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**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, ACQUIRES WORKS BY AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS
FROM JOHN AXELROD COLLECTION**

**MFA Marks One-Year Anniversary of Art of the Americas Wing with Display including Works
by John Biggers, Eldzier Cortor, and Archibald Motley Jr.**



Cocktails, about 1926, Archibald Motley

BOSTON, MA (November 3, 2011)—Sixty-seven works by African American artists have recently been acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), from collector John Axelrod, an MFA Honorary Overseer and long-time supporter of the Museum. The purchase has enhanced the MFA’s American holdings, transforming it into one of the leading repositories for paintings and sculpture by African American artists. The Museum’s collection will now include works by almost every major African American artist working during the past century and a half. Seven of the works are now displayed in the Art of the Americas Wing, in time for its one-year anniversary this month.

This acquisition furthers the Museum’s commitment to showcasing the great multicultural artistry found throughout the Americas. It was made possible with the support of Axelrod and the MFA’s Frank B. Bemis Fund and Charles H. Bayley Fund. Axelrod has also donated his extensive research library of books about African American artists to the Museum, as well as funds to support scholarship.

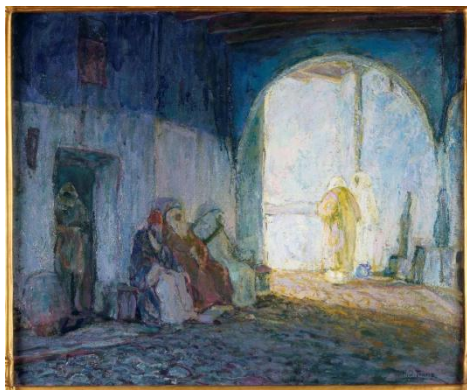
“This is a proud moment for the MFA. When we opened the Art of the Americas Wing last year, our goal was to reflect the diverse interests and backgrounds of all of our visitors. This collection, with its many exceptional artists, enables us to more fully illustrate the richness of the American experience,” said Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the Museum. “John has been a great friend of the MFA, and I extend my thanks to him for making these works available for our many visitors to enjoy.”

Assembled by Axelrod over the course of 15 years, the collection is regarded as one of the finest holdings of American art by African American artists. It features works that span the mid-19th through 20th centuries by renowned artists, many of whom have

been unrepresented at the MFA, and a grouping of 18 works by Brazilian artists of African descent. Included in the acquisition are 39 paintings, 10 drawings, and 18 three-dimensional objects (sculpture, ceramics, glass, and mixed-media assemblage).

The initial seven works from the collection to be displayed are now on view on Level 3 of the wing. *Cocktails* by Archibald Motley Jr., the iconic painter of Chicago's Bronzeville community, and *Untitled* (1930) by Aaron Douglas are in the John Axelrod Gallery (1920s and 1930s). Five additional works are on view in the Melvin Blake and Frank Purnell Gallery (20th-Century Art: Places): *Big Wind in Georgia* (about 1933) by Hale Woodruff; *Shotguns* (1983–86) by John Biggers; *Environment* (1947) and *Still-Life: Past Revisited* (1973), both by Eldzier Cortor; and *Greene Street* (1940) by Beauford Delaney.

“For a great collection of American art, you must include these important artists,” explained John Axelrod. “I buy what I love, and I’m particularly pleased to be able to share my passion for these works with a wider audience.”



Street Scene, Tangiers, about 1910,
Henry Ossawa Tanner

Also among the works by African American artists are paintings by 19th-century landscapists Edward Bannister and Robert Scott Duncanson, as well as Henry Ossawa Tanner, whose rare depiction of Tangiers, *Street Scene, Tangiers* (about 1910) is included among the works the MFA acquired from the Axelrod Collection. *Tangiers* joins Tanner's *Interior of a Mosque* (1897), already in the Museum's collection. Featured in the collection's 20th-century holdings are works by artists associated with the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to Douglas and Woodruff, these include W.H. Johnson and Loïs Maillou Jones, as well as sculptors Sargent Johnson, Augusta Savage, William Edmondson, and James Richmond Barthé.

Demonstrating the range of styles of works by post-WWII-era African American artists is Norman Lewis, whose black-and-white painting *Every Atom Glow: Electrons in Luminous Vibration* (1951) illustrates the Abstract Expressionist style. Works by Charles Alston, Bob Thompson, Romare Bearden, Charles White, and Kerry James Marshall are also included in the group. Additionally, the Axelrod Collection's selection of 20th-century works by Brazilian artists of African descent comprises paintings, carved wood sculptures, and a work on paper, reflecting a unique aspect of the global black diaspora.

“These important works from John Axelrod's collection greatly enhance the MFA's Art of the Americas holdings, allowing us to tell the broader story of American art,” said Elliot Bostwick Davis, John Moors Cabot Chair of the Art of the Americas Department. “John's discerning eye has enabled him to assemble a remarkable collection of works in a range of media by some of the greatest African American artists of the past 150 years. I'm delighted that we can begin to display them as the Museum celebrates the one-year anniversary of the Art of the Americas Wing.”

Since its opening in November 2010, the Art of the Americas Wing has showcased a variety of works collected by Axelrod, which are on view in the John Axelrod Gallery (1920s and 1930s). Highlights include *Punchbowl from the Jazz Bowl Series* (1930) (previously donated), and the recent gifts of the Paul Theodore Frankl *Desk and bookcase* (about 1928); the Donald Deskey *Screen* (about 1930); and a 12-piece silver *Vanity set* (1934) by Tiffany and Co. These are drawn from the collector's holdings of American decorative arts from the 1920s through the 1930s, often known as Art Modern.

Axelrod, who lives in Boston, is a retired attorney whose collecting interests encompass design, paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, and decorative arts. He is an Eminent Benefactor at the Museum and a former member of its Trustee and Overseer Diversity Advisory Committee (TODAC), which promotes community outreach and the diversification of the MFA's collection. Since 1985, Axelrod has given to the Museum nearly 700 works, comprising several collections of 20th-century European decorative arts, including nearly 140 pieces of Schneider glass, numerous examples of Memphis Group designs, and, in 2008, some 377 pieces of American decorative arts from the 1920s and '30s from the Axelrod Collection of American Modern art and design. In recent years, Axelrod has become a collector of graffiti art from 1980-84. His growing collection of graffiti features works by artists including Crash, Daze, Futura, Dondi and Keith Haring. Also included in his graffiti collection are works by artists from the Lower East Side of New York City, or "Loisada," including Martin Wong, David Wojnarowicz, and Richard Hambleton.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has developed several initiatives that incorporate the diverse perspectives of its visitors and supporters. The MFA's Trustee and Overseer Diversity Advisory Committee (TODAC) promotes engagement and advocates for broadening the Museum's reach in the community. In 2005, TODAC created The Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection for the acquisition of works by artists not currently represented in its collection. In 2010, the Museum received a National Endowment for the Humanities \$250,000 "We the People" challenge grant for the Heritage Fund to further help diversify the Museum's collection by providing acquisition funds for works by American artists of color which would resonate with visitors of all backgrounds and illustrate the full scope of American art and history.

Additionally, the MFA launched two groups: Catalyst, focused on multicultural audience development; and the Heritage Remixed Friends Group, which offers culturally rich programming and events throughout the year. The MFA also reaches out to young people through the Teen Arts Council (TAC), a leadership development and apprenticeship program that connects the MFA with Greater Boston's teens, families, and communities. In paid positions, the teens chosen to be TAC members are introduced to a wide range of museum professions and learning opportunities while also gaining valuable work experience. A major project of TAC is wordUP, which encourages members to present their personal perspectives on select works of art in the MFA's collection. The text composed by the teens is placed on wall labels and displayed alongside the curatorial labels describing the work.

Please see next page for collection highlights.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE JOHN AXELROD COLLECTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ART

**Denotes works on view in November 2011*

Charles Alston
Family Group (about 1950)
oil painting

Edward Bannister
Workers in the Fields (about 1890)
oil painting

Romare Bearden
Untitled (about 1964)
collage

John Biggers
Shotguns (1983–86) *
charcoal and conte crayon drawing

Eldzier Cortor
Environment (1947) *
oil painting

Eldzier Cortor
Still-Life: Past Revisited (1973) *
oil painting

Allan Rohan Crite
At the Tremont Street Car Barns (1939)
oil painting

Beauford Delaney
Greene Street (1940) *
oil painting

Aaron Douglas
Untitled (1930) *
charcoal and gouache drawing

Dave the Potter (Dave Drake)
Jar (1857)
stoneware

Robert Duncanson
Lancaster, New Hampshire (1862)
oil painting

Unknown maker; Thomas Davies Pottery, Edgefield District, SC
Three Face Jugs (about 1860)
stoneware and kaolin

Sargent Johnson
Mother and Child (about 1935)
painted wood sculpture

William H. Johnson
Cagnes-Sur-Mer (1928-29)
oil painting

Jacob Lawrence
Junk Man, Harlem (1937)
tempera painting

Norman Lewis
Every Atom Glow: Electrons in Luminous Vibration (1951)
oil painting

Archibald Motley Jr.
Cocktails (about 1926) *
oil painting

Betye Saar
The Good Old Days
mixed-media assemblage

Augusta Savage
Portrait Head of John Henry (about 1940)
sculpture

Henry O. Tanner
Street Scene, Tangiers (about 1910)
oil painting

Bob Thompson
Untitled (Paris) (1962)
oil painting

Charles White
Clarinetist (about 1959)
charcoal and gouache drawing

Hale Woodruff
Big Wind in Georgia (about 1933) *
oil painting