mhcam

JOURNAL
2021–2022

Exhibitions

Faculty Acquisitions
Through May 29, 2022
This exhibition features works selected by Mount Holyoke professors who participated in an innovative museum acquisitions seminar during the 2019–2020 academic year. The artworks range from photography and new media to mixed media, sculpture, and print. Together they enhance the Museum's teaching mission in their engagement with issues related to gender, race, colonialism, and migration.

Skinner Museum 75
September 28, 2021–June 2023
This exhibition series celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum bequest to the College in 1946. Comprising back-to-back solo exhibitions of the work of Lenka Clayton and vanessa german, *Skinner Museum 75* reanimates and reorients collection objects and their stories through these artists' unique creative practices.

This year MHCAM is pleased to present *Lenka Clayton—Comedy Plus Tragedy.* Featured next year is the work of activist artist vanessa german in her exhibition, titled *THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH.*

Lenka Clayton—Comedy Plus Tragedy
September 28, 2021–May 29, 2022
British-American conceptual artist Lenka Clayton (b. 1977) draws attention to the exceptional eccentricities of the Skinner Museum's distinctive collection. She has found both comedy and tragedy in the varied and unusual objects, unearthing witty and stark truths. Through her selection and reinterpretation, Clayton guides viewers to unexpected places.

Random Sampling—Photographs by Rosamond W. Purcell
September 28, 2021–December 12, 2021
Rosamond W. Purcell (b. 1942) has spent a lifetime creating photographs, sculpture, and texts about collectors and collections. This exhibition presents photographs from Purcell's multiyear exploration of the diverse collections accumulated by Joseph Allen Skinner. Purcell's work reveals new discoveries and finds beauty in the overlooked.

Jane Hammond: Digital and Analog
January 25, 2022–May 29, 2022
MHCAM is proud to present work drawn from the Museum's collection by artist and alum Jane Hammond, on the occasion of her 50th class reunion. Hammond's unique approach of remixing digital and analog mediums and technologies is on display in a selection of her photography, prints, and collage.

MHCAM Journal, Issue 8, 2021–22
Photographer: Laura Shea, unless otherwise noted
Designer: Allison Bell
Editor: Kendra D. Weisbin

Cover: Lenka Clayton (British, b. 1977), *Sculpture for Keyboards (Rocks and Minerals II),* 2021, vintage Royal typewriter, typed sheet of paper, rocks and minerals, Purchase with the Henry Rox Memorial Fund for the Acquisition of Works by Contemporary Women Artists, 2021.14

Above: Mavis Iona Pusey (American, b. Jamaica, 1928–2019), *Paris: Mai-June,* 1968, screenprint, Purchase with the Eleanor H. Bunce (Class of 1926) Art Acquisition Fund, 2020.9

How to Rise and Renew

Confucius once said, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." The past two years have certainly been remarkable and historic. There were the challenging and difficult moments, the shocking realization when the entire world was felled by Covid-19, something detectable only under a microscope but powerful enough to spawn a global pandemic. There were also the moments when society bared its unjust ills so rawly, with the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, and too many others to name.

There have also been redeeming moments when humanity rose to the occasion, when medical and essential workers did what needed to be done, saving lives. Protests erupted around the world, staking claim for social justice. As an important consequence, museums are responding to this time, rising up and striving to be better at what we do, not only for our public but for staff as well. As Lonnie Bunch, revered secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, stated on July 2, 2020 in *The New York Times:*

> *I believe very strongly that museums have a social justice role to play, . . . to help the community grapple with the challenges they face, to use history, to use science, to use education, to give the public tools to grapple with this. . . . What I'm expecting museums to be is driven by scholarship and the community. I want museums to be a place that gives the public not just what it wants, but what it needs.*

Prior to March 2020, we at MHCAM were already reevaluating how we present our collections and exhibitions, reinstalling our galleries and acquiring new work in order to decenter traditional Eurocentric narratives and raise the voices of marginalized cultures and communities. Now, we are focused with more urgency. We will experiment and take risks—as one can do more freely at an academic museum. In the process, we will undoubtedly make some mistakes but we will learn and continue to rise.

Our central goal is to assess and offer what our communities need—those both within and outside the MHC gates. In part, this means better representing these communities in our galleries. For example, our Front Gallery features a small exhibition devoted to new acquisitions selected by MHC faculty, works by BIPOC artists that can be used in our dynamic Teaching with Art program. In addition, we are pleased to unveil a new acquisition by Shinnecock artist Courtney Leonard, featured in our evolving American gallery.

We are also celebrating what is distinctive about Mount Holyoke College. Last year we had planned to host special exhibitions honoring the 75th anniversary of the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum bequest to the College. Instead, we will commemorate this unique collection of material culture over the next two academic years with three exhibitions featuring contemporary artists and their investigations of the Skinner Museum. This year our galleries welcome *Lenka Clayton—Comedy and Tragedy and Random Sampling: Photographs by Rosamond W. Purcell.* Next year we will feature activist artist vanessa german and her exhibition, titled *THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH.*

Of course, we would be nothing without our students and alums, who are indeed our *raison d'être.* Two Art Museum Advisory Board members who were once involved with the Skinner Museum, Beth Chernichowski '73 and Rebecca Keim '76, share their recollections in this issue of the *MHCAM Journal.* And this spring we honor esteemed artist Jane Hammond '72 with a solo exhibition to coincide with her 50th class reunion.

This year we at MHCAM are ready for much needed regeneration and renewal to support our students, faculty, and valued communities. We are back in whatever form the moment will require!

Tricia Y. Paik
Florence Finch Abbott Director

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A History of the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum: Celebrating 75 Years at Mount Holyoke College

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

Irving Ramsey Wiles (American, 1861–1948) *Joseph Allen Skinner,* ca. 1930 Oil on canvas Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College SK C.5 (Detail)

How does someone write the history of a place that is so enigmatic? Who was Joseph Allen Skinner? Where and how did he accumulate such an incredible and varied collection? Why did he acquire the things that he did? Why were they arranged so? Because there is little documentary record of his decisions, it is left up to the visitor to attempt to answer some of these questions for themselves. This challenge is in part what makes so many of us love this idiosyncratic treasure of a Museum.

Joseph Allen Skinner was born in Williamsburg, MA in 1862 to Sara Elizabeth née Allen (1834–1908) and William Skinner (1824–1902). Born into a life and family of means, his father owned the Unquomonk Silk Mill (est. 1857) where they dyed and processed imported East Asian silks. A pivotal moment in young Joseph's life, and indeed for many in the region, was the Mill River Dam Disaster of 1874. An improperly maintained dam burst, sending a wall of water more than 20 feet high and hundreds of feet wide hurtling down the river valley. More than 139 people perished and homes and businesses—including the Skinner family mill—were wiped away. However, with the loss also came opportunity for Skinner's father. In that same year, William Skinner was invited by the town of Holyoke, MA to build a large new mill along the engineered mill races of this newly developing industrial center. That move, and the resulting subsequent growth and success of the Skinner Silk name propelled the family and their fortunes skyward.

Prescott Meeting House reassembled as Skinner Museum, ca. 1930 Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College SK 2006.2543.5.INV

Right around this time, there is the first evidence of Joseph Skinner becoming interested in collecting. So many of us collect as children. There seems to be something innate in the human experience that creates a desire to accumulate, categorize, and display—Skinner's first collection of rocks and minerals is something relatable to many of us. Skinner went on to receive a degree from Yale in 1883 and joined the family business. A few years later, Joseph took a Grand Tour of Europe where he visited historic sites and museums. It may have been during this time that the seed of an

idea for his own museum took root. Through the following decades, Skinner traveled for work and pleasure and acquired objects for his home—and perhaps with other designs in mind as well. We must work backwards from the objects in the Skinner Museum to try to piece together the progression of the collection's growth. Samurai swords and other objects from Japan might reflect a 1913 trip. The dugout canoe and hippopotamus skull were likely acquired on later cruises in Africa, South America, and the South Pacific.

In the late 1920s, with the construction of the nearby Quabbin Reservoir, Skinner seized the moment to create his museum. To make way for the reservoir project, hundreds of buildings were dismantled from the communities that were to be inundated. Skinner acquired the Prescott Congregational church and carriage house and relocated them in South Hadley to house his collection. In 1932, the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum opened to the public. From the few extant records and photographs, the Museum changed rapidly in the subsequent years. Skinner must have already had many objects, but with the establishment of the Museum, his collecting went into overdrive. Skinner acquired items not only from his travels but at auctions and from dealers across New England and perhaps the globe. Additionally, many other artifacts were gifted to him by friends, family, and locals with an interest in preserving history. The original display of objects within the Museum is largely preserved intact with more than 7,000 objects from every inhabited continent and representing thousands of years of human history. Little is known about Skinner's intentions behind the unique layout. It is left to today's visitor to work through this fascinating and complicated artifact.

The Skinner name is heard frequently around Mount Holyoke's campus but often without any context. Skinner received an honorary doctorate for his service on the College's Board of Trustees (1905–1931), spending many of those years as its president. The College President's house was built thanks in part to Skinner's generosity. Skinner Hall was a gift of Joseph and his brother William and today, students in Art History, Chemistry, History, and Physics receive fellowships in his name. The Mount Holyoke range and 237 surrounding acres (now Joseph Allen Skinner State Park) were gifted to the Commonwealth. Perhaps above all in personal significance was the bequest of his beloved Museum to the College in 1946.

Not a lot is known about the happenings at the Museum in the decades after 1946. The institution was periodically open and maintained, but many alums from the 1950s to the 1990s weren't aware of the Museum's existence at all—suggesting it went largely dark for decades. One notable exception was the period from 1976 to 1983 when Beth Chernichowski '73 served as the Director of the Skinner Museum with a very successful tenure engaging many MHC disciplines in teaching with material culture (see pp. 17–18). With the loss of external funds, the moment unfortunately passed. However, In the early 2000s, with the long deserved attention of the Art Museum and its newfound Teaching With Art initiative, the Skinner Museum once again began to serve as a teaching tool and resource for the campus and community.

Interior view of Skinner Museum, ca. 1932

Skinner Museum 75: Lenka Clayton—Comedy Plus Tragedy
September 28, 2021–May 29, 2022

Tricia Y. Paik, Florence Finch Abbott Director
Aaron F. Miller, Associate Curator of Visual and Material Culture, NAGPRA Coordinator

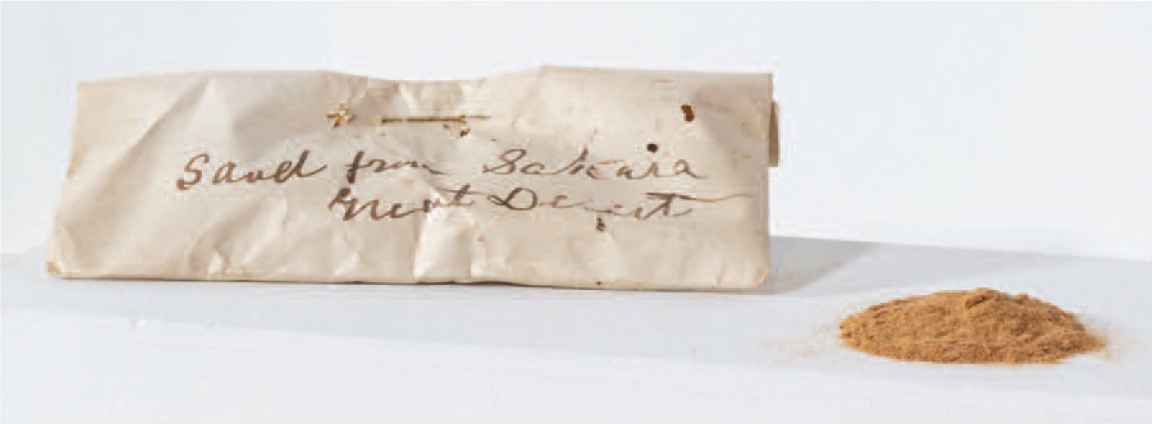
For our 75th anniversary celebration of the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum bequest to MHC, British-American artist Lenka Clayton (b. 1977) draws our attention to the exceptional eccentricities of this distinctive collection. The told and untold stories of objects have always fascinated Clayton, so it is no surprise that she has turned her incisive lens onto the archives and collections of museums including the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Philadelphia, and the Allen Steinheim Museum, Alfred University, New York.

In 2018, MHCAM invited Clayton to probe the collection of the Skinner Museum. During on-site visits before the pandemic, she selected specific objects acquired by the passionate collector Joseph Allen Skinner. In her exhibition *Comedy Plus Tragedy,* the artist has reactivated such objects for a 21st-century audience. Through her insightful reinterpretation—including new titles, shifts in context, and material juxtapositions—Clayton renders each object anew, most likely in ways that Skinner never intended.

The central focus of her exhibition is *Remainder,* a commanding installation featuring 21 vessels of graduating size, from miniature to large. Clayton chose these objects from hundreds of receptacles at the Skinner Museum in order to represent a range of cultures, materials, forms, functions, and periods of manufacture. All but the largest vessel is encircled by halos of black sand, vestiges of a repeated action that reanimated these objects.

The arrangement of *Remainder* was created by pouring sand from the largest vessel into the adjacent smaller one, an action repeated twenty times. The physical traces of such actions are sand haloes that encircle the base of each vessel, the literal remainder of that which could not be con-

Installation view of *Remainder,* 2021
Ceramic, copper, glass, pewter, and wood with sand
Objects from the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College



Installation view of *Envelope Containing 0.00000000000000015 957% of the Sahara Desert,* 2021
Envelope with sand
Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College

tained. The progression of spilled sand marks the passage of motion and time, highlighting the fact that when such functional objects became collected objects of display, they were stripped of their original purpose and cultural context. Clayton has temporarily renewed them as receptacles once more.

The inspiration for *Remainder* was Clayton's discovery of a seemingly mundane object, a small envelope usually displayed in one of the many glass vitrines in the Skinner Museum. Clayton was impressed by the unlikely and surprising contents of this envelope, identified by the old-fashioned cursive in aged brown ink, "Sand from Sahara Great Desert." Just as people pick up shells and pebbles at the beach, someone years ago decided to collect sand as a souvenir of the Sahara Desert, which spans 3,600,000 square miles across Africa. Through approximate calculations and by retitling this object *Envelope Containing 0.00000000000000015957% of the Sahara Desert,* Clayton has laid bare the comedic impossibility of trying to contain something as infinite as the vast Sahara.

Time and again, Clayton uncovers hidden truths about humanity and everyday life. In the installation titled *Four Invisible Objects: Flag too Big to be Seen, Exploded Cannonball, 134-Year-Old Wedding Cake Eaten by Mice, Stolen Diamonds,* the artist has brought together objects from the Skinner Museum that for various reasons can no longer be displayed. An enormous American flag from the 19th century is too fragile to unfurl while a piece of Joseph Skinner's 1887 wedding cake, which survived intact in a small white box for 134 years, was finally devoured by rodents during the pandemic. In May 2018, collection risk assessment led the South Hadley Fire Department to call the local bomb squad to explode a cannonball that had survived the horrific fields of Gettysburg. What remains is a handful of lead shot from this 21st-century detonation. Lastly, by displaying old object labels typed by either Skinner himself or his staff, Clayton has exposed the story of unknown thieves who pilfered precious gems from the Skinner Museum decades ago. Through *Four Invisible Objects,* Clayton remembers what has been forgotten and

Installation view of *Four Invisible Objects: Flag Too Big to be Seen, Exploded Cannonball, 134-Year-Old Wedding Cake Eaten by Mice, Stolen Diamonds,* 2021
Cardboard, ribbon, and wax paper, linen, wood with paint, ink on paper
Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College

Installation view of *Meteorite at its Highest Height in 50,000 Years,* 2021
Iron nickel
Joseph Allen Skinner Museum, Mount Holyoke College

shows us that we do not need to behold in order to contemplate—we can still have meaningful experiences with the invisible and unknown.

Another distinctive object that arrested Clayton's poetic imagination is a meteorite often overlooked in its crowded vitrine at the Skinner Museum. Instead, this celestial object is given its own space and installed to the artist's specifications. Approximately fifty millennia ago the meteorite comprising nickel and iron exploded into the atmosphere above what is now Canyon Diablo, New Mexico. This asteroid's monumental voyage across millions of miles ended on Earth, to be collected by Joseph Allen Skinner countless millennia later. Now for her exhibition, Clayton has returned this meteor fragment into the air once again, with a new title, *Meteorite at its Highest Height in 50,000 Years.*

When Clayton visited the Skinner Museum in December 2019, she was also drawn to the minerals, rocks, and gems on generous display. The artist made two new sculptures in response. The second in this series, *Sculpture for Keyboards (Rocks and Minerals) II* (see cover), features a vintage Royal typewriter to which she added 26 rocks and minerals, matching each stone by its name to every letter key. For example, a squarish piece of hematite rests on the "H" key, striped jasper on the "J" key, and semi-translucent kyanite on the "K." Through the addition of each rock or mineral, Clayton layers in both wit and loss by making this keyboard unusable. Sourcing her own typewriter for this sculpture, the artist also alludes to her almost decade-long practice of making drawings exquisitely rendered through only a typewriter and its ink. In 2021, MHCAM acquired this sculpture as well as a selection of six typewriter drawings by Clayton.

Artists are truth-tellers. Through their vision, they help us see the world anew. Clayton has found both comedy and tragedy through the varied and unusual objects that reveal the idiosyncratic and fascinating collection of the Joseph Allen Skinner Museum. Unearthing witty and stark truths through her selection and reinterpretation, Lenka Clayton guides us to unexpected places.

Random Sampling: Photographs by Rosamond W. Purcell
September 28, 2021–December 12, 2021

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

Rosamond W. Purcell (b. 1942) has a long and significant relationship with the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and *Random Sampling* marks her fourth solo show with us. Purcell has spent a lifetime creating photographs, sculpture, and texts about collectors and collections. Throughout her career, Purcell has gravitated toward projects that focus on natural history and collections that require a deep dive. This exhibition presents photographs from Purcell's multiyear exploration of the diverse collections accumulated by Joseph Allen Skinner in the late 19th and early 20th century. While documentary, the work is not meant to be representative of everything that makes up the Museum, it is instead a reflection on the objects and spaces that drew the artist's eye.

Purcell's first visit to the Skinner Museum came in July of 2013. Wendy Watson, the Art Museum's curator of 40 years (now curator emerita), was interested in having Purcell look at the taxidermy passenger pigeons from the Skinner collection. Purcell has an avid interest in taxidermy and at one time the Museum had an extensive assemblage of taxidermied birds of North America. As

Rosamond W. Purcell
(American, b. 1942)
Egg collection with no annotation, 2013 capture/2021 print
Aqueous inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Museum Etching paper
© Rosamond W. Purcell

Rosamond W. Purcell
(American, b. 1942)
Key Deer fawn (Odocoileus virginianus clavium), 2013 capture/ 2021 print
Aqueous inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Museum Etching paper
© Rosamond W. Purcell

the recently-hired assistant curator for the Skinner Museum, I was given the opportunity to show Purcell the collection.

In many ways, I have had the unique opportunity to rediscover the Skinner Museum countless times over the years, seeing it anew through every visitor's eyes. Sometimes these first moments are filled with awe and wonder and sometimes people are overwhelmed or even disturbed by aspects of the collection. Everyone experiences it in different ways and that can open up fascinating and necessary conversations about the wonderful and problematic sides of this Museum and its creator. It has been one of the highlights of my career to relearn and resee this Museum through Purcell's visits and photographs.

In the beginning, Purcell's visits to the Skinner Museum were casual and did not have a specific end goal, though conversations often led to thinking about future publications or exhibitions. As Museum conversations coalesced around a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Skinner bequest, including a selection of Purcell's photographs was an obvious key element. Plans were put into place to invite Purcell back to Skinner for a multi-day focused photographic exploration of the space. As with so many plans in 2020, that visit was not meant to be. Fortunately, Purcell's years of visits to the Skinner Museum had created an exceptional archive of images from which to choose. *Random Sampling* is just that, the fruits of Purcell's photographic journey of discovery through the Skinner Museum. Everyone's experience at the Skinner Museum is a different one. There are so many objects on view that one cannot take it all in on the first visit, let alone third, or even tenth. Purcell's eye leads us on her personal voyage of discovery, making the seemingly unimportant important, finding beauty in the often overlooked, and drawing us into the magical moments of light and reflection that can only play out in a place like the Skinner Museum.

Jane Hammond: Digital and Analog
January 25, 2022–May 29, 2022

Tricia Y. Paik, Florence Finch Abbott Director

Artist Jane Hammond '72 has been mesmerizing art audiences since she emerged on the New York art scene in the late 1980s. Through painting, mixed media, photography, prints, and other works on paper, Hammond brings together disparate inspirations to create multilayered works of visual and conceptual complexity. Her work has been collected by leading museums across the country, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

To coincide with Hammond's 50th class reunion, MHCAM is proud to present a selection of the artist's work, all drawn from the Museum's collection. While at Mount Holyoke College, Hammond majored in studio art while also studying poetry and biology, interests that she has continued to integrate into her art. For example, in *Scrapbook* (2003), Hammond has gathered some of her favorite subjects such as butterflies and leaves. Here she recreated the semblance of an actual scrapbook, rendering it in three-dimensions using digitally scanned images and the pigmented inkjet print process. In contrast to her ongoing use of digital technology, Hammond also hand-colored a number of the vibrant images featured here.

Hammond's unique amalgam of the digital and analog generates much of the intellectual depth and visual texture in her work. For *Results of a Search (Cameo),* Hammond turned to the internet and conducted searches on a mathematical theme, resulting in a plethora of mathematical shapes as well as random images. After methodically rendering each by hand, she collaged them onto her own three-dimensional armature. As in all her work, the viewer's eye can never rest as it is compelled to move from one intricate image to the next.

The aesthetics of collage are central to Hammond's work, seen in the way she is always adding, merging, and combining her diverse subject matter. To characterize this approach, Hammond has described her work as "recombinant DNA, in its polyglot nature, its lexicon, and combination of elements in different ways." Early in her career, she established a fixed vocabulary of 276 images from diverse sources such as magazines, maps, board games, science manuals, and the internet. Having since expanded this earlier fixed lexicon, Hammond continues to draw from new imagery.

For Hammond, technique and meaning are fluid and multiple through the shifting juxtapositions of her uncommon visual language. As Hammond explained in 2006 (in the catalogue that accompanied MHCAM's major traveling show titled *Jane Hammond: Paper Work),* "I see this lexicon of mine—the language it makes and the way it creates meaning—as a living thing capable of infinite variation." We are honored to celebrate Hammond's distinctive contributions to the art world as well as to Mount Holyoke, through this focused exhibition timed to her 50th reunion.

Jane Hammond
(American, b. 1950)
Results of a Search (Cameo), 2015
Sumi ink on gampi paper with Japanese silver leaf, rag paper, acrylic paint, plastic tubing and aluminum wire on museum board
Purchase with the Art Acquisition Fund
2017.19

Faculty Acquisitions: A Collection Grows During the Pandemic Through May 29, 2022

Ellen M. Alvord, Associate Director for Engagement and Weatherbie Curator of Academic Programs
Stephanie Sparling Williams, Associate Curator

Hector Dionicio Mendoza (American, b. México, 1969)
Mariposa/Butterfly, 2017
Cast paper, acrylic paint, spray paint, ethnic bread, synthetic hair, aluminum tape, plastic, acrylic sealer, rubber cement, leather, wood and metal
Purchase with the Anne and Fredric Garonzik Acquisition Fund
2020.5.1

On display in the Front Gallery this year is a selection of bold and conceptually rich work chosen by Mount Holyoke College faculty. The installation celebrates an exciting recent initiative in which professors were invited to play a central role in the process of acquiring new artworks. This project is part of an ongoing effort to diversify the Museum's holdings by artists from all backgrounds. During the 2019–2020 academic year, eight dynamic faculty members met monthly with Museum staff as part of a formal acquisitions seminar. The professors were already frequent museum collaborators and admired thought-leaders who have been advancing Mount Holyoke's curriculum around issues of gender, race, colonialism, and migration.

During the initial meetings, faculty learned about the nuts and bolts of the museum acquisition process as well as the physical requirements (and limitations) of the Museum's galleries and storage spaces. As the seminar progressed, faculty shared specific works of art and visual media that supported both their teaching and individual scholarship. Each member brought new artists to the attention of the other seminar participants. The discussions were lively and interdisciplinary, reflecting the range of disciplines represented in the group, which included Art History, Africana Studies, Critical Social Thought, Economics, English, Gender Studies, Latino/a Studies, and Sociology.

Shifting to the Zoom format in May 2020, each professor presented a formal acquisition proposal for one work of art, with the goal of having the group collectively decide which works to acquire within a predetermined budget set aside from the Museum's endowed acquisition funds. The stellar proposals were intellectually rigorous and compelling. Faculty thoughtfully selected works by their chosen artists, working collectively to stay within the prescribed budget and support the widest range of pedagogical goals. These exciting new artworks have been acquired and are already expanding the possibilities of the Teaching with Art program.

The nine pieces range from photography and new media to mixed media, sculpture, and print. Two mixed-media wall sculptures by Latinx artist Hector Dionicio Mendoza—the monumental

Faculty seminar participants (left to right): Anthony Lee, David Hernández, Kimberly Juanita Brown, Vanessa Rosa, Iyko Day, Lucas Wilson, and Patricia Banks (Ren-yo Hwang not pictured)

Mariposa and more intimate *Immigrant Shoes* (2010)—reflect a confluence of merging cultures and identities and the complexity of the U.S. Mexico border, while also expanding the Museum's holdings of artworks by artists of Latin American descent. Mendoza's work was proposed by David Hernández and Vanessa Rosa.

Blur 1 (2) (2016/17), the haunting photographic work of Canadian artist Sandra Brewster was selected by Kimberly Juanita Brown, and Patricia Banks recommended *Paris: Mai-Juin* (1968), an abstract print by African American artist Mavis Pusey, representative of her time in Paris, France. Together, these stunning works on paper amplify the growing collection of art by diverse black women-identified artists working across the globe.

Additionally, Iyko Day, Ren-yo Hwang, and Anthony Lee proposed art that expands representation of contemporary Asian and Asian American artists. *Lake Moraine, Northwest Territories, Canada* (1986) by the acclaimed photographer Tseng Kwong Chi, *Untitled* (Pakistan/China) (2017–19), a 2-channel video installation by Wei Leng Tay, and two exquisite wall sculptures, *Diagrams X and IX* (2021) by Jes Fan, which have already been requested for use in classes.

Finally, Lucas Wilson brought the work of the interdisciplinary artist collective Postcommodity to the collection. *It's My Second Home, But I Have a Very Spiritual Connection With This Place* (2010) is an immersive 2-channel video installation that explores the flows of land, people, and commerce. Each of the participating faculty selections directly aligns with the Museum's teaching mission and brings depth and richness to the overall collection. Visitors to the Museum will be able to see a rotating selection of these works on view through May 29, 2022.

"The art acquisitions seminar was a wonderful and impactful learning experience. On one hand, we learned how the Museum acquires, curates, and stores art. That was eye-opening and gave me a new appreciation for this valuable resource at the College. On the other hand, I learned so much from my colleagues—many of them renowned experts in visual culture. That the seminar was structured so I could contribute from my own unique background was gratifying. Collectively, we were introduced to a world of teaching opportunities—many of which are on the Museum's walls right now."

—David Hernández, Associate Professor of Latina/o Studies

Lessons Learned from a Year of Virtual Teaching

Ellen M. Alvord, Associate Director for Engagement and Weatherbie Curator of Academic Programs
Kendra D. Weisbin, Associate Curator of Engagement and Interpretation

When the College was forced to abruptly transition to remote learning in March of 2020 due to the pandemic, it was difficult to imagine how we could continue our active Teaching with Art program without direct access to physical objects. But with a shared sense of purpose and passionate belief in the power of art to help us meet the moment, Museum staff quickly pivoted to provide virtual engagement in many forms. Partnering with faculty, we were able to create collaborative and immersive experiences with art and material culture for a wide range of courses. As we prepare to welcome students back to the physical Museum in fall 2021, we look back to the lessons learned from a year and a half of unprecedented teaching moments.

New uses of technology

As it did across the world, the pandemic forced us to embrace new technologies and, in some cases, use older technologies in new ways. The first significant transition involved using Zoom as our new conduit for almost all synchronous interactions. This meant taking advantage of the Museum's impressive archive of hi-res images created and managed by digital collections coordinator and museum photographer, Laura Shea. In addition to 2D images of 63% of the collection, Laura has created photogrammetry or 3D images of a small group of museum objects. Described in Laura Shea's words, "Photogrammetry is the process of taking multiple overlapping photographs and using specialized software that formulates precise measurements to create a three-dimensional digital model." When Assistant Professor Lan Wu virtually visited the Museum with her history course, "Modern East Asia, 1600–2000," this technology allowed her students to view objects even closer than they could in person, zooming in on miniscule details on the surface and turning objects in all directions to view their interiors, undersides, and more.

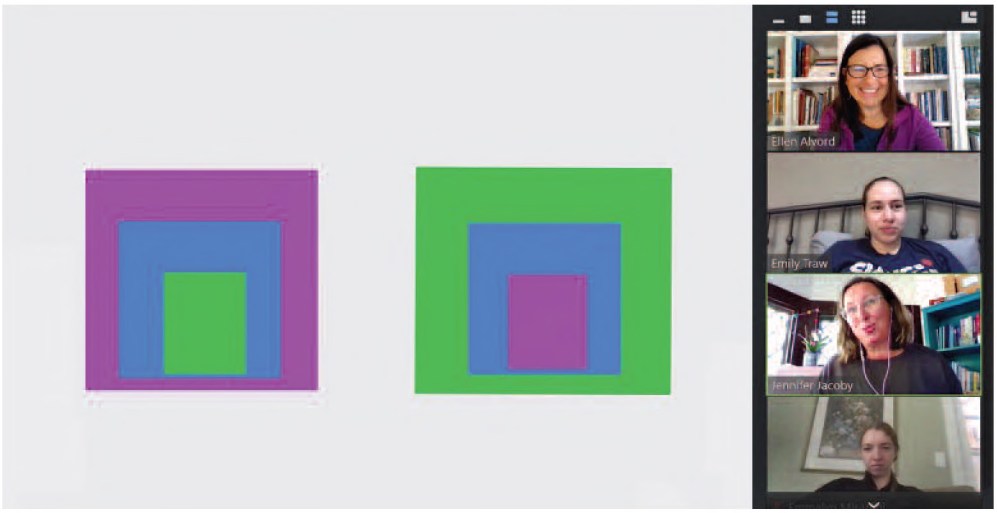
Other digital platforms offered for free on the internet enabled us to engage students in creative, experimental exercises. For instance, for Jennifer Jacoby's first-year seminar "Childhood" we teamed up with the Fimbel Maker and Innovation Lab to design a two-part visit examining the influence of Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), a German educator who invented kindergarten and whose work influenced Bauhaus artists in their exploration of fundamental forms and colors. After learning about Bauhaus artists in the Museum's collection, students had an opportunity to work in small groups over Zoom to design their own Froebel-inspired drawings using a free online program called Autodraw: Fast Drawing for Everyone. Together we created a Google slide presentation combining the students' digital drawings with the Museum artworks that inspired them.

Slowing down

Despite the bells and whistles of digital technology, one thing quickly became clear in our whirlwind adaptation to virtual teaching—we had to slow down in the new zoom format and spend more time on fewer images. Across courses from different disciplines we honed our object lists, encouraging faculty to do a deeper dive with a smaller number of images. In some cases, this meant spending an entire class session on a single artwork. This was the case with Assistant Professor Meredith Coleman-Tobias's "Introduction to African Diaspora Religions." During the course's unit on vèvès and Hatiain religious practice, we were able to devote a full seventy-five minute class session to Willie Cole's *The Ogun Sisters* (2012), which features several religious visual elements previously explored in Coleman-Tobias's readings and class conversations.

Similarly, working with a group of creative writing students taught by Visiting Lecturer Samuel Ace, we spent our museum session devoted to the

exploration of a single artwork, Romare Bearden's *Courtyard* (1971). Slowly and from different angles, we analyzed each visual component of the collage, asking questions such as: how did the artist organize the space? What were the patterns, repetitions, and shapes? Was there a central focus? Together we thought about color, rhythm, energy, and even sound. This exercise prepared students to make an extended observation of a work of their own choosing from the virtual museum, which they then used as inspiration for a writing assignment.



Students in Jennifer Jacoby's first-year seminar use an online tool to explore form and color inspired by Bauhaus artists in the MHCAM collection.

New Modes of Interaction

Small group work has long been a mainstay of the Teaching with Art program at MHCAM. Zoom allowed us to experiment with this format in new ways. For instance, in "Arts of Japan," taught by Ajay Sinha, Julie '73 and Helene '49 Herzig Professor of Art History, we hoped to devote a class to Kiyohara Yukinobu's six-fold screens with Taoist Immortals. However, the course had over 30 students in it—a challenge whether teaching remotely or in-person. After viewing hi-res images of the screens as a large group for around ten minutes and eliciting first impressions from students, we divided them into small breakout rooms with super hi-res details and a series of prompts to consider. When we brought the students back together, their detailed insights were remarkable. In particular, they were able to make observations about brushwork that may not have been possible in person, and then connected those observations to ongoing course conversations about principles of Zen.

With Jerrine Tan's "Global Anglophone Literature" class, the remote format enabled us to try two new forms of virtual interaction not typical during in-person visits. The first was to ask students to add one to three words in the chat feature of Zoom to capture their first impressions before we discussed Edward Burtynsky's *Nickel Tailings #30* (1996). Within moments, we could see what students were thinking without having to wait for each person to take a turn verbally. We subsequently turned those initial impressions into a word cloud, emphasizing the big takeaway ideas—something that is much easier to do digitally than with spoken language. The second part of the class focused on analyzing a new media work by Wei Leng Tay, an artist based in Singapore and Hong Kong, who was able to join us virtually from halfway around the world for a discussion with the students. The opportunity to have a conversation with the artist in real time, without the expense of physically bringing her to campus, was a highlight of the course.

Looking forward

As difficult as it was to not be with our students in-person at the Museum, the experience of teaching virtually forced us to adapt our pedagogies and find new ways to access and engage with the art. We learned new skills, exercised creative problem-solving, and built exciting collaborative partnerships with faculty, students, and other staff members. We also came to appreciate the important role technology can play in bridging long distances and making art more accessible down to the smallest detail. And finally, we were reminded how impactful it can be to slow down and focus on depth of experience and not just breadth. These lessons will certainly be with us as we physically re-enter the galleries once again to teach and learn with original works of art and not just their digital facsimiles.

New Acquisition: A Work by Courtney Leonard

Stephanie Sparling Williams, Associate Curator

In Shinnecock conceptual ceramicist Courtney Leonard's practice there are infinite breaks. Broken contracts—treaties. Broken bodies—disease. Broken land—erosion. Broken water—scarcity. Broken nations—war. Through her multilayered and interdisciplinary approaches to claywork and installation, the artist explores and documents the relationship between Indigenous people—particularly those based in now-North America—and their natural environment. Integrating fine art, environmental science, and Indigenous epistemologies, Leonard's work coalesces into bodies of work she terms "LOGBOOKS," each representing a distinct period of time and unique meditations on the concept of "BREACH."

A breach (noun) is a break, or the act of breaking. To breach (verb) is to break, both a forceful trespass, and also the rupture of the ocean's surface by whales coming up for air. MHCAM recently acquired Leonard's *BREACH #2 (BREACH: LOGBOOK #21),* which consists of 60 ceramic whale teeth, referencing the teeth of an adult sperm whale and conceptually signaling a season of tribal abundance and material access.

The Shinnecock Indian Nation is a coastal community based on the eastern end of present-day Long Island, New York. Commercial whaling in the United States began in the mid-17th century with a contract between English settler colonists and the Shinnecock Nation. Having no expertise of seamanship or whale hunting, the colonists wholly depended on the tribe's whalers for success in their own commercial exploits. For nearly a century, New England whaling companies thrived off the indentured labor of the highly skilled Native people.

In the mid-18th century, whaling sharply declined as the industry led to the overfishing of whales off the coast of New York, which were originally hunted solely for tribal subsistence. Undeterred, whaling companies contracted Shinnecock whalers on ships that sailed across the globe, a complicated history placing Indigenous lifeways at the center of global commercial extraction.

Today, the Shinnecock Indian Nation is barred from whale hunting, a devastating blow to the tribe's cultural viability. Furthermore, through numerous broken agreements and powerful land grabs by the uber rich, tribal lands continue to be encroached upon and their subsistence cultures restricted and policed. Together, the tribe's historical connection to the whaling industry and present-day geographical tensions inform the conceptual masterwork that is *BREACH #2 (BREACH: LOGBOOK #21).*

Ultimately, Leonard's work further challenges complex issues of sustainability and advances understanding of Tribal resilience in the face of environmental changes threatening cultural practices and foodways that depend on the whale and other endangered aquatic life for subsistence. Indeed, there are many parallels that can be drawn between the fragility of Leonard's ceramics and that of the environment and Indigenous food sovereignty.

Courtney Leonard (Shinnecock, b. 1980) *BREACH #2 (BREACH: LOGBOOK #21),* 2016–2021
Ceramic on wood pallet
Purchase with the Jean C. Harris Art Acquisition Fund
2021.12

Memories of Skinner: An Interview with Beth Chernichowski '73 and Rebecca Keim '76

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

Between Joseph Allen Skinner's passing in 1946 and the early 2000s, the Skinner Museum was largely inactive, with the notable exception of a revitalization effort in the mid-1970s and early 80s. The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum's advisory board is fortunate to have two members who were engaged with the Museum at that time: Beth Chernichowski and '73 Rebecca Keim '76. The following interviews shed light on that time at Skinner. In many ways, the curricular engagement with the Skinner Museum has come full circle since the 1970s. Rebecca and Beth's work secured the Museum's place within the College and laid the foundation for the work we are doing in the present.

Photograph from May 1975 Mount Holyoke *NOW* newsletter. Original caption read: "Tools of the Trade are examined by (left to right) Becky Keim '76, Jay Putnam of Hampshire College and "T" Gebhard '75, as they browse through a 19th century carpenter's chest in the Skinner Museum"

How did you become involved with the Skinner Museum and what did you do there?

Rebecca Keim: Following a summer internship at the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, I learned about another student who was doing work at the Skinner Museum (Christine "T" Gebhard '75). In the year '74 we put our heads together in terms of what we could do there. Untouched for so long, the Museum was very dirty and we spent a lot of time cleaning and taking inventory. We quickly realized the Museum was a treasure box for teaching in a wide range of academic disciplines, and became committed to encouraging the College to be more engaged with this unique property and its collections.

Beth Chernichowski: In spring 1976, having completed my graduate work at the College of William and Mary, I responded to a call in the *Alumnae Quarterly* for those with experience in Americana to assist with a review of the Skinner Museum. I volunteered to write a survey report of the collection and, based on that report, was offered the position of director of the Skinner Museum with charges to expand the survey report, seek funding to continue the position, and create a program. I was there from 1976–1984, during which time I wrote a National Endowment for the Humanities proposal to introduce the Skinner collections into the curriculum that received the largest NEH funding given to MHC at that time. Eventually, I was named a member of the American Studies committee and co-taught a course as well as numerous workshops across the disciplines, a recognition that something of some value lay in those artifacts.

Do you have an intriguing recollection of your time at Skinner?

Rebecca Keim: For me, Skinner's richness as a place of constant discovery stands out. When most people first enter the Museum, they are astonished by the range and quantity of items on

Holiday celebrations at the Skinner Museum, December 1978 Photograph Beth Chernichowski

view. As you move through the displays, discoveries in history, biology, geology, religion, foreign lands, and early American culture, among others, emerge. Many objects in and of themselves tell a story or are beautifully crafted, with the collection broadly having cultural value for research, teaching, and learning.

Beth Chernichowski: The observer is always part of the observation: Physics 101. When those who viewed the concept of material culture as either too simplistic or not academically relevant were hit with a lightning bolt that objects can give voice to the unheard and be the bridge to interdisciplinary learning, the hot topic of 20th century academia.

Has working with the Skinner Museum changed you in any way?

Rebecca Keim: The experience solidified my desire and determination to go into museum work and it paved the way for the early years of my career. It was a launch pad.

Beth Chernichowski: It has taught me that I tend to work best with those who think ahead of the trends, but with that comes a certain amount of immediate dismissal.

Why do you think the Skinner Museum is important?

Rebecca Keim: It's important for a number of reasons. One, it's been part of the College for 75 years and certainly Mr. Skinner was very much part of Mount Holyoke's history. I also believe that the Skinner Museum enriches the offerings of the College as an educational institution, both on campus and in the broader community. It is a uniquely valuable teaching resource that connects material culture with many different disciplines.

Beth Chernichowski: The breadth of the collection allows its contents to enhance and refine clarity in every academic discipline, especially as Mount Holyoke positions itself as an anti-racist institution. What other school has this type of resource? The artifacts build a bridge between the College and the larger community. Its existence is so rich; it gives those who will follow us opportunities to re-imagine material culture teaching in ways we can't even begin to state just now.

Join us in 2022–23 for the next *Skinner Museum 75* exhibition:

vanessa german—THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH

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Inside back cover (top): Photograph courtesy of THE RAREST BLACK WOMAN ON THE PLANET EARTH

Back cover and inside back cover (bottom): Dennis Purcell (American, b. 1941) *Interior view of Skinner Museum,* 2019
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