundamental level. Morgan asks how much we truthfully “see” through the veneer of a photographer or an artist’s gaze.

ASHLEY BRYAN

Born New York City, New York, United States

American, 1923–2022

*Suffer the Little Children to Come unto Me, Jesus and Children*,

ca. 2000–2010

acrylic on canvas

Gift of The Ashley Bryan Center

2021.51.9

Writer and illustrator Ashley Bryan grew up in New York City surrounded by books, music, and art. He was admitted to Cooper Union School of Art after being rejected from other schools on the basis of race. He continued his education at Columbia University and was a member of the first class at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1946. Although he never stopped his painting practice, Bryan ultimately became an award-winning children’s book author and illustrator whose titles often drew on African folktales, incorporated a deep sense of spirituality, and centered Black characters. This painting demonstrates Bryan’s use of vibrant colors and dynamic brushwork, and its subject matter evinces his Christian faith. Notably, Bryan has portrayed Christ as a Black man, signaling his

commitment to celebrating Blackness and inserting it into widely understood narratives of human experience.

### Fetish and Objects and Primitivism: Collecting African Art

During the Civil Rights Movement, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art promoted African studies and culture on campus, organizing exhibitions such as *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting* in 1964 and *The Art of Sub-Saharan Africa* in 1968. The following year, the Museum also purchased three African objects, including these two Central African reliquaries. When such objects first entered European museums, they were often labeled as “fetish” objects, a term that misconstrued the role they played in the societies that made and used them. In the early twentieth century, many European avant-garde artists celebrated them as “primitivist” artistic achievements. Whether denigrated as fetishes or celebrated as primitivist masterpieces, the incorporation of such works into museums remind us of the many ways Indigenous art forms have been appropriated in Western institutions, even when such artworks were aimed at building more diverse and global collections.

This micro-exhibition was curated by Benjamin Allen '23, with support from David Gordon, Roger Howell Jr. Professor of History, Bowdoin College, and Cassandra Braun, BCMA Curator.

#### UNIDENTIFIED FANG ARTIST

present-day Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon

Reliquary Figure (possibly nlo bieri or eyema byeri), ca. 1900

wood, palm oil

Museum Purchase, Florence C. Quinby Fund, in memory of Henry Cole Quinby, Honorary Degree, 1916

1969.70

The Fang people inhabit portions of Central Africa, comprising significant populations in Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. They have long been recognized for their rich artistic practices, including carved masks and sculpture. This reliquary portrays an ancestor and would have been kept in a special structure that was off-limits to anyone except the owner. Reliquaries like this once played an important part of the spiritual life of the Fang, invoking ancestor cults that helped the entire lineage. Such sculptures were also highly coveted on the international art market by the mid-twentieth century, leading to the creation of fakes, forgeries, and examples that had been deliberately aged to make them seem older and thereby more authentic to potential buyers.

#### UNIDENTIFIED KOTA ARTIST

present-day Gabon and Republic of Congo

Reliquary Figure (Mbulu-Ngulu), ca. 1900

wood, copper, and brass, on wooden base

Museum Purchase, Florence C. Quinby Fund, in memory of Henry Cole Quinby, Honorary Degree, 1916

1969.69.a&.b

The Kota of present-day Gabon and the Republic of Congo believed that their ancestors could protect the living community from harm and ensure social cohesion. Reliquaries such as this one would have once been connected to a small box containing the remains of an important ancestor. Placed in a household shrine, the reliquary provided a means for the family to maintain strong links to their ancestors through prayers, rituals, and sacrifices. The use of copper, a highly desirable commodity, belies the respect the maker had for the ancestor. Kota reliquaries were among the earliest types of African art to enter the international art market, in large part because of their influence on Cubist artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque who appropriated the forms and aesthetics of Central African sculpture.

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What is a fetish?

When Portuguese sailors encountered African religions on the West coast of Africa in the sixteenth century, they observed Africans using objects to induce change in people and in their surroundings. Although these objects were not unlike the icons of Catholicism at the time, the Portuguese related them to non-Christian forms of magic, such as spells and charms. They named these African objects *feitiços* (fetishes), objects that act through magical processes. In the seventeenth century, the Protestant Dutch and English adopted the term. They changed the non-Christian, magical meaning of fetish to signify instead an irrational belief in the power of objects. From then, and especially through the nineteenth century, the fetish became a prejudicial term to denote irrational beliefs in general, as represented by the religious objects of African peoples.

What is Primitivism?

In the 1870s, African art began infiltrating the global market, one consequence of European colonial conquest and expansion into the continent. Among the first to collect African sculpture were members of the early twentieth-century European avant-garde, such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Paul Klee, who would have encountered these objects in the growing number of ethnographic museums in Europe. These artists were particularly intrigued by the way African carvers approached the abstraction of the human form and soon began to appropriate these stylistic attributes into their own work, pushing against the naturalism that had dominated Western art since the Renaissance. However, they rarely sought to understand of the meaning and function of African art in its original context. Throughout the twentieth century, the strong influence of African aesthetics on modern Euro-American artforms was known as Primitivism. Today, we recognize the label as problematic, as it implies a hierarchy of sophistication and skill that denigrates non-Western artforms as “primitive” and elevates Euro-American traditions.