

SOUTH AMERICA PAST AND PRESENT

The MFA, like many North American art museums, has recently made collecting the art of colonial and post-colonial Central and South America a significant priority. We are delighted to welcome these objects by South American artists into our collection as examples of our increased commitment to the arts of all the Americas.

São Paulo-born artist Vik Muniz makes photographs that challenge the very idea of photography as truth. His images, such as our *Walt Disney, Pantheon*, are complexly constructed illusions that are never actually what they appear to be. Now living and working in New York City, Muniz is one of a number of contemporary artists using photography to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. Muniz's Brazilian heritage makes this an addition that enhances our contemporary collection and also illustrates our commitment to art from beyond our North American borders.

Exemplifying this goal is a diverse group of outstanding Spanish colonial domestic and ecclesiastical works of art given to us by Landon T. Clay. The repoussé and chased silver missal stand was executed in a lavish late baroque style and the decoration includes such indigenous South American motifs as wild strawberries. Among the secular objects included in the gift are a pair of wine cups probably created for a wedding, a chocolate pot with a finial shaped like a cacao pod, and this delightful nineteenth-century container in the form of a turkey.

> Brazilian-American artist Vik Muniz creates what he calls "photographic delusions" by constructing and photographing familiar-seeming objects using common substances such as chocolate syrup, sugar, or ink—as in *Walt Disney, Pantheon*, 2002, from the series *Pictures of Ink*.



^ Our early-eighteenth-century missal stand is a reminder of the opulence of Spanish colonial churches in South America.

< The turkey-shaped container is a nineteenth-century object that recalls earlier filigreed or pierced examples.

September 11

The events of September 11 are forever etched in our collective memory. For those who sought a place of peace and reflection during this most painful time, we opened the Museum’s galleries and gardens, free of charge, through the end of September. Great works of art remind us of the enduring value of all that is best in the human spirit, and the MFA’s doors were open to all in the hope that these works of art, some of them born out of suffering and grief, would provide comfort and solace.

With the horror of 9/11 came a heightened appreciation for firefighters and the police. The Museum honored our own local heroes by offering all Massachusetts police and firefighters free admission to the Museum during the month of December.

Master Site Plan

On February 14, after months of anticipation, we unveiled the architectural designs of our comprehensive Master Site Plan, developed by the internationally renowned architectural firm, Foster and Partners of London. The designs embody an architectural statement that is not only intensely beautiful but also innovative and precisely functional. The architects responded magnificently to the needs of the Museum. Drawing their inspiration from the wealth of the Museum’s treasures and the beautiful Fenway setting within Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace, their designs will stimulate a revitalized visitor experience within the Museum as well as a greater connection to our neighbors and the City of Boston.

The first phase of the Master Site Plan will truly transform the MFA and how our visitors interact with art, as well as how the Museum interacts with our neighborhood. Expected to take five years to complete, major elements of Phase I include:

- A reinstatement of the building’s strong central axis through the heart of the Museum, which extends south to north from the Huntington Avenue entrance to the Fenway doors, resulting in enhanced accessibility to the collections, better navigation throughout the MFA, and the reopening of the Fenway entrance
- An exquisite “jewel box” made of glass and steel that will enclose the East Courtyard and link it to the new East Wing
- An East Wing that will consist of an expansive central building within the “jewel box,” flanked by two smaller pavilions showcasing the Art of the Americas and Contemporary Art collections

- Expanded educational facilities, including a 150-seat state-of-the-art cinema, seminar room, studio arts classroom, and workshop

- Refurbished Art of Europe galleries

- Enhanced and enlarged conservation and research facilities

Beyond Phase I, the long-range Master Site Plan as a whole envisions the creation of a glazed “crystal spine” running the full length of the site east to west, delicately uniting courtyards and galleries both old and new, greatly expanding our gallery and work space, improving orientation for visitors, and strengthening the Museum’s ties to its surrounding communities through an open and transparent structure. Its cumulative effect will be transformational.

Diversity Initiative

Since at least the late 1960s there have been many initiatives and committees formed to study the issue of diversity in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Within the past eight years, we formed the Director’s Working Group on Diversity and the Diversity Council to discuss and study the issue in even greater depth. In some respects, one might say that the Museum is already diverse. We are blessed with collections that are remarkably multicultural, coming from all inhabited parts of the globe and from all periods in history. We have long-established programs that reach into virtually every area and group in the Boston community, including the Fifth-Grade Program with the Boston Public Schools, teen internship programs, award-winning programming for visitors with disabilities, and our internationally respected film program, which includes the New Chinese Cinema series, the Women in Film and Video/New England Festival, the Boston Gay and Lesbian Film/Video Festival, and the annual African Film Festival.

As we move into a more comprehensive diversity plan, it is important to define our working idea of diversity more exactly. To me, diversity means not just ethnic or cultural origin, but age, occupation, and economic status as well. It means not just different kinds of people, but different life experiences and varied starting points for the appreciation of the visual arts.

Although progress has been made in hiring diverse candidates for our hourly work force, our senior administrative curatorial staff and, indeed, our volunteers remain less diverse than we wish. Women are well represented in our ranks but our numbers are still overwhelmingly European in ethnic origin. Our volunteer opportunities have been structured in ways that made it impossible for working people to participate. We want our staff, volunteers, and visitors to reflect the nature of the community as a whole. As the completion of each phase of the Master Site Plan makes the Museum increasingly transparent to the outside world, linking

it to the revitalized Fens and the community around it, it is my hope that those outside the Museum will look in and see a Museum community that reflects the community at large.

To that end, the Trustees, led by Chairman William F. Pounds and President Susan W. Paine, voted unanimously in May to accept the Diversity Action Plan prepared for the Museum by Riscoe & Associates of Philadelphia, the culmination of months of detailed and careful study and interviews with staff and volunteers. The Diversity Action Plan represents a new phase in our ongoing work—one that, I believe, marks an important departure from previous efforts. Our diversity program will be managed centrally from the Director’s Office. At the end of June, I was pleased to announce the appointment of Sidney Punter to the position of Director of Diversity and Community Relations reporting directly to me. Sidney’s charge is to coordinate diversity efforts throughout the Museum and to carry out the recommendations contained in the Diversity Action Plan, which include:

- Increasing diversity throughout our volunteer forces, including the Trustee and Overseer level

- Making special efforts to seek out, recruit, hire, and promote diverse candidates for professional and curatorial positions while continuing efforts for diversifying the non-professional workforce

- Establishing a five-year plan to build collections that highlight under-represented groups, including artists of color, and to identify resources to support exhibitions that will appeal to broader, more diverse audiences

- Continuing to build upon and promote our existing, inclusive programming with a renewed focus on community and diverse audiences

- Continuing initiatives to cultivate meaningful relationships with cultural and civic leaders and community organizations that will embrace collaborative projects

- Establishing Museum-wide goals for contracting with minority-owned and -operated businesses
- Formalizing and reinforcing the MFA’s relationship with the National Center for Afro-American Artists

Perhaps the simplest and most useful definition of diversity is one which reflects my idea of the Museum’s future—that the MFA will be a place where anyone from the community, and indeed from around the world, can feel welcome, at home, and among friends and compatriots. When we reach this ideal point, the Museum and its extended family will no longer run an institution that does things for the Boston community. They will be that community.

Collections and Exhibitions

During the year, our Exhibitions and Design Department oversaw thirteen special exhibitions, forty-two gallery rotations, three permanent gallery renovations, six touring exhibitions, and four special projects. Highlights include:

- “A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston 1870–1940,” compellingly brought to life the women who played a significant and important role in the history of Boston art.

- “Netsuke: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Miniature Sculpture” featured more than 350 netsuke and was one of the most important exhibitions of these wonderfully intricate objects.

- “Poetry of the Loom: Persian Textiles in the MFA” showcased our own rich holdings of Persian textiles, including complex and sumptuous silks and velvets, embroideries, rugs, and costumes.

- “Sophie Ristelhueber: Details of the World,” was the first American survey of the artist’s powerful photographs. Her images of the scars and traces left on the earth through both natural and man-made actions took on a deeper meaning for visitors post-September 11.

- “The Look: Images of Glamour and Style” celebrated the photographs of George Hoyningen-Huene and Horst P. Horst, two of the most prolific and stylish photographers of fashion and society in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

- “From Paris to Provincetown: Blanche Lazzell and the Color Woodcut,” drawn mostly from the collection of Leslie and Johanna Garfield, highlighted the distinctive and dramatic work of one of the first women to introduce modern art to America.

- “Impressionist Still Life,” the first major exhibition devoted to Impressionist still life, attracted 179,416 visitors and was accompanied by an audio tour featuring the voices of Julia Child and Jacques Pepin.

- “Robert Rauschenberg: Recent Work” was shown in conjunction with the SMFA’s presentation of the seventh Annual Medal Award to this highly influential artist.

- “The Poetry of Everyday Life: Dutch Paintings in Boston Collections,” showcased sixty rarely seen seventeenth-century Dutch paintings borrowed from fifteen private collections in and around Boston.

- After a five-year hiatus, the Egyptian Late Period Gallery reopened in November, with nearly one hundred objects on display, ranging in size from miniature to monumental.

Programs

The comprehensive educational work of the MFA grew and strengthened during the past year. A succinct mission statement for the Education Department was formulated and a proposal to change the department's name to the Department of Museum Learning and Public Programs was approved by the Trustees in January.

Highlights of the year included the expansion of learning opportunities for youth and family audiences and the strengthening of the MFA's role in the community through a number of projects designed to reach new friends and collaborators as well as strengthen old relationships. Among these vital links to the community was the pilot Community Partnership program, funded by the Damman Fund, which began with The Children's Museum of Boston and involved joint work with the Museum School's faculty and students. In addition, we advanced our continuing relationship with the Boston Public Library, which included workshops for families at all twenty-seven BPL branch libraries.

The area of studio learning became another new point of emphasis within Museum Learning programming. In addition to the Community Partnership program, it was in the studio learning area that the intersection with the Museum School was particularly apparent. Through offerings such as Drawing in the Galleries, a drawing marathon, artists' demonstrations, SMFA student gallery talks, and the presentation of student work, visitors to the Museum had increased opportunities to meet our students and experience the process of creating art firsthand.

In addition to regular Museum Learning programming, Photo Studio staff hosted a group of teenage photographers who, with their chaperons and teachers, were part of a program called "Street Vision—Viet Nam." This organization uses photography as a tool to approach, educate, and rehabilitate street children whose families were disrupted by the Vietnam War.

Staff

Museum staff have been busy behind the scenes preparing for the implementation of Phase I of the Master Site Plan and the move of part of the collection to off-site storage.

Curatorial staff have been reviewing and documenting every object in storage—and making some surprising discoveries. Objects approved for deaccessioning as many as ninety-five years ago have never left the collection. Viewed from a new perspective, some will be reinstated while others will be sold as originally intended. Hidden gems, unappreciated in the past and relegated to storage, are being unearthed, the potential highlights of future displays.

Collections management staff, their colleagues in the Curatorial Division, Conservation, and Facilities, along with independent consultant art handlers, are in the process of moving, conserving, and re-housing approximately eighty thousand objects off-site.

With this in mind, we welcomed new staff, including Matthew Siegal, Collections Manager, who has the daunting task of overseeing and coordinating the move; William Stover, Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art, who comes to us from the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York; Bet McLeod, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, who comes from the Victoria & Albert Museum in London to join Art of Europe staff; David Figiel, Manager of the Gallery Instructor Program and Resources, who formerly was Museum Educator for Teacher Services at the Brooklyn Museum of Art; and Jim Armbruster, Head Designer, who brings a new creative eye to the Design Department.

We are pleased to announce that Bo Smith, longtime head of our acclaimed film program, became the first Katharine Stone White Head of Film and Video. George Rogers joined the staff of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts as Director of Institutional Advancement.

In June, we bid farewell to Elly Rubin, Coordinator of Accessibility, who retired after twenty-four years of service. Elly established the Museum's access services and built them into a nationally and internationally renowned program of specialized tours, educational programs, and services for senior citizens and visitors with disabilities. Through Elly's efforts, the Museum won a number of awards, including the 1995 AAM Accessibility Award "In Recognition of Dedicated Service to the Museum Community and the American Association of Museums." This was the first award of its kind ever given to a museum, and it recognized the MFA's leadership in the area of universal access.

The Museum family was deeply saddened by the death in April of Barnet Rubenstein, SMFA alumnus and member of the School's painting faculty for more than thirty-five years.

Conclusion

"May you live in interesting times" is a well-known Chinese curse. The year has certainly been an interesting time for the MFA as well as for the nation as a whole. Nowadays we say, with American optimism, that we have had a "challenging year." That is to suggest that, after a series of shocks and surprises, we emerge stronger and wiser than before. It is often in difficult times that we most vividly realize the vital importance of art to our lives. We have seen the power of art clearly demonstrated this year—art as a means to console, heal, and educate.



MALCOLM ROGERS
ANN AND GRAHAM GUND DIRECTOR
OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON