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BMA to Open *Shapeshifting: Transformations on Paper* Exploring Physical and Creative Transformation as Source of Inspiration for Artists Across Centuries

[Exhibition captures new narratives from the BMA's extensive collection of prints, drawings, and photographs](#)

BALTIMORE, MD (April 21, 2022)— This May, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will open an expansive exhibition that explores the centrality of metamorphosis to artistic creation and imagination across five centuries. *Shapeshifting: Transformations on Paper* will feature approximately 35 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books drawn from the BMA's collection. Inspired by classical myths, ideas of renewal, and shifting manifestations of identity, the works in the exhibition highlight the many ways in which transformation has compelled and captivated both artists and viewers. The presentation includes works by Margaret Burroughs, Théodore Chassériau, Zackary Drucker, Samuel Fosso, Hendrick Goltzius, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, Gerda Wegener, and numerous others. This eclectic selection demonstrates that the fluidity of identity is not merely a post-modern notion but one deeply rooted in the history of art and reflects the BMA's mission to present diversity and equity across time. *Shapeshifting* is on view May 8–October 2, 2022, and is the second exhibition to be presented in the BMA's recently opened Nancy Dorman and Stanley Mazaroff Center for the Study of Prints, Drawings and Photographs.

"*Shapeshifting* reflects the mission of our new study center to engage audiences with new narratives inspired by the museum's extensive collection of prints, drawings, and photographs," said Andaleeb Badiee Banta, BMA Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs. "The process of transformation is embedded in everyday life and experience. For this reason, it has provided a fertile lens for artists across centuries to consider and understand its relationship to changing concepts of identity and self-presentation in contemporary culture."

The works in the exhibition are organized loosely around a range of subjects, including natural cycles of decay and renewal, mystical metamorphoses, performance and masquerade, aesthetic and physical articulations of gender and identity, and corporeal transformations of materials in the process of artistic creation. Many of the works showcase hybrid entities that create unexpected connections and upend standard approaches to categorization. Collectively, the works challenge traditional binary structures, highlighting the mutability and evolution of physical, social, and political constructs.

A selection of highlight objects from the exhibition follows:

Margaret Burroughs (American, 1915–2010). *Black Venus*. 1957: The ocean, with its ever-shifting boundaries and changing nature, has long been associated with the concept of metamorphosis, and artists have often invoked it to symbolize diverse geographical, historical, and social shifts. Chicago artist and activist Margaret Burroughs' *Black Venus* demonstrates the magnitude of the African diaspora through an image of a mythic Black Venus crossing the ocean in triumph. Defying the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade and the racist iconography used to justify it, the central Black female figure stands astride the waves as an expression of her power.

Théodore Chassériau (French, 1819–1856). *Apollo and Daphne*. 1844: The lithograph captures the tale of Daphne and Apollo from the ancient Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Apollo, god of the sun and poetry, desires the chaste wood nymph Daphne. Daphne prays to the gods to protect her from his romantic pursuit and is transformed into a laurel tree. As a gesture of mourning, Apollo cuts off a laurel branch and wears it as a crown. The image of Daphne sprouting into leaf was popular among artists wanting to demonstrate their ability to mimic the changing properties of nature and the passions driving the human psyche.

Zackary Drucker (American, b. 1983) #35 (*Pygmalion*), from the series *Relationship* 2008–2014, printed 2020: This work references the ancient Roman poet Ovid's tale of Pygmalion and Galatea from *Metamorphoses*. The sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with his carving of the ideal woman, Galatea, who becomes flesh and blood through the help of Venus, the goddess of love. Artists have returned to this subject for centuries, with varied interpretations. Here, Zackary Drucker employs the myth to question traditional feminine norms and the unrealistic expectations associated with feminine beauty standards.

Toyin Ojih Odutola (Nigerian, active in the United States, b. 1985). *LTS IX*. 2014: In this drawing, Toyin Ojih Odutola portrays one of her brothers among patterns and colors reminiscent of African mud cloth textiles, Ife carvings, and scarification designs. The image challenges the viewer to untangle the figure from the background as a reflection of the artist's experience of adapting to different contexts as her family moved from Nigeria to Alabama. The work belongs to a series titled *Like the Sea*, abbreviated as *LTS*, after a passage from Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: "Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore."

Man Ray (American, 1890–1976). *Le Violon d'Ingres*. 1924: Man Ray likened the body of celebrated cabaret singer, model, and artist Kiki of Montparnasse (born Alice Prin) to the curves of a violin. In this work, he captures her form, keeping her arms out of view and drawing f-shaped sound holes at her waist. He then rephotographed the composition, transforming her body into a symbol of heterosexual male desire.

Paula Gately Tillman (American, b. 1946). *RuPaul outside his apartment building, from the "Bad Ass" photo shoot, Atlanta, 1986*. 1986: Baltimore-based artist Paula Gately Tillman photographed an eclectic array of personalities in the Atlanta and New York alternative scenes during the 1980s and early 1990s. She met RuPaul through her friend Dick Richards, co-founder of the Atlanta-

based Funtone Records label and one of the creators of the public access television program *The American Music Show*. This is one of several portraits she made of RuPaul between 1986 and 1992, capturing his rise from an underground figure to full-fledged celebrity and drag icon.

This exhibition is organized by Andaleeb Badiie Banta, BMA Senior Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs, and Leslie Cozzi, BMA Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

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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., and on Thursdays until 9 p.m. Timed reservations 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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