



2023-24





## LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

**“Go forward, attempt great things, accomplish great things.”** With these words, Mary Lyon set the vision for the College’s future ambitions and successes in 1837. Thirty-nine years later, our Museum was founded in 1876 in a new building called Lyman Williston Hall for Art and Science.

Two other visionary women recognized the value of this new gallery on campus and its teaching potential. The wives of two College trustees, Mrs. E. H. Sawyer and Mrs. A. Lyman Williston, joined forces to purchase the Museum’s first contemporary art acquisition, Albert Bierstadt’s *Hetch Hetchy Canyon*, painted in 1875. As they wrote in a November 1876 letter, “It is our hope that this fine painting, as one expression of the best in American art, will prove an inspiration to your pupils...”

Fall 2026 will mark a key milestone in our history—the 150th anniversary of the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum! To celebrate this remarkable occasion, the Museum has embarked on an ambitious three-year plan to rethink and reinstall all our permanent collection galleries. Aligned with the goal set forth in 1876 by the two donors of our cherished Bierstadt painting, we, too, want our galleries to be a continued inspiration for our students.

More than 90 years ago, a third visionary woman who then served as professor of archaeology, Caroline Galt, established our Friends of Art program in 1931, in order to “vitalize the artistic life of the College.” This decision, of course, significantly altered the course of our Museum. Without the vital support from our



MHCAM Director Tricia Y. Paik with Museum supporters from the Class of 1972 during their 50th reunion, May 2022. Left to right: Tricia Y. Paik, Judith W. Mann, Elizabeth Stahl, Jane Hammond, Susan B. Weatherbie

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Friends of Art members, donors of endowed funds and gifts of art, and our Art Museum Advisory Board, MHCAM would not be the integral resource we are today for our college community and beyond.

And we are only able to serve our communities thanks to our stellar and talented staff. It is with bittersweet congratulations that we say goodbye to one of these valued staff members—Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture and Head of Cultural Repatriation Aaron Miller, whose contributions to our exhibitions, collections, and teaching mission over more than a decade have been incalculable. I am also pleased to introduce three staff members who have joined us over the past year and a half: Ethel Poindexter, Museum Preparator; Keeley Anderson, Communications and Stewardship Coordinator; and Allison Logan, Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow. Also joining us more recently is Emily Wood, MHCAM's new Assistant Curator. All four bring valuable experience and expertise as well as new vitality and commitment to the Museum.

Finally, everyone on campus is thrilled to welcome MHC's new president, noted legal educator and social justice scholar Danielle Ren Holley, who this fall begins her first academic year at Mount Holyoke. The Museum



New staff members Allison Logan, Ethel Poindexter, and Keeley Anderson

is honored to be included in a series of events celebrating President Holley's Inauguration—a panel featuring faculty members from different disciplines who regularly teach their impactful classes at MHCAM. Let us extend our gratitude to the visionary women who set the path for our Museum many years ago so that today we can be an invaluable and dynamic resource for MHC and beyond the gates.

Tricia Y. Paik  
Florence Finch Abbott Director

Director's Circle members on annual art tour at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Mill Run, PA, May 2023





## EXHIBITIONS

### **I will spatter the sky utterly:**

**Romuald Hazoumè**

**August 29, 2023–May 26, 2024**

Curated by Kimberly S. Newberry

Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumè's masks are narrative sculptures memorializing people, places, and moments. Composed mostly of plastic gasoline containers and other discarded materials, the masks are a voucher for reuse, resilience, and rebuilding. Heavy with subtext, they speak to the fraught life of the Beninese men and women who are forced to navigate porous borders between Benin and neighboring Nigeria as part of the illicit fuel trade in order to survive. This intimate exhibition presents a single mask by Hazoumè—*Kawessi*, 2013—in the larger context of environmental crisis and activism.

*This exhibition is made possible by the Susan Davenport Page 1931 and Margaret Davenport Page Fales 1929 Art Fund*

### **RELAUNCH LABORATORY**

**August 29, 2023–May 25, 2025**

Leading up to fall 2026, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's 150th anniversary, Museum staff will be working to imagine new methods of display. This full-scale rethink aims to broaden and deepen the stories we are able to share, raise the voices of marginalized communities, and unseat traditional Eurocentric and colonialist perspectives that have dominated museum practices for centuries. Greeting visitors when they

first walk in the Museum, RELAUNCH LABORATORY will be a working space for new ideas, themes, and juxtapositions as we plan our new galleries. Showcasing a wide range of global art while making connections across time and place, this long-term installation aims to elicit reflection as well as feedback from visitors.

*This exhibition is made possible by the Susan B. Weatherbie Exhibition Fund*



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Above: Unidentified Colima maker (in present-day Mexico), *Seated dog vessel*, 250 BCE–250 CE, earthenware with burnished black pigment, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James F. Mathias (Barbara V. Lord, Class of 1934), 1975.15.23

Right: Mary Lee Bendolph (American, b. 1935), *Husband Suit Clothes*, 1990, mixed fabrics including denim, cotton, polyester, and synthetic wool, Purchase with the Anne and Fredric Garonzik Acquisition Fund, 2018.7 © Mary Lee Bendolph

Cover: Romuald Hazoumè (Beninese, b. 1962), *Kawessi*, 2013, plastic can, synthetic hair, copper wire, Purchase with the Belle and Hy Baier Art Acquisition Fund, 2023.3 © Romuald Hazoumè

Back: Detail of Xylor Jane (American, b. 1963), *Love Beast*, 2022, oil, ink, and graphite on wood panel, Purchase with the Belle and Hy Baier Art Acquisition Fund, 2023.1 © Xylor Jane [Photo: Joe DeNardo]



## A NEW INSTALLATION

### **Art of the 20th and 21st Centuries Reimagined** **Opening August 29, 2023**

Museum staff are reimagining our permanent collection for our 150th anniversary in fall 2026. That begins with a fresh take on art from the 20th and 21st centuries. This installation features strengths of our permanent collection—primarily American and European art, with several works by other international artists. Significant 20th-century developments such as

photography, Surrealism, and abstraction reflect the changing viewpoints of a modern society, while more recent works shift between abstraction and figuration in a wide range of media. The installation also highlights how artists use non-art materials, deploying mass-produced and found objects to craft novel responses to living in the 21st century.





## RELAUNCH LABORATORY

August 29, 2023–May 25, 2025

Aaron F. Miller, former Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture and Head of Cultural Repatriation and Kendra D. Weisbin, Associate Curator of Engagement and Head of Interpretation

How can a museum best display the range of human creativity from ancient history to the present? For over a century this question had one answer in Western museums: highlight those places, time periods, and genres that leading 19th- and early 20th-century art historians, then predominantly white men, long deemed most significant. These traditional categories—such as the Renaissance, American landscape painting, and ancient Mediterranean art—are reflected in this Museum's current gallery layout, which has been relatively static since 1971.

Leading up to fall 2026, the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's 150th anniversary, Museum staff will be engaging with the campus and community to imagine new methods of display. This full-scale rethink aims to broaden and deepen the stories we are able to share, raise the voices of marginalized communities, and unseat traditional Eurocentric and colonialist perspectives that have dominated museum practices for centuries.

The Relaunch gallery will be a working laboratory for new ideas, themes, and juxtapositions as we design our new galleries. The layout of this space mirrors current plans for the large-scale installation—a roughly chronological approach that will allow us to showcase a wide range of global art while making connections across time and place. These connections, both visual and thematic, will highlight commonalities in how cultures over the centuries have used art to make sense of the world in which we live.

The installation starts in 2,800 BCE with a jar made by an unrecorded artist from the Neolithic Majiayao culture. It is joined by two other ancient artifacts—a marble epitaph to a young Roman girl and a Colima vessel (made in present-day Mexico) in the shape of a dog. Taken together, the three objects—all probably from grave contexts—shed light on ancient artistic production and burial practices across cultures. Acquired by the Museum between 1910 and 2019, they also open up conversations about the ethics of archaeology and collecting practices.

The chronological and thematic approach allows us to juxtapose objects never before seen together. A



Unidentified maker(s) in Lodz, Poland, *Charity box for dowering brides*, ca. 1860–1890, gilt brass and velvet, Purchase with the Shelley Nan Weiner '68 Art Museum Fund, 2022.18.3a-b

shimmering 13th-century lusterware jar from Kashan, Iran, for instance, is paired with an Italian Renaissance example from three centuries later—an *alberello*, or drug jar, inspired in shape by the Islamic prototype. This fresh approach also allows us to intervene in the chronology, comparing and contrasting objects from different periods. An Italian box for a woman's precious belongings from the 1560s, for instance, is paired with an 1860-90s charity box for dowering Jewish brides. Both are small, gilded, and invite closer looking. Both also speak to class and the gendered lives of women in their respective eras.

The Museum's collection is particularly strong in 19th- and early 20th-century works. Never before



on view are a Chamba tripod vessel from Nigeria and a child-size jar (*olla*) from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. Two primarily utilitarian vessels, the Chamba vessel was used for cooking while the *olla* for transporting water; both met the daily needs of those who made and used them. They are paired unexpectedly with Ukrainian-born artist Chana Orloff's 1928 bronze sculpture, *Maria Lani (Shepherdess)*. The three works are captivating in their visual commonalities—their black curved surfaces catch the light while inviting exploration from all sides.

Wrapping around the room, the exhibition continues with two important new acquisitions from the mid- and late 20th century, *Pastoral* (1965), by Bob Thompson, a gift from Cynthia Sahagian Cross (Class

of 1960), and *Bird* by El Anatsui (1992). The exhibition concludes with Alexandria's Smith's dramatic 2019 work *UnearThings I*. The work presents an African Mende dance mask perched atop a tall white column and set against a darkly glittering backdrop. *UnearThings I* belongs to Smith's ambitious project, *Monuments to an Effigy*, and questions whose histories are privileged and shared in museum spaces. The work has been paired with the Museum's Mende Sowu Wui dance mask from the early 20th century. A fitting conclusion to the installation, the pair disrupts the linearity of time and brings forth questions about museum collecting, the authority of museums as storytellers, and the place of the past in the present.

Bob Thompson (American, 1937–1966), *Pastoral*, 1965, oil on canvas, Gift of Cynthia Sahagian Cross (Class of 1960), 2022.16  
© Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY





## I WILL SPATTER THE SKY UTTERLY: ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ

August 29, 2023–May 26, 2024

Kymberly S. Newberry, Assistant Curator of Special Projects

I was standing...you know the way the President and First Lady of the United States stand on the North Portico awaiting the arrival of the motorcade of a foreign dignitary...yes, that's the way I was standing. With the poise of Jacqueline Kennedy standing next to her beloved Jack awaiting the arrival of President and Madame Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast in 1962, that was me, in front of the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum (with a jacket hastily thrown over my gardening overalls). Finally, after an eternity (about 15 minutes) the truck pulled into the circular drive and a crate was lowered and wheeled into the Museum. *Kawessi* (2013), one of Romuald Hazoumè's playful and potent jerry can mask sculptures, my dignitary, had arrived.

Hazoumè, the celebrated Yoruba artist from the Republic of Benin, was keenly aware of African politics at a young age and, following high school, began using salvaged plastic jerry cans, or *bidons*, as his medium to create anthropomorphic masks. These masks glide seamlessly between multiple meanings. They take a solemn tone when speaking about politics, reflecting the urgency of his sharp opinions. They take a more

humorous expression when telegraphing messages about women's hairstyles—which, among other things, announce their social and marital status. Hazoumè's masks are narrative sculptures memorializing people, places, and moments and are a voucher for reuse, resilience and rebuilding. Not only are the masks incredibly imaginative, they are also deeply symbolic. The fact that most of them are made from jerry cans in and of itself makes a statement about the importance of oil in Benin—and around the world.

While speaking about her extraordinary exhibition, *Shaping Power: Luba Masterworks from the Royal Museum for Central Africa*, the late curator Polly Nooter Roberts referenced 19th- and 20th-century Lukasa memory boards. Memory boards are archives of the cultural identity of the Luba people of Central Africa contained within a hand-held, multi-colored beaded device. 'Court historians,' or *Mbudye* men or women of memory, as they are called, run their fingers over the surface of the memory board and begin to recount the knowledge and history of the Luba people that is held within the board. Like the Lukasa memory boards, Hazoumè's masks demonstrate how the past is continually re-imagined through present-day perception, holding constellations of histories both sparkling and somber.

In the tradition of the itinerant artists or *ares* from Benin's royal period who carried culture from kingdom to kingdom, Hazoumè (who speaks a dozen languages), creates works that are blistering commentaries on the atrocities visited upon the most vulnerable. Equally, he creates work that recounts everyday incidents and the social life of his community, the 'sidewalk radio,' as the grapevine is called. He is devious, not in the English connotation of the word defined as underhanded, no—Hazoumè is a *bricoleur* in every sense of the word as it's used by recyclers in Dakar, Senegal, referencing one's ability to deviate from usual course and identify potential (often economically profitable) reuses of an object. Curator Allen F. Roberts on a research trip to Benin, met a man who described recycling as a *détournement*, a word derived from a French verb meaning "to change the direction of." In the case of *Kawessi*,

Kymberly S. Newberry and *Kawessi* on the day of its uncrating at the Museum







Still from a video of *bidon* carriers

a recycled jerry can with a tornado of hair sweeping skyward, and three coquettish curls on each side, Hazoumè “changes the direction” of the original object and creates the illusion of a woman—and a quite wealthy woman at that, according to Hazoumè. But this *détournement*, also changes the direction of our thoughts from mirthful to sober as we are equally confronted with the fraught life of the Beninese men and women forced to make perilous journeys navigating porous borders between Benin’s capital, Porto-Novo, and neighboring Nigeria. Traveling on motorbikes with hundreds of gallons of gasoline—soon to be sold to 90% of the Beninese population from roadside stalls at sometimes half the usual price as part of the illicit fuel trade—these men and women risk becoming moving bombs in order to survive.

I first encountered Hazoumè’s work in Paris during the exhibition *Africa Remix*, at the Centre Pompidou in 2005. His massive sculpture, *Bidon Armé* (2004), remains braided in my memory like a glorious African

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*Hazoumè creates works that are blistering commentaries on the atrocities visited upon the most vulnerable.*

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hairstyle. Nearly 20 years later, invited to submit an acquisition proposal to the Museum for possible consideration, it was no surprise that Romuald Hazoumè’s masks would sit at the summit of my wish list. Following rigorous revisions, and ensuring that my due diligence was done, the piece was given the final nod of approval and sent from the October Gallery in London.

Nearly seven months after I submitted the proposal, I stood in the circular drive of the Museum awaiting its arrival. I opened the shipping crate the day after, as objects need to acclimatize to the temperature and humidity of a new environment for 24 hours. For so many reasons, tears raced down my cheeks as I humbly lifted her from the crate. I was overwhelmed that this moment had actually come to pass, one of Romuald Hazoumè’s magical works was in my hands. I thought of the men and women in Benin, who take incalculable risks to move the “smuggle gold” across the borders. And too, my thoughts turned to Ghanaian scholar, Nana Oforiatta Ayim’s assertions about repatriated looted artifacts needing “time for rest and recovery from the years they were away from home.”

Though not repatriated, *Kawessi* is here now, a long way from home. After she rests, we have much to learn from her.



## A NEW INSTALLATION: ART OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES REIMAGINED

August 29, 2023–May 25, 2025

Tricia Y. Paik, Florence Finch Abbott Director

All art was once contemporary. As time marches on, art inevitably takes on the patina of age, reflecting a particular idea, approach, or technique from the past. In museums such as ours, those that span antiquity to the present, we have the privilege of showcasing human creativity and invention across time and place.

As we prepare for our 150th anniversary in fall 2026, we are proud to debut our first permanent collection reinstallation, a fresh take on art from the 20th century to the present, now featured in the Harriet L. and Paul M. Weissman Gallery. It is, of course, impossible to display every global art trend from the past century to now, even in larger museums. Instead, we offer a snapshot drawn from collection strengths and new acquisitions. This installation features primarily

American and European artists, with some other international perspectives.

Significant artistic developments from the first half of the 20th century such as photography, Surrealism, and abstraction are presented here. Such approaches reflect the changing viewpoints of a new modern society shaped by late 19th- to early 20th-century industrialization and technological developments including the train and modern warfare. For example, Surrealism emerged during the aftermath of World War I. Responding to the irrationality and devastation of WWI, European poets and artists created works that attempted to unleash the unconscious mind in order to make sense of the recent ravages of war. In *Lurid Sky* (1929) Yves Tanguy

Edward del Rosario (American, b. 1970), *Civilization II*, 2013, oil on linen on panel, Purchase with the Gilbert A. and Hester Hemstreet-Carn (Class of 1928) Art Acquisition Fund, 2015.5 © Edward del Rosario

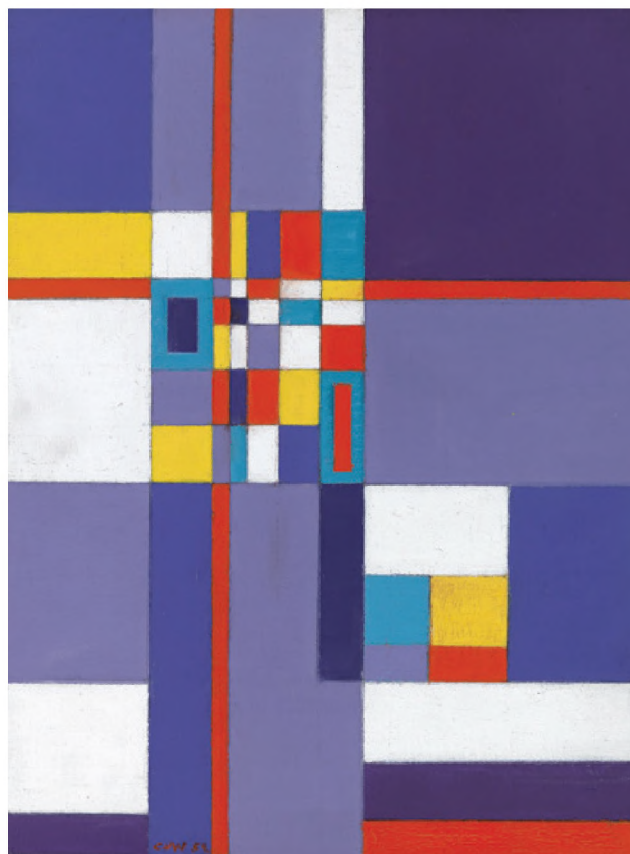




depicts an abstracted barren landscape, its haunting yellow sky filled with indecipherable shapes, some that can be read as plumes of smoke.

Other modes of abstraction developed in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, some more geometric and “rational,” like the abstract aesthetic of Dutch master Piet Mondrian. His move to New York City during World War II shaped a new generation of American artists interested in geometric abstraction, such as Charmion von Wiegand. A practicing journalist and art critic, von Wiegand began to paint during the mid-1920s, and in 1941 she interviewed Mondrian shortly after the Dutch painter moved to the States. This meeting led to a close friendship between the two artists. Indeed, Mondrian’s influence is easily observed in the rectilinearity and asymmetrical balance of von Wiegand’s painting, *42nd Street, New York* (1957–1960).

Lenka Clayton (British, b. 1977), *Sculpture for Keyboards (Rocks and Minerals II)*, 2021, vintage Royal typewriter, typed sheet of paper, azurite, bismuth, calcite, desert rose, emerald, fluorite, garnet, hematite, indigo gabbro, jasper, kyanite, lapis lazuli, mookalite, nickel, obsidian, pyrite, quartz, rhodonite, selenite, tourmaline, unakite, vessonite, white howlite, xylophal, yellow jasper, zosite, Purchase with the Henry Rox Memorial Fund for the Acquisition of Works by Contemporary Women Artists, 2021.14 © Lenka Clayton



Charmion von Wiegand (American, 1896–1983), *42nd Street, New York*, 1957–1960, oil on canvas board, Purchase with the Art Acquisition Fund and the Susan and Bernard Schilling (Susan Eisenhart, Class of 1932) Fund, 1979.11, © Estate of Charmion von Wiegand; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

More recent works in the Weissman installation reveal the shifting pendulum between abstraction and representation over the past century, whether through painting, sculpture, textiles, collage, or video. Kiki Smith’s sculpture, *Shield* (1988) intriguingly answers to both abstraction and figuration. This life-size work is a cast of a pregnant belly that has been abstracted from the rest of its body, like a fragment of ancient sculpture.

In Edward del Rosario’s *Civilization II* (2013), the artist evokes his own painted fable of a civilization, with thirteen individuals rendered with figurative precision against a white background. Each individual seems to play a specific role in this imagined society, one represented through a curvilinear fortress that speaks of borders and boundaries, where some people belong and others exist on the outskirts.

A key development of the early 20th century, which still continues to this day, is the artist’s use of





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 © Willie Cole

non-art materials, especially for work more conceptual in practice. Instead of relying on centuries-old artistic media like oil paint, a number of contemporary artists featured here deploy mass-produced objects or other found materials, organic or not, in order to craft novel responses to living in the 21st century.

For *Street Dragon I* (2018), Willie Cole uses an assortment of readymade shoes to create an African-style mask. Intentionally stacked with only high heels, the mask addresses contemporary topics of fashion, consumption, gender, and beauty. In contrast, Lenka Clayton speaks of obsolescence and loss in *Sculpture for Keyboards (Rocks and Minerals II)* (2021). Having sourced a vintage Royal Typewriter, the artist matched each letter key with a rock or mineral starting with that

letter. With all letter keys covered by a small stone, the typewriter is rendered even more obsolete in this fast-moving digital age.

Time—no matter how much we try to slow down the course of our lives, time is perennial. It marches on despite our attempts to save time through our phones, laptops, or other devices. Museums endeavor to capture and save time authentically through art and objects that serve as physical embodiments of the past and, indeed, of our collective and personal histories. For our own counting of time—our milestone 150th anniversary in fall 2026—the Museum staff and I are honored to have the opportunity to rethink the past, present, and future through MHCAM's distinctive collection.



## vanessa german: THE FATHER SHOES

Allison Logan, Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow

In *THE FATHER SHOES* (2022), two black Oxford shoes sprout towering wings made of feathers and hover above a pedestal of turf grass. Under the left shoe, sharp, rusty nails point jaggedly toward the ground. Under the right shoe, a cascade of gold beads shimmers delicately. The full title of this sculpture, seen in the caption below, shines a light on both the heavy roots of this creation and the hope that the artist seeks to impart to viewers.

Last fall, in an exhibition titled *vanessa german—THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH*, citizen artist german combined her personal quest for transformation with community healing and liberation. The artist collected hundreds of anonymous notes as well as objects, such as clothing, shoes, and jewelry, from the Mount Holyoke College community. This journey led to the creation of german's *MUSEUM OF EMANCIPATORY OBJECTS*, a transformation of pain, sorrow, and loss into beautiful assemblages intending to facilitate collective release, growth, and healing.

After the opening of the exhibition, german shared the process of collecting and sorting the many anonymous notecards she received in more detail. In an Instagram (@vanessagerman) post she wrote, “The cards were intense. I read and organized them all. The top stacks were: 1. Heartbreaks and lies, 2. Unreported sexual violence, 3. People feeling distant from their physical bodies/beauty, 4. Worry for the future.” She goes on to say, “I spent time with every word and synthesized them into a series of works that communicated spaces of sovereignty, wholeness, strength in being, LIBERTY—as the Soul’s right to BREATHE and more.” *THE FATHER SHOES* appears to belong to the first category of notecards, and the shoes embody the dualities that german highlighted throughout the show.

The heartbreak and individual trauma endured over the loss of a parent is hauntingly captured by german’s sculpture. But, as someone trained in the discipline of sociology, I would suggest that the object also invites us to think of how these traumas do not stop at the individual level. Fathers leaving (by choice or by force—and sometimes it is very difficult to disentangle the two) can be exacerbated or mitigated by the social systems that organize and govern our society. These shoes and the dual experiences they capture invite us to think

about the social expectations that come with masculinity. The effects of racism, economic disenfranchisement, the legal system and mass incarceration, emotional and physical health care, and immigration laws all impact why fathers and other adults may or may not be able to be present in children’s lives. These issues do not affect all groups equally, with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Queer individuals experiencing the unequal effects of these systems disproportionately.

By centering her experience as a Black, queer woman seeking a multifaceted emancipation, german’s exhibition creates a link between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective. *THE FATHER SHOES* beautifully captures the connection between personal suffering and collective responsibility.

vanessa german (American, b. 1976) *THE FATHER SHOES: inspired by two note cards about fathers leaving and the enduring absence being a constant quake in the being of the cards’ authors. THESE FATHER SHOES: one for leaving, and one for coming back*, 2022, leather shoes, glass beads, nails, and other materials, Purchase with the Belle and Hy Baier Art Acquisition Fund and the Teri J. Edelstein Art Acquisition Fund, 2023.9.1 © vanessa german





## LESSONS FROM THE MAKING OF A POSSUM-SKIN CLOAK

Ellen M. Alvord, Associate Director of Engagement and Weatherbie Curator of Academic Programs and Aaron F. Miller, former Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture and Head of Cultural Repatriation

What does it mean to decolonize a museum? As an academic art museum, we are fortunate to have faculty and students as our partners in thinking about such complex issues. Our institutions, both the College and the Museum, are inherently colonial. Recognizing this is a first step in reimagining how to create space for repair, recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, and partnerships with Indigenous communities and contemporary artists moving forward.

One recent opportunity to engage in this thinking resulted from a remarkable class collaboration initiated by Assistant Professor of Anthropology Sabra Thorner in spring 2022. In her advanced-level seminar, “Decolonizing Museums,” she created space for students to explore “other ways of learning, knowing, and transmitting knowledge” beyond the traditional modes of scholarly readings and academic writing. She secured a Native American and Indigenous Studies Mellon Grant from Five Colleges, which was part of an Australian Research Council funded project (2020–2023) called “Indigenous Storytelling and the Living Archive of Aboriginal Knowledge,” led by Creative Writing scholar Jeanine Leane (Wiradjuri) and Senior Research Fellow Fran Edmonds at the University of Melbourne. The grant enabled a family group of Indigenous Australian artists (Maree Clarke, Kerri Clarke, Mitch Mahoney, and Molly Mahoney) to visit campus and lead student

learning during the last month of classes. With the support of campus partners—including the Museum, the Fimbel Maker & Innovation Lab, and the Anthropology and Art Studio departments—Professor Thorner transferred authority to the artists, who fostered an inclusive and immersive environment for the co-production of embodied knowledge through storytelling, community-building, and making.

The final product emerging from this collaboration was a possum-skin cloak. Students had the privilege of being mentored by the artists as they focused their final weeks of the semester on this creation. As Kerri Clarke (Boonwurrung / Wemba Wemba) explains, “possum-skin cloak making is specific to southeast Australian Aboriginal knowledge systems, and represents connection to place and time.” For thousands of years, customized cloaks were made to accompany individuals from birth through death, starting with a few pelts and added to over time, eventually becoming a burial shroud. They are garments that mark personal connections to place, community, and cultural identities.

This traditional cultural practice was nearly lost during a devastating period of colonization and displacement in Australia, but is now part of a thriving revitalization effort by the artists and others in their community. As matriarch Maree Clarke (Mutti Mutti / Wamba Wamba / Yorta Yorta / Boonwurrung) has

Artist Kerri Clarke (center) with students in Assistant Professor Sabra Thorner’s Anthropology seminar, “Decolonizing Museums”  
[Photo by Ellen M. Alvord]





stated, “My practice is revivifying research. It starts with the research I do and then I turn that research into art, telling stories through art in a contemporary way... and then pass that knowledge on to the next generation.”

For the cloak made at Mount Holyoke, the artists chose the Seven Sisters as their central design motif, a storytelling theme of cultural significance to both the makers and the place where the cloak was made. As Kerri Clarke explains, “This is a connection that is felt around the world through a constellation of stars that can be seen in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, and which has inspired stories and transcended cultural differences, connecting us as human beings.” Extending that sense of connection are references to Mount Holyoke, one of the original Seven Sisters women’s colleges, and the nearby Seven Sisters mountain range.

This thoughtfulness and deep research is part of the artists’ process, as students witnessed first-hand. The generosity of the artists’ approach and their sharing of traditional Indigenous knowledge through the collaborative making of such a meaningful object, made a lasting impression. As part of the class-generated website, students reflected on their experience: “Maree [Clarke] and her family opened our class to a new way of learning that made us reflect on our connection to ourselves, each other, and our land. This new mentality pushes against the Western concepts of education that forces a strong ideology of individualism on people.” They also described it as “a life changing experience—one of building community and keeping Indigenous ways of learning alive and validated.”

At the conclusion of the class, and in partnership with Professor Thorner and the artists, the *Seven Sisters Cloak* was transferred to the Museum where it was acquired for the permanent collection. It is now a touchstone for ongoing relationships with the artists and future collaborations. Last fall, the cloak was featured in the year-long exhibition *Considering Indigeneity*, which enabled the larger community to engage with it. The cloak was utilized by courses across many disciplines, creating a cascading impact and dovetailing with parallel efforts to decolonize the curriculum on campus.

Having the cloak on view in conversation with other



Artists (from left to right) Molly Mahoney, Mitch Mahoney, Maree Clarke, and Kerri Clarke with the *Seven Sisters Cloak* made at Mount Holyoke College in April 2022 [Photo by Ellen M. Alvord]

objects made by Indigenous artists from around the globe created a synergy for discussions about urgent issues such as sovereignty, repatriation, and the Land Back movement. The cloak became a focal point for essential questions students were wrestling with in a wide variety of courses. Examples of this included an education class imagining new ways to teach about Indigenous cultures in the classroom, a social justice course examining the ways art could potentially disrupt and transform systems of discrimination, a creative writing course asking how art can create personal connection to the natural world, and an environmental studies class exploring how art can challenge and widen our understanding of Indigeneity and decolonial efforts.

With each class visit, the cloak’s powerful themes of life and the affirmation of our interconnectedness seemed to resonate and expand in new directions. Biology students found that the geometric forms of the seven stars reminded them of cells and delighted in noticing the intricate patterns of life forms throughout. Psychology students commented on how spending in-depth time looking at and discussing the cloak created a sense of belonging and inclusion.

In a full-circle moment reflecting on the educational legacy of making the cloak and its power to forge reciprocal relationships, Professor Thorner reminds us, “It’s actually about continuing to be in conversation and in relation with these artists, and learning from them how to change our thinking, our exhibition practices, our education practices. It’s about sharing in the power to know and to create and disseminate knowledge.”



## REIMAGINING ARCHIVES: NOTES FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH JAZZMEN LEE-JOHNSON

Kay Brown '23, Jetta Jones Curatorial Intern and Student Museum Educator

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson is a visual artist, animator, producer, musician, and curator originally from Baltimore, Maryland. Her work explores historical archives and the loophole of history for Black people across the African diaspora.

In the three Lee-Johnson works recently acquired by MHCAM, we see themes that run throughout her work, including the importance of archives and the influence of hip hop. For Lee-Johnson, hip hop is not only an influence—it is a methodological tool. While she does not use a turntable, her message is as sharp as a needle expertly placed on a new record. She states, “I’m thinking about how do you shift, change the resonances, the frequencies, of history, so that it is legible to us?”

Lee-Johnson’s unique methodological approach also builds upon writer and scholar Saidiya Hartman’s theory of critical fabulation: “I definitely talk about her in my work, and it was the first time that I was able to try to actually—as a visual artist—make work that was sampling the archive, or looking within the archive and trying to shift perspective,” said Lee-Johnson.

Hartman originally coined “critical fabulation” as a methodology “... to displace the received authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done” (Hartman, *Venus in Two Acts*, 11). Critical fabulation encourages historians and artists to fill the silences and gaps in history, a tool Lee-Johnson found instrumental in advocating for her art practice. Lee-Johnson brought this framework to her investigation of the archives in the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), which led to the *Contraband Series*, in which she combines and remixes her disparate influences and utilizes not only historical archives but the personal archives of family members.

Lee-Johnson recalls, “While I was taking breaks from the reading room, I would be scrolling through Instagram, and it was an interesting juxtaposition to be looking at this stuff in the archive and then on the Instagram archive.” When she started putting those things together, she contacted her cousins for their consent to use their images, eventually creating *free my twin, fuk da law* (2020). This is the first screen print that she made using the imagery of her two cousins, whose diverging life paths took a devastating turn. “I made the

piece before he passed away. He was actually a security guard, and on his way home, one night after a shift, he was murdered at gunpoint. Meanwhile, the other cousin, his twin, was incarcerated at the time,” Lee-Johnson explains. The death of her cousin resulted in an artistic pivot and she became interested in their personal archives. When the surviving twin was released from prison, Lee-Johnson once again asked permission to use his photographs before completing the other works of the series. These works were the last direct correlation to the twins’ Instagram archive before Lee-Johnson expanded the *Contraband* series. This shift enabled Lee-Johnson’s future work to indirectly sample the personal while creating universal images of grief.

While completing her fellowship at AAS, Lee-Johnson examined ledgers that recorded the sale of both people and goods considered contraband. In Lee-Johnson’s bio on the AAS website, it notes that she is interested in “imagining the possibilities of the present by disturbing fixed notions of the past and *conjuring* the future that might come to be.” When asked about the word choice, “conjuring,” Lee-Johnson responds:

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson (American, b. 1984), *Trained 2 Go*, 2021, screen print on paper, Purchase with the Henry Rox Memorial Fund for the Acquisition of Works by Contemporary Women Artists, 2022.17.2  
© Jazzmen Lee-Johnson







Jazzmen Lee-Johnson (American, b. 1984), *Free my Twin, Fuk da Law*, 2020, screen print on paper, Purchase with the Henry Roy Memorial Fund for the Acquisition of Works by Contemporary Women Artists, 2022.17.1 © Jazzmen Lee-Johnson

“Why the word conjure? Because a future is something that we are never in... If you think of time linearly, it’s this thing that’s always in front of us. But if you think about time cyclically and circularly, then it is this thing that we actually do have some access to.” For Lee-Johnson, conjuring is a useful word to explain alternative ways of knowing and the process of making something from perceived nothingness.

In her *Contraband* series, Lee-Johnson is able to expand her definition of an archive to include personal themes. She began to laugh as she gave examples of archives that are not contained in institutions. “I say this all the time—your collection of hair products on your shelf is an archive, your playlist that you make for a friend, or a mixtape, your Instagram. I think of an archive as sort of a repository...”

But Lee-Johnson wants people to know that you don’t have to know the archival or personal source material to approach her work. For those looking to explore the meaning of her artwork, she suggests starting with what you see. “I really think of these as visual essays. Through the archival use, through the contemporary references, through the layering and the juxtapositions, and the overlapping and overlaying

and double imaging—this is intellectual inquiry. It’s a historical inquiry. It is healing, for me at least, to process these narratives, and it’s also hard. It’s a little bit traumatic at times to process it, but nonetheless it *is*.”

Lastly, for Lee-Johnson, music is a space that has the potential to transport her to where she needs to go to dream, imagine, and create. Music is the primary mode of transportation that assists in Lee-Johnson’s critical thinking and art practice. “I created a playlist for *Contraband* actually, that I play when I’m working,” exclaimed Lee-Johnson. “It’s that conjuring of a certain space that I need to get to enter the work.” The list of songs she mentions encompasses the narrative of her life and artistic work. The genres span from hip hop to fusion jazz, although for Lee-Johnson all genres, like time and history, are entwined. Lee-Johnson’s ability to hear the individual samples of the archives is what makes her work unique. She possesses a musician’s ear, an animator’s hands, and a knack for telling long stories short, enabling her to fabulate human narratives from the archives. Lee-Johnson’s work moves us to tune into a frequency where one can imagine the deconstruction of the past being a constant in our present.



## OUR MUSEUM, OUR VOICES: STUDENT ACQUISITION INITIATIVE

Kendra D. Weisbin, Associate Curator of Engagement and Head of Interpretation

As an academic art museum, we believe representing student voices is one of our greatest strengths. As such, MHCAM aims to build and display a collection that both reflects and responds to the diverse student body at Mount Holyoke. In the spirit of inclusivity and engagement, MHCAM invited students in spring 2023 to take a role in building the Museum's collection. This student-led acquisition initiative, *Our Museum, Our Voices*, was the second for the Museum, and was held in conjunction with Mount Holyoke's BOOM Community Day on March 28. The event focused on the possible acquisition of a work from the 2022–23 exhibition, *vanessa german—THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH*.

82 students joined us for an afternoon of art and conversation, considering four possible artworks by *vanessa german* for the Museum's collection. After presentations by MHCAM Student Museum Educators and Student Guides, attendees mingled, discussed the art, and cast their votes. We are delighted to announce *Skinner and the Washerwoman in the Garden of Eden* (2022) emerged as the students' pick and is now part of the Museum's permanent collection.

Above: Students mingle at the *Our Museum, Our Voices* event  
Below: Students discuss *Skinner and the Washerwoman in the Garden of Eden* at the event [Photo by Ellen M. Alvord]



### STUDENT PRESENTERS

Lily Alexander '25

Verity Boyer '23

Kay Brown '23

Josie Fitz '25

Jocelyn Greer '23

Laura Hinojosa '23

Lexy Lee '23

Darwin Michener-Rutledge '24

Savannah Pérez '23

Kara Setal '25

Dana Seville '24

Alānah Smith-Timberlake '23

Tue-Chan Mira Thai '23

Kay Tsukamoto '23

Keyang Zhao '25





# Become a Friends of Art Member

Your gift to Friends of Art supports the Museum as a cross-disciplinary laboratory for students and faculty and as an arts destination for local and regional communities.

## Why should you become a Friends of Art member?

As a Friends of Art member, your donation supports some of our most essential work. Your gift makes the Museum's dynamic and inclusive exhibitions and programming possible, including our signature Teaching with Art program. Not only does your donation ensure the successful daily operations of the Museum, it also provides meaningful opportunities for people of all ages to connect with art.

## What are the benefits of Friends of Art membership?

Membership gives you enhanced access to MHCAM and its creative community. You'll connect with other art-loving Friends and MHC alums who are committed to the visual arts and enjoy special access to exhibitions and programs, artists, travel programs, and behind-the-scenes opportunities.

To learn more about our membership benefits, please visit our website at [artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/get-involved/membership](http://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/get-involved/membership) or

[scan the QR code below](http://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu/get-involved/membership).

## How do I become a Friend of Art at the Museum?

To join our Friends of Art membership program, you can:

**Donate online** via credit card (scan the QR code to be directed to our GIVE page)



**Donate by mail** by writing a check (payable to "Mount Holyoke College Art Museum" or "MHCAM") and sending it to:

**Art Museum, Mount Holyoke College**  
**PO Box 889**  
**South Hadley, MA 01075-0889**



Your membership donation supports transformative student opportunities! MHCAM student museum educators selected this artwork to be on view in our galleries.

**Visit us to read the student-written labels and tour the galleries with one of our educators!**

Chobunsai Eishi (Hosoda) (Japanese, 1756–1829),  
*Yoshinamaru Funa Asobi [A Party on the Pleasure Boat Yoshinamaru]*, ca. 1790, woodblock print, ink and color on paper (nishiki-e), Gift of Mrs. Louis C. Black, 1973.235.Q.RII



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To learn more about MHCAM exhibitions, events, and membership, visit [artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu](https://artmuseum.mtholyoke.edu).

## MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday–Friday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday, 1–5 p.m.

Free, open to the public, and fully accessible.



**museums**10

