

Bowdoin College Museum of Art to Open Major Reinstallation of Permanent Collection and Corresponding Special Exhibition Summer 2019

Marking the 125th anniversary of the Walker Art Building, Art Purposes will probe the collection's continued and evolving vitality across the varied disciplines of scholarship and learning.

Brunswick, Maine, January 23, 2019 — This summer the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA) will open *Art Purposes: Object Lessons for the Liberal Arts*, featuring exceptional modern and contemporary works from the BCMA's encyclopedic collection and focusing on their role as powerful catalysts for current conversations in the liberal arts and beyond. On view June 29 through October 27, 2019, *Art Purposes* brings together approximately 150 objects from around the globe that reflect art's capacity to unsettle conventions, foster learning, and inspire creativity.

Marking the 125th anniversary of the opening of the Walker Art Building, designed by Charles Follen McKim of McKim, Mead, and White, *Art Purposes* draws its title from the inscription prominently placed in the rotunda of the Walker Building, dedicating the space "to be used solely for art purposes." The exhibition will explore the broad and important implications of "art purposes," presenting longstanding highlights from the permanent collection in conversation with new acquisitions and promised gifts at a moment when the BCMA continues to deepen its impact across Bowdoin College's curriculum. *Art Purposes* will feature key pieces from its holdings that reflect the polyphony of contemporary artistic production, including works by Barbara Chase-Riboud, Barkley Hendricks, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta, and Peter Hujar, among many others.

In recent years, since the renovated and expanded Museum opened in 2007, the BCMA's collection has grown dramatically, adding nearly 10,000 objects, to a current total of approximately 25,000 objects. Through gifts and strategic purchases, the Museum has filled gaps in its encyclopedic collection and amplified the narratives of global art history presented in its galleries. *Art Purposes* will mark the debut of several new acquisitions, including:

- **Chen Yifei's** *Going Home (Suzhou)* (1986), produced in the wake of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–76). While its compelling beauty could be mistaken for an Orientalized view of the "East," the lyrical landscape painting is in fact a reaction against the political and propagandistic uses of art during this tumultuous period in Chinese history and serves as a hopeful beacon for new possibilities in art when these restrictions were lifted.
- **Guillaume Bijl's** *Composition Trouvée* (1990), the first work of installation art to enter the Museum's collection. Resembling a junk shop window display, this large-scale assemblage of found objects envisions the 'archeology' of contemporary humanity—as a society, what do we leave behind and what do these decontextualized objects convey?
- **Nancy Spero's** *Carnival II* (2000), which ties together the traditionally polarized themes of motherhood and female sexuality. As the viewer moves down the collage from the very modern stripper-like ad to the prehistoric birth symbol, the work exudes a celebration of female exhibitionism, eroticism, birth, and pleasure.
- **Alfredo Jaar's** powerful photograph, *Angel* (2007). An artist whose politically driven projects have engaged many corners of the globe, Jaar met the young man featured in this picture during a film shoot in Luanda, Angola. The boy's impoverished circumstances, represented by the

homemade Nike logo on his T-shirt, is accentuated by the background of the rapidly growing cityscape of Luanda, where concentrated oil wealth has furthered economic disparity.

- **Heather Dewey-Hagborg's** *Stranger Visions: Sample 7 NYC (Reconstruction of a Face Based on found DNA, from the Series "Stranger Visions")* (2012–2013). This work challenges conventional notions of portraiture, generally reflecting personal encounters. Instead, by collecting materials such as hair, chewed up gum, and cigarette butts from the streets, public bathrooms, and waiting rooms of New York City, the artist extracts DNA and computationally generates 3D-printed, life-size, full-color portraits based on genomic research. This rendering of a face tests the boundary between art and science—despite its scientific accuracy, in the absence of information about its subject's life experiences, it cannot capture the relationship between appearance and character that is the traditional aim of portraiture. This work is currently on long-term loan to the BCMA and is a promised gift to the collection.

Recent acquisitions of historic works will also be on view as part of a reinstallation of the permanent collection galleries, including works from Greek antiquity through the nineteenth century. They include an altarpiece from the Antwerp workshop of Jan de Beer, a rare John Singleton Copley pastel depicting Elizabeth Bowdoin, and a painting of the Sun Dance Ceremony by a member of the Lakota tribe from about 1900.

Art Purposes will capture the expansive possibilities of a museum's role in an academic setting and within the world of ideas at large," notes exhibition curator Joachim Homann. "The Museum is in an excellent position to facilitate conversations that bring together students, scholars, and visitors across generations, academic disciplines, backgrounds, orientations, and convictions. Its collection demonstrates the desire to pass on to future generations works of art and objects of material culture that open viewers' eyes to the world around us, foster learning, encourage creativity, and sustain an ever more inclusive critical discourse."

According to Co-director Frank Goodyear: "The foundations of *Art Purposes* rest upon the rigorous and interdisciplinary academic culture that has defined Bowdoin College throughout its distinguished history. Works of art stand for values such as authenticity, creativity, and innovation that are deeply ingrained across artistic production and at the same time lay at the core of a liberal arts education. Over a century ago, Bowdoin College President William DeWitt Hyde invited students 'to count art an intimate friend.' This exhibition makes good on that promise, affirming the significant role played today by the BCMA's collection in a contemporary intellectual and social environment."

Adds Co-director Anne Collins Goodyear: "*Art Purposes* demonstrates the power of art to engage with challenging subjects and to provide insights into complex issues. Works of art always remind us that no single point of view is adequate for understanding the whole and that context—historical, personal, and physical—always inflects meaning. We are grateful to the many friends of the Museums—patrons, faculty, students, artists, and members of the community at large who have made possible the tremendous growth to BCMA's collection in recent years to inspire the next generation of scholars, practitioners, and innovators."

Art Purposes will be accompanied by a new BCMA collections catalogue, the first in nearly forty years. Co-published with Del Monico-Prestel and distributed internationally, *Art Purposes: Object Lessons for the Liberal Arts* will feature approximately 120 exceptional works of art in full-color plates, offering a fascinating overview of holdings from antiquity to the present across world cultures and artistic media. In brief essays, more than 70 contributors across disciplines will illuminate individual works and demonstrate

the breadth of inquiry generated by art objects in the Museum's collection. Introductory and concluding commentary by Museum co-directors Anne Collins Goodyear and Frank Goodyear and curator Joachim Homann provides insight into the Museum's history, its vision for the future, and its commitment to a multifaceted exploration of its collection.

An international roster of more than 70 catalogue contributors reflects the diversity of the BCMA's collection and its commitment to engage with the leading scholars and distinguished curators of our era, including Janet Berlo (University of Rochester); Ada Cohen (Dartmouth College); David Peter Corbett (Courtauld Institute of Art); Thomas B. F. Cummins (Harvard University); and Dennis Geronimus (New York University). In addition, Bowdoin faculty offers insights into interdisciplinary work with the collection, including Margaret Boyle (Romance Languages); Dana Byrd (Art History); Shuqin Cui (Asian Studies and Cinema Studies); Alyssa Gillespie (Russian); Brian Purnell (Africana Studies); Meghan Roberts (History); Jay Sosa (Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies).

About the Bowdoin College Museum of Art

The collections of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art are among the most comprehensive of any college museum in the United States. Collecting commenced over 200 years ago with a major gift from the College's founder James Bowdoin III and his family that included Gilbert Stuart's magnificent portraits of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The Museum is housed in the landmark Walker Art Building, designed in 1894 by Charles Follen McKim. Located on the historic quadrangle of Bowdoin College, the building is graced by murals by John La Farge, Kenyon Cox, Elihu Vedder, and Abbott Thayer. A \$20.8-million renovation and expansion in 2007 provided a stunning setting for objects as diverse as monumental Assyrian reliefs from Nimrud, Iraq; European Old Master paintings; and works by American modernists. The Museum is the centerpiece of Bowdoin's vibrant arts and culture community and offers a wealth of academic and educational programs. The Museum is also a prominent summer venue for major exhibitions such as *Edward Hopper's Maine* (2011); *William Wegman: Hello Nature* (2012); *Maurice Prendergast: By the Sea* (2013); *Richard Tuttle: A Print Retrospective* (2014); *Night Vision: Nocturnes in American Art, 1860 – 1960* (2015); *This Is a Portrait If I Say So: Identity in American Art, 1912 to Today* (2016); *The Ivory Mirror: The Art of Mortality in Renaissance Europe* (2017); and *Winslow Homer and the Camera: Photography and the Art of Painting* (2018).

Fully accessible, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art is open to the public free of charge from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday through Saturday; 10:00 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday; and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

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