mhcam

JOURNAL
2019–2020

Exhibitions

In the Making: The Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop
August 3, 2019–June 21, 2020

A celebration of printmaking, this exhibition explores the dynamic and experimental work generated by the Printmaking Workshop (1984–2012) founded by Nancy Campbell, Professor Emeritus of Art.

Money Matters: Meaning, Power, and Change in the History of Currency
August 31, 2019–June 21, 2020

Inspired by Associate Professor Desmond Fitz-Gibbon's course, "Histories of Money," this exhibition reveals money not just as a means for economic transaction but also as a catalyst for social transformation. Ranging from Mesopotamian clay tablets to counterfeit bank notes to contemporary art, the works on view illustrate the material shifts of currency over time and across cultures.

Katrien Vermeire: Der Kreislauf (A Handful)
August 31, 2019–June 21, 2020

Katrien Vermeire's film, *Der Kreislauf,* captures a day on a beach in De Haan, Belgium, where French and Flemish speaking children gather each summer, creating an economy of paper flowers paid for with sea shells. Vermeire's poetic film invites viewers into this world of exchange, offering a meditation on the meaning and measure of value.

Major Themes: Celebrating Ten Years of Teaching with Art
Through June 21, 2020

September 2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's renowned Teaching with Art program. This exhibition explores five broad themes inspired by the interdisciplinary, object-based conversations that occur when classes use the Museum as a site of discovery.

This year's exhibition program is made possible by the Susan Davenport Page 1931 and Margaret Davenport Page Fales 1929 Art Fund, the Susan B. Weatherbie Exhibition Fund, and the Leon Levy Foundation.

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Cover: Stan Natchez (Shoshone/Paiute; American, b. 1954), *Geronimo's Cadillac,* 2019, archival jet print on canvas, oil, glass beadwork. Purchase with the Ann Nelson Behrman (Class of 1954) Art Acquisition Fund, 2019.11. © Stan Natchez (detail)

Top: *Brixton ten pound note,* British, 2017, ink on polymer. Purchase through prior Bequest of Helene Brosseau Black (Class of 1931), 2019.15

Above: Kiki Smith (American, b. Germany, 1954), *Falcon,* 1999–2001, color etching and aquatint on paper. Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, 2004.6. Printed and Published by Harlan & Weaver.

Continuity and Renewal

In 8 CE, Ovid wrote in his epic *Metamorphoses*: "So time flies on and follows. . . . Always, for ever and new. What was before is left behind; what never was is now; And every passing moment is renewed." Still centuries later, Ovid succinctly captures what it feels like to experience continuity and renewal simultaneously.

Indeed, that is the atmosphere at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum as we say goodbye to two staff members with significant legacies: Debbie Davis, who dedicated 17 years to overseeing operations and development at the Museum, and Linda Delone Best, who recently retired after 20 inspiring years caring for the Museum's collection. It is also an exciting time as we welcome three new talented staff members to Team MHCAM: Associate Curator Stephanie Sparling Williams, Museum Registrar/Collections Manager Abigail Hoover, and Assistant Museum Preparator Christina Frank.

Our new colleagues bring with them fresh perspectives, spirited innovation, and distinctive expertise. Together, we will continue to provide transformative experiences with works of art and material culture for our students and community. Whether through exhibitions, classes, or mentoring, we will do so with renewed focus and energy inspired by our new colleagues.

This fall we officially celebrate the tenth anniversary of our exceptional Teaching with Art program, which began in 2009 with generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and an endowment from Susan Weatherbie '72. The exhibition that marks this important milestone, *Major Themes: Celebrating Ten Years of Teaching with Art,* continues for its second and final year, with several installation changes that enliven the gallery.

In the Making: The Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop is curated by Katelyn Allen, our 2018–2020 Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow, and honors the achievements of this workshop that brought leading women printmakers to Mount Holyoke over almost three decades. *Money Matters,* an exploration of the history of currency, is co-curated by Associate Professor of History Desmond Fitz-Gibbon and Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture Aaron Miller. Students from Professor Fitz-Gibbon's course, "Histories of Money," were also involved in planning the exhibition, exemplifying the kind of innovative collaborations MHCAM often undertakes with both faculty and students.

Looking to the past is what we do at museums, but always with an eye to the future. While we were sad to say farewell to the brilliant students of the class of 2019 who worked with us closely at MHCAM, we are thrilled to welcome our new interns and student guides and receptionists. And there is no better way to capture the pulse of the future than through greeting and getting to know the incoming class of 2023. Such is the cycle of a bustling academic museum like ours. All at once we are a place of the past, present, and future—of continuity, change, and renewal.

Tricia Y. Paik
Florence Finch Abbott Director

Director Tricia Paik with new MHCAM staff members Christina Frank and Stephanie Sparling Williams.

IN THIS ISSUE

In the Making: The Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop

Katelyn M. Allen, 2018–2020 Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow

From woodcuts to lithographs, etchings to screenprints, printmaking can feel like a confounding process. For Nancy Campbell, a printmaker and emerita professor of studio art at Mount Holyoke College, this posed a challenge to many of her students. Wanting to make printmaking more accessible and engaging, she established the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop, an artist-in-residency program that she ran from 1984 to 2012.

Each year, Campbell invited one leading woman artist and one master printer to campus to create limited-edition works and give a public lecture. Students from Mount Holyoke and the broader Five College community were encouraged to participate in these residencies, giving them greater exposure to the printmaking process and to the often collaborative work done by artists and printers. While a portion of the prints produced from each residency were sold to fund future workshops, many were given to the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, where they continue to be used by students and faculty.

Student involvement was an integral component of the Printmaking Workshop. Students, Campbell notes, had the opportunity to "interact in close proximity to the actual working process that the artist goes through in planning and executing a fine art print," allowing them to witness the creative exchange that occurs between artists and printers. In many instances, they were also able to assist the artist and printer by inking plates, preparing and treating paper, and operating the printing press. Through this direct engagement, Campbell hoped that students would develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the technical complexity of printmaking.

The Workshop exposed students to printmakers whom Campbell saw as "strong, capable, and successful women artists." Although women have

Faith Ringgold (American, b. 1930) And Women?, 2009 Serigraph; printed by Curlee Raven Holton Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop 2010.14. © 2019 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

Sondra Freckelton
(American, 1936–2019)
Openwork, 1986
Screenprint with 17 colors; printed by Norman Stewart
Gift of the Mount Holyoke College Printmaking Workshop
1987.2
© www.StewartStewart.com 1987

engaged in making prints since the late 16th century, they have received little recognition for their work throughout history. Up until the early 20th century, women were limited in their access to art schools, museums, and other institutions, and thus had fewer opportunities to advance professionally in printmaking. These conditions made it nearly impossible for women artists to rise to prominence without the support of male figures like fathers, husbands, and brothers. This has created a lack of representation within the field of printmaking. By inviting accomplished women artists to participate in the Printmaking Workshop, Campbell hoped that students would be inspired by their resilience and courage, and would feel empowered to imagine a successful career in printmaking for themselves.

In the Making celebrates the work of the artists and printers who participated in Campbell's Printmaking Workshop, while recognizing the significant contributions they made to the College community. The exhibition also sheds light on the creative process underlying each artist's work through the display of preparatory drawings, proof states, and archival images. We hope this exhibition will foster a deeper understanding and respect for the technical and intuitive aspects integral to the art of printmaking, for there is much to be learned in the making.

Artists / Printers

1984: Elaine de Kooning / John Hutcheson
1985: Joan Snyder / John Hutcheson
1986: Vija Celmins / Doris Simmelink
1987: Sondra Freckelton / Norman Stewart
1988: Jane Dickson / Maurice Payne
1989: Susan Shatter / Maurice Sanchez
1992: Sue Coe / Melissa Katzman Braggins
1995: Aline Feldman (artist as printer)
1997: Sylvia Plimack Mangold / Carol Weaver
1999: Kiki Smith / Carol Weaver
2008: Jessica Stockholder / Liz Chalfin
2009: Faith Ringgold / Curlee Raven Holton
2012: Petah Coyne / Jon Goodman

ON VIEW
Fall-Spring

Money Matters: Meaning, Power, and Change in the History of Currency

Desmond Fitz-Gibbon, Associate Professor of History

Tetradrachm of Deified Alexander III, 360–281 BCE
Greek
Silver
Gift of the Estate of Nathan Whitman
2004.13.1

Écu of Philip VI,
1328–1350 CE
Gold
Gift of the Estate of Nathan Whitman
2004.13.520

Money has arguably been one of the most powerful technologies to shape the human experience. It is, as the saying goes, money that "makes the world go round" and it is money that "answereth all things." These aphorisms speak to a seemingly universal truth about the power and ubiquity of money. We know from the research of anthropologists that the idea and use of money extends to some of the earliest instances of human civilization. At the same time, however, the material matter of money comes in a breathtaking multitude of forms. Each one of these forms is inscribed with the social, economic, political, and cultural particularities of a given time and place.

As the objects in this exhibition demonstrate, the history of money has always been a plural one,

Money Matters Acquisition Spotlight: Geronimo's Cadillac

Stan Natchez (Shoshone/Paiute; American, b. 1954), *Geronimo's Cadillac,* 2019, archival jet print on canvas, oil, glass beadwork. Purchase with the Ann Nelson Behrman (Class of 1954) Art Acquisition Fund, 2019.11. © Stan Natchez

and also one that stretches beyond the functional definitions of money as a measure, medium of exchange, or store of value. These were the considerations that first inspired the "Histories of Money" course—upon which this exhibition is largely based. Using the wide-ranging resources of the Museum's collection—both traditional numismatic material and beyond—students were invited to consider money and the stories that can be told about it. "Money talks," as yet another saying goes. This course asked students to listen carefully to what it has to say. Many of the artifacts and ideas presented in *Money Matters* have been selected, curated, and designed by students enrolled in the course in spring 2019.

How do we know money when we see it and where and whence did it first arise? The search for these answers can drive a person crazy. John Maynard Keynes, one of the great economists of the 20th century, once referred to his own search for the Ur-form of money as, aptly enough, his "Babylonian madness." Similarly, Joseph Schumpeter, who

Tye & Kilner (British, active 19th century)
Snuffbox in the form of a fox head, 1826
Silver
Bequest of Josephine Purtscher Fellows (Class of 1924)
1986.33.141

We all come to art in different ways. I have always had a deep appreciation for fine arts, but coming from the field of historical archaeology, I am often most drawn to the stories behind the images.

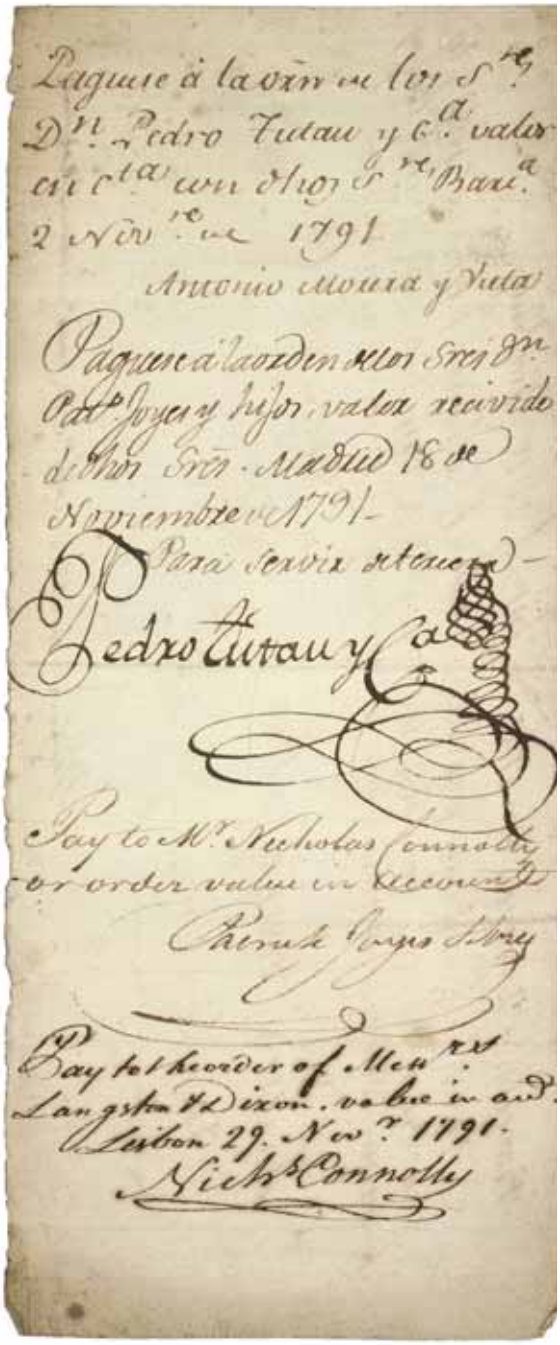
One recent acquisition, Stan Natchez's *Geronimo's Cadillac,* utilizes two complicated and iconic images—a historical photograph and a US bill. The 1905 photograph of Apache leader Geronimo (Goyaałé) behind the wheel of a Locomobile Model C with two unnamed Native men comprises the foreground of Natchez's work. This staged image was part of a press event arranged during Geronimo's internment with the US government as a prisoner of war. At an Oklahoma ranch, Geronimo was placed in numerous stereotypical contexts meant to excite the American imagination, despite the fact that they were far removed from his own life experience.

The background of *Geronimo's Cadillac* is an equally powerful image. The reproduced bill is a US 1899 silver certificate featuring the Hunkpapa, Lakota leader Running Antelope (Tȟatȟóka Íŋyaŋke). This controversial image was created just a few years after Running Antelope's death, in a complicated moment for US-Native relations. Like the staged photographs of Geronimo, the portrait on the bill was inaccurate—the headdress of a different tribe was used to fit the vision for the currency.

Natchez holds an MFA from Arizona State University and draws inspiration from pop artists Andy Warhol and Kiowa artist T. C. Cannon. Natchez's own Shoshoni/Paiute heritage is at the forefront of his work and he blends the past and present together through the use of imagery, color, and collage. *Geronimo's Cadillac,* like much of his work, engages with stereotypes that push viewers to question what they think they know.

Natchez's art takes time and reflection to digest, mirroring the work we are doing at MHCAM with students, faculty, and the public through the thoughtful display of art and material culture. A fitting addition to the *Money Matters* exhibition, *Geronimo's Cadillac* is a layered composition that opens up important conversations about the past and present.

— Aaron F. Miller, Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture, NAGPRA Coordinator



Bill of exchange, 1791
British, Portuguese, and Spanish
Paper with ink
Gift of Ellen M. Alvord (Class of 1989)
2013.12

died having failed to finish his long-anticipated analysis of money, conceded that "views on money are as difficult to describe as shifting clouds." We often think of money as coins, or as objects containing some inherent quality of value, like gold. These ideas can be challenged, however, by many objects in the exhibition. Ancient Babylonian clay tablets record abstract accounting measures for public and private debt; paper notes demarcate fiat money; and a host of shells, textiles, metals, and other unusual forms belie the simplistic association of money with coins.

Regardless of the form money takes, what is very clear is that political authority has long played an essential role in shaping it. Landlords, kings, city-states, and nation-states have all invested in the production and circulation of money, both for its functional benefits and as a way to communicate power and identity. The story of the earliest forms of currency in ancient Greece and Anatolia, for example, cannot be told without reference to the rise of city-states, which used coins to celebrate their feats, fortunes, and military allegiances.

The empires of early-modern Europe were invested in the power of money on an even greater scale. Spanish silver coins—the first truly global currency—circulated from the mines of colonial South and Central America to the merchant houses of the Mughal Empire and the Chinese Ming dynasty. Trust in the authority of money was never absolute, however, which explains why the newly-born American republic chose Spanish dollars to back its revolutionary notes. With similar zeal, the legislators of the French Revolution abandoned their country's traditional currency in favor of a new one—*assignats*—the value of which was linked to the sale of confiscated church lands.

Money, reliant on those who make it and those who spend it, can often slip the bounds of power and end up as a platform to demand change of a more radical kind. Thus, when 19th-century British suffragettes defaced the coins of the realm with "votes for women," or when artists today deconstruct currency as a symbol of colonial oppression, money shifts from reflecting the world as it is, and has been, to the world as it might one day be.

Katrien Vermeire
Der Kreislauf (A Handful)

Desmond Fitz-Gibbon, Associate Professor of History

"Now we are rich!"

Sunshine, sand, seagulls, and the sound of ocean waves and laughter. A beach in De Haan, Belgium, might seem like an unusual place to think about money and exchange. Yet for nearly a century, French- and Flemish-speaking boys and girls have gathered here each summer, creating an economy of paper flowers, paid for with handfuls of shells gathered from the shore. The children use shells because, as one of them calmly observes, "children don't give each other real money . . . It's a game." As is so often the case, however, the world of childhood play mirrors more grown-up themes. Katrien Vermeire's documentary, *Der Kreislauf,* captures a day on this beach and its world of exchange, while also offering a meditation on the meaning and measure of value.

The delicate crepe paper flowers stick out from sandbanks fashioned into temporary sales counters. "I take care of them [flowers] as if they were precious gems," says one boy in French. "Because I think they have value. Without them, I can't earn razor shells." Shells have been used as currency for hundreds of years, so it is perhaps no surprise that these children have happened upon the idea of gathering them from this beach. But if all can agree that shells make the best money, how to measure them is more negotiable. "Use both hands!" one girl shouts. "Will you be doing [the] handfuls?" asks a mother elsewhere to a young flower seller. "You. I trust you," he responds.

Like play, money is a social tool. It brings communities together and measures bonds of trust, reciprocity, and obligation. For centuries, great minds have pondered the nature of money, but on this day, amidst the sand and surf, it is as easy to understand as child's play.

Katrien Vermeire
(Belgian, b. 1979)
Still image from *Der Kreislauf (A Handful),* 2014
High definition video
Courtesy of the artist

Thinking with Objects: Engaging the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum

Ellen M. Alvord, Weatherbie Curator of Education and Academic Programs

As the Teaching with Art program has evolved over the last ten years, the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum has become an increasingly important site for student and faculty engagement. Three recent classes exemplify the innovative possibilities for researching individual objects and examining the Museum itself as a site of cultural complexity. In each case, faculty embedded multiple Museum visits into their curricula, allowing extended time for these encounters to inform deeper connections with their course material.

Students from Professor Ombretta Frau's material culture class research objects at the Skinner Museum.

Italian 311:
Gendering Material Culture in Italy

In spring 2019, Professor of Italian Ombretta Frau taught a second iteration of her "Gendering Material Culture in Italy" class, incorporating four visits to the Skinner Museum over the course of the semester. Following a general introduction to the Museum, students were invited to think about how objects from our everyday lives might become conduits for examining "female" and "male" spaces within the domestic spheres of 19th- and early 20th-century literature.

Students were instructed to choose an object from the Museum's collection—such as a pocket watch, inkwell, sewing implement, lighting device, or musical instrument—and then follow its presence (or absence) in their readings. One of the learning goals was to analyze how everyday objects can not only define a space but also one's personality and life. After researching and studying their objects from both literary and material perspectives, the students presented their findings in a digital exhibition. Impressed with her students' results, Professor Frau noted, "they were able to immerse themselves in 19th-century culture with an enthusiasm that I have rarely seen. Their interactions with the actual objects made their readings come alive."

Anthropology 316:
Anthropology in and of Museums

Similarly interested in having her students work directly with original artifacts, Assistant Professor of Anthropology Sabra Thorner designed a course in close collaboration with both campus museums during her first semester of teaching at Mount Holyoke. This advanced-level course considered the museum itself "as an object of ethnographic inquiry, examining it as a social institution embedded in a broader field of cultural heritage that is perpetually under negotiation." The students' first visit to the Skinner Museum offered a provocative case study. As a museum dedicated to one wealthy industrialist's personal collection, it inspired conversation and critical thinking about earlier methods of collecting and exhibiting.

This visit served as a backdrop for thinking more broadly about the relevance of museums to the field of anthropology today. Professor Thorner had each of her students select an object from the Art Museum's collection of artifacts brought back by Mount Holyoke alumnae who traveled the world as missionaries in the 19th century. Students

conducted research informed by their course readings and utilized primary resources such as documents from the College's Archives and Special Collections and Museum records. Closely studying the artifacts in person, however, was a pivotal experience. As Donari Yahzid '19 described, "How a person is allowed to engage with an object determines the extent to which they can become knowledgeable about the object. I thus took what I gathered from meeting my object to investigate its origins and journey." The students' thoughtful research yielded significant discoveries which have transformed our knowledge about these objects.

Dragon construction by Yuqi Zhang '22 displayed as part of the *Responding to the Skinner Museum* student installation on April 29, 2019.

Art Studio Foundations 131: Seeing, Making, and Being

Gina Siepel, Lecturer in Studio Art Foundations, envisioned an ambitious final project for her beginner course, "Seeing, Making, and Being," involving a partnership with the Skinner Museum. One of the goals of the project was to link "conceptual exploration and personal expression to formal skill-building" by responding to an object in the Skinner Museum and its complex history. The students visited the space several times throughout the semester and selected an object to study closely. Professor Siepel invited students to develop an "imaginative, empathic relationship" to their object by spending extended time looking and then writing a letter either to or from the object. She encouraged the students to question the inevitability of the authoritative voice of the Museum and to examine the post-colonial perspective as part of their artistic process.

Working in cardboard, students were asked to replicate their object at a larger scale, making interpretive changes to it. The results of this conceptually and technically challenging assignment were then displayed in the Skinner Museum. The campus community was invited to an event hosted by the students, who shared both their artwork and personal responses to the project. As Yuqi Zhang '22 noted: "To me, art can reflect how artists interact with the environment and how they interact with themselves. The moment I saw the Chinese tile fragments, I felt like lightning struck me. I wondered about the story behind them, and had a heated debate within myself about whether those tiles should be returned. Those tiles are telling the story of the Skinner Museum and I believe they also tell the story of me, an international student who comes from the other side of the globe." Collectively, the installation of the students' remarkable creations within the Skinner Museum itself offered a dynamic re-interpretation of the space, highlighting the possibilities of critical engagement with this historical museum.

Label Writing at MHCAM: New Voices, New Directions

Kendra D. Weisbin, Associate Curator of Education

In 2016, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum celebrated its 140th anniversary with a special exhibition featuring new acquisitions, significant reinstallations of its permanent collection galleries, and a goal to reinterpret the collection through new and engaging didactic texts.

Prior to this initiative only a handful of artworks on view featured extended labels containing narratives beyond the title, artist, and date. Visitors of all ages frequently expressed a desire for more information, and as a teaching museum, staff felt it was imperative to bring label writing into our broader educational mission.

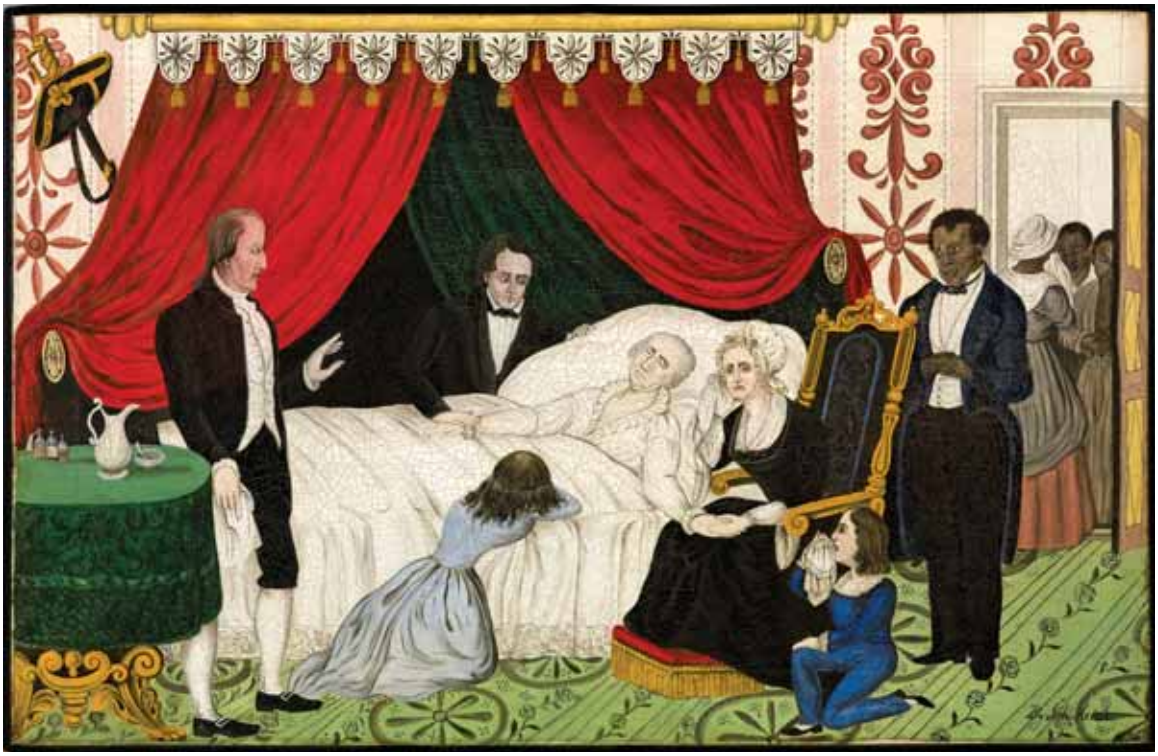
A Museum visitor in the Warbeke Gallery.

The exciting changes in 2016 sparked a major writing initiative to provide extended labels for more artworks. In a single summer, MHCAM staff collaborated on reformatting, printing, and mounting approximately 500 new labels, many of which featured 100–130 word narratives. Introductory panels were also created for the Museum's five permanent collection spaces. Museum staff seized upon this opportunity to standardize the label formatting, increasing font size and choosing a typeface that would be widely accessible.

Since the initiative, MHCAM has continued to strengthen its commitment to providing greater context in its galleries. As of spring 2019, the Museum's permanent collection galleries featured 104 narrative labels, as well as an additional 45 in special exhibitions. These labels are written largely by an in-house team of five curatorial and education staff members. Occasionally labels are written collaboratively and all are edited for accessibility.

Building on the collaborative model of our label writing team, the Museum has introduced an even greater variety of perspectives into our gallery texts. Faculty and students have proved natural partners in this endeavor. Currently, the permanent collection galleries include seven faculty-written labels, seven student-written labels, and two labels written by members of the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) and Mashantucket Pequot communities. Our special exhibition, *Major Themes: Celebrating Ten Years of Teaching with Art,* features an additional 18 labels written by faculty members and three by students. The presence of these diverse voices allows visitors to view artwork through a range of perspectives and disciplines, and directly aligns with the Museum's goals of inclusivity and academic experimentation.

For Suparna Roychoudhury, Associate Professor of English, writing a label opened up new ways of thinking: "A balance has to be struck between conveying information to the viewer and inviting



John Meister (American, active 19th century)
George Washington on His Deathbed, 1876
Oil on canvas
Bequest of Caroline R. Hill
1965.272.I(b).PI

them to form their own response. These two aspects of the label text—the tautness and the openness—struck me as evocative of art in general. Writing the label led me to reflect on the mysteriousness of this—something I do think about but hadn't expected to be reminded of in the course of my task." As Professor Roychoudhury's experience suggests, label writing provides an opportunity for faculty to explore new ideas and forms of discourse.

Increasingly, labels are serving not only to engage and educate visitors, but also to offer new and overlooked viewpoints. The new label for the Museum's iconic painting by Albert Bierstadt, *Hetch Hetchy Canyon,* is one such example. In her text, former MHC history professor Christine DeLucia focuses on the violent history of manifest destiny and the erasure of Native Americans within the painting. Similarly, a label for the John Meister painting, *George Washington on His Deathbed,* was rewritten to address the history of slavery at Mount Vernon.

Indeed, MHCAM is using extended labels to push back against traditional, often myopic, narratives. The Museum routinely invites institutional critique from students, staff, and faculty. This critique can be essential in writing and rewriting labels and other Museum texts. In one generative conversation centered on our American art gallery in 2017, a student singled out an introductory panel, titled "Exploration and Escape," for critique. She noted that "Exploration," referencing the aggressive westward expansion of Euro-American settlers, was left unproblematized. Recently, curators rewrote the panel with this critique in mind, simultaneously reimagining the scope and content of the gallery itself (see p. 14).

MHCAM hopes to build on this momentum, providing richer information about our collection and more nuanced explorations of art and material culture to visitors. To this end, we look forward to forming new partnerships with students, faculty, and community members as we continue to enliven our gallery texts.

What is American Art?

Aaron F. Miller, Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture, NAGPRA Coordinator

When a visitor enters a museum they may be prompted to consider whose version of history is being displayed. Recently, the Warbeke Gallery—which houses our collection of American art—was reimagined with this question in mind. Who created the artwork on view, whose landscapes are depicted, and whose voices are included to contextualize the art and material culture?

This gallery has long held significant historical American landscapes and portraiture—works that largely tell the stories of white male artists and the wealthy patrons who collected their art. Today, this gallery endeavors to broaden the definition of American art by focusing on the diversity of people who call this country home and the spaces and landscapes they encounter. Today, vacant panoramas are reoccupied when seen alongside artworks and objects created by indigenous peoples of the United States. Works that have traditionally been undervalued in museums are now exhibited, and new conversations emerge when historical and contemporary works are juxtaposed. The majority of the works on view are now given much-needed context through extended labels (see p. 12).

Visitors to the newly reinstalled American gallery will also notice new works of art on loan to us. As MHCAM seeks to broaden its own holdings of paintings and sculpture by African American artists, the Museum was able to secure a special two-year loan from the David C. Driskell Center for the Study of the Visual Arts and Culture of African Americans and the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park. Although the Museum's collection includes many important works of art by African American artists, the great majority are prints and photographs. Subject to fading from light exposure, these works on paper can only be on view for a short time followed by a longer period of rest in storage. This means that there are few works that can be on view constantly. This loan of nine extraordinary works from the Driskell Center enables us to display works by African American artists for a full two years rather than a single semester.

In addition to those on view in the American gallery, Driskell center loans can be found in the special exhibition *Major Themes: Celebrating Ten Years of Teaching with Art* and in the Evans Gallery of ancient art. The loan includes historical works by Grafton Tyler Brown, Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, Laura Wheeler Waring, Claude Clark Sr., and Walter Williams, as well as objects by contemporary artists Willie Cole, Melvin Edwards, Jefferson Pinder, and Therman Statom.

Our newly envisioned American art gallery and the Driskell Center loans are a small step towards a more inclusive future for the Museum. In the coming years we hope to continue to reimagine our spaces and bring in new and diverse perspectives.

View of the Warbeke Gallery.

New Acquisition: Photo Stills from Conceptual Performance by Lorraine O'Grady

Stephanie Sparling Williams, Associate Curator

Conceptual artist Lorraine O'Grady remembers September 17 as one of the hottest days of summer. She, along with fifteen hired dancers and actors holding small gold frames, joined a sea of floats and marching bands at the 1983 African American Day Parade, an annual tradition in Harlem, New York. O'Grady had built, with artist collaborators Richard DeGussi and George Mingo, a massive 9x15 foot antique-style gold frame mounted on a gold-skirted float. Entering the parade in the heat of the day, and completing a five-hour trek up Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard to the end of the route, the group captured spectators and surroundings within their frames. In her own writing, O'Grady characterized the sporadic rhythm of the parade as long waiting periods followed by sprints to catch up, a durational performance temporally rendered in the crowded urban environment. O'Grady gave this mixed-modality experience the title *Art Is…* after the black bolded text painted on the side of the float.

Art Is… was the last in a series of performances orchestrated between 1981 and 1983 by the artist's alter-ego, Mademoiselle Bourgeoise Noire. It was a continuation of O'Grady's probing critique of the boundaries of the avant-garde and addressed an acquaintance's assertion that "avant-garde [art] doesn't have anything to do with black people." Funded by a New York State Council on the Arts grant, her dynamic performance positioned avant-garde artistic sensibilities at the center of blackness in New York, and arguably, in the nation's artistic core.[1]

Reminiscent of street theater of the late 1960s and 1970s, O'Grady's intervention subverted the art world's narrow conception of the avant-garde. Placing black and brown bodies inside gold frames, thereby proposing them as art, *Art Is…* simultaneously highlighted and rejected the notion of blackness as outside or antithetical to avant-garde creative sensibilities. An observation made by one of the parade's participants—"That's right, that's what art is. We're the art!"—becomes a pointed manifesto, as co-produced black existence within the frame becomes the material evidence of artistic genius.

Lorraine O'Grady
(American, b. 1934)
Art Is. . . (Dancer in Grass Skirt), 1983
image capture / 2009 print
C-Print
Purchase with the Henry Rox Memorial Fund for the Acquisition of Works by Contemporary Women Artists
2018.4.1
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York
© Lorraine O'Grady/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum recently added two performance stills from *Art Is…* to its holdings through a 2018 student-led acquisition initiative, the first works in the collection by O'Grady. For me, as an O'Grady scholar and brand new to the Museum, the acquisition is prophetic and welcoming. In one print, an exuberant woman in white, brown tresses flying and mouth agape in exclamation, holds a gold frame to another woman in a floral wrap and grass skirt as she dances in the street. While the woman with the rogue frame seems to invade another troupe's performance, the woman captured is smiling radiantly, her skin alight with glitter and sunshine. Within the frame, black faces delight in her movements. Behind them, snatches of a building's façade ground the chaotic scene in the visual semiotics of Harlem. Indeed, a work of art.

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1. "Art Is . . ." (1983) Lorraine O'Grady. Accessed May 19, 2019. http://lorraineogrady.com/art/art-is/.

STUDENT VOICES

The Black Collection

Mollie Wohlforth '19, MHCAM Curatorial Intern and Student Guide

Yoshida Hiroshi (Japanese, 1876–1950) *Shinbashi (or Shinkyo) [Sacred Bridge],* 1937 Woodblock print (woodcut); ink and color on paper Bequest of Helene Brosseau Black (Class of 1931) 1991.4.7

Over the course of 16 years, Helene Broussard Black '31 gave the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum a remarkable number of gifts, followed by a generous bequest of 1,723 artworks and objects upon her death. The collection poses a problem that museums continue to grapple with: transferring paper records into digital databases. With Mrs. Black's gifts and bequests came a vast quantity of archival material, including correspondence with art dealers, artists, and other museums. The archive also includes assorted Christmas cards, wedding invitations, and even an insurance report from Mrs. Black's fender bender. Also accompanying this gift was a catalog of over a thousand typed index cards with individual entries for each of the works in the collection, many with added notes in Mr. and Mrs. Black's own handwriting. Sorting through these materials was one of the major tasks of my year-long curatorial internship at MHCAM.

In an attempt to condense this material, I began sorting through the card catalog, entering Mr. and Mrs. Black's handwritten notes into the Museum's digital database. This methodical process gave me a nuanced understanding of the collection, as well as its collectors. The Blacks' collecting interests became clearer as I processed the collection documentation—they had hundreds of Japanese prints as well as over a thousand European and American prints, drawings, and watercolors, mainly from the 19th century.

I found myself most interested in the collection's outliers. For example, they had twenty turtle figurines dating from the 5th century BCE to the 1900s. They also had two Islamic astrolabes—an undeniable and somewhat puzzling departure from their collection of 19th-century European works. There was also a selection of German bookplates, a Japanese cloisonné jar, and four Indian paintings.

Through this process, I was able to piece together a story of these collectors as academically-minded buyers who sought significant works that connected to their primary collections. However, as apparent as they made their goal to build the depth of their Japanese and European print collections, they were also curious people drawn to art and objects that they just simply liked. Clearly, one of them had a penchant for turtles. During my time with the Black Collection archival material, I learned first-hand how museums like MHCAM are shaped by collectors like Helene and Lewis Black—who are as meticulous as they are idiosyncratic in their accumulation of art.

Water dropper in the form of a turtle, 15th century Chinese Stoneware with celadon glaze Bequest of Helene Brosseau Black (Class of 1931) 1991.4.19

New Acquisition: An Italian Ketubbah

Kendra D. Weisbin, Associate Curator of Education

Last year the Museum was gifted a generous fund by Shelley Weiner Sheinkopf '68 dedicated to the acquisition of objects of Jewish visual and material culture. It was an area which, until now, was a major lacuna for the collection. In December 2018, thanks to this gift, the Museum was able to purchase three important objects that will enrich the collection with their exhibition and teaching potential, including an early 19th-century Italian *ketubbah,* or marriage contract.

Ketubbah celebrating the wedding of Joseph David Shabbetai ben Solomon of Perugia and Tovah Rachel bat Joseph Shabbetai Hazak in Ancona on Thursday 5 Sivan 5583, May 15, 1823
Italian
Ink, gouache, and shell gold on vellum
2019.1.3

Detail from *ketubbah* showing Rachel and Jacob's meeting at the well

Ketubbot (the plural of *ketubbah*) guarantee the financial maintenance of a wife in the event that she be divorced or widowed. The contract also states the obligations of the husband, including "her food, her clothing, and her conjugal rights" (Exodus 21:10). The bright colors and lively rendering of the figural scenes remind us that this is not just a legal contract, but a celebration of marriage. The document marks a moment in time—the wedding of two early 19th-century Italian Jews—while also connecting those individuals to a historical lineage and a diaspora. Indeed, every Jewish newlywed from antiquity to the present, from Italy to Iran, has had their own *ketubbah.*

The Museum's *ketubbah* was made in Ancona, Italy in 1823 and reflects long-standing Jewish visual traditions, such as the arched design and crown finial. Other design elements, such as the winged figures that flank the top of the arch are specific to Italian visual culture. The biblical scenes depicted at the top and in the left and right borders relate to the names of the bride, the groom, and the groom's father. On the left we see the biblical patriarch Joseph, relating to the name of the groom—Joseph David Shabbetai ben Solomon of Perugia. On the right is an image of the biblical story of Rachel and Jacob meeting at a well, referencing the name of the bride, Tovah Rachel bat Joseph Shabbetai Hazak. The vignette at the top, portraying the famous tale of the judgement of King Solomon, refers to the groom's father's name.

As an object explicitly related to the lives of women, the *ketubbah* joins other important dowry and marriage related objects in the Museum's collection, such as the early 18th-century Hadley chest and a Renaissance cassone. And as a legal document protecting the rights of women, the *ketubbah* is a natural addition the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's collection.

Twenty Years of Collection Care

Linda Delone Best, Collections Manager

Unlike a director or curator, whose efforts are visible in exhibitions or catalogues, my work goes on behind the scenes. The Collections Manager is primarily responsible for the physical care of the collection as well as managing information and records. The MHCAM collection has been my responsibility for the last 20 years and I take pride in what has been accomplished to improve storage and ensure the safety of the collection for future generations. My retirement seemed an appropriate moment to reflect on these achievements.

Museums abhor a vacuum. No sooner is room made on a shelf, screen, bin, or table than a new acquisition or loan arrives to claim that empty space. Of the approximately 17,000 objects in our collection, only about 4% are on view at a time and the remainder are kept in storage.

The Museum's collection is diverse and encyclopedic, ranging from ancient art to contemporary and coming from all across the globe. Each work in the collection is different in size, structure, and material and thus every object requires its own particular type of housing and care. A major renovation project in 2000 provided the opportunity for me to improve the efficiency, safety, and accessibility of storage.

Works on paper comprise approximately 40% of our collection. Of these, many are prints and drawings, which are commonly created on acidic paper that is prone to deterioration and fading. Although costly, the buffered board that supports the paper collection serves to mitigate that deterioration for decades. Drawings executed with pastel or charcoal present a unique challenge for storage. They must be stored framed so that nothing rubs or abrades their delicate surfaces. However, it would be harmful to store them vertically, as many other framed works are kept. Imagine how chalk dust falls from a chalkboard, coming to rest in the tray underneath. Similarly, if stored upright, pastel and charcoal can loosen and slip from the surface of the paper, accumulating in the bottom of the frame. For this reason, the Museum's collection of works in pastel and charcoal are stored horizontally in special housings. Other materials also require their own special consideration in storage. Framed paintings are now stored on aluminum compact screens to minimize vibration. The ancient collections are housed in custom enclosed shelving to protect from dust and water exposure.

Objects in storage rest safely in custom-made individual housings

Linda Delone Best with the Museum's painting storage screens.

The generally accepted standard of care for collections is to limit access and handling. However, with the initiation of our Teaching with Art program in 2009, we required a more flexible approach. As guardians of the collection, registrars would prefer that the objects we care for stay safe and secure, perpetually in dark storage. However, once I personally witnessed students being inspired and enlightened by up-close interactions with original objects, I wanted to do all I could to facilitate those moments, while still ensuring the safety of the collection. How can this be accomplished while providing for the retrieval and use of approximately 1,500 objects per academic year, for roughly 100 class visits a semester from around 34 different disciplines? Utilizing a range of approaches and policies, we have confidently and successfully met this challenge. We have been particularly inventive in dealing with three-dimensional objects, many of which are now housed in creatively hand-crafted foam and box containers that allow for ease of retrieval and safe-handling in class use.

These improvements have not been accomplished single-handedly. The Collections Department has doubled in size, now including the inimitable Jackie Finnegan '08 as our Senior Museum Preparator. Talented student interns are routinely recruited to hone their skills while being introduced to the inner workings of collections management practices. With my retirement I take joy in knowing that in addition to contributing to the continued longevity of the collection, I have inspired others to engage with and care for our shared cultural heritage.

The Best of the Best

Stepping inside Linda Best's secluded office, one enters the heart of the Museum. Registrars and collection managers like Linda are usually hidden from sight deep inside museums, where the public rarely goes. It is here that for 20 years Linda has worked her magic—keeping the Museum firmly on track, documenting collections, processing acquisitions, surveying conservation needs, controlling the location and movement of every object in the Museum, working on disaster plans and provenance research, and expediting the travel of objects all around the world.

In a teaching museum like MHCAM, where objects move more freely and frequently than in public collections, Linda maintains a calm countenance in the face of educators' and curators' attempts to dismantle her carefully calculated operations. She even participates in the special endeavors of our teaching museum with gusto and commitment. Her myriad responsibilities do not keep her from sharpening her wit and sense of humor, which go a long way toward maintaining great working relationships with staff and students. In this and many other ways, we can attest that Linda is the "Best" of the breed and the Museum will be forever grateful for her transformative contributions.

— Wendy Watson, Curator Emerita

MOUNT HOLYOKE

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artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu

To learn more about MHCAM exhibitions, events, and membership visit artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu

MUSEUM HOURS
Tuesday–Friday,
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1–5 p.m.
Free, open to the public, and fully accessible.

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01075
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Back cover:
Kiyohara Yukinobu
(Japanese, 1643–1682)
Six-fold screens with Taoist Immortals
Second half of the 17th century
Ink and color on paper, wood, gold leaf
Purchase with the John Martyn Warbeke Art Fund, 1996.7
(detail)

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