

# PRESS RELEASE

Press Contact

**Rachel Eggers**

Associate Director of Public Relations  
rachele@seattleartmuseum.org  
206.654.3151

SEPTEMBER 26, 2022

## SEATTLE ART MUSEUM (SAM) PRESENTS TRANSFORMATION OF ITS AMERICAN ART GALLERIES

*American Art: The Stories We Carry* opens October 20, 2022

SEATTLE  
ART  
MUSEUM

ASIAN  
ART  
MUSEUM

OLYMPIC  
SCULPTURE  
PARK

1300 First Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101

206.625.8900

seattleartmuseum.org



SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *American Art: The Stories We Carry* (October 20, 2022-ongoing), the first major reinstatement of the museum's American art collection in 15 years. Funded primarily by a \$1 million grant from The Mellon Foundation and a \$75,000 grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art, the exhibition brings the museum's historical American collection—predominately comprised of works by artists of European descent—into conversation with Native, Asian American, African American, and Latinx art, including contemporary art and new acquisitions and commissions. The galleries will feature regular rotations beginning in April 2023.

*The Stories We Carry* is the result of a two-year process and an unprecedented level of collaboration among SAM curators and staff, regional artists, and advisors from the Seattle community. Two key goals of the project were to create a new interpretive framework for the American art galleries that brings forward historically excluded narratives and artistic forms and to deepen the museum's commitment to inclusive exhibition-planning practices. The project was led by Theresa Papanikolas, Ann M. Barwick Curator of American Art, in partnership with Barbara Brotherton, Curator of Native American Art.

Collaborators on the project to interrogate and recontextualize the collection were artists Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/Unangax, b. 1979) and Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke, b. 1981), who created new commissions; artist and co-founder of Wa Na Wari Inye Wokoma, who curated a gallery in the exhibition; four emerging museum professionals in paid curatorial and conservation internships; and an advisory circle comprised of 11 experts from the Seattle

SAM

area. The exhibition website shares in-depth details on the project, including a project timeline, photos, and videos.

“This is a new era for American art at SAM,” says Amada Cruz, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. “After two years of serious inquiry and dynamic collaborations with important partners, we are thrilled to unveil this exhibition to the community. We are deeply grateful to the Mellon and Terra foundations and others for their support of this major project, which not only opens up new avenues of exploration in our American art galleries but will have an impact on how the museum approaches exhibitions of its global collection in the future.”

“With this project, Barbara and I are seeking ways to expand the American art canon and challenge fixed definitions of American art,” says Papanikolas. “Collaborating with our many partners has brought fresh perspectives to this work as well as a layer of accountability not always present in exhibition planning. The reinstalled galleries are not only the physical manifestation of this process, but also, we hope, an incubator for ever-evolving ideas of what American art can and should be.”

### WHAT IS AMERICAN ART?

The project began with the question, “what is American art?” SAM’s American art galleries were last substantially reinstalled in 2007 for the opening of the expanded downtown museum, giving preference to the historical American art canon over the many perspectives that have driven cultural production in North America from the 17th century to World War II, particularly those of artists active in the Pacific Northwest region’s diverse communities.

SAM’s historical American art collection is approximately 2,500 examples of painting, sculpture, works on paper, and decorative arts. It features works by nationally renowned and historically significant artists, as well as Pacific Northwest artists long overdue for closer examination within the American context. The reinstallation emphasizes a more critical and intimate approach to the story of American art, in particular how it intersects with the museum’s Native American art collection, which is presented in adjacent galleries.

### NEW CONVERSATIONS IN AMERICAN ART

With artworks across a range of media and genres—including portraiture, landscape, sculpture, decorative arts, and textiles—*The Stories We Carry* presents America’s complicated history across several themes.



The first gallery that visitors enter, *Storied Places*, fittingly starts with the land itself, exploring diverse approaches to place, nature, and the landscape genre. Visitors are beckoned into the space by Wendy Red Star’s light box installation, *Áakiiwilaxpaake (People Of The Earth)*, in which portraits of local Native women and children are set within the iconic Seattle skyline, including Mount

Tahoma (also known as Mount Rainier). This section also explores landscape paintings by Grafton Tyler Brown

(American, 1841–1918) and Sanford Robinson Gifford (American, 1823–1880) that reveal how nineteenth-century artists prioritized travel and observation in pictures of the new nation’s most famous destinations, whereas a work by Shaun Peterson “Qwalsius” (Tulalip/Puyallup, b. 1975) offers a more experiential approach to the land as a keeper of stories and sustainer of culture. Also on view in this section are works by modernists Morris Graves (American, 1910–2001), Georgia O’Keeffe (American, 1887–1986), and George Tsutakawa (American, 1910–1997).



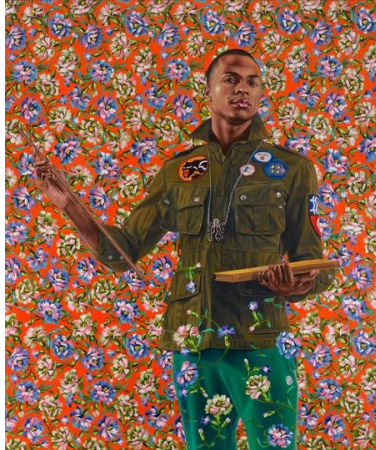
The next theme, *Transnational America*, explores how North America became part of a global network of ideas, economies, and cultures and unearths the histories embedded in objects of migration, trade, and exploration. American tableware and textiles reflect extensive systems of labor and commerce; although fabricated in North American workshops and homes, they are the products of materials and processes that originated the world over—more often than not at substantial human and environmental cost. Objects by Native artists were made specifically, and out of necessity, for trade in light of diminished access to longstanding cultural practices. This section also features landscapes and city scenes that

reveal the regional sentiments and allegiances that complicated the notion of a unified nation.



*Reimagining Regionalism* was curated by Inye Wokoma. Invited by the museum to participate in the project, he was inspired to curate a new interpretive framework around some of the collection’s most well-known works and elevate historically excluded narratives of communities in the Pacific Northwest. *Blanket Stories: Three Sisters, Four Pelts, Sky Woman, Cousin Rose, and All*

*My Relations* (2007) by Marie Watt (Seneca, b. 1967) is a towering column of blankets placed in the center of the gallery, a visual metaphor for the importance of Native communities past and present in American history. The epic painting *Puget Sound on the Pacific Coast* (1870) by Albert Bierstadt (American, born in Prussia, 1830-1902) was commissioned by a wealthy merchant; its grand imaginings of the landscape contrast with the seemingly inconsequential Indigenous figures along the shoreline. The elevator screen from the Chicago Stock Exchange (ca. 1893-94) by Louis Sullivan (American, 1856-1924) is a literal emblem of economic expansion, its seed grain symbols representing the overwhelming might of colonialism. Now installed so that visitors can circulate entirely around it and look through it, the screen offers an opportunity to consider what this gateway was leading to—and what it kept out.



*Ancestors + Descendants* considers the complexities of portraiture, long a dominant American art form, and reveals the multiplicity of American identities. *Anthony of Padua* (2013) by Kehinde Wiley (American, b. 1977), an important work in SAM's contemporary art collection, is placed near *Dr. Silvester Gardiner* (1708-1786) by John Singleton Copley (born in Boston, 1738–1815), an anchor work in SAM's historical American art collection. Shown side-by-side, the striking similarities in the figures' poses highlight their differences, creating a dramatic reimagining of a historical paradigm. This section also features *The Accident* (1939), a tempera painting by Kenneth Callahan (American, 1905–1986) that

underwent extensive conservation for this project; new research connects this scene of a Pacific Northwest workplace accident to Callahan's many trips to Mexico, where he learned from and worked with artists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. A lithograph by Rivera (Mexican, 1886–1957) is also on view in this section. A romanticized depiction of an Indigenous artist by George de Forest Brush (American, 1854/1855-1941) reveals how white artists who spent time in Native communities sentimentalized their subjects and devalued actual Indigenous livelihoods at the turn of the twentieth century. This section also features portraits by John Singer Sargent (born in Italy, 1856–1925), Augusta Savage (American, 1892–1962), Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000), Will Wilson (Diné, b. 1969), and Amy Sherald (American, b. 1973).



*Memory Keepers* reflects on different cultural approaches to storytelling, remembering, and legacies, with a special focus on the Pacific Northwest region. *Four Self-Portraits* (1995), the museum's first acquisition by the Chicana artist Alfredo Arreguín (American, born in Mexico, 1935) is on view alongside works by Paul Horiuchi (American, born in Japan, 1906-1999), Annie May Young (American, 1928-2013), and Cecilia Concepción Alvarez (American, b. 1950). Also on view are intimate photographs by Eduardo Calderón (Peruvian, b. 1948) of Seattle jazz legends including Ernestine Anderson and Quincy Jones. Another important new acquisition, ceremonial regalia by Danielle Morsette (Stó:lō First Nation/Suquamish; Shxwhá:y Village, b.

1987), joins other regional Native garments and basketry.



The reinstallation also debuts a new direction: one of the museum's galleries dedicated to modern American art will feature ongoing temporary installations exploring fresh perspectives. The first iteration presents the narrative series *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1986–97) by Jacob Lawrence. The 15 silkscreen prints are a recent acquisition by the museum and are on view at SAM for the first time. The series—based on Lawrence's 1936 painting series—celebrates the revolutionary Haitian strategist and statesman (1743–1803) who liberated his country from colonial rule to establish the first independent Black republic.

## WHO DECIDES THESE STORIES, AND HOW?

The museum embarked on this project two years ago with the goal not only to transform its American art galleries, but to deepen its commitment to inclusive exhibition-planning practices. In an unprecedented collaboration between SAM curators and staff, artists, and advisors, the museum opened up its collection, history, and process to create an installation that reflects and responds to community knowledge. The work of all the project participants has initiated a groundbreaking shared-authorship model for curating SAM's collections that will impact the future of the entire institution.

### **Artists**

SAM collaborated with three contemporary artists to engage with SAM's historical American art collection and create a response based on their own practices and perspectives. Working collaboratively with guest artists and curators has long been a practice at SAM, but this marks the first time the museum has taken this approach with its historical American art collection.

- **Wendy Red Star** and **Nicholas Galanin** embarked on exciting new commissions created especially for the reinstallation; Red Star's lightbox portrait *Áakiwilaxpaake (People Of The Earth)* (2022) welcomes visitors to the reinstalled galleries. Galanin's neon installation will debut in spring 2023.
- **Inye Wokoma** was inspired to curate a gallery of works from SAM's collection, offering a distinctive new framework for interpretation.

### **Curatorial and Conservation Interns**

This project launched four new paid internships in the curatorial and conservation departments, targeting two career paths in the museum field that are particularly lacking in equitable representation by people of color. Within each department, SAM hired two interns: an intensive 21-month internship for students at the graduate level and 10-week internships for emerging leaders that builds on SAM's Emerging Arts Leader (EAL) internship model.

- **Caitlyn Fong**, Emerging Museum Professional, Conservation
- **Moe'Neyah Holland**, Emerging Arts Leader, American Art
- **Kari Karsten**, Emerging Museum Professional, American Art
- **Rosa Sittig-Bell**, Emerging Arts Leader, Conservation

### **Advisory Circle**

Over the course of 18 months, SAM met with a group of advisors who provided critical input on the development of the artwork selection, interpretative strategies, outreach, and programming. The group helped create an exhibition that explores America's complicated history in a way that empowers community perspectives.

- **Rebecca Cesspooch**, Northern Ute/Assiniboine/Nakota visual artist and educator
- **Juan Cordova**, elementary school teacher at New York City Public Schools (formerly of Highline Public Schools)
- **Fulgencio Lazo**, artist and co-founder of Studio Lazo
- **Jared Mills**, librarian at Seattle Public Library
- **Chieko Phillips**, cultural administrator
- **Jake Prendez**, owner and co-director of Nepantla Cultural Arts Gallery
- **Delbert Richardson**, Ethnomuseumologist

- **Juliet Sperling**, Assistant Professor of Art History, Kollar Endowed Chair in American Art, School of Art + Art History + Design, University of Washington
- **Asia Tail**, Cherokee Nation, artist, curator, co-founder of yəhaw Indigenous Creatives Collective
- **Mayumi Tsutakawa**, Writer with focus on Asian American history
- **Ken Workman**, Duwamish Tribal Member and descendant of Chief Seattle

#### PROJECT SPONSORS

Lead Funding provided by



Major Support provided  
**Terra Foundation for American Art**

Generous Support provided by  
**Estate of Christian Hermann Heesemann**

**Image credits:** *Minidoka Series #2: Exodus*, 1978, Roger Y. Shimomura, acrylic on canvas 60 x 72 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ofell H. Johnson, 79.5 © Roger Y. Shimomura, *Song for the Moon*, 2002, Shaun Peterson (Qwalsius), acrylic on canvas 101 x 42 x 1 in. Gift of the Seattle Art Museum Docents, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2022.17 © Shaun Peterson, *Mitchell's Point Looking down the Columbia*, 1887, Grafton Tyler Brown, oil on canvas, 18 x 30 in. Bruce Leven Acquisition Fund, 2020.26, *Gypsy Baron crazy quilt*, ca. 1887, Mrs. Jones, silk velvet, metallic thread, jacquard woven silk, paint: pieced, embroidered 60 x 68 in. Gift of Mrs. Jacqueline A. Wood, 75.23, *Puget Sound on the Pacific Coast*, 1870, Albert Bierstadt, oil on canvas, 52 1/2 x 82 in. Framed: 71 1/2 x 101 1/2 x 7 in. Gift of the Friends of American Art at the Seattle Art Museum, with additional funds from General Acquisition Fund, 2000.70, *Anthony of Padua*, 2013, Kehinde Wiley, oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in. Gift of the Contemporary Collectors Forum, 2013.8 © Kehinde Wiley, *Four Self-Portraits*, 1995, Alfredo Arreguín, oil on canvas, painting: 49 3/8 x 42 3/8 in. Frame: 55 x 43 in. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Art Acquisition Fund, 2022.13 © Alfredo Arreguín. *General Toussaint L'Ouverture*, from *The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture*, 1986, Jacob Lawrence, silkscreen on Bainbridge two ply rag paper through hand-cut film stencils, image: 28 1/2 x 18 1/2 in., paper: 32 1/4 x 22 in., General Acquisition Fund, 2021.18.2. © Estate of Jacob Lawrence/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

#### **ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM**

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and rededicated as the Asian Art Museum in 1994, and it reopened on February 8, 2020, following an extensive renovation and expansion. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.