

IRREPLACEABLE YOU: PERSONHOOD AND DIGNITY IN ART, 1980S TO NOW
ADDRESSES THEMES EVOKING OUR SHARED HUMANITY
AT BOWDOIN COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

Brunswick—This winter, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) will present the exhibition *Irreplaceable You: Personhood and Dignity in Art, 1980s to Now*, exploring the complexities of human empathy in a world that can seem dominated by acts of violence and dehumanizing rhetoric, and supported by both the relentless 24-hour news cycle and the pervasive influence of the Internet. The exhibition includes more than sixty contemporary works in different media, by artists employing strategies like portraiture, storytelling, naming, and sometimes even traces of their own bodies. Among the artists included are Samira Abbassy, Alfredo Jaar, Glenn Ligon, Titus Kaphar, Hayv Kahraman, and Zanele Muholi. *Irreplaceable You* will be on view at the Museum from January 16 to June 1, 2025.

“A central question in our very polarized society is how we can continue to recognize the personhood and dignity of those we don’t know, and perhaps even those we do” said Sean Kramer, the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) and the exhibition’s curator. “While this is an issue that has challenged societies since at least the beginning of the modern world, the impact of the rise of cable television, the Internet, and social media puts a different spotlight on the subject, when it can be so easy to dismiss people as ‘other.’ The artists whose work is presented here are all responding to these larger themes around personal dignity, but doing so in ways that reveal and encourage empathy, rather than by shocking the viewer.”

The exhibition will unfold across several of BCMA’s galleries, exploring themes such as:

- **State power and violence, and spectacle versus vulnerability**, including works such as Joshua Rashaad McFadden’s photographs *Tenderly Speaks the Comforter* (2020) and *I Can’t Breathe* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) (2020).
- **Visibility and invisibility, precarity, and empathy as resistance**, represented by works such as Alfredo Jaar’s *Real Pictures (Camp)* (1994-1995) and Berlinde De Bruyckere’s sculpture *Untitled* (1992).
- **Portraiture and self-portraiture, performance, dignity, and loss**, including Sergio Miguel’s painting *Jacinta* (2022) and Zanele Muholi’s photograph *Sine IV, Melbourne, Australia* (2014).

As part of the exhibition, there will be several targeted interventions throughout the museum, with works placed into collection galleries and juxtaposed with historical works of art to draw out additional perspectives. For example:

- Glenn Ligon’s set of ten lithographs *Runaways* (1993) explores America’s legacy of slavery and colonialism as a contrast to the more traditional narratives presented in a gallery otherwise focused on 15th to 19th century American and European art.
- In the Museum’s Rotunda, Reza Aramesh’s *Site of the Fall – Study of the Renaissance Garden Action 247: At 11:45 am Friday 27 June 2003* (2023) addresses contemporary themes of political violence and subjugation, while evoking Greco-Roman sculptural traditions and Christian images of suffering saints.

- And works like *Melissa (Country of Origin: Peru)* (2006), by photographer Chan Chao, focuses attention on issues such as drug trafficking, sex work, and other challenges facing migrants and refugees, which adds a new dimension to the gallery's exploration of labor and bodies in 20th and 21st century art.

"This exhibition serves as a crucial reminder of the power of empathy, and the role of art and artists in fostering it, even while addressing an array of challenging themes," said Frank Goodyear, Co-director of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. "A project like this is also precisely the type of show that an academic museum like ours, on a college campus, is well-positioned to present, with a diverse array of artists representing cultures from around the world." Added Anne Collins Goodyear, Co-director of the Museum, "Reflecting on our shared humanity is central to what we do, from our exhibitions and programs to our collaborations with students and faculty. A strong liberal arts education succeeds best when it starts from this understanding of our intrinsic worth, and *Irreplaceable You* is an example of how this can be done through art."

Public talks and workshops with featured artists along with a scholarly symposium and online collection of essays will accompany the exhibition. As part of the exhibition, the Museum will also dedicate one space to serve as a room for meditation and reflection for viewers. This will include books related to the exhibition's artists and themes, headphones with playlists curated by some of the featured artists, and pencils and paper for those looking to express themselves through writing or drawing.

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The Bowdoin College Museum of Art is the cornerstone of the arts and culture at Bowdoin. One of the earliest collegiate art collections in the nation, it came into being through the 1811 bequest of James Bowdoin III of 70 European paintings and a portfolio of 141 old master drawings. The collection has been expanded through the generosity of the Bowdoin family, alumni and friends, and now numbers more than 20,000 objects, including paintings, sculpture, works on paper, decorative arts and artifacts from prehistory to the present from civilizations around the world. www.bowdoin.edu

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