

*ART PURPOSES: Object Lessons for the Liberal Arts*  
Bowdoin College Museum of Art | Brunswick, Maine  
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Labels

*Art Purposes: Object Lessons for the Liberal Arts*

Art can be considered a process rather than a product. At Bowdoin College, art objects catalyze academic inquiry and generate opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. Through art, students and faculty engage with thoughts, perceptions, and vocabularies that inform their own. As artists establish starting points for their own creativity, they, too, study others' works, whether in museum collections or elsewhere. They set an example for all who observe, research, interpret, innovate, and communicate—that is, anyone learning about and practicing the Liberal Arts.

New installations of the Museum's collection throughout the Walker Art Building, which turns 125 this year, invite you to get involved. Many works on view, including recent acquisitions that are publicly presented for the

## **Observing**

New technologies provide ever more sophisticated tools for observation. Do they reveal new facets of reality, or,

*Wildener Straße 7, Salchendorf* (Inhabitant: Heinrich Roth, farmer), 1961  
From *Half-timbered Houses, Siegen Industrial Region, Germany, 1958–1973*

*Group of Cooling Towers (Kühlturm Gruppe), Bargoed Power Station, South Wales, 1966*

*Oberhausen-Osterfeld, D 1977*  
From *Water Towers, 2005*

*Toledo, Ohio, USA, 1978*  
From *Water Towers, United States, 1974–1983*

*Béziers, Hérault, France, 1984*  
From *Water Towers, 1972–2009*

*Plant for Styrofoam Production, Wesseling near Cologne, Germany, 1997*

Collection of Roger L. Conover, Class of 1972

Bernd and Hilla Becher's serial photographs document industrial infrastructure and vernacular architecture. They catalogue humble residences for workers and farmers, water and cooling towers, furnaces, gas tanks, and plants that were or still are essential to modern society but often remain overlooked and unheralded. Inviting comparison between multiple examples, the Bechers capture the complexities, idiosyncrasies, and austere beauty of functional buildings that they termed "anonymous sculptures." Hilla and Bernd Becher often shoot on overcast days in the early morning, when the camera picks up myriad details in even, soft light. Examining the images, one could infer notions of class, history, and labor, but the photographers seem indifferent to any such interpretations. The purpose, they insist, is not to confront political issues or glorify the working class, but instead to connect with the internal memories of a region or community. As expressions of such memories, the anonymous monuments appear simple, unromantic, and unapologetic.

GUILLAUME BIJL  
Belgian, born 1946

*Composition Trouvée, 1990*  
mixed media

Gift of The Foundation, To-Life, Inc.  
2018.30.2

This large-scale assemblage of found objects is the first work of installation art to enter the Museum's collection. Since Marcel Duchamp anonymously submitted a signed urinal to the Society of Independent Artists in 1917 and titled it *Fountain*, artists have gleefully decontextualized everyday items and inserted them into exhibitions and art discourses. Bijl selected a range of objects from Europe and the United States for this work that has the appearance of a junk shop window display. Referencing the past as well as past notions of the future, at a time when the crumbling of the Eastern Bloc gave rise to the idea of the *End of History* (Francis Fukuyama), he envisions and illustrates the "archeology" of contemporary society. With *Lazy Hardware* (1945), Marcel Duchamp had already presented an installation as a

window display in Gotham Bookmart, New York, to advertise the publication of André Breton's book, *Arcane 17*.

CHAKAIA BOOKER

American, born 1953

*Solitaire*, 2011

rubber tire and wood

Lent by a Friend of the Museum

With a formal inventiveness that seems to have no bounds, Chakaia Booker mounts sliced rubber tires on wood backing into extravagantly beautiful sculptures. *Solitaire*, to be affixed to the wall, graciously extends into space and confidently takes possession of it. It engages the viewer into a far-ranging conversation: Rubber tires, for Booker, not only embody the quest for mobility and, implicitly, economic expansion, they also speak to matters of post-colonial ecological exploitation. Cast into tread patterns and marred by use on the street, the material communicates what could be understood as identities and personal histories. Booker has long been interested in African dance and Tai Chi Chuan and studied sociology at Rutgers, which might have contributed to her commitment to personal expression and provided interpretative models as well. "One must give oneself permission to create," she explained in 2003, "In this culture, it's difficult to be different."

FRANK BOWLING

American, born 1936

*Skowhegan Green II*, 1984

acrylic on canvas

Gift of Julie McGee, Class of 1982 in Honor of David C. Driskell H'89

2010.60

Born in 1934 in Bartica, British Guiana, Bowling moved to England in 1953. His first trip to the U.S. was in 1961, and by the late 1960s he was exhibiting with some of the best young black American artists of the day. While Bowling frequently moved between the metropolises of New York City and London, *Skowhegan Green II* is tied directly to the summer of 1984, when he was an artist-in-residence at the

2018.38.4

The ambiguity and multivalence inherent in fluidly applied paint on canvas has been Katherine Bradford's love affair for many years. In this painting, she delivers a bravura painterly performance on a stage of her own making that puts her energy, imagination, and irreverence on full display. Bradford does not create in a vacuum, but inserts herself in a dialogue with works of art by historic and contemporary practitioners. The Brunswick painter, who spends winters in Brooklyn, lives down the road from the Museum and once jokingly explained that as a young mother she liked to stop there when

Director, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York

ELIZABETH CATLETT

American-Mexican, 1915–2012

*There is a Woman in Every Color*, 1975

color linoleum cut, screenprint, and woodcut

Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund  
2015.61

African American artist Elizabeth Catlett contributed to the civil rights movement with politically engaged sculptures and prints. A feminist and teacher, she became the first female professor and head of the sculpture department at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in Mexico City in 1958. Made around the time of her retirement, this print renders a black woman's dignified face as a positive image in black, while her negative image appears in white, perhaps reflecting the artist's belief that racial difference is merely seeing two sides of the same coin. The multicolored row of figures references the color bar, a form of measurement for registering color accuracy in printing that is usually later removed. In this instance, Catlett's inclusion of this graphic standard enacts an integration of the margins (or marginalized) that can be read as a metaphor for her commitments to global civil rights and equality.

HEATHER DEWEY HAGBORG

American, born 1982

*Stranger Visions: Sample 7 NYC (Reconstruction of a Face Based on found DNA, from the Series "Stranger Visions")*

Gift of halley k harrisburg, Class of 1990, and Michael Rosenfeld  
2017.8.4

Thornton Dial, a child of Alabama sharecroppers, created assemblage art in relative obscurity for decades. He only began working on paper around 1990 at the time of his first museum exhibition. Art historian William Arnett, who documented the work of African American artists in the South, provided Dial with professional art making materials, and enabled him to exhibit his work in major institutions. Dial embraced new opportunities, whether traditionally associated with the fine arts or not: “Art is like a bright star up ahead in the darkness of the world. It can lead peoples through the darkness and help them from being afraid of the darkness. Art is a guide for every person who is looking for something. That’s how I can describe myself: Mr. Dial is a man looking for something.”

DAVID C. DRISKELL  
American, born 1931

*Shaker Chair and Quilt*, 1988  
encaustic and collage

Museum Purchase, George Otis Hamlin Fund  
1990.2

Born in Eatonton, Georgia, David C. Driskell’s first sojourn in Maine was in 1953, when he

perceptions of race in America. This triple full-length, life-size portrait imbues studio painting with the directness of street photography. The artist had encountered the dashing man on a stroll through Boston and was immediately attracted to his outrageous attire and supreme confidence. Hendricks snapped photographs that he translated in his Connecticut studio into painting. Its scale, the cropping of the figure at top and bottom, as well as the technique of using glossy oil for the figure and mat monochrome acrylic for the ground, all contribute to the immediacy of the work. Its title *Northern Lights* derives from Boston's northern location (in relation to Connecticut) and the radiance of the model, whose shiny leather coat and gold tooth impressed Hendricks.

JENNY HOLZER

American, born 1950

*Inflammatory Essays*, 1979–1982  
offset lithographs

Gift of David P. Becker, Class of 1970  
1994.10.247–.258

Conceived in 1979, *Inflammatory Essays* convey dogma, extremism, and fanaticism. An homage to the creative and destructive capacity of the manifesto, the “essays” are in fact short and standardized: 100-word paragraphs of twenty lines each, printed in the same font on colorful paper. Holzer produced a pastiche of taboo-breaking texts (unrelated to her personal convictions) in response to a variety of



the boardwalk? What would happen if the figure shifted his balance and changed the way these two bent limbs folded into each other? What other shapes could Hujar see or make happen? The figure becomes another part of the receding Lower Manhattan that Hujar was so set on recording.

Joseph Jay Sosa

by the homemade Nike logo on his t-shirt, is set against a background of sprawling affluence. The rapidly growing cityscape of Luanda indicates the concentrated wealth that has arisen from oil production but failed to trickle down to Angola's wider population.

Denise Birkhofer

Collections Curator, Ryerson Image Center, Ryerson University, Toronto

ALFREDO JAAR

Chilean, born 1956

*Real Pictures (Camp)*, 1994–1995

photo archivebox with cibachrome print

Archival Collection of Marion Boulton Stroud and Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, Maine. Gift from Marion Boulton "Kippy" Stroud Foundation

7.2018.342

Alfredo Jaar, the Chilean-born artist, architect, and filmmaker, understands that the visibility of art—its ability to generate public discourse—presents a political charge. For several decades, Jaar has taken on the responsibility to raise awareness of dire societal problems on a global scale. This work challenges visitors to imagine the photograph inside the box, which remains invisible. Withholding the image, Jaar attempts to break through the filters we routinely apply to our perception to shield us from personal tragedy around us.

ALEX KATZ

American, born 1927

*Tulips I*, 2012

chalk and charcoal

Gift of Alex Katz

2017.15.5

With unrivaled energy and enviable sense of style, Alex Katz understands how to transform mural-sized canvases into vibrant, unforgettable images. This cartoon, a to-scale drawing for the painting of the same year, offers a glimpse into the artist's practice. Katz usually sketches a subject in oil paint on a small board and projects the image onto a larger sheet of paper. He then translates the color image into a line drawing in charcoal, capturing the essence of his motif and defining its relation to the canvas's shape and dimensions. Following a procedure first established among Renaissance mural painters, he perforates the line with a pointed wheel, further editing the composition in the process. A pouncing of the lines with powdery red crayon transfers the image onto the canvas. With the pre-mixed oil paint on his palette ready to go, Katz is finally able to paint swiftly in his masterful wet-on-wet technique.

ALEX KATZ

American, born 1927

*untitled (Skowhegan, Maine landscape)*, 1960

oil on canvas

Museum Purchase, Hamlin Fund  
1983.19

Approached by the Museum after the acquisition of this untitled painting, Alex Katz reminisced in 1983 in a letter from Lincolnville, Maine, where he summers: “The landscape ... was painted in Skowhegan in 1960. It’s at the art school where I was teaching that summer. The view is facing east near the center of the art school—the bridge and pond still exist.” Introduced to Maine’s luscious landscapes and brilliant light as a young student in 1949, Katz was first appointed a member of the faculty of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in the summer of 1960. This painting feels loose, as if the artist let his mind wander while he captured the essence of the scene. In its carefree use of gesture, the painting conjures Katz’s joy in working *en plein air* and testifies to his unmatched eye for color and composition.

PER KIRKEBY  
Danish, 1938–2018

*Skowhegan V*, 1991  
oil on canvas

Jane H. and Charles E. Parker, Jr. Art Acquisition Fund  
2014.49



ancestors the subjects of such ads? How would I have been described if I were a run away slave, someone's property, not seen as a full person? From years of experience, I know that each time I encounter *Runaways*

digital pigment prints

Gift of the Robert Rauschenberg

While the title of this work identifies it as an aid for ailing bodies to overcome the forces of gravity, no one has attempted so far to use this object as a personal mobility device. Too vague is the formal similarity with conventional walkers, too precious are material and craftsmanship, too impractical the construction. Brunswick artist, furniture maker, and gallerist Duane Paluska delights in changing peoples' perspectives on the world around them. A former faculty member in Bowdoin's English Department, he decided to forego teaching in the classroom in favor of the studio and workshop. What might be the lesson this work imparts?

HOWARDENA PINDELL

American, born 1943

*Video Drawings: Tennis*, 1975

chromogenic print

Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund  
2018.7

Pindell created this unique chromogenic print by superimposing a drawing on mylar over a television screen and then moving the shutter on her camera. This "Video Drawing" synchronizes a sports motif with references to mathematics, by correlating vectors and a tennis match and applying an aleatory approach. Underlying is Pindell's political commitment: The presence of small ink circles in the layered drawing not only suggests the motion of the ball, but appropriates the dot she encountered as a child in Southern restaurants on plates reserved for black customers. Tennis itself was hardly a neutral choice, representing at the time a site for an aggressive assault on gender and racial privilege carried out by such stars as Billie Jean King, Althea Gibson, and Arthur Ashe.

RICHARD POUSETTE-DART

American, 1916–1992

*Untitled (Ramapo Freeze)*, 1976

graphite

Gift of the Richard Pousette-Dart Estate  
2018.44

*Untitled (Ramapo Freeze)* is quietly monumental. Harmoniously balanced, multidirectional graphite marks of various lengths and densities fill the entire sheet, up to its beveled edges. They center the viewer's gaze on a horizon indicated by more forcefully applied clusters of short vertical hatching. A few brief horizontal lines indicate a vertical axis that further acknowledges the viewer's perspective. While the eye detects a myriad of graphite traces, the mind sees brilliant light emanating from the drawing. This glow can only be explained as a result of the artist's deep understanding of the field of vision and his deliberate manipulation of our perception in areas of focus as well as on the periphery. Situated "just on the edge of awareness," such works effectively evoke an aura that has motivated artists' forays into abstraction since the early twentieth century. Walter Benjamin called it a "unique appearance of distance, no matter how close," and Vasily Kandinsky identified it as "particular spiritual sound."

LUCAS SAMARAS



video, black and white, sound, looped, 11:00 min.

Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection  
2013.21.270

Pat Steir's title poetically implies a reckoning with an aesthetic and cultural legacy fixed in Western art. After Winslow Homer alerts viewers to the passage of time and its suspension in art. Steir observed in

2010.7

This color linocut of a gum ball machine, a recurring motif in Thiebaud's work, exemplifies his interest in quotidian objects evocative of personal memories. In a 1969 interview, he described such a dispenser as "both a most elementary mechanism and a gadget for stimulating the grandest sort of associations and references." Thiebaud imbues the mundane with a sense of intangible nostalgia and magical realism through bold colors, dark contours, crisp shadows, and graphic compositional balance—devices characteristic of his early training as an animator and commercial advertiser. The heightened sense of perfection achieved through simplification of form and pristine linearity paradoxically conveys a dreamlike quality of the familiarly generic yet personally specific, and allows the "psychological implications," as Thiebaud described, to radiate through his work.

AL TAYLOR

American, born 1948

*Rat Guards*, 1998

colored ink, gouache, acrylic, and acrylic mica mortar

Gift of Sarah-Ann and Werner H. Kramarsky

2003.26.9

Art critic Klaus Kertess once described Taylor's works as "new tools for vision." Whether Taylor constructed sculptures out of ephemeral objects or focused in his works on paper on the visual potential of the most mundane, he constructed poetic and highly original invitations to look and think anew. This gouache overlays shimmering vertical planes of diluted inks and acrylic paint to generate an image at once mysterious and enticing. For Taylor it was a souvenir from a trip to Hawai'i, where he had noticed tin sleeves around the trunks of coconut trees, ostensibly discouraging jungle rats from stealing the precious fruit. He exhibited a series of works on paper dedicated to those "Rat Guards," his own term, together with sculptures made from fishing floats washed to the Hawai'ian shores. With an edgy humor and knack for the poetry of trash, Taylor evoked glistening island beauty and continuous motion of the waves in objects a tourist would rather not want to see.

ALMA WOODSEY THOMAS

American, 1891–1978

*Double Cherry Blossoms*, 1973

acrylic on canvas

Gift of halley k harrisburg, Class of 1990, and Michael Rosenfeld

2003.28

Alma Woodsey Thomas's intense and searching exploration of the figure-ground relationship in her late paintings has led critics and scholars to liken these compositions to screens and lattices. In his influential book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), activist and author W. E. B. Du Bois famously employed an analogous symbol — "the veil"—to approximate what he termed the "double consciousness" of African Americans. "For Du Bois," scholar Howard Winant explains, "the veil is a complex metaphor for the dynamics of race. It represents both barrier and connection between white and black. Imagine it as a filmy fabric, a soft and semitransparent border marker, that both keeps the races apart and mediates

between them.” These dynamics play out, albeit metaphorically, across the surface of this canvas. The all-over array of nearly monochromatic brushstrokes set starkly against a plain background generously offers the viewer the phenomenological equivalent of “double consciousness”—of being othered—with

*African/American*, 1998  
linoleum cut

Collection of Alvin Hall '74

In the 1990s, artist Kara Walker revived the Victorian art of the cut-paper silhouette, popular in nineteenth-century portraiture. Her characters—ranging from slave masters to enslaved children—are often shown engaging in taboo acts of sex, violence, and debasement. She describes the semi-nude figure in this print as “your essentialist-token slave maiden in midair.” Without any background or context, this figure seems to be helplessly falling through a timeless void. While she has been both celebrated and criticized for appropriating negative stereotypes of African Americans, Walker seeks to

sold in nearby markets into slavery. The first part of the title of this work is based on the Haitian Creole word for “catastrophe;” the second a word play with the artist’s first name.

ANDY WARHOL  
American, 1928–1987

*Polar Bear*, 1983  
graphite

Museum Purchase with Donated Funds  
2019.10

Warhol’s early screen-prints typically de-contextualized everyday objects to void their meaning and gave them new life as clichés of media culture. Warhol then carried this treatment to portraits of celebrities and subjects of political sensitivity that rejected customary interpretations and judgments. This drawing is a preparatory study for the screen-print portfolio *Endangered Species*, which was published in 1983 by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in support of animals protected by the 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA). Although a Polar Bear does not appear—and was not added to the ESA until 2008—scholars believe that Warhol drew (most likely traced from a photographic image) this image as he was exploring its possible use in the series. Such tracings were a necessary step in preparation of the screens used for printing. The drawing of the polar bear is all the more fascinating for the fact that this image did not make the cut.

CARRIE MAE WEEMS  
American, born 1953

*American Icons: Untitled (Salt and Pepper Shakers)*, 1988–89  
gelatin silver print

Archival Collection of Marion Boulton Stroud and Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, Maine. Gift from the Marion Boulton “Kippy” Stroud Foundation  
2018.10.329

The viewer might look at this photograph and wonder: What is the race or ethnicity of the person or family who lives with these objects? What would I think and feel about these people if I saw such caricatures displayed in their home? I think of my mother, who worked as a maid her entire life. What would she have thought if she had been required to dust these items every week in the home of her non-African American employer? The brilliance of Weems’s quiet domestic photograph is that it disquiets the viewer. It stimulates each person who looks closely to reflect on how, even today, in small, routine ways, each of us could be readily accepting, living w(e) 4 (t) loflndrven q0b(i) (vi) -26 We4 (e) 4T(r)troud Founday

*Blue Yellow*, 1991  
color polaroid

Museum Purchase, Lloyd O. and Marjorie Strong Coulter Fund  
2011.13.a–b

Deliberately exploiting new photographic media to reimagine what art could be, Wegman turned to video in the mid-1960s and the polaroid in the late 1970s. During the same period, he became immersed in a partnership with a Weimaraner dog named “Man Ray,” after the Dada photographer. A successor, named Fay Ray, is pictured here. Just as, with a sly sense of humor, Wegman references the legacy of Minimalism by placing Fay Ray on stacked cubes, so too his pet’s very presence eerily shifts the image

computer. The composition features a row of pregnant teenagers replicated from one model. Bearing the consequences of (outlawed) female sexuality and the emotional trauma of pregnancy, the twelve figures reflect larger social problems of family planning policy and gender issues attendant to adolescent anxiety. The white dress suggests innocence and vulnerability in a society that regulates female chastity