GALLERY GUIDE
ART AFTER 1900

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MOUNT HOLYOKE
COLLEGE ART MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION

This gallery brings together art and material culture from 1900 to the present. Styles and subjects converge and diverge across a wide range of media, with particular strength in American art. Significant artistic developments such as photography, surrealism, and abstraction reflect the changing viewpoints of a modern society shaped by late 19th- and early 20th-century industrialization and technology. More recent works here shift between abstraction and figuration in painting, photography, sculpture, textiles, collage, and video.

This guide offers three themes drawn from the works on display, making connections across time and place. For each theme, we illustrate objects to aid your exploration, perhaps providing moments of reflection or surprise.

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Kaneshige Tōyō, *kōro (incense burner)*, Bizen, Japan, ca. 1955 (1979.14.1)

THE SONIC

How do some artists connect their art to sound?

This gallery features art that primarily speaks to the visual, yet sound, like sight, can also help us experience works of art. Some works ask us to imagine hearing a voice sustained in song or perhaps the noise of clanging machinery.

Despite first appearances, this Mende *sowo wui* dance mask **(1)** is not a silent, motionless work of art. Carved faces like this one are worn during masked performances by important members of the Sande society, a women's social and political organization of the Mende people in Sierra Leone. While the performer makes no vocal noise—the mouth of the mask is closed—she is always moving, responding to sounds and calls from the crowd. Such public displays are usually accompanied by musical instruments like bells, *segbureh* rattles, and *sangbei* and *kelei* drums.

In contrast, *Untitled (Open Measure)* **(2)** is intended for static display on a wall. Through this work, artist Jennie C. Jones challenges our perception of sound and silence. Look closely and you'll see two acoustic panels that the artist has stacked on the canvas. These panels, commonly used in recording studios and auditoriums, actively absorb the sounds surrounding the work. *Untitled (Open Measure)* asks us to question the presence (or relative absence) of sound here in this gallery—for example, the unspoken social rules that dictate volume levels and types of noise. It draws attention to art's ability to amplify, echo, or overpower voices and stories within a space.

1

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TRACING TIME AND PLACE

Where do past, present, and future converge in contemporary art?

Artists compel us to consider time by making it visible, collapsing it, or connecting it to land and memory. The notion of time is also flexible, encompassing anything from an individual's daily routine to collective human history. Peruvian artist Ishmael Randall Weeks creates *códigos atemporales* (timeless codes) **(3)** to encapsulate in one small work the vast chronological expanse of humanity. Rectangular cuts into the surface reveal staggered layers, each made of a substance he collects on daily walks around Lima, Peru. These cuts resemble aerial views of archaeological sites, mines, and quarries—all human attempts to unearth clues about the past.

While Randall Weeks literally mines the land, Aboriginal artist Emily Pwerle paints it. She draws from the Indigenous Australian concept of Country, which comprises land, water, sky, law, and living things. Time, like Country, is an expansive concept for which non-Indigenous understandings are insufficient. In this artwork **(4)**, layers of U-shapes and stripes evoke the ceremonial body paint worn by Alyawarre and Anmatyerre women in the Central Desert of Australia. During the *awelye* ceremony, women sing ancestral stories passed down from generation to generation. In general, these stories take place during a past and present that constantly evolve together, linked by memory, land, and kinship.

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CARE AND COMMUNITY

How are acts of care and nurturing expressed through art?

A number of the works in this gallery were created with care and community in mind. Caregiving in all forms takes time, energy, and resources—in this way, care and labor can go hand in hand. Cochiti Pueblo artist Helen Cordero's *Singing Mother* **(5)** holds a child in her arms, her eyes closed and her mouth open in song. She is providing the child with a moment of rest and love: an act of caregiving. Simultaneously, she passes down Cochiti stories and songs, strengthening and continuing her community's traditions.

Art can also address the ongoing need for care and healing within a community. American artist Nick Cave's *Unarmed* **(6)** is a bronze sculpture cast from his own forearm surrounded by beaded flowers. Pointing to the sky, his fingers appear to mimic a hand holding a gun, as conveyed by the title of the work. This gesture recalls the phrase "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," a key slogan in the Black Lives Matter movement. By placing a wreath of flowers that shields the arm, but does not hide it, he creates a memorial space for healing to begin. Both artists pass care to future generations; as Cordero's *Singing Mother* holds her child, Cave cradles the arm with flowers, memorializing both collective loss and community activism.

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WORLD MAP

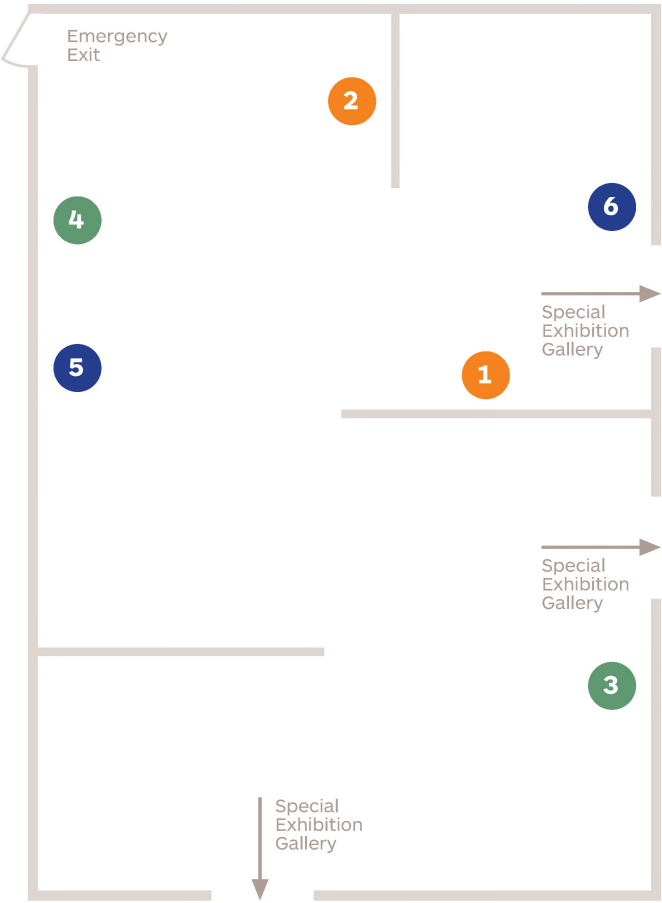
WORLD MAP

This map features several of the objects in this guide and can help orient you to where they were made. However, many works from this period are not tied to fixed locations. For example, some artists and makers may be members of diasporic communities as first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants, while others may travel, making their work abroad. Artworks are often shaped by identities and ideas of home as well as their places of creation.

IMAGE CAPTIONS

1. *Sowo wui dance mask*, Sierra Leone, early 20th century (2013.2)
2. Jennie C. Jones, *Untitled (Open Measure)*, United States, 2021 (2022.10.1) © Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York; © Jennie C. Jones
3. Ishmael Randall Weeks, *Código atemporal #88,* Lima, Peru, 2022 (2022.12.1) © Courtesy of the artist and Arróniz, Mexico City
4. Emily Pwerle, *Awelye Atnwengerrp,* Utopia, Australia, 2009 (2025.5.2)
5. Helen Cordero, *Singing Mother*, Cochiti Pueblo, ca. 1970 (2019.31.36)
6. Nick Cave, *Unarmed,* United States, 2022 (2023.15) © Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

GALLERY MAP



Morton Livingston Schamberg, *Abstraction*, United States, ca. 1909 (2010.7)