



BMA Debuts New Presentation of African Art Collection and New Dedicated Galleries for Art of the Ancient Americas and Oceanic Collections

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Installations Capture the Breadth and Depth of Three Important Non-Western Collections

BALTIMORE, MD (October 7, 2021)—The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) today announced details for the reinstallation of galleries for art from Africa, Ancient Americas, and Oceania. In addition to reinterpreting the arts of Africa within its existing gallery spaces, the reinstallation includes creating—for the first time in the museum’s history—separate dedicated galleries for Oceanic art and art of the Ancient Americas. Each of the galleries will provide audiences with a chronological history of art, emphasizing creative innovation through time and the significance of social, political, religious, and cultural histories to these artistic evolutions. The effort will result in the largest presentation of the BMA’s collection of historic, non-Western art when it opens on December 12, 2021. The African art collection has been off view since spring 2020 due to the construction of the adjacent Nancy Dorman and Stanley Mazaroff Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings and Photographs and Ruth R. Marder Center for Matisse Studies. The collections of art from the Ancient Americas and Oceania have been off view since 2013.

“Coinciding with the 100th year anniversary of the BMA’s first acquisition of a non-Western artwork, the newly reinstalled galleries will demonstrate evolving artistic form and creativity, as inflected by social, political, and cultural changes, rather than grouping objects solely by geography, function, or general theme,” said Kevin Tervala, Associate Curator of African Art and Department Head for the Arts of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. “This approach captures a dynamic art history and explores the vast array of creative vision, technique, materiality, and form that has and continues to emerge from these cultures. It gives particular primacy to the influence and importance of interaction and exchange between states and societies.”

African Art

The African art galleries—which encompass 2,500 square feet—will feature approximately 90 artworks from across five millennia, beginning with ancient Egyptian stonework and ending with contemporary Nigerian photography. The featured objects—half of the which were not in the previous installation of the collection—provide important touchstones within the historical trajectory of African art. The first gallery displays a range of objects that showcase the diversity of African artistic expression with artworks created for performance, personal adornment, monuments, and memorials, as well as examples of painting, photography, textiles, architecture, assemblage, decorative arts, and book arts. These objects will change periodically as works are added to the collection.

A second gallery places artworks within their evolving historical contexts to capture the ways that African artistic production has been inextricably intertwined with social, political, and religious movements. Groupings of objects focus on art and power in Central Africa, art and belonging in West Africa, globalized trade, European exploitation, European colonialism, and independence and movements for self-determination. The installation also includes more objects from North African countries than prior presentations.

Among the works either new to the collection or new to this installation of the collection are a 4th-6th-century *Pilgrim's Flask (Ampulla) with Saint Menas* from an Egyptian artist, an early 19th-century *Four-legged Bowl for a Chief* by a Southern Sotho artist, a 19th-20th-century *Illustrated Prayer Book* from Ethiopia, and a mid-20th-century *Medicine Container* by Sandawe artists that was used in healing ceremonies likely associated with fertility and pregnancy. Examples of contemporary African art include *Bronze Head* (1987) by Nigerian artist Rotimi Fani-Kayode and a painting titled *Rua Araujo, and Three Maria's nightly bread* (2020) by Mozambican artist Cassi Namoda.

Art of the Ancient Americas

The newly dedicated gallery to art of the Ancient Americas will focus on the creation and evolution of artworks spanning 2,000 years of Indigenous art history within the Americas. The focus is on major civilizations that thrived in the region prior to Spanish colonization such as Nayarit, Maya, Nahua (Aztec), Muisca, Tolima, Paracas, Moche, and Nasca. Though incredibly diverse in scale and character, each of these disparate cultures considered the way that the divine interceded in the world of the living, employed complex stylistic vocabularies to communicate symbolic meanings in their art, and flourished through the establishment of sophisticated trade networks that linked them. The installation will feature approximately 30 objects that highlight the ways that regional interaction and exchange shaped the trajectory of art, emphasizing especially the impact of urbanization in Mesoamerica, the influence of antiquity on ceramic production in the Andes, and the significance of active trade networks that blanketed the Americas. This gallery is curated by Darienne Turner, BMA Assistant Curator of Indigenous Art of the Americas.

The BMA's collection includes a depth of ceramic works, and the new installation features new presentations of a selection of these objects. Among the highlights of the installation are a Moche *Portrait Head Bottle* (300-500) and Paracas *Mantle Fragment* (2nd century BCE-2nd century CE) from Peru, two gold-copper Muisca votive figures (15th century) from Colombia, and two Nahua deity figures (14th-early 16th century) from Mexico.

Oceanic Art

The BMA cares for one of the nation's most important collections of Oceanic art with over 450 works dating back to the 18th century from all of the major regions. Oceania is comprised of 10,000 islands on the Pacific Ocean, where people established thriving and interconnected states and societies for over 40,000 years. The new gallery for this collection will present a chronological survey that focuses on the years between 1800 and 1970, an era defined by intercontinental trade, European colonization, worldwide war, and economic globalization. The installation explores the ways that artists and artworks evolved and changed because of these regional and global networks with flashpoints from the long and diverse history of Oceanic artistry.

Among the highlights are a magnificent *Breastplate* (1820-50) created by a Tonga master artist for a leader in neighboring Fiji, an intricately carved *Ritual Flute Stopper* (1920-36) created by a Biwat artist from New Guinea, and a rare mid-19th-century *Mask* by an artist from the Torres Strait Islands. Works being shown for the first time include a mid-20th-century *Story Board Depicting Ademei and the Crocodile, Figure* (mid-1950s) by Isaiah Torazi, and *Hunting Scene* (c. 1968-71) by George Liwukang Bukurlatjpi.

“The new African, Ancient American, and Oceanic art installations reflect our commitment to reimagining how we approach, develop, and present the whole of our collection. While we have focused in particular in recent years on expanding the narratives articulated within our holdings of contemporary, American artists, we are equally working to ensure that we can share the depth and complexity of artistic innovation from across the globe and through time. The reopening of these galleries marks an exciting moment to reengage audiences with the richness of our non-Western collections and to offer new interpretations of these diverse and magnificent objects,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “As we continue in this effort, we are also looking forward to adding new works to these collections to fill critical gaps and to extend conversations about collection diversification beyond the realm of contemporary art.”

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. artbma.org

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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