BMA Debuts New Narratives of American Art with Arctic Artistry and American Modernism

Exhibition highlights works by Indigenous artists and collection reinstallation centers on historically underrepresented artists

BALTIMORE, MD (May 19, 2022)—In July, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) will open two new installations of American art from its collection that center works by Native American, immigrant, and underrepresented artists. The presentations include a substantial reinstallation of the museum’s renowned American Modernism collection and the exhibition Arctic Artistry, which features 20 rarely shown objects by Indigenous artists of the North American Arctic. Opening on July 13 and July 17, respectively, the installations reflect the BMA’s ongoing commitment to challenging long-standing art historical narratives and expanding the range of artists recognized for contributing to the evolution of art. At the same time, they capture the museum’s focus on its collection as a critical source for new, diverse, and inclusive storytelling.

American Modernism
From July 13 through September 2024, two thematic galleries in the BMA’s Dorothy McIlvain Scott American Wing will examine anew what it meant to be “American” and “modern” during the cultural and social upheavals that occurred between 1900 and 1950. The new American Modernism galleries will feature approximately 60 objects, emphasizing the voices, experiences, and artistic contributions of Native American, immigrant, and historically underrepresented artists. Among the objects are new acquisitions, treasured works that have not been on view in recent years, and a rotating selection of rarely displayed works on paper.

The thematic groupings allow visitors to draw connections among the objects and to relate the works to contemporary issues and everyday life. In the “Identities” gallery, works by artists and designers such as Richmond Barthé, Jacob Lawrence, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Elsa Tennhardt illuminate changing ideas around race, gender, and economic status through subjects like performance and leisure. The “Technologies” gallery brings together works by Greta Grossman, Louisa Keyser, Maurice Martiné, Isamu Noguchi, Horace Pippin, and Joseph Stella, among others, to focus on the rapid societal changes of this period—urbanization, world war, industry, and migration. Two cases adjacent to the galleries will highlight the influence of towering skyscrapers and high-speed transportation, as well as material innovation, in household objects designed for machine-age living.

The installation is curated by Virginia Anderson, Curator of American Art, and Brittany Luberda, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts.
Arctic Artistry
From July 17, 2022, through January 8, 2023, Arctic Artistry will explore the evolving roles of Indigenous artists of the North American Arctic through 20 rarely shown objects from the BMA’s collection. Artists are esteemed among the Yup’ik, Iñupiaq, and Inuit people, and their work has continually responded to and reflected the needs of their changing communities. Historically, Indigenous artists who lived in the Arctic lands created ritualistic and utilitarian objects whose beauty was meant to honor the beings that sustained life in the harsh climate. As an influx of explorers, missionaries, whalers, and gold prospectors arrived to their lands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indigenous artists became vital economic forces that sustained their communities by producing art, including model kayaks and cribbage boards made for sale to non-Native markets.

By the mid-20th century, Canadian Inuit artists began carving animal sculptures and producing prints in collaborative workshop settings, such as Summer Caribou Hunt (1960) by Kiakshuk and Searching for Seal Holes (1960) by Innukjuakju Pudlat, which the BMA acquired from the esteemed Kinngait Co-operative (also known as the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative) in 1961. Later artworks spoke to both internal and external audiences, dancing between the traditional, the functional, and the commercial. Examples include Judas Ullulaq’s sculpture The Caribou Hunter (c. 1970s) and Irene Avaalaaqiaq’s wall hanging Frightened by the Land Spirits (c. 1994). Both artists have been featured in museums and galleries far beyond the Arctic. The most contemporary work in the show is Three Thousand (2017), a loan of a 14-minute video by Canadian Inuit artist asinnajaq that weaves together archival footage from the National Film Board of Canada with original animation to reveal 100 years of colonization within the Inuit Nunangat (Inuktitut for “homeland”).

This exhibition is curated by Darienne Turner, Assistant Curator for Indigenous Art of the Americas.

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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., with extended hours on Thursdays until 9 p.m. Timed reservations are required for all visitors to the galleries. 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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