

PRESS RELEASE

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SEATTLE ART MUSEUM PRESENTS OUR BLUE PLANET: GLOBAL VISIONS OF WATER

Over 80 works from SAM collection and local loans tell global stories of water from across time

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SEATTLE - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *Our Blue Planet: Global Visions of Water* (March 18-May 30, 2022), exploring the many ways artists around the world have engaged with the theme of water. The exhibition features works from SAM's collection and three local lenders, with over 80 works of art from 16 countries and seven Native American tribes, including video, sculpture, textiles, paintings, ceramics, and photographs. The works date from ancient to contemporary times, including work by 46 living artists and two contemporary works acquired specifically for the exhibition.

Our Blue Planet is a collaboration among three SAM curators: Barbara Brotherton, Curator of Native American Art; Natalia Di Pietrantonio, Assistant Curator of South Asian Art; and Pamela McClusky, Curator of African and Oceanic Art. In the early months of the pandemic, museums and galleries around the world were impacted by exhibition schedule disruptions; SAM began to plan for a future special exhibition primarily relying on its wide-ranging, global collection that would respond to an urgent and relevant topic.

Water emerged as a rich theme for exploration, especially with the museum's location in the Puget Sound region, which is literally shaped by water. The curators worked closely with many of the living artists on view to develop the themes and points of view in the exhibition; many of the artists' thoughts will be represented with labels in the galleries. The artistic responses to water



found in *Our Blue Planet* range from wonder and awe to anger and revelation, inviting viewers to learn, dream, and engage their empathy to create social and environmental change.

On behalf of the collaboration, McClusky says, “We sought to present diverse perspectives on water, with works from the museum’s collection—from Durer to Hiroshige to Bierstadt—placed alongside younger artists whose work has often not been shown in the Pacific Northwest before. *Our Blue Planet* offers reminders of the great pleasures water provides while also turning to artists who help us face the impact of our species on the planet. Indigenous artists in particular offer long-term visions of what is just and sustainable, as we all face increasing environmental emergencies.”

The local lenders who provided the majority of loans are Josef Vascovitz and Lisa Goodman, Sanjay Parthasarathy and Malini Balakrishnan, and Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan, all longtime lenders and supporters of SAM. Together, these loans reveal a forward-thinking collecting community in Seattle, devoted to bringing art from around the world to the city.

NAVIGATING THE EXHIBITION

WELCOME TO OUR BLUE PLANET



Entering the exhibition, visitors are first greeted by a welcome in Lushootseed, the Salish language, given by Ken Workman, member of the Duwamish tribe and a descendant of Chief Seattle. Two works by Carolina Caycedo (Colombian, b. 1978) create an immersive introduction to the exhibition’s theme. *Wanaawna Meets Salty Waters* (2019)

is a 52-foot-long silk banner, suspended from above and printed with a portrait of water. Adjacent, a single-channel video, *A Gente Rio: We River* (2016) plays, using satellite footage and interviews to unveil the impacts of the Itaipu Dam of Brazil on local communities.

This introductory gallery also features a space honoring local and international water protectors: activists and cultural workers aiming to protect water and water systems. This space grounds the exhibition as both an invitation to engage various ideas and a call to action.

RIVERS AND CANOE JOURNEYS THAT SUSTAIN LIFE



The next large gallery space explores various forms of water: rivers, rains, seas, and pools. For rivers, visitors are first greeted by several ceremonial regalia for tribal canoe journeys created by Danielle Morsette (Suquamish, b. 1987); one of these is a new acquisition. On the reverse wall is the video *Clearwater: People of the Salish Sea* (2018) by Tracy Rector (Choctaw/Seminole, b. 1972). These works foreground the importance of water and water journeys to the Native people of the region.

RAINS THAT FLOOD AND HYPNOTIZE

Highlights of the six works on view in this section include *Reservoirs of Rain Water* (2019) by John Grade (American, b. 1970), a video documenting the Seattle-based artist's massive installation in the Arte Sella Sculpture Park in northern Italy, comprised of 5,000 heat-formed plastic droplets, molded in the shape of various cupped palms and held together in translucent nets. Raghbir Singh (Indian, b. 1947) pioneered color street photography; his *Monsoon Rains, Monghyr, Bihar* (1967) depicts four women huddled on the banks of the Ganges in a frieze-like composition.

OCEANS WITH BODIES LIKE OUR OWN



This section features three works depicting oceans. In two, visitors see a comparison between two walks on beaches, taken 140 years apart: the painting [Beach Scene] (ca. 1871-73) by Albert Bierstadt (German, 1830-1902) and the photograph *Untitled*, from the series *But Not Actually* (2011) by Paulo Nazareth (Brazilian, b. 1977).

POOLS OF PLEASURE AND REVERENCE

Mirage 24 (2018) by Adrienne Elise Tarver (American, b. 1985) is from the artist's *Mirage* series of figurative watercolors on tarot-sized paper, depicting nude women swimming and lounging in tropical settings. These archetypal figures play with mythical and historical associations of the water nymph, inviting viewers to confront their role as voyeur. *Kurtal* (2005) by Ngilpirr Spider Snell (Australian Aboriginal, b. 1930) is a vivid painting of the snake spirit Kurtal, guarding a *jila*, or cool desert spring. Other artists on view in this expansive space are Utagawa Hiroshige (Japanese, 1797-1858), Ansel Adams (American, 1902-1984), Wayne Thiebaud (American b. 1920), Susan Point (Musqueam, b. 1952), Derrick Adams (American, b. 1970), and more.

ESSENCES OF WATER



A subsequent, intimate gallery features works of abstraction, revealing how artists have evoked the essence of water. *Nooksack* (2005) by Claude Zervas (American, b. 1963) is a sculpture of CCF (cold cathode fluorescent) lamps and high-flex wire; its sinuous form echoes that of the Nooksack River. Also on view in this gallery is the sculpture *Circle Blue* (1970) by De Wain Valentine (American, b. 1936), a work on paper

by Robert Motherwell (American, 1915-1991), lacquerware by Suzuki Masaya (Japanese, b. 1932-2013), and more.

FUTURE WATERS THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Next, visitors encounter works that ask crucial questions about the future of water resources. *The Boat People* (2020) by Tuan Andrew Nguyen (Vietnamese, b. 1976) is a single-channel video projection shot at various Filipino landmarks, including the Boat People Museum. Set in a post-apocalyptic future, the film explores the adventures of five children traveling by sea and

collecting objects from the lost world.

Also on view is a new acquisition, the photograph *Distant Echoes of Dreams (Water Life Series)* (2018) by Aida Muluneh (Ethiopian, b. 1947), a stylized portrait of two women carrying water through one of the driest landscapes on earth, highlighting the difficulties of access to fresh water. This gallery also has a video on the artist's work by Adeyemi Michael.

WHERE WATER IS LAW IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA



This large gallery space goes underwater, exploring below-the-surface scenes. In the center of the gallery are four Australian Aboriginal paintings of natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, including *Buyku* (2008) by Djirirra Wunungmurra (Australian Aboriginal, b. 1968); on the wall behind are four Australian Aboriginal graphic works etched on aluminum or steel. The intricate patterns are derived from sacred water estates, offering a reminder of laws, policies, rituals, and visual patterns that guide life.

SEA CREATURES THAT ARE HONORED AND ENDANGERED



Three dimensional works of sea-related creatures abound, including *Mask of Kumugwe' (Chief of the Sea)* (ca. 1880), depicting the ruler of water creatures in the Kwakwaka'wakw tradition, carved in red alder and cedar and vividly painted in red and dark blue. Sherry Markovitz's (American, b. 1947) *Sea Bear* (1990) remakes the hunting trophy with this polar bear bust created with wood, beads, and shells; nearby is the red cedar *Sea Bear Crest hat (Tsa.an Xuu.ujee Dajangee)* (ca. 1870), a favorite of SAM's Northwest Coast collection.

TRAGIC MEMORIES OF GLOBAL TRADE



Next, visitors turn a corner to travel a long, narrow gallery exploring the tragedies and transformations of journeys across water. Two mixed media works by Seattle-based Marita Dingus (American, b. 1965)—*200 Women of African Descent* and *400 Men of African Descent* (both 1997)—are what the artist called, “a visual prayer,” processing the horrors of slavery after a journey to Elmina Castle in Ghana,

where enslaved Africans were held before crossing the Atlantic.

MYTHIC VISION FROM WATER'S CREATION TO REGULATION



Cosmic journeys are explored in 10 works, including *The Garden of Earthly Delights V* (ca. 2004) by Raqib Shaw (Indian, b. 1974), a densely surfaced mixed-media painting inspired by the work of Hieronymus Bosch depicting mythic underwater creatures.

DESECRATION OF OUR TROUBLED WATERS



This final gallery, before visitors exit back through the first gallery to revisit the space dedicated to water protectors, features seven works portraying the destruction of water sources due to human activity. *Desecration #2* (2017) by John Feodorov (Diné, b. 1960) is from the artist's *Desecration* series, in which the artist commissions Diné wool rugs and draws on them with acrylic paint, graphite, and conté crayon. The sacred wool rug represents sovereign Diné lands, and the artist's alteration, the continued environmental threats from governmental and private interests.

This section also features four notable photographic representations of troubled landscapes around the world, all captured in a restrained, documentary style: *Railroads and Shipping Containers on the Monongahela River* (2013) by LaToya Ruby Frazier (American, b. 1982); *Weyerhaeuser Sorting Yard Along the Chehalis River, Cosmopolis, Washington* (from the series *SawDust Mountain*) (2007) by Seattle-based Eirik Johnson (American, b. 1974); *Tautira, Tahiti* (2010) by Guy Tillam (South African, b. 1962); and *I Was Not Waving But Drowning* (2005) by Atul Bhalla (Indian, b. 1964).

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

For major exhibitions, SAM convenes a group of advisors from the community to participate in planning and contribute their perspectives. The *Our Blue Planet* committee is:

- **John Feodorov** (Diné), artist, Associate Professor at Western Washington University
- **Darcie Larson**, Senior Manager, Community Engagement & Inclusion, Seattle Aquarium
- **Savitha Reddy Pathi**, Deputy Director, Climate Solutions
- **Jordan Remington**, Community Engagement & Programs Coordinator, Friends of Waterfront Seattle
- **James Rasmussen** (Duwamish), Superfund Manager, Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition
- **Jim Wharton**, Director of Conservation Engagement and Learning, Seattle Aquarium

TICKETING

Museum Hours

- Closed Monday & Tuesday
- Wednesday–Sunday 10 am–5 pm
- Holiday hours on the website

Special Exhibition Prices

- \$29.99 Adult
- \$27.99 Senior (65+), Military (with ID)
- \$19.99 Student (with ID), Teen (15–18)
- FREE for children (14 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

Special Prices

- First Thursdays: Free to all
- First Fridays: Free general admission for seniors (65+)

Details are subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on planning a visit, go to seattleartmuseum.org.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

The exhibition is organized by the Seattle Art Museum. It is made possible by

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Image captions: *Awa Province, Naruto Whirlpools (Awa, Naruto no fuha)*, from the series *Famous Views of the Sixty-odd Provinces (Rokujuyoshu meisho zue)*, 1855, Utagawa Hiroshige, woodblock print: ink and color on paper, framed: 14 1/8 x 9 1/4 in. Gift of Mary and Allan Kollar, in honor of the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2017.23.20; *Mirage 24*, 2018, Adrienne Elise Tarver, American, born 1985, ink on paper, 5 1/2 x 4 in., Josef Vascovitz and Lisa Goodman © Adrienne Elise Tarver; *A Gente Rio: We River* (video still), 2016, Carolina Caycedo, single-channel HD video (sound and color), 29:29 min., commissioned by the 32 Bienal de São Paulo - Incerteza Viva. Courtesy Carolina Caycedo; *Yakima River at Thorp, WA, January 17, 1980*, 1980, Johsel Namkung, digital chromogenic laser print, 40 x 50 in. Gift of Barney A. Ebsworth, 2006.114 © Johsel Namkung; [Beach Scene], ca. 1871-73, Albert Bierstadt, oil on paper mounted on fiber board, 19 1/4 x 24 1/4 in. Gift of Mrs. John McCone in memory of Ada E. Pigott, 69.107; *Nooksack*, 2005, Claude Zervas, CCF (cold cathode fluorescent) lamps, wire, electronics, steel, 36 x 96 x 216 in. Gift of John and Shari Behnke, Rena Bransten, Carlos Garcia and James Harris, David Lewis, Kim Richter, Josef Vascovitz, Robin Wright, Dawn Zervas, and the Contemporary Arts Council, Seattle Art Museum in honor of Lisa Corrin, 2005.140 © Claude Zervas; *The Arrival of The Boat People*, 2020, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, pigment print on Hahnemuhle paper, 27 x 48 in. © Tuan Andrew Nguyen 2021. Courtesy the artist and James Cohan, New York; *Buyku*, 2008, Djirrirra Wunungmurra, natural pigments on eucalyptus bark, 50 x 28 3/8 in. Promised gift of Margaret Levi and Robert Kaplan, T2011.55.141 © Djirrirra Wunungmurra; *Mask of Kúmuḡwe' (Chief of the Sea)*, ca. 1880 Native American, Kwakwaka'wakw, alder, red cedar bark, cloth, paint 19 1/4 x 17 x 6 in. Gift of John H. Hauberg, 91.1.30; *400 Men of African Descent*, 1997, Marita Dingus, cloth and mixed media, African Art Acquisition Fund, 98.43 © Marita Dingus; *The Garden of Earthly Delights V*, ca. 2004, Raqib Shaw, mixed media on board, 47 5/8 x 83 7/8 in. Gift of Rebecca and Alexander Stewart, 2004.97 © Raqib Shaw; *Desecration #2*, 2017, John Feodorov, acrylic, graphite, and conté on wool rug, 50 1/4 x 44 1/4 in. Ancient and Native American Art Acquisition Fund, 2020.2.2 © Artist or Artist's Estate

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.