FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE BMA PRESENTS A POWERFUL EXAMINATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN IMAGES IN “LOOKING FORWARD/LOOKING BLACK”

Exhibition programs provide opportunities for community dialogue

BALTIMORE, MD (January 25, 2001) – Looking Forward/Looking Black is a contemporary reexamination of the ways African Americans have been portrayed in art, mass media, and 20th-century popular culture. On view at the BMA from February 6 to May 5, 2002, this powerful exhibition includes 45 paintings, prints, photographs, and sculpture by more than 20 artists. These works are sometimes humorous, sometimes provocative—a reminder of the complicated role images play in the construction of memory, history, and identity.

According to exhibition curator Jo Anna Isaak, Professor of Art at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, “The black body has been everywhere in evidence in painting, film, photography—even cookie jars and lawn ornaments—and at the same time been rendered invisible.” Isaak adds, “In the process of re-seeing what was intended to go unnoticed, these artists are engaged in undoing a whole system of denial and, at the same time, re-constructing and reclaiming images of selfhood on their own terms.”

From Bill Traylor’s 1940s folk art drawings to Beverly McIver’s self-portraits in blackface to Renée Cox’s superhero liberation of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, Looking Forward/ Looking Black not only examines images of African Americans but also stimulates a dialogue on the issues of race in America. These include the legacy of slavery, the history of Uncle Tom imagery, and contemporary discussions of sexuality and identity.

The BMA is presenting several programs in conjunction with the exhibition to encourage dialogue on the challenging issues presented in the works of art. Included in these events is a panel discussion with artists Beverly McIver, Michael Ray Charles, and Renée Cox, as well as curator Jo Anna Isaak. Additionally, BMA Curator of Contemporary Art Helen Molesworth will conduct a three-part mini-course on African-American art focusing on the cultural and political significance of art created, historically and currently, by well-known African-American artists.

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“The BMA is committed to presenting exhibitions that not only engage us with their artistry but also provide a forum for discussion,” said BMA Director Doreen Bolger. “Looking Forward/Looking Black accomplishes both of these goals and provides a wonderful opportunity to showcase more of the work by African-American artists represented in the collection.”

Featuring mostly African-American artists, the exhibition includes four color screenprints from Jacob Lawrence’s “John Brown Series,” a woodcut and sculpture by Alison Saar from the BMA’s collection, paper silhouettes by Kara Walker, and photography by Carrie Mae Weems, Lyle Ashton Harris, Roy DeCarava, Gordon Parks, and James Van Der Zee. Looking Forward/Looking Black also includes works by Robert Colescott, Glenn Ligon, Emma Amos, Michael Ray Charles, Bill Traylor, Peter Williams, Leon Golub, and Lorna Simpson. Several works by DeCarava, Parks, Simpson, Van Der Zee, and Walker are from the BMA’s collection.

Looking Forward/Looking Black is organized by Jo Anna Isaak, Professor of Art, Hobart and William Smith Colleges. This traveling exhibition has been seen at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (Scottsdale, Arizona), Georgia State University School of Art and Design Gallery (Atlanta, Georgia) and at several other university galleries. It will be presented at the Dayton Art Institute (Dayton, Ohio) from July 9 through September 8, 2002. The exhibition is curated at the BMA by Helen Molesworth, Curator of Contemporary Art.

Media sponsor for the exhibition is The Afro-American.

CATALOGUE
A 48-page color catalogue of the exhibition is available in the BMA Shop for $25. Featuring an introduction by exhibition curator Jo Anna Isaak, it also includes essays by scholars Marilyn Jimenez and Ingrid Schaffner, and artists Emma Amos and Peter Williams, among others

BMA COLLECTION BACKGROUND
The BMA is actively committed to building its collection of works by African-American artists. Among the most notable contemporary African-American artists represented in the BMA’s collection are Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Robert Colescott, Sam Gilliam, Jacob Lawrence, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Faith Ringgold, Alison Saar, Jeffrey Henson Scales, and Kara Walker as well as Baltimore-based artists Carl Clark, Linda Day Clark, Cary Beth Cryor, Robert Houston, Tom Miller, Kenneth Royster, and Joyce J. Scott. Works by several of these artists can be seen on permanent display in the West Wing for Contemporary Art.

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The BMA also has a long history of highlighting African-American artists through special exhibitions. Recent exhibitions featuring work by African and African-American artists include “Joyce J. Scott Kickin’ It with the Old Masters,” “Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold’s French Collection and Other Story Quilts,” “Elizabeth Catlett: A Fifty-Year Retrospective,” “Chokwe! Art and Initiation Among Chokwe and Related Peoples,” and “Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou.”

The Museum’s outstanding collection of African art is widely recognized as one of the finest in the mid-Atlantic region. Dating from the 12th century through the present day, the collection features headdresses, masks, figurines, royal staffs, textiles, jewelry, tools, and pottery. Comprised of more than 1,600 objects from west, central, southern, and northeast Africa, the collection’s greatest strength is the art of the Guinea Coast, particularly Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

VISITOR INFORMATION
The Baltimore Museum of Art is open Wednesday through Friday, 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. until 6 p.m.; and during FREESTYLE, the first Thursday of every month (except major holidays), 5 until 8 p.m. The Museum is closed Monday, Tuesday, New Year's Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. General admission is $7 for adults, $5 for seniors ages 65+, and college students with I.D., and free for ages 18 and under and BMA Members. Admission is free on the first Thursday of every month. Admission to FREESTYLE and all related FREESTYLE activities is free. The BMA is located on Art Museum Drive at North Charles and 31st Streets, three miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. To obtain general Museum information, call 410/396-7100 or visit the BMA's web site at www.artbma.org.

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