

AFRICA, IMAGINED: Reflections on Modern and Contemporary Art explores the complex nature of African art, while demonstrating how modern and contemporary artists have been inspired, intrigued by, and responded to its truths and myths. For centuries, the arts and cultures of Africa have captured the interests and imaginations of people across the globe. Between the 7th and 15th centuries, long-standing trade routes across Africa introduced their cultures, arts, and philosophies to Europe and Asia. These early encounters not only promoted trade but advancements in Western arts and sciences.

However, the ensuing enslavement of Africans from the sixteenth century through Europe's formalized colonization of the continent, during the late nineteenth into the early twentieth centuries, resulted in Africa's plunder. For the various ethnic groups of Africa, the system of value for their lands, raw minerals, and materials, such as cocoa, iron ore, ivory, gold, and rubber was vastly different from that of Europeans. They believed in a responsibility to preserve these resources and pass down their cultural

traditions, ensuring the well-being for Africa's future generations. Europeans disrupted these long-held systems and promoted the myth that Africans were unaware of their resources' capabilities. They seized these materials and other goods for economic and societal gain. Disconnected from their homelands and original purposes, animals, artworks, cultural traditions, and even the people themselves were used to forward notions of African "primitivity". This belief cemented ideals of Western supremacy and justified the brutalities of displacement, forced labor, and poaching, among other practices throughout Africa.

Ironically, by the early to mid-twentieth century, African art had Europe and the United States abuzz with new ideas and energy. The avant-garde of that era discovered the promise offered by African art's bold and stylized figures, energetic and repetitive lines, unique patterning, and vibrant coloring. During this period, artists appropriated these motifs and forms, embracing—and even at times

prompting—an exoticized view of African art and its creators. *Africa, Imagined* acknowledges these complicated Western histories, interpretations, and experiences. Yet this exhibition also presents works by artists from that time through today, who drew and continue to draw inspiration from African art. With their artworks, these artists freed themselves from prevailing aesthetic norms by responding to and reclaiming African art and culture. Their efforts created new pathways for deeper understanding of and appreciation for the peoples of Africa, whose lives and artworks honor their ancestors, communities, and the natural and spiritual worlds. Moreover, these makers were intent on dispelling inferior associations in relation to the peoples and arts of Africa. In their hands, the cultural importance, diverse social practices, and lifestyles of the Akan, Bwa, Dogon, and Yoruba, among others, as well as those within the African Diaspora, are manifest. *Africa, Imagined* illuminates the cultural vitality and sophistication of African art and art

making, revealing its enduring impact on the Western art world as we know it today.

# CHARLES WILBERT WHITE

Born 1918, Chicago, IL

Died 1979, Los Angeles, CA

## ***Kasai Dance Mask***, ca. 1937-1938

pencil on cream wove paper



Gordon Parks, *Charles White in front of his mural "Chaos of the American Negro,"* 1941, gelatin silver print. Charles White Archives.

Charles White's images depict African Americans with determination and grace.

*Kasai Dance Mask* comes from one of White's sketchbooks during his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago. This image bears markings similar to masks made by the Kuba



Kuba Artist, *Female Face Mask (ngady mwaash)*, late 19th–early 20th century, wood, pigment, raffia textile, cowrie shell. New York Public Library

people in the southern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Kuba have some of the most elaborate masks and masquerading traditions that honor the ngesh (nature spirits). The ngesh are thought to be similar to humans, live near water, and can appear at any moment. The Kuba believe that ngesh influence happenings within the

community, such as periods of harvest and women's fertility. While White drew geometric patterning above the brow and on the face; a line of dangling cowrie shells on the temple; almond-shaped eyes, the identity of the mask is unknown. It is perhaps a ngady mwaash, a highly decorated mask used to honor Kuba women.

*Kasai Dance Mask* displays the artist's potential to create powerful images that convey pride in African and African American culture. White believed art could change the world saying, "Art must be an integral part of the struggle. It can't simply mirror what's taking place. It must adapt itself to human needs. It must ally itself with the forces of liberation."

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund Purchase, 2008.1**

## ROMARE BEARDEN

Born 1911, Charlotte, NC

Died 1988, New York City, NY

### ***Mecklenburg Autumn*, 1979**

color lithograph



Diane Waler, Romare Bearden in his Canal Street studio, 1976. via Queen City Nerve.

Romare Bearden was an African American artist and writer, renowned for his collages and photomontages. Bearden's dynamic and evocative works put a spotlight on African American lives and experiences during the mid-20th century, bridging the gap between innovation and tradition. Bearden believed his art making process was akin to jazz or blues composers. So, his works are highly energetic and spontaneous. His semi-abstract works feature flattened yet sculptural figures, complex patterns, and bold blocks of color.

In *Mecklenburg Autumn*, the figure of a woman with a patterned quilt on her lap looms grandly in the foreground. The artist renders the woman's face as an African mask, giving her a statuesque

appearance. Another woman stands beside her, cradling a jumble of fabric. Bearden, a native of North Carolina's Mecklenburg County, found frequent inspiration in this region and other American locales, the Civil Rights Movement, and African American music. As with many Black artists during the 1960s and '70s, African art and culture also influenced his works. Bearden's contributions to American art went beyond his artworks. He co-founded several groups that advocated for African American artists and civil rights issues, including Spiral, Cinqué Gallery, and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 2007.23**

## JACOB LAWRENCE

Born 1917, Atlantic City, NJ

Died 2000, Seattle, WA

### ***Workshop***, 1972

lithograph



Jacob Lawrence, 1991.

Robert Sorbo ©

AP/Shutterstock.com

Jacob Lawrence's use of flat planes in vibrant hues and angular yet organic forms was developed during the Harlem Renaissance. Lawrence, like other Black artists of his era, often depicted the lives and experiences of African Americans. As a young man, watching construction workers build things fascinated him. As a result, builders were an especially common theme featured in Lawrence's works. Throughout his career, the artist repeatedly portrayed carpenters working and building up their communities, improving the lives of their residents. In this image, Lawrence shows three men at work, while two young men sit on the floor amidst tools, screws, and other building materials. For Lawrence, builders symbolized both artistic creativity and the struggle to survive within society. However, in this examination of

American craftsmanship, the artist demonstrates that race doesn't have to be a factor that divides when the effort to build something for a community is collaborative.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 1993/4.23**

# PABLO PICASSO

Born 1881, Málaga, Spain

Died 1973, Mougins, France



## ***Tête d'Homme à la Pipe***, 1912

etching

Pablo Picasso is best known for co-creating Cubism, an artistic style that broke down two-dimensional pictorial planes, to create the illusion of three-dimensional space. While visiting an exhibition at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1907, Picasso became interested in African art and artifacts. For the artist, the stylized properties, bold lines, and vibrant patterning of African reliquary figures, sculptures, and masks conveyed the forces of nature and the human spirit. Picasso believed that the people of Africa had tapped into something timeless and innate—that art was both physically and spiritually powerful. In return, Picasso channeled this knowledge into his work via simplified figures and shapes, resulting in works that resembled the wooden sculptures he encountered. The artist innovated his practice to render human faces that

resembled African masks and figures, which were indistinguishable from his compositions' backgrounds and alluded to wood relief carvings.

*Tête d'Homme à la Pipe* reflects these influences, as well as the artist's lifelong experimentation with drawing and printmaking. In this etching, angular forms and lines shift and merge. The composition's central figure is obscured, fragmented by geometric planes. Viewers can see the effects of African art within *Tête d'Homme à la Pipe*, whose forms seem to be in rhythmic motion, yet captured and made still within the confines of the two-dimensional space of paper. Picasso's inspiration from African and Iberian art not only contributed to the development of Cubism, but also to that of Surrealism and Expressionism.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts; Gift of  
Mr. and Mrs. Donald S. Gilmore by exchange,  
2013.46**

DAN ARTIST  
Côte d' Ivoire

***Dan Mask***, ca. 1900-1940  
wood



Fashioned from a single piece of wood, this oval-shaped face mask was made by a Dan carver from the Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia. The wood has a shiny yet muddled, black and brown surface. In Dan society, the forms of forest spirits are expressed as human face masks and are imbued with spiritual significance. In performances danced by men, the masks are integrated into the political and religious systems that order Dan society. Mask spirits send dreams to the men, so that they can perform its corresponding dance.

Traditionally, Dan masks can embody a dozen or more properties that address the cultural needs of the community. These can include entertainment, spirits entering villages from initiation camps for food, protecting villages from harmful fires, preparing men for battle, and

participating in racing contests, among other requirements. However, once these masks are removed from their cultural context, their personifications are not easily identifiable. While this mask can be identified as belonging to the Dan people, its intended purpose remains a mystery.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Markin, 1969/70.54**

BWA/NUNA or NUNUMA ARTIST  
Burkina Faso

***Hornbill Mask***, 20th Century  
wood, pigment



Among the Bwa, Lela, Mossi, Nunuma, Nuna, and Winiama in Burkina Faso, abstract and representational masks like this *Hornbill Mask* depict nature spirits who are responsible for life in our world. While unseen in the physical world, these spirits manifest via the natural forces of nature and the cycles of life. Masks like this one are not maintained by secret societies, but entire families, with elder men charged with their care. Performances of these masks narrate encounters with the spirits, and are used during funeral rites, rites of passage, and harvest celebrations.

Masks in these societies symbolize Dwo, the creator spirit's son. Dwo is believed to serve as an intermediary between humans and the spirit world—a messenger. Birds, too, are thought to be couriers, bringing messages from the spirits to

the people. As for the pair of figures crowning this mask, they portray the spirit beings who are thought to live in male and female pairs and have families, similar to that of humans. The graphic patterning found on masks, originating from the Burkina Faso region, indicates a system of communication that illustrates how the people should conduct themselves in society. As a result, masks like these are effective systems of communication that bridge the spirit and human worlds.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund purchase, 2021.12**

## MARTIN CRAIG

Born 1906, Paterson, NJ

Lived and Worked in East Hampton, NY

### ***La Tête Bombe*, 1962**

bronze

Martin Craig was a researcher for the Bell Telephone Laboratories, and was largely a self-taught artist. In the 1930s, Craig created designs for the Federal Art Project and the New York World's Fair. During the 1950s, he taught sculpture at Cooper Union and the Brooklyn Museum Art School.

*La Tête Bombe's* bulbous form is impaled by several bronze rods, dangerously expanding in all directions. The work recalls nkisi nkondi, which are intricate objects imbued with power that are symbols of community well-being and consensus. At their initial discovery, objects like these were used to discredit the beliefs and practices of their makers. However, artists like Craig used nkisi nkondi elements to explore their



Nkisi N'Kondi, mid to late nineteenth century, wood, paint, metal, resin, ceramic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

own artistic practices, even speaking to the issues of the day.

*La Tête Bombe* translates from French as “bomb head.” Here, Craig juxtaposes his scientific training with the physical properties of nkisi nkondi, evoking the philosophical and societal issues of the era. The work’s date brings up other associations, such as the Vietnam War, which would have been on year seven of twenty. *La Tête Bombe* communicates the intense emotion and physical dynamism that nkisi nkondi inspire, and perhaps even the growing sentiment of a world riddled by conflict, with no end in sight.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts; Gift of  
the Longview Foundation, 1961/2.536**

## BAMANA ARTIST

Republic of Mali

### ***Seated Female Figure***

***(Gwandusu)***, early 20th century  
wood



In Bamana culture, the initiation into a specific society leads to obtaining social and spiritual knowledge. The society's leadership commissions and cares for these sculptures, which illustrate their cultural beliefs and morals. These grand, yet idealized figures bear incredible detailing and accuracy to emphasize the figure's power and the Jo's rituals such as initiation, healing, and social responsibilities. They are also used in Gwan, a subsection of Jo associated with fertility and childbirth. This seated woman may be associated with Gwandusu, a name that suggests determination, power, and vitality. It merges Gwan (the group's name), which also means hot, hard, or difficult with dusu, meaning anger, courage, love, and spirit.

Her full, round, and ornately decorated bosom signals motherly attentiveness and a woman of exceptional influence. She wears a geometrically patterned hat, perhaps depicting a charm attached. Both arms are adorned with cuffs, but bound on her left may also be a knife. She holds an ax in her right hand; what was held in her left is unknown. The ax, hat, and knife are all common symbols that convey the might of male hunters. These elements combined reveal the extraordinary nature of this idealized woman. Sculptures like these are shown in groups during yearly events that promote the society's shared beliefs. Before each public showing, they are cleaned, oiled, and clothed; ensuring that these figures attract the attention and reflection of the Jo's devotees.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 2021.16**

## MENDE ARTIST

Sierra Leone

***Helmet Mask (Sowo Wui)***, 20th  
century  
wood



This skillfully rendered *Helmet Mask (Sowo Wui)* represents the Mende Sande women's society's ideal beauty characteristics and social mores.

These include an elaborate hairstyle, an unwrinkled but wide brow, almond-shaped eyes, small but proportionate lips, and a magnificently ringed neck. Together, these elements convey a sense of serenity and self-control. Moreover, each trait symbolizes specific ideals: the ears signify learning and sexuality; the mouth dignity; and the neck rings health and wealth.

Masks such as these are used during rites of passage ceremonies, demonstrating the roles and responsibilities of the community's women to new initiates. Sande society masks can also represent their founding and guardian deity, Sowu, while also participating in major public

events. The society unites the community's women, making their collective social and political influence powerful.

The importance of the *Helmet Mask (Sowo Wui)* and corresponding masquerades is that this is the only cultural tradition of African-based masquerades not performed by men. This underscores not only the Sande society's importance to their community, but also their roles as intercessors between the spirit and physical worlds.

**Long-term loan from Richard Hunt, H95.01**

SHEILA PREE BRIGHT

Born 1967, Waycross, GA

Lives in Atlanta, GA

***Untitled #12*** from the ***Suburbia***  
series, 2006 (printed 2020)  
archival inkjet print (edition 4/15)



In the *Suburbia* series, Pree Bright focused her lens on common economic signifiers of the middle-class like articles of clothing and plush environments. In this image, the subject is a woman reading *Newsweek* on a brocade-covered bed. The magazine's cover seems to replace the face of the woman holding it. The artist's strategic use of the prop and soft lighting deliberately veils the woman's ethnicity—a sly reminder from the artist to “not judge a book by its cover.” While images like these might be typical today, Pree Bright's aim during that time period was to question depictions of the American middle class—or the lack of representation of the Black middle class. The artist asks viewers to question the real and imagined differences of those having the same economic privilege and mobility. Is

there such an ideal as a Black or White home?  
Or are these deliberately constructed narratives  
perpetuated throughout mainstream media and  
external social forces? Pree Bright asks viewers  
to challenge these concepts and decide if the  
middle-class across varying cultures has more in  
common than not.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund purchase, 2020.26**

OMAR VICTOR DIOP

Born 1980, Dakar, Senegal

Lives in Dakar, Senegal

***Jean-Baptiste Belley (1746-1805),***

2014

pigment inkjet print on Harman by  
Hahnemühle paper



Omar Victor Diop reimagines celebrated historical figures within the African diaspora. In this photograph, Diop portrays, Jean-Baptiste Belley. Formerly enslaved on the island of Saint-Domingue (now Hispaniola), Belley purchased his freedom in 1764 and fought to end slavery as an infantry captain during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). The National Convention in Paris elected Belley as its first black deputy in 1793.



Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson, *Portrait of J. B. Belley, Deputy for Saint-Domingue, 1797* oil on canvas, Musée National du Château, Versailles

Diop re-envisioned a French Romanticist Girodet's painting of Belley. Wearing similar garments to Belley's uniform, Diop inserts the French Republic's colors and injects contemporary elements. Instead of leaning against the bust of the French philosopher and abolitionist Guillaume Raynal, Diop leans on a soccer ball.

Says the artist: "Soccer is an interesting global phenomenon that for me often reveals where society is in terms of race. When you look at the way that African soccer royalty is perceived in Europe, there is a very interesting blend of glory, hero-worship, and exclusion. Every so often, you get racist chants or banana skins thrown on the pitch and the whole illusion of integration is shattered in the most brutal way. It's that kind of paradox I am investigating in the work."

**Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan**

HANK WILLIS THOMAS

Born 1976, Plainfield, NJ

Lives in New York City, NY

***Afro-American Express, Discover, MasterCard***, 2004

ink, paper, and plexiglass



Nathan Bajar for The  
New York Times

*Afro-American Express, Discover, MasterCard* by Hank Willis Thomas is a work from the artist's *Branded* series that critiques commerce and advertising practices. In this work, Willis Thomas uses a symbol of global consumerism—credit cards—to comment on the illusion of individual buying power, while also alluding to an industry from which much of America and Europe's wealth was amassed—the slave trade. It also speaks to how credit cards can be a form of financial access or indebtedness, providing people with the ability to pay for the necessities and excesses of their everyday lives. Says the artist: "...[I]n our society you need a credit card, even if you don't use it...so I started thinking about credit as a form of indentured servitude, because of the way we're conditioned to buy into this and to carry

around all this debt. And so one of my friends, Ryan Alexiev, who is a graphic designer, and I started thinking about credit cards...[as] an interesting way to speak about this form of indentured servitude, using imagery from the abolition movement.”

**Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan**

## BRENT HARRIS

Born 1970, Flint, MI

Lives in Kalamazoo, MI

### ***Diasporic Spirit*, 2020**

cypress, nails, and steel



Nkisi N'Kondi, mid to late nineteenth century, wood, paint, metal, resin, ceramic. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Trained in various sculpting and casting techniques, Brent Harris drew inspiration for this piece from nkisi nkondi. Originating from the Kongo peoples of the Democratic Republic of Congo, nkisi nkondi power figures can serve as vessels on which oaths are made to resolve disputes or as guardians from harm. While this sculpture is not an actual nkisi nkondi, the individual nails, which traditionally signal a formalized agreement and therefore enhance its power, are instead imbued with some of the artist's life force and perhaps even those of his ancestors.

Says Harris of the work, "*Diasporic Spirit* envisions the souls of our ancestors as they are

released from this world and in transition to the next...the wood is carved and burned intuitively... The heat from the torch flame brings out texture and fissures inherent in the wood and symbolizes the release of its spirit into a new form. The insertions of iron nails driven into the wood traditionally stir the spirit held inside and are a reminder of the impermanence of our bondage to this world.” Thereby, *Diasporic Spirit* illustrates the continuing influences of African Art on the practices of artists today.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
David Isaacson Fund Purchase, 2022.16**

## CHARLES SEARLES

Born 1937, Philadelphia, PA

Died 2004, New York City, NY

### ***Dancers***, c.1975

acrylic on canvas



Influenced by AfriCobra's (a 1970s Chicago-based group of black artists who sought to translate elements of African culture into an African American context) use of vibrant colors and themes celebrating the African and African American experience, Charles Searles' works juxtapose the symmetry and patterning of African textiles. Combined with a dynamic color palette, the overall effect is dazzling. By employing these intense colors and electrifying patterns, artists like Searles hoped to amplify viewers' spiritual awareness and political consciousness. This work displays two dancers similarly posed and clothed in a bold yet harmonious combination of patterned suits. Both dancers appear to be the same woman, but closer inspection reveals that Searles deliberately varied the colors on their faces, hands, and feet. The vertical and circular

lines in varying hues of yellow, orange, and brown framing the top and bottom of the painting further accentuate the figures' garments and movements.

Searles' official biography states, "His travels in Africa marked his life and work forever - the life, the rhythms, the patterns, and the energy... [The Dancer] series marked a change in his life, celebrating his new sense of renewal and the African experience."

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
David and Muriel Gregg Estate Fund, 2022.2**

KEN GONZALES-DAY

Born 1964, Santa Clara, CA

Lives in Los Angeles, CA



***Africa: (left) Republic of Congo, Mask; Mali, Mother and Child for the Gwan Assoc.; Kota Peoples, Obamba or Mindumu groups, Janus Reliquary Guardian Figure; Republic of the Congo, Figure of Hunter; Nigeria, Plaque; Republic of Congo, Figure; Liberia, Mask; (center) Indonesia, Magical Figure of the Toba Bakat, (Louvre); Côte d'Ivoire, Fetish Figure; Republic of Mali, Boli (Komo Society Altar) (all LACMA) from the series *Constellations*, 2019***  
archival Ink on Canson PhotoSatin Paper

Ken Gonzales-Day's interdisciplinary projects examine the historical construction of race, identity, and systems of representation within photography and museum collections. His *Constellations* series is a body of work featuring clusters of objects drawn from various museums. In these works, the artist seeks to examine how cultures, objects, and races are classified and

displayed in museums from the nineteenth century to the present.

Composed of various African sculptures and masks from different cultures, the artist uses this cluster to allude to the plunder of African art and artifacts, as well as the history of collecting and presenting these objects to support Western notions of cultural superiority. Gonzales-Day sees these compositions as conversations with the past, encouraging viewers to re-evaluate how objects have historically emphasized racial hierarchies and Whiteness in art and society. The artist's *Constellations* series aims to dispel notions of cultural difference and illuminate the rich and long-standing cultural traditions of a people and their objects.

**Courtesy of the artist and Luis De Jesus Los Angeles**

## CHAKAIA BOOKER

Born 1953, Newark, NJ

Lives in New York, NY

### ***Minor Illusion*, 2007**

rubber



Photo of Chakaia Booker by  
Nelson Tejada.

Since the 1980s and '90s, Chakaia Booker has transformed discarded tires into striking, abstract sculptures. Her interest in rubber as an artistic medium grew while living in Manhattan's East Village during a period when the neighborhood was overrun with vacant lots, graffiti, and waste. Booker's commanding sculptures explore a range of issues, such as industrial waste and decline or the constructs of race and class. Her works also hint at the cultural and historical associations of the medium, such as Belgium's former reliance on exploited African labor in the Congo to harvest the rubber plant. Through a labor-intensive process that involves slicing, twisting, and weaving, the artist reshapes a material used in many commercial products into intricate and evocative forms. As with other works by Booker, *Minor Illusion* asks viewers to consider our roles

within a system that causes our society to abuse its natural resources, and as a result, negatively impact our environments and people.

**Mott- Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan**

RICHARD HUNT

Born 1935, Chicago, IL

Lives in Chicago, IL

***Untitled***, 1974

lithograph



Richard Hunt's reflections on the natural world take shape in the form of abstract drawings, prints, and sculptures that suggest movement, grace, and the unknown. Hunt also uses his works to communicate the complexities of the Black experience in America. In *Untitled*, the artist juxtaposes organic and geometric forms to create an abstract composition of pyramids against a stark white ground, with the uppermost part of the print being composed of blacks and grays filled with angular, yet organic forms. Perhaps the artist is inferring the Egyptian belief in life after death or how pyramids can be symbolic of physical and spiritual enlightenment. At once abstract and evoking elements of a landscape, the artist allows viewers to decipher these markings for themselves—offering limitless interpretations. A graduate of the School of the

Art Institute of Chicago, Hunt has been widely celebrated nationally and internationally for his innovative artistic practice during his almost 70-year career.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Nause, 1975/6.58**

# LE CORBUSIER

Born 1887, La Chaux-de-Fonds,  
Switzerland

Died 1965, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin,  
France

## ***Unité - No.2***, 1965

etching



Nina Leen © / Time Inc.  
/ Getty Images

Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, or Le Corbusier, was a Swiss-French architect, designer, and painter who pioneered modern architecture. During the early 20th century, Le Corbusier co-founded the Purist movement with artist Amédée Ozenfant, stating that objects should be rendered in their simplest forms. Later on, the artist embraced abstraction that emphasized curvilinear forms, lines, and contours.

In 1953, Le Corbusier created a series of pastel sketches that he revisited twelve years later in a 20-etching and aquatint portfolio called, *Unité* or Unity. The background of the composition is broken into three sections of color punctuated by blue, green, and red. The print is abstract, and its

angular lines and organic forms allude to a head in profile. Upon close examination of the head with its stacked forms at the crown, viewers can see Cubist and Purist impulses. Made in collaboration with the printing workshop, Atelier Crommelynck, *Unité* reveals Le Corbusier's desire to represent the complexities of life in intuitive forms, bold color, and dynamic lines.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1966/7.75**

## CHARLES ALSTON

Born 1907, Charlotte, NC

Died 1977, New York City, NY

### ***Jazz***, 1950

oil on canvas



Andrew Herman, *Charles Alston*, 1939. Archives of American Art.

A renowned educator, muralist, painter, and sculptor, Charles Alston's art practice and styles varied widely throughout his life. In *Jazz*, Alston merges abstraction, cubist, and figurative techniques to convey the impression of a female jazz singer with the hazy figures of a bassist, trumpet and piano players in the background. The muted color palette and shadowy figures do not lessen the energy or emotional impact of the setting. This scene most likely depicts one of the artist's experiences attending any one of the dozens of jazz cafés in New York City. Alston was a jazz enthusiast and was friends with famous musicians like Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday. Perhaps one of those famed women is the subject of this painting. Regardless, the emotional properties of jazz are clearly evident throughout its composition. Jazz

and its impact on people was a theme Alston revisited repeatedly throughout his decades-long career.

**Courtesy of Private Collection**

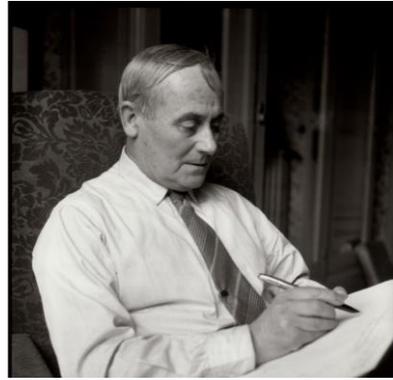
## JOAN MIRO

Born 1893, Barcelona, Spain

Died 1983, Palma, Spain

### ***Tete Fleche***, 1960

etching



Ida Kar, Joan Miró, 1954 ©  
National Portrait Gallery,  
London

Though never officially part of the Surrealists, Joan Miró is considered a leading artist of the group. Miró was also a pioneer of automatism: a method of spontaneous drawing that attempted to express the inner workings of the human psyche. Automatists and especially, Surrealists believed the unconscious embodied mythic qualities—and that non-Western cultural rituals, like those in Africa and other parts of the world, had a secret knowledge that provided more insight into the natural world. Much like other artists, who employed the aesthetic principles of these movements that offered artists more introspection and freedom to break with artistic conventions, Miró continues his own explorations of the unconscious in this print.

Close scrutiny of *Tête Fleche* (translated from French means Arrow Head) reveals the artist's rendering of an amorphous head-like shape in profile. To the left of this figure, an anchor-like form directs viewers' gazes upward. However, the artist interjects a new technique—etching with aquatint and carborundum in colors into his explorations. Different from traditional etching—the incised work is replaced by a relief work, the artist wrote, “the results are fascinating and very beautiful. The artist can express himself with more richness and freedom... which give a beautiful substance and a more powerful line...”

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1973/4.1**

## ADOLPH GOTTLIEB

Born 1903, New York, NY

Died 1974, New York, NY

### ***Figure Eight*, 1967**

screenprint



Marvin Lazarus,  
*Adolph Gottlieb in his  
23rd St studio*, 1965. ©  
Roberta Fast Lazarus

Adolph Gottlieb was one of the members of the first generation of Abstract Expressionism. Gottlieb became a founding member of “The Ten,” a group of artists devoted to expressionist and abstract painting. Abstract Expressionists believed in using simple yet large forms, Surrealist principles, and symbols from non-Western cultures to create meaning.

As a collector of African, Oceanic, Pre-Columbian, and Indigenous American, Gottlieb believed in appropriating those cultural emblems to convey nature and the real world. The artist believed art should communicate with viewers and evoke emotional responses. He stated, “do these images convey any emotional truth?” This,

of course, indicates my belief that art should communicate...

I love all paintings that look the way I feel."

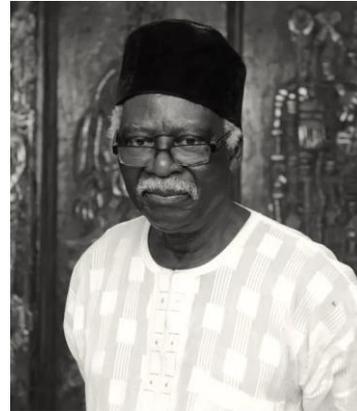
*Figure Eight* signals the artist's transition from utilizing non-Western cultural signifiers. However, the print is similar to his mid to late 1960s paintings, which saw radically simplified compositions. While *Figure Eight* may bridge the period between his "Pictographs" and "Imaginary Landscape" series, he continued to assert the value of "paintings as a conversation between the artist and viewer" throughout the artist's decades-long career. Despite *Figure Eight's* defined background and pared down symbols that lack any physical likeness to the world, the artist's desire to create universal and introspective images demonstrates his deep appreciation for African art and other non-Western forms.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Mr. Edward F. Safdie, 1980/1.52**

## BRUCE ONOBRAKPEYA

Born 1932, Agbara-Otor, Nigeria

Lives in Lagos, Nigeria



### ***Afieki I*, 1979**

linoleum cut

As one of the pioneering figures in a Nigerian artistic movement grounded in African aesthetic traditions, Bruce Onobrakpeya co-founded the Zaria Art Society, a group dedicated to developing a style of postcolonial Nigerian art that embraced Pan-African folklore, motifs, and symbolism. Onobrakpeya's work showcases Nigeria's rich cultural traditions and challenges the prevailing notion of European superiority in the arts.

In *Afieki I*, the artist employs *Ibiebe*, an original writing style he invented and refined from 1978 to 1986. During this time, he explored ideas linked with Urhobo beliefs, customs and history in his art. The Urhobo people are from southern Nigeria, near the Niger River; therefore, many of their spiritual beliefs and traditions reflect their

connection to water. The abstract appearance of Ibibé ideograms within the composition lends itself to calligraphic, painterly, and sculptural associations. *Afiéki I* depicts a set of figures in the rhythmic patterning, reflecting the artist's knowledge of his heritage. Afiéki means market, which the artist has depicted as being abuzz, full of energy and people in the midst of their daily activities.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Howard Wolpe, 1982/3.15**

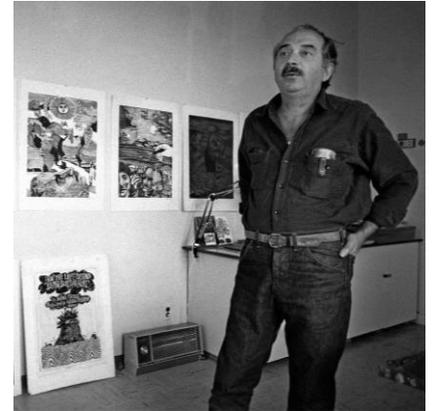
## ANTONIO FRASCONI

Born 1919, Montevideo, Uruguay

Died 2013, Norwalk, CT

### ***Head of a Negro Worker*, 1944**

woodcut



Antonio Frasconi in his studio in 1978. Jack Manning/The New York Times

In 1953, *Time* magazine declared Antonio Frasconi to be “America’s foremost practitioner of the ancient art of the woodcut.” Politically active, Frasconi disliked art that dwelt on aesthetics at the expense of social problems. Throughout his career, he created a series of woodcut prints that addressed war, racism, and poverty. Included are woodcut portraits of people who were tortured and killed under the military dictatorship in Uruguay, the Vietnam War, and the 1970 on-campus killing of four Kent State University students by the Ohio National Guard. On his choice of subject matter, the artist stated, “A sort of anger builds in you, so you try to spill it back in your work.”

*Head of a Negro Worker* reflects Frasconi’s commitment to representing individuals from

marginalized groups. In this woodcut, the artist depicts a Black worker, emphasizing the individual's humanity, as well as the condition of labor. The medium allows intense and distinctive mark-making, and the deliberate cropping of the subject focuses viewers on the individual's head. The laborious woodcutting process is made visible on the subject's skin, resembling wrinkles. Frasconi poignantly conveys the potentially exploitative labor conditions, along with the psychological and physical impacts of such practices on a person.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1964/5.744**

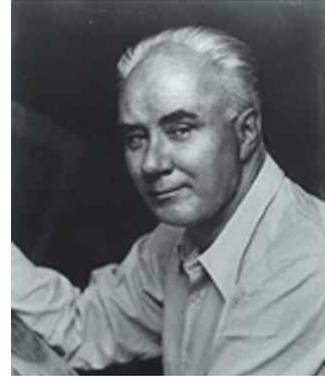
## ADOLF DEHN

Born 1895, Waterville, MN

Died 1968, New York, NY

### ***African Shore*, 1967**

lithograph



Peter A. Juley & Son  
Collection, Smithsonian  
American Art Museum

Adolf Dehn was one of the most notable lithographers of the 20th century. Created a year before his death, *African Shore* illustrates Dehn's exploration of new textures and techniques that expanded the scope of lithography. Using tushe (a liquid lithographic medium that allows fluid effects), the artist created an appearance of wash to suggest a cloudy sky. In the lower foreground, hazy figures emerge, perhaps suggesting groups of people. The overall effect lends the work an eerie quality.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Dehn achieved national fame. His subsequent financial success allowed him to travel to various places around the globe, such as Cuba, Haiti, the Yucatan, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and India. Although there are no official records of him

visiting the African continent, the unfamiliarity of the people and cultures he encountered while traveling became a source of inspiration for many of his works during this period. *African Shore* reflects the artist's interest in new lithography techniques and his impressions of the "exotic" places he visited.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1968/9.9**

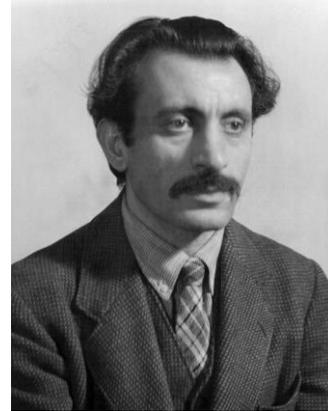
## ARSHILE GORKY

Born 1904, Van Vilayet

Died 1948, Sherman, CT

### ***Mannikin***, 1930-31

lithograph



Arshile Gorky was a key figure in the transformation of American art, and is well known for his work that fused American Abstraction with European Surrealism. While Gorky is best known for free-flowing and colorful compositions, early works recall Paul Cézanne and the experimental Cubist aesthetics of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. In 1937, art critic and acquaintance of Gorky, Harold Rosenberg, said to him in mock sympathy, “Just when you’ve gotten Picasso’s clean edge, he starts to run over.” In response, the artist proudly said, “If [Picasso] drips, I drip.”

*Mannikin* exemplifies the artist’s style during the early stages of his career, reflecting the ever-in-flux New York art scene that provided a platform for his continuous experimentation and innovation. A mixture of both geometric and

Surrealist-inspired forms, a biomorphic structure looms at the center, grounded by three distinct shades of black. Along with these black backgrounds, cross-hatched lines to the form's left accentuate the outline of the organic form. Gorky's *Mannikin* alludes to the West's fascination with and exploitation of the visual ambiguities and fractured spatial planes present in African art.

To learn more about Picasso's relationship with African art, please refer to the extended label on Picasso's *Tête d'Homme à la Pipe*, 1912 in this exhibition.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute  
of Arts; Gift of David Markin, 1999.4**

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

Born 1915, Aberdeen, WA

Died 1991, Provincetown, MA

***Africa Suite: Africa 7*, 1970**

***Africa Suite: Africa 10*, 1970**

screenprint



With his bold, abstract, and often intuitive style, Robert Motherwell is considered one of the key forerunners of Abstract Expressionism. Motherwell completed the *Africa Suite* series in 1970. It was his first project entirely devoted to silkscreens, and a divergence from the heavily layered nuances of his oil paintings. In *Africa Suite: Africa 7 & 10*, his black abstract forms stand crisply against their off-white backgrounds. However, upon closer inspection, their tumultuous edges seem to weave in and out of focus. In 1944, the artist wrote, “All my works [consist] of a dialectic between the conscious (straight lines, designed shapes, weighted color, abstract language) and the unconscious (soft lines, obscured shapes, automatism) resolved into a synthesis.”

Motherwell's exploration of automatism (method of art-making focused on the subconscious) and the subconscious can be traced back to his relationship with a group of Parisian Surrealists and French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud (who helped inspire Surrealism). In his 1946 essay *Beyond the Aesthetics*, Motherwell discusses Rimbaud's expedition to Africa and compares Rimbaud's journey to the Surrealist's break from Dada. Similar to Rimbaud who abandoned his intellectual pursuits for a life centered on travel and adventure, the Surrealists rejected Dada's satirical and impractical aesthetic to explore the subconscious. For Motherwell, the subject of Africa represented a similar journey for himself—a clear break from the past, and a leap into the unknown.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Mr. Sheldon Block, 1981/2.61;  
Gift of Mr. Ira H. Levy, 1980/1.40**

TOM NAKASHIMA

Born 1941, Seattle, WA

Lives in Floyd, VA



***Untitled***, 1977

lithograph

Growing up in World War II America, with a Japanese American father and a European-Canadian mother, Tom Nakashima struggled with his cultural heritage and identity. In his work, Nakashima addresses social and political themes that have personal resonance for him, including nuclear war. These themes appear in his work as Eastern and Western symbols and art-historical references.

*Untitled* is the final rendition of his 1973 print titled *Samurai (All Black)*. On *Samurai (All Black)*, the artist states, “[I] watched a lot of Samurai movies – swords slashing kimonos. The final proof was [done in] 4 colors, but for [*Samurai (All Black)*,] we printed the 4 plates each inked with black.” In *Untitled*, a field of intricate patterns is cut by sharp diagonal lines, visualizing the artist’s

fascination with Samurai films in an abstract manner. For the third-generation Japanese American artist, Japan remains a source of inspiration and fascination. However, the vibrant coloring and patterning of this print draws strong comparisons to African fiber printing and production processes such as Yoruban Batik, Bamana Mud Cloth traditions, or even West African wax print fabric.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick Nause and  
Dr. and Mrs. Christopher Graf, 1978/9.70**

## KARA WALKER

Born 1969, Stockton, CA

Lives in Atlanta, Georgia

### ***I'll be a Monkey's Uncle*, 1996**

screenprint



Borrowing from the 18th and 19th century practice of paper portrait silhouettes, Kara Walker reintroduced this unique art form into contemporary art. Recreating narratives from the Antebellum South that re-cast racial stereotypes and plantation mythologies, Walker recalls the imagery of African Americans from minstrel shows, novels, and artworks. The artist's works often show her subjects in demeaning positions, with exaggerated physical attributes in physically and sexually abusive situations. The scenes represented in her work are often nightmarish and difficult to behold. For Walker, the antebellum period, historically thought of as the height of American gentility, is conceived of as a time of terror and intimidation.

*I'll Be A Monkey's Uncle* features a barefoot, African American girl wringing a cloth. A squat, presumably male figure with a large head, flat nose, and long monkey tail faces her, reaching out his claw-like hands towards the dripping cloth. The title of Walker's work is an expression of surprise or improbability of a situation. This sarcastic phrase has its roots in late-19th century beliefs in the supernatural origins of man that rejected the theory of apes and man sharing an ancestor. Walker's use of the zoomorphic figure and the work's title are ironic and noteworthy, alluding to racist stereotypes that dehumanize African Americans by comparing their physical characteristics and behaviors to that of animals.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Helen Sheridan in memory of Ben Tibbs,  
1999.17**

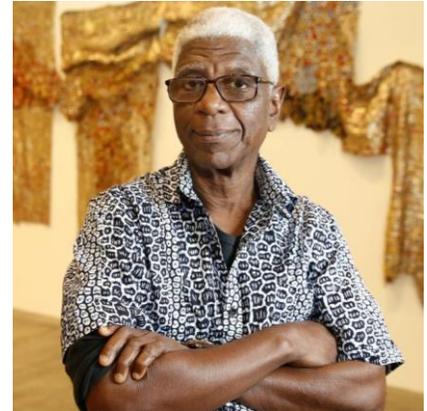
EL ANATSUI

Born 1944, Anyako, Ghana

Lives in Nigeria

***Untitled (Copper Edge with Black)*, 2013**

screenprint with hand stenciling



Although El Anatsui is widely known as a sculptor for his “bottle-top installations” (works that are made out of thousands of aluminum pieces sourced from alcohol recycling stations and are sewn together with copper wire for an appearance of cloth-like fluidity), the artist meticulously orchestrates his materials like a painter working with oil on canvas or the director of a tapestry workshop. In fact, the artist converts found materials into a new type of media that lies between sculpture and painting, combining the aesthetics of textile traditions from his birth country, Ghana (Ghanaian kente cloth) and the global history of abstraction. *Untitled (Copper Ede with Black)* mimics the forms found in Anatsui’s aluminum-based tapestries. The surface of the print shimmers and ripples

depending on viewers' vantage points. The artist made this work so that it could be hung horizontally or vertically. This print continues Anatsui's investigations into the boundaries and qualities of his chosen medium, while also serving as a critique of western consumerism: currently, used electronics, scrap metal, and other waste sites in Ghana pose immense health and social crises, with the Agbogbloshie dump in Accra being one of world's largest. *Untitled (Copper Ede with Black)* also raises questions about ethnic identity in relation to the history of abstraction in African and European art.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Partial purchase through the generosity of an  
anonymous donor and partial gift of  
Thomas Lollar and Paul Limperopulos, 2013.25**

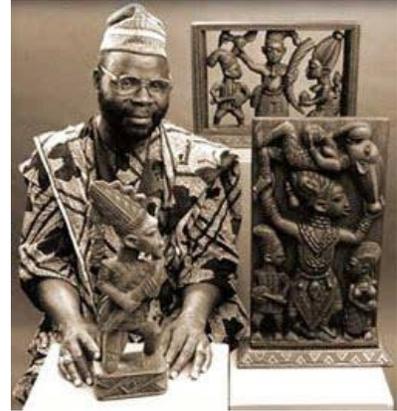
## LAMIDI OLONADE FAKEYE

Born 1928, Ila Orangun, Nigeria

Died 2009, Ife, Nigeria

### ***Yoruba Figures***, ca. 1960

iroko wood



A fifth-generation Nigerian sculptor and academic, Lamidi Olonade Fakeye stands between traditional Yoruba artists and academically trained Nigerian artists who are part of the international contemporary art world. In *Yoruba Figures*, the artist creates a low and even relief panel of a standing male figure, accompanied by two female figures. The male figure, potentially the Yoruba orisha Ogun (the god of iron) holds two staffs. The staff in the male figure's left hand is perhaps the artist's version of a Ọ̀pá Ọ̀sanyìn (herbalist's staff). The bird at the top of the staff represents communication and spiritual power.

Meanwhile, the accompanying women hold jars and carry a child on their backs. A single face is carved in the panel's right corner. This panel is emblematic of Fakeye's carvings depicting

traditional imagery and symbols of Yoruba devotees. However, he carved a single rectangular panel, rather than a full three-dimensional sculpture, updating the format of this iconic and historical subject matter.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of the artist, 1967/8.41**

## ROMAIN DE TIRTOFF ERTE

Born 1892, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Died 1990, Cochin Hospital, Paris,  
France

***Conte Hindou***, ca. 1930 - 1939

tempera



One of the best-known artists of the Art Deco period (a popular design style of the 1920s and 1930s characterized by sleek geometric or stylized forms), the Russian-born French artist Romain de Tiroff, known as Erté, was renowned for his drawings and illustrations of slim, elegant figures, exquisitely clad in imaginative and colorful costumes. Due to their flattened and decorative surface, Erté's works are often compared to Edo-period Japanese woodblock prints. Such comparison reveals the complicated and contentious relationship between Western modernity and non-Western cultures, which is exemplified by *Conte Hindou*.

*Conte Hindou* depicts a figure characterized by sharp, flat, and stencil-like imagery. However, unlike his popular illustrations of fashion models, *Conte Hindou* (translated as Hindu tale) depicts a black semi-nude figure in chains. His restraints at his wrists and waist, along with a loincloth, feature corresponding, intricate patterns. Although clearly art deco in style, the figure's black skin color lends other stylistic comparisons—Greek figure pottery. However, the man's distressed posture, gaze, and attire, along with physical characteristics (full, pink lips, broad nose, and curly hair), make this image most unsettling. While viewers can never be certain of Erté's intent, the image highlights a potentially exploitative gaze and the fraught relationship between Western and non-Western cultures.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Mr. Irving Gilmore, 1977/8.103**

## ADEWUYI OGUNTUNDE FAKEYE

Born in Nigeria, Unknown

Died in Nigeria, ca.1958

***Ere ibeji figure (female)***, 1939

***Ere ibeji figure (male)***, 1939

ire ona wood, thread, and beads

The Yoruba people of Nigeria have one of the highest birth rates of twins in the world. With 45 of every 1,000 children born being a twin, there is also a high mortality rate. In Yoruba culture, twins are considered to possess special powers: they are believed to be one soul, and must be cared for accordingly. If a twin dies in infancy, the family has a wooden figure carved to represent the deceased twin. These carvings are called ere ibeji ('ere' means sacred image, 'ibi', means born and 'eji' means two). Yoruba carving has a number of characteristics: the conical head, an elaborate hairstyle, a roundness of the eyes and facial features, and a balanced composition between the body parts. These features reference a moral virtue or inner goodness all children should develop. Ere ibeji carvings reveal

not only the importance of twins and a strong belief in the afterlife, but also what the Yoruba regard as beautiful and correct. The elaborate style and beauty of the carvings are influenced by the powerful artistic and cultural traditions of the Kingdom of Benin, which flourished in southwest Nigeria between the 13th and 19th centuries.

Adewuyi Oguntunde Fakeye came from a family of carvers and would pass on this tradition to his son Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (1928–2009). After the senior Fakeye's death, Fakeye would keep the familial tradition moving forward by training his brother Akinlabi Fakeye (1936–2012) from 1958–1967. The Fakeye carving tradition lives on in Akinlabi's son, Lukman Alade Fakeye, who lives in Houston, Texas and travels back to Nigeria frequently.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of David Curl, 2020.12.1 & 2020.12.2**

## MIGUEL ORTIZ BERROCAL

Born 1933, Villanueva de Algaidas, Spain

Died 2006, Antequera, Spain

### ***Romeo e Giuletta*, 1967**

brass



Miguel Ortiz Berrocal was known for “puzzle sculptures,” which could be disassembled into abstract pieces. The figurative and abstract sculptor had a personal artistic philosophy that focused on seven main points: science as inspiration, empty space, disassembly, interactive aesthetics, techniques, multiples, and projects.

*Romeo e Giuletta* (translated from Italian means, Romeo and Juliet) is one of Berrocal’s puzzle sculptures and can be presented in several different ways. It is unknown why he chose to render the unlucky lovers, Romeo and Juliet. However, there is much symbolism found within this subject and work. Romeo and Juliet, a timeless drama conveys how long-standing tensions between two wealthy families can lead to love, tragedy, and peace. Perhaps, the

gleaming, gold finish and coloring of the brass signifies greed and the excesses of wealth, also alluded to in *Romeo and Juliet*. However, it is the visual language of fractured planes associated with Western modernist aesthetics and the work's ability to take flexible forms, which is noteworthy. *Romeo e Giuletta's* highlights how modernist principles, which were informed by African art allowed artists the freedom to interpret classic narratives using new aesthetic forms.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of  
Arts;  
Gift of Mr. Martin Bernstein, 1982/3.14**

## SENUFO ARTIST

Côte d' Ivoire and Republic of Mali

***Helmet Mask (Kyponyugo)***, 20th  
century  
wood



Awe-inspiring helmet masks like this one can be found throughout the region spanning the present-day national borders of Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The term "Senufo" can be applied to at least three million people who reside in any of the three countries. However, they do not share a common cultural identity. For instance, there are fifteen different languages among the Senufo people.

Sculptors of helmet masks utilized fierce animals such as antelopes, crocodiles, and warthogs for their carvings, with the intent to inspire fear. This *Helmet Mask (Kyponyugo)* is a composite horizontal mask as it fuses more than one animal together. Typical of masks of this kind, the long snout of the animal extends outward grandly with large teeth bared, while sharp horns jut out from

its head and nostrils. When combined, the effect is menacing and striking, underscoring the mask's power. Helmet Masks like this one are worn with their accompanying costumes by members of the Poro, a men's secret society (Côte d'Ivoire), and other fraternal orders are used during funerals and other ceremonies to embody the powerful spirits charged with escorting the deceased to the afterworld and with general protection of the community from evil spirits. Due to the vigorous and aggressive gesturing and movements of helmet mask performance, women and children are forbidden from attending these events. This restriction is normally respected, as trespassers will have a high penalty exacted from them.

**Long-term loan from Richard Hunt, H95.35**

## LADISLAS SEGY

Born 1904, Budapest, Hungary

Died 1988

**394**, 1966

wood and steel



In 1922, Ladislav Segy—an artist, scholar, and collector—moved to Paris where he began collecting African art and Cubist paintings. Beginning in the 1950s, Segy wrote about African sculptures. His books include *African Sculpture Speaks* (1952), *African Sculpture* (1958), and *Masks of Black Africa* (1976). In *African Art Speaks*, Segy approached African art from different but interrelated perspectives. He viewed the sculptures as products of a distinct African culture and secondly as high-quality works of art. Seeking to bring the African carver's work within the scope of the Western observer, Segy stressed the need for appraising African art within its own context, suspending established procedures for art appreciation and viewing the object as it actually is, not as we think it is or should be.

His sculptural works, such as *394*, are inspired by African art. This work takes its departure from nkisi nkondi power figures. However, Segy's work has geometric and organic references. The artist brings viewers' attention to the small black square at *394*'s center. The sharp-end of several nails frame the square's edges, jutting out precariously yet harmoniously. Segy completes the composition by enclosing these elements in a large black square frame. Similar to Martin Craig's works, Segy's works are informed by Congolese power figures and titled in a mysterious way: To what could *394* be referring? Regardless, Legy achieved his artistic exploration of merging African art traditions and Euro-American abstraction in *394*.

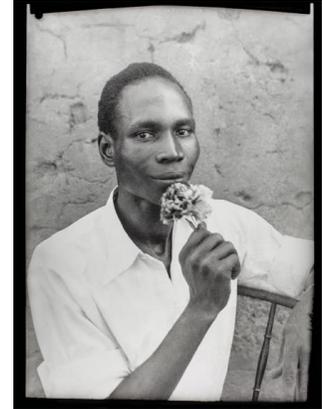
**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of the artist, 1966/7.135**

## SEYDOU KEÏTA

Born 1921, Bamako, Mali

Died 2001, Paris, France

***Girls from Mali***, 1949 (printed 2001)  
gelatin silver print



Seydou Keïta, Self-portrait, ca. 1950s

A self-taught photographer, Seydou Keïta is considered to be one of the most important precursors of contemporary African photography. In *Girls from Mali*, the artist overlays ornate patterns. Contrasting floral patterns of the women's skirts are juxtaposed against an arabesque-like (intertwining plant forms combined with abstract curvilinear motifs) background. A third girl stands behind the sumptuously attired girls in a crisp, white dress. All three wear similar hats in varying designs. Even though they are dressed in their finest perhaps for this momentous occasion, no one smiles. Although the image is black and white, the vibrant jumble of patterns creates a dazzling effect, encouraging viewers to imagine the intensity of the colorfully attired girls and their

background. His masterful composition accentuates their dignity and quiet strength.

Although formally posed, Keïta's studio portraits were not staged or flashy. The artist often used bedspreads and other common materials for his portrait backdrops. He also offered a variety of costumes and accessories his clients could use. Often, they wore their best clothes and brought their own props. This portrait is one of hundreds taken in Keïta's infamous studio, until following Mali's independence, he closed it after taking a job as government photographer in 1962. Keïta retired during the mid-1970s, but the legacy of his timeless photographs that captured how the sitters appeared, how they saw themselves, and how they wanted to be seen by others live on in works like the *Girls from Mali*.

**Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan**

## RICHARD BLACK

Born 1932, Farnhamville, IA

Died 2020, Farnhamville, IA

### ***Ezekiel's Wheel*, 1978**

etching



Born in 1932 in Iowa, Richard Black received a BFA from Drake University in 1957. From 1960 to 1994,

he served as a Professor of Art and Printmaking at Drake University.

In *Ezekiel's Wheel*, Black creates an abstract rendering of the biblical narrative of Ezekiel's wheel (a vision of four wheels that illustrates the spiritual, divine essence of God, and His omnipresence in our reality). Archeologist Elizabeth Pruitt, PhD explains that the wheel-like image in the Book of Ezekiel and the cosmogram “represented the universe, and the path we travel through this world and the afterlife” and “it stands for the enduring connections between this world and the next, the power from above and below.”

In *Ezekiel's Wheel*, Black recreates the narrative through simplified symbolic forms, guiding the viewer's eye through its dynamic color and central composition. The dynamic colors and patterns, together with the spiritual symbolism infused within *Ezekiel's Wheel*, recall African arts' sculptural and two-dimensional works that represent—even bridge—the connection between the spiritual and physical worlds. Black's composition demonstrates that while different culture's spiritual practices have their unique symbols and narratives, some principles are Universal.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Nause, 1979/80.13**

# FAYGA OSTROWER

Born 1920, Łódź, Poland

Died 2001, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**#5907**, 1959

etching



Courtesy Fayga  
Ostrower Institute

Fayga Ostrower was a Polish-Brazilian engraver, painter, illustrator, and university professor. She began her artistic career creating wood engravings for famous Brazilian authors such as Aluísio de Azevedo and Ignazio Silone. Many of her works illustrated social issues, depicting women washing clothes, children from the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and other scenes portraying the life of the poor. However, in the 1950s, the artist abandoned the depiction of figures and began to create abstract works resembling the style of German Expressionism. This aroused criticism stemming from the artistic and cultural beliefs of that era. However, Ostrower resisted, continuing to be introspective, in search of her own rhythm and moral pathway.

Although the artist cast off figurative art making, she also asserted her respect for art as the eternal language of humanity, something she would continue stating for the rest of her life. In #5907, the artist's use of abstraction to convey the human condition is rendered in a compelling grid of blues, black, gray, and white. While the Ostrower's composition is a geometric field of color, subtle angular and curved lines weave their way throughout the composition. Even though the print's title gives viewers no indication of its intended narrative, the overall effect of the work is controlled, yet dynamic; precise, yet spontaneous. While the connection to African Art initially may not be obvious to viewers, one can detect the similarities in her rendering of this composition, along with the belief in artworks' ability to communicate with their viewers.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1967/8.7**

## FRANCES LITTNA

Born 1903, Prague, Czechia

Died 1973, Kalamazoo, MI

### ***Untitled***, 1959

ink on paper

Born in 1903 in Prague, Frances Littna studied law, economics, painting, and music at the University of Prague. Just before the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939, Littna escaped to England. In the 1950s and 60s, he divided his time between London and Paris. In Paris, he became close friends with avant-garde artists such as Jacques Villon (Cubist artist) and Oscar Kokoschka (Expressionist artist). *Untitled* reflects the artist's engagement with the Parisian art scene in the mid twentieth century. The drawing features a group of figures rendered in simplified biomorphic forms. The lack of depth, along with intentionally fragmented spatial planes, reveals the influences of Cubism, an art movement which draws some of its aesthetic properties from African Art. The angularity of the black lines draw viewers into a central focal point. The figures' heads are in profile, and the layers of

shadow, figures, and actual facial features become indistinct—even mask-like. Littna, like other European modern artists, demonstrates his interest in the artistic modes of the era, revealing African art's ability to provide new inspiration for experimentation and innovation within European and American arts scenes.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Victoria Littna, 1981/2.70**

BAULE ARTIST  
Côte d' Ivoire

***Kple Kple Mask***, n.d.  
polychromed wood



The abstract, geometric features of kple kple are uncommon in Baule art, demonstrating that the Goli dance was appropriated over a hundred years ago from their western neighbors, the Wan peoples. In Goli society the Kple Kple masks represent unruly and mischievous spirits, considered both frightening and amusing. They are performed at festive events and during somber occasions by junior ranking Goli dancers prior to more important mask pairs making their entrance. The Kple Kple masks are danced in pairs. The black mask shown here is considered feminine and the red mask masculine. The feminine and masculine pairs of the Baule version of Goli emphasizes the connection between men and women. While the circular face represents the life-giving force of the sun and the buffalo horns are associated with aggression.

**Collection of the Flint Institute of Arts; Gift of Justice and Mrs. G. Mennen Williams, 1973.13**

YORUBA ARTIST  
Nigeria

***Osanyin Staff***, n.d.  
iron



Yoruba herbalists and priests enlist the aid of Osanyin, the spirit of herbal medicines, or Opa Erinie, in their work against mental and physical illness caused by malevolent forces and individuals. The Yoruba believe the power of Osanyin is vested in a wrought-iron staff that is placed on altars for this Orisha.

The staff is composed of a circle of small birds and a shaft in the middle that elevates a large bird above the smaller ones. Birds are emissaries of Ogun, the Yoruba god of Iron, and refer to the herbalist's understanding of and power over these malevolent people. There are typically 16 birds, invoking the most sacred number of divination.

**Collection of the Flint Institute of Arts;  
Museum purchase with funds from the  
Collection Endowment, 2018.71**

## DOGON ARTIST

Republic of Mali

***Kanaga Mask***, n.d.

polychromed wood



The Awa, a men's secret society that honors the dead, made and danced this mask. Kanaga masks are worn, with an accompanying costume at a dama ritual. This ceremony leads the souls of the deceased away from the village, allowing for their transformation into ancestors. These impressive masked performances and an abundant array of generosity, also increase the status of the deceased and his descendants.

Uninitiated members of the Dogon community are told that the double-barred superstructure represents a mythical bird with white wings and a black forehead. However, the mask holds more cultural significance to Awa members, who learn that this superstructure represents the body of god, the crossbars serve as his arms and legs, and the order of the universe, with the upper cross-bar symbolizing the sky and the lower

crossbar embodying the earth. All Dogon masks are said to belong to the afterworld, where life and death meet.

**Collection of the Flint Institute of Arts; Gift of Justice and Mrs. G. Mennen Williams, 1973.56**

FRED WILSON

Born 1954, New York, NY

Lives in New York, NY

***Untitled (Venice Biennale),***

2003

C-print



Fred Wilson's work challenges viewers to become familiar with the unseen peoples and untold histories—particularly the experiences of African Americans. As the U.S. representative to the 2003 Venice Biennale, the artist turned his attention to the largely unrecognized presence of Africans in Renaissance Venice. Resulting from Wilson's observations of the Moor as an exoticized slave present throughout the city, *Untitled (Venice Biennale)* superimposes photographic reproductions of two found objects: a historical engraving of Venice and a sculptural "Blackamoor." This term refers to African Muslims or any dark-skinned immigrants, many of whom supported the Venetian economy as skilled craftsmen, gondoliers, and slaves.

Similar to the one pictured here, decorative sculptures of turbaned, servile figures are found on courtyard doors, in hotel foyers, and advertising luxury goods. Like the historical population they stereotype, the artist felt these figures were overlooked, even viewed as “part of the furniture.” In this print, the artist brings the image of the African Venetian to the composition’s forefront, placing him over the city’s signature gondolas. By fusing these two symbols, the artist alludes to their shared historical and economic contributions to Venice’s culture. Wilson's repositioning of this figure creates a lasting impression for viewers, while also illuminating the Moors presence within Venice’s history.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 2012.6**

## WILLIAM MAJORS

Born 1930, Indianapolis, IN

Died 1982, Portsmouth, United Kingdom

### ***Untitled #9***, 1964

etching and aquatint



William Majors studied at both the Cleveland School of Art and the University of Indiana's John Herron Art School. Major's main interests were abstract representations of Biblical stories that endured throughout his career. Majors received the John Hay Whitney Fellowship to study religious art in Italy in 1960. During this period, the artist's aesthetic shifted to more abstract expressionist impulses. After his return in 1962, realizing the need for a more vibrant arts scene and in search of more equitable living, Majors moved to New York City. By chance he met Richard Mayhew, becoming fast friends and was invited to become a member of Spiral, a group dedicated to African American artists and civil rights issues. Says Susan Stedman, Curator and Executor of the William Majors Estate, "Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not view his

art as a political weapon. His primary emphasis...was on the transcendency and universality of art.”

While Untitled #9 is not an abstract work that Major would not have said reflected his African American heritage, the artist did employ abstraction as a means to convey the spiritual nature of the world. For Major, his complex juxtapositions of varying surface qualities and lines create compositions for spiritual contemplation. This idea is somewhat akin to the Bamana culture’s emphasis on the figure of *Gwandusu*, which features ornate patterning throughout its surface, which is supposed to inspire Jo devotees spiritual reflections.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1964/5.746**

## BEATRICE BASSETTE

Born Unknown

Died Unknown

***Return***, 1968

etching



As a widowed mother of three, Beatrice Bassette began her career in 1950 working a variety of professions and as a freelance illustrator. She began her professional art career as a sign painter at Gilmore Brothers. In 1960, Bassette shifted to illustrating fashion advertisements. By the next year, she was the talk of Kalamazoo, with an article appearing about her successful career at Gilmore Brothers in *Ebony* magazine. Founded in 1945, *Ebony* was and continues to be one of the most widely circulated magazines chronicling Black life in America. *Return* shows Bassette's progression, or rather yet her explorations, into the artistic mode of the time, abstraction. The artist creates a central focal point for viewers. Abstracted figures on the left-side are composed of line, form, and shading.

Combined these elements demonstrate  
Bassette's command of the etching process.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of  
Arts; Gift of Tom and Gail Bielefeldt,  
Binghamton, NY, 2016.19**

## KARL SCHMIDT-ROTTLUFF

Born 1884, Chemnitz, Germany

Died 1976, West Berlin

### ***Head***, 1915

Woodcut



Schmidt-Rottluff ranks among the leading artists of the German Expressionist art movement. During the first decades of the 20th century he, among other European artists, sought to promote a modern perspective within the arts. During this period, inspired by African art's angularity and bold lines, artists began re-envisioning their artistic media and methods. The revival of woodcut printmaking gave rise to experimentation with color, form, and subject matter.

The closely cropped figure and thick, angular lines featured in *Head* lend the composition a sculptural, yet unrealistic appearance. Unlike most portraits that record specific people, the artist chose to render a more stylized version of a face. Is this an image of a woman or a man?

Devoid from the remaining parts of the human body, combined with the composition's simple title, *Head*, the emphasis is clearly not on identifying a specific individual. The skewed perspective, flattened space, and angular lines lend the work an evocative and mysterious air. The boundaries of reality are blurred in *Head*, encouraging viewers to question the existence of such a figure in the real world.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase,  
1991/2.6**

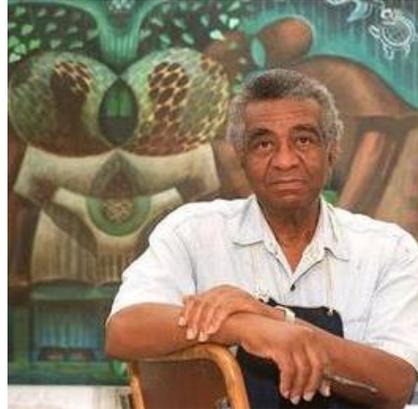
## JOHN BIGGERS

Born 1924, Gastonia, NC

Died 2001, Houston, TX

### ***Our Grandmothers*, 1994**

cloth-bound book



John Biggers' life and artworks were shaped by some of the most tumultuous events of the 20th century, including WWII and the Civil Rights Movement. A muralist, painter, sculptor, printmaker, and teacher, Biggers emphasized African symbols and culture that he blended with images from his Southern upbringing to create a personal visual language. Born in Gastonia, North Carolina, as a young student Biggers was encouraged to explore his culture using his art. As a teacher at Texas Southern University, he encouraged students to create art using their experiences to develop a style that could express their beliefs, culture, and history.

Chosen specifically by Dr. Maya Angelou to illustrate one of her favorite poems, *Our Grandmothers* (first published in *I Shall Not Be*

*Moved*, 1990), John Biggers portfolio is composed of five prints and Angelou's text. The poem recounts the harsh realities of enslaved women's lives and how they endured their oppression to give rise to generations of Black people. Much like Angelou's eloquent and haunting words, Biggers used his unique and meticulous drawing skills to underscore the importance of these women to the existence of Blacks in America and Africa. The artist renders them with dignity, while also honoring their strength and determination to survive.

To hear a reading of Dr. Maya Angelou's poem, *Our Grandmothers*, 1990, scan the QR code.



**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Ronda Stryker, William Johnston,  
Michael, Megan, and Annie Johnston, 2002.4**

## ELIZABETH CATLETT

Born 1915, Washington, D.C.

Died 2012, Cuernavaca, Mexico

### ***For My People*, 1992**

Linen bound book, color lithographs,  
hand-set type, and letterpress

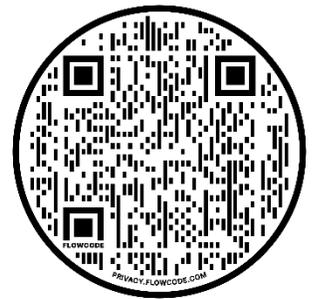


This work is part of a portfolio of works created in response to Margaret Walker's poem *For My People*, 1942. Walker and Catlett were not only alumni of the University of Iowa, but also roommates during their time there. Catlett takes Walker's powerful poem, transforming the famed author's words into iconic images that visualize the complexities of the Black experience. Catlett's images reveal the despair, trials, triumphs, and joys Walker's text conveys. At the bottom of this particular image, the fifth of six plates, stripes of yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, and green in different proportions lead viewers gazes upward. At the composition's center and laid over these colors is a brown circle with nine different, mask-like faces—some in profile and others facing frontally. Above the

circle, the artist places a field of blue. Together, these elements signal the promise of a bright future, which can only be realized through unity.

Says the artist, “I have always wanted my art to service my people—to reflect us, to relate to us, to stimulate us, to make us aware of our potential,”

To hear a reading of Marget Walker’s poem, *For My People*, 1942, scan the QR code.



**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts; Gift of Ronda Stryker, William Johnston, Michael, Megan, and Annie Johnston, 2002.5**

HUGHIE LEE-SMITH

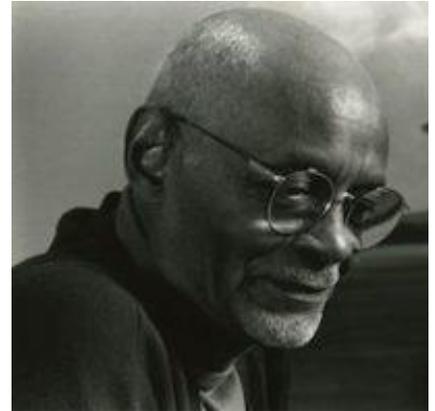
Born 1915, Eustis, FL

Died 1999, Albuquerque, NM

***Untitled (Face and Figure Study)***,

1969

monotype



Hughie Lee-Smith has been associated with both Magical and Social Realism for his realistic urban and rural scenes full of symbolism. Working during a period dominated by the Abstract Expressionists' colorful and rapidly painted canvases, Lee-Smith chose to instead focus on depicting solitary figures or groups in open spaces. His quietly powerful and sometimes mysterious drawings, paintings, and prints challenge viewers' perceptions about society and our environments.

*Untitled (Face and Figure Study)* is truly unique; no other impression of it exists. Similar to Lee-Smith's paintings, this print is an enigma. Is the Black boy at the center of the composition, leading away, perhaps even comforting, a

younger boy? What meanings are viewers to decipher from the inclusion of an older, tie-wearing man? Why did Lee-Smith include two different renderings of a nude figure—one standing, the other on its side? The artist deliberately rendered first the youths, then the man, and finally the nude forms. The juxtaposition of the boys, nude figures, and professionally attired man conveys a sense of vulnerability—even their shared humanity. Lee-Smith suggests that regardless of age, attire, or differing perspectives that with time little truly separates us from one another.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 2009.78**

MICKALENE THOMAS

Born 1971, Camden, NJ

Lives in Brooklyn, NY

***You're Gonna Give Me the Love  
I Need*, 2010**

mixed media



Andrew Manguam for  
The New York Times

In *You're Gonna Give Me the Love I Need*, Mickalene Thomas presents the reclining figure of a woman, a familiar pose known as the Odalisque. Traditionally, a reclining nude woman portrayed by European male painters, symbolized women as sexually available, idealized, and submissive. In Thomas' hands, however, the woman is fully clothed in a v-neck blouse, black skirt, and red peep-toe pumps. This modern-day woman's posture and facial expression communicate her commanding presence and undeniable style. Weaving in bits of cloth and adding a dash of glitter, Thomas incorporates the bold colors, patterns, and textures of black culture, fashion and everyday life. Despite her colorful surroundings, the model's palpable energy at the composition's center draws in viewers' attention, underscoring

the woman's dynamism and ownership of her sexuality. Thomas' work re-envisioned the Odalisque as a Black woman with agency and power, repositioning the formerly subservient subject to command respect—and even reverence.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund Purchase, 2010.52**

## KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

Born 1955, Birmingham, AL

Lives in Chicago, Illinois

### ***Keeping the Culture*, 2011**

screenprint and linocut in colors,  
on Arches paper

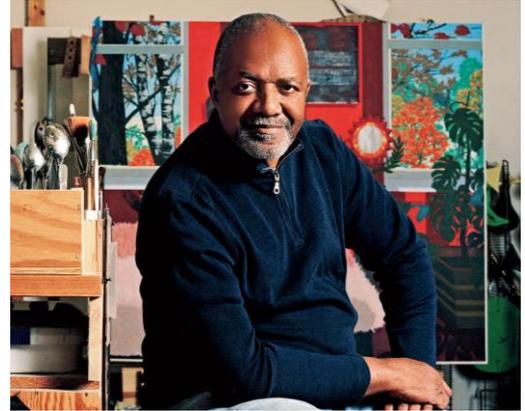


Photo by Dawoud Bey

Kerry James Marshall uses painting, sculptural installations, collage, video, and photography to comment on historical representations of black identity both in the U.S. and in Western art. In this Afro-futurist print, Marshall depicts a nuclear family in modern and stylish settings, surrounded by examples of traditional African masks, statues, and textiles. A tapestry of a Bambara home, typical of the architecture of the Mande people of western Africa, hangs directly behind the couch. The mother and father stand together admiring what appears to be a Kanaga mask of the Dogon people from the central plateau of Mali, which symbolizes God's dominion over the Earth, its atmosphere, and the universe. The couple's two children sit on the sofa, attentively studying a holographic projection of the globe. In Marshall's

imaginings, the black family is together, culturally and technologically advanced, yet still connected to the legacy of their ancestors.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund purchase, 2018.46**

## RENÉE STOUT

Born 1958, Junction City, KS  
Lives in Washington D.C.

***Marie Laveau***, 2009  
color lithograph



Using West African cultural traditions as an entry point to fashion her own unique visual language, Stout creates meticulously constructed images overflowing with symbolism. For example, in *Marie Laveau*, Stout's rendering of the snake recalls the animal's mythical cycles of life, death, and rebirth with which it is often associated. Though famous in both life and death, Marie Laveau is shrouded in mystery. From her appearance to the number of children she bore, much is unknown; and perhaps the artist uses her own likeness in this work, since no verifiable portraits of Marie Laveau exist.

Laveau was born in New Orleans in 1794 to Marguerite Henry D'Arcantel and Haitian-born Charles Laveaux, both free people of color. Her maternal grandmother was born in Africa and brought to the Americas as a child. The name

Marie was one that carried significant weight in her family: Laveau's paternal grandmother's name was Marie, as was a daughter, who eventually succeeded her, Marie Heloise, or Marie II. Marie Laveau, the so-called "Voodoo Queen," was a devout Catholic and a practitioner of indigenous African spirituality. Renowned for her spiritual power and community standing, Laveau served as a vessel—inheriting and passing on her family's religious and cultural traditions to future generations. The anglicized word "voodoo" is derived from the Fon Vodun, which translates to "introspection into the unknown."

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund Purchase, 2010.32**

YASHUA KLOS

Born 1977, Chicago, IL

Lives in Chicago, IL

***You Learn Stillness To Become More Gentle*, 2019**

mixed Media; paper construction of woodblock prints and graphite on archival paper



Yashua Klos' dynamic and multi-layered collages feature overlapping prints and drawings reflecting the artist's musings on community, identity, and cultural memory. For him, they serve as metaphors for the "fragmentation of African American identity." The artist's juxtaposition of whirling and fractured heads, figures, and geometric forms create dynamic spaces that challenge ideas about race, marginalization, and urban mythology surrounding black masculinity created by pop culture.

Here within this composition, Klos creates swatches and samples of textures by hand-carving and inking woodblock prints to create a complex layer of visual information. Piecing and

arranging a selection of patterns laid over a pencil blueprint, the artist creates a complete portrait. Klos uses *You Learn Stillness To Become More Gentle* to suggest that despite outward turmoil and the burden of others' perceptions, introspection can be a means of survival and ultimately freedom. Says the artist, "It's also about a beauty that comes from adapting and thriving in that fractured relationship to America AND African-ness."

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund purchase, 2020.1**

## BAMANA ARTIST

Republic of Mali, Republic of Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Republic of Senegal



### ***Chiwara Antelope Headdress,***

20th century

Wood, beads, fiber, metal

*Chiwara Antelope Headdress* is another type of composite mask that combines the long, curved horns of an antelope with a small, humped body—most likely that of an aardvark. The circular-shaped pattern imprinted on the sides of both these animals, most likely recalls the pangolin, occasionally referred to as “the scaly anteater”. All three animals have strong connections to the land—aardvarks claw the earth searching for ants, antelopes paw the ground with their hooves, and pangolin dig into soil and plants for their prey. This carved headdress represents Chi Wara, the spirit of Mali’s Bamana people they believe is responsible for teaching them how to farm. At one time, young men wore both feminine and masculine versions of this

mask in a performance that both instructed and celebrated the best farmers. Today, while headdresses similar to these still represent Chi Wara, performances are more for fun than ceremonial use.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Purchased with funds provided by an anonymous  
donor, 2009.94**

## IBRAHIM SAID

Born 1976 Cairo, Egypt  
Lives in Greensboro, NC

### ***Calling***, 2013

white earthenware



Inspiration for Ibrahim Said's sculptures come from Islamic art and Egyptian culture. For Said, the physical form of his works serves as each piece's foundation. Each additional step, including its carving, glazing, and firing must support, even complement his sculptures. *Calling*

features trumpet-like forms much like the megaphones often affixed to the top of minarets that call Muslims to prayer. However, the highly patterned ends of Said's "megaphones," resemble ancient Islamic jug filters. Over the centuries, jug filters were embellished with beautiful floral, geometric, and calligraphic patterns. Said continues this tradition

by incorporating those patterns into his sculpture. The simple circular shapes balance the ornate carving. The sculpture's green glaze is similar to glazes used in ancient Egyptian ceramics.

*Calling's* dynamic patterning, hybrid form, and deep surface color are a harmonious blend of tradition and contemporary. Said demonstrates the historic and innovative nature of Islamic and Egyptian art that endures today.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund purchase, 2016.37**

ASHANTI ARTIST  
Côte D' Ivoire

***Untitled***, ca. 1930-1940  
cast brass



In the region of what is now modern Ghana, gold was abundant and easily mined. In this region, the Akan peoples created a flourishing gold market; and for centuries routes between sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Arabia, and Europe promoted the trade of ivory, spices, and gold. During the 14th century, the Dyula of Sudan injected Islamic systems for measuring weight into the Akan trading system.

Ashanti gold weights are found in two forms: geometric motifs or stylized figures. Islam forbids depicting figures or idols, and is widely thought the reason why geometric patterns were used to decorate gold weights. Geometric gold weight designs are also found on Ashanti fabrics and other items. Some of these markings are actually Adinkra symbols related to Sankofa principles. Over time, patterning became more complex, like those featured here, bearing spirals and waves.

Eventually, geometric weights became more figurative, showing people in the act of their daily activities, the royal court, and even animals. The KIA also has several of those representational weights in its collection.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Gift of Edwin Meader, 2003.11.34-43**

YORUBA ARTIST  
Nigeria

***Sango Priest and Diviner***, Late  
19th/Early 20th century  
carved wood, pigment



These figures were possibly made for a shrine, dedicated to one of the Yoruba orisha (deities)—potentially Sango. Sango in Yoruba chronology, was the fourth king of ancient Oyo town and is highly respected and considered a central deity of the Yoruba religion, Ise. He is the god of lightning and thunder, the provider of children, and the guardian of twins. Sango can also be a symbol of kings and warriors. Frequently, depictions of Sango worshippers show figures kneeling in reverence, but interestingly, these *Sango Priest and Diviner* stand, almost as if ready to perform an impending ceremony. Each figure bares equipment signaling their duties. The priest holds the main symbol of Sango in his right hand—a once double-headed axe staff. The diviner wears an eleke (necklace of protection) and in her right hand grasps a gourd rattle, another instrument of Sango worship. The use of their left hands signal an event beyond the

realms of the natural world. The man touches the top of his head, perhaps invoking Sango. While between her left shoulder and hand, the woman balances what appears to be a rope of kola nuts, cowrie shells, or beads—all three are divination tools. Throughout each figure's surface are traces of red and blue pigment, revealing their frequent use.

Isese is the root for other spiritual practices such as Candomblé, Santeria, and Vodun, among other religions that worship orishas around the world.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Permanent Collection Fund purchase; 2021.13**

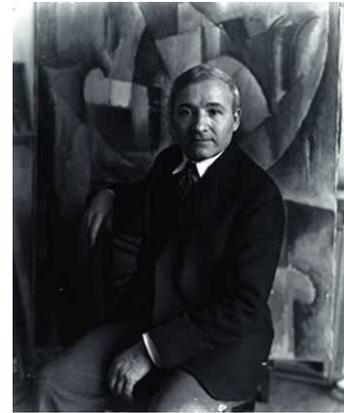
## MAX WEBER

Born 1881, Białystok, Poland

Died 1961, Great Neck, NY

**Figure**, c. 1920

woodcut



In 1891, Max Weber and his parents moved from Białystok, Russia to Brooklyn, New York. At sixteen he began studying art with Arthur Wesley Dow at Pratt Institute. He would study there for three years and move on to teach in Virginia and Minnesota, until he saved enough money to travel to Europe. From 1905 to 1909, Weber traveled throughout Europe, principally studying and working in Paris where he became acquainted with notable modernists of the day Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Henri Rousseau. There he embraced Cubist painting principles and the French fascination with African art and other non-western art forms.

Weber's 1910 return to the United States was a period of printmaking experiments in composition, color, and form. From this period through the mid-1920s the artist embarked upon

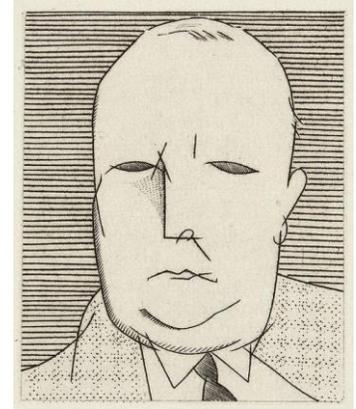
Max Weber seated in front of Interior with Music, ca. 1930, Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum J0002275

several cubist-inspired compositions that reflected his interest in African or non-western themes and aesthetics. In 1926, Weber had a series of poems and small woodcuts from earlier years, entitled *Primitives* published by Spiral Press. Figure may be one of the images from that volume. Regardless, the print shows Weber's use of bold and exaggerated lines combined with abstracted forms to convey a dramatic figure in motion. Like other artists of this era, reality and imagination intersect, revealing the complicated and potentially fraught dynamics of the western gaze upon non-Western cultures.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Director's Fund Purchase, 1960/1.372**

JEAN-EMILE LABOUREUR  
Born 1877, Nantes, France  
Died 1943, Pénestin, France

***Les Dockers Nègres (Black Stevedores)***, 1918-20  
engraving



Jean-Emile Laboureur,  
*Self-Portrait*, ca. 1925-  
1928

Born in Nantes, France, Jean-Emile Laboureur is best known for woodcuts and etchings of daily life. Laboureur studied wood engraving with Auguste Lepère and etching and lithography with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. Between 1899 and 1911, Laboureur lived in the United States, Canada, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Turkey, where he came into contact with many diverse cultures prior to World War I (1914-18). France was one of the main battlegrounds of that war which brought in an influx of armies and populations from different countries and of varying ethnicities. In images such as *Les Dockers Nègres (Black Stevedores)*, the artist understood the importance of documenting those experiences. Therefore, the artist created images of Black men at work, dining together, and as uniformed soldiers. Considered to be one of the first Cubist

printmakers, Laboureur's exaggerated graphic style illustrates one of the most radical modern techniques of art making of that era.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Elisabeth Claire Lahti Fund Purchase, 2013.17**

## MAX PECHSTEIN

Born 1881, Zwickau, Germany

Died 1955, Berlin, Germany

### ***The Infant*, 1918**

woodcut



The German Expressionist painter and printmaker Max Pechstein began his career as a decorator in 1896. In 1900, the artist moved to Dresden to pursue academic training at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts), and met Erich Heckel (German painter, printmaker, and founding member of Die Brücke). Through Heckel, Pechstein joined Die Brücke, a collective of German artists who rejected their country's established artistic and social hierarchies. Alongside its members, Pechstein explored non-western art forms, which were instrumental in developing Primitivism, an art movement that stressed the expression of emotional tension through vivid colors, distorted forms, and non-naturalistic drawing techniques. Even though the artist was expelled from the group in 1912, he continued his exploration of primitivism throughout his career.

*Infant* was published in *Das Kunstblatt*, a German art magazine that promoted the work of living artists and the spirit of the "new art." With its thick black lines, geometric forms, and simplified composition, *Infant* not only recalls African sculptures of mothers and children, but also attests to the artist's lifelong interest in non-western art forms.

**Collection of the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts;  
Art Auction Fund Purchase, 1999.14**