



Baltimore Museum of Art's New Contemporary Wing Reinstallation Emphasizes Artists' Voices and Social Themes Relevant to Audiences

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How Do We Know the World? encompasses three rotations, starting in November 2021, with works by more than 100 artists, including many new to the collection

BALTIMORE, MD (October 7, 2021)— On November 14, 2021, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) opens *How Do We Know the World?*, a major reappraisal of its contemporary collection that builds on the museum's ongoing efforts to embrace an expansive range of voices and narratives within its holdings. Nine galleries featuring 56 objects center the way artists engage with the historic, social, political, and environmental constructs that shape our world, capturing stories of personal and communal relevance. By grounding the installation in social history, the BMA departs from the focus on chronology and the evolution of style typically found in presentations of museum collections. In this way, the new contemporary wing offers visitors a more meaningful way to experience and connect with the art on view by emphasizing how artists observe, understand, and respond to our shared everyday circumstances.

How Do We Know the World? will be presented in three rotations, with approximately half of the artworks changing with each installment through September 2023. Curated by Jessica Bell Brown and Leila Grothe, both Associate Curators of Contemporary Art at the BMA, the presentation is organized around themes relating to expressions of care, progress, wayfinding, self-possession, witnessing, reckoning, and legacy. Developed predominantly during the time of the pandemic, these themes are particularly significant to happenings from the past 18 months but also resonate well beyond our current moment.

In the first rotation, which will be on view for approximately six months, the themes will be explored through 56 objects across a wide variety of media created by 52 artists, including **Allora & Calzadilla, Robert Colescott, Paul Chan, Rafael Ferrer, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Meleko Mokgosi, Howardena Pindell, Kara Walker, and Carrie Mae Weems**. More than half of the works have never been on view at the BMA and this is the first time works by self-taught artists are firmly established in the contemporary collection. Artists new to the collection are **Jadé Fadojutimi, Shirley Gorelick, Nancy Graves, Rashid Johnson, Gisela McDaniel, Martine Syms, Kay WalkingStick, and Wilmer Wilson IV**. Several works are by artists with ties to Baltimore such as **Theresa Chromati, Jerrell Gibbs, Nate Lewis, Soledad Salamé, and Wickerham & Lomax**. By September 2023, at the conclusion of the third rotation, the galleries will have featured more than 100 artists—many of them new to the BMA.

“On the heels of the BMA’s *2020 Vision*, this reappraisal and reinstallation embraces the porosities of social and cultural histories from which these collection works emerge. We’re listening to the featured artists’ stories and forging new connections. This installation is also an invitation to you. Challenge us. Question us. There is no official accounting of life,” said Brown and Grothe.

As part of their artist-centered approach, Brown and Grothe spoke to many of the featured artists about their visions for how their work is displayed and relates to wider dialogues within the presentation. In this way, the installation strategy shifts from a curatorial reading of a collection of objects to a collaborative process that emphasizes the artist’s voice and storytelling. Equally important to the presentation is a direct engagement with audience. To establish more intimate connections between viewers and the artworks, objects will be hung and installed lower than the museum standard, creating a more direct physical relationship, as well as making the works more accessible for visitors in wheelchairs. Didactic materials and digital, on-the-go content will have a more inquisitive tone and ask direct questions of visitors about their interpretations and experiences of some of the themes.

How Do We Know the World? also captures the development of the BMA’s collection over the past several years, as the museum has acquired more works by women and artists of color and deepened scholarship about artists whose contributions have not been articulated in the dominant narratives of art history. The first presentation includes 43 artworks by BIPOC artists and 29 artworks by female artists. Thirty of the featured works have also been acquired since 2018, when the museum, under Christopher Bedford’s leadership, committed to a strategic plan that placed dual emphasis on artistic excellence and social equity. The reinstallation of the contemporary wing builds on the BMA’s *2020 Vision* initiative, which focused on the work and achievements of women artists and leaders, and the BMA’s wider acquisition of works by artists of color following its 2018 deaccession of seven works by white, male artists that represented redundancies in the collection.

“Over the past several years, we have committed to expanding and developing our collection to more accurately reflect the spectrum of artists that have shaped the trajectory of art and to represent the diversity of our community. These motivating principles also need to be applied to our presentation strategies, ensuring that we are actively sharing the work we acquire and doing so in ways that are meaningful to our audiences,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “The approach that Jessica and Leila have taken with the reinstallation focuses on the social and communal relevance of art and highlights in particular the importance of artist voices to fostering dialogue, new thinking, and different ways of processing world events. We are very excited to reopen our contemporary galleries with this new presentation and to engage our visitors in these conversations.”

Adjacent galleries in the contemporary wing feature the concurrent opening exhibitions *On Certainty: Gifts from the Collection of Suzanne F. Cohen*, and *All Due Respect*, with new works by four artists with connections to Baltimore that have received support from the Joan Mitchell Foundation. The reinstallation of the BMA’s contemporary wing precedes new presentations of its collections of art from Africa, the Ancient Americas, and Oceania, which will open in December 2021.

How Do We Know the World? is supported by Transamerica, the Suzanne F. Cohen Exhibition Fund, and The Dorman/Mazaroff Contemporary Endowment Fund.



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, Juneteenth, 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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