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DIVERSITY INITIATIVES AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), is a dynamic institution that serves a wide variety of people—from schoolchildren to adults of all backgrounds and interests—through direct encounters with works of art from cultures around the world. In keeping with its mission to make its global collections accessible to all, the MFA is committed to diversifying these holdings through important acquisitions. It also actively welcomes new audiences through outreach and community engagement initiatives.

The opening of the MFA's Art of the Americas Wing in 2010 and the Linde Family Wing for Contemporary Art in 2011 has provided the Museum with new opportunities to present the breadth of artistic expression through acquisitions in a number of areas, including works of art from Native American, Spanish Colonial, and Latin American cultures. A particular focus has been a greater representation of works by African American artists, and with the acquisition of several important collections in recent years, the MFA has elevated its holdings, which now comprise 442 works across the Museum's collections. These recent acquisitions have enabled the Museum to become an important center for the presentation, interpretation, and study of art by African American artists.

ACQUISITIONS

John Axelrod Collection of Works by African American Artists

In November 2011 the Museum purchased one of the finest private collections of works by African American artists. Assembled by MFA Honorary Overseer and long-time Museum supporter John Axelrod, the collection includes 67 works by almost every major African American artist working during the past 150 years. Included in the acquisition are 39 paintings, 10 drawings, and 18 three-dimensional objects (sculpture, ceramics, glass, and mixed-media assemblage). Six of the works are now displayed in the Art of the Americas Wing, and additional works will be placed on view in the future.

Among the highlights of the collection are *Street Scene, Tangiers* (about 1910) by Henry Ossawa Tanner; *Cocktails* by Archibald Motley Jr.; *Big Wind in Georgia* (about 1933) by Hale Woodruff; *Portrait Head of John Henry* (about 1940) by Augusta Savage; *Greene Street* (1940) by Beauford Delaney; *Untitled* (about 1964) by Romare Bearden; *Still-Life: Past Revisited* (1973) by Eldzier Cortor; and *Shotguns* (1983–86) by John Biggers. Additionally, the Axelrod Collection's selection of 20th-century works by Brazilian artists of African descent, which includes paintings and carved wood sculptures, reflects a unique aspect of the global black diaspora.

George T. and Joyce A. Wein Collection

The Museum purchased in 2007 six works of art from George T. and the late Joyce A. Wein, distinguished collectors of works by African American artists. The acquisition included works from leading artists of the 20th century: *The Room No. V* (1948) by Eldzier Cortor, *Untitled* (1943) by Wifredo Lam, *Harlem Jazz Jamboree* (1943) by Norman Lewis, *Girl in Mirror* (c. 1945) by John Wilson, and a bronze sculpture by James Barthé. Also included in this group was Allan Crite's *Tire Jumping Outside My Window* (1936–47), the first Museum acquisition made with contributions from the MFA's Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection (see next page for description). In addition, George Wein gave Cortor's drawing, *Nude Dressing* (ca. 1945) to the Museum in 2007.

Daphne Farago Collection of Jewelry by Art Smith

In 2006, longtime Museum supporter Daphne Farago gave to the Museum 20 pieces of studio jewelry by Art Smith (1917–82), an African American studio jeweler. He studied art and design at the Cooper Union in New York and apprenticed to jeweler Winifred Mason in Harlem. Smith's jewelry is characterized by flowing organic forms that reflect the influence of Surrealism, but is marked by his own distinctive sense of scale, balance, and movement.

Lois Mailou Jones

Boston native Lois Mailou Jones (1905–1998) transcended barriers of race and gender to become an acclaimed 20th century artist. A graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA), she later went on to teach at Howard University and to paint works that were influenced by museum collections, leading members of the Harlem Renaissance, travels abroad, and her own African American and New England heritage. Jones died in 1998 and bequeathed gifts to the MFA through the Lois Mailou Jones / Pierre-Noël Trust in 2005 and 2006. These 19 paintings and works on paper are included in the Museum's exhibition *Lois Mailou Jones*, on view through October 14, 2013. Jones also established a scholarship at the SMFA.

Additional acquisitions

In 2012, artist Eldzier Cortor made a gift of three paintings and more than 50 prints and related plates. Given in recognition of the MFA's efforts to acquire and exhibit his work and the art of other leading African American artists of his generation, Cortor's generosity further enhanced the MFA's status as a destination for the study of 20th-century art by African Americans. In a similar gesture, contemporary Native American painter Stanley Natchez recently facilitated the gift of his major recent painting, *Guernica to Wounded Knee*, in recognition of the MFA's history of exhibiting his art, saying that it would be appreciated at the Museum and would make a difference in Boston. The MFA has also has acquired other notable works by African American artists, such as *Untitled* (about 1960–64) by Norman Lewis, *The Juggler #1* (about 1964) by Hughie Lee-Smith, *Interior of a Mosque, Cairo* (1897) by Henry Ossawa Tanner, and *Clock* (1979-1980) by Frank E. Cummings III.

INITIATIVES TO DIVERSIFY THE MFA'S COLLECTION

The MFA celebrates many diverse cultures by hosting a variety of public programs, including film festivals, concerts, and lectures, as well as organizing special events, such as those marking the Indian Festival of Lights "Diwali," and the Persian New Year "Nowruz." Additional initiatives include:

Trustee and Overseer Diversity Advisory Committee

In 2003, the Museum's Board of Trustees created the Trustee and Overseer Diversity Advisory Committee (TODAC) to advance community-oriented initiatives; engage diverse audiences; advise and advocate for educational programming, activities, and exhibitions that appeal to audiences reflecting a diversity of perspectives and interests; and expand the depth of the Museum's Art of the Americas collection by acquiring more works by American artists of color.

Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection

The Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection was established in 2005 by TODAC. It provides funding for the acquisition of works by American artists of color and other works of art representing the experiences of people of color that broaden the visitor experience by presenting a more complete record of America's rich cultural history. The first work purchased by the Heritage Fund in 2007 was *Tire Jumping in Front of My Window* (1936–47) by Allan Rohan Crite, a painting depicting the artist's native South End in Boston. Additional works acquired through the fund include:

- *715 Washington Street, Greenwich Village*, 1947, by Walter Augustus Simon
- *Cube 27*, 1970, by Alvin Loving, Jr.
- *Untitled (Black and White Frontal Caballero)*, about 1952–55, by Martín Ramírez
- *A Yellowstone Geyser*, 1887, by Grafton Tyler Brown
- *Secretary (writing desk)*, 1841, by Thomas Day
- *Iago's Mirror*, 2009, by Fred Wilson
- *The Kiss*, 1985, by Raphael Montañez Ortíz
- *Kevin*, from the series *Class Pictures*, 2005, by Dawoud Bey

- *Parasitos y Perecedos* (20 photographs and five fiber art sculptures), 2012, by Daniela Edburg
- Supported acquisition of The Axelrod Collection; 67 works by African American artists, from 19th and 20th century
- *Confessional*, 1996–2000, by Martin Puryear

National Endowment for the Humanities Grant

In 2010, the Museum was honored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) with a \$250,000 “We the People” challenge grant for the Heritage Fund, which will enable the MFA to acquire works or artists not currently in its collection. This is the first time the Museum has received an NEH grant to support an acquisition fund, the only museum in the US to receive acquisition support from the NEH that year.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Heritage Remixed Friends Group

The Heritage Remixed Friends Group was launched in the fall of 2011 in response to the success of the Heritage Fund for a Diverse Collection and the opening of the Art of the Americas Wing and the Linde Family Wing for Contemporary Art. This group unites current MFA members and new friends with the Museum to make deeper connections with its diverse collections and curators.

Catalyst

Catalyst, launched in 2008, is an audience development initiative designed to broaden the range of visitors to the Museum. Members represent the diversity of Greater Boston. They serve as MFA advisors and ambassadors to strengthen engagement with individuals, families, and organizations within communities of color. The group has planned and hosted special events, such as the America Remixed party that celebrated the opening of the Museum’s Art of the Americas Wing, and have contributed ideas for the *MFA Fridays* program and lectures. Catalyst members also support the Heritage Fund and the MFA’s other acquisition initiatives that promote a diverse collection.

MULTIMEDIA GUIDE AND DOWNLOADABLE TOUR

In February 2012, the MFA launched a new multimedia tour for visitors that features 10 works of art by African American artists from the 19th century to today. The self-guided tour is hosted by Edmund Barry Gaither, Director and Curator of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists. Artists featured include Archibald Motley, Kara Walker, and Fred Wilson. Interviews with Walker and Wilson provide insight into their works, and take the visitor on a journey throughout history. The guide features conversations with Boston artist Robert Freeman, painter of *Black Tie*, and John Axelrod, whose collection of works by African American artists was acquired by the MFA, greatly expanding the Museum’s holdings. Highlights of the multimedia tour are available for download at <http://www.mfa.org/explore/mfa-guide/african-american-artists>.

The MFA also offers a Latin American Artists Tour. Available in English and Spanish, and narrated by José Massó, host and producer of *¡Con Salsa!* on WBUR, this tour highlights 10 objects from the Ancient Americas to modern times, ranging from an Olmec Mask and Central American gold, to *Cercle du Blé* by Matta (Roberto Sebastian Matt Echaurren) and *Staccato* by Cesar Paternosto. Highlights of the tour are available at <http://www.mfa.org/explore/mfa-guide/latin-american-artists>. The multimedia guides can be rented at the Museum (\$5 for members, \$6 for nonmembers, and \$4 for youth) or visitors can download highlights of the tours onto their own mobile device for enjoyment in the galleries.