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2017-2018

# Exhibitions

## **A Very Long Engagement:**

### **Nineteenth-Century Sculpture and Its Afterlives**

July 29, 2017–May 27, 2018

Curated by Gülru Çakmak, Assistant Professor of Nineteenth-Century European Art, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Fifteen small-scale statuettes from the Museum's collection offer an overview of different modes in European and American sculpture in the 19th and 20th centuries. Including works by Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, and Anna Hyatt Huntington, the exhibition encourages intimate and prolonged engagement and was developed by Professor Çakmak in conjunction with her fall 2016 seminar "Modernizing Sculpture from Canova to Duchamp."

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

## **Beautiful Physics:**

### **Photographs by Berenice Abbott**

August 19–December 17, 2017

Curated by Spencer Smith, Assistant Professor of Physics, Mount Holyoke College

One of the great photographers of the 20th century, Berenice Abbott believed in her medium's unique capability to give science its voice. This exhibition explores Abbott's groundbreaking images that illustrate fundamental physical laws, captured with precision and stark beauty. Abbott helped inspire a generation of scientists, and her iconic images still influence physics education today.

*This exhibition is made possible by the Natalie Hofheimer Program Fund.*

Cover: Mary Lee Bendolph (American, b. 1935), *Ghost Pockets*, 2003, Denim and flannel, Purchase with the Art Acquisition Endowment Fund, 2017.16

This page: Sir Alfred Gilbert (British, 1854–1934), *An Offering to Hymen*, 1884–86, Bronze, Gift of Nicolette Wernick, 1985.24



## **William Kentridge: Tango for Page Turning**

September 5–December 17, 2017

South African artist William Kentridge is internationally recognized for his film, drawing, sculpture, animation, and performance. For more than three decades, his work has addressed contentious political systems through powerful allegorical imagery. *William Kentridge: Tango for Page Turning* features a stop-motion animated film in which sketched figures and text fragments dance across the pages of antiquated chemistry books. Related to Kentridge's famed chamber opera *Refuse the Hour*, the film explores string theory, black holes, and the implications of standardized time.

*Tango for Page Turning* is the inaugural acquisition of the New Media Arts Consortium, a collecting collaborative of the art museums at Bowdoin College, Brandeis University, Colby College, Middlebury College, Mount Holyoke College, and Skidmore College.

*This exhibition is made possible by the Lucy P. Eisenhart Fund.*

## **Piece Together: The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph**

January 23–May 27, 2018

Mary Lee Bendolph is an accomplished quiltmaker from the small, historically black community of Gee's Bend in Alabama. Over three-quarters of a century, Bendolph has witnessed changes to her hometown and its rich quiltmaking tradition, from the effects of the New Deal, the civil rights movement, and more recently, unexpected art world celebrity. The exhibition considers her quilts as hybrid objects, blending tradition with innovation, utility with virtuosity, and deep spirituality with everyday materials.

*This exhibition is made possible by a grant from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation and the gifts of individual donors in support of the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's*

*Diverse Voices Initiative. The exhibition catalogue is organized by the List Gallery, Swarthmore College and made possible by the William J. Cooper Foundation.*

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Fall greetings from Mount Holyoke! Ever since I was a child, I have loved the arrival of fall. Back then, it meant my carefree summer was over, but somehow I already grasped the promise of new beginnings. As I start my first official fall at Mount Holyoke, I find that I am greeting this new semester with the same authentic excitement. It has been almost a year since I arrived at the College, and I continue to be inspired by the stellar education and myriad opportunities that Mount Holyoke offers its students.

Speaking of new chapters, this newsletter is our first annual (as opposed to biannual) issue. Reconceived to provide richer content and different perspectives, the annual newsletter will complement our exhibitions with scholarly essays and collection research. We are including more faculty and student voices, and continue to highlight our Teaching with Art program.

This fall our exhibition program is quite diverse in its offerings. We are especially pleased to unveil two guest-curated exhibitions that highlight our ongoing collaboration with faculty at the College as well as those in the Five College Consortium. This kind of collaboration is at the heart of what we do at MHCAM, and all three of our special exhibitions will be accompanied by gallery talks by MHC and Five-College faculty, including professors Gülru Çakmak, Spencer Smith, and Donald Weber.

Our permanent galleries also feature fresh and exciting changes. The Museum's Harriet L. and Paul M. Weissman Gallery showcases important works of modern and contemporary art from the collection, with a spotlight on the Museum's strong holdings in Surrealist art. Rarely-seen works on paper debut in the Norah McCarter Warbeke Gallery of Asian Art and the Caroline R. Hill Gallery, among others.



Tricia Y. Paik and Rubin Bendolph, Jr. discuss Mary Lee Bendolph's *Ghost Pockets* during an interdisciplinary faculty seminar on January 17, 2017. Photo: Ellen Alvord

We are also thrilled to announce that leading contemporary artist and professor Michelle Grabner is our featured speaker for the Patricia and Edward Falkenberg Lecture, kicking off our fall opening events on September 14, 2017. The lecture also marks an important acquisition of her work for MHCAM, which will be on view in the freshly-installed Weissman Gallery.

In the spring of 2018, we open *Piece Together: The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph*, the culminating project supported by the prestigious *Diverse Voices* grant from the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation and the generous gifts of individual donors. This transformative exhibition showcases quilts and prints by Bendolph, one of the renowned quilt-makers of Gee's Bend, Alabama.

As you can see, there is plenty of activity at MHCAM, and I do certainly hope you will visit us this year. Please be sure to stop by and say hello!

Tricia Y. Paik, Florence Finch Abbott Director

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## A Very Long Engagement: Nineteenth-Century Sculpture and Its Afterlives July 29, 2017–May 27, 2018

Gülru Çakmak, Guest Curator and Assistant Professor of Nineteenth-Century European Art, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Auguste Rodin  
(French, 1840–1917)  
*Tête de Balzac (Head  
of Balzac)*, 1897  
model/1955 cast  
Bronze  
Gift of T. Marc Futter  
2001.6.3

The French poet and sometime art critic Charles Baudelaire's review of the Paris Salon Exhibition of 1846 contained a short section rather curtly entitled "Why Sculpture is Boring." Passionately advocating for an art that triggered the imagination of the beholder, Baudelaire declared sculpture to be irrelevant to modernity, judging its obstinate materiality to fade into nothingness next to painting, which embodied "an extraordinary mystery one cannot touch with one's fingers." Developments that occurred in French and English sculpture in the second half of the century would prove him wrong. *A Very Long Engagement: Nineteenth-Century Sculpture and Its Afterlives* demonstrates the dynamism that galvanized Western sculpture from the second half of the 19th century onward through the end of the

20th century in a selection of pieces drawn from the Museum's collection.

The exhibition has a specific lens through which this narrative is conveyed, that of the statuette—small-scale sculpture produced in multiple editions. The statuette was a trend on the rise in the 19th century that aimed to capitalize on the fame of high art by making sculpture affordable and practical for display in domestic interiors. The statuette format avoids the aggressive physicality of a life-size sculpture. Life-like figures in smaller-than-life dimensions persistently remind us of their status



as artifacts, as objects crafted by a maker for a viewer. Their diminutive sizes stimulate an immersed mode of engagement, insisting on prolonged viewing. This is how sculpture would make itself relevant to an indifferent public.

The earliest piece in the show is the intricate *An Offering to Hymen* made in the 1880s by Sir Alfred Gilbert, a prominent representative of the New Sculpture Movement. This movement marked the modernization of sculpture in England in the second half of the 19th century. Signaling a heightened sense of sculpture's materiality, the piece demands the viewer to approach, and be absorbed by the often surprising and unexpected details animating it all the way down to its pedestal.

Two other works in the show bear the signatures of artists most closely associated with artistic experimentation in France in the second half of the 19th century. Auguste Rodin's *Head of Balzac* belongs to the artist's embattled project for a monument to the great French author. Another piece devoted to the spirit of pure experimentation is the Impressionist Auguste Renoir's *Dancer with Tambourine*, created in collaboration with a

young sculptor. It took its inspiration from a painting made by Renoir about a decade earlier, while integrating aspects of free-standing statuette into a relief format. The remaining works in the exhibition, from Aristide Maillol's *Small Phryne with Drapery* to Niki de Saint Phalle's *Nana* demonstrate how 19th-century strategies led to multiple directions in French, English, and American sculpture in the course of the 20th century.

Keeping the number of works to a minimum, and leaving space around each piece in the gallery, were key considerations in the installation of this exhibition. With attentive close looking from multiple angles, visitors will make discoveries not immediately evident at first sight from a single viewpoint, allowing these sculptures to perform their magic.

Several of the pieces in the exhibition were selected and researched by students enrolled in my seminar, "Modernizing Sculpture from Canova to Duchamp," at UMass Amherst in fall 2016. Their contribution is reflected in the gallery guide accompanying the exhibition. Additionally, their final research projects have been posted on a digital exhibition platform built in collaboration with the faculty support staff in the Instructional Media Lab at UMass Amherst, and partially supported by a Five College Blended Learning Initiative Grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The website can be reached at <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/modernizing-sculpture/index>.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919)  
*Dancing Girl with Tambourine*, 1909  
Oil on canvas  
National Gallery, London  
Bought, 1961  
NG6317  
Open Access Image on Wikimedia Commons

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (French, 1841–1919), and Louis Fernand Morel (French, 1887–1975)  
*Danseuse au Tambourin (Dancer with Tambourine)*, ca. 1918–19  
Bronze  
Gift of Mrs. Harold Kaplan in honor of her daughter Irene Kaplan Leiwant (Class of 1947)  
1997.9.1



## William Kentridge: Tango for Page Turning September 5–December 17, 2017

Hannah W. Blunt, Associate Curator

*"The separation between the past, the present, and the future is an illusion."*

– Albert Einstein

In 1905, just two decades after the establishment of the prime meridian and the standardized world clock, Einstein's theory of relativity showed that time is not fixed and absolute, but relative and resistant to control. His research added an international community only recently adapted to the imposing concept of universal time. Einstein's science seemed to echo more intuitive—and also poetic—ideas about time, like how a day can feel endless but years fly by.

Fast-forward to our time, with our deadline-driven work culture, instantaneous access to information, and distance-defying digital communication. In 2012, artist William Kentridge unveiled *The Refusal of Time*, a five-channel video installation (now jointly owned by SFMOMA and the Met) that explores the history and rich metaphorical potential of Einstein's idea, and the related subjects of black holes and string theory. In this work, Kentridge makes time visible and audible through music, recorded narrative, moving sculptures, animation, and live-action video. The immersive installation, as well as Kentridge's related chamber opera, *Refuse the Hour*, is a deep

meditation on time and mortality. The artist investigates emotions and experiences that are intrinsically linked to time—hope, regret, fear, excitement—as well as colonialist attempts to control it.

Though more modest in scale than these multimedia opuses, Kentridge's stop-motion animated film, *Tango for Page Turning*, distills many of the same images and themes into a 2 minute, 48 second audio-visual journey. The film opens with the tattered cover of a 19th-century chemistry book and then turns rapidly from one page to the next. Against this literal backdrop of narrative time appear animated drawings and scraps of paper with mysterious words and phrases: *unsay, undo, the right chair, the wrong chair*. Figures depicting Kentridge and choreographer Dada Masilo sit, run, and pirouette across the pages, colliding only once in a climactic moment of synchronicity. The soundtrack is a Dadaist mash-up of sung lyrics from *Le Spectre de la Rose*, by composer Hector Berlioz. The film trembles with a restless energy, reminding us of Kentridge's painstaking animation process, and the unstable nature of time.

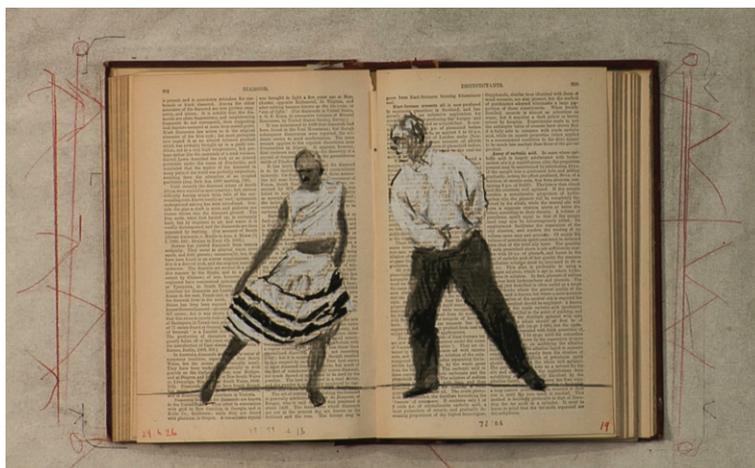
Born in South Africa in 1955, Kentridge is internationally recognized for his film, drawing, sculpture, animation, and performance. For more than three decades, his work has explored

contentious political systems through powerful allegorical imagery and theater. To that end, Kentridge's film was a fitting inaugural acquisition of the New Media Arts Consortium, a collecting collaborative of the art museums at Bowdoin College, Brandeis University, Colby College, Middlebury College, Mount Holyoke College, and Skidmore College, founded in 2016.

William Kentridge  
(South African, b. 1955)  
Still from *Tango for Page Turning*, 2012–13  
Single channel HD video

An acquisition of the New Media Arts Consortium, a collaboration of the art museums at Bowdoin College, Brandeis University, Colby College, Middlebury College, Mount Holyoke College, and Skidmore College, Purchase with the Art Acquisition Endowment Fund 2016.6

© William Kentridge, courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery



## Beautiful Physics: Photographs by Berenice Abbott August 19–December 17, 2017

Spencer Smith, Guest Curator and Assistant Professor of Physics, Mount Holyoke College

ON VIEW  
Fall

From a distance the staccato imprint of each moment captured in Berenice Abbott's stroboscopic photograph of a bouncing ball fuse together to trace out a succession of elegant parabolic arcs. Closer up, finer patterns emerge in the stark lighting: equal horizontal spacings, regularly changing vertical divisions, and subtle variations in the relative crispness of each captured moment. Between bounces the ball's path is symmetric, leaving the direction of time's flow uncertain. With a wider field of view this mirror symmetry is broken, and the familiar irreversibility of life is restored.

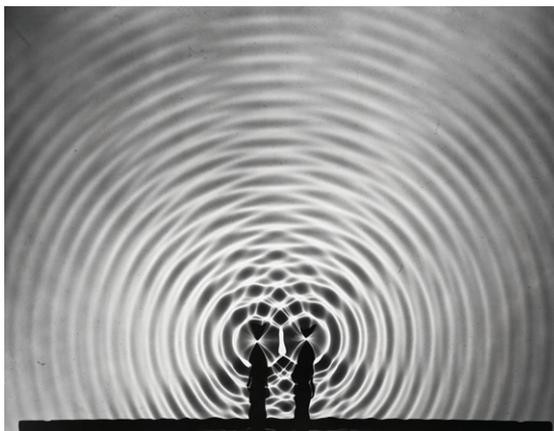
Behind these observations is a wealth of fundamental physics, from kinematics, Newton's laws of motion and gravitation to the deeper, more abstract concepts of energy conservation, symmetry, and the inexorable increase of disorder (entropy). Berenice Abbott, one of the great photographers of the twentieth century, recognized the potential of her medium to act as "a friendly interpreter between science and the layman," and through her photographs sought to "endow [science] . . . with the poetry of its own vast implications."<sup>1</sup> This theme, art illuminating physical phenomena and ideas, is central to the exhibit, *Beautiful Physics: Photographs by Berenice Abbott*. Abbott's mastery of lighting, composition, and timing imbue these images with a stark beauty and clarity that evoke the underlying physics so well. Indeed, this potent combination of precision and aesthetics formed the visual backbone of the landmark Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) textbook, inspiring a whole generation of post-Sputnik-era scientists.

As a physicist, the well from which I draw my inspiration has always been beauty: the directly accessible beauty of the natural world, as well as the hidden internal beauty of the patterns, regularities, and equations we use to make sense of it. It is poetically fitting that the fine arts should have this great capacity to convey the intuitive core of

these often very abstract ideas. In Abbott's images we find a virtuous cycle: art lowers the barrier to understanding the ideas of physics and their hidden beauty, while physics provides a richer context for art and ultimately enhances our appreciation of it.



Berenice Abbott  
(American, 1898–1991)  
*Bouncing Ball*, from the series *The Science Pictures*, 1958–61 negative/1982 print Gelatin silver print photograph  
Gift of Joseph R. and Ruth Lasser (Ruth H. Pollak, Class of 1947) 1983.21.4



Berenice Abbott  
(American, 1898–1991)  
*Water Pattern*, from the series *The Science Pictures*, 1958–61 negative/1982 print Gelatin silver print photograph  
Gift of Joseph R. and Ruth Lasser (Ruth H. Pollak, Class of 1947) 1983.21.9

### NOTE

1. Berenice Abbott, et al. *Documenting Science* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012): 6.

## Piece Together: The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph January 23–May 27, 2018

Rubin Bendolph, Jr. in conversation with Ellen M. Alvord

This spring, MHCAM will feature a special exhibition of quilts and prints by Mary Lee Bendolph (b. 1935), an acclaimed quilting artist from Gee's Bend, Alabama. The quilts in the exhibition are loaned courtesy of Bendolph's son Rubin Bendolph, Jr. Over time he has become the family historian and a devoted memory collector. In an interview with Ellen Alvord, Weatherbie Curator of Education and Academic Programs, Rubin shares stories about his mother and the quilt-making traditions of Gee's Bend.

**EA:** What are your earliest memories of your mother quilting, and did she ever include you, as a child, in the process?

**RB:** When I was around 6 or 7 years old all I wanted to do was play. But Mom had a different agenda for me. Preparing to make a quilt involved three

ingredients—the pieced together quilt top, the batting, and the quilt backing. Here is where my involvement came in . . . I had to go out to the barn to gather enough cotton to cover the quilt back. You would think this would be a quick and simple task . . . but I had to get past a nursing mother hog in the doorway.

Once I got the cotton back to the house, I had to remove any cotton seeds and debris from it prior to repeatedly beating it with a small stick to make it fluffy and clear of dirt. Now clear of the debris I would place the cotton onto the quilt back and beat it evenly over the entire area. Mom would then take one end of the quilt top and I would take the other and we would spread it over the top of the batting across two sawhorses. Once I threaded the needle for Mom and she felt like all was good . . . playtime was on.

Mary Lee Bendolph with two of her quilts hanging on a line outside her home in Gee's Bend, Alabama, August 20, 2016. Photo: Ellen Alvord



**EA:** How did your mother learn to quilt and can you tell us the story of how she came to make her first quilt when she was young?

**RB:** According to Mom, she started piecing quilts when she was just 12 years old. Her mother would sit out in the yard in the spring piecing quilts and patching clothes. So, she asked her mother [Aolar Mosely] to teach her how to piece quilts. It took her a year to make her first quilt because they had very little material. Sometimes she would find a piece of a rag on the side of the road. She would take it home and wash it and hang it out on the fence to dry, then rip it up and make a block in her quilt.

**EA:** Why is the tradition of quilt-making so strong in Gee's Bend?

**RB:** In 1859 when Dinah Miller, Gee's Bend's earliest identified quilt-maker, was brought to Gee's Bend as a slave, quilt-making was a necessity because none of the log cabins at that time were insulated. Having only a fireplace to keep warm, the women would make quilts in abundance. Most of the time three to four were used on the bed as blankets and one as a window cover to block the frigid wind at night coming through the holes of the log cabins.

Once I asked Mom, "Why would you take large pieces of clothing and tear them into many small pieces to make a quilt? Wouldn't it take more time sewing the many pieces together versus one or two large pieces?" Mom's answer to this question was interesting. She said that as a young family, "we didn't have a lot, so nothing was wasted . . . when your father and sibling's clothing was worn out and patching them was not an option, I would take them and rip them up into pieces to make the look I wanted in a beautiful bedspread . . . that I just couldn't afford to buy." When you are poor, you quickly learn to make do with what you have.

**EA:** Your mother first had quilts displayed in major art museums in 2002, and she started making fine art prints a few years later. Can you tell us the story of how Mary Lee began making prints?



Mary Lee Bendolph  
(American, b. 1935)  
*To Honor Mr. Dial*, 2005  
Color aquatint etching  
Gift of Renee Conforte  
McKee (Class of 1962)  
2012.52.2

**RB:** The owners of Paulson Press had visited the Gee's Bend exhibition at the Whitney Museum, and they invited Mom and a few other quilt-makers to come out to Berkeley, CA to make quilt-inspired prints in 2005. Mom's very first print published at Paulson Press was titled *To Honor Mr. Dial* as a tribute to the self-taught African American artist Thornton Dial, with whom she became friends.

**EA:** And *To Honor Mr. Dial* was one of two Mary Lee Bendolph prints given to MHCAM in 2012, which eventually led to our collaboration with you, and this wonderful exhibition of Mary Lee's work.

*A longer version of this interview will be included in the exhibition catalogue Piece Together: The Quilts of Mary Lee Bendolph, along with essays by professors Kimberly Juanita Brown (English/Africana studies, MHC), Lucas Wilson (economics/Africana studies, MHC), and Sarah Willie-LeBreton (sociology, Swarthmore College). The exhibition will travel to Swarthmore's List Gallery in fall 2018.*

## Monsters and the Meaning of a Romanesque Capital

Michael T. Davis, Professor of Art History and Architectural Studies, Mount Holyoke College

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's capital depicting humans and animals exemplifies the creativity of Romanesque sculpture while presenting the viewer with a series of physical, visual, and interpretive challenges. It entered Mount Holyoke's collection in 1959, thanks to the generosity of Caroline Rogers Hill (1878–1965). However, lacking documentation, we must rely on the capital itself to tell its story.<sup>1</sup>

The marble capital is an orphan from its original setting. Carved on all sides, it must have sat atop a free-standing column. Its modest size (9 x 9 7/8 x 9 7/8 in.) and good state of preservation suggest an intimately-scaled structure in a sheltered location, perhaps an interior gallery or cloister arcade. The unknown sculptor who carved the capital had to fit his figures to its architectural shape. Placing figures and heads at the corners and marking the centers of each side with tails, a flower, or a face, he emphasized its structure and supportive function. At the same time, order is subverted by the three animals that lunge and slide around the corners to devour a female figure.

There are stylistic similarities with mid- to late 12th-century sculpture of northern Italy or Austria.<sup>2</sup> However, the most compelling questions orbit around the capital's subject matter. Was a medieval viewer presented with a decorative fantasy or a serious and meaningful image? Let us begin by taking a census of the capital's population. To the left of a bird-siren we see a basilisk and a bearded head. Lions fill two adjacent sides: one, missing its head, balances atop a serpent that swallows a woman's feet, while its mate, opposite, bites her head. Eyes closed, mouth in a grimace, she lies prone, her genitals covered by a leaf.

Bernard of Clairvaux seems to have had such a capital in mind when he wrote his *Apologia* in 1125: "But in the cloister . . . what profit is there in those ridiculous monsters . . . ? So many and so marvelous are the varieties of diverse shapes that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books. . . ."<sup>3</sup> However, the prominence of lions and serpents on the Mount Holyoke capital suggests an edifying purpose for its imagery that echoes Psalm 91:13, "You will tread on the lion and the basilisk, the young lion and the serpent will you trample underfoot." As explained by Augustine, this passage warns of the proximity of evil:

The lion openly rages, the dragon lies concealed: the devil has each of these forces and powers . . . .  
What does a woman who is corrupt in her heart preserve in her body? Thus a Christian woman is before a virgin heretic. For the first is not indeed a virgin in her body, but the second has become married in her heart . . . to the dragon. But what shall the church do? The basilisk is the king of serpents as the devil is the king of wicked spirits.<sup>4</sup>

Italian or Austrian  
*Capital with human  
and animal figures*,  
first half of the 12th  
century  
Marble  
Gift of Caroline R. Hill  
1959.6.P.OII

View of capital side  
with nude woman  
being eaten by lions  
and a serpent.





View of capital corner depicting, left to right: bird-siren, basilisk, and two heads.

Augustine's commentary includes the cast of the capital's characters who catalog the ways in which the devil attacks the soul through the senses: the bird-siren embodies sensuality, the basilisk kills through its glance, the serpent bites, the lion growls. The realm of the senses is the realm of demons, who "most often resemble monstrous men, gigantic in stature marked by large heads."<sup>5</sup> And what of the woman? Martyr or temptress? Naked and lacking a halo, she appears an unlikely saint. Rather, her posture emphasizes her breasts in a pose seen in depictions of Lust.<sup>6</sup>

Psalm 91 was sung at the end of the monastic day to protect monks from evil as they slept. Sirens, lions, and serpents crowd monastic art, appearing in manuscripts and in cloisters. Like the recitation of the Psalm, these images worked to externalize the soul's demons, allowing the monk to purge them through meditation. So let us imagine the Mount Holyoke capital back into a monastic setting where its arresting imagery enlisted the Psalms, the wisdom of Augustine, and the liturgy in the struggle against carnal temptations and toward a spiritually enlightened life.

#### NOTES

1. Thanks to Kristina Bush '17, who shared her research on Caroline Rogers Hill undertaken in Art History 301: "Founding Sisters: the Origins of College Collections" taught by Bettina Bergmann.
2. Walter Cahn, *Romanesque Sculpture in American Collections*, 2 vols. (New York: B. Franklin; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1979), 1: 51–52.
3. Conrad Rudolph, *The "Things of Greater Importance": Bernard of Clairvaux's Apologia and the Medieval Attitude Toward Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990): 11–12.
4. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms* (Psalm 91) <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801091.htm> (accessed February 23, 2017).
5. Thomas E.A. Dale, "Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa," *Art Bulletin* 83 (2001): 426.
6. Cahn (*Romanesque Sculpture*, 51) saw the gesture of modesty as a sign of the woman's virtue. Also see Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London: R.T. Batsford, 1986): 58–79.

Katia Kiefaber '17, Art Museum Advisory Board Fellow

Upon first glance, a landscape painting by Bostonian Charles Furneaux, a Native Hawaiian necklace, and an Inuit tobacco pipe appear unrelated. However, these three objects are linked: all were probably acquired and donated by Mount Holyoke alumnae working abroad as missionaries. These and numerous other objects were donated for the purpose of educating students back at the College through exposure to unfamiliar cultures. The objects now form what is called the “missionary collection” at MHCAM. These three treasures from the missionary collection reveal the interconnectedness of artistic design and history through the lens of material culture.

Although Diamond Head is now one of Hawaii’s most recognized icons, few Western depictions of this majestic volcano existed during Charles Furneaux’s lifetime. Furneaux traveled to the Kingdom of Hawaii in the late 19th century to paint the awe-inspiring volcanic eruptions of Mauna Loa and Kilauea along with other artists, aptly named “The Volcano School.” These artists captured the

drama of the volcanoes through romantic, colorful landscapes visually similar to mainland American landscape paintings. Furneaux’s legacy, however, is not based solely on these volcanic paintings. Hawaiian King Kalakaua decreed Furneaux a *chevalier* (similar to a knight) and commissioned Furneaux to paint royal portraits of the king and his family. His portrait of Queen Kapiolani still hangs proudly in Iolani Palace today.

The painting was a gift of the Alumnae Association of Hawaii, specifically of Persis Thurston (Class of 1845), who acted as a missionary in Hawaii in the mid-19th century. Thurston’s parents, Asa and Lucy Goodale Thurston, were among the first missionaries to come to Hawaii through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, inaugurating a period of mission work in Hawaii by New Englanders.

Another striking object in the missionary collection is a “whale tooth” necklace (*lei niho palaoa*) constructed of delicate braided strands of human hair and native Hawaiian olona fiber with a

Charles Furneaux  
(American, 1835–1913)  
*View of Diamond Head,*  
1880–1901  
Oil on panel  
Gift of the Alumnae  
Association of Hawaii  
1901.44.l(b).PI





Hawaiian  
Whale tooth necklace  
(*lei niho palaoa*), early  
19th century  
Human hair, olona  
fiber, and walrus ivory  
7.V.M

actually made of walrus ivory. Whaling-driven trade with Americans and Europeans in the 19th century dramatically altered the availability of these necklaces. Considerable trade of walrus ivory from Alaska and other subarctic regions constituted an easily accessible, visually analogous alternative to whale ivory. More people were able to own these necklaces and the size of the pendant became larger, like the “ponderous” tooth Thurston wore. Additionally, many of these necklaces were presented to foreigners, especially missionaries like Thurston’s family, as tokens of appreciation.

Like the necklace, the 19th-century Inuit tobacco pipe might never have been introduced to the Museum’s missionary collection without the influence of trade. Tobacco is not native to the subarctic regions Inuit inhabit, nor was it a significant part of their culture historically. However, the Hudson’s Bay Company, founded in 1670, changed this. Founded as a fur retailer, the company did business with native groups in the region, trading tobacco and liquor for furs. Tobacco use spread throughout the subarctic and arctic regions, ushering in a wave of newly designed smoking pipes. Featuring a carved stone bowl and a flat, spruce wood stem attached by sinew fiber, this specific pipe form was unique to Inuit in the Hudson Bay region.

As illustrated by these objects, trade and other forms of cultural contact can initiate captivating fusions of artistic design. Just as the missionary collection once gave Mount Holyoke students a window onto other cultures, these objects can still be used today to reveal historical narratives, inform our understanding of complicated and often problematic colonial and missionary contact, and educate in a promising new way.

Inuit  
Tobacco pipe, 19th  
century  
Wood, stone, metal,  
and string  
Gift of Anna Baker  
Clarke (Class of 1879)  
16.F.M

large, hook-shaped ivory pendant. In a letter from Jerusha Babcock to Mary Weaver (both Class of 1845), Babcock writes about Persis Thurston’s return to campus: “. . . around her neck, a neck-lace of human hair, taken from the head of captives; the hair was braided in little braids and a number of hundred composed the Neck-lace; in front, fastened over the hair was the ponderous tooth of a whale. . .”<sup>1</sup> This “ponderous tooth” was a key status indicator for those who traditionally wore these necklaces. Sperm whales are highly respected in Hawaiian culture and their teeth could only be harvested if a whale was found dead, making their ivory a rarity for only the nobility to use—a practice common in the 15th through 18th century.

Despite Babcock’s colorful description of the necklace, the “tooth” of MHCAM’s example is

NOTE

1. Alumnae Biographical Files, Class of 1845, Babcock, Jerusha, Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections, South Hadley, Massachusetts, RG 27.1



## Exploring Identities with Students of Springfield Renaissance School

Relyn Myrthil '19 and Amy Chen '17

MHCAM Art and Community Engagement Interns, 2016–2017

In December 2016, MHCAM welcomed high school students from the Springfield Renaissance School to participate in *Art & Identity*, a new weekly program at the Museum. Supported by the Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation, the program focused on showing students the importance of art museums as a resource for exploring their interests and building personal connections with original works of art.

Week after week, students were introduced to a variety of original objects from the Museum's collection. Working with art ranging from a Kara Walker print to a 10th-century Persian bowl, we conducted close-looking sessions to develop the students' skills in visual analysis and public speaking. We then complemented these sessions in the galleries with art studio workshops and creative writing exercises that challenged the students to make their own collages, sculpture,

and poetry in response to Museum pieces. As a final project, students selected original artworks from MHCAM's collection and created self-portraits inspired by them, with the goal of producing an exhibition and culminating event to showcase their work.

On a warm spring day in May, the students hosted an event at the Museum to conclude their *Art & Identity* program. Parents, teachers, and friends came together to hear the students

speak about their appreciation for their selected artworks and the meanings behind their self-portraits. A special surprise was artist Barry Moser attending the exhibition to view a student's self-portrait inspired by his work. As facilitators of the program, we couldn't be happier that what we shared with these students generated such introspection and positivity. Our experience working with the wonderful staff and students of the Springfield Renaissance School strengthened our belief in creating meaningful and lasting museum-school partnerships.

MHCAM interns Relyn Myrthil '19 (far left) and Amy Chen '17 (far right) pose with Springfield Renaissance students in front of Jane Hammond's *All Souls (Masindi)* during the exhibition opening on May 13, 2017. Photo: Ellen Alvord



Beginning the program in the midst of the frosty New England winter, we first broke the ice by leading students in a series of “impossible” drawing exercises. The students were challenged to complete a graphite drawing of a figure in less than one minute. The purpose of the activity was to create a safe space to push beyond their comfort zones and to break free of any preconceptions about making art. As expected, giggles were heard around the Carson Teaching Gallery as students held up their unidentifiable but fascinating line drawings.



## NEW ACQUISITION

MHCAM is pleased to announce the acquisition of a new sculpture by contemporary artist Michelle Grabner. Grabner's sculpture and painting often draw upon everyday textiles to explore themes of patterning, symmetry, abstraction, and motherhood. This sculpture, a baby blanket cast in bronze, was made using a process that destroys the original delicate fabric. By rendering the hand-knit or crocheted blanket in bronze—a traditional medium often reserved for heroic or memorial sculpture—Grabner gives meaningful permanence to this everyday domestic object.

Michelle Grabner (American, b. 1962)

*Untitled*, 2016

Bronze

Purchase with funds from Susan Abert Noonan (Class of 1982) in honor of her sister, Janice E. Abert (Class of 1982) for all she does for MHC.

2017.13

© Michelle Grabner. Courtesy James Cohan, New York.

Photo: Max Yawney

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Be sure to check out recent features on [mhcameo](#), the Museum's blog:

- ◆ Multimedia: Didn't catch photographer Pete Muller and Dean of Faculty Jon Western's conversation, "A Tale of Two Wolves" last spring? Watch the video and learn more about Muller's documentary photography in an introduction by Professor Kavita Khory.
- ◆ Teaching with Art: In, "Methoughts the Shilling: Teaching History with Money" Assistant Professor Desmond Fitz-Gibbon describes some of the intriguing stories told

by coins and other money-related objects in the Museum's collection.

- ◆ Objects of Our Affection: Associate Curator of Education Kendra Weisbin explores a newly acquired Turkmen weaving, and her love of Islamic carpets.
  - ◆ Skinner Weird: Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture Aaron Miller shares ten unusual objects from the Skinner Museum.
- ... and much more!

To learn more about MHCAM exhibitions, events, and membership visit [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.

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