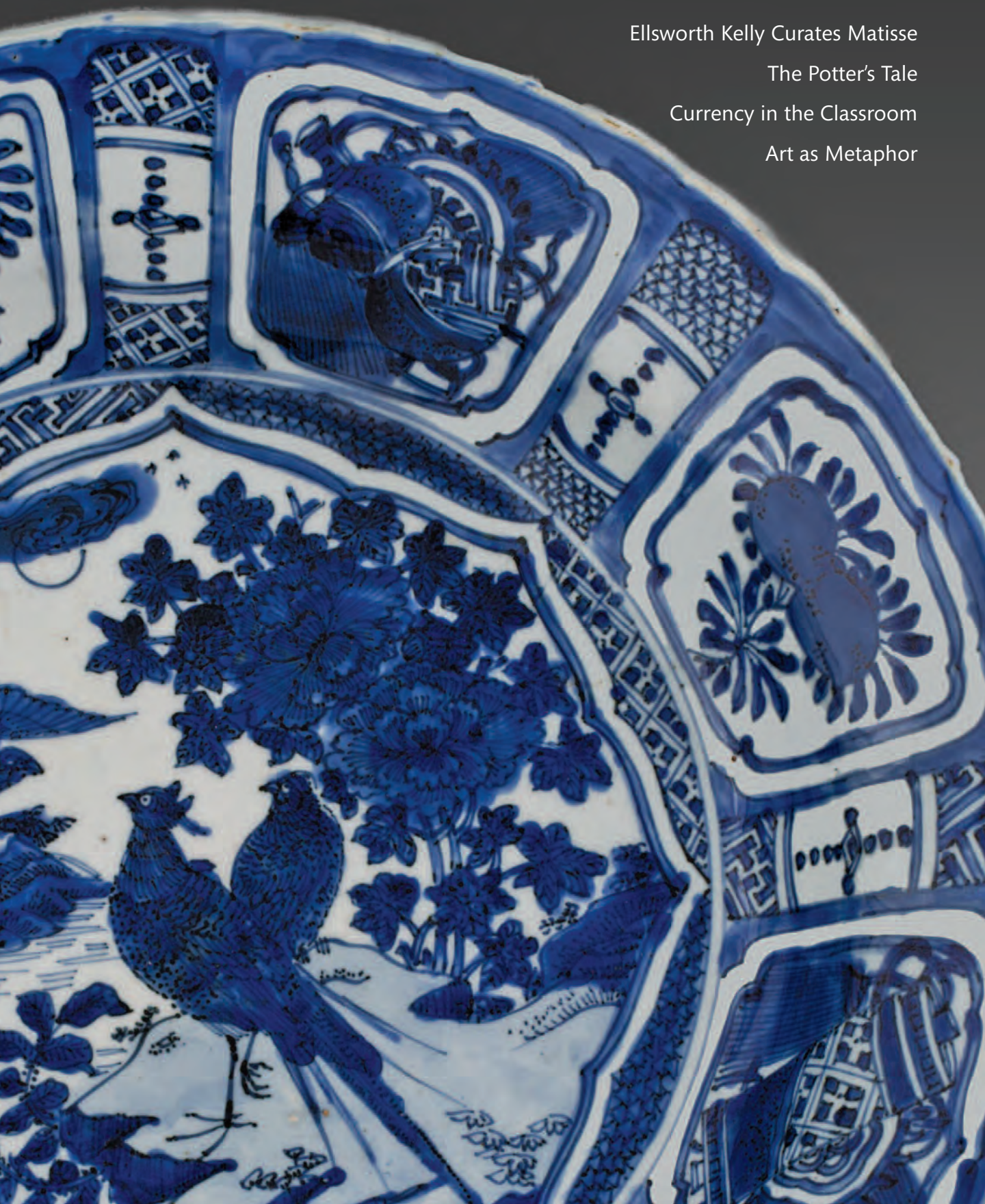
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

FALL 2014



Ellsworth Kelly Curates Matisse

The Potter's Tale

Currency in the Classroom

Art as Metaphor

John Stomberg
Florence Finch Abbott Director
Mount Holyoke College
Art Museum
Photograph Jim Gipe

THERE IS ONE MAXIM that almost any new museum director at a smaller institution will hear: specialize. You cannot be a miniature Metropolitan Museum. Of course I took this to heart when I started at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum three years ago. I headed valiantly down the path of identifying that one area above all others where the collection shone. In retrospect, I can hardly believe my naiveté.

MHCAM was founded in 1876 because the College already had a fast-growing collection on site. The collection predates the Museum by at least 30 years. By the time the Museum opened in old Williston Hall, there were hundreds of objects from around the world populating the original display cases. In addition, some of the families deeply connected to the College made sure that the fledgling Museum had contemporary art to show. Both Albert Bierstadt's *Hetch Hetchy Canyon* (1875) and George Inness's *Saco Ford* (1876) came to the Museum in its first decade of operation. Since that auspicious start, the collection has continued to grow simultaneously in myriad directions. It now stands at 17,000 objects, and the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum houses an additional 7,000.

The first step toward finding my singular focus for the Museum was to study the collection. Time and time again, the curators would introduce me to another facet of our holdings. The first was our antiquities collection. Rich in sculpture, mosaic, fresco, glass, and ceramics, this part of the collection, it seemed to me, must be the area on which we could build our future reputation. We even have the vessel used to identify the hand of an unknown Greek painter now known around the world as the "Mount Holyoke Painter." That's it, I thought, we'll be the Museum with the great emphasis on the ancient world.

Not so fast.

At that time, curatorial work on our Peruvian and West Mexican ceramics was underway for a new installation. As the curators brought out one magnificent work after another, it soon became clear to me that this was our area of great strength. Vessels shaped like imaginary creatures, glazes the brightness of which belied their antiquity, portraits, and small sculptures. As the display shaped up, it became clear that the Etruscan, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquities had some real competition from ancient art of the Americas for a claim as the "heart of the collection."

By now you can see where I am going. Over the next few years, we focused our research on a variety of subcollections including: Old Master European paintings, American paintings, American and European prints and drawings, American decorative arts, photographs, and Native American artifacts. In each instance, the area is represented in some depth. The Museum boasts paintings from Duccio to Daubigny and Erastus Salisbury Field to Milton Avery, prints from Dürer to Kara Walker, master drawings from Luca Cambiaso to Camille Pissarro, American objects from a stellar Hadley Chest to a new stoneware vessel by Mark Hewitt, everything photographic from Roger Fenton salt prints to mural-sized

COVER:
Chinese (Ming Dynasty)
Kraak dish
Porcelain, 1573–1619
Purchase with the Sylvia Chen
Chinese Art Memorial Fund
Photograph Laura Shea
2014.10

works by Edward Burtynsky, Lorna Bieber, and Susan Derges, and beadwork, basketry, and ceramics from indigenous American cultures. During the course of our study for the collections plan, we even received a great and significant gift of Asian art from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, making it possible for us to add judiciously to this area while increasing exponentially the stories we can tell.

It was too late.

After 138 years, the collection does resemble a "mini-Met." That particular horse has long since left the barn. This was the first major realization to emerge from the process of developing a multiyear collecting plan: we will not enjoy the benefit of a narrow focus. Our Museum is simply way too broad in its holdings to justify the singularity of emphasis so often recommended for smaller museums. Once this reality set in, the enormity of the gift we have to offer emerged. The MHCAM reflects almost the entire world through some 6,000 years of history. With the College now boasting one of the most internationally diverse student populations, almost anyone from almost anywhere can find themselves and their home represented in our collections.

We are pleased to note that we have hired two new Museum professionals to help achieve our goals of collection diversity and accessibility. Our Assistant Curator of Visual and Material Culture, Aaron F. Miller, has a background in American material culture and decorative arts. He brings a wealth of expertise to an area of the collection both large and important. And our new educator, Kendra Weisbin, though a committed generalist, is trained in Islamic art and will add significantly to our ability to engage with this important area. These scholars expand the coverage we currently enjoy, which includes American art, European painting, antiquities, and modern and contemporary art. This variety of staff expertise reflects the future direction we are planning for the Museum and its collection.

We have now charged ourselves with a multitiered plan. We will actively acquire works of art in areas where there is both great demand among the faculty and reasonable opportunities in the art market. As an example, in the last year, we have successfully brought a wide variety of objects into the collection including a small Roman domestic sculpture of a deity, an Italian Renaissance altarpiece, a tenth-century Iranian ceramic dish, a Carleton Watkins photograph, and a Judy Pfaff sculpture. These works fit with the curricula of professors teaching in classics, art history, Islamic history, ecology, and studio sculpture.

This then is our collections mandate—we will support the breadth of teaching at the College and reflect the diversity of our student body in collections drawn from places across the globe and throughout history.

JOHN STOMBERG
Florence Finch Abbott Director

Matisse Drawings: Curated by Ellsworth Kelly from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation Collection

30 August–14 December 2014

John Stomberg,
Florence Finch Abbott
Director

OPPOSITE:
Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954)
Esquisse pour "La danse" (Study for "The Dance")
Pencil on pasted paper, 1931
Collection of The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation

2311.206240

Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954)
Femme en fauteuil (Woman in chair)
Pencil on paper, 1935
Collection of The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation

346.203120

Drawing is like making an expressive gesture with the advantage of permanence.
—Henri Matisse

MATISSE'S SHADOW extends across the art of the 20th century. He drew constantly, and his direct, elegant draftsmanship has become a hallmark of modern art. His individual explorations of form, color, and line define high modernism, in which it is often these very concerns, rather than narrative content, that carry the weight of emotional expressiveness.

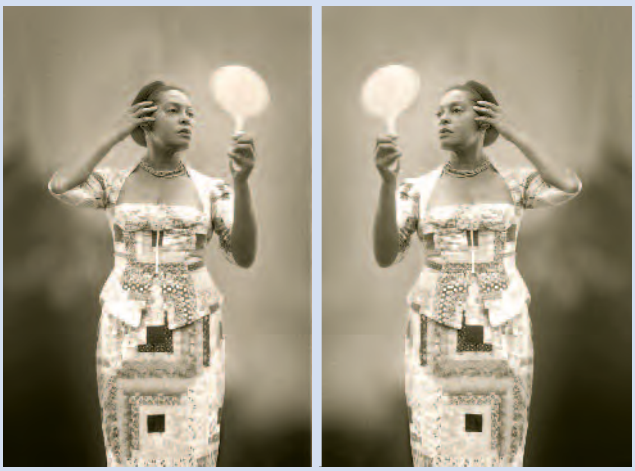
Matisse's particular gift was his economy of line. A seemingly simple curve could simultaneously define a shoulder, establish its place in relation to the picture plane, suggest its volume, outline the shape of the upper torso, and lend an emotional tenor to the sitter. His lines are complex descriptive instruments that at first glance appear understated. A majority of what Matisse communicates with his drawings he achieves through implication rather than replication.

This exhibition features Matisse drawings across 50 years—from 1900 to 1950—that is, through most of his career. They range from fully realized compositions to quick sketches, and from studies for known paintings to repeated views of a detail. This selection allows viewers to explore Matisse's draftsmanship across the spectrum of his work in drawings.

The selection also illuminates a special kinship between the guest curator and the artist. When the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation offered to let the Museum borrow from their collection, we realized that this was an opportunity to see Henri Matisse drawings through the eyes of Ellsworth Kelly. Both artists created drawings characterized by a rare certainty, fluidity, and circumspection. In this, they share a dominant position in the history of drawing in the modern era and beyond. Kelly's affinity for Matisse is not based on influence—there are critical differences in their work—but rather on inspiration. As Kelly recently explained, "Picasso made me want to paint, but Matisse made me want to draw." In this exhibition, we are invited to share his great enthusiasm for the French master's work.

For this exhibition, Kelly has designed every detail of the space. Each drawing has been reframed and matted to match his specific visual goals. He asked for particular crème-colored mats and pale wood frames so as not to draw attention away from the artworks. The drawings are spaced evenly in a single row around the entire gallery with no break for signage. The installation creates a virtual horizon line on the wall of the gallery that (at least obliquely) recalls the proportions of some of Kelly's abstract work. While every Matisse drawing is shown to its best advantage, Kelly's composition of the whole adds dramatically to the experience of the exhibition.

We thank Ellsworth Kelly for making a brilliant and discerning selection and for conceiving a stunning presentation of these drawings. We further thank The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation for generously making the Foundation collection available to him for this project.



Carrie Mae Weems
(American, b. 1953)
I Looked and Looked to See What so Terrified You, from *The Louisiana Project* series
Digital print, 2003 image capture, 2006 print
Purchase with the Elizabeth Peirce Allyn (Class of 1951) Fund and the Madeleine Pinsof Plonsker (Class of 1962) Fund
Courtesy of the Artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY
2013.7.2a-b

Museum Spotlight: Carrie Mae Weems

An installation of Carrie Mae Weems's *I Looked and Looked to See What So Terrified You* (2006) continues the Museum's series of permanent collection spotlights this fall. In the diptych, the artist portrays herself wearing a beautifully quilted dress as she looks into a handheld mirror. Each panel is the mirror image of the other. Typical of Weems's conceptual photography, the images operate on several levels simultaneously. She suggests the gap between viewer and viewed, between self- and public image; she considers issues of racial and gender identity as well as the role of text (the artist's choice of title for the work) in shaping our understanding of an artwork—and she achieves all this with brilliantly composed portraits that are visually compelling before the viewer even starts to engage with them intellectually.

The Museum is honored to present this spotlight in conjunction with Carrie Mae Weems's appointment as Mount Holyoke's 2014 Leading Woman in the Arts, an annual program that is made possible by the InterArts Council and the Weissman Center for Leadership. A recent recipient of the MacArthur Foundation "Genius Award" and the subject of a major traveling retrospective, Weems will engage students during a multi-day visit to campus and offer a public lecture on September 18, 2014.

The Potter's Tale: Contextualizing 6,000 Years of Ceramics

26 August–31 May 2015

Yingxi (Lucy) Gong '13,
Art Museum Advisory
Board Fellow

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, humans around the world have shaped and fired clay into practical, artistic, and ideological objects. Looking closely at these ceramic products can reveal important social and technological information that has been passed on for generations and exchanged between cultures. This exhibition, *The Potter's Tale: Contextualizing 6,000 Years of Ceramics,* highlights the Art Museum's extensive ceramic collection, which spans not only six millennia, but also all human-inhabited continents.

Drawing mainly from the permanent collection, the exhibition features many works of art on display for the first time, including some extraordinary treasures from collection storage, such as a Chinese stem cup with intricate "circled butterfly" decorations. Recent acquisitions are also highlighted. Of particular note are a large Chinese kraak dish (see cover image) and a Persian bowl with an elegant band of calligraphy. In addition, several key loans from private collections and the Hispanic Society of America complement the Museum's holdings and provide critical links between objects.

Chinese (Qing dynasty)
Doucai Stem Cup
Porcelain, ca. 1723–1735
Gift of Mrs. Samuella Crosby
(Class of 1880)
Photograph Laura Shea
1936.7.Q.A

To facilitate the telling of a variety of narratives, the objects are grouped under different themes that allow viewers to make connections between diverse decorative motifs and manufacturing techniques, and to construct a story of cultural exchange throughout history into the contemporary period. A central focus is a case study built around the recent acquisition of the stoneware vessel, *Diadem,* made by the contemporary ceramist Mark Hewitt. By placing *Diadem* within the context of vessels from Asia, West Africa, and North America, and even a painting from Europe as primary source materials, this narrative emerges to show how global technical and decorative influences are absorbed by the artist and transformed in his final creations.

Turkish (Ottoman Period)
Iznik dish
Stonepaste, ca. 1580–1585
Purchase with the Warbeke
Museum Fund
Photograph Petegorsky/Gipe
1980.8

Another spotlight in the exhibition grouping three beautiful vessels examines the international fascination with blue and white ceramics. Although the vessels come from very different cultures—Turkish, Spanish colonial, and Chinese—each displays unique but related aesthetic qualities. This group also connects to other objects in the exhibition, such as a Chinese snuff bottle with a blue and white garden scene and a pair of contemporary Cubist vases with hand-painted blue decorations, offering bridges between the chapters of the curatorial story narrated within the gallery. Visitors with keen eyes will find countless discoveries in this rich installation of craftsmanship and ingenuity.

Plant Lithographs by Ellsworth Kelly, 1964–1966

26 August–14 December 2014

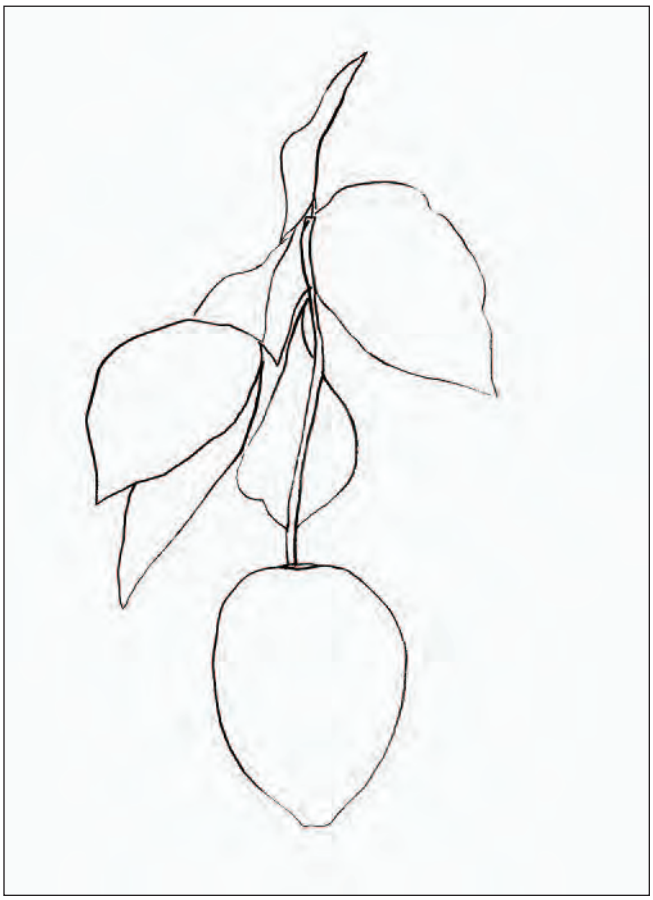
Rachel Beaupré,
Assistant Curator

FOR MANY ART ENTHUSIASTS, the name Ellsworth Kelly is synonymous with color: broad expanses of bold hues, flat planes, and rigid geometric forms define his compositions. But a more lyrical side of Kelly is apparent in a body of botanical drawings created over the last four decades. Beginning in 1949, these images of fruit, flowers, and plants are often credited as the crucial bridge between Kelly's figurative work and the abstract paintings and sculptures for which he is so well known.

Plant Lithographs by Ellsworth Kelly, 1964–1966, on view in the newly named Anne Greer and Fredric B. Garonzik Family Gallery, represents a selection of prints from the artist's first lithographic botanical suite. Drawn from the 28-image series, the exhibition ranges from flowering plants to succulent citrus fruits, reflecting the summers Kelly spent in southern France during 1964 and 1965. Each image is a meditation on a single natural form—a distillation of Kelly's observations into a concise arrangement of flat shapes.

Kelly sketches nearly daily, and these preliminary drawings are often the basis for his lithographs. He describes his botanical drawings as "discoveries" in which he becomes intimately connected to the natural specimen through the act of looking. The studio sequence of drawing on lithographic decal paper is a performance in contrast. Kelly works in large scale, moving his crayon across the sheet in broad, sweeping arm gestures. A single leaf might be created in two swift strokes from top to bottom, while a more complex subject, such as a lemon branch, suggests slight shifts in speed and pressure as Kelly searches for the object's essential form. Kelly later collaborates with a master printmaker—Maeght Editions of Paris produced this suite—to transfer the waxy crayon drawing to a lithographic stone for editioning. The printed image is therefore a precise replica of his original drawing.

These seemingly effortless botanicals are generally created in mere minutes, and yet they are the result of acute study and practice over much of Kelly's career. As the artist reflects, "You must not copy nature. You must let nature instruct you and then let the eye and the hand collaborate." Devoid of color and detail, Kelly's prints are a masterful synthesis of observation, translation, and execution, capturing the tangible object in its purest form.



Ellsworth Kelly (American, b. 1923)
Citron (Lemon)
Lithograph in black ink on handmade Arches paper, 1965–1966
Purchase with the Elizabeth Peirce Allyn (Class of 1951) Fund
© Ellsworth Kelly
Photograph Laura Shea
2012.50.1

CURATOR'S DESK

New Acquisition: Judy Pfaff's *Wallabout*

Wendy M. Watson,
Curator

VISITORS ENTERING THE ART MUSEUM this spring were treated to a veritable explosion of form and color. *Wallabout*, a new acquisition by sculptor Judy Pfaff, fairly bursts off the wall in a maelstrom of visual energy, moving out into our own space and even around the corner to occupy walls at right angles to one another. The aptly named sculpture of 1986 deploys an array of materials—wood, metal, and sign-painters' pigments, and even a working light bulb—to delight and astound the viewer.

The piece was included earlier this year in an extraordinary exhibition at Pavel Zoubok's New York gallery focusing on the artists who showed with art-world dynamo Holly Solomon (1934–2002) in the 1970s and 1980s. Seen alongside works by Nam June Paik, Robert Mapplethorpe, Andy Warhol, Christo, Mary Heilman, and Gordon Matta-Clark, Pfaff's dynamic wall piece resembles a reduced-scale version of the enormous installation pieces for which she became so well known. Critic Roberta Smith highlighted Pfaff's sculpture in her January *New York Times* review, describing "the exuberant *Wallabout*" as a "multipart wall-hung assemblage with bright routed elements that resembles an explosion in a woodblock print shop."

Judy Pfaff (American, b. 1946)
Wallabout
Mixed media assemblage, 1986
Purchase with funds from Astrid Rehl Baumgardner (Class of 1973)
Photograph Laura Shea
2014.8

The review caught the attention of many, including Art Museum Advisory Board member, Astrid Rehl Baumgardner (Class of 1973) and her husband, John, who had been searching for just the right contemporary work to add to Mount Holyoke's collection. A trip to the 26th Street gallery cemented their impression of the sculpture's sensational color and inspired use of three-dimensional space. "We wanted the work to represent our values as collectors," Baumgardner reflects. The impressive and delightful piece is a perfect exemplar of the moment when women artists were breaking the gender divides of the gallery scene.

But this breakthrough was not a first for Pfaff, the English-born, Detroit-raised artist who bounced from school to school and almost miraculously began to pursue a master of fine arts degree at Yale in the early 1970s; Pfaff was the only woman in the program at that time. She quickly found as a mentor the prominent abstract painter Al Held who remained a life-long adviser. A polymath in the world of artistic media, Pfaff first studied painting, then printmaking, moving on into sculpture, and finally to the world of installation art and even stage set design.

Pfaff balanced her lifelong voraciousness as a learner with her dedication to passing this knowledge along as an educator. The winner of numerous awards including grants from the MacArthur Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, Pfaff shines as a role model for young women artists today.

Hook, Comb, and Awl: Excavating Native Histories

Gabrielle Lachtrup '16,
Museum Intern

AFTER TAKING A COURSE in Native American history last fall, I became interested in working with the Museum's collection of objects from indigenous American cultures. I pursued a two-week January internship and focused my work on a small collection of Native Alaskan objects. Through this project, I gained a much stronger sense of material culture research, and now hope to pursue Native Alaskan history as an area of further study.

Mary Gage Peterson, a native of Concord, New Hampshire, spent only two semesters at Mount Holyoke, but her time there left a deep impression. Named as a trustee in 1910, she donated a series of Alaskan objects to the Art Museum in 1921. My research suggests that Peterson's son, William Adolf, whose childhood hobby of collecting arrowheads burgeoned into a lifelong fascination with Native artifacts, initially acquired the items.

Native American; Haida; from Sitka, Alaska
Halibut fish hook
Wood, metal, twine, and bark
Gift of Mrs. Mary Gage Peterson (Class of 1865)
Photograph Laura Shea
22.G

A halibut hook made by the Haida Nation was among the more striking objects of my research. It is formed from a piece of spruce wood that was extracted from the heart of the tree, steamed in a kelp bulb, and then pressed into a mold, where it cooled into the desired, sinuous shape. Hooks of this style were popular with 19th-century collectors; often, tribes crafted them for sale, not use. Given its origin in Sitka, Alaska, a locus of the early tourist trade, Peterson's hook may well have been among these collected items.

Native American; Haida, Tlingit, or Tsimshian; from Juneau, Alaska
Awl
Mountain goat horn, copper alloy, and iron
Gift of Mrs. Mary Gage Peterson (Class of 1865)
Photograph Laura Shea
19.G

However, not all of the collection's artifacts were created for commercial purposes. Among the smaller items is an object underrepresented in most Native Alaskan collections—a sewing awl. Used in clothing production and basketry, awls of this kind were produced by Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian communities. The needle is formed from a nail and attached to the handle with part of a gun shell, possibly a .410 shotshell. Both metal components could have been scavenged and repurposed by the awl's maker, or else acquired from a nearby Russian or Euro-American settlement. The handle itself, made from mountain goat horn, is incised with lines that evoke the image of a mosquito. Mosquitoes feature prominently in legends from Tsimshian cosmology, and mountain goat horns were often used to make spoons for Tlingit winter feasts. It is this confluence of cultural and material elements that make the awl one of the most intriguing items in the collection.

This enriching project became all the more gratifying when I publicly presented my research findings to student and community audiences. This coming semester, I hope to begin working with objects in the Museum's missionary cabinet, as well as to extend my understanding of Peterson's collection as a whole. With luck, future collections will prove equally fascinating.

The Value of a Coin: Currency in the Classroom

Aaron F. Miller,
Assistant Curator of Visual and Material Culture

COINS. Though omnipresent in our pockets, purses, cars, and homes, most of us spare little time to consider their significance beyond purchasing our morning coffee. Coinage and other earlier forms of currency have existed for thousands of years. Even today, though we live in a world of debit cards and electronic transactions, these objects remain ubiquitous in our daily experiences.

Take a moment to contemplate your gold wedding band, silver bracelet, watch, or other piece of jewelry. Precious metals have been just that—precious—since antiquity. Gold and silver adornments reflected the wealth and status of their owners, and coinage minted from these same ores transmitted comparable messages of worth or rank. These precious metals are now absent from our currency. Nonetheless, the gold and silver items we wear, in many cases had countless currency-related past lives. The ring on your finger may have been a Roman *aureus,* a once-buried Saxon hoard, or a Spanish *escudo* made from melted Incan sculpture.

Coins are densely packed repositories of information. Every year the Museum's collection of nearly 1,500 coins is put to use in dozens of courses. As a unit of commerce, a coin can measure how much an object or service costs. Seen as an object in its own right, a coin can be examined for its metal content, its wear and tear, and for other physical alterations that reveal a larger historical context. Coins have never been purely functional objects; they also carry significant meaning to indicate political affiliations, national identities, and religious convictions, or to register regional cooperation, assimilation, or subjugation.

Although frequently studied by classes across the disciplines, the Museum's collection will be the focus of a course exclusively on the history of currency for the first time next year. In the spring of 2015, Desmond Fitz-Gibbon, Assistant Professor of History, will spend the semester with his "History of Money" class discussing and unlocking the educational potential of coins and related objects. His students will have a unique hands-on opportunity to examine the Museum's impressive collection of coinage from around the world and across time.

This growing interest in coinage and the ongoing development of a collecting plan has revealed the collection's strength in Greek and Roman examples as compared to its relatively sparse early modern holdings. A group of Spanish colonial 8 *reales* (the predecessor of the U.S. dollar) is one key recent addition that has begun to address this existing gap and expand the teaching potential of the collection.

Every coin has several stories to tell—some have more than others. Of particular note is a new Museum acquisition minted in Mexico in 1796

of New World silver ore. Although Spanish supremacy had faded long before this date, it was in large part the mineral deposits of the Americas that made them an enduring dominant global force. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, Great Britain lacked silver coinage. In response, the Bank of England and some unscrupulous English tradesmen repurposed and punch-marked Spanish 8 *reales* with the bust of George III to show that they could be circulated as British currency. At some point in the history of the coin in Mount Holyoke's collection, a skilled engraver added the voice bubble "Thank Heaven for the 11th of May 1797." Was this statement a political or social commentary? Was it commemorating a victorious battle or the day of a wedding? We may never know. Nevertheless, sometimes not knowing an answer can be the most thought provoking. The continued use of these fascinating objects by Mount Holyoke classes is sure to raise more intriguing questions, and possibly even provide some answers, about the Museum's diverse collection of coins.

British (minted under George III); Spanish (minted under Charles IV)
Countermarked 8 reales
Silver (AR), 1796–1820
Purchase with the Marian Hayes (Class of 1925) Art Purchase Fund
Photograph Laura Shea
2013.16

ON THE ROAD

As one of America's leading muralists and a frontrunner of the Regionalist movement, Thomas Hart Benton is best known for his depictions of life in America. This September, Mount Holyoke's Benton oil study will take part in a historic exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art celebrating the very achievement that set the artist's career in motion—the ten-panel mural cycle *America Today,* commissioned by the New School for Social Research in 1930.

Recently donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *America Today* is a testimonial to the Roaring Twenties; a panoramic snapshot of America before the anguish of the Great Depression took hold. The products of the Machine Age thunder across the central panel with rail and air transportation highlighted in a mesmerizing display of metal, smoke, and wind. Another section focuses on the agricultural products of America's farmlands, while a contrasting panel captures the vitality and excitement of life in the city. Mount Holyoke's oil is a preparatory study for *Steel,* a dynamic passage that emphasizes the rugged workforce and powerful machinery used in processing iron ore. Celebrating the Met's recent acquisition, *Rediscovering Thomas Hart Benton's 'America Today' Mural* (30 September 2014–19 April 2015) will reunite Benton's studies with the ten monumental panels for the first time.

Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975)
Study for *Steel*, from the *America Today Murals*
Oil on canvas, mounted to board, 1930
Purchase with the Warbeke Art Museum Fund and the Belle and Hy Baier Art Acquisition Fund
Photograph Laura Shea
2010.5

Art as Metaphor

Ellen Alvord, Weatherbie Curator of Academic Programs

"Remember that an idea is a feat of association, and the height of it is a good metaphor."
—Robert Frost, interview in *The Atlantic*, 1962

AS WE ENTER into the second half of our three-year "Creative Campus Initiative" grant from The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, we continue to experiment with ways the Museum can provide an innovative forum for student learning across many disciplines. One effective model is something we've started referring to as "conceptual linking," which gives students and faculty an opportunity to make metaphoric or conceptual connections with specific topics and themes they are studying. These connections often yield new insights and fresh ways to approach course material.

A vivid example of this happened recently with an Italian Language and Literature seminar titled "Apocalyptic Thinking: Italy on the Verge of Disaster." This upper level course taught by Erica Moretti, Lecturer in Classics & Italian was designed to investigate "the literary, sociological, and historical representations of the natural and social disasters that have affected Italy since 1350."

Edward Burtynsky's arresting photograph *Nickel Tailings #30, Sudbury, Ontario* prompts students to question their assumptions regarding beauty and catastrophe. (Photograph Laura Shea)

Although the Museum does not have many works of art that deal specifically with Italian disasters, Professor Moretti knew there was a particular image in the collection that might capture her students' imaginations. She had previously seen something in our storage area that made a lasting impression on her, something that resonated with a conceptual link she wanted to explore with her students.

It was a large-scale contemporary work by the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky depicting nickel mine contamination. She hoped to use this as the centerpiece of a discussion about beauty and catastrophe. Professor Moretti wanted her students to think about these questions: Can a catastrophe be beautiful or generate a work of art? And if so, what are the implications of this apparent disjunction?

This was the perfect invitation to think more creatively about making abstract links with a thematic concept relevant to her course. Knowing that she was willing to work with art not directly connected with her historical and literary Italian subject matter, we were able to select several other modern works, including *South Tower Remains* by photographer Michael Jacobson-Hardy; *They Damaged Us More Than Katrina* by printmaker Robin Holder; and *Blema* by Ghanaian artist El Anatsui. Each took a different approach to depict-

ing disasters and catastrophes, though all were noteworthy for their visual allure and formal beauty.

Knowing we had chosen provocative images, we still weren't prepared for how engaged the students would be with the art and for the moving quality of their responses. Their conversation was rich in the variety and thoughtfulness of the links they were making between the visual details they were seeing and the broader themes they had been thinking about in their course all semester.

Professor Moretti's students engage in conversation around Robin Holder's serigraph, *They Damaged Us More Than Katrina*. (Photograph Laura Shea)

Written comments from the students exemplified the complexity and power of their thinking. International Relations major Alessandra Baffa '14 described her interaction with the photograph by Burtynsky this way: "These nickel tailings, simultaneously destructive and gorgeous, mystify the observer and force us to question our preconceptions of disaster. Can true, unadulterated beauty lie in destruction? This type of disaster is exceptional in that it places humanity's faults at the forefront while hiding their presence in the same moment. Whether beautiful or not, Edward Burtynsky leaves the viewer mesmerized and uncomfortable, reminiscing on our greater role in constructions of catastrophe."

Edward Burtynsky (Canadian, b. 1955)
Nickel Tailings #30, Sudbury, Ontario
Chromogenic color print, 1996
Purchase with the Madeleine Pinsof Plonsker (Class of 1962) Fund
Photograph Laura Shea
1999.1

Focusing more on the museum experience as a whole, Romance Languages and Cultures major Madhu Giri '14 mused: "One of the fascinations of contemplating a work of art is that the mind finds connections between what it has been pondering and what it sees manifest before it. Looking at the art works, I heard the human voice through form and image, and I let myself feel these profound concepts that we have been contemplating; through the absence of words I found greater connection and understanding."

As these articulate reflections demonstrate, the students used the art as visual and conceptual metaphors for understanding the ideas presented in their course. Experiences like these reveal the potential of how imaginatively selected art can function—for many different classes—as a catalyst for students to approach the material from a new angle and deepen their understanding of a topic. Inspired by what we have already learned from these students' encounters with original works of art, we look forward to collaborating with more faculty on integrating this model of conceptual linking into their courses.

This article was adapted from the panel presentation "Teaching and Learning with Art" given at the Yale University Art Gallery conference "Expanding a Shared Vision: The Art Museum and the University," May 9, 2014

MHCAM Director's Circle members visit Project Row Houses with Executive Director Linda Shearer during their Houston Art Tour. Join us in New York City for the spring 2015 Director's Circle trip!

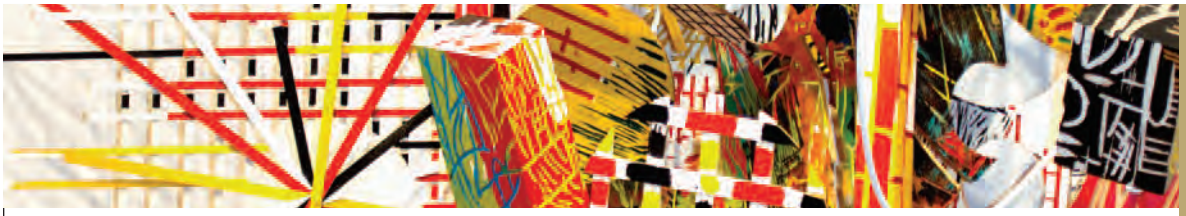
Students look for inspiration in the folded bottle top palette of El Anatsui's sculptures during a weekend origami workshop led by Charlene Morrow, Lecturer Emerita of Psychology and Education.

The Museum completed its second grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services this July. Thanks to the hard work of Digitization Specialist Laura Shea, nearly 10,000 object records with photographs are now publicly accessible online: www.museums.fivecolleges.edu.

South Hadley teachers participate in a professional development workshop on local history focused on the Skinner Museum collections.

In preparation for a fall 2015 exhibition of Edward Lear watercolors, Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation curatorial intern Elizabeth Kendrick '14 catalogues a recent acquisition.

Jessica Ford, a Visiting Artist in Costume Design at the MHC Theatre Department, offers an *Art à la Carte Gallery Talk* investigating painted depictions of fashion.



CALENDAR

Fall Exhibitions

Plant Lithographs by Ellsworth Kelly, 1964–1966
26 August–14 December 2014

The Potter's Tale: Contextualizing 6,000 Years of Ceramics
26 August–31 May 2015

Matisse Drawings: Curated by Ellsworth Kelly from The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation Collection
30 August–14 December 2014

Collection Spotlight: Carrie Mae Weems
30 August–14 December 2014

Fall Events

Thursday, 4 September 2014, 5:30 pm
Exhibition Opening and Annual Patricia and Edward Falkenberg Lecture
"Matisse: Line, Color, Action"
Olivier Bernier, Historian, Lecturer, and Author
Gamble Auditorium
Reception to follow

Thursday, 18 September 2014, 7:00 pm
Leading Women in the Arts Lecture
Carrie Mae Weems: "Art and Humanity"
Gamble Auditorium
Reception to follow
This event is made possible by the InterArts Council and the Weissman Center for Leadership

Wednesday, 1 October 2014, 5:30–7:00 pm
Film Screening of Sharon Hayes' video installation *Ricerche: three* and conversation with artist Sharon Hayes, director Brooke O'Harra and MHC student participants
Gamble Auditorium
Reception to follow
Co-sponsored by the Film Studies Program

Thursday, 16 October 2014, 5:30 pm
"Start with a House, Finish with a Collection"
Panel discussion with book co-authors Leslie Anne Miller ('73) and Alexandra Kirtley, Montgomery-Garvan Associate Curator of American Decorative Arts at Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Paul Staiti, Professor of Fine Arts on the Alumnae Foundation, Mount Holyoke College
Gamble Auditorium
Reception to follow

Tuesday, 21 October 2014, 6:30–8:30 pm
London cocktail reception and exhibition with artist Jane Hammond ('72) and John Stomberg, Florence Finch Abbott Director
Hosted by Lyndsey Ingram ('01)
Sims Reed Gallery, The Economist Building
30 Bury Street, London SW1Y 6AU
RSVP by 14 October to Roger Gove:
rgove@mtholyoke.edu; 413-538-2259
20% of Jane Hammond sales will be donated to the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

Art à la Carte Gallery Talk Series

Thursday, 9 October 2014, 12:20–12:50 pm
"Henri Matisse and Ellsworth Kelly"
John Stomberg, Florence Finch Abbott Director

Thursday, 30 October 2014, 12:20–12:50 pm
"The Potter's Tale: Contextualizing 6,000 Years of Ceramics"
Co-curators Aaron Miller, Assistant Curator of Visual and Material Culture, and Yingxi (Lucy) Gong, Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow

Thursday, 13 November 2014, 12:20–12:50 pm
"Steven Young Lee and Kurt Weiser: Contemporary Masters of Clay"
Leslie Ferrin, Ceramics Specialist and Director of Ferrin Contemporary

MOUNT HOLYOKE
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum
50 College Street, South Hadley, MA 01075-1499

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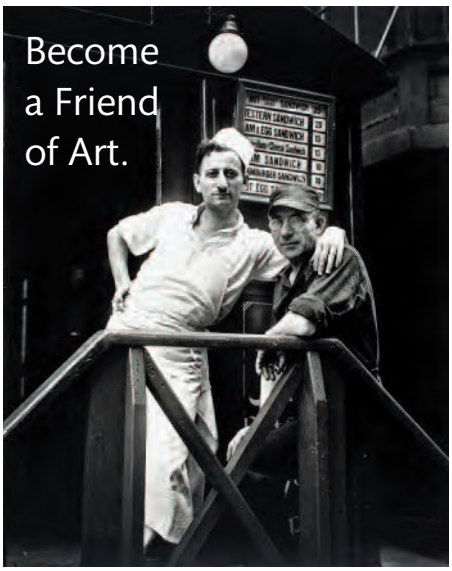

Friends of Art provides crucial funding for special exhibitions, publications, and public programs. Friends receive invitations to opening receptions, lectures, and other events as well as the newsletter. Memberships, valid for one year, are tax-deductible contributions to support Mount Holyoke College Art Museum.

ABOVE: Walker Evans (American, 1903–1975) *Lunchroom Buddies, New York*, gelatin silver print photograph, 1931 negative; 1974 print, purchase with funds from Gaynor R. Strickler (Class of 1973) in honor of her husband Charles S. Strickler Jr. (Amherst College, Class of 1971), 2014.14.2, photograph Laura Shea

Museum Hours: Tuesday–Friday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m. and weekends, 1–5 p.m. Admission is free. Donations are welcome. Fully accessible. 413-538-2245. www.mtholyoke.edu/artmuseum

To sign up for *MHCAM News* and receive exhibition and event announcements, go to www.mtholyoke.edu/artmuseum.

museums 10
ART, BOOKS, HISTORY...

Engage with Art! Become a member!

Friends of Art Membership Levels

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*Mount Holyoke students or alumnae who graduated within the last 5 years

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- ☐ Contributor $100
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- ☐ Patron $500
- ☐ Director's Circle $1000
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Checks may be made payable to Mount Holyoke College Art Museum or MHCAM.

Return this form to: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Lower Lake Road, South Hadley, MA 01075

☐ I would like more information on donating art.

☐ I would like more information on: endowing a fund, gifts that provide income, establishing a bequest.

Memberships are tax-deductible contributions to support the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, a department of Mount Holyoke College. Memberships are valid for one year. Questions? Call 413.538.2245 or email artmuseum@mtholyoke.edu

Thank you for your support!