

Form + Figment



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PERMANENT COLLECTION

SEPT 2, 2022–MAY 28, 2023

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The modern and contemporary artworks in this exhibition reference the human body in both realistic and abstract forms. Ranging from portraits to fragmented figures, these works serve as meditations on physical and psychological states of being. The suggested presence—and sometimes absence—of the human figure evokes a tension between the mysterious and the concrete, the real and the imagined.

The materiality of the objects—from layered veils of oil paint to found object collages—signal an act of transformation. While each artist has engaged in transforming physical materials, the subject matter of each work also hints at a continuous state of emerging or becoming something new. Whether through the pain of loss or the promise of renewal, the embodied forms depicted here invite us to contemplate ourselves, and others, in an ongoing process of transition.

This exhibition is made possible by the Joyce Marcus Art Exhibition Fund.



Dorothea Tanning (American, 1910–2012)

Still in the Studio, 1979

Oil on canvas

Purchase with the Warbeke Art Museum Fund

2013.11



Mary Ann Unger (American, 1945–1998)

Black Heart, 1996–97

Hydrocal, fiberglass mesh, cheese cloth, shellac, pigments, diluted beeswax, graphite powder

Purchase with funds from Marion and Alan Brown

1998.18

The shape of this sculpture recalls the human heart, the powerful organ that sustains life. Scarred, wrinkled, blackened, and brittle, the surface has telltale marks of bodily suffering.

Achieved by covering a steel armature with cheesecloth, plaster, beeswax, and other materials, the sculpture is part of a series begun by artist Mary Ann Unger following her first bout with breast cancer. Unger battled the disease for more than a decade. During that time, she created works that explore the vulnerability of the body, as well as its regenerative forces. Her deeply evocative sculptures express the opposing forces of life and death that are inherent in our precarious bodies. Unger, who is an alumna of Mount Holyoke College, class 1967, died at the age of 53.



Zanele Muholi (South African, b. 1972)

***Thulani I, Paris*, 2014**

Gelatin silver print

Gift of Pavel Zoubok

2019.42.5



Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany, 1954)

***Shield*, 1988**

Painted plaster

Gift of David and Renee Conforte McKee (Class of 1962)

2008.22



Charles McGill (American, 1964–2017)

***Black Again*, 2013**

Deconstructed golf bags on panel

Gift of Pavel Zoubok

2019.42.12

Classically trained as a painter, Charles McGill's practice evolved, eventually making sculptures out of found objects. His work centers the game of golf as a symbolic framework for critiquing U.S. race, class, and gender politics. Best known for his deconstructed golf bag compositions, the bags in *Black Again* have been sewn onto a canvas stretcher, and their arrangement references early abstract painting.

In similar works, McGill experiments with forms resembling Ku Klux Klan hoods, and in others, golf bags are arranged to represent perpetrators of violence and their victims. The abstract composition of *Black Again* invites close reading while remaining elusive. If the work is embedded with an allusion to American racism, McGill has strategically maintained its subtlety, leaving space for other complex associations.



Willie Cole (American, b. 1955)

***Street Dragon I*, 2018**

Shoes, wire, and screws on a metal stand

Purchase with the Susan and Bernard Schilling (Susan Eisenhart, Class of 1932) Fund

2021.8



Audrey Flack (American, b. 1931)

***Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, 2013**

Serigraph on Heavy Arches Digital paper

Gift of the Experimental Printmaking Institute in honor of Harold and Janet Tague (Janet Hickey, Class of 1966)

2014.36.2

Audrey Flack's *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* features a photorealistic depiction of a famous sculpture by the Baroque artist Bernini. Focusing in on just the saint's face, Flack highlights the emotion and pain of her trance-like religious encounter. Underneath her image, Flack prints part of Saint Theresa's description of her vision of being pierced by an angel with a spear: "I saw in his hand a little gold and at the point a little fire. He thrust it into my heart and pierced my very entrails. When he drew it out he seemed to draw them out also and leave me on fire with a great love." Flack plays with this imagery, pairing the text and image with a tube of lipstick with a fiery red tip.



Andargé Asfaw (American, b. Ethiopia, 1956)

***Ethiopian Cross*, 2009**

Color photograph

Gift of Charles and Blanche Derby

2020.13.2



Edward del Rosario (American, b. 1970)

***Civilization II*, 2013**

Oil on linen on panel

Purchase with the Gilbert A. and Hester

Hemstreet-Cam (Class of 1928) Art Acquisition Fund

2015.5

Edward del Rosario's playful and confounding image, *Civilization II*, seems to teeter on the edge of reality. Elaborately costumed figures inhabit a glowingly smooth and white surface, congregating in and around an uncanny structure that seems both natural and human-made. About his own work del Rosario says, "I have been using painting to explore a narrative that deals with power struggles in the aftermath of a post post-colonial world. . . The characters exist in an austere, allegorical world where identity and tradition, belief and myth all intersect to redefine and recreate meaning." The smooth, polished quality of the surface is essential to del Rosario's work. In a labor-intensive process, he primes the linen surface with eight coats of oil paint and sands down each layer. Transparent glazes are then added to the surface to create the composition, each one drying and being sanded down before the next is applied.



David Clyde Driskell (American, 1931–2020)

***Chieftain's Chair*, 2011**

Serigraph

Partial gift of the Experimental Printmaking Institute, Lafayette College and purchase with the Jean C. Harris Art Acquisition Fund 2016.2.19

This work was inspired by an early oil on canvas created by the artist in 1966. It references a royal chair or throne of the Nigerian Chief "Oba." Driskell was introduced to the African ancestral legacy while a student at Howard University. He was a newly appointed professor at Fisk University when his research turned toward African art with a passion and he began integrating African references into his work, especially as abstracted forms. In addition, Driskell often used inanimate objects—such as the chair in this image—as vehicles for his creative investigation.

This print was executed in the same painterly style that was signature Driskell. A dense layering of color was achieved by overprinting and shifting the screen so that the ink overlapped. This approach allowed for the building up of heavy areas and texture, making some elements more dramatic and creating an illusion of depth and three-dimensionality.

The texts in this gallery guide were written by Museum staff members from the curatorial and engagement departments, with the exception of *Chieftain's Chair*, which was written by Curlee Raven Holton, Director and Artist-in-Residence, David C. Driskell Center for the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora.

